

# Cydra Vaux's

## Sculptures and Writings

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## Introduction and Acknowledgements

By reclaiming ourselves and our rich history through art, women can continue to establish their place in an egalitarian world that honors both men and women in harmonious balance.

My goals include having my work acquired by museums; making women's history visible; healing my own life through art.

I have a website at [www.womansculpture.com](http://www.womansculpture.com). My work may also be viewed on the Brooklyn Museum's Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art: Feminist Art Base:

[http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/eascfa/feminist\\_art\\_base/gallery/cydra\\_vaux.php](http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/eascfa/feminist_art_base/gallery/cydra_vaux.php)

I am forever grateful to my beloved husband Carl, and my son Cavan for helping me to battle cancer and supporting my artwork. My husband photographed me so I would have images to use with my self-portraits. Thank you to my brother Gregson Vaux for encouraging me to study art. I am grateful to my mentor Duncan MacDiarmid and my web designer Terry Varner. My sculptures are dedicated to my mom, Verna Sylvia Robinson, my spiritual sister.

## Chronological List of Cydra Vaux's Sculptures with Writing

### 1.) *Minoan Snake Goddesses*

1998, terra cotta, underglaze

Goddess #1: 13" H x 10" W x 5 " D

Goddess #2: 20" H x 11" W x 7 " D

Goddess #3: 31" H x 17" W x 12 " D



The first of these Goddesses (Goddess #1) is a replica of the Minoan Snake Goddess found on the Island of Crete. In our patriarchal culture Goddess is hardly acknowledged, if at all. My ideal is to show what would have happened if Goddess was to have been historically handed down to us with the same all

encompassing impact as a male God: She would be ever present. She would be infused into every aspect of our conscious and unconscious minds, our language, myths, secular and religious culture. By creating a series of these Minoan Snake Goddesses I am imagining what could have happened with the unimpeded evolution of Goddess; each of the Goddesses gets progressively taller to illustrate her evolving status.

Additionally, Goddesses #1 represents the religion we are given by our parents. As we mature we change, abstract, rearrange, subtract from and add to our original religion until we have made it our own. The changing forms of Goddesses #2 and #3 highlight this metamorphosis.

While Goddess #1 is a replica, Goddess #2 incorporates other designs from the Minoan culture. For instance, her flowered skirt design is found on the walls of the Queen's Megaron at the palace of Knossos. The flora and fauna found on Minoan vases graces her apron. For Goddess #1 and #2, the majority of the designs come directly from actual Minoan artifacts. I have simply selected and rearranged these design elements. The first two Goddesses introduce the culture of the Minoans and their value system. For instance, the images on Goddess #1 and #2 are peaceful scenes depicting flowers and marine life that reflect the Minoans close ties to nature and the sea. Minoan pottery and palace frescos do not depict scenes of war or military activity. Rather, they show palace life and the resplendent beauty of nature that surrounded their island.

The theme for Goddess #3's skirt design comes from a Minoan vase depicting the labrys (double-bladed ax). The labrys is a complex symbol that is related to the butterfly through its symmetrical shape. The labrys was a ceremonial scepter in Crete and might have been used in the ritual slaughter of the sacred bull (Barbara G. Walker, 1995). The butterfly is a symbol for the soul and transformation. However, these two symbols may be related in a variety of other ways. I choose to juxtapose these two symbols because of their historical richness and complexity.

On each of the blue checks on Goddess #3's skirt I have painted a butterfly, and on each of the brown checks a labrys. The two bottom rows of butterflies are fairly realistic in their depiction. Likewise, the two bottom rows of axes are close in design to Minoan labrys'. As the viewer's eye travels upward, the butterflies and labrys's become increasingly more abstract and at times resemble each other. This fluidity between symbols shows their interrelation and creates new meanings and constructs. For instance, the labrys is human-made, heavy, and durable, while the butterfly is natural, weightless, and transient. Both symbols

also speak to the concept of transformation. The butterfly comes from a cocoon and the ax from metals in the earth. The Labrys can also be seen as a form of the double-edged sword that heals as it cuts.

The axes and butterflies from the third row up have been infused with symbolism relating to Goddess. Some of the female symbols included are eggs, crescent moons, and bowls/caldrons/grails. There are also a variety of yoni (womb of the world), mandorla (almond) and vesica piscis (vessel of the fish) shapes. An example of this is a triple mandorla symbol in the traditional colors of the maiden (white), mother (red), crone (black).

If the Minoan Goddess had continued to flourish, she would have undoubtedly influenced other cultures in ways that we can only imagine. With this in mind, there are a variety of symbols from different cultures that have been incorporated into skirt #3. These include labrys that incorporate the shape of a Chinese yin yang, the Egyptian Eye of Horus, and an infinity sign. Likewise, the skirt has butterflies that are patterned from pomegranates, the lunar swastika (which is found on Cretan coins), African masks, and a geometric Native American design. My intention was to give her an international breadth that embraces a variety of cultures and religions. Some of the symbols are cross-cultural such as the egg, the caldron/bowl/grail, and the spiral.

Each of the three Goddesses has a wide structural base to signify that these women are not pushovers, metaphorically, or literally. The stability, solidity, and power of these Snake Goddesses are important. This piece is utopian and the women I am portraying are in their ideal state. They are not struggling to overcome oppression, or make order out of chaos; these Goddesses dwell in an ordered, peaceful, stable realm. Their world is also beautiful and filled with rich colors, opulent patterns and symbols that are laden with cultural history and female identity. If we see a world filled with the feminine divine we can begin to bring that world to fruition.

These three pieces are deeply indebted to *The Woman's Dictionary of Symbols and Sacred Objects* (1999) by Barbara G. Walker. Walker has reclaimed women's symbols from the patriarchal clutches of history. Without this text these powerful symbols and their complex meanings could be lost. Many of the designs on #3 are based on traditional symbols found in Ms. Walker's text. An example of this is the Sheila-na-gig located on the lunette of the skirt. I took the idea of the Sheila-na-gig from the Barbara G. Walker's dictionary and abstracted her body so that her four limbs resemble the wings of a butterfly, and her yoni the butterflies' body.

These three Snake Goddesses also address the issue of the male gaze and the question of woman as subject or object. Feminist art historians regard "forthright eye contact between female subject and the viewer as embodying sexual meaning, according to them, the viewer, who is considered to be male, exerts control over the female subject, who is positioned as an object to be regarded. Eye contact between the presumed male artist/viewer and the female subject/model as the "male gaze": men look; woman are looked at (Barter, 49)". Nancy Spero writes "It's about defiance, defiance of giving pleasure to the male gaze, instead of giving pleasure to ourselves".

While Goddesses #1, #2, and #3 embrace their sexuality, their purpose is not primarily connected to male gratification. They enjoy their beauty and sexuality, but it is not the main focus of their action. Instead they are fully engaged in ritual; they do not make eye contact with the viewer; their state is trance-like, yet aware. Their focus is simultaneously inward as they attend to the task at hand, and outward, as they engage the onlooker in the ritual.

#### References:

*Barter, Judith A. (1998) Mary Cassatt: Themes, Sources, and the Modern Woman. In Mary Cassatt: Modern Woman. Harry N. Abrams, Inc., New York*  
*Spero, Nancy (1995) From the art exhibition of Leon Golub and Nancy Spero: War and Memory. Organized by Katy Kline and Helaine Posner. MIT List Visual Arts Center, Cambridge April 15-June 25, 1995.*  
*Walker, Barbara G. (1998) The Woman's Dictionary of Symbols and Sacred Objects. HarperCollins, New York.*



2.) ***Crowning Egg Goddess with Fish***

1999, terra cotta, underglaze  
5" H x 3" W x 5" D



This small sculpture finds its kernel of being in a variety of ancient sculptures such as the *Venus of Willendorf*. The all seeing eyes of the *Crowning Egg Goddess with Fish* can be traced to other figures like *Goddess*, mid-third millennium B.C.E., Treasure of Ur, Mari. The blue sgraffito on her body includes symbols representing fish, swirling lines, snakes, eyes, a sacred triangle, and a wheel of life pattern. The blue lines on her legs recall rivers and bolts of lightning. Her yoni is giving birth to a cosmic egg.

The opening to her womb is in the classic shape of the yoni. Likewise, the fish on her belly finds its predecessor in the yoni's shape. Barbara G. Walker writes in the *Woman's Dictionary of Symbols and Sacred Objects* that "the shape of external female genitalia , which the ancients clearly recognized as the seat of female sexual power....the sign of the yoni passed into Western symbolism under such titles as mandorla (almond) and vesica piscis (vessel of the fish).



Mandorla means “almond”. Almonds were female-genital symbols and maternity charms from very ancient times.” (p. 18,10.)

3.) ***Virgin, Mother, Crone with Shared Yoni***

1999, terra cotta, underglazes  
5" H x 9" D



This piece demonstrates the virgin, mother, crone progression in a woman's life. Traditional symbolic colors are used, white for the virgin, red for the mother, and black for the crone. Sgraffito symbols that relate to each phase of a woman's life add pattern to this figurine.

4.) ***Double-Goddess Birthing an Egg From her Head***

1999, terra cotta, pigment

10" H x 12" W x 12" D

(also titled: *Wheel of Life or, Swastika Goddess*)



Barbara G. Walker (1998) writes in her *The Woman's Dictionary of Symbols and Sacred Objects* that the swastika is "named from the Sanskrit "so be it," or "amen," the swastika has been a religious emblem of worldwide occurrence since at least 10,000 B.C.E. It appeared on the oldest coinage in India, on images of Buddha in Japan, and on Greek and Roman figures of the Great Goddess. On

artifacts dating from the thirteenth century B.C.E. onward, the swastika has been found in Asia Minor, Greece, China, Persia, Libya, Scandinavia, Britain, and Iceland....a swastika with arms pointing clockwise was generally regarded as a solar emblem. A counterclockwise one (sauvastika) represented the moon, night, and the feminine principle. The swastika was much used in medieval church decorations and heraldry. It was adopted by Hitler's Third Reich on the supposition that it was a "pure Aryan" sign. This was not true, although a variant eight-armed swastika had long represented German anti-Semitic secret societies like the Vehmgericht" (p. 61).

I used the shape of the swastika to make the four legs on this piece. Like the word "cunt", the swastika represents a word and symbol that has been robbed of its rich and beautiful heritage. As a young girl I visited the Navajos, seeing swastika designs woven into their rugs, I erroneously thought they were Nazi sympathizers.

This double Goddess is birthing three eggs, one out of the top of her head, and two from the yonis. While constructing the egg coming out of the head, two ideas surfaced in my mind. First, I was reminded of Zeus. Barbara G. Walker writes in her *Woman's Encyclopedia* "Hellenic Greeks pretended their new Father Zeus gave birth to the much older Goddess Athene from his head. But before he could give birth to Athene, he had to swallow her real mother, Metis (Wisdom), who was pregnant with her at the time. The Hellenes also claimed Zeus gave birth to Dionysus from his thigh; but again, the real mother was the Moon-goddess Selene, whom Zeus killed during her pregnancy. As Conductor of Souls, Hermes took the six-month fetus from Selen's womb and sewed him up in Zeus's thigh to continue his gestation" (Walker 106). By having my Goddess's birth the egg from their head I am commenting on Zeus's usurping of the feminine power of birth-giving.

Secondly, I was reminded how women, and men, give birth to ideas such as books, inventions, artwork. Therefore, the egg coming from the women's head also comments on ideas springing forth from our intellect, a different kind of birth.

Why did I image eggs coming from their yonis instead of infants? I am not sure why I chose the egg. I read about the cosmic egg in *The Goddess* by Shahruckh Husain (p. 52) and was intrigued.

I made certain this figure had pubic hair after reading that throughout much of the history of western art, nude women have been portrayed without hair surrounding their yoni; only demonized witches were shown with pubic hair. By placing pubic hair on these figures I am attempting to normalize it; thereby reclaiming another

piece of woman that has been defiled and thereby elevating it to the status of Goddess.

5.) ***Sitting Woman with Feet and Hands in Yoni Shape***

1999, terra cotta  
8" H x 5" W x 9" D



6.) ***Yoni Egg with Tri-Motif Signs***

1999, terra cotta  
4" x 3"  
Not included on my web site



7.) ***Yoni Rattle with Cervix Handle and Vulva Slit***

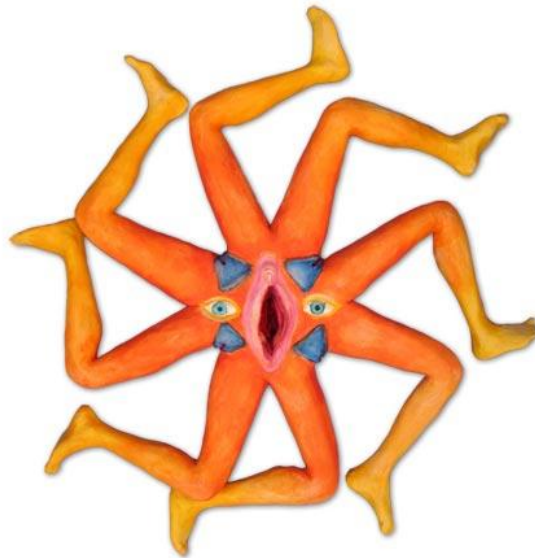
1999, porcelain, amaco underglaze  
6" x 2"  
Not included on my web site



This is a simple hand held rattle or musical instrument. The cosmic egg inside the head of the rattle moves freely. Inside the vulva slit are five little eggs that also move freely to make a rattle noise.

#### 8.) ***Eight Leg Solar Wheel of Life Goddess***

1999, terra cotta, oil paint  
20" H x 2" D



This piece, while incorporating elements of the swastika, is also a Sheela na gig. The colors are festive, hot, celebratory; they are a carnival of dancing flames, a sun burst. My goal with this Sheela is demystification of the unknown. This piece takes away the secrets, shame, and over sexualization of the yoni; this yoni is about joyful, active female energy.

This is a solar swastika in that the legs are moving in a clockwise fashion. A counterclockwise one (sauvastika) represents the moon, night and the feminine principle. The counterclockwise movement is also expressive of the moon's retrograde path (Walker 55, 61).



9.) ***Siren with Split Fish Tail and Serpent Hair***

1999, terra cotta, paint  
17" H x 12" W x 2" D



This figure, a Sheela na gig, draws her inspiration from her Irish counterparts of the same name. Sheela na gigs, found in early Irish churches, were thought by some to invite the worshiper to run their finger into the yoni groove - touching the sacred divine. The mythological split-tail mermaid, handed down in modern forms like the Starbucks logo, is also a Sheela na gig in that her two leg-like tails are parted to reveal her yoni. Other symbols sgraffitoed into this piece are: the yoni as an all seeing eye; the serpent-like hair that speaks to wisdom and consciousness; and the yoni coupled with the sacred triangle.

10.) ***Spider Sheela-na-gig***

1999, terra cotta, oil paint  
16" H x 7" W x 2 " D



At the time I made this sculpture I had just come across the stories of Anansi the spider, composed of an all male cast that included Anansi, his seven brothers and their father. The deficit of the female characters in the Anansi stories contrasts with the Navajo legends of Spider Woman, one of the Navajo's most honored deities who taught the Navajo ancestors weaving upon a loom. This inspired me to reclaim the divine feminine with this sculpture.

The imagery of this piece also draws from the Sheela na gig figures from Ireland who demystify the yoni with humor and direct aplomb. Medusa also asserts her influence with writhing serpent hair.

11.) ***Womb/Tomb Virgin, Mother, Crone*** (X-Ray)

1999, terra cotta, paint  
11" H x 2" D





This piece explores the virgin, mother, crone progression in a woman's life and draws inspiration from the X-ray art of the Aboriginal Australians. By designing the piece as an X-ray one can look into the uterus of the woman. An example of this can be seen in Richard L. Anderson's *Calliope's Sisters: A Comparative Study of Philosophies of Art* (2004, p. 61). Symbolic colors are used; white for the virgin, red for the mother, and black for the crone.

This piece also investigates the idea that with every birth there is a death and with every death there is a birth. For example, when one set of choices is decided upon, another set must be let go of. *Virgin, Mother, Crone, Womb/Tomb* also references the dual function of the uterus as womb and tomb. The women can be birthing each other, or welcoming each other back into a final resting place, or both. This piece also depicts cycles, and how phases of our lives segue into one another, evolution, interrelatedness, dependence on one another, receiving from the previous generation and passing onto the next. Finally, the piece's triangular center and perimeter alludes to the pubic triangle, a symbol of woman.

Unlike the *Virgin, Mother, Crone with Shared Yoni* piece which shows a progression of age, the three women in *Virgin, Mother, Crone, Womb/Tomb* are all the same age. By keeping the ages of the women the same, the losses that we experience on a daily basis are explored. When I first made the piece I was not sure why I wanted them all the same age, I just knew it felt right. Upon later reflection I think I did this to represent cycles of coming of age, birth, and death that happen in my own life on a daily basis, and during times of change. Even though I have not passed into the crone phase of my life, I am still able to tap into some of the wisdom of others in my life. It has helped me in times of crisis to know that there is a past (the virgin), a present (the mother), and a future (the crone) and that the present situation will pass.

I read the following paragraph to my husband: "From the age of eleven to fourteen years, we see the "young virgin" as she is portrayed in mythology, with budding breasts and rounded, yet boyish contours inspiring a particular kind of sexual desire. Her sexuality is present in her eyes and movements, but it is fugitive in her actions, both attracting and repelling in a game of subtle, often innocent, seduction. The young virgin lives on the borderline of sainthood and sin, her body is pure and untouched and yet it expresses the force of an unbroken wave of sexual passion, of the longing for unity with a man and with life seen through the new veil of love." My husband's response was "Written by a man, right?" It was penned by Manuela Dunn Mascetti, in her book *Goddesses: An illustrated journey into the myths, symbols, and rituals of the goddess*. I always find it particularly unnerving to see aspects of the patriarchy living on in women's psyches. I question the phrase "unity with a man" in that it assumes women are all heterosexual and in need of a man to fulfill them. I also think age eleven is a too young to be thinking about "unity with a man", and I question calling unity with another person sin.

What I also find questionable is that the virgin archetype becomes activated in a woman's life when she reaches puberty, or when she sexually comes of age. I sometimes wonder if the myth writers who have presented us with the virgin, mother, crone archetypes were men to whom the female was invisible until she was sexually mature. Where does childhood figure into the virgin, mother, crone continuum? Would it make sense that the virgin would be from birth to sexual maturity? Perhaps the first menses could signify the mother phase because this is when a woman has the capability to bear a child. In my own experience I did not feel the mother archetype activated until I became pregnant. I could really feel the mega shift from my carefree days to that of being responsible for the raising of my son. However, this raises questions for women who decide not to have children, or cannot have children. Where do they fit into this cycle?

## **12.) Cunt Eggs**

2000, porcelain, terra cotta, 3"  
Not included on my web site



*Cunt Eggs* are composed of yoni forms, the cosmic egg, and letters that make up the word cunt. These small pieces are meant to be held in the hand and experienced through sight and touch.

The word cunt is not seen all at once. The viewer must pick up the eggs and hold them, become physically intimate with them, and rotate them to see all of the letters that make up the word cunt. While doing this, their fingers are moving into the yoni shapes on the egg. This can be a soothing, intimate experience because the eggs are comfortable to hold, and fit in the palm of the hand. *Cunt Eggs* enable us to celebrate a symbol that moves beyond the sphere of women and encompasses larger dialogues that include the symbol of the cosmic egg.

