

Wanxin Zhang: *Warriors of Soul*, Turner Carroll Gallery, 725 Canyon Road, 986-9800; exhibit through Aug. 18

A genogram is a family tree illustration that can be used to trace ancestral patterns of behavior, similarities of appearance, and medical, psychological, and religious factors, revealing our predecessors' legacy — good and bad — for us. Creating a personal genogram can lead to major breakthroughs in self-awareness — for example, the recognition that alcoholism, red hair, diabetes, musical talent, divorce, or faith seem to run in one's family. China-born artist Wanxin Zhang's figurative sculptures, based on the terra-cotta funerary army created for the first Chinese emperor, speak to the issues of ancestry and heritage in a similarly powerful way.

Zhang, who has been working in the United States for about 20 years, has integrated the weight of Chinese history and contemporary culture into his hand-built, slab-based figures, which range from about 2 feet tall to life-size. Constructed of the same materials as the Qin Dynasty warriors that were discovered in 1974, the abstracted figures are glazed in strong hues; their shiny surfaces feature cracks, deep fissures, pebbling, and layered drips of multiple colors. They wear garments that approximate the ancient warriors' heavy tiered robes, and their hair is drawn up into topknots. Some bear Chinese characters and carefully wrought clay buttons, loops, and other clothing notions on their surfaces.

If Zhang had stopped there in his attempt to create what he calls "a new genre of warriors," we would be disappointed. Instead he has explored who they might be today, if they were the descendants of the third-century B.C. army. It's a dual narrative: one, it raises questions about the people upon whom the warriors were modeled, and two, it juxtaposes the art techniques and style of third-century B.C. China with those of today. Heady but accessible stuff.

Wanxin Zhang: left, General (detail), 2010, fired clay and pigment; below, from left, Panda Warrior, 2010, fired clay and pigment; First Step, 2012, fired clay with glaze

