FALLING/FLOATING: PIECES OF NATURE

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FALLING/FLOATING: PIECES OF NATURE

by

Susan Belau

A THESIS

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FALLING/FLOATING: PIECES OF NATURE

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University of Nebraska, 1999

Adviser: Joseph M. Ruffo

The work presented in this exhibition developed from my sustained interest in the metaphorical power of landscape. In a time when the scale of our land is dwarfed by modern technologies, and the American wilderness has shrunk to near extinction, I look to the small and intimate in the landscape to find awe and an awareness of cycle. My intaglio prints depict fragments of nature — leaves, sticks, pods — and are distinguished by layering of forms, the combination of rendering with abstraction, and lush color. The images evoke ideas of loss, endurance, possibility, and growth — ideas inherent in my personal response to these pieces of trees and plants. Examining and drawing my subjects, I am confronted with the power and energy that goes into such a small fraction of the world. It is an experience best described as sublime — a confrontation with the limit of self. These prints are made in an effort to give voice to the range of emotion and thought — from the pain and longing of isolation to the hope of something greater and more powerful — that accompanies such a confrontation.

Central to this body of work are two areas of formal inquiry: the exploration of color and the coupling of related forms. In combining these forms, shifts in scale, color and level of abstraction create movement across and into the image: intervals develop not only laterally, as with the diptych format, but also have depth and exist between the layers of the ink. In traveling over and into this physical space, a psychological space meant to serve as a receptacle, a container for thought and emotion, is formed.
Color acts to enhance, or sometimes contradict, the boundaries within the image and the space between layers of ink. The use of color in these prints is largely intuitive and exploratory. The goal is color that creates drama, offers visual and emotional lushness, and allows for hope and desire.

With the division of the picture plane and the layers of colored ink, my aim is to take the viewer beyond what is there, to what is between, what is felt, what has passed and what is to come.