CERAMICS NOW

Issue 3

M A G A Z I N E

EDITOR IN CHIEF
Vasi Hîrdo

CONTRIBUTORS
Rachel Dickson, Lucy Gent, Erez Mayaan, Lilianne Milgrom, Debra Sloan, Laetitia Wilson

EDITORIAL ASSISTANT
Anca Sânpetrean

ART DIRECTOR
Andrei Sîncrăian

MANY THANKS TO
Sabin Bors, Keiko Fukai, Vladimira Horotan, Beca Laliberte, Xavier Mestre, Yufuku Gallery, Gallery VOICE, Gavril Zmicală, and all the artists

MAILING ADDRESS
Ceramics Now
35 Gheorghe Dima street, ap. 1
Cluj-Napoca, 400342
Romania

CONTACT
office@ceramicsnow.org
(004) 0748 311 663

Ceramics Now is an independent art platform and magazine specialized in contemporary ceramics. Based in Cluj, with contributors from around the world, we are a small non-profit organization established to promote, advance and document contemporary ceramic art.

Visit our magazine shop at www.ceramicsnowmagazine.com

ISSN 2248-115X

Front cover: Kristine Tillge Lund, State, 2012, Porcelain, 78.7 x 19.7 x 19.7 inches / 200 x 50 x 50 cm.

EDITORIAL

In the last couple of years, I had often found myself questioning why I am making this journal and for whom. I also wanted to know if I'm making it right or not, and if the community needs it. These were issues that needed answers years ago, but I lacked experience, and I didn't know how to answer or how to ask them. I did not know what Ceramics Now Magazine should be—but I was about to start identifying it.

I knew that nobody wanted to read just plain interviews and that the journal needed to investigate and challenge the current perceptions of ceramic art. It had to encourage real critical thinking. I had also realized that the ceramics field is undergoing a paradigm shift and that the artists desired to express why they do what they do, and not just how they do it. To enable artists to speak about them and about their reasons for creating art, I asked them 'why' in one way or another.

The 'how' question and its answer can become too much a focus while the other issues are sometimes considered secondary or not discussed at all. This is the reason I had decided to take a careful step to categorizing the artworks based on what I perceived as their primary concept, and show that these artworks are part of a larger discourse. The five sections of the journal are Environments and Perspectives (E), Corporealities (C), Material Reflections (M), Terra Nova (T), and Spiritual Territories (S).

In a few words, the (E) section encompasses the expressions of the artists' understanding of their surroundings. The section is also about imagined or perceived settings, and about external (social and cultural) forces and conditions. The (C) section includes artists whose works speak about and question issues related to body and identity. The (M) section is where the material—enhanced by the creator's technique and sensitivity—speaks for itself and reflects its complex characteristics. The (T) section—inspired by Wendy Gers' concept—has to do with new criteria, technology, digital/virtual, 3D printed, and recycled materials. In the (S) section, we find expressions of the self, expressions of the spirit and suggestive observations of our being.

The issue also features six articles written by our contributors. Debra Sloan writes about the history of contemporary ceramics in the province of British Columbia, Canada. Lilianne Milgrom does a three-way interview with artists that are in the 'grey area' of fine art/design/craft/décor. Erez Maayan presents Roy Maayan's exhibition that dealt with the artist's return to his biographical memory of dining. Laetitia Wilson writes about Here&Now14, an ambitious show that featured the works of 12 Australian artists. Lucy Gent spotlights Kerry Jameson's latest exhibition of imaginative, hybrid creatures. And Rachel Dickson presents a personal perspective to 3D printed ceramics.

I trust that this issue will provide a unique in-depth view of the artists' thinking and creative process. I also hope that the sections, titles, questions and answers will make you think about and react to the works. Enjoy the issue and please send me your thoughts to vasi@ceramicsnow.org

Vasi Hîrdo
Editor-in-Chief

CONTENTS

ARTICLES 4

30 ENVIRONMENTS AND PERSPECTIVES

CORPOREALITIES 50

64 MATERIAL REFLECTIONS

TERRA NOVA 92

104 SPIRITUAL TERRITORIES

CONTEMPORARY CERAMICS OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

By **Debra Sloan**

In the province of British Columbia, on the far western edge of Canada, the ceramic culture was initiated through international immigration during the 20th Century. BC is one of the few places in the world where the indigenous people did not develop a ceramic technology.

Instead, the First Nations were and remained masters of wood—their source of all things practical and expressive. Ceramic knowledge had to be imported, and a local audience is still in the process of being cultivated. The variability of the BC ceramic practice reflects the waves of immigration that have and continue to flow into this region. Equally various are the recipients - a polyglot of information meeting a polygon culture.

Processes and traditions that have taken humanity millennia to develop were, upon importation to BC, freely re-interpreted and quickly disseminated. BC's first known potter was a Swede, Axel Ehbring, who immigrated shortly after WW I equipped with training in traditional pottery. A handful of other immigrants, from the UK, Belgium, Hungary, Italy, USA, Japan, Korea and China, brought their ceramic knowledge to BC between and after the World Wars. By 1955, the Potters Guild of British Columbia (PGBC) was founded. Unlike European Guilds, the PGBC was never intended to establish specific technical or aesthetic standards. Instead, during the 50s and 60s, the Guild founders sponsored many internationally renowned teachers to present workshops, such as: Edith Heath from California, Alexander Archipenko from New York, Olivier Strebelle from Belgium, Carlton Ball from the University of Illinois, Kyllikki Salmenhaara from Finland, and Marguerite Wildenheim via USA, trained in Germany, Harry Davis from New Zealand, and Michael Cardew from England. The PGBC and the North-West Ceramics Foundation (NWCF) have continued in this learning tradition with an active Speaker Series and sponsoring numerous workshop opportunities.

With these artists came the knowledge of Asian traditions, the Bauhaus School, and the Arts and Crafts and Modernist art movements. Another significant influence in BC ceramics, as elsewhere, was that of Bernard Leach. During the late 50s through to the 70s six potters from BC studied with Leach, bringing his philosophy back to BC initiating a surge of independent studio potters province-wide. The works of Wayne Ngan ①, Sam Kwan, Ron Vallis, and Jackie Frioud show a variety of influences of the Leach Mingei traditions. Leach had been affected by all of these art movements, but was most profoundly affected by Soetsu Yanagi, author of The Unknown Craftsman and founder of the Mingei, a Japanese folk art movement. Yanagi himself had been influenced by the philosophy of the British Arts and Crafts movement. The works of Kinichi Shigeno, Brendan Tang ②, and Mariko Patterson are examples of how European and Asian philosophies have come full circle in British Columbia and are expressively hybridized.

By the 1940s, some education in ceramics was available at the old Vancouver School of Art (VSA), and by the 50s at the University of British Columbia as well as at small private pottery schools. Presently there are four universities in BC, and there are many colleges and art centres offering classes. The works of Don Hutchinson, Darcy Grenier, Debra Sloan ③, and Evan Ting Kwok Leung ④ are diverse examples of four artists who were self-taught or initially trained in BC. In the early 70s author and artist Robin Hopper with his knowledge of many technologies, emigrated from the UK and began teaching in Ontario and then in BC. Emily Carr University of Art and Design (ECUAD) replaced the VSA, and offers a BFA in ceramics, and has commenced a graduate programme. The ECUAD ceramics programme was led by Tam Irving and Sally Michener for over 20 years, and is now headed by author and artists, Paul Mathieu ⑤, Justin Novak and Julie York. Another avenue for

② *Brendan Tang, Manga Ormolu Ver. 5.0-k, 2011, Ceramics, mixed media, 18.5 x 23 x 13 inches / 47 x 58.5 x 33 cm*

learning has been to pursue post-graduate degrees or residencies abroad. Artists Ian Johnston, Alwyn O'Brien ⑥, Eliza Au ⑦, and Ying-Yueh Chuang ⑧ are among the many who have travelled and studied in the UK, Europe, Australia, USA and Asia. There are a few residency opportunities in Canada. In BC, the Museum of Anthropology is about to host Lisa Henriques ⑨ for a six-month residency. Medalta, in the province of Saskatchewan, has an extensive international residency programme. The Banff Centre in the province of Alberta has an established ceramic residency and this year is partnering with NCECA. Les Manning, one of the jurors for the 2013 1st Cluj Ceramics Biennial, and a participant at the 9th Symposium in Cluj-Napoca, was instrumental in establishing both of these residencies. Red Deer College also in Alberta, has an established Artist in Residence programme.

The absence of an indigenous ceramic culture has had cultural consequences. Public institutions did not have a framework in place to study ceramics, and the general populace did not have a tradition of supporting and using local handmade ceramics. Consequently public galleries, museums and other institutions have been slow to find a context for or to support the ceramic practice. Very few regional institutions have BC ceramic art in their permanent collections, and ceramics is rarely included in exhibitions of contemporary art. In terms of awards or grants, there are only two government grant agencies in the region, the BC Arts Council and the Canada Council for the Arts. The B.C. Achievement Foundation has an annual award and the NWCF funds an Award of Excellence. Progress is slowly being made as ceramicists are actively striving for their art practice to receive greater recognition and integration, and to promote a culture of collecting and connoisseurship. Several Guilds and Co-ops support small galleries and shops largely through the tremendous initiative and work ethic of their members. One outcome of the limited cultural support in BC is that many artists seek exhibition, residency and teaching opportunities outside of BC and Canada, and it is interesting to note how many have achieved international recognition.

There are the other factors, quite apart from the cultural aspects mentioned above that have an effect on the BC ceramic practice. BC is a "new" region—the most recently populated through immigration on the North American Continent. Immigration to BC was encouraged only when the railway across Canada was completed in 1881. The previous alternatives were – after 1869 when the trans-American railway was completed – to travel by land or sea the 1500 kilometers from San Francisco to Vancouver, or to endure the perilous months-long sea journey around the Cape Horn. The next factors are what Canada is known for—distance and weather. Canada itself is over 7000 kilometers from sea to sea. In BC, from east to west, one travels nearly 1000 kilometers, and over 2500 kilometers north to south. Consequently the distances between the small towns and cities in BC are vast, making transport and travel expensive and time-consuming. In BC, the distance factor is combined with daunting geography and capricious weather. The massive Rocky Mountain Range acts as an isolating barrier between BC and the rest of Canada. The Rockies made building the railway a deadly enterprise, tragically costing the lives of uncounted Chinese and other immigrant labourers. Eighty years later the Rockies also challenged the progress of the Trans Canada Highway, which was only completed in 1962. Also, within the province, there are the Selkirk and the Coastal Mountain ranges. Vancouver itself, where most of the BC population lives, is situated in the Southern corner of BC, beside the Pacific Ocean. Outside of this rainy and temperate coastal region, winter weather and those mountain ranges combine to prevent easy travel from October to April. Coastal BC is a northern rain forest and is often referred to as the "Wet Coast". Clouded skies, rain, and blue-grey mists prevail an average of two hundred days a year. The powerful effect of these landscapes and environment can be seen in the works of Cathi Jefferson ⑩, Mary Fox, Laurie Rolland, and Rachelle Chinnery.

Taking all these disparate factors into consideration and adding the globalization of ceramics into the mix, BC ceramics is, at this time, difficult to categorize. In addition, there has been increasing cross-fertilization between contemporary art practices, as barriers crumble and art practices expand their perception of material use. Perhaps by virtue of being corralled within the geographical "isolation" of mountains and sea, and by having commenced a practice free of traditional restrictions, the ceramics made in BC will, over time, speak for this region through the spirit of their variable and unconstrained nature. Future historians may be able to discern influences carried forward from other contemporary art practices, the environmental impact, international heritages, the Leach/Mingei principles and indigenous First Nation's totemic and form-line traditions. The works featured in this article demonstrate vitality, individualism and breadth – characteristics of the province of British Columbia – and represent only some of the dynamic artists working in the province of British Columbia.

This article is based on Debra's presentation at the 9th International Symposium Ceramics and Glass between Tradition and Contemporaneity that accompanied the first Cluj International Ceramics Biennale Exhibition in October-November 2013, in Cluj-Napoca, Transylvania, Romania.

