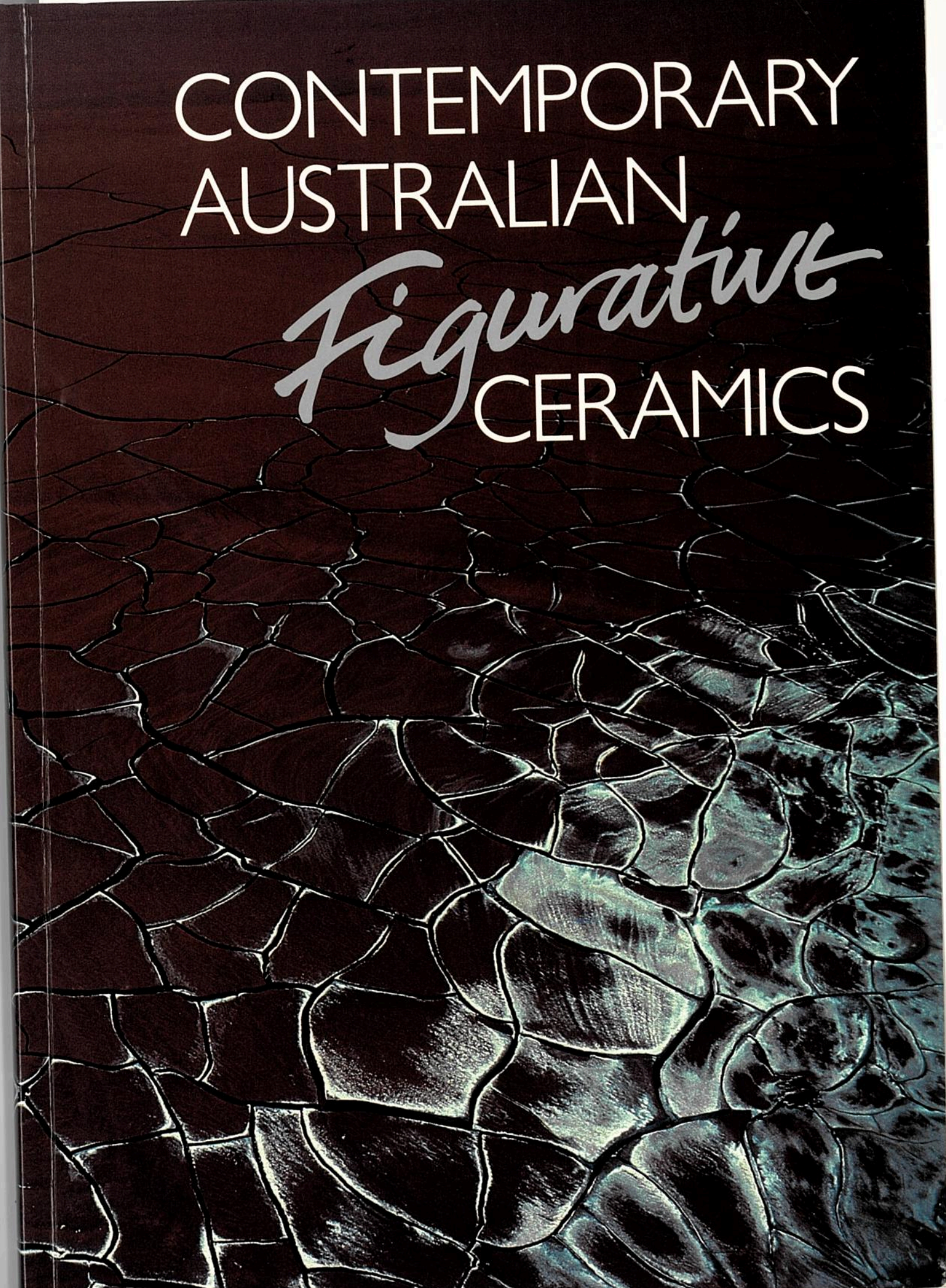


CONTEMPORARY
AUSTRALIAN

Figurative
CERAMICS



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CONTEMPORARY AUSTRALIAN *Figurative* CERAMICS

collected by

Virginia Hollister and Kathrin McMiles



This project was assisted by the Australia Council, the
Federal Government's art funding and advisory body.

CONTEMPORARY AUSTRALIAN FIGURATIVE
CERAMICS

Collected by Virginia Hollister and Kathrin McMiles

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INTRODUCTION

In Australia over the last twenty years many clay artists have explored the power of the figurative image, using it to express social and political concerns. Utilizing a wide vocabulary of ceramic materials and techniques, innovators have constructed images that investigate cultural and personal mythologies. The evolution of this work has been largely outside the formalist preoccupations of functional ceramics. Alternatively these artists have engaged in an enthusiastic mimicry of contemporary cultural icons and past figurative conventions to create new visions.

This genre represents a vital impulse in ceramic expression. Throughout history the human form has been imaginatively interpreted in clay. The great examples of Chinese, Indian, African and European figurative work have a timeless quality, providing insight into the past and inviting reflection on the present. These works transmit something of the physical, psychological and spiritual environment of the time and place, thus making them a potent form of cross-cultural communication. By reinvestigating the archetypes, artists in this exhibition are contributing to the continuing debates on Australian cultural identity and aspirations. Their work is, at the same time, expanding the parameters of aesthetic statements in clay.

The impetus for *Contemporary Australian Figurative Ceramics* came in planning for the fifth National Ceramics Conference, to be held in Sydney during May 1988. The concurrence of the World Crafts Council Meeting, the International Academy of Ceramics Conference and the seventh Biennale of Sydney with the Ceramics Conference provided a unique opportunity to focus attention on clay artists working with the figure.

Our aim has been to present the work of those ceramicists who have been committed to working with the figure in three dimensions for some time, and of others who have more recently turned to this genre to explore their personal and political concerns. Up to this point there has been little critical assessment of the content and modes of expression characteristic of the genre. This first collection of *Contemporary Australian Figurative Ceramics* begins to redress the isolation of the artists by stimulating debate about their work as social, cultural and aesthetic constructions.

This publication provides the basis for a critical framework for looking at figurative ceramics. Two introductory essays identify some of the complex issues being addressed: Jacqueline Clayton outlines the history of successive waves of figurative ceramics in Australia, and John McDonald raises questions of theatricality, humour

and recent psychoanalytic theory. In addition, each artist has reflected on his or her motivation and sources of inspiration, and each has provided technical notes about construction and firing methods.

Virginia Hollister
Kathrin McMiles

FIGURATIVE CERAMICS IN AUSTRALIA

JACQUELINE CLAYTON

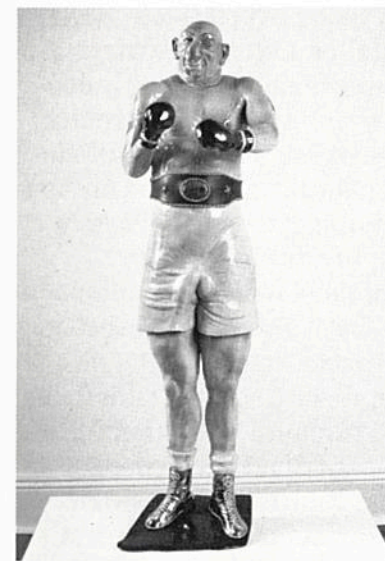
If there exist conventions in writing on ceramics, it must surely be those of relating clay to flesh, the product of the traditional potter to the body and the archetypal clay form to the fertile human image. Adam, we are assured, was created from clay; a successful pot is endowed with the attributes of a Botticellian Eve: delicately waisted, with a full belly, elegant foot and well-rounded shoulder; and archaeological evidence depicts the international Adam and mate petitioning for abundance through the intercession of voluptuous clay images. Similarly, the vernacular of ceramics is littered with allusions to the condition of the figure (a clay 'body' may be 'short', 'fat' or 'bloated'). Even at that esoteric point where the rhetoric of Zen meets the aesthetics of folk art, a pot may be identified as a charged void articulated by its stretched clay 'skin'.

The tradition of the ceramic figure has passed easily from fetish object to funerary sentinel, through Eastern prototypes to the figures of eighteenth century European porcelain factories and persists in its most enduring form as the figurine confections of the gift store. Likewise, effigy vessels of South America are recalled in English Toby ware and the figurative container forms of Merric Boyd and Anne Mercer.

But in choosing to concentrate on larger sculptural pieces outside the realm of the vessel-based object or small-scale figurine, Hollister and McMiles have brought together a body of work that refers more to the concerns identified with current mainstream art debate than to the tradition of the figure in clay. For, in the much quoted 'return' to figuration,¹ painters and sculptors have hewn a new path and peopled their destination with unfamiliar, challenging presences. No longer is the figure simply a prop in the representation of a narrative or subordinate to a principal concern with art making and art process. Instead, evocative, expressive, often autobiographical, its dynamic is the personal association and response of a human spectator.

In challenging its audience the new ceramic figure must confront the viewer body to body, funding the impact of scale in order to subvert the sentimental, idealized references of the hand-held figurine, that most 'unrelentingly positive' and 'disappointingly shallow' of artefacts.² For Australian ceramicists, this approach appears to represent a recent significant phase of three dimensional body imagery in clay.³

Throughout the nineteenth century our fledgling potteries were represented in International Exhibitions by their output of industrial products, domestic ware and clay samples. Commercially produced figurative ware was unusual,⁴ although individual pieces were produced by a



Paul Greenaway *Boxer* 1980

number of 'artist-potters', the vanguard in the first and earliest phase of Australian figurative ceramics. Doreen Goodchild in Adelaide in the 1920s, John Perceval and David and Hermia Boyd two decades later are notable examples.

By the 1950s Bernard Leach's *A Potters Book* was widely available. It formed the foundation stone in an edifice that has been called the Anglo-Eastern approach to clay. Buttressed by the precepts of the Arts and Craft Movement, the writing of Yanagi Soetsu and an appreciation of the work of Hamada, this imposing composite was enthusiastically embraced as 'the first truly satisfying aesthetic presented to Australia's studio potters since the country first began'.⁵ At its heart the approach held use, beauty and truth to be inseparable, a proposition that prevailed in the training institutions, pottery associations and critical literature for at least twenty-five years. It is not surprising that in such an environment it was the vessel form that was most visible. Indeed, the relatively slim legacy of figurative work from this period is almost entirely thrown, pot oriented and domestic in scale, sometimes assembled from a number of components.⁶ These 'figures', symmetrically stylized into decorative impotence, use the techniques of the potter to achieve the expressively restrained end of the figure modeller. Often the work displays references to folk art sources and to the ceramic figures of Picasso. In 1957 Helen McIntosh and Alexander Leckie, a Scotsman, had established Ravenswood studio in South Australia. Well known both locally and nationally as a versatile potter in the Leach tradition, later as an educator, Leckie's sculptural pieces exemplify this tendency.⁷ Of course, the persistence of this mode of work was undoubtedly influenced by market forces and by a critical response that took the truth-to-materials approach as its standard.

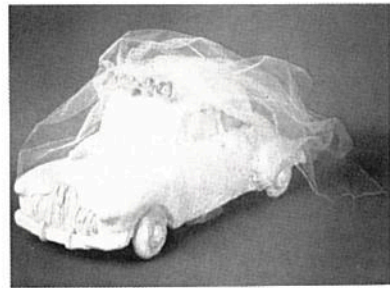
However, Leckie's spirited approach to clay heralded the second major phase of figurative ceramics in Australia. The contentious child of a period of experiment and change, Australian ceramic sculpture was nurtured in an atmosphere of optimism and affluence. At its most potent it pushes at the limits of ceramic technique and conscripts the 'expressive potential' of clay to the vigorous exposition of social, political, sexual and art issues. Undoubtedly, developments overseas informed the work of the period. The so-called Abstract Expressionist ceramics of Peter Voulkos and his Los Angeles based group had demonstrated, in the late 1950s, a new, adventurous approach to clay. Traditional notions of scale, colour and surface were challenged. Epoxy adhesives were used to assemble torn, gouged components. Massive forms, some

requiring up to two tonnes of clay, demanded new methods of working, handling and firing. American Pop Art of the 1960s, brash and colourful, displayed a preoccupation with the homeland. Coca-Cola stalls and hamburgers proliferated in incisive observation on American consumer culture. Robert Arneson responded in clay. Arneson and his students at the University of California, Richard Shaw and David Gilhooly, went on to generate a Funk clay idiom, teasing wit and comment from the most banal objects painstakingly refashioned in clay. Production casting techniques and commercial moulds and glazes were adopted, as were the skills and materials of the china painter.

Developments at home, too, were crucial. Nationally, the Arts were buoyed by hitherto unparalleled federal support, while in South Australia the Dunstan government was known for its public and productive slaughter of holy cows. It was against this backdrop that an Englishman, Bill Gregory, was appointed lecturer in ceramics at the South Australian School of Art in the mid-1960s. Although perhaps extravagantly credited with 'fully liberating ceramic development in South Australia',⁸ his work evidently produced hyperbole in its reviewers. Patrick McCaughey wrote of it as 'splendidly hideous and marvellously useless',⁹ and Donald Brook described a 1968 show as 'refreshing as drought breaking rain after an aeon of cider jugs with bucolic bodies like boiled oatmeal'.¹⁰ Certainly his influence at the School of Art was important in the development of that body of work now known as Skangarooovian Funk which was produced in Adelaide during the decade from the late 1960s to the late 1970s.

Developments further east, though less prominent, also bear mention. Noel Flood's fearsome female forms with their very obvious procreational attributes suggest a perverse continuity with the fertility images of tribal cultures. Female viewers may be offended by their disturbing presence; or are his personages a jibing comment on the pristine prototypes of the figurine heritage? Stephen Skillitzi in Sydney and Ken Leveson in Melbourne exhibited humanoid forms of similar grotesque charm in the early 1970s. Skillitzi's work was notable for its experimental character; both were enthusiastic in their use of non-clay accessory materials.

The elegant and eloquent sculptures of Frédéric Chepeaux displayed consideration in the use of non-traditional materials. This work shares the humour, fantasy and acerbic comment of that of his peers of the period, but like Lorraine Jenyns and Gerald Makin there are strongly felt interior, perhaps intuitive components that suggest affinities with contemporary figuration. Likewise, Bernard



Margaret Dodd Bridal Holden

Sahm's large art machine-bodies pre-empt a current inclination to make near life-size images that relate directly to their audience.

