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# FIGURATIVE SCULPTURE IN PAPER CLAY

A THESIS  
PRESENTED TO THE FACULTY OF  
THE DEPARTMENT OF ART AND DESIGN  
EAST TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF FINE ARTS

by  
Valarie G. Lyle  
August 2001

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Ralph Slatton, Chair  
Dr. James C. Mills  
Don Davis

Keywords: Paper clay, Figurative sculpture, Figurative Ceramics, Georges Jeanclos, Stephen De Staebler, Mary Frank

## ABSTRACT

The artist discusses her Master of Fine Arts exhibition at East Tennessee State University, Carroll Reece Museum, Johnson City, Tennessee, March 9 - 17, 2001. The exhibition marked her return to organic, gestural work. Works are figurative, ceramic, sculpture, made of paper clay, ranging from 8-inch, wall mounted, bas-relief to life sized, full round figures. Most are slab constructed, unglazed or lightly glazed with soda wash.

Topics discussed: the artist's development, including the influences of Stephen De Staebler, in his treatment of the individual in mass culture, and of Mary Frank, in psychological content and in the use of negative space; similarities with sensuality in Georgia O'Keeffe's flower paintings; paper clay technique and the work of Rosette Gault; ceramic workshops in Appalachia; mythology and feminism as inspiration; the effect of nature and environment on art; and Georges Jeanclos.

Includes images and discussion of seventeen works.

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Design consultant: Michael Garrett.  
Photographs of current works by Tim Barnwell, Chris Stewart, and Val Lyle.  
All other photos by Val Lyle, unless otherwise noted.

## DEDICATION

To my brother, James,  
  
who always believed in  
me even when I didn't,  
and who kept every  
scrap of artwork I threw  
away, saying "You'll  
need this when you're  
famous."

To my mother, Phyllis  
Eggers Lyle,  
  
who brought me back  
home to East Tennes-  
see, and who gave me  
all my tenacity...  
plus hers.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you: **Don Davis**, for going out on a limb to keep me in the ETSU Ceramics program. **Ralph Slatton**, for supporting that limb, and asking me the powerful question, “What do you *want* to do?” **Dr. J. C. Mills**, for teaching me the value of prioritizing the right things. **Lynn Whitehead Lehnert**, for saying “If you think it and explain it to me, then we can figure out how to make it.” You totally empowered me in making art and teaching art. **John Steele**, for offering perspective. **Michael Garrett**, for truth and insight in the midst of chaos. **Seth Piercy**, for unwavering strength and support. **Robert Reedy**, for teaching me how to see myself with humor and still to make good art. **Mark Anderson**, for working with me as a contemporary sculptor. **Ethelia Patmagrian**, my first hands-on, real-life, totally capable woman figurative sculptor role model. **Laura Bagwell**, for teaching me that black grass is OK if it helps the picture. **V.G. Stern**, for showing me that a woman could be tenacious well into her 70’s with her chain-saw sculptures. **The Carroll Reece Museum, Blair White**, and all the folks working there. **My mother**, for keeping good art on the walls and good books on the shelves. **An art teacher**, in a night class at a community college in Oahu, Hawaii, in the 80’s. I don’t know your name, but thank you for saying, “If you really want to go to art school, you can find a way.” You were right. **Free and low-fee community help organizations**. We need more. **And so many kind people**, for giving me encouragement along the way.

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Special thanks to my husband, Mark Smith. You gave me love and encouragement enough so that I could make art again. “Thank you” is an understatement. You have earned your honorary degree in ceramics from ETSU.

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## INTRODUCTION

In early March, 2001 “International outrage escalated ...as Afghanistan’s Taliban militia pressed on with their ‘Islamic’ mission to smash ancient statues across the country.” [1] They began blowing up the Colossal Buddha located at Bamiyan. This 175 ft tall sculpture had been carved into the living rock some 2000 years earlier. [2] The event was called an international crisis, but world wide public outcry could not save the figure. [3] The loss was called catastrophic to the history of human culture, art, and religion. That is the impact one figurative sculpture can have.

The Bamiyan Buddha is especially important to me because it was lost at the very time I was pondering why I make figurative sculptures. I was on the verge of thinking everything figurative had already been done a thousand times. How much could it matter what I made? The same week we studied the Bamiyan Buddha in Asian Art history class it was lost. The “coincidence” was bone chilling, and the message was loud and clear: people do care. We make and respond to figurative sculpture.

In the work presented here, I am continuing my 15-year exploration of the human figure in clay. When I first started to learn how to control clay as a medium, accurate representa-

tion was important to me. I spent several years learning to form convincing lifelike portraiture from live models and clients (figure 1).

While working on my BFA at the Ringling School of Art and Design in Sarasota, Florida, I began experimenting with abstraction. My figures became very organic and sensuous (figure 2). Those works were satisfying, but the series was interrupted. I moved to New York for several years, where millions of people seem to be running around like crazy ants. It is no wonder then, that the representation of the specific individual became even less important in my work.

Fig. 2

*Foam Rubber Series 3*  
1989.

Mattress foam, 30 x 50 x 30 in.  
From my BFA show, Sarasota, FL.  
Abstract, organic, sensuous.

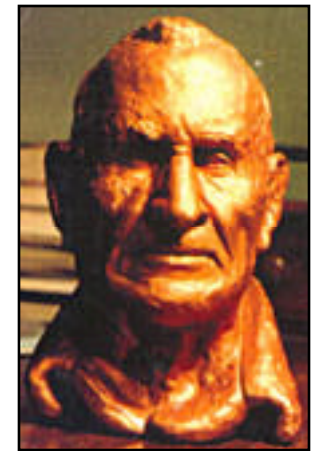


Fig. 1

*Portrait from Life,*  
*I.D. Eggers*  
1992.

Air-dried clay, with  
faux bronze patina.  
10 x 7 x 7 in. Early  
figurative work.

While in New York, I made several series of torsos with no arms or legs and several series of fragmented figures. In retrospect, I meant the amputations as a metaphor for the loss of power I felt living there. The figures were usually struggling. They had not given up (figure 3).

Fig. 3

*3 Torsos*  
1991.

Each lifesize.  
Ise Cultural Foundation,  
at 555 Broadway, New  
York, NY.



