

**A PRACTICE-BASED INVESTIGATION
EXAMINING THE POSSIBILITY THAT
THE ECSTATIC EXPERIENCE CAN BE
EXPRESSED IN CONTEMPORARY
VISUAL FORM**

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**THESIS
CONTAINS CD
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THE DEVELOPMENT OF A BODY OF WORK THAT EXAMINES THE POSSIBILITY THAT THE ECSTATIC EXPERIENCE CAN BE EXPRESSED IN CONTEMPORARY VISUAL FORM.

The aim of this inquiry is to examine the possibility that the nature of the transcendent and ineffable ecstatic experience can be revealed in contemporary visual form.

Research resulted in the development of a final project that attempts to communicate the ecstatic state as understood through meditation and conveyed through installation, abstraction and film. The multimedia installation unites a series of nine circular canvases with film of a performance within the installation to affect an immersive space.

The accompanying exegesis explores the origin, methodology, practice, methods, influences and significance of the work as an original contribution to the field of knowledge.

The research continues work completed for a Master of Arts degree at California State University Dominguez Hills. The nature of the mystical experience prompted an inquiry into the possibility of developing a visual context for expression.

Preliminary research is discussed in the accompanying written text as it relates to the final project installation.

The work builds upon precursors in the field. Bill Viola's video productions and Mark Rothko's abstract expressions were important influences as were the writings and theories of Susan Gablik concerning the healing power of art.

The research reveals that when performance on film, abstraction and immersion are united and shown to educate, illuminate and potentially heal, the installation is more likely to express the nature of the ecstatic experience.

The research contributes to a fund of knowledge about the ecstatic experience and the final project functions as a viable tool toward achieving the ecstatic experience.

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INTRODUCTION

Purpose

The purpose of this practice-based doctoral research is to examine the research question which asks whether or not the ecstatic experience, found to be ineffable and transcendent, can be successfully expressed in contemporary visual form. This supporting textual commentary accompanies the practice-based research that consists of a preliminary body of work, *Homage to the One*, and a final project, *The Circle Way*, that attempts to express the nature of the ecstatic experience with abstract forms, installation and film. The *Circle Way* installation is composed of nine painted circular forms that utilize color and shape as well as other compositional elements to suggest the stages of the ecstatic experience. A performance on film is available to viewers as they enter the installation space.

The research continues work submitted as a final project for the Master of Arts Degree at California State University Dominguez Hills. The MA thesis project consisted of a series of conceptual constructions that dealt with contemporary issues which plague American society but are not specific to the United States (McDermott, 2000). Concepts such as malaise, immigration anxiety, and alienation were explored. The MA thesis project was concerned with means to express the problems as well as the resolutions.¹ Some of the artwork for the Master's degree was created based upon the

¹ Expressionism is a natural response to social alienation. On page 81 in *The Expressive Fallacy*, H. Foster quotes T. Adorno's *Notes on Kafka*, reminding the reader that, "the more the I of expressionism is

assertion that alleviation from psychological pain can lay in the way we perceive our experiences.

It is generally accepted that simple meditation techniques can be used to alleviate anxiety and alienation.² These techniques can contribute to a relaxed mental state where a decrease in conscious thought can lead to an ecstatic event (Burnham, 1997; Dalai Lama, 2002; Keating, 2002; Yogananda, 1994).

Research into the topic revealed the mystical or ecstatic experience to be a universal phenomenon (Armstrong, 1993, pg. 219) and prompted an inquiry into the possibility of developing visual forms that expressed the transcendent state of reality. Fieldtrips to significant collections, museums, galleries, exhibits and lectures in the United States and Europe supplemented the literature review and revealed that there has been a long tradition of attempts to express or educe ecstasy in the arts. Some of these attempts are discussed in Chapter 2. This review of the precursors in the field revealed a lack of visual expressions that successfully conveyed the experience in a comprehensive manner. Therefore, the research consists not only of this textual account but includes a practice-based component that will attempt to answer the research question.

Assumptions

The final project installation entitled *The Circle Way* is comprised of nine abstract painted mixed media circular forms accompanied by performance on film. Wassily

thrown back on itself, the more like the excluded world of things it becomes.” It is in this ‘world of things’ that the MA thesis began.

² An example of a contemporary use for meditation techniques can be found by listening to Audio Cassette, *Learn To Relax: Proven Techniques for Reducing Stress, Tension and Anxiety-And Promoting Peak Performance* by C. Eugene Walker (2001).

Kandinsky and Kazimir Malevich's belief that abstraction had the potential to instill a sense of spiritual transcendence impacted the subsequent decision to produce abstract forms (Becks-Malorny, 1994; Tuchman, 1999). Abstract Expressionists Mark Rothko and Adolph Gottlieb sought spiritual content for their work as well, but looked at the writings of Carl Jung and Native American painting for inspiration rather than Theosophy which was so important to Kandinsky (Tuchman, 1999, pg. 49). The American Abstract Expressionists were important influences in the final project installation. However, early research, 2D and 3D work primarily in encaustic, deviated from the purely non-objective and was influenced by artists Anselm Kiefer and Louise Bourgeois, whose work is filled with symbolism that had to be explained by the artist in order for the viewer to fully interpret the meaning (Bernadac, 2000; Ransmayr, 2001).

Themes explored in the early research included the abolition of polarity, the interconnectedness of all things, journey, and oneness. The connection to the work is examined in Chapters 1, 2 and 3. Nevertheless, the work in the early stages of discovery contained too much personal symbolism. If it is the case, as Barnett Newman had written, that 'Abstract Expressionism is a language to be used to project visual ideas . . . and shapes and colors alone can be symbols', then there would be no need to deliberately inject symbols into the work (Tuchman, 1999, pg. 49). Yet, there was no need for the research to pursue the pure abstraction Ad Reinhart had attempted when he created his monochrome paintings in black because color would continue to play an important role in the final project installation.

After exhibiting and reflecting upon the first body of work, it became increasingly evident that the second body of work should be concerned with whether or not the work

could be viewed as a product of the exchange between the space, the viewer, and everything within that space, namely the paintings. Although influenced by much of what Donald Judd had said about spatial concerns, that space was more powerful than the painted flat surface, it was not necessary to abandon painting as he had done in the early 1960s (Stiles & Selz, 1996; Spector, 2001, pg. 150).³ Revisions were made and additional methods of practice described in Chapter 1 were employed that resulted in a strategy for production of the final project installation and accompanying performance on film that attempts to resolve the problem.

In utilizing multiple media that creates an exchange between the viewer, artwork and space, the installation was found to fulfill a set of emergent criteria within the study, namely, that it educate, illuminate and heal.⁴

Scope

A number of methodologies have been identified as acceptable approaches in practice-based art research projects (Gray & Malins, 1993). The research undertaken here requires a distinctively creative and imaginative approach that borrows from hermeneutics, heuristics, and action research within a reflexive/reflective framework of a 'creative-production project report' as advocated by Scrivener.⁵

³ Tacit understanding, viewer acceptance of the first body of work, and a review of predecessor's artwork provided enough evidence to show that the painted surface can be part of a credible vehicle for expression of the ecstatic experience. See section 3.2.1, *Abstraction to Illuminate* and 3.3, *Enticing the viewer, a discussion about aesthetics* for more about the paintings in *The Circle Way*.

⁴ See section 3.2 *Gablik* in Chapter 3 for a discussion of the criteria in the context of the artwork.

⁵ S. Scrivener is the head of research at Chelsea College of Art and Design, University of the Arts, London. He is an experienced examiner of practice-based PhD projects in the UK. In *Characterizing Creative-Production Doctoral Projects in Art and Design* (2002) and *The Practical Implications of Applying a Theory of Practice Based Research: A Case Study* (2005), coauthored with Peter Chapman,

Chapter 1 discusses the research methodologies and methods of practice employed in producing the projects. Chapter 2 accounts for the nature of the ecstatic experience, how artists have attempted to communicate that information, and how engaging with the key texts and works of art has affected the research. Chapter 3 discusses theory and context and triangulates data for validation. Results of the research, recommendations for future research and the significance of the work as an original contribution to the field of knowledge are presented in Chapter 4.

Scrivener makes a strong case for the utilization of a record of creative-production that includes 'reflection-in action-and-practice' as an integral part of the process.

CHAPTER 1

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND METHODS OF PRACTICE

1.1 Methodology

The methodology was derived from a number of theorists and was chosen in an effort to preserve the primary importance of the artwork in the practice-based research. Gray and Pirie (1995) make a strong case for the chaotic nature of artistic research and assert such a process should not try to emulate scientific research models nor should it try to conform to conventional measurable systems. Artists as practice-based researchers are aware of the difference between art knowing (intuition) and science knowing (rationality) and choose evaluation methods that acknowledge observations based on intuition as valid (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2001, pg. 54). Much of the research described in this document is based upon intuitive tacit knowledge¹ which makes heuristics² and hermeneutics³ useful for this art practice-based investigation. Action

¹ For Polanyi (1974) tacit knowledge is personal knowledge that functions as background knowledge which assists in accomplishing a task. This is different from what Polanyi describes as focal knowledge or knowledge about an object in focus. When the term tacit knowledge is used in this document it will refer to intuitive knowledge as defined by Polanyi. Tacit knowledge is used to interpret and make decisions in the research.

² Heuristics is a highly personal process of inquiry and researchers must have personal experience with intense interest in the phenomenon being studied (Patton, 1990, pgs. 71, 410-411).

³ Hermeneutics focuses on human practice and self-understanding and permeates the whole of existence, including the research undertaken here (Taylor, 1991).

research methods were chosen to validate the art work because action research entails outside participation (Dick, 1994).⁴

Newbury (1996, pg.16) claims that methodological decisions in art research should be based on procedures that are embedded in creative activity and reflection upon those procedures. With this in mind, this document as exegesis⁵ rather than thesis conforms to Scrivener's framework for documentation of art practice-based research (2002, pg. 16).

Scrivener (2002) advocates the use of a creative production project report that emphasizes process and how that process changes the work as it progresses. Scrivener (2002) argues that the traditional thesis format of establishing a question, describing methods of testing, applying those methods and finally discussing results and theory can not easily be applied to creative practice projects.

Scrivener's model includes the following steps:

- Identification of issues
- Review of theory
- Reframing the issues (in response to material found)
- Summary of work
- Reflection on work
- Action and practice
- Statement of revised issues
- Summary of information and knowledge gained
- Post-project reflection (on the project as a whole)
- Reflection on reflection (critical reflection upon one's work-focused reflection)

⁴ Dick (1994) explains that action research implies a partnership between the researcher and clients. In hermeneutics and heuristics the emphasis is upon personal intuitive knowledge which is difficult to validate. Therefore proven action research methods are used to aid in the validation process. Dick goes on to explain that action research values responsiveness over replicability, otherwise it would be difficult to achieve the required action as part of research. This is important to the research undertaken here in that it looks at responses to the immersive space as part of *The Circle Way*.

⁵ G. Sullivan (2005, pg. 92) quotes de Freitas (2002) when explaining that an exegesis is more than merely a critical explanation, but rather a document 'through which ideas can develop'. He argues that exegesis is an appropriate form of written documentation to accompany artifact in practice-based research projects because it acknowledges that art can be research unto itself. The nature of the research undertaken here does not rely solely on the quantitative and qualitative strategies employed because they do not unequivocally prove 'something' as required in a 'thesis' This document is closest to what Sullivan and de Freitas describe as exegesis. R. Stewart (2000) in *(Re) inventing Artists' Research: Constructing Living Forms of Theory* reminds the reader that in the end, it is the quality of the study, not the form of the document that reveals the value of the research.

This reflective/reflexive methodological approach does not diminish the importance of the artifact in the research.⁶

Gray and Malins (1993) identify the steps in structuring research in general and note similarities in the processes for the sciences, fine art, and design research even though the content and outcomes are very different. Gray and Malins' (1993) outline the following steps:

- 'Felt need' or urge to create
- Data collection
- Definition of problem
- Development of models, experiment and field work
- Illumination and articulation
- Verification testing
- Critical context (human response)
- Revise and improve and alter concepts

For Gray and Malins, difficulties arise in validating art research (Gray & Malins, 1993, pg. 9). Validity is the degree to which a thing measures what it is supposed to measure (Johnson, 2005, pg. 82). For Gray and Malins verification testing and human responses are employed to validate the research. Scrivener's model does not take validation into consideration.

The twelve step methodology for the research was developed in response to Scrivener's ten step model while incorporating steps from Gray and Malins'

⁶ Alvesson and Skoldberg (2001, pg. 5) identify two basic characteristics of reflexivity as careful interpretation and reflection. Scrivener's model is based in reflexive methodology. In reflexive/reflexive methodology reflection is turned inward toward the researcher and interpretation is paramount in the research. Therefore intuition plays an important role in the theories developed in the art-based research. Alvesson and Skoldberg (2001, pg. 248) further distinguish between reflective and reflexive practice. In reflexive practice, the levels of practice are reflected in one another. A dominant level can contain reflections on other levels and more than one level may interact. In reflective practice there is a focus upon specific methods or levels of interpretation. For example, the connection between Gablik's criteria and chosen mediums for *The Circle Way* discussed in section 3.2 exemplifies reflective/reflexive practice.

traditional approach in order to validate the research and fit the unique nature of the research problem. The steps are partly driven by heuristic inquiry.⁷

1. Beginning with a 'felt need', identify the issues in order to create.
2. Define the problem, reframing if necessary.
3. Collect data.
4. Develop a body of work based upon the collected data (methods of practice for the first body of work).
5. Reflect upon the work and articulate revised issues to be explored.
6. Take action in practice by revising and improving altered concepts (methods of practice of the second body of work).
7. Present existing theory in the context of the research.
8. Verification testing in a critical context (human response).
9. Summarize information gained.
10. Post-project reflection.
11. Reflection on reflection (critical reflection upon one's work-focused reflection).
12. Recommendations for future research.

Step 1: Identify the issues in order to create. The research began with a 'felt need' to create visual artwork that expressed the ecstatic experience in a comprehensive manner. Allison (1997) identifies the 'felt need' as a legitimate source for research. The introduction briefly identifies the issues to be examined in the research.

Step 2: Define the problem, reframing if necessary. The problem is identified in the introduction and reframed after the creation and exhibition of *Homage to the One*.

Step 3: Collect Data. This step continues throughout the research and was presented in part as research journals at the examination in September 2005. The early literature and art review in Chapter 2 is the culmination of the data collection process.

⁷ Moustakas (1990) identifies four stages in the process of heuristic inquiry. Heuristics involves 'immersion', where the researcher becomes completely involved in the experience. In the next stage, 'incubation', the researcher contemplates and waits for tacit understanding and insight. In the 'illumination' stage, themes and patterns emerge and new discoveries are made. The 'explication' phase involves a full understanding of the experience.

Step 4: Methods of Practice: Develop a body of work based upon the collected data.

This step is outlined in this chapter in *Homage to the One, in practice* and based upon Sullivan's position that the studio is a powerful site for inquiry (2005, xix). It is in the studio that a personal aesthetic is turned into visual artifacts. The practice is iterative and based upon intuition framed by a personal aesthetic that is loosely derived from a synthesis of Western and Eastern traditions that stress non-objectivity in imagery.⁸ Images of the artwork are included in this chapter to familiarize the viewer with the work at the outset of the document. The summaries accompanying each of the images represent the reflective/reflexive nature of the research.

Step 5: Reflect upon the work and articulate revised issues to be explored. *Homage to the One* was evaluated after exhibition, issues were reframed and revised and *The Circle Way* was created to account for deficiencies. This step is presented in this chapter as *Reflection upon Homage to the One*.

The importance of 'experience' emerges from the research and is manifested in the inclusion of an immersive space in the final project installation. This reflective/reflexive process where ideas emerge, are interpreted, and played off one another, reveal a hermeneutical approach operating throughout the research where 'experience' is the basis of knowledge (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2001, pg 83). In

⁸ The link to Bauhaus ideas about design can be seen in the references to Kandinsky (pgs. 11, 24, 70, 72, 80) Itten, (pg. 24) and, Albers, (pg. 44). Reference to the Zen concept of Enso, (pgs. 39, 40, 42, 45), mandalas (pgs. 41, 71 and 79) and Tantric illustrations (pgs. 29, 67, 79 and 81) throughout this document, indicate an Eastern influence in the artwork. These influences pervade imagery in modern and postmodern fine art, advertising, outsider and visionary art and culture. The influence of Rothko and Newman's abstract expressionism in the artwork for the research can not be understated. References to these two artists are on pages 11, 73-76, 79, 81, 82 and 85. Other important influences include Bourgeois (pgs. 11 and 69), Beuys (pg. 80), Kiefer (pgs. 11 and 69) and Viola (pgs. 73 and 83).

hermeneutics as in heuristic inquiry, knowledge is intuitive and truth constitutes an insight (Heidegger, 1962).⁹

Step 6: Take action in practice by revising and improving altered concepts (methods of practice of the second body of work). This step is presented in this chapter as *The Circle Way, in practice*. Images of the artwork are included to familiarize the viewer with the artwork before an in-depth survey of the antecedent and theoretical underpinnings are presented in Chapter 2.

Steps 7: Present existing theory in the context of the research. The art and literature review presented in Chapter 2 reveals a lack of visual artwork that comprehensively expressed the ecstatic experience. Chapter 2 begins with a discussion of the nature of the ecstatic experience, identifying two uses for the term. The connection between artist's intent and aesthetics is discussed as it relates to the research.

The theoretical underpinnings of the research are then identified, beginning with a brief survey of mysticism and recent science that studies the meditative state and the ecstatic experience. Some musical, literary and performance art that takes the ecstatic experience as its subject are identified. The work of visual artists concerned with the ecstatic experience is then reviewed in the context of the practice-based research.

Step 8: Verification testing in a critical context (human response) is used to give support to validation. Qualitative research is interpretive (Creswell, 2003) and action research, a branch thereof, involves among other things, an enquiry into ones own practices (Johnson, 2005). The research employs accepted action research methods

⁹ This research incorporates some hermeneutical and heuristic approaches when it discusses methods of practice, the knowledge gained in the meditative process, and the pre-knowledge that generated the investigation in the first place.

to validate the artwork by triangulating¹⁰ theory and data from viewer feedback and a variation of a causal-comparative study.¹¹ Viewer comments written in a journal left at all exhibitions and responses to a post-event e-mail survey¹² were interpreted to gauge the human response to the work. The record of viewer experiences in the space is used to validate the research and presented in Chapter 3.

Step 9: Summary of the information gained. Chapter 3 opens with a variable table illustrating features in predecessor's artwork. Chapter 3 presents Gablik's ideas about the responsibility of artists to make art that educates, illuminates and heals. The chapter then connects education, illumination and healing to the chosen mediums in *The Circle Way* revealing a multi-faceted interactive relationship that includes other imaginative possibilities about the work.

Step 10: Post-project reflection. *Connections, reflections and new meanings* in Chapter 3 reflects upon some of the ideas that emerged from the research. Some connections between process, theory and interpretations are revealed.

Step 11: Reflection on reflection (critical reflection upon one's work-focused reflection). This step is presented in Chapter 4 with a discussion of the original contribution to knowledge and the results of the research.

Step 12: Recommendations for future research. Chapter 4 presents further research for future researchers as well as future personal inquiries.

¹⁰ Triangulating data is used in action research to check for accuracy. It entails looking at the subject to be observed along with two other data sources (Johnson, 2005, pg. 83).

¹¹ Causal-comparative research is undertaken to find the difference between two groups. It looks at conditions that have already occurred and collects data to investigate why one group is different from another (Johnson, 2005, pg. 95).

¹² The e-mail survey, an acceptable research method in action research, allows researchers to get information quickly (Johnson, 2005, pg. 76).

1.2 Homage to the One, in practice¹³

The creative practice provides a fundamental dimension to the research and this section documents the production of the first body of work. The process is reflective and reflexive.¹⁴ In this practice, interest in the ecstatic experience as a universal phenomenon led to a review of artists who took the experience as their subject. A problem was framed and through exploration, interpretation, experimentation, reflection, reassessment and re-reflection of the initial problem the first body of work was created. The process is intuitive and improvisational as the practice-based component of the research attests. Throughout this chapter both practical and theoretical components of the methods of practice including formulas for encaustic, choice of mediums, design innovations, symbolism, abstract expression, performance and film will be discussed. The steps taken to accumulate evidence to examine and resolve whether or not the nature of the ecstatic experience can be revealed in contemporary visual form will be described through the methods of practice employed.

Homage to the One represents the first attempt at expressing the ecstatic experience in contemporary visual form. Symbols¹⁵ appearing in the individual works of art are discussed in this section as they relate to methods of practice.¹⁶

¹³ This section discusses step 4 of the methodology, methods used to develop a body of work.

¹⁴ According to Alvesson and Skoldberg (2000, pgs. 5-6), reflexive/reflective practice constantly assesses relationships between knowledge and the ways of doing knowledge. Interpretation and reflection are at the forefront of the research. The importance of language and pre-understanding determine interpretation. Reflection can be defined as interpretation of interpretation. The artwork for *Homage to the One* is a visual 'interpretation' of 'interpretation' of ideas.

¹⁵ A symbol is defined in the *Oxford English Dictionary* online at <http://dictionary.oed.com> as something that stands for, represents, or denotes something else (not by exact resemblance, but by vague suggestion, or by some accidental or conventional relation); *esp.* a material object representing or taken to represent something immaterial or abstract, as a being, idea, quality, or condition; a representative or typical figure, sign, or token. As the research is concerned with abstract ideas, symbols were employed in the early research.

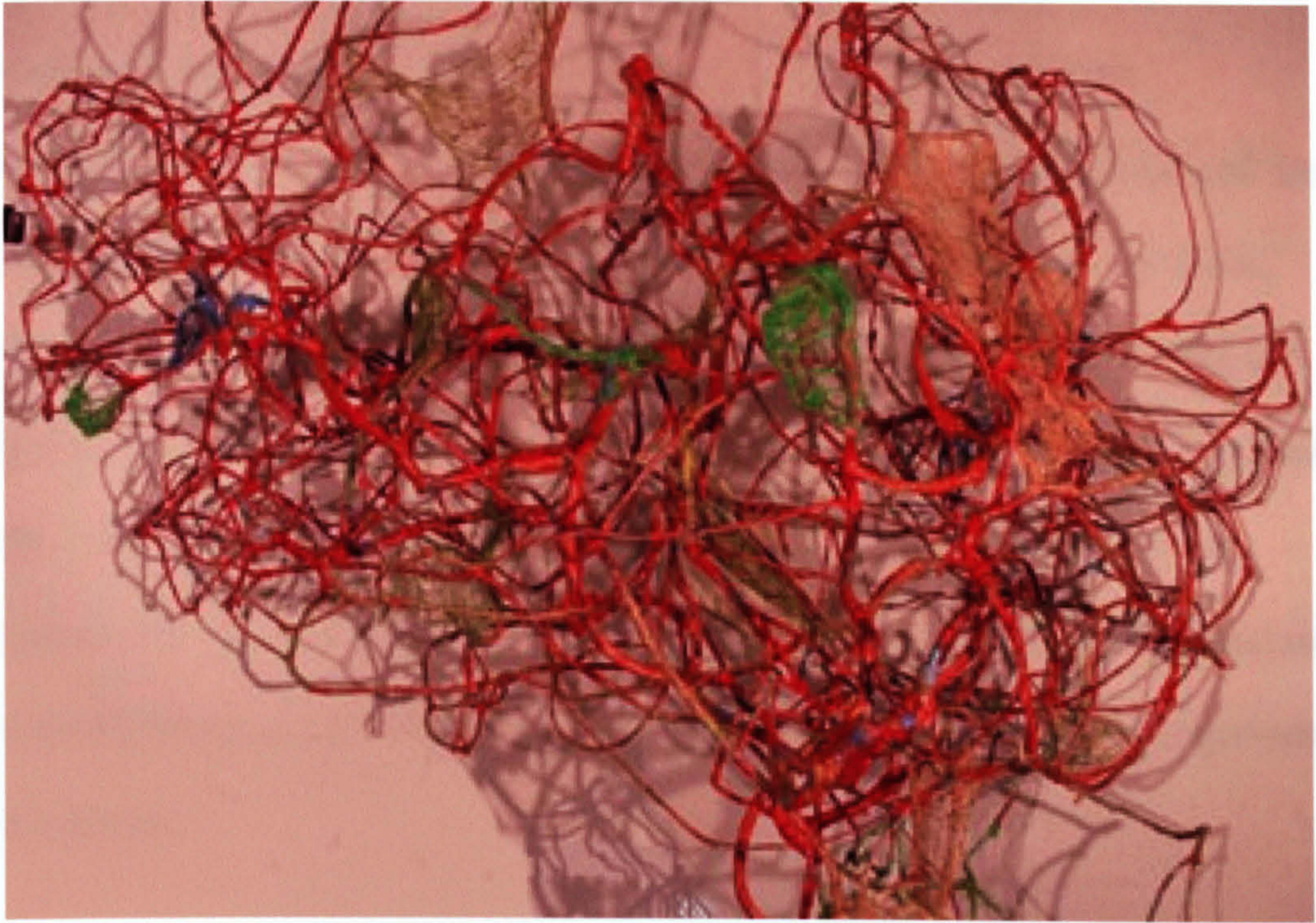
Encaustic, a wax-based paint, was chosen as the principal medium because of its impermanent nature and fluidity. When heat is applied to the surface of an encaustic painting, these qualities are revealed. Shapes and colors become fleeting, like the nature of the ecstatic experience itself.

Artists who work in encaustic were influential in the research. Joanne Mattera's comprehensive guide to encaustic that includes a formula by Jasper Johns was an indispensable tool in the early stages of the work (2001). As work progressed, personal formulas for encaustic were developed.

The practice-based research began with the construction of a piece entitled *The Interconnectedness of All Things* (Fig. 1). It was constructed of dried Ureops branches glued and tied together at the ends with thread and cheesecloth to create one continuous line. The branches were dried for about six months before construction began. It was coated in beeswax and then fused with a heat gun. After initially painting the form with encaustic, cheesecloth was draped over some of the branches and repainted with encaustic. The whole form was then painted with red and black acrylic paint. Diamond dust was added to the surface to reflect light. Encaustic formulas used during the research are heated at approximately 350° F on an electric skillet.

¹⁶A complete understanding of the connection to symbolism is documented in Chapter 2 in section 2.5.1, *Symbolization*.

In *The Interconnectedness of All Things* as in Alan Davie's *Entrance to Paradise* in the Tate Britain, line and color do not describe the shape; they work as independent elements that allow for reworking until the final piece emerges from the materials, colors, and lines. This transformation can suggest 'journey', and the ultimate arrival at the knowledge that all things are interconnected. Many of the forms in the early research attempt to engage the viewer with symbols. Symbols are not injected into *Interconnectedness of All Things*; the form itself suggests its purpose.



Interconnectedness of All Things, 53x45x30 inches, encaustic on dried Uerops branches with cheese cloth, acrylic paint and diamond dust

Figure 1

Illusion of Duality (Fig. 2) and *Reliquary for John* (Fig. 3) are constructed from recycled hollow core doors. Symbols are incorporated into both. *Illusion of Duality* is one of the few pieces from the series that was conceived beforehand, sketched out and

replicated from the sketches. The spontaneous nature of the brushstrokes is linked to abstract expression in the piece. The encaustic was applied in long brushstrokes much like oil paint, before the nature of the encaustic medium was understood completely. In subsequent work, heat is used to create dramatic affects in the encaustic and in some cases these effects are the symbols.

Aside from the placement of spirals, which are seen as symbols for the acknowledgment of our perceived reliance upon the concept of duality, color and forms are used as symbols as well.¹⁷ Yellow and blue can suggest the human and divine (Kandinsky, 1977; Eiseman, 2000; Itten, 2002) respectively and the single form that appears as two emphasizes that the piece is about transcending opposites and abolishing polarity. The green is drawn onto the surface with a stylus in recognition of the mystical writers who realized that duality is an illusion. Red is dribbled in appreciation of the sand painters and abstract expressionists whose spontaneous work inspired much of the research.

¹⁷ Influenced by the symbolism in Kiefer and Bourgeois's work, *Illusion of Duality* features the spiral as a symbol for birth and rebirth, constructive and destructive forces, growth and evolution. See *The Mystic Spiral: Journey of the Soul (Art and Imagination)* by Jill Purce, 1980 for more information about the spiral.

