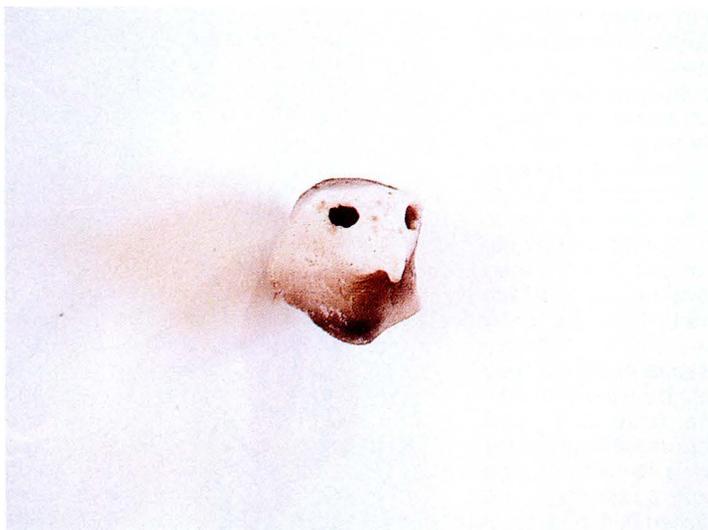


Daisy Youngblood at David McKee

In this exhibition, which spans the years 1979-99, the spirits of animals and humans seem to have switched vessels. Daisy Youngblood's deftly formed clay and bronze gorillas, horses and hawks have an anthropomorphic clarity, exuding a keen awareness that is by turns threatening, benevolent and wary. Meanwhile, her human faces and figures have a mask-like opacity, suggesting a consciousness that is impenetrable to ordinary human connection.

This latter quality is especially clear in a 1982 portrait of the art dealer Dick Bellamy. Bellamy's body is a shapeless clay vessel which narrows near the top into a human neck. This rises into a precisely modeled head topped with a crown of real hair. The eyes are slits into the vessel's hollow interior. The hair, rather than contributing to the realism of the form, seems to bring it into the realm of the African fetish. Though done during Bellamy's lifetime, this might almost be a death mask, or perhaps a clay golem awaiting the breath of life.

Other sculptures are equally unnerving. A fired black horse head (1979) juts from the wall, its clay skin pulled back tautly to suggest a skull. Bits of white rib bones create the teeth that line its open mouth, and the straining thrust of the whole brings to mind the anguished scream of the horse in *Guernica*. *Gorilla* (1996) is a mass of black bronze; the animal is seated on the ground with its abbreviated legs



Daisy Youngblood: *Hawk Head*, 1999, low-fired clay, 2 by 1½ by 2¾ inches; at McKee.

pushed out in front. The gorilla's face is fierce and angular, while its huge body seems to have partially collapsed into itself, creating a barely recognizable jumble of sharp-edged planes that suggest a formation of jagged rock. At once animal and mineral, it conveys a sense of subdued power.

A female gorilla (1998) has a gentler aspect. Also bronze, she has a greenish patina and a rounded belly that suggests she may be pregnant. Her outlines are softer and fuller, and she has something of the presence of a Henry Moore nude. Her narrow face dips down, with chin resting on chest, and she casts her eyes downward with the serenity of a Renaissance Madonna.

In contrast to the bulky, free-standing gorillas, most of the other works are small and attached to the wall. This does not lessen their presence. One of the smallest is a tiny hawk head, realized twice, once in clay and once in stone. Its sharp, talonlike beak and beady eye give it command over a wide swath of the surrounding space.

Taken together, the personages in this show have an ancient quality, as if they were unearthed rather than fashioned. They feel like living artifacts, breathing the spirits of primal loves and hates into the otherwise inanimate gallery.

—Eleanor Heartney