

MARTHA GLOWACKI
CURIOSITIES OF EARTH AND SKY

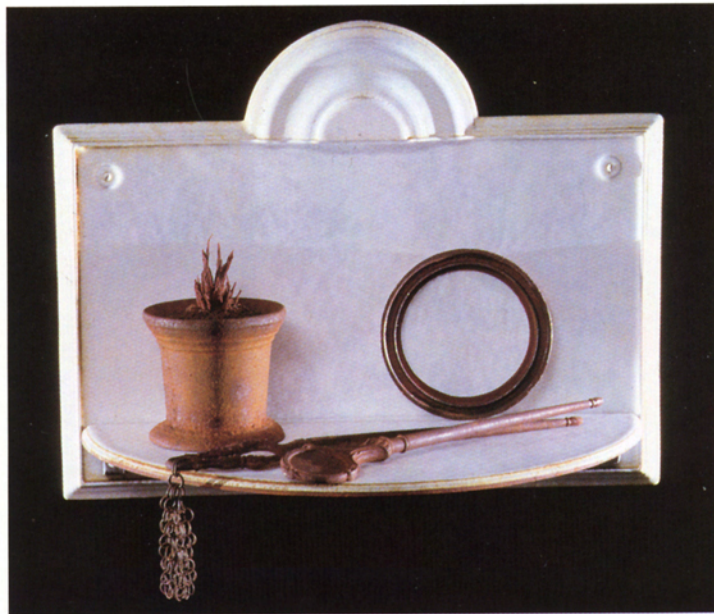


MADISON ART CENTER
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The desire to know and to understand is a quintessential aspect of the human mind. The more unfathomable the subject of inquiry, the more rigorous the attempt to comprehend. Certainly, the night skies, the cycles of nature, and the physical composition of the planet intrigued our ancestors, who developed myths to explain the creation of earth and sky and the behavior of their unpredictable forces. These myths served as a means to grasp the unknown and render it less frightening by ascribing human form or attributes to environmental phenomena.

Out of the construction of myth grew the investigations of science. Early astronomers employed figures of Greek mythology to chart the cosmos, grouping stars together to form such constellations as Orion the Hunter and Cassiopeia, Queen of Ethiopia. Deriving from humankind's need to impose order on apparent chaos, the organization and naming of heavenly bodies gave these scientists a sense of taming the galaxies. Similarly, horticulture and metallurgy were developed in order to know, to influence and to control how the universe functions.

Martha Glowacki's sculptures reveal the influence of these branches of study. A volume of antique celestial charts, a 16th-century mining treatise, and a catalogue of early fruit-gardening books lend their imagery to her work. From each of these publications she has extracted the visual patterns of a system that seeks to reconfigure the natural world. Her intent



is to depict the mapping and manipulation of nature as a metaphor for society's examination and manipulation of human nature. Ultimately, her deepest interest is the intrapersonal. Humankind's endeavors to define the forces of earth and sky symbolize the individual's efforts to know, to influence and to control the forces within one's self.

Many of Glowacki's works can be interpreted as psychological portraits. In *Cleft*, *My Humours*, *Clearing* and *The Last One*, organic elements signifying the individual are isolated within vintage found containers—a 1930s Queen Bee display cage, a glove box and 19th-century clock boxes. The interior space and intimate scale of these enclosures convey an aspect of female sexuality, an aspect most directly referred to in *Cleft*, with its fissure of golden earth surrounded by dark thorns. In *My Humours*, three shiny

spheres resembling seed pods—tightly wound, serenely smooth, aggressively spiked—symbolize the artist's changing states of mind, while the title refers to those bodily fluids of medieval physiology believed to determine a person's health and disposition. *Clearing* and *The*

Last One also contain representations of living, growing entities preserved like relics within their environments.

However, these works evidence attempts to modify a plant's production: a truncated tree sustains grafted, golden branches; a trellis-trained vine sprouts oversized gilt buds. These sculptures intimate that cultural constructs or one's own disciplined behavior can dictate the development of personality traits, physical appearance and the expression of emotions in much the same way that horticultural processes can alter the growth and flowering of plants.

