

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  
rebellious 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"