

PAM HALL
the Coil that Binds
the Line that Bends

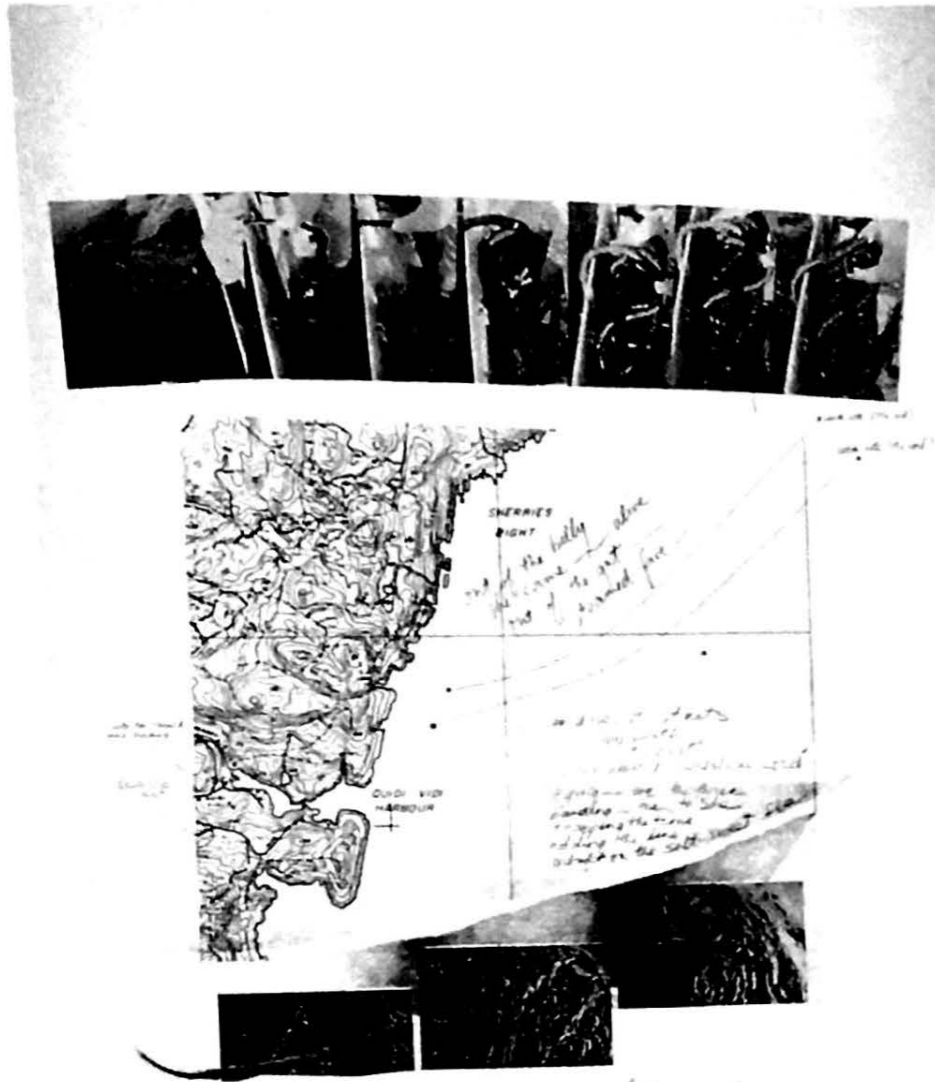
PAM HALL

the Coil that Binds the Line that Bends

Memorial University of Newfoundland
Sir Wilfred Grenfell College Art Gallery
January 14 - February 18, 1990

*and so - it starts
my berth
its birth
pulled aboard - umbilical cord
tying - we, the three
binding - me, to she
trapping the time
holding the line
adrift on the salt-sweet sea*

*Pam Hall
from Biographical Note #1*



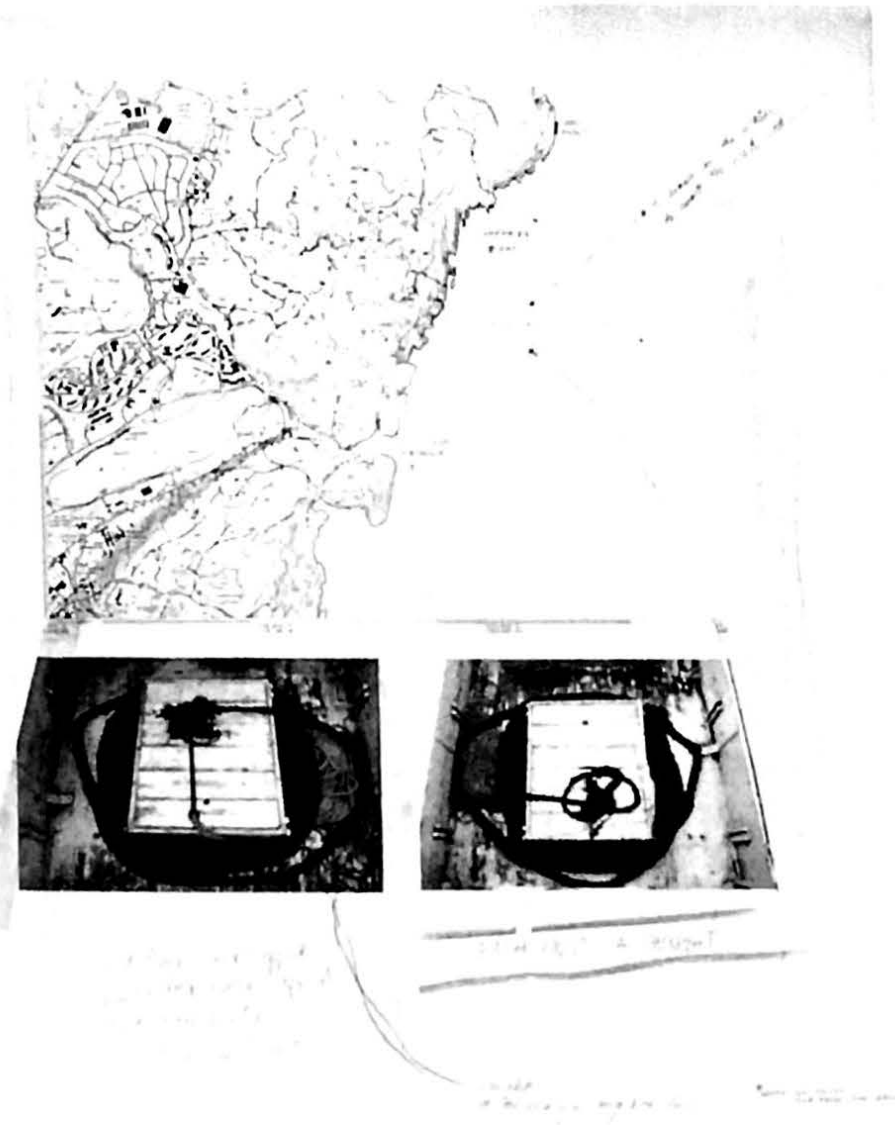
a bending - a binding
a berth on the water

a bending - a binding
a berth on the water

Pam Hall's continued exploration into Goddess mythology and imagery, combined with her interest in the Newfoundland fishing industry, has resulted in an exhibition that focuses on the core functions of the Great Goddess as life-giver, death-wielder and regenerator, as manifested in the aquatic cycle of birth, growth, sacrifice and rebirth.