Now that I have been away from New York for five years, my figures are not so much about struggling. Sensuousness and movement have returned as major elements. The figures are appearing more often in pairs rather than always so very alone. The reappearing pairs may be couples, siblings, or lovers, or even my own muse whispering in my ear.

I am also now interested in nature and figurative art and am drawing inspiration from mythology. Many examples exist from history where cultures have expressed their relationship with nature beyond physical survival. In the West, I find the Green Man carved into ancient Celtic lore. [4] Here, a human face is pictured regurgitating all that is vegetation. In the ancient

East, the femme Yakshi and the homme Yaksha [5] are the figurative and voluptuous nature deities that I took inspiration from (figure 4, catalogue no. 3).

These current figurative sculptures are much more archetypal in their representation than my previous work, going beyond the specific individual but also inclusive of individuals. I hope the use of abstraction helps to bring the viewer to a more primitive, subconscious engagement with the works. I am influenced by Carl Jung's ideas of archetypes and the subconscious. The two living figurative ceramic sculptors that I identify strongly with, Mary Frank and Stephen De Staebler, also cite direct influences with Jungian archetypes and mythological representations of the human psyche.

I am comfortable working within my subconscious. While the intellect plays a significant role in my art, down deep I don't trust the intellect. Intuitive, emotional, and subconscious drives are my guide. I often start with clay not having a predetermined image in mind. When I delve as deep as I can into my psyche—and myself—I go to a semiconscious dream place. This dream place is about sensuality. When I say sensuality, I am talking about the pure senses—taste, touch, smell, sound, sight. Maintaining a physical relationship with nature in the environment where I live plays significantly in my art and well-being. For my recent work, the work discussed here, touch and sight are the subjects. In five of my past exhibitions an original audiotape on a continuous loop was a part of the experience. At the opening for the work presented here spring breezes brought in the scent of fresh flowers, delicious homemade food was served and a live jazz duo played great music.

All of the works presented in this catalogue are ceramics made with paper clay. There are freestanding and wall-mounted, bas-relief works. Size varies from 6 inches to life-sized.

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Fig. 4

*Tennessee Yakshi*  
2001.

In the following chapters, I explore this body of work. In chapter 2, I will discuss my artistic development by isolating the most significant art historical influences, especially Mary Frank and Stephen De Staebler. In chapter 3, I will discuss my coming to know and love the medium of paper clay. In chapter 4, I will discuss briefly each sculpture presented here. In chapter 5, I will briefly summarize and project my future direction.

## CONTEXT

In the next few pages I will discuss two living figurative ceramic artists who have had significant influence on me, Mary Frank and Stephen De Staebler. I will discuss each artist separately, and then I will have a brief comparison of the two. I will then briefly touch upon another artist whose works resonate with some of my current explorations, Georgia O’Keeffe.

### MARY FRANK

Lynn Whitehead Lenhart, who was head of ceramics at ETSU but out on leave, suggested a book to me. It was Mary Frank’s monograph by Hayden Herrera [8]. What I saw in this book was an artist who had absolutely broken new ground in construction methods, compositions, and the handling and manipulation of clay slabs towards a figurative sculpture. Her use of positive/negative space challenges even an experienced viewer, redoubled by changing symbolic scale and changing imagery as a piece is viewed from different angles. Her flat slabs melt into ocean waves upon turning a corner. Usually there is a solitary figure, confronting or experiencing life’s journeys. Birth, death, sexuality, fear, and sensory experiences dominate her subjects. Mary sculpts strong women in strong gestures of clay. Even depicting a woman in heightened sensual-

*“Despite variations of style and philosophical intent, the human figure, male and female, has been the primary subject matter for the artist in Western art since the ancient Greeks and remains the central object of study in art schools today.” [6]*

*“[Clay] is the most impressionistic material I know” — Mary Frank [7]*

ity, Mary's figures deal with the psychic state of the subject (figure 5). The sculptures are every woman; they are everyone.

Fig. 5

Mary Frank  
*Persephone*  
1985.

Ceramic in five parts.  
27 x 73 x 40 in. Collection  
of the Metropolitan  
Museum of Art, New  
York, NY. Gift of Seavest  
Private Investments,  
1997.

Photographed by Ralph  
Gabriner. Used with  
permission of Mary  
Frank.



I had to put the book down and simply try to absorb what I thought I saw. It went that way for several weeks, me peeking at a few pages at a time, and then setting it aside again. It didn't scare me and I wasn't jealous. I felt like I was looking at myself in some kind of mirror. This had happened to me once before, discovering Magdalena Abakanowicz in a 1992 exhibition at Marlborough Gallery in New York while working in a closely related medium. In two months



time, I was able to read only a few pages, possibly turn through the first half of the book, when a friend needed to borrow it. For about the next year I was without the book, but I believe it was for the better. Mary's work had such an impact on me, I think it was good for me to be working with the impression of her sculptures, rather than referring to actual photographs of her sculptures.

What I was most taken with was her explorations into figure-ground relationships, her fresh and gestural 3-D sketches in clay. These works turned my head inside out. I had been thinking about relatively simple differences in scale for psychological content, or a figure simply piercing a ground-plane. Mary Frank's work is extremely sophisticated in these areas. She worked in all types of materials until she found her stride in clay at the age of 36, combining with her figures additional subject matter including horses, other animals, fish, flowers, ferns and ocean waves.

As a direct result of Mary Frank's influence in figure-ground relationships, both *Sketch for Einstein's Daydream* (figure 6, catalogue no. 11) and *Einstein's Daydream* (catalogue no. 12) were completed for this exhibition.

