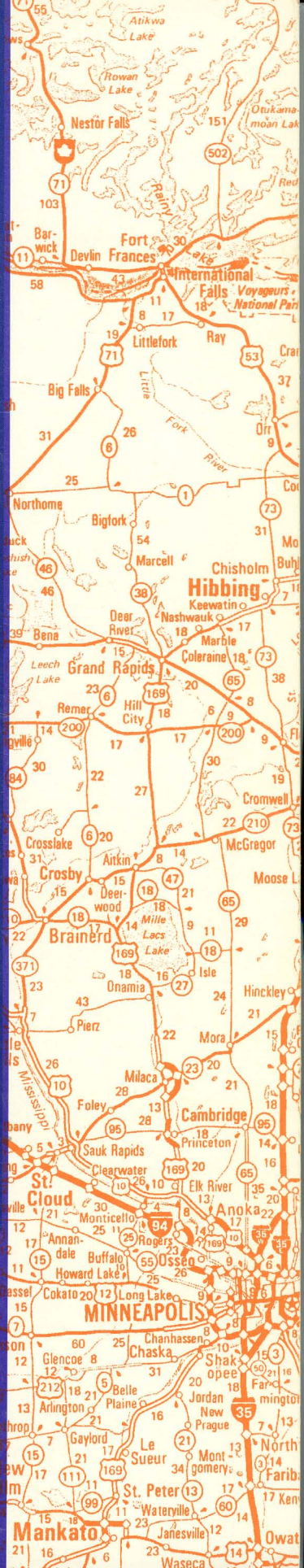


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**1995 Journal**

**BORDERLINE CLAY**





# NCECA

Volume 16, 1995

MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA

## BORDERLINE CLAY



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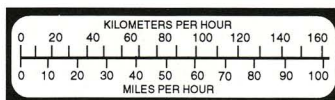
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shaped by culture, and by gender within a culture? What is the future of clay? The discussion has barely just begun.

The women who participated in the presentation were as follows:

Takako Araki, Kyo Tsuji, Kimiko Asai, Yuriko Matsuda, Sachiko Kawamura, Minori Hirokawa, Kaku Hayashi, Nobuko Tsutsumi, Ayumi Shigematsu, Etsuko Tashima, Mari Onami.

The work of the following women was also included in Nishi and Nicholas' study and NCECA presentation:

Kiyoko Kohyama, Shoko Koike, Mieko Okuda, Machiko Ogawa, Nanako Kaji, Junko Kitamura, Chieko Katsumata, Kazue Tsukuda, Kyoko Takagi, Kimiyo Mishima, Yuki Nakaigawa, Yoko Nakamura, Sachiko Fujino, Kyoko Hori, Ruriko Miyamoto, Tomoko Nishimura, Kyoko Tokumaru, Miwako Watanabe, Katsuyo Maeda, Chika Itoh, Matsuko Emi.

**A graduate of the Interlochen Arts Academy, Susan Crowell earned BFA & MFA degrees in ceramics at the University of Michigan and worked at Penland School of Crafts. She exhibits her works widely in the U.S. and Italy and writes on ceramics and issues of contemporary ceramics. Her writing has appeared in *Studio Potter*, *Ceramics Art and Perception*, *Ceramics Monthly*, and the *New Art Examiner*, as well as the *NCECA Journal*. Crowell currently lives and works in Ann Arbor, where she teaches ceramics, writing, and criticism at the University of Michigan Residential College. In 1996-97 she will work in Japan, affiliating with Miyazaki International College.**

## Erotics and Esthetics: Ceramics and Sexualities

by Paul Mathieu

When I submitted this proposal to the NCECA board, and I want to thank them for giving me the opportunity to present this material, I had a rather vague idea in mind. The relationship between sexuality and ceramics has long been an interest of mine, both for professional and personal reasons. Yet, I wasn't prepared for the wealth of material that would come my way in the process of researching this topic. My original idea was to present some historical precedents and then concentrate on more contemporary examples. As early as last week, I was still getting slides in the mail, and I actually hope that more are on the way and that people will keep forwarding appropriate—and inappropriate—material in the future. So, I am afraid this is going to be a work in progress, and I will only partly uncover, address and undress some of it today. I had to make a selection among nearly 500 slides by 60 different artists, each of them deserving of a whole hour devoted to their work; I want to give them my warmest regards for sending me material and trusting me with what I might say about their work. I also would like to thank all the others who suggested and shared sources and information with me.

It is important to say right away that I am speaking only for myself here, not for any other person, not for any of the artists presented and discussed, nor for any particular group. As philosopher Michel Foucault so well said, I will try to avoid "the infamy of speaking for others" and leave that to the politicians.

The relationship between clay and creation in mythology is well known. Genesis is a case in point. As well, religious experience and sex have long been linked. Akio Takamori explores that relation in "Kwannon to a Man" of 1995; Kwannon is the female side of the Buddha image, and she is the Goddess of Mercy, but in Japanese slang, Kwannon-sama is a polite term for female genitalia. All over the world, in most creation myths, clay plays a central role, as does the potter and/or his wife. This in itself could take an hour to discuss. Yet, the specific relationship between ceramics and sexuality, its language and metaphors, is virgin territory, so to speak, and it takes many forms, some of which I would like to explore today.

The first true erotic representations to be found in art are the pottery vessels of the Mochica of northern Peru. In this ceramic work we find the oldest graphic representations of sexual scenes



to be found anywhere. They date from 800 to 500 B.C. The Mochica, more than any other people, felt the need to IMMORTALIZE their sexual desire. The word immortalize is not used lightly here, since these objects were found in tombs and served a role in funerary rituals. Ceramics, being a rather permanent material, is ideal for that purpose. This relation between Eros and Thanatos, between sexuality and death, is something I will come back to later. The fact that these representations are embodied in pottery forms is also significant. It is very rare to find erotic representations in other materials than clay. In these pots, and they are always pots, objects of containment, in themselves metaphorically gendered with female openings and male spouts, we find all possible sexual acts represented—but interestingly enough, 95% of these show anal intercourse between heterosexual partners. Despite the fact that hundreds were found, only one has been recorded to show homosexual acts, yet the homophobic scholarship evident in the books on the subject probably ignore some

courtesy Paul Mathieu



The Sosias Painter, "Achilles Bandaging Patroclus Wounded," Attic C. 500 B.C., Berlin, Charlottenburg

other evidence. In male representations, even with single figures, the penis is almost always in erection. Many bowls and drinking vessels release their contents through vaginal, penile, even anal openings, forcing the user into vicarious fellatio or cunnilingus. This is the same principle at work in the famous surrealist cup and saucer of Meret Oppenheim, "Breakfast in Furs," with its lesbian connotation and in my own small stack set of dishes, "Protection Cup for Wayne Gretzky," where the athletic cup supporter is brought to the mouth in the process of drinking. Ultimately, as with most anthropological evidence, the meaning and significance of Mochica erotic art will always escape us. The examples shown were from Rafael Larco Hoyle's book *CECAN*.

