



Things of Nature Unknown

PERSPECTIVE – EDITH GARCIA works addresses the 'human condition'; here she sets out the context.

PHOTOGRAPHY – EDITH GARCIA



Artists work in many forms; for me it is a way to record my individual experiences, depicting everyday occurrences and past activities while addressing issues specific to the human condition. As my life changes so will the content that informs my art. Focusing mostly on clay, my work has woven a path between different media and disciplines, reflecting my observations and experiences. Dependent upon the concept and using my knowledge of artists' materials and tools, the approach to each project can alter and adapt.

My Mexican background finds expression in my work; the series *Peeling off the Skin of Childhood* (1999), which explored the awkward transition from childhood into adulthood, focuses on the phrases that were used by parents to discipline their children by implying a sense of fear: 'se te van a salir los ojos / your eyes are going to fall out' and 'te voy a lavar la boca con javon / wash your mouth out with soap.' Influenced by the raw, essential qualities of traditional art from ancient Egypt, Africa, India and the diverse pre-Hispanic world, I sought to create works that looked at both human and animalistic qualities, creatures that slowly

reveal their true self. I worked with variations in scale, glaze and colour on high-fire clay bodies. For *Untitled* (1999), I was able to create individual glass faces for the sculptures using high-temperature plaster moulds. I also fabricated glass cast teeth and heads cast in wax for two life-size sculptures of *Tragate los Dientes*, and wax legs for *Osico de Animal*.

PSYCHOLOGY

Since studying monumental outdoor works at Minneapolis College of Art and Design, where artists would mimic the human form in its natural state, the figure has always been present in my work. Bronze, which allows amazing detail, can suggest movement and calls out to be touched. While I was initially concerned with how we create replicas of ourselves, I soon realised that it was the more psychological aspects of the figure that intrigued me. The feeling and emotions that lie hidden beneath the surface led me to explore the inner rather than the outer, a concern that has become the main focus of my work.



Such thoughts informed the series *Milk-ed* (2000), in which a succession of figurative heads, attached to udders where their bodies should be, could be seen to symbolise lives that had done their suckling, creating an intensely unsettling quality. *Milk-ed* offered an insight into the circumstances and experiences that drain our energy, speaking of people that continue to siphon our inspiration and steal what they want from our life. The piece also made use of multimedia by including a soundtrack where you could faintly hear the sounds of suckling, offering an acoustic portrait of the sensation of constantly being milked and exploited.

MONTANA

During a residency at the Archie Bray Foundation for Ceramics Arts, Helena, Montana (2001), I had the opportunity to re-evaluate my work in an amazing new environment. With the help of other artists and the Bray community, I challenged myself by creating what, for me, is some of my most intriguing and innovative work. By being able to move from the traditional notion of clay work to simply using the medium as a tool to express the concept with the addition of digital media, a door seemed to open to new and exhilarating projects and ideas.

At Archie Bray I created and installed *Soy Yo* (2001), a permanent installation at its public sculpture park, which consisted of 500 porcelain black and white dollies mounted on the ceiling of an outdoor structure. *Soy Yo* dealt with reminiscences of home, the idea of an ideal domesticity and memories of the home as a child, with associations of the deteriorating effects of time on recollection.



TRAVEL

Following the residency I was awarded a Jerome Foundation fellowship to travel through Europe to explore contemporary ceramics, providing an opportunity to further expand my knowledge of the medium and the concepts behind others' and my own work. I spent time in London in 2002 and showed pieces at the St Ives International Ceramics Festival in a solo exhibition at the Burton Museum and Art Gallery which showcased numerous ceramics objects and a forty-foot ceramic installation with sound entitled *Dicen que te quieren / They say that they love you* (2002).

My most recent research has involved the use of custom-made decals applied to a fragment of the figure, working directly on the pieces themselves and creating a fusion between my sculptural production and my painting and

OPPOSITE PAGE TOP: *Hack-er* series, slip-cast and altered, lustre and cast latex, 2005, H16cm ■ INSET: Edith Garcia ■ THIS PAGE LEFT: *Hidden Inside*, handbuilt stoneware, underglazes, H28cm ■ TOP RIGHT: *Perdío la Pata*, handbuilt stoneware, underglazes, L27cm ■ BOTTOM RIGHT: *Para los Desaparecidos*, handbuilt stoneware, underglazes, H57cm.



drawing. Being able to create a relationship between the object and the surface allowed a secondary dimension beyond the physical, its linear trajectory interspersed with patterns and shapes on the surface.

Sometimes it feels as if I am fighting with the object itself, the painterly aspect set against the permanent physicality of the clay. My most recent series, *Otra Vez* (2005), continues this exploration of surface and shape but in turn radically deconstructs the human body. Initially I began to question how far one could actually push a figurative sculpture while continuing to engage the audience and offer a contemplative experience; to question form and function and still respond emotionally. With multiple limbs, eyes and illusory faces, the works push the idea of comfort and security within the object.

In *Sin Sentido / Without Feelings* (2005), I have elongated the human skull to create a long, unsettling form combined with a perfectly circular mouth featuring large, grinning teeth. The work speaks of both the physical force of a bite and the use of words spoken through the mouth. The multiple human mouth drawn onto the surface emphasises the theme and continues to break down the human figure into its elemental form. When you recall that the human body consists largely of meat and bone, I try to move the clay and brush as if it were flesh, physically assaulting the surface, resonating with the primitive violence explored in early African and Indian sculptures, and our inevitable relationship with our own mortality.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

How far can one extend and explore this fragmentation? In some ways my move to London, a city where you can easily slip into the stream of life and just disappear, suggests a



potential way forward. Currently I am developing *Phantom* (2006), a series that explores the raw animal in the city. Where once people foraged for food and a position in the pack, today they fight for social position and comfort. I am developing ideas around invisibility and the dissolving of the individual in the urban environment. Clay will envelop negative shapes of the figure, suggesting the ghostly traces of what was once a person, but only offer the embedded silhouette within the density of the material.

The move away from representing the human form in a conventional manner has brought about a new freedom. In reinterpreting the figure in this way I have been able to create pieces that demystify the body, creating a physical continuity between the inner, intangible and outer, tangible aspects, erasing features, subtracting limbs, expanding the scale, moving beyond the familiar. Changing what nature dictates and removing the boundaries of the natural world has taken my vision to a level that explores other ways of extending the body in sculpture and in doing so creates work that reaches beyond the physical and into a world of ideas. **CR**

Forthcoming exhibitions: *Ceramic Art London 2006*, Royal College of Art, London, March 3-5; *NCECA*, Northern Clay Center Booth, Portland, Oregon, USA, March 8-12; *Six McKnight Artists*, Northern Clay Center, Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA, September 2006.

Website www.nenadot.com

OPPOSITE PAGE LEFT: *Attached*, handbuilt stoneware, underglazes, H21cm | RIGHT: *Soy Yo / It's Me*, outdoor installation, black and white porcelain, 2001, H430cm | THIS PAGE TOP: *Milk-ed* installation, clay, Leach white celadon glaze, 1999-2000, L457cm | BOTTOM: *Untitled* (detail), raku, cast glass faces, H259cm.

