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PHYSICAL SENSATIONS. A CONTEMPLATIVE ODYSSEY

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OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF**

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By
Mark L. Henderson

Thesis Committee:

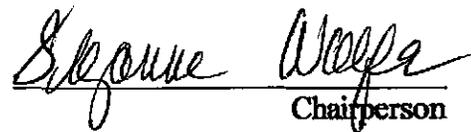
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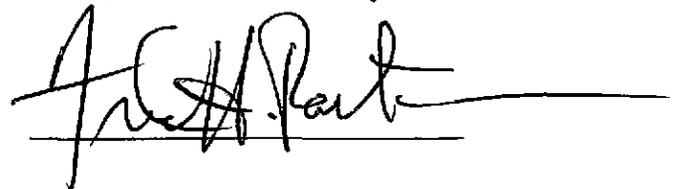
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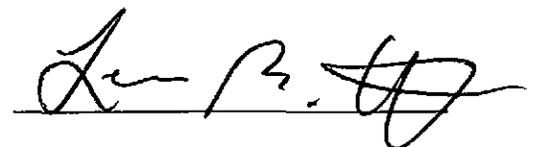
Lewis B. Andrews

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By

Mark L. Henderson

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INTRODUCTION:

Physical Sensations. A Contemplative Odyssey

The skin tender and soft having been touched with just the right balance leaves an impression both physically and mentally. The anticipation of the sensation, the pressure of the contact, and finally, the exchange of energy. In a fraction of a second, the intimacy of the connection is forever engraved in the mind and body. This work is a representation of constraint and release, restriction versus freedom, control versus surrender, the dynamic tension between feminine and masculine energies.

(Plate #1) WALL STATEMENT DETAIL

The above statement, displayed on the wall of the exhibition, was intended to plant the seed of curiosity. It was not intended to be read as a single thought, as it addresses a variety of ideas about touch. When trying to explain the dynamics of touch it is apparent very quickly how multifaceted the subject becomes. Even though touching is a universal facet of social exchange between individuals, emotional responses to touch depend on the where, the how, and the when. In order to better understand the statement and its significance, I will provide my interpretation. The first sentence introduces the idea of pleasure, as when receiving a long, slow, strong, stroke during a massage. Balance is the key: if a massage therapist applies too much pressure to a muscle it will

contract and spasm; and if the pressure is too weak, the stroke becomes ineffective. When being massaged the body reacts to touch physically without the mind having control. A good massage therapist reads the body and learns the right 'balance' while moving and applying pressure. The second sentence reveals the desire to be touched. For instance when a possible new love interest enters the room, the anticipation begins. Being apprehensive I stay seated; but I am thrilled when the individual sneaks-up from behind and touches me. The duration of time between visually seeing the individual and actually being touched becomes magnified by the contemplation of how it will transpire. As a consequence of waiting and running through different scenarios, the individual's touch has now produced a mental connection associated with pleasure. Finally, the last sentence represents how our society has an amazing capacity for making the simplest activities (touching) an incredibly convoluted affair. What is appropriate for some is not appropriate for others. Constraining an individual is dependent upon many aspects such as developing honest, sincere communication, and profound trust. Touching and mentally connecting with an individual when they have relinquished control can become a transcendent experience for the parties involved. Many will agree that it is definitely easier to surrender and bare your body than it is to bare your soul.

Physical Sensation. A contemplative Odyssey was a thesis exhibition comprised of figurative work that visually portrayed the psychological and physical impact of touch on the body. Unquestionably, more than with any other subject, creating figurative sculpture presents an individual with both the greatest variety in form and the biggest challenge in definition. For instance, in my experience a single naked body is rarely inspiring; it is merely a record of what some one looks like when they are naked.

However, when characterizing the body in an overtly sexual situation a sculpture can evoke a whole range of emotions. The pairing of the figurative sculptures in this exhibition seeks to express what one desires, fears, or idolizes. That being the case, what should one make of an exhibition created by a male that consists of a half-dozen naked women with strong sexual content? It must be pornographic? Hopefully, the viewer's perception of this work is more than a quick generalization. The forms are intended to address the complex relationship between the need for physical touch and psychological manifestation that occurs to the body as a result. The nudity and lack of faces was an attempt to reveal that the body alone is capable of communicating internal feelings. Thus, when looking at the world, an individual should not rely on his or her eyes alone. I believe an individual's perception of their surroundings is influenced by all the senses, which then produce emotional responses to what one truly observes. When creating a sculpture that touches its viewer's emotions, that sculpture has to be more than straightforward. The perception of the pieces in the exhibition is multifaceted: the deeper the viewer's contemplation the more complex it becomes.

THE CONCEPT:

When individuals look through books dedicated to the history of sculpture, or if they walk through the galleries of the sculpture in most great museums, they will be struck by the amazing fact that an enormous amount of all the sculpture ever created is devoted to the human form. In fact, man's fascination with the dynamics of creating the human form pre-dates recorded literature. The nude figure has been depicted in the works of art in all civilizations since the beginning of time. Neither, landscape, still life, nor the most monumental sculpture has held the same recurrent fascination for the artist. Instinctively, it seems, the eye and hand of the artist cannot turn away from the challenges of the body. Therefore, the human form has provided a visual record of how civilization has idealized, eroticized, and emotionalized the body. Throughout the ages various styles and representations of the perfect human form have been created and refined. Beyond primitivism, it is easy to find examples of the continuing evolution of the artistic approach:

“When the Greeks built a torso as a geometric composition... when the painters of Fontainebleau elongated the limbs till refinement became metaphorical... when the Egyptians held rigidly to a frontal representation of the human form... when the flesh of Ruben's women blurred the lines between abundance and redundancy... when Picasso took man apart and joined him together in no pattern ever intended by Nature” (Wentinck, Preface).

The perseverance of the human form clearly is an indication of mankind's born passion to understand, create, and appreciate beauty.

Auguste Rodin's work captures all of the above qualities and his style was a tremendous influence when creating my exhibition:

“In Rodin's work, the life-sized human figures represent ideals of masculine and feminine form. Rodin captured the sensual delight of the highly charged moment when lovers embrace. Our emotions are engaged as we overlooked the hardness

of the marble out of which the illusion was carved. The implied natural softness of flesh is accentuated by the rough texture of the unfinished marble on which the figures sit” (Preble, 43).

