

MARLENE MILLER
ENCOUNTERS IN CLAY



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SCULPTURAL WORKS

1985 - 2017



PORTRAIT OF UNCLE MEINROD
1985, 30 X 20.5 X 17.5"
EARTHENWARE WITH
STAIN AND ACRYLIC

ARTIST STATEMENT

At the age of seven, I discovered the world of clay and I was smitten. I vividly recall, in my first visit to an art studio, mounds of the wet earthy substance waiting to be shaped, buckets of scrap and water, and the irresistible feel of the material in my hands. In art school years later, I came to love its fluid responsiveness, indomitable and mercurial nature. Yearning to explore complex human content, I inevitably turned to figurative sculpture in clay. As my exposure to art from around the world and across the ages deepened, I came to believe the most powerful artistic expressions emanate from deeply private realms that are inextricably connected to universal human experience. Drawn to mysteries found there, I have wrestled for decades with themes fueled by the murky relationship between power and vulnerability, the comic and tragic, wonder and horror, the holy and corrupt.

From 1981 to 1990, I focused on ceramic portraits of individuals living on the fringes, and the underlying life within each subject, in images of nursing home patients, my invalid uncle, and a trio of siblings I had met deep within Appalachia. My gaze then turned inward, when one night in 1990 I dreamed of a young girl standing alone on top of a lopped off tree stump in the woods, looking directly at me. The intense encounter shook me and inspired a new and more personal direction. From 1990 to 1996, I felt an urgent call from within to portray this elusive little girl in smooth surfaced pastel colored 1950's frocks. In each of the sculptures from the series, I wanted to capture the innocence and openness of this little girl, and explore her intense psychological and emotional interior world.

A period of tumult and loss followed, resulting in a turning point in my perceptions and in my work. Wishing to redirect my life and career, I undertook a monumental ceramic mural commission in 1998. The highly textured clay I used, along with the scale of the project, demanded a loosening grip on surface polish and detail, a focus on the essential, and trust in a more intuitive approach. The dug-from-the-earth, rough-hewn look it produced, complemented my darker

sensibility, so I continued to use it. In 2000, I left the security of my teaching position to focus exclusively on my sculpture and to further explore the rich terrain of the unconscious, a move both terrifying and liberating. Then came the devastating blow of 9/11/2001, awakening within me an urgency to make sense of what seemed now, an unfathomably complex world. From 1998 to 2002, I also experienced the sudden loss of several of my closest friends. Signifying the end of one phase of my life and work, and signaling a new chapter, I dreamed one night of old man in flowing white hair, beard and gown, my childhood image of God. Standing atop a frozen icy dome in the sky, he suddenly slides off into the dark unknown as his perch melts away. Running to my studio in the dream, I discover that my gas kiln has self-ignited, exploded, and the door has burst open wide.

The solid ground beneath me, and the control I thought I had once possessed, were gone. An emotional nakedness emerged, along with a more profound sense of freedom, deeply impacting my work. My aim shifted to more fully embrace the unknown, opening the way for instinct and improvisation to reign. From 2002 onward, my work became increasingly more visceral and raw, even savage at times, in subject matter and handling of the clay. I explored the intersection of religion, power, and violence in the grizzled medieval sentries tasked with judging who is good enough to enter through the gate, and in the embattled warriors whose faces, skin, and garb embody the effects of profound struggle. During this period, I have also frequently revisited the little girl as my subject and as a vehicle to explore life in all its complexities. She has become freely expressive; at times wearing nothing but a collar and a smile, she hovers, appears as a disemboweled apparition, and exudes dignity and self-possession. Today, as I let go of preconceptions and restraints, the clay, the emerging subject, and I come together in a wild dance. I build up and destroy, over and over, pounding and gouging the clay with my hands, in search to discover something I have never seen before, and to be transfixed by the presence looking back at me.



