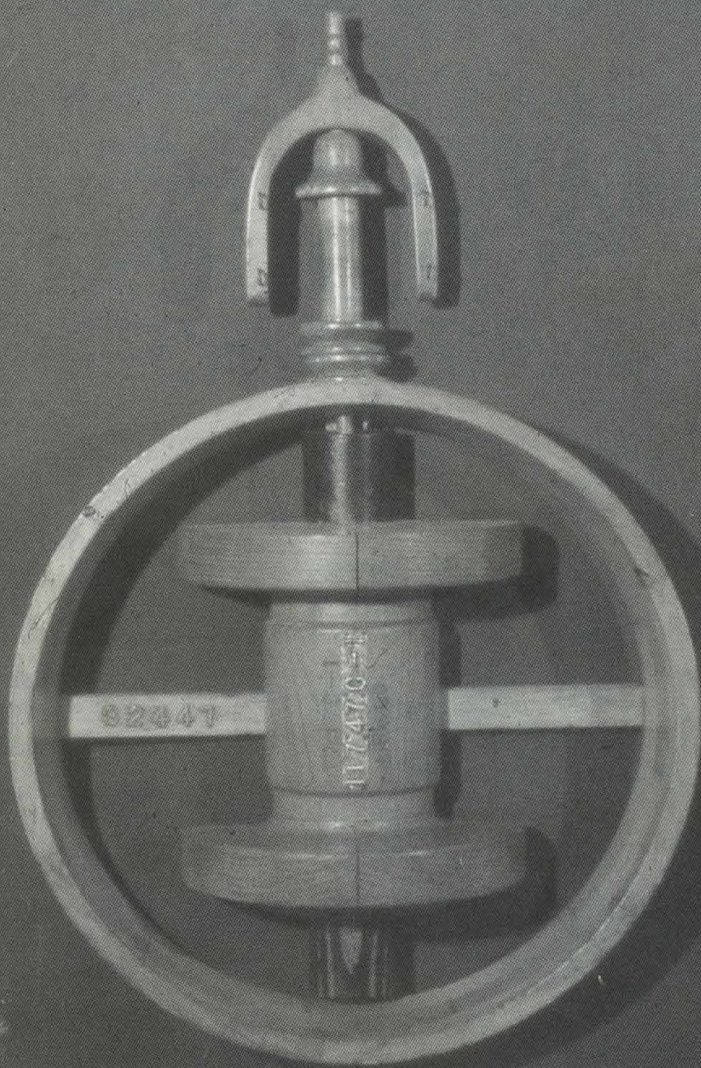


# **ARTSCENE**™

The Monthly Digest to Art in Southern California



**EVA KOLOSVARY-STUPLER  
"CAPTAIN NEMO"**

**ROBERT SMITHSON • WILLIAM CATLING /  
JEFFREY CRUSSELL / NANCY HARLAN •  
JOEL NAKAMURA • AND MUCH MORE**

whimsical imagery. But underlying the chromatic playfulness and whimsy is a humanistic core around which swirl icons of the subconscious. The title painting, *Ephemeral Soup*, for example, depicts a giraffe on an empty, cracked landscape beneath a deep blue night sky. That celestial vault could well be the night sky of the dreaming mind. This sky lends an aura to all things under it. It is a sky sparse with few stars, two amorphous white clouds and a butterfly--that symbol of metamorphosis.

The head of the giraffe is that of an alien deity with rows of jagged teeth and two beehives for eyes. This faintly African creature has the top of its head lopped off to reveal a bowl of blue liquid out of which emerges a dragonfly. The dragonfly has a green monkey's head and two mechanical 'beaters' for feet that are emerging from the aqueous blue as he flies up into a red vapor filled with glowing suns. A blue man-in-the-moon adorns the dragonfly's chest, and out of the mouth of the alien giraffe a long tongue darts, stopping a small banana with a pair of dragonfly's wings in mid-air. Strange plants in the background slither like serpents skyward out of the cracked soil. In the distance an odd pineapple sits impassively on the horizon.

The entire painting is a theatre of metamorphosis in which the microcosm emerges from out of the macrocosm. The imagery connects to the viewer in a way that bypasses the conscious and logical mind. It bypasses culture and ethnicity, language and religion. It is out of the very 'silliness' of this painting, its nocturnal junctures of unlikely realities, that the force of the work is derived. A thorough and very broad humanity informs its simplicity. The painting depicts a place which we all have visited, athwart the dreaming mind, transfixed in sleep.