In *Illusion of Duality* (Fig. 2) a slit is cut on one side of the door only, so that the form remains one piece. Beeswax was applied to the surface and then fused. Jute cloth was applied. An encaustic formula of microcrystalline and damar crystals was used to shape and harden the cloth. It aptly began to resemble a shroud; the dimensions were chosen by using the heights of deceased and living family members in an effort to incorporate symbols for life and death into the piece. Jute rope spirals were added to the surface and then color was applied.¹⁸

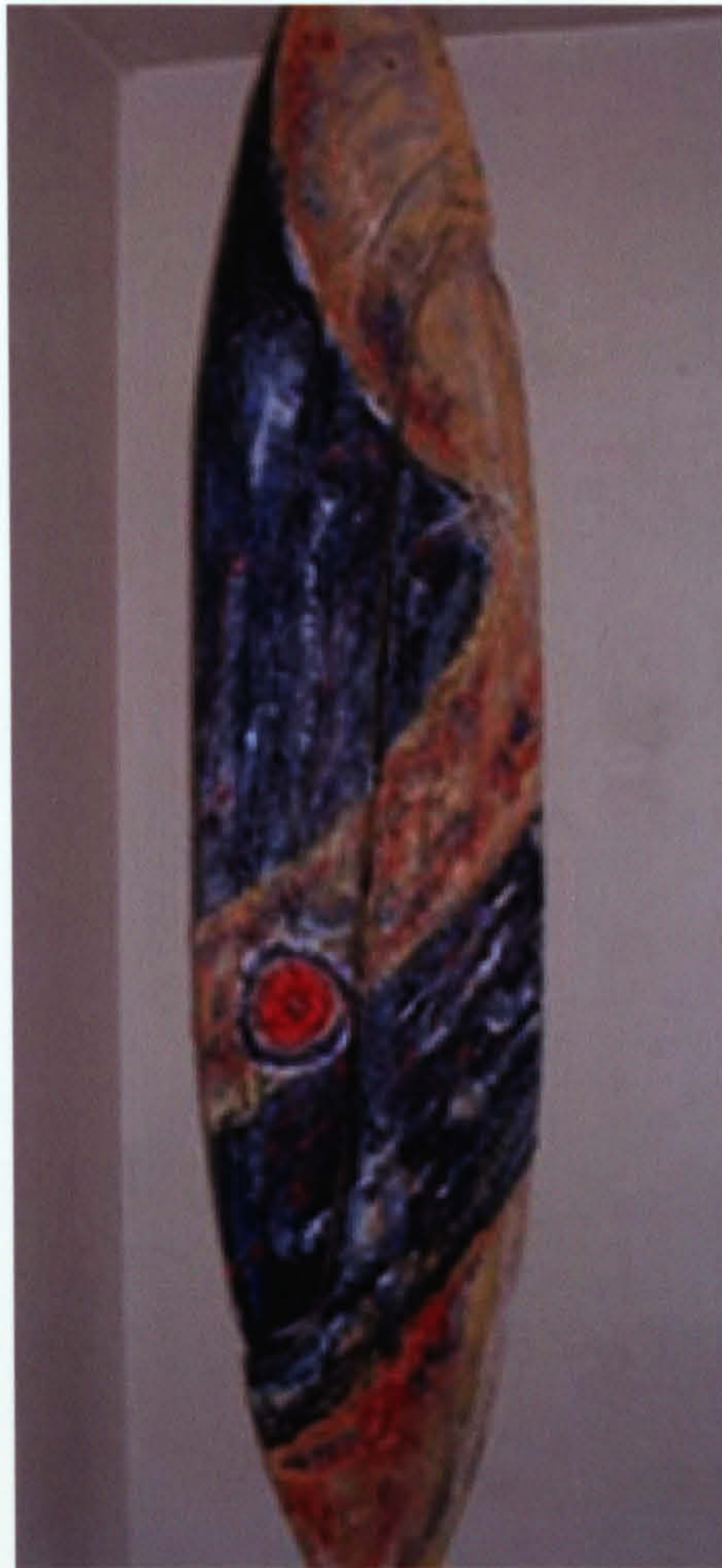


Illusion of Duality 67x15 inches, encaustic on jute cloth on recycled hollow core door

Figure 2

¹⁸ A number of encaustic formulas were used during the research. The encaustic formula consisting of 60% microcrystalline, 20% beeswax, 10% damar crystals, 8 % linseed oil and 2% dry pigment was used often. Linseed oil was not added when oil paint was substituted for dry pigment

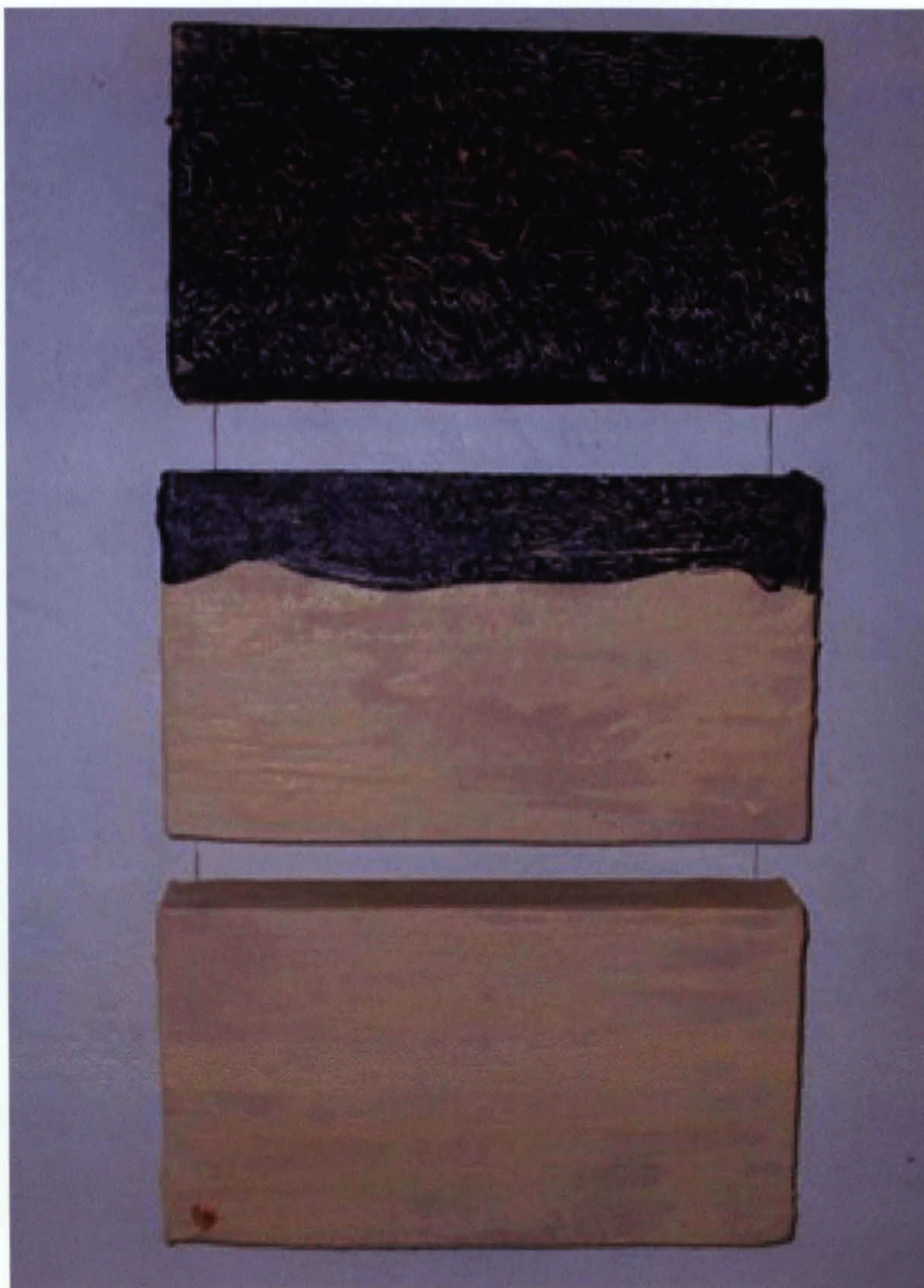
In *Reliquary for John* (Fig. 3) the same measurements were used as in *Illusion of Duality* (Fig. 2), however the form is elliptical rather than slab-like. The inclusion of a reliquary that holds a scrap of cloth from a garment of a deceased family member refers to abolition of polarity and death. The piece is slit in the front, but instead of jute cloth as in *Illusion*, cheese cloth is added to the surface for texture. Broken glass and Lourdes water are sprinkled on top. The alleged healing power of the water in contrast to the destructive process of shattering glass reinforces the dual nature of the piece.



Reliquary for John 70x14 inches, encaustic on cheese cloth on recycled hollow core door with relic cloth from deceased, broken glass and Lourdes water

Figure 3

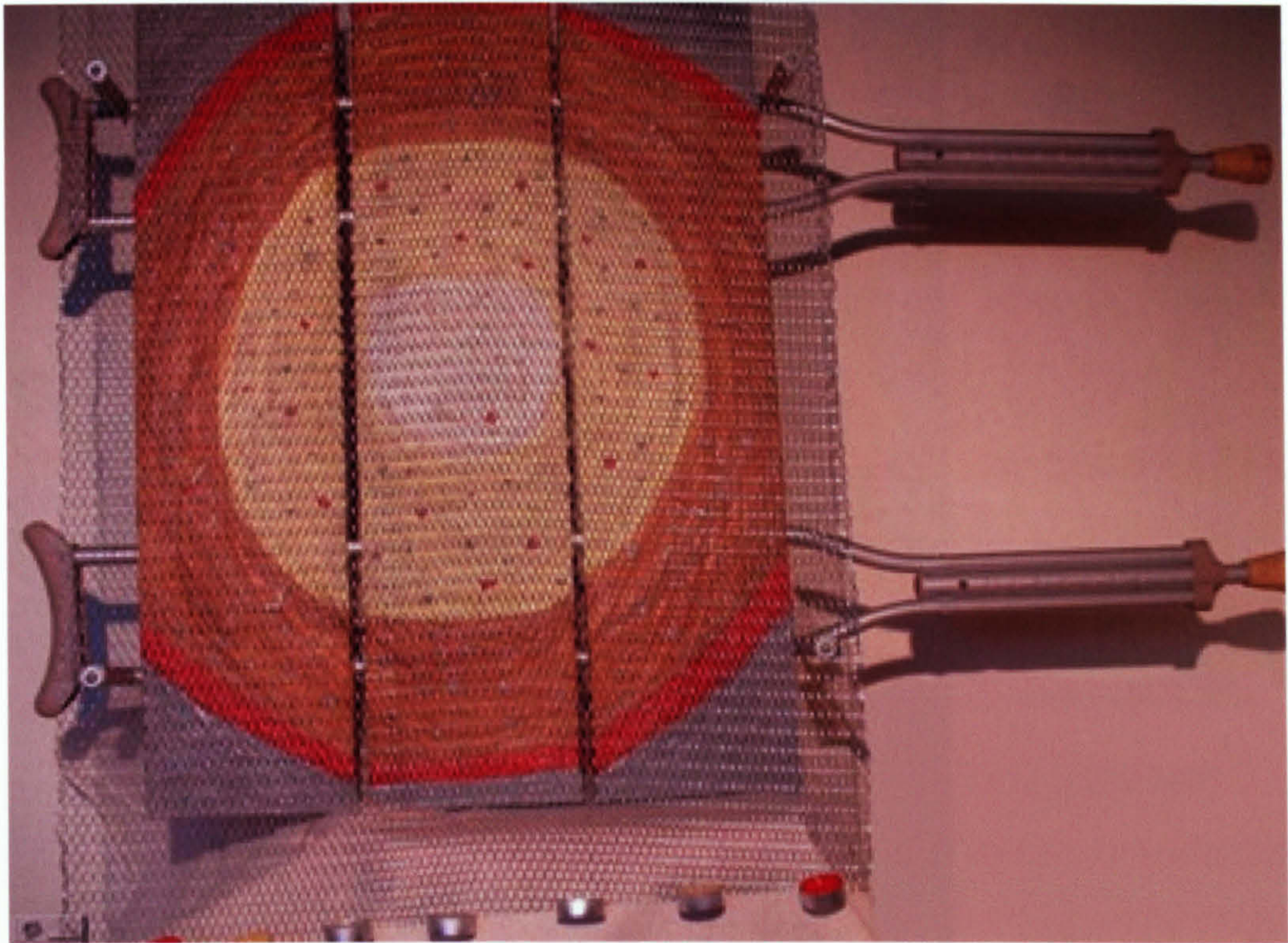
In *Anxiety Gives Way to a Sense of Calm* (Fig. 4), the meaning resides in symbols as texture, color, line, shape and brushstroke. Yellow encaustic was applied to three cotton cloths on stretchers. Black encaustic was painted over the top of the triptych and then scratched with an Exacto knife resulting in a series of anxious yellow lines. The smooth yellow brushstrokes suggest calm and stability. Brushstrokes imply action, in that the 'giving way to' in the title is a conscious effort. One must do something in order to achieve calm.



Anxiety Gives Way to a Sense of Calm Triptych
11.5x22 inches, encaustic on cloth on wood with stone

Figure 4

Application of encaustic in *Untitled Triptych* (Fig. 5) continues similar painterly methods employed in *Anxiety Gives Way to a Sense of Calm* (Fig. 4), *Reliquary for John* (Fig. 3), and *Illusion of Duality* (Fig. 2) and uses traditional Western religious motifs such as the triptych, candles, and screen in conjunction with the mandala symbol to convey meaning. Symbols are predominant in the work, yet viewers are left to interpret as they wish. Three wooden panels were constructed and held together with aluminum crutches. Industrial grade aluminum lathing works as a screen. This is the first piece in the series where the circular form consciously dominates the work.



Untitled Triptych 49x42 inches, encaustic on wood with aluminum crutches and mesh

Figure 5

Tantric Device (Fig. 6) is based upon a traditional meditation device and the first in the series where heat is used to cause patterns in the encaustic. The result is an amorphous mass of swirling color akin to the circle with no beginning or end. Patterns recall attempts by Fischinger to express the 4th Dimension mentioned in Chapter 2. *Tantric Device* is a small piece and constructed from a piece of hollow core door. Two Sculpey clay¹⁹ eyeballs hang from the central core to symbolize that it is not optical vision that allows us to see. Deep rich colors, cadmium red, magenta, blue, black and white seemed appropriate for a meditative tool.



Tantric Device 17x7 inches, encaustic on recycled door with Sculpey clay and acrylic paint

Figure 6

¹⁹ Sculpey is polymer clay that cures at 275°.

Souls (Fig. 7) is constructed of 1/8 inch wood panels cut in a selection of circles ranging in size from 7 to 16 inches in diameter. Two inch slats are placed between the back donut shaped circle and the front circular panel. Cheese cloth is applied with a coat of beeswax, followed by a yellow ochre base coat of encaustic. Red and blue drips are fused to the surface. White is applied and fused to the center of the forms. All of the white encaustic on the surface of *Souls* is applied in a spiral movement. Gold leaf is applied to raised areas of the cheesecloth. The absence of hard edges and corners is intended to be soothing and in union with the white pigment and gold leaf²⁰ often used as iconic devices in western Christian art, *Souls* attempts to engage with circular shape and primary colors to imply the 'God-image in the self' or 'the divine essence' in all life.



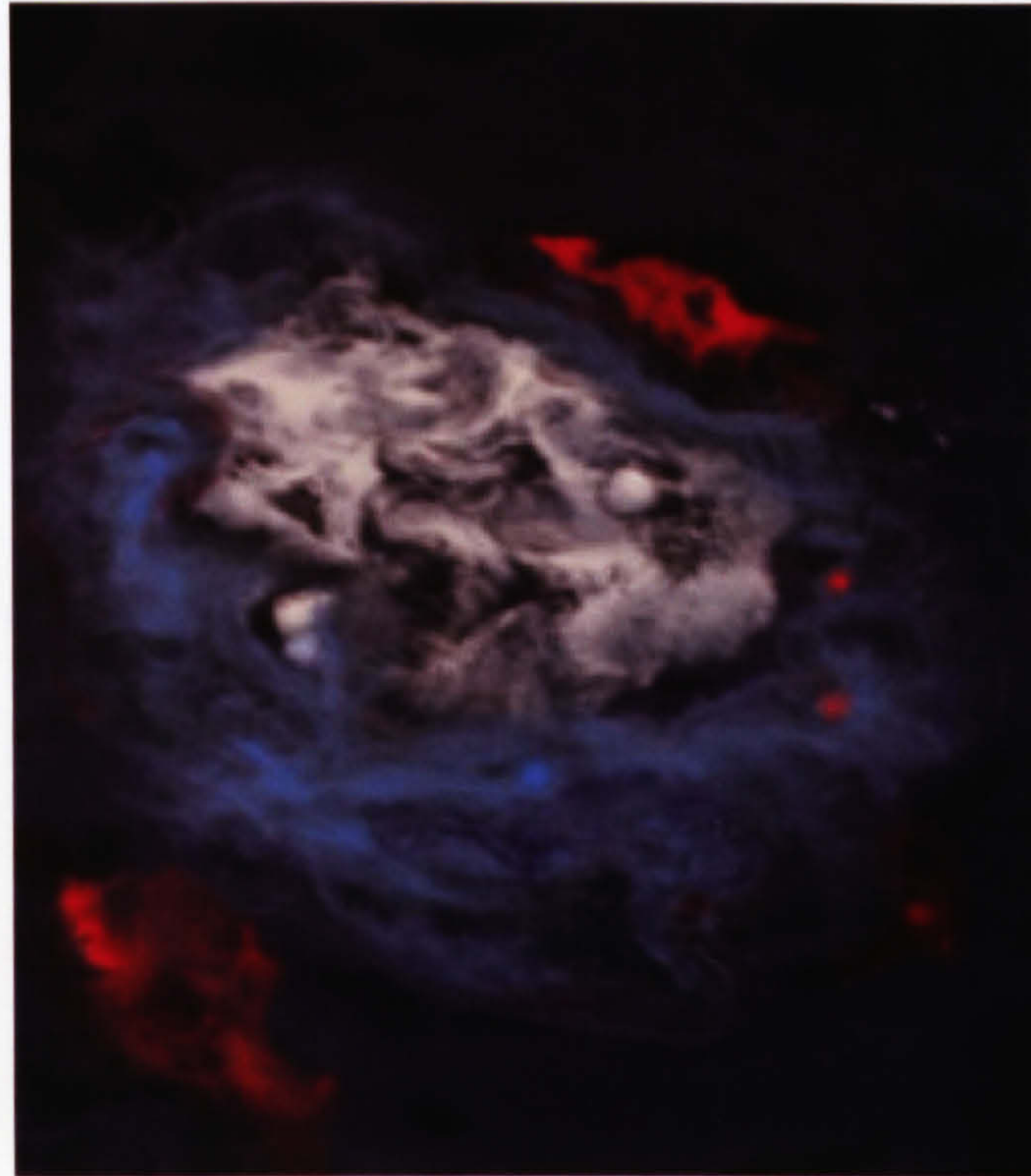
Souls 60x45 inches, encaustic on cheese cloth on wood with gold leaf

Figure 7

²⁰ Gold leaf was used in early Christian illuminated manuscripts and mosaics to reflect light. In mosaics, the gold leaf is applied to the back of the glass tile to refract light and make the surfaces sparkle. *Gardner's Art through the Ages*, 12th edition, pages 313-15. Early Christian manuscripts were decorated with gold leaf to brighten and adorn the sacred word. *Gardner's Art through the Ages*, 12th edition, pgs. 318-20. These devices are used to create a sense of light. Imagery of light is an ancient sign of divinity and holiness, in *From Abacus to Zeus*, page 165. Images of God the Father, one of the three manifestations of the Trinity in Christianity, often clothed in white as a symbol of divinity can be found throughout the history of Christian art. One of the most notable examples is Michelangelo's *Creation of Adam* on page 626 in *Gardner's Art through the Ages*, 12th edition.

Cloud of Unknowing II (Fig. 8) is the work most closely related to the experience itself. Intention was to engage as representation.²¹ However, it became immediately apparent that this was not possible with the medium and subject chosen. Paul de Man aptly wrote, "...unmediated expression is a philosophical impossibility".²² In the end, the art can only exist by proxy or substitution.

After the wooden frame was constructed, a dark encaustic formula in black and violet was applied to the surface. After fusing and smoothing the surface, small smudges of cadmium red, cerulean blue and white were swiftly brushed on top of the dark pigment. Heat was applied so that the colors could swirl and blend into the darker pigments.



Cloud of Unknowing II 17x14 inches, encaustic on lauan wood panel

Figure 8

²¹ A represents B if and only if A appreciably resembles B or A represents B to the extent that A resembles B. From Nelson Goodman's *Language of Art*, page 3. *Cloud of Unknowing II* was created to represent the experience as it was believed at the time that it appreciably resembles the experience.

²² See page 80 in *The Expressive Fallacy* by H. Foster where he quotes Paul de Man, 'Criticism and Crisis' in *Aesthetics Today*, pg 345.

In *Revelation II* (Fig. 9), only beeswax and no microcrystalline was added to the encaustic formula resulting in a slick black surface. White clouding appears on the surface of the encaustic when heat is continuously applied after the fusing process is complete. Once this was discovered, it was done intentionally in *Revelation II* and *Cloud of Unknowing II* (Fig. 8). Smudges of cadmium red and magenta encaustic were added to the surface and heated until a swirling mass appeared.



Revelation II 18.5x14 inches, encaustic on lauan wood panel

Figure 9

Experimentation with Plexiglas began with *Spiral* (Fig. 10) and *Cosmic Energy Divided* (Fig.11). *Spiral* is symbol in copper and paraffin on Plexiglas. The spiral can be a symbol for duality as well as journey to the cosmic energy within each of us, much like the 'deity as self' theme explored in *Souls* (Fig. 7).²³ An innovative technical step is represented in the mixing of mediums Plexiglas, wax, and copper.

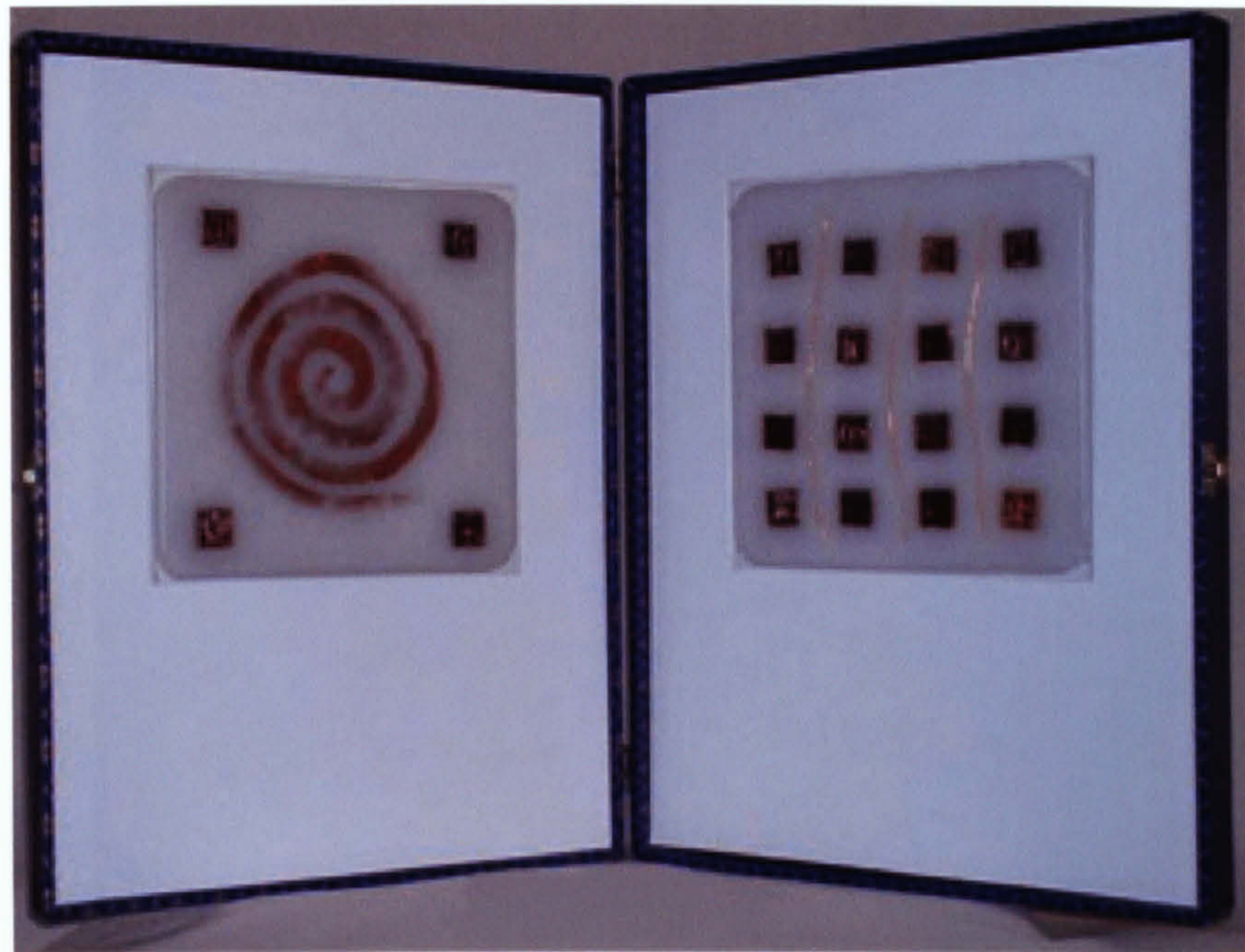


Spiral 8.5x11 inches, copper foil and wire in paraffin wax with gold leaf on Plexiglas

Figure 10

²³ See page 8 of Purce's *The Mystic Spiral: Journey of the Soul (Art and Imagination)* for the various symbolic uses of the spiral.

In the diptych, *Cosmic Energy Divided* (Fig. 11), heated paraffin wax was poured into Teflon cake molds. Copper and tiles were added while the wax was still in liquid form. The hardened wax was removed from the mold and then placed upon ¼ inch thick Plexiglas rectangular sheets. Each was placed in a recycled cutlery box behind matte board. The work attempts engagement through symbols that can suggest we tend to live in isolation.



Cosmic Energy Divided 26x17 inches, tile, copper, wire and foil in paraffin wax on Plexiglas in recycled cutlery box

Figure 11

In *The Interconnectedness of All Things II* (Fig. 12) paraffin was poured into an aluminum mold sprayed with cooking spray for easy removal. While in liquid form a single strand of copper foil and broken glass pieces were dropped into the hot wax. The form was allowed to harden, removed from the aluminum mold, and placed in a clear acrylic box frame to hang. It is intended that it work as a symbol for the knowledge that all things are interconnected.



The Interconnectedness of All Things II
8.5x11 inches, copper foil and broken glass in paraffin wax on Plexiglas

Figure 12

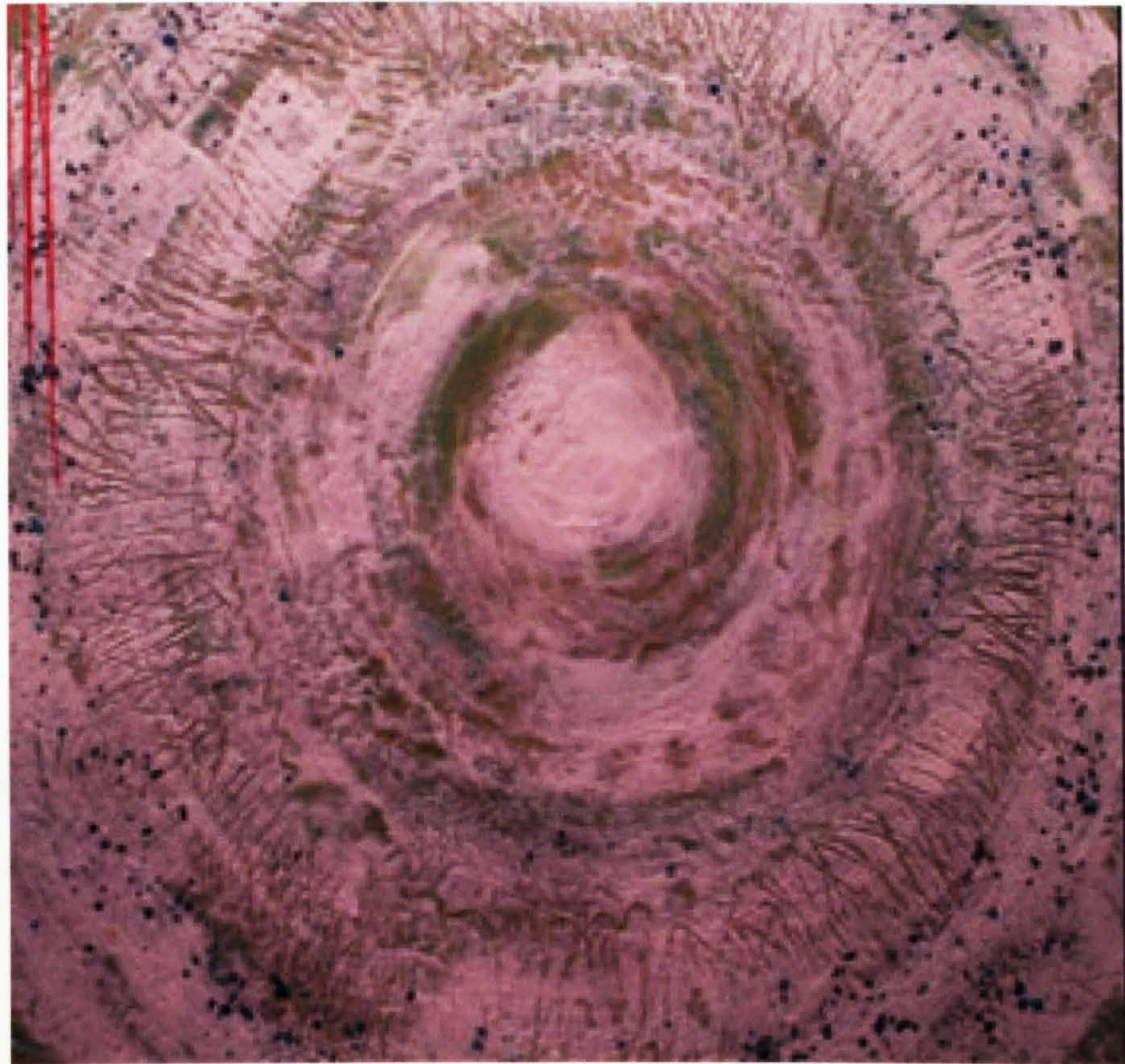
It was originally intended that *Tree in the 4th Square* (Fig. 13) be colorized as *Revelation II* (Fig. 9), *Cloud of Unknowing II* (Fig. 8) and *Tantric Device* (Fig. 6); however, it was created during the first visit to De Montfort University and unfamiliarity with the University's heat gun yielded a completely different look than the previous nebulous forms created in the studio. It is constructed of four 18 inch wooden square panels. A recess is cut from the bottom right-hand square. A dried rooted plant sits within the recess as a symbol for the 'Tree of Life'. Copper foil and wire conduct heat and energy and were incorporated into the surface as symbols for cosmic energy and oneness.



