

Artist Statement:

Taking nature as his inspiration, Bob Brady hand-builds dynamic, totemic sculptures in clay.

He rolls the clay body into slabs to construct pieces that evoke seed pods, trees, plants, and other fragments of the natural world—from blooming to decay. Brady's pieces are often finished in a raku firing—an ancient Japanese ceramics technique.

Raku is like alchemy in action, with a flash of pyromancy—divination by fire. I am participating in the making, but something meets me halfway. I am collaborating with the clay and fire, and that is thrilling!

Brady sometimes adds combustible materials to the high-fire clay that burn out during the firing. This leaves pits and marks that suggest the passage of geological time as it breaks down organic matter through the combined forces of wind, rain and sun.

When I was young, I was fascinated with impermanence. I'd collect small treasures, put them in matchboxes and bury them. I'd wait as long as I could stand and then would excavate my time capsules to see how time had etched the objects. I treat the surfaces of my pieces similarly. But now I use glazes, raku-firing and sandblasting to imprint a "forced time" on treasures of my own making.

In contrast to the many years Brady spent as a graphic designer, working with an organic material like clay allows him a kind of freedom and spontaneity not possible within the strictures of the digital world.

Sticking my hands into clay was the perfect antidote to the computer keyboard.

Brady first studied clay with Santa Fe legend Felipe Ortega, learning how to hand-build functional, micaceous pottery. Over time, he began to create more sculptural pieces, which he based on kouros, ancient Greek statuary depicting idealized, young athletes. Like his childhood fascination with artifacts, Brady was intrigued by the fragmentary nature of surviving kouros in museums: torsos with missing arms, legs and heads. As Brady's kourosseries developed, it grew increasingly abstract, suggesting tree trunks and other forms of animal and plant structures which, in turn, evolved into delicate vessel-like shapes that reference blossoms, seed pods and the remnants of forest and ocean floors.

When I look at the sky in New Mexico, I'm reminded of the expanse of the ocean. The weathered shells I collect, decayed by the salt of the sea, look like sun-dried bones. All these objects give me a humbling sense of time passing.

As he continues to explore time's effect on nature in his work, Brady is now combining clay with other materials and techniques, including Shou Sugi Ban—a Japanese method of charring and preserving wood.