

Carol Gouthro

Biorhythms



A Profile by Judy Seckler

WHEREAS AUTHORS SUCH AS LEWIS CARROLL created surreal journeys that sprang from words, Seattle, Washington based ceramics artist, Carol Gouthro, uses form, texture,

colour, pattern and line to present distinct, dreamlike possibilities in which waking and sleeping cycles are blurred. A childhood love of microscopes, scientific botanical and zoological cross section illustrations,



as well as vintage medical illustrations have been filtered into the uniquely dynamic visual language that comprises her most recent *Aurlia* series of sculptures.

While it is not likely for Gouthro to be found pouring over a microscope or clutching a scalpel to dissect a plant as a scientific exercise, the acquisition of a home in 1991 with its surrounding gardens deepened Gouthro's affection and appreciation of plants and nature. Collecting flora and visiting public gardens became what she describes as a 10-year obsession. Furthermore, stumbling upon a biology textbook titled *Animals Without Backbones*, she was introduced to sea creatures such as hydras, polyps and anemones and corals, all illustrated in cross-section. Known by the scientific name of Anthozoa, which translates as "flower animal", Gouthro began exploring the meaning of this duality or hybrid identity in her work.

Fellow Seattle mixed-media artist Margaret Ford likens Gouthro's garden to being her "laboratory". She adds, "Carol is doing her best work ever. Every work looks so real but it is invented. She is a master in a conceptual context."

While the microscopic world of plants continues to be a major influence, Gouthro credits travel as another source of inspiration. In India, she was awestruck by the rich, encrusted surfaces of the local architecture and the use of colour in textiles. In China, a country she has visited five times, she saw temples and absorbed art from the Qing Dynasty. She also credits the work of German photographer Karl Blossfeldt, Spanish architect Antoni Gaudi, and the textile design of William Morris as additional influences.

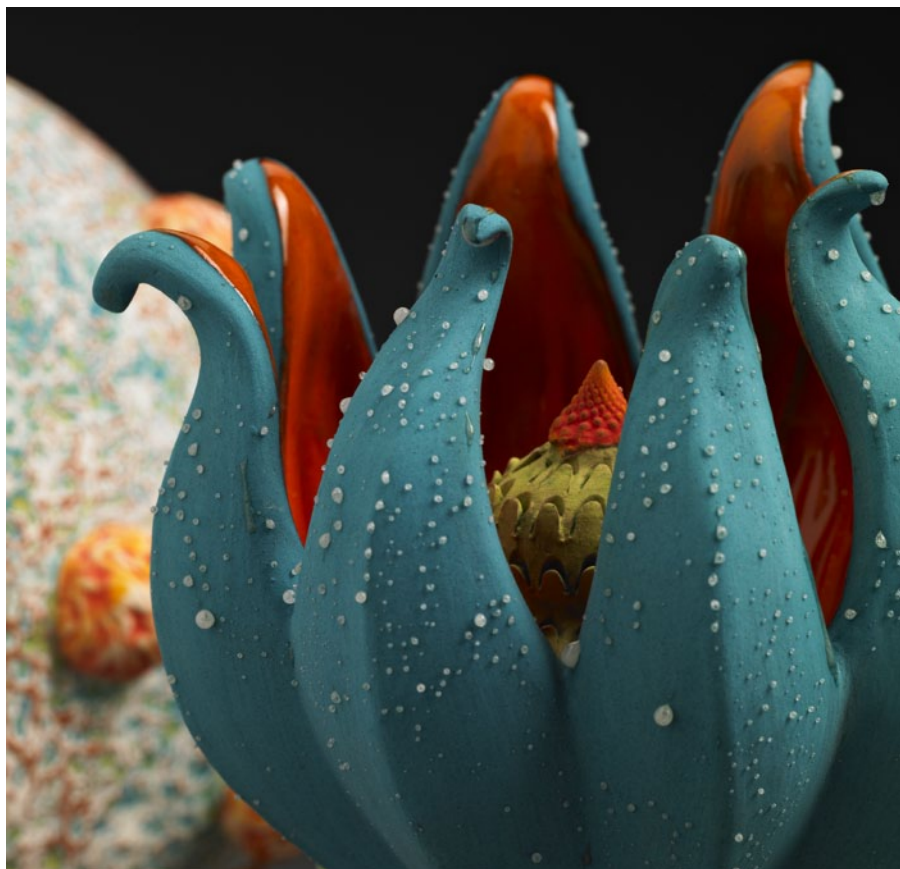
In her latest series, Gouthro's sculptures serve as a portal into an alternate universe as she pushes beyond the boundaries of reality. Using existing botanical nomenclature, she has given birth to a unique species of plant/animal hybrid and named them after herself in keeping with the scientific practice of