Barbara G. Walker writes in her *Woman's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets* "Cunt is a derivative of the Oriental Great Goddess as Cunti, or Kunda, the Yoni of the Uni-verse. From the same root came county, kin and kind....Related forms were Latin *cunnus*, Middle English *cunte*, Old Norse and Frisian *kunta*, Basque *cuna*. Other cognates are "cunabula," a cradle, or earliest abode: "Cunina," a Roman Goddess who protected children in the cradle; "cunctipotent," all-powerful (i.e., having cunt-magic): "cunicle," a hole or passage; "cuniculate," penetrated by a passage: "cundy," a covert culvert: also cunning, kenning, and ken: knowledge, learning, insight, remembrance, wisdom. Cunt is not slang, dialect or any marginal form, but a true language word, and of the oldest stock (Walker, p. 197).

### 13.) **Scroll**

2000, terra cotta, paint  
9" H x 19" W x 2" D  
(also titled *Cunt Scroll*)



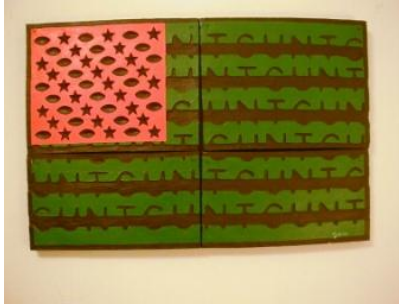
At the far left of *Scroll* are two horizontal, parallel lines that move from left to right. As these two lines proceed to the right in a straight path, an unwanted object forces them to detour around it. After clearing this obstacle they continue on their parallel course. Another impediment, and another, are all successfully cleared and the lines continue forward. The obstacles, the letters of the word cunt, represent womankind and the two lines represent the linear path of the patriarchy (not men, but the patriarchy which represents the cultural oppression of women). This piece affirms that however hard the masculine tries to suppress the feminine, it cannot be concealed.

I want my work to function with a multiplicity of meanings. Friends have commented that *Scroll* also look like a spine, or Hebrew text. Viewers do not see the word cunt right away. They first need to have the piece soak into their eyes before getting hit by a word that they have mistakenly been taught to loath. The first time I saw the work of Eric Fishel I was instantly drawn to his big canvases, and bright colors. Then, the one two punch in the gut come later upon closer inspection of his disturbing subject matter. Although my subject matter is not disconcerting, I am trying to use the same tactic that Eric Fishel used- that of surprise.

#### 14.) **Flag**

2000, terra cotta, paint, hardware, wood

19" H x 29" W x 1" D  
(also titled: *Cunt Flag*)



What if women had played an equal role in history along side of men, instead of a subordinate one? With the American Flag we celebrate our country. *Flag* (*Cunt Flag*) celebrates a country that is friendly towards women. The pun is intended in that we get the word country from the word cunt (see “cunt” in the Barbara G. Walker encyclopedia). *Flag* is a direct comment on the flags of Jasper Johns and questions what our American Flag might have looked like if Jasper Johns had been a woman, or if he had lived in a country that celebrates women.

An alternate title for the *Cunt Flag* is “Virginia Woolf wonders what would have happened if Jasper Johns’ sister had a room of her own”. In Woolf’s book *A Room of One’s Own*, Woolf creates the fictitious character of Shakespeare’s sister. With this title I have wondered about Jasper Johns’ fictitious sister. Another alternate title could be “*If this cunt flag offends you then you are still buying into the patriarchy’s negative view of women*”. Another title might be “*Jasper Johns’ Flags sold for 28 Million*”.

I want to get people to think, to educate them, to question how they view women. At the same time I do not like to be reactionary, and I do not want to offend people. I do not want to react against the patriarchy. Rather, I want to elevate women in a pure way. However, the very act of elevating women will always offend the patriarchy. I am aware of how this piece can be seen as an “angry piece”. The piece, however, does not deserve to be seen only as an “angry piece” and is not intended as a slam against Jasper Johns. It is not commenting on his work as an individual. Rather, I have taken a piece that is valued highly by our society. I ask would we still value the piece if it were made by a person, man or woman, who values women?

When I was getting ready to paint the *Flag* I toyed with the thought of painting it red, white, and blue. I ran the idea past my mom, who said that that would be too offensive to people. If someone walked into the gallery and saw cunt across the flag they would probably freak out. Then, I would have no chance of having them contemplate my piece. But, I hope they will see the green, black, and orange not as The American Flag, but as a type of American Flag. They will see my *Flag* as "the other". Also, I hope they will be curious when they see the different colors and the strange way the stripes meander and sort of look like they might have letters in them.

I got the green color by mixing green acrylic out of the tube with a bit of white and some yellow. The black is straight out of the acrylic tube and so is the orange.

Like Johns' own *Flags*, my piece is interactive. The viewer is invited to stare at *Flag* for a full two minutes, and then look at a blank white wall. The complimentary after image colors of red, white and blue will be seen. Therefore, the only true place the artwork exists is on the viewer's retina. I enjoy the thought of the viewer becoming an active participant.

I am trying to reintroduce the world to the word cunt, wash off the scum and elevate it to its proper status. If I made a flag with the word cunt clearly written across it I would be afraid that people would walk into the gallery and not even give my stuff a look. I am hoping people will look at the flag for a bit before they even see the word cunt in it. Judy Chicago used this same tactic with her dinner party. The viewer sees what they are ready to see or wants to see. An example of this was one of my floor mates from college who was quite uncomfortable with sex. I showed her many of the plates from Judy's *Dinner Party*. She did not comment that the dishes looked like yonis. Rather, she said she liked them, and how organic and natural they looked to her. She did not want to see cunts, and so she didn't. As I write this I realize that I cannot be too indirect, I need for people to see the word cunt. I guess I am trying to soften the word cunt, to make it not be the first thing people notice.

Barbara G. Walker (1983) writes in her *Woman's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets* "Cunt is a derivative of the Oriental Great Goddess as Cunti, or Kunda, the Yoni of the Uni-verse. From the same root came county, kin and kind...Related forms were Latin *cunnus*, Middle English *cunte*, Old Norse and Frisian *kunta*, Basque *cuna*. Other cognates are "cunabula," a cradle, or earliest abode: "Cunina," a Roman Goddess who protected children in the cradle; "cunctipotent," all-powerful (i.e., having cunt-magic): "cunicle," a hole or passage; "cuniculate," penetrated by a passage: "cundy,," a covert culvert: also cunning,



kenning, and ken: knowledge, learning, insight, remembrance, wisdom. Cunt is not slang, dialect or any marginal form, but a true language word, and of the oldest stock (Walker, p. 197).

15.) ***Bust of Linda***

2000, terra cotta, milk, pigment

15" H x 11" W x 7" D

153 claybody, cone 05-06



16-18.) ***Four Women, Gothic Arch, Sheela na gig***

2000, terra cotta

16 "H x 9 " W x 2 " D

there are three of these that are all very similar, one of the three was given away as a gift, I have the other two originals.

This piece was also cast into a mold and several copies made.





This piece is about using the powerful energy in our bodies to fuel our dreams, to help us to grow and become self-aware, compassionate people who can give and receive love. The yoni, in addition to being a sexual symbol, is a symbol of life and new beginnings. Giving pleasure to ourselves relates directly to the problem Jungian psychologist Paula Young notices of women she treats in therapy. When asked what they want, they are unable to give her an answer, since they are so used to tuning into the needs of others they are unable to identify their own wants, needs, and pleasures. The heads of the women are at the locus of the clitoris. These yonis have clitorises because as Nancy Spero writes "it is about giving pleasure to ourselves and not to the male gaze." (*Leon Golub and Nancy Spero: War and Memory*, Organized by Katy Kline and Helaine Posner MIT List Visual Arts Center, Cambridge, 1995)

Kathryn Price Theatana writes in her essay *Sila na Geige* (*Sila of the Trees* "Sacred Spaces, Sacred Places" issue of *Sagewoman Magazine*, Winter '98/99). "In the shifting realm between the worlds, She reveals to you the gateway - the vulva of Woman - through which every one of us entered this world, through which all of our foremothers entered this world -- like an archway-pillared corridor reaching all the way back to First Woman." Because this piece is a Sheela na gig, it is meant to be touched. When designing it I had in mind the upward thrust of gothic arches. I also worked with the image of generations of women giving birth to each other, reaching into the future and back into the past.

The last Sheela in this series, with the red amaco underglazes, is designed to look like the shield of an Amazon warrior. Instead of being a concave structure, it is convex, like a shield. I painted it red because I want it to be dynamic and I like that it is the color of a menstruating woman's yoni. With the shield shape, the vulva becomes an active, protective, assertive symbol, women protecting themselves and fighting for their lives. This piece is also reminiscent of a seed with its layers, or the flame of a candle.

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*Spero, Nancy (1995). From the art exhibition of Leon Golub and Nancy Spero: War and Memory. Organized by Katy Kline and Helaine Posner. MIT List Visual Arts Center, Cambridge April 15-June 25, 1995.*  
*Theatana, Kathryn Price (1998). Sila of the Trees. Sagewoman Magazine, Winter 98/99.*

Reflections on *Four Woman-Gothic Arch-Sheela na gig* March 21, 2000: I made three of these pieces. The first uses 240 clay; I rubbed this one smooth. The second also uses 240 clay. However, with this one I took a spray bottle and sprayed it with water until the grout in it started to show through and gave it a grainy appearance. The third *Sheela* is made of red terra cotta with a high grout content. I then painted the terra cotta with two layers of amaco underglazes. I mixed redbrown and red amaco underglaze together. This piece is burnished with oil. See page 40 of my large note book and page 112 of my small note book.

In the book *Women and Art* (1999) by Judy Chicago and Edward Luci-Smith, Luci-Smith writes about the ecstasy of *St. Teresa of Avila*: "This emphasis on a female hero's helpless bondage to sexuality might perhaps be read as a way of denying her power" (p. 37, Luci-Smith). This piece is about pleasuring ourselves sexually, but more importantly using the powerful energy in our bodies to fuel our dreams, to help us to grow and become self aware, compassionate people who can give and receive love. The kind of love Robert Firestone talks about in his book *Fear of Intimacy*. My focus is not on the yoni as a symbol of sex. Rather, the yoni/cunt is a symbol that unites all women (and includes men, too). Our cunts/yonis are a vehicle of life and new beginnings. A friend, Natasha, looked at this piece and said it looked like a seed with all of the layers in it. I really like that image for this piece. It was somewhat unsettling to me to be diagnosed with breast cancer in December of 2001 and have my left breast removed. I had to wonder if my body knew I had cancer and was trying to tell me when I made this piece a year or so earlier. I just don't know.

In the collections of: Jen Keller; Allegheny Hospital Auction, Dr. Donal and Mary Warde. V-Day, University of Hawaii at Manoa, 2006 event, contact: Nohealani March.

19.) ***Copy of Venus of Willendorf***

Given as a gift to Ron Curran  
Not included on my web site; no picture taken

20.) ***Copy of Venus***

Given as a gift to Ron Curran  
Not included on my web site; no picture taken

21.) ***Tomico Reading***

2000, terra cotta  
12 " H x 6" W x 8" D



22.) ***Figurative Sculpture of Guy***

2000  
14" H x 8" D x 7" W  
not included on my web site

23.) ***Figurative Sculpture of Trinity***

2000, terra cotta  
15" H x 12" D x 7" W  
not included on my web site



24.) ***Yoni with Seashell Forms***

2000, terra cotta  
12" H x 8" W x 2" D



25.) ***Dog, Vejigante, Laocoon***

2000, terra cotta  
17" H x 8" W x 2" D



This yoni-as-woman provides the yoni with a face, an identity, a soul and personalizes it. The symbols in the upper part of the sculpture represent parts of the woman's psyche. These thoughts recede and advance from bands that represent how thoughts fade in and out of our consciousness. The dog represents dependence, the vejigante mask relates to our dark side. The man's face, from *Laocoon*, depicts pain and suffering. The sheila-na-gig, at the top of the sculpture, is the trickster that reveals to us the mysteries of women. On one side of the woman, roses represent growth and fruitfulness; on the other side a spine signifies backbone and strength. By placing the woman's head at the locus of the clitoris, a clitoris-as-mind connection is formed. For me, the clitoris represents a woman's ability to give pleasure to herself. By symbolically superimposing mind and clitoris, pleasure is paired with intellect, responsibility, and choice. The folds of her robe are the inner lips of the yoni. The mandorla/almond shape around her are the modified outer lips of the yoni.

This piece draws inspiration from *Virgin of Guadalupe* by Yolanda M. Lopes. In her portrait, Lopes paints herself as the Virgin surrounded by the traditional framework of the mandala. This aura around Lopes' body, and the pink folds of her skirt look like a yoni.

*Dog, Vejigante, Laocoon* is also a response to Judy Chicago and Edward Lucie-Smiths' ideas on Gustave Courbet's painting *The Origin of the World* from *Women and Art: Contested Territory* (1999, p.144-145). Lucie-Smith writes "Not all of Wesselman's paintings are as sexually emphatic as the example illustrated (*Helen*, 1966), but kinship with Courbet's work is obvious. Female potentiality is reduced to one thing-the ability to give sexual pleasure to men."

What I appreciate about *The Origin of the World* is its frankness. It does not appear as pornography to me, which is unauthentic and degrading. The canvas

looks enclosed; if the canvas was widened and the view pulled back we would see a specific woman, the bedroom of Courbet and his lover/wife. The woman's robes have a soft rhythm to them. I can find no comparison between Courbet and Tom Wesselman's *Helen*. I abhor *Helen* by Wesselman. (Unless Wesselman is a feminist who is holding a mirror to us to show us how vile we can be to women). Once again, artist motivation is very weighty. Lucy Lippard writes: "It is a subtle abyss that separates men's use of women for sexual titillation from women's use of women to expose that insult." (Chicago & Lucie-Smith 1999, p. 144).

The question of subject versus object leads me to compare the photographs found in *Femalia* (1993) by Blank with *Origin of the World*. I realize the woman in Courbet's *Origin* lacks arms (action), legs (mobility), and a head (individuality and brains). I wonder what Lucie-Smith would think of Joani Blank's *Femalia* (1993). Blank's vulvas are similar to Courbet's *Origin* in that neither have legs, heads, arms, etc. The vulvas in *Femalia* are not "general" non-specific cunts; each cunt in *Femalia* has a personality, a distinct face. Is Courbet's *Origin* too generalized? Would it be less offensive to Smith if Courbet had included her face, arms, and legs, the model looking at something or engaged in an activity?

Perhaps the difference between Courbet and Joani Blank is their intent. One would have needed to talk with Courbet to learn his motives. However, the title *The Origin of the World* clearly shows Courbet's relationship to his subject. Courbet paints this woman as a Goddess or archetype of creation, celebrating her ability to give life. She is the origin of the world; a title of great honor. Yet, some have suggested Courbet's picture objectifies the woman-- i.e she looks like she is in his bed, her nightgown pushed up as if he has just had sex with her and he is now painting her while she sleeps.

I find *Venus of Willendorf* more unsettling-- the feet are very small, the arms are short, and there is no face. In this way, *Venus of Willendorf* is a realistic portrayal of what it feels like to be pregnant. When pregnant, women's mobility, action and self are subsumed by the pregnancy. Still, the small feet, short arms, and facelessness seem to wipe out all other aspects of her personhood, and only highlight those which relate to her reproductive functions. If *Origin of the World* was made/painted by a woman would we be upset? Why is the Washington Monument not seen as symbolic and reducing a man to anonymity and only his sexual phallus? My only answer to this question is that men are in a more powerful position in the world and do not have to worry about being subordinated and the object of the female gaze. Also, the phallus has historically been imbued with attributes of strength and stature, whereas the yoni has been consistently depicted as passive and receptive in Western culture.



References:

*Blank, Joani (1993). Femalia. Down There Press, San Francisco.*

*Chicago, Judy and Lucie-Smith, Edward (1999). Women and Art: Contested Territory. Watson-Guption, Toronto.*

26.) **Mr. Clean** (sketch)

2" H sketch made to understand facial proportions  
he looks like Mr. Clean from the television commercial  
Not included on my web site, no photograph

27.) **Atlas** (sketch)

2000, terra cotta, 15" H x 7" W. Standing Atlas holding up the world, the world is implied in the pose. Although this is just a quick sketch, it is a piece I always enjoy looking at. Not included on my web site

28.) **Atlas** (maquette)

2000, Client, Guy Sanchioli. Atlas is kneeling and holding up the world. The world is implied in the pose. Not included on my web site

29.) **Almond Heart, Celtic Heart, Cupped Heart, Hands Heart, Listening Heart, Sacred Heart, Woman Heart, Yoni Heart**

2001, terra cotta, milk, paint, pigment, approx. 3"



Sacred Heart



Almond Heart



Hands Heart



Yoni Heart



Woman Heart



Listening Heart





Celtic Heart



Cupped Heart



Gloria Steinham wonders in her foreword to *The Vagina Monologues* (1998, p.xiv): “the shape we call a heart—whose symmetry resembles the vulva far more than the asymmetry of the organ that shares its name—is probably a residual female genital symbol...watching little girls drawing hearts in their notebooks, even dotting their i’s with hearts, I wondered: *Were they magnetized by this primordial shape because it was so like their own bodies?*” Ms. Steinham’s eloquent words inspired me to make eight small handheld sculptures. These hearts are a combination of the heart shape and the female form. I used the invaluable book *Femalia*, edited by Joani Blank, as a model for many of these pieces.

*Almond Heart* is an abstraction of fallopian tubes, vagina, and ovaries. The opposite side has deeply grooved lines that are an abstraction of the clitoris, vulva and vulva lips.

*Listening Heart* has a vulva on one side and a pair of ears on the other. The vulva has a consciousness of its own and is capable of listening. I did not make this *V-Day Heart* with Ensler’s monologue about birth in mind. However, when I looked at the piece later it reminded me of the birth monologue because Ensler’s works acknowledge the consciousness and symbolism of the vulva. Ensler’s monologue follows: “I stood, and as I stared, her vagina suddenly became a

wide red pulsing heart. The heart is capable of sacrifice. So is the vagina. The heart is able to forgive and repair. It can change its shape to let us in. It can expand to let us out. So can the vagina. It can ache for us and stretch for us, die for us and bleed and bleed us into this difficult, wondrous world. So can the vagina.”

*Hands Heart* has two hands joined to make the sign of the yoni with a vulva in the center. The swirling designs at the top of the heart are common symbols found in many cultures. These swirling symbols remind us of breasts or a maze that leads into the center of our being and out again. The opposite side repeats the motif of the lines of the fingers. These fingers become the folds that surround the vulva.

*Yoni Heart* has a yoni in its center. The outer lips and thighs make up the shape of the heart. The other side is blank.

*Sacred Heart* has a pubic triangle and breasts.

*Celtic Heart* has the Celtic interlace design composed of three mandorla/yonis shapes. The opposite side has three hearts that join to make a clover.

*Woman Heart* has the entire body of a woman on one side. The other side is a picture of ovaries, fallopian tubes, uterus, and vagina. The heart in the center of the vagina is a baby, and the heart at the point of the heart is a clitoris. The reason I included the woman’s full body was that I wanted to make sure to not equate woman with vulva. A woman has a cunt, and breasts, *and* a brain, and legs for action, and hands for creativity. I sort of ran out of time, but I had wanted to make a *V-Day Heart* with a vulva on one side and a brain on the other, and another with a vulva on one side and a face on the other. This idea relates to the *V-Day Heart* with the vulva on one side and the ears on the other. I like the idea of each vulva having a face, a unique identity. Also, the vulva is not seen as a separate part of a woman, but is her.

