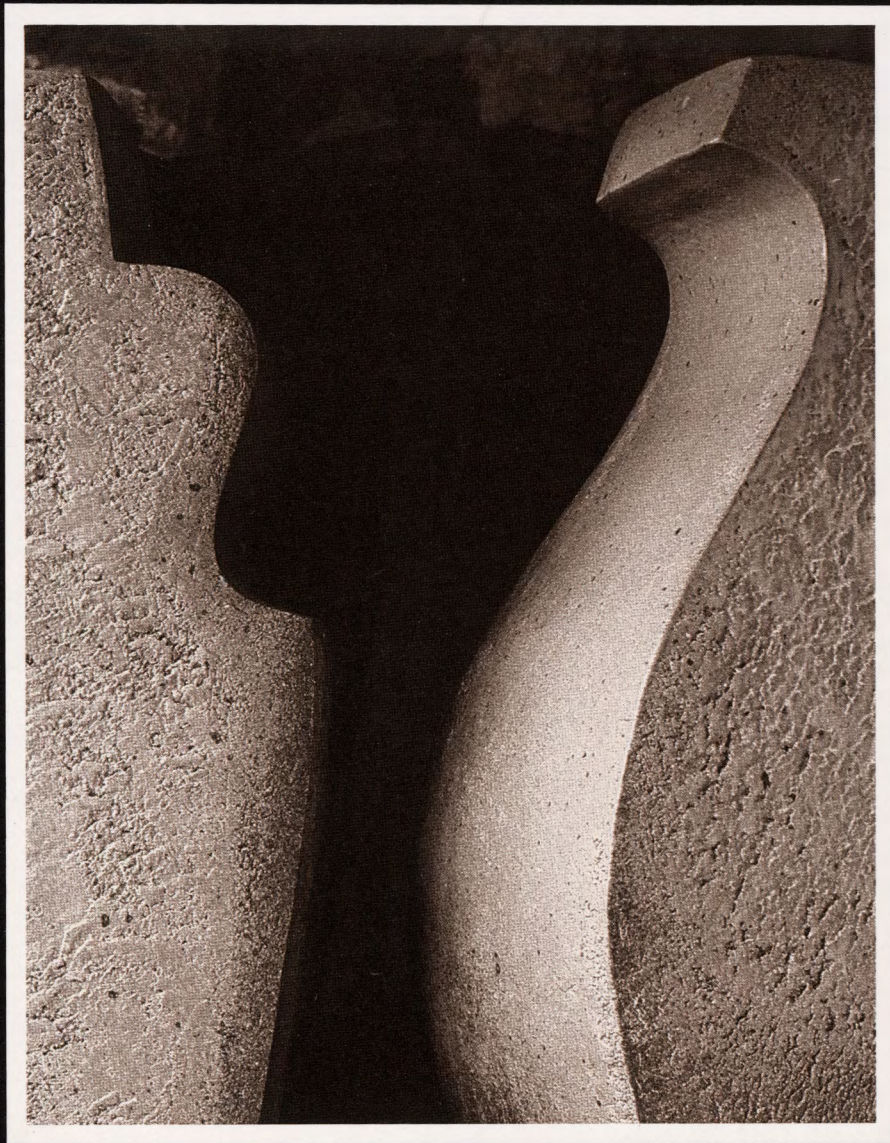

JAMES GREIG



WELLINGTON CITY GALLERY
MARCH 1986

ARTIST'S STATEMENT



This exhibition shows developments following from the 'Transformations' Exhibition at the City Gallery in 1982. The catalogue for that show could be a starting point to place these works in context.

The works follow no established stylistic genre, and have to create identity within their own formal references. These references are explored progressively in the work, through various cycles. Different facets of the underlying concerns, which relate more to forms in metamorphosis than to finality, move through the work as it proceeds. This means that each piece is part of a larger shaping process and I feel that in my life's work in pottery, I am working to create "one work."