Like so much work of this period, Tim Moorhead's figure-encrusted pie shells and his 1974 show *Ceramic Expressionism and the Power of Humpty Dumpty* derive impact from calculated humour and the *double entendre*. His 1971 *Experiment One* show at Prahran College of Technology drew students from diverse areas of the institution and culminated in an exhibition of clay pieces that reflected students' prior experience of their own particular discipline. Such disregard of conventional barriers between areas of art practice typifies the experimentation of the time.

Nowhere were the benefits of this approach more apparent than at the School of Art in Adelaide. It was the proximity of Bill Gregory's ceramics department to the sculpture area that is credited with a formative influence on the colourful clay objects of a generation of ceramic artists. But of those who participated in the exhibition *Skangaroo-vian Funk*, it is perhaps the work of Margaret Dodd, Olive Bishop, Bruce Nuske, Paul Greenaway and Mark Thompson that is best remembered.

Each developed a powerful iconography through which they engaged a revealing diversity of personal and political issues. Dodd's colourful metaphoric cars, unabashedly clay, resonate with an energetic, consciously Australian presence while poignantly enshrining the sensibility of generations of Australian women. Consummate ability in the handling of porcelain characterizes the work of Bruce Nuske, Mark Thompson and Paul Greenaway. Their often rococo extravaganzas relentlessly exploited the precocious naïvety of the nursery doll, the minutiae, clichés and gilded fantasy of the figurine. In a challenge to 'good taste', conservative religion and sexual stereotyping, their work was no stranger to public controversy. Indeed, Thompson's *Martyrdom of Christopher the Unwise*, nominated the 'most virulent, high-camp statement in contemporary ceramics',¹¹ addressed and was cited in topical local debate over the 1980 Adelaide Festival administration. The finesse of these pieces is testament to Thompson's training in jewellery and painting and further typifies the delight of ceramicists of the time in appropriating the associations of other materials to the meaning of their work in clay.

In retrospect, one may suspect that the use of non-clay media and processes from the commercial ceramic industry represented an intoxication with the possibilities and novelty of materials and techniques rather than a reasoned use of the new to a particular end. Nevertheless, the legacy

of information from the period has enriched the repertoire of the subsequent third phase of figuration.

In eschewing the spontaneous gesture of Abstract Expressionism and the magnificent chaos of experimentation for its own sake, ceramic artists are now well situated to turn their attention to notions of subject rather than process. In line with Post-Modernist practice, contemporary ceramicists have rummaged for sources appropriate to their needs and found a rich lode in self, personal experience and, by extension, in humanist issues and questions of psychology. Susan Weschler writes of the 1980s 'quest for spiritual grounding in an age of anxiety'.¹² It may be that figurative work has come to address symbolic needs, whether as a vehicle for fantasy or as a means of exploring personal and shared mythology.

Lorraine Jenyn's work has consistently displayed such a character. Early pieces — contemporary effigy vessels — described family members and familiar places with reference to astrology and personal totem. More recently, *Fragments of Memory* (1986) invoked images of Joyce, the artist's mother, and through her of the mother archetype and of religious and mythical goddesses.

Myth and fairytale have been explained as expressions of archetypes, and archetypes as images of the psyche¹³ which, in Jung's terms, manifest as patterns of behaviour contained in the collective unconscious. The preoccupation with myth, conspicuous in the work of many contemporary ceramicists, describes a powerful connection between the concerns of contemporary psychology and those of this group of figure makers. (Indeed, the American psychiatrist Jean Shinoda Bolen uses archetypes in the guise of Greek goddesses to describe personality types and as a psychoanalytic tool.) Deities or mythical beings, in particular, are well represented. Some, like those of Maria Kuczynska, are a hypnotic fragment, reverberant with dimly apprehended memory traces.¹⁴ Others, like those of Kathrin McMiles, are alert presences, part of an active quest for personal discovery and understanding. Interestingly, Pamela Irving's angels are based not on personal fantasy or intuitive response but possess the definite attributes of a particular mythical tradition carefully researched and particularized.¹⁵ Despite a suggestion of the didactic model, these pieces confirm a fascination with the archetype of the heavenly being.

There is also a considerable body of current work which presents as an archaeologist's prize. Drawing on references to the museum object, these 'new artefacts' share both with their historical counterparts and with recent figuration in reflecting something of the nature of the culture and the



Mark Thompson Ma-Don-Na 1980

experience of the individuals from which they derive. Freya Povey's humorous busts have presented her *alter ego*, the kangaroo Princess Narelle, in a variety of everyday situations, rather akin to the documentary diary notation. The princess is accompanied by an array of meticulously constructed off-beat characters from the street, from popular literature and from Povey's whimsical review of local events. Like the figurine grown up and writ large, these characters represent a kind of descriptive artefact of popular culture.

In a period that celebrates quotation, and from a material tradition so strongly located in associations with the figure, it is no surprise to find an abundance of work that draws on earlier clay sources. What tends to set this work apart from that of earlier periods, however, is the end to which references are directed. In this more recent and mature body of work, the tradition of the clay figure has been selectively plundered to derive forms that provide a vehicle for exploring issues that range far beyond a parochial involvement with ceramic practice and ceramic technique. Figurative clay has quite literally 'grown up' to talk less about itself and more about the concerns of its makers, which are shared by contemporary artists generally.

References

1. Klaus Kertess, 'Figuring It Out', *Artforum*, vol. 19, November 1980.
2. Mike Glier, 'The 1979 Dime Store Figurine', *Artforum*, vol. 18, March 1980.
3. The magnificent Aboriginal rock paintings of clay and clay pigment cannot be overlooked, nor their influence on a number of twentieth century Australian ceramic artists discounted. However, this discussion is limited to sculptural clay.
4. Thomas Bosley's Bosleyware range of animal and bird ornamental figures is one of a number of exceptions.
5. Joyce Warren, 'Australian Studio Ceramics — Historical Notes', *Pottery in Australia*, vol. 19, no. 1, 1980, p. 38.
6. A group of figures seven foot high designed by Les Blakeborough and Bert Flugelman at the Sturt Workshop appear to be notable exceptions. However, these works differ only in scale: they, too, read as emotionally neutral decorative pieces displaying the static quality of their well-centred components.
7. For example, work reproduced in *Pottery in Australia*, vol. 2, no. 2, 1963. On his return to Australia in 1979 as Artist in Residence at Melbourne State College, Leckie

exhibited pieces such as *Man on Horse Wine Bottle* (*Pottery in Australia*, vol. 18, no. 2, 1979) which were not dissimilar.

8. Noris Ioannou, '150 Years of South Australian Ceramics', *Pottery in Australia*, vol. 25, no. 4, 1986, p. 71.
9. Judith Thompson, 'Skangaroo Funk', *Pottery in Australia*, vol. 25, no. 3, 1986, p. 12.
10. *ibid.*
11. John McPhee, 'Sex, Politics and Religion', *Pottery in Australia*, vol. 24, no. 1, 1985, p. 7.
12. Susan Wechsler, 'The Raw Edge of American Ceramics', *Pottery in Australia*, vol. 24, no. 1, 1985, p. 41.
13. Jean Shinoda Bolen, *Goddesses in Everywoman*, Harper and Row, New York, 1984, p. 14.
14. It has been suggested that excesses of art criticism developed in response to the 'anorexia' of minimalism. Spare, elegant art required wordy mediation to 'transform immateriality into an imposing verbal object' and to describe what was no longer there (Edward Lebow, 'A Warning to Readers', *American Ceramics*, vol. 2, no. 3, p. 19). If the new body imagery, by contrast, is mediated by personal response and apprehended through deeply felt resonance, are we to witness the 'death' of the critic — or might we look to the psychologist as art commentator?
15. 'I used the Bible as my source and made angels which follow the pseudo-Dionysian hierarchy, a hierarchy of illumination that was established in AD 500, setting up nine orders of angels . . . all . . . having certain duties and characteristics attributed to them' (Pamela Irving, *Craft Australia*, Spring 1987, p. 74).

FIGURATIVE CERAMICS IN CONTEMPORARY ART

JOHN McDONALD

Modern art has tended to veer back and forth between poles of freedom and strict regulation, with rules being enforced by schools and movements or entirely self-imposed. Perhaps as a reaction to the freedom of Abstract Expressionism, in the 1960s and 1970s the mania for discipline and dogma reached a kind of *reductio ad absurdum* with the post-painterly abstraction championed by Clement Greenberg, as well as minimalism, systems art and post-object art. The abiding assumption behind all these rules and codes was that art was still taking part in an evolutionary movement towards a distant, but indefinable perfection. Work that deviated from the correct style was excluded from the critical debates.

In the 1980s, that belief has been all but completely relinquished. The current climate is one of untrammelled pluralism, in which many different styles and tendencies inhabit the same gallery spaces and the pages of the same glossy magazines. Many artists have become stylistic chameleons, exchanging eclecticism for the exaggerated purity of the last decade. In major international exhibitions we can leave a room full of Donald Judd's aluminium boxes and encounter a gallery plastered with Julian Schnabel's wall-sized paintings covered with antlers, cow-hide and layers of broken plates. Even Frank Stella has turned his impeccably formal art into a Neo-Baroque bonbon, complete with illusory depth, day-glo spray paint and glitter.

There has been protracted argument as to whether the pluralism of the 1980s should be seen as a liberatory celebration of difference or as a sterile levelling of art's values and commitment into a single market-oriented scene. One of the best known attacks on pluralism has come from Hal Foster in his collection of essays, *Recodings*.¹ He sees pluralism as a wilful refusal to acknowledge the historical and ideological bases for the production and circulation of contemporary art.

He does not propose any viable alternatives to this situation because if you argue against pluralism you must act in the name of an implicit order, hierarchizing one form of work over another. One of the biggest casualties in drawing up the list of aesthetic priorities, as Foster does, is the idea that a work of art can be something that can provide pleasure and entertainment without lapsing into a kind of apolitical decadence.

For figurative ceramics, the road to serious assessment has been a difficult one. In Western art, ceramics has often been relegated to a lesser plane of aesthetic interest than painting or sculpture, with comparatively little critical feedback or exposure in the museums. There are obviously as many links with sculpture as with traditional forms of

ceramic art; the main feature that distinguishes it from sculpture *per se* is the choice of material. Indeed, the malleability of clay seems to encourage playfulness and experimentation, and the figure, as one of art's most accessible motifs, provides a flexible, universal basis for an artist to represent themes of personal and public identity.

A main impetus may have come from the California Funk Movement, especially from ceramic artists like Bob Arneson, whose works showed a fondness for visual puns. For instance, a bust of a screaming figure was called *Crazed*, a title that also alludes to the cracks in a glaze. It would be easy to dismiss this work as a joke, but since it upsets our conventional expectations of ceramic art as an endless procession of bowls and vases, we are forced to take such jokes seriously.

Ceramic art has frequently been judged by how well it combines harmonious form with practical usefulness. Although a jar, a vase or a plate are all capable of serving decorative as well as practical functions, figurative ceramics relinquishes most instrumental aspirations in favour of creating a strong and expressive image.

It is inadequate to approach a great deal of this art in the same way as we would traditional ceramics. Probably many of these artists would consider themselves to be primarily image makers rather than 'potters', clay being simply a tactile medium of expression. The turn to figuration may be seen as a reaction to the oriental-style stress on skill and mastery, as exemplified by Australian potters such as Peter Rushforth and Col Levy, in which the pot becomes a vessel of spiritual intent, each mark and surface resonating with the potter's touch. We could link this style with the aesthetic values of the Abstract Expressionist era, when the object became a permanent record of the artist's gesture. The content of such a work is largely synonymous with its form.

The figurative artists may have felt frustrated by the lack of immediacy of this method or the comparatively restricted nature of its expressiveness. In many ways, this tradition of Anglo-oriental pottery represents a withdrawal from the world. A Chun-style vase, for instance, asks the viewer to plumb the resources of his or her own psyche when contemplating it. The piece works as an aid to introspection.

It is precisely this reclusiveness against which much figurative work has reacted. In the 1986 Adelaide Arts Festival, a special show of 'peculiar' sculptural ceramics dating back to 1968 showed pieces by local ceramic artists who sought to instil a direct social and political dimension into their work.² Artists like Aleks Danko, Margaret Dodd, Mark Thompson and Paul Greenaway did not just assert

aesthetic freedom but deliberately attempted to deal with specifically Australian content, as opposed to the disembodied and timeless interests of Anglo-oriental ceramics. Many pieces were concerned with issues such as the Women's Movement or Gay Liberation, while others, such as Olive Bishop's *Wash and War*, protested against our involvement in Vietnam.

Like the Adelaide works, the pieces in the present survey draw on a large battery of cross-cultural styles and influences; but in their preoccupation with the figure and, more particularly, with the self, they echo the stress on individual expression that re-entered art at the end of the 1970s with the rise of German Neo-Expressionism and Italian 'trans-avantgarde' painting. Thinking back to the linguistic interests of American artists like Arneson, we may link this return to the self to a general loss of confidence in the master narratives, a disenchantment with the efficacy of outspoken political art. The 1980s has been a decade when mass politics have generally given way to a more individualist bias. It is no longer possible to take the direct approach to make a statement that works both aesthetically and socially. Consequently, many artists have adopted a more obliquely humorous stance, one that also contains an element of self-parody, as if recognizing that we are all in the same boat and saying, 'Who am I to preach?'

The humour of much of this work responds to a distrust with the expressive possibilities of language and the legitimating power of aesthetic orthodoxies. It seeks to address the viewer in a more personalized way than the figurative works of the 1960s, and largely eschews the spiritual emphasis of Anglo-oriental ceramics. In many ways, it deals in an unashamed fetishism.

A fetish is something that compensates for a perceived lack of wholeness, that seems to complete what has been lost. We can imagine a buyer investing a traditional Japanese pot with an exaggerated delight, as though possession of such an exquisite object marks him or her as a person of undeniable taste and sophistication. Yet by making such a pot into a fetish, a support to the ego, we undermine the original selfless intentions of its making.