For serendipity's sake, I had curiously remained on a mailing list for a nonprofit organization called "Artists talk on Art" in New York City. [9] There, for spring of 2001, a slide lecture by Mary Frank was listed. It fell during the spring break of the semester this thesis was due. A search for economical plane fare gave a round-trip bargain. I flew to New York for 2 1/2 days to sit in an audience of an unknown number, hoping to just be able to see her from a reasonable distance. A public introduction to Mary Frank was given by Eleanor Munro, on the

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**Fig. 6**  
*Sketch for Einstein's  
Daydream*  
2001.

occasion of the re-issuance of her book titled *Originals: American Women Artists*, which includes a chapter on Mary Frank. [10]

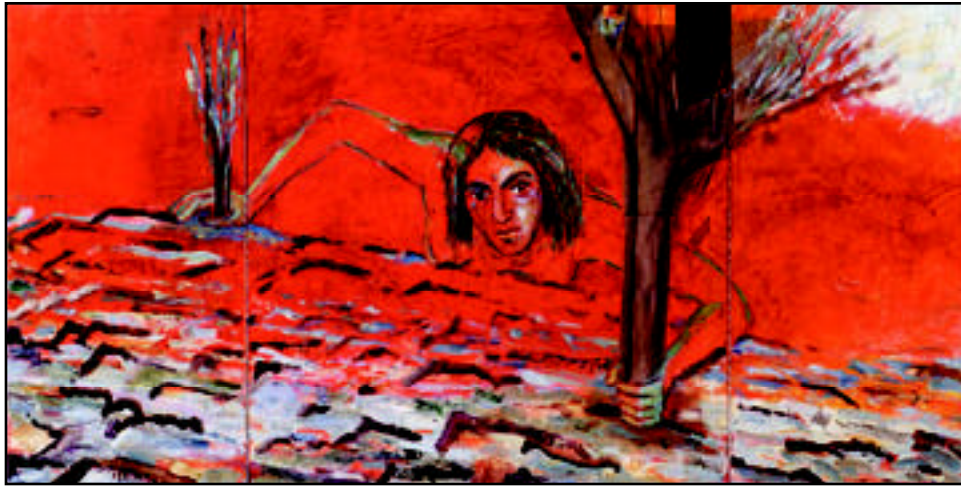


Fig. 7

Mary Frank,  
*Where or When?*  
1999.

Triptych, inside view.  
Oil and acrylic on  
board. 48 x 96 in.,  
open.

Photographed by Jerry  
L. Thompson. Cour-  
tesy DC Moore Gal-  
lery, New York, NY.

For her slide presentation, Mary used dual projectors to walk the audience through her art's progression. I was familiar with most of the information regarding her earlier ceramic works from Hayden Herrera's book. [11] For the last ten years or so, Mary has concentrated on prints and paintings, particularly using a large triptych format that mounts on a wall and can be opened and closed like a book to reveal a different work (figure 7). Even while using a flat format, Mary has invented ways to give layers to her works, which still incorporate nature, animals, myths and archetypes. What struck me most about Mary Frank's slide lecture was the equal enthusiasm she paid to a humanitarian effort she promotes that provides solar cookers to third

world families. [12] In addition to the ability to safely cook food without having to travel dangerous miles in search of rare wood fuel, the solar cookers also provide a means to easily pasteurize water in areas where water-borne sickness is rampant. The double benefit was a chance for the completely defoliated landscape to begin healing. Even in the spotlight organized towards her and her art, Mary Frank took the opportunity to educate us as to how we could easily make a huge difference in the “bigger picture” of the world.

Mary Frank. A thousand tiny and major events lined up that we could be comfortable speaking together. She invited me to go with the inner group to dinner. I went. She pulled up a chair beside her at the end of the table and invited me to sit with her. I did. She asked me why I had chosen her for a mentor. I said, “You have already been at a place on a path that I find myself at now. I want to learn as much as I can from you, and perhaps save a few steps.” She seemed to accept that, and we spoke until close to midnight. I walked with her out into a cool, misty rain in Soho long enough to see her into a cab. My feet never touched ground as I walked up to 26th Street in my old neighborhood, passing Blue Man Group as they were letting out of a performance, blue kisses and all, through the East Village.

Mary and I have spoken a few times since. To be near an artist you admire cannot be underestimated. She is extraordinarily kind and centered. I am fortunate to have met her.

## STEPHEN DE STAEBLER

De Staebler’s work (figure 8) made a great impression on me the first time I saw a reproduction of it in a magazine while I was studying sculpture at Ringling School of Art. I wasn’t sure what I was looking at. It looked old, real old. I couldn’t tell the scale, couldn’t tell if

*“A life  
without making things  
that tell you who you are  
and what you feel is not  
enough. So I make  
things.” — Stephen De  
Staebler [13]*

it might be a real person all burnt up in a molten lava flow, or if somebody even made that thing I was looking at. And if somebody had made that, I was shocked at the nerve, the boldness of presenting the human species in such an unflattering representation. Ten years later, when my work became dark while living in New York City, his work helped me understand what I was doing: Donald Kuspit, noted art critic and interpreter of De Staebler, writes,

De Staebler articulates the secretly surviving rawly human being within the streamlined, efficient functionary demanded by society in its pursuit of progress and technology. His archaic figure represents the alive but devastated self within the efficient technocrat that is the ideal modern person. De Staebler's archaic figures are wounded survivors of the streamlining process that robotizes human beings into efficient operators. [14]

According to Kuspit, De Staebler himself cites Jungian influences, specifically his theory of the psyche. Kuspit draws revealing analogies between Jung's Anima/Animus and De Staebler's female and male figures, and describes convincingly the Steles in terms of Jung's conception of a "shadow side" to the psyche. De Staebler feels that we have gained comfort and technology at great expense to the health of the environment and the health of the human psyche. [15] His figures are in ruins, in fragments to show this state of consciousness.

It was this contradiction between organized, "efficient" urban living and what I felt was an inner need for connection with the environment and living on a human scale that led me to my work in New York. There, I feel my sculpture was animated by this shadow side.



Fig. 8

Stephen De Staebler  
*Seated Woman with  
Quartered Abdomen.*  
1978.

Stoneware, porcelain,  
slab built, stains. Mint  
Museum of Art, Char-  
lotte, NC. From the  
Allan Chasanoff Cer-  
amic Collection.

