

WORSHIPPING THE STONE
PAM HALL

Prayer is the study of art.
Praise is the practice of art.

— William Blake, *The Laocoon*



Callanish Stones — Main Circle

I was stone, mysterious stone;
my breach was a violent one, my birth
like a wounding estrangement,
but now I should like to return
to that certainty,
to the peace of the center, the matrix
of mothering stone.

— Pablo Neruda, *Skystones XXIII*

cover: The Wounded Cross

INTRODUCTION

Pam Hall's intention, in her *Worshipping the Stone* series, is to make monuments — in a time and society in which we seem to believe we need none. In making these works she draws not only on her own skills and imagination but on a personal enduring response to the earliest monuments we know, the great prehistoric stone sites such as Carnac in Brittany, Avebury, Dartmoor, and, in particular Callanish in Scotland.

Hall shares with many artists this reference to prehistory, this working from forms of the past to give meaning to the present. American art historian Lucy Lippard has described ancient sites, symbols and artifacts as a major source of ideas for American artists of the past two decades. She sees this in part as breaking away from a reductive art focused on purely formal elements and, in larger part, as an effort to restore to art a function beyond decoration, to give it an integral role in daily life as a link between humans and their environment, a concrete expression of some general human experience.¹

Such contemporary art is extremely diverse, ranging from ritualistic performance pieces and body works such as those of Ana Mendieta, through sculpture, to giant-scale earthworks by artists like Dennis Oppenheim and Robert Smithson. Canadian artists too have worked from these prehistoric and nature-based reference points, among them Bill Vazan, Michael Olito, Richard Prince, Jeanne Fabb and Marlene Creates. That range is suggested by contrasting a monumental, macho earthwork like Robert Smithson's 1970 *Spiral Jetty* with Creates' delicate, transient works made by draping paper across Irish prehistoric cairns and Inuit inukshuks. It is worth noting that much of this work is being done by female artists.

From prehistoric times, earth and stones have symbolized immortality, survival, energy, magic powers, fertility and healing. Menhirs, dolmens, cairns and rings — stone monuments have been raised by our ancestors to embody or celebrate these qualities. Even today the stones retain something of their power as the popularity of Stonehenge and increasing interest in other sites attest. Only think how much stronger their impact must have been 4,000 years ago before layers of time and knowledge dulled our receptiveness. . .

For many years the power of stone and beliefs surrounding it, such as Old European myths of the Great Goddess or Great Mother, have preoccupied Pam Hall. In her 1984 exhibition *Saltwater Rock*, she was concerned mainly with the external properties of rock — colours, shapes, patterns — and with formal manipulations. Now, while addressing a different range of formal concerns — new media, new processes, a change in scale — she is more involved with content, with making for viewers a visual experience in some way equivalent to her own feeling for stone in all its endurance, physical beauty and mysterious psychological force.

Larger scale is integral to Hall's intentions — not because we equate monuments with great size or in an attempt to recreate actual sites but because large works involve viewers more directly. Robert Morris has written that, "The quality of publicness is attached (to an object) in proportion as the size increases in relation to oneself."² A certain tension develops in Hall's work as the scale moves us back and the complexity and richness of surface draws us forward. The "quality of publicness" is matched by a quality of intimacy in the personal, meditative response evoked by these solemn, silent pieces.

The works are extremely physical — large, scarred, multilayered, with surfaces subtly coloured, gleaming here and there with metallic gold and copper. Hall literally works with stone, pounding at the paper with rocks, then folding it, grinding in or scrubbing on pigments, tearing, layering, reassembling. Some fragments begin as embossed relief prints while the "bones" are constructed. The move off the wall into three dimensions is the most recent development.

Layering in these works is metaphorical as well as literal, alluding to historical or human time overlaid on geological time, modern attitudes on ancient beliefs, human intervention on the natural environment, individual response on monuments that were a collective form of expression.

Lippard has written of prehistoric stones and contemporary artists: "They offer a framework within which to explore the crucial connections between individual desires (to make something, to hold something) and the social values that determine what we make and why."³ That serves well as a signpost to Pam Hall's work.

Patricia Grattan
Curator

Footnotes

1. Lucy R. Lippard, *Overlay — Contemporary Art and the Art of Prehistory* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983), pp 4 — 5.
2. Robert Morris, "Notes on Sculpture Part 2", *Artforum*, October 1966, p. 21.
3. Lippard, *Overlay*, p. 4.



Old Mrs. McClead ~
hanging her clothes
each day
in her garden.

