









DONNA GREEN

HOSTLER | BURROWS

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## INTRODUCTION

It seemed fitting to ask Tony Marsh to sit down in conversation with Donna Green as it was he who introduced us to her work in the fall of 2019. We had visited Tony in his studio at CSULB where we met several of the artists in residence at the same program in which Donna had participated the previous summer. As luck would have it we were able to meet Donna and see her work in person soon after in her TribeCa home, just around the corner from our first gallery.

The works were five enormous hand built vessels, pinched, poked, and pummeled throughout - heroic in scale and imperfect in their distortions. Donna communicated her creative process so vividly that I pictured her almost crawling inside the pots, working at them from the inside out, extending the energy of her own person into the clay. There was something raw and unexpected in the work and we expressed our interest in showing it right then and there.

Donna speaks often about the emotionality of creativity. "Hate it, love it, destroy it, make it again." Those are words that to me represent an emotional engagement liberated from any paralyzing neurosis. If she hates it, she can destroy it. If she loves it she can also destroy it. And/or make it again. The emotions, and by extension the clay, no longer have rules or predictable outcomes - the resulting works smolder with seemingly contradictory energies. We often hear of artists who pour their emotions *into* their work; with Donna it seems that there can be a torrent of emotions that is released *through* the work.

This is Donna's first solo exhibition with the gallery, and feels somehow like an unveiling, the emergence of an artist at a creative threshold. No longer concerned with being a "good, polite woman" she surges unfettered towards the beauty that lies ahead in the unexpected.

Thank you Tony Marsh for the fortuitous introduction, Alexandra Rowley for the sensitivity of your photographic eye, Victor Levie for a beautiful catalogue, and Donna Green for this fearless body of work.

Juliet Burrows









## DONNA GREEN | TONY MARSH: A CONVERSATION

Somewhere on the long continuum of art & significant objects your work might be positioned between the Venus of Willendorf and the work of Louise Bourgeois. Can we begin the discussion by talking about the various feminine principles at play in your work?

When building with clay, I am playing, doodling, experimenting, meandering. I am absorbed by the material. I have no conscious thoughts about themes or meaning as I work, but a kind of female symbolism organically emerges as the sculpture grows and takes shape.

Each piece is a puzzle made up of shapes. These shapes have become forms that are associated with the female body—breasts and orifices—but they are also phallic shapes too. I don't start with the idea of making sexual forms—they manifest purely from the pleasure of working with the sensuality of clay.

Clay is about texture and touch, malleability, transition, physics, nature...mud. The material and all its possibilities and limitations reflect something back to me that makes working with it an immersive, intuitive, and emotional experience. I find myself in it. The work is ultimately a reflection of myself as a woman.

Venus of Willendorf (circa 28,000 - 23,000 BC) is tiny, just 4.5 inches tall, and made of oolitic limestone. She has a bulbous stomach and breasts, and fleshy thighs. She is primal, raw, and beautiful; the authentic ideal of life, fertility, birth—the eternal woman.

Additionally, Louise Bourgeois' *Mamelles* and her series of sculptures referring to the Artemis of Ephesus with their multi-breasted forms are important references and inspirations for me that connect to ideas of womanhood and sexuality.

Really, I am simply playing with mud! Not thinking too much except about gravity, the weight of the clay, the centrifugal force of the wheel. The air trapped inside spheres.

Stretching the physical boundaries of space and material, pushing the clay until it collapses.





**At 60 you are not the same person nor artist that you were at 40. Can you share with us some of the wisdom or insight you have gained along the way?**

At 60 I have entered a renaissance, a period of enlightenment or rebirth. I am sifting through all the cultural conditioning of life and societal influences of being a “good,” polite woman. I can now take time to discover what I really care about and allow it to be okay.

The artistic wisdom that I have gained is to listen to my own voice. To be authentic. To make because I love to and need to. To embrace mistakes, try again, take time, get frustrated, hate it, love it, destroy it, make it again. Not needing to justify or explain.

Aging has allowed me to find the beauty in all aspects of nature, in its growth and decay. Beauty is not only in the perfectly asymmetrical flower, but also in the putrefying leaves or murky swamp or decaying carcass. And it’s in the Venus of Willendorf’s folds of flesh.

