



**Andrew Lord**

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Johnson County Community College • Gallery of Art



*Five Pieces, Fist. Tin.*, 1992, glazed ceramic, epoxy, gold leaf, encre de chine, varying dimensions, courtesy the artist

### *Andrew Lord's Human Touch*

What are we, if not the manifest record of every hand that has grasped us, touched us or held us? Reservoirs of love, compendiums of disappointment; skeletons of wild nights and lonely days; the embodiment of all our physical encounters incarnate – we are living proof, flagrante delicto – inventories of our corporal encounters with the real world. Do we silently – perhaps unconsciously – dwell on our carnal past – our *physical histories*? Do we think about those who adored us, stroked us or hurt us? Do they think of us? Is there someone, somewhere – right now – musing over you? These people we *touched* and were *touched by* are our biographies – who we are (or were). These “others,” these encounters, are markers, brief respites from our “regular, normal” lives when we ventured *beyond words* to the physical side of things (the times when you’re the most *you* perhaps). What effects have I had? What affected me? How am I remembered? *Am I remembered?*

There are photographs where you can see the ghostly specter of someone long after they have left the room. You can see where they stood and what they did. If this technology were improved many times would it be possible to train this camera on our own skin and behold the fingerprints, gentle taps, loving embraces and gnarled gyrations we indulged in? Are they still there? Could we further distill this chemical and drop it into our eyes, allowing us to behold the physical past of all those we see? On a very fundamental level Andrew Lord makes intimacy visible. It’s as if this chemical elixir was at his fingertips. He likes this ethereal, oscillating experience and makes it manifest in sculpture that is simultaneously humble and awkward, as well as serene and ravishing. Andrew Lord’s sculpture tells you its physical history.

Lord works mostly with clay, and most of the objects that he fashions look like familiar things – albeit hyped-up on steroids or kneaded by torquing gravity: vessels, vases, urns, pots and plates. He

builds all his forms by hand (not at a wheel, in other words), coiling and manipulating the clay while it is still wet. The evidence of his presence is everywhere. If this were the scene of a crime, you’d be able to piece together *exactly* how this had been made – how the artist held his hands, where he touched the object, etc. So this makes looking at Lord’s sculpture something of a “whodunit” process and keeps it fun. Lord never forgets that not only the making of art should produce pleasure – but the looking at it as well. And looking at Lord’s sculpture is pleasurable – in fact the way you experience it is a little like having a crush on somebody. It’s charged and slightly obsessive.

Even though he uses clay, Lord altogether transcends the narrow confines of *Ceramics* – as he makes clay sing the song of itself. Starting out by narrowing down his lexicon to 30 or so basic shapes or forms (you can see him repeat them from grouping to grouping, thus setting a subplot into motion) that derive from the artist’s

long-time observation of Mycean, Delft, Mexican and Chinese pottery, Lord builds these shapes while subjecting them to a number of predetermined forming procedures – procedures that connect directly to the body and what it does – or what it has done to it.

As strong as the work is conceptually, the process is everything to Andrew Lord. Lord established seven ways of making *Modelling* (he always spells this word with the British spelling, perhaps because he was born in Rochdale, England, in 1950. [Curiously, his work seems more mature than his years; it's as if Lord has an old soul]), *Round*, *Touching and Holding*, *Marking*, *Pressing and Squeezing*, *Fist* and *Palm*. Each one of these seven procedures produces a fundamentally different-looking object. All these ways, of course, are rooted in *physical touch*. It's almost a *Kama Sutra* of sculpture – a lover's manual describing ways of caressing, entering and embracing physical form. As an artist Lord is both a *lover* – obsessed with his object – and a *creator* – once removed with a grand plan. He has an affinity to material – especially clay – which is rather astonishing. These tranquil groupings seem on the verge of

something tremulous or some tear in the physical world where sensuousness and thought meet.

Looking at Andrew Lord's sculpture is a little like looking into the Grand Canyon: if you look at either of them long enough you'll understand how they came to look the way they do. Both are records of the forces that formed them. And both are physical – almost geological – autobiographies that tell stories of stress and strains, fire and earth. Plus, with Lord's work it's nice to think such *big* thoughts before such twisted, inebriated – even bashful – forms. For as beautiful as these works are (and they are among the most beautiful works being produced by an artist today), there is an inherent *outlandishness* or *silliness* about Lord's forms. There's something almost deformed about them. They're full of holes and gouges, tilted and collapsing. Lord works around the idea of the mortification of form the way religious artists depict the mortification of the flesh. But there is a *nobleness* about the work – a yearning-to-breathe-free-ness. Indeed, there is a breathtaking breathing-of-life into these inanimate objects – a Geppetto-to-Pinocchio side to these simple shapes (is this partly

because his last name – Lord – is such a big word?). This may be what accounts for their quicksilver, lilted delicateness. You could break them – indeed many of the pieces have already been patched with dazzling gold leaf – but there's something bewitching about Lord's work that makes you want to take care of it – take it home – in ways that feel over and above the way you usually feel about nonliving things. This may be caused by Lord's elegant presence and his dreamy, if sure, touch. This work actually makes you feel in good hands – trustful and precious.

