Adrian Arleo

BODY LANGUAGE

AS A CHILD, I ALWAYS ENJOYED "ARTS AND CRAFTS" AS A FORM of playing. I discovered early on, though, that when an object conveyed emotion, it became powerful beyond mere play. This power is what became, and continues to be, my motivation in making art. I have a black-and-white print of myself at age six, caught in the act of discovering this power. The photo was taken by my mother at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. I'm standing in front of Andrew Wyeth's painting *Christina's World*, and the way I'm staring up at the stranded, reclining woman in the painting reminds me of the intense wonder and recognition I'd experienced. Somehow, through the gesture Wyeth had given her, I knew exactly what Christina was feeling.

Adrian Arleo,
***Honey Child I* (detail), 2004**
23 x 17 x 10½ in.
(58.4 x 43.2 x 26.7 cm)
Coil-built low-fire sculpture clay body, electric fired, bisque cone 06; textured with carved wooden dowel; low-fire glazes, electric cone 04; wax encaustic
PHOTO BY CHRIS AUTIO

Adrian Arleo,
Honey Child I, 2004
23 x 17 x 10½ in.
(58.4 x 43.2 x 26.7 cm)
Coil-built low-fire sculpture clay body, electric fired, bisque cone 06; textured with carved wooden dowel; low-fire glazes, electric cone 04; wax encaustic
PHOTO BY CHRIS AUTIO

Some artists must traverse a long and circuitous road to find their medium. I was lucky to discover clay at an early age. My engagement began somewhat ignominiously, with the classic lumpy, pinched animal projects in grade school. When I was about 10, my older brother started taking pottery classes. Intrigued by the garbage can full of reject clay and slurry, I tried my hand at a horse head that ended up having the appearance of an animal emerging from a stormy sea; its neck was arched, its mane seemed windswept, and its gesture contained some sort of drama that made my heart pound. That was it for me: I was sold on clay.

In 1979 I entered Pitzer College in Claremont, California, where I studied art and anthropology. Because the art department was small, and run by the ceramic artist David Furman, it focused mainly on clay. I became interested in slab-built, low-fire sculpture. I avoided the potter's wheel, glaze chemistry, and the gas kiln. I liked the control I could get with an electric kiln; I didn't like to leave anything to chance. My work consisted of surreal boxed landscapes, some with fish swimming into or out of the box, others with cacti growing on the box, which later evolved into a small series of cactuslike human figures. All were impeccably crafted, with clean edges and accurate, realistic underglaze finishes.

> Of all the features of the body, it's the face that most intrigues and challenges me.

Upon entering the MFA program at Rhode Island School of Design in 1984, I received a rude but helpful awakening. During my first grad-school critique with then-head Jacquelyn Rice, I was devastated by her assessment that my work was coming from the school of "tight is right." Jacquie was so sure I needed to loosen up that she vetoed my use of slabs, then gave me a new assignment: work only with coils. Her assumption was that this method would cause me to work more loosely, with fewer preconceptions. Twenty years later I continue to have pretty strong preconceptions about most of my sculptures, but I'm still working only with coils. And my interest in the human form began in earnest with this change in building methods.

The idea that my work was "tight" struck me as some kind of sin and jolted me toward a new kind of imagery. Movement, sensuality, and a subtle suggestion of the figure became the first antidote to that tightness. I began moving toward the human figure by coiling twisted, tubular forms that more closely resembled sea slugs than humans. For me, building with slabs had felt almost like woodworking in that it consisted of cutting slabs to certain specific shapes and dimensions, then joining them. With coils, I would start building at one end, with a comparatively modest conception of where the piece was heading, and figure out the form as I went.

At this time I also began to experiment with terra sigillata as an alternative to underglazes. To visually activate the smooth surface of the clay, I layered different colors of terra sigillata, then sanded down through the layers with superfine steel wool to reveal colors and create patterns. After lightly dampening the surface in small sections at a time, I'd buff the sig to a sheen with a piece of plastic bag. I found butterfly wings and shells endless sources of inspiration for different pallets of color and pattern variations.

