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Chris Gustin

Chris Gustin's most distinctive sculptural vessels, starting in the late '80s, are chubby, fleshy, rounded, twisting, muffinlike "three-dimensional doodles" in a few traditional categories: some clearly are vases, although their long necks preclude use, while those that vaguely evoke teapots haven't a prayer of function. Gustin's works combine a notion of abstract form with the known contours of the body, usually the short, appealing dimensions of a baby, toddler or cartoon character rather than the elongated dimensions of an adult. That makes them innocently erotic and often amusing. They are given a variety of colors, mostly the skin range of pinks, coppers and beiges.

Gustin (b. 1952) grew up in the Los Angeles area, where his family owned commercial whiteware manufacturing companies. He ran one of them for two years, between starting his college education at the University of California, Irvine (where he took a class from John Mason) and going on to the Kansas City Art Institute (BFA 1975). After Alfred (MFA 1977), he taught at Boston University and, through mergers and moves of institutions, ended at the University of Massachusetts, Dartmouth, from which he retired after 20 years of teaching, in 1999. In the intervening period, in addition to making his sculptural vessels, he started his own tile company in 1994. In 1986 he was one of the founders of Watershed, a ceramic residency program in Maine (along with Peg Griggs, George Mason and Lynn Duryea).

Though Gustin has also made teabowls, pre-Columbian-inspired stirrup pots, and more moderate if still decisively contoured vessels, the fleshy pads and twists of the sculptural forms have become his signature. Teapots may consist of a succession of curves without a conventional

handle or spout, and he has experimented with handles that seem like outlines or quotation marks around the body of the pot, as well as with a suggestive variety of spouts, from jutting to sagging.