Gwen F. Chanzit

Overthrown:

New Turns in Contemporary Ceramics

opposite: Annabeth Rosen's studio (detail), January 2010

To overthrow has different meanings for different people in different contexts. Some people think of regime change, others to go beyond the mark. The meaning "to conquer and topple" includes going beyond prior boundaries—which may be both physical and conceptual. Each artist in this exhibition has set a personal mark that surpasses the norm, showing ceramic art to be among the most versatile, diverse, and inventive of any art seen today. Discovering the work of these artists who push the limits in myriad ways is an adventure. It's my hope that this exhibition will not only surprise and delight, but that it might even overthrow some prevalent notions of what ceramics look like.

Clay—this most ancient material—is today still primarily thought of in terms of being tactile, expressive, malleable, hands-on, direct, and subject to impulse. As is true of most generalizations, those about clay continue to describe much of its appeal. But there is a new language of contemporary ceramics that goes well beyond the stereotype. The artists in *Overthrown* bring this contemporary attitude to clay.

Differences are plentiful in this group of twenty five artists, yet there are commonalities. Each has a sustained commitment to the medium; they are not among the many artists today who are occasional experimenters with clay. And although some might not see themselves as particularly radical, as a group what they present will surprise even viewers who make regular rounds of ceramics exhibitions.

They work in all scales, from architecturally expansive to almost impossibly small, using twenty-first-century technology hand in hand with standard modeling and molding techniques. Whether upending traditional borders—art/craft, potter/sculptor, artistry/technology, emotional/intellectual, fluid/fixed, narrative/non-narrative, unique/multiple, hand modeled/mass produced, functional/nonfunctional—each artist pushes beyond what mainstream visitors expect to see and is undaunted by what others might assume to be the limitations of the medium.

Much of the work in the exhibition moves beyond pedestal to wall, floor, and even ceiling; some incorporate a kind of integrated platform, support, or enclosure that places the work in its own self-contained context. Others exploit the interplay between the work and its site. Many use not only clay, but also found objects—metal, plastic, abandoned industrial materials, pottery shards, and other debris.

The history of modern sculpture embraces not only mixed media and the found object, but also the release of sculpture from the pedestal. From Rodin to the constructivists to installation art, the removal of psychic distance and the integration of viewer, object, and space are now accepted modes. What is it about ceramic art that makes this move from the pedestal unexpected in the popular perception? Are people still stuck in an art/craft, high/low, functional/nonfunctional mindset? Many have noted that only relatively recently has photography been accorded the serious consideration that today places it in comprehensive museums. Is ceramic art only now having its day? It may be that soon no one will think twice about ceramics presentations expanding beyond the traditional display of discrete objects on neutral platforms.

Today, ceramic practices are as likely to rely on the computer as on the wheel. Digital photography and the computer are central to John Roloff's explorations and fabrications. Mia Mulvey uses a laser cutter to cut thin porcelain forms. Several of the artists in the exhibition, including Neil Forrest, Del Harrow, Walter McConnell, and Jeanne Quinn, utilize 3D modeling software. McConnell uses a 3D printer to make prototype models (positives) from which plaster molds (negatives) are made for some of his wet clay figures. Others, like Forrest, go from concept drawings for computer-designed objects directly to computer-controlled mills that make the mold without need of a model. Yet these artists are just as likely to use low-tech methods. Sometimes McConnell uses molds from the hobby industry to produce clay figurines for his humid enclosures. Harrow has used an inner tube, as well as foam board and tape, to make his forms. Almost all incorporate handmade construction, hand modeling, and molding in their work. Annabeth Rosen's constructed and baled works rely on disparate parts—some formed, some found, some taken from broken shards.

Many of these artists' works are engaged with physical or thematic relationships. Harrow responds to the geometric shapes of the Denver Art Museum's Hamilton Building, designed by Daniel Libeskind. Roloff's digital photos and clay samples from the Colorado Front Range speak to his core ideas about geologic and ecologic considerations of place. Linda Sormin's in-museum environment references mining, a longtime activity of the locale. Clare Twomey's work engages physical and conceptual relationships. Her luscious drifts of red clay dust derive directly from the red clay color that gives this state its name: Colorado (Spanish for "colored red"). Her installation is about relationships to physical and behavioral aspects of place—in this case, the Denver Art Museum complex. The turquoise color in Harrow's tile glaze comes from copper oxide, a substance found in the Rockies. Martha Russo, Katie Caron, and Sormin all use found materials from the area.

