

## DANVILLE CHADBOURNE



Plate 1 THE MEMORY OF BECOMING ETERNAL 1984 Front Cover FALSE HISTORY OF DECEPTION 1982-88

## DANVILLE CHADBOURNE

# RETROSPECTIVE PART 2: ARTIST'S COLLECTION, WOOD RELIEFS 1980-1999

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AS ALWAYS, FOR DIANA



Plate 2 THE SUBTLE ECHO OF FORBIDDEN KNOWLEDGE 1988-93

#### STATEMENT FROM THE ARTIST

Shortly after moving to San Antonio in 1979, I began a series of relief works that were going to be a major preoccupation for almost 20 years and result in approximately 100 completed pieces. The works were primarily of wood, often constructed and carved, usually painted, and emphasized a dislocated artifact-like quality. Because they were wall-oriented and essentially two-dimensional they functioned somewhat like paintings, but what was most important to me was their object-ness.

The genesis of these ideas had begun several years earlier. In the mid-1970s I arrived at what I considered a crisis concerning my two-dimensional work. As much as I felt comfortable about the developing organic iconography in the work, I was uneasy about the picture-like quality of my paintings, the sense that they were simply framed images and were not in congruence with the physicality of my sculpture. The forms were similar, but the effects were different. At the time I felt an increasingly strong desire to create a coherent formal and conceptual vision out of an increasingly diverse set of materials, forms, and images.

When I moved to Hobbs, New Mexico in the fall of 1976 to begin a new teaching position, I began to explore the local environment with a friend, driving around isolated desert roads and hiking in the sand hills looking for artifacts and exploring the many abandoned houses and structures from earlier times.

Within the first year I had begun some new large paintings that suggested the lost, fragmentary, and mysterious properties of this abandoned landscape. There were no direct references or literal interpretations of this environment, only a sense of time passing and of inevitable change. These new pieces were like architectural fragments with relief elements, enigmatic images, and accidental configurations. They were objects, not paintings of objects, and there was a strong sense of the effects of time. I felt that these paintings had begun to achieve the kind of organic logic that I was seeking, and were the proper complement to the more three-dimensional work.

Inevitably I began to isolate the relief elements for their purely sculptural qualities. Detached from the defined space of a painting format, they began to suggest new meanings and endlessly expansive formal possibilities. This led in many different directions simultaneously. I began to elaborate the suspended works begun in the early 1970s, as well as creating more complex sculptural compositions made of ceramic elements and wood. However, the relief works begun in San Antonio were the most direct manifestation.

The new reliefs were almost exclusively made of wood and often constructed with reused materials. Although I had used wood frequently in conjunction with ceramic elements, it was often in a secondary role, usually carved or shaped into fluid, organic

forms. Using a kind of softened geometry and deliberately crude construction, low relief carving, and a restrained color palette, the pieces suggested ritual objects, fragments from some unknown culture disassociated in time. The 'ethnographic' association in these works is particularly strong. The shape of the work now carried its own information. Where previous paintings still operated within the traditional formats of rectangle and square, the new reliefs had eccentric formats and proportions, operating on the wall much more like sculpture in real space.

These reliefs occupied much of my time during the 1980s, sometimes dominating my work, at other times an intermittent engagement. By the late 1990s they were slowly transformed into other wall-oriented works and replaced by other sculptural concerns. In retrospect, they have a distinct visual character and sculptural presence. While I worked on numerous other artworks during this time, these reliefs always had a strong effect on other works and were often the point of initiation for many thematic and formal inventions.

Included in this exhibition is a small selection of sculptures from the period. My primary intention is to focus on the relief works, since they were a rather discrete set, but it seems reasonable to show some of the sculptures that were directly related to them. During this time I produced a substantial number of sculptures in wood and clay, both small and large. Many shared ideas with the reliefs. The connections were of similar

forms, iconography, or both. Sometimes the sculpture would be an almost three-dimensional version of the relief, other times there would simply be common images. As with all my work these shared characteristics appear both coincidental and intentional. This ambiguity of interpretive possibility, and the multiplicity of forms and images used and repeated, were as integral to my growing vision then as they are today. Although this exhibition investigates a relatively small and specific group of works, they were and still are important components in the larger family of images, and are still an active force in my current vision.

