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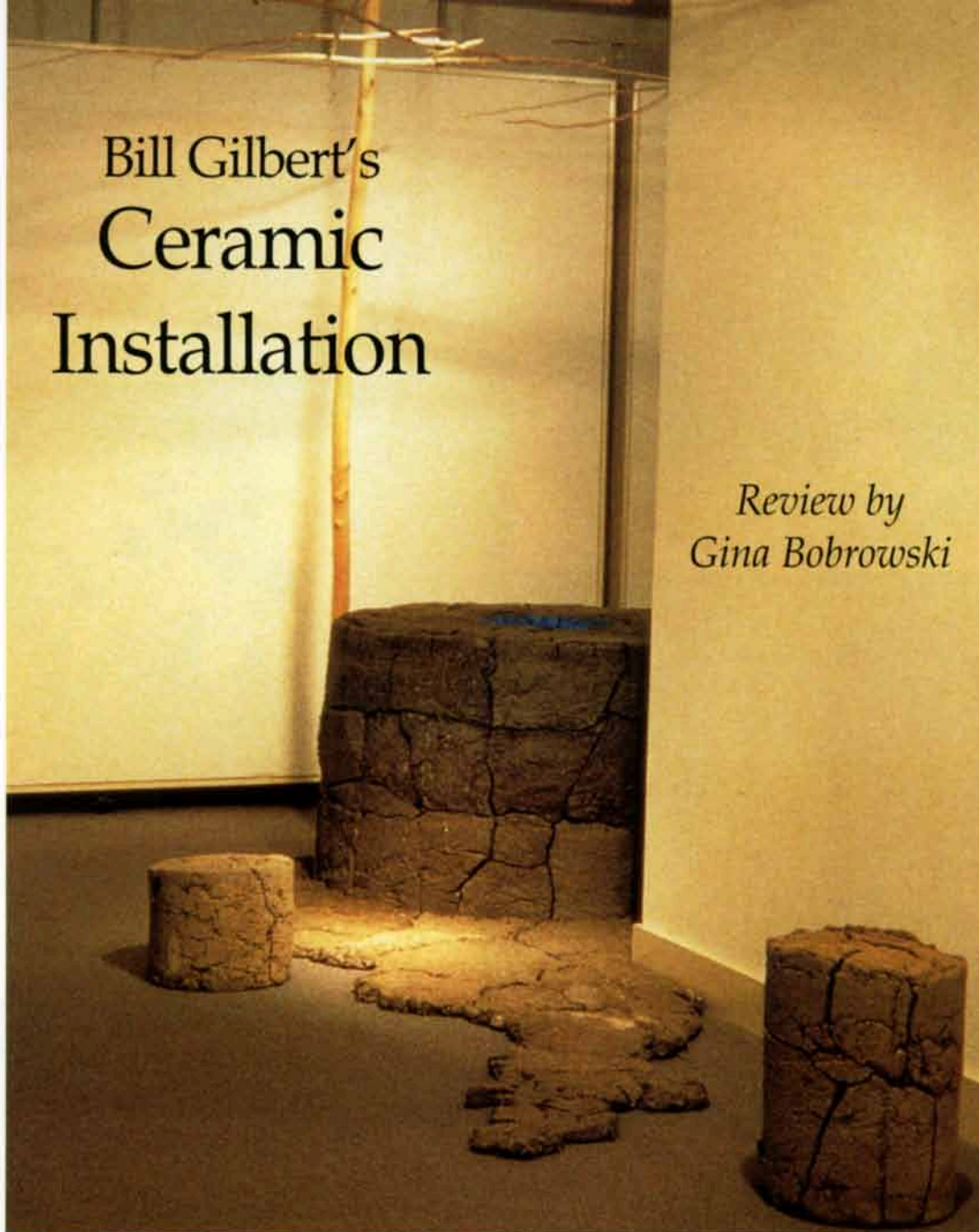
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Bill Gilbert's Ceramic Installation

*Review by
Gina Bobrowski*



BILL GILBERT'S SOLO EXHIBITION, *LINEAGE*, PRESENTS a journey through a curious geography that speaks of the relationship of human and geologic processes. The viewer moves through groupings of bare and burned aspen limbs and fused adobe forms which suggest basic shelters, water troughs and weathered columns. Video monitors, encased by earth and wood, sit at waist level atop two of the columns. These read as milestones or lanterns which light the central space of Gilbert's work. The first monitor shows a man who is engaged in daily, repetitive acts and dwarfed by the limitless space of the

desert which surrounds him. The second monitor projects what alternately appears as footage of a single man at four different ages in his life, or as four generations of men from the same family. The steady hum from the monitors, and the intermittent sounds of a man at work, provide a sense of ongoing activity in the predominant stillness of the installation.

Gilbert approaches the gallery's architecture as an interior volume which he redefines physically and contextually. Aspen limbs wind around corners and reach through walls to create an interaction between the exterior organic world and the interior man-made,



architectural one. While this could be read strictly as a comment on the relationship of humankind with nature, it also alludes to the relationship between the conscious and the subconscious intellect. Gilbert's understanding of place comes through direct participation in his immediate environment, using materials that are indigenous to his region: wood gathered in the forests of northern New Mexico and adobe created from fusing various earthen materials that are found on the artist's land. Materials are chosen for their innate qualities and metaphorical relationship to content and are treated with an economy of touch

that avoids excessive manipulation. Aspen provides a floating, linear quality. Adobe lends a sense of weight, mass and ideas of ancient cultures. The monitors represent icons of contemporary society which are surrounded by a larger environment of natural materials which place human issues in geologic perspective. The figures on the screen are miniaturised, both in the landscape they inhabit and in the environment in which the monitors are placed.

Gilbert presents a straightforward, unadorned view which looks to the natural world to put the human in perspective. Despite our human capacity to



disrupt geological processes, destroy the wilderness and deplete exhaustible resources, *Lineage* affirms that human endeavours are temporal when put into the context of natural time. Gilbert's impermanent environment promotes a sentient approach to life, where strength of character and continuity are earned through perseverance and simple acts. Meaning is attained through the reductive processes of nature, such as the cleansing principles of fire, and through the completion of basic human tasks. *Lineage* encourages us to reflect on each person's ability to gain significance through daily work, connection to others and to the greater environment that sustains us.

Gilbert describes himself as a "contemporary Western artist" who uses the formal language of video and installation to question "what is the meaning of

human presence in this vast space". His work could be defined as regional in that it shares a minimal and conceptual approach favoured by many contemporary New Mexican artists. That Gilbert is tied to a specific sense of place is indicated through his use of predominantly native materials.

However, a primarily regional interpretation of Gilbert's work would be shortsighted. Gilbert addresses broad-based issues of community, identity, time and place, with the fluid attitude towards materials, processes, structure and viewer participation that places him in the global arts community.

Gina Bobrowski is a ceramic artist from New Mexico.