the Coil that Binds, the Line that Bends documents the birth of 'the Coil' from the sea where all life begins, then charts its movement to the barrens and beaches of Newfoundland in 15 'Biographical Notes' which incorporate topographical maps of the coastline and barrens of Newfoundland with color photographs, Xeroxes, text and drawing. These mixed-media drawings are accompanied in the exhibition by the Coil itself. Made from a section of the floor and

Sea water wet
coiled on the deck



wall of a cod net, it was bound by Hall with red polyester fishing twine until it assumed a serpentine shape, 105 feet long and 9 inches in diameter at its widest point. Spiralled in the middle of the gallery floor it represents "rebirth and fertility connected with woman, water and healing." Renewed by the shedding of its dead skin, and its 'rebirth' and awakening after a season of hibernation, the snake also stands as a symbol of immortality, linking the living with the dead, functioning as an umbilical cord connecting the past with the present. "Female snake, bird, egg and fish played parts in creation myths and the female goddess was the creative principal. The Snake Goddess and the Bird Goddess create the world, charge it with energy, and nourish the earth and its creatures with the life-giving element conceived as water. The water of heaven and earth

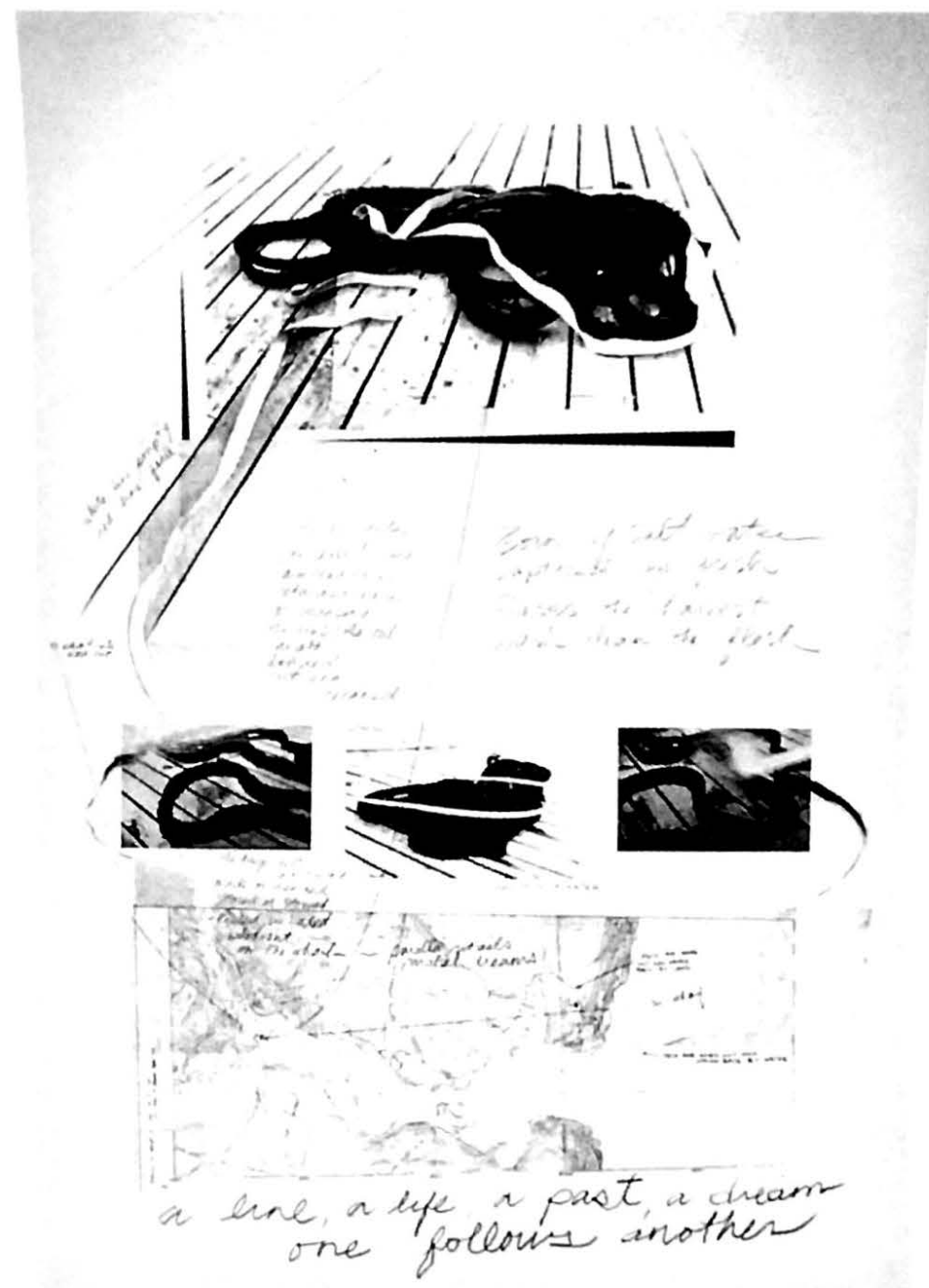
Sea water wet
coiled on the deck

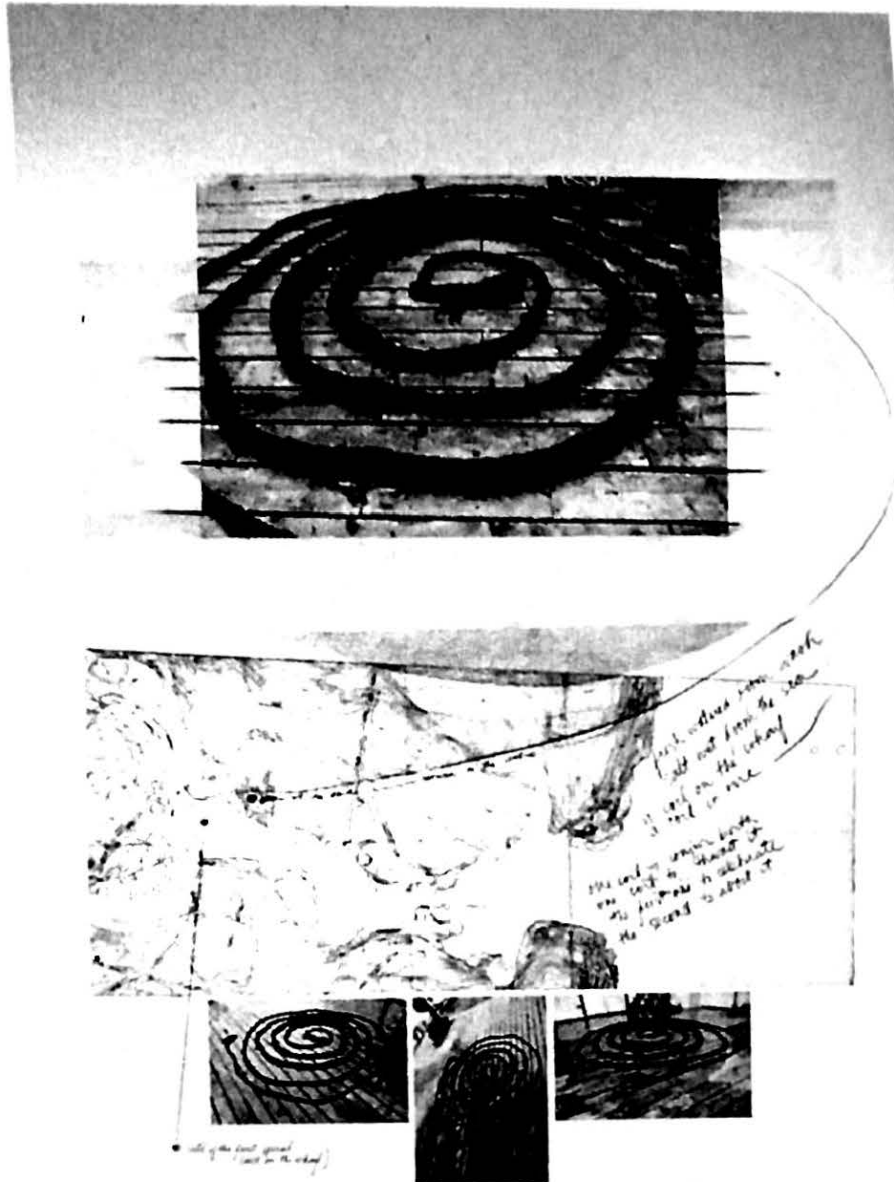
*a line, a life, a past, a dream
one follows another*

artifacts, symbols and images to represent aspects of the Great Goddess. In doing so, she has contributed to the creation of a new feminist myth, as evidenced in **Worshipping the Stone** 1988, **Lunar Legends** 1988, and most recently **the Coil that Binds, the Line that Bends**, 1989.