Greek art, and particularly Greek pottery, is a fecund source of sexual representations as well. In this century, Pablo Picasso appropriated and transformed many of these classical motifs. Around 500 B.C., the Brygos Painter created this scene between heromenos and herastes, the lover and the loved one. (Here the cup was signed by Brygos as potter and the image is therefore anonymous; a typical example of hierarchisation by art historians, since for the Greeks the prestige of the potter was greater than that of the painter.) Although homosexuality was well accepted in Ancient Greece, it was problematized by hierarchies between men and boys, men and women, master and slave. The most problematic of these was the relation between men and boys since both were considered free citizens and not subjugated like women and slaves were. The active, passive role between men and boys was somewhat resolved by intercurial sex where the penis was inserted between the thighs and ejaculation took place outside the body. This is the position, in progress, illustrated here.

Again, as with the Mochica, most Greek pottery was preserved because it was used by the Etruscans, who collected vast quantities of it, as offerings in their tombs. For the Greeks, these objects were part of everyday life; and although the Greeks also had specific funerary pottery, it is the Etruscans who actually used the Greek pottery we are most familiar with for funerary purposes. For that reason, most of it was found in Italy.

Another example is the famous "Achilles bandaging Patroclus wounded" by the Sosias Painter, now in Berlin. The composition here is absolutely masterful, in a circle stressing the shape of the shallow drinking cup, with Patroclus's foot resting on the circular frame. In Homer, Achilles and Patroclus are not explicitly lovers, and it is Aeschyles who makes them so, at the time that scene was painted, around 500 B.C. Usually in Greek art,



representations of gods, heroes as well as ordinary humans, are idealized, with schematic, small genitalia. Satyrs and herms often have erect penises, otherwise only barbarians are shown with realistic or large flaccid members. (Robert Arneson referred to herms in his famous self-portrait "Classical Exposure." Arneson, usually not given to restrain, doesn't dare give us an erection here.) The Sosias Painter, named after the potter Sosias who made and signed the cup, and probably painted the image as well, usually idealizes the body, while here it is objective and realist. The small folds of the scrotum are all accounted for. The pubic hair, often absent altogether or reduced graphically to a sign, is here distinctive. Patroclus is shown facing us, with legs spread, exposing himself to our gaze. Even Achilles' genitals, distinct under the transparent garment, are made visible despite the fact that the crouching position of his body would normally hide everything. It is significant that both sets of genitalia are represented. This is the most realistic portrayal, in size, detail and pilosity, of male sexual organs in Greek art. But it is the eyes and the visual tension that are most remarkable here. Patroclus is shown looking away in order to hide his pain from his friend. Prior to this period, eyes were shown frontally, even with figures in profiles. We have here a formal innovation, with realistic eyes which give the figures not only eyes but sight. These figures are actually looking, and this might be the first example of visual art, ever. We can debate whether Achilles is looking at the focal white bandage or at Patroclus offerings. He might soon say himself, like Socrates in CHARMIDES on first encountering Alcibiades: "then I saw what was under his garment and I was aflame and besides myself." We are actually looking at a scene of extraordinary tenderness and psychological tension, which could be used as an example for AIDS caring, based in sensuality yet inspired by a recognition of

death. After Patroclus has died, Homer says of Achilles that "all should know of his grief as all knew of his love."

There are also often graffiti-like inscriptions on Greek pots, added by the maker to celebrate "Païs Kalos...", a beautiful boy. In the case of Douris, these inscriptions happen over a period of 20 years, always for the same beautiful Hippodamus. Contemporary British artist Angus Suttie, who uses many references to the human body in his work, would also scratch gender specific slogans on his vessels. "Your bum is best" is an example. He died of AIDS about a year ago. His work is paired here with this plate in French faience showing a "sans-culotte," meaning without pants, the name given to ardent Republicans during the French Revolution.

Other examples of sexual pottery forms are this phallic water container, from Crete, 6th Century B.C., meant to be worn around the waist in an exhibitionistic manner like an advertisement, and this contemporary interpretation by Richard Milette from Montreal. The title of the piece "Hic Habitat Felicitas"—here lies happiness—comes from an inscription in Pompeii. The penis plays the role of the handle, and fondling is necessary in order to pour the content, a characteristic not present in the antique source.

Greek philosophy, still so influential in Western thought, was the first system to make distinctions between body and mind. For the Greeks, by surrendering to desire, the soul lost its mastery over the body. Sexual desire was considered to be a force external to the soul which entered the body through the eyes. Thus begins the denial of the body in Western philosophy and the association of the visual with reason, separating sight from the other senses. The following ideas are excerpted from Robin May Schott's *Cognition and Eros*. The separation between soul and senses and between sight and the other senses was not only anti-body but anti-female as well. Women represented the pollution associated with the body and sexuality because of their role in giving birth, which brings with it the threat of death. Also, because of woman's primary identification with reproduction, man was freed to identify primarily with the nobler works of reason. For Aristotle, the biological differences between genders have "mental correlates": activity (or form) is expressed through rational self-determination, and passivity (or matter) becomes manifested through emotion. This polarization by the Greeks between male and female, body and soul, reproduction and reason, form and matter, is still evident today in the prevalent debate between art and craft.



