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senior thesis exhibition

brooke berryhill
kathryn caputo
alfred tart duus
charles gallagher
john koontz, jr.
laura krajewski

april 13 to may 6, 2000 — marsh art gallery, university of richmond museums

senior thesis exhibition

COVER:

Théodore Géricault's painting, *Raft of the Medusa*, 1818-19, as interpreted in a tableau vivant by the senior studio art majors, clockwise from lower left corner:

Kathryn Caputo, Brooke Berryhill, Charles Gallagher,
John Koontz, Jr., Alfred Tait Duus, and Laura Krajewski

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brooke berryhill kathryn caputo alfred tait duus charles gallagher john koontz, jr. laura krajewski

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brooke berryhill

artist statement

I have favored, for as long as I can remember, crisp lines emphasizing simplicity and curvaceous forms with a design quality. My earliest memories include choosing coloring-book pictures with the simplest composition and with a depiction of nature for its subject. Also, beautiful things have always caught my eye and intrigued me. Whether it was watching my mother put on her make-up or admiring all the new life that each Spring had to offer, I was fascinated.

The tendency to be drawn to art that embodies these characteristics greatly influences my work today. While I prefer representational art, I believe that art does not need to conform to a realistic view of nature. I strongly agree with James Abbott McNeill Whistler's quote, "Art is not an imitation of nature, but a transformation of nature into design." Whistler explains that the artist should be allowed to alter the truth of the image in order to heighten beauty and emotion. I have surrounded many of my subjects with empty space as opposed to leaving them in their natural settings. The negative space becomes as important as the image itself. Thus, the space takes on a life of its own.

With a minor in art history, my exposure to various types of art has increased immensely. Asian art, specifically Japanese woodblock prints and Zen paintings, captures my interest. A feature of Japanese art that I identify with is a respect and fascination for nature. This admiration for the beauty derived from nature's simplicity has helped me to appreciate nature for its lack of pretension. In addition, the use of empty space and asymmetry, commonly employed in Japanese art, appeals to me. The manner in which these elements are manipulated can determine the emotional impact and pace of the piece. Another influence is the artist and composer John Cage. His systematic embossment pieces with just hints of color have given me the courage to create works with an absence of color. I have discovered a new love for texture and a desire to place greater emphasis on this element.

I have chosen printmaking because of its emphasis on highly detailed linear work, its close relation to drawing, and its variety of possible techniques from which to choose. Aquatint allows me to achieve lines of varying width and blocks of varying value. I can achieve fine detail with pencil-thin linear work, as well as dramatic lines that direct the viewer's eye throughout the picture. Inkless embossing allows me to concentrate on texture instead of line and value, and it permits the artwork to retain a stark cleanliness and innocence.

thesis: a celebration of nature

For my thesis, I have created prints of images that illustrate nature's transient, yet stalwart quality and its delicacy. Nature's ability to be simultaneously fragile and resilient creates the contradiction on which my work is based. I have taken these complexities and translated them into a visual study. Each aspect, the subjects, the materials, and the methods of construction, equally contributes to each piece's manifestation of beauty.

Although my subjects vary, the ways in which they demonstrate nature's intricacy and constant state of metamorphosis link them to one another. For example, the delicacy of both the orchid and the leaves relates to the fragility of the wings of the butterflies. Butterflies are often thought to be a symbol of transience, while the orchid's temperamental nature makes it a plant which sporadically loses its blooms only to be replenished as if on a whim. Fallen leaves have lost their chlorophyll and are transforming into bright bursts of color. While they are approaching the end of their life cycle, leaves are at the pinnacle of their beauty and fragility. Much like the butterfly, seashells also hint at nature's cyclical pattern. As a crab or snail grows larger, it begins to encompass its living space, the borrowed shell, and looks for a new home. The empty shell patiently waits for its next inhabitant.

