

The Home Issue

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AT HOME WITH
VAL KILMER
THE ART
OF LIVING

PLUS ARTFUL HOMES, ARTFUL ARTISTS,
ARTFUL AUTHORS, AND MORE

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of the 2010 Lincoln "Shield Cent" penny) Lyndall Bass, at a Club International aerobics class. "What Santa Fe and New Mexico are really good for is making work," says Laurence. "You can explore your internal landscape very easily here."

Explore it, mine it, refine it, struggle with it he has. Neither an absolute realist nor a modern-day classicist, Laurence falls somewhere in between and outside both categorizations. He calls himself a feelist—feeling around for the best way to get an emotional response that's timeless, not transitory. "I try to make imagery that'll sit in your mind and turn over and over, the way the classical painters did," he says. "I like the idea of going back to a painting again and again and getting something new out of it each time."

His paintings are gorgeous, off, odd, and Odd Nerdrum-y; classically informed, contemporary, and expertly rendered. Whether of John Wayne in the supermarket or of Zyklon-B canisters (which held the gas the Nazis used to kill millions), they exhibit what's known among Judaic linguists as antiphrasis, a

kind of Talmudic Yiddish doublespeak, as when a cemetery is termed *dos gute ort* ("the good place") or *beys khayim* ("house of life"). Not exactly euphemisms, in Yiddish antiphrases are called *losh sgeynehoys*—"language rich in light." Laurence's Zyklon canisters are an example of this opposite-think, as are his epic canvases of Jews in their concentration camp garb crossing a Stygian river into oblivion. He renders these otherwise awful pictures with such grace and care that as melancholy, bitter, and sad as they may be, there's also a tremendous amount of light in them. Redeeming light. Salvational light. "It's important for us to find ways to contact our subconscious as well as our conscious world," says Laurence thoughtfully. "To me, art's not about marketing a product. It's a form of prayer. A way to connect with a higher power."

Geoffrey Laurence's Inheritance runs October 1–October 31 at Skotia Gallery, reception October 1, 5–7 PM, 150 Marcy, 505-820-7787, skotiagallery.com

all in the family

the Clifts—comin' down in three-part harmony

by Devon Jackson

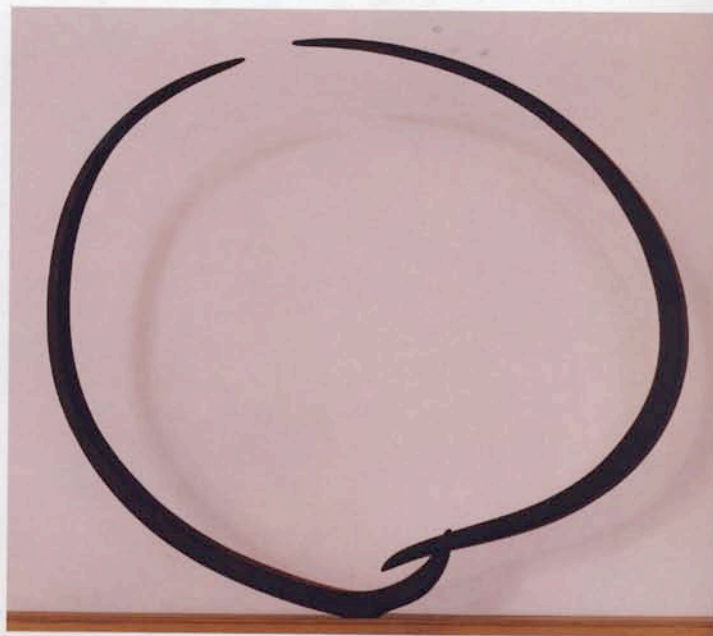
IF THERE'S A GENE FOR RIGOROUSNESS, the Clifts certainly have it. Artistically, intellectually, and spiritually, William ("Bill," 66) and his children Will, 31, and Carola, 36, pursue their art with a level of seriousness and tenacity that might prove crushingly intimidating were it not for their disarming personalities. (Bill's wife, Vida, 69, and their oldest daughter, Charis Clift Jones, 39, are no slouches in the department of self-motivation either. Vida, who emigrated from Lithuania after World War II, put herself through Radcliffe and Berkeley before teaching English at St. John's College here in Santa Fe. Clift Jones now lives in New York City and runs her own art handling firm.)

