

Wolf Mask

Richard Heller

HELLER CAME TO SCULPTURE EARLY DURING HIS THIRTY YEARS AS A BLACKSMITH. HE CONTINUES TO SHOE A SELECT GROUP OF HORSES. BORN IN LOS ANGELES IN 1952, THE ARTIST HAS ALWAYS IMMERSSED HIMSELF IN NATURE. IN THE 1970S, HE LIVED IN TENTS IN VARIOUS ISOLATED LOCATIONS FROM MEXICO TO ALASKA. FOR MOST OF HIS LIFE, HE HAS WORKED WITH ANIMALS, NOT ONLY SHOEING HORSES, BUT ALSO STUDYING VETERINARY PHYSIOLOGY. HE SPENT SEVEN YEARS WORKING WITH EMOTIONALLY DISTURBED CHILDREN, TEACHING THEM HORSEBACK RIDING AND COUNSELING THEM BY INTRODUCING THEM TO A NATURAL WORLD [THAT CAN BE APPRECIATED]. HE HAS CONTRIBUTED TO HOOFBEAT, AN EQUINE JOURNAL AND IS AN AUTHOR OF POETRY AND SHORT STORIES.

THE ARTIST'S LOVE FOR NATURE STEMS FROM HIS EARLIEST YEARS, AND HE HAS HAD A PARTICULAR FASCINATION WITH WOLVES, PLEADING THEIR CAUSE EVEN AS A TEENAGER, TO ALL WHO WOULD LISTEN. THE ARTIST HAS ALWAYS MAINTAINED THAT DESPITE ITS FEROCITY, THE WOLF IS THE MOST MISUNDERSTOOD AND MISTREATED OF ANIMALS. IN PART THIS HAS LED THE ARTIST TO SEE THE WOLF AS A FELLOW TRAVELER AND COUNTERPART TO THE HUMAN. SEEING THE WOLF AS MISUNDERSTOOD BECAUSE OF ITS COMPLEX NATURE. IT IS BEAUTIFUL AND FEARSOME, SOCIABLE AND DEADLY. THUS THE WOLF IS A SYMBOL OF THE UNCONSCIOUS PROCESS IN HUMANS, EVIDENCED BY LINGUISTIC WOLF METAPHORS IN CONTEMPORARY USAGE AND ANCIENT WEREWOLF LORE. AS HUMANS BECAME CIVILIZED, THEY GRADUALLY DOMESTICATED CANINES. THIS DEVELOPMENT LED TO THE COMMON VIEW OF THE UNDOMESTICATED WOLF TO VEER FARTHER AND FARTHER FROM ITS TRUE CHARACTER, CREATING A CHASM BETWEEN POPULAR CONCEPTION AND FOUR-LEGGED REALITY.

THIS WORK CAREFULLY EXPLORES THE TEMPORAL ASPECT OF SCULPTURE INHERENT IN ITS SPATIALITY, WHICH RESULTS FROM THE FACT THAT THE WHOLE CANNOT BE VIEWED AT ONCE. DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES OF THE WOLF ARE VIEWED ONLY SEQUENTIALLY. THE INTERIOR OF THE MOUTH AND THE EXTERIOR OF THE SNOUT AND JAWS CANNOT BE PERCEIVED FROM THE SAME POINT AT THE SAME TIME. THE WORK IS DESIGNED TO EMPHASIZE THE DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF THE WOLF'S NATURE. THE VIEWER IS LIKELY TO SEE THE MAJESTIC PROFILE OR THREE-QUARTER VIEW FIRST AND SNARLING MOUTH ONLY LATER, FOLLOWED BY ANOTHER PROFILE. THE GOAL IS NOT SIMPLY TO DEPICT THE WOLF BUT PORTRAY ALL ITS COMPLEXITY. THE DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES SHOW THE BEAUTY AND THE VIOLENCE OF THE WOLF (EMPHASIZED BY THE ARTIST'S CHOICE OF DARK PATINA ON THE BRONZE). HELLER BELIEVES THAT SCULPTURE IS CLOSER TO POETRY AND MUSIC THAN TO PAINTING. THE USE OF NEGATIVE SPACE IN SCULPTURE, THE MOMENTS VOID OF SOUND IN MUSIC, AND THE LINE BREAKS IN POETRY HELPS TO DEFINE THE WORK.

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