

Adrian Arleo LOLO, MONTANA

As a child I always enjoyed making things. It's been part of my trajectory from the very beginning; I loved to draw, paint, sew, and create doodads with whatever was around. My family has a history of women artists, though it has only been my generation who has worked professionally at it. My mother has always painted and worked with different media. Seeing my strong interest in art, she signed me up for various art classes outside of school starting when I was quite young. In my teen years, I continued with extra-curricular classes in jewelry, enameling, photography, life drawing, and two-dimensional design. When I was about thirteen, my older brother took a pottery class and brought some clay home. The initial attraction to the material may have come from my love of the little glass and china animals I collected. I would sit on my bed with a wad of clay and make small figurines and animals with as much detail as my fingers could manage. I offered the most choice pieces to my parents, then decided to sell the rest at a local boutique gift shop. Selling my "work" was not a new concept to me; starting at the age of seven or eight, I set up a roadside stand in the summers and sold an assortment of crafty items ranging from beaded and shell necklaces to painted rocks. It was a good business; I made \$13

in one day and was stunned by that amount of money. There was a kid across the street who occasionally sold lemonade. One day, our marketing strategy was to pull a long thin log across the road as a speed bump to slow prospective shoppers down. In hindsight, it was not a terribly thoughtful approach.

What I've always loved most is making things; I was very fortunate to discover that people happened to want the things I made. This kind of encouragement, both from my family and from the public, helped create a sense of myself as an artist at a young age, and I've never thought to do anything else.

As I got a little older, I discovered how much more engaging things became when they had some kind of emotional content. This became my motivating force: creating objects that could make me feel something mysterious, and had a story to tell. Working in clay felt like the right medium for this kind of exploration. When I entered Pitzer College (BA 1983), it was clear that I would major in art with a focus in ceramics. I soon added anthropology as a second major. Studying the art of a range of cultures showed me how their symbolism and narratives conveyed the basic essence of what it is to be human and reiterated universal core themes. When



PHOTOS CHRIS AUTO

Above: Arleo working on *Apiary Twins*, 21½ in. (55 cm) in height, clay, glaze, wax encaustic, 2009; the piece on the left is *Glade*, 28 in. (71 cm) in height, clay, glaze, wax encaustic. Opposite page: *Turtles/Transitions*, each 36 in. (91 cm) in length, clay, glaze, wax encaustic, 2009. Collection of Harborview Medical Center, Seattle, Washington.

I went on to graduate school at the Rhode Island School of Design (MFA 1986), I continued with ceramic sculpture and soon became drawn to working specifically with the human form. I started to create a fusion of the figure with texture and imagery from the natural world. I was aiming at something like a more feminine take on Michelangelo's unfinished *Slaves*, blended with the colors and textures of a coral reef environment. I discovered that by rendering the body with references to water, stone, flora, and fauna, I could allude to something beyond the physical—something more emotional/spiritual/psychological/ephemeral. At the time, I didn't know that these were themes I would work with for the next 23 years (and counting).

After focusing on this kind of work for over two decades, how do I keep the creative juices flowing and the interest still alive? A trip to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City is always a great shot in the arm. But here at home, my ideas come mainly through observation and curiosity, taking note of what's around me: wasp nests, bird tracks in snow, the eyes in aspen tree bark, the limbs of trees, deer grazing in the fields, all these things are analogous to our own experiences with life cycles of birth and growth, reproduction and nurturing impulses, defense mechanisms, aging, death, decay. I've gone through my own cycles of pregnancy and birth, the raising of kids, seeing them start to leave the nest, and my getting older, imagery that I've used in the past takes on new meaning in the present. For instance, about eight years ago I made a portrait of my adolescent daughter in a honey comb texture. The choice of honey comb as a surface for her at that time was a metaphor for her coming of age, references to blossoming and fertility. Since then, I've continued with the honeycomb series. With the onset of colony collapse disorder in honey bees, this work suggests new, more uneasy meanings. With the changing state of the world, I feel a greater and greater urgency to remember and express how we are all connected, all dependent on the same air, water, soil.

My family and I have lived in Montana for sixteen years now. Being in a comparatively remote part of the country has been inspiring to my work in that I've often relied on nature for inspiration, but it has also forced me to ship all of my work out to larger cities with active art markets. As one of the poorer states in the country, and a state in which *sculpture* tends to mean bronze wildlife and bucking broncos, it would be tough to depend on Montana's art market to support an artist like me. Having a website might seem like a useful tool to market my sculpture, but I've never been a fan of trying to promote my own work. Because of



this, I've relied on galleries to represent me for almost twenty five years, and they keep their websites up to date with my current and available work. If someone were to Google my name, a lot of sites come up. For the most part, working with galleries has been a good arrangement and I generally work with two to three in major population centers, producing a solo show about once a year. My galleries also take my work to the SOFA (Sculptural Objects and Functional Art) fair in Chicago, New York, and soon in Santa Fe. This has expanded my collectors base and given the work a lot of visibility.

I think it's important to point out that what has driven the sale of my work has not been my own studying of marketing strategies, creating a website, researching advertising, and so on. It's been focussing steadily, year in and year out, on making work that engages me on the deepest possible level. That engagement, in turn, has drawn the gallery interest that's led to sales. In my experience, my enthusiasm for the work itself drives the enthusiasm of my galleries and collectors. It's also that depth of engagement and enthusiasm that enables me to work the long hours in my studio. In a wacked-out economy and a culture full of spin and hype, it's easy to get confused and overlook this basic equation.

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Snyderman-Works Gallery, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
www.snyderman-works.com

Jane Sauer Gallery, Santa Fe, New Mexico
www.jsauergallery.com

Grover/Thurston Gallery, Seattle, Washington
www.groverthurston.com