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INTERNATIONAL CERAMIC ART REVIEW

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CULTURAL OLYMPIAD

GREECE 2002

GENERAL ASSEMBLY

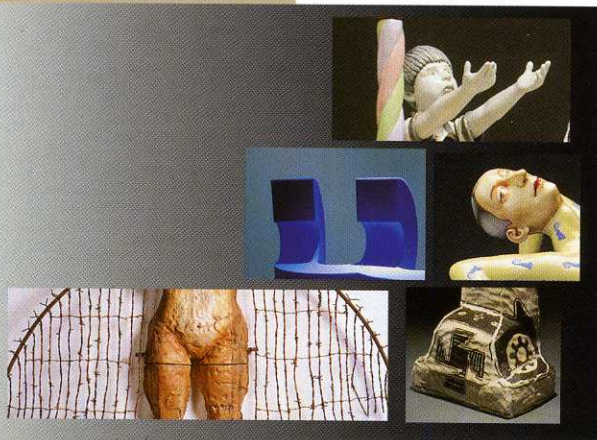
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CONTEMPORARY CERAMICS
BYZANTINE POTTERY

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THE NEXT GENERATION OF CERAMIC ARTISTS IN AMERICA

By JUDITH S. SCHWARTZ



Peter Voulkos, the most influential clay artist in America, died in February of this year. His charismatic presence and highly original art inspired a generation of work in clay. He, and he alone was responsible for enabling the medium to become a reactive

energy in America, breaking from pottery traditions, and entering the mainstream of art.

His training and those of his generation took place in newly- established departments of art modeled largely after the Bauhaus - which divided departments into areas based on materials and techniques. Peter found clay for his personal self-expression, and the rest was history.

The university in America was, until recently, the place where artists mixed talent, opportunity, exposure and critical thinking into a special form of art education. But now there has been a shift in structure and, more importantly, in the thinking about how artists are to be educated.

Today the single medium and its tools of artistic expression are de-emphasized as students are encouraged to think of them as secondary to serving the themes and ideas they wish to develop.

Multi-medium expression, aided by rapidly-growing technologies serve as the tools for artistic expression.

Students experiment with a wide variety of technical possibilities as they move freely around the art department working with whatever technique best conveys their ideas.

Demarcations, for example

,between photography and painting have long broken down and in the last 10 years issues such as colonial/postcolonial, gender studies, and critical theory have radically infiltrated art making. Computers become the starting point for many two-dimensional as well as three-dimensional ideas.

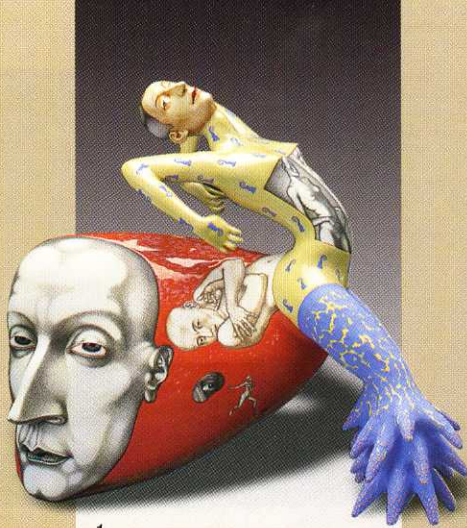
These changes have been gathering momentum at art schools around the United States as institutions re-define the place of materiality in a dematerialized cultural world of art production. Traditional craft areas have blurred as well. There is a new awareness of the place of social issues --- issues that are more about context or meaning rather than technique, material, or tradition.

While the purpose of this discussion is not about the education of artists, it is about what artists are producing and what work is being offered to galleries and exhibition arenas. One cannot talk about current trends without acknowledging the changes taking place. I contend that the newest, strongest work is a reflection or outgrowth of the restructuring of the thinking in the art schools in America - an environment where social and cultural statements in art have become standard Postmodern practice.