Tree in the 4th Square 36x36 inches, encaustic on wood panel with copper wire, foil and small tree

Figure 13

Green Revelation in Blood Sweat and Tears (Fig. 14) began with sizing the canvas with five coats of rabbit skin glue. Calcium carbonate powder was made from ground green and yellow children's chalk, added to the remaining glue and painted to the surface as gesso. Pea green colored encaustic was applied. More tints of green were added and scraped away. Geometrically shaped copper chips were left in a patina solution to dry in the sun and then added to the surface. A glistening impermanent coat of paraffin was added to the surface in reference to the fleeting quality of the experience. Most work is painted on the ground so that sweeping brushstrokes can be applied to large canvases to minimize dripping of the hot wax. Blood, sweat, and tears fell into the work as it was being created, hence the title.



Green Revelation in Blood, Sweat and Tears 54x54 inches, encaustic on canvas with copper foil and paraffin wax

Figure 14

The system devised to create *Green Revelation in Blood, Sweat and Tears* (Fig. 14) was used again to create *Winter Meditation* (Fig. 15). Colors mimic the patinas formed on the copper shapes applied to the surface. After all the encaustic, copper shapes, beads and paraffin were added, the painting was placed on an easel so that copper paint could be dripped from top to bottom.



Winter Meditation 54x54 inches, encaustic on canvas with copper foil, beads and paraffin wax

Figure 15

In *Enso I, II* and *III* (Fig. 16, 17, 18), Zen inspired circles of enlightenment²⁴, brushstroke, color, shape and texture are utilized to engage the viewer. It is at this point that a technique for encaustic application for the final project came to fruition, ultimately abandoning the notion that the free flowing amorphous forms created by the heat would serve as the principal method. The breakdown of color, shape, texture and brushstroke in the abstract expressions within the final project emphasizes the nature of the entire installation in that it too is both a union and a division of mediums, technology, methodology, and themes to educate, illuminate and heal.



Enso I 16x16 inches, encaustic on lauan wood panel

Figure 16

²⁴Enso is a Zen symbol of enlightenment. "A circle like vast space, lacking nothing and nothing in excess" is often written on an Enso painting. See <http://zenart.shambhala.com/browse-gallery.htm?selectedBrowseKey=2488> for a collection of traditional Zen Enso art. *Enso I, II and III* in *Homage to the One* unite abstract expression with the traditional concept of Enso.



Enso II 16x16 inches, encaustic on lauan wood panel

Figure 17



Enso III 16x16 inches, encaustic on lauan wood panel

Figure 18

Mother Mandala (Fig. 19) was an experiment on Plexiglas with mandala making as advocated by Jung as a means to self-awareness.



Mother Mandala 22 inch circle, encaustic on Plexiglas with copper foil

Figure 19

1.3 Reflection upon *Homage to the One*²⁵

This section discusses the themes understood through the meditative process and explored in *Homage to the One*. The significance of a work of art is derived from an interaction with methods of practice, cultural interpretation of the themes based upon prior knowledge and most importantly upon personal research interests.²⁶ In this 'self-

²⁵ This section is concerned with step 5 of the methodology, articulating revised issues to be explored.

²⁶ This research is not only a reflexive/reflective inquiry but is heuristic as well, because it involves intense insight, intuition, and tacit understanding that results in a personal picture of the experience.

reflexive' practice, personal interest and creative insight direct the investigation informed by knowledge about the subject.

Symbols and design elements were employed to express personal insight and intuitive knowledge in *Homage to the One*. 'Universal Oneness' is expressed in form and color in *Interconnectedness of All Things I and II, Souls* and the three *Ensos*. Abolition of polarity is suggested in *Illusion of Duality* and *Reliquary for John* through symbols, color and form. Journey is implied in *Spiral* as a symbol, in *Cosmic Energy Divided* through form, and in *Mother Mandala* as shape and color. Decreasing conscious thought and stilling the mind in meditation can be derived from *Tantric Device* and *Anxiety Gives Way to a Sense of Calm*. A reference to the 'Tree of Life' along with symbols for the 'One' are present in *Tree in the 4th Square*. *Winter Meditation, Mother Mandala, Tantric Device* and *Green Revelation in Blood, Sweat and Tears* attempt engagement as symbols for the 'One' and are available as meditation tools. *Revelation II* and *Cloud of Unknowing II* attempt abstract expression of the void. Symbols in *Untitled Triptych* challenge the viewer to interpret as he or she pleases, yet the piece was motivated by an intention to warn that practices like these can become 'crutches' and stale rituals.

The goal of any research is ultimately to form new knowledge and understanding.²⁷ Each time a viewer sees the artwork, it is with a new perspective.²⁸ The viewer can

Moustakas (1990, pgs. 50-6) recognizes stages in heuristic inquiry: immersion, incubation, illumination and explication.

²⁷ Tacit knowledge as defined on page 14 and insight of viewers discussed in section 3.4.1, *Feedback interpreted* are important examples of how new knowledge and understanding is formed in this highly reflective/reflexive research project.

²⁸ Sullivan, in *Art as Practice* (2005) on page 23, summarizes MacLachlan & Reid, (1994) when he makes a case for the context in art practice changing according to perspective, connection and settings thus creating new interpretations.

make new connections to potentially make new knowledge. Research about the visual expression of the ecstatic experience could have ended with the construction, exhibition and documentation of *Homage to the One* because the work expressed the ecstatic experience.²⁹ However, after exhibiting *Homage to the One* as a method of research and analysis, there were ‘nagging’ concerns about the work. One viewer confirmed those concerns when she wrote about the artworks in *Homage to the One*, “They were very evocative-perhaps a long meditation with them would have led me to my original ‘imaginal’ dialogue”.³⁰ Viewers enter the space, view the work, read the titles and make cognitive connections to understand and interpret the artwork. The artwork was filled with personal symbols; and like predecessors in the field, it needed textual reinforcement to fully engage the viewer.³¹ Furthermore, there was no space provided for the meditation necessary for the ecstatic experience.³²

A ‘reflection’ upon the work resulted in an alternative approach to expressing ecstasy because as research it should not simply express, but be understood by the viewer.

²⁹ A complete list of appendices that includes documentation of exhibitions can be found on page 7. Appendix I holds a PowerPoint show of the body of work entitled *Homage to the One* and documents as a PowerPoint show the November-December 2003 exhibition at the Art Institute of California Gallery. An interview about the work, a solo show in February 2004 at the Expressive Arts Institute and a simultaneous exhibition of three of the MA thesis pieces at the GETM gallery is stored on a CD as Appendix II. The work was again exhibited at the Art Institute of California Gallery in June and July of 2004. The *Ensos* were exhibited in Los Angeles at the L2Kontemporary Gallery in November-December 2004 and a record of the opening as a PowerPoint show is in the Appendix I CD. A statement about the art that accompanies exhibitions of *Homage to the One* is submitted as Appendix V.

³⁰ See Appendix IX for Judith Greer Essex’s response to an e-mail survey about the work.

³¹ A complete understanding of the connection to predecessors’ artwork is found in Chapter 2 section 2.5, *A survey and critical appraisal of the precursors in the context of the research.*

³² The theory that performative space is necessary for the expression is fully explained in Chapter 3 in section 3.2.3, *Immersion as healing.*

1.3.1 The role of shape

The decision to use the circular form in *The Circle Way* was based upon pre-knowledge about circle symbolism.³³ However, it is not the intention that the circles specifically convey that knowledge. The painted forms in the final project consist of up to 9 circular canvases ranging in size from 57 to 87 inches in diameter.

1.3.2 The role of color

Color choices were influenced in part by Albers' (1971 ed.) experiments which demonstrate that contextual elements can alter perception of color. Color is variable and depends entirely upon surrounding hues for visual sensation. For example, when red is surrounded by grey, it tends to advance and appears more vibrant.

Gage (1993, pg. 26) insists that red was a divine color for the ancients and Rothko was aware of the symbolism (Weiss, 2000, pg. 258). Gage also claims that Rothko was influenced by Matisse's *Red Studio* more than any other painting. Rothko said when looking at the red in the painting he 'became that color' (Weiss, 2000, pg. 261). Rothko often referred to a 'sense of immersion in color' when discussing his own paintings (Weiss, 2000, pg. 261). Rothko's choice of red for many of his paintings influenced the choice of red for *The Circle Way*.

³³ See Section 2.5.2, *The circle* for an in-depth discussion of the significance of the circle.

1.3.3 The role of texture and brushstroke

Texture was created by building up layers of encaustic. All of the forms were painted while on the ground and the hot encaustic was applied quickly with large sweeping brushstrokes, dripping at times to form arcs, crescents and circular forms. No fusion took place. As a method, it is a spontaneous process inspired by Zen painters of Enso and the action painters and abstract expressionists of the 1950s and 60s. The technique was worked out during the early research while working on *Enso I, II and III* and *Green Revelation in Blood, Sweat and Tears* and reinvented on a large scale in *The Circle Way*.

1.3.4 The role of composition

A progressive rhythm of color, shape and texture is apparent in any arrangement of the forms. The red areas of color within the circles increase in size as the circles increase in size. Subsequently, the more textural grey areas are pressed to the edges and eventually disappear, suggesting the elimination of outside stimuli during the meditation process. Emphasis has been placed upon the organization of areas of colors, shape, texture, and location in space as symbols to engage the viewer in *The Circle Way*.

1.3.5 Performance on film

All nine circles were brought to The Expressive Arts Institute in San Diego and arranged in a passageway configuration. A student and a life drawing model from the

Art Institute of California were employed as cameraman and performer.³⁴ The film of a dry run of the performance is submitted on DVD as Appendix IV. Live performances took place at the opening exhibition. Final Cut Pro and DVD Studio Pro were used to edit the footage from the evening. Some computer graphics and sound were used in the final DVDs.³⁵

1.4 The Circle Way, in practice³⁶

Explanatory reinforcement as text (titles) is replaced with the visual (performance on film). Personal symbols are removed and elements of composition alone are symbolic. Finally, a contemplative space is provided where the viewer is afforded the opportunity to experience that which can only be brought about by meditation, namely ecstasy. The construction of *The Circle Way* attempts to unite all the themes introduced in *Homage to the One* in one installation.

The work was exhibited as a means to critically evaluate actions taken after revisions. The union of abstract forms and performance on film in an immersive space represents an innovative approach in the expression of the ecstatic experience in contemporary visual form. The results of this critical analysis and reflection and revised issues that necessitate the union are fully articulated in Chapter 3.

³⁴ Todd LaSota filmed Brook Annette's performance as she walked among the circles. A full description and significance of the performance on film can be found in section 3.2.2, *Performance on film to educate*.

³⁵ The film is accompanied by Spaceman 3's *How Does it Feel?* (1997) and galleries have the option to play the music when showing the film.

³⁶ This section discusses step 6, the revisions in the methods of practice employed to make the second body of work, *The Circle Way*.

A sample of five circles, two paintings from the early research, DVD documentary evidence, a scale model, personal journals and a PowerPoint of the research findings were presented at the examination in 2005. This revised document was presented in 2006 after a period of 'reflection upon reflection' was fully realized.

The complete list of appendices is found on page 7.³⁷

³⁷ Appendix I contains PowerPoint shows of the forms in *The Circle Way* and of the set up, exhibition, and performance in *The Circle Way* in December 2004.

Appendix III is a DVD documenting an exhibition opening of *The Circle Way* at the Expressive Arts Institute in December 2004. Appendix IV is a DVD of a performance within the installation space. Appendix I also contains a PowerPoint show documenting participation in an exhibition at the Triskelion Gallery in February 2005 in San Diego. A statement accompanying all exhibitions of *The Circle Way* is submitted as Appendix VI. A selection of postcards announcing exhibition openings is submitted as Appendix VII. Proof of permission to use the soundtrack for the DVD is included as Appendix VIII.

Circle Backs with aluminum frames (Fig. 20) nesting in one another. The frames are constructed of 8 and 12 foot length 1.5x.25 inch aluminum strips. The canvases are cut, sewn and stretched over the aluminum frames. The canvases not only nest inside one another, but can be easily removed from the frames for shipping.



Figure 20

After the circles were assembled and the charcoal colored encaustic was painted on the first four canvases, a 1:21.75 scale model (Fig. 25) was constructed while at De Montfort University for the second yearly visit. The scale model served numerous purposes. First, it was important that the first supervisor see the plan for the final project.³⁸ Secondly, it was important to visualize the charcoal encaustic application and mixed media area of red color for the remaining five circles. The nature of the alizarin crimson base necessitated a preconceived notion. It has a semi-transparent quality and had to be applied correctly during the first applications. Thirdly, the spatial characteristic of the installation would have to be visualized and managed. The model facilitated this aspect as well. Numerous arrangements are feasible; the model is one such possibility.

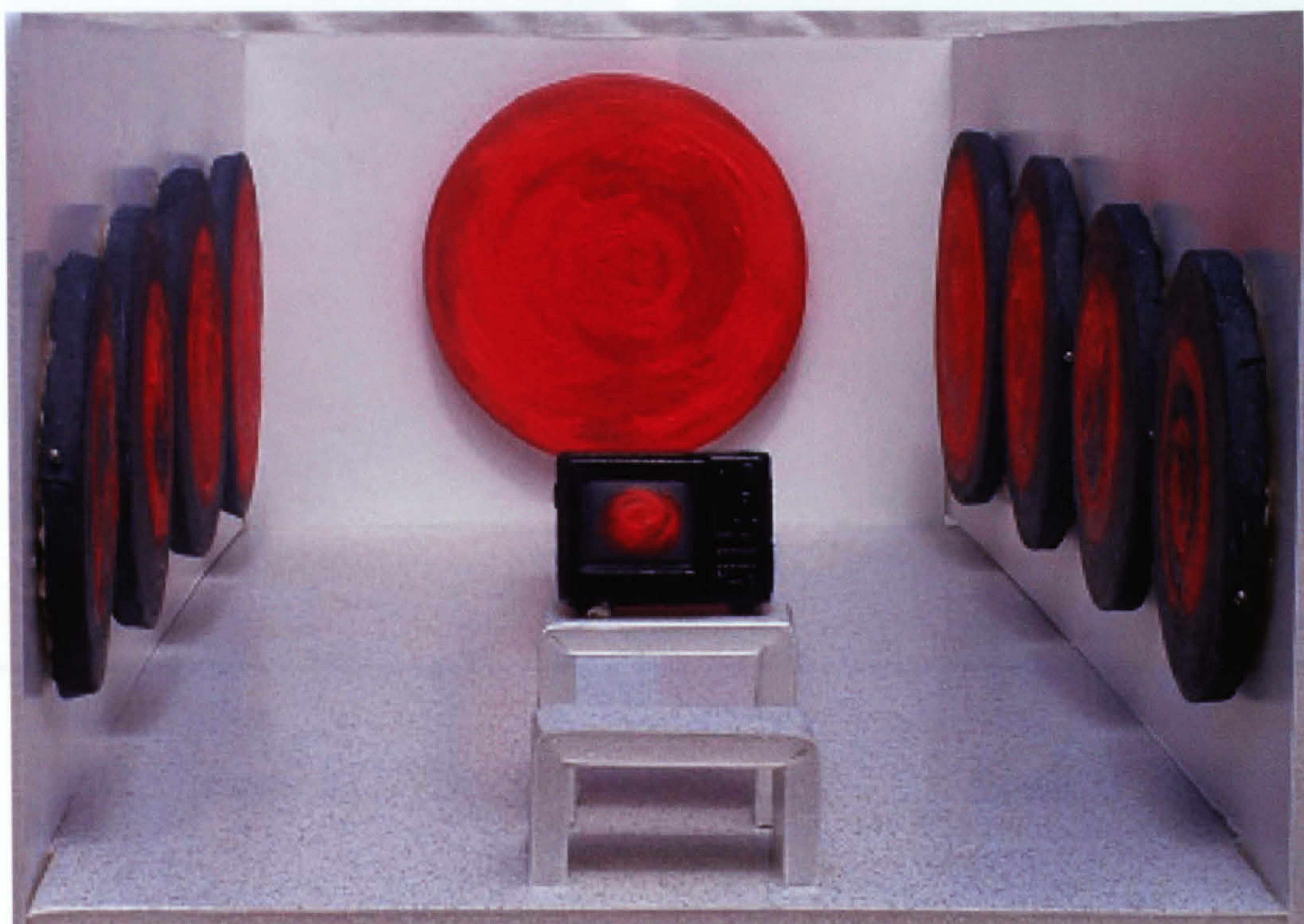


Figure 21

³⁸Ian Kirkwood was the first supervisor for the research and his input was crucial to development of ideas. He suggested a research trip to the Rothko Chapel. It was at the chapel that it appeared the final project could be successful.

Circles 1 (Fig. 22) and 2 (Fig. 23) are 57 and 59 inches in diameter. The circles were all painted with a base coat of rabbit skin glue sizing before four to five coats of grey gesso were applied. Several coats of charcoal grey encaustic were painted on the circles. The encaustic formula devised during early research that included microcrystalline and beeswax together with damar crystals, linseed oil and pigment was used in all the circles of the final project. Pure beeswax, aside from being costly, tends to crack more easily. A 60%-70% microcrystalline formula was chosen for its flexibility.

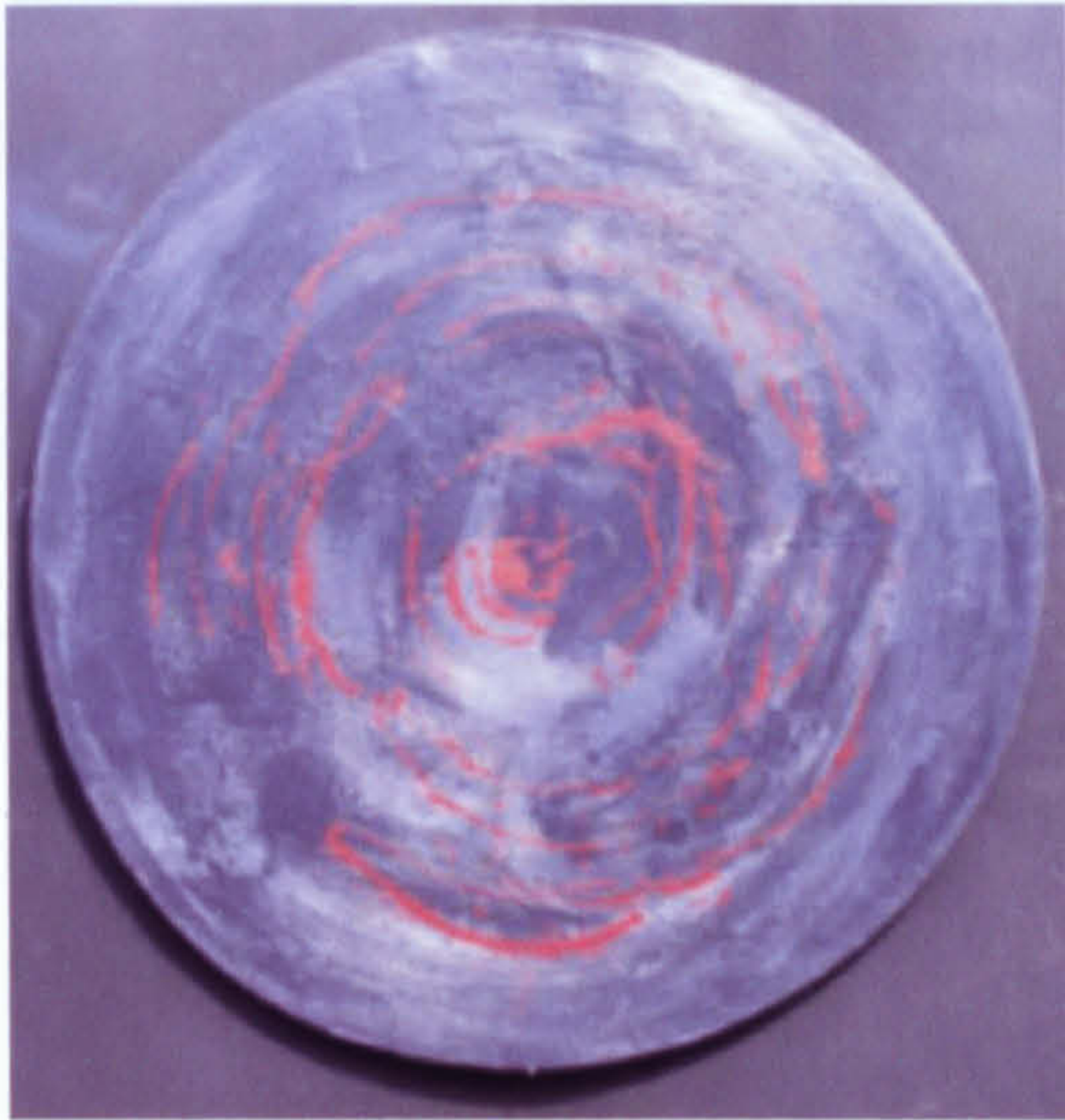


Figure 22

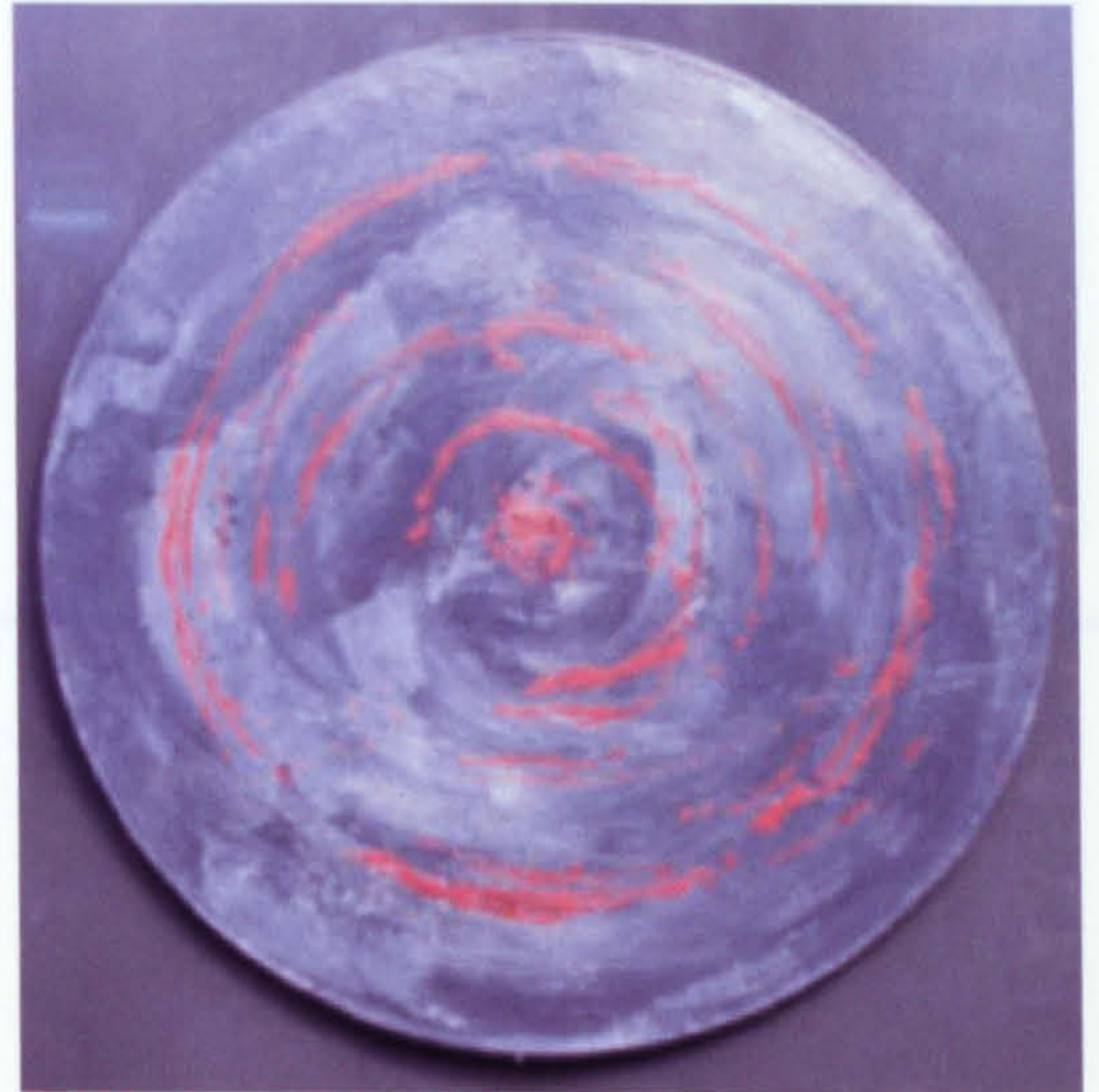


Figure 23

Circles 3 (Fig. 24) and 4 (Fig. 25) are 63 and 65 inches in diameter.