For relief, here are some other objects. Although we find erotic representation in Chinese porcelain as early as the 15th century, most date from the Qing period of the 19th century, as does the one shown here. Despite the fact that they were probably made in vast quantities, very few examples of these kind of works are left, and most were destroyed during the revolutions of this century. The low esthetic standard is a result of the need to meet the demands of a large popular erotica market. Sexuality is depicted matter of factly, whether hetero or homosexual, although the latter is not common. (This contemporary bottle with stopper by Patrick Heller from Philadelphia, who works with archetypal gay images, is somewhat more charged emotionally than the Chinese piece.) When shown by themselves, representations of sexuality are graphic and straightforward. When combined with scenes of domesticity or courtship, the sexual aspects are usually hidden underneath the lid of bowls, the foot of cups or the bottom of bowls and saucers, not so much as shameful secrets but as pleasant surprises. These examples are from John Byron's book *Erotica of the Late Qing Period*.

Examples of erotica are also found in Italian majolica of the 16th century, where they usually take a more humorous character. The obvious "Leda and the Swan" by Francesco Xanto Avelli is a serious mythological example, here paired with a contemporary plate by Matthias Ostermann from Montreal, with a baffled useless stork surrounded by two dancing men. This satyr exposing a woman by lifting her skirt, from Deruta, paired with a porcelain plate by Angela Fina, from 1973, with a very phallic twisted bread and a semantic double-entendre; the word PAIN but also "pain" for bread in French. This knotted penis, tied up and immobilized, might very well be what awaits our satyr as well. Another plate from Deruta, now in the Louvre, shows a woman collecting male organs in a basket and the

inscription "the good fruits for women," paired with another Angela Fina plate with fruits, letters and inscriptions. The B for the banana/penis, the L for lemon/breast, the O for orange/navel, the W for walnut/testicle or vagina. These letters can be assembled to form the word BLOW, a sexual reference, as well as the word BOWL which creates semantic confusion since the object is not a bowl but a plate.

Funnier still, this plate from Castel Durante with a head entirely composed of penises and the inscription that reads "everyone thinks I am such a dickhead" (pre-Arcimboldo, by the way), paired with a plate by Philip Cornelius, 1974, with a landscape with peeing penises, made in reaction to the diversion of water from the High Sierras to Los Angeles and the wastefulness of natural resources for profit. The goal here is political and satirical, not sexual commentary.

In a different mood, this indiscreet Harlequin peeking under a dress, in Meissen porcelain, modeled by J. Kaendler, from the Gardiner Museum in Toronto and this porcelain biscuit plaque from Sèvres, early xxth century, showing an embracing couple with pointed tongue and open mouth, in a sixty-nine position, a rare slip by the usually staid celebrated manufacture.

Closer to us, Akio Takamori makes exemplary work based on human sexuality, gender relations, mythological images and most importantly the psychological tensions involved in relationships. This continuous body of work mines the inexhaustible catalogue of images related to desire, creation and generation and the eternal conflicts and resolutions of male/female interactions.

At the beginning of this century, George Ohr made lots of sexually charged objects, like this vagina vase in menstrual red. The folds and twists of his thrown forms are ideally suited to sexual connotations. His vagina bank, crudely made with the slot for money, brings together power and sex, money and desire, with amazing directness. These six tokens for New Orleans brothels continue this idea in a more humorous manner. I LOVE YOU DEAR, LET'S GO TO BED, CAN I SCREW YOU, GOOD FOR ONE SCREW, etc., can be deciphered here. George Ohr saw the making of his work as a process of giving birth, and he considered his pots to be his babies, literally. His work as well as his writing is infused with sexual metaphors and references to feminine powers of creation and reproduction. I particularly like this homomorphic teapot in a sixty-nine position. What of these very phallic pieces of Jun Kaneko? I wonder what it is they are doing?



Marcel Duchamp is responsible for the most famous ceramic object of this century, his "Fountain" of 1917. I guess that also makes him the most famous ceramic artist. Although Duchamp was not a homosexual, he dressed in drag and took a feminine persona, Rose Sélavy. Here she is in a urinal I made that invites you in the French inscription to PLEASE TOUCH. You can also desecrate the image in other ways than touching, since this is a fully operational functional object, but touching is still the ultimate taboo in art. Duchamp's work is ambiguous, without judgment or commitment, no opposition or condemnation; he simply acknowledges. My urinal is unambiguous, judgmental, committed; it opposes and condemns simply by being a functional object.

Marek Cecula from New York, in his Scatology Series of 1993, explores sexuality and hygiene in our particular time and, I quote him, "our paramount fear of death coming together with puritanical obsessional attitudes toward sex, specifically today in the midst of the AIDS crisis. White glossy porcelain made to fit the body conveys a contradiction; it is a beautiful luminescent form and surface which channels and disposes the dirty, unwanted by-products of our organism." The forms suggest male and female bodies, orifices and sex. The stainless steel tray reminds us of clinical sterility, laboratories, hospitals and of our fears.

Recent work by John DeFazio, from New York as well, emphasizes that aspect. "Skull Toilet" and "Venus Throne," both in glazed porcelain, are functional objects that push similar ideas in other directions. It is interesting to point out that public bathrooms are often the site of homosexual encounters as well as gay bashings and often unite desire and death. Pottery is part of the cycle of life and death, sustained by food, and pottery functions are closely related to bodily functions. Pottery contains food, preserves

and excretes it, then receives the waste the body rejects. The terms we use to describe pottery forms not only refer to the human form through formal analogy, but also have semantic meaning; the human body and pottery operate similarly.

Grayson Perry is a British artist who uses pottery forms. Although not gay, he as well takes on a female persona named Claire and dresses in women's clothes and lives like a woman for periods of time. His work uses classical forms that could be characterized as female, and it is the pictorial surfaces, associated with the male gaze, that are original and unconventional. This dichotomy creates the tension that makes the work operational. If the forms were idiosyncratic like the surfaces are, the result would be confusing; by using the conventions and codes of pottery and of gender, he establishes parallels that serve his purposes. Notice that the faces of Princess Di and Prince Charles have been switched in "Y-Front and Roses," 1988, seen here with "Childhood Drama Manifesting Itself In Later Life," 1992.

Travestism itself is a highly coded and conventional mode of representation. Although perceived as unconventional by the mainstream, it is these binding conventions that give it its power and subversivity. Travestism is an exhibitionistic practice, highly public, even when the only public consists of a mirror. Patrick Hurst, from Calgary, explored the theme in his "Della Robbia Johnny West and Bobby Orr," 1973, with the two heroes portraying the Madonna and the Infant Jesus. In an appropriated object found in a souvenir shop, Gary "Candyass" Leibowitz, from Brooklyn, NY, offers us this "Study for Portrait of an 18th Century Lesbian Couple," 1994. The two figures are gendered male and female in their clothing, yet both their faces are unmistakably feminine.

