

The Art of Transformation

Pam Stephens

One of the truly wonderful things about teaching at the post-secondary level is the aspect of working with professional artists on a daily basis. Included on the campus where I teach is a highly regarded ceramics program.

The ceramics faculty is known for their expertise in the field. One of these ceramic artists is Paula Rice.

Some of Rice's recent artwork involves her interpretation of the planets within our solar system. Unlike typical sphere-like representations of the planets, Paula's work transforms the planets into human-like personifications that symbolically capture the unique essence of each. "New scientific discoveries are included in the postures of each piece," explains Rice. "Mars, for example, is in the process of drinking water from the hand; [an] acknowledgement of the recent discovery that there has been water on the surface of Mars."

A Visual Representation

Walking into a gallery with all of the planets on display brings the solar system to life in ways that maps and traditional drawings cannot. In other words, the solar system is transformed into a visual representation that resonates with meaning. For example,

Neptune's blue surface relates to the actual planet's coloration, while the rings around the sculpture's head remind us that the actual planet has comparable rings. Likewise, Rice's Earth, Jupiter, Mars, Mercury, Ura-

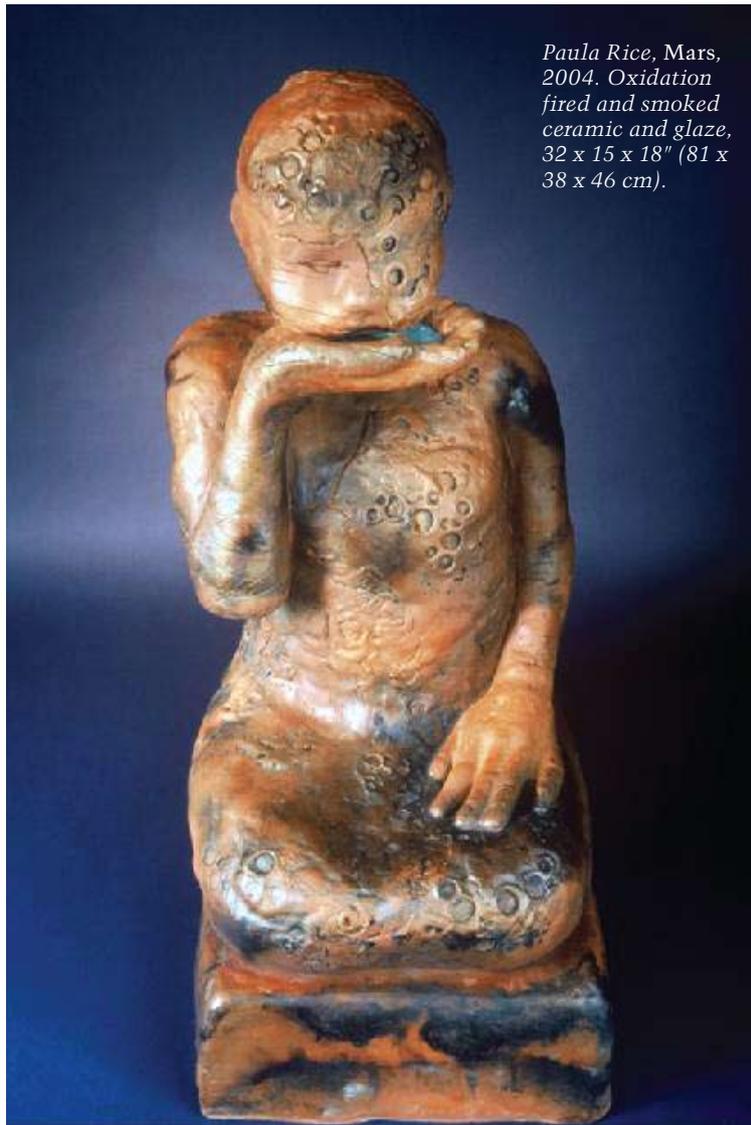
tion of "planet." With this bit of information, little Pluto encourages us to question this demotion.

Rice's ceramic sculptures of the planets serve as a reminder that art is not a handmaiden to other con-

tent areas; indeed, the visual arts when handled in such a thoughtful and sensitive way serves as a core function in the curriculum. Work like Rice's ceramic sculpture gives us reason to pause and contemplate bigger ideas associated with the pieces. What a remarkable concept for young students to contemplate how concrete ideas such as the physiology of planets can be transformed into memorable art objects that connect to real life.

Join the Discussion

Transformation takes on many guises in art. From the metamorphic images of M.C. Escher to contemporary digital videos, the idea of transformation is rich with possibilities. How do you teach students about transformation in art? Join our roundtable discussion on the *SchoolArts* Facebook page, or on schoolartsroom.blogspot.com.



Paula Rice, Mars, 2004. Oxidation fired ceramic and glaze, 32 x 15 x 18" (81 x 38 x 46 cm).

nus, Saturn, and Venus demonstrate through symbolic transformation ideas that inform our understanding of each planet. It is interesting to note that while Rice worked on the series, Pluto was demoted from the designa-

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