

MASTER'S THESIS
SADIE BRIDGER

Based on her installation
"Inside the Cook-room"

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Thesis Board:

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PROLOGUE

When I was laying the foundation for "Inside the Cook-room," I would read fairy tales, myths and stories in the evenings. I found that many of the stories possessed instructions which were capable of opening up my psyche to my untouched subconscious. They could be taken like medicine, where all you needed to do is to stop, be silent and listen. Within some stories strange powers were embedded and the memory of them either remained in my consciousness or somehow seeped back into the deepest recesses of the mind. I had such an experience with one story: It grabbed me in ways that I was not aware and took me through a spontaneous journey where longings and understandings had to be dealt with.

It started innocently enough, through the door of inner hearing where I thought I was relaxing, getting away from it all, but I found that the story entered me into a space where I could explore my difficult inner landscape as well as my connection to the surrounding world. It is a story about the bone people as told by the old Spanish land-grant

farmers and the Pueblo people of the American Southwest. According to cultures in both Mexico and the United States, the bone people have the power to bring the dead back to life and are known for their restorative qualities in helping all kinds of animals and humans. No matter where the story's collector, Dr. Clarissa Pinkola Estes, traveled, the stories about the bone people were numerous and they came in many forms.

Once upon a time there was a snarl of an old woman who lived in a secret place that only seekers could find. Everyone sensed there was this mysterious place where only a handful had been. She was larger than life itself, surrounded by mounds of flesh that made it hard to see her form, she was covered by hair and her sounds could not be distinguished as either human or animal. There were the people who wandered who did not know their direction and those who knew they were lost but stumbled from place to place and seekers who knew there had to be more to life. She waited for them all with hopes to evade their company.

It is uncertain where she lived, but people saw her in the unlikeliest places. They said she loved to ride shotgun with truckers to Morelia; others have seen her pass by in a car charred black with the rear window shot out traveling near Monte Alban. Some think she is buried near a water well just outside of Phoenix, while others swear that she

still lives in the granite valleys in the Indian territory of the Tarahumara. Indeed she is curious, so much so that her names are many. People have called her *La Que Sabe*, The One Who Knows; *La Trapera*, The Gatherer; *La Huesera*, Bone Woman; and *La Loba*, She Wolf.

La Loba lives in a cave with an assortment of bones that she has gathered from the creatures that roam the desert floor. Her daily work is preserving that which is on the verge of being lost to the world, so she spends most of her time collecting bones. People who have stumbled upon her home have seen the skeletons of rattlesnakes, crows, lizards, deer and rabbits but she is known to specialize in wolves.

On all fours she crawls up and down the mountains and when she reaches a riverbed she sifts through the silt and sand looking for wolf bones to put back together. And when the last bones have been arranged and the wolf skeleton is complete she sits by the warmth of the fire and stares at her handiwork and gazes into the bones while a powerful urge to sing comes over her.

Then she throws her arms over the creature and sings out with the clearest of voices. And almost simultaneously flesh begins to appear on the bones and the entire creature begins to regain its life. The longer she sings the more the creature becomes realized; it shakes its strong legs and

wags its tail until finally you can hear the breath of the wolf. With great instinctual movements the creature opens its eyes and springs forth to reach the nearest canyon. And while the wolf runs with the wind by its side, with the worldly light glistening on its coat, it magically transforms itself into an ageless old woman who dances and laughs so loudly that she fades into the landscape. And to this day, bone woman still wanders searching to restore that which is lost.

This story remained in my subconscious from the beginning to the end of my show, and I didn't even realize it until after my environment, "Inside the Cook-room" was completed. One evening after the completion of my exhibition I had the time to start reading stories again and I picked up the book, Women who Run with the Wolves, in which I had first read this story. It had been months since I had picked up the book so I browsed over the stories I had already read and was struck by the common threads that ran through my work and the content of the myths of the bone people. Dr. Estes analyzes the bone stories and observes their essence this way:

We all begin as a bundle of bones lost somewhere in a desert and it is our work to recover the parts. This miracle story, shows us what can go right for the soul. It indicates what we are to

look for -- the indestructible life force, the bones. In the tale, *La Loba* sings over the bones she has gathered. To sing means to use the soul-voice. It means to say on the breath the truth of one's power and one's need of restoration. She knows the personal past and the ancient past for she has survived generation after generation, she lives backward and forward in time simultaneously, correcting for one side by dancing with the other. (Estes, pp. 28-29.)

