Closely Observed

Meghan C. Sullivan
University of Nebraska-Lincoln, megsullivan27@hotmail.com

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CLOSELY OBSERVED

By

Meghan Clare Sullivan

A THESIS

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There are many ways in which people communicate but the most powerful ways are often unspoken. Our gestures can convey a tremendous amount of information. The smallest change of posture will alert us to a shift in mood. This is understood on a subconscious level. In every interaction, there are layers of information that color each person’s understanding of what is happening at the moment. Many aspects of our personalities are unknown to others. Subtle and seemingly ordinary interactions can have deep emotional and psychological resonance.

My figurative ceramic sculptures are observations of people existing in prosaic moments. The gestures of my figurative sculptures provide the clues that tell us how to interpret the figures’ relationships and emotions. They may be conversing, sleeping or simply sitting in the same space. However, the idea of our unknown inner self is the subject of this work. A psychological narrative is created within each piece. It is through gesture and body language that the underlying elements of each relationship become evident, such as the depth of communication and the level of intimacy.

These sculptures become allegories for intimacy, vulnerability and fragility. The nudity of the figures contradicts the ordinariness of their situations and heightens their emotional content. The nudity also removes the social cues offered by clothing and emphasizes the feelings evoked by posture. The viewer may feel voyeuristic while
observing private spaces in which the figures are unaware. The viewers are given the freedom to interpret the scenario based on their own experiences.

I hire models to pose in imagined scenes. The use of models assures that this work will more realistically reflect the idiosyncrasies of the body. I work with clay additively because this allows me to respond quickly and intuitively to the model. Through this technique, I abstract and exaggerate fleeting, gestural expressions. The energy and motion of my hand as I sculpt is evident in the surface of each piece. This active surface refers to the physicality of the human body. The layered and textural glazes create depth and color that emphasize the modeling of the clay. The color and textures of the surfaces intensify psychological aspects of the figures and of the interactions between the figures.

My background has influenced the tone and content of my work. Each piece is based on personal experiences, however the finished work is altered from the actual event. A specific instance from a larger experience is pinpointed and extrapolated to create the final composition. The desire to explore complicated, private, and emotional relationships in my artwork originated from my experiences in a large, close-knit family. When one lives so closely with others, one learns that small interactions are what build and alter relationships. Within each interaction, there are unknown aspects of personality and personal history.

Close relationships contain the fleeting moments that reveal hidden parts of ourselves to others through body language. Even though we are all complicated and unique, we are able to understand and relate to each other at a subconscious level. The communication of the emotional and psychological connections is at the heart of my work.
Closely Observed
Meghan Sullivan