

THE UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

"PERSONAL MYTHOLOGIES"

A Written Accompaniment to the Thesis Exhibition

by

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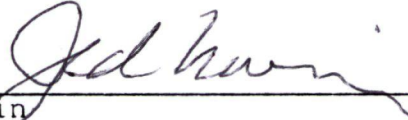
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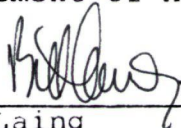
The undersigned certify that they have viewed and read and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for acceptance, respectively, a Thesis Exhibition and a supporting written paper entitled "Personal Mythologies": An Accompaniment to the Thesis Exhibition, submitted by Kirsten Abrahamson in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts.



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ABSTRACT

The sculptures created in the exhibition Personal Mythologies represent a variety of responses to personal circumstances, experiences, and feelings relating to various events in the past two years of my life, and therefore are, for the most part, autobiographical.

The works are created primarily out of low-fire clay and glazes, incorporating a representational language which is figurative, narrative, and symbolic, and often contains elements of social and political satire of a local and personal nature.

The accompanying support paper outlines specific historical styles and elements which have had major or relevant influence in the work in this exhibition. This is followed by a discussion of the actual works in the exhibition which were completed during my tenure as a graduate student at the University of Calgary.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

My work most often grows out of personal experience, and therefore is autobiographical. Technically, the work is usually fairly complex; high quality of craftsmanship is demanded. However, the main focus of the work is social commentary, referring to direct and local experiences.

By incorporating representational language which is figurative, narrative, and symbolic, the work expresses subjective feelings and also describes certain situations.

Because the work is individualistic, and often contains elements of social and political satire, it has become necessary to develop personal allegorical and symbolic imagery to maintain an element of disguise. It is somewhat like exposing the contents of my private diary, except that the contents are in a foreign language which only I can interpret fluently. This approach allows me more freedom to expose a larger portion of my emotional life while still retaining much of the exact meaning relatively disguised. But although the ideas are camouflaged, the imagery and symbolism have a universal quality, which enables a viewer to gain at least

partial access to my idea, and/or to invent his or her own logical interpretation of what the work is about.

The following pages will attempt first to ascertain certain elements which have had major or relevant influence in my work. Once these have been established, the actual works which have been completed during my tenure as a graduate student at The University of Calgary (September 1988 - August 1990), will be discussed.

CHAPTER TWO

Influences

While many historical influences are apparent in the technical, decorative, and conceptual aspects of my work, the three most important, from which elements have been consciously incorporated, are, first and foremost, the technical and conceptual aspects of the California ceramic Funk movement which surfaced in the early 1960s. Second, and to a slightly lesser degree, technical and conceptual aspects of early 20th century American figurative ceramics, which were Austrian-influenced, and which developed in the Cleveland area in the late 1920s. Third, conceptual aspects of 19th century French caricatures created by such artists as Honore Daumier and Charles Philipon.

Having been born and raised in Cleveland, Ohio, I was exposed at an early age, via annual school field trips to the Cleveland Museum of Art, to the ceramic sculpture which evolved in that area during the first half of the century. Many years later, in 1979, when I moved to Calgary to attend the Alberta College of Art, I was exposed to ceramic Funk sculpture through one of my instructors who had studied in the United States and had obvious Funk influences in her work.

Through visiting artists' presentations at the College, attending local and international ceramics conferences and summer workshops at the Banff Centre, I was further exposed to ceramic Funk sculptors such as Robert Arneson (b. 1930), Joe Fafard (b. 1942), Marilyn Levine (b. 1935), and Richard Shaw (b. 1941), all of whom had a major impact on the early development and direction of my work.

Because these two historical ceramic influences bear the most weight on the style and approach of my work, I will first discuss them, chronologically, and follow up with a brief discussion of the influence of the 19th century French caricaturists.

CHAPTER THREE

Historical Ceramic Influences

It should be noted that figurative ceramic sculpture in North America has not even a century of tradition, and that early 20th century Cleveland ceramics, and the later California Funk, are, for the most part, the only two major periods and styles of figurative ceramic sculpture on this continent. Until the 1920s, ceramics had little to offer the art world except "tasteful art pottery which was popular through the end of World War I".¹ While bronze and marble were strongly entrenched in the art world with their long and rich histories of use, ceramics carried a stigma, restricted primarily to the making of utilitarian objects, or regarded as merely contributing to the bronze-casting process. Therefore, in the 1920s, when eastern Americans were exposed to the figurative ceramic sculpture of the Viennese, the Austrian principles and styles were eagerly adopted. To properly understand this Austrian influence, we must first look to 19th century Europe.

CHAPTER FOUR

Early twentieth Century Ceramics and Their European Roots

The nineteenth century in Europe witnessed the industrial revolution. As a result of mass production, stemming from the industrializing of the manufacturing process, cities grew at incredible rates. The demand for consumer products increased as well. In Pioneers of Modern Design, first published in 1936, Nikolaus Pevsner writes that the growth of industry was the principal cause of virtual extinction of the working methods of skilled artisans.² While the use of machines to create art during this period provided new technical alternatives for creating utilitarian and decorative objects quickly and in large quantities much more cheaply than by the hands of a skilled artisan, industries had little concern for the aesthetic qualities of the objects they manufactured. Instead of working within an established tradition, manufacturers invented their own standards; the shape and appearance of industrialized art was left to artistically uneducated creators. Because growth happened so quickly, quantity soon replaced quality; refined craftsmanship was jettisoned in the name of progress.

As with everything else machine-made during this era,

ceramic sculpture fell victim to commercialism in the sense that little concern was given to high aesthetic quality in the product. Pristine mold-made figurines glazed with soft, subdued colours, usually depicting male and female aristocrats of the previous century, were produced by the thousands as early as the middle of the 18th century. Employing the slip-casting process and various molds, manufacturers produced these wares cheaply and quickly with the aid of unskilled laborers. Poor in aesthetic quality, and signalling the demise of craftsmanship in the product, these relics can still be found today, usually cluttering up tables at flea markets and antique displays at shopping malls.

Thus, while industrial society now had the mechanical techniques to bypass many of the labor-intensive elements of the arts and crafts, it had not yet the means to produce anything of real aesthetic quality. Unfortunately, the buying public did not seem to care or even notice the difference, most likely because they were thrilled at the fact that these machine-made goods cost only a fraction of what an original work made by an artist would cost, and buyers were also probably uneducated in matters calling for aesthetic taste. As a result, many artists were forced to close their businesses and ceased to practice. However, certain artists began to fight back by trying to revive the art of the hand-made object and to reinstate the dignity of skilled artists.

William Morris (1834-1896), a London artist who was strongly influenced by Ruskin, the English critic and social theorist, was trained in the medieval tradition; Morris was an important pioneer in re-establishing artistic craftsmanship to counteract the industrial degradation of something he felt should be "made by the people, for the people".³ And although he does not comment on them directly, it is a reasonable assumption, based on his disgust for machine-made art, as Pevsner points out, that Morris would have abhorred the ceramic castwares of his day because they lacked individual communication with skilled artists; instead, they were mass produced through the use of molds. The importance of the work having a direct input by an artist could be compared to the importance of a surgeon's presence during an operation -- it would not be wise to leave the surgery in the hands of someone with no medical training.