It is interesting to note the serendipitous beginning to De Staebler's work. Early in his career he made sculptures of landscapes and sculptures of figures, but it was relocating to a house on a hill that brought the two together. Unsuccessful attempts with his figure-fragments were tossed beside the house and they began to pile up against the earth bank. One day he looked at the earth/figure pile differently and the rest is history. [16]

## COMPARISON OF FRANK AND DE STAEBLER

It is interesting that both Stephen De Staebler and Mary Frank are concerned with the threats to environmental well being and feel that references to this are made in their works. While similarities between Mary Frank's and De Staebler's work include the obvious—ceramic, figurative, fragmented, minimal surface decoration, usually a single figure depicted in a non-idealized manner—less obvious similarities are powerful. Both artists are peeling away layers. Over and over again, their sculptures are peeled apart to reveal what is below. And both artists blur where the earth stops and the individual begins. What is below is the big difference between them. When Stephen De Staebler peels apart his psychically charged sculptures he reveals the bones of humanity below the layers. When Mary Frank peels apart her psychically charged sculptures she reveals the living inner psyche of the figure's archetype. Hers are alive, his are very dead.

In reference to my work, I feel that while I was living in New York City I was very much aligned with De Staebler's aesthetic. Now I feel much more aligned with Mary Frank's aesthetic of present and future possibilities.

## GEORGIA O'KEEFFE

The 3-D *O'Keeffe Flower Pot with Flower* (figure 9, catalogue no. 15) and its companion piece, *Pitcher Plant* (catalogue no. 14) were named on behalf of American born Georgia O'Keeffe, who is most noted for her large sensuous paintings of flowers. [17] Although many people insisted they were sexual in nature, Ms. O'Keeffe herself always insisted that they were not, that she was just painting a flower. American mixed media artist Judy Chicago is direct, even though abstracted, in her ceramic depictions of female sexuality at the famous installation *the Dinner Party*.

For me, I am happy to marvel out loud at how similar an orchid really is to our own sexuality, and perhaps compose a bit myself in clay to playfully, wonderfully, and respectfully reveal those similarities (for example, *Orchid*, figure 10, catalogue no. 13). I believe it is a challenge to represent healthy sensuality and sexuality in today's Western, North American, East Tennessee art environment. *Lovers #4* (catalogue no. 9) is another effort in this direction.

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Fig. 9

*3-D O'Keeffe Flower Pot:  
#2 with Flower*  
2001.

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Fig. 10

*Orchid*  
2001.

## CERAMIC PAPER CLAY

Paper clay can change ceramic sculpture, as we know it, for the better.

From my training in bronze, sculpture and ceramics at Ringling School of Art & Design, clay was my first choice as a figurative sculptural medium. It was clay—simple clay—that responded immediately to my touch and fed my inspirations. The goal was to find a permanent direct solution, rather than the molds I had been forced to use with bronze casting. I found myself pushing the material to its limits, and wanting more from it. The trouble I encountered was that large pieces would break while I tried to load them into a bisque kiln. Regular greenware clay was simply too fragile for the methods I was attempting.

A rumor circulated about a material called “paper clay”. The concept was simple and as ancient as adobe itself: Introduce cellulose fiber to whatever clay you are working with for the multiple benefits of greenware strength, moisture wicking for fast even drying, and wet on dry applications.

### EXPERIMENTATION

It was a ceramics student at ETSU named Troy who first gave me his paper clay recipe: one *Wall Street Journal* and two *Wednesday Johnson City Press* newspapers torn to bits.



Leave in the big dough mixer (our clay mixer), in water, with the beaters going for a couple of hours. Add to this enough dry mix to make 100 lb of wet clay. He suggested I experiment a lot, and told me about another student named Suzanne who might have a book on the subject. I tried many experiments, with all sorts of paper at all sorts of percentages. I had some great results and some dismal failures.

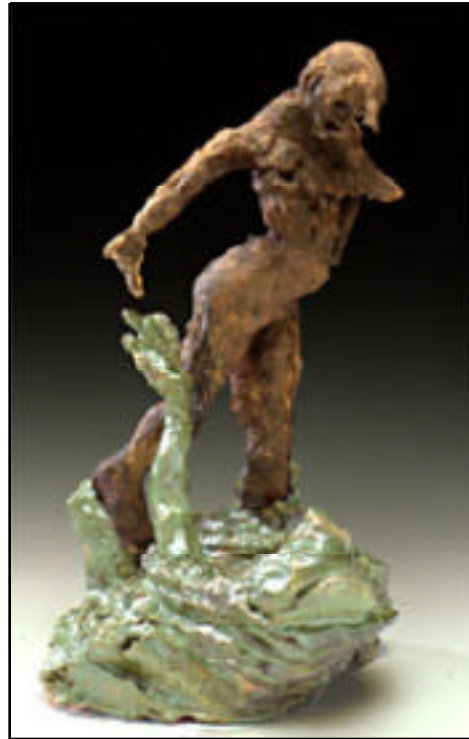
An early, encouraging experiment was using the paper clay to repair a bisque piece that broke into pieces during firing (*Catharsis*, figure 11). Literally, the largest piece intact was a leg. I patched it up with the paper clay and refired. It held.

The culmination of this exploration was two life-sized, high bas-relief figures. While they were pit-firing overnight, a security guard at ETSU saw the smoke, dumped them out of the garbage cans I used for firing onto the 20° F concrete and hosed them off, while they were red hot, with freezing water. They survived. The velvety smoke that permanently penetrating the surfaces of my figures seemed to speak about the subconscious.

Fig. 11

*Catharsis*  
2001.

Bisque clay,  
with paper  
clay. 18.5 x 15  
x 11.5 in.





I began making waves and ripples of paper clay just for their own beauty, pit-firing them just to see how the smoke would kiss them each time. Pushing this new medium, I made a two-foot tall standing figure overnight in paper clay, using a blow dryer to stiffen the legs as I built upwards. There were no cracks, and it dried, uncovered, quickly. This success gave me confidence to experiment further. Next I made a figure out of a large slab and multiple-fired it (*Madonna*, catalogue no. 16). After that, I tried a pair of larger figures, on a base, with thin, extruded legs. These I titled *Lovers # 3* (figure 12, catalogue no. 17).

## ROSETTE GAULT

I finally got around to asking Suzanne about her experiences with paper clay. She brought in a tattered book by Rosette Gault titled *Paper Clay*. [18] Ms. Gault had made paper clay the subject of research while she was a resident artist some 10 years ago. With the help of friends, she had done numerous studies and experiments enough to publish a small book. I highly recommend this book and its subsequent follow-up book to anyone interested in paper clay. It will save you weeks of reinventing the wheel, and I agree with all of it with one exception.

