

Amanda Means
Artist's Statement
1997

I grew up in a rural environment, close to nature, observing the changing seasons and weather, the shifting light on the fields, and in the woods. I remember walking through my father's apple orchards in spring – the sweet smell of trees full of blossoms, the hum of bees, the warmth of the sun.

Our cobblestone farmhouse was surrounded by one hundred acres of apple orchards. Built in the early 1800s, it was constructed with small palm-sized stones naturally rounded by the lapping waves on the shores of Lake Ontario. My sensibility as an artist is woven from a deep connection to this childhood on the farm. I slept in a tree house in summer, and built little nature worship shrines of sticks, mud and stones in the woods.

Small farms cannot survive today. This is the era of agribusiness. In my childhood farms were controlled and operated by one family. Enormous barns, empty and decaying relics of time gone by, are scattered throughout the countryside in upstate New York.

I move to New York City to study art.

We lose our family farm.

My father dies.

As an art student I loved the biomorphic paintings of Gorky, Pollock, de Kooning, the early works of Rothko and Newman, and the paint charged vista of surface, light and color of Abstract Expressionism.

The move to the largely man-made urban environment of New York City intensified my sense of loss of nature. I became acutely aware of the growing fragility of the natural world – animals, plants, the atmosphere, entire ecosystems were threatened. My photographs of flowers – are a metaphor of this sense of loss.

I do not photograph these flowers with a camera. I place an actual flower in the enlarger. Light passes through both the flower and the lens to expose photographic paper below. The luminosity resulting from this unusual approach transforms the imagery into a burst of radiant light, surrounded by intense darkness. This changes the imagery from the purely botanical to become a metaphor of the life-giving quality of light itself to the living organisms of this earth.