

kerameiki techni

INTERNATIONAL CERAMIC ART REVIEW



PROJECTING BOUNDRIES OF LIFE

THE RELIEFS
OF LEE STOLIAR

By JUDITH S. SCHWARTZ



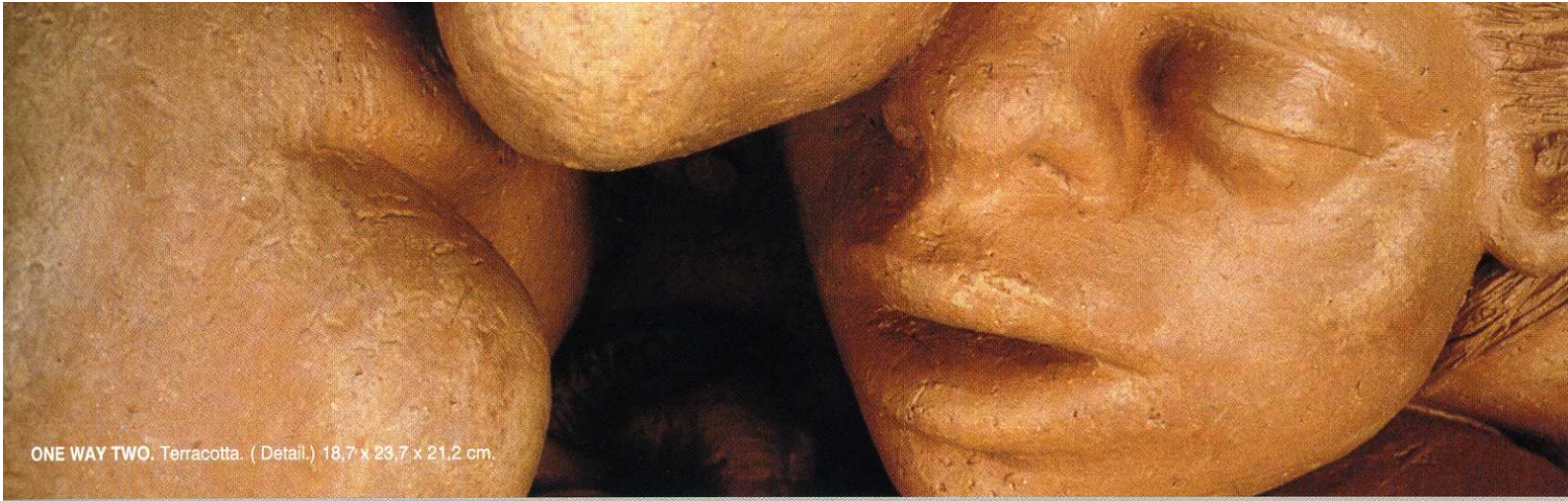
TROWEL. Terracotta. 18,7 x 23,7 x 15,5 cm

The terra cotta high relief sculptures of Lee Stoliar are so deeply modeled, so intensely sculptural, and so primordially fluid, that they seem to ooze from the black wooden frames that constrain them. The frames are metaphors for the boundaries of the life's experiences and the experiences are women's and the issues that challenge them. Whether projecting a view about relationships or motherhood or sexuality, Stoliar's figures speak of energy and the limits to energy. Whatever her subject matter, her figures are always packed into a box in tightly compressed spaces, tumbling, constricted and constrained.

The sources of her interest in clay are clear. "My irresistible urge to make things with clay came upon me quite early, at City & Country School, a progressive elementary school in New York City's



MAKING IT. Terracotta. 18,7 x 23,7 x 16,2 cm



ONE WAY TWO. Terracotta. (Detail.) 18,7 x 23,7 x 21,2 cm.

