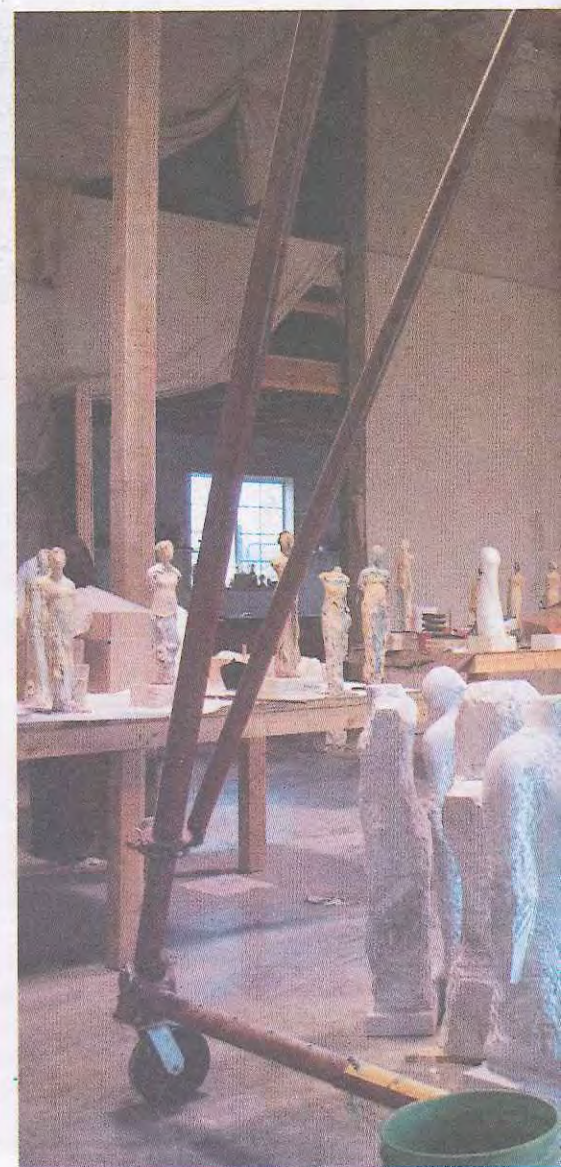


CLAY is very
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It's like DRAWING,
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straight FROM my
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— Claire McArdle



ANCIENT & OF THE MOMENT

THE SCULPTURE OF CLAIRE McARDLE



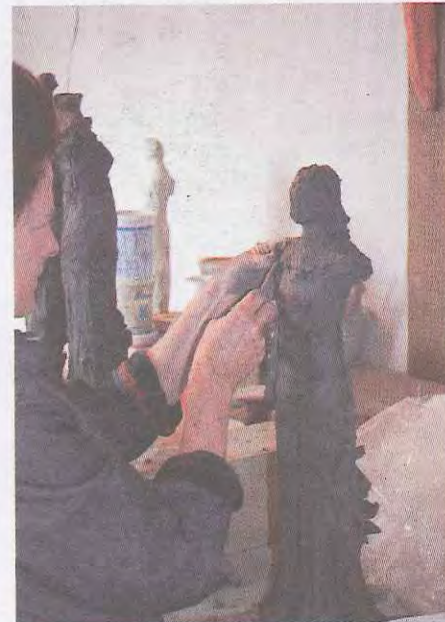
The work of Colorado-based sculptor Claire McArdle is at once timeless and contemporary. Drawing on ancient and modern sources of inspiration, McArdle fashions stoic, sensual, and exotic figures in clay, bronze, and stone. A former grade-school art instructor, McArdle took advantage of an opportunity in the 1980s to travel to Carrara, Italy, famous for its marble quarries, to study under master artisans. “At the time, I was teaching art and writing art curriculum for schools,” said McArdle. “I basically quit my teaching job and moved over there.”

