

Since his earliest exhibitions in the late 1970s, British artist Andrew Lord has worked with clay, plaster, beeswax, bronze, drawing, printmaking and video. This exhibition provides the first overview of the artist's career, charting the development of his practice, from the close observation of nature and references to modern art to casts from the body and use of memory as a sculptural tool. Born and brought up in Lancashire, Lord works primarily in New York City and the Netherlands.

After exploring the sculpture of the Della Robbia workshop in Florence, the Meissen sculptors Kändler and Kirchner and the ceramics of Mexico and Staffordshire, in the early 1970s, Lord frequently reworked the traditional forms of jugs, vases and cups. His early experiments, made from a studio in the Netherlands, often investigated artistic styles such as Cubism or different effects of light and shade.

Sixteen pieces. Angled (1986) was made by using tracing paper to record the fall of light on a set of round vessels, before the drawn outlines were reconstructed in three dimensions in clay. As Lord explains, 'In the 1980s... I painted the fall of light onto the vessels I was making in ways I'd seen in painting. After looking at Monet's *soleil couchant* I made an *Impressionist set* and, after looking at Cézanne, I made a *Cézanne set*. From patterns I collected in Mexico I made a *patterned set*. I painted a *grey shadow set* in sharp electric light and I made a *Cubist set* after looking at Picasso's – I think – *Harlequin* and *Woman with a Necklace*. To make a *Cubist set* I drew the divisions of light and shade across a vase's surface and from this rebuilt a flat angular form. Finally I made a *black set*. The black sets were objects without light and recalled an object whose simplicity and mystery had seemed incomprehensible, a sculpture of an English light bulb by Jasper Johns...'¹



Andrew Lord, *Profile vase (Duchamp)*, 'Lunch Poems'/O'Hara, weight, left and right eye, 2002 / Courtesy the artist

Although clearly derived from classic vessels, these early shapes often evoked the human body, recalling for example a dancing figure by Henri Matisse or a Cubist head by Picasso. This correspondence between the vessel and the human body is a consistent feature throughout Lord's career. Lord's *profile vases*, for example, fuse the continuous outline of a vessel with the facial profile of key artists including Marcel Duchamp, Paul Gauguin, Jasper Johns and Pablo Picasso. These works consist of a number of Lord's personal objects, references and symbols, including replicas of books from his library and casts of parts of his body, including his eye or tongue. The process of casting itself and the incorporation of real objects into these works is used by the artist as an exploration of the ambiguous borderline between the real world and a represented image.

In the early 1980s, Lord moved into a basement studio in New York and continued to work with vessel forms but began to focus on using his own body as a sculptural tool. He produced a series of work around the senses by pressing his nose, tongue, eye sockets, ears and teeth into clay to emphasise basic bodily functions such as breathing, smelling and swallowing. *Watching* (1998), a three part work, has been built up from impressions of the artist's eye sockets and echoes, in three dimensions, the drawings of vases with eyes. It is as if the artist is giving sight or sense to inanimate matter, creating an association between flesh and clay and inevitably toying with the act of creation itself.

Many of Lord's ideas and forms were prompted by his visits to the Anthropology Museum in Mexico City in 1974. Some of his vessels referred to specific pre-Columbian motifs, while others are variations on classic Mexican forms, such as tripod pots from Teotihuacan. In *Eighteen Mexican pieces* (1993), Lord builds variations on forms and subjects like the serpent and skull, all in a glaze that recalls the brilliant mineral blue of Maya and Mexican vessels. The gold lines and droplets frequently found in Lord's sculptures were applied along cracks created during the firing process; instead of being hidden, these imperfections have been transformed into prominent aesthetic features.

Second Avenue, No. 3 (2007) embodies the moment when Lord moved away from vessels to embark on a new phase in his career. Each piece in this series relates to a stanza from Frank O'Hara's 1960 poem of the same name. Here, in its last throes, the form of a previously rotund jug is reduced to an emaciated and ghostly outline.

