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Art

MY NATURE (32pp.)

Director of Thesis: Kirk Mangus

This thesis explores my clay sculptures that celebrate the diversity of life that is revealed in natural objects and living organisms in and along the ocean and its shores. Each individual piece is inspired by the multitude of intricate details of sea-plants, coral, driftwood and ocean sea creatures that I have encountered throughout my life.

The ocean is a place to explore, contemplate and relax, enjoying the variety nature has to offer. Through the process of creating, my work is at once familiar and strange, projecting a level of wonder and mystery. The pieces are static in the nature of sculpture, yet appear to possess a life of their own cultivating a unique, animated and sensuous presence.

These sculptures suggest individuality, a fantasy creature that is inviting in form, texture and color. I chose ceramics as a medium to convey my ideas because of its organic composition and its ties to the environment. The pliable, plastic nature of clay allows me to be playful and spontaneous in my decision making. They are decisions that have been made to draw attention to the mysteries of the ocean and how it provides an endless source of inspiration. These sculptures are to be acknowledged as individual pieces representing a view into my nature, a nature that can be shared and enjoyed by those who are fascinated by the natural world of the ocean and the fantasy of the created object.

MY NATURE

A thesis submitted to the College of the Arts
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This body of work is dedicated to my wife, Catherine, who gave me the strength, support and desire to create art and live my life as an artist.

A special dedication to the memory of my mother and father, Margaret and John M. Leslie.

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MY NATURE

My clay sculptures celebrate the diversity of life that is revealed in natural objects and living organisms in and along the ocean and its shores. Each individual piece is inspired by the multitude of intricate details of sea-plants, coral, driftwood and ocean creatures that I have encountered throughout my life. The ocean is a place to explore, contemplate and relax, enjoying the variety nature has to offer. My work is at once familiar and strange, projecting a level of wonder and mystery. These pieces are static in the nature of sculpture, yet appear to possess a life of their own. They provide a fantasy that is full of animation and sensuality. These thoughts are echoed in the words of Thomas Moore:

If we could loosen our grip on the functionality of life and let ourselves be arrested by the imaginal richness that surrounds all objects, natural and human-made, we...give ordinary life soul (1992).

It is within the sensibilities of Thomas Moore's words, that I strive to instill imaginal richness into the creative process and give my work soul. These sculptures suggest individuality, a fantasy creature that is inviting in form, texture and color. Each exhibits a diverse dichotomy between convex exteriors and concave interiors. The outer surfaces suggest the weathering of time. The interiors contrast with luscious, smooth surfaces which roll and fold with activity implying new life within. It is here at the

threshold, where different surfaces meet, that creates a tension between the exterior and the mysterious inner void.

Coupled with these contrasting elements, these hand-built pieces are relatively small in size, which allows them to be approached and entices the viewer to visually explore. Although these works are inert forms, they capture the essence of a life-cycle through stance, shape, texture and color. It is a cycle, perhaps inspired by a journey, guided by the ocean currents, only to finally rest upon the sandy shores. These attributes lead to contemplations. Could they be alive? Where did they come from? Have I seen something like this before? It is within this interaction that I wish to establish an intimate connection between the viewer and the mysteries of this biomorphic work. Embracing these objects visually, invites numerous assumptions of individual explorations and discoveries into one's own personal experiences of ocean life.

I chose ceramics as a medium to convey my ideas because of its organic composition and its ties to the environment. The pliable, plastic nature of clay allows me to be playful and spontaneous in my decision making. Each individual piece is the result of meticulous forming and carving with a variety of conventional and unconventional methods and tools. Staging the initial shape of each piece is begun by employing a variety of hump molds. A one-quarter-inch slab of clay is draped over the molds establishing the base for the structure. One-half-inch coils of clay are attached to the slab until the form is completed and closed. The basic shape is then paddled and carved to enhance subtle curves and folds. Further interpretations of movement are created through applications of lines, gouges and patterned marks to the exterior using forks, knives, brushes and nails. Placement of the concave interior is carefully calculated to appear as

slices or cuts exposing an inner volume. First, the position for the cut is etched-out and sliced away. A three-eighths-inch slab of clay is draped into the opening and through two or three cut access windows; the intruded slab is twisted and turned by hand to create undulating valleys and crevices.

