

TONY MOORE

SCULPTURE



Art as a Process of Discovery: The Singular Aesthetic of Tony Moore

Robert C. Morgan

The ceramic sculpture of Tony Moore represents a point of view that moves between inspiration, originality, force of will, and a dire commitment to form. Throughout his perpetual, on-going involvement as an artist, Moore understands form as an intuitive resolution where the imagination comes in contact with materiality in an indeterminate way. In a recent work, such as *Collector's Cabinet* (2016), the use of intuition to achieve form is clearly shown through the artist's embedding of "stones" and shards of glass in clay. These elements will eventually be transformed in the glazing process after they are placed inside a wood-fired kiln.

Moore's manner of work suggests a type of bricolage in which the disparate shapes and colors come together in a way that communicates a heightened emotional feeling. More specifically, the connection between Moore's use of chance operations in relation to form happens in an instant, a fraction of time during which the artist is still in the throes of manipulating the clay. Suddenly the rugged, earth-bound slabs begin to come alive. Their commonplace appearance is transformed into a spiritual allegory filled with haptic energy. The transition moves from the heat of the cauldron into the visual environment of everyday life.

Related works, such as *Move Upon the Waters* and *Face of the Deep* (also 2016), become symbolic forms in which traces of objects, placed on shelves, suggest ties from the past that have influenced the present. These works, pulled from a recent firing, recall porcelain elements found in *Collector's Cabinet*, additions that go beyond the limits of automatized production. Given the artist's vast range of lyrically sensitive subject matter, one may discover the paradox between the material and spiritual world. In doing so, his forms manage to reveal both a visceral and unique intellectual vitality. Rather than conceptualizing the way he chooses to work, Moore allows himself to become involved with the tactility of the medium. In the process of pounding, cutting, and combining lumps of clay, he holds out for the moment of unconscious effect, the unknown discovery that often lingers beneath the material surface. He hopes to find just what he is seeking – the magical element needed to complete

Cover Art

Tony Moore
Soul Of The Servant (detail) 2015
17" x 22 3/4" x 4 1/2", wood-fired ceramic, glass

the finished piece – even before the elusive wonder of the object emerges from his Japanese-style Anagama-Noborigama wood-fire kiln.

I have been aware of Moore's presence as an artist and his synchronic methods of work emanating from the gaping mouths of enormous crucibles for more than a decade. During this period of time the artist has managed to develop a serious quantity of remarkable forms. In addition, I have found Moore's awareness of art-in-general uncanny in breadth and sophistication. Not only is he unique and exemplary by technical standards, but he further reveals a visually astute thought process – what some read as spirituality or transcendence – that includes attention and alertness to the clay medium in which he works.

I say this based on my understanding of his arrival into the field of ceramics after paying his dues as a sculptor and painter in his early career. What has evolved at the current stage of the artist's resonant career is integral to all he has learned previously working in numerous studios of fine art. This, among other personal incidents and chance situations, brought him to a point where he began reorienting his work by adapting himself to the infinite and inventive possibilities that became available to him through the medium of ceramics. This came in the mid to late 1990s after having worked as an artist for more than a quarter century.

Born and raised in England, Moore attended the Cardiff College of Art in Wales before coming to the United States in 1971 to enter the MFA graduate sculpture program at Yale. His work is now in several important collections including the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, the Brooklyn Museum of Art, the Greenville Museum of Art (North Carolina), and the Yorkshire Museum and Derby Museum, both in the United Kingdom. His knowledge of art is considerable. Moore's extraordinary insight suggests the work of a lyrical metaphysician, a seeker of his own relative truth in response to the human condition that exists in our global environment from one day to the next. His sensitivity as an artist is deeply involved – tuned-in, shall we say – to how life manages to go on despite the corruption and travails, the rampant disease and privations, the natural and human disasters which most of the world's population is forced to endure.

In this sense, Moore is an artist/humanist whose ceramic sculpture, often in the form of tombs or ancient architecture, such as *Flower of the Godchild* and *Journey of the Ferryman* (both 2015), metaphorically defines the state in which human beings live their lives on planet Earth today. These works show the hand of a diligent, material-based artist, given to both precision and coincidence as

he works. What he has learned and acquired over the years as a sculptor and painter in his early years is that, through persistence, one may discover new forms that do not appear readily apparent at the outset. An example would be a recent series of ceramic works, called *Fragments* (2013-2016). These forms are derived from sections of wet clay, kneaded and beaten into large slabs, which have been cut-off and pushed aside, only to be transformed into small-scale works that contain intrinsically poetic abstract elements.

