

CONFRONTATIONAL CERAMICS
JUDITH S. SCHWARTZ





PAUL MATHIEU (Canada), *Abu Ghraib Flower Vases (3 of 12)*, 2004. • Porcelain 45 x 20 x 20 cm (18 x 8 x 8 in). Photo: Kumiko Yasukawa.

PAUL MATHIEU I see ceramics as an independent, autonomous and specific art form, and my work explores craft practices, such as decoration, function and containment, in a unique relation to time, history and to human experience. The *Abu Ghraib Flower Vases* are press-moulded porcelain made with a cast from a *Venus de Milo*. Positioned upside down on its base, the sculpture transformed into a flower vase and took on an iconic stereotype.

The series was made in China and decorators painted the form, mixing styles and periods using prototypical patterns found in Chinatowns the world over. Painters chose patterns and colours so my involvement was minimal. Other sources were flower forms found in the paintings of Cézanne, Van Gogh, etc. The Abu Ghraib images were transferred using a digital process to affirm their media origin and to contrast with the hand-painted decorative surfaces. The presence of these powerful (and in my opinion beautiful) images on these objects changes our understanding of the objects, just as it also changes our understanding of these images in such a domestic, innocent and decorative context.