Figurative ceramics, on the contrary, appears to embrace fetishism wholeheartedly. As Foster succinctly puts it: 'the fetish is a substitute which blocks or displaces a traumatic experience of loss' (castration in psychoanalytical terms).³ The deliberate making of such objects could be seen as a means of repairing a rift in the self, a cathartic project that, often humorously, works with autobiographical material in a cryptic way — a method that both simultaneously conceals and reveals something about the artist. This seems



Peter Hook *Figure from the Anzac series*



Toni Warburton
Metaphore 1985

especially the case with an artist like Lorraine Jenyns, whose work is full of personal allegory in the sense that Benjamin Buchloh describes as 'to speak publicly with hidden meaning'.⁴

The theatrical aspects of figurative ceramics cannot be underplayed. It is all theatre: a theatre of memory and of influence, full of conceits and jokes. In his influential essay of 1967, *Art and Objecthood*, Michael Fried steadfastly maintained that 'art degenerates as it approaches the condition of theatre'.⁵ He felt that 'the distinction between the frivolous and the serious becomes more urgent, even absolute, every day, and the enterprises of the modernist arts more purely motivated by the felt need to perpetuate the standards and values of the high art of the past'.⁶

Looking back over twenty years, the messianic tone of such statements sounds faintly comical. It seems quite a long time since anyone has written about art with such authority and certainty, right down to the certainty of dealing with Modernist art, as opposed to the amorphous Post-Modern variety. Many artists feel nowadays that the forward march of Modernism has irretrievably broken down, taking with it most of the artificial injunctions that separated so-called serious art from frivolous art. (According to the philosopher Jacques Derrida, 'philosophical style' itself 'congenitally leans to frivolity'.⁷)

Fried's distinction is ultimately untenable, since it is hard to imagine any work of art that escapes some degree of theatricality. Even the flattest colour-field paintings acted like gigantic screens on which we were invited to project our own thoughts and feelings. By rejecting 'frivolity' outright, he assumes that comedy or satire cannot convey certain forms of knowledge or act as a means of social or philosophical enquiry.

For Fried, art progressed by gradually stripping away illusionism, until an object could be said to *represent* nothing but itself. Another school of thought argues that the greatest art consists in achieving the highest degree of detachment from a subject, the most perfect distance between the represented and the representer. Art is, therefore, more real when it is most artificial or theatrical. This is Diderot's thesis in his essay *Le Paradoxe Sur le Comédien*. Such distance is absolutely crucial to the practice of humour or irony. We could even suppose that such theatricality is a necessary ingredient for any form of art and that at a certain point it becomes impossible to determine the boundaries between representation and reality. It becomes equally impossible to cleave to any objective basis for truth.

With the collapse of academic certainty about art's

mission, artists have fallen back on the self to provide their main benchmark of creative integrity. Instead of asking if something is 'true' in any general sense, they have asked 'is it true for me?'. Such narcissistic investments are widespread in all forms of contemporary social life, not just the visual arts, so we are inevitably forced to ask whether this is a good or a bad thing. If we automatically condemn, then we must ask what was so great about the Modernist purity that we left behind? It may have been the most profound version of bad faith to consider art as a deadly serious progression towards nirvana, safeguarded by a small band of ascetics and intellectuals.

As opposed to the ideas of more classical art, where a painting, a sculpture or a pot could be judged by various rules of composition to see whether it was a balanced and satisfying object, Modernist and Post-Modernist culture has shied away from such set solutions. In many schools of psychoanalysis, particularly those following the ideas of Jacques Lacan, the self is thought of as irreparably fragmented. Forever suffering a sense of lack, we seek an impossible reunion with the breast or the womb. According to Lacan, neuroses arise when the expectations of our ego ideal far outstrip the possibilities of ever being satisfied. The media, with its barrage of advertisements and visions of rich and extravagant lifestyles, continually aggravates these expectations. French structuralist psychoanalysis seeks to break down the ego ideal, to restore to the subject a more pragmatic sense of his or her own ego. It means recognizing certain everyday limitations and relinquishing unrealistic fantasies.

As if responding to Lacan's insights, the image of the fragmented body, such as we find in the work of artists such as Hieronymous Bosch, has again become very popular in contemporary art. Rod Bamford has based a whole series of work on the fragment; Frédéric Chepeaux, too, has created images of broken torsos.

The fragment should not be seen solely as a metaphor for the dislocated ego. There is obviously a much broader reference to the way we experience the culture of the past as a collection of sherds and ruins. We catch incomplete glimpses of the past through history books and through individual works of art, marooned in the antiseptic space of the museums, cut off from their original contexts. The fragment is also a rebuttal of the functional preoccupations of ceramic art. You can eat off a plate or put flowers in a vase, but you can do very little with a large Rod Bamford fragment or a Maria Kuczynska broken torso apart from look at them. Lorraine Jenyns has stretched this game with functionalism even further by making some of her pieces

into mutant teapots that cling to a slender thread of 'usefulness'.

The stress on the figure in these works seems, more than anything, to be an attempt to make an accessible, highly communicative art, which quite rightfully admits self-expression to be the main impetus for the creative act. It freely allows the audience a chance for imaginative identification rather than alienation. Naturally, self-expression can lapse into self-indulgence and narcissism can grow from primary to pathological dimensions, but the basic impulse is an open and vital one. We could say the same about any art that seeks to enlarge creative possibilities rather than close them down.

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SUZANNE ARCHER



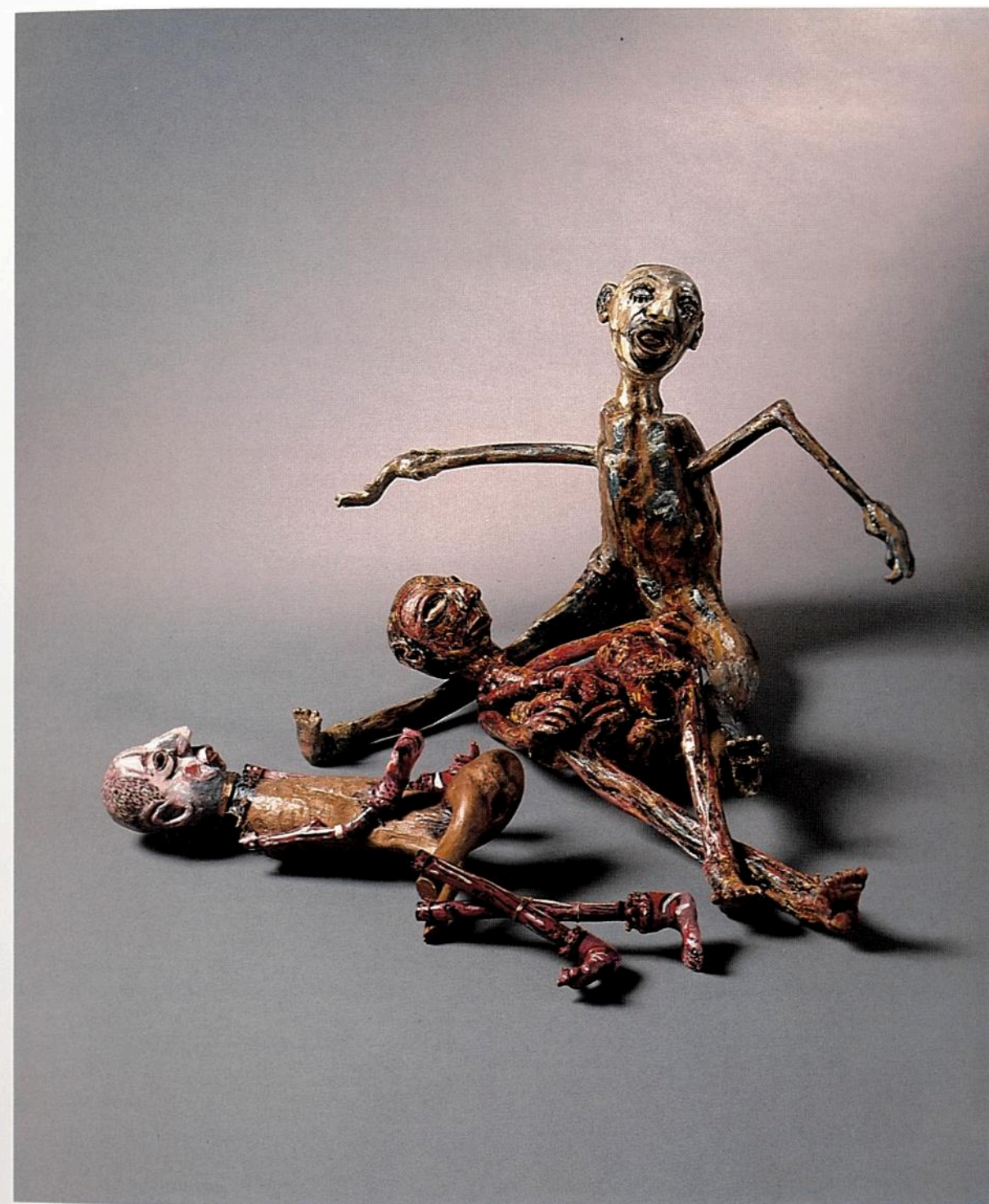
My work in the past has often been concerned with autobiography and this series is no exception: currently I am working on paintings, drawings and sculptures under the umbrella title *Portrait of Myself as a 41-year-old Pregnant Woman*. These works have been conceived as a trilogy. The first part will deal with the baby *in utero* and with my own changing body, the second part with confinement and birth and the last part with motherhood.

The work included in this collection is an expression of conflicting emotions, of on the one hand being absorbed by the nurturing and loving process of carrying a baby and on the other hand of feeling invaded by that being. This is my third child and each time I have revelled in the experience of being pregnant, but this time my being so much older has inspired me with a much greater awareness of the whole miraculous process. I am enthusiastically indulging myself and my art in this most universal of subject matters.

The choice of clay as the predominant medium in these works came about because my primary experience with ceramic sculptures occurred when I was running the pottery in a psychiatric hospital at the time I was pregnant with my second child. I had found working with clay extremely therapeutic (in its original sense of nurturing or caring), and after the birth it was still an appropriate medium to be using, as it allowed me to work whenever I had time. During this recent pregnancy I remembered how much I had enjoyed the tactile qualities and it occurred to me to use it again. Over the last few years I have been making sculptures out of Celluclay (an instant papier mâché) but for me this had some structural problems that clay does not. Also I wanted a different look for the new work and clay, in combination with found bush timber, would offer that.

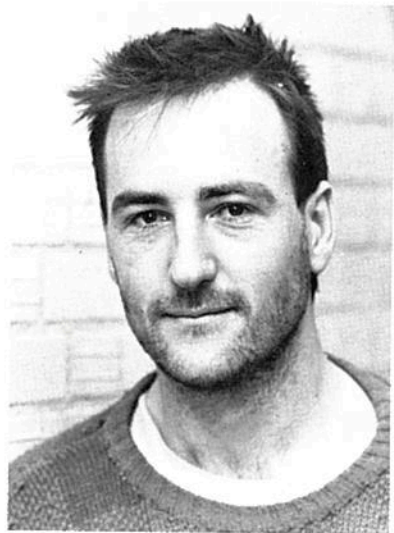
Suzanne P. Archer.

For technical information see page 60.



Trio (from the In Utero series)
Painted ceramic, painted wood, copper nails and wire,
synthetic polymer
'Alien' 0.58 x 0.84 x 0.80 metres; 'Succubus' 0.76 x 0.38 x
0.17 metres; 'Incubus' 0.81 x 0.37 x 0.30 metres

MARK BUNDER



PHOTOGRAPH: JAN W. TEL

The body is the vessel containing our life, the organ of all our perceptions and feelings.

Herbert Read

The work I am producing at present is a balance of analytical observation and intuitive reflection on basic elements that are a consequence of relationships between figures and the figure and landscape.

The earth is our physical sustenance. The figure is created from earth. It exists for a period of time, then dissolves back to earth. Clay is the result of biological and mineral decay. I recreate the figure from its physical source.

Another pure element of existence is the spirit. The consequences of spirit are the conscious emotions and thoughts. Light has for centuries been the symbol for knowledge or life. I use manipulated light combined with glass as a physical representation of this spirit.

I use glass combined with light to create the physical representation of the unseen. On the glass and clay surface two dimensional symbolism is applied to indicate thought.

Colours are chosen for their felt aesthetic quality, to reflect the emotions observed. Each material is chosen for its make-up, to give symbolic meaning. Other materials used are steel, wood and string.

The figurative pieces are placed in a sculptured landscape. The wood and steel are at times used to describe the environment and its relationship to the figure. This is done to show contrast and reason for the reaction indicated by elements used in the figure.

All in all I try to visualize a moment of human existence and to capture the figure in its total but essential nature.



For technical information see page 60.



Silent Communication
Earthenware and lacquered steel
Two sections, each 0.70 x 1.00 x 0.22 metres

REBECCA CHAPMAN



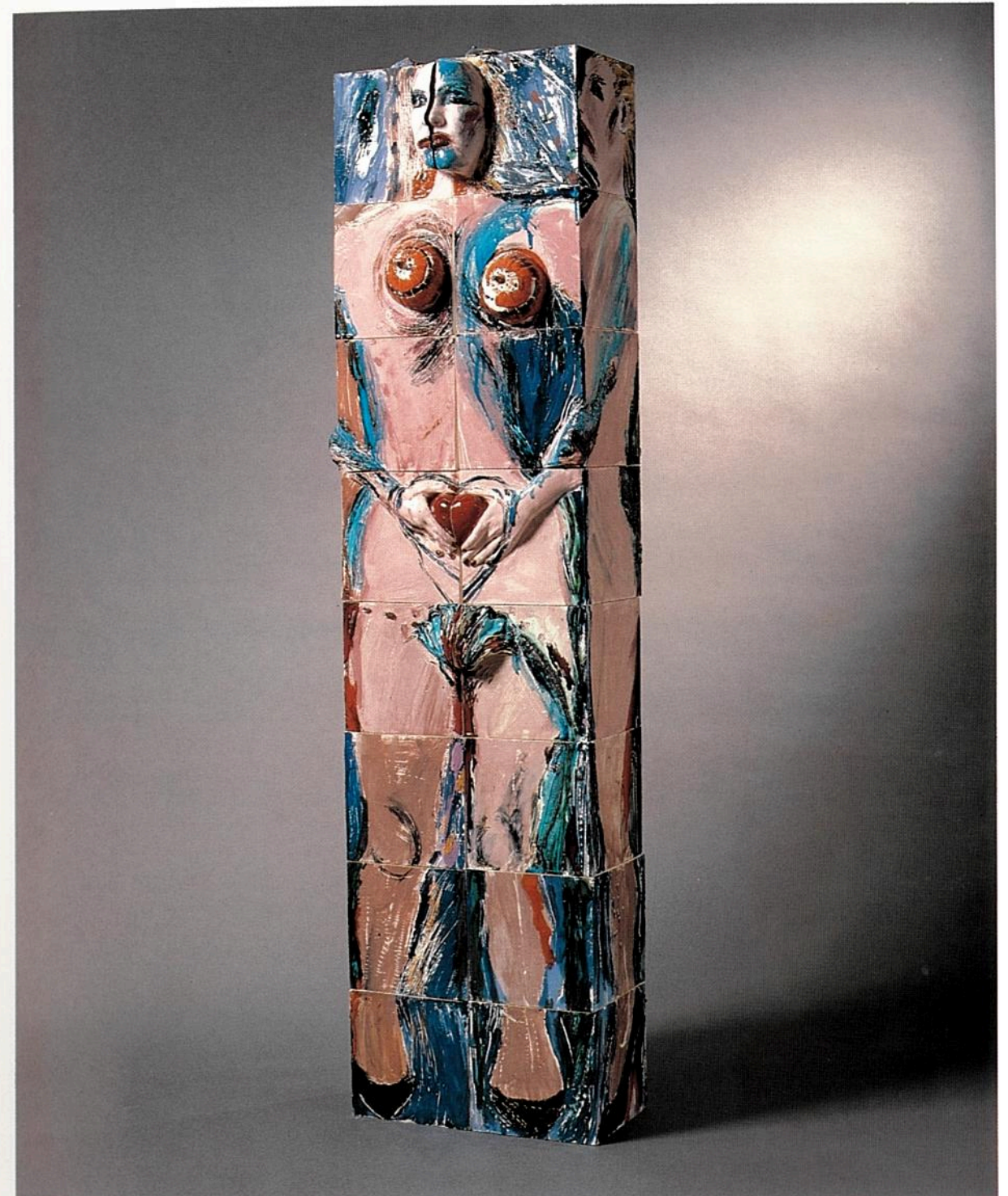
Generally my work is concerned with the figurative and most recently it has been specifically involved in an idiosyncratic analysis of female image construction. The mysterious and unresolved complexity of this area of analysis is a continuing interest within my art practice. This restrictive situation is contained within the ceramic figure shown here.