Despite the fact that I did not use marble, the connection between the different clays and the concrete was a reflection of the same concept. It was my intention, coming from a ceramics background, to duplicate the various textures of the body through different types of clay. The importance of the texture on the surface of the figures was an attempt to emphasize realism in the sculptures. Drawing attention to the small details in the skin such as wrinkles, lines, and fingerprints is a reminder of how multifaceted and complex the body is:

“The surface of the skin has an enormous number of sensory receptors receiving stimuli of heat, cold, touch, pressure, and pain. A piece of skin the size of a quarter contains more than 3 million cells, 100 to 340 sweat glands, 50 nerve endings, and three feet of blood vessels. It is estimated that there are some 50 receptors per 100 square millimeters... The number of sensory fibers from the skin entering the spinal cord by the posterior roots is well over half a million” (Montagu, 7).

Replicating the skin and the impressions left from touch was an indicator of how contact in everyday life is often ignored. An enormous amount of research has been done in recent years with regard to touch. The results show that the lack of touch can lead to reduced sexual interest, emotional distress, and even a weakness in the immune system.

“Touch stimulates the production of the chemicals of the brain, and these feed our blood, muscle, tissue, nerve cells, glands, hormones, organs. Deprived of touch to stimulate these chemicals, we may be as starved as if we were deprived of food” (Colton, 21).

Clearly, human relationships show us that touch is a basic behavioral need, just as breathing is a basic physical need. Humans are social creatures by nature and throughout life we need contact with others. What touch means to us and how we respond

psychologically depends on several factors. By creating emotionally charged pieces I was attempting to stir up pleasant memories of touching or being touched in the viewers. In my opinion, throughout the ages there have only been a small number of sculptors that have achieved the unexpected 'awe factor' when contact and touch are involved. The visual impact from Michelangelo's *Pieta`*, the *Laocoon [and His Sons]*, Giambologna's *Rape of the Sabine Woman*, Canova's *Cupid and Psyche*, Bernini's *Pluto Abducting Persephone*, and Rodin's *The Kiss* has been encapsulated in history as instigators of engaging our emotion. If one were to study every expression and gesture in this grouping and read the language of these bodies one would see that the union between the figures stands for a thousand other such events.

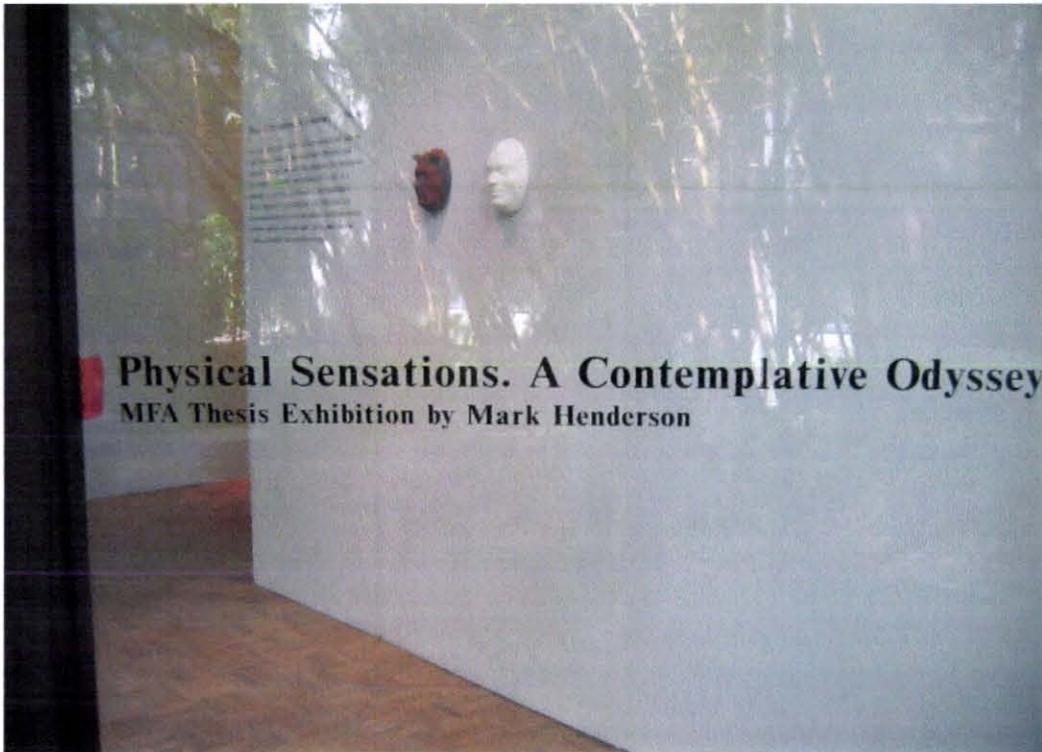
Human emotions and their effects on the physical body are an extremely complex science and they are just now beginning to be understood. What has become increasingly evident is that the body's internal anatomy is particularly sensitive to touch. When viewing a work of art that has captured the essence of the nude figure, I have to restrain myself from reaching out and caressing the curves of the body. Instinctively, my hands reach out, even in a museum, to touch the surface, to feel the contours of the muscles, or to see if the body will react as a result of my touch. Although, I know this is not appropriate, when touching the work, there is an extraordinary feeling of emotion, which re-emerges from my own personal experiences. As a result, the focus on touch for the exhibition was a way to engage the viewer, if only for a moment, into a pleasure-seeking state of their own.

THE EXHIBITION:

The gallery walls were assembled to conceal ninety percent of the gallery, from the viewer who was passing by. This was achieved by placing walls three feet away from the front window, leaving only a five-foot opening in the middle. The intention was to place a few stimulating sculptures in the front window to create curiosity about the contents of the show. Thus, the main purpose of the placement of the walls in the exhibition was to draw viewers into the gallery. The exhibition was organized into four main groups, the front window (plates 5-7) the entrance and the hall (plates 10-12), the sidewall (plates 13), and the inner wall (plates 14).



