

Journal Writing as an Essential Component to My Artistic Practice

Sabine Likhité

A Thesis

In

The Department

Of

Art Education

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of Master of Arts at

Concordia University

Montreal, Quebec, Canada

April, 2004

Copyright Sabine Likhité, 2004



National Library  
of Canada

Bibliothèque nationale  
du Canada

Acquisitions and  
Bibliographic Services

Acquisitions et  
services bibliographiques

395 Wellington Street  
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4  
Canada

395, rue Wellington  
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4  
Canada

*Your file* *Votre référence*  
*ISBN: 0-612-91067-9*  
*Our file* *Notre référence*  
*ISBN: 0-612-91067-9*

The author has granted a non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of this thesis in microform, paper or electronic formats.

L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de cette thèse sous la forme de microfiche/film, de reproduction sur papier ou sur format électronique.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur qui protège cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

---

In compliance with the Canadian Privacy Act some supporting forms may have been removed from this dissertation.

Conformément à la loi canadienne sur la protection de la vie privée, quelques formulaires secondaires ont été enlevés de ce manuscrit.

While these forms may be included in the document page count, their removal does not represent any loss of content from the dissertation.

Bien que ces formulaires aient inclus dans la pagination, il n'y aura aucun contenu manquant.

**Canada**



## **ABSTRACT**

### **Journal Writing as an Essential Component to my Artistic Practice**

**Sabine Likhité**

In an attempt to rekindle my artistic practice, I conducted a qualitative research project to see if an exploration and understanding of my journal writing could be used as a medium for growth and artistic advancement.

The discovery of similar women artists' journals and the development of a body of assemblage sculpture also became ingredients in the evolution and understanding of my self as an artist and creative person.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>CHAPTER</i>	<i>PAGE</i>
<b>Introduction</b> . . . . .	. 1
<b>Methodology</b> . . . . .	. 4
<b>Literature Review</b> . . . . .	. 5
<u>Daybook</u> by Anne Truitt	6
<u>Voicing Our Visions</u> edited by Mara Witzling	10
<b>Process of self Reflection</b> . . . . .	. 14
<b>Data: Journal and Artwork</b> . . . . .	. 15
Studio Work	15
Chronology	23
Journal Themes	37
<b>Conclusion</b> . . . . .	. 50
<b>References</b> . . . . .	. 58

## LIST OF ART WORKS

<i>ART WORK</i>	<i>PAGE</i>
Burrs in bark (1999) Burrs, white birch bark	2
Moth (1999) Wood, copper, rusty fencing, steel screen, moth	17
Fur (1999) Mink tail, birch bark, wood	18
Package (1999) Burrs, steel screen, button	20
Precious (1999) Burr, wood, bark, screen	21
Cardinal Song (2001) Slate, cardinal feathers	22
Fur II (1999) Mink, rusty fence, wood, white veil	24
Package II (1999) Wood, burrs, veil	25
Center (2000) Wood, abalone, turkey feathers	26
Wired (2000) Slate, bronze and copper wire	27
Lines (2001) Catalpa pods, wood, bronze wire, metallic paint	30
Golden Center (2001) Birch wood, thorns, metallic paint	32
Out (2001) Beech wood, thorns, glass marble	33

Pod (2001)	36
Birch, copper, poppy pod, peacock feathers	
120 (2001)	42
Slate, cardinal feathers, thorns	
Vessel (2001)	43
Beech	
Cicada (2000)	45
Birch, copper wire, cicada raven feathers	

## **Introduction:**

Going back to school to pursue a Master's degree in Art Education at Concordia University was a deliberate decision. It had been ten years since I had completed my art school training and subsequently ten years since I had been consistent about making artwork. During that time I explored several mediums, making small bodies of work in photography, painting, and some carving. In the summer of 1999, I took a weeklong workshop on assemblage sculpture. This approach stimulated me to utilize items from nature and other found objects into my artworks. Like many other women, I found myself juggling a career, relationships, family, an active lifestyle and a spiritual practice, neglecting my personal artistic practice. I therefore decided to take a leave of absence from my job as a secondary level art teacher to pursue my goal of becoming a more committed artist.

There are several reasons why I chose a university graduate program as a means to attain my goal. As the process of making art is a solitary and sometimes lonely endeavor, it became clear to me that I needed the support of others and that extra push that comes from being in a university environment. I hoped that I would find a built-in community of other artists/educators involved in their own studio process; like-minded people to help support and encourage me. I was also interested in the cultural aspect of living in Montreal, a large cosmopolitan city so different from the rural Vermont setting in which I live and teach.

I was also very conscious that when my course work at Concordia was over, I would find myself alone again, facing many of the same obstacles I had experienced





"Burrs in bark", 1999

before on my path to becoming a more dedicated artist. The question could be, would I be successful in continuing with the activity and energy level that I found when in school, and continue my goal of becoming a working artist when I returned to my “real” life in Vermont?

My year in Montreal was everything that I hoped it could be. I was surrounded by the community that I had sought, and advanced in my artistic practice. I also learned of the lives of many other women artists in similar situations as mine: women who struggled to balance the demands of everyday life with the need to express themselves creatively, and be recognized, as artists. During this time I also began keeping a personal/artistic journal to record the thoughts and feelings related to this change that I was making.

As my interest in journaling grew, I found that that many other women artists kept personal diaries. Many of these journals had been published and were available. I knew that the diaries of male artists were also available, but felt that those by women would be more relevant to my personal pursuit. Through my investigation of these journals, I came to realize that my diaries might become a source of deeper understanding and insight into my own needs, interests, and struggles as an artist. This led me to question the relationship between journal writing and an artistic process. How could I personally benefit from keeping an artistic journal? As journal writing seemed a natural and instinctual addition to my process, I was especially interested in the connection that I could make between them.

Thus the question proposed in this thesis is:

How can journal writing be an essential component of my artistic practice?

## Methodology

To investigate the connection between journal writing and art making, I pursued three parallel tracks: an examination of published journals by women artists; the development of my own artistic journal; and the creation of a body of artwork. These venues became the data, or resources, from which I began a qualitative study into my own development as an artist. Through understanding my own, and other women's artistic journals, I reached some conclusions as to how journals could be used as a practice for artistic growth.

In the anthology Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials (1998), Denzin and Lincoln state that qualitative researchers "...study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them." (Denzin and Lincoln, p.3). In a chapter of this anthology entitled "Personal Experience Methods", Clandinin and Connelly mention "Journals" and "Autobiographical Writing" as methods of collecting data when making use of qualitative research. Connelly and Clandinin also refer to journals as a place where the writer can "weave together their accounts of the private and the professional, capturing fragments of experience in attempts to sort themselves out."(p.166-7).

Since qualitative research is considered to be "...multimethod in focus, involving and interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter," (Denzin and Lincoln, p.3), it seemed to be a useful method for my study. Denzin and Lincoln also state "...qualitative researchers deploy a wide range of interconnected methods, hoping always to get a better fix on the subject matter at hand." (p.4). With this type of research as an approach, I used

information regarding my own experiences as well as the experiences of others to fuel my query into the significance journal writing could take in an artistic practice.

It was my intention to use these qualitative methods to examine my own journal writing, and that of other women artists as sources for my artistic development. I wanted to explore whether keeping a journal and reading those kept by other artists could support my art making and how they could be integrated into my artistic practice.

I was fortunate to have had the year that I spent at Concordia to initiate this inquiry into journal writing and my own artistic process. The courses that I took gave me the structure to explore my own artwork in a safe setting, as well as providing the format to find out about other women artists who had similar stories, and had used their personal writings to document it. I found that there were many women artists' journals on hand, and these became an important aspect of my qualitative inquiry.

### **Literature Review**

It was a pleasant surprise to find that a wealth of women's journals exists. I read many journals and letters of artists, including those of Anne Truitt, Frida Kahlo, Georgia O'Keeffe, Eva Hesse, and Barbara Hepworth. It seems that journal writing is a commonly used form of reflection and problem solving for women artists. These collections of women's journals can also become a source of support and community for working artists. "The female voice in writings by these artists can be a mirror for the contemporary woman looking to understand her own experience,"(Witzling, p.4). For many women, the form of self-reflective autobiography (journals, letters, and autobiography) can become a means of hearing the voices of other women artists,

“validating their vocation” (Witzling, p.4) and becoming primary resources, documenting the artists’ thoughts and struggles.

There are two compilations that specifically influenced my artistic process.

Daybook: The Journey of an Artist (1982) is the first of three published journals by Anne Truitt. She is an internationally renowned minimalist sculptor whose work is exhibited in the collections of the Whitney Museum of American Art, The Museum of Modern Art, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, and many other museums and galleries. She currently resides in Washington DC.

Voicing Our Visions: Writing by Women Artists (1991), edited by Mara Witzling a professor of Art and Art History and Coordinator of Women’s studies at the University of New Hampshire ([www.arts.unh.edu/faculty/witzling99.html](http://www.arts.unh.edu/faculty/witzling99.html)), also seemed to be directly related and relevant to my goal of being a more dedicated artist who can learn from her own experience.

Anne Truitt kept the journals that later became Daybook over a seven-year period, in order to “deepen her understanding of the artist within herself.”(Truitt, back page review). In this volume Truitt integrates her thoughts on motherhood, her personal memories, her career, domestic activities, and the choices and processes that she has encountered in her life as an artist. “[Truitt] weaves back and forth between the present and the past, letting themes develop and deepen through an examination of her origins, ...and uses the daybook to come to terms as her three children begin to move away and establish homes of their own.” (Kronsky, p.88)

As I sifted through Truitt’s writings to find themes that I felt were related to my pursuit to integrate art making with all other parts of my life, I found that there were

several relevant and repeating themes that resonated with me. The topics of artistic identity, the artistic process, motherhood, the conscious choices that she had to make in order to develop her life as an artist, being a woman, and finding a balance, are all recurring subjects found in her reflections.

**Artistic Identity:** In Daybook Truitt presents the reader with the qualities, struggles, and challenges specific to the artist. “They [artists] are like riders who gallop into the night, eagerly leaning on their horse’s neck, peering into the blinding rain. And they do it over and over again.”(Truitt, p.26). She does this in a manner that is revealing to both the artist and the layman, as she defines and demystifies a life spent in the pursuit of artistic goals. “Artists have no choice but to express their lives. They have only, and that not always, their choice of process.”(Truitt, p.43). “The most demanding part of living a lifetime as an artist is the strict discipline of forcing oneself to work steadfastly along the nerve of one’s most intimate sensitivity.” (Truitt, p.178). Truitt shares her personal reflections and discoveries about what an artist is --“This leads me to the uncomfortable conclusion that artists are special because they are intrinsically involved in a balance not so blatantly precarious in other professions.”(Truitt, p.24) -- and the environment, skills and conditions needed in pursuing a vocation in art. “(Artists) need their balances in order to support their risks.” (Truitt, p.26).

**Artistic Process:** Truitt gives the reader an inside view of the joys and hardships that she encounters within the artistic process. “My work is coming steadily along. My pace in the studio is practiced. I move from one task to the other with the ease of Tarzan swinging on lianas through the jungle.” (Truitt, p.28). She puts forth the loneliness and mystery that making art holds for her: “But the essential struggle is private and bears no

relation to anyone else's. It is of necessity a solitary and lonely endeavor to explore one's own sensibility, to discover how it works and to implement honestly its manifestations" (Truitt, p.68): as well as the drudgery and discipline needed in pursuing the work of an artist. "It is all very well to be entranced by working in the studio, but that has to be backed up by the common sense and industry required to run a small business." (Truitt, p.117). Truitt's evocative testimonials concerning the positive and negative aspects of making art give the reader a notion of the process that one must encounter when faced with their artwork in the studio. "For me the process is mysterious. It's like not knowing where you're going but knowing how to get there."(Truitt, p.41).

**Motherhood:** Truitt presents a first-hand perception of the personal conflicts that she has encountered as a mother. She found that, in hindsight, the circumstances related to the struggle for her to conceive her children were positive. "...Had I born children during the first years of my marriage, as I yearned to do, I would not have been forced to concentrate on my own development. It was from 1948, the year following my marriage, until 1955, when Alexandra was born, that I developed the studio discipline that has supported my work ever since." (Truitt, p.91). Truitt writes about motherhood as a role essential to her being-- "My motherhood has been, I realize, central to my life as a stove is central to a household in the freeze of winter."(Truitt, p.172)-- but separate and conflicting with her role as an artist. "It is becoming apparent that the mother and the artist do not speak much to each other, and when they do the speech is initiated by the artist who wishes to be off about her business."(Truitt, p.138). Through the journal we share the emotions she feels concerning the tasks involved in being a single mother,

creating a fulfilling life for her children, and watching them find their independence and move away from home.