It is no surprise that architecture informs many of the works; ceramics have been an integral component of architectural programs since ancient times. Much as we see in the language of world architecture, Kim Dickey's surface decoration unites diminutive modular elements across a whole. Roloff's "windows" are sited not only within the gallery, but also in strategic locations around the museum—with some presented in relationship to the museum's own fenestration. Tsehai Johnson's work relates not only to architectural form and space, but also to literary precedents—and to social values and behavior within an architectural context. Julian Stair's work also considers social, as well as spatial, implications of architecture. Stair's beautifully crafted objects sit upon clay "grands,"[1] platforms that create the relationship of object to object, object to room, and among pots, ground, and architectural space. Nathan Craven builds ceramic floors on which to walk. Twomey's red clay dust deposits span the museum complex, inciting an awareness of time, space, and narrative.

Collected objects in Caron and Russo's construction are emancipated from former rational contexts, much as in works by the early twentieth-century master Kurt Schwitters, whose materials were unfettered by function. Anders Ruhwald's ceramic objects, many furniture-like, also are decidedly nonfunctional, though they are very different in form and context. In Ruhwald's installations, the relationship of his anomalous objects to interior space is fundamental. The arrangement defines the work; neither objects nor space will ever be the same. Quinn also delineates a portion of the gallery's interior space as her own, though it is very different from that of Ruhwald. She acknowledges the space as a total work of art—a *Gesamtkunstwerk*—with her chandelier construction that for most of us calls up notions of palatial opulence and excess. Yet she also references the natural world. Her oppositional layering of interior and exterior, domestic and landscape spaces intrigues.

Caron and Russo utilize one large sloping wall, and bridge across to another. The placement of Dickey's freestanding wall, relative to the gallery wall, is a critical part of its reading. Sormin incorporates the building's voluminous atrium with a work some twenty feet tall, which engages the dynamic space and is intended to be seen from many vantage points, including above and below. Though both Stair and Marie Hermann use the wall in arranging objects, the resulting artworks are vastly different in temperament. Stair's wall constructions are orderly and precisely placed; Hermann's poetic arrangements rely on a subtle, nonconforming relationship of tactile elements that derives more from the human and the experiential than from the systematic, and allows for the viewer to help create meaning.

Thematic relationships may be historical, cultural, even nostalgic, as in Kristen Morgin's combinations of books, board games, and characters from vintage cartoons and popular television. Loss is a part of this *memento mori*, and entropy is an integral element—the realization of mortality, memory, and fantasy. Dickey often references art historical masterpieces, both classic and modern; McConnell's allusions run from Asian temples to figures from painters Casper David Friedrich, Asher B. Durand, and Jan van Eyck. Brendan Tang's works refer as much to Asian blue and white ware as they do to Japanese *manga* and *anime*.

Like Roloff, whose interest in geology and ecology propels his work, both Mulvey and Forrest also find inspiration in science. Mulvey refers to scientific display and wonder, with both the real and the poetic existing side by side. Forrest's underpinnings range from the relationship between micro- and macro-structures to insect activity and habitat and skeletal structures; his particular interest is in the intersection of the organic, the technological, and the architectural.

Sans exhibition mounts, sculptural works by Rosen, Paul Sacaridiz, Morgin, and McConnell operate autonomously. Rosen's freestanding sculptures mounted on casters appear as anthropomorphized bundles that relate spatially to each other and to us. As we walk amid them, we interact, one-on-one, in physical and psychological terms. Sacaridiz's constructions, often inspired by utopian ideals of architecture and city planning, are self contained; their integrated platforms enable the intentional incorporation of correlations and allusions within the structure itself.

Every work in the exhibition has a relationship to craft. Many of these artists push boundaries and technologies, like Forrest, whose investigations about the interaction between ceramics and architecture prompt him to take advantage of new technologies in kiln systems and clay fabrication. Andrew Martin experiments with extraordinary glazing techniques, fully aware of precedents from the distant past and from faraway cultures. John Gill, Heather Mae Erickson, and Tang push the forms and formats of functional objects; Erickson goes so far as to consider rethinking our dining rituals. Cheryl Ann Thomas explores fragility and loss; she exploits the kiln incidents that she predicts will occur when her large, balanced, coiled forms succumb to gravity, weight, and heat. Ben DeMott works such fragile filaments of porcelain extrusions that he executes his sculptures under magnification with tweezers, always with the realization that the life of each work is subject to uncertainty. The constructive process asserts and exposes itself in the works of Rosen and Sacaridiz.