PROCESS

The source that inspired me to create the environment "Inside the Cook-room" fell into my life unexpectedly. One fall evening I was catching up with my mother, and during the conversation I was attempting to explain my work to her. It came out that I was thinking of using bones in my artwork. When I told her that, she told me that she had been collecting wishbones since the 1960s and that they were stored in the attic and if I wanted them she would be happy to send them my way. I had remembered some of them decorating a small Christmas tree that sat on the dining room table, and I remembered how our family had been together and how things had changed since the death of

several members. I also realized that these wishbones were a symbol of my mother's love and hard work. She had cooked many a meal as a daily duty that nurtured me while I grew up. When the bones arrived in the mail none of them had been broken and I set out trying to figure out how they could be included in my art.

The wishbones came in various sizes, from very small to around hand size and were from wild quail, chickens and turkeys. Some had a quality of fragility while others were imbued with strength. Most appeared bone-white but my mother had decorated some green and gold for holiday trim. I wanted to return all of the wishbones back to their natural state where they had the presence of being either recently stripped or saved. After failed attempts of removing the paint on my own, I met with a conservationist at the Strong Museum and devised a method that returned them back to their bone state. It took several months but in the end it was worth it, for the wishbones became the driving force behind my thesis.

Constantly I thought of where these wishbones would fit and where they would make sense. Often I wondered why we are afraid to question the way we live our lives. I remember when I started working on the initial pieces for "Inside the Cook-room" I felt enormous anxiety over the troublesome nature of my vision. If I were honest with

myself I sensed a disconnectedness that was prevalent in the daily collective life that we live, in how we nurture as a society. I wondered, what happens in the space where others nurture themselves? Do they love nurturing, hate it or just do it because their body is hungry? And what of the soul? I thought of how we pretend we are certain of our environment, our rituals, but we live in a world where destruction is prevalent. The thoughts poured forth: I thought of the impermanence of life, the expectations society places on women, the battle over gender and the roles each of us take to play out in our culture. It struck me that each individual becomes part of the hierarchy where urban is over rural and culture is over nature and that each of us learns to misinterpret our relationship with nature.

At my family's table, where we gathered to eat, these wishbones became visible before our very eyes as we peeled the meat from the bones. There my family rituals took shape and dissolved into memories. When I think of how I became the way I am and where I learned to fit into the world, I know that a lot of my core was formed inside the kitchen, the place where we nurture and are nurtured. In the kitchen one thing becomes another, flour and water become dough, which then becomes a biscuit a roll, a loaf of bread. The ingredients come from outside: A field of wheat is brought inside to cook, and the cooked wheat ends up inside my body,

which gives me the energy to fix the meals, set the table, and eat while sitting on a comfortable chair and connecting with the ones I love. There I have learned the joys of nurturing and being nurtured as well as the heartaches.

With these different thoughts in my head I began to create work piece by piece. The first piece that I executed was a dirt tablecloth which was placed on a table with wooden legs gone slightly askew. Initially, I had planned to place all of the wishbones on the table top, but when they were placed there the piece became too decorative and lost its subtlety. It interested me how we don't connect the earth with the food we put into our bodies. The earth I chose for the tablecloth was barren, dry, cracked and had been over-used and not cared for. At each place-setting was a tiny quail wishbone that blended in with the twigs which were embedded inside the cracked earth. I knew that it was unlikely that a spectator would notice but I thought that was part of the problem I wanted to address: how we stay too busy to stop and contemplate the important things.

Next, I worked on two pieces simultaneously, a chair and a hanging shelf. The shelf came very quickly. I used discarded materials that I had collected and the hardest part was making the piece stable since the materials were ephemeral. A fragile miniature tree, barkless with severed roots, hung upside down from the shelf which was covered in

dirt and which initially stored the wishbones my mother had given me. This place of storage was partly functional, but mostly symbolic -- up-rooted like the tree. For eight months I experimented with an assortment of perishable goods on top of the shelf and when the piece was complete, there was seven pounds of baker's bran on top, with some spilled over onto the floor. Since the baker's bran worked best for the piece I removed the wishbones and started thinking if there was another place they could fit.

The hanging nest chair positioned in a corner was a constant struggle from December 1993 until the beginning of October 1994. It moved through more stages than I can remember. The chair started out shiny enamel white, with all its parts intact. I kept deconstructing, then reconstructing, never satisfied. At one point it was on all fours, its legs removed and replaced with tree parts. Sometimes I would put a leg back on and then remove it; I did this four or five times. The white paint was removed, and underneath I found an assortment of colors until I reached the bare wood, which looked exhausted from age and processing. While working I thought of the Mark Boyle passage from Journey to the Surface of the Earth, which was quoted in Ann Hamilton's Seattle/Sao Paulo catalogue:

Things are created and survive only by the destruction of other things. In this sense, materially or formally, all art is destructive. When Ortiz destroys a chair, he is destroying an object which is the record and trace of the ritual destruction of a tree. (Spector, p. 50.)

