The idea for this exhibition began several years ago, inspired by my curiosity regarding plant and animal imagery in historical architectural ornament. Images and abstractions from nature have been used for centuries to create the shapes and embellish the surfaces of artistic forms. To read the meanings of these motifs, I searched for their sources. Ancient embellishments were often derived from indigenous plants and animals. For example, representations of the Egyptian papyrus, the Grecian acanthus, and the Indian lotus were images that carried symbolic or visual significance. As well, they provided a connection, a mediation, between the domesticated shelter of the built environment, the culture, the society, and the enigmatic, unpredictable aspects of nature. Disseminated, recycled, and reworked over centuries and in various cultures and continents, ancient motifs entered the visual lexicons of many artistic traditions. They gathered new and altered cultural meanings, and in many cases their meanings were consumed. Yet, regardless of a motif’s specific significance, plant and animal images used for ritual, special, or serviceable objects became visual and tactile referents to nature. They provided humans with the means to examine, reflect upon, and express their relationships to other kinds of living beings, and by extension, the natural world. They still do.

FLORA & FAUNA
Ovidio Giberga

Ovidio Giberga spent his childhood in Washington, DC, Madrid, and Bogota. He earned an Associate Arts degree from Miami Dade Community College in 1988, then spent five months learning traditional marble carving techniques in Pietrasanta, Italy. In 1991, he received a Bachelor of Science degree from Florida State University, and in 1996 an MFA in ceramics from the University of Florida. Giberga was a resident artist and technician at the Archie Bray Foundation for the Ceramic Arts in Helena, Montana, where he participated in many group and solo exhibitions, notably at the Myrna Loy Center. He currently teaches sculpture and ceramics as an adjunct assistant professor at the University of Florida in Gainesville and is active in his local community through workshops in the public schools.

This exhibition explores current works of seven artists who continue to mine a vast array of natural motifs. Their visual statements are evidence of the age-old impulse to represent and interpret plants and animals, flora and fauna. Flora and fauna are scientific terms used to describe, classify, and order the animals and plants of a given time period or region. These artists redefine the terms by inventing new forms to explore the relationships between our contemporary industrial world, human culture, and the natural environment.

In these works, we see the creations of hybrid figures that combine animal and plant with human and mechanical anatomies. The hybrid form

Keisuke Mizuno

A native of Japan, Keisuke Mizuno is assistant professor of ceramics at St. Cloud University in St. Cloud, Minnesota. His work is shown extensively across the country in group and solo exhibitions, and he is represented by the Frank Lloyd Gallery in Santa Monica and the Dorothy Weiss Gallery in San Francisco. Mizuno earned a Bachelor of Science degree from Indiana University in 1993, and an MFA from Arizona State University in 1997. He also studied ceramics at the Kansas City Art Institute as a special status student. Mizuno's sculptures are in the collections of the Renwick Gallery of the National Museum of Art and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.
derives from heterogeneous sources, merging elements of different or incongruent kinds. *Hybrid* is originally from the Latin word for the offspring of a tame sow and a wild boar; it mingles the territories of domesticity and wildness, the familiar and the unknown, the seen and the unseen, the regulated and the lawless. Each of these artists uses the hybrid form to question the place of humans in both the cultural and natural realms.

Ovidio Giberga’s big game trophy heads are burdened with, and seem stunned by, the attachments of bizarre and absurd orthodontia. The dental devices call attention to the animals’ teeth as a reference to the “ancient belief that teeth embody the strength and vitality of the being.” By hybridizing forms in an unexpected and disturbing way, Giberga speaks to the “debate over how mining, logging, poaching, and urban encroachment are manipulating and tapping the strength and vitality of the wilderness.” In these works, human intervention – that of the hunter, the taxidermist, the dentist, and the artist – is unseen, but has left its mark.

Keisuke Mizuno’s highly detailed, china-painted fruits appear to be perfect and idealized from afar, but change as the tiny sculptures come into closer range. Voracious insects feed on these luscious, delectable, but unfamiliar plant products. Embedded in the fruits’ flesh like deceased, inert seeds are tiny
Adrian Arleo resides in Lolo, Montana. She has received numerous honors, including awards from the Virginia A. Groot Foundation in 1992 and 1993, and a Montana Arts Council Individual Fellowship in 1995. She is represented by the Trinity Gallery in Atlanta, the Ferrin Gallery in New York City, and The Works Gallery in Philadelphia. She has lectured and taught extensively in colleges and universities across the United States and has conducted numerous workshops. Arleo graduated with honors from Pitzer College in 1983 with a double major in Art and Anthropology. She earned an MFA in ceramics from the Rhode Island School of Design in 1986.

human skulls and fetuses. A story is being told, one which reverses the pecking order of an anthropocentric view of “nature’s” categories.

The restrained, anonymous female figures made by Marilyn Lysohir are dressed in the 1940’s clothing style of her mother’s generation. The headless, armless figures politely stand on bases of dinosaur vertebrae from the Mesozoic Era. A pre-historic, geologic age, this period traversed hundreds of millennia, and was characterized by the development and extinction of the dinosaurs, as well as by the appearance of most flowering plants, invertebrates, birds, and fishes of modern types. Images of these life forms, which have evolved into the conventionalized motifs of twentieth-century tattoos, are incised into the dress/bodies. Lysohir suggests the vast continuum of known time and Homo sapiens’ short life-span in the ongoing evolution of the animate world.

