

T1586

NC 0020880 9



NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN
CRAFT DESIGN
CERAMICS

CONCEPTS OF METAMORPHOSIS IN THE WORK OF
STEVE TOBIN AND SONJA LANDWEER

by
Kate Fine

Submitted to the Faculty of History of Art and Design
and Complementary Studies
In Candidacy for
the Degree of Bachelor of Design

1996

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Sonja Landweer and Steve Tobin for their time and support in allowing me the benefit of interviews and source material. Also, I am greatly indebted to my tutor, Nicola Gordon Bowe.

CONTENTS

LIST OF PLATES

INTRODUCTION TO STEVE TOBIN	1
INTRODUCTION TO SONJA LANDWEER	3
INTRODUCTION	5
CHAPTER ONE CYCLES, STAGES, INITIATIONS, TRANSITIONS AND RITUALS	9
CHAPTER TWO CREATIVITY, THE CREATIVE PROCESS	22
CHAPTER THREE ARTISTS' WORK	28
Steve Tobin's <i>Cocoons</i>	29
Sonja Landweer's <i>Seed Forms</i>	34
Conclusion to Chapter Three	37
CHAPTER FOUR PRODUCT AND COMMUNICATION	38
CONCLUSION	44
BIBLIOGRAPHY	47

LIST OF PLATES

- Figure 1 Steve Tobin's *Bone Sculpture*
- Figure 2 Sonja Landweer's *Bowl*
- Figure 3 Sonja Landweer's *Tokens*
- Figure 4 Sonja Landweer's *Tokens*
- Figure 5 Sonja Landweer's *Tokens*
- Figure 6 Steve Tobin's *Tree of Life*
- Figure 7 Steve Tobin's *Cocoons, Cocoons at Retretti*
- Figure 8 Steve Tobin's *Door, Memories of Prague*
- Figure 9 Steve Tobin's *Teepee, Artists Studio, Pennsylvania*
- Figure 10 Steve Tobin's *Bowls*
- Figure 11 Steve Tobin's *Torco, Enlightenment*
- Figure 12 Steve Tobin's *Waterfall, Retretti River Waterfall*
- Figure 13 Steve Tobin's *Sarcophagus Installation*
- Figure 14 Steve Tobin's *Reliefs, L'Histoire en Marche*
- Figure 15 Steve Tobin's *Cocoons in Chapel, Ascension, Antwerp*
- Figure 16 Steve Tobin's *Regeneration Journey*
- Figure 17 Steve Tobin's *Cocoon With Egg*
- Figure 18 Sonja Landweer's *Seed Form*
- Figure 19 Sonja Landweer's *Seed Form*

- Figure 20 Sonja Landweer's *Seed Form*
- Figure 21 Sonja Landweer's *Seed Form*
- Figure 22 Sonja Landweer's *Seed Form*
- Figure 23 Sonja Landweer's *Seed Form*
- Figure 24 Sonja Landweer's *Seed Form*
- Figure 25 Steve Tobin's *Door, Blue Sun*
- Figure 26 John Coplaans' *Self-Portrait*
- Figure 27 Andy Goldsworthy's *Wooden Beech*
- Figure 28 Steve Tobin's *Toy Bronzes*
- Figure 29 Sonja Landweer's *Body Sculpture*

INTRODUCTION TO STEVE TOBIN

Steve Tobin, born in 1957 in Pennsylvania, USA, has studied a wide range of subjects and instructed in many Institutes such as The Tokyo Glass School (1986) and the New York Experimental Glass Workshop (1984). He was also a guest artist at the Seguso Vitre de Arte Glass Factory, Venice, in 1985. In 1984 Tobin taught at the Pilchuck School of Glass, Seattle. He also has a BSc in Mathematics, Physics and Music (1979). Tobin has also played in a Blues band.

Having had many one-person shows since 1979 in the US, Japan, Switzerland and Finland, Tobin has also shown extensively in group Exhibitions in France, Belgium the US and Japan. Tobin's work has been described by Time Magazine as "*dazzling*" (Time Magazine Reconstructions, 1995, inside sleeve).

He has embarked on an adventurous path, from his glass figures to his glass bowls, and Glass for Tea Ceremony (1987) towards more innovative applications of glass, including Architectural constructions and outdoor installations. Pieces such as *The River of Glass*, a forty-foot cascade of glass, and *Bottle Village*, an acre of fused perfume bottles.

Like many artists, he has continually referred to nature as a source of inspiration. Over the last ten years, his work has reflected two parallel and equally important concerns. Through installation works and large individual pieces of sculpture, he has attempted to

define a location for himself in both a natural and cultural landscape and to interpret the human figure as part of that landscape.

From the first, Tobin's focus has been on making objects whose origin is slightly mysterious. Things that look both old and new, simultaneously found and fabricated. Many of his pieces suggest artifacts of the deep past, recovered from the great civilisations of the ancient world. At the same time, they hint at the possibility that they may have come back to us by means of time travel, from somewhere in the future.

Recently, Tobin has turned his energies towards bronze, with which he is using the idea of found objects. The New York Times has commented "*Mr Tobin is doing something a bit madder and grander with his medium than anyone else*" (The New York Times, *Reconstructions*, 1995, inside sleeve).

The most recent exhibition of his work, called *Reconstructions*, was at the Philip and Muriel Berman Museum of Art at Ursinus College, Pennsylvania, USA, during the Fall of 1995 (*Figure 1*). It brought to fruition two years of immersion in metals by the artist and his team, where the evolution from glass to steel and bronze is juxtaposed in the installation therein.



Figure 1
Steve Tobin's *Bone Sculpture*
Bronze and Bone, 5" (L) x 5" (W) x 6" (H)
1993-1995



INTRODUCTION TO SONJA LANDWEER

Sonja Landweer was born in 1933 in Amsterdam in Holland. She studied at the Amsterdam Institute for Industrial Design between 1952 and 1954 where she based her own studio, working mainly in ceramics. In 1963 Landweer won a travelling scholarship to Spain, France, Denmark and England and in 1964 became an Artist in Residence at the inception of the Kilkenny Design Workshop in Ireland. At that time Ceramics as a form of art were unrecognised in Ireland.

Between 1964 and 1965 she was invited to be a guest Potter at the famous Arabia Ceramics factory in Finland. In 1974 she was awarded the *Prix Artistique* at the Fourth Biennial Internationale de Ceramique d'Art at Val in the South of France. In 1981 her achievement in Ireland was publicly recognised when she became a member of Aosdana.

Landweer has had many one-man shows since 1958, in the Hague, Amsterdam, Amersfoort, Leewarden, Copenhagen, Goteburg, Hildesheim, Dublin, Belfast, Cork and Kilkenny. She has shown extensively in group exhibitions throughout Europe, the Americas and Japan. Her work is represented in collections in Holland, Denmark, Finland, England, Ireland, USA, Germany and Switzerland. Her highly aesthetic and sculptural approach to ceramics was somewhat isolated in her first ten years in Ireland. However, from the late 1970s, there was a change in the concept of what ceramics could achieve as a fine art. The publicly exhibited work of Landweer showed new possibilities for Irish ceramic artists.

Landweer has always looked to nature as a source of inspiration. Whilst she is a master of essential ceramic techniques, she does not stress craft virtuosity, but rather a meditative frame of mind that combines intuition with a deeply educated intelligence.

Her work, invariably inspired by nature, is innovative in its interpretation of forms and materials. From the early 1980s she has moved away from throwing pottery (*Figure 2*) to a variety of other shapes, including stoneware, bone, slate and mixed media, recalling Celtic torcs and bracelets. She has created objects which can be appreciated for their tactile and visual pleasure, apart also from the fact that they can often be worn.

Landweer's strongest influences stem from two key figures, the potters Lucie Rie and Hans Coper, in whose studios she has shared time. Their work is different, yet all three share a similar love of form, texture, scale and colour.

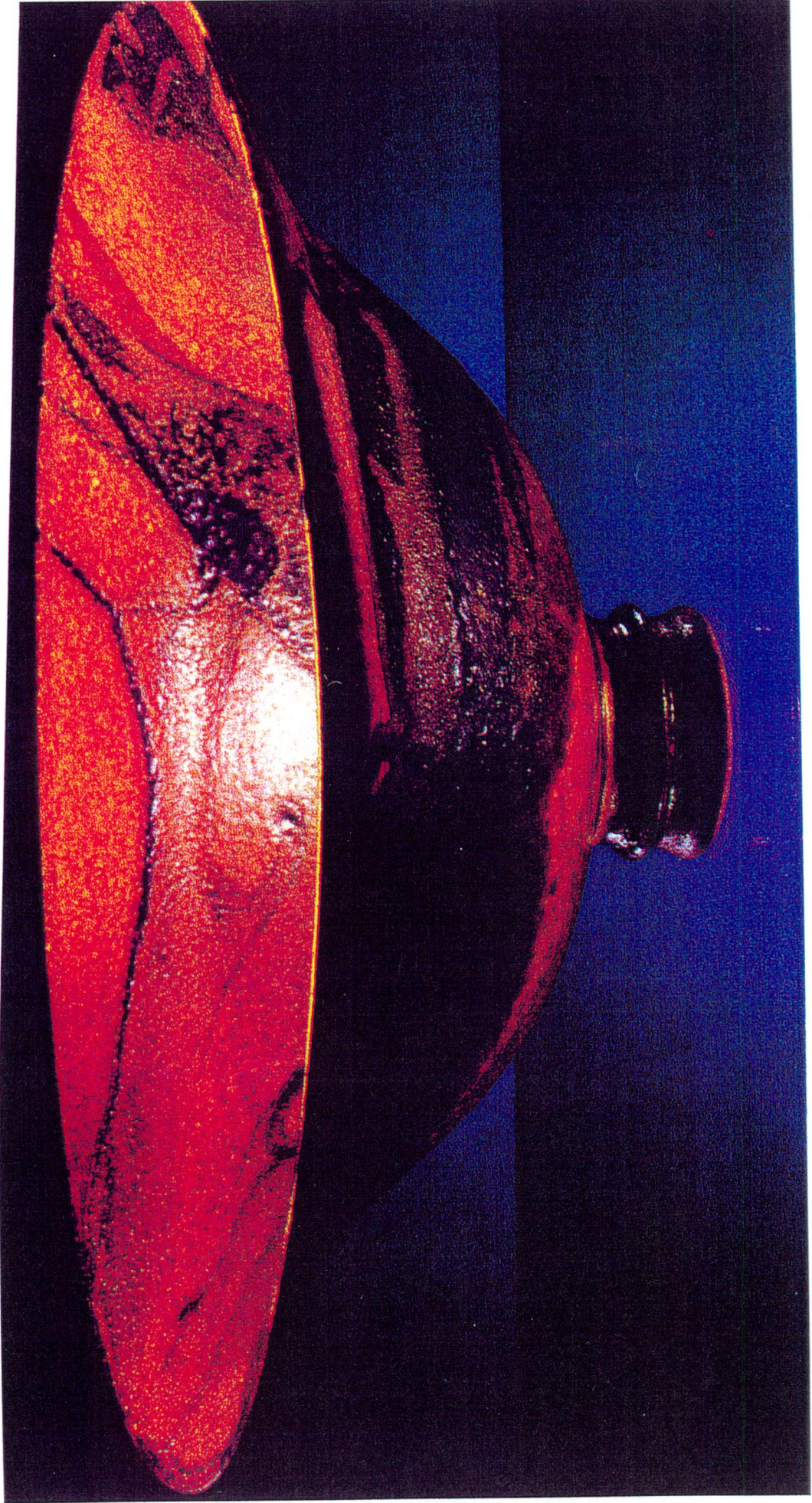


Figure 2
Sonja Landweer's *Bowl*
Thrown Clay Bowl with Colourful Glazes
Early 1980s

INTRODUCTION

Metamorphosis means changing from one shape to another and in living creatures this term is applied to changes that take place during the lifetime of one individual. Basic biology has already explained that Metamorphosis may be gradual, leading through slight bodily changes up to the final moult into a fully fledged adult individual, which differs totally from the preceding stages.

When I discovered Steve Tobin's *Cocoons* (1988-1990) and Sonja Landweer's *Seeds* (1990-1994) the connection between their forms and the pupa stage of a caterpillar's life cycle struck me as being very strong. The pupa period is when everything is resting between larva (caterpillar) and an adult (butterfly). Although inactive, great changes take place internally, as larval features are lost and adult characteristics develop. These changes are not really evident externally until the pupal skin splits and the adult butterfly emerges in due course.

I find that this transition, involving potential development from the caterpillar to butterfly, is similar to the concept behind the recent *Rites of Passage* Exhibition held in the Tate Gallery (London, 1995). At this exhibition a group of artists exhibited works based on a theme, titled the "Liminal State" (Morgan & Morris, 1995, p12) (Limen is latin for threshold). This state was so named by the Dutch anthropologist Arnold Van Gennep in 1908 when he wrote the book *The Rites of Passage*, examining what he called "*Life Crises*" (Morgan & Morris, 1995, p12). Van Gennep proposed that the ceremonies that

related to these life crises move through three phases, *Separation*, *Transition* and *Incorporation*. In the Transitional phase when the person is "neither in or out of society" (Morgan & Morris, 1995, p12) he or she exists in what Van Gennep called a *Liminal State*. The Transitional phase is one of the principal concerns of my Thesis.

Considering this *Liminal State*, namely a phase of transition from one state to another, I am drawn to question how life is broken into stages and how these very stages can be expressed in art. The cycle from birth to maturity and then to death can be seen as consisting of these stages and transitions.

I will be examining closely a liminal period known and experienced by every human, namely the transition from childhood to adulthood. Sonja Landweer's *Tokens* stated that prior to puberty, children grow in body and mind but the changes that occur are only quantitative. Puberty brings the quantitative changes that start to differentiate relatively asexual girls and boys into women and men.

The adolescent years are a time of importance, self-discovery, and are when a child's emergent sense of identity is further shaped and solidified. The uncertainty of being neither child or adult can be bluffed away outwardly, concealing what is going on inside the person. The importance of this transition in our society is all too often ignored and differs from that of other primitive societies.

I would like to discuss a further *Liminal State* by reflecting on a statement from Dr Samuel Johnson which reads:

It is wonderful that five thousand years have now elapsed since the creation of the world and still it is undecided whether or not there has ever been an instance of the spirit of any person appearing after death. All argument is against it but all belief is for it. (Penguin, 1968, p209)

I propose not to contend with the above statement, yet within it lies my whole belief. Metaphorically speaking, human existence in life is as that of a caterpillar, whose body dies, yet whose spirit is transformed into the butterfly. Shakespeare states "*all that live must die, passing through nature to eternity*" (Penguin, 1968, p209).