To become more informed about the human body, I began to study what we could call "figure sculpture's greatest hits": the Cycladic figures, Roman and Greek statues, and the work of Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, Auguste Rodin, Alberto Giacometti, Manuel Neri, Stephen DeStaebler (where are the women?), and Louise Bourgeois. I also learned, from the cast plaster figures of Pompeii, how the most unplanned, defensive, or helpless gestures can convey devastating emotional impact through the mysterious power of body language.

Adrian Arleo,
***Nest Arms*, 2004**
30 x 27 x 27 in.
(76.2 x 68.6 x 68.6 cm)
Coil-built low-fire sculpture clay body; electric fired, bisque cone 06; low-fire glazes, electric fired, cone 04; wax encaustic, wire
PHOTO BY CHRIS AUTIO

Adrian Arleo,
***Embodiment*, 2004**
23 x 17 x 10 1/2 in.
(58.4 x 43.2 x 26.7 cm)
Coil-built low-fire sculpture clay body, electric fired, bisque cone 06; press-molded hands; low-fire glazes, electric fired, cone 04; cherry wood, steel rod
PHOTOS BY CHRIS AUTIO

For several semesters my grad school imagery went through some awkward transitions. The sea slugs grew more "humanesque" but held on stubbornly to forms and coloration that referred to an undersea environment. Not till I allowed the human form to emerge undisguised did the content begin to come clear, and narratives begin to unfold.

Solving Sculpting Problems

When I worked with the human figure, issues of scale immediately came into play. To deal with life-size forms and the limitations of my kiln size, I learned about sectioning pieces by cutting them apart in such a way as to make the line as inconspicuous as possible. Some artists—Viola Frey, for example—use blocklike sections as a part of the composition and content of the work. I prefer to hide the sections within the form and texture. With standing figures it's easiest to make the division at the waist, or under the buttocks around to the groin. With a seated figure, cutting off the head around the jaw and along the hairline is usually a good way to camouflage the line. To avoid distortion of the form when it's taken apart, the clay should be quite stiff before sectioning it. Laying the sections on thick foam rubber helps keep the shape intact while a large flange, or lip (its size depends on the size of the piece), is built into the inside of the top piece. The flange needs to fit securely into the lower section.

Another useful tool for building and displaying tall, narrow, stacked, or tippy pieces is a steel base and threaded steel rod. I like to use a simple design in which the rod is removable for shipping. A short piece of threaded steel rod is welded to the center of a steel plate, and a suitably sized connector nut is used to attach any length of threaded steel rod to the short piece that was welded on. Most often the rod needs to go only about halfway up inside the piece. When building a piece on a rod, cover it with a thin layer of newspaper so that if the clay shrinks, the piece won't get stuck. Internal clay "spokes" are used to hold the sculpture in place on the rod.

