SHARON NELSON

Learning By Hand

1

We do not think much about the cells of the skin of our hands, the cells of the skin of the fingers of our hands. We do not mourn them as they are shed and washed away, as if our hands were free agents separate instruments, our hands that touch everything, the clean and the unclean, as if it were separate from ourselves as if we could remain untouched by what our hands touch.

2

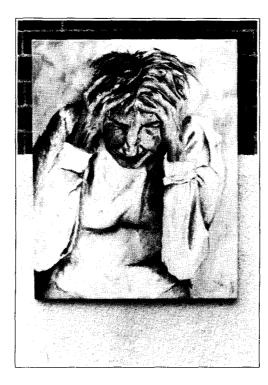
What our hands know we know whether or not we know that we know.

Hands may forget their cunning; hands do not forget that they once possessed cunning. Our fingers may swell, become misshapen; the small bones rebelling against alignment, the grasp not what it was, not what it was at all.

Things slip away from us out of our fingers as if by miracles: we had it *here* in our hands an instant ago.

Fingers bent,
warped as wood left
wet too long,
once plucked the child
out of harm's way
plucked pinfeathers
plucked
the mote out of an I
pluck now
at the small balled bits
of well-worn blankets
washed too many times.

Is that what we come to?



Chery Holmes, *One of the Forgotten*, oil on canvas, one panel of diptych, 22" x 28"