Glimpses of my journey
by Richard Lee Thorn

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts
Montana State University
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Abstract:
Art today seems primarily in the service of decoration, innovation, or self-expression.

At the same time, we seem to have lost contact with the earlier, more profound functions of art, which have always had to do with personal and collective empowerment, personal growth, communion with this world, and the search for what lies beneath and above this world.

-Peter London, No More Second Hand Art I am an explorer. I work in a personal and private way, which enhances my own journey of exploration and discovery. My site-interactive ceramic sculptures intensify the bond of energy that exists between myself and nature, revitalizing me and reaffirming that which I know to be true or of value. I deliberately create startling or unsettling conditions that are intended to provide a glimpse into unexplored inner realms, challenging myself and viewers to engage in exploration.

My work is not a finished product, but a continuing process. The process begins with my exploration of the surrounding mountains, with my search for sites with which I feel an inner connection. This exploration inspires the construction of site-interactive sculptures which I call Spirit Vessels: ceramic sculptures which function as containers for my spirit and as focal points for my thoughts and energy. I choose shapes, colors, textures and a scale which unify the vessels with their sites. I return often to the sites, frequently bringing back rocks to guide me in the treatment of each work's surface. At times, I texture my work with these rocks by pounding or pressing them into the wet clay.

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of

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APPROVAL

of a thesis submitted by

Richard Lee Thorn

This thesis has been read by each member of the thesis committee and has been found to be satisfactory regarding content, English usage, format citations, bibliographic style, and consistency, and is ready for submission to the College of Graduate Studies.

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Date 7-29-94

# ARTIST'S STATEMENT

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My work is not a finished product, but a continuing process. The process begins with my exploration of the surrounding mountains, with my search for sites with which I feel an inner connection. This exploration inspires the construction of site-interactive sculptures which I call Spirit Vessels: ceramic sculptures which function as containers for my spirit and as focal points for my thoughts and energy. I choose shapes, colors, textures and a scale which unify the vessels with their sites. I return often to the sites, frequently bringing back rocks to guide me in the treatment of each work's surface. At times, I texture my work with these rocks by pounding or pressing them into the wet clay.

Installing the sculptures in the spot I intuitively feel is right brings a rewarding closure to this part of the process. I gain much from the hard physical work and direct contact with the land. It is not uncommon for my heavily ladened blue and white Landcruiser to jostle down muddy, potholed logging roads or for me to cradle eighty pound stoneware sculpture sections as I head up-slope to a chosen site. Aching arms hold the piece firmly against my chest for support, as heavy footfalls struggle to keep balance. I often wade waist deep into streams. Cold penetrates my body as a frigid mountain waterfall pours over my head and back. Senses awaken, I am more fully alive, and the experience becomes embedded in my soul. And as I install the final piece, I feel a connection, the melding of my spirit with that of nature.

Distilled moments come in to focus in my viewfinder, and the weariness and pain drift away. Seeing my work from multiple points of view, I perceive different feelings from the same work. The resulting photographs enable me to share this part of my journey with others.

The process, however, does not stop here. Nature continues to interact with my work, affecting my perceptions upon later visits; and as I go about my daily life, I remain focused and in tune with nature by consciously visualizing my spirit vessels on site.

My work is based on several personal philosophical points of view. I see life as a purposeful journey of exploration, discovery, learning, growing, and sharing which culminates in an ever evolving personal and collective actualization. The people and objects that we encounter are our mirrors. How we perceive and react to them are more a reflection of ourselves than that which we think exists. Reality is malleable; a person's reality is only what one can perceive it to be. Expand or alter a person's perceptions, and you can alter one's reality. I believe a life force flows through everything on earth, and as

I install my sculptures on site, my energy fuses with nature's. My work is, likewise, influenced by many tribal and ancient methods of working which have a strong spiritual component and express the unity of humanity and nature.

With my work, I am offering to share glimpses of my journey with others. I strive to activate the viewers' senses, to take them to a higher state of awareness, toward a connectedness with the energy that surrounds and penetrates our beings. By balancing how much I conceal or reveal, I create a point of focus which will spark a feeling of mystery and intrigue, luring viewers to step into a state of contemplation, reflection, introspection or speculation: upon entering this inner state, viewers are challenged to become explorers--to make contact with the mysterious unknown, discovering or rediscovering thoughts and feelings which connect with their own lives.

# LIST OF SLIDES

1. Mask
   Hyalite Canyon, Montana
   Stoneware, 5 1/2"h

2. Mask
   Hyalite Canyon, Montana
   Stoneware, 8"h

3. Mask
   Hyalite Canyon, Montana
   Stoneware, 10 3/4"h

4. Spirit Vessel
   Squaw Creek, Montana
   Unfired clay, 30"h

5. Spirit Vessel
   Squaw Creek, Montana
   Unfired clay, 12"h

6. Mask
   Hyalite Canyon, Montana
   Stoneware, 18"h

7. Spirit Vessel
   Squaw Creek, Montana
   Unfired clay, 12"h

8. Mask
   Hyalite Canyon, Montana
   Stoneware, 8"h

9. Spirit Vessel
   Hyalite Canyon, Montana
   Stoneware, 36"h

10. Spirit Vessel
    Hyalite Canyon, Montana
    Stoneware, 36"h

11. Mask
    Hyalite Canyon, Montana
    Stoneware, 10 3/4 "h

12. Mask
Hyalite Canyon, Montana
Stoneware, 8"h

13. Spirit Vessel
Bear Mountain, Montana
Stoneware, 78"h

14. Spirit Vessel Enclosure
Bear Mountain, Montana
Stoneware, 78"h

15. Spirit Vessel Enclosure
Bear Mountain, Montana
Stoneware, 78"h

16. Mask
Hyalite Canyon, Montana
Stoneware, 8"h

17. Northeast view
Haynes Fine Arts Gallery

18. Southwest view
Haynes Fine Arts Gallery

19. Spirit Vessel
Stoneware, 132"w

20. Portal
Haynes Fine Arts Gallery
Stoneware, 75"h

21. West view from Portal
Haynes Fine Arts Gallery

22. Spirit Vessel Enclosure
(From Bear Mountain, Montana)
Stoneware, 78"h

23. Spirit Vessel Enclosure
Detail
Stoneware, 78"h

24. Southeast view through Portal
Haynes Fine Arts Gallery

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