

PETER VANDENBERGE – (1935 -)

Dutch artist Peter VandenBerge spent his early years living in Indonesia, an idyllic existence that ended abruptly with the Japanese invasion of the islands during World War II. Imprisoned with his family for three years, the young boy fled with his family after the war, moving first to Australia, back to The Netherlands, once more to Indonesia, and finally to the United States where he settled permanently. VandenBerge was part of the legendary group at University of California, Davis, during the 1960s. Working under Robert Arneson he was part of the Funk Art movement but evolved in his own direction. He is best known for his larger-than-life busts and figures, elongated beings that are roughly constructed, reminiscent of ancient tribal art, and finished with texturing, glazes, and stains. VandenBerge has said that the figures arise out of long ago memories of puppet shows he loved as a child in Indonesia, the memories blurred and mixed with the variety of experiences that have comprised his life since those days. In addition to his work as a studio artist, VandenBerge has had a long and successful career as a teacher: first at California State University, San Francisco and then for nearly 30 years at his alma mater, California State University, Sacramento where he is presently Professor Emeritus having fully retired in 2003.

ARTIST'S STATEMENT – PETER VANDENBERGE

“Much of the sources for my work are from past personal experiences, many arising from childhood, that hopefully will find a sculptural form, most often figurative and interwoven with all the technical and aesthetic considerations of the clay medium.

My notion of the figure originally started by stacking wheelthrown cylinders on top of each other and then, while still pliable, formed them into figures. Later on, the cylinders were replaced by coils which were more versatile in building with clay.”¹

1. Quoted from: Peter VandenBerge, “Statement.” John Natsoulas Gallery. Davis, CA

RESUME – PETER VANDENBERGE

1935	Born, The Hague, The Netherlands
1954	Move to California to join his father
1954-1957	Bakersfield Junior College, Bakersfield, CA
1957-1959	California State University, Sacramento, CA, B.A.
1959	Art Academy, The Hague, Holland, The Netherlands
1960-1962	Sacramento State College, Sacramento, CA
1962-1963	University of California, Davis, CA, M.A.

1964	Marries Marilyn Jones, Bolinas, CA
1966-1973	Instructor, California State University, San Francisco, Ca
1970	San Francisco Art Festival, Purchase Award
1973-2003	Professor, California State University, Sacramento, CA
1972	Instructor, University of Washington, Seattle, WA
1975	Instructor, State University of New York, College of Ceramics at Alfred University, Alfred, NY
1978	Sacramento Metropolitan Arts Commission, Art in Public Places Program, Commission for Ceramic Mural
1981	National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship Grant
1983, 1986	Instructor, Appalachian Center for Crafts/Tennessee Technical University, Smithville, TN
1984	Sacramento Metropolitan Arts Commission, Art in Public Places Program, Sculpture Commission
1998	Professor of Art Emeritus, California State University, Sacramento, CA
Present	Studio Artist

BIOGRAPHY – PETER VANDENBERGE

Peter VandenBerge was born in The Netherlands in Voorburg, near The Hague. His father was a geologist, working for Royal Dutch (Shell Oil), and traveled a great deal and his mother was a physical therapist who also enjoyed drawing. Shortly after VandenBerge's birth, his father was sent to Indonesia and the family lived there until Peter was nine years old. Some of his early memories are good ones: occasionally traveling with his father, exploring the exotic landscapes and seeing crocodiles, monkeys and elephants. He also remembers the puppet shows, flat shadow puppets as well as three-dimensional ones, and that in these shows the puppets would interact with the audience. Images from those long-ago performances would later appear in his work. The memories are not all good, however. World War II reached Indonesia in 1942 when the Japanese invaded the islands for their oil. Unable to escape, the family hid for as long as they could but were eventually captured and put in prison camps. For three years they suffered from deprivation until the bombing of Japan brought an end to the Japanese occupation and the Dutch took over the government. One war ended and another began as the Indonesians now took on the Dutch in their bid for independence. Indonesian friends hid the family until they could arrange for a flight out of the country. Since The Netherlands was itself trying to recover from the European phase of the war, his father's company sent the family to Australia for a year to regain their health and VandenBerge attended school there, learning English. In 1946 his father resumed working and the family returned to The Netherlands for a year, then moved back to Indonesia for a short time until the family was once again sent to a new assignment. This

time it was to Bakersfield, CA; his father moved there in 1950 while the rest of the family remained behind so VandenBerge and his brother could finish school. In 1954 VandenBerge joined his father in California, finished high school and attended Bakersfield Junior College, studying art. During the summers he helped his father in the oil fields, saving up enough money to return to Europe to see his mother and brother and to travel in Europe. On one of these trips he met the artist Alberto Giacometti whose work would influence VandenBerge's own.

