

an interpretation of nature

Artist Leslie Green honors endangered predators by carving them into clay

BY SARAH PAYNE
THE ENTERTAINER

For 44 years Leslie Green has sculpted and carved animals into clay, giving the inanimate material a life and the animals a face. Her studio in Philomath is an artistic zoo: the faces of animals — wolves, large cats, even an abstract elephant — adorn the walls, the clay textured with bark and stone and creating a primitive feel in the art.

Green's work is on display in The Arts Center's Main Gallery through July 14, along with the work of Portland artist Greg Conyne. This joint exhibit intends to honor the natural world.

For Green, an integral part of honoring the natural world is honoring its animals. Her works focus on large predators, specifically the polar bear, the wolf and the lion, animals threatened by extinction. Her displayed work, created for this exhibit, focuses on the importance of those animals and their importance in the ecosystem and in our own lives.

"I'm trying to reach people on a deeper level," she said. "We all have a very deep, unconscious relationship to animals, and because of being civilized for about 12,000 years, that's sort of been covered over and we

don't acknowledge it, and we push animals to the outside of our culture.

"But for most of our evolution, we had a profound connection, and animals — especially the large predators — helped define who we were."

Green has always had an artistic interest in animals, and they have been a near-constant theme in her work.

"I'm not a scientist. I can't do much to help animals, but maybe through the power of art I can spread some awareness," she said.

It's not just about creating pieces of art depicting animals; Green's pieces are intended to speak, to reach into the subconscious.

"I learned to draw animals because I loved them," she said. "Starting early on I was able to draw them, and now it's a process of using that drawing to not just make a beautiful piece, but to go beyond that and say something."

Green works entirely in clay, sometimes manipulating it and giving it enough texture to look like wood or even stone.

"Clay is so pliable and yielding," Green said. "Over the years I've learned how to work with it so that I'm telling the clay what to do to a certain extent, and the clay is doing what it wants to do and it's showing me."

Sometimes this involves

throwing a slab of clay on the floor — literally.

"I will take a big piece of clay and toss it on the floor, and I'll do all sorts of marks on the surface with texture tools and pencils. I'll toss it out on the floor a few times, and then it activates the right brain and I start to seeing things in it — 'Oh, OK, I see the outline, I see the ear and a profile' — so then I'll go in with a pencil. So in that way the clay is sort of telling me what it wants to become."

Green's pieces on display in The Arts Center have been created in the style of cave art, giving the works a more primitive feel.

"I'm very interested in cave art and in that earliest form of expression," she said. "Some of that is the earliest art that's been seen and the quality of the drawing is as good as anything being done now."

The art on display also represents her own personal interpretation of nature.

"Nature is my teacher, and it's feeding me all the time," Green said.

Green attributes her inspiration for the pieces from OSU professor Bill Ripple's work on the role of predators, particularly wolves, in the environment; her love of cougars and large cats; and the writing of Paul Sheppard, who talks about the connection between humans and



Artist Leslie Green is pictured in her Philomath art studio Monday afternoon.

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Top: Wolves in clay, by Leslie Green. Right: Polar bear mural in clay, by Leslie Green.

animals as pleistocene creatures.

"I'm trying to locate that within me, and maybe connect to that in others, too," she said.

Green began throwing pottery when she was 16, under the tutelage of ceramics teacher Esther James, who has a shared love of nature.

"For some reason, at 16, I knew that her aesthetic and the way she worked, and her views of nature as her teacher, was the path that I wanted to follow," Green said.

Green now teaches ceramics and raku — Japanese pot-

tery — to others, holding classes in her studio in Philomath and at the Benton Center. For more about Green and her art, see <http://lesliegreen>



[art.com](http://theartscenter.net). For more about her exhibit with Greg Conyne, see <http://theartscenter.net>.

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