Travestism is the other pole from the rituals of sadomasochism whose manifestations are basically private. Richard Milette, from Montreal, uses both aspects in his teapots and stirrup vessel of 1992; Mickey Mouse is imitating Minnie Mouse. He/She is not only proud of his/her little dress, but sports a flamboyant faux black rubber covered erection, the actual spout of these vessels. This other teapot is camouflaged as a leather and metal covering, emblematic of the master and slave dress code.

An understanding of the mechanisms of sadomasochism could help in understanding the workings of the art world as well. French philosopher Gilles Deleuze, in *Coldness and Cruelty*, states that "sadism is about autonomous acts, masochism about theatrical suspense. Sadism is about nature and power, masochism is about culture and ironically, the law; sadism deals with



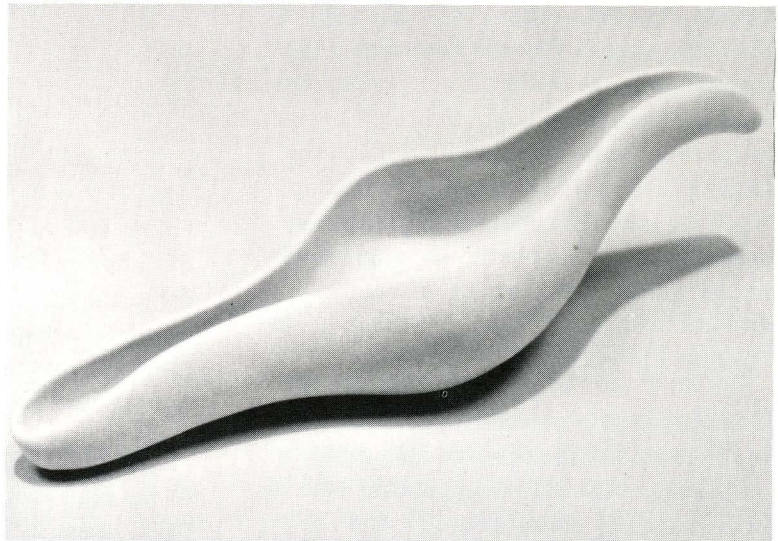
the imposition of formal values and the cruel imposition of natural law and masochism focuses on deferred sublimity and the vertiginous rhetoric of trust. As a consequence, the sadist is in need of institutions and the masochist of contractual relations." If we substitute sadism for art and masochism for craft in what precedes, we get a very revealing picture; art is in need of museums and craft of retail spaces!

The same game could be played with Jean Beaudrillard from his book *Seduction*, with seduction becoming craft and sex being art. "Seduction supposes a ritual order, sex and desire a natural order . . . Interpretation (art history, criticism) is par excellence, opposed to seduction . . . since the ritual sign is not a representative sign; it is not therefore worth understanding. Instead, it delivers us from meaning."

If art making is characterized by the complementary interaction of sadism and masochism, there is a lot of travesty out here as well, and the genuine article is very rare indeed. Here are two: Kevin Stafford, from Winnipeg, now living in Los Angeles, and his 1994 "Gift" and Patti Warashina's "Born to Be" of 1980. Kevin's winged figure in bondage, hanging from a chain is in stark contrast with Warashina's female figures of freedom and becoming. Kevin's work is sexy and sexualized, Warashina's is gendered and the political content removes the potential eroticism from the work. Yet, both artists use very different methods to attain similar results: to gain liberation either through physical restraint or through psychological emancipation. It is often said that art is about theory, and it could be said that craft is about practices. Usually, ceramics is about certain kind of practices, throwing, glazing, firing, etc. In the case of these two artists, the practices are not technical but sexual and psychological.

Philip Eglin, a British ceramic sculptor, also desexualizes his naked figures. They are too estheticised by the references to classical Madonna and Child and the audacious painterly surface and text to be erotic. Yet, they remain highly sensual and effective otherwise.

The problem of the "gender" of a work of art is also interesting. Dave Hickey, a Los Angeles art writer, wrote in his collection of essays *The Invisible Dragon* that "the feminine qualities (beauty, harmony, generosity) are still extant in works of art, but are no longer validated by our language of value. As such, they are verbally invisible. We now validate their masculine counterparts, strength, singularity, autonomy, etc." Since craft is often perceived as feminine and art as masculine, the verbal invisibility of craft can be explained in this manner as well. It was argued in a panel at NCECA '94 in New Orleans that ceramics has basically ignored feminist theory. To a degree, I agree with this statement, yet I would argue back that ceramics has certainly been informed by feminist PRACTICES, specifically in providing its practitioners with control over production and financial independence. The fact that many ceramic departments were founded and chaired by women from the 30's on (a situation rarely found in art departments) reinforces the connection between feminism and ceramics. A feminist content is evident in New York artist Kim Dickey's "Pissoir" of 1994, here seen by itself and documented in use. She says: "The photograph suggests intimacy and the function of the vessel, enabling a woman to pee standing up, yet the mediation places the viewer at a further distance from the event and objects, emphasizing our ambiguous relationship to real acts and physical



Kim Dickey, "Pissoir #4," 1994, porcelain

courtesy Paul Mathieu



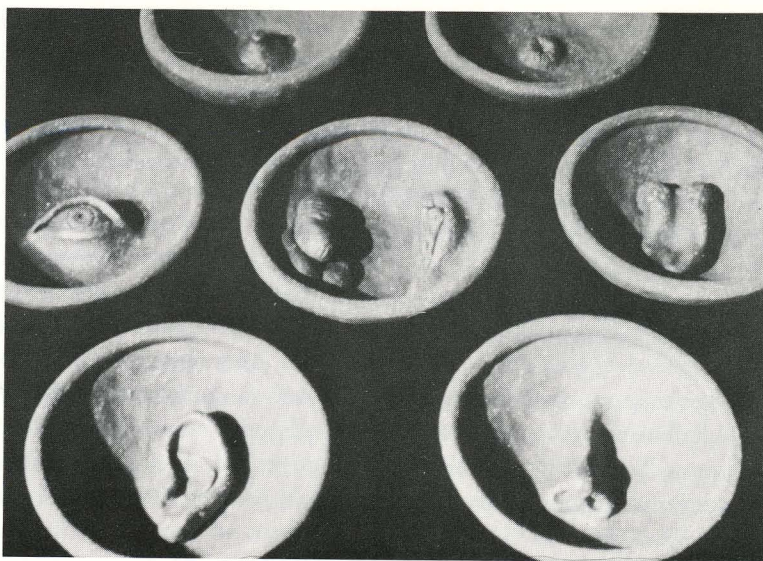
touch." This stresses the problem of relying on visual material for a lecture that is meant to celebrate *all* senses.

