

## Pamela Earnshaw Kelly: 1995 to Present

2002 Dr. Roy E. Morgan Exhibition

March 10, - April 21, 2002

**Sordoni Art Gallery**  
Wilkes University  
150 South River Street  
Wilkes-Barre, PA 18766  
(570) 408-4325

Hours: Noon until 4:30 p.m., 7 days a week

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P A M E L A E A R N S H A W K E L L Y

## A CONTEMPORARY BESTIARY

### The Sculpture of Pamela Earnshaw Kelly

By Karen S. Chambers

Pamela Earnshaw Kelly's subjects are ordinary—farm or jungle animals—and her material is humble—clay. But there is nobility in her depiction of her subjects, and thousands of years of ceramic history to show clay's potential to move, provoke, memorialize, honor. It is an expressive material, an artistic medium. And it is one that Kelly handles with great sensitivity as she models her sloe-eyed lambs, her open-faced bovines, her curious chimpanzees. All these animals lose nothing of their animal nature, even as we see human traits and discern human emotions.

For example, in *Me? Mine?* the sheep's face is mournful and pleading; the mouth seems to quiver as the intelligence behind the eyes judges whether to speak, to mewl plaintively or insistently. The raku-fired clay with its smoky surface adds another element that speaks of deterioration, of years of suffering from the vicissitudes of living. Kelly heightens the impression by leaving the limbs incomplete, just expressionistic, abstract forms. The foreshortened figure is installed on the wall and seems to emerge out of it, not be hung from it. Just a touch of glaze coats the inner ear, delicately suggesting more refinement or a quickening, a Pygmalion moment.

Kelly grew up on a dairy farm in Pennsylvania, where her father bred champion cows. She was surrounded by the matter-of-fact daily issues of life and death. She watched newborn calves unable to take that first breath, die and be carried to a remote corner of the farm to decompose. Now that experience can be clearly seen in her work focused on unlikely heroic animals.

As a child, there was no inkling that Kelly would become an artist. At Syracuse University, she studied interior design, realizing before she graduated in 1971 that this career was not for her. She completed the degree, knowing that it would provide a livelihood as well as knowing that she "needed to make art."

First she was attracted to Japanese watercolor because it combined "spontaneity and discipline, order and chaos," she explains. But the two-dimensional nature of the medium frustrated her, so she began to study sculpture at the State University of New York at Binghamton in the early 1980s. She worked exclusively in metal, first making bronze and steel abstract sculptures, then casting figures.

Representation suited her expressive needs, but metal sculpture lacked the spontaneity that had attracted her to art in the first place. A 1986 visit to the Oriental collection at the Johnson Museum, Cornell University, brought her to the realization that clay could be the medium. She has written, "I loved not only the forms, but especially the surfaces of the works: layers of colored slip eroded by the passing millennia, corroded bronze, and opalized glass. I felt these surfaces expressed certain truths about the nature of existence; art,

like life, though perfectly conceived and executed is subject to time, misfortune, and precarious existence. Yet miraculously these objects did survive."

Family obligations precluded Kelly being able to pursue ceramics seriously until the late 1980s. In 1991 she received a master of fine arts degree from Marywood College. Her thesis show reflected her exploration of subject matter and included thirty human figures, four abstractions, a number of large vessels, and one calf relief sculpture. It also revealed the need to focus more clearly.

Always interested in Eastern philosophy and meditation, Kelly became intrigued by Jungian psychology as a means to explore dream, myth, and imagination. Childhood images led her to her current work. "The creatures I create are as much about human nature as they are about the beasts they represent," she explains. "As symbols, they inform parts of me unreachable by the intellect, places only art and nature can touch."

Kelly uses the animal as a vehicle for her ideas. They are not anthropomorphized figures, as is eloquently expressed by the horse in *The Blue Door*. With touches of green and ochre glazes suggesting a T'ang Dynasty funerary horse, the title brings the viewer's attention to the rectangle of blue beneath the horse's belly. It serves as a possibly necessary support, but it also reinforces an interpretation that this figurative sculpture is meant to represent a transformation from one state to another, from life to death or afterlife.

Kelly's shaggy *Buffalo* stands with head lowered and back hunched, perhaps gathering strength to charge. The clay is globby and the surface cracked. From the buffalo's flank emerges a mask-like face. The features are bland, the face blank. It could be a death mask or a veiled sleeper. It is cast from Kelly's own face, but it is as much a symbol of genderless humanity as a self-portrait. The title gives no clue as to Kelly's intent, but the sculpture depicts the strength of the once-free-running and still formidable beast.

In *Post Annunciation* Kelly illustrates the Biblical story of God sending the angel Gabriel to tell the Virgin Mary that she is to bear His son. In depictions of this event, a dove represents the Holy Spirit. Kelly's dove has twigs as feet, connecting it to the earth we know. As the dove flies away, its power is forcefully expressed through the span of its wings. The head of a second dove can be seen behind the flying dove, which looks downward while the one being carried stares straight ahead, already seeing the future. It is indeed post annunciation.

Kelly's creatures speak volumes, and they speak for themselves.

Karen S. Chambers, a critic and independent curator based in New York City, has written for *American Ceramics*, *Ceramics Monthly*, and *Ceramic Art and Perception*.



BLUE DOOR, 2001  
Raku fired ceramic, 14½ × 16 × 8 inches

BUFFALO, 2001  
Raku fired ceramic, 14 × 19½ × 10 inches



ANNUNCIATION, 2001  
Raku fired ceramic, paint, wood, 34 x 34 x 12 inches



WITNESS, 2001  
Raku fired ceramic, wood 87 x 19 x 17 inches

**PAMELA EARNSHAW KELLY**

**Education**

- 1991 Marywood College,  
Master of Fine Arts
- 1973–1983 SUNY at Binghamton,  
Postgraduate Study of Sculpture
- 1967–1971 Syracuse University,  
Bachelor of Science
- 1965–1967 Wyoming Seminary,  
Kingston, Pennsylvania

**Exhibitions**

- 2001 One-Person Show, John Elder Gallery,  
New York City
- 2001 Group Exhibition, John Elder Gallery
- 2001 "Hounds on Leash," Albuquerque  
Museum, Albuquerque, New Mexico
- 2001 One-Person Show, LewAllen  
Contemporary, Santa Fe, New Mexico
- 2001 Guest Artist, Bellevue Sculpture Biennial,  
Bellevue, Washington
- 2000 Exhibit SOFA Chicago,  
for John Elder Gallery
- 1999 One-Person Show, John Elder Gallery
- 1997 About Time (Solo Exhibit), Elan Gallery,  
Santa Fe, New Mexico
- 1997 Art-Making, John Elder Gallery
- 1997 One-Person Show, Marywood College,  
Scranton, Pennsylvania
- 1996 Nature of Clay, One-Person Show,  
Robertson Museum, Binghamton,  
New York
- 1995 Clay Matters (One-Person Show),  
Marywood College
- 1995 January Cover, *Ceramics Monthly*  
(Magazine)



ACORN, 1996  
Raku fired ceramic, 18 x 20 x 12 inches

SHEEP III, 2000  
Raku fired ceramic, 29 x 18 x 7½ inches