Self-taught from 1973-79, ***Debra Sloan*** *attended the Vancouver School of Art 1979-1982 and Emily Carr University of Art (BFA, in 2004). She is on the North-West Ceramics Foundation board and the founder of the archival website www.arch-bc.org. Her work is represented in 6 Lark Publications. Debra was awarded the Circle Craft Scholarship and a BC Arts Council Visual Arts Award for a residency at the International Ceramic Studio, Hungary in 2010 and returned in 2013. In 2014, she attended a residency at the Leach Pottery and had a solo exhibition at the Gallery of BC Ceramics.*

③ *Debra Sloan, Momentum Illusion, 2014, Midrange red clay, coloured skips and rebar wire, 21.7 x 22 inches / 55 x 56 cm*

① *Wayne Ngan, Sculptural Vase with Lugs, 2007, Stoneware, cast iron slip, 8.3 x 7 x 6.3 inches / 21 x 18 x 16 cm Photo by Goya Ngan*

④ *Ting Kwok Leung, Harmony III, 2011 (Collection of New Taipei City Yingge Ceramics Museum, Taiwan), Clay, oxidation firing, 51.2 x 51.2 x 48 inches / 130 x 130 x 122 cm*

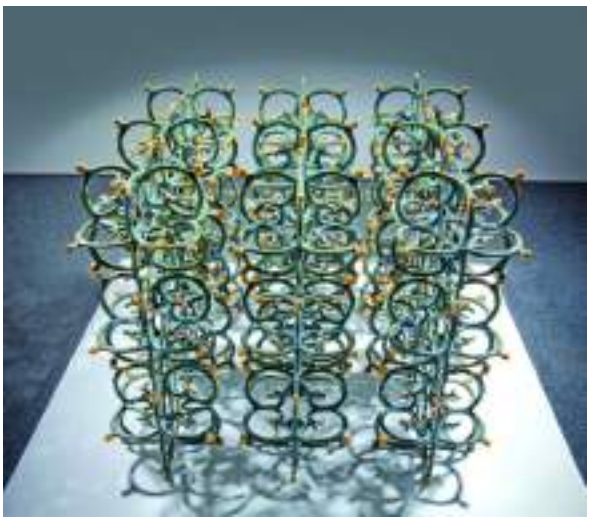
⑤ *Paul Mathieu, Morphed Photo Vases, 2009, Porcelain, photo transfer, paint, H 13.8 inches / 35 cm.*

⑩ *Cathi Jefferson, Mountain Forest, 2012, Stoneware, soda firing, 26 x 15 inches / 66 x 38 cm. Photo by Teddy McCrea.*

⑨ *Lisa Henriques, Untitled 35, 2010, Porcelain, terra sigilatta, 16.1 x 13.4 x 16.1 inches / 41 x 34 x 41 cm. Photo by Ken Mayer.*

⑥ *Alwyn O'Brien, Stories of Looking, 2010, Porcelain, 13.8 x 17 x 7.9 inches / 35 x 43 x 20 cm.*

⑦ *Eliza Au, Axis, 2011, Stoneware, 36.2 x 36.2 x 36.2 inches / 92 x 92 x 92 cm. Photo by David Stevenson.*



⑧ *Ying-Yueh Chuang, Flower Series, 2011, Commercial vintage fabric, wood, Chinese imperial porcelain, 119 x 104 x 4.7 inches / 302 x 265 x 12 cm.*

THREE-IN-ONE

A conversation with Beth Katleman, Molly Hatch and Shari Mendelson

By **Lilianne Milgrom**

Beth Katleman, Molly Hatch and Shari Mendelson each create highly distinctive bodies of work that have catapulted them into prominence in a very competitive playing field. These three artists, though fueled by singularly unique ideas, philosophies and process, share common ground not only in their varying relationships to clay, but also in their inspired connection to the past and their commitment to a labor-intensive artistic practice.

The artists are represented by Todd Merrill Studio Contemporary in New York City. All three came to Todd Merrill's attention when he set out on a quest to discover artists that were defining design in the 21st century. He found them in the boundary-bending 'grey area' of fine art/design/craft/décor. "Katleman, Hatch, and Mendelson are of-the-moment," says Merrill. "The work they each produce manages to be totally contemporary without sacrificing evidence of the maker's hand."

Indeed, not only are these artists united in their hands-on approach to their work, but they have each redefined the artistry of bygone ages. They are stirred by the beauty, opulence and refinement present in art historical textiles, design, objets d'art and architecture and they have built upon these influences to create fresh, contemporary work.

At the start of her artistic journey, Beth Katleman was pulled in two different directions–design and fine art. Her current work is a perfect synthesis of the two. Upon closer inspection of her detailed installations, one finds clues to Katleman's nuanced views regarding art and culture. Despite her unapologetic love for royal porcelain, she is nonetheless conflicted by the despotic nature of the very regimes that supported the creation of these ornaments. Likewise, she is fascinated by the darker side of American society while at the same time admiring its "almost Pollyanna-ish" optimism, progress and innovation. These dualities lend a tension to her disarming panoramas.

Molly Hatch uses the allure of decorative art history to entice the public to enter into her work and her world. Flying in the face of contemporary wisdom, Hatch embraces Beauty, insisting it is "not the Kiss of Death". Proudly calling herself an artist designer, Hatch challenges preconceived notions of the studio artist by embracing the entire spectrum of her creativity. She tests her "smaller ideas" in the commercial marketplace while creating larger one-of-a-kind ceramic installations that mine the deeper, political implications of opulence and luxury on a grand scale.

Ironically it is Shari Mendelson's work that represents the more familiar ceramic forms, even though, the artist's material of choice is recycled plastic–a material she uses to tackle the issues of rampant human consumption. Her playful, luminescent vessels remind one of the works of Beatrice Wood. Both an interest in ancient forms and her strong political views on how to deal with trash went hand-in-hand in inspiring her most recent body of work. Mendelson believes in "doing what you enjoy doing, not what is popular." All three artists have proven the validity and veracity of this approach. By demonstrating an unwavering commitment to their creative paths, these artists are role models for future and contemporary ceramicists.

Lilianne Milgrom *is an international artist based in Washington DC. Her ceramic installations have been exhibited in the United States, Romania, Israel and France and her work can be found in private and public collections worldwide. She is also a writer on the arts and a contributor to Ceramics Monthly Magazine, Ceramics Art and Perception, Art and Beyond Magazine and The Great Nude.*

A word with Molly Hatch

Molly Hatch, Deconstructed Lace: After Royal Copenhagen, 2015, 93 Hand-thrown and hand-painted porcelain plates, 99 x 96 x 1.5 inches / 150 x 245 x 4 cm

You have characterized your work as 'plate paintings'. By discarding the traditional utility and social function of plates, I am wondering what purpose they play other than serving as blank canvases for your imagery. Why ceramic plates?

MH I am not entirely discarding the utility of plates; the plate paintings are technically functional. To answer more precisely, I am interested in using the plates to give the viewer an access point into viewing my paintings that isn't possible using a traditional canvas. I grew up with a mother who is a painter and a father who was a farmer, my family placed value in the functional object, in things with use. I think I was attracted, at first, to using utilitarian forms to house my paintings and drawings because they could be valued as functional objects at the very basic level—even if the surfaces were not as approachable. There is a sort of disconnect with framed art or art on the wall. We are trained or taught how to read paintings, but without training, it is hard to know what to look for and what is meaningful in a painting. We all know what a plate is, we use them every day. This familiarity gives anyone a way to relate to the plate paintings I make. Whether they engage further with the concepts and imagery of each painting is up to the viewer. Ultimately, I want the viewer to see plates as paintings, and to think about plates in a way they may not have before.

Molly Hatch Versailles Orangerie: After Rigaud, 2014, 78 Hand-thrown and hand-painted porcelain plates, 60 x 130 x 1.5 inches / 152 x 330 x 4 cm.

Your work has one foot in the decorative arts and design, and one foot in the fine art arena. Many artists have felt the need to justify or defend this sort of duality yet you seem perfectly comfortable straddling both worlds. How do you do this?

MH Good question. I am going with my gut about what feels best for my career—if one aspect of it is no longer enjoyable or feeding my creativity, I will let it go. Much of it has to do with my work patterns and my interests. My fine art work is marketed to high-end collectors and museums, which is necessary to be able to afford to take the time it takes to make each piece by hand and paint each piece by hand. I enjoy making the plate paintings because they are long-term projects, many of which take several months to complete from throwing plates, to painting them and then firing them. The process that I go through to make each piece is at once contemplative and meditative in the painting process. This work is conceptually rewarding in the development and research of each piece.

My designs for manufacture take less time to make than the larger scale one-of-a-kind work for my gallery and are perhaps more humorous and lighter in mood in general. My designs reflect similar concepts, inspiration and source material to my one-of-a-kind objects and require much of the same research and development. I think this is a way for me to get my ideas out into the world with the help of industry. I have more ideas than I can make available to the world simply by hand. So the two are mutually exclusive—I need each aspect of my career for different reasons. I also enjoy the affordability of the design work. The artwork is so expensive and out of most people's reach financially, I love the idea that more people have access to what I am making than just the elite and museums. I have ignored people who tell me that I can't make both careers work. It seems to be working just fine.

You have mentioned your strong connection to objects. Can you expand on the human propensity to cover and surround ourselves with objects of (subjective) beauty?

MH For me my covetousness stems from a need to learn from the object. I typically am interested in an object because I want to have more of it in my life, or I want to figure out how it was made or decorated. I love finding the repeats in patterns; I've always had. Figuring out a pattern is fascinating and rewarding.

How does surface decoration alter our emotive and subliminal response these objects?

MH For my work, the surface decoration is generally grounded in historic pattern and imagery. This reference for me is an additional access point for the viewer. I want the viewer to look at the work and feel it is familiar, yet unfamiliar at the same time. I want to encourage the viewer to take a second look, and spend more time with the work.

Your work combines both your love of painting and drawing, and ceramics. Would you describe yourself as a ceramicist first?

MH Yes, I do think of myself as a ceramicist though I wonder if that is simply because of my training. When I am asked to describe myself, I typically call myself an artist designer.

I'm curious: Do you have an organized arrangement in mind when you begin throwing your plates or do you throw different sized plates and then design the overall installation as you start painting?

MH When I am making an organic or off-the-grid composition, I typically begin each piece with a source image and then I work the image in Photoshop to create a composition that highlights certain aspects of the source image and crops out others. I aim to retain much of the original information in the source, but manipulate it (often quite dramatically) to make it read well on the surface of the plates when viewed as a larger plate painting composition. I make the plates to the scale of the Photoshop design and hang the plates on the wall. With the help of a projector, I get the scale correct, and then I hand paint the work.

When I am making a gridded piece, I typically make the design fit a grid and manipulate the source image to make it work in a grid format. More often than not, I find it more satisfying to create a composition that is off the grid as I have more control over the composition.

Beth Katleman, Girls at War, 2013, Porcelain and wire, 58 x 174 x 12 inches / 147 x 442 x 30 cm.

A word with Beth Katleman

Your references and influences are drawn from a more genteel time. Although your work is very contemporary in its approach, it possesses the formal quality of a past aesthetic. What role does beauty play in your work compared to the narrative theater?

BK Beauty is very important to me. In the art world, beauty has been a code-word for femininity for a long time, and hence something to be avoided if you wish to be taken seriously. I think it has a lot to do with elitism, mistrust of the senses and privileging the intellectual over the physical.

You manage to pack a big punch using large numbers of very small, detailed and highly refined elements. Are these individual units always relegated to a role within the Big Picture or do they have a life and meaning of their own?

BK I choose trinkets that work as stand-ins for the classical or pastoral motifs you would find in a rococo paneled room or in toile wallpaper. For example, I found a reclining plastic bikini girl at a cake decorating shop. She was meant for a bachelor party cake, but I casted her in porcelain, and she became a Venus figure. Curly from the "Three Stooges" functions as a comedy tragedy mask, a souvenir pencil sharpener of Le Sacré Coeur becomes a garden folly, and so on. I am particularly drawn to dolls and souvenirs from the 1950's, which convey a sense of American optimism.

The relatively recent sea change in the art world's embrace of contemporary ceramic art as 'legitimate' fine art seems to correlate with the move away from functional and traditional pottery towards conceptual message-based work? Your thoughts?

BK I am continually mystified by what is anointed by the art world! That said, we've had a steady diet of minimal, conceptual art for 50 years or so, and it has become something of an orthodoxy. Maybe the embrace of ceramics reflects an urge to put the "visual" back in visual arts – one can only hope...

Your work is very time and labor intensive, contrary to the mass produced pieces you collect to be used as foundational components of your installations. Are you reclaiming the artist's place in society? How do you envision the role of the artist ceramicist in the future?

