

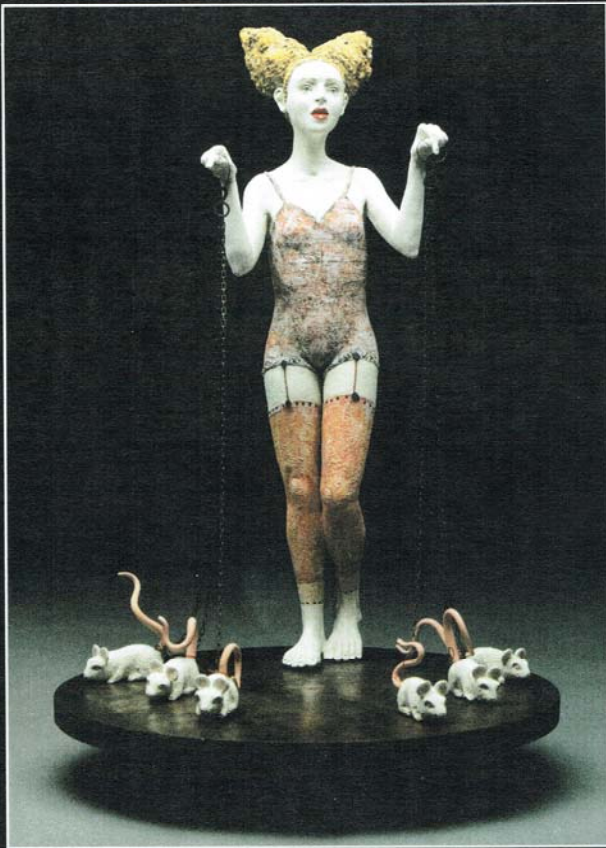
KIRSTEN STINGLE

STORIES IN SCULPTURE

“ There has to be sincerity, but you have to laugh at how seriously we take our own lives. ”



© 2012, Mixed media with porcelain
on foundry mold, 18" x 8" x 27"



Nice Kitty, 2012, Mixed media: porcelain stoneware, antique wooden foundry mold, vintage clock chain, 25" x 15" x 15"

by Karen Parr-Moody

Kirsten Stingle's work is whimsical and seductive, dark and post-apocalyptic. Each ceramic sculpture is a carefully arranged homage to the female point of view, to humanity's universal struggles, and to an aesthetic that can only be described as Steampunk. By tossing in a handful of flotsam and jetsam, the look is uniquely her own.

Still, Stingle's work is even more than the sum of these parts because it articulates so much at once. Here's what we know about such complexity: Stingle doesn't believe that her chosen medium of ceramics demands that she simply turn out beautiful vases. A vase is lovely, but a figural ceramic sculpture? That is a different type of wet dust altogether.

The discipline of ceramics can straddle the line between artisan and art, which proved to be a dilemma for Stingle when she embraced the medium and launched her artistic career. "Ceramics sort of take hold in the craft world, and it's hard to find a niche in the fine-art world," she says. "People are used to seeing ceramics as a pot, something that sits on a shelf quietly and gives them that beauty. Whereas mine, through telling a story, is trying to evoke a response from the viewer."

There is nothing quiet about the stories Stingle's sculptures tell. Take *Riveted* as just one example. Stingle was inspired to create this piece after discovering an old riveter machine at the Antique



Adaptation, 2013, Hand-built porcelain stoneware with multiple layers of underglazes, slips and stains. Mixed media: porcelain stoneware, alligator skull, vintage wheels, leather straps, 21" x 25" x 21"



Riveted, 2013, Mixed media: porcelain, vintage riveter, roof nails, vintage wheels, jackal skull, 19" x 21" x 8"



PHOTOGRAPHY: JERRY ATNIP

Archaeology store in Nashville. An image of the iconic Rosie the Riveter sprang into her mind as she mulled over the strength women can summon to “get the job done.” As a double entendre, Stingle also thought about the word “riveted” and the idea of being transfixed by an awe-inspiring subject.

