

# GLADSTONE GALLERY

Knight, Christopher, "Art review: 'Andrew Lord: Selected Works, 1990-2010' at Santa Monica Museum of Art," *Los Angeles Times*, May 29, 2010



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The Bible is pretty straightforward about the moment when human life begins, and it isn't at conception. Genesis 2:7 is unambiguous: "And the lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul."

I was thinking of those lines from Genesis the other day while looking at the gorgeous Andrew Lord exhibition at the [Santa Monica Museum of Art](#). Lord, despite the surname, produces thoroughly secular sculpture. The show includes 27 works from five series, most completed in the last dozen years, plus a short video. But humanity's spiritual mystery courses through it all.

Lord usually makes ceramics. Clay -- the "dust of the ground" -- is his primary material. He breathes remarkable life into the human qualities that, since ancient times, have been attached to ceramic vessels.



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Most any clay vessel has a mouth, lip, neck, body and foot, and the use of bodily terminology is not accidental. Lord regards those body parts quite literally -- not by making forms that necessarily describe them but through highlighting the sense of touch. He even uses his body, as well as his hands, to push, squeeze and mold the vessels. The forms can appear crude on initial encounter, but they grow sophisticated, even elegant, the longer you linger.

Yes, those are bite marks all over a trio of vessels aptly titled "biting." The oversize cup, urn and three-footed bowl of the group titled "tasting" feature surfaces that are lumpy but smoothly licked. A pair of tall, differently shaped vases called "swallowing," which may be the most beautiful objects in the show, appear to have taken shape by physical manipulation in the crook of the artist's neck, formed between jaw, shoulder and collarbone. Lord's body was employed as a tool.



Maybe that's why one of the two "swallowing" vessels has its own inordinately long neck, while the other seems to be just about all neck and nothing but. There's an awkward grace to the caressed forms, a muscularity and sensual appeal that are like vigorous, well, necking.

Santa Monica Museum executive director Elsa Longhauser, who organized the show, installed a cast bronze vessel from 1994 in a small room by itself. Its monumental quality, relative to an ordinary household jug, is a sign of things to come.

"Jug. Pressing and squeezing" is 2 1/2 feet tall, a single-handle vessel whose form enshrines the hands' energetic manipulation of the material.

The bronze sculpture's surface patina is a dark gray-brown, like burned toast, its golden highlights accentuated along the edges and ridges formed by fingers that clawed, squashed, dug, compressed and otherwise handled the original clay, before the jug was cast in metal. The glinting light animates the stationary object as you walk around it.

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As in Lord's 1980s work, those evanescent golden highlights take shape as material substance in the clay sculptures. Rips, tears and breaks that occur as the vessels are being made, glazed and fired in a kiln are patched with epoxy, covered in gold leaf. The pots' white crackle glaze is like a pore-flecked skin; gold sanctifies the vessels' bodily wounds.

These repairs, aside from the visual sensuality of the liquid gold splashes, have a metaphoric aspect: Bodily wear and tear rather than being seen as a compendium of flaws is consecrated by them, blessed with a measure of respect. Think worldly stigmata, without any religious associations but overflowing with the scarred knowledge of hard-lived corporeal experience.

The body's ravages over time also under-gird seven vessels based on late-19th-century stoneware by Post-Impressionist painter Paul Gauguin. Lord's are rendered in a dark, graphite-colored luster glaze, which gives them the odd character of three-dimensional drawings in space. Silver leaf rather than gold marks the fissures.

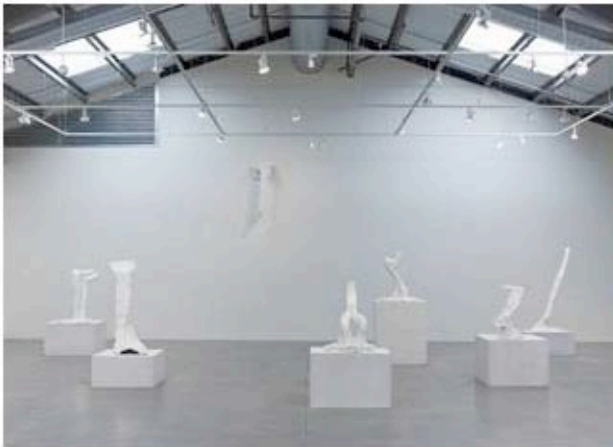
In an interview with Chicago curator James Rondeau, Lord talks about his interest in Jasper Johns -- which also might explain these sculptures' grayness. (The interview will be printed in a catalog that, unfortunately, won't be ready until the Santa Monica show leaves for a museum in Lord's native England.) The grayness in much of Johns' painting and sculpture often seems geared to the cadaverous mortification of the flesh, which may be the appeal for Lord.

The most compelling of the Gauguin-related works is a 15-inch-high raised dish, somewhat like an ancient Greek kylix used for drinking wine but here sporting just one eccentric, wildly looping handle. This serpentine appendage is appropriate to the carnal subject -- the applied figure of a nude bather, recalling Eve, who wades into the bowl where water would mix with wine.



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The show concludes with seven very recent works that, rather than clay, are sculptures made of plaster and beeswax over burlap. They're derived from a seven-minute video that tracks the path of Spodden River in northwestern England, where Lord grew up. The abstract forms evoke small waterfalls and cascades, separated from the rocky landscape through which the water flows.

Technically, they're accomplished -- Lord is too skillful for anything less -- but they also disappoint. The crude, rough-hewn, off-white

forms evoke plaster body casts for broken limbs, which does resonate with the breaks in human experience that memories of the past conjure up. (You can't go home again, or step in the same river twice.) But these embodied flows of sculptural water are just too similar, without adding much, to an extensive body of bronze waterfalls made by sculptor Bryan Hunt in the early 1980s.

Still, many of the show's other sculptures are profoundly moving. In the best of them, body and mind come together in powerful ways. Consciousness acutely honed always maximizes sensual knowledge -- and vice versa.

-- Christopher Knight

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"Andrew Lord: *between my hands to water falling*, selected works from 1990 to 2010," Santa Monica Museum of Art, Bergamot Station, 2525 Michigan Ave., (310) 586-6487, [www.smmao.org](http://www.smmao.org). Through Aug. 21; closed Sunday and Monday. Admission: \$5.

*Photos, from top: "Untitled," Andrew Lord, 2004; "swallowing," 1998; installation views. Credit: Douglas M. Parker*