

# Flash Art

## Richard Hawkins

Richard Telles and Jenny's / Los Angeles

From phallus to anus to breasts and ovaries, a bodily exuberance and polymorphous perversity was everywhere in Richard Hawkins's recent exhibition of twenty-five square, low-relief, wall-mounted clay sculptures. If his imagery seems to express the unhinged imagination of pubescent desire, his treatment of clay counters the trend of more refined ceramic works with the pure abjection of scatological Play-Doh. Neurotic perforations, rough carvings and crudely fingered impressions serve as decorative details on works rendered with just a single layer of underglaze, leaving candy-hued pinks, blues and greens with a dull, chalky veneer.

As in previous work, such as his *Ankoku* and *Urbis Paganus* series, Hawkins brings an art-historical impulse to these pieces, responding directly to the figure of Antonin Artaud. The poet-dramatist's asylum drawings, his trip to Mexico in search of the remote Tarahumara people, and his complex, violent and carnal 1934 novel *Heliogabale* provide the coordinates for reading the fractured planes and puzzle-like arrangements of Hawkins's multiplicity of bodies. Here the iconography of fertility — breasts and distended wombs — conflates with the imagery of subjective desire. Peyote buttons, assholes, mechanical gears and cosmological signs are visually interchangeable, while distinctions between male and female forms become obscured through exaggeration. In one work, endometrial folds and phallic protrusions form a womb-like cavity that hangs above a set of testicles, reminding us that reproductive organs are both containers and things to be contained. Within this interpretive framework, Hawkins not only appropriates Artaud's drawings but seems also to respond, in turn, to the thorny history of modern art's appropriation of "primitive" cultures, suggesting that material and cultural hybridity involve an ongoing process of absorbing and being absorbed.

by Olivia Cha

