

Penetrating the undercurrent [slide]
by Katie McLeod Harvey

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts
Montana State University
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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree

of

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APPROVAL

of a thesis submitted by

Katie McLeod Harvey

This thesis has been read by each member of the thesis committee and has been found to be satisfactory regarding content, English usage, format, citations, bibliographic style, and consistency, and is ready for submission to the College of Graduate Studies.

Dec 9, 1991
Date

Chairperson, Graduate Committee

Approved for the Major Department

12/17/91
Date

Head, Major Department

Approved for the College of Graduate Studies

12/27/91
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Graduate Dean

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Date 12-16-91

# ARTIST'S STATEMENT

When encountering this body of work, one is aware of a persistent repetition of imagery and drama evoked by the movement of paint, light and dark. I will first describe what is visible in my work and then share the course of how this imagery evolved, touching on historical, personal and theoretical issues.

Immediately visible is raw swirling paint and vigorous markmaking depicting images which resemble nests, whirlwinds, spirals and vortexes. The images I use represent personal symbols and interact, sometimes with long sweeping amorphous shapes and spherical masses. My color is intuitive and often muted. My art alludes to a darkened inner-world space. Although dark, this place is not still. Images spin and collide. Energy is wound in coils of paint and surface markings. A visible struggle occurs when combining these images which exude such different energy and directional forces. This provides an ambivalent and turbulent relation to space. These

images appear to want to break out of the limitations of the surface and framework.

The particular images which persist in this work have been in my work for nearly three years. These symbols began to unfold soon after the birth of my son--a time of turbulence, inexplicable biological connections and intense love. Integrating motherhood and art created anxiety, a frenzied sense of time, a struggle between traditional male and female aspirations, and an occasional harmonious blending of responsibilities.

This life experience had impact on the art which was to follow. After the birth, I had no desire to continue with subject matter that had intrigued me before. Working small and at home, I delved into mother and child subject matter. In the development of this theme, the child became a spinning form --a kind of cocoon-like image enveloped in the mother's arms. Eventually the embrace of the mother began to look like an encircling nest. Nests and cocoons began to flourish in my larger paintings. The implications of these nests and cocoons were more powerful than any

of my previous mother and child imagery. This relates to what Georgia O'Keefe referred to when she said, "I found I could say things with color and shapes that I had no words for." This emerging abstract imagery allowed for some visual ambiguity and psychological complexity that was unavailable to me in the way that I approached the figurative world.

The struggle for meaningful imagery is a continual endeavor for me. I must respond to the elements of the physical, social and aesthetic worlds while seeking forms and symbols which express my particular reality. This reality in no way presents a static situation. As a painter, I must move within the ebb and flow of humanity, while struggling with a body of aesthetic and physical notions involved in paint.

Exemplifying this evolution, my imagery has now developed into a symbolic abstract form. My artwork now symbolizes larger elements of life such as water, refuge, confrontation, turbulence, sexuality, biological matter, planetary orbits and birth.

It is paradoxical that as I struggle honestly with personal imagery that interpretations of the work can embody such diverse and elemental components of life. Imagery which began with struggles integrating motherhood and art, anxiety regarding traditional male and female roles, experiencing woman's biological realities of giving birth and lactating, loving connections and family turbulence --all these issues led to the subsequent art. Pablo Picasso once said, "It is not what a man DOES, but who he IS." In my case, it is of value to note that it is a particular female perspective and female turbulence which inspired this work.

Two contemporary women painters with whom I associate conceptually are Elizabeth Murray and Susan Rothenberg. I respond to Murray's turbulent domestic scenes and "mucky" (her description) built up surfaces, and Rothenberg's spinning figures describing mysteries of motion with the act of painting. The work of both artists evokes an incredible mastery of motion, energized surfaces and actual physical involvement with paint. The way these artists handle

the physicality of paint leads to an immersion into the medium which presents qualities and content I admire. The word "immersion" alludes to all sorts of connotations such as immersing oneself in water or the unconscious. This is an element with which I struggle to give form and content to my work. To further develop this connection, I'd like to cite the words of poet Robert Duncan:

> I do not speak here of that river
> you read to be an allusion
> to ancient myth and poetry,
> though it too belongs to a story,
> but of a rushing underground of the
> very life-flow,
> a sinking-back,
> a loss of the essential in the
> shadows and undertow--1

In my struggle to penetrate an undercurrent of thought, with this focus on the "loss of the essential" amidst life's more obvious realities, there exists the possibility that something of significant human value will emerge.

---

1Robert Duncan "The Quotidian." New Directions 40 (New York: New Directions Publishing Company, 1980) 43.

# LIST OF SLIDES

1. Life Cycle
   48"x72"
   acrylic on panel, 1991

2. Nest
   48"x72"
   acrylic on panel, 1991

3. Split I
   48"x72"
   acrylic on panel, 1991

4. Tainted Eggs
   48"x72"
   acrylic on panel, 1991

5. Interaction
   3 panels 48"x72" each
   acrylic, 1991

6. Diptych
   2 panels 22"x34" each
   acrylic, 1991

7. Going Through The Red Fog
   4 panels 24"x48" each
   acrylic, 1991

8. Uplifting Images
   2 panels 24"x48" each
   acrylic, 1991

9. Cycle Spin
   22"x34"
   woodcut, 1990

10. Ochre Spinning
    17"x21"
    woodcut, 1990

11. Waves
    34"x22"
    woodcut, 1991

12. Nourishment
    22"x34"
    woodcut, 1991

13. All In One Sweep
    22"x34"
    woodcut, 1991

14. Two Forms Collide
    16"x24"
    woocut, 1990

15. Merging Images
    19"x22"
    woodcut, 1990

16. Vortex
    18"x26"
    woocut, 1990

13. K.M. Harvey DEC 14,1991 Top

9. K.M. Harvey 3 DEC 14,1991 Top

5. K.M. Harvey DEC 14,1991 Top

1. K.M. Harvey Top DEC 14,1991

15. K.M. Harvey Top

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2. K.M. Harvey Top DEC 14,1991

16. K.M. Harvey Top

11. K.M. Harvey DEC 14,1991 Top

7. K.M. Harvey DEC 14,1991 Top

4 DEC 14,1991 3. K.M. Harvey Top

14 DEC 14,1991 12. K.M. Harvey Top

8. K.M. Harvey Top DEC 14,1991

4. K.M. Harvey Top




















7/5
Cycle-spin
Lisa Hennessy 91



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Ochre Spinning

Kate Harvey '90










Vortex
Kit Hanney 90

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