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# **Rochester Institute of Technology**

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the College  
of Imaging Arts and Sciences in candidacy for the  
degree of Master of Fine Arts.

**"Heritage"**

**by**

**Kelly Anne Coleen Cornell**

June 12, 1997

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Date 6-24-97

# DEDICATION

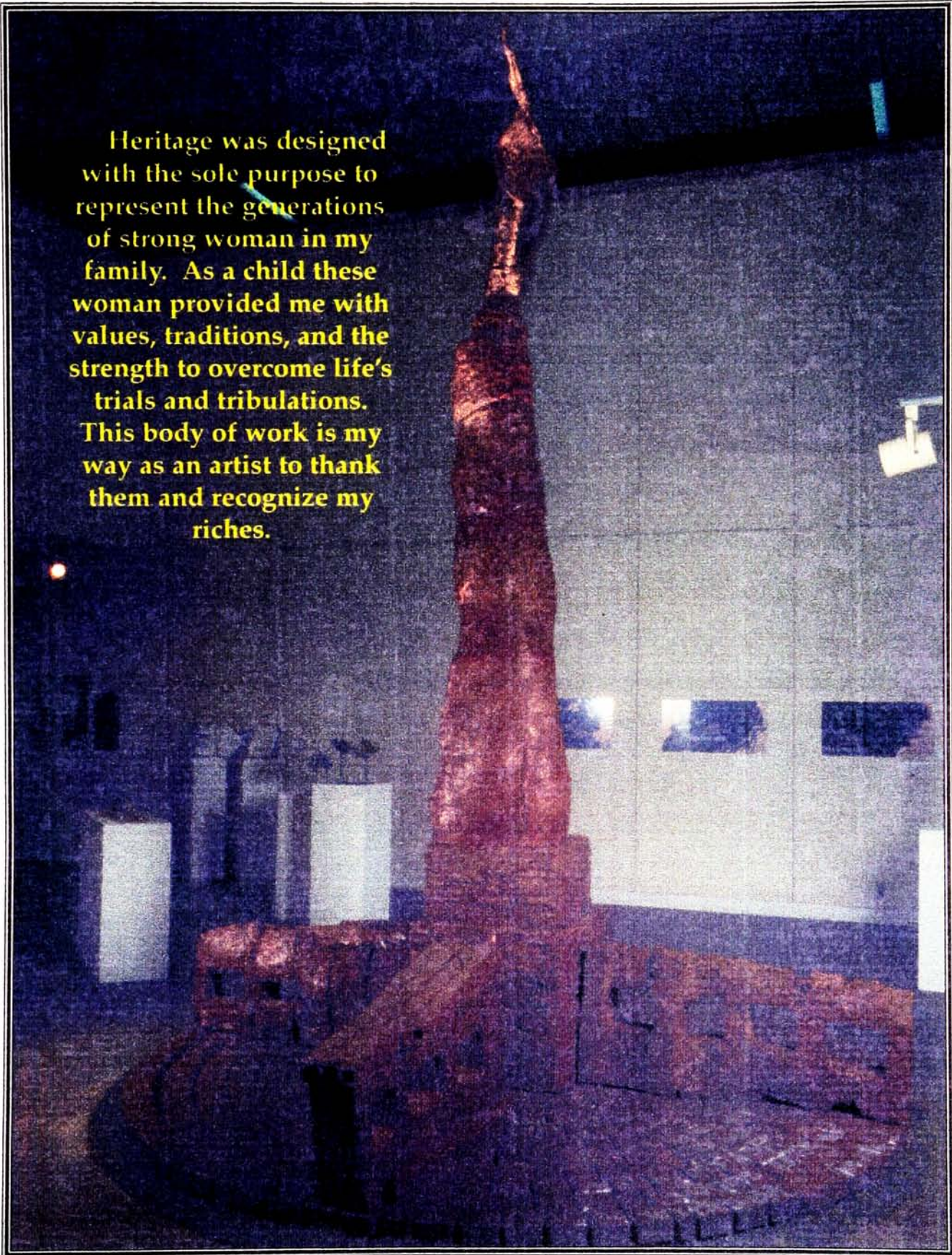
Heritage was created out of love and respect for the women in my family. I feel that this sculpture entitled "Heritage" strongly reflects a special bond I shared with my mother that connects me to her mother and her mother's mother and so on. My mother gave me much more than life. She taught me how to respect who I am and who came before me. Family to her was the most pertinent aspect of living. At the age of forty-three she died of an inoperable brain tumor. But even when her life was coming to an end she displayed her concern for my needs and concentrated her thoughts and words on her family. So I dedicate this thesis work in loving memory of Judith M. Cornell.





# HERITAGE

Heritage was designed with the sole purpose to represent the generations of strong woman in my family. As a child these woman provided me with values, traditions, and the strength to overcome life's trials and tribulations. This body of work is my way as an artist to thank them and recognize my riches.





# INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this thesis will be to explore sculptural forms which depict my attributes, as an artist, going into womanhood. I will be using sculpture in a more abstract form to encompass my heritage. I have chosen sculpture because of it's allowance to portray my emotional historical journey in a three-dimensional art form. These forms will unite the structure which captures in essence the rite of passage to my inheritance. Such qualities like honesty, perseverance, strength, and faith are just a few examples I hope to express.

The main objective in composing these clay sculptural forms is to link the inner strengths of myself to the outer perimeters of an object and express an idea which captures a true volume that challenges a higher intellectual experience. This research will rely on a closer examination of who I am and what I am about, based on the customs and beliefs I've been so fortunately taught.

Technically the clay sculptural forms will be hand built out of terra-cotta clay. These slab, coil and extruded constructed pieces will reflect the relationship between me as an artist and more distinctly as a descendant into my family. These sculptural pieces carry with them a memorial representation, as I my heritage.

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# HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

One of my earliest memories involves my great-grandmother teaching me how to put my shoes on the proper way. Meaning what shoe goes on the right foot as oppose to the left foot. This woman had the patience and concern that a rambunctious four year old needed in order to eventually sit down and listen. Nana, as all her great-grandchildren referred to her as, had the talent of turning every job into a classroom learning experience. This technique was a tremendous goal achiever, especially for a young child who was envious of her big sis who was already attending school. Nana had a clever insight because she knew that playing school would allow me to be a big girl like my sis and peak my curiosity to learn which would get the job done.

