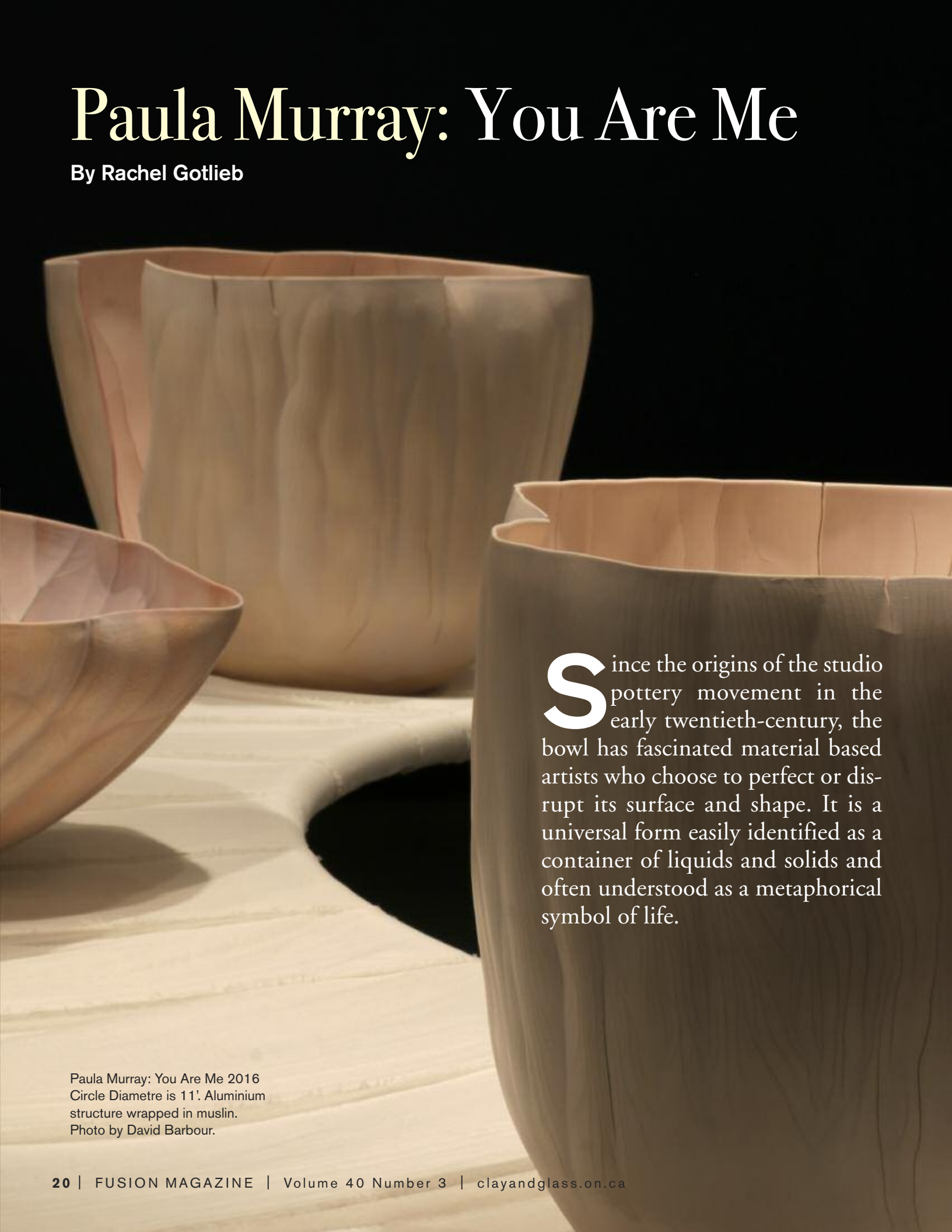


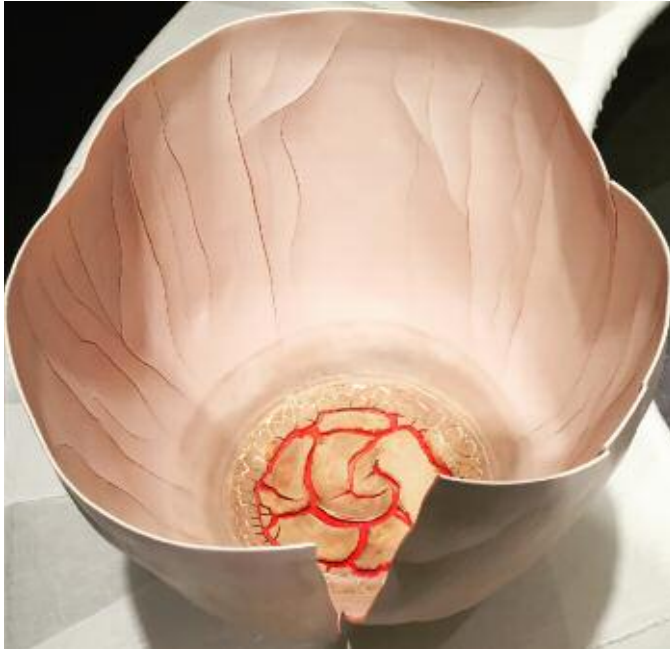
Paula Murray: You Are Me

By Rachel Gotlieb



Since the origins of the studio pottery movement in the early twentieth-century, the bowl has fascinated material based artists who choose to perfect or disrupt its surface and shape. It is a universal form easily identified as a container of liquids and solids and often understood as a metaphorical symbol of life.

Paula Murray: You Are Me 2016
Circle Diametre is 11". Aluminium
structure wrapped in muslin.
Photo by David Barbour.



Paula Murray: You Are Me III Detail 2016. Porcelain, Original Process, Multiple firings, 17”h x 17”w x 21”d. Photo by David Barbour.

For Paula Murray the clay vessel is a canvas to explore the tensions of life’s many paradoxes: culture and nature, deliberation and chance, fragility and strength and, most importantly, the individual and the collective. Murray lives and works in a cottage by the lake in Gatineau Park. Here she witnesses the volatility of nature, which informs her work instilling a distinctly organic aquatic sensibility. She and her family sailed the world for five years. She has spent as much time in a vessel as she has thinking about and making them.

“Raw” and “fragmented,” these are the words that Murray uses to describe her upbringing and they fittingly apply to the vessels themselves. After years of trial and error, Murray has refined an original process of casting liquid porcelain with fiberglass, a blend that causes stress in the hybrid clay body, which Murray further exploits by prematurely releasing the work from the mould and gently manipulating its shape as it dries to warp and furl.

Each bowl begins with a pure and unblemished skin but over multiple kiln firings, Murray employs a variety of techniques of infilling, knitting, sandblasting and burnishing to either enhance or diminish the ruptures. The patina that Murray creates in these open, closed, vertical and horizontal receptacles conveys a uniqueness seemingly attained over a passage of time. Look inside and outside each vessel: the smooth and rough textures, the fractures, the ripples, and the wrinkles connote pulsating veins, muscles, flaws, and defects. The bowls nestle in a ring on a wrapped tubular metal armature. Together as a group they form a wondrous and harmonious collection while maintaining their individuality to reveal both strength and tranquillity. The message is at once ambiguous and clear: we are all the same yet different, you are me, and I am you.



