EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL ENVIRONMENTAL MANIFESTATIONS

A Thesis

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by

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\[Signature\]
To My Teachers
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I express sincere appreciation to the members of my committee, Robert Shay, Deborah Horrell and Pheoris West. Special thanks to Emily Franz and Cathy Ellis for their patience and helpful clerical assistance.
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INTRODUCTION

Everyday I wake up differently. I am added to, subtracted from the previous days experience. My work and my life are constantly developing through experience and memory, growing to better understand who I am & what my purpose on earth is, if I must have one.

The visual language I've discovered communicates conscious and subconscious emotional and intellectual 'states of being'. Conscious refers to the identifiable internal and external events that build self-awareness. Subconscious refers to repressed emotions and events that surface through symbols and complex layers of free associations. The intellectual aspect relates to the metaphorical and conceptual analysis, which embrace my mental state at the time of execution. My relationship to the outside world is revealed through the external response I perceive. I am starting to find commonalities with others. The more I communicate my feelings, the smaller the world seems to be.

Graduate school is a stepping stone, giving me the license to call myself an emerging artist and the provocation to write a thesis; to record thoughts about my life and my art.
PART I
THE PRIMORDIAL CONFLICT

My art, a transformative process, manifests the accumulation of thoughts and emotion from my past and present experiences. Both two and three dimensionally, it translates repressed emotion or inaccessible people, places or events into a tangible identifiable language. Three distinct bodies of work, drawing, sculpture and plates have simultaneously existed feeding off each other, sharing similar imagery and emotion. Constructed figurative representations combined with mechanical imagery, metaphorically represents my internal microcosmic reality. That reality is comprised of opposing, conflicting, powerful emotions, and to retain sanity, must be channeled to a positive manifestation: artwork.

I feel a close connection to the land and have used the environment as a vehicle to metaphorically represent my inner struggle to understand myself. My agrarian background mandates the need to control and manipulate; to benefit from the land is parallel to my inner search for information. To understand and gain control in identifying my repressed emotions, purges and strengthens my personality. I strive to tap into the unconscious and draw out images that trigger responses, that in turn trigger further responses, intending to slowly build an identity communicable to others and myself. I am searching for self-definition.
The driving force of my creativity is emotion. My artwork thrives on a certain amount of conflict to balance the powerful diametrically opposed emotion such as love and hate. Anger and hate, the powerful feelings, overwhelm the more vulnerable feelings connected with intimacy. So the intimacy in my life is substituted by the time I spend in solitude and the dialogue established in my artwork communicates repressed feelings or emotion. I have always used my art to channel my energy; to transcend my emotion to a tangible manifestation.

Symbols are universal. As a child, the Pysanky or Ukrainian traditional Easter eggs, I painted, were symbolically connected to the land. The geometric plant and animal motifs represent every aspect of the agrarian lifestyle. Eastern Europeans have a close connection to the land, being the life source and unifying force of the people. My work remains symbolically charged in the mark making, imagery and color, reflective of the emotional conflict and environmental manipulation from my background experience. The energetic mark-making reveals direct emotional feelings by rapidly forming and assertively handling the media. The act symbolically represents the need to take control and self discover.

The natural spontaneity of drawing provides the immediacy of transforming negative emotion into bold direct, confronting marks; my intellect reinforces, opposes, harmonizes, in response, by adding additional marks to balance the composition. The skin-like quality of the clay connects me to my past, replaces the void intimacy at the same time allowing the transformation of violent emotion through manipulation and destruction of a classical, whole form.
I witnessed a lot of birth and death growing up. Manipulation of the environment with strange man made contraptions has always influenced me. These contraptions have taken many lives of farmers. They have broken the land, pulverized the top soil, but, ironically, have also provided a nurturing environment for the seeds to germinate. The environment is quickly becoming more devastated. Nature has no time to replenish nutrients, so it's mechanically injected with synthetic compound nutrients, upsetting the natural balance of the land; breaking cycles. Realizing that changes had to be made for me to better function in the art world, I am breaking many cycles from my past. Re-evaluation of my beliefs has directed my life and my art. I have made important discoveries.
PART II

DRAWING: THE SPONTANEOUS TRANSFORMATION

Upon analysis, two types of drawing have emerged: the very expressive black and white compositions, stemming from raw emotional power and the atmospheric, layered, painterly pieces representative of the external and internal contemplative environments. The internal environment, within myself, is comprised of fragments of memories and dreams, the external environment is the representation of landscape and atmospheric conditions. The landscape is a metaphor for my inner being.