These seven bowls by Agnès Dumouchel, from Montreal, show the seven orifices of the human body, with penis and vagina paired in the middle bowl. They are shown with this untitled vase from the 1970's by Verne Funk of Texas. This representation of sensual taste shows a gaping mouth swallowing a penis.

But certainly touch is the dominant sense when it comes to working with plastic clay. I will quote from a letter of 1914 from Roger Fry to Duncan Grant, speaking of his and Vanessa Bell's first experiments. This extract is from Garth Clark's new book on English Ceramics: "It is fearfully exciting when you do get it centered and the stuff begins to come up between your fingers. Vanessa would never make her penises long enough, which I thought very odd . . ."

This plastic quality of clay is very visible in Andrew Lord's "Round Set, Pressing and Squeezing" of 1985. Pushed, pulled, coaxed and cajoled are all words with sexual connotations used by Los Angeles critic Christopher Knight to describe his work. Johan Creten from Belgium materializes smell in his 1992 piece "L'Odor di Femmina," the smell of woman. Millions of other examples could be used to illustrate the role of senses in ceramics, but it is touch that plays the larger role. The work of Robert Arneson, "Call me Lover" of 1965 unites both touch and hearing in this phallic and vaginal telephone, and Ann Roberts from Waterloo, Ontario, utilizes the caressing touch in her "Double Embrace" of 1993.

Contemporary philosophy and theory is trying to reconcile all senses in its attempt to propose new and all encompassing ways of understanding reality. Yet sight and the eye remain central to contemporary discourse.



Agnès Dumouchel, "Bowls With Human Orifices," 1994, terracotta

Much more is to be done. And until then, practices that rely on touch in both their materialization and their experience will remain largely misunderstood and ignored. One of my generation's mythical figures was The Who's Tommy, the sense deprived hero who understood the world through touch alone. This might explain some of the fascination I have for that sense.

Beatrice Wood, alias Countess Lola Screwvinsky, suggests that through love and touch, progress could be made in "Settling the Middle East Crisis," the title of this piece from 1973. In typical fashion for this unconventional artist, notice the reversed missionary position with the woman in the active role. It is paired here with Ann Robert's "Budded Embrace" of 1993.

Western theory of knowledge and morality is dominated by the ascetic paradigm and the denial of touch. And ascetism, with its insistence on sin, has remained the dominant theme of Christianity and has led to an anti-sexual view toward life.

For an affirmative sexual view toward life, here are Jeannot Blackburn's "Double-Edged Knife" of 1988 and Stephen Schofield's "Les Bonhommes" from Paradise Pools of 1980, both Montreal artists. Penetration, bodily invasion and the desire to physically overwhelm the other in an amorous relationship are exemplified here, along with the dangers of passion and intimacy.

In her book *Cognition and Eros*, Robin May Schott addresses these issues by analyzing the still prevalent role played by German philosopher Immanuel Kant in Western thought. Kant's



paradigm clearly defined a break between sensibility and understanding. For him, the sense of sight is the noblest, since, of all the senses, it is the farthest removed from the sense of touch and touch is the most limited of perceptions.

On the screen, Howard Kottler's "Mommy Volcano" of 1965 and Adrian Saxe's "Lollycock" of 1968, the first about touch with its furriness, the second about the denial of touch, with its presentation under a plexiglass case.

Kant went so far as to state that perceiving the texture of an object depends on touching and as such is excluded from the intellectual dimension of sense experience. This from a man who was celibate all his life and who, despite his absolute reliance on sight to apprehend reality, went for three years with blindness in one eye before noticing the change. Kant also valued pain over pleasure, not surprisingly. Quoting Schott: "This emphasis on vision expresses the erotic interest of the voyeur, whose gratification is derived solely from looking at the object of desire. This attitude also establishes a distance between the subject and his/her body." The eye separates from the world while the other senses unite us with reality.

Tom Dean, from Toronto, is a Canadian artist who often uses ceramics and pottery forms in his work. This piece is part of a series of works done over a period of 10 years in the 1980's titled "Excerpts from a Description of the Universe." Notice that all objects on the metal table are containers—the hat, the vases, the apron, the dress and the porcelain pitcher with function denied in the process of giving it a handle. The two vases on the right, part of the same installation but shown here separately, are images of gender (the female torsos), race (the black and the white), hierarchies (the different heights). But their most effective aspect are these holes all over

the surfaces, which not only deny function but, most importantly, carry our gaze all over the form and in the process objectify and create an awareness of objectification, which is stressed further by the absent limbs and heads.

Two very different examples of objectification in Jeff Koon's porcelain sculpture "Naked" from 1986 and Kiki Smith's "Urogenital System, Male and Female," bronze, 1986 as well.

At last year's NCECA conference, New York art critic Peter Schjeldahl defined the differences between art and craft in terms of distances, the farthest being architecture, the nearest crafts and art being in the in-between, in the middle distance. This tension between image and object is the operative factor between representation and presentation; representation in art (as in sex) is acceptable, yet presentation, the real thing, is taboo. And objects are not meant to represent life but to participate in it, to be present in reality.

It has become obvious by now through my choice of images that my presentation is clearly biased. Are issues of sexual identity relevant in discussing artworks? According to feminist theory, the personal is political. Is the political an integral part of interpretation? How does sexual orientation manifest itself in artworks? There is still a prevalent tendency not to give too much weight to issues of sexuality when discussing artworks. Since the beginning of this paragraph, I have been flashing on the screen examples of works by Michael Cardew, Maja Grotell, Glen Lukens, Karen Karnes, Geert Laap and Howard Kottler. Is it important to know the sexual orientation of these artists in order to understand their work? If we look at a vase by Laura Andreson with its shape similar to a feminine lower torso and the decoration referring to a pudenda, or a vessel by Richard DeVore, all folds and curves, it becomes evident that both are sensitive to and influenced by the specific sensuality of the female form.