SPOONS. Terracotta. 18,7 x 23,7x 22,5 cm



ONE OF THE WAYS 3. Terracotta. 25 x 30 x 27,5 cm



DRILL. Terracotta. (Detail.) 18,7 x 23,7 x 15,5 cm

Greenwich Village where, to the delight of my bohemian artist mother, unstructured "Clay" was one of my primary activities from age 5-13. My maternal grandmother had been a sculptor whose career had been derailed by being a spouse and mother. During my teen years, however, when she was quite elderly, grandmother resumed sculpture making and produced a sizable body of work. At the same time, my engineer father joined skills with my mother to design and manufacture fly-fishing equipment. So I was raised in a fertile, enthusiastic environment that encouraged the pleasures and satisfactions of manually making things".

Stoliar begins by pounding clay into a 2 inch deep box frame until it is flush with the top surface and becomes an anchor onto which she can build up, carve out and shave off until the forms can extend 11 inches or more. A protruding elbow, an overhanging arm, a jutting foot are carefully controlled by her intense self-imposed restrictions on form and size. The viewer peers onto a small stage upon which conflicts ensue.

Stoliar demonstrates a highly developed sensibility to the special qualities, refinements and challenges inherent to relief sculpture. Relief sculpture traditionally gives the illusion of a sculpture in the round that logically and symbiotically attaches to a panel or wall. But Stoliar transforms the art form by going beyond the cross-sectional quality of traditional relief sculpture by creating volume, shape and form that look as though they barely touch a supporting surface. She has re-invented the art form to fit an extraordinary creative vision,

CALLING IT. Terracotta. 18,7 x 23,7 x 12,5 cm



DRILL. Terracotta. 18,7 x 23,7 x 15,5 cm

thereby transforming it. By visually punctuating the forms she adds significant psychological weight to the figures and empowers them even more.

Historical references to reliefs are abundant in Stoliar's work. Hindu reliefs which adorned Indian Temples from the fourth to sixth centuries are cited as influential. Also, relief carving in Pre-Columbian art and Greek and Romanesque wall sculptures are viewed as important. From the contemporary, she acknowledges the influences of her close friend and sculptor, Peter Gourfain, who carves and models socially and politically potent images onto monumental vessels and wall tiles. But seen in the broader context of her work, these influences are merely tangential for Stoliar takes her figures into far more layered, intimate, emotional and complex levels.

What are her stories?

In works created in the early eighties, her male and female figures tossed and tumbled in obvious foreplay and her titles indicated that there was always some "thing" or IT that the couple encountered to play around. Consequently titles of works always included the "IT". Chopping It, Making It, Calling It, Getting I., Stoking It and Dancing It were typical works in which issues layered with psychosexual meanings permeated the narrative between the figures.

By the mid-eighties, the male and female subjects were in conflict over domestic objects and her titles reflected encounters over such items as Life Saver(s), Spoon(s), Screw Driver(s) and Telephone(s).

In the nineties, Stoliar embarked on a new series, which optimized the layered complexities between the sexes particularly during the act of lovemaking. Conflict, aggression, power struggles became intermingled with sexual and semi-erotic overtones. In one series of work entitled One of the Ways, she numerically records body positions during the sexual act.

Lee Stoliar's figures appear to float in uteri. Self-absorbed, tumbling, they are impossibly contorted about their playthings, which like their bodies reflect an ambiguity of innocence and experience. The close proximity of these body parts echoes the stimuli we receive in everyday urban life: very intense, very close, and often so layered and complex it's hard to know exactly what's going on.

Lee Stoliar was born in New York City in 1956. She studied at Bennington College Vermont. In 1990 she received the New York Foundation for the Arts Award and in 1995 the Virginia A. Groot Foundation Award (3rd place). She has exhibited in various museums and her work can be seen in prestigious public and private collections.

Judith S. Schwartz teaches ceramic sculpture at New York University. She is a member of the IAC, and is currently President of the Board of the newly formed Museum of Ceramic Art/New York.

SCREW DRIVER. Terracotta. 21,5 x 17,7 x 18,2 cm



ONE OF THE WAYS. Terracotta. 18,7 x 23,7 x 16,7 cm



TELEPHONE

