

THE CODE

1974

PAMPHLET FILE

SEP

1985

In 1974 sometime Ruth Cravath looked in and gave me a piece of wood for my potbelly stove. It was a cold year - those awful years of Watergate happened to coincide with my own individual odyssey - and I (and I would think this universal) was not-am not - always identified with Odysseus Penelope perhaps or Calypso Well, I wander. I thought the piece of wood rotting away- looked like any number of things city streets messages left by someone dead whatever. At the same time I began carving (with a razor blade) a small piece of hard (Madrone) wood into a hand. My friend of many years standing, John Thomas said. 'Take the hand and mount it on the piece of wood with a needle and call it 'The Code' "I said, "Right you are."

Sea Shell

1975

Ah, Wax - blessed medium. So plastic. So responsive. That same Winter of 74-75 Ruth gave we a piece of wax. It sat on the shelf until August of 1975 while I went through various processes, medical and legal and governmental incident upon the progressive degeneration of the nerve system of my legs. Then, having established some support system and Ruth and all others being away from the Compound (Ruth was in Mendocino teaching sculpture.) So I took off my clothes - hot hot in S. F. when one can do that comfortably - arranged a system of mirrors so I could have mirror in mirror image and so avoid some of the single reflection displacement - and when Ruth Cravath and Tekeshi Sugimoto returned and saw what I had done, were attentive and reflective and supportive and so I persevered - figuring that my only sort of selfness was in this business of attention and response . I must go back just a little way to perhaps 1972 or 3 when Ruth's close friend Nora Southwell spent some time in Ruth's guest room overlooking my studio and bed. Delightful intelligent lady - a portrait artist . Many of you see9ng this show know her, I'M sure. Well, Nora and Ruth loved to have me bring my my Watergate

drawings. I had become immersed in Watergate and made many sketches of persons and notes on testimony, etc. Nora and Ruth gave me a copy of 'The Natural Way to Draw' by a man by the name of Nicolides^{au}(Sp?) who taught for many years in N. Y. I used the ideas in the book to begin to contour draw -speak of Eros! - now theres an experience! But We are exploring outer space with our very own 'felt' eyeballs, intelligences out there.

Boy with Towel 75

I had no anatomy and felt my way to an expression of form was not sure for a while which sex the creature was - pleasant form I think (for be it from me to denigrate these forms)

Benevolent Lady 76

Enough said. Dan Donovan had Tony Stellan cast if the same time that he cast the next piece.

Four Faces of Desire 76

Was not sure of a title for this piece untill I saw a sketch from an old notebook where I had drawn something like this and named it so. I was working on it in the patio when Ruth came by with her friend Monica. I was unsure how to finish it off and Ruth said it reminded her of an Indian Incense burner she had seen. Oh, I said. So Art and Science and Politics get done. Life, ain't she grand?

Homage to Stone 75

The stone which forms the base for this bronze, modelled in wax and cast by Berkeley Art Foundry, was found by me in this yard. It is so beautiful

in contour and surface that I meditated much on how to honor it - how better than by a study of self? Thought much of my father, that old man remembered so ambivalently - a journey into self is a journey into all that is not-self the most familiar and close and feared and loved first. We look alike.

Jeffrey . 77

Ruth taught this class in portraiture in her studio. She had to admonish Jeffrey every once and a while not to ~~drop~~ his lower lip. I rather think the slight ambivalence shows.

Freddie 77

Done in a class with Ruth Cravath. My first work in stone.

Luke 77

The year of the cats! I must say it was like the Coliseum - over-run and had to call the SPCA to get traps for them - ruthless (many jokes around here about Ruthlessness!) and in the midst of it all Ruth gave me a piece of travertine marble just the size of a kitten. Lots of cats, wanted and unwanted, but no kittens; then one appeared in the stoneyard complete with Federal Linen Service towel. I suspect a certain lover of cats and kittens in the neighborhood who knew of my plight. In any case it was too much for statitutions and our collective (Ruth Cravath, Dick Clinton and I) Church conciousness ~~to think in~~ ^{I thought} those kind of terms and came up with Luke, the next day being that saint's day. So I had a model which I carried to class in a bird cage. Now, working from nature in stone - that is fine. "Remember, significant detail!" Ruth said.

Sometime this Spring of 78 I heard a commotion in the yard and went out and saw Lucy (Luke turned out to be Sister Luke and thus Lucy) engaging a robin. I did sketches which I used later to create the bas relief in clay from which I made a mold and did a couple of positives in wax and cement. The copy displayed is from a mold made from a terra cotta positive and thus 1/8 smaller than the original.

Pregnant Couple	78	Man with Bird	78
Child under Quilt	78	Eve	78
Bird on Line	78	Family Portrait	78

All of these pieces were done with clay on a flat surface for background - making molds and positives from the molds. There were several more - Ruth and Lucy (Sister Luke and the Mother General!) and one of Ruth and Freddie - rather like them for personal and esthetic reasons but I'm not showing everything!

