FROM THE INSIDE

A Thesis

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by
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* * * * *

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[Signature]
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Approved by
To my son Chris.

For all the years

of love and support

and for being my greatest fan.
VITA

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FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field:             Art
                        Ceramics
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FROM THE INSIDE

I am interested in the physical, emotional, and spiritual passages we experience as we grow and develop as human beings. For the last ten years I have been actively working on becoming more emotionally healthy. Through counseling and education I have learned a great deal about myself and how I have grown into the person I am. What's happening on the inside of me has always been quite different from what is visible on the outside. My fascination with relationship between the inside and the outside has held me captive for many years and is the focus of the exploration in my work.

Initially I began working with life drawings. I was completely fascinated with the human form, especially the female figure. I learned more about myself with each drawing I made. In the beginning I was experiencing the figure drawings as an exploration of the beauty of line, form and volume. I hadn't made a connection to myself as a woman or as a human being. I loved drawing the figure, but I hadn't considered that there was more to it than the formal aspects of figure study and a way to get somewhere else, somewhere important, like learning to see more accurately and articulately. I didn't see figure drawing as an end in itself or possessing any particular content. Drawing the figure seemed like an academic exercise.

As I began my undergraduate work at San Jose State University in 1985, I was working on a series of exercises in drawing, water color, printmaking and pottery. Everything I had produced to that point offered immediate gratification. I thought I needed to work on something much more serious; something with at least some content beyond the beauty. I was certain that making art should be a more grueling and soul searching activity.

The two-dimensional work I was doing in printmaking was leaving me bored and frustrated. The processes I was using were tedious and seemed to destroy any spontaneity I had previously experienced. I had all but abandoned life drawing as yet another self-indulgent activity. However, my
ceramic sculpture was developing very spontaneously, so I changed my concentration to ceramics.

By this time I was in my third year of personal, individual counseling. Major issues were beginning to reveal themselves. I started work on a series of ceramic sculptures I later called Nightmares. (Plate I)

These sculptures were directly related to my counseling work on issues of being a survivor of child abuse. The work consisted of several child figures being towered over by larger female monster figures. The last sculpture in that series was a huge, seven foot figure of a female monster. She later became known as Big Mama.

Big Mama was coil constructed in clay. As she grew-up, she began to reveal an incredible interior of flowing, undulating negative spaces. My original intent was to create a creature that would intimidate even the biggest man, to express the kind of terror a person experiences when they are being battered by someone bigger and stronger. I found myself detaching from that content and exploring the formal elements more fully.

I became more involved with the interior of the form. I started thinking about how beautiful the interior was and how my interior seemed like a train wreck. It was ironic. I was building a sculpture that was horrifying on the outside and beautiful on the inside and I felt almost exactly the opposite. The series drew to a close as I found myself resolving the child abuse issues in my heart and mind. Once I had worked through the major emotional pain of that life experience, I no longer felt a need to continue to explore these ideas and feelings in my work. The discovery of the interior space and the possibilities of ways to investigate that idea of private, interior territory led directly into the next series.

The Nightmares sculptures had consumed almost two years. I was emotionally exhausted from dealing with the heavy content and looking forward to pursuing something more formal, like positive and negative space. The interior spaces of Big Mama, introduced me to a new way of thinking about the figure; as possessing more than exterior beauty. (Plate II)

The foothills of Santa Clara Valley in California are gentle rounded remains of an ancient ocean floor. They are covered with long, dry grasses that ripple in the wind like golden velvet. They've often reminded me of
reclining figures of women. They are meditative and offer an invitation to drift into fantasy. I started making connections between the figure and landscape. I wanted to try to describe the feeling of that landscape and the inside of the figure to my viewer; to create a form that would be abstract, yet evoke the feeling of land formations and figures.

By the winter of 1988 while finishing work on Nightmares, I met Sandro Lorenzini, ceramic sculptor from Savona, Italy. Sandro appeared in our studios in January during our Christmas break and immediately began building huge ceramic, coil constructed figures. I was still working on Big Mama, so I was very interested in Sandro’s approach to building, particularly his clay body and any technical information he might share with me. His building and glazing techniques were amazingly efficient and functional. The surfaces were beautiful yet subtle. (Plate III)

After working in adjacent studios for a semester and quietly absorbing as much information as possible, I approached Sandro about working as his summer studio assistant in Savona. He agreed to hire me as an assistant so I could learn more about the technical and engineering aspects of building monumental ceramic sculpture.

