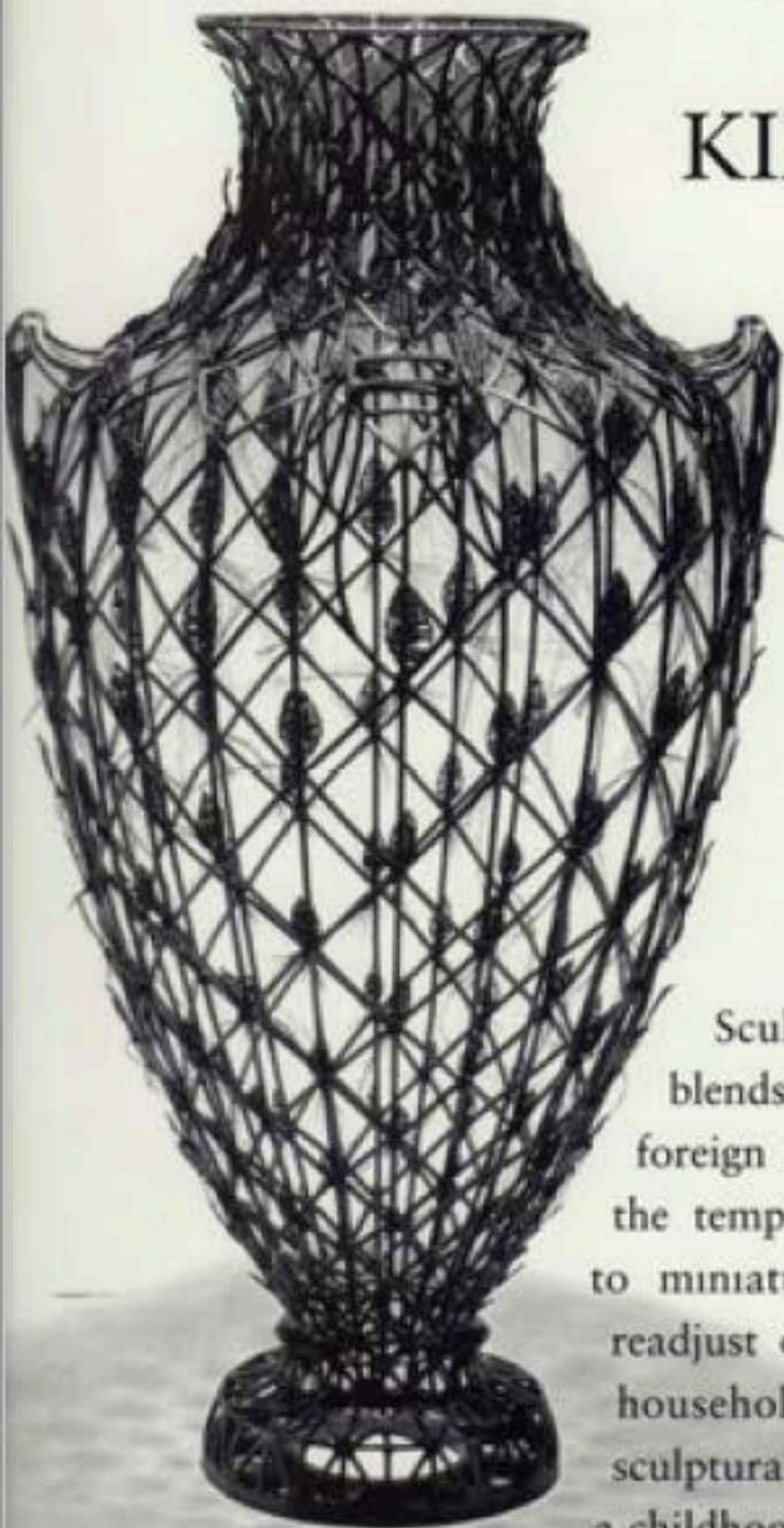


KIM CRIDLER

Impossibility and Persistence



JOHN MICHAEL KOHLER ARTS CENTER



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All things that we love and cherish,
Like ourselves, must fade and perish,
Such is our rude mortal lot—
Love itself would, did they not.

Percy Bysshe Shelley, 1820

Sculptor Kim Cridler blends the familiar with the foreign and the lasting with the temporal. From oversized to miniature, Cridler's works readjust our associations with household objects. Her sculptural forms emanate from a childhood spent caring for the ceramic and silver heirlooms on her family's Michigan farm. Washing, polishing, and dusting these objects fostered an intimate relationship between object and caregiver. This intimacy extends to Cridler's attitude about her sculptures, which take their shapes from vases, teapots, chandeliers, and other objects in the domestic realm.

