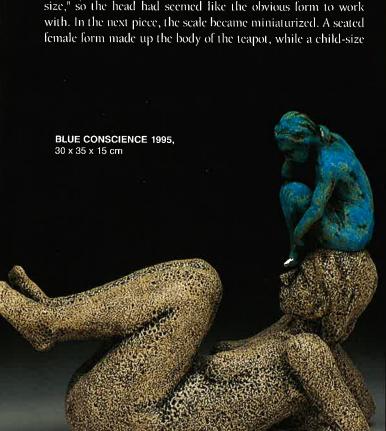


When I was asked nearly twelve years ago to participate in the National Teapot Invitational exhibition at Craft Alliance Gallery, in St. Louis, Missouri, I had no idea that this "assignment" would become the catalyst for an ongoing significant body of small works. Having always been a figurative sculptor, and having always worked on a much larger scale, I was initially stumped by the request. I felt determined to make a piece that was in keeping with my large sculpture, but at the same time had the elements of a teapot. My first such piece tried hard to keep "function" in mind. It consisted of a glossy, watery head laying on its side, with its hair sweeping forward to create a spout, and back to curl into a handle. The ear came off as a lid. In the end, the effect was that of a severed woman's head resting on some ocean floor--a rather morbid first attempt, but it did pour well!

Since the severed head could have held tea, but not the feeling I wanted, I returned to working with the full human body, which has long been my subject. I had been concerned about scale in the first piece, wanting the figurative aspect to be "life-size," so the head had seemed like the obvious form to work with. In the next piece, the scale became miniaturized. A scated female form made up the body of the teapot, while a child-size



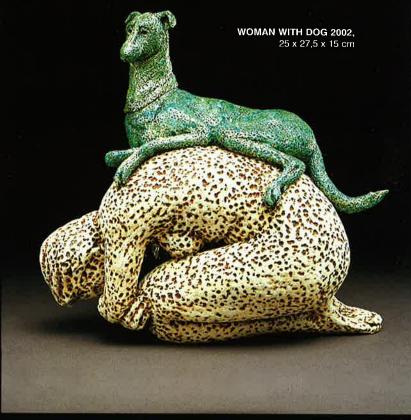


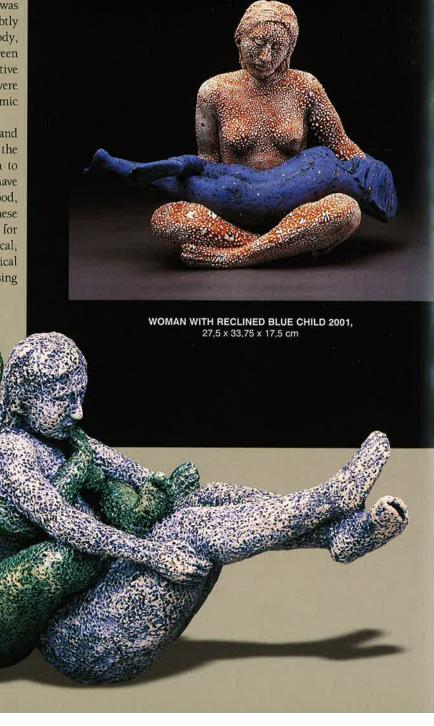
figure hanging off her back became the handle. The woman's head came off as the lid, and her hollow, out-stretched arms formed the spout. Varying the scale of the two figures within the piece worked well for making up the teapot elements, and also created a playful narrative that paralleled my daily life with my own small daughters. A lengthy series unfolded, the inspiration coming from tumbling/wrestling/cradling images based on interactions with and feelings about my children. What soon became apparent was that the more complex the forms became, the less functional the teapots became.

At this point I made a conscious decision to follow the narrative quality at the expense of their literal functionality. I still continued to glaze the interiors of the pieces in an attempt to stay true to the notion of function. I knew, however, that if someone were intrepid enough to actually brew and pour tea from some of these pots, it would just as likely flow from the opening for the lid as from the spout.

Pourability became less an issue for me as I was increasingly drawn to the quiet stories unfolding in the work. Through subtle rearrangements of the figures, surprisingly different feelings

could be conveyed. For example, a child stretched out on the back of a curled up woman, by drawing its feet up and out to form a spout, could create a feeling of familiar playfulness between a mother and child. But a simple repositioning of similar figures --with the female seated upright with one hand extended in a begging gesture while a child slumped on her back-- brought to mind a more sobering scenario. What I learned from making these pieces was that by working with the intimate scale of the teapot, and by subtly disguising lid, handle and spout elements with parts of the body, the viewer could be drawn into exploring the relationships between the figures. When placed in a domestic setting, the narrative unfolding in these works thus becomes their "function." These were teapots meant not to pour tea, but to offer a little story in a dynamic yet softly spoken way.

As with my large figurative sculpture, surface textures and coloration are meant to add layers of mood or meaning to the content of this smaller work. For years I've felt an aversion to making figures with flesh-like skin as the outer surface, and have instead created surfaces suggesting other materials such as wood, stone, water or nonspecific natural textures. The attributes of these other materials can lend poetic depth to the narrative. Water, for example, can suggest flowing movement, or perhaps a less physical, dream-like state of being. Stone can remind us of ancient or classical sculpture. Given its inanimate solidity, stone also has a surprising



WOMAN WITH CLINGING GREEN MAN 2000, 20 x 30 x 16,25 cm



same gesture as one of support, the male adding his gentle strength to the female's effort. I am fascinated by the fact that, even though I created the piece, her interpretation is as valid as my own. We come to works of art with unique experiences and private understandings. The work is not asking for the one right answer. It merely invites interaction.

In pursuing this notion of one figure being "real" and the other being something other, I introduced animal imagery to the work. Deer, dogs and horses have had their place in my large work for years. Though all three animals are common where I live, there is an almost mythical presence to these animals that I wanted to convey. In one piece, a deer takes the place of a reclined child on the back of a woman who appears withdrawn to the point that the animal seems a figment of her imagination. In another, a dog looms large, creating a jewel-like ground on which a tiny green figure sleeps, perhaps dreaming of the dog beneath her. In

another, a horse lies still enough to balance a golden ball on its back. The ball functions as the lid.

The work of the past two years has taken on a different feeling and motivation for me, which I owe to the events of 9/11. Although, as mentioned earlier, I have an aversion to a flesh-like coloration for the surfaces, I am moved now by the physical weight of body on body. I feel compelled to articulate --through a relaxed posture, a limp hand, a slump---the sag of physical weight; in an embrace or cradling of figures this suggests an emotional weight and a feeling of surrender. In some of the pieces, one figure hangs loosely with limbs woven through the limbs of another. Heads are aligned so that they meet ear to ear, listening silently. Faces almost but don't quite touch. Through this subtle accentuation of physical weight, I hope to convey the non-physical essence of our fundamental need to give and receive support, safety and love.