(Plate #II) OVERVIEW FROM OUTSIDE

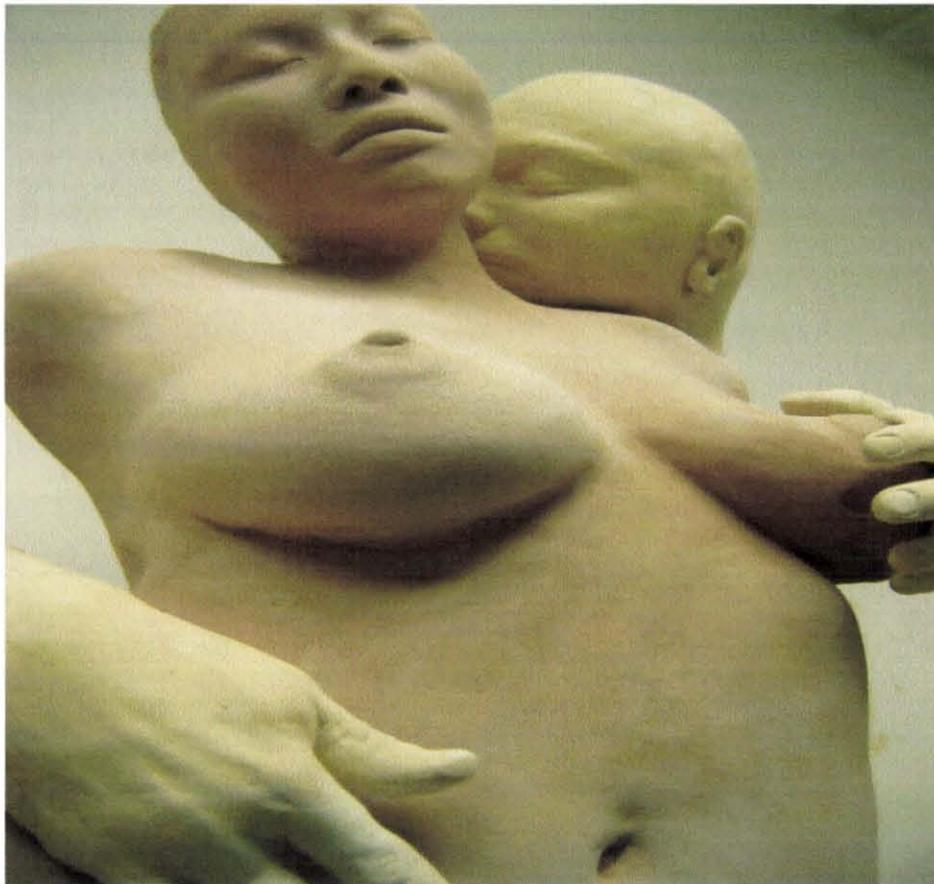


(Plate #III) OVERVIEW FROM ENTRANCE



(Plate #III) OVERVIEW FROM HALLWAY

The first sculpture in the outside window (plate #V) suggests that the anticipation of touch intensifies the exchange of energy between two individuals. The sculpture depicts a man embracing a woman from behind while caressing her neck with his lips. There is an exaggerated expression on the woman's face with her head tilted up, eyes closed, and mouth slightly opened as if she were gasping for air. The man's right hand appears to be headed downward as he clinches the woman's right hip, while his left hand firmly squeezing her left breast pulling her back into his embrace. The woman's body is curved in an S shape due to the power and intensity from the man's embrace. Furthermore, the exaggerated S shape is a representation of the release of tension caused by the force and anticipation of his touch.

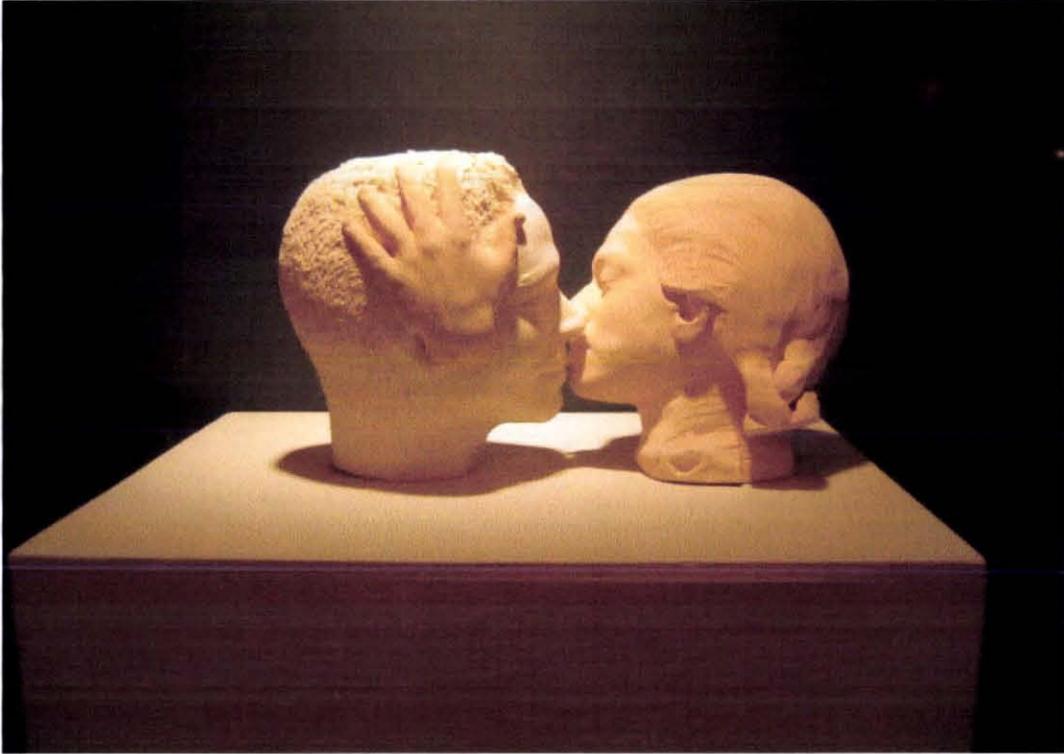


(PLATE #V)