**Choices:** Anne Truitt provides the reader with a clear picture of the choices that she made leading to her life as an artist: “I honestly do not believe that I would be an artist now had I not been a nurse’s aid.” (Truitt, p.65); the decisions that she consciously made in order to succeed in her roles as artist and mother:

“Confronted by the situation, [of being a single parent and artist] I made two major decisions: The first was to invest in myself, as needed, the money I inherited from my family.... The second major decision was to increase my energy output and to use it as wisely and fully as I could.” (Truitt, p.125-26). Anne Truitt made many sacrifices in order to follow her calling as an artist, and she paints a picture of the choices entailed, and the reasons for her decisions. “I have acted the only way it seemed to me I could have acted.” (Truitt, p.177)

**Woman:** In her journal, Truitt notes the challenges unique to the woman who chooses a career in art. “There is a cant going around now that this is more difficult for women.” (Truitt, p.109). She establishes the facts of her experience without remorse or bitterness. “So I end up in the position of a reasonably aspiring, reasonably ambitious man, no more or no less boundaried by my own character. This is lucky; because I cannot help doing the work that I do, which feels to me as vital as breath... But were I a man, I would not have had laboriously to pick my way through such an obvious train of thought to such an obvious conclusion.” (Truitt, p.112). Truitt succeeds in giving the reader a view of the path unique to the woman artist – making us aware and giving us a further understanding some of the inequities concerning women in the art world.



**Balance:** The balance between being an artist and tending to everyday tasks and challenges is precarious. “The ideas in my head are invariably more radiant than what is under my hand. But something puritanical and tough in me won’t take that fence. The poem has to be written, the painting painted, the sculpture wrought. The beds have to be made, the food cooked, the dishes done, the clothes washed and ironed. Life just seems to me irremediably about coping with the physical.” (Truitt, p.143). Truitt describes this phenomena in her life clearly, and makes statements related to her needs as an artist: “[Artists] need their balances in order to support their risks.” (Truitt, p.26); and the discipline she uses in finding the balance that she needs. “The familiar strain of sustaining the various demands of daily life is once again a whine in the back of my mind. As I move from cleaning the house to washing and ironing to cooking to work to studio to helping the children with their homework, even in the satisfaction these activities evoke, their inexorable sequence jerks my body into a faster pattern of response than is natural to it.” (Truitt, p.63).

Truitt’s insights, personal revelations, and private thoughts are stimulating to those of us who have art making in our veins. Her understanding of self, and her insights into the practice of being an artist, makes her a potential role model for the emerging artist. She is honest and forthright about her dedication, discipline, and the choices that a woman must make when choosing to pursue a career in art, and she doesn’t make light of the heart-breaking decisions that may be involved.

Voicing Our Visions: Writings by Women Artists is a compilation of self-reflective autobiographical writings collected by Mara Witzling. It includes excerpts from

the private diaries, letters, essays, poems and stories by twenty women artists including Judy Chicago, Mary Cassatt, Frida Kahlo, Rosa Bonheur, and Georgia O'Keeffe.

Witzling considers these women to be writers, even though they chose to define themselves as visual artists. "Their writing was neither casual nor occasional, but was sustained over a period of time." (Witzling, p.1). Witzling dedicates a portion of her introduction to the importance of women's writings, stating, "For the same reason that women artists have needed to validate their own vocation, their writings are especially meaningful to current readers. Many readers find biography (including autobiography) fascinating, searching it for implications concerning their own life and work." (Witzling, p.4). These writings by women artists become important testimonials that can be used for research, and a further awareness of the elements that make up the artist's lives.

Many women artists kept journals that have become primary documents recording their lives, inspirations, processes and challenges. Witzling states that women's writings have been overlooked due to the disparities and under-representation of female artists as a whole. (Witzling, p.3). She assigns her book a "dual purpose, to provide a resource for informed readers and students and to point scholars in fruitful directions to further explorations. Its additional goal is to bring muted voices to speech, to gather together a chorus." (Witzling, p.2).

This collection of writings by women artists was inspiring to me. Not only was my process of further understanding myself as an artist justified, but I could also relate my thoughts and feelings to others' in my situation. "Women artists have been isolated, from other artists, from other women artists, from the concept of art itself, and one major

reason that they have written has been to validate their functioning as professional artists.” (Witzling, p.4).

Voicing our Visions helps create ties that bind the community and kinship between women artists, as their struggle to be seen and heard creates a common bond. (Sabine, *Arte 672*, p.4.) In compiling the writings of so many women artists, I found another form of community in that these women are mentors for me and other women artists. They speak openly of the things that drove and discouraged them, making it a more “human” and less isolated endeavor to pursue a life of making art.

Several of these artist/writers’ voices particularly affected me. Marie Bashkirtseff (1858-1884), a young artist whose death in her early twenties leaves her “place” in the art world unclear, had her journals published three years after her death. I seem to share some of the same frustrations that she did when she dedicated herself to working on her artistic progression, and faced the conflict of dealing with every-day responsibilities. “No continuance, nor regularity, no real energy! I ought to have conquered my work by doing a study every week; whereas instead of that I have been looking over fifty different things...” (Bashkirtseff, p.121). Marianne Werefkin (1860-1938), a member of the *Blaue Reiter* group of artists, was also a “prolific diarist” (Witzling, p.127). In her writings she developed an aesthetic theory, and “established a safe place where she was free to construct her artistic persona” (Witzling, p.127). She speaks of her theories on art, her state of mind, her loves, losses, and how she perceives the world: “I love the things that are not.... Things that are imaginary, desirable, dreamed, invented. As much as I believe to have loved it, it is one of those impossible things at the eye of reality, existing as all who create art.” (Werefkin, p.140).

Emily Carr (1871-1945), a renowned Canadian painter, gained much inspiration from nature: “The woods were in a quiet mood, dreamy and sweet.” (Carr, p. 182). I feel linked to her connection with the outdoors; “Oh what a joy morning! Sun blazing, whole woods laughing...” (Carr, p. 182), as well as with the emotional barriers that can come up when working without attaining one’s target: “I made two poor sketches today. Every single condition was good for work, but there you are – cussedness!” (Carr, p.182). I feel more sustained in my frustrations to know that other “famous” women have felt the same.

Faith Ringhold, a contemporary artist born in 1930, has lived a life that has similarities with mine. She was a public school art teacher for many years before she chose to devote more time and space to her artwork. She did this in union with her teaching, raising a family, and nurturing romantic relationships. An excerpt of “Being my own Woman, 1977” found in Witzling’s compilation speaks of the conscious choices and sacrifices that that Ringhold made in order to devote a summer to preparing for a show. “The summer would be my only real chance to paint.” (Ringhold, p. 364). She sent her daughters to study in Mexico, and adapted her life so that she could mainly concentrate on her artwork.

I found this collection of writings to be priceless in my evolution of taking myself seriously as an artist. It became apparent that my frustrations and insecurities were not new, but lived and felt by many other women artists. I also found myself in a “community” of other artists who wrote, and whose words helped them to structure and understand their motivations, fears, needs and routines.

### **Process of Self Reflection:**

I began keeping a journal specific to my life as an artist in January 2001, prior to my discovery of the existence of other women artists' writings. In retrospect, my journal writing underwent three phases. When I first began writing my journal, it was a "stream of consciousness": "of, pertaining to, or characterized by a manner of writing in which a character's thoughts or perceptions are presented as occurring in random form, without regard for logical sequences, syntactic structure, distinctions between various levels of reality, or the like", ([www.infoplease.com/ipd/A0674086.html](http://www.infoplease.com/ipd/A0674086.html)). At this point my journal consisted of a recording of my thoughts and feelings related to my life, art making, relationship, family, etc. As I became more aware of other women artists' journals, and the resource that they had become for me, I consciously decided to dedicate my journal to my art and artistic process. I still included other "life" aspects that came along, but made art the central subject of my writings. During this period, I would dedicate at least one afternoon a week to this "active consciousness" form of writing.

When asked what I wrote about, and where I was going with this journal, I realized that I had put a theme forth, but had not considered where this was taking me. It was at this point that I decided to reread my writings, reflect upon them, and see what they revealed to me. It was suggested that when writing, I divide my pages in two, so that one half could serve as space for writing, devoting the other half to my "reflective consciousness"- my thoughts, insights, and revelations related to re-reading my own writings.

These half pages became a place for me to gather and direct my thoughts. As I found trends in my writing, I would jot them in the margin and keep track of the different

themes and areas of interest to me. The concept was that my writing would become even more focused, and inspire me to becoming a committed artist, who has a consistent practice and exhibitions. This process could provide a means of discipline, connecting me to my creativity, increasing my commitment, and possibly motivating me to stay on task and grow as an artist.

In my goal to establish myself as an artist, I used the process of making a body of work coupled with consistent journal writing as vehicles for becoming a serious, motivated art-maker. I wondered if these channels would help me become more consistent and self-assured in my art making, and whether these could become a greater motivation in making work when I was outside of the university community.

The processes of making work combined with reflective journal writing have developed as the means for me to consciously become a more serious and committed artist. They serve as the vehicle for self-realization that will hopefully evolve into the self-assurance needed for me to progress toward becoming an exhibiting artist.

### **Data: Journal and artwork**

#### **Studio Work:**

The elements from which I assemble my artwork are mostly natural and found materials. I have collections of wood, slate, feathers of many different colors and patterns, rusty fence, metal, copper and brass wire, thorns, porcupine quills, animal bones and teeth, old glass marbles, nails, the bark of different trees, dead insects, seeds and seed pods from plants, nuts, fur, wood shavings, etc. My collections are always growing because something new is forever catching my eye or interesting me because of its color,

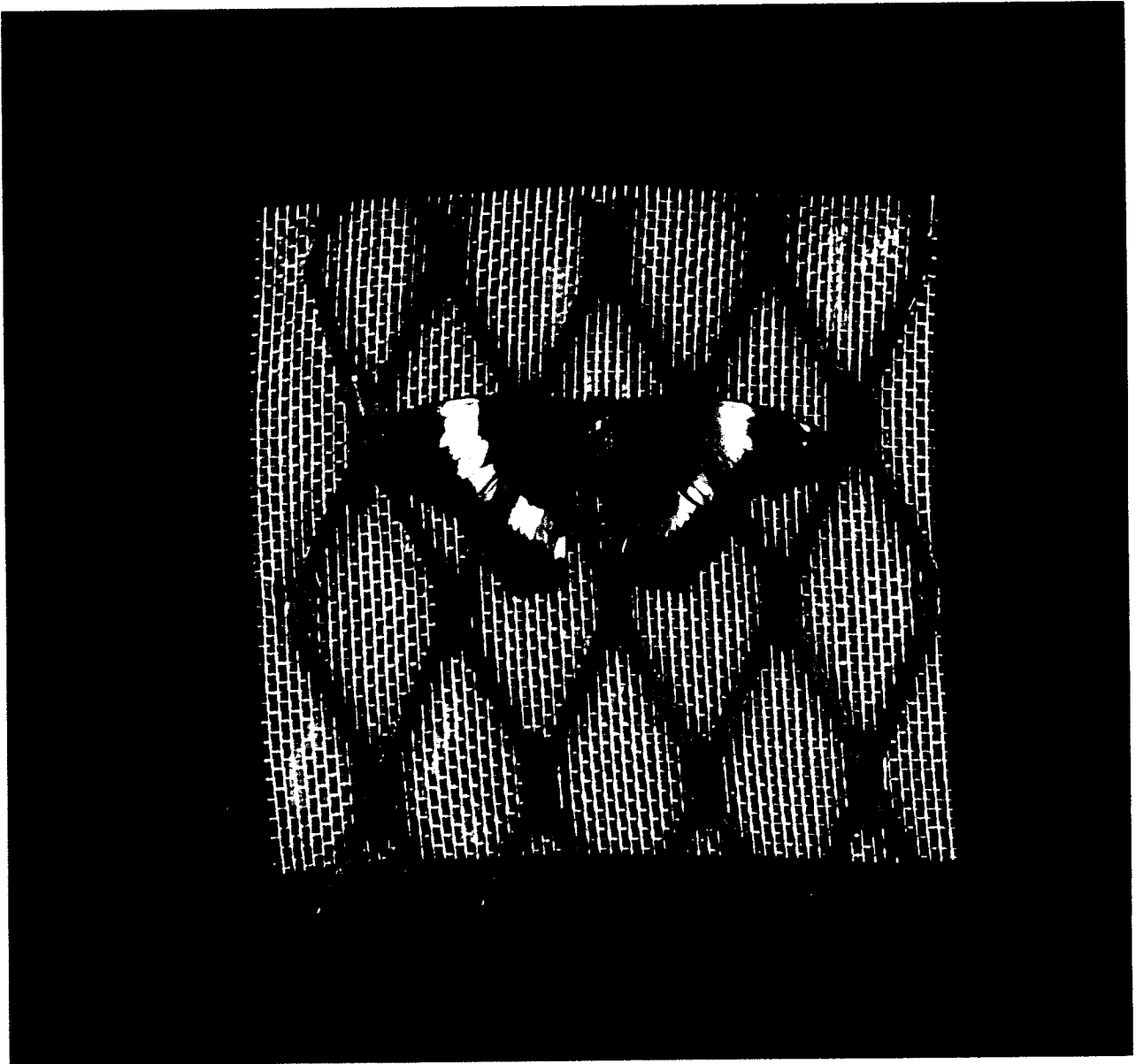
texture, or shape. My friends are also aware of my interests and collections and they often find things and offer them to me.