In 1861, Morris opened a firm called Morris, Marshall, and Faulkner. Their objectives were to establish themselves as fine-art craftsmen specializing in painting, carving, metal works, and furniture making.⁴ All work was done in the medieval tradition, without machinery. In doing this, Morris influenced many followers. One such example, relevant to ceramic sculpture, is the evidence of his ideologies in the Austrian commercial production establishment, the Wiener Werkstätte (Viennese Workshops). Founded in 1903, it did

incorporate machines but also strove to retain integrity in idea, form, and skill by employing skilled designers and artists.

Ceramics were incorporated into the Werkstätte's production in 1917. At this time several talented ceramists such as Susi Singer (1881-1965), and Vally Weiselthier (1895-1945) were employed, and began to produce a line of one-of-a-kind figurative ceramics. The production facility, and the nature of their employment, enabled them to "aspire to the status of full-fledged artists."⁵ Their work was distinguished by their direct and daring hands-on approach to the clay, the use of bright vivid colours, and, as well, the originality of the ideas and images. A high quality of craftsmanship in their work became extremely important, especially with the addition of a spontaneous, whimsical, and decorative finesse -- a marked difference from those horrific cast figurines mentioned earlier.

In 1928 an exhibition of international ceramics, which included works by the Viennese artists, was mounted in America. It opened in New York at the Metropolitan Museum of Modern Art; this was followed shortly by a showing at the Cleveland Museum of Art.⁶ At that time, an Austrian teacher, Julius Mihalik, moved from Vienna to Cleveland and began teaching at the Cleveland Institute of Art.⁷ Mihalik is

credited as being one of the key people who introduced Viennese ceramic design principles to America. These circumstances were the major influences which caused several Cleveland artists such as Viktor Schreckengost (1906-) and Russel Barnett Aitken (1910-) to be influenced and to adopt some Viennese styles and decorative techniques, developing a hybrid style with a unique American flavor which dominated eastern American ceramic sculpture for the next twenty years. While the Cleveland artists' work reflected the Austrians' direct, hands-on approach, their high quality of craftsmanship, and their colourful, whimsical, light-hearted style, it also added a new element, satire, and displayed a more daring conceptual approach to its subject matter, reflecting the attitudes of American culture.

This new approach can most likely be largely attributed to the socio-economic circumstances of the period, which included the Great Depression and World War II; these were two challenging decades which tried the spirits of the American people. Morale was low; the nation needed an escape from all its troubles during these hard times. One of the most successful mechanisms counteracting low spirits during this period was comic relief. This can be seen in movies such as those of the manic Marx Brothers, and more politically satirical films such as Charlie Chaplin's film The Great Dictator, (1940). Evidence of this is also found in music,

such as Spike Jones's satirical musical salute to Adolph Hitler, Der Fuehrer's Face, at about the same time.

Parallels to this type of humor can also be found in the period's ceramic sculpture, especially in the works of Viktor Schreckengost, who studied at the Cleveland Institute of Art in 1929, then in Vienna a few years later.⁸ Apocalypse '42, (1942), is a good example of this. While it retains the bright colours and whimsical style of the Viennese ceramics, it nevertheless depicts the four horsemen of the Apocalypse, portrayed respectively by Death in a Nazi uniform, with Hitler, Hirohito, and Mussolini riding one furiously galloping horse. Each character bears a distinct likeness to its original, and the work is executed in such a way that at first glance it appears to be a cute, light-hearted, humorous caricature. Upon closer examination, this superficial caricature is blotted out by its unnerving political statement equating specific powerful rulers to the mythic powers of evil. Iconographically and historically, this work is extremely important; it is probably the first time ceramic sculpture confronted a topical political issue of deep significance.

Not all works of this period carried such serious statements. Light-hearted satire often accompanied images through multi-layered meanings. Russell Barnett Aitken,

another disciple of the Viennese style, also studied at the Cleveland Institute of Art and often used parody, but not with as serious an intent as his contemporary Schreckengost. Aitken explored themes which were in a more concrete -- that is, non-symbolic -- realm, such as self-portraits and memories of his student days. In his book, The Diversion of the Keramos, Ross Anderson describes Aitken as "a real character", taking on the international art scene in his burlesque of a Salvador Dali painting, which he entitled Futility of a Well Ordered Life, (1935).⁹ Aitken depicts an eighteen inch high turquoise-haired woman with a vase inside her midriff, clocks for breasts, mice racing around her abdomen, and lambchops sprouting out of her shoulders. This piece is obviously Viennese in its inspiration and rendering, but the idea is boldly American in its ebullient satire. This depiction embraced the eccentric notions of Dali, including his surrealistic use of objects and their juxtapositions. It is visual double talk: while it pays tribute to the artist whom the ceramist so admired by using his typical concept and imagery, the work at the same time pokes fun at Dali both through its title and in its presentation of a Dali work à la Aitken.

The principles embodied in these works forshadowed the Funk movement which emerged in San Francisco's Bay area in the early 1960s, the parallel lying in the social and political

narratives and the daring attempts at confronting and satirically parodying actual events. These aspects are also common in my own work, in that clay is used as a vehicle to express social and political circumstances in a somewhat similar technical and conceptual fashion. I feel, however, that there is more of a closeness in my work to that of the California ceramists from the 1960s onward.

CHAPTER FIVE

The 1960s and the Emergence of Funk

"Funk." Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary provides three quite different definitions of this word: a state of paralyzing fear; having an earthy unsophisticated style and feeling; having a style of the blues. The capitalized word "Funk" also describes an art movement which emerged in California in the 1960s.

The phases of "Funk" and "Bay area ceramics" are synonymous, standing for a tradition that has influenced and dominated the mainstream of ceramic sculpture in North America for over twenty-five years. Often figurative, narrative, bold, satirical, whimsical, and colorful, ceramic Funk sculpture sprang from San Francisco's ceramic community in the early 1960s, and its influence spread quickly across North America.

While many of the properties common in the earlier ceramics of eastern America are evident in the later Funk ceramics as well, there is no evidence of direct influence -- that is, no simple migration from Europe or from the eastern United States to the west coast. Perhaps there was a subtle

osmosis through exposure to travelling exhibitions from the east, and photographic reproductions, which excited some interest.

At the time Funk was being born, Pop Art and Andy Warhol were sanctifying everyday images as art in New York; on the west coast, ceramists were taking an opposite and deliberately iconoclastic approach. Perhaps ceramic sculpture took the direction it did as a reaction to the times. The 1960s in the United States was without a doubt one of the most domestically rebellious periods in recent American history. That decade witnessed the assassinations of two Kennedys, Malcolm X, and Martin Luther King; the American people felt social and political unrest during the Nixon and Johnson administrations; and there were also the wrenching anxieties and frustrations caused by the Vietnam War. People marched for peace, ecology, equality, or any of many other ardently pursued causes. This was also the decade of the generation gap, of flower children, free love, and the drug culture. At the urging of Timothy Leary, people were tuning in and dropping out. The result was the development of an unprecedented subculture. Within this context, the arts began to take on a new attitude, rejecting the conventional and opting for more radical approaches.

