

THESIS

BEYOND THE CIRCLE

Submitted by
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Colorado State University
Fort Collins, Colorado
Summer 1990

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WE HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER OUR SUPERVISION BY ALAN P. GERHARDSTEIN ENTITLED 'BEYOND THE CIRCLE' BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING IN PART REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF FINE ART.

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS
BEYOND THE CIRCLE

The direction of this thesis is one of personal expression, not intended to educate or direct the viewer, but to freely address concerns to which I am sensitive. The need to deal with my own values and those of the traditional world led me to ask questions about their parallels, relationships and validity. I realized I was influenced by a traditional ideology and needed to understand and evaluate it's meaning. For me, tradition is a world already named, safe and comfortable; it provides the assurance that life is already explained and not unduly threatening. Tradition and training encouraged me not to question but to accept readily the ways I inherited.

Among other things, those traditional concepts established the expectations of male and female. For example males are invested with a sense of power and authority which often prohibits their true emotions to be expressed. In such cases they are expected to "act like men". Their toughness is assumed to justify their power over the "weaker" sex. The female is expected to be an attractive homey, individual who compassionately nurtures those around her while expressing

"soft emotional" characteristics. Because I questioned these stereotypes, I felt a need to establish my own definitions based on the basic structure of nature, avoiding cultural preconceptions.

The basic structure of nature is void of human political, social and regional sexual preconceptions. At this level I am able to feel what it is to be human--not male or female. A parallel exists between the earth and humans in this regard, for the earth is neither male nor female but both. The earth is strong yet nurturing and, at the same time, powerful and weak. The power and violence of storms and other natural phenomenon are as intrinsic to the cycles of earth as are the calm and stable moments of a sunny day. To observe this in nature brought forth more evidence of the cyclical qualities of these characteristics.

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To bridge the gap created by traditional values and expectations, I observed the parallel cyclical qualities of earth and humans. Both create and nurture life exposing strong and weak characteristics and are interconnected to rhythmic cosmic forces. The moon acts as a visual reminder of change similar to the cyclical forces effecting earth and women. The transformative quality of the crescent shape as the moon moves through its phases implies constant change and emphasizes correlations I am concerned with. In figure #1, "Conception #3" I layered the crescent over a bulbous womb shape and integrated topographical lines and textures to imply a parallel between earth and women.

In figure #2, "The change happens so fast", my intent was to represent the cyclical movement that humans are connected

with, yet unless physically effected we tend to miss portions of crucial growth. I used two crescents layered over two round bulbous shapes with implied movement through two phases acting as representations of the cycles of life affecting me.

With the birth of my child this observation was enhanced by my immediate involvement in the cycle of life. I discovered I wanted my role to be one of nurturing this creation, a role which our tradition awarded to the female.

There is a logical reason to explain why women receive the role of caretaker of new generations since the cycles enable them to nurture the creation prior to birth. My desire to nurture my child came from love and sensitivity and a need to transcend tradition in order to be in harmony with my values. The caretaking experience allowed me to bring forth that side of myself considered feminine by our culture but "human" to me. It also cultivated a closer bond with my child, and offered greater insight into the complexity of the traditional role of women and consequently helped me see something within myself needing to be openly challenged. A resolution of feelings and desires resulting from the discovery of aspects of life negated to me by cultural rules together with the lofty feeling of giving something back to those around me granted me a wholeness not evident before the experience.

Wholeness to me implies an achieved knowledge of oneself and a total integration that overrides the restrictions of traditional values. As I approached this wholeness I realized

that the basic concerns most important to me were the parallel cycles of Earth and Women because of the life giving and sustaining qualities of both. Both are vessel-like in their ability to hold and nurture life. In figure #3, "Parallel Origins", I blended the traditional feel of a vessel with images of the embryo and topographical lines to reflect this idea.

