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Constructed Knowledge

A Written Accompaniment to the Thesis Exhibition

by

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ABSTRACT

Where the exhibition Constructed Knowledge speaks visually and generally about representation and issues of identity, the paper in support of the exhibition is structured in an unusual way to tell the specifics of the intellectual and personal journey that has led me to a clearer understanding of my work and my life. The narrative is interwoven with brief discussions of modernist and postmodernist art theory, feminism, and epistemology, areas that have influenced my painting over the past ten years. Within the framework of process, form, content, and accessibility to viewers, I situate my modernist practice of abstract painting within a postmodern context.

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CONSTRUCTED KNOWLEDGE: THE BLUEPRINT

It is unfortunate that the term "voice" -- denoting a person's transition from a state of silence -- has become a catchword and often meets with feigned interest or reciprocal silence in intellectual discussions. This is, in part, the result of double messages given to us by postmodern theorists who, on the one hand, base subjectivity on concepts of collective positionality and difference and, on the other, claim the death of the subject. It is also the result of disinterest, that hood of smiling boredom that slips over the eyes of those who assume there is no longer a problem with voice, that everything has been said. Particularly evident when women's issues enter into the discussion, this mask covers the faces of young women who mistakenly assume that their equal status in society has already been assured and, conversely, of young men who are unnecessarily defensive due to their misunderstanding of feminist objectives. All of these perspectives are dangerous, for if intellectual theory prevails and individuals are not validated for telling their stories, we may never come to a complete understanding of what "otherness" entails and, more importantly, that the dualistic positions of subject and "other" are artificial constructs; while they may be useful devices for comparison, adhering to their limitations does not promote an understanding of the complexities of living within society.

Constructed Knowledge, the support paper, is a dialogue between three voices. Writing as a person who has come only recently to seriously question the relevance of art theory to personal experience, I speak initially in two voices: the

one, my academic voice, addresses those of you who would evaluate (according to presumed established academic standards) the depth of my research into modernist and postmodernist theory and to critique (from your own understanding of presumed established academic standards) my own understanding of that research. The second voice describes the personal experience which I believe has guided both my studio and academic research for the past two years. Framed within my two voices is the voice of authority, those articulate specialists in particular areas of theory whom I carefully quote or paraphrase.

While my voices reflect the division of the rational and the emotional, that great dichotomy which so many artists in the past have addressed, I hope to bring it into the context of epistemology. Within a critique of the ways in which knowledge is given and acquired, my two voices represent the states of separate and connected knowing.

Of course, both voices are limited for I cannot cover all the theoretical ground that I might and I choose to tell you only those parts of my personal narrative that I am willing to share. Through the academic discussion, I hope to place the modernist practice of painting within a postmodern context. Throughout the narrative I relate personal stories from a tale that I am asked to tell over and over again, in different situations, to people from diverse backgrounds. What I hope to do through these separate finite voices is to eventually synthesize them into the one voice that, I believe, expresses itself through my art practice.

An individual's right to speak must involve subjectivity and, because I am a woman, my subjectivity is based in feminism. Since it was the university experience that introduced me to feminism and to my right to question the status quo, this

paper also addresses education, the learning process which has allowed me to understand the motivation behind my work.

In the end, my work is my voice.

CONSTRUCTED KNOWLEDGE: THE FOUNDATION

We found that women repeatedly used the metaphor of voice to depict their intellectual and ethical development; and that the development of a sense of voice, mind, and self were intricately intertwined.

Women's Ways of Knowing

In western culture, the metaphors commonly associated with the acquisition of knowledge are visual; scientists and philosophers have often likened intellectual understanding to sight and light, aspects of the world that, like objective thought, require some distance for contemplation. Within the context of epistemological research among women, the features of closeness, listening, and speaking have been tied to the metaphor of voice.¹ The first implies a singular, subjective manifestation, the other an interactive exchange between subjects.

¹ Evelyn Fox Keller quoted by Mary Field Belenky, Blythe McVicker Clinchy, Nancy Rule Goldberger, Jill Mattuck Tarule, Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind, (New York: Basic Books, first edition 1986; reissued 1997), p. 18. Hereinafter, referred to as WWK.

When I was thirty-five years old, my husband asked me what I wanted to be when I grew up. He was not being cruel or facetious. After 17 years of serving as the primary care-giver and facilitator for my husband and children, I was restless and he recognized my desire to move on with my life.² Little did he know how our lives would change. Little did I know that, at the time, I was waiting for his permission.

Modernist texts written primarily from a masculine viewpoint gave rise to Barthes' essay which proclaimed The Death of the Author, removed "the author as both the source and locus of meaning," and proposed the impossibility of absolutely determining meaning. Meant to question "an ossified and essentially retrograde bourgeois humanism," it is questionable if the demise of the subject has been a liberating concept.³ The death is suspicious because it is "touted principally by white male academics in mostly elite universities"; removes the "forms of value and response"; and eliminates the "chance of challenging the ideology of the subject (as white male and middle-class) by developing alternative and different notions of subjectivity." It becomes troublesome when it further marginalizes those who would claim their individual and collective identity and their rights within society. Nancy Hartsock offers the most compelling objection:

² I loathe the term "housewife" since I have never felt especially attached to the houses within which I worked and parented our two children.

³ Abigail Solomon-Godeau, "Photography After Art Photography," Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation, ed. Brian Wallis (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1984), p. 81. Hereinafter, Art After Modernism.

Why is it that, exactly at the moment when so many of us who have been silenced begin to demand the right to name ourselves, to act as subjects rather than the objects of history, that just then the concept of subjecthood becomes 'problematic'?⁴

And so, I went to university to learn how to paint. And I did learn -- I learned the vocabulary and techniques of a modernist art practice, I learned how to place art works within an art historical context, and I learned how to discuss contemporary art issues. Much to the delight of my instructors, I discovered the joy and challenge of non-representational painting. A proselyte to formalism, I avoided any discussion of content for I believed my art to be objective and entirely self-referential.

The basis for subjectivity is giving the other a voice; the obstacle to overcome is to communicate concepts of identity without expressing individuality. It is reassuring that a theorist, Andreas Huyssen, has addressed the postmodern dilemma which would determine what it is that I may reveal of my search for identity: "It is certainly no accident that questions of subjectivity and authorship have resurfaced with a vengeance in postmodern text. After all, it *does* matter who is speaking or writing."⁵

⁴ Henry Giroux, Curriculum Discourse as Postmodernist Critical Practice, (Geelong, Victoria: Deakin University Press, 1990), p. 28. Giroux quotes Nancy Hartsock, Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, Terry Eagleton, and Andreas Huyssen.

⁵ Andreas Huyssen, "Mapping the Postmodern," The Post-Modern Reader, ed. Charles Jencks (London: Academy Editions, 1992), pp. 63, 64. Hereinafter, The Post-Modern Reader.

This distancing from my work served me well, for I understood that within academia my previous work and experience was unimportant and that my continuing roles as wife and mother were not validated by institutions of learning. I fought the label of "Mom," any patronization by instructors, and the stereotype of the "Sunday\hobby painter." I knew that I was intelligent, and that I could make it in this new and exciting context on its own terms and by my own merit.⁶

Having been given approval, I have a story to tell through my art. The next question is, if I prove worthy of the challenge, who then will judge if my "other" view is valid? As Mary Kelly has pointed out, "... how does the critic authenticate the work of art when the author is sexed and "his" truth is no longer universal?"⁷

For art history courses, I avidly researched the life and work of artists like Matisse, Antoni Tapies, Jack Bush, of contemporary Canadian artists from John Hall to Jeff Wall, and the theories of Clement Greenberg. While I loved to paint non-representationally I did not espouse a particular dogma, mostly because I asked carefully considered questions rather than offering answers. I was interested in the figurative, hyperrealistic,

⁶ "In acquiring the skills of separate knowing, women at this position did, indeed, transcend the stereotypes of women as creatures ruled by instinct and emotion, incapable of reason; but they also adopted a stereotyped view of reason as detached from feeling and remote from everyday experience." *WWK*, p. 124.

⁷ Mary Kelly, "Re-viewing Modernist Criticism," *Art After Modernism*, p. 98.

conceptual, and found-object oriented work of my peers, and I listened as they discussed conflicting views to modernism in critiques and argued contemporary issues, especially post-modernist theories, outside of class. I quietly listened and kept my thoughts to myself. I was "just" a painter as I had been "just" a homemaker and I had nothing to say.⁸

CONSTRUCTED KNOWLEDGE: THE FRAMING

With the Western tradition of dividing human nature into dual but parallel streams, attributes traditionally associated with the masculine are valued, studied, and articulated, while those associated with the feminine tend to be ignored.

Women's Ways of Knowing

In postmodern theory, subjectivity has been removed from the modernist realm of the individual unconscious, the territory explored by abstract expressionists, to the collective search for identity in contemporary, pluralistic culture.

⁸ "The inner voice turns critical; it tells them their ideas may be stupid. Women at this position think before they speak; and, because their ideas must measure up to certain objective standards, they speak in measured tones. Often, they do not speak at all. But this is not a passive silence, on the other side of this silence, reason is stirring." *WWK*, pp. 94, 95.

Otherness includes those who have been represented within the patriarchal system of modernism rather than having been the subjects of modernism; those who are outside the experience of "Western" culture, or who are not white, middle class, and male. Still primarily a phenomenon of Western society, there is little about other cultures that does not come from western sources.⁹ Fortunately, for my purposes, postmodern feminist criticism has provided an abundance of information on subjectivity.

I relied on the expertise of my instructors, but I did not find a mentor, someone I could openly question and in whom I could confide, In retrospect, I see that was partly my fault and partly the fault of the faculty; during the four years of my undergraduate program I took only four courses taught by women and only two of those instructors made occasional references to feminism. I did not identify strongly with any of them, even though I had a vague sense that I lived a feminist life. I took the formal training that they offered me and concentrated on honing my skills as a painter.¹⁰

⁹ Charles Jencks, What is Postmodernism?, 3rd ed. (New York: St. Martins Press, 1989), p. 58.

¹⁰ "The tragedy is that hidden multiplists still their public voice and are reluctant to share their private worlds; ultimately this hinders them from finding mentors who might support their intellectual and emotional growth. Hidden multiplists can be silently alienated from their educational experience" WWK, pp. 66, 67.

One expects that, because the subject is female, the discourse of feminist criticism is opposed to the object who is male. Discarding the radical image of feminists, that parody of angry, bra-burning females, feminist criticism gives valuable insights regarding the marginalization of women through predominant societal and cultural mechanisms. This is particularly true of representation, for in the past women have been the passive objects of representation, "... the constant point of masculine appropriation in a society in which representation is empowered to construct identity."¹¹ The feminist view of modernism then is situated within a critique of representation and its influence on the structuring of identity.

After earning my undergraduate degree, I immediately set up a studio separate from my home for I had been warned by an art dealer that I would be taken seriously only if I worked as a professional from an independent studio. And so began my part-time career as an artist. Like most artists, I had to work full-time to help support my family and my art practice; if there wasn't a conflict with work or family events, I managed to make it into my studio on a fairly regular basis. I revelled in the process of painting, eagerly anticipated any chance to work in my studio, and doggedly applied for exhibitions. For a few years I successfully juggled work, family, and studio.