Facing page, top: *Aurlia Gouthroii Raphanus 2*. 2013. Terracotta, handbuilt and press moulded with slips, underglazes and glazes. 9 x 17 x 9 in. Photo by Stan Hain.

Facing page, below: *Aurlia Gouthroii Barnacles*. 2011. Terracotta, handbuilt and press moulded with slips, underglazes and glazes. 7 x 17 x 7 in. Above: *Aurlia Gouthroii Blastula*. 2011. Terracotta, handbuilt and press moulded with slips and underglazes. 8 x 14 x in.

Below: *Aurlia Gouthroii Blastula (Detail)*. Above three photos by Roger Schreiber.





letting the name reflect the discoverer of the plant or animal.

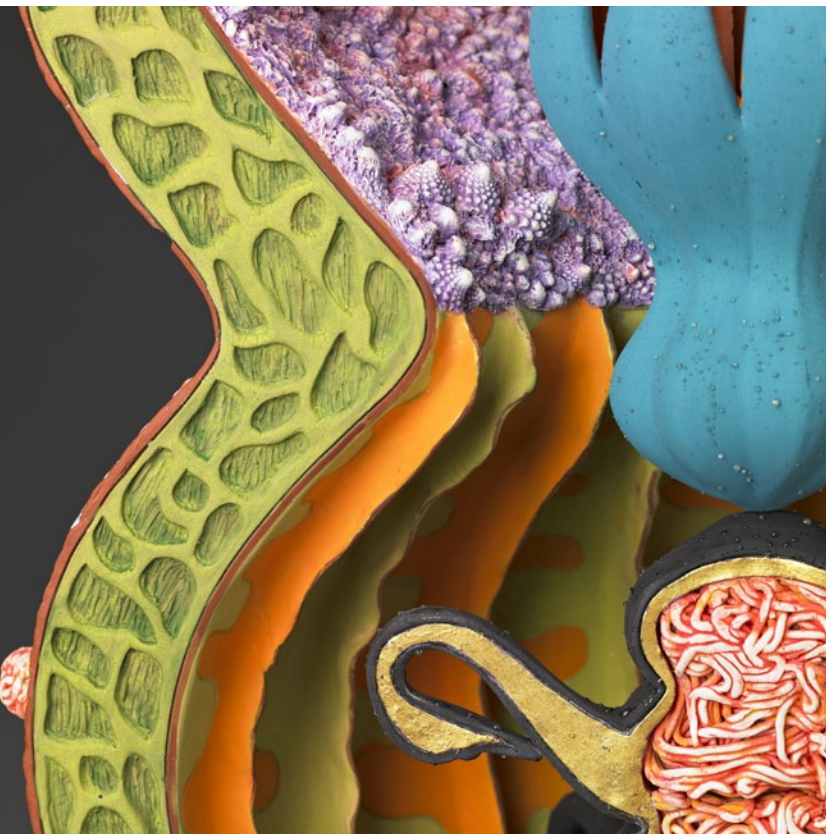
The gourd-like contours of *Aurlia Gouthroii Raphanus 2* are the perfect introduction into Gouthro's world. The eye is drawn to the primary bulbous shape graphically delineated by alternating black and yellow-orange patterns along the matte surface. Attached to the sculpture's pointed end is a brown, undulating root juxtaposed at the opposite end with fleshy green leaves suspended in a lavender coral-encrusted stem. The tension created between the form, pattern and the choice of colours is alternately familiar, alien and vibrant. Gouthro fired the work as two separate pieces that are fitted instead of glued together.