"We share a certain sensibility," says Bill, who grew up in Boston and got his first camera (a Polaroid) at age 10, at 15 took a workshop with Paul Caponigro (later, Carola's godfather), learned to inject feelings into his pictures when he operated an architecture and yearbook portrait studio from 1963 to 1970, married in 1970, moved to Santa Fe in 1971, and took his first pictures (of many) of Shiprock in 1973. "Luckily," he says of Will and Carola, "they never had to distinguish themselves from each other or me."

Disavowing any innate talent ("I'm a good dowsler," he says. "My pictures have more to do with being open and sensitive and working hard"), Bill firmly espouses the uncomfortable, the difficult, the way of the loner. All are traits Will and Carola have embraced as well. Bill self-published his first book in 1987 (shortly after leaving the gallery world) and still self-publishes ("so I don't end up blaming other people"). "If I can keep looking at something and it's still a challenge," he says, "that's what I'm looking for."

Carola's paintings (abstract watercolors) and photographs (aerial shots of the West and pictures taken from her car along interstates) are as dowslerlike—and intriguingly gorgeous—as her father's work. "There's a great deal of intuition in all our work," says Carola, a wunderkind pianist until she got to UC–San Diego, where "music went from something inside of me to something outside of me." Disillusioned, she took a sabbatical, bought a camera, traveled, started painting, went to museums, got reinvigorated, and returned to school.

After she graduated, she came back to Santa Fe, intending to stay only a couple months. But a fateful exhibit with her father led to a gig for Nathaniel



Will Clift, *Enclosing Form, Round*, wenge, 25 x 30 x 2"

Owings (of the late Owings-Dewey Gallery) and then to showings with both Owings in 2000 and Wendy Lewis's Photo-Eye Gallery in 2001. She's been a full-time artist ever since, and in true Clift fashion she works rigorously if intuitively. "I'm not trying to translate a preconceived idea," she says of her methods. "All my work takes place just beyond the edge of my understanding."

Will Clift (yes, they're relatives of actor Montgomery Clift) followed no more a prescribed path to his art than his father or sister. However, despite double-majoring in integrative design and engineering, master's work in management science (all at Stanford), and a three-year stint at Denver's Rocky Mountain Institute (a natural resources think tank), Will seemed almost destined for sculpting from early childhood.

COURTESY WILL CLIFT

While his parents were building their house in Las Campanas, young Will supplemented his wooden toy set with spare scraps of wood. For a high school physics assignment on equilibrium, he cobbled together three pieces of wood



Top: Carola Clift, *7 April 2008*, watercolor, 10 x 10";
below: Bill Clift, *La Mesita*, photograph, 13 x 19"

"That was my first cantilevered self-balancing structure," he recalls. "It was not an artistic endeavor. It was an experiment in gravity and form equaling balance."

Now drawing upon a huge stock of decontextualized bits of form, and always open to skid marks on the street, the line of someone's neck, and a blade of grass, he takes pictures, makes

sketches, and creates elegant finished pieces that explore the way we occupy and move through space and that suggest that movement in static objects. His work is not unlike that of sculptor George Rickey—but in wood rather than metal. He also admires Richard Serra, who relied on mass (whereas "I rely on a lack of mass and stability," says Will, "but there's a similar visceral physicality"). His pieces are never glued together, always balance on their own, and demonstrate his continuing fascination with curves, which in his sculptures reflect those in our own bodies and one another.

"There's a lot more dynamism in a curving piece," he says. "Once you work with linear elements, you lose the connection to the human body, to the natural quality of balance and how we understand it. These are different ways of exploring balance and its impact on the viewer. I'm trying to delve into something more subconscious, not just to make pretty pictures out of wood balancing together."

His sculptures could even be seen as reflections of the ways he and his family have found a balance. "We're similar," he says, "in that we all have followed our own distinct way." Gracefully, if rigorously.

Gerald Peters Gallery hosts Will Clift's latest sculpture show, October 1–November 13, reception October 1, 5–7 PM, 1011 Paseo de Peralta, 505-954-5700, gpgallery.com; William Clift's photographs can be found at williamclift.com; Carola Clift's work at carolacrift.com