The use of a white clay body acts as a blank canvas, allowing expression of surface dynamics with color. My color palette is influenced by the juxtaposition of color harmonies and applications by the French Impressionist, Claude Monet. In Monet's paintings where colors are built-up and carefully placed in multiple layers to create a vibrant image, he is able to capture the essence of nature. Using his philosophies and techniques, I embrace these theories for maximum impact.

Once the piece is bisque fired, multiple washes of stains and colored slips are blended together to enhance and define the exterior textures. On each piece, a range of earthy, complimentary and secondary colors are applied to create a dynamic skin on the exterior surface. Thin washes of reds, greens, oranges, blues, yellows and purples are applied by brush, sometimes following, sometimes working against textural directions. Such placement of these colors creates a vibration and presents a richness and harmony between the exterior surface and the inner void. The concave interiors of these sculptures are glazed using multiple colors to create a pearly, luminescent depth that contrasts and compliments the dry appearance of the exterior. Interior glaze colors are either warm or cool opposing the exterior surface. Some pieces employ blues, violets or greens which saturate these interior regions suggesting a cool internal life. Others have warm interior colors, such as reds, yellows and oranges that constitute an-inner-warmth, contrasted by a cooler exterior.

The titles of these sculptures represent specific places of inspiration. They mimic oscillating surfaces and characterizations of coral, driftwood and ocean-life creating a unique one-of-a-kind sculpture. For example, Nauset Point (Figure 8), exemplifies the variety of ocean objects that can be discovered along Nauset Beach on Cape Cod, Massachusetts. Inspired specifically by driftwood, this sculpture depicts a twisted, heavily scarred battered tree or stump that has endured the cold salty waters of the Atlantic Ocean. The cracks, knots, edges and striated lines imitate an endurance created by these conditions. The combination of textures and colors appear to compete, yet portray a convincing compatibility. The heavily carved lines and dotted holes encase the twisted shell as it branches off in several directions. Some of the appendages are rounded into knobs or flipper-like paddles, while others protrude in sharp points. They represent limbs that have been worn and softened by the salty water. It may conjure up images of human or animal-life that swam the ocean and made the sandy shores the final stop on a lengthy voyage. The overall shape and stance replicates the results of pressures created by the ocean's force. Carved lines follow the shape or cross-hatch in certain places. Perforated holes of varying sizes concentrate in some areas and become sparse in others. The colors on the outer shell are slips and stains of warm yellows, oranges and reds that sink into darker hues on the underside. Blotches of yellows lay across the outer surface saturating specific portions of raised edges and rounded tops. The overall form looks as if it is sliced open, exposing a sensuous volume flowing through the interior surface. The cool, deep-blue crystallizing glazes reflect torrent ocean currents and breaking waves. The patterns in the glaze rumble through deep caverns and rounded surfaces. It is the

duality of external and internal qualities, which coexists and compliments one another, creating the impression of life within.

Key Largo (Figure 6), is an example which references my experiences snorkeling off the coral reefs of the Florida Keys. The varieties of textures and colors of the many species of coral plants and fish-life provide endless inspiration. The coral-like textures of this sculpture projects a lime-green surface with large and small perforated crevices. It provides a visual feast attracting the viewer to carefully inspect. Smooth areas of darkened surfaces are encrusted with varieties of shallow and deep-holed textures that are saturated with dark green and blue slips. Lime-green and yellow slips are layered on the top surface openings, which simulates a saturated appearance of heavily encrusted coral-life. Flipper-like appendages extend, offering stabilization to the rolling and folding form, presenting the illusion of a spongy organism oscillating in the ocean water. The concave interior opens to expose a smooth, glassy surface of flowing bulges and crevices, dappled in deep blue and red glaze. A red line of glaze follows the inner depths as it flows from one end to the other. It is a surface that exposes a mirage of movement, life and vitality.

Cayman King II (Figure 10), appears to be an ancient creature sprawled out with its alligator-like-skin encasing multiple extremities and thorny points that twist, turn and probe. This sculpture depicts a fantasy creature, perhaps sunning itself on a sandy beach almost ready to move. It is a glimpse into the mysteries and created fantasies from my visit to the Cayman Islands. Varying sized oval and checkered textures drenched in light and dark green, yellow and blue slips were created by several different pieces of lace. The lace material was pressed into the exterior clay surface to mimic a skin of varying

sized scales. The interior voids stretches from one end to the other exposing segments of varying depths. Some of these pockets turn inward and fold to narrowing channels. Each of these sections mirrors the exterior limbs. Further, hues of reds, blues and white, streak and puddle within the shiny crackled glaze, contrasting the colors and dry appearance of the exterior form.

