

# It's All <sup>Oh</sup> ~~in~~ Your Head



Ceramics by Sara Swink

# AT THIS MOMENT IN TIME

we see everything in  
light of COVID-19. It's  
the current paradigm.  
Yesterday it was tigers  
at the Bronx Zoo with  
the virus. Just days ago I  
posted pictures of one of  
my ceramic tigers wearing  
a face mask. Works  
started months before  
take on new meaning.

*Working at Home* (2020)  
12" x 5" x 3"



My animal figures are often stand-ins for

## the human condition.



They offer layered meaning to emotional states, express an instinctual response to things. The use of quirkiness and humor is a way of distancing a bit. Each head contains a mirror maze of self-reflection. Please don't try to pin me down on any one point of view; the truth is, it's all kind of complicated and paradoxical.

*Marmalade* (2020)  
18" x 13" x 10"



*Frazier* (2020)  
14" x 15" x 9"



*Big Cat, Little Cat* (2020)  
8" x 10" x 4.5"



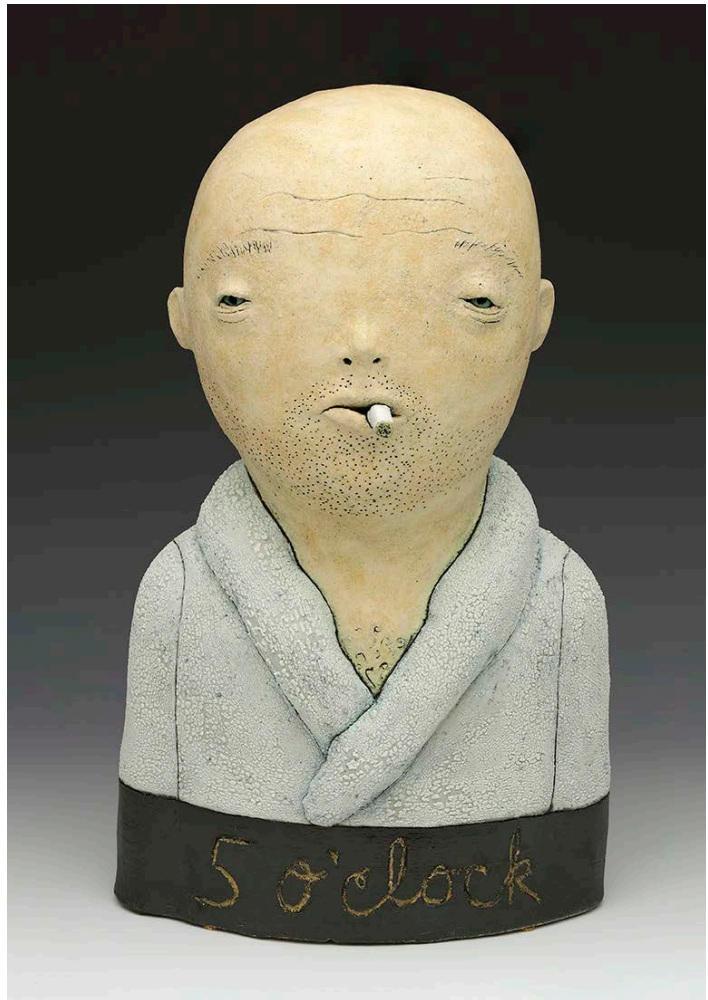
How do I get all of that out of a childlike lion head with human-like teeth? “Frasier” is kind of a gestalt or container of memory strands of my sometimes embarrassing, sexualized alcoholic father combined with strands of my playful, lighthearted muse of a daughter. All of the above are aspects of myself, opposing introjects, and the juxtaposition is how I process discomfort and difficulty—with



SPOONFUL  
OF  
HUMOR.

Some call that “whimsy”, but I try not to use that word. One of my professors told me early on, we don’t do whimsy here.

Cursed forever.



5 O'Clock (2020)  
15" x 9" x 7"



*Little Marmalade, Circus Tiger (2020)*  
7" x 6" x 5"

## I'm a cat person.

I identify with cats, purring when they want something, aloof other times, solitary creatures, always watching, waiting. The big cats I've done here, like all my work, are deeply personal. The personal, my own knowing truth, is what seems the most honest to me, and yet it's *personal*. It has to be held in reserve. The personal is my preferred level of operating: it's what I care about in relationships. I'd rather take on the world one person at a time.



