

MARCH 5-27, 1993
SNYDERMAN GALLERY
303 CHERRY STREET, PHILADELPHIA, PA 19106



Above: *Leveling the Feminine*, 1992, Clay, paint, 42"h x 38"l x 36"d
Cover: *World Scribe*, 1993, Clay, copper, wood, paint, 49"h x 52"l x 46"w



MITCHELL MESSINA



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The Evelyn Shapiro Foundation

P.O. Box 121
Bala Cynwyd, PA 19004
(215) 667 4284

Catalogue:

PHOTOGRAPHY BY:
Walter Colley
Rochester, N.Y.

DESIGN BY:
Barbara Sosson
Philadelphia, Pa.

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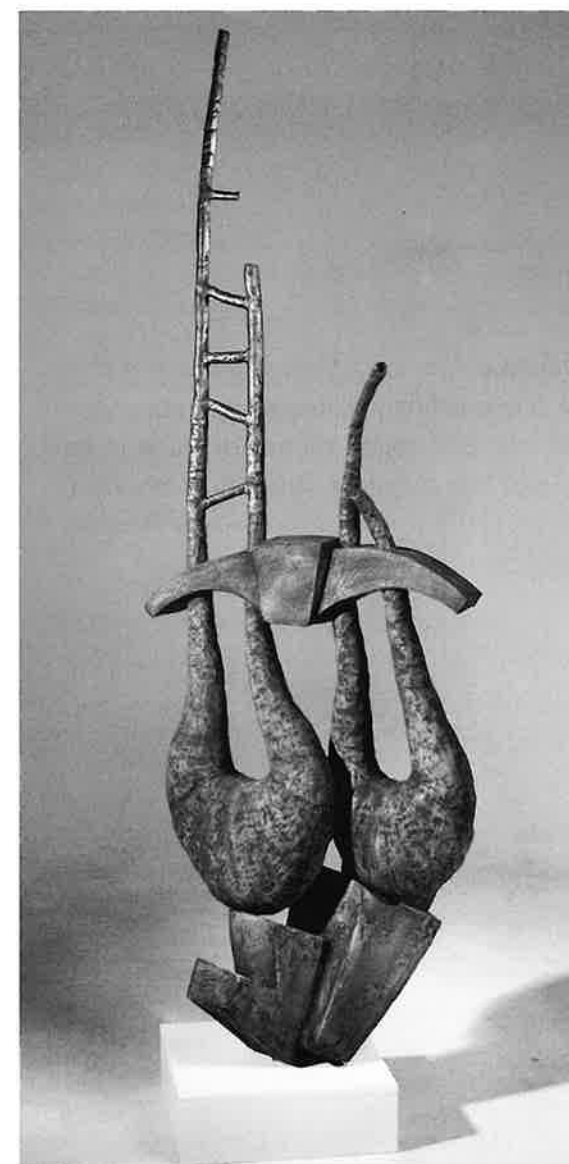
The Evelyn Shapiro Foundation is pleased to present this catalogue for the exhibition of ceramic sculpture by Mitchell Messina, the recipient of the Foundation's first annual ceramics grant. The work in this exhibition, completed under the auspices of the Foundation, together with this catalogue, is the capstone of our annual grant program, designed to assist young craftspeople in the early stages of their careers.

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I would like to thank the Members of the Foundation, whose commitment and support help make this program possible.

Stanley H. Shapiro, *President*



Mitchell Messina with Stanley Shapiro



Artist's Statement

The focus of my current work involves my curiosity with the association of parts to make unified and balanced sculptures. I create narratives assembled from clay translations of objects gathered from a number of references and sources. In my work, I attempt to recapture the unorthodox balance and disproportionate scale of forms presented by the ever-increasing urbanization of our landscape, such as industrial residue, towers, stacks, and vents. I am also fascinated with collections of objects, such as those found on flea market tables, curiosity shelves, or in history museums, the relationships the objects have with neighboring ones, and the intangible meanings that can be ascribed to them. Together, these forms serve as a rich and metaphorical vocabulary of fragments that I manipulate to comment on the paradoxical and fragile nature of the human condition.

I collect pre-industrial tools whose specialized functions, forms, and implied history preserve and enlarge what might be called a new presentation of the history of our country from the point of view of the work of human hands. My selection of imagery, based on tools and the re-presenting of them in clay sculptures made by hand, is intended to look back from the present to the past—archaeology turned upside down.