Much of my assemblage work has a frame, or base, made of wood, slate, or metal. Many of the pieces are wall sculptures, assemblages that are meant to be hung for viewing.

Wood and slate predominantly act as a frame for these pieces, as the objects brought together on these “backings” relate to each other and their background. Some of these pieces have an added circle of material coming out of, or around the base.

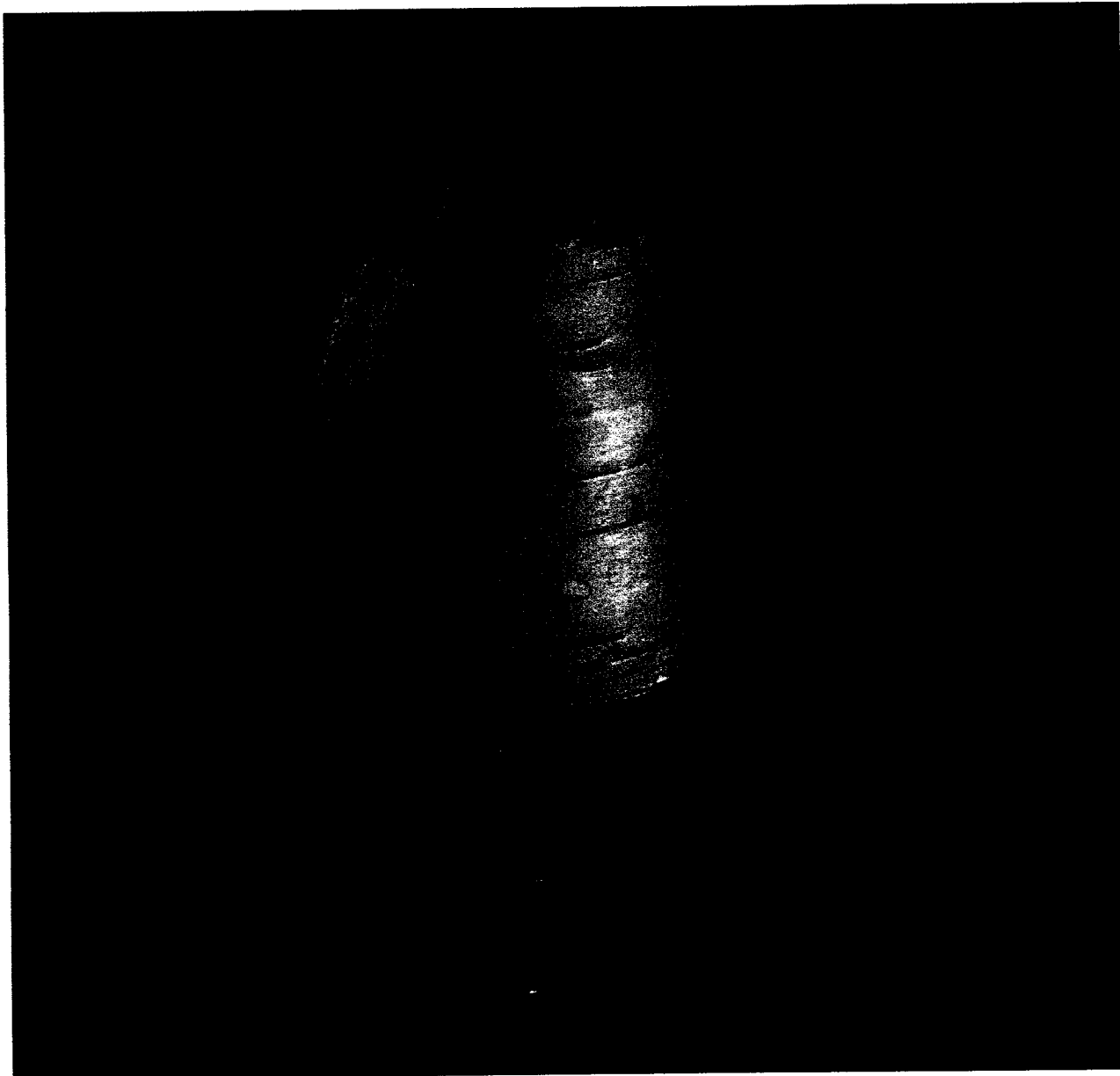
Some of my pieces are freestanding, and in this category have small wooden pedestals or legs. It is important for me to separate all of these works from the wall or table on which they are viewed, so that they stand-alone or in pairs.

In making my work, I try to resurrect elements from their natural environment, giving them a new relationship and context. I am assuming an interventionist role when I give these objects a new context; a symbolic, spiritual life. I have always been attracted to the small things that stand out in the natural world, because of their contrast or uniqueness in their environment. A cardinal or tanager is shocking because of its brilliant color. A red berry or perfectly round nut attracts me because of its “special” place in the world. I attempt at showing a respect for nature and these objects, keeping their “internal spirit” intact. Sometimes I use contrasting materials, such as feathers and stone, or fur and metal, to speak to the unnatural effect that we humans can have on our environment. I ultimately attempt at drawing the viewer closer in so that they, too, can appreciate the visual and symbolic beauty of these small things. I am attracted to the visual patterns of



"Moth", 1999





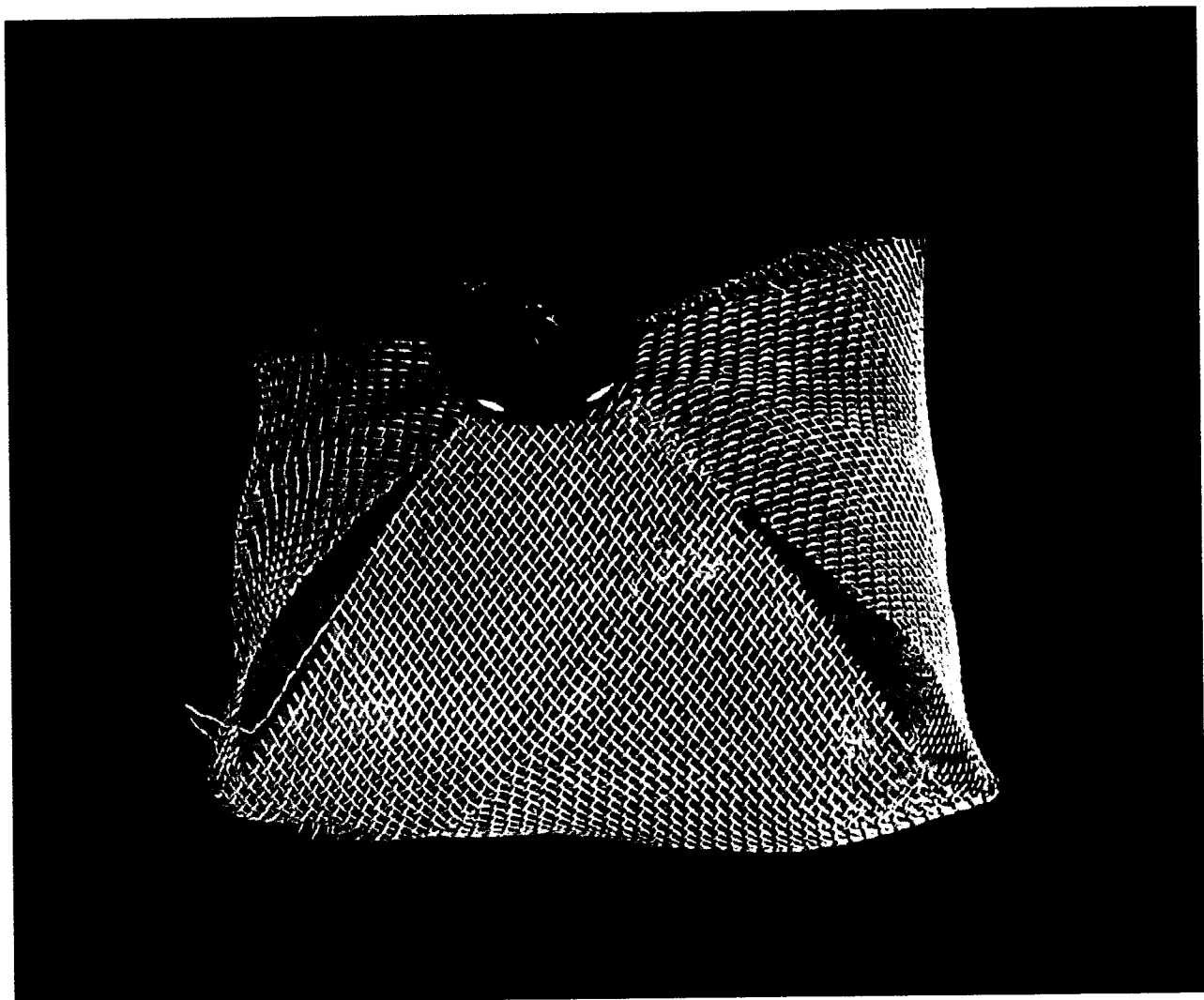
"Fur", 1999

the natural world as well as the instances when there is a surprising change in the pattern, like the cardinal with its unusually vivid color.

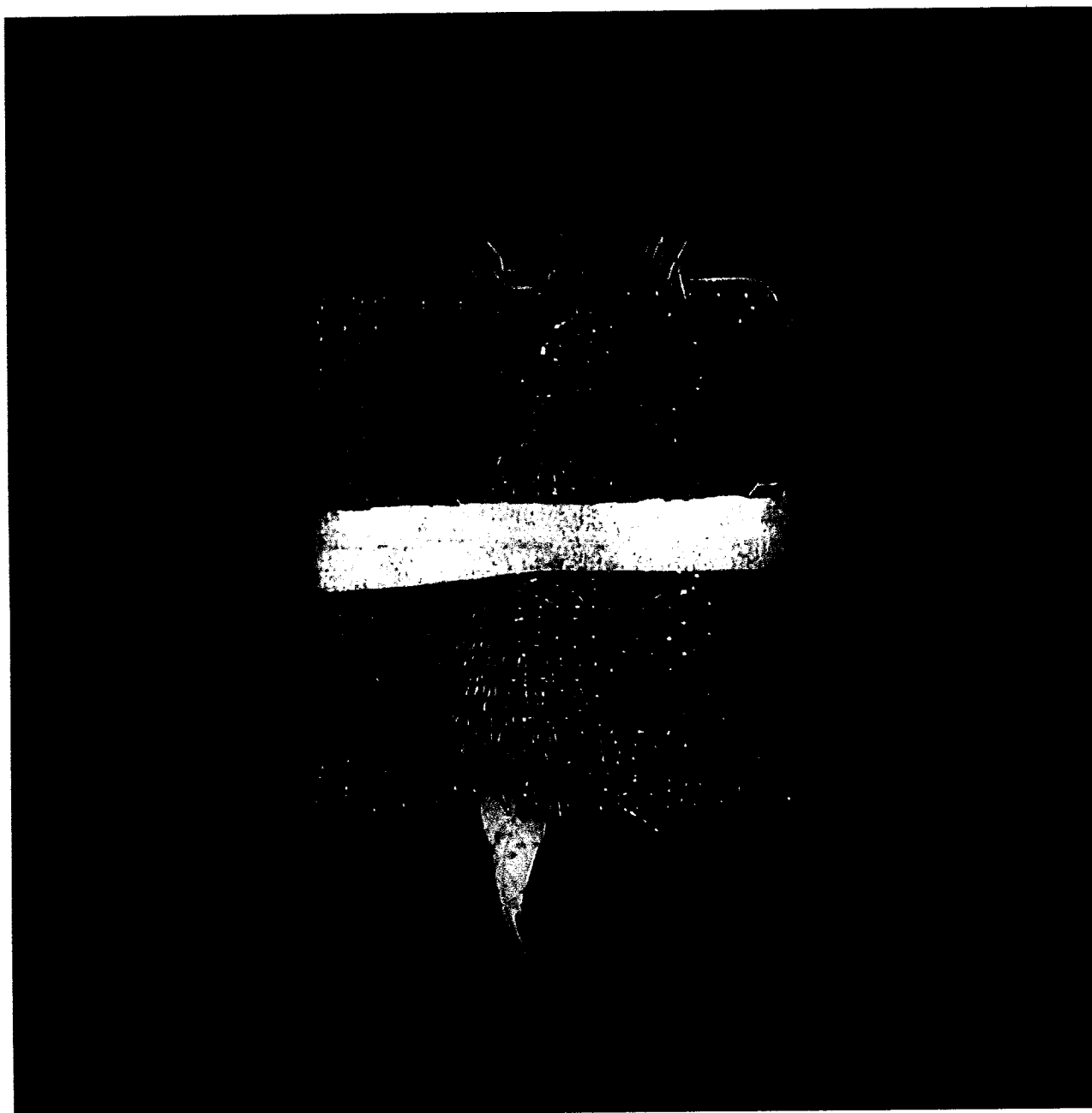
I think of my work as “precious” in that I try to help these elements become treasures for the eye. I try to stay sensitive to the small things in nature, and keep their integrity. I hope that an exchange is created between the piece and the viewer so that they can be attracted to, and interested in the materials and feelings that the work might convey.