Occasionally, a representational form will come into view, such as *House on the Rock* (2015), which later suggested to Moore a train lookout tower near the rural village where he grew up. Two works from the following year (2016) include, *Vigil*, which reveals symmetrical wing-like forms heroically spreading out from a central core, and *Banner*, an elegant singular wing that possibly relates to the flag of a warrior horseman as portrayed in Japanese samurai films.

At the moment, there are three mediumistic approaches in which the artist works. There are the previously cited "fragments" and "fire paintings." In addition to these, are his highly meditative and consciously provocative sculptural forms, all built by hand and heated at high temperature to 2,350 Fahrenheit in his wood-fired kiln (where for almost twenty years he has worked in seclusion in the mountain woodlands of the Hudson Highlands, New York). An important example of his sculpture from a decade ago, *Who Knows Why?* (2006), includes 150 body-cast heads (of his own) encased within and around a tower of six steel racks or cages, stacked in a vertical progression. My initial reference upon seeing this work was comparable to the "stacks" of the Minimalist Donald Judd from the late 1960s, which appear neutral and architectonic when compared with the more explicit humanist content found in Moore's work.

In contrast, the press-molded clay heads stacked within the cages are covered with a mysterious blue glaze, while the accompanying heads situated on the floor are unglazed. Moore's sculptural installation offers a considerably different point of reference from the work of Judd. In *Who Knows Why?* the repetition of the artist's facial life-size physiognomy suggests autosymbolic meaning, in other words, meaning that is self-referential. Even so, the array of heads gives us a sense of ourselves even as the character and expression of the face belongs to the artist. This paradoxical affect conflates the sordid dehumanized aspect in which human heads are displaced in racks with those neatly lined up on the floor. In doing so, the artist augments the feeling of a programmed society in which people are transformed into statistics, similar in feeling to Jasper Johns' *Target with Four Faces* (1965), rather than being understood as unique individuals with emotional and corporeal needs.

Despite the lofty, often majestic appearance apparent in sculpture such as *Portal and Journey of the Ferryman* (2015), both works testify as to the artist's durable understanding of frontality as a kind of architectural façade that provokes an analysis of the elements housed within and the support structure that gives further credibility to why these forms exist and how they are linked to one another. This is carried further in two-dimensional "fire paintings," especially in the early cruciform works from 2004-10 and later in the nature paintings from 2010-14. In each case, Moore returns to his desire to make paintings that occupied a good deal of his attention from the late 1970s until the mid 1990s. In the "fire paintings," his grasp of flat spatial form is reiterated and re-contextualized with regards to how imagery, both abstract and concrete representation, can function on a smaller scale and in relation to a vastly different medium. While painting on canvas and glazing on clay are technically different from one another, they still share the touch of the hand and a clarity of understanding as to surface composition.

As suggested at the outset, Tony Moore's work for more than two decades has focused on the artist's ability to take what he learned from his early work as a sculptor and painter and to transpose it in relation to the medium of ceramics. To this he might respond: "Yes, but there is more to it than that." And this is perfectly correct. The preceding remarks can only serve as a summary of what Moore's thoroughly involved and precision-oriented art is essentially putting forth. While others have remarked on his desire to bring his ceramic sculpture into some kind of transcendent outset, I have – perhaps wisely – not attempted to define this, even as there is little doubt that Moore thinks, feels, and works in this manner. Moreover, I would give emphasis to each viewer's personal experience with the artist's works, and to further suggest that such an experience can only be fully realized by seeing the actual physical works of art in real time and space.

Robert C. Morgan is a distinguished art critic, scholar, and artist. He holds an MFA degree in sculpture and a Ph.D. in aesthetics and art history. Author of numerous essays, reviews, and books on contemporary art and criticism, Dr. Morgan has been translated into over twenty languages. He was inducted into the European Academy of Sciences and Arts (Salzburg) in 2011, and was given the first Arcale award in International Art Criticism in Salamanca (Spain) in 1999. He is a board member for Art Omi International and Professor Emeritus in Art History at the Rochester Institute of Technology.