It's been said that ceramic artists have always used new technologies. These artists continue to push forward and take risks that entail material chemistry, maverick kiln techniques, digital photography, and computer-aided technology. Yet John Gill's statement reminds us that above all, these are creative ventures: "I explore and dream up new systems. I am a conductor and builder, a channeler of ideas."[2]

When this project began, a well-known slogan used by a certain company kept repeating in my mind: "No Limits." These artists have gone to the extremes—they have broken boundaries that are physical, technological, conceptual, and spatial. Overthrowing expectations of what ceramic art looks like—its size, its context, its methods, and meaning—brings these artists to new ways of using this versatile and timeless material. That is indeed one goal of this exhibition. But beyond that, these works are a visual feast. As I write this, the time grows close for the artists to gather here. I await the installation with eagerness. The energy is electric.

GWEN F. CHANZIT

NOTES

1 *Grand* is Stair's own word to describe these platforms.

2 See John Gill, artist statement in this catalog, page 26.

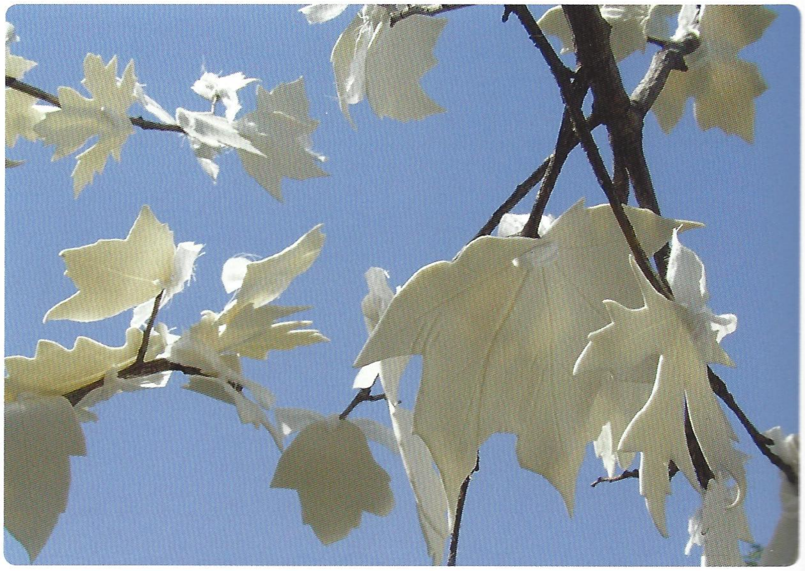
Mia Mulvey

STATEMENT The scientific and museum context identifies a system based on order, fact, and discovery. It is within this system of scientific display, process, and ideology that my work exists. I am inspired by science and, in it, our ability to discover wonder.

Wonder is not a static moment; it is the process of moving from the unfamiliar towards understanding, a marvel that incites a desire to realize truth. By investigating scientific processes and contexts I can present real and imaginary objects that hint at the multilayered discoveries of understanding, innovation, and beauty found in nature.

For this installation I am interested in presenting repaired or lost natures. Efforts to repair and recreate reveal both wonder and absurdity through their relationships with history, museums, and personal experience. My goal is something beautiful yet dark, that speaks to real-life environmental issues as well as the more poetic, undefined feelings of loss and the futile desire to put things right.

BIOGRAPHY Mia Mulvey earned her BFA from Arizona State University and her MFA from Cranbrook Academy of Art. Her ceramic sculptures are inspired by natural history, science, and early museum practices. Mulvey actively exhibits her work nationally and internationally and has had recent solo shows in Colorado and Michigan. Her grants and awards include a Colorado Council on the Arts fellowship and a Kohler Arts in Industry residency. She is an assistant professor of art at the University of Denver.



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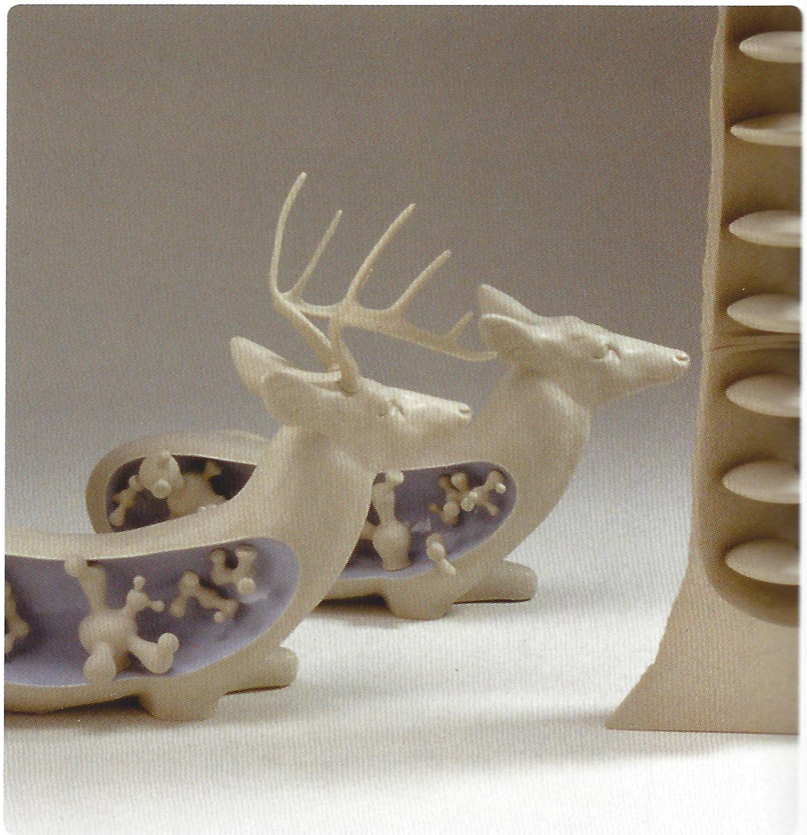