Nana had plenty of years experience with teaching her daughter, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. Traditions are strong reminders for me about my heritage. My grandmother, nana's daughter is and has always been a positive role model for me about family. She helped raise three children with my grandfather and she's always been there with advice and support for her grandchildren. This woman is my anchor and inspiration for living and seeking my dreams. A few years ago before my mother became ill my great-grandmother started showing signs of alzheimer's. Nana lived with her daughter all my life and I believe all my mother's life, too. When nana started getting forgetful my grandmother stayed home to provide her with care she needed. While she was taking care of nana, my mother became ill and she was the savior with comfort and support. My grandmother remained strong and provided her grandchildren with comfort, kindness, and a shoulder to cry on. Family for me is a way of life. My grandmother has shown me that responsibility provides family members with coping duties for living.

My connection to my nana and grandma is my mother. My mother was a strong dependent woman who taught me that actions are a lot stronger than words. She was a doer. My mother took the time to really get to know her three children and allow them to feel the love she has for them. Her family was her life and she loved life. She stayed home to raise her children and she enjoyed spending each day with us. Most of all her children enjoyed her company and particularly her sense of humor and lightheartedness. Even though it's been over seven years ago since she passed away her memories remain as strong influences in my life. Especially her touch and laughter which still provide my life with comfort and security.

There is an old Indian legend that best describes some of the values my mother has conveyed to me. It goes like this, *a long time ago, the Creator, gave us what we call the Three Sisters, and it's the beans, corn, and squash. They were our sustainers of life.*

*The Corn Spirit was so thrilled at being one of the sustainers of life, she asked the Creator if there was anything more she could do for her people. So he told her about a doll that could be formed from her husk. A beautiful doll was made, and she was given a very beautiful face. Now the Indians believe that everything has a spirit, and this doll travelled from village to village. When the doll travelled from village to village, everybody told her how beautiful she was. It wasn't long before she became conceited. This means that she thought she was better than everyone there.*

*One day she heard a voice call her, and it was the Great Creator. And on the way to the Creator's lodge, she passed a pool of water and looked down at herself in the water at her reflection, and she admired herself. She thought, "I really am beautiful."*

*So when she met the Creator,*  
*the Creator told her, he said, "you have to stop being conceited; you have to stop thinking your better than everyone else, or I will give you a terrible punishment."*

*What it was he would not say. And the doll became very frightened. And so the doll returned to the village again, and once more she travelled from village to village. Everybody started reminding her again how beautiful she was, so it wasn't long before she forgot the Creator's warning. Again the Creator called to her. And so on the way to meet the Creator she passed the pool of water again, and she looked down and admired herself. She finally met the Creator and the Creator said, "You did not listen to my first warning; now I have to take your face. You can never have a face again."*

*The doll pleaded with the Creator, but he would not listen. So the doll, on the way back to town, knew where a pool of water was, and she looked down at the reflection and didn't see it. And she was very sad.*



*This is an Indian legend on the No-Face Doll, and it's a lesson story that we learned that we should never think we are better than anyone else or a punishment this great could be given to us by the Creator. (Wall 1993, 135-137)*

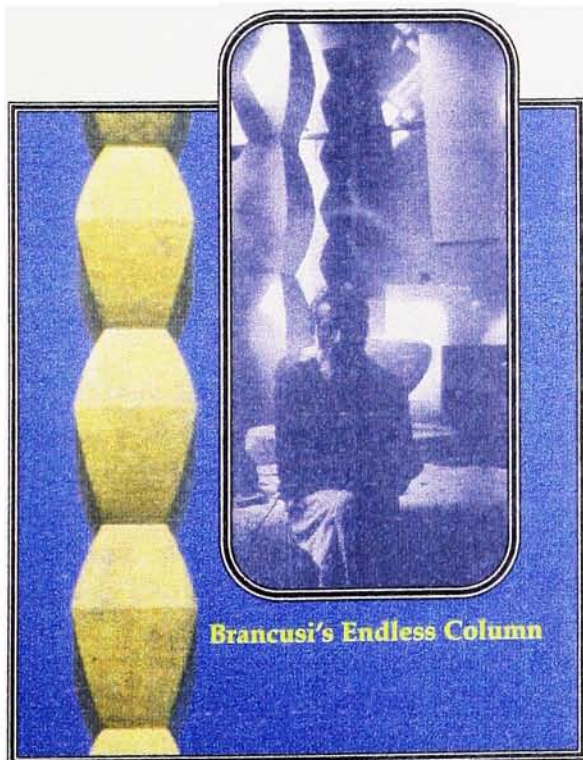
I really enjoy this Indian legend, and even though my ancestors weren't of Indian heritage the lessons and values I've been shown are found in many cultures all throughout history.

Family is really where my desire to create comes from. I primarily looked at the guidance and strength given to me by strong women role models in my life, but I am greatly aware that equally strong men stand beside each of these woman. I recognize the responsibilities in creating a family that reflects the strengths and values present in both partners for that relationship to grow and prosper. My grandfathers have given me a name and long history of traditions which I am now able to respect and begin to form an understanding about. The men as well as the women in my family have given me life, sense of self-worth, and a history to share with others.

# ARTISTIC INFLUENCES

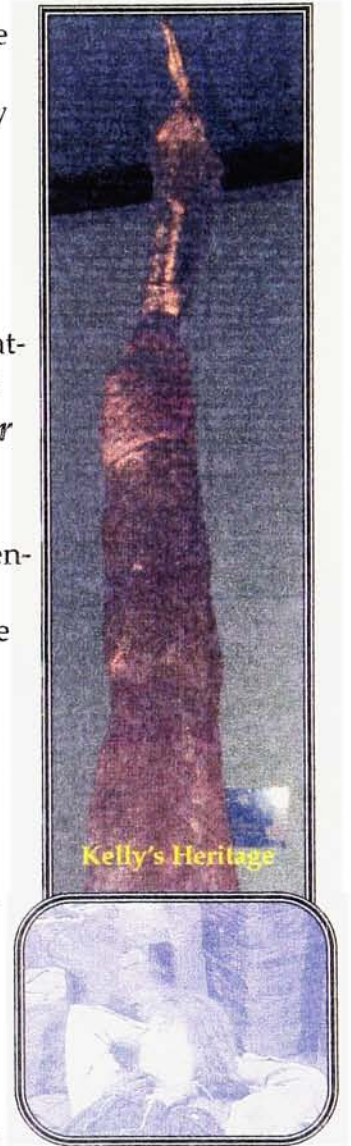
Family is where I looked for meaning in creating this sculpture. Beyond my emotional ties for creating this work I've been influenced by such great artist like Brancusi. Brancusi's Endless Column has educated my aesthetical approach to design. The form appears to extend on up to infinity. This ideal notion attracts my attention because as an artist I am always discovering new relationships between the form and what it symbolizes. Brancusi's Endless Columns use repetitive forms to create everlasting life. Quoted as stating, *" You see, even the pyramids had to end somewhere, at a single point of finality; whereas my Endless Column never ends. "* (Varia 1986, 236-237)

My approach to achieving everlasting life was by creating a linear centerpiece that expressed growth as it reaches for the stars. I wanted the center structure to represent the power of life.