What is somewhat alarming is that much of feminist criticism is based on the re-reading of Sigmund Freud by Jacques Lacan; after all, it is a man's re-reading of a male text. Perhaps the explanation, given by Kate Linker, is that Lacan's texts "... call

¹¹ Kate Linker, "Representation and Sexuality," Art After Modernism, p. 393.

fraud the subjection of woman to those laws which construct the subject as masculine, revealing the arbitrariness, the imposture of that position."¹² Engendered by Freud's concept of the Oedipus complex, Lacan theorizes that humans are socialized, through language, to unconsciously accept the sexually-biased structures of our patriarchal society.¹³

But "life" takes unusual turns and within a period of six months I lost my job, celebrated my twenty-fifth wedding anniversary, enrolled in a full-time program to upgrade my computer skills, found new and better-paying employment, and was diagnosed with a painful, chronic, and potentially crippling illness. And still I believed that I could manage.¹⁴

Feminist critique is both about sexuality and not about sexuality: the phallus becomes the signifier of male authority and power, "... an image not simply of anatomical difference, but of the values assigned to it."¹⁵ Images of the female body, as well, have been used as interpretive devices to explore the problems of representation in a society which hides the true identity of women behind a

¹² Kate Linker, "Representation and Sexuality," Art After Modernism, p. 399.

¹³ Kate Linker, "Representation and Sexuality," Art After Modernism, p. 396.

¹⁴ Personal crisis is often the catalyst which motivates a woman's search for identity. Emily Hancock, The Girl Within (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1989), pp. 98, 99.

¹⁵ Craig Owens, "The Discourse of Others," The Post-Modern Reader, p. 336.

"patriarchal facade."¹⁶ However, this metaphorical convention has a tendency to mirror the masculine perception of women as primarily sexual beings: women remain the objects of the male view rather than the subjects of their own. The difficulty with the psychoanalytical model for feminist criticism is that it "... always collapses sexual difference into one, masculine sexuality."¹⁷

Looking back, it seems appropriate that it was through my painting that I recognized that I was in crisis. I had received a grant, approved on the basis of a very formalist proposal, for a series of paintings on which I was working. During this difficult time, I blindly continued to paint; I assumed that my work was addressing all of the formal challenges that I had set for myself. It was a shock when I finally realized that the paintings were out of control, the colours were too oppositional, the gestures were too aggressive, and I didn't like them. My paintings mirrored the confusion and frustration in my life. When I found the courage to mention this phenomenon to an artist-friend, her only comment was that she had seen it happening, just as she had always seen more in my work than I had dared to acknowledge.

¹⁶ Mary Kelly, "Re-viewing Modernist Criticism," Art After Modernism, p. 97.

¹⁷ Luce Irigaray quoted by Constance Penley in "A Certain Refusal of Difference," Art After Modernism, p. 382.

This aspect of positionality is a recognized feminist predicament, one that challenges women theorists, artists, and critics to explore other ways of defining female identity. Some call for a radical change to objective scientific methods which place the subject in opposition to the object; for the revaluation of human life and the nurturance of individuals within society; and for a restructuring or balancing of the social values of our patriarchal system.¹⁸ The problem is complex, for the theories surrounding the repression of women have assumed that the "essence" of what it means to be female will be found when the social injustices of patriarchy have been remedied.¹⁹

I immediately began setting boundaries, both in my life and in my paintings. I moved my studio closer to my home (but not into my home), and began a new series of paintings where my painting gesture was contained within rational, decorative borders. I took what I thought was a huge risk and made paintings based on a dream-image. Finally admitting to the latent content in my supposed non-representational work, I began to seriously question the place of my work within contemporary art practice.

It is naive to assume that "femininity" has an unchanging essence, but today few would argue that women, like men, are persons defined by more than the

¹⁸ Emily Hancock, The Girl Within, pp. 241, 259.

¹⁹ Constance Penley, "A Certain Refusal of Difference": Feminism and Film Theory," Art After Modernism, p. 375.

physical division of gender. In 1690, just as modern philosophy began turning the question of reality and being into a dense cloud of esoteric thought, John Locke offered a simple description of person which I paraphrase here:

To address personal identity, we must first determine what *person* stands for. A person is a thinking intelligent being, who can reason and reflect, and can consider itself as itself, in different times and places. A person does this only by that consciousness that is inseparable from thinking and essential to it: it being impossible for any one to perceive without perceiving that [s]he does perceive.²⁰

Of course, Mr. Locke limited his description to men, but it seems a righteous post-modern act to appropriate it from history to describe an aspect of the "essence" of woman. Currently confined to the forms of a patriarchal language, we must raid it in order to redefine ourselves.²¹ If women could be given the equivalent 300 years that intervene with the bewildering state of philosophy today, perhaps we could obscure the issue even more.

Despite constant pain and fatigue, I continued to work full-time to bring home that pay cheque, I remained closely involved in my family's affairs, and I constantly pushed myself

²⁰ John Locke, "Of Identity and Diversity," Personal Identity, ed. John Perry, (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1975), p. 39.

²¹ Carolyn Hielbrun, Writing a Woman's Life (New York: Ballantine Books, 1988), p. 41.

*to stay vertical and moving -- all at the expense of my studio work. The studio became a somewhat dusty place that took my left-over time and energy. It's not surprising that, after two years of robotic behaviour, I discovered that I was angry. Confused, the only thing I knew was that I was not, deep-down in my arthritic bones, this angry person.*²²

Julia Kristeva, a respected feminist with an extensive background in linguistics and psychoanalysis, described the danger of women trying to master and fit themselves within male-dominated discourses; each woman risks the loss of any impetus to find her own language. Her caution that feminism should not be practised "in a herd," reinforces the necessity of individuality in these postmodern times.²³

Anger pushed me into action. I found help through cognitive-behavioral therapy, I took time for reflection, and I began writing in a journal. What surprised me was the discovery that, despite the small step I had taken towards becoming an artist, I had allowed my life to happen to me. I had achieved all

²² "The expression of anger has always been a terrible hurdle in women's personal progress. Above all, the public and private lives cannot be linked, as in male narratives. We hardly expect the career of an accomplished man to be presented as being in fundamental conflict with the demands of his marriage and children; he can allow his public life to expand occasionally into the private sphere without guilt or disorder." Carolyn Heilbrun, Writing a Woman's Life, p. 25.

²³ Julia Kristeva, Julia Kristeva Interviews, ed. Ross Mitchell Guberman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), p. 117.

that was expected of me – I was a supportive wife, a compassionate and strong mother, a caring daughter, a helpful sister and aunt, and a good friend. Compelled to be concerned and sensitive toward others, I had lost any sense of who I was or what I wanted. I found this person who had hidden herself under the needs of others and who thought it was selfish to do otherwise.

As a feminist, I prefer to describe myself as a reasoning human being within a female body, rather than as a human being who endures absence. Western culture's artificial opposition of the masculine and feminine subsumes the identity of women, creates a wall of misunderstanding and mutual renouncement between persons who are integral and essential to society, and denies the heterogeneity of context and the formative influence of women upon other women.

CONSTRUCTED KNOWLEDGE: THE WALLS

The mental processes that are involved in considering the abstract and the impersonal have been labelled "thinking" and are attributed primarily to men, while those that deal with the personal and interpersonal fall under the rubric of "emotions" and are largely relegated to women.

Women's Ways of Knowing

Representation in the visual arts is no longer confined to realism or the depiction of objective images, but is a complex issue that involves language and its

inherent instability. Postmodernism is based on literary theory and the proposition that language is the way by which we understand the world and ourselves as individuals within that world. This becomes problematic if we do not also understand that language is an abstract concept issuing from particular sources for particular reasons. A prevalent art theory of the later twentieth century, postmodernism has crossed into many disciplines, including education. Language is the primary tool within our educational institutions and, in western culture, educational institutions are our primary source of knowledge.

The journal was the key to unlocking my anger. Rather than simple diary entries in a book to track my thoughts and emotions, the words immediately turned into blind verse. (I had neither written in a journal or in poetry form before and at first denied that my journal entries were poems. Who was I to presume to call my words poetry?) I was compelled to write, I spent hours reflecting, and minutes writing the thoughts that emerged from those reflections. I wrote outside in the summer, in my studio and cafes in the winter. At the time I did not comprehend that the journal was becoming the evidence of personal transition.²⁴

An example of the critique of subjectivity at its best or most productive is Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind, the result of research by specialists in student development into the methods and validation of

²⁴ "During the period of subjectivism, the predominant learning mode is one of inward listening and watching. The women associated this mode with a sense of change." WWK, p. 85.

knowledge. A study of the educational experience of adult women, the book deconstructs the male-oriented models of intellectual development especially as it pertains to the claiming of personal identity. Its significance becomes more evident with time; often used as a textbook for women's studies courses and recommended by its readers to others, the book has also generated an anthology of essays written by women scholars.²⁵

Change was important but difficult. My early plans to enter an MFA program, to continue the learning process that I had begun and to accelerate an already-late career change, had been abandoned. Now, because of age, illness, and ongoing financial constraints, I knew that this move was not practical; how could I justify it to my family and friends? Stereotypical graduate students are young and at the beginning of their careers, not middle-aged and just beginning. The physical stress of graduate work had the potential to take a further toll on my compromised health. Returning to studies meant assuming a student loan somewhat late in life. And, most important, while my husband had been supportive during my undergraduate studies, I knew that pursuing my goal could

²⁵ Knowledge, Difference and Power: Essays Inspired by Women's Ways of Knowing, ed. Nancy Rule Goldberger, Jill Mattuck Tarule, Blythe McVicker Clinchy and Mary Field Belenky (New York: Basic Books, 1996).

*jeopardize our marriage. Fearing the ramifications of my decision, I made my choice and applied for graduate school.*²⁶

Until recently, theorists and research subjects in the field of human development have usually been male; "If and when scientists turn to the study of women, they typically look for ways in which women conform to or diverge from patterns found in the study of men."²⁷ Giving credit to their predecessors, the authors admit to the "reconstruction" of William Perry's seminal work in the evolution of knowledge in college students.²⁸ However, where Perry's model of epistemological positions is based on research subjects who are white, middle-class, and male, their's is based on women from all cultural and social backgrounds. Part of the appeal of their exclusively-female study is that they believe their resultant model is not gender specific; they also candidly acknowledge that their epistemological positions are not "fixed, exhaustive or universal categories."²⁹ Their postmodern blurring of dualism and endorsement of context fits within Perry's position of *relativism*, designated in their own study as *constructed knowledge*, the final stage of epistemological development. (See Appendix A for a comparison of both models.)

²⁶ "These were women for whom the birth of the self was occurring as late as thirty or forty, even fifty. Along with their reported sense of being newly born were significant indicators of an impetus toward action, change, and risk taking." WWK, pp. 82, 83.

²⁷ WWK, p. 6.

²⁸ WWK, p. 9.

²⁹ WWK, p. 15.

Conflict was swift to settle in. My husband did not speak to me for four days, a friend from whom I expected excitement and complete support only cautioned me against endangering my marriage, my doctor strongly advised against the move, and acquaintances were dumbfounded by my decision. The prevailing question was "why?" Unwilling to share the passion behind my dream and knowing the impossibility of justifying it to pragmatists, I answered, "Because I want to teach college- and university-level art." This answer was somewhat acceptable; it would be too much to understand that a seemingly solid and respectable middle-aged woman would abandon a good job ("Do you know how many people would love to have your job?") and leave her family behind ("Isn't that a bit selfish?") for the love of painting. My own doubt about acceptance into a program became an easy way to deflect the negativity of others. Despite the optimistic encouragement of a few friends and my husband's eventual acceptance and full support, I was surprised when I was accepted into the MFA programs of two universities.

Another attraction is the methodology of the case study; recognizing their biased theoretical background, the authors designed an interview mechanism that encouraged the research subjects to tell their own stories. Accepted in the practice of psychology, this phenomenological approach affirmed each woman's right to speak and provided the researchers with a virtually new beginning, for which they give the women credit: "These are the lessons we have learned in listening to women's

voices."³⁰ Their excitement over their findings is evident and infectious. Situated within and supporting the analysis of the study are stories that have not previously been told – stories that readers, like myself, have not previously heard. The recognition of a common experience, something not often available to women within educational institutions, is exhilarating; in essence, WWK described and validated my passage to the position of *constructed knowledge*; it's as if, at the end of the journey, I found the map.