Gloria Feman Orenstein in "The Re-emergence of the Archetype of the Great Goddess in Art by Contemporary Women," states that "by summoning up the powers associated with the Goddess archetype, (contemporary women artists) are energizing a new form of Goddess consciousness . . . gradually repossessing the powers long associated with the various manifestations of the archetype of the Goddess."

Of the powers associated with pagan matriarchal worship, the powers of ritual and invocation are the strongest in





first sign - first site
coiled line - in-sight

first sign - first site
coiled line - in-sight

the Coil that Binds, the Line that Bends. The definition of the term ritual used here, is much different from how it is generally understood. Repetition is not necessarily an essential element. Margot Adler in **Drawing Down the Moon** believes that NeoPagan rituals (which include those of feminist goddess-worshippers) have a purpose other than attaining an altered state of consciousness.

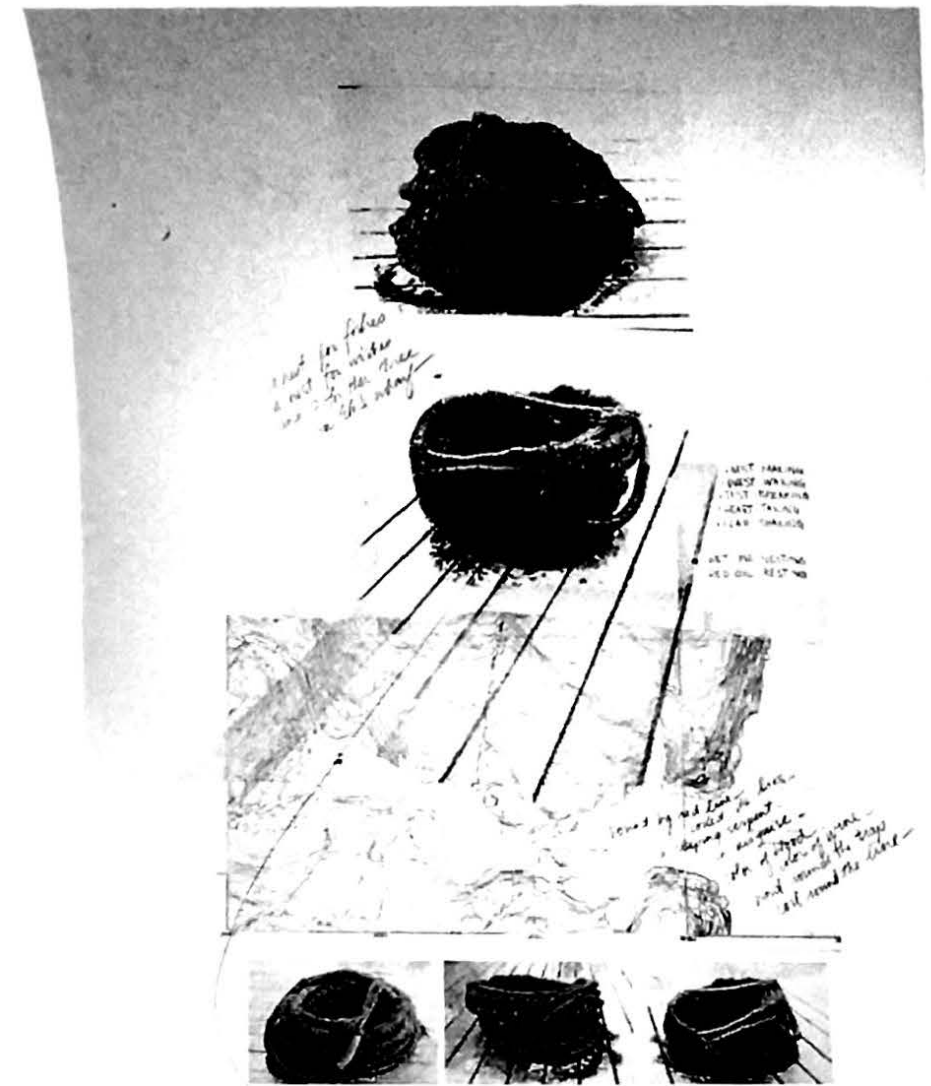
She feels that the purpose of ritual is "to end, for a time, our sense of human alienation from nature and from each other It allows us to feel biological connectiveness with ancestors who regulated their lives and activities according to seasonal observances."³

In repossessing the power of ritual, Hall creates her own ritual without identifying with any particular tradition. It

