

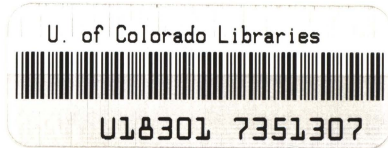
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GENDER UNIONS

by

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B.A., Princeton University, 1986

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A thesis submitted to the  
Faculty of the Graduate School of the  
University of Colorado in partial fulfillment  
of the requirement for the degree of  
Master of Fine Arts  
Department of Fine Arts, Creative Art  
1995

University of Colorado at Boulder



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This Thesis for the Master of Fine Arts degree by

Dennis J. Martinez

has been approved for the

Department of

Fine Arts

by

Kay Miller

Kay Miller

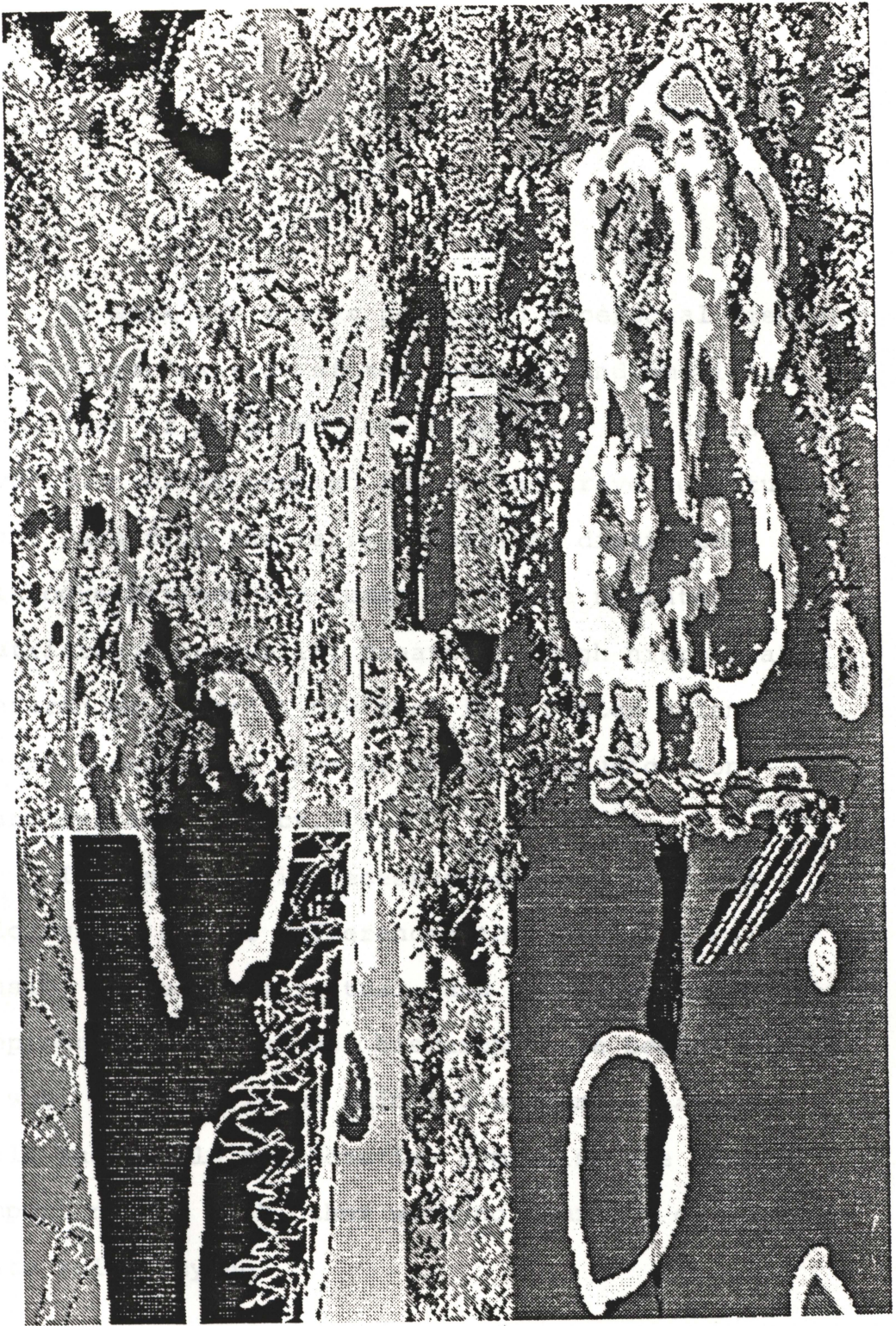
Celeste Rehm

Celeste Rehm

Gene Matthews

Gene Matthews

Date 4-19-95



THE REAL JOURNEY OF DISCOVERY IS NOT IN SEEKING  
NEW LANDSCAPES, BUT IN FORMING NEW VISIONS.

My work has always portrayed a personal viewpoint on the complexities of the physical and emotional specifics of male and female gender. The artistic evolution of my painted images has traveled a turbulent path from the representational distinction and dialogue between the sexes to a more narrative patriarchal inequality created through historical references. What I now feel is a better balanced, shared, and equal form of gender communication, harmony, and respect.