Left: *Harnessed*, 1993, Clay, paint, 105" h x 37" l x 16" w

Mitchell Messina's recent sculpture achieves a rare contribution to contemporary ceramics:

Each work is a complex of transformed, yet gradually familiar objects in stacked juxtapositions.

Each form is in a dissonant relationship to others and is different in kind.

All elements carry color not associated with their familiar role or character.

In his enjoyment of serious mimicry, Messina pursues an unusual view of the role of clay in his sculpture. While clay is the basic material, it is kept firmly as messenger rather than message, as is so often the case. His prototypical and altered forms are made to be arranged in precarious balances and axial tensions. This transforms them from innocent, standby implements into protagonists caught in interludes of pause, a scrambled harmony with gravity that is witty, serious, and unfettered.

Equilibrium is commonly maintained in vertical works by branching extensions or by thin-walled volumes in stages. Messina ingeniously shifts weights rather than piling them up, using their points of contact to continue lines of force through the interdependent, divergent volumes and planes, moving the viewer's gaze with them.

The way color is used in this work is critical to its mood, which is somewhere between the armillary sphere and the surrealistic, between the tool-like or programmatic and the oneiric. The colors are more suggestive of dream or theater than of "real life." Their dry, flat thinness and lack of complexity dovetail with the scored, scratched, dragged surfaces of the clay, modulating and setting the mood of the work exactly—the paint "works."

The supporting role Messina has given the clay and its attendant process is consistent with the deft way in which he holds the focus on sculptural issues and goes beyond the ubiquitous charm of the medium.

William D. Parry



Monkey Wrench, 1993, Clay, steel, paint, 85"h x 37"l x 16"w

Mitchell Messina

Born in San Jose, California in 1961, Messina studied ceramics at Portland State University in Oregon, where he received a B.S. in 1984. He earned an M.F.A. from Tyler School of Art, Temple University, Elkins Park, in 1986. He has taught at many schools, including Moorhead State University in Minnesota, and is currently an Assistant Professor at Nazareth College in Rochester, New York, where he is the Head of Sculpture and Ceramics. Messina's work has been exhibited in many group and one-person shows, including, in 1992, a solo show *Amassed Objects* at The Clay Studio in Philadelphia, and *Ceramic Alumni of Tyler School of Art*, a NCECA exhibition. His museum shows include *Art Now: Contemporary Philadelphia Artists* at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, and *Ways with Clay, Monarch National* at the San Angelo Museum of Fine Art in Texas, both in 1990.

Mitchell Messina was recently honored by being chosen to present his work at the 1992 NCECA conference as part of the Emerging Talent section.