The rigidity of the building block construction is utilized to produce a totem pole of sexuality. The incorporation of moulded female body surfaces, with pumpkin breasts, clam-shaped pubis and stiletto shoes, synthesizes into an absurd, fetishistic *femme fatale*.

The dominant image of the female transposes the obscured female identity. This produces a contradictory notion of sexuality which is repressed within the female psyche. The fish swim around the female object to evoke a sense of subliminal subjection. The disembodied hands clasping the clichéd heart reveal the false promise of romantic love, which in turn produces the female desire to become a fetishized object.

R Chapman

For technical information see page 61.



Untitled
Glazed cast stoneware with coloured slips
2.40 x 0.48 x 0.24 metres

FRÉDÉRIC MARIE RENÉ CHEPEAUX



PHOTOGRAPH: FIONA CURREY

Back in 1972 I had my second exhibition of ceramic sculptures. The work was all human figures and concerned the human condition. In those days it was a lonely road because most 'ceramicists' were only potters, makers of containers and not of 'contents'.

When, much later, P.Greenaway, P.Hook, J.Techendorf and myself were called 'image makers', it was a vindication of a very serious personal philosophy: the content is more important than the container; art and craft must coincide; beauty is not only about aesthetic concerns; an artist is a witness to his time.

My Anglo-European background and the time I spent in Paris have subjected me to a fast changing flow of influences and stimuli which I had to contain and cull (if for no other reason than to achieve sanity) in order to use them when making images. The human figure, through various treatments, has become for me the only vessel into which float emotions and meanings, because it is expressionistic and symbolic all at once. In this mode I am not unique: the paintings and sculptures of the art of the stone age, the Classical Greeks and Romans, the age of 'faith', the Renaissance, the Surrealists of the Neo-Realist school, all convey the same continuum of concern for the human condition.

I strongly suspect that the post-war generation of artists, whose concern with abstraction, pure design and surface decoration has become obsessive, are practising escapism. They are the Houdinis of art. Not so those of us who choose not to ignore the frightening aspects of our time, mundane and brutal, materialistic, polluting, coercive and on the brink of self-annihilation. It might not be very popular but it certainly is more honest.

The human figure in the midst of such conflicts will suffer fragmentation, isolation, encroachment. Its image reflects these because I suffer from the same, but not without what Rabelais called 'man's own property': laughter, the ultimate sanity clause (Marx brothers).

For technical information see page 62.



Icarus Iuvenis Delinquitus
Painted earthenware, wood, metal, synthetic polymer
0.97 x 0.98 x 0.30 metres
Design concept and execution of woodwork by Frédéric Chepeaux and Mike Walsh

NOEL FLOOD



PHOTOGRAPH: TONY BOYD

Born in Ballarat, I survived an archaic introduction to life sculpture and pottery at the School of Mines before I moved to RMIT and excursions to the studios of David Boyd, John Percival and Alex Leckie.

Completing my DipArt, I enlisted the assistance of Gwen John to obtain work with Alan Caiger-Smith, producing majolica and lustre ware at Aldermaston — very picturesque, traditional and rather stifling but an opportunity to learn good studio discipline.

Later, inspired by the art/peasant/tourist potters of Vallauris, I became part of the newly formed experimental department at the Royal Delftware manufactory, at a time when Joan Miro, Lies Cosijn, Henck Trumpie and others were designing and producing large scale ceramics at Delft. Encouraged by the art director, Dr Dobbelmann, I produced a series of female forms and held an exhibition at the Royal Delft Showrooms.

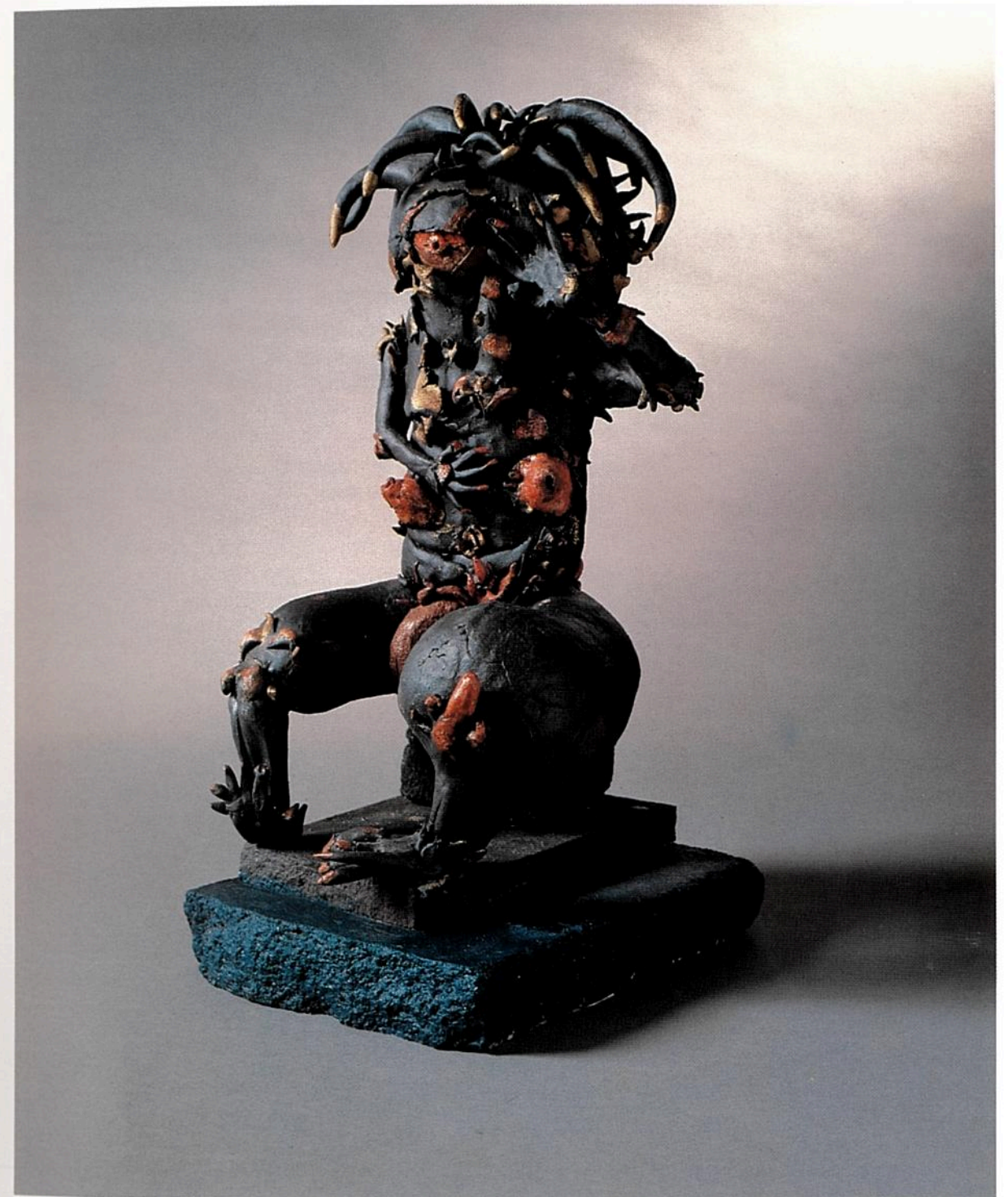
Returning to Australia and a position at Melbourne College of Advanced Education, I had the opportunity to continue developing my female forms, sometimes striking a raw nerve with the more 'aware' feminists. However, the work, although considered vulgar and concerned with the vulva, is not anti-woman but is concerned with the way the 'ocker' perceives the female.

A visit to Dublin to celebrate the birth of James Joyce, explore my roots and the rather dismal influence of the Irish on the visual arts in Australia provided inspiration from the leading lady of *James Joyce's Women*. I exhibited much lewd work based on *Ulysses* without any great disturbance to the hearts of the faithful apart from the hostile reaction of a feminist art critic in the *Irish Times*.

Recently, to escape my preoccupation with mantelpiece homosexual art, I collaborated with Pamela Irving who made me aware of the sensual fluidity of form. This infusion of concept and form reached a climax at an exhibition at Devise titled *Body to Body*, which was described by the *Age* critic Kim Martin as a titillating show, completely over the top.

Noel Flood

For technical information see page 62.



Post Hard Metal
Glazed ceramic
0.58 x 0.25 x 0.33 metres

RAY HEARN



PHOTOGRAPH: ROSEMARY SMITH

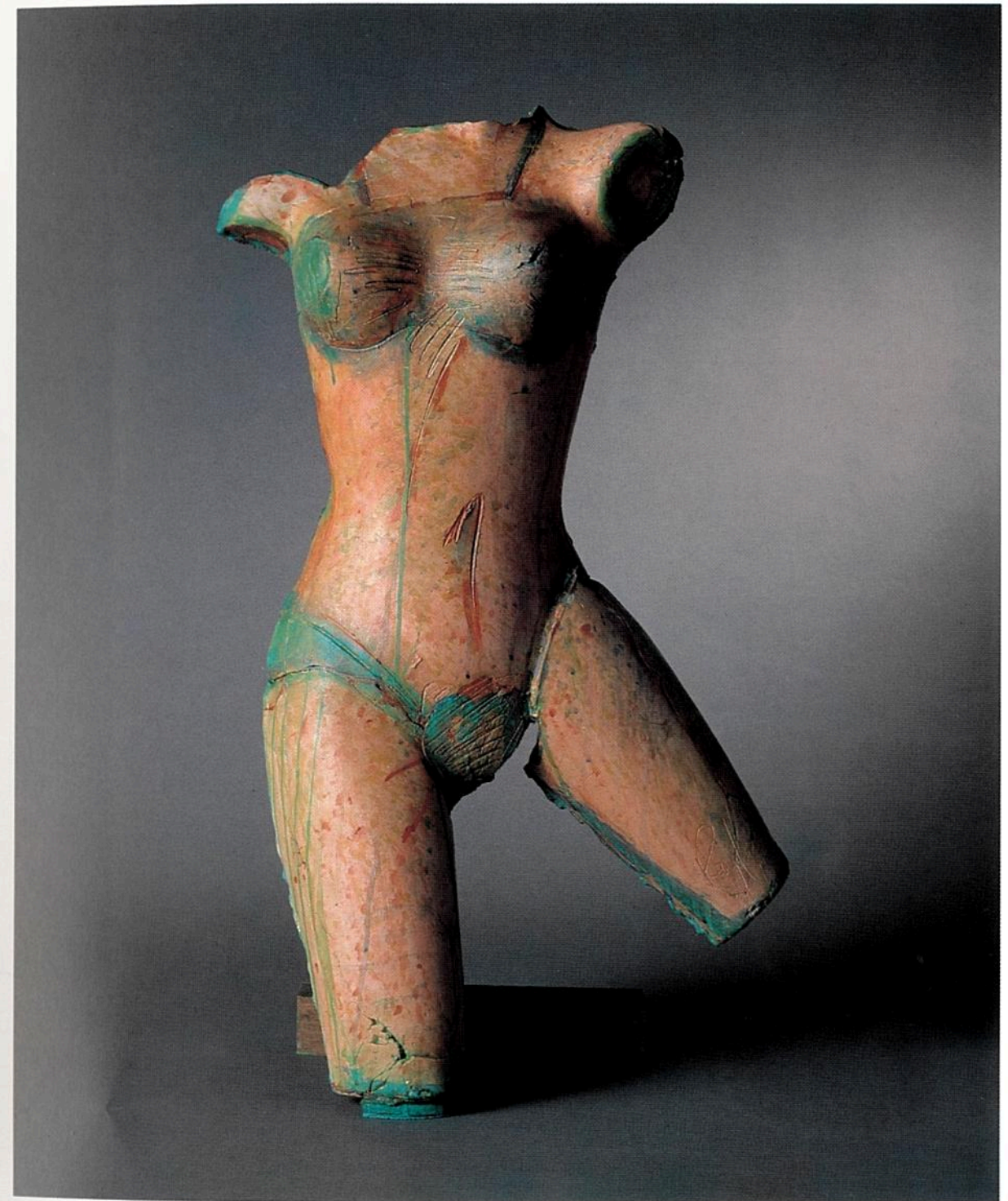
Like most of us, I really loved art as a kid, working away in a dream world with the Lakeland pencils, drawing and colouring-in Bedford trucks and 1950s Holdens. I left home and enrolled in art classes at night at Bendigo College of TAFE (then the School of Mines). I chose ceramics as a major or, as it seemed, clay chose me and I graduated in 1970 as a potter. There was no other option: respect for the material, honest craftsmanship and commitment to mostly drab greenish or brownish pottery (like Henry Ford's choice: 'Any colour so long as it's black').

