

Front Cover:  
#3, 1986  
H 32" W 32" L 32"  
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unless otherwise noted

All work is composed of earthenware with metallic industrial tailings,  
and utilizes coil construction. All work has been sandblasted with the  
exclusion of the cover piece.

# GRAHAM MARKS

## NEW WORK

September 5–November 2, 1986  
Everson Museum of Art  
Syracuse, New York

January 13–February 7, 1987  
Sculpture Center  
New York, New York

March 1–April 5, 1987  
Cranbrook Academy of Art Museum  
Bloomfield Hills, Michigan

Foreword by Dominique Nahas with  
essays by C.E. Licka and Wayne Higby

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## FOREWORD

Graham Marks has been working for the past eight years on his science-fictions. The recent works in this exhibition are variations of the basic egg-shaped form and can be seen as part earth-scapes, part dream-scapes, positioned to invite the curious and implacable eye. Presented, tilted, as artifacts or homologous specimens that are broken open for inspection, their large scale confronts and directs the gaze toward their surfaces. Viewed as inexplicable anomalies, congealed and hardened with time, they straddle the animal, vegetable, and mineral worlds all at once.

Marks's poetic objects, floating between the world of empirical reality and the trance, violate near boundaries, eradicate differences, and confuse distinctions made between the organic and inorganic. The surrealistic aspect of the works is alloyed with a romanticism akin to the nineteenth century landscapists such as Thomas Cole and Frederic Church, who, in their botanical and geological studies, speculated on the mutability and diversity of natural formations as keys to the age of the earth. Such concerns were held to be the means whereby art, in encapsulating the moment of creation, could broach the sublime.

Graham Marks's enigmatic sculptures remind us of the interconnectedness of all things; at the same time they stress equations not normally made between objects and find similarities that are not immediately apparent. The artist hopes his works will trigger associational flows that somehow convey a sense of the numinous. No explanations are offered. The questioning is the solution and the provocation. The intangible quiet that inhabits the forms connects the viewer to the deepest levels of the primitive psyche; their biological references take one to the beginning

of creation. They sit as though picked by an enormous Hand from the tree of life.

This exhibition could not have been possible without the close cooperation of a number of individuals, institutions, and organizations.

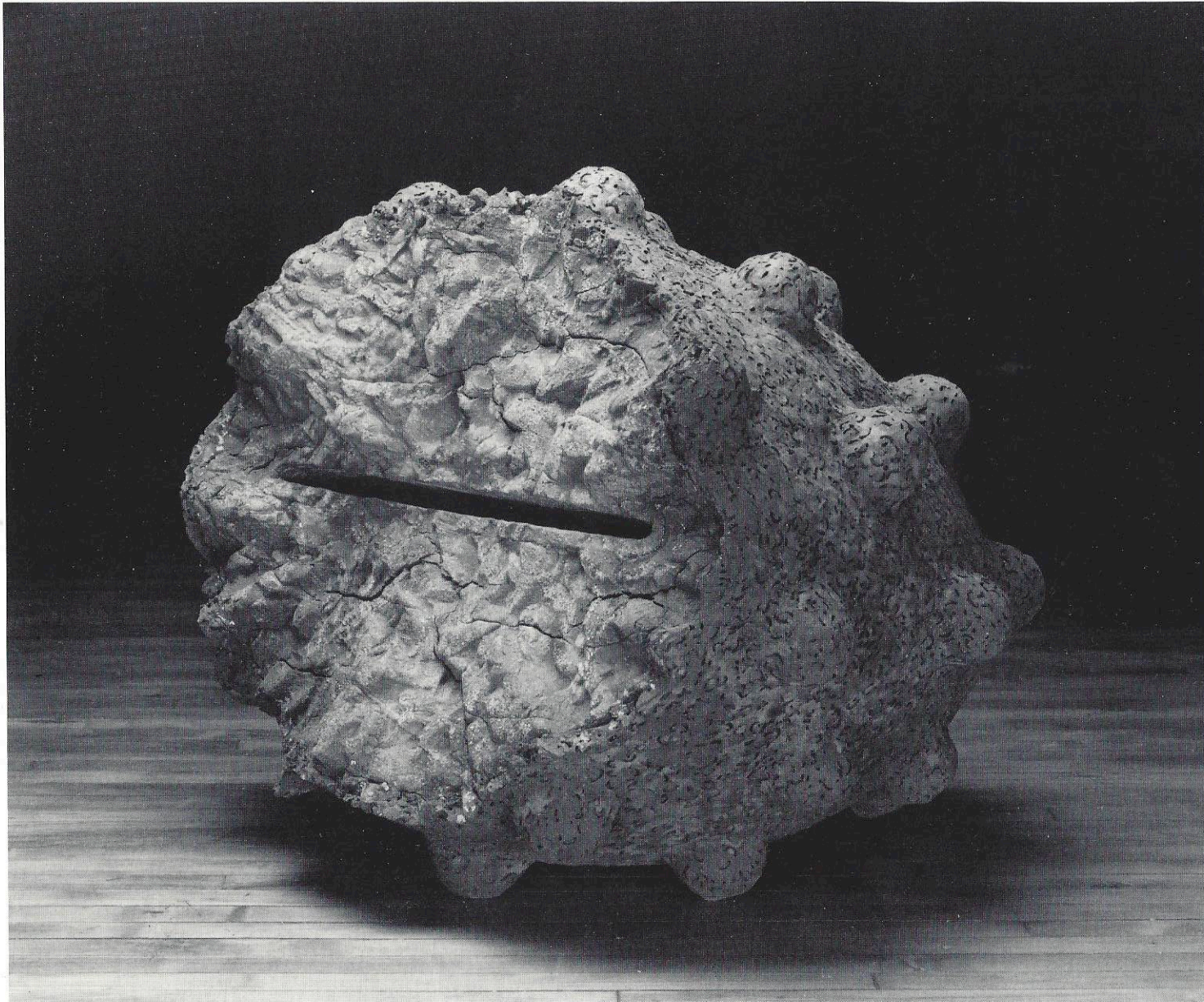
Thanks are given to Graham Marks for his unstinting patience in submitting himself to a barrage of questions from the catalogue writers, C.E. Licka and Wayne Higby, as well as from myself. I thank the two aforementioned individuals for their efforts, as well as Thomas Piché, public information officer at Everson, for his extraordinary, meticulous editorial services and production management in the making of this catalogue.

Marian Griffiths, director of the Sculpture Center, and her staff, as well as Helen Drutt and her gallery staff were instrumental in successfully bringing this project to fruition. The combined, unflagging enthusiasm and professionalism of these organizations and individuals transformed difficulties into pleasures.

Everson Museum is thankful for the kind editorial assistance of Megan Staffel and for Lanham Deal's devotion to details as project facilitator. Special acknowledgements are given to V.W. Odajnyk for his advice regarding this project.

Finally, deep-felt gratitude from all involved is given to the New York State Council on the Arts without whose support this catalogue would not have been possible.

Dominique Nahas  
Curator, Everson Museum of Art



#1, 1986  
H 28" W 34" L 30"

## RADIANT REFLECTIONS: The Multivalent Sensibility of Graham Marks

Just as the images of the present dilate themselves, as all sounds reverberate, as everything that occupies a place in the spatial universe tends to become larger or to move up to the first rank, so in the extents of duration everything continues to radiate, that is to say, palpitate, to project light, to reproduce itself, to tend to approach the actual. And the property of the poet is precisely to further by the act of retrospective vision all this confused movement by which the past strives to become the present again.

Georges Poulet, *The Interior Distance*<sup>1</sup>

The vectors of historical and critical writing on ceramics; an increased exposure of present and past clay developments at museums, galleries, and universities; the convolutions of current clay production; the complex nexus of personal connections between ceramists; and other influences external to the tradition of ceramics have all been important factors in determining the wide range of clay objects being made in the postmodernist period.

But this is a time when appropriated forms and images are accelerating in a world more receptive to Malraux's "museum without walls." If this is our current situation, are there any ceramic objects being produced expressive of either a new consciousness of form or a "hard-won solution to some problem"?<sup>2</sup> For instance, when we look at Graham Marks's works, are we witnessing the manifestation of a will-o'-the-wisp gesture, or a patient artist concerned with working out problems within the constraint of traditional pottery in order to transcend it?