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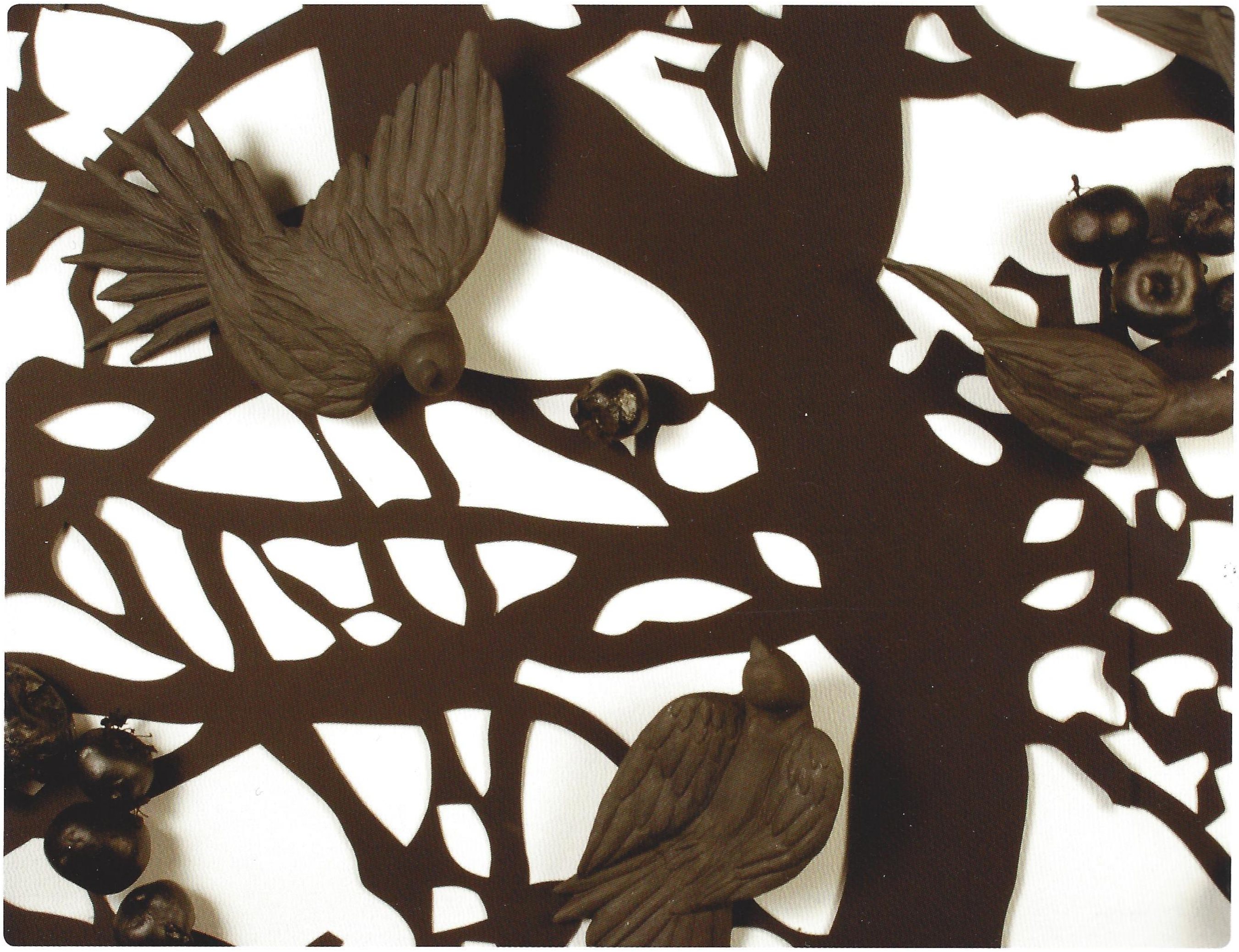
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❶ *Arboreus stativus*, 2004 Porcelain, dead tree, and cotton fabric 144 × 144 × 12 inches
❷ *Cervidae* (detail), 2004 Vitreous china 48 × 96 × 48 inches
❸ *Arinae* (detail), 2010 Porcelain, paper, and apples 36 × 96 × 6 inches Installation view, Victoria H. Myhren Gallery, University of Denver