The technical realizations of the ideas and forms of the era in ceramic Funk sculpture (and in the earlier works of Wieselthier and the Cleveland artists) -- aside from the

obvious talents of the artists -- was mainly due to the use of low-fire clay and glazes. The maturation of clay and glazes at a lower temperature than stoneware (a durable clay commonly used for creating functional pottery) had two strong selling points: clay which matured at a lower heat when fired had a lesser chance of suffering cracks and warping, and allowed for a wider and brighter spectrum of colours than glazes available only in the high-fire range. This gave ceramic sculptors a higher success rate when creating large and/or awkward structures that, due to their forms, might not have survived the stress of stoneware-firing temperatures. It also provided a painter's rather than a potter's palette: stoneware glazes almost always provide only a small range of dull, muted colours, and the effects are often hard to repeat because the extreme heat produces many variables, whereas low-fire glazes, having to endure less heat stress, come in a wide variety of bright and more dependably reproducible colors. This gave ceramists the freedom to work as painters did -- with the palettes of their choice. It was also perfect for creating eye-catching imagery to stimulate an apathetic audience that, in San Francisco, "did not identify itself closely with contemporary art by any real level of positive patronage".¹⁰

The lack of interest in modern art in the San Francisco community, combined with cultural influences such as Mexican

folk art, American Indian pottery, as well as local phenomena and colourful cultural motivators such as strip joints, fast food outlets, commercialized junk, and pet cemeteries -- all these played a part in setting the mood for Funk style ceramics. Lump all of these components together with the radical national socio-economic and political attitudes so rampant then and it is not hard to understand why the Bay area artists created Funk. It was both a visual and a verbal attack on society, art, and the universe. The term itself described a free, earthy style of improvised street Jazz. The term was applied to west coast ceramics to epitomize its free-form appearance and the offbeat posture it had suddenly adopted. The Funk philosophy parodied many of the academic, social, and cultural foundations of art and society. Its proponents, in effect, said "Funk it" to all that. This attitude mirrored the hippies' distaste for the establishment. Even though Funk seems to have surfaced slightly before love beads and before the Flower Power children were first visible, it seems that Funk, like the hippie movement, stood for the rejection of convention and was, therefore, a rejection of some conditions then present in America. It was also during this period that one man came along who was to alter the course of contemporary ceramics for the next thirty years. Often referred to as the Grandfather of Funk, his name is Robert Arneson, and within the artworld he is internationally respected.

Wit is evident in every piece Robert Arneson has created. Wit has always been an underlying element in Funk, but it was Arneson who coined the name and developed the philosophy, and so, when someone mentions Funk style ceramics, it is Arneson we think of first. In his tireless energy and imagination he is like a Titan, forging new and adventurous directions for contemporary ceramics both technically and conceptually. His technical command of the medium reinforces his ability to duplicate ideas which encompass a realm extending from witty, sarcastic, and even obscene visual-verbal puns to extremely serious social and political statements. Arneson has been a major influence on my own work and development as an artist. He has produced prolifically, and was one of the first to introduce mixed media and mold-casted ceramic components into his sculpture. In a 1976 interview, Alfred Frankenstein praised Arneson for being "almost single-handedly responsible for the fact that ceramic sculpture is now a major sculptor's medium".¹¹

Born in Benicia, California, Robert Arneson received his B.A. from the California College of Arts and Crafts in 1954, and his M.F.A. from Mills College (Oakland) in 1958. In 1962 he became head of the ceramics department at the University of California, Davis, where he continues to teach.

In 1963 Arneson embarked on his famous John series,

because he felt the toilet bowl to be "the ultimate ceramic," and, "within the ceramic tradition which had no heritage".¹² The penile handles and vaginal drains (left unflushed), and unidentifiable scatological oozings that grace the surfaces are indicative of Arneson's characteristic humor and unbridled use of satire. The viewers of these works, in 1963, were, needless to say, shocked by his creations. But Arneson himself professed feigned surprise at the negative reactions to these pieces. In a 1976 interview he wondered "why people could look at toilets in their own homes and not be troubled by them but would look at my toilets in art galleries and be horrified".¹³ The interviewer pointed out that home toilets flush.

Wit is evident in other early Arneson works, especially in the realm of visual-verbal puns. These include Call Girl (1967), a telephone with breasts; Typewriter, (1965), a typewriter with red polished nails for keys; and Toasties (1965), in which a hand pops out of a toaster instead of a bread slice. The appeal of these works lies in their use of metaphor, and in their parodies of common utilitarian objects.

Arneson has created several works which involve self-portraiture and which make important social statements at the same time. The influence of this concept can be found in my own work and therefore credit must be given, at least partially, to Arneson for this. In Arneson's 1972 work

entitled Fragments of Western Civilization, he uses cast bricks with his name stamped on them to create a full scale self-portrait. He then scatters them about the floor as if the structure had crumbled. This suggests the fall of man and the "breakdown of American culture".¹⁴ In a more recent body of work, he makes an even bolder attempt at describing to us the threat of nuclear war -- a more serious issue. This work, exhibited at The University of Calgary's Nickle Arts Museum in 1988, combines drawings, bronze, and clay with mixed media. His images in this body of work include larger-than-life portraits of demonic figures who wear American Army uniforms, and fictitious portraits of people in the military who look like nuclear war victims. The clay pieces are colourfully glazed and the surface treatment is quite exquisite in its variety and control -- Arneson is a true master of surface manipulation and visual effects. A precedent can be found in the work of Viktor Schreckengost, Apocalypse '42; in his work, Arneson also uses the medium for political statements about war and death. Both artists approach the topic with an exacting technique that seems to belie its underlying bleakness. The images are still delightful to look at in their colours and whimsical styles of execution, but the figures represent nightmarish visions of separate holocausts. This ironic dichotomy evokes a tension within the viewers: they are irresistibly confronted with harsh contemporary realities.

Perhaps Arneson was seeing a different kind of hell -- his own. In 1984 he paid a brief but unforgettable visit to the Banff School of Fine Arts. Students were informed before his arrival that he was suffering from leukemia. He showed slides of his recent work, the Nuclear War series. In view of their obvious reference to death, perhaps these pieces also related to his awareness of his disease. Although he made no reference to this notion, two pieces indicated an interest in his own mortality. Both Nuke News (1985), and Forge (1984), are large bronze-cast pieces which include elements of self-portraiture. While all the other works within that series portrayed the human form in a more cartoon-like fashion, resembling no specific person, these two bronze pieces definitely portray the artist, and confront the transformation of the human body after death. They neglect any spiritual consolation which would help believers to come to terms with the prognosis of leukemia. These pieces are thus personal while still considering a common, universal question. They are therefore much more serious in intent than much of his earlier work, and this marks a divergence from the original Funk style: while form, surface, and sarcasm are carried over from the days of Arneson's John series, there is a seriousness of statement never before revealed explicitly which now cannot be denied, and it is for these reasons that Arneson's concepts have had such an impact on my work.

The combining of personal and political events and concepts are two major reason why I felt it necessary to include Robert Arneson as one of my main sources of inspiration. But it is not his work alone, nor Funk style ceramics, nor yet the earlier Cleveland style of ceramics which should take total credit for influencing the way I work, although there are many obvious technical and conceptual ideas which do parallel my own approach to making art. Another major source of influence, which has become apparent only in the past year and a half, are the theories and principles behind the works of the 19th century French caricaturists.