*Cupped Heart* is a flat heart with the point and lobes folded. I wanted it to look like it was embracing. The point mimics the pubic triangle, and the two lobes mimic breasts. The inside of the heart is gold, and the outside is red.

The paints used to patina these *V-Day Hearts* are reds, pinks, flesh tones, green (for the clover), browns, golds. Some of the paints have a metallic finish to them.

30.) **Allison** (*falling asleep, 3 hour pose*)

11" H x 12"D 6" W  
153 clay body  
Not included on my web site; picture needed

31.) **Allison and Trinity** (4 class pose)

2001, terra cotta  
11" H x 12"D 6" W  
153 clay body  
Not included on my web site

32.) **Ron** (he is leaning on a table, on his knees)

2001, terra cotta  
10" H x 14"D 5" W  
Not included on my web site



Ron is a sketch pose from a live model.

33.) **Divine Female Tile**

2001, terra cotta, underglaze  
15" H x 13" W



The figure in the *Divine Female Tile* is a split tail mermaid, or siren, commonly found in the Starbucks logo. The split tail mermaid is a Sheela na gig, in that she has parted her tail/legs, to reveal her yoni. The mermaid is a being who lives in the water, traditionally a symbol of the subconscious. *The Divine Female Tile* and the *Divine Male Tile* incorporate elements from each other's panels, thereby reinforcing their interconnectedness.

### ***Divine Male Tile***

2001, terra cotta, underglaze  
15" H x 13" W



The figure in the *Divine Male Tile* is based on the Green Man archetype. While the siren from the *Divine Female Tile* lives in the water, the Green Man resides on the land, a symbol of consciousness. The male panel incorporates the elements of the snake motif found in the female tile. At the bottom of this tile, in the border, the roots of the trees swirl together to form a stylized yin yang. The yin yang reinstates how opposites, like land and water, day and night, male and female, connect to form a whole.

### ***Divine Androgyne Tile***

2001, terra cotta, underglaze  
15" H x 13" W



In his book *Goddesses in Art* (1997, p. 43), Lanier Graham states that “In many creation myths, the creator is said to be neither male nor female, but both. Surveys of the Great Goddess that overlook this androgynous aspect neglect one of her most important features. Much of her greatness is due to being the supreme unity that transcends all opposites; she is the universal synthesis of all particulars.... The sacred image of the Androgyne has been particularly difficult for Modern people to comprehend. Those who encounter an image of the Androgyne today are somewhat like students of Zen contemplating a koan--reasoning does not work; comprehension requires intuition. The most famous androgynous images in Asian art are Hindu.... The concept of the Androgyne continues in the esoteric teachings of the world religions- not only Taoism, Hinduism, and Buddhism, but also esoteric Judaism, Christianity, and Islam...Some writers describing this image use the term hermaphrodite, but that is a physical description of a human being who has the sexual organs of both a male and a female. The Great Goddess/God cannot be understood in such physical terms. The Androgyne is a metaphor that has nothing to do with any form of ordinary human sexual activity, be it heterosexual, homosexual, or

bisexual.... the ultimate goal of the spiritual quest is androgyne, a state of mind in which the finite consciousness of the individual and the realm of the infinite cosmos are realized as one. From the perspective of comparative world mythology, the consciousness of the Androgyne is identical with that of the Buddha consciousness or Christ consciousness.”

The male on this panel holds a jar of spouting water, traditionally a female symbol. Likewise, the female holds a customarily male symbol, the thyrsus, or sacred rod of Dionysus. The Tattvas, attached to the woman’s thyrsus, represents one of several Hindu systems for classifying the elements. Water is represented by a silver crescent moon, air by a blue circle, fire by a red triangle, earth by a yellow diamond, and spirit by a black egg – the void. These sacred, primary symbols and colors can be mixed to create the world in all its hues (Walker, 1998, p.106). By bestowing the male and female with attributes from the other sex, gender roles are explored and shared.

The sea (subconscious and female) and the land (consciousness and male) are depicted in balance and harmony. The trees repeat the Green Man motif found in the *Divine Male Tile*. Each of the snakes is double headed, a common symbol for nonduality in the Stone and Bronze age (Graham, 1997, p.32). The idea for the male and female entwined as serpents comes from *Nu-Wa and Fu Xi in Cosmic Union as the Double Serpent* (China, circa 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> century AD, British Museum, London). Three yonic shapes are seen in the negative space of the twisting serpents.

#### References:

Lanier, Graham (1997) *Goddesses in Art. Artabras, New York.*

Walker, Barbara G. (1998) *The Woman’s Dictionary of Symbols and Sacred Objects. HarperCollins, New York.*

#### 34.) **Yoni with Serpent** (previous title: *Yoni with Snake*)

2001, terra cotta  
10" H x 6" W x 5" D







*(reproductions shown)*

*Yoni with Serpent* depicts a yoni birthing a serpent, and speaks to emerging, active, feminine energy. The serpent represents the feminine wisdom inside of us that can strike at the truths and falsehoods in others and ourselves. The vulva is sometimes described as being a passive, receptive vessel. By adding the serpent I am affirming the power inside of women that is active, sharp, penetrating, and that can strike when needed.

Serpents are often linked mythologically to women and their wisdom. Leonard Shlain (1998, p.55) writes about snakes in his book *The Alphabet Versus the Goddess*. "So connected in the Egyptian psyche was beneficent serpents and goddesses that the hieroglyph for goddess was the same as the one for serpent. The *uraeus*, the coiled cobra atop every pharaoh's headdress, was the crowning symbol of Egyptian royal power." Barbara G. Walker (1988, p.387-389) also writes extensively about serpents and their relationship to women in her *Women's Dictionary of Symbols and Sacred Objects*.



Women can go weeks, years, a lifetime without looking at their own yoni. The vulva is sometimes split off from the integrated whole of a woman. Women view their vulvas as the other, or “down there”, instead of as a wellspring of wisdom and energy. Additionally, our culture can oversexualize the vulva, or teach us shameful and harmful myths about it. By looking at the vulva in an integrated way we can also begin to demystify it and see it in a positive, joyous context. This piece aims to take away the secrets, the shame, the oversexualization of the yoni; sex is a part of the vulva’s function; moreover, it is our source of creative energy.

References:

*Shlain, Leonard (1998) The Alphabet Versus the Goddess. Viking, New York.*  
*Walker, Barbara G. (1998) The Woman's Dictionary of Symbols and Sacred Objects. Harper Collins, New York.*

Claybody is 119, this piece has a silicone mold and mother mold. Copies of this piece are in the collections of: Anita Malinger; Matway Family; University of Hawaii at Manoa, 2006 during their V-Day event.

35.) **Guy Sanchioli as Atlas**

2001, 153 clay with sculpy globe  
commissioned piece, sold for \$200  
18” H x 9” wide, Not included on my web site



Guy was great to work with, but I put a lot of time and effort into this sculpture, and it really had nothing to do with my own vision of art. This was my first commission, and hopefully my last.

36.) ***Woman with Serpent Around Her Shoulder***

2001, modified gypsum (there is also the original from terra cotta)  
silicone mold  
12" H x 7" W x 5" D



In 2000, when I performed in *The Vagina Monologues* (1998), I had an idea for this piece after I finished the show. I envisioned a women being born, almost flying out of a yoni. In rehearsing the monologue, I was at first very nervous about my acting abilities. However, in meeting the emotional challenge of the performances, I felt freed of my fears and emerged with renewed strength.

*Woman with Serpent Around Her Shoulder* is also based on a sculpture I saw in the book *Devi The Great Goddess* (Shaner and Eickel, 1999, page 285). The figure is called *Nagini* from India, state of Bihar ca. 100, grey terra-cotta 30 x 13.5 x 12.5. (collection of Anupam and Rajika Puri.) The book states this Nagini: "...depicts a female figure of semidivine, if not entirely divine status while her girdle consists of a string of large medallions...The 2 serpents that casually wind themselves around the body of this superb, although partly damaged, terracotta figure suggest her affiliation with images of the Nagas and Naginis, semidivine serpent beings generally carved as human figures against a coiled serpent backdrop and seen abundantly from the 1st century onward....snakes with their ability to cast off their dead skin and emerge smooth and fresh, are used as analogies in the Hindu religion for the way a soul casts off its dead body after each life only to reemerge anew. In India, serpents are considered auspicious beings...While the exact identity of this serpent-related deity may be difficult to establish, she may be described as an early prototype of a snake goddess. It is noteworthy in this connection that the serpent goddess Manasa (cat. No. 63,

page 307) was especially popular in the adjoining cultural region of Bengal in Eastern India."

Once again, as with many of my other pieces, the frame of the piece is in the shape of the mandorla/yni. With this piece I am reinstating wisdom and consciousness to the realm of woman. I put the medallions on her to reference the Nafini piece mentioned above, to honor it, to be a part of carrying on the tradition in my own lifetime, to feel connected to my woman heritage.

#### References:

*Ensler (1998) The Vagina Monologues. New York : Villard Books.*

I sold one of these copies at Change Makers, a bookstore in California. I gave one to the Third Wave Foundation and they auctioned it for a fundraiser.

Diary Entry, August 23, 2001

Back in February of this year when I performed a selection from *The Vagina Monologues*, I had an idea for a piece after I finished the show. I had the idea of a woman being born, almost flying out of a yoni. I saw the yoni as a wall piece and the woman almost perpendicular to the wall emerging from the yoni. (If you look at page 135 of my little drawing book one can see the little picture I sketched with this idea.)

*The Vagina Monologues* helped me feel better about my acting abilities. I found out that I enjoyed doing the monologue and that I was a decent actor, not great, but I was happy with what I did. I think that I felt that I had emerged, been reborn and this is how I got the idea to do this piece.

I probably started this piece in April 2001? I can't remember. When I made the piece I made the woman's head too big. I couldn't remedy it, so I had to simply cut off the woman's head and made a new one. I was able to do that and I am proud of myself for it.

The two snakes that flank the woman are the stylized lips of the vulva. I was at a loss as how I would texture these snakes/lips. I got the idea to texture them the way I did from Audrey Flack's *Egyptian Rocket Goddess*. I was going to have the woman nude, however, with the medallions around her hips she looked like a Marvel Comic sex fantasy, so I put her in clothes. Audrey Flack's *Rocket Goddess* does not look like a comic book fantasy.

Duncan, as always, was very helpful with this process. I thought she was done, so I brought her to class to see what he had to say. He thought the snakes on the outer lips of the vulva looked like worms. He was right. He helped me to give them more “color” by catching the light on them.

When I first brought this piece to class one of the men, an ex-psychologist in his 50's said “What's a nice girl like you doing with a thing like that?” This is one of the reasons why I continue to make my art. I bet if he and I had met up a couple hundred years ago he would have had me burned at the stake.

37-38.) ***Wheel of Life Goddess Birthing Wisdom***

2001, terracotta  
(clay sketch for this piece was discarded)  
23" H x 15" W x 5" D



This piece was inspired, in part, by an Indian sculpture of a woman giving birth to a serpent from the book *Tantra* by Philip Rawson, plate 39, 'Yogini with serpentine energy manifesting from her vulva. South India c. 1800. Wood, 12 inches'. For me, the vulva birthing the serpent symbolizes woman giving birth to wisdom.

My piece is a stylized yoni/vulva giving birth to a woman who is in turn giving birth to a serpent. The outer frame is in the shape of a mandorla/yni. The outer lips of the vulva are shown as the wheel of life, or key pattern, and the inner folds of the vulva are a swirling area that is convulsing with birth.

39.) ***Wheel of Life Couple with Sma***

2002, terra cotta  
12" H x 10" W x 2" D



The idea for this piece came when I saw a picture of the Egyptian Amulet of the Sma (or Amulet of the Sma). The Sma is a representation of the yoni and lingam in union. However, my *Wheel of Life Couple with Sma* is not an erotic piece, even though it symbolizes sexual union. I was also intrigued to read in several accounts that the Arabic magic word Sesame, from the phrase "Open Sesame", is a derivative of the Egyptian word seshemu ("sexual intercourse.")

I made the female portion of my Sma in the shape of a heart. Ever since I read Gloria Steinem's foreword to *The Vagina Monologues* (1998, p.xiv) I have seen the heart shape with new eyes: "the shape we call a heart—whose symmetry resembles the vulva far more than the asymmetry of the organ that shares its name—is probably a residual female genital symbol...watching little girls drawing hearts in their notebooks, even dotting their i's with hearts, I wondered: *Were they magnetized by this primordial shape because it was so like their own bodies?*" Prior to my reeducation concerning the heart symbol, I had always felt embarrassed by them. Hearts seemed to be trivial, banal and the height of cutesy; they were too girly-girl for me. How could you be taken seriously if you drew hearts? Now, I feel proud when I see the symbol, and Valentine's Day is for me a wondrous celebration of my womanhood.

Another symbol I have reclaimed in this piece is the misappropriated swastika, or wheel of life. Barbara G. Walker writes in her *The Woman's Dictionary of Symbols and Sacred Objects* that the swastika is named from the Sanskrit "so be it," or "amen". The swastika has been a religious emblem since 10,000 B.C.E. and has appeared in India, Japan, Asia Minor, Greece, China, Persia, Libya, Scandinavia, Britain, and Iceland, among other countries. A swastika with arms pointing clockwise was generally regarded as a solar emblem. A

counterclockwise one (sauvastika) represented the moon, night, and the feminine principle (page 61).

I used the wheel of life symbol for several reasons, primarily because, it is a powerful and archetypal symbol, as is evidenced by its prevalence in many cultures. Secondly, it is a metaphor for how women have had many of their symbols besmirched and robbed of their rich and powerful heritage.

Clay body used is 153

References:

Ensler, Eve. (1998) *The Vagina Monologues*. New York: Villard Books

Walker, Barbara G. (1998) *The Woman's Dictionary of Symbols and Sacred Objects*. New York: Harper Collins.

40.) ***Medusa Revisioned***

2002, terra cotta (mold made)  
18" H x 16" W x 11" D



When the Greeks rewrote Medusas' history, her many faceted character was reduced to that of a terrifying gorgon who turned men to stone. However, the more I get glimpses into what her pre-Greek history might have been like, she emerges as a three-dimensional character with a range of traits.

Medusa's name comes from the same root word as medicine and measure. Her name derives from a Greek word meaning "to protect, to rule over." (Babcock) The Gorgons, Medusa, Stheino and Euryale derive from the virtues of wisdom, strength and universality. It is thought that they were a trinity of the goddesses, and Pre-Hellenic mystics called the moon "the Gorgon's head." (Husain, pg.61)



Barbara G. Walker (1983, p.629) writes: "Medusa was the goddess of the Libyan Amazons, and represented female wisdom. She was the Destroyer aspect of the Triple Goddess called Neith in Egypt, Ath-enna or Athene in North Africa. Her inscription at Sais, the capital of Egypt during the 7<sup>th</sup> century B.C., called her "mother of all the gods, whom she bore before childbirth existed." She was the past, present, and future: "all that has been, that is, and that will be." So famous was this description of her that Christians copied it for their god Jehovah (Revelation 1:8). (p.629)

With these ideas in mind, I made a sculpture that depicts Medusa as pre-Greek people might have perceived her, in this way revealing another aspect of her personality. Bernini's *Medusa*, housed at the Palazzo dei Conservatori in Rome, the snakes writhe out of control, turning upon and attacking each other. Medusa's face is anguish. Women in history have suffered, and one might imagine their faces, like Bernini's Medusa, hardened like marble masks of pain. Yet, women have resolve at their core and can garment themselves in that strength. Instead of her face being a mask of pain or a grimace I tried to render a placid countenance with a simultaneous inward and outward gaze.

The snakes on her head represent female wisdom, and are also an embodiment of the ideas and potential energy within each woman. Instead of these snakes writhing out of control, I have envisioned them as an energy that is held in check. Medusa the destroyer is also seen as a protector of the future, as embodied by the snake egg she tenderly holds in her hand.

#### References:

Babcock, Michael, *Goddesses Knowledge Cards*, Published by Pomegranate, courtesy Susan Eleanor Boulet Trust.  
Husain, Shahrukh (1997) *The Goddess*. New York: Little, Brown and Company.  
Walker, Barbara G. (1983), *The Woman's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets*, New York: HarperCollins.

Photographs of *Medusa* were photographed for the front and back book jacket for *Remembering Medusa Remembering: Poems by Monique Chenier*, Your Scrivener Press, Ontario, Canada 2007.

In the collections of Mary Schenhofen (a hydrocal copy); Allegheny General Hospital auction and was purchased by Dr. Fred and Susan Harchelroad from Shady Side Academy; Change Makers bookstore in California, also sold a copy.

#### 41.) ***Bust of Cristina***

2002, terra cotta  
14" H x 10" W x 11" D



42.) ***Self Portrait with Mastectomy***

2003, terra cotta  
12" H x 10" W x 5" D



After my surgery and chemotherapy I wanted to acknowledge the changes to my body so that I could integrate them into my being and celebrate that I was still alive. My husband photographed me and I used his photos to make this piece.

43.) ***Bust of Michael***

2003, terra cotta  
15" H x 11" W x 10: D



44.) ***Trinacria***

2003, terra cotta  
13"H x 13"W x 5"D



In the fourth century B.C. a tryfus (three-foot) or triskelion symbol was adapted for the emblem of Sicily. At this time Sicily was called Trinacria or “Three Capes”, and like the tryfus or triskelion Sicily is triangular in shape. (Barbara Walker, 1988 pg. 43) Today, the Sicilian Banner bears the trinacria at its center.

I am interested in the trinacria because this emblem incorporates many of the symbols I regularly use in my artwork including Medusa, snakes, the yoni, and the wheel of life (swastika). The lunar swastika that rotates in a counterclockwise (widdershins) direction is seen as female, lunar, mysterious and sacred (Barbara G.Walker, 1988 pg. 5)

That the face of Medusa appears at the locus of the yoni in the trinacria is of particular interest to me. This links the yoni to active feminine energy that has a voice, consciousness, and intellect. (for more information about Medusa please see my sculpture *Medusa Revisioned*.)

I have retained most of the elements found in the traditional trinacrea form. One of the changes I did make was to form the snakes at the top of Medusa’s head into the caduceus, the universal symbol of the medical

profession. Medusa's name comes from the same root word as medicine (Babcock). The symbol for female wisdom, the snake, is now linked to Medusa as healer.

It is also significant that the wheel of life found in the trinacria has three legs instead of four, whereas the number four is often used in conjunction with masculine themes. The number three, however, is often associated with the Virgin, Mother and Crone. (Barbara G. Walker, 1988 pg. 34) The number seven was sacred to the ancients because it embodied the unity of the feminine three and the masculine four (Barbara G. Walker, 1988 pg. 46).

When I was young I was captivated by the story of King Arthur's daughter Burd Ellen. The Warlock Merlin explains that "because she went round the church windershins—opposite to the sun. She is now in the dark Tower of Elfland." (Katharine Gibson, 1901 pg. 59) The story concludes "They reached home safely and were welcomed with great joy by fair Gwenevera, their queen mother. And never again did Burd Ellen go round the church or churchyard windershins." (Katharine Gibson, 1901 pg. 68) Can one extrapolate that Burd Ellen left behind her woman heritage, and all that was female, lunar, mysterious and the essence of herself? Did she instead follow what was exclusively male, symbolized by the sun? Could it be that because the legs of most traditional trinacria move in a lunar (windershins) path, women's customs are reinstated as constructive through this symbol?