This entire body of work expresses my intrigue with objects encountered when walking the sandy shores and swimming in the many oceans of various countries over the course of my life. My imagination has been captivated by these discoveries that have washed ashore and live within the grains of sands, as well as, beneath the waves. It is the wonder of these mysterious and sensuous shapes, colors and textures that compel me to recreate my own interpretations in clay. Although many of these sculptural objects may appear to be unfamiliar, they appeal to the visual sense and provoke curiosity. They are intended to reflect an appreciation for the ocean's beauty conveying a sense of exhilaration through the playfulness of clay.

My thesis exhibition draws attention to the mysteries of the ocean and how it provides an endless source of inspiration. Each sculpture has been taken out of its assumed natural context where one might expect to find these objects. They are placed upon a white pedestal, elevating their status to a level of importance and prestige. The organic nature of these objects in a gallery setting, allows their character to be seen as perhaps never before. They are to be acknowledged as individual pieces representing a view into my nature. It is a nature that can be shared and enjoyed by those who are fascinated by the natural world of the ocean and the fantasy of the created object.

TECHNICAL INFORMATION: CLAY BODY, GLAZES & STAINS

White Clay body (Cone 04 – 6)

Tile #6	30
Nepheline Syenite	25
Om4 Ball Clay	20
Holmes Fredericksburg Fireclay	15
Cedar Heights Fire Clay	10
Medium Grog	5

Glazes (Cone 04-6)

K's Clear Glaze Cone 04

Frit 3124	80
F-4 Spar	10
EPK	10
Bentonite	1

15 Blue Glaze Cone 04

Frit 3124	78
Kona Feldspar	14
Whiting	6
EPK	2
Red Iron Oxide	2

Copper Oxide	2
Milled Rutile	2
Brad's Mint Green Cone 6	
Ferro Sub cc 298-2	50
EPK	15
Flint	35
Milled Rutile	4
Nickel Oxide	1
Cobalt Carbonate	.35
Jamie's Ox Red Cone 6	
Bone Ash	2
Gerstley Borate	32
Talc	14
Custer feldspar	16
EPK	5
Flint	31
Red Iron Oxide	15

Ox Blood Cone 6	
Nepheline Syenite	55.33
Gerstley Borate	12.61
Whiting	10.71
Flint	21.35
Copper Oxide	.39
Tin Oxide	.99