It is interesting to note that the artist has as much to learn from studying his own work as others may have. In the struggle to create, the artist is not just giving form to what he already



knows, but is in a process of forming new experience. The course of life is a shaping process too. But in art one forms tangible images of the human spirit, in matter accessible to sensory experience. Ultimately, in art we experience the relationship of spirit and matter; of man and the world.

'Transformations' highlighted as a central theme of the work a search for awareness of universal principles of form, and the source of "shaping forces" behind the appearance of form in nature. Mechanistic forces of decay act in the mineral sphere, but when substance is imbued with life it becomes a vehicle for formative powers, and these obey different laws.

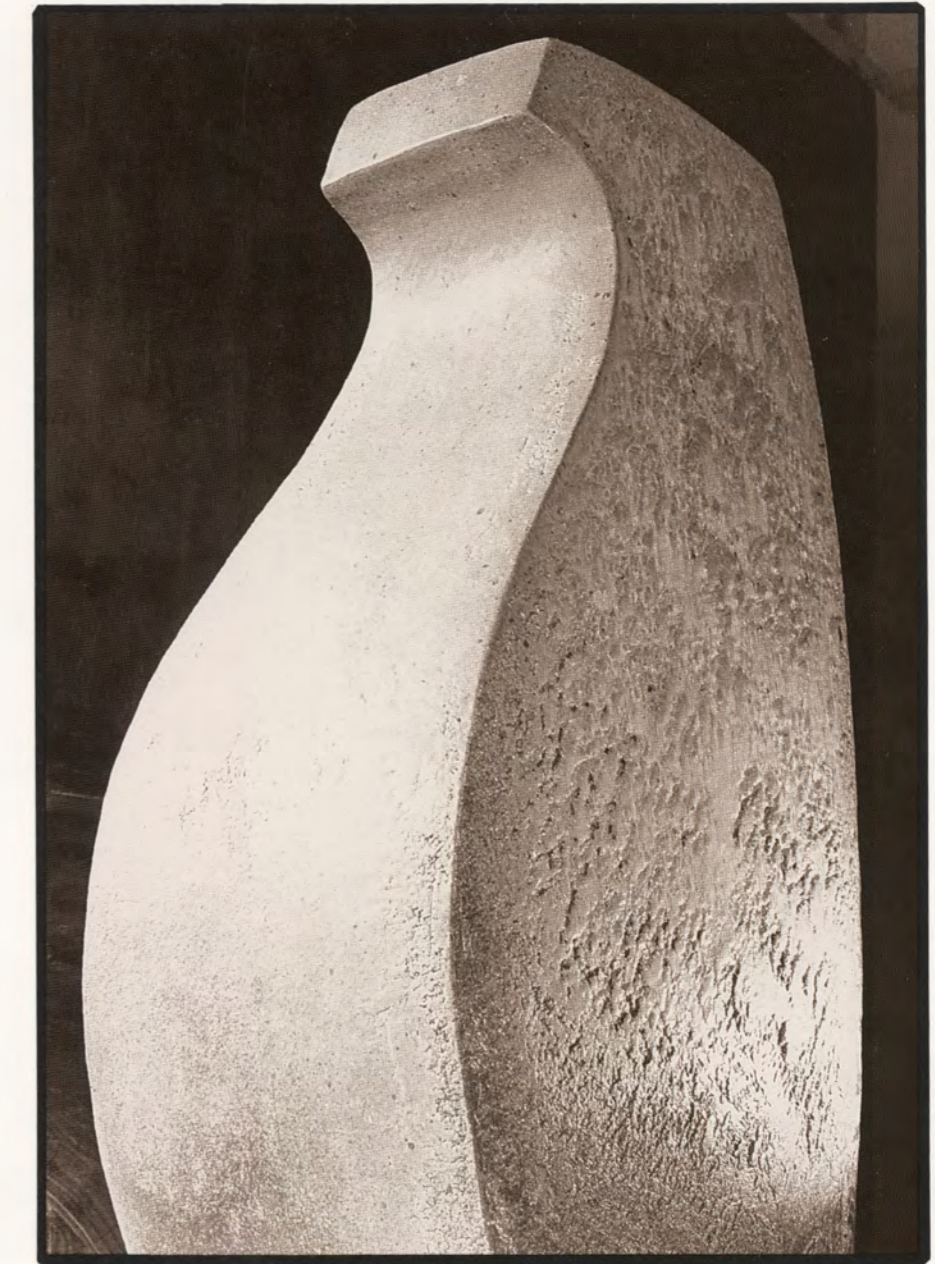
The world-view which forms the basis for this search has appeared at times throughout history, (with its opposite) in various modes, from Plato, through to the Romantic movement at the time that the mechanistic world-view took root as the basis for modern science. That mechanistic view, in which man can find no meaning or purpose for his existence, and in which form can reveal no higher relevance than physical laws of causality, is a very new phenomena in human history.