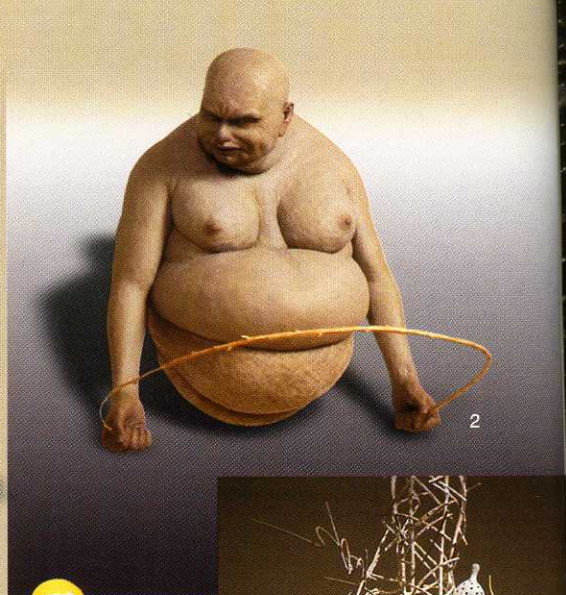
So what is new, fresh and exciting in ceramics in America?

In an attempt to accurately decipher current trends in a country as large and diverse as America, I sent 50 letters to art schools, galleries, artists, residency programs and museum curators -requesting recommendations of new-generation artists.

It would be most fitting, given this location, to draw upon an idea from the Greek Philosopher, Plato, who believed that no one under the age of 35 should study Philosophy because a