Marks's deliberate and painstaking attention to details of color, line, and structural unity has more of an affinity with "slow patient painters, such as Claude Lorrain and Paul Cézanne, whose lives contain only one real problem."<sup>3</sup> For Marks, the major problem seems to focus on maximizing

meaning and form within the context of "container images" in order to simultaneously go beyond and accept the tradition of the vessel format. If this is the case, we have to ask whether or not he has added "previously unknown elements to the topography of the form-class, like a new map reporting unexpected features in a familiar but incompletely known terrain."<sup>4</sup>

His coiled ovoid forms dating from 1976 were quartered and sliced into hemispherical cross-sections, which exposed the interior to the spectator's gaze. By 1978, he had begun to create open, maze-like, patterned cavities that penetrated the space of his architectonic forms. However, even though one appears to get lost in the shadowy depths of these complex patterned structures, one is still given ordered and structural relationships that help to complete the "picture" in the mind's eye. All of these forms appear to be characterized by an act of exposure similar in concept to the X-ray images in aboriginal bark painting, or even the dissection procedures in autopsies.<sup>5</sup> Then, in 1983, the slot, or slit, made its appearance on the flat surfaces of his ovoids, preventing one from peering into the interior. Closed off from the recesses of these forms, one enters these spaces by imaginative means. The current works at the Everson Museum reflect the inventiveness and refinement of his concern with open and closed forms. But the question must still be asked, What is innovative about Graham Marks's work?

According to the art historian George Kubler, there is a distinction between artistic and useful inventions: "Artistic inventions alter the sensibility of mankind. They all emerge from and return to human perception, unlike useful inventions, which are keyed to the physical and biological environment. . . . aesthetic inventions enlarge human awareness directly with new ways of experiencing the universe, rather than with new objective interpretations."<sup>6</sup>



#2, 1985  
H 31" W 31" L 28"

By shifting our attention away from the notion of "useful invention" to "aesthetic invention," Marks has been continually widening the "range of human perceptions by enlarging the channels of emotional discourse."<sup>7</sup> This has been accomplished by creating large-scale coiled forms that have conceptual and symbolic references to the container, and by returning us "to the primitive images that had perhaps been centers of fixation for recollections of our memories."<sup>8</sup> Like a phantom limb with nerve endings that produce the illusion of an actual limb resonating with a "felt" presence, Marks's earthenware objects radiate with connections from our collective ceramic past:

I am moved by a quality present in ceramics from many neolithic cultures throughout the world... one senses their makers gathering sources from their world and using that information to inform structure and decoration. There is a feeling of trying to grasp forces much larger than the individual — chaos, storms, change. Aside from utilitarian needs, these vessels are an attempt to give intuitions form; trying to capture their essence with an abstract language.<sup>9</sup>

Marks's "abstract language," by its very nature, tends to "exist below the threshold of names" and elicits "association that are non-specific."<sup>10</sup> His objects place us in the space of analogies where "man is surrounded by it (analogies) on every side, but inversely, he transmits these resemblances back into the world from which he receives them. He is the great fulcrum of proportions — the center upon which relations are concentrated from which they are once again reflected."<sup>11</sup>

My forms are constructed from coils because I am intrigued with their ability to make connections between architecture (animal and human), natural forms, anatomy, and pottery. I work on a scale that is somewhat imposing for ceramics because I want the work to start to have a one-to-one relationship with the human body, so that the pieces can exist as autonomous beings, not models of things. I work in clay to enlist the rich and multi-leveled references that ceramic materials can have to time, man and structure.<sup>12</sup>

Marks's analogical mode is similar to the mind set of the *bricoleur* which is "multi-conscious" and able to construct a "world picture" out of "significant contrasts found on different planes: the geographical, meteorological, zoological, botanical, technical economic, social, ritual, religious and philosophical."<sup>13</sup>

How do these silent and immobile forms imaginatively move us? Their mythopoetic and analogical potential is crucial to their success, but their material presence with surfaces that scratch, bite, and agitate our senses is also important. In short, by selecting formal motifs, materials, and processes that mirror the reverie of elemental forces and the form-making consciousness of man the maker (*homo faber*), Marks creates a world of structures that link us momentarily with the past.

When one encounters the massive ovoid forms of Graham Marks in a gallery or museum context, their quintessential nature and proportions, approaching a one-to-one relationship with the human body, spark a multitude of associations.

Seen in profile or in an anterior position from a distance, these sliced three-dimensional ovoidal shapes hover silently in space. Like lithic glyphs from an unknown phylum, their pulsing material presence invites the imagination to decode and explore them.

When one is positioned in front of these patterned forms, the network of cracks, spirals, slits, and circular apertures on the flat planes of these pieces draw the eye and mind forward to their surfaces. Having more of an affinity with energy fields, cracks in the earth's crust, or hyperspace tunnels pulling one into the dimensional past or future, these pieces operate as semaphors of the unconscious by means of their tactile immediacy. One thinks of magical doors and mirrors, Einstein-Rosen bridges, Schwarzschild wormholes, or light piercing the interior of a camera obscura.

Gaining only partial entry into the interior of these forms, one is for the most part prevented from visually penetrating and exploring them. There is an act of closure in operation that activates the mind, and like Alice's looking glass, one can slide through a slit and descend through the layers of an imagined primordial space and time.

This hidden space is conceptual in essence and purposely constructed to be "excavated" and experienced. The slit piercing the flat plane of two of Marks's pieces (*Nos. 1 and 7*, 1986), when coupled with the "conversational" disposition of these slightly inclined forms, creates a "horizon line" of expectations — a sort of soliloquy in time. Reminiscent of Loren Eiseley's first chapter in his book *The Immense Journey*, Marks's slit, like Eiseley's, gives the viewer a metaphorical entry point into time:

The crack was only about body-width and, as I worked my way downward, the light turned dark green from the overhanging grass. Above me sky became a nar-



row slit of distant blue, and the sandstone was cool to my hands on either side. The Slit was a little sinister — like an open grave, assuming the dead were enabled to take one last look — for me the sky seemed already as far off as some future century I would never see.<sup>14</sup>

Once in the slit, Eiseley uncovers a skull embedded in the sandstone. This confrontation with the skull sets off a train of associations that focus on man's existence and ancestral roots by referring symbolically to the slit:

Perhaps the Slit with its exposed bones and its far-off vanishing sky, has come to stand symbolically in my mind for a dimension denied to man, the dimension of time. Like the wistaria on the garden wall he is rooted in his particular century. Out of it forward or backward — he cannot run. As he stands on his circumscribed pinpoint of time, his sight for the past is growing longer, and even the shadowy outlines of the galactic future are growing clearer, though his own fate he cannot yet see. Along the dimension of time, man, like the rooted vine in space, may never pass in person.<sup>15</sup>

In light of the passages, Graham Marks's objects might well be viewed as an abstract form of the age old theme of *vanitas* without the moral overtones. When the spectator is confronted by these structures, their massiveness paradoxically "speaks" about fragility and human transience. This contrast between massiveness and fragility is expressive of the dialectical methodology he uses to explore a variety of opposing notions: "old/new, hard/soft, male/female, man/nature, in/out."<sup>16</sup>

Just as there is an interior topology of the imagination individuals can map out for themselves, there is also an exterior topology suggestive of further associations.

The textural treatment and decorative motifs found on the carapaces of these "post-neolithic" objects obliquely refer to Neolithic artifacts and pottery: the encrusted surfaces of Bükk pottery, Yang Shao and Cucuteni A style pots with their spiral motifs, the incised patterns on New Grange megalithic grave art, or the marvelously carved stone balls from Aberdeenshire, Scotland, covered totally with nodes.

Historical connections, however, are simply one point of departure in Marks's assimilation and distillation of forms. Pots and shards are traces of past cultural activity. They are one of the ways we can understand past cultures. By referring to Neolithic sources, the artist has annexed an anonymous past radiant with evocative power by virtue of their inherent abstract patterns. Of course, the decorative

patterns appear abstract to us today, but only because they have lost their symbolic and ritual function.

Three works in this exhibition, Nos. 6, 8, 9 (1986), reflect a different treatment in the details of their surfaces. Examining them closely, we find these surfaces randomly covered with the residual traces of lathe turnings, nuts, and bolts. In these pieces, decoration doesn't assume the controlled rhythms and patterns found in primitive cultures. Instead, we are given references to totally opposite modes of production dealing with standardization, mechanical processes, and obsolescence. Divested of their function, these industrial bits and pieces are also lost symbols of function and the automated rituals of our own century.