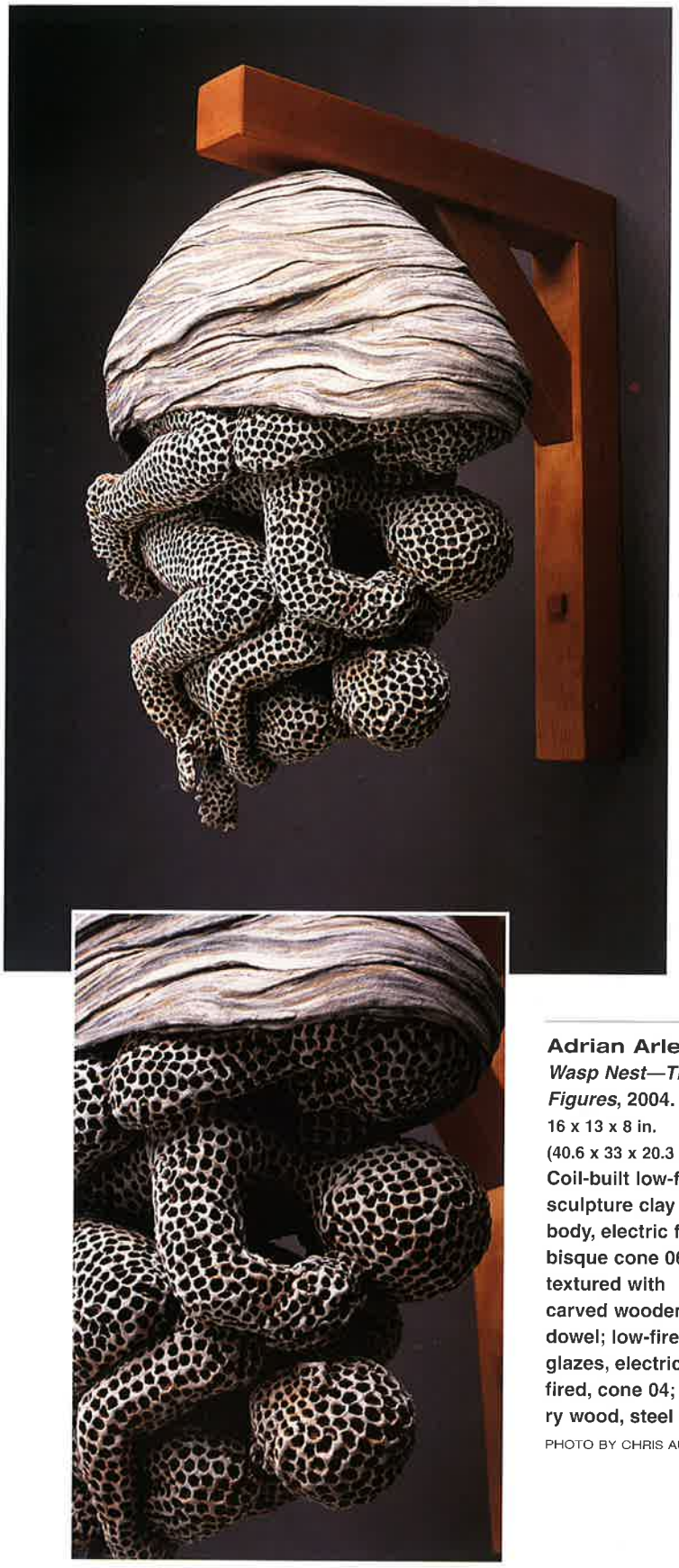
In building large pieces I've found that by using fairly stiff clay and a consistent wall thickness (¾ to 1 inch [1.9 to 2.5 cm]), and by carefully pacing the drying of the figure, I can solve slumping and cracking problems. This in turn allows the forms to be more structurally complex. And, as shown in the next section, using coils lengthwise for legs and arms is a more efficient way to create narrow forms. Lengthwise coils also aid in the angling and positioning process. (Adding coils round and round, horizontally, can lead to sagging and cracking.) Making small, internal, crescent-shaped clay support buttresses also helps stabilize the forms.

Sources and Inspiration

I usually begin a piece with pencil sketches of ideas, then refine the image and work out three-dimensional issues through maquettes. As far as anatomy goes, I'm of the same mind as Nathan Goldstein, who, in his book *Figure Drawing*, writes, "We should recognize that the artist, unlike the anthropologist, does better to support his perceptions with intuition than with calipers." I'm concerned with making the figure accurate enough that nothing is proportionally distracting, but not so obsessively rendered that "life-likeness" or "accuracy" becomes the main focus. I consistently prefer to make heads proportionally on the small side, because I find large heads awkward looking. I probably make legs a little too long, hands sometimes small, sometimes big, depending on the content of the particular piece. I seem to start with feet too small. Almost all of my pieces have a tendency to grow as I work.