Danville Chadbourne September 2010



Plate 3 MONUMENT TO THE SCIENCE OF DEATH 1982-83



Plate 4 THE PROTECTOR OF THE GHOSTS OF MEMORIES 1988-99

## RETROSPECTIVE 2: WOOD RELIEFS 1980-1999

Danville Chadbourne has been a collector all his life. His studio, a place that at first blush seems chaotic and disorganized, reveals an insatiably curious but also orderly mind. In the living areas, like things gather together—music, films, books, folk art, cooking utensils, and beads from around the globe—, labeled for easy access and housed in floor-to-ceiling hand-made shelving. These collections are organized, yes, but not static: one gets the feeling that the thousands of books, music albums, and films are frequently consulted, listened to, and viewed.

In the multiple interior and exterior work spaces, natural elements—piles of tree branches and logs arranged by size, reclaimed lumber, stones, bones, and shells—reside alongside groupings of finished art pieces and works in progress (the artist often works on 100 pieces or more at a time). A palpable energy permeates these spaces, an energy that helps explain the remarkable output of this prolific artist over the past 40 years of art making, which brings us to the subject of the current exhibit.

This exhibition, RETROSPECTIVE 2, is the second in a series of retrospectives envisioned by the artist. The first, at Blue Star Contemporary Art Center in spring 2009, centered on Chadbourne's large-scale paintings and sculptures made since 1980, works that at the time of the exhibit were in his possession. That exhibit is being

reprised in a slightly different form in fall 2010 at the Louise Hopkins Underwood Center for the Arts in Lubbock, in conjunction with the Texas Sculpture Symposium cosponsored by The Sculpture Network of Texas and Chadbourne's alma mater, Texas Tech University. Future exhibits will focus on specific media or technique, such as wood reliefs, works on paper, and ceramic vessels, or works thematically or formally united, such as his series of suspended works that explore themes of weightlessness and gravity, or his cycle of Zen-like earthenware mountains.

Most of the wall reliefs and sculptures in RETROSPECTIVE 2 were produced in the 1980s, but they are informed to a great deal by Chadbourne's New Mexican adventures over the prior ten years—at a Texas Tech summer field school in Taos with ceramicist Steve Reynolds in the early 1970s and later in the decade in Hobbs where Chadbourne taught art and art history at New Mexico Junior College. New Mexico's parched deserts contributed a somber palette—the most subdued in the artist's oeuvre—, while its stark landscape occasionally pocked by ghost towns and skeletal drilling rigs, remnants of Texas oil booms in the 1920s and at midcentury, yielded frequent references to death and decay. But death implies rebirth. Found objects amassed by the artist in this periodreclaimed wooden planks and copper wire, sun-bleached bones and stones-found new life in Chadbourne's art. He began attaching



these found materials to huge constructed paintings, somewhat akin to architectural fragments, that he was producing at the time. Through them the artist deliberately moved from painting as 'illusion' to painting as 'object' as his work began to break free from the boundaries that traditionally separate two and three-dimensional art. By the time he relocated to San Antonio in 1979, the objects themselves—those reclaimed bits and pieces previously attached to the surface of his big paintings—would become a primary subject of his work.

A number of physical characteristics unite the works of the 1980s selected by the artist for this exhibit. Muted, warm sepia tones of worn woods bathed in brown paints predominate. They contrast with passages of subdued complementary colors: red and green, blue and orange, black and white. Typical shapes include long narrow flat planks and shallow rectangular boxes constructed from recovered wood, sometimes joined by staples and brads made of recycled copper wire. Decoration is restricted to incised channels and grooves, shallow pecked recesses, and natural nodes and knots accentuated by hand carving.

