

Ardent Notions:

a contemporary Everywoman's essence examined

by

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"In comparison with this big world, the human heart is only a small thing. Though the world is so large, it is utterly unable to satisfy this tiny heart. Our ever growing soul and its capacities can be satisfied only in the infinite God."

Sadhu Sundar Singh



My body of work, *Ardent Notions*, uses personal narrative to address universal questions of identity. It is my intention to make work which exudes two intangible attributes that every man and woman continually seeks; joy and peace. Stemming from the

culmination of my twenty-seven years of life experience, I employ self-specific imagery referencing family, home and partnership in an effort to convey the very essence of my 'tiny human heart.'

As an avid bibliophile, I have long realized that an author's words speak most true when writing about what he or she knows. Each of us carries a story within our hearts as we journey along life's path. Our storylines remain unique, yet similar in that they each contain a point of origin and, most assuredly, joy and sorrow.

Ardent Notions is an installation of objects that form a personal narrative which expresses my points of origin, current passions and hopes for the future. Though the work speaks to my specific truth, I want the viewer to form their own personal connections with the underlying subject matter concerning mapping, place, relationships, womanhood, love and the cyclical nature of life.

For as long as I can remember, I have been a storyteller, but it was my formal training as a metalsmith that provided the artistic outlet in which to creatively express myself. I am seduced by malleability, melting points, intimate scale and endless possibilities.





STORYTELLER /ARTIST/ MAKER:
METALSMITH, JEWELRY DESIGNER, MATERIALSMITH

How people choose to adorn themselves is often a statement of identity. Jewelry may address one's name, medical needs, relationships, nationality, beliefs and causes or even a favorite color.

Historically, adornment functioned as ornamentation as well as protective amulets or religious relics. The act of putting on jewelry and feeling its weight against the skin can be intimate and ritualistic. Pieces are often passed down generationally, with each new owner adding layers of meaning to the objects' patina as their stories mingle with the one before. The remarkable concept of my great-granddaughter wearing a ring made by my hands motivates me to create.

As a contemporary metalsmith, I work intuitively combining both ancient and modern techniques to create pieces that translate the collected bits and pieces of my life into wearable art objects.

The work begins with a notion and becomes a sketch. While the idea continues to marinate in my mind, the process for completing the initial thought can take many paths. At home I might make a paper model, generate a word list or venture out to snap inspirational images. In the studio I might mix up a fresh batch of plastic, playing with dyes until the color feels right or fire up my acetylene torch and solder elements into metal structures.

All artists have their own unique combinations of design essentials. Employing circular forms that reference the cyclical nature of life, I create pieces that contain personal sanctuary. Garden iconography and architectural structures are used to surround and protect my heart within a nurturing environment.

My design aesthetic is driven by the challenge to successfully amalgamate hobbyist materials with precious metals mined from the veins of Earth. In an effort to engender optimism and humor, I incorporate signs of life using these materials as pops of color and funky textures. The combination produces pieces that are seductively refined while remaining accessible and modern. This unexpected juxtaposition of fine art with craft materials creates a situation in which the unknown attracts the viewer and draws them in for a closer look



WOMAN/WIFE:
NURTURER, LOVER, COMPANION



Making *stackable wearables* began as a desire to make each part of my narrative function as wearable objects. During early critiques of my work, it was said that when my work was not being worn, it “really hugged the table” on display. This comment challenged me to begin creating more dimensional piece. It was, however, a second comment that lit the spark that resolved this issue. During a studio visit, a professor and I were playing with the small parts and pieces that litter my countertops. As we stacked and rearranged the components I attempted to verbalize what influences my imagery and forms. Her response was, “Oh, it looks like little towers of your heart.”

Since childhood miniature, imaginary worlds have intrigued me. Now, as a young married woman, working on this tiny scale provides a playful way to explore my own inner environment. As a new wife, cultivating heart and home is at the forefront of my conscious and subconscious. Thus, the pieces are centrally displayed in a garden setting that symbolizes a nurturing environment for these current passions of my heart. Though I honor the past and anticipate the future, I must live in the moment, taking one day at a time in order to progress forward on the footpath of life.



I began to design separate jewelry pieces that assemble into sculptural towers; *E pluribus Unum*. The body of each stackable wearable is fabricated from rod and sheets of silver, copper or brass. The garden derived forms also have a distinct visual reference to wedding cakes. It tickles my fancy to fabricate elaborate metal constructions that are embellished with colorful plastics or faux foliage to serve as the icing on these proverbial cakes.

