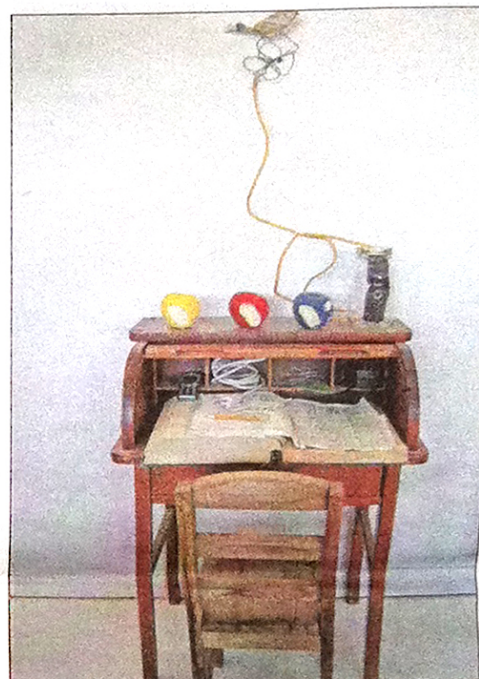


# SURFING

## *the third wave*

KATHLEEN McCLOUD



Artist Kathleen McCloud picked up an old telephone handset, which she had enhanced with some glued-down map fragments, and said, "I think of this as one of the most sensual objects ever made." Also known as a "receiver" (harking back to the day when the microphone was part of the base telephone and the object you picked up only held the receiver), it is clunky by modern standards, but it's also resolutely ergonomic and obvious — designed to be held with round receiver to the ear while speaking into the round microphone end — in contrast to the flat little cellphones of today with nearly invisible speakers and microphones. "If you're a talker, you want a transmitter and a receiver. With cellphones, I never know what's going on," McCloud said.

The handset is an element of her installation piece *Futurology 101: Welcome to the Third Wave*, opening Friday, March 18, at Axle Contemporary. In her hands, this ordinary object is pregnant with possibilities and issues — some troubling, some liberating. The ideas revolve around the swift expansion in our culture of the newest manifestations of the Information Age. Already, suddenly, the land-line telephone is, to a significant percentage of the population, an old-fashioned artifact of some earlier technology.

"In the last couple of years I was observing my own resistance to learning the digital media," McCloud said during a recent visit to her studio. "I was frustrated, and everyone I was talking to was dealing with the same things about Twitter and Facebook and whether it's this kind of file or that kind of file."

"This body of work came out of that. It's about conversation and questions, not about my point of view. The more I enter into this, this new-media environment, it's bringing up a need to readjust my sense of time and value and make choices. How do I want to communicate? What do I say yes to?

What do I say no to? And it's about patience — that if I want to learn something, I need to suspend time in a different way. In the past, if I was trying to learn software or something else on the computer, I'd get frustrated because, while I was doing that, I wasn't working."

McCloud's career has encompassed weaving, freelance writing, Navajo blanket restoration, printmaking, painting, producing museum audio tours, and sculpture. Throughout it all is an interest in storytelling. Her early incentive to create *Futurology 101* had to do with printing innovator Johannes Gutenberg and the alphabet, with the overarching importance of the visual in our society, and with the ideas of futurist Marshall McLuhan. Particularly potent for her is McLuhan's 1967 book *The Medium Is the Message: An Inventory of Effects* and his notion of the "global village."

"I've always thought content is everything, that the medium has had more effect than any message that's come through in my lifetime," McCloud said. "TV, radio, and electronics have done more to change society and our approach to life and how we interact than any of the messages that come and go."

The installation title was taken from *The Third Wave*, a 1980 book by another futurist, Alvin Toffler. "We are still agricultural, which was the First Wave," she said. "Then the Industrial Revolution was the Second Wave, then we have the Information Age, which is Toffler's Third Wave. And at a certain point, things go so fast that it breaks down. We re-tribalize. I see that happening. There's this hunter-gatherer part that's showing up again, and we need that for our own survival. We need to be out there in the unknown, disconnected, not wired, and just in the wild."