Death is feared and seen as the end of human life to some people. Charles Frohman's last words before tragically drowning in the Lusitania were "*Why fear death? It is the most beautiful adventure in life*" (Penguin, 1968, p163). There are endless transitions from birth to death. I believe that in our last stages of life there lies evidence of our return to the womb. A baby must be fed, clothed and washed, just as an elderly person needs similar attention in their latter years. My grandmother once told me that the older she got, the more her dreams reflected her childhood. This leads me to believe she is getting closer to the same point in her life cycle as to when she was born and to rebirth. Steve Tobin's exhibition in the Retretti Caves in Finland (1993) offers an interesting view into this concept, which will be exposed in Chapter One. Through Tobin's *Cocoons*, *Doors* and *Torsoes* he has illustrated that

the creative process is generation and birth as well as transformation and rebirth. Thomas Berry says "The sacred moment of anything is the moment of origin... In this way, one's personal journey is a creative process guided by a transformative dynamic. At each stage of growth something new breaks forth" (Robbins, 1985, p33) in each individual.

For an artist, there is a liminal stage period between the idea and the product. These are stages which develop within his/her mind. I would like to focus on this process of creativity. I do not want to attempt to define it as creativity or that this liminal process follows a set of particular defined stages. Creativity occurs as a result of many influential factors and depends mainly on the individual. Essentially, the creative process witnesses man's innate need for a manifestation of the human search for order out of chaos.

One may question if society should care whether anyone is creative? In my view a possible ^{answer} is that we are connected to one another in fundamental ways. That which a creative person wants to express and manifest lies in their work, and therefore may be given form in the world through communication.

The exhibition *Rites of Passage* proposed that artists have an important role in society, that they be considered as passeurs, priests (perhaps) of that secular religion that art has become. Describing the French scholar Michel Foucault, his colleague Michel Certeau called him "*a passeur*" (Morgan & Morris, 1995, p12) or "*man of passage*" (Morgan & Morris, 1995, p12), a person who opens doors for others.

CHAPTER ONE

CYCLES, STAGES, INITIATIONS, TRANSITIONS AND RITUALS

For an ancient people living closely with their environment, the cyclical rhythm of nature and life was a deeply rooted and omnipresent force. We know from myths which, according to Mircea Eliade in his book *Myths, Dreams and Mysteries* (1960) "*reveal the structure of reality, and the multiple modalities of being in the world. That is why they are the exemplary models for human behaviour, they disclose the true stories, concern themselves with the realities*" (Eliade, 1960, p17). In the Myth of the Goddess which was the predominant belief among prehistoric peoples from as early as 200,000 BC the earth was seen as a harmonious living unity in which life and death were part of a continuous circle in which man participated. They also perceived nature as a cycle of eternal return which might undergo changes but basically were unaware of a beginning or an end.

Life renews and regenerates itself continuously. As new birth succeeds the old, the daylight and the seasons recur, as do the tidal movements of the waves and the sea, the cyclical path of the sun, and finally, man dying to be reborn. In the words of Mircea Eliade:

It is the moon which disclosed par excellence the flux, passage, waxing and waning, birth, death and rebirth, in short, the cosmic rhythms, the external becoming of things, time... due to lunar symbolism, prehistoric man was able to become conscious of the temporal modality of the cosmos well before systematic thought had succeeded in extricating the concept of "becoming" and expressing it in adequate terms (Eliade, 1959, p4)

During its monthly cycle, the moon passes through eight stages, "*new moon, waxing crescent, first quarter, waxing gibbous, full moon, waning gibbous, last quarter and waning crescent*" (Guiley, 1991, p18).

As with the moon, man's life cycle consists of many stages. The concept of life's stages is to compare and contrast assorted aspects of development at one period or between periods. Stages help make sense of life. They can indicate how people in one phase can be expected to differ from those in others. Stages also suggest that there are developments and experiences which in their own right deserve attention. Around such arguments, many famous developmental theorists like Freud, Piaget, Erikson and Werner have championed stage theories.

In *As You Like It*, William Shakespeare rendered his belief about stages in the life span when he wrote, using the metaphor of the theatre, that:

*All the World's a Stage,
And all the men and woman merely players,
They have their exits and their entrances,
And one man in his time plays many parts,
His acts being seven stages* (Penguin, 1968, p196)

It can also be said that in the successive stages of growth, the physical and motor components develop, i.e. infants creep and crawl, the young walk and run and the old hobble.

In Knopf's book, *The Centuries of Childhood: A social History of Family Life* (1962), he mentions Philippe Aries and has argued that before the Middle Ages, childhood did not

hold the status of a unique stage of life. The period from birth to six or seven was understood as a kind of necessary transition to full adult status. It has been seen in agrarian societies that generations often overlap, whereas in industrial societies, reasons arise to separate these generations. It was not until the post-industrial nineteenth century that childhood and adolescence came into their own as separate stages of life.

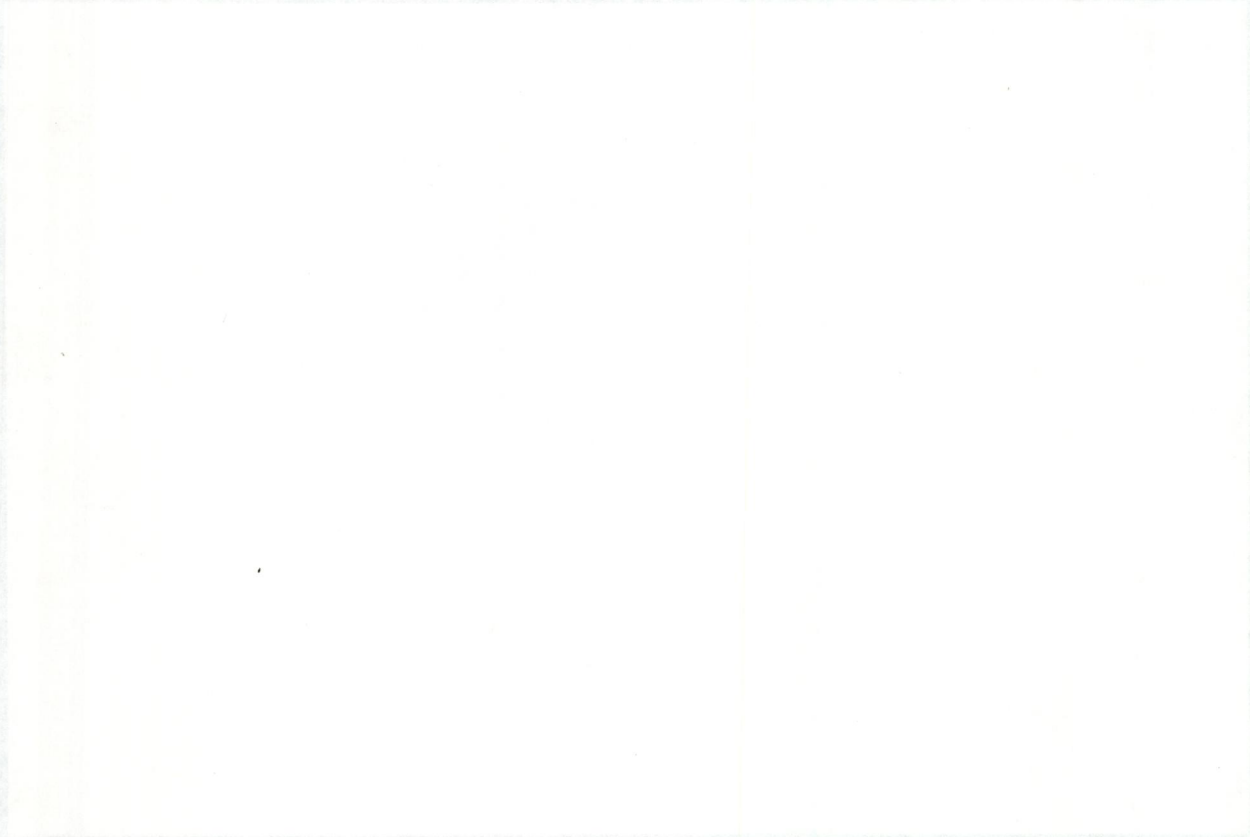
Stages represent a complex pattern of inter-related characteristics that undergo a phase of formation in order to reach a phase of fulfilment. For example, they may involve parallel biological, psychological and/or sociological events. Biological events might include physical changes like puberty; psychological events might include changes in social status like one's first job, and entrance into the labour force. The characteristics of one stage differentiate it from the former and the ensuing stages. The accomplishments of earlier stages are carried into and mesh with new elements that are innate in earlier ones.

The transition from teenager to adult is a very important stage within our lives and constitutes an important initiation or ritual (or rite of passage). In focusing on this aspect of puberty, it must be considered that these rites are obligatory for all youth to gain the right to be admitted among young adults, and to pass through a series of initiatory ordeals. It is by virtue of these rites, and of the revelations that they entail, that he or she will be recognised as a responsible member of society.

For the artist Sonja Landweer, this transition is particularly important in one's life, so she has incorporated her ideas on this fact, along with other additional values, to produce her *Tokens* (1990) (*Figure 3*).



Figure 3
Sonja Landweer's *Tokens*
Clay and Slate, Wood Base, approx 8" (H)
1990



A token for Landweer means something special, but not necessarily precious. In early childhood, tokens

usually are, or can be things we find and treasure as special objects, although they may appear meaningless to someone else. Yet, out of similar experiences, most of us can identify how a simple found object can conjure associations with a particular place or a particular time (Landweer, Interview)

From here, Landweer began to think how specific events are celebrated, such as Baptism, First Communion, confirmation, Engagement and Marriage, particularly the transition from childhood into adulthood.

Landweer observed that when someone changes from child into adult in a so-called primitive society, the sexes are carefully kept separate, sometimes for quite a period of time, in order to be prepared for the transition, which in our own society is almost ignored, except for largely redundant religious symbolism.

The rugged Northern Frontier District in Kenya is inhabited by the Samburu people. The Samburu moral and social codes are designed to ensure their collective welfare is based on respect. Such respect for rituals and customs are especially important for the elders, whose role it is to maintain Samburu social codes and community order. The elders arrange the various ceremonies which enshrine the way of the Samburu. Their ways may at first be hard for an outsider to comprehend, particularly as they appear fluid and formless, but they are more strongly adhered to than in societies where such things have not been codified.

The most important ceremonies for young men are the circumcision rites which initiate them into warriorhood. Likewise for girls, the circumcision rites prepare them for marriage.

The e-muratare, known as the period of male circumcision, is the most important of all the Samburu ceremonies. Not only do these rites ensure the continuity of the laji (age-set) system, they mark the time at which the new generation of Imurran (warriors) begins to take the place of the previous laji, which in turn moves on to marriage and elderhood. The ceremony also unites the whole Samburu nation and re-establishes clan bonds and the social hierarchy (Magor, 1994, p16-17)

As a child reaches puberty, his or her right earlobe is cut and plugged with a bundle of thin sticks. The identical procedure is then carried out on their left earlobe. The hole is gradually enlarged until it will accommodate the ivory plugs worn by men during warriorhood and the ear rings worn by women in marriage. Next, the upper rim of the right ear, and then the left, is pierced with a hot stick. Lastly, the two lower front teeth are removed. For whatever the reasons behind these practices, they require a considerable display of bravery and courage on the part of the children. The physical pain they experience symbolises the often spiritually painful transition into adulthood. *"The ways the processes in the body change are expressed almost in secret, very much in private"* (Landweer, Interview).

These emotions are expressed through Sonja Landweer's *Tokens*, portraying little slate dolmens supported by clay (*Figure 4*). They relate to those significantly precious treasured found objects, with personal special meanings *"all that we aim for in our lives originates from within ourselves that is not visible outwardly"* (Landweer, Interview). The



Figure 4
Sonja Landweer's *Tokens*
Clay and Slate, Wood Base, approx 8" (H)
1990



actual scale of these pieces is small, yet monumental in their treatment. Balanced on top of solid, complementary fired clay piers, angelic shapes of slate lie, representing a sort of totem.

Landweer has left all the slate pieces as they were found and has modelled the clay around them. The slate is not attached yet perfectly slots into the clay piers. The burnished surfaces of these clay bodies, tiered with layers, also resembling the lines on the slate, are coloured with oil paints. This was purely experimental for Landweer as she was attempting to break away from the familiar bright glazes of recent years. I find the texture and colour is almost reminiscent of the polished quality found in chestnuts or wood. What appeals to me most in these *Tokens* is the way Landweer has achieved a diversity of motion, giving the impression that the pieces are unstable when actually they rest in perfect balance with themselves. (*Figure 5*).

Often the ages of life are rendered in art as steps rising from birth to maturity and then descending to old age and death, as a tree showing growth to full stature before withering or perhaps as a wheel, reflecting the view that human beings are allotted a single revolution of time and inevitably arrive back at their point of outset.

Steve Tobin's 1993 exhibition at the Retretti Art Centre in Finland echoed a cyclical transition of perpetual return. He offers his view into the "*transformational nature of life and the universe*" (Tobin in Järjestäjät, 1993, p4) so that his philosophies and art are one.

The Anthropologist Margaret Mead, noted "*When a person is born we rejoice, and when they are married we jubilate, but when they die we try to pretend nothing has happened*"



Figure 5
Sonja Landweer's *Tokens*
Clay and Slate, Wood Base, approx 8" (H)
1990

(Johnson Gross, 1994, p191). It follows that our contemporary society, so youth-obsessed, wants to keep itself death-ignorant and yearn for the Peter Pan legend of eternal youth without measure or end.

Today, the tragedy of younger deaths owing to AIDS, means that it has once again become more difficult to live without being constantly reminded of the inevitable. However, as mentioned earlier, we do eventually arrive back at our beginning or starting point. I strongly feel that the wheel can be re-set in motion, enabling man to live for yet another revolution of time, and so on, indefinitely. Reincarnation is a belief in the rebirth of the soul in one or more successive existences, which may be human, animal or, in some instances, vegetable. Usually found in the Asian religions and philosophies, the belief in reincarnation is sometimes referred to as the transmigration of souls, Metempsychosis (or, more properly, Metensomatosis, the changing of bodies), or palingenesis (Greek). It has also been found in the religions (e.g. the Greek Orphic Mysteries), Manichaeism, as well as in such modern religious movements as Theosophy. However, the major religions that hold a belief in reincarnation are the Asian religions, especially Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism and Sikhism. All of these arose in India and hold in common a doctrine of Karman (effects) which is the law of cause and effect, and state that what one does in this present life will have effect in the next life.

