

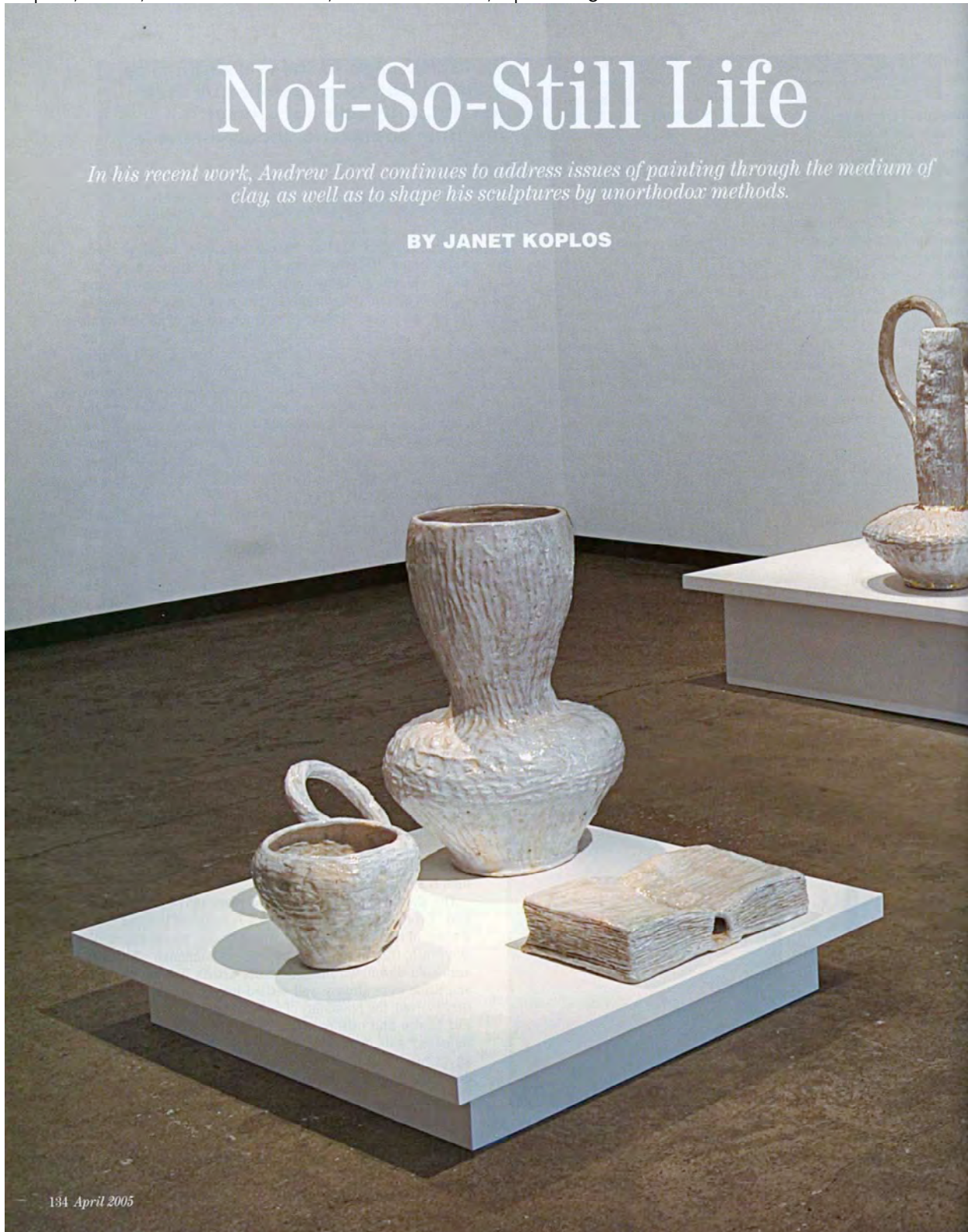
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Koplos, Janet, "Not-So-Still Life", *Art In America*, April 2005

Not-So-Still Life

In his recent work, Andrew Lord continues to address issues of painting through the medium of clay, as well as to shape his sculptures by unorthodox methods.

BY JANET KOPLOS



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Andrew Lord's ceramic vases, jars, pitchers and other forms might have emerged from a nightmare. They seem to sway and tremble as they rise higher and higher. Redoubling their already uneasy character, the artist groups them into sullen families on low platforms, or sets them in discordant twos or threes on high, broad pedestals so that their unexpected, largish size can seem even more unsettling at eye level.

In his recent show at Paul Kasmin Gallery's two spaces in Chelsea, the British-born, New York-based sculptor once again used these forms and this material to convey both perceptual effects and states of mind. After studying ceramics at the Central School of Art in

London, later working at the Delft Pottery Factory in Holland, and subsequent to much thought on his own, Lord arrived spectacularly on the New York scene in 1981 with a body of ceramic work inspired by pottery representations in early modernist painting. It was a theme worthy of the attention it got, as critics reacted with enthusiasm to Lord's exploration of pottery's intersection with issues of painting and sculpture. Early on, he reworked vases into Cubist exaggerations of planes of light and shadow, and later he shaped vessels through a program of specific bodily acts such as punching and squeezing—convention altered by concept.

View of Andrew Lord's exhibition, showing (left) Vase, cup and open book. Modelling., 2004, 23 3/4 inches high, and (right) Nine pieces. Modelling. Open book., 1999-2001, 29 inches high; at Paul Kasmin Gallery, New York. Images this article courtesy Paul Kasmin Gallery.

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With titles such as *Listening*, *Watching* and *Breathing*, Lord sets viewers at the task of examining the objects in a nonliteral way.