The idea of parallel cycles of Earth and humans is the basis for my thesis. The creation of the art pieces parallels a mutual nurturing cycle during the process of work feeding my developing thoughts: one motivates the other. A similar parallel to the cycles of life that I discovered is that as the creation of the pieces progress I gain more self knowledge leading me to a richer humanness. For instance, in figure #4, "Self Portrait--What Now?", during the development of this piece my own individuality became secondary to what I feel is universally more important in realizing our connectedness as a species. So the piece reflects not my personal image but three nameless images of varied mood with reference to the cycles around us. The crescent and topographical lines are used to connect us with the earth and the cycles of life. The reflective inserts on the border further emphasize the idea of our parallel with the earth. All the pieces are abstractions involving all of these ideas: breast, womb, moon, and earth which all visually interconnect the elements of human and earth cycles through universal images.

A common element in these pieces is the circle or a reference to it which is representative of cycles, nurturing, development and change. The shape itself is stimulating to me because it relates to many elements I am dealing with from the phases of the moon to the images of earth and to the roundness of a developing womb and breast. The circle is the form which I choose to express how my concerns are integrated. The conceptual correlations and the implied movement of continual change excite me and free me to begin a journey of self-exploration.

The conception and birth of each piece was and is a place of spiritual growth and change for me. The actual process of working the metal-- cutting, forming, hammering, and finishing-- allows me a meditative time for conceptual development. The cycles created by starting a new idea cause me to become a problem originator as well as a solution facilitator. I am forced to ask myself questions which result in honest self examination. The problems and solutions created during the development of the work leads me to a higher level of self awareness and consequently more wholeness and compassion of and for the world around me. During this process, I am able to transcend social and traditional expectations, and my mind can eliminate unnecessary social clutter. I can achieve the mental freedom which historically has been pursued through meditation, exercise or other means. I've finally been able to recognize these conceptual correlations from this creative process.

In addition to the circle, the crescent form is an integral part of these pieces because it is another aspect of the cycle of change; moon phases and women's cycles are bonded with a monthly element of change tied to the cosmos. The crescent image marks time and freezes a moment of the cycle on my pieces. The breast, womb, moon and earth all seem profoundly interconnected to me: they give or complement life and are always integral elements of future generations. In a fast paced world which is fragmented into divisions; political, social, sexual, etc. the basic order is taken for granted or dismissed entirely.

By being sensitive to cyclical implications of the circle and crescent along with the parallels of Earth and humans I feel more aware of my own position to the basic order. The personal growth resulting from this insight signals an integration of my concerns with my development. The awareness, self-knowledge and reevaluation of prior values resulting from this investigative process has allowed me to become a participant in life cycles instead of a mere spectator as tradition placed me. The nurturing I allowed myself to share with the development of my daughter spills over into all facets of my life. My child grows, expands and changes as does my art. The relationships I have with others is respectfully significant with improved human interaction. My emotional nature now is not of the "male" in me but of the human being I have become.