Belonging to another series of works produced at this time, *cast neck and tongue* (2005–06) and *cast arm and hand, the Bowery, January* (2007) represent fragments of the artist's body, cloaked in plaster and beeswax. Instead of being integrated into vessels, these body parts hang in isolation, and relate to Walt Whitman's

celebration of the human body in the poem *I Sing the Body Electric* from *Leaves of Grass* (1855).

The two tablets *between my hands* and *inside my mouth* (2010) demonstrate a complex play between form and content, merging both the object in the work and the subject of the work as well as integrating drawing with sculpture. As with the adjacent cast of his nostrils, for example, these works reveal Lord's long-standing interest in the relationship between inside and outside. One of the distinguishing characteristics of the ceramic medium and of vessels themselves is that they have both an inside and an outside, a feature shared by both vessels and bodies.

Lord's recent work turns to memory as a tool to extend his visual language and sculptural form. The Long Gallery focuses on the period since 2005, when Lord worked with a broader variety of subjects including architecture, folklore and landscape. These works evoke deeply personal references, often drawing on the artist's childhood memories. *Dancer in Bacup (II)* (2008–09), *arch spanning river, Healey Dell (II)* (2008–09) and *tower, Blackpool (II)* (2008–09) all form part of a sculptural mind map of buildings, landscapes and figures that made a lasting impression on the young Andrew Lord. As he explains, 'Using vessels as subject matter was a useful way to work through ideas about art, about light and shade and an observed optical world. And later a physical world, and there was a point – when I made the series *Second Avenue* – that the vessels faded into the barest remains of themselves and after that it occurred to me their use for me had gone. They faded into a wider world of barest shapes. *Tower, Blackpool*, for instance, became as useful a starting point and sometimes more so, because it involved an earlier memory, a lost memory.'²

The sculpture *Dancer in Bacup (II)* (2008–09) recalls a traditional event in the small town of Bacup, Lancashire that retains its mystery from Lord's childhood: every Easter Saturday a band of men known as the Britannia Coconutters dance through the streets with blackened faces, possibly reflecting a pagan tradition or mining connections. The sculpture of *Harry without his arm* (2010) represents the artist's great uncle, who lost an arm in the war, while the relief, *swallows around his neck (II)* (2008–09) evokes a memory that has almost crystallised as myth; that of his uncle's tattooed 'necklace' of swallows, where each bird represented a crossing of the equator. As well as such personal recollections, Lord's recent sculptures are invariably informed by his earlier work, so that the natural form of *small valley (Doctor's Wood)*, *Whitworth (II)* (2008–09), for example, inevitably recalls the shape of a vessel, while also giving shape to elusive memories.

The series of poems about Lord's work installed in the hallway was written by James Schuyler (1923–1991), a central figure of the New York School of Poetry that included Frank O'Hara and John Ashbery. He also wrote

for *Art News* and worked at the Museum of Modern Art, New York before receiving the 1981 Pulitzer Prize for Poetry.

The Resource Area behind the Information Desk contains a number of the artist's notebooks from the last thirty years, showing the genesis of numerous ideas, as well as the explicit relationship between body parts and vessels, as in the drawing armpit and jug or the head-vases referencing Peruvian models. A number of images of theatre projects, made in collaboration with Dutch choreographer Ton Simons, include shots of dancers wearing costumes of cups, bottles, cigarettes and musical instruments.

The Events Room on the first floor of the Gallery presents a series of short videos, made since 2008, as Lord drifts with a handheld camera through places and scenes embedded in his memory since childhood. *Road from Catley Lane Head to Rake Head, Stacksteads, June 14* (2009) follows the path of a Victorian stone road in Lord's native Lancashire as it winds through a picturesque landscape. Similarly, *river Spodden at Healey Dell, Whitworth, 28 December* (2008) captures a relentless torrent of water coursing over stones and through rock pools providing a reference to a number of drawings and sculptures, including *arch spanning river, Healey Dell (II)* (2008–09), which is in the Long Gallery. As Lord has explained, 'Whenever I returned to Whitworth I was struck, shocked really, by the landscape, the moors, and how much the surface and markings of my own work and the lines I make resemble the moors and it occurred to me that my own work had been a search for this first landscape...'³