I identify with the concept of the Golem from Jewish folklore—the anthropomorphic being made of mud or clay that can be good or evil, male or female. Most often the Golem mutates into a terrifying monster. A wonderful monster.

**Would you speak to the significance of the ever-present vessel in your practice?**

I am inspired by the perfect proportions of ancient vessels as in the Minoan pottery from Crete (2,000 - 1,500 BC), their naturalistic and flowing shapes painted with octopus tentacles reaching around the forms; and Japanese Jōmon funerary bowls (3,500 - 2,500 BC) with their swirling, dynamic rims; and Japanese Haniwa—ritualistic terracotta figures (2,000 - 5,000 AD).

The vessel is a body. It often has a bulbous belly, a foot, a neck, arms. The vessel holds water or air. It has an inside and outside. A function.

I grappled with the concept of function for many years. My background in industrial design trained me to design objects that have a specific use—a chair to sit in, a kettle to boil water, etc. These are objects used by people so there is a human interface to be considered in design.





My first works in clay were functional—cups, bowls, vases—vessels. All conforming to the notion of being used. They were lightweight, perfectly hollow; they had handles that fit the hand, rims that were easy to drink from and didn't spill.

A breakthrough in my practice was to move away from the idea of function. The work is my body, torso, fingers, elbows, chin. The work has no function; it only relates to my own self physically and psychologically. I have released myself of all the previous boundaries, yet there is still a vessel, which is a body.

One of the questions I have been exploring in the studio is if I close a form is it still a vessel? When I close the form it is finished in a sense. There is air swirling around it, but the air inside is trapped. I can make holes for the air to escape. When I leave a form open there seems to be never-ending possibilities. The inside, the outside, the flow of space, of being and not being. I am now making vessels from vessels. From thrown spheres and cylinders. Not cutting them away to be hollow, but allowing the form to grow from these shapes, unfettered.

**Are there other specific moments, turning points or breakthroughs you have experienced that have had a significant impact in your development as an artist?**

I started working in clay when I was 27, taking night courses at Greenwich House Pottery. Little did I know I would become obsessed with the material and processes. A turning point occurred some years later in 1997, when I participated in a week-long workshop organized by Janet Mansfield (the wood firing potter and publisher of the magazine *Ceramics: Art and Perception*). The workshop was held on her approximately 1,000 acre property, which had been an old sheep station. It was and still is located in the dry and remote countryside of Gulgong in New South Wales. Janet had invited several artists from all over the world to make site-specific sculptures that would dot the landscape. I worked with the Danish artists, Nina Hole and Jorgen Hansen, building a 15-20 foot tower out of specially formed clay bricks that we made. We created a firebox underneath the tower. The sculpture became the kiln when we fired it overnight and covered it with a fireproof fibre blanket. In the early morning, we unwrapped the tower to reveal a smoldering and scorched tower—true to all the elements of



the earth and fire. After my experiences in Gulgong, I felt anything was possible! From that moment on, I began to work on large-scale vessel forms made from coils, painting them with calligraphic gestures using engobes mixed with elements and minerals like chrome, manganese, and rutile.

Another influential person is the photographer Janelle Lynch who I met while taking classes at the International Center of Photography. We have been talking together for over a decade now, and during that time she has taught me to slow down, look, listen, feel. Find the emotion in creativity. Listen to my own voice.

Then, in 2019, I met you Tony, and spent a glorious summer as an artist-in-residence at California State University Long Beach doing whatever I wanted! Using tons of clay, making huge pieces, firing in enormous kilns. Again, I was working with coils, but this time pushing the clay with my fingers and body, creating a new aesthetic and language. I pushed the clay to its extremes—letting it tear—squishing it and kicking it, embracing it as in a dance. After the residency, I returned to New York with renewed enthusiasm and a sense of liberation.

#### **What is it that your work celebrates?**

My work celebrates a sense of discovery and liberation, joy, anger, love, hate, revulsion, horror, beauty, birth, death, transformation, the natural world (earth, water, fire, air), physics, sex, freedom. Life.

Clay is a humble material but also incredibly complex. It goes through radical transformations, from wet earth to a final fired glazed work. The clay when wet can collapse into a heap or it can slump when fired in the kiln. Part of my discovery is embracing these challenges. While it can be frustrating, there is also a feeling of abandon, freedom, and joy in the making, which I hope can be seen and felt in my work.