The materials and construction of the works tie the underlying idea of the intertwinement of nature's opposite qualities together. In *Orchid* and *Shells*, intricate drawings of nature's manifestations appear on strong, roughly textured paper. Both embossed works, *Release* and *Butterfly with Flower*, are created using durable paper, yet the individual pieces that comprise the total composition are held together with fragile thread. In other pieces, the paper and image heighten certain aspects of the subject. The tissue paper in *Butterflies* mirrors the wings' translucence by allowing light to playfully dance through. The repetition of the butterfly serves to elaborate nature's subtle individuality. Often subjects in nature appear very similar at first glance, yet upon further study one notices that each blossom on a plant is decidedly different from the next. By magnifying the differences of design in butterfly wings through color and positioning, I have caused their distinctiveness to be blatant. The subtle has become the obvious.

Even after four years of exposure to various artistic styles through study and practice, I have never parted from my original interest in line and aesthetically pleasing images. My growing knowledge of previous artists' work and my own experimentation in different media have only strengthened and reaffirmed my innate fondness for these characteristics in my work.



Brooke Berryhill

Butterfly with Flower

2000

embossed print on
paper with stitching

14 x 14 inches

kathryn caputo

artist statement

I must have been an above-average child because according to Binney & Smith of Crayola Crayons, the average child will exhaust 730 crayons by the time he or she reaches ten years of age. I used to organize and reorganize my hundreds of crayons, arranging them in different color patterns. I have always been fascinated by color, and creating art is my way of indulging this love of color. I am always struck by the brilliant oranges and pinks created during sunsets or by the interesting ways light reflects off a person's face. These are the kinds of effects that I like to capture in my work.

I have studied Josef Albers's Interaction of Color and have learned a great deal about color theory. I am fascinated by how color is able to fool our eyes. I am inspired by Henri Matisse's bold use of color and by his pure, simple sense of design, especially in his cut-outs. David Hockney's brightly colored geometric landscapes have also been a source of motivation for me. Kendall Shaw's work is very exciting as well. He creates extremely large designs through a structured system of tiny squares. I admire his willingness to experiment with different materials.

I am very conscious of my surroundings and, as Plato said, I think the environment in which we live is important to our well-being. My art has always been an attempt to achieve my own definition of what is beautiful. Color plays a large role in this philosophy because it has the power to affect our emotions. It has the ability to make us experience feelings such as agitation or tranquillity, joy or sorrow. The colors that I believe to be the most beautiful and inspiring are the most vivid and intense of the primary and secondary colors. So it is no coincidence that these are the colors that show up most often in my work.

My work is primarily about enjoying and experiencing color, whether it is in a representational or a nonrepresentational work of art. Sometimes I work hard to accurately recreate the colors I perceive and other times, my color choices are entirely subjective. In the case of the latter, there is nothing but my own sense of color to tell me when I have reached the perfect color combination. I prefer using media in which it is possible to get marks of pure, uninterrupted color, such as pastel, acrylic paint, or colored paper. I find great pleasure in searching for the perfect color, whether it is perceptual or conceptual, and enjoying the effects it produces.

thesis: color mosaics

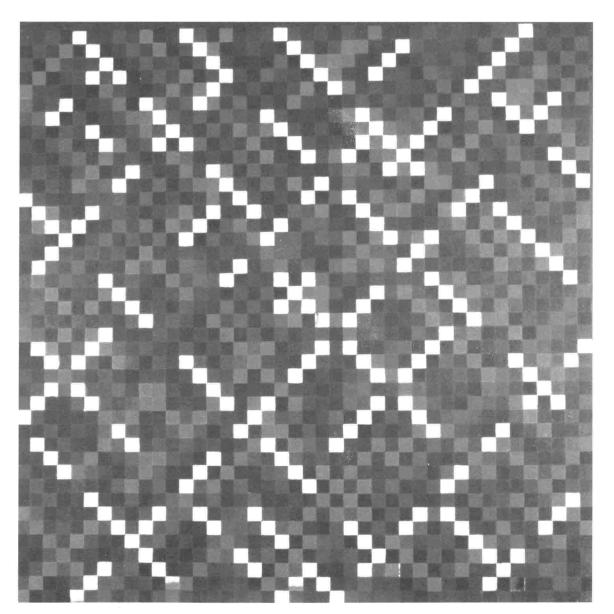
I have created for my thesis a series of mosaic-like designs that deal with color, texture, and reflective surfaces. Each of these pieces is concerned with color and its relationship to either mirror or texture. In some cases, all three elements coexist within the same piece. I work with intense and harmonious color combinations as well as monochromatic studies.