Stones marking each point
on the magic triangle
of her world.

She will not walk among them.

Each day, at six
She puts a hat on in the house,
prepares the evening meal,
and passes the time ~
watching BBC and
speaking Gaelic
with her grown children
who live with her there ~
centred in the triangle,
laughing at their Mother's
tales about the Stones,
but holding in their bellies,
Her fear, her respect ~
Her awe ~
Children of this, and of another time ~

Cnoc Teann
"Choiraidh"
(Loch Fionn)

Old Mrs. McClead's
Bed and Breakfast

Cnoc Fillehin Beag

Callanish ~
Main Site

There is no window in the house that does not
look upon these Stones ~

Old Mrs. McClead's Bed and Breakfast

Pam Hall 1986

ARTIST'S STATEMENT

Worshipping the Stone represents my most recent explorations in an ongoing search for what might be called an imagery of power. . .of magic. . .of transformation.

The sources to which I respond as an artist are many and varied, and these works emerge clearly from my experience of the rock forms of the Newfoundland environment, from my fascination with the standing stones and stone circles of Megalithic Britain, and from my preoccupation with the qualities of stone which have provoked many cultures throughout history to view it as both object and vehicle for worship.

In both form and content, however, this work does not seek to replicate or reproduce some form or element which I have observed. Rather, it seeks to create new objects which hold some echo. . .some resonance. . .some mysterious reverberation. . .of the power implicit in stone.

These works, made and marked by the beating of stone on paper, serve as offerings to a Nature which remains, for me, animated and alive. . .a Nature that belongs more to the alchemist's reality than to the Cartesian's. They have emerged out of a continuous search for a visual language capable of embracing both beauty and meaning. . .a language through which I can investigate my own place in a world needing re-enchantment.

Pam Hall
January 1987

The artist gratefully acknowledges the assistance and support of the Canada Council and the Newfoundland and Labrador Arts Council.