Katie Caron & Martha Russo
Apoptosis (detail), 2010–11

Donald Kuspit

OVERTHROWN IN DENVER

It's a wonderfully ambiguous title for an exhibition of clay art. One of the many meanings of *throw* is "to shape on a potter's wheel." It seems clear that, with a few exceptions—the teapots of Andrew Martin, Julian Stair, and Brendan Tang and the vessels of Marie T. Hermann—none of the works in this exhibition have been shaped on a potter's wheel. They're made of clay, but it's as absurd and naïve to think of them as "hand-crafted" as it is to think of Luca della Robbia's *Madonna and Child* of 1455–60—a terra cotta work with polychrome glaze—as only a clever product of manual skill, more pointedly, to reduce a so-called "signature painting" to the "crafty" hand that made it. Like della Robbia's works, the works in *Overthrown* are installations in public space—in della Robbia's case the Orsanmichele in Florence, in the case of the exhibition's works the much more geometrically complicated space of the Denver Art Museum. And just as della Robbia's work is large—a tondo almost six feet in diameter, with an abstractly ornamented arch supported by Ionic columns, sheltering the idealized figures of a seated Madonna and standing Infant—so the works in *Overthrown* tend to be large, indeed, often spread in space, as Anders Ruhwald's, Linda Sormin's, Jeanne Quinn's, and Neil Forrest's are. Not only do they take up space, but they seem to "elaborate" it, becoming site-specific spatial environments in their own right, however much they "respond" to the space of the museum, as Clare Twomey's work playfully and ironically does.

All the works are "well-crafted"—"overthrown," as it were—and "thrown" in space, sometimes dominating it, but, more importantly, at least to me, they are lively, inventively abstract, even when they allude to nature, as Mia Mulvey's and Tsehai Johnson's organically spreading works do, or incorporate the human figure, as Kristen Morgin (Mr. Peanut on top of a ladder) and Walter McConnell (two enclosed figures, illuminated from above) do. To overthrow means "to depose, as from a position of power," more particularly, "to overthrow tyranny." What gives the exhibition's works their art-historical importance is the freedom—apparent in their imaginative freedom (not to say poetic license) with which they use clay—with which they overthrow the reductionist abstraction that has been dominant since Minimalism. They are "Maximalist," revitalizing an abstraction that has been pared down to a dead-end formalism.

Mark Rosenthal, in the magisterial essay that accompanies his 1996 Guggenheim Museum exhibition *Abstraction in the Twentieth Century*, worried that abstraction had become merely a "formal exercise" by eliminating the "poetic," as Clement Greenberg insisted it must, or what Braque earlier had called "excess." The result was the sort of mechanically engineered abstraction evident in Andre's, Judd's, and Kelly's "pure"—empty, "inexpressive" (Germano Celant's word)—not so say simplistic geometry. Abstraction had in effect collapsed in on itself, suffering from a delusion of pseudo-intellectual grandeur, isolating it from experience in pretentious stand-apartness.

None of the works in the exhibition stand apart from experience: Many invite us to experience nature in a new way, offering a fresh vision of its vitality; others engage society, often with critical irony. They are humanly inviting as well as intricately abstract. They restore abstraction to the credibility it had when it engaged "feeling," as the pioneering abstractionists Kandinsky and Malevich said it should. Reductionist abstraction reduced abstraction to its "technical" limits by emphasizing its "formal factors" (Greenberg's term), and with that "purified" art (Greenberg again). Post-reductionist abstraction—carried to a lively extreme in the exhibition's works—makes it clear that art is unavoidably informed by "impure" content, suggesting that abstract form is always symbolic, and as such "expressive."