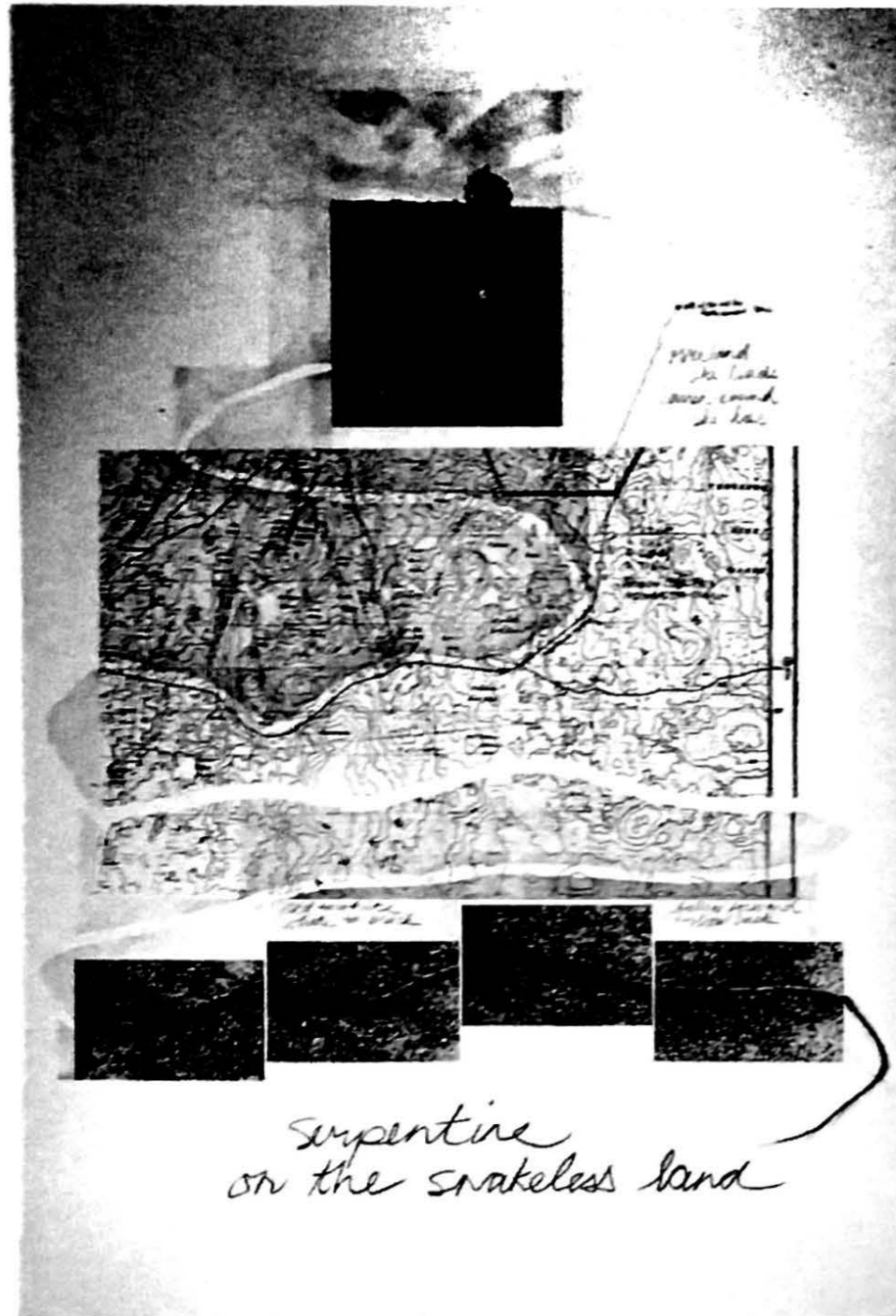
~his net, her nest, at rest~

begins with the binding of the cod net - a laborious but necessary task for her to complete alone. The repetitive act of looping the fishing twine around the netting and tying a knot each time to hold the loop secure was much more than just a mechanical process. The repeated looping and knotting saw not only the beginning of the birth of the Coil, but also the beginning of the binding of Hall to her most ancient roots, particularly to 'she,' the Goddess. (See Biographical Note #1).

The actual birth of the Coil was in the Atlantic, off the coast of Sherries Blight and Quidi Vidi Harbour in eastern Newfoundland. From a 37 foot fishing boat called the **Whispering Sea**, Hall photographically recorded, for Biographical Note #1 the Coil's birth in the water.



~his net, her nest, at rest~

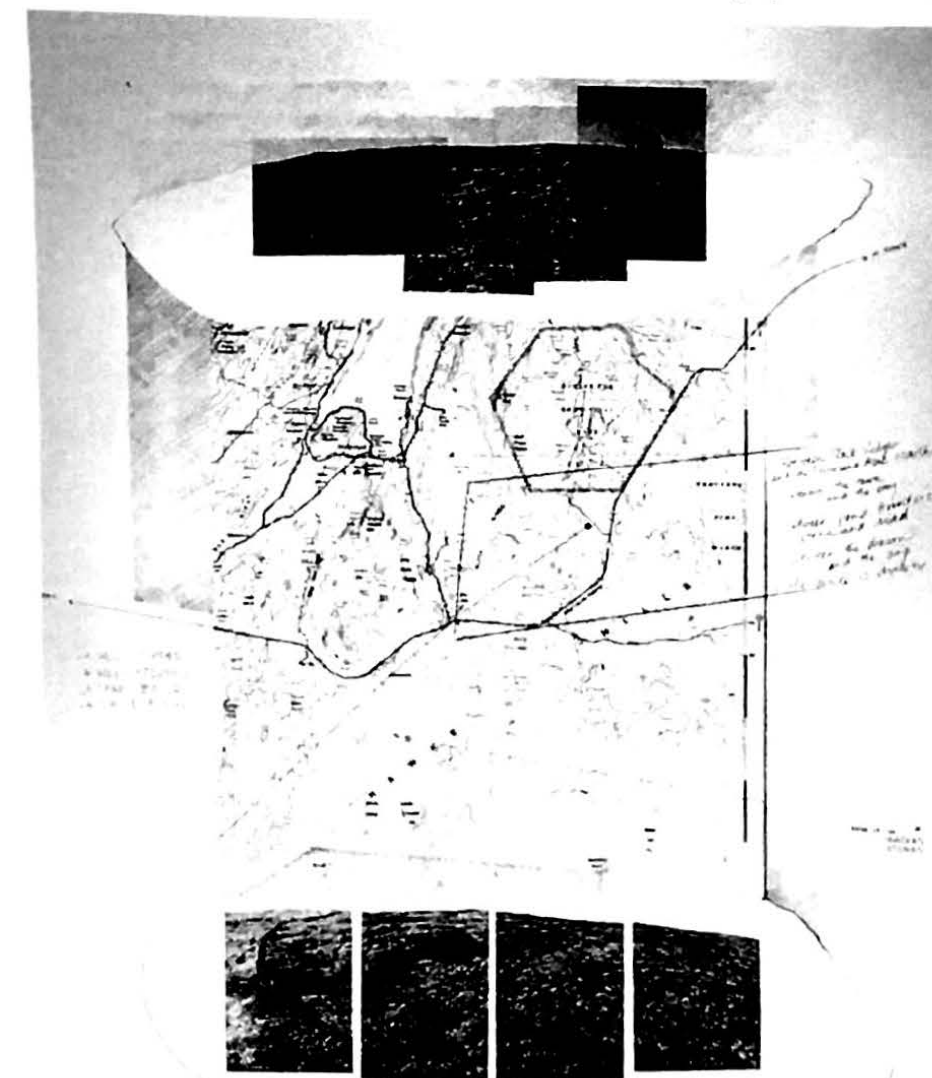


serpentine
on the snakeless land

- *Between Black Ridge
And the Thousand Acre Marsh*
- *Between the town
And the bay*
- *Between pond, Hunter's
stone and road*
- *Between the dream
and the day*
- *The circle is drawn'*

The words and sounds of the text in this biographical note, as in many of the others, are reminiscent of invocations, bringing to mind the Old Religion of the Goddess, also known as Witchcraft. Feminist spiritual leader and ecofeminist, Starhawk, author of **The Spiral Dance**, an introductory book to Neo Paganism, Goddess spirituality and Wicca (the old English word from which witchcraft is derived, meaning to bend or shape) says that "to evoke the Goddess is to awaken

