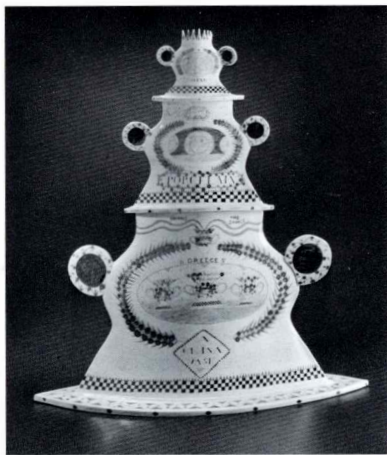


Mara Superior

Angela Fina

A China Vase
(1988), 24" x 14½",
slab-constructed
porcelain.



Michael Cohen

Mara Superior's pieces are vessels of memory, powerful forms filled with a remembrance of things past. They are commemorative icons expressing a hieratic spiritual quality that calls for ceremonial placement in the environment. The content of the drawings is contemplative and complex, and the use of words gives clues to the paradox being explored.

Superior has chosen to flatten certain historically evocative pot forms to give the kind of boundaries that spherical shapes do not have, creating a shaped canvas for drawings. The forms are instantly recognizable, but they are exaggerated. Curves sometimes become angles, lids are miniature repetitions of the same pot form, lids often have lids, and the foot can become a separate pedestal. The pieces have a trophy-like presence that comes from their frontal, pedestaled presentation and from the content of the narratives drawn and written on the surface. The optical quality of the reduction-fired, clear-glazed, white porcelain is an important sensual part of Superior's work. She explores and exploits many self-referential ceramic themes, including that of the permanence of fired clay. The formal, deliberate, and over-sized pieces are made to last centuries. She also deals graphically with the traditional relationship of pottery form to human body parts. There are animal references, such as swan-neck teapot spouts with beak openings. She uses the shapes of historically evolved pots, and, despite the flattened and monumental size of her pieces, each is carefully made to be functional. Vases can hold a bouquet, and their function is celebrated and explained in the drawings on their surfaces. Superior's work is firmly grounded in ceramic tradition; the ancient Greeks, too, decorated their ceremonial pots with narrative drawings. The fascinating physical beauty of glazed porcelain, with its copper-red blushes and floating cobalt blues, is of central value in these pieces. They could not exist with the same impact in any other material. They are about ceramic art. The quality and content of the drawing conjures memories of illuminated manuscripts, with their house portraits, pastoral scenes, textile patterns, and small botanical studies. The drawings, mostly inspired by Superior's New England environment, also have the graphic quality of an embroidered sampler, with an earnest, deliberate pace that precludes cuteness. There is a very personal and idiosyncratic quality in Superior's work that co-exists with a great strength and dignity. The work appears not to be influenced by current fashions in drawing and painting or by such hot trends as brightly colored, low-fire clay art. A unique freshness emerges from the artist's almost cloistered, confident, personal vision.