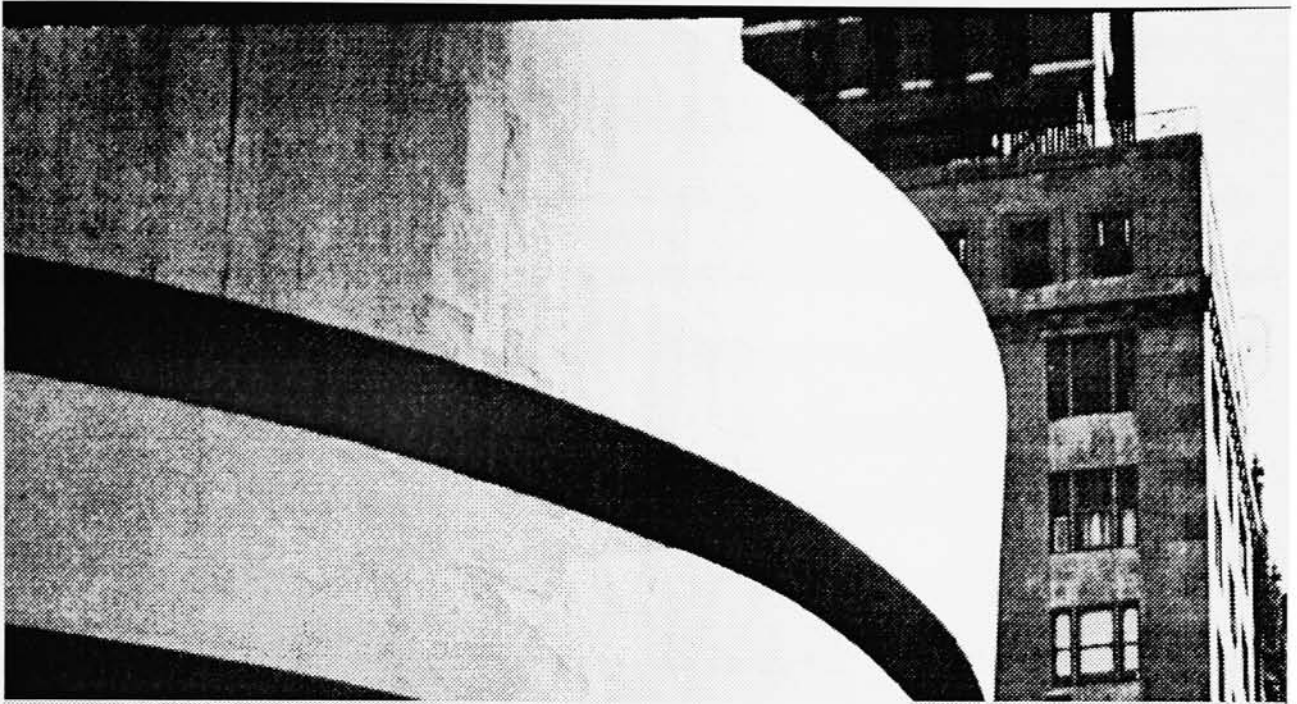
To stand for the  
past, present,  
and future lives

of the women in  
my family.





Architecture has always peaked my interest in sculpture. I view good architecture as sculpture. I am deeply influenced by architects like Frank Lloyd Wright and Joseph Maria Olbrich.



Frank Lloyd Wright's form follows function theory demonstrates an understanding of space. I remember visiting the Guggenheim Museum in high school and just feeling astounded by the form and size of the building. Growing up in a small town where all the architecture looks the same in style, I think for me the Guggenheim Museum awoke a desire to build.

*Joseph Maria Olbrich is stated as a man of highly gifted, impulsive and imaginative, a poetic interpreter of space, and a decorator of rare taste. He describes his architecture as giving birth to a new life. "With what joy did I give birth to this building! It arose from a chaos of ideas, an enigmatic clue of the lines of feeling, a confusion of good and bad; not easy! There were to be walls, white and shining, sacred and chaste. Solemn dignity should pervade. A pure dignity that overcame and shook me as I stood alone before the unfinished temple at Segesta. There I conceived the germ of that contempt with which I face clumsy pieces of work that are concerned with everything but with warmth, with the heart. And when I understood the task with the heart, when the inner feeling grew louder than mind and spirit, then I also had the fortitude to produce what I felt; and it was born!" (Latham 1980, 18-19)*



Architects like these men have provided me with inspiration to build and create new ideas. I view "Heritage", as a building block for my exploration into form, function, and environment. I set up a challenge for myself by choosing to represent a personal aspect of my life. This challenge changed my attitude about the way I handle clay. I chose clay as my main material because I wanted to create a sculpture that suggests timelessness within a realm of traditions. Clay has a history that intertwines with my continuation of life. I was using my historical background as my platform to reflect upon. "Heritage", architecturally speaking, has a foundation which is made from cultured stone, this base is like a cornerstone that carries on the family name, values, beliefs. This structure needed to be strong and dependent physically from the rest of the sculpture. I thought of many plausible solutions but I felt that the textured look of stone as really the right solution. I grew up in a very old two-story stone foundation house that supported my family's needs. "Heritage" needed to be about family, and from my own experience with my family I knew that a stone foundation was the right material to build a centerpiece upon. Just like values and character traits which are passed on from parent to child, I wanted to encompass the nature of time which evolves from generation to generation and how the same structure can still support new life which shares the same customs and traditions passed down from one's lineage.

Other influences that I looked at for inspiration and ideas were architectural works by ceramicists like Tony Hepburn and Betty Woodman. Tony states, *"that the idea of being inside of, and ultimately passing through, a work of art and the aspect of framing whereby the space defined by the structure becomes as important as the structure. It therefore embraces the context within which it stands."* (Rubin 1985, 14-15)

I envisioned "Heritage", as a structure that is placed inside another structure. The towering centerpiece and the four

