

MICHAEL LUCERO – (1953 -)

Born in California, Michael Lucero's personal history and art reflect the cultural mix that is the peculiar heritage of this young part of America. His ancestry includes Hispanic and Native American as well as both Catholic and Jewish influences, and his early memories of his grandparents' home in Las Vegas, NM, reappear repeatedly in his later work. As a child, he would explore the reminders of the ancient civilizations in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains; as an adult, he continues to find inspiration in the histories of other civilizations and their art. "I didn't want to use clay indiscriminately, but rather through its use allude to symbolic meanings of the material, the history of the material. I thought clay-vessel, clay-bones. I wanted to refer to the ancient and to speak of it in contemporary terms."¹

Lucero works primarily in series, using both clay and metal and more recently found objects to create his art. His art mixes the historical with the contemporary and personal to foster a new way of looking at a familiar object, pulling together seemingly disparate elements that form a whole.

1. Mark Richard Leach. "A Conversation with Michael Lucero." Michael Lucero. New York: Hudson Hills Press, 1996.

ARTIST'S STATEMENT – MICHAEL LUCERO

"I don't have to weld or chisel wood or carve stone to be able to make sculpture...there were all these wonderful alternatives...[Using clay I could] make something that was [as] justified or legitimate as anyone else...yet have my own identity felt through the work."¹

"For me, the idea of reclamation seemed to come at a time when found objects interested me more and more. I frequent thrift shops, antique shops, antique malls, and antique fairs. This habit of mine might be considered my way of attempting a social study of American culture, of other cultures, of this conglomerate of all sorts of things from different times and different places. Different worlds collide in these places, and that really interests me."²

1. Quoted in: "Michael Lucero: Sculpture 1976-1995." *Carnegie Magazine Online*, 1998.
http://www.carnegiemuseums.org/cmag/bk_issue/1998/marapr/feat6.htm

2. Quoted in: Peter Held. "Shared Passion." Tempe, AZ: Arizona State University Art Museum.
<http://asuartmuseum.asu.edu/sharedpassion/essay.html>

RESUME – MICHAEL LUCERO

1953	Born, Tracy, CA
1975	Humboldt State University, Arcata, CA, B.A.
1977-1978	Ford Foundation Scholarship
1978	University of Washington, Seattle, WA, M.F.A.

	Young American Award, Museum of Contemporary Craft Council, NY
1978-present	Studio Artist,
1979	National Endowment for the Arts, Artist Fellowship
1980	Creative Artists Public Service Program Fellowship
1981	National Endowment for the Arts, Artist Fellowship
1983	Nettie Marie Jones Fellowship, Center for Music, Drama and Art, Lake Placid, NY
1984	National Endowment for the Arts, Artist Fellowship
1993	Richard Koopman Distinguished Chair in the Visual Arts, University of Hartford, CT
2003-2004	Lamar Dodd Professorial Chair, University of Georgia, Lamar Dodd School of Art

BIOGRAPHY – MICHAEL LUCERO

Born in Tracy, CA, Michael Lucero had a childhood enriched with artistic experiences although at the time he did not make the connection. His maternal grandparents lived in a traditional adobe in Las Vegas, NM, and in the summer the family made the drive from California to visit. Lucero has vivid memories of the trading posts with their stunning pottery, jewelry and rugs – items that were not only meant to be useful, they were also meant to be beautiful, and all made by hand. Equally fascinating were the figures made of wire and burlap that hung outside and blew in the wind, and the desert landscape itself with ravines and arroyos and all manner of desert creatures. All these influences were to reappear later in his work, and the idea of useful items as things of beauty played a major part in his decision to pursue the field of crafts.

Lucero enrolled in Humboldt State University in Arcata, CA, where he majored in painting but also studied printmaking, metalworking and ceramics. He did not particularly enjoy throwing but at Humboldt the emphasis in ceramics was on sculpture, not throwing. Lucero was drawn to the infinite possibilities of the medium, both in the plasticity of the material and the variety of surface decorations. From Humboldt, he pursued graduate studies at the University of Washington, Seattle, studying under Howard Kottler, Patty Warashina, and Robert Sperry. He began exploring the figure, trying new approaches such as suspending his figures rather than placing them on bases and using many small shards to build up the form as opposed to a more solid form.

