Human Nature

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MFA Thesis Exhibition / Graduate Catalog
Mary Kathryn Robb
Master of Fine Arts Degree
Fort Hays State University
Hays, Kansas
2022

Kailin Nielsen, Catalog Designer
Tyler Dallis, Photographer

The catalog submitted to the Graduate School in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Fine Arts
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Human Nature

Thesis Statement

Human Nature explores my personal observations and life experiences through the use of my narrative ceramic sculptures. Anthropomorphism is the attribution of human characteristics or behaviors to non-human entities, such as animals. Some animals are more desirable than others, but all have value and purpose. They exist for a reason. They all bleed. They just want to be. People are like that. I became untrusting of humans after a childhood trauma and began relating more to animals than humans. I observed many similarities in wild animals with my experience. They are continually on alert searching for food and watching for predators. I became afraid of humans and fearful I was being hunted. Using human animal hybrids allows me to tell my stories free from the entanglement that human to human interaction brings.

The choice of animal for my sculptures varies, but the innate qualities of a certain species play an integral part in developing my concept. *How Long Were You There?* is a doppelganger for the pedophile who exposed himself to me and chased me. At a very young age I was left to handle the repercussions alone, developing PTSD, neurosis, and body dysmorphia. Crocodiles evoke fear and trepidation in most people. Their stealth is impressive considering their size. The raised portions of a crocodile’s armor are sensors that detect the slightest ripple in water alerting them to the possible presence of prey. Life is like that. One never knows when meeting a stranger is this person friend or foe, or how long have they been watching. The size of *How Long Were You There?* is commensurate to the impact that event had in my life. That one moment consumed 25 years. In *Scorned* the choice of the snake human hybrid is a metaphor for people who refuse to forgive others. Bitterness takes root in their hearts evidenced by the venom spewing from their mouths. Most of us have experienced difficulty forgiving someone we believe wronged us, only to find that forgiveness is for us, to free us from the entanglement unforgiveness breeds. Becoming a Butterfly centers around the figure of speech, a social butterfly, that compares an extrovert to a butterfly who flits from one flower to another. The use of a butterfly is also suggestive of the journey my art has taken me and the stages of a butterfly’s metamorphosis. That process is reflective of rebirth, redemption, and second chances. Capturing the details of each species further develops the character of each sculpture.

Looking deeper at the intricacies of the animals I choose confronts a deeper understanding of my life and who I am. Animals that have a foreboding presence are more difficult to ascertain just how I want to use them and what it is about the animal that is significant to my life. Through the process of researching a particular idea or concept, sourcing various photographs, modeling solid clay for proportions and contours, reassembling hollowed-out body parts, and carving the details leads to a revelation of the impact in my life.

Different surface techniques add to the realistic nature of the finished product. I either sponge or spray underglaze washes to seep into the crevices of deep carvings. Additional layers of underglaze are applied using the dry brush method, overlapping colors to enhance the complexities of the animal adding to the realism of the surface. Animals with fur or for those that need a softer touch receive a layer of pan pastels blending the color transitions seamlessly. Reptiles may be finished with several layers of China paint enhancing the color without adding softness. Many of these techniques are specific to ceramics and are only achieved through multiple firings.

The human element in my work is symbolic of the transformation in my life—from just surviving to becoming human. Ceramics is about the transformation of materials through the firing process. It is about purifying the elements from one state to another and the constant refinement the materials go through until completion. Finding oneself in art is about narrowing focus, about becoming the person you were always meant to be and imprinting your soul on your work so that the light in you radiates from its image.
Kathy Robb was raised an only child in a small two-bedroom bungalow on the outskirts of Kansas City, Missouri. It was a time of prosperity, strict gender roles, and black and white television. Her father lived in the business world while her mother worked at home and was Robb's creative influence. Untrusting of humans, because of a childhood trauma, Robb withdrew to the comfort and solace of her pets. She loved the intimacy and close bonds she was able to develop with animals. Hoping to develop her artistic nature, Robb’s mother enrolled her in dance lessons at age 8 leading to performances on a children’s television program and appearances in several productions at Kansas City’s Starlight Theater. Her parents rejected the notion of her pursuing an art career repeating the starving artist mantra. Their advice was to get a job with a good company, work 40 years and retire.

So Robb forgot about being a professional artist, but after decades in the corporate world emerged as a self-taught mixed-media artist and started a part-time business for retail and private collectors. In 2007, after retiring from her corporate job, Robb fulfilled a life-long dream of going on an African safari. Returning to the bush on her second trip to Africa she observed the animals she longed to see. She witnessed the beauty and grace of leopards, the power of lions feasting on cape buffalo, and the enormous size of elephants. Observing these wild animals in their natural habitat, free to follow their instincts was satisfying and inspirational.