Paula Murray: You Are Me 2016. Circle Diameter is 11”. Aluminium structure wrapped in muslin. Photo Guy L’Heureux.

Paula Murray is a master of her materials, and yet, there are cracks in all her vessels currently on display at the Ottawa Art Gallery. How can that be?

Perhaps courage. This woman with a gentle, sweet soul is showing us beauty, perfectly proportioned exquisite shapes, almost ethereal, with cracks, some subtle, others more blatant, like injuries, wounds. Some of these wounds are recent, red and raw, some are in various stages of healing, others have healed, scars which add to the beauty of the vessel, making the shape more interesting.

An old story; injury, healing, wounds healed by beauty. Paula Murray tells it again in these exquisite, beautiful vessels, courageously bringing us to the edge of the ancient, universal emotions inherent in injury, physical or emotional, injury held in the beauty that can aid and comfort, and ultimately heal; in her hands a message so subtle it becomes universal, a message straight to the soul. – Joan Petch

My practice is rooted in the relationship between process, material and meaning. I am interested in the exchange of energy that is essential to life, be it intrinsic or extrinsic. The energy at the molecular level that attracts or repels particles of clay is invisible to the eye, but the effects are apparent. I have developed a process of working in which the juxtaposition of clay and glass creates another layer of tension, allowing me to test the limits of endurance and resilience within the form of the porcelain vessel.

I am drawn to how these ceramic materials and processes have affinities with the human condition; how we respond and engage with the injury of experience - within, with each other, with the other. By embracing wounds, deeper meaning can be brought to our lives, transforming suffering into something worthy, sensuous and beautiful. – Paula Murray