

Bill Gilbert's relationship with sculpture

Materials come from the Earth

By Dottie Indyke

Bill Gilbert's sculptures beckon the viewer closer if only to determine the origins of the pieces.

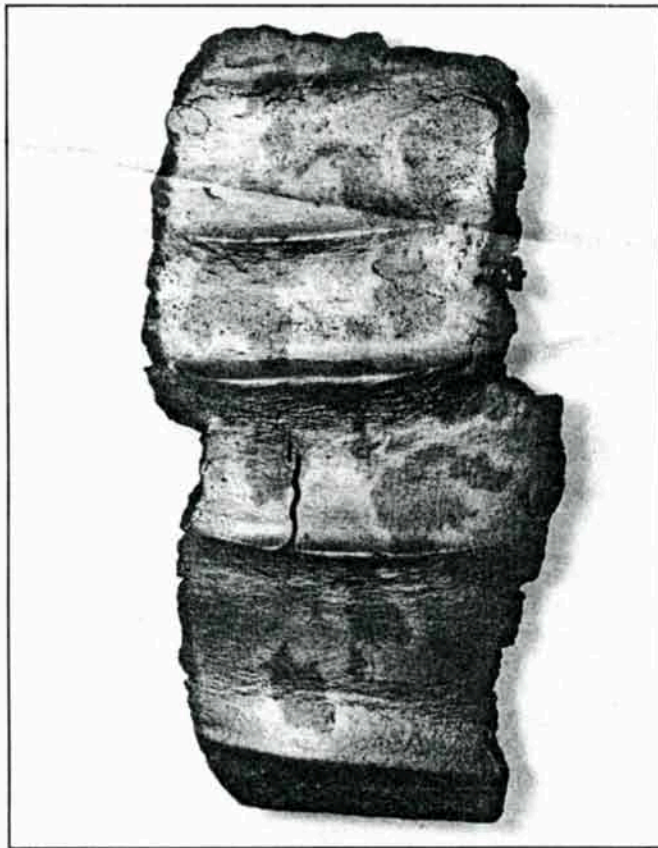
The gently flowing slabs that hang on the studio wall are pock-marked and grooved. Some are as smooth as ebony and honey-combed, others variegated black and silver like burnt bark or as thick and pale as stone.

One piece lying on a table appears as if a chunk of mud embedded with a trail of dog prints has been lifted right out of the ground. That observation turns out to be close to the truth. The marks are not canine-made but the material is straight from the artist's backyard.

Gilbert has been making sculpture and elements of an installation for two upcoming shows. An exhibit of the mysterious ceramic sculptures opens with a reception today at Conlon Siegal Galleries. Plan B Evolving Arts will showcase the self-described earth artist's environment of adobe, sand and video beginning later this month.

The sculptures speak about the blend of landscape and water, about fluidity, and they testify to the dynamic personality of their material. On the one hand, clay is passive, Gilbert said, recording everything that crosses its path. Yet it also is willful, spontaneous and ever-surprising.

But content is not really the point; sensuality is. The artist wants his viewers to feel the tug of his sculptures' physicalness, march right up to the pieces and touch them.



'Pacificpushwavemancha,' 1998, ceramic, 37 x 20 inches

Gilbert wants the question of what his pieces are made of to form in the gazer's mind — the more questions the better.

That is a theme that peppers Gilbert's conversation. Here is a man steeped in nature, in the universal, in human relationships, an artist working toward integrating art and life.

His artmaking began with pottery then moved to installations carved of clay. Working in Montana, he became fascinated with adobe, but the material was purely conceptual until he moved his family to New Mexico 20 years ago.

Gilbert's early sculptures were elaborate constructions made of juniper branches and great blankets of clay draped over wooden support beams. For a decade he forbade himself from using store-bought materials and found creative ways of manipulating plants and earth.

"I am drawn to the exposed landscape," Gilbert said. "The carved arroyos. The layers. Things from way back exposed then covered up again. I'm curious about what ends up being seen. This is a place where you can read the landscape's record."

His desire to make art about place inspired his current sculpture series. Forget the urban intellectual artists who tell people how to feel about place, Gilbert said. Do something holistic.

It's hard to imagine a more hands-on process than the one Gilbert employs. He throws a slab of clay on the floor and rolls it out, pressing into it with his thumb and forefinger, sometimes clawing with his whole hand.

"I'm definitely into working with stuff that has no inherent value," Gilbert said.

"If there is value, I'd rather it come from the alchemy of artmaking. I'd rather people buy because the piece has that value than because of the high price of the material." □

DETAILS

WHO/WHAT:
Bill Gilbert/
Ceramic sculpture

WHEN:
Opening reception
5-7 p.m. today, July 3

WHERE:
Conlon Siegal Galleries
702½ Canyon Road

INFO:
Through Aug. 4
Separate exhibit
July 17-Aug. 23
at Plan B Evolving Arts

Bill Gilbert's relationship with sculpture

Materials come from the Earth

By Dottie Indyke

Bill Gilbert's sculptures beckon the viewer closer if only to determine the origins of the pieces.

