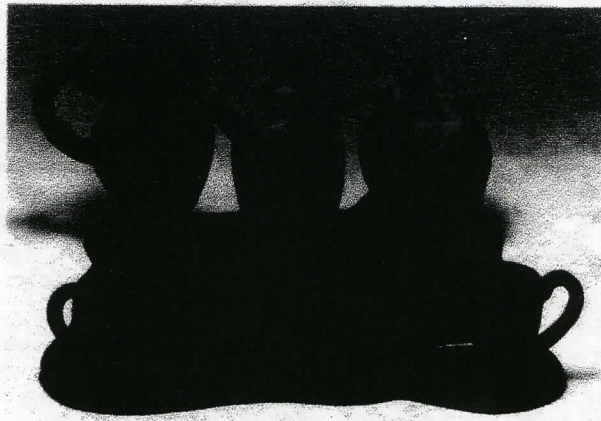


April 1986



Andrew Lord: *Coffee Service*, 1985, painted and fired clay, platter 16½ inches long; at BlumHelman.

### Andrew Lord at BlumHelman

Andrew Lord, the sculptor from England, is known for the sort of forms we ordinarily associate with the ceramic materials he favors—vases and pots and cups and saucers. He makes these objects all life-size, roughly, so a strong atmosphere of domesticity surrounds his art. However, there is nothing homey about a ceramic piece by Andrew Lord. Each one reflects sophisticated thoughts about the tangled relationships of two- and three-dimensional form since the days of Cézanne.

In other seasons, Lord borrowed Cézannesque planes and Cubist angles with abandon, reassembling them in jagged, tilting, always witty objects that appeared to cry out against their utilitarian fate. At the same time, they were sculptures that wanted to be paintings. Yet their protest was never bitter. With dashing, splashy painterly lines of glazing running alongside their sharpish edges, Lord's vases seemed determined to make the best of it. If they had to be sculptural, they would do it with the utmost elegance. A few of the ensembles in his current show revealed that sort of tension, but most did not.

Lord does not simply plunk down single forms to be seen in isolation. As in a cupboard or a table setting, his vessels gather into crowds. Each comments on the others, and receives comments in return. When his somewhat earlier work sums up early-modern angularity, Lord's point of reference may be Cubism, but more likely it is the plainer, bolder abstraction that evolved from the Constructivist experiment. Lord's new sculpture, by contrast, is much rounder and softer—not so pushy about its 3-D references to the 2-D complexities of painting.

Pictorial references are almost completely lost in those cases where Lord retains the marks of his hand—kneading the clay, pushing and shoving and building it up. These rougher forms have their own charm: Lord, it seems, cannot drag his fingers over a clay surface without imprinting it with graceful signs of process. Yet the best pieces in this show are the smoother, subtler ones. Here you have to look twice to see that all is not exactly as it appears. These are not just pleasant stoneware objects with a nice dull, dark, silvery gray luster. They are devices for getting you to look very, very closely.

A painting requires only one point of view, a sculpture many. As you walk around the ceramic tray that holds the subtlest of Lord's new works, you find that each stopping place offers its own distinctive viewpoint—an angle of vision that flattens a pitcher's curve ever so slightly, that tilts up the rim of a cup, or throws the axis of a pot a few degrees out of whack. Views do not slide smoothly into one another, as they do with sculpture in the round. You almost seem to be looking at a series of paintings, especially since the faint, almost subliminal distortions are what we expect from still-life painting. Despite the full-bodied presence of Lord's ceramic forms, you keep interpreting them as if they had only two dimensions and could only represent, not possess, volumetric form. Lord's art achieves trompe l'oeil in reverse.

—Phyllis Dertner