TONY MOORE

Biography

Tony Moore is an English-American sculptor and painter represented in international museum collections including the Guggenheim Museum, Brooklyn Museum and Greenville Museum, US, and the Yorkshire Museum and Derby Museum, UK.

He received a MFA in Sculpture from Yale University, an Art Teaching Certificate from Cardiff University and BFA from Cardiff College of Art. He is the recipient of prestigious awards, including a Louis Comfort Tiffany Award, CAPS Grant and Sally and Milton Avery Fellowship.

In 1998, after 25 years of residing and maintaining a studio in New York City, Moore relocated his home and studio to the scenic Hudson River Valley near Cold Spring, Putnam County, NY (50 miles north of NYC) where on a mountain top property he built a spacious studio, gallery and Japanese style Anagama-Noborigama wood-fire kiln. His unique ceramic sculptures are fired in the kiln four times a year in weeklong communal events.

Artist Statement

My work is concerned with the relationship of humanity and nature. I conceive of an expanded concept of "Nature" as embodying all existence, both the seen and unseen, socio-political events, daily occurrences, as well as private intuitions that are made concrete through creative action. My objects are places of remembrance where multiplicities of associations take place. Their function is that of contemplation and the transmission of the energy contained within them.

Through additive and subtractive manipulation, the sculptures evolve to where a combination of vision and intent project a final resolution. This process is one of discovery where the known (history) and intuition come in to play. One enters in to the dialogue of energies brought into being within a specific moment of time. Most recently these have been concerned with issues of the human condition. Often the resultant forms are discovered as though they were pre-existent, and my own actions are simply to reveal their inherent truth.

www.TonyMooreArt.com



Collector's Cabinet 2016
16" x 21 3/4" x 6", wood-fired ceramic, porcelain, glass



Move Upon The Waters 2016
15 1/2" x 22" x 5", wood-fired ceramic, porcelain, glass

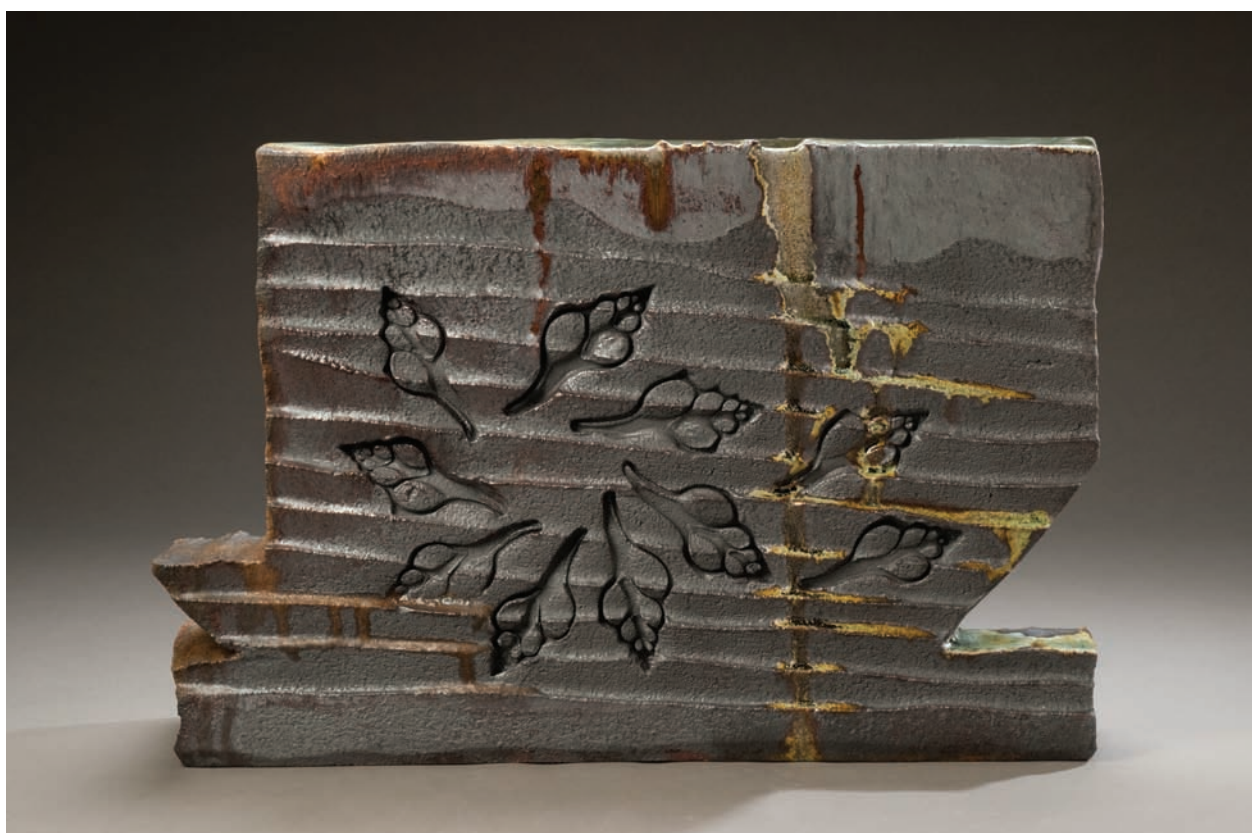
This Time Around 2015
18 1/2" x 22 1/4" x 7", wood-fired ceramic, glass