I thought I was destroying more than "the ritual destruction of a tree." A chair is designed for comfort to accommodate one person, and near a kitchen table its primary function would be to aid in human consumption. I did not want the chair to function as a place for human comfort. The chair ended up backless and hanging with a rope from the ceiling, wrong side up with a nest in the seat's opening. If the chair had been turned right side up the nest would have fallen out and if the nest was used in a natural sense with eggs or baby birds one would not be able to use the chair without interfering. For me it signifies the struggle with our symbiotic relationship with nature. I hung the chair in a corner to evoke feelings of being cornered, and how far in the corner we keep our instincts. I must say that this was the most difficult piece for me and that still there is something unresolved about it. Others have described the chair as a "torture chamber," "the nasty little secret in the back of your mind," "an animal being hung and butchered," or a woman on a trapeze, her hair

falling to the ground in a highly sexual way. My subconscious was working overdrive on this piece and I cannot discount such interpretations.

While trying to come to terms with both the shelf and the chair piece, I started two other pieces that were done inside my apartment: a bread pile and an apron. First of all, I started burning slices of bread with wishbones embedded into the surface. Then I started baking bread, trying to make each loaf uniform. Finally, I found a baker who baked the quintessential loaf of bread, and I began a ritual of my own: I would purchase several loaves, take them home and rebake them up to four hours each morning until they were burnt to perfection. At the beginning, I wedged a wishbone into the end of each loaf before I started the burning process, but when it was finished I noticed that the bread and wishbone didn't look integrated. It was at this point I started using a kitchen knife to carve the shape of a wishbone into the end of each loaf after the burning was complete. By the thirty-ninth loaf, I finally had a system in place.

The idea for the bread piece came from two places: how I felt about baking and being a woman, and a book called The End of Nature by Bill McKibben. In the beginning of McKibben's book, he explains how we are not sure of what we have done to our environment, that "it's like misreading a

recipe and baking the bread for two hours instead of one: it matters." (McKibben, p. 12.) In this case, the burnt bread is about being in tune to the right amount of time, and the bread piece suggests a lack of balance between what is needed and what is done. We don't pay attention until it is too late, until we have burned our resources.

A part of me enjoyed burning the perfect loaf of bread, because as a woman you are supposed to want to know how to make the perfect loaf. It is liberating to discarded an outdated standard (to give the finger to perfection), but during the burning process at one point I asked myself, at what price does one need to make a point? The fundamental question is: Am I going to choose a negative way or a positive way, because either way it will take a lot of energy. A group of six-year-olds visited the environment while it was up, and one of them said, "The bread reminds me of how we treat trees -- we don't take care of them, we burn them up." Others have mentioned the religious overtones of our daily bread. I found creating this piece immensely engaging and wish I could have burned 365 loaves of bread for each day of the year.

The apron had been used in my creative work for over a decade; I thought that my cook-room, like every kitchen, had to have one. I sketched it first in my art book and called it the ugly apron and wrote the word "work" eight times next

to the drawing with the phrase "no time for self clean up for everyone." As for the actual apron itself, I embroidered the phrase "Inside the Cook-room" on one side of the strap and in the center an earth-colored wishbone, which when worn lies close to the heart.

It was here that I realized I was creating objects for inclusion into a room, and that space was the place where we nurtured ourselves typically known as a kitchen. But in my mind's eye the word kitchen told very little of what went on inside the space. So I came up with the word cook-room, which indicates some of the actions that take place in a kitchen.

In a cook-room with a table and an apron goes a broom, so I reconstructed a magical one which sprouts a wild tree with buds. The broom piece is transformed into art by the merging of nature and the domestic. When Bettye Welch, a visitor, saw the broom leaning beside the door in the environment her response was, "If you stay in the kitchen long enough you become grounded to the room like the tree is grounded to the earth."

In my environment the sculptural objects were surrounded by a series of "cropscares," litho photographs of gardens and fields of harvest that were backlit by candle. I think of the photo structures as altars which have a real sense of the sacred. Black wax dripped down the wall behind

each altar, symbolizing constant change. Since the wax is not a benign-looking substance, one thinks of blood, of the ultimate kind of change -- of death and decay. But on the other hand, the fire brings the image of the living plants to life and has the potential of changing one thing to another. Fire, after all, was the primal element inside the first cook-room, a hearth somewhere in a cave.