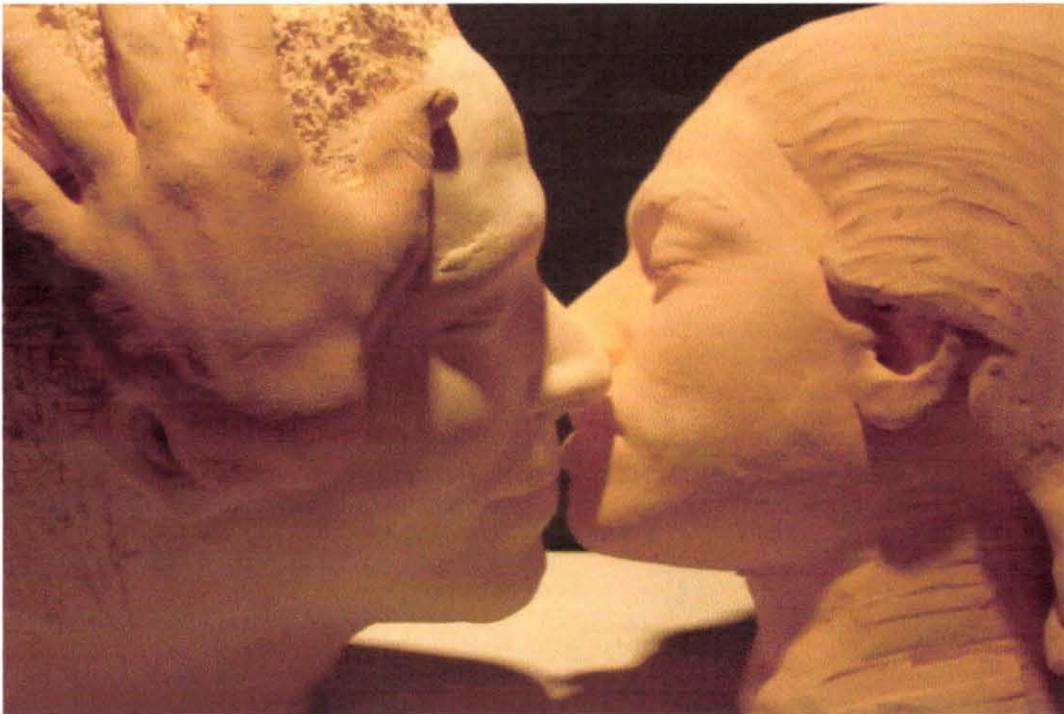


(Plate #V) DETAIL

The second sculpture (plate #VI) involves the head of a man and woman facing one another as if they were about to kiss. The hands of the woman are grasping each side of the man's head tightly as his hair separates around her fingers as if to suggest that she is pulling him forward. The position of the woman's head (higher) and the pressure of her touch is an indication that the woman is the one controlling the intensity and exchange of the encounter. The sculpture indicates a role reversal of the dominant male and the submissive female.

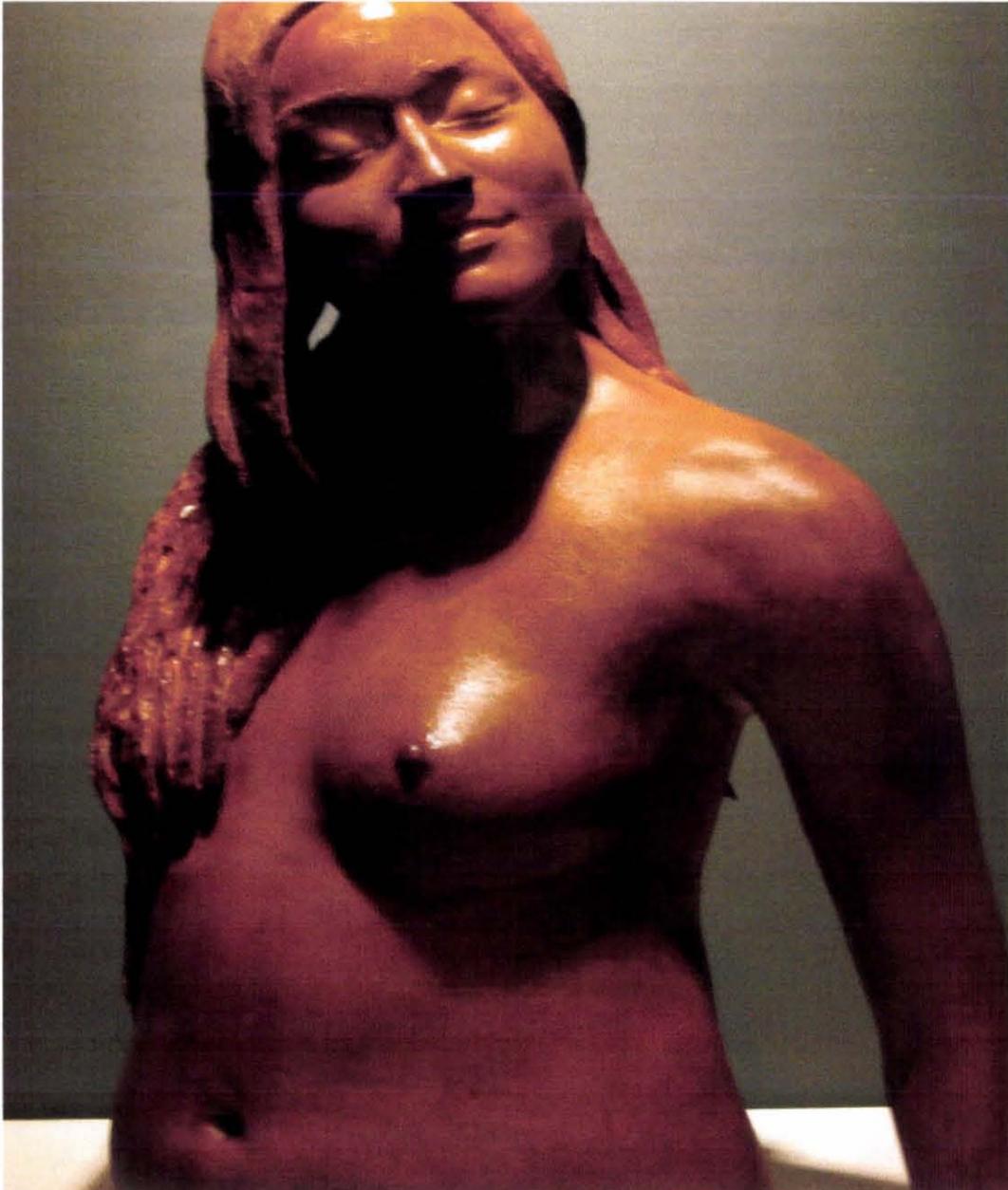


(Plate #VI)



(Plate #VI) DETAIL

The third sculpture in the window (plate #XII) is a life size nude woman from the waist up. The body is slightly turned to the left as if she were walking through waist deep water with one arm in front of the other. Her eyes are closed and her head tilts slightly upward as if she is recalling a memory of being touched. The sculpture represents being alone while reflecting on the intimacy from a previous encounter.



