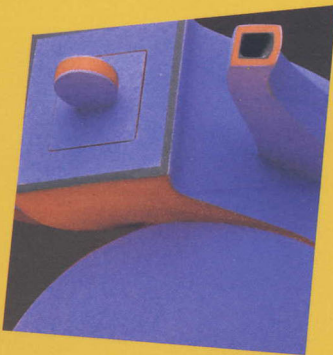
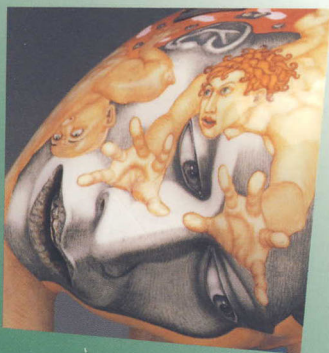
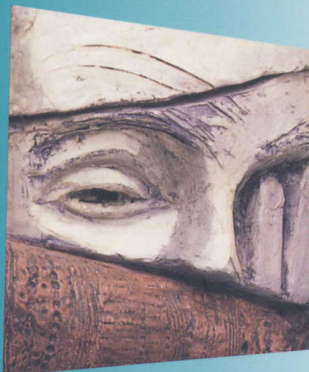
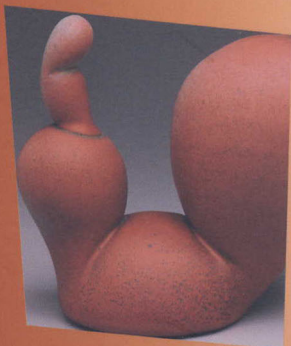
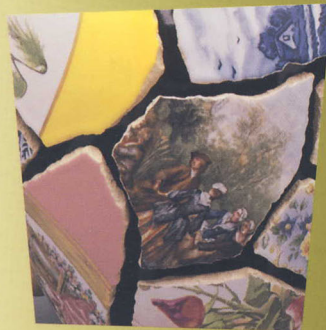
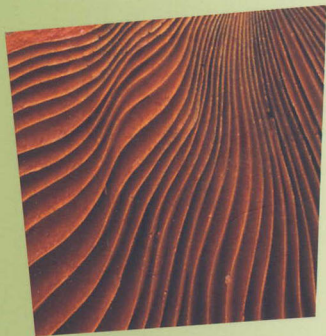


Allan Chasanoff CERAMIC Collection



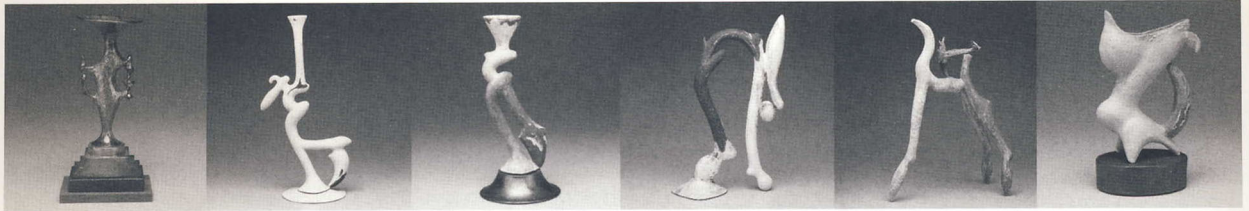


Fig. 4. Marvin Sweet, *l to r: Modern Antiquity #4, Earthbird, Animistic Vessel, Naima, Guardian of Memory, Animistic Pitcher.*

becomes a meditation on what it means to be eaten. His dark tableaux of nature's food chain compare to the *Garden of Eden Tureen* (1992) in which consumption of the spirit is illustrated. Nakamura likewise portrays human failings with his apocalyptic images of jumbled chains and arrows, which challenge traditional, European decorative art motifs.

Each of these works is multifaceted and somewhat unclassifiable as a hybrid of sculpture and decorative art. Its ability to shift parameters is intellectual, whereas a physical transformation describes another group in the collection that begs the question, "Animal, vegetable, or mineral?"