lie lightly on the land

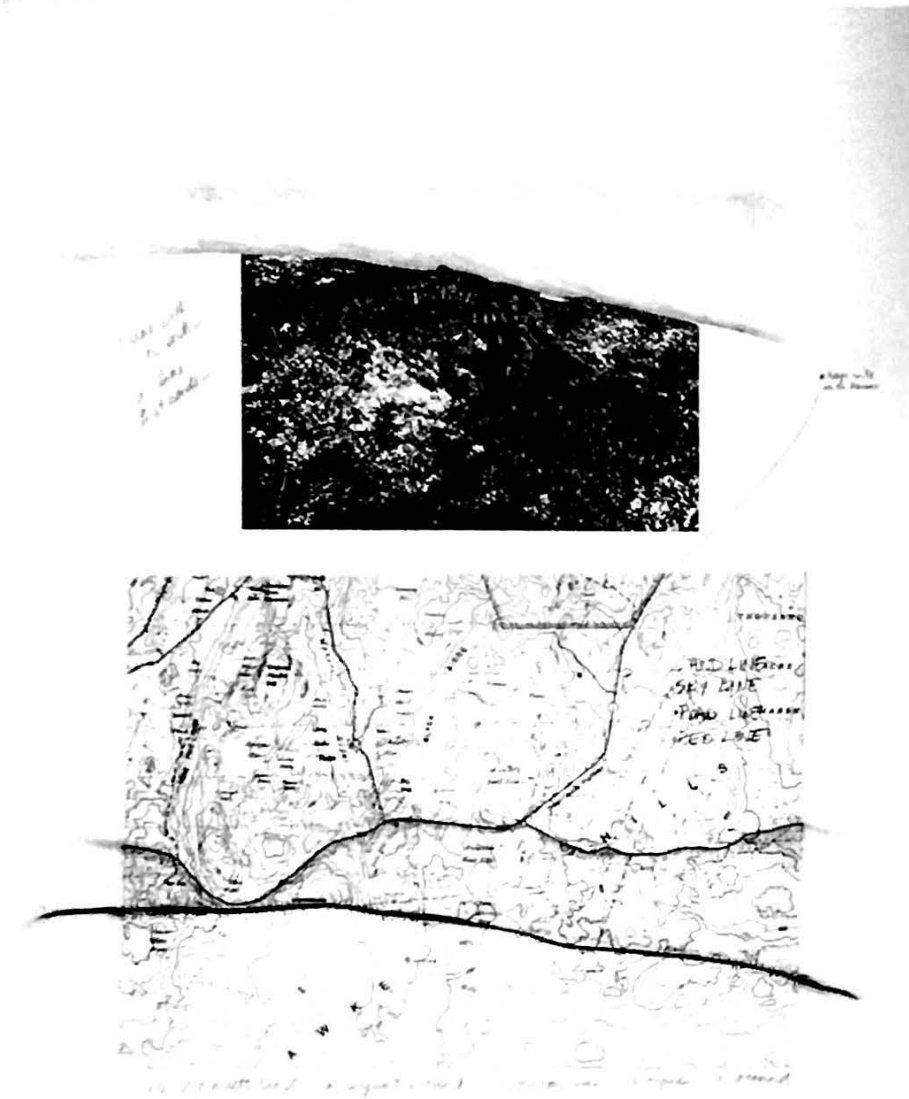


lie lightly on the land

the Goddess within, to become, for a time, the aspect we invoke.”’ By becoming the aspect we invoke, it is then possible to repossess the spell-binding powers of the Goddess.

In reclaiming the power of invocation, Hall has written in graphite, at the bottom of Note #10, “spell-binding on the barrens.” Spell-binding is not quite the same as spell-casting. The spell is bound only after the spell is cast. The purpose of binding being to ‘set’ the spell so that it does not ‘inadvertently cause harm.’

It is impossible to discuss the powers of the Goddess without discussing present-day Witchcraft. The two are so intertwined. Today, “it is experiencing a renaissance, a re-creation. Women are spurring this renewal, and actively



random - red
heaped on the barrens

random - red
heaped on the barrens

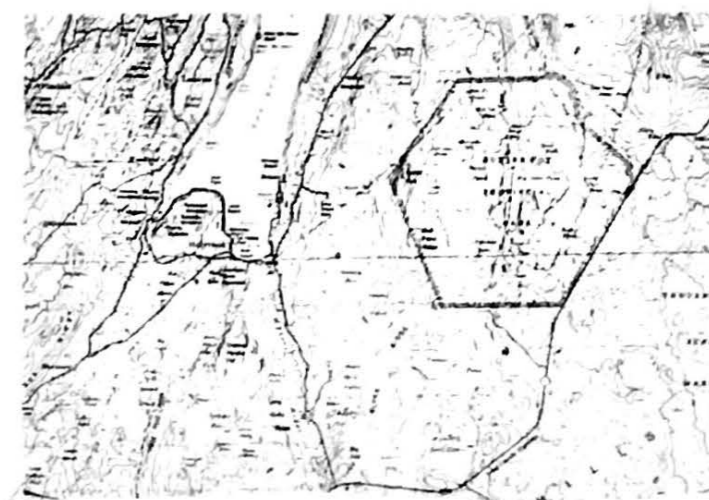
reawakening the Goddess, the image of 'the legitimacy and beneficence of female power.'⁶ Now called the New Religion, Witchcraft is very different from the great world religions such as Christianity, Judaism and Buddhism. It has neither dogma nor scriptures. Its teachings come from nature and it is more closely related to native American tradition or Arctic Shamanism. Witchcraft is a spiritual tradition based on the Goddess and, according to Witchcraft legend, began more than 35,000 years ago, then was forced underground during the Inquisition.

Hall's exploration, wittingly or unwittingly, into the New Religion has led her not only to investigate the powers of ritual and invocation, but also to include in her work symbols and images associated with the various manifestations of

spell-binding
on the barren's



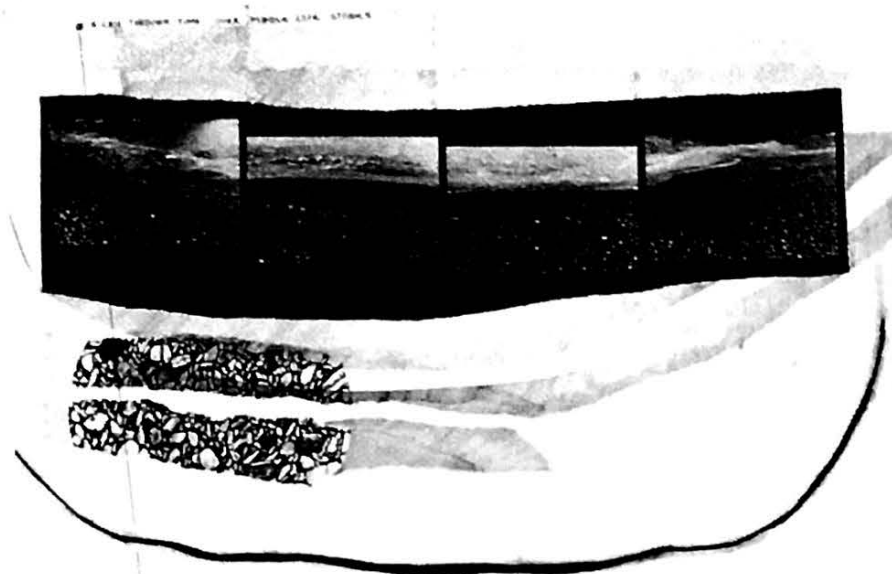
2 small - covered
2 under - covered
found - fence
on barren ground



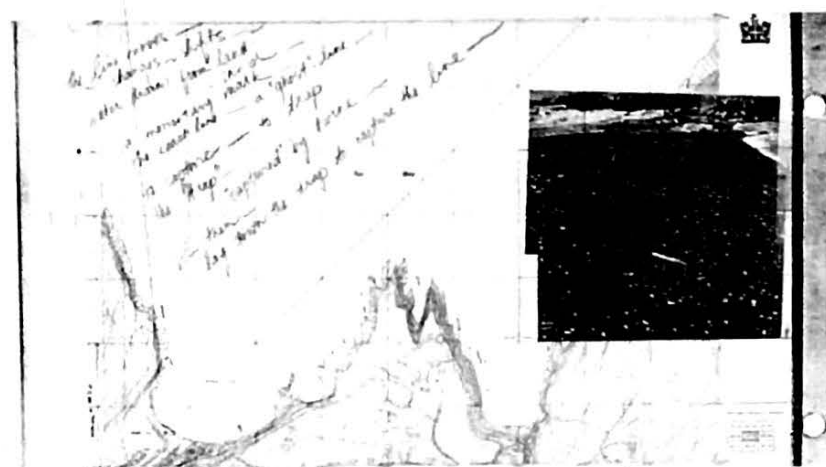
spell-binding
on the barren's

the Great Goddess. There are many in this exhibition, but only the ones repeatedly used by Hall will be discussed here. These include the color red, standing stones, nest, coil, and spiral.