BK I spend hours upon hours lovingly recreating a dime store trinket in porcelain, a material that suggests luxury and refinement. Then I take this precious throw-away and incorporate it into an opulent extravaganza that takes its visual cues from the time of Marie Antoinette. I think it has to do with my ambivalent relationship with

Beth Katleman, Hostile Nature, 2014,
Porcelain and wire, 96 x 70 x 5 inches / 244 x 178 x 12 cm.

Beth Katleman, The Enchanted Hunters: Wood Nymph, 2015,
Porcelain, wire, mirror, 63 x 36 x 6 inches / 160 x 91 x 15 cm

consumption, status, and desire. At the same time, it represents a longing for beauty and a sense of wonder. When I walk into a Buen Retiro porcelain room, such as the one in Aranjuez, I can't help but gasp.

A current of hostility and barely contained mayhem exists beneath the surface of your work. Is this in reference to the chaos that exists in the natural world, or the havoc that Man wreaks upon the Earth?

BK The narratives are deliberately ambiguous, but they have to do with domesticity and how beneath our polite veneers we all have a touch of perversity (some more than others!). Through advertising and social media, we present a very sanitized version of ourselves. Also, let's face it—I work late at night casting smiling, miniature woodland creatures in porcelain. A dark sense of humor goes with the territory...

Would you address the pragmatic challenges of working with porcelain in large-scale, complex installations?

BK I get around that by working in a modular way. I am looking for a sense of lightness and space in my work. The wall and the wire elements enable me to achieve that lightness.

A word with Shari Mendelson

Even though you do not work with clay, much of the inspiration for your recent body of work is derived from studying old glass and ceramic vessels. What is it about the history and aesthetics of ancient forms that speak to you?

SM First of all the forms of the ancient work are gorgeous and often funny, charming and surprising. Their history interests me almost as much as their form. I am especially drawn to vessels because they offer an intimate connection to the maker and the user. Looking at a 1st-century Roman glass vessel becomes a meditation on time and ephemerality. It puts our time on earth into a perspective that I find somehow comforting.

I am struck by the irony that both fired clay shards and non-degradable plastic last for millennia. Could you comment as to the organic/inorganic nature of your work?

SM Previous to this body of work I had been making work from purchased sheets of plastic. I was horrified by the amount of scrap plastic that I was throwing away. I realized that the plastic bottles littering the streets offered the same qualities that I was looking for—color, shape, pattern, transparency, and translucency. I began thinking about what future generations would say about our plastic trash in the same way we study those clay shards looking for clues about ancient civilizations. I don't think we will look like an advanced society when the trash of our time will be analyzed.

You have spoken about the value of objects over time. How do you hope your sculptural creations will be valued and understood in the next century and beyond?

SM This is not something I really think about. Honestly, although the plastic pieces will remain, I don't think they will be thought about much in the next century. I tend to think the future will be more apocalyptic. The next century will probably have more important things to think about than my sculpture—like survival on a planet that is too hot, dry and full of trash. I hope I'm wrong.

Part of the mystique of your work is the dichotomy they present between ancient forms and contemporary materials. Do you see yourself creating future works that do not reference the past?

SM I have been drawn to objects from the past for as long as I can remember. Looking to history grounds me and offers a lifetime of resources to draw from. For now I am immersed in historical references but it's hard to say what will happen in the future; the direction of the work moves organically. The materials that I use may change over time although I think I will always be conscious of the amount of disposable resources that go into the making of it.

Shari Mendelson, My Metropolitan: "In this digital collage, I replaced the art in a Greek and Roman gallery at the Metropolitan with vessels made from discarded plastic bottles."

Shari Mendelson, Large Syrian Vessel, 2015, Plastic, hot glue, acrylic polymer, mono filament, paint, 24 x 15 x 15 inches / 61 x 38 x 38 cm.

How closely do your completed sculptures resemble their original sources? Once you begin to construct your vessels, do they take on a life of their own?

SM Some of my pieces are closely related to the source material. I will look at a photo of a historical piece and try to imitate the curves and textures with my plastic scrap and applied mediums. Sometimes I just look at the bits and pieces of material on my worktable and start building without a particular reference object in mind. Other times I start with a specific object as a reference but if the new sculpture doesn't work as an independent piece I alter it so that it stands on its own.

The ancient vessels that inspire your work were beautifully crafted by hand as are your sculptural forms. What are your thoughts on the growing number of contemporary artworks that do not require hands-on skill or craftsmanship on the part of the artist?

SM For me, the working process is the pleasure. When I am working in my studio, I am focused and relaxed. While my hands are busy, my mind can wander to think about the meanings of the piece, time, and history. The visual decision-making that happens when my hands are busy is a crucial part of my process. Different artists have different ways of working – there is room for all – but for me there is nothing more satisfying than getting my hands dirty making something.

FOLLOWING LOST MEMORY IN MATTER: ON ROY MAAYAN'S NO ADDED PRESERVATIVES

By **Erez Maayan**

Five Formica tables, the kind found in almost every (Israeli) kitchen through the mid-1980s, on top of which are what appear to be fossilized meals. Twenty-one porcelain dishes filled with *gastromorphic* (food-resembling) matter that is completely and undeniably inedible while not completely identifiable. Platters crammed with what could resemble rotten patties with congealed gravy, putrid porridge or moldy gefilte fish; soup-tureen with a stiff, cloudy, jelly-like substance; gravy boats, appetizer platters and a tri-dip-bowl containing an unidentifiable, revolting mush. All are generously served in what could have been a festive meal that froze over. Hanging over the tables are four painted clay plates with images of four women in gold and glaze.

This is a description of Roy Maayan's installation No Added Preservatives, presented in 2013 (curation: Erez Maayan). The artist returns to his biographical memory of dining, reminiscing about his childhood and gathering last fragments of remembrance just before they fade away.

Dining table installation, mixed ceramic medium, from Roy Maayan's "No Added Preservatives", Periscope Gallery, Tel-Aviv, 2014
Photo by Hagar Cygler

Recent decades have witnessed an increased artistic interest in representing that which cannot be represented—memory. By nature, the representation of a memory – particularly private, familial memory – relies on the recollection of the person holding that memory. By definition, it is not objective. On the other hand, a personal memory is oftentimes mixed with collective memory, flirting with it and criticizing it from a position that is not committed to a common meta-narrative, thereby liberating it and enabling others to relate to it. No Added Preservatives grants this perspective to the Israeli suburban family of Maayan's childhood and adolescence. The perspective does not conform to the common tendency to glorify the past, but rather problematizes it, as well as the relationship between past, memory, and representation.

French historian Pierre Nora makes a distinction between environments of memory (milieux de mémoire) and sites of memory (lieux de mémoire), which requires a further distinction between history (the historiographical act) and memory (the act of remembering)[1]. Memory is life, "open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting, unconscious of its successive deformations, vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation, susceptible to being long dormant and periodically revived". By contrast, history "is the reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer"[2]. Memory is an experience in an eternal present while history is a representation of the past. History is an intellectual, prosaic act that belongs to everyone and no one due to its claim to universal authority. History calls for critical discourse while memory instills remembrance within the sacred and "is by nature multiple and yet specific; collective, plural, and yet individual"[3]. As such, spontaneous memory takes root in the concrete, in everything experienced – space, gesture, image, and sense – and thus consigns the past to the future. In contrast, the historiographic act is a selective, linear process that reorganizes relations between temporal continuities, therefore making it an act of annihilation – rather than glorification – of what has taken place. These dialectics between memory and history result in history's perpetual suspicion of memory and its aim to suppress and destroy it, as exemplified by archives, museums, medallions, and monuments that drain the past of its ability to relate to an individual's own experienced memory. It seems that our relationship with the past is "no longer a retrospective continuity but the illumination of discontinuity"[4].

Nora argues that modern memory is no longer spontaneous, psychological, individual, and subjective, but rather or, above all, archival, relying entirely on the materiality of the trace, the immediacy of the recording, the visibility of the image[5]. "The passage from memory to history has required every social group to redefine its identity through the revitalization of its own history. The task of remembering makes everyone his own historian"[6]. This results in a growing obsession with the archive, the urge to completely conserve the present, as well as totally preserve the past, as manifested in the increasing number of museums, libraries, depositories, centers of documentation, data banks, anniversaries, eulogies, notarized bills, etc. Since modern man no longer possesses spontaneous memory, these new archives are no longer a reminder of the living memory; they have become the conduit to lost memory, a prosthetic memory. They became sites of memory (lieux de mémoire) due to a lack of environments of memory (milieux de mémoire)[7]. These lieux de mémoire fundamentally remain the ultimate embodiments of a memorial consciousness that has barely survived in a historical age that calls out for memory because it has abandoned it.[8]

Lieux de mémoire are a strange hybrid, subject to both memory and history: at once immediately available in concrete, sensual experience and susceptible to the most abstract elaboration. Their primary goal is "to stop time, to block the work of forgetting, to establish a state of things, to immortalize death, to materialize the immaterial"[9]. What sets them apart from every previous historical or scientific approach to memory, which is concerned mainly with realia is that lieux de mémoire have no referent in reality; or, rather, "they are their own referent: pure, exclusively self-referential signs" [10].

I would like to demonstrate that No Added Preservatives is a unique form of lieu de mémoire. Nora states "the less memory is experienced collectively, the more it will require individuals to undertake to become themselves memory-individuals"[11]. In his work, Roy Maayan exemplifies this memory-individual, attempting to constitute his identity by constructing his own archive for the non-archival, the temporal, a fragment of memory. The installation is a lieu de mémoire in which memory residues are accumulated, selectively cataloged and given eternal life in nonperishable material, while simultaneously stressing its decay as memory. Creating the pieces for the dining installation is, much like a historiographical act, a deliberate process of formalizing, an illusion of memory reconstruction. The use of clay that is incapable of capturing an event as it happens, rather than a more reproductive media (such as video or audio recording), emphasizes the artist's inability to recall any memories in this modern era, not even through obsessive archiving. Some of the objects even contain what appears to be actual food residues, preserved in matter, but altered, disintegrated and decayed.

Plate No. 4, mixed ceramic medium, from Roy Maayan's "No Added Preservatives", Periscope Gallery, Tel-Aviv, 2014 Photo by Hagar Cygler.

In this sense, No Added Preservatives could be considered a lament for the lost art of memory vis-a-vis history. It is quite clear that the images are inspired by Flemish food paintings of the 17th century, an age that preceded the tyranny of history, in which memories were conceived and captured not by immediate archiving but through a durational process. A process in which there was no need for complete realia in representation when images were illuminated and displayed in an exaggerated and elevated manner. As the artist's memory derives not from the 17th century Renaissance dining, but his own, instead of exotic aphrodisiacs he presents the classic 'Israeli' dining table—a common yet personal biographical memory of a specific time and period, though this table has lost its seductiveness,

Clay is Gold

The two brothers and artists also collaborated on a performance (*White Cube #2*) held in October 2013, during the first edition of Cluj International Ceramics Biennale. For 27 hours, they realized different actions with clay following a strict schedule, inside a cubic construction of 3x3 meters, located in the city's Central Park.

Dressed in tuxedos, the brothers played, slept, ate and washed their teeth inside the cube while visitors observed them from a tiny window. They performed, reading texts out loud, creating objects, singing, fighting, and interacting with the visitors. Every hour – with no exception, even during the cold night – the artists took a photo of themselves inside the cube, and uploaded it to the biennale's Facebook page, creating an online archive of the event.

At the end of the event, the artists left the cube open, for people to observe and collect various pieces of clay. The artists examined the triangle time, space, and clay, in a quest to define these variables. They used this material because it connects, divides, restricts and inspires. On the walls of the cube visitors were left with this message: "Clay is gold."

shape, and distinction. It becomes an excessive, overflowing, bubbling and dripping mess, while concurrently presented neatly as a catalogue of faded memories. The installation of memories preserved in matter can be seen as a unique form of lieu de mémoire that aims to eternalize memory but – because of its own means of production – illustrates the inability to do so. It in no way represents actual experience, but rather creates a non-glorified sphere, one of absent-mindedness, even oblivion—a shadow of lieu de mémoire. Historiography and memory cancel each other out.

