

Harry Geffert, Moody Gallery

By John Devine

Harry Geffert is something of a Texas legend. Virtually any artist in this state who has cast sculpture in bronze has found their way to Geffert's Green Mountain Foundry in Crowley at some time or another; folks like Jim Surls, Lucas Johnson, Linda Ridgeway, Joseph Havel, Vernon Fisher, and Virgil Grotfeldt have all sought Geffert's skills and knowledge. But now he has ceased casting for other artists, insisting that he needs all his energy for his own work. Judging by a recent exhibit at Moody Gallery, the loss to Texas sculptors is our gain.

Roses and water are the dominate motifs in this body of work. Mounted almost immediately opposite the door, Morning Dew (all works 2002, except where noted) was a ghostly rose, the white flower bleaching out the pale green patina of the extended stem and its leaves, creating the silvering effect evoked by the title. On adjacent walls, Black Water and White Water (both 2001) were frozen in flow, the former suggesting lava as much as water, the latter more subtle, its roiled surface more intricate; also more strictly rectangular, its shape and dimensions suggested a hanging scroll, calling to mind Chinese landscapes. The gallery was dominated by Come Along Rose, a long meandering river of bronze, surmounted by another rose---looking as though it were embarked on some journey—and set upon a low bed of stones (the piece is intended for outdoor installation).

The rose has long been a symbol of perfection beauty, as well as of the mystery of life, while water, in addition to being an absolute necessity to life, represents flux and fluidity and potentiality. In Geffert's hands, both motifs also become manifestations of a primal vitality. Roses thrusting up on their spindly stalks, streams flowing up and then ebbing down again ---these sculptures exploit all the sensuousness that bronze is capable of to convey that vitality. Arguably the tour de force of this show was Jacob's Ladder, a worm's eye view of a series of roots. Once this quiet sculpture caught the

attention among the showier pieces, one was drawn into amazement at its vibrant delicacy, the fragile shoots of each root system reaching towards its neighbor, seeking and offering support. That bronze can be coaxed to such seeming fragility is as remarkable as the natural forms that inspired it. And while the sculpture's wall mount suggested the orderly arrangement of a row in a garden, the irregular spacing of the roots spoke to wilder randomness.

In fact, the exposed root was another motif running through this show; the roses were not of the flower shop, but presented themselves roots and all. On first consideration, this emphasized a sense of vulnerability, even tenuousness. But Matriarch, one of two sculptures in the garden courtyard, dispelled that notion. This rose rode atop an arching water flow, her stem becoming more solidly tree-like as it approached the tendrils that gripped the stream. Nothing fragile about this vitally affirmative lady. A reading of vulnerability had to be reconsidered.

A Crooked Little Rose sits on an acrylic pyramid, its yellow bud atop an attenuated, gently arching stem. The stalk bends ninety degrees at the apex of the pyramid before curving down to touch the floor. The more one looked at it, the more one thought of Rodin's *The Thinker* as realized by Giacometti, more stoic than brooding, and braver, such anthropomorphism might be a risk, but it points toward an explanation for the vague air of melancholy that suffused this exhibit, with its themes of fluidity, the passage of time and beauty, fragility, tenuousness, tenacity. There is an echo here of Dylan Thomas:

"The force that through the green fuse drives the flower
Drives my green age; that blasts the roots of trees
Is my destroyer.
And I am dumb to tell the crooked rose
My youth is bent by the same wintry fever."