

Chapter Fifteen

Gestures in Clay

When a mark is made in clay, it is in itself a record of the action by which it was created. Some marks record slow, deliberate, controlled actions – others are indicative of vigorous, spontaneous gestures. When a mark records a spontaneous gesture, it tells us not only about the physical action by which it was created, but also conveys something of the emotion which was translated into that action.

For some artists, their actions/gestures as they work on each piece, are in themselves an important element of the overall artistic statement.

Neil Tetkowski in his studio.

NEIL TETKOWSKI

Neil Tetkowski is an American ceramic artist who lives in Buffalo in New York State. For many years he experimented with, and was known for, very large thrown disc forms, often up to one metre in diameter, and made from about 136 kg of clay. His studio is in what was once a thriving industrial area with several steel mills. The remnants of that industry, the rundown mills and heavy machinery, are still to be seen there. Gradually the influence of this environment manifested itself in Neil's work. In a body of work entitled 'American Iron and Steel Series', made in 1986, found objects such as cog





wheels, railroad spikes, gears and chains were used to create vigorous incisions and impressed marks on the surfaces of large thrown discs, before some of them were permanently embedded in the clay. This series showed Neil's response to modern life as it has been affected by the Industrial Revolution.

More recently his work has combined ceramics and performance art. At one such event, which took place at the time of the Gulf War, in front of an invited audience, a three-foot disc was thrown, then lowered to the floor. Surrounded by

'Railroad Mandala Series (RMS) # 3' by Neil Tetkowsky (USA), 1991, 55 cm/diam. This series 'features found objects from the American railroad industry. Each work incorporates four railroad spikes. In the tradition of the Mandala, they are symmetrically arranged in each disc form.'
Photograph by Bruce Mayer.

performing jazz musicians, Neil proceeded to work on the surface of the disc, his actions in time with the music. Using individual bullets and cartridge belts, the surface of the clay was impressed, combed



Neil Tetkowsky at work on a piece created to communicate the artist's response to the Gulf War.

and gouged. The objects used to make the marks were then arranged and embedded in the clay. The completed clay work, titled 'Ground War', was later cast in bronze.

Another body of work, the 'Railroad Mandala Series', features found objects from the American railroad industry. Each work incorporates four railroad spikes (see photograph on page 103). The series included both disc and 'smokestack' forms.

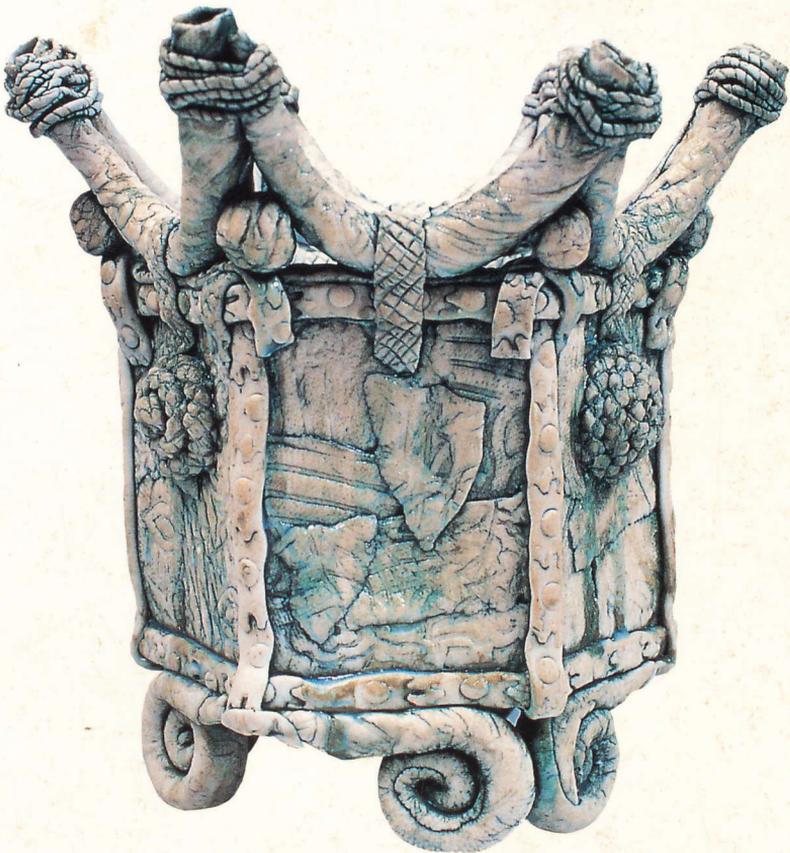
Before firing, the pieces are sprayed with terra sigillata to which colouring

oxides have been added. During firing to 960°C, the kiln is lightly salted. In the fired work, the delicate colour variations on the clay surface, often tones of pale blue or pink (achieved by a combination of the use of the terra sigillata and the firing process), are in marked contrast to the harshness of the jagged gouges, incisions and imprints, and more especially the steel objects, some now blackened, which remain embedded in the clay. Neil succeeds in making powerful artistic statements, incorporating found manmade objects selected from his environment, in such a way that the energy and power expended in creating each piece, is clearly recorded in the finished work.

CERAMICS HANDBOOKS · CERAMICS HANDBOOKS

CERAMICS HANDBOOKS · CERAMICS HANDBOOKS · CERAMICS HANDBOOKS · CERAMICS HANDBOOKS

IMPRESSED AND INCISED CERAMICS



CERAMICS HANDBOOKS · CERAMICS HANDBOOKS · CERAMICS HANDBOOKS · CERAMICS HANDBOOKS

COLL MINOGUE

CERAMICS HANDBOOKS · CERAMICS HANDBOOKS