In Hinduism, the process of birth and rebirth, i.e. transmigration of souls, is continuous until one achieves salvation, by realising the truth that liberates them, so that the individual soul (Atonan) and the absolute soul (Brahman) are as one. Thus, one can escape from the wheel of birth and rebirth (Samsard).

In Hinduism, Dharma is the religious and moral law, governing individual conduct, and one of the four ends of life, to be followed according to one's class, status and station in life.

With these concepts in mind, I would now like to bring you on a visual journey around Steve Tobin (in Järjestäjät's) exhibition at the Retretti Art Centre in Finland. Here an expansive network of caves blasted out of the Finnish rock is unique. Descending sixty steps, the visitor enters into a singular, unreal, celestial world and is immediately reminded of catacombs, labyrinths and dungeons. *"Here at a depth of twelve metres neither darkness nor death determine the atmosphere. Rather, it is fairytale like, or perhaps better yet, filled with myth"* (Klotz, 1993, p20). Tobin has staged an exhibition where he *"tells a story, the myth of coming to be and the passing of time"* (Klotz, 1993, p20).

The rock surface in these caves functions as a perfect backdrop to the works which are made from glass and bronze. However, these works were not made intentionally for the caves; the flowing patterns developed by the molten glass during Tobin's creation of his works reflect on rocks which the earth itself has created. The caves lend their power to any installations and these sculptures bring life to the caves. The rock and glass come together at Retretti echoing the theme of the Exhibition. *"All cultures are one. All time is now. Everything is everything"* (Tobin in Järjestäjät, 1993, p8).

The dramatically staged materials (glass and bronze) expressing symbolism, embodying light and sounds, stressing Tobin's philosophies of the world. *"These sculptures perceived*

as artifacts, are clues to the birth and evolution of the soul of man. The viewer may re-evaluate his concept of time, spirit and cultural origins" (Tobin in Järjestäjät, 1993, p4).

The place, the pieces, lights and sounds together present a range of stages and events. This scenario represents, from my perception, the whole cycle from birth to death and rebirth. One is focused on the view that human beings are allotted a single revolution of time and inevitably arrive back at their beginning. Tobin's exhibition, once ended, can also begin again. Descending the stairs through numerous small white floating baby glass cocoons, the visitor first comes to the Tree of Life (*Figure 6*). From a distance one is reminded of icicles hanging on a cold winter's day. The encased larvae of butterflies hanging open on a bare tree, the soul or the spirit is captured, but ready to come into new life. At the next station, one is offered the suggestion of emulation through life of flesh and blood in the body imprisoning the soul. These sculptures, still shaped in cocoon fashion, stand upright together as if in groups. They are supported or caged by textured iron rods, which contrast dramatically with the smooth skin of the glass (*Figure 7*).

Differing in size but in similar blown form, their elongated bodies seem to be reaching searchingly upwards. This sense is accentuated by the patterns captured in the glass, such as the swirling marbled effect at the top, which slowly falls down in vertical lines to a collected drop at the bottom. I am somewhat reminded of treacle. Again, Tobin captures this direction with an upward spiral of glass tubing, wrapped around the body of the cocoon. The cocoons stand in radiating shades of reds, oranges, black, white and tints of blue. By using the deeply symbolic colour red, Tobin can symbolise "*the relationship of body and soul, of love and death, of freedom and being imprisoned*" (Klotz, 1993, p24).

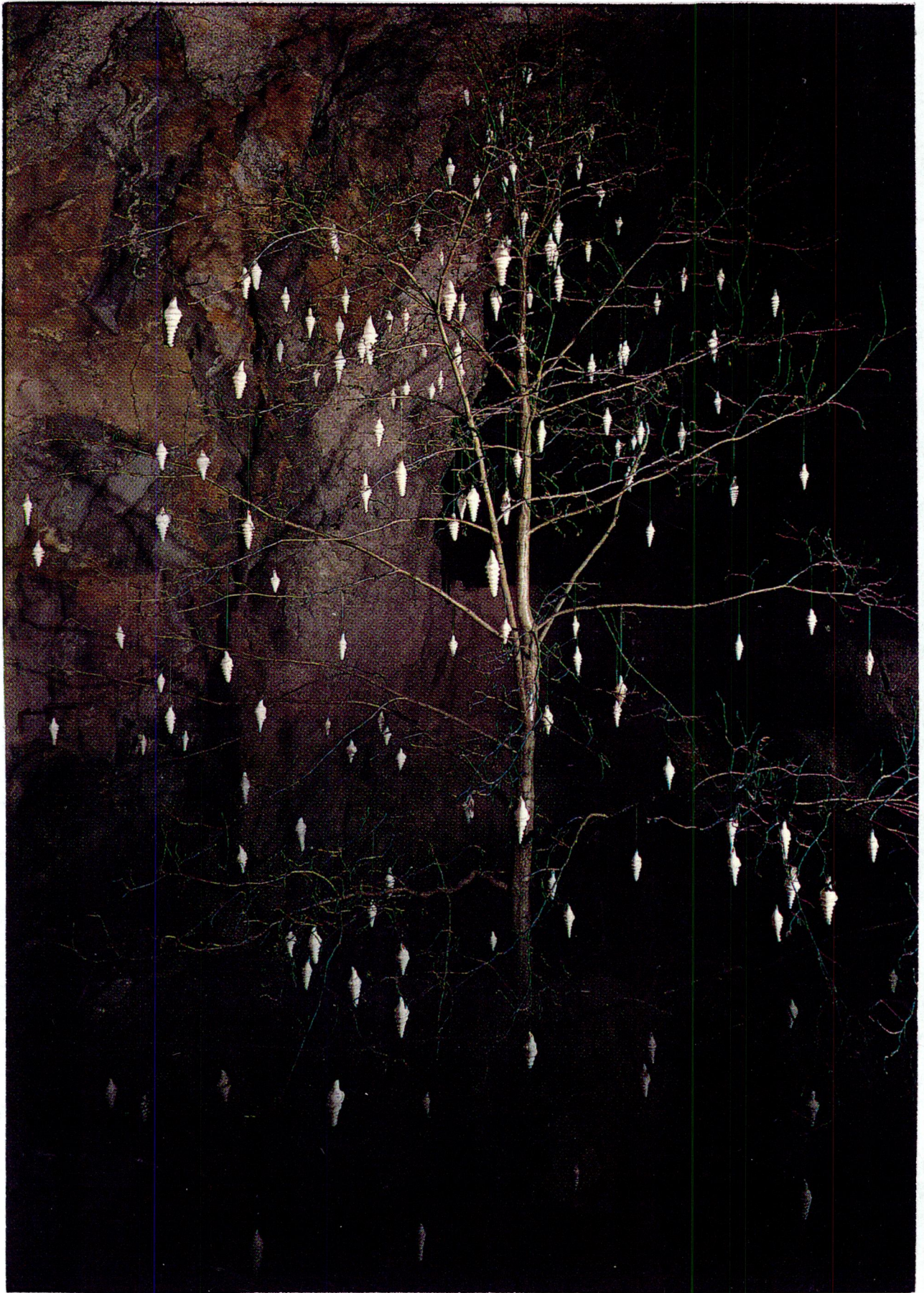


Figure 6
Steve Tobin's *Tree of Life*
Glass, 6 x 4 x 4m
1993



Figure 7
Steve Tobin's *Cocoons*, *Cocoons at Retretti*
Glass and Iron, 2-4cm (H)
1993



The next stage shows an expression of transformation that is also supposed to represent change. Tobin has here chosen the door as the symbol (*Figure 8*). For Tobin, these doors do not stand for the beginning, birth, or the end, death, but rather they attempt to make clear that "*here, life has to be understood as process, as continuous change makes alive*" (Klotz, 1993, p24). Resembling gravestones, these doors are slabs of colourfully illuminated glass, roughly textured on one side and polished on the reverse. Some stand alone, whilst others are grouped. Several carry etched writing whilst several are plain. The light placed behind these slabs highlight the beautiful range of colours featuring yellows, oranges, greens, blues, browns and reds, all flowing like water within a pool of glass. Featured floating towards the top of certain doors are discs of glass centred with vibrantly coloured pupils, like eyes, drawing the viewers into the respective pieces. Though they may be reminiscent of gravestones, they are not intentionally made for the viewer to mourn the dead, but rather for those who recognise these pieces as doors through which contact with the spirit or the immaterial, can be sensed.

Continuing on, in the depth of the caves, one comes to a glass teepee (*Figure 9*) consisting of discarded long glass tubes arranged in bundles to give the effect of slating tiles. With no door, nor any real surface, it is only a reflection of light that gives this piece the illusion of being a solid object. For Tobin, the teepee is a symbol of the movement of a culture into time, specifically the Native American Culture. For example, the modern world uses the visual images, land and foods of their culture, but we have no room for them as a people. We have chosen not to actually enter their culture. That is why the teepee has no door. It is purely symbolic. It exists only as an idea of itself. Tobin's next stage, situated on a small byway from the path, is a collection of bowls (*Figure 10*). Large and small, high and low, they stand carried by narrow rods of iron, in a small

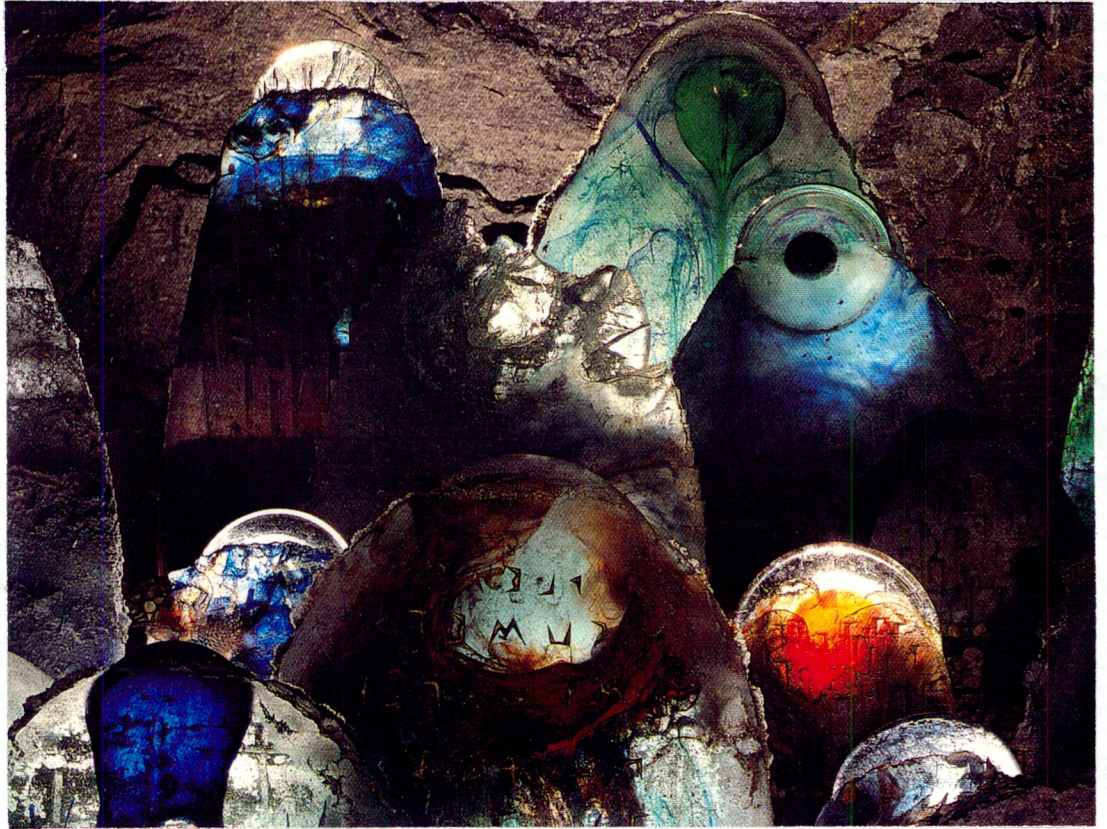


Figure 8
Steve Tobin's Door, *Memories of Prague*
Detail, Glass, 3 x 10m
1993



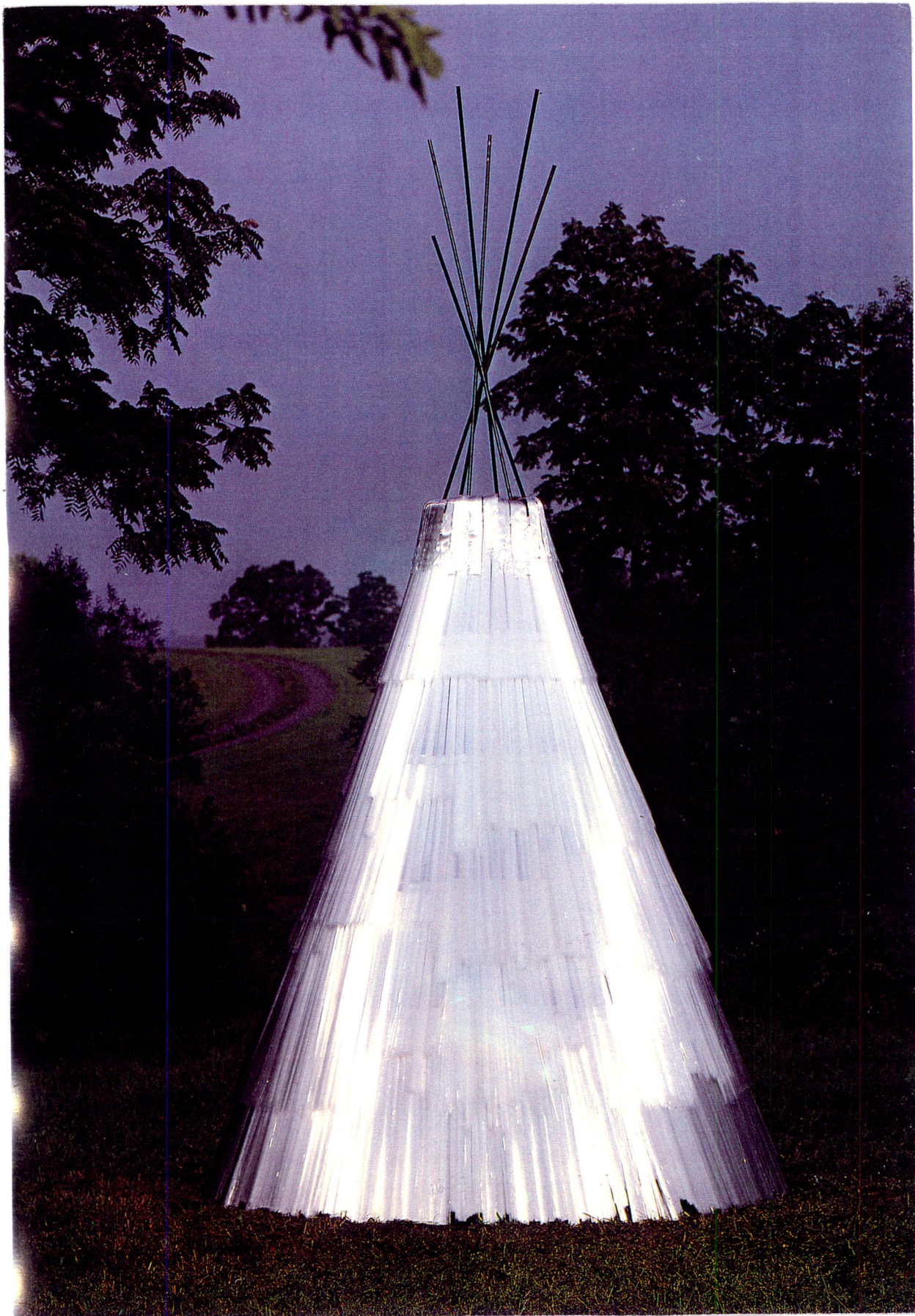


Figure 9
Steve Tobin's *Teepee*, Artists Studio, Pennsylvania
Glass Tubings and Iron, 9 x 5 x 5m
1992



Figure 10
Steve Tobin's *Bowls*
Glass and Iron, 100-250cm (H)
1993



underground lake. Water drips into same, giving an added dimension to the image through an acoustically amplified sound, which Tobin himself composed. The colours range from white over delicate pink and orange, right down to strong but light red and even blue. The smoothness of these glass bowls is intercepted by the cracking effect on the surface.

