DAVID GILHOOLY - (1943 - )

Along with Robert Arneson and others, David Gilhooly was part of the group that developed Funk Art and took ceramic art to another level. Although probably best known for his imaginative anthropomorphic frogs and other creatures, Gilhooly has had a wide career as an artist in a number of mediums and still continues to evolve. Gilhooly has given up working in clay (twice), but he is the first to state that his current metamorphosis is not the final one.

ARTIST’S STATEMENT - DAVID GILHOOLY

David Gilhooly is primarily known for his ceramic sculpture of animals, food, planets, and most particularly FrogWorld. He is a graduate of the University of California at Davis, studying under Robert Arneson and working with the group in TB-9 (temporary building 9) that evolved into the Funk Ceramic Movement in the San Francisco Bay area. A prolific ceramic artist, his irreverent, darkly humorous objects are in many collections throughout the world, and he has been the focus of a number of exhibitions. Gilhooly turned from clay to working with Plexiglas and now is working on shadow boxes using mixed media and found objects and has also worked in printmaking and drawing. He lists his hobbies as “shopping (fighting with little old ladies for jigsaw puzzles)” \(^1\) and his bad habits as “collecting souvenir totem poles and watching cartoons.” \(^2\)

1. [http://www.sites.onlinemac.com/cchang/vitalstats.htm](http://www.sites.onlinemac.com/cchang/vitalstats.htm)
2. Ibid.

RESUME - DAVID GILHOOLY

1943 Born, Auburn, California
1965 University of California, Davis, BA
1966 University of California, Davis, MA
1967-1969 Teaching-watercolor: San Jose State College, San Jose, California
1969-1971 Teaching –ceramics: University of Saskatchewan, Regina, Canada
1971-1975 Teaching: York University, Ontario, Canada
1976-1977 Teaching: York University, Ontario, Canada
1978, 1979 Teaching: California State University, Sacramento, California (summer school)
BIOGRAPHY - DAVID GILHOOLY

David Gilhooly was born in Auburn, California, in 1943. His family moved several times during his growing up, living variously in California, the Virgin Islands, and Puerto Rico. Following his high school graduation, he returned to his native California to attend the University of California-Davis, receiving first his BA in 1965 and then his MA in 1967. “I first got into ceramics trying to impress a girl,” he has stated – the class he enrolled in was the first ceramics class taught by Robert Arneson at University of California-Davis. The girl who caught his eye left school to marry someone else, but the ceramics took. He became Arneson’s assistant and remained so until he received his master’s. It was there in TB-9 (temporary building 9), the metal building that housed the ceramics department, that Arneson and Gilhooly, along with students Chris Unterseher and Margaret Dodd, began making the ceramic objects that would come to be known as Funk Ceramics. The drive to make functional pieces that at the same time were grotesque and pushing the edge led to FrogWorld, the series of pots and vessels whose anthropomorphic frogs are still among Gilhooly’s best-known works. From 1968 to 1984 he produced a large body of work, turning out hundreds of frog objects with names that gave clues to what his intent was when he made it.

Following graduation from Davis, Gilhooly began a series of teaching jobs, first at San Jose State College in San Jose, California. From there he went to the University of Saskatchewan where FrogWorld continued to develop. “That was the nice thing about clay,” he said. “If you didn’t like the way something really was, you could always fix it up,” and FrogWorld allowed Gilhooly to create the world as he thought it should be. In addition to clay, Gilhooly also worked in paper mache, and one of his creations, a portrait of his department chair and his wife as baboons, resulted in his dismissal. He left Saskatchewan for York University in Ontario, teaching part-time there until 1977 except for returning to University of California-Davis for a year in 1975-1976. “I didn’t want to miss the Bicentennial Year and all the FrogAmerican historic pieces that it suggested.”

Frogs evolved into vegetables, often tied up with mythology of different cultures, and soon food and frogs began to merge. FrogFood came into maturity in Davis in 1975 and 1976, and such pieces as Macaroni and Cheese with Frogs and Frogs in an 8-bean Stew appeared. His move to Davis in 1975 during the patriotic fervor of the Bicentennial year and his access to large kilns after many years resulted in a large number of frog historical characters, such as FrogFranklin and FrogWashington.

Gilhooly was widely exhibited during the 1970’s, having over 30 one-man exhibitions. Among them was a major retrospective at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, in 1976. But by the end of the seventies, Gilhooly was growing tired of the clay and decided to end FrogWorld. At first thinking it was just dissatisfaction with three dimensional forms, he began rolling out large slabs of clay and setting the frog figures on them as if on a stage. However, this technique relied more on the glaze work rather than the sculpting, and Gilhooly did not particularly like glazing: “…having my idea exist
in the physical world as an unglazed piece of work was, for me, the end of the creative process. Having to glaze it was a tedious, seemingly unnecessary job."

The critics did not respond well to the 1981 Whitney Museum of American Art exhibit “Ceramic Sculpture: Six Artists," and around the same time, Gilhooly turned to Plexiglas, intrigued by a material that not only reflected light but also diffused it. He still found it frustrating to break away from FrogWorld and the ceramics world where his work was known and the money was good. He banned FrogFood and tried to send the frogs into space, only to have them continue to evolve as planets and other celestial bodies. Finally Gilhooly began combining other materials such as Plexiglas and found objects and found the resulting mediums more satisfying. However, he didn’t complete his last clay piece until 1996 when for the second time (the first was in 1983) he gave up clay.

Gilhooly continues to evolve. Finding working with Plexiglas alone too labor-intensive, (“It was too much work. I’d have to cut out all the pieces and then finish the edges and put the piece together.”) he returned to his love of found objects. His more recent work involves framed shadow boxes which contain the sculpture and hang as a framed picture. While the style and techniques are different, the dark sense of humor is still there as are the themes of FrogWorld. Now, however, instead of “fixing up the world” in FrogWorld, he is using plastic and other contemporary objects.

He himself, however, doesn’t think this metamorphosis is his final one.

All quotes courtesy of David Gilhooly’s web site:
http://www.sites.onlinemac.com/cchang/index.htm

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**Books and Catalogs**


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“Civilizations in Clay.” Craft Horizons 37, no. 6 (December 1977): 28-35.


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**GALLERIES / WEB SITES - DAVID GILHOOLY**

Larry Evans Gallery, 333 Grant Avenue, #407, San Francisco, California 94108

Art Exchange Gallery, 49 Geary Street, San Francisco, California 94108
WEB SITES - DAVID GILHOOLY

http://www.davidgilhooly.com
Artist’s web site; last revised February 20, 2006

http://www.sites.onlinemac.com/cchang/vitalstats.htm
Older web site of the artist

http://www.art2u.com/artist/gilhooly.html
Interview and images of more recent work

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