I found I could make paper clay easier and quicker by starting with warm water in the dough mixer we use for a clay mixer, adding toilet tissue, about 4 rolls to a 100 lb batch, letting the beaters run a while, say five minutes, then adding dry mix. A small amount of Vee gum T, say 1%, and 1/4 cup of vinegar makes a perfect batch. The book reaffirmed all my tests, plus gave me more working knowledge as well. Paper clay fires the same as the clay would ordinarily, perhaps even a cone higher. It accepts the same glazes and stains as the clay normally

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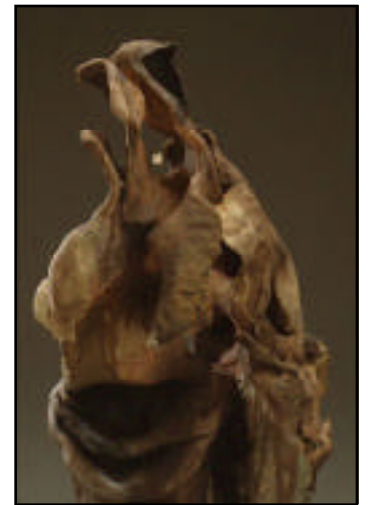


Fig. 12

*Lovers #3*  
2001.

would. Any clay can be paper clay with the introduction of cellulose. My best experiments came from using the easily broken-down bathroom tissues. You could not tell the difference between most fired regular clay and paper clay works by looking at them. The difference would be slightly lighter weight after the cellulose fiber burns out, and tremendous green ware strength.

### A COMMERCIAL SOURCE FOR PAPER CLAY

Facing my last semester, I made some hard decisions. I gave up the backbreaking job of mixing my own paper clay and decided to buy a ton from the only east coast supplier I could find at that time, Axner Company in Florida. [19] I knew that I was going to have my thesis show at the Carroll Reece Museum, so I took a dozen different clay samples to check color under their lights and against their walls before I ordered a ton. Shipping cost was half again. Bad weather nationwide skewed the arrival date just enough to hit the surprise early closing of ETSU one December Friday before holidays. So, I sat in below freezing temperatures in my unheated van to meet the truck and unload the ton myself. I was on my way. The first piece I made from my thesis ton was the big double backs I call *Embrace* (figure 13, catalogue no. 8).

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Fig. 13

*Embrace*, detail  
2001.

## CATALOGUE

This catalogue represents my MFA show held at the Carroll Reece Museum on the Campus of East Tennessee State University from April 5th through the 18th, 2001. Every sculpture in the show was ceramic, made from paper clay.

Every piece in the main gallery (figure 14) was of commercially produced raku paper clay from Axner in Florida, rated for low temperatures up to cone 10. The sculptures were fired in either an electric or a gas kiln at ETSU in an oxidation or neutral atmosphere to an average of cone 4. Most of these pieces were slab constructed; however, the *O'Keeffe Flower Pots* incorporated coil techniques and *Home* and *Lovers #3* included extruded elements. Most of these works were made during the spring of 2001 at ETSU.

In an alcove outside the main exhibit, I included three earlier sculptures fabricated of paper clay I made, with a sculpture body of 1/3 kyanite, 1/3 goldart, and 1/3 fireclay by dry weight, to which I added about 30%+ wet by volume to wet of paper pulp. These were fired in a variety of ways as described on their respective catalogue pages.

My vision was light on form. So rarely do artists have the opportunity to show a large body of work in a pristine Museum. I made every single piece in the main gallery to look great on that color wall under that color light.

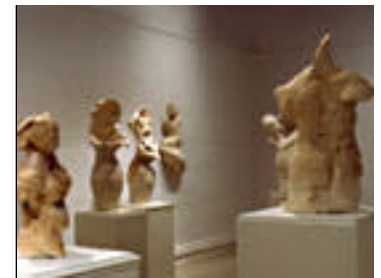


Fig. 14

MFA Show,  
Carroll Reece Museum  
April 5, 2001.

No. 1

## A Difference of Opinion

Paper Clay,  
14x13x10

I made this sculpture in Paula Rice's workshop, *Reinventing the figure*, using her building and firing techniques. This piece was made very quickly using paper clay I had brought with me. I used this image on my thesis exhibition card. It was also included in the NCECA 2001 Regional Student Juried Exhibition. It is more narrative, southern narrative even, than the works I made especially for the thesis exhibition.



No. 2

## Adam

**Paper Clay,  
28.5x15x15 in**

This is the first large torso with paper clay. A strong De Staebler influence is evident in this work. The torso is twisting, the evidence of its creation is left showing as a gestural and naked metaphor for the struggle of any life. This is a continuation of 15 years of exploring the torso.





No. 3

## Tennessee Yakshi

Paper Clay,  
35.5x20.5x13 in

This female torso is slightly larger than life-sized and full-round. A suggestion of arms reads more like a fluttering short cape that continues to form her scapula in the back. A slight upward turn of clay at the neck suggests the head, and a slab of clay whose edges ripple across both loins predict organic works to come. The title is referencing the Asian Indian Yakshi, which is a voluptuous nature deity. I took liberties in combining the potbelly of her male counterpart, the Yaksha, with her gracious figure. She is an ideal, a monument in her own right.



No. 4

## Mars

Paper Clay,  
14x7x4

I did a series of three small 14-inch torsos: Luna, Mars and Torso Abstraction (catalogue no. 6). *Mars* has a dark purple-brown slip from my creek silt that has been rubbed lightly off with an iron oxide wash. I attribute this directly to the study of traditional American Potter's techniques. This full-round male torso with head has emphasized musculature that gives him a powerful presence. I applied the heavy slip to green ware. The rough outside texture I prefer swallows the dark slip in every crevice. Wiping it off in the green ware state gives a softer surface, much more pleasant to touch with all the detail in tact.



