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Introducing LG Williams “Grey Matter” Series

By B. Pierre Beigay, Curator of Operations and International Exhibitions at Fuga Gallery



LG Williams and The Estate of LG Williams
#147 from *The Grey Matter Series™*, 2016, Porcelain Ceramics

***“One look at our hands...tells the whole story.” —
Robert Thurman***

LOS ANGELES — In 2014 artist LG Williams began a series of abstract, tabletop ceramic objects. Williams acknowledges that these small-scale, hand-made ceramic sculptures “pack a punch.” They are an artistic assault upon the postmodern and conceptual traditions championed by artists, museums, and collectors over the last 50 years.

These small, light-grey clay sculptures viscerally reenact the action of one’s own hands and fingers

manipulating soft chunks of clay. The sculptures’ defining characteristics are their lively textures and all-over surface variations. Subtle combinations of white, yellow and pink hues highlight and underscore the energy of the final firing process.

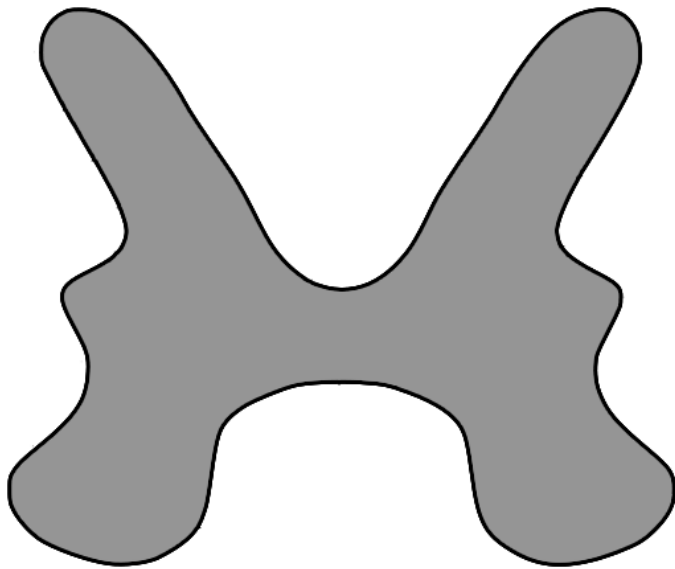
The name of this series—“Gray Matter” is a suitable departure point from which the viewer can begin to unpack the artworks’ unexpected and far-reaching implications.

It is the unique structure, evolution, and cooperation between the hand and the brain that the artist aims to reify and explore. Williams’ artworks redefine, in plastic terms, one of the most important stories in history—the story of how humans became the preeminent, evolutionary animal on the planet.

“What is revealed by these sculptures,” says Williams, “is the human hand itself as the genius underlying art, the miracle of creative biomechanics, and one of the crucial adaptations in the history of human-artistic evolution. Humans are the only creatures with a fully opposable thumb, and the hand’s unprecedented manipulative ability is our greatest strength.”

Most people recognize that the hands of a master ceramicist can manipulative clay into glorious forms that stir the emotions, orient a commonplace task into a delicate procedure, or into a thing of beauty. “Still,” explains Williams, “our knowledge of the importance of the hand for art-at-large is wholly inadequate.” His “Gray Matter” sculptures are an attempt to remedy this fact.

The unusual, interpretative, and ambitious character of these intimately-scaled sculptures encourages study and invites contemplation. In this regard, they share many of the physical and metaphysical qualities of naturally formed "Chinese Scholars' Rocks"—unusual rock-formations that served as inspiration in the study spaces of ancient Chinese connoisseurs and literati. The significant difference between the scholars' rocks and "Gray Matter" sculptures is that Williams own hands shaped his forms for a specific artistic stratagem: these sculptures embody evolution, ideation, and conceptualism itself.



Grey Matter (pictured above) is a major component of the central nervous system

Williams is quick to point out “the uncanny similarities between his “Gray Matter” sculptures and grey matter itself—a major component of the human central nervous system (the brain). Grey matter is the most complex and our most recent evolutionary development. It is involved in muscle control, and sensory perception such as seeing and hearing, memory, emotions, speech, decision-making, and self-control.

Visually, the hand-shaped sculptural forms, folds, and surfaces of each object, viewed as a whole, on a schematic level, reveal a striking resemblance to the shape of one's own mind, a.k.a. grey matter. Both are both light grey, share roughly the same volume, are aligned along an axis, have left and right sides, and are distributed in an “H” shape which can be oriented toward the horizontal or vertical. Their many folds



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actually increase the surface area of the forms and therefore increase the amount of material and the amount of information that can be stored and processed.

Building upon these remarkable similarities, Williams’ ceramic sculptures make a bold statement: artistic intelligence is fundamentally somatic. “Gray Matter” series masterfully renders the embodied, dynamic implication of the hand, an awareness of the wonder that the simplest manipulation, trivial or sophisticated, can reveal enormous complexities and artistic truths, and the unique structure and movements of the hand and its evolution in cooperation with the brain has enabled homo sapiens to become renowned artistic creators in the first place.

Provocative, illuminating, and delightful to view, handle and touch, Williams’ “Gray Matter” artworks encourage us to see and think in new ways about one of art’s most taken-for-granted assets—the human hand.

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