Gary Erickson

MC Gallery
Minneapolis, Minnesota

Like ancestral echinoderms, their spiny plates embedded in soft tissue, Gary Erickson's recent works seemed to twist their bodies into shapes designed to confound. Which end is up? Where is the front? What is inside? What kind of entity is it?

Erickson works exclusively with hand-built, coiled clay sculpture. Foregoing the vessel form, he has the freedom of starting with diagonal and twisted forms, rather than with the round mass of clay and centrifugal forces demanded by the potter's wheel. He loops and knots large, elongated forms into compact masses.

Often obscuring the coils on the outer surface, the artist leaves them visible, ringing the inside of a narrow opening. This pore is accentuated with glaze and color. It is the open mouth through which a portion of the colorful, glistening world inside the body can be glimpsed.

The rough exterior of these animalistic forms invites cautious exploration with a fingertip, but not long strokes. Only the heat of the kiln makes them approachable. Erickson covers the clay body with an earthenware slip impregnated with color. On top, he applies a crawling, textural glaze, which, he discovered pulls apart during firing to reveal the original color between its cracks and craters. Subdued and earthy, his colors accentuate references to nature. Whether his forms are perceived as serpentine, botanical, or marine, their unmistakably organic inspiration is apparent. Erickson's choices of material, form, and surface are congruent with one another and with his unique, well-defined point of view. He achieves the delicate balance between control and accident, exercising a consistently high degree of craftsmanship while welcoming, within a carefully limited range, the serendipity of materials and process.

The strength of Erickson's pieces is not apparent at first glance. It relies, instead, on perceiving the interplay between the massive exterior and the barely seen interior, the earthy tones of the scaly outer surface and the brilliant coils of the inner. These pieces resonate with the energy of primordial creatures around which myths are created.

Sandra Price

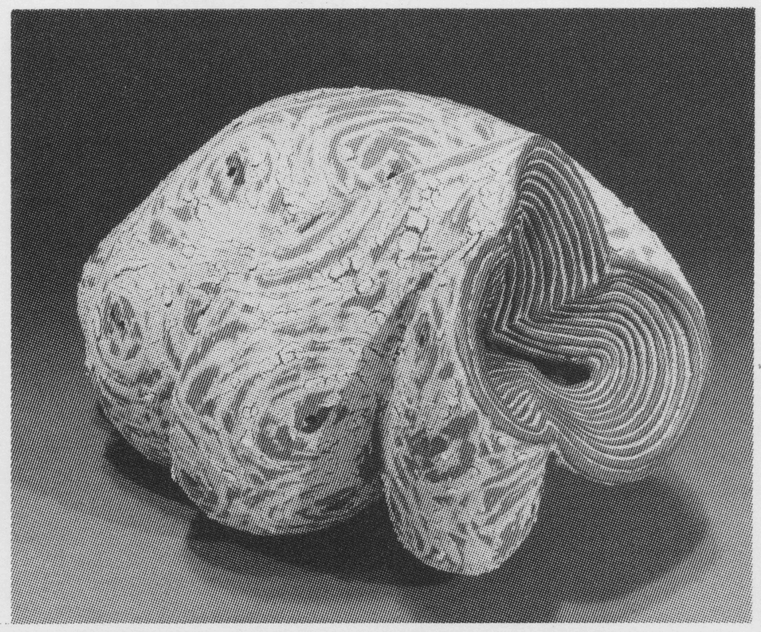

Photo: Gary Erickson.

Natural Calling *(1990), 10½" x 10½" x 17", earthenware.*

Gayle Fichtinger

Joanne Rapp Gallery/The Hand and the Spirit
Scottsdale, Arizona

Gayle Fichtinger understands danger. She understands the humor and agony of chaos, the chaos of the everyday, of nature. Her ceramic figures are swamped with frogs, steeped in fireflies, blinded by monkeys that cling to the figure's back. Her figures resemble rock; they have stone souls, at once ancient and contemporary. They are people connected to earth, to wind, to harvest, to insects and to animals. Besides the compelling physical beauty of her sculptures – her dramatic use of color and monumental format – Fichtinger possesses a keen talent for engaging the viewer in the conflict of each character's story. She suggests a universal human relationship to nature that is uncomfortable, necessary, evil, and divine.

She accomplishes this most strongly in pieces like *Nocturnal* and *Blinded* (1989). In *Nocturnal*, a woman enters the world of night; we see her in the light of fireflies that cover her body. Folding her arms like the fireflies' wings, the woman covers her breasts. Fichtinger gives us the feeling that the woman both embraces and shields her most vulnerable self from the nocturnal world. To enter it she must become it, without losing her flesh, her humanity. The woman's head is thrown back, exposing her strong night-blue throat in praise or submission.

