

VAN DOREN  
WAXTER

# THE NEW YORK OBSERVER

## Victim of Minimalism Triumphs With Bold Ceramic Sculpture

By Mario Naves • 05/17/04

### Hollow, But Not Empty

One of the most important characteristics of Daisy Youngblood's sculpture, on display at David McKee Gallery, is that each piece is hollow. Sculpture is an art of the body; it confronts us as fellow masses occupying real space. Ms. Youngblood is wise to this: Whether depicting the human form or, as is more frequently the case, animals, she is sensitive to the power and possibilities of matter. Her sculptures are made from low-fire clay and sometimes cast in bronze. The surfaces are delicate and rough-hewn, the scale modest-the biggest, *Elephant Head* (2001), measures just under three feet in height. Yet the presence of each piece is commanding. *Bird* (1993), a sculpture that could be grasped in the palm of your hand, holds the room and demands our attention. For Ms. Youngblood, the occupation of space is less important than impelling the viewer to be cognizant of it. The area surrounding the work is rendered disconcertingly present.

Ms. Youngblood's subject is mortality and, as its obverse, eternity. Each sculpture-each body -has been rendered as a vessel, an artifact. Vitality has been drained from them; an animating spirit is conspicuous by its absence. Tapping into primordial archetypes and non-Western traditions, Ms. Youngblood endows these memento mori with an unnerving nobility. As Maria Friedrich writes in the show's catalog, one "cannot imagine a culture in Sub-Saharan Africa, the foothills of Japan, the mountains of Switzerland or the steppes of Russia that could not understand [Ms. Youngblood's] humanity." She's right, though I would add that the human animal elicits from Ms. Youngblood a sentimental streak that stifles her universalist aspirations. Donkeys, cows and horses-that kind of thing prompts an imaginative and emotional leap from the artist. Birds especially encourage Ms. Youngblood's dour and stringent lyricism. Then again, if someone told me that *Standing Gorilla 2002* (2002) is a masterpiece, I wouldn't think of arguing otherwise.

Daisy Youngblood: A Selection of Works 1975-2003 is at the David McKee Gallery, 745 Fifth Avenue until May 29.