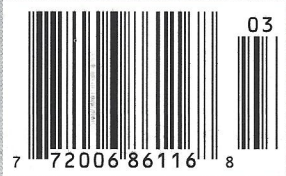
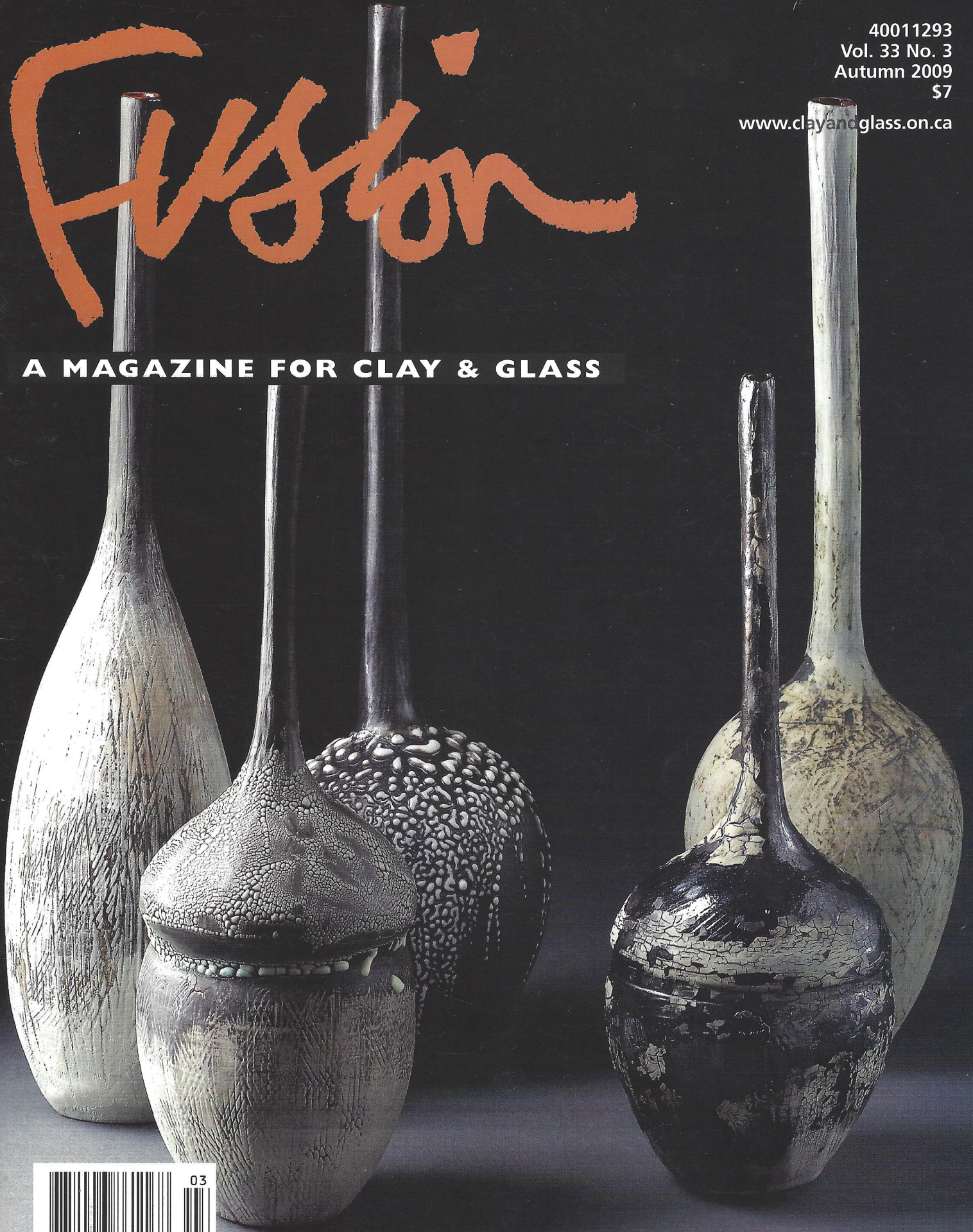


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Kathy Kranias

Becoming the Persephone



Kranias Queen Persephone, 2009, red earthenware, slip, glazes, 28cm x 27cm



Kranias Hades, 2009, red earthenware, slip, glazes, 28cm x 22cm 2



Kranias The Persephone Emerges, 2009, red earthenware, slip, stain, glaze, 35cm x 35cm



Kranias Diamond Queen, 2009, red earthenware, slip, stain, glazes, 40cm x 30cm 2



Kranias With Pomegranate III, 2009, red earthenware, slip, glazes, 27cm x 28cm



Kranias With Pomegranate I, 2009, red earthenware, slip, stain, glaze, 27cm x 35cm-1