Native aboriginal artwork from many cultures speaks to me, and influences my work. I am awed by the relationship with the natural environment, and the respect that these works evoke towards the animals and materials used in their creation. For a period of time my work had a very Native American feel, for I was influenced by my husband Jonathan who is very active in his Native heritage, and displays his fans and regalia all through our house. I am also attracted to South American feather work because of the colors and finesse involved in putting so many little feathers together. Indian art, with all of its colors, patterns and repetitions speaks to me, as does the repetition and colors found in Australian aboriginal work.

Earth Art, starting with prehistoric sculpture and drawings, to the more modern trend of using the earth and nature as a means of expression, has always held my attention. Andy Goldsworthy, Chris Drury, Amish Kapoor are just three of the more well known artists whose work has influenced mine. I think that my earlier work is more about protection and has a feeling of being closed or contained. In this category I would put some of the fur and fence pieces, the bark and wood shavings and the “packets” of burrs and wood shavings. This is my earlier assemblage work and in retrospect I think that it



"Package", 1999



"Precious", 1999

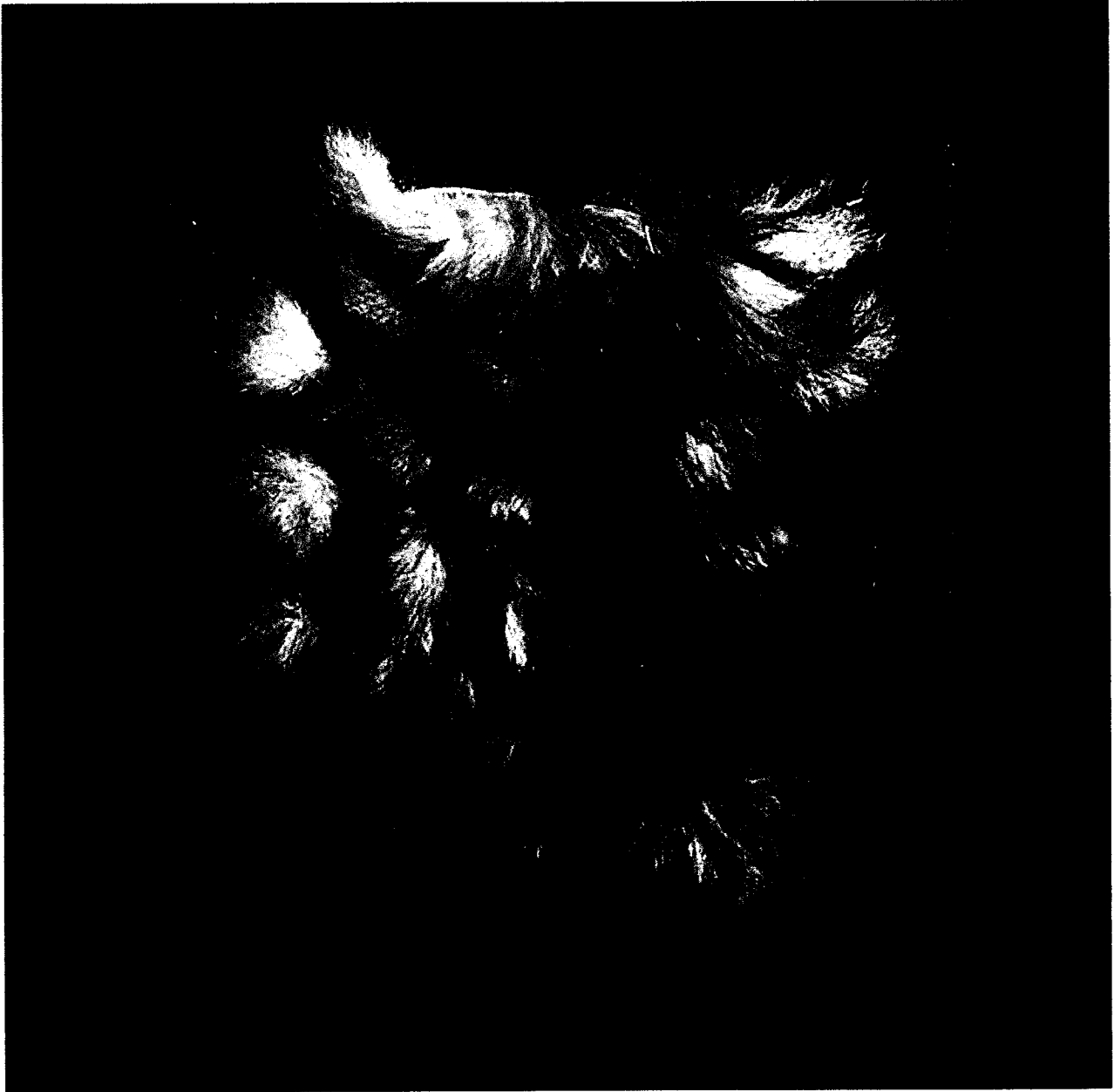


"Cardinal Song", 2001

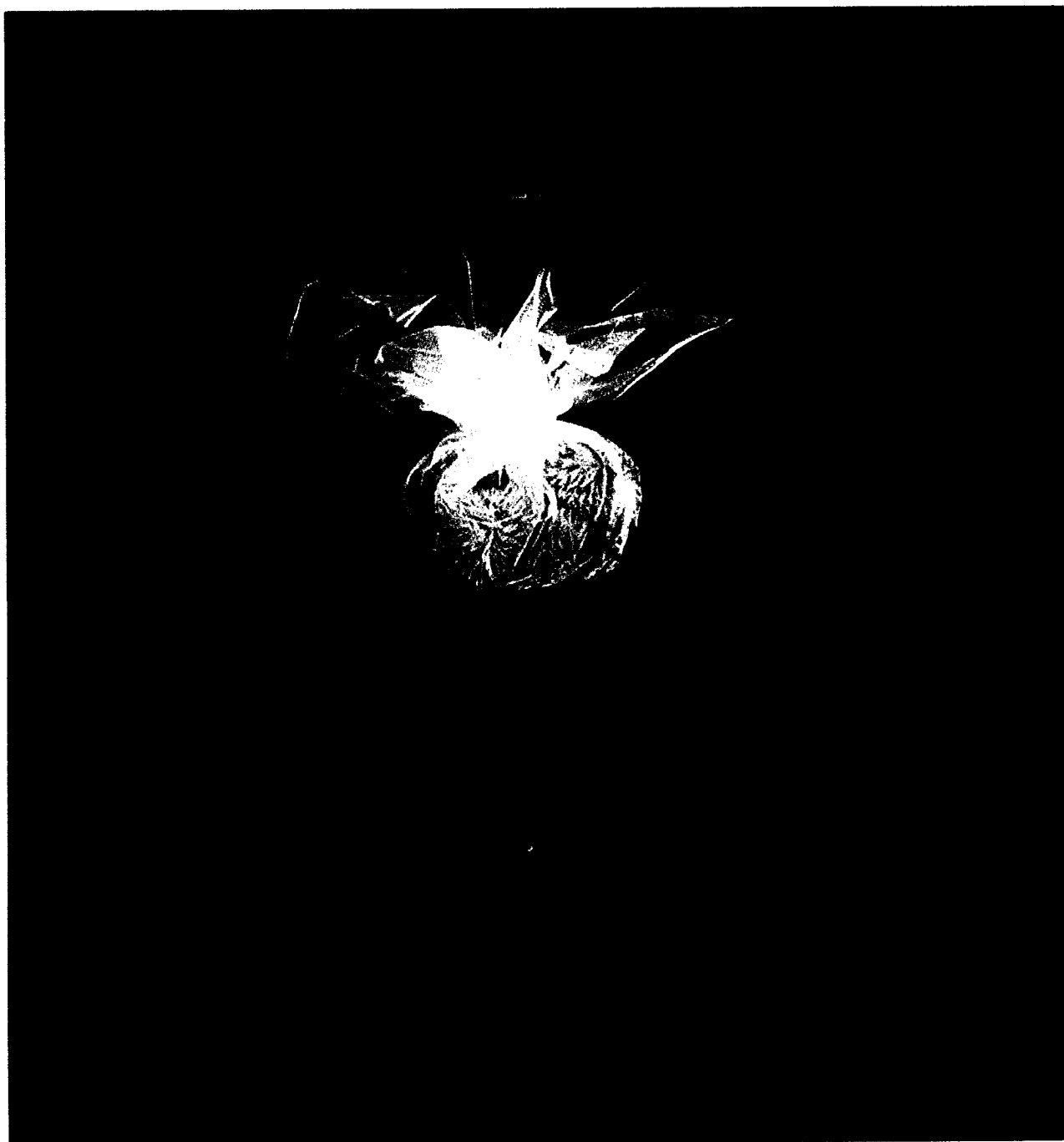
speaks to my fear of opening my self and my heart. This work was made during a period of time when I felt content in my solitude. I felt that my life was whole, as my time was filled with teaching, my friends, my dog Lucie, my yoga practice, and an active lifestyle was sufficient. When I started changing direction; I met Jon, and pursued my goal of pursuing my education and artistic practice, my work changed. It evolved from having a closed, protected feeling and became more open, seductive, and sacred. These pieces usually radiated from a “precious” center of shell, or a bright hue, surrounded by thorns, feathers, wire, etc. Not all of my work fits into these two categories. Some of my work is more literal, like the metal thread sewn into the slate, which spoke of a frustrating and time consuming experience with a computer. I do feel that the progression of my work speaks to the changes and openings that happened in my life, as I learned to accept my need for love and family to be present in my life.

### Chronology

The Art Education graduate program at Concordia provided many of the things that I had been seeking. The diverse community of artists and teachers present there gave me the support that I had been yearning for. There were a dozen students new to the graduate program who were interested in and serious about their artwork. “Now that I have this new commitment to make art. My teaching is put on hold--and really this is what I wanted to happen through the process of this program. I have to do it--I have to make it a priority. Moving forward, learning, *making*.” (1/23/01)



"Fur II", 1999



"Package II", 1999





"Center", 2000



"Wired", 2000

I began keeping an artist's journal with the intention of taking my "self" as a whole more seriously, and as an on-going practice, parallel to my art making. I thought that this could possibly help feed and nurture my artistic practice while I was in and out of graduate school. "This is the official beginning of my attempt to find order in my life and answer some questions for myself. Through the process of reading, writing and creating "little treasures", I will attempt to find my center or core--the place from which my creativity will stem. A personal journey exploring my thoughts and actions--a journey which I hope will lead to better decision-making- better choice-making – ultimately so that I may become more creative and focused."(1/23/01)

Through my Studio Inquiry courses I received regular feedback on my artwork and found that my work was growing and developing. My identity as an artist also grew. The thoughtful responses that I received from my colleagues helped me realize that my artwork was more than elements put together but that they spoke of the progression of my life and love, and held my fears and joys. "I am so excited that the things I make hold meaning."(1/23/01). My classmates helped me in seeing the content of my work as they grew to understand me as an individual, since I revealed things about my life when sharing my work.