Another painting of Nakamura's conveys, with deft simplicity, our human connection through a supernal image. *Collective Dream* depicts a tree of royal purple and blue. At the base of the tree and at its crown is a bird with wings outstretched. Human figures are adjoined by their heads to the trunk of the tree. Two hands and a



Joel Nakamura, "Ephemeral Soup," 2004, polymer on tin, 18 x 14".

wing also sprout out of the tree trunk. The birds, the figures and the hands all appear to be limbs and leaves of the tree. The unity of the disparate elements form a single blue tree within which are celestial stars.

This tree of life, so reminiscent of the zephiroth of the Kabbala, is set against an active luminescent background filled with floating heads, hands, figures, eyes, clouds and molecular structures. Birds in folklore quite frequently symbolize the human soul. In the context of Nakamura's painting the birds seem to illustrate the soul's entry into mortal life at the base of the tree and its exit at the crown. Nakamura's tree is visual dream language of the highest order.

Ray Zone

## WILLIAM CATLING, JEFFREY CRUSSELL and NANCY HARLAN

(OCCCA, Orange County) Three artists, sculptor William Catling, multimedia artist Jeffrey Crussell and ceramicist Nancy Harlan title their current group show *Journeys*. This is apt since they aim to lead their audience, through their art, down the more or less convoluted paths of their own inner journeys.

Catling's sculptures evidence a journey that begins with the ancient question: Who are we; who am I? He draws answers from human history and the tenets of the Christian gospel.

Consequently, his work evidences a beatific joy and pain. Viewers familiar with his near-monumental clay sculptures will recall that the figures, in nearly all instances, pay homage to the nobility and inevitability of suffering.

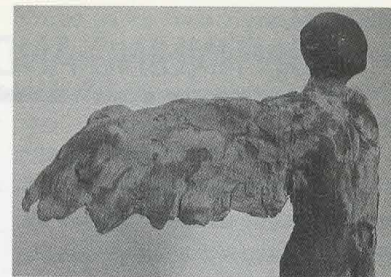
For this show Catling has, for the first time in decades, created his unrelentingly anguished figures cast in bronze. But, besides his rediscovery of a long abandoned medium and a scaling down of size, little has changed conceptually. His torn, flayed and Sebastian-like androgynous figures are still emaciated, hidden behind reed-like constructions or imprisoned in cocoons with faces partially obscured and contorted in pain. They are metaphors for tortured souls, but never devoid of beauty and the implication of hope.

Whether Catling's figures' feet are spiked with countless nails, their torsos scarred and convoluted, or their limbs severed from bodies, they convey a nobility that is informed by classical sculpture as well as the earthy and provocative work of Rodin or Giacometti. A more immediate precedent would be Steven De Staebler. Indeed, Catling studied under that master and is eloquent in expressing his admiration for him.

Catling builds soaring, winged spiritual entities. He describes a bronze angel titled *Pilot to the Realm Unknown*, as a spiritual guide. Much like the flight of creation, these angels are beautiful apparitions that may be seen as timeless and yet topical.

Nancy Harlan's life journey has taken her down several paths, 25 years of corporate law practice among them. Working now as a full-time ceramicist, her pieces address women's social issues, particularly conditions imposed by their native culture. For example, she tackles the subject of physical mutilation for the sake of marriageability.

In an installation titled *1001 Bowls*, so titled for the quantity of ceramic pots filled or embellished with found or recycled objects. She likens the vessels to Buddhist monks' begging bowls that are filled by the faithful to sustain them as they wander. In the same spirit Harlan insists on using



William Catling, "Pilot of the Other Realm" (detail), 2003-04, bronze.

recycled materials. As a result, the installation effectively approximates her personal creative journey and its unpredictability. Viewers in tune with the environment and appreciative of a Zen attitude toward life will find resonance in this work.

Jeffrey Crussell uses his divorce as a point of departure for many of his architecturally influenced constructions, attempting to analyze the convoluted paths of male/female relationships and the choices they entail. Presuming the random way most approach such couplings, Crussell presents a thirty-four-inch in diameter roulette wheel positioned so that viewers can give it a spin. If you take the trouble to do so, you might find out what lies in store for you and your mate.

At first glance one might take Crussell's work as an exercise in ego exposition, but he deserves credit for mapping both successes and failures. He says that the works are designed to draw viewers into the dialogue, causing them to examine their own relationships and the influence they exert on their lives. *Life Line*, roughly 25 feet long, chronicles several of the artist's relationships and how long they lasted. Crussell likens his works, covered as they are with letters and words, to the artist books he made at the beginning of his creative journey.

It seems these artists, like many others among us, are finding their creative path by retreating into their own space, and drawing on the vicissitudes of their personal lives. Perhaps we have seen too little of this of late, and these artists reflect that an unspoken edict banning highly personal art is lifting. One can be hopeful that such collective soul searching will provide fresh aesthetic revelations.

Daniella Walsh