Red, dominant throughout this exhibition, was chosen as the color of the fishing twine that wrapped the cod net. The Coil, documented in each biographical note, displays its omnipresent red as it is seen wrapped and knotted around the **Whispering Sea's** hold, hanging from a pulley, being sprayed with fresh water, formed into a spiral, then coiled into the shape of a nest at Eli's wharf in Quidi Vidi Harbour. (See Biographical Notes #2-#6.)



*stones to sand — water to land
there — the line that binds*



*stones to sand — water to land
there — the line that binds*

*bound by red line
coiled, she lies
a sleeping serpent
in disguise
colour of blood
colour of wine
bind 'round the trap
coil 'round the line'*

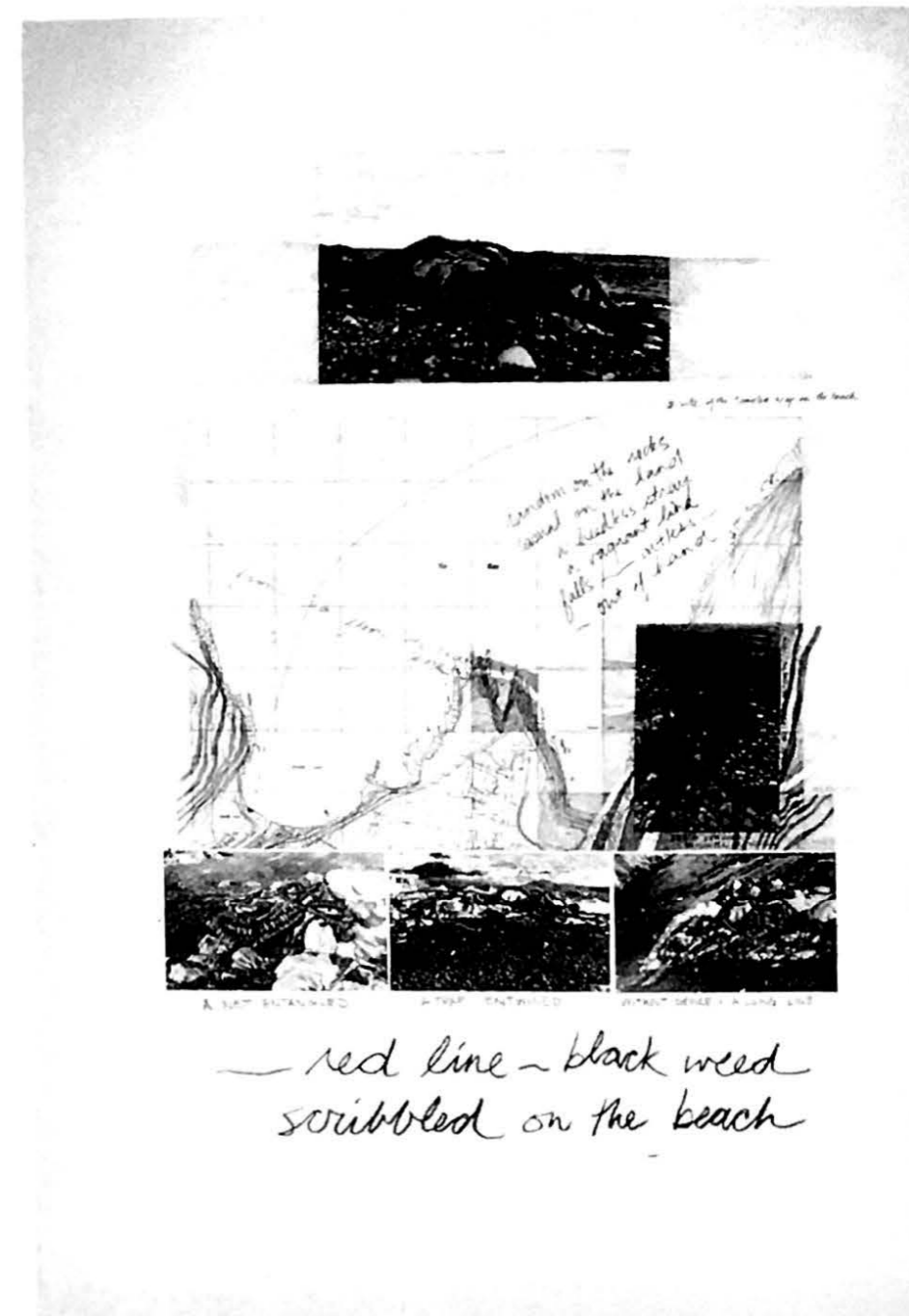
Sacred to the Old Religion and to Old European ideology, red or red ochre is the symbol of life's blood. Red ochre was found at the site of Avebury (2600 B.C.) where birth, death and regeneration are its themes. These are also the themes of this exhibition. Red means as well, as Hall informs in Note #9, "the nest or spawning trench of fishes."

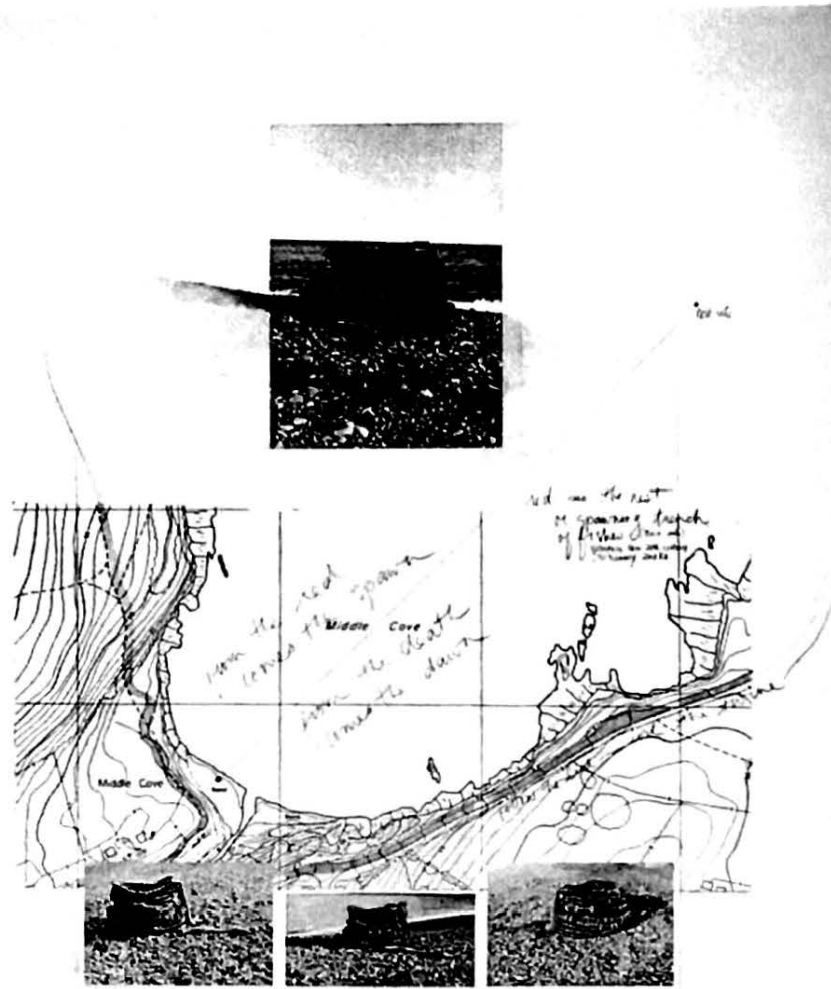
In the context of Hall's environment, a combination of red ochre and fish oil has been used to paint fishing

— red line — black weed
scribbled on the beach

buildings.⁸ The native Beothuk painted their bodies with it; hence the nickname “red indians” or “redskins.” They also used it at burial sites, where this powdery pigment was smeared over everything.