For Adrian Arleo, “the word ‘nature’ can be expanded to refer to human nature, (our) psychological states, and ‘character’ in a narrative sense.” Arleo’s hybrids are interwoven elements that establish benevolent, empathetic bonds between plants, animals, and humans. In Hatchlings, a fetal human/bird form emerges from a seed pod or egg. From another view of the same piece, the egg form transforms its shape to appear as the new life’s unfolding wings. “The images are meant to be open to interpretation, allowing each viewer to respond with

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experiences, feelings, or dreams from their own life.” In Arleo’s works, humans are reminded that they are an integral part of nature. Her visual stories suggest that we are part of a “primordial, greater-than-human force” which can compel us to higher psychic realms.

The distorted, dismembered bodies of Adelaide Paul’s horse forms are often united with rusted, found-metal parts. She has chosen this form as a "stand-in for the (human) body”. When these bodies are merged with metal scraps, as in Prosthesis, they become new beings that are ambiguous, as-yet-unconceived fruits, organs, or medical apparatus. Richly textured, organic, and colorful glazes “act as an aesthetic counterbalance” to these perverse hybrids. The pieces insinuate that an artificial contrivance is not a satisfactory substitute for the connective tissue which bonds humankind with nature. Nevertheless, Paul says, all creatures evolve, transmute, and change: we cannot know the future of our species.

Neil Forrest grafts images of insects into planes of stratified colored clays, which in turn are set into large, flat serving trays. His insect images are “filtered through the beauty of decorative language, but, in reality, insects are often bothersome, even frightening, and certainly perceived as ugly.” He finds himself forming a new relationship to the natural world as he portrays it through decoration. “Its contemplation demonstrates the proximity of beauty to ugliness.” Our various readings and interpretations of nature

Chris Weaver

Chris Weaver is a sculptor and metal designer living in Prairie Grove, Arkansas. He has worked as a metalsmith, an industrial potter, a historic monument conservator, an architectural ornament model- and mold-maker, and a museum preparator. He has also been a visiting instructor at several universities, including University of Nebraska, Louisiana State University, and the University of New Mexico. Weaver worked as a resident artist at the John Michael Kohler Art Center in Sheboygan, Wisconsin, the Archie Bray Foundation in Helena, Montana, and at the Demis Foundation in Omaha, Nebraska. Weaver earned a BFA from the Kansas City Art Institute in 1983 and, in 1988, an MFA from New York State College of Ceramics at Alfred University.
are incongruous. Cultural production enables us to become aware of these contradictions. Forrest seems to assert that we need culture, perhaps we created it, to better decipher and understand our relationship to nature.

Fragmented, discarded, and found elements from industrial production and nature are assembled by Chris Weaver to create dioramas and composite figures. In the human form of Birdwatcher, a mud dauber’s nest begets the form of a bird and in turn a human shoulder, a tree trunk stands in for the human trunk, and the shape of a sheet metal appendage simultaneously references a hand, a flame, a flower. Topped with a human head form, this compound human body is woven of parts from plants and animals, suggesting that we are all made from the same fabric. Yet Weaver’s assemblages can also unsettle, ambiguously placing animal forms in the contexts of human detritus and scientific observation.

What do we know of flora and fauna – the animals, and our more distant relatives, the plants – and what do they know of us? As a member of the animal kingdom, yet the only extant species, sapiens, in our genus, Homo, humans are solitary beings in our system of scientific classification. With one foot set in...
culture, and the other in the animal kingdom, humans occupy an enigmatic place in the world. These artists probe the finely threaded but loosely woven gossamer connecting nature and culture.

By engaging space with clay, these artists acknowledge a reference to the earth's foundation, which supports many life forms. Clay is a source from which humans gain much of our economic and physical survival. Malleable in its raw state, clay responds to touch. When fired to a fluxing point, the glass-forming components of the ceramic minerals melt and create a hard, resistant record of the artist's action. The texture and temperature of the artist's handling and intent for a work's shape and surface contain an expressive potential for the meaningful content of a piece. In the processing of the medium, as well as in its traditional forms of ritual and service such as pottery and architecture, clay is a material that can engage the body's tactile sense. Touching, like seeing and speaking, is a sensibility, a tool these artists use to experience and examine their world.

- Cary Esser July 30, 1999

All quotes courtesy of the artists' written statements.

Neil Forrest

Neil Forrest lives in Halifax, Nova Scotia, where he is an associate professor of ceramics at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design. Forrest has exhibited his work and lectured on ceramics internationally, most recently in Hong Kong, Korea, and Texas. His recent solo shows have been held at the Pewabic Pottery in Detroit, the Ontario Crafts Council, and the Hong Kong Potter's Guild. Forrest has been awarded grants from the Canada Council, the Nova Scotia Arts Council and the New York State Arts Council. He earned a BFA from Cranbrook Academy of Art in 1981 and, in 1984, an MFA from New York State College of Ceramics at Alfred University.