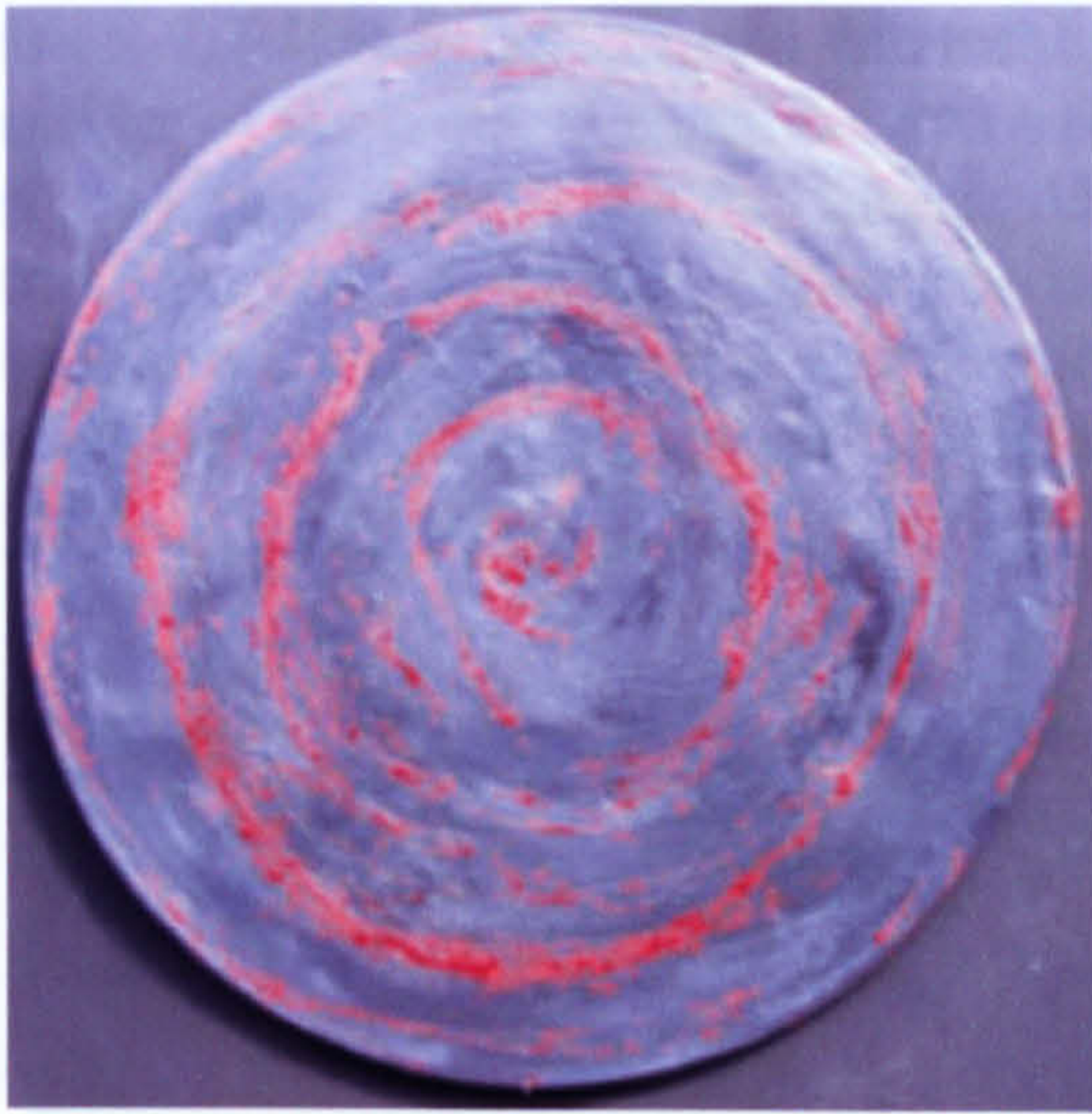


Figure 24

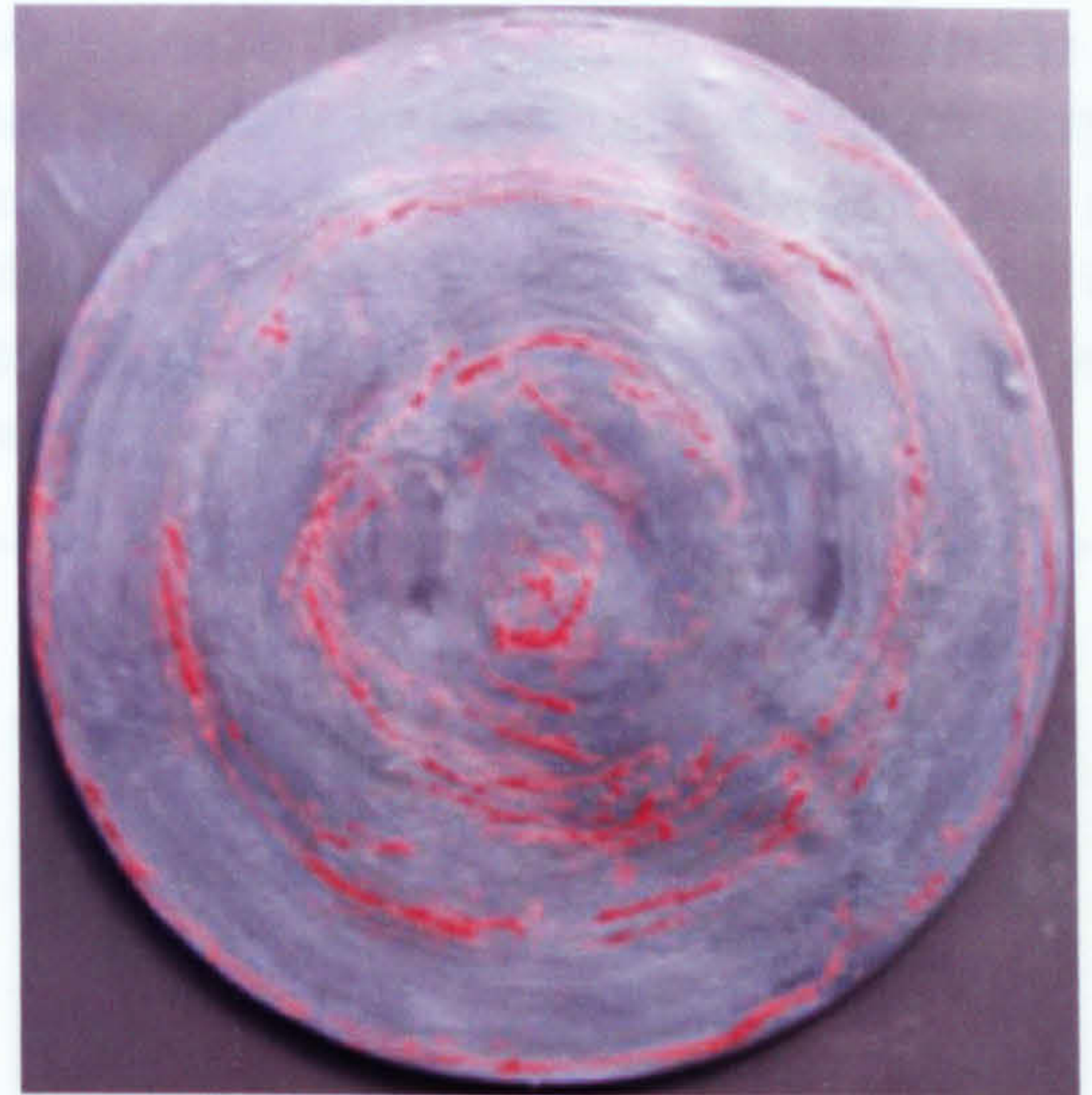


Figure 25

Circle 5 (Fig. 26) is 69 inches in diameter, circle 6 (Fig. 27) is 71 inches. Circles 5-8 are painted only on the outer edges with the grey encaustic formula. The smaller pair was painted with an eight inch rim and the larger pair was painted with a five inch rim of grey surrounding the center part of the canvases. Alizarin crimson sizing was painted on circles 5-9, followed by crimson encaustic. Manganese violet pigment was added to the remainder of the crimson encaustic and painted sparingly to the forms. Crimson acrylic paint was then painted on the forms. Alizarin crimson, magenta, cadmium red and charcoal grey oil paint was applied to circles 5-9. A mixture of cadmium red and alizarin encaustic was dripped and spread sparingly on all the circles. Over the next several months more encaustic and oil paint were applied to the forms.

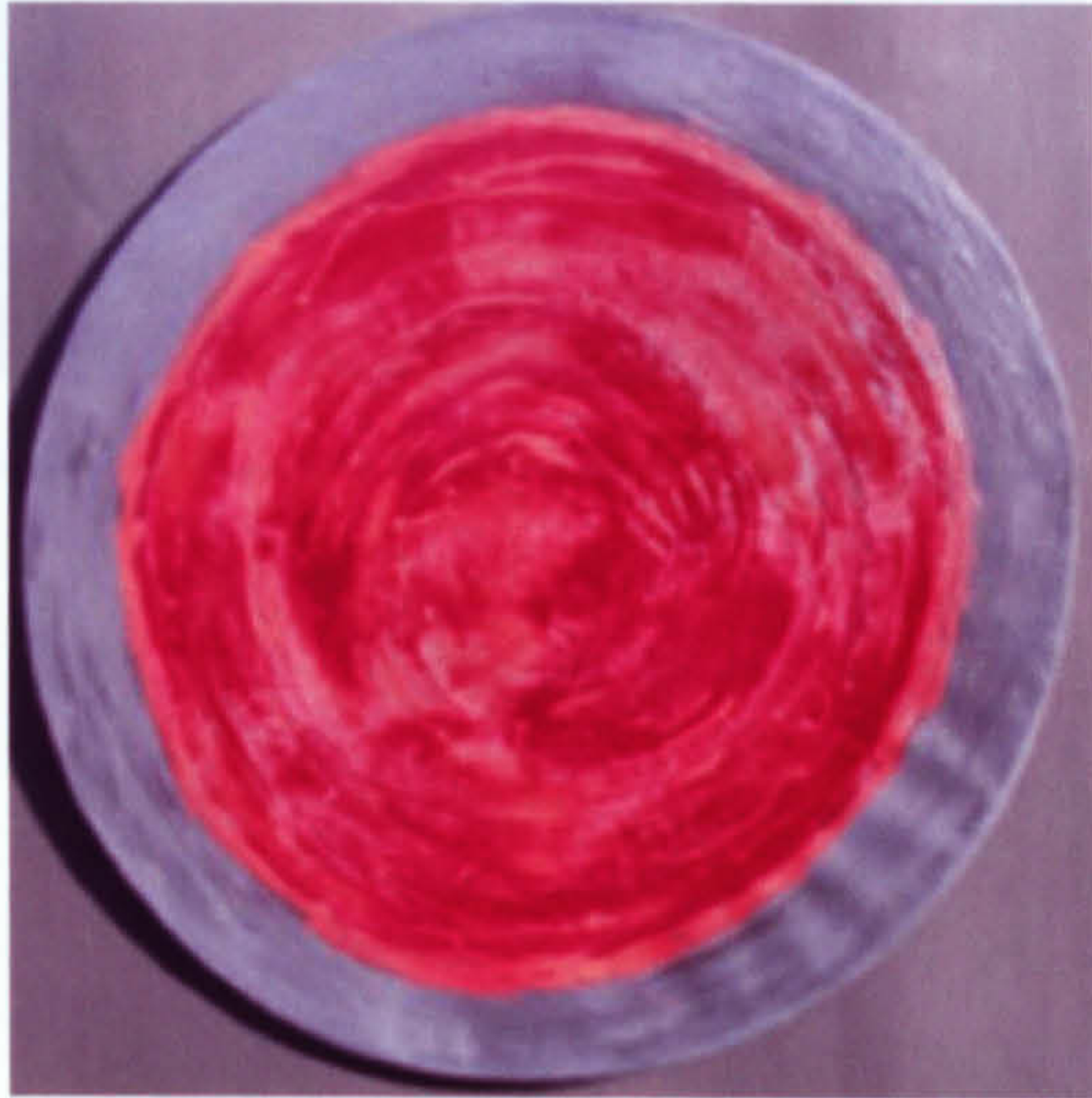


Figure 26

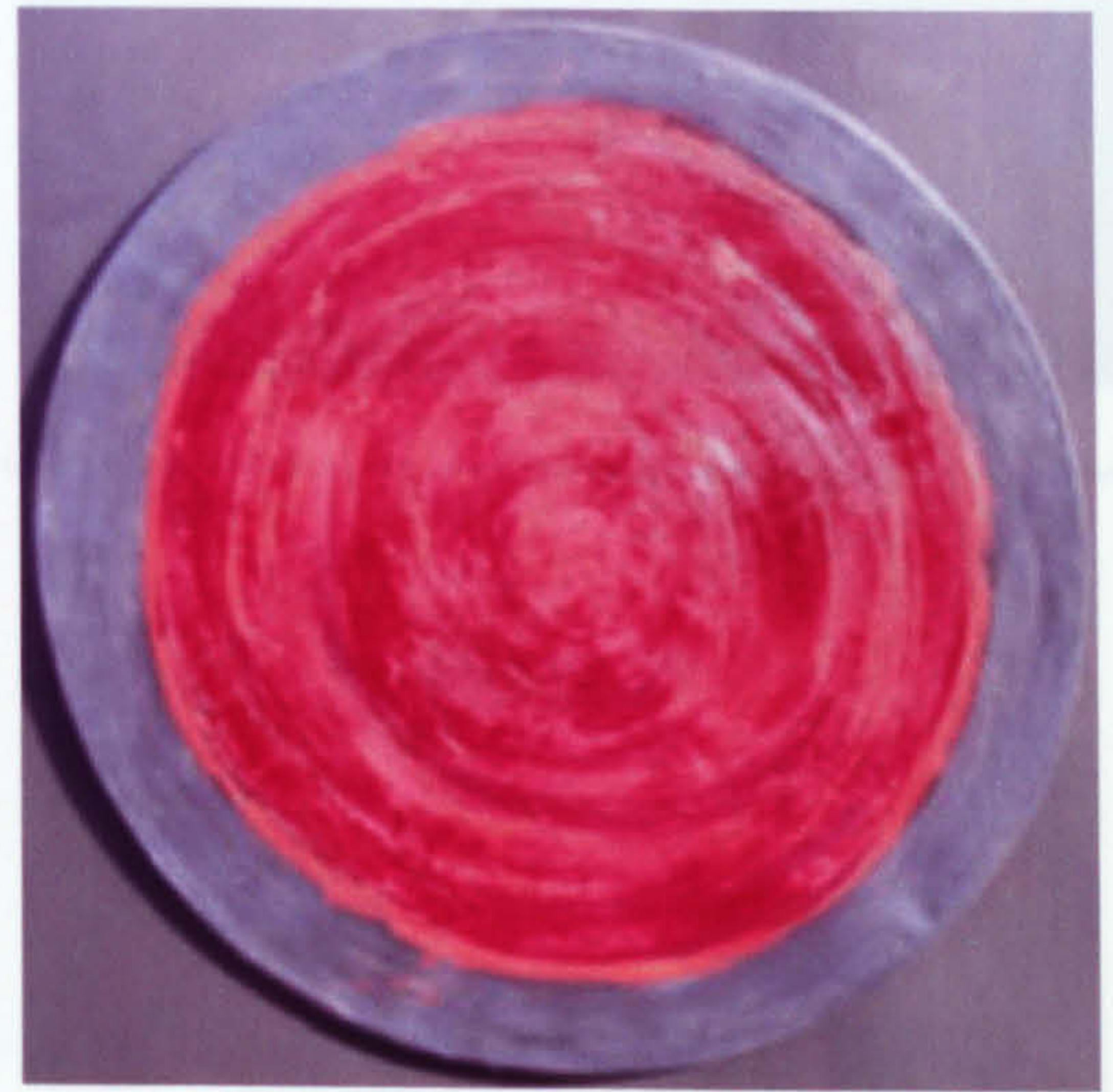


Figure 27

Circle 7 (Fig. 28) is 73 and circle 8 (Fig. 29) is 75 inches in diameter.

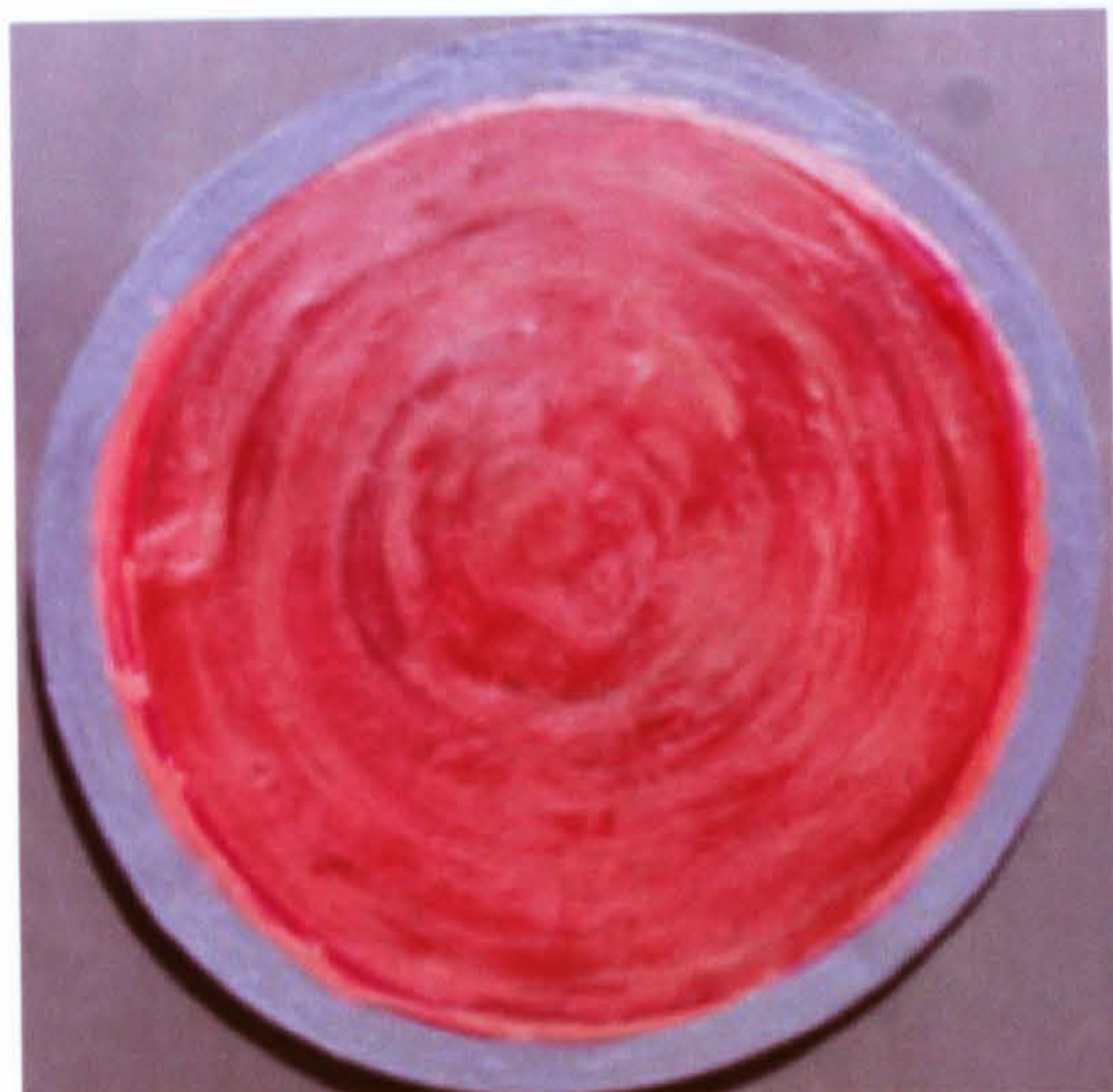


Figure 28

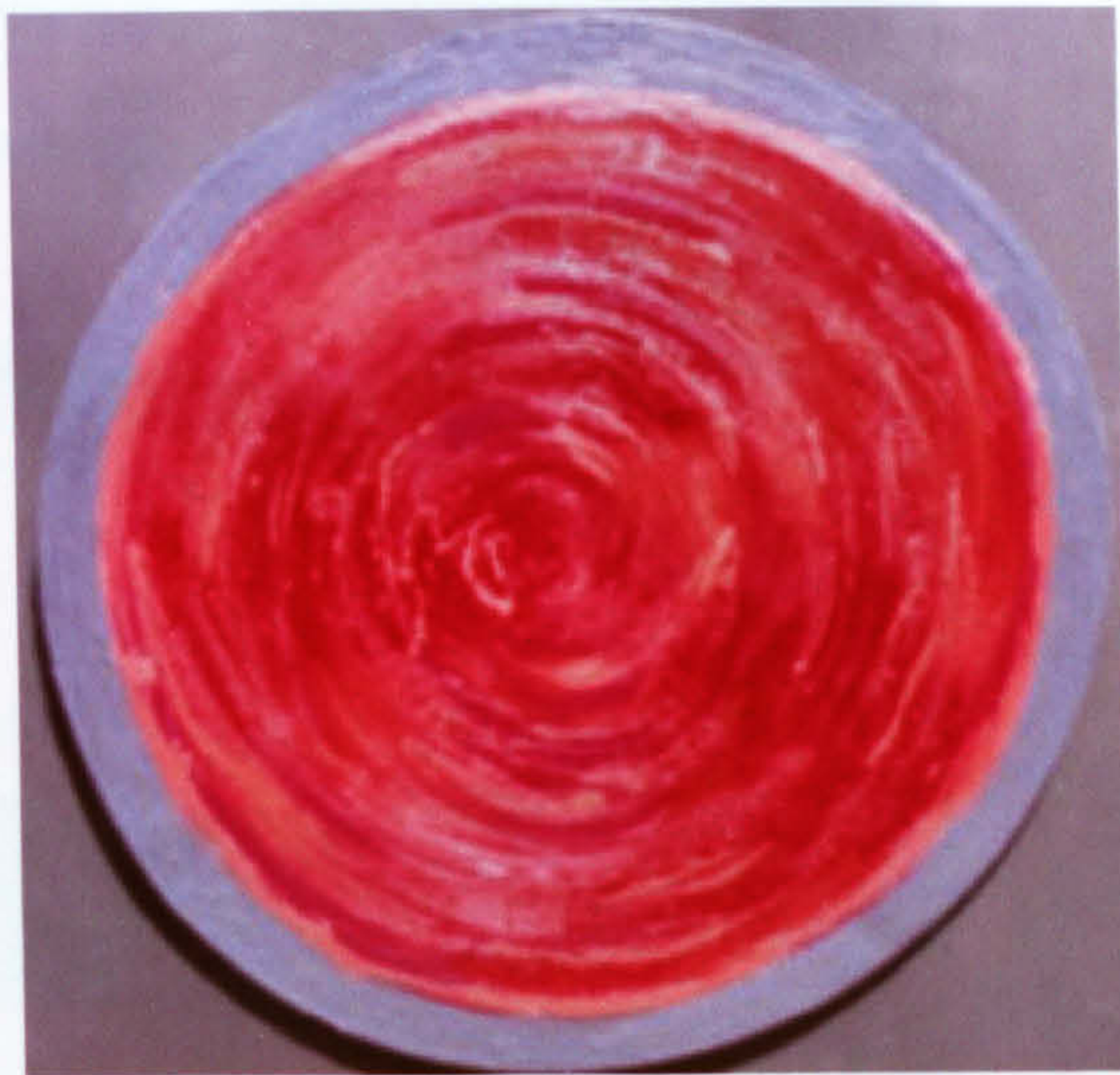


Figure 29

Figure 30 shows the circles at a preliminary stage of development. Sizing was painted on circles 5-9 with a masonry brush.



Figure 30

Figure 31 is a close-up of the surface of circle 9 before encaustic was added.



Figure 31

Oil and glaze have a more luminous appearance than encaustic and were added to the surface of some of the circles for a more dynamic appearance. Circle 9 (Fig. 32) is 87 inches in diameter and painted exclusively in a variety of red encaustic, oil and glazes as the final stage in the meditative process is realized and the ecstatic experience is possible.



Figure 32

The opening exhibition of the installation, captured on DVD as appendix III, included five live performances throughout the evening. Brook Annette is seen in Figure 33 as she stands in front of the largest circle during one of the performances. At all subsequent viewings of the installation, the performance on film is available to viewers as they entered the installation space.



Figure 33

A viewer utilizes *The Circle Way* as a contemplative space between performances in figure 34.



Figure 34

Viewers wander through the space during a performance in figures 35 and 36.

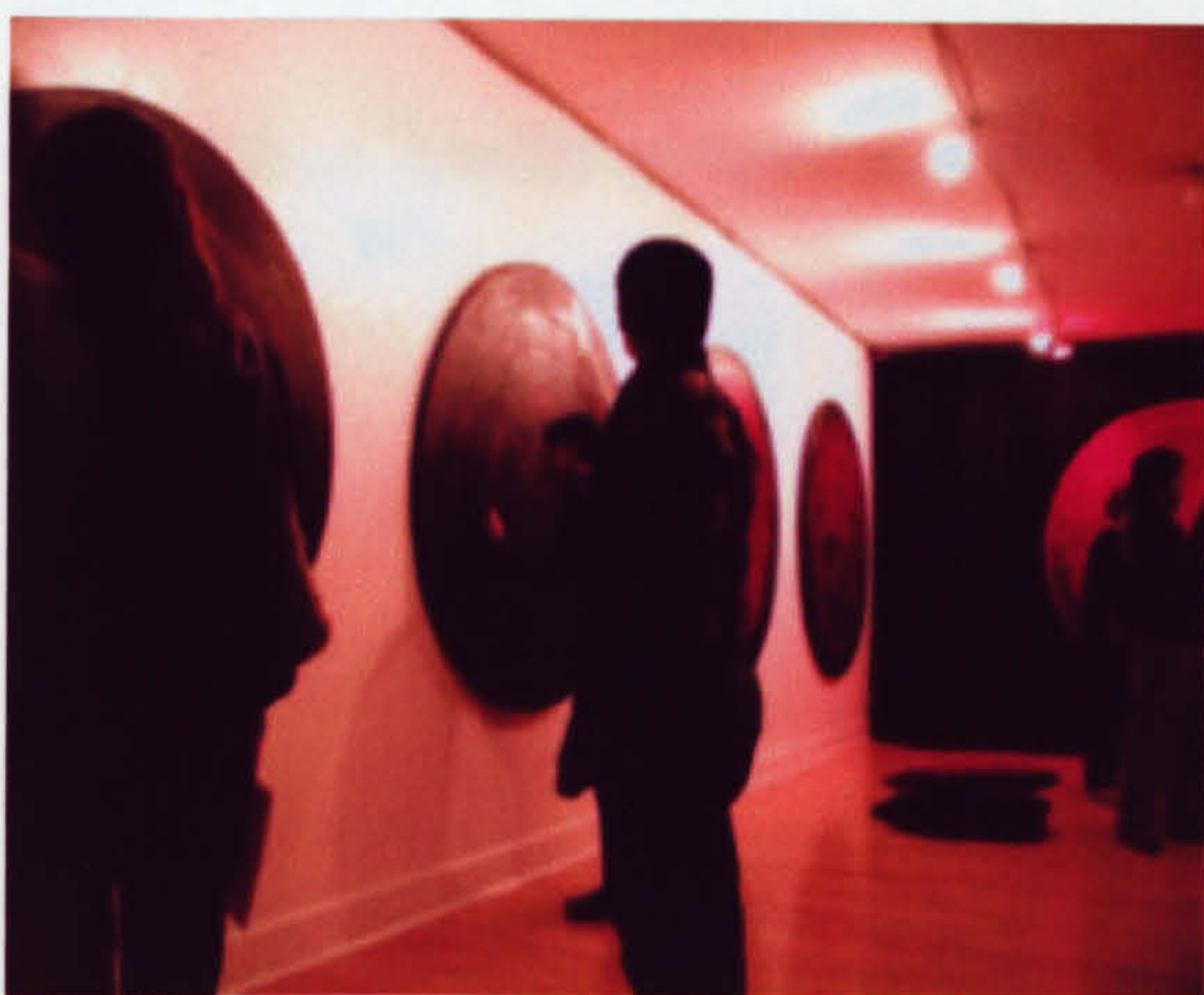


Figure 35



Figure 36

CHAPTER 2

THE ECSTATIC EXPERIENCE, MYSTICISM, SCIENCE AND ART¹

2.1 The ecstatic experience

To allay any confusion that may stem from the many uses for the terms ecstatic experience or ecstasy, two meanings considered necessary for the purposes of the research will be discussed. The first, ecstatic experience as mystical experience, the primary subject of the research, is defined as the “apprehension of an ultimate non-sensuous unity in all things, a oneness or One to which neither the senses nor reason can penetrate . . . it entirely transcends our sensory-intellectual consciousness” (Stace, 1960, pgs. 14-15). The other usage of the term is defined as an ‘exalted state of feeling’ characterized by or producing strong emotion (chiefly pleasurable).² The ineffable³ and transcendent⁴ quality of these very different experiences lends itself to symbolism and

¹ Step 3, data collection continued throughout the research. Step 7, a review of existing theory, is the culmination of the collection process and is presented in this chapter.

² This description of ecstasy is found in the Oxford English Dictionary Online at <http://dictionary.oed.com> (1989). Although the research acknowledges the interconnectedness of all things, other definitions for ‘ecstasy’ such as the name for a synthetic hallucinogen methylenedioxymethamphetamine and sexual climax do not directly relate to the research problem.

³ Ineffable is described as: too awesome and sacred to be spoken. See James’ *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 1996, page 300.

⁴ Kant in *Critique of Pure Reason*, 1781 explains ‘transcendent’ as independent of the world and existing outside the material universe, thus not limited by it.

metaphor which makes art, music, poetry, and performance ideal vehicles for attempts to reveal its nature.⁵

The second usage of the term, ecstatic experience as an emotional state is exemplified in a review by Susan Sontag who writes, “There has never been a movie like *Russian Ark*. If you're up for an ecstatic experience at the movies, there is no one like Sokurov.” (2003).⁶ Bell describes this kind of emotional experience as an aesthetic response and bases it upon the relationship of forms (pgs. 17-22, 28, 32, 1958).⁷ Sontag may have had an emotive or aesthetic experience while watching the movie, but probably did not achieve the ecstasy that is under investigation in the practice-based research. Succinctly stated, an aesthetic experience is not possible without either sensual perception or an appreciation of beauty in nature and art.⁸ These kinds of aesthetic experiences are not concerned with stilling the mind in contemplation, which has been the standard way to achieve a mystical experience and discussed more fully in section 2.2, *A Survey of Mysticism*. To recapitulate, ecstatic experience can be either mystical or aesthetic. Mystical experience, the research subject, is characterized by deep relaxation and an apprehension of oneness and interconnectedness with all things brought about by meditation.⁹ Aesthetic experience can be characterized as an

⁵ See section 2.4, *Exploration of ecstasy across artistic disciplines* and 2.5, *A survey and critical appraisal of the precursors in the context of the research* for art, music, performance and literature created specifically as expressions of ecstasy. Section 2.2, *A survey of mysticism* provides evidence of the transcendent and ineffable nature of the ecstatic experience under investigation here.