life younger than that was not lived long enough to gain the insights and experiences necessary to reflect on meaning. I note with interest that Peter



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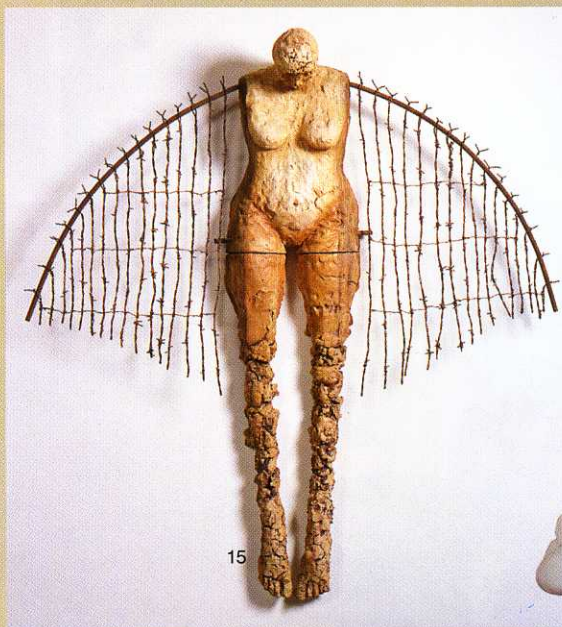
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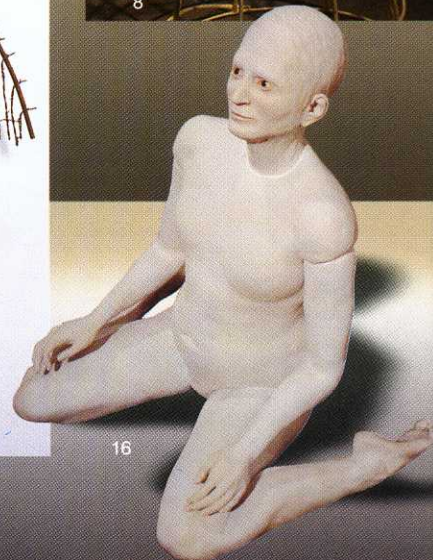
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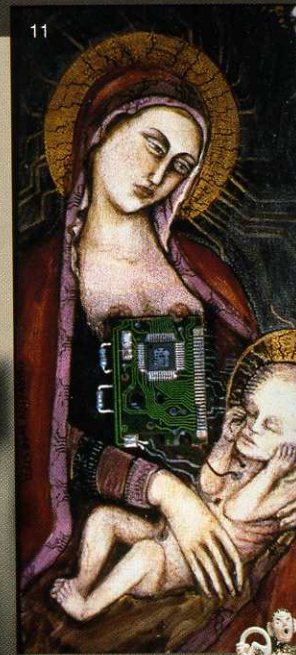
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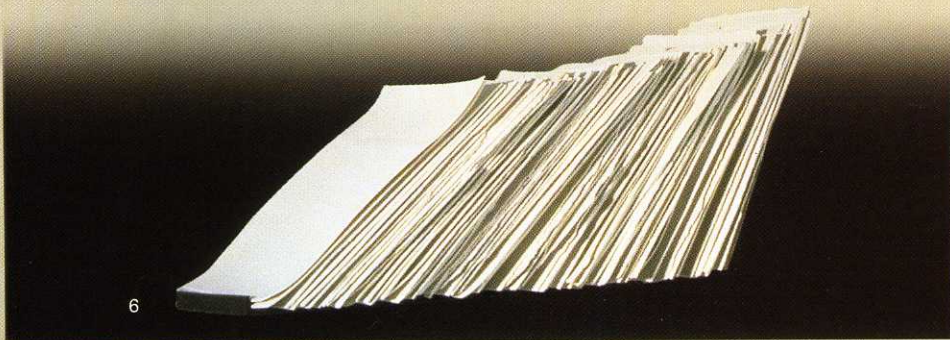


