

# kerameiki techni

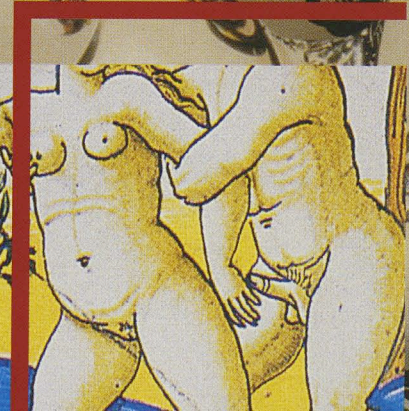
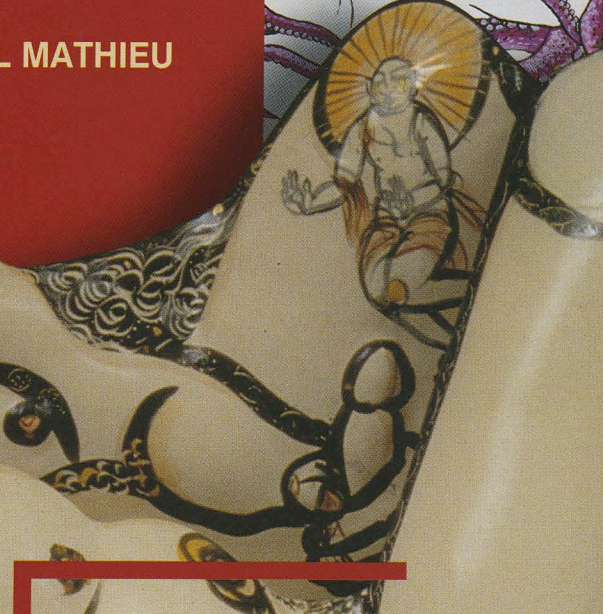
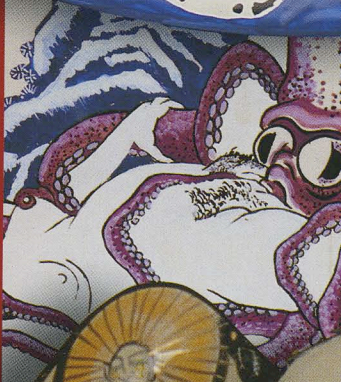
INTERNATIONAL CERAMIC ART REVIEW