Breaking away from materials typical of historical vessels, Cridler creates spare gridded structures made of steel. The stark yet graceful skeletal forms are then embellished with various temporal or decorative substances, adding an unexpected delicacy to the work. Owing both to the process by which they are made and their resultant forms, the objects become stand-ins for human relationships, and thus are subject to damage or eventual destruction. The forms also serve as models of connection. What one generation makes or cherishes is cared for by successive generations. The vessel outlives the maker and serves as a carrier of remembrance as much or more than as a functional object. Cridler recalls, "I learned about

my family through these [heirlooms], they had a value that surpassed the utilitarian. The reason they were important was the family connections, the memories, and the kind of sentiment that was invested in the objects, not how they were used. I got away from making useful objects, and started making objects that were stripped down, torn apart, because I wanted to get the emotional charge these things carry."¹

Female artists have been slowly unraveling patriarchal models for art making for over twenty years. In her own way, Cridler furthers the disintegration of rigid guidelines for artistic practice. Rather than viewing art making as an asocial experience and the product as the sole site of meaning, she acknowledges process and reveals modes of relatedness and connectedness. Writer and critic Suzi Gablik notes that the modernist myth of the patriarchal hero stripped away the feminine value of relatedness. Differentiating between a "dominator" model of masculine consciousness and a "partnership" model, she writes: "Within the 'dominator' system, the self is central, power is associated with authority, mastery, invulnerability and a strong affirmation of ego-boundaries. Autonomy disregards relationships, however; it connotes a radical independence from others." By contrast, Gablik continues, "in the 'partnership' model, relationships are central, and nothing stands alone, under its own power, or exists in isolation, independent of the larger framework."²

Women's work and domestic craft have been devalued in the past. The objects that are laden with love and family sentiment have rarely been recognized as valuable artistic works. Cridler regards craft's place in contemporary culture with some suspicion. "I don't know if craft can exist as beautiful handmade objects to use, unless the user is not conscious of its status—the handmade coming from necessity. I think craft has to assume a more conceptual and subversive agenda. Otherwise it is consumed as an artifact: a trophy and parody of the idea that ordinary people's lives could be enriched by handmade objects of utility."³ Cridler liberates her vessels from a traditional role to speak about a larger framework. She draws on the idea that historical vessels did more than serve utilitarian purposes; they existed to ease and comfort, to mark status, and to contain memory. And in many cases, the physical qualities of the objects were secondary to these associations.

In choosing to work with objects descended from the domestic realm, Cridler integrates the aesthetic traditions of fine art and craft that preceded her. Originally trained as a silversmith, Cridler creates steel structures in which a kind of sensitive fastidiousness is apparent. Her finely worked sculptures evoke other vessels made with care and attention. They speak about historical objects of daily use in which the act of making has been taken for granted. Cridler places a high value on the act of making. A former artist-in-residence in the Arts Center's Arts/Industry program at Kohler Co., she recognizes the impact this experience had on her:

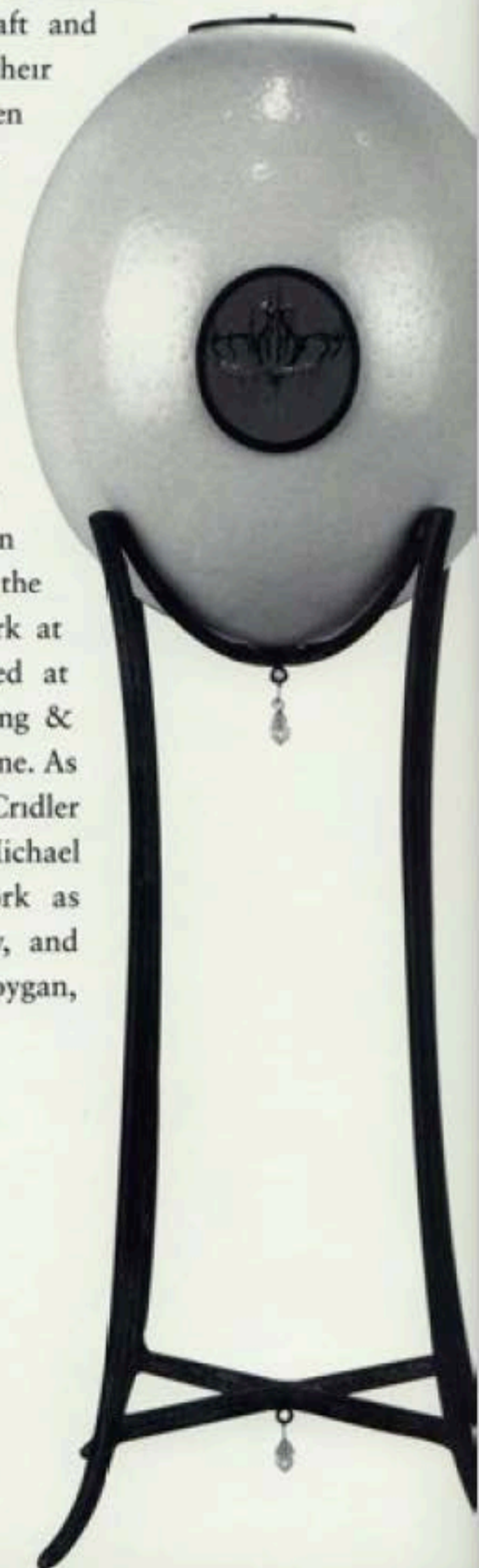
The Kohler experience made me focus on how the making of my work relates so strongly to its meaning. To me, labor is salvation, it is symbolic of the power of hope in the face of almost certain failure. And this applies to everything—from my desire to make something entirely beautiful and not contrived, to the desperate daily attempts people make to avoid the fact that they will die. For me, trying and failing is what the whole of