(Plate #VII)

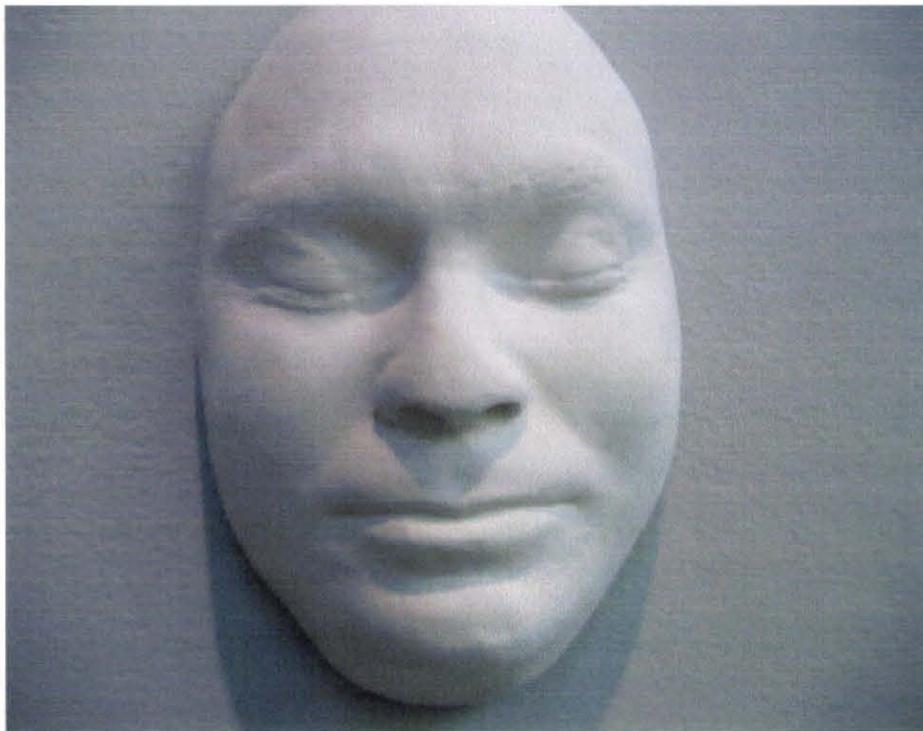
The first figures when entering the gallery (Plate #VIII) represent a man's internal struggle with his own character. The two masks symbolize the choices that occur when deciding what face to wear. The good and evil scenario questions the intentions for making contact: are they genuine or is there a motive behind it? It is evident that the two faces were created using a single mold, but they appear different due to modifications in shape and color.



(Plate VIII)

