



# Paradox in Form

Vivian Goldstein explores the interrelationship of material and transcendent realities in the sculptures of Tony Moore.

*If it is not paradox, it is not truth. Suzuki Roshi*

For almost forty years painter and sculptor Tony Moore has passionately explored the profound mysteries and paradoxes of human experience. From the beginning he was motivated by the awareness that we are simultaneously transcendent beings in human form and human beings who are informed by the non-physical dimension. This seeming duality has been the subject of human expression throughout the millennia. As part of this continuum, Moore has evolved creatively, producing ever more balanced and powerful objects expressing the interplay of these two coexistent realms. Within different modalities of material and form he continues to pursue this fundamental interrelationship with increasing purpose.

**APPARENT DICHOTOMIES** Most recently, Moore has focused on making a range of sculptures in wood-fired clay that address this issue in ever more powerful and direct ways. Some of these works are singular objects such as his 'helmets' (*To What End*, 2004) or 'shrines' (*Defender of the Spirit*, 2004), while others are aggregates of smaller elements that show evolution or decay from an archetypal form such as a church or fortress (*Smoke Screen*, 2005 and *Trophy*, 2005). Some are

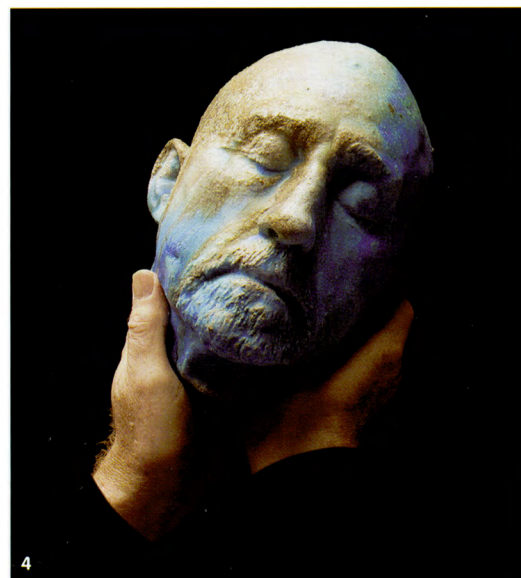
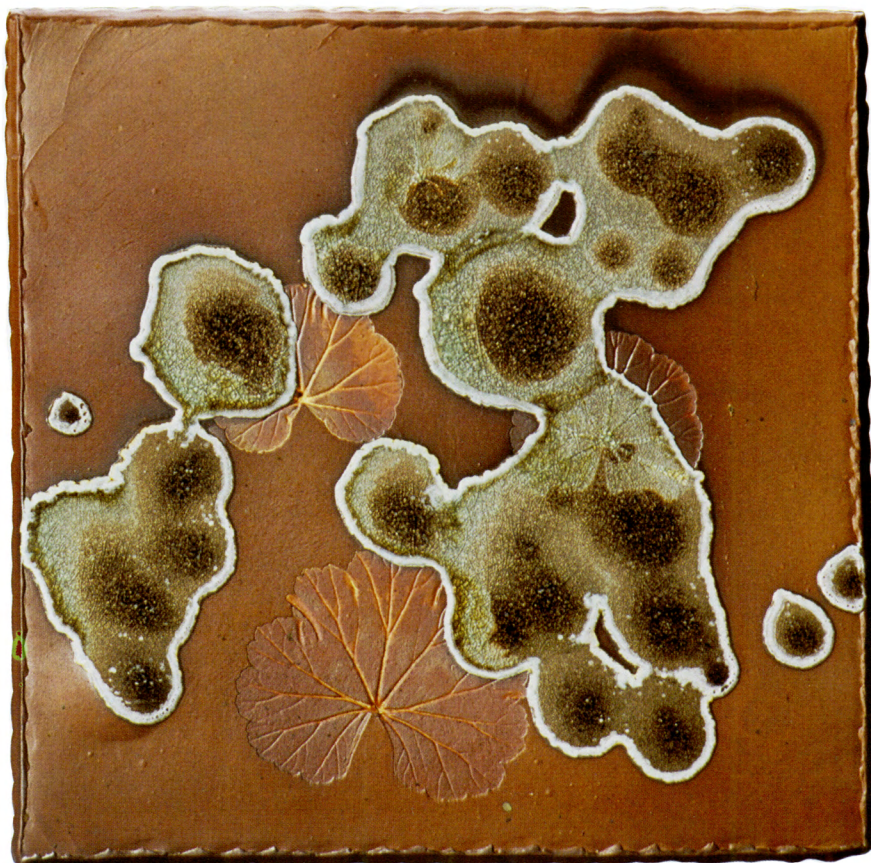
displayed in grid format on the wall while others are large-scale installations placed on the floor. Moore has further integrated his painterly sensibility in clay tiles (*Fire Paintings*), which not only carry physical imprints of botanicals but also convey a sense of 'deep space' that is far more expansive and luminous than the planar qualities of the object itself.

