

BETH CAVENER STICHTER (1972 -)

Ohio ceramic artist Beth Cavener Stichter draws on the artistic gifts she inherited from her mother and the scientific curiosity she inherited from her father to produce her incredible sculptures. The construction of these pieces is painstaking and meticulous, beginning with solid forms which are then sectioned, hollowed, and reassembled. Many nearly life-size, the sculptures first appear to be giant hares, goats, horses, but closer inspection reveals the emotions all animals – feral and human – share at the most basic level. As viewers we see first the animals and then ourselves, and the line between one and the other is blurred. “I want to develop an allusion to those uncomfortable, awkward edges between animal and human,” Stichter says. “...An uncomfortable relationship grows between the pieces and the viewer as familiar human proportions are confused with those of smaller species. Something conscious and knowing is captured in their gestures and expressions. An invitation.”¹

1. Beth Cavener Stichter. “Artist Statement.”

<http://theartspiritgallery.com/html/ArtistBio.asp?artnum=57>

ARTIST’S STATEMENT – BETH CAVENER STICHTER

“There are primitive animal instincts lurking in our own depths, waiting for the chance to slide past a conscious moment. The sculptures I create focus on human psychology, stripped of context and rationalization, and articulated through animal and human forms. On the surface, these figures are simply feral and domestic individuals suspended in a moment of tension. Beneath the surface they embody the impacts of aggression, territorial desires, isolation, and pack mentality.

Both human and animal interactions show patterns of intricate, subliminal gestures that betray intent and motivation. The things we leave unsaid are far more important than the words we speak out-loud to one another. I have learned to read meaning in the subtler signs: a look, the way one holds one’s hands, the tightening of muscles in the shoulders, the incline of the head, the rhythm of a walk, and the slightest unconscious gestures. I rely on animal body language in my work as a metaphor for these underlying patterns, transforming the animal subjects into human psychological portraits.

I want to pry at those uncomfortable, awkward edges between animal and human. The figures are feral and uneasy, expressing frustration for the human tendency towards cruelty and lack of understanding. Entangled in their own internal and external struggles, the figures are engaged with the subjects of fear, apathy, violence, and powerlessness.

Something conscious and knowing is captured in their gestures and expressions. An invitation and a rebuke.”

1. <http://www.followtheblackrabbit.com/statement.htm>

RESUME – BETH CAVENER STICHTER

1972	Born, Pasadena, CA
1994	Scholarship, Sculpture Instructor, Cecil Academy of Art, Florence, Italy
1995	B.A., Sculpture, Haverford College, Haverford, PA
1996-1997	Appalachian Center for Crafts
2000-2002	M.F.A., Ceramics, The Ohio State University, Columbus, OH
2001	Edith Fergus Gilmore Merit Grant
2002	Edith Fergus Gilmore Materials Grant Artist in Residence, Lecturer, and Instructor, Archie Bray Foundation, Helena, MT
2003	Emerging Artist Grant, American Crafts Council
2004-2005	Artist in Residence, The Clay Studio
2005	Ohio Arts Council Individual Artist Fellowship Virginia A. Groot Foundation Grant, First Place Artist in Residence, University of Massachusetts at Dartmouth
2006	Artist in Residence and Fellowship, Pottery Northwest, Seattle, WA
Present	Studio artist, Portage, OH

BIOGRAPHY – BETH CAVENER STICHTER

“The connections between art and science have always been at the heart of my work. My mother, a ceramicist, and my father, a molecular biologist, raised me with an appreciation for the world on its most minute and grandiose scale. From my mother I learned the language of clay and the power of ideas passed through hands. My father and I spent hours staring at the night sky, while he stretched the seams of my imagination with tales of recombinant DNA and evolutionary battles on the microscopic scale. Every moment of my memory has been spent investigating the natural world around me.”¹

Stichter’s dual heritage from her parents has truly shaped her path. Growing up, she spent time in her father’s biology laboratory, working with animals. The experience gave her not only an intimate knowledge and appreciation of the animal form, it also led to a study of the human animal and its psychology, and it is this theme that she explores in

her work. But scientific studies became more about facts and less about awe, and she turned from studying animals to making them. Like her mother, she chose ceramics to explore and express her ideas. She began with a scholarship to study sculpture in Florence, Italy, and then apprenticed with sculptor Alan LeQuire in Nashville, TN. After receiving a B.A. in sculpture at Haverford College in Haverford, PA, she spent a semester building her portfolio at the Appalachian Center for Crafts in Tennessee. At this point, Stichter states, she had found her medium of expression but had not yet decided what she wanted to say. For a time she struggled with the “craft vs. art” argument, but ultimately chose to pursue ceramic sculpture. Stichter and her mother showed together for a time, both working in ceramic sculpture but with different approaches.

She then went on to complete her graduate studies at Ohio State University, Columbus, OH, in 2002. In addition she has been awarded artist-in-residence in several programs, including the Archie Bray Foundation in Helena, MT, from 2002-2004, and the Clay Studio. She has also received several fellowships and grants which have allowed her to pursue her work. Among those are an Emerging Artist Grant from the American Crafts Council, an Ohio Arts Council Individual Artist Fellowship, the Virginia A. Groot Foundation first prize, and more recently the first Jean Griffith Fellowship.

