



Ceramic sculpture
by Monica Helena Van den Dool

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:

The observation of everyday actions and interactions provides me with the motivation for this body of work. The situations, motives, and characteristics of my sculptures are no more indecipherable, strange, or ambiguous than what I see around me everyday. To me, the figures are clear and more than real, crystallizing and magnifying the course of day-to-day life.

In general, figurative work appeals to me because of its directness. Its presence and impact are less remote, more immediate. The bulk, scale and chunky physicality lend an important quality to these figures; a sense that they are uneasy in their own bodies. In *Deep Sea Catch*, this theme is explicit. A blankly smiling and seemingly oblivious woman holds out a prehistoric-looking fish. The fish represents the primitive in the character's nature, a connection that she cannot even begin to grasp.

The figures are all female for a variety of reasons. I am obviously more familiar with the female figure and work from my own poses in the studio. There is also a feminist element in the work, although the emphasis is on the more sweeping concerns of the human condition. The issues I address are common to both genders in varying degrees, but are expressed more naturally for me through the female figure.

In the earlier sculptures, which are not draped, the generic style of clothing is an attempt to establish a kind of uniform of normalcy. The women, outfitted in pumps, necklaces, and dresses, appear to be comfortable and well-off. Their placid and carefully groomed exteriors form an ironic contrast to their more desperate or suggestive circumstances. For instance, in *Chicken Dinner*, two women interact with a pair of dead chickens. The women's incongruous style of dress and apparent delight heightens the strangeness of what could have been a relatively normal scenario.

As the figures became more refined, I grew more interested in the articulation of movement and gesture. The drapery was introduced to facilitate this and create a more active and engaging surface. The classical reference also creates a more intriguing and explicit dialogue between the heroic and mock heroic, the tragic and the comic. Although there are still clear references to our own society in these later figures, their problems are in no way unique to a particular time frame.

There is a change in emphasis between the two styles of figures, but in most respects they have much in common. All of the figures engage in ambiguous and slightly disturbing activities. Their actions and particular circumstances are physical manifestations of their own various insecurities and inner torments. For instance, in *Clutch*, a woman buckles under an onslaught of arrows, searching her purse for some handy solution to this unexpected emergency. Alternately confused, oblivious, amused, frustrated, resolved, or grieving, each character reacts differently to her respective plight.

My influences have been largely in literature rather than in the visual arts. John Updike and Raymond Carver explore the absurdities, isolations, and frustrations of middle-American existence. Southern writers such as Flannery O'Connor and William Faulkner pursue the wildly dramatic and often disastrous consequences of everyday and innocuous actions. My work is also related to James Joyce's concept of the epiphany, when some sort of revelatory experience is triggered by a seemingly

insignificant occurrence. The difference is that when I create a scenario, the characters are not cognizant of this potential revelation. Their situations are plainly revealed to the viewer, but the women themselves remain unchanged, isolated, and unaware.

CERAMIC SCULPTURE

by

Monica Helena Van den Dool

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

of

Master of Fine Arts

MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY
Bozeman, Montana

April 1995

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Signature Melva D. L.
Date April 21, 1995

ARTIST'S STATEMENT

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LIST OF SLIDES

1. "Chicken Dinner," ceramic, 68" x 34" x 65", 1994
2. "Lamps," ceramic, 73" x 72" x 130", 1995
3. "Bit by Bit," ceramic, 67" x 28" x 29", 1994
4. "Appetizer," ceramic, 82" x 48" x 36", 1995
5. "Clutch," ceramic, 69" x 29" x 27", 1995
6. "Deep Sea Catch," ceramic, 68" x 46" x 24", 1994
7. "Gasoline," ceramic, 71" x 38" x 66", 1994
8. Installation in gallery
9. Installation in gallery

NO.

DATE

TITLE

Slide-Saver

Made in U.S.A.

MUSEUM QUALITY
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