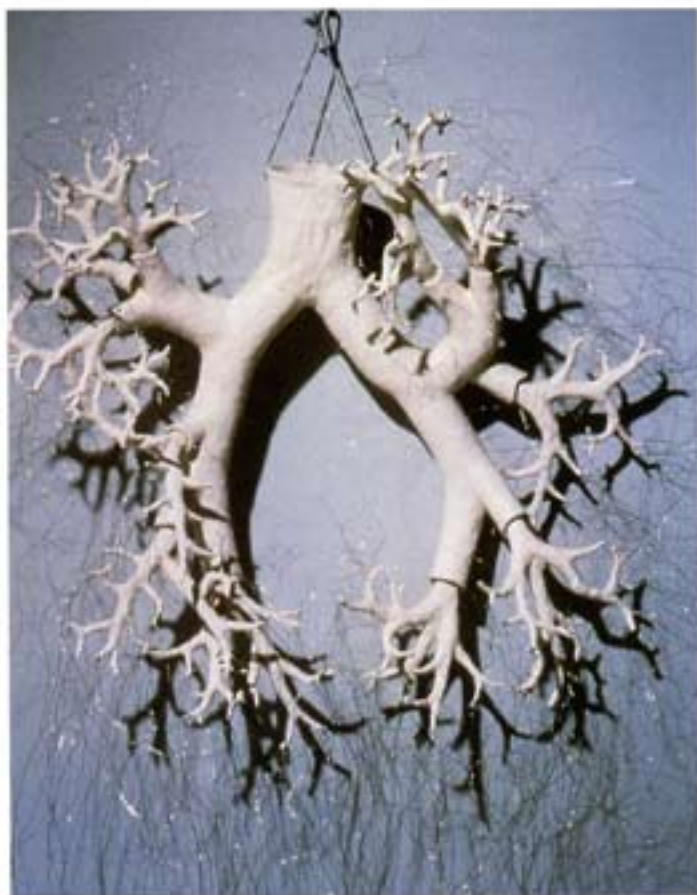


Visual Perspectives: 14 Years of the Virginia A. Groot Awards

Figurative portraiture can assume many forms and it may not always be what it appears to be at first glance. As Judy Moonelis herself has acknowledged, her interest in the "rich and complex world of human anatomy, from micro to macroscopic," has informed her sculptural work.⁶⁷ She explored the nature of human memory in her *Memory Portraits* (1996-98). A second series, *Touch Portraits*, 1999-2000, explores our sense of touch through mixed media including porcelain, copper and glass. Her investigation into the world of sensory structures led to the creation of these miniature-scale porcelain portrait heads with embellished copper wires serving as touch receptors. Each portrait is mounted on a copper pole ranging from 5 to 7 feet in height. A critic noted, "Moonelis suppresses the gross body in these portraits by concentrating on the face as a focal point of portraiture. The face offers immediacy and intimacy. It is where we try to read the feelings of the people around us."⁶⁸ One interesting insight into her work is the analogy offered that connects our desire to touch the work on exhibit (despite museum restrictions on such activities), and "the public space of our repressed bodily desires,"⁶⁹ With the body being "conceptually minimized...we are left with the head, the site of the public perception of touch and the publicly accepted part of the socialized body."⁷⁰ The portraits are modeled directly from life in clay, and each captures the spirit of the model at a specific moment in time. Her current work "investigates the primacy of breath and the human bronchial tree, an internal structure in the respiratory system, whose shape resembles an inverted tree or botanical root."⁷¹ Memory, touch, breath—it makes one eager to discover what Moonelis will explore next.



Judy Moonelis, American, b. 1953, *Breathing Root*, 2001 (detail), mixed media (earthware, steel), H: 72" L: 40" D: 12," Courtesy of the artist

Judy Moonelis

1991 FIRST PLACE

New York, New York

Born: May 30, 1953, Jackson Heights, Queens, New York

Education

1978—M.F.A. New York State College of Ceramics,
Alfred University, Alfred, NY

1975—B.F.A. cum laude, Tyler School of Art, Temple
University, Philadelphia, PA

Professional Experience/Academic Appointments

1980-present—Studio artist in New York City, NY

1999-present—Assistant Professor, Fairleigh Dickinson
University, Madison, NJ

1997, 1994, 1993—Visiting Professor, Rhode Island
School of Design, Providence, R.I.

1997—Visiting Professor, New York University,
New York, NY

1995-96—Visiting Associate Professor, Massachusetts
College of Art

1990—Visiting Professor, Hartford Art School, University
of Hartford, Hartford, CT

1986-87—Instructor, Hunter College, New York, NY

1984-87—Instructor, Parson School of Design,
New York, NY

As a visual artist I have maintained an active interest in the sciences. The rich and complex world of human anatomy, from micro to macroscopic has informed my sculptural work. Medical illustrations and anatomical models, both historic and contemporary, have provided a rich resource. The visually seductive scientific approaches to collecting, arranging, ordering and studying materials have also provide an impetus.