Center Piece 79

Coming along, arn't we? Enough said.

Ascent 79

Interesting to me looking back over these ten years to see the work that was done with direct and formal tutoring as with all the waxes of this period and the more symbolic works done independently more or less. Ruth always made herself available to me but never intruded - such a generous and restrained teacher. Some times it was too much to bear! She came by my studio one day reached down and picked up a piece of wax from the floor, looked over at a wax figure I was working on, said 'May I?' When I nodded, she placed it in just the precisely right place. 'Right you are!' I said.

A Vallombrosa number. Ethel Souza also studied sculpture with Ruth and had her to teach week long workshops with model there for several years. Beautiful place - five days of nothing but sculpting - three hours each morning meals on the premises - nothing to worry about.

Mr. Dwight Taylor, musician, carpenter, writer. Ruth and Dwight shared our church experiences and other matters. That Summer Dwight came to my place with another artist - built a model's stand, took his clothes off and sat on it. Ruth gave me critiques from time to time - but this piece stands somewhere between those pieces done under the Cravath eye and those from my head or alone more or less with the anatomy text, etc.

Fish People	79	Book Ends	80
Hat	79	Incense Burner	80
Portrait of Bob Ray	80		

Bob and Marcie Ray are from Alabama and are particularly close friends *as Dwight & Ruth* present a good deal of time studying and working together to bring this about. Ruth gave us a good deal of help - I say 'us' because the model has to be cooperative and to grow in insight as well as the artist. Used to talk about this with Nora Southwell.

Ancient Temple	80
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This incense burner, modelled in clay and cast and then painted with food coloring. I deliberately did not repair chisel marks and faults in

casting - ravages of time. A piece of Ralph Stackpole stands right outside my window now as I write this in the compound in Tufa stone - much used in S.E. Asia where there are 'Buddha Factories' where the serene one is duplicated over and over agin in tufa stone which is soft to cut and hardens after it is exposed to the air. Mr. Stackpole deliberately let chaos in, slashing and hewing! Well, thats life - cuts and bruises and insights. O. K.

Adam & Eve wax 80

Adam & Eve cement 80

Both of these studies - a unified and a separated Adam and Eve I think speak for themselves, Non?

Head 80

A pretty busy year - no model available so this study came from my head with the help of anatomy texts. I was thinking of the S. F. politician Willie Brown for a while there. Mean it to be pretty free of special characteristics but of course that can't be. I must comment on the effects of the weather. That too is part of the process, which is not to say that one cannot make provision for protecting works of art.

Sea Bass 80

Visited a fish market and got two sea bass.

Tekeshi Group 80

Tekeshi gave me the particulr clay for these pieces and fired them for me. I take this opportunity to pay my respects to Tekeshi Sugimoto who along with Ruth Cravath was the first to encourage me to follow the mad and purifying path of high art. Simplicity is all.

Child's Shoe

80

Perhaps all the artist does is say 'Look! Well lots of things enter in the process. Found this child's shoe in the Ivey - the fencing was discarded by Jim Gongwer.. Nice to have one mobile.

Mary Beth

80

I look at this form now four years later and detect qualities that mark it off from the Cravath tutored pieces and the alone-work. Tekeshi taught a class that year and I took it. Resisted suggestions but began to learn to be less defensive about learning. Has, indeed, a sort of Japanese quality, I fancy!

Dwight

80

Dwight modelled for me -

Matrix

80

Funny, sometimes at the end of concentrated work the hands 'themselves' fashion something while 'one' can only observe, and do homage!

Laura

80

Ah, lovely creature. She posed in the back studio and I cannot remember if some of us got together and hired her or if Ruth gave a workshop. I remember Laura. I renewed my acquaintance with the form just two months ago in anticipation of this show. Most of the waxes spent some time broken up in component parts - arms and legs and torsos and heads in a wax graveyard--these bones shall rise again! There is a certain debonair and freedom making quality to working thus after a period of time (Wordsworth and Coleridge in the Preface to their 1797 (?) edition of Lyrical Ballads which sat off the Romantic era : "Poetry is strong

emotion recollected in tranquility." De-mystifying too.

The Dancer 80

My friend Ken Sawyer stopped by here on his 50th birthday- bicycling north to Puget Sound - took off his pants to sew up a tear and I said."Don't put your pants back on; take off your shirt and stand there." He had to leave before I got information for the face so used components from Dwight's face, which was more readily available.

Nancy 80

A vallombrosa model. The beauty of some of these resurrected pieces is their new 'sistums' firebrick from the Cravath-Gongwer house.

Longlegged Lady 81

Can't remember the name of this beauty - done in the studio here. In this case I remember that a number of us hired her for the sessions.

Creche 81

unfired clay.