At the next point of the journey, the visitor is greeted by doors and torsoes (*Figure 11*) standing in water, featuring oranges, reds and greens. Here the glass doors reflect expanded circles and ovals. Cast from life, these glowing torsoes are simultaneously vitrified from parts of the body from which they have been made. They are then frozen in glass and petrified in the moment of a gesture, i.e. the figure reaching upwards, possibly a sign of power. That they contain or contained life is implied by "*the swirls and veins of colour within them, their degree of animation changing radically with different sources of illumination*" (Porges in Thierry, 1992, p6).

These torsoes are adorned with spiralling pyramidal shapes of shells and crystals emerging out of the surface. Here Tobin is referring to the evolution of natural forms, the way an organism gracefully accumulates its form through time.

This "skin" of decoration refers both to nature's temporary adornments - flowers, leaves on trees, and to the more permanent changes that take place over millennia, describing when shells and fossils attach themselves to the surfaces of lost relics, transforming something manmade into something which appears to have been invented by nature" (Porges in Thierry, 1992, p6)

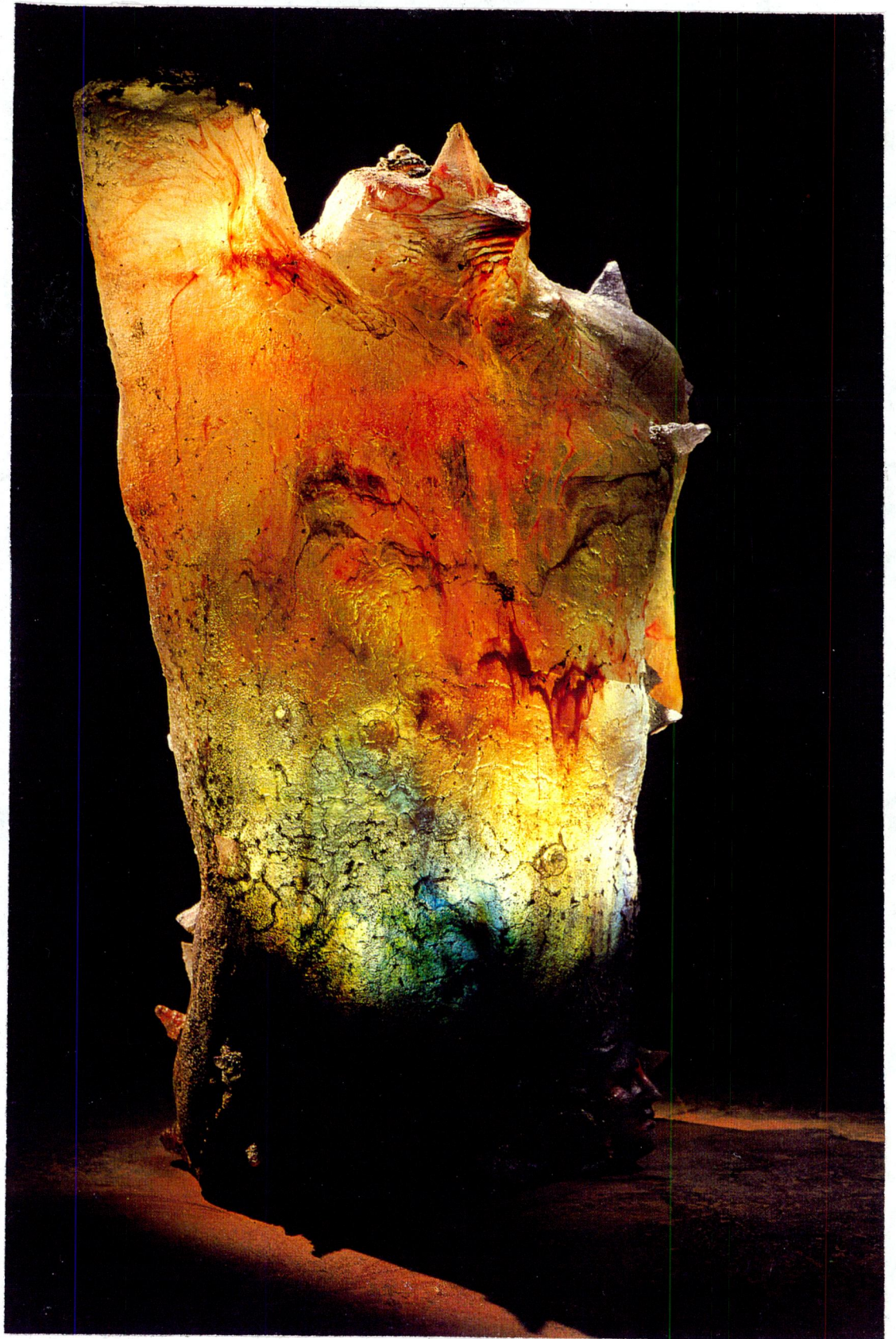


Figure 11
Steve Tobin's Torco, *Enlightenment*
Glass, 70cm (H)
1991



The next experience is the waterfall (*Figure 12*), consisting of an enormous collection of glass tubes glittering in the light, suggesting the sun's reflection on water. The directional flow of glass cascading down and suddenly dispersing and crashing invites me to almost hear it in my mind.

Progressing further along the path of this exhibition, Tobin's familiar doors re-emerge. The viewer by-passes the doors and is led to another stage where real water splashes and roars, reaching down the deepest point in the cave. Here, in a pond, cocoons are laid out (*Figures 13*). They stand glistening in water, beaming and lightweight. Some of these cocoons are supported by iron rods, like grasping arms reaching up out of the water. At each end, others rest in extended round clasps, which are attached to an adorned bronze bed. One senses seeing a desert island. A cocoon lies embedded in a sea of iron nails, yet it seems hardly to touch them, basically hovering within.

Continuing on, the viewer is led through the catacomb's corridor, passing reliefs (*Figure 14*) which are made from blue tinted glass with bronze. These reliefs are heavily decorated with motifs such as columns, pyramids, faces, bodies and shells, each emerging out of the surface. These pieces feature parabolic shapes and the content seems to suggest the stone monuments of some earlier civilisation.

Finally, at the end of the journey, one ascends a staircase passing shimmering glassy reeds and ever increasing floating cocoons. Now the cycle can begin again. Full of myth, Tobin's view on the transformational nature of life and the universe is portrayed in these caves, leading the visitor from birth to death, or a beginning to an end, but in my view



Figure 12
Steve Tobin's Waterfall, *Retretti River Waterfall*
Glass Tubing, 5 x 4 x 25m
1993



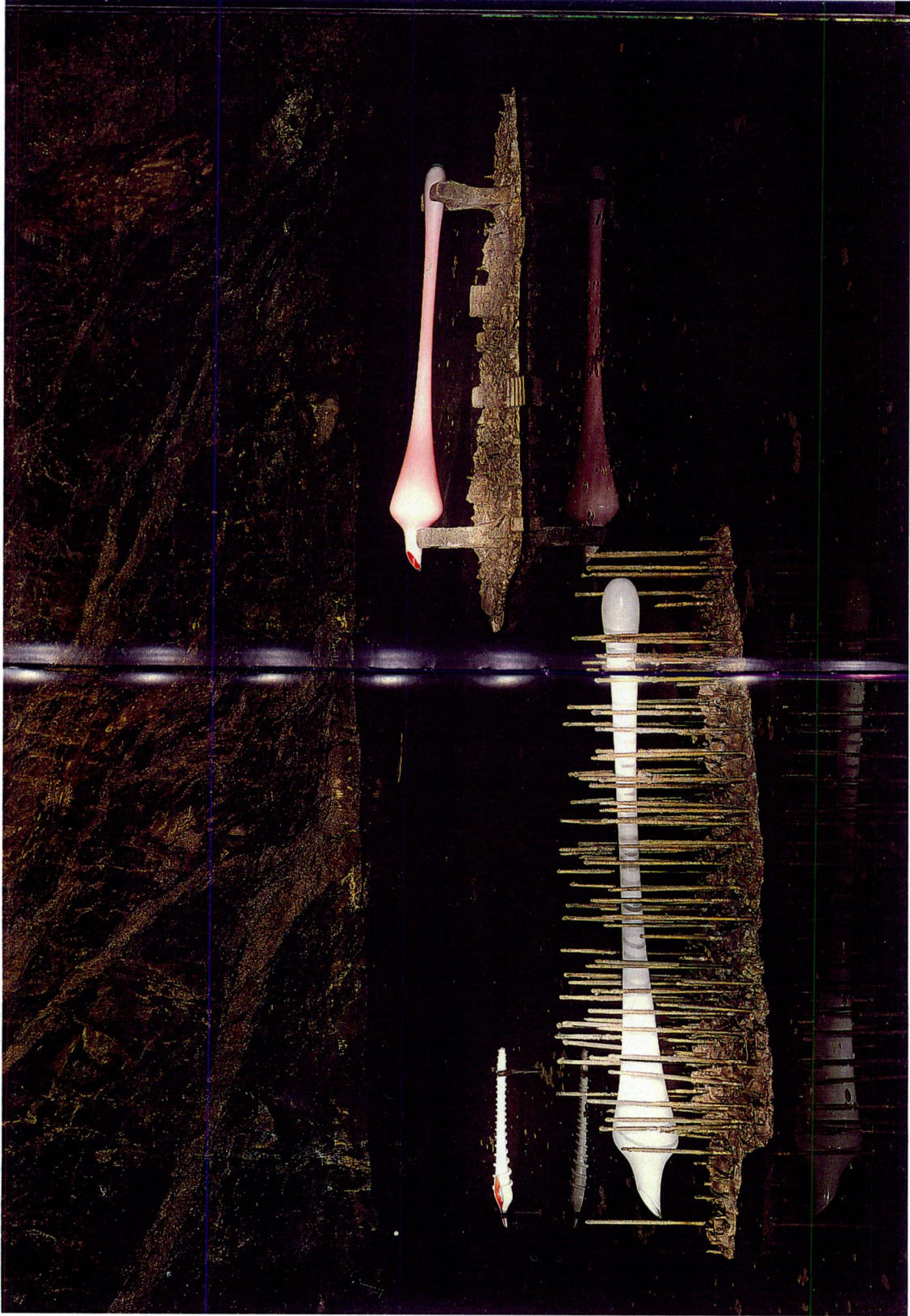


Figure 13
Steve Tobin's *Sarcophagus Installation*
Glass, Bronze and Iron, 5 x 10 x 10m
1993



Figure 14
Steve Tobin's Reliefs, *L'Histoire en Marche*
Glass, 80cm (H)
1991



the beauty of this experience lies in the way the viewer may enter these caves again and again, and commence a new cycle.

In the philosophy of history, "*When the flow of time is held to be not recurrent but one-way, it can be conceived as having a beginning and perhaps an end*" (Encyclopedia Britannica, 1978, Vol 18, p412).

There seems an obvious relationship between this statement and Tobin's exhibition.

CHAPTER TWO

CREATIVITY, THE CREATIVE PROCESS

To Create means to bring into being, to produce a new form and a continual process of creation in this elementary sense takes place in nature. According to Freud, "*the creative urge lives and grows in him like a tree in the earth from which it draws its nourishment*" (Jung, 1966, p75). Nature provides us with an established order and it is man's eternal quest to understand this order and relate it to his man-made world. The artist has always depicted nature, imposing on his own particular order. People create from objects and are inspired by objects around which they see. Nature has traditionally been the ultimate inspiration for the artist who, depending on his/her orientation, seeks to imitate it, improve it, or interpret it.

Dr Mackinnon, who has been involved with the Institute of Personality Assessment Research at Berkely, UCLA, describes creativity as a "*multi-faceted phenomenon*" (Mackinnon, 1970, p19) in an article discussing creativity. According to Tobin,

Art is not just about making objects. The object created is a souvenir of the art process. Art happens in the formation of an ideas in the motivation of this idea. For me the art is the personal emotional and mental growth that occurs as a result of realising an idea. The object that is created only documents this growth, so art form is a multilevel experience. There is a mental creativity which conceives an idea. There is emotional creativity which is the personal feelings and emotions and the ability to elicit them. There is also physical creativity which is the intuitive expression of the body. (Tobin in Järjestäjät, 1993, p6).

Landweer believes that "*the reality is through making the object*" (Landweer, Interview, 1995). Landweer has found that "*a process of blocking out the head and feeling with the hands*" (Landweer, Interview) is more natural for her.

