

Ceramics

Art and Perception

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Cover

Alison Britton
*Leaning
Blue and White Pot.*
42 cm/h.

Photo: David Cripps

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A genuine interest in sharing knowledge among peers is how Ted Hamlyn described the Salt-glaze Seminar held in Ireland in 1994 in his review of the event published in this issue of *Ceramics: Art and Perception*. In only one week in Thomastown, we completed 18 firings, testing clays, slips and glazes and subjected various protective kiln coatings to severe conditions. If the atmosphere in the kiln was sometimes extreme, that of the workshop was one of friendly exchange of information; we were able to discuss why certain reactions were achieved, how to alter them and how the resulting effects suited the pots we were making. The Irish potters participating in the workshop were an exemplary group of potter/businessmen. Most were running workshops that had found a niche selling to a healthy tourist market. Their talk also revolved around employees, export incentives, marketing ploys and numbers. For them the workshop was an opportunity to talk to each other over an extended period and enjoy the more direct contact with materials and processes of pottery that are so important to the salt-glaze potter. Making decorative earthenware or white stoneware and using colourful brushwork or sponge decoration, their production was impressive both in quality and numbers of items made. Their professional attitude and attention to all the aspects of running large workshops seem to have given them a satisfying, successful and enviable lifestyle as potters.

In this issue of *Ceramics: Art and Perception*, several articles focus on the making of large environmental works. Tova Beck-Friedman is setting her large works both in the gallery and the Israeli desert; Carol Fleming has placed her tall columns on commissions to enhance building sites in the US; Mary Di Iorio works with multiples placed in the Brazilian environment; and Bernard Dejonghe's blue forms reach for the sky in Europe. In May, 1995, an event, *ClaySculpt Gulgong*, will see some environmental works made, fired and installed in the Australian bush, 300 km west of Sydney. This is a participatory workshop led by 18 master ceramic sculptors who will arrive in Australia from all over the world to share time and expertise with professional ceramists and students. Some of these registrants are also from distant countries and a truly international congress will occur. The opportunity for contact, dialogue and future interaction should be immense. When numbers of people with similar interests converge to fire kilns, make sculptures, cook and eat together around the campfires, the camaraderie and the enjoyment of talking shop should ensure the success of the event. Add to this the opportunity of firing your own pots in five different types of high-temperature wood-burning kilns and an equal number of low-temperature experimental firings. This history-making week will, however, be held in a wide brown land, not the emerald green of Ireland.

*Loading the salt-glaze kiln in Thomastown, Kilkenny, Ireland. Photo: Gus Mølbek



The Sentencing, 1989, 30 x 30 x 10 cm.

Pluperfect

The Painted Narrative Vessels of
Cindy Kolodziejski

Article by Jo Lauria



Harvest, 1994. 30 x 22.5 x 12.5 cm Photo: Anthony Cunha

THE PAINTED VESSELS OF CERAMIC ARTIST, CINDY Kolodziejki, marry image to form, context to subtext. They are studies in Platonic argument, conveying the premise that there is reason behind intellectual art, that paintings and objects exist as ideas and language. Kolodziejki's narrative vessels are equally conceptual and visionary as they express several layers of meaning and imply the existence of a world where every formal aspect – shape, style, scenario – carries meaning.

To understand this work is to understand and accept the statement of the Readymades. Marcel Duchamp's touring urinal was a celebration of the intellect: found object transformed into *objet d'art*. The intent of the Readymade sculptures is to underscore the cerebral capacity of Art (with a capital A) and to manipulate the mindset of the viewer. In forcing an alternative and deeper perception, Kolodziejki's work functions on this level. In essence she is using the vessel as a vehicle of transference. In this vernacular, a pot is never just a pot. It is instead a monument to art history. It begs the observer to follow its ascension from function to form, to calculated formalism: the finished piece always exists as a window of creative vision, exposing all the layers of excavation.

In the past decade, Kolodziejki has been producing 'finished' pieces (a descriptive and stylistic term) which take manipulation to its highest octave. The vessel forms of this series of work recall ancient models and this is combined with contemporaneous

industrial and domestic hardware. These historical/cultural references connote a deliberate dialectic. The grandiloquent exaggerated decorativeness is contrasted with the hard-edged, machine forged surfaces of the mechanical parts. This surface tension is amplified by the underlying social anxiousness: Are these precious objects of aristocratic bearing or are they icons of pluralism? Kolodziejki explains: "My pieces are manipulated. The synthesis of the discordant parts, perhaps a co-mingling of the baroque with the industrial, sets up an intentional complexity of oppositions. I'm opposing the old with the new both in terms of time and thought constructs. I am challenging the validity of object as cultural signifier. My vessels are seductively decorative and mimic the wares which were owned by the 17th and 18th century bourgeoisie whose ostentatious display of such objects affirmed their wealth and social standing. However, in my pieces the seductiveness is a starting, not an ending point. It's my way of getting the viewer to stop and ponder the larger issues, the story on and around each piece."

An analysis of the vase, *The Sentencing* (1990), is illustrative of this discussion. The vase shape is a revival of classical prototypes and the contravenes of its ornamented parts is clearly stylistically neoclassical. Introducing segments of gear parts for handles, and a bath/shower component for the base, integrates industrial and machine age, thus referencing contemporary culture. It is like pole vaulting to



Artificial Lure, 1993. 27.5 x 17.5 x 10 cm.



Double Entendre, 1989. 30 x 22.5 x 10 cm.