I use a wide variety of materials to make these collages: colored paper, acrylic paint, painted paper, matboard, fabric, and foil. I have also made extensive use of mirrors in these pieces, especially the earlier ones. The mirrors draw in color from the environment and allow for infinite variety because the play of reflections in the mirrors is constantly changing. In *Intersections*, the observers' experiences are modified depending on the clothing they are wearing or the angle from which they view the piece. The mirrors bring in colors of different values and I mimic this effect with the squares of different shades of black and gray. As my interest in texture grew, I reduced the role of the mirrors and in some cases eliminated them because they can be a distraction when focusing on texture.

This concern with texture introduced an entirely different dimension to my artwork and gave me a new way to experiment with color. Each texture captures light in a different way and changes the way a color appears. The design in the monochromatic pieces is articulated through texture rather than color. Some pieces are smooth, some have a pronounced texture, some are shiny, and some are matte. In *Red on Red*, the wool fabric has a texture that absorbs light and exhibits a very rich red, no matter what the lighting conditions. However, the smooth satin-like material shows a different shade of red depending on how the light strikes it or where the viewer stands.

The squares within these mosaics are positioned in a very orderly grid-like manner. To counter this organization, I juxtapose disorderly designs with the grid. Black on Black has a subtle random circular design that pierces through and interrupts the order. This opposition adds tension and variety to the artwork. Too much conflict is confusing and overwhelming, while too little is boring; my ideal is to strike a balance between the two.

Not only do I enjoy the final products of each of these projects, but I derive pleasure from the process of creating them. I enjoy being surrounded by the materials I work with, and I take pleasure in the precise technical work each of these pieces requires. I make these color mosaics to satisfy my own love of color, design, and texture. However, I also intend to give the observer a heightened appreciation of these aesthetic effects.



Kathryn Caputo
Intersections
1999
acrylic and mirrors on
foamboard
32 x 32 inches

alfred tait duus

artist statement

The uniform randomness of nature fascinates me. Leaves and snowflakes all fall to the ground, but some twirl, some glide back and forth, and some leaves hang on for dear life. Ocean waves roll and break into tubular shapes onto the sandy beach. Some are bigger than others, some carry seaweed and fish, and like leaves falling, there is no pattern to breaking waves. While the sun always sets in the west, every sunset is different. Every sunset is amazing, and each one is like a beautiful painting.

Stream of consciousness writing is a style of writing which calls upon one's subconscious. Beginning with any single thought, the writer takes off and places his/her thoughts onto paper as they come. With random thoughts and intriguing statements throughout, and each word and every sentence affecting and relating to the others, this style of writing mimics the uniformity and randomness of nature. I very much enjoy writing in this manner.

Because I adopted the idea of stream of consciousness thought into my artwork, my paintings carry with them a free-flowing energy that places the viewer in nature. Since my art is meant to mimic nature, I chose paint as my medium. With paint I can make every color in the spectrum. I can mix the bright colors of flowers, the dull greys of rocks, and the dark browns and reds of timber. As in nature, the range of color with paint is limitless. I also have the option of slow-drying oil and fast-drying acrylic. I am drawn to the beautiful effect of oil paint as colors blend and to the complex colors created from layering acrylic paint.

With nature as my subject, my pieces were seeming to me to be unfinished. I felt the need for something a bit more tangible than just marks representing nature. Chaim Soutine became a great influence on my work as I began studying the human figure. Most intriguing to me is his portraiture work. His free-flowing marks going through his figures give them liveliness. The looseness of the marks which create his figures makes his paintings breathe. He lets the marks move freely through his paintings, giving them organic qualities and in turn bringing the figure to life on the canvas. The more information I took in from the figure and poured out onto the canvas, the more I realized how much the figure mimics nature.