Babcock, Michael, *Goddesses Knowledge Cards*, Published by Pomegranate, courtesy Susan Eleanor Boulet Trust.

Walker, Barbara G. (1988), *The Woman's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets*, New York: HarperCollins.

Retold by Katharine Gibson, Illustrated by Isobel Read *Fairy Tales* copyright MCMI (1901), by Whitman Publishing Company Racine, Wisconsin

45.) ***Almond Cross*** (sketch)

2004, terra cotta, gold and violet paint  
10" H x 6" W x 1" D  
not included on my web site

Please see *Pope Joan Revisioned*, where I have explained the meaning of the Almond Cross.

46.) ***Triquetra***

2004, terra cotta  
22" H x 12" W x 5" D



Barbara G. Walker (1998) describes the triquetra as “an ancient symbol of the female trinity, being composed of three yonic vesicas interlaced so as to form the continuous “gateless” type of design, always regarded as protective. Naturally, this symbol was exploited by Christian mystics as a sign of the male trinity, however inappropriate its basic shaping was to such in interpretation.” (p. 42)

It is criminal that the triquetra has been reassigned to an exclusively male god-head. My purpose with this sculpture is to reinstate the triquetra as a female symbol by placing yonic forms next to female forms to highlight their similar structure. As with other pieces the head of the woman references the clitoris, consciousness and identity.

*Walker, Barbara G. (1998) The Woman's Dictionary of Symbols and Sacred Objects.*  
*New York: Harper Collins.*

47.) ***Pope Joan Revisioned***

2004, terra cotta  
17" H x 11" W x 12" D



As with some of my other work, *Pope Joan Revisioned* tells a utopian story. It illustrates the alternative ending to her life: she flourishes in an environment that grooms both men and women to be powerful spiritual leaders--Popes.

Currently, Pope Joan's history is controversial, with some regarding her as a myth and others as a documented historical figure. I have chosen to side step this debate, realizing that Pope Joan's life holds truths and lessons in both its historical and mythical accounts. The fact that she is such a strong myth may speak to our desire for a female Pope. I am not illustrating history. Rather, I am giving voice to our desire for the balanced masculine and feminine in our lives.

Judy Chicago details Pope Joan's life in *The Dinner Party*: "A brilliant scholar, Joan disguised herself as a monk in order to study in Athens, where she obtained a degree in philosophy. She then went to Rome, where Pope Leo IV made her a cardinal; upon his death in 853, she was elected pope by her fellow cardinals. After two years, four months, and eight days as pope, she was discovered to be a woman when she gave birth to a baby, whereupon she and the child were stoned to death. She remained recognized as a pope until 1601, when Pope Clement VIII officially declared her to be mythical" (1996, p. 75).

I have included an inscription on the back of Pope Joan's throne that reads: "Pope Joan, her reign is one of peace and the fruit of her labor brings joy to the land". The text is stated in the present tense to reinforce her timeless story. *Pope Joan Revisioned* embodies the historical Pope Joan, the mythical Pope Joan and the Pope Joan of the present and future.

The child at Joan's feet references the child that was historically stoned to death. I have revisioned her and that child as alive, and another child on the way.

The cross that I have repeated along the base of the dais is similar to the cross mentioned by Dan Brown (2003) in his book *The Da Vinci Code*: "The head of



this key was not the traditional long-stemmed Christian cross but rather was a square cross—with four arms of equal length—which predated Christianity by fifteen hundred years. This kind of cross carried none of the Christian connotations of crucifixion associated with the longer-stemmed Latin Cross, originated by Romans as a torture device. Langdon was always surprised how few Christians who gazed upon “the crucifix” realized their symbol’s violent history was reflected in its very name: “cross” and “crucifix” came from the Latin verb *cruciare*—to torture.” ...equal-armed crosses like this one are considered peaceful crosses. Their square configurations make them impractical for use in crucifixion, and their balanced vertical and horizontal elements convey a natural union of male and female...” (p. 145).

Barbara G. Walker (1998) also references a cross, shaped within a square, called a “cross Patee”, or “cross formee” (p. 48).

Carl Jung also differentiates between the Greek and Latin cross: “Up to Carolingian times, the equilateral or Greek cross was the usual form, and therefore the mandala was indirectly implied. But in the course of time the center moved upward until the cross took on the Latin form, with the stake and the crossbeam, that is customary today. This development is important because it corresponds to the inward development of Christianity to the high Middle Ages. In simple terms, it symbolized the tendency to remove the center of man and his faith from the earth and to “elevate” it into the spiritual sphere. This tendency springs from the desire to put into action Christ’s saying: “My kingdom is not of this world” Earthly life, the world, and the body were therefore forces that had to be overcome.” (1964, p. 273)

In the descriptions by Brown, Walker and Jung, the cross, a predominately male symbol, is described. Yet, the area surrounding the cross is regarded as the background, or the negative space, which serves to highlight the positive subject: the cross. This relationship between the cross and the surrounding space can be seen as a metaphor to describe the relationship between men and woman. Women have been cast as the background, the negative space, the invisible, the secondary, the discarded.

Seeing the “invisible spaces” between the arms of the cross was an ah-ha experience for me. I had just finished Dan Brown’s *The Da Vinci Code* in March of 2004 and I was sketching the Templar’s cross, when in a lighting flash, instead of seeing the cross, I saw nestled between the arms of the cross, four yonis! I was overjoyed to see how these two powerful symbols, the cross and the yoni,

defined each other and were dependent upon each other to shape the other's form.

Therefore, I have modified the Templar's cross, and have taken it in a different direction by highlighting the spaces between the arms of the cross: the yonis. Although my version of the cross is similar to the Templar's cross, it is not one I have seen before. From this point on I will refer to this symbol as the Almond Cross, a name I have devised that acknowledges both the male and female forms. "Mandorla means 'almond', which was one of the more cryptic synonyms for this symbol, also known as vesica piscis, the Vessel of the Fish, and more simply as the yoni. Almonds are female-genital symbols and maternity charms from very ancient times. The virgin birth of the god Attis was conceived by a magic almond. Even the Israelites' tabernacle made use of its fertility mana (Exodus 37:20), and Aaron's rod produced almonds in token of a general power of fructification (Numbers 17:8)" (Walker, 1998, pg. 10).

Recently, I was looking at a postcard of the Pope when I had the epiphany that the shape of the Pope's miter hat, and the face of the Pope combined, formed the almond shape: the yoni. To understand this relationship, envision a line that starts at the apex of the Popes Miter hat and curves down along the side of his face to the nadir of his chin, and then back up along the other side of his face to the starting point at the tip of the miter hat. This will outline an almond shaped yoni. The word yoni has come to connotatively represent for me the concept of a sacred space.

This discovery was startling and reminded me of Leonard Shlain, who documents that in overly patriarchal structures the feminine principle continues to surface in elements of the godhead despite monumental efforts to repress her. He notes: "As a general rule throughout Asia, the more patriarchal the society, the more the Buddha looks like a woman; the more egalitarian the society, the more the Buddha looks like a man." (1998, p. 200)

I would assume this is because in a more egalitarian society the female principle is allowed to express itself freely and does not need to be subverted and reassigned to the male. It is my hypothesis at this time, that because the Catholic Church does not have balanced power between yin and yang, the yin must subvert and express itself in one of the most potent and salient symbols of the Pope, his miter hat. Additionally, red is often associated with a woman's menses. When I look at the Pope's face, and red miter hat on top of his head, I am reminded of the sacred space of woman. I have also added a jewel to Pope Joan's miter hat to indicate her third eye, and clitoris.

I have composed Pope Joan's throne from a curvaceous feminine yoni shape, and a geometric, masculine square shape. These shapes have an interplay between them and remind me of a variety of shapes: mosque-like onion domes and doorways, a phallus, a key hole.

I define patriarchy as the cultural oppression of women, which is composed of both men and women. Perhaps, the most insidious propaganda of the patriarchy is to use women to perpetuate the continued suppression of other women. This way, the enemy becomes internalized and women continue the cycle of self hatred. An example of this is how Athena, Mary Magdalene, and the Virgin Mary are represented in sculptures crushing a serpent, representing female wisdom and Goddess religions, beneath their feet. For this reason, I have shown Joan's foot protruding from her robes, and a serpent, a symbol of female wisdom, crawling over her foot. Harmony and balance between the masculine and feminine is restored.

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- Walker, Barbara G. (1983), *The Woman's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets*, New York: HarperCollins.

48.) ***Four Pope Joans***

November 2004, terra cotta  
21" H x 9" W x 9" D



When getting ready to start a new piece, I often look back through my art journals to review different ideas. When I was looking for ideas before starting the *Four Pope Joans*, I came across a small thumbnail sketch from 1998 of four pregnant women standing back to back, which became the inspiration for this piece. Furthermore, I have been heavily influenced by Indian Goddesses with their myriad of waving arms, spinning legs and the lyrical patterns they create.

The four women in this piece can represent four different popes, or different aspects of the same woman. The echoing pattern of the four women adds strength through repetition to the concept of a divine feminine power. I also think one of the reasons I chose to replicate the Pope into four women is because four is symbolically the number representing the Self. This repetition impresses the image and the reality into my psyche. Perhaps it is almost as if I have to repeat her over and over again to prove to myself that she can and does exist. I remember a therapist of mine in the past telling me that when I dream about twins it is because my mind is repeating the image to impress it into my psyche more forcefully.

Why are so many of my figures pregnant? The faces on my *Jana* sculpture have been mistaken as men's faces; they are not men's faces, they are women's faces. I don't want my work to be perceived as either made by a man, or that my figures are male, or that my work comments on the male experience and point of view. This fate has been common among women artists throughout history. Either their work has been interpreted from a male's point of view, or the work has been attributed to male artists. Rarely do men depict pregnant women. Instead, men often depict women as sexual beings, or the virgin archetype. When a woman is pregnant she is no longer seen as an object of desire by other men who strive to perpetuate their own genetic line. A pregnant woman is already committed to a man, and is no longer as desirable, or accessible. I also use pregnancy as metaphor for life and unknown potential that is ready to burst forth into consciousness.

Please see the writing for *Pope Joan Revisioned* for more information.

49.) ***Mandorla Egg with Almond Cross Pattern and Woman***

2005, terra cotta  
22" H x 15" W x 4" D



I started *Mandorla Egg with Almond Cross Pattern* in November of 2004 and finished it August of 2005. An entry from my diary on November 23, 2004: "A lot has happened since my last entry. The biggest change has been no change; George Bush still usurps the White House. The two weeks before the election I went all out for Kerry. I stood at the corner of the Boulevard of the Allies and Halket Street, Penn Circle, and Aiken Avenue and Center Avenue waving signs and dancing around with my sign for Kerry. I spent evenings making phone calls from the Move On and Victory 04 headquarters. Three days before the election I canvassed countless homes and spent Election Day working at the polls.

The few days after the election were a fog of disbelief, then dread and depression set in for me. I started a new piece of a large yoni with the almond cross pattern all over it. There is a large slit running the length of the piece. Deep within this crevice I have placed a woman. Who is she? I don't really know. Perhaps she is the spirit of the yoni. Is she trapped in there waiting to come out? Is she hiding? Is she emerging, or retreating? Part of my mission as an artist is to make utopian art, art that provides hope and envisions solutions to our confusion and pain. Great Mother I certainly have been in pain over the election. While making the piece at times the woman in the yoni looked like she had retreated into her shell, to hide and peak out until she knew it was safe to come out. Other times she seemed to be trapped, as if the shell around her was enveloping her and she was suffocating inside of it.

However, I will not make a negative piece, which continues to affirm a world of victimization, but I must admit to myself that at times the piece was going in a direction I didn't want. I will continue to work with the piece until it looks as if the woman belongs in the yoni, that she will emerge, or that we have peeked into the yoni to see the spirit of the yoni that resides deep inside".

The Almond Cross pattern that covers this piece finds its seeds in the cross mentioned by Dan Brown (2003) in his book *The Da Vinci Code*: "The head of this key was not the traditional long-stemmed Christian cross but rather was a square cross—with four arms of equal length—which predated Christianity by fifteen hundred years. This kind of cross carried none of the Christian connotations of crucifixion associated with the longer-stemmed Latin Cross, originated by Romans as a torture device. Langdon was always surprised how few Christians who gazed upon "the crucifix" realized their symbol's violent history was reflected in its very name: "cross" and "crucifix" came from the Latin verb *cruciare*—to torture." ...equal-armed crosses like this one are considered peaceful crosses. Their square configurations make them impractical for use in crucifixion, and their balanced vertical and horizontal elements convey a natural union of male and female..." (p. 145).

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The mandorla shape found in the the Almond Cross is repeated in the overall shape of the piece itself.

50.) ***Pope Joan with Miter Hats, Ganesh and Boubo***

2005, terra cotta  
21” H x 8” W x 8” D



When I started *Pope Joan with Miter Hats, Ganesh and Boubo* I had a very different sculpture in mind from the one that I ended up making.

One morning, as I was stretching my arms over my head, I noticed that my arms formed the shape of the Pope's miter hat. From this, I decided that my next sculpture would be a direct evolution from my latest piece, *Four Pope Joans*. This new sculpture would depict 3 women standing back to back with their arms stretched over their heads to create mandorlas, or miter hat shapes. I would call this piece *Three Popes*. The figures would be dressed in regular clothing, as opposed to clerical garb; the idea being that the sacred can reside in the ordinary person. Each one of us is able to tune into the divine and claim our own sacred nature. As Joan of Arc reminds us, we have the capacity to directly relate to the divine without an intermediary. We are an embodiment of the divine.

As I started to rough this piece together, my mind had a clear picture of how the finished piece would look. It would be a straightforward portrait of three women in plain clothing standing back to back with their arms stretched over their heads to create miter hat, or yoni shapes. Only the title, *Three Popes*, would unlock the meaning of the piece. However, as I started to sculpt, my fingers took a dissimilar path. It was as if the spirit of Mother India, Boubo, and Ganesh were washing over me, and soon there were faces at knee joints, and eyes where breasts should have been. It was very exciting to feel almost possessed by these unanticipated spirits. I was exploring an exotic country without a map and discovering new places.

In addition, this piece marked a milestone for me. For perhaps the first time I felt as if I was in "the zone". I just could not sculpt fast enough. Decisions came easier and interesting choices presented themselves with not as much effort as I have had to expend in the past. It seemed as if the years of struggling were finally beginning to pay off. Also, I didn't worry about making a realistic sculpture,

but rather, a sculpture with interesting forms that repeated themselves and had a variety of colors, depth and texture. For instance, the bands on the arms of the women can be seen as bracelets, or folds of fabric, but their main purpose is that they add interest and repeat the folds in the skirts.

Currently, Pope Joan's history is controversial, with some regarding her as a myth and others as a documented historical figure. I have chosen to side step this debate, realizing that Pope Joan's life holds truths and lessons in both its historical and mythical accounts. The fact that she is such a strong myth may speak to our desire for a female Pope. I am not illustrating history. Rather, I am giving voice to our desire for the balanced male and female in our lives.

Judy Chicago details Pope Joan's life in *The Dinner Party*. "A brilliant scholar, Joan disguised herself as a monk in order to study in Athens, where she obtained a degree in philosophy. She then went to Rome, where Pope Leo IV made her a cardinal; upon his death in 853, she was elected pope by her fellow cardinals. After two years, four months, and eight days as pope, she was discovered to be a woman when she gave birth to a baby, whereupon she and the child were stoned to death. She remained recognized as a pope until 1601, when Pope Clement VIII officially declared her to be mythical." (1996, p. 75)

The bawdy Belly Goddess, Baubo, amusingly described in Clarissa Pinkola Estes' book *Women Who Run With the Wolves* made an unanticipated appearance in this piece. I had read Ms. Estes's descriptions of her years ago, and Baubo is so personally detailed in Este'ss book that Baubo took up residence in my heart, waiting her turn to be revealed in my art. So, in true Baubo fashion, she just seemed to appear in this piece without any preconceived notion. She had been nestled in the recesses of my being waiting to jump out, trickster fashion.

Another serendipitous discovery was that Ganesh made an appearance in this piece. As I was working on the three female figures it became apparent that the skirts in between the figures looked like the elephant trunk of Ganesh. I then worked to accentuate these elephant-like forms. That Ganesh makes an appearance in this piece is significant to me because he is known as the remover of obstacles. Planning my trip to India was an exercise to creatively use every resource available to me to move through, around and over seemingly impossible obstacles to make my trip a reality. Also, I am a breast cancer survivor, and I had to move around many obstacles to reclaim my health and life.

The differences in scale between the larger figures in this sculpture and the smaller figures reminds me of how the Egyptian sculptors at Abu Simbel used

proportion to make their monolithic figures appear even more imposing by adding smaller figures along side of them. The proportional relationships in this sculpture also reminded of my trip to Petra, in Jordan. I have treasured photographs of me standing beside colossal architectural wonders; my small size making them appear even grander.

I am indebted to an anonymous artist who carved an intricate sculpture of Saraswanti that I paid only twenty-eight dollars for in a local Indian shop here in Pittsburgh. If I had made such a beautiful piece, I would have expected much more for it. The piece is carved from wood and the artist used the sharp blade of a knife to inscribe detailed designs into the surface. Also, the face is very intricate and expressive. I was inspired by this small piece that is only ten inches high and it motivated me to carve designs into my piece, and also inspired the topography of the faces in this sculpture.

As with other pieces of my artwork, I have incorporated the mandorla (almond, or yoni) shape into this piece, exploring the different layers of meaning this elastic symbol encompasses. The simple shape of the mandorla allows it to be infused with multiple meanings and it can be found throughout this sculpture in the flaming chalice (a symbol used by Unitarian Universalists), the triquetra, the miter hat, among other forms.

Exploring the similarities and relationships between symbols used in different cultures finds its place in many of my pieces. Likewise, the symbols in this sculpture take on new meanings and layers due to their new relationships to one another. This international potpourri with signifiers from India, the Pope, Greek deities, and symbols like the triquetra, the chalice, and flame are formed together to create a multicultural fusion.

### **51.) *Altar Piece with Fish and Flowers***

2005, terra cotta  
22" H x 12" W x 7" D



I used a spontaneous process to make *Altar Goddess with Fish and Flowers*, inspired by artists like Wassily Kandinsky and artists from the Surrealism movement, who worked directly from their subconscious in a stream of consciousness manner. They did not use a preconceived theme; rather they allowed colors and forms to emerge, prompted by subconscious emotions. I enjoyed the process of making a piece whose outcome I did not know. It was like reading a good book and not knowing what would happen next, kind of like life.

The only idea I had when starting this piece was that I wanted to sculpt faces that were similar to the faces from my last piece *Pope Joan with Miter Hats, Ganesh and Boubo* into a base upon which a woman would stand. I envisioned these faces melding together so that the eyes would be shared by the different faces. Other areas that I discovered which segued well were the eyebrows of the faces at the base of the sculpture which blended into the folds of the dresses of the woman who are standing on these faces. Perhaps the heads the two women are standing on are dreaming up these women, or the women are their thoughts. Or, possibly the two women are elevated by the ideas of their predecessors, represented by the many faces upon which they stand.

