

**Andréa  
Keys  
Connell**

**Pattern  
Mapping**

**curatorial essay**

# A Map of Care

## Pattern and Presence in the Work of Andréa Keys Connell

At the heart of Andréa Keys Connell's work is a search—an effort to understand how the things we make can hold us, mark time, and carry memory. Her ceramic sculptures, often emotionally charged and materially rich, explore what survives in us and through us—especially in the aftermath of rupture. These are not portraits in the traditional sense, but vessels of feeling. Connell's figures do not represent specific people so much as they evoke presence: fleeting, weighty, and difficult to name.

These sculptures resist fixed identities. Many are fragmented or cloaked in looping patterns and gestural marks. They hover in states of ambiguity—between concealment and exposure, stillness and motion. Some are hollowed, some whole; some lean forward while others stand in still defiance. Yet all pulse with a shared inner life: a language of care, vulnerability, and persistence that lingers long after the viewer walks away.

Connell's figures do not always appear whole—or even immediately legible. Limbs are massaged into repose or caught mid-motion; faces are obscured; bodies sway in states of precariousness. Yet there is a tenderness in their making that



Andréa Keys Connell, *Holding*, 2023, clay, underglaze, and glaze. From the artist's studio.

suggests healing, or at least the possibility of being held. She invites us into that complexity, crafting sculptures that feel archetypal yet painfully specific, familiar yet alien, sentimental yet unsettling.

*Pattern Mapping* brings together works from across several years of Connell's practice, unified not by chronology but by a shared interest in pattern as both a visual device and a conceptual thread. Floral motifs, textile references, and all-over surface treatments recur throughout, not solely as decorative flourishes, but as means of holding and transmitting memory. Pattern, in these works, becomes a form of language: something repeated, shifting, accumulative.

In some sculptures, pattern acts as a kind of camouflage; in others, it is the figure's most legible feature. It recalls inherited objects, intergenerational care, and the rituals of domestic labor. Connell's surfaces are not static—they are built, layered, stitched together with color, texture, line, and volume. The result is a kind of visual palimpsest, where history is not told but felt.

**Pattern, in these works, becomes a form of language: something repeated, shifting, accumulative.**



Andréa Keys Connell, *Slumber*, 2024, clay and underglaze.  
From the artist's studio.

This mapping is not only visual, but also emotional and temporal. These works are, in part, concerned with time—how it's marked, recorded, stretched, and fractured. Connell's personal history inflects the work: the memory of her grandmother, a Holocaust survivor who painted a ration box with traditional Hungarian floral patterns; the devastating fire that destroyed her family's restored general store; the quiet, radical shifts of motherhood. These experiences don't illustrate the work—they inhabit it, residue rather than narrative. Her sculptures operate like emotional artifacts: objects of feeling, assembled in clay and gesture, where pattern becomes memory made visible—a fingerprint of human experience.

The installation is organized as a kind of landscape—what we might call an embodied terrain—shaped by absence and

endurance. The figures inhabit space not as monumental objects, but as presences in dialogue with one another. The gallery becomes a field of relations, where sculptures cluster like constellations or stand apart like sentinels. Their arrangement evokes not a linear narrative, but a kind of emotional cartography. As Connell writes of her own practice: “At some point our grip loosens. And in that letting go, what might feel like a cataclysmic absence or loss can be transformed into a presence, a fingerprint, a language that is kind and communicates a powerful care capable of filling infinite empty space.”

**Her sculptures are not declarations but offerings—objects that hold, rather than explain.”**

Care is a central ethic in Connell’s work—not as sentimentality, but as a radical act of attention and endurance. Her figures are born not only of sculptural labor, but of lived experience. She has spoken openly about the challenges of making work as a mother, as an academic, and as someone deeply attuned to the weight of what is inherited. Her sculptures are not declarations but offerings—objects that hold, rather than explain. They propose that care, like pattern, can be repeated without ever being identical. The gestures we make—toward others, toward the past, toward the materials in our hands—carry meaning even when words fail.



Taken together, these works affirm that craft is not merely the making of things—it is a way of marking time, holding presence, and tracing how we survive. It is a visual and emotional language that persists long after touch is no longer possible. Through this exhibition, Connell invites us to move slowly, to notice what remains, and to recognize in pattern not repetition, but care.



Andréa Keys Connell, *Plaaaaaaaid*, 2023, clay and underglaze. From the artist's studio.

Connell is an Associate Professor and Program Coordinator for Clay in the Studio Art program at Appalachian State University, and her practice is rooted in both rigorous material engagement and reflective pedagogy. The emotional and intellectual threads woven through these selected works reflect that dual commitment. This is a body of work that thinks deeply about form while remaining wholly invested in feeling. The sculptures are not didactic, but they teach us something essential: that fragility and survival are not opposites, and that rupture can be a point of connection, not just a wound.

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# Andréa Keys Connell

## Pattern Mapping

June 28 - November 29, 2025  
Rankin West Gallery

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