

# Concerning (Ceramic) Sculpture

Cover: *Clare Twomey*  
Consciousness/Conscience, 2003.  
Frontispiece: *Jolyon Hofsted*  
(1942-2004). Untitled, 2003.  
Ceramic, bamboo.  
Photograph by *Janet Hofsted*.

When the June issue of the magazine, focusing on function, came out, several people expressed approval and relief that *STUDIO POTTER* was returning to its true subject. These people will not be happy to see that we turn our attention in this issue to sculpture. They might wonder: what's sculpture got to do with it? Some may feel that contemporary sculptural ceramics already diverts attention and resources away from pottery. It's hard enough to find serious discussion of pottery and its practitioners; why should *STUDIO POTTER* give air time to anything else?

Actually, *STUDIO POTTER* has always exercised its right to be interested in all aspects of clay, and sculpture – both historical and contemporary – has been featured in the magazine since its early issues. We reject the professional specialization and niche-marketing that presumes people to be concerned only with what directly resembles or affects them. What interests us here, beyond the strong work and thoughtful reflection of individual contributors, are the questions raised by the very term “ceramic sculpture.” Is this even a meaningful concept, and where does it overlap with or diverge from “ceramic pottery”? Simply applying parallel terms points up that sculpture is rarely tied to a specific medium, while pottery, by definition, is always made of clay. Contemporary sculptors are free to work in whatever material their ideas demand, but the essays in this issue suggest a more complex dynamic. Sculptors who work in clay have often put the intimate scale, utilitarian roots, alchemical magic, and theme-and-variation rhythms of pottery to unexpected uses, while many a contemporary potter inserts sculptural tension, monumentality, or figurative eloquence into functional objects.

The resulting discussion is a kind of Venn diagram of overlapping and distinct concerns. Where clay's physical properties are an animating force in someone's work, potters and sculptors find common ground. Where medium is downplayed in favor of other factors, the conceptual framework will take on larger significance – but in an era when making objects of any kind is an oddity, all makers are called on to create a conceptual framework for their work. It is the nature of clay to take myriad forms and serve multiple purposes. From the perspective of most of post-industrial culture, we're all at the same party.

– MB

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