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JOE FAFARD

By ELIZABETH SEITZ

2007

MacKenzie Art Gallery VIRTUAL EXHIBITION OF REGINA CLAY



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MacKenzie Art Gallery



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Regina Clay: Worlds in the Making

**November 19, 2005 to
February 26, 2006**

Organized and circulated by the MacKenzie Art Gallery with the support of the Museums Assistance Program of the Department of Canadian Heritage.

Clay is a paradoxical medium. Its history as a material for pottery is as old as mud, but as a medium for sculpture its lineage is no more ancient than the aluminum pop can. It can take any shape, mimic any material, but despite its versatility it has struggled to win the respect given to metal and stone. As a medium with too much and not enough history, with abundant promise but no esteem, it was very much like the place where it found an unexpected home in Canada during the 1960s and 1970s: the small prairie city of Regina, Saskatchewan.



This exhibition examines how, in Regina, clay came into its own as a sculptural medium and became the vehicle for a creative explosion. Over 130 works by 14 artists are featured in this nationally touring exhibition, which includes sculptures by Lorne Beug, Victor Cicansky, Joe Fafard, David Gilhooly, Ricardo Gómez, Beth

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Hone, Ann James, Margaret Keelan, Marilyn Levine, Lorraine Malach, Maija Peeples-Bright, Jack Sures, David Thauberger, and Russell Yuristy.

This exhibition narrative begins in 1964-65, with the arrival of sculptor Ricardo Gómez and ceramist Jack Sures at the art school of the University of Saskatchewan, Regina Campus. Under their influence, gifted students, such as Marilyn Levine, Victor Cicansky and Ann James, developed an interest in clay as a medium and helped establish Regina as a vital centre for ceramic sculpture and studio pottery.

Events in 1969 set the stage for Regina's ceramists to be recognized on the national and international stage. The Hone-James Studio, founded a year earlier by Ann James and Beth Hone, held an important workshop featuring California funk artist James Melchert. A coinciding exhibition at the MacKenzie Art Gallery exposed the community directly to leading figures from the California clay scene. Significantly, one of the artists in that exhibition, David Gilhooly, was soon afterwards hired by the university to teach ceramics.

Gilhooly's effect on the local scene and on the younger faculty members, Joe Fafard and Russell Yuristy, is legendary. Gone were the hierarchies of high art and the reverence which attended them. Art was an activity not to be divorced from life, locality, or personal history. And clay was more than just a medium for creating functional pottery - out of its stuff one could create entire worlds. Although Gilhooly's challenge to institutional authority and to the prevailing modernist orthodoxy led to his untimely departure after only two years, he continued to be associated with the Regina ceramists for year to come.

Although the Regina clay scene never developed into a movement with a formal manifesto or a defined membership, it was soon evident to outside observers that a creative eruption unlike anything else in Canada had occurred. Here was a group of artists who had rejected the serious modernist enterprise of uncovering abstract, universal truths in favour of a playful, if at times ironic, exploration of concrete, local realities. In many cases, artists had become associated with imagery that reflected a personal connection to people, places, and histories, for example: Fafard's *Pense* portraits, Cicansky's outhouse temples, Gilhooly's frog mythologies, Levine's leather bags and boots, Yuristy's stone boat drawings and animal playground sculptures, and James' urethane and clay figurative assemblages. Their assertion of the importance of place aligned them with the emerging postmodern concern for locality and they struck a chord with the popular imagination at a moment when the back-to-the-land movement was at its zenith.

Throughout the 1970s, artists were shown in a flurry of exhibitions in Saskatchewan and across Canada. International recognition took place simultaneously through exhibitions in Japan and the United States, and, most significantly, in the selection of Gilhooly, Fafard, Cicansky, Yuristy, Levine, and James to exhibit in Canada *Trajectories '73* at the Musée d'art moderne de la Ville de Paris in 1973.

However, by mid-decade Gilhooly had taken a teaching position at York University, Levine had moved to Oakland and James to London, England. Yuristy had been forced to leave the university faculty followed suit. While modernist orthodoxy had been breached, the overthrow was never total. Nevertheless, interest in ceramics persisted in Regina throughout the latter half of the 1970s as artists continued to explore clay's sculptural possibilities.

In retrospect, the *Regina Clay* artists are notable for being among the first in Canada to win respect for ceramics as a sculptural medium. Despite the limitations of producing small scale works without a theoretical agenda and in a regional centre,

their work succeeded in gaining international attention. Furthermore, their articulation of an aesthetic that is based in place and personal experience stands as one of the first attempts at a "cognitive mapping: of the emerging postmodern world. Located at the intersection between the local and the global, the worlds that they created continue to engage viewers with a freshness and intensity that derives from their intuitive understanding of the complex cultural issues that even now shape our globe.

Timothy Long
Head Curator

Image Credit:

Joe Fafard

Ford, 1976

clay, glaze, acrylic, wood

40.5 x 43.8 x 38.3 cm

The Saskatchewan Arts Board Permanent Collection 1977-302

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