I have been raised in a gambling lifestyle. To me, farming is a game played with bankers and nature. The latter being unpredictable is therefore the most challenging. My black and white drawings are very unpredictable, I let nature take over, the element of surprise and discovery results. After the fact, I discover the repressed emotion revealed in them. I relate very strongly to the following quote by Marc Chagall, an artist whose work I greatly respect.

I am unable to see how I draw. My hand sees, but my eyes are often turned toward the interior and focus on other drawings and paintings I shall realize one day.

The black and white drawings are assertive and represent the duality of powerful and vulnerable emotion; love and hate. Love is the white purity of the negative space, hate is the opaque black positive areas. The positive and the negative shapes compete for attention and sometimes reverse dominance.
They are very well balanced, not symmetrical by any means, but
figure ground claim an equal amount of physical space, presenting
dichotomies, formally and conceptually. The bold black marks are awkward;
the thin sensitive lines are graceful. The mark-making is explosive but
contained within the papers edge defining the machined figures; they imply
motion but are rigid and still.

The Saddle Series protects and defends who I am. I am the figure in all
of my work. They are self portraits constructed from the need to control. The
saddle horn, which becomes the head and shoulders of the figure is the
metaphor for control; to take charge of the powerful beast within. The first
drawing, Internal View (plate i); a black figurative/saddle horn form, opens
slightly, framing the interior space ( the white of the paper). The negative space
contains a repeated image of the black shell form. The repeated image is
composed of delicate, fragile lines representative of the repressed emotions so
vulnerable, that they must be protected. The second Untitled drawing (Plate ii
), another self portrait, displays the black saddle/figure at the top of a stack of
black blockish shapes. The blockish shapes are derived from the cross-
sectional perspective of the cast sculpture form. The blockish forms are
contained within rib like arms wrapping, protecting, defending what I see as the
inner cavity. The inner cavity becomes the foundation of the figure, as well as
the powerful emotive aspect of the personality. At the center of the drawing is a
series of repetitious lines, contained within an organ shaped negative space,
located at the heart of the figure. The heart of the figure is wound very tight with
delicate lines, creating tension on the infrastructure that emanates and
becomes all encompassing. The third Untitled drawing (Plate iii ) reveals the
figure and the foundation with an empty heart. The figure in the fourth Untitled
drawing (Plate iv) balances on the edge of a fine line. The heart is an empty circle of negative space. The black positive shapes making up the foundation has dwindled numerically to one. The dark cavity formations represent the repressive aspect of my personality, yielding to a thin delicate line, representative of the more vulnerable feelings such as love and trust, to take over, trickle through and be shown.

The Saddle Series manifests a healing process. Initially (Plate i), black dominates the composition, totally captivates the interior space and the delicacy within, as the second drawing (Plate ii) of the series does, but is more balanced in terms of positive and negative space. In the third drawing (Plate iii), the inflated figure goes beyond the picture plane, and has opened up. The interior tension of the heart in non-existent, just empty. The last drawing (Plate iv) drawing is open, more spacious than any of the four, the sensitive line is free, and moves across the picture plane separating the dark cavity and the saddle/figures’ head and shoulders. This series is a healthy transition; a therapeutic resolution.

The Untitled drawing (Plate v) and the Untitled ceramic plate (Plate vi) both reveal the same emotion; hate. Hate of the masculine aspect of my personality that, as a child, I’ve been rewarded for. To be tough and not show the vulnerable emotions, according to my father is an asset to any personality. Hate for the emotions that come too easily, like anger, and jealousy. The large figure experiences conflict; represented by the blue lines scribbled across the face; implying disregard. In both instances the lines are contained within the organ shaped, negative space, which, earlier in this paper has been referred to as the heart, but in this case is the head as well. This piece also suggests protection or repression of the heart felt emotion. The ceramic plate (Plate vi)
with the dark face contains or restricts the powerful emotion; pushing, erupting from within, almost breaking the surface.