Mason stains and slips

Amaco Velvet Underglaze V-342 Chartreuse

Amaco Velvet Underglaze V-309 Deep Yellow

Amaco Velvet Underglaze V-389 Flame Orange

Amaco Velvet Underglaze V-390 Bright Orange

Amaco Velvet Underglaze V-387 Bright Red

Amaco Velvet Underglaze V-382 Red

Amaco Velvet Underglaze V-322 Purple

Laguna Red

Laguna Yellow

Degussa 13584 Yellow

BL-125 Blue

6224 Hunter Green



FIGURE 1

THESIS EXHIBITION, SCULPTURE GALLERY

KENT STATE UNIVERSITY



FIGURE 2

FIRST ENCOUNTER

28" L X 17" W x 16" H

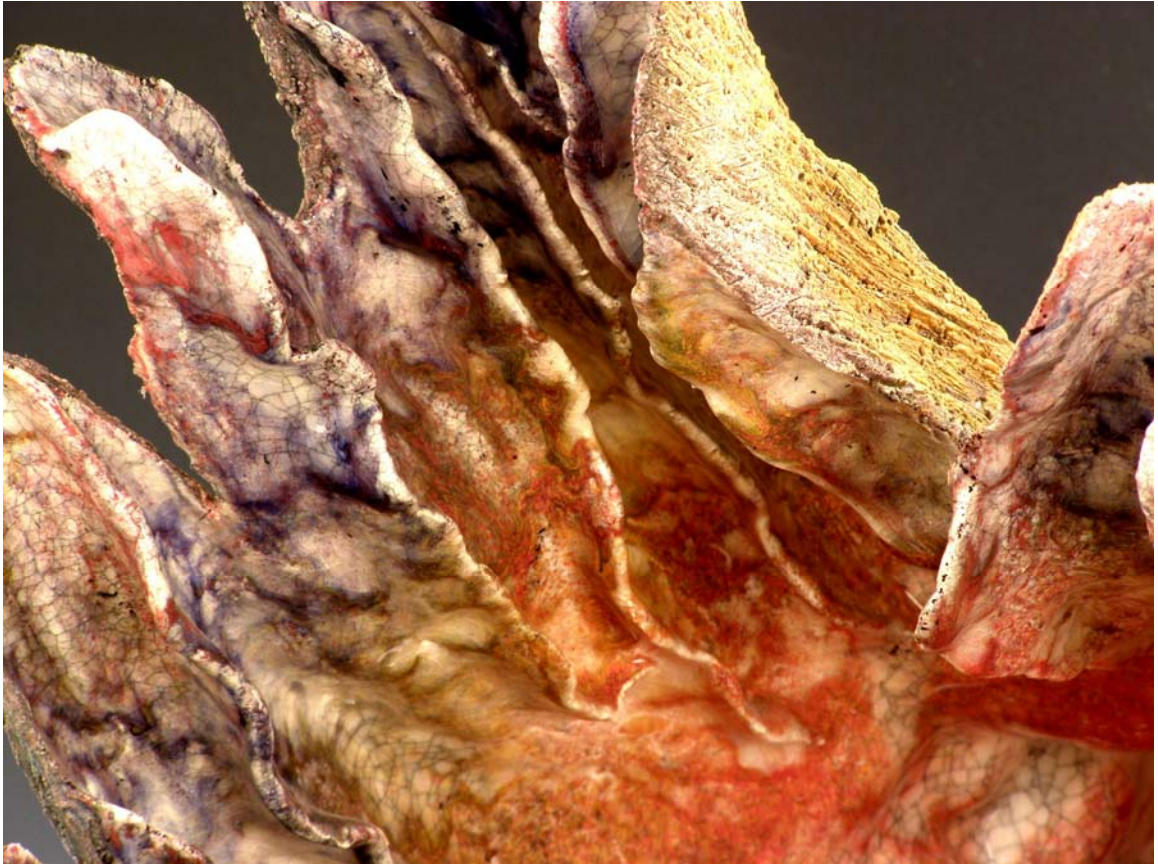


FIGURE 3

FIRST ENCOUNTER, DETAIL



FIGURE 4

BARBADO REEF

23" L x 11" W x 7.5" H



FIGURE 5
BARBADO REEF, DETAIL



FIGURE 6

KEY LARGO

24.5" L x 15" W x 8" H

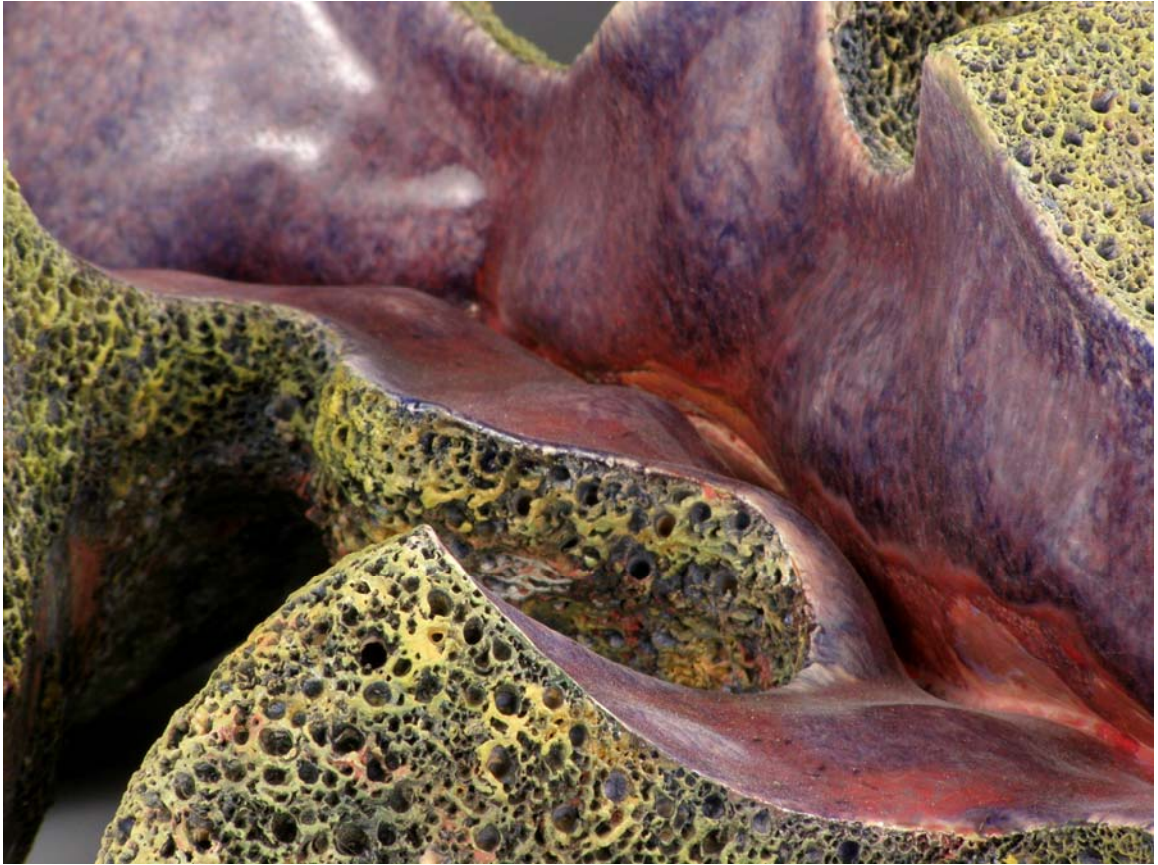


FIGURE 7
KEY LARGO, DETAIL



FIGURE 8

NAUSET POINT

26"L x 14" W x 8" H



FIGURE 9
NAUSET POINT, DETAIL



FIGURE 10

CAYMAN KING II