The dining-installation invites viewers into the knowledge of the individual's futile attempt to remember, in a lieu that contains fragments of what could be seen as recognized and familiar. A fragmented collective memory of a homely meal with soup, chicken, Israeli couscous and eggplant that are no longer themselves, but rather a decayed version of themselves that are barely identifiable and hardly *gastromorphic*. It is not even a meal that has frozen, but one that has lost its form and became inhospitable. A meal that was once 'everybody's meal' becomes 'nobody's meal'; a kind of familial banquet that has not taken place and could no longer take place—a non-banquet. The once familiar loses its familiarity, becoming odd, unusual, even threatening, while gaining eternal and even iconic life in clay. The food is expropriated of its familiar, familial, nourishing and temporal functionality, becoming strange, inedible, poisonous and fossilized. This shift can cause significant unease or discomfort in the eyes of the beholder, not unlike those described by the Freudian concept of the uncanny[12].

Plates 1-25, mixed ceramic medium, from Roy Maayan's "No Added Preservatives", Periscope Gallery, Tel-Aviv, 2014
Photo by Hagar Cygler

Freud stated "the uncanny is that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar"[13]. It originates in what has come to be perceived as friendly, intimate, warm and personal but becomes a source of troubling alienation, not because of its unknown traits but because of those that are familiar. That which is familiar, yet incongruous. In No Added Preservatives, the dining tables – laden with savory foods – encourage the viewer to wander through them as if in an intimate, identifiable space. But hospitality is undermined, and nostalgic potential is negated, producing restlessness instead.

As the artist's disoriented memory unfolds through the objects, the notion of the uncanny is further established. As Nora states, because lieux de mémoire have no actual referent, they refute the notion of memory[14]. A memory is

what is known but has no presence in realia, and the uncanny will be felt when, in reality, it fails to match the known. The dining installation creates common, collective hints of missed memory and thus creates a structure constructed to cause a glitch in the known—that is the uncanny. However, the artist doesn't leave it at that. Hanging above is a mythical comfort—the four women.

Facing the dining installation are the four "feeding mothers" as a symbol of feminine tenderness and comfort, both particular and general, personal and universal, real and remembered. These women are a representation of the artist's family, but the perennial fixation in glaze and gold luster in high fire gives them a sense of mythical quality, suggesting them to be a collective "mother," "grandmother," or "wife," a nourishing, everlasting, comforting Madonna—the opposite of the discomfort of the clay non-banquet. The artist seemingly sought to escape from the great oblivion into the sublime, once again binding the act of memory to an eternal present through clay.

Feeding mothers icons, clay and glazes, from Roy Maayan's "No Added Preservatives", Periscope Gallery, Tel-Aviv, 2014, Photo by Hagar Cygler.

Erez Maayan *is a Tel-Aviv based multidisciplinary artist and academic. In recent years, he has created, curated, performed and designed pieces of art in various fields – theatre, performance art, dance-theatre, multimedia art and art installation – in galleries, theaters, and festivals in Israel and other countries. He is currently pursuing his Ph.D. in performance studies at Tel Aviv University.*

1 Nora, P. (1989). Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoire. Representations, 26(26), pp. 7-24
2 Ibid, p. 8
3 Ibid, p. 9
4 Ibid, p. 15
5 Ibid, p. 13
6 Ibid, p. 15
7 Ibid, p. 14
8 Ibid, p. 12
9 Ibid, p. 19
10 Ibid, p. 23
11 Ibid, p. 16
12 Freud, S. (1919). The uncanny. In The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud (Vol. XVII, 1917, pp. 217-256)
13 Ibid, p. 220
14 Nora, p. 22

EXPANSIVE VISIONS DRAWN FROM THE LAND AND REACHING BEYOND

By **Laetitia Wilson**

Installation view of HERE&NOW14 at the Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery, The University of Western Australia, Crawley.

Once in a while a ceramics exhibition reaches breathtaking proportions by defying expectations and ambitiously expanding the medium. Here and Now 14 at the Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery was such an exhibition. It showcased new works from 12 Western Australian artists and situated ceramics as a strong medium looking outward as ever greater than the insular cottage industry of bygone years.

The sheer diversity of ceramics practice today was made manifest as the exhibition provided a snapshot of current practice alongside a suggestion of potential future material and conceptual directions. The ancient art of clay forming occupied the gallery space with presence and reached epic sculptural proportions. This was emphasised by the contrasts between powerful and delicate, use of light and dark materials, large-scale and small-scale pieces, audacious and modest aesthetics and both objects and moving image.

A dusk to dawn toned series of porcelain vessels and inverted forms by Pippin Drysdale immediately captured the eye with its simultaneously bold and soothing spectrum. Closer inspection revealed sophisticated attention to detail in the delicate incision of the surfaces. This horizon was undoubtedly influenced by the richness of the Western Australian landscape, from the expansive view when looked upon from a distance, right down to its earthly striations formed by persistent winds.

Drysdale's installation formed the backdrop for a more rough and rugged interpretation of the landscape theme, with the mighty pots of Warrick Palmateer. Placed upon a curving plinth these pots commanded attention through not only mass but also the rich layers of their encrusted textural skin. With a combination of materials including porcelain, stoneware, iron sulphate, silicon carbide and copper carbonate, they were like apprehending a dense and craggy landscape from a bird's eye perspective.

Pippin Drysdale, Ribbon Lightning at dusk – Porcelain Vessels Group of Three Tanami Mapping III, 2014, 9.3 x 8.7 inches / 23.5 x 22 cm, 8.7 x 8.3 inches / 22 x 21 cm, 6.3 x 7.8 inches / 16 x 20 cm. Photo by Sue Warrington.

Warrick Palmateer, Form 1, 2014, Clay, H 59 inches / 150 cm. Photo by Kevin Gordon.

Installation view of HERE&NOW14 at the Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery, The University of Western Australia, Crawley.

In contrast to such heavy works were the delicately refined porcelain pieces of Stephanie Hammill, who again responded to the Western Australian landscape. Materials drawn from the land, including ilmenite sand and garnet were combined with fine porcelain to result in a gradated surface, recalling the experience of looking across an open plain as the first light breaks, where the sky is all cool hues and the land is streaked with rising mist.

Black-fired within the land then, were the vessels, coolamon and message sticks of Bevan Thompson. Here a spiritual and ancestral connection to the land was expressed, as the cosmology of the artist's family stories was carved onto the surface of the earthenware and stoneware. The objects were darkly stained by the firing technique and crafted to be deeply resonant with meaning.

From landscape to technologies of communication, Graham Hay presented a work collapsing the ubiquity of the mobile phone with one of the most ancient forms of communication, the clay tablet. 8000 paper clay cast tablet iPhones were made ceramic and placed atop of one another to form two large pillar-like heads. This piece towered above the viewer, as a layered monolith reflecting on how humanity has shifted from back then to here now while the principles of communication and connection with others remain consistent.

A positive outcome of this exhibition was the connections it enabled across the university campus. It was integrated into the visual arts university curriculum. Students from the Faculty of Architecture, Landscape and Visual Arts flocked to the gallery to draw the myriad of forms and objects, resulting in transformation drawings that sought to merge distinct artworks into the single images. Such activity demonstrated the timely relevance of ceramics practice as a source of inspiration to students learning about art and artists working in other mediums.

Here and Now 14 was an inspiring exhibition that situated ceramic art as a veritable contender in the wider global art worlds. It also acted as a definitive moment in the history of exhibiting ceramics that firmly demonstrated the enormous potential of the medium and the artists included.

Participating artists: Luke Aleksandrow, Sandra Black, Greg Crowe, Ian Dowling, Pippin Drysdale, Stephanie Hammill, Graham Hay, Andrew Nicholls, Jacob Ogden-Smith, Warrick Palmateer, Bevan Thompson and Andrea Vinkovic.

Laetitia Wilson *completed a doctorate in 2011 in Art History at the University of Western Australia. For over half a decade, she has lectured at UWA and currently works as Adjunct Lecturer and Curator at the Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery, in addition to being art critic for the West Australian newspaper and freelance writer.*

Graham Hay, Stone Phone Cairns (detail), 2014, Ceramic, galvanised steel, marine-grade stainless-steel, nylon washers, each 78 x 39.4 inches / 198 x 100 cm.

Bevan Thompson, Scarification (detail), 2014, Earthenware, stoneware, black fired, Dimensions variable.

Stephanie Hammill, Bowl 6, 2014, Porcelain, 2.4 x 6.3 inches / 6 x 14 cm.

METAMORPHOSES IN BOSTON

By **Lucy Gent**

Horse Head, 2014, Earthenware, oxides, glaze, fabric, wool, acrylic and seed shells, 23 x 33 x 9 inches / 58 x 84 x 23 cm.

Kerry Jameson's 2015 Boston show, The Remade Series, deals in unpredictable hybrid creatures. They are epitomised in "Horse Head" where the animal head is combined with a body crawling on its elbows and knees wrapped in wool, as if protecting the pilgrim on a painful journey to a holy shrine. The horse's countenance is expressionless, gainsaying any notion of pain. With its mysterious signs of binding and concealing, the image is atavistic. Such rich, imaginative and sometimes scary connotations of Kerry's works draw us into the ambivalent emotions of her 2013 exhibition, Unbounded (London, Marsden Woo).

The techniques in her Boston show were developed in the run-up to Unbounded. Kerry has always drawn on other artworks, sketching in museums and galleries. Her interest in Baroque religious art led her to visit London's National Gallery 2010 exhibition of seventeenth-century Spanish polychrome sculpture. In these pieces, highly lifelike saints' figures are constructed around a wooden core, and clad in fabrics—a kind of religious uncanny. Kerry experimented with combining ceramic core and fabric and, more radically, began to break up fired pieces and redistribute them, trying out relationships between parts until they felt right. In the 2015 "Robin", for example, a bird's head is joined to a woman's body. Found objects, such as stones for eyes and teeth, started to play a significant part.

Kerry's methods undergo all sorts of changes in response to the Bostonian ambience and the materials it offered her. Sketching has remained a constant, both in and out of doors. She observed the local robins and sparrows and these reappear, in groups of birds and an outsized bird head sitting on top of a woman's body—a disconcerting mixture of the familiar and a bird familiar, in a land that has seen witches' trials. A longstanding interest in embroidery was reawoken by an exhibition of the Pilgrim Roy quilt collection at Boston's MFA, and she sought out needlework elsewhere in Boston, and at the Peabody Museum

Rider, 2014, Earthenware, oxides, glaze, string, stones, seeds and enamel, 21 x 12 x 7 inches / 53 x 30 x 18 cm.

Owl, 2014, Earthenware, oxides, glaze, fabric, acrylic and stones, 21 x 9 x 11 inches / 35 x 23 x 28 cm.

Donkey, 2014, Earthenware, oxides and glaze, fabric, buttons and stones, acrylic, 39 x 14 x 12 inches / 99 x 36 x 30 cm

in Cambridge, Mass. This experience has extended her use of fabric, with all its tactile possibilities—coloured rough strips of pattern material used for making patchwork quilts hang swirling from the waist of "Bear". The mantle of "Owl" is pleated fabric. Kerry admired the pleating of quilts and, via an Egyptian mummified cat, figured out how to translate it into a three-dimensional form. She was drawn to folklore art and observed colonial portraits of sitters wearing the dark garments favoured by a Puritan ethos. She walked along nearby Revere Beach and remembered how Joan Miro used to go down to the sea every dawn to collect tide-washed objects: "They were things waiting for someone to discover their personality." Found objects, such as stones (but they have to be the right ones) are often incorporated into her work. Lobster claws transform under our eyes into primeval gulls' heads. Leonardo da Vinci said the artist could find inspiration in the stains on walls. Anonymous commonplace objects found by accident are often starting points for Kerry's work, helping (in Stephen de Staebler's phrase) induce "a freer state of mind".

Boston's Puritan past is picked up in the sombre dark colours Kerry observed in those museum portraits, such as the skirts of "Robin". The show is remarkable for its blacks and dark pewters, ranging from the burnished light-reflecting ceramic of "Cat and stones" with its chainmail headpiece to the

Cat and Stones, 2014, Earthenware, oxides, glaze, acrylic, wool and stones, 22 x 13 x 11 inches / 56 x 33 x 28 cm

completely light-absorbing black burlap garment and bandages in "Bear". These darks are shocked into life by flashes of colour, such as a yellow or red beak. Covered heads – it may be by burlap or a sand balaclava – are a recurrent theme. I am reminded of the black veil that the Minister donned in Hawthorne's short story "The Minister's Veil" and wore to his grave—a sign of a secret sin carried by the human being. While the masking materials in Kerry's pieces allow glinting little eyes – improbably lifelike – to peer out at us, those very glances from within suggest some veiled inner secret.