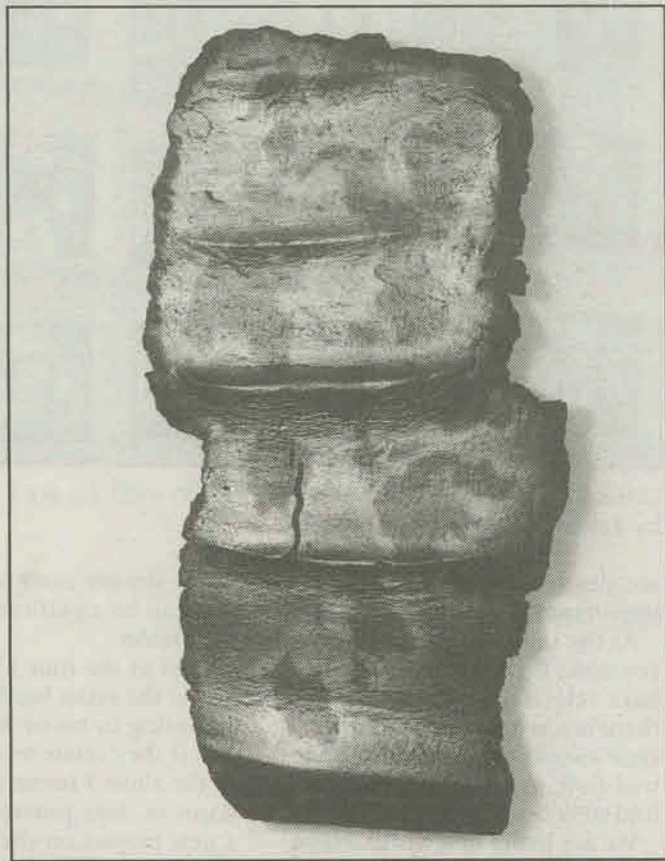
The gently flowing slabs that hang on the studio wall are pock-marked and grooved. Some are as smooth as ebony and honey-combed, others variegated black and silver like burnt bark or as thick and pale as stone.

One piece lying on a table appears as if a chunk of mud embedded with a trail of dog prints has been lifted right out of the ground. That observation turns out to be close to the truth. The marks are not canine-made but the material is straight from the artist's backyard.

Gilbert has been making sculpture and elements of an installation for two upcoming shows. An exhibit of the mysterious ceramic sculptures opens with a reception today at Conlon Siegal Galleries. Plan B Evolving Arts will showcase the self-described earth artist's environment of adobe, sand and video beginning later this month.

The sculptures speak about the blend of landscape and water, about fluidity, and they testify to the dynamic personality of their material. On the one hand, clay is passive, Gilbert said, recording everything that crosses its path. Yet it also is willful, spontaneous and ever-surprising.

But content is not really the point; sensuality is. The artist wants his viewers to feel the tug of his sculptures' physicalness, march right up to the pieces and touch them.



'Pacificopushwavemancha,' 1998, ceramic, 37 x 20 inches

Gilbert wants the question of what his pieces are made of to form in the gazer's mind — the more questions the better.

That is a theme that peppers Gilbert's conversation. Here is a man steeped in nature, in the universal, in human relationships, an artist working toward integrating art and life.

His artmaking began with pottery then moved to installations carved of clay. Working in Montana, he became fascinated with adobe, but the material was purely conceptual until he moved his family to New Mexico 20 years ago.

DETAILS

WHO/WHAT:
Bill Gilbert/
Ceramic sculpture

WHEN:
Opening reception
5-7 p.m. today, July 3

WHERE:
Conlon Siegal Galleries
702½ Canyon Road

INFO:
Through Aug. 4
Separate exhibit
July 17-Aug. 23
at Plan B Evolving Arts

Gilbert's early sculptures were elaborate constructions made of juniper branches and great blankets of clay draped over wooden support beams. For a decade he forbade himself from using store-bought materials and found creative ways of manipulating plants and earth.

"I am drawn to the exposed landscape," Gilbert said. "The carved arroyos. The layers. Things from way back exposed then covered up again. I'm curious about what ends up being seen. This is a place where you can read the landscape's record."

His desire to make art about place inspired his current sculpture series. Forget the urban intellectual artists who tell people how to feel about place, Gilbert said. Do something holistic.

It's hard to imagine a more hands-on process than the one Gilbert employs. He throws a slab of clay on the floor and rolls it out, pressing into it with his thumb and forefinger, sometimes clawing with his whole hand.

"I'm definitely into working with stuff that has no inherent value," Gilbert said.

"If there is value, I'd rather it come from the alchemy of artmaking. I'd rather people buy because the piece has that value than because of the high price of the material." □