In the figure *Blinded*, we meet a woman with a monkey on her back. The beast's tail wraps her face, half concealing her view of us and ours of her. From the front she appears to be twisting in order to shoo the monkey away, yet from the back we see her one eye peering at us, filled with both a common irritation and a mischief of the darker side. A powerful game involving them both, and perhaps us, has been set in motion, leaving none numb or safe.

The people who live in Fichtinger's vision are your aunt, your children to be born, and the people you will never know from cultures as ancient as Egypt and Babylon to rural Mexico and Minnesota. Like a fine novelist Fichtinger allows these people to tell their own stories. If you bend close and listen hard, you will hear the clay speak. You will hear the flap of the firefly, the croak of the frog, the screech of the jungle. You will smell the chaos and feel the character's stone breath warm on your neck.

Nona Caspers

Photo: Paul LaFreniere.

Blinded *(1989), 26" x 21" x 15", terra-cotta.*

John Gill

Grace Borgenicht Gallery
New York, New York

Over the years John Gill's vessels have evolved almost imperceptibly into forms at once simpler and more concentrated than their antecedents. Gill's vessels have metamorphosed into a range of elegantly controlled volumes on which the surface painting shifts subtly between accentuating the volume and asserting surface pattern. Not that Gill has abandoned either the witty humor or the anthropomorphic attributes with which he charges his eccentric containers. Instead, he just seems to be getting better at what he's been trying to do for some time.

Vase #18 (1990) underscores this evolution. In it the interior space and surface of the vessel are in near-perfect equilibrium. Gill achieves this equilibrium by simplifying the overall contours of the volume through his remarkably sophisticated use of glaze painting.

Vase #18 is a wide, relatively low, bulging form on a recessed, flat pedestal. It narrows slightly at the top into an angular opening fashioned almost like an adobe wall. Gill heightens the impact of the spherical bulge on the right side of the vase by darkening the otherwise translucent periwinkle blue glaze into a sooty circle placed like a bull's-eye at the center and licking into this circle with a wavelike scallop of celadon that wraps around from the other side. He plays mass against volume by lopping off what would have been the balancing bulge on the left side of the vase and by glazing the resulting curved plane half black, half periwinkle blue. Gill's glazing reads almost entirely as painting, in part because he has extended his palette to include such a broad and unexpected range of hues and in part because he now controls the outlines of his color shifts so that they read as shapes in their own right.

Gill has relied on the traditional vehicle of the vessel to assert the interior space of the potter over the exterior space articulated by most sculptors. His mastery as a glazer has allowed him to further emphasize the quirky contours of his vessels' surfaces in such a way that, for all their assertiveness, his volumes are held in check by the planar quality of their surface painting. By working so abstractly with the relationships between surface and volume, Gill may never run out of new possibilities. And, by staying close to the tradition of glazed pottery, he seems all the more able to invent new forms.

Linda Norden

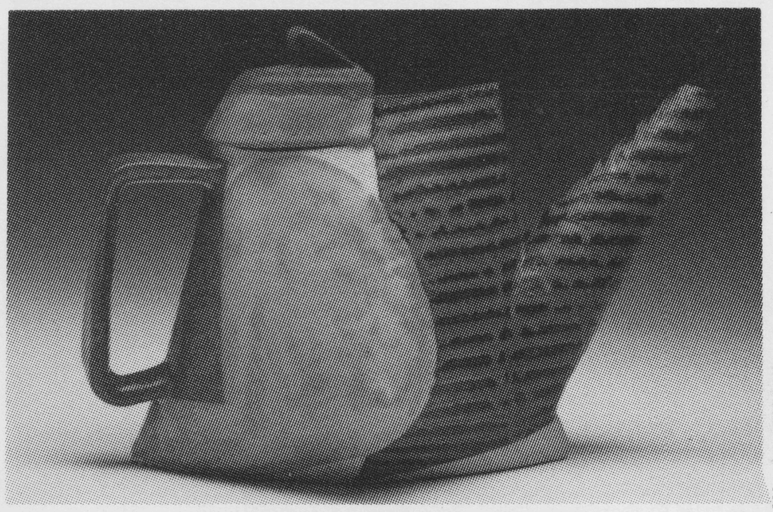

Photo: Stephen Myers.

Teapot #57 *(1990), 11½" x 13" x 9", stoneware.*