When I was thinking of using fire with the altars, I was reading Weston La Barre's The Human Animal. He writes about the difference between a living person and a dead one and how the concepts of fire and warmth are key to distinguishing between the two. After reading this passage I knew that fire was the only source that would work to backlight my altars:

Naive observation readily reports several facts: the phenomena of warmth, breath and movement appear to have been 'subtracted' from the living body to make the dead one. This is taken to be the man's life which has departed his body and the soul being the difference between the living man and the dead one.

As warmth, this life or "soul" possesses by analogy the attributes of fire, heat or light. The Indo-European root word for spirit or deity is *di* -- "the shining, the heavenly," the deity being the fire-soul of a dead man. Man must often have speculated about fire, since it was one of his earliest cultural possessions. Fire mysteriously consumes, giving off heat and light; is dangerous and punishes with pain; and unaccountably changes one substance into another

-- and then it is gone. Man has a little warmth within him and feeds this central flame with food, which it consumes -- and this is the same fire that leaves him at death. Surely fire is spirit and deity in nature, for it reappears in larger guise beyond man. It comes again as lightning in the storm, and it is the sun, moon, planets and the star. (La Barre, p. 273.)

In my photographs, the garden is used as a metaphor for the life/death/life cycle, much as *La Loba* is in the bone people story. Whatever can happen in a garden can happen to you.

The final piece I did was a cabinet encased in dirt. The idea had been with me for months but its execution was far from certain. I talked to everyone I knew about how to adhere dirt to a metal structure, and most told me that I was on uncharted waters. After experimenting with an assortment of glues and surfaces the piece finally came together.

Consciously, I thought of the cabinet as another place of storage that would bring the cook-room to completion. But after the cracked earth was applied to the outside of the cabinet and as I started working on the inside with the cabinet lying flat on its back I was struck as to how it looked like a coffin that had been dug up. Once again, I was reminded of the relationship between death and life and memories of growing up in my home. I felt again the pain of missing the things I used to do with my brother, my

grandmother, my aunt and my cousins, all now dead. It occurred to me that it was here in the cabinet that the wishbones belonged: at the heart of the coffin, dead but glowing with the possibility of rebirth. These wishbones symbolized not only wishes but all the wonderful moments we had together -- the warmth and the rituals of eating and being together. To honor this memory, on opening night I asked my mother to place the wishbones on each shelf and afterwards I lit the candles that were inside. This earthen cabinet was the only consciously personal piece in the environment.

Not coincidentally, I noticed that people reacted strongly to this object. They either loved it or felt it was too obvious. Never did I tell anyone of its personal meaning because I felt it could function in many ways. It could function as a cabinet of wishes (filled or unfulfilled), as an empty place (where there was no food inside, only bare bones), or as hope for the future -- it all depended on how the individual chose to read the environment.

When all the pieces came together, a metaphorical kitchen was created. "Inside the Cook-room" became a ritual space where stillness resided and, I hoped, contemplation began. It had to do with the impact of life and change and how ordinary things can become important when disrupted by

death. There one could delve into both the individual and the common world that all souls inhabit. The space encompasses the ritual of nurturing and our ability to sustain ourselves both on a personal and on a larger political level. If one listened closely, it was my intention that they hear a faint voice urging them to stop and take the time to think about the world they are creating.

INFLUENCES

During my two years of coursework, I researched many artists and was interested in a variety of art movements. Several influenced my eventual body of work. One of these was Ana Mendieta (1948-1985), the Cuban-born artist who came to the United States as an exile and evolved from painting into mixed media. Mendieta made outdoor works which were ephemeral but connected to the earth, and she documented them with photographs, which initially were her actual art pieces; later, she worked in sculpture itself as the final piece. In her early work, Mendieta was carrying on a

dialogue with the landscape and her body. The "Silueta" series, in which she traced the outline of her own body in the earth, was a way for her to re-establish her connection to the primal elements. Mendieta explains that "through my earth/body sculptures I become one with the earth....I become an extension of nature and nature becomes an extension of my body." (Tucker, p. 10.)

Mendieta also experimented with anti-gallery genres in the categories of performance art, body art and earth art, and she used organic materials like mud, blood and fire. One of her first known works was a 1973 piece about rape, in which friends entered Mendieta's home to discover her half-naked and covered in blood. This performance piece was a cry in reaction to violence against women and was provoked by the murder of a fellow student at the University of Iowa. By 1975, the art historian and critic Lucy Lippard wrote about the "shocking, bloody rape tableaux" that Mendieta had produced.