It was not until a friend showed me Robert Arneson's genital-encrusted teapots in January 1970 *Craft Horizons* that I found reinforcement for my own mostly immature attempts at social comment. As well, there was some stress in my relationship with clay. There was not much point in being struck with a fantastic idea for a creation if there were twenty-seven casserole lids waiting to be turned in the studio. In 1973, Labor's slogan 'It's Time' signalled the end of the McMahon years for the nation and the sale of my Shimpo for me. With my family I migrated to Canada and a Masters degree in ceramic sculpture.

Connection is much more sculpturally catholic than a specific esoteric affinity for *ceramic* sculpture. Some influences: Robert Arneson's *Smorgi Bob*, Peter Voukos's *Aratsa*, the Venus of Willendorf, all the public sculpture of Bendigo, Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty*, Picasso's *Glass of Absinthe*, Degas' *Little Dancer*.

About four years ago I started a new series of figurative ceramic sculpture. The main objective was to embody both contemporary and universal issues of mankind in a historical context with a particular classical reference. The evidence of the passage of time, the use of often-broken fragments of torsos, social comment, large scale and colourful work that is positive, forward looking and, above all, with a sense of humour are the current objectives of my work.

For technical information see page 63.



Dancer
Painted ceramic, wood, synthetic polymers
0.84 x 0.40 x 0.30 metres

VIRGINIA HOLLISTER



PHOTOGRAPH: TRICIA DODSON

The link for me between figurative expression and clay started with the language of ceramics, which depicts the forms and qualities of a pot in bodily terms. In 1980 I began to use this language reference consciously to express a sense of myself as a vessel composed of the same minerals as the clay. I made a series of pieces called *Bowled Over* in which my oxide and salt covered body was pressed into a grid of freshly thrown bowls. The crushed, deformed, stained bowls carried my imprint as maker directly, rather than via the traditional codes of ceramic expression. At the same time, in a photographic work titled *The Red Slip*, I posed as the 'clay body' and let an iron slip, my 'life blood', trickle down my leg, punning on a woman's most embarrassing moment and on clay body decoration. In 1983 the notion of a link between women, serving and domestic pottery led to a series of life-size broken and reassembled kitchen items. The functionless clay toasters and Italian coffee makers were an exercise on the location of women and ceramics in the home. The pieces looked like archaeological finds, this deception pointing to the artificial constructions of history.

In 1986 I began to make busts. The aged quality imparted by raku firing makes the contemporary figures instantly and comfortingly ancient. There is a deliberate attempt to play along the fine line between caricature and portraiture, to humorously and lovingly articulate archetypal Australian characters. In my most recent work the figures are more openly reactive, in moments of anguish, shock or surprise. The intensity of their emotions implies something 'not seen' to which they are responding. The subject matter has become an exploration of the powerful covert causes of personal and political discontent.

Virginia Hollister

For technical information see page 63.



Pukamani
Clear glazed raku, smoked, with coloured slips
0.60 x 0.44 x 0.24 metres

ELS HOUWEN



In most religions the first act of the gods was sculpturing: the creation of man. A direct sensuous experience.

My subject, too, is the human form in its endless diversity. As the gods created man, standing in and determined by time, my greatest endeavour is to create works with a timeless feeling, standing outside time, stopping time to a degree, realizing the saying: 'Through art man speaks to man across the ages' (J.B. Kenny).

My figures look down and smile on our miseries and painful spasms as we try to come to terms with our existence, because for them time is eternity and everything else is insignificant.

My art is not aggressive. My works are both 'innocent' and 'wise'.

Of course, there are lots of influences. I am a child of my time, educated overseas, with a background in the fine arts and antiques trade. I am influenced by the limitations of the material; battling constantly with clay for structural firmness, balance and shape.

I hate labelling. I think people and the art they produce are too complex to dispose of in 'isms'. I do not want to be a theorist, whose work would only be a 'caged concept evolved out of words'.

I see my sculpture as a very independent, personal expression, in which I work with my whole personality. Consciously and unconsciously. There is no boundary between art and living. For me, one is absolutely necessary for the other. I think of the nature of my work as being communicative, but I am leaving the interpretation of my work to the capacity and the needs of the individual viewer.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which reads "Houwen". The signature is stylized and includes a long horizontal line underneath the name.

For technical information see page 64.



Spring and Summer
Grogged earthenware
1.00 x 0.61 x 0.20 metres

LORRAINE JENYNS



You could say that my decision to employ clay as my major medium, a decision taken over twenty years ago, sprang from a need to work three dimensionally in a narrative or figurative manner, with a material that responded to a direct, spontaneous approach. I have always worked from a personal point of view — from the inside out — rather than the other way around, through private fantasies, memories and traumas that were heavily veiled in the earlier works but that over the past few years have been allowed to get closer to the surface.

Certain historical examples of figurative ceramics give off an aura of power, and it is these ancient Egyptian, Chinese, Indian, Etruscan, African and South American examples that draw me to them. It is this essence of power that I seek — not to emulate outwardly these earlier works, but to reproduce or transpose what can only be called the spiritual power within them.

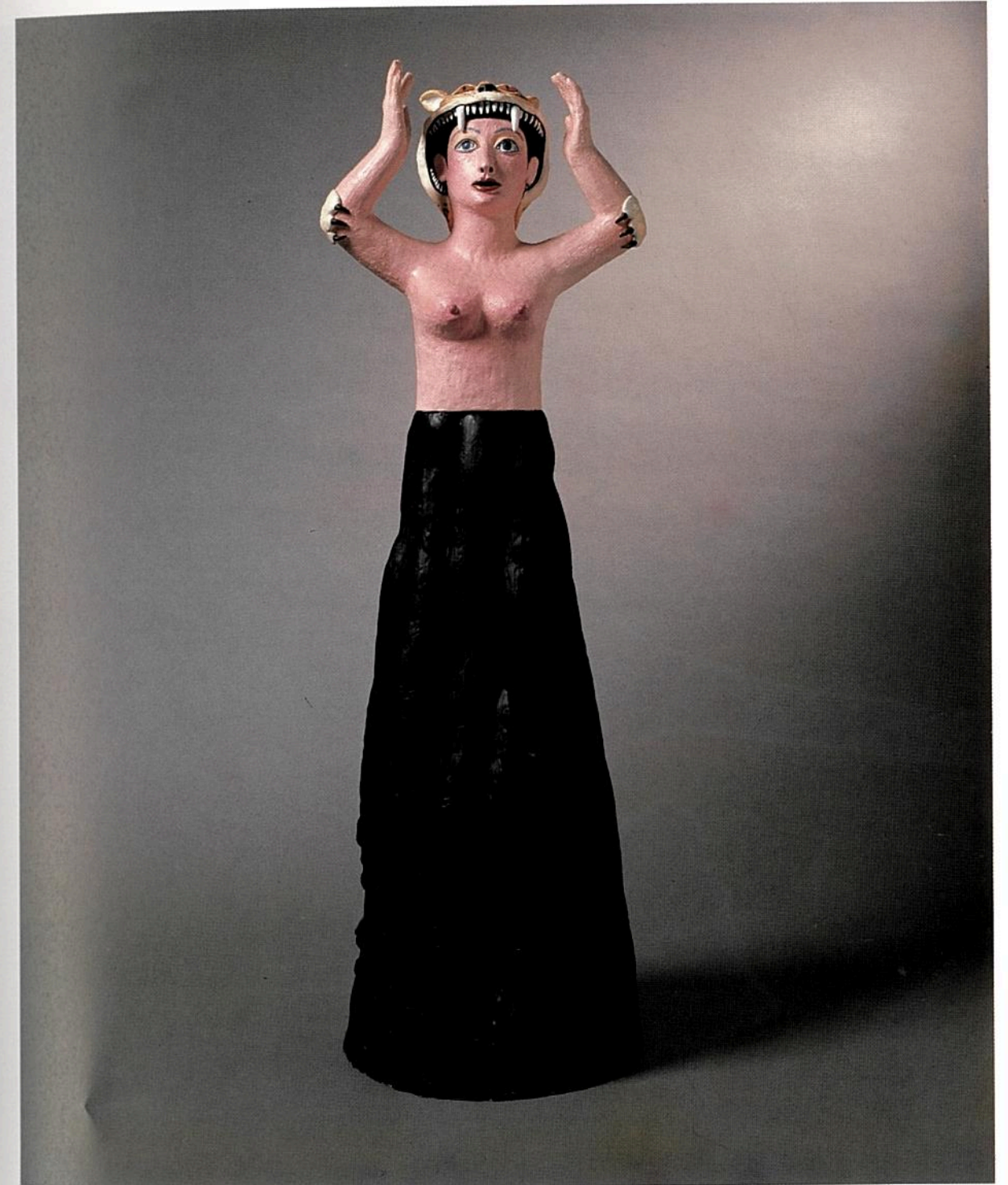
Generally, I would choose to work across time — not address myself to specific problems of the present, but more to universal timeless concerns. A recent series of animal/human teapots, although they dealt with recent news-making human tragedies, really were meant to spotlight man's attitude to animals as scapegoats and subservients and to highlight his fear of them.

Another concern of mine, however, is the way writers and historians are often believed unequivocally by the general populace, although each represents only one person's point of view. Because 'it is written', it becomes the 'truth'. This was the theme of my exhibition at Watters Gallery in Sydney in 1986. In *Fragments of Memory*, I attempted to take 'history' and turn it on its ear, replacing many of the male gods with a universal goddess figure and creating her story.

To work figuratively has been, and is, my choice. As in the art of many ancient civilizations, the represented figure is a receptacle for the soul.

Lorraine Jenyns

For technical information see page 65.



Joyce with Jaguar
Painted earthenware
1.60 x 0.52 x 0.52 metres

GUDRUN KLIX



It happened when I was walking along the beach one day. I had gone out early that morning, thinking to find an appropriate quiet spot away from any passers-by, to do my yoga. I had finished my asanas and was lying quietly on my back, pleasantly absorbed into the feel of the place. Gradually I became aware of a gentle vibration passing through my body, a hitherto unknown sensation. It was as if a gentle force was flowing from the earth, upon which I was lying, into and through my body and out beyond it again. I was aware that my body presented no resistance or obstacle to this flow, which seemed to me to be parallelling the line of the beach. It was as if I were a part of the earth, no different than the grains of sand and no more separate than the fallen leaves upon which I lay, and yet I was aware of my independent consciousness, as my ears picked up the warbling of the magpies on the gum trees and the cry of the red-winged parrot, as well as the gentle lapping of the waves on the sand of the beach. My senses all appeared to be more pure, cleaner somehow, heightened by the experience, and a feeling of being part of the whole and at the same time separation pervaded me. After some time I got up and continued down the beach absorbed in the peaceful feeling of the place.

For technical information see page 66.



Naomi
Grogged earthenware, slips and terra sigillata
0.53 x 0.38 x 0.30 metres

MARIA KUCZYNSKA



PHOTOGRAPH: JOHN FORD

One of the most important elements of sculpture is monumentality, which is not related to size but rather to proportion, a thing which we instinctively recognize and respond to. Our aesthetic judgement could be applied to any object but certainly the most intriguing is the human body. To the best of my belief there is no more majestic reason for working in art than to comment on the human figure. And once again, after the last Post-Modern years, the figure has become an expression of contemporary vision.

Through sculpture we might discover — as in a mirror — the fragility of our existence: the simple fact that despite our belief in our own importance we are only elements of endless repetitions.

After six years I left art school with the belief that clay was only meant to be used as a training material for sculpture. Responsive by nature, it enables the artist to search for ideal form, to exercise problems of design until a final destination is reached, a final destination in stone, metal or wood.

Working on my sculpture as an extended drawing, a sketching on form, as a quest for an object that reveals the process of struggle rather than a final conclusion, I found clay a most suitable material. It has endless possibilities as a medium. Its freshness, its expressiveness becomes photographic in the firing, a draftlike documentation of creative process.

By using the slab technique I extend the process of working a sculpture, retaining the possibility of control from the beginning to the last touch. In this way clay becomes the final material for me — the solution achieved cannot be transformed to metal, stone or wood.

M. J. Kuczynska

For technical information see page 67.



Figure
Glazed black fired terracotta
0.75 x 0.35 x 0.28 metres

MAGGIE McCORMICK



My art declares who I am, where I am and why I am. I laugh at, cry for and celebrate my time and place. My means of expression has always been the figurative. The human element is the centrepiece of my art, as it is the centrepiece of my life.

Women, now and past; artists of social conscience; the work of contemporary artists in the United States; the patterns and colours of cultures such as Mexico; as well as my own urban culture have all played a role in creating my style and sense of direction as an artist.

A year in the United States in 1983 was a maturing point for my art and, like other overseas experiences I have had before and after, it was a time of accelerated sense of direction and a clarity of perspective. I was drawn to Robert Arneson's commentary pieces on nuclear war that I saw in Colorado that year, as I had been drawn to Judy Chicago's *Dinner Party* in San Francisco in 1979. *Dinner Party* expresses the strength, vitality, and creativity of women largely written out of history. My growing up and my education denied this heritage but, like others, I searched and I found. My assertion of this is a major part of my expression. My work is concerned with the double edge of life. These strengths inspire celebration, and the precariousness of our lives clouded by the threat of annihilation inspires contemplation, reassessment and re-direction. The challenge of art is to have some effect on the life that is being lived out here. It can be a powerful tool or a passing diversion and it is a fine line between the two. I have looked for much of my inspiration in the work of artists who have stepped down from the line. This is the challenge for clay artists — to accelerate the emerging maturity of clay as an expressive canvas.

Maggie McCormick.

For technical information see page 68.



Mirror, Mirror
Painted ceramic with oxides and underglaze
0.66 x 0.50 x 0.23 metres

KATHRIN McMILES



PHOTOGRAPH: ANTHONY JAS

During recent decades, mainstream art thought and practice has been closely aligned with the scientific and academic thought that has produced the current technological era. The consequences have been a breakdown in communication between the artist and the community at large, echoing the more alienating aspects of our technological achievements.