The MFA program at the University of Calgary was everything that I expected; or, perhaps this time around I demanded more from myself. I found a mentor who encouraged me to explore the postmodern atmosphere of contemporary art practice and the personal motivation behind my supposedly completely objective paintings. By one simple statement, "This is the nineties, you can do anything you want," Jerry Hushlak released me from the intellectual bondage I had willingly entered during my undergraduate studies. The power of his statement cannot be underestimated: again, I was given permission to openly voice my questions, to demand answers, and to take risks with my work.

The signposts had always been there, in the form of my journal entries during a time of personal crisis; it was through recording a difficult transition that I found the courage to change the course of my life. In WWK I was astounded to find that,

³⁰ WWK, pp. 10 and 229.

like me, many women who identified themselves in terms of the relationships which they sustained and nurtured, experienced a "considerable flux in self-concept" when they began to look beyond those personas.³¹ Relatively late in our lives, we accepted the risk and anticipated the adventure:

I've never had a personality. I've always been someone's daughter, someone's wife, someone's mother. Right now I'm so busy being born, discovering who I am, that I don't know who I am. And I don't know where I'm going. And everything is going to be fine.³²

Who were you
in that other time
before
the burden of love
(or was it fear?)
embraced
(encased) you

when being
was everything
and enough
senses
freeing you
to the real
solitude
savouring

³¹ WWK, p. 81.

³² WWK, pp. 82, 83

the now
and self?

Changing, April 26, 1994³³

It still amazes me how often I have waited for permission to change and how little confidence I have had in my own skills and intelligence. The explanation came when, speaking with a friend about the frustration of trying to tie art practice and theory to personal experience, he suggested that I read Women's Ways of Knowing. What a revelation -- unlike my slow and hard-won research into the male-dominated field of art, art history, and art criticism, I couldn't read it fast enough. It validated my learning experience, tied my educational experience to my relationship with family and friends, and brought me to a new level of understanding my self and my art. I discovered that I was a member of a community of women who shared a similar experience.

Unknown to each other, we withdrew into our selves, reflected, listened, and watched before we took action. We talked to our selves through diaries or by whatever means felt appropriate as we learned to become comfortable with our

³³ Marilyn Grabinsky, Changing: A Journal of Plain Poems, unpublished manuscript, 1995. Hereinafter referred to within the text as Changing and situated by the date of the journal entry.

individual voices.³⁴ My bond with these strangers, these women, is so strong that I regret being unable to speak with them, to share in person the irony of our loneliness during that time.

The quiet
 aloneness
 surrounds me
 and I hear
 the complaining
 sounds
 of my house
 over
 my mind's confusion
 as I ache for calm
 and try
 to set
 my thoughts
 my life
 in order.

Changing, May 21, 1994

Despite an incredibly busy schedule, I began to read more about human development and feminism. I read The Girl Within in two days and found the stories of women who, like I,

³⁴ WWK, pp. 85, 86.

had experienced personal crisis and the resultant search for identity; the similarities of their stories to the entries in my personal journal astonished me. After reading "Feminism is not the Story of my Life", a discussion of the political and moral questions that cloud feminism, I understood why I had been reluctant to call myself a feminist -- an omission that I have now corrected.

The hinge of our common experience turns on the positions of *separate* and *connected* knowing. Locating them within the position of procedural knowing, WWK adapted terms previously used to describe experiences of the self as "essentially autonomous (separate from others)," or as "essentially in relationship (connected to others);" a *separate* epistemology is "based upon impersonal procedures for establishing truth" and a *connected* epistemology is one "in which truth emerges through care." Separate knowers distance themselves from the objects of their knowing; connected knowers respond to the context within which the objects of their knowing exist.³⁵ It is the objective, rational voice that is validated within our educational institutions; perceived as insignificant, the subjective, empathic voice is typically neglected.³⁶ The gap between academic knowledge and experiential knowledge is unacceptable to connected knowers: "Authority in connected knowing rests not on power or status or certification but on commonality of experience."³⁷

³⁵ WWK, p. 102.

³⁶ WWK, p. 124.

³⁷ WWK, p. 118.

Red brown
of the earth
speaks rarely
of the other
partner
to the sky
midnight blue
longing for
realization
of the dream
one at last
if ever.

One flies
one stays
and of the space
no answer.

Changing, May 3, 1994

These were stories that I understood. Throughout my education I had learned that the rational was to be valued above all. Intelligent, I understood the everlasting dichotomy of the rational and irrational (after all, it showed up in my work), but I had believed that feelings fell into the realm of the irrational. Objective, "separate" knowing was the highest achievement. Deprived by this belief of the right to speak of my connections and my commitment to the people in my life, I had, unknowingly, been alienated from my own experience. I

believed that my story was not important. Writing a Woman's Life empowered me to believe otherwise.

Again, these categories are not necessarily gender-specific, nor are they mutually exclusive.³⁸ The move towards constructed knowledge is the attempt to integrate the critical, analytical voice with the intuitive, experiential voice; to "[weave] together the strands of rational and emotive thought;" to come to a new, more complete, and fulfilling way of understanding:³⁹

I am
 unravelling
 threads
 of my self
 coming loose
 drifting away.
 Sadness
 covers me
 as I watch
 wondering
 if
 I will ever mend
 and
 if I do

³⁸ WWK, pp. 102, 121.

³⁹ WWK, p. 134, 135.

how
will I be woven?

Changing, May 23, 1994

My naivete astounds me. I am embarrassed that an intelligent woman (myself) discovered only in middle age that there are others she can relate to in order to validate her experience. I feel betrayed by an educational system that devalues the importance to society of women's experience and I am grateful for the assistance, encouragement, and open-mindedness of the scholars I have worked with in my graduate program. There is hope yet for a new direction in epistemology and pedagogy.

The authors of WWK best articulate my move into constructed knowledge, a process that I see in retrospect began in my first year of graduate study:

For women shifting into the position of constructed knowledge, an inner voice and self exist but may have had a minimum of attention, particularly if the women have learned the lesson of "weeding out the self," which our academic institutions so often teach. During the transition into a new way of knowing, there is an impetus to allow the self back into the process of knowing, to confront the pieces of the self that may have been experienced as fragmented or contradictory.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ WWK, p. 136.

The ultimate goal of my graduate experience has been to trust that intuition and emotion can be balanced with reasoning; to carefully search for all the shades of grey between black and white; to situate knowledge and meaning within the complex richness of living, and to communicate my new way of knowing through my art. The process has been a conjoining of intellect and emotion; I deny nothing and embrace all the aspects of my self within the context of my world for, like my unknown companions, I am a "daughter, friend, mother, lover, nurturer, thinker, artist and advocate."⁴¹ I have become a "connected passionate knower:"

Constructivists seek to stretch the outer boundaries of their consciousness -- by making the unconscious conscious, by consulting and listening to the self, by voicing the unsaid, by listening to others and staying alert to all the currents and undercurrents of life about them, by imagining themselves inside the new poem or person or idea that they want to come to know and understand. Constructivists become passionate knowers, knowers who enter into a union with that which is to be known.⁴²

As far as it is possible, I believe that I now know who I am. I have reached the point where I have the confidence to construct my own knowledge.

⁴¹ WWK, p. 137.

⁴² WWK, p. 141.

CONSTRUCTED KNOWLEDGE: THE ROOF

To see that all knowledge is a construction and that truth is a matter of the context within which it is embedded is to greatly expand the possibilities of how to think about anything, even those things we consider to be the most elementary and obvious. Theories become not truth but models for approximating experience

Women's Ways of Knowing

Everything that I have learned, I bring to my art-making; employing the knowledge that I have accumulated from my formalist training and my recent study of postmodernism, I tell the story of a life-changing experience. Enabled by personal crisis and propelled by my search for something more from my art, the last two years of studio research, academic research, and ongoing discourse with my peers has contributed to the exhibition entitled Constructed Knowledge. I have appropriated WWK'S final epistemological position as the title for my thesis exhibition and the above quote to display as my artist's statement. This is the first interpretive clue that I give to my viewers.

Working as an abstract painter in the late twentieth century, I find that viewers often cannot see beyond my contemporary use of a modernist practice; within a culture driven and obsessed by the mass media, painting is perceived as *passee*. Postmodernists still have a tendency to situate painting entirely within the context of the existing art market as a preferred medium which is engaged in a "frantic" attempt to save the "collapsed modernist project."⁴³ And, from a strict

⁴³ Brian Wallis, Art After Modernism, p. xvii.

duality (unusual for a postmodern theorist) between authenticity and reproduction, Rosalind Krauss labels the opacity of abstract painting as the dishonest reduplication of reified signifiers.⁴⁴ Even recent postmodernist painting, particularly that which revives classical painting styles, has been seen as regressive or defensive.⁴⁵

The objection that painting is no longer viable because it panders to the art market is moot now that postmodern work is receiving more attention within art institutions and appears, in fact, to be overtaking modernist work in status. And, by transcending the polarity of modernist/postmodernist art practice, abstract painting's opacity or obtuseness of meaning becomes a desirable concept within postmodernism's instability of representation.⁴⁶ After all, for the viewer it is a fine line that separates the difference in looking at an object which reveals no meaning, or looking at a representation and being unable to find meaning. However, the most baffling question is, how can the appropriation of tradition, an approach championed by postmodernism, be defensive? Painting has been with us since the days when we dwelt in caves; to confine its practice entirely within formalism, as the epitome of modernist failures, and then to abandon it is the denial of a valued tradition.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Rosalind Krauss, "The Originality of the Avant-Garde," Art After Modernism, p. 22.

⁴⁵ Hal Foster, "Re: Post," Art After Modernism, pp. 197, 199.

⁴⁶ Walter Klepack, "The Order of Words, the Order of Things," Sightlines: Reading Contemporary Canadian Art, (Canada: Arttextes Editions, 1994), p. 268.

⁴⁷ Hal Foster, "Re: Post," Art After Modernism, pp. 197, 199.

Painting has become the postmodern scapegoat in a strictly dichotomous relationship with modernism. Like the death of the subject, postmodernism's closure of painting is a premature undertaking, especially now that representation has been freed from the oblivion of modernist theory, for as a painter has said, "The discursive nature of painting is persuasively useful, due to its characteristic of being a never-ending web of representations."⁴⁸

Like Charles Jencks, I understand postmodernism as "both the continuation of Modernism and its transcendence."⁴⁹ I willingly surrender all claims to originality -- everything *has* been done -- I affirm the tradition of painting, and appropriate the style of painting known as abstract expressionism. I use my favourite modernist form to quote it as an accepted art historical style of painting, not to defend modernist themes.⁵⁰

Steve Nunoda, a contemporary artist who is conversant in art theory and criticism, often says that the reason artists make art is because they like to make "stuff." We choose the ways in which we make stuff by how much we enjoy the process of making the stuff.⁵¹ For university-educated artists, this sounds pretty

⁴⁸ Thomas Lawson, "Last Exit: Painting," Art After Modernism, p. 164.

⁴⁹ Charles Jencks, "The Post-Modern Agenda," The Post-Modern Reader, p. 11.

⁵⁰ Kim Levin, Beyond Modernism (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), pp. 3-4.

⁵¹ Steve Nunoda, Calgary artist and friend, has made this statement many times during engaging discussions of contemporary art theory -- and he calls me a pragmatist! With Katy McKelvey, we jokingly categorize ourselves as post-emergent conceptual formalists.

simplistic, but it has a grain of truth (so far as we can know truth). He makes labour-intensive, aesthetically-pleasing, formal, rational, and ironic sculptural installations; I make quickly-rendered, aesthetically-pleasing, formal, gestural, and thoughtful paintings that verge on sculpture. My work is both conceptual and intuitive; simply put, after hours of thinking and reflecting, I love to move paint around – I love to make stuff.