As I started to work the idea formed in my mind that I wanted to make a woman with multiple arms in the style of art from India. Because I didn't want the arms to be protruding where they can easily be broken off, I decided that I would frame the figures against a large mandorla shape that would add structural support. I placed a figure on each side of this mandorla shape. Then, I created two mandorla shapes that were back to back with the space in between creating long mandorla-like spaces on either side of the two figures. Into this space I eventually put fish on one side, and flowers on the other. This composition also created four "sides" to the sculpture inviting the viewer to explore the different

sides of the piece. I used the mandorla and circle shapes in repeating motifs. It was fun to see the variety of symbols that the yoni could take: eyes, fish, leaves, eyebrows, arcs. As I mentioned before, none of these ideas were preconceived. Rather, I let ideas birth new ideas.

I was very surprised that the many faces at the bottom of the piece were as easy to sculpt as they were. When I worked on *Pope Joan with Miter Hats, Ganesh and Boubo* it was really hard to get all the eyes/breasts the same size and shape. They needed to look consistent for that piece. However, for *Altar Goddess with Fish and Flowers* it works for each of the eyes, noses and eyebrows to be a bit different. Perhaps this is because our faces are unsymmetrical and we are used to that.

As the piece is viewed straight on, the tips of the crescent shapes from the other side peek out from behind the concave areas of the crescent shapes. These forms then vibrate as the viewer moves around the piece, creating a layered halo around the edge of the piece.

Margaret Starbird mentions in her book *The Woman with the Alabaster Jar* (1993) the concept of the Sister Bride, symbolic of combined passion and purity (p. 128). While reading her book I realized that the Sister Bride concept that she details is embodied by my piece. On one side of my piece is a woman with a halo that references Mary Magdalene, the hypothetical wife of Jesus. On the other side is a woman representing a more sexual, and sensuous aspect, reminiscent of sculptures from India. These women represent the spiritual and the sensuous in harmony and two different faces, or aspects of the holy. The one woman is more traditional and conservative. Her dress is long and modestly cut; she wears a halo. The other woman is a more sensuous; her dress is more revealing and her body is more curvaceous. Her facial features are fuller and intense.

To further highlight the aspects of the women the sides of the piece further illustrate each of them. The lush flowers at the sides of the sculpture relate to the sensuous woman. The tessellating fish on the other side speak about the woman with the halo.

This piece was made in 2005, before my trip to India in November of 2005, and my interest in art from India heavily influences this piece.

When my Mom looked at this piece she understood at once what the three different pairs of arms of the women meant. The two bottom arms were in a position of openness, like the arms that one often sees in paintings of Jesus.



The second pair of arms is giving a blessing and the third pair of arms is reaching upwards, towards wholeness. As I worked on this piece I began to envision it in the center of the room on an altar and people sitting around it so they could view the four different sides of the piece.

Yet, lest my discourses run to erudite, it is amusing to know where I got the idea for the mandorla pattern that surrounds the woman with the sleeveless dress. My son likes to watch the Three Stooges and these days just about every sentence of his starts with “Curly...”. Gosh, don’t you just wonder where this is going? Well, we were watching the Three Stooges’ episode *Three Little Pirates* and there is a scene where Curley is disguised like a Rajah in a robe that is covered with an exquisitely beautiful mandorla pattern. As soon as I saw this pattern I walked right into my studio and carved the design on this piece. As they say, the rest is history.

This piece incorporates themes found in Indian art and marries them to motifs from Christian art and contemporary traditions.

52.) ***Pope Joan of the Wind***

2005, terra cotta  
19” H x 11” W x 11” D



From my art diary of July 7<sup>th</sup> 2004: "I woke up this morning with a vision of *Pope Joan of the Wind* in my mind's eye. A wind is blowing her robes out, the winds of change, the winds of the holy spirits (not exclusively in the Christian tradition, but in a universal tradition). These are the wild sweet winds that come right before a storm when the air is crackling with excitement and the sky is a heavy steel blue. One feels so powerful, so alive. Yes, I remember that feeling as a child, right before a storm, standing out in our back yard, my arms stretched out to embrace the mystical."

This piece finds its inspiration in many things including Bernini's *Ecstasy of St. Theresa*. Her jaw is slack; her robes are beautiful large billowing robes. This

piece is about humility before power. She is choosing to step into the life force and embrace her place in the wide current of the powerful jet streams. She is not saying "I am powerful." She is saying: "I step outside of my house, into these wild winds to join my strength and purpose to theirs. They will infuse me with their mystery, magic and power, with the Beyond, with what is greater, The All. It is a cleansing wind one can't control."

This piece is about none other than the fabric, the fabric needs to say most of what I want to say. I want it to be billowing out, and with the wind sweeping up under her dress and is almost going to expand her dress like a big balloon, and carry her away. The piece will also be about the expression on her face: letting go, open slack jaw, she is melting into the power of the wind. Her hands can each say a different thing. She needs to be shown as infused with the power and energized, yet yielding and swept away by it- a tension between her energy and her surrender.

As I write this I am acutely aware how this is a metaphor for where I am with my work. Ever since my son and Carl went to New York, and I made the decision to commit to my artwork, I have been infused with tremendous energy and purpose. I am up at 6:30 making art for 45 minutes before I wake my son up and take him to Chatham day camp. I feel so frightened and yet so energized and bold. I steady myself in times of fear with the idea that I am responsible only for my part. I can't control if other people want to buy or see my work. I can only make it and market it. The rest is up to other people. I will suit up, show up and do my part. That is very comforting to me, to realize that I only have to worry about my part. Eighty percent of life is showing up. I am showing up for my art in a big way these days!

53.) **Toy Box**, based on "*Altar Piece with Fish and Flowers*"

2005, terra cotta  
22"H x 12" W x 7"D  
not included on my web site



This piece was made during the week that my son and husband were away during the summer of 2005. I felt very conflicted about the content of the piece, and I still do. Friends visiting my studio commented that I should make a piece that was on the lighter side, not quite as serious as my past work. So, I made this piece because I think it is important to have a sense of humor and be able to laugh at life.

Everyone loves this piece. I do not feel as connected to it because I feel like my art space is my own and is a place where I can sink into my own reality. A friend of mine made the very wise comment that if folks feel my art needs to go in a different direction, perhaps they did not understand what I was trying to say in the first place and that I did not need to augment my vision with a humorous piece; my body of work was rich enough on its own. I was very grateful for her comment.

Basically, this piece is a humorous comment on my role as mother. I made the piece to look like “Altar Piece with Fish and Flowers”, except it looks like my son’s toy box has exploded and toys are everywhere. I am standing in the center of the melee: Yoda stands on my head brandishing a light saber, a Power ranger mischievously fires a laser beam, and I hold a dripping ice-cream cone in one hand. At the base of the sculpture are portraits of my son, husband and the Three Stooges. I hope you get a laugh from the piece and enjoy something different from my usual work!

2006, terra cotta, acrylic paint  
“22 H x “8 W x “8 D  
not included on my web site



I cannot recall when I started this piece, although I think it was before I went to India. I had been looking at pictures of yantras in a book, both two dimensional yantras, and three dimensional ones and decided to make one of my own. I have included some of the basic shapes found in yantras including basic geometric shapes that are considered to be both sacred geometry and archetypical forms. The lotus blossom is also referenced. At the top of the piece is a crown of yoni shaped lotus petals. I made this piece with the express intention of painting it when it is fired. A friend visiting my studio commented that it looked like a rook from a chess set. I cringed because I know he had a point.

55.) ***Jana*** (*Goddess of the past and future*)

2007, terra cotta  
22" H x 13" W x 9" D



Upon returning from India in November of 2005 I felt very out of sorts for many months. I just couldn't quite get my bearings. I felt displaced and missed India like my home. I felt very much in between stages of my life. It seemed that on a profound level I was leaving one stage of my life and getting ready to enter another. I was questioning a lot of my life and often felt like the ground underneath me had shifted profoundly and I was trying to make sense of things. Also, I was not able to make art for a while after returning from India. It was very unsettling and painful for me. My identity and creative expression is rooted in sculpture. Gratefully, I did return to my studio and this sculpture, Jana, was the piece that broke my silence. As with many of my previous pieces I did not have a plan for the piece. I just started pushing clay around on the stand in the later part of 2006. All I knew was that I wanted to make a very large face. I was about half way finished with the piece and a friend visiting my studio in January of 2007 commented that the piece looked like the Goddess Jana. It suddenly dawned on me that this piece perfectly reflected the space I had been in for the past year. The Goddess Jana looks behind her to the passing year, and forward to the upcoming year, just as I had been doing since my return from India. Even before I knew that I had been sculpting Jana all along, I was very certain that the "front" of the piece would be what most people would consider as the side of the piece and that the two faces of the women would be seen in profile. The face on the left stares back on the past with a look of contemplative rest, the other looks to the right gazes towards the future with an engaged and intense stare.

My mother, Verna Sylvia Robinson, the person most in tune with my work, noticed that the gaze on the face looking into the future seemed unfocused. I



was going to change the gaze so that it was more attentive. However, mom suggested that I keep it unfocused because we can never properly focus on the future. And so, the side of Jana that looks towards the future has the wide eyed stare of defocus as she boldly faces the uncertain future.

Alternative writing on the Brooklyn Museum webpage:

Upon returning from India in 2005 I felt out of sorts for many months. I missed India like my home. On a profound level I was leaving one stage of my life and getting ready to enter another. I was questioning a lot of my life and often felt like the ground underneath me had shifted profoundly and I was trying to make sense of things. Also, I was not able to make art for a while after returning from India. It was very unsettling and painful for me. Gratefully, I did return to my studio, and Jana was the piece that broke my visual silence. As with many of my previous pieces I did not have a plan for the piece. I just started pushing clay around on the stand. A friend visiting my studio commented that the piece looked like the goddess Jana. Jana looks behind her to the passing year, and forward to the upcoming year, just as I had been doing since my return from India.

## 56.) ***Shiva Linga***

2007, terra cotta  
16" H x 15" W x 15" D



I began this piece in the later part of 2006 shortly after starting Jana and finished it in February of 2007. Just about every temple I visited in India had a Shiva Linga in it. I am captivated by this ubiquitous symbol that is embedded in the iconographic images in India's collective history. I am intrigued that with many of the Shiva Linga I saw, the linga portion sometimes looked like a cosmic egg and evoked the feminine which is inherent in the egg symbol and evokes female characteristics of birth and renewal. Conversely, the linga portion of the Shiva

Linga sometimes took on a more phallic shape and was less rounded. I wondered why some artists portray the male aspect through a feminine symbol: the cosmic egg; yet others choose a more angular presentation, which is traditionally more masculine.

In addition, I have been missing India fiercely and am trying to sooth myself by bringing as much of India to my home as I can. So, I made my own Shiva Linga to put in my flower garden. I started this piece by intersecting two yonic, or almond shapes. Into the center of this “cross” I placed the cosmic egg.

The Shiva Lingas that I saw in India had only one spout. I made four spouts that will face the four directions. I don't know why I chose the spouts to face the cardinal directions, but it just seemed to make sense to me. Also, I liked the way the four spouts, when viewed from above, evoked the shape of an equal armed cross, or Greek cross mentioned by Dan Brown (2003) in his book *The Da Vinci Code*: “The head of this key was not the traditional long-stemmed Christian cross but rather was a square cross—with four arms of equal length—which predated Christianity by fifteen hundred years. This kind of cross carried none of the Christian connotations of crucifixion associated with the longer-stemmed Latin cross, originated by Romans as a torture device. Langdon was always surprised how few Christians who gazed upon “the crucifix” realized their symbol's violent history was reflected in its very name: “cross” and “crucifix” came from the Latin verb *cruciare*—to torture.” ...equal-armed crosses like this one are considered peaceful crosses. Their square configurations make them impractical for use in crucifixion, and their balanced vertical and horizontal elements convey a natural union of male and female...” (p. 145).

Barbara G. Walker (1998) also references a cross, shaped within a square, called a “cross Patee”, or “cross formee”. (p. 48) Carl Jung (1964) also differentiates between the Greek and Latin cross: “Up to Carolingian times, the equilateral or Greek cross was the usual form, and therefore the mandala was indirectly implied. But in the course of time the center moved upward until the cross took on the Latin form, with the stake and the crossbeam, which is customary today. This development is important because it corresponds to the inward development of Christianity to the high Middle Ages. In simple terms, it symbolized the tendency to remove the center of man and his faith from the earth and to “elevate” it into the spiritual sphere. This tendency springs from the desire to put into action Christ's saying: “My kingdom is not of this world” Earthly life, the world, and the body were therefore forces that had to be overcome.” (p. 273)

57.) ***Ganesh***

2007, terra cotta  
21" H x 16" W x 9" D



58.) ***Which Church***

2008, terra cotta  
22" H x 8" W x 9" D



*All fanatical, organized religion suppresses women with  
an endlessly creative and unfathomable myriad of atrocities.  
It is the stuff of nightmares. It is the stuff of hell.  
Suppression subtle and gross,  
Suppression covert and overt,  
Suppression conscious and unconscious.  
Suppression insidious.  
Suppression incessant.  
Suppression systemic.*

*Yet...*

*How can you hide the moon?  
How can you hold back the tides?  
How can you crush the wind?  
How can you cool the burning fires that smolder in the deep of the earth?  
How can you tame Woman?*

-----Cydra Vaux—April 5, 2008

These words can be applied to any group of people who have been suppressed. Instead of the word woman, substitute: Dalits, Blacks, Jews, Lesbians, Gays....this list can go on and on. However, I am specifically addressing the struggles of women through this sculpture. Also, when I speak of fanatical, organized religion or the patriarchy that suppresses women I am not speaking exclusively about men. Rather the patriarchy represents the cultural oppression of women by *both* men and women. I will go on to say that I believe that humanity can be seen as whole and when women are suppressed, the men in the culture are also greatly damaged. However, *Which Church* is addressing the pain felt by women, yet this is not to say that men are not in need of healing, and have not suffered brutally through rigid dogmatic structures. Further, the Son of God should be revealed in and honored. However, rigidly organized religion, and the patriarchy have distorted the balanced yin yang between men and women.

Isadora Duncan succinctly states “No, I can't explain the dance to you; if I could say it--I wouldn't have to dance it!” And so, although I can relate the symbols I have used, and how I have chosen to arrange the elements of art, and why I have ordered the principles of art in such a way, and my historical references, and the mood, and what I hope you might take with you, I can't explain the sculpture to you. I am sorry, and it pains me, because art is about communication, and I want to have that shared experience with you that will bind our hearts together. And I worry fiercely that I did not get my ideas across clearly and convey the layers of meaning this piece holds for me. No, I can't explain the art to you. Yet, I will never stop trying. My art is married to the written word. My right brained images are in a synergistic relationship with my left brain words; they uphold one another like music and lyrics.

Looking up at the spire of an old church, the kind one sees in New England, I noticed the spire reminded me of a witch's hat. I have had the idea for *Which Church* living in my head for several years now. Sometimes a sculpture lives in



my head, and although it is a good idea, it does not need to breath in the world; living in my head is good enough for the both of us. But, this image kept flashing across my mind's eye. My relationship to witches is to see them as wise women, the women who gave medicines to other women to ease labor pains during child birth.

Upon entering the gallery, the viewer sees only the front of *Which Church*, a building, and then as they walk around the piece they are surprised to see a witch at the back of the piece. Therefore, the front of the piece must be the church because this is the story I am telling: a history that tries to suppress the feminine, but cannot. And, this is how things often are. At first glance we are only shown the male aspects, and yet, on closer inspection we see the almost invisible fingerprints of women—everywhere, yes, everywhere.

In Bernini's *Medusa*, housed at the Palazzo dei Conservatori in Rome, the snakes writhe out of control, turning upon and attacking each other. Medusa's face is anguish. Women in history have suffered, and one might imagine their faces, like Bernini's Medusa, hardened like marble masks of pain. Yet, women have resolve at their core and can garment themselves in that strength. Therefore, the horizontal lines of my piece's robes speak of that quiet strength.

Proportion is a consideration for this piece. Ideally, I would have liked the piece to be bigger; this is because the viewer needs to be shocked, surprised by the size of the witch: she is as magnificent and as grand as the church.

Unfortunately, I do not make sculptures as large as I would like because I don't have the room for them in my home, and I don't have the physical strength to chuck them around my studio. I was assured when I saw a show of Dali's paintings and was struck by how small his canvases are, and yet how much he was able to pack into such a small space--petit, yet powerful. Also, how the piece is shown will impact on its effectiveness—I will compensate for her lack of size by placing *Which Church* above eye level with the viewer to make her seem larger than she is.

I was talking with Verna Robinson, my mom, about my work and I was reflecting on how many of the women in my sculptures have a reserved, or intellectual distance about them, a feeling of coolness. Mom and I discussed how that coolness relates to the verity that these women cannot be owned, they cannot be bought. They have a strength and self-containment about them that can be perceived as cool. Sometimes, we expect our women to be warm and nurturing,



like a Mary Cassatt painting, and when they are not, we can feel abandoned by the Mother archetype.

Why she is the witch pregnant? Why are so many of my figures pregnant? The faces on my *Jana* sculpture have been mistaken as men's faces; they are not men's faces, they are women's faces. I don't want my work to be perceived as either made by a man, or that my figures are male, and that my work comments on the male experience and point of view. This fate has been common among women artists throughout history. Either their work has been interpreted from a male's point of view, or the work has been attributed to male artists. Rarely, do men depict pregnant women. Instead, men often depict women as sexual beings, or the virgin archetype. When a woman is pregnant she is no longer seen as an object of desire by other men who strive to perpetuate their own genetic line. A pregnant woman is already committed to a man, and is no longer as desirable, or accessible. I also use pregnancy as metaphor for life and unknown potential that is ready to burst forth into consciousness.

The front of this sculpture, the church, represents the solar or masculine aspects of fanatical and rigid religious systems. The back shows the lunar or feminine traits of humanity that have survived the genocide of gender. This piece specifically references the witch hunts that took place in Europe and the New England states, yet the piece is universal enough to encompass other trials our wise women have faced throughout history and that we face, in legion, today.

The church and the witch are joined together in much the same way the yin yang's light and dark portions join to compose a complete circle. The known and the unknown; male and female; front yard and back yard; the predictable and the unpredictable; the civilized and the primitive, the conscious and the unconscious: each of these pairs join together to form a whole and inform and shape the other.

Conversely, *Which Church* as yin-yang parts that complete each other also speaks to conflicting ideas that suffocate one other with their bound proximity. The dichotomy of these two ideas: that of the yin-yang that forms a whole, and that of two opposites bound together in a prison like suffocation can exist side by side and do not negate the other.

When I was a young girl I was captivated by the story of King Arthur's daughter Burd Ellen. I did not remember Burd Ellen until after I had finished *Which Church*, and yet I know her story spoke to me from deep in the crevices of my mind. The Warlock Merlin explains that "because she went round the church windershins—opposite to the sun, she is now in the dark Tower of Elfland." The story

concludes “They reached home safely and were welcomed with great joy by fair Gwenevera, their queen mother. And never again did Burd Ellen go round the church or churchyard windershins.” (Katharine Gibson, 1901 pg. 59-68). Windershins means counterclockwise or against the sun. When we go against the sun, or against the Son of God, as expressed in *rigid dogma*, and turn windershins we delight in what is right brained, lunar and we discover the feminine, we see the witch behind the church, we see alongside the Son of God, the Daughter of the Divine, and we know that it is good.

Alternative writing on the Brooklyn Museum webpage:

Looking up at the spire of an old church, I was reminded of a witch’s hat. Witches, or wise women, were the ones who gave medicine to ease labor pains during child birth.