Mackinnon suggests a need for the creative person to be creative is derived from a sense of feeling "*that something is wrong, or lacking, or mysterious*" (Mackinnon, 1970, p20). Initially, he says "*the creative process starts when a person can identify a problem*" (Mackinnon, 1970, p27). Tobin also agrees with Mackinnon - he views "*the creative process as a form of problem solving*" (Tobin, Fax, 1995).

Carl Rogers, a practising psychotherapist, suggests that the reason a person creates objects is because it is self satisfying and felt to be "*self-actualising*" (Rogers, 1961, p352). "*Self-actualization can be defined as growth of the individual towards psychological maturity and realisation of individual potential*" (Rogers, 1961, p43). In his book *On Becoming a Person* (1961), Carl Rogers states that the motivation for self actualization is "*man's tendency to actualise himself, to become his potentialities. By this I mean the directional trend which is evident in all organic and human life - the urge to express and activate all capacities of the organism, or the self*" (Rogers, 1961, p351).

For Steve Tobin, the challenge and urge lies in creating work which most closely reflects his ideas. "*My choice of materials, processes and representation should reinforce my concepts and personal philosophies*" (Tobin in Järjestäjät, 1993, p5). Regarding this, the individual is changed by the novel products of one's creativity.

Lois Robbins, an artist and teacher, suggests that life is a creative process supported by the need to express and develop one's own spirituality. In her book *Waking Up* (1985) she suggests that an initial reason behind someone being creative is a decision to look for something, or find a challenge. This she sees as the start of the creative process. Similarly, Tobin utilises the creative process to explore his inner self and tries to solve the mystery in the work that eluded him. "*This is the motivation that I have, to make a piece. I feel that my best pieces are created outside the realm of understanding*" (Berman & Berman, 1995, p66).

Creativity is seen to happen as part of a process through a series of stages. When a person has found a reason to be creative and has decided to be so, he/she can be said to be at the start of the creative process.

This process was outlined by Wallas in 1926 as consisting of four stages. These were: Preparation, Incubation, Illumination and Verification. Today this outline is generally accepted but Lois Robbins and Dr Mackinnon have since made further elaborations. Robbin's outline consists of six stages: Preparation, Frustration, Incubation, Illumination, Elaboration and Communication.

The process that Mackinnon has put forward consists of five stages which are: Preparation, Frustration, Withdrawal, Elaboration and Application.

All three of these outlines start with the preparatory stage, where a problem is identified and there is a deliberate decision made to find something. Robbins calls this the "*data gathering*" (Robbins, 1985, p20) stage, when all possible solutions are spread out before a person in a seemingly unconnected fashion. According to Mackinnon, the process starts

when a decision has been made, but the preparation stage is where the person acquires the elements of experience and cognitive skills and techniques which make it possible to pose a problem to him/herself.

Indeed, in the view of Tobin, this preparatory stage is the purest stage of his work. *"Often I can convey an idea through words, drawings and gestures better than I can by actually making the piece. The actuality of the piece often competes with the idea of it. Maybe some pieces exist better simply as ideas"* (Tobin in Järjestäjät, 1985, p20).

The second stage for both Robbins and Mackinnon is a stage of Frustration coming from the creative person's being confronted by so many solutions but none of them being the right one.

The frustration stage for Tobin begins when he can completely see a piece in his mind but then he does not feel compelled to make it. *"I make about five percent of the mature ideas that are formed in my mind. I feel most driven to make the pieces that intrigue me but are beyond my ability to fully understand. Often it will take me several years to complete an idea"* (Tobin in Järjestäjät, 1985, p20).

The delay in finding the answer to this stage leads into the next. This stage is described by Mackinnon as a time of withdrawal from the problem and by Robbins as a period when no conscious thought is used on the dilemma, but work continues on unconscious levels. Robbins has described this stage as being when the information from the initial stage is *"allowed to float around the central issue in a free and unconstricted way"* (Robbins, 1985, p21).

Landweer, talking about her *Tokens*, explained that as a result of many attempts at trying to express her idea creatively, she finally found herself in a state of confusion as to which medium and style to use: "*and now I cannot make up my mind which one it is to be.. a clay piece? or a slate piece? There are several in both materials*" (Landweer, Interview).

The Illumination stage follows and here the "*happy*" (Stein, 1974, p14) idea occurs. This is where inspiration is accompanied for Mackinnon by a feeling of excitement. This is the turning point of the process. Up to now, the individual has been seeking an answer without inspiration. When the answer finally appears, the creative person knows that it is the right answer and can now proceed to the last stage.

Wallas's and Mackinnon's last stage is where the "*validity of the idea is*" (Stein, 1974, p14). The inspiration is worked up on and applied to produce it into a particular form. This is where the creative product is produced. Robbins has included in the process a final stage of communication which she sees as essential for its completion.

Mackinnon does see communication as necessary, but does not include it as a particular stage of the process.

Tobin believes that no creative product is a perfect embodiment of an idea. He will always be trying to get closer to that perfection. "*But I am content with the direction in which my life and ideas are heading. I am moving more towards my ideals than away from them. I feel that I am just beginning to wake up as a person. So my contentment lies not in what I have done but where I am going*" (Tobin in Järjestäjät, 1993, p6).

From the above discussion, the creative process may be seen to be activated for a variety of reasons, ranging from the need to solve a problem, or to simply feel that something is mysterious. What seems to be of vital importance for Robbins, Mackinnon and Wallas is the basic need for the reason which sets the process in motion.

It is noted that none of these descriptions are systematic in practice. All stages are said to overlap and it is very difficult to know at any one time the particular stage one is at when involved in the process; therefore it surely a matter of experience.

CHAPTER THREE

ARTISTS' WORK

For Mircea Eliade, "*artists succeed in circumventing fate. They suspend the traditional perception of time and space by the act of making*" (Eliade, 1990, pxi). Forming art as an act

in which we share through participating in the environment of that art work. During the moments of artistic creation, artists fulfil the fundamental human instinct for transcendence. The craving to be freed from the limitations of one's humanness is satisfied by the experience of passing over into the other. Momentarily tasting transcendence, artists break the iron band of individuality and experience universality. They are freed not only from the limitations of human frailty and, precisely the most powerful from frailty, death. Artistic creation suspends time" (Eliade, 1990, pxi)

In this chapter I will discuss certain aspects regarding the above statement by Mircea Eliade. I have, in the previous chapters, talked about stages, phases, transitions, rituals and initiations. At this stage I will apply these concepts to the two artists, Steve Tobin and Sonja Landweer, and their work. I have chosen a form from each artist where there lies an obvious and subliminal link.

There work seems to contain a secret energy or inner force, yet the outside remains quiet.

I will be discussing this inner force and its potential in relation to the concept of death and the "*Passing over into the other*" (Eliade, 1990, pxi).

The passing from one thing to another in terms of death to rebirth is evident from the chosen forms of the artists. I will be examining Steve Tobin's *Cocoons* (1988-1990) and Sonja Landweer's *Seed Forms* (1990-1994). Metaphorically speaking, both these forms, the cocoon and the seed, may represent the egg conception to birth, or even the idea of chambered nautilus. With this in mind, I will be referring to myths, rituals and initiations. Initiatory death is indispensable for the beginning of spiritual life. Its function must be understood in relation to what it prepares: birth to a higher mode of being. Mircea Eliade speaks of initiatory orders as more or less implying a ritual death, followed by resurrection or a new birth "*The central moment of every initiation is represented by the ceremony symbolising the death of the novice and his return to the fellowship of the living. But he returns to life a new man, assuming another mode of being*" (Eliade, 1959, pxii).

Steve Tobin's *Cocoons*

In 1984 Steve Tobin first started making his *Cocoons* at Wheatch Village in New Jersey, where they presented themselves as a form suggestive both of nature and of ancient cultural traditions such as the amphorae of Mediterranean civilisations. His first pieces were small repeatedly during the next four, years Tobin experimented with both the form and its presentation, eventually arriving at the gracefully elongated cocoonical shape which came to characterise these works. The first fully realised group of these pieces, made at his studio in Pennsylvania, are still a pure white. Cradled on dark metal supports,

fabricated from found materials and old steel scrap, the vaguely alien organic quality of these gleaming carapaces simultaneously attracts and repels the viewer.

The cocoons in the Finish Retretti Caves, standing in cast iron cages, have been designed to hold the pieces upright, thus suggesting both support and restraint. The textured, blackened metal recalls the branches of a grove tree, contrasting dramatically with the slick surface skin of the glass. The cocoon communicates to the viewer the spirit imprisoned in the body.

To many people, the cocoon installations communicate a sublime solemn atmosphere, concealing spirits within them. Just what these spirits are and where they are going each person must imagine for himself. A possible answer could be found by looking back to the ancient Egyptians who believed that man was composed of body and spirit. They also believed that the spirit could remain alive after the physical death of the body, and were therefore preserved and provided with the necessary sustenance. Where the after-life of the spirit was thought to take place is not known, but it may have been in a kind of underworld to which access was gained through the pit of the tomb.

The cocoons can also be taken as both a witty and serious comment on sexuality in the age of AIDS, because the form of the works unintentionally brings to mind the shape of a condom,

One could, however, unburden the works of excess meaning and accept them as they are, with the directness of a child: as an enchanting fairytale providing the exuberant pleasure of discovery and realisation. They can also be seen as a rich folkloristic explosion of feeling" (Kookinen, Järjestäjät, 1993, p2).

Tobin's spiralling forms, his *Cocoons*, are therefore reminiscent of a wide range of associations such as Greek amphora vessels, sepulchres. The nautilus genus of molluscs related to the octopus and squid that lives in the Pacific and Indian oceans and has a spiral shell, and a human figure. I also find that his cocoons resemble the chrysalis of a silkworm. The caterpillar is hatched from an egg and it moults four times during its growth over a period of about a month. It then spins a mat of silk into which it digs its claspers, then forms a girdle of silk around its body helping it to hold itself in a semi-vertical position. It then becomes shorter and fatter until the cuticle splits in the thorax region. The emergence of the butterfly from the pupa is another instance of metamorphosis where the wings are at first small and crumpled but are gradually pumped up by blood forced into their veins.

Steve Tobin's exhibition in the Retretti Caves takes one through a range of stages symbolising the events in the whole cycle of life from birth to death. To me, the *Cocoons* signifies rebirth. What concerns me most about these forms is the passage or journey of the spirit in its transition to the other world.

They are fashioned in different ways, sometimes open and split, revealing their delicate interiors, sometimes grandly enhanced as the ceremonial centre of attention. The tranquil unsplit/cracked cocoons are outwardly quiet yet there is an inner force, the spirit which seems to be developing, preparing itself to be released or perhaps it already has been released into a different state of being.

In a 1990 installation in a chapel in Belgium (*Figure 15*), a grove of these caged cocoons provided the counterpart for a second group suspended high above them from an armature



Figure 15
Steve Tobin's *Cocoons* in Chapel, *Ascension*, Antwerp
Glass and Iron, 10m (H)
1990



of steel bars. Unadorned, with either the vivid colour or the elaborate decoration of the pieces clustered on the chapel floor, the streamlined floating forms were lit from within. As they revolved slowly around the shadowy high-ceilinged space, these spirit cocoons suggested angels or maybe souls, released from their gaudy carapaces below.

It is possible to consider that there was a transitional stage (a journey) from the spirit (or soul) being released and arriving at the other world, to which they belonged. This finds expression in many religions. Considering this expression and looking at Tobin's split cocoons, I am reminded of boats, carrying something whole and precious, possibly a spirit or soul (*Figure 16*). This journey or transition in Egyptian Eschatology sometimes involved crossing water. In Celtic mythology the transition from the mortal to the other world (Tír na nÓg, Land of youth and immortality) was often undertaken by a journey over water, one of those myths being Fionn MacCumhaill's journey (MacCana, 1968, pp104-113).

Furthermore, it was known that many tombs in Egypt were equipped with boats to enable their owners to make the journey to Abydos, the other world. The Egyptians offered various explanations to account for the daily passage of the sun across the earth. According to the view most commonly accepted, an Egyptian God, accompanied by his retinue, traversed the sky each day in a boat. The moon and the stars were likewise believed to journey across the sky in ships. No method of transport would seem more natural to the ancient Egyptian than a ship, for both he and his ancestors from time immemorial had used the Nile to travel from place to place, and it was only logical that the heavenly bodies should be conveyed on their celestial journey by similar means.