Marks also incorporates the sandblasting process in a metaphorical manner to refer to time. By sandblasting his pieces after he has fired them, he operates like an archaeologist unearthing different layers within the earthenware body. The process creates a form of "instant time" — a way to compress time so Marks can go "a mile in an inch" to express the erosive forces of nature.

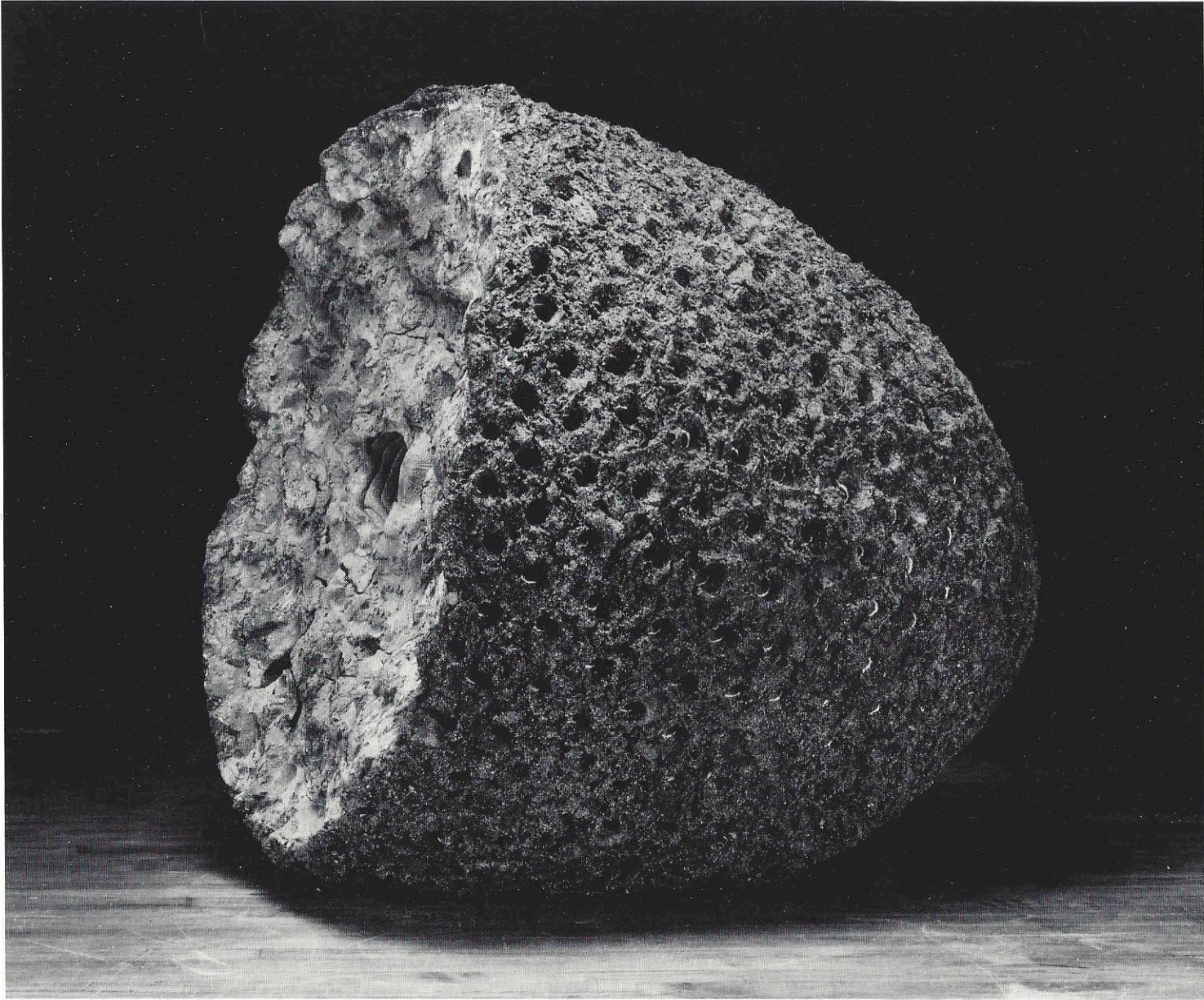
What Marks accomplishes in his work is to place us at the interface of the past and present. The pieces seem to reverberate with thanatotic overtones. Are these "time capsules," then, *memento mori* to our consciousness? In one sense, yes, but the poet/potter is also capable of giving us the means to rejuvenate the human spirit. By splicing his forms into the continuum of time, he has analogically edited the past — a personal vision of the tradition of pottery — to his personal experiences and through architectonic forms. One is reminded of the last two lines of T.S. Eliot's poem "Whispers of Immortality" when viewing these vestigial earthenware probes:

But our lot crawls between dry ribs  
To keep our metaphysics warm.

C.E. Licka

## NOTES

1. Georges Poulet, *The Interior Distance* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1959), p. 161.
2. George Kubler, *The Shape of Time* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), p. 33. As Kubler states in his discussion on formal sequences: "Every important work of art can be regarded both as a historical event and as a hard-won solution to some problem. It is irrelevant now whether the event was original or conventional, accidental or willed, awkward or skillful. The important clue is that any solution points to the existence of some problem to which there have been other solutions, and that other solutions to this same problem will most likely be invented to follow the one now in view."
3. *Ibid.*, p. 87.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 87-88. In discussing the response of artists to their past and how they cope with it during leisurely "urbane periods," Kubler says the following: "Under these conditions, and for as long as the old pictures or their derivatives survive, painters of a certain temperament will feel summoned to meet their challenge with a contemporary performance. Ingres continued upon the lines marked by Raphael; Manet accepted the challenge put before him by Velázquez. The modern work takes its measure from the old... Sometimes the map seems finished: nothing more can be added; the class of forms looks closed until another patient man takes a challenge from the seemingly complete situation, and succeeds once more in enlarging it"
5. Conversation with the artist, April 1986. Graham Marks remarked about the textural treatment and "cross-sectional" appearance of his work as an "act of incision." He also specifically referred to the film *The Act of Seeing with One's Own Eyes*, from Stan Brakhage's trilogy *The Pittsburgh Documents* (1971), as being important to his notion of the "act of seeing." The film deals with scenes of an external autopsy at the coroner's office and focuses on what it means to see. The name of the film, *The Act of Seeing with One's Own Eyes*, was based on the root word for "autopsy." It is derived from the Greek word *autopsia* which can be literally translated as "the act of seeing with one's own eyes." Throughout the film, Brakhage explores the experience of the "act of seeing" which is, as Brakhage says, "something different than just seeing." The film deals with the muscularity of seeing and the gut reactions Brakhage had in experiencing the autopsy procedures. Marks's objects also evoke a highly visceral response or muscular sight on the part of the spectator. (The Brakhage references are taken from *Brakhage Scrapbook: Collected Writings 1964-1980* [New Paltz, New York: Documentext, 1982], p. 198.)
6. Kubler, *op. cit.*, p. 65.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 66.
8. Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), p. 30.
9. Statement of the artist.
10. *Ibid.*
11. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), p. 23. Foucault, in his chapter "The Prose of the World" discusses analogy as one of the four forms of similitude having the capacity "to extend, from a single given point, to an endless number of relationships. For example, the relation of the stars to the sky in which they shine may also be found: between plants and the earth, between living beings and the globe they inhabit, between minerals such as diamonds and rocks in which they are buried, between sense organs and the face they animate, between skin moles and the body of which they are secret marks." (Foucault, *The Order of Things*, p. 21.)
12. Statement of the artist.
13. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1966), p. 93.
14. Loren Eiseley, *The Immense Journey* (New York: Random House, 1957), p. 4. Graham Marks, in a conversation with the author on June 7, 1986, discussed the importance of Eiseley's ideas about man and nature. "The Slit," a chapter from Eiseley's book, was forwarded to the author later that week.
15. *Ibid.*, pp. 11-12. One also senses another parallel between the way Marks's forms have a penchant to be tilted towards the spectator, as if engaging them in a "mute" conversation, and the following passage of Eiseley's: "The skull lay tilted in such a manner that it stared, sightless, up at me as though I, too, were already caught a few feet above him in the strata and, in my turn, were staring upward at that strip of sky which the ages were carrying farther away from me beneath the tumbling debris of falling mountains. The creature had never lived to see a man, and I, what was it I was never going to see?" (Eiseley, *The Immense Journey*, p. 5.)
16. Statement of the artist.