Of all the features of the body, it's the face that most intrigues and challenges me. During the 20 years I've worked with the figure, the faces have moved steadily from vagueness toward increasing specificity and recognizability. The eyes, when I was starting out, were undefined; they have since evolved from being closed, to being downward turned, to being open and forthrightly gazing.

I almost always play with how specific to get with facial features. I prefer facial expressions to be quiet,



Adrian Arleo, *Wasp Nest—Three Figures*, 2004.
16 x 13 x 8 in. (40.6 x 33 x 20.3 cm). Coil-built low-fire sculpture clay body, electric fired, bisque cone 06; textured with carved wooden dowel; low-fire glazes, electric fired, cone 04; cherry wood, steel rod.
PHOTO BY CHRIS AUTIO

introverted, or even somewhat blank, suggesting that the person is experiencing an internal moment rather than trying to actively confront the viewer. In my most recent body of work I've swung back and forth between very specific faces (including a portrait of my daughter in *Honey Child I*) to no features at all (as in *Wasp Nest—Three Figures*, or the standing figure *Embodiment*).

The Psyche As Form

In recent pieces I've been thinking about the concepts of *recognition* and *identification*. Something in us naturally responds to a *specific* visage. In recognizing a face that is "familiar," empathy is a frequent response. Yet there is a reversal at play here too. Sometimes a work of art taps more deeply into us when it has no specific features, and so resonates as an archetype.

My main conceptual concern in working with the figure doesn't stem from a fascination with the construction and problem-solving process. Nor is it just the beauty of the human form that holds me. What continues to absorb me is how, by rendering the physical body, one can convey, or at least suggest, a remarkable array of nonphysical, internal, ephemeral, spiritual, emotional, or psychological experiences. I use the human form to get at the human being and human nature, not at the body as an end in itself.

I find the nesting and nurturing instincts of wild creatures to be a powerful creative role model.

For years I've worked with themes of metamorphosis. Arms, legs, or heads are transforming into other creatures, perhaps as we ourselves are transformed in our fantasies, intuitions, and dreams. In most of these pieces I feel that the animal, bird, or other creature has been hidden within the human and is emerging in a way that suggests the person's internal state or character. In some cases the revealed state is benign; in others it's ambiguous; in still others it's deeply disturbing.

Tangential to the metamorphosis theme are references to textures and shapes found in nature. In order to avoid a trivial fascination with "nakedness" and tap into more poetic renderings of the human body, I've refrained from creating fleshlike surfaces and have instead developed a wide range of textures that suggest organic and inorganic substances. Deep scorations in the clay can suggest wood or water; porous, open surfaces can allude to rock, coral, or beehives. Many of these textures are created by pushing into the clay with simple wooden tools. Some tools are carved to create specific effects, as with my wasp's nest comb. For this texture, I whittled the end of a wooden dowel into a hexagon, then carefully aligned and pressed 1/4-inch-deep (6 mm) holes into almost leather-hard clay. Glazes can give added depth when used as washes and/or layers. I gravitate toward dry, opaque glazes that don't show brush strokes; the glazes listed at the end of this chapter are old favorites that work well together. The Sand Dry base glaze is excellent as a wash in textured areas. I wipe the surface clean of glaze and apply a coat or two of the Stony Lithium base glaze over it. The Sand Dry saturates through and gives wonderful depth to the texture.

After the final firing of *Gathering*, wax encaustic was melted in a double boiler and quickly painted on some areas of the piece while the wax was still flowing on the brush. A heat gun was used to further melt and adhere it to the surface. The wax has a thick satin quality that complements the dry surface of the Stony Lithium base glaze and gives it a more finished look, with areas highlighted with its sheen. The birds were first fired with terra sigillata as a dense base coat. Casein was painted over the fired sig to enhance the color and add a layer of translucency that mimics the shimmer of feathers.