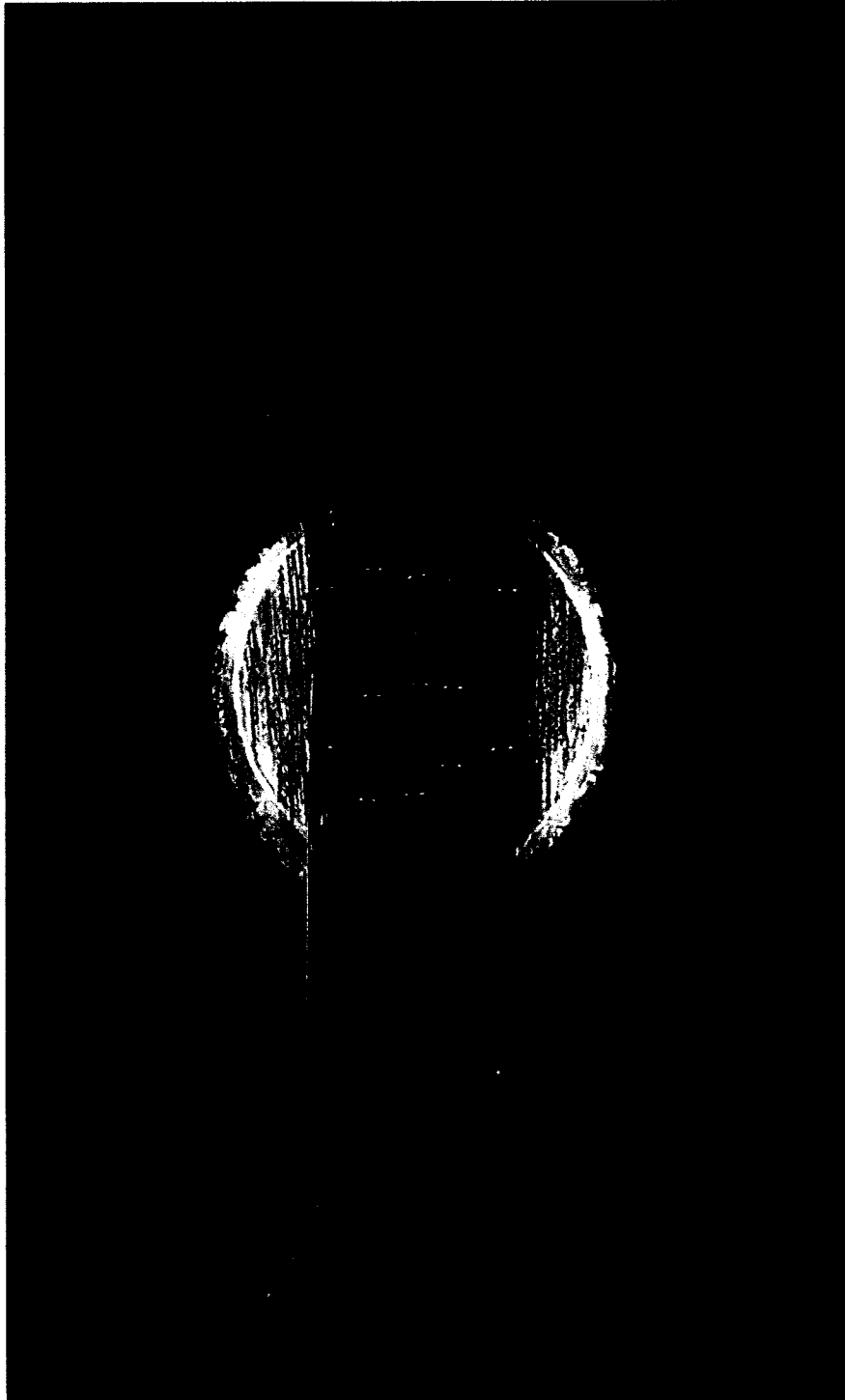
Making artwork made me feel alive. I would spend my weeks thinking about what I was going to make next, or how I would resolve a piece in progress. "Every day I wish that I was working on that piece in my studio--I have a piece unfinished--waiting for me to work on it- and another in mind. I have been gathering materials every weekend-- and *thinking*. How will I resolve this piece? I can't wait to be back home- mostly so that I can be in my teeny-tiny studio resolving another piece."(3/13/01)

Writing in my journal seemed to help me see my personal and artistic progression objectively. It became a place for me to reflect on my artwork, studio practice, and take in and process the feedback that I was receiving when sharing my work.

The actual process of making artwork also became important to me. "I thought a lot about the piece I wanted to make and realized something about my process. Because I am only able to work on weekends I find that I think about the work all week. Hence the Sunday artist who thinks of it every day." (2/4/01)

I started to think about how I was making things, and what things were necessary for me to proceed. "I have a clear idea of what I want to make--and once I actually get my hands dirty the idea works me and moves me forward."(2/4/01) I became very deliberate with the materials that I chose, and my work developed steadily, as did my energy, happiness and creativity. "I feel so pleased to be my *self*--to be and feel so clear about who I am and what my priorities are. I am clear in my person, clear in my goals, clear in my love, clear in my priorities."(3/21/01)

When I returned to Vermont permanently at the end of April 2001, I did not go back to "reality" right away. I had been accepted to participate in "Vermont Week" at the Studio Center in Johnson, Vermont, only 10 miles from my home. The Studio Center is an artists' residency where artists and writers are provided with a studio, a bedroom, and three meals a day. Being here was an easy transition from Concordia, as I had the goal of developing my work into a thesis exhibit. "I am going [to the Studio Center] with the direct goals of making work for a show and for my master's thesis. I will require more focus and directive behavior in order to do this." (4/30/01).



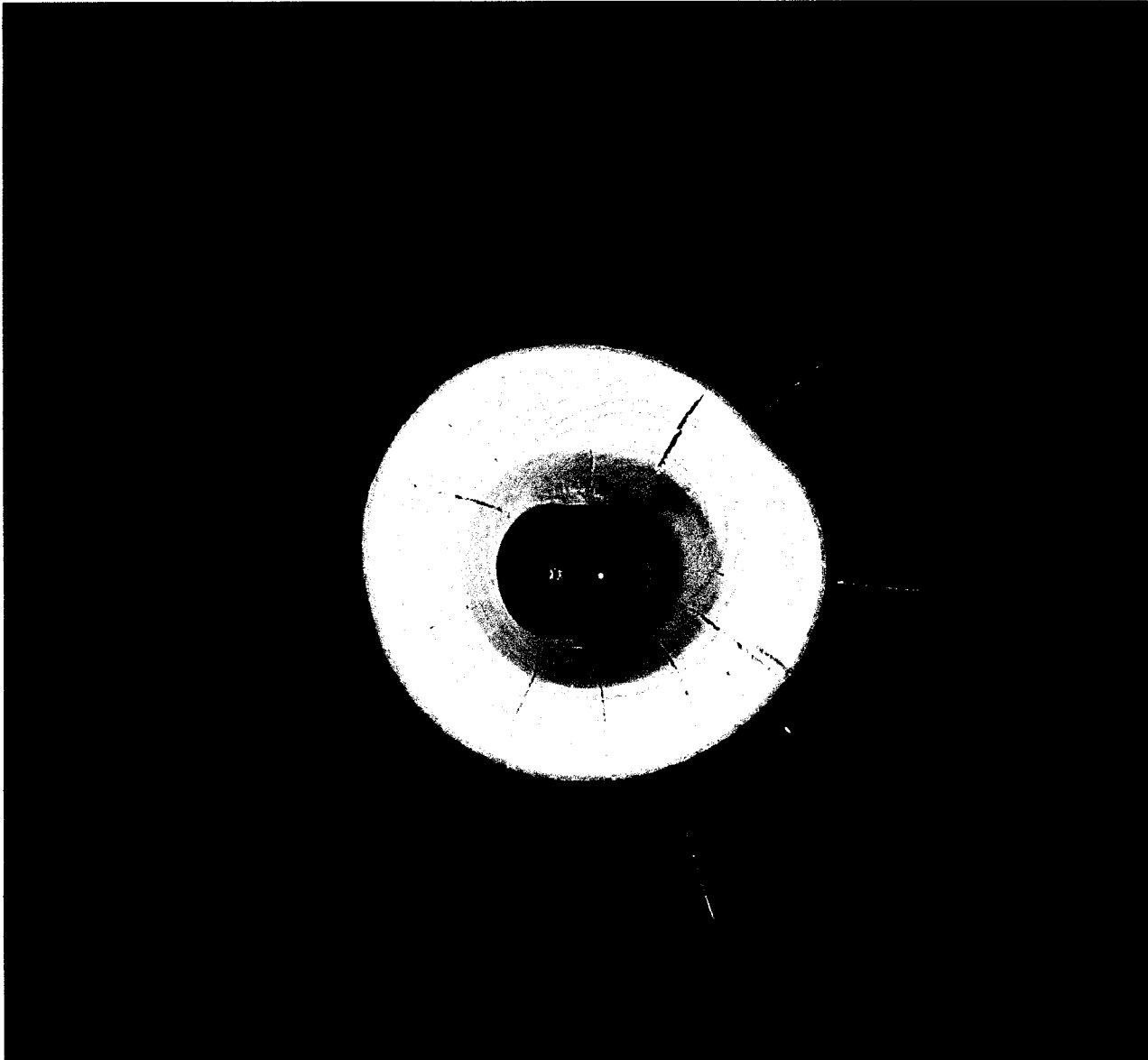
"Lines", 2001

Having a week of un-interrupted work time was incredible. "It is so much different not to be constantly interrupted by dog, cat, cooking, cleaning, etc." (5/1/02). My work seemed resolved and thoughtful, as I spent much of my time writing and reflecting upon my process. "I think that my process is very different than I thought it would be. I seem to need the time to really think certain pieces and ideas through in order to make better pieces. If I make things thoughtlessly ... then they just don't turn out right. I feel like I should be making things non-stop because I'm here, but that doesn't cut the cake. I also need that process time to work through the different things that I do so that they can be intentional." (5/2/01) This was a fertile time for my growth as an artist.

As my work grew, and I advanced in my thinking, I began to take the idea of an exhibit seriously. "I really need to get moving on that--I think that it would be really special to be able to get some exposure. I am still shy about my work--but driven. I am really interested in getting over my shyness about showing my work and get some feedback on it. If I am serious about making it then I should also share it with the world out there."(5/4/01). The content of my work also became more obvious and important to me. "I think that I succeed in incorporating the things which I notice and love from nature into it [my work]. Those things that surprise me in their beauty and presence in the world. Isolating those elements make them stand out more, and I feel lucky to be able to incorporate nature into my work."(5/04/01). It was during this period that my whole year came to a creative hiatus, as I had never felt so sure of my artwork and myself. "Writing things down, as long as it takes, resolves things in my mind. I am rich to have found this parallel process to my creativity. It's been a great mix--making, writing, and being with nature. Hooray!"(5/6/01).



"Golden Center", 2001



"Out", 2001



Returning to my teaching career was a struggle. I found little balance between my arduous schedule, searching for and finding housing, and trying to make progress with my art/graduate schoolwork. During this time I also realized the level of commitment that I was feeling towards Jon, and proposed marriage to him, an event projected for the next summer.

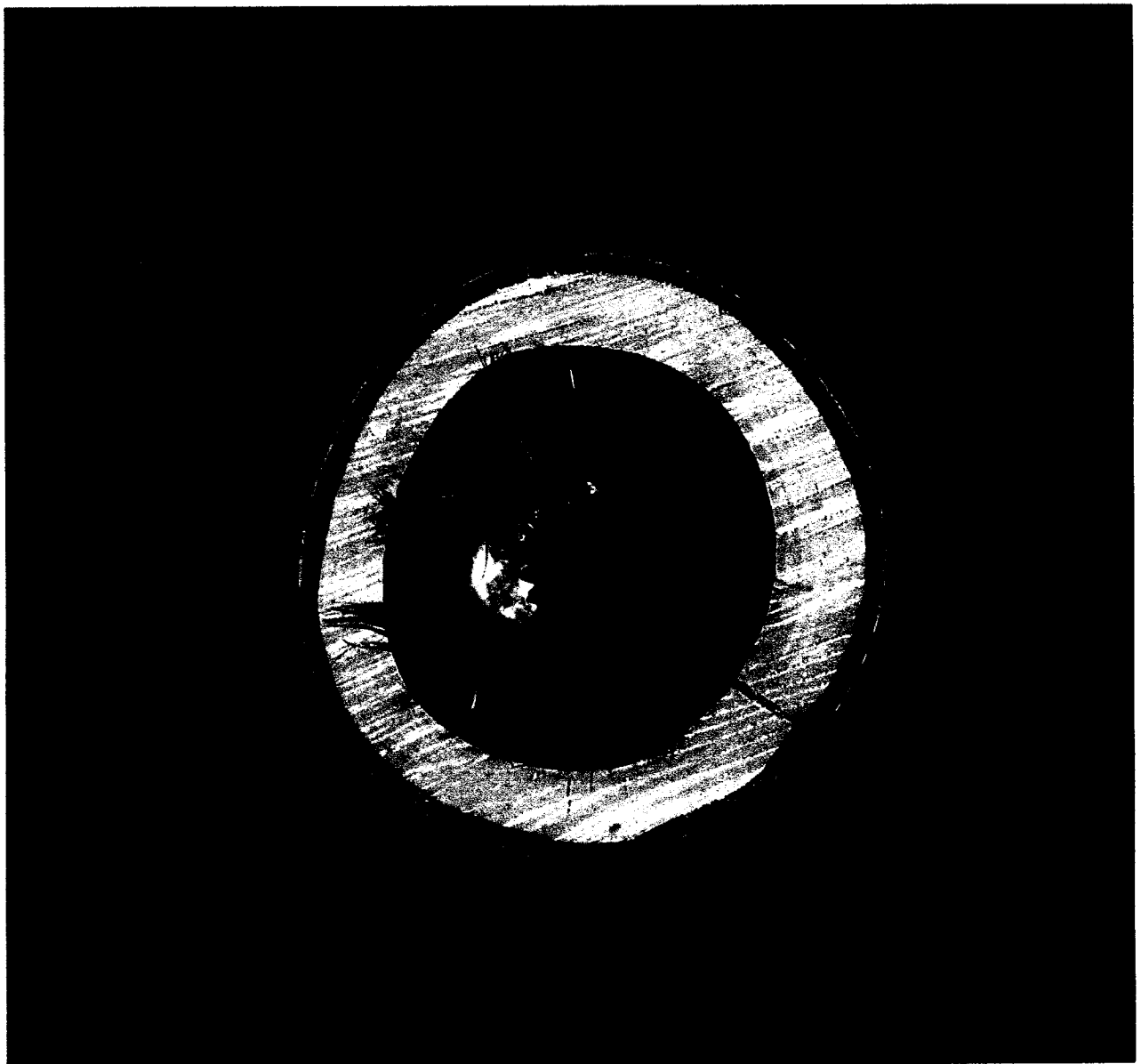
My journal writing became very sporadic during this adjustment period. In late September I started setting time aside every Monday after school to write in my journal. This structure was perfect for me, as it became “my” time to write and reflect and try to progress as an artist. “Well--this is my second week of taking some of Monday afternoon to specifically work on my thesis--and I actually look forward to it!”(10/1/01) I did this in a coffee shop in Johnson, which was a reminder of my time at the Studio Center, since many students and artists frequented this location. “Even if I’m not talking to anyone else, the feeling of a presence of like-minded people makes me feel like I am in a supportive environment. No one is questioning that I just feel the need to sit down and write and reflect. I fit right in and it all seems natural.”(10/01).