#8, 1986  
H 33" W 30" L 33"

## SOMETHING THAT CAN'T BE NAMED

Clues are agents of mystery. Fossils hold tight the secrets of former geological ages. Weatherworn rocks are tangible evidence of the puzzling forces of nature. Megalithic stones of ancient temples house hidden meanings of ontological significance, and the smallest fragments of pottery often resound with echos of the impenetrable prehistory of human culture. Clues of infinite variety and complexity are all around us, waiting to exercise the human mind's uncontrollable will for meaning. Scientists working in the realm of rational knowledge measure, qualify, and classify these clues. Philosophers contemplate them and artists transform them into poetic images that are sacred, magical, random, and commanding.

Graham Marks is an artist who transforms random clues into clues that are iconic. He combines numerous stimuli into single units or objects, which are themselves fragments of some unknown whole. These fragments, although complete as sculpture, appear to be pieces of evidence that, if understood, would reveal an answer to a great primal mystery. Marks creates clues that invite a type of speculation that ultimately gives way to an intuitive comprehension of the unity behind everything that exists in the temporal world. His sculptures suggest an incontrovertible linkage between such things as fossils, shells, sea urchins, and seedpods; eroded rocks, pottery vessels, and shards; sexual organs, stone fetishes, and curious pieces of technological engineering. The synergetic action of these various subjects or images produces results that often seem to be both animate and inanimate, endowing the artwork with a superreal quality, and suggesting that it is the result of a synthesis of experiences, which take into account many aspects of the artist's mental conditioning.

In a similar way, our appreciation of Marks's sculpture involves a synthesis of objective and subjective responses. However, the subjective responses prove to be the most

provocative ingredients in this mixture because they provide valuable insights into ourselves, our connections to the mysteries of nature, and to the origins of social and spiritual life. Graham Marks's clues-as-sculpture act like those clues that reveal a reality outside ourselves while triggering an internal response.

Since prehistoric times, certain events or objects — natural or manmade — have served as bridges between the physical outer-world and the psychic inner-world that underlies our perception of existence. Similar objects and images appear and reappear throughout history and across all cultures. Carl Jung, recognizing this phenomenon, called these basic symbols archetypes and explained that they emerge from humanity's collective unconscious. Archetypal symbols express the essence of a greater whole. They link together orders of reality, binding them one to another in a way that projects them into a unity that conveys a spiritual or metaphysical truth. Graham Marks makes clues that function like archetypal symbols.

In the presence of these clues we search for meaning, recognizing immediately that they are objects removed from some original context and placed in a museum or gallery setting like some fragmentary sample of galactic geology. This sense of dislocation is fundamental to the disturbing, evocative power of these works of art. Although obviously large, imposing, and assumed to be heavy and dense, they appear to defy gravity. Some almost seem to float as they rest gently in their designated spots. These objects do not stand or rise from anywhere in our space or time, yet they remain mysteriously accessible. Poetically recalling an image of the broken pieces of a strange cosmic egg or lingam, they take root in our imagination.

We experience empathy for these abstract forms because, although they seem massive, removed, and otherworldly, they are of a size and shape that is curiously

familiar: They reflect human scale. Not much larger than the average male torso, one could embrace the diameter of one of these forms with outstretched arms. In addition, their structural anatomy suggests that they were touched or, in some cases, even made by humans. The indications of a human gesture are often recorded in their surface textures. Those with whitewashed exteriors reveal the traces of fingers at work. Others have protrusions or nodules that would easily fit the cupped palm of one's hand. On closer examination, several of these same pieces reveal the timeworn evidence of the patting or packing of a soft material into place. Also, one will occasionally be incised with a series of marks that are unexpectedly similar to the letters of some ancient, incomprehensible alphabet.

The question arises, If these fragments are part of whole objects produced by human beings, at what point in time were they made and what did they represent? Much of the evidence reports that these fragments have come forward in time as the found halves of objects used by a lost Neolithic culture. They show signs of the human hand, but are worn as if they were endlessly tumbled on an isolated beach, or eroded by the wind and sand as they lay on the floor of some timeless desert. Also, although they are obviously very hard, they look as though they might previously have been soft. As a result, they reveal a transformation process that clearly suggests that they were exposed to intense heat or compression, or both, over a period of time. This fact begins to raise doubts about their origin: Their transformation from soft forms into stone is quite closely related to organic sources. Could these fragments be part of the petrified remains of a Mesozoic tropical fruit? Further study supports this possibility, as we discover that one or more of their "skins" show signs of a worm or maggot infestation; yet the decomposing process was obviously halted by an unknown cataclysmic event that served to preserve them intact until they were broken apart during a recent phase of their drift through time. This thought is substantiated by their color, which is reminiscent of something organic or of the earth that has been kept in a suspended state by geological magic.

Satisfied that we have gained some ground in solving the mysteries of these giant clues, we begin to feel content until we notice that one of the fragments has a metallic element embedded in its surface. On closer inspection this metallic particle turns out to be one of a countless number of nuts and bolts and other residue of a mechanical, technological nature. Could these be fragments of some



Detail, stainless steel industrial tailings

compressed conglomerate that have been carried back through time from a future, industrial culture that has been destroyed by an unknown holocaust? At this point we are compelled to review all the evidence.

In the process of this review a baffling cycle develops in which question begets question, and answer after answer turns in on itself, leading to a conundrum of extraordinary proportions. Like the Gordian knot, the complex interweaving of facts, assumptions, and emotional responses generated by these sculptures cannot be unraveled. Mass and density are contradicted by hollowness. Internal volumes push out against compressed exteriors, and generate rigorous tensions between inside and outside. In some cases, inside is not even truly inside, but only another layer of a womb where walls conceal unknowable space below and beyond their confines. Small holes or incisions penetrate these boundaries and suggest places of emergence or signs of an ambiguous invitation to contemplate an inner antediluvian world. Only the artist, within the privacy of his studio, can imagine a clean cut through these complexities by envisioning new and even more provocative answers.

For Graham Marks, fresh, new answers will no doubt come directly out of the process of making. For an artist,

making is a way of forgetting, and forgetting allows the gift of insight to flow forth in material form. Of course, skill plays an important role, especially for an artist like Marks. His work, as well as being conceptually rich, is a tour de force in the manipulation of ceramic materials and techniques. In fact, the unique presence of his sculpture is directly derived from the interrelation of the facts of making and the meaning desired for the object, which coalesce in the final product.

To clarify this statement it is useful to consider more carefully the way in which Marks's sculptures relate to the space that surrounds them. As mentioned earlier, they seem to defy gravity, suggesting that they have been removed from some original context. This simple fact is the key to their intriguing presence. In contrast to this sculptural dynamic, clay (the material from which they are made) is exasperatingly attached to gravity. Its natural state is the lump. Therefore, in order to reify thoughts and feelings in clay, an artist must develop a system of working that either accepts the clay's response to gravity or defies it. The potter's wheel is a well-known device for moving clay up and out against its inclination to return to earth.

Graham Marks works with gravity by building his sculptures upside down. That is to say, the flat or almost flat surface of his pieces — the face that reveals the interior — is inaccessible during construction because it is parallel to the floor of the studio. This procedure is necessary in order to move the clay into such a large semicircular form. If Marks were to raise the clay from the center out rather than from the perimeter in, the form would collapse before reaching even one-fourth of its desired size. This approach to making also allows Marks to build walls within walls, which can later be altered to effect the mysteries of interior space. More importantly, when these pieces are rotated to their rightful position after drying and firing they take on the qualities of relocated objects. Rotation reveals the face that was parallel to the floor as a break across the diameter of the form; they suggest "fragment" for the first time.

Which came first, the demands of material and process, or the conceptual musing of an artist's oneiric state of mind? Neither, both are fused by the necessity of creation into a non-linear process in which material and technique inform idea, and idea demands that the artist use all his magic to realize the transubstantiation from physical substance to poetic image.

The phenomenon of transubstantiation is nowhere more apparent than in the revelations of the fire. It is in the numinous cradle of a blinding, orange-red flame that

Graham Marks's sculpture acquires its power to convince. It is the firing process that gives his work its conceptual core — that intrinsic sense of time. The fire is also primarily responsible for the color of each piece. During the firing, the atmospheric condition inside the kiln serves to draw oxygen out of the body of the sculpture, causing its surface to turn dark and stone-like in appearance. This process does not, however, affect the flat side of the form because each piece is fired upside down with that particular face parallel to the floor of the kiln. As a result, that part of the form remains inaccessible to the firing atmosphere and, therefore, exhibits a lighter, fresher coloration. This implies that what we see is a fragmented, less timeworn part of some larger, complete object. The importance of the fire's residual presence in the work makes it clear that the aesthetic nature of these sculptures is dependent on their ceramic origins.