The front of this sculpture, the church, represents the solar or masculine aspects of fanatical and rigid religious systems. The back shows the lunar or feminine traits of humanity that have survived the genocide of gender. The church and the witch are joined together to reference the yin yang’s light and dark portions that compose a complete circle. Conversely, *Which Church* speaks to conflicting ideas that suffocate one other with their bound proximity. The dichotomy of these two ideas: that of the yin-yang that forms a whole, and that of two opposites bound together in a prison of suffocation, paradoxically exist side by side.

I use pregnancy as metaphor for life and potential that is ready to burst forth into consciousness. I also use pregnancy to confront the “male gaze”. Rarely do male artists depict pregnant women. Instead, they often image women as sexual beings, or appeal to the virgin archetype. When a woman is pregnant she is no longer seen as an object of desire by other men who strive to perpetuate their own genetic line.

When I was a young girl I was captivated by the story of King Arthur’s daughter Burd Ellen. The Warlock Merlin explains that “because she went round the church windershins—opposite to the sun, she is now in the dark Tower of Elfland.” The story concludes “they reached home safely and were welcomed with great joy by fair Gwenevera, their queen mother. And never again did Burd Ellen go round the church or churchyard windershins.” (Katharine Gibson, 1901 pg. 59-68). Windershins means counterclockwise or against the sun. When we go against the sun, or against the Son of God, as expressed in *rigid dogma*, and turn windershins we delight in what is right brained, lunar, and we discover the

feminine, we see the witch behind the church. We see alongside the Son of God, the Daughter of the Divine, and we know that it is good.

**59.) *Creation Story***

2008, terra cotta  
21" H x 8" W x 8" D



I am inspired by artists who work spontaneously, from their subconscious. I was able to work this way on *Creation Story* because I am gaining a better understanding of body proportions and how I can effectively distort the figure without it looking too grotesque. I kept in mind “La Grande Odalisque” and her three extra vertebrae. So, as I worked I tried not to think too much, I just kept focusing on chucking clay up on the stand to make interesting patterns and forms that flowed and created appealing elements that make sense in their own right. Also, I wanted this piece to have a flavor of India about it, without being an overtly Indian piece of art.

The title of this piece envisions men and women working together to create order, beauty and life. It moves beyond the narrow confines of a dogmatic creation story, and instead presents our religious myths as a symbolic dialogue that inspires and comforts us, mirroring back to us our past, present and future dreams. I was very inspired by my brother’s partner who labored to birth their son. My brother relayed mythic tales of her heroic efforts and how she spent many hours in hard labor to birth their dear little baby. Her birthing story is awe inspiring, it is profound.

It was aware that by working on *Which Church* and *Creation Story* simultaneously they helped to inform the other piece. In my studio I have two sculpture stands and I often work on two or more sculptures at the same time. I work on one until I am frustrated, or can’t get the solutions I need, and then I work on the other piece. Or, I work on one piece for several days and leave the other covered for a few days. Then, when I return to the other piece days later I have fresher eyes. I think it is interesting how these two pieces are facets of the same constellation of ideas surrounding men and women working together to either make up an institution like the church, or to work together in creative pursuits like birthing children, the future, beauty and order.

Although, I do not consider myself an auditory learner, I strive for my work to be informed by some of the same concepts musicians use such as layering, syncopation, patterns of repeating choruses. Thinking about music’s structure allows me a different vantage point from which to view the elements and principles of design such as line, shape, direction, size, texture, color, value, balance, gradation, repetition, contrast, harmony, dominance, and unity. Sometimes when I am listening to a really good song, I think to myself, how I can get those same emotions, feelings, or structures in my sculptures. A friend said they appreciated the mandorla pattern - kind of “sexy” to have this fabric-like element peeking through the spaces and teasing the viewer. This was what I like to call a “happy accident”. When making the sculpture, I had all of the figures in

place and ended up with small patches of space that I couldn't decide what to do with. So, I added a fabric-like mandorla pattern to these areas. This gives the piece a layered effect, and the tiny bits of hidden fabric add an element of surprise.

Note: at the opening show at the JCC Society of Sculptors @ 75 Years, American Jewish Museum juried show; I received the Vivian Lehman Award for Portraiture for *Creation Story*. The piece was also selected to be part of a self-guided tour to encourage patrons to answer questions and think deeper about my work.

Alternative writing on the Brooklyn Museum webpage:

This piece envisions men and women working together to create order, beauty and life. Moving beyond the narrow confines of a dogmatic creation story, it presents religious myth as a symbolic dialogue that inspires and comforts. I was inspired by my brother's partner who labored to birth their son. My brother relayed mythic tales of her heroic efforts and how she spent many hours in hard labor to birth their dear little baby.

Working spontaneously from my subconscious I tried not to think while making this piece. I focused on chucking clay up on the stand to make interesting patterns and forms that flowed. I wanted this piece to have a flavor of India about it, without being an overtly Indian piece of art.

60.) ***Ardhanariswara / Tennis Everyone!***

2008, terra cotta  
20 " H x 10" W x 7 " D





On the front of the sculpture is the India figure of Ardhanarishwara, who was created to bridge the gap between the male and the female: Shiva gathered Gauri in his embrace and held her so closely that the two became one body, one heart, one soul. A single being, half male, half female: The Ardhanarishwara.

In his book *Goddesses in Art* (1997, p. 43), Lanier Graham writes: "In many creation myths, the creator is said to be neither male nor female, but both. Surveys of the Great Goddess that overlook this androgynous aspect neglect one of her most important features. Much of her greatness is due to being the supreme unity that transcends all opposites; she is the universal synthesis of all particulars.... The sacred image of the Androgyne has been particularly difficult for Modern people to comprehend. Those who encounter an image of the Androgyne today are somewhat like students of Zen contemplating a koan--reasoning does not work; comprehension requires intuition. The most famous androgynous images in Asian art are Hindu.... The concept of the Androgyne continues in the esoteric teachings of the world religions- not only Taoism, Hinduism, and Buddhism, but also esoteric Judaism, Christianity, and Islam...Some writers describing this image use the term hermaphrodite, but that



is a physical description of a human being who has the sexual organs of both a male and a female. The Great Goddess/God cannot be understood in such physical terms. The Androgyne is a metaphor that has nothing to do with any form of ordinary human sexual activity, be it heterosexual, homosexual, or bisexual.... the ultimate goal of the spiritual quest is androgyne, a state of mind in which the finite consciousness of the individual and the realm of the infinite cosmos are realized as one. From the perspective of comparative world mythology, the consciousness of the Androgyne is identical with that of the Buddha consciousness or Christ consciousness.”

The Androgyne and the Ardhanarishwara relate to the yin yang and the concept of a dichotomous whole. The two opposites of the yin yang are able to unite and have compassion for each other. The “war between the sexes” is over and peace reigns, embodied by the Ardhanarishwara. (I have explored some of the same themes of the yin yang in other pieces of my work, including *Which Church*.)

Again, as in some of my other pieces like *Altar Goddess with Fish and Flowers*, I have juxtaposed the sacred/secular, and the serious/sarcastic. I am interested in the tension between these different states, the commonality between them, and their separateness. Each of these seeming opposites helps to define the other and to draw out the subtleties of the other by their juxtaposition. To this end, the woman with the tennis racket represents the secular and the sarcastic, while the Ardhanarishwara depicts the sacred and the serious.

Another concept that intersects with this tension between the sacred and the secular is the dialogue best illustrated by the life of Joan of Arc, who did not believe that she needed an intercessory priest to give her direct access to the divine. In *Ardhanarishwara / Tennis Everyone!* I have blurred the distinct boundaries between the spiritual and the secular, thereby creating a permeable relationship between these two states. The woman with the tennis racket involved in the secular activity of playing tennis is elevated to the sacred by the halo-like tennis ball behind her and the orbiting tennis balls which reference the moon and its changing phases. In this way the mundane act of tennis is a vehicle for transcendence. This is done in a playful way that mocks our inability to sometimes see the relationship between the sacred and the humorous. We can sometimes take our sacred religions a bit too seriously. And to this end, the tennis player acts out the ubiquitous and healing role of the trickster archetype found in all cultures.

To further highlight this permeable and symbiotic transmission of concepts between these two states, I have positioned the hands of both women in the same universal mudras. These mudras, symbolic positions in which the hands are held in Hindu dancing and rituals, are common in Christian, Indian, and Buddhist art, and I would guess in other religious art traditions. The right hands of both women are in the Abhaya Mudra: the Fear-Not Mudra which shows good intentions, a sign of peace and a way of showing that you mean no harm because you carry no weapon in your hand. In the Buddhist tradition the Buddha made this gesture after attaining enlightenment. The left hands of both women are in the Varada Mudra, or the welcome or Wish-Granting Mudra which signifies compassion, sincerity and the wish to devote oneself to human salvation.

When I was a young girl I knew it was unfair that the boys could discard their tee-shirts on hot summer days and feel the sun and cool breeze on their bodies; they were so free, while I had to keep my immature chest covered because of shame or some odd notion that a young girl should worry about the male gaze. As with many areas of our lives, it is good when we have a choice about matters that directly influence us. The irony is that now that I am missing my breast I could now go topless....who would stop me? Myself, I am a woman who chooses to live within our social norms. I am not advocating that I want to go topless, however, I am giving voice to the different standards that women and young girls are held to and I am voicing the wild spirit in me that longs to be free, and to have a choice about matters. With my own mastectomy I, in part, physically embody this archetype of the Ardhanarishwara. If I could have my two breasts, I would; I miss my breast. Yet, I now embody the concept of the Shiva in his androgyne aspect as Ardhanarishwara who holds the promise of wholeness and understanding.

The writing underneath the figure of the tennis player directly tips a hat to the feminist movement and the feminist art movement's indictment of the male gaze with this snappy little ditty of a manifesto:

Burning Her Bra?  
She Was Burning Her Tops!  
Goodbye Tan Lines, Hello Sunshine!  
Goodbye Male Gaze, Hello Carefree Days!

The tennis player on the back of the piece also speaks to "letter of the law" beliefs. These are laws that are artificially invented by people and only follow logic and reason. "If my breasts are cut off, I can go without my shirt and

experience freedom". Even though the law is flawlessly sound, we know it is not grounded in truth. The tennis player mocks the law of the land by revealing its absurdity.

Conversely, the Ardhanarishwara represents the spirit of the law that defies logic and like many truths cannot be pinned down by logic or laws. It is a truth that we sometimes only see for a fleeting second out of the corner of our eye, or a truth that resides deep in our being. It is not logical that a body can be both male and female. And, it is not logical that we can hold in our being seemingly opposite and sometimes conflicting truths, and yet we do, and with great wisdom. This can happen in the symbolic and mythical form of a God/Goddess like Ardhanarishwara.

The writing underneath the figure of the Ardhanarishwara is a quote from the bible, except I have substituted the word Compassion for Christ:

There is no Jew nor Greek.  
There is no Bond nor Free.  
There is no Male nor Female.  
You are all one in Compassion.

I think this sentiment from the bible is a perfect example of a truth that is transcendent in its wisdom and infuses logic with love. I also wanted to move beyond the concept of Christ into a more universal truth: that of compassion. I purposely capitalized the word Compassion to personify it, give the word consciousness, and the same value as that of Christ. I also use an Indian figure that is married to the Christian text. Therefore, the boundaries between these two religions are broken down and unite together to create a powerful whole in much the same way the tension between male and female are broken down to create wholeness.

It is my intention that the two different women in this piece will open a dialogue within the viewer. The Ardhanarishwara is on one side, and the tennis player who has been afforded some degree of equality with men because of her illness. She has had to both literally and figuratively cut off her femaleness in order to be accepted as equal by the males. And we know that that will never happen. Even with her breasts removed, she will have to keep her shirt on. So in this way the sculpture also becomes a comment on how women struggle to enter into the sphere of male privilege, no matter if they obey the rules or not. I applaud the saucy and bold tennis player. She is the product of sarcasm, boldness, in-your-face-defiance, and the gut wrenching desire for choice and freedom.

My intention is that this sculpture will be experienced on many levels and be viewed both literally and figuratively, depending on the emotional needs of the viewer, as multiple meanings are intended. This sculpture can be viewed as a symbolic parable of sorts that brings imagistic conflicts to the surface where they can wrestle with each other to bring about a better understanding of the issues they raise. Or, a more literal interpretation may also be applied to include how I continue to make sense of my breast cancer. I didn't think my breast cancer would work its way into my art. I did not want to make breast cancer art. Every time I fill out a doctor's form and I have to put down that I have had cancer as part of my medical history, I am stunned. I feel like I have temporally stepped out of my own body into someone else's life.

*Ardhanariswara / Tennis Everyone!* is perhaps the first piece I have made besides *Toy Box* that strays from my subsuming goal of creating utopian art. I have been very careful to try and imagine a utopian, and an ideal, in my art. My goal is to hold before myself the goals I want to attain, and to remind myself of order, balance and beauty that I can rest into in times of strife. I am fully aware that the sarcastic and in-your-face defiance of this piece is a break from my work; I am comfortable with this. I guess my inner Trickster thought it was time!

Alternative writing on the Brooklyn Museum webpage:

The front of the sculpture images the Hindu figure of Ardhanarishwara who is half male and half female. The writing below reads:

There is no Jew nor Greek.  
There is no Bond nor Free.  
There is no Male nor Female.  
You are all one in Compassion.

On the back is a woman with a tennis ball for a halo; she embodies the trickster archetype. Orbiting tennis balls reference the moon and its changing phases. The writing below reads:

Burning Her Bra?  
She Was Burning Her Tops!  
Goodbye Tan Lines, Hello Sunshine!  
Goodbye Male Gaze, Hello Carefree Days!

This piece creates a relationship between the spiritual (Ardhanarishwars) and the secular (Tennis player). To further highlight the permeable transmission of

concepts between these two states, I have positioned the hands of both women in the fear-not and welcome mudras.

Ardhanarishwara represents the spirit of the law that defies logic and like many truths cannot be pinned down by judgment. It is a truth that we sometimes only see for a fleeting second out of the corner of our eye, or a truth that resides deep in our being. It is not logical that a body can be both male and female. And, it is not logical that we can hold in our being seemingly opposite and sometimes conflicting truths, and yet we do, and with great wisdom.

The sculpture comments on how women struggle to enter into the sphere of male privilege. The tennis player has literally and figuratively cut off her femaleness in order to be accepted as equal by the males. Yet, this will never happen. Even with her breasts removed, she will have to “keep her shirt on”. She mocks the law of the land by revealing its absurdity. She is sarcastic, in-your-face-defiant, with the gut wrenching desire for choice and freedom.



61.) ***Cancan Girls: Baubo and Demeter***

2008, terra cotta  
18" H x 13" W x 5" D





Instead of narrating *Baubo and Demeter* in a traditional way, I have expressed their mood and the emotions they stir up in me when I hear their story. Traditionally, Boubo is rendered without a head, and her face superimposed upon her torso, giving voice to the body and circumnavigating the intellect. In Greek mythology Baubo is the trickster who shakes Demeter from her deep mourning with sacred obscene jokes. In addition to a high kicking boisterous dance, the title cancan refers to a woman's ability: Yes, We Can!

Clarissa Pinkola Estes writes with saucy eloquence about Demeter and Baubo in *Women Who Run With the Wolves* (1996, p. 362-374): "There is an aspect of women's sexuality that in ancient times was called the sacred obscene, not in the way we use the word obscene today, but meaning sexually wise in a witty sort of way. There were once Goddess cults that were in some part devoted to irreverent female sexuality. The rites were not derogatory, but were concerned with portraying parts of the unconscious that remain, yet today, mysterious and largely uncharted. The very idea of sexuality as sacred, and more specifically, obscenity as an aspect of sacred sexuality, is vital to the wildish nature. There were Goddesses of obscenity in the ancient woman's cultures—so-called for their innocent yet wily lewdness...the importance of these old Goddesses of obscenity was demonstrated by their ability to loosen what was too tight, to lift gloom, to bring the body into a kind of humor that belongs not to the intellect but to the body itself...The mischief and humor of the obscene Goddesses can cause a vital form of medicine to spread throughout the endocrine and neurological systems of the body."

62.) ***The Holy Act of Cleansing***

2009, terra cotta  
21" H x 8" W x 7"



I made this piece in 2008 before I was diagnosed with liver cancer. In retrospect this piece adds an even deeper appreciation of the body's ability to rid itself of urine waste. I wonder if my body knew in June of 2008 that my liver was sick. At this time I had a blood test that showed a slight elevation. My doctor at the time reassured me that the discrepancy was caused by medication I was taking. He was wrong, very wrong.

Excerpt from my Diary, June 2008: "I had a dream I climbed into a window in a church. My fingers gripped the deeply grooved, bevel-carved stones that formed a boarder around the church's window. The soft, dove grey stones of the windows were smooth, cool, and formed a series of curved surfaces that made it easy to grip. Once inside, I proceeded up a short flight of steps, and reached the top floor of the church. Turning to the left, I entered a bathroom that belonged only to me. The room was spacious, and the defused light lent it a calm, peaceful, clean, private, spiritual and airy feeling. A plant flourished on a marble counter top. There was artwork, but the only piece I can remember was the bust of a man that looked similar to the face in the statue of *Laocoön and His Sons*, but the face was not in as much pain. The "toilet" in the room was like a large raised white porcelain basin with a bidet that reminded me of a baptismal basin, or a wash basin. Squatting in basin, with my feet on the rim, I could easily see my yoni. Then I was peeing and the stream arced into the air and then went right into the little rectangle drain in the side of the bowl. Also, there was a beautiful lamp that had an egg like shaped globe with elegant wrought iron designs on it. However, I think I was also sad, because this would be the last time I would get to use this bathroom. What does this dream mean? I have this horrid fear of death ever since my diagnosis of cancer in 2001. But I keep thinking of that bathroom and that sensuous relationship with my body and squatting in the large basin to urinate, just like the Indians. I love to think of that bathroom. It makes me happy and it made me really happy and content in my dream. It was all mine to use.

On the side of this piece are gothic windows that reference the spirituality of a church and below them are public toilets, like the ones found in Rome.

Alternative titles that I decided against: *Piety*

I also thought this could be an alternative title:

*As a liver cancer survivor cleansing my system has become holy.*

*In my dream I crawled through the church window, ascended a flight of stairs, and opened a door into my own bathroom; the room was peaceful and filed with soft light. I squatted on the round rim of my own toilet that reminded of a baptismal basin.*

Alternative writing on the Brooklyn Museum webpage:

I made this piece in 2008 before I was diagnosed with liver cancer. In retrospect this piece adds an even deeper appreciation of the body's ability to rid itself of urine waste. I wonder if my body knew in 2008 that my liver was sick. At this time I had a blood test that showed a slight elevation. My doctor reassured me that the discrepancy was caused by medication I was taking. He was wrong, very wrong. On the side of this piece, gothic windows suggest the spirituality of a church, and below them are public toilets, like the ones found in Rome.

63.) ***Leaving Perdah and the Palace of Winds***

2009, terra cotta  
18" H x 11" W x 6" D



Perusing a book of architecture from India, I came across the beautiful Hawa Mahal, or Palace of Winds, built in 1799 in Jaipur. The building is captivating and

I longed to visit it. Yet reading about the palace, I discovered its disturbing history. On the façade are windows with lattice work that catch the wind and provide a breeze inside the palace. However, the underlying reason for the lattice was to enforce strict purdah, or face cover. The women of the harem could watch the world outside their prison without passersby seeing them.