Remember the fifties? Lily Tomlin says, "No one was Gay in the fifties, they were just shy."

I am afraid I will now have to use the infamous "we" referred to at the beginning: "although gay people have certainly contributed to cultural life as a group, we have been robbed of our culture. Like blacks and women, we are taught by omission, that we have no heroes or heroines, and certainly, no role models" (from *Out of the Closet: The Voices of Gay Liberation*, Karla Jay and Allen Young, ed., New York, Douglas/Links, 1972).



One of my role models was Lèopold L. Foulem from Montreal. His "Don't Be So Uptight" from 1972-74, with the clenched teeth, the garish acrylic color surface, the fake pubic fur and the real cap from a Vaseline jar. These customized bicycle seats, mixing fantasy, fantasies and fetishism are from 1978-82 and were included in a solo show called "There's Queens and Queens." His example showed me possible ways for my own work. This "Wet Dream" from 1973, shaped like sperm and covered in sequins and "Juicy Banana" from 1973-76, oozing white creamy stuff on a silver tray are from two solo shows, "The Carrots are

Huno



Richard Milette, "Vase Chinois Bachelier À Têtes De Snoopy," 1991, H: 21 3/8"

Gorgeous This Year Dear" and "Jewish Banana and Other Stuff." But I had also many other heroes, who are not necessarily queer, although it could be said that their work is somehow. When I saw Warren McKenzie's "Four Vases for a Gynecologist's Office" in the Nelson book, as a young student, it made me realize that it was possible for pottery to be relevant in the contemporary world, something confirmed by Ken Price (from 1986, these three works of voyeurism and objectification, "El Saturn," "Noches de Oro" and "Club Atomica") and many others later.

Adrian Saxe ("Mystery Ewer" from 1991) is an interesting example. If Adrian was gay and he was as outrageous and confrontational about it as his work is, what he does would be perceived very differently. Adrian Saxe is a straight man who makes gay art. One can be straight and be queer, the same way one can be male and be a feminist. For that reason not all homosexual artists are gay or queer, which are political terms, not all their work is queer either. Before going back to the queer question, Adrian's work deserves another look. His ewer is paired on the screen with Richard Milette's "Vase Chinois Bachelier avec Têtes de Snoopy" from 1991. I said earlier that ascetism was a defining term of western culture. The other one is fetishism. Adrian's and Richard's fetishism both have as source the Sèvres porcelain of 18th century France. While Saxe quotes more or less directly through stylistic references, Milette denounces and politicises fetishism by using earthenware instead of the nobler porcelain and by using faux leather with studs as well as faux historical fragments to signify commodification. Despite the presence of lids or spouts, both deny function and prohibit touch through preciousness and physical constraints, fishing hooks in the case of Adrian Saxe. This contributes to make the work acceptable as art by creating distance from the object (remember Schjeldahl's middle distance), a characteristic inherent to visual art. Adrian's work looks different from Sèvres, yet functions similarly; Richard's piece is in direct reference to Sèvres prototypes yet stands in complete opposition. Cindy Koldziejewski, from Los Angeles, also uses fetishism in her work, here on two sides of the same piece, with images of bodybuilding and nail care. Pornography, according to Jean Beaudrillard, is "the quadruphonics of sex. It is the hallucination of details that rules." Adrian's, Richard's and Cindy's works are pornographic, in that (positive) sense of the word.

On the screen, two views of Gary Candyass Leibowitz's "Homo Vase" from 1992.



Many concepts involved in art are accessible on a number of levels without awareness of sexual orientation. But for a more engaged reading, it becomes an important factor. According to Josephine Mills, a gay activist and writer, "by keeping sexual orientation in the realm of the just personal, we become complicit in the history of its oppression and the censorship of its representation."

The famous Oscar Wilde teapot from the 1880's is paired here with Matt Nolen's, from New York, "Glitter and Be Gay" from 1993. Both objects address stereotypes, proof that they are difficult to kill since 100 years separate them. The wildly phallic flower, the limp wrist on both teapot and jar, the queenly crown, the David in Calvin Klein's underwear all act as stereotypes, but they also represent an attempt at iconography in order to create a vocabulary of images that refer not only to oppression but to identity. Other examples are Matthias Ostermann, from Montreal, referring to mythology and the oldest work of fiction in his "Gilgamesh and Endiku," the first lovers of literature, and Daniel Neish, from Seattle, using silhouettes of pornographic and sexualized images, at once simplified and detailed, as source. His "S.P.#4" of 1992 redefines the meaning of the nine inch plate! Plates are a fertile format for such research since they bring together an interesting pictorial shape with connections to domesticity and family.

Words and qualificatives are also potent means of oppression and identity. These two "Hydrias" of 1994 by Richard Milette are part of a series on four letter words—LOVE, HATE, PÉDÉ, HOMO, SCUM, FUCK and RAPE. There have been many examples shown so far establishing the relation between pottery and text, language and sexuality. I unfortunately cannot go deeper into it at this time.

Lesbianism and the female body are each a fecund source of inspiration for contemporary art. I should say right away that I am mixing the two complementary but not necessary synonymous aspects quite liberally here; most of the artists featured in this section are women, not all are lesbians.

This said, the first work is by a man, this cup with two haetaerae or courtesans by Apollodoros, circa 500 B.C., with its obvious sexual subtext, in a scene with two women at their toilet. Jill Beppu is a lesbian, Japanese, American woman who made this sculptural installation in 1992, "Violets are Blue Too," part of a series on Liberty Belles. The layering of names she uses to describe herself is also symptomatic of the many levels of reading possible in her work. Culture, color, race, sexual orientation and identity, individuality and reproduction are all intermixed.

K.T. Blacklock, from New Orleans, with "Cross your Heart" from 1992, uses the female form as container. The obvious gender objectification challenges the viewer as objectifier. The literal openings and inner spaces add layers of meaning to the form.

Anne Mulford, from Las Vegas, and her "Vagina of Guadalupe" from 1993, refers to the theories of psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan. She "argues for the existence of an exclusively female gaze that has and does exist as a viable and equally effectatious counterpart to the ever present male gaze." Her "Lesbian Heaven" and a detail "Pussy Angel," from 1994, explore aspects of female desire "where the act of objectification is a form of worship, the religious symbolism refers to the need to enshrine life experiences and display them." This fetishism is reinforced by the bicycle seat form, used to signify the female sexual triangle and by using visual/literal stereotypes to create variations on a theme. Pussy, fish, beaver, etc., become metaphors and are meant to re-appropriate clichés and disparaging terms positively.