Until the modern epoch art was a crucial focus for the society in which it was made, a means of connecting with the life force of nature. Sophisticated cultures — Egyptian, Minoan, Mycenaean, Greek and Roman — produced artefacts around which sacred rites and rituals of the culture were performed. Other cultures rich in metaphoric language — Aztec, Mayan, American Indian, Australian Aboriginal — also created sacred objects, using symbols common to the language of the people, to impart essential cultural mores.

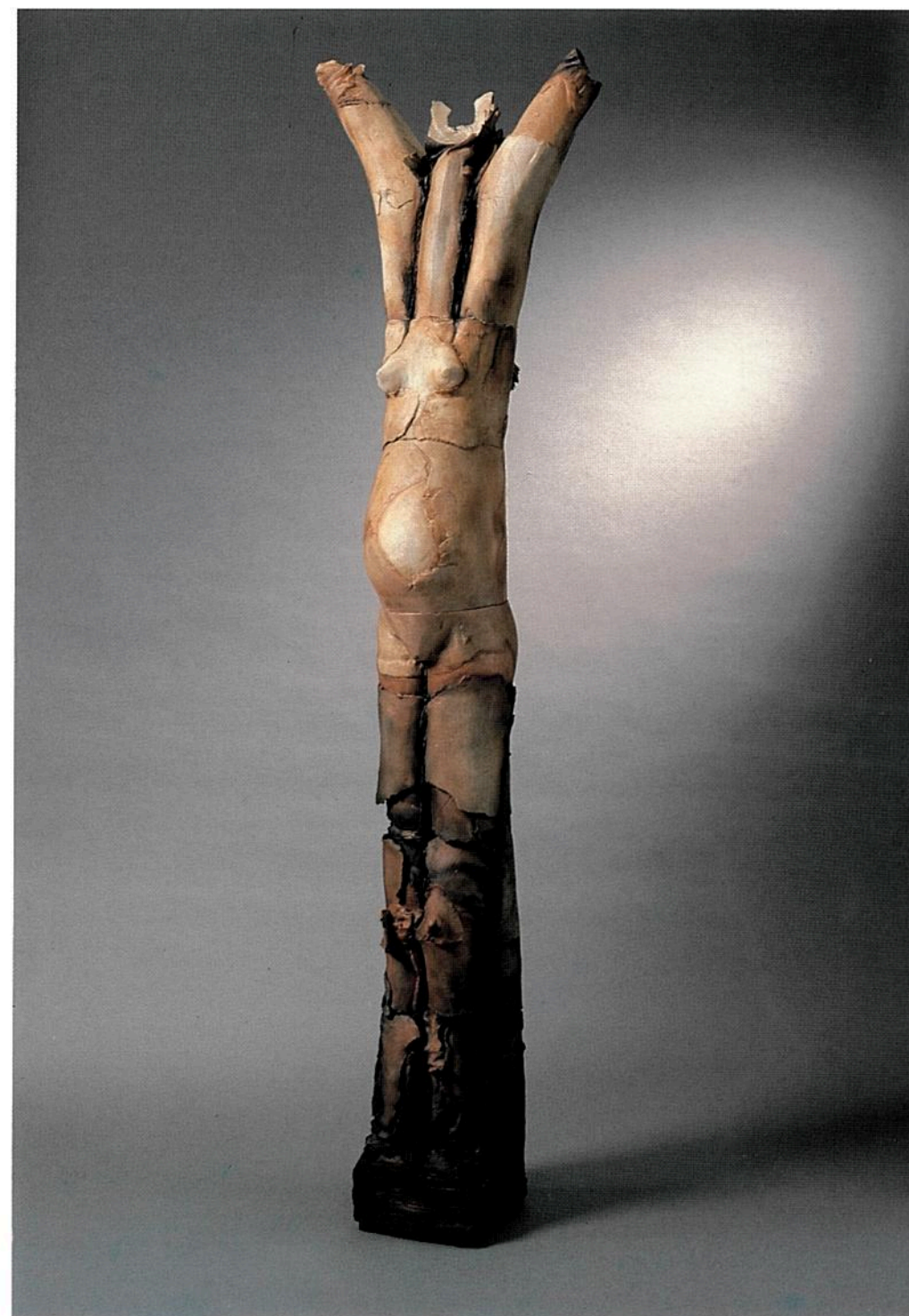
It seems to me, that in a time when our culture is infused with anxiety under the threat of ecological disruption and nuclear annihilation, one of the most crucial objectives must be to develop forms of communication that encourage co-operative interaction and hope for the future.

My work for the past ten years has been dealing with the spirit of change, primarily in my self. The act of making objects became a liturgy, invoking the spirit of my own becoming. The object became part of rituals, for myself and others, performed in private rather than in public places; the act, the place being more important than the object. My attention turned to relationships with others, dealing largely with veils of perception. As William Blake said: 'If the windows of perception could be cleansed, we would see everything as it is, infinite'.

My ideas are currently focused around a need to make work that contains the spirit of a place or a time, to reach into the richness of the past and invoke hope for the future. The images I use are mostly figurative, the language gestural. I believe the human form is the most accessible symbol of cross-cultural communication.

Kathrin McMiles.

For technical information see page 68.



Theophany
Grogged earthenware, oxides and watercolour
2.38 x 0.62 x 0.37 metres

ALICE NIXON



My challenge in ceramics is to depict the human form in all its variety. This resource is virtually inexhaustible and, while my aim is never realism, I can maintain a link with the reality that surrounds me. Human form is always easily recognizable, which means I am then free to manipulate shape to aesthetic ends to produce spontaneous and universal images rather than literal and specific ones.

I aim for a style that is simplified and not contrived, in the manner of the primitive and ancient art. The work of the Mayans, for example, possesses for me a timelessness that extends its relevance to the present day. This is the essence of the art I admire and an ideal I try to incorporate in my work.

My environment is perhaps my most important stimulus. I derive inspiration from observing ordinary life, the apparent simplicity of which belies deeper, more complex elements, and although the whimsical aspect of my work is strong, my intention is always to produce an affectionate parody. I wish in working with figures to allude to real life, yet avoid simply being a mirror.

My attraction to the ceramic medium is based on the tactile immediacy of working in clay. It allows a free exploration of human form and offers potential for the use of a myriad of surface decoration techniques; I enjoy two dimensional patterning on the three dimensional form. I find that non-referential design provides a dynamic play with reality and thus I abandon pure representation.

Alice Nixon

For technical information see page 69.

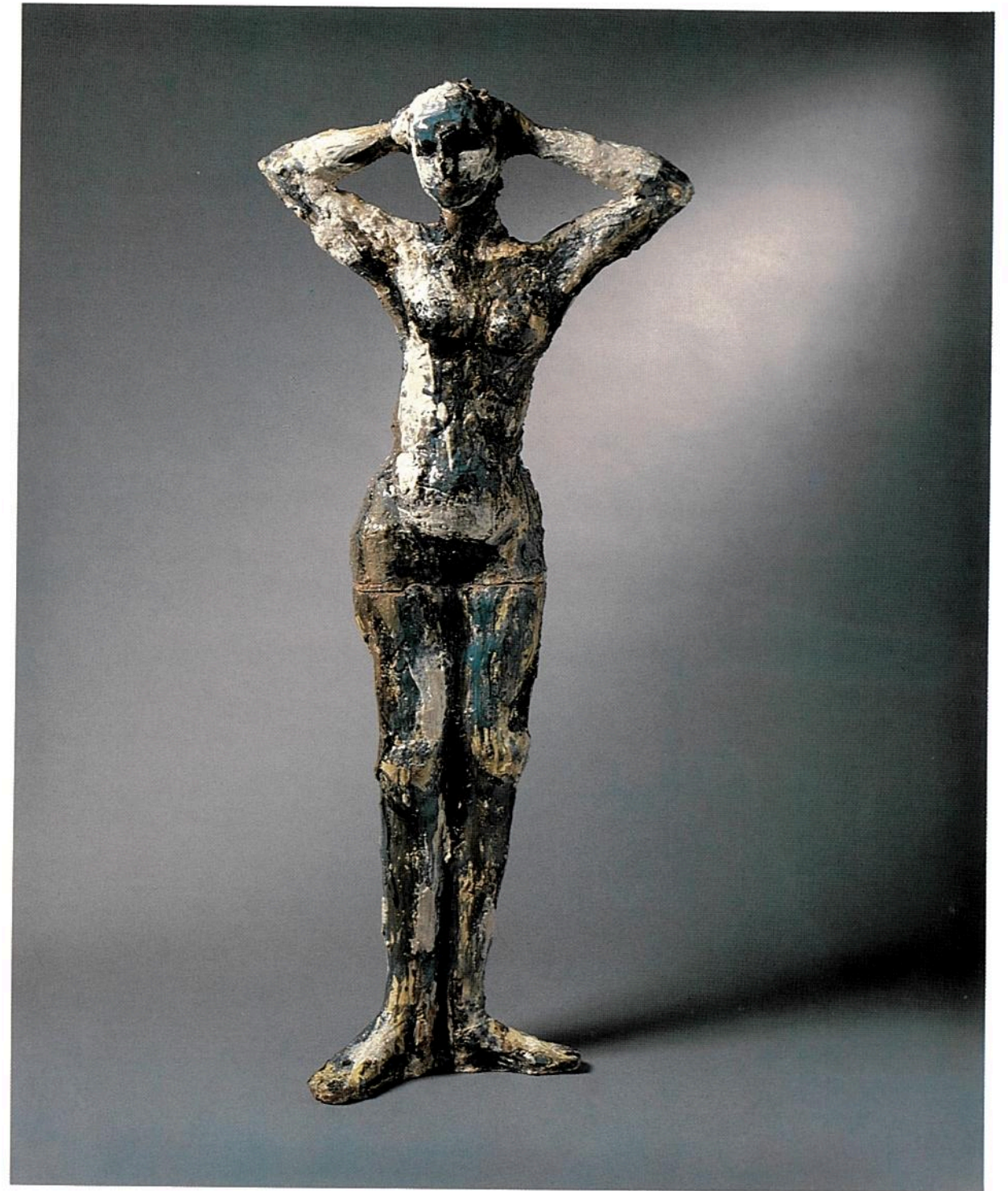


Figure
Clear glazed grogged earthenware with coloured slips
1.74 x 0.76 x 0.30 metres

JENNY ORCHARD



I decided to work in clay using the slip casting process because I enjoyed the idea of making multiples. The decision to move from functional items to figurative work comes from the desire to create a multiple personality. All my figures are aspects of the same person.

Cast multiple components are manipulated to create individual images. I do not see the process of using same-size cast components as restrictive, rather it is a vocabulary that is constantly expanding.

I have always been drawn towards the more eccentric elements of any society, the shaman, the witchdoctor of primitive culture, the radical and indulgent in modern society. In each figure I try to create a facet of existence, or rather to personify a particular attitude or attribute.

I have always been drawn towards African sculpture. My shapes and forms are based on the formal aspects of the primitive construction of life forms.

Lastly, colour is life, joy and celebration. I like to use it with abandon and conviction.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jenny Orchard', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

For technical information see page 69.



Nadzikambe Woman
Cast earthenware, bisque stains
0.75 x 0.30 x 0.08 metres

FREYA POVEY

My creatures are confidants and love objects. I talk with them and adore them.

I use features of my friends and draw inspiration from the beautiful peoples of Africa. I ogle and wonder.

Films, videos and comic characters blend with memories and observations.

I make these personages, these hybrids, to intrigue, and for pure enjoyment.

F. Povey

For technical information see page 70.



Phantomette

Glazed and painted stoneware with sequins and synthetic polymer additions

0.63 x 0.24 x 0.16 metres

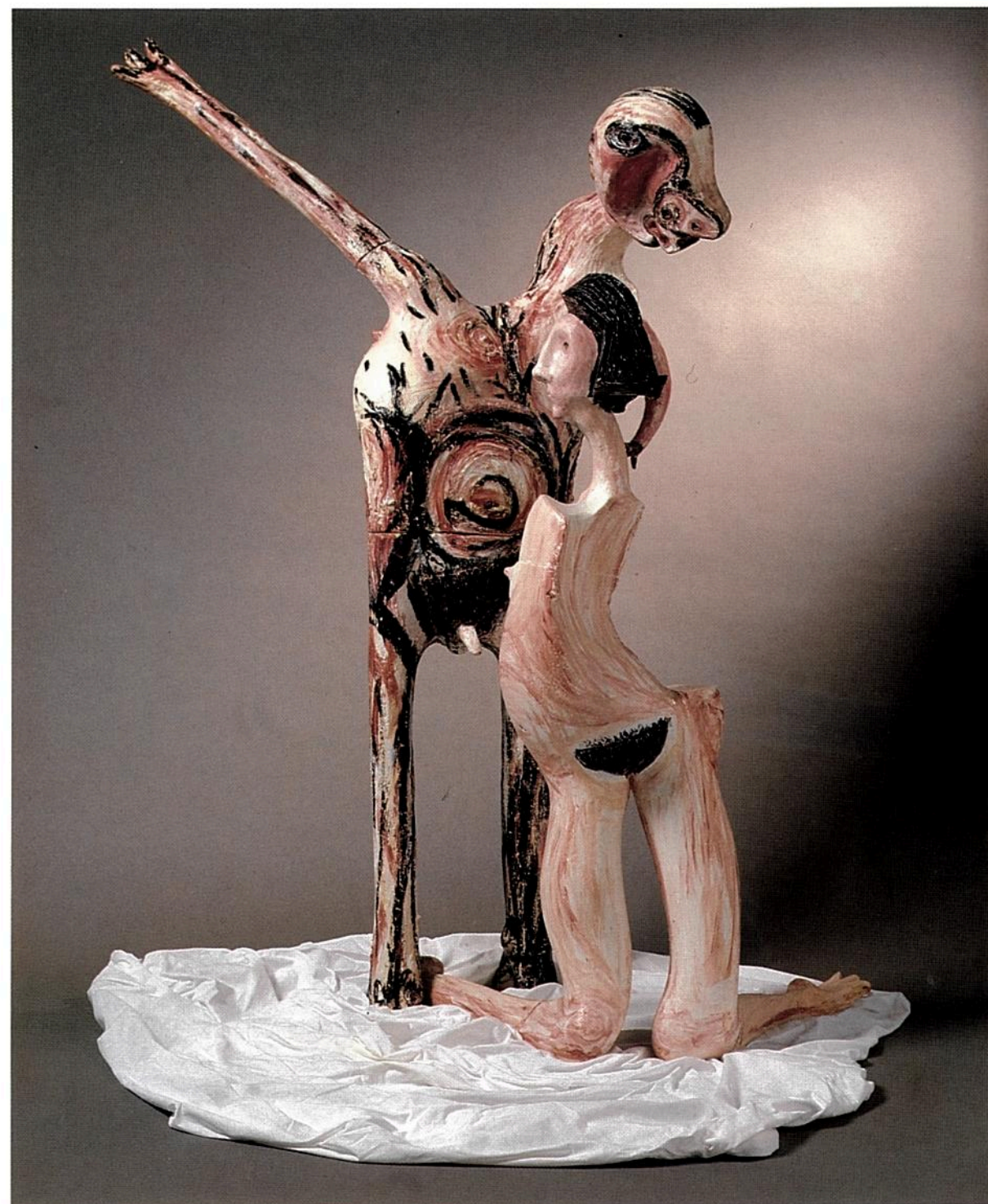
GIUSEPPE RANERI



My work represents the many different human weaknesses, the daily errors of living, the atrocious differences between the falseness of appearances and the humiliating realities of life.

