

GLADSTONE GALLERY

Pincus-Witten, Robert, "Andrew Lord", Artforum, Summer 2009, pg 333-334

Andrew Lord

GLADSTONE GALLERY

The arts/crafts divide is a vexed passage; painting and sculpture versus the potter's wheel and the loom. Of recent decades the rancor that once marked these age-old oppositions has abated. Certainly, much contemporary art embraces crafts' methods—think of the feminist coding of weaving so central to Eva Hesse's sculpture. Conversely, while craftspeople may now be regarded as artists, convincing examples are rare. Peter Voulkos, who led the West Coast ceramics renaissance, comes to mind, and now, with this ambitious show, Andrew Lord enters the lists.

Lord is a master ceramist of intense personality. Eschewing the wheel, he has long found his impulsive hand guided by deeply experienced

GLADSTONE GALLERY

Pincus-Witten, Robert, "Andrew Lord", Artforum, Summer 2009, pg 333-334



Andrew Lord, *small valley (Doctor's Wood)*, Whitworth (I), 2008-2009, ceramics, glaze, gold leaf, 15 1/4 x 25 x 19".

responses to internal forces such as breathing, swallowing, or hearing. His tactile identification with the very actions of squeezing and squashing—manifested as a near-regressed playfulness of fingers dragged through clay—has led to the creation of a challenging body of oddly deformed (though eccentrically pleasing) amphorae, pitcher shapes, and ancient Chinese forms. At times, Lord's work recalls David Hockney's parodies of Picasso; at others, Jasper Johns at

his most impulsive—think *Painting Bitten by a Man*, 1961. Still, up to now, Lord's vessels fell within the purview of crafts.

But the work in his recent exhibition, titled "Whitworth," is something else—a body of ceramics that engage the landscape genre, evoking Whitworth in Lancashire, England, where Lord was born in 1950. Thus, his "subject" is no longer the vessel itself (however sodden or deformed) but the monuments and places, the persons, memories, and sentiments of home—an archway spanning the river in Healey Dell, a small valley called Doctor's Wood, the passage to Market Street, seafront steps in Blackpool, the Cowm Reservoir, a man missing an arm, swimmers at Wham Dam, a pair of swallows, a road leading to Facit Quarry, a dancer in Bacup, and so on.

Relocating the vessel paradigm to the precincts of place and memory, Lord in his new works rejects facile grace—as he always has—while charting unfamiliar terrain. His forms often reach for the bowed or ox yoke-like, resembling magnified Asian brush rests. The new work both hovers at ungainliness and aims at the cryptic confessional. One group is glazed an unsympathetic tin white, another mustard yellow. A third group is glazed workaday black. A bleak fundamentalism ranges even as the new themes appear. The forms are blunt and generic, porridgey and glum—despite their specificity of place, biographical referent, or recollection.

A vigorous, impatient will to form leads Lord at times to fire certain pieces when they are perhaps not absolutely dry as a means of underscoring, even dramatizing, the marked cracking that at times results. Lord purposefully repairs these explosive breaks through the use of expressionist pools of gold and silver epoxy—puddings that remind us of the exquisite gold reparations of Song/Yuan celadon. Thus, an often adjured but inherent feature of clay is transformed into a positive desirable and, in its way, a distinctly Lord-like index.

Read the harsher adjectives in this review with quotation marks around them; oppose them to the empty praise endemic to the touchy-feely crafts world in which Lord stands *primus inter pares*. His radical relocation of crafts to art means that we must now judge his work as we do painting and sculpture, the way we think about the work of Bruce Naumann (the solidification of space between things), Rachel Whiteread (ditto), Bryan Hunt (the finger-dragged cascading forms), and Kiki Smith (the swoony romanticism). In engaging such questions, "Whitworth" represented Lord's victory over crafts and secured his place above the salt at the larger stylistic table of his time.

—Robert Pincus-Witten