The horticultural imagery of *Twain*, *Hybrid* and the *Glasshouse Series* also allude to the systematization of nature and, by extension, the structuring of the individual. The *Glasshouse* works incorporate found bird cages; their wire structures mimic in miniature the steel armatures of



19th-century British greenhouses. Within each cage a latticework supports the growth of a bush, coerced into a tradi-

tional botanical pattern. But these plants, in a display of nature's inimitable power, rebel against such torturous maneuvers, retaliating with a proliferation of fearsome thorns. Likewise, *Hybrid* produces an unexpected new fruit—hairy blossoms which resemble

small paint brushes or broom ends—while *Twain*'s grafting results in two branches: one of buds and one of brambles. Despite



Didactic Object: Jester (detail)
12. Didactic Object: Jester

the careful application of gardening techniques, nature sabotages the efforts of science to achieve a desired, predictable outcome. The sculptures' defiant mutations symbolize hope for the integrity of the individual.

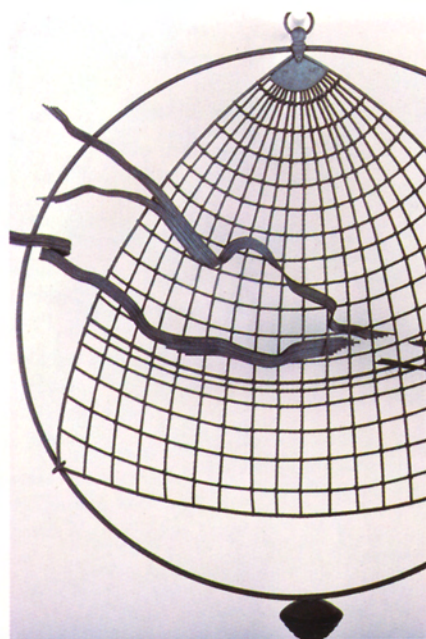
The dichotomy conveyed in *Twain* is an aspect of

much of Glowacki's sculpture. In *Fine Specimens*, two trees intertwine thick shocks of branches bearing, respectively, thorns and buds. Their luxurious growth is the result of pollarding, a pruning practice in which a tree is cut back to the trunk to promote unnaturally dense foliage. Presented as scientific examples of a botanical method and nature's unruly response, the two trees, explicitly figurative, represent opposing aspects of the human personality, while their entangled limbs express an attempt to blend and balance these dualities. The trees' mysterious hybrid, implied by an unoccupied round plot, might be a new species—one which could reconcile opposing needs such as those for home and career, or reclusiveness and socialization. As in *Fine Specimens*, the sinuous stalks of *Three Wands* host either thorns or buds and express an overtly figural presence. The wands seem posed as the three muses—goddesses of the arts. Their lush vegetal

“hair” and “clothing” and precise geometric “heads” suggest a marriage of nature and science, emotion and rationality. Both works, set on iron shelves backed by translucent glass, appear to be elements of a greenhouse, that environment which artificially enhances the growth of plants.

Chymia et Alchymia: Mirrors and *Chymia et Alchymia: Cones* also are composed of

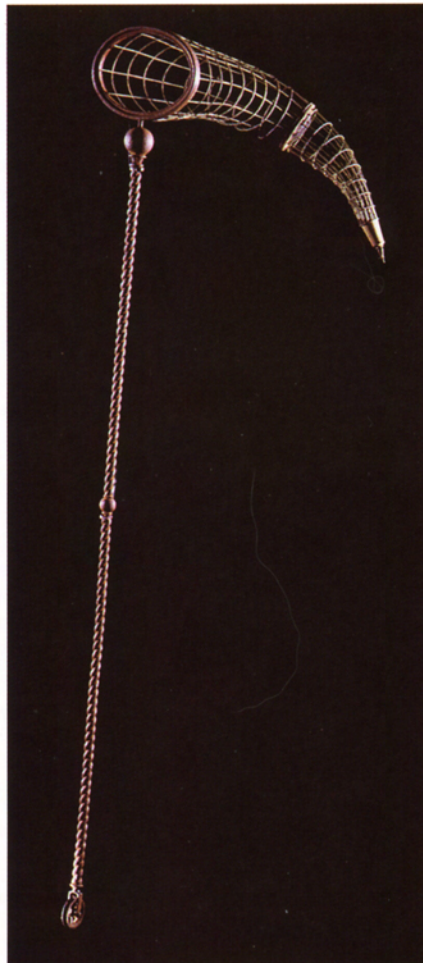
elements on shelves. These works refer to alchemy, the magical pursuit of converting base metals into gold which gave rise to the science of metallurgy. In *Mirrors*, a small crucible for distilling