In recent years I've focused on nests of different kinds. This interest stems from a desire to find refuge and solace through intimate observation, stillness, and empathy with, and in, the other-than-

Adrian Arleo,
Plumage, 2004
21 x 15½ x 15 in.
(53.3 x 39.4 x 38.1 cm)
Coil-built low-fire sculpture clay body, electric fired, bisque cone 06; press-molded hands; low-fire glazes, electric fired, cone 04
PHOTO BY CHRIS AUTIO

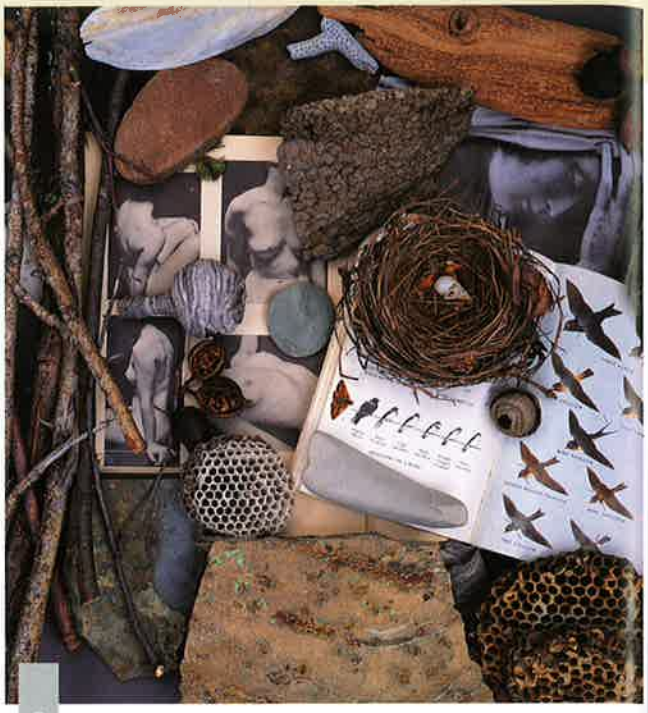
human world. Again, a certain evolution has been at play. I was first drawn to nest imagery in 1989, when I was considering becoming pregnant. When this procreative energy welled up, I suddenly saw my own body as an abode—a place of nurture for another—and a group of human/nest sculptures was my response. The nest imagery I've been drawn to more recently, in contrast, comes less from my own experience and more from observing the procreative drive in the natural world. I find the nesting and nurturing instincts of wild creatures to be a powerful creative role model. It also reassures me that creation knows exactly what it's doing, even when human beings seem not to.

ADRIAN ARLEO

TECHNIQUE: COIL

Adrian Arleo, ***Gathering*** **(detail), 2004**
PHOTO BY CHRIS AUTIO

1 A rough sketch and a small model of the piece are made to refine the idea and work out three-dimensional problems.



2 The artist's source material

3 One-inch-diameter (2.5 cm) coils are extruded then rolled to compress the stretched clay. I usually extrude about 25 pounds (11.4 kg) of clay at a time and allow the coils to lay out on the work surface to stiffen up to the right firmness. For me, that means the clay will be firm enough that I can quickly build a large form without any sagging. The coils are then wrapped in plastic and occasionally sprayed with water to maintain the right level of moisture.

4 To start a seated figure, the bottom of the piece is made from a pounded-out slab about 3/4 inch (1.9 cm) thick.

5 I put the slab on several sheets of newspaper so that when the piece dries, it won't stick to the work surface. The edges of the clay are curled up and reinforced with coils—like buttresses—to help support the area; later, when the piece gets larger, there'll be a lot of weight and stress here. Other areas of stress, such as where the *glutaeus maximus* meet, need to be reinforced as well to avoid splitting apart.

6 This figure is going to have one leg resting as in a cross-legged position, and the other leg will have the knee drawn up. To begin the leg that's lower, the underside of the thigh is first created with coils extended out lengthwise, with a support block and foam rubber under them.

7 "Bridges" of clay connect the thigh to the stomach.