The front of this piece shows the Palace of Winds; the reverse side finds a modern-day woman standing on a train platform surrounded by her luggage. She represents women who have been able to break free from horrific practices like purdah. On the surrounding walls are traditional tessellating tiles. Behind her is a wall clock that reads two o'clock and is a play on the word "to", as she is going "to" someplace. The circular form of the clock serves as a halo and speaks of divinity amidst the secular. On the tableau beneath, birds in flight echo her freedom.

While I was making this sculpture I was preparing to go to Brazil on a Fulbright Group Study Abroad. I was wrestling with feelings of responsibility to my husband and son and how although I love being a mom and wife, I was looking forward to this new adventure.

64.) ***Breast/Liver Cancer Self-Portrait with Life (Mary) and Death (Skeleton)***  
***in the Segan Semui-in Mudra***

2010, terra cotta  
20" H x 9" W x 9" D





During the past months of battling breast cancer metastasized to my liver, life and death have been my companions embodied here by Mary and a skeleton who flank me on each side.

All three figures stand with their arms in the Segan Semui-in mudra. Mudras, symbolic positions in which the hands are held in Hindu dancing and rituals, are common in Christian, Indian, and Buddhist art. The right hands of the three figures are in the Abhaya mudra: the Fear-Not mudra which shows good intentions, a sign of peace and a way of showing that you mean no harm because you carry no weapon in your hand. In the Buddhist tradition the Buddha made this gesture after attaining enlightenment. The left hands form the Varada mudra, or the welcome or Wish-Granting mudra which signifies compassion, sincerity and the wish to devote oneself to human salvation. Combined together, the Abhaya and Varada mudras structure the Segan Semui-in mudra.

In my left hand I hold a container to catch the ascitis fluid that collects in my abdomen and needs to be drained. In my right hand I hold the chemotherapy and herceptin that enters my body through a port that has been inserted into my chest. Fighting lymphedema, my left arm is wrapped in a compression garment.

A friend of mine who paints icons says that every figure gets a halo, even if they are not saints. Each of these figures has a halo which lifts them from prose to poetry and highlights the spiritual dimensions of the mundane.

Having a drain in my abdomen, undergoing long-term chemotherapy, and numerous hospital stays, I strive to understand the gifts that Life and Death afford me.

65.) ***De/Termination: Self-Portrait Speaking Life over Breast/Liver Cancer***

2010, terra cotta  
22" H x 9" W x 9" D





*De/Termination* was born in a flurry of motion with me quickly chucking clay onto my sculpting stand. In these moments I imagine that “if I can just keep sculpting,

I can keep death at arm's length". This piece is about me trying to stay alive, to create a fountain of life that rises above death. Seeing this sculpture my mom, Verna Robinson, commented: "All ends up in the bone yard, all ends up dry bones, what continues on after we are gone is what we have called forth." She thought it looked as if the three large faces were speaking their legacies, and that the figures coming out of the mouths were the ideas that transcend death and live beyond the grave.

Three large faces represent different aspects of myself that help me fight cancer.

The first of the faces is a self-portrait with two puti angels tumbling from my lips that represent life, joy and all the dear sweetness that babies bring.

The second colossal head is a Hindu goddess with a dancing Indian woman issuing from her mouth. The Indian woman, her tongue sticking out like Kali's, has a non-emotional quality like some of the women in my other works who are focused goddesses that rule their worlds.

The third large bust is a Tiki God of war; a horse bursts from his open jaw speaking to beauty, power, the raw energy of life, and is the male counterpart to the Indian woman.

Between the heads are three motifs: a curvilinear and symmetrical pattern speaks to order over chaos; a second area suggests life giving water; the third section images fire, vines, and floral elements that reference energy and life. It is not important that these things are realistically represented, as much as what they evoke: feelings of motion, life, wind, water.

Death is represented by six skeletons at the base of the sculpture.

This piece was challenging was to make. Even when it was two thirds of the way finished, it wasn't jelling and I really had to keep working to get the piece to come together.

Duncan MacDiarmid had a piece in the show titled *The Bird of Truth*. I admired the way Duncan made water in his sculpture and I was inspired to make water on this piece too.

66.) ***Self Portrait, Looking for Life Beyond Breast/Liver Cancer  
(with skeleton pillar)***

2010, terra cotta

26" H x 6" W x 6" D



December 7, 2009 I was diagnosed with breast cancer metastasized to my liver and was admitted into the hospital with the beginnings of liver failure. My health, which for the past few months had been waning, rapidly deteriorated.

Struggling to keep food down my weight plummeted 25 pounds. From the waist up I looked gaunt, from the waist down my body retained over 20 pounds of fluid. When I did start to get better and the fluid in my legs started to drain, I lost 20 pounds of weight in one week. My legs were so swollen with fluid I could barely bend my knees to walk up the stairs. I had to swing my left leg out to the side to get it up the stairs because it was so swollen. The fluid in my legs also made the skin tender to the touch, and discolored. The lips of my vulva were also swollen from fluid and were many times the normal size.

I looked like I was about 9 months pregnant because my abdomen was filled with ascites fluid; at one hospital visit they drained three and a half liters. Later, they inserted a drain in my abdomen so I could draw off the fluid myself. Every other day I would remove a liter of fluid from my swollen abdomen. When my abdomen was distended with fluid it made it hard to breathe, sometimes I would wake up at

night gasping for breath. An oxygen tank sat next to the hospital bed in our living room and was joined by a wheelchair, which thankfully, I never needed to use.

My first oncologist, who I let go of after our first visit because of her apathetic attitude towards me, said that my bilirubin levels should have returned to the normal levels of zero or one. She was concerned that I was not responding to the chemotherapy and herceptin and she thought I had about 2 weeks left before hospice should be started. At that point my bilirubins were at 6.7, and my ammonia levels were high enough that they recommended we tell my young son that I might start to become incoherent from ammonia poisoning. My bilirubins did not return to normal levels, and they continued to climb until they leveled off at a stratospheric 20.5.

When I looked in the mirror an alien stranger with deep bronzed yellow skin and bright yellow eyes stared back. I tried not to look in the mirror.

Poisoned by the toxins in my body, I itched all over to the point that I spent sleepless nights and thought I would tear my skin off with the desperate scratching. I tried to sooth my skin with showers, ice compresses, Aveno anti-itch lotion, and Benadryl, to little effect.

Lying in bed, sometimes 23 hours a day, I lost muscle tone and even had difficulty writing. When I did start to recover I held off driving because I didn't think I had the capacity to quickly step on the brake.

I watched the clock and took my next anti-nausea pill as soon as I could. In a good deal of pain and mostly on the verge of being sick, my upper lip would curl up involuntarily. At first I thought this was a tick, or side effect. It was disconcerting to be talking to someone and have my upper lip curl back in a sign of deep disgust. It finally occurred to me that I was having a disgust reaction to the nausea, and pain I was constantly in. I also had sores in my mouth.

Because my liver could not correctly metabolize oral pain killers it would sometimes take hours for a pain pill to yield its effects. Also, I found out that I was allergic to most of the oral pain killers as they were absorbed differently than the IV ones. As the oral pain killers wore off my skin would begin to itch even more. Benadryl didn't help enough; I was always relieved to be at the hospital because only the IV pain killers brought real relief.

I was bathed by a visiting nurse. I had a hospital bed in my living room along with an IV pole and boxes upon boxes of medical equipment filled one side of the living room. I was dressed in adult diapers by my loving and steadfast husband. Our living room sometimes reeked from the portable toilet that sat next to my hospital bed. Due to my high ammonia levels, I was put on lactulose, which gave me severe and constant diarrhea. I was awakened numerous times each night by diarrhea that left me shaky and depleted.

Laying my hospital bed, in the dark of our living room, during one of the long and sleepless nights, the wind and snow were howling outside and I could imagine death standing outside my door raking his scythe back and forth across the door, a scratching sound. I would think to myself “No, not yet, my door is locked against you”, feeling so vulnerable, as if all that separated me from the final grip was a metal bolt and a door.

When I finally did start to recover from my liver cancer, and my skin was a rosy pink again, instead of sickly mustard, I had the image of having crawled out of a deep and muddy, dirty hole in the ground, or, of having been dug and drug up out of this awful pit. I imagined myself lying, exhausted, by that tomb and trembling with fear at the thought of falling down into it again. What could keep me from being pulled into that terrible place again?

I was finally able to return to work in May 2010. Yet, my recovery had its bumps in the road that sent me spiraling back to revisit that fear. I had four additional hospital and ER visits due to an infection in my abdominal drain that was finally removed in September 2010.

As I write this, it is now January 2011. Every day that passes allows my fear to recede; yet, I am still recovering from the traumas. Each time I have any physical problems, I am vividly reminded of death with all of its uncompromising finality.

*Self-Portrait: Looking for Life Beyond Breast/Liver Cancer (with skeleton pillar)* illustrates some of these feelings of being able to rise above, or more accurately, being lifted by grace, above that black chasm of death.

All three figures are self-portraits in three poses: standing, sitting and laying down. Standing, I feel energy and hope flow through my body and I can look ahead with excitement to the days and years ahead of me as I plan for the future. One of the things that was taken away from me when I was sick was the ability to look ahead to my future. I was taking my life day by day, not sure how many hours I had left.

The reclining figure illustrates how I feel when the emotional weight of this illness levels me and I curl up like a wounded animal. I drop down into the silence of my breath as it fills my abdomen, retreats and fills again. I melt into the strong arms of the divine, into the tender arms of motherly compassion and rest on the eternal. I am empty and death is a wide black sky, a universe I am hopeless against.

The sitting figure was a practical consideration, as she props up the standing one. Also, the oddly numbered group offers a pleasing composition and rhythm.

The three figures are suspended in an otherworldly plane, existing in an out-of-time, surrealistic space. It is a lonely limbo where I wait for death to recede and life to begin.

All three figures stare off into the distance at something which has caught their attention, and gives them hope – life!

The ground they rest on blocks their view of the sub rosa skeletons. At times, they know that the death is there, yet they cannot see it because death, like the face of God, is too vast and great to be fully comprehended. My mind can only hold death's dreadful awe for a moment before my self-preserving brain short circuits the connection.

The death-skeletons are not climbing up the pillar, but are tumbling off of it, for life is victorious over them. The skeletons will not breach the ground on which the figures rest. A friend visiting my studio commented that the skeletons didn't look 'scary', but were matter of fact.

The pillar serves contradictory purposes: it separates the figures from their normal lives. They are stranded in this out of time limbo, vulnerable in their nakedness and surrounded by emptiness. How can they ever climb down from this deadly perch? They are trapped. Yet, the pillar affords them a vista they did not have before; only death allows them to view life from a new vantage point.



67.) ***Self Portrait: Looking for Life Beyond Breast/Liver Cancer (enlarged view)***

2010, terra cotta  
15" H x 12" W x 11" D



It is necessary for me to reflect back to myself my reality, to affirm it as valid and worthy. I have a plump body with one breast and not the idealized figure found in most art, especially that created by men. By sculpting the real me, instead of an idealized version I confront stereotypes of beauty and what a real woman should look like; I celebrate myself as a human being who is weathered by time and mortality. I am vulnerable in my nakedness, yet strong in grace, dignity and tenacity.

For this piece I enlarged the figures *from Self-Portrait: Looking for Life beyond Breast/Liver Cancer (with pillar)*. *Self Portrait, Looking for Life Beyond Breast/Liver Cancer (with skeleton pillar)* and *Self Portrait: Looking for Life Beyond Breast/Liver Cancer (enlarged view)* are two parts of one piece and should be shown together.

In the piece with the pillar the figures are smaller. I created a second part to the sculpture because I wanted to highlight these figures and have them become a focal spot, in the same way a camera zooms in on a scene and that section fills the whole picture frame. Secondly, I was thinking that repetition would reinforce my ideas; sometimes in my dreams there are figures that appear in doubles to reinforce themes. Therefore, by making the figures again, I add emphasis to

them. Another reason I wanted to make a larger version of the figures is because the face holds much of the essence of a person. Simply, the faces were too small in the first piece to transmit facial expressions.

In some respects I fell short of my goal because the faces are not that much more expressive in the enlarged version. Yet, the second piece reinforces the first one, and acts as a layered image of the first. The viewer sees the first piece, then looks at the second and realizes that they are the same figures in the same grouping. The viewer then glances back to the first, then to the second to compare them, pulling the viewer into an intimate relationship with the piece.

The text at on the base reads: LOOKing for LIFE BEyond LIVER CANcer. I capitalized the life affirming words in the text: LOOK, LIFE, BE, LIVE, CAN. I do not have liver cancer; I have breast cancer that has metastasized to my liver, but titled the sculpture for brevity's sake.

#### 68.) ***Self Portrait with Horse and Skeleton***

2011, terra cotta  
19" H x 8" W x 8" D

(Photograph Pending)

*Self-Portrait with Horse and Skeleton* finds me flanked by a horse (life) and a skeleton (death). I had a comforting dream in which a horse I were friends, we spoke with each other; the horse was a protector and guide for me.

In my studio I often work on two pieces simultaneously. I started *Self Portrait with Horse and Skeleton* along with *Self Portrait with Mirror Image of Death, with Church Window*. As I was working on these pieces I realized that they were in dialogue with each other. The first part of the narrative, illustrated by *Self-Portrait with Horse and Skeleton*, images me shunning death and choosing life. *Self Portrait with Mirror Image of Death, with Church Window* illustrates what happens when I reach the end of what I am actively able to do to help myself live. I surrender to the mystery of life and death which is mediated by the transcendent power of the Divine: the church window.

I used the whiplash line, found in the lines of a snake's body and the Art Nouveau movement because it has motion that is snappy and dynamic and one can hear in their mind the crack of a whip. A curvilinear line, especially a spiral, and used in some of today's goddess art, can feel trite and overly

feminine. The spiral seems predictable and monotonous; one knows where it starts, and where it will end.

Sometimes, as I draw or sculpt, I alternate between straight and sinuous lines. This blend of geometric and curved lines reinforces the balance I strive to create between masculine and feminine in my work with regards to content and form. I wonder if the brain processes straight and curved lines differently. Are straight lines processed by the left brain and curved lines by the right? I am not attracted works of art that are strictly geometric; they are too conformist, lacking imagination. Likewise, overly swirly lines feel sugary and lack a backbone. One of my favorite artists is Bob Dylan because his yearning and tender moments are balanced by defiance.

I made one side of the horse's face rough, the side that is near the skeleton. Conversely, I made the side of the horse's face that is nearest to me smooth and soft. The roughness speaks to dynamic energy that is ready to spring forth and fight. The smoothness evokes softness; the sunlight is caressing the figures.

There was a period of time I could not work on this piece, yet I had to spray it down with water to keep it moist. And, over the weeks, the image of the figure became fixed in my mind; I had to destroy that fixed image in my mind by just adding something, anything, and subtract something, anything to disrupt the fixed image of it in my mind and to have some spontaneous and unexpected ideas flow in as possibilities.

While making *Self-Portrait with Horse and Skeleton*, I tacked up pictures by Thomas Hart Benton to my studio wall. The swirling flux and sculptural forms in his work resonate with me; the grass is alive, the clouds are alive; each element has a consciousness about it. Using different points of perspective, the figures look like they belong in different worlds that have intersected, adding to the heightened motion. I also referenced Oskar Kokoschka's *The Bride of the Wind* because of his use of motion.

69.) ***Self Portrait with Mirror Image of Death and Church Window***

2011, terra cotta  
17" H x 7" W x 7 " D







This sculpture highlights the relationship between life and death when they are touched by the divine. The window illustrates the metaphor that death and life

can face each other, when they are infused by the light of the divine, represented by the window. Without the divine these two elements are at odds with each other. However, the divine offers a safe haven and a still point of mediation between these two opposites.

In a weary contrapposto, I rest up against a mirror. Yet, my own reflection does not shine back; instead a skeleton mirrors my form. I stand with my arms in the Segan Semui-in mudra. My right hand is in the Abhaya mudra: the Fear-Not mudra which shows good intentions, a sign of peace and a way of showing that I mean no harm because I don't carry a weapon in my hand. My left hand forms the Varada mudra: the Welcome or Wish-Granting mudra which signifies compassion. Combined together, the Abhaya and Varada mudras structure the Segan Semui-in mudra.

Practically and metaphorically, neither of these figures can stand up by themselves, yet by leaning against each other they gain support. They are bound together like the yin yang. Life and death, as opposite as day and night, come together to complete the grandest cycle of all. Like the yin yang, life carries a piece of death in her; conversely, death carries a spark of life in her withered form. The church window they rest against also offers support.

I am not at peace with death; I have not accepted death into my home; I desperately want to be among the living. Yet, my near-death brush with breast cancer metastasized to my liver forced me to go toe-to-toe with death, and at the height of my illness I was staring down the barrel of a loaded gun. In some of my sculptures I run from death, in others death wears a halo and is part of the universe's pantheon and cycle of life. In this sculpture I face death head on, not because I want to, or from some heroic stance, but because I have not been given a choice; I have been cornered like a wounded animal by death. I am powerless to death. It is the final big chill, the equalizer. Like a tsunami it doesn't care about the destruction it leaves in its wake. Death is not about life. Death is about death.

Although I cannot, I still strive, for my own sanity, to meet death on my terms. Because it has cornered me, I will try and face it with every weary shred of dignity I can muster. If I look it in the eye, can I make peace with it? No, I doubt it, not at this stage of my life. But it is better for my own sanity to stand and face it in the eye. I have stopped running from death and there is a bit of freedom in that.

My son and I went to several churches in our Pittsburgh area to study the architecture; I took my camera and recorded several windows that I incorporated



into my window. The designs I used include the equal armed, or Greek cross with its masculine right angles and geometric structure. The Greek cross is mentioned by Dan Brown in *The Da Vinci Code*: “The head of this key was not the traditional long-stemmed Christian cross but rather was a square cross—with four arms of equal length—which predated Christianity by fifteen hundred years. This kind of cross carried none of the Christian connotations of crucifixion associated with the longer-stemmed Latin Cross, originated by Romans as a torture device. Langdon was always surprised how few Christians who gazed upon “the crucifix” realized their symbol’s violent history was reflected in its very name: “cross” and “crucifix” came from the Latin verb *cruciare*—to torture....equal-armed crosses like this one are considered peaceful crosses. Their square configurations make them impractical for use in crucifixion, and their balanced vertical and horizontal elements convey a natural union of male and female...” (p. 145). One of my goals as an artist is to image harmony between the masculine and feminine; to this end the Greek cross is an ideal symbol with its promise of peace.

Balancing the masculine lines of the equal armed cross is a flower composed of yonic forms with feminine curved lines. Yoni is Sanskrit for vulva, source, origin, vagina. Barbara G. Walker writes about the yoni in her *Woman’s Dictionary of Symbols and Sacred Objects* that “the shape of external female genitalia , which the ancients clearly recognized as the seat of female sexual power...the sign of the yoni passed into Western symbolism under such titles as mandorla (almond) and vesica piscis (vessel of the fish). Mandorla means ‘almond’. Almonds were female-genital symbols and maternity charms from very ancient times.”(p.18)

The floral pattern edging throughout the piece harkens to growth and living things and holds out hope for my own flourishing life.

This piece, and the five preceding it, deal with breast cancer metastasized to my liver. There are over two dozen skeletons in these pieces that reference death. I am hoping this piece will be the end of this series on death. It has brought up emotions to sculpt death in such frank terms and to have made six sculptures in succession that deal with the tension between living and dying. A friend visiting my studio commented on how brave and courageous I was to sculpt these things; years ago I would have only heard empty praise. Now, her comment rings true, it did take courage to sculpt this. Yet, the other option would have been even harder, that of running away from and denying the presence of death.