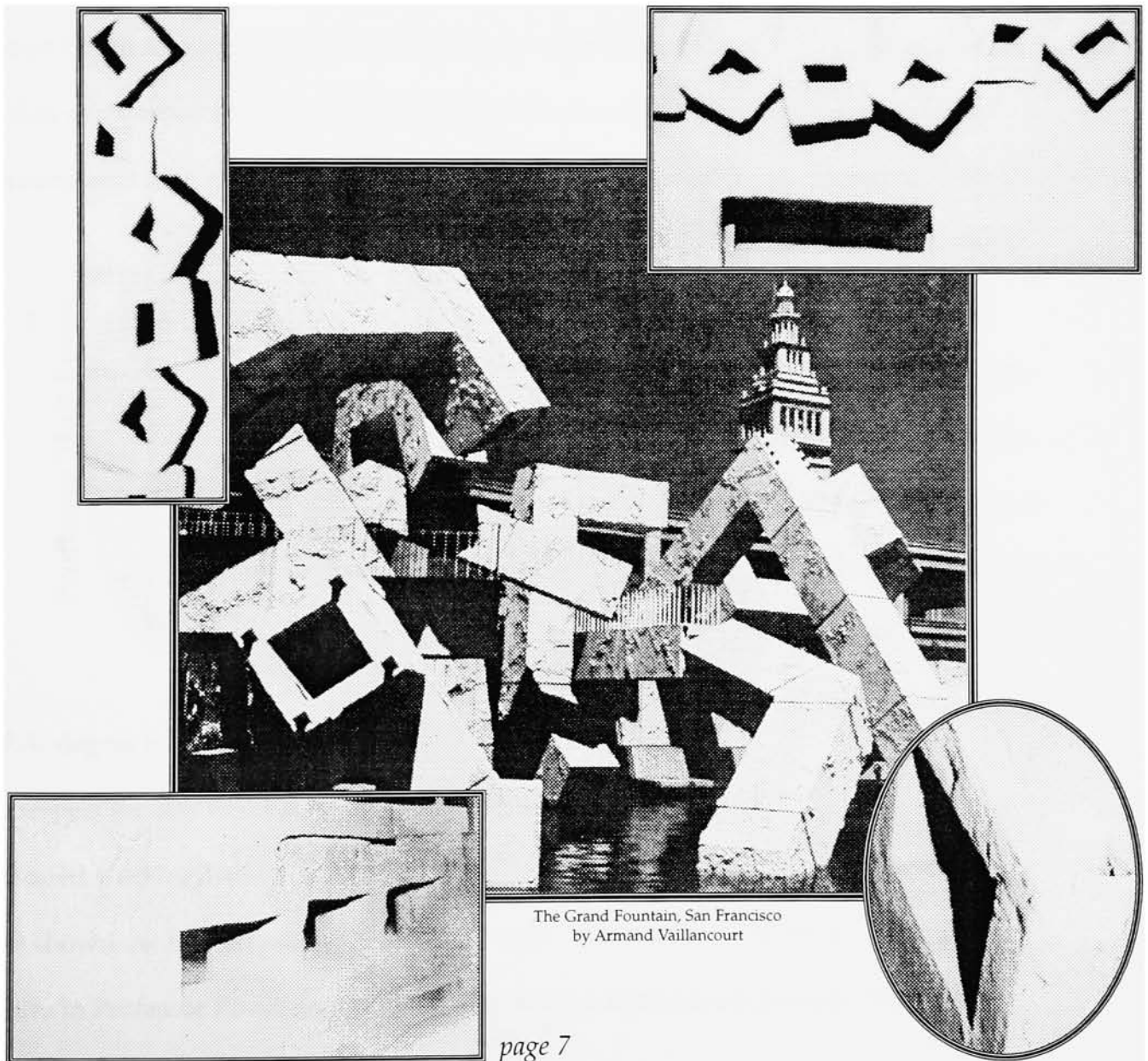


St. Louis Gate (1985) ceramic and mixed media  
96" x 48" by Tony Hepburn

elongated bridges are placed inside a circular platform. The circle is very symbolic for me, because I feel that the circular form represents the continuation of life.

*Sculpture-as-architecture may be defined as an environmental shell in which people may live, work , or play ----- an enclosed sculptural volume seen from both inside and out. (Robinette 1976, 28)*

By using that definition I can easily find sculpture in every corner of the universe. Before I started planning, drawing, and constructing "Heritage", I began to take notice of how forms reacted with there surroundings. Architecture was a very dominate form that defined the space it preoccupied. I wanted to capture a dominance in the form so I chose to work larger than past projects.



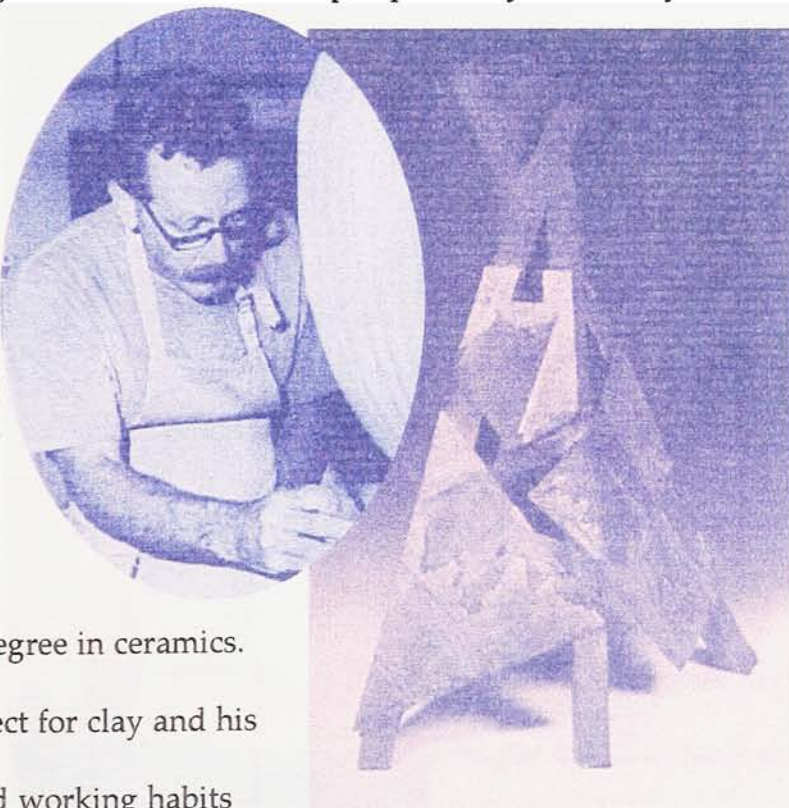
The Grand Fountain, San Francisco  
by Armand Vaillancourt



A truly captivating influence was my undergraduate mentor, Professor Matt Povse. Professor Povse has shown me how to work with clay and to enjoy the process of the material. He always was very adamant about clay possessing a memory. Upon first hearing about clay's memory, I laughed. After a few years of working with clay I am starting to understand its thinking process.