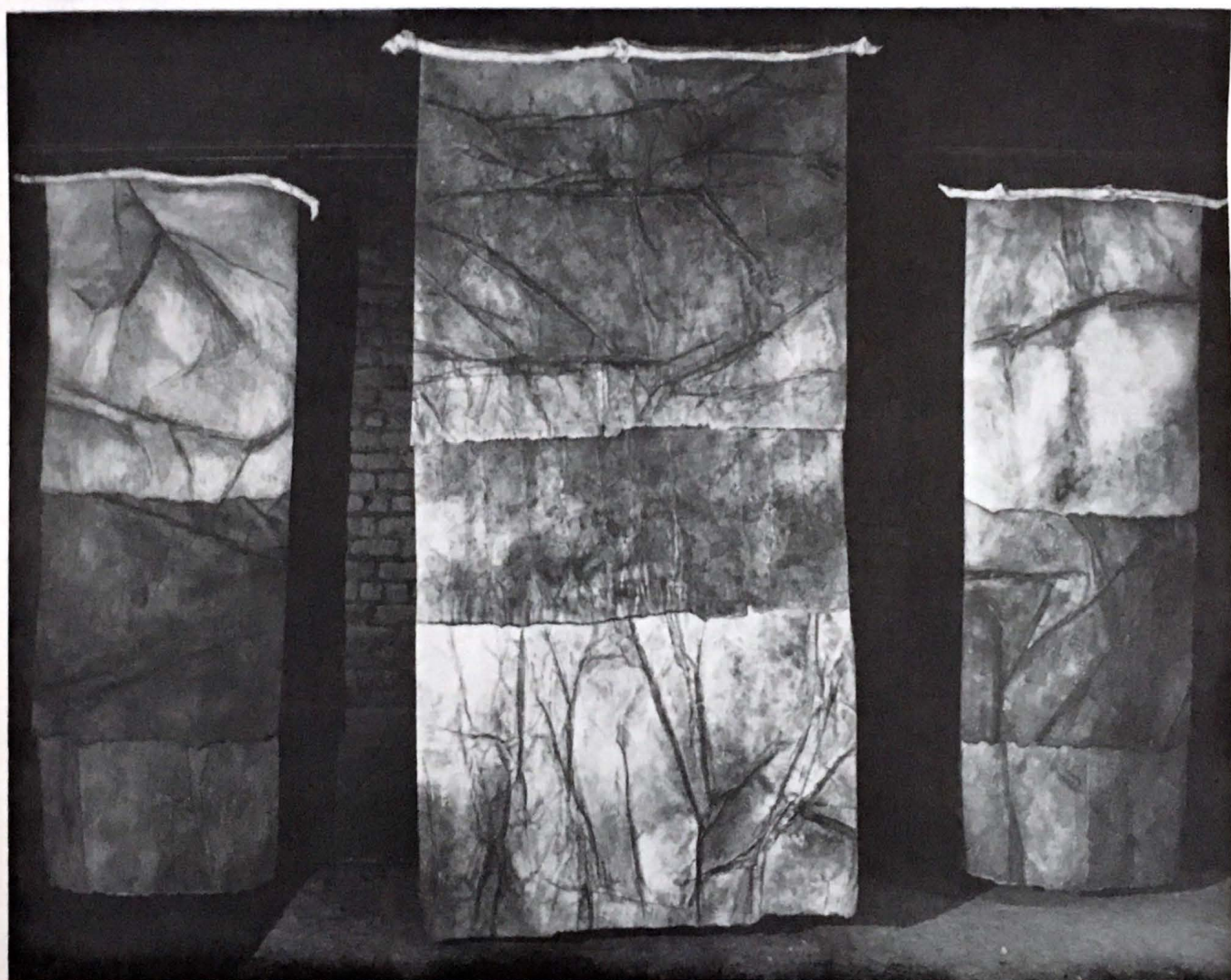


Stone Puzzle — Studio Installation

EXHIBITION LIST

(Height precedes width)

1. **The Golden Cross** 1986 Mixed media on beaten paper, canvas, wood, plaster, acrylic and leather 66" x 43"
2. **Altered Bluestones** 1986 Mixed media on beaten paper, canvas, wood, plaster, acrylic, leather and fiberglass Two panels, one freestanding unit, 10' x 17'6" x 4' overall (approx.)
3. **Reconstructing Callanish** 1986 Mixed media on paper, canvas, plaster and wood 82" x 46" x 2.6"
4. **Skin of the Mother, Skin of the Earth** 1986 Mixed media on paper, canvas, plaster and wood Three panels, 10' x 12'8" x 3" overall (approx.).
5. **Return to the Mothering Stone** 1986 Mixed media on paper and canvas 83" x 42"
6. **Wounded Cross** 1986 Mixed media on Canson mounted paper Three panels, 8'6" x 17'6" x 4" overall (approx.)
7. **Stone Puzzle** 1986 Ten panels mixed media on paper, one freestanding unit mixed media on fibreglass Wall installation 14' 6" x 13' 8" — plus freestanding unit approx. 8' x 42" x 18"
8. **Callanish Diaries** Vol. I, Nos. 1 to 7 1986 Mixed media on paper Each panel 40" x 30"



Skin of the Mother, Skin of the Earth

PAM HALL

1951 Born in Kingston, Ontario

Education:

- 1978 M.Ed., University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alta.
1973 B.F.A., Sir George Williams University, Montreal

Experience:

- 1984 Visual artist, writer
(to present)
1981-84 Director of Communications, Government of Newfoundland & Labrador
1981 Communications Policy Analyst, Government of Newfoundland & Labrador
1980 Author, freelance editor and researcher
1974-80 Art consultant, Dept. of Education, Government of Newfoundland & Labrador
1977-78 Teaching assistant, University of Alberta, Edmonton
1975 Sessional lecturer, Memorial University of Newfoundland
1973-74 Art teacher, I.J. Samson Junior High School, St. John's, Nfld.

Principal Solo Exhibitions:

- 1986 *Newfoundland Scotch on the Rocks*, Contemporary Graphics Gallery, St. John's
1984 *Saltwater Rock*, Memorial University Art Gallery, St. John's (toured province)
1982 *On the Edge of the Eastern Ocean*, Memorial University Art Gallery, (toured province)

Principal Group Exhibitions:

- 1986 — *25 Years of Art in Newfoundland*, Memorial University Art Gallery (touring nationally)
— *New Found Artists Land at . . .*, Memorial University Art Gallery (toured Ontario)
— *Works from the Eastern Edge*, Galerie Sans Nom, Moncton, N.B.
1985 — *Newfoundland Photography Survey*, Memorial University Art Gallery (toured province)
— *Making Marks: Recent Newfoundland Drawings*, Memorial University Art Gallery (toured province)
— *The Peace Show*, Pollyanna Gallery, St. John's
— *Women's Show*, Contemporary Graphics Gallery
1984 — *Works on Paper*, Madison Gallery, Toronto
— *Women's Work*, Resource Centre for the Arts, St. John's

Publications:

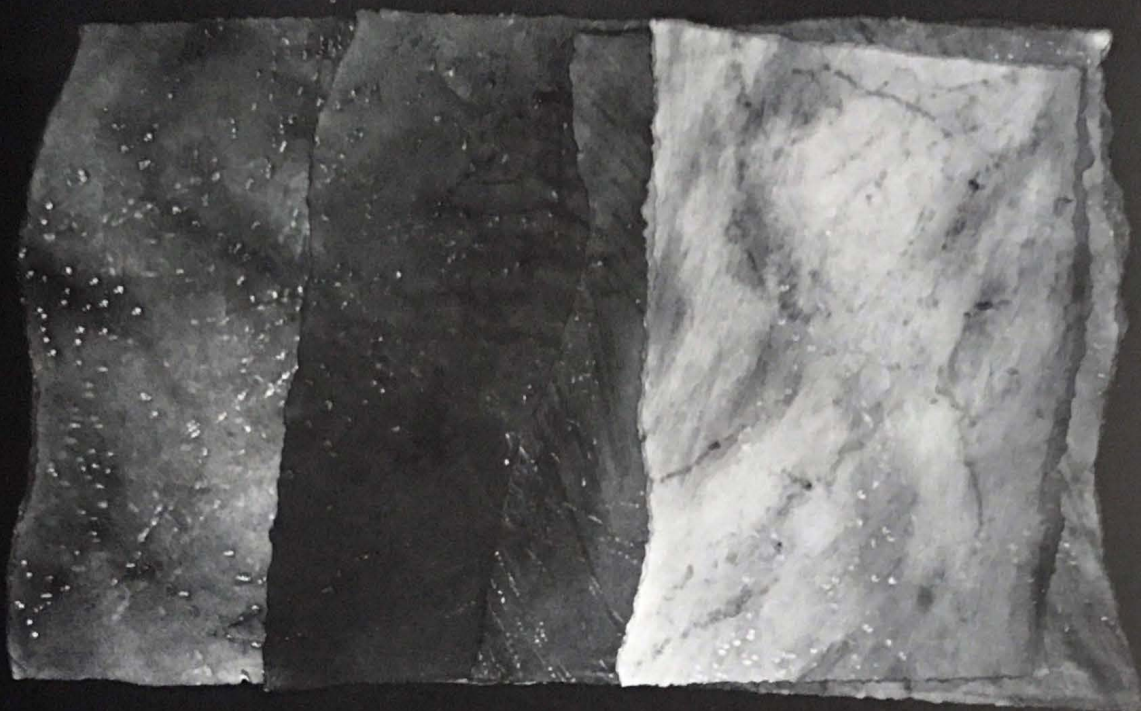
- 1982 *On the Edge of the Eastern Ocean*, GLC Publishers, Toronto
1980 *Comin' To Our Senses*, the Report on the Task Force on the Arts in Education in Newfoundland
1977 *Down by Jim Long's Stage*, written by Al Pittman, illustrated by Pam Hall, Breakwater Books, St. John's

Awards:

- 1986 Canada Council "B" grant
Newfoundland & Labrador Arts Council grant
1985 Canada Council short-term grant
1978 Amelia Francis Howard Gibbon Award for best Canadian illustration (*Down by Jim Long's Stage*)

Collections:

The Bank of Montreal
Canada Council Art Bank
Dept. of External Affairs, Government of Canada
Government of Newfoundland & Labrador
Memorial University of Newfoundland Permanent Collection
Private collections



You mystery, you
Forsaking words to meet
the wonder with
endless speculation...

Judge's court
or David's Temple
Celestial Prophet
in Deadman's Tomb

You lie across the hills
a bleached spine from
some prehistoric creature
Challenging the sky and I
to find your measure
make your meaning
seek your source
at the root of our own.
Three thousand years of peat
could not disguise your power
And now exposed,
hill bound by Northern waters,
Your magic quickens,
quivers, holds.

†c. 1680 Mearns:

• men converted into Stone
by an Enchanter, they
were set up in place for
devotion.