⁶ Sontag's review is at http://www.angelikafilmcenter.com/plano/archive_results.asp?mode=title&bw=R.

⁷ See Kant's 'Judgment about the Beautiful' in *Critique of Judgment*, pgs. 165-172, 205-209 and Dewey's *Art as Experience* pgs. 35-38 for discussions of the nature of aesthetic experience as based on taste that is an emotional reaction to art. Bell (1958, pgs. 17-22, 28, 30), in *Form in Modern Painting* convinces us that aesthetic experiences have no objective validity and are matters of taste. Bell's definition of aesthetic experience as emotional experience based upon a relationship of forms is as convincing as any other definition of aesthetic experience.

⁸ Both are definitions of aesthetic (adj.) in the *Oxford English Dictionary Online* at <http://dictionary.oed.com>.

⁹ Brain imagery technology shows frontal lobe activity like emotions and self-conscious awareness as going off-line during meditation. See Stein's article, Just Say Om in *Time*. Aug 4th Ed. Vol. 162 No. 5.

emotional response to art or nature. Ecstatic experience is considered ineffable or cannot be adequately described in language, and transcendent or existing outside of the material world. When the term ecstatic experience is used in this document it will refer to mystical experience.

‘Aesthetic’ can describe experience, as explained above, or it can describe judgment. ‘Aesthetics’ is also a set of principles that guide the making of a work of art.¹⁰ For Zangwill (2003), both are subjective. For Parker (2003) aesthetic judgments about beauty begin with the premise that there are no a priori methods of establishing standards and these judgments are developed based upon personal taste and historical context.¹¹

The Circle Way is an attempt to express the ecstatic or mystical experience in contemporary visual form. However, before viewers come to interpret this expression of the ecstatic experience, they must make a connection with the imagery that compels them to enter the space in the first place. This initial response to the artwork is based upon a judgment of what is beautiful or horrific, an aesthetic judgment. In engaging with artwork, the viewer is engaging with the artist’s aesthetic, which may lead to an emotional or aesthetic experience.¹²

¹⁰ Baumgarten identified two uses for the term ‘aesthetic’; sensual cognition and a theory of art. Judgment and experience are based upon cognition while, a theory of art can be defined as a set of principles and techniques applied to making art, but distinct from actual practice. See *The German Aesthetic Tradition* by Kai Hammermeister, 2002. A personal aesthetic that guided the making of the art for this research is briefly described on page 18.

¹¹ When aligned with qualitative and limited quantitative measures, a personal aesthetic guides interpretation.

¹² This is exemplified in the following example. *Hazy Morning* and *Valley of the Shadow of Death* by Hudson River School painter George Inness were on exhibition at the San Diego Museum of Art in 2004. The accompanying explanatory text about the exhibit stressed that Inness allegorized nature in order to elude an ecstatic experience in the viewer. The ecstatic experience was then explained as an aesthetic experience, based upon emotional reaction to the artwork.

The viewer can engage with the work of art without knowledge of the artist's intent. There has been a longstanding debate over the importance of the artist's intention as understood by the viewer. The 'intentional fallacy' suggests that to judge a work of art according to the artist's intent is not desirable or necessary.¹³ It is commonly understood that meaning resides in the work itself and is inherent in its form and structure. This is a difficult subject to reconcile and intentionalists and anti-intentionalists are unable to reach an agreement as to whether or not viewer appreciation is enhanced by being privy to the artist's intention. Wollheim (1980) observes that the nature of art has to be understood simultaneously by the artist and viewer. Common sense and our powers of observation reveal that it is possible to have an emotive response to a work of art without knowledge of intent. It happens all the time when viewing art and listening to music.¹⁴ Barthes (1977) argued that value is brought to a work of art or literature by the viewer or reader and does not intrinsically lie in the art object or literature itself.¹⁵

After making an initial aesthetic judgment about the work, the viewer may decide to enter *The Circle Way*, realize intent after viewing the performance on film, and decide to use the space to meditate. There is no guarantee that he or she will have an ecstatic experience, only that the conditions exist whereby the experience is made possible.

¹³ Wimsatt and Beardsley wrote *The Intentional Fallacy* in 1946 for the August/September issue of the *Sewanee Review* sparking a debate over the relevance of the artist's intent in viewing a work of art. Anti-intentionalists insist that to attempt to find meaning in artwork outside of the artwork, as in intent or personality of the artist, is to move away from the aesthetic aspect of the work and has nothing to do with the work itself.

¹⁴ Take for instance, Bernini's sculpture *The Ecstasy of St. Teresa* in the Cornaro Chapel in Rome. It communicates the mystical ecstasy described by Teresa in her writings. Viewers may appreciate the aesthetic characteristics of the sculpture without knowing Bernini's intent or Teresa's writings and can make all kinds of associations and connections that have nothing to do with the sculpture. This aspect can never be completely overcome and the intentional fallacy insists that our interpretations should not be confused with the artist's (Dykstra, 1996, Wimsatt & Beardsley, 1946).

¹⁵ In validating art, viewer engagement is all that is necessary. When validating art as research other conditions exist. See section 3.6, *Validating the research* for more about this topic.

Aesthetic judgment and aesthetic experience cause the viewer to interact with and interpret the installation as a visual expression of the ecstatic experience.

Knowledge of intent, therefore, is not necessary for art appreciation, but is necessary for the art as research. First of all, knowledge of predecessors' intent facilitates the research when searching for works of art and determining whether or not they will impact the practice-based component of the research. Knowledge of predecessors' intent is necessary when reviewing existing theory, defining a problem and developing a body of work based upon collected data. Interpretation of intent helps the artist/researcher make informed choices by selecting and utilizing methods, approaches and media worth further investigation. Knowledge of intent is necessary when examining the aesthetic principles used to guide the work of art in order to gauge artistic clarity. Knowledge of intent is necessary when interpreting evaluation methods in the research.¹⁶ If intent is not realized the work becomes self-validating and independent (Sullivan, 2005, pg. 23) and not useful for research.

2.2 A survey of mysticism¹⁷

The ecstatic or mystical experience has always been part of human experience. The research is concerned with the experience as understood through the traditional means of achieving oneness with all things, the quietude and stillness of meditation. As the ecstatic experience is demystified in contemporary culture because of a rise in interest and involvement with the practice of meditation, accounts of personal experiences are

¹⁶ See section 3.6, *Validating the research* for an in-depth discussion of the importance of knowledge of intent for validation.

¹⁷ The term mysticism is described at <http://dictionary.oed.com> in the Oxford English Dictionary Online as a belief in or devotion to the spiritual apprehension of truths inaccessible to the intellect.

becoming widespread. Sophy Burnham's description of her ecstatic experience at Machu Picchu in Peru is quite typical and concurs with characteristics of mystical states identified by William James (1997).¹⁸ Even though the ecstatic experience can occur without any preparation, generally achieving ecstasy is dependent upon the ability to still the mind. Meditation has been the traditional vehicle for stilling the mind in order to have an ecstatic experience. Contemplative prayer, concentration on images such as mandalas, breathing exercises, Yoga, and chants are common practices in achieving the mental stillness necessary for meditation.

Most documentation of the ecstatic experience has been religious in nature and the experience has traditionally been associated with religion, although in modern Western culture secular mystics like Walt Whitman are not uncommon.

Although anthropologists believe meditation was practiced by shamans in early hunter-gatherer societies, the first written accounts of meditation are found in the Vedas from about 1500 BCE (Noss, 1994). Proponents of the Indian philosophies of Brahmanism and Vedantism believe the end of human reflection and effort is to deliver the soul from its transmigration into eternal absorption by Brahma. In China, the Taoism of the Philosopher Lao-Tzu is a metaphysical and ethical system in which mysticism is a fundamental element (ed., 2004). Buddhism, especially the Zen school, emphasizes enlightenment through meditation.

¹⁸ In *The Ecstatic Journey, The Transforming Power of Mystical Experience*, Burnham writes, "I remember the destruction of planets, and time passing millions of years perhaps. I saw the perfection of all things that had ever happened or that ever will. I saw that everything was perfect. I saw there is no death" (1997, pg. 79). In his seminal text (1997 ed., pgs. 299-300) *Varieties of Religious Experience*, James notes specific characteristics of mystical states. Mystical states are transcendent, ineffable, transient, brought about by some kind of mind-stilling activity, such as meditation, and illuminating, in that there seems to be an awareness of great truths.

In the West, at around the time of Christ, the Alexandrian Jew Philo combined the mystical teachings of Plato with the Old Testament to teach that people, by freeing themselves from matter and receiving illumination, could reach ecstasy and be absorbed into divinity. In the second century Christians known as the Desert Fathers meditated to achieve closeness to God.

Islamic Sufis embraced mystical practices about twelve hundred years ago.¹⁹ Kabbalists, Jewish mystics, have been practicing meditation for over eight hundred years (Noss, 1994, pg. 473).

Mysticism flourished in fourteenth century Europe. An anonymous English mystic and cloistered monk explained the ecstatic experience as entering a meditative state of consciousness that the intellect cannot understand, which he referred to as the 'Cloud of Unknowing' (Armstrong, 1994). In sixteenth century Spain, Ignatius of Loyola, John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila²⁰ all wrote of their mystical experiences.

According to mystical scholars and practitioners of meditation, the most significant result of the ecstatic experience and a determining factor in verifying its authenticity is the way the experience changes the life of the person who experiences such an event.²¹

Since meditation is clearly and historically linked to the ecstatic or mystical experience, creating an environment which increases the possibility for meditation increases the possibility of the ecstatic experience.

¹⁹ See page 612 in *The History of the World's Religions* by D. and J. Noss, 1994.

²⁰ Teresa of Avila, whose grandfather was Jewish (Dupre', 2001, pg. 307) and may have been a Kabbalist, often used the language of love and marital union to describe her ecstatic experiences (Peers, 1961).

²¹ Contemporary writers Armstrong (1993), Burnham (1997) and Keating (2002) recognize and write about the profound change that takes place in persons who practice meditation and have had ecstatic experiences. See 3.2 and 3.2.3 in Chapter 3 for a discussion of multiple media in the project linked to three criteria; the final criterion is that the work be able to heal through a change of heart.

2.3 Science and the meditative state

Scientist Dr. Gregg Jacobs of the Harvard Medical School has been using new technologies to monitor brain activity during meditation (2004, pgs. 245-54). Aside from common physiological changes such as a decrease in breathing, pulse rate and circulation, scientists have found that the parietal lobe and thalamus, both sensory regulators, allow only a trickle of information into the brain during meditation. The cortex, the most highly evolved part of the brain, shuts down during meditation. Brain wave activity is also altered (Stein, 2003, pgs. 52-53).

Dr. Michael Persinger (2000) of Laurentian University in Ontario, Canada claims to have had success in reproducing the ecstatic experience under laboratory conditions by applying weak magnetic fields to the brain during meditation (Morrison, 2004).

According to Dean Hamer, molecular biologist and chief of gene structure research at the National Cancer Institute, a recent discovery of a variation in a gene known as VMAT2 is directly related to the ability to feel transcendence. Hamer claims those with nucleic acid cytosine in a particular spot on the gene ranked high on a self-transcendence test and those with this particular gene variation were more likely to quest for the experience (2004, pg. 17).

Scientific evidence presented in this section indicates that measurable, physical change takes place in the brain during meditation, that an ecstatic experience can possibly be reproduced in a laboratory setting, and that there is a genetic component involved in both the quest for the experience and the ability to achieve it. Mounting evidence that the ecstatic experience and the meditative state have a measurable

component is an important step in meditation becoming secularized and separated from religion.

2.4 Exploration of ecstasy across artistic disciplines

There has long been an association between art and the ecstatic experience and before discussing those visual works of art that impacted the research, other art forms that either attempt to express the experience or were created as aids for the meditative process will be acknowledged in an effort to illustrate that the experience has inspired a wide variety of not only visual, but literary,²² musical and performance art.

Music can be used as an aid in stilling the thought processes in order to ultimately achieve the ecstatic experience. Tibetan artist Lama Karta (1996) records Buddhist chants and Ragani (2003) records Kirtan (Yoga chant) for meditation purposes.

There are other musical works of art created as expressions of transcendent experiences. Sir John Tavener describes his music for *Veil of the Temple* as a 'journey to the center' (2002).²³ *A Love Supreme* (1960) is considered John Coltrane's musical expression of his personal spirituality.²⁴ Inspired by Coltrane's music, Richard Serra made a single color etching entitled *Coltrane* in 1999. Serra's print features a single black circular form.²⁵

²² St. John of the Cross' mystical poem, *Dark Night* ed. Peers, 1990, inspired one of the works of art in the final project for the MA Degree.

²³ See Tavener's comments at <http://www.theveilofthetemple.co.uk/music.php>.

²⁴ John Coltrane writes in the notes to *A Love Supreme*, "During the year 1957, I experienced, by the grace of God, a spiritual awakening which was to lead me to a richer, fuller, more productive life". <http://www.miguel.com/text/tsupreme.html>

²⁵ See more about the circle and its significance to the ecstatic experience in section 2.5.2, *The circle*.

Composer Morton Feldman wrote *Rothko Chapel* (1971) as a meditative piece to complement and be played in the Houston space.

Whirling Dervishes are Sufis who perform whirling dances as acts of ecstatic devotion. The dance and accompanying music is not only an expression of the experience but a vehicle for becoming one with Allah.²⁶ Expressing the ecstatic state may be more effective if the art acts as a vehicle for ecstasy. *The Circle Way* is available as a vehicle for ecstasy.

These works of art affirm the enduring curiosity about the ecstatic experience and further establish it as a worthwhile subject for continued art research. The evidence presented in this and the following section demonstrates a tradition of art-based research of the ecstatic experience.

2.5 A survey and critical appraisal of the precursors in the context of the research

Since the practice-based research is concerned with visual expression; the rest of this chapter will discuss the precursors in the visual arts and their relevance to the current research.²⁷ The research revealed a number of shortcomings in the work of artists who take as their subject the ecstatic experience. For instance, Bernini's *Ecstasy of St. Teresa*, a descriptive visual account, does not adequately express the experience in a contemporary context. Seventeenth century abstract Tantric illustrations, although created as meditation tools, often need some kind of textual clue for the viewer to

²⁶ To see more about the ritual dance (sema) of the Dervishes, go to <http://www.whirlingdervishes.org/whirlingdervishes.htm>.

²⁷ An investigation of predecessors in the field was undertaken via fieldtrips to museums and galleries in the US and Europe and through textual accounts of significant artwork.

understand their function (Tuchman, 1999, pg. 133). On a rudimentary level the titles of the works provide clues to intent. Except for Bill Viola's video productions, descriptive works had little impact on practical decisions in the research.

The Zen garden²⁸ makes an immersive space²⁹ where one can experience an ecstatic event available to the viewer. However, it requires clues, such as textual commentary about the space, in order to discern its purpose. The availability of an immersive space became an important aspect in the later research.³⁰

2.5.1 Symbolization³¹

Symbolism became important in the early research and artists who used symbols in their work were reviewed.³² Specific works of art by Russian artists Ivan Kudriashev, Ivan Kliun, and Kazimir Malevich, who sought to suggest the fourth dimension, validated and influenced the early research. Oskar Fischinger devised a wax slicing machine in 1923 in order to create experimental films that would suggest 'fourth

²⁸ See more about the significance of the Zen garden at B. Greider's website <http://www.uwec.edu/greider/BMRB/culture/student.work/devitavl/>. Zen gardens are typically designed to achieve mindfulness in order to achieve Enlightenment. Scientists believe they have uncovered the secret to the calming effects of the Zen garden in the Ryoanji Temple in Kyoto, Japan. The rock formation creates a tree form and is supposedly subliminally calming. See Mayell's article for *The National Geographic News Online* at http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2002/09/0925_020925_zengarden.html for more about this phenomenon.

²⁹ According to G. H. Hovagimyan, an immersive space is defined as a place where one can absorb oneself in concentration to the exclusion of all other thoughts and outside stimulus. It is a space for stilling the mind in an effort to decrease conscious thought. See *Notes on Immersion* at <http://artnetweb.com/port/immersion/>.

³⁰ Immersion is integral to the final project installation and film and will be discussed more fully in Chapter 3 in section 3.2.3, *Immersion as healing*.

³¹ 'Expressionism, like representation, is a mode of symbolization; and a picture must stand for, symbolize, and refer to what it expresses. All expression is exemplification.' From Nelson Goodman's *Language of Art*, 1976, page 52.

³² See section 1.2, *Homage to the One, in practice* for images and commentary about the early research symbolism.

dimensional speculation'.³³ The term fourth dimension was used by artists in the beginning of the Twentieth Century to refer to mystical themes such as 'the oneness of the individual with the absolute' and infinity rather than the mathematical and scientific definition of time (Tuchman, pgs. 219-220).³⁴ Much of their experimental work during the 1920s seemed visually close to what was emerging in the preliminary research.

Although not specifically concerned with alternate states of consciousness as the Russian artists had been, it was the symbolism employed by Anselm Kiefer and Louise Bourgeois that had the most profound effect on the early work. In *Tree with Palette*, Kiefer suggests the 'Tree of Life' concept and in *Le Defi*, Bourgeois used glassware to symbolize personal pain (Rosenthal, 1988; Spector, 2002). These themes are part of the early research and an understanding of how these artists could successfully incorporate symbols into their work became an important issue. Bourgeois explains that, 'Symbols are indispensable because symbols allow you to communicate at a deep level with people' (Bernadac, 2000, pg. 143). Problems arise when the pictorial systems employed by the artist are not easily discoverable. Kiefer and Bourgeois' personal symbols must be deciphered for the viewer to understand the intended meaning of the work.

Homage to the One was filled with personal symbolism. After taking step five of the methodology and evaluating the work after it was shown in exhibition form, it became apparent that, like predecessors who used symbols, individual pieces taken from the context of the grouping needed textual explanation. *The Circle Way*, an installation that

³³ Unfortunately only a few minutes of Fischinger's films are still in existence today. See *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890-1985* by M. Tuchman, 1986, page 302.

³⁴ See page 175 Kudriashev's *Luminescence* 1926, page 177 Kliun's *Red Light, Spherical Composition*, 1923 and page 164 Malevich's *Suprematist Painting*, 1918 in *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890-1985* by M. Tuchman, 1986.

includes film and abstract pieces where only texture, color, and shape are used as symbols, was conceived and begun in early 2004.³⁵

2.5.2 The circle

In many of the world's magico-religious mythological systems, the dot, and by extension the circular form, has long been a symbol for the link or the point of union between the human individual self and the divine self (Eliade, 1991, Pgs. 41-46). It retained this symbolism in the early research and seems an appropriate form to adopt in the final project, even though it is not specifically used as a symbol in the installation. The circle is everywhere in nature, from a single cell to a planet, and it is this ubiquitous versatility that has drawn artists for thousands of years (Jung, 1964; Eliade, 1991; Fontana, 1993).³⁶

D'Arcy (1967) points out that some fundamental symbols contain a wealth of meaning and the circle is one such symbol. The archetypal circular shape can be a symbol for infinity, perfection, eternity, and the void. Empedocles wrote, 'God is a circle whose center is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere' (Cunningham, 2003, pg. 20).

³⁵ The realization that *The Circle Way* could express the profundity of experience with the chosen mediums was not unlike accounts of Newman's breakthrough when he created *Onement, I*. He realized that he was emptying space rather than filling it with paint. See page 31 of *Barnett Newman* by T. Hess, 1969.

³⁶ Kandinsky wrote to Grohmann (1930) about how circles influenced his work, "If I have in recent years so frequently and so enthusiastically made use of the circle, the reason is not the geometric form of the circle, or its geometric characteristics, but rather my own extreme sensitivity to the inner force of the circle in all its countless variations. I love circles today in the same way that I previously loved horses—perhaps even more, since I find in circles more inner possibilities, which is the reason why the circle has replaced the horse." (Becks-Malorny, 1994, pg. 157). Thai artist Montien Boonma used the circular form as a psychological and spiritual symbol for the alms bowl and the paradoxes it expresses, such as emptiness is fullness and giving is receiving (Cotter, 2003). The early research sometimes attempts to engage the viewer in a similar manner.

Mandala-making has impacted at least one of the forms in the early research. Artist Sofu Teshigahara experimented with mandalas, circular symbolic meditative devices, in an attempt to convey the ecstatic experience and the void (Jung, 1964). Jung noted that certain symbols, like mandalas, recur in myths, legend and rituals throughout time and across geographical boundaries, and concluded they had universal significance (1964, Pg. 97).³⁷

Even though the circular form as seen as a symbol for the link between the human and divine and that the merging of the two realms is the essence of the ecstatic experience, Goodman reminds us that the ability to read art and symbols has to be acquired and our perceptions are determined by frame of reference, visual experience and conditioning, thus different objects are represented differently to different groups of people (1976, pg. 14). To minimize instances of viewers not being able to interpret the work, personal symbols are not used in *The Circle Way*.

The circle was chosen as the dominant form in *The Circle Way* because of pre-knowledge of the symbolism. However it is not specifically used as a symbol for the ecstatic experience. It is simply a shape that for some viewers may symbolize the ecstatic experience.

³⁷ Artist John DeMarco, concerned with Jungian psychology and the collective unconscious, continues to produce work that attempts to manifest these themes (Cunningham, 2003).

2.5.3 Expressions

The painted forms in the research are most profoundly influenced by Expressionism. Kandinsky's breakthrough in painting from that of representation of the outer world to one of a symbolized inner world³⁸ where he could in some way suggest higher realities was not new to visual art. It is generally accepted that Native Americans and Australians have used the vision quest³⁹ for inspiration since before recorded history. Self-expression can be an emotionally charged activity resulting in artistic expression. The research described here is less concerned with emotional states and responses than with a meditative state of detachment from the world of the senses. Emotional expressions contradict such a state of consciousness. There is a fundamental inconsistency in earlier expressionist works that attempt to communicate such themes. Ad Reinhardt, alternatively, was not concerned with an emotional quality in his work. He believed that 'negative abstract painting'⁴⁰ could be a conduit for the ecstatic experience. Ultimately, *The Circle Way* forms progress through to a negative abstraction and are likewise devoid of religious overtones and symbolism.

Additionally, in *The Circle Way*, viewers are invited into the installation to utilize it as a contemplative space. Thus, the expressive fallacy, where the artist expects the

³⁸ In *The Expressive Fallacy*, Hal Foster contends that the classical painter substitutes for things the representation of them, while the Expressionist substitutes for these representations freed marks and colors that signal self-expression (pg. 80).

³⁹ A vision quest is described by Wolf Moondance in *Vision Quest: Native American Magical Healing* (2004) as a spiritual journey characterized by a period of solitude and reflection during which one searches for inner revelations that will provide meaning and direction for life.

⁴⁰ Negative abstract painting is characterized by monochromatic painting in either black or white. It is devoid of symbols and religious overtones. See page 319 in *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890-1985* by M. Tuchman, 1986.

viewer to experience the same emotions he or she experienced when the work was created, is overcome (Foster, 1983). No emotional response to the work is expected.⁴¹

2.5.4 Viola, Rothko and Newman

A study visit to the Guggenheim Museum of Art in New York early in the research to view Bill Viola's *Going Forth by Day* influenced the decision to include film in the final project installation. Viola's highly descriptive video that echoes Renaissance painting involves five different video loops, projected simultaneously on four walls.⁴² Each portrays a different phase of human life from birth to rebirth (Strickland, 2003). Viola says he is '... always aware of the presence of death and rebirth at every instant and that it is central to all these threads of mysticism' (Kidel, 2002).⁴³ Themes and philosophy aside, film can be an effective educational tool, which is important as one of the emergent criteria. Alone it is capable of educating emotional responses, but less likely to offer the quietude necessary for meditation for the ecstatic experience under investigation here.

After seeing *Going Forth by Day*, a visit to the Rothko Chapel in Houston, Texas confirmed the decision to shift from symbolic to abstract expressions. One can not help but experience the Chapel with its fourteen abstract canvases as an immersive space. Immersion rather than interaction would be important to the success of the final project

⁴¹ Viewers are given the opportunity to experience ecstasy, yet they are not required to do so for the work to engage. Nor are they required to have an aesthetic experience in the space. Nonetheless, it is the aesthetic experience that compels a viewer to enter the space in the first place.

⁴² See G. Glueck's review of *Going Forth by Day* in the New York Times. In *Timeless Themes Suddenly Timeless*, Glueck argues that Viola's video cycles do not relate to one another.

⁴³ See <http://www.guardian.co.uk/arts/story/0,3604,669788,00.html> for Viola's comment about *Going Forth by Day*.

and the temporal quality of performance and film within a sublime space would be investigated.⁴⁴

The Chapel lends itself to meditation, because the canvases produce an environment of their own, creating a sense of the sublime.⁴⁵ Nodelman surmises that the size and color of the canvases were created to exclude the viewer so that he or she is thrown back upon his or her own resources (1997, pgs. 297-98). This referral back to the self is part of the contemplative process and why the Rothko Chapel is successful as a meditative space.

A similarly large collective manifestation as a single articulation is Barnett Newman's *Stations of the Cross*. Nodelman suggests that Rothko was more than likely influenced by this collection when he created the canvases for the Rothko Chapel (2000, pgs. 192-193). Newman did not consciously exclude the viewer as Rothko had done. He explained that his fourteen and later fifteen canvases, a comment on the universal condition, originally to be called *Lema Sabachthani* (God, why have you forsaken me?), is, 'a human scale for the human cry' (Temkin, 2002, pg. 229).

⁴⁴ M. Falkenberg argues that Interactivity is anything but interactive, claiming that by the mid 1980s interactivity no longer implies an effort to create an exchange with the viewer, but rather refers to the creation of immersive spaces that the viewer temporarily inhabits. The shift calls for a greater level of passivity from the viewer, as the challenge of soliciting the viewer's equal participation remains unresolved. From the *Circuit of Exchange: The Myth of Interactivity in Video Art*, pg. 5.

⁴⁵ The terms sublime or sublimity are used throughout this document to define profound experiences that elude easy description or expression in words alone. For philosophers, the sublime is discussed in terms of the effect on the psyche of encounters that overwhelm the senses and lead the mind to a heightened awareness of what lies beyond the everyday. The word has been used in another sense as well, to denote the feelings of awe that can be experienced in contemplating the infinitude of space and time in a scientific context. Immanuel Kant called it the mathematical sublime. These two facets of the sublime unite to account for that which is beyond comparison and beyond comprehension. Sublimity is used in this document as an umbrella term that covers both the aesthetic and mystical meanings of ecstatic experience. From *Sublime: 25 years of the Wesfarmers Collection* by H. Carroll, 2002.

The idea that Newman's collective grouping should include rather than exclude the viewer implies commonality with *The Circle Way*. Newman created the paintings for the *Stations of the Cross* as pairs (Hess, 1972, pg. 62). The canvases in *The Circle Way* were created in pairs. The large but manageable canvases in *The Circle Way* and *The Stations of the Cross* invite the viewer to discover the subtle changes in color and texture and ultimately reside among the forms to meditate if he or she desires.

Rothko's work on the other hand, attempts to 'drive' the viewer to the meditative process (Nodelman, 2000, pgs. 330-331). Rothko revealed that he conceived the paintings as contemplative experiences and arranged them in an axial configuration so that the viewer could conceivably experience ecstasy from any location while in the Chapel. (Barnes, 1996, pg. 44). In this respect *The Circle Way* shares a common purpose with the Rothko Chapel as well.

It is possible to achieve a meditative or contemplative state anywhere at anytime. It is even possible for someone to sit in front of one of the variations of *Red on Maroon* in the low lit space of the Rothko Room at the Tate Modern or Monet's *Water Lilies*⁴⁶ at the Musée de l'Orangerie on a crowded Sunday afternoon and experience ecstasy. Over one million viewers streamed into the Tate Modern in 2003-04 to see the lighted sphere of Olafur Eliasson's *Weather Project* and attempted to meditate. However, given the nature of the ecstatic experience, it is more likely that it would happen in a quiet chapel setting rather than a crowded museum.⁴⁷ In discussing Rothko's Chapel paintings, Hughes insists that the paintings fail to engage the viewer because of a 'deep

⁴⁶ The *Water Lilies* triptych was on exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1959. Rothko undoubtedly saw it. Although the configuration and number of paintings that comprised *Water Lilies* and the Rothko Chapel differ, they share commonality. Both large overpowering installations aid in defining the space. See Nodelman's *The Rothko Chapel Paintings Origins, Structure, Meaning*, 2002, pgs. 57-58.

