



"Seeking Truth," multimedia, 15½" × 20"



"Open Mind," multimedia, 15½" × 20"

THE ARTS

THE PORTALS

Hillary Riggs presents artistic gateways into the transformative power of everyday life.

By Gussie Fauntleroy

It's one of the great paradoxes of life, that something as mundane and common as the passage of time, the touch of another's hand, or a surge of memory can be the catalyst that propels us out of the everyday and into another dimension, a new way of seeing the world. We can be pondering and suddenly break free of the web of customary patterns of thought. We can cry, and on the flood of tears we flow into fresh understanding.

"Portals," Hillary Riggs' most recent series of low-relief wall sculptures, pays tribute to very familiar and accessible states of being which can be gateways to transformation. More importantly, these inviting and finely carved and painted works—some of which include small doors that can be opened—are meant to serve as re-

mindors. Each of the 24 panels in the series allows the viewer to meditate on a different aspect of ordinary life, the artist explains. And through such contemplation, one may become more open to the experience of positive change.

The idea for the series was sparked by the memory of a visit Riggs made, many years ago, to the Metropolitan Museum of Art. She recalls being deeply impressed by a room filled with small religious paintings set in boxy, elaborate frames. They were intended as objects for spiritual reflection, and yet their very tangible frames provided a strong connection with the physical world.

In a similar way, Riggs' "Portals" provide the aesthetic pleasure of exquisite woods in various natural hues and grains, the experience of carved and painted imagery, and

in some cases doors to open and touch. The scale of the pieces invites intimacy while also establishing a tangible presence in the room. Yet beyond these physical elements each also offers fodder for imagination, reflection, and the gradual unveiling of deeper levels of feeling. As reminders of the power of common events to shift one's reality, the "Portals" themselves can become a stimulus for that kind of shift.

"Touch," for example, speaks of the power of physical connection, embrace, massage, and the potential for healing energy contained in touch. The sculpture's wood is as delicate in color and grain as human skin. Yet the painting in the center of the panel is in black and white.

We have so many ideas about touch, Riggs points out, and in many ways our



"Waiting," multimedia, 15½" × 20"



"Touch," multimedia, 15½" × 20"



"Insight," multimedia, 15½" × 20"



"Fire in the Belly," multimedia, 15½" × 20"

PHOTOS BY MARK NOHL

culture has turned touch into something that takes place in the mind. But these are always only ideas, removed from the tactile reality of touch itself. The viewer is brought back to this inherent reality by the hands, which were carved by Alex Nugent, the artist's son. "It's kind of a reverse portal—you move from the inside out, from the mind to the physical," Riggs observes.

In "Insight," the process of creative thinking is symbolized by an eye and a field of floating red neurons behind an interlacing network of fine wire webs. The piece offers connotations of "sweeping away the cobwebs," or of webs that catch ideas and connect them to other ideas. There is also the concept of "getting in behind the structures, moving underneath and exploring that space behind the components," Riggs explains. "That's how we arrive at insight: We get to another layer, another context."

Other "Portals" in the series are meditations on such subjects as death, time, memory, and tears. One piece explores the nature of contraction and expansion—the physics and metaphysics of events, bodies, and life experiences as they move through the cyclical pulses of this type of change.



In her own life, the artist has seen a form of spatial contraction over the past year, which followed the devastating fire in Los Alamos, where she lived. Though her own home was spared, the experience prompted her to sell it and move into a much smaller studio and living space in Santa Fe.

Her art, meanwhile, has shifted from themes based on the collective experience of the human race to a shared but more personal view. At the same time, Riggs is anticipating the next cycle as she makes plans to build a new home and studio on foothill land with interconnecting trails and expansive views. In her new space, she is sure, her artistic vision will shift again.

"Part of this is that these are universal experiences—these are not stories about my life per se," Riggs notes. "The 'Portals' can trigger universal memories in everyone, and communicate something. But everyone can put their own ideas into them. There's a world in every one of these. They're very simple and mundane in one sense—but they're huge concepts."

Hillary Riggs' "Portals" will be on view beginning November 2 at Quimera Gallery, with an artist's reception Friday, November 2nd at 6:00 p.m. The gallery is now at a new location: 206 East Palace Avenue (near the plaza). Call (505) 820-0951, fax (505) 992-2837. Steve Sovelove provided background woodworking on the "Portals."