CHAPTER SIX

The Influence of 19th Century French Caricaturists

In Europe in the 19th century, governments were constantly being parodied by caricaturists in newspapers and journals to criticize political situations. Countries such as England were fairly tolerant of the caricaturists, who were often mercilessly sarcastic in their portrayal of governmental figures and political situations. France, on the other hand, was not so fortunate. Under the strict laws of Louis-Philippe (1773-1850), caricaturists such as Charles Philipon, Honoré Daumier, Henri Monnier, and Grandville, suffered from stiff censorship laws where fines were common and scarcely affordable.¹⁵ These fines were levied against any caricatures of an explicit political nature. But this did not, at least for a while, discourage the French artists. What resulted was the development of more subtle codes which represented certain political figures or attributes, and, to some degree, it became a game of who could out-wit whom. The most famous example of this game of secret codes and symbols is the image of the pear, representing Louis-Philippe. Invented by Charles Philipon (1800-62), editor of the journals La Caricature (1830-34), and Le Charivari (1832-42), it drew an analogy between the King's body and the shape of a

pear.¹⁶ It also had a linguistic pun: poire (pear) was a slang word for fat-head.¹⁷ The symbol caught on fast and soon was found in literature as well as drawn caricatures. Judith Wechsler, in her book A Human Comedy, comments that "the pear openly teased the censors and provoked them to more convoluted regulations, which in turn the caricaturists bypassed with increasing inventiveness". This went on until November 1831, when Philipon was brought to court charged with "offence to the person of the King".¹⁸ In his defence, he drew four heads. The first was of Louis-Philippe, the second was a slightly less detailed and distinctive version of the first, the third was a more exaggerated version of the head (which was small on top and wide at the bottom), and the fourth was an image of a pear. He pointed out that if the court were to prosecute him, then any drawing even remotely resembling a pear should also be subject to prosecution. The court finally decided against Philipon and made him pay another fine. But the popularity of the pear image grew fruitfully, to such a degree in fact that in the town of Auzueme, the mayor, in despair, "added to the post-no-bills sign 'nor any pears'".¹⁹ Apparently, French caricaturists found the pear image extremely tasty, and were quick to include it in their allegorical larders. But four years later, the censors realized that they had not the wit nor stamina to match the salt and atticism of Philipon and the others, and out of desperation "adopted Philipon's doctrine of

consistency and forbade caricaturists to draw any pear-like objects".²⁰

But in the few years before censorship had reached this extremity in 1835, Honoré Daumier (1808-79), who worked closely with Philipon, was extremely prolific in "pearing" Louis-Philippe, and spared him no mercy. In Lower the Curtain, the Farce is Over, (1834), Daumier portrays the king in a clown suit pointing a wand at a personification of France, gagged and blind-folded. His message is not kind, and emphasizes the oppression France experienced under the king's rule.

Daumier created many caricatures of Louis-Philippe; one, entitled Gargantua, (1832), resulted in a six-month jail sentence. In this work, the pear shape is extremely obvious in the King's gargantuan head and body. His legs, on the other hand, are spindly and crooked, and look as if they can barely support him. He sits on a huge throne and his royal attendants, about one-tenth his size, literally feed him bribes. Having passed through his digestive track, these come out his other end in the shapes of medals and coins. Wechsler observes that this "referred to Louis-Philippe's distribution of the insignia of the Legion of Honour, ennobling bureaucrats and shopkeepers loyal to Napoleon's military glory".²¹

Finally the new censorship laws were invoked in 1835, and this forced the development of a new type of caricatural language. Symbolic figures which represented specific types of classes and/or political affiliations were substituted for the individual portraits ("portrait charge") of specific political figures. Wechsler notes that the "classification of people by types became part of the caricaturists' armory", and that these new type were "more resistant to censorship".²²

One well-known emblematic character type was adapted from a comedy, banned in 1835, satirizing the July Monarchy, by the actor Lemaitre. The character of Robert Macaire was originally invented for theatre by Lemaitre, but the character assassination of Monsieur Macaire was carried out two-dimensionally by Daumier from 1835 to 1838. Macaire represented "the quintessential con-man", and became a standard satirizing symbol of the July Monarchy and its "financial oligarchy".²³ Daumier introduces Macaire to Louis-Philippe in a lithograph of the two embracing and, at the same time, picking each other's pockets. Following this work, with Philipon composing the accompanying texts, Daumier produced hundreds of caricatures of Macaire which were published in Le Charivari from 1836-1838.

During this period of caricature, the French were also exploring, in more depth, the theory and techniques of physiognomics, where human traits and physical characteristics

were compared to those of various animals. Examples can be seen in the works of Grandville (Jean Isadore Gerard, 1803-46), whose work tended also to lean toward being fantastic and surrealist. In many of his works, the caricatures depict the actual animal behaving humanly according to its specific characteristics. In one instance Grandville uses the lizard to represent the nursemaid or nanny who rears the children. Perhaps this refers to a notion that nannies are serpentine in their disciplining of the young, or to a childhood memory of a nanny that had physical characteristics similar to those of a lizard.

This period in France was perhaps the most inventive and controversial in satirical caricature, which developed mainly because of the strict censorship laws and political oppression of the French Government. While not all the caricature of this period was politically based, it generally did reflect the socio-political culture, customs, and opinions of the day. The modern-day viewer may not perceive this work as being quite as daring and humorous as it was once thought to be. But this can be attributed to the fact that what was then considered risqué, now has less impact because of our distance from the topical situations.

In the past year and a half, this particular historical period of caricature has become extremely influential on my work. While I do not often depict issues such as national

politics on Daumier's grand social scale, the period has provided me with the incentive (and courage) to attack my own locally encountered political forces and personal problems through the development of my own secret codes and symbols of characters.

While there are other influences which are apparent in the style of my work, such as the decorative styles of the Renaissance and Baroque, they are not as direct as the styles and periods which have been discussed. Therefore, rather than elaborating on them in extensive detail here, they will be referred to as they have appeared in works which I have created from September 1988 to August 1990, collectively entitled "Personal Mythologies."

CHAPTER SEVEN

Personal Mythologies

The works I have created in the past twenty-four months chronologically represent a variety of personal circumstances, experiences, and feelings about various events in the past two years of my life; e.g., doing dishes, relationships, graduate school. I think the most logical way to discuss the works is in the order of their creation. Because of the nature of the works, an element of secrecy will be maintained to protect my privacy; not all works will be totally decoded. It will also be necessary, to some degree, to make some reference to my state of mind at the times of their conception, in order to understand more clearly what provoked the ideas.

CHAPTER EIGHT

The Cure of Folly

and

The Cure of Folly/Response

September - October, 1988

"The hidden stone ripens fast,
Then laid bare like a turnip
Can easily be cut out at last.
But even then the danger isn't past.
That man lives best who's fain to live
Half mad, half sane".²⁴

When I first entered graduate school in 1988, I felt that I was suddenly required to think more academically about what I was trying to say through my work. I had recently come across the above old Renaissance poem by the Flemish poet Jan van Stijevoort. This poem seemed to somehow parallel, in an exaggerated way, how I felt about being in school again. It seemed logical, therefore, to do a satirical piece about it.

The character who displays the turnip-like folly on his head represents myself. The figure is dressed as a professional fool or clown might have dressed at the time the poem was written. This is to represent the fact that I was light-heartedly poking fun at my new situation, and also

making reference to the period in which the inspiring poem was conceived. The other character in the first piece (Slide 1), was intentionally dressed as a sort of wizard, to represent one who might magically transform me into an unlikely academic. Behind the figures is a landscape scene, which has continued to appear frequently in my work, making reference to the local environment -- the part of the world in which the events took place. On the reverse side is another figure of a fool but with only a small turnip-like folly sprouting from his head, juggling some of the things in life that make humans crazy: love, money, food, drink, knowledge.