I have found it necessary to peel away the biological sexual differences to reveal a stronger basic, cellular, spiritual, and emotional commonality. Reproduction and gender hierarchy have become strong visual elements in my painting and installation. Male and female reproductive symbolism are equally important for each other with no dominant or subordinate role playing.



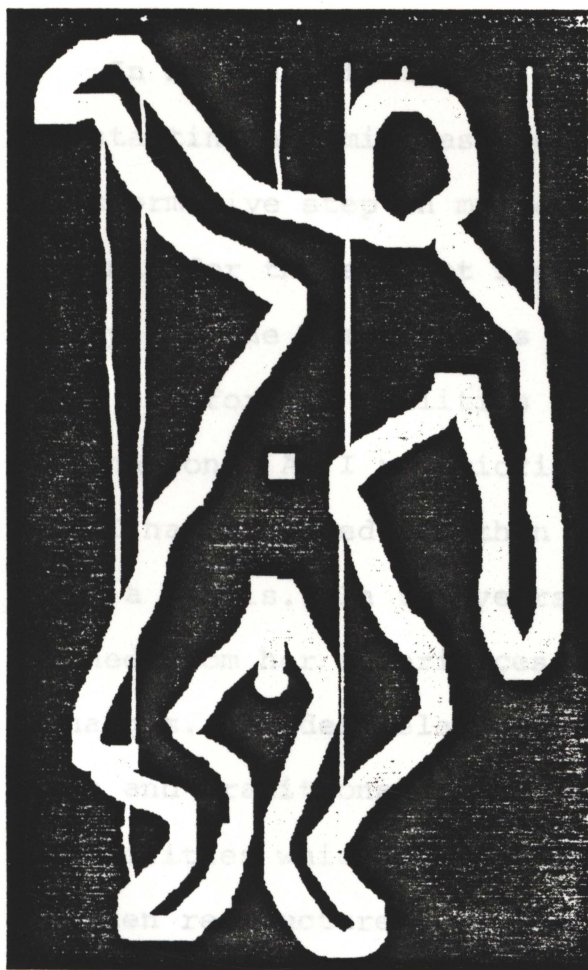
One extremely potent image and symbol I use repeatedly is the circle. This singular, interconnected structure peoples and cultures from the very beginnings of time have emulated, grasped, and ultimately defined for themselves. The circle has been thought of as symbolizing the point at which infinity meets and equals the empty set or void, or at which everything equals nothing. It is that point at which all sets of dichotomously opposed pairs are once and for all synthesized.<sup>2</sup>

In reproductive terms these circles can represent ovaries, eggs, sperm or testicles. Overall they are multi-faceted portrayals of the human body, mind, and spirit. They move, jump, and expand. They are full of life and vigor. They are the cells of creativity continuously forming and splitting. My circles possess both the magic and delicacy of a bubble. They are carried along by the wind with no certain path to journey and with no precise shape or size. Large or small, long or short, they are of equal strength and fragility left only to the wind for their destiny.