Above: Crying Woman Teapot, 1989. 30 x 30 x 10 cm.
Left: Spacewalk I, 1992. 27.5 x 17.5 x 10 cm.

postmodernism, then an epochal leap backwards to the Renaissance on confronting the painting which graces the front and back panels of the vessel. The painting consciously imitates the classicism of the old masters in its formal composition, subdued colour palette and chiaroscuro treatment. The subject matter, however, is not so easily classified. The drama which is being played out is a naked (vulnerable) young woman who stands supplicated in front of two old men, seemingly sitting in judgment of her. The shoes which the woman wears are strapped sandals, the straps tightly wound



Apollo. 1992. 55 x 45 x 40 cm. Photo: Anthony Cunha

around her feet and ankles suggestive of bondage. A half turn of the vase reveals the painting of the flowering plant hemlock on the other side. The dramatic undercurrent of this story is a feminist statement. Trapped by a social system where men lord power over women, the empowering choice, the clear alternative, is to ingest poison. Hence, an unfurling of the cloak of classicism unveils a barb cunningly flung far at present day cultural injustices.

Subtext permeates all of Kolodziejewski's narrative paintings. This layering of meaning is what makes them rich and engaging. Sculpturally the pieces are arresting but it is the unfolding of the story which provokes thought. Thematically Kolodziejewski's recent body of work has been a symphony in three movements. The first movement she describes as her *Weeping Women* series (whence *The Sentencing* derives). This grouping is comprised of such vessels of domestic use as teapots, cups, plates and vases. Structurally Kolodziejewski's selection of forms is reflective of a woman's social stature: as keeper of the domestic fires. The narratives on these vessels are emotionally charged vignettes of women outpouring their misery visualised by the weeping and the wringing of hands, *The Crying Woman Teapot* (1989) and *The Crying Woman Plate* (1989) respectively by the plunging of a dagger into a breast *Lies*, teapot (1989) and by the receiving of the stigmata at the foot of Christ's cross, *Double Entendre*, teapot, (1989). These are not scenes of enlightened ladies as their demonstrative torment

is undirected, the object of scorn is always off screen. Perhaps the most telling images in this series are those painted on the framed panels of the teapot, *Nurture Baby* (1989). On one side a mother's hand spoons soup to her baby taken from a table laden with food. On the reverse side there is barrenness. Set on the table are the utensils for eating but there is no food. "This piece is about the difficult choices women have to make in a relationship. There is the potential for nurturance. But if one makes a bad choice one ends up with the empty side, the side devoid of all nurturing."

The second series of work is unified by the theme of mankind's undying quest for the spiritual, for the unknown, for deep, dark space. Mythology archaeology and aerospace-technology serve as inspiration for the imagery on these vessels collectively called the *Astronaut* pots. In the Egyptian and Greek cultures the sun was worshiped as a mythical god. The sun god known to the Egyptians as Ra and to the Greeks as Apollo, pulled the sun across the underworld and then resurfaced, marking a new day after each passage. (Apollo carried the sun in his chariot). These gods flew through a space that was not tethered to earth. Kolodziejewski views this passion for outerspace as a driving human force. "The desire to reach out into the void, to become godlike, dates as far back in history as the Mayan civilisations where actual space capsules were carved on pyramid walls."

The urgency to find the 'grail' reached its pinnacle in Western civilisation in the 1950s and '60s with the



Soup Tureen. 1993. 25 x 32.5 x 22.5 cm. Photo: Anthony Cunha

US vs Soviet 'Race For Space. In the urn, *Apollo* (1992) the front/back diptych embraces the Apollo myth extant in two distinctly separate cultures. On one side is pictured Apollo's horses racing through the clouds, and, on the other side, it is the space shuttle, representative of the Apollo Mission rocketing through the earth's atmosphere. And the other vessels in this series portray astronauts floating out in space in their self-contained space suits, one with a lifeline and another free floating. In these compositions the earth is a small distant blue orb. Kolodziejki uses these point and counterpoint tableaux to question political motives – is it a quest or a conquest? – and to challenge the image of the astronaut as cultural hero. The pretty pot becomes polemical

The third group in this symphony deals with the connections and confusions of the animal world and man. Kolodziejki juxtaposes imagery which pointedly plays on the animalistic behaviour of man and the anthropomorphising of animals. In the teapot, *Harvest* (1994), this duality is dramatised through the representation of an Asian peasant woman stooping to pick rice in the fields on the front of the pot, opposed on the reverse by the portrayal of a heron caught in the act of catching a fish which is clearly too large for its mouth. The peasant is performing an activity of survival, while the bird engages in an act of greed. "The lines between man's behaviour and that of the animal are not plainly drawn and this work resonates between the metaphor"

To further echo her intention in these works, Kolodziejki has used animalistic parts as assemblage elements. A Chinese dragon serves as spout of the *Harvest* teapot; a lion's head and claw function as base and knobs for *Soup Tureen* (1993) and an arching platypus creates the handle for the *Artificial Lure* teapot (1993). Again, Kolodziejki's motivation is not to produce pleasant pictures but to use her painting facility to spark cognition.

Cindy Kolodziejki is still a young artist whose work at this juncture is several years shy of the 'mid-career' category. This is notable because the pieces which are discussed here are setting the direction and the tone of what will follow. Kolodziejki's stated objective for future work is to search for new imagery that functions as visual representations of intellectual ideas and to persistently tweak the viewer's awareness of object as both artifact and signifier. "I'm going to continue to use cultural materials to present distilled precise moments in time. To place the observer in a voyeuristic position, forcing a finish to the story. The ongoing objective of my work is to create situations which disrupt perception of everyday reality"

Jo Lauria is a freelance writer and a ceramic artist. Quotes used in this article are from interviews with the artist conducted during May, 1994. Cindy Kolodziejki is represented by Garth Clark Gallery.