Kranias Kore, 2009, red earthenware, slip, glazes, 25cm x 18cm



Kranias Winterdead, 2009, red earthenware, slip, stain, glazes, 27cm x 38cm



Kranias With Pomegranate II, 2009, red earthenware, slip, stain, glaze, 35cm x 27cm



Kranias Kore in the World Under, 2009, red earthenware, slip, stain, glazes, 25cm x 43cm 2

By Gil McElroy

The thing about a set of stairs is what it can mean. A staircase is a profligate thing, rich in lore, symbolism, and metaphor. A staircase is a narrative, a story, moving us from one level to another. It is a journey, a transition. Be it the domestic bifurcation separating the social part of a home – the kitchen, living room and the like – from the more private, intimate spaces of the bedrooms above; whether it is the steps that the condemned climb to meet their judicially imposed fate on the gallows above; or if it's a spiritual metaphor of the ladder (the elemental staircase) employed in, say, St. John Climacus's classic seventh century text *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, the fecund metaphor of the staircase shapes our experience of the world in immeasurable ways.

This is all by way of giving some context to a relatively new exhibition space at the Art Gallery of Peterborough. In the old house that was the original gallery, a spiral staircase adjacent to what was the main entrance to the home has, for the last couple of years, become an exhibition venue of much promise. It's off the beaten path, to be sure; the stairs lead only to some upstairs offices, and its not close to the gallery's other exhibition spots, so an effort has to be made to seek it out. In effect, you say "yes" to the work that is exhibiting here before you even see any of it.

Toronto-based ceramist Kathy Kranias is the latest artist to utilize this venue which essentially comprises the walls and floor space of a small main floor foyer, the winding staircase itself, and the second-floor landing. *Becoming the Persephone*



Kranias Spring Tree, 2009, red earthenware, slip, glazes, 25cm x 18cm



Kranias Winter Tree, 2009, red earthenware, slip, glazes, 25cm x 18cm



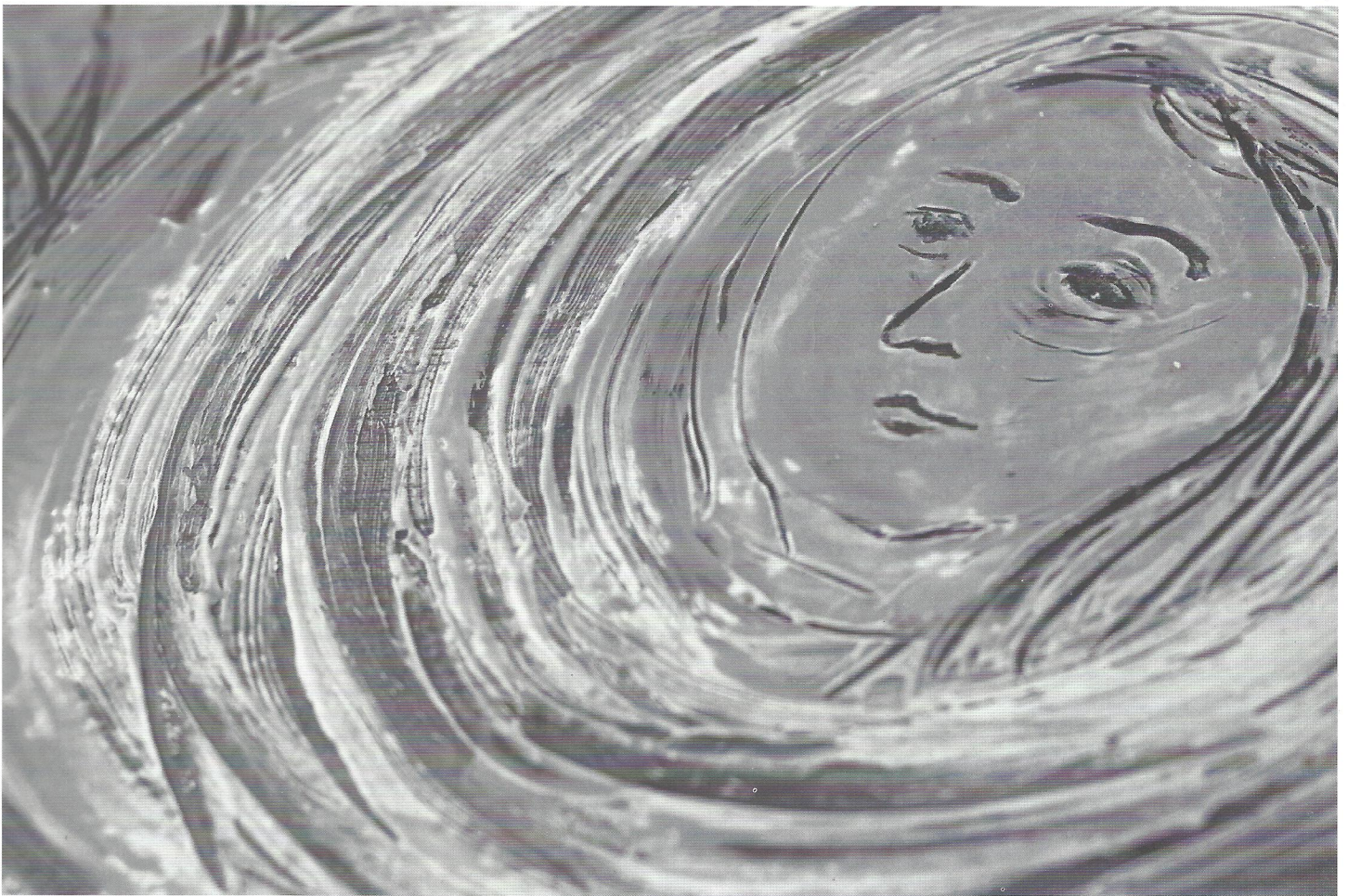
Kranias Skeletal Trees, 2009, red earthenware, slip, glazes, 23cm x 26cm