I want my artwork to address all these issues to reveal the energy and emotion they entail. I utilize these elements for I believe they add to the well-being of not just myself but everyone. I truly



believe it necessary for the post-modern artist to form a strong, personal, visual vocabulary and dwell less on the self. My images are intended to cross genders, races, cultures, classes, and religious beliefs. This enables me to look outward yet search the heart for answers.



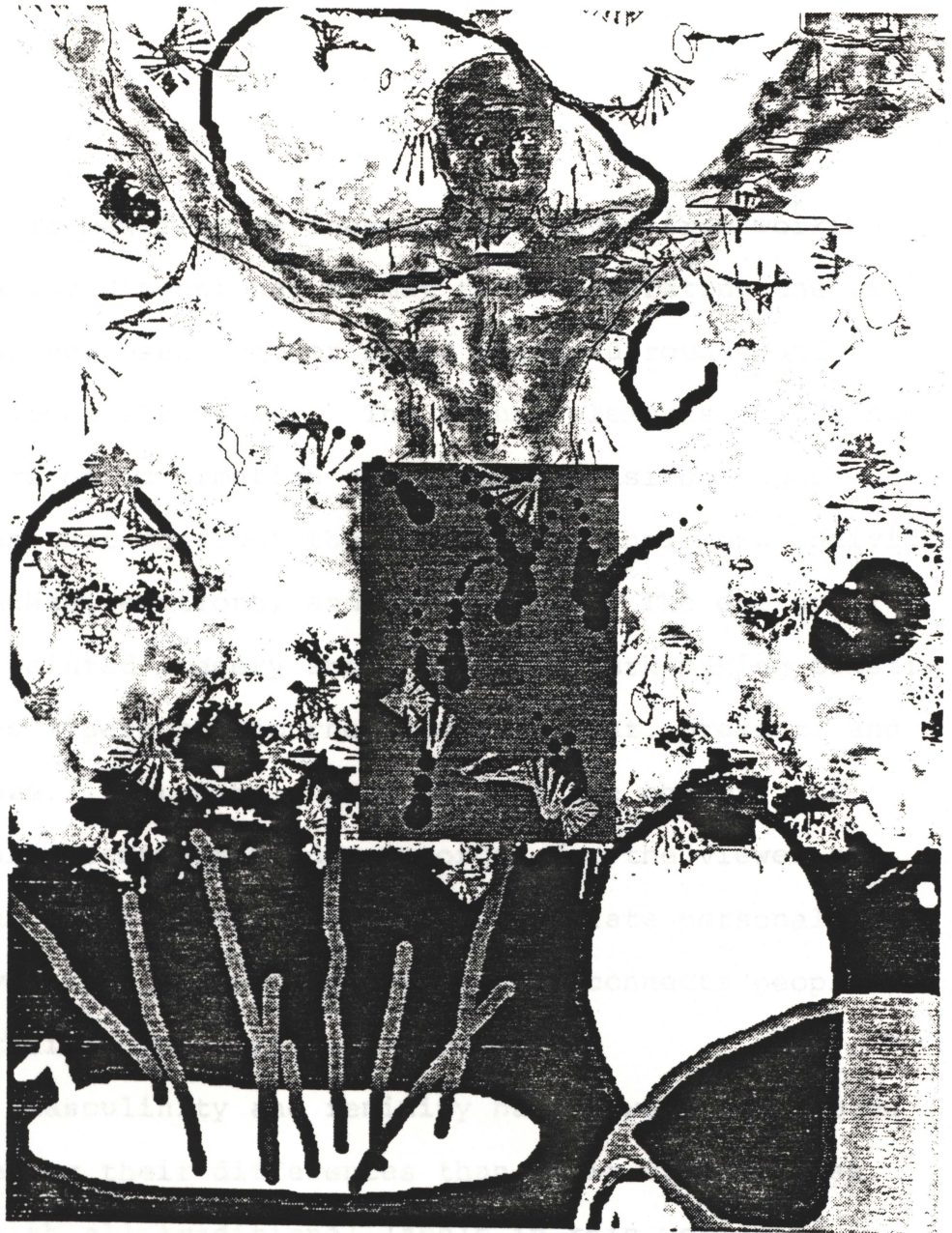
MAN IS NOT ONLY PHALLIC. HE COULD NOT BE TOLERATED AS PENETRATING IF HE WERE NOT ENVELOPING AT THE SAME TIME. SOCIETY IN GENERAL DOESN'T WANT TO KNOW ANY -  
THING ABOUT THIS POWER BECAUSE IT REACTIVATES A  
SORT OF DEEP FEMININE AND MATERNAL IDENTIFICATION.