VandenBerge continued his art studies at California State University at Sacramento where he earned his B.A. degree. He returned to his native country for a while, attending the Holland Free Academy and once again seeing Giacometti and also meeting Joan Miro. VandenBerge was studying for his M.A. at Sacramento State College when he saw Robert Arneson doing a demonstration at a state fair. Impressed by what he saw, and with an offer of some part-time work from Arneson, he transferred to University of California, Davis and completed his master's work there, graduating in 1963. He stayed at Davis for a few more years working in the foundry at TB-9, helping to develop the non-explosive, non-cracking whiteware clay that he, Arneson, and others would use in making the ceramics known as Funk Ceramics. VandenBerge left Davis in 1966 to teach at the California State University at San Francisco. Living in Haight Ashbury with his wife and children during the height of the turbulent '60s, the surrealistic times found their way into his work. He began making vegetable forms, inspired by the shapes he saw in a nearby farmer's market; first the forms were containers for food but then they took on anthropomorphic features. The vegetable-people sometimes stood alone but also were placed in settings, usually humorous although the humor could have a dark tinge. From there it was perhaps inevitable that he would move to the human figure itself and it is those figures, both full-size standing ones and busts, that comprise his best-known work.

VandenBerge left California State University in San Francisco in 1973 to teach at his alma mater, California State University in Sacramento, where he remained until his full retirement in 2003, having received Professor Emeritus in 1998. He spent a summer and a semester teaching at Alfred University in 1975 and it was there that his large figurative heads first appeared. "I was throwing some cylinders, and let them set up for awhile. Then I stacked them together on top of each other and started pushing and pulling at the clay. Then, almost unconsciously, a nose started appearing, then the eyes. Then I started building them out of coils and made them larger and more elaborate. In a sense the heads are figures because they're elongated. Like you're a figure. You see a person and it's an elongated form. Heads are figures in themselves to a degree – they have a feeling like that."¹ The heads often reach to six to seven feet. VandenBerge works quickly and forcefully, the walls of his studio covered with drawings of the works in progress. They are roughly built, the coils that form them often visible, and finished with underglazes and stains applied with brushes, sponges, knives, and anything else that produces the effect he is looking for. The rough surfaces are often carved, dug into, scraped and painted. They are often compared to the Easter Island "heads" in their stretched shape and tribal art feel., and the influence of the work of both Giacometti and Modigliani is evident as well. He next moved beyond just the head to making larger-than-life figures, still continuing the elongated, cylindrical form, the rough, textured finish completed with underglazes and stains. Architectural features also appear, blending with the human figure until the one becomes the other. The heads and figures are VandenBerge's closing of the circle that ties his memories of his childhood in Indonesia and his subsequent experiences with his present. "The linkage between where I came from – the temples where I was growing up and the Indonesian puppet theater – *that was my link.*"²

VandenBerge's work has been exhibited extensively both in the United States and abroad and is included in the collections of the Oakland Art Museum, Oakland, CA; the Everson Museum of

Art, Syracuse, NY; the Crocker Art Museum, Sacramento, CA; and the Contemporary Museum, Honolulu, HI, among others. Included in his awards are a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship Grant and two commissions from the Sacramento Metropolitan Arts Commission for Art in Public Places Program.

1. John Natsoulas. "Interview with Peter Vandenberg," in *Vandenberg*. Davis, CA: Natsoulas Novelozo Gallery, 1991.
2. Roth, David M. in *ArtView* (May 1993): 3.

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GALLERY REPRESENTATION – PETER VANDENBERGE

Harvey/Meadows Gallery, 0133 Prospector Road, Suite 4114 A, aspen Highlands Village, Aspen, CO 81611

Solomon Dubnick Gallery, 1050 20th Street, Suite 130, Sacramento, CA 95811

WEB SITES – PETER VANDENBERGE

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