And there are of course secrets—of what has occurred in the genesis of the pieces, the breakages, fractures and accidents, events traditionally dreaded by the ceramicist, but which contribute to free the mind. Kerry would say that she is fighting the permanence of fired clay and that her apparently desperate strategy of breaking up a fired piece keeps the ceramic "breathing and moving", just as the fabric hints at life, as in the skirts of "Bear". Then there is what physically lies hidden from us. If a curious researcher passed these figures through a scanner in a future age, unexpected contents would be revealed: who would dream that there is a human figure within "Donkey"? Her pieces are fragmented, or built from fragments. There is a congruity here with de Staebler: "We are all wounded survivors, alive but devastated selves, fragmented and isolated".

Openness characterised Kerry's response to Boston in summer 2014, and it is a feature of what she makes, down to her titles. There is also what Alison Britton has called a "deceptive depth of skill in her manner of working". The rabbit in "Rider" has a typical quality of "unfinish" which in itself constitutes another openness. We are free to engage with each piece as we choose, finding gravity or humour in "Owl", dark or lightheartedness in "Donkey". Edgar Alan Poe said of Hawthorne's writing, "high imaginations gleam from every page". The same can be said of Kerry's Boston show: high imaginations gleam from every piece. But they have to be paid for. The inner darkness in Hawthorne's story is perhaps a nudge to acknowledge the shadows that lurk inside and drive Kerry's creations.

Lucy Gent *is a critic and artist living in London. After a career as an English lecturer (and a surfeit of language), she went to London's Byam Shaw School of Art, 1994-97. Ironically this was a moment when London's art schools were conceptually oriented, thus setting language above image. She then did an MA in printmaking (University College of Northampton, 1999-2000, Distinction), ending up – predictably? – in the word and image world. She is also a gardener (see online "Lucy Gent garden") who believes in interdisciplinarity.*

Jonathan Keep, Seeds 2013, 3D printed ceramics – Porcelain and glaze, D 2.8 inches / 7 cm.

DRAWING THROUGH CLAY

By **Rachel Dickson**

It is no coincidence that we refer to the 'making' of a drawing. To draw is to make and to make is to draw. To draw on skills, experience, material qualities, the past, a glimpse of the future and the influence of others. Others who have taught us, told us their stories, showed us their secrets and entrusted us to pass them on. Others we have never met.

How do we learn to explore our stories through material and line. Is this a skill developed by chance, by coincidence, through the influence of other 'drawings', by experimentation, or being directed. In all cases, the link between the head and hand unfolds through the 'drawing'. The hand often answers many questions that the mind or sketch cannot, and there may also be lessons to be learned of trust. A trust in the ability of the artist/maker, and experience stored that is somehow remembered through the hand.

Drawing can be viewed as preparatory thought, conversation or exchange. Sometimes never revealed, it becomes the secret held by the artist, utilised to produce the more cohesive, final, concluded work. Somehow, this hidden process can appear the most interesting and thought provoking element in that line from idea to object (whether this is ceramic, painting or print).

Makers will employ a range of drawing techniques in their particular practice. It can often become revelatory to 'peek behind the curtain' and explore the decision-making process used, through the making of marks, thoughts, maquettes, material tests, and drawing in space. Some ceramicists will only see drawing as the plan on a page, which leads to the construction of a material object. Others will explore a line using altered or found materials, which then manifests itself in space. Others use clay, glaze, oxide as basic drawing material, substituting these from pencil and ink.

Drawing in these terms, lends itself to analysis and exploration and, therefore, becomes linked with integrity and honesty. In contemporary practice, drawing/making can no longer be seen as secondary or confined to the margins. Looking, seeing, thinking, making, are all vital and fundamental elements of the conveying of ideas. By viewing works in clay as works of drawing and process, these objects seek to encourage and enlighten us.

When it is possible, we are privileged to experience the drawing process, in its broadest terms, of makers. As a course director and lecturer in contemporary applied arts, I am lucky to witness such exploration and experimentation amongst ceramics students seeking out ways to develop and enhance their work in clay. It is also interesting and perhaps significant in contemporary practice that many of these new makers have embraced technology in the 'drawing' or 'construction' of their work. There is a sense of the machine, a use of technology that is both skilful and appropriate, yet does not appear to overpower the hand. To relinquish control of making seems to be the antithesis of craft, yet many contemporary makers are employing industrial techniques or using appropriated objects in order to explore further, the line between head and hand. The question may arise as to the level of craft which remains in these final works.

The incorporation of industrial processes cannot be disregarded within the realm of ceramics. The importance is in an understanding of the process. The artist should have knowledge of the 'how', in order to understand and exploit the possibilities. Is it not crucial that there appears a sense of investigation, a seeking out, an experimentation, and a respectful approach to both the context and the material. We cannot be afraid of the 'drawing' of works through a 3D printer, just as we embraced the technology of an electric wheel or industrial slip-casting techniques.

The fascination exists in the knowledge that these makers have the ability and responsibility to produce works, which take up space in the world, in whichever processes they have chosen to create ceramic objects. Some works are fleeting, momentary, projected, glimpsed, made from dust. Others are more permanent, existing in the context of their environment. Added layers exist in the revealing of the drawing, in the construction of an idea and the process of drawing it out into an object.

Courage can be sought in the revealing of the artist's own drawing process, an honesty in the making, in whichever process this may be, and an integrity of context. The objects and works produced seek to reveal what can be 'drawn' from this.

Rachel Dickson *is a graduate of the Royal College of Art and is currently Associate Head of School of Belfast School of Art, Ulster University. As a practicing maker, research interests explore ideas of memory, the narrative of objects, and the space between art and craft, to include the possibilities of digital fabrication and the handmade. She is a Director of CraftNI, a member of Applied Arts Ulster, and ICE: Irish Ceramic Educators.*

Rachel Dickson, to make: to remake, 2014, Porcelain paperclay, paper, found ceramic. Photo by Glenn Norwood.

A Journey into Intuitive Feelings and Wonderment

Interview with **Xanthe Isbister**

I compare experiences in clay to experiences dating "the bad boy"; it's a lot of drama, but a lot of fun.

You spent a great deal of time immersed in the Canadian wilderness, which has been a major influence in your work. How did the natural environment shape your identity and consequently your practice?

Initially, I had no idea that my time spent in the wilderness was going to impact my creative process. My first three years in undergraduate school were pretty lame. I had no idea what I wanted to communicate visually, and I was focused on improving my facility with a variety of materials. A breakthrough occurred in my fourth year and began to create works that described an aesthetic inspired by the wilderness of the Canadian Shield. I spent my summer vacations in North Western Ontario on Kakagi Lake with my father, mother and brother since I was three. We would explore the lake, and portage to surrounding ones. It was a magical time; we would fish and cook on an open campfire, hike, and swim. Kakagi Lake is large, has endless islands and is very deep. It was rare to see another boat, it felt like we were all alone at the end of the world; it's a unique place. These memories are positive ones, filled with love and shaped who I am. When I began to create pieces inspired/influenced by those memories/experiences, I felt a strong desire to capture something within the work that would describe this place. I felt a need to convey that same feeling of wonderment to the viewer. I felt this was accomplished with my first installation Dusk in Kakagi I-XV.

Do you think that it is possible to live in a human-made environment without any psychological consequences?

This is a tuff question, as I am not an environmental physiologist, but from my experiences, I know my time in the wilderness shaped who I am. The wilderness has a profound effect on the way I make my way in the world. It provides perspective on life, and its strength feeds your soul. There are many people who live in "concrete jungles" and have no interest in experiencing nature. Depending on their lifestyle, the absence of experiencing nature may have no effect on their happiness or wellbeing.

My opinion from experience: I moved from Canada to the USA, to attend graduate school in a small city in the midwest. During this time, I experienced withdrawal from a lifestyle that was no longer an option and consciously made work in response to this absence. My thesis was devoted to researching the psychological impact our natural environment has on our wellbeing. When I am unable to experience nature on a regular basis, it affects my happiness. As soon as I go for a long walk in a place far away from lights and the noise pollution, everything feels just as it should be.

When did you start working with clay?

I began working with ceramics when I was in my high school art class. At one point, we had a student teacher, and he introduced us to slip casting. I was totally blown away with the material and enjoyed working in 3D (compared to the usual drawing and painting we had done up until that point). During my second year of undergraduate school at the School of Art, at the University of Manitoba I enrolled in an introductory ceramics course. Even though I wasn't successful and quite frustrated, I felt drawn to being able expressing myself through clay. In retrospect, I enjoyed the challenges clay presented. The material was unforgiving, but you can make anything you want clay, and when it works, it feels amazing. I compare experiences in clay to experiences dating "the bad boy"; it's a lot of drama, but a lot of fun.

White Athabaska III, Red, Red III, Red IV Athabaska, 2007, Ceramic, acrylic, 120 x 75 inches / 3.05 x 1.9 m.

I ended up doing my undergraduate thesis in ceramics, and there were a few people that really impacted my evolution as an artist. Mariko Patterson was an instructor in the department during my fourth year, and the casual conversations that we would have in the studio lead me to working more loosely, hand building as a sculptor rather than throwing on the wheel. It was freeing. The second person that impacted on my evolution as an artist was Linda Christianson, our visiting artist during my thesis year. We had the most thoughtful conversation about my work, and she was really present. I was having a difficult time expressing what my work was about and didn't know what was influencing/inspiring my ideas. She reached over and looked at a few images I had pinned to the wall, and turned them on their side, saying "that's where they come from, that's them, right there." I ended up creating an installation of fourteen over life-size sculptures titled Dusk in Kakagi I-XV. To this day, I feel that my most successful pieces came from intuitive feelings that I followed. I had no idea what the work was about during the making process and feel that work that results from this approach is the most successful.

The surface of your work offers a visual contrast between smooth and rough areas. Can you tell us more about this contrast and choice of materials?

The visual contrast within my work comes from formal decision-making, and not wanting the pieces to be too manic. Subconsciously, forms emerge that allude to the human figure and organs and collide with non-descriptive forms from nature, created through an approach of ripping, gouging, cutting, and smoothing the clay. I use a low fire, red clay body that I developed over time, which stands up well in a variety of outdoor climates. The clay body has an immense amount of grog (a variety of particle sizes) that helps with firing large forms with inconsistent thicknesses.

You employ memory narratives to create sculptures and installations. How does this process work? Do you create art spontaneously?

I work in a very spontaneous, intuitive approach (I don't map out or make plans); I get an idea and execute it. Sometimes, I just get a feeling and have a vague vision of an installation or sculpture. I work with clay in a very physical manner. Traditional ceramic techniques such as slab or coil building felt very restrictive. Ever since my last few years in undergraduate school, the work has gotten bigger and bigger, not just in height, but mass.

During my first-year committee review in graduate school, I was eaten alive. I presented an installation outdoors titled Hung to Cure, based on my recent experience living in a remote community in Northern Saskatchewan. The ceramic components of this piece where slab built triangular forms, from which I cast plastic "pod-like" forms that hung in a semi-circle around them. The piece was all about these plastic pods. They were massive balloons, painted blood red, and the aftermath of painting them made my studio look like a slaughterhouse (my studio mate was a very understanding person). A result of that critique was a conversation with one of my committee members, Pete Pinnell. I expressed how limited I felt, and described how I would ultimately like to work with clay; have a large solid mound to manipulate in a "whole-body" physical approach. He asked, what was holding me back? I said, "I would have to make like, a 1000lbs of clay" and he said, so? From that day on, I began to make 1000-1500 lbs of clay every two weeks for two years. It was great.

To this day, I feel that my most successful pieces came from intuitive feelings that I followed. I had no idea what the work was about during the making process and feel that work that results from this approach is the most successful.

Red I, 2011, Ceramic, 34 x 24 inches / 86 x 61 cm. Photo by Koi Neng Liew.

Disengage, 2009, Ceramic, oil paint, 160 x 80 inches / 4.06 x 2.03 m
Photo by Koi Neng Liew

A few years ago, you said that you use "banal" as a tool to remind yourself that honest, soulful ideas may be mundane to some, but are fulfilling, emotional expressions of who you are. How and why did you start using this tool? Do you also apply it when deciding if a work is finished?