The Honeymoon Years

RING - *Joy*
BROOCH- *Compromise*
BRACELET- *Support*



3.5"x 6" stacked
silver, copper, brass, coriander, plastic, faux foliage, resin

My husband, Aaron and I went from first glance to saying our vows in less than nine months. Our courtship was a whirlwind affair. I entered graduate school with the ink still drying on my Bachelor of Fine Arts diploma and one year of marriage under my belt. The prospect of taking three years in a fresh place to further my education and continue to develop our partnership was exciting. I have come to think of this time in our lives as *The Honeymoon Years*.

A silver picket fence encloses brilliantly-colored coriander seed and the silhouette perched on top captures the exact lines of our form as we pose for a photo on our first wedding anniversary- a frozen moment of *Joy* in which we merge into one being. Contrasting materials are indicative of the necessary *Compromise* made by newlyweds during the struggle to mesh two personalities. Budding organic forms spring up from the foundation built to *Support* our genesis.

Home Is Where the Heart Is

Heart at Home - RING

Lace and Fences - BROOCH

Everything is Roses – BRACELET

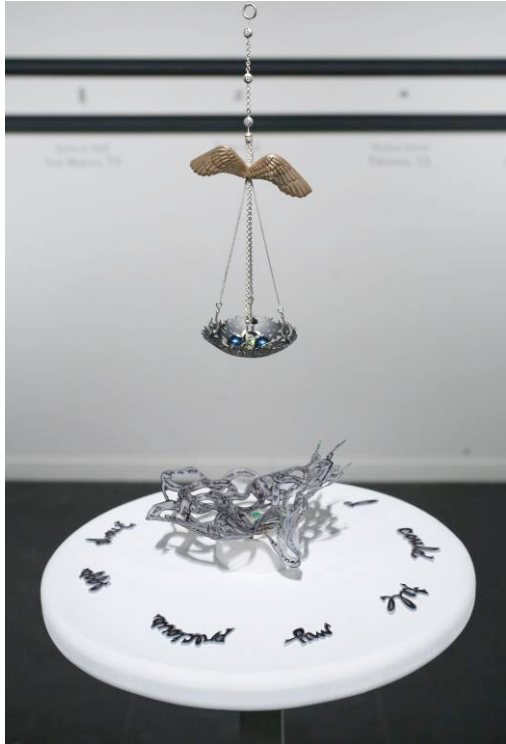
Cut Grass - BASE



4.5”x 5” stacked
silver, copper, faux foliage, Fimo, photo, paper, resin, fabric

The second in my *stackable wearable* series uses an image of the human heart to reference my innermost feelings – the extravagantly romantic. This tower is a physical manifestation of my sentiments regarding the idea that *Home Is Where the Heart Is*. My emotions are well protected within four layers of walls and fencing.

The anatomically correct *Heart at Home* is displayed within a skeleton house of square silver wire. My intention was to capture the marrow of home by fabricating a distilled version of four walls and a roof. A photo from my wedding day lies preserved under a layer of resin and hidden inside the double guard of rock wall and picket fence. It can only be revealed when the ring is removed while the tower is un-stacked. *Love, Lace and Fences* is the central support piece and *Everything is Roses* surrounds it all with a fabricated “iron” fence and etched brick wall. Miniature roses bloom from lush greenery, giving the piece a sense of life and hope. All sits inside a meticulously hand *Cut Grass* base.



Nesting for the Future

NECKLACE - *Wings Bearing Ovums*
BASE - *Letter to My Future Children*

The concept for this piece emanated from the desire to experience motherhood. What seemed a given to me as a child is becoming a lovely and fragile dream. I feel that time moves so swiftly. Soon I will be thirty. I find myself resenting the restriction of my birth control pills and mourning the loss of my precious eggs each month.

In *Wings Bearing Ovums* a pair of golden wings hangs from a delicate chain of three silver birth control pills. Four chains emerge from the wings, suspending an intricately pierced nest that cradles four stylized ovum; pearls nestled in delicate silver cytoplasm and topped by domed nuclei.

This entire neck piece hovers over a second nest, which contains text in the form of a *Letter to my Future Children*. This letter offers words of love and wisdom so that my children may one day know, as the Psalmist wrote, that they are “fearfully and wonderfully made.”





I approached the installation process in a similar way to that of my wearable work. A sense of order and balance is evident upon entering the gallery. The works on the three walls are supportive pieces that address my foundations and future. This ancillary work is done in gray tones and surrounds the vibrant, central garden containing pieces about my current heartfelt dreams and desires. Without my past, my present and future could not exist.