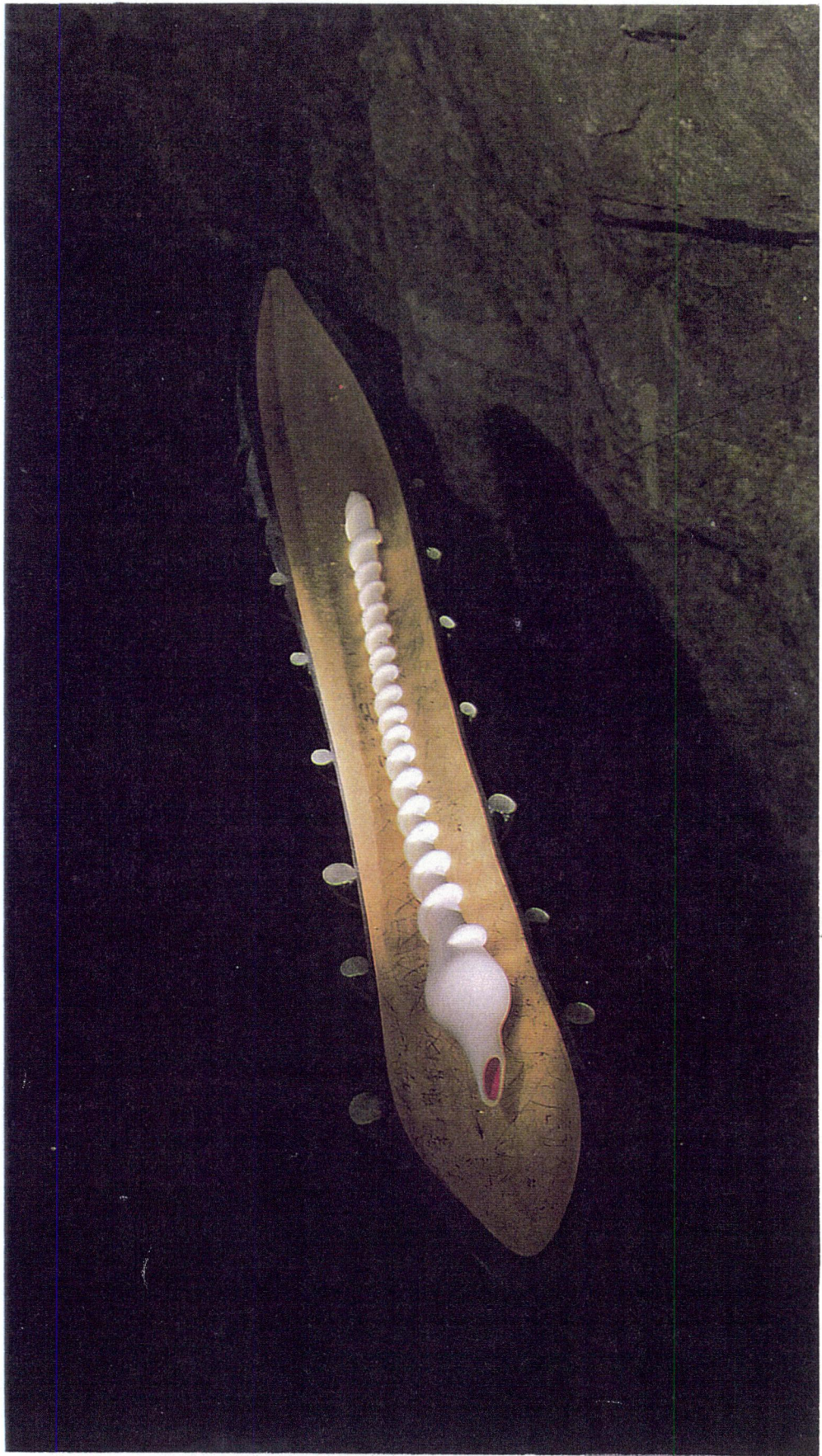


Figure 16
Steve Tobin's *Regeneration Journey*
Glass, 1.1 x 2m
1993

In one of the best stages in Tobin's exhibition at Retretti, you come to the deepest point in the cave where, as mentioned in Chapter One, cocoons are laid out in a pond to resemble an Indian Burial. Here the sculptures stand in water, lightweight, shiny and radiant. An association with Charon is not far off. The Greeks and Romans believed that the dead were ferried across an infernal river, the Acheron or Styx, by a demonic boatman called Charon, for whom payment was made by placing a coin in the mouth of the deceased. Another way of looking at the concept of rebirth may be perceived in Tobin's split cocoons by associating them with a child in the womb image. The large egg in the centre could possibly be seen as the child cradled in the womb (*Figure 17*). Therefore I find an association with the egg (child) to Palaeolithic burials, namely where skeletons are found lying on their sides, in a crouched position, have been interpreted by some prehistorians as evidence of belief in rebirth. The posture of the corpse perhaps imitating the position of the child in the womb.

The rich colour of red that Tobin has beautifully captured in his cocoons can again be associated with palaeolithic burials. "*The presence of red in some burials suggests the practice of contagious magic*" (Encyclopedia Britannica, 1978, Vol 5 p533). The corpse would possibly be stained with the colour of blood in order to revitalise it. For Steve Tobin, his cocoons

are metaphors for the dialogue and transformation of body and spirit. They are human scale and larger to involve the viewer. The viewer can be overwhelmed standing in an environment of cocoons. One can get lost among the cocoons and feel caged by them as well. But ultimately it is the ideal of metamorphosis that I am trying to introduce in relation to the human condition. What is the next for us? I do not have any answers, only questions. (Tobin in Järjestäjät, 1993, p5)

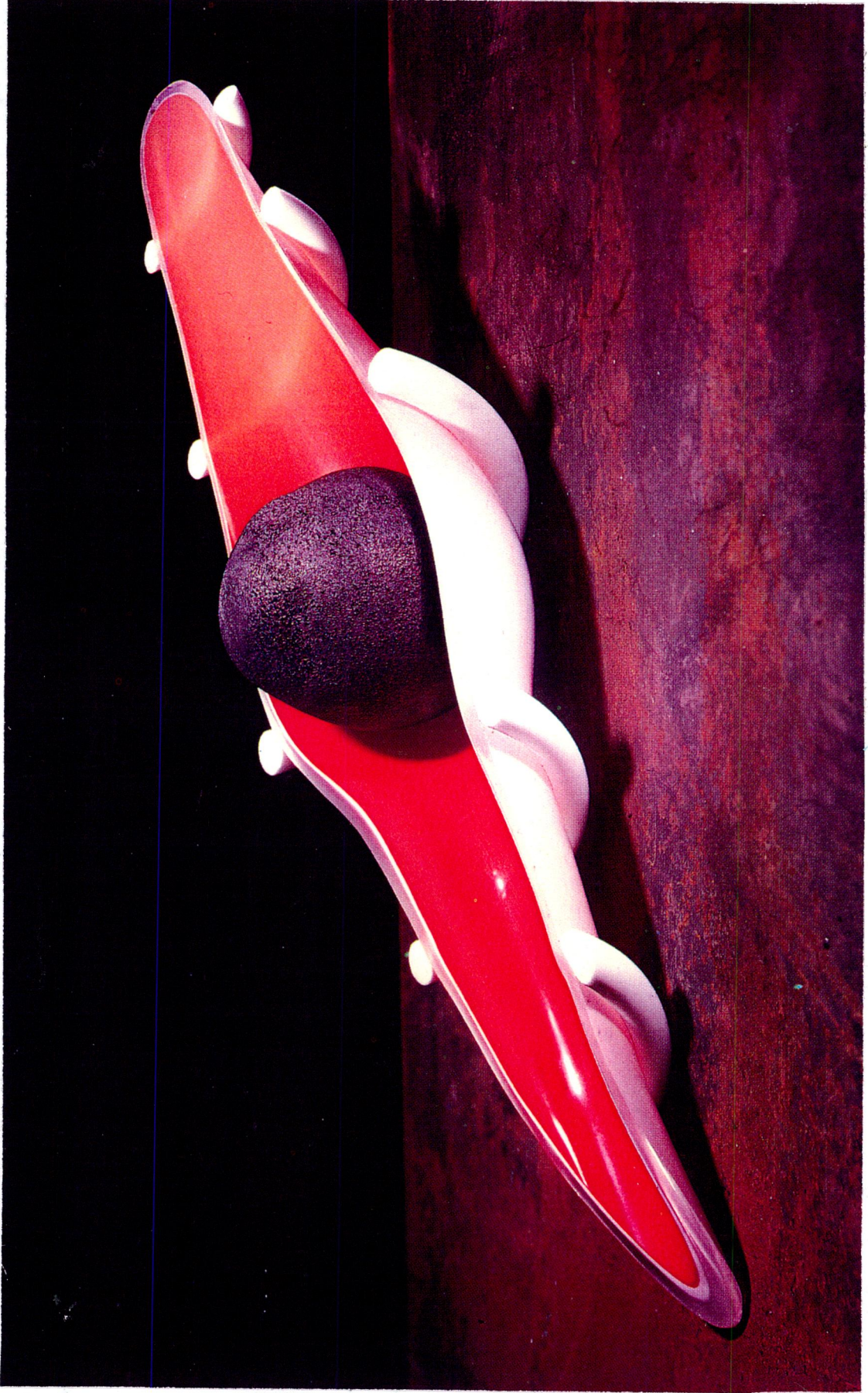


Figure 17
Steve Tobin's *Cocoon With Egg*
Glass, 1.1m
1990



Sonja Landweer's *Seed Forms*

"The forms are simple and organic: perhaps with sexual overtones, but severe and formalised. The effect is immediate, despite their small size" (Irish Times, 31/8/93)

For Sonja Landweer, as long as she can remember, seeds have held her imagination.

All those diverse forms holding within them the blueprint of the organism that was, and the future organism that will become. Seeds are to me miraculous secrets. Even with the utmost imagination, one cannot deduct from their form what will grow from them. Yet they contain within them the quintessential of what grew before - plant or tree that can spring to life again if allowed to germinate their own archetype contained within.
(Landweer, Interview, 1993)

Landweer seeks to express in her seed forms those things which manifest the truths in which she believes, namely that natural forms are themselves creative gestures. *"Spiritual statements solidified"* (Robinson, Bowe, Files on Sonja Landweer) may be an apt comparison. Landweer's *Seeds* are a metaphor. They are made paradoxically out of clay, which is the very substance of nature that seeds need as their natural environment in which to be able to germinate and grow forth. *"My 'seeds' hardened into permanence by fire and nature's seeds ripened through fire of the sun. Both culminating through processes of warmth"* (Landweer, Interview, 1993).

Gratefully, I have visited Sonja Landweer's home in Kilkenny, where I was able to study her *Seed Forms*. To actually see and touch these forms is certainly more awakening rather than to view them in a photograph. I found it hard to believe that the *Seeds* were made

out of clay. Ovoid, almost embryo-like forms, satin smooth, monochrome black, some emphasised with gilding (*Figures 18 and 19*), these *Seeds* reminded me of pebbles I used to find on the beach, eroded and smothered forms, formed with curves by the movement of the ocean's current.

Landweer's small seed forms were intentionally made with concern for the sense of touch. I found that whichever way I held a particular *Seed*, it fitted or moulded comfortably into my hand (*Figure 20*). Like Ying-Yang balls (Chinese therapeutic balls you rotate in a certain rhythmical manner in your hands) I found that rotating the form in my hand was very therapeutic and relaxing.

Flower-like, the *Seeds* spread their fragile rim, allowing me to peer inside, visually enter and examine the interiors as well as to stand back and admire the exterior (*Figures 21 and 22*). Looking at these forms from above, presented yet another space entirely, similarly outlined by an internal profile that did not necessarily need to match the external; space itself became that which was sculpted and defined by solid walls.

Different values could be implied by these internal and exterior profiles. The open mouth, a dark passage accentuated internally and externally by ribbing. The impression on the outside was a rounded oval base whilst inside, a dark obscure space was evident, perhaps a womb-like chamber and pod (*Figures 23 and 24*). In my view these *Seed Forms* are reminiscent of new-born creatures seeking nourishment and daylight, reflecting an ancient Egyptian ritual called "*the opening of the mouth*" (Encyclopedia Britannica, 1978, Vol 5 p533). The Egyptians believed that the body was essential for a proper afterlife, so a