8 When using the coils lengthwise, I work back and forth from one side to the other, coming up the sides and meeting in a V shape. Later, smaller coils will be added that come around and form the knee.

9 The V is filled in by pressing the two sides together and filling it with a coil. Scoring is a good idea in these places.

10 At this point, I'm working on three cylindrical forms, rotating from one to another to keep the weight balanced. A thick "spine" is added to create a more rigid back; it will help support the curve of the form later.

11 A hole or two needs to be cut out of the bottom of the form to help relieve stress and aid in drying. Without holes, large cracks can occur across the flat surface during drying and firing. When a hole is cut out, it's important to compress its edge with my finger to ensure that cracks don't develop. I make sure not to compress the edges by pushing down, making them thin and papery. Instead, I push in to thicken them.

12 The form can be altered at any point. Here, the buttocks are enlarged by first making a low horizontal cut, then, from the inside, the form is pushed out, scored, and filled with a coil. A rubber rib and paddle are used to sculpt the surface.

13 Paddling the thigh. While working out the leg with the knee drawn up, the thigh was coiled at an angle to help keep the curve of the form. The back of the knee area was left out because the calf will be against it.

14 Building up the back of the torso, keeping the weight balanced with the legs. It's very important that I pay attention to the balance of the form. If too much leg is built before there's enough weight in the torso, the form can tip and rock forward, distorting the bottom of the piece and messing up the proportions. This is particularly critical when building a figure with both legs drawn up. It's a good idea to keep the edges that aren't being worked on wrapped in plastic.

15 Supports inside the back

16 To create the lower part of the leg, I add coils lengthwise from the back of the knee area down to the work surface, extending several out to form the bottom of the foot. Add more lengthwise coils to form the calf muscle; continue around to meet approximately at the shin.

18 To close off the form, I score the two sides and add a scored coil, then use my hands or a tool to smooth the area. At this point there's enough weight in the legs to cause stress on some joints; I check to make sure there's no cracking or separation where the thighs meet the stomach or hip. If I see cracks, I score the area, add a coil, and compress the surface. I check the interior for cracking too. Sometimes, due to the weight of the wet clay, cracks can start inside the bottom of the figure. If they do, I compress, score, and add a coil.

17 Modeling the calf by pushing the clay in and out. I add more clay to any areas that get thin.

19 The foot is formed from the lengthwise coils extending out from the bottom of the leg. These coils make up the bottom of the foot. More coils are added to make the sides...

20 ...then smaller ones are added to bridge over and fill down to the toes. In this way, a general foot "wedge" is formed. Later, the definition of toes and bones will be modeled and carved.

22 The shoulders are covered from front to back. Note the spine support up the back; later it will continue up into the neck as well. The shoulders are reinforced with buttresses too. With the shoulders covered, more definition can be given to the torso. Breasts will come later.

21 When the back is getting tall, I cut a V out of each armpit area to start to define the broadness of the back and shoulders.

23 The lower half of the second leg is started, as with the other, using lengthwise coils.

24 More coils are added around and down into the foot. At this point the detail on the feet is carved and modeled with wooden tools.

25 While the armholes are still open, the breasts are made by cutting two open U shapes into the chest. I position where they'll be by drawing the lines first, then cutting and roughing out one breast at a time so as not to weaken the chest structure. I push the flap out from the inside and start to give it some shape from the outside.

26 Scoring the edges (the clay of the torso may be a bit drier than the new clay) and adding coils to form the breast.

27 After the breasts are done, a structural grid is coiled on the inside of the chest (two horizontal and two vertical coils, one or two coils tall) to add rigidity to the wall so that when the head is added, the chest won't sink in and collapse. This is particularly important when the head leans forward or looks down.

28 Like the legs, the arms are made with lengthwise coils, which is helpful not only for composing the position and proportion of the arm but also aids in making the form more streamlined and easy to adjust. When the undersides and sides are done, the arm and hand will be closed the same way as were the leg and foot.