One theme that pervades this disparate work is the tension between the manifested world in contrast with the liminal and ephemeral sphere. Another is that between what is life enhancing and what is destructive to living entities. Moore asks us to confront these dichotomies. For example, in the large-scale installation *Who Knows Why?* (2006) we see approximately 150 body casts of the artist's head, half of which are glazed blue and amassed within a vertical stack of six rusted steel cages while the remainders are unglazed and distributed on the floor.

Looking at huddled masses of heads imprisoned in cages creates a sense of claustrophobia and suggests a mass grave, but the serenity of the visages themselves may propose that we are equally prisoners of our own mental structures and not merely the victims of those who seek to dictate how we should think and live. There is an eerie suggestion in his work that limitation itself is relative and a distortion

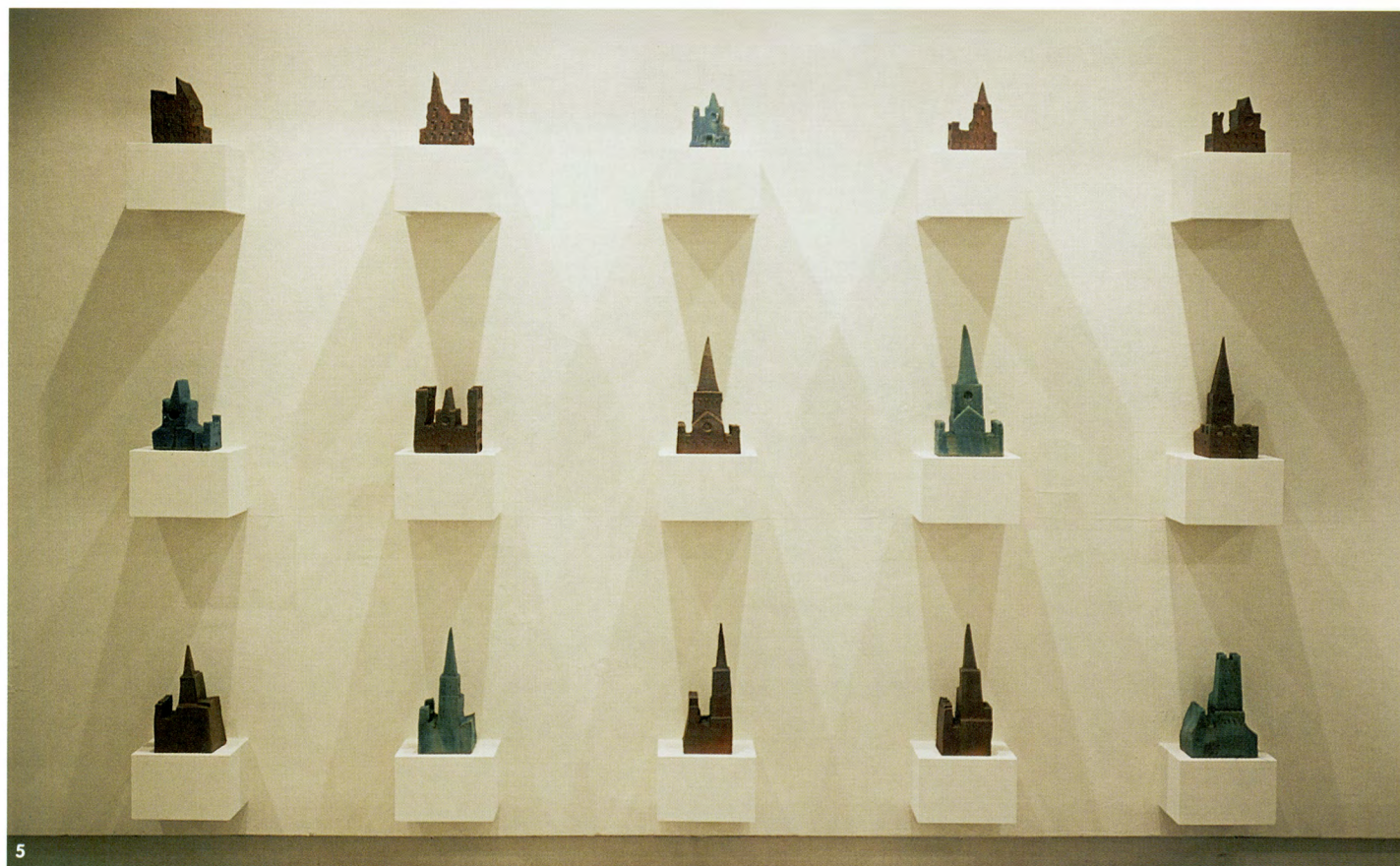


1 *In the Age of the Innocents* (detail), 60 body-cast human heads, steel, Southern Ice porcelain, 2007, L203cm 2 *Who Knows Why?*, 150 body-cast human heads, steel, architectural stoneware, barium glaze, 2006, H213cm max 3 *Fire Painting*, 2006, W27cm 4 *Who Knows Why?* (detail)





5 *Smoke Screen* (a work in 15 parts),  
barium glaze, 2005, W274cm 6 *To What  
End*, 2004, H62cm 7 *Defender of the  
Spirit*, 2004, H43cm 8 *Trophy* (a work in 15  
parts, detail) 9 *Fire Painting*, 2007, W27cm



of the truth of essential freedom, especially in referencing death masks, implying that consciousness may transcend any and all limitations inherent on this plane.

A further evolution of these ideas is seen in a more recent large-scale sculpture *In the Age of the Innocents* where approximately sixty porcelain heads, within a singular raised horizontal cage, seemingly float above the floor. The form and dimensions suggest at once a bed or a coffin and when seen together evoke a human body in repose, possibly in transition from corporeal reality to the non-material world.