A vase by Meg Larvey, from 1993, and a jam jar from 1991 by Kim Dickey, both combine vaginal shapes and pottery forms for similar references to the body as container; these kinds of formal references are very fertile ground for the creation of personal and expressive pots.

Angela Fina, living in Toronto at the time, made "Burning Love" in 1975; the flaming folded vagina form with a clitoridian pearl, was a response to the macho breast art going on in the early 1970's, at the same time Judy Chicago was working on her Dinner Party, here, the Georgia O'Keefe plate. I should point out that both artists were working independently of each other,



as is often the case, despite the similar subject matter, in reaction to the same political situation. Angela Fina also made in 1974 a series of penis vases, using 20 different techniques and materials. They were displayed together in a case labeled "Teaching Samples." Léopold L. Foulem made this phallic Rhyton Drinking Cup in ceramic with found objects. I believe neither of them is a lesbian, but I do not know for sure.

Penelope Kokkinos, with "Female Body-builder" from 1989 and Mimi Cabri, "Teapot" from 1990, are two Ottawa, Ontario artists who celebrate differently aspects of femininity inside cultural boundaries.

It seems important to point out that these works are not necessarily representative of the whole oeuvre of all these artists. Sexuality doesn't always appear; yet, if sexuality is perceived as "a theme of existence, it infuses our life and informs other non-erotic aspects as well." We therefore must resist the tendency to attribute all of what these artists do to their sexual orientation, whatever it might be.

Coming up soon is a section on animals as substitute for humans to depict sexual behavior; here is a preview with Jack Earl "Love in the Harbor," from 1975, a courtship scene with dogs and Stephen Schofield, "The End of Love," 1980, with two dogs passionately engaged in a battle confusing war and lovemaking. Seduction as well as sexuality can be expressed in a variety of ways. Yet, the dominant culture presents us with only two alternatives; co-option or marginalization. The position of ceramics as a marginalized practice certainly influenced my choices as an artist. This marginalization created a parallel with my own burgeoning sexuality and how it was perceived socially. I identified with the marginalization of ceramics because I felt socially marginalized otherwise. This might have been the case for many others as well and

might partly explain the large number of gay artists now working with clay, especially potters. I think this might also be true historically. I know dozens of examples, but I am not going to out anyone, although outing is also a popular contemporary practice.

Another important and crucial aspect of contemporary culture is the role played by the AIDS crisis in current practices. Mark Burns, from Las Vegas, made these two companion pieces in 1976, "Sebastian at the Baths" and "Lot's Wife." They can now be seen in retrospect as amazingly prescient, prophetic images, a premonition of AIDS. The arrows piercing the flesh of Sebastian remind me of attacking HIV viruses, and the scare of infection, sickness and death changed bodies into pillars of salt. AIDS brought to the forefront of desire the relation between sex and death. Johan Creten, from Belgium, with "Cell #3," part of an installation, combines skull and erect penis in a single object. It is paired here with a Mochica drinking vessel from pre-colombian Peru, joining the same two potent symbols, skull and penis, proof that this symbiosis between Eros and Thanatos has long been central to humankind and that ceramics has played an important role there as well. Other historical precedents are the canope jars of the Greeks, Egyptians and Etruscans, made to contain the internal organs of embalmed corpses, the Anasazi bowls placed over the head of the deceased, and most importantly, in sheer size anyway, the terracotta army of Emperor Ch'in, buried with him as substitute for living soldiers and horses. The Mochica drinking vessel seen here has holes around the rim, so that the user must drink from the large erect penis while looking in the eyes of the snarling skull.

There has also been a resurgence of funerary urns as pottery form in the last years. I made these two examples between 1985 and 1990, with the bronze mounts drawing male and female torsos around the central black stoneware container.

Jeannot Blackburn, from Montreal, made this series of six pieces titled "Salade" in 1993. The work embodies the difficulties of relationships and physical contact in the present time. This is emphasized by the absence of the bowl, since what we are looking at is the content and not the container, a brilliant conceptual as well as perceptual reversal. A group of naked male bodies is tossed together like a mixture of green vegetables, and as we move to the other pieces, we get closer progressively in a cinematic zooming close-up effect. Soon, a single figure is left, abandoned by the others; then, fragments of the dismembered body, with the cuts in blood red, and a naked male form oozing out, white and ghostly from the penis tip. Is he sleeping or dead?

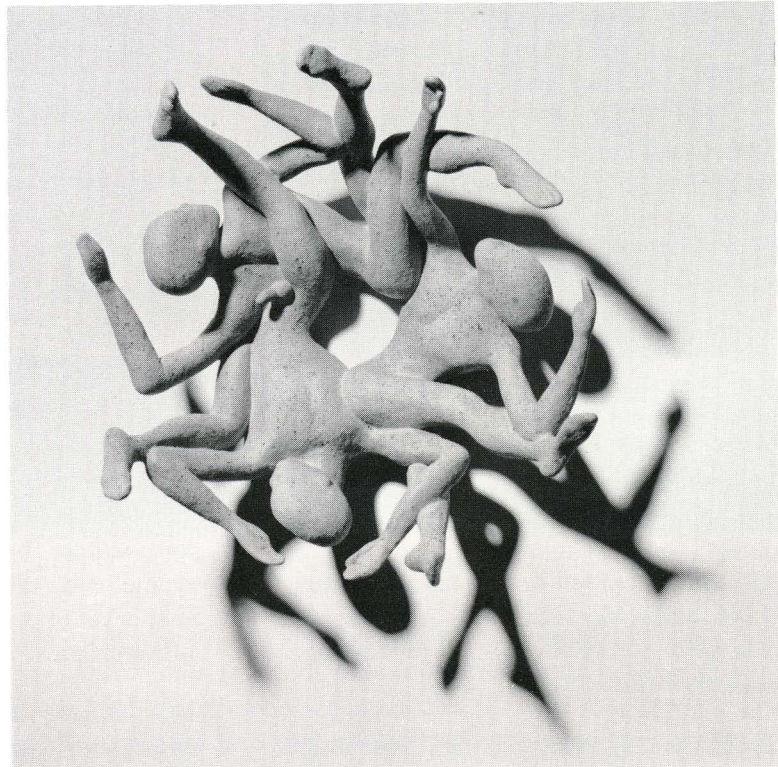


"Sida O No Da Sida," to give or not give AIDS, as inscribed in Spanish on a little folk art souvenir from Mexico, showing two skeletons in their prison.

