

ceramics

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Cover: Takashi Hinoda's
"Alternative Muscles"

Spotlight: The Nevica Project,
an online-only gallery

Clay Culture: The permanence
and disposability of ceramics



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1 Louis Pierozzi's teapot, 12¾ in. (32 cm) in length, wheelthrown, handbuilt, and sandblasted stoneware, 2010. 2 Sam Chung's teapot, 8½ in. (22 cm) in height, China paint, glaze, and porcelain. 3 David Bolton's *Entrapped Ewer with Paisleys*, 8 in. (20 cm) in height, wood-fired porcelain, 2010. 4 Warren MacKenzie's teapot, 8½ in. (22 cm) in height, stoneware, clear glaze over white crackle slip with bamboo handle, 2010. Photo: Ben Bates. 5 Tom Turner's teapot, 10¾ in. (27 cm) in height, wheel-thrown porcelain, paddled, stamped, multiple oilspot glazes, 2011. Photo: Koos Badenhorst. 6 Pete Pinnell's teapot, 9 in. (22 cm) in length, brown stoneware, wheelthrown and handbuilt. Photo: Koos Badenhorst. 7 Robert Archambeau's teapot, 8 in. (20 cm) in height, soda-fired stoneware, 2010. Photo: Ben Bates.

Teapots: an Invitational by Antoinette Badenhorst

Imagine a tilted teapot with a strong elegant stream of tea pouring through a spout, wide at its base and tapered towards its end. The teapot is held firm and comfortably by a handle that balances the physical weight of the body. The spout is placed so that the tea does not start pouring out too soon. As the teapot is tilted, the lid stays securely locked in place and the tea does not spatter. When the user puts the teapot down, no liquid dribbles down the spout and the elevated foot both protects the table surface from burns and ensures that the remaining tea stays warm. This would be the perfect utilitarian teapot.

For more than five centuries, potters have explored and created teapots. The complex design in which spout, handle, lid, and foot have to work together aesthetically as well as functionally always challenges artists. By adding unique and special touches; associating them with human bodies and animals for instance, potters can give their teapots personality. These beautiful ornaments evolved and associations with hospitality, comfort and status prompted them to push the literal meaning of the teapot. It became a medium through which they communicated social, political, and idealistic views. Striving to balance craftsmanship and artistic expression keeps them on the edge of solving problems as they turn utilitarian teapots into works of art.

Knowing all of this, Ben Bates encouraged his students to explore the teapot form and exposed them to some of the country's finest teapot makers when he invited 37 potters to exhibit their teapots in the Robert T. Wright Community Gallery of Art (<http://gallery.clcillinois.edu>) at the College of Lake County, Grayslake, Illinois. I had several op-

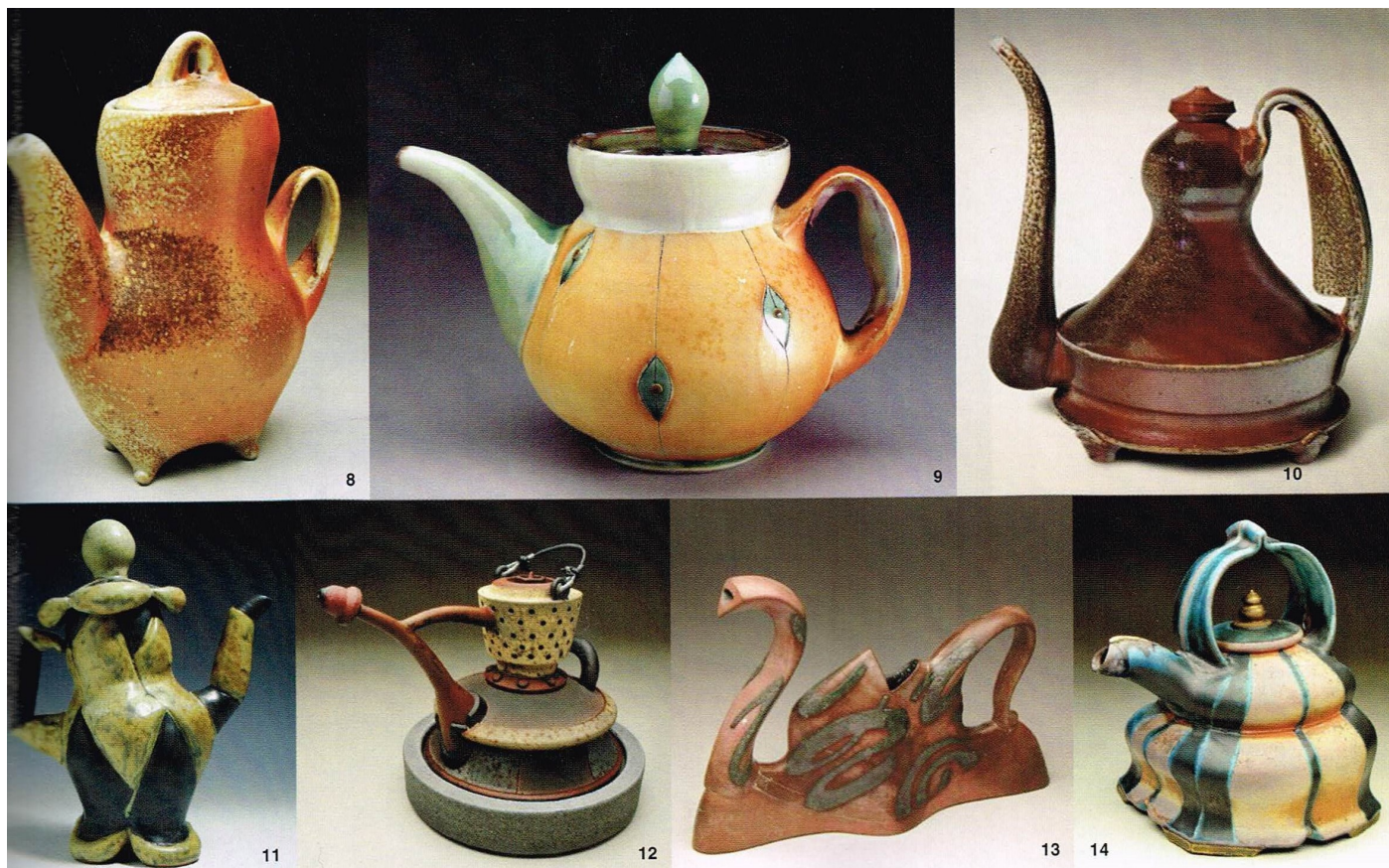
portunities to revisit and observe the exhibition. My own education about the teapot was reinforced as I studied each one.

