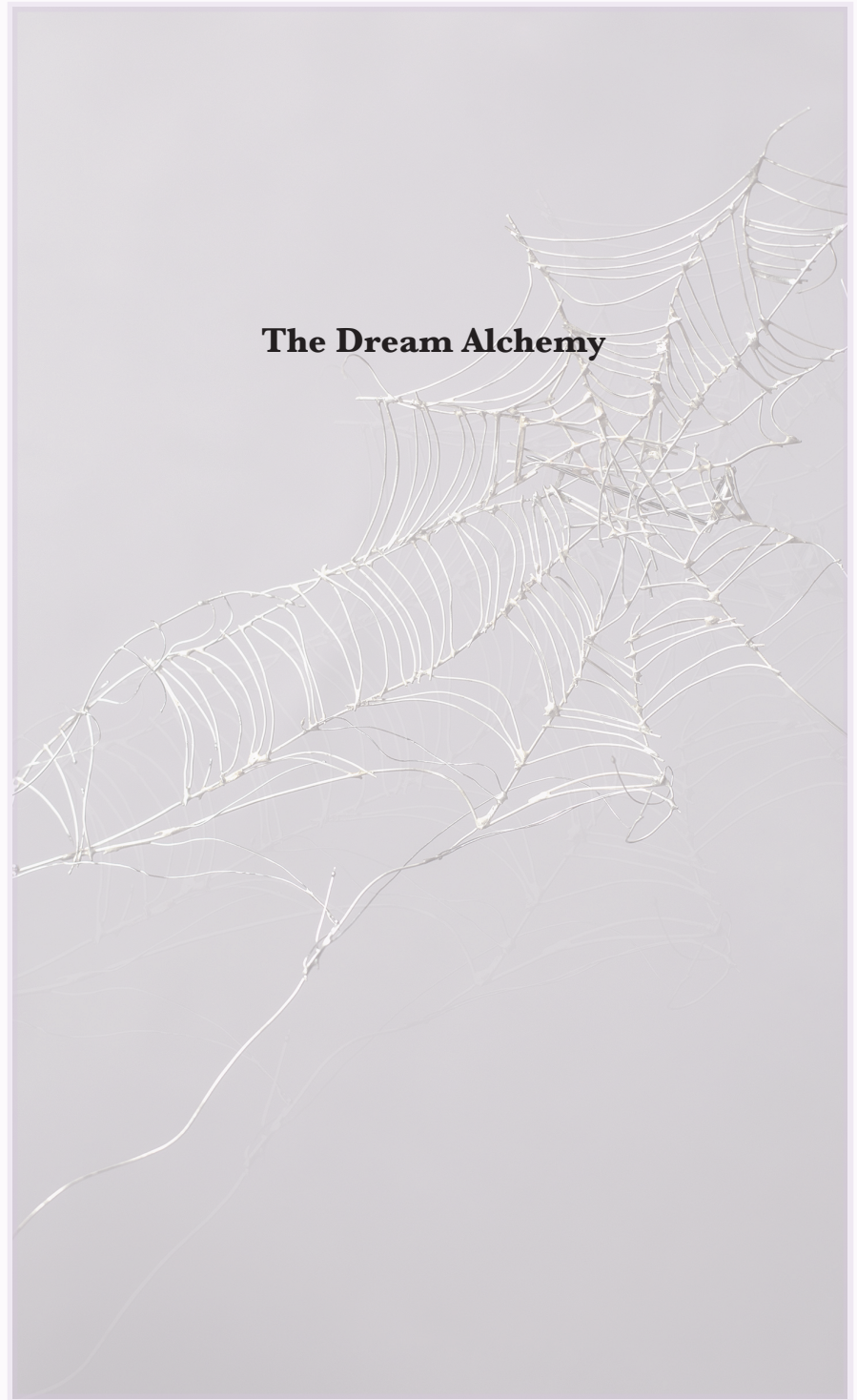


**The Dream Alchemy**



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## The Dream Alchemy

A thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree  
Master of Fine Arts in Metal and Jewelry Arts in the Department of Jewelry &  
Metalsmithing Department of the Rhode Island School of Design, Providence,  
Rhode Island.

by

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2018

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## Abstract

I strive to record and express moments from within my dreams, in order to obviate their elusiveness. I am a spectator in my dreams and sometimes find myself seized by violent and terrific events. These dreams from my subconscious guide me to the part of myself which I do not always recognize in my consciousness. I wish to know where these contents come from, why I have these dreams, or if these dreams are referencing narratives from my personal experience. The contents of these dreams, as well as the act of reflecting on them, call out my shadow—the unconscious aspect of my personality which I tend to repress. As a jeweler, I bring this darkness back to reality and document it through my work. By carefully constructing my “silver drawings,” I transcribe the shadow into something tangible. Now I can always be mindful of my shadow.