No. 5

## Mercury, the Messenger

**Paper Clay,  
30x20x10**

Mercury is a wall mounted bas-relief sculpture. It has presence. This piece is about thrust and form. A hand dragging fingers through convex clay, pushing it down to reveal what is not torso, defines what is torso. The revealed figure reads like a robe in strong wind. The thigh and leg might as well be a surging wave crest of lava. An attached head is



equally abstracted,  
turned towards the  
goal, towards the  
wind. This is a  
gutsy piece verg-  
ing on clay for  
clay's sake.



No. 6

## Torso Abstraction

Paper Clay,  
26x18x10

This is the third in a series of 14-inch torsos (see *Mars*, catalogue no. 4). On this female torso with head, I really played with negative space to the point of losing the figure from one angle. As you move around the piece, the clay slabs organize themselves into a complete torso on the other side. She has heavy soda spray to the point of making a bubbly coating in places, but still toasty in color and appropriate for the piece. I



suggest that whether she is coming together as in forming, or coming apart as in deconstruction, would be based largely on the mental outlook of the viewer.

No. 7

## Home

**Paper Clay,  
26x18x10**

The interior armatures of all the torsos, both big and small, look something like this structure. It is based on a technique I learned from Paula Rice at her week-long workshop, *Reinventing the figure*, at The Appalachian Center for Crafts. I attached the head first, which I don't normally do. The sad, longing face became so strong on the startlingly architectonic torso that I had to stop working on it and let it live. The face I had actually made for another piece, but I didn't like it there. This way of working is similar to the random assembly technique I used in *Sketch for Einstein's Daydream* (catalogue no. 11).



No. 8

This was a difficult piece. They are so powerful in inferred meaning that I found it necessary to give them a rather positive title, just to remind viewers that it could be positive.

## Embrace

**Paper Clay,  
40x36x20**

Duality is the subject of this piece. Female/male, anima/animus, yin/yang, positive/negative, black/white—the number two. Each of these examples illustrates that there are two sides, and the two sides of this piece are necessary to stand up. I further emphasized this duality by painting porcelain slip on the insides of both pieces in a hakami style, to contrast against the very rough outer backs.



No. 9

## Lovers #4 with Flower

Paper Clay,  
39x25x10

I was reading Carl Jung and became interested in his ideas about the subconscious. I would pull a big slab down onto the table and begin pushing it, draping it, and folding it until I saw forms that interested me enough to keep and enhance them. Frequently a piece would change dramatically from what I thought it might be initially. This piece is a result of that method of working. The flower is the second of a series that get much larger (see *Orchid*, catalogue no. 13) and it becomes a metaphor for new life, rebirth, and conception cycles. On this piece it also adds a third dimension to an otherwise rather flat bas-relief.





No. 10

## In Community

Paper Clay,  
28 x 23.25 x 6

As in *Lovers #4* (catalogue no. 9) this wall-mounted sculpture was a result of spontaneous creativity. An unplanned event resulted in the clay getting harder than I liked before I was able to finish it. Rather than throw it out, I carved and pushed into it in new ways. The folds and rhythms became two-way figures. This piece was purchased for the Carroll Reece Museum's permanent collection.



No. 11

## Sketch for Einstein's Daydream

Paper Clay,  
16x12x4

As a direct result of studying Mary Frank's work, I wanted to try some smaller "sketches" of a figure in some type of landscape. I have been thinking a great deal about the difference between a figure and torso with no landscape, and a figure or torso that is in a landscape. I believe the difference is that a figure without a figure-ground relationship is a kind of ideal, a kind of archetype. A figure in any sort of figure-ground relationship is a specific figure at a specific time and place, therefore easier for us to relate directly to. According to some texts, Mary



Frank did a great deal of preparation for each piece she made. My plan was to work spontaneously, so I made a pile of torsos, a pile of heads, a pile of organic shapes, and found an inspired spontaneous day of random assembly. I have found that to be a pleasant way to utilize the benefits of paper clay because this method would be impossible with regular clay. This small wall mounted piece is one of the results.

No. 12

set it off beautifully. The three little torsos are meant to be figures in the rolling sea of time/space.

## Einstein's Daydream

Paper Clay,  
30x42x20

This piece is a large piece which I made with slabs. It took five old pillows, four old comforters, and lots of newspaper to prop it up while it dried as a draped form. It stood in my studio as greenware for probably four months before I had the nerve to call it finished—the way it always had been. A light soda spray really





No. 13

## Orchid

**Paper Clay,  
22.5x38x8.5**



The small flowers I had made fascinated me. Paper clay makes it easy to build and add onto the clay stems. I brought in a native wild flower book at another student's suggestion to study what they really look like. They can be quite erotic, especially the orchid family with lady slippers and such.

No. 14

### **3-D O'Keeffe Flower Pot: Pitcher Plant**

**Paper Clay,  
41x18x20**

The *Orchid* (catalogue no. 13) was a great success and very popular, but difficult to hang. I decided to make a freestanding flower. The shape evolved as I built it into a rather traditional vase form. I added the back hood inspired by my native pitcher plants and left the throat open. It is beautiful in its simplicity.



No. 15

**3-D O'Keeffe Flower Pot:  
#2 with Flower**

**Paper Clay,  
41x18x20**

Following the first *3-D O'Keeffe Flower Pot* (catalogue no. 14), my next experiment was to fill up all that beautiful clean open negative space with as frilly a flower as I could make. It is similar in size to the first pot.



No. 16

## Madonna

**Paper Clay,  
39x19x12**

Madonna is the first large paper clay sculpture I made. She is slab construction. She has been multiple fired, first with stains, then with reduction raku glazes in a gas kiln fired in oxidation, then pit fired. I am especially pleased with the relationship of the surface treatment swirls in her belly to the abstracted shape of her figure.



No. 17

## Lovers #3

Paper Clay,  
46x22x20

This is the second large paper clay sculpture I made. The legs are extruded with slab torsos added. I like the play between 2-D and 3-D. The negative spaces are beautiful as one moves around the piece. *Lovers #3* is also multiple fired, first with stains, then pit fired.



## CONCLUSION

During the course of this work, I realized that in my art experience in New York City, I wandered too far away from the work I wanted to make. The study of archetypes, particularly through mythology, has helped me re-center my figurative sculptures. The study of Jungian concepts has led me to a number of other notable authors, including contemporary interpretations by Robert Johnson [20] , Joseph Campbell [21] , Carol Pearson [22] , Matthew Fox [23], and Clarissa Pinkola Estes [24] . While these authors are worthy of a lifetime's study, I only have time to make brief mention of their names. Also of great use to me have been works by these same authors regarding the role of serendipity, chance and the subconscious.