Teaching

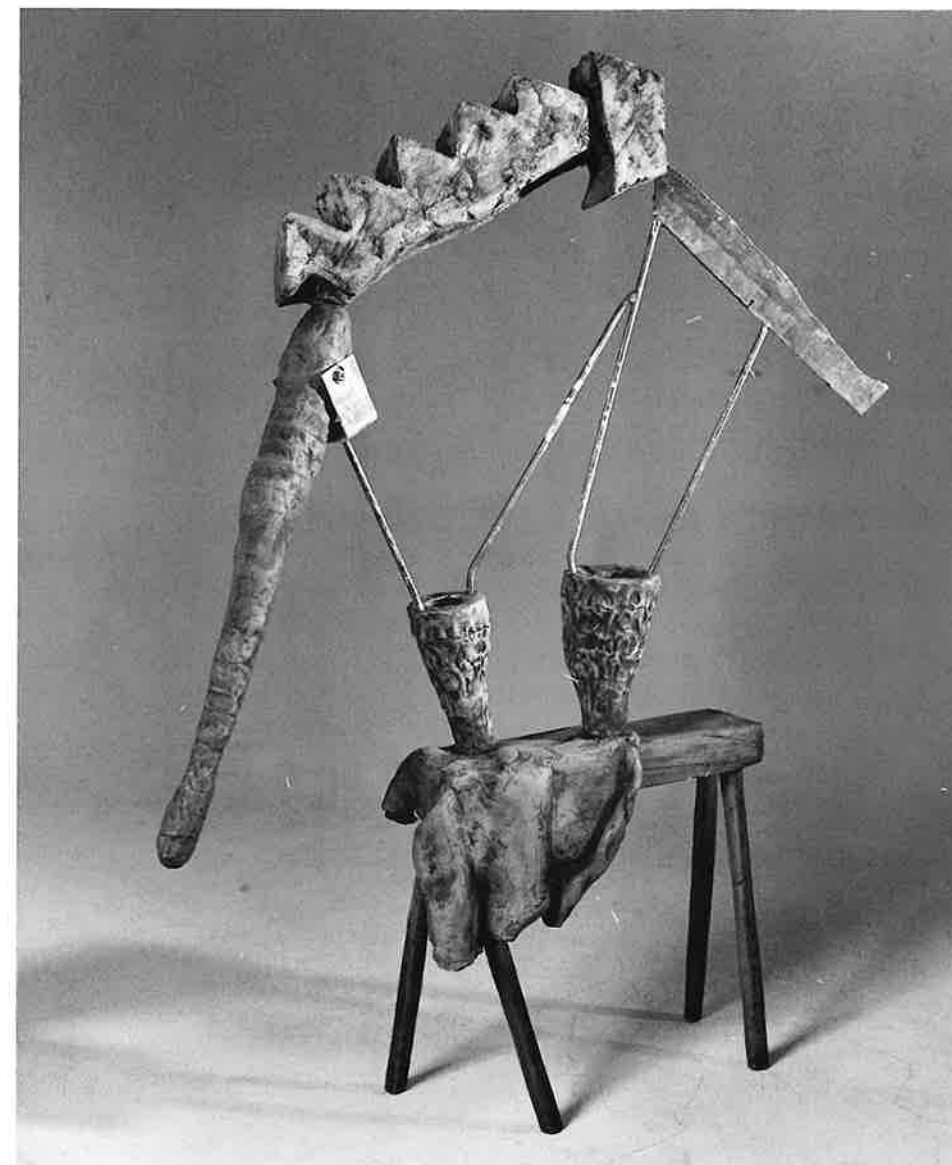
- 1990–present Assistant Professor, Head of Sculpture and Ceramics, Nazareth College of Rochester, N.Y.
1989–90 Assistant Professor, Head of Ceramics and Glass, Moorhead State University, Minn.
1986–89 Instructor, and Member of the Educational Planning Committee, Cheltenham Art Center, Pa.
1988 Instructor, Ceramics and Drawing, Grand Valley State University, Allendale, Mich.

Selected Exhibitions

- 1992 Solo exhibition, *Amassed Objects*, The Clay Studio, Philadelphia. Juried.
Ceramic Alumni of Tyler School of Art, a NCECA exhibition, Temple University Art Gallery, Philadelphia. Juried.
Craft Art 1992, Western New York, Burchfield Art Center, Buffalo State College, N.Y. Juried.
1991 Three-person show, Dawson Gallery, Rochester, N.Y.
Great Lakes Show, Lill Street Gallery, Chicago. Juried by Richard Hensley and Donna Polseno.
1990 *Units, New Ceramic Sculpture*, Penelec Gallery, Allegheny College, Meadville, Pa.
Art Now: Contemporary Philadelphia Artists, Philadelphia Museum of Art. Juried.
Ways with Clay, Monarch National, San Angelo Museum of Fine Art, Texas. Juried.
1989 *Challenge Exhibition*, Fleisher Art Memorial, Philadelphia. Juried.
Wichita National '89, Wichita, Kans. Juried by Tony Hepburn.
One-person exhibition, Overbrook Gallery, Muskegon Community College, Mich.
American Clay Artists, Philadelphia '89, Port of History Museum, Philadelphia. Juried.
Group exhibition, Gallery Aart Vark, Philadelphia.
1988 *61st Western Michigan Regional Exhibition*, Muskegon Museum of Art, Mich. Juried.
Burlington County College Outdoor Sculpture Garden, One-year installation, Pemberton, N.J. Juried. Cash award for excellence.
1987 *Lenexa National, Dimensions '87*, Lenexa, Kans. Juried by Michael Monroe and Margaret Moorman.

Selected Honors and Awards

- 1992 Recipient, The Evelyn Shapiro Foundation Grant for Ceramic Excellence.
Participant in the Emerging Talent section, 1992 National Council for the Education of Ceramic Art (NCECA) conference, Philadelphia.
1988 Lift-Tech International Award, Western Michigan juried competition, Muskegon Museum of Art, Mich.
1986 Alumni Association Award of Tyler, Tyler School of Art, Temple University, Elkins Park, Pa.



Bench Jack, 1992, Clay, steel, paint, 72" h x 60" w x 18" d