## The Acknowledgement of the Self

We cannot look directly into the hidden domain of ourselves. The shadow is forever hiding, as if the light of consciousness would steal its very life.<sup>1</sup> The shadow is one of the important concepts of the Swiss psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Carl Jung. The shadow refers to an unconscious aspect of the personality which represents unknown or little-known attributes and qualities of the ego.<sup>2</sup>

Robert Bly, an American poet and activist, called the shadow “the bag we drag behind us”. In his theory, a child is a living globe of energy. Later on, this child starts to put the parts of their personality which their parents find friction with in a invisible bag. With the child growing up and going to school, the bag collects more and more “stuff.” By the time the child reaches twenty years old, the bag has become quite large. What fills the bag comes not only from the influence of outside forces, but also from qualities in conflict with our self-image. Out of a round globe of energy, the twenty-year-old ends up with a slice—the rest is in the bag.<sup>3</sup>

I imagine how much I put in the bag, and wonder how much is still left in myself. My parents did not subject me to many family rules. However, as members of society, to some extent they have been influenced to raise me by our culture. Most Chinese childhoods are full of extracurricular activities, and mine was no exception. I have participated in several art classes, such as drawing, ballet, and traditional Chinese dancing. By the time I attended middle school, my after-class free time had become less and less due to the increasing time spent in tutoring classes—even if I got good grades in school, my parents believed I needed extra tutoring to maintain them. I started to give up the classes that held my interest.

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1 Connie Zweig, and Jeremiah, Abrams, “Introduction: The Shadow Side of Everyday Life,” in *Meeting the Shadow: The Hidden Power of the Dark Side of Human Nature*, ed. Connie Zweig and Jeremiah Abrams (NY: Penguin Group Inc, 1991).

2 Marie-Louise von Franz, “The Process of Individuation,” in *Man and His Symbols*, ed. Carl Jung and Marie-Louise von Franz (London: Aldus Books, 1964).

3 Robert Bly, “The Long Bag We Drag Behind Us,” in *Meeting the Shadow: The Hidden Power of the Dark Side of Human Nature*, ed. Connie Zweig and Jeremiah Abrams (NY: Penguin Group Inc, 1991).

Meanwhile, my parents and I agreed on keeping one of them—besides giving myself a commitment to keep doing what I love, my specialty in art got me extra credit while applying to schools. This is how drawing struggled to survive in the remaining slice of me.

According to Bly, before we are twenty years old, we decide what parts of ourselves to put into the bag, and after that we try to get them out again, for the rest of our lives.<sup>4</sup> Twenty years old is approximately the age we leave high school, move out from home, or have other changes that require us to adjust our self image from childhood. I left my hometown of Chengdu and went to Beijing for the drawing training during that time. I was seventeen. I was away from my parents, but school was still my whole life. I became accustomed to repressing the negative emotions stemming from school life. I was anxious because I acknowledged my anxiety, I was afraid because I acknowledged my fear, and for the sake of my school life I had no choice but to throw them into the bag.

They would not regress nor be sealed in the bag forever; instead, they would be banished to the invisible realms over and over again. Taking the shadow out does not mean to act on it, but to be conscious of it and face it directly. In order to know what was stowed in the bag, and in what way can I take it out to build myself up from the remaining slice, I would first need to acknowledge that my shadow is not a negative agent.

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4 Ibid.

## On Dreaming

*Dreams are so strange—and so involuntary—as to challenge and deny the twin notions of rationality; but in dreaming I appear irrational. And I lose my sense of volition. How, then, can I be responsible for my dreams? Surely they occur whether I will them to or not. If I do not will them, how can I cause them? While clearly involving me, dreams seem to happen to me regardless of my will; and they run their course—with few exceptions—no matter what I say, think, or feel.<sup>5</sup>*

—J. Allan Hobson (1988)

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<sup>5</sup> J. Allan, Hobson. *The Dreaming Brain: How the brain creates both the sense and nonsense of dreams* (New York: Basic Books, Inc, 1988), 10.