2. Didactic Object: Net of Projection
Didactic Object: Net of Projection (detail)

metals is assembled with other tools for transforming substance or behavior. A magician's hoop, a magic mirror and a wand with threatening chains imply the mysterious manipulation of an object's physical structure or a person's appearance or actions. *Traveller* and *Capricious One*, too, are instruments of control. Based on the waywiser, an invention which measures distance by revolutions of its staff-mounted wheel, these devices have the potential to measure and map terrain, real or imagined, while their screened nets might capture an illusive landscape's ambience and atmosphere. Medieval-looking implements of fantastical function, all of these tools refer to a time when what the scientist could not accomplish remained the sorcerer's pursuit.

The staff and net elements of *Traveller* and *Capricious One* also appear in Glowacki's series of *Didactic Objects*; as the former sculptures trace the earth, the latter chart the sky. The fan-like nets of *Livio Sanuto's Trapezoid* and *Net of Projection* borrow their imagery from schemes of intersecting lines which represent the latitude and longitude of the earth. Across these flattened spheres curve the path of celestial rivers appropriated from antique astronomical maps. Here, these phantom rivers of water, wind or fire connote the flow of energy which moves through all living things. The planar grids of these sculptures are wrapped into the cone-shaped nets of works like *Jester*. Its delicate webs, resembling a double-spouted alchemical vessel, might distill dreams, ephemera or the answers to supernatural secrets.



The conical nets of *La Voie Lactée* and *Centaur Staff*, from the series *Les Curiosités du Ciel*, trap their mysterious treasures with metal etchings of the Milky Way and Centaur galaxies. These mapped images, juxtaposed with the works' nets and staffs, create triads of power: the power of knowledge, the power of possession, and the power of authority signified by the sceptres of royalty and church officials. This series again refers to the efforts of science to control the forces of the universe, and nature's counterattempts to

retain dominion by virtue of its incomprehensibility. All of Glowacki's cosmological sculptures reveal her interest in this struggle. Mastery of nature is presented as the model for management of one's self; nature's inherent enigmas are likened to one's intrinsic temperament.

Each of the works in *Curiosities of Earth and Sky* embodies the artist's inner investigation, posing questions that elude a conclusive response. Do the rarefied environments of greenhouses nurture or stifle the growth of the plants within? Will an alchemist's thorny wand cause pleasure or pain? Can astronomers fully analyze the origins of the galaxies, or predict the universe's fate? How does one map the unknown: outer space, the mind, the spirit? The mutability of scientific truth and knowledge expressed in Glowacki's sculptures has its human counterpart. Images of change—the pruning of a tree, the distillation of metal, the flow of cosmic energy—serve as metaphors for personal transformation, a continued redefining of the self and one's values and beliefs. As early skygazers marked the position and path of stars and planets, Glowacki plots the individual's evolving place in the physical and spiritual worlds.

Tina Yapelli
Curator of Exhibitions

CATALOGUE OF THE EXHIBITION

Dimensions are noted in inches; height precedes width precedes depth.

