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Constructing Entropy

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Constructing Entropy

by

Xanthe Isbister

A THESIS

Presented to the Faculty of
The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska
In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements
For the Degree of Master of Fine Arts

Major: Art

Under the Supervision of Professor Gail Kendall

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Constructing Entropy

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University of Nebraska, 2008

Advisor: Gail Kendall

Significant portions of my life have been spent in the wilderness of Northern Canada. These experiences such as hiking, exploring, and prospecting, that began in early childhood created in me a profound respect and concern for the wilderness environment. I seek to capture and express this “sense of place” in my work. In the last three years visits to this region of Canada, or to any wilderness area, for that matter, have been minimal. This absence has created a drive within me to employ memory, perhaps idealized, as source material in this ceramic sculpture.

A demanding and labor-intensive way of constructing ceramic sculpture is a significant aspect of my work, to the point of becoming part of the content of each piece. Clay is a malleable, immediate, responsive material and several methods are used when creating the work. I begin by mixing thousands of pounds of clay and then throwing and smashing large hunks of it into a solid mound. Then in a very vigorous, physical manner, I form pieces by slashing, cutting away, slicing, folding, tearing and pounding the clay. Working from a solid mass is not common in my field, in that much ceramic sculpture demonstrates techniques commonly associated with the vessel making such as slabs, coils, slump of drape molds. In part, the physical demands involved in the studio, stands in for the many ways I have engaged with the wilderness environment over the years.
Although 'process as content' is important in this sculpture, other ideas drive my studio efforts as well. This exhibition presents the results of an investigation into ideas of depletion in the natural landscape. The transformations that occur within the natural environment from effects such as wind and water erosion alter the landscape: precarious rocks, snowdrifts and crevasses may result. I am interested in the ways in which 'depletion' and 'erosion' in the landscape refer to the processes and events that are part of our human lives. The environmental activist David Suzuki says; "The natural environment informs us about what it means to be human. We can only gain a thorough sense of our human identity in the face of our own limitations.....through comparisons with non human entities."1 Most of us exist in an environment that is removed from the wilderness. Susan Clayton states, "The degradation of this human dependence on nature brings the increased likelihood of a deprived and diminished existence. Much of the human search for a coherent and fulfilling existence is intimately dependent upon our relationship to nature."2 The wilderness landscape has had a profound effect on my creative work and detachment from the wilderness has created a need to make work in response to this separation.

1. *Burnt*
   Ceramic and Glazes
   144 H x 240 W x 180 L inches

2. *Burnt*
   Ceramic and Glazes
   144 H x 240 W x 180 L inches

3. *Burnt*
   Ceramic and Glazes
   144 H x 240 W x 180 L inches

4. *Burnt*
   Ceramic and Glazes
   144 H x 240 W x 180 L inches

5. *Burnt*
   Ceramic and Glazes
   144 H x 240 W x 180 L inches

6. *Burnt*
   Ceramic and Glazes
   144 H x 240 W x 180 L inches

7. *Burnt*
   Ceramic and Glazes
   144 H x 240 W x 180 L inches

8. *Burnt (detail)*
   Ceramic and Glazes
   144 H x 240 W x 180 L inches

9. *Untitled*
   Ceramic, Terra Sigillata, Oil Paint
   74 H x 58 W inches

10. *Shifted*
    Ceramic, Terra Sigillata, Oil Paint
    74 H x 58 W inches

11. *Shifted*
    Ceramic, Terra Sigillata, Oil Paint
    74 H x 58 W inches

12. *Shifted (detail)*
    Ceramic, Terra Sigillata, Oil Paint
    74 H x 58 W inches

13. *Shifted (detail)*
    Ceramic, Terra Sigillata, Oil Paint
    74 H x 58 W inches

14. *Shifted (detail)*
    Ceramic, Terra Sigillata, Oil Paint
    74 H x 58 W inches

15. *Shifted (detail)*
    Ceramic, Terra Sigillata, Oil Paint
    74 H x 58 W inches

16. *Shifted & Drift*
    Ceramic, Terra Sigillata, Oil Paint
    74 H x 58 W / 25 H x 52 W x 91 L inches

17. *Drift*
    Ceramic, Terra Sigillata, Oil Paint
    25 H x 52 W x 91 L inches

18. *Drift*
    Ceramic, Terra Sigillata, Oil Paint
    25 H x 52 W x 91 L inches

19. *Drift*
    Ceramic, Terra Sigillata, Oil Paint
    25 H x 52 W x 91 L inches

20. *Drift*
    Ceramic, Terra Sigillata, Oil Paint
    25 H x 52 W x 91 L inches