All the works in *Overthrown* build on basic modern ideas. Thus we have floor pieces, corner pieces, and hanging pieces—earthbound, ironically architectural, and gravity-defying works. But where Carl Andre's Minimalist floor piece is a simplistic grid, materially dull and conceptually pretentious, Nathan Craven's Maximalist floor piece is a lush carpet of undulating colors. And where Robert Morris's Minimalist corner piece marks a corner in a so-called white cube, reminding us that a corner is a place where two walls matter of factly meet to form a right angle, Clare Twomey's series of corner pieces, each ingeniously and playfully placed in some odd corner of the complex architecture of the Denver Art Museum—hardly a nice, neat readily readable white cube—accent, not to say dramatically punctuate, its intricate structure. They work with and within its eccentric space, and with that restore and extend the original "eccentric" purpose the corner piece had when it was a Russian Constructivist innovation. The bright red color of Twomey's corner pieces adds an unexpected "painterly" intensity to the luminous white space of the museum, complicating their architectural-sculptural dialectics by turning the museum into a kind of *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Twomey's window corner piece, located above a panel of metallic handprints, makes the point subtly. The works integrate by way of their rectangularity, even as they maintain their dialectical difference by way of the contradiction.

There are also hanging sculptures in the exhibition, all much more lively than Eva Hesse's peculiarly morbid hanging sculptures with their oddly muted expressionistic look, not to say stylized eccentricity. Jeanne Quinn's hanging sculptures are more luminous and organic, Neil Forrest's eccentrically shaped "flakes" are much more colorful, float more serenely, however jagged, and hang together more harmoniously—as do Quinn's branches—than the anonymous components of Hesse's. They are ingeniously two-sided, one side a smooth plane of red color, the other a grid of elliptical cavities. Each is a contradiction in terms—an unresolved dialectic. The "flakes" are in effect fragments of a shredded wall—pieces of a destroyed building "elevated" into ironically abstract art. They stand "opposed" to Kim Dickey's garden scene displayed on a rectangular mural that rests on the floor on its long edge. Society, a wreck symbolized by the architectural shards, and flourishing Nature, idealized and intact in a beautiful image, are at odds: another unresolved contradiction.

There are also a number of wild assemblages in the exhibition. Linda Sormin's seems unstable and chaotic: an assemblage of random objects heaped in a precarious pile. Kristen Morgin's bizarrely painted unfired clay objects are more systematically arranged. Paul Sacaridiz's objects are more abstract—a twisted gestural sculpture, all white, stands among geometrical oddities, all green, and eccentrically colored "oddballs"—and seem to be exhibited in a home under construction, as the boards and makeshift coffee table suggest. Martha Russo and Katie Caron's assemblage rises to the ceiling, climbing up a diagonal wall like a lush vine. It becomes more luminous as it rises from the dark earth—which is what its base in effect is—finally climaxing in radiant growths. It is a cornucopia of nature in all its glory.

We have something similar in Annabeth Rosen's installation: The illuminated vessels are readable as breasts, all the more so because they form abstract figures, in effect totemic idols, suggesting they allude to the multi-breasted Diana of Ephesus—that is, Magna Mater, the Great Goddess, Mother Nature (as their green markings and milky whiteness suggest). The sense of irrepressible abundance is evident in many works, confirming their high-spirited post-Minimalism, as it has been called, or, as I prefer to call it, anti-Minimalism. Cheryl Ann Thomas's freeform, peculiarly expressionistic sculptures, one black, the other white, both marvelous simulations of cloth even as they remain relentlessly abstract, both grand gestures twisting and turning as they convulsively move in space, make the point decisively. They are *tour de force* demonstrations of the inherent malleability of clay, making it peculiarly uncanny and with that unconsciously appealing, for it has the "plasticity" of the unconscious.

Virtually all the works turn the gallery space into a kind of stage, perhaps most conspicuously in the case of Ruhwald's and McConnell's installations. Their "messages" are quite different. Ruhwald's work is completely abstract. It is composed of smooth, flat wall and floor grids made of small orange and blue modular square tiles, with the floor grid at a diagonal angle to the wall grid, making for a certain aesthetic tension. One can't help being reminded of Kandinsky's remark that red and blue are dissonant opposites. In abrupt contrast, three large rounded vessels—earth-colored and roughly surfaced, indicating that they are made of clay—stand like idols on the floor grid, broadly reminiscent of modernist "primitivism," more particularly the "totemism" of early modernist sculpture. The modules are in effect mass produced; the individualized vessels with their comparatively rough surfaces seem shaped by hand. Also on display are a smaller "figure," no more than a sphere mounted on a truncated triangle, evoking Cézanne's idea of a geometrically based art, and a small clay box, as materially dense as the "statuesque" vessels, resting on a large box, with a gird surface composed of enlarged orange and blue modules arranged in rows. Similar boxes—one smaller, one larger—and a flat elliptical slab complete the abstract picture. The three large vessels are the major actors, the other objects set the stage: Has the drama begun or has it ended, the participants taking a bow? Ruhwald's work is conceptually and materially complex: a grand *tour de force* of abstraction, conspicuously geometrical and subliminally gestural, as the "hands-on" look of the clay pieces suggests. More pointedly, it is inventively "postmodern" in its hybrid character—its mixture of methods, forms, meanings.