♦ illustrated

1. *Didactic Object: Livio Sanuto's Trapezoid*, 1989
Bronze, brass, wood and graphite
30 x 13 x 3
Collection of Rayovac Corporation, Madison, Wisconsin
2. *Didactic Object: Net of Projection*, 1989♦
Bronze, brass, wood and graphite
31 x 12 x 2
Collection of Rayovac Corporation, Madison, Wisconsin
3. *Cleft*, 1990
Wood, glass, graphite and pigments
13 x 21 x 5
Courtesy of the artist
4. *The Last One*, 1990
Wood, glass, bronze, steel and graphite
16 x 8 x 6
Courtesy of the artist
5. *Les Curiosités du Ciel: Centaur Staff*, 1990
Bronze, wood, limestone and graphite
55 x 12 x 8
Collection of Natasha Nicholson and Thomas Garver, Madison, Wisconsin
6. *Les Curiosités du Ciel: La Voie Lactée*, 1990
Bronze, wood, steel, porcelain and graphite
53 x 19 x 20
Courtesy of the artist
7. *Clearing*, 1991
Wood, bronze, glass, graphite and pigments
18 x 8 x 5
Courtesy of the artist
8. *Glasshouse Series: Double Palmette*, 1991
Wood, steel, graphite and pigments
15 x 15 x 12
Collection of Dino A. Maniaci, MANI Graphics & Co., Madison, Wisconsin

9. *Glasshouse Series: Horizontal Training*, 1991
Wood, steel and graphite
15 x 15 x 12
Collection of Dino A. Maniaci, MANI Graphics & Co., Madison, Wisconsin
10. *My Humours*, 1992
Wood, string and bronzing powder
3 x 14 x 5
Courtesy of the artist
11. *Didactic Object: Concenterer*, 1992
Bronze, brass and bronzing powder
50 x 12 x 20
Collection of Mary and Walter Dickey, Sauk City, Wisconsin
12. *Didactic Object: Jester*, 1992♦
Bronze, brass and bronzing powder
55 x 17 x 13
Courtesy of the artist
13. *Capricious One*, 1993♦
Iron and bronze
50 x 11 x 12
Courtesy of the artist
14. *Chymia et Alchymia: Cones*, 1993
Iron, bronze and enamel
15½ x 19 x 9½
Courtesy of the artist
15. *Chymia et Alchymia: Mirrors*, 1993♦
Iron, enamel and pigments
15½ x 19 x 9½
Courtesy of the artist
16. *Hybrid*, 1993
Metal, wood, hair, graphite and pigments
22½ x 9½ x 9½
Courtesy of the artist
17. *Traveller*, 1993
Iron and bronze
49 x 12 x 16
Courtesy of the artist
18. *Twain*, 1993
Metal, wood, graphite and pigments
20½ x 9½ x 9½
Courtesy of the artist

19. *Fine Specimens*, 1994♦
Iron, glass, bronze, wood, graphite and pigments
18 x 18 x 11
Courtesy of the artist
20. *Three Wands*, 1994
Iron, glass, hair and pigments
18 x 18 x 11
Courtesy of the artist

BIOGRAPHY

Born 1950 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin
Resides near Sauk City, Wisconsin

EDUCATION

1978
Master of Fine Arts, metalsmithing, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Madison, Wisconsin

1972
Bachelor of Science, art education, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Madison, Wisconsin

SELECTED PROFESSIONAL POSITIONS

1993-Present
Lecturer, Art Department, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Madison, Wisconsin

1990
Visiting Artist, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Milwaukee, Wisconsin

1987-1990
Lecturer, Art Department, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Madison, Wisconsin

SELECTED AWARDS

1993
New Work Award, Wisconsin Arts Board

John Michael Kohler Arts/Industry Residency, John Michael Kohler Arts Center, Sheboygan, Wisconsin

1990
Grant, Percent for Art Program, Wisconsin Arts Board

1982
Artist's Fellowship, National Endowment for the Arts

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

1990
Recent Work, Natasha Nicholson/Works of Art, Madison, Wisconsin

1989
Alternate Paths, Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts & Letters, Madison, Wisconsin

1984
Fields of Reference, Michigan Technological University, Houghton, Michigan

1983
Chatauqua Arts Association Galleries, Chatauqua, New York

1982
Kit Basquin Gallery, Milwaukee, Wisconsin

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

1993
Passion, Politics and Poetry: Storytelling in Twentieth Century American Craft, Craft Alliance Gallery, Saint Louis, Missouri; traveled

