

BEGINNING TO END: CHRISTINE GOLDEN, AISHA HARRISON, CLAYTON KEYES

SANTA FE CLAY HAS LONG BEEN A VALUABLE

art resource in town. These days, it includes a retail ceramics supply store, a gallery, and a fully equipped studio. Annually, SFC hosts twenty resident ceramic artists, and classes and workshops that provide a stimulating environment for students of all ages, from beginners to professionals. Every kind of clay work may be seen in various stages of completion on the shelves in the studios. In the gallery, the exhibitions focus on clay used in sculptural idioms.

The current show, *Beginning to End*, is a case in point. Showcasing three artists, all of whom received their MFAs within the past few years, it has a freshness that enlivens the literal heaviness of the material. Clay, after all, is mud, sand, dirt, earth, dust, minerals. So, more than with bronze or stone sculpture, one can viscerally sense the weight of the earth's body in these pieces. For one thing, every inch has been kneaded and stroked by the human hand. This fingerprint evidence of hand-crafting draws me in. Also engaging is the fact that all three artists represent the human body, in whole or part, and they do this not in the refined manner that we associate with beautifully finished ceramic vessels, but in ways that point to the vulnerability and impermanence of flesh.

Clayton Keyes' *Conflict Resolution* consists of two male torsos in a graphic representation of an ambivalent relationship—one stitching up, while the other cuts off the literal threads of their flesh-to-flesh connection. In *Last Moments* a nude female crouches to put flowers on the eyes of a supine male corpse. The ensemble is large and rests on a table, allowing views from different angles. Implying some mysterious and complex relationship preceding loss, it could be a tomb sculpture. Similarly unsettled (and unsettling) are the two female torsos of Christine Golden's *Together*. Each has a single breast and arm. Their eyes and foreheads are covered by flowered washcloths that droop like batter, melting over their heads as each simultaneously gropes for and shoves away the other. Golden's other work consists of four similarly sized pieces: *Kids in the Garden 1*, and *Kids in the Garden 2*, *Memento 1* and *Memento 2*. All depict a young child from the waist up in a sort of tub. In one set, the (acrylic) water in which the child is supposedly soaking holds fragments of dismembered elderly bodies; in the other set, the children, a boy and a girl, have a focused, almost menacing air. The scenario's allusion to birdbaths is complicated by its strange incorporation of innocence and menace.

Aisha Harrison's large slab of rough clay bears the title *All the Tests Didn't Prepare Me for This*. The human figure in the tall rectangular doorway cut into the slab suggests the whole is something like a ruin at Chaco. The backside of this slab is glazed with a child-like rendering of a forest of tall pines. There is a slowly revealed sense of interplay or tension between solidity and monumentality on the one hand, and of transition, wonder, and misgiving on the other. Harrison's three other pieces are of blindfolded figures.

It Comes in Threes features a blindfolded woman with hand on hip, leaning expectantly upward toward three large black birds suspended above her as if they are about to land. The male figure of *Restive* is drawing on or poking through his blindfold. In *If Only*, he

is lifting the blindfold with a finger in order to peek under it. Expectation, hope, and uncertainty are rife in these pieces; there may be hope but there is more of something like bewildered seeking.

Christine Golden's wall relief, *Flying with Waxed Wings*, is a visceral allegory with multiple, unstable interpretive possibilities. The young fertility figure in the center, crowned with corncobs, breastfeeds an old man below her; below him a sheep's head and legs weigh down the lower left of this complex composition. Above her, behind her back, an old woman with a plaited headdress is surrounded by shining globular shapes. On the lower right, tubes or pipes jut downward, lined with myriad decayed images of animals, cities, cars, and classical scenes. The work's title

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brings to mind Icarus, a mythological character of hubris and recklessness who flew too near the sun and melted the wax on his wings, causing him to plunge to his death. Indeed these figures—somewhat like our civilization—seem enraptured by and swept up in their Dionysian processes and symbols without a thought for consequences. The allegorical is the primary symbolic mode here, using sharp polarities of youth and age, life and death, dark and light to underscore this elemental cast of mind. At the same time, a visceral interplay of desire and revulsion, fear and hope, keeps everything in motion, cycling through primal force fields of need and excess. Just like life.

—MARINA LA PALMA

Christine Golden, *Flying with Waxed Wings*, clay, decals, paints, napkins, wood, and fabric, 40" x 45" x 13", 2012