It seems that finding a home, “This *home* thing is wonderful.”(1/5/02), and moving, “I feel like I can relax a part of life that was totally stressed and start to think of the next step more clearly.”(1/5/02) was a turning point for my growth. My journal became more productive from this point on, even though my “projects” became more numerous. I continued to move forward towards becoming a true artist, although I was not making work. “Two months later...some progress and still some slow moving. I am proud, though, to see that two things that I really needed to do, and put on my last list, are done! I got slides made of all of my assemblage work... I am really psyched that I now

have nice slides to show people and move forward with. I have also found myself a studio space! I'm excited that it's affordable, well-lit, and in the midst of Jeffersonville village so that I have walking access to all kinds of places!" (3/4/02). Writing in my journal helped me through this period, as it kept me organized and committed to advancing artistically. I would make lists, jot down ideas for work, and just think about the importance that my creativity held in my life. Without my journal I don't think that I would have been as motivated to make slides of my work, find a studio, or start to exhibit my work. My journal became my conscience. Before writing every week I would reread my last entry and be faced with my advancement, or lack thereof.

The summer of 2002 led to a major turn in the road. I married Jonathan and had a month of family events surrounding this union. I also became more active in my studio and my progression as an artist. "Things that have become clear to me: With my lifestyle as it is, I am not doing what I really want to be doing. I went back to school 2 years ago

in order to start making artwork again, and find the needed dedication to my artwork that I was yearning for. I want to be able to consider myself an artist--someone who regularly thinks about and makes artwork, and has the guts to exhibit her work."(7/24/02). I also began looking for and applying to area exhibition spaces and was accepted to participate in two Burlington area art shows. As I gained some objectivity towards my school-year, how busy I was, and that being an artist *and* a full-time teacher was not compatible, "...The fact that I work full-time at a job that is exhausting and overwhelming, that I am married and am trying to keep a good relationship, keep a home and be physically active with yoga, hiking, running, etc."(7/24/02), I started thinking that I should make a change concerning my job and work toward a part-time teaching career



"Pod", 2001

concerning my job and work toward a part-time teaching career so that I could spend more time working in my studio and showing my work. "I have been doing a lot of thinking, nonetheless, about teaching/creating/my studio, what I really want to do."(7/24/02).

Analyzing my journal writings applying the active and reflective consciousness techniques enabled me to understand my thoughts and ideas more objectively, and also helped me advance in my goal to establish myself as what I felt was a working artist. The rereading and contemplation, along with the dissection of the themes prevalent in my journal, helped me gain a further understanding of my self, and what I needed as a person in order to move forward. I used the right side of the page to note the recurring issues, and categorized them for frequency and importance. This leads to the organized themes that were crucial to my artistic progression.

### **Journal themes**

Re-reading and reflecting upon the content of my journal has been an eye-opening and emotional process. At first when I did this, it was as if I was reliving the many positive and some traumatic events that had passed. This process made me more conscious about the "theme" and purpose of my journal, thus I omitted more unrelated thoughts and proceedings.

An active and reflective approach to looking back over the thoughts and occurrences of the past several years led me toward finding the themes present in my diaries that were important to my advancement as an artist. Learning from my writing has been directly related to consciously dissecting and reflecting upon its contents.

Art making as a whole became the most extensive subject matter present in the journals. I found many topics to be directly related to my evolution toward becoming a serious, more established artist. My artistic process, my feelings toward my artwork, my relationship and thoughts regarding the materials that I worked with, and the pursuit of a studio space and exhibiting my work all appeared repeatedly.

Other themes emerged which I deem as important as my artistic practice. I contemplated concepts related to my growing relationship with Jonathan, my teaching career, my need for balance, and my connection to nature. I also noticed how writing developed into a growing practice. The lists that I wrote to help organize myself and were equally related to my development.

I discovered that there was no real hierarchy concerning the subjects found in my journals. All of them are interdependent and my understanding of the “whole” would not have happened without all of the parts.

The thoughts and feelings that revolved around my artistic process were prevalent in my writings. I not only wrote about things as they were happening--“These holes in the middle of the wood are really calling to me.” (5/2/01)--but also gained an understanding of *how* I made things. During my time at the Studio Center I reflected upon my productivity as an artist, and gained a better understanding of myself. “My idle time is not idle--It’s thinking, processing and creating time. This time is key to my production and to having good ideas that strongly speak to me. I need to stop feeling guilty about taking this time to write, reflect, and walk through the woods...The time spent gathering materials is part of my artistic process. The choice of materials and collections make my work possible. I should not minimize it.” (5/4/01). I recorded

periods of inactivity--“I haven’t even thought about making artwork. I’m so preoccupied with everything else that artwork comes last.” (5/19/01), and learned from my work and myself: I get a lot of energy out of making things. It is hard to get motivated--and lately I’ve had a hard time doing anything, but when I reread about the thrill I get in making things it really makes me want to make more.” (6/13/01).

With hindsight, I learned important details that correlated to my personal evolution “I really have to take things and make them into chewable bites--small pieces that make sense.” (3/4/02). With the many projects and life activities that I was trying to balance, the journal helped me make advances as an artist, and in my understanding of my personal process. “I am doing the things that I have been waiting to do--getting opportunities (and taking them) to show my work, dabbling with materials in my studio, getting organized to work, etc.” (8/6/02).

The maturation process of a possible exhibition of my work is also documented in my writings. As I began thinking of the possibility of sharing my work with others in a formal setting, “I have been starting to think about finding a space to show my work--there are so many things that I’ll need to do to make that happen.” (5/2/01), I was insecure. “Should I be embarrassed to show my new work?” (5/2/01). The development of this aspect became a pre-occupation: “I am still really shy about this work-but driven. I am really interested in getting over this shyness about showing the work and get some feedback on it. If I am serious about making it then I should also share it with the world out there. Get over it! Stop being a baby and just show it!”(5/3/01). I worked towards making an exhibit of my work a reality, and from there gained a sense of outside support and encouragement. “I showed six pieces at the Hannabelle art show in Cambridge last

weekend, and I think that I would have had a good chance of selling some of the work--if it was for sale. Jon and I went to the party that they held after the show, and shmoozed. This “art collector” guy was really interested in my work and would have bought some. All of this gave me more motivation and drive to make work.” (9/1/01). The journal writing helped make the small steps that it took to show my work more structured, for if I attained my weekly goals and lists, and then I made progress. “The next bites that I can chew are to start to find a space where I can SHOW my work. I would really like it to be a gallery of some kind.” (3/4/01).

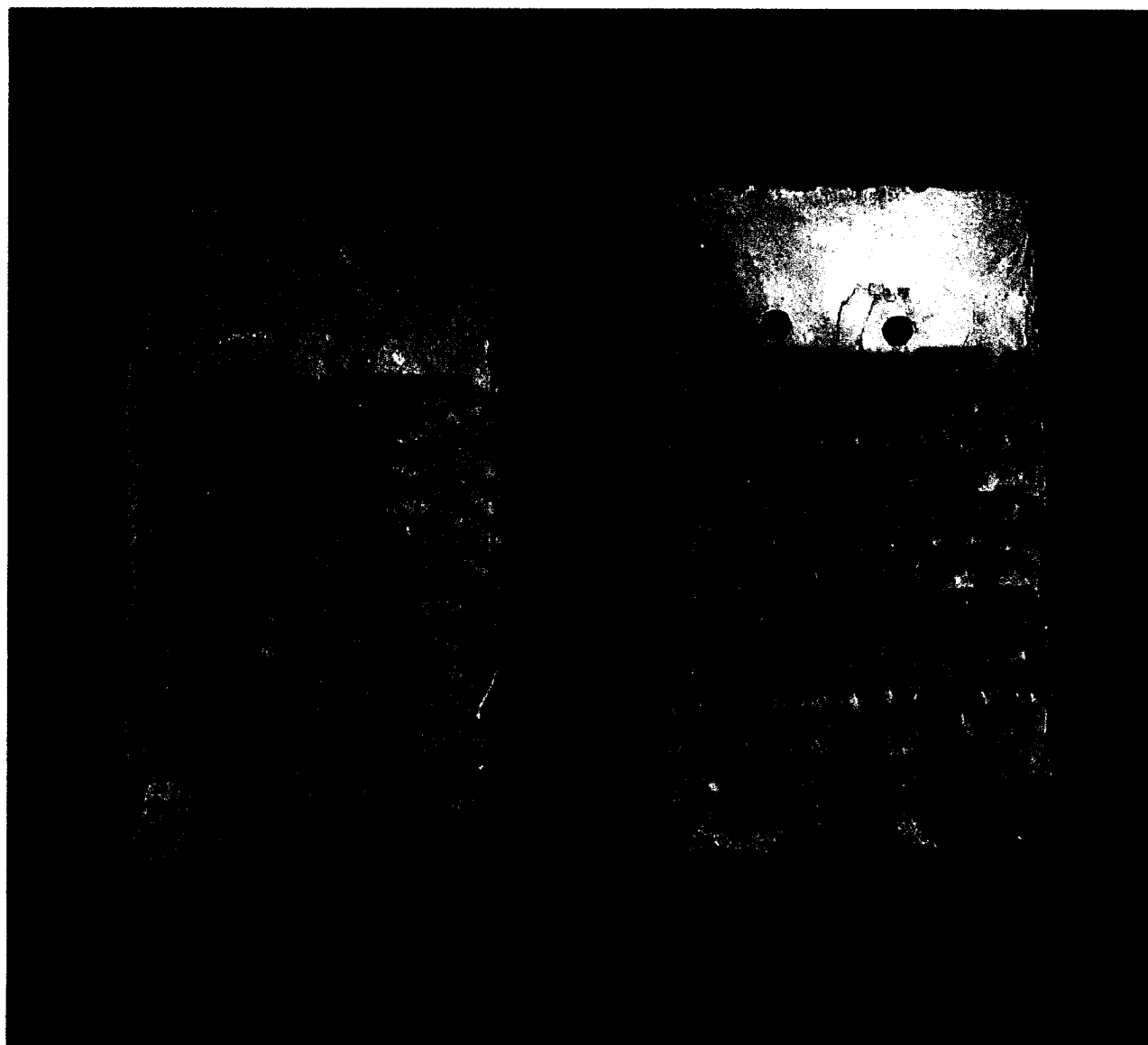
As materials are required ingredients for my work to be possible, I found that I not only reflected on the actual materials that I was using: “100 cardinal feathers! They are such a source of inspiration.” (5/3/01); but also how I got them, “I spent the morning walking the Urie Farm loop so that I could collect thorns for the piece I made today. I knew what it was that I wanted to make- and I knew that I didn’t have enough of the right materials. It was great to get into the woods” (5/4/01); how I felt about them: “It is wonderful to have such beautiful things – I think that in the winter, too. How I love to have beautiful things to look at.” (6/1/01); and how they contributed to the content and meaning of my creations. “I am getting more interested in the direction which my work is coming from and going. I think that I succeed in incorporating the things that I notice and love from nature into it. These things that surprise me in their beauty and presence in the world. Isolating them makes them stand out a little more, and I feel lucky to be able to incorporate them into my work.” (5/5/01).

