

MADHVI SUBRAHMANYAN
NEW WORKS

March 28th to April 14th 2001

Cymroza Art Gallery



Opening reception: Wed March 28th 2001, 6pm onwards
Illustrated slide presentation of artist's work at
Cymroza Art Gallery, Wed April 4th 2001, 6pm

FLESH MADE CLAY

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Suno sunoji katha anokhi

Kabirdas ki ulti bani

Barse kambal bhije pani.

(Listener! Listen to my marvellous tale, told in Kabir's upside-down way: It rains blankets, and the rain gets wet.)

When I look at Madhvi Subrahmanian's ceramic objects, I realise how important it is *not* to make a perfect pot. A clay-footed logic? Not at all. Unlike most studio potters in India, Madhvi does not confine the vocabulary of her ceramics to table-top functionality, on the one hand; nor does she limit herself to the archetypal symbolism of organic forms, on the other. In the present series of works, the functional impulse, which was her mainstay earlier, has been overtaken by sculptural possibilities.

Like Kabir, Madhvi subjects the conventional understanding of function to irony: she morphs a lid into a child's rattle, or lends a house a set of four legs that make it mobile. But Madhvi does not merely stand function on its head: she also experiments with form, intelligently probing the glaze and gloss that characterise well-finished, pottery. To exemplify, Madhvi allows a thick coat of glaze to crawl, on a vegetal form, making the object look like a piece of wrinkled skin. Even such accidents of process as random bubbles are left on the surface, to harden there into a fruit-sweat or crystallise into a brick-red landscape wrapped around the pot. And as the glaze crawls, outside the walls of the pot, inside it, Madhvi sets off a spray of golden sparkle.

This juxtaposition of an abstract, almost phlegmatic natural landscape on the exterior of the container with an unabashedly kitschy interior suggests a hybrid statement in clay, a cross between the studio's mandates and the signs of the street. The artist's teeming work environment, the road bursting with people and knick-knacks outside her studio at



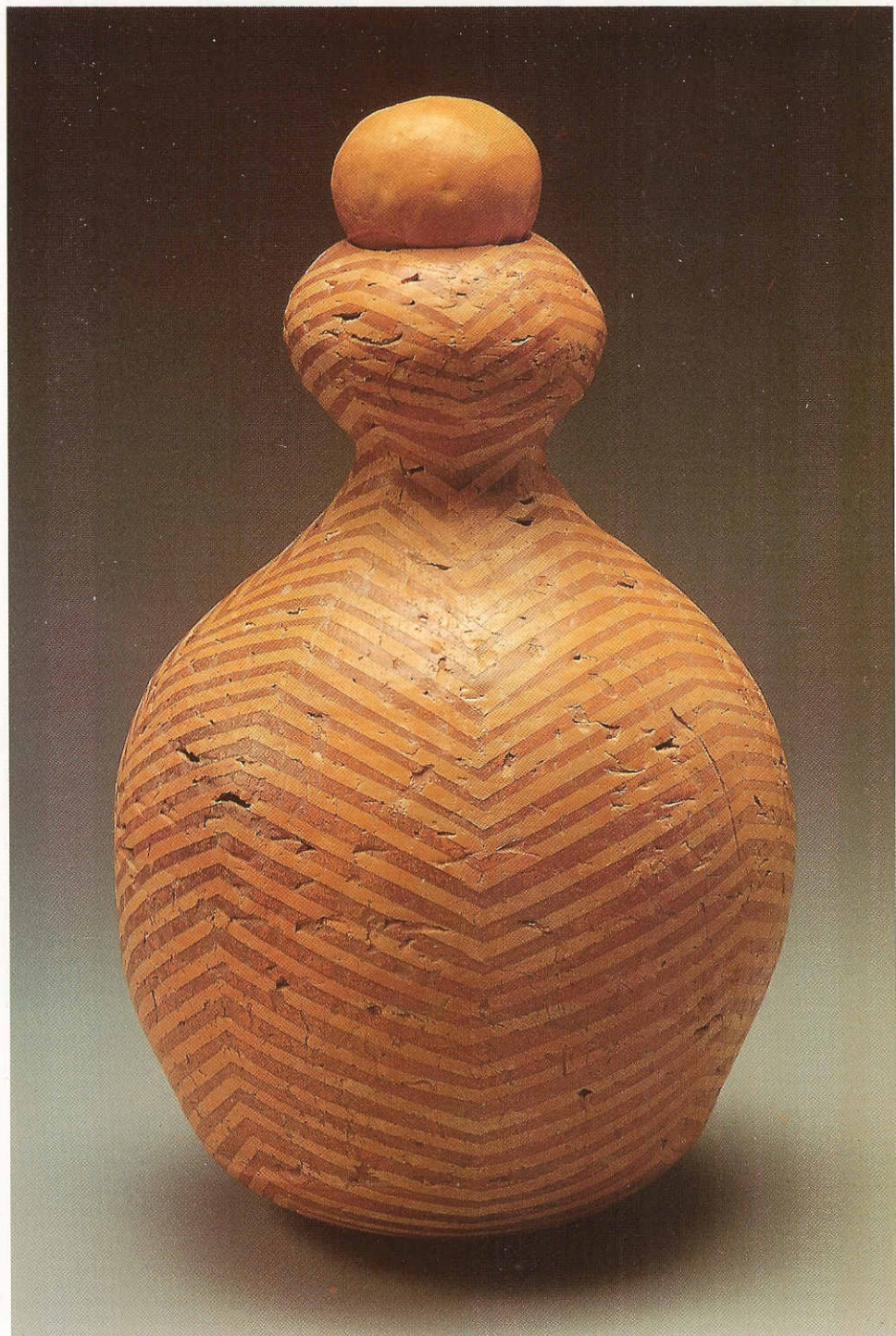
Kalbadevi " rag piles of shredded cloth and paper, the smell of diesel and *farsan*, sections of decaying wrought-iron curlicued grill left on the pavement, and the sun held hostage in the flashing mirror of a tin sheet " has tinged her recent ceramic objects with a smudgy human strain.