Eye Piece 81

Fencepost 81

Homage to a Stonecutter 82

In eighty two Ruth Cravath agreed to sit for some of us. Tekeshi started a bas relief and I too began to do drawings of Ruth. This piece was started with a charcoal drawing done right on the marble while Ruth sat - arranged by her companion, Sarah Dixon Roberts - and beginning (Oh, pity) to lose sense of right and left and up and down. Dear wandering one.

Someone gave the Cravath Stonecutting Class a number of stones, marble and alabaster. I chose one piece and Ruth said; "It's a rabbit!" I said "Of course!" She: "You'll love it when the light shines through the ears!" And so I did, with Ruth's help, even though her up and down and back and forth mechanisms were beginning to go. A disquieting time for the Compound but all worked.

Portrait of an Artist 82-83

This is the only painting in this show. I use a little color, it is true, in other places but this is the only painting full of color. I spent much time upstairs sleeping in the guest room that winter while Ruth was waiting for someone to be her companion. Looking down on my quarters from the same perch that my friend Nora had a year or so before - the year of Watergate. Now, Ruth needed to have someone near for fear of her leaving the gas on, or mistaking down for up in the stairwell, etc. - all those taken for granted in the world of creatures. It was a year. We all, Carol Sundell was a frequent guest and others of Ruth's friends. Well to this painting - what a marathon, what a torture what a joy what an affair! It was finished after innumerable drawings done and set aside and finally the outline (the eyebrows-continual surprise, Ruth Cravath) was got from a napkin drawn on over coffee and breakfast!

Gatepiece

83

The limestone was given to me by Ruth. I simply sat down, perhaps, with no preconceptions, and it occurred. Well, there are many arguments and discussions over millenia about that kind of thing in art or in the sciences or whatever - what is it to explore the universe? or oneself? is self discovery universe discovery and the obverse?

Jim Gongwer, Husny, I and Helen Philips were busy this year and had a couple or so models. With Frank I believe I worked more with sketching though I constructed the framework for the wax I'm displaying. More of the information is mediated through the two dimensional drawing to the eye and hand again and to the three dimensional wax form. Whatever, the whole process of human beings recording and interpreting their interactions with the rest of the universe...Well, words fail me. But then so does every form.

Juggler and the City 84

When pieces of cuttable stone from the retaining wall separating the upper yard from the lower on the Cravath Compound were assigned by Ruth to various of her students, I obtained the stone for Gatepiece. Mary Erchenbrach, long time friend of Ruths and fellow artist, got the marble that turned into the Juggler - but I talked her out of it after conditions changed so radically here, Ruth moved north to Washington and I needed something hard to work on. It was located then in Ruth's Meditation corner, next to her studio office with an east light. Hard winter - internal contradictions uncertainty as to my future - North Forty up for sale - fear of eviction - bad legs - Angola - Reagan - Kirkpatrick - Ah Aagh aagh a very hard cold time - took my ther^mos over with me - determined - no model - the sun rising and shadows suggest so I end up with the Juggler and the Apples - Later - months - after Jim Gongwer moved the marble over to my side of the Compound and I was able to back away from it and sit in my place and sit and meditate and look at it through binoculars - It became 'done' finally in a flurry of drawing from a May 15, 1983 Cravath Garden celebration photo which included a back view of a young human's head just as I needed it.

Now, as to the City side of this double trip. The City - any city is fascinating to me. I've lived in New York, Philadelphia, San Francisco other cities i've lived in and viewed from near, from far, caught in them drunk and sober ~~so~~ stormy and fair. Good view of the City from here. Sense of the endlessness of the sea and all that continent and all that human history. And what of when we - that is 'we' were not yet the seers the self concious hearers and measurers and analysers and interpreters that we are becoming.

Bottle Tree 84

For the past several years I've toyed with the idea for using the redundancy of certain ~~throu~~^w away things like bottles - threw out the idea of a bottle pole to Dwight Taylor who came up with this form and executed it after some brainstorming with me and other friends, Jessica and Jason. Jim Gogger provided about sixty of the 75 bottles - at least I found them in his basement and appropriated them (O. K. Jim?) I provided for the rest and partly enjoyed it.'

Eros 80/84 and Psyche 80/84

Patrick and Vallombrosa and 1980 - stayed there the whole week - no radio and no T. V. Patrick and Ruth's lovingly demanding eye and Patrick in the a. m. food on the lovely premises - an anatomy text. Very good but had many problems slow of understanding seemed the chest a beauty of tracking (understanding?) great confusion about the standing creature - brought it home - set it aside worked on it a ye ar later them cut off above the knee (Ruth's suggestion) back into the wax mortuary then out agin to be demystified - separated into those forever false forever helpful dichotomies human thought is so inclined toward - that is into Sex and Intelligence Eros and Psyche. O.K. That about wraps it up.

Ben Spinks