The contemporary portrait has been a subject of much of my work. This has included simultaneous exploration of the internal and external, the physical as well as psychological realms and the representation of the specific individual as a collective cultural portrait.

Memory Portraits, a series created primarily between 1996-98, used the portrait format to explore the nature of human memory. Sitters were represented as various body fragments, ranging from heads, hands, ears or feet. Quotes from conversations with the sitters about memory were inscribed onto their portraits. Many of the pieces were then grouped into collections. The feet from this group are fully formed, yet hollow, inviting an intimate identification, as if these feet could be stepped into and slipped on.

Awards and Honors

2001—Grant in Aid, Fairleigh Dickinson University

1994—Adolph and Esther Gottlieb Foundation
Artists Fellowship

1991—Virginia A. Groot Foundation, 1st Place Award

1989—New York Foundation for the Arts, Individual
Artist Fellowship

1986—National Endowment for the Arts, Individual
Fellowship

1985—New York Foundation for the Arts, Individual
Artists Fellowship

1980—National Endowment for the Arts, Individual
Fellowship

Selected Exhibitions

2000—Solo, John Elder Gallery, New York, NY

1998—Solo, John Elder Gallery, New York, NY

1994—Solo, Hillwood Art Museum, Greenvale, NY

1992—Solo, List Gallery, Swarthmore College, PA

1988, 1985—Solo, Rena Bransten Gallery,
San Francisco, CA

Selected Collections

American Craft Museum, New York, NY

Everson Museum, Syracuse, NY

Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts

Renwick Gallery, Smithsonian Institute, Washington, DC

Wustum Museum, WI

The strong relationship between human memory and the human senses was evident and led me to an exploration of the sense of touch in a series called *Touch Portraits* (1999-2000). In these works the microscopic internal world of touch receptors became an integral part of the portraits. In depth research on the physical as well as the emotional aspects of touch led me to research histology texts and the minute world of sensory structures. I investigated the remarkable touch receptors and the mechanics of where and how the human body registers touch. The diverse sensory receptors of the skin (Pacinian, Meissner's and Ruffini's corpuscles, among others) are highly responsive to vibration or pressure and are electrically activated when stimulated, creating a kind of internal firework. Broad referencing and cognitive research presented the groundwork for intuitive and subjective thinking in the development of these works. In *Touch Portraits* the microscopic internal anatomy was made large and juxtaposed against the external portraits, which inversely, were small. Many of the small portraits are porcelain set on 5'-7" lengths of copper pipe with fine wires and attachments sprouting from behind the hollow heads. These wires are highly responsive to vibration, referencing our elegant inner wiring and the touch receptors' motion sensitivity. *Touch Wall* approaches these same concepts, but in a wall composition format. The "receptors" in these works are as varied as the people who sat for the portraits, and were created in direct response to them.

In both the memory and touch series, the portraits were all modeled directly from life in clay, a material that readily records evidence of touch. The portraits bear likeness to the models, but the primary objective was to capture a vivid or alive quality, and something of the individuals' inner workings at a specific moment in time. The memory and touch works are not conventional portraits, yet the history and tradition of portraiture has been a resource. Painted image sources include the ancient Egyptian-Roman mummy portraits and Flemish painters Jan van Eyck, Johannes Vermeer and Rembrandt. The sculpted portrait has recently been a subject, specifically the head of the woman in the well-known ancient Etruscan life size clay tomb sculpture, the "Reclining Couple" sarcophagus.



Photo: Melissa Davis, NYC

The elephant portraits refer to "Ganesha," the Hindu god (son of Shiva and Parvati). Ganesha is represented as a fusion of human and animal, with a human body and elephant head, and is known as the "Lord of Easy Passage," "Remover of Obstacles." Historical Indian temple sculpture and miniature paintings of Ganesha have provided a broad range of inspirational images. The elephant heads I have created are intended to feel part human and are coupled with human portraits as a kind of alternate identity for both as in *Pair #1*.

My current work investigates of the primacy of breath and the human bronchial tree, an internal structure in the respiratory system, whose shape resembles an inverted tree or botanical root. The bronchial tree, ordinarily hidden from our gaze, has become greatly enlarged and functions as a kind of internal portrait. The wires in "Breathing Root" refer to the impulses regulating the body's nervous system, as well the root structures in plants, both indispensable to life. A connection between touch and the rapidity and profundity of breath, first considered in *Touch Wall*, is further explored in these works. *Inversion* considered the bronchi in an inverted position, its close resemblance to a tree form and the sense of our world turned upside down.



Photo: Michael Kohn, NYC

Judy Moonelis

American, b. 1953

Pair #1, 2000

porcelain

H: 10" W: 8" D: 3"

Courtesy John Elder Gallery, NYC

On loan from the artist

Judy Moonelis

American, b. 1953

Touch Portraits, Installation, 2000-2002

mixed media (porcelain, copper, glass, steel)

Group of five shown on a slate floor ____" H x 48" W x 60" D

Individual Touch Portraits range in height up to H: 68" L: 21" W: 24"

Courtesy John Elder Gallery, NYC

On loan from the artist

