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This Thesis for THE MENTOR SERIES
by
David Griggs
has been accepted for the
B.A. Hamilton College, 1977

A thesis submitted to the faculty of the Graduate
School of the University of Colorado in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts
Department of Fine Arts, Creative Art

1984

Garrison Koets
Garrison Koets

Date _____

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The Greek mythological figure Mentor was the wise friend to whom Odysseus entrusted his household while engaged in the Trojan War, in Homer's *Iliad*. Mentor remained in Ithaca as counselor to Odysseus's wife Penelope, and tutor to his son Telemachus. The goddess Athena assumed by Athena to rouse Telemachus out of his inactivity in search of his father, and later to accept the inevitability of events and not plunge Ithaca into civil war. From these events the term "mentor" has come to mean a wise and faithful counselor, and more specifically a compassionate teacher.

This Thesis for the Master of Fine Arts Degree by

David Griggs

has been approved for the

Department of

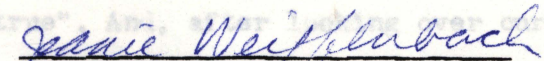
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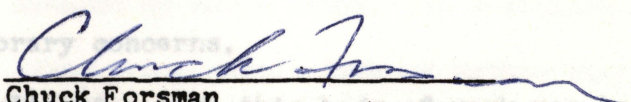
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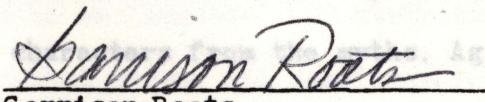
This series of sculptural wall figures relies heavily on an understanding of mythology. When I first began to review some of the Greek mythological figures at their apparent contemporary reappearances, I was struck by a quality which even today seems to "ring true". These figures have a quality which even today seems to "ring true".


Jerry Kunkel

are very contemporary concerns. My first interest in this body of work was to give form to specific mythological figures. Agamemnon, Clytemnestra, Cretes, and Aegisthus have been represented in earlier work. But I realized that I was not actually interested in the characters as personalities. Rather, I became interested in those things that gave these personalities mythic stature. The gods and mortals of Greek mythology were not modeled after real Greeks. Instead,


Jeanie Weiffenbach


Chuck Forsman


Garrison Roots

Date _____

these characters were coined by the Greeks to represent certain personality traits or attitudes. They were symbols for the potential of these things. Among themselves, these gods presented

The Greek mythological figure Mentor was the wise friend to whom Odysseus entrusted his household while engaged in the Trojan War. In Homer's epic poem, Mentor remains behind in Ithaca as counselor to Odysseus' wife Penelope, and tutor to his son Telemachus. The guise of Mentor is assumed by Athena to rouse Telemachus out of Ithaca in search of his father, and later to accept the inevitability of events and not plunge Ithaca into civil war. From these events the term "mentor" has come to mean a wise and faithful counselor, and more specifically a compassionate teacher.

This series of sculptural wall figures relies heavily on an understanding of mythology. When I first began to review some of the Greek myths and plays I was amazed at their apparent contemporary relevance. They have a quality which even today seems to "ring true". And, after looking over current trends in the art world, I recognized that mythology and myth-making are very contemporary concerns.

My first inclination with this body of work was to give form to specific characters from the myths. Agamemnon, Clytemnestra, Orestes, and Aegisthus have all been represented in earlier work. But I realized that I was not actually interested in the characters as personalities. Rather, I became interested in those things that gave those personalities mythic stature. The gods and mortals of Greek mythology were not modeled after real Greeks. Instead,

these characters were coined by the Greeks to represent certain personality traits or attitudes. They were symbols for the potential of these things. Among themselves, these gods presented idealized versions of those traits and attitudes. In their relationships with mortals they often come to signify the failure of the ideal.