How does this happen? The short answer is: Andrew Lord *embeds thought in material*. What does this mean? It means you don't necessarily have to know what the works are about to appreciate them. It's the thing that makes almost all great art great. Depending on how the pieces are titled, you can establish how the work was made.

Because Lord's scale is so ambiguous, his forms really occupy a lot of psychic and aesthetic space. Lord may be to “medium-to-medium small” what Richard Serra is to big. Not big, yet not small, most of Lord's work is about waist

*Eighteen Mexican Pieces*, 1993, glazed ceramic, epoxy, gold leaf, varying dimensions, courtesy Gagosian Gallery, New York





*Six Pieces, Round.*, 1993, glazed ceramic, epoxy, gold leaf, varying dimensions, courtesy Gagosian Gallery, New York

high – bigger than a small dog, smaller than a horse or a refrigerator. As pots they're overgrown whoppers, but they're more than pots. They come from the Kilns of the Gods, from some clay-based Valhalla. Really, Lord's sculpture occupies the nether-scale of Alberto Giacometti, an endlessly intelligent scale that is indeterminately *real* yet simultaneously dreamlike. His work is on an *existential scale* – a scale of the world as if seen from about nine-and-a-half feet (at an odd distance, in other words), and this infuses the work with a slurred, vexing – if visionary – namelessness. Never overlook the size of one of Lord's pieces. Get close to one – as close as an animal might to another animal. Figure out how much space it takes up and how it nestles into space.

A grouping, titled *Five Pieces, Fist. Tin.* from 1992, is formed by the artist pressing his fist into the outside of the piece and catching it on the inside with his cupped hand. Sound simple? It is. As simple (and as complex) as having someone hold your hand. This group (which is a rich tin white color) looks more “under the influence,” more determined by multiple touch than does *Round*. This is sculpture-of-the-world. It has a sense of experience, of having

been around the block a few times. But still this grouping looks pure, even saint-like. Exquisite as this grouping is, it had one wobbly foot in the world of fortuitous accident. These are very confident works. Lord seems to risk a lot in this body of work (that may be what makes these pieces feel as if they were made by someone older than Lord's 48 years – there's a real earthy wisdom here). He knows what he's doing now and he likes it. The evolution that is visible in a work like *Five Pieces, Fist. Tin.* is fairly vast, but the evolution that is not apparent is similarly vast (you feel as if a lot of thinking, honing down, trial and error went into arriving at this “simple” system). This gives the work a methodical obviousness that is grounded in something deeply mysterious.

Lord is a fascinating colorist, too. His recipes are simple, but the application of the glaze might be guided by something as fanciful and conventional (not to say scientific) as how light is falling on the object. This also infuses the work with a terrific serendipity. His colors are luscious and gooey looking, deep and jewel-like. They seem to come from another world – an emerald green from the Far East, a leaden grey from the Stone Age, a pink from someplace just

outside of Florence, perhaps. This lends a certain universality to Lord's work and gives it its *ambidexterity* – as if Lord's work is functioning on a lot of different levels.

The works are made exactly the way their titles say they are. *Modelling* is made by, in the artist's own words, building the shapes by “leaving my fingerprints in the clay.” See how little things mean a lot to Lord? In *Pressing and Squeezing*, Lord builds the pieces by “using as much pressure on each side of the clay to form the clay, the clay being sandwiched forcefully between the hands.” Or how about the artist's description of *Marking*, where Lord builds by “pressing two fingers into the inside of the vessel and catching them in my cupped hand on the outside.” Sound sexy? It *is* sexy. This is like a sex manual for clay. Lord – if he is not exactly making love with his material – is certainly *manhandling* in sensuous, provocative ways – and we can feel his human touch, his warmth, his thought and his love.

Andrew Lord makes sculpture that speaks (and sings) of its physical contact with the world, sculpture that wears its history of its skin. You can get lost in his erotic surfaces, so exaggerated and tangible are they. These weird forms have nonsensically undulating loop-de-loop handles and droopy necks and are filled with holes so they're essentially useless. But there's a *sensu-logical* veracity to Lord's work. No mark is gratuitous or finally decorative. Every gouge and lumpen pucker is the visceral result of one of Lord's seven “forming” motions. Lord's work whispers the secrets of its creation in muted, elegant – even otherworldly – tones. His is a hushed, agile *savoir-faire* formalism that breaks into a free-falling euphoria. Lord, who appears to be on the brink of even more rudimentary forming techniques, attains a crescendo of form and a quiet ecstasy of touch and being in these works.

– Jerry Saltz  
curator and critic, New York

Cover: *Jug, Modelling.*, 1996, ceramic, epoxy, gold leaf, 25¾" x 17¾" x 11¾", courtesy Gagosian Gallery, New York