Dawn of a new day [slide]
by Susan Henderson

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:
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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts

MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY
Bozeman, Montana

June 1989
APPROVAL

of a thesis submitted by

Susan Henderson

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.

Date June 19, 1989

Chairperson, Graduate Committee

Approved for the Major Department

Date June 19, 1989

Head, Major Department

Approved for the College of Graduate Studies

Date July 21, 1989

Graduate Dean
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Signature  Susan Henderson

Date  June 19, 1989
Artist's Statement

I have worked in clay for sixteen years. For me, answering the question "Why do I work in clay?" is hard. Clay reinforces my imagery and content of landscape and figures because clay is earth; when it is fired it becomes rock. The brittle unevenness of the surface, the colors, the cracks, the dents, the holes represent human vulnerabilities, frailties, imperfections, their humanness, their perserverance, their impermanence. I alter the clay body to make the clay surface look similar to a slice of land with veins of color running through it. My firing process furthers the geological nature of my sculptures. The clay is underfired and unevenly fired resulting in further color variations on the surface. Clay cracks as it dries. These cracks add to the natural land image and reinforce my content. I build in supports on either side of where I want a crack, cut the clay on the inner sides and let the shrinkage do the rest of the cutting. Clay lends itself to texture. Feelings are channeled directly into the clay surface through finger marks that follow the contour of the form.

Coil building in clay is meditative and centering. I surrender over to a process much bigger than myself by working in this scale. The duration in time involved in completing each sculpture helps me develop deeper involvement. The monumental aspect of my work reinforces my content of land and figures.
I make paintings in conjunction with sculptures for three reasons. First I use painting as a vehicle to translate an abstract concept into a sculpture. Second, by placing the sculpture I'm working on into another context (a painting), I can see it differently and resolve problems. Finally, the paintings are an immediate expression of feelings as compared to my sculptures, which are a slow expression of my feelings on a deeper, more profound level. In my paintings I record glimpses of the beauty in life, the moment.

The forces of nature cannot be bound. They symbolize something intrinsically inherent in human nature, freedom. My influences are the sensations evoked by nature. I stand still and conjure up sensations such as the wind blowing on my ears. I am interested in such concepts as becoming one with nature and animals. Outer voices from my environment and inner voices from childhood influence my work.

Therapy, spirituality, religion, philosophy and sociology are the topics of my work. I am interested in how individuals, groups of people and the natural world fit together. The essence of human spirits and how one is shaped by life is the basis of my art. My work is about an on-going process of growth and healing stimulated by a transformation from dualism to spirituality. My work is about an acceptance of who one is by recovering what has been lost. I do work to offer hope and stimulate ideas of alternatives and choices in life (being). My sculptures are meant to convey the sense that we are the same. No one is better or worse than anyone
else, and that even bad experiences in life are positive, for one can learn from them.
List of Titles

1. UNTITLED
   1988
   Clay - 240" x 180" x 50"

2. UNTITLED
   1988
   Clay - 240" x 180" x 50"

3. REMEMBERING
   1989
   Clay - 200" x 190" x 55"

4. REMEMBERING
   1989
   Clay - 200" x 190" x 55"

5. THE ABYSS I
   1988
   Acrylic - 162" x 96"

6. THREE FIGURES
   1989
   Acrylic - 72" x 36"