THE APPROACH
OF
MY ART LIFE

A Thesis

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the degree Master of Fine Arts in the
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by

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VITA</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF PLATES</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE APPROACH OF MY ART LIFE</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PLATES</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FOOTNOTES</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REFERENCES</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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VITA

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# LIST OF PLATES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PLATE</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. Homeless</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. Climbing</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. Serenade</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. The Source of Life</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. Family</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I am not an artist who focuses his effort on abstract art, neither do I have the ambition to become such an artist. Each artist must have some topics which have more interest to him than others. Two things are most interesting to me: one is the restating of the human figure, and the other is the investigation of nature. Human figures have various appearances. Like language, baby gestures convey kinds of emotions, and represent the flow of life, namely, a kind of subtle rhythm.

Nature is the other source of my inspiration. Many objects of nature, such as little stones, rocks, skeletons, weathered wood, the shape of foliage, catch the attention of my imagination. I especially prefer the asymmetric forms which contain subtle aspects of a balanced existence. Therefore, I have begun to search for the natural beauty and irregular structure of asymmetry. I like ways of interpretation that express non-rational flow in messy jumbles or disordered organization.

From earlier works, such as "Homeless," to the more recent series, "Baby Movements," a central idea of my work is based on a fascination with nature, phenomena of life, and emotions generated in the process of life. Basically, I want my sculpture to contain the energy, structure, and sentiment of life. I want it to present vitality and deep feeling.
Similar to any creature, a successful sculpture is lively and tensile. Although it may be made from one or several varieties of material, the work is not just a mixture of materials. Its spirit exists beyond the combination of original material ingredients; it has "soul", and a unique individual life. No matter what method the artist adopts to create his work, he has to infuse vigor and profound sentiment into the work.

When I begin to conceive a piece of sculpture, I usually don't draft a plan or intend to express an explicit concept. During the process of creation, I rely on my intuitive feelings to direct the construction of the work, and I stop only when totally satisfied. For me, the process is not an intellectual one. I won't critique myself, "this is too much, and that is too little." By watching, feeling, and touching, I rebuild the work whenever I am not quite satisfied. I believe that the methodology of artistic creation comes primarily from personal subjective feeling, instead of being able to be traced and described by intellectual logic. Only a vague route of feeling can be traced by intellectual analyzing. My attitude toward sculpture is the accumulated result of my investigation and experimentation with the essence of form. All my works are inspired by and reflected in personal experience and therefore my understanding of life.

I usually make about ten embryos or models of the coming creation. If these models sustain or elevate my enthusiasm to keep working with the
idea, I will use them to transform the idea into a larger work by various modifications.

Gradually I have discontinued making drawings for my sculpture because the drawings merely show a certain aspect of the sculpture. Previously, because of the limitations of the drawing, I faced a lot of pragmatic problems when I tried to execute them into three-dimensions work. Hence, I have decided not to rely on drawing drafts, for there is a huge gap between two-dimensions and three-dimensions. Also, I can avoid the risk of being bound by the strongest first impressions, and I am able to create with a much more open mind.

I derive the substance of my sculptural creations from the course of life. For example, "Homeless People" originated from my impression of the subway in New York City.

In my opinion, long and intense study of the human figure is the necessary foundation for a sculptor. The human figure is most complete and difficult to grasp in form and construction, and so it makes the most exacting form for study and comprehension.
This quote from the English sculptor Henry Moore generally expresses my attitudes about doing my "People" series which is a product of my exploration of the relationships among people. This series results from a long period of reflection and preparation, some of which originated from my trip to New York City in the winter of 1987.

The original purpose of that trip had been to visit the famous museums in order to fulfill a childhood dream to see the best creations in the world. I saw many works of art from the ancient Egyptian heritage, the middle-age culture, and modern western civilization, and I was especially interested in the area of sculpture.

What I discovered, however, was that I was also deeply affected by the city outside of the museums. New York City is a very peculiar city. It is the financial center of the world, with the residences of some of the richest people, famous colleges, prosperous businesses. And I was surprised to see that there were many homeless people wandering in the subway stations and living on the street. It is a unsettling feeling when you see the poor in winter staying outside of a magnificent tower where the rich live. It is amazing that many extremely opposite things can exist at the same place and same time. For example, the homeless people lying on the subway station floors and the mummies lying in the museums are all in the same posture, but their living conditions are not the same. I began to think
about the human relationships between modern and ancient, rich and poor, noble and humble, intimate and aloof.

