



Dangerous Bowl

SURFACE TREATMENT

What: *Push and Pull by Carla Thorman Hughes*
Where: Beyond Arts Gallery, 114 North A Street, Harlingen
When: Through July 23. Hours are Wed-Fri: 1-5pm,
Sat: 10am -5pm
Contact: (956) 230-2859

Evolving Tensions

Local artist Carla Thorman Hughes explores the tensions between her materials and life's choices in *Push and Pull*, a series of sculptures and ceramics currently on exhibit at Beyond Arts Gallery. Working with an earthy, subdued, palette, her art takes on a restraint underlined by her interest in geometric, usually angular, constructions.

Hughes ceramics are informed by a mid-century retro style that typifies the clean, angular construction found in her slab-built pieces. The textured surfaces in her thrown pieces originally helped set this style apart from the solely utilitarian. "Dangerous Bowl" incorporates a rough bark-like texture around the exterior; its interior holds a rough dull blue shade of secondary glaze that presses a dimensional crackle pattern against the body of the vessel. A series of varied "V" shaped vessels, the "Ceramic Wall Pieces," are installed on the rear wall of the gallery, all possessing unique retro surface patterns. Although none actually show the use of the popular lava glaze, which was often used to create a broken bubble pattern on surfaces, there are several pieces here that reference it through the initial clay structure. Hughes worked on this group for eighteen months before she was satisfied, but still sees more that she can do with the idea. "They're always going to be evolving," she says, "and that's why I keep doing them."

Hughes' statement speaks of the influence of push-pull tensions experienced by many American women when dealing with personal and societal expectations, and her expression of this view communicates most effectively in her sculptures. Her ceramics exist for themselves, such as the piece, "Ceramic." Her sculptures reach out beyond their boundaries and grasp at her conflicting concerns. In the sculptural analogy informed by Greek mythology, "You be the King, I'll be the Sword," this crossover piece incorporates welded steel and ceramic. Spare and direct in its design, Hughes ponders

the myth of the Sword of Damocles. Damocles learned through King Dionysius that with great power also comes great responsibility and danger. She explained that two ideas both hit her at once: the myth, and the experience of often being spoken to condescendingly. Her sculpture shows a small, crowned metal object placed anxiously beneath a massive ceramic blade, symbolizing the sword of abusing responsibility - potentially the real danger to persons with authority. "Topple" shows a slender rocker-based metal pyramid being pulled by a group of ceramic cubes. The tension manifests itself in the cords attached to each cube. Which side will win? Ceramics or metal?

"I think the pots are really exciting because they're installed as if they're a piece of sculpture," Hughes said of her ceramic-sculpture push-pull dilemma. "I will always go back to those sculpture roots; I can't get away from that and that's good. I have the most fun with sculpture. I don't see me leaving one or the other behind right now. I don't see them as separate anymore.

Nancy Moyer, Professor Emerita of Art from UTPA, is an art critic for The Monitor. She may be reached at nmoyer@rgv.rr.com