G Raneri

For technical information see page 71.



The Kiss
Clear glazed earthenware, coloured underglaze
male 1.98 x 1.15 x 0.70 metres; female 1.42 x 1.20 x 0.70 metres

RACHEAL TAYLOR



It is sometimes easier to explain the technical processes than to give an explanation of why I work figuratively. I guess it has a lot to do with feeling comfortable with the human form, particularly the female figure, since the initial impetus for my work comes from personal experiences and feelings. I may not end up detailing a personal narrative, but this starting point allows me to touch on collective, social and political issues of the human condition.

The bride, for instance, symbolizes an ancient longing. No matter how sophisticated we are in our technical and scientific achievements, how clever we have become in entertaining ourselves, the desire for connectedness is a powerful force that is not easily satisfied with quick fixes and material comforts. My bride has been waiting for centuries for the promised fulfillment. She has traversed many lands and fought many battles, she bears great wounds and is heavily marked and scarred, she is brave and heroic; yet she waits idealistically and wistfully in hope for fulfillment. She will finally awake to the fact that the marriage will only occur within her own psyche: the marriage of her feminine and masculine elements. Then we will hear her beautiful song across eternity, then will be time for the goddess's return.

Rachael Taylor

For technical information see page 71.



The Bride
Glazed grogged earthenware with slips, oxides and synthetic polymer
1.90 x 0.42 x 0.25 metres

LIZ WILLIAMS



To make a statement of my work is a difficult task, for I see an essential difficulty in translating an expression made in one medium into another. The process of thought and words and the process of sculpture are so different to me that I find it almost impossible to make a verbal expression of my clay work.

In fact, I am hesitant to attempt to precisely locate the sources and processes of my work. I want nothing to interfere with the freedom of not exactly knowing where the expression has come from and where it might take me. There is a sense of journeying, of unlimited discovery that arises out of the combination of imagination and experience. And all of this finds its expression in a visual language.

Georgia O'Keefe said, 'Colour speaks louder than words'. For me, form speaks louder than words. The form is a vehicle for expressing feelings and ideas. A feeling, a thought, is the inspiration and this in turn suggests a beginning for the form. Perhaps these two aspects, feeling and form, grow together, equally dependent, and create meaning.

It is only in retrospect and with time that the fullness of the content begins to become apparent. Then there are glimpses of the experience and interests that have accumulated and found their way into the form, into the language. But most surprising is the feeling that I know so little about the work I have made.

In my most recent work I can see that I have been looking for an essence in simplicity and stillness: the quietness that resides in the soul of the woman who is content in her aloneness.

The tangible realities lie, however, in the act of the work itself, and these are the aspects that I know with real familiarity: the pleasure of working easily, the frustration of things not working well, and the moment to moment decisions made in search of an attempted exactness to express a feeling to its fullest.

This experience of making is a discovery, more interesting, intimate and close than any other experience I know.

Liz Williams

For technical information see page 72.



Shrines between Birth and Death No. 4
Stoneware and stainless steel
0.56 x 0.55 x 0.26 metres

TECHNICAL INFORMATION

Suzanne Archer

The ceramic heads, hands and feet of my figures were handbuilt using pinch-pot technique with additions. After they had been bisque fired, I gathered 'found' bush roots suggestive of human torsos. I then manipulated the roots with hammer and chisel to enhance the sculpture's figurative form. I also made use of pieces of bush timber to construct the arms and legs, attaching the hands, feet and heads by wiring through pre-designed holes in the clay sections onto copper nails driven into the timbers. The wire and nails were strengthened with Araldite and finished off with a filler. I then coloured the figures with acrylic paint and coated them with Estapol.

I would like to thank Tony Hull for his assistance in firing the ceramic pieces and



'Alien' by Suzanne Archer, showing method of joining ceramic section to timber.

David Fairbairn for his help in assembling the parts and for taking the black and white photographs.

Mark Bunder

Before I commence a piece I have already approximately analysed the observation I intend to recreate. The idea is sketched in a series of drawings and is then put to rest to allow possible illuminations to come forward. These drawings will be reworked if required, or other drawings might be produced as a reaction to the illuminations.

I always wait for the basic essence of the idea to emerge before commencing construction. When the idea has a quality of insight, I then determine a certain technique and choose the desired clay. The clays I use are earthenwares, as they have fewer shrinkage problems than stonewares. Clay has raw quality that I never like to completely camouflage.

Most often the ceramic figures are handbuilt, although if the idea calls for a moulded construction this technique is used. When the figure has been built I then proceed to break off the areas that I feel only serve to overkill the idea. Supports are used to keep this fragile form from collapsing.

I use many types of glazes, engobes, body stains or paints because the one selected needs to have a physical relationship with the idea.

The ritual of the firing technique is also considered. An electric kiln is often used for bisque firing and glaze firing. Gas kilns are used for enclosed box sawdust firings and open box sawdust firings.

If the piece is to be combined with a steel or wood form, it is constructed after the clay has been fired to its permanent size. If ideas illuminate or if I have become aware of a necessary change that needs to be made after the firing, I don't hesitate to saw, chisel or drill sections away from the ceramic piece.

The metal or wood object is formed to conclude the 'narrative'. The general



PHOTOGRAPH: JAN W. TEL

Mark Bunder constructing *Silent Communication* at the Foundation Ceramic Work Centre, Groningen, the Netherlands.

construction of the environment or landscape is also ritualized in relationship to the general idea.

Finally the work is presented with consideration given to light, space and colour.

Rebecca Chapman

My figure is constructed from blocks because aesthetically I wanted it to seem disjointed, and from a practical point of view I thought it would be stable and solid if it was built this way.

I had earlier made a sculpture by handbuilding each block. This proved to be an incredibly boring and laborious task. When I started to paint the surface I found this process also seemed to have a sense of restriction and was less expressive than I had envisaged.



PHOTOGRAPH: JAN W. TEL

Mark Bunder cutting away excess clay from the head of *Silent Communication*.



Post-firing surface treatment by Rebecca Chapman.

This time I decided to slip cast the blocks after the plaster moulds were made. This process is comparatively quicker and the blocks could be painted more freely. The blocks are cast using white earthenware slip. The fish, hands, face and breasts are also slip cast, and they are joined to the cube while the clay is still wet. The surface is then painted with coloured slips and glazes.

The firing takes place in an electric kiln. I bisque to 900°C over a period of twelve to eighteen hours. There are then two glaze firings as the glazes used mature at different temperatures ranging from 1040° to 1100°C.

Frédéric Marie René Chepeaux

The handbuilding techniques I use include press moulding, slab building and modelling in sections. Three kinds of clay provide visual texture and colour for the background. I incorporate other media for interest and some areas have been sandblasted. The surface colour is produced using a combination of firing effects (such as

smoking from sawdust) and air brushed acrylics. This combination demands exactitude so that the fitting of the various elements is precise. I cannot start a piece unless I know exactly where it will end. I believe that the techniques must always be at the service of the ideas.

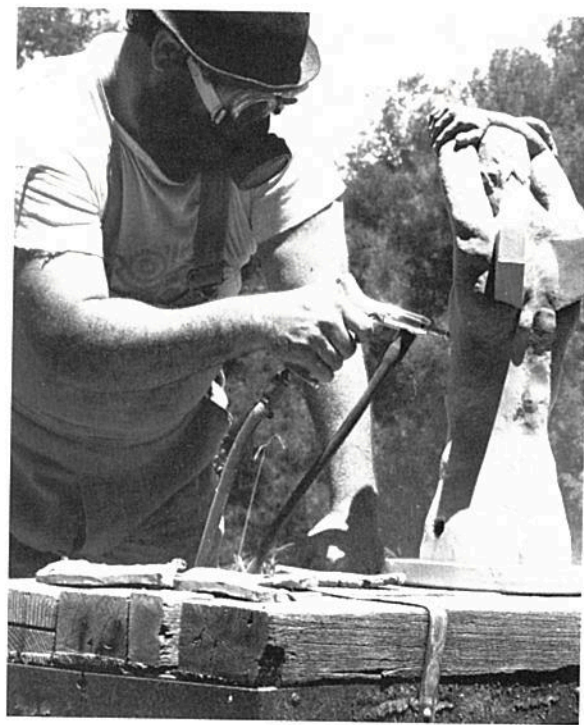
Noel Flood

Fundamentally my ceramic technique is based on the Delft attitude of make it and there is always a method of firing and colouring it.

Overall, I believe that art schools do a lot of harm in that they teach from a material base rather than a concept, thus preventing students from discovering methods of making.

I have used high fire, low fire and room temperature glazes combined with various glues, depending on the surface required.

Firing is in a 0.23 cubic metre electric kiln and a deep pit.



Frédéric Chepeaux sandblasting a figure prior to firing. Note safety equipment.

PHOTOGRAPH: MARIE MORE

Ray Hearn

I am always reminded by Arneson's piece *Secret Ceramic Glazes* (a glaze-splattered ceramic book that could not reveal the contents anyway) that there is a dichotomy — for the artist technique is only part of the means to the end but for the potter technique tends to be a much more dominant part of the creative process. I try to be aware of both and not deny the one for the other, though I do like the freedom of found objects and happy accidents.

There are many precedents for recycling, restoring and regenerating (not simply from Dada) but the biggest technological development of this decade has been, for me, adhesive bonding. Bisque clay joined with silicon sealant is flexible. I use five-minute epoxy mixed with any oil-based colourant, printing ink, oil paint; or white woodworking glue (PVA) mixed with water-based acrylic paint or powder paint, such as poster paints. PVA thinned with water sprayed over the porous bisque gives a sealed surface sheen.

My concept is to make ceramic sculpture that combines contemporary issues with a historical/classical context, which exploits rather than fights against the major property of fired clay: it breaks. The majority of archaeological evidence about the origin of our society is from the rubbish dumps of the past. This may or may not explain my interest in the rubbish dumps, the flotsam and jetsam of today, but I do feel more happy with my techniques now than I ever have previously, though the perfect sculpture is still firmly out of my reach.

Virginia Hollister

I use Feeney's Raku clay, the only commercially available raku clay that I cannot snap in two when it is fired to 1000°C. Its good strength during coiling also helps to keep the pieces from getting 'flabby' during construction.



The edges of Ray Hearn's press moulded, bisqued torso are chipped away after firing. The surface is then sprayed, brushed and rubbed with a mixture of water, PVA and powder paint.

I coil the busts on a thin bed of sand, which acts like ball bearings as the piece shrinks. Building internal connecting walls as I go helps to spread the load and keep the shape. When working on the heads, I build a wall from nose to nape first to provide a profile template. I find it important to continually spray the pieces with a fine mist to prevent drying and to keep the surfaces pliable. At the end of the construction process, before applying the slip, I wrap each piece tightly in plastic for a few days to equalize the moisture content. The whole building process is quite fast, eight to twelve hours usually.

The coloured slips are mixed by adding commercial stains and a small quantity of powdered glaze to a white decorating slip, as I find the straight colours too 'cold'. This necessitates extensive testing for combinations that please me and are visually compatible. Even with my twelve colours the possibilities seem endless, and some

pieces deviate quite noticeably from 'naturalism'. I apply up to three coats of each slip to achieve an intense and true showing under the glaze.

I find the bisque temperature will significantly alter the slip colours as the oxides achieve greater saturation. I bisque to 960°C, the colours becoming too harsh if fired higher.

The clear crackle raku glaze is applied in several coats, either sprayed or brushed on. It is left overnight to dry. Glaze firing is quick — about one hour to 1000°C in an LPG 2 burner coffin kiln with a fibre lid. When temperature is reached I open the lid and wait until most of the orange glow is gone before lifting the busts out. I am swathed in leather and fibre gloves, safety mask and lots of protective clothing. If the pieces are taken out too soon, while the glaze is still very soft, the surface gets blemished from the sawdust. The busts go into a smoking pit for about twenty minutes with just a few handfuls of extra sawdust tossed in before the tin lid is clamped down.



Detail of Pukamani by Virginia Hollister, during construction. The internal walls stop the shape from sagging.

Els Houwen

One of the problems of using clay as a medium for sculpturing is structural firmness. As most of my works are standing, I use a heavily grogged raku clay and, before starting the fine detail, I push the heavier grog deep down into the clay with a wooden tool. All my works, big or small, are coil constructed, except for a couple of bas-reliefs, for which I used slabs. I use no armatures, just the strength of the clay.

There are a set of proven steps I always follow in constructing my works.

1. I use clay of the same dampness throughout the process. It is better a little dry, for wet clay is unworkable.
2. I always roll the coils by hand. It pushes the heavier grog down to the centre of the clay and leaves a smooth surface.
3. I place the first coil down in the shape desired, and carve down into it all around. The second coil I torture the same way and use some pressure of my thumb to push it, carved side down, onto the first one so that



Pukamani has been placed in sawdust for smoking. The piece, glowing orange at 1000°C, is cooled to 700° before smoking.

the two are locked together. I never use water or slip to glue the coils together. I roughen the top of the second coil, carve the third one and lock them together, and so on. After putting down three coils, I work them into one another — inside and outside, with a sharp wooden tool. After that I smooth the rough surface with a big piece of wood. Then I start again from the third coil.

4. Every three coils I stop and try to visualize my work from all sides. Where am I going? Sometimes I make a little sketch in clay.

I often use coloured slips to accentuate a part of a sculpture, for example white slip for the white of the eyes. I experimented with coloured clays (clays mixed with oxides). I hardly ever use glazes.