I decided that I wanted to be an art major because when I would sit down to do my academic work, I would draw. I decided that I wanted to paint because I did not enjoy the emptiness my drawings had without color. They asked me what my paintings were about, I never thought about that. I looked at my paintings, and they said to me, "We are nature."

thesis: figure it out

My thesis work is a study of the brushstroke, the human figure, and the medium of paint, and also how these elements very closely mimic nature.

I began my work concentrating on the study of the brushstroke. I find that the stream of consciousness method in writing is very complementary in studying the mark in artmaking. It allows me to relax and not think so much about making a pretty picture as much as following the brushstrokes through my paintings. My marks have a very organic quality to them. *Living Space* is a display of curvilinear brush-marks closely mimicking the organic qualities of nature. Some marks are long and winding, others are shorter, and still others are repeated randomly throughout. There are passages of short, choppy strokes turning into long, wispy lines that reflect a leaf tumbling across the grass and being carried away by a gust of wind.

Chaim Soutine's portraiture work has been an important influence on my thesis work. As I began to feel unsatisfied with just a study of brushstrokes, Soutine showed me a whole new light in the study of the figure. I do not have to paint exactly what I see in order to capture the figure and make it come to life. In fact, Soutine's loose marks streaming through his paintings, in and out of the human figure, make the people in his portraits live and breathe. His influence on my work is fairly evident in *Recycle*. This piece represents the figure with loose organic marks. Brushstrokes swoop and curve around and through the figures. Quick, short lines bring the viewer out of one space into a new space.

My choice of medium is just as significant as my brushstrokes and the figure. Just as both of these mimic nature, paint is a medium with organic and natural qualities. Acrylic and oil paints provide a wide range for color selection. When I paint, I do not discount any color. My art is made of very vibrant, lively colors. I am Ocean, Hear Me Roar is an example of my color selection and how it resembles nature. There seems to be no method to the combination of colors in the natural world, rather they are randomly dispersed throughout. In this painting, colors are randomly placed together. You will not find every color in the spectrum here, but you will see that I put orange, pink, green, and purple in the same passage.

The stream of consciousness method gives my art work the free-flowing randomness of nature. The media of oil and acrylic paint give life through color and their organic qualities. The human figure gives the basic structure necessary in organic life. A study of all of these elements together creates a collage of nature.



Alfred Tait Duus

Bottle in a Message
1999

oil on canvas
7 x 5 inches

charles gallagher

artist statement

For me, painting and drawing are a form of meditation and self-therapy where I find an avenue of release. Painting and drawing induce a calm and quiet mind which allows me to concentrate and enjoy the task at hand. I leave my baggage at the door, and revel in the freedom and escape the medium allows. Each of my paintings has a life of its own and entails a journey; and while I enjoy leaving my personal issues at the door, they inevitably tip-toe in attached to my subconscious mind, quietly manifesting themselves on the canvas without asking me first.

The noise of my baggage and subconscious mind finds an instrument in the human figure. My figures take on heroic aspects, and an illustrative sense as a result of such influences as the artists Frazetta and Brom. I enjoy the conflict, drama, and barbaric chaos these two artists create in their paintings as well as their ability to shock you and evoke feelings from the viewer. Frazetta has the ability to choose the right moment to illustrate, while Brom creates an uneasy atmosphere which keeps the viewer off balance. In hindsight the figures in my paintings are a kind of self-portrait, certainly not literal, but rather a kind of self-flattery, a mask to hide myself from the terrors my mind might reveal. This type of idealized figure also stems from looking at the work of Frazetta and Brom, who use idealized figures extensively in their own work.

