

Anderson Ranch arts center BLOG



Friday, November 19th, 2010

In Residence: Lisa Conway

The pristine whites of **Lisa** Conway's unfired ceramic sculptures contrast sharply against the studio's earth tones, but they somehow fit in well among her countless source images and glaze jars. Finding space to set my recorder, **Lisa** and I began to talk. Stumbling over my words at first, we eventually got on the subject of whimsy, humor and formal aesthetics.





BIO

Lisa Conway was born in Detroit. She received her BFA from the University of Michigan and her MFA from Louisiana State University. **Lisa** worked as a summer assistant at **Anderson Ranch** in 1990 and 1993, after which she taught at the University of Alaska until 1998. She currently lives and teaches full-time in Portland, Oregon.

Carey: I feel like you have a degree of humor to your personality, and your work has this huge sense of materiality. Could you talk about how those two work together, or don't work together?

Lisa: Well I don't think that humor is a huge part of my work, but the work is definitely an extension of me. There's no denying that. We've also talked about my work just being really pretty, and I think I really try to take advantage of the material for that. I'm really interested in how I can push clay in a fluid way, and take advantage of this malleable material. I really try to work with a sense of space; the concept of inside versus outside. I'm really interested in how they relate to the table, or to the wall, that kind of in-between space; I try and have that be a real draw. Though I think if people only saw them as funny it would be missing the mark.



Carey: No, I don't think that's the first thing that strikes me as a viewer. The first thing that I take away is a sense of delicacy. But I think the other big thing that strikes me is their feeling of whimsy. They have a sort of imagined biology.

Lisa: Yeah, someone once described them as having a [Lilliputian](#) quality.

Carey: You mean from Gulliver's Travels?



Lisa: Exactly...One thing that [Kim \(Dickey\)](#) said yesterday about the fantasy-biology in my work: some of them really have that sense of imagined biology, then she looked at another piece and said, “Now that one looks like a piece of sculpture instead (referring to the piece in the image above).” That is what I’m aiming for. When it’s too much referencing, “Oh, that’s a lily flower blown up really large,” then people can name it and reference it, and I don’t necessarily want that. I want the work to be more suggestive, evocative and subtle. That way, it comes more back on the viewer to complete the piece.



Carey: It forces the viewer to make their own conclusions about the piece?

Lisa: Right, so they can’t just say that a piece makes me feel funny because it’s a giant strawberry. Instead the viewer thinks, “Oh that piece makes me feel funny, maybe that’s something about me?” That’s something that I struggle with, how to get away from a direct reference. I try to have lots of different references, combining a plant and a shell and part of a human body. Hopefully then it’s not about any one of them.

More of Lisa’s work can be seen on her website at: www.lisaconway.com