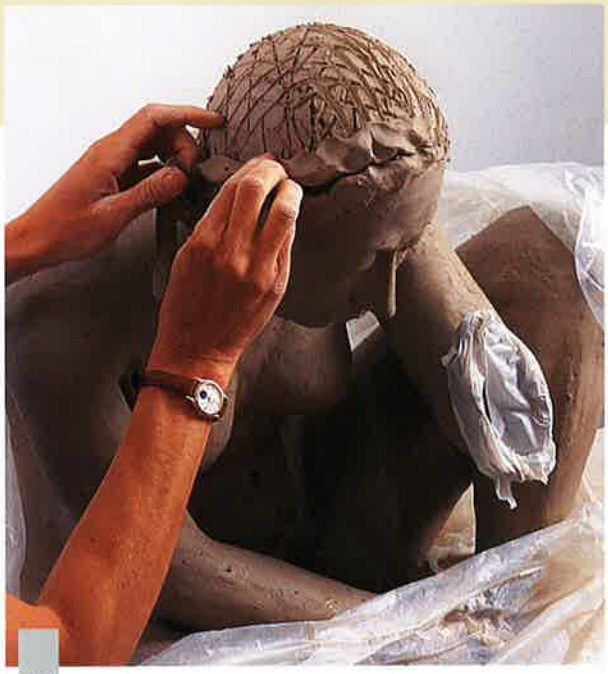
29 The head is made separately by starting with a pinched bowl form making up a "skull cap" the same thickness as the rest of the figure; coils are then added, and a general head/skull shape is formed. The benefit of making the head separately is that it can be held up to the body and easily altered to the right proportion before it's attached. I find this to be much easier than building the head, from the chin up, directly on the piece.

30 The neck is elongated so that it will fit inside the head. It must be left uncovered to stiffen up while the face is being worked out; otherwise, it will sag with the weight of the head. Since facial features usually take some time, the body is wrapped in plastic to keep it from drying out.

31 Features such as eye sockets are pushed in, and the cheeks and chin are pushed out. The nose and lips are made from small coils added to the scored surface, then defined with tools. I find eyes to be the toughest feature to get right. I often wait to finish them until after the head is attached to the body and I can orient them to fit the overall gesture and feeling of the piece. I used a photo as a reference for the face because I really liked the simplicity and tranquility of the features.

32 Attaching the head. The inside of the jaw is heavily scored, then inserted over the elongated neck, which has been scored on the outside. The top of the head is then cut off, and the interior neck is pressed against the inside of the head for reinforcing the connection. Coils are then added around the jaw to create a smooth transition and add strength.

33 The top of the skull can be scored and reattached if the head seems to be the right size and shape. Often, however, I need to alter the shape. This can be done in a variety of ways. Here, a V shape is cut out to make the head smaller; small coils are added to the scored, pressed-together edges, and the overall form is paddled and sculpted with tools. Finally, the hole is coiled in and paddled a little more. When paddling, support the head so that you don't weaken the neck or alter its position.



34 Hair is created by scoring the scalp and adding smaller coils. If the hair will be very thick in some areas, it's a good idea to use a thin tool to poke holes through the thick spots to aerate the clay and allow moisture to escape more easily when drying and firing. This aerating technique can be used anywhere on the piece wherever I think the clay may have gotten a little too thick (with most sculpture bodies, more than 1 inch [2.5 cm]). The holes' outsides can be smoothed over.

35 If an air pocket is created between the neck and the hair, I poke holes through to the inside of the piece.

36 To fit the piece in the kiln, I cut off the head at the jaw line, first incising the line before cutting it with a clean fettling knife. I prefer to cut straight in rather than at an angle. Due to the angle of this head, supports had to be used to keep the head from falling forward. These blocks will need to stay in place for the drying process to ensure that the head doesn't tip and distort the neck. The head will be epoxied in place after all firings are done.

