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## Kim Dickey “Finding a Native Nuttiness”

by Kevin Dykstra, October 24, 2001

Never having attended a lecture by a visiting artist before, I must admit I was both excited and somewhat skeptical. Excited because of the opportunity to learn something special from an experienced artist and skeptical because all that I had heard prior to the lecture was that Kim Dickey made erotic ceramics: something called a ‘Lady J’. A Lady J is functional ceramic piece that women can use to go pee while standing like a man. How crazy is that!

Born in 1965, holding a “BFA in Ceramics from Rhode Island School of Design and MFA from New York State College of Ceramics at Alfred University, Kim Dickey now holds Assistant Professorship at University of Colorado, Boulder. She has shown with the Garth Clark Gallery in NYC since 1990. In 2000, she mounted a solo exhibition at Rule Modern and Contemporary in Denver and was included in the Colorado Biennial at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Denver and in Confrontational Clay: The Artist as Social Critic, traveling around the U.S.” (See note 2)



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What I discovered from the very onset of the lecture was that not only is Kim Dickey “nutty” but she’s ‘passionately nutty’! Kim Dickey loves what she is doing! For her, artistic creativity comes from a certain madness that is created by experiencing all opposites. This means, for example, to experience life not as a man ‘or’ a woman but a man ‘and’ a woman at the same time. It is this creative artistic madness that inspired the Lady J’s for women and the ‘feeding breasts’ for the men. In their use, her ceramics not only act as props in what she refers to as a uniquely theatrical setting but also serve as an intense relationship between the artist and the audience. In doing this, Kim Dickey allows the suggestive quality of the artwork to be realized.

She says “Ceramics with its long history of providing objects for eating, drinking, and other necessary rites, provokes my interest in intensifying the relationship between user and object. That this is a sensual relation is emphasized by the sexual dimensions of my forms. I want these objects to suggest a landscape of certain tactile pleasures and functions as ‘props’ for an uneasy seduction. With this physical interaction, I recognize my works potential to trigger memory, allowing for character or role play and create an interior landscape, a stage where things could happen.”

Kim Dickey creates this theatrical setting for her work in the gallery believing that the gallery is the transition place between the artist’s studio and the buyers home. It is also worth noting that in these theatrical settings Kim Dickey prefers not to participate in the ‘acting’ out with the props that she herself has created. Her relationship with the user of her art begins with the creation of the ceramic but finishes as part of the audience watching the proceedings. Although her forms are in many cases still functional, examples of Kim Dickey’s ceramics serving as theatrical props continues in both fantasy settings and settings that don’t necessarily exist. One example is the dinner setting for the Devil in which a short video was created with an actor playing the role of the Devil eating a full gourmet meal from each of the stacked ceramic pieces. Another example is the “Mirage” installation at the Colorado Biennial exhibition with desert plant life created in ceramics and plaster in a small desert scene and a psychic sitting just under one of the palm trees performing psychic readings.

Kim Dickey’s ceramics are full energy and vitality. She creates every one of her ceramics using the painstaking “pinching” method demonstrating again her passion and intimacy with her work. Being the nature lover that I am, I immediately felt connected to the plant life feeling of her ceramics. They are all at once grounded, organic and sensual displaying both the relevance of ceramics to everyday life and also her playful attitude. Her most recent work continues to show this earthy connection to plant life but with a renewed intensity stemming from her closeness to the natural plant life in Colorado. Kim Dickey has found her native nuttiness and in her ceramic forms has discovered a way to cultivate her own madness. Listening to her lively presentation as she introduced us to 15 years of ceramic creations, it was difficult not to be inspired and even more difficult not to laugh along with her as I thought about how fortunate I am to be doing something I love to do too. Her passion for what she is doing creatively inspired me and I hope as well to find soon that native nuttiness within me.

1. Ferrin Galley, Erotica in Ceramic Art, Jacqueline’s Lady J, [http://www.ferringallery.com/gallery/erotica/erotica\\_artists/dickey.html](http://www.ferringallery.com/gallery/erotica/erotica_artists/dickey.html)
2. Watershed Center for the Ceramic Arts, Kim Dickey, Guest Artist, <http://www.watershedcenterceramicarts.org/residencies.html>