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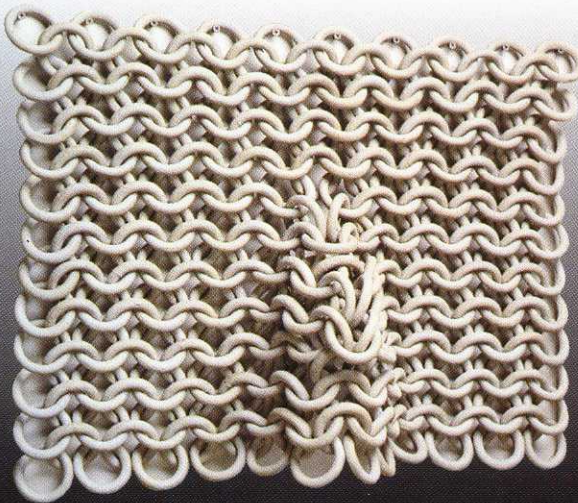
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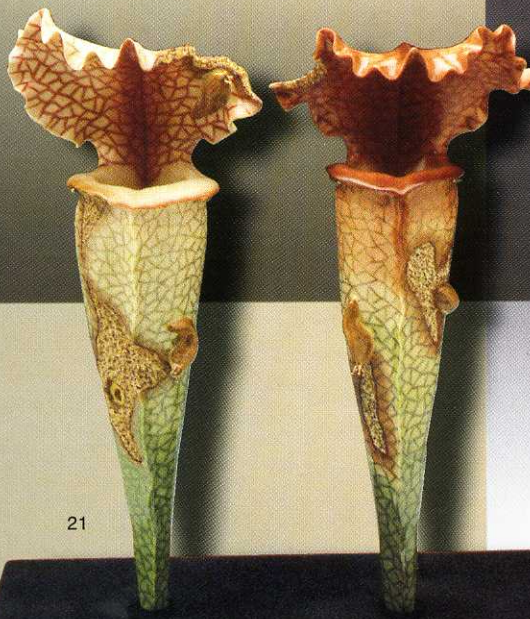
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1. **SERGEI ISUPOV.**
RULER, 2000. Porcelain. 27,5 x 30 x 15 cm
2. **JOSEPH SEIGENTHALER.**
SWITCH MAN, 1999. 87,5x 85 x 95 cm
3. **JUSTIN NOVAK.**
DISFIGURINE #7, 1997. Raku-fired ceramic. 45 x 15 x 15 cm
4. **JOHN BYRD.**
LAIKA MODEL, 2001. Clay, taxidermy, resin, mixed. 75 x 75 x 37,5 cm
5. **VINCENT BURKE.**
GOBSTOPPER #3, 1999. 45 x 55 x 30 cm
6. **SUSAN YORK.**
TILTING STACK (75 SHARDS), 2000.
Porcelain, steel. 15 x 25 x 10 cm
7. **TONY PAZZI.**
IN SICKNESS AND HEALTH TILL DEATH
DO US PART, 2001. Clay, wood, metal. 7,5 x 17,5 x 5 cm
8. **TIP TOLAND.**
LOOK SHE CAN FLY, 2000.
Porcelain, paint, mohair, fabric. 40 x 10 x 17,5 cm
9. **KATHERINE BLACKLOCK.**
FISH STAIRS, 2001.
Porcelain, china paints, marble. 45 x 25 x 17,5 cm
10. **RYAN BERG.**
YELLOW CENTAUR, 2001.
Ceramic mixed media. 25 x 17,5 x 77,5 cm
11. **MARYANN WEBSTER.**
MOTHERBOARD III, 1998. Porcelain, circuite board,
enamels. 37,5 x 30 x 2,5 cm
12. **TIM ROWAN.**
BOX, 2001. Wood fired ceramics, porcelain. 17,5 x 25 x 15 cm
13. **RUTH BORGENICHT.**
MONS MAIL, 2000.
Stoneware. 45 x 67,5 x 15 cm
14. **JIM SHROSBREE.**
BRIGHT VOICE, 1992.
16,2 x 13,1 x 4,3 cm
15. **WILLIAM CATLING.**
GENTLY AND SLOWLY RISING, 2000.
Ceramic, wire, steel. 150 x 50 x 20cm
16. **REBECCA KARDONG.**
STAY, 2001. Clay, mixed media. 80 x 75 x 65 cm
17. **LISA CLAGUE.**
QUIESCENT, 2000.
White clay, wire. 210 x 67,5 x 67,5 cm
18. **ILONA GRANET.**
LOOKING INTO THE ASHES, 1998.
Porcelain. 50 x 25 cm.
19. **BROOK LE VAN.**
VACCUUM CLEANER from North American Legacies, 1996.
Clay, life-size, real vacuum cleaner.
20. **RUSSELL BILES.**
SEVEN DEADLY SINS, 2001.
Envy, pride, anger earthenware, ind. approx. 40 x 37,5 x 20 cm
21. **KEISUKE MIZUNO.**
FORBIDDEN FLOWER, 2001.
Porcelain. 35 x 35 x 15 cm
22. **ALISON MCGOWAN.**
VASE, 2001.
Porcelain. 37,5 x 20 x 20 cm