Matt's work focuses on form and the structure of the form. He uses a wide variety of techniques combining thrown forms with slab and extruded ones. I find myself, especially in the construction process with "Heritage", using extruded rectangular forms which I watched Matt manipulate time and time again. As a undergraduate student I tried to pretend that Matt's influence wasn't apparent in my work, because I felt that as an artist I should be creating from my own personal knowledge and not mirroring someone else's technique, primarily an already established professor. I am

Professor Matt Povse



"Quadruple Pod"

glad that I matured in how I perceive and gain new knowledge. Matt's attitude about enjoying the process of making art has guided me in the pursuit of obtaining my

M.F.A. degree in ceramics.

His respect for clay and his dedicated working habits

have shown me how to pursue a career in clay. After all, hard work is a value I admire in Professor Povse and in the strong women represented through "Heritage".

My first day of graduate school was a very frightening experience. There was this man who introduced himself as Professor Rick Hirsch. I sat there listened and began to wonder why I decided on ceramics. Professor Hirsch threatened us, at least upon first hearing his request. He wanted every student to prepare and take an active role in the planning

and facilitating of the 1996 NCECA Conference

hosted by Rochester Institute of

Technology. After the conference was

over I began to realize the extent of

experience, knowledge, and in-

fluences Professor Hirsch had exposed

us too. That's when I realized his

threats in the beginning were just motiva-

tional techniques to prepare us for an unbeliev-

able experience.

Rick has taught me a great amount

about my work just from watching him conduct

our class. His approach to identifying with each

graduate student is based on individual assessments

and informative discussions. I've discovered my own

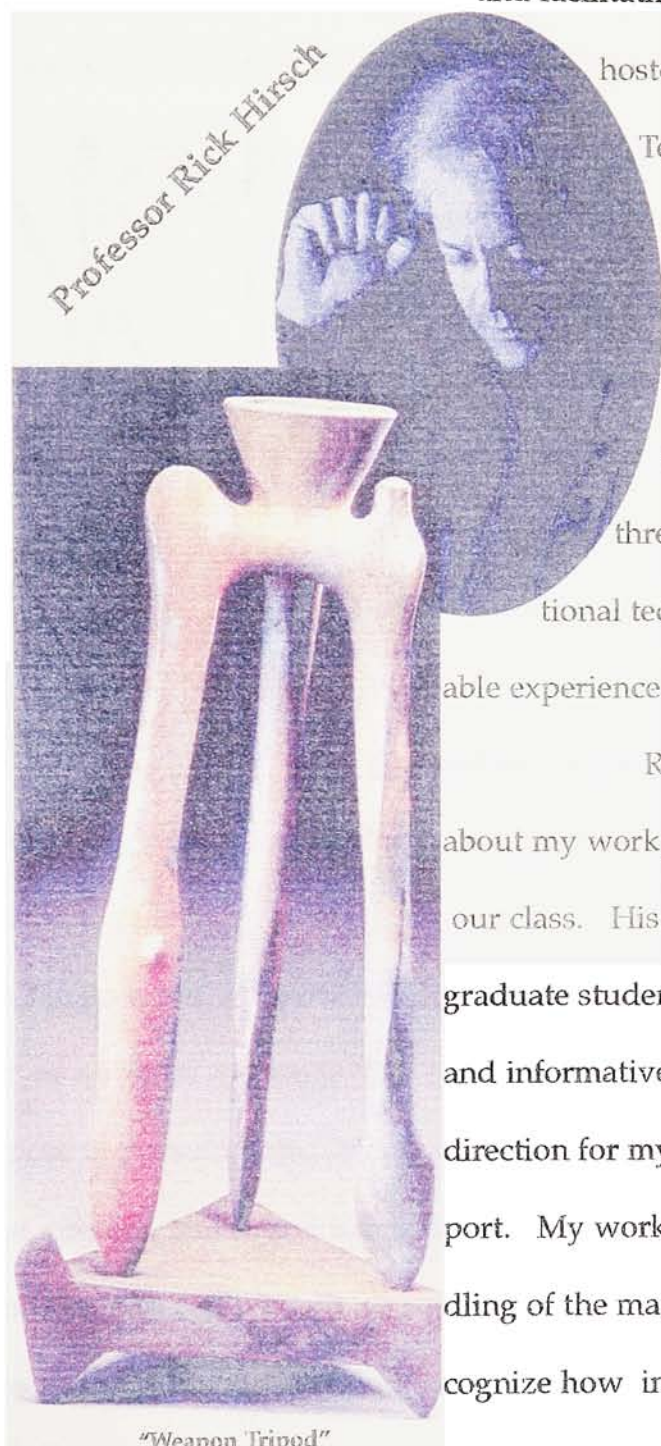
direction for my work through his guidance and sup-

port. My work with clay has grown and my han-

dling of the material has matured, I've come to re-

cognize how inspiring his role in ceramics is for help-

ing me plan for a successful future in teaching and

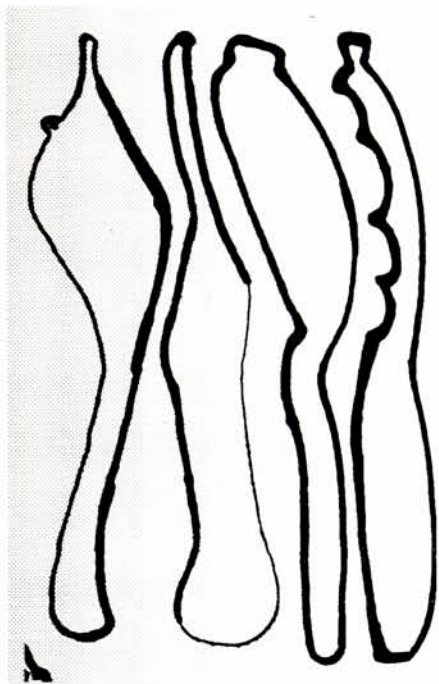


"Weapon Tripod"



## DESIGN APPROACHES

Heritage, started out as a body of work that responded to personal traits which were initially going to be vessel forms. The traits I was referring to were based on values and traditions demonstrated for me by strong women in my family. Honesty, perseverance, and determination are some of the traits I'm speaking about. I thought about capturing these



ideas in a vessel format. Using the vessel as a narrative to represent the inside as a reflection on humanistic values and the outside form to capture womanhood.

After examining my thoughts and sketches I realized I wanted to speak about an inner power. I wanted to memorialize my upbringing because after twenty some years I am sadly discovering a different value system. I have always taken for granted that my family's values and traditions are just ordinary customs in everyday living. As I listen to more

an more young people I see a change in their ideas and beliefs from there parents and grandparents.