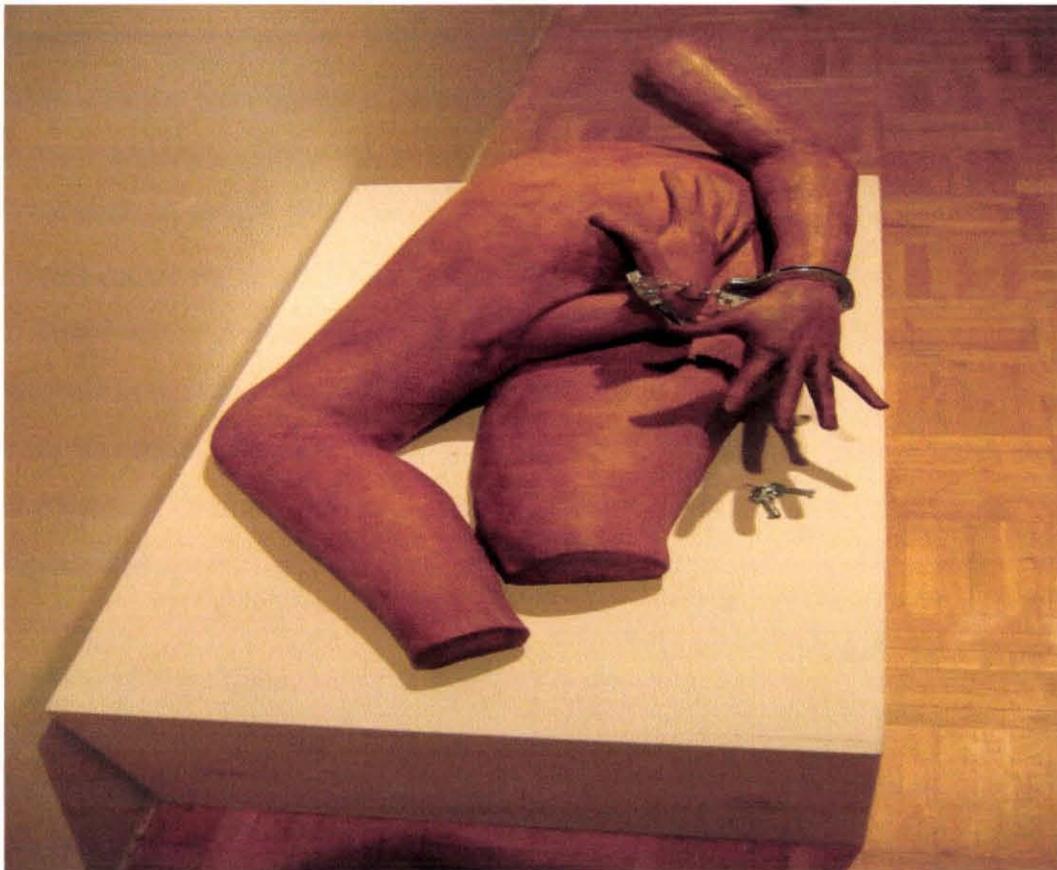


(Plate #VIII) DETAIL NO. 1

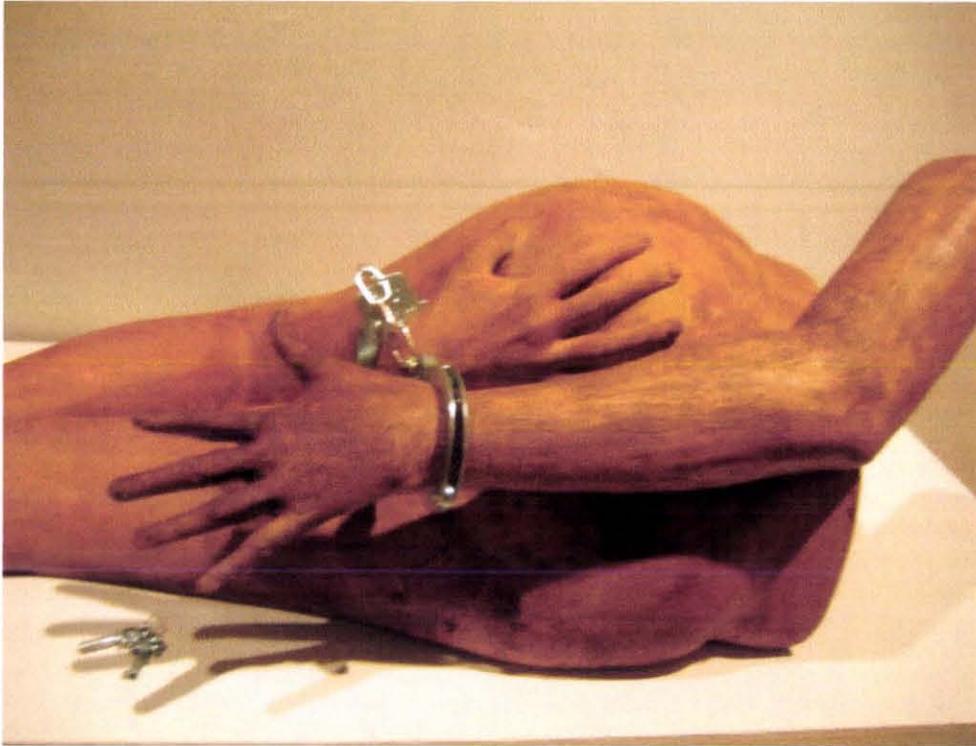


(Plate #VIII) DETAIL NO.2

The first figure in the hallway was a woman's body (life size) lying on her side from the waist down to the ankles. The right leg of the woman is straight and the left crosses over the top with the right hand reaching through the legs toward the buttocks. The left arm is lying over the left hip and is handcuffed at the wrist to the right hand. The left hand is open and below the hand there is a key to the handcuffs. The position suggests the many aspects of constraint and release, restriction versus freedom, control versus surrender. It is evident what is appropriate for some is not appropriate for others. Constraining an individual is dependent upon many aspects, such as, developing honest, sincere communication, and profound trust. Touching an individual when they have relinquished control can become a transcendent experience for both parties involved.



(Plate #VIII)

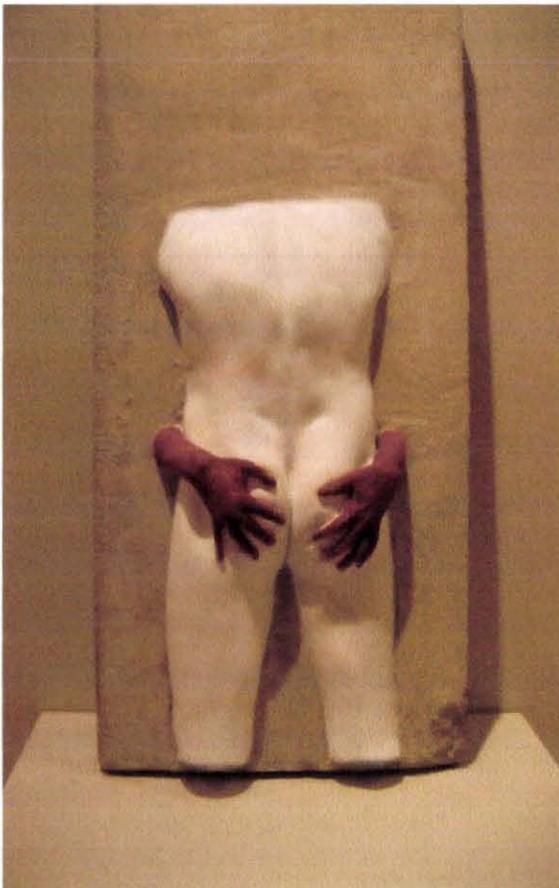


(Plate #VIII) DETAIL NO. 1



(PLATE #VIII) DETAIL NO.2

The second figure (plate #XI) in the hallway suggests the idea of feminine energy and control. It consists of the backside of a man from neck down to his knees, with the hands of a woman squeezing his buttocks as though she was pulling him forward. The sculpture also challenges the stereotypical roles of the past according to which the females were submissive and males, dominant. The impression on the male's buttocks was an attempt to show the aggressiveness behind the female's grasp. The figures were submerged in a concrete square slab to suggest the illusion of a having been drawn in.



(Plate #X)



(Plate # X) SIDE DETAIL

The third piece (see Plate #XII) in the hallway is a pair of hands from a man and a woman. The woman's hands are on top of the man's hands and represent the calming effect of connection. For example, the activity of the brain's ten billion nerve cells is mainly electrical and they interact with the nervous system of the entire body, including the skin. By gently touching or stroking your partner, you are grounding their electromagnetic energy, calming their nerves, and balancing out the workings of the endocrine system. The endocrine system relates to glands that secrete hormones directly into the bloodstream.