What attracted me to Mendieta's work, and what influenced me, is the enormous intensity of the work and the poetic response required to fully grasp its content. In her retrospective catalogue, John Perreault says, "the tragic sense of exile that informs her artwork suggests the separateness from nature and spirit that is almost the definition of modern life." (Tucker, p. 14.) This concept

of separateness and the lack of connection is one of the threads that holds my work together. I was also influenced by Mendieta's use of different media and felt that this example helped my own development from photographer to mixed-media artist. After seeing Mendieta's oeuvre, I saw the power of organic materials, in how they mimic life and the cycle of life and death better than synthetic materials that last indefinitely.

Another artist that I studied and admired who followed her own rhythm was Louise Bourgeois (1911-). She has worked for over half a century using a full range of media, and her output consists of everything from individual drawings to installations. Most of her pieces make allusions to the exploration of organic forms and are strengthened by fragments of human anatomy. In comparison to Ana Mendieta, I found Bourgeois' work more polished and cooler, with a psychological edge that seduces the viewer. Even when the subject was unpopular, Bourgeois had the inspiration and courage to derive her work from her personal history and experience as a woman, daughter, wife and mother. In her most recent group of installations, which she refers to as Cells, she shares her obsession about her childhood and the anxieties that it produced. In "Cell (Choisy)" there is a recreation of Bourgeois' childhood home carved out of cool marble with a fence in front and a

guillotine that looms at the entrance. Other Cells display fragmented body parts such as three severed arms holding on to each other placed in a room where lessons are taught called "Cell (You Better Grow Up)." By looking at these installations one can see how much self-analysis Bourgeois did to arrive at such self-penetrating work. It is this psychoanalytical approach of coming to terms with her innermost feelings that drew me to her work. This model made it easier for me to include in my installation the wishbones that my mother had given me.

The Italian Jannis Kounellis also struck a chord with me. His work is poetic and varies continually in its many forms. He painted numbers and letters, and in his sculpture and installations he used burlap, wool, beds, fire, living plants, animals and occasional human performers "that served simultaneously as allegories of historical fragmentation and celebration of the vitality of real life." (Spector, p. 15).

Kounellis was an exponent of the 1960s Italian Arte Povera movement. Arte Povera artists used materials that were non-precious and considered "poor." They were concerned with both the importance of having a concept and tracking its process while making an art piece. This approach favored a sensory experience of looking at the work that related to personal memory and public history.

Kounellis had a moral impulse and incorporated materials that could be strongly identified with our environment.

In America, a related movement, the process art movement, was going strong with participants such as Eva Hesse, Robert Morris, Hans Haacke and Richard Serra. The process art movement, as the name implies, was concerned above all with how a piece was made; like the Arte Povera movement, their use of materials reflected the impermanence of life. As a reaction against minimalism and its cold impersonality these artists were committed to what happened during their creative process as opposed to the end result of the finely polished art object. By using wax, felt, ice or fire their work had a nonprecious quality which they hoped would have little allure for the art market. Now we know that this work was absorbed by the marketplace, but in the early 1960s many artists worked at changing the modernist view of the precious object.

One artist who was influential in both the Arte Povera and the process art movement was the German artist Joseph Beuys (1921-1987). Wherever my interest guided me, Beuys' name kept popping up as either influencing the artist I was interested in or somehow being attached to a particular movement. In time, he became my biggest influence while working on "Inside the Cook-room."

Joseph Beuys also used materials that were ephemeral. He often referred to his art materials as "poor" and loved their ordinary functions even though he transformed their use in both drawing and sculpture. In drawings he used cardboard, scrap paper, cloth and discolored sheets of paper, and he opened up the idea of watercolor by drawing with rust, iodine, dust, blood, beef, coffee, tea and by using fruit, vegetable and herb juices. Similarly in sculpture he used fat, felt, honey and lavender oil as major components of works like the Lavender Filter, Fat Chair or the Honey Pump at the Workplace. For Beuys the fat was seen as a source of protection, whereas the felt warms and the honey nourishes. In an interview in the 1980s Kate Horsefield asked Beuys how he decided to do a piece of art, what he knew about it and how he proceed. Beuys answered by saying, "I know a lot before I start an action. I know a lot about the necessity of the general idea of sculpture, but I don't know anything about the process in which the action will run. When my action runs, I am prepared to do a thing without knowing where it goes." (Kuoni, p. 71.) Joseph Beuys mentions his process as streaming forth from his idea whereby the process becomes only one of the many facets involved in the act of creation.