Notes # 7 - 10 document the Coil on Hawke Hills barrens between Black Ridge and the Thousand Acre Marsh, beginning with the Coil laid out in a serpentine line pointing towards the Hunters’ Stone, a large solitary boulder used to guide hunters. The Hunters’ Stone is similar in shape to the Standing Stones of the British Isles. Relics of ancient pagan cults, the menhir or standing stone is believed to be the epiphany of the Goddess. In the next three notes, the Coil is circled at the ridge of this stone, heaped into a pile, and once again coiled into a nest.





~ coiled from a fish-killer's trap
~ a spawning nest

~ coiled from a fish-killer's trap
~ a spawning nest

Hall then took the Coil to Middle Cove Beach, where it was laid upon the beach stones, piled onto the rocks, coiled one last time into a nest, joined at its ends to form a circle, and laid out for the second and final time in a spiral.

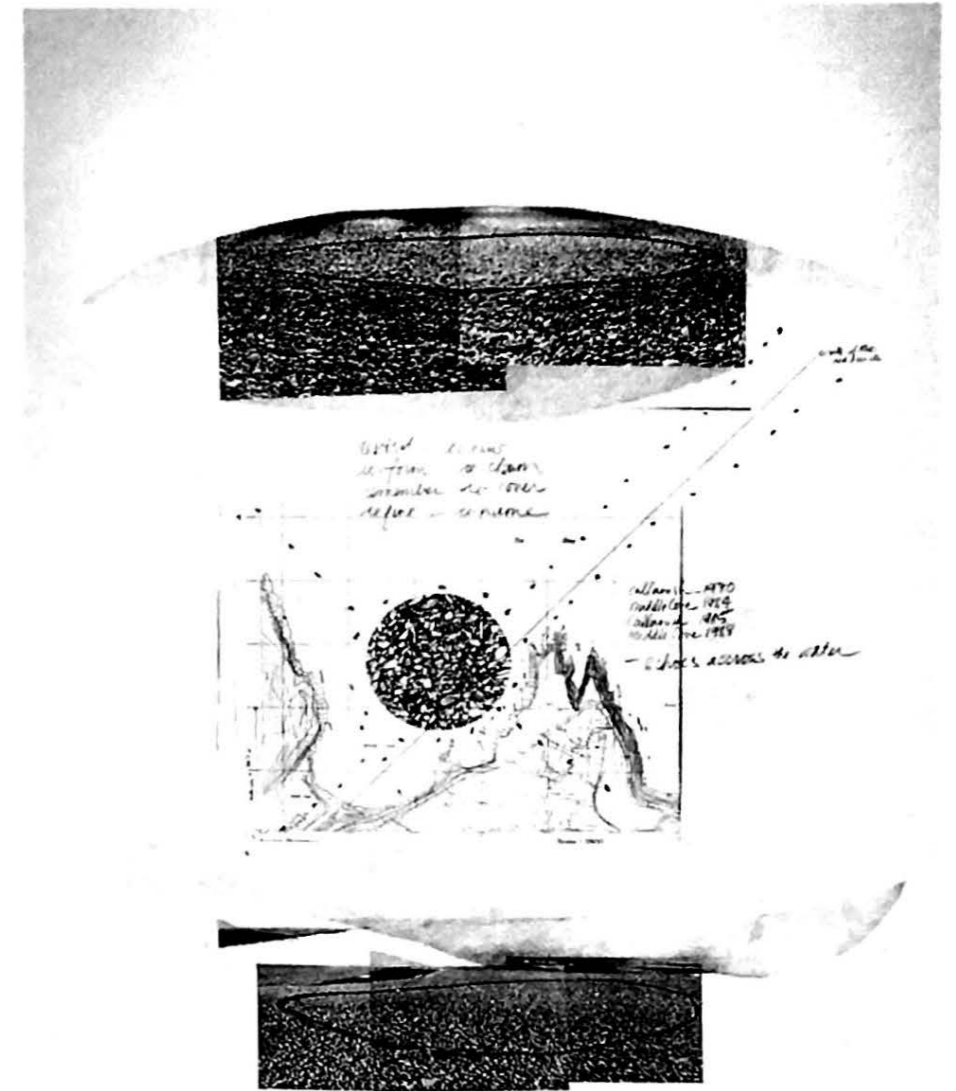
The nest, generally associated with home, pregnancy and family, also refers, in the context of this exhibition, to the Bird Goddess. Along with the Snake Goddess, she is also 'Mistress of the Water.' Both are represented as separate figures and as a single divinity, but their functions are intimately related in creation myths.

The circle speaks of infinity and eternity. With neither a beginning nor an end it symbolizes the cycle of birth, growth, death and regeneration. Prehistoric stone circles dating from about 3300 B.C. are found near river valleys and

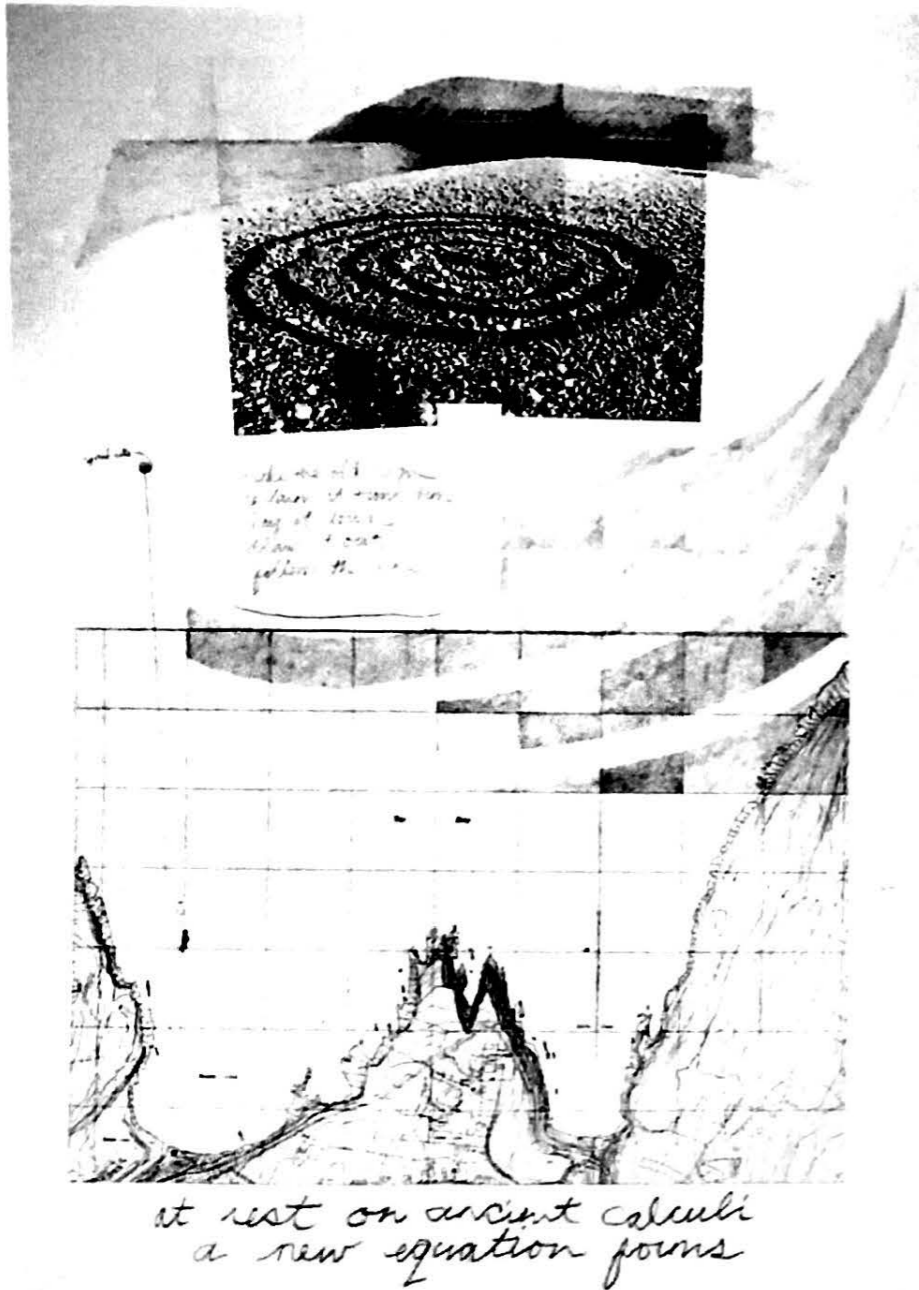
ed circle — stone circle
re-turning through time