In the second piece (Slide 2), the figure of the fool is taking a defensive stance -- meaning that I have decided to fight to retain my "folly," regardless of what others may think of what I am doing. On the reverse side is a follow-up poem to the original, saying that if my folly were to be taken away, it would kill me. Clearly, this points out that I am one who resists change.

In both pieces there is an image of a tree on a wheel. It is an image which I have carried with me since childhood. Although I am not sure of its origin, I think it came to me in a dream, as much of my imagery does. But regardless of how it made its way into my life, it has become a recurring symbol in many of my pieces. When I started graduate school I decided

to revive the image even though I was not sure of its meaning. It has become something of an obsession, and its meaning is not much clearer. But perhaps it just stands as my own personal symbol; not of myself per se, but of my art, my psyche, my life, and my interest in symbolism and nature. Logically, the wheel cannot spin with a tree on top of it, nor can the tree put down roots in the soil while on top of a wheel. This odd juxtaposition perhaps refers to the lack of stability and routine in my life, and in the lives of people in general.

CHAPTER NINE

The Allegory of Good Gardening

October - December, 1988

I have often compared gardening to life, and the saying "you reap what you sow" has always seemed to make a lot of sense. Although it may sound a bit idealistic, if people were to treat their lives like gardens by watering, weeding, fertilizing, pruning, etc., they would most likely receive bountiful harvests. And equally, if neglected, a garden can produce little or no harvest, becoming overgrown with weeds, or dying from lack of food and water.

The title The Allegory of Good Gardening, (Slide 3) is a play on the title of the fourteenth century Italian Renaissance painting by Ambrogio Lorenzetti, The Allegory of Good Government. Painted to hang in an Italian civic building as a sort of propaganda, it depicts the effects of good and bad government in the country and the city. The back panels on the inside of the entire gardening allegory sets my narrative near Calgary. This is depicted by prairie farmland and mountains in the background. There is also a city in the background, identifiable as Calgary by the inclusion of the Husky Tower. This is merely to indicate where the piece was

created, and to make reference to the mountain and prairie landscape which never ceases to overwhelm me. The entire piece and its individual sections, as is true of most of my work, can be read as one might interpret a tarot card, the included symbolism being most often fairly literal.

The right panel, selected purposefully to be the right one, implies the effects of good gardening: a farmer carefully tends his fields so that they are green and bountiful. Baskets of harvested goods are filled with produce; a neatly stacked wood pile, a well-fed cow, and a tree bearing fruit symbolize order, hard work, and the pay-off of effort. The left panel, on the other hand, depicts a bad garden. It shows a man in a drunken sleep surrounded by barren, dried up fields. His rake lies carelessly on the ground, indicating that he has abandoned the things that could help him in his work. Stones and weeds overlie the areas which should have been cultivated, and in the background his home is burning. This implies carelessness, neglect, and loss of things important to one's well-being. Thus, every aspect of this man's life is in chaos, and his state of sleep not only suggests his neglect, but also his ignorance and his not being aware of his ruin and destruction.

The centre panel is divided into two parts. Below, there is a celebration of good gardening shown by men and women

dancing around a maypole. It is meant to suggest spring, and eagerness to start new undertakings. Above, there is a sort of gardening icon: two sunflowers sit next to a fruit-laden tree on a wheel, which is crossed by a rake and shovel -- two very necessary gardening tools. A basket of fruit is in the foreground, meant to imply bounty. A pumpkin is placed on a pedestal to represent the fact that gardening should be given high priority. A gardening angel holds up a scroll which bears writing in two languages. First, in Latin, "Caveat Lector", meaning "Reader Beware", followed by the French saying "Il faut cultiver notre jardin", or "we must cultivate our gardens", (tend to our own affairs). The two languages were chosen to add a layer of mystery, because not many people in Alberta read French, and I am sure that even fewer understand Latin. The Latin was also selected to make reference to my university education. The symbol on my undergraduate degree (from The University of Calgary) is a shield with some Latin words which I cannot understand without looking them up in a dictionary of foreign words and phrases or in the university calendar. Latin was also a language which used to be commonly studied by previous generations at many post-secondary institutions. The French, on the other hand, makes note of the fact that I live in a bi-lingual country which sports two languages on most commercial packaging.

The outside of the piece is decorated with roses at the top centre, and trees at the bottom of both sides. The roses stand for the month in which I was born -- June. The tree on the good gardening side has fruit on it, while the tree the bad gardening side has a snake coiled around it, an obvious reference to the dark side of man and evil. Below this tree is a panel with a picture of a bad gardener in a garden being struck by lightning, as if being chased from the garden. On the other side, there is another panel, this time with a cheerful man and woman, each holding gardening tools and standing next to a tree on a wheel.

The overall piece has a whimsical, highly detailed, and well crafted quality, much like the style of ceramics from the Cleveland era. It also has obvious early Renaissance influences in its style of narrative and moral implications. Also, it is one of the few pieces discussed in this paper which is not completely personal and autobiographical.

CHAPTER TEN

Fish Box

November, 1988

While The Allegory of Good Gardening was in progress, and created mostly for the public at large, it seemed necessary to create a more personal gardening icon for myself. "Fish Boy" was created to serve as a self-portrait, selected and named to maintain an element of secrecy. This image appears often in works which followed, and has proved to be very successful in keeping viewers wondering about its identity and/or meaning. In Fish Box (Slide 4), the fish stands beside a tree on a wheel. The tree, for the first time, has become more ornate, and has the abstract shape of a crucifix. On the trunk are specific symbols of things necessary for good gardening. At the top is the sun, one of the most important elements in garden growth, and below that a rain cloud, water being equally important to sustain a garden's life. The other objects include a winged heart, which implies a spiritual love for the act of gardening, paint brushes to represent the artist or creativity, a hammer to pound down supporting stakes, scissors to aid in trimming and pruning, and an eyeball to keep watch over it all, unlike the bad gardener in the last piece who lost everything because of his lack of

attention. The skull and bird in a nest, on opposite tree limbs, symbolize life and death, the beginning and end, birth and rebirth, the change of seasons.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Kirsten Goes to Grad School

December 1988 - February 1989

In this work the Funk style and 19th century French caricature influences are very apparent in the use of personal political satire and style. The overall piece, from a distance, appears bright, colourful, and whimsical, but looked at more closely, it is obvious that something is amiss.

After completing a rigorous first semester in graduate school, my wide-eyed, naive enthusiasm began slowly to diminish. I suddenly began to experience the pressures of internal politics -- the kind which prevails at all institutions and cannot be avoided. Kirsten Goes to Grad School (Slide 5) was initially intended to be a generally focussed, light-hearted parody of the troubles of graduate school, but as time elapsed, it evolved into a more pointedly cynical statement about what I perceived as my own personal situation. This was due in part to the fact that I had been assigned, as part of the Art History component in the MFA program, to research various gestures in caricatures. Much of my research proved that caricature often reflected and parodied a social and/or political state of affairs, and was

often used as a weapon to criticize social and political points of view. With this new, valuable knowledge, I felt confident in my decision to be a bit more daring, literal, personal, and specific in the presentation of this piece, almost like a rebellious child boldly uttering his or her first swear word to the world.

