



Sculpture

December 2004

Vol. 23 No.10

A publication of the
International Sculpture Center

New York

Daisy Youngblood

McKee Gallery

Daisy Youngblood understands gravity. Gravity curves the backs of her tiny, bronze holy men. Their arms rest with natural weight across their knees or rise against the pressure of the earth to gesture as they teach. A bronze donkey stands, all 11 inches of him, as though he weighs what he would if he were alive. Perfectly modeled, he waits with patient dignity, balanced against the pull of the earth. The low-fire clay head of a Lama rests with convincing weight within its vitrine. It could be a relic. It could be a death mask. It could be a severed head. The flesh of the cheeks folds down over the chin, the lips mold down and around the teeth, the eyes are puffy and drawn with age. Youngblood's peerless draftsmanship reproduces the weight and curve

of flesh and bone absolutely, so that although many of the pieces within this exhibition are tiny, none is miniaturized.

Youngblood's absolute mastery of her craft makes works such as *Dylan's Cheetah* (2001) possible. Four-and-one-half inches high, hung simply on the wall, the cheetah pants with anxiety. His stripes are cut into the clay, from the corners of his eyes down to his half-open mouth. His forehead is split, and his wide nose is a black void. He is as open as a piece of fretwork, an unlit lantern, an empty mask. There is so little of him, and yet he contains such a great grief that his keening is nearly audible. *Mother and Child* (1987) is another masterpiece of brevity and sorrow. The two African figures hang from the wall. The child is melded

into the mother's body at the crook of her elbow. The mother appears to be pregnant again. Her body is literally cut off below the knees. Her left arm has been replaced with a stick. She stares straight ahead into the distance, defiant, indomitable, hopeless. What can she do but keep moving?

Horse Crucifixion (1975) is another kind of haiku. Suspended from a stick balanced on two nails driven into the wall is the torso of an alert horse with pricked ears and curious eye. His body ends at his deep chest, which takes the shape of a quickly folded cone, exactly like a hastily made pastry bag or a quickly sewn hand puppet. He does not appear mutilated or unfinished. He is the perfect portrait of a horse captured while looking at something interesting.

The low-fire clay birds hanging from the wall are slightly different. Made skillfully and quickly, they are plump where they should be and sharp of beak. But they also are scorched to the color of ash so that they appear flash-burned, as if they came from Pompeii. They alone look lighter than they should be and appear to be artifacts or symbols. Perhaps they are warnings against meddling with nature.

Youngblood possesses one of art's greatest gifts: the ability to share the complexity of one person's experience of his or her path through the world with another. She does this by creating unique objects freighted with emotion and absolutely without irony. Elephant, horse, donkey, gorilla, men, and women are all conduits through which Youngblood's emotions flow; for her, I think, they are just differently shaped portals to breach the wall that separates one person from the next.

—Jan Riley



COURTESY MCKEE GALLERY, NY

Daisy Youngblood, *Lama*, 1996.
Low-fire clay, 8.75 x 6.75 x 7 in.