*Dec, 3*

*A sea lion follows me like a pet dog.*

*I sit down and he is also sitting in front of me.*

*I pet him. And I watch the show.*

*I open a drawer, and I see a pile of candy*

*in five different colors.*

*Dec, 4*

*A living match dog.*

*Dec 5, 2017:*

*I hang out with a group of friends in the busy city.*

*We see a man with social anxiety.*

*He cuffs himself to a street lamp, it is so crowded around him.*

*My friend asks him why he is doing this,*

*he looks at us, answers sincerely,*

*this is to force himself to communicate with others,*

*he does not want to be isolated from people anymore.*

*My friends and I get our answer,*

*so we walk away.*

*Dec, 6*

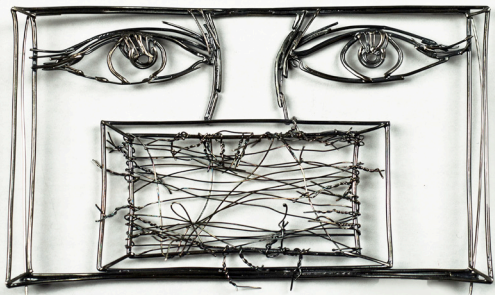
*A tunnel with a label "3344".*

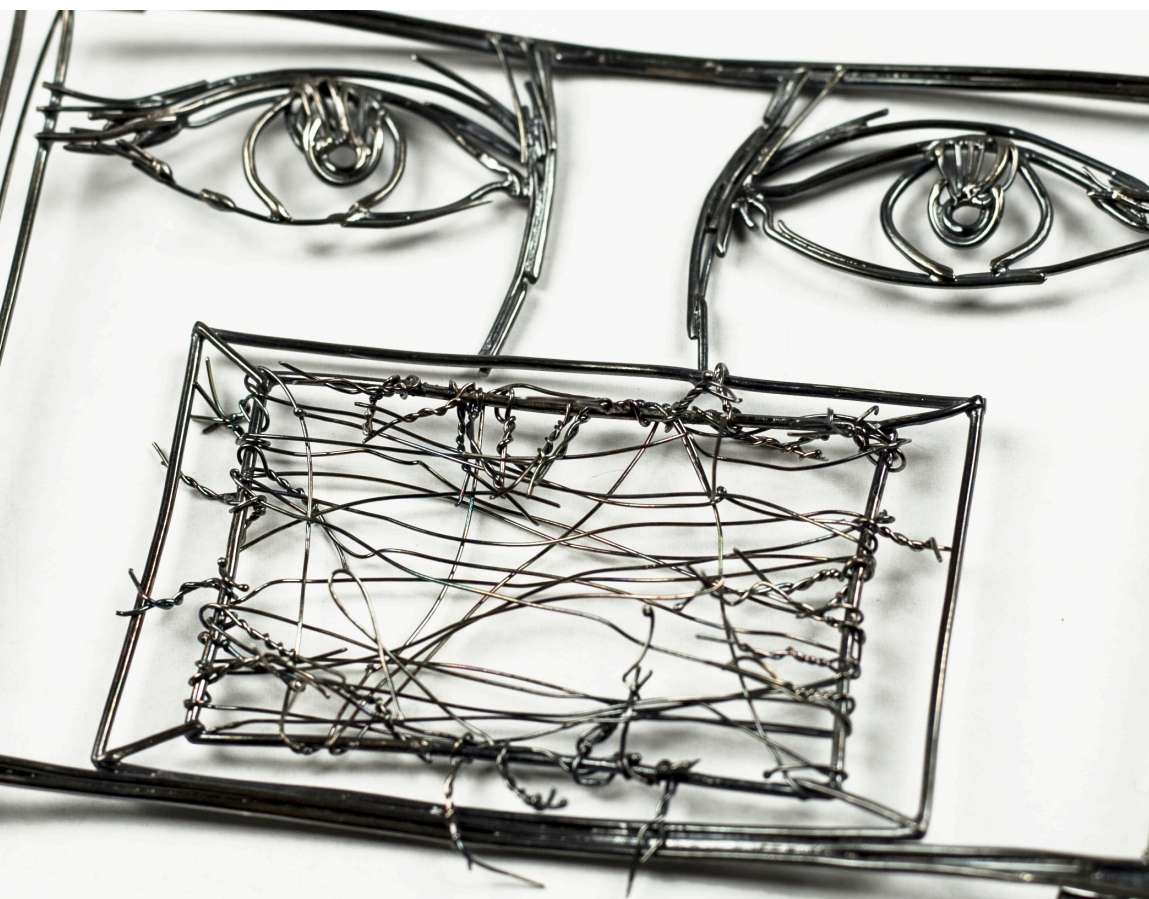
*We stand in front of the tunnel, it is really dark inside.*



The contents of the dreams represent realms of the intangibles, the unpredictable, and the uncontrollable. I am a spectator, sometimes seized by violence and terror in my dreams. These peculiar dark contents are bizarre, illogical, and threatening. They appear to be irrational not only because there are peculiar units of time, place, and personage, but also because they contest rules and social ethics. However, I do not want to avert these events in my subconscious world. I do not let my consciousness fold the remembrance of my disturbing dreams into the ocean of my secrets even though they are not desirable. To reject or mutilate the terrifying or incomprehensible aspects would be to pretend I had a dreamless night. By doing this I am filling my invisible bag again because I am abandoning part of myself and trying to remain ignorant of it. Dreams are subliminal materials for understanding my subconscious, even if some of them are by no means admirable, they cannot be ignored. Dreams are fleeting, I must always chase my dreams back however pleasant or disturbing I find them to be.







*Dec 12, 2017:*

*Empty.*

*Dec 13, 2017:*

*I walk in an abandoned industrial building,  
hearing a voice calling my name  
from the otherside of the hallway.*