Overall, the exhibition provides a partial overview of Andrew Lord's career. The artist's interests and focus have naturally ebbed and flowed over the last thirty years with numerous reprises and riffs, overlaps and deviations. Nevertheless, Lord has continuously aligned personal observation with a wealth of associations from art history and poetry to produce a significant and complex practice driven by relentless enquiry and curiosity. As he expressed it, 'Making objects has been a way for me to understand things I've found incomprehensible, whether it is Jasper Johns' light bulb or dancers in Bacup, and making things has been an attempt to break a spell of incomprehensibility. It is a way to answer questions I set myself: this is how I paint light as an Impressionist, this is how I make Cubism, this is swallowing, this is breathing, these are the things I grew up knowing, this is the River Spodden. So on.'⁴

1. Andrew Lord in conversation with James Rondeau, Andrew Lord, MK Gallery and Santa Monica Museum of Art, 2010, p.20.

2. Ibid., pp.16–17.

3. Andrew Lord Interview with Anthony Spira, MK Gallery, August 2010, published online: [http://www.mk-g.org/library_2010/ Artist_Interview_AndrewLord_Sept2010.pdf](http://www.mk-g.org/library_2010/Artist_Interview_AndrewLord_Sept2010.pdf)

4. Rondeau, p.20.

MK Gallery

Exhibition guide

- Profile vase (Gauguin), 'Leaves of Grass'/Whitman and Demuth 'S'; 2002
Ceramic, gold leaf, epoxy and wire / Courtesy the artist
- Profile vase (Duchamp), 'Lunch Poems'/O'Hara, weight, left and right eye, 2002
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- Untitled, 1985
Crayon on black paper
Courtesy Rijksmuseum Twenthe, Enschede, depot VBVR
- Untitled, 1985
Crayon on black paper
Courtesy Rijksmuseum Twenthe, Enschede, Loan Andrew Lord
- Sixteen pieces. Angled, 1986
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Courtesy the artist
- Untitled, works on paper, 2001
Conté crayon on Nepalese paper
Courtesy the artist and Gladstone Gallery, New York
- watching, 1998
Ceramic epoxy, gold leaf and encre de Chine
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- cast plank, Carson, 2005-06
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Courtesy the artist and Galerie Eva Presenhuber, Zurich
- cast neck and tongue, 2005-06
Plaster and beeswax
Courtesy the artist and Galerie Eva Presenhuber, Zurich
- Second Avenue, No.3, 2007
Plaster and beeswax
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- two modelled skulls and base, the Bowery, August, 7 pm, 2007
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- Eighteen Mexican pieces, 1993
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Courtesy the artist and Galerie Eva Presenhuber, Zurich
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Ceramic / Courtesy the artist and Gladstone Gallery, New York
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Ceramic / Courtesy the artist and Gladstone Gallery, New York
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- 34-36. Selection of artist's notebooks, 1974-2009
37. Images from a selection of artist's notebooks, 1974-2009
38. Images from theatre projects in collaboration with Ton Simons including: Kameubel Kamengelmoes, an entertainment for children (1979), Commonplace Quintet (1980) and Whitworth/Beesel (2010)

First Floor Events Room

- VIDEO:
river Spodden at Healey Dell, Whitworth, 28 December, 2008
12 minutes 47 seconds

Small valley (Doctor's Wood), Whitworth, 28 December, 2008
6 minutes 49 seconds

tower, Blackpool, 23 and 28 December, 2008
23 minutes 25 seconds

road from Catley Lane Head to Rake Head, Stacksteads, June 14, 2009
17 minutes 36 seconds

Brittania Coconutters dance through Bacup, Easter Saturday, 2009
1 hour 37 minutes

sheep on a bank. Trough of Bowland, 9 April, 2009
25 seconds

geese at Gawmless End, Shawforth, 10 April, 2009
37 seconds

swans on the river Swalm at Rijkel, Limburg, 28 December, 2009
2 minutes 34 seconds

All videos courtesy the artist

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Andrew Lord, *Sixteen pieces. Angled, 1986*
Ceramic / Courtesy the artist / Photo: Andy Keate