water in low-lying areas. The circle is believed to transmit “the energy (of the Goddess) increased by the combination of stone, water, mound, and circling motion.”⁹

With a serpent force and a rhythm that infuses all life, the spiral, like the circle, is also a symbol of energy and cyclic time. By following the line that bends into a circle, spiral, or coil that binds, we return to a time when humankind worshipped the Great Goddess in all her



ed circle — stone circle
re-turning through time



at rest on ancient calculi
a new equation forms

manifestations, to

revisit - re-new

re-form - re-claim

remember - re-cover

refine - re-name¹⁰

and then return again to the present, when the Goddess is being awakened within.

Colleen O'Neill
curator

NOTES:

1. Lucy Lippard, **Overlay: Contemporary Art and the Art of Prehistory**, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983), p.66.
2. Marija Gimbutas, **The Language of the Goddess**, (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989), p. 236.
3. Margot Adler, **Drawing Down the Moon**, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986), p. 162.
4. Pam Hall, from Biographical Note # 8.
5. Starhawk, **The Spiral Dance**, (San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1979), p. 99.
6. Ibid., p. 23.
7. Pam Hall, from Biographical Note # 6.
8. Marlene Creates, **Don Wright: The Artist as Part of a Whole**. (St. John's: Memorial University of Newfoundland Art Gallery, 1990), footnote #13.
9. Gimbutas, p. 311.
10. Pam Hall, from Biographical Note # 14.

BIOGRAPHY

BORN

1951 Kingston, Ontario

EDUCATION

1978 M.Ed., University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta

1973 BFA (Honors), Sir George Williams University, Montréal, Québec

EXHIBITIONS

SOLO

1988 **Lunar Legends**, Contemporary Graphics, St. John's, Newfoundland
Worshipping the Stone, Mount Saint Vincent University Art Gallery, Halifax, Nova Scotia
In the Temple, Eastern Edge, St. John's

1987 **Worshipping the Stone**, Memorial University Art Gallery, St. John's

1986 **Newfoundland Scotch on the Rocks**, Contemporary Graphics, St. John's

1984 **Saltwater Rock**, Memorial University Art Gallery, St. John's

1982 **On the Edge of the Eastern Ocean**, Memorial University Art Gallery, St. John's (toured provincially)

SELECTED GROUP

- 1989 **Maskunow: A Trail A Path**, curated by Joan Borsa, Memorial University Art Gallery, St. John's
- 1988 **Sound Symposium, Path to the Wishing Place**, St. Michael's
City and Sea, Bank of Montreal Building, Duckworth Street, St. John's
- 1987 **Innovation; Subject and Technique**, Scarborough Campus Art Gallery, University of Toronto, Scarborough
The Leading Edge, Eastern Edge Gallery, St. John's
Slings and Eros, Eastern Edge Gallery, St. John's
Don Wright, Pam Hall/Drawings, Contemporary Graphics, St. John's
- 1986 **25 Years of Newfoundland Art; Some Significant Artists**, Memorial University Art Gallery, St. John's; Beaverbrook Art Gallery, Fredericton; Cambridge Art Gallery, Cambridge
New Found Artists Land, Memorial University Art Gallery, St. John's; ARTSPACE, Peterborough; SAW Gallery, Ottawa; K.A.A.I., Kingston
- 1985 **Newfoundland Photography Survey**, Memorial University Art Gallery, St. John's, (toured provincially)
Making Marks; Contemporary Drawings in Newfoundland, Memorial University Art Gallery, St. John's (toured provincially)
The Peace Show, Polyanna Gallery, St. John's

PUBLICATIONS

- 1982 **On the Edge of the Eastern Ocean**, GLC Publishers, Toronto
- 1980 **Comin' to our Senses**, The Report of the Task Force on the Arts in Education
- 1977 **Down by Jim Long's Stage**, by Al Pittman, illustrated by Pam Hall, Breakwater Books, St. John's

RELATED EXPERIENCE

- 1989 “The Contexts of Artistic Creation: Some Speculations on the Role of the Artist in Society,” paper presented at Creating in Context: A colloquium on Issues Affecting Art and Artists, Victoria, BC
Art director, **The Lost Salt Gift of Blood**, Front Porch Pictures, Toronto
- 1988 Set designer -**There’s Nothing to do There**, Red Ochre Productions - 1/2-hour drama for CBC Family Pictures Series
Art director - Pigeon Inlet. Two 1/2- hour episodes - **On the Halves and Deadman’s Lights**, Centurion Productions Ltd.
Member, Canadian Advisory Committee on the Status of the Artist, Ottawa
- 1987 Art director, **Finding Mary March**, feature film, Red Ochre Productions, Telefilm Canada
Member, Canadian Advisory Committee on the Status of the Artist, Ottawa
National spokesperson, Association of National Non-Profit Artists’ Centres (ANNPAC/RACA)
- 1986 National spokesperson, ANNPAC
- 1985 Secretary, ANNPAC
Chair, Citizens Coalition Against Cultural Cutbacks, St. John’s, Newfoundland
- 1984 Board member, Resource Centre for the Arts
Founding member, Eastern Edge Gallery, St. John’s, Newfoundland

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To Eli, the gift-giver. To Caleb and Jamie, brothers in the bearing, companions in the hunt. To Nigel, witness and second pair of eyes.

Pam Hall

On behalf of the Sir Wilfred Grenfell College Art Gallery, I would like to express appreciation to Pam Hall for her enthusiastic co-operation in the planning of the exhibition. We are most grateful to the community members who volunteered their time as gallery attendants.

Colleen O'Neill

CREDITS

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Design by Gary Richardson

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STAFF

Colleen O'Neill, director/curator

Nora Kennedy, secretary

the Coil that Binds, the Line that Bends was first shown in its entirety in January/February, 1990 at Memorial University's Sir Wilfred Grenfell College Art Gallery. In 1989 a portion of this work was included in **Maskunow** — a Cree word meaning a trail or path — curated by Joan Borsa for the Memorial University Art Gallery in St. John's, Newfoundland.

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