

Journal - Summer 2019 - Vol. 35, No. 3

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PHOTOGRAPHS BY: TOM OWENS &
NIKKI MARIE, CORE CLAY STUDIO

TOM OWENS: SATIRE AND COMEDY PULLED FROM THE CLAY



Every now and then someone plops into your life who makes an impression. Such was the case when I met a new ceramic artist at Core Clay Studio in Cincinnati, Ohio in late 2017. Tom Owens is a 59 year old IT Programmer by trade, but someone who has always sketched and has enjoyed the internal world of creation. In 2017 he turned his two-dimensional artistic skills into the three dimensions of clay.

Members of the studio quickly noticed this quiet and unassuming guy sculpting strange characters in clay. Tom looks like something out of a Harry Potter movie, with a big fluffy beard with an intent look as his creativity reigns and magic happens.

Whimsical creatures start to emerge under his expert hand. Satire and comedy are pulled from the clay as the sculpting adds emotion to the character. His clay characters expertly transmit his dry wit.

Each character is up to 50 hours of sculpting, refining, glaze testing, and glazing. Body components are made separately and finally come together in the last few days in order to dry together as a unit. Some parts are slipped together to dry as a unit, some will be glaze-fused. But the drying process is delicate and lengthy in order to keep delicate and fragile pieces from cracking. Glaze treatments may be a combina-

Oom "Depressed by the udder futility of life, this sacred cow took the bull by the horns and cultivated her higher awareness. Getting grounded provided just the "lift" she needed. While others simply chew cud, she ruminates on the cosmos, the nature of being, and the being of nature. Let her be. And please, no tipping!"

"The cow and rug are separate pieces with hardware in between. She's currently "floating" about an 1/8" above the rug and raised or lowered from there depending upon which pieces from the hardware store are utilized. She was briefly a "bobble cow" but I decided I didn't like the effect..." Tom Owens.



Tyrannosaurus Mingus One of the lesser known dinosaurs in popular taxonomy is the Tyrannosaurus Mingus. “These unusual creatures were capable of many traits thought to have originated with primates such as opposable thumbs, the use of tools, mastery of fire, and the ability to walk “eight to the bar.” Scientists find it difficult to reach a consensus on how adept T. Mingus may have been with their tiny forelimbs. Many suggest that these minuscule appendages were more useful than they appear while others believe they were only effective in conjunction with teeth or tail.”

“T. Mingus was mostly extinct by the end of Jazzcene age but there’s some thin evidence suggesting some may have survived as late as the Smoothjazzcene age. Their dependence on flint and vinyl suggests an earlier extinction date as does their well documented inability to care for their own young which were quite vulnerable to daytime predators.” Tom Owens

tion of stains and oxides in various clay bodies, or a surface application of oxides, underglazes, or combinations. Tom is always tweaking and testing new combinations for the perfect color for his creatures.

A usual part of the process is a catastrophe of some sort with a few well-chosen words to highlight the process, then an inspired fix to overcome the insult to the piece. I wish I could say he has taught me new words, but I know them all and use them routinely in my own work.

Everyone notices and walks over to his table at the studio to see the latest progression of the sculpture. As details are added, most people just smile as they notice the whimsy. Each piece is something to be studied, finding new details with each examination, always evoking a smile in the admirer.

Tom’s skill and talent are evoking desires within the studio members at Core Clay for a teaching workshop, to learn some of Tom’s methods. But his humility at present seems to be a limiting factor, Tom just not comfortable with such praise and admiration. Reserved by nature, being thrust into the spotlight is not his preferred space in the world.

One serious admirer is Riley Humler of Humler Nolan Auction and appraiser on Antiques Roadshow. Riley had seen one piece being sculpted and immediately remarked on the level of skill, saying that “This guy has talent and deserves to be recognized.” Encouragement quickly was expressed for the AAPA Show in Virginia in May.

Tom’s descriptions of his work convey the whimsy and spirit of his creations. The Oom bovine beauty started as a bobble head which then evolved into a floating Yoga cow. The realism of the carpet, constructed in clay, is a fooler. Frankestoner was a Halloween inspiration, this one being more chill than the one in the old black and



Rusty Robot “Undeterred by life-threatening oxidation, Rusty, a plumbing robot from the near future, is a master of pipe craft. He cuts, he threads, and, after a brief admiration of his own fine skills, applies the pipe where needed. His iron construction, although impressive, is a bit of a design flaw considering his wet work environment. Consequently, his internal hydraulic system requires quite a bit of maintenance (hence the unintentionally provocative placement of various screws). It’s also unintentional that he resembles a mirror image of Michelangelo’s David. He is not yet aware of his inevitable replacement by the v2.0 design: Steely Dan.”



white movies. Tyrannosaurus Mingus is one cool dino. Presenting... Elephis! – yes, Elvis lives, but he could use a little less time at the buffet line, as seen by the buckling of the floor. Party Animal might be a comment on the State of Affairs, but Tom prefers to remain non-political. His most recent work, Fat Cat, is currently underway, testing ongoing for the perfect oxides, stains and underglazes to accentuate the cat and mouse characters. At present I have only seen a teaser for the next work, but it does involve paws and a Flugel Horn. And so it goes....

Tom Owens first national show will be at the AAPA Show and Sale in Chantilly, Virginia on May 4th and 5th, 2019. Tom can be reached via email at tom.owens.sculpture@gmail.com.

Elephis! “Don’t let the questionable guitar skills fool you! Elephis is a fine entertainer and a real heavyweight in the Elvis Impersonator field. Expertly ringmastered by one of the best dressed mice in the business, he’s a formidable presence for any stage. And yes, that IS his real hair!” Tom Owens

Party Animal Some animals just need to stay out of the house.

Frankenstoner “Perhaps the only individual to be born as a full-fledged adult, Frankenstoner immediately squandered that advantage by indulging his worst tendencies. His” father,” a prominent research physician, struggles to accept his son’s lifestyle, such as it is. He hopes he will one day slouch in the direction of a job, or perhaps even get out of bed before noon. Perhaps it’s just a “phase” but oh, how it stings when Frankenstoner exclaims, “Leave me alone! I didn’t ask to be born!” The doctor yearns, once again, to proclaim, “It’s alive!...ALIVE!” But now, he’d just be happy to see him make a living.”

Self Sculpture Yarn Bowl The first sculpt by Tom was a self-portrait that captured his essence and the attention of fellow studio members.