So she took that riveter machine and built from it—as she does for many of her figures—a mechanized form of transport, what she calls a “machine creature” complete with a coyote skull at the helm. It looks like something a *Mad Max* character might straddle to traverse the dusty, post-apocalyptic plains.

Does this figure, she of the flaming-red Medusa hair, look intense? Yes. Is she hunched over her machine, eyes squinted and teeth clenched as though she might hurl a spiked iron ball? No. This figure steps back a pace from that particular brand of intensity, possessing instead a more nuanced strength. Yes, she grips her post-apocalyptic machine firmly between her thighs. But her face describes the rapture that belongs to a saint while her hands are posed as delicately as those of a dancing geisha. Despite being a true warrior, as Stingle explains, this figure boldly confronts the possible future with a sense of wonder.

This dance between the delicate and the intense is key to Stingle’s work. Stingle, who never formally studied art, achieved a B.A. in theatre at Ohio University and a master’s degree in public affairs from Columbia University. Her undergraduate studies in drama boldly temper the physicality of her sculptures—particularly the

face, hands, and feet. While she spent her childhood viewing opera and ballet with her mother, an experience she credits as formative, it was her degree in theatre that emphasized the importance of gesture.

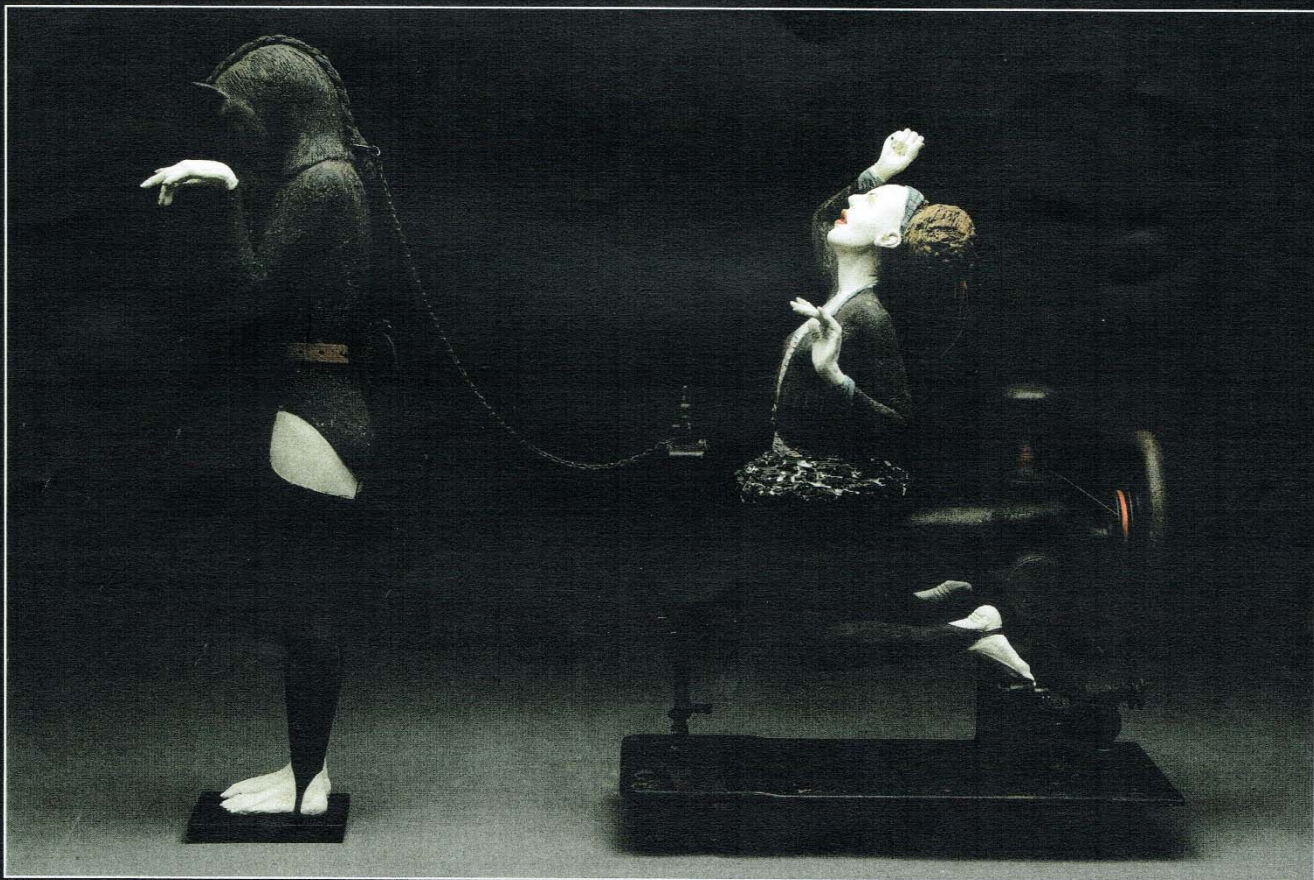
To that end, Stingle spends a lot of time working on every figure’s face, hands, and feet. “So much of the emotional powerhouse that tells the story is in those three areas,” she says.