Chadbourne "deliberately weathers" and unites the surfaces of these disparate recovered materials, often already weather beaten, with paint applied in layers and scrubbed by hand between coats with rough sandpaper, a process that visually ages the work. "All things are in constant flux, acted upon by the process of aging and deterioration," Chadbourne avers, "a process

that is observable and that dictates the passage of time"; the artist's work not only suggests but becomes part of a continuum.

Additional materials, occasionally suspended and at other times attached to the surface with copper rings or braided yarns, include natural materials such as tree branches and bones, ceramic 'horns,' and, for contrast, delicate wire-strung beads that form "lines in space." Cross shapes, pendant elements, twin or oppositional pairs, squares divided into quadrants, and recurring numbers, especially 4, 7 and 13, comprise a personal lexicon that is also familiar to the viewer on some deep, even spiritual, level.

Many of Chadbourne's wall pieces in this period are self-contained, either enclosed in shallow boxes set away from the wall on narrow underlying frames that cast shadows, or self-framed with finished exterior edges. The latter are painted and/or inscribed with patterns that continue, in many cases, around the back of the work, the side facing the wall. Self-framing not only prohibits the later addition of a traditional frame to the work, but also creates an 'insider' aspect—a detail that only the artist and patron, perhaps, know about the work. In a similar fashion, Chadbourne's sculptures that develop in this period, as in THE PATH OF THE BELIEVER (Plate 19) or MONUMENT TO THE SCIENCE OF DEATH (Plate 3), are also self-contained: their single or multi-level pedestals remain inseparable from the rest of the work. The artist retains control over the physical display of the work long after it has left his studio,



Plate 6 THE WHIMSICAL ORDER OF THE ABSOLUTE



Plate 7 THE DIVISION OF THE INDIVISIBLE 1987-88

even as he relinquishes control of how the work is perceived and what it means to the viewer. It is intentionally ambiguous.

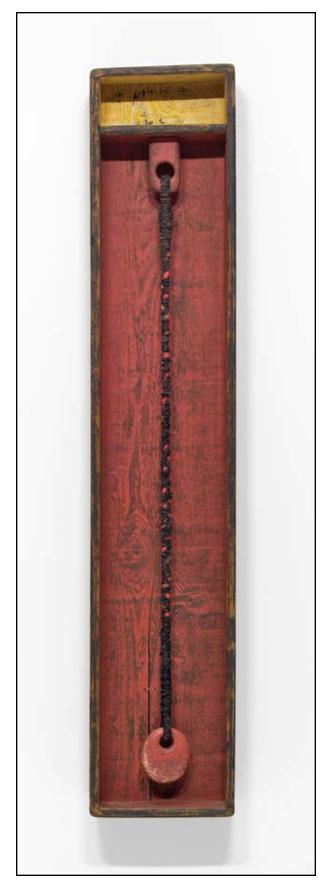
The six-foot high WHIMSICAL ORDER OF THE ABSOLUTE (Plate 6) is an excellent example of Chadbourne's relief wall sculpture from the early 1980s. It is composed of a single weathered plank-conceived as a ritual shield or standard, a symbol of power and authority too narrow to be defensive-carefully 'repaired' by the shaman artist with handmade 'staples' of flattened copper wire. They mend a vertical crack at the tapered end of the piece and secure a wooden patch mid-point on the right. Three shallow and imperfect recesses, linked by a pecked surface that reappears liberally throughout this body of work, emphasize its two-dimensionality. Carefully investigated, the corralled peckings convey a meditative calm—one can imagine the artist rhythmically, deliberately peck, peck, pecking away at the yielding surface of the old wood. This roughedup surface is then sanded down a bit, as if pelted away by decades of irregular desert storms, and then washed with color. Color-a scoured red—links the smaller upper niche with the recessed stubby-armed cross at the bottom. The long center indentation, which consumes about three quarters of the length of the plank, is divided into seven rectangles that alternate from white to black. The recesses are framed by a worn-down brown paint that leaves exposed the naturally occurring knots, nail and worm holes, and other surface imperfections.