After receiving his M.F.A. in 1978, Lucero moved to New York, continuing his explorations using shards, creating not only figures but also animal forms. By the early 1980's he felt a need to move forward in his work and the next series of work was "Totems," in which the forms were stacked, forming a column of individual objects that together comprised a whole. Individual heads also appeared, many larger than life, elaborately painted with landscapes, animals – almost Surrealistic in their approach. As they evolved, some of the heads became animals themselves, still decorated with landscapes and other forms from nature. Lucero continues to

work in series, including the “Pre-Columbus” series which reflects his interest in other cultures both ancient and modern, an amalgamation of the various experiences in his memory. For the “New World” series he worked with master potter Chris Daniels, but not in a collaborative way. Daniels threw the forms under the direction and supervision of Lucero, producing a generic vessel rather than a personal expression. The completed vessels were then combined and altered to produce sculptures, referencing in some cases the face jugs and other traditions of ceramics. More recently he has worked with found objects in what he calls his “Reclamation” pieces. These works combine items found in thrift shops, junk yards, indeed just about anywhere with clay and glaze and other materials to form new creatures that are recognizable but not real, a hybrid form, still with the elaborately finished surfaces that force the viewer to look again at common objects and rethink their original use. “In a way, I guess that’s living so much, carrying so many images in your head for so many years...all kind of mixed and running together and just sort of popping out...without having to look at a specific reference anymore.”¹

Arizona State University’s Ceramic Research Center curator Peter Held has described Michael Lucero as “..a transcultural nomadic traveler.”² Lucero traces his heritage to one of the first Mexican families to settle in New Mexico in addition to Native American, Sephardic Jewish, and Catholic roots along with the general mix that defines most native-born Americans. It is not surprising that this rich, varied background would extend to a more global interest in other cultures and traditions, both modern and ancient. He also credits his instructors, many of them women, for broadening his view of the world and further allowing him to find his vision. In their “Preface” to the catalog for The Mint Museum of Art’s retrospective, curators Mark Richard Leach and Dr. Barbara J. Bloemink wrote: “Taken as a whole, Lucero’s artworks contain three core elements: an ecumenical borrowing from the history of art of various cultures, a persistent metaphorical and physical movement between interior and exterior structures and spaces, and a faithfulness to the ceramic medium. The artist’s creative reworking of multicultural forms and his exploration of such dialectical ideas as beauty and grotesque, culture and nature, the sacred and the profane, ritual and accidental, and purity and contamination offer an authentic model of cultural pluralism. Unlike traditional views that explain cultures as isolated, separate entities, Lucero’s creative vision interprets civilization as an aggregate, formed over time by exposure, improvisation, and adaptation.”³

While Lucero has taught briefly at several noted institutions, he has worked primarily as a studio artist. In addition to appearing in numerous solo and group exhibitions, Lucero’s work is included in the permanent collections of the American Craft Museum, NY; the Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, PA; The Everson Museum of Art, Syracuse, NY; the Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY; the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, among others. He has been honored with fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts in addition to other awards.

1. Quoted in: Barbara J. Bloemink. “Mining for Meaning.” *Michael Lucero Sculpture 1976-1995*. New York: Hudson Hills Press, 1996.

2. Peter Held. *Shared Passion*. Tempe, AZ: Arizona State University Art Museum. <http://asuartmuseum.asu.edu/sharedpassion/essay.html>

3. Mark Richard Leach and Dr. Barbara J. Bloemink. *Michael Lucero Sculpture 1976-1995*. New York: Hudson Hills Press, 1996.

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GALLERY REPRESENTATION – MICHAEL LUCERO

Duane Reed Gallery, 7513 Forsyth Blvd., St. Louis, MO 63105

Donna Schneier Fine Arts, 910 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10021

WEB SITES – MICHAEL LUCERO

<http://www.howardhouse.net/artists/resale/default.html>

Brief article on Michael Lucero

<http://asuartmuseum.asu.edu/sharedpassion/essay.html>

"Shared Passion: Sara and David Lieberman Collection of Contemporary Ceramics and Craft."
By Peter Held

<http://www.bta.it/txt/a0/02/en/bta00214.html>

"...But We Are Still 'Only Human.'" By Irene Amore.

<http://www.sofaexpo.com/NY/2005/onb.htm>

Article with link to Michael Lucero talking about his work.

<http://www.carolinaarts.com/204mintcd.html>

Article about the exhibition "The Artful Teapot" with photo of Lucero's work

http://www.carnegiemuseums.org/cmag/bk_issue/1998/marapr/feat6.htm

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<http://www.ceramicstoday.com/potw/lucero.htm>

Article about Michael Lucero with photos

<http://www.beitzelgallery.com/images/Lucero/MLBio.htm>

Biographical information for Michael Lucero

<http://www.duanereedgallery.com/Artists%20Pages/lucero/lucero.html>

Michael Lucero's information page at Duane Reed Gallery

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