The surface qualities of the heads are unique due to the vagaries of the wood-firing process itself, exposing each somewhat differently to heat, fire and ash in addition to the atmospheric variants of oxidation and reduction. Some heads glisten because the ash is fluxed at high temperature, producing a translucent glaze, while others appear marbled due the high vitrification of the porcelain clay (fired for four days to cone 12). Beneath the surface is yet another layer in which there is an intricacy of detail, a matrix of differentiated colours, shapes and forms, creating interest in the object's deeper aspects.

Further, the artist has deliberately incised a small, precise elliptical mark into the brow of several of the heads. These could appear as both wounds and apertures into the mind/consciousness of the





**Tony Moore** is represented in international museum collections including the Guggenheim Museum and Brooklyn Museum, USA and the Yorkshire Museum and Derby Museum, UK. He is the recipient of a Louis Comfort Tiffany Award and MFA from Yale University. The British-American

sculptor and painter resides in the Hudson Valley near Cold Spring, New York State  
**Email** [tonymoore@optonline.net](mailto:tonymoore@optonline.net)  
**Web** [www.tonymooreart.com](http://www.tonymooreart.com)  
**Vivian Goldstein LCSW** maintains a private practice in New York City. She frequently writes on art, spirituality and culture



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resting forms. In counterpoint are more random coarse marks of scarification, which are consequences of the actual moulding and firing process. Yet, one cannot help being struck by the sensuous undulation of the overall contour of the unified mass and the miraculous sense of its luminescence. There is a vitality and aliveness in this work despite the fact that the forms seem to be inert, asleep or dead. The interplay of all of these elements creates a dynamic dialogue between materiality and transcendence.

Tony Moore's work does not so much present a world view as reveal a need for the artist, as well as for all people, to take note of the paradoxes of mind and body, individual and social group, conventional reality and spiritual possibility. Tony Moore invites us to first immerse ourselves in the truth of things as they are and then to reach beyond the 'bars of our cages' to the boundless and unlimited possibility that awaits fulfillment of our human potential. 