



Mother and Child. Stoneware and earthenware. 117 x 89 x 81.5 cm.

of sculptures is a fresh summation of *Mother and Child*. Resembling worn Roman River gods, these double figures begin as 'seeds'. Chen hand-forms dozens of small clay lumps until he discerns the right form to bear his theme. Unselfconscious play leads to fully refined works as the model is duplicated many times larger. Using a dark, rough-toothed claybody, Chen may utilise wheel-thrown forms to amplify the scale of the figures. Coil applications and meticulous texturing of surfaces, often resembling weathered wood or stone, follows. Patient and one-pointed focus accompanies this gradual gestation.

Critical for their value as symbols, coloured and textured glazes are also developed with discernment. Mature at cone 04, as is the claybody, glazes overlay the work with formal finish, and clues to the narrative and dialogue are suggested in these evocative figures. Chen says, "I took six months to develop these glazes. Always the darker figure is the mother, the smaller lighter one is the child." On one sculpture a dark brown tightly-pulled surface stretches over the winged material element. It is glaze-encrusted with a granular crystal, resembling barnacled marine life. A smooth sheen of matt ivory seals the vertical child figure. Glaze drips suggest tears.

A pinnacle of significance is orchestrated in the silent communion of the two at the point where each leans upon the other. Rhythms of elegant lines,

contrasts of dark and light hues, empty and full spaces all serve the cardinal Chinese principle—balance.

Again the visual and visible is an 'equivalent' for the internal realm of significance. Chen explains, "The touching points are so important to my pieces because that is the energy within myself to be strong." He also recognises a reversal of roles as "the child reaches to protect the mother". With an adventurous sense of experiment, nuance of material and uncommon commitment to craft, Chen offers his work to the viewer with hope and humility. Even as abstraction offers a generous field of access and interpretation, his own intention remains. "It is about concern for my mother; it is how I put all my energy into my voice; that is the language I am trying to achieve with my sculpture."

REFERENCES:

1. *Georgia O'Keeffe – American and Modern*. Charles Eldridge Yale University Press, 1993. p 171.
2. *Mother and Child*. MFA Thesis; Rochester Institute of Technology, Gow Hwei Chen, 1997. p 16.

Patrick Timothy Caughy is a ceramic artist and art educator. A member of the Baltimore Clayworks, he is also an artist in residence at Wesley Theological College in Washington, DC. He serves as an educational consultant at the Freer Collection of the Smithsonian Institution. Ray Chen will receive the Emerging Artist Award at NCECA, 2001, in Charlotte, North Carolina.