With Joseph Beuys there is always the idea that in artistic practice there ought to be a moral or social

dimension at the core. This is embedded in both his expanded concept of art and his Social Sculpture. In Suzi Gablik's The Reenchantment of Art she cites Beuys as a model for this kind of art. As she writes, "It needs to be said that this action of 'caring for the whole and taking it to heart' is more purposeful, and goes beyond the earlier efforts of 'process' art to challenge the dominant paradigm by closing the gap between art and life." (Gablik, p. 142.) I was drawn to Beuys because he aspired to transform a dysfunctional culture and believed that humankind had the solution. In his own words, Beuys said, "To me, the work of art became a riddle to which the solution had to be man himself -- the work of art is the supreme riddle, but man is the answer." (Stachelhaus, p. 66.) Even though he saw social and moral problems on a grand scale, Beuys was always hopeful and worked toward an ethical way of making art without ever giving up.

In order to grasp his ideas on art, creativity and what it meant to be an artist one needs to understand that he thought the old concept of art was outworn. The modernist view of an aesthetic painting or the perfectly formed bronze was pointless to him. He deeply believed that the old art form was paralyzed and had to be transformed "into a living, pulsating shape that cultivated life, soul, and spirit." For Beuys this was a major principle and its existence with

practice could transform everything. He often referred to this theory as his finest artwork which he called the "expanded concept of art."

It was during the pronouncement of Beuys' expanded concept of art that he declared that everyone was an artist. Many took what he said as literal, that everyone was either a sculptor or a painter. But in fact he didn't think that at all, he thought that everyone had creative inclinations that needed to be recognized and developed. As his biographer notes, "As an anthropological concept, the term art refers to universal creative faculties." (Stachelhaus, p. 61.) It becomes a crucial priority to open up the definition of art whereby all forms of artistic expression are embraced. As a society, Beuys felt that social art could build a spiritual foundation and in doing so would enable each individual to both experience and recognize their own creativity. In that way, he felt, they would participate in the act of shaping and defining their world.

Beuys took these idea of the expanded concept of art and built upon them a larger philosophy called Social Sculpture. This philosophy was extremely ambitious and called for a collective work of art that would foster "true creative democracy." While I was and am fascinated by this idea and admire its goals, I never felt versed enough in political policy to attempt such a grand scheme. In "Inside

the Cook-room" I did, however, want to create a public, universal theme similar to the ones Beuys had advocated. My environment was shaped so that it felt like the interior of a church, a communal space where one indulges in ritual, contemplation and other activities of the spirit. Within this environment, I hoped that the viewer would reflect upon how they lived their lives and how this affects their soul, which in turn becomes part of the society we live in. In a sense, I absorbed Joseph Beuys' philosophies from his expanded concept of art to create my environment.

Building the environment was also Beuysian in that I wanted to not build it alone -- I wanted members of my community to actively participate and help create what would become known as "Inside the Cook-room." I consciously chose a location that was uncared for, a corner of the Pyramid Art Gallery, so that by working as a unit we could metamorphosize the space into a place that cultivated the deeper meaning of art, whereby it became a space that represented possibilities -- a symbol for hopefulness. With over twenty-five people participating and creating this environment they began to shape how they felt about the community they lived in. Many people mentioned to me that the space was initially very seedy but that as we worked on it together it transformed into a meaningful space with future possibilities. The transformation of the space was as

much exhilarating as exhausting -- and in the end I felt it was worth the hard work.

The young contemporary artist Ann Hamilton is another artist that affected my work. For the first time in 1993 I experienced her constructed environments at the Power Plant in Toronto. The piece was titled, "a round," and it was a cavernous yet chapel-like atmosphere with stacks and stacks of human forms piled from the floor to the ceiling. While observing these featureless but spirit-like humans I noticed my presence had been silenced, and underfoot I noticed bare canvas. In the center of the room two columns had been dressed in cloth, and yarn had been wrapped around them many, many times. This yarn was the source for thread that a person sat and knitted together. Without warning, a banging noise broke the silence. I was disoriented, and my sense took me to the top of a column and there was a mechanized punching bag flapping back and forth, back and forth against the cloth column.

The multitude of sensations -- visual and aural -- attracted me to Hamilton's work, but it was the *absence* of sensation, the acute stillness and silence, that most attracted me. Ironically, the silence heightened my senses and made me receptive to receiving information in a non-literal, non-verbal way. The experience itself became the significant part of being there. Her piece did not depend

on words to explain it or descriptions on the wall; the silence spoke to me better than any words could.

