Brian and Amy Meissner Creativity Award in the Visual Arts:

Balance

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ARTISTIC PURPOSE

My work is a mirror; a materialized introspection of our most intense psychological states and emotions. These conditions are universally experienced and thus unify us cross-culturally as being human. We may cope with these experiences differently, but at the core, we are all similar. I believe that life is a tragicomedy and by portraying difficult circumstances in a humorous light, they are easier to confront. By creating this work, I am giving my audience the opportunity to interact eye-to-eye with their most primal urges and reactions.

I am interested in people; the way they think, the way they act, and how they feel. My work is personal; generally self-portraits derived from my own emotions, opinions, and experiences. By exploring my own thoughts and feelings I hope to create work that is relatable, but uncomfortable and thought-provoking. I work primarily in ceramics, a malleable and challenging medium. Its plasticity allows the artist to mimic almost any material, but never without a fight. Clay reminds me that nothing is permanent--there is always room to adapt, grow, and change. Just like Life.

Life is unpredictable, but thrilling and delightful. The challenges and experiences that we face as well as our choices and reactions are what make us who we are as individuals. When faced with difficult circumstances, sometimes all you can do is laugh. Through these emotional caricatures, I encourage the viewer to confront their own emotional and psychological selves on a pedestal. There is something beautifully cathartic about pounding a lump of clay into submission; creating fine art out of dirt. I can only hope that my viewer is able to share this experience.
CREATIVE PROCESS

This piece was derived from an Advanced Handbuilt Ceramics assignment based on Confrontation. I began by brainstorming contemporary matters that offend, perplex, and/or interest me. From this list, I created multiple sketches for potential ideas. I presented these images to my professor, and we discussed each idea. Once I settled on a basic subject, I built mocketts—rough draft miniature sculptures—to troubleshoot pose and composition. I then researched for images for inspiration and shot my own reference photos. I used these sketches, mocketts, and photos to create my final piece.

MEANINGS

There was a time in our culture when men were the bread winners and women were homemakers. Shifts in perceptions, culture, and economy have skewed these roles. Women have gained equal rights in employment and education which have empowered them to seek fulfillment in educational and career paths. We live in a society facing difficult economic times, and it often takes two incomes to make a household function efficiently. Women are no longer expected to stay home and raise children, now they are faced with the challenges of working side-by-side with their male counterparts. On the other-hand, there are still children to be raised and housework to be done. It becomes a precarious balance between these two roles. Women want to feel fulfilled intellectually and vocationally, and simultaneously no one wants a stranger to raise their children or to keep their home.

I decided to illustrate this precarious balance literally. I used an iron to illustrate
the traditional women’s role as a housewife and mother, and the book to illustrate the vocational-educational role of women in contemporary society. The woman, represented only as a head, is sandwiched between these two roles.

INTENDED IMPACT

I created this piece to represent a rite of passage. As a young woman maturing into full adulthood, I am faced with a decision between focusing on my education and career or starting a family. I don’t know how to do both, but the women whom I admire juggle each seemingly effortlessly.

This piece illustrates a literal precarious balance between these two roles. I urge the viewer to step lightly and admire her acrobatic ability. The tension between the housewife and educated career woman is accentuated by placing the woman’s head between two symbolic objects. Her facial expression is neutral, conveying complacency. She is strong and graceful, unaffected by the overwhelming nature of her predicament. She gazes forward at her goals and responsibilities with confidence. This piece is a monument for women to identify with, and a piece of art to be admired by those who may not appreciate the grace of this balancing act.

ARTISTIC TECHNIQUES

This work is comprised of three pieces that have been sculpted individually from Redart earthenware. Each piece was sculpted from solid. Clay was compressed into basic shapes and then refined to reveal detail. The iron and hand were built using
reference photos. The head was sculpted using a combination of reference photos, a mirror, and anatomy books. The book was sculpted using an actual book as reference. After each piece was sculpted, it was cut apart, hollowed, and reassembled. In order to make the pieces balance, a “prosthetic” had to be added to the head’s right cheek. I created a “male” triangular form that fit into the “female” crease of the book. In order for the iron to balance on the left temple, places of the cheek were built up and subtracted in order to create a flattened area. Keeping these pieces separate makes for easier transportation, but also enables the pieces to be displayed separately. The iron has been finished with an undersurface of white slip and royal blue underglaze. The skin tone on the face and hands were derived from a combination of white XX Sagger Terra Sigilatta, Redart Terra Sigillata and mason stains. The hair and eyes are a combination of mason stain and burnt umber. The books pages are colored with an undersurface of white XX Sagger Terra Siggilata. The cover is a combination of Redart Terra Sigilata and mason stain. I prefer to use undersurfaces and stains to color my work as it has a matte finish. I feel that this matte finish is much grittier and intimate than the shiny refined surface of traditional ceramic finishes. Each piece was “once fired” to Cone 04.