Madhvi also includes other elements from popular culture, like textile patterns, in her work: the casual orange polka, which dots some of her plate surfaces, turns the simple spherical form into an object of fantasy. This experience of play, a constant transaction between the given, forms of pottery and the everyday vernacular of popular culture, allows for a post-modernist informality in Madhvi's works.

The seeds of this evolution were already evident in Madhvi's 1999 exhibition, *A Vessel and a Container*, which emphasised the rougher jagged edges of her vocabulary. For instance, she constructed her pots through loosely structured handmade clay coils, permitting the light to form filigreed patterns through the interstices; she also employed an imaginative combination of the wheel-thrown and handmade processes to allow chance to intrude into the tight grid of technicalities. One especially remembers the pots with bloated stomachs that challenged gravity, standing poised on a small vulnerable base: perhaps there, Madhvi was unconsciously questioning the rootedness of a pot to its pedestal.

In the current works, apart from putting toy conches and gourds in bowls and plates, Madhvi also introduces a phantasmagoric creature with twists of spooky hair, quoting a character from the popular *Dr. Seuss* series of children's books. By creating interactive objects, Madhvi sets up a veritable toyshop, employing humour and wit to unbend the formality of perfectly made pottery.

On the other hand, although Madhvi's ecological forms appear to echo a mysterious primordial reality, they are stained by the same laboratorial approach that colours the animated earthen toys. Dents and clefts are carved into their surfaces: for instance, a blue cleft in a burnt brown banana leaf, which looks like a cupped eye. Another eye of consciousness stares at us in the form of a belly-button mould that Madhvi made by taking the measurements of her own stomach during her pregnancy. With the children delivered and in the process of growing up, these moulds are not mnemonic fragments so much as they are receptacles for new ideas that emerge fresh from the kiln of studio pottery. In a Kabirian sense, milk has become flesh and flesh clay.



20" H



EDUCATION:

- Assistant to William Daley, Haystack School of Crafts, Deer Isle, Maine, 1994
- Summer school with Val Cushing, Alfred University, Alfred, New York. 1993
- Master of Fine Arts, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, TX, 1993.
- Summer workshop with Warren Mackenzie at Peters Valley, N.J. 1990
- Studied at Golden Bridge with Ray Meeker and Deborah Smith, Pondy 1985.
- Bachelor of Commerce and Economics, Bombay University, India, 1982.

SOLO EXHIBITIONS:

- 2000 • *Pod and other containers* Triveni Kala Sangam, New Delhi, India
- 1999 • *A Vessel and a Container* Cymroza Art Gallery, Mumbai, India
- 1995 • *Mosaics* Dallas Visual Arts Center, Dallas, TX USA.
 - *East meets West*, Carmicheal Gallery, Museum of Art, Tyler, TX, USA.
- 1993 • *Masters of Fine Arts Show*, Meadows Museum of Art, Dallas, TX, USA.
- 1990 • *Excentricities* Gallery, West Hampton Beach, NY, USA

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS:

- 1999 • *Mumbai Potter's Tea Party*, NGMA, Mumbai, India
- 1996 • *Sehweisen*, S. E. Gallery, Darmstadt, Germany
- 1994 • *Dinner Works*, Louisville Art Association, Louisville, KY.
 - *Scissors, Paper, Rock*, Barry Whistler Gallery, Dallas, TX
- 1993 • *National Teapot show II*, Cedar creek Gallery, Creamer, NC.
 - *Object and Image*, Eastfeild College Gallery, TX. Two person show.
 - *The Clay Cup*, Abington Art Center, PA. Juror: Ron Nagle



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72, Bhulabhai Desai Road, Mumbai 400 026. INDIA.
TEL.: 3671983 Fax: 3671999
Email: cymroza@vsnl.net Website: www.cymroza.com
Timings: 10 AM to 7 PM excepts Sundays.