The base includes two games: a Graduate School Wheel of Fortune, which one can spin to find out his or her fate, and a "Try Your Luck at Grad School" strength tester, where one hits a weight with a mallet to send it up a grade scale with "A" being at the top. The line from "A" down to "B-" is in black, whereas below that point the line is in red -- a warning that below this grade level a student is placed on probation, most funding is suspended, and the student can be asked to withdraw from the program. This, of course, is to ensure a high academic achievement level at the institution.

On the top of the base is a book, entitled 10,000 Words #1. This refers to the 10,000 word research paper I was required to write in the first semester. Resting on the top of this is a box which has a portrait of me jumping through hoops held by three men wearing mortarboards. The head-dress represents the academic hat and profession. On the back of this top piece is a painted picture of a scale. One side of the scale is weighed heavily down by books, contrasted with

what is on the opposite scale -- artwork. The point I was trying to make was that I felt that most of my time was taken up in writing rather than in creating art in order to keep up with the program requirements.

The two side panels of this piece become a bit more pointedly specific, and sarcastic. Following closely the format of Bosch's painting The Cure of Folly, 1475-80, I replaced his characters with myself as the patient, and members of a specific committee as the surgeon and advisors. The other panel has the same committee sitting around a table eating a roasted graduate student on a platter as their main course.

The message this piece was intended to convey seemed to be conveyed successfully; however, in later works I felt it necessary, and more interesting, to become less literal, and more symbolic in my representations of specific people. This however, was not to take place until after the creation of one more work.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Goyarilla Warfare

February - March, 1989

February and March 1989 were two very stressful months; I continued to have uncomfortable encounters with certain political aspects of graduate school. It seemed to weigh so heavily on my mind that it became necessary once again to make light of a dark situation. Inspired by Goya's painting Saturn Devouring His Son, (1820-23), I intended to express my anger to those who I felt were responsible for the way I was feeling by copying the gesture in Goya's piece. It also incorporated the political satire commonly used by the caricaturists, as well as the bold exaggerated style of Robert Arneson and the Funk ceramists.

I created a life-sized portrait of myself (Slide 6), with each hand clutching three (shrunk down to size) responsible parties; they are raised to my widely opened mouth, about to be devoured. To this day I feel that it is one of the most successful pieces I have ever created, largely because each time I look at it it seems so emotional, and extremely funny. And while I questioned whether or not I was getting sidetracked from the optimal direction which my art work

should take, I was able to reassure myself that it was all right; I arrived at the conclusion that my work had, for years, largely been autobiographical, and that I was not diverging from my natural path. What I did realize, though, was that in the future it might be better to be a bit more subtle, tactful, and perhaps even secretive about what I wanted to say.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Casual ConversationCasual ConfrontationCasual Degradation

May 1989

This series of three works (Slides 7, 8, & 9) marks the first real evidence of a conscious attempt at minimalizing the literalness of some of the characters in my work by selecting certain elements of their personality traits and personifying them rather than the individual, much like the 19th century French caricaturists did when they parodied their government and their king. In these three works, the politics I criticize are of a more local nature. In all three pieces certain characters recur in various settings, each scene representing a specific occasion in which I had encountered them.

The figure who has a mouth with pointed teeth and a tongue hanging out, both where his stomach should be, represents a specific group/entity who seemed to me to be speaking with parts of themselves other than their brains or intellect. The teeth are sharp, as were the words spoken by them, the tongue wagging from the mouth because things were

said that should not have been, and also, hopefully in their carelessness, they might bite their tongues off by shutting their mouths too quickly while trying to conceal information. There is an apple resting on the character's head, symbolizing, in this case, an aspect of the educational system -- a small clue about the prototype of the character.

The jack-in-the-box stands for unexpected surprises; evidenced by the nasty facial expression of this particular clown, the surprises are of an unpleasant nature. This character, like "Stomach Man", also stands for a particular group, or entity, much as a logo does for a specific sports team. In every piece these two figures appear in following these three works they continue to represent the same qualities and the same people, unlike some of the other characters I have developed in later works.

The cat, which appears in only one of these pieces, is a character that has a variety of meanings, depending on the context in which it is placed. In this case, it poses as someone who heard or knew something but was afraid to say anything about it for fear of what the other two characters might do to it. It runs past them as if to get away without being caught or discovered.

In these works, and in many of those that followed, I

have made an effort to create them so that they will appear from a distance to be bright, colorful, and whimsical, but like Schreckengost's Apocalypse '42, upon closer examination they will have a slightly disturbing look to them as one interprets their subject matter. I like to describe this look as a type of "nightmarish-nursery-rhyme", and find it to be an intriguing dichotomy.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Oops

June - July, 1989

In June of 1989, my stressful situations came to a peak, and, out of pure frustration and uncontrollable anger, one day I became so upset that I slammed my hand down on a table and accidentally broke my right middle finger.

When I left Calgary's Foothills Hospital emergency ward shortly thereafter, I was sporting a cast all the way up to my elbow, and, suddenly, life's small tasks became extremely difficult. I was unable to drive, write, and could barely even feed myself. Needless to say, creating artworks was almost impossible. Then, after three weeks, the cast was replaced with a small finger splint, and, still feeling that I had been victimized, it became important to express the significance of the incident in another piece.

Oops (Slide 10), is another life-sized self-portrait, but this time, unlike Goyarilla Warfare, I portray myself as the victim in a sort of William-Tell-gone-askew story. The work portrays myself with a cast on my arm, an apple on my head, and, an arrow meant to strike the apple but hitting my eyeball

and coming out the back of my head instead. The rapt expression on the face and the gesture of the body are reminiscent of Bernini's baroque marble sculpture The Ecstasy of St. Theresa. This gesture was purposely selected rather than a painful one in order to emphasize how defeated I had felt, and perhaps inject a slight bit of martyrdom as well. The apple on the head, as in the earlier character of Stomach Man, represents education, fruit from the tree of knowledge. The fact that the arrow missed its mark symbolizes that something did not happen as it should have, and the colors on the arrow are the only clue as to where it originated. The title, Oops, is meant to pose the question, "What happened"? Did she move, causing the arrow to miss its mark, or did the archer make a mistake in his aiming?

Formally, the figure is slightly out of proportion, and has a slightly over-worked appearance. This of course was a result of my lack of control during the building process because of my broken finger. In the end this, in my opinion, actually seemed to enhance the work, and further emphasized that it had been a very rough time for me.

In a way Oops is reminiscent of Arneson's portraits in his nuclear war series, in which he created disfigured and decayed portraits of himself. While my portrait is not concerned with the global issues in Arneson's, it is political

in a local sense, and does, like him, incorporate self-portraiture which is not necessarily out to beautify or enhance the figure's appearance, but instead to convey a message.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Allegorical Stockpile

May - September, 1989

The axiom "more is more" is usually obvious in the way I decorate my work, and I set out deliberately to epitomize this in Allegorical Stockpile (Slide 11). The elaborate floral decoration which winds around the three-tiered piece was a direct influence from the late Renaissance and early Baroque styles, both of which I am drawn to because of the rich and overdone approaches to their subject matters.

The initial conception of this piece involved developing a stock of disguised images which represent specific people, general character types, incidents, and/or emotions directly related to my first full year in graduate school -- to act as a sort of documentation or journal. The three tiers establish a hierarchy of sorts, the bottom layer discussing general events, the middle being more specific, and the top a personal icon standing apart from the rest of the events.