31"L X 21" W x 7.5" H



FIGURE 11
CAYMAN KING II, DETAIL



FIGURE 12

CORAL SPRINGS

24.5" L x 18" W x 18" D



FIGURE 13
CORAL SPRINGS, DETAIL



FIGURE 14

POCHET NECK

24"L x 16" W x 8" H

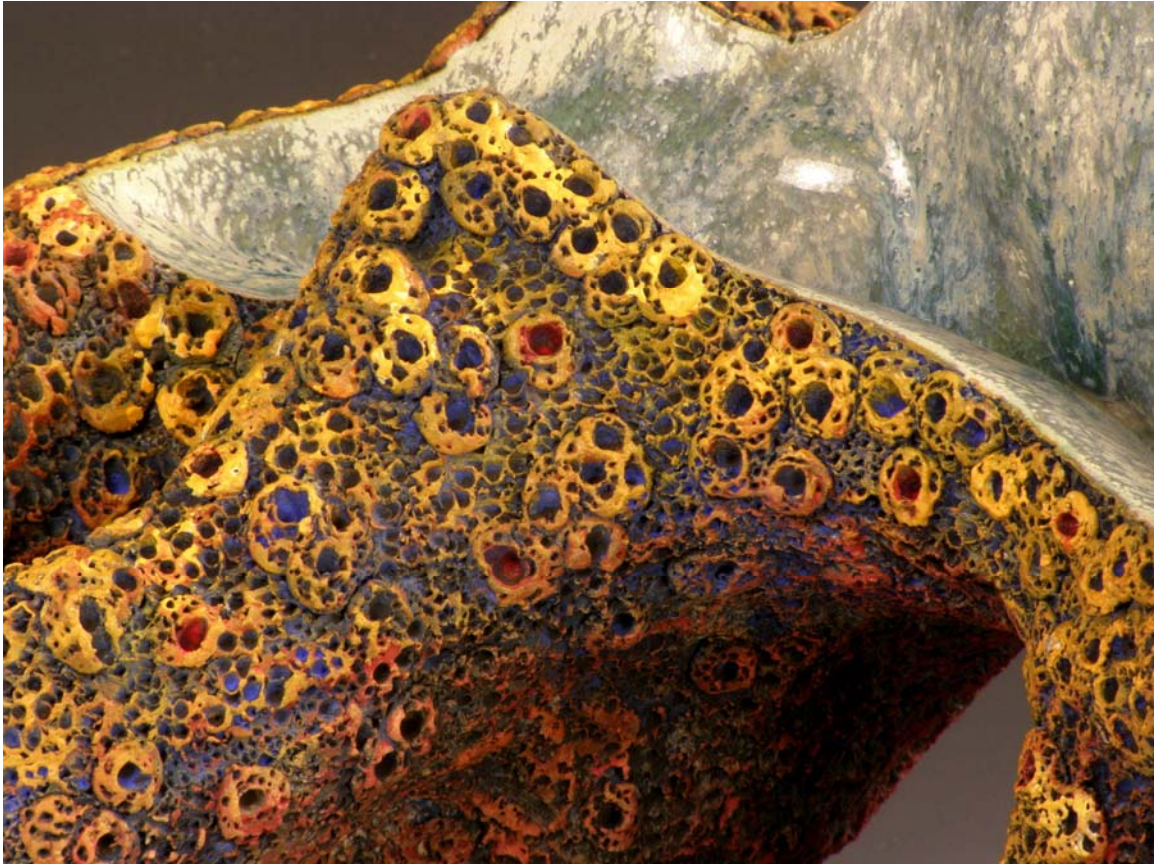


FIGURE 15
POCHET NECK, DETAIL



FIGURE 16

RED TIDE

20.25" L x 12" W x 7" H



FIGURE 17
RED TIDE, DETAIL



FIGURE 18

THE PAMET

31" L x 15" W x 8.5" H

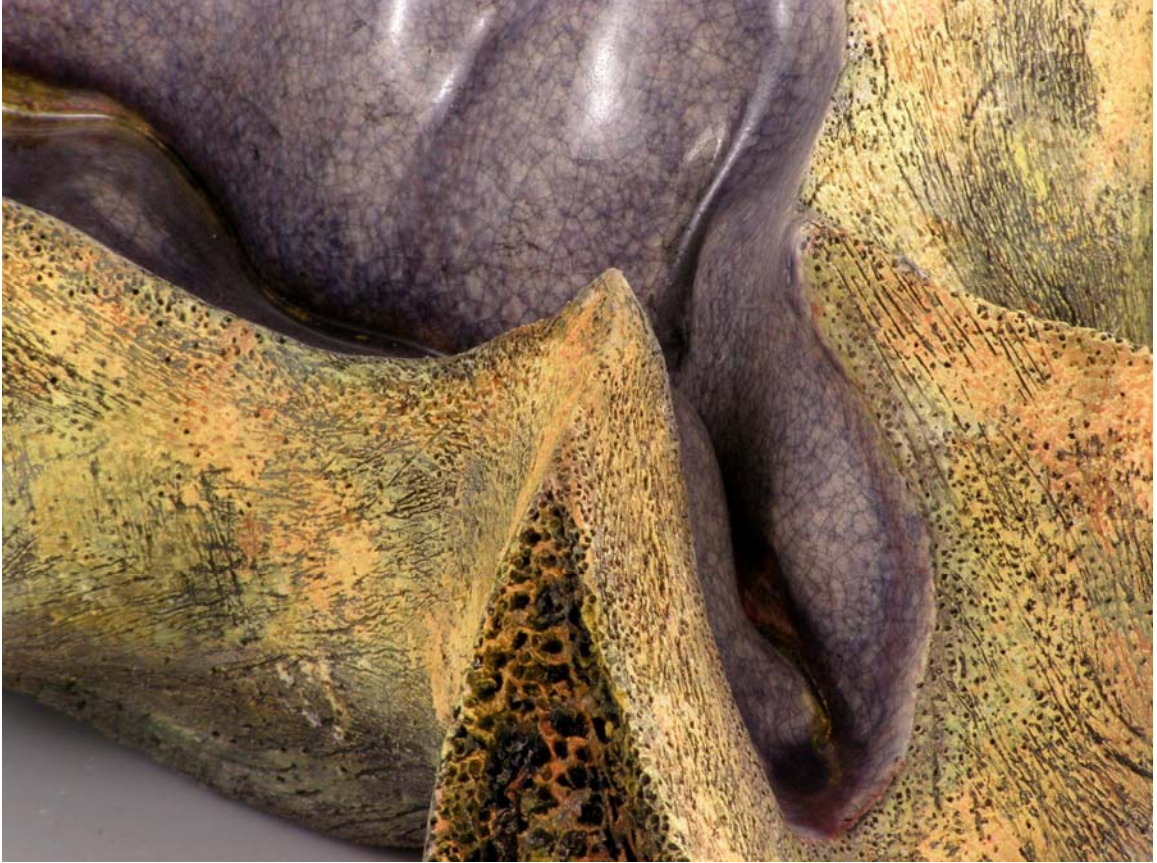


FIGURE 19
THE PAMET, DETAIL