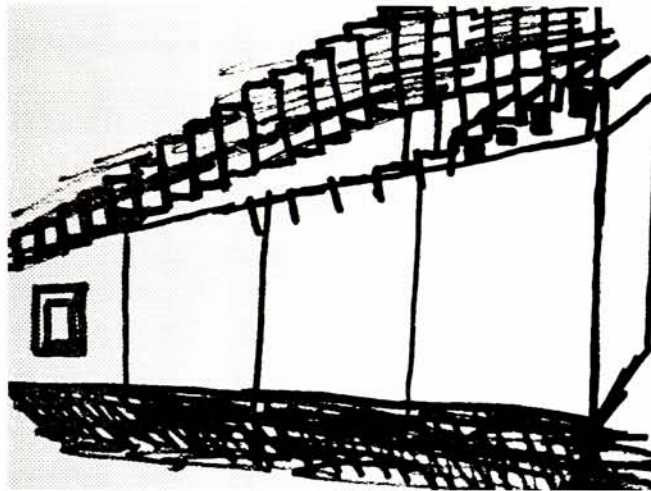
Change is not always a bad occurrence, but I see losing respect as a sign of weakness that establishes no just meaning or purpose in pursuing life. Heritage, is about respecting the past, present, and future lives. It's about sharing a common concern and compassion for sustaining life for future generations to come. Creating a monument about life is really all I was trying to do.





I needed to build a structure which connected the past, present, and future generations. Using connect as a key word, led me to create four bridge-like structures. These four bridges symbolize four generations of women who at one time all existed together on this earth. These women now represent the past, present, and future.

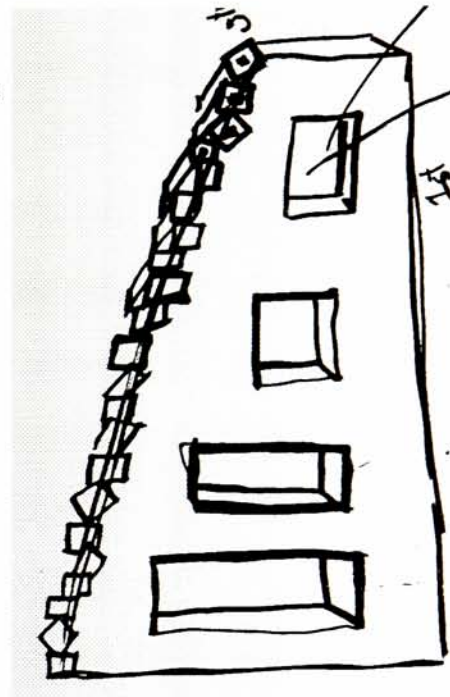
Each bridge changes in style slightly, to represent



a different generation.

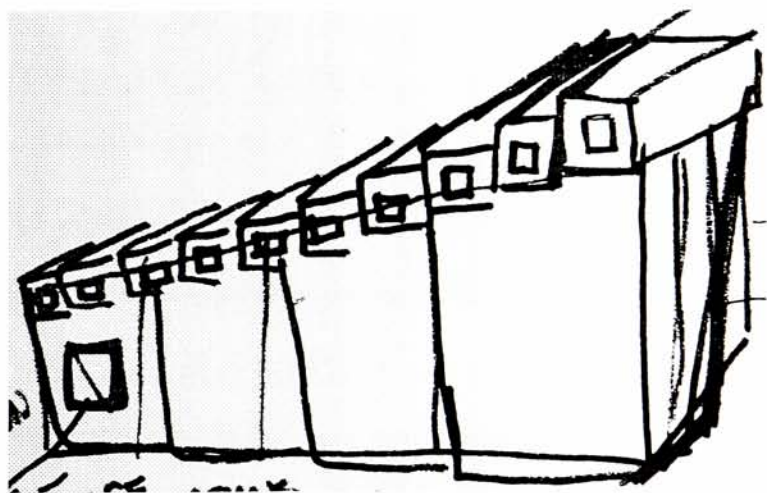
The first bridge was designed with

one opening, or what I refer to as windows for viewing the past, present, and future.



The second bridge with two and so on unto the fourth with four windows. The windows are significant because they allow each generation to view the past, live in the present, and foresee future generations.

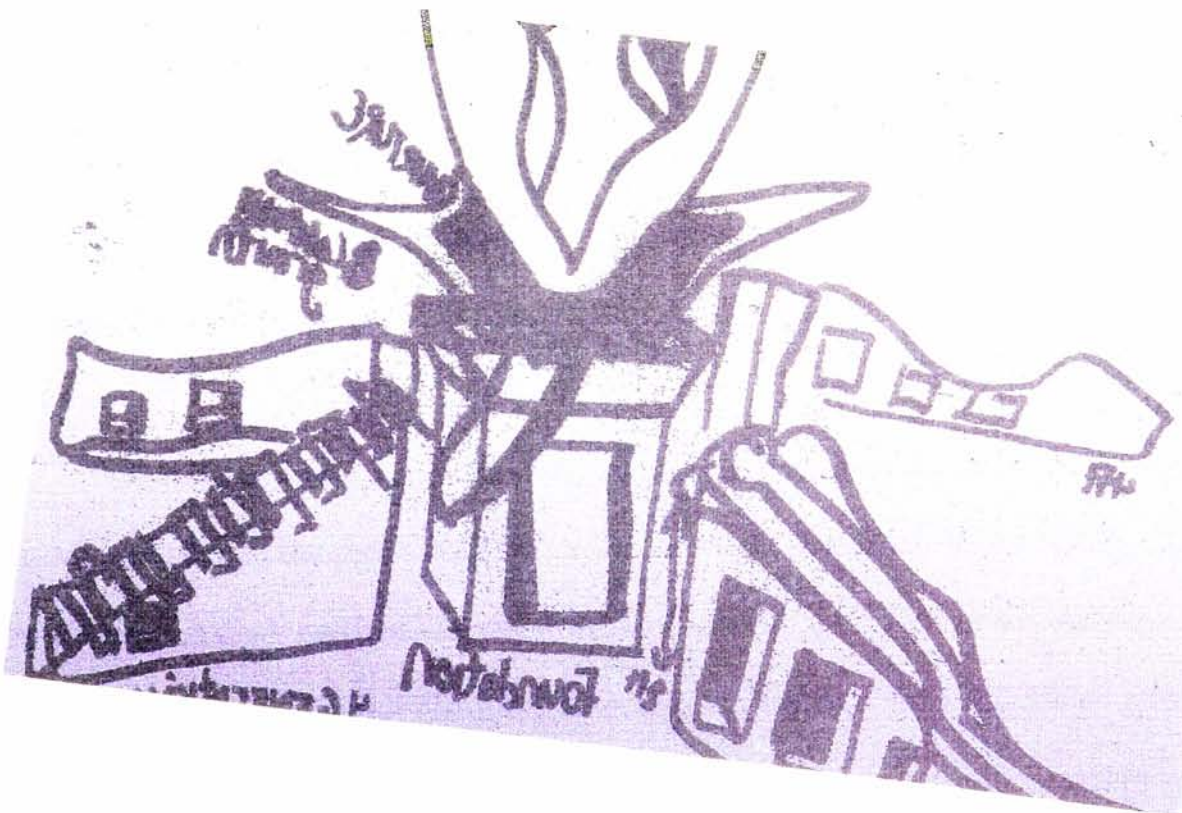
Speaking primarily about four generations of women, I needed to connect the bridges visually as well as representing the spiritual nature of the monument. I chose to use the same color palette



for all four bridges to reflect upon a unity in family and carry on a tradition of sharing the same values and beliefs.