*Untitled*, 2020 Stoneware with glaze 24" H x 23" W x 25" D





*Untitled*, 2021 Stoneware with glaze 34" H x 18" W x 19" D



*Untitled*, 2020 Stoneware with glaze 29" H x 17" W x 21" D











*Untitled, 2021 Stoneware with glaze 14" H x 15" W x 14" D*





*Untitled*, 2020 Stoneware with glaze 23" H x 15" W x 18.5" D



*Untitled*, 2020 Stoneware with glaze 34" H x 20.5" W x 19" D







*Untitled*, 2021 Stoneware with glaze 13.5" H x 17" W x 17" D



*Untitled, 2021 Stoneware with glaze 13.5" H x 17" W x 17" D*









*Untitled*, 2021 Stoneware with glaze 18" H x 14" W x 15" D



*Untitled, 2020 Stoneware with glaze 32" H x 16" W x 16" D*







**DONNA GREEN**

Australian, b. 1960

Lives and works in New York, NY

EDUCATION

1980-1984

Sydney College of the Arts, Bachelor of Arts, Industrial Design

1986-1988

The New School, New York, NY

1995

Workshop, "Fire Up" with Janet Mansfield, Gulgong, NSW

1997

The National Art School, Sydney, NSW

2000

The Handbuilt Vessel with John Gill at The Anderson Ranch, Snowmass, CO

2011

Workshop with Chris Gustin, David Pinto and Doug Casebeer at The Goodhope Plantation, Jamaica

2017-2018

New York Studio School of Drawing Painting and Sculpture, New York, NY

2018

The Vessel as Metaphor with Tony Marsh at The Anderson Ranch, Snowmass, CO

RESIDENCIES

2019

Artist Fellowship, Greenwich House Pottery, New York, NY

Resident Artist, California State University Long Beach Contemporary Ceramics Center

EXHIBITIONS

2021

Stone, Green, Watson: Contemporary Ceramics, Utopia Art Sydney, NSW

2020

Fog Design + Art, Hostler Burrows, San Francisco, CA

2019

Design Miami, Hostler Burrows, Miami, FL

2020

Jane Hartsook Gallery, New York, NY

“Form”, Utopia Art Sydney

2019

“Sydney Contemporary 2019”, Carriageworks. Utopia Art Sydney, NSW Dobrinka Salzman Gallery, New York, NY

“Clay 5”, Utopia Art Sydney, NSW

Sculpture Space, Long Island City, NY

2018

“RE:CONSTRUCTION”, McClain Gallery, Houston, Texas “Sydney Contemporary 2018”, Carriageworks, Sydney, NSW

“Clay 4”, Utopia Art Sydney, NSW

“The Small Works”, Malia Mills and Folioeast, East Hampton, New York Hampton Good Design, Wainscott, NY

Kimcherova Gallery, New York, New York Sculpture Space, Long Island City, NY

2017

“Sydney Contemporary 2017”, Carriageworks, Sydney, NSW

“Museum III”, Utopia Art Sydney, NSW

“Alternative Museum”, Utopia Art Sydney, NSW

“Winter Salon”, Malia Mills, East Hampton, NY

2016

“Clay 3”, Utopia Art Sydney, NSW

“Weird Ceramic”, Gippsland Art Gallery, Sale, VIC

“The Last Hurrah”, Utopia Art Sydney, NSW

2015

“Vessels”, McClain Gallery, Houston, TX

“Clay 2”, Utopia Art Sydney, NSW

“Collectible”, Utopia Art Sydney, NSW

2013

“Vessels”, Storefront Gallery at Greenwich House, New York, NY

2012

“Home”, Umbrella Arts, New York, NY

2009

“Please Handle the Pots”, Legge Gallery, Sydney, NSW

1997

“Ceramics”, Ray Hughes Gallery, Sydney, NSW

PUBLIC COLLECTION

Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, Sydney, NSW

PUBLICATIONS

“Hidden in Plain Sight,” Architectural Digest, March 15, 2018

“A Bold All Red Bouquet...”, The Wall Street Journal, 22 December 2016

“Donna Green: Clay 2,” Art and Australia, February, 2015

“A De Kooning Inspired Flower Arrangement,” The Wall Street Journal, May 30, 2014

“Coiled Pots,” Ceramics Technical, No. 5, 1997, Sydney, NSW



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