During my residency at The Medalta International Artists in Residence, I began to write very candid streams of consciousness pieces and post them on my website. The one titled Banal was about my graduate school thesis defence. I initially thought my graduate thesis review was an awful experience. I had worked so hard to create an installation that included several components: Burnt, Shifted, and Drift. These were major pieces, and it was an "act of god" that they survived the firing process. I had expectations that I was going to be praised for my evolution as an artist and the discussion would focus on the work in the exhibition, as well as my development as an artist over the last three years. This was not the case. One of the committee members cast a dark cloud over the entire defence, starting the discussion by saying the work was banal and had nothing to say about it other then how boring it was. I was really taken aback; the rest of the defence was a blur.

About a year later I realized that comment was an important one and thought about its meaning. It taught me how to anticipate critique, how to be more objectively critical, and to realize that the work you make is a personal journey. If you make work that is honest and meaningful, stay true to your practice and are fulfilled, and this results in work that is banal to some, then so be it, c'est la vie.

You are the Curator of Travelling Exhibitions (TREX) for the Alberta Foundation for the Arts. Tell us about this program and about the role you play.

I feel lucky to have a position in the Arts. I work at the Esplanade Arts and Heritage Centre (esplanade.ca) as the Travelling Exhibitions program manager and curator for the Southeast region of Alberta. The programs mandate is to provide every Albertan with the opportunity to enjoy visual art exhibitions in their community, supporting and promoting Alberta made art, with each show traveling for 2.5 years. These professionally curated exhibitions travel all over the province to non-traditional gallery spaces such as schools, libraries, health centers and small rural museums or galleries. Each of the four regions circulates an average of 9 unique exhibitions 12 months of the year, with an average of 60,000 visitors experiencing a TREX exhibition yearly.

Exhibitions are curated from a variety of sources, such as the 8000 pieces permanent collection at the Alberta Foundation for the Arts, which showcases the creative talents of over 2000 Alberta artists. The educational components of the program aim to help the viewer to engage with the artwork beyond the decorative. It provides educational support material with each exhibition through an interpretative catalog and educators guide. It is filled with information about the history of the medium featured in the exhibition, lesson plans for visual art projects, and information about the featured artist. TREX also offers a Visiting Artist Program to our venues, with our artist conducting hands-on workshops. When their exhibition is on display, we can plan for the featured artist(s) to travel to host venues. The program is unique to western Canada, and I feel very fortunate to be a part of it.

Destructive Behavior in the Age of Progress

Interview with **Alfonso Espronceda**

Sugar Faces, 2012, Performance still,
Photo of performer (the artist) holding a ceramic rhino horn

When did you become interested in the duality that lies between society's progress and our destructive behavior? To what do you attribute this behavior?

I find the future very frightening, and it is difficult at times for me not to obsess about it. In life, things could change in an instant. In fact, there have been several times in my life where if circumstances were different I could have potentially fallen apart. By working with this duality, I reference those fears and assert a symbolic control over them—control given to me by the medium and control over people's perceptions. I compare this practice to religious rituals that console their participant.

You gain inspiration from objects that are deemed visceral or intimate because they hold close relationships to bodily functions. We have consumed and discarded all sorts of items since millennia. What has changed?

Objects of the past survive if we deem them important. Museums have collections and a set canon of firsts that curators outline and arrange in exhibitions. The thought of every museum featuring water bottles on displays seems farfetched at this time, but I'm sure it will happen.

In addressing your question from an ecological perspective, this is the time of environmental consciousness where we are constantly reminded that the world is on the brink of falling apart. Although our planet reflects and echoes that we have discarded items for millenniums, the shelf life of an item has been shortened significantly by consumer culture/convenience in recent human history. It is now seen as fashionable to conserve and limit our carbon footprint. The use of social media has escalated this movement by educating and shaming those that do not follow this practice.

I would describe technology and religion as a type of ornament. We dress ourselves up in it like I dress my sculptures up in pattern and opulent materials because it makes our lives easier to live.

Why do you turn disposable items into fetishized icons?

There were many factors that have pointed me in that direction of my practice. Initially, a college professor who described the role of the Catholic Church in art history sparked my interest. The realization that artists throughout history used their abilities and ideas to essentially create propaganda for the church was an awaking. Soon after I began to view all art as propaganda, which was disheartening. I do recognize that not all art illustrates or gives a direct message, but it does represent a particular mindset, which its creators can communicate with great zeal. By turning disposable items into reliquaries/icons, I play with the tradition of religious artwork on my terms.

By utilizing vibrantly colored glazes, which are lustered with erratic patterns of gold, you adapt the drama and the visual appeal of our ideas about divinity. Why do we associate the divine with gold and glitter?

Gold gives movement and warmth to surfaces. If an object is static, the reflections on a metallic object's surface change and dance as viewers move around the piece. I think silver shows a truer reflection that resembles a mirror, which does not interest me. Gold symbolically reflects a dream or something more mythological because it doesn't give an exact interpretation. Its monetary value and history also contribute to our relationship to the material. Making or covering an object with a precious material automatically makes it significant. I was raised in a culture/environment with religious objects and the relationship between the gold and the divine is unquestionable.

You define ornaments as "a visual tool that denies imperfections by covering them up with the allure of pattern and color, which momentarily distracts from a looming mortality". In your opinion, why are we afraid of our mortality and animalistic desires?

As human beings, we are all afraid of the unknown. Death is the ultimate unknown, and that's why we

seek to escape it. People have religious beliefs and practices to describe an afterlife and, therefore, explain the unexplainable. I would describe technology and religion as a type of ornament. We dress ourselves up in it like I dress my sculptures up in pattern and opulent materials because it makes our lives easier to live.

Our animalistic nature is imperfect and unpredictable. I think we scare ourselves when we actually consider what we are capable of doing in certain circumstances and situations. Animalistic tendencies arise as a survival mechanism. Being in survival mode is not desirable, and the stress can alienate people from the rest of society. Much like soldiers who suffer from PTSD.

How do fur, feathers and leather work combined with ceramics?

I work with materials that have an automatic visceral effect on me. These materials, like the glaze, are very seductive. Feathers and fur contrast and attribute to different visual weight shifts in my compositions. Incorporating them into work can aerate an otherwise visually heavy ceramic object.

You captivate the viewers through seductive and surreal displays, but only until they realize the grotesque content of your work. Why put your viewers through this experience?

I find it difficult to capture people's attention and interest. I believe that working with this duality grips people's attention and creates interest. The goal of my work is to put people at odds with themselves by using this duality to reveal our tendencies to be easily manipulated by aesthetics. I believe it's one of the first steps to a sense of self-realization. I speak as an individual who is constantly conflicted by these factors.

I find the future very frightening, and it is difficult at times for me not to obsess about it. In life, things could change in an instant. In fact, there have been several times in my life where if circumstances were different I could have potentially fallen apart.

Pads and Cheetos, 2012, Earthenware, low fire glaze, luster, mixed media, 28 x 25 x 5 inches / 71 x 64 x 13 cm

One Day of Work, 2012, Porcelain, decals and 2800 pennies, 120 x 240 x 8 inches / 305 x 610 x 20 cm

Inequality Issues

Interview with **María Albornoz**

Through your work, you raise awareness of the social, cultural and political inequalities surrounding your heritage and the heritage of all American immigrants. Tell us about your background and why you chose to address these issues through art.

I was born in Kansas, but I spent my formative years in Caracas, Venezuela. I returned to the US a week after my eighteenth birthday to meet up with my older brother and cousins who were living in Florida. Soon after the election of former President Hugo Chávez, the country's political regime started to change. My parents, opponents of the system, were now politically ostracized and lost their jobs along with a large portion of the country. In Florida, I became aware of the inconsistency and misfortunes surrounding people from different legal backgrounds.

As a Venezuelan artist living in the US, I find myself the in position and feel the moral obligation to be a voice of those who cannot speak for themselves. I believe art is a language that speaks across racial, cultural, social and educational frontiers. Art provides a different way of thinking. Processing information through a visual component allows for more entry points and therefore easier understanding. Art reflects our surroundings; it is a cultural tool; it can help actualize emotions, create visceral reactions; it shocks and inspires us to action.

I find myself the in position and feel the moral obligation to be a voice of those who cannot speak for themselves.

Do you believe that contemporary art has the power to create meaningful change (on the immigration issue)?

Contemporary art emerges from an enormous and complex network of histories, styles, materials, techniques, and geographic regions. As such, there is no singular way to make a work of art, nor is there a singular way to view, experience and understand it. Contemporary art might not create change directly but as an additional tool for information, I certainly believe art can enlighten and influence society in a positive way.

Many immigrants assimilate the culture and traditions of the host country. Why do you think they lose their cultural identity? Are you afraid that the same thing could happen to you too?

In my experience inevitably though time some customs and traditions get lost, forgotten or replaced due to constant exposure to the host country's culture. Many Americans currently live multicultural lives. Maintaining cultural identity and values in a changing and multicultural world requires both awareness and effort. For the most part, I think I have acculturated and hopefully adapted to the US culture while maintaining my Venezuelan heritage, but I am sure if my grandmothers were alive today, would say otherwise.

Some of your objects explore the juxtaposition of permanent and durable ceramics with ephemeral materials like fiber, paper or cardboard. How do you choose the materials you work with?

My studio practice is a combination of experimentation, trial and error and research. Part of my studio development is intuitive but part comes from memory and reacting to the contemporary issues I feel, affects me as an artist. I hope the disposable quality of some of the materials that I use symbolize a transitory quality and a reminder that nothing is eternal.

You also used fabrics in some of your installations. Can you tell us more about them and the choice of material?

I created Unstitched reacting to issues of labor in the garment industry. The installation consists of 1135 pieces of repurposed fabric that embody the silenced lives lost in the factory collapse in Bangladesh in 2013. The technological advances of the information age, predominantly information overload has had a tremendous impact on the process of remembering. The objective of this piece is to create images that fill in the gaps formed by memory loss. Colombian artist Doris Salcedo states "memory should be the essence of an artwork; if we don't know our past, there is no way we can live the present and, therefore, no way we can face the future."

Globalization has made the production of inexpensive low-quality clothing possible, which has allowed corporations to obtain the maximum return for their investment in human labor. In order to maintain the low pricing of clothing, companies have set up shop in third world countries where labor is cheap, and employment laws are lax. As a result, garment workers get exploited, and consumers lose appreciation for manufacturing—treating clothes as cheap disposable wear. Mistreatment of workers in the fabric industry has been occurring for a long time. Impoverished workers are regularly abused and forced to work in horrible and dangerous conditions. My hope with this piece is to inform and influence consumers to recognize and appreciate the labor behind garments and change the value placed on purchased garments.

I moved to Philadelphia two years ago to attend graduate school. Through this change, I relived my past, and once again I left my family and community. The first months in Philadelphia were hard; I was uncomfortable, alone in an unknown city, surrounded by strangers. Through Spanglish, I hope to I communicate feelings of nostalgia, loss, and longing. This piece is about the uncertainty and anxiety of relocating to a foreign land. I use fabric to create a travel pillow big enough to cuddle and protect me. Facing the pillow were laser cut pieces of cardboard wrapped in an emergency blanket. I created an island made out of cardboard, the negative space between Venezuela and Florida.

What concept are you developing for your MFA thesis?

The language I am currently investigating is food consumption, lack thereof, access to food, scarcity versus excess and waste. Consciously or unconsciously, I always find myself comparing my experiences living in both countries. For the past sixteen years, the political climate in Venezuela has worsened to a point of almost being in a state of civil war. Political upheaval, extreme immigration and food and medicine shortage have run down the country. At the same time, the US suffers from obesity due lack of access to healthy foods. Large areas of the country suffer from food deserts. But this is not a problem just affecting my two countries; lack of access to food is a problem happening all throughout the world. This concern and the frustration and the inability to solve the problem became the thesis of my MFA thesis exhibition.

Do you ever dream of going back to live in Venezuela?

I have this fantasy of someday buying a home in Caracas big enough that the entire family could all spend the Holidays there. Christmas time is amazing is Venezuela—everybody is warm and welcoming, always celebrating. I have been living in the US for a very long time; I have adapted to the comforts and ways of the American life. I do not think I could easily adjust to the current devastating state of the country. I hope someday, Venezuela can rid itself of corruption and rebuild into stable and secure country. Living in the US for so long has shaped or perhaps distorted the memories of my youth. Uruguayan artist Luis Camnitzer once said, "I may be describing things in my memory rather than those in reality..." The perfect and beautiful Venezuela of my youth, the one I remember, perhaps never existed.

Hams (detail), 2015, Stoneware, latex, acrylic paint, wood pallets, 84 x 36 x 40 inches 213 x 91 x 102 cm.