*Standing Tiger (2020)*  
5" x 9" x 4"



*Blue Tiger* (2020)  
12" x 8" x 6"

*Hungry* (2020)  
3" x 8" x 3"



*Leo* (2020)  
12" x 11" x 10"





*Me Thinking of You  
Thinking of Me (2019)*  
11" x 5" x 4"

My art is how I document my life, albeit in fragments and innuendo. I respond to impulses, like something in a collage, I

PLUNGE  
ahead

and make pieces that resonate, I look at what I've done and process it by writing about it and sometimes get insights and understanding on personal or universal levels. Each piece reflects a constellation of feelings and thoughts made manifest. I try not to judge it (though I'm not successful) any more than I would judge some thoughts in my head (not successful at that either). It's a practice. I just keep making, just as I keep breathing and eating, exercising and sleeping. It's how I process my life: in clay.



*Feeling Foxy (2020)*  
5" x 9" x 3"

While following

## the threads of my psyche,

I also experiment with ceramic surface techniques, and the experiments just get folded right in, which is why sometimes a body of work contains some rather far flung ideas and looks, and one body of work transitions into another.

I'll just chalk it up to imagination, a lust for novelty, and a lack of oversight.



*Jilly* (2020)  
16" x 5" x 5"



*Kitty Queen* (2020)  
13" x 5" x 5"



*Red Gloves* (2020)  
12" x 4" x 5"



Sweet One (2020)  
9" x 7" x 7"



Reverse of Sweet One (2020)  
9" x 7" x 7"



Chicken Head (2020)  
11" x 11" x 5"



Reverse of Chicken Head (2020)  
11" x 11" x 5"

# I dig around in my inner world:

memories, dreams, reflections a la Jung, and look at how it weaves with the zeitgeist. This comes naturally, and I try not to judge my self-involvement nor my ceramic creations too harshly (though I do). The clay grounds me and makes the exploration concrete. It turns out so many of my personal ideas are universal anyway.



*Ravenous Heart* (2019)  
16" x 7" x 6"

*Berry Bowl* (2019)  
10" x 6" x 5"



This piece, “Democratic Process,” is

MORE OUTER-WORLD,

an anomaly in this body of work, made during the time leading up to the impeachment debacle. It describes what the group experience can be like: overwhelming, disorderly, chaotic, out of control. Yet we’re all in the same boat, generally trying to get somewhere.

This body of work reflects my response to all these things, the messy aspects of life. I’m calling it “It’s All in/ On Your Head”, which I might have called it a year ago, but which

has a new meaning and context in the age of corona virus.

It functions on a personal level, *it’s all in your head*, i.e., you’re imagining things, which implies you’re delusional, (read “it’s a hoax”), but looked at a bit differently, might simply mean you’re imaginative. And *it’s on your head*, you’re responsible, each one of us is responsible, it’s up to me. You can see how this could also be applied to the mishandling of the pandemic by The White House, but I’d rather not go into that now.



*Democratic Process* (2019)  
13” x 18” x 9”

# Sara Swink: My life in clay.

I make clay human and animal figures with a psychological stance. My hand-built sculptural work imparts ideas through stories, often with a humorous edge. I've always loved animals and enjoy expressing human foibles through the animal persona. I like to form fast in a gritty sculpture clay, incise into the clay, bisque fire, finish



*Tat Girl with Lemur*  
(2020)  
9" x 4" x 3"



Clay Circle  
STUDIO

Sara Swink  
Clay Circle Studio  
971-271-0480  
sara.swink@gmail.com  
www.saraswink.com

with oxides, underglazes and glazes, then fire to cone 5. My ideas derive most often from a process methodology, which I teach in workshops that employs simple and accessible techniques like collage and doodling to unleash the unconscious. Then I try to stay out of the way, letting ideas flow, selecting the ones that most resonate to bring into clay. I also get ideas from what I'm reading, a phrase or concept that triggers an idea for a piece. I sketch a lot, and one piece often leads to more ideas. There is a thread of personal narrative that runs through all my ceramic work. Reflection and writing help me to recognize and make some sense of the progression. It's the process of inner exploration that keeps me moving forward.

My love of clay began at the age of 8 with the encouragement of a neighbor who was a potter. In high school, I learned to throw on the potter's wheel, hand build, and mix glazes. Many years later I returned to ceramics with a class at Palo Alto Art Center, followed by a workshop with Coeleen Kiebert. Her workshops fuse artmaking and ceramics with the psychology of the creative individual. I was invited to teach this approach, and at the same time pursued an academic art education in art history, ceramics, drawing, printmaking and foundry work at Foothill College, San Jose State University, and San Francisco State University through the first year of graduate study in ceramics. I taught at a number of California venues and in my own studio, while participating in regional shows. In 2006, I moved to the Portland area, where I established Clay Circle Studio and continue to show and teach. In 2013, I was featured on Oregon Public Broadcasting's "Oregon Art Beat".