*I walk through the hallway, it is dark and unfurnished.*

*Then I come into an empty room and there is a computer-sized box in it.*

*The voice I heard comes from the box.*

*I walk closer, and, surprisingly,*

*I see my best friend's face inside the box.*

*Meanwhile, her mouth morphed into a even smaller box, with grass all over.*

*She looks terrible, I talk with her,*

*but I can do nothing*

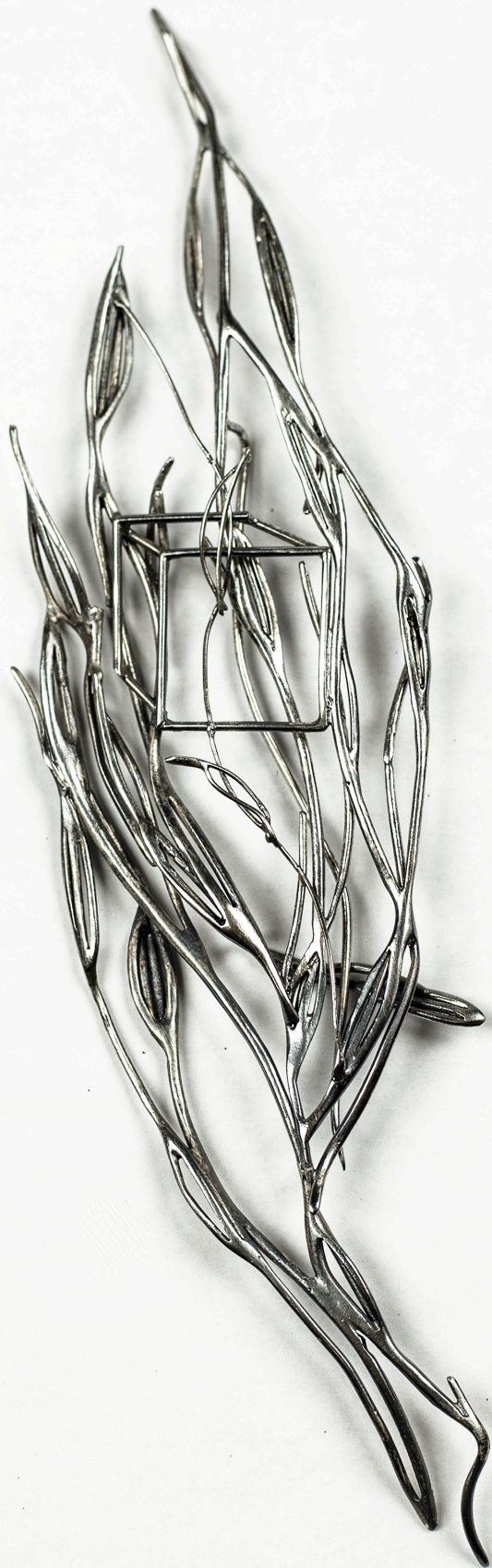
*to help her.*

The disturbing dreams make the waking me feel uncomfortable. The autonomous events which happen in my subconscious transmit their power to my consciousness. Through remembering and recording what happens and how I respond to the events in my subconscious world in the form of the dream, my shadow is revealed to me. I cannot respond to my anxiety and terror rationally in the dream but the critical and judgemental awareness comes back to me after I wake up. I should have helped that man with social anxiety, but instead I turned my back to him. I should have tried to change my friend back to a normal human, or at least take her out of the place of horror, but the dream did not give me enough time to do so. I woke up before I could take action. By that time I feel powerless in my subconscious world.

I try to make connection between the negative feelings I repressed and the terrific contents emerging in my dreams. The repressed agent finds its way out of the bag and presents itself in front of me, by bubbling up in my dream world, the subconscious world, and proving its power.

My passion for and practice of drawing accompanied me throughout childhood. It is one of the few survivors from my childhood education. I went on to study drawing under an academic structure during high school and went through a period of strict and stressful drawing training. This training created the worst anxiety and fear I experienced before I left the Chinese education system and started to rebuild my self-image from my own will. I have to carry it with me instead of throwing it into the bag, because it is so connected to drawing, and drawing is something I always love to keep with me. Therefore, I choose to confront my biggest challenge. The reinvention is through my art practice —jewelry making. I no longer feel powerless against my subconscious, and do not worry about how much I have put in the bag—the more I have in the bag, the deeper I can dig into the underground layer of myself. I am building a new relationship with my shadow.