The Morph Factor

By definition, *morphology* is the scientific study of form and structure, applied to animals and plants in particular. This concept can be applied to the ceramic sculptures of Vincent Burke, Gerda Spurey-Gruber, Marc Leuthold, Mary Rogers, Elspeth Owen, Peter Simpson, Angela Verdon, John Roloff, and others who work in a style of organic abstraction. These objects resemble exoskeletal remains, fossils, pods, bleached bones, and mineral encrustations. Together, they recall a cabinet of curiosities with its exotic specimens and artifacts.

At once familiar and strange, these artworks remain incomprehensible as distinct forms. Some have no obvious orientation, such as James Shrosbree's *Cast(e)*, which appears to be a head, although the neck could also be the spout of a vessel or the handle of a tool. Some deny access, like Owen's *Sealed Pot*, which presents a conundrum—what is its nature? Many of these objects look natural, not manmade.

Others, like Sheila Fournier's *Layered Bowl* or Ursula Morley Price's *Bottle*, graft culture onto nature with the application of a vessel's foot or rim to an organic structure. Such hybridization is the hallmark of Arnold Zimmerman's *Vapor* series in which "organic elements combine to suggest mechanical apparatus."⁶

Marvin Sweet's work, a favorite of Chasanoff's, best illustrates evolutionary form. The artist's six pieces comprise a lineup of purpose gone awry as vessels develop hips and shoulders, start walking, or double as three-legged creatures (fig. 4). Lacking the vessel reference of an opening, *Naima* is especially dumbfounding; it suggests the indefinable anatomy of a creature undergoing metamorphosis.

Daisy Youngblood's work suggests metamorphosis as well, but perhaps more in the realm of psychology than biology. Her *Evening Cow* retains that animal's characteristic grazing posture, but in the absence of legs, its body floats in space, giving this weighty creature an ethereal quality. Another work, *Demeter Presiding Over Impotence*, vaguely resembles an elephantine head, although it also could be a female figure, female reproductive organs, or male genitalia, as the title suggests. The piece is sufficiently blank to accommodate these shifting perceptions. Her *Goat/Heart Spouting Blood* (1979) (fig. 5) functions like a Rorschach test: first you see its head, eyes, nostrils, and horns, and then, when you read the title, the head becomes a heart and the horns become the aorta and the vena cava.

There are many variations of the metamorphic object in the Chasanoff collection. Some operate as visual puns, such as Bruce Morozko's *Board Dog Chasing Tail*, a trompe-l'oeil rendition of wooden slats popped loose by the curving structure. Others have a surrealist quality, evocative of M. C. Escher drawings and bad dreams. Bones, a shroud, and an electric chair are the macabre elements that underscore transformations in Deborah Horrell's *Bird's Nest*, Linda Kramer's *Two Chairs (Rape)*, and Mark Huff's *Pilot*. Even the most traditional art form—figurative sculpture—undergoes change as with Peter Vandenberg's *Made in Holland—Dutch Man in Window*, which has windows for eyes and a roof for a head.

To morph is to change the form or character of. *Morphing* refers to a computer graphics technique that blends one image into another.

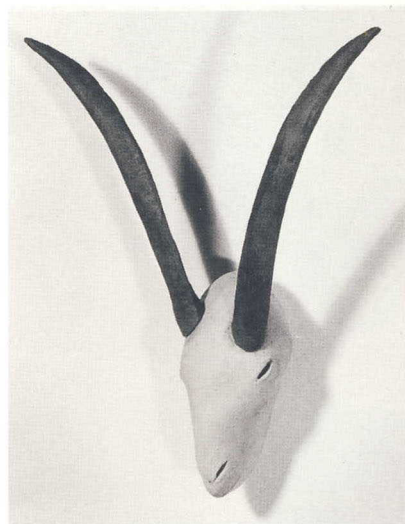


Fig. 5. Daisy Youngblood
Goat/Heart Spouting Blood 1979
Collection of John and Jane Comfort,
photo courtesy of McKee Gallery, New
York, NY.



Marvin Sweet. American, 1953–
Naima 1993
stoneware, hand built, glaze, raku fired
27.25 x 17.38 x 8"
PG1997.39.101