“I choose clay to be the raw visceral material for my work because its roots are wrapped around my past....Not only is the inert nature of the material alluring with its ties to the primitive and raw, but its voice spans a wide range of sensual, violent, and careless textural possibilities.”² Stichter’s large sculptures are first solid forms, built up around steel armatures with wet clay that she models and sculpts as she works. The amount of clay involved is huge – often 1,000 pounds or greater - and the effort of manipulating this heavy mass is also huge; Stichter describes literally digging into the clay and slamming, pounding, working until she tires and needs a break to rest and reflect on the next approach. “I need the mass of clay to pull and sag like a solid chunk of meat and bone. I need to relate to the material with my own physicality.”³ The completed sculptures are then cut into sections, hollowed out, and reassembled before firing. “Equally important is that quiet intense time I spend hollowing these forms out to leave only their thin skins. I push on those bellies and throats from the insides, swelling them with internal pressure like held breath.”⁴ Even hollowed out, the large pieces are heavy enough to often require several people to assist in lifting and putting the individual pieces back together.

Her intimacy with the piece is present throughout its creation. “As I am hollowing the sculpture, piece by piece, that empty space inside becomes one of the most intense focal points for my thoughts about the conceptual image, as well as my relationship with them.....I think about closing myself in, slipping them on like skins. I imagine being enfolded within a wild hare, ears laid back, body tensed...watching.”⁵ The completed sculpture is often finished with terra sigillata or slip to achieve a surface that emulates skin or clay. Drying and firing are both done very slowly because of the size and weight of the piece.

Many of Stichter’s animals are of human dimension, most depicted as victims, their fate uncertain, not clear. Although at first the animal form is most apparent, looking closer the viewer sees human references – proportions changed, a navel or collarbone added. The blurred line between feral animal and human is very real and often disconcerting, the situations that confront them and the resulting emotions all too familiar. Beneath the human skin is a primal self, and it is this self that Stichter evokes and has the viewer face. These sculptures are, as Garth Clark as stated, “...in emotional terms, Trojan

horses, hares, goats and possums. They arrive as an intriguing gift from a virtuoso sculptor, and then over a period of time they release the aggression, pain, and danger contained within.”⁶

Beth Cavener Stichter’s work has been the focus of a number of exhibitions including the Smithsonian Museum of American Art and The Archie Bray Foundation International Celebration, among others. She continues to work as a studio artist at her home/studio in Ohio.

1. Beth Cavener Stichter. “Artist Statement.”
<http://theartspiritgallery.com/html/ArtistBio.asp?artnum=57>
2. Ibid.
3. Sheri Boggs. “Chris Antemann & Beth Cavener Stichter.” *Ceramics: Art and Perception* no. 56 (2004): 26.
4. Ibid.
5. Beth Cavener Stichter. “Materials and Techniques.”
<http://www.followtheblackrabbit.com/material.htm>
6. “Beth Cavener Stichter: A Modest Proposal.”
<http://www.garthclark.com/exhibit/exhibitions.php?ex=57>

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Books and Catalogs

Conroy, Michel L, and David Russick. *Biomimicry: the Art of Imitating Life*. [Indianapolis, IN]: National Council on Education for the Ceramic Arts, 2004.

500 Animals in Clay. Ashville, NC: Lark Books, 2006.

500 Figures in Clay. Ashville, NC: Lark Books, 2004.

Jones, Bill, ed. *Advanced Raku Techniques*. Westerville, OH: American Ceramic Society, 2004.

McCoy, Paul A. *Lincoln Arts & Cultural Foundation Presents: Feats of Clay 2001, May 5-27, 2001*. Lincoln, CA: Gladding, McBean & Co., 2001.

Stichter, Beth Cavener, and Garth Clark. *Beth Cavener Stichter: November 7 – January 6 2007*. New York: Garth Clark Gallery, 2006.

Periodicals

Boggs, Sheri. “Chris Antemann & Beth Cavener Stichter.” *Ceramic Art and Perception* no. 56 (2004).

Cloonan, Mary K. “Flesh and Emotion.” *Ceramics (Sydney, Australia)* 49 (2002): 41-44.

"Feats of Clay XIV." *Clay Times* (November/December 1999): 16-17.

"Gallery." *Ceramic Review* no. 212 (March/April 2005): 14-16.

"I Am No One." *ARTnews* 105 no. 10 (November 2006): 17.

"The Inquisitors." *Sculpture (Washington, D.C.)* 24 no. 10 (December 2005): 1.

"Megrim." *American Craft* 65 no. 5 (October/November 2005): 67.

"No Going Back." *American Craft* 65 no. 5 (October/November 2005): 67.

"Portfolio.: *American Craft* 65 pt. 5 (October/November 2005): 64-67.

Stichter, Beth Cavener. "New Beginnings." *Ceramics Monthly* 47 no. 5 (May 1999): 48-53.

"Strange Attraction." *Art in America* 93 no. 4 (April 2005): 39.

"The Wilderness Within." *American Ceramics* 15 no. 1 (2006): 9.

GALLERY REPRESENTATION – BETH CAVENER STICHTER

Garth Clark Gallery, 24 West 57 Street, Suite 305, New York, NY 10019

Cervini Haas Gallery, 4222 N. Marshall Way, Scottsdale, AZ 85251

The Art Spirit Gallery, 415 Sherman Avenue, Coeur d'Alene, ID 83814

WEB SITES – BETH CAVENER STICHTER

http://www.followtheblackrabbit.com/index_main.htm

Web site of Beth Cavener Stichter

<http://www.garthclark.com/artists/artists.php?id=Stichter>

Garth Clark Gallery, Stichter page

<http://theartspiritgallery.com/html/ArtistBio.asp?artnum=57>

Resume and statement, Beth Cavener Stichter

http://www.gallerymateria.com/artists/stichter_b/stichter_b.html

Cervini Haas Gallery web site for Stichter

http://www.nuvo.net/print/article_2180

"Sinister Beauty," by Julianna Thibodeaux.

http://www.ceramicstoday.com/potw/cavener_stichter.htm

“Artist of the Week, Beth Cavener Stichter.”

<http://www.sofaexpo.com/NY/2005/ny05.htm>

SOFA 2005 with link to video of Stichter talking about her work

December 2007