A Heart Well Tethered was a decided effort to step out of my design norm in regards to intimate scale and circular construction. The entire process, especially fabricating the map display, provided a multitude of lessons that enriched my tool knowledge. *Charting Home* was an opportunity to utilize empty space by providing a linear element to guide the viewer through the exhibition. I chose to frame my tiny houses in wainscoting to enhance the notion of home.

A soft bed of grass invites one to step into the garden and examine the three works perched on elegant pedestals, while the protective fencing serves to keep the viewer at the proper distance, and preserve the intricacies that the pieces represent.



(GREAT-GRAND) DAUGHTER (IN-LAW) / FRIEND / SISTER:
STUDENT, TEACHER, CONFIDANT

*"To be adult means, among other things, to see one's own life in continuous perspective, both in retrospect and prospect."
Erik Erickson*

In *Charting Home* I drew from memory each of the seventeen dwellings I have called home, as a method of contemplating my foundations. In order to navigate forward, we must identify our point of origin, documenting where I have been allows me to reflect on what home means to me.

Each image was then transferred onto translucent shrinkable material, cut out around each silhouette and shrunk. These tiny, black-and-white renderings of home march along the wall framed in black wainscoting and set at eye level, inviting the viewer in for closer inspection. The timeline of homes turns the corner to mark the momentous occasion of my marriage.



A Heart Well Tethered is a locket for the safekeeping of anodized aluminum silhouettes of those I hold most dear. The hand-cut figures of family and friends emerge on delicate silver chains from the chamber of my human heart-shaped container.

While on display, the heart is mounted over my current place of residence, Lawrence, KS within a 5'x 5' steel map consisting of each state I have lived in. The inch high populations affix to their respective hometowns. When worn, the magnetic-backed silhouettes attaches easily to the wearer's clothing so that I may carry my loved ones with me wherever I go. My cast of characters is made up of both biological and selected family. I have met many wonderful people who are truly dear to my heart along my meandering path.



MOLLIE KATHLEEN RICE BLACKBURN:
DREAMER, BELIEVER, PEACEMAKER

Addressing questions of human identity allows each of us to discover what is true and meaningful in our lives and in ourselves. In an attempt to know my own truth I delved into research regarding psychology, personology and psychosocial moratorium. Excavated information leaves no doubt that the source of personal identity formation is a topic widely debated across myriad fields of study and expertise. Each new source led to another theory on the age old debate of nature vs. nurture.

Modern society forces us to lead ever busier lives as technology provides us with the tools to multi-task. As we transition from childhood to adulthood more and more often we play the role of Juggler as new roles are introduced into our spectrum of self.

Keys to My Identity is a way of dissecting all of the roles that play a part in my everyday existence. A single,

stylized silhouette of my body is used to indicate that although the characteristics are many, they are all a part of my whole. Colorful text hangs in between each figure declaring sub-categories.

One of my life's most defining moments occurred when I was nineteen. I made the split second decision to swerve when a cat darted into the path of my oncoming vehicle. The resulting years of follow-up surgeries and physical therapy from the disabling car crash were lessons in stability, patience and trust.

Steady Stick is a response to my literal and figurative need for support and guidance as I move forward on my life's path.



silver, copper, aluminum, purple-heartwood, rice, resin

The body of the cane speaks to: what is in a name?

My first and middle initial are centered between representations of my maiden and married names. My maiden name is self-explanatory and my married name means people of the black water.

The grip is topped by a fanciful garden of hand-cut lace, colorful brick and verdant foliage. This time, the figures of my husband and I were cut freehand instead of in an exacting silhouette- whimsical lines of man and woman holding hands and looking forward. The *Genesis Fountain* ring slips into the brick wall and conceals a hollow cavity, perfect for holding a small weapon. This is a practical consideration, for I cannot physically run from an attacker, should the need ever arise.



My work communicates in myriad ways the message that *it takes courage to rejoice*. When I speak about path, it is indicative of living intentionally with purpose. I continue my journey by moving forward while working everyday to be a disciple of love. I have come to the conclusion that it is my most personal nature to nurture.

Our world is in a constant flux. It is my hope and intent that my work may remind every man and woman to pause in the present moment and appreciate the blessings that life offers.

My utmost thanks go out to...

My husband, Aaron

For every moment of love and support you have given me; I find home in your arms.

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