37 Cleaning up the edges and trimming the inside of the neck so there'll be room for a lip, or flange. I score the inside edge of the rim of the head and add coils to create a flange that's long enough to secure the head in place.

38 Adding toilet paper to the rim so the clay won't stick together, then putting the head back on. I use a rib or wooden tool to clean up the connection, which may entail taking the head off a few times to shave off clay from the flange for a proper fit. I gently lift the head up and down to make sure it's easy to remove then clean its edges of any thin overhangs or crumbs that would later break off and look sloppy. I dry the piece with the head on, checking it every now and then to make sure it doesn't shrink so much that it sticks. After the piece is glazed and finished, the head can be epoxied on permanently or left removable so that the sculpture may be shipped in a smaller crate.

39 The second hand on this piece is made separately by attaching a clump of coils together, then carving the fingers with a wooden tool.

40 The hand is attached by tapering and scoring the wrist so it will fit inside the scored, open end of the arm. Coils are then added to secure the joint and create a smooth transition.

41 Since the head had to be sectioned to fit in the kiln, the hand is also too high and must be removed. The least noticeable place to make this section is at the elbow. The arm will be epoxied back on after the final firing. The inside of the cut is textured with incised lines to give the epoxy something to grab onto.

42 This piece is textured with little globs of clay meant to imitate the surface of cliff swallow mud nests. A slurry is made up of dry, crushed clay mixed with vinegar and Patch-A-Tatch, a ceramic mender made by Duncan. Little balls of clay are dipped into the slurry, then pressed onto the scored surface. The slurry helps to create a more natural, irregular-looking surface.

43 Birds are pinched and carved from solid clay, then hollowed by sticking a thin wooden tool down the length of the body to aid in drying and firing. Holes are made for the legs and feet, which will be created out of wire (not to be fired) and painted and epoxied to the piece after the last firing.

44 The piece is now ready to dry. The arm will dry on a piece of foam rubber, and the head will stay in place, on the supports.

Adrian Arleo,
***Gathering*, 2004**
25 x 23 x 22 in.
(63.5 x 58.4 x 55.9 cm)
Coil-built stoneware; electric cone 06; glaze cone 04; wax encaustic on figure; terra sigillata, casein paint, and wire on birds

PHOTO BY CHRIS AUTIO

Stony Lithium Base Glaze

This glaze is very dry and works well alone (as a white base), with colorants, or layered with other glazes. Try the glaze over a dark, glossy one that has been applied in a textured area. Fire to cone 06–05.

Lithium carbonate	15.6
EPK	22
Flint	45
Bentonite	3.7
Ferro Frit 3110	13.7
Total	**100**

Colorants

Gray

Mason Stain 6500 Sage Gray	2

Brown

Iron chromate	5

Low-Fire White Sculpture Clay Body

Fire to cone 06–04. Due to the large amount of fire clay in it, this clay body can be fired to higher temperatures. It has been known to do well in anagama firings reaching cone 10 to 11. However, it's always smart to do a test first.

Greenstripe or AP Green fire clay	36
OM4 ball clay	27
EPK	9
Talc	10
Wollastonite	9
Flint	9
Total	**100**
Add	
Fine grog	10
Medium grog	15
Nylon fiber	30–40 grams

Sand Dry Base Glaze

This glaze is good for using as a wash in texture; it's compatible with Stony Lithium Base Glaze, below. Fire to cone 06–04.

Gerstley borate (or substitute)	50
Nepheline syenite	17
Alumina hydrate	33
Total	**100**

Colorants

Lighter Blue-Gray

Copper carbonate	3.75
Cobalt carbonate	0.85

Very Dark Blue-Black

Copper carbonate	3.75
Cobalt carbonate	3.75
Iron chromate	1.85

Chestnut Brown

Red iron oxide	18
Manganese dioxide	8

Lighter Brown

Iron chromate	13.5

Dark Green

Copper carbonate	18
Iron chromate	8

Nylon fiber in the clay body