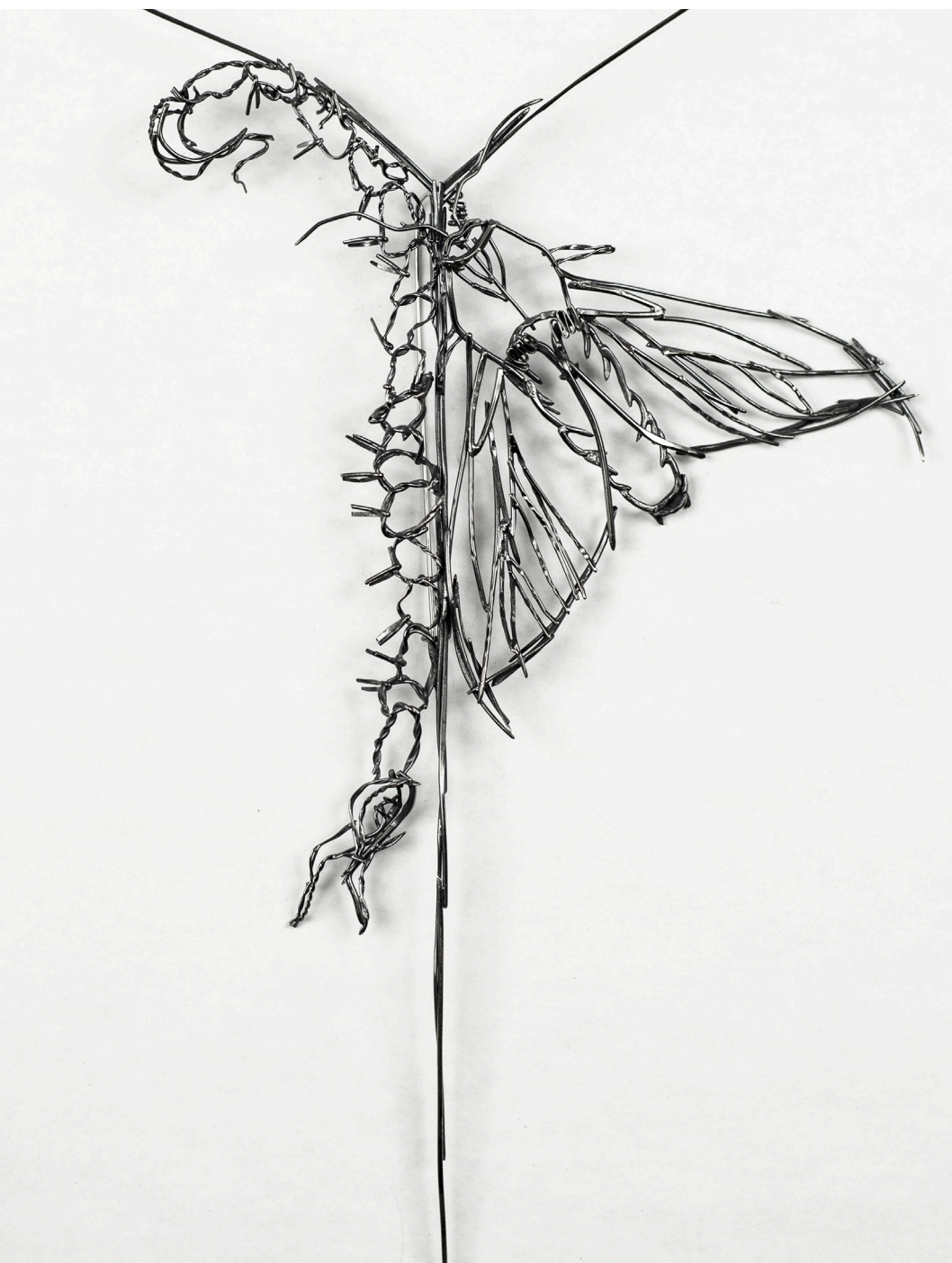




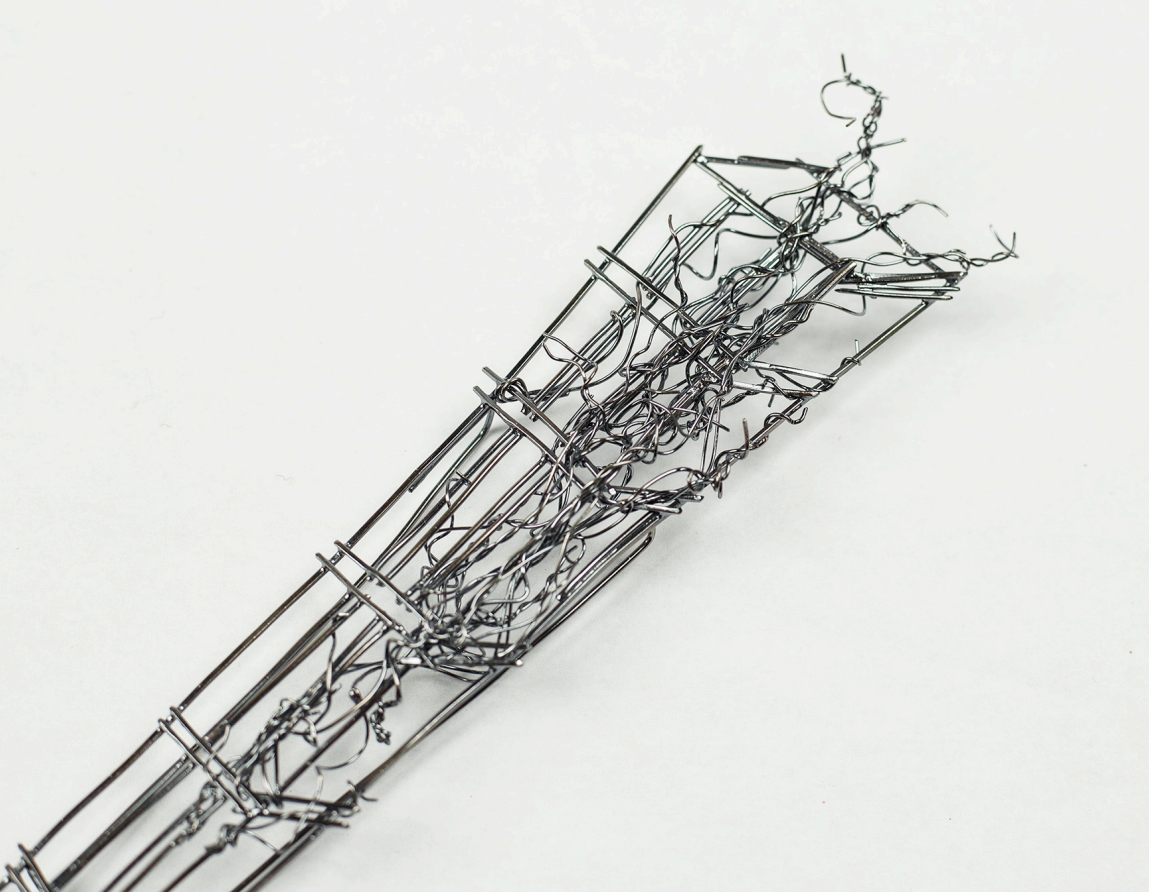


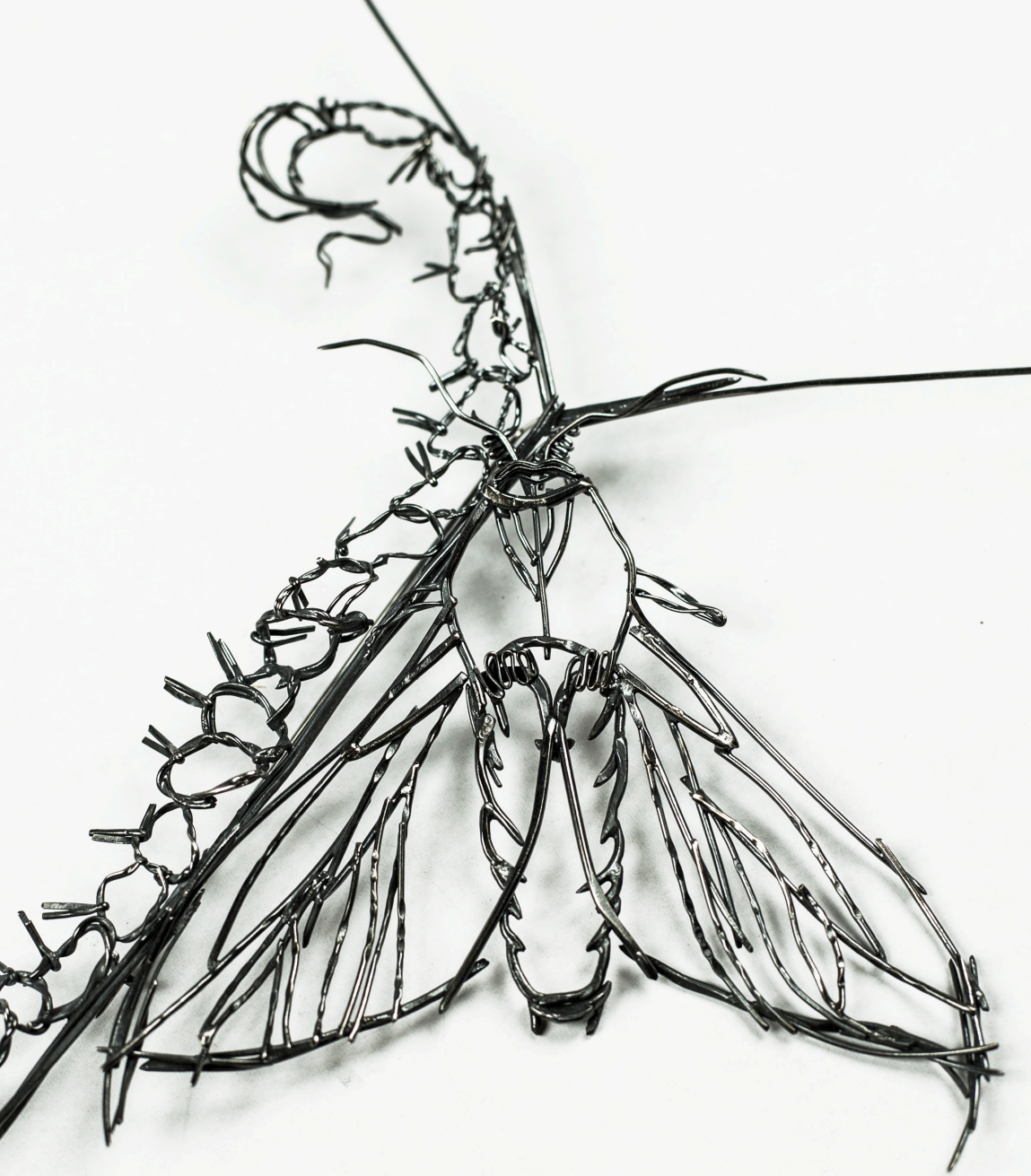
Of all the materials that I have interacted with, silver has become my favorite drawing medium. The enduring nature and preciousness of this material has enabled me to preserve and solidify the moments I encounter in my dreamscape. I make “the Dream Alchemy” by soldering each individual wire, constructing them into an image and making it to a brooch. Similar to drawing, the “silver drawing” is a slow and tender process, and time is commissioned to consolidate the story-telling of these pieces. With the building up of wires, the piece gradually reveals itself to me, and the introspective narrative is woven alongside this process.





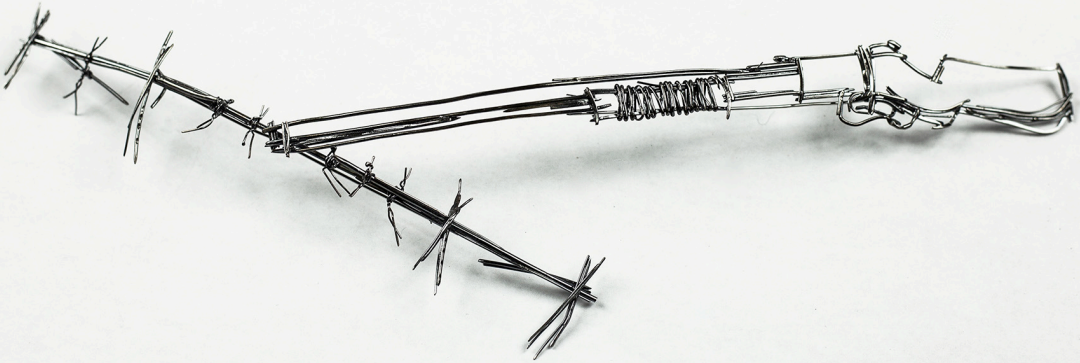
















*One of my friend's dog can just live just like a dog  
and it is already a year and a half.  
We are taking good care of him  
and waiting for that day to come.*

*Feb 21, 2018:*

*My friend asks me to take care of her ferret for a day.  
I play with that ferret all the time,  
but I am playing too hard, suddenly the ferret breaks into two  
The head part is still alive, but the tail part is dead  
I am so worried that my friend will see this after she comes back, so I try to  
and I am also wishing that  
the tail part will be back alive if it is connected to the head again  
The glue doesn't work. I try to sew the two parts by thread, but it also  
I don't know how to face my friend,*





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*two parts.*  
*s dead.*  
*to glue the ferret back,*