Figure 18
Sonja Landweer's *Seed Form*
Clay, Monochrome Black, Gilding
1990



Figure 19

Sonja Landweer's *Seed Form*
Clay, Monochrome Black, Gilding
1990



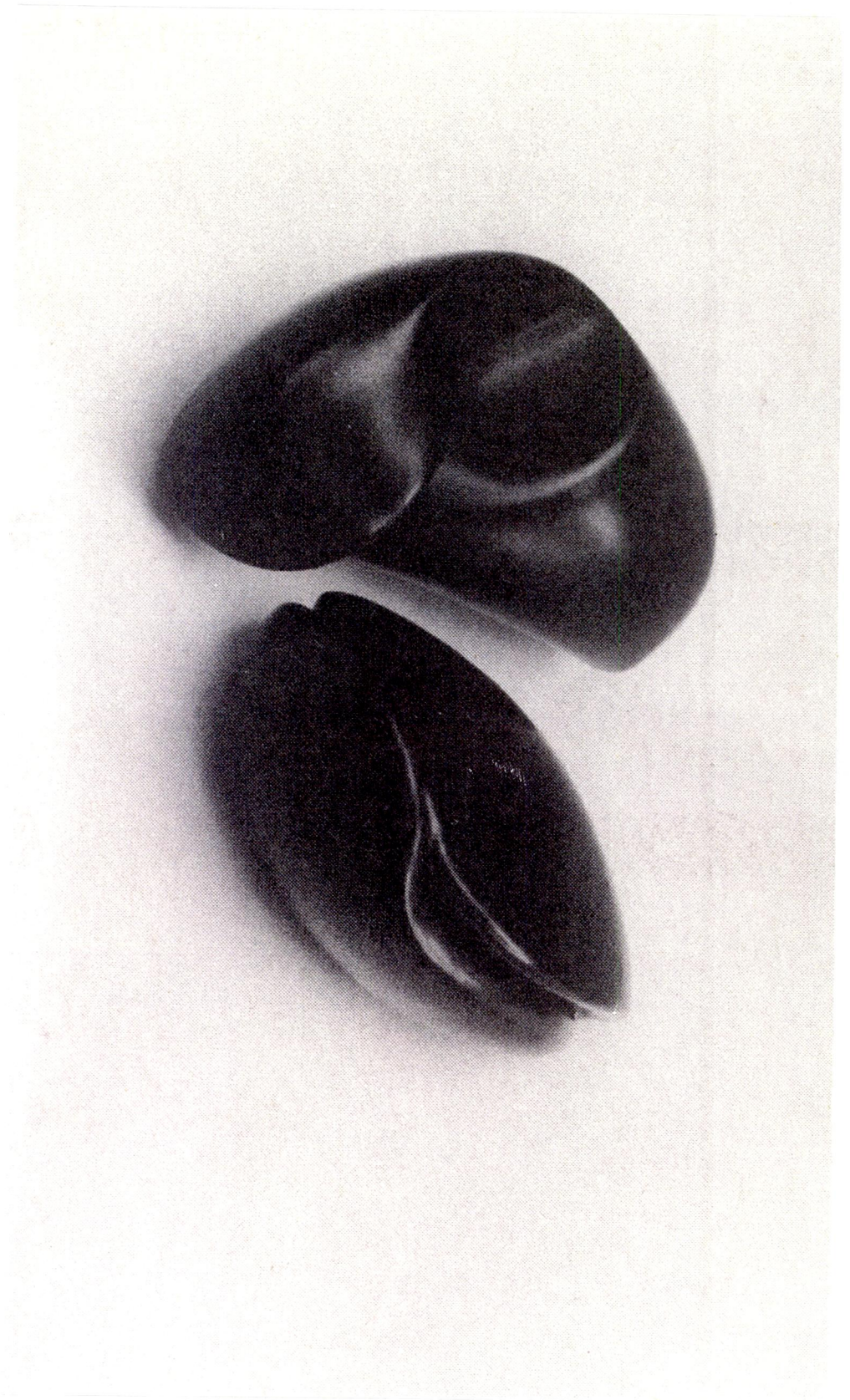


Figure 20
Sonja Landweer's *Seed Form*
Clay, Monochrome Black
1993/94



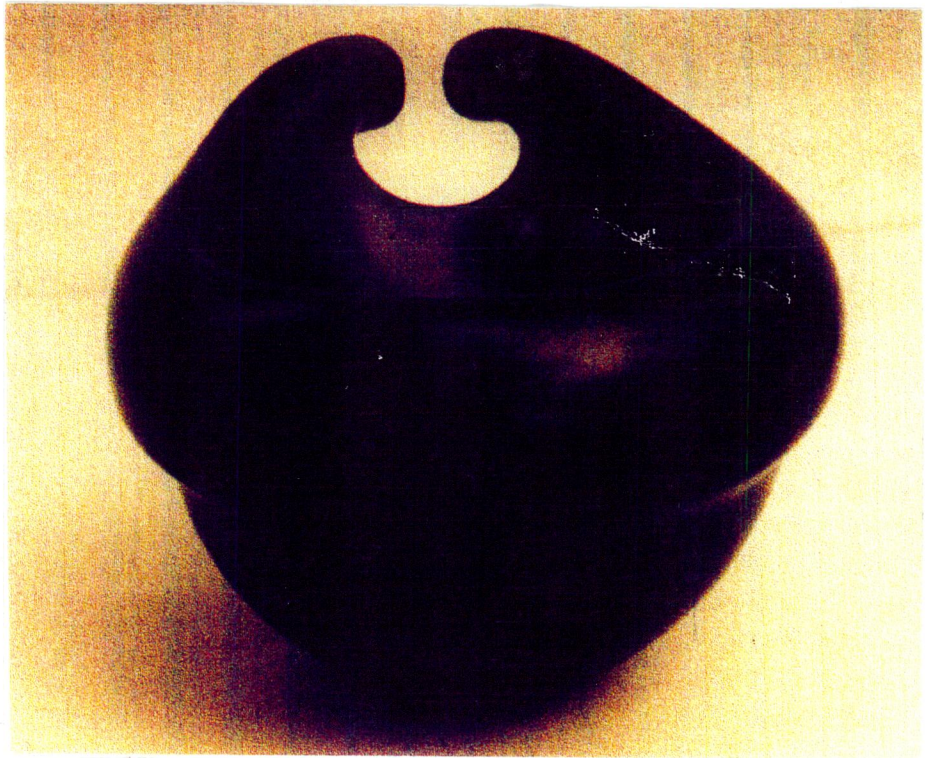


Figure 21
Sonja Landweer's *Seed Form*
Clay, Monochrome Black
1990

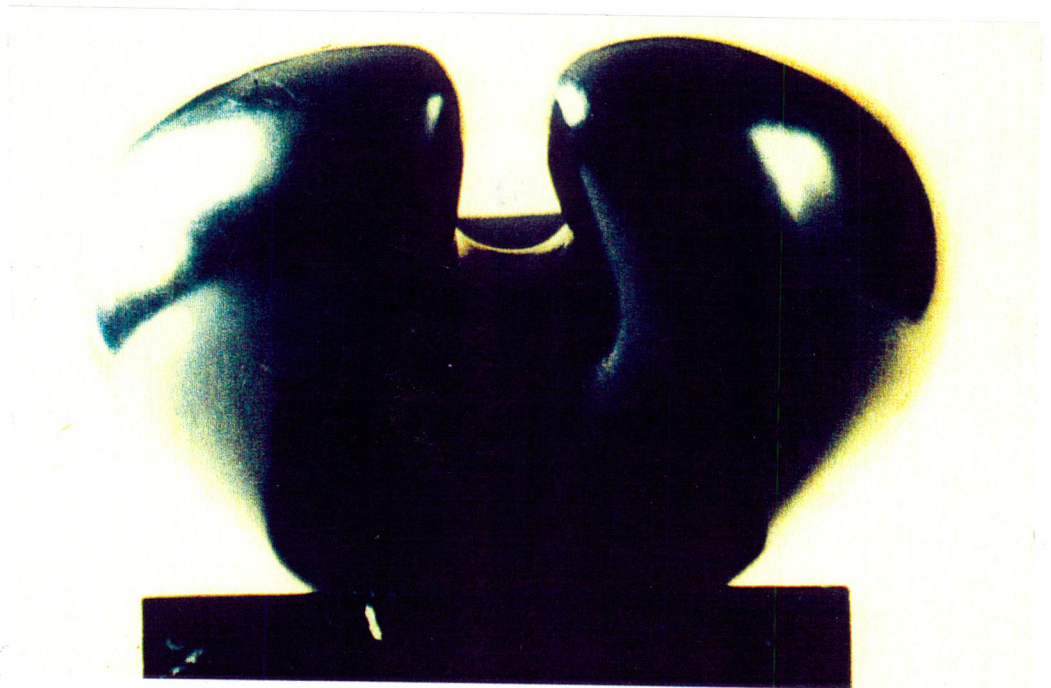


Figure 22
Sonja Landweer's *Seed Form*
Clay, Monochrome Black
1990





Figure 23
Sonja Landweer's *Seed Form*
Clay, Monochrome Black Gilding
1990



Figure 24
Sonja Landweer's *Seed Form*
Clay, Monochrome Black
1990



complex process of ritual embalming was established. This process was intended not only to preserve the corpse from physical disintegration, but also to assist in reanimation. "*Opening of the mouth*" ((Encyclopedia Britannica, 1978, Vol 5 p533) which visually relates to the open generous mouth of these seed forms, was the most significant of these ritual transactions. Specifically designed to restore to the mummified body its ability to see, breath and take in nourishment, this can be related to Landweer's new-born spirit about to emerge.

Landweer's pieces are hand build around a removable core and are beaten and compressed, shrinking around a secret interior space, gaining density and exerting pressure on the space surrounding them. This secret interior space attaining to another mode of being - that of spirit - is equivalent to being born a second time, to something new, as the most striking expression of newness is birth. Therefore, these seed forms are initiatory symbols of returning to the womb and birth. We find this same pattern in a large number of initiatory myths and rites. The idea of gestation and childbirth is expressed by a series of homonogizable images - entrance into the womb of the Great Mother (Mother Earth) or into the body of a sea monster, or of a wild beast, or even of a domestic animal. Obviously, the initiatory hut also belongs to the same family of images, projecting the image of the seed.

We find the pattern of the perilous return to the womb, firstly in those myths in which the hero is swallowed by a sea monster and then emerges victorious, by forcing his way out of its belly. Secondly, in the myths and miraculous narratives of Shamans, "*who during their trances are supposed to enter the belly of a giant fish or whale*" (Eliade, 1959, p52). Thirdly, in a number of myths of an initiatory traversal through "*a vagina dentata or a*

perilous descent into a cave or crevasse assimilated to the mouth or the uterus of Mother Earth - a descent that brings the hero to the Other World" (Eliade, 1959, p52). Fourthly and finally, the same pattern is interwoven in the group of myths and symbols that for example have to endure, with a "*paradoxical message*" (Eliade, 1959, p52) between two millstones in constant motion.

Like the hero being swallowed by a sea monster and forcing himself out, the secret interior energies (or spirits) in these pieces are forced out in to another world, unwillingly, but ultimately for their salvation.

A recurrent theme in Irish mythology, is that of shape shifting and reincarnations permutating through the animal and mortal world, such as the Story of Clan and his many reincarnations. In the form of a salmon he was eastern, entered the womb of a woman and was born once again (Scott, 1992, p32-39).

Conclusion to Chapter Three

"*What the caterpillar calls the end of the world, the master calls the butterfly*" (Bach, 1992, p134). These occult cycles of transformations are contained within a shell, which obscures the inner force of the creative potential of the cocoon, chrysalis seed and indeed the human shell. Where lie temples for this life force, the soul and a hidden force driving the entire universe through *Liminal* states suggesting states of latent transformation.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRODUCT AND COMMUNICATION

In this chapter I propose to refer back to my Introduction and following chapters. Up to this point in my Thesis I have examined *The Rites of Passage* (Morgan & Morris, 1995, p12) in which Arnold Van Gennep explains life crises and ceremonies and projects the moments of stages, transitions and ceremonies. For the artist, the creative process beings with an idea, often resulting in a product. It is in this chapter that I will discuss the product, with reference to Tobin in conjunction with *Rites of Passage* containing the concept of a "passeur" who "*moves people or things across borders into forbidden zones, in other words a ferryman*" (Morgan & Morris, 1995, p12). With this in mind I will discuss how the artist's product communicates to the viewer and whether they can form bridges via communication. I feel one must pay particular attention to Steve Tobin's *Doors*, which appealingly invites the transformation of space and emotion for the viewer. I will also be briefly mentioning the exhibition *Rites of Passage* held at the Tate Gallery in the summer of 1995. As previously mentioned (Chapter Two), the end result of the Creative Process arrives at the final product. As far as Robbins is concerned, communication completes this process, whereas for Mackinnon this is necessary, but he does not include communication as a specific stage. I see communication as an important stage, whether it is included or excluded from the creative process. For the artist, after working out his inspiration, this creative individuality plays two finely balanced roles. He/she is both creator and audience. He/she communicates with himself and his work. Psychoanalyst Kris (1952) says "*While the artist creates in the state of inspiration, he and*

his work are one. When he looks upon the product of his creative urge, he sees it from the outside and his own first audience - he participates in what the voice has done" (Stein, 1974, p61).

"There is thus a dialogue between creator and his work" (Stein, 1974, p61). Steve Tobin comments on this, *"my work influences me more than I influence it"* (Tobin, Fax, 1995). The dialogue between the creator and the creation often needs to continue long after an artwork is completed. The artist may decide to release many pieces free to do their work in the world: he may prefer to communicate with others or retain some pieces around himself as with old friends.

What is important to us when communicating is words. I strongly feel that the power of images can be another language. Both image and communication can be direct and concrete but the usual modes of writing and speaking obscure rather than reveal the vibrant depths of the creator's intentions. The viewer's enjoyment of the work of art is due to the ability to enter into the artist's creative experience. *"Deep speaks to Deep; the same source that the artist tapped into is touched in us"* (Robbins, 1995, p114). Yet Stein believes that

In the process of communication with others, the creative person must eliminate some of the difficulties he experienced in the course of arriving at his final product: This does not mean that the final product may not be complex but only that the audience is not expected to re-experience all the problems and difficulties involved in the process. (Stein, 1974, p32)

I agree with Robbins, although there are emotional elements involved through the communicative power of the work. When the artist reaches into the inner depths and brings forth something genuine, a bridge is formed between people and/or between the individual and the creator. According to Robbins,

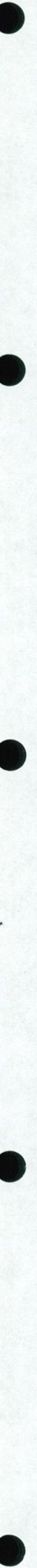
The imagination is the bridge between our mind and our feelings, for example, by the purposeful utilisation of mental images and symbols, we can release blocked emotional energy, transform it when released, and also develop or evoke feelings which are most in tune with our best values and goals (e.g. serenity, harmony, beauty, joy and courage)... All approaches to mental imagery play in one or more ways on the interaction between mental elements and the emotional field. (Robbins, 1985, p114)

In 1993 Tobin began working with his parabolic form in a new way. Creating a series called *Portals*, Tobin's arched slabs of cast glass suggest the monoliths erected at places like Stonehenge, by worshippers of light. Tobin's newest pieces are loci of energy, focusing our attention on a transition or displacement from one place to another. This journey is not from one physical location to another - the literal function of a portal - but rather into a different emotional state. These *Doors* or *Portals* are pointed towards the body and mind of the viewer (*Figure 25*). As one moves through these doors however, one experiences different emotions. The flowing patterns developed by the molten mass of glass during the making of the works, have solidified into colourful ornaments. This flow recollects the material's previous existence; just as the rocks of the globe are frozen, revealing strata that date from the origin of the earth. Tobin searches for similarities and concentrates this through the medium of pure abstract glass.

The immense physicality of these pieces act as a potential barrier to the viewer. The translucent volume of the glass invited the viewer into the interior. The body is obstructed,



Figure 25
Steve Tobin's Door, *Blue Sun*
Glass, 2.2m (H)
1993



allowing only the mind and emotions enter the space much as a painting does. Nevertheless, whilst paintings seem to be ideas of themselves, the volume and massive presence of these *Doors* exists in three dimensional space and confronts the viewer's physical self and inquisitiveness. It is this physical confrontation that Tobin hopes "*will shake loose the more subliminal primal emotions that he is attempting to transform in the interiors of these Doors*" (Tobin in Järjestäjät, 1993, pp5,6)

The doorway can lead you to a place and the colour in his glass *Doors* helps to define that place: bubbly blue-green materials evoke colours of primordial sea; yellow-red/orange is the colour of fire and creation of energy. The transition in colour represent the transformative nature of creation. The shape of these pieces comes from the space under an arch or doorway. This tall parabolic form is the solid representation of that space which we must pass through when we cross a threshold.

I am using this shape as a vehicle to contain the colours and textures that I am painting with, much like the rectangular shape of painter's canvas, except that this shape carries the theme of the work into a literal plane as well as presenting the viewer with a physical/metaphysical door. (Tobin, in Järjestäjät, 1993, pp5,6).

If for one instant I can catch the viewer off guard with my presentation, the effect of the work may enter their subconscious before reason deserts it. This is why I often design a piece that is uncomfortably large for its intended space. By dramatically impacting or assaulting the viewer with the presentation I can throw him off balance and move his mind and emotions. For that fraction of a second the unreal becomes real. once this door is opened it can never be closed" (Tobin in Järjestäjät, 1993, pp5,6).

It is therefore fair to term Tobin as a "*Ferryman*" (Morgan & Morris, 1995, p12) and it something he hopes to be.

The *Doors* by Tobin exhibited in his retrospective at the Retretti Caves, Finland (1993), play only a small part in forming these bridges. This exhibition, which I described earlier, was the first presentation in the American and Finnish cultural exchange project entitled *Bridge of Glass*. The exchange of artists and exhibitions between Finland and the United States is a proud tradition and an effective way of communicating between two cultures.

John K. Kelly, US ambassador, said "*Steve Tobin's exhibition demonstrates again that the visual arts do, indeed, provide bridges across borders*" (Kelly in Järjestäjät, 1993, pii).

The exhibition *Rites of Passage* proposed that "*artists have an important role in society: that they be considered as passeurs, priests (perhaps) of that secular religion that art has become*" (Morgan & Morris, 1993, p12).

All eleven artists, through their work attempted to raise questions about many aspects of our lives and how such works of art function in a period of personal and global vulnerability.

Now, at the end of a century, indeed, at the millennium, a shift of attitude may be taking place. More and more, art is about issues in the world in general. It is not that art is there to solve our problems, but that the particular way of problem solving which art can

undertake may be of more use to us than the day to day workings of (say) politics, our model for one way in which the world can be changed.