The daily work in the studio was an invaluable experience. I had watched Sandro build monumental figurative sculptures for a semester at San Jose State University. The forms were simple and stylized with a painterly texture, and colored with oxides. (Plate IV) I was enchanted by the work I saw in California, but seeing him in action in his own studio, helped me gain a much clearer understanding of what his work was about. The content was about his insights into human beings and their relationship to the earth, sea and the universe around them.

It was very helpful for me to see a contemporary, figurative, ceramic sculptor working on narrative themes. I felt like he was giving me permission to make very personal and private work; to indulge myself. The stories Sandro told with his clay were auto-biographical and related to his immediate environment. Listening and talking to Sandro about his ideas for his work and their relationship to his life, helped me realize how important it is to talk about what you know best in your work. I was inspired to follow my heart and begin work on the kind of sensual, organic forms I had seen inside Big Mama.
More than any other artist, Sandro Lorenzini had a very powerful influence on the way I think about what I make. He helped me clarify my thinking process and get closer to understanding what my sensibilities are. By the end of the summer I was anxious to get back to my own studio.

When I returned from the summer's work in Italy I began a series of undulating wall forms I called *Endomorphics* (inside forms). (Plate V) They were coil built ceramic sculptures that twisted and curved around creating cave-like areas that contained figurative elements. The texture was similar to the sandstone cliffs of the Pacific coast south of San Francisco, where the wind and the sea spray carve out deep grooves and hollows like fingers through cake frosting. The form, texture and earthy red color was perfect for the clay. I wanted to create a soothing environment in miniature; a safe place to rest and contemplate life and enjoy its beauty; a place that seemed secure and inviting.

Emotionally, I was resting. I had worked very hard to recall my horrific, childhood memories that informed the *Nightmare* sculptures. The *Endomorphics* gave me a chance to digest all of that painful information and explore more peaceful feelings I had experienced as an adult; the feelings of peace that had allowed me to begin healing.

The final exhibition of these pieces was in an environment that created a feeling of contrast and alienation. They floated over the pedestals on hidden platforms. The pedestals and gallery walls were painted an incredibly pale blue-green. The contrast of the complimentary colors and the large floating ceramic forms created an alien feeling in the room.

I enjoyed the angular architectural elements of the pedestals and the room combined with the curvilinear organic forms of the sculptures. I felt the installation successfully expressed the curvilinear aspects of the figure while maintaining a feeling of a geographic place. With the momentum of a successful body of work behind me I was eager to get started with my graduate work.

I began my graduate work at The Ohio State University in the fall of 1989 with every intention of continuing with this idea. The sculptures quickly began to assume a more landscape than figurative quality. I was hiding the figure and felt like I was losing my focus. What was the most
important idea or concept to me? Was I interested in the figure or landscape? As my children struggled to adjust to the move from California to Ohio, I struggled to maintain my focus in the studio. I was frustrated with the ceramic forms I was building and felt as though I was at an impasse.

At the end of my first quarter at OSU my father died. I was stunned by his death. I hadn't talked to him in two years and felt a tremendous amount of guilt at moving across the country without being able to reach him. Not having developed a regular communication with my siblings or mother prior to that time left me feeling more alone than ever before. When I returned to Ohio from his funeral a few days before Christmas, I was emotionally exhausted. My children were having a hard time adjusting to the Ohio winter and I was more confused than ever in the studio.

During the winter break I began some drawings that dealt with my feelings about losing my dad, the funeral and seeing my siblings. The drawings were from memories, dream images, and fantasies. I was crying almost constantly. After a few weeks of mourning I decided to temporarily abandon the sculpture and start drawing the figure again. I felt as though I was floundering with the clay and had no idea how to continue. Drawing from life was an attempt to get closer to the core of my interests and recapture some of my lost passion.

I enjoyed drawing the model again and found a new intensity injected into my work. I began a brief exploration of ceramic, low-relief wall sculptures, motivated by the life drawings. (Plate VI) These clay plaques led to more three-dimensional renderings of the drawings. As I shifted back and forth from drawing the model to sculptures to drawings of the sculptures, the images became more abstract.