In keeping with Beuys' philosophies, Hamilton's immense communal labors demonstrates that everyone can be an artist. Hamilton recruits large numbers of people to help in the fabrication of her environments such as adhering 750,000 pennies with honey to a gallery floor, stuffing sawdust into 1,200 human shaped bags, or skimming algae from a pond to attach to a gallery wall. Her work, like Beuys', is about the interconnectedness between artist and community, a literal weaving of the two together.

The objects I made for "Inside the Cook-room" during this time had to do with change and the impermanence of life. I noticed in Hamilton's work a similar idea of death. Her subtle references to death are not as apocalyptic or foreboding as the work of Anselm Kiefer's, but rather they are accepting and peaceful. Time and time again, Hamilton created situations that alluded to the transformative quality of death such as in "parallel lines" where Dermestid beetles are placed in a glass vitrine with turkey carcasses. The beetles gnaw away and clean the bones, and during this metamorphosis one can see how life can be sustained from death. In another installation titled "malediction," on an eleven-foot table Hamilton placed a wicker casket that was once used to collect dead human bodies. From a huge bowl of

dough, she made negative impressions from the interior of her mouth and placed them into the casket. The image assimilated both the action of life and the lying to rest. Of the stacked spirit-like bodies that surround Hamilton's "a round" environment, the critic Louise Dompierre perceptively writes:

Their death-like stillness does not threaten but rather pacifies me. I see that their forms are moulded, enfolded almost, into one another in a love-like embrace. They breathe life even in death. They exhibit difference even in their mass-produced sameness. Stored aside, ready to be used and consumed, they at once suggest surplus and imply need.

Dormant beings lying in wait for a future that has not yet been defined, or temporarily resting from a past that they can no longer bear. (Dompierre, p. 17.)

By this time I had already begun making objects that would deteriorate and constantly change. Once you start to think of change, it becomes impossible not to think of decay and finally death. At some point I discovered that the idea of death held an important place in Beuys' work. The wonderful discovery, however, was that Beuys' could hold in him both the sadness of death and the regenerative quality of life simultaneously. In an November 22, 1979 interview with Louwrien Wijers in Dusseldorf, Wijers ask Beuys to

explain how he looked at death. Beuys replied by saying, "Yes, death belongs to life you know. In the spiritual meaning life is not possible without death." (Kuoni, p. 248.) Further into the interview he adds, "But it means a kind of death, when the whole spirit comes to an end. But this is not for all times. This is only a kind of fixation in a death condition, and one can surpass it, one can recreate it, one can lead it back toward life." I liked the complexity of holding two opposing themes, death and life. Obviously one can see the connection between Beuys and Hamilton, with their interest in the interconnectedness between life and death.

Another Beuys-Hamilton link was noted by the critic Buzz Spector in his introductory essay for two of Hamilton's installations. He writes:

Beuys' use of monumental scale, allied to his idealized conception of "social sculpture," within which the model body stands in for the body politic, and in which everyone can be an artist, has clearly influenced the structure and scope of Hamilton's installation. Beuys' pedagogy, which he viewed as an extension of his art, likewise stands as a precursor to Hamilton's mobilizations of workers. (Spector, p. 14)

In the same paragraph, however, Spector notes an important distinction between the two artists:

Unlike Beuys, however, Hamilton does not claim the structure of her work to be a political analog. The relation of labor to materials in Hamilton's work models the family rather than the state.

In other words, Joseph Beuys intended for his work to affect the political structure of society while Ann Hamilton's work deals with the most basic structures of human existence -- the family and the importance of receiving information through the skin. Both Beuys and Hamilton have influenced my art. Like Hamilton, my work refers to personal intimacy which is modeled after individual relationships either in the family or in daily existence. But just as important is that my work alludes to the political, at least in the sense that just as everyone is an artist, everyone's actions are felt both politically as well as personally. With the disconnectedness and violence that is prevalent in our lives, the ability to sense and feel becomes as important as the ability to intellectualize. Individual actions, whether one loves or hates, nurtures or abuses, make up the sum total of society as a whole. In other words, one affects the other.

Hamilton uses an anti-word approach, while Beuys' driving ideas are highly verbal. One could figure out Hamilton's attitude to *logos* if they set foot in her 1993-

1994 "tropos" installation at the DIA Center for the Arts in New York City. Quickly, one smells that something is burning and finds out that a person is meticulously singeing the words out of an old textbook. On the other hand, Beuys thought that his major contribution to the artworld was verbal, done through his teaching and the ideas he put forth in his expanded concepts of art and his Social Sculpture.