Figure #1
Concepción #3, '89

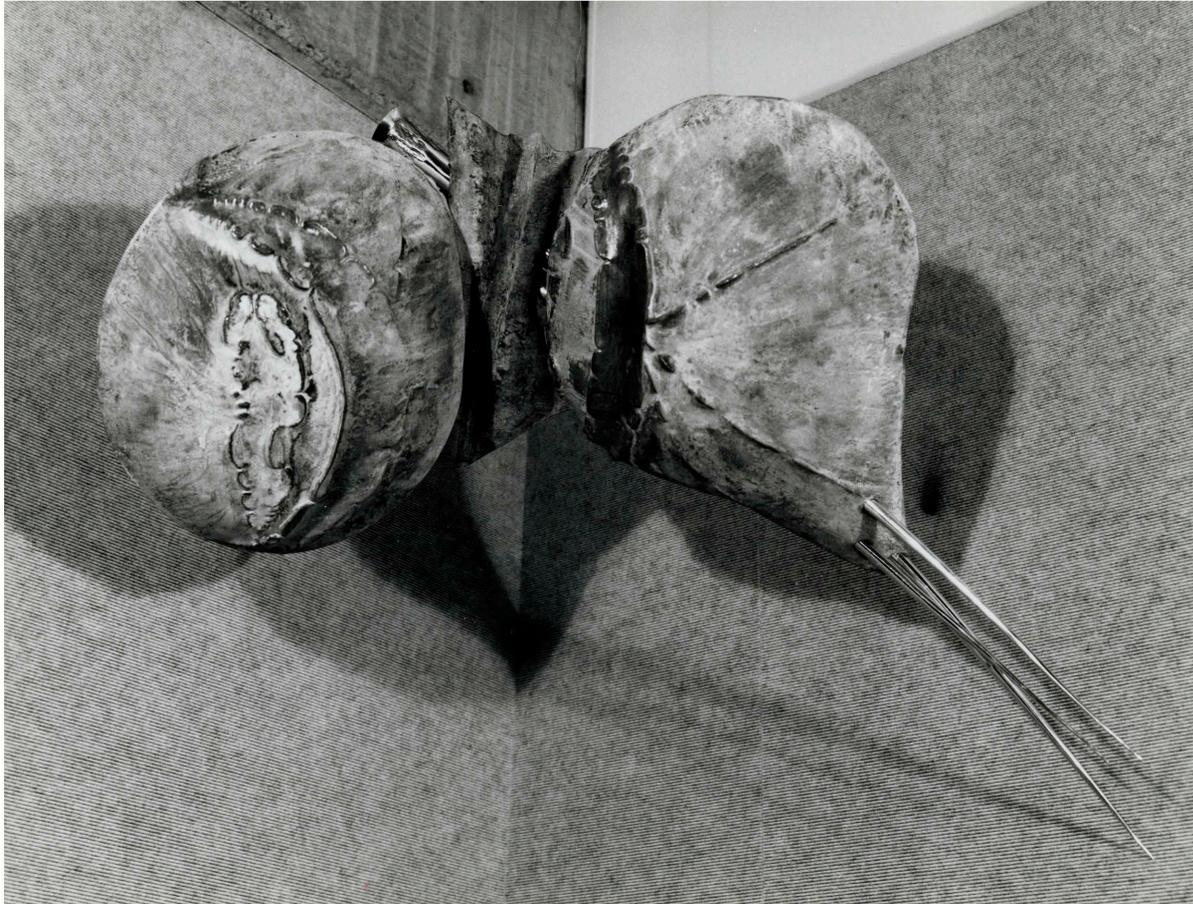


Figure #2

The Change Happens So Fast, '90



Figure #3
Parallel Origins, '90