# SEX POTS

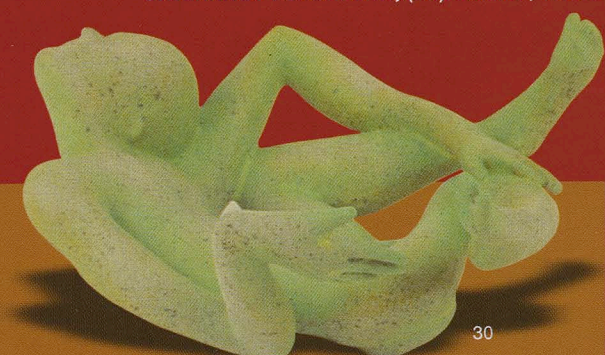
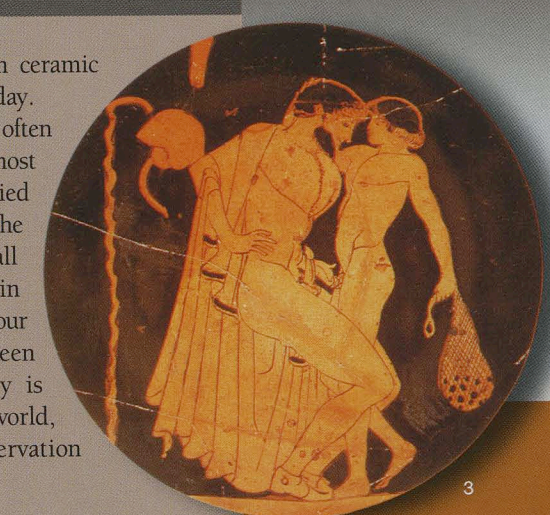
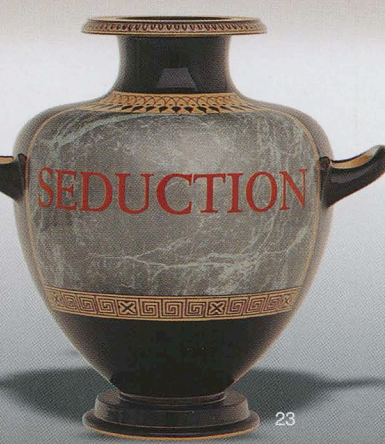
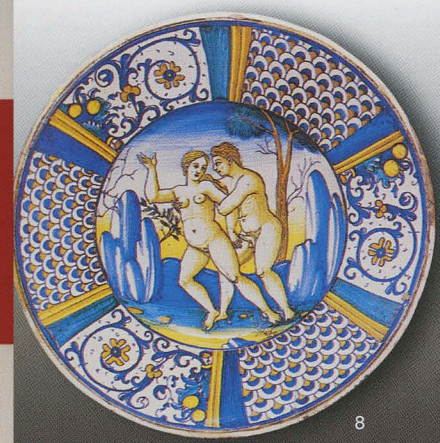
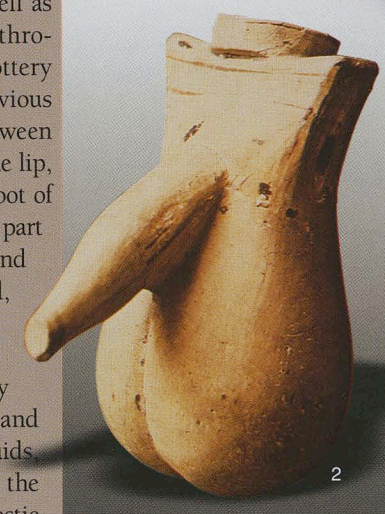
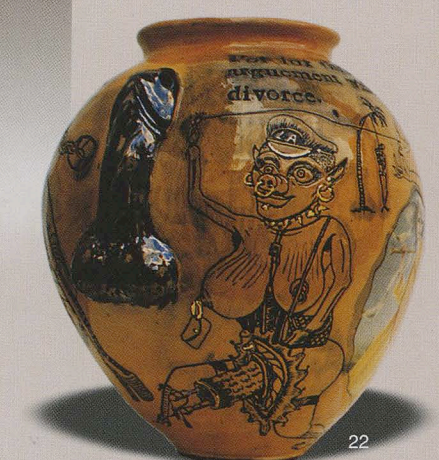
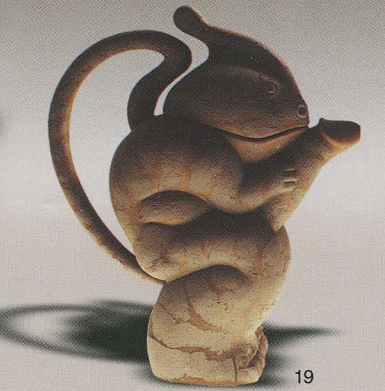
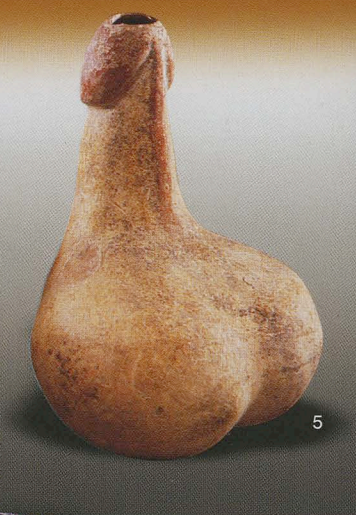
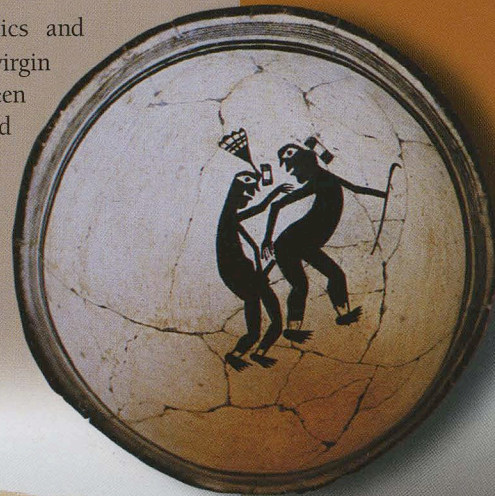
EROTICISM  
IN CERAMICS