The **Heart** series are full of passion, color and energy. These drawings fall into the second category; the painterly atmospheric works, stemming from memory and dreams rather than repressed emotion. During the creative process I am aware of the impetus and choose color to represent the happier, flamboyant subject. The series represents love. In **Hearts** (Plate vi) the layered transparent painted marks dance across the background, explode with energy but are contained by linear, delicate contour images of a repeated heart shape. The containing linear aspect represents my inability to express peaceful, intimate feelings.

The sculptural/drawing mixed-media pieces reflect the same personal concept, formally combining the three dimensional reality with the two-dimensional illusory images in attempt to manifest the transitory phase of a spiritual experience. **Physical Fragmentation/Spiritual Transition** (Plate vii) comments on the whole spirit and its' connection to a physically fractured being. The broken piece, stemming from emotion, reflects a dysfunction in reality. The whole, ethereal, ghost figure in the background represents the pure, unhampered, but inaccessible spiritual being. It is far in space; seemingly inaccessible through layers of semi-opaque washes of white oil paint and short, breath like, repetitious linear stokes of pastel. The physical ceramic piece is fractured and dark; domineering the delicate, whole, spirit figure. The composition set in a landscape format, is an awareness of the existence of the precious, inaccessible spirit, and the admittance of an incomplete physical reality.
PART III
CERAMICS: THE CONNECTION TO THE LAND

I believe that art substitutes the lost, distant or inaccessible people, places, feelings or events. Now that I'm in the city, I yearn to be in nature; so I reflect upon it and strive to reproduce in glazes and layers of mixed drawing media, the richness, intensity and color. Nature is so complete. I've always been close to it but didn't realize it's beauty and harmony until I moved away from it. Now that I'm so detached from it I strive to connect natures' sensibility to my own. I recall the color, the shape and textures in nature when I think about form. Every color and hue appears carefully related to one another. I believe the relationship and proximity of color can be natural or contrived, so when I use color, I think of it's origin.

When I first touched clay I immediately became attracted to the skin-like, sensuality of the medium, perhaps it replaced the removed intimacy that I continue to long for in my life. The familiarity and connection to my childhood experience made it irresistible.

The transformation of the ceramic process parallels that of the land during the growing season. The discipline and patience in timing during and between the stages are similar. Preparing the clay is the same as cultivating the field in preparation to sow. Wedging allows time to cultivate ideas, stir the particles, remove air; potentially devastating like weeds in a field. My body becomes a machine while I manipulate the clay in the wheel throwing process.

9.
The learned mechanical skill allows my mind to rest; to become absorbed in the sensuality of the medium, with the ingrained vision of the finished product. The furrows left behind the tractor and implement are as consistent, rhythmic and hypnotic as the throwing lines left in the clay. They are equally meditative activities. When the seeds are sewn; ideas mentally visualized; then the evolution begins, develops, and ends. The transformation between the states of the clay and seedlings into mature plants is uncontrollable; we are helpless to earths' power elements.

The slip cast sculpture, *Spinal Corrosion* (Plate viii), and the two plates, *Furrows* (Plate ix) and *Subterranean Upheaval* (Plate x) are similar in that they both deal with environmental issues. They reflect destruction.

I used the potters wheel to create the large forms. I think of them as circular clay canvases. Once the classical circular shape is formed on the wheel, they are manipulated by breaking and replacing the powerful rim, pushed up from the bottom piercing the internal surface, then glazed to enhance the manipulated area. They contain the same energy as the drawings, but lack the figurative representation. Rather than the figuratively represented victim, swallowed by emotion, I am the destroyer releasing the violent emotion. The role reversal therapeutically satisfies another part of my persona.

The *Spinal Corrosion* is multi-associative formally and conceptually. The piece consists of three slip-cast, elongated, ribbed forms stacked vertically and suspended in space. The bottom of the piece is sandblasted to reveal the empty interior; deteriorating, corroding, becoming delicate and vulnerable. The piece has a dual sense: mechanical and organic. It is mechanical from the rigid undulating repeated formations and organic from the encompassing
erosion taking over.