Among the other pieces of her installation are *The Wave*, a large mixed-media painting; *Mercury*, a giant feather-plume pen sculpture; a wolf sculpture she began as part of a Santa Fe Community College sculpture class; and a floor "paving" of books including Nancy Drew adventures, Golden Encyclopedias, and 1950s issues of the journal *ETC: A Review of Semantics*. "A lot of these are kind of moldy, and they were going to end up in the dump," McCloud said. "They're cultural artifacts, and I enjoy them visually. It's a mosaic. To me the books are beautiful visually. When I was restoring textiles, the Navajo would see the English letters as just graphic elements, and they would incorporate them in their weavings. I love that, and I'm sort of doing that. I'm also being very naughty: I'm Second Wave, raised in the public schools, and you don't put books on the floor. And I cut some in half to get them to lay down better. Very bad."

In the midst of *Futurology 101*'s tackling of thorny philosophical topics, it's nice to find expressions of McCloud's simple love for apples. A yellow, a red, and a blue apple — each with a bite removed — sit on a small school desk. They represent the openness of what McCloud calls the "beginner's mind" but also the artist's fondness for Apple computers and the earthy nature of apples and applewood.

She was looking forward to mounting the show in Axle Contemporary, a mobile art gallery (a modified 1970 Grumman Olson step van with a Chevrolet Camaro engine) run by Matthew Chase-Daniel and Jerry Wellman. "I love the van," McCloud said. "I love what they're doing, and it feels very apropos to our times with the mobility and impermanence and also its accessibility."

One advantage of a mobile gallery is that the artist doesn't necessarily have to travel to set up the show. McCloud said she would install it — possibly including cutting the big painting to fit — in the Axle Contemporary van parked at her La Cieneguilla home over a four-day period before the opening, when it will be parked next to the Santa Fe Farmers Market.

"In better weather they curate shows, and the van is open so people can go inside and see. In wintertime, they put a glass panel on the rear, and you can look in," McCloud said. "It's like the old-school natural-history diorama."

She tapped into her skill at producing museum audio tours to create a six-minute audio segment about the show's topics, and it will run on a loop for the van's in-lookers. The piece features her own voice and, at the end, the voice of musician/artist/surfer Rob Bird-Robinson talking about waves and the value of intuition and patience to the surfer.

In this and other aspects of *Futurology 101*, McCloud's motivation is about resolving, or at least fervently working with, the perplexities of living life confronted by the vast, internet-powered, interactive, new-media environment. "There is the seduction that information is somehow paving our way to wisdom. Not necessarily. It's a great diversion. But I think with Facebook there's a threat of feeling connected but not really being connected.

"I don't understand a lot of it," she said in a discussion of the details of Facebook's functions. "I'm in a constant state of not quite knowing how to drive the car. I do find that I like my privacy, and with all this it's like, whoa, we're just giving it all away. So it brings up questions about what's private and intimate. I'm not sure why this is all important, but I have a playfulness about it, where I'm willing to suspend judgment and check it out. And I am very hopeful about it all."

"Toffler says the big change began in 1955, the year I was born. So it's like being born into Second Wave values but being a very Third Wave person. I never felt like I fit into that highly specialized world, and I feel all of what's going on is unknown and sketchy, but I feel like if I stay light on my feet and open and intuitive, I'm OK." ◀

## details

- ▼ *Futurology 101: Welcome to the Third Wave*
- ▼ Opening 5-7 p.m. Friday, March 18; through April 10
- ▼ Axle Contemporary, parked by Santa Fe Farmers Market, 1607 Paseo de Peralta, during opening; see [www.axleart.com](http://www.axleart.com) or call 670-5854 or 670-7612 for updated locations