Coomaraswamy's Bridge 2013
14 1/2" x 22" x 5 1/2", wood-fired ceramic, glass



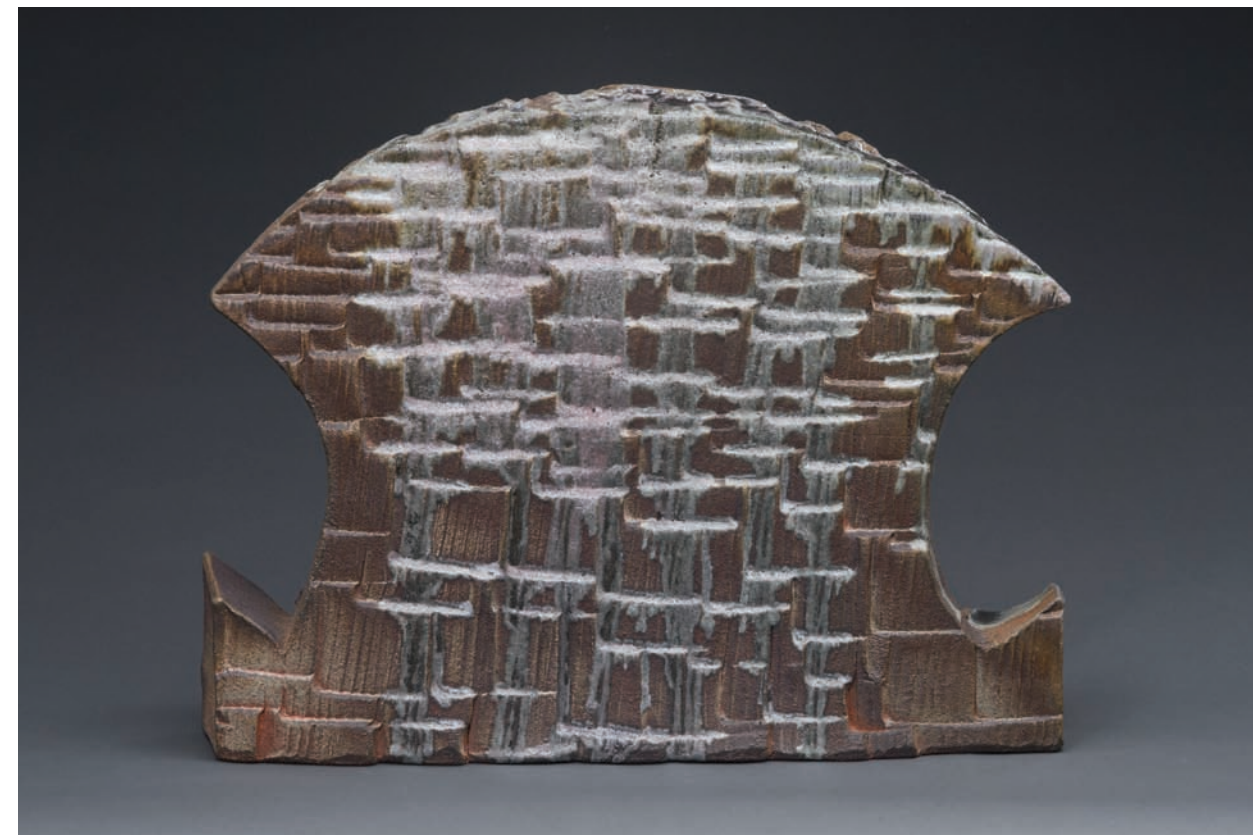
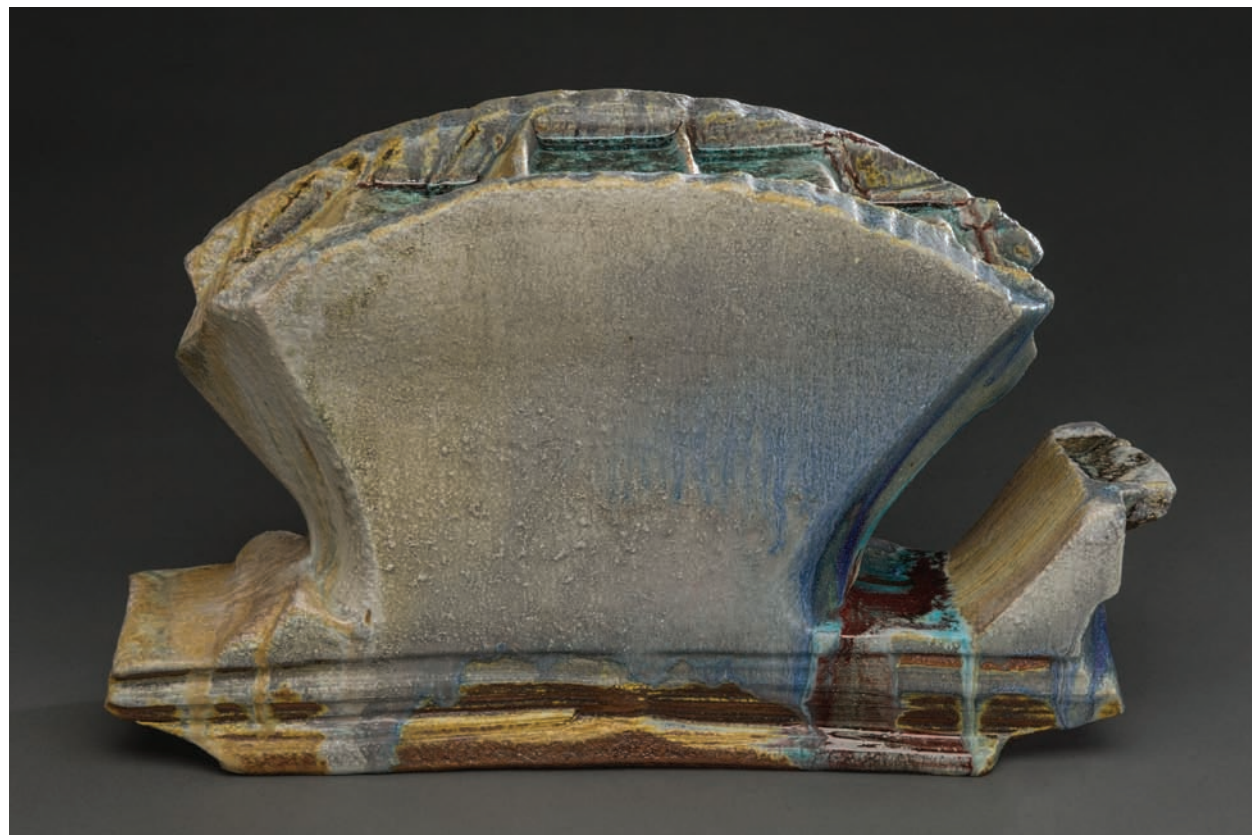
Face Of The Deep 2016
15" x 21" x 7", wood-fired ceramic, porcelain, glass





Portal 2015
15 3/4" x 22" x 5 1/2", wood-fired ceramic, glass

Flower Of The Godchild 2015
15 3/4" x 22" x 5 1/2", wood-fired ceramic, glass



Journey Of The Ferryman 2015
15" x 24" x 6 1/2", wood-fired ceramic, glass

Soul Of The Servant 2015
17" x 22 3/4" x 4 1/2", wood-fired ceramic, glass



Banner 2016
9 1/2" x 7 1/4" x 3 1/2", wood-fired ceramic, glass

Vigil 2016
10" x 9 3/4" x 3 1/2", wood-fired ceramic



Cenotaph 2016
5 1/2" x 8" x 3 3/4", wood-fired ceramic, porcelain, glass

Aftermath: June 12th 2016
7" x 8" x 6 1/2", wood-fired ceramic, porcelain, glass



Will to Freedom 2016
9" x 11" x 6 1/2", wood-fired ceramic, porcelain, glass



We Thought We Were Gods 2016
12 1/2" x 7 1/2" x 5 1/4", wood-fired ceramic, porcelain, glass



