

NATIVE

AMERICAN ART

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Static Decay

CANNUPA HANSKA LUGER'S NEW EXHIBITION, *RELIQUARY*, examines ceramic skulls as vessels of life, death and everything in between.

FORT COLLINS, CO

In *Reliquary*, ceramicist Cannupa Hanska Luger's newest exhibition, the New Mexico artist contemplates the theme of vessels and their contents, particularly the vessel of the skull and its contents, particularly knowledge, thought and a being's entire existence.

"The skull is a reliquary vessel, a container for a sacred object esteemed and venerated because of its association with a saint or martyr. The skull holds our thinking capacity, our agency, our spark,

this brain of preciousness inside of a bone container," he says. "I took this dead thing and I made it lovely, suggesting that death is not the end, but the possibility of a beginning. It takes some of the fear out of dying and makes it pretty and suspends it in place."

Luger—who comes from Mandan, Hidatsa, Arikara, Lakota, Austrian and Norwegian descent—takes these themes of life, death and stored memories and projects them not onto human skulls, but on static animal forms that he creates using slip-cast molds. The



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skulls are bleach-white like real animal bones, but also lightly tinted with a wood stain to bring out some of the cracks and imperfections in the design of the forms. The artist presents them to his audience upside down, in a way that allows a deeper connection to the shapes and the imagery they invoke.

“You’re comfortable seeing them the other way, so I turned them so they could look up thinking it would add more to that faintly spiritual experience, because death is an ascension,” Luger says. “It’s amazing how much is changed with a simple rotation.”

Hanging from the ceramic skulls are strands of yarn, the “meat” of the animal, and a variety of spiraling horns, antlers and bird wings done in a poly foam. Each piece in the *Reliquary* series is numbered and will be presented in front of a geometric yarn display designed by Luger and created at the Duhesa Gallery at Colorado State University in Fort Collins, Colorado. The layout and format of the gallery were major influences on Luger and his

process, particularly the glass cases that contain exhibition artwork.

“These large cases really made me think of taxidermy and heads as trophies. I wanted to use this idea of bones and trophies, and suspend decay right in the cases. Growing up in North Dakota I would go hunting, and I’m familiar with field dressing an animal and what not. The only trophy we took would be antlers because we’d use everything—even the face meat would go into sausages,” he says. “I liked the idea of stripping it down to its essential form. Without the fur and soft exterior it’s still a version of it, but it’s so completely changed.”

Luger brings the viewer deep into his themes by including a tool dangling in the yarn in every piece. “Hanging from the artificial gore is a ceramic knife. The knife is an icon of human interaction,” he says. “This interaction supplies the viewer with responsibility, giving the object the esteem of a martyr. It has died and we are to blame. The animal has perished for us, by us.”



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1. *Reliquary 6*, ceramic skull forms, yarns, wool, fabric and EVA foam, 72 x 24 x 10"
2. *Reliquary 1*, ceramic skull forms, yarns, wool, fabric and EVA foam, 72 x 24 x 10"
3. *Reliquary 8 - Anomaly*, ceramic skull forms, yarns, wool, fabric and EVA foam, 72 x 24 x 10"
4. *Reliquary 4*, ceramic skull forms, yarns, wool, fabric and EVA foam, 72 x 24 x 10"
5. *Reliquary 3*, with yarn design behind it, installed in the Duhesa Gallery.



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Through June 1, 2016
Reliquary

Duhesa Gallery, Lory Student Center,
 Colorado State University, 1101 Center Avenue Mall,
 Fort Collins, CO 80521

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