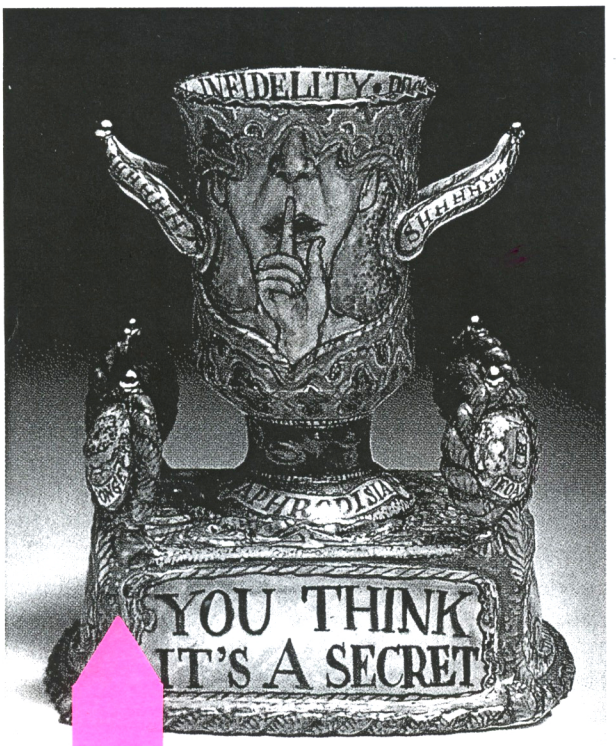
Forms & TransFormations

Covered jar, 10 inches in height, stoneware with sea sand, wood fired, by Pascal Chmelar, New York City.

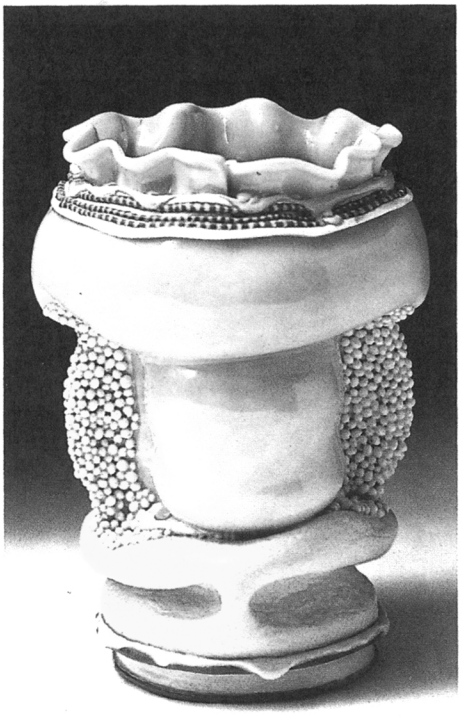


"Infidelity Cup," 8 inches in height, porcelain, by Matt Nolen, New York City.

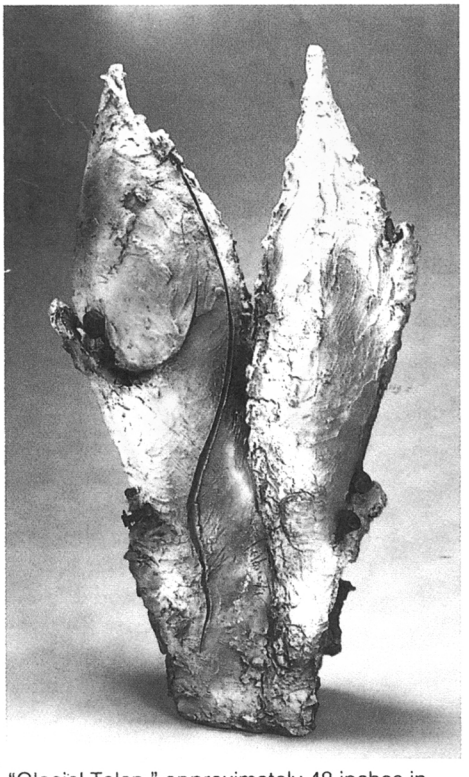
"Art, industry, research and manufacturing come together to form and transform ordinary clay into objects of great beauty, function and necessity. The interactions between designers, engineers and artists [represent] a truly amazing display of virtuosity," notes Judith S. Schwartz, associate professor at New York University and curator of "Forms & TransFormations: Current Expressions in Ceramics, from Art to Industry." With this exhibition, she wanted "to bring a new understanding to the diversity of current expressions in ceramic art while exploring the technological advancements made by ceramics industry."