consisted of an installation of a number of Kranias's ceramics vessels and plates with a little bit of textile thrown in for dramatic effect. It's all based on the Greek myth of Demeter and Persephone, which goes something like this: Demeter is the goddess of fertility and the agricultural cycle who gave humanity the grain crops and whom the poet Homer called "the bringer of seasons." Demeter's daughter Persephone (a.k.a.: Kore) takes up with Hades, god of the underworld, sending her mother into a deep depression. With the world dying because of Demeter's state of withdrawal, Zeus eventually forces Hades to release Persephone. There's a caveat, though: as she has eaten a handful of pomegranate seeds while in the underworld, the deal is that she must return there each year for six months.

Now, the obvious employment of the AGP's Staircase Gallery as a narrative device would be to tell the story from upstairs down, to mirror Persephone's descent into the underworld. But the architectural layout of the building precludes that conceit; one is forced to construct the narrative from the ground up,

which Kranias does – to a point. The story she tells is related largely via a series of earthenware plates hung on the walls at eye level, but there are a couple of exceptions to this rule. The first comes first. Tucked away in a narrow spot around the corner from the first step of the staircase, swathed in fabric, is a small grouping of ceramic objects of ugly black, red, brown, and green, along with some internal lighting that emanates from this arrangement of objects. Putting two and two together leads to the presumption (and it is just that; no labels indicate anything of the sort) that Kranias has given shape to a version of the underworld in this small corner of the gallery. One object here – an open-ended, vessel-like thing of an interwoven lattice of glazed green clay strips that lies on the floor in two separate sections – is of consequence further along the installation.

The journey up the stairs provides encounters with a series of wall-mounted earthenware plates ornamented with images – figurative and landscape – relevant to the story, like a series of three each of which depict Persephone holding a



Kranias Kore in the World Under-detail

pomegranate. Two are sketches – outlines of the head of Persephone and her hand holding the fruit etched into a field of aquamarine glaze. The third breaks the pattern: in *With Pomegranate III*, Kore is a more fully fleshed out image rendered on a plate glazed green and blue, and the pomegranate in her hand depicted in naturalistic red. Critically, the plate itself is broken – cleanly cleft into two pieces right through the fruit in Persephone's hand.

En route up the stairs, the mythologically affected landscape factors into the installation. The plates *Spring Tree* and *Winter Tree*, for instance, depict seasonal landscapes via images of a single tree respectively with and without foliage. *Winterdead* proffers a scene of an almost abstract landscape – one which lacks the narrow particularity of Kranias's tree plates – inert and seemingly lifeless during the period Persephone does her time in hell and Demeter mourns.

We're also given to see plated figurative images of both Hades and Persephone, the latter in one of the show's more formally interesting work, *The Persephone Emerges*. We

encounter the face of the goddess peering out from beneath peeled-back layers of overlaid clay, like onion skins pulled back to reveal the heart of things. On the wall nearby, Kranias gives us the goddess in her role as Queen of the underworld in *Diamond Queen*, a disk-shaped work in which the image of Persephone's face sits at the centre of a circle of radiating clay flames.

Up on the second-floor landing, tucked into another corner on the only plinth in the exhibition, sits *Bridal Gown*. It's here that the upstairs and downstairs of the installation link up, for this piece – a freestanding sculptural work that resembles two cones of glazed clay lattice joined together at their narrow ends to suggest the narrow-waisted form of the titular wedding textile – is the linch-pin holding everything together. Downstairs, Persephone's gown lies broken. Here, it is rendered whole and resplendent, and here things fuse. In Kathy Kranias's *Becoming the Persephone*, medium (ceramics) and message (the power of transformation) coalesce.