Among the last of the shield-like planks to be produced by the artist in this period is the work titled THE DIVISION OF THE INDIVISIBLE (Plate 7), which is bisymmetrical but not rigidly so. Its central black equilateral cross floats on a field stained green. A pair of ivorycolored horizontal pecked stripes, continuous around the back of the piece, divides the plank into bands. It is capped and footed by almost-matching stepped motifs related in form to the stepped cloud symbol commonly found in Native American art.

The long narrow flat plank format with shallow recesses, essentially two-dimensional, gives way to the long narrow framed box, more three-dimensional in concept, which houses a single vertical element, sometimes pendant, at other times bound in place. In EROTIC POEM MADE FROM THE BONES OF FEAR (Plate 8), the framed box enshrines a long pendant branch. Its natural aspen shaft banded by a narrow black stripe, is scraped by hand to play up distinctive knots and nodes. Seven short wooden pegs painted blue jut from the branch, creating an irregular pattern of receding shadows and projections in space. In form it suggests the universal Cosmic or World Tree, or Tree of Life. A complex construct, the tree, with roots in the soil and branches in the sky, symbolizes the relationship between earth and heaven. It marks the center, the axis along which spirits move from one plane, one world, to another. The use of the number seven in this context is significant—in Siberian initiation ceremonies, for example, shamans cut seven or nine notches or insert seven pegs into the trunk of the sacred birch tree (the birch is to the Eastern Hemisphere what the aspen



Plate 8 EROTIC POEM MADE FROM THE BONES OF FEAR 1982-83



is to the Western) to record the progress of their ascension—; it points to Chadbourne's intentional appropriation of cultural symbols and constructs that become part of his personal symbology.

The related long box piece, titled RELIQUARY FOR OBVIOUS SECRETS (Plate 9), houses a flexible fiber cord made of yarn-bound strips of fabric hand dyed by the artist and weighted at the bottom with a ceramic disk. It suspends from a wooden hook appended to an upper shelf that divides the box in two, the upper painted yellow, the longer lower one washed a warm red.

Many of these framed box pieces are made from cast-off shipping crates, gifts from a friend who was an importer of Mexican folk art. Chadbourne appreciates this immediate material connection to folk tradition: Folk artists routinely reuse whatever materials are at hand or that have been discarded by others. The artist's studio-home brims with exotic treasures either picked up on site during frequent trips to Mexico and to places like India, Spain, and China where traditional folk arts abound, or gifted to the artist by traveling friends familiar with the artist's penchant.

In THE MEMORY OF BECOMING ETERNAL (Plate 1), a white shallow box made from recovered crate wood frames a pendant inverted cross. The cross motif—the third of four universal symbols; the other three are the centre (god), the circle, and the square—appears in Chadbourne's work in multiple forms and across all media. Hanging from

a pair of copper rings, this cross, painted in alternating blocks of black and white, has potential for movement, but its arc is restricted by the narrowness of the box. Three strands of tiny glass beads—from the blue strand hangs a ferrule that clamps down on a fetishized tuft of human hair—embellish the central juncture of this cross. It dangles in front of a pecked robin's egg blue ovoid, another element that recurs in both two and three dimensions across the artist's work.

The framed box construction doubles in the work titled DEADLY COMMUNION—THE FEAR OF BECOMING ONE (Plate 10), which consists of a pair of shallow rectangular boxes—conjoined fraternal twins, one closed and painted blue, the other open and painted white. An upside-down bone-like tree bough, which dangles from copper rings at the upper edge of the white box, is bifurcated, a form that symbolizes choice or paths ('a fork in the road'). Its form echoes in the fissures that fan out across the outside of the closed blue twin.