The overall concept of form exhibited in these sculptures implies that the artist's vocabulary of three-dimensional design also originates in ceramics. This seems to be the case particularly because of their formal relationship to the bowl. It is safe to speculate that we are drawn to Graham Marks's sculpture, at least in part, by a magnetic attraction that is deeply seated in our unconscious perception of the vessel form. The bowl is a basic and even symbolic construct founded on human need, logic, and imagination. It is one of a few archetypal forms in the history and evolution of art that connects us directly with the individuals who struggled to establish human life at the dawn of civilization. For that reason, it has an unusual power to communicate subliminally the essence of human existence.

If any one piece of Marks's sculpture was turned onto its small end so that its axis was vertical to the floor (a position directly opposite to the one it takes during construction), its exterior contour would exhibit a space-containing curve that peaks at, or near, the point of the break created at the top of the form. This distinctive element of artistic language is directly related to the dynamics of pottery. A careful look at many a well-potted bowl will reveal a similar sense of curving exterior contour or wall, holding in place a volumetric interior space. It is a well-known pottery principle that if a bowl is to emit an intense feeling of holding (either material or space), its contour must peak at an extreme point just before the wall of the pot turns back in on itself. If we were to put two bowls of equal size and shape together, we would make a sphere or egg-like form. Putting one of Marks's fragments

together with its "missing part" by imagining the extension of its exterior contours to their logical conclusions would have a similar result. The implied form of a sphere, which is intuitively recognized when we view Marks's work, is far more important than any specific reference to pottery. It is the general sense of roundness, elemental to the vessel, egg, or sphere, generated by these pieces of sculpture that endows them with their feeling of rightness or harmony. This feeling is interrupted, of course, by the fact that each piece is but a fragment of a round form. However, this interruption is vital to our interest in the work because it causes us to search their mysteries in the hope of restoring them to an original state (if only in our mind's eye), and thereby establishing a wholeness or a roundness that we know will summon a sensation of contentment. Gaston Bachelard in his book *The Poetics of Space* writes: "Images of full roundness help us to collect ourselves, permit us to confer an initial constitution on ourselves, and to confirm our being intimately, inside."<sup>1</sup> He also quotes Van Gogh who wrote: "Life is probably round."<sup>2</sup>

Since full three-dimensional roundness is only an illusionary part of Marks's sculptures, and because the paradoxical information they offer only allows us to speculate about their meaning, we are prohibited from arriving at a totally satisfying conclusion. In their presence we experience a type of renewable closure common to all important works of art. Carolyn Bloomer astutely points out the following in her book *Principles of Visual Perception*:

If the work of art is too simple, people will see, identify, turn off, and move on to something else rapidly. On the other hand, if the work is too obscure, people cannot make closure and will also tune out and move away. One characteristic of really great art is that it provides enough stimulus for partial closure but not enough to completely turn you off<sup>3</sup>

Bloomer goes on to point out that the possibility of always seeing something new in a work of art is due "not only to the meaning the artist has expressed, but also to dimensions of meaning that he has withheld and that you, the viewer, project from your own experience."<sup>4</sup> The experience the viewer projects may be objective or subjective or, as Carl Jung points out, primal — part of the human collective unconscious.

It is important to mention that the subjective reactions involved in viewing the sculptures of Graham Marks constitute the most profound aspect of our communica-

tion with them. Because they command us to confront and comprehend our relationship to the clues of external reality, they tap deep, unquantifiable feelings that have the potential to reveal each of us to ourselves and leave us with that sense of fulfillment and knowledge all good art is capable of creating. But we must approach art with a sincere impulse towards admiration if we are to receive the full benefit of its poetic image. Any premature attempt at evaluation destroys the possibility of real comprehension by blocking the primary avenues of imagination. It also seems clear that, in general, too much intellectualizing and deductive reasoning inhibits the potential for fully experiencing a work of art. It is best and most rewarding to simply experience the sculptures of Graham Marks; to accept willingly that they are something that can't be named.

Wayne Higby

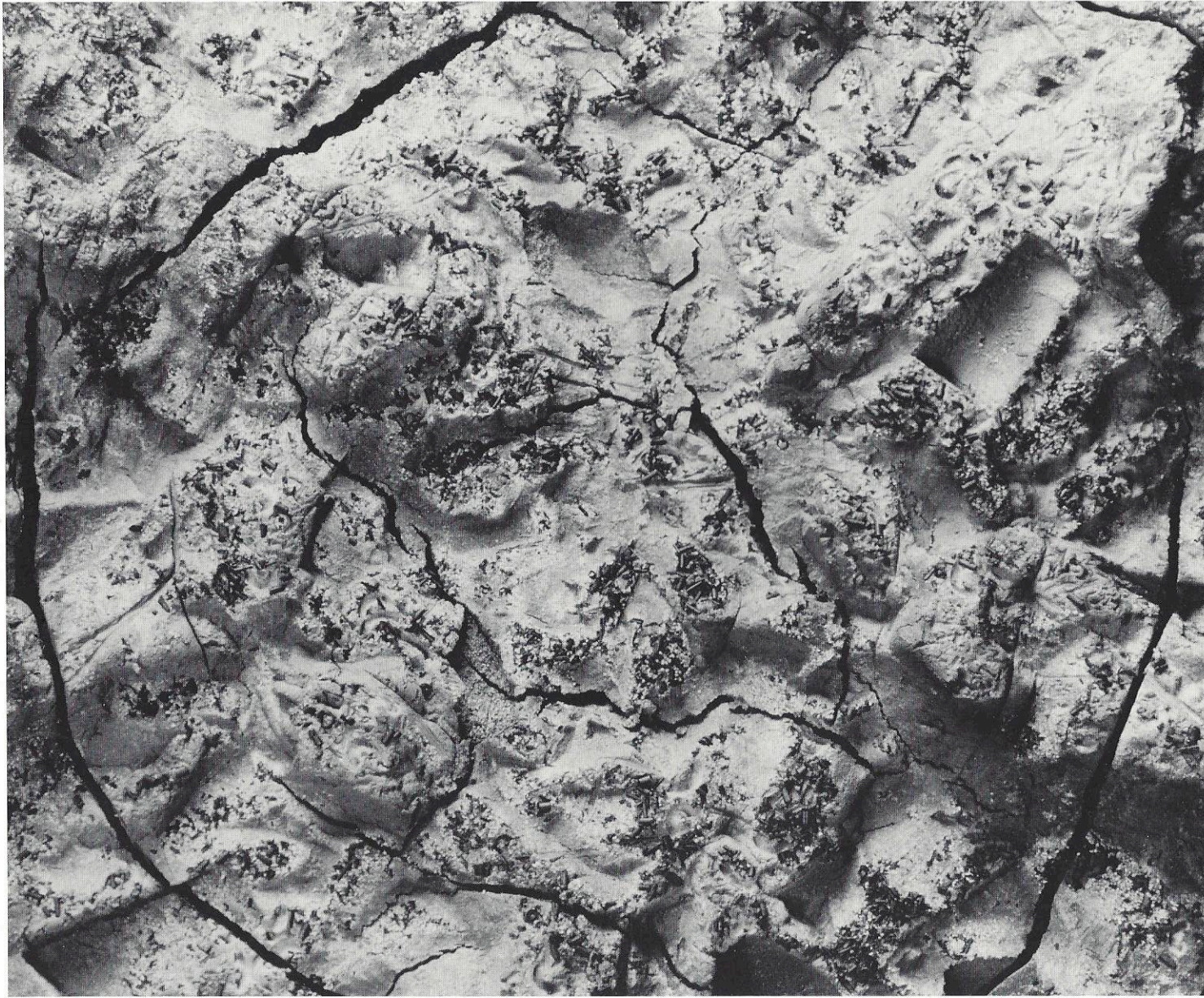
#### NOTES

1. Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), p. 234.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 232.
3. Carolyn M. Bloomer, *Principles of Visual Perception* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1976), pp. 16-17.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 17.