CONSTRUCTED KNOWLEDGE: THE BUILDER

I am often asked how I approach my work. Let me confess: I hold my mind and my work free from any association foreign to the act of painting. I am thoroughly inspired and agitated by the actions themselves which the development of the painting continuously requires.

Hans Hoffmann on Painting

Like Hans Hofmann, when I am painting I suspend all thought and react intuitively to the canvas, the material, and the colours that I am using; I immerse myself in the physical act of painting. However, the most intensive work that I do as an artist is thinking about what I am doing. My method of working is best illustrated by the evolution of the relief boxes in the *Facade* series.

The shadow boxes began, during my undergraduate studies, as a practical way to use the buckets of left-over paint which I was loathe to discard. At the time, I was painting all-over, gestural, and highly-textured compositions comprised of

acrylic medium, colour, and sand. My small studio space began to be overrun by 4-litre pails of unused paint that took up a good portion of my peripheral vision as I sat and considered my finished paintings. Influenced by art-historical and drawing studies of Persian and Greek reliefs, I decided to manipulate the colours of the left-over paint and begin a series of works contained within shallow boxes.

Originally a flat, utilitarian support for the paint within the box, the metal mesh gradually became a three-dimensional element. I moved the grid forward into the viewer's space and, recognizing the possibilities inherent in the boxes, began to mix colours and textures specifically for them (Figure 1: *Untitled*).

Time constraints forced me to neglect my ideas for the reliefs while I focussed on a series of two-dimensional paintings; it was not until I entered graduate studies that I resumed working on the boxes. Encouraged by the interest of my graduate colleagues at a time when I was struggling with my painting, I began exactly where I had ended (Figure 2: *Unravelling*). This lone box hung on the wall of my studio for at least a month before I moved forward with the concept; it was the conception that took time.

During the four weeks that I considered the solitary relief box upon the wall, I contemplated its shape: width times length times depth. I noticed that the similar aspect of rectangularity between the box and the metal mesh was changed only when I bent the grid to increase the box's three-dimensionality and cut it to create interest. The questions arose, why would I and how could I change the shape of the box? The "why" was answered by the concept of interior versus exterior, another useful dualism; the "how" by taking the mesh outside of the box and adding a lateral extension to the frame (Figure 3: *Who were you?*). Because these decisions brought the wall into the equation, it seemed only natural to extend the grids onto the wall.

The shadow boxes then became the focal point of the larger assemblages in Constructed Knowledge. (Figures 4-9).

Thinking is a key element in my working process. I often sit for hours contemplating works upon the wall: I examine the visual form for strengths and weaknesses; I look for similarities, comparisons, and connections amongst my most recent and past works; I think about the work of other contemporary and historically important artists (I am particularly drawn to the work of Paul Gauguin, Henri Matisse, Hans Hofmann, Antoni Tapies, Jack Bush, and Howard Hodgkin); and I puzzle over work that I am compelled to make. I am equally comfortable developing ideas already evident in past work and accepting the challenge of ideas that recur for no immediately apparent reason.

The relief box entitled *The Forest*, (Figure 9) is an example of both methods: it is a recent piece that, in many ways, resembles my previous reliefs. However, it is white, beige, and pink, colours unusual to my palette. I had visualized and discarded this white-on-white piece so frequently over a period of several months, that I could no longer ignore the concept. I began hesitantly, looking long and hard at the cutout background before even priming the surface. After applying the gesso, I struggled with the blankness and potential boredom of white, came to understand that there is no absolute white (relative to my other works this piece is definitely white – not pink, beige and white), and determined to adjust the texture and hue to create interest. When composing *The Forest*, I incorporated text and lace, elements that have appeared in my work over the last two years; I also determined that the box would be simple, without a metal grid. In the three months that I worked on the piece, my thoughts alternated between formal and contextual concerns. Only toward the end of the process did I realize that the box's visual strength lies in its

contrast to my other work and understand that its theme is about girlhood and innocence. Thus a childhood memory, my very first poem written in a cafe as I struggled with my identity on a cool spring day, became the source of *The Forest's* text and title:

walking
 in the tall tall forest
 behind Daddy
 sun streams
 flow
 from the trees
 splash
 on the wonders
 lush
 green
 dark
 bright
 brown
 warm
 loamy
 scented
 delicate fronds
 curl and wave
 enticing

Hurry up now.
 Don't get lost.

Changing, April 21, 1994

Although I may not comprehend the significance of a piece or of a series of work at its inception, I proceed with the painting. The unpredictable rhythm of quiet reflection punctuated by sudden bursts of activity suits me for it is evident in both my life and my studio work. I am an intuitive, expressionistic painter who gives a good deal of thought to her work.

CONSTRUCTED KNOWLEDGE: THE UTILITIES

To learn to speak in a unique and authentic voice,
women must "jump outside" the frames and systems
authorities provide and create their own frame.

Women's Ways of Knowing

My affinity for paint, surface, and colour emanates from the modernist language of abstract expressionism, but my paintings have moved beyond the frame of the self-referential art of Greenbergian theory.⁵² Never a proponent of post-painterly abstraction's reduction of painting to its support (two-dimensionality of the canvas plane), colour (admittedly shared with theatre, but crucial to painting), and the medium (paint which is colour), I have pushed all three aspects into different realms. My work has a vibrancy of colour that, from a distance, entices

⁵² An excellent resource for Greenbergian theory is Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism, ed. John O'Brian (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

viewers into an aesthetic experience and, alternately, has abrasive surfaces and dangerous edges that, up close, rebuffs them.

Although I continue to work on canvas, my painting has begun to verge on sculpture and the use of physical supports other than traditional, two-dimensional framed canvas; while I am conscious that I am blurring purist ideas about both painting and sculpture, it's important to me that the work refers in some way to painting.

The doorway and window paintings resemble traditional abstract paintings within rectangular frames; however, they deny the literal flatness of the canvas plane to suggest the illusion of space juxtaposed with the tangibility of the surface. They sit upon sills in the way that doors and windows do, but they are opaque representations of painting, doors, and windows. The gestural, emotive works, *Nostalgia*, *Clarity*, and *Circumstance*, are partnered with their close-coloured, hard-edge equivalents, *Red Window*, *Yellow Window*, and *Violet Window* (Figures 10-12).

Upon the floor, both within and without the assemblages, are floor sculptures constructed of painted, torn, and collaged rice paper or painted metal mesh. Abstracted representations of the human figure entitled *Memory* (Figure 13), they stand close to the wall remaining within the sphere of painting.

Considering the evolutionary progression of the shadow boxes, it seemed logical to take painting into sculpture. I began casting layers of paint into rectangular molds, creating the vertically stratified columns entitled *Persona: Daughter* and *Persona: Mother* (Figures 14, 15). While they are obviously made of paint, they exist suspended in three-dimensional space. The light boxes in this piece are made from the molds used for the casting process; *Persona: Painter* refers back to painting (Figures 16, 17).

The also-suspended skin of paint brings the medium to its purist form, that of paint existing on its own fragile terms without a flat plane of support (Figures 18, 19). Initially, I had intended to suspend three other skins of paint within the exhibition; one is pure paint, one has a netting ground, one a lace ground, and all are suspended from dowels. However, since they interrupted the visual flow of the exhibition, I removed them. The remaining *Curtain* visually connects the works, *Open* and *Unravelling*, which are otherwise awkwardly separated by a doorway to the fire exit in the gallery. The grid that exists within it – the hardware cloth – is not necessary to the work's physical support, but echoes the use of grids within the assemblages. A further reduction of the two-dimensional realm of Greenbergian purism, the *Mesh Curtain* then infringes upon the field of sculpture by virtue of hanging within an open space.

The glass work, the three tables and their accompanying boxes, is the last project of my current research and is moving me into new and uncharted territory (Figures 20-22). As sculptures, they exist in three-dimensional space: I quote painting within the glass bricks upon the *Painting Table*, I indicate content within the glass boxes upon the *Writing Table*, and allude to my new way of knowing upon the *Reading Table*. I am uncertain where these sculptures will lead me in the future; perhaps they indicate the closure of this theme. However, I do know that they tie together the formal and symbolic elements of Constructed Knowledge.

CONSTRUCTED KNOWLEDGE: THE POWER

Representation, in modernist painting thought of as figurative or representing something in the objective world, takes on a different meaning in postmodernism. This is not to say that postmodern art does not involve figurative work, for it usually does, but it is the act of representing that is crucial. Whereas modernism saw the work of art as a self-referential object, postmodernism sees the viewer as an active participant in completing the meaning and structure of the work. The triad of signifier, sign, and signified has replaced the sterile interaction between the work and the viewer, wherein the work is a self-contained object which is free of connotative meaning.⁵³

The most significant outcome of my graduate research is that, rather than placing my work entirely under the umbrella of form, I now acknowledge and enlarge upon its latent content. Always a part of my work, these contextual themes exist in the simple, visual metaphors of texture, layers or strata, grids, gesture, and obscured text.

Early in my career I discovered the enticing tactility of a thick painting surface that hides or slightly reveals what is underneath. While I was aware that my use of texture may have implied personality characteristics, I claimed it simply as a formalist device to which viewers responded because of their own aesthetic, phenomenological reactions. Now I admit to the connotation of facade, of vulnerability, of purposefully covering and uncovering only what I wish to expose.

⁵³ Klepack, "The Order of Words," *Sightlines*, p. 265.

The grids in my assemblages, metal mesh and lace, exist on two levels: they can be interpreted as filters, screens or facades – additional elements in the layering process – or they can be seen as a commentary on the modernist grid. However, where the modernist grid connotes balance, I believe that my grids challenge the "formal, abstract, repetitive, flattening, ordering, literal" symbol of modernism. Their placement in the assemblages is visually balanced, but they take the work beyond the rectangular support for the grid, the prevailing frame of modernist painting. While my grids may not fall into the same system as Kim Levin's postmodern maps, I do agree with her that grids are "man-made superimpositions."⁵⁴

The lace is a machine-made, repetitious, organic grid which is associated primarily with women's clothing: confirmation dresses, wedding dresses, fancy dresses and, of course, lingerie. In my work, I free lace from its male-oriented association with fetishism to the signification of the superimposition of patriarchy upon women's lives. The juxtaposition of this finely woven fabric with the machine-made metal grids that are commonly used in construction – metal lathe, hardware cloth, and expanded metal – crosses gender lines, speaks of the restrictions of authority and societal expectations, and refers to the attributes of adaptability and strength.

The analogies of layering, strength, and adaptability also apply to *Personas*. Because they are suspended vertically above the floor, they are abstract representations of the human figure. The association of their titles combined with

⁵⁴ Kim Levin, Beyond Modernism, p. 9.

the two light boxes, one with the text of Psalm 139: 13, 15, 16a and one with layers of paint and mesh, imply issues of identity (Figures 14-17).

I also communicate identity through gesture. In an attempt to deny authenticity, Mary Kelly criticizes the use of gesture, the "painterly signifier [which] is manipulated precisely to trace a passage, to mark the subjectivity of the artist in the image itself," as primarily a means of distinguishing the artist-genius creating a reified art object.⁵⁵ Her understanding of gesture suggests the impossibility of separating authenticity from the modernist theme of high art to the postmodern theme of human context. It's important that the marks I make indicate my presence and identify the imperfection of the artist within the process; I keep a rawness in my work, to challenge the viewer's perception of art as elegant and refined. I use gesture as a code for identity, as my voice coming through a modernist practice. If this is perceived as the evidence of authenticity because of today's stormy romance with information technology, then so be it. Long after society's affair with the mass media has waned, I will still be (or will have been) an authentic human being.