Added complexity can be seen in *Aurlia Gouthroii Barnacles*. The slender neck of a spherical, coral-encrusted lavender body sprouts a botanical bloom with unusual foliage. The petals are either orange or two shades of green surrounding a layer of round nodules each possessing four-way slits that appear to be gaping mouths ready to devour anything that comes near. Gouthro's delicate use of sgraffito, varied textures and colours mesh together to give the sculpture its sensuous appeal.

The pockmarked spherical body and pointy-petaled seedpod in *Aurlia Gouthroii Blastula* and *Aurlia Gouthroii Blastula (Detail)* are decidedly more sinister in ambience. In actuality, a duality exists such that the sculpture seduces and repels at the same time. Gouthro uses colour to both luscious and aggressive effect. The thrusting turquoise seedpod petals sit like a faceless head anchored on a slender neck and fleshy body. For the sculpture, Gouthro cast a found object and altered the shape in a succession of moulds. The seedpod went through several modifications to arrive at its final incarnation and the petals were carefully handbuilt. With a nod to the real world, Gouthro added random tiny surface droplets on leaves to simulate dewdrops.

Medusa-like appendages springing forth from the cross sectional views of *Portal 1 Anthozoa Fulfillment* and *Portal 1 Anthozoa Fulfillment (Detail 2)* simultaneously fascinate and repulse. The exaggerated forms are animated and accessible yet the dominant lime green-turquoise colour scheme and collage of intestine-like spaghetti hints at a world where danger lurks around the bend. Separately, the forms, textures and colours are recognisable from the plant and animal world, but the end result is an evocative ambiguity.

The ambiguity spills into an object such as Gouthro's *Teapot Anthozoa*





Chromatello. Keeping the sculpture functional is a remnant from Gouthro's early days of ceramics, while its surface is subordinate to its cross-sectional point of view in which Gouthro achieves an effervescent convergence of colour, texture and pattern.

Colleague Patti Warashina, a fellow ceramist, says that a key to Gouthro's work is that she, "makes forms that have a life of their own. Carol has a warm, personal vision, her own unique Garden of Eden that she creates, using elements from animation and rainbow colours. Her patience and dexterity are inspiring."

Gouthro spends several weeks creating a work in which she alternates the time building two or three pieces. For some pieces, she starts by carving solid clay forms into a right angle board. Plaster is then poured to create a quarter segment mould. Afterward, up to four sections are formed and combined. The challenge during the work process is to keep the clay properly hydrated. Timing is essential.

Gouthro began her creative life as a painter at the University of Manitoba, School of Art, but was quickly won over by a class in ceramics. Upon graduation, she rented space in Seattle's Pottery Northwest for a seven-year period, where she had access to materials, equipment and the camaraderie of other artists. Her transition from functional ceramics to sculpture represents a growing confidence to reorient the brilliance of nature into a lush, spirited conversation and a visual bouquet, lasting well into the future.

Facing page, top: **Portal 1 Anthozoa Fulfillment**. 2010. Terracotta, handbuilt, press moulded and slipcast with underglazes, glazes and gold leaf. 26 x 17 x 7 in.

Facing page, below: **Portal 1 (Detail 2)**.

Above two photos by Roger Schreiber.

Above: **Teapot Anthozoa Gouthroii Chromatello**. 2013. Terracotta, handbuilt with underglazes and glazes. 6 x 10 x 6 in.

Below: **Aurlia Gouthroii Raphanus 2 (Detail)**. Above two photos by Stan Hain.



Judy Seckler is a Los Angeles-based magazine writer, specializing in art, design and architecture. (www.judyseckler.com) ([www.twitter.com/judyseckler](https://twitter.com/judyseckler)). Her previous three reviews for *Ceramics: Art and Perception* were "Loving Cups" (*An Ocean in a Cup*); "Snap! Crackle! And Pop!: *Raku on the Edge*" and "Wall-Paper: Domesticity Deconstructed" (Issue 92, July / August 2013).