Cary Esser

Cary Esser lives in Kansas City, Missouri, where she is associate professor and chair of the ceramics department at the Kansas City Art Institute. She has completed several public art commissions, including ceramic relief sculptures in the Secretary of State Building in Raleigh, North Carolina; Heritage Park in Sanford, North Carolina; and the Paint Branch High School in Burtonsville, Maryland. Esser has worked as a resident artist at the Archie Bray Foundation in Helena, Montana, the John Michael Kohler Art Center in Sheboygan, Wisconsin, and the Watershed Center in Newcastle, Maine. She has presented many lectures and workshops at universities and arts centers in the United States, and is represented by the Sherry Leedy Gallery in Kansas City.
exhibition checklist

Adrian Arleo  Lolo, Montana
Consider 1999
white sculpture clay, mixed media
22.5 x 33.5 x 13"

The Bird's Lover 1996
white sculpture clay, glaze, stain
17.5 x 18.5 x 15"
courtesy of Trinity Gallery, Atlanta, GA

Hatchlings 1999
white sculpture clay, polymer clay, wire, epoxy
set of three, each: 3 x 6.5 x 3.5"
courtesy of Trinity Gallery, Atlanta, GA

Neil Forrest  Halifax, Nova Scotia
Trivet: Navigate 1999
porcelain, Egyptian faience, mortar, gouache
7 x 20 x 8"

Trivet: Trunk 1999
porcelain, Egyptian faience, mortar, gouache
2.5 x 20 x 13"

Trivet: Pied 1999
porcelain, Egyptian faience, mortar, gouache
2.5 x 17.5 x 5"

Trivet: Borge 1999
porcelain, Egyptian faience, mortar, gouache
4 x 16 x 6.5"

Ovidio C. Giberga  Gainesville, Florida
Mountain Goat with Headgear 1997
stoneware with atmospheric firing, metal, urethane
24 x 15 x 18"

Mountain Lion with Retractors 1997
stoneware with atmospheric firing, metal, urethane
13 x 12 x 17"

Coypu with Retention Brace 1997
stomeware with atmospheric firing, metal, urethane
20 x 12 x 11"

Boar with Banding 1997
stomeware with atmospheric firing, metal, rubber band
23 x 14 x 17"

Marilyn Lysohir  Moscow, Idaho
Tattooed Ladies: Snake 1999
white sculpture clay, underglaze, glaze
26 x 12 x 8"

Tattooed Ladies: Rose 1999
white sculpture clay, underglaze, glaze
25 x 12 x 8"

Tattooed Ladies: Hand 1999
white sculpture clay, underglaze, glaze
25 x 12 x 8"

Tattooed Ladies: Blue Dress with Leaves 1999
white sculpture clay, underglaze, glaze
25 x 12 x 8"

Bird Tiles #2, 3, 4 1998
white tile clay, underglaze, glaze
each: 12 in. square
courtesy of Byron Cohen Gallery of Contemporary Art, Kansas City, Missouri

Keisuke Mizuno  St. Cloud, Minnesota
Forbidden Fruit 1999
porcelain, glaze, china paint
3 x 11 x 6"

Forbidden Fruit 1999
porcelain, glaze, china paint
7 x 11 x 6"

Forbidden Fruit 1999
porcelain, glaze, china paint
5 x 6 x 6"

Adelaide Paul  Lubbock, Texas
consume/consumer/consume/consummate 1999
white stoneware, glaze, copper funnel, clear and red tool dip
3.5 x 11 x 4"

Horse with Lid 1999
white stoneware, glaze, lustres
5.5 x 10.5 x 2.5"

Prosthesis 1999
white stoneware, glaze, steel
3 x 9 x 10"

Site/Stay 1999
white stoneware, glaze
9.5 x 7.5 x 3"

Chris Weaver  Prairie Grove, Arkansas
Birdwatcher 1999
white stoneware, brick, cement, mixed media
33 x 22 x 6"

Wild Bird 1999
white stoneware, brick, mixed media
38 x 17 x 11"

Cary Esser  Kansas City, Missouri
Campus radicans 1999
ceramic, terra sigillata, glaze
32.5 x 19.5 x 1.25"
courtesy Sherry Leedy Gallery, Kansas City, Missouri

acknowledgements

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Flora and Fauna was curated by Cary Esser, Associate Professor and Chair of The Ceramics Department at the Kansas City Art Institute. The curators gratefully acknowledge the artists: Michele Twieg, Executive Director of Florida Craftsmen, Inc.; Suzanne Wisner, Director of Florida Craftsmen Gallery; the staff at Florida Craftsmen; Kathleen Collins, President, the Kansas City Art Institute; Rachelle Smith, Director, H&R Block Artspace at the Kansas City Art Institute; Catherine Amidon, Director of Exhibitions, Karl Dreyf Gallery; Sharyn O'Mara, Assistant Professor, the Kansas City Art Institute; John Esser, Assistant Professor, Wagner College; and Mo Dickens, beloved CEO.

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