⁴⁷ See section 2.1, *The ecstatic experience*.

uncertainty about the nature of the art' (1990, pg. 243). He disagrees with Diane Waldman's positive response to the paintings.⁴⁸ Like Hughes, Harrison offers an unenthusiastic critique as well, finding the paintings in the Chapel 'too large, too labored and too pretentious' (2001, pg. 599). Harrison makes a valid argument when the work is viewed as intended by Rothko, that is, 'the painting is not about the experience, it is the experience' (Nodelman, 1997, pg. 341).

Rothko's long standing ambition to control the viewer's experience (Anfam, 1990, pg. 163) may very well have been why the work does not engage some viewers. When observers are given clues to the nature of the art and are left to experience it as they wish, there is less chance of the uncertainty discussed by Hughes and the debate about the importance of the artist's intent becomes a moot point. Because *The Circle Way* is art as research, viewers are given clues about intention with performance and film, but are ultimately left to view as they wish.

The Rothko Chapel illustrates how meaning is constructed when multiple media are united to conveying the nature of the ecstatic experience and influenced the decision to use multiple media in the final project.

⁴⁸ Hughes quotes Waldman in *Nothing if not Critical*, (1990, pgs. 242-243) when she says that the paintings 'create a tonal environment, a unified atmosphere of all encompassing, awe inspiring spirituality. . . fusing the conscious with the unconscious, the finite and the infinite, the equivocal with the unequivocal, the sensuous and the spiritual'.

2.5.5 The Perfect Death

After seeing a scroll from James Lee Byars' *The Perfect Death*, circa 1960, it became clear that the final project could be successful, even though not in a chapel setting,⁴⁹ the work itself can affect the space and experience.⁵⁰ Byars engaged the viewer through installation and performance. His work consisted of a series of scrolls in orange and black accompanied by a performance piece where he dressed in gold cloth, laid on a bed of the same material, and became lost within.

Other factors affect viewer engagement as well. After 44 years, the paper scroll was becoming faded and brittle. 'Installation has always been a transient kind of art,' says Susan Greer, 'but now museums are making an effort to preserve' (2004, pg. 1). In the digital age it is necessary for the artist to preserve on DVD those happenings and performances within an installation space and *The Circle Way* performance is recorded on DVD.

⁴⁹ A scroll from *The Perfect Death* was part of *The Big Nothing* exhibition at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in June, 2004. To read more about *The Big Nothing*, see M. Kimmelman's *Artists Who Just Say No. to Everything* at <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/06/25/arts/design/25KIMM.html?cx=1089167717&ei=1&cn=18466138794f4b7c>.

⁵⁰ Contemporary installations like Martin Creed's *Lights Going On and Off* and Christo and Jeanne Claude's *The Gates* are vivid reminders of how works of art can alter space to ultimately form experience in art. This experience can include active or passive participation. Viewers were encouraged to walk through *The Gates* in Central Park in New York City to fully experience the art while viewers were asked to view *Lights Going On and Off* from a stationary position. See <http://www.tate.org.uk/britain/turnerprize/history/creed.htm> to read more about Creed's work and <http://www.christojeanneclaude.net/tg.html> for more information about *The Gates*.

CHAPTER 3

THEORY, VERIFICATION TESTING, VALIDATION, AND SUMMARY OF INFORMATION GAINED¹

3.1 Table of features of predecessor's visual artwork

Sullivan (2005, pg. 173) convincingly argues that the visual image itself can be seen as a form of data that has the potential to be used as evidence. This happens in the research when *The Circle Way* and *Homage to the One* are referenced against previous attempts to reveal the nature of the ecstatic experience. Table 1 (page 80) in illustrating common characteristics in artwork that takes the ecstatic experience as its subject, shows how this takes place in the research. After examining these works of art, it became evident that some works were narrative and attempted to visually represent the experience. Others made available a space for contemplation so that viewers could experience ecstasy on their own. Others provided meditation aids both abstract and representational.

The table illustrates that *The Circle Way* includes an immersive space, a visual description of the work and abstract forms that can be used as meditation tools. It is the only work of art in the table that includes all the features at all times. Evidence presented in this chapter suggests there is a higher probability of comprehensively

¹This chapter deals with steps 8, 9 and 10 by presenting the results of the human response to the work, discussing validation, summarizing information, and reflecting upon the project.

expressing the ecstatic experience when all of the features (media) are present in one visual work of art. Much of this chapter is devoted to justifying the inclusion of multiple media in *The Circle Way*.

TABLE 1

FEATURES OF VISUAL ARTWORK THAT TAKES AS ITS SUBJECT THE ECSTATIC EXPERIENCE

Artist	Title	Inclusion of: Immersive Space	Visual or Textual Description: film, narrative, painting or sculpture	Visual Form made for Meditation	Abstraction
Bernini	Ecstasy of St Theresa	√*	√		
Byars	The Perfect Death	√	√**	√	√
Dali	Christ of St. John of the Cross		√		
DeMarco	Breakthrough (mandala)		√	√	√
Fischinger	Trinity of Ouroboros before the Alchemical Rose		√		√
Kliun	Red Light, Spherical Composition				√
Kudriashev	Luminescence				√
Malevich	Suprematist Painting				√
McDermott	Revelation II		√	√	√
McDermott	The Circle Way	√	√	√	√
Newman	Stations of the Cross		√***		√
Reinhart	Abstract Painting			√	√
Rothko	Chapel Paintings	√		√	√
Teshigahara	Sun Wheel (mandala)			√	√
Viola	Going forth by Day		√		
Unknown	Pure Consciousness (17 th c. tantric illustration)			√	√
Unknown	Thangka (Tibetan Buddhist meditation art)		√	√	
Unknown	Zen Garden in Ryoanji Temple in Kyoto, Japan	√		√	√

* The sculpture resides in Sta. Maria Della Vittoria in Rome, Italy. Chapels are meditation spaces.

** The original performance was not repeated and viewers were left with no visual clues about the nature of the artwork.

*** The title implies the intent as a contemplative works of art.

3.2 Gablik

Susan Gablik speaks of the responsibility of artists today to use their art to affect social change in order to heal and build a sense of connectedness between people. She stresses the responsibility of the artist to produce work that heals, educates and illuminates (2001). Although Beuys², Kandinsky³ and Gablik articulated such theories, these ideas have been fundamental to art since its inception. By using Gablik's guidelines and linking film, abstract expression and immersion with education, illumination and healing respectively, a more comprehensive understanding of the experience is revealed. Sullivan convincingly argues that reflexive practice reveals a plurality of new views that can cause different readings of the same artwork (2005, pg. 101). The following sections introduce new and imaginative connections between Gablik's theories about socio-cultural obligations in contemporary art and *The Circle Way*.

3.2.1 Abstraction to illuminate

The Circle Way was conceived and created after exhibitions of *Homage to the One* demonstrated that individually and out of the context of the whole exhibition, the forms in *Homage to the One* failed to fully engage the viewer as intended. Take for instance, *Revelation II*. Similar to a Tantric illustration; it could be used as a meditation device,

² G. Ray (2001) writes on page 73 in *Joseph Beuys and the After-Auschwitz Sublime*, "The greatness of Beuys work comes from its strong, simultaneous engagement with both past and future. The way out of the transgressive and traumatic past is the way into the redemptive future", from *Joseph Beuys Mapping the Legacy*. Ray postulates that Beuys' catharsis heals the entire viewing public.

³ Kandinsky's manifesto, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, (1977 Ed.), discusses the need for artists to be like musicians and express internal truths not dependent upon the material world. According to Kandinsky, the artist has a responsibility to use his talent to serve the viewing public and make works of art that create a spiritual atmosphere (pgs. 54-55). He does not explain how the artist's cathartic experience is transferred to the viewer.

but without some kind of clue, viewers could not discern this intent. The clue can be audio, visual or textual. As the research examines the possibility that the ecstatic experience can be expressed in contemporary 'visual' form, it was decided that audio and textual reinforcement are not appropriate for a solely visual experience

Therefore, no personal symbols were included in *The Circle Way*, eliminating the need for lengthy narratives or descriptive titles in order to engage the viewer. The circles act as tools of illumination, with only shape, color and texture as symbols. They perform the same function as mandalas, Rothko's paintings in the chapel or Tantric illustrations; thus fulfilling one of Gabor's three criteria, the ability to illuminate. As viewers proceed through the corridor of circles, mimicking the journey toward enlightenment⁴, they are confronted with textural areas of red upon grey. The red mixed media areas increase as the circles themselves increase in size. The largest circle at the end of the path is painted completely in reds to suggest that all external stimuli have been overcome and the ecstatic experience is possible.

If textual reinforcement is eliminated, then there would have to be some kind of visual clue to educate viewers about intent.

3.2.2 Performance on film to educate

A performance on film was united with the circles as visual explanatory reinforcement. *The Perfect Death* attempts to engage the viewer with performance, however, at subsequent viewings of *The Perfect Death*, viewers are left with no clues to

⁴ For Saint John of the Cross, the stages toward enlightenment or ecstasy are purgation, illumination and union. See Peers, E. (Ed) (1990) *St. John of the Cross, Dark Night of the Soul*.

understand the nature of Byars' work.⁵ There is no record of the original performance and the viewer is left to read about the 'Happening' rather than experience it visually. Byars' work lacked the visual indicator that is present at all showings of *The Circle Way*. In the case of Rothko's paintings, the chapel itself implies intent; for Newman's *Stations of the Cross*, it is the title that indicates intent.⁶ The film in *The Circle Way* is an important educational tool about the installation and the nature of the experience, taking the place of titles that were present in *Homage to the One*. Gablik's second criterion, ability to educate, is met.

In the film that accompanies *The Circle Way*, a performer enters the gallery from the street suggesting an inner journey is about to begin. She walks quickly among the first few grey circles in the front of the gallery, touching the textures, alluding to the idea that the cognitive world of the senses is still part of her consciousness. She slows down and walks among the predominantly red circles at the back of the gallery, sits and meditates in front of one of the circles. She rises and moves to the front of the large circle, stands in front of it momentarily and is absorbed, becoming one with it. The performance mimics St. John of the Cross' stages leading to ecstasy.⁷

⁵ Table 1 indicates that like *The Circle Way*, *The Perfect Death* unites all aspects identified.

⁶ Newman did not provide visual clues to inform people of his intent. The title, a textual clue, gives the viewer some indication of intent. For Christians, praying at the Stations of the Cross is often a contemplative exercise that begins with a meditation of the Passion of Christ. When interpreted in this manner, Newman's grouping can affect a contemplative space, but textual commentary is a precondition. The paintings in the Rothko Chapel, because of location within a chapel, meditation cushions and the sublime ambience created by the skylight, are immediately recognizable to the viewer as meditative works of art and the space engages as much as the artwork. Therefore, it is understood that the specificity of the space assists and encourages the nature of Rothko's work. Rothko's paintings and Bernini's sculpture are both in chapel settings which imply that they can be contemplative artworks.

The Circle Way is a temporary installation and highly unlikely that a chapel will be built to house it, nor does the title indicate intent. Individual circles have no titles either, leaving viewers only visual clues to inform about intent. When Rothko removed titles from the Chapel paintings, he removed reference to anything but size, scale, color, form and brushstroke (Barnes, 1996, Pg. 50). The circles in the installation attempt engagement in a similar manner.

⁷ See Peers, E. (Ed) (1990) *St. John of the Cross, Dark Night of the Soul* for the stages toward ecstasy. They are purification, illumination and union.

However, it can be asserted that film alone does not necessarily wholly express the nature of the experience. Viola's films engage with mystical themes, yet do not make available a space for contemplation. On the contrary, Viola's work is so active that it hardly seems possible, given the nature of ecstasy, that one could experience it while viewing *Going Forth by Day*.

3.2.3 Immersion as healing

For this reason, *The Circle Way* is made available as a space for contemplation. Seating is placed along the length of the circular forms to provide availability of a contemplative space. The seating also serves as a visual indicator of intent.

The following argument makes a case for the inclusion of an immersive space as an important component of the installation. The argument is based upon the assertion that the expression is meaningless unless the viewer is given the opportunity to experience ecstasy firsthand. If ecstasy is experienced through stilling the mind in meditation and that experience is ineffable and can not be fully understood in language or image alone, then a space where the viewer can experience ecstasy would have to be provided for a fully comprehensive understanding of the experience. If expressions of experiences can only exist in art by proxy or substitution⁸ then it follows that a comprehensive expression would have to afford viewers the opportunity to directly experience the ineffable nature of ecstasy.⁹ Therefore, a space where viewers can meditate is provided. The inclusion of an immersive meditative space along with the performance on film as a

⁸ See page 31 for a reference to de Man by Foster in *The Expressive Fallacy*, 1983.

⁹ See page 59 for definitions of ineffable and the ecstatic experience under investigation in this study.

visual educational tool provides viewers the opportunity to make informed interpretations of the artwork. 'Experience' rather than 'sensual impression' becomes interwoven with the expression. Informed interpretation of ecstasy and expression itself are no longer based upon language or image alone but upon the possibility of 'experience'.

Research confirmed that a significant determiner of the authenticity of the ecstatic experience is a change of heart.¹⁰ When the installation is offered as a meditative immersive space, the possibility exists for the ecstatic experience to occur, thus having the potential to affect a change of heart. It is this potential to produce a change of heart that ultimately results in healing. The last of Gablik's criteria, the ability to heal, is met.

3.3 Enticing the viewer, a discussion about aesthetics

All of the features illustrated in Table 1 (pg. 80) have been incorporated into the installation so that *The Circle Way* becomes a totally visual experience.¹¹ Yet, how can it be deemed a satisfying visual experience that engages the viewer? As mentioned earlier, it is arguable whether or not the viewer need know artist's intent, however there must be some set of principles used to construct the installation that make it aesthetically pleasing, or in some cases not pleasing, that will entice the viewer to enter

¹⁰ See page 65 for references to texts by mystics and those who study the ecstatic experience. All write about a change of heart being a result of the experience.

¹¹ According to G. B. Jones, those artists who mix technologies have the intention of engaging and providing the viewer with a more intense sensory experience (1989). Although the installation mixes technologies and media and initially provides the viewer with a more intense sensory experience, ultimately it makes available an immersive space where viewers are invited to still their thoughts in meditation.

and engage. A personal aesthetic formed by social, educational and cultural history is referenced in the making of both bodies of work.¹²

The work was placed in the public arena for further interpretation.¹³ The installation existed only as separate media until it was brought to the Expressive Arts Institute and assembled as one collective grouping of ideas, theories, mediums and methods of making. When finally assembled, the tungsten lights in the gallery caused glare on the encaustic and did not produce a satisfying affect.¹⁴

It was determined that the installation would have to shape a sublime¹⁵ space for viewers to be inclined to use the installation as a meditative space. Low lighting would enhance the look of the circles as they hung in the gallery and contribute to a sense of the sublime.¹⁶ The lighting can have a dramatic effect upon the installation and some curators insist upon their own lighting arrangements that can change the original concept of the artwork.¹⁷ If not controlled correctly, the installation may not persuade the viewer to enter the space and engage with the work. Red lights were used to counter balance the glare from the tungsten lighting. Unexpectedly, the red lights enhanced the sense of the sublime and when possible a series of low wattage red spot lights will be

¹² See page 18 for a reference to a personal aesthetic that guided the practice.

¹³ Visual arts can be interpreted with reference to different aesthetic, social, political and educational ends and best understood when opened up for discourse (Sullivan, 2005, 168-69). This is represented as step 8 of the methodology.

¹⁴ Naturally, this assessment is based upon all the preconditions for an aesthetic judgment and personal aesthetic discussed on pages 59-61.

¹⁵ The sublime in art has been the subject of some controversy and Newman in *The Sublime is Now* (1948, pgs 51-53) took pains to separate it from its link to Edmund Burke, the Romantics and Beauty.

Twentieth-century artists who tended to associate the sublime with spiritual and transcendent experience often connected it with emotional states brought about by painting. For Carroll, (2004) it is in, "The mind's capacity to give form to profound experience that art shares common ground with the sublime". It is at this fundamental level of meaning that *The Circle Way* would have to transmit sublimity. Also, see page 75 footnote 45 for a definition of the sublime.

¹⁶ This assertion is ultimately based on an artistic judgment shaped by a personal aesthetic.

¹⁷ For this reason, Barnes, claims (1996, pg. 57) Rothko was adamant about the light on the paintings and the color of the walls. This is connected to the reference to Albers on page 44 that notes context can alter perception of color.

arranged to illuminate circles 5 through 9 during exhibition.¹⁸ Bathed in red light, circle 9 had a velvety appearance and when the tungsten lights in the gallery were turned down during the live performances, the gallery exuded an ambiance of sacred space, church or temple. Like a chapel, Zen garden, cathedral or even a quiet museum setting, the space shaped by the lighting, film and circles became sublime.

G. Ray (2001) contends that the effect of the sublime depends upon the openness on the part of the spectator. The risk is always that the expressions may not be followed by adequate interpretation by the viewer (2001, pg. 72-73). The artist can only present the work. At that point it is up to the viewer to accept or reject the work.

It is the sense of sublimity exuded from the installation that compels viewers to immerse themselves in the space. This takes us back to the viewer's acceptance or rejection of the work that in turn is dependent upon his or her frame of reference.¹⁹

3.3.1 Other observations about the work after exhibition

Limited space in galleries may make it necessary at times to exhibit the installation with less than nine circles. The installation can be effective with a sample of circular forms, as long as the film and contemplative space are still available to viewers.

Although the 'corridor' arrangement is most effective, axial, hexagonal and other configurations of the circles can function. Photographic and DVD documentary evidence revealed that the arrangement of the circles in a 'passageway' or 'corridor'

¹⁸ This is an artistic judgment of what constitutes sublimity and based on personal preference.

¹⁹ See page 72 for a reference to Goodman about frame of reference, visual experience and conditioning as factors in forming perception.

configuration created a proportion based on a derivative of the golden rectangle. This proportion is found in natural growth patterns and has influenced art and design throughout history. This is another subjective judgment based on an accepted aesthetic principle.²⁰

3.4 Verification testing

Most reflective interpretations and meanings made in the research thus far have been based in heuristic inquiry where personal experience with the phenomenon is critical (Patton, 1990, pg. 71, 410-411). Tacit knowledge²¹ plays an important part in determining whether or not the artwork is a satisfying expression of the ecstatic experience. However, tacit knowledge is difficult to validate with conventional research methods. Therefore, for the purposes of validation, viewer engagement with the work in exhibition is gauged through verification testing, step 8 in the methodology. Feedback is obtained from a post-event e-mail survey, a comment journal left at all exhibitions and the examination team's approval of the artwork. Video and photographic evidence of how people engaged with the artwork at exhibitions is

²⁰ By rotation the diagonal of the half-square on both sides, rather than on one in a single golden rectangle, two overlapping golden rectangles are created. This kind of arrangement can be seen in the east facade of the Parthenon (Lauer, 2005, pg. 78). The dimensions account for the length and width of the exhibition space at the Expressive Arts Institute. The space was roughly 10'x24'.

²¹ See page 14 for Polanyi's definition of tacit knowledge. According to Polanyi (1974, pgs. 4-26), creative acts are inspired by personal hunches that he regards as tacit knowledge. Fragments of tacit knowledge are brought together in the research to make art, create theory and determine if the work is a satisfying expression of the ecstatic experience. For Schön (1983, pg. 68) the concept of tacit knowledge is 'reflection in action' that involves looking at prior experience in order to generate new understanding. This concept permeates the entirety of the research and is especially evident in the making of and reflection upon *The Circle Way*.

collected and presented in a variation of a causal-comparative study. The data collection methods are driven by action research.²²

3.4.1 Feedback interpreted

An e-mail survey of nine persons who attended exhibitions of both bodies of work was undertaken as a qualitative measure to help evaluate viewer engagement. The survey represents a variation upon a focus group interview with a one shot question.²³ The interview is a formative²⁴ qualitative evaluation strategy providing information within a specific set of activities at specific times for specific people (Patton, 1990, pg. 156).²⁵ The participants were chosen because they attended both exhibitions and had knowledge of the research subject (Patton, 1990, pg. 173).

Participants were asked two questions. Question 1 asked, “Do you believe that the inclusion of performance in an immersive space in the installation *The Circle Way* aided in the expression of the ecstatic (mystical) experience?” Question 2 asked, “Do you believe that *Homage to the One*, a series of symbolic 2D and 3D works of art expressed the ecstatic (mystical) experience?” The sample group is approximately 10% of the total

²² Action research is an investigation into one’s own practice (Johnson, 2005). Dick (1993) stresses how action research uses a ‘reflective spiral’, integrating theory and practice, action and understanding to inform the next action. For this reason, accepted data collection methods for action research were used to help assess the value of the work when placed in the public arena for testing.

²³ The focus group is typically a homogeneous group of 5-8 persons who come together for about an hour so that people can consider their own views in the context of others (Patton, 1990, pg. 335). As these people already came together for at least an hour at each of the exhibitions and had the opportunity to consider their own views in the context of others, the questions give them the opportunity to articulate those views. Patton (1990, pg. 333) explains that the ‘One Shot Question’ is typically informal and unscheduled. E-mail is an ideal way to conduct the one shot question. In this survey, the participants were asked 2 questions.

²⁴ Formative evaluation is limited to a specific context and used to improve a program (Patton, 1990, pg. 156).

²⁵ Patton (1990, pg. 156) explains that generalizations are not made from formative evaluations.

number of participants at the opening of *Homage to the One* and approximately 18% of the population who attended *The Circle Way*. The responses are part of Appendix IX.

Since only nine people took part in the e-mail survey, additional feedback was needed to make informed interpretations about viewer engagement. Nine pages in a comment journal left at all exhibitions are used to support the e-mail survey data and submitted as feedback.²⁶ The comments are found in Appendix IX. Most viewers commented on compositional elements such as texture or color, however there were a number of viewers whose observations pertained to the installation as an immersive meditative space.

In referring to *The Circle Way*, one participant in the e-mail survey wrote, “I felt a sense of inclusion or immersion”, while another wrote” “It made me feel temporal which I feel is a form of mysticism itself.” One viewer wrote about *The Circle Way* in the journal, “What fabulous use of color and space. Enjoyed the work immensely.” Another wrote, “Once I walked into the gallery, I understood your vision!” Another simply wrote, “Sublime”.

Alone, the data collected through the e-mail survey and the exhibition comment journal has a limited application in the research and can only be used to make inferences about the two bodies of work and the viewers who took part in the survey and those who wrote comments in the journal. Yet, when triangulated with other data, formative evaluations can help determine whether or not the artwork expresses the ecstatic

²⁶ Nine pages with thirty-one observations about both bodies of work were chosen from the comment journal, bringing the total number of comments about the artwork to forty. The observations from the journal differ from the e-mail observations in that the observers did not attend both exhibitions, were not given direct questions and did not have knowledge of the research subject. Nonetheless their feedback is important for validation.

experience in contemporary visual form. The survey revealed that of those questioned, 22% more believed *The Circle Way* with the inclusion of the immersive space and the performance on film aided in the expression of ecstasy. However, quantitative data is not relevant in this qualitative study.

The examination team's approval of the two bodies of work as major components of the research is an important addition to the feedback. It represents the positive endorsement of experts in their field of knowledge and is included as part of the triangulated data used to validate the research.

The comments in the journal reveal that viewers engaged with compositional elements in *Homage to the One* and *The Circle Way*. Viewer engagement with the installation's immersive space is evident as well.

The small sample e-mail survey, record of viewer comments and examiner's acceptance of the work at examination simply reinforce the theory derived from tacit knowledge that the inclusion of immersive space and performance on film aid in the expression of the ecstatic experience.

3.4.2 Causal-comparative study

A variation of a causal-comparative study, which is an accepted quantitative research strategy in action research (Johnson, 2005, pg. 93), was utilized to make a summative²⁷ evaluation, that determines the overall effectiveness of inclusion of specific mediums in

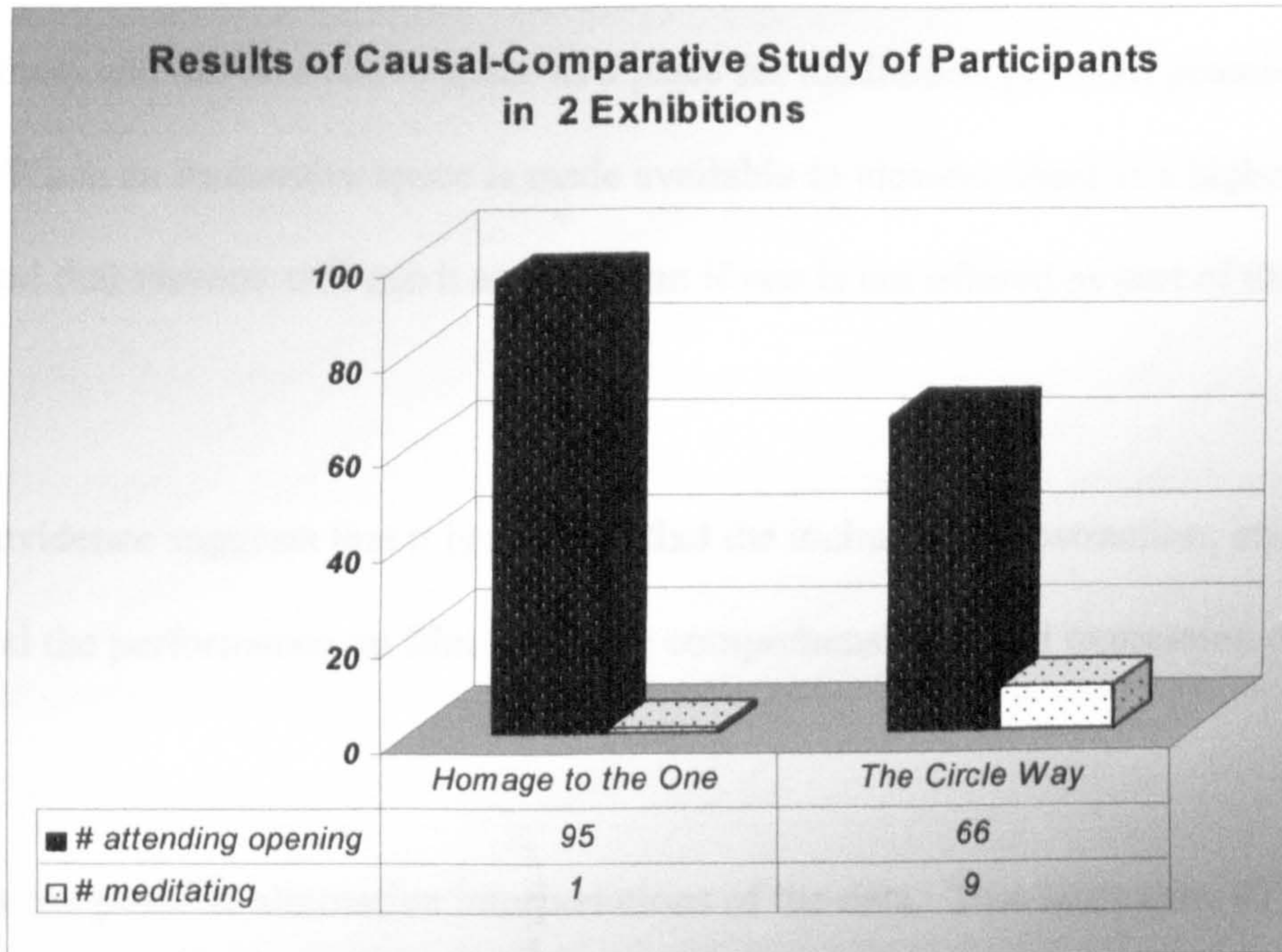
²⁷ Summative evaluation is quantitative in nature and serves to determine the overall effectiveness of a program (Patton, 1990, pg. 155). In this case, a causal-comparative study, which is an accepted quantitative research strategy (Johnson, 2005, pg. 93) used to make summative evaluations in action research, is utilized to determine the overall effectiveness of including immersive space, abstraction performance on film in the final project.

the final project. Generalizations are made from noticing patterns and recurring themes and help to understand particular situations as well as inform similar situations (Johnson, 2005, pg. 83). When the research is mainly qualitative, sometimes it is useful to include simple quantifications (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2000, Gherardi and Turner, 1987; Silverman, 1985). This study is inconclusive alone and serves only as a limited quantifiable study for triangulation with other data.