My favorite ancient surprise was the Sheela-Na-Gig, a female guardian carved onto every cornerstone of every protective wall in ancient Ireland and beyond. [25] She spreads her genitalia wide over the gateways. According to legend, warring factions would see the center of the universe there, realize the insignificance of their intentions, and leave that place without doing harm. Every church had one.

Of tremendous inspiration to me has been direct contact with people who are doing "it." A three-week kiln-building workshop with Will Ruggles & Douglass Rankin at the North Carolina Pottery Museum in Seagrove, NC [26], took the mystery out of kiln building and wood



firing. Paula Rice [27], a large-scale figurative artist from Northern Arizona University had a great positive effect on me, and thereby on this body of work. I met Ms. Rice at a workshop she gave called *Re-Inventing the Figure* at the Appalachian Center for Crafts in Smithville, Tennessee. [28] We had many significant discussions about functional vs. sculptural ceramics in universities and about how figurative work fits into sculpture. She taught me new building techniques, new firing techniques, and new surface treatments that are incorporated here. Ms. Rice had the students work very fast, again and again, with short exercises. I found that, like my drawings, my clay sculpture was best when it was fresh, spontaneous, gestural, and released. In not having time to second-guess my work, I was brought around again to Jung's subconscious theories.

I recently discovered, while visiting Garth Clark Gallery in New York [29], a monograph by the French ceramic artist, George Jeanclos (figure 15). [30] He will be my next point of research.

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At ETSU, I taught myself a new medium, paper-clay. This appears to be the answer to most of my problems as a figurative ceramic artist. However, much research and experimentation is still needed with paper clay. I found that the commercially made paper clay rated for raku to cone 10, when fired to cone 4 was extremely brittle and even developed fissures well after firing. The same paper clay fired higher and the "homemade" paper clays did not have this problem. I will continue explorations of the figure, figure-ground relationships, and of surface treatments including textures, slips, stains and glazes. My intentions are to set up a home studio



Fig. 15

Georges Jeanclos  
*Kamakura Number 1*  
1984.

Terra-cotta. Mint Museum of Art, Charlotte, North Carolina. Allan Chasanoff Ceramic Collection



and kiln. Ultimately I would like to have a web site to post electronic images of recent work for direct sale. I want to actively seek out the best mentors I can imagine. I have learned to raise my goals and expectations. In all, however, what I am most happy about is the return of life, fertility and sensuality to my sculptures.



## NOTES

- [1] "Taliban begins pulling down statues, VHP vows retaliation." *The Times of India*, ONLINE. March 2, 2001, <http://www.timesofindia.com/020301/02indi21.htm>, (accessed June 6, 2001)
- [2] John Huntington, *The John C. and Susan L. Huntington Photographic Archive of Buddhist and Related Art*, <http://kaladarshan.arts.ohio-state.edu/>. (Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University, Department of the Arts, accessed March 15, 2001).
- [3] Michael Sullivan, "Taliban Destruction of Buddhist Relics Draws World Protests." *Weekend Edition Saturday*. (National Public Radio). WETS. March 3, 2001.
- [4] William Anderson and Clive Hicks, *Green Man: The Archetype of our Oneness with the Earth*. (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1990).
- [5] For example, see Sherman E. Lee, (1994) *A History of Far Eastern Art*. (New York: Harry N. Abrams. Inc.. 1994), Heinrich Zimmer, *Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization*. Edited by Joseph Campbell. (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), or Benjamin Rowland, *The Art and Architecture of India: Buddhist, Hindu, Jain*. (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd., 1953).
- [6] Richard J. Boyle, in Frank H. Goodyear, Jr., *Seven on the Figure*. (Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, 1979), p. 5.
- [7] Hayden Herrera, *Mary Frank*. (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1990), p. 10.
- [8] *ibid.*
- [9] *Artists talk on Art*, <http://www.atoa.ws/>, (New York: Artists talk on Art, accessed 5 June 2001).
- [10] Eleanor Munro, *Originals: American Women Artists*. (New York: Touchstone, 1982).
- [11] Herrera, *op. cit.*
- [12] *The Solar Cooking Archive*, <http://www.solarcooking.org/>, (Sacramento, California: Solar Cookers International, accessed July 6, 2001).

- [13] Harvey L. Jones, *Stephen De Staebler, Sculpture*. (The Oakland Museum, 1974), p. 7.
- [14] Donald Kuspit, *Stephen De Staebler: The Figure*. (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1987), p. 24.
- [15] Donald Kuspit, "Stephen De Staebler's Archaic Figures." *Ceramics Monthly*. (Columbus, Ohio: Professional Publications, Inc., 1988), pp. 28-30.
- [16] Ted Lindberg, *Stephen De Staebler*. (San Francisco: Emily Carr College of Art and Design and The Art Museum Association of America, 1983), p. 24.
- [17] Georgia O'Keeffe, *Georgia O'Keeffe*. (New York: The Viking Press, 1977).
- [18] Rosette Gault, *Paper clay*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998).
- [19] Axner Pottery Supply, <http://www.axner.com>, accessed June 6, 2001.
- [20] Robert Johnson, *Owning Your Own Shadow*. (New York: HarperCollins, 1983).
- [21] Joseph Campbell, *The Inner Reaches of Outer Space*. (New York: Harper & Row, 1986).
- [22] Carol S. Pearson, *The Hero Within*. (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998).
- [23] Matthew Fox, *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ*, (New York, Harper & Row, Inc. 1988).
- [24] Clarissa Pinkola Estes, *Women Who Run With the Wolves*. (New York: Ballentine Books, 1992).
- [25] Jack Roberts and Joanne McMahon, *An Illustrated Map of the Sheela-Na-Gigs of Britain and Ireland*. (Bandia Publishing, 1997).
- [26] *North Carolina Pottery Center Home Page*, <http://www.ncpotterycenter.com/>. (Seagrove, North Carolina: North Carolina Pottery Center, accessed June 6, 2001).
- [27] Dannon Rhudy, "Paula Rice: Works of Consequence," *Ceramics Monthly*, January 2001, pp 36-38. See also <http://www.Ceramicsmonthly.org/>.
- [28] *Appalachian Center For Crafts*, <http://craftcenter.tntech.edu>, (Smithville, Tennessee: Appalachian Center for Crafts, accessed June 6, 2001).
- [29] *Garth Clark Gallery*, <http://www.GarthClark.com>. (New York: Garth Clark Gallery, accessed July 6, 2001).
- [30] See, for example, Françoise Magny, *Georges Jeanclos*. (Lille, France: Musée de l'Hospice Comtesse, 1999).