A significant aspect of Romanticism (as I see it) was that secrets of existence, or universal truths, are revealed through a wholistic, imaginative experiencing of form in nature, through feeling. Developed further this view could ultimately lead to an imaginative thinking enhanced by will, through which man could overcome dualities of knowing and being; of subject and object, of the world and "I".

Form, in the above contexts, includes experience of form in life cycles of metamorphosis, rather than just static form.

'Transformations' showed the development of pots encompassing archetypal form principles — Polarities, Metamorphosis; and also an evolution away from centric forms. The great polarity of expansion and contraction, (central to all life forms) and polarities of surface and volume, solid and void, inwardness and openness, emerged — indeed, this interplay of opposites in dynamic equilibrium formed the works.

Imagining the polarity of expansion and contraction, we can visualise the "contraction-pole" as the archetype of gravity forces (physical forces) whereby mass is drawn towards a centre. And we can imagine the traditional globular pottery form with its inner space, and a "centric form", totally centred and focussed within itself. Living form arises in a rhythmic balance of contraction and expansion, and the traditional pottery container incorporates such a balance (hence its hollowness). But in these pots the expansive aspect is transformed to a different level of experience through a "turning outwards" to become an expanding outer aspect. The forms



become non-centric in their focus. In them the inner space of the container can now be visualised as turned outwards to surround the form, and experienced in a new way as a shaping force. In nature we can see how an enclosed seed transforms its inner potential into an expanding leaf form. It's also interesting that with two cupped hands we can make a bowl, and unfold them to make a plate.

Centric forms imply contraction to a point, and conversely the peripheral expansive forms imply expansion to a plane. Intersecting planes form the basis of many of these shapes. Alternatively they can be seen as intersections of mass and space, each shaping the other.

The rounded pottery forms made since ancient times can be seen as images of man's own inner organs, and of embryonic organisms. Though these were first made by hand, the long heritage of the potter's wheel and its centric nature has preserved this relationship to the body.

In this a living vitality is able to flow directly into the work, ("it flows through the body" — as has been aptly said) although this capacity is waning in modern times. This promotes an intensity of feeling for one's own corporeal nature.

The emblematic nature of this newer work is more fully grasped at a different level of imaginative consciousness, with a striving towards enhancing one's senses beyond the self. A reflection of man's stance is also intended in the work — looking outwards, but with the world mirrored within his consciousness.

Maintaining my work within the pottery medium, (rather than a freer form of sculpture), with its manipulation of the inner spatial aspect as a central feature, has been appropriate. The S curving motif used to reflect the fluid lemniscate movements primal to life, combines emblematic references to the classical pottery forms with swelling belly and neck, transformed now to profile form.

Pottery can be seen as standing between sculpture and architecture. I see the essence of sculpture to be the infusing of an image of life processes into matter (although I realise other approaches are current). This contrasts with other visual arts of architecture — more related to the physiology of man's structure, and painting — more centred in the psyche; man's inner reality glimpsed in mobile images of dream and colour. These dominant characteristics do not of course confine the various modes of expression.

A few words about clay, the physical medium for the work, may be of interest. I feel that clay has what I call a "spark of life". Looking at the earth we see in the coalfields, limestone deposits and oil fields that a more intensive vitality of life existed once than does today. One can even envisage the earth itself as being in ancient times a sort of living organism, with cosmic forces streaming into it (sensed by the ancients) Humus seems to be a link with this.

