

# **“Still Searching ...”**

## **Jean-Pierre Larocque Artist Review**

**By Kevin Dykstra  
Student ID# 4566505**

**February 27, 2002**

**Ceramics 230 XX  
Professor: Penelope Kokkinos**

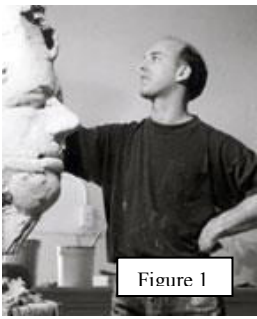


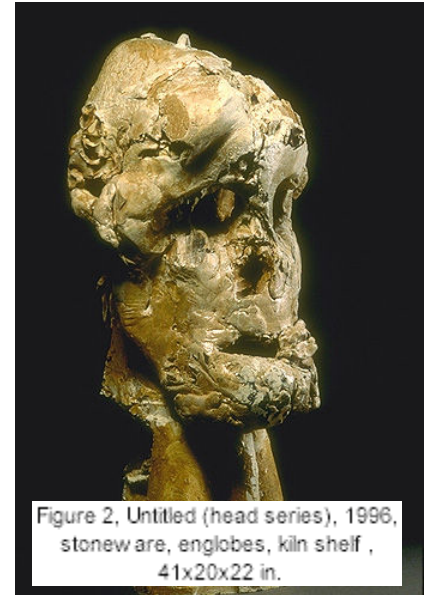
Figure 1

# Jean-Pierre Larocque “Still Searching ...”

by Kevin Dykstra

This is only the second time I have had the fortunate opportunity to listen to a visiting artist. Like my first experience I was left with a sense of awe and a personal reassurance that entering the art world to explore my creative side has been one of my greatest decisions. Although Jean-Pierre Larocque’s approach is a transformational process leaving much to chance whereas my own approach is almost at the other extreme, I found a commonality in our passion for what we do and unrelenting searching for answers in every piece we create.

Born in 1953, Jean-Pierre Larocque received his BFA from Concordia University, Montreal, in 1986 and his MFA from the New York State College of Ceramics at Alfred University, Alfred, NY, in 1988. Since then he has taught at Universities throughout the US, among them the University of Georgia, Athens, the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, and Alfred University. He has currently returned to Montreal, the city where he grew up, and is a full-time studio artist. He has received grants from the Canada Council and the ministry of Cultural Affairs in Quebec. He has exhibited extensively and his work is included in many public and private collections as well as national and international publications. (Footnote 4)



Jean-Pierre Larocque first introduced us to his clay sculptures of the head (see figure 2). Although he described his early figurative pieces as much more skeletal and abstract than they are today, the materiality and rawness of his heads have remained. As one regards each successive piece and is pulled further and further into his world it is hard not to be overwhelmed by the richness of these pieces that feel at times more like paintings than sculptures. Most of these heads stand about 42 inches and are built from the head down. He uses things around his studio to support his larger pieces during the drying process and some works (see figure 3) are left with some of the clay supports in the works displaying part of the artistic process. For most of Jean-Pierre’s pieces he uses mid-fired bisques and multiple (maybe as many as 10) low fire glaze firings in an attempt to keep the freshness of the clay. It is this freshness, this earthy natural feeling and layered textures created by constant marking and erasing which gives his works a haptic quality.



Next, we were introduced to several series of horse sculptures. Unlike the speed and refinement we may often associate with racehorses, Jean-Pierre’s horses convey a powerful equestrian image, and a peace closer to that of a Clydesdale workhorse. Jean-Pierre is best known for these works and has realized more recently that there is certain intimacy that he has with this subject that explains why he comes back to it again and again as he learns something new. Similarly as with his heads, these pieces also have a very heavy painterly quality to them. He uses slabs of terra cotta on a base of stoneware layering the thin slabs by literally throwing them on the subject as his interest in transformation wants to see just what will happen. As his pieces reach the final stages he continues to add and subtract adding many more layers of coloured slips through a series of multiple low firings.

What I really enjoyed the most was his description of his process. He starts with no intention or agenda although later admitted that originally he was much more abstract and once he started doing horses, having a subject liberated him of many problems. He feels that in a lot of art today there is a tendency to make reading (art) easy, so he tries to resist that. In his process he knows he is after something but doesn’t know what. For him, the way he works is way of thinking without words. With all of his work, even including his early drawings that he did while at Concordia, his process involves constant markings and erasing. At one point he stopped working with glazes and just started using different coloured slips. This started when he covered certain sections with black slip so he could see where he was adding and subtracting from. So how does he know when the piece is completed? He waits until the piece talks back to him in some way and says it’s finished. He continues to add and subtract in an effort to see what the object (the source) and he can both bring to the piece. In the end, all of his work remains untitled as Jean-Pierre continues to search ...

<sup>1</sup> & <sup>3</sup> Garth Clark Gallery -> Artist Biographies, <http://www.garthclark.com/Artists/JeanLarocque/shortbio.htm>

<sup>2</sup> REVOLUTION – Jean-Pierre Larocque, <http://revolutn.com/archive/laro/08.htm>

<sup>4</sup> Santa Fe Clay – Workshops, <http://santafeclay.com/summer.htm>