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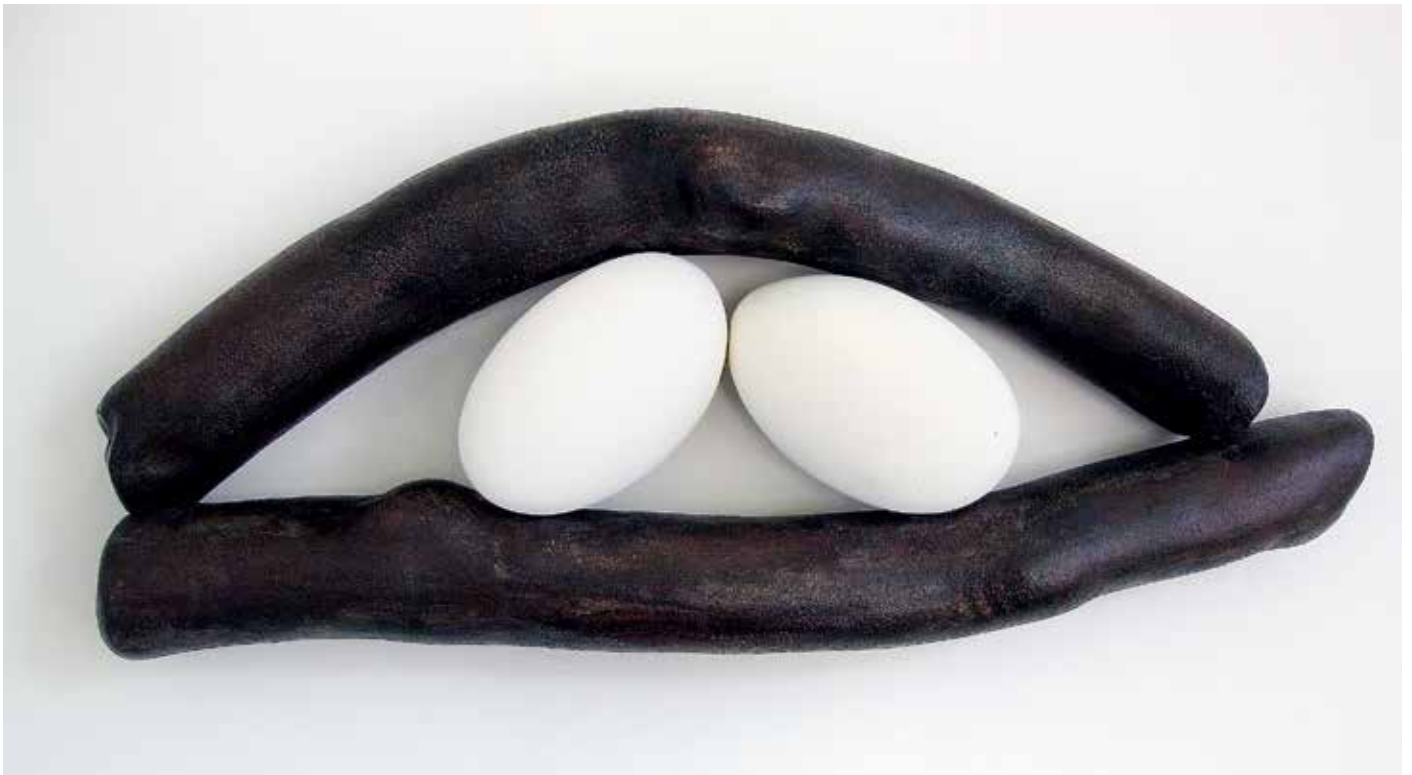
Nancy Lovendahl

Reconnecting with Nature

Ronald Andrew Kuchta



An issue of the New York Times magazine which I recently read featured an article by Verlyn Klinkenborg titled *Awakening to Sleep*. It describes the scientific investigation of sleep and finds modern sleep as largely a cultural product. It questions the traditional assumptions that „humans had potentially evolved out of the constraints of the environment”. What if the environment is inescapable? What if sleep is a physiological product equivalent to consciousness and not just a state of suspension in which the mind is suddenly untrammelled? Modern sleep – severely delimited sleep – is largely a cultural product. It is only, at most, a few centuries old, a result of our profound conviction that we can control the details of our biological destiny. What was sleep like before television, before electric lights, before the industrial revolution, before agriculture? Finally, the author writes, „It is tempting to speculate that in prehistoric time the arrangement (the oscillation between sleep and wakefulness) provided a channel of communication between dreams and waking life that has gradually been closed off as humans have compressed and consolidated their sleep. If so, then this alteration might provide a physiological explanation for the observation that modern humans seem to have lost touch with the wellspring of myths and fantasies.”



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Not so, however, for quite a number of contemporary American and British artists inspired to investigate what the earth itself has to tell us symbolically in art made of the earth and out of the landscape – the so-called „earth artists” of the past few decades working mostly on a large scale: Walter DeMaria, Robert Smithson, Michael Heizer, Richard Long, Andy Goldsworthy and Lita Albuquerque, for instance, have been engaged with the elements of the earth trying to understand the earth’s inner nature by constructions on the earth or out of the earth itself.