Because the piece is so loaded with imagery, only specific characters will be discussed. Since most of the characters have a universal quality in their symbolic

representation, the rest, I believe, can be interpreted with a certain amount of accuracy by any viewer without my definitions of their meanings.

Certain characters reappear in this work, such as the jack-in-the-box, who is portrayed both two-dimensionally on a small circular panel on the centre support structure, and three-dimensionally as a punching bag on the bottom tier. Reference is also made to Oops, as a painted picture on another circular frame. New characters such as the ass holding a pig's mask in front of his face on the middle tier represents a specific character who I felt was an ass but who acted like a pig. A black jackal, or Anubis, an Egyptian god that supposedly watched over people in the shadows, also on the middle tier, sits attentively with his front legs resting on a stick of Wrigley's Juicy Fruit gum. This jackal stands for someone who, during many of my rough times, expressed concern and seemed to watch over me to make sure I was okay. The gum, in this piece, stands for my studio. The reason for this is that someone had given me a stick of this gum when I had first started school and it had sat around in the studio, constantly in my way for about a year before it was put to use -- its use being that it was chewed up and used to stick the arrow of Oops inside the head so that the arrow would not be permanently affixed (so that it could be more easily packed), but would not wobble around when the piece was displayed. In

a later piece, Allegorical Stockpile II, the gum has an entirely different meaning.

Another figure is a mold-casted chess piece of a pawn. The pawn is dressed as a knight might be and therefore, represents one who had done a lot of fighting on my behalf. The fact that it is a chess piece symbolizes that this person, and the whole situation, were part of a big game. The game aspect is further emphasized by the checker-board floors on each tier. The checker-board is commonly used in many of my pieces and always represents the idea of a game. A game in the sense that everything is a game: school, work, life, and that there is playfulness -- perhaps gamesmanship -- within my work. The idea of "funning around" is also seen in the character representing me, wearing a black shirt which says "Bad Grad". This character is hiding behind the centre support column, holding a puppet which is making a face at the ass which holds the pig mask. This is meant to suggest that, although this character was not a particular favorite of mine, my intentions in portraying him were not really malicious.

As in my other works, elements in this piece, such as placements of characters, are extremely important for discerning further clues to the messages. One might read this piece, and my other works as someone would a Renaissance painting, where scale, placement, gesture, and content are all

extremely symbolic and important in understanding the message. It should be stated that not everyone will read my work the way I do; this, however, is fine because there is enough universal symbolism displayed in the works so that several variations of the message will often be fairly close, and if they are not, that is acceptable also, for the meanings in the works are designed to be masked to allow the viewer a chance to exercise his or her own imagination.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

"Idée Fixe"

June - October 1989

As the title suggests, this piece (Slide 12), is about my obsession with the image of the tree on the wheel, and was created to serve as a personal tribute to it. This piece has become so close to me that I often wonder if it has become a symbol which represents a non-physical part of myself.

On the outside back panel, there is an image which is a personal landscape of my life. The bottom of the picture depicts Cleveland, with its Terminal Tower, and, river of fire -- the Cuyahoga which, because of heavy industrial pollution caught fire and burned several years ago. Further up the landscape is a dotted line with an American flag below it and a Canadian flag above. This represents my moving to Canada. The specific location is indicated by a church with a sunset over the sea and a cross on the top of it. In Kitchener, Ontario where my family moved in 1975, there is such a church right across the street from the house we bought, and the sunset and cross spin around on top of the church day and night, much as a sign on top of a fast-food outlet does. Further up in the picture is Calgary, my present home, with

its flaming tower and mountains and prairies in the background.

The personal landscape was placed on the back because the image of the tree on the wheel originated in my mind in Cleveland and was carried with me all the way to Calgary. I felt that this would enable the entire image to make more sense about to its origin, and mine as well.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Stopping to RestBraving the Elements

November, 1989 - February, 1990

Both these pieces seem to relate closest to the early 20th century style of ceramics which were more light-hearted than Funk. In these two works, I took a slightly different approach in that neither piece discusses an actual event or specific emotion. Since many of my troubles seemed to have subsided when these pieces were conceived, it was an appropriate time to take a rest from the usual courses of action and contemplate other ideas previously outside the usual pool of subject-matter.

Stopping to Rest (Slide 13), as its title suggests, is my attempt at a vacation from the satire so often present in my work. Instead of creating a parody from real-life circumstances, I became momentarily intrigued by simply isolating certain symbolic images I had been using in other works, and combining them together to create oddly juxtaposed images, somewhat like the image of the tree on the wheel, and somewhat indicative of the new-found calmness in my life. Because my life had suddenly become very unstressful, I think

the images I selected to combine together reflected this. A cloud at the bottom, followed by a winged heart in the middle, and topped with a tree on a wheel, all seemed to suggest that chaos had taken a holiday from my life.

In Braving the Elements (Slide 14), a similar approach was taken; however, this time I included the self-portrait image of the fish standing in water gazing up at the structure of the cloud, winged heart, and tree on the wheel. I intended to suggest the four elements: earth, the base; fire, the flames surrounding the base; water, depicted by the ocean; and, air, by the cloud. Love is alluded to by the heart, and this supports my personal symbol, the tree on the wheel. This piece is once again about my retreat from satire, stress, and chaos, and my attempt at gaining a stronger inner peacefulness by becoming in tune with things that were starting to be more important in my life.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Conflict/ChaosA Fine and Private Place

February - March, 1990

Created as a pair, Conflict/Chaos (Slide 15), and A Fine and Private Place (Slide 16), both discuss two very separate parts of my existence, the first being my life in graduate school, the second being my life away from there. Both pieces have a set of three doors, each representing a choice or an incident. The idea was taken from an old game show called "Let's Make a Deal", where contestants were asked to choose one of three doors, their prizes being behind their selected doors. In this case, though, no door need be selected, for what they hold behind them are certain aspects of my academic life or my private life.

In front of each piece is a series of objects. In Conflict/Chaos, it is two blue dogs involved in a tug-of-war. The image of Blue Dog has several meanings, such as alarm, or warning, as a dog will bark to inform about, or challenge an intruder, or guard its territory and/or master. In this instance it is a feeling of alarm, and represents a pulling in two opposite directions.

In A Fine and Private Place, the objects in front of the doors all specifically represent something which is part of my private life, such as the reproduced rhinestone star-and-moon pin, which was a gift from someone very close to me. Other objects such as the rose, the angel, and the tea cup, also symbolize part of the same aspect of my life, and combined together seem to reflect, for me, a rare state of calmness in my otherwise turbulent life.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Maison de Sante

November, 1989 - March, 1990

Formally, this piece is slightly different from my usual way of working. It combines clay with welded steel and mirrors, two kinds of mixed media which are relatively foreign to me. The welded steel structure, although designed by myself, was competently built by one of The University of Calgary's Sculpture Department technicians, Steve Heimbecker, since I have little knowledge of or desire to weld, but needed the structure to realize the idea. Because of its size, this piece becomes more like an installation than a sculpture, another aspect with which I am relatively unfamiliar. It was, however, not intended to be classified as an installation, and therefore I would rather it be referred to as simply another sculpture.