Despite its instability, the common attribute that connects people is language. Within Constructed Knowledge, text acts as both symbol and narrative. The titling of the show and the individual works within the show together with the indecipherable text of the paintings within the assemblages are the signs of content within an abstract process (See Appendix B for the poems contained within the painting). In effect, I direct the viewer to think of them as products of a personal as well as a material process. Those viewers with a background in art history will comprehend

⁵⁵ Mary Kelly, "Re-Viewing Modernist Criticism," Art After Modernism, p. 90

the contradiction of abstract work which openly acknowledges content; others will not.

Understanding that these metaphors are subtle and accessible only to a few people, text also plays a literal part for those viewers who wish to know more or who are untutored in art. This type of access allows me to discuss identity, especially as it pertains to traditional female roles and personas; the ways in which knowledge is given and acquired; and the impact of personal transition.

A selection of poems from my personal journal take the form of coloured text applied to transparencies and contained in glass boxes set upon the *Writing Table* (Figure 21). One poem is inscribed upon each transparency and, since the transparencies are layered into the glass boxes, the viewer's immediate perception is of contained, indecipherable text. If they so choose, viewers may then take the transparencies out of their containers and easily read the separate poems.

Although I may not understand all the connotations of the glass project, I do know that glass is analogous with windows, transparency, and the passive activity of looking through to something beyond. I have spent a good deal of my life looking through windows, both literally and figuratively. However, I have spent less time, metaphorically, in the active pursuit of opening and going through doors.⁵⁶ While both are opaque illusions of paintings, the window paintings imply a well-defined view and the doorway paintings hint at passage and the possibility of change, of new beginnings.

⁵⁶ "If windows are the eyes of a house, a door is its mouth. Windows are passive, doors are active. Through windows we glimpse what is and what happens, but when we pass through a doorway we encounter and most likely become involved in what lies beyond." Val Clery, *Doors* (Toronto: Jonathan-James Books, 1978), p. 12.

Colour, installation, light, and shadow visually integrate the works in Constructed Knowledge; text integrates the work and the theme (Figures 23-26).

CONSTRUCTED KNOWLEDGE: THE FINISHING

The exhibition, Constructed Knowledge, is my public voice, one that has emerged from the received knowledge of my university education and from the subjective voice of my journal entries. Within an educational institution which delivers knowledge to society, I tell the story of a person who went into hiding under the expectations of society, an intelligent person who tried to fit into the dominant discourse, a person who became activated only through traumatic circumstances, a person who thought she was alone, a person who changed. My ignorance of a common experience means that my story and that of my unknown friends has not been told often enough in different venues. While I am the subject of the story, my voice speaks a cautionary tale: individuals today, both men and women, are often unaware of their submissiveness to societal expectations and their invalidation within a culturally-determined patriarchal hierarchy.

Today, it is a most unfortunate circumstance that young artists increasingly accept the myth of the death of the subject and believe that personal stories, including their own, are not significant. To a younger generation of women who seem to have a sense of self-direction and more confidence in their right to speak out, my story may not have meaning. But wouldn't it be a shame if we stopped

telling the stories and society allowed women's lives to slip back into the same old traps.

I am not even certain that young women today have the confidence to speak clearly in a public voice. During individual tutorials with senior-level undergraduate students in the visual arts, I found students, predominantly women and those of both genders from different ethnic backgrounds, who were unable to defend their choices to their instructors, to stand up for what they believed was right for them. Knowing the dedication of the faculty members involved, I believe that the problem is more systemic than specific; our educational institutions are still leading students to believe that the rational, objective method of learning is to be honoured above all else. Perhaps the move in epistemology and pedagogy towards an understanding that people acquire knowledge in ways that have previously not been validated, will make my story history. I would be pleased to see that happen.

In the meantime, I continue to live my life with my family and friends, to make art, to read and reflect, and to recommend the book Women's Ways of Knowing to others, especially to young people. Always one to think and analyze, I endeavour to understand everything within its context and to find joy wherever and whenever I can. Accepting and anticipating change, I can see that I have passed through one door and am now ready to find another; perhaps I will search out my unknown companions and tell the same story using their voices. The only thing that I know for certain is that, from now on, I shall always be a connected passionate knower.

FIGURES



Figure 1: Untitled, 1990. Acrylic paint, glass bead sand, painted metal mesh, and wood, 41 x 25.5 x 1.5 inches.

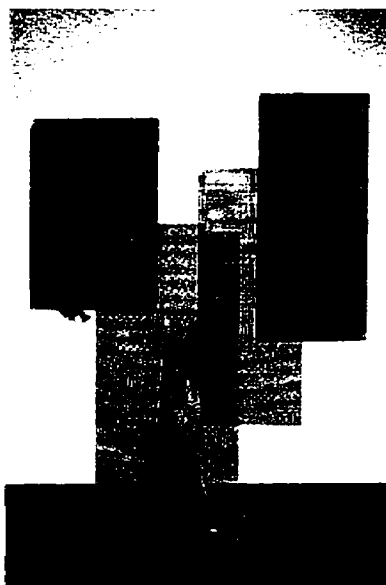


Figure 2: Facade: Unravelling, 1996. Acrylic paint, glass bead sand, painted metal mesh, canvas, and wood, 77.75 x 63 x 22 inches.



Figure 3: Facade: Who Were You, 1996. Acrylic paint, glass bead sand, painted metal mesh, mirror, canvas, and wood, 71 x 108 x 6 inches.

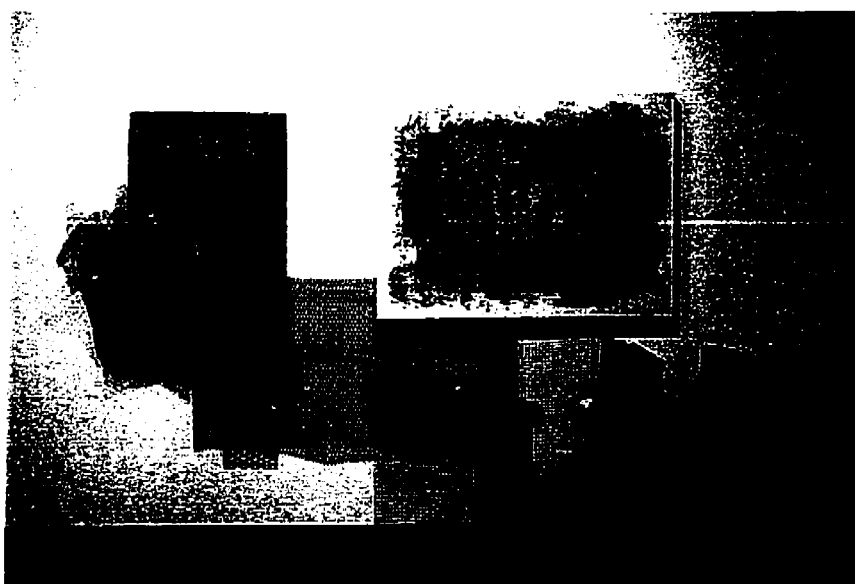


Figure 4: Facade: Wavering, 1996. Acrylic paint, glass bead sand, painted metal mesh, canvas, and wood, 70.75 x 108 x 17 inches.

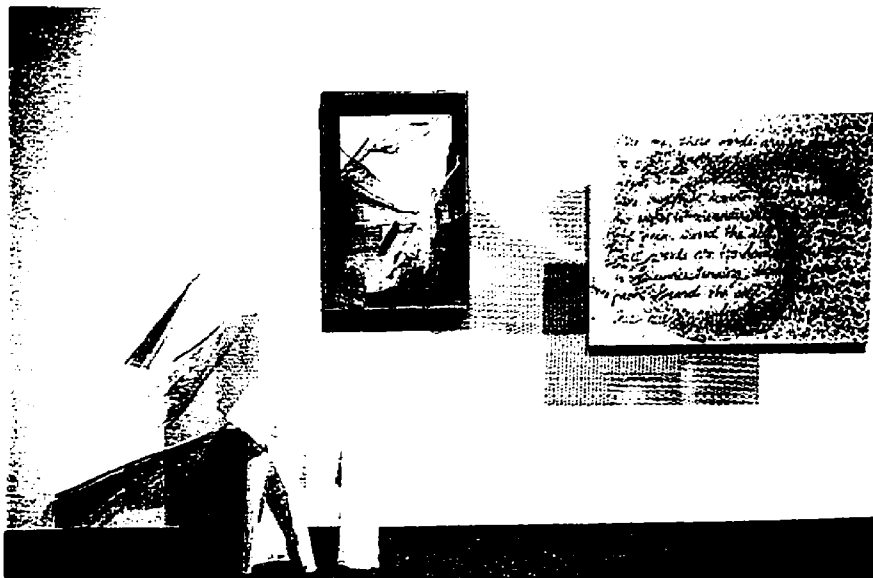


Figure 5: Facade: Open, 1996. Acrylic paint, glass bead sand, painted metal mesh, lace, canvas, and wood, 74 x 129 x 14 inches.

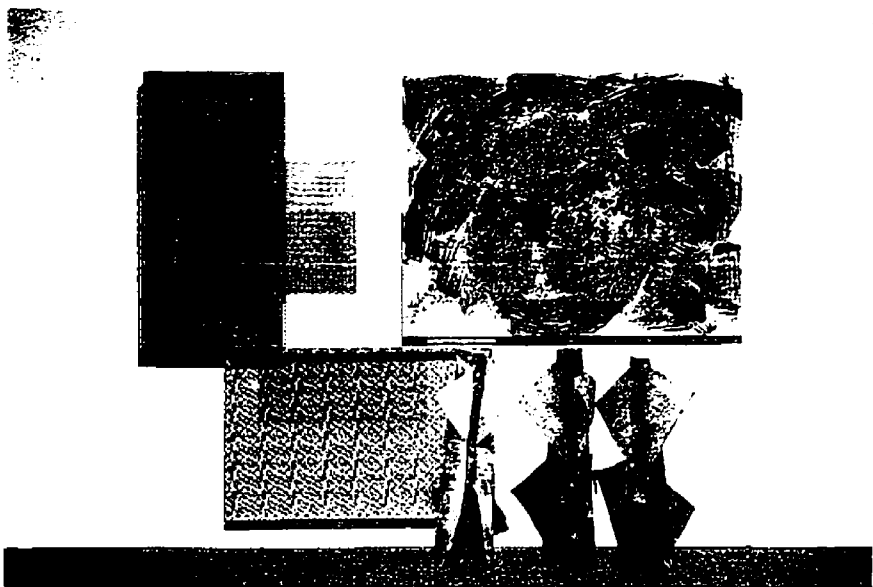


Figure 6: Facade: Perception, 1996. Acrylic paint, glass bead sand, painted metal mesh, lace, canvas, and wood, 78 x 98 x 19 inches.

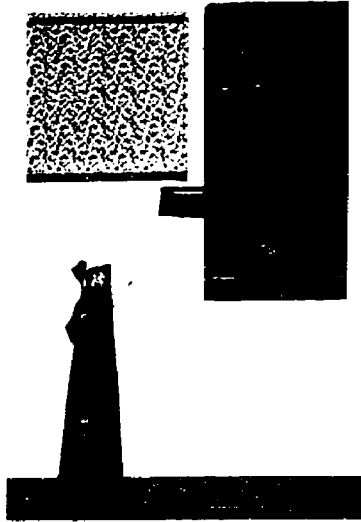


Figure 7: Facade: Descent, 1997. Acrylic paint, glass bead sand, painted metal mesh, lace, canvas, and wood, 78 x 98 x 19 inches.