The twin theme expands exponentially through the use of multiple sets of oppositional pairs in a duo of seven-foot high wall pieces, titled THE SEARCH FOR ALTERNATE LIES - I and II (Plates 11 and 12). Each is composed of a long vertical shank, divided by narrow intersecting channels (the cross again) into quadrants painted in opposing yellow and blue, and surmounted by a rectangular box, one closed and painted white, the other open and with a lamp-black



Plate 10 DEADLY COMMUNION - THE FEAR OF BECOMING ONE 1984



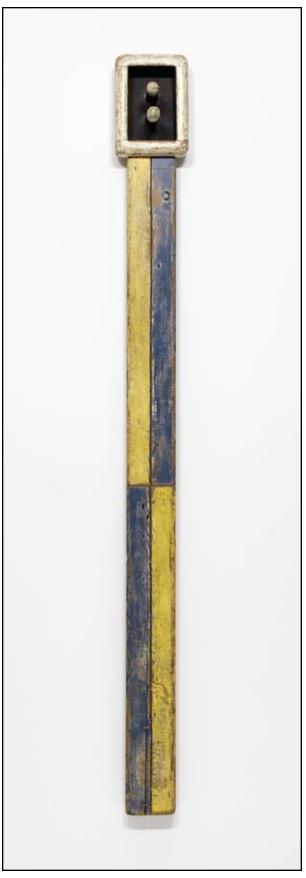


Plate 11 THE SEARCH FOR ALTERNATE LIES - I 1985

Plate 12 THE SEARCH FOR ALTERNATE LIES - II 1985

interior that reads like a void. From each box protrudes a pair of wooden rods, black ones from the white box and white ones from the black, oppositional pairings that symbolize the duality of the cosmos and of the individual, of light and dark, of heaven and earth, of the physical and the spiritual.

Chadbourne's work is often a celebration of the handmade object, a recognition of the individuality of the maker, to the point that some works have a "deliberate clumsiness" about them. Boxes and planks are sometimes not quite square and edges don't match up perfectly. On closer inspection, however, joins and corners are expertly crafted: These works are purposefully engineered to last. A good example is THE ASTUTE PHILOSOPHY OF INDIFFERENCE (Plate 13). Its four irregular sides that almost form a trapezoid frame a simple stick divided into seven bands, some painted, others made of wrapped yarns. The special surface treatment of the stick and its isolation in the handmade 'imperfect' box signals ritual or ancestral import. Another good example of intentional irregularity is the work titled THE UNCERTAINTY OF PRIVATE DESIRE (Plate 14), a transitional piece situated somewhere between the plank and the framed box constructions. It is composed of a wider than usual plank that approaches the proportions of some of the trapezoidal box pieces, surmounted by a flattened rusty red ovoid from which a single short dowel From it hangs a chain of two projects. copper rings that link through a small hole drilled in one end of a long, crooked branch, hand scraped and painted red. Its shaft,

interrupted by a band of soft metal attached with copper brads, ends in a white ceramic 'horn' with a pocked surface. It is bound to the shaft with black yarns.

Between these two bodies of work-the shieldlike planks and the framed boxes—is a group of works that are less easily categorized. Wonky attachments move these pieces away from the stricter planar format of the plank, yet their surfaces remain relatively low. The tripartite LYRIC RECONSTRUCTION OF THE PAST (Plate 15) is a case in point. The center element, a rectangular wide board with round corners, is divided by two shallow reddish-orange channels into three sections, each with a prominent natural knot. The three knots align vertically like planets in a constellation that bleed through a battered night-sky blue. An open rectangular frame, soft edged and surfaced with more planetlike knots, lashes by a row of copper staples to the bottom of the board. It is crowned by a top-heavy u-shaped (horned?) component, a prescient bifurcated element that appears repeatedly in Chadbourne's work from this point forward. In form and proportion, this construction calls to mind the tablitha, a multi-level masked headpiece found in precontact Pueblo imagery from New Mexico.

The bifurcated form takes its most elegant guise in the mask-like work titled THE PROTECTOR OF THE GHOSTS OF MEMORIES (Plate 4). This long slender wall relief consists of a slightly irregular plank, painted red and white, overlaid by a small white framed box with a blue interior that insistently marks