The recession of 2008-2009 led her back to school to pursue an Associates in Business Administration, but she realized this was not her hearts-desire and shifted direction to pursue art. She earned a BFA with an emphasis in Ceramics from Wichita State University and is expected to graduate with her MFA with an emphasis Ceramics from Fort Hays State University in May 2022. Robb’s future plans include setting up her own studio and scaling down her ceramic sculptures to enter in national and international exhibitions and competitions. The ideal studio for her would be having a studio downstairs and living above the studio in an old building in a quaint, artistic neighborhood. While her future residence is undecided, Robb has plans for an up-coming series of work and is anxious to start.
Education

2022 | Master of Fine Arts | Emphasis in Ceramics
Fort Hays State University, Hays, Kansas

2018 | Bachelor of Fine Arts Ceramics
Wichita State University, Wichita, Kansas

2012 | Associates Business Administration
University of Phoenix online

Work Experience

2018 | Del Norte-Armando
Wichita, Kansas
Engagement Assistant for Horizontes, a community-based project and winner of the Knight Foundation’s Knight Cities Challenge Grant, using art to bridge the divide between two underprivileged Wichita communities and Studio Assistant making two-piece molds for his ceramics business.

2018 | Glazing Grace Stoneware
Douglass, Kansas
Worked as a studio assistant wedging clay, helping to glaze, and wax the bottoms of pottery, Did some extruding and stamping of finished pottery. Also helped pack finished pottery for sales.

2020 | Ceramica Clay Club | Vice President
Fort Hays State University, Hays, Kansas

Workshops Conducted

2021
Fort Hays State University, Hays, Kansas
High School Art Day Workshop, Press Mold Acorns with Dry Brush Underglaze Techniques

2019
Fort Hays State University, Hays, Kansas
High School Art Day Workshop, Fun with Figures, Fort Hays State University, Hays, Kansas
Workshops

2021 | Fort Hays State University, Hays, Kansas
- Marshall Maude, Woodfire Workshop
- Nan Smith, Minority Status
- Delvin Goode and John R Hamilton, Tiger Flow
- Linda Ganstrom, Experience Design and Installation Art Workshop
- Carol Guthro, Printing on Clay
- Ariel Bowman, Mixed Media Mixer
- Jamie Bates Slone, Figurative Workshop
- Justin Zielke, Problem Solving
- Sondra Schwetman

2020 | Fort Hays State University, Hays, Kansas
- Linda Ganstrom, Ceramics and Mixed Media
- Ariel Bowman, Animal Sculpting
- John Hamilton, Accounting and Marketing
- Curt Hammerly, Accounting and Marketing

2019 | Fort Hays State University, Hays, Kansas
- Conrad Snider, Building Pipe Burners, Tiles using Rubber Molds
- Ted Neal, Soda Kiln Building
- Mike Stumbras, Investigating Ornament
- Melanie Sherman, China Painting and Decals

2018 | Fort Hays State University, Hays, Kansas
- Trisha Coates, Slip Dip and Slip Casting
- Rose B. Simpson, Figure

2018 | Ceramics Symposium Association, Lawrence Art Center, Lawrence, Kansas
- Alessandro Gallo
- Robert Brady

2016 | Ceramics Symposium Association, Lawrence Art Center, Lawrence, Kansas
- Sergei Isupov and Lisa Clague

Scholarships, Honors, and Awards

2021
- Graduate Scholarly Experience Grant Competition (GSE), Human / Nature Thesis and Diorama Displays, Fort Hays State University, Hays, Kansas
- Graduate Scholarly Experience Grant Competition (GSE), Authentic Hybrid Sculptures, Fort Hays State University, Hays, Kansas
Scholarships, Honors, and Awards (Continued)

2021
-Scholarly and Creative Activities Day, Fort Hays State University, Hays, Kansas
-Graduate 3D Art, 3rd Place
-HEERF Direct Grant, Fort Hays State University, Hays, Kansas
-Earl O & Winona Field Art Scholarship, Fort Hays State University, Hays, Kansas
-Earl O & Winona Field Art Scholarship, Fort Hays State University, Hays, Kansas

2020
-Graduate Scholarly Experience Grant Competition (GSE), Animal Finishing Project, Fort Hays State University, Hays, Kansas
-Graduate Scholarly Experience Grant Competition (GSE), Abstract Painting Research Project, Fort Hays State University, Hays, Kansas

2019
-Scholarly and Creative Activities Day, Fort Hays State University, Hays, Kansas
-Graduate Scholarly Experience (GSE) Grant, Fort Hays State University, Hays, Kansas
-Scholarly and Creative Activities Day, Fort Hays State University, Hays, Kansas
-Graduate 3D Art, 2nd Place

2017-2018
-James and Catherine Buck FA Scholarship, Wichita State University, Wichita, Kansas
-Kansas Comp Grant Scholarship, Wichita State University, Wichita, Kansas
-Elements Competition, Ceramics division 1st place. Wilson K. Cadman Art Gallery, Wichita State University, Wichita, Kansas

Exhibitions

2022
-Human Nature Thesis Exhibition, Moss-Thorns Art Gallery, Fort Hays State University, Hays, Kansas