Voulikos arrived at the Otis Art Institute at the age of 30 and by the time he reached Berkeley, and launched his unique way with clay, had just turned 35.

So in my selection process I discounted artists who were just out of school (chose those working for at least 5 years) and also included only those who had at least a couple of shows since graduating. I received 103 slide packages and have chosen 28 to present.

First let me start with some statements about what I discovered as categories of work. There were four which emerged. These were: 1) Cultural, Political or Social Commentary; 2) Installations; 3) Figuration; and the final, what I call, 4) Process /Function.

In addition to the above categories, several other important observations were made.

Many in this new generation of artists do not come from formal clay teaching environments. Their multi-dimensional training enabled them to pick up clay and its technology solely for the implementation of their concepts.

Technology permeates the work. One example would be Xerox images (iron oxide used in the ink) that can be applied to glazed surfaces and fired in a modern version of the decal process. Fusing photo images onto clay allows endless narrative possibilities.

Another would be the innovation and widespread use of Paper Clay - which has facilitated and perpetuated the making of large scale work and is also forgiving of faulty craft practice.

Advances made from industrial research are beginning to infiltrate studio practice, enabling new equipment to change fabrication. One example would be the use of non-water-based clay ram- pressed into molds allowing the making and firing to cone 10 in a matter of a few hours.

It is clear that clay has been moved to a point where it is used for content and acknowledged for the issues it can convey. So, for example, we find a conceptual based work using stacks of dishes for visual surprise and altered sensibility or an arrangement of teapots in which spouts are anthropomorphized into sexual engagement.

Major themes are reflective of post-modern themes in art generally:

gender and identity issues, design, narrative issues, environmental and social concerns, war, politics and the human condition, popular and material culture.

There are strong tendencies to coalesce issues art and life, high and low art, the incorporation of craft practice into the fine arts, and the participation of the viewer in interactive work.

CULTURAL, POLITICAL OR SOCIAL COMMENTARY

Artists in this area make vivid, potent images which reflect on the



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1. JEANNE QUINN.
ENTANGLEMENT, 2000.
 Glazed porcelain. 15,6 x 43,7 x 30 cm

2. JAE WON LEE.
FRAIL HOPE, INTERNAL DISTANCE OBJECT IV, 2001.
 Porcelain, found drawer. 15 x 37,5 x 30 cm

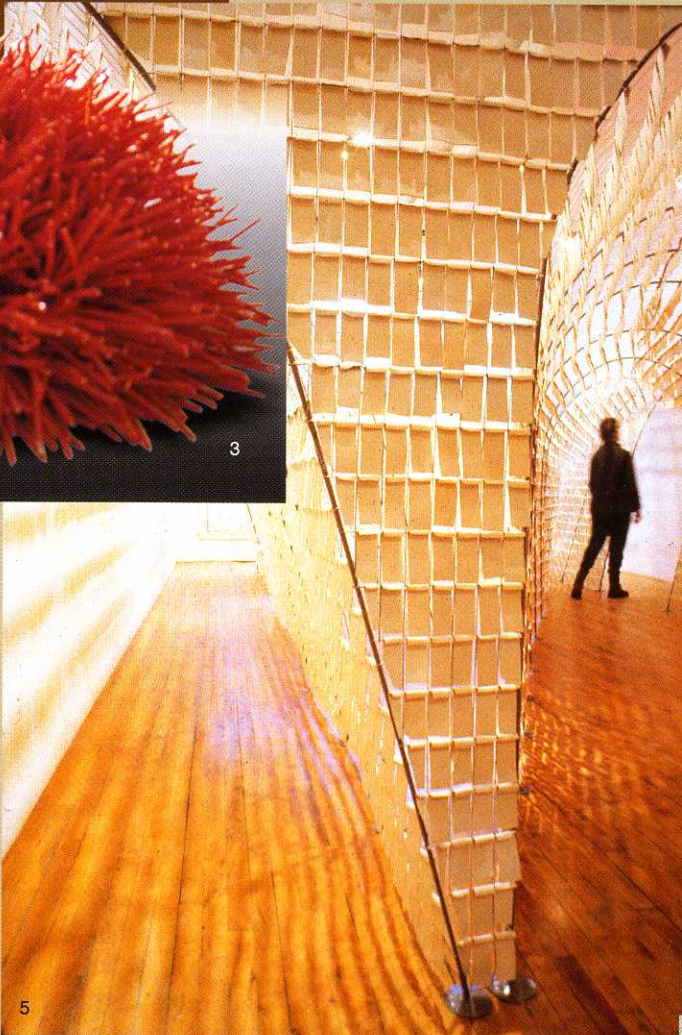
3. BEAN FINNERAN.
RED CURVES, 1999.
 White clay, glaze. 70 x 35 cm

4. TOMAS MYLLER.
TOMATOES set 1, 1998.
 Clay, glaze. 7,5 x 7,5 x 7,5 cm

5. BERRY MATTHEWS.
IN SPACE, 2001.
 Clay, metal mesh. 22,5 x 45 x 77,5 cm



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cultural, sociological, and political changes going on around them. Their work is confrontational, disorienting and at times shocking. They are looking for a freer and more intimate personal expression, which move the viewer to needle the Establishment, recognize oppressive governments, confront the futility of war, or uncover the bleak existence of the underclass.