House On The Rock 2015
8 3/4" x 12 1/2" x 4 1/2", wood-fired ceramic, glass



Earth And Sky 2010
14" x 15 1/2" x 17 1/2", wood-fired ceramic, glass



Earth And Sky (detail) 2010
14" x 15 1/2" x 17 1/2", wood-fired ceramic, glass



Earth And Sky (detail) 2010
14" x 15 1/2" x 17 1/2", wood-fired ceramic, glass

"Tony Moore has passionately explored the profound mysteries and paradoxes of human experience, as both a painter and sculptor, for almost 40 years. 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."

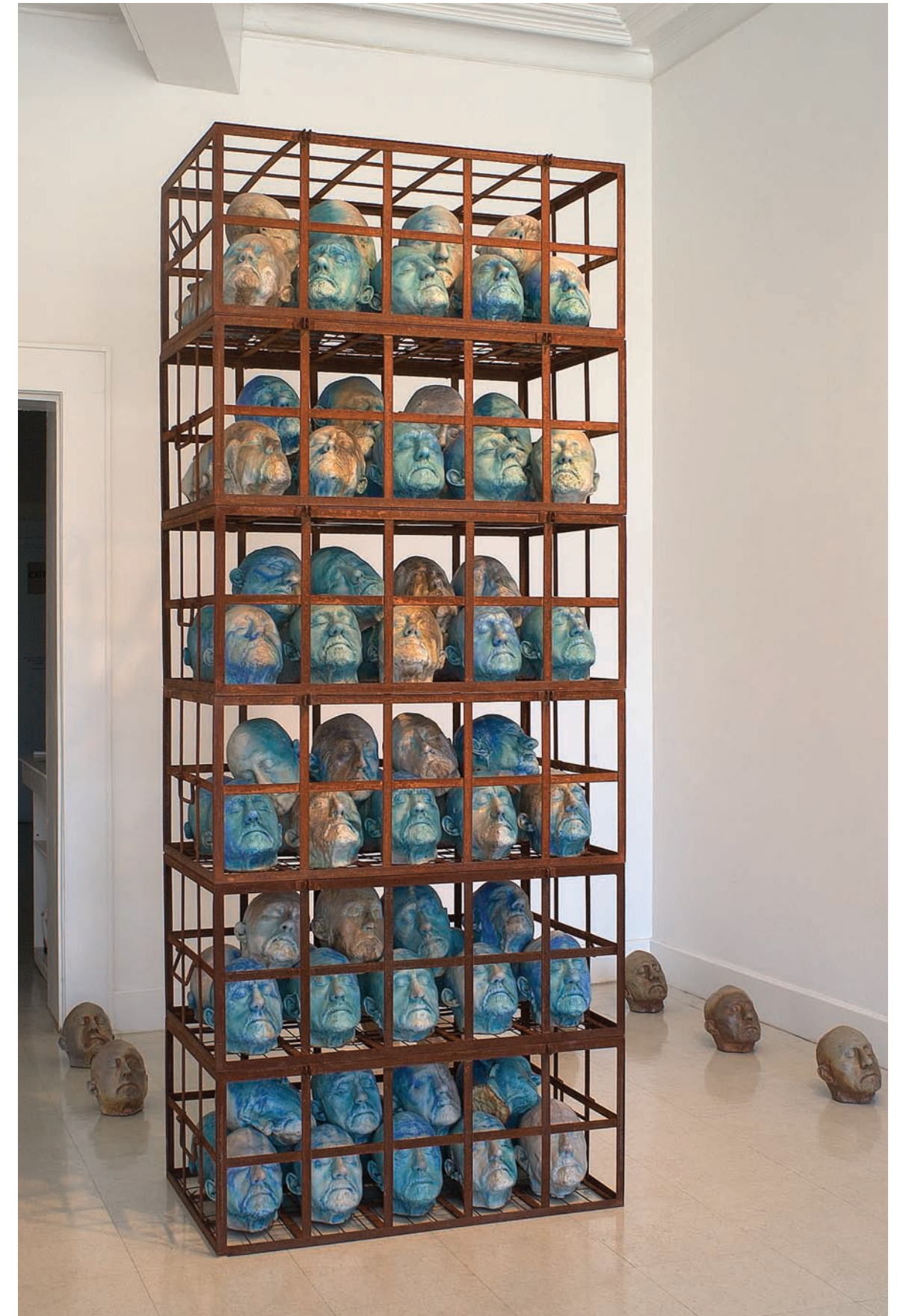
Vivian Goldstein LCSW maintains a private practice in New York City and frequently writes on art, spirituality and culture. Excerpt from "Paradox in Form", *Ceramic Review*, UK and "Tony Moore Sculpture: The Embodiment of Spirit in Form", *New Ceramics/Neue Keramik*, Germany.