I don't see myself as a traditional ceramist. I permit myself every possible way to reach a desired effect, as long as I am satisfied the colours are good quality and permanent. I have used waxes, watercolours, woodstains, acrylics, oils, gold leaf and so on.

Lorraine Jenyns

I generally use a terracotta clay or a white handbuilding clay, and I prefer not to use too much grog since this makes the carving or modelling of detail very difficult. If I am constructing a life-size or larger figure, I often add chopped nylon or rayon fibres to the clay to give it more strength, but again, too much will impede any carving back into the work. Construction techniques used include coils, slabs and wads of clay, and often, if I am not satisfied with a shape I have built, I will cut, tuck and join until it is right.

I find a large piece is often best built directly on a kiln shelf so that it can easily be transferred from trolley to front-loading kiln. I use an adjustable height trolley to place the work level with a shelf in the kiln and simply push it into position. If any cracks form before the bisque firing, I use a slip made of dry clay and vinegar, often applying it three



Els Houwen joining heavily scored coils.



Els Houwen blending the coils by combing the surface.



Lorraine Jenyns working on a piece for the Legend exhibition.

or four times until the crack is filled. Adding vinegar to the water in my plastic spray bottle also slows down the drying out of a piece I want to work on over days or weeks. I always fire ceramic sculpture very slowly, pre-heating the kiln slowly overnight to around 200°C and then firing next day to approximately 1040–1060°C.

Occasionally, I use slips — powdered white clay, body stain and vinegar — usually on bone-dry clay. Most of my colours though — underglazes, earthenware glazes, special-effect glazes — are applied after the bisque firing. Some are matt, others shiny. Firing is to between 1000° and 1060°C. There may be a third firing for lustres, golds, silvers or onglazes and I find that with some glazes — such as reds, yellows or special effects — a relatively fast glaze firing of six to eight hours is more successful, but with clear glaze or majolica a longer firing is preferable. If I use a mixture of glaze types I have to compromise. Some areas of the work will be left unglazed for post-firing use of

acrylic or oil paints, pastels and gold leaf.

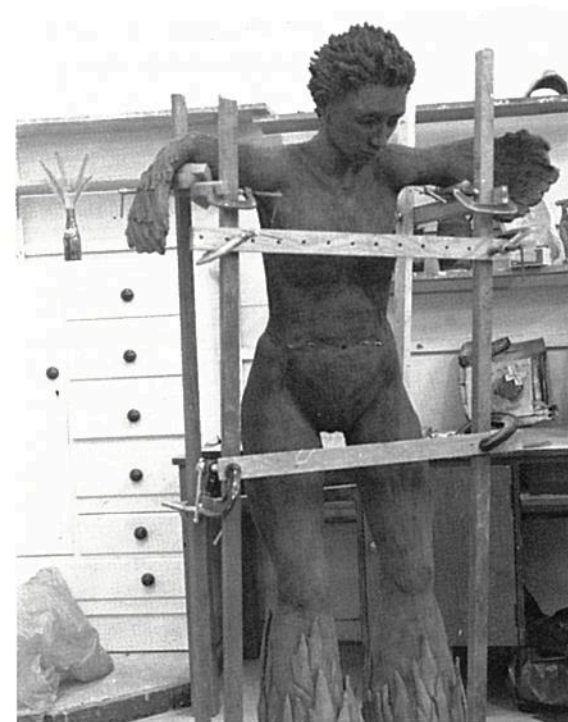
The kiln I prefer is a large, front-loading electric kiln, approximately 1.5 metres high (interior) and 0.6 metres wide and deep. Because of the uneven temperature in an upright kiln, it is necessary to have two or three sets of controls or the temperature can vary as much as 60–70°C.

Gudrun Klix

I used Feeney's Raku clay for this work, primarily because it has a great ability to stand up and does not readily slump under its own weight. With this clay I can easily build a structure 1 metre high on one day without having to worry about the work collapsing. The walls are approximately 10 millimetres thick and are built up out of rows of 50 to 75 millimetre slabs, stacked end on end on each other. If the clay is reasonably moist I can add one to the other without slurry or slipping, as long as I work

the seams together well. It is a very quick way of building up a form, much quicker than coils, and it seldom cracks as long as I dry the work carefully. It also produces reasonably lightweight work. With pieces 1.25 metres high, weight can be an important factor when transporting the work to the kiln.

I begin a work with an idea. I might make several working drawings or sketches, then I begin building the work. I try to remain open to the piece while I am working, so that it evolves a life of its own. The end result might be quite different from, though related to, the original idea. Once a piece is completed I spray or paint it with coloured slip and carve out the areas that after bisque firing are inlaid with glazes. It is then carefully wrapped in plastic bags with holes cut out and is left to dry. The pieces seldom crack when this method is used, as it allows the work to dry slowly and evenly from the bottom up.



The wet and drying work of Gudrun Klix is supported by scaffolding that can be adjusted as the clay shrinks.



Detail of the way Maria Kuczynska builds up a slab surface.

I generally do two firings, the first to 1068°C, cone 3, for the slip and the second to 1050°C for the low fired glazes that are laid into the recessed areas. The work is fired in oxidation in either an electric or gas kiln, depending on which kiln it will best fit into. I am always experimenting with glazes and slip formulations since different pieces require different finishes, textures and colours.

Maria Kuczynska

Clays used in my figures are porcelain, stoneware and terracotta. I generally apply thin slabs of clay directly to the form or, where size makes this impossible, moulds are made from a solid clay original (built up of slabs) and a press-mould casting is made from it.

The porcelain and stoneware surfaces are either glazed or unglazed, often with the addition of lustre surfaces. Terracottas are

black fired with reduction copper surfaces. Firing is in an electric or top-hat gas kiln. I use the gas kiln for black firing. After firing, surfaces are sometimes enhanced by graphite or metallic leaf treatment.

Maggie McCormick

My path to clay has been from a painter's canvas rather than a potter's wheel, and I see my clay sculptures as a three dimensional canvas. I decorate this canvas using oxides, underglazes, metallic stains, acrylic paints and glazes, and I use the white earthenware body as an integral part of the design in many pieces. Painted surfaces dominate more and more in my work as I respond to the intensity and immediacy of expression this allows me. As I paint and decorate I cloth the pieces in the patterns and colours of many cultures and places that move in my mind as memories, ideas and visual images of the many places I have lived in and travelled through.



Maggie McCormick painting the surface after firing.

I feel very close to each piece as I build from the clay in coils and slabs. As the three dimensional form emerges I can feel their strength and vitality and hope they take something of this with them when they leave the studio environment. I will often incorporate with the clay other media, such as paper, threads or wood. Most of my major pieces are approaching life-size. This has not been a conscious decision but a natural evolution and I see this as reaffirming my link with the figurative. All glazing is raw glazing and I once fire in an electric kiln to 1170°C.

Kathrin McMiles

The parameters I have set for this work are monumental, mythic, sensual, elegant. Monumental necessitates a lot of clay, and so I use a raku clay which gives building and firing strength.

As the finished piece is over 2 metres high, I began with a metal rod (two 1 metre lengths joined with a threaded sleeve into a flanged bracket) screwed onto a wooden base. The rod was to help with vertical alignment during building and later it served as a support to keep the work stable.

The clay construction was done on the base board around the metal rod, with a combination of coil and wire-cut slab techniques. The piece was built up in sections, for ease of dismantling and firing, and each section was separated by cloth during construction. Great care had to be taken to ensure each section was dry enough to support the weight of the following section. The tricky bit of construction was the internal clay armature or skeleton, designed to transfer weight around the structure for support during building and firing. The exciting part was having to climb up a ladder to build to the height necessary for the piece.

Firing was in a gas brick kiln with a fibre lid attached to the ceiling by a pulley. The kiln is designed so that the height can be



PHOTOGRAPH: ANTHONY JAS

Kathrin McMiles burning ferric chloride onto the fired piece with a gas burner.

reduced or increased according to the dimensions of the work. The work was fired several sections at a time to 1000°C, with ferric chloride brushed directly onto the piece. During a second firing, to approximately 800°C, pellets of ferric chloride were placed in containers around the work, which was muffled with sawdust and sherds, for fuming under heavy reduction.

Alice Nixon

I have chosen to work with handbuilt ceramics as it allows for freedom of personal expression within the realms of form and surface. The malleable quality of clay is best suited to echo the imprecise and non-geometric human form. In recent years I have been using a coarse grained raku clay, fired to earthenware temperatures in a large electric kiln. I construct the figures from flattened coils and build up slowly over weeks. To overcome the problem of balance I build in one piece, then divide each figure into sections so that it fits in the kiln. Slips are added constantly during the making process to produce varied and more satisfactory colours. I also find that the use of slips softens the line and edge of a piece,

again avoiding sharpness. Surface decoration is prompted by my feeling for each piece as it develops, aesthetic demands change with the individuality of each new work, be it in the use of inlaid metal, glass, over-fired glaze, or slip-soaked fabrics. Sgraffito is another technique I use extensively and it is common for me to glaze directly on the greenware surface. All these techniques are employed where deemed appropriate.

Jenny Orchard

I use white earthenware slip clay. I find Cesco the easiest to construct with and it also gives the whitest and smoothest finish. Unfortunately, it has a tendency to reject Duncan bright colours and glazes. I have most trouble with the darker colours. For this reason I sometimes use the American imported Westwood clay, which does not give such a white, clean surface and is more difficult to construct with but which holds the colours and glazes well. It is a bit of a juggling act.

I slip cast all the components of my figures and then assemble them. The piece



Alice Nixon applying surface texture to Figure.



Jenny Orchard securing an arm after pieces have been fired.

is, therefore, worked out reasonably well before I begin. Construction of large pieces is sometimes complicated and has to take place at a particular stage of the drying process when the clay is 'hard' enough to stand the weight of the piece and soft enough to ply together. Sometimes complex balancing acts using extra pieces of clay as buttresses and reinforcements are necessary.

I paint the work when it is dry and unfired. I bisque once to 1025°C and then glaze to 1080°C for Cesco clay and 1025°C for Westwood, using G2 and Duncan G-11 glaze respectively. I then fire at 80° per hour, slowly so as not to crack the piece.

Freya Povey

Most of my work is a combination of techniques. I incorporate a lot of press moulding with coils, slabs and extrusions,

using Walkers White Handbuilding clay.

I use coloured slips, either painted or sprayed on, sometimes over newspaper templates. I also incorporate both low and high fire glazes, in an electric kiln.

When I use the low fired glazes (1060°C), I first fire to 1180°C to give the piece strength, then keep heating it and applying the glaze until the desired thickness is reached.

For finishing, I use a variety of materials — paint, rubber, gold leaf, sequins, plastic tubing and sheeting, leather — in fact, anything that will give me the effect I want.

I have recently been doing some slip casting, and I hope more ideas will develop from learning what is, for me, a new technique. My training was in sculpture and not ceramics, and so a good deal of my work is 'necessity is the mother of invention' and 'nothing ventured, nothing gained'. If it doesn't work, jump on it and stick it back in

the bag, and have a little lie down. If it is a post-firing disaster — plant it in the garden.

Giuseppe Raneri

The clay I use is based on a white earthenware clay which is then mixed with grog and sand, giving the clay texture and strength. The glazes and stains that are used in colouring have a firing range from 1000°C to 1100°C. They are bought premixed from suppliers and can be blended together to make other colours.

The sculptures are all handbuilt using coil and slab techniques. Some of the large works are built in sections and are put together using steel rods. Bases are made for standing figures, giving balance to the sculptures. The sculptures have to be built slowly so that the clay has time to firm up. They also need to have a slow drying period so that joins do not crack apart.

There is a layer of soft clay put on the surface once the main body has hardened a little. This gives the surfaces a rough texture. Coloured stains are used to highlight certain areas and are brushed on vigorously. As the clay hardens lines can be engraved into the clay with the use of a wooden tool to emphasize different features.

The sculptures are all fired to 1060°C in an oxidizing atmosphere over a period of twenty-four hours. They are once fired and have a slow firing cycle to avoid any major cracking.

The kiln used is electric with control switches at the top, middle and bottom. This makes it possible to control each section of the kiln with precision.

Racheal Taylor

I have always tended to start from a narrow base. I enjoy the sense of precariousness it gives my work, but coupled with my desire to work on a large scale, it has provided quite a challenge. I have tried lots of



Construction around pole (white slip) by Racheal Taylor.

techniques, many of which have led straight to disaster, but the most successful method of construction to date is to work around a central axis. Usually a 38 millimetre diameter dowel is embedded in a base board, to which I screw castors. Then another sheet of ply goes over the pole and turns on the castors.

This has allowed me freedom to work on the inside as well as the outside. As I am building I use sponges and/or vermiculite to support the work around the dowel. Foam is ideal because it compresses while the work is drying and shrinking. The internal support

system has allowed me to work with composite sections while allowing me to see the piece in totality. Building in sections also allows easy firing. When the piece has dried, I take the pole out, lay the work on foam, vacuum out the vermiculite, and pull the sponges out. I fire the work upright, either leaning against the back wall of the kiln or leaning against a column of bricks. I fire extremely slowly for a bisque at 1080°C, which can take up to two days.

I like textured surfaces so my work tends to be heavily marked. I use anything to make marks: soles of shoes, meat tenderizers, cardboard. I then emphasize this by rubbing copper into the recess areas. I usually cover the piece with white slip — this covers the clay colour, and gives a better colour response with the glazes. I use a combination of commercial glazes, to which I add up to thirty per cent stains and terra sigillata. I paint or spray them on, depending on the mood of the piece, which dictates whether I use lots of colour or not.

After the glaze firing, I reconstruct the sections over a steel pole that has been welded to a steel base.

Liz Williams

I use the technique of coiling to build a hollow form. The process is much the same as building any vessel form. It is a time honoured method in the tradition of building clay figures. The slowness of its rhythm gives me time with the work.

I generally make more than one piece at a time, keeping the clay damp during construction by wrapping the figures in plastic.

Ideas and solutions come through the act of working rather than thinking.

As I am so concerned with form, I do not embellish or decorate the surface. It is as though the piece itself dictates the degree of finish, larger works made out of coarser clays being less precisely finished than smaller porcelain pieces.

The work is once fired in an electric kiln to approximately 1120°C.

Materials and technique are inseparable elements of the form and as such are an integral part of the vehicle of this visual language through which I am attempting to speak.

