PERSONIFIED: Deborah Potter, Anita Rocamora

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Cover:
On left: Deborah Potter "Kapade", Clay, 2009
On right: Anita Rocamora "Mothership II", Clay, 2010

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Clay as a medium holds tremendous communicative potential. A plant material before firing it is a highly workable and expressive medium. These qualities lend it favourably to the needs of artists working with the human form as subject matter. The ability to manipulate the position of a shoulder or hip changes posture, placement of hands and facial features create gestures – all of which can convey emotion, disposition and humour. The malleability of clay also allows for both actual textured surfaces and visual “textures” suggestive of tactile sensation. Modeled clay can evoke the physicality of yielding flesh or draping fabric, whether these are supple or loose, smooth or wrinkled. With skilful formation, the ceramic figure serves as a vehicle through which the scope of human experiences and emotions can be expressed.

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Deborah Potter’s ceramic figures convey narratives specific to women. Although Potter’s work is at times autobiographical, her aim is to present common female perspectives related to the internal psyche. Potter draws on her own life experiences as well as the experiences of women friends to build identifiable narratives in the work. There are several groups of figures in Potter’s production, each with distinctive formal qualities and each using different materials or modeling methods. Although each group of figures has a different focus, all address the social and personal pressures experienced by women. The group of multi-coloured underglazed porcelain figures yield flesh or draping fabric, whether these are supple or loose, smooth or wrinkled. With skilful formation, the ceramic figure serves as a vehicle through which the scope of human experiences and emotions can be expressed.

Anita Rocamora’s work uses the figure to examine issues of body perception, sexuality, maternity and mortality. Rocamora’s work originates from a personal place, responding to childhood memories, life experience and dreams. Aging is a principal subject in the work, and like Potter, Rocamora creates figures that imitate “real” bodies. We see drooping stomachs and breasts along with rounded thighs and rumps. However, this work is not as focused on the body, the interest here is the human spirit. The body is viewed as the vessel in which we travel through life. Some of the pieces examine particular stages of life - a set of three figures reveal, through portals in the torsos, either full or empty nests. Passing from one stage of life to another is the human journey, the vessel changes along the journey as does the emotional terrain. Rocamora’s work presents this with humour and acceptance. There is symbolic buoyancy in many of the figures. Although fleshly and curvy they possess a visual nimbleness. The posture, pose, and line of the body create a vertical emphasis, visually lifting the figure from the base. In some pieces the figure is physically suspended above the base of the sculpture, and in one work the figure possesses paper wings. These reoccurring themes of weightlessness and flight suggest transcendence, a lightness of spirit and triumph over psychological obstacles or social restraints.

Overall the work presented in Personified is about the beauty, individuality and dignity in every person regardless of stature, age or gender. Working adeptly with clay these artists imbue the body with cultural, political and personal significance, creating work that encourages self acceptance and celebrates the individual.