When the urge from such thinking pushed me to make some substantial creation, I combined the shape and posture of the mummy with the shape of living people as the basic elements for "Homeless" (Plate 1). After several trials, I decided on the material and size. I found that styrofoam was an appropriate material because it was light and easy to manipulate and I could work on human scale. The technical procedure of "Homeless" was to stick many pieces of styrofoam together, then to use an electrically heated wire to cut the styrofoam mass into a rough shape, repeating this step until getting an ideal shape. To change the feeling of styrofoam quality, I sprayed plaster at random on the surface of the figure. I made several styrofoam figures, each of which was different in shape, size, and quality from the other, but they still were generated from similar materials and processes. The figures presented a microcosm of human society, since there were no two individuals who resembled each other completely. Exploration of subject relationship was displayed by the space arrangement among these figures and environment; some figures were hung at different heights by strings from the ceiling, and some figures were lying on the ground. In this arrangement, the figure relationships seemed in a stable condition, but with the shifting of time, the relationship would be changed in subtle degrees with the turning of string or figures.
After "Homeless", I made paper sculpture for a while which was born from the introspective feeling concerning the discovery of certain black frozen dead birds in the winter time. "The Dead Birds" may not be a completely mature work from my viewpoint now, however, it is a turning point in my creative life. It has significant meaning to me in my exploration of new material to express my ideas. It was not until this work that I realized paper could be an excellent source for creation because of its flexibility of deformation and intimacy with daily life. With my thinking of death, I became interested in the expressions of life. Therefore, "The Dead Birds" inspired me to new directions for future creation which became even more evident after I became a father.

The birth of my new baby redirected my viewpoint and my feelings. I began to pay more attention to the warm feelings and love expressions in my life. Day and night, every movement of the baby — such as crying, smiling, sleeping, waking up, sucking — reminds me that he is a real and growing life. I feel the pulse of life every time I hold him in my arms, and sense the pride of a father. Eventually it dawned on me that the baby and my strong fatherly emotions could become wonderful topics for my sculpture. The subject met my desire to project my inner feelings and faithfully convey my expressions through my art.
The work, "Climbing," was finished after great effort (Plate II). I tried to record the abstract feeling of a baby's crawling and turning around. I combined the baby's figure from many aspects and organized them to form a new individual. This work is like a red Chinese dragon climbing up from the floor, with the hint of the growing of life. This is the first time that I chose Chinese newspaper over a frame of light weight steel rod, a change that resulted in a combination of materials I have continued to explore.

"Serenade" is a floor piece involving a series of movements related to baby motions (Plate III). The image for "Serenade" comes from a several-weeks-old sleeping baby who awakens at midnight and is irritated because of hunger. He then becomes soothed upon being fed and he gradually falls into sleep again. Sometimes I feel that the crying of a baby is a kind of noise, but at other times I feel that it is a wonderful music of life. For me, the fits of crying and undulation of the baby's movements is similar to a musical serenade in various forms.

"The Source of Life" was created about the same time when I continually experienced the pleasure of having a new born baby (Plate IV). In this work, I attempted to trace back the origin of life, and I tried to catch the feeling of the intimacy between the baby and the mother since the new life was conceived in the uterus. Such an intimate relationship resembles that between a seed and fruit. So I applied the figure of flower and nut shell as metaphor for the origin of life.
With the growing of my child, I increasingly realize the meaning of family and this is the basis of another series entitled "Family" (Plate V). This work is composed of three individual elements which have shell-shape appearance. The smallest among the three represents a little baby, and the other two are the father and the mother. I choose the shape of sea shell to symbolize the feeling of family, because the overlapping, folded structure reflects my idea of family: an organization built by strong crossing arms of parents, and centralized by a delicate baby.

I hope my work is attractive to the viewer no matter from which angle he looks. I think the advantage of making models as ideas for the final work is the following: I can easily handle, control, and observe these little models.

I believe that the concept of a particular work can be completely presented by means of applying appropriate material exactly. For instance, in the "Baby" series, I experimented for a period of time, then finally decided to select the Chinese newspaper as a material. The reasons are: its texture is flexible, thus it is easy to be formed into another shape; the Chinese ideogram is an important part in my life and in my thinking.

Surveying my works in this period, I find that I am influenced consciously by American sculpture and culture. Though I do not like all
the sculpture works which I have seen in America, some ideas slip into my mind. Through the refinement process of creation, all the ideas, old and new are blended together and become a new synthesis for me.
Plate I, "Homeless".
Plate II, "Climbing".
Plate III, "Serenade".
Plate IV, "The Source of Life".
Plate V, "Family".
FOOTNOTES

1. Henry Moore, *The Reclining Figure* (Columbus Museum of Art, 1984), 29.
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Moore, Henry. *The Reclining Figure*. Columbus Museum of Art, 1984.