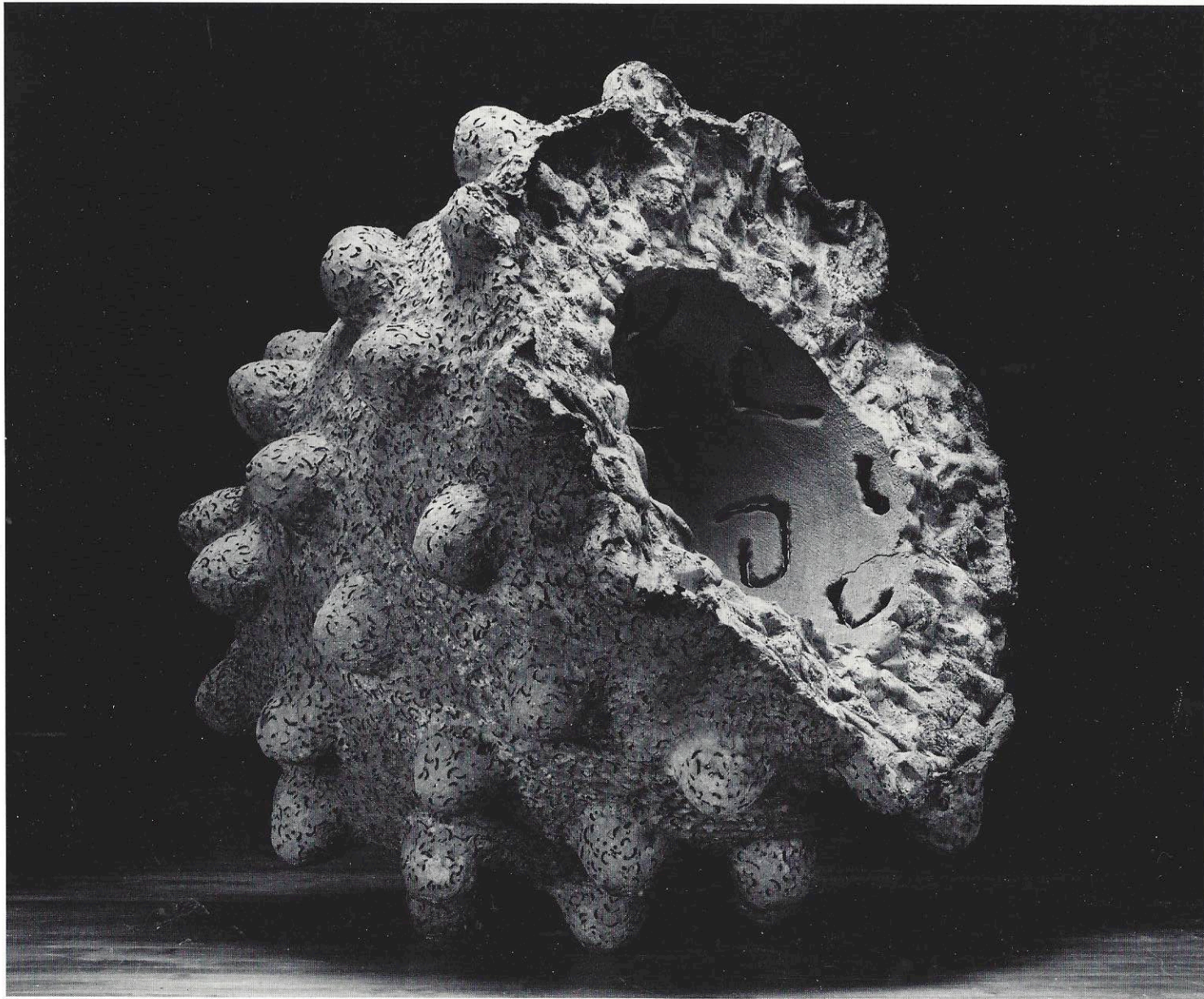


#4, 1986  
H 31" W 30" L 35"