Video footage and photographic evidence were used to gauge the number of people who attended two exhibition openings and the number of people who meditated in the spaces. Exhibition openings took place in the same gallery during 'Ray at Night', a monthly venue for local art that includes over 20 galleries in San Diego, CA. 'Ray at Night' draws people from all over the area including collectors, students, artists, art instructors, and those just interested in an evening of art viewing. The crowd is fairly consistent from one month to the next. Results are found in the following data retrieval chart (Table 2).

Hypotheses rather than conclusions are formulated from the collected data (Patton, 1990, pg. 487). The collected data provides immediate results. Inclusion of the immersive space and the performance on film resulted in more viewers using *The Circle Way* to meditate than when those mediums are not available as in *Homage to the One* at the Expressive Arts Institute.

TABLE 2



14% of people who attended the opening exhibition of *The Circle Way* and less than 1% who attended the opening exhibition of *Homage to the One* meditated in the space.²⁸ The viewer, who meditated during the opening of *Homage to the One*, did so in front of *Winter Meditation*. It can be inferred that the subject gleaned intent from the title. A larger percent of people who attended the opening of *The Circle Way* used the space as a meditative space than did people who attended the opening of *Homage to the One*.

²⁸ Seven people not included in the causal-comparative chart meditated in the space in the afternoon before the exhibition opening. If they had been included, 24% of those who attended the exhibition meditated in the space. Those seven people were among the 66 who attended the opening.

3.5 Summary of information gained

Alone, the feedback and causal-comparative study are inconclusive, but when triangulated with theory about the inclusion of performance on film in lieu of textual commentary and the immersive space as a place for meditation provides promising results. When an immersive space is made available to viewers, there is a higher likelihood that viewers will use it as such than if one is not offered as part of the art work.

The evidence suggests that it is possible that the inclusion of abstraction, immersive space and the performance on film is a more comprehensive visual expression of ecstasy.

There are possible alternative interpretations of the data. That more than 85% of participants did not use *The Circle Way* as a meditative space could suggest that the work did not engage as intended or that the gallery was too crowded for the viewers to use it as a meditative space and the inclusion of the immersive space is not a necessary part of the ecstatic expression. Yet again, it is the creative synthesis of tacit understanding, intuition and collected data that results in informed interpretation, not the interpretation of only one data source.

3.6 Validating the research²⁹

Art and art as research are validated in different ways. When the artwork has no other aim but to engage, Einspruch (2003) claims it is validated when it is accepted or appreciated by viewers. It is generally believed that this acceptance or appreciation is not always immediate, often based upon conditioning and prevailing ideas of what has aesthetic value, and not dependent upon knowledge of the artist's intent. *Homage to the One* and *The Circle Way* are validated if engagement with the work is the only condition necessary. Photographic and video evidence and viewer feedback clearly indicate that viewers engage with the work at exhibitions.³⁰ Both bodies of work can be said to express the ecstatic experience as well. The evidence provided in these chapters attests to this.

However, the art was created as research, and as research it should not only express the ecstatic experience, but be understood to express the ecstatic experience by the viewer.³¹ Although aesthetic value is a consideration in the making of a work of art, other conditions exist that make *The Circle Way* a convincing expression of the ecstatic experience. Validity for art as research is established when reflection upon the triangulation of arguments and data collection methods presented in this document

²⁹ Creswell (2003 pg. 196) explains that validity is used to determine whether the findings of the research are accurate from the standpoint of the researcher. Creswell maintains triangulation of data sources to justify themes as one way to check for validity. In this research, it is the triangulation of the information gained from viewer feedback, the causal-comparative study and most importantly, arguments to substantiate theory that inform action, enhance decision making and help to solve problems in an effort to make the research valid (Patton, 1990, pg. 12). Nonetheless, validating qualitative data is debatable and Lincoln and Guba (1985, pg. 308) recommend peer debriefing along with triangulation of data sources as a strategy to examine evidence and justify themes. Both are used in the research. A peer debriefing with Wes Chester, recent postgraduate student was undertaken to enhance the accuracy of the data.

³⁰ See appendices I-III for the video and photographic evidence of people engaging with the work at exhibition. See appendix IX for a record of comments about the exhibitions. One viewer wrote about *Homage to the One*, "Thank you for showing your inspirational work. We need art like this. I love *Souls*."

³¹ See page 63 for a discussion about the importance of knowledge of intent for the purposes of research.

produce useful and credible results that provide new perspectives and interpretations rather than absolute truth about the work.³² This chapter provides the evidence to validate the research.

Sullivan argues that in critical reflection, the visual image is more than a product that can be isolated and contextualized, it is research unto itself (2005, pg. 63). This means that art making is a form of research and the product should be recognized as a new creation where new knowledge is imbedded in the work. Table 1 (pg. 80) compares *The Circle Way* with predecessors' work and illustrates that it is an innovative and original expression of the ecstatic experience, providing further evidence of validation.

Other interpretations of the work are possible as well. For instance, at the opening of *The Circle Way*, the gallery was crowded and people may not have felt comfortable meditating at that time, though they may have acknowledged that the provision of the immersive meditative space was an important ingredient in expressing the experience. This inevitably leads to new forms of engagement with the work, resulting in new interpretations.³³

In as much as a work of art can never duplicate the experience to which it refers, the installation can at least suggest the experience and be available as a space for viewers to experience ecstasy.³⁴ The work is not validated only when the experience takes place;

³² Validation strategies are dependent upon the methodology used throughout the research. The eclectic mixture of methodologies used in this research calls for validation strategies that utilize reflection and interpretation. (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2001, pg. 59).

³³ Feedback documents alternative interpretations of the same space. See appendix IX.

³⁴ De Man wrote, "unmediated expression is a philosophical impossibility" and "individuals who chose to ignore this fundamental convention would be slated for crucifixion or ridicule". See *The Crisis of Contemporary Criticism in Aesthetics Today* Morris Philipson and Paul J. Gudel, Eds., pgs. 337-351, 1980. If this is the case then all expression is by substitution and any attempt to convey transcendent and ineffable states would be futile.

but when the conditions exist for the experience to take place. The multimedia installation provides those conditions.

3.7 Connections, reflections and new meanings

The artwork was not created in a vacuum and as a result levels of reflection, connections and interpretations occur.³⁵ *The Interconnectedness of All Things* becomes not only the title for one of the works of art, but a term that encompasses the entirety of the research. The temporal quality of the film and performance within the space containing abstract expressions in which the arrangement of color, shape, and texture are the symbols for the journey and experience, come together in *The Circle Way* to engage the viewer. *The Circle Way* implies journey by the arrangement of the circles in the space; stilling the mind in the arrangement of the compositional elements; oneness as indicated in the film, and availability as a place to experience ecstasy, through provision of the installation as a meditative space. All of the themes explored in *Homage to the One* come together in one visual statement in *The Circle Way*.

A characteristic of reflexive practice lies in the connection between Gablik's proposal that the capacity to educate, illuminate and heal is necessary for art with social value and the chosen mediums in *The Circle Way*.³⁶ When uniting performance on film and abstraction in an immersive space, *The Circle Way* can be shown to fulfill these three criteria. This is not to say that art can never convey the nature of the ecstatic experience when multiple media are not present, only that art that uses the chosen media

³⁵ Alvesson and Skoldberg (2000, pg. 247-50) suggest that reflection occurs when one level of thought is confronted by another and reflexive, when the levels are reflected in one another.

³⁶ The work is not specifically concerned with social issues; however Gablik's criteria can also be applied to *The Circle Way*. See Gablik's online lecture, *Paradigm Spinning and Visionary Criticism: A Personal Profile* at http://streams.wgbh.org/forum/forum.php?lecture_id=1277.

can satisfy Gablik's criteria and can be interpreted as having a higher probability of conveying the ecstatic experience.

Other connections exist. Heuristic inquiry itself reflects the stages involved in reaching ecstasy, reflected further in the film; the arrangement of compositional elements within the space, and the multiple mediums used to educate, illuminate and heal.³⁷

The union of methodologies and the triangulation of qualitative and quantitative studies reflect the nature of the final project that unites media in order to convincingly express the ecstatic experience in contemporary visual form.

The union of compositional elements to form convincing abstract works of art within the installation reflects the nature of the multiple media used, the multidimensional approach used to validate, and the multilevel personal aesthetic used to guide the making of the work. The mix of new technology, contemporary abstract forms and ancient encaustic represent a bridge between the old and new.

Connections are not static. New knowledge is generated every time persons enter the installation and engage with the work.³⁸ *The Circle Way* makes spatial and temporal connections with painted forms, space, film, artist and viewer. One participant in the e-mail survey wrote about *The Circle Way*, ". . . it actually added to the engagement of the

³⁷ See Moustakas (1990) about the heuristic method. Immersion and incubation together involve a purge of outside stimuli in order to allow for illuminations to happen. Explication is equated with union where full understanding is gained.

³⁸ Different interpretations of the work are possible generating new meanings and new knowledge. Shamanism and ritual space are two topics that arose during discussions at the Expressive Arts Institute. Healing is a significant aspect of shamanism; see Weiss, 1995. If *The Circle Way*, or any installation for that matter, is used as a meditative space, healing occurs. The artist can then be interpreted as a shaman. See 3.2.3 on page 84, *Immersion as healing*. When viewers utilize the space as intended, *The Circle Way* installation becomes a ritual space.

imagination, and thereby raised new curiosities, rather than clarifying the purpose of the work". His statement reaffirms what the artist/researcher can expect to accomplish with practice-based research in art; new meanings are revealed.

Goodman (1976, pg. 260) asserts that no work of art is universal in appeal and understanding and what we see when we view art varies with what we bring to it. Each of the nine circles in *The Circle Way* can stand alone as meditation devices. However, it is only as an installation unit that the work can possibly engage the viewer as intended.

CHAPTER 4

CRITICAL REVIEW AND CONCLUSION¹

4.1 Results of the research

The research revealed a number of important concepts about the expression of the ecstatic experience in contemporary visual form. Many predecessors, especially in the modernist tradition and more specifically abstract expressionism², claimed to be able to directly communicate the ecstatic experience in visual art. However, the research reveals that expressions are substitutions for authentic experience for both the artist and the viewer and ecstasy is understood through direct experience. The availability of a performative space for the experience then becomes a condition for the comprehensive expression of ecstasy.

The evidence presented in this document suggests that alone, the mediums in *The Circle Way* are shown to be inadequate to convey the experience, but when united, form a more compelling expression of the ecstatic experience. Performance on film, abstract expression, and immersion are linked with education, illumination and healing respectively revealing an interactive relationship for a more convincing expression of the ecstatic experience. The research makes a case for the inclusion of film in lieu of text to inform, immersive space for 'experience' of ecstasy, and abstract forms as

¹ This chapter discusses steps 11 and 12 of the methodology, a reflection upon reflection and recommendations for future research.

² See a reference to Rothko on page 77.

meditation tools to achieve ecstasy and convincingly triangulates theory with data collection methods to show that the artwork expresses ecstasy. Validation is found when the experiences of the viewers and the examiners support the theory. Viewer comprehension indicates that the work is not validated only when the experience takes place; but when the conditions exist for the experience to take place. *The Circle Way* provides those conditions.

4.2 Original contributions to knowledge

The research represents the first analysis to test and reveal the importance of the immersive space as a component in the comprehensive expression of the ecstatic experience. Uniting the immersive space for 'experience' with technology vis-à-vis the performance on film, yet maintaining a link to 'handmade' works of art to express ecstasy represents an innovative approach in a long legacy of artwork that takes as its subject the ecstatic experience, recognizing the importance of all three as essential to the expression. The work provides an original way of understanding the ecstatic experience and a unique way of expressing it. The collection and interpretation of data that generated the research in the first place illustrates how new knowledge is born of personal meaning. Specifically, interpretations of predecessor's work led to the development of the innovative approach for the expression of the ecstatic experience.

The research investigates the effectiveness of specific features to express not only ecstasy, but ineffable subject matter. The research employs an innovative approach to structuring the research for a practice-based exploration. The research contributes to

the understanding of the relationship between abstract art and the expression of the ecstatic experience.

4.3 Further research for future researchers

Future research may involve the investigation of 'virtual experience' as a component in the expression of the experience. Could provision of a 'virtual experience' replace a 'real experience'? Can this ensure that the nature of the experience will be conveyed in new and novel ways for new generations? Other future investigations may include computer animation as a substitution for real performance and an investigation of computer generated imagery in lieu of hand-rendered artwork to insure that the expression of the ecstatic experience continues to be of interest to future generations of researchers.

Goodman argues that perceptions are determined by frame of reference, visual experience and conditioning, and that we are brought up to accept those conventions current in the society into which we are born (1976, pg. 14, pg. 90). Carter suggests, that there is never one true meaning to the work (1990, pg. 135). These assertions suggest that even though ecstasy has been shown in Chapter 2 to be a universal experience, it will be expressed quite differently by different people. How do gender, age, culture, economic conditions, and education affect the visual expression of the ecstatic experience? If artists create work using the features in Table 1 to express the experience, will patterns emerge? As the world connects through the Internet, local social conventions and symbols transfer quickly from one group to another and can become nearly universal. Will there be similarities in the expression because of the

interconnectedness available on the Web? Research that looks at these questions is needed.

The impact that doctoral level research is having upon art is not fully understood at this time. An examination of the quality and content of research art is necessary for the future of the discipline and art production in general. Further research is needed to determine the effect practice-based research is having upon the production and perception of art.

4.3.1 Future personal enquiries

The Circle Way sustained extensive damage during shipping to the US after presenting at De Montfort University in September 2005. Two exhibitions scheduled for 2006 had to be postponed until the work is repaired. In the mean time, teaching Zen inspired drawing classes as a means to continue the research in the public arena and an accompanying text are planned.

The ecstatic experience has been part of human existence for thousands of years and the more we come to understand it through science, religion, philosophy, art and history the closer we come to understanding our place in the universe.

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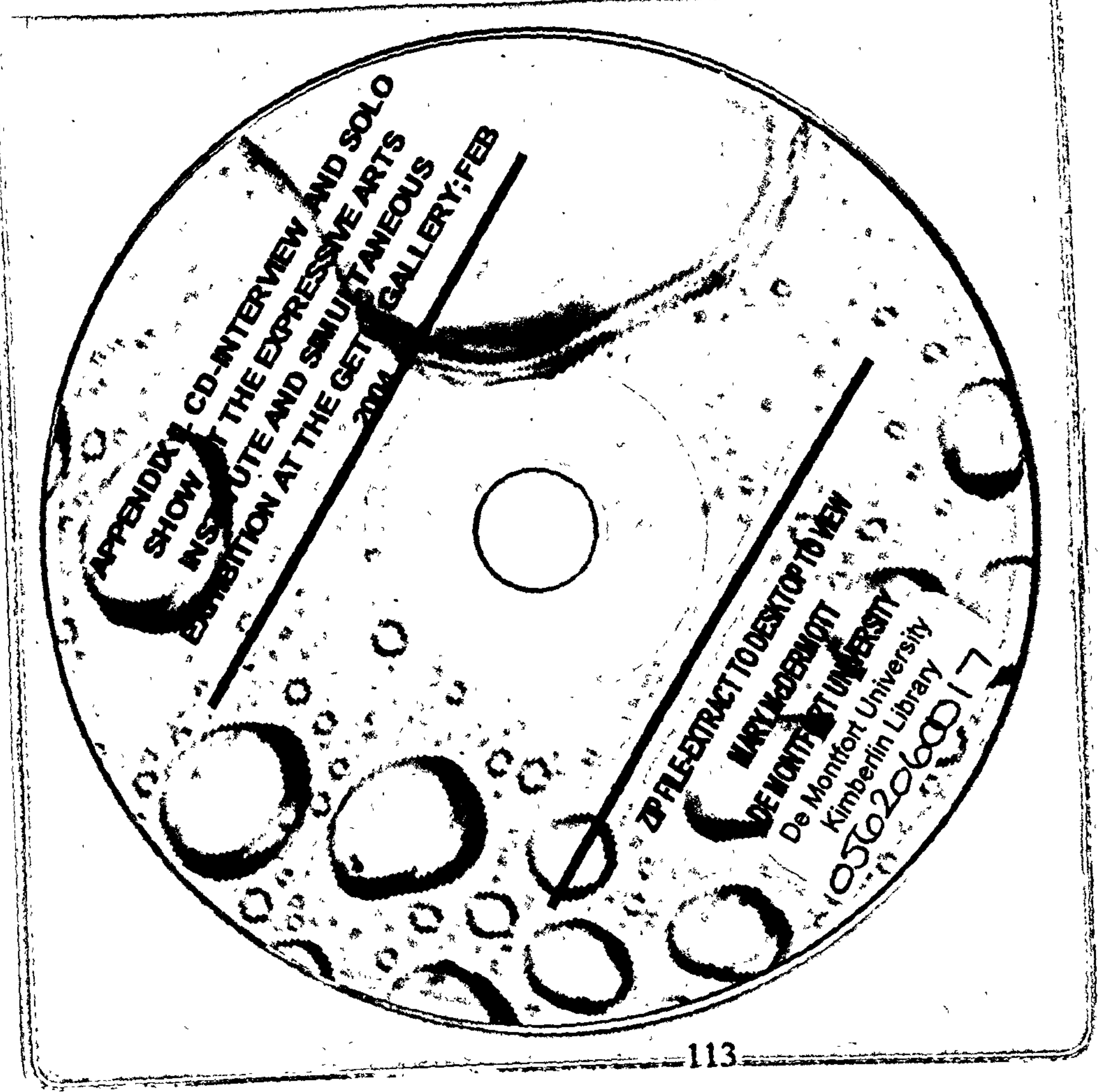
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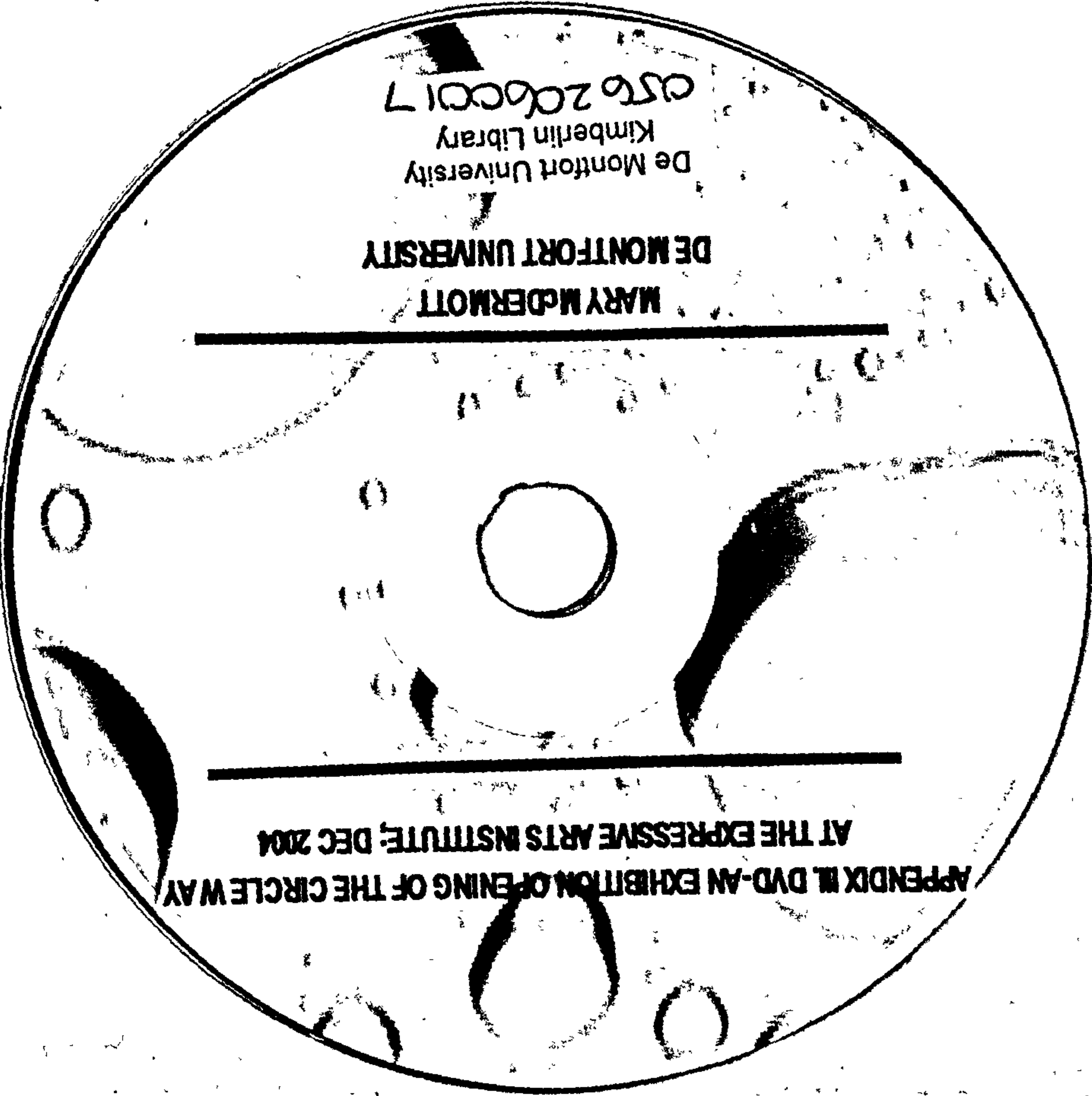
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APPENDICES





BEST COPY

AVAILABLE

Poor text in the original
thesis.

Some text bound close to
the spine.

Some images distorted

Homage to the One

Artist Mary McDermott's work suggests a way of witnessing the world meditatively as interconnected, in both space and time. Her recent exhibitions have focused upon ideas of continuing the deep tradition of spiritual and ecstatic art, and its most recent component abstraction.

For most of the history of western art, spiritual content was conveyed through symbolism and focused upon the exaltation of a particular deity. In medieval illumination, figures were sized according to their spiritual importance, so that in paintings, Christ towered above the disciples, while still smaller was the common man. With the discovery of perspective, these 'hierarchical sizes' disappeared, but religious symbolism became even more common, with images such as St. George slaying a dragon serving as metaphor for defeating sin. This branch of spiritual art continues today, but often feels un-enlightened, crowded with the baggage of monotheistic tradition, outmoded by the current diversity of culture and belief.

In her statement below, Mary cites *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* by Wassily Kandinsky as an influence, but it is clear that her process owes much to eastern tradition and philosophy as well, with its recognition of the human as being 'of nature' rather than in nature. Kandinsky envisioned art as a tool to enlighten society, and making change in spiritual awareness and artists as the logical and necessary leaders of the spiritual growth and vision in society. Mary's concept of the 'One' suppresses concern about society with an understanding that human society is a small component of a larger universe with which it is intimately connected. Mary writes:

Art has always been about external manifestation of inner truth. Humans have struggled to create a language of visual imagery in order to express this truth since the Paleolithic Age. Many scholars suggest prehistoric hunter-gatherers attributed magical properties to the images they painted on caves at Lascaux, France and elsewhere.

In Ancient Egypt, a preoccupation with the afterlife prompted the building of grandiose temples elaborately and luxuriously decorated. Greeks and later Romans created fabulous statues to honor gods. For centuries in Europe, artists painted and sculpted master works with one theme-religion.

For the last 100 years or so abstraction in art has found a voice and in 1911, Kandinsky's *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* was published. Kandinsky was convinced that painting should grow from what he termed 'inner necessity'. He believed the decisive factor in the creation of a picture should be the inner voice of the artist and viewed this inner voice as the ultimate authority. Mondrian believed that abstract art was the key to his enlightenment. Malevich and Fischinger worked toward visual representation of the Fourth Dimension. Rothko created large abstract paintings in an effort to elicit an ecstatic experience in the viewer. Beuys, like Kandinsky, believed art to have healing power. Kandinsky's influence is widespread and still relevant today.

For abstract art to continue to have relevance in the twenty first century, it must transcend materialistic society, be concerned with the past and present, eastern and western tradition, and most importantly the human and divine.

About the Medium: Encaustic is a painting technique in which pigment is mixed with wax and applied to a surface while hot. The wax paint used in the process is also referred to as encaustic.

Mary McDermott's recent work is in encaustic and is concerned with expressing the ecstatic experience in contemporary visual form. This 'mystical state' is a pure understanding of the interconnectedness of all things, when all is in balance, and past and future are of no consequence. In this state there is a sense of harmony with all things. The experience itself is as natural as taking a breath, and in fact can be brought about by controlled breathing while meditating. It is not elusive and is accessible to all.

The Circle Way

My work has always been about the cycle of pain and redemption. *The Circle Way* attempts to convey the redemptive nature of the ecstatic experience with abstract forms, installation and performance.

This series of mixed media canvases, *Circle 1 through 9*, were influenced by American abstract expressionists of the 1950's and 60s, particularly Mark Rothko, Barnett Newman and Jackson Pollock who believed that expressionism could be used to project visual ideas and shapes and colors could be symbols.

The installation is an attempt to make available to the viewer a sublime space conducive to meditation. Performance is used as a tool to inform the viewer of the nature of the work.

In as much as a work of art can never duplicate an experience or event to which it refers, the installation can at least suggest and be available as a space for contemplation that can ultimately lead to the ecstatic experience.

Appendix VII
Selection of postcards announcing exhibition openings.

Mary McDermott is an artist/educator living in California with her husband of 27 years and 2 of her 4 children. She has been producing, exhibiting and selling her paintings and jewelry to galleries, dealers, and collectors for over 25 years. She is originally from New York where she received a B.A. from Queens College of the City University of New York. After moving to California, she decided to obtain an M. A. from California State University Dominguez Hills in order to teach. She now teaches drawing courses at the Art Institute of California San Diego and art history courses at The Art Institute Online. She is working toward the completion of a PhD in Fine Art-Painting at De Montfort University in Leicester, England.

All profits from the sales of the encaustic paintings in the **Homage to the One Exhibition** go to either the **San Diego Rescue Mission** or **Saint Vincent De Paul Village**. These and other works by the artist are on the web at <http://members.cox.net/mary10154>.