Charles Jencks argues that postmodern art, as distinct from modern art, is "double-coded," meaning there is no single reading and no unified structure. Indeed, Ruhwald's work lends itself to multiple readings, and it involves a variety of structural elements, all highly differentiated and conspicuously incommensurate, with no one dominating any other. The work not only has no structural unity but no unifying meaning. We have the colorful abstract grids, the somber figural vessels with their own geometry, and the representation of nature, off-stage yet part of the performance. The work is complex—complex at root. Joseph Casti argues that postmodernism involves "complexification," in contrast to the modernist tendency to simplification. Postmodernism restores "poetry" to art, a poetry grounded in modernist ideas that have become historical, not to say prosaic, paradoxically using them to make more emotionally resonant and formally complicated art than reductionist modernism was capable of. It is impossible to reduce the works in this exhibition to a few simple, "essential" terms, more broadly, as Greenberg said, to their material medium. Greenberg insisted on speaking of "painterly abstraction" rather than "abstract expressionism," for the latter called attention to the feelings the paint seemed to express and evoke rather than to the properties of the paint itself, made evident by the painter's handling of it. (He famously dismissed the "spiritual" feelings aroused by Rembrandt's paintings as an illusory byproduct of Rembrandt's brilliant manipulation of pigments.)

None of the works in *Overthrown* are readily reducible to clay—to reduce any art to its material is to betray its meaning and short-circuit the experience of it. One doesn't even realize that the works are of clay until one is told they are. A good work of art imaginatively transcends its material—the material, after all, is just a medium—and the works in this exhibition are very good. Even the teapots rise above their material—and "servitude"—into serene expressivity. No doubt some of the works are postmodern in the negative sense of that word—grandly installed in complex panoramas, they seem to belong to our so-called society of the spectacle, a world of appearances in which nothing is real, of manufactured illusions with no substantial meaning—but the clay that informs them makes them real. And creatively complicated, if creativity involves "cross-fertilization between different disciplines," as Arthur Koestler said: in the case of these works cross-fertilization between the "discipline" of clay art and the "discipline" of abstract art.

Each can revitalize the other, as the works in *Overthrown* show: They have a fresh unconventionality, the fruit of the integration of traditional opposites. Clay art overcomes its conventional dependence on the vessel, with its emphasis on containment—geometrical containment, as though to deny the gestural potential of clay (always latent, even in the smoothest surfaces)—and becomes uncontainable in spectacular installations, broadly abstract whatever their representational details. Even the vessels in the exhibition are installed in "communal" rows, horizontal or vertical, bringing out the inherent abstractness—formal quality—of the vessels while making a "spectacle" of them. They acquire "exhibition value"—pure, abstract form is more "exhibitionistic" than impure representations—giving them an aesthetic aura that makes them peculiarly unfamiliar however socially familiar they remain. When they stretch the limits of the vessel, like Brendan Tang's wildly growing, not to say bizarrely out-of-shape vessels, they seem inherently spectacular, all the more so because they collapse the difference between geometrical and gestural abstraction. A spectacle gives space a shape, which is what the exhibition's artists do when they install their works in the spectacular space of the Denver Art Museum's Hamilton Building, a space that is dramatically abstract, making the installations all the more spectacular and convincingly abstract. Virtually all play off—interact with—the museum's space, confirming their own spectacularity. Jeanne Quinn's installation, with its infinite regression of curvilinear branches suspended from the ceiling, with their luminosity reflected in the floor of the darkened gallery, makes the point clearly, all the more so because one can move under, around, and in the space configured by the piece, ingeniously integrated with the museum's space.

Del Harrow's, Walter McConnell's, and John Roloff's installations are postmodern spectacles *in extremis*, as it were: They show that contradiction is unresolvable. They make a spectacle of contradiction, suggesting the absurdity that informs postmodern art: the irreconcilability of the codes of art, whether the modern code of abstraction or the traditional code of the figure—that is, the inner meaning of postmodernism. Postmodernism neither analyzes nor synthesizes but focuses on the incommensurate results of artistic analysis of form and experience. Thus in Harrow's installation the black and white forms—both abstract, the former a stepladder-like accumulation of small rectilinear fragments, the latter a grouping of curved forms that seem like sections of a female body—appear side by side by side. Neither the mechanically redundant nor organically flowing is more formally convincing or preferred to the other; they're equally valid aesthetically and equally evocative, for the former "feels" masculine, the latter feminine—another contradiction and stand-off of opposites.