Who Knows Why? 2006
84" x 300 sq. ft. size variable, wood-fired ceramic, steel

"This artist's remarkable work is at once heroic and confrontational, elegantly and delicately detailed, minimalist and substantial. It does not so much present a world view, as expose the need for all people to take note of the paradoxes of mind and body, individual and social group, conventional reality and spiritual possibility. Drawing on spiritual tradition, the idea of "radical acceptance", the courage to be with things exactly as they are, is the essential wisdom."

Vivian Goldstein LCSW maintains a private practice in New York City and frequently writes on art, spirituality and culture. Excerpt from "Paradox in Form", *Ceramic Review*, UK and "Tony Moore Sculpture: The Embodiment of Spirit in Form", *New Ceramics/Neue Keramik*, Germany.



Who Knows Why? (detail) 2006
84" x 300 sq. ft. size variable, wood-fired ceramic, steel



Call And Release 2007-10
60" x 80" x 32", wood-fired porcelain, steel



Smoke Screen (15 parts/detail) 2005
72" x 108" x 9", wood-fired ceramic, plywood shelves



Smoke Screen (15 parts) 2005
72" x 108" x 9", wood-fired ceramic, plywood shelves

"Lyricist in a time of war, Moore offers both the loveliest of studies in quiet clay and something like the portrait of blind militarism. Moore is able, both as a witness to war and as a poet who cares for small but telling things. The poet looks at how fire moves across clay surfaces and deposits marks, how the impress of a leaf before the firing leaves behind a fossil-like, detailed image, how a strangely eloquent Sign of the Cross can emerge from a complex technical sequence of superposed tiles, clay slip, and the heat of an extended, six-day kiln firing."

"In "Meditation" one comes upon Moore's lyricism, free of our conflicted times and exercising itself in the realm he knows to be his home ground: clay and the wood-fired kiln."

Roger Lipsey PHD writes on a wide range of topics from art history and criticism to spirituality. His book, "The Spiritual in Twentieth-Century Art" (1988), remains in print with Dover Books. Excerpt from "Tony Moore: Lyricist in a Time of War", Van Brunt Gallery exhibition brochure and *Ceramics Monthly*.



The Gathering 2004
36" x 22 1/2" x 2 3/4", wood-fired ceramic, stone inclusions



Fire Painting #3.4.13 2013 (top image) / Fire Painting #11.7.13 2013 (bottom image)
15" x 22 1/2" x 2 1/2", wood-fired ceramic, stone inclusions

Fire Painting #5.9.13 2013 (top image) / Fire Painting #7.9.13 2013 (bottom image)
15" x 22 1/2" x 2 1/2", wood-fired ceramic, stone inclusions



Fire Painting #52.7.08 2008 (top image) / Fire Painting #61.7.08 2008 (bottom image)
11" x 11" x 1/2", wood-fired ceramic

Fire Painting: Meditation 2006 (top image) / Fire Painting: Botanicals And Cross 2004 (bottom image)
11" x 11" x 1/2", wood-fired ceramic



Tony Moore firing his Anagama-Noborigama wood-fire kiln, Cold Spring, NY

Photo: Tom Loggia

www.TonyMooreArt.com
East Mountain Studio Press
78 Trout Brook Road
Cold Spring, NY 10516
845 265 3097

Essay Robert C. Morgan

Photography On Location & Howard Goodman

Printing Grey Printing