GIRL I
1990-1992, 46 X 19 X 19"
EARTHENWARE WITH
UNDERGLAZE AND OILS
COLLECTION OF FIGGE MUSEUM,
DAVENPORT, IA



GIRL II
1992, 55.5 X 19 X 15"
EARTHENWARE WITH
UNDERGLAZE AND OILS



ADOLPH'S DREAM
1996, 10.5 X 7.5 X 4.5",
EARTHENWARE WITH
UNDERGLAZE AND STAIN
PRIVATE COLLECTION,
EAST LANSING, MI



WITNESS
2003, 36 X 22 X 19"
STONEWARE WITH
UNDERGLAZE AND STAIN
PRIVATE COLLECTION,
ELK GROVE VILLAGE, MI



THE LUCKY ONE
2006, 18 X 10.5 X 4"
STONEWARE WITH
UNDERGLAZE AND STAIN
PRIVATE COLLECTION,
SALEM, OR



BLUE DIRGE, AKA FALLUJAH BLUES
2005, 31 X 14.5 X 5"
STONEWARE WITH UNDERGLAZE
AND STAIN



THE WATCHMAN
2006, 25.5 X 20 X 14"
STONEWARE WITH
UNDERGLAZE AND STAIN



SENTRY
2005, 32 X 31 X 16
STONEWARE WITH UNDERGLAZE AND STAIN
PRIVATE COLLECTION, WOODWAY, WA



MR. BLACK AND BLUE
2006, 22.5 X 26 X 15.5"
STONEWARE WITH UNDERGLAZE AND STAIN
PRIVATE COLLECTION, QUINCY, IL



SENTINEL IV
2008, 32 X 25 X 14"
STONEWARE WITH UNDERGLAZE AND STAIN
PRIVATE COLLECTION, FALLS CHURCH, VA



EFFIGY
2010, 47 X 17 X 14"
STONEWARE WITH UNDERGLAZE AND STAIN
PRIVATE COLLECTION, PEORIA, IL



QUEENIE
2012, 39 X 12 X 10"
GLAZED STONEWARE



AMELIE
2012, 34 X 15 X 15"
STONEWARE WITH UNDERGLAZE AND STAIN



BELOVED IV
2012, 36 X 20 X 16"
STONEWARE WITH STAIN AND OILS



LITTLE FLOWER
2010, 32 X 16 X 14"
STONEWARE WITH UNDERGLAZE
AND STAIN





WARRIOR I
2016, 33.5 X 20.5 X 16.5"
STONEWARE WITH UNDERGLAZE
AND STAIN





WARRIOR IV
2016, 31.5 X 20.5 X 16.5"
STONEWARE WITH UNDERGLAZE
AND STAIN





WARRIOR II
2016, 30 X 19.5 X 13.5"
STONEWARE WITH UNDERGLAZE
AND STAIN





WARRIOR VI
2017, 30 X 19 X 12.5"
STONEWARE WITH UNDERGLAZE
AND STAIN





BELOVED V
2017, 30.5 X 17X 11.5"
STONEWARE WITH UNDERGLAZE
AND STAIN



EDUCATION

- 1986-88 Advanced Studies in Figure Drawing, Illinois State University, Bloomington, IL
 1978 M.F.A, Syracuse University, Syracuse, NY
 1976 B.F.A, Bradley University, Peoria, IL

SOLO AND TWO-PERSON EXHIBITIONS

- 2017 *Blood and Iron* Solo Exhibition, Abel Contemporary, Paoli, WI
 2016 *The Warrior Series* Solo Exhibition, Exhibit A, Peoria, IL
 2013 *The Girl Series* Two-Person Exhibition, Art@803, Key West, FL
 2012 New Work Solo Exhibition, Artisan Gallery, Paoli, WI
 2010 New Work Solo Exhibition, Contemporary Art Center, Peoria, IL
 2009 *Small Works* Two-Person Exhibition, Art@803, Key West, FL
 2008 New Work Solo Exhibition, Artisan Gallery, Paoli, WI
 2008 New Work Two-Person Exhibition, Prairie Arts Center, Peoria, IL
 2007 *The Girl 1990-1996* Solo Exhibition, Figge Museum, Davenport, IA
 2007 *Erdklumpen* Solo Exhibition, Bradley University, Peoria, IL
 1995 *Solo Exhibition of Sculpture and Drawing 1985-1995*, Peoria Art Guild, Peoria, IL
 1987 *Solo Exhibition of Drawing and Watercolor*, Illinois Central College, East Peoria
 1986 *Solo Exhibition of Sculpture*, Allegheny College, Allegheny, PA
 1983 *Portraits of Appalachia* Two-person exhibition, Southern Illinois, University, Carbondale, IL
 1982 Two-person Exhibition, Callanwolde Fine Arts Center, Atlanta, GA
 1980 *New Sculpture in Clay Solo Exhibition*, Illinois Wesleyan University, Bloomington, IL