By the end of spring 1990 I was drawing large scale, charcoal, figurative abstractions from ceramic maquettes of figure sections. Concerned with creating a sense of depth and volume with a strong directional light from behind the figure, I started thinking about being in a dark passageway with a light coming from somewhere beyond; from a spiritual place. (Plate VII) I continued in this vein and produced a few studies of the inside of a hollow ceramic torso. My attention refocused on the undulating interiors of the figure with the addition of the ambiguous spiritual light from beyond. (Plate VIII) The cave-like drawings reminded me of that desire to create a peaceful
place in my work and in my life. The landscape reference was resurfacing. Charcoal and paper were still my primary materials.

In the summer of 1989 I visited Hocking Hills, a geographic wonder located about an hour south of Columbus. Experiencing the drama of the cliffs and their similarity to my home shores of California, made me homesick. Seeing the beautifully carved cliffs was very healing for me. That summer I began experimenting with color in a series of large scale pastel drawings. The drawings were abstractions of rock formations with figurative references. (Plate IX).

I was still very interested in creating a sense of space, depth, volume, and light. I began to see the rocks as figures and the light as knowledge. The formations were creating a passageway to a deeper understanding of my spirituality which still needed healing. The view in most of the drawings is of the back of the figures looking from the darkness toward a light. The pastels offered a sensual velvety feeling to the texture and color of the drawings.

My children had gone to California for the summer to visit friends, and I was in an emotional state of healing, rest and enjoying my freedom. I felt myself regaining emotional strength.

By the end of the summer, once again, I was dealing with a tremendous emotional loss in my life; my children decided to stay in California, I lost a pregnancy and a love relationship. For the first time in my life I was alone - alone in a place that wasn’t home, with none of my old friends to rely on for emotional support and with an incredible final year of graduate school ahead of me. I was overcome with grief. I continued drawing in an effort to pull myself out of this painful place. I was filled with anger and a sense of violation at losing a chance to have another child, the loss of someone that I had trusted with my most precious possession, my heart and the sadness of experiencing my son’s rite of passage into adulthood.

The drawings I produced during that fall were large scale interior views of wombs and vaginas. My own interior felt incredibly violated. I didn’t want to draw some graphic depiction of a pregnant womb, but to express a feeling about being pregnant and holding life. I started to think about women’s bodies as a storage place for other people’s hope; but also as a place to grow and nurture miracles. I was feeling that my body and the spirit inside
had been used and abused when it should be celebrated for its miraculous nurturing and to grow babies.

I wanted to address these concerns in the drawings, but to abstract the shapes to their simplest form. Once again as I was trying to heal myself, I found myself abstracting the figure almost out of recognition. I started taking the forms and elements I saw appearing most often in reference to the figure and creating simple combinations of those in a rectangle. The rectangle felt like a very important element. It referred to confinement, contrast, containment, structure and a safe place for the organic elements to move within. The more I reduced the amount of information being presented, the more ambiguous the figure/landscape relationship became. (Plate X)

I enjoyed the ambiguity of the work. Once again I was hiding, looking for that safe secure place to rest and be nurtured. Hiding the figure helped separate me from the pain.

I had long conversations with my friends concerning my interest in the figure, its ability to transform information and speak to many different ideas and feelings in a single form. I was confused about my desire to abstract the figure to a nearly unrecognizable element. Why did I always want to hide the figure when I needed to feel safe?

In the spring of my final year of graduate school I finally realized that I should simply make figures and celebrate what I love; celebrate my body, women's bodies in a natural way, with clay. I began building the sculptures for my thesis exhibition. The idea seemed to embrace all of the concerns I'd had about line, form, volume, the body as a vessel (container), and the relationship of the interior to the exterior.

I was eager to get back to the figure in such a direct way. I began to visualize figures of women; full in figure, hollow, coil-built, clay forms; simple forms with natural soft full curves. As the women grew, I saw those beautiful inside forms re-emerge. My hope was that the simplicity of the forms would allow the viewer to slow down enough to contemplate and enjoy the beauty of the interiors. I thought about how precious the inside of us is and hoped this translation would be experienced by my viewer. (Plates XI, XII, XIII, XIV)
I believe that if I can share something about my intimate perception of our human beingness and increase the viewer's awareness of the importance of our interior self, we may more fully understand and cope with the problems of our relationship to each other and to the earth. If by describing one tiny element in a way that touches the viewer in that private place of understanding, I can facilitate a change, then I have succeeded.

My work grows from a need to understand myself better and to become a more healthy human being. As an artist I want to share what I'm learning. I believe the key to understanding life and finding happiness is to love and heal ourselves inside. I hope that my work communicates some of these ideas.
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PLATE II, BIG MAMA
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PLATE IV, SANDRO LORENZINI
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