Clay results from weathering, breaking-down processes, which should result in salts — but the resultant colloids are new minerals, which seems to imply life processes in the earth.

Looking imaginatively at mineral forming processes in the earth, following the lead of the Romantics, we can see that images of developing life-forms are reflected in them. The earliest primal granite rocks show granular structure akin to the globular structure in the morula stage of embryology: the following schists and slates, and porphyry, shows flat plate-like surfaces relating to the differentiating of organs and cavity forming processes of the germ layer stage; the later Jurassic limestones, as sediments, relate to ossification and calcium depositing of life forms.

The clay is physically inert, (its trace of bygone life is more like a "memory") but in falling out of the organic stream of life it becomes receptive to man's creative spirit. This receptivity is carried in its plasticity, gained through its colloidal affinity with water, the "bearer of life".

Man fixes his image in the clay by fire. The clay becomes pottery, fixed in form and no longer open to any life processes, or to breaking down by environmental forces. It becomes so at the point where the heat removes the last of its combined water. In working clay, there are great mysteries to ponder.

The fire too — not only fixes the form, but in renouncing our work to this power greater than ourselves, we have the possibility of the work attaining a richness greater than we ourselves can give it alone. It is both a trial and an opportunity.

The basic glaze-forming material is silica, and we can also see in living organisms that silica clothes the outer surfaces and reflects light and colour, (being concentrated in skin, hair, bark, husks, feathers, scales, eyes), just as it does on our pots.

In the ocean the silica covered amoeba (radiolaria) have forms which radiate outwards. We find silica concentrated in the earliest rocks too, and we conjecture that the earth may have once been more open to influences of light and air.

I find such connections of absorbing interest, which can lead to realising correlations between mineral processes and form development in living organisms, and also to similar connections reflected within our own bodies.

We can visualise panoramically the whole process of pottery making as reflecting life cycles — of life taking form and dying away, then gaining in its renunciation a receptivity to be again infused with new life, in new form.

To a considerable extent in New Zealand now the arts are looked to for social commitment — statements of protest issues such as race, environment, nuclear, and so on. This pottery may

seem irrelevant in this context. However it may be felt that art arising from a view of life which sees mankind as part of a living unity with all the kingdoms of nature, sees all life as emanating from universal spiritual reality — such an art may be a necessary affirmation alongside protest. For example, Maori consciousness of land and sacredness of water can only be comprehended by changing a mechanistic view of the earth for a living one. Likewise only can the earth be redeemed from exploitation.

This work has led to connections with Japan being established, which can be seen in the light of the following. With the growing world role of Japan and other Asian countries, the relationship of East and West is in a new dynamic phase, with the need for developing greater mutual understanding.

In terms of human consciousness it can be seen that what has to be striven for by people of one stream, is aculturally endowed "gift" and taken for granted in the other. For instance the sense of individuality in the West; the sense of spiritual reality and continuity, and the sense of group identity in the East. And each stream seems to have a yearning for their counterpart, only to be gained through effort, which points to the two streams having to come together as a necessity for "wholeness". As also for reasons of trade, world order, and cultural fulfilment. In these latter spheres also, we see the need for developing greater mutual understanding. Art has much potential to play a role in this.

© 1986 James Greig
Photographs James Greig

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

Born: March 20, 1936, Stratford, New Zealand.

Studied Architecture at Auckland University and was introduced to pottery by L.R. Castle in 1959.

There have been many solo exhibitions of his work in New Zealand and overseas. His works are in many museums and galleries and he has received several Q.E.II Arts Council awards.

In 1982 he was awarded a Japan Foundation Fellowship, and he is now exhibiting regularly in that country.

This is his first exhibition in New Zealand since March 1982.

He has recently been appointed as a New Zealand Cultural Ambassador.

Works available for sale through the artist:

James Greig
'Matarawa'
Carterton R.D.1 Ph. 8080