Betty Foy Sanders Department of Art News
April 7, 2008
Tripping the Beauty Queen: Exhibition by Artist Gayle Shaw-Clark
at Center for Art & Theatre, Georgia Southern University

Tripping the Beauty Queen, an exhibition by Master of Fine Art Candidate Gayle Shaw-Clark is featured in the Contemporary Gallery at Georgia Southern’s Center for Art & Theatre from April 7 – 25, 2008. The installation of large ceramic sculptures by Shaw-Clark investigates the construction of, and constriction to, female sexuality, beauty, and competition based upon existing definitions of beauty. The public is invited to attend the exhibition’s opening reception on Friday, April 11th at 6 pm.

Shaw-Clark describes her initial inspiration for Tripping the Beauty Queen, “In my world growing up, it was more important for one to win a beauty contest than to be valedictorian.” She describes the ‘chosen’ girls from her peers throughout her life – those young women who entered beauty pageants and had the dates with the sports elite—who were indeed smart and funny, but noted more so for their beauty. The artist describes how she “was not of the same visual caliber and could not compete. I never had problems with these girls; many were my closest friends. However, just because I liked them, doesn’t mean I secretly didn’t want to trip them.”

Through this exhibition, Shaw-Clark intends the viewer to reconsider their judgments of women and honor female intelligence and power. Representing mental and physical pressures related to female appearance, the artworks examine social rules and unrealistic expectations placed upon women because of their physical appearance. Shaw-Clark identifies specific social constructs and constraints, portraying both those that are accepted and those are taboo. The works visual represent how sexual and gender roles have been perpetuated throughout history in art and life.

An oral defense of the thesis exhibition by Gayle Shaw-Clark, a Master of Fine Art candidate in the Betty Foy Sanders Department of Art will be held in the Contemporary Gallery on April 9 at 5pm. “The research compiled to create my thesis and body of work has stirred emotions and feelings I thought were absent in myself. I always felt inadequate as a young girl, through my adolescence and into womanhood never realizing that there is nothing wrong with me… it’s what is wrong with society.”

Gayle Shaw-Clark received her Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from Georgia Southern University in 1992. In 1996, Shaw-Clark completed post-baccalaureate work attaining teaching certification. After teaching K-12 for six years, Shaw-Clark describes that she began graduate school in 2005 “to have the opportunity to be immersed in a research community and grow as an artist.” Gayle Shaw-Clark will graduate this May with a Masters in Fine Art degree, the terminal degree in studio art, from Georgia Southern University.

The Betty Foy Sanders Department of Art Gallery Programming is supported by Student Activity Fees. All events are free and open to the public. The Center for Art & Theatre is open Monday through Friday from 9-5 and by appointment. Docent tours are welcome and available upon request by calling (912) 478-1712. For more information visit: http://class.georgiasouthern.edu/art/.

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