On view recently at the Queens Library Gallery in Jamaica, New York, "Forms & TransFormations" included works by 27 clay artists alongside everyday consumer products made of ceramic materials. "The technical advances made in ceramic engineering have produced a range of objects that are diversely functional and without precedent, from sports equipment to space rockets," Schwartz observes. "Clay woven into inch-thick cloth insulates furnaces so efficiently that it remains cool to the touch on one side, even when the other side is exposed to 3000°F. Pens with clay tips resist wear better than metal tips. Ceramic fibers make stronger skis and dampen vibration. Clay cast as honeycomb filters is used to block the passage of disease-bearing microorganisms. Knives made of clay are sharp, and do not corrode or stain. Clay buttons resist the chemical effects of commercial laundering. Hip-joint replacements and dental prostheses made with clay are durable and more easily assimilated into the human body."

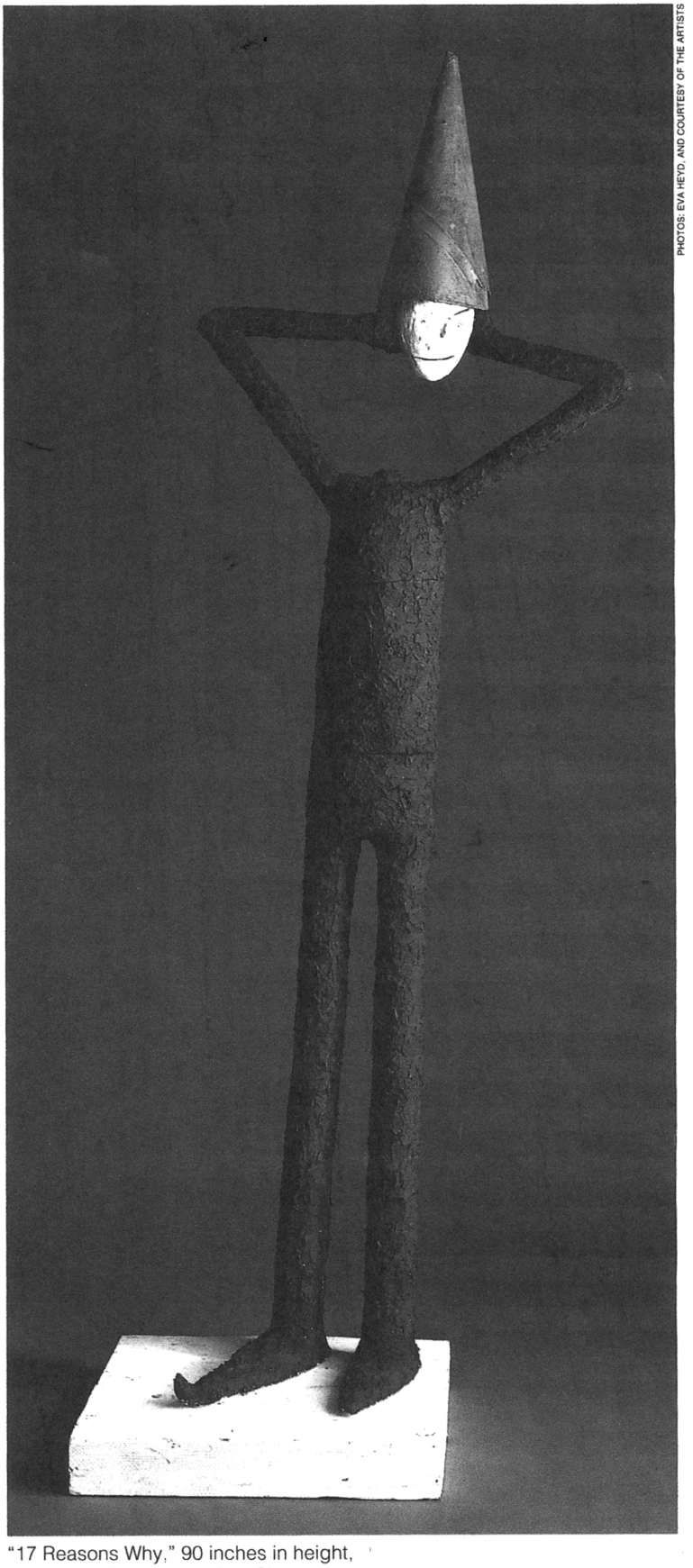
While artists commonly employ different fabrication methods "to convey highly personal and unique expressions," Schwartz recognizes that they share with engineers "an understanding of clay and an ambition to utilize its resources. These two facets of ceramics, the technical and the artistic, demonstrate the diversity of ceramics in our lives, a diversity that is only expanding as our understanding of the medium grows." ▲



"Sow," 4⅜ inches in height, glazed porcelain, by Kathy Butterly, New York City.



"Glacial Talon," approximately 48 inches in height, by Neil Tetkowski, New York City.



"17 Reasons Why," 90 inches in height, by Melissa Stern, New York City.

PHOTOS: EVA HEYD, AND COURTESY OF THE ARTISTS