My work also uses a lot of dark imagery, and as a result I use a lot of deep, rich blacks which are easy to hide in. These blacks feed on the reality that the fear of the unknown is much greater than the fear of the known. My attraction to these blacks is influenced by such artists as Robert Motherwell and the Zen calligraphers of Japan. They do not include self-portraits in their work, but they do believe that each mark contains the character of the artist. Zen calligraphers also use their art as a means of meditation. Motherwell uses rich blacks and his forms take on animate qualities, while their size, mass, and placement create a drama between the forms.

I benefit from making art through this meditative therapy and release, and when I am done with a painting I have a visual representation of my journey in paint. My art is self-knowledge, and self-knowledge is important in understanding more of myself.

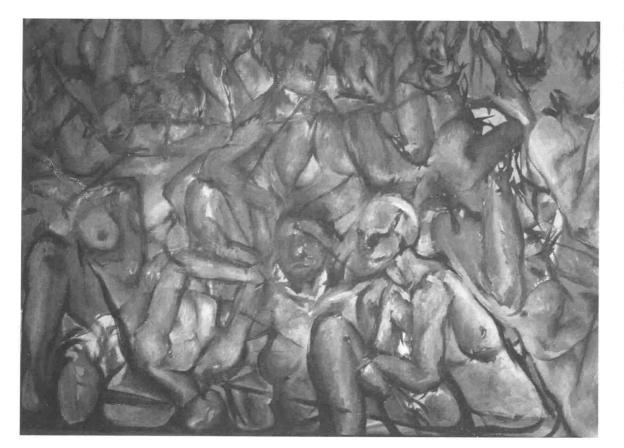
thesis: balancing extremes

This body of work deals with contrasting dualities, such as hot and cold, hard and soft, male and female, order and chaos. Another way to describe this is yin and yang, the Asian definition of balancing opposites, with yin representing cold, soft, female, and order, and yang representing hot, hard, male, and chaos. It is these extremes that are in constant conflict and flux in the world, sometimes more yin than yang, and sometimes more yang than yin, and it is these elements that we seek to balance in our own lives. Some extremes seem appealing to us, such as good as opposed to evil, light as opposed to dark, pain over pleasure, creation over destruction. Each of these "good" extremes become meaningless in the absence of their counterparts. What is good without evil? Light without dark? Pain without pleasure? Creation without destruction?

I have chosen the figure as the subject of my paintings, and I use a collage method of painting to fill the canvas with figures. I greatly enjoy painting the figure because of the uniqueness of each figure and pose and the challenges they present to me. The figure also applies to the theme of contrasting dualities, for not only are there male and female, but there are also subtleties in the changing colors of the skin. Skin colors change as forms turn and recede in space, or as cool light hits the surface, or when orange from the surrounding cloth bounces up and colors the skin. These changes in color contrast with the strong contours created by the shape and lines of the arm, or torso, which I have emphasized using dark colors.

In the painting *In the Beginning...*, the jumbled mass of figures goes from orderly and identifiable at the bottom to chaotic and unidentifiable at the top. In the middle there is a transition area in between these extremes of order and chaos. Many of the figures in the painting are incomplete, with holes in them where the background shows through, depicting the conflict between creation and destruction, and the artist as both creator and destroyer. In the painting *Creep*, I have abstracted the figure so that it is almost impossible to identify the figure, and then I emphasized the contours. However, in this piece the color and value often contrast strongly with each other, and sometimes the heavy dark lines recede into nothingness.

The palette is mostly limited to various flesh tones, but there is some local color included in the figures. Instead of using a large palette and inventing flesh tones, I prefer to depict the color more realistically because I love all of the various earth tones. I am amazed at the range of all the different colors you can find in flesh when you really look.



Charles Gallagher
In the Beginning. . .
2000
oil on canvas
35 x 48 inches

john koontz, jr.

artist statement

My main interest is studying the human figure. I have experimented with a variety of media from bronze to clay to stone, and I have found wax clay the most interesting. Most recently I have been abstracting the wax clay figures I create and cutting them into chunks, then I allow the individual pieces to interact as separate entities.