When she builds each figure, by hand and without the use of molds, Stingle creates details in the face, hands, and feet with a straight pin. To deepen the color, she uses many layers of underglazes and slips. It is only after firing the figure that she finishes it through a variety of methods, including carpentry, sewing, fabric staining, and welding.

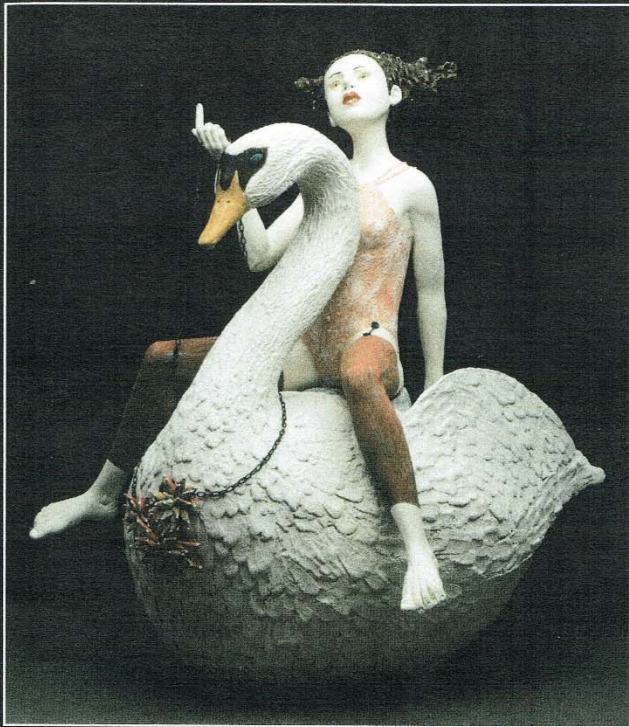
Through each piece Stingle tells a story, which is a skill she gleaned from her past career in public policy. Before abandoning that career to sculpt full time, she held a position in which she gathered the stories of families trying to make the transition from welfare to work. In doing so, she uncovered the roadblocks such people came up against.

“It just sort of showed me how it’s the same thing we’re all dealing with,” she says. “How do we provide a better life for our family? The power of the story moved me.”