The search for a space that I could use solely to concentrate on my creativity needed time to develop and become a reality. After putting ads in the local newspapers,

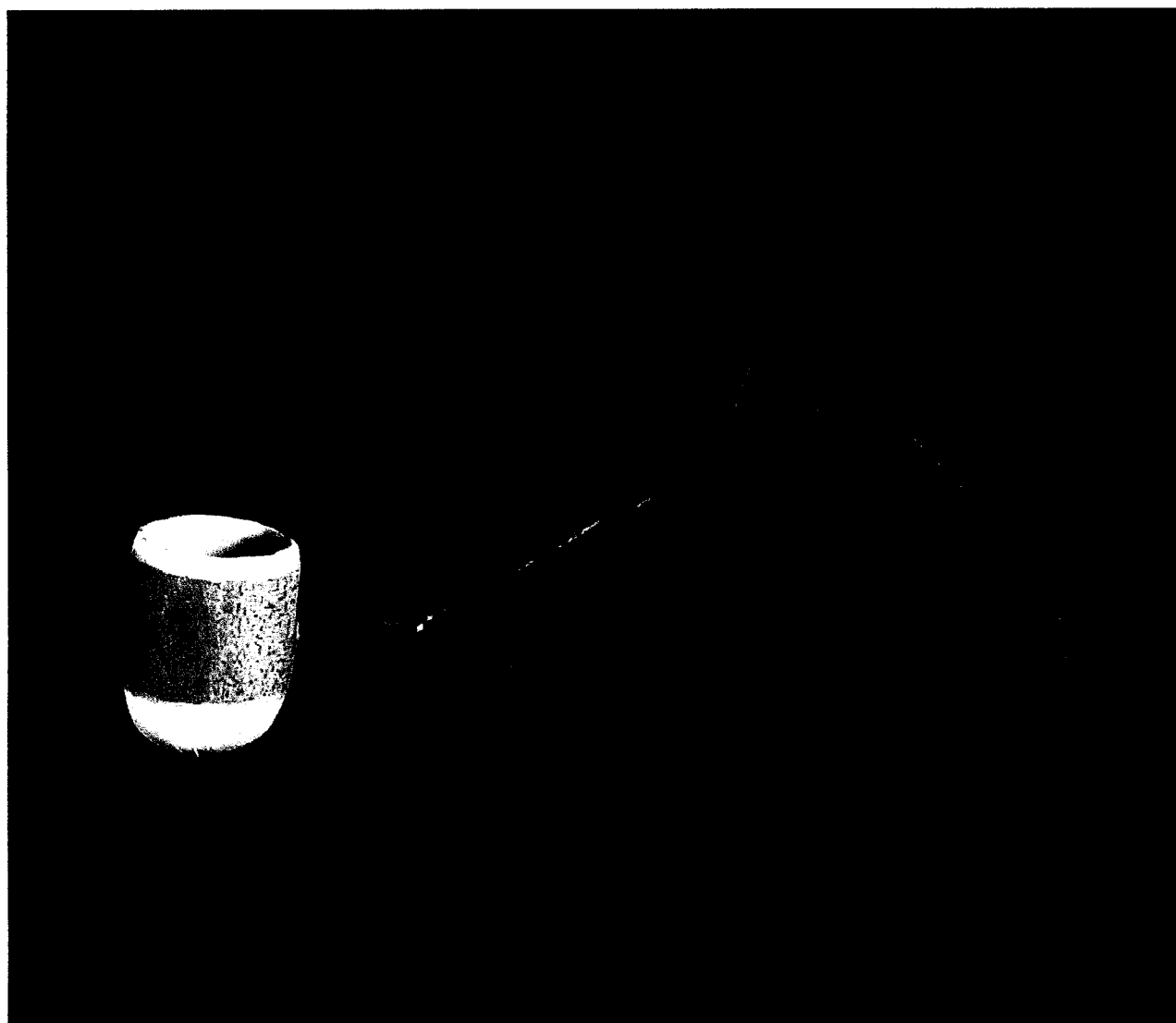
searching word-of-mouth around the community, and investigating spaces that appeared to be vacant, I found a small, reasonably priced studio that I could call my own. "I have my studio! Now I need to make the time to go in and work--like this -- this is work that I could be doing sitting in the comfortable atmosphere of that nice room. It is a place just to put all of my beautiful things that I have collected for so long. It is light and pleasant and I really like it!" (4/5/02). This space seemed like a gift: "I am so fortunate to have my studio. It is as if a message was sent to the world, and back came exactly what I was yearning for; a small, quiet, private space that is *mine*--where I can make a mess, store all of my materials, and feel at home." (8/2/02), which I used as soon as time would allow me to; "Wow! It didn't take me long to get a lot going in my studio--it's a working space!"(8/6/02).

Making a body of artwork led to a deeper understanding of, and self-assurance about my work. "I really feel that the newer work is stronger--more sophisticated and together." (5/5/01). I considered the influences of my work: "I see Andy Goldsworthy as an influence. I love his work. I also see aboriginal South American feather work as an influence. I'm obviously affected by the Native American work." (5/5/01); and persisted to reflect upon and learn from it when I was no longer actively making work. "I continue to be interested in my artwork. I've taken down some of the pieces that I didn't like and am enjoying the body of work that I am seeing in front of me." (6/13/01).





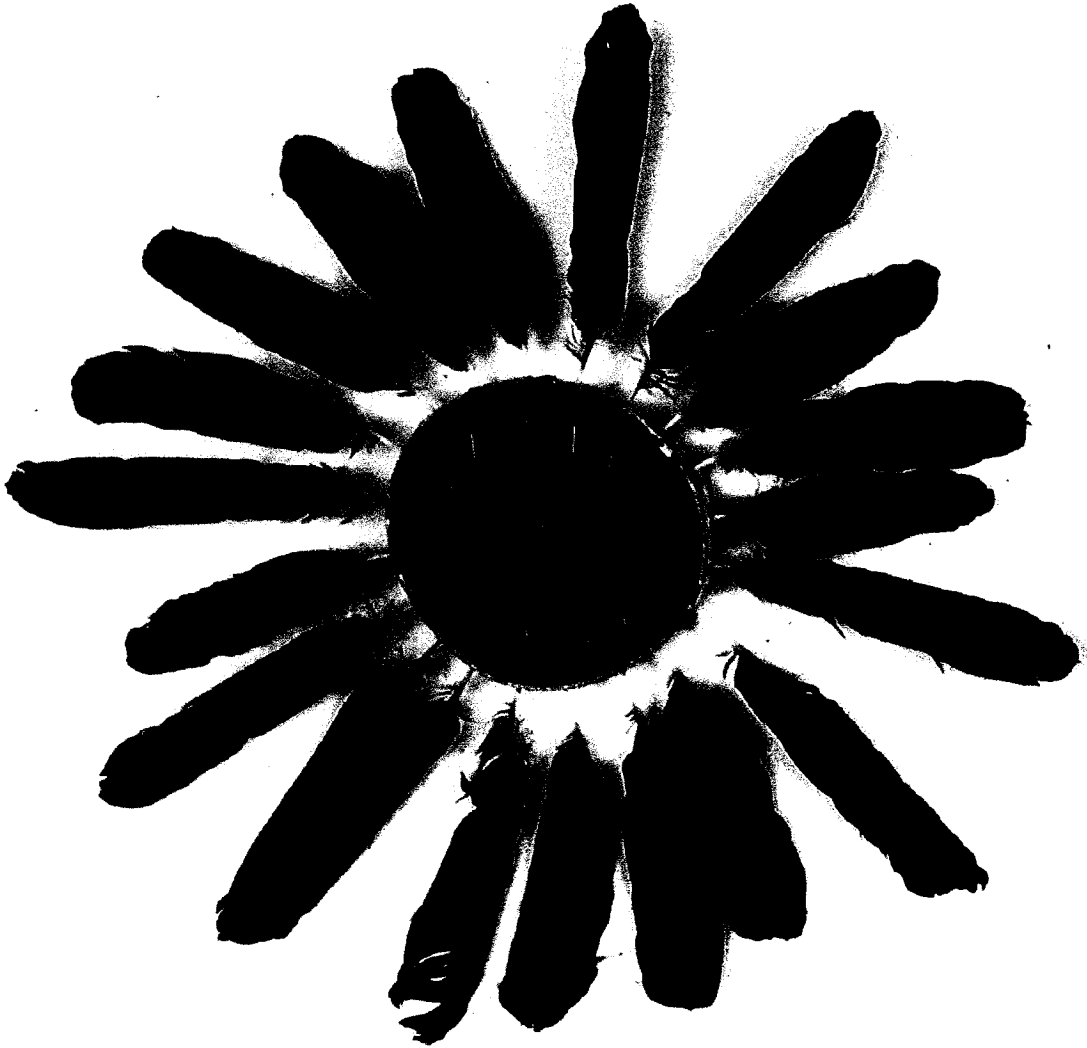
"120", 2001



"Vessel". 2001

The influence and connection that my artwork has with nature goes deep into my being. I am a person who finds solace and inspiration in nature during all four seasons. “I’ve been working pretty steadily for the past couple of hours and thought that it was time to reunite myself with the birds and the river.” (5/2/01). Even though this is apparent to me, I was surprised at the frequency that it happened as revealed in my journal. “I saw some really neat wildlife yesterday and today. Yesterday I was hiking up to Sterling Pond and it was like being back in early spring. Today I saw a flicker and a bobolink and a bluebird.” (6/1/01). It became clear that the natural world was a place for me to heal, “I am excited to walk in the woods... This can give me the extra push that I need during a summer like this – a summer of loss – Nat leaving, leaving my home of three years, and losing my seventeen year old friend, my beloved dog, Lucie.” (5/19/01); find balance: “I am so happy that it is starting to be fall. Walking and hiking and the beautiful light are incredible. I feel more grounded and inspired.” (9/1/01); and find stimulation: “Sitting by the river watching the minnows swim around makes me think about how inspirational nature is to me. Where I live and what I do for leisure/balance seems to revolve around my love and admiration of this beautiful earth. It is nice to live in the trees, look up from my deck and watch the hawks fly by, watch the flowers, birds, and animals come and go. I am lucky, and thankful, to be able to live like this.” (8/18/02).

As my relationship with Jonathan grew and developed into a marital union, he took an obvious space in my life and writings. My certitude that a life of love and commitment with Jon would be a positive and supportive aspect of my life was made clear through my words concerning him, and our relationship. “Having Jonathan in my life is a real grounding factor.” (5/4/01). His presence helped me grow and develop into a



"Cicada", 2000

more loving and trusting person, as his patient nature gave me the space and support that I needed to take my artistic development seriously. "Another exciting thing is that I am going to get hitched up to Jonathan. I am really looking forward to duking out and enjoying this relationship with him. He is such a special, wonderful being. I love our good times and feel a sense of peace and fulfillment through duking it out during our hard times. I am psyched to put energy towards a marriage and a celebration. Yeah!"

(11/5/01).

The lists that I made in my journal spoke of all of the aspects of my creativity and life. They seemed to provide the structure that I needed to balance my art making with the other demands in my life. When overwhelmed, I would list all of the things that were on my plate: "There are so many things coming: Now that I write I can think of what's coming- cleaning to do at home, laundry. Montreal this weekend, my forever time at school, trying to progress artistically, the work that I want to make (that wall of thorns) goals other than my "work" such as a proposal and marriage with Jonathan, getting things patched up with Nathalie, travels to India, France, Vancouver, Montreal, Boston, even Burlington! Friends that I'm neglecting and not making time to connect with, that time consuming relationship, cultural events, art show, events, gatherings, etc. *Wow--and that's not all of it. Family responsibilities, visits, pets, children, human relations, love, joy, mourning, food, cooking, sleeping, etc. Work. How will I ever do it all?"*(10/1/01).

I recorded things that I saw:

6/1/01 "Blue bird

Shocking red of red-winged blackbird

Sword fighting with Jonathan and Sean

Tenting

The sound of the wind, the smell of the fields

Swallows flying low

Lucie is lying in the sun.”

What needed to do for myself spiritually:

5/15/01 “I need to walk in the woods

To write uninterrupted

To make work

To spend time with Jon

To send Nathalie mementos

I really need to find myself again.

I need to work on my body image-to love myself the way I am

I need to do more yoga!

I don't have the *time* to do everything.”

And logistically:

10/29/01 “SLIDES-call Romero

STUDIO- talk to Jon's friend

SUPPORT-talk to some artists

MOVE-find a place to live

THESIS-call Paul

HEALTH- talk to Michael”.

It was a really exciting feeling to recapitulate the things that I had accomplished, for they indicated progress and a forward movement:

4/5/02

“I have: \*SLIDES

\*HOME

\*STUDIO

\*OPPORTUNITIES

\*LOVE

\*STABILITY”

When I returned to my teaching career it became clear to me that the nature of a full-time position, and the responsibilities attached to it were hindering my personal artistic growth. As much as I was committed to the subject and the students’ personalities and growth, I found that I had little time and energy left for myself.