Price List of Encaustic Work

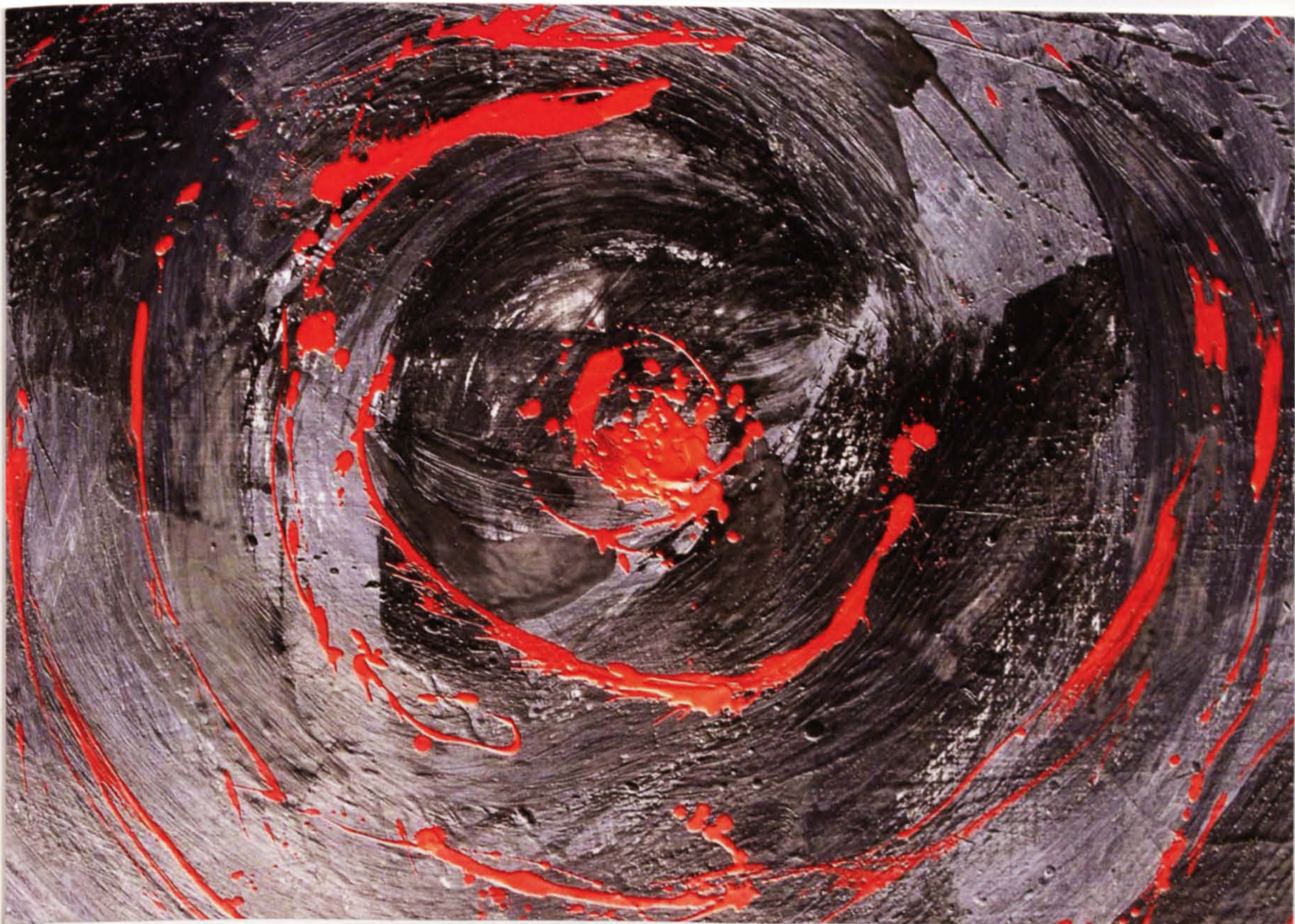
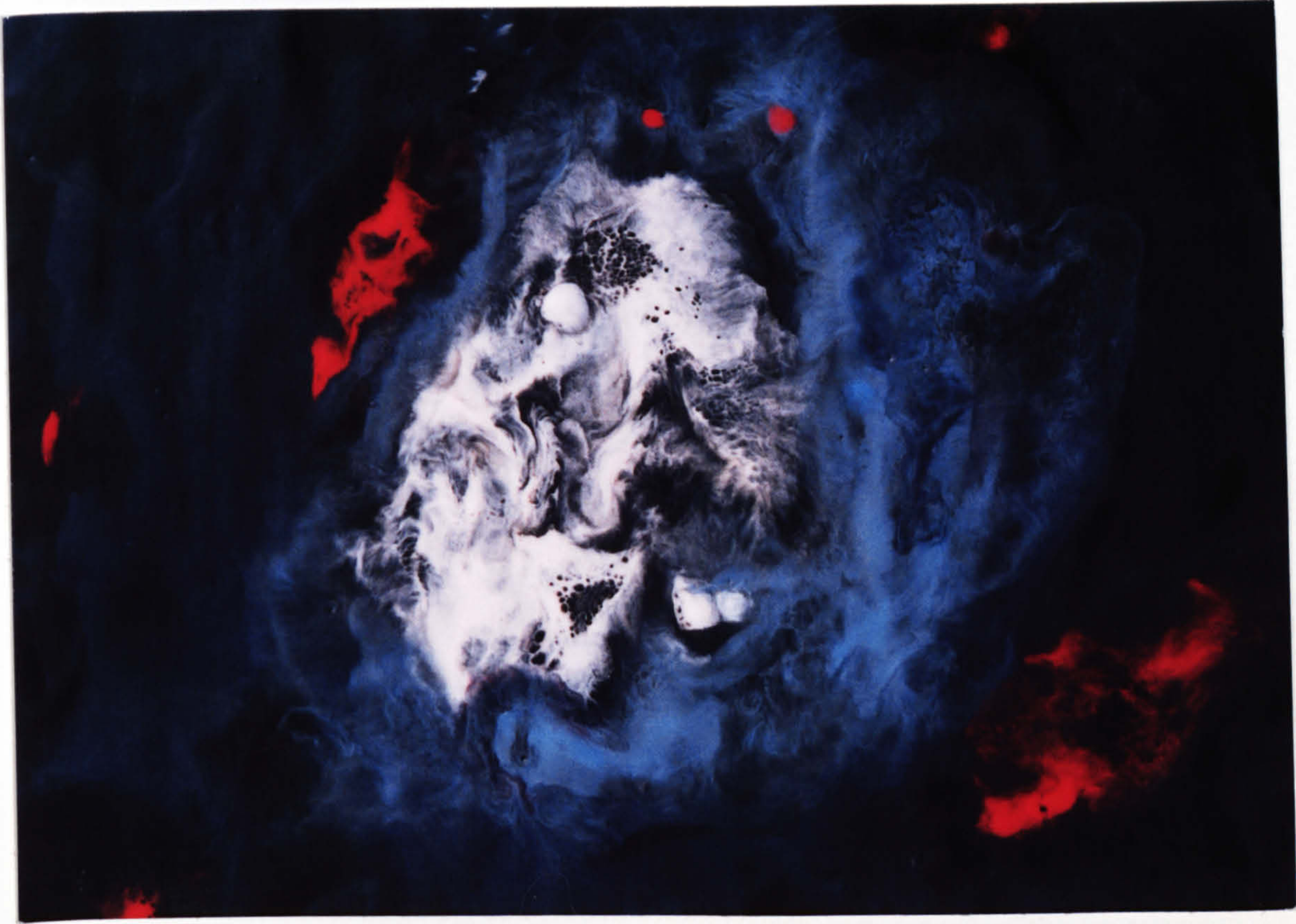
Anxiety Gives Way to a Sense of Calm	\$300
Enso I, II or III	\$250 each
Green Revelation	\$1000
Illusion of Duality	\$1000
Mother Mandala	\$500
Reliquary for John	\$1000
Revelation I	\$250
Revelation II	\$500
Souls	\$1000
Tantric Device	\$250
The Interconnectedness of All Things I	\$1500
Untitled Triptych	\$1000

**Any experimental and impermanent pieces in the collection or those on loan from private collectors are not for sale.*

Appendix VII
Selection of postcards announcing exhibition openings.



Appendix VII
Selection of postcards announcing exhibition openings.



Appendix VIII
Permission to use Spaceman 3 soundtrack for performance DVD.

71 Leanna Street
Chula Vista CA 91911
January 4, 2004

Adasam Ltd
PO Box 8
Corby, Northamptonshire, England
NN17 2XZ

Dear Steve,

I am writing to obtain permission to use *How Does it Feel?* from *Playing with Fire* by Spaceman 3 as a DVD soundtrack for educational purposes. I am working on a PhD in fine art/painting at De Montfort University in Leicester, England and will be submitting nine paintings and a DVD as my final project in September of 2005. I would like to use *How Does it Feel?* in a continuous loop DVD of a performance that takes place in and accompanies the abstract paintings. The music will in no way be used for profit or monetary gain and your permission will be noted in the dissertation. Thank you in advance for your approval to use the music.

Sincerely,

Mary McDermott

Main Identity

From: "Adasam" <adasam@adasam.co.uk>
To: "Mary McDermott" <mary10154@cox.net>
Sent: Wednesday, January 05, 2005 8:29 AM
Subject: Re: Use of music

Dear Mary,

Many thanks - the use as described in your letter is fine.

Kind regards,

Steve Kalidoski
Adasam Ltd
PO Box 8, Corby, Northamptonshire, England. NN17 2XZ
Tel. +44 (0)1536-202295
Fax. +44 (0)1536-266246
Email: steve@adasam.co.uk

— Original Message —

From: Mary_McDermott
To: Adasam
Sent: Wednesday, January 05, 2005 1:21 AM
Subject: Re: Use of music

Thank you, Steve.

I've attached a word document with all the requested information.

Sincerely,

Mary McDermott

— Original Message —

From: Adasam
To: Mary_McDermott
Sent: Tuesday, January 04, 2005 6:51 AM
Subject: Re: Use of music

Hi Mary,

This shouldn't be a problem but you do need to submit to me a request in writing with your mailing address and the tracks that you would like to use - an attached word document is fine.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Kind regards,

Steve Kalidoski
Adasam Ltd

1/5/2005

PO Box 8, Corby, Northamptonshire, England. NN17 2XZ

Tel. +44 (0)1536-202295

Fax. +44 (0)1536-266246

Email: steve@adasam.co.uk

— Original Message —

From: Mary_McDermott

To: enquiries@3rdstonerecords.com

Sent: Thursday, December 30, 2004 1:04 AM

Subject: Use of music

To whom it may concern,

I am writing to obtain permission to use music as a DVD soundtrack for educational purposes from a CD I recently purchased in the US from Taang Records entitled Playing With Fire by Spaceman 3. I am working on a PhD in fine art/painting at De Montfort University in Leicester, England and will be submitting nine paintings and a DVD as my final project in September of 2005. I would like to use one or two of the tracks from Playing with Fire in a continuous loop DVD of a performance that takes place in and accompanies the abstract paintings. The music will in no way be used for profit or monetary gain and your permission will be noted in the dissertation.

Thank you and I look forward to your response. If you need more information, please call (619) 427-6644.

Sincerely,

Mary McDermott

This email has been verified as Virus free
Virus Protection and more available at <http://www.plus.net>

This email has been verified as Virus free
Virus Protection and more available at <http://www.plus.net>

1/5/2005

PO Box 8, Corby, Northamptonshire, England. NN17 2XZ
Tel. +44 (0)1536-202295
Fax. +44 (0)1536-266246
Email: steve@adasam.co.uk

----- Original Message -----

From: Mary_McDermott
To: enquiries@3rdstonerecords.com
Sent: Thursday, December 30, 2004 1:04 AM
Subject: Use of music

To whom it may concern,

I am writing to obtain permission to use music as a DVD soundtrack for **educational purposes** from a CD I recently purchased in the US from Taang Records entitled Playing With Fire by Spaceman 3. I am working on a PhD in fine art/painting at De Montfort University in Leicester, England and will be submitting nine paintings and a DVD as my final project in September of 2005. I would like to use one or two of the tracks from Playing with Fire in a continuous loop DVD of a performance that takes place in and accompanies the abstract paintings. The music will in no way be used for profit or monetary gain and your permission will be noted in the dissertation.

Thank you and I look forward to your response. If you need more information, please call (619) 427-6644.

Sincerely,

Mary McDermott

This email has been verified as Virus free
Virus Protection and more available at <http://www.plus.net>

This email has been verified as Virus free
Virus Protection and more available at <http://www.plus.net>

1/5/2005

Appendix IX

Responses to an E-mail survey sent to participants attending two exhibitions and viewer comments recorded in an exhibition journal.

Main Identity

From: "Judith Greer Essex" <judith@arts4change.com>
To: "Mary McDermott" <mary10154@cox.net>
Sent: Tuesday, October 18, 2005 8:56 AM
Subject: Re: Did you receive my email?

At 05:31 PM 10/17/2005, you wrote:

Hello participant,
 HI Mary, I have a few more words to share.
 Thank you for answering two questions about exhibitions you attended in 2004.
 'Yes' or 'no' answers will suffice.

Question #1

Do you believe that the inclusion of performance in an immersive space in the installation entitled *The Circle Way* aided in the expression of the ecstatic (mystical) experience?

I am not a mystic in the usual sense. My "belief in things unseen" usually means the imagination, or the imaginal realm, where all images live. To me, estactic experiences involve some form of Dionysian surrender, meaning a participatory expereince; one cannot simply witness it and then also have the expereince. I do not think the dancer was estatic or surrendered, I did not have the expereince of witnessing such an experience. To me, the ecstatic and mystical are not synonymous. But after the long wind-up, to answer your question in one word - no.

Question #2

Do you believe that *Homage to the One*, a series of symbolic 2D and 3D works of art expressed the ecstatic (mystical) experience?

Again, in the case of the 2 and 3D works, I would be looking for the traces of the ecstatic experience in another. Unless I was a true believer and visiting the shrine of my saint or god, I doubt that viewing something would call forth in me the ecstatic experience - Grand Canyon and certain other landscapes being the exception. To me, as an expressive arts therapist, the ecstatic experience is a bodily felt one, I must have the experience in my senses and my own body. I really loved these paintings, wanted to be with them and hear what they had to say, especially the golden round ones called, I think, Souls. They were very evocative - perhaps a long meditation with them would have led me to my own imaginal dialogue - but in the setting as it was the answer was another - no.

When I think about my own experience with ecstasy I think minimally with the notion of a dramatic change inmy ordinary awareness. I can envision changes in the way the venue was set up and the way the performance was done that might actually get at the ecstatic expereince, but not as they were. But again, I loved these paintings, they are remarkable. I love the dialogue. Did YOU have the escatic experience with them? when? Have you had it with other 2D or 3D art forms? I certainly have.. Very best of luck with your research. I too am plugging along!

Judith Greer Essex

10/18/2005

Main Identity

From: "Ellyn Norris" <ellynnorris@gmail.com>
To: "Mary McDermott" <mary10154@cox.net>
Sent: Monday, October 24, 2005 12:47 PM
Subject: Re: quick survey about my exhibitions in 2004

On 10/7/05, Mary McDermott <mary10154@cox.net> wrote:
Hello participant,

Thank you for answering two questions about exhibitions you attended in 2004.
'Yes' or 'no' answers will suffice.

Question #1

Do you believe that the inclusion of performance in an immersive space in the installation entitled *The Circle* aided in the expression of the ecstatic (mystical) experience? Yes, the performance made it feel temporal which I feel is a form of mysticism in itself.

Question #2

Do you believe that *Homage to the One*, a series of symbolic 2D and 3D works of art expressed the ecstatic (mystical) experience? Yes, these pieces evoked emotions even though they were abstract.

Thank you for your prompt reply to these questions.

Sincerely,

Mary McDermott

Ellyn Norris, Faculty
The Art Institute Online
ellynnorris@gmail.com

10/24/2005

Main Identity

From: "Wes Chester" <wes@arts4change.com>
To: "Mary McDermott" <mary10154@cox.net>
Sent: Tuesday, October 18, 2005 10:32 AM
Subject: Re: Did you receive my email?

Dear Mary,

Thanks for your patience. It has been a long 10 weeks of daily work, so I'm just getting back to you now, because I have time to address the questions with some I hope salient responses.

#1. I would not use the language of *mystical* or *ecstatic*, because of the philosophy I have about art. I believe what occurred in the performance is an engagement of the viewers imagination, through subjective entry into *liminal space*. The term comes to be important in the understanding of ritual from the work of Victor Turner, and originally appeared in the work of Arnold Van Gennep a sociologist working in the 1960's, who studied ritual in culture. He's the man who coined the phrase "rites of passage" and I think the strong ritual nature of the performance, along with the structure of it had a strong element of such a rite of passage. A single person separating from the crowd, and entering ritual space, journeying deeper into that territory. The word limin, which is Latin for threshold, and so in rituals of imagination in our field, we use the expression "to enter liminal space." The *liminal condition* is defined by Turner to be "a place where all familiar structures have been given up and new ones have not yet appeared." (all this is taken pp. 39-51 from Paolo J. Knill, Ellen Levine and Steven Levine's, Principles and Practice of Expressive Arts Therapy: Toward a Therapeutic Aesthetics, 2005, Jessica Kingsley Press) So we pass from our day-to-day reality into liminal space whenever we enter the imaginal realm, and to that extent, I think the performance was **highly successful** in engaging the public in a journey into their own imaginal.

In essence, your question seems to be: "Did the performance enhance expression of meaning in the installation?" I'd say it actually added to the engagement of the imagination, and thereby raised new curiosities, rather than clarifying the purpose of the work. I think the transmission of meaning by any artwork, even representational work is highly unlikely. (Take one of histories most notable failures, Barnett Newman's *Stations of the Cross*) It does not mean that art isn't meaningful to you or to others. It does mean that the likelihood that it will evoke for another the same resonant response as your own, or as the one you intend is largely random chance. And transmitting your experience is impossible.

#2) Maybe part of my thinking here is, that the ecstatic experience is inexpressible, precisely because it is an experience (and therefore subjective), so that your personal vocabulary is likely to be most effective for you in the form of a diary of heuristic experience. A kind of arts-based research on the ecstatic.(see Moustakas on heuristic research). We love this kind of research in our field. The other read on the questions is, "Did the performance and paintings help YOU express the ecstatic experience?" And of course, only you know the answer to that. I found both shows to be very engaging aesthetic experiences, which enlivened my imagination, and pleased my senses. And with the accompanying text, they did create a discourse on ecstasy and mysticism among the viewers. And I think that's all anyone could ask of an art experience.

Hope the dissertation's going well.

Cheers,
 Wes

Main Identity

From: "Caveney, Larry" <lcaveney@aui.edu>
To: "Mary McDermott" <mary10154@cox.net>
Sent: Monday, October 17, 2005 9:44 AM
Subject: RE: quick survey about my exhibitions in 2004

Larry Caveney
Assistant Academic Director
858-598-1353

From: Mary McDermott [mailto:mary10154@cox.net]
Sent: Friday, October 07, 2005 8:35 PM
To: don mcdermott; Wes Chester; Judith Greer Essex; Ellyn Norris; Caveney, Larry; amanda schaffer; sean mcdermott!!!!; shezready4action@hotmail.com; martin mcdermott; Contact; mary10154
Subject: quick survey about my exhibitions in 2004
Importance: High

Hello participant,

Thank you for answering two questions about exhibitions you attended in 2004.
'Yes' or 'no' answers will suffice.

Question #1

Do you believe that the inclusion of performance in an immersive space in the installation entitled *The Circle Way* aided in the expression of the ecstatic (mystical) experience?
Due to the event being staged within a familiar space (gallery) the 'ecstatic' experience was too pre-described.

Question #2

Do you believe that *Homage to the One*, a series of symbolic 2D and 3D works of art expressed the ecstatic (mystical) experience?

I had no mystical experience; although the presentation was good.

Thank you for your prompt reply to these questions.

Sincerely,

Mary McDermott

CONFIDENTIALITY NOTICE: This email and any files transmitted with it are confidential and

10/17/2005

Main Identity

From: "Don McDermott" <dogm44@cox.net>
To: "Mary McDermott" <mary10154@cox.net>
Sent: Saturday, October 08, 2005 10:54 AM
Subject: Re: quick survey about my exhibitions in 2004

#1) Yes, the space affected me. I felt a sense of inclusion, or immersion if you will, which enhanced my enjoyment of the exhibition. The universality of the symbolism of the circles required no explanation.

#2) No. Although the elements indicating that the artist was concerned with the experience were present, and I could relate some of the pieces, for example, Winter Meditation and Cloud of Unknowing (and others as well,) to my own experiences, the symbols required a particular sphere of reference to be effective.

— Original Message —

From: Mary McDermott
To: don mcdermott ; Wes Chester ; Judith Greer Essex ; Ellyn Norris ; Caveney, Larry ; amanda schaffer ; sean mcdermott!!!! ; shezready4action@hotmail.com ; martin mcdermott ; Mary McDermott
Sent: Friday, October 07, 2005 8:35 PM
Subject: quick survey about my exhibitions in 2004

Hello participant,

Thank you for answering two questions about exhibitions you attended in 2004.
'Yes' or 'no' answers will suffice.

Question #1

Do you believe that the inclusion of performance in an immersive space in the installation entitled *The Circle* Way aided in the expression of the ecstatic (mystical) experience?

Question #2

Do you believe that *Homage to the One*, a series of symbolic 2D and 3D works of art expressed the ecstatic (mystical) experience?

Thank you for your prompt reply to these questions.

Sincerely,

Mary McDermott

Main Identity

From: "sean mcdermott!!!!" <lazer_mczap@hotmail.com>
To: <mary10154@cox.net>
Sent: Saturday, October 08, 2005 5:17 PM
Subject: RE: quick survey about my exhibitions in 2004

yes no

>From: "Mary McDermott" <mary10154@cox.net>
>To: "don mcdermott" <dogm44@cox.net>,"Wes Chester"
><wes@arts4change.com>,"Judith Greer Essex" <judith@arts4change.com>,"Ellyn
>Norris" <ellynnorris@gmail.com>,"Caveney, Larry" <lcaveney@aui.edu>,"amanda
>schaffer" <schaffer_amanda@yahoo.com>,"sean mcdermott!!!!"
><lazer_mczap@hotmail.com>,<shezready4action@hotmail.com>,"martin mcdermott"
><FeeBeezer@aol.com>,"Mary McDermott" <mary10154@cox.net>
>Subject: quick survey about my exhibitions in 2004
>Date: Fri, 7 Oct 2005 20:35:15 -0700

>

>Hello participant,

>

>Thank you for answering two questions about exhibitions you attended in
>2004.

> 'Yes' or 'no' answers will suffice.

>

>Question #1

>

>Do you believe that the inclusion of performance in an immersive space in
>the installation entitled The Circle Way aided in the expression of the
>ecstatic (mystical) experience?

>

>

>Question #2

>

>Do you believe that Homage to the One, a series of symbolic 2D and 3D works
>of art expressed the ecstatic (mystical) experience?

>

>

>

>Thank you for your prompt reply to these questions.

>

>

>Sincerely,

>

>

>Mary McDermott

>

>

Main Identity

From: <FeeBeezer@aol.com>
To: <mary10154@cox.net>
Sent: Saturday, October 08, 2005 8:54 PM
Subject: Re: quick survey about my exhibitions in 2004

In a message dated 10/7/2005 8:35:29 PM Pacific Standard Time, mary10154@cox.net writes:

Hello participant,

Thank you for answering two questions about exhibitions you attended in 2004.
'Yes' or 'no' answers will suffice.

Question #1

Do you believe that the inclusion of performance in an immersive space in the installation entitled *The Circle Way* aided in the expression of the ecstatic (mystical) experience?

YES

Question #2

Do you believe that *Homage to the One*, a series of symbolic 2D and 3D works of art expressed the ecstatic (mystical) experience?

YES

Thank you for your prompt reply to these questions.

Sincerely,

Mary McDermott

Main Identity

From: "Maggie McDermott" <shezready4action@hotmail.com>
To: <mary10154@cox.net>
Sent: Wednesday, January 25, 2006 1:28 PM
Subject: RE: Fw: quick survey about my exhibitions in 2004

>>>From: "Mary McDermott" <mary10154@cox.net>
>>>To: "don mcdermott" <dogm44@cox.net>,"Wes Chester"
>>><wes@arts4change.com>,"Judith Greer Essex"
>>><judith@arts4change.com>,"Ellyn Norris" <ellynnorris@gmail.com>,"Caveney,
>>>Larry" <lcaveney@aui.edu>,"amanda schaffer"
>>><schaffer_amanda@yahoo.com>,"sean mcdermott!!!!"
>>><lazer_mczap@hotmail.com>,<shezready4action@hotmail.com>,"martin
>>>mcdermott" <FeeBeezer@aol.com>,"Mary McDermott" <mary10154@cox.net>
>>>Subject: quick survey about my exhibitions in 2004
>>>Date: Fri, 7 Oct 2005 20:35:15 -0700

>>>
>>>Hello participant,
>>>
>>>Thank you for answering two questions about exhibitions you attended in
>>>2004.

>>> 'Yes' or 'no' answers will suffice.

>>>

>>>Question #1

>>>

>>>Do you believe that the inclusion of performance in an immersive space in
>>>the installation entitled The Circle Way aided in the expression of the
>>>ecstatic (mystical) experience?

>>>Yes. I understood the significance of the circles in the space after
>>>seeing the performance.

>>>

>>>Question #2

>>>

>>>Do you believe that Homage to the One, a series of symbolic 2D and 3D
>>>works of art expressed the ecstatic (mystical) experience?

>>>Yes. I had to read all of the titles of the work to understand their
>>>meaning. The artist explained during the exhibition of The Circle Way
>>>that there were no titles because the performance took the place of the
>>>titles. I felt the Circle way was a total visual experience.

>>>

>>>Thank you for your prompt reply to these questions.

>>>

>>>

>>>Sincerely,

>>>

>>>

1/25/2006

Main Identity

From: "amanda schaffer" <schaffer_amanda@yahoo.com>
To: "Mary McDermott" <mary10154@cox.net>
Sent: Tuesday, October 11, 2005 7:48 PM
Subject: Re: quick survey about my exhibitions in 2004

Mary, here's answers to your survey - Amanda

Question #1 - yes
Question #2 - yes

Mary McDermott <mary10154@cox.net> wrote:

Hello participant,

Thank you for answering two questions about exhibitions you attended in 2004.
'Yes' or 'no' answers will suffice.

Question #1

Do you believe that the inclusion of performance in an immersive space in the installation entitled *The Circle Way* aided in the expression of the ecstatic (mystical) experience?

Question #2

Do you believe that *Homage to the One*, a series of symbolic 2D and 3D works of art expressed the ecstatic (mystical) experience?

Thank you for your prompt reply to these questions.

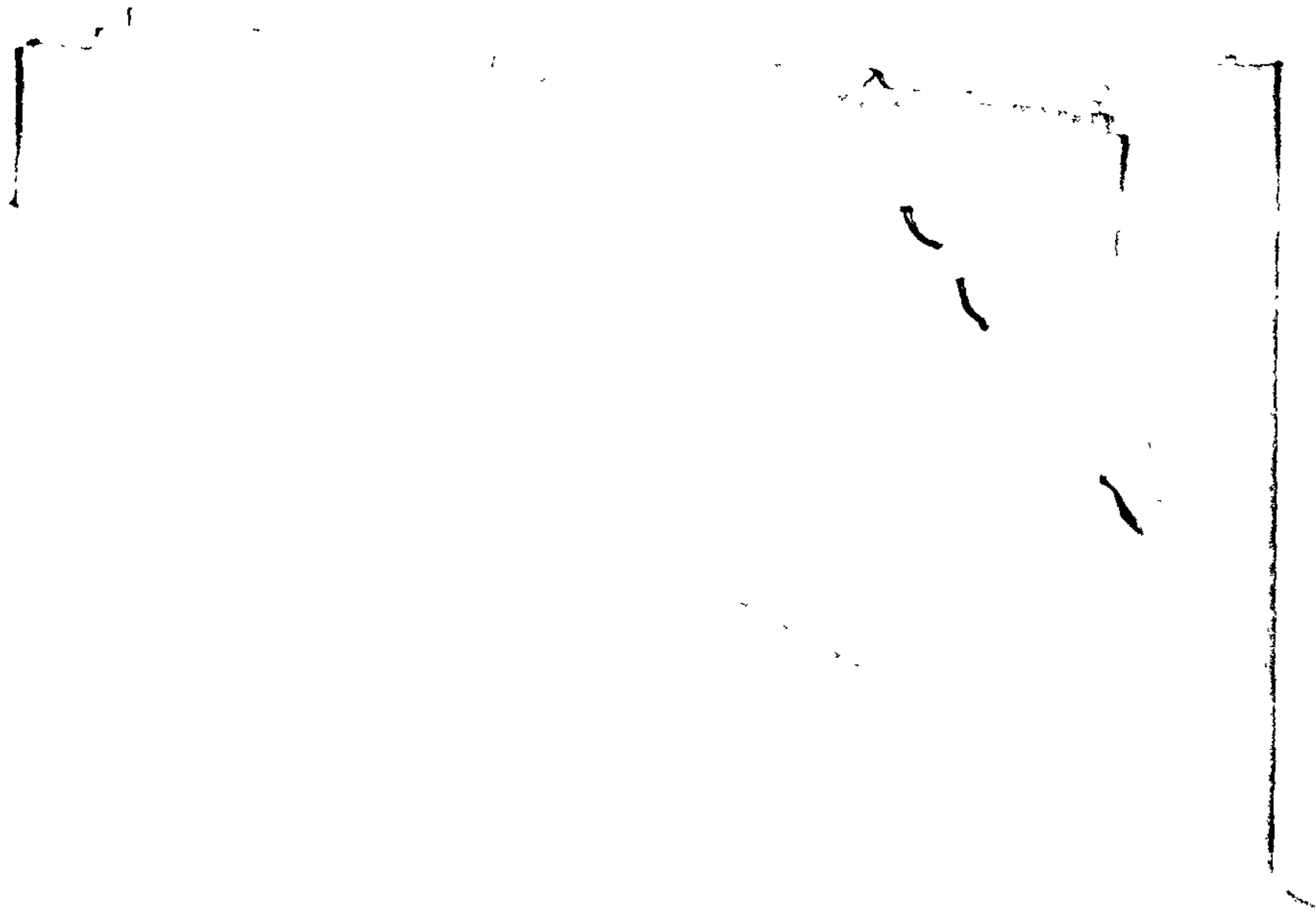
Sincerely,

Mary McDermott

Yahoo! Music Unlimited - Access over 1 million songs. Try it free.

10/11/2005

Appendix IX continued



Amazing as always!
Love the depth you
have achieved in color
very moving. Show me
your video. Elyn

What a fabulous
Use of color
and space!

Enjoyed the
work
immensely!
RFP

Great Show! Love your work
Tony Smith

It's unreal - good - int unreal
+ I love it! Anna.

you go girl!
- Ellen & Hillary &
Spray

Best of luck
Best of luck
you
I have you
Gene
I have you
Gene
I have you
Gene

Hey when
they show. When from the United States
and give it to me. w/stop

~~W/stop~~

Next Staff: ~~W/stop~~

PRETTY IMPRESSIVE.
I WISH I HAD THIS
MUCH TO SHOW!
- NICK SIMON

What a fabulous
use of color
and space!

Enjoyed the
work
can see why!

RFTM

Amazing as always!
Love the depth - you
have achieved in color
very moving. Show me
your notes. Eileen