So too has the artist Nancy Lovendahl participated in a related search that might be compared to the aforementioned artists and to the ever-greater general movement of art and science to understand our primordial roots in nature. Her art, sculpture often combining ceramic, wood, bronze, stone, cast paper, and rubber, has evolved over the past two decades, consistently identifying with the earth and the landscape of her rural Colorado environment. She has, in fact, identified both her inner and outer self with the nature surrounding her and has given certain natural objects and forces metaphorical significance allied to her personal spiritual struggle. The tree, the

opposite page **Woman on Man**, ceramic and mixed media, 46 cm x 31 cm x 25 cm, 2010

above **America**, ceramic and shoe polish, wall mounted, 24 cm x 58 cm x 11 cm, 2008

Slung, ceramic, mixed media and rope, 101 cm x 46 cm x 46 cm, 2010



The ceramic and cast paper objects are appropriately imitating nature, naturalistically. The bowl-like vessel forms are seemingly casually made, subtle in the form and surface irregularities, which often display undulating edges and random scored markings in their interiors.

nest, the egg, the wind and the sky as well as the land figure as basic motives. This reification of her emotions and of forces and energies associated with the self is her true poetic mission. She invokes as well the Indian Lord Datta, the Greek Gaia, the Persian Rumi and contemporary philosophers her cultural inspirators, in seeking to „heal the disconnection I feel in my life and reveal this journey of discovery in what I make”. Lovendahl identifies her body with the earth as in ancient myths our ancestors identified their gods. Her recent obsession with eggs, nests and trees are obviously and admittedly visual metaphors for her physical self as well. Recently Lovendahl wrote „my works continue evolving out of an idea of conceptual landscapes serving as metaphors for myself. The image of tree, nest and egg refer to my past, present and future – reflecting both the physical and nonphysical realities they occupy in me.”

Lovendahl is fortunate to live in the midst of magnificent western mountain terrain at Old Snowmass, Colorado. She is inspired by the shifting light and the dramatic formations of the hills and mountains about her. Her works are redolent of the dry, high pure air that wafts over her studio and give a healthy breath to her imagination daily.

Her works are dynamic, yet somehow quiet. There is always the implication of nature’s movement, however artfully constructed, and traces of some prescient beings’ former presence – the ceramic eggs with their spiralling patterns for instance, found in the cavities of certain vessel-like forms, emulating the dry, striated earth with branches randomly crisscrossing their volume – the wooden or wire suggestion of nests perched between branches or atop a tree trunk again with fragile cast paper eggs left to symbolize new life or renewal.

In her specific artworks Lovendahl often employs elements extracted from nature – twigs in *GOURD* (1996) wood, organ-like fragments in *THIN SKIN* (1997) and stone in *CLIFFDWELLER* (1994) for instance, and wax with again twigs in *GENE POOL* (1995). In most of these works the „found” objects are fused with the hand-made clay, wood, marble or cast paper forms to which they relate, are embraced by, or contain. The ceramic and cast paper objects are appro-



Black Madonna 2,
ceramic, metal leaf, mixed media, wall mounted or pedestal,
51 cm x 35 cm x 19 cm, 2004

privately imitating nature, naturalistically. The bowl-like vessel forms are seemingly casually made, subtle in the form and surface irregularities, which often display undulating edges and random scored markings in their interiors. Gourd (1998), for instance, has stamped and scratched impressions marking its interior, which conjures up ideas of an aerial landscape and yet has a recognizable melon-like body and the scale of an actual gourd. Lovendahl's earth-inspired indoor studio works are usually more modest in scale at least than those of the more grandiloquent earth artists with whom she might be compared. Yet her egg and tree forms contain the mystery and the spiritual power of much more spacious works made of the landscape by some of her illustrious artistic progenitors. Her magical works are more intimate and relate not only the artist's personal quest for meaning in nature and within herself but also point to something of a universal need in this over-cultivated world – to reconnect with mother earth – to accept a re-balancing of ourselves with nature. Her outdoor works, larger than life size yet still inviting a sense of intimacy with nature, create a physical place in which to do this re-balancing in ourselves. In this sense, Nancy Lovendahl's very original works of art succeed in re-focusing our attention on something important for our wellbeing as fundamental as the natural media she employs – from the earth.

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NANCY LOVENDAHL

I escaped what I anticipated would be a numbing, predictable life in my childhood home of the Chicago suburbs by moving west after attending the University of Illinois in Champaign-Urbana. My art making is split between large outdoor installations in stone and more intimate studio works of ceramic, stone and mixed media. I make sculpture as a way of grappling with the physical world. These artworks are the records of my responses to life and culture. My art has been shown nationally and internationally in galleries and museums, commissioned for public and private collections such as the Phillips Petroleum Company and included in museum collections such as the Smithsonian in Washington, DC and the Keramikmuseum in Germany. My art was 2012 in an exhibition in the Quintenz Gallery, Aspen, CO and in fall of 2012 as part of The Goethe Institut exhibition celebrating Pirosmanni's 150 birthday in Tbilissi, Georgia. In June 2012 I completed a 20-month project sculpture weighing 210,000 lbs of limestone, made in 18 parts for private collectors in rural Colorado, USA. Upcoming shows are planned in Belize, Central America and Denver, Colorado. I live and work in Old Snowmass, Colorado, USA with my husband, jewellery designer Scott Keating, a dog and a cat.