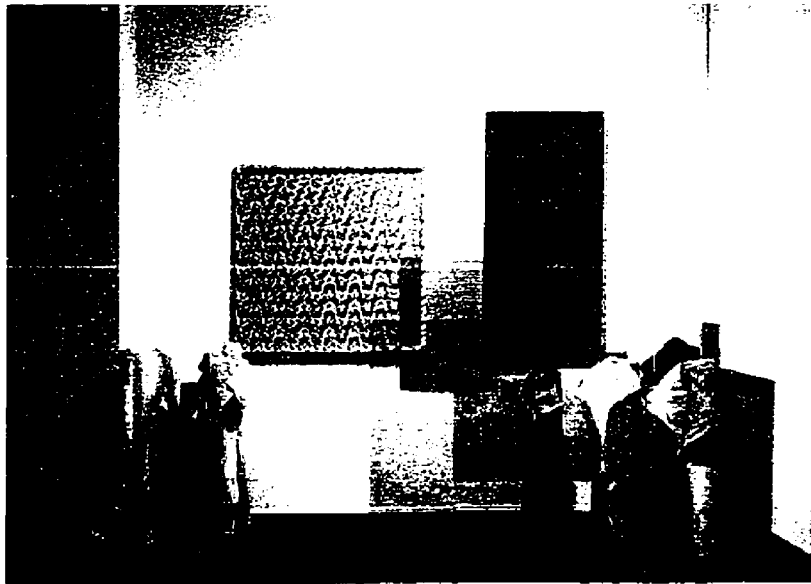


Figure 8: Facade: Craving, 1997. Acrylic paint, glass bead sand, painted metal mesh, lace, canvas, and wood, 78 x 140 x 20 inches.

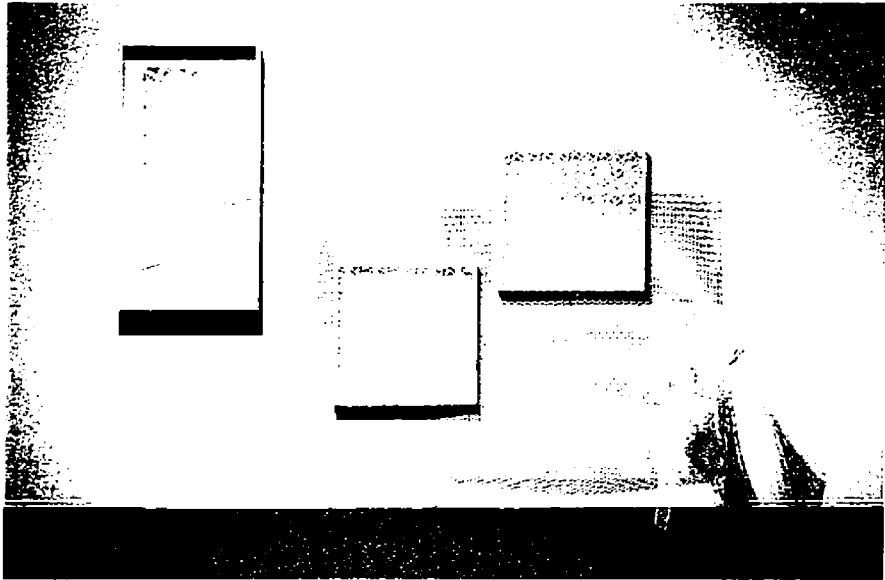


Figure 9: Facade: The Forest, 1997. Acrylic paint, glass bead sand, painted metal mesh, lace, canvas, and wood, 78.75 x 108 x 16 inches.

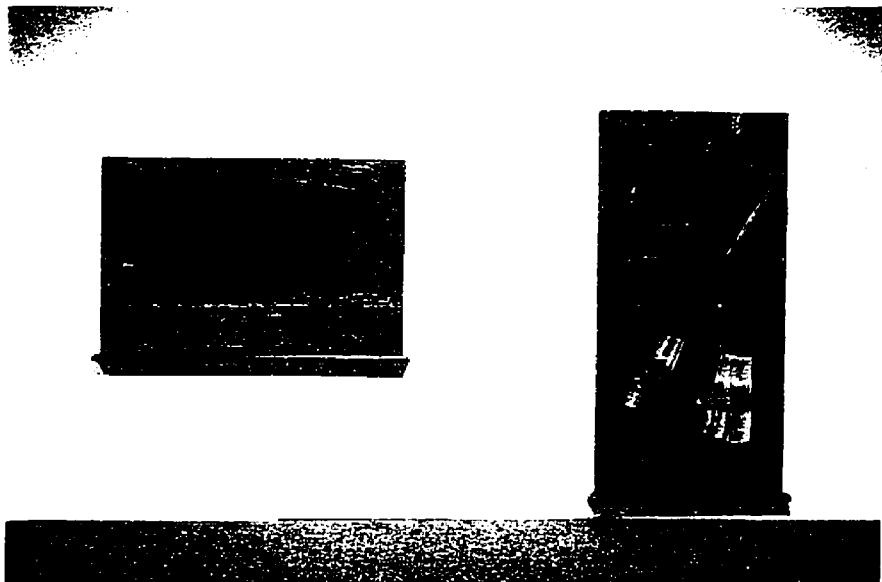


Figure 10: Red Window, 1997. Acrylic paint and glass bead sand on canvas, and acrylic paint on wood sills, 41.5 x 63 x 3.5 inches. Nostalgia, 1997. Acrylic paint and glass bead sand on canvas, and acrylic paint on wood sills, 80.5 x 42 x 3.5 inches.



Figure 11: Violet Window, 1997. Acrylic paint and glass bead sand on canvas, and acrylic paint on wood sills, 41.5 x 63 x 3.5 inches. Circumstance, 1997. Acrylic paint and glass bead sand on canvas, and acrylic paint on wood sills, 80.5 x 42 x 3.5 inches.

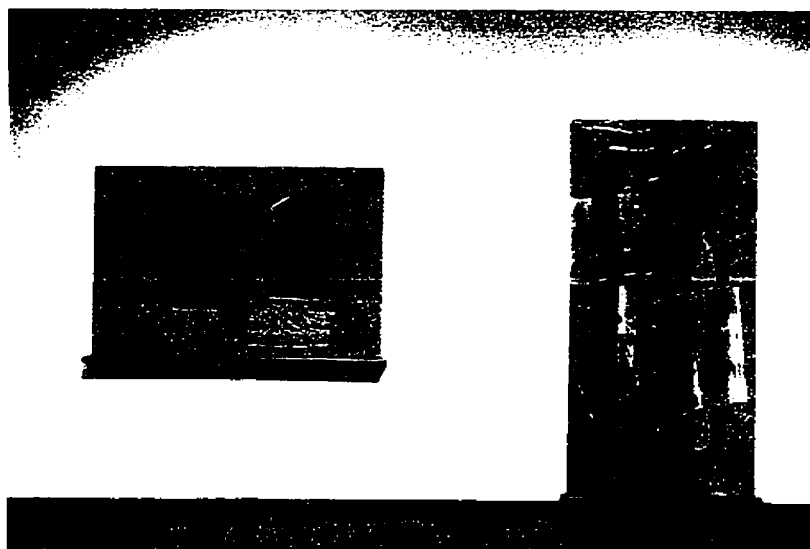


Figure 12: Yellow Window, 1997. Acrylic paint and glass bead sand on canvas, and acrylic paint on wood sills, 41.5 x 63 x 3.5 inches. Clarity, 1997. Acrylic paint and glass bead sand on canvas, acrylic paint on wood sills, 80.5 x 42 x 3.5 inches.



Figure 13: Memory, 1996 - 97. Paper works: watercolour, gouache, rice paper, and acrylic matte medium. Metal works: acrylic paint on painted metal mesh. Sizes vary from 28 to 37 inches high and between 8 and 10 inches in diameter.



Figure 14: Persona: Daughter, 1996 - 97. Acrylic paint, glass bead sand, wire rope, and washers, 60.5 x 8 x 8.5 inches.



Figure 15: Persona: Mother, 1996 - 97. Acrylic paint, glass bead sand, wire rope, and washers, 60.5 x 8 x 8.5 inches.



Figure 16: Persona: Painter, 1996 - 97. MDF, metal mesh, acrylic paint, and flourescent light, 60 x 8 x 8.5 inches.

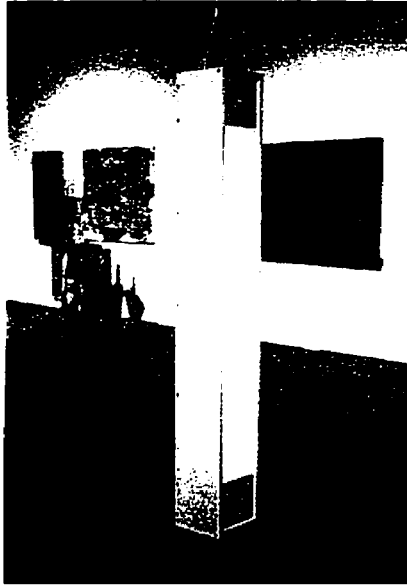


Figure 17: Persona, 1996 - 97. MDF, etched glass, and fluorescent light, 60 x 8 x 8.5 inches.

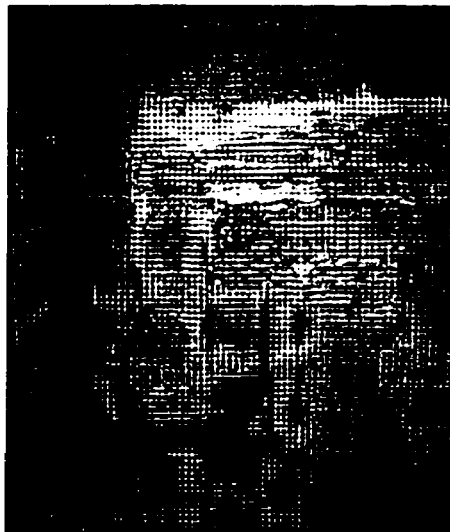


Figure 18: Mesh Curtain, 1997 (front view). Acrylic paint, glass bead sand, and metal mesh, 44 x 37 inches; top edge suspended 75 inches from the floor.



Figure 19: Mesh Curtain, 1997 (back view). Acrylic paint, glass bead sand, on metal mesh, 44 x 37 inches; top edge suspended 75 inches from the floor.

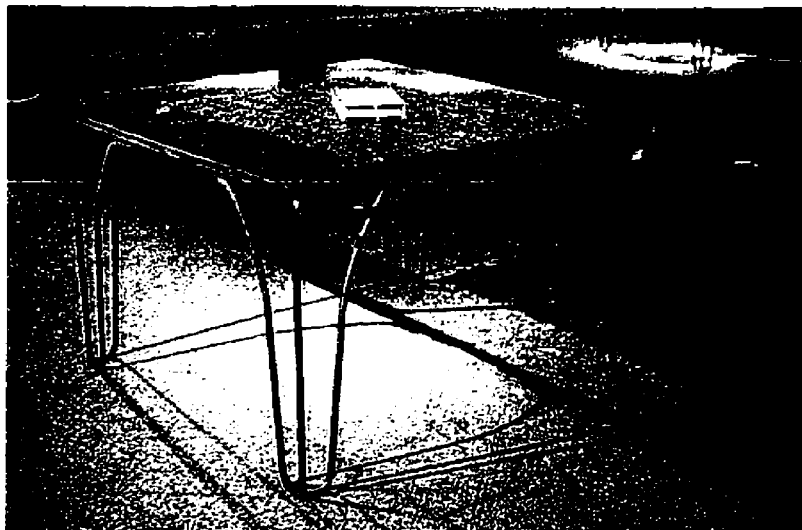


Figure 20: Reading Table, 1997. Glass, steel rod, book, and acrylic paint, 30.5 x 60.75 x 48.75 inches.



Figure 21: Writing Table, 1997. Glass, steel rod, painted metal mesh, transparencies with text, and acrylic paint, 30.5 x 60.75 x 48.75 inches.

