



(AV) *Code X*. Ceramic with glaze, feathers, netting, paint on steel. 161 x 26 x 32 cm.



(AV) *Code X*. 1999. Detail. Ceramic with glaze, feathers, netting, paint on steel. 161 x 26 x 32 cm.



Fleur (Magia). Ceramic, glaze, paint, flocking. 16 x 17.5 x 10 cm.



Tom Tom (Blaze). 1999. Ceramic. 11 x 9 x 18 cm.

Jim Shrosbree At Revolution

Article by Tony Hepburn

IN VIEWING THE WORK OF JIM SHROSBREE ONE IS, initially, confounded. What are these objects? Description is difficult, the juxtaposition of materials improbable. This, added to a sense of levitation, makes looking for facts a futile journey. In 1966 Lucy Lippard wrote a review of an exhibition at the

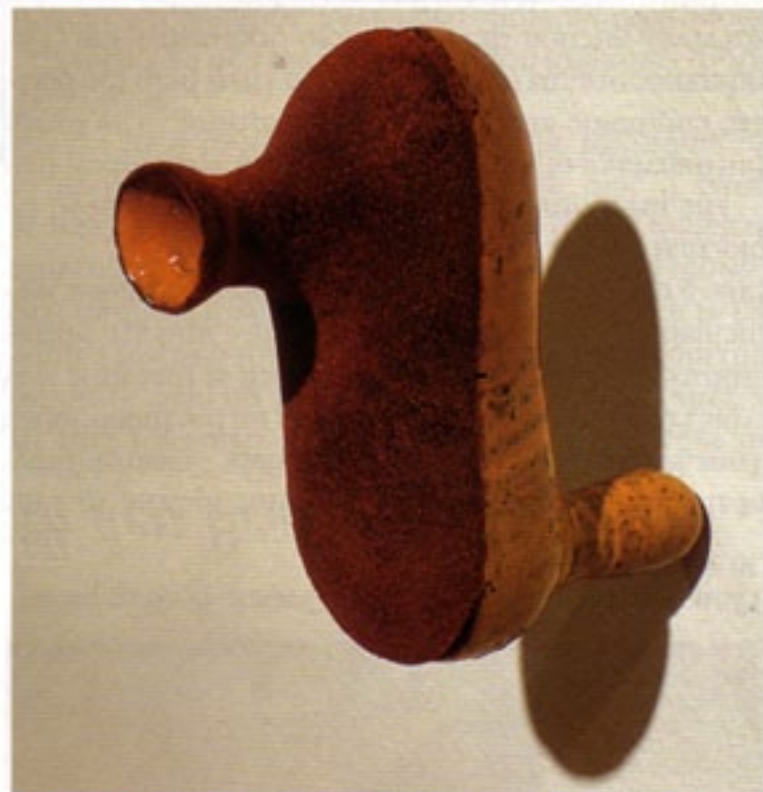
Fischback Gallery in New York. She titled the work *Eccentric Abstraction*. Included in the group were the then little-known Bruce Nauman, Eva Hesse and Frank Viner. "These artists refuse to eschew imagination and the extension of sensuous experience while they also refuse to sacrifice the solid formal basis



Oneyone (tom tom). 1999. Ceramic, acrylic fur, paint. 21.5 x 7 x 15 cm.



Olfax (CU2). 9 x 20 x 7.5 cm.