By PAUL MATHIEU



The specific relation between ceramics and sexuality, its language and metaphors, is virgin territory, so to speak. This relationship between clay as a material, ceramics as a practice and sexuality itself are numerous. Both imply touch and transformation, and touch is the dominant sense when it comes to working with plastic clay. Clay comes from the earth, it is alive and fertile. Clay is like flesh, and most mythologies use clay as origin in creation myths. Clay is also common, basic, cheap and dirty. In ceramics, the body has always played a large role in representation, as well as abstractly, in the anthropomorphism of pottery forms and in the obvious semantic relation between pots and body parts (the lip, neck, shoulder, belly, foot of a pot). Also, pottery is part of the cycle of life and death sustained by food, and pottery functions are closely related to bodily functions: pottery contains, preserves and excretes food and liquids, then receives the waste the body rejects. This domestic dimension, of bodies coming in intimate and direct contact with ceramic objects, is still central to ceramic practices today.

Historically as well, ceramics objects are often related to funerary practices and rituals, and most historical ceramics are found as offerings buried with the dead in tombs, from the poorest to the wealthiest. The objects we now make, like all other ceramics objects before, will become in the distant future testament and witness to our time, when all other materials have been reabsorbed into oblivion. And if sexuality is necessary for the continuation of the organic world, similarly ceramics' capacity for preservation functions as the memory of humankind.



1. MIMBRES BOWL, 950 – 1150 AD. HOMOSEXUAL SEDUCTION SCENE. 8,9 x 18,8cm
2. KAMIROS, RHODES, GREECE. PHALLUS VASE, 2nd quarter of 6th century BC
3. BRYGOS & BRYGOS PAINTER, GREECE. SEDUCTION SCENE, 4th century BC
4. HUGO KAAGMAN. (NL). GEISHA PLATE, 2000. 30cm
5. VICUS CULTURE, PERU. +- 400 BC. MALE GENITAL VESSEL
6. WESLEY ANDEREGG (USA). PENIS MAN, CUP AND SAUCER
7. DAVID FURMAN (USA). THE LASCIVIOUS LIBERTINE II, 2000. 30 x 15 x 40cm.
8. MAIOLICA PLATE WITH EROTIC SCENE, early 16th Century
9. CHINA, QING PERIOD, ca 1900. PORCELAIN REPRESENTATION OF A COUPLE ON A STOOL, 11cm
10. ROBERT ARNESON, (USA). CALL ME LOVER, 1969. 24 x 30 x 26cm
11. MATTHIAS OSTERMANN, (CA). EX WITH THE ANGELS, 2000. W: 47 cm
12. AKIO TAKAMORI, (USA). KANNON APPEARS TO A MAN, 1993. 70 x 60 x 25cm
13. LATE STUART PHALLIC DRINKING CUP
14. CINDY KOLODZIEJSKI, (USA). THE ORIGIN OF THE WORLD, 1999. 15 x 25,5cm
15. MAIOLICA PLATE WITH WOMAN AND SATYR, 1st quarter of 16th century BC.
16. CHINA, QING PERIOD. PORCELAIN REPRESENTATION OF A COUPLE ON A STOOL, ca 1915. 11cm
17. MICHAEL LUCERO, (USA). MASTER POTTER (NEW WORLD SERIES), 1993. 50 x 40 x 30cm
18. RICHARD MILETTE, (CA). TEAPOT FOR QUEEN X, 1989. 16 x 31 x 17cm
19. TONY BENNETT, (UK). DINOSAUR TEAPOT. 24cm
20. PAUL MATHIEU, (CA). FLUID EXCHANGE, 1996. 40 x 30 x 20cm
21. SERGEI ISUPOV, (USA). CHAIN, 1999. 25 x 35 x 20cm
22. GRAYSON PERRY, (UK). A WEDDING PRESENT – POT TO BE THROWN IN AN ARGUMENT WHICH ENDS IN DIVORCE, 1990.
23. RICHARD MILETTE, (CA). SEDUCTION, 1996. 38,6 x 40,9 x 30,6cm
24. RICHARD MILETTE, (CA). INCESTE, 1996. 38,6 x 40,9 x 30,6cm
25. GRAYSON PERRY, (UK). SUBURBAN ORGY, 1994.
26. RYOSAKU MIWA, (JP). EGG, 1976. 24,5 x 22 x 26cm
27. JIANHUA LIU, (CH). GAMES, 2000. 59 x 59 x 18cm
28. MATTHIAS OSTERMANN, (CA). SATYRS, 1997. 20 x 28cm
29. GEORGE E. OHR, (USA). VAGINA BANK, ca 1900
30. JEANNOT BLACKBURN, (CA). SALADE, 1993. D: 30cm