I agree with Hamilton that language falls short of articulating many feelings and that is why there are times that I need to make a dirt tablecloth, a pile of burnt bread and a cabinet full of wishbones, which become visual descriptions of my ideas and feelings. On the other hand, I think that our society is so entrenched in its belief in the superiority of words that anyone would find it very difficult to communicate without using them. I remember the torture of deciding the amount of text to use in my exhibition; finally, I compromised by using words only on the outside of my room, so that people who needed the written word would be able to understand my installation. I wanted to reach as many people as possible and tried to balance the visual language with the written.

This balance is always a struggle for me because I do believe we rely on words over all of our other instincts and we have lost touch of who we really are. As in the story of *La Loba*, we need to identify our need for restoration -- to

bring the dead part of ourselves back to life, to recognize how our actions affect the whole. We are like an erect cabinet needing to get inside -- and once the door is open there is a warm glow, a flame that lights the way that keeps us in touch with our wishbone, which helps us to flourish and grow.

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Michelle Pe...

Sadie Bridger © 1994
Inside the Cook-room



Closeup of dirt tablecloth dirt
5'9" x 4' x 3/8"

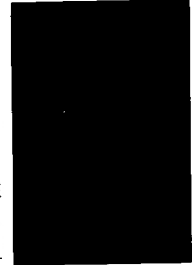
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Sadie Bridger © 1994
Inside the Cook-room



Shelf, tree, bakers bran
wood, dirt, clay, flour
3'7" x 1'1" x 4.5" x 6.5"

Sadie Bridger © 1994
Inside the Cook-room



Chair hanging with nest
wood, dirt, honeysuckle
10' x 1'4" x 1'5"

Sadie Bridger © 1994
Inside the Cook-room



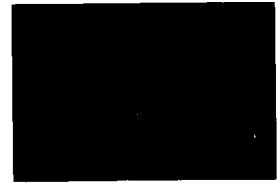
Bread carved with
wishbone impression
4'6" x 9'4" x 1'4"

Sadie Bridger © 1994
Inside the Cook-room



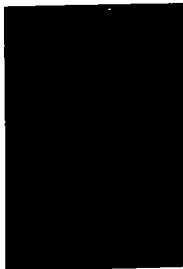
Bread closeup with
wishbone impression
4'6" x 9'4" x 1'4"

Sadie Bridger © 1994
Inside the Cook-room



Inside the environment
Broom, bread, apron,
and hanging chair

Sadie Bridger © 1994
Inside the Cook-room



4" x 5" toned litho film
with candle on dirt altar
garden scape (corn)

Sadie Bridger © 1994
Inside the Cook-room



4" x 5" toned litho film
with candle on dirt altar
garden scape (corn)

Sadie Bridger © 1994
Inside the Cook-room



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Sadie Bridger © 1994
Inside the Cook-room



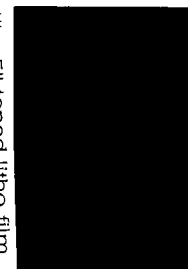
4" x 5" toned litho film
with candle on dirt altar
garden scape (lokral)

Sadie Bridger © 1994
Inside the Cook-room




4" x 5" toned litho film
with candle on dirt altar
pair of garden scapes

Sadie Bridger © 1994
Inside the Cook-room



4" x 5" toned litho film
with candle on dirt altar
burnt garden scape

Sadie Bridger © 1994
Inside the Cook-room




4" x 5" toned litho film
with candle on dirt altar
garden scape (tobacco)

Sadie Bridger © 1994
Inside the Cook-room




4" x 5" toned litho film
with candle on dirt altar
Series of garden scapes

Sadie Bridger © 1994
Inside the Cook-room




4" x 5" toned litho film
with candle on dirt altar
Series of garden scapes

Sadie Bridger © 1994
Inside the Cook-room




4" x 5" toned litho film
with candle on dirt altar
pair of garden scapes

Sadie Bridger © 1994
Inside the Cook-room




4" x 5" toned litho film
with candle on dirt altar
pair of garden scapes

Sadie Bridger © 1994
Inside the Cook-room



Cabinet, candles,
wishbones
5'7.5" x 1'8" x 1'1.5"

Sadie Bridger © 1994
Inside the Cook-room




Table, cabinet with
images (dirt & litho film)
Table: 2'7" x 4' x 2'4"

Sadie Bridger © 1994
Inside the Cook-room



Sadie Bridger © 1994
Inside the Cook-room



Entrance of environment
Table, cabinet, images
dirt, litho film, candles

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