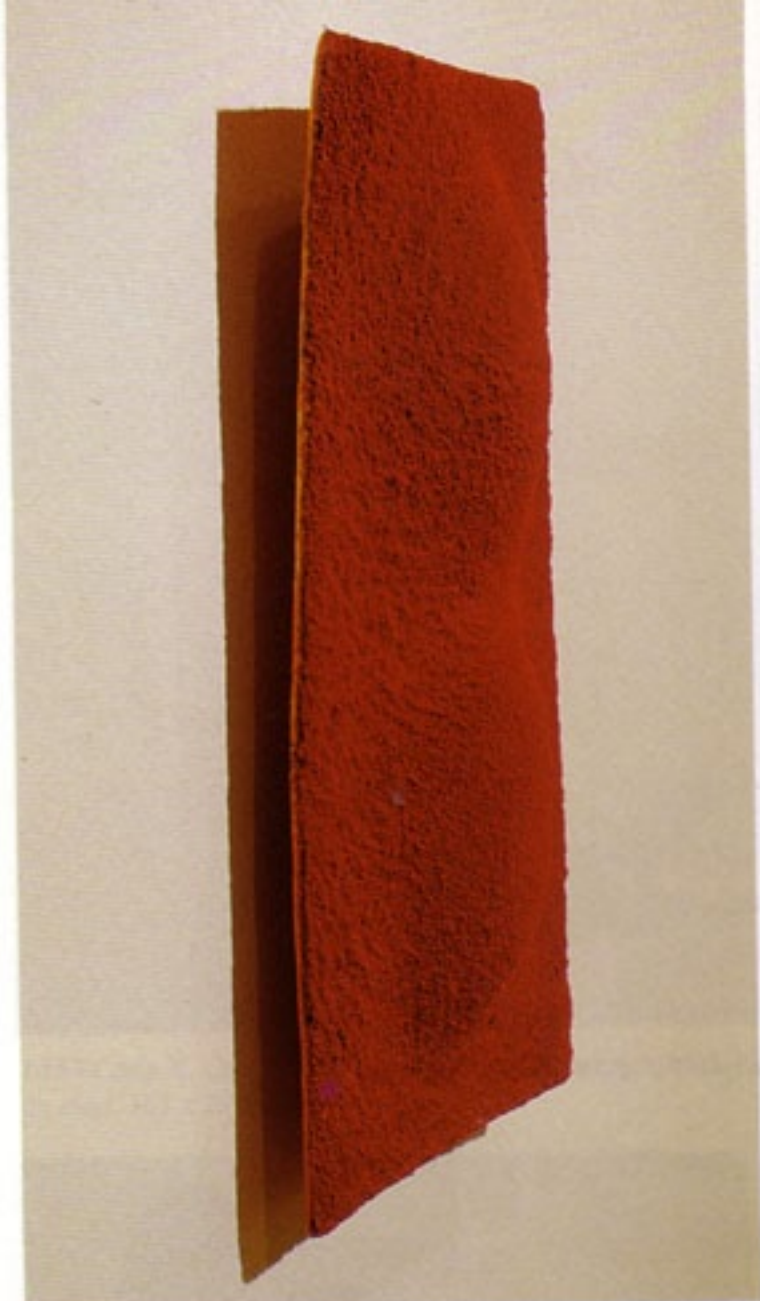


Ufuzzi (red/red). 1999. Ceramic, suede flocking. 14 x 5 x 14.4 cm.

demand of the best in current non-objective art. Eccentric abstraction introduces humour into the structural idiom where angels fear to tread. Incongruity, on which all humour is founded and on which surrealism depends so heavily, is a prime factor in eccentric abstraction but the contrasts that it thrives upon are handled impassively, emphasising neither one element nor the other nor the encounter between the two. Opposites are used as complementaries rather than contradictions; the result is a formal neutralisation, or paralysis, that achieves a unique sort of wholeness. Surrealism was based on the recon-

ciliation of distant realities. Eccentric Abstraction is based on the reconciliation of different forms, or formal effects and a cancellation of the form-context 'dichotomy'.¹ Eccentric Abstraction raised questions about sculptures' identity. Minimalism and conceptualism were at their zenith with a coherent theoretical base when Eccentric Abstraction offered a place for the idiosyncratic.

The ceramics field has always regarded and held secure that aspect of art making from George E. Ohr through Ken Price and Ron Nagle. Shroobree is in that lineage. However, he does introduce his own brand



Fleur (chromo). Side View. 1999. Ceramic, flocking, paint. 30.5 x 18 x 5.5 cm.



Fleur (chromo). 1999. Ceramic, flocking, paint. 30.5 x 18 x 5.5 cm.

of the aesthetic, cultural and mythic hybrid. In 1968 Tom Wolf's book entitled *The Candy Coloured Tangerine Flake Streamline Baby* centring on the finish-fetish culture in southern California which at that time was inclusive of surfboards, custom cars... and art. Shrosbree's use of flocking, fake fur, glitter and plastic, evoke that era but with a sense of being nostalgic.

The presentness in Shrosbree work is achieved by the marriage of the fetishised surface with forms that are enigmatic and sometimes disturbing. The forms reference organs of the body, pills (that help the body survive), suction devices, micro organisms, etc. The sculptures are often wall mounted in such a way that they appear to float and have gestures that seem to beckon. On close inspection one senses a vulnerability that even breathing too close could bring their demise. This manipulation of the viewer – a push-pull effect – creates an instability and gives the pieces their life.

William Tucker once remarked in his definition of sculpture that "It is subject to gravity and realed by light".² Light and gravity are Shrosbree's primary 'materials'. The aforementioned surface treatments absorb (flocking, feathers, fur) and reflect (glaze, copper, steel, glitter) light. The manipulation is carefully controlled and the effect is to evoke softness and hardness simultaneously. However, one piece, *Olfax*, introduces other possibilities.

A small clay form loosely resembling a child's toy automobile sits on a highly polished piece of copper which penetrates the wall. The components use a single light source in the gallery to produce a haunting geometric aura stretching up the wall and gradually dissipating. *Olfax* seems to embody many of the principles of Shrosbree's art. The tangible and the illusive playing side by side in complete harmony.

Of other contemporary artists only Richard Tuttle comes to mind as one who shares Shrosbree's interest in ambiguity. Susan Harris in writing on Tuttle, and the same could be said of Shrosbree, said: "Art for Tuttle is not a search for a signature style; it is a truth one must follow. One responds to its poignancy as one would to a chord of music or a phrase in poetry. Tuttle/Shrosbree hopes that his work gives poetic insight into another human being."³ Shrosbree's work may be small in scale but hugely daring in its ambition.

REFERENCES:

1. Lucy Lippard. *Changing*.
2. Bill Tucker. *The Language of Sculpture*.
3. Susan Harris. *Richard Tuttle*.

Tony Hepburn is Artist in Residence at the Cranbrook Academy of Art, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, and is currently writing a book on the ceramic artist, Robert Turner. Jim Shrosbree's exhibition was held at Revolution Gallery, Detroit, during 1999.