I don’t want to wallow in negativity, and I hope that sculpting these dark recesses will contrast with future work that will illuminate the joy in my life, bringing it into

focus in much the same way the dark makes the light even brighter. I want to manifest life and wholeness. I can sculpt wholeness, and other times I will sculpt pain with the intent to exorcize it out of my body and out of my life.

The writing on the base of the sculpture reads: "my arms form fear not and wish granting mudras; transcendent healing holy - the light of the divine infuses us".

70.) *Self Portrait with Totem to Protect Life and Ward off Cancer*

2012, terra cotta

20" H x 7" W x 5" D



Since December of 2009 I have been trying to recover from the ongoing trauma of cancer. I have experienced a lot of strain and shock to my body and life. In response, I am trying to carve out a space of safety for myself.

Although this sculpture draws from different cultural and religious sources, its foundation is the totem pole found in the North West region. My family is from Washington, so I grew up with this Native American iconography during the sacred time of childhood, when the experiences from that period carried more power for me than those of my adult years. If I had not been exposed to this art in my youth I don't think it would be as meaningful to me now. Visiting the South West or the ocean as a child is very different than viewing them through mature eyes.

The boat at the top evokes the crescent moon traditionally found on goddesses' headdresses, and Viking ships from my Scandinavian heritage. The three equal armed crosses speak to balance between heaven and earth and are figural stand-ins for my husband, son and myself. The boat and three figurative crosses allude to Max Beckman's *Departure*. Like Beckman's family who is transported by boat on a beautiful blue sea away from atrocities, may our family sail away from the atrocity of cancer.

The front of the totem speaks to fierce forces that ward off malevolence. Safely tucked in, I peek out from the belly of totem spirits that dispel death. The tradition of using grotesque beings to evict evil is found in countless traditions. The woman references India's Kali and her powerful arms carry our boat to safety. The Tiki gods I saw growing up on the West Coast speaks to the secular that is imbued with the divine by a child's mind. Snake-like arms offer protection as do her breasts in the shape of sharp beaked birds.

The back of the totem pictures regenerative spirits. The woman's vine and leaf arms hold the promise of growth. Although my abdomen is swollen with ascities, hers is bursting with a swirling sun that heals with light. Her breasts herald songs of life. Flowing from her yoni is life giving water, or blood and riding this wave is a figure in the wheel of life, or swastika position.

The similarities between the sculpture's front and back highlight the relationship between nurturing and aggression and how these two seemingly opposite states can grow out of, meld into, and support each other. In most cultures people are discouraged from expressing anger. Here, fury is claimed as a positive force that unites with life to offer protection. As I continue my battle with cancer, I claim the gifts of these two services.

This piece has been easier to sculpt compared to my realistic pieces because I have not had to consider correct body proportions including muscle and skeletal structure. Instead, I have focused on symbolic meaning, interesting shapes and composition. When making a realistic sculpture I am bound to predefined forms; I consult dozens of pictures of the skeleton, my face, and horses. Although I strive to make good sculptures rather than accurate ones, on a previous piece I had to redo my ear because it was too flat, then move it down a bit. Also, I muck around for hours on the bane of every artist: hands and feet. However, this piece has different birth parents: the elements and principles of art including form, rhythm, proportion, line. When I was in theatre I was aware of how my creativity was filtered through the text of the play, the director's interpretation,

and the give and take between other actors and myself. The process offered a great deal of creativity, but sculpting from only my mind, I am afforded more room to make my own decisions.

I use a blend of straight edged and curved lines to reinforce the balance between the masculine and feminine. Does the left side of the brain process straight lines while curved lines are understood by the right hemisphere? I am not attracted to works of art that are strictly linear; they are conformist, lacking imagination. Likewise, overly swirly lines feel sugary and lack backbone. Therefore, I have used linear lines on the front to reveal aggressive maternal protection; softer curves on the back evoke maternal nurturing.

My previous six pieces of art address my battle with cancer and image thirty four skeletons that represent death. Hopefully, I have finished that chapter and am ready to guide the ship of my soul to a new place that will not involve sculpting skeletons.

I feel a desperate passion for sculpting as if I am sculpting my reality, my future, my life. Perhaps it is wishful thinking, positive thinking, or prayer to think that what I sculpt will manifest, like the three fates who wove the future.

At times my art takes me away from others; I am fiercely driven and must immerse myself in my art. This need to make art runs in cycles that are powerful. When I want to sculpt the drive is overwhelming and I feel great satisfaction after and during sculpting. Gratefully, the pendulum swings back and forth and I want to be with people again.

I think about the golden mean when starting a new sculpture and I own golden mean calipers. I am not always adept at using them; still I try to be aware of different size relationships between the main forms of the piece.

In regard to copying, appropriation, or fair use, I am in humble gratitude to the different artistic traditions and styles that I draw upon. In many cultures art is passed from generation to generation without individual creativity or variation so that the stories and culture of the people can be handed down. Some examples of this are Egyptian art, Indian art, Catholic icons in which individual originality is discouraged in favor of passing on a codified set of symbols and a pantheon of divine beings. To justify my using this iconography I have no excuse except that I feel drawn to it. I am not copying, but I have tried to make sure that I have

internalized the artistic forms and that they have been integrated with my own set of images, symbols, and content so the result is original.

I strive to make syncopated and complex rhythms as opposed to evenly spaced elements. When sculpting something like hair I find that I place the elements in a predictable and evenly spaced manner. Later I realize how boring it is and I go back to space the elements in varied rhythms. I wonder why I am drawn to such dull patterns as a default, and what comes to mind is the soothing predictability of these forms. Variation can be emotionally and intellectually challenging. I think I have so much unpredictability in my life, I gravitate towards the predictable.

71. *Drawing Strength from Art and Ancestors (Self Portrait with Sun Totem Women with Singing Breasts, and Primal-Child-Animals)*  
2012, terra cotta  
21" H x 11" W x 9" D (w/o base), 26" H x 11" W x 9" D (with base)







My belly is swollen hard like a drum with cancer, bowel, ascites fluid and the effects of chemotherapy. The bandage on my abdomen covers a drain tube that drains the excess fluid from my abdomen. I am tired, too tired to stand, and I don't need to. I rest into the comforting traditions of art, of ancestors, of customs that sustain, transcend and heal.

My left hand draws energy from the totem and its benevolent spirits; my right hand channels this energy into my being, into my heart.

The totem is a woman with a round sun face; her headdress radiates sunshine. Her face is kind, yet she is fiercely maternal and ready to do battle. Songs burst from her breasts. She wears her heart on her body for all to see. Her belly, unlike my own distended abdomen, is flowing with life giving water. Her womb births a fish, a traditional female symbol. The sacred animals ringing the bottom of the totem are similar to the animals from *Where the Wild Things Are* by Maurice Sendack. My mom says the animals embody the primal child; she is right.

Excerpts from my Art Diary:

July 9, 2011: The day before I start a piece I get my studio ready, I knead the clay, clean up the studio, and put a layer of clay around a support pole. This is a ritual I have followed for years. Getting my studio in order is how my subconscious is signaled to begin forming the piece I will work on.

July 10, 2011: I have been rolling different ideas around in my head for two months now, but still couldn't settle on an idea. I woke this morning feeling a bit

panicked because I still didn't know what I would sculpt. My husband and son will be going away to our Unitarian church camp and this is my one uninterrupted week of the year to spend exclusively on my art. Even though I have ideas, nothing was feeling quite right. So, I spent about a half an hour in my bedroom quickly jotting down some of the thoughts that have been floating around in my head. However, the idea for this piece was different from any of the ideas I had been considering. I like when my subconscious surprises me like this. I knew in a flash that the idea was a good one, and I felt really excited about it. So, I worked on it all day Sunday.

July 11, 2011: Most of the work I did yesterday on my new piece I had to redo. I realized the totem looked too small in comparison to the figure. So, I spent two hours redoing it. Then, I just had to make the figure a little smaller in height. For the most part, I didn't mind. I understand this is just part of the process. I didn't get as much done as I would have liked, but that's ok. I am just grateful to not be in the hospital, and to be this side of the grass and able to sculpt at all.

July 25, 2011: This past week I had to have a permanent drain tube inserted into my abdomen to syphon off the liter and a half of ascites fluid that bloats my abdomen daily. Today I feel joy because I could sculpt for one whole hour; that felt so good. I feel upset when I can't sculpt and I think that comes from feeling like I am ratting out on myself and putting myself last. Plus, I think I feel so much like my identity is a "breast cancer patient with mets to the liver". Yuck, how dull is that. I need to try and sculpt regularly to cultivate my identity: "Yes, I am an artist and I make beautiful and meaningful sculptures."

October 12, 2011: I finally added the figure to the large totem pole. I had to work on them separately. It sounds like such a simple thing and for some reason I was nervous about attaching the two because I was not sure where the figure should make contact with the sculpture. So, my husband took photos of me so I could see how my body should connect to the totem.

Ever since this past Friday I have been in a dream time, or an art/creative space. Going to an art show and seeing my mentor and the other members from the Society of Sculptors made me feel connected and reaffirmed me as an artist in a deep way. I just love to lay in bed at night, or driving along in the car and think about my sculptures, and a little thought about them will come to me, and this is so comforting and I feel alive and creative and energized at these times. These are things that belong to me alone. They are in my control and they bring me great pleasure and satisfaction that is deep.

March 27, 2012: Yes, I started this sculpture more than seven months ago, and I am still working on it, yet it feels almost done. In January and February I spent 17 days in the hospital with additional ER visits because I also had a reaction to an antibiotic that left me covered from head to toe in itchy hives.

July, 2012: It took me about a year to finish this sculpture and my other totem pole piece. Gratefully, I was able to just keep chipping away at my artwork when I was able to, until it they were finished.

72. *Self Portrait with China Chow (based on dress by Yves Saint Laurent from the book Wise Women by Joyce Tenneson)*

2012, terra cotta

14" H x 6" W x 3" D



There is a beautiful photograph in Joyce Tenneson's book *Wise Women* of China Chow and her mother. China is wearing a dress by Yves Saint Laurent that reveals the form of her body including her nipples and naval. The dress is exquisite and I wish I had one that was custom made for me. However, as a mastectomy survivor my dress would challenge our ideas of beauty, sexuality and wholeness.

73. *My Nurse and I and Frida Kahlo*  
2013, terra cotta  
19" H x 6" W x 8" D



This piece is in response to Frida Kahlo's *My Nurse and I*. Art critic Hayden Herrera gives a thorough review of Frida's piece which is worth reading.

When I was two years old our family spent two summers in Alaska in an area so remote our food was brought in by pontoon plane. Mindful of the Alaska brown bears in the area the men carried guns. Mom didn't carry a rifle; she knew that if a bear wasn't killed with the first shot she would just enrage it. During our two summers none of the men encountered a bear, but Mom and I did. Walking along a path through the woods Mom had baskets of laundry balanced on each hip; I was sitting on her shoulders. As we rounded a bend in the path an 800 pound bear was in front of us, just two feet away. I began to squeal with joy "Oggie, oggie!" My Mom says she can still remember looking into the face of that bear as it turned, went to the side of the trail and looked at us. Mom just continued on down the path. If she had wanted to she could have reached out and touched the bear's fur, it was so close. Mom's not sure why the bear didn't attack. Perhaps the bear didn't know what to make of the two headed creature

with massive basket hips and a second head at the very top of the creature babbling away. Mom said the bear was watching me as we passed; she thinks the bear might have sensed that I was a child. I am not going to anthropomorphize the bear, nature is nature and when bears are hungry they eat. Yet, I like to think my meeting the bear was a moment of sublime awe and wonder that I have cradled in my deeps these many years. Bears have always been symbols of fierce mothers that protect their young. Right now, with my illness, the wagons are circled, and Mother Ursula has come to protect her young.

I have always been drawn to Frida Kahlo because of her colorful imagery, and her unique vision that was not filtered through anyone else's lens. She made the art that made sense to her and it was honest and defiant. I have never regarded myself as anything but healthy. During the past few months I have had to accept that cancer is considered a disability, and that I now have a disability. And, so, Frida Kahlo's own health issues draw me closer to her for comfort and guidance on how to emotionally navigate a chronic illness.

On the front of the piece Frida stands with her arms in a cradle, mimicking the bear's arms with the implication that Frida also holds me in her arms like a child. The bear claw-like necklace around her neck also links her to the bear. The soft folds of fabric and bunches of flowers add comfort and life to the tableau. Her arms wrap around herself as if she is comforting and holding her own body; she is a mother to herself. At other times, it seems as if she is in pain and is holding herself to make the pain abate.

When sculpting Frida's face I looked at several photographs. I see different expressions in my portrait: defiance, sadness, resolve, peace, suffering. An artist once said to me "Don't try to assign meaning to your pieces, you may not understand what they mean for years to come." I am a meaning maker; yet, I do see this portrait of Frida as mercurial, encompassing the many emotions she must be feeling.



74. *Self Portrait with Wolf (based on a dream)*

2013, terra cotta

15" H x 7" W x 7" D



In October 2011 I had a dream I was with a group of people and wild animals; we were walking and running through hills in a wild far off land. The people in the group ran ahead of me and I couldn't catch up to them. I was afraid to be with the wild animals; I had a whistle on my neck and I was blowing it to call for help, but it wasn't loud enough. As I was running, one of the dark wolves came up behind me, and I stopped running to face it. I wasn't too afraid, and regardless, I knew I couldn't outrun it. The wolf then pulled back the fur around its head to reveal the face of a young man. He was upset and said that he would never be acknowledged or valued. My heart went out to him and I said "Yes, you are right you will never be valued by this culture". I knew that our society values the civilized, and not the wild-free-primitive. Then, I took the wolf in my arms and we embraced in a deep kiss and I was crying with the relief of our understanding and the pain I felt for him.



75. *Institutions Support Yet Suffocate; Transcendent Art Restores (with double Self Portrait)*

2013, terra cotta

21" H x 9" W x 4" D



Diary Entry: My dreams woke me up in the middle of the night and I was full of emotion thinking about this piece. I have been remembering *Woman Closet* from Judy Chicago's *Woman House*, and Louise Bourgeois' *Femme Maison*. I feel claustrophobic: hospital stays, endless doctor appointments, not being able to leave Pittsburgh to go on vacation because of my health, the drain in my abdomen keeps me from even swimming. This piece is about being trapped by institutions and buildings I am responsible to; yet at the same time these structures and institutions help to support me.

The front of the piece is a self-portrait. I am vulnerable in my nudity, helpless against the encroaching architecture, the look on my face is a fighting face of defiance, not giving in, not being a victim.

On the back of piece I am the sculptor resting on the ground after making a tableau of some of the images I saw in India. My sculpting tools lie on the ground next to me. Sometimes I like to imagine I could have been one of the sculptors who carved the magnificent, fantastical figures from Khajuraho, or Mamallapuram.

At the top of the piece I have recreated a Naga, or water snake goddess surrounded by her dankini and tantrika spirits. Trees dig their roots deep into Mother Earth where a small animal burrows in her bosom. One of the trees grows into a fecund goddess; a bird nests on her shoulder and sings a melody. A bare back riding cowgirl and her horse catapult into the air towards one of the open windows. She is a messenger between this world of the unconscious and the conscious on the other side. She brings succor to me, trapped on the other side.

This piece can be displayed with the back against a mirror. The figures on the back function like dreams and memories which are “viewed through a glass darkly.” The viewer is then invited to look through the three triangles created by my body to see the back of the piece reflected in the mirror. The buildings on the sculpture are claustrophobic and without windows. However, I have used my own body to create widows and a breathing space. The three triangular windows, act as a metaphor for viewing my interior and subconscious world (the triangle is a common female symbol).

## **Cydra's Feminist Art Statement**

A favorite photograph of mine shows Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro sitting on the steps in front of Womanhouse in 1971. At that time, I was too young to join one of the most profound feminist dialogues in my life. However, every time I go into my art studio, located off my kitchen, I am forwarding that revolution.

My earliest remembrance of using my art to further my sex's liberation came at the church of my youth, overseen by a distant white bearded god who neither desired a companion nor needed one to single-handedly father the whole universe in his own image. Even at a young age I felt this inequity in my core. My response: to cut out the construction paper words "God loves you, pray to Her", and staple them to a bulletin board in the main entry of the church. My brazen words proclaimed their truth to the painted cinderblock hallway for the briefest period - before a pack of laughing boys tore it down.

My adult years find me continuing the work of that grade school girl, creating for myself the presence of the divine feminine. My work is often utopian, imagining a world where women and men validate each other, cultivating compassion and equality between the sexes. I need to imagine a world of transcendence and wholeness. To this end the hallmark of my work is symmetry, harmony, and beauty.

Because much of women's history has been absorbed into patriarchal frameworks, I create feminist sculptures that reclaim and revision women's symbols, history, and mythology. The writing that accompanies my visual work is an integral part of the work, and not an afterthought. These written and visual components are a metaphor for a symbiotic relationship between the masculine and feminine. The written word (masculine, left brained) is married to the figurative image (feminine, right brained) to form a complete whole, or yin yang.

I am grateful to my beloved husband Carl, and my son Cavan for helping me to battle cancer and supporting my artwork, and my brother Gregson Vaux for encouraging me to study art. My sculptures are dedicated to my mom, Verna Sylvia Robinson, my role model and spiritual sister.

## **Biography**

Cydra Vaux was born in 1962 in Utah. She lives and works in Pittsburgh.

Awards include the Vivian Lehman Award for Portraiture, 2010; *Art and Society: Brazil*, Fulbright Hays Group Project with the Andy Warhol Museum, 2009; Paul G. Benedum and Wimmer/Kamin Fellowship for figurative sculpture in India,

2005. Her work has been shown at the American Jewish Museum, Three Rivers Arts Festival, The Manchester Craftsmen's Guild, and numerous galleries in Pittsburgh.

Since 1998, Cydra has refined her focus on the female terra cotta figure. Her work is firmly rooted in traditional and feminist art history. Often, she works spontaneously from her subconscious and dreams, invoking surrealist traditions. She explores the relationships among archetypal images from different cultures, including the mandorla, swastika, heart and serpent. These symbols form an amalgam reflecting a modern feminist world view that unites dissimilar cultural traditions, religious traditions, and gender roles.

Cydra reimagines and reclaims the lives of historical and mythological women by reassigning meaning through a feminist lens. At times, the women in her sculptures project a reserved distance, a feeling of coolness that speaks to the veracity of their strength and self-containment. In this way the mother archetype is expanded to favor a more comprehensive view of woman.

Travels to India, Egypt, Brazil, and the Southwest also inform her work. Through exposure to a myriad of religious, spiritual and humanist traditions, she explores tension and harmony between the secular and the divine. Making sculptures that are multi-sided, Cydra uses sculpture as a metaphor for multiple viewpoints. Seemingly fixed images morph among different vantage points. The three dimensional sculpture, with its unlimited number of views, becomes an allegory for mercurial thoughts and multi-faceted perspectives. This tension between seemingly opposite sides fits well with her exploration of the yin-yang as it is expressed through female/male, secular/divine, life/death, image/word.

Symmetry and beauty inform much of her work, holding out hope for utopian ideals. However, in recent work, Cydra explores her battle with breast cancer metastasized to her liver. This work is deeply personal, while having a universal reach. Death and the Divine are figures in her work which struggle to resolve the irresolvable.