Condoms are part of the new iconography as well. Philip Cornelius uses the form on his "Quadra Bird" teapot of 1993. Canary birds were used as warnings by miners in coal mines; when the bird died, it was time to get out quick. With AIDS, there was no warning and we are left with condoms for protection. Another artist using the image is Matt Nolen, with "Apothecary Jar #5, 1992," on the famous albarello historical form. The function of the object is very contemporary, for prophylactics from a variety of trademarks. Swarming bees are both viruses attacking and warnings of potential danger.

Alternatives are solitude, exemplified by Vancouver artist Glenn Lewis "My Heart" from 1967, part of a series of salt and pepper shakers, where the familiar pair was used as symbol for relationship. In this piece, only one object is present, phallic like, inside a heart shaped dish. As an aside, Glenn Lewis was trained as a functional potter in the Leach tradition, and he is now one of Canada's best avant-garde artists working mostly with text, video and installation. Gary Candyass Leibowitz is another artist, one of many recently, using pottery forms and ceramic traditions in their work. His "Official Candyass Dildo Holder" and "Official Candyass Chocolate Milk Holder, Fill it to the Rim" from 1993 address the universal commodification of desire now, another particularity of contemporary life.

Nonetheless, a new sense of community is developing; yet gone are the days of the "Fairy Ring" (the title of this piece by Glenn Lewis, from 1968, with the same salt and pepper shakers organized in a ritualistic celebratory circle) and the days when care-



Jeannot Blackburn, "Salade n°2," 1993, 10 cm H, 23 cm diam.

free sexuality was celebrated freely as seen here on Sally Michener's "Woman Impaled on a Pedestal and Man with Dancing Maidens" from 1979. Both artists are living in Vancouver, Canada.

What is left of marital bliss? Maybe some renewed version of hell, illustrated here on two pieces by Bruno Simard, 1994, from Montreal.

This selection is in no way an exhaustive view of queer or erotic ceramics. This will have to be done eventually, possibly by somebody else. What I set out to do was to explore a relatively recent phenomenon in ceramics, despite numerous historical precedents, and the implications of that phenomenon.

I will conclude this conference on a lighter note, visually at least, by interjecting slides on animals, vegetables and flowers used as metaphor for human sexual behavior. In many cases, this permits graphic representation without the loaded, problematic utilization of the human form. But I will start with teapots and the obvious association of penis with spout, and the work of Adrian Saxe, 1970, this little girl figurine sporting an appendage that might explain her coy demeanor, Jeannot Blackburn, 1985, this muscular torso with legs spread to make space for the



spout, Kevin Stafford, 1994, a golden meditative monk sprouting the necessary elements of teapots, and Tony Bennett, from England, 1980, this fierce and fiery monster whose only teapot attribute is this incongruous spout coming out of its groin.

"Erotics and Esthetics: Ceramics and Sexualities" makes use of some interesting words which have the particularity of having a plural form but operate in the singular. The meaning of this parallelism escapes me. The term Erotics functions similarly, to define our relationship to reality using ALL senses, and possibly, primarily touch, the way Esthetics refers primarily to the visual.

On the screen, Jeff Koon's "Pink Panther," 1988, and a Mochica bowl, "Vampire and Woman," both with animals embracing women intimately.

Erotics as a system of thought is actually closer to Poetics, the discourse on love, than to other forms of discourse. Above all, it is a practice, not a theory, theory being the privileged domain of the esthetic. Yet, the erotic has theoretical implications that might help in understanding creative activities (among others) in a more complex fashion. The study of Erotics might lead to a new understanding and a renewed position for ceramics in the field of knowledge.

Now, Cindy Koldzewski's "Mating Frogs," 1993, and Jack Thompson's, from Philadelphia, "Howling," 1994, with two anthropomorphic dogs copulating, are projected. Jack Thompson says of his work that the force is being exchanged through intercourse rather than discourse. Joe Fafard, from Saskatchewan, with "Arneson and Bob," 1980, presents us with two figures of Arneson, one dressed, one naked, observing each other in a mirror like fashion, and another Jack Thompson "Auto Erotic Bookends," 1994; these two very different pieces exhibit narcissistic connotations, an aspect of sexual-

ity not specifically covered in this conference, yet one which probably permeates all images and all words presented here.

David Gilhooly's "Frog Sodomizing a Rutabaga," 1978, and Victor Cicansky, from Regina, "The First Time," which celebrate the sexual lives of vegetables. Jack Sures, also from Regina, presents these fornicating anteaters, where intimacy is merged with domesticity in this untitled porcelain bowl of 1991. Similarly, Johan Creten, from Belgium, offers a sculptural piece, these "Lovers," 1994, two mating cocks with scrotum-like wobbles.

Throughout this reading, many terms have been used in relation to others; body/mind, sight/touch, female/male, activity/passivity, craft/art. These associations are not meant to be perceived in an oppositional or polarized fashion. I propose that characteristics of pottery forms, top/bottom, exterior/interior, form/surface, handle/spout, filling/emptying, etc., could serve as an inclusive physical model to reconcile differences, a problem that is yet unresolved by contemporary theory yet finds its resolution in every pot ever made.

I would have liked to explore the connection between flowers, which are the sexual parts of plants, and decorated ceramic forms, another continuous interest of mine, as exemplified in this "Garniture #4," 1992-93, which merges both the naked sensual male form with a background of colorful flowers. Another approach is that of Farraday Sredl, from Phoenix, with this "Vase With Agave at Night," 1990, and its uterine shape and a central image of a burgeoning agave stalk bud, fusing male and female elements.

But that is probably enough for now. I will close on these rather confrontational recent works by Kevin Stafford, "Pinkie" and "Figure Group," which sums it all.

To paraphrase Plato's Symposium: "Eros is never in and out of need and stands moreover between ignorance and truth. Eros signifies the longing for the good to be one's own forever."

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