Utility and Expression

Many of the artists successfully incorporated expressive qualities into primarily utilitarian teapots. Kevin Foy's black and gold teapot imitates a harlequin's pattern and stance, integrating surface and form with a functional design. Robert Archambeau's teapot has a pleasant classic quality; good craftsmanship and simple, unpretentious execution result in a utensil that works well. Charity Davis-Woodard also created a functional handle and foot, a good working spout and a well-fitting lid, but the teardrop shape that's repeated in the handle and the lid, as well as the surface decoration on the body of the piece, and the selective glazing that unites these along with the spout, not only work together aesthetically, but add a charming ornamental quality to it.

Via its form and scallop design elements, Pete Pinnell's somewhat ornamental teapot reflects nature. The uniquely elevated foot grows from the scallops and promises to keep tea warm, while handle, spout, and lid promise a trouble-free pouring of tea.

Tara Wilson and Sam Chung flirt with both functional and expressive teapots. Although worlds apart in look and feel, there are subtle similarities between their work. As they both draw from traditional and historical references, they acknowledge the need for a spout that pours well, a practical handle that allows for a balanced grip in relation to the size and weight of the teapot, and a well-secured lid. Both artists



8 Tara Wilson's teapot, 8 in. (20 cm) in height, wood-fired stoneware. Photo: Ben Bates. 9 Charity Davis-Woodard's teapot, 9½ in. (24 cm) in length, soda-fired porcelain, slip, multiple glazes, 2011. Photo: Ben Bates. 10 Jane Shellenbarger's teapot, 11 in. (23 cm) in height, soda-fired black stoneware, 2010. 11 Kevin Foy's teapot, 11½ in. (29 cm) in height, stoneware, 2010. Photo: Chris Arrecis. 12 Matt Wilt's *Server*, 14 in. (36 cm) in length, stoneware, concrete, steel, 2009. Photo: Ben Bates. 13 James Lawton's teapot, 12 in. (30 cm) in length, clay, saggar-fired terra sigillata with cone 6 glaze script. 14 Ben Bates' teapot, 10 in. (25 cm) in height, soda-fired porcelain, 2010.

pay special attention to a neatly tapered pouring edge—not risking chipping easily with too sharp an edge, but just sharp enough to cut the surface tension and prevent the tea from dribbling down the spout.

Tom Turner offers a curious finial on the inside of the teapot lid that helps create a lower center of gravity, a solution to keep it from falling out when tilted.

Expression and Utility

During the last half century, artists began to use the teapot genre as a means for expression. Bates uses the traditional elements of the teapot, but mostly focuses on the overall aesthetic success thereof. Subtle indications of expression, like visual weight, warn the viewer not to confuse it with a utilitarian object. The vessel form becomes a vehicle for ceramic techniques and surface decoration; offering a large canvas for Bates to play with combining masculine and feminine characteristics. The meaning is left open to personal interpretation.

Focusing intentionally on a full, heavy belly, Bede Clark's teapot leaves an image of physical and emotional satisfaction. The warm, eye-pleasing surface carries stress marks of a wood firing, while the placement of the spout signals an unwillingness to spill its content.

Jane Shellenbarger, Ted Neal, and Louis Pierozzi offer good examples of how artists keep stretching and testing the boundaries of the teapot genre. Their intentional inflection of traditional attachments forces the viewer to seek for meaning and content rather than function. At the same time, Jim Lawton breaks totally free from the

formal essentials of teapots. The communicated content, in which the artist betrays his fascination with handwritten script, comes across long before the observer associates it with a teapot. Subtly similar, although borrowing from the quilt-making craft instead, David Bolton's wood-fired *Entrapped Ewer with Paisleys* leaves the viewer somewhat confused between ewer and teapot. While he proposes that as a possible problem, he leaves it up to the observer to find a solution.

Matt Wilt created *Server*, which uses clay, concrete, and steel to push the teapot—in terms of its shape and function—to unimportance. However, when he fills it with content that is expressive in nature he restores its status again.

It becomes an ambiguous object that raises questions with answers to be found in the different layers of form, color, texture, and all materials used. The viewer unravels the answers when she or he finds familiar elements that provoke personal associations.

Persistence of Form

The work of iconic potter, Warren MacKenzie, displayed intimately close to those of young artists, told a story of persistence. The silent promise of an evolving teapot encourages those who still have much to learn, to explore, and strive to refine the function of teapots, while building the vocabulary of artistic expression.

the author Antoinette Badenhurst lives in Illinois. She is a ceramic artist, educator, and writer for national and international ceramic magazines.