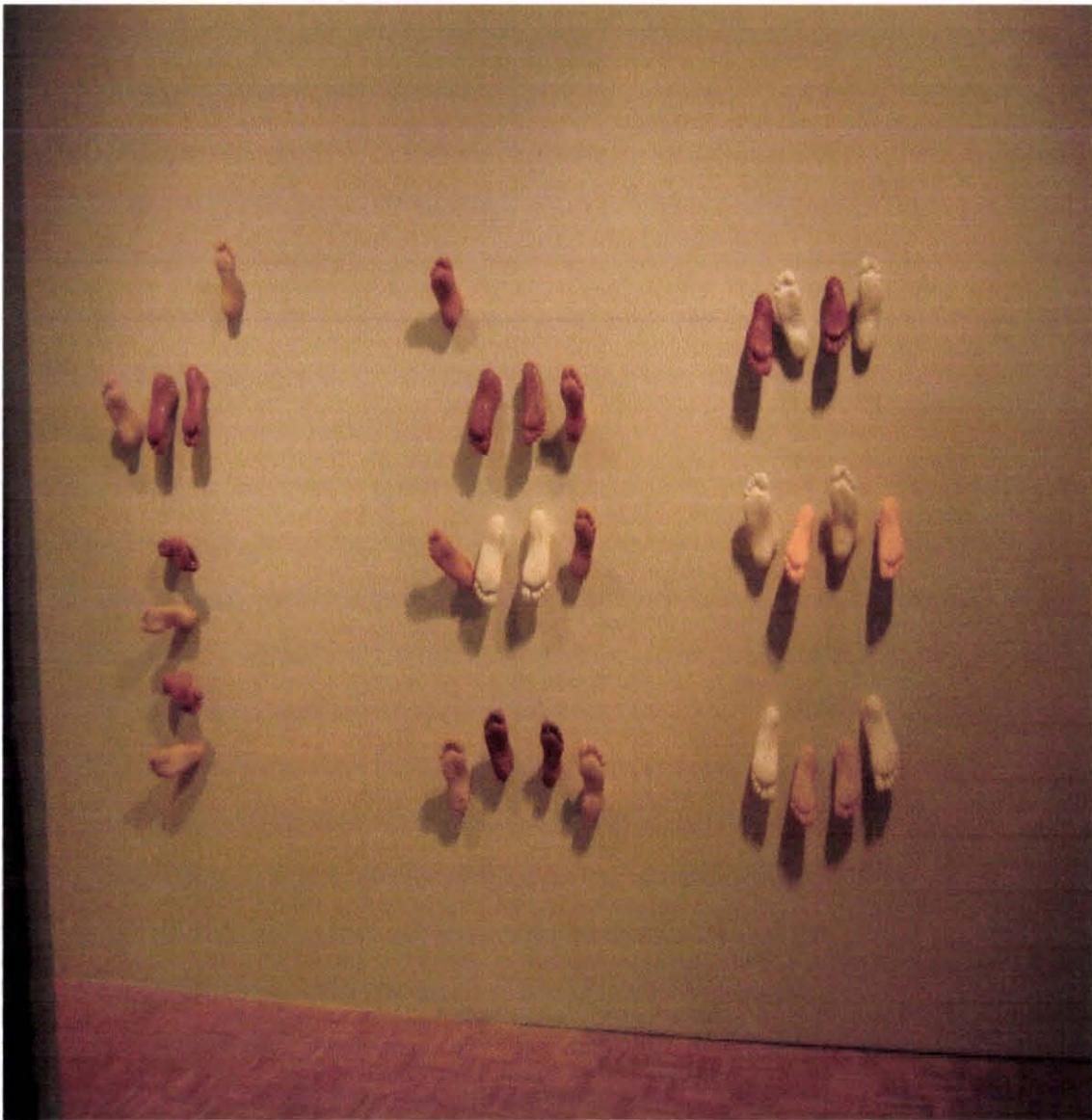


(Plate #XI)



(Plate #XI) SIDE VIEW

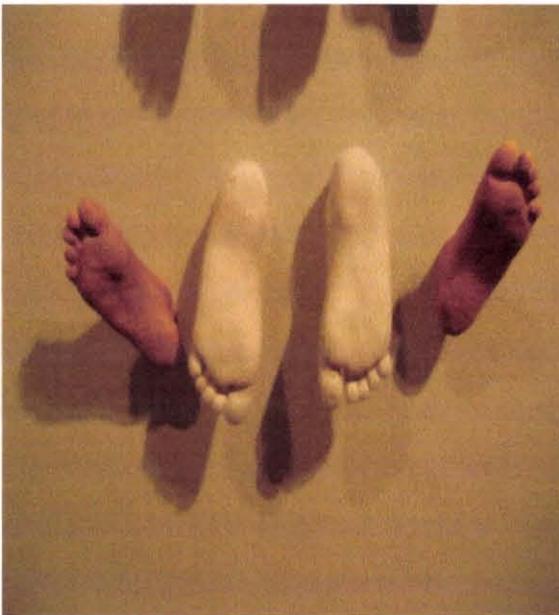
The sidewall consists of twelve pairs of couples' feet in various sexual positions. The positions of the feet represent various ways of touching performed by men and woman. I believe every one of us has a sexual perception as unique as our footprints. Also, no two people have the sense receptors that respond exactly the same way to touch. Sexual positions are best when two people teach each other, with their touch, what their areas of greatest pleasure are.



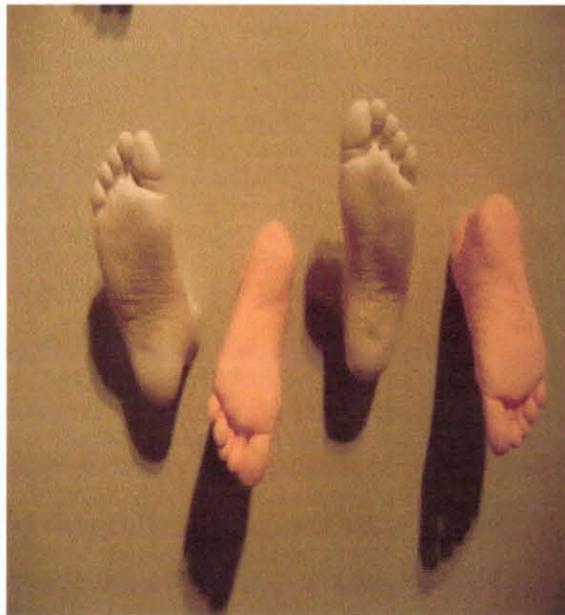
(Plate #XII)



(Plate XII) DETAIL NO. 1



(Plate #XII) DETAIL NO. 2



(Plate #XII) DETAIL NO. 3

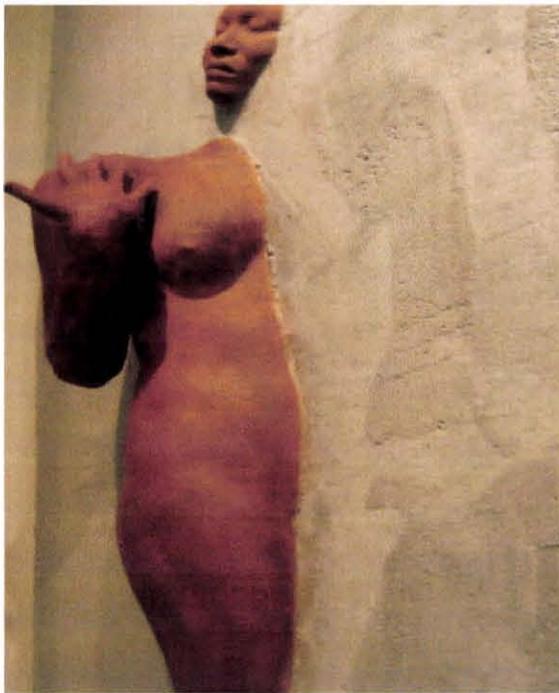
The middle wall sculpture consists of five (life size) castings of nude women that are emerging from concrete. The bodies are arranged in various positions, forward, backwards, and sideways. The emerging bodies represented in a surreal way about one's desires or fantasies to touch the female form.