Objects, Memories and Reactions

Interview with **Margaret Haden**

Growing up in an environment filled with beautiful objects has greatly influenced your work. How did you realize that you have a fascination for objects?

I have always tended to keep my hands busy touching things and figuring out different materials. As a child, I was always fiddling with things. I would take objects apart, often completely destroying something in order to create something else. This drove my family crazy because I would often then just discard what I had dismantled. I also liked to create fantasies about peoples' lives based on what they displayed in their homes. I have always enjoyed checking out the objects people collect and guessing what their lives must be like. I think the objects people display in their homes can say a lot about them.

When I realized that I could actually make things, my fascination with objects grew. I found that I enjoyed not only the process of putting something together but also the reward of having something beautiful or interesting for myself and others to enjoy. I suppose I first came to realize my fascination when I took my first ceramics class, which was at John Woolman Friends' high school when I was about 16 years old.

How do your objects contribute to the creation of memories for others?

I have always viewed my work as meant to live in someone's home. Growing older with an object and perhaps seeing it every day is a different experience than viewing something in a gallery or a museum. In a way you and the things you hold onto throughout your life experience things simultaneously. It's like the creation of a veneer of memories surrounding a family's objects. I make objects with a hope that they will become a part of a family's, or someone else's, a veneer of memories.

You create large clay sculptures with highly decorated surfaces. Why did you choose ceramics as a medium of expression?

I chose ceramics because of its truly limitless qualities. It can mimic most materials and allows endless possibilities in terms of form and surface. Making ceramic work is a challenging endeavor. It requires a lot of planning and a strong knowledge of the material; I have always enjoyed the problem solving that comes with working in clay. Although, of course, ceramic works can break, it has a kind of permanence and strength that other materials don't have. Clay is a very responsive but sometimes stubborn material that is constantly changing throughout the making process, and this has always excited me. And, of course, in the simplest terms, ceramics is what I have been good at from a young age.

Most of the time, I don't feel complete or put together unless I have adorned my body in some way. And the same goes for my ceramic work. It doesn't feel finished to me unless it has been adorned.

Tell us about your present body of work, which draws inspiration from the ways in which plants can regrow from destroyed land surfaces.

I grew up in California's central valley. It's an agricultural area that requires a lot of water in order for the farming industry to survive. Because of the seasons – normally wet in the winter and dry in the summer – but also because of irrigation, the landscape is constantly changing. There has not been enough water for the last several years, and this has made the landscape even more brutally dry in the summer than normal. But I know from living in the valley most of my life that beauty does re-emerge from destruction. Recently I have limited myself to making vases and baskets. I find that this allows me to feel connected to nature because of the objects' overall function. They hold flowers, fruit, things harvested from the land. I am making decorative vases and drawing inspiration from the colors of the landscape, like using gold to represent the dry water-starved foothills and pairing it with a shade of blue that resembles the color of the sky. In some of my current work I am matching vase forms with charred black stands or baskets, and in an abstract way expressing plant regrowth emerging after an area has been destroyed by fire.

What role do adornments play in your work?

As humans, we have always adorned our bodies in a multitude of different ways. It can be as drastic as body modification or as simple as wearing a pair of earrings. A lot of my work, particularly my larger work, can take on a very figurative quality. I see the adornment that I use on my work as being similar to me getting dressed in the morning, doing my hair and putting on makeup. Most of the time, I don't feel complete or put together unless I have adorned my body in some way. And the same goes for my ceramic work. It doesn't feel finished to me unless it has been adorned.

You said that color, form or the use of gold can create different moods and attract different types of attention. Have you been interested in finding out which color, surface or form determines which mood?

As my work has continued to develop, I am starting to become more interested in reactions to the different surface treatments that I am using. I think that, as I continue, it could be a helpful experience to learn about what colors and surfaces do for different people. As of now, the choices that I make are determined by my mood and what I think will best heighten the ceramic piece. I think it's important for me to make small changes often, so exploring the mood reactions of others more deeply could be a catalyst for something exciting.

You are the current resident artist in ceramics at the Kansas State University. What do you hope to achieve during your residency?

I have been very lucky to have the opportunity to be the Artist in Residence at Kansas State. Sadly my time there is coming to an end, and I will be off doing something else. While there, I have taught four Ceramics classes and have had the freedom, space and time to focus on making a new body of work. It has been wonderful being back in an educational environment while not being a student or a full-time faculty member. The students and faculty have been very supportive, and the time that I have spent there has given me a lot of freedom to explore what comes next. What I have achieved will be demonstrated as I move on.

Regrowth 02, 2014, Earthenware, underglaze, decals, luster, cone 04 glazes, 16 x 9 x 7 inches / 41 x 23 x 18 cm
Photo by Nathan Woodruff

Untitled, 2013, Earthenware, underglaze, luster, cone 04 glazes,
42 x 24 x 24 inches / 107 x 61 x 61 cm
Photo by Nathan Woodruff

4 Level Vessel, 2014, Glazed stoneware, 8 x 8 x 10 inches / 20 x 20 x 25 cm.

Vessel (w/Applied Parts), 2014, Glazed stoneware, 10 x 10 x 12 inches / 25 x 25 x 30 cm.

Interplays

Interview with **Ian McDonald**

I am far more interested in the language and point of view that originates from my work than I am in ritual.

You are trying to bring the details and qualities of pottery into sculptural objects. Where do you think the border between pottery and sculpture is? How would you differentiate them?

I do think about the sculptural form and the form of pottery, but I tend to think about the differences in terms of boundaries less and less. I think within my more recent projects, the objects have been made in a similar way in terms of multiple parts being dissected and reassembled into singular objects. Some are made on the potters wheel, some are built in various other ways, but they all share a similar approach. In that way, the boundaries and possible hierarchy of objects within my work are less of a focus. The difference for me is more formal but in terms of value, all the objects are of equal importance to the overall vision.

In your solo exhibitions, the conceptual value of objects is emphasized through multifaceted arrangements and, more recently, through the objects' connection with their support. What do you have in mind when setting up an exhibition?

Since I am always making multiple objects, I see my exhibitions in terms of an arrangement and interplay between forms. I may at some point feel some type of object is missing formally and make that work fulfill the language of that arrangement. At some point when everything starts to influence how an arrangement is viewed, it was only natural that the support would have equal importance to the object it displayed. This has proven to become tricky for me. In some cases, the display and support can become overbearing and start to distract or even render the objects entirely interchangeable which for me could be either good or terrible. More recently, I have been thinking of taking the influential support away and trying to find a more neutral space where objects can be interpreted on their own. It's not easy.

Is the functionality of your work important to you?

Yes, it is for certain work, but this appeals to me in both practical terms as well as a conceptual starting point. Some work originates from a model based on a vessel whereas others are clearly defined as functional objects. It relates back to your first question, in that the differences are more formal, but the values are the same.

Please describe your concept of the economy of form.

The economy of form has to with how to identify what is most important to the form or basically, how much information I need to describe an object. I sometimes feel like contemporary ceramics has a lot to do with too much technique. I sometimes feel more like plunging my thumb into a lump of clay and calling it a bowl. It might perform in very much the same way as a technically savvy bowl. My work tends to be more precise than that, but I am mindful of overworking forms. I think my best work is at its core, clear, concise and to the point.

Your vocabulary of shapes and forms is improvised within a set parameter. Aren't you tempted to experiment with other forms or other materials?

I have worked with many other materials and forms but in most cases I set the parameters as a way to understand the ways I am working with in a deeper way. I have also found that the material and process of ceramics is of critical importance to my work. It's such a unique process that can't really be cheated. In that way, the ceramic form has become a way to highlight both other materials and ceramics itself. I feel like I can always find something new in a simple cylinder or another basic form.

You are using the same potter's wheel you used 20 years ago. Are you a man of rituals?

I'm not really a man of ritual in that I tend to roam around the landscape of ceramics. I fire at different temperatures, different atmospheres and try new clays and glazes all the time. This can sometimes be painful, but the payoff is bigger. I have begun to narrow down some parts of the process, but I don't want to become too dependent on any one technique so to speak. I am far more interested in the language and point of view that originates from my work than I am in ritual.

I sometimes feel like contemporary ceramics has a lot to do with too much technique. I sometimes feel more like plunging my thumb into a lump of clay and calling it a bowl.

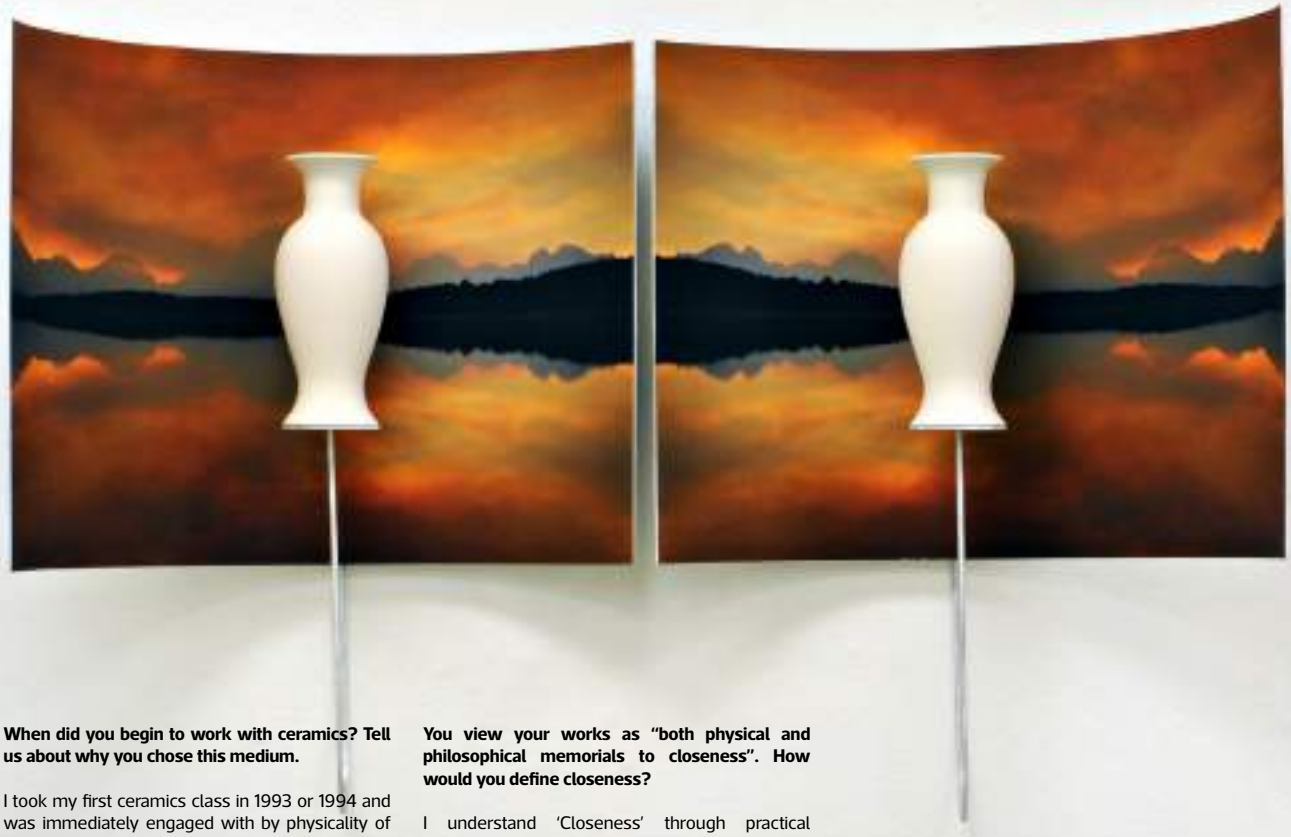
Wearing (Flax), 2011, Glazed stoneware, powder coated steel, rope, flax fiber, 30 x 12 x 96 inches / 76 x 30 x 244 cm

Wearing (Shelving unit / All in one), 2011, Glazed stoneware, walnut, rope, powder coated steel, wool, concrete, 48 x 12 x 60 inches / 122 x 30 x 152 cm

Arrangement #1 (Rena Bransten Gallery), 2013, Glazed Stoneware, powder coated steel, painted wood, 48 x 12 x 20 inches / 122 x 30 x 51 cm

A Commemoration of Human Landscapes

Interview with **Jason Hackett**



When did you begin to work with ceramics? Tell us about why you chose this medium.