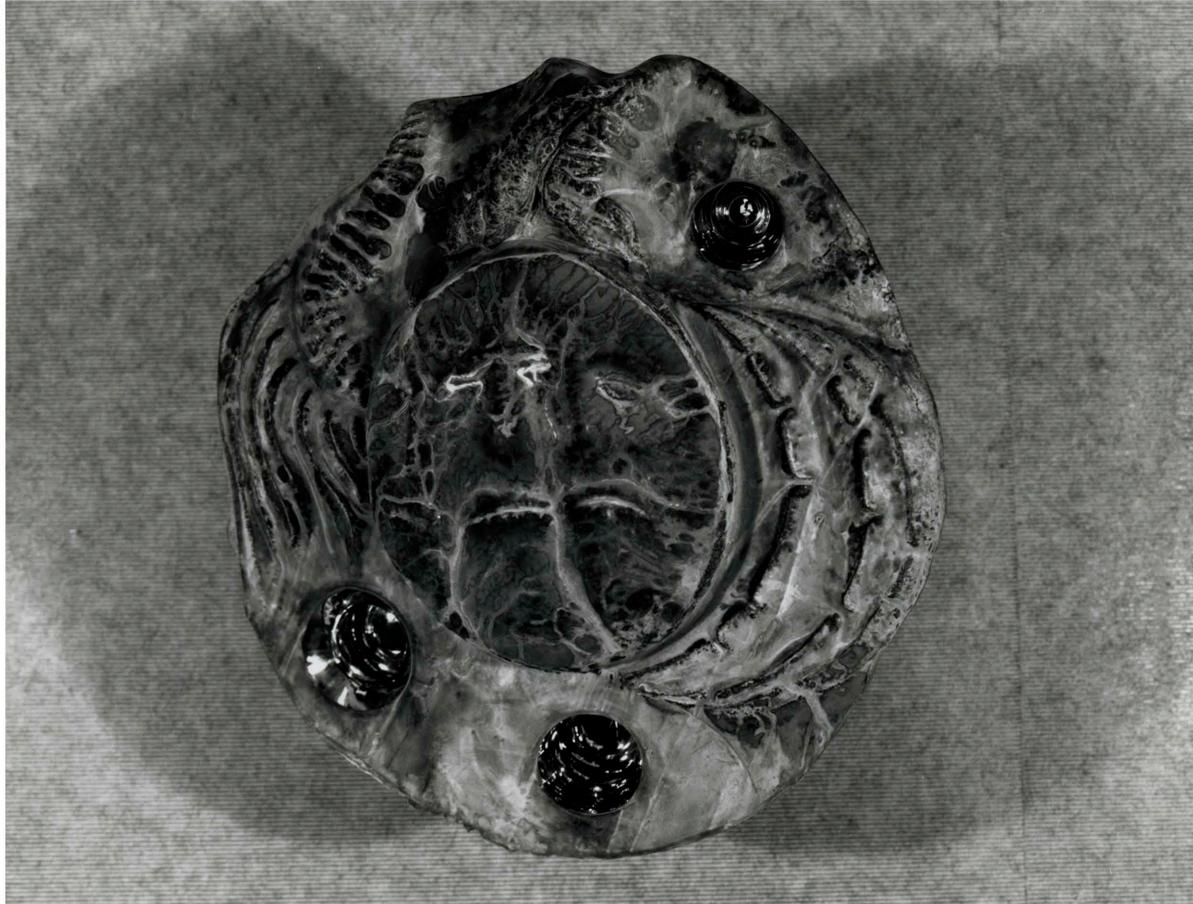


Figure #4

Self-Portrait - What Now?, '90

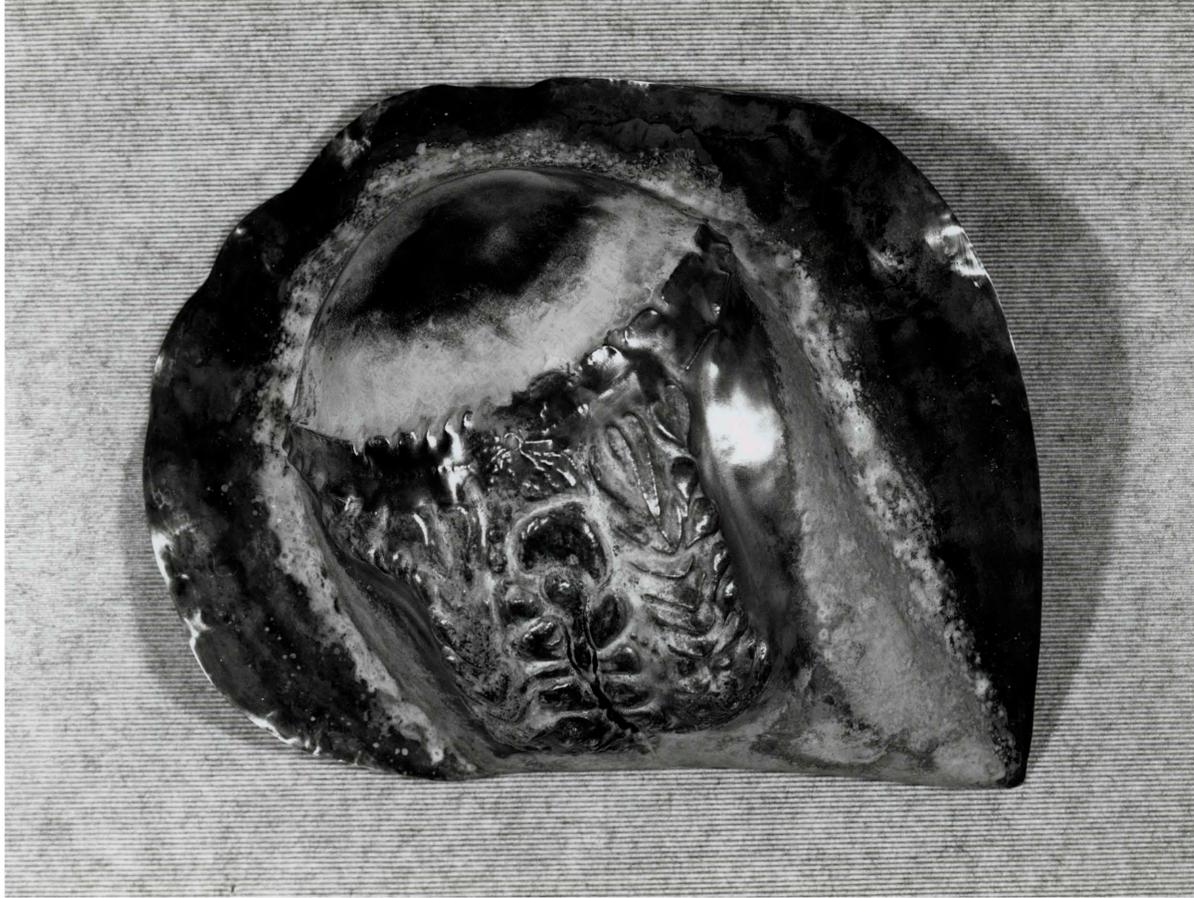


Figure #5
A Journey, '90



Figure #6