The most ambitious piece for me was the centerpiece. The center structure needed to be an uplifting force that grew up out of the trail left by the bridges. A vertical form that twist and curved towards the sky. The centerpiece was about triumph over the struggle of living in order to reach a clearer existence. The flag like structure at the top of the centerpiece represents the freedom in our lives and the spirit to protect the freedom of living. Displaying women as the bearers and protectors of life.

On a more personal note, I wanted the centerpiece to represent women as high achievers. A power that believes in the strength of women as future doer's. A *s p i r i t   d i s p l a y e d*  
*for me by the w o m e n*  
*in my f a m i l y .*





# Engineering

After months of constructing, firing, and painting; it was finally time to set up.

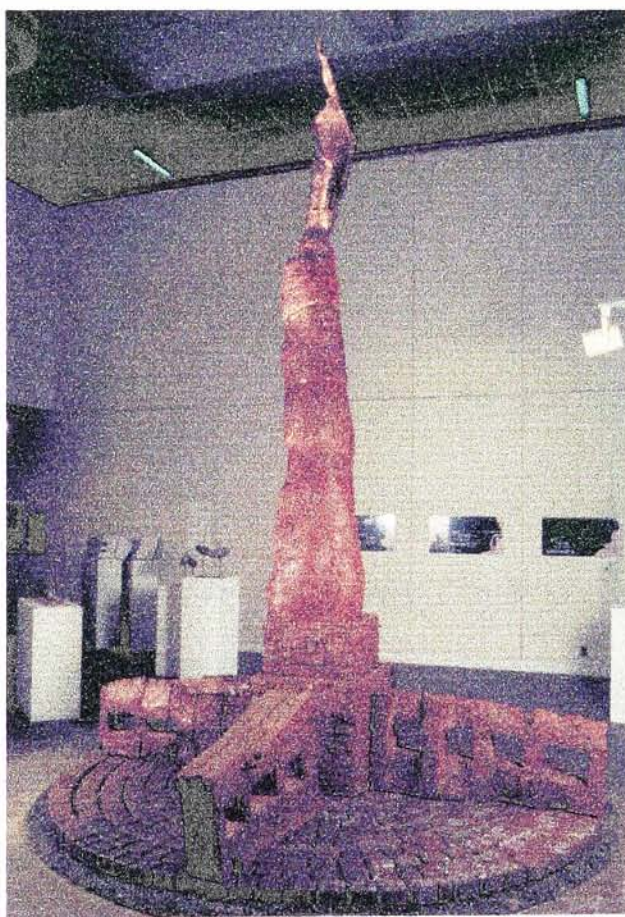
A circular platform constructed out of four sheets of CDX plywood and a dozen two by fours were bolted together by galvanized four inch steel mending plates on the gallery floor. Next, two metal plumbing floor flanges were bolted down approximately two inches apart within a nine inch diameter from center point. The plywood should have been painted with brown latex paint at this point , but I was unaware that the bricks would leave a slight gap which intern would expose a little of the plywood. So I continued by placing the center base directly in the center twenty-four by twenty-four inches on top of a half dozen circular paving bricks. Then I continued placing the paving bricks to fill the ten foot diameter plywood platform.

Before the scaffolding arrived I began to work on stacking up the clay centerpiece. The center base that I placed earlier stood three feet in height. I reached in and placed two pieces of three quarter inch black steel plumbers pipe down the center of the the base and screwed the pipe into the floor flanges. I then filled the center base with sand to support and stabilize the plumbers piping. Next I placed the bottom section of the clay center piece which was built in four connecting sections. Connected another section of piping up through the clay piece and filled the inside with styrofoam to keep the pipes separate and stable.

Scaffolding arrived and I continued by adding the second section of the clay centerpiece and placing the piping and styrofoam in the same manner as previously. Then I added the third and final sections following the same procedure. As I was standing up on the scaffold I discovered a fear I had forgotten about which is falling from high places.

Next step involved heavy lifting, It was time to place the four bridges horizontally from the center base. Starting with the one window bridge at the three o'clock mark, then the two windows bridge at the six o'clock mark, the three windows bridge at the nine o'clock mark, and finally the four windows bridge at the twelve o'clock mark.

I enjoyed the final step, which was hand writing the prose I wrote about the piece on- to the brick pediment. And one last preparation for the piece was shopping for sod in April. After I called and called, I finally found a place that specializes in turf called Batavia Turf Farm. And I placed a three inch strip of turf around the outer diameter of the plywood platform.





# TECHNICAL DATA

CENTERPIECE

## Stoneware Clay Body

Foundry Hill Creme	50%
Hawthorne Fire Clay	25%
OM #4 Ball Clay	15%
Custer Feldspar	5%
Flint / Silica	5%

## Terra-Cotta Clay Body

Red Art	50%
Hawthorne Fire Clay	20%
Foundry Hill Creme	15%
Wollastonite	10%
Talc	10%
OM #4 Ball Clay	10%
Fine Grog	10%
Medium Grog	10%
Coarse Grog	10%

BRIDGES

Paving Bricks ( Romansque )	
Cultured Ledge Stone	
Masonry Wire	
Mortar	
CDX 3/4" Plywood	6 sheets
2 X 4's	16
2" Wood Screws	3 boxes
Galvanized 4" steel plates	8
3/4" Plumbers Pipe	28 feet
Floor Flanges 3/4" Pipe	2
Sand & Styrofoam (filler)	
Brown Latex Paint	1 pint
Sod	2 yards

PLATFORM / BASE

TOP STRUCTURE

Masonry Wire	
Plaster Imbedded Gauze	
Plaster	
Copper Acrylic Paint	1 pint

## SURFACE PAINTED

Automotive Acrylic Lacquer





PROSE  
about "HERITAGE"

*She stood tall  
Her mother even taller  
I looked up  
She taught me  
I listened  
Then watched  
time passed  
I learned  
Then preached*

