

Carol Gouthro's

# FUTURISTIC ARTIFACTS

by Judy Wagonfeld

Architect Robert Venturi once remarked, "Less is a bore." Ceramist Carol Gouthro, like Venturi, advocates design exuberance and embellishment. Her glitzy biomorphic vessels and goblets read Baroque meets Sci-Fi, the antithesis of Bauhaus simplicity. To Gouthro's way of thinking, minimalism negates the complexity of contemporary life. Rather than striving to escape the fray, she embraces its diversity and craziness.

As if a wacky horticulturalist, Gouthro seeks mutant hybrids. Borrowing from botanical forms and mundane household objects, she throws, slab builds and casts forms that merge and metamorphose into quirky sculptures. The foot-high works of her recent show at Seattle's Pacini Lubel Gallery ([www.pacinelubel.com](http://www.pacinelubel.com)) blaze with sumptuous glazes, slips, terra sigillatas and underglazes. Shrunken to half the size of her earlier sleeker vases, these enigmatic shape-shifters venture into a less realistic, edgy realm. Accentuated by Gouthro's hallmark kaleidoscopic hues, they glow like rainbows after a storm, exuding visceral joy. Preening as voguish envoys from an exotic paradise, they handily dismiss doom.

Gouthro, a master of unique finishes, constantly dreams up dazzling brocades of color. Recorded in a six-inch-thick recipe book, they refresh her memory, a necessary step when making many of her own glazes and array of smooth, crusty tactile surfaces and luminous lustres. Captivated by these unusual qualities, viewers may to fondle the maze-hued spiny points punctuating the salmon colored cup of "Floris #2."

In most pieces, the top section vaguely resembles a flower. These petaled orifices and phallic-filled in-



"Floris #1 and #2," 12 in. (30 cm) in height, slip-cast and handbuilt terra cotta and white earthenware with slips, stains, underglazes, glazes and lustres, fired to Cone 04, 2006.



"Floris #6," 24 in. (61 cm) in height, thrown and handbuilt earthenware with slips, stains and glazes, fired to Cone 04, by Carol Gouthro, Seattle, Washington.

teriors, fired in luscious and glossy glazes, recall the eroticism of Judy Chicago's "Dinner Party" plates, the paintings of Georgia O'Keefe and the goofiness of Funk Art. Although this anthropomorphic femininity forms a component of sexuality in Gouthro's vessels, it also alludes to a broad swath of women's multi-tasked lives.

For Gouthro, who teaches, makes and sells production-based tableware and spends spare moments nurturing a prolific garden, the component parts reflect her balancing act of time, finances and domestic responsibilities. Art and life meld in daily thoughts. Nostalgia

plays an important role. A jello mold, cast in plaster and sliced into varying parts, becomes a base. A rubber dog toy, enhanced through wax erosion and cut into bony segments, mimics a spine. Metal bees, cast into clay, emerge from a sea-green vessel glaze.

Inspired by nature's botanical shapes found in gardens and wild lands, Gouthro delves into research for her projects. Studying historical floral illustrations and photography, she's been inspired by the close-up plant microphotography of German photographer Karl Blossfeldt (1865–1932). Focusing on the menacing qualities of spikes, holes and insectlike legs, she merges them with benign fairytale swans, ducklings and frogs, building outlandish organic structures.

Gouthro fearlessly mixes traditional black-and-white stripes, vines and leaves juxtaposed with Pop Art papaya, turquoise and chartreuse hues. Meshing all into a cogent whole looks back to pattern-and-decoration artist Miriam Schapiro, as well as Mexican folk art. Floral concepts, as if viewed while on a mind-altering drug, burgeon as in Yves Tanguy's surrealist aberrations of nature's elements. In "Floris #1" (see page 47), a Creamsicle-hued vertebral stem grows from chartreuse leaves. At the top, a perky orange stamen rises from the interior of its dusky blue flower.

Gouthro's signature use of glistening "raised droplets" of beaded glaze, when dry, resembles morning dew. Spiky globules, applied by slip-trailed drops, impart the danger of nature's protective thorns. Dull sheen finishes, achieved through a wax erosion stage followed by sponge rubbing produces a soft, eroded-over-time appearance. Repeated color layers, sanded with steel wool, evolve to eerie mottling. Multiple firings of natural terra cotta clay yield stunning coppery hues.

Gouthro's voluptuous segments, combined in vertical stacks, reflect Asian temples, ornately carved statuary and over-the-top Venetian glass. Her obsessive attention to detail and repeated glaze firings allow each work's personality to blossom. Through bumps, quills and pitting, she contrasts rough and smooth, and the sponge and lichen textures that echo nature. To create pock marks, holes and lines, Gouthro carves leather-hard clay with a dental tool, pokes it with a wire brush and molds around the bumpy outsides of golf balls. Painstakingly piercing the clay shapes with a hollow metal tube transforms a goblet bowl into a hole-punched, lotus pod, botanical colander.

Unswervingly, Gouthro's theatrical, lush work projects a primeval voice. Never a shrinking violet, it bursts forth with the splendor of a mountain meadow, juxtaposing serenity and commotion. Free of decay, each mutant, as if a futuristic artifact, seduces like erotic eye candy. Though the bricolage towers hint at danger, a celebratory fiesta of sexuality and hope prevails. Each flamboyant piece reminds us to seek beauty and possibility while navigating the riotous garden of modern life.

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## THE CERAMIC SURFACE

by Carol Gouthro

In the new "Floris" series, the smaller, intimate scale allowed me to focus on detail and indulge my love of embellishment, sensuous surfaces, rich, intense color, intricate pattern and texture. The ceramic glaze process is one that I enjoy immensely and I spend hours painting and firing every piece, often four and five times.

"Floris #4" demonstrates several surface design techniques:

**Beaded Glaze:** By beading glaze up on the bisque surface, I form sparkling droplets, evocative of dew. After glaze firing, I use a magnifying glass and tiny brush to luster each drop. Though this requires hours, the dazzling effect makes the time well spent.

**Wax Resist:** To achieve my black and white patterns I favor wax-resist techniques. First, I paint white underglaze on bone-dry surfaces. After that dries, I paint patterns with wax resist. This preserves the white areas when I cover the entire surface with a black underglaze. I've found that wax resist is the surest method to fabricate an intricate pattern with crisp, sharp edges.

**Raised Patterns:** To make the raised thorn pattern on the small spherical forms, I squeeze thick, colored slip through a fine tipped hair-dye applicator bottle. After tinting the slips with colorants and Mason stains, I cover the surfaces with a colored transparent glaze. The resulting sharp tactile surface is reminiscent of forms in nature.

"Floris #4," 11½ in. (29 cm) in height, slip-cast and handbuilt earthenware with slip trailing, wax-resist, underglaze, glazes and lusters, fired to Cone 04.

