

CHIMERIC: A POETIC ECOLOGY OF ENERGY by Mary Bucci McCoy

Chimeric is Linda Leslie Brown's largest, most ambitious indoor installation to date. She further develops the compelling ideas explored in *Nurse Log* (Members Gallery, Kingston Gallery, 2012), and the relationship between her gallery installations and her outdoor, site-specific installation work is increasingly fruitful.

In her gallery work, Brown recuperates discarded domestic and other manufactured objects and, combining them with found natural objects, inventively assembles gestural armatures that she covers with air-drying paper clay and then paint. In some instances the original objects remain identifiable; in other places the original form is subsumed into the wholeness of the new structure. Clusters of quartz crystals are partially embedded in the clay when it is still malleable, and a variety of live plants are added after the clay hardens and is painted. In the outdoor work, such as *Drala Dancing Ground*, an installation created during her 2012 residency at I-Park Foundation in Connecticut, Brown climbs trees to loop strands of antique crystals between branches to create energy pathways.

While the first pieces in this body of indoor work were discrete wall-mounted and freestanding sculptures, in *Nurse Log* Brown introduced an explicit connection between her indoor and outdoor work: the log-like form of the sculpture resting on the floor referenced the woods, and looping strands of energy — this time in the form of ropes of Spanish moss — connected “satellite” sculptural wall pieces to the main sculptural form on the floor, which harbored more plants, echoing in multiple ways her site-specific installation work.

Expanding on this installation, the large, totemic vertical structures that form the heart of *Chimeric* simultaneously reference trees and the human body while smaller, wall-mounted “family member” sculptures connect to the central forms via umbilical ropes of Span-

ish moss. By relating this installation to the space of a forest, Brown introduces a scale shift in relation to both the space and the human body that not only opens up fertile creative possibilities for her but also subtly reframes her audience's relationship to the work.

The title of the work, *Chimeric*, explicitly addresses the issues of combining different things into a new whole. The references are multifaceted: both the genetic phenomenon in which all the cells in an organism do not contain the same DNA, and mythological, hybrid, often terrifying creatures. But far from monstrous, *Chimeric* is simultaneously marked by humor and grace, playfulness and gravity. Brown leverages the possibilities art offers, proposing a poetic, hybrid framework for considering the complex morality of our humanity in relation to the natural world through many interconnected current topics and disciplines: cloning, hybridization, and genetic modification; ecology, recycling and consumerism; and identity and familial relationships. Moving around and through the work offers viewers the opportunity to inhabit this magically recombinant space both physically and energetically.

Brown's early experience working with ceramic materials is a key to the success of her work. The sensing, sensitive imprint of her fingers is everywhere evident, and in this digital era the primal language of human touch — warmth and caring — invites the viewer into the dialogue while offering recalcitrant opposition to a clinically scientific approach to the issues she investigates with *Chimeric*. She gives us an approachable, and hopeful, alternative means for considering our evolving understanding of our situation and role in our biosphere.

Mary Bucci McCoy is a painter based in Beverly, MA. She is a longtime contributor to *Art New England* magazine.