The rhythmic, linear marks are ordered strokes like breathing, heartbeats or the former environmental association, furrows in the land. The ribbing of each form also creates a tracheal or spinal association which reads figure. The spinal part of the figure erodes from the base up, destroying the foundation. The corrosion suggests impurity of the pristine whole.

The fossil association speaks of stored energy and the exploitation of world resources now diminishing rapidly. The rhythmic, hypnotic breath like strokes in the fossil form are disrupted and have become an unharmonious, vulnerable, shell. The decaying color of the crumbly glaze is carefully chosen, and placed to reinforce the destructed, manipulated surface.

Both slip casting and wheel-throwing have satisfied an obsessive part of my personality. The slip cast process worked very well for me, involving mechanical ingenuity to devise the handling system. The repeatable process, producing like units has fostered the growth of countless ideas. Wheel-throwing substitutes the lost sensuality of the slip-casting process and introduces a more human touch marking my spiritual presence.

I work with vigor, become emotionally and physically involved in the technical and conceptual process. My artwork will change as I grow older and deal with these painful emotional issues and allow more elated emotion to take over.
PART IV
THE FLEETING MOMENT

When I first arrived in Ohio, I received a signal from nature. Two praying Mantises, attempting to mate were in my apartment. They brought me luck in the two years that followed. I caught them and released them in the outdoors. I haven't seen one since.

Since I've been in school, the word 'spiritual' has been overused, so that I've come to question the meaning of the word and have concluded that a lot of spiritual enlightenment, in my mind, is untruthful. A spiritual experience in my mind is a state of trance that takes over, when your mind dissociates from reality and your body unconsciously responds. It doesn't exist without the belief that their might be some higher power in control, whether it be a god or our own mind, is up to the individual. We must be strong enough or secure enough to let the need to control go and to allow another force to take over, at least momentarily.

A few summers ago I attended a local spiritual event held at a neighboring Erminskin Indian reservation in Alberta. Several invited tribes attended bringing their best dancers, singers and musicians. It was a showdown, very similar to the art school environment. We, the young artists are constantly being watched, like the dancers in the circle of spectators at the Powwow. Creating art in a school environment is difficult, because we are constantly looking over our shoulder, looking for approval and conscious of
being watched by people who grade our development. It is difficult to concentrate; to block the extraneous noise and activity; to focus on the beat that strikes harmoniously with our own heartbeat, and then not be afraid to let go of the control.

In our society spirituality is reserved for the few who spend time discovering who they are. Solitude is often avoided. People are afraid to be alone to face the thoughts they encounter in solitude. It leads to self-discovery.

Through my artwork I strive for self-definition, by surfacing the subconscious reality. By assertively handling the media, tension is released, making way for free flowing conceptual and emotional manifestations. Drawing has been an important discovery in terms of self-definition. It allows freedom of spontaneity and has opened up areas of imagination, specifically two dimensional illusory space.

Throwing utilitarian ware is another way I maintain the spirituality in my life. I throw pots and always will throw pots because it is an art form that is tactile and shared by others, for utilitarian and visual aesthetic. The spiritual experience in a piece of pottery is the handling and containment of a life source.

During my six years of school, if I had ten minutes of spiritual involvement, I feel pretty lucky. Those ten minutes have happened in the last two years while I've been in graduate school. The spiritual experience has happened while working two dimensionally, making those compositions of one or two brushstrokes that took two minutes to complete. Francis Bacon sums up the spiritual experience I'm relating to.

If anything ever does work in my case it works from that moment when consciously I didn't know what I was doing....2.
Every time I tack a clean piece of paper to the wall, I consciously try to dissociate from reality, it doesn't work until I let intellectualizing go, conceptually and formally. One in twenty times it happens, for one or two minutes. I feel lucky that it has happened so often while I've been here and my hope is that with time I will be able to channel my energy more efficiently to make way for more regular spiritual impulses. I have an intense passion for art-making; to be alone, to express through symbolic imagery, powerful and vulnerable emotions.

My work is constantly changing, leading to further discoveries about myself. The more I know, the more complex my life seems. My art becomes more simplified in order to be multi-associative and speak universally through symbols. I'm seldom satisfied with a piece of artwork I create, there is always a further step, and in my mind a better piece waiting to be discovered.
Plate I., *Internal View*, from the Saddle Series
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