Diversity and fragmentation have characterised the art of the decade: more than ever before, artists are engaging with new types of practice and claiming an ever-wider vocabulary of materials as available to art. Rites of Passage is an exhibition which celebrates this variety and breadth of experience in art today. (Serota in Morgan & Morris, 1995, p7)

The works of the eleven artists "*which work with the impossible, with the disgusting the intolerable*" (Kristeva in Morgan & Morris, 1995, p7) may lead the audience to repress this state of crisis portrayed, refusing to acknowledge it, or others may be looking for a form of catharsis (*Figure 26*). The artists have done their work by giving their work form, and must leave the interpretation to others and the future. They present images in much the same way as nature allows a plant to grow. It is up to us to draw conclusions.

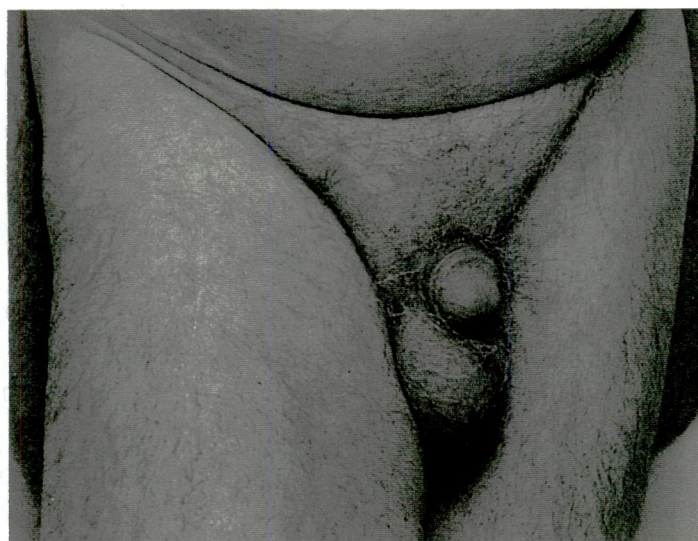
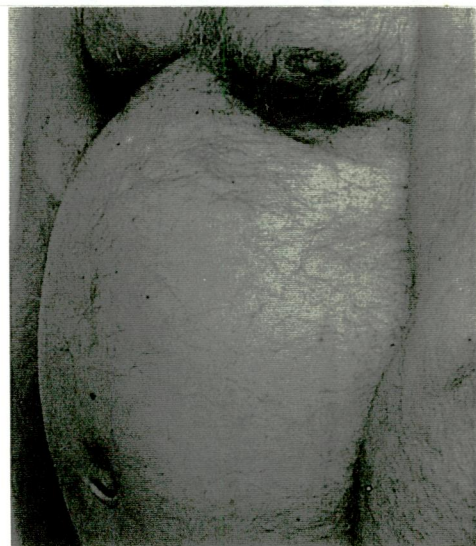
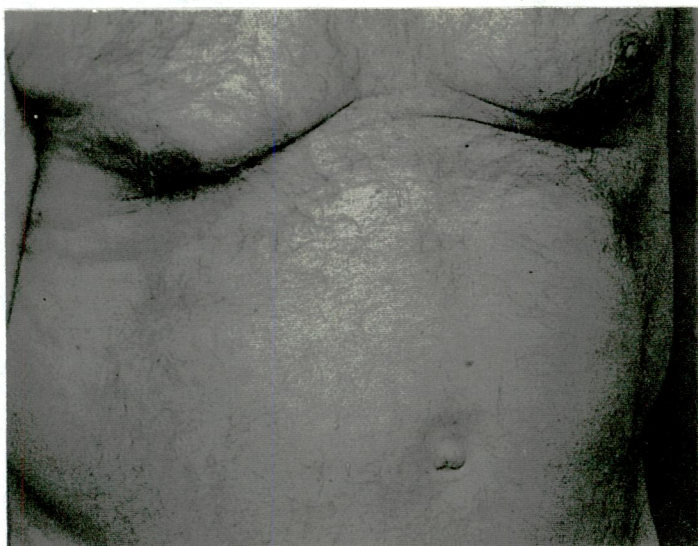


Figure 26
John Coplaans' *Self-Portrait*
Silver Print Photographs Cold Mounted on Sintra Board, 78" x 68"
1994



CONCLUSION

Ultimately, today we find ourselves in the midst of the most perilous time in the history of the earth. The problems we face are so incomprehensible that most of us feel paralysed by their magnitude.

Man discovered interchangeable parts, the machine assembly lines, and went berserk producing things. We call this the Industrial Evolution. Industrial nations, particularly America, in a little over 100 years, have sapped the earth of resources that it took millennia to create. We have done this in an orgy of object making. Typically, we can hardly wait to throw away the object we have just made in order to make the next one. Computers for example, where one new model, one new program, one speeded-up function, replace each other one after another,

However, today there are many artists whose work involves the worship of nature and a ritual participation in its process, such as Andy Goldsworthy (*Figure 27*). This work is not generally to be found in galleries but in the landscape, and many leave no trace of their short existences except in photographic records.

Steve Tobin's work today is portraying a revealing history of patterns connecting man and nature, conveyed through his vision. When Tobin takes a fish and points out its skeletal structure, we are able to see that the same pattern is repeated throughout nature. The



Figure 27
Andy Goldsworthy's *Wooden Beech*
Wood, Hooke Entrance, Dorset
April 1986



structure of a fern or a leaf that stems from a central branch and spreads out like wings shows the essence of its function which is universal in all nature.

Philosophically, using found objects is Steve Tobin's contribution to re-cycling. He has turned surplus tank windows into a prismatic adobe hut. Animal bones have been cast in bronze and manipulated into orbs, arches and undulating walls, e.g. children's toys, women's shoes and garden fresh vegetables have been frozen in bronze to create thoughtful compositions (*Figure 28*).

Landweer's works from the past up to today also show a strong link to nature and man. When Landweer takes hand-made paper, tissue or crepe paper and makes lightweight adornments, we can see that she is concerned with the need to recycle certain materials of which paper is one. She has turned bone, slate and leather into many beautiful adornments (*Figure 29*). Landweer states

For many years I have been fascinated how other cultures use inherent materials for the making of human adornment, by which the wearer can be changed in many ways for festive occasions; for status; for ritual or to conceal or enhance both body and individuality (Landweer, Interview, 1988)

I think that creativity can no longer be left to artists; creativity must find its way into our everyday activities, inform our personal and corporate decision-making and influence our political processes. Either we allow a creative dynamic to be expressed through us in positive ways or we destroy ourselves and our earth. We must all become artists and take into account what is good for this organism we inhabit called earth. In the U2 song *The Fly*, the lyric says "*Man will rise, man will fall*".



Figure 28

Steve Tobin's *Toy Bronzes*

Vegetables, Shoes & Bronze, 12"(L) x 4"(W) x 5"(H)

1993-95



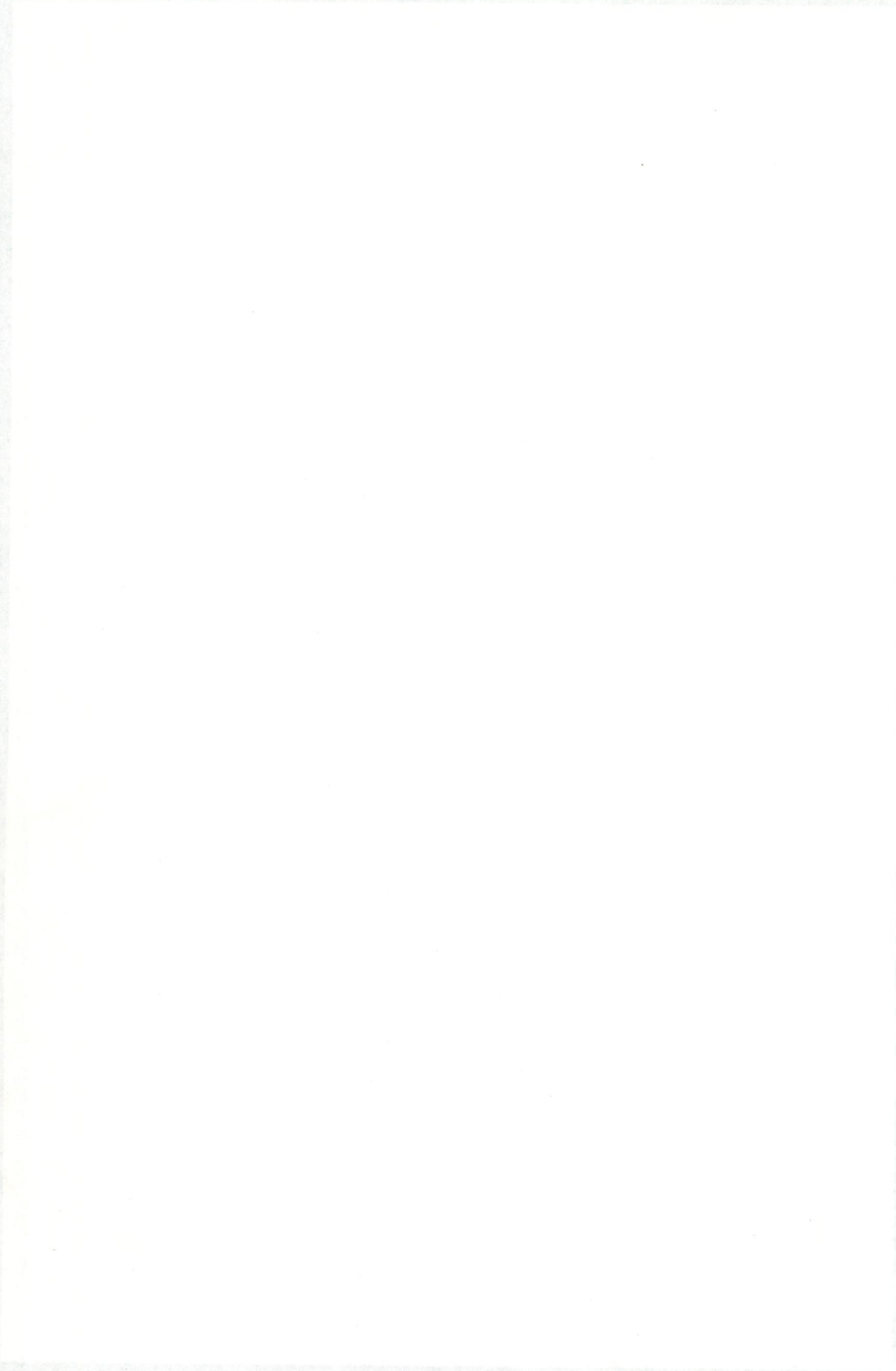


Figure 29

Sonja Landweer's *Body Sculpture*

Stoneware, Linlaid With Sisal and Buffalo Leather

ND



There are many predictions as to what will happen to the earth and the human race. I believe that just as a caterpillar in its life cycle is unaware of its destination, it can only prepare itself for the next stage by building a cocoon around itself in order to emerge into something new - the resulting butterfly. It may be possible for the human race to emulate this. One who does not know his destination is instinctively like a caterpillar, slowly wrapping a cocoon around one's very own species. Who knows, one day that cocoon may split, and as the dinosaurs disappeared, and the ape/human arose. It may emerge as something new, transformed. It is all a never-ending cycle.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- BACH, Richard, *Illusions, The Adventures of a Reluctant Messiah*, Pan Books, London, 1992
- BAILIN, Sharon, *Achieving Extraordinary Ends*, Ablex Publishing Corp, New Jersey, 1994
- BALDICK, R., *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life*, Knopf, New York, 1962
- BERMAN, Philip & Muriel, *Steve Tobin: Reconstructions*, Philip & Muriel Berman Museum of Art, Collegeville, Pennsylvania, 1995
- COHEN, J.M & M.J (eds), *The Penguin Dictionary of Quotations*, Penguin Books, London, 1968
- EDWARDS, I.E.S., *The Pyramids of Egypt With New Material*, Penguin Group, London, 1993
- ELIADE, Mircea, *Myths, Dreams and Mysteries*, Harvill Press, London, 1968
- ELIADE, Mircea, *Birth and Rebirth*, Harper and Bros. Publications, New York, 1959
- ELIADE, Mircea, *Symbols, The Sacred and The Arts*, The Crossroad Publishing Co., New York, 1990
- ENCYCLOPEDIA BRITANNICA, *Encyclopedia Britannica*, No. 18, 1978
- ENCYCLOPEDIA BRITANNICA, *Encyclopedia Britannica*, No. 5, 1978
- GILCHRIST, Margaret, *The Psychology of Creativity*, Australian Education Pub., Minnesto, 1976
- GROSS, Kim Johnson, *Body*, Thomas & Hudson Ltd, London, 1994
- GUILEY, Rosemary Ellen, *Moonscapes*, Cynthia Parzych Publishing Inc., New York, 1991
- JÄRJESTÄJÄT, Näyttelyn, *Steve Tobin at Retretti*, Retretti Art Centre, Retretti, 1993

JUNG, C.G., *The Spirit of Man, Art and Literature*, Bollingen Foundation, London, 1966

KLOTZ, Utam, *Nothing New Under the Earth*, Neues Glas, No. 4, 1993

MacCANA, Proinsias, *Celtic Mythology*, The Hamlyn Publishing Group Ltd, London, 1968

MacKINNON, Donald W., *Creativity: A Multi-Faceted Phenomenon*, North Holland Publishing Company, Amsterdam, 1970

MAGOR, Thomasin, *African Warriors*, Harper Collins Publishers, London, 1994

MORGAN, Stuart, MORRIS, Frances, *Rites of Passage, Art for the End of the Century*, Trustees, Tate Gallery Publications, London, 1995

ROBBINS, Lois B., *Waking Up In The Age Of Creativity*, Bear & Co., New Mexico, Sante Fe, 1985

ROGERS, Carl, *On Becoming A Person*, Constable & Co. Ltd, New York, 1961

SCOTT, Michael, *Irish Myths & Legends*, Warner Books, London, 1992

STEIN, I. Morris, *Stimulating Creativity*, Academic Press, New York, 1974

THIERRY, Gulan, *Steve Tobin*, Birdyland Editions, Birdyland TG International Art Gallery, Chatres, 1992

Interviews

FINE, Kate, *Interview with Sonja Landweer*, Letterkenny, December 1995

Other Material

BOWE, Nicola G., *File on Sonja Landweer*

FINE, Kate, *Correspondence with Steve Tobin via Fax*, December 1995

U2, "The Fly", *Achtung Baby* Album, Dublin 1991