Lord's clay is usually rough-surfaced; his objects are essentially traditional in format but often distorted and oversize (vases are typically 2 to 2½ feet tall). The works in Kasmin's principal space, which dated from 1995 to the present, are uniformly covered with a pale monochrome glaze. It reads as muted and gray when it's thin and crackled, often with a faint warmth, just a hint of rosiness; but it is white when it pools in crevices. And there are multitudes of crevices, because most of the works have irregularly tactile surfaces, and some are ragged enough to seem forbidding. (Actual flaws such as cracks, however, are patched with liquid-looking applications of gold, following Japanese precedent.) Providing a relatively serene base image against which to measure divergence, the work titled *Vase and closed book*. *First round*. (2000) offered a relatively classical-looking vessel 27½ inches tall, paired with a book that appeared to have been cast from sheets of corrugated cardboard. The smoothness of the vase was anomalous in this show, but the work's allusion to still-life composition was not. Lord's groupings frequently embody that painting genre's conventions, thus defining his preferred frame of reference.

The pedestal pieces that were presented in pairs or trios in the gallery's main room have sensory gerund titles: *Listening*, *Watching*,

Vase and closed book. First round., 2000, ceramic, epoxy and China ink, 27½ inches high.



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Swallowing, 1998, ceramic, epoxy and China ink, approx. 29 inches high.

Breathing. With these words Lord sets viewers at the task of examining the objects in a nonliteral way, wondering whether the title describes the artist's act or (more imaginatively) the pots', since some of them seem to have noses or eyes. The scale (approximating a small adult torso) and a pedestal viewing height that puts the work almost right in front of your face both encourage direct encounter between vessel form and viewer form.

Sometimes the titles have an obvious correspondence: *Biting* is textured with sets of tiny teeth marks. These look too small to be from the choppers of an adult male, but according to the gallery press release, the vessels are shaped by being pressed on the artist's body parts. What's important is that this particular oral gesture implies an unorthodox and intimate relationship between man and material, and that's communicated even if you haven't read the release. My favorite work in this series has the less obvious title *Swallowing*. That couldn't mean that the artist swallowed clay. The neck of this vase is thickly clotted and lumpy; the piece *looks* the way swallowing with an obstruction *feels*.

An assembly that was shown on a low platform in the main room is titled *Twelve Mexican pieces. Modelling*. (1996-2004). "Modelling" is apparently Lord's term for the finger-scraped texture featured in these and other objects (sometimes these marks can be seen inside the mouth or neck of a vessel, drawing your eyes toward the mysterious and inaccessible darkness within). This work is a compendium of shapes seen in the smaller groupings, plus a few variations. There's a

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Sleeping Head (center left) and Skull (center right), both 1994, with three drawings, at Paul Kasmin Gallery.

three-legged, fat-bellied pot that recalls Shang Dynasty bronze tripod goblets. There's also a table with three skinny legs and a lidded jar with a thick, straight, vertical handle that rises up like the rod of a butter churn. The mix of handles in this assembly calls attention to their somehow ingratiating excesses: too long, too lumpy, too thin, too looping. While the very existence of handles makes reference to practicality, Lord abandons it in favor of a gestural line that exists for its own sake. In this grouping it's particularly apparent that everything leans. Lord's forms are hand-built rather than thrown on the wheel, but that doesn't mean they can't be erect and symmetrical. He must choose to slant. They still sit firmly, so they are not off balance, just off center. The distinction may be symbolic, since it could describe how one sees oneself in a social or political context, and such an interpretation is supported by the expressive qualities of the pots, which suggest the existence of personal meanings.

In Kasmin's nearby auxiliary space were nine drawings and two individual ceramic forms, dated 1993-2004. The sculptures, which were among the earliest works in the show, are related by their base forms. *Sleeping head* might recall Brancusi's muse, but a cone flares out from above and behind the left ear—or perhaps bores into the reclining head. The face is barely defined. You sense that the mouth is a little open. There is no real neck or jaw contour, and the surface, like that of the pots in the main gallery, is finger-raked. The other, *Skull*, again goes rounded and general in back, where the artist has not bothered to suggest a neck. This head is embellished with a large,

ropy handle that curls resiliently, like a pig's tail. Rising from the skull is a vase with a strange rim that could be read as a yawning maw.

A graphite-on-Indian-paper drawing from 1993 also titled *Skull* has slightly different implications: the skull is the same, but the lip of the vase has the profile of a heart (somewhere between conventionalized and anatomical), and the looping handle looks like entrails. Among other drawings are four individual pots outlined in red conté on Somerset cream paper, in each of which the line is not flowing but halting. It's as if Lord drew in pulse increments. Here he has added to this trembling motion and to the leaning posture so common among the pots, an aura composed of conté fingerprints and smudges. Two drawings on black paper are like ghostly recollections of pots, while the most conventional depiction of the bunch, a 2004 drawing of a coffee pot that is tall but not so distorted in form, is disturbed by three distinct "brandings" with ear shapes.

Lord's drawn line equates to the scratched, interrupted skin of his ceramics. The emotional tenor he achieves in all of these pieces may be the single most memorable quality of his work. The skulls are only casually morbid, like Mexican Day of the Dead imagery, but in any case Lord's idiosyncratic, intransigent forms—classical yet inventive, abstract yet figural—are strikingly alive. □

"Andrew Lord: Sculpture and Related Drawings" was shown at Paul Kasmin Gallery, New York [Sept. 10-Oct. 9, 2004]. It was accompanied by a catalogue with essays by Agnes Gund and Janet Kraynak.