

Barbara McFadyen

My work is about love & longing, remembering, and finding solace through reflections of the past.

An accomplished metalsmith and enamelist, as well as an inventive book artist, Barbara McFadyen has been producing unique, wearable forms for over four decades. Much of her work focuses on humankind's relationship with nature, a subject she explores in her jewelry and unique artists' books. As she stated, "My inspirations, thoughts, and emotions are deeply connected to the natural world; they have been nourished by observing, exploring, and gathering from nature throughout the seasons since childhood. Through my work I seek to transform reflections of nature's raw and wild beauty into distilled moments of tranquility." However, her vision of nature is filtered and transformed by her awareness of diverse cultural traditions. She has a particular affinity to the art of Japan which, she feels, embodies an inimitable, subtle, and unobtrusive beauty as well as a deep connection to the flux of nature.

Born in 1952, McFadyen attended Eckerd College in St. Petersburg, Florida where she was awarded her BA in Creative Arts in 1974. In the mid-1970s, she studied at the Kulicke-Stark Academy in New York where she was first introduced to enameling. She later studied with master enamelists Bill Helwig, Martha Banyas, Jamie Bennett, Linda Darty, and others. In 1982 she became a partner in a jewelry gallery in Chapel Hill, North Carolina and later pursued graduate studies at East Carolina University where she was awarded her MFA in 2017. At ECU she studied with Ken Bova, Robert Ebendorf, Mi-Sook Hur, and Tim Lazure.

In a body of work exhibited at her MFA show at ECU, McFadyen explored the cyclical nature of life, from birth to death, through a series of sixteen highly evocative pieces. Including both enamel jewelry and artists' books, Anamnesis, meaning the recollection or remembrance of the past, traced the impact of life's transitions through work exploring such issues as love, loss, solace, memory, and reflection. Remarkably, much of the power and beauty of this series was informed by the death of the artist's own mother, giving McFadyen's work both a deeply personal significance and a universality. In the exhibition and the thesis she wrote to accompany it, McFadyen examined the history of mourning jewelry in Western culture - wearable forms intended to both commemorate the deceased and provide solace to the living. The works McFadyen made and exhibited were influenced in part by those traditional forms of jewelry. In drawing upon and transforming those

traditions, McFadyen discovered a new vehicle for personal expression and for her exploration of universal concerns.

Based on a photograph of her mother when she was young, *Cherish* is rich in memory and wistful reflection. As McFadyen described, "The process of creating this brooch brought a sense of protection, as if my own mother was keeping watch over me. Amid her floating silhouettes, the center oval enamel is laser etched with a poignant letter of heartfelt thanks she wrote to me. This is one of many such cherished letters I received from her." With its superbly wrought leaves, etched enamel letter, and silhouetted image of her mother, this brooch exemplifies McFadyen's masterful metalwork and enameling. It is also a poignant tribute to the healing power of memory. In the piece, the links surrounding the central image suggest the unbreakable connections between a mother and child and the silver leaves signify renewal through reflection.

Weeping Willows, in which delicate buds from a willow tree are placed over an image of its leaves, pays homage to the traditional use of the weeping willow - especially in 19th-century needlework, mourning pictures, and jewelry - as an emblem of sorrow and commemoration. This superbly crafted piece features several techniques: silver casting for the branch, laser-etched enamel for the image of the willow leaves, and basic metal construction techniques for the oval frame.

Bernard Jazzar and Harold Nelson
Enamel Arts Foundation



Weeping Willows, 2017
Enamel, copper, sterling silver
3 1/2 x 2 1/2 x 3/8 in.
Collection of the Enamel Arts Foundation