NOW I STAND TALL



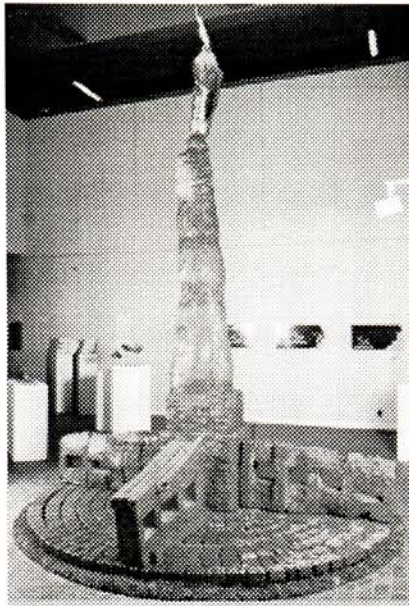
TALLEST OF THEM ALL



*CONVERSATION*  
dishes get washed  
little hands dry them  
*CONVERSATION*  
relaxing in the parlor  
television attracts our attention  
*NO CONVERSATION*  
the kitchen is clean  
the parlor empty

*LIGHTS OUT*

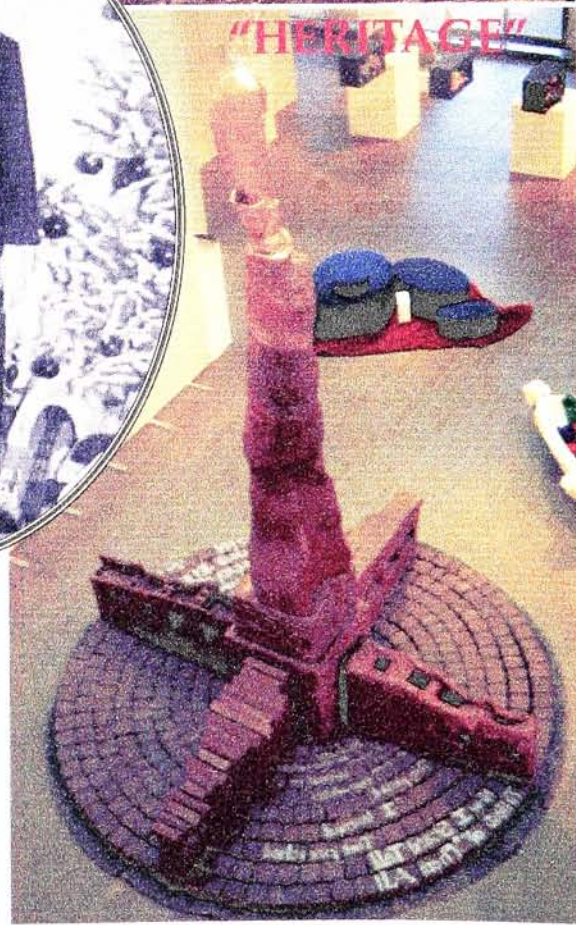
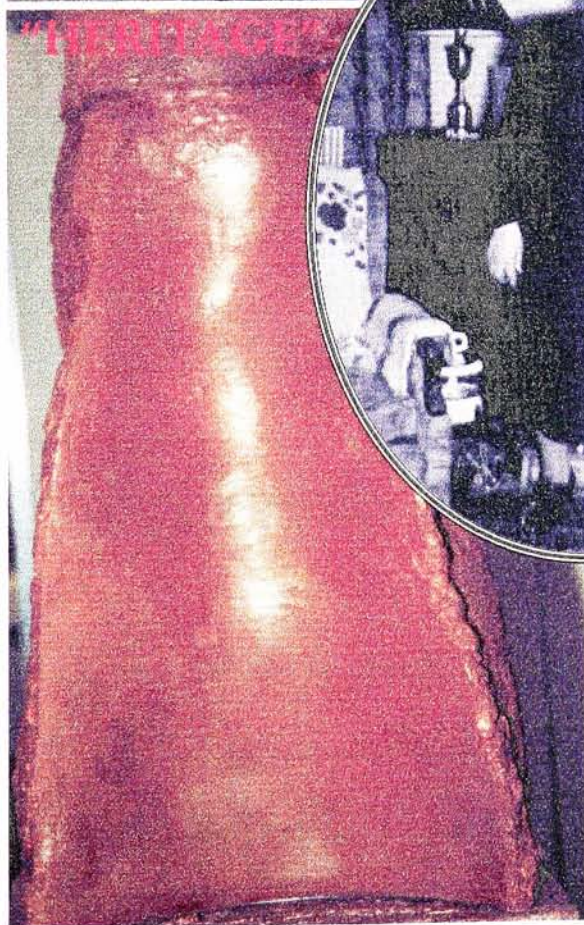
*NO CONVERSATION*



her hand on mine  
my hand smothered  
my face frightened  
my ears not listening  
her hand shaking  
my hand comforting  
my face frightened  
my ears not listening  
her hand feels cold  
my hand provides heat  
my face attentive  
my ears not listening  
HER HAND LET'S GO  
MY HAND GRAB'S ON  
my face assertive  
my ears awakened  
HER HAND NOT HER'S  
MY HAND BOTH OUR'S

MY FACE NOT MINE  
MY EARS NOT MINE  
our face - our ears





"HERITAGE"



## Conclusion

When "Heritage" was set-up in the gallery, I made some very intriguing encounters. One afternoon while I was maintaining the turf around the piece this middle age gentleman came up to me and started asking me questions about the piece. He wanted me to share some of my thoughts about the work and vis-versa. I listened as he explained how this piece made him reflect back on his early days, primarily his childhood and the relationships he had with his family. He then proceeded to read the prose I wrote onto the bricks, while I continued watering the lawn. He again started speaking to me and wanted to know if one of my prose was about divorce. I at first took offense to such an appalling remark since I had never experienced such a tragic lose, but then he explained how he made such a conclusion based on his experience as a child with his parents. So, I explained the poem about "conversation" which ended with the words "no conversation" and then "lights out " as referring to the end of a day and bedtime for all. After that chat I realized that I created something that literally has an interpretation based on individual experiences.

A few weeks after my show was over I had another inspiring encounter. This time it was another grad student who I met in prior classes here at Rochester Institute of Technology she shared with me a inspiring story. This woman has never really had a close bond with her mother. Her family is not very caring or concerned with her well- being but she became inspired by my piece and felt that maybe there was someone else like a grandparent who she never met. She did some investigating and discovered another living relative, a grandmother who the family just sort of forgot about. She told me that my piece had motivated her to seek out her own heritage.

I am beginning to realize how powerful Art can be. I plan on working in clay for a very long time and if by explaining my life I inspire others than I know my destiny has a deeper purpose.



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