INTERNATIONAL GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2017 13th International Ceramics Exhibition, Aveiro, Portugal Museum of Art
 2011 10th International Ceramics Exhibition, Museum of Ceramics, Manises, Spain
 2009 9th International Ceramics Exhibition, Aveiro, Portugal Museum of Art
 2007 8th International Ceramics Exhibition, Aveiro, Portugal Museum of Art
 2007 SOFA Chicago, International Exposition of Sculpture, Objects, and Functional Art, Navy Pier
 2004 SOFA New York, 7th Regiment Armory, NYC
 2004 SOFA Chicago, Navy Pier
 1995 Fletcher Challenge International Ceramic Exhibition, Auckland Museum Auckland, New Zealand
 1992 Fletcher Challenge International Ceramic Exhibition
 1992 International Biennial of Ceramics, Chateau-Musee of Vallauris, France
 1991 Faenza International Ceramics Exhibition, International Museum of Ceramics, Faenza, IL

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2018 Smithsonian Craft Show, National Building Museum, Washington, D.C.
 2017 *Emergence*, Riverfront Museum, Peoria, IL
 2016 *13th Ceramics Invitational*, Abel Contemporary Gallery, Paoli, WI
 2015 Three Person Exhibition, Liz Solaro Gallery, Quincy, IL
 2015 *Little Ones Invitational*, Cinema Gallery, Urbana, IL
 2014 Cornell Museum of Art Exhibition, Delray Beach, FL
 2012 *Ink and Clay*, California Polytechnic University, Pomona, CA
 2010 *Red Heat: Contemporary Work in Clay*, University of Tulsa, Oklahoma, Best in Show
 2009 *A Contemporary Look at Abraham Lincoln*, Peoria Art Guild
 2007 *Ink and Clay*, California Polytechnic University, Pomona, CA
 2006 *The Other*, Mary Lou Zeek Gallery, Salem, OR
 2004 *Contemporary Crafts*, Mesa Contemporary Arts, Mesa, AZ
 2003 Smithsonian Craft Show, National Building Museum, Washington, D.C.
 2002 *Inspired in Illinois*, Lakeview Museum, Peoria, IL
 2001 *Illinois Women Artists*, Illinois State Museum, Chicago; Illinois State University, Normal; Lakeview Museum, Peoria, IL
 2000 Ceramics Invitational, Texas A & M University, Commerce, TX
 1999 Guest Curator and Exhibitor, *Narrative and Poetic Expressions: The Human Figure in Clay*, Lakeview Museum, Peoria, IL
 1997 *Figurative Ceramics*, The Works Gallery, Philadelphia, PA
 1994 *Ceramics Now*, Downey Museum of Art, Downey, CA
 1993 Regional Art Exhibition, Davenport Museum of Art, Davenport, IA, First Place Purchase Award
 1993 *29th Ceramics National*, Everson Museum of Art, Syracuse, NY
 1991 *Clay USA*, Georgia State University, Atlanta, GA
 1990 National Ceramics Exhibition, Taft Museum, Cincinnati, OH
 1989 Ceramics Now, Downey Museum of Art, Downey, CA
 1987 Whirlpool Foundation National Sculpture Traveling Exhibition
 1986 *Interior Images*, Esther Saks Gallery, Chicago, IL
 1985 Ceramics National Traveling Exhibition, Erie Museum of Art, Erie, PA
 1984 *Erotica*, University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee
 1984 Southwest/Midwest Exchange Exhibition, Museum of Fine Arts of New Mexico, Santa Fe and Lill Street Gallery, Chicago, IL
 1982 *What's New in Clay*, University of Houston, Houston, TX
 1980 *Tradition in the Making*, Atlanta College of Art, Atlanta, GA
 1979 *Clay / Form, Function, and Fantasy*, Long Beach Gallery, CA
 1979 Objects '79, Western Colorado Center of the Arts, Grand Junction
 1978 *Clay from Molds: Multiples, Altered Castings, and Combinations*, John Michael Kohler Arts Center, Sheboygan, WI
 1978 Crafts '78, Women's Cultural Trust Gallery, Philadelphia, PA

AWARDS / HONORS

- 1976 Two Year Graduate Fellowship Award, Syracuse University
 2002 Illinois Arts Council Individual Artist Fellowship Award



1998, ARTIST'S STUDIO
CERAMIC WALL RELIEF COMMISSION
ILLINOIS CENTRAL COLLEGE, EAST PEORIA



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