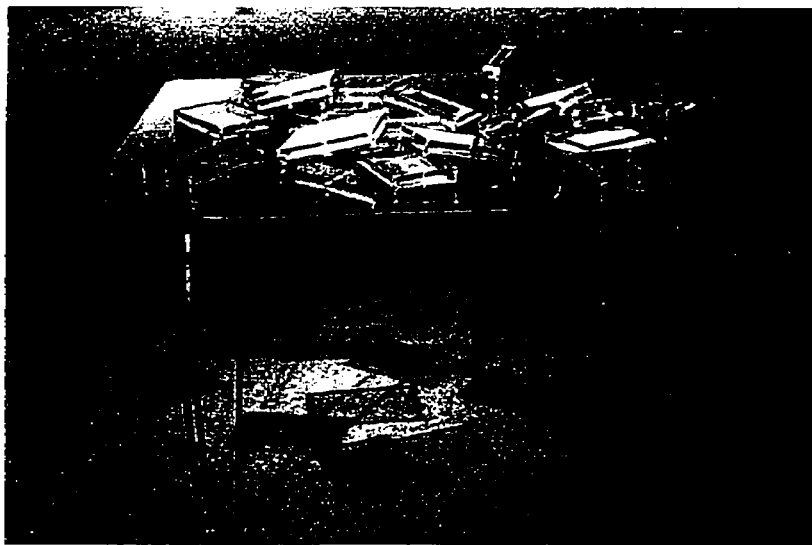


Figure 22: Painting Table, 1997. Glass, steel rod, transparencies with text, painted metal mesh, and acrylic paint, 30.5 x 60.75 x 48.75 inches.

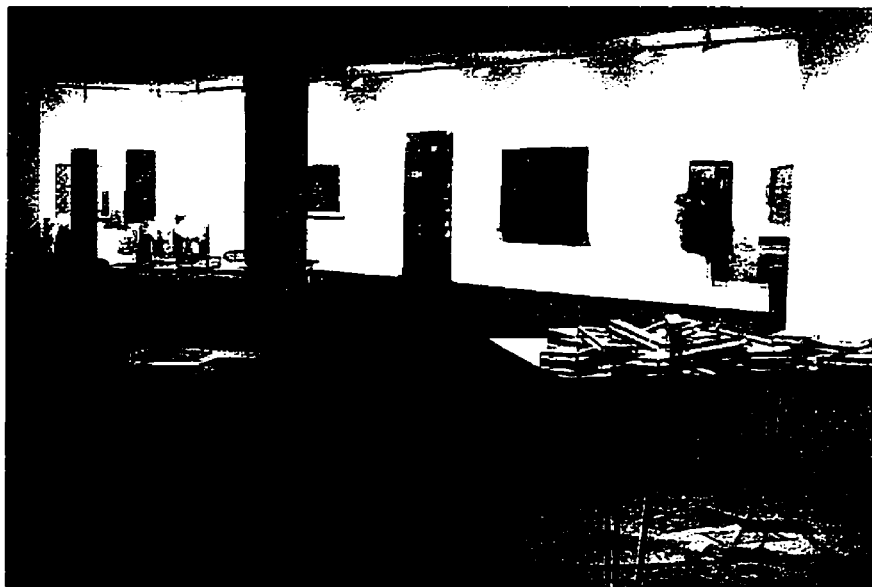


Figure 23: Constructed Knowledge (installation view), 1997.



Figure 24: Constructed Knowledge (installation view), 1997.

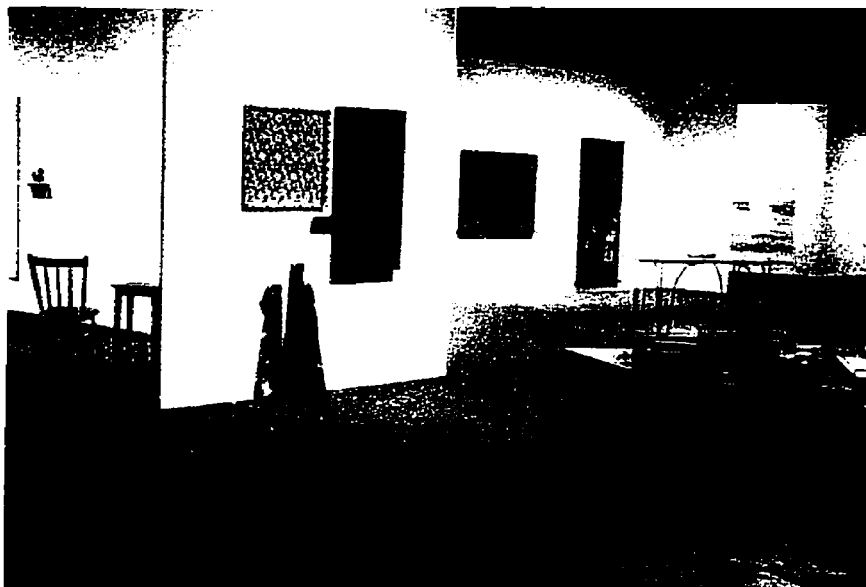


Figure 25: Constructed Knowledge (installation view), 1997.

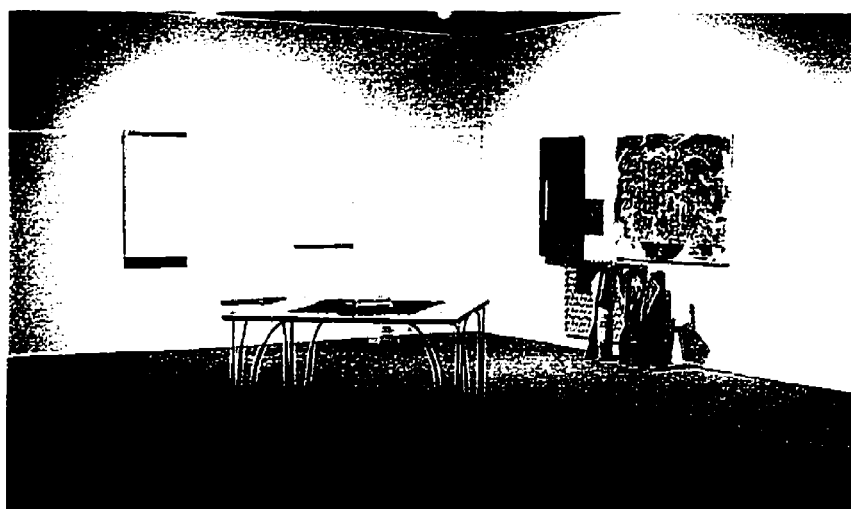


Figure 26: Constructed Knowledge (installation view), 1997.



Figure 27: Constructed Knowledge (installation view), 1997.

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APPENDIX A

EPISTEMOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

These positions are described as coherent interpretive frameworks by which "students give meaning to their educational experience."⁵⁷

PERRY'S MODEL

Basic dualism, a position where the student views the world in polarities [and] passive learners are dependent on authorities to hand down the truth, teaching them "right from wrong." Gradually the student becomes increasingly aware of the diversity of opinion and the multiple perspectives that others hold, and the dual faith in absolute authority and truth is shaken.

Multiplicity, a position where the student comes to understand that authorities may not have the right answers.... The student begins to grow beyond a dependency and trust in external authorities and carves out his own territory of personal freedom.

Relativism subordinate, because of the insistence on evidence and support for opinion, a position where an analytical, evaluative approach to knowledge is consciously and actively cultivated at least in [academics], if not in the rest of one's life.

Relativism, a position where the student completely comprehends that truth is relative, that the meaning of an event depends on the context in which that event occurs and on the framework that the knower uses to understand that event, and that relativism pervades all aspects of life, not just the academic world. Only then is the student able to understand that knowledge is constructed, not given; contextual, not absolute; mutable, not fixed.

BELENKY, ET AL'S MODEL

Silence, a position in which women experience themselves as mindless and voiceless and subject to the whims of external authority;

Received knowledge, a perspective from which women conceive of themselves as capable of receiving, even reproducing, knowledge from the all-knowing external authorities but not capable of creating knowledge on their own;

Subjective knowledge, a perspective from which truth and knowledge are conceived of as personal, private, and subjectively known or intuited;

Procedural knowledge, a position in which women are invested in learning and applying objective procedures for obtaining and communicating knowledge;

Constructed knowledge, a position in which women view all knowledge as contextual, experience themselves as creators of knowledge, and value both subjective and objective strategies for knowing.

⁵⁷ WWK, pp. 9-10, 15

APPENDIX B

Following are the journal entries, in chronological order, written and obscured in the paintings and relief boxes of Constructed Knowledge:

The Forest (assemblage)

walking in the tall tall forest

behind Daddy

sun streams

flow from the trees

splash

on the wonders

lush

green

dark

bright

brown

warm

loamy

scented

delicate fronds

curl and wave

enticing

Hurry up now.

Don't get lost.

April 21, 1994

Who Were You? (assemblage)

Who were you
in that other time
before
the burden of love
(or was it fear?)
embraced
(encased) you
when being
was everything
and enough

senses
freeing you
to the real
solitude
savouring
the now
and self

April 26, 1994

Craving (assemblage)

She is everything
they want
compassionate
wise
and strong
no suspicion

of the passion
disturbing her mind
ruling her heart
craving more
that they can give
or take.

May 5, 1994

Wavering (assemblage)

She exists
wavering
between
past and future
child and woman.

Outwardly content
she craves
change
fears
for love
and safety
waits for a sign
 a word
to bridge
the uncertainty
and guide
her step
into life.

May 6, 1994

Open (assemblage)

Like me
these words
are too honest
too open
to derision
 misunderstanding
 and pain.

Guard
the self.

May 21, 1994

Unravelling (assemblage)

I am
unravelling
threads
of my self
coming loose
drifting away.
Sadness
covers me
as I watch,
wondering
if
I will ever mend
and
if I do

how
will I be woven.

May 23, 1994

Companion (painting, chair, table, mesh and mirror)

Fresh
from the day's rain
this gentle spring evening
full of birdsong
and flower scents
speaks warmly
a promise
for tomorrow
soothing
my sadness
like a mother
comforting
her crying child.

May 23, 1994

Circumstance (painting)

Do you need
to know
my statistics
the circumstances
of my life

to comprehend
my words?

I am you.
I speak of
dreams
 fears
joy
 sadness
love
 anger.

We know
the sun
the moon
and the shade
of sky
that holds them.

June 7, 1994

Clarity (painting)

Looking
for my self
I caught
a glimpse
of her
today.
She startled me
with her clarity

as she watched
me
looking
for my self.

August 4, 1994

Descent (assemblage)

I am hollow.
I echo empty
like a clear glass vessel
set sharply
upon a cold glass shelf
until
the heaviness descends
in wave upon wave
of indigo blue
shabby purple
deepest black
softly folding in
one upon the other
suffocating the emptiness
filling me
with the darkness
of night.

September 20, 1994

Nostalgia (painting)

My life is changing
my children grown
making their ways in the world
building their own families
and
in my heart
next to the nostalgia
for a time gone too quickly past
I look to my own dreams
and move on.