life is about, not something even remotely fatalistic or futile. It is the most exceptional thing about life.⁴

Cridler alters scale and layers the sculptures with materials that call our attention to the cultural, historical, and sexual climates in which the original objects—too ubiquitous to dissect in this way—are immersed. Her welded steel forms establish the strong foundation, but surface materials such as eggs, wax, hair, and gut suggest the ultimate frailty of human love and labor. Her work addresses the need for ongoing faith and persistence when confronted with the seemingly impossible effort humans face as they continually craft and rebuild in the face of their mortality. She says that "given almost certain failure, people still strive for love, for transcendence, for immortality. Given almost certain failure, I would try to map this beauty."⁵

Kim Cridler earned a bachelor of fine arts at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, a master of fine arts at the State University of New York at New Paltz, and also studied at Skowhegan School of Painting & Sculpture in Skowhegan, Maine. As a result of this exhibition, Cridler was hired by the John Michael Kohler Arts Center to work as coordinator of Arts/Industry, and she currently lives in Sheboygan, Wisconsin.

Leslie Umberger
Senior Curator of
Exhibitions and Collections





KIM CRIDLER: IMPOSSIBILITY AND PERSISTENCE
MAY 6-AUGUST 19, 2001

Height precedes width precedes depth.

All works courtesy of the artist unless otherwise noted.

CURTAIN

1996
Steel, paint, and satin
108 x 84"

UNTITLED (LARGE VESSEL)

1997
Steel and gut
96 x 84"
From the collection of the
University of Texas at El Paso

PAIR

1998
Steel, wax, and plaster
72 x 50" diameter

LAUREL LEAF VASE

1999
Steel and woven hair
30 x 20" diameter
From the collection of the
Scottsdale Museum of
Contemporary Art, Arizona

KEPT

2000
Steel, eggs, and satin
79 x 40 x 162"

FOIL

2000
Steel and wax
81 x 42 x 81"

SOUVENIRS

2001
Steel and beeswax
17 x 25" diameter

SITE 4

2001
Ostrich egg, brass, steel, glass,
silver, and paint
24 x 12" diameter

SITE 3

2001
Ostrich egg, brass, steel, glass,
silver, and paint
24 x 12" diameter

MOCKINGBIRD

2001
Charcoal, graphite, and ribbon
on paper
30 x 40"

Notes:

- ¹ Kathleen Venesian, "Monuments to Memory: The Sculpture of Kim Cridler" *Lisa Sette Gallery Newsletter*, Volume 3, 1998/1999.
- ² Suzi Gablik, *The Reenchantment of Art* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1991) p. 62.
- ³ Kim Cridler, unpublished correspondence with Leslie Umberger.
- ⁴ Kim Cridler, unpublished correspondence with Leslie Umberger.
- ⁵ Kim Cridler, unpublished correspondence with Leslie Umberger.

Images:

- Cover: *Untitled (Large Vessel)*, detail
Inside left: *Laurel Leaf Vase*
Inside right: *Site 3*
Above: *Pair*
Reverse: *Foil*, detail
Back cover: installation view at JMKAC





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