2021
-Smoky Hill Art Exhibition, Hays Art Council Gallery, Hays, KS. (juried by Jay Nelson)
-Mix Discipline: FHSU Graduate Exhibition, Annex 1010 Main Gallery, Hays, Kansas
-Perseverance and Fortitude, Hays Art Council Gallery, Hays, Kansas
-Perseverance and Fortitude, The Prairie Museum of Art and History, Colby, Kansas
-Perseverance and Fortitude, Lincoln Arts Center, Lincoln, Kansas

2019
-Kansas Artist Craftsmen Association (KACA), Material Mastery Exhibition, Ottawa, Kansas (juried by Jessica Belangee)
Exhibitions (Continued)

2019
-People, Places, Things, Augusta Arts Centre Gallery, Augusta, Kansas
-Augusta National All Media Crafts Exhibition, Augusta Arts Centre Gallery, Augusta, Kansas

2018
-Justice and Redemption, Wilson K. Cadman Art Gallery, Wichita State University, Wichita, Kansas
-Stations 11, Group BFA Exhibition Hue Gallery, Wichita, Kansas
-Origins, solo. Wilson K. Cadman Art Gallery, Wichita State University, Wichita, Kansas

2017
-Ulrich Museum of Art, Undergraduate Scholarship finalist, McKnight, Wichita State University, Wichita, Kansas

Conferences

2020
-National Council on Education for the Ceramic Arts, online

2016
-National Council on Education for the Ceramic Arts, Kansas City, Missouri
-Kansas Artist Craftsman, Wichita, Kansas

Press

2021

2018
-Dream It. Built It. Do It Now. #WSUNOW, Think It. Create It. Do It Now. https://www.instagram.com/p/Bg4FZM5hcy1/?tagged=wsunow

2017
How Long Were You There?
I Can Fly
Becoming a Butterfly
The Waiting Game...In The Waiting
Ceramics

1. Look Dad
14 ¾ X 15 ½ X 13 7/8”
Tree 116 ½ X 52 X 58”
Antler 6 ½ X 15 ½ X 12 ½
Porcelain Paper Clay, Underglaze, Pan Pastels, Mixed Media

2. How Long Were You There?
17 X 96 X 22”
Porcelain Paper Clay, Underglaze

3. Catch Me, If You Can
10 X 12 3/8 X 8 ¾”
Porcelain Paper Clay, Underglaze, Pan Pastels

4. My Hiding Place
27 X 10 X 10 ½”
Porcelain Paper Clay, Spray Paint
Wood Fired

5. Baby
2 ¼ X 4 X 3 ¼”
Porcelain Paper Clay, Underglaze, Pan Pastels

6. I Can Fly
26 X 18 X 7”
Porcelain Paper Clay, Underglaze, Pan Pastels

7. All That
23 X 24 x 9”
Porcelain Paper Clay, Underglaze, Pan Pastels, Synthetic Hair

8. Scorned
16 ¼ X 19 3/8 X 12 1/8”
Porcelain Paper Clay, Underglaze, Glaze, Pan Pastels

9. Storing Treasures
25X 10 ½ X 7”
Porcelain Paper Clay, Underglaze, Pan Pastels
10. Stretch
6 ½ X 13 X 5 ½"
Porcelain Paper Clay, Underglaze, Pan Pastels

11. Over Here
12 X 6 X 4 ½”
Porcelain Paper Clay, Underglaze, Pan Pastels

12. Dumbfounded
8 ½ X 6 ½ X 3 ¾”
Porcelain Paper Clay, Underglaze, Pan Pastels

13. Mine
16 ½ X 25 ½ X 10”
Porcelain Paper Clay, Underglaze, Pan Pastels
(Dead Rabbit) 2 ¼ X 8 ½ X 5 ½” (rabbit lays at base of rock)

14. The Snoop Troop
Eaves Dropper
15 X 15 X 9 ½”
Porcelain Paper Clay, Underglaze, Pan Pastels

15. Say What
12 X 17 X 6”
Porcelain Paper Clay, Underglaze, Pan Pastels

16. Interloper
7 X 9 X 2 ¾
Porcelain Paper Clay, China Paint, Acrylic

17. Becoming a Butterfly
26 X 11 ½ X 7”
Porcelain Paper Clay, Underglaze, Pan Pastels
Butterfly Branch 1 (top branch)– 6 ½ X 23 X 9 ½”
Butterfly Branch 2 (top right)– 8 X 14 X 6”
Butterfly Branch 3 (bottom right) – 6½ X 16 X 9 ½”
Butterfly Branch 4 (bottom left)– 7 ¾ X 15 ½ X 6 ¼”
Butterfly Branch 5 (top left) – 6 ½ X 14 X 5”
Porcelain Paper Clay, Underglaze, Pan Pastels
A special thanks to Professor Linda Ganstrom Committee Chair. Without your guidance, knowledge, intuition, and leadership I could not have accomplished this. You always knew what to say and when to say it. You proved to be the perfect person to get me through the program. Thank you to my graduate committee members and all my professors in the Art and Design Department. I would also like to thank all my educators. Each stage built on the next and without you I would not be where I am today. Thank you to my family and friends for believing in me and for your support. Last but not least I would like to thank my Lord and Savior for being with me every step of the way. This has been the journey of a lifetime.
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