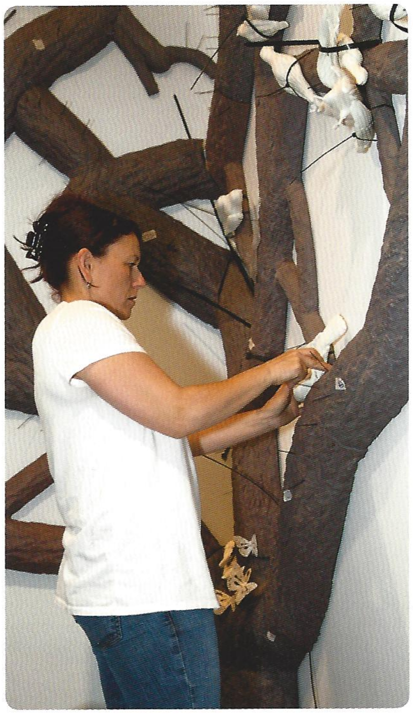
Similarly, and just as dramatically, Roloff's installation divides into two incommensurate sections, however subtly related: the two large rectangular windows on the flat wall and the two smaller curvilinear abstract sculptures mounted on a flat plane slightly raised above the flat floor. There's an "overlap" between the windows of digitally printed vinyl and the sculptures (which look like sections of a canoe)—for example, the sweep of the curve of the right sculpture is echoed in the sweep of the black and white of the right window. In general, there are loose connections between light and dark and between smooth and rough textures. But the overall effect is of the unresolved contradiction between two-dimensional painting and three-dimensional sculpture, wall and floor art, rectilinear and curvilinear geometry, and even object and attitude, for the wall pieces seem to have more "attitude" and "presence" than the floor pieces, however conspicuously present they are.

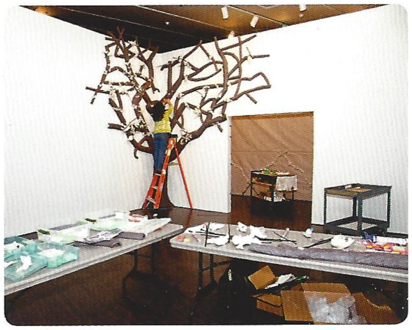
Perhaps the contradiction between the figures and the rubble-like fragments in McConnell's installation is the most poignant. They are presented, like museum pieces, in three hermetically contained if transparent units or cells, each starkly illuminated on the inside by a naked light bulb and differently sized and differently placed in the gallery space, confirming the isolation and alienation of the figures. It is an end of the world—and of humanity—scenario, fraught with apocalyptic implications, as the raw earth fragments suggest. McConnell's piece is a strong statement about the futility and absurdity of the human condition. Where the nature-inspired or related works suggest hope and *joie de vivre*, McConnell's is a display of despair, which is rare in the exhibition. It also adds an important touch of existential realism.

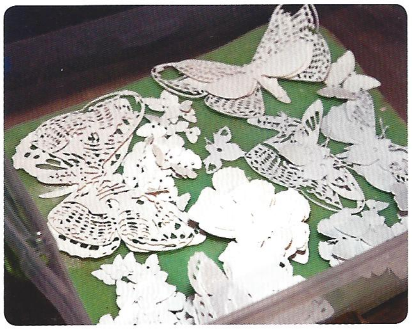
DONALD KUSPIT

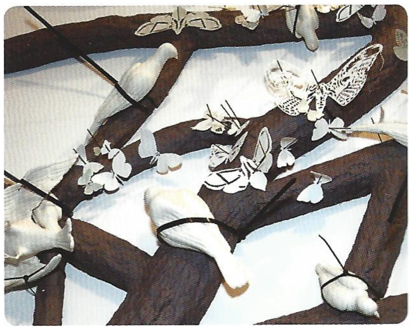
Mia Mulvey

STATEMENT The oak, America's national tree, has long been a symbol of endurance and strength. The title, *Mast Year*, refers to the phenomenon in which oak trees produce a prodigious abundance of fruit. This proliferation has been recreated with emblems of beauty and nature: birds, butterflies, and moths. Using lifeless forms such as bird "skins" and insect mounts, and using synthetic, manmade modes of attaching the fauna to the tree, the work highlights the forced, unnatural attempts to recreate the sublime. Swarms and flocks have been viewed as omens of both luck and death, and such sights in nature are rare if not completely absent. The ultimate goal is to invoke something beautiful yet dark that speaks to the fragility of nature as well as the more poetic and undefined feelings of loss and the futile desire to exert control.









In my work I am inspired by science and in it our ability to discover wonder.

Mast Year, 2011 Stoneware, porcelain, cable ties, and pins