Erotic representations in clay are more numerous than in any other material, simply because the other materials disintegrated or were eventually recycled or destroyed. Ceramics is a very permanent material that survives exceptionally well since it offers great resistance to the passage of time. If ceramics is fragile and can be broken easily (and most objects are found in fragments and shards, as often in refuse piles and garbage dumps as in tombs), it is at the same time almost indestructible. We will never know if erotic representations also existed in large number in wood, metal, paper, glass or other materials. They simply disappeared. Yet, most ceramic objects survived and their eloquence still resonates.

In ceramics there has been a significant increase recently in the use of sexuality as content and in this type of work, sexuality can be perceived as a theme of existence which infuses our lives and informs other non-erotic aspects as well, despite the fact that this association between ceramics and sexuality might not be obvious at first. Yet, not only ceramics, but all craft practices need to redefine their role within culture by expanding upon their perceived nature of innocence and, at times, irrelevance.

We have come to forget, or at best ignore, that ceramics play a very large and seminal role within art and culture as a whole. And the study of Erotics might lead to a new understanding and a renewed position for ceramics in the field of knowledge.

It is important to note that there is an interesting predominance of ceramics in erotic representations world wide, and the fact that this activity of expressing the sexual urge through clay is still continuing now. Historically, we can see that ceramic objects played an important role, predominantly in a religious context, in ritualised activities that were at times connected directly to daily life. Yet, it remains almost certain that these rituals were mostly religious and/or social in nature, establishing a link between peoples lives and the inexplicable, the uncontrollable, as well as the after-life, in funerary rites and rituals surrounding death, as connected to the cyclical rhythms of seasons in nature. This connection with generation and regeneration creates a direct link between rituals and sexuality and simultaneously with the various vessels, usually ceramics, used in these performances and activities. That many of these vessels have sexual attributes comes as no surprise.

Ceramics is related to sexuality in numerous ways. The material itself, clay, is overflowing with characteristics shared with sexuality and sexual practices. The transformation of the material and the processes used therein all imply countless sexual analogies and connotations. Equally important, ceramic vessels in their various forms, in their morphology, make countless references to the human body, to particular body parts, and by extension to sexual organs and sexual acts. Yet, most tellingly, it is the actual experience we have of

these objects, not only through touch and direct physical contact, but also through the operative workings of the objects (to contain, to preserve, to pour, to spill, to prepare and dispense food, etc., or again to dispose of the body's unwanted residues), that reaffirms ceramics exceptional relationship to sexuality.

