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Undergrowth

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University of Iowa

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UNDERGROWTH

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree in
Teaching and Learning (Art Education) in the
Graduate College of
The University of Iowa

May 2018

Thesis Supervisor: Clinical Professor Clar M. Baldus

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

MASTER'S THESIS

This is to certify that the Master's thesis of

Amber L. Ruden

has been approved by the Examining Committee for the thesis requirement for the Master of Arts degree in Teaching and Learning (Art Education) at the May 2018 graduation.

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Thank you to all the family and friends that have supported, and continue to support me in my artistic journey.

ABSTRACT

My work is inspired by nature and my travels to different areas of the country and the world. I examine the changing formal properties of nature based on the elements, the changing seasons, and the overall environment. I translate these ideas into sculptural art jewelry that is wearable and unique. I experiment with several techniques in my work. *Undergrowth* focuses on sculptural pod forms using a lost wax casting process. I add color and texture using various enamel, etching, and weaving techniques. I also experiment with patinas to bring out the natural colors and beauty of the raw metal. I create pieces that honor nature and are a loose interpretation of my experiences and feelings when in nature.

PUBLIC ABSTRACT

In this body of work I explore the changing qualities of nature and I strive to represent these subtle qualities in my earthy patinas and brightly enameled pieces. My work examines how the elements affect our natural world and how changing seasons and the passing of time causes humankind to change shape, and grow. I also strive to honor our natural world and my jewelry pays homage to nature and it's transformative elements.

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ARTIST STATEMENT:

UNDERGROWTH

I am constantly observing the natural world around me and conscious of nature's therapeutic and restorative properties. While traveling, one of my favorite things to do is to hike and explore new terrain. It is like a wonderful treasure hunt and adventure to find different plant life and botanical forms. I am very inspired by color and texture patterns that I find on these hikes. My work becomes a visual record of the places I visit and the things I see while exploring different geological and topographical locations.

In my work I am always experimenting with different ways that I can fabricate metal, and by melting and striking the silver I am able to achieve organic, stone-like shapes. I developed an interesting technique that works very well for creating hollow, organic-shaped forms. I create these organic forms in clay, dip them in wax, carve out the clay and use the wax shell in the lost wax casting process. I incorporate patination, and enameling to bring out the colors and textures of the materials. I enjoy making multiple pieces and forms and then putting them together later. I sometimes use an initial sketch, but often change my ideas based on aesthetic sensibilities in the moment. My natural and organic aesthetic is often contrasted with geometric shapes to create a dichotomy between nature and humans imprint on nature. In my work I focus equally on form and function and strive to find a compromise between concept and functionality. I want my art jewelry to be wearable and attainable, I feel that jewelry should be worn.

My work strives to capture the transformative qualities in nature. How nature evolves and changes with the seasons and years, and also how it varies depending on geographic location. The idea of "Undergrowth" is meant to be a play on words. It refers to aesthetic inclination towards the organic and natural, but it also suggests my own personal evolution, growing and adapting to changing environments professionally and personally. As an artist and a person I hope to change and adapt to my surroundings as gracefully as the plant life around me. I hope that my sculptural art jewelry will honor nature and show the oneness and calm that I feel when I am in the great outdoors.

IMAGES OF WORK



Figure 1. *Greenery*, brass, alloy, enamel, silver, 2015.



Figure 2. *Thicket*, silver, gesso, paint, wood, 2015.



Figure 3. *Floating Pods*, silver, alloy, enamel, 2015.



Figure 4. *Brushwood*, copper, silver, brass, alloy, enamel, 2015.



Figure 5. *Aqua Pod*, silver, brass, enamel, 2015.



Figure 6. *Pebble*, Silver, 2015.



Figure 7. *Cluster Pod*, silver, alloy, copper, enamel, 2016.



Figure 8. *Nest Egg*, alloy, enamel, silver. 2015.



Figure 9. *Stumps*, silver, enamel, wood, 2017.



Figure 10. *Drop Leaf*, silver, enamel, copper, brass. 2017.



Figure 11. *Engrained*, porcelain on steel, enamel, alloy, silver. 2017.



Figure 12. *Ivy League*, Silver, alloy, copper, patina, 2015-2017.