Conception, '89



Figure #7
Conception #2, '89

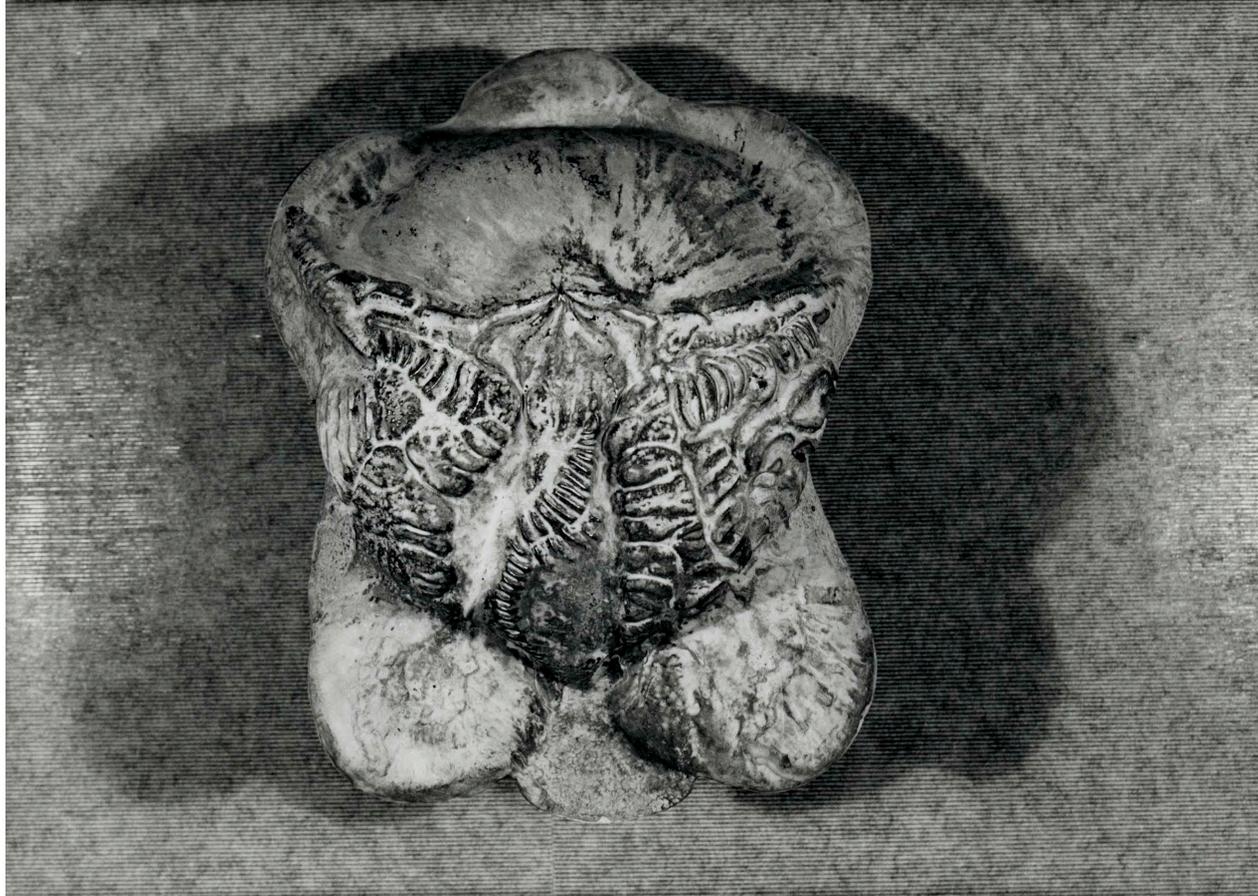


Figure #8
Take Me As I Am, '90



Figure #9
Intuitive Travels, '89



