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HARRIS, JOHN PAUL. Heads. (1975)  
Directed by: Gilbert Carpenter. Pp. 3.

This thesis consists of an exhibition of animal and human heads in fired clay, plaster, bronze, and cast iron.

NINETEEN-HUNDRED AND SEVENTY-FOUR

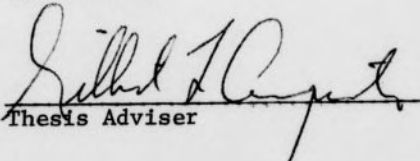
by

John Paul Harris

A Thesis Submitted to  
the Faculty of the Graduate School at  
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro  
in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Fine Arts

Greensboro  
1975

Approved by

  
Thesis Adviser

This thesis has been approved by the following  
committee of the Faculty of the Graduate School at the  
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December 9, 1975  
Date of Examination by Committee

CATALOGUE

<u>TITLE</u>	<u>HEIGHT</u>	<u>MEDIUM</u>
1. Cow	3½ "	Fired clay
2. Chicken	4¼ "	Fired clay
3. Goat	3½ "	Fired clay
4. Rabbit # 1	3½ "	Fired clay
5. Rabbit # 2	2½ "	Fired clay
6. Saung	14 "	Cast iron
7. Margie	15 "	Bronze
8. Becky	11¼ "	Plaster
9. Conrad (boy with red hair)	10½ "	Plaster
10. Mark	13 "	Plaster
11. Uncle Rankin	9 "	Plaster
12. Portrait of the Artist As a Young Wind	10 "	Fired slip

For my work I use clay as the initial medium, laid up on armatures, or built in the hand if size permits. I choose clay because it is very plastic, reusable, fairly durable when fired; and molds can be taken from it for casting in more durable materials. I find that as I come to understand clay, I am able to achieve greater technical flexibility and broaden the parameters of my conception.

I choose the head because it seems to articulate practically everything about the figure in a form of "shorthand". The head has the ability to focus the particular kinds of energy that the body expresses. Eric Ambler wrote:

A man's features, the bone structure and the tissue which covers it, are the product of a biological process; but his face he creates for himself. It is a statement of his habitual emotional attitude; the attitude which his desires need for their fulfillment and which his fears demand for their protection from prying eyes....It is a screen to his mind's nakedness. Only a few men, painters, have been able to see the mind through the face.

I see the head, or face, as the ultimate expression of not only man's mind, but soul as well. I am interested in exploring the "poetry of being" in the latter part of the Twentieth Century as our civilization approaches the third millennium.

I choose models for their availability and their face, which comes to the surface of the crowd.

My work with the head represents two possible ends (with human

heads) and a form of exercise (with animal heads). The primary end is the clay drawings in three dimensions which represents the immediate experience of the head. The heads of "Becky" and "Uncle Rankin" are the best examples of this end. Usually the work is done in two or three hours involving one or two sittings. It is very like a drawing in its short execution time and the strokes of clay which could easily be compared to marks on paper. The heads at best appear to be expanding and have a turgid surface. This turgidity comes from the application of clay as clay, allowing it to bulge and breathe, rather than pounding and smearing it to death. The expressive power of the head and the clay takes precedence over any academic rendering of the form. The most obvious failing, in an academic sense, is the lack of active treatment of the eyeballs. However, in their absence, they attain an expressiveness that is somewhat like the emptiness of a gun barrel. The form around the empty eye sockets points the hollows at the space before the head, charging the space in a way that staring balls and pupils never could. A special option for certain heads is making mostly closed eyes, as in the head of "Becky". On the other hand, animal eyes often protrude from the head and can be dealt with as any other form. There is an inherent purity of uncompromisingly functional form found in animals that is simpler and easier to understand than the civilized, social head of a human. My work with animals broadens the kinds of forms usually encountered and

offers a delightful alternative to human heads.

The second possible end in my work is the taking of the head for one reason or another to a more refined state than the initial clay sketch allows. Usually the reason for this is a failure on my part to stop the initial thrust at the critical time, or the failure to achieve an inflated turgidity. In any case, the possibility of struggling with and manipulating the form leads me in the refinement process. Almost inevitably the tendency of these refinements is toward a destruction of the freshness of the first effort, though it is my intention to retain as much as possible of their vitality. Delacroix said that the ideal style would be a combination of Michelangelo and Goya. (In painting I would pair up the styles of Leonardo and Goya, but) as a sculptor, I agree with Delacroix. The "Portrait of the Artist as a Young Wind" represents my efforts to produce a sculptural form that is derived from my own inner rhythms even though it lacks the immediacy of Goya's "mad" art. This refinement is part of my leaning in the direction of Brancusi's essences, and Trova's minimal humanoids. It becomes obvious to me that there is a delicate balance between immediacy of expression and cogitated refinement of form. When I am able to achieve this balance I think I will have fused the two divergent elements of my work.