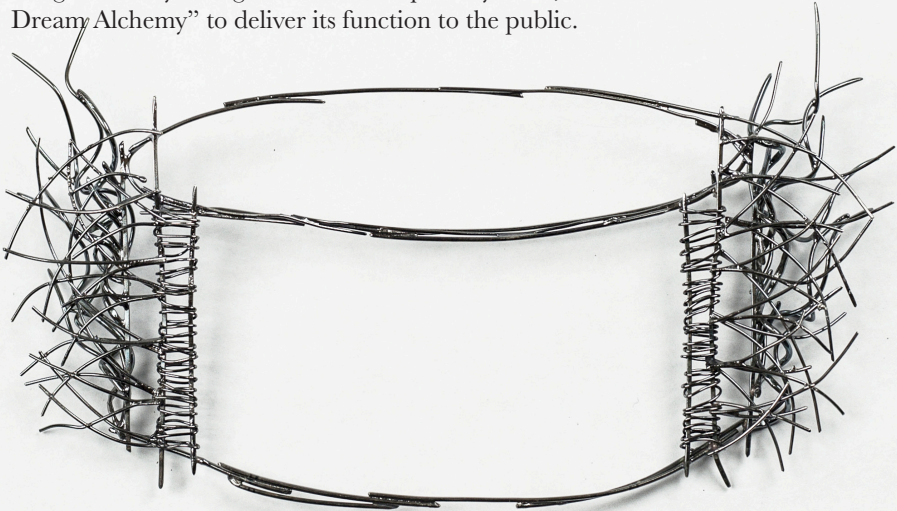
*d again.*  
*also doesn't work.*

*I am anxious.*

## The Alchemist

The relationship between my dreams and waking life did not remain emotional once I was determined to bring my dreams into my jewelry practice. Dreams exist above the human body, but making them in the form of jewelry brings them back to the physical body. The content of the dream replays over and over during my making process. The piece was finished as the story ends in my dream. I record the darkness that was created by my subconscious without fixing it within consciousness. I do not write any after story in order to giving these dreams happy endings, because rewriting them is to deny and repress the darkness of my subconscious—which is my shadow.

I am the first wearer of my pieces. Jewelry contains meaning both in private and public realms. The narrative embedded in these pieces retains a strong emotional connection to me. They elucidate my shadow, which I normally process and repress secretly in my internal world. These dreams come from my subconscious, they are part of my repressed personality, but they are chosen to be brought to the external world and be seen by others. Dreams from the subconscious inform us of things which by all logic we could not possibly know,<sup>6</sup> and this is the chance for “the Dream Alchemy” to deliver its function to the public.



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<sup>6</sup> Aniela, Jaffe. *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* by C. G. Jung (NY: Vintage Books, 1989), 302.





Mostly we see the shadow indirectly, the part of the personality we place in the bag will eventually come to us somewhere else on other people. We may not always see the shadow of ourselves, but we can see it on other people. It is a more tasteful, and safer way to observe it. If we see our own unconscious tendencies in other people, it is “projection.”<sup>7</sup> Projecting our shadow is not merely the first step for us to acknowledge our shadow, but leads us to involuntarily behave behind our own backs. Since we tend to project our own shadow onto others, we are familiar with the shadow of others but somehow inexperienced with our own.



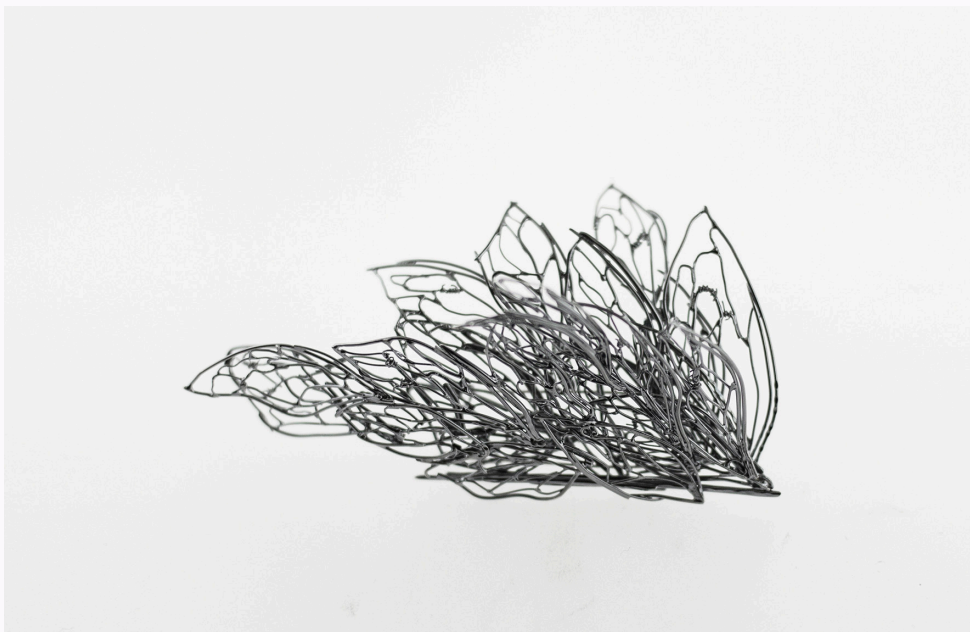
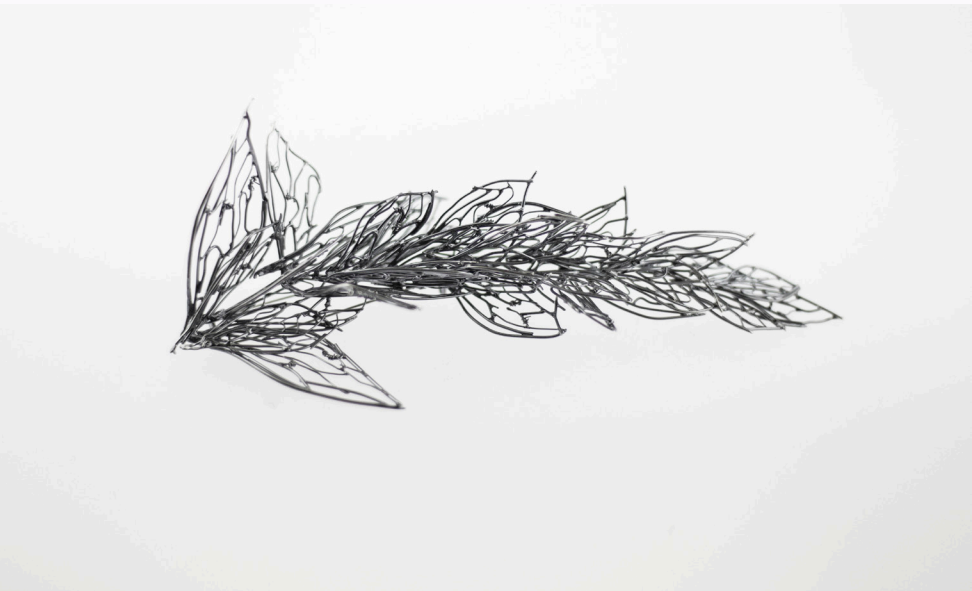
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7 Marie-Louise, Von, Franz. “The Realization of the Shadow in Dreams,” in *Meeting the Shadow: The Hidden Power of the Dark Side of Human Nature*, ed. Connie Zweig and Jeremiah Abrams (NY: Penguin Group Inc, 1991).