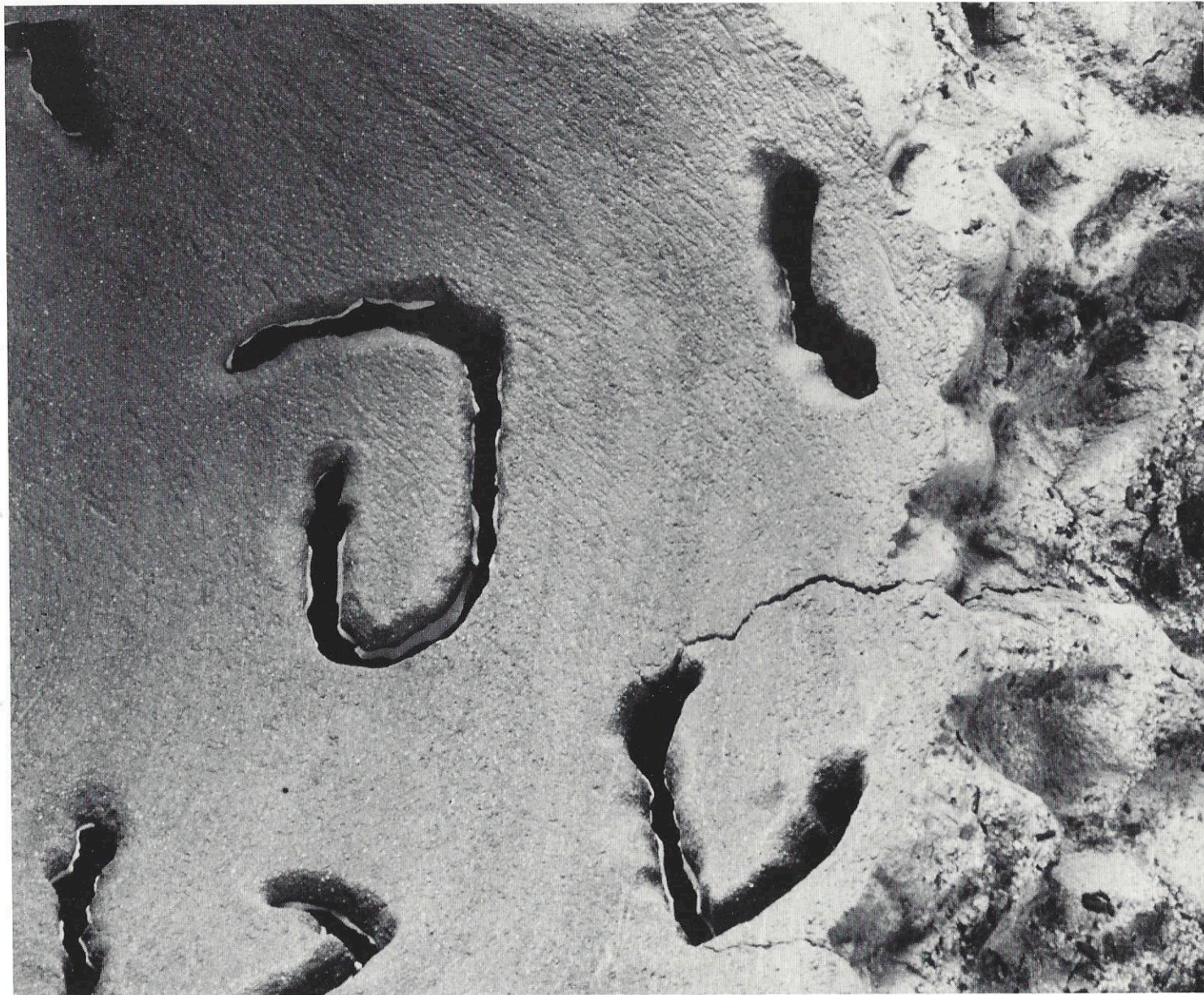




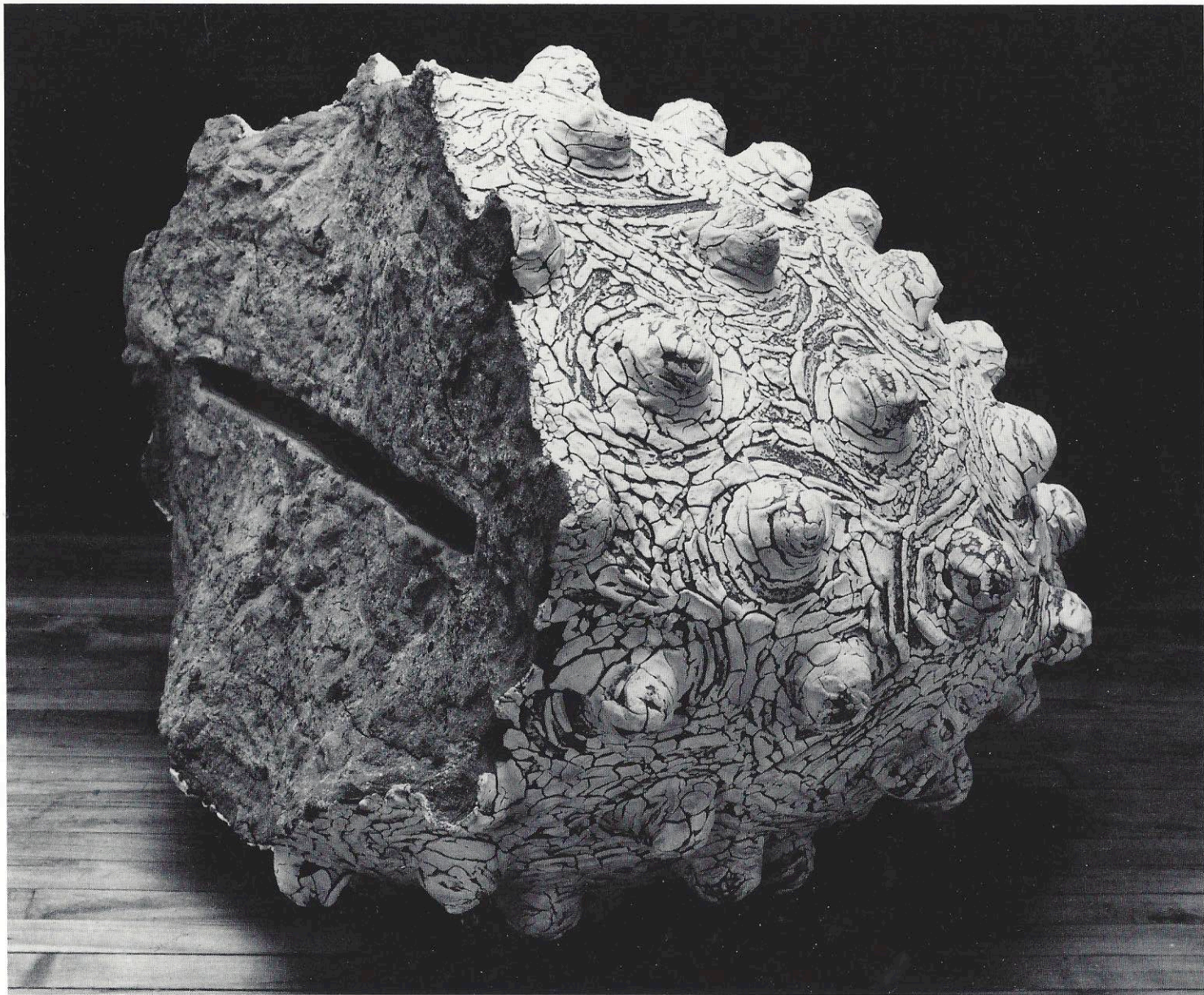
Detail, #4  
Photo: Graham Marks



#5, 1986  
H 37" W 36" L 39"



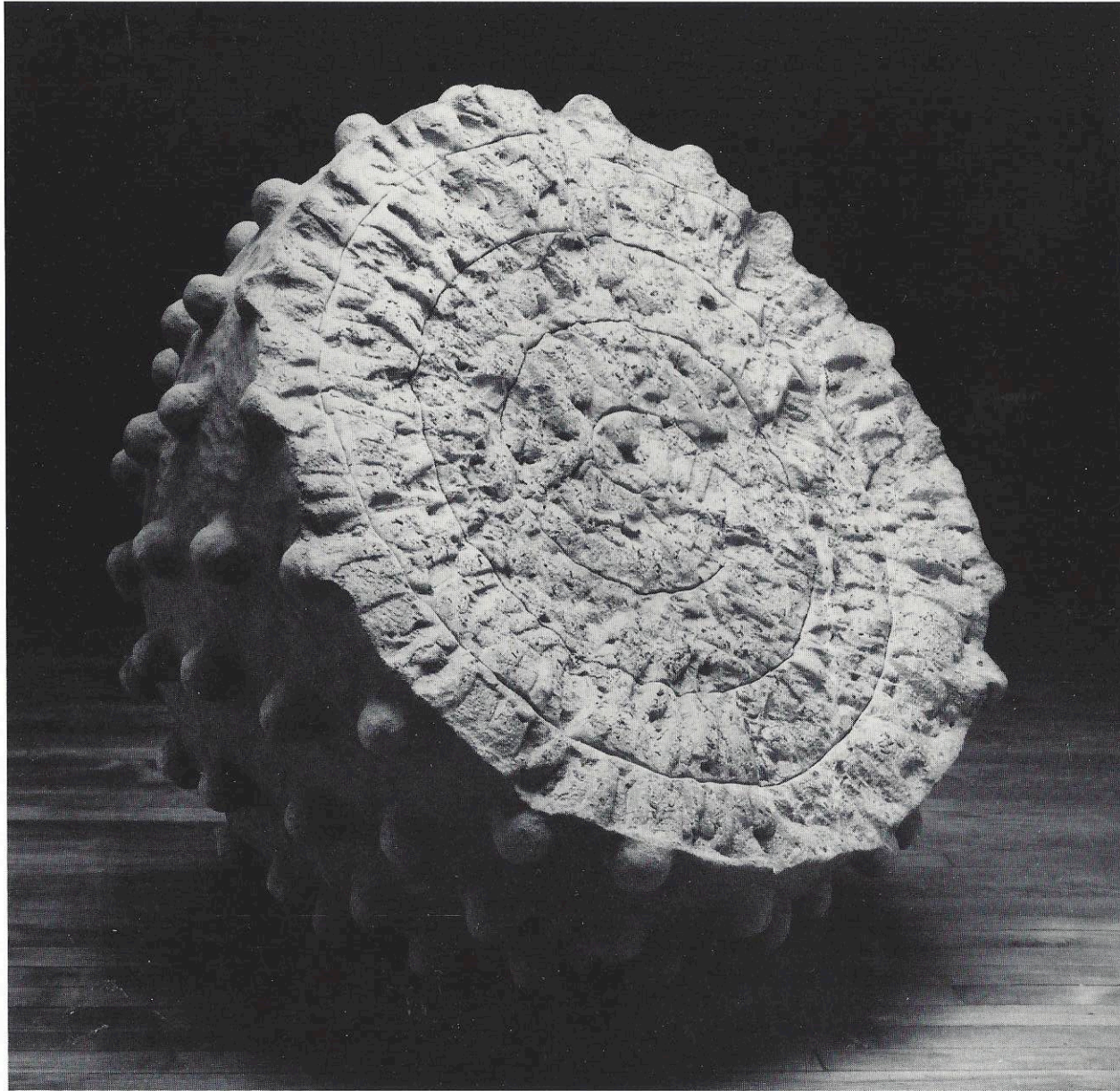
Detail, #5



#7, 1986  
H 26" W 32" L 28"