The merging of content within the symbiosis of form (object) and surface (image) is not only typical of ceramics but is also emblematic of all craft practices. These contents make various references to multiple social phenomenon. This political aspect of ceramics can be explored within various ideologies (patriarchy, feminism, or queer studies, and countless others), but it is most interesting to me in relation to hierarchies and marginalisation. Here again, ceramics and sexuality (sexualities) share common ground, by being both constantly affected by the workings of social hierarchisations and institutional marginalisations, through prejudice, discrimination, censorship and, still, silencing, by non-inclusion and non-representation.

The sexual content of ceramic objects is particularly fertile in potential investigations within the complementary aspects of popular culture and consumerism. The commodification of desire through objects, be they inert things or objectified bodies, is particularly fruitful here. The consummation of the flesh through images in our hyper-mediated culture parallels the consumption of food on plates and other ceramic objects, as well as the cultural activity of collecting

as a form of consuming.

At the level of myths and mythologies, whether we go back in time to the origins of humankind with the support of creation stories and legends, or if we look at contemporary fictions of all kinds, ceramics still plays an important role in its ability to refer to the primal, the intemporal, the universal, as does sex. Interesting connections with basic matter and primary transformation is brought forth by the scatological nature of clay and the special (and specialised) role played by ceramic objects in food preparation, absorption and rejection.

Pottery forms are representations, abstractly, of human bodies. Through touch and direct contact, they are experienced intimately by bodies and their inherent functions mimic as well as support bodily functions. This tactile necessity of clay as a material and of ceramic forms in their experience is explored in ceramics' relation to the natural world of organic systems: the richly varied universe of plants, flowers (the sexual parts of plants), and the geological world of continuously transformed nature and these other phenomena which are actually themselves responsible for the genesis of clay, to begin with.

The central notion coming out of these diverse aspects of ceramics, within the particular context of sexuality, is the prevalent role played by ritual throughout. Rituals are central to ceramics in its materialisation as well as experience, as it is also true for sexuality,



**IMRE SCHRAMMEL, (HU).**  
EARLY SPRING, 1991. 29 x 59 x 14cm

and the ritual aspects are reinforced by real contact, by real acts mediated by touch.

By reconnecting us with rituality and sociality, simultaneously, ceramic objects altogether contest and propose other norms and models than those offered by the hegemonic visual culture. They create centres of resistance to the ambient barrage of flickering obsolescence. This is why craft objects and practices, like ceramics, are still central to contemporary life, since only they can make these essential connections and reconnect the past to the present and to the future.

The concept of permanency is central to my argument for a variety of reasons. Not only is it an important, if too rarely considered, aspect of ceramics as a cultural practice, it also connects with sexuality directly. Sexuality is the activity that assures the continuity of humankind, through progeny; it makes the continuation and potential permanency of humankind possible, while ceramics embodies other forms of continuity (it is universal, made by all culture through all times). Due to their permanency and resilience to the workings of time, ceramic objects specifically (likewise, in



**BRUNO SIMARD, (CA).**  
**MY THREE GRACES, 1999.**  
23 x 12cm

their own way, other craft practices, as transmissible forms of knowledge), are essential tools for the continuation of memory, the maintenance of humanity's consciousness and the commemoration of precedence, in a process that unites, it needs to be said again, with the past, through the present, to the future.

I will now end by quoting from Plato's Symposium:

*Eros is never in and out of need and stands moreover between ignorance and truth. Eros signifies the longing for the good to be one's own forever.*

This article was realised on occasion of the publication of the book *Sex Pots: Eroticism in Ceramics* (see book column pages 76-77) which was published simultaneously in the UK by A&C Black, in a German edition by Haupt and in the USA by Rutgers University Press.

The book's author Paul Mathieu, is an artist and professor who lives in Vancouver, Canada. He teaches ceramics at the Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design.



**JOHAN CRETEN, (BE).**  
**THE TWO COCKS, 1994.**  
112 x 107 x 51cm