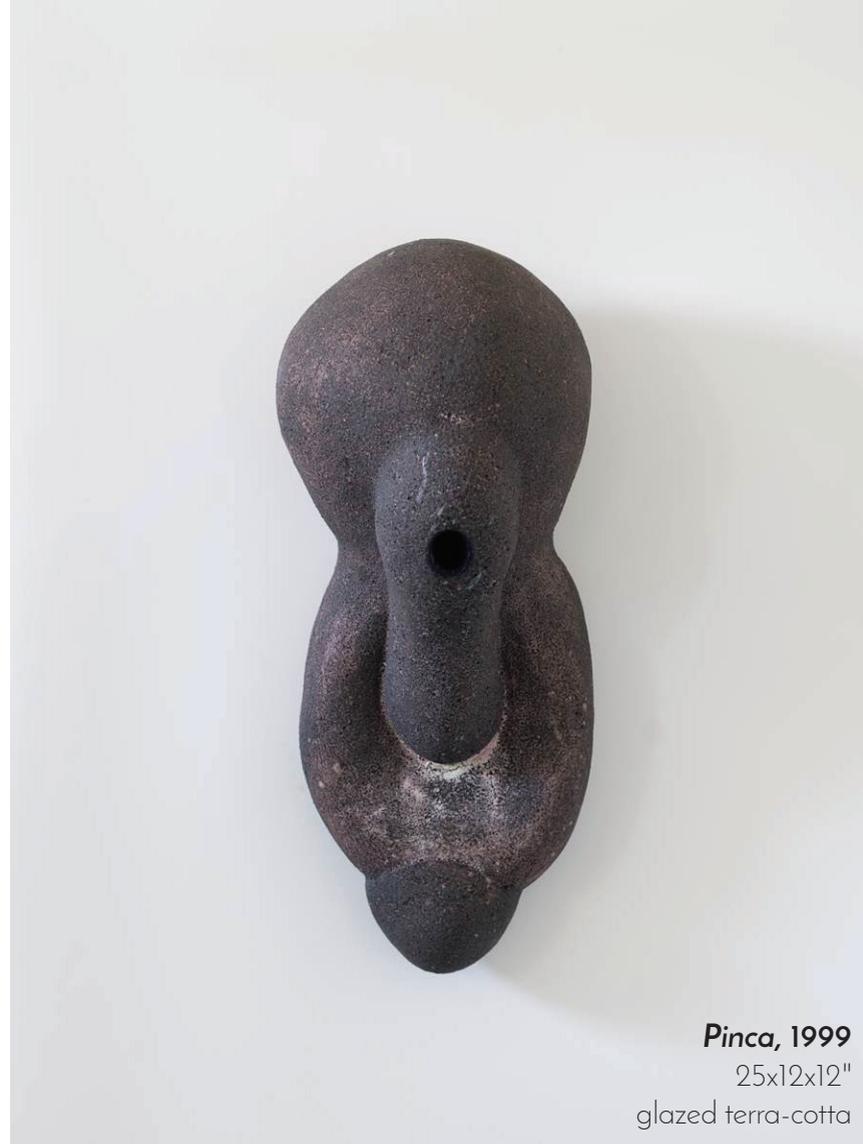




Heved, 1995
18x17x10"
glazed terra-cotta



Pinca, 1999
25x12x12"
glazed terra-cotta



Scott Chamberlin: A Body of Work Sculptures and Drawings

Front cover image: *Ered*, 1996, 30x18x12", galzed terra-cotta



Hon, 1999
18x12x12"
glazed terra-cotta

I've been looking intently at Scott Chamberlin's art for many years. His evolution as an artist – primarily a ceramic artist – the working and reworking of the themes and concerns to which he is committed continues to seduce and compel me. His work is intellectually challenging and satisfying as well as aesthetically pleasurable. It is also unconventionally beautiful which is to say that the sculptures aspire to an integrative unity and a capacity for comprehensive affective experience. Although the nature of the work encompasses a range of qualities and ideas, predicaments and resolutions, certain elements remain consistent. The works are typically abstract - combining amorphous tactility, intuitive construction, and instinctual urgings to dazzling effect. They are human-scaled and at times even "humanoid" - one can "converse" with them as one might converse with a visitor from another planet. And like the material from which they are formed, they retain a "primal," instinctual feel that precedes or entirely eclipses any intellectual obfuscation. They aren't only objects to be *looked* at and evaluated but are objects that *do* things.