As a child, she found great pleasure perusing works in antiquity collections in museums in her native city of Washington, D.C., and so Carrara and the surrounding Tuscan cities, with their ancient ruins, tombs, and museums, were gold mines of inspiration. “When I went to Carrara and was in the quarries, and then I went to the studios and saw the process of taking these big blocks from the mountains and all the power tools, it was kind of a big turning point,” she said. “What was great was this sort of camaraderie with people who were learning about working in marble. You have the artisans who are trained, who work in all those studios, who were the best teachers for me compared to university professors, who don’t really work in the studios with you. Between the artisans and all the sculptures from antiquity that were all around me, there’s no question that my style has evolved from a combination of all of that.”

To look at McArdle’s marble and travertine sculptures is to be reminded of museum pieces dating from archaic and classical Greek and Roman eras, still standing yet ravaged by time. The missing heads and limbs of many of her pieces are nods to how we in the modern world see work from antiquity today, but their slightly amorphous forms have a more subtle sensibility, as though McArdle finds in her inspirations a beauty that transcends the damage time has wrought.

continued on Page 41

Claire McArdle’s studio in Longmont, Colorado; opposite page, top, *Into the Light*, Calacatta marble, 24 x 7 x 7 inches; left, *Prelude Torso 11-1*, terra cotta and terra sigillata, 21 x 5 x 5 inches; individual sculpture photos by Jafe Parsons



Right, *Spirit of Ireland With Lion*, Italian travertine, 24 x 10 x 11 inches; opposite page, terra cotta works in progress





Claire McArdle, continued from Page 39

McArdle exhibits her sculptures at Darnell Fine Art in Santa Fe; her sculptures were recently featured in the gallery's exhibit *Mysterium*. She began her career in sculpting by working with clay. Before going into art education, she pursued a fine-art degree in ceramics. "I've been working in clay for over 30 years. It's a part of my blood. When I have to actually model something, I work with a few tools, but really, I only use my hands. Clay is very spontaneous. It's like drawing, in a way, it comes straight from my subconscious."

McArdle's experience with stone has influenced her process for working with clay. "I have blocks of clay prepared, almost like blocks of marble," she said. "A lot of ceramicists will build up the clay, which is called modeling, but when you work stone, it's a subtractive method. Because of working in stone all these years, now the way I work in clay is subtractive."

McArdle's ceramic pieces are made from terra cotta, drawn from original sources in Tuscany. She sources travertine, which she has used for quite a few pieces in the gallery, from Italy as well. "The travertine quarries in Italy are closer to Siena," she said. "In that area everything is made in travertine."

In general, McArdle's terra cotta pieces, though they place emphasis on the human figure, have a rougher, less refined appearance than most of her marble, travertine, and bronze. But traces of her working method are etched into those less malleable materials of stone and metal as well. "Leaving the marks of my tool is the evidence of my work," said McArdle, whose larger sculptures in stone are sometimes modeled on her smaller ceramic pieces.

A more recent series draws on McArdle's connection with animals. She created a number of horse sculptures that draw on her experience working with and riding horses but that capture the august spirit of the beasts in a way suited to her bold use of sculpture. A small travertine, *Spirit of Ireland With Lion*, alludes to Celtic spirituality and McArdle's Irish heritage. The lion is depicted resting atop an early Christian church. "Art has an aesthetic value — the ancient sculptures were all about that — but then there's art that tells a story. In my work, I'm attempting to have both. Ancient art and artifacts have always been an inspiration, but I'm blending that with my own life experiences to express my story. As a modern-day sculptor I try to have work that will resonate with somebody else's spirit." ◀

Claire McArdle's work can be seen at Darnell Fine Art, 640 Canyon Road, 984-0840.



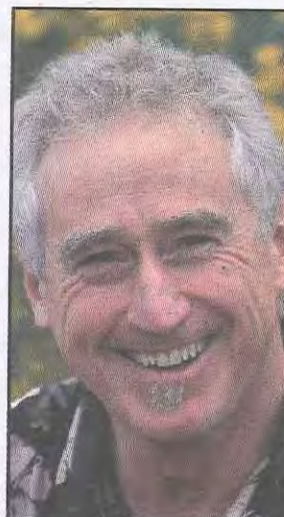
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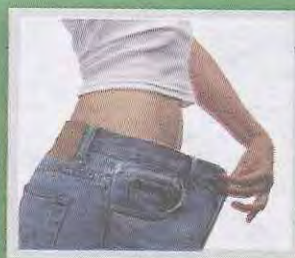
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