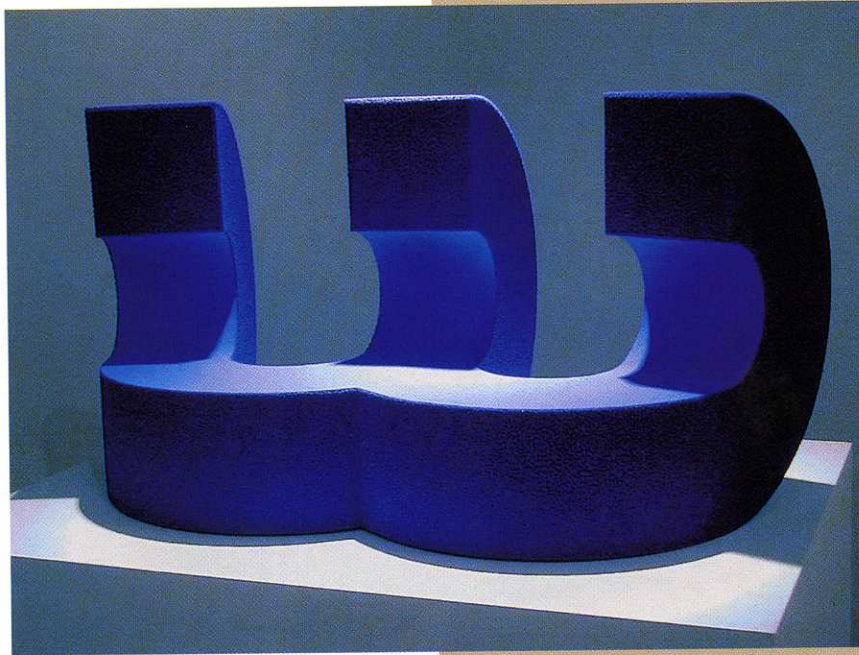
INSTALLATION

Artists working in this area use multi-media, multi-dimensional and multi-formed works to make statements about time and place. It is important for the viewer to be part of the space, to be interactive,

in this material.

PROCESS/ FUNCTION

The term refers to the 60's concept in which the process or technique becomes the subject matter and the material is evidence. Many artists in this category are intimate with the intrinsic qualities of clay; its malleability to be bent, cast, fired in wood, or its translucency and ability to have chameleon-like surfaces. There is also no denying that when functional pottery is well conceived and expertly handled, it is as powerful as any contemporary sculpture and in fact has all the elements of a great work of art.



CARLO SAMMARCO.
ACTIVE BLUE, 2001.
Earthenware, slip.
42,5 x 85 x 43,7 cm

to walk around and experience the placement and the "feeling" of the work. Many installations involve site-specific placements and so works are created solely for a defined space in the gallery or museum location. For ceramics, this arena has enabled preconceived notions of ceramics as historically tabletop objects to enter fine art domains and compete for interesting environments both indoors and out.

FIGURATION

There has been an exuberant resurgence of work depicting the body. Perhaps encouraged by photography, the work is detailed, accurate, and sobering. The use of the figure plays an important role as a starting point for examining the self. Ceramic tradition has made it possible for some of the best contemporary sculpture to be created

The expanded views and exuberant expressions found in clay today, as exemplified by the categories just enumerated, have moved the medium to greater presence in mainstream art and guaranteed its continued vibrancy.

Judith S. Schwartz, Ph.D., Professor at New York University, NY.
The article is based on her lecture presented on occasion of the **International Academy of Ceramics Conference held this past August in Athens .**