Figure #10
Distant Parallels, '89



Figure #11

Sometimes It's Painful, '89

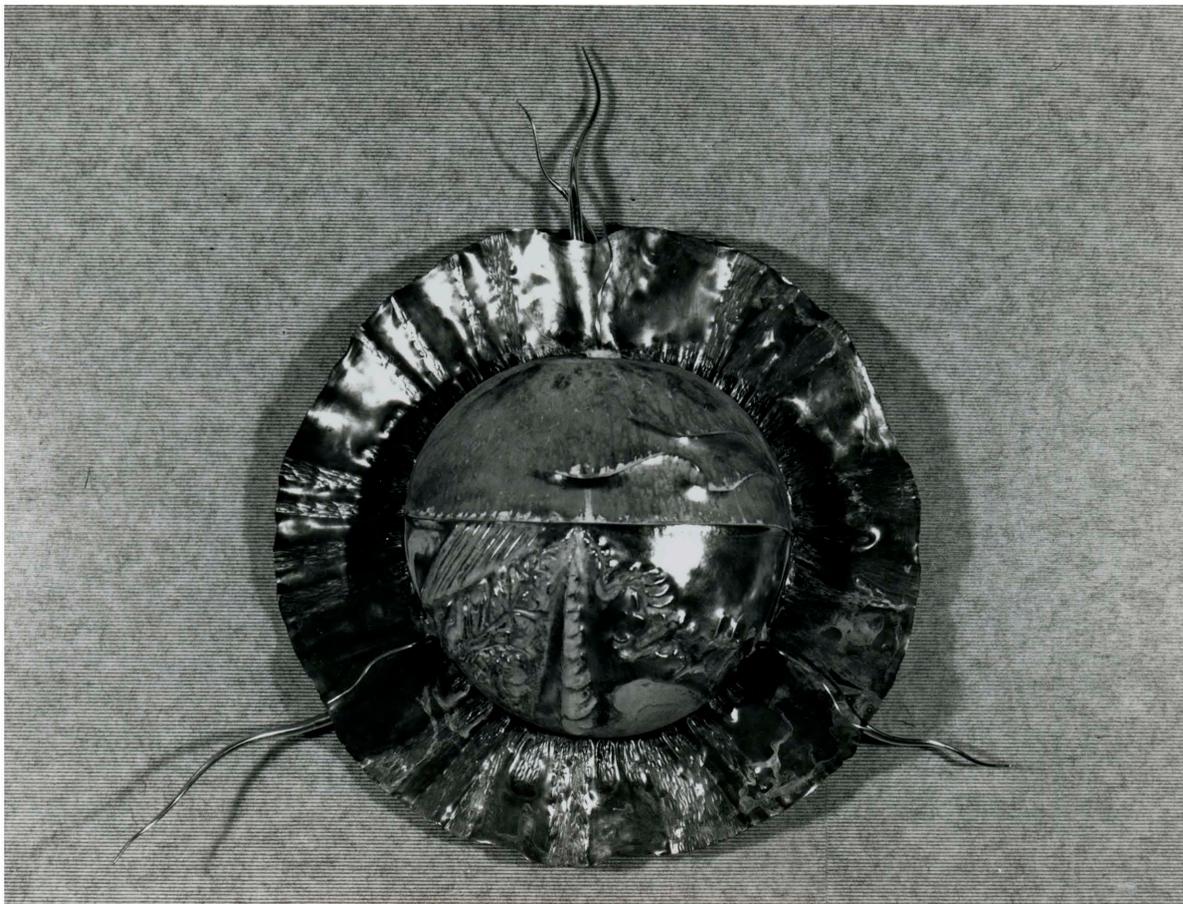


Figure #12
My Code Of Arms, '90