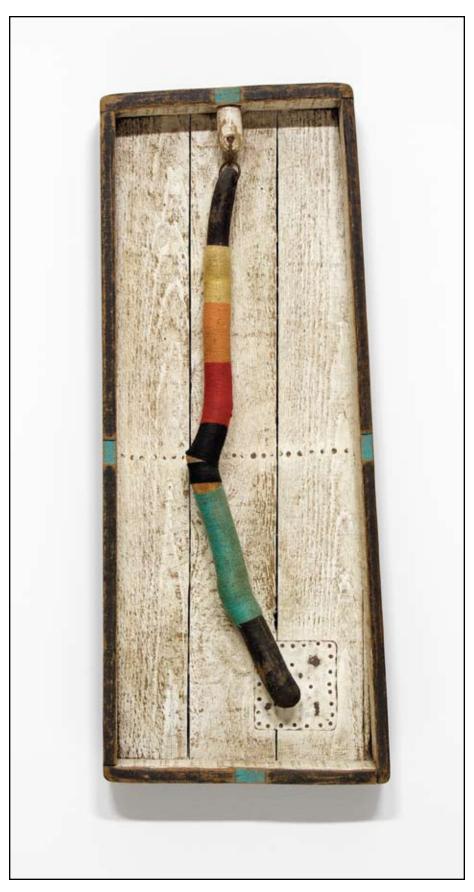


Plate 13 THE ASTUTE PHILOSOPHY OF INDIFFERENCE 1983-87



Plate 14 THE UNCERTAINTY OF PRIVATE DESIRE 1984-88

the center. From the top of the plank spring two long slender round horn-like forms, their white shafts tipped in blue.

The final group of wall reliefs in this exhibit is rectangular in format. Each is divided into quadrants by a cross element that takes multiple forms. Planar examples include the reductive SOFT REALITY OF EQUIVOCATION (Back Cover)—its opposing blue and white quadrants are divided by intersecting incised red lines-, and THE SUBTLE ECHO OF FORBIDDEN KNOWLEDGE (Plate 2). The surface of the latter is divided into four by a recessed pecked red cross, its intersection marked by four black and white squares. Small rectangles in relief with rounded corners and pecked interiors inhabit the center of each quadrant. Painted true blue in the white quadrant and turquoise in the black, these small rectangles call attention to the insistent repetition of the number four in this composition, which is defined by the central cross motif. This cross and quadrant combination is found universally. The latitudinal and longitudinal arms of the cross divide the world into four parts. There are four cardinal directions, four seasons, four winds, etc.... The number four suggests the totality of the universe.

The cross and quadrant configuration recurs in FALSE HISTORY OF DECEPTION (Front Cover), which consists of a shallow framed box almost four feet in diameter that is superimposed by a cross constructed of straight branches painted blue. They are bound to one another at the junction (the

center—'god') and to the sides of the box by braids of black fibers. Behind the cross a white pecked square with rounded corners sits slightly off center, like a cast shadow, against an orange field. Four blue irregular nodes mark the midpoints (the cardinal directions) of the four sides of this white shape. It calls to mind a map of the universe, its nodes indicating the location of the four sacred mountains of Pueblo cosmography.

Chadbourne's fetishized, ritualized objects stir a collective memory that connects us as human beings to a primordial past. His sculptures conjure up sacred ritual, space and time, ancestor worship, and consecrated rites of passage. They are at once universal truth and private fiction, the constructs of an erudite artist with broad experience in and of the world. They spring from deep within the artist's fecund imagination and are inspired by his appreciation for the material culture and ancient traditions of indigenous peoples, about which our knowledge is only fragmentary. The artist deconstructs archetypes and reassembles their parts into paradoxical and enigmatic imagery open to individual interpretation. "It is my intention," says Danville Chadbourne, "to provoke questions, suggest possibilities, and ultimately elicit responses that are more than just intellectual. I want the viewer to feel something."