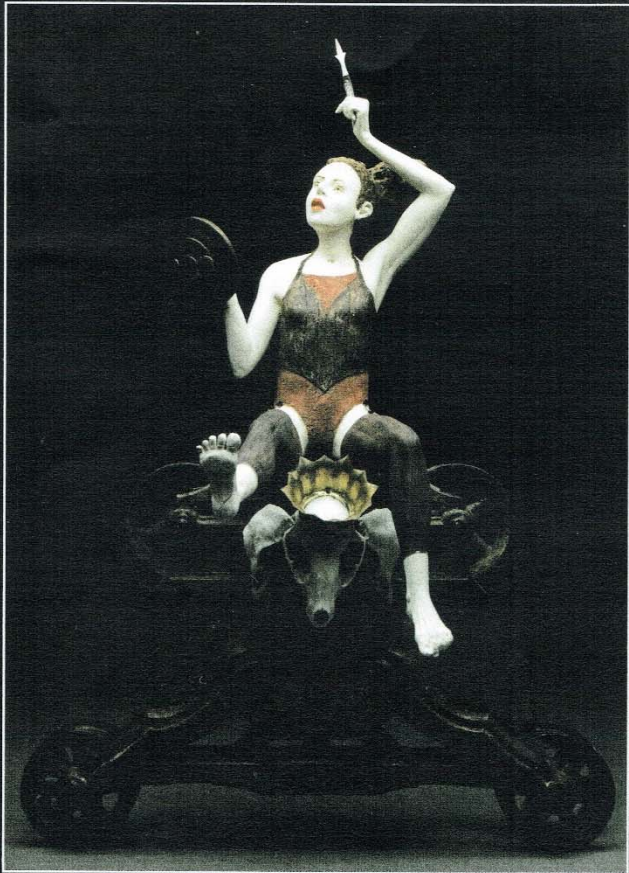
Stingle also tosses in heaping tablespoons of sly humor to lighten the tone of her tales. In the figure *Escape* there are objects,



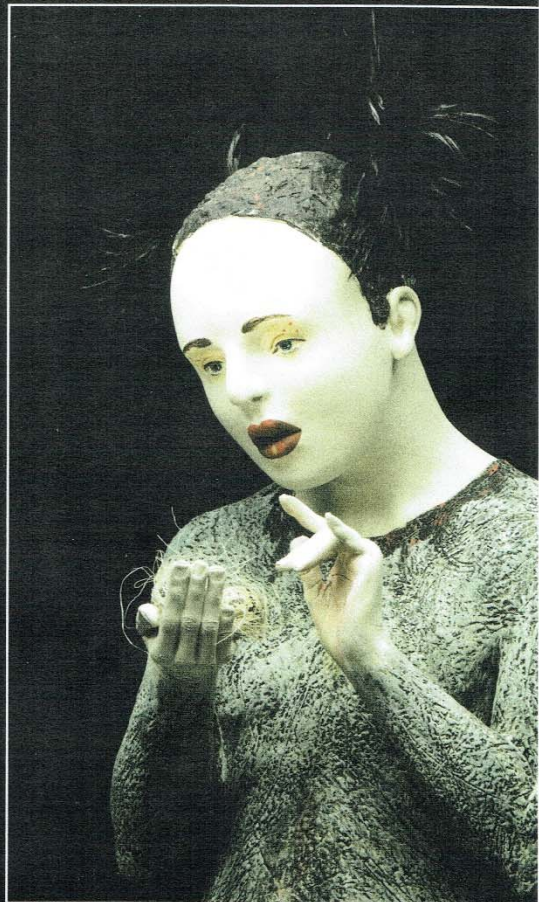
Horseplay, 2013, Mixed media: porcelain stoneware, antique sewing machine, vintage roller skate strap, 22" x 8" x 24"



Harnessing Dreams, 2011, Mixed media: porcelain stoneware and vintage clock chain, 24" x 17" x 13"



Conquest, 2013, Mixed media: porcelain stoneware, antique barn trolley, turkey skulls, vintage glass button, 27" x 19" x 13"



Endangered, 2013, Mixed media: porcelain stoneware, fiber, and millinery feathers, 26" x 11" x 10"

which seem to be balloons, tied to a woman's waist. Upon inspection one discovers that they are, in fact, bombs.

"I could express it in a heavy-handed way, or I could express it in a funny way," Stingle says of her stories told through her art. "They're not high Shakespearean dramas. They're more like... You have to poke fun a little bit, but at the same time you have to be true to the story you're telling. There has to be some... you have to laugh at how seriously we take our own lives."



Defiance, 2012, Mixed media, porcelain stoneware, vintage collar, leather, 13" x 18" x 18"