Despite their often cartoonish friendliness, Chamberlin's sculptures are also suffused with melancholy and poignancy. These qualities are most evident in their "eroticism" by which I mean not only their sexiness but their aspiration to engage us where we most deeply live. Georgia O'Keefe called eros "a fierce longing to make one's unknown known." I believe that this "longing" drives and animates Chamberlin's work and is what we recognize intuitively in our engagement with it.

I chose to exhibit this earlier (1990's) body of Chamberlin's work at the Fulginiti Art Gallery for many reasons but primarily because I was struck by the sculptures' clear corporeal and anatomical allusions. An abstracted but uncanny resemblance to the body's productive and reproductive plumbing is a persistent characteristic of many of the sculptures. Their "bio-organicity" – their apertures, fleshy protrusions, intestinal loops, orifices and cavities present a jumbling and occasionally grotesque dismantling of the body according to Chamberlin's creative criteria rather than the criteria of functional veracity. Chamberlin's imaginative scattering and redistribution of body-like parts is the antithesis of the body as a functional tool or of a "still-life." This is art – not medical science, but its sources and affinities appear (at least to this viewer) fairly obvious. Chamberlin's anatomical references – while they allow for a wide range of interpretation and emotive responsiveness conjure the predicaments, potentials, and anxieties of the human body. Chamberlin, in this series as well as in much of his more recent work, attempts to assert – against a frightening proliferation of totalitarian possibilities – human presence. He achieves this through an abstract profusion of forms, gestures, signs, marks, historical references and particularly through the potential of clay to give room, shape and fecundity to the urgency of his imagination.

As an art-historical aside, it's worth noting that it is only fairly recently that the position of ceramics in the wider context of modern and contemporary art has been clarified and ceramic practices have finally infiltrated the world(s) of "fine art" and overcome the historical associations that relegated the medium to the lesser realms of utilitarian craft and "hobby." Until the latter half of the 20th century in the galleries of major museums one was likely to encounter ceramic objects such as ancient Greek amphorae, exquisite Asian porcelain, and perhaps Native American pots, utensils and ritual objects. In modern and contemporary galleries they were seldom to be found. In many ways this parallels the situation of photography. Photographs were either documentation or "snapshots." The artists who set the standards for the field and argued most persuasively for the photograph as a serious art-form, with some rare exceptions, weren't seriously embraced until the 1960's. Contemporary ceramics took a little longer to gain a steady

foothold in art-world venues and with each passing decade the medium becomes more versatile, stronger in its expressive range, and more enthusiastically championed and restored to its unique position in the history of sculpture. Scott Chamberlin, although he's too young to be included in the pioneering generation, is certainly one of those artists who today are shifting the perception of ceramics ensuring that the medium – whether it continues to be informed by traditional shapes and functions or to be utilized in the creation of wildly improvisational and expressive sculpture – receives the recognition, the critical, institutional and curatorial imprimatur that it deserves.

Scott Chamberlin is also a consummate draughtsman. I have chosen to include a group of drawings that are related to the sculptural works and both inform and are informed by them. Drawing is a less process-intensive medium than ceramic and its relative freedom from the encumbrances of process permits the kind of spontaneity of gesture and mark that serve as a perfect accompaniment to the sculptures. The drawings are not "preliminary sketches." They are fully realized independent works which while they are thematically related to the sculptures do not require them in order to be accessed or entered.

I've been eager to work with Scott for almost as long as I've known him. I appreciate his unstinting generosity in giving me the opportunity to rummage through his studio on repeated visits and his full participation in every aspect of this exhibition. I was also happy to renew our long friendship. I'm grateful, as always to Dr. Tess Jones for her clear, rigorous and unwavering commitment to the importance of arts in medicine and especially for her championing the exhibition programs of the Art Gallery at the Fulginiti Center for Bioethics and Humanities.

Simon Zalkind, Curator
The Art Gallery at the Fulginiti Pavilion



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