

Finding the Authentic Self



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A simple boat, pulled to shore or land, is an image I love. I have used a boat form for several years but always as one element in a larger construction; a boat perched precariously on a precipice, or passing through a rectangular frame; a boat navigating its way atop an undulating form with a rock and a cage between it and the land it was navigating; or a cage and a boat in a variety of different positions, inside, thinking of a move, as well as one exiting the cage. There was no reference to water, except that the boat would be dreaming of it or searching for it. These pieces were the beginning of the “Lost on Land” series.

Why an artist begins a series is sometimes incidental. I started using porcelain, and focused on a simple closed boat form, rather than a complex construction. It is angled to suggest potential movement as a boat would have in water but hangs vertically on a wall. The series “Lost on Land” suggests a sense of displacement, isolation, as well as longing. The surfaces became the “land” reference. The boat form could have its history recorded as its surface, map-like drawings of passages, places, and meanderings. Black and white photographs of land inspired the surfaces I created, aerial views taken by a surveyor. I found the river paths and agricultural patterns fascinating, as the shapes created were sometimes odd and awkward as they obviously followed the lay of the land. But I loved how they worked together beautifully. My drawings are invented as I draw across the surfaces. There is no reference to any particular place or destination. I thought of them marking or scarring the land in search of water. Other marks on the surfaces were made to create a sense of movement like wind or shadows of objects passing over the land, and could also be interpreted as time passing, or thoughts or dreams.

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I could tell when I started with small porcelain boats alone I was in love with that form, simple yet strong. I would lay them on my lap and seriously get lost as I started drawing, there was a story there somewhere about something. You don't want it planned out, but let it take its course in a sense and then follow it from top to sides and back again. Several ways of navigating the form became evident. Obviously, one has to resolve and finish, but leave a little mystery there. There really is no ending.

To me, the work made me realize it was a story in a sense of myself, and anyone else making his or her way through life. I didn't have much official experience in art classes, only one was offered in my high school. My parents studied photography at the Illinois Institute of Design in Chicago, where experimentation was encouraged and photographic images became more abstract rather than realistic. I think growing up with that, and visiting galleries and museums influenced me a lot. Born right in the middle of the twentieth century let me experience such an amazing art history; with so many different styles and movements, I guess I felt one could feel okay about one's own work and making it personal. Music was very inspiring and meaningful, as well.

Since I didn't have any art portfolio to present, applications to art schools seemed a bit impossible, so I applied to colleges where I could be a part of the Art Department if I did well enough. Ceramics was impossible to get into, because it was so popular, with Richard Zakin as the ceramics professor. I did sculpture for a few semesters and I worked on welded pieces until I fell in love with clay in my first semester in ceramics hand building. In all the art classes I took, students really worked on their own, with direction from professors, but not many critiques. Students navigated their own way. In one sense, it left you wondering if you should keep going. I guess that is a good thing, as the decision becomes our own.