In designing these sculptural wall figures my primary aim is to have them function like the characters in the myths. I want them to be mythic, in that they represent something, whether it be an event, trait, or attitude. They should take a stand, hold a position, or have a characteristic way of viewing the world. The characters in Greek myths are practically cartoons. For the most part they are one-dimensional: they serve to embody or represent one attitude, and they are often so overwhelmed by that attitude or world view that it becomes a weakness as well as a strength. But the undertaking of contemporary cartoons has shifted. No longer do cartoons play as significant a role in providing mythic figures. With greater access to more and more information, the need for mythical figures is more directly handled by movie stars, pop musicians, and New York artists. When these people take on mythic stature they are referred to as "legends" (in their own time or mind). Unfortunately for that person and sometimes for the public, that legend's public influence is usually bound to their supposed legendary abilities. Witness the common lack of respect for political positions taken by celebrities, or the public reaction to artists who use their artistic devices to take political stands. A legendary figure represents something in the public

eye, and any aggressive trespassing into other areas of influence is often treated with ridicule or resentment.

The point of this is that a distinction has to be made between contemporary legends and "true" myths. Legendary figures attain stature because of something they have done. The "legend" is tacked on to a real and complex personality. With a mythic figure, however, that (legendary) trait is it's personality. A mythic character is an embodiment of that event, trait, or attitude which it represents. Like cartoons, mythic figures are relentlessly one-dimensional. They don't even have political positions. With this distinction in mind I am interested in giving the wall figures a sense of mythic stature rather than mere legendary ability. They should represent something by seeming to be the embodiment of that something. In this way they should appear godlike, because they are their attitudes rather than have their attitudes. (For Christians, God is love, not God has love.)

As this series of work evolved I questioned my own motivation for doing the work. I felt that my interest in mythology was only part of the reason for making these figures. I began to draw on personal experiences in order to understand the form that the work was taking. Each figure had three separate stages to it's completion. First, they were proportionately sketched out and then scaled up to size with a grid. Next, the component pieces were traced, cut out of styrofoam, and glued together. Finally, each figure was gessoed, underpainted with latex paints, and finished with alkyds. Between each stage I tried to "characterize" the figures so that I could understand how

to handle them during the next step. I characterized each figure by identifying it in terms of it's apparent gesture, motion, direction, and point of view. I also drew on personal experience to delineate the figures according to people that I knew. By relating the figure to a real person I was better able to understand why that figure appeared in it's specific form. The form gave clues to that one-dimensionality that I was looking for; that attitude, point of view, or characteristic way of dealing with the world. In other words I was making a connection between outward appearance and inner character. This relationship between appearance and temperament is the concern of the pseudo-science physiognomy. According to physiognomy, humans can be divided into several different physical types, and each group has a characteristic temperament or attitude. This "science" stems from the inveterate practice of making quick evaluations of the many people that we encounter every day, an ability which was probably more valuable to our ancestors than it is to us. In order to evaluate the wall figures I compared them to people that I knew well. By relating each figure to a real person I could exhume that figure's predominant (human) quality (in terms of motivation, temperament, or attitude) and try to give that quality visual form. The visual form revealed itself in each figure's characteristic color, pattern, shape, and gesture.


The other personal motivation for this work that I am aware of has to do with the title that I've given this series. The Greek figure Mentor was a bit player in Homer's Odyssey. And yet, for doing his bit he's established quite a legacy. The term "mentor" is exceptionally positive, and anyone identified

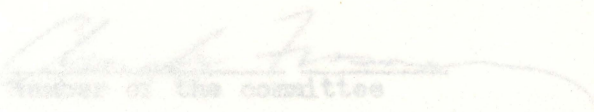
as a mentor has been undoubtedly honored. Looking back at my reasons for entering graduate school, I realize now that one of the things that I hoped to find was a mentor. Before graduate school I had a good studio and a supportive job, but I was floundering as an artist for lack of direction. I have not found a mentor here, but I did find direction. And, several people have acted as mentors here at appropriate times. I think that my hope of finding that unique student-teacher relationship was unrealistic. It seems that a university system could not support that kind of relationship. It's not efficient enough, and could not be made financially feasible. It has also occurred to me that graduate school, at best, may recognize this and attempt to train students to be their own mentors.