Sculptural Concerns, The Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati, Ohio; traveled

Wisconsin Triennial, Madison Art Center, Madison, Wisconsin

1992

Just Plane Screwy: Metaphysical and Metaphorical Tools by Artists, Charles A. Wustum Museum of Fine Arts, Racine, Wisconsin

Master Metalsmiths, Joanne Rapp Gallery/The Hand & The Spirit, Scottsdale, Arizona

1991

Verging on Emergence, UWM Art Museum, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Milwaukee, Wisconsin

1990

Wisconsin Triennial, Madison Art Center, Madison, Wisconsin

1988

Wisconsin Craft Masters, Charles A. Wustum Museum of Fine Arts, Racine, Wisconsin

Dynamic Dimensions: Craft in the New Age, Milwaukee Art Museum, Milwaukee, Wisconsin

1986

Metalsmiths Making Sculpture, Mitchell Museum, Mount Vernon, Illinois

1985

World Goldsmith Exhibition, Galerie Dentler, Ulm, West Germany

1984

Joyas Sorpresas, organized by Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service (SITES); traveled to museums in South America

NEA Craft Fellowship Invitational, Contemporary Crafts Gallery, Louisville, Kentucky

The Alternative Image II, John Michael Kohler Arts Center, Sheboygan, Wisconsin

Jewelry U.S.A., American Craft Museum, New York, New York

1984

Wisconsin Biennial, Madison Art Center, Madison, Wisconsin

1983

Craft: An Expanding Definition, John Michael Kohler Arts Center, Sheboygan, Wisconsin

1981

Good as Gold: Alternative Materials in American Jewelry, Renwick Gallery of the National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.; traveled by Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service (SITES)

The Enamelist's Art, Gallery of Contemporary Metalsmithing, Rochester, New York

Contemporary Metals: Focus on Idea, Museum of Art, Washington State University, Pullman, Washington

Wisconsin Directions 3, Milwaukee Art Museum, Milwaukee, Wisconsin

1980-1981

Young Americans: Metal, American Craft Museum, New York, New York

1980

Cartography, John Michael Kohler Arts Center, Sheboygan, Wisconsin

Copper 2, University of Arizona, Tucson, Arizona

Flux, Fusion, Fireworks, Contemporary Crafts Association, Portland, Oregon

1979

National Metals Invitational, Visual Arts Center of Alaska, Anchorage, Alaska

Unpainted Portrait, John Michael Kohler Arts Center, Sheboygan, Wisconsin

1978

Altered Image, A.R.C. Gallery, Chicago, Illinois

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

1986

Watson-Jones, Virginia, *Contemporary American Women Sculptors* (Phoenix: Oryx Press).

1985

Wisconsin Academy Review, Wisconsin Academy of Arts, Sciences & Letters (Vol. 31, Number 2), 81.

1983

"Martha Glowacki: Fields of Reference," *Metalsmith*, Society of North American Goldsmiths (Vol. 3, Number 3), 19-22.

SELECTED COLLECTIONS

Mary and Walter Dickey, Sauk City, Wisconsin

John Michael Kohler Arts Center, Sheboygan, Wisconsin

Dino A. Maniaci, MANI Graphics & Co., Madison, Wisconsin

Natasha Nicholson and Thomas Garver, Madison, Wisconsin

Rayovac Corporation, Madison, Wisconsin

SPONSORS

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The Madison Art Center is an independent, nonprofit museum of modern and contemporary art that depends on businesses and individual members for support. Admission is free for most exhibitions at the Art Center, which occupies four floors within the Madison Civic Center. Gallery hours are 11-5 Tuesday through Thursday, 11-9 Friday, 10-5 Saturday and 1-5 Sunday. The museum is closed on Mondays.

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