Projection folds both positive and negative meanings, to realize the shadow and treat it without fear and hostility. Then the shadow is no longer our enemy. It will work for us.<sup>8</sup> Instead of projecting on others, being the wearer of these pieces is a means to sensitively remind ourselves of our shadow, and be unashamed of it. Moreover, if we do not project, we may not see our shadow at all. Wearing these pieces provides an opportunity for others to project as well, and share in a sense of mutuality. The viewer does not need to see a real crime scene to realize brutality, neither do they need to stand in a thrilling place to realize fear. In addition, these pieces are jewelry, they are meant to be worn on the body. This is the connection between the “silver drawing” and people—what we see in the drawing is not only a scene, but also what it attributes to, and what creates it—the repressed part of a person’s personality.

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

*April, 12:*

*Empty.*

*April 13, 2018:*

*I am in high school.*

*I join a school union with my friend.*

*However, I have to leave that union due to the time conflict.*

*My friend is upset about being left alone in a group of strangers.*

*I go back to the meeting space            to pick up my personal belongings,  
the head of the union leads me to the storing room.*

*He passes me a box, by the time he opens it, I see a cat lying within it.*

*I ask him where are my belongings,*

*he opens the cat's belly.*

*There is a bloody cut on the cat's belly    and my belongings are inside its body.*

*I was so shocked that he killed a cat to be a container,*

*suddenly I see the cat blinks its eyes.*

*So I shout out: "*

*You asshole, its still alive! How can you just let it suffer like this!"*

*He said:*

*"Yes, I just cut its belly before you came. This is the very first one I've ever made."*

*April, 14:*

*I travel the whole city with my cousin. The city might be my hometown,  
but it looks like San Francisco.*

*Then I feel tired,*

*I walk into a Japanese Cafe.*

*I want to have a cup of coffee, but they only sale rose tea.*



My pieces represent the repressed side of us, they can be uncomfortable to view or wear. However, even if it is a struggle, just like recognizing the dark side of ourselves, it is meaningful. The bag behind us contains part of our personality, that means it also contains part of our power—this power comes from the “stuff” in the bag. Rejecting what is in the bag means rejecting part of our power. “The Dream Alchemy” cannot enlarge personal power, but it can remind people who project onto it of their invisible power. Like mourning jewelry, it cannot bring the beloved one back to life, but it works as a memento, reminding us of the lost person, and allowing us to project our memorial on it. Like a talisman, it refers to a magical figure that is charged with an intended force, and is believed to bring good luck to the owner or prevent the owner from trouble.<sup>9</sup> “The Dream Alchemy” is the materialized form of my personal shadow, and it helps me to project and collect my power from within my shadow. As mentioned before, the shadow lives in the hidden domain of ourselves, it is hard for us to look directly into it. These pieces which tell the stories of my subconscious instances act as daily life jewelry and are tangible media for us to observe ethereal contents.

Constructed from layers of silver wires, these pieces in a way are steady—they will not be worn off like the pencil drawings I used to make. On the other hand, they are fragile, and can be distorted. Like the ethereal dream contents, they are not fixed. I bring dreams into the waking world, and by wearing them, the wearer lives side by side with the dream and the meaning it carries—the shadow. The shadow lives with us, by facing it and acknowledge it in ourselves, it changes us from the remaining slice of us. By taking the shadow out, it also changes.

The darkness may still come to my dreams, but I have learned to embrace it. If the disturbing dreams unceasingly occur, I have the courage to meet them. In the waking world, through making and wearing my pieces, my shadow will be reintegrated as a part of me.

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9 Migene, Gonzalez-Wippler, *The Complete Book of Amulets and Talismans* (St. Paul, Minnesota: Llewellyn Publications, 1991), Llewellyn’s Sourcebook, 203.











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