The concept of Maison de Sante (Slide 17), initially evolved out of my restlessness while anxious to finish school and go out into the working world. The steel cage on wheels is reminiscent of a circus cage which holds and transports its animals. I chose to paint it a simple, uniform black colour because the school facility which it represents is very plain

and sterile in its structure. There is one white wall in the cage, and mirrors on the floor. I intended to reflect the plain interior of the building, as well as its ever so shiny floors which, in real life, shine like mirrors because they are constantly being washed and waxed all day long. On the white wall inside the cage is a large tree on a wheel. It is decorated with several symbols similar to those which have appeared on my other previous tree/wheel sculptures. There is the addition of a few others, such as the fish, representing myself, a noose in which I could hang myself if I really wanted to get out, and a few candles about to blow out, standing for wishes that most likely will not come true. The large figure on the board with coasters is another self-portrait. Unlike the earlier Goyarilla Warfare and, Oops it is not intended to be a literal representation. I have left the face blank, except for several pink bumps which cover it and also its arms. This was meant to make reference to the fact that for the past eight months I have been breaking out in hives daily, and for no apparent reason other than stress (so says my doctor). The hands hold snakes, creatures which I have a true fear of, and the meaning is that I'm holding onto something that scares me and it's driving me mad. The clothing represents the stereotypical prisoner's outfit of black and white stripes. The number over the left breast is my personal student number which identifies me, whereas my face cannot. The face being blank insinuates that I am one of

many and seem to have little individuality. The portrait rests on a dolly with casters. This idea came from an experience when I was in Europe as a small child: I saw a man with no legs making his way around on one of these devices. This ties in with the cage, making the figure appear like a freak in the circus. The blue dog outside the cage barks because he is alarmed by what is inside the cage and wants to alert everyone of what is there.

The title Maison de Sante, means in French, private hospital, or asylum. While this is a bit of an exaggeration, at the time of its conception and creation, it did seem to describe my feelings about myself very accurately.

CHAPTER TWENTY

Allegorical Stockpile II

May - July, 1990

A follow up to the earlier Allegorical Stockpile, Allegorical Stockpile II (Slide 18), deals with issues confronted in the second and final year of my graduate studies. Similar in structure to the first one, it is a three-tiered piece, but this time it is not as elaborately or uniformly decorated. Perhaps this is because in my second year I had become more realistic in my perception of my milieu and felt that covering up, or decorating a situation which did not deserve such attention was not the right thing to do.

The bottom tier has the centre support structure built as a tower, similar to the card depicting the tower in a tarot deck, which usually stands for disaster, perils, chaos. The tower is on fire, and out of one window a figure, myself, screams for help. The figure also screams in horror at the character of Stomach Man who is in the process of mowing down a flower garden. There are blue and pink flowers in the garden. The colours were chosen to represent males and females -- in this context, graduate students. This was meant to indicate that the entity which Stomach Man represents was

not being fair: some were allowed to live while others were mowed down. Of course this is not a literal translation, but it was meant to allude to a certain unfairness in a crucial area of a student's existence and academic well-being. Other figures on the bottom tier are Blue Dog, again sounding the alarm, and a three-headed monster which does not appear to pose any threat.

The middle tier is my private place, fenced off for protection, so that no one may intrude. This refers to the mental barrier I had begun to construct as a sort of self-preservation device. A stick of gum, similar to the one in Allegorical Stockpile, appears again, but this time it refers to the fact that I recently quit a long habit of cigarette smoking and have since taken up chewing gum, sometimes in copious quantities. These days a stick of gum would not sit around my studio as did the one referred to in the earlier piece; instead, it would be chewed up as soon as it was spotted.

The top tier speaks of the end, and of leaving. The cage door has opened and the fish, now sporting a set of hard-earned wings, is able to depart along with the tree on the wheel. This top narrative scene is set on top of a red book, similar in appearance to this bound support paper. The only difference between that one and this, aside from the obvious

differences in materials, is the title. This suport paper is titled Personal Mythologies, whereas the ceramic one is inscribed Furor Scribendi, Latin meaning "rage for writing" - my final dig at something which never has appealed to me but which, for the past two years, has been a major part of my life. With that, I felt enough had been said, the piece was complete, and so was the work for the graduating exhibition.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

Conclusion

My work has been greatly influenced by three primary sources, those being the early 20th century Cleveland ceramics, the later style of Funk ceramics, and the 19th century French caricaturists. Combined, they tend to have produced a sort of hybrid style within the ceramic spectrum, which, I believe, is unique. Perhaps this is also due in part to local culture, influences, and events which, obviously, play a major role in the conception of the pieces I create, and in the formal presentation of the work.

It should be stated that while all the work in the exhibition, Personal Mythologies, is autobiographical, and that the works were inspired by actual events, emotions, and/or circumstances, there is a strong tendency to exaggerate. This is perhaps an influence acquired from studying the French caricaturists, and the Funk ceramists. As mentioned earlier, this is a prominent attribute of both styles. It is not my intention, nor has it ever been, to use my work as a tool for venting malice. I would rather describe it as a vehicle for parody, and an instrument for light-hearted satire.

The characters created, although usually designed to represent someone specific, intentionally have universal qualities, like the figure of the ass who acts like a pig in Allegorical Stockpile. I am sure that there are many people who, at some point in their lives, have encountered someone like that. The work thus transcends being completely personal and private, because of its recognizable and symbolic characteristics. It enables others familiar, or unfamiliar with the circumstances and/or characters, to identify, interpret, and relate to the work in their own ways, while still allowing me to retain a certain amount of privacy within the actual, or real, story being told. I feel that it is important and necessary to make my work at least somewhat generally accessible because people, many of them, are the causes and the sources of almost all my ideas.

NOTES

1. Ross Anderson, introductory essay in The Diversion of the Keramos, (New York: Everson Museum of Art, 1983), p. xiii.

2. Nikolaus Pevsner, Pioneers of Modern Design, (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1936), p. 20.

3. Pevsner, p. 24.

4. Pevsner, p. 22.

5. Jane Kallir, Viennese Design and the Weiner Werkstätte, (New York: Galerie St. Etienne, 1986), p. 80.

6. Anderson, p. xiv.

7. Anderson, p. 54.

8. Anderson, p. 37.

9. Anderson, p. 77.

10. John Coplans, "Circle Styles on the West Coast", Art in America, 52, no. 3 (June 1964), pp. 32-33. John Coplans describes further the apathetic attitude of the public toward art and artists by describing San Francisco as having "all the charm of a merry-go-round, but the horses monotonously circle without going anywhere, and, despite its dreams of culture, the blandly concealed hostility of the environment toward modern art is insidious, stifling, and energy-sapping. In the face of it, only the most inner-directed artists can sustain themselves".

11. Alfred Frankenstein, "The Ceramic Sculpture of Robert Arneson: Transforming Craft into Art", ARTnews, 75 (January, 1976), p. 39.

12. Garth Clark, A Century of Ceramics in the United States, (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1979), p. 271.

13. Frankenstein, p. 40.

14. Marshall, Richard and Suzanne Foley, Ceramic Sculpture: Six Artists, (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1981), p. 88.

15. Judith Wechsler, A Human Comedy, (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd., 1982), p. 88.

16. Wechsler, p. 71.

17. Wechsler, p. 71.

18. Wechsler, p. 72.

19. Wechsler, p. 73.

20. Wechsler, p. 75.

21. Wechsler, p. 76.

22. Wechsler, p. 82.

23. Wechsler, p. 85.

24. Jan van Stijvoort, "The Cure of Folly", 1524, in Bosch, by Albert Skira, (New York: Crown Publishers, 1960), p. 27.

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