Kellen Kee McIntyre, PhD Executive Director, Bihl Haus Arts



Plate 15 THE LYRIC RECONSTRUCTION OF THE PAST 1981-83



Plate 16 PHANTOMS OF CONSCIENCE



Plate 17 THE OBVIOUSLY HIDDEN TRUTH 1981



Plate 18 THE RELICS OF ECSTASY AND FEAR 1983



Plate 19 THE PATH OF THE BELIEVER 1991



Plate 20 THE IMPASSIVE FACADE OF DOUBT 1989-90



Plate 21 INCOMPLETE RECONCILIATION - A TALE OF INDIFFERENCE 1983-84



Plate 22 THE ILLUMINATION OF OBSCURITY WITH LIES 1980



Plate 23 THE ILLUMINATION OF OBSCURITY WITH LIES 1980

#### WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION

#### RELIEFS

1.	PHANTOMS OF CONSCIENCE acrylic on wood, fabric, wood 39" H. 6" W.	1981	17.	THE DIVISION OF THE INDIVISIBLE acrylic on wood 81" H. 9" W.	1987-88
2.	MYSTERY DISGUISED AS A LIE acrylic on wood, metal, fiber 51" H. 7" W.	1981	18.	THE IMPASSIVE FACADE OF DOUBT acrylic and metal on wood, fiber, wood 31" H. 32" W. 7" D.	1989-90
3.	THE WHIMSICAL ORDER OF THE ABSOLUTE acrylic on wood 72" H. 9" W.	1981	19.	THE SOFT REALITY OF EQUIVOCATION acrylic on wood, beads 20" H. 22" W.	1988-93
4.	THE OBVIOUSLY HIDDEN TRUTH acrylic on wood, metal, fiber 60" H. 20" W.	1981	20.	THE SUBTLE ECHO OF FORBIDDEN KNOWLEDGE acrylic on wood 38½" H. 19" W.	1988-93
5.	THE LYRIC RECONSTRUCTION OF THE PAST acrylic on wood, metal 48" H. 17" W.	1981-83	21.	THE PROTECTOR OF THE GHOSTS OF MEMORIES acrylic on wood 41" H. 12" W. 6" D.	1988-99
6.	THE RELICS OF ECSTASY AND FEAR acrylic on wood, earthenware, fiber 35" H. 19" W.	1983	SCU	LPTURES	
7.	EROTIC POEM MADE FROM THE BONES OF FEAR wood, acrylic on wood, metal 62" H. 10" W.	1982-83	22.	THE ILLUMINATION OF OBSCURITY WITH LIES graphite on smoked earthenware 25" H. 23" W. 12" D.	1980
8.	RELIQUARY FOR OBVIOUS SECRETS acrylic on wood and earthenware, fiber 57" H. 11" W.	1983 - 84	23.	MONUMENT TO THE SCIENCE OF DEATH smoked earthenware, acrylic on wood and earthen metal, fiber	
9.	DEADLY COMMUNION - THE FEAR OF BECOMING of acrylic on wood, metal, beads 26" H. 40" W.	ONE 1984	24.	77" H. 19" W. 19" D.  THE BLACK SONG OF POWER AND INDIFFERENCE stoneware, earthenware 94" H. 19" W. 19" D.	1982-83 1984
10.	THE MEMORY OF BECOMING ETERNAL acrylic on wood, metal, beads, hair 45" H. 18" W.	1984	25.	THE PATH OF THE BELIEVER acrylic on wood and plywood, concrete, wood, fabri 42" H. 20" W. 20" D.	
11.	INCOMPLETE RECONCILIATION - A TALE OF INDIFF acrylic on wood, fiber, metal 60" H. 22" W.	ERENCE 1983-84		42 n. 20 W. 20 D.	1991
12.	THE SEARCH FOR ALTERNATE LIES – I acrylic on wood 84" H. 8" W. 7" D.	1985			
13.	THE SEARCH FOR ALTERNATE LIES – II acrylic on wood 84" H. 8" W. 7" D.	1985			
14.	THE ASTUTE PHILOSOPHY OF INDIFFERENCE acrylic on wood, metal, fiber 31" H. 13" W.	1983-87			
15.	THE UNCERTAINTY OF PRIVATE DESIRE acrylic on wood, metal, earthenware, fiber 53" H. 16" W.	1984-88			
16.	FALSE HISTORY OF DECEPTION acrylic on wood, fiber 47" H. 53" W.	1982-88			



Plate 24 THE BLACK SONG OF POWER AND INDIFFERENCE 1984 Back Cover THE SOFT REALITY OF EQUIVOCATION 1988-93





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