I am interested in the figure because of its complexity. As I have progressed in my artistic endeavors, I have realized that the human figure can be related to any other work of art. There is a reason for this. Artists often have little in common. Their differences are what make them unique, fresh, new, and even creative. But what binds them all is that they are human and that their work in some way relates their experience as a human. We all have bodies, and although they are very different they manage to present us with similar obstacles and restrictions in the world around us. This link between all of us is reflected in the art that is created.

But despite this link, there exists complexities within the figure that are beautiful. People are constrained by the fact that their bodies allow them to do only so much, but the beauty of each individual figure lies in the fact that they can be so different and serve the same end. It is the same with any two organic things that seem the same to the naked eye. Upon closer study, they are completely different. The idea of being united by the fact that we are all embodied, juxtaposed with the notion that each of our bodies is so different, provides me with many possibilities for exploration.

Cutting the figure into individual pieces reverses this relationship between the individual and his/her peers. Now, each piece is no longer a body but an individual piece without any of the features of another piece. What links the piece is no longer that it is constrained to the same basic figure; the link is that every piece came from the same human form. This becomes curious when pieces from different bodies are put together.

We are used to thinking of the body working only as a whole. It is dependent on all of its individual pieces functioning together. We are also used to thinking of humans living and working among other humans. In my most recent work I suggest that these pieces of the human form need each other, even when they are detached from their natural position, in order to make sense. Even if the pieces have been distorted slightly, they are meaningless without the explanation of a corresponding piece. I feel that it is important for each of us to work in harmony with our fellow humankind, just as these pieces require other pieces in order to give them meaning.

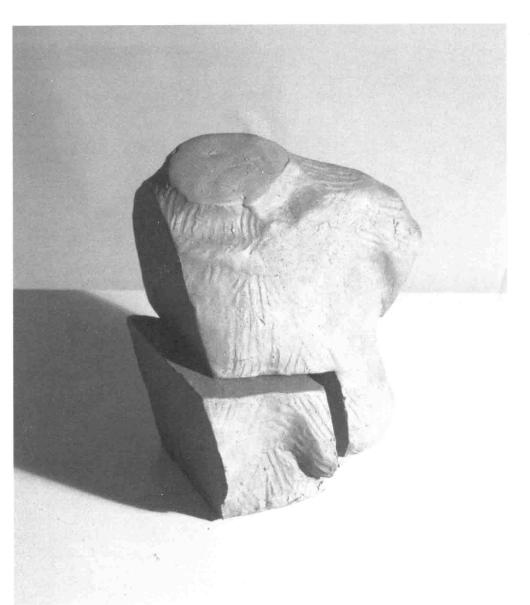
thesis: breaking down the human form

This body of work explores the human form. Reactions to the human form as it is seen every day are very ordinary. Intellect tells us that we are familiar with the form and that there is no further need for significant investigation. These works focus on details of the form. By isolating body pieces and treating them uniquely, this study calls attention to often neglected areas of the figure.

Contours and texture are the major themes explored, and they are pushed to extremes to exaggerate the idea. While one piece's contours and textures seem radical when juxtaposed to another's, this very contrast mimics the differences between all human body types. The contours of the human figure are also affected by the flat planes that are left after cutting the whole figure into various pieces. This produces a sharp contrast between geometric, two-dimensional planes left from the cuts and the complex details of the human contours.

It is also important to pay attention to the internal aspects of the figure as well as the external ones. Each time the figure is cut into a particular piece, I have given special attention to make a piece that draws one's attention to what would represent the entrails of a man. It is more interesting to leave this explanation blank. Rather than represent the insides as one would expect, it is more surprising and surreal to see a simple flat space, void of detail. This further emphasizes my focus on the contours of the figure by not straying to far from that end.