While making these wall figures I noticed how this tied in with my graduate school experience. I've had several artistic mentors in school, and some others before. Each of these people have been influential in their own peculiar way. So, instead of finding one person who could motivate me in many ways depending upon what I needed at the time, I've found several people who have happened to push me in different directions at appropriately different times. Any true mentorial relationship would have to be very complex and demand that many different roles be played by that mentor. Probably that relationship would be too demanding for any one person over a long period of time, and so it would be better handled by several people. While thinking about this I began to characterize the figures in terms of this unique relationship. If an "ideal" mentorial relationship were dissected


into it's component parts, it would have many levels of motivation and manipulation. As a wise counselor, a mentor would need to distance himself enough to be objective (Mentor I (the witness)), (Mentor VII (the gadfly)). As a faithful ally, a mentor would have to show loyalty and even friendly complicity (Mentor III (the supplicant)), (Mentor VI (the accomplice)). But a mentor may also want to motivate his student by challenging him or competing with him (Mentor IV (the adversary)), (Mentor II (the rival)). As a compassionate teacher, a mentor might want to show sympathy, encouragement, or praise (Mentor III (the supplicant)). But an effective mentor would also realize the benefits of harsh criticism and disruption in motivating his student (Mentor VII (the gadfly)), (Mentor VIII (the vandal)).


Department of Fine Arts

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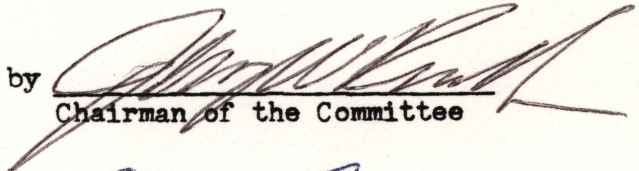

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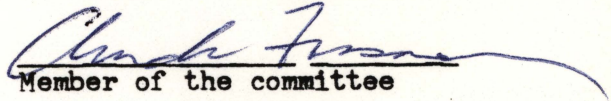

 Chairperson, Department of Fine Arts

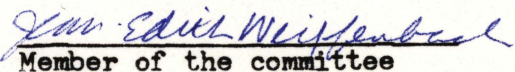
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for the degree Master of Fine Arts

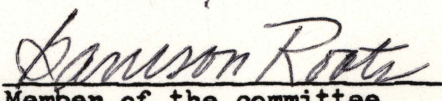
alkyd on styrofoam 110 David Griggs Mentor I (the witness)
alkyd on styrofoam has submitted this written thesis I (the rival)
alkyd on styrofoam as a supplement to the creative thesis (the supplicant)
alkyd on styrofoam 111 x 5 and 17" Mentor IV (the adversary)
alkyd on styrofoam 121 eight slides Mentor VI (the accomplice)
alkyd on styrofoam which are in the permanent possession of the (the gaffly)
alkyd on styrofoam University of Colorado and recorded with the (the vandal)
alkyd on styrofoam Department of Fine Arts (Heckel and Hyde)

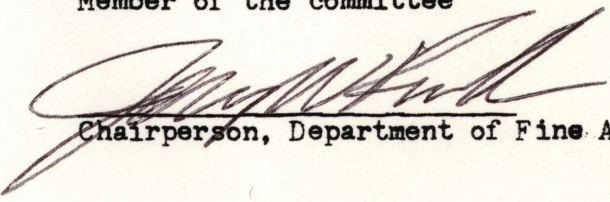
Approved by


Chairman of the Committee


Member of the committee


Member of the committee


Member of the committee


Chairperson, Department of Fine Arts

Eight slides, Alkyd on styrofoam

alkyd on styrofoam	110 x 42 x 21"	Mentor I (the witness)
alkyd on styrofoam	107 x 54 x 14"	Mentor II (the rival)
alkyd on styrofoam	102 x 50 x 56"	Mentor III (the supplicant)
alkyd on styrofoam	113 x 52 x 13"	Mentor IV (the adversary)
alkyd on styrofoam	121 x 56 x 18"	Mentor VI (the accomplice)
alkyd on styrofoam	133 x 51 x 17"	Mentor VII (the gadfly)
alkyd on styrofoam	135 x 53 x 16"	Mentor VIII (the vandal)
alkyd on styrofoam	74 x 60 x 11"	Jeckel (Heckel and Hyde)

FIG 222

