

Artist Statement 2012
Kelly Cox

In 1989 when I was four years old I visited the Lascaux caves in southern France and was struck by the paintings of animals that were brushed onto the walls of the caves. I felt that the images had the ability to reach across time and impress upon me a primal truth about what it means to be human. I was carried away by the fluidity of style in which the bulls were painted in the *Hall of Bulls*. The way that the textures inherent in the walls of the cave gave life and movement to the bulls became the foundation for my sense of aesthetic.

I have always enjoyed the texture of paintings. As a sculptor I have worked to marry the tactility of a painting with an appreciation of form to create a visual language that is a combination of representation, symbolism and expression. I think about the caves and I ask how does time paint? How does water leave marks in the rock and sand? How do lichens paint across the surface of a boulder? Time paints with a give and go, an adding of color or information and then on top of that, the subtraction. I have to admit that I do not have a lot of interest for how machines paint or how people paint who are envious of and trying to imitate machines.

What attracts me to clay is its earthiness. By earthiness what I mean is that clay, water, heat and stains such as iron, coppers, wood ash and salts are the mediums of the earth that are manipulated by time and the cycles and movements of our planets to create the landscapes around us. They leave an imprint of the physical history of our world that geologists are able to interpret and thus are the tools of the language of the earth.

I also enjoy the intimacy of creating a form through touching. Clay has a plasticity that responds to the shaping of my hands as well as to the forces of gravity, moisture and heat the way that no other material does and so connects me while sculpting, to the physical reality of the moment. The markings left by the hand in clay are an expression of life, of movement and style and all of the little decisions that go into making something.

Originality is important to me. There are current trends in Contemporary Ceramics that I am not and am not trying to be a part of but I believe that artistic expression as a reflection of nature needs to diversify in order to thrive. I am interested in history and the heart of this moment and how that translates into a visual language through symbols and the tactility of the creative process. I am trying to pull together images from our culture to create new and relevant icons of humans and animals and animal humans that break through the barrage of visual propaganda and advertisement and hopefully remind people both of the vibrancy of a threatened world and the humanity and history that we all share.

Much of my recent work has also been about balance and the awkwardness of the jointed figure, often posed in an attitude of fight or flight. Totem or tribal artwork excites me because it blurs the line between what is human and what is animal as well as what is real and what is imaginary in a way that evokes a primal, mental space. I am also interested in the theatricality before violence (such as in a predator-prey scenario) and in the melodrama of a frozen moment between two personalities.

In March of 2011, my husband and I were backpacking around Japan during the earthquake/tsunami/nuclear power plant disaster. Outside of Kyoto in the mountains near Shigaraki is the Miho Museum of Art and amongst the treasures from the golden ages of every continent handpicked for their aesthetic grace, we saw an exhibit of screen paintings by Nagasawa Rosetsu, "the fanciful painter." My newest sculptures *I'm Sorry* and *Fukushima* are sculptural interpretations of his painting *White Elephant and Black Bull* in which he plays with the contrast between black/white and large/small. Our time traveling around Japan and admiring the beauty of the artwork, temples and cherry blossoms in the shadow of uncertainty about Fukushima, about what it was doing or could do along with my sympathy for the region that had been destroyed is the basis for my current sculptural work.