†c. 1720 Stukeley:

• David temple of a type
known as a "Dracottion"
or serpent temple

†1726 Toland:

• twelve stones for the Zodiac
four side altars = four winds
nineteen stones on both sides
of the avenue = 19-year cycle
• sun temple dedicated to
Sun, elements, seasons

†1808 Headrick:

• astronomical observatory
for marking rising sun, moon
and stars, seasons and hours

†1773 Lettbridge:

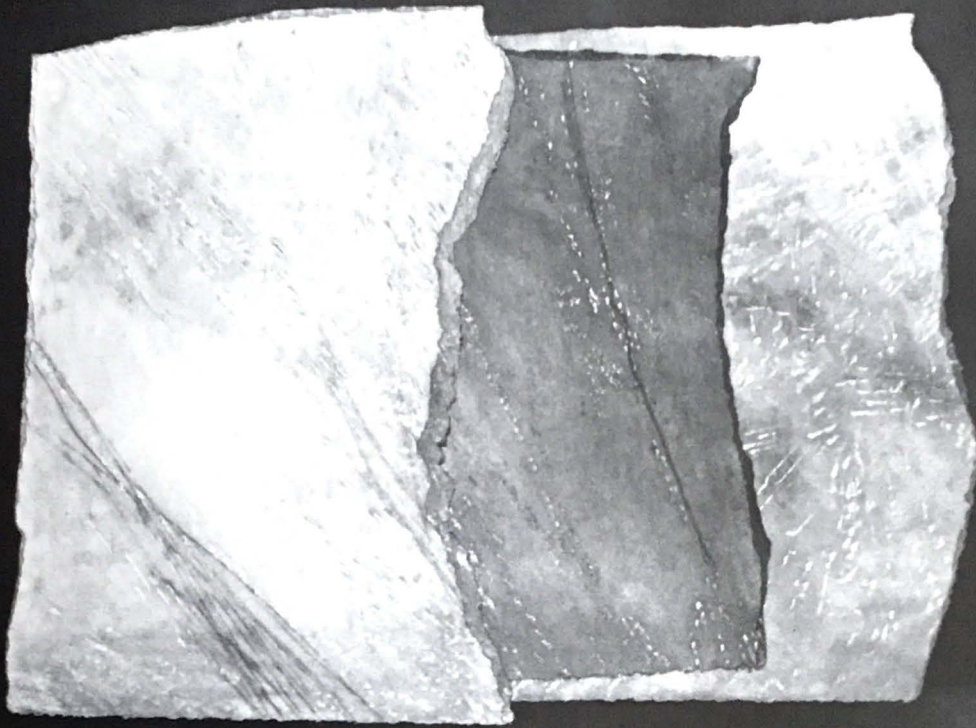
• landing marks for flying
saucers returning to pick
up Martian survey parties

†1981 Wood:

• the brow in the "Chakra system"
being ancient sites in an earth
energy network

On the Power of Theories and Theories of Power

Pam Hall 1986



Stone
Bone

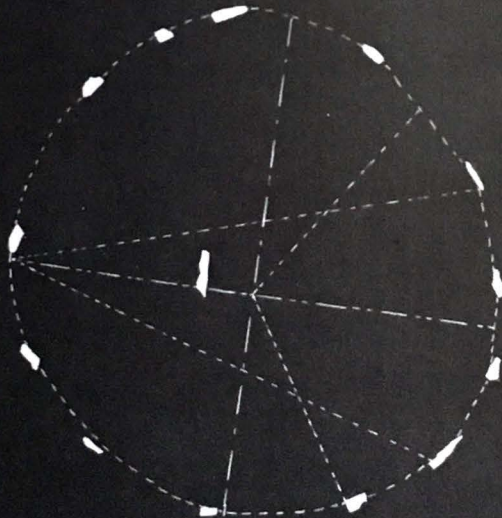


Flesh
Ash

Bury the Dead
Praise the Living
Suckle the Father
Sooth the Fanned
Bewitch the Blind
Devour the Wicked

Follow the Stones
Lines and Rows
Awaken the Magic
Speak the Spell
Conjure the Trance
Begin the Dance

Hold, hold, hold
to that sweet path
inward
for in your belly
lies the beginning.



So speaks
Diodorus -

"there is also on the island
a notable temple
which is spherical in shape
the moon, as viewed from the island
appears to be but a little distance
from the earth. The god visits
the island every nineteen years -
the god - dances continuously the
night through from the vernal
equinox until the rising of the Pleiades."

So speaks the High Priestess of Kahi -
Three Stones for the Goddess, One for
the Virgin, One for the Mother, One for the Hag -
Find the Moon, Find the Sun, Find the
Black Night in the morning, Mark the
Past, Hold the Present, Map the Future -
Plant the Stone close the Circle
Hold the earth, marry the heavens -
Bless the harvest - Worship the Stone.

Something grasped me by the shoulders - and held me fast against the Stone.

Three Stones for the Morrigan

Pam Hall 1986



The Golden Cross



Reconstructing Callanish