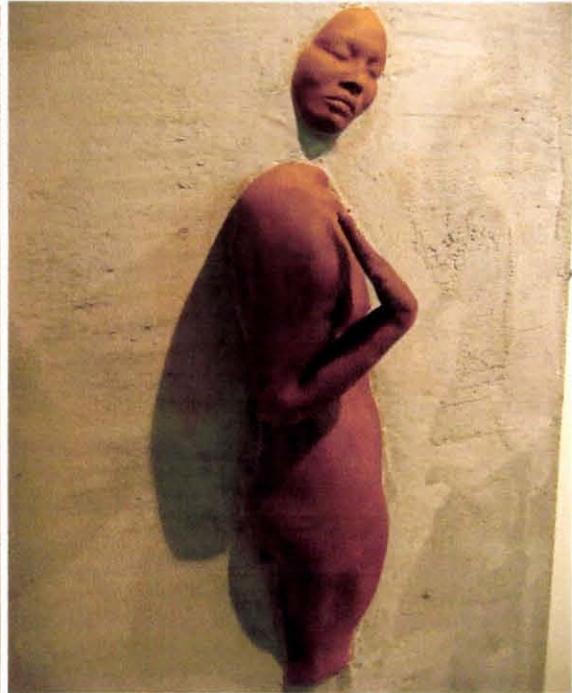
(Plate # XIII) SIDE VIEW



(Plate #XIII) FRONT VIEW



(Plate #XIII) DETAIL NO. 1



(Plate #XIII) FRONT DETAIL NO.1



(Plate #XIII) DETAIL NO. 2



(Plate #XIII) SIDE VIEW NO. 2



(Plate # XIII) DETAIL NO.3



(Plate #XIII) SIDE VIEW NO. 3



(Plate XIII) DETAIL NO. 4



(Plate XIII) SIDE VIEW NO. 4



(Plate #XIII) DETAIL NO.5



(Plate #XIII) SIDE VIEW NO. 5

TECHNOLOGY AND THE EXHIBITION:

The work in this exhibition brings together the technical practices that have been used in the traditional working methods of masons, the ceramic artists, and sculptors. These figures demanded the use of various forms of body casting techniques and mold making, using flex wax, alginate, plaster bandages, plaster, clay, and concrete. The procedures were as follows: the models applied a release agent 'vaseline' to their skin and then held their pose until the chosen casting process was complete. In my first attempt to achieve the fine detail I was looking for I decided to use only alginate. Alginate is a fast-setting flowable molding compound used in the dentistry field. The process works by adding water to the powdered alginate, which then changes form into an insoluble gel and then hardens into a reproduction of the model by an irreversible chemical reaction. The process of using alginate proved to capture a large amount of detail, but was not effective for the multiple applications of mold making. As a result of this, I started over by using flex wax, which is a low melting temperature wax that stretches more than regular wax when hard. I proceeded with this method by melting flex wax and applying it to the models by dipping, pouring or bushing. Although I was satisfied with the fine detail of the flex wax, the strength of the flex wax was insufficient as a press mold. Experimenting with the process I applied the flex wax to the model in the same manner but then reinforced it with plaster bandages. The plaster bandages made the casting procedure take longer but provided a significant amount of support in order to remove the casting from the model. While this proved to be a much stronger mold it still did not provide enough strength to be used as a press mold with clay. So, I proceeded in

the same manner, but added regular plaster about a half inch thick to the back of the plaster bandages and that solved the strength problem.

All the molds were then treated with three coats of a tile sealer to help seal the plaster. Before applying clay to these plaster molds the insides were all coated with Murphy's soap which helps in the release process. Half-inch thick slabs were created using a slab roller and were then pressed into the molds and clay cross supports were added. They were left until the clay was firm enough to support the form, at which time the molds were removed. After the forms became leather hard the clay surface was refined into the desired texture.

Three types of clay used in the exhibition; B-mix, Long beach, and recycled clay. B-mix clay is a white clay body, Long Beach is a light brown and the recycled clay varied in color. Wanting a variety of color and surface texture in the recycled clay when making it, I added redart clay and perlite. Redart clay provides a darker brown clay body and perlite affects the texture. Perlite is a white volcanic rock that expands to increase soil porosity for growing plants. The perlite melts during the kiln firing and produces a unique surface on the finished clay body. Another technique that affected the finished surface was rubbing red iron oxide on the bone-dry clay figures before they were fired. The variety of colors and texture in the figurative sculptures was a representation of the diversity in the different types and colors of human skin.

All large clay sculptures in concrete were first fired in a one-time firing to cone 4. Five of the clay sculptures were placed in a concrete rectangle seven feet, by three feet by four inches. One was placed in a smaller concrete rectangle five feet, by three feet, by four inches. The concrete rectangles were created using a one by six wooden frame. Rod

iron was added around the inside of the rectangle frame and an iron mesh was placed across the entire piece to add strength. The wooden frame also had a foam piece two and a half feet, by six and a half feet placed in the middle and covered with plastic to lighten the weight and decrease the amount of concrete needed. Eight to ten bags of fifty-pound 'quickcrete' concrete mix was prepared in a concrete mixer and then poured into the frame. During the mixing of the concrete I added black dye to the concrete to vary the color. The clay figures were placed in wet concrete and the area around the figures was worked into the desired surface and left to dry. After the concrete had set the wooden frame was removed and reassembled to repeat the process.

Three different temperatures of gas firing were used on the clay sculptures. The first was a cone 4 (2158° Fahrenheit) reduction firing and the second was a cone 10 (2372° Fahrenheit) reduction firing. Reduction firing is a process used to deprive the kiln of oxygen and affects the glazes and clay color. The third type of firing was a raku fire. This is a low-fire technique, where bisqued work is quickly heated to a red-hot temperature and then taken out of the kiln and placed in a container to be reduced with newspaper or similar combustible material.

CONCLUSION:

The original concept for the exhibition was not what was produced in the final show. Creating sculpture dealing with touch and the unexpected 'awe factor' was never actually achieved. The main idea about touch shifted and the focus became more about the technology. The final pieces in the exhibition reveal the fascination for the sexuality that the body exudes. The pairing of the sculptures was an attempt at producing a pleasure seeking moment in the viewers. The impressions, nudity, and lack of faces in the exhibition revealed that the body alone is capable of communicating emotions. The perception of the exhibition is multifaceted, the deeper the viewer's contemplation regarding each sculpture's significance the more complex it becomes. Ultimately, I believe the bodies in the exhibition evoke the mysteries of desire and sexuality as much as they reveal a fascination of the human form.

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