Each piece is cleaved from the entire form so that it is not quite obvious that the form is captured within it. It is the borderline between recognition and non-recognition that fascinates me in this project. As I make whole figures into smaller pieces, I look at each piece, turning it or suspending it, just to see what it will take for me to deceive my own eyes. There is a gray area where your mind seems to be searching, as if it knows a particular piece like an old friend's phone number but it will take it a few seconds or minutes or longer to come up with the first digit. I am fascinated by the sensation of the moment when you realize that a particular piece is not only from the body but it is the hip and thigh extending into the stomach. I managed to trick myself with pieces from older figures that were lying around my studio. That inquisitive sensation compels me to believe that our ideas and perceptions about the human form can be pushed far from our everyday and ordinary comprehension.



John Koontz, Jr.
Contour Study
2000
oil clay
7 x 6 x 4 inches

laura krajewski

artist statement

The creative objective in my work is to slow the perception of time. I chose to begin with the idea that many people are never living in the moment, instead their focus is directed toward where they need to be or what they might be doing later. I found myself inspired by artists such as Georgia O'Keeffe, who enlarged flowers in her paintings to such a grand scale that they could not possibly be overlooked, and Dorothea Lange, who gave her subjects a voice that would speak to us well into the future. Whether I am taking a photograph, working on a painting, or creating stained glass works, my purpose is to slow down the precious time that is ours for such a short while. Each of these media portrays this idea in their process. Working on a photograph, a painting, or a stained glass piece forces me to focus solely on each step of the work.

I started working in various media as a small child in an effort to occupy time. At a young age I always felt that I had all the time in the world. It was at eighteen when this changed. A friend of mine passed away, and at that moment I realized that our amount of time on this earth was not guaranteed. We could spend one hundred years in this place, or we could find that our time has run out at the age of twenty-four. So now at a mere twenty-two years of age I feel that an essential factor in my life has been to enjoy my time living. This decision has carried through into my artwork. My aim is to grab hold of that moment that causes me to stop and take notice and then to share it with others.

Depicting a perceived moment on a piece of paper or in a stained glass work is not the only important aspect of my work. I also find it necessary to convey the movement of the moment. I want the viewer to realize that the moment that is perceived is a borrowed one. This is facilitated by the use of light as another aspect of my work. In the work I have done with glass I am able to control the acknowledgment of time in the work. Although the composition remains, the changing light alters the perception by the viewers each time that the piece is viewed. As a result of this, viewers feel that they are truly witnessing borrowed time.

thesis: the elements of time

The purpose of this body of work is to explore the moments and movements of the elements. I have chosen stained glass as a means of expression for this body of work.

With the use of stained glass, I am able to depict the various colors of the water as the light dances across the surface. With the process of creating a work in glass, I am able to completely involve myself in the work. Due to its timely nature, I find myself unable to think of the final outcome and only to concentrate on the task at hand. As I work, I am thinking solely of each cut that I am making. The elements are set into screens, each of which is comprised of three panels. While the screen serves to envelop the viewer, my aim is to invite the viewer into the element, to cause the viewer to stop and notice the way that the light is playing along its surface.

I chose water as the first element to depict because water is the element I connect with most completely. Whether the reason for this is the fact that water is the element I was born under the Zodiac, or not, is unknown to me. However, the connection I feel to water is very clear. I have chosen to depict the moment when the viewer stands before a vast expanse of water. It is at this precise moment when I feel the passage of time most clearly. Standing before the water as it moves about and reflects light in a vast array of the most beautiful blues and greens imaginable is the moment when the whole world known to me seems to take a breath and revel in the fact that it is unfolding before you. For me, it is a form of retreat, a break from the constant flow of every day; yet the water is in constant motion. The work serves to create a paradox in this aspect. While it makes the viewer aware of the passage of time by creating a situation provoking remembrance and hope, at the same time it brings the viewer back to the present moment. The medium of this work produces a transcendental experience as the changing light alters the perspective of the underlying subject matter.

This project is ongoing which is the reason there is a single element depicted at this time in the exhibition. The three sketches that are accompanied with maquettes are the plans for the following elements. It is my plan to finish each of the screens as time and financing permits.



Laura Krajewski
Water, from the
Elements series
(detail)
1999
stained glass with
lead mullions
36 1/2 x 24 1/2
inches (detail shows
second section)