In my own life I must attribute getting married and starting a family as the one greatest and most transformative step in my journey. This is important not only for the evident increase in personal responsibility and the complexities that accompany the situation, but for the realities I discovered in self-examination. As I re-prioritized the issues in my life I have learned and then created what I believe being a man is. In the years with my wife I have learned from her experiences as a woman in our daily exchanges. Gender relationships with their stereotypes and traditional conformities have become everyday familiarities which must be broken down, evaluated, and then restructured. I find myself doing this time and time again.

History has a funny way of working the mind toward its repeated viewpoint on sexual identification. My conclusion isn't to make a neutered society with the characteristics of a cold war, but to ignite a mutually acknowledged respect for the differences between the sexes. A good term for this learning process could be called "alternating dominance", as it can increase awareness without the imbalance of subordination on anyone's part. This can only be achieved when key roles are changed and exchanged knowingly between

two people.

The roles of gender and reproduction are also very complex issues that take on the brunt of my visual story. The attribution of sex tends to rely primarily on genital confirmation. A newborn baby is immediately defined in most, if not all cultures, as a boy or girl on the basis of its genitals. My images are male, female, both, or neither. I attempt to break the boundaries of human knowledge and perception to create a broader definition of equality and multiplicity as it applies to the essence of human sexual presence.



THIRTY SPOKES SHARE THE WHEELS HUB;  
IT IS THE CENTER HOLE THAT MAKES IT USEFUL.  
SHAPE CLAY INTO A VESSEL;  
IT IS THE SPACE WITHIN THAT MAKES IT USEFUL.  
CUT DOORS AND WINDOWS FOR A ROOM;  
IT IS THE HOLES WHICH MAKE IT USEFUL.  
THEREFORE, PROFIT COMES FROM WHAT IS THERE;  
USEFULNESS FROM WHAT IS NOT THERE.

-LAO TSU  
FROM THE TAO TE CHING

To manifest my ideas I have moved from working in a two-dimensional format to incorporating the use of an enclosed room or space which surrounds and envelopes the viewer. The visual elements are painted layers of information and three-dimensional constructions that confront the viewer with their own individual thoughts, emotions, and experiences. The energy of the painted imagery and expressive mark-making constitutes a personal journey covering past, present, and future. I purposely keep many of the objects and figures somewhat hidden in order for the viewer to focus at an individual speed and relate personal soul travelings. Hopefully this work reconnects peoples to their commonalities and bondings.

Masculinity and feminity have always been noted more for their differences than their similarities. As with all traditional labels in this world, it is important not to fall into the sterotype of identification. It is far more important to explore those elements of lesser significance and exposure to give modern culture the diversity and complexity it truly needs. Understanding both masculinity and femininity means respecting individuality, knowing the inherent differences, spawning open communication, giving a meaning to, ultimately choosing how one is going to

act, acting from that interplay, and being open to new realizations.

My hope is to continue creating something that is not of the past. Man and woman must work together on all levels of exchange and communication and bring to this union a balance between the genders. In uniting opposites a complete awareness is formed creating new choices that both strengthen and glorify gender individuality. Humanity views the world through socialization. Judgements and insecurities are then formed. We need to break from this history.

For if we only come from our beliefs we will only repeat them.

ENDNOTES

1. James A. Mischke, Circles, Consciousness and Culture (Arizona: Navajo Community College Press, 1984), 2-17.
2. Ibid., p.1.
3. Dana Breen, The Gender Conundrum (New York: Routededge, 1993), 23-26.

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In partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree Master of Fine Arts  
Dennis J. Martinez  
has submitted this written thesis  
as a supplement to the creative thesis  
and ten slides  
which are in the permanent possession of the  
University of Colorado and recorded with the  
Department of Fine Arts

Approved by Kay Miller  
Kay Miller

Celeste Rehm  
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