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Baruch College, Manhattan, New York  
1992-1993

Ringling School of Art and Design, Sarasota, FL  
Bachelor of Fine Arts, with Honors, 1993

Workshops: Paula Rice, "Reinventing the Figure" one-week workshop and Michael Weisner, "Southwestern Pottery" one-week workshop, Appalachian Center for Crafts, 2000; Ruggles and Rankin, three week kiln building workshop, North Carolina Pottery Center, 2000

Short workshops: Mark Hewitt, 2001, Tom Spleth, 2000, Hector and Gracella Gallegos, 2000, Odyssey Center for the Ceramic Arts, Asheville, NC; Steven and Susan Kemenyffy, 1988, Patrick Lindheart, "Master Printmaking," 1988, Ringling School of Art, Sarasota FL

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

Teaching Associate, East Tennessee State University Fine Arts Department, foundations courses in Ceramics, 2-D design, 3-D design, Color Theory 1999-2001

Calendar Editor, Museums New York Magazine 1995-1996

Visiting Artist and lecturer, senior Fine Arts Thesis Retreat, Ringling School of Art, Sarasota FL 1994

Designer and fabricator, prototype sculptures for international company, 1990-1994

Artist, large-scale interior and exterior murals, Florida, Hawaii and Tennessee

Assistant to head of the Sculpture Department during the instruction of bronze and aluminum foundry procedures, lost wax techniques and welding, Ringling School of Art and Design, Sarasota, FL, 1989-1988

Producer and Director, documentary video, "Binding and Compression," 1989

Art Program Director, Palama Settlement, three-month Summer Arts Program for 150 children, Hono, HI, 1983

Graphic artis, Honolulu, HI, 1985-1983; Knoxville, TN, 1982

HONORS AND AWARDS:

Phi Kappa Phi Honor Society, ETSU Chapter, 2001

New York "Artist's Space" Grant, 1991

Who's Who Among Students in American Universities and Colleges, 1989 and 1987

Featured emerging artist, "Conversations with Annette Scherman," Channel 4, Sarasota, FL, 1988

Represented Ringling School of Art and Design in the AAASC National Traveling Print Show, 1988

SELECTED EXHIBITIONS:

23rd Annual First Tennessee Bank Art Show 2001, Reece Museum, Johnson City, TN

"A Difference of Opinion," Master of Fine Arts Exhibition, 2001, Carroll Reece Museum, East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, TN



## SELECTED EXHIBITIONS: continued

National Conference on Education in the Ceramic Arts Juried Regional Show, 2001, Rock Hill Arts Council, SC  
Graduate Honors Exhibition, 2001, Carroll Reece Museum, East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, TN  
Graduate Honors Exhibition, 2000, Carroll Reece Museum, East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, TN  
Honors Portfolio Print Exchange, 1999, University of Georgia  
"Works In Progress," solo exhibition, 1998, Virginia Intermont College, Bristol, VA  
"Exposure and Vulnerability," National Outdoor Sculpture Juried Exhibition, 1995, 1994, and 1993, New York State Parks Commission and the Brooklyn Waterfront Artists Coalition, Empire Fulton Ferry State Park, New York  
"From the Bar," solo print and drawing exhibition, 1995, 360 Third Ave, New York, NY  
"Wooden Objects," invitational group exhibition, 1993, Joshua's Trees, New York, NY  
"Underground," two-artist exhibition, 1993, Fourth Street, New York, NY  
Showcase, two-artist exhibition, 1991, The America-Japan Art Association, the Ise Cultural Foundation, and the Soho Art House, 1993, 555 Broadway, New York, NY  
"Assembly Required III," 1992, Zazoo Club, New York, NY  
"Snare & Pop," solo exhibition, 1992, Ise Cultural Foundation in cooperation with 555 Broadway, New York, NY  
AIR Open Group Exhibition, 1992, Soho, New York, NY  
"Group of Five," new works exhibition, 1991, Cork Gallery at Avery Fisher Hall, Lincoln Center Plaza, New York, NY

"Assembly Required II," juried exhibition of five artists, 1991, Kampo Cultural Center, Soho, New York, NY  
"Assembly Required," Installation in a five-artist exhibition, 1991, Broome Street Gallery, New York, NY  
"Nude Show," Invitational group exhibition, 1990, SixToSix Gallery, New York, NY  
"Binding and Compression," solo exhibition, 1989, Sarasota, FL  
"Art in the Park," group exhibition, 1989, 1988, and 1987, St Armand's Circle Association, Sarasota, FL  
"Best of Ringling," juried group exhibition, 1989 and 1988, Sarasota, FL  
"Emerging Artists," juried group exhibition, 1988, Voorhees Gallery, Sarasota, FL  
"National Traveling Printmakers Exhibition," 1988, Association of Accredited Art Schools  
"Genesis," solo exhibition, 1988, North Gallery, Sarasota, FL  
Juried group exhibition, 1988, American Savings and Loan, Sarasota, FL  
Juried sculpture exhibition, 1988, Longboat Key Art Association, Sarasota, FL  
"A Studio Opening of 12 Artists," 1987, Sarasota, FL  
1st Annual Career Awards Competition in Art, 1984, National Society of Arts and Letters, Honolulu, HI  
Group exhibition, 1981, Dogwood Arts Festival, Knoxville, TN



## COLOPHON

Body text was set in BernhardMod BT Roman, 14pt. Titles and headings were set in Arrus BT Roman, small caps. Type was either black or Crayola *Swamp Fire*.

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