

# Metamorphosis Metaphora

By

Rebecca Rose Barton

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of Master of Fine Arts.

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Chairperson Lin Stanionis

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Mary Anne Jordan

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Gina Westergard

Date Defended: April 20, 2011

The Thesis Committee for Rebecca Rose Barton  
certifies that this is the approved version of the following thesis:

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Plants have become the focus of my artwork as a way to explain a state of being. I have always retained a deep love for the natural world, finding an inherent order in the seeming disorder of life and its processes. Growing up in a highly industrialized area that lacks vegetation and scenery, I became captivated by the ephemeral nature of plant life. In my early metalwork, I incorporated plant forms into my art in an ornamental way. However, over time my ideas and processes have evolved into something much more personal with the plant imagery taking on new meaning. I am drawn to certain characteristics that plants exhibit. Plants can be fragile and vulnerable, yet simultaneously resilient and durable in a way that reflects my own faults and strengths. Using traditional metalsmithing techniques along with modern patina processes, I create pieces where plants are metaphors for my emotions and experiences.

One of my primary goals as an artist is to create work that is intentionally realistic. There is a challenge in transforming raw metal into forms that have an organic and life-like appearance. Realism also serves a more important purpose in that it creates the metaphors that I express. It is also a way to facilitate a universal connection to my work. For example, though plants' rate of growth and change can be very different from our own, I believe people identify with the plant's life cycle, seeing a parallel in their own life. Due to this analogy, plants as metaphors, both in literary and visual symbolism, can aptly describe the changes, conditions, and stages of life. An example of this is the Tree of Life. The Tree of Life is a complex, yet culturally significant image, its branches and roots representing the interconnectedness of all life on the planet.

On a more personal level, I utilize elements from the surrounding environment to represent my experiences of growth and change, along with the progression of emotions in my relationships. In my work I choose to depict plants at a specific stage in their development to better serve the

metaphor or feeling that I want to express. For instance, I use small and newly developed roots to symbolize the beginning phase of a new situation. New and exposed roots can also emit a feeling of vulnerability. Another example is a flower in full bloom, which I employ to represent a positive outlook on a fully developed relationship. For me, metal is an ideal way to permanently capture such transient experiences and emotions.

I find it natural to have a direct connection with my jewelry pieces. My body and skin develop a relationship with the metal through the tactile experience of touching and creating the work, as the pieces become an extension of the self. All of the jewelry works were made to fit me specifically, as the pieces are also self-portraits. Two of the pieces were designed to be worn jointly with my boyfriend, reflecting our time and experiences together. The body, along with being an environment where the pieces are displayed, possesses a life and vulnerability that infuses the work.

*Metamorphosis Metaphora* is an exhibition that embodies these ideas and also acts as a reflection of recent personal experiences. The pieces selected for the installation present a sequence of events, documenting my time in Kansas. Graduate school is a place for growth, both at its inception and at its finish. After the sojourn is completed, life begins anew—the cushion of school has been removed and the future is uncertain.

In the exhibition, the pieces in *Metamorphosis Metaphora* float in space in proximity to where they would be worn on the body. Spider web-like monofilament captures the suspended pieces. Viewers, when entering the space, can envision where the pieces would rest on their own body.

Separated from the rest of the gallery by a dark velvet curtain, the exhibition becomes a private place that invites viewers on a journey to explore my experiences from the last three years.





*De Novo*

2008

Copper, Colored Pencils

Roots are an anchorage developed over time, such as the roots I developed when living in the same house for twenty-three years. With my move from Illinois to Kansas, my roots were suddenly pulled from the ground; I was left feeling weak and vulnerable. However, the move marked the beginning of a new chapter in my life. *De Novo* tries to capture this feeling through the use of a maple tree sapling that, while uprooted, is still full of potential for new growth.



*Coalesce*

2010

Sterling Silver, 14kt Gold, 24kt Gold

The close connection and commitment I have with my boyfriend is a significant and precious part of my life. The metals used in *Coalesce* reflect this idea, as they are also precious: silver and gold. The clover roots symbolize both the beginning stage of the relationship and the good fortune at finding another soul with which to bond. Our youthful fingers, as well as the relationship, are captured in a moment of time. The clasped fingers protect the new roots, insuring further growth to maturity.



*Floruit*

2011

Copper, Acrylic Paint, Colored Pencils

*Floruit*, embodying ideas about people and situations I have encountered, represents how people can add stress to another person's life. The invasive vines symbolize this concept. The vines are chaotic and constricting. Conversely, the morning glory flower represents the calm in the eye of the storm; the blue color of the flower promotes healing and tranquility. It is my interpretation of how other people tend to perceive me—a calm, empathetic person to which one can go to reveal and unload life's problems.





*Memento*

2011

Copper, Acrylic Paint, Colored Pencils

*Memento* represents the growth and optimism resulting from having a healthy and established relationship with another person. The hands share a physical connection when the work is worn. The two pieces interlock, but can also be worn individually. The color and size of each piece reflect the personality of the wearer. The Forget-Me-Not flowers symbolize enduring love and faithfulness. They also act as a reminder of the relationship's initial passion.



*Spero*

2011

Sterling Silver

It takes commitment, hope, and persistence to overcome difficulty. *Spero* is a reflection of the last eight years of my life and the transition I face as I finish my formal education. The snowdrop is one of the first flowers of spring, showing even while there is still snow on the ground. This flower's bloom symbolizes hope and renewal of life after the hardship of winter. An apt metaphor as my life enters a new stage after my time spent in school.

The pieces in *Metamorphosis Metaphora* are fragile, both literally and metaphorically. All of the pieces that have roots do not have established and mature ones. I find that, even after living in Kansas for three years, I still feel displaced. The pieces have a transitory quality; they express inexperience, hope, and the temporal nature of life. We have all experienced feelings of fragility and of being uprooted and transplanted. People, like plants, need strong roots in order to survive and flourish, season after season.