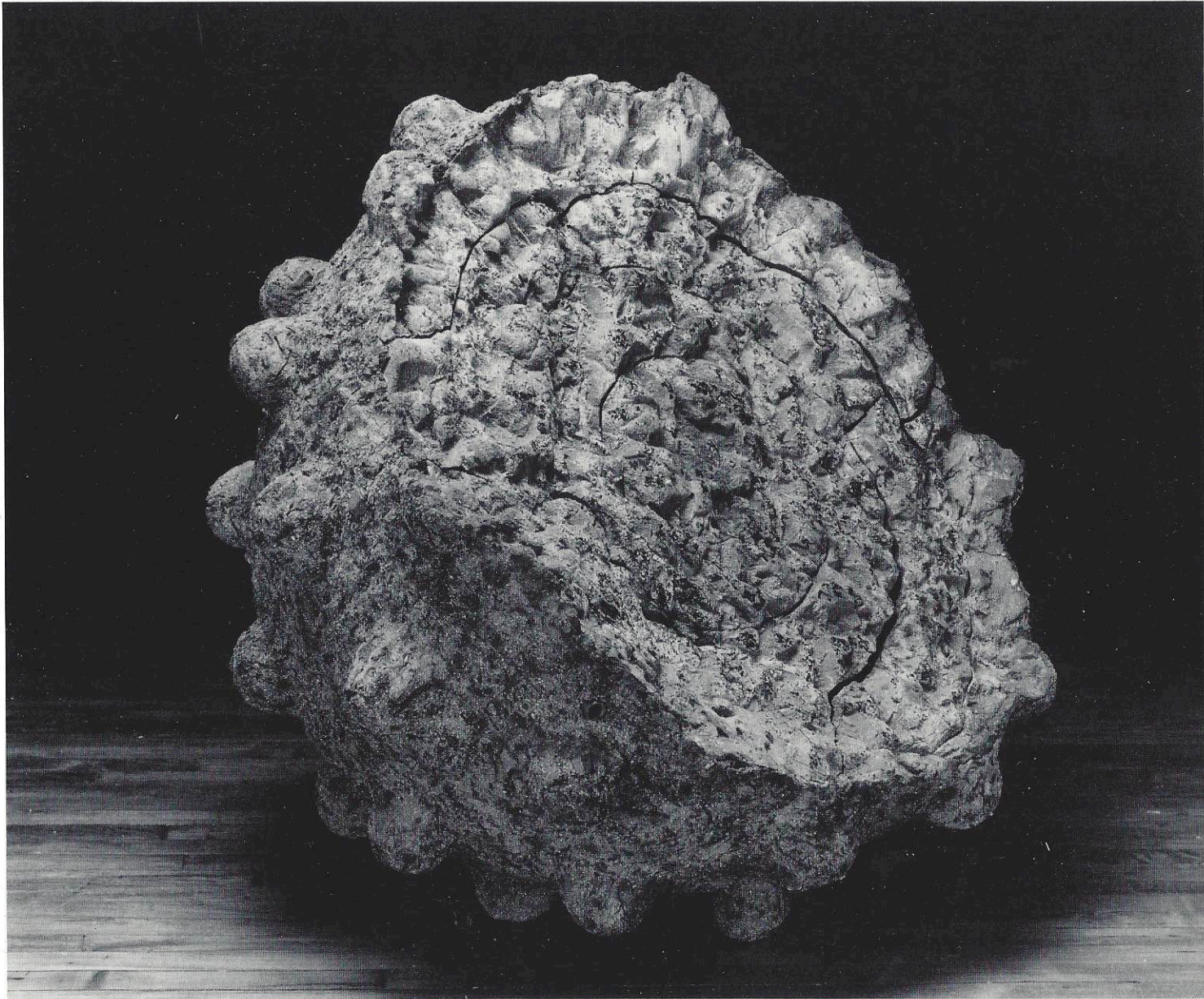
Detail, #7



#9, 1986  
H 31" W 33" L 31"



Detail, #9  
Photo: Graham Marks



#6, 1986  
H 35" W 34" L 34"



## GRAHAM MARKS

Born 1951, New York City

Currently: Head of ceramics department, Cranbrook  
Academy of Art, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan

## EDUCATION

M.F.A. New York State College of Ceramics at Alfred  
University, Alfred, NY (1976)

B.F.A. Philadelphia College of Art, Philadelphia, PA (1974)

## AWARDS

1985 Fellowship, The New York Foundation for the Arts

1984 Fellowship, National Endowment for the Arts  
Sponsored Project Grant, New York State Council  
on the Arts

1978 Fellowship, National Endowment for the Arts

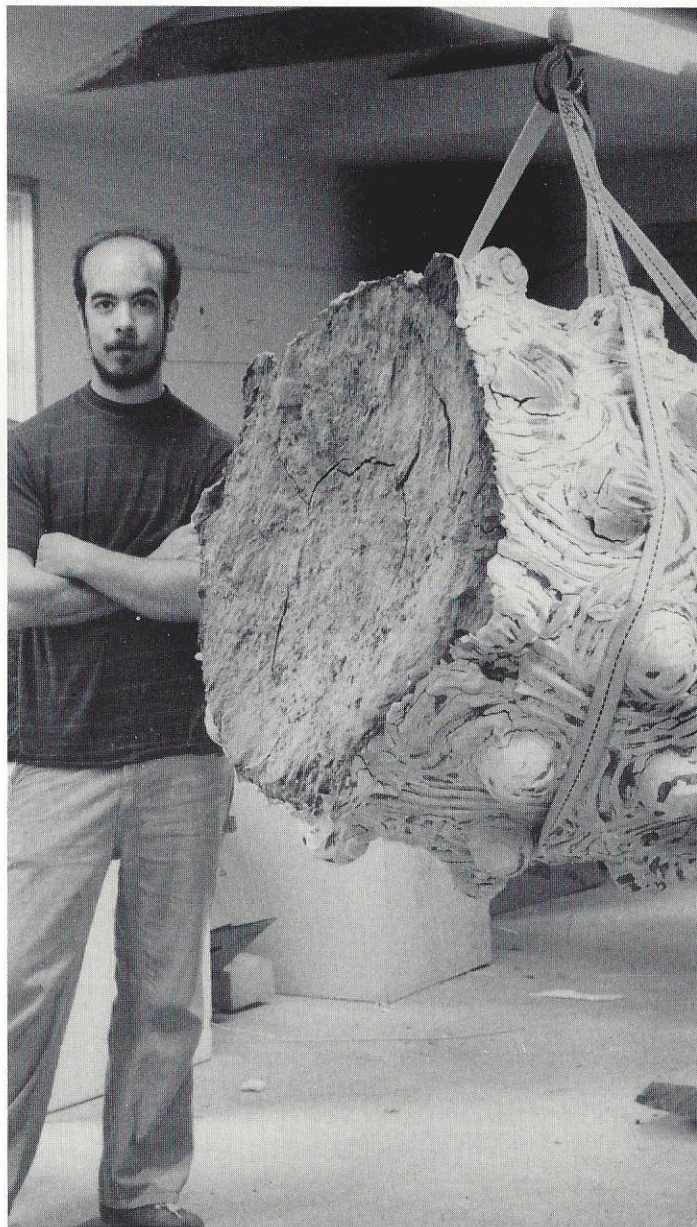
## SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

1986 Everson Museum of Art, Syracuse, NY

1984 Nina Freudenheim Gallery, Buffalo, NY

1983 Helen Drutt Gallery, Philadelphia, PA

1981 John Michael Kohler Art Center, Sheboygan, WI



Studio-Scottsville, New York  
Photo: Graham Marks

## SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 1986 *Craft Today: Poetry of the Physical*, American Craft Museum, NY  
*Material and Metaphor: Contemporary American Ceramic Sculpture*, Chicago Public Library Cultural Center, Chicago, IL  
*Contemporary Arts: An Expanding View*, Wellesley College Museum, Wellesley, MA; The Monmouth Museum, Lincroft, NJ
- 1985 *Organic Abstraction*, Clark Gallery, Lincoln, MA; Perimeter Gallery, Chicago, IL  
*Contemporary American Ceramics: Twenty Artists*, Newport Harbor Art Museum, Newport Beach, CA
- 1984 *Multiplicity in Clay, Metal and Fiber*, Skidmore College, Saratoga Springs, NY
- 1983 *Who's Afraid of American Pottery?* Dienst Beeldende Kunst, Hertogenbosch, Netherlands; Paleis voor Schone Kunsten, Brussels, Belgium; Stedelijke Musea, Fouda, Netherlands  
*Graham Marks and Gary Griffen*, Rochester Institute of Technology, Rochester, NY  
*A Passionate Vision: Contemporary Ceramics from the Daniel Jacobs Collection*, DeCordova Museum, Lincoln, MA
- 1982 *Group Invitational*, Haber/Theodore Gallery, New York, NY  
*Young Americans — Award Winners*, American Craft Museum, New York, NY
- 1981 *Sculpture Invitational*, Tibor de Nagy Gallery, New York, NY  
*Clay*, Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, RI  
*Centering on Contemporary Clay: Ceramics from the Joan Mannheimer Collection*, University of Iowa, Iowa City, IA

## SELECTED COLLECTIONS

- Alpert Family Trust, Boston, MA  
American Craft Museum, New York, NY  
Dienst Beeldende Kunst, Hertogenbosch, Netherlands  
Nina and Bob Freudenheim, Buffalo, NY  
Daniel Jacobs, New York, NY  
Karen Johnson Keland, Racine, WI  
Vincent Lim and Robert Tooley, Philadelphia, PA  
Mrs. Joan Mannheimer, Des Moines, IA  
Memorial Art Gallery, Rochester, NY  
Earl Millard, Belleville, IL  
New York State College of Ceramics at Alfred University, Alfred, NY  
Robert Pfannebecker, Lancaster, PA  
Rochester Institute of Technology, Rochester, NY  
Schnader, Harrison, Segal and Lewis, Philadelphia, PA  
The Lannon Foundation, Palm Beach, FL  
Hope and Jay Yampol, New York, NY

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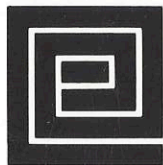
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