“Teaching has been *so* ever and all-consuming.” (10/15/01). There seems to be change in progress, in this area. Even though I have committed myself to teaching during the 2002-3 school year, writing has led me to an investigation of the possibility of different career options: “I need to move forward soon. I’d like to work toward having more free time. Maybe work part-time?” (9/1/01); leading to change. “I am not really sure how I could make a comparable living otherwise- I am interested in teaching privately and could be really creative in making money. It’s just scary to go back to having little money, no

health insurance, etc. But, when I think about how little I spent when I was at school at Concordia and how happy I was with my hands in so many different pots--and having a different schedule every day. I did tell myself that I would teach for ten years and then re-evaluate, well here I am re-evaluating! I should make a list of the pros and cons of having this job, and start deciding and possibly re-directing my professional life.”(8/8/02).

Even though the time and energy spent teaching seemed discouraging to my growth as an artist, I also started to see it as one of my creative outlets. The units and energy put forth in my classroom, together with the personal approach that I give to each student’s artistic growth, is also a factor in my evolution.

The actual process of writing was the source that led to the deepest understanding of my self as a whole. As I wrote about writing, I understood the necessary place that it took in my life, as it helped clarify and feed my artistic development. “I really like making writing a part of my artistic practice. It helps make things feel whole.”(5/2/01). The action of writing not only served as a mediator of reality, it also helped put the parts together and merged with the artistic process. “I love to take the time and stop and write in this book. It does two things: Makes me feel like I am making progress regarding my thesis and the work that I have been interested in--*but*--it also makes me look in the mirror at all of the things that I haven’t done yet.”(10/8/01).

The act of writing encompassed all that I was thinking, doing, working toward, structuring for myself, and accomplishing. I found that I could work through ideas and problems as well as express my frustrations and feelings using my written word. Writing became the tool that linked my artwork and artistic life with the projects and ideas that



were prevalent in my teaching, relationships and the rest of my life as well. It became the place where I could find the organization and motivation that I needed to move forward.

My artwork and journal together helped me to clarify my thoughts, structure my life and understand my needs as a growing artist. They also helped me to objectify my feelings about my self, my relationships with others and the significance that my artwork and creativity held in my life. Both were equal in their significance to my life and the evolution of my self as an artist. The objectivity that I gained in rereading and analyzing my words were also crucial to my growth. As I mentioned before, my journal became my “conscience”, the place from which I had to reflect on my progress as a growing artist. It helped me see my life, profession and creativity more objectively. The ingredients that have helped me transpire to where I am presently are directly linked to the women artists’ journals that I read, the making of my own personal journal, my art practice, and my deeper understanding of my self and my creative nature.

### **Conclusion**

My progress as an artist, the decisions that I am considering regarding my career as an art teacher and the deeper understanding regarding the process of returning to a commitment to my artistic practice are all directly related to the inquiry that I made into the potential benefits of journaling. These elements that I pursued have become important pieces linked to my creative growth and development, and to the understanding of my self, and others, in this process. Women artists’ journals remain a resource of understanding the route to take in becoming an artist for me. Journaling and the important place that my writing has in my life are also a factor in my evolution as an

artist. All of these components have helped me keep a more regular studio practice, as well as given me the courage to exhibit and share my artwork, and grow in my understanding of myself and my career.

My understanding of my own creativity and what I consider to be my creative activity has also evolved. I have gained an understanding of myself as a creative being and have an expanded notion of the creative avenues in my life. This enables me to feel less regret when I am not in the studio or working on my growth as an artist.

Elements from most of the women artists' journals that I read in the process of this personal investigation continue to echo in my mind. These writings have become voices in my head that resonate when I need a little extra motivation, or some inspiration to keep going. Anne Truitt's words regarding the discipline, increased energy, and time before children resound in my mind on a regular basis. I hear her talk about how making one's life as an artist is similar to running a small business. This helps me when I am overwhelmed with my life and career and cannot find time to get to the studio. It is at times like this that I realize how many demands are involved in my career and how impossible it would be to take on another "small business" at the same time. Truitt's words also come to mind when I am putting myself out there, sharing my work with friends or a potential exhibitor. I am continuously reminded that a part of being an artist is taking risks. For me that means taking chances with materials as well as in the sharing of my work.

My mixed feelings about not having had children yet are similar to the way Truitt felt when she was unable to conceive. In retrospect, she felt that she would not have

developed artistically if she had had children earlier, and hearing her words makes me feel more justified in making my personal and artistic advancement a priority.

Truitt also spoke of the increased energy, and the balances that it took to follow her artistic vocation. These thoughts have helped motivate me when I have been tired but still brought my work to a potential exhibitor, or made myself go to my studio. She also inspired me to find out what balances in my life I need in order to take on the many projects that I am faced with, or choose for myself.

Witzling's compilation of women artists' writings does "validate my vocation". The insight that I have gained into the lives and thoughts of these many women artists have helped me feel less isolated and has succeeded in creating a resource for support and kinship. I feel more "authentic" as an artist knowing that many women have faced similar barriers and breakthroughs as I have.

These writings have had an incredible impact on my awareness of the course of action involved in taking one's creative development seriously. They have increased my knowledge of the sacrifice and energy involved in creating and exhibiting artwork, and helped me paint a realistic image of the procedures that I needed to take in order to personally advance in my career as a creating artist.

My artistic journal has had a monumental impact on my artistic advancement. Devoting my time and energy to pursuing a master's degree with the aim to develop as an artist took a positive turn when I coupled art making with journal writing. My journal took on many roles, as it became a place for me to verbalize visual ideas, work out problems, provide encouragement, and become a safe place to prepare for taking risks. My journal became the mirror that reflected my accomplishments, kept me focused,

structured my tasks, clarified my personal and conceived obstacles, and reinforced my commitment to art making. This process helped me gain a better understanding of my working style, and helped me uncover the sources of my artistic inspiration. I could not have predicted what an immense impact my understanding of my journal would have on my personal and artistic growth. Writing in my journal has become a key element in my artistic accomplishments, the understanding of my creativity, and the place that my career takes in my life.

Making a body of artwork has also been a positive step in my professional artistic development. I have come to understand some of my interests more deeply in making and contemplating the value and meaning that my artwork has for me. I know now that I need to structure time into my busy life in order to collect materials and make artwork. I have also come to better understand the sources of inspiration and the relevance that my work holds in my life. It makes much more sense to me to make work that I believe in and that mirrors the way that I look at and perceive my world. Not everyone has the opportunity to live this life of mine, and if I can relay my love and sensitivity towards nature and the beauty to others, then I have accomplished something worthwhile.

Sharing and exhibiting my work has increased my self-assurance regarding my artistic competence and the quality of my work. I have started to get used to showing my work to the art viewing public in order to participate in the half dozen exhibits that my work has been in in the last few years. I am not as prolific in this pursuit as I would like to be because it would require more time, energy, and artwork, but I have progressed and feel much more comfortable in sharing and showing my work.

At this point in my path of understanding myself and growing as an artist, I feel as though I have better understood the elements that I need in order to make art effectively and develop the self-assurance to exhibit my work. Reflecting upon my journal helped me understand that my home and relationship with Jonathan help provide the stability and support that I need to progress. Without these foundational factors I do not feel grounded. I have also come to the conclusion that I need to dedicate space and time to creation. My studio, the place that I have consecrated to my materials and to developing my ideas, has become crucial to my creating and exhibiting work. Because this space organizes my materials it becomes a structure that houses my ideas and a safe place to take risks. My studio has also become a place of solace, a personal space where I can retreat from the world and its responsibilities and devote myself to my creative production. There is no telephone and only rare interruptions so I am able to stay focused on ideas, and I am obliged to work.

I have also found that when I am able to set specific time aside to be in my studio, or make clear deadlines for work accomplished, I am more likely to be productive. If I have an exhibit to prepare for, or gifts to make for a certain celebration or holiday, I am forced to work out my ideas and produce work. Although I am by no means prolific, I have found that my ideas have evolved and my improvements are visible. I have also deviated from making only assemblage and have included photography and painting as means of expression. My interest in nature continues to appear in the work that I do, but my materials and means have become broader. This change is related to circumstance and time. As I have been teaching Multimedia Art, I have become more interested in digital photography as a means of expression. I also find that painting is less time

consuming, and have been making small watercolor paintings that express emotion and that I can work through ideas more efficiently given my time constraints. They also make nice gifts that people relate to more easily than assemblage and I find satisfaction in making them.

My journal writing has also evolved. I am less structured and specific when writing in my journal, but continue to use it as a tool for growth. I have found that I write more in periods of change or if I need extra motivation to get working again. I also tend to write when I first arrive in my studio, a process that becomes a meditative exercise allowing me to let go of worry, mundane stress and all of the other activities of the day. When I am unable to work in my studio, my journal also becomes an outlet for ideas that I may not be able to act on immediately. The many aspects that my artistic diary has taken in my growth is something special and I feel fortunate to have found this parallel tool to my creative production.

Making a body of work and understanding my journal has had an effect on my teaching career. Several of my students have gone to see my work in the group shows that I have participated in and I have heard them say on several occasions that I must know what I am talking about since I am an artist. I love teaching, and I love the rapport that is possible between myself, my students, and the artwork that they produce. I have also come to the clear understanding that if I was to take my artistic career more seriously, I would have to cut down on my teaching. I regularly contemplate the idea of a part time teaching career in order to devote more time and energy to making work, because I know how involved I get in my students and the work related to teaching. I do

not know how to “do less” when teaching, as there is always a new idea, problem, or project to tackle. If I didn’t put my all into it, then I would be shortchanging the students.

My clearer understanding of the place and demands that my career takes in my life has allowed me to expand my concept of my own creativity. I used to feel that I was only advancing artistically when making my own work and felt frustrated and guilty in my periods of artistic inactivity. I now see my teaching, relationships, and my home as places where I am a creative being.

In my teaching I am following many of the same processes that I utilize when making my artwork. I often think seriously about the problems that come up in my students’ work and help them find options or solutions that I can suggest. I am constantly learning to teach. By this I mean that I am always trying new projects or new approaches to old projects and learn through the students’ successes and level of understanding and interest. I am also constantly challenged by students’ personalities and behaviors. Whether I am working with students to keep them interested or individually challenged, or dealing with the problems that arise in my classroom, I find that I need to stay alert and be creative in my approach to all students.

Being in a committed relationship is also a process that requires creativity. Jonathan and I love to have fun together and have created a wonderful sense of trust and intimacy. In order to keep this we work through problems and face the challenges that arise together. I have found working with someone else toward a common goal to be more rewarding but also more challenging, than when alone. I have had to learn to be creative and flexible in my approach to working through problems, as well as keeping

things fresh and fun. This process definitely flexes my creative muscles, and is measured by our growth and happiness together.

Investigating women artists' journals, creating a body of artwork, and keeping my own journal have become the catalysts that have guided me to taking myself and my artistic profession more seriously. My journal also became the place where I was faced with reviewing and reflecting upon my artistic advancement and teaching career. I have evolved in my teaching and artistic production because of this very personal investigation. I have matured in my artwork and understand my needs and the choices ahead of me with more clarity. I feel committed and validated as an artist and a teacher and feel strongly about the important place that they both have in my life. I feel grounded and ready for what life brings to me and thankful for all of the important improvements that I have made in the process of this inquiry.



## ***REFERENCES***

Cowart, J. & Hamilton, J. (1987). Georgia O'Keeffe: Art and Letters. New York: Little, Brown and Company (Inc.).

Denzin, N. & Lincoln, Y. (Eds.). (1998). Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials. California: SAGE Publications, Inc.

Hawke, D. (1996). Autobiography as an Approach to Research of Artistic Practice. Australian Art Education, 19(3), 31-36.

Herivel, A. (1996). A Voyage Between Tide and Time: Creating Research in the Studio. Canadian Review of Art Education, 23(2), 55-73.

Meaning of Stream of Consciousness. (n.d.). Retrieved August 17, 2002, from <http://www.infoplease.com/ipd/A0674086.html>

Munro, E. (1979,2000). Originals: American Women Artists. Originally published: New York: Touchstone/Simon Schuster.

Truitt, A. (1982). Daybook: The Journey of an Artist. Originally published: New York: Pantheon Books.

Truitt, A. (1986). Turn: The Journey of an Artist. New York: Viking.

UNH Department of Art and Art History, "Mara Witzling, Professor – Art History, Coordinator of Women's Studies". (n.d.). Retrieved August 16, 2002, from <http://www.arts.unh.edu/faculty/witzling99.html>

Watrin, R. (1999). Art As Research. Canadian Review of Art Education, 26(2), 92-100.

Witzling, M. (Ed.). (1994). Voicing Today's Visions: Writings by Contemporary Women Artists. New York: Universe.

Witzling, M. (Ed.). (1991). Voicing Our Visions: Writings by Women Artists. London: The Women's Press Ltd.