December 20, 1994

GLOSSARY

Definitions are quoted or paraphrased from the Oxford Reference Dictionary (1995), unless otherwise noted.

code: A system of symbols (as letters, numbers or words) used to represent assigned and often secret meanings.

deconstruction: An approach to and method of critical analysis whose philosophy and practice attempts to challenge certain perceived assumptions of the Western philosophical tradition. Deconstruction was initiated by the French philosopher Jacques Derrida in the late 1960s and subsequently taken up by mainly US literary critics such as Paul de Man and J. Hillis Miller. Derrida claimed that Western philosophy had become rooted in a tradition which sought truth and certainty of meaning by privileging certain types of interpretation and repressing others; he emphasized, on the other hand, the instability and deferral of meaning in language and the limitlessness (or impossibility) of interpretation and coined his word *differance* in reference to this. Although deconstruction seemed to favour a challenge to traditional hierarchies and centres of power and thus has formed a strand in political movements such as feminism, its emphasis on the internal workings of language and texts and on the dissociation of text and external world has led to it being criticized for its insularity and lack of political engagement.

determinism: A theory or doctrine that acts of the will, occurrences in nature, or social or psychological phenomena are causally determined by preceding events or natural laws.

dichotomy: A division or the process of dividing into two especially mutually exclusive or contradictory groups.

discourse: The verbal interchange of ideas especially conversation. Also, a formal and orderly and usually extended expression of thought on a subject.

empiricism: the theory that all knowledge is derived from sense-experience. Empiricism, which denies a priori concepts, developed in the 17th and 18th centuries, stimulated by the rise of experimental science; Locke, Berkeley, and Hume were its principal exponents.

epistemology: the theory of knowledge especially with regard to its methods and validation. Epistemology is the investigation of what distinguishes justified belief

from opinion. The traditional debate has concerned the foundation of knowledge; opposing theories within epistemology are rationalism and empiricism, while scepticism holds that justification, and hence, knowledge with any kind of certainty, is not possible.

feminism: the advocacy of women's rights on the ground of the equality of the sexes. Feminism is a broad term which does not refer to a single unified movement and is used to cover a great variety of political and social campaigns and ideas. The history of the struggle for women's rights began during the late 18th century. In recent years intellectual feminism, associated with psychoanalysis and deconstruction has come into prominence; there has also been something of a backlash against feminism and the hailing by some of a post-feminist age.

fetish: "... elements to which desire attaches to fulfil a fantasy of wholeness" (Kate Linker, "Eluding Definition," *Postmodern Perspectives*, p. 216). An object or bodily part whose real or fantasised presence is psychologically necessary for sexual gratification and is an object of fixation to the extent that it may interfere with complete sexual expression.

formalism: The practice or the doctrine of strict adherence to prescribed or external forms (as in religion or art).

hermeneutics: The study of the methodological principles of interpretation.

heterogeneous: Consisting of dissimilar or diverse ingredients or constituents.

heuristic: Involving or serving as an aid to learning, discovery, or problem-solving by experimental and especially trial and error methods. Also, of, or relating to exploratory problem-solving techniques that utilize self-education techniques (as the evaluation of feedback) to improve performance.

historicism: The theory that social and cultural phenomena are determined by history. Also, an excessive regard for past styles, etc.

humanism: A doctrine, attitude or way of life centred on human interest or values especially a philosophy that usually rejects supernaturalism and stresses an individual's dignity and worth and capacity for self-realization through reason.

irony: A pretence of ignorance and of willingness to learn from another assumed in order to make the other's false conceptions conspicuous by adroit questioning -- called also Socratic irony. Also, the use of words to express something other than and especially the opposite of the literal meaning; a usually humorous or sardonic literary style or form characterized by irony.

materialism: A theory that physical matter is the only or fundamental reality and that all being and processes and phenomena can be explained as manifestations or results of matter.

metalanguage: A form of language used to talk about another language (e.g. art criticism talks about art).

metaphor: Something considered as representing or symbolizing another thing.

metonymy: The substitution of the name of an attribute or adjunct for that of the thing meant (e.g. crown for king)

mimesis: A close external resemblance of an animal to another that is distasteful or harmful to predators of the first. This is obviously a biology term and the connection to philosophy, theory, and criticism is difficult to distinguish unless one uses the Greek derivation from *mimetikos* which indicates imitation. Combining both the biological definition with the Greek derivations, mimesis then could be imitation with the intent to mislead.

modernism: Modernism is a broad term used to refer to a whole range of individual artistic movements and artists, mostly in the first half of the twentieth century. The emphasis tends to be on form rather than content, and represents a deliberate programme to challenge traditional (often nineteenth-century) forms of expression associated with narrative and representation, at the same time often questioning basic tenets relating to Western civilization and human progress. This questioning is characterized by a self-conscious break with the past and a search for new forms of expression. In literature, it is associated with writers such as James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, Ezra Pound, and T. S. Eliot and with movements such as imagism and vorticism; in the visual arts, with cubism, futurism, Dadaism, and surrealism; in music, with Schoenberg and Webern; and in architecture with Frank Lloyd Wright.

nonrepresentational: Nonobjective; representing or intended to represent no natural or actual object, figure or scene.

ontology: A branch of metaphysics concerned with the nature and relations of being.

pedagogy: The science of teaching.

phenomenology: the science of phenomena as distinct from that of being (*ontology*). Also, the philosophical movement that concentrates on the study of consciousness and its immediate objects, associated particularly with Edmund Husserl and influential on the work of Martin Heidegger and other existentialists.

pluralism: A state of society in which members of diverse ethnic, racial, religious, or social groups maintain an autonomous participating in and development of their traditional culture or special interest within the confines of a common civilization. In philosophy, a system that recognizes more than one ultimate principle or kind of being. In moral philosophy, the theory that there is more than one value and that they cannot be reduced one to another. In postmodern theory, pluralism refers to diversity both in society, in philosophy, and in art-making mediums and techniques.

positivism: A theory that theology and metaphysics are earlier imperfect modes of knowledge and that positive knowledge is based on natural phenomena and their properties and relations as verified by the empirical sciences.

postmodernism: A late 20th-century style and concept in the arts, architecture, and criticism, which represents a departure from modernism and has at its heart a general distrust of grand theories and ideologies as well as a problematical relationship with any notion of 'art.' Typical features include a deliberate mixing of different artistic styles and media, the self-conscious use of earlier styles and conventions, and often the incorporation of images relating to the consumerism and mass communication of late 20th-century post-industrial society. Postmodernist architecture was pioneered by Robert Venturi; the AT&T skyscraper in New York (completed in 1984) is a prime example of the style. Influential literary critics include Jean Baudrillard (b. 1929) and Jean-Francois Lyotard (b. 1924).

poststructuralism: A school of thought representing an extension and critique of structuralism, which emerged in French intellectual life in the late 1960s and early 1970s. It embraced various standpoints, including the philosophical deconstruction of Jacques Derrida and the later work of Roland Barthes, the psychoanalytic theories of Jacques Lacan and Julia Kristeva, the historical critiques of Michel Foucault, and the writings in culture and politics of figures such as Jean-Francois Lyotard and Jean Baudrillard. It departed from the claims to objectivity and comprehensiveness made by structuralism and emphasized instead the plurality and deferral of meaning, rejecting the fixed binary oppositions of structuralism and the validity of authorial authority. After initially being influential in France, it subsequently became important in Britain, the US, and elsewhere in the late 1970s and 1980s.

pragmatics: A branch of semiotic that deals with the relation between signs or linguistic expressions and their users.

realism: A doctrine that universals exist outside the mind specifically the conception that an abstract term names an independent and unitary reality. The conception that objects of sense perception or cognition exist independently of the mind. Also, fidelity in art and literature to nature or to real life and to accurate representation without idealisation.

reflexivity: Marked by or capable of reflection: reflective. Also, characterized by or being a relation that exists between an entity and itself.

representation: One that represents as an artistic likeness or image.

romanticism: A movement in the arts and literature which originated in the late 18th century as a reaction against the order and restraint of classicism and neoclassicism, and was a rejection of the rationalism which characterized the Enlightenment. In their place were inspiration, irrationality, subjectivity, and the primacy of the individual. In music, the period embraces much of the 19th century, with composers including Schubert, Schumann, Liszt, Wagner, and (in the opinion of some critics) Beethoven. Writers exemplifying the movement include Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Shelley, and Keats; among romantic painters are such stylistically diverse artists as William Blake, J.M.W. Turner, Delacroix and Goya. In its implicit idea of an artist an isolated misunderstood genius the movement has not yet ended.

scopophilia: "Although the instinct is modified by other factors in particular the constitution of the ego, it continues to exist as the erotic basis for pleasure in looking at another person as object." (Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," Art After Modernism, p. 363.)

semantics: The study of meanings. A branch of semiotic dealing with the relations between signs and what they refer to, including theories of denotation, extension, naming and truth.

semiotics: A general philosophical theory of signs and symbols that deals especially with their function in both artificially constructed and natural languages and comprises syntactics, semantics, and pragmatics.

sign: A thing indicating a quality or state, etc. Also, a mark, symbol, or device used to represent something or to distinguish the thing on which it is put.

signified: Especially in linguistics, a meaning or idea, as distinct from its expression by a physical medium (as a sound, symbol).

signifier: Especially in linguistics, a physical medium (as a sound, symbol, etc.) expressing meaning, as distinct from the meaning expressed.

simulacrum: Image, representation.

structuralism: A method of analysing and organizing concepts in anthropology, linguistics, psychology, and other cognitive and social sciences in terms of

contrasting relations (especially binary oppositions) among sets of items within conceptual systems. Structuralism has had a profound influence on many disciplines in the 20th century. Its origins can be traced to the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, who formulated a number of fundamental distinctions, such as that between the signifier and the signified and that between syntagmatic association (word in context) and paradigmatic association (words in sets such as the parts of speech). Saussure's ideas were extended by the French anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss, who analysed kinship, myths, taboos and other subjects on the basis of the relational structure of the terms used. These ideas were further developed by a group of French writers and critics, including Roland Barthes, and their followers in many other countries, with the aim of providing a 'grammar' of narrative, fashion, food, and innumerable other aspects of culture.

sublate: To negate or eliminate (as an element in a dialectical process) but preserve as a partial element in a synthesis.

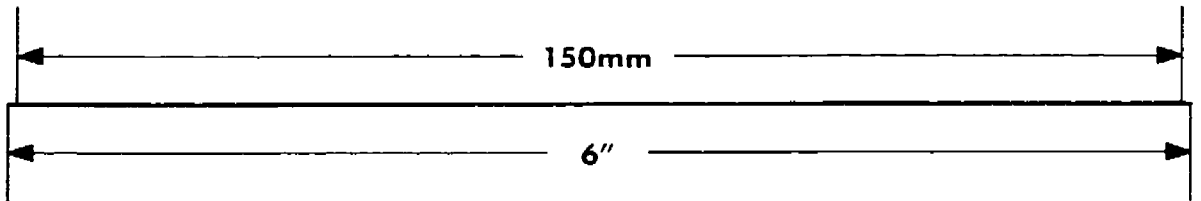
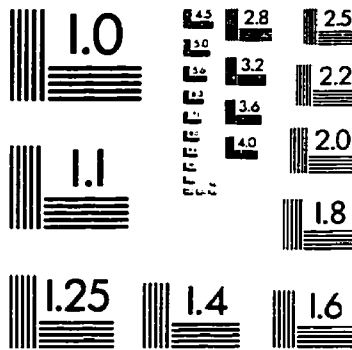
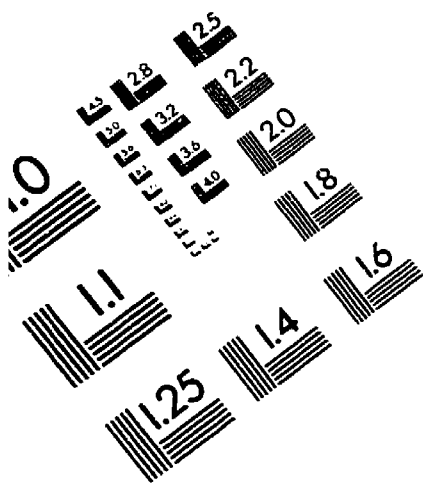
syntactics: A branch of semiotic that deals with the formal relations between signs or expressions in abstraction from their signification and their interpreters.

taxonomy: The study of the general principles of scientific classification: systematics.

teleology: The fact or character attributed to nature or natural processes of being directed toward an end or shaped by a purpose. The use of design or purpose as an explanation of natural phenomena.

theory: A supposition or system of ideas explaining something, especially one based on general principles independent of the particular things to be explained.

TEST TARGET (QA-3)



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