I took my first ceramics class in 1993 or 1994 and was immediately engaged with by physicality of working with it. It was just my hands and the clay. I responded well to handling materials without a tool. I would try and wrestle it into submission and was challenged by my search for finesse. The following year the university I was attending hired a new professor, John Balistreri. John's raw energy and the community dynamic he created were instrumental in making me want to be a bigger part of what was happening. Under his influence, I learned to push myself beyond what I thought was possible and to willingly embrace my failures as much as my successes. The clay's responsiveness to my handling of it continued to be crucial, and I learned to understand it has had a memory or containing a record of my activity with it. This idea of handling (or not handling) material still contributes largely to how I think about what I make today.

You view your works as "both physical and philosophical memorials to closeness". How would you define closeness?

I understand 'Closeness' through practical experience, actual contact, and by examining distance. Distance can be arrived at by looking back on history or speculating the future; it is understood in inches, miles, minutes, and hours – created by abstraction and ambiguity – but can be narrowed by providing tangibility to all of those mentioned above, much like a clock does for time.

The materials I handle, tool, and cast, and my use of found items, parallel my thoughts about tangibility. In my studio, I consider the use of tools and molds architects of distance on a micro scale. They reside between my hands and materials. They eliminate touch. I think a lot about the varying amount of actual material forming my hands conduct when working in the studio. Most recently I've noticed that the touch of my hand is less present in the work. As a result, the parts I've been making appear more anonymously made.

Lingerings, 2014 (collaborative work with Jeff Hackett), Slipcast ceramic, digital photography aluminum, 31 x 52 x 6 inches / 79 x 130 x 15 cm

Commemorative Set (Mesa, Basin, Mitten, Moon), 2014, Ceramic, india ink, 13 x 55 x 2 inches / 33 x 140 x 5 cm.

In my studio, I consider the use of tools and molds architects of distance on a micro scale. They reside between my hands and materials. They eliminate touch.

I consider the unbelievable, the unremembered, and the unpredictable as related to ideas of speculation and time and interpret this as distance. Humans have tried to resolve this concretely through the invention of commemorative items, statuary, trophies, tombstones, memorials, and even plates. These items serve purposes of recall and familiarity in attempts to keep memories near and bring the unfathomable into reality. I began referencing and using formats such as these nearly 15 years ago in an effort to bridge gaps from tangible reality to distant histories, futures, and hypothetical theories.

What was the starting point of your concern for the value of community and family?

I think it starts with an acknowledgment of being a part of the human family. The parts within my collage pieces were easy for me to see as individuals among communities or families. The variety materials, surfaces and construction processes from which items were made revealed characteristics unique to themselves.

You take materials, images, and forms, then merge them into structures where "contemplation defines their functional nature". What should we contemplate—memory, landscape, ritual, or perhaps harmony?

What I have always thought of as most important in the works is the place where the different parts come together. The actual and implied connections between parts are metaphors that reflect our landscape as a complicated living synthesis of people and place fundamental to human identity.

As for me, I thought a lot about what makes humans similar and discovered what we have in common is varied and plentiful. Recently, I've been focusing my attention on people's general recognition of pottery, the human form, mortality, anonymity in respect to the grand scale of time and location, and the idea that we are all part of a greater single landscape. I'm satisfied making work that commemorates a human landscape filled with these items and ideas.

Why do you use found manufactured ceramics in your work?

Found manufactured ceramics brings a history to the work that I'm not a part of. These histories include the processes from which they were manufactured. By using them, I am attempting to bring myself closer to that part of history. I want my understanding of ceramics and clay to be as comprehensive as possible.

How does the form unfold when you're working on a new piece? Take us through your working process.

When working on pieces I consider more object oriented, I'll usually work on several of them at once. I think the most I've worked on at one time was about 10. There is typically a found element within these works. I'll lay them all out and begin intuitively responding to them, laying cast forms over the top of them, using paper to block out parts of images or imagining plates cut. I'll sit with them for a while, and they will often undergo multiple iterations. When I'm comfortable with the composition, I start masking, sandblasting, cutting, polishing, casting, press molding, and throwing clay. Ultimately, these smaller collage works get secured together with epoxy.

The larger pieces usually are quite a bit more planned. They need to be because there is a lot more risk in arriving at a finished piece that I'm satisfied with. Coincidentally, these pieces also typically involve learning a new process. Some processes took longer to learn, like slip casting. I learned jiggering in about an hour though. Once I'm confident in my ability to employ the new process, I'll begin working on the piece. At this point, it becomes more labor oriented, and in some instances I hire assistants to help me complete more laborious tasks like sandblasting or casting multiples.

Photography and ceramics were mixed in your latest exhibition, made in collaboration with your brother, photographer Jeff Hackett. Tell us more about this two-person show.

The photographs within these works capture time, changes in the atmosphere, geologic history, and location. The vases and skulls are stand-ins for and remnants of humans. Our use of dissimilar processes and materials created compelling interactions between elements of the opposition. Polarities such as 2D and 3D, image and form, artificial and real, and literal and metaphorical are arranged together perplexing time, location, and existence. I like to think about the conceptual spaces between these many pairings as the place where viewers end up and linger. In a way, the viewer becomes the epoxy, or glue connecting gaps with their thoughts. Coincidentally, I think the pieces function as a type of epoxy between my brother and myself.

Complex Geometries

Interview with **Tatiana Gvozdetskaya**

When I found this style after many years of experiments with other ceramic work styles, I have never looked back. Now, I am not tempted to create other styles of work as they would not be an accurate reflection of my nature.

How did you develop this very distinct body of work? Have you had any contact with ceramics prior to the year 2000?

I was born in Kazakhstan in 1958 while my Ukrainian mother was working there on an industrial project. In 1980, I completed my degree in Nuclear Engineering (Automatization) at the Order of the Red Banner of the Labour Polytechnic Institute in Odessa, my home city on the northern shore of the Black Sea. Part of my training program involved a stint at the now infamous Chernobyl nuclear plant. Work in the Soviet nuclear industry was notoriously poorly paid, so I supplemented my income designing and constructing fashion garments. After immigrating with my husband and daughter to Australia in 1990, I found, not surprisingly, little demand here for employment in the field of nuclear engineering so instead set up a successful clothing manufacturing business.

After more than ten years of very hard work, I took a well-earned trip to the US in 2000. It was while staying with an old student acquaintance in Cleveland, Ohio that I was invited along to my friend's hobby ceramics class. For me, it was a Damascus moment: I was immediately and utterly captivated by the experience of working with clay. On returning to Melbourne, I enrolled in a course at the Holmesglen College of Technical and Further Education, later continuing my studies at Box Hill TAFE.

You use engineering concepts in the design and construction of your structures. Would you associate this approach with your background in nuclear engineering or to your affinity for Kasimir Malevich and Vladimir Tatlin's work?

During my training at Box Hill ironically, I was first introduced to the work of the two great Russian revolutionary artists who became my primary sources of inspiration: the Suprematist painter and sculptor Kasimir Malevich (1878 - 1935), and the Constructivist sculptor Vladimir Tatlin (1895 - 1956), both fellow Ukrainians. I would say that my style of work has been influenced equally by these two great artists as well as my background in engineering. It is difficult to answer or speculate if one had more influence than the other.

Can you fully express your emotions and feelings through pure geometry and abstraction? Have you ever been tempted to create other types of work?

When it comes to expressing my emotions through my work, geometry and abstraction come naturally to me. Although the geometric shapes that form the foundation of my work can at times appear to lack emotion, I express my emotions through the addition of colour and the complexity of shape. Throughout the years, the colour scheme has changed drastically in my work. At times, I would create pieces with predominantly black glaze, and I feel this is a representation of the emotionally turbulent period in my life. At a later stage, I had desired to include the colour while, followed by yellow and finally red. The red colour resonated firmly with me in the recent years and since then has been featured prominently in my work. Some pieces created by me are purely infused with the red colour, and I associate this with the vital life force while others in later years have again gravitated toward being predominantly black. When I found this style after many years of experiments with other ceramic work styles, I have never looked back. Now, I am not tempted to create other styles of work as they would not be an accurate reflection of my nature.

Due to the structural complexity of your compositions, you sometimes go through failed firings. How do you feel when that happens?

GYM, 2010, Porcelain, glaze,
19.7 x 9.8 x 15.7 inches / 50 x 25 x 40 cm

I particularly enjoy the challenge of making clay behave in a similar way to wood and metal.

Failed firings is not a common occurrence in my work and truthfully occurs very rarely. I can account this due to the extensive drying period that I ensure that all my pieces go through before the firing is done. I believe that allowing the clay to dry in a very slow process decreases the chances of cracking and movement during the firing process. Once the piece is created, I then wrap it in many layers of glad wrap and leave it under a press. The layers of glad wrap are then removed very slowly over time, and the entire process of drying can take over two months for each piece. During the unwrapping of the piece, I watch for the change in colour of the clay as it dries towards the leather hard stage and then on to the bone dry stage. Once the piece has reached the bone dry stage, I then apply the glaze and take it through a firing process. This firing is done slowly straight up to cone 6 (1222 ˚C). I do not do the bisque firing on any of my pieces as is commonly done with other forms of ceramic art. I chose this method because only in the bone dry stage I can achieve my white lines that are prominent in my pieces.

Why did you choose porcelain and not other material? How about the matte glaze and the limited spectrum of colors?

Porcelain was the clay of choice for me due to the sharp edges required in my pieces. All other materials would not provide me with this level of sharpness of the edges. Earthenware clay when raw is not able to absorb my glaze that I make up myself. The glaze I have developed and currently still use is matte. I have experimented with various shiny glazes but have found that matte provides a greater contrast in colours and allows me to create white sharp edges in my work. Porcelain is the best material in absorbing my matte glaze, which was developed over many years of trials and errors. Lastly, porcelain is a considerably stronger material when compared to other forms of clay.

Tension and energy arise from the different shapes that are combined to form an object. How do you balance them?

The balancing of the tension in my work is one of the biggest challenges I face with each piece and is what makes it always challenging and at times exciting. It is, of course, often very rewarding when my ideas fall into place and come to fruition. I particularly enjoy the challenge of making clay behave in a similar way to wood and metal. Once an idea is formed in my mind, and the creative process begins, the shapes almost form themselves.

Finding solutions to complex formal problems form the foundations of my work and may reflect my early training as an engineer in Soviet Russia. This training has assisted me in balancing what are often complex shapes in my designs and has assisted me in understanding of the fundamental mathematical shapes and their combinations.

Why do you base your work on a neo-constructivist philosophy? How would you characterize this genre?

My work is Neo-Constructivist in style following the precepts of Kasimir Malevich and Vladimir Tatlin. These two great artists had inspired me long before I have entered the world of ceramics and have played a significant part in influencing my work in the years that followed. The true inspiration for my work, above all else, comes from a deep place inside my soul. I do not intentionally base my work or set out to base my work on a particular philosophy or genre.

A Visual Investigation into Ceramic Practice Phenomena

Interview with **Kristine Tillge Lund**

The understanding of ceramics as a (social) phenomenon is a predominant theme in your work. Why do you investigate familiar representations and experiences?

Ceramics is present all around us, often to such a degree that we automatically act certain ways when we encounter it, without even paying attention to it. I believe that focusing on exactly these familiar representations and experiences, I can create an awareness of our understanding of the surroundings in which things, situations, and events change meaning over space and time.

How and why do you re-appropriate the meaning of everyday objects?

I analyze the experiences with a kind of anthropological view, creating new meanings and associations by rearranging the ceramic material to form new scenes for old traditions.

Phenomena within the ceramic field that are used to being worked with, seen or perceived in certain ways, are subject to a number of underlying meanings. I am interested in the broad study in which many different areas are examined, and I illustrate particular points in a profession that is so broad. I look at how ceramics can be used as a form of representation to study something more general about our understanding of the surroundings, including a closer look at the strengths of a particular in-depth knowledge and experience one has as a ceramist.

For me there is something very special about our position as we, through our comprehensive training, get a working knowledge of everything from traditional objects, to design, architecture and material based sculpture and installation. This gives a reflection basis within a narrow discipline, which at the same time has roots in all parts of society. By relating conceptually to the specific history and traditions that have followed, I can touch different parts of the field at one time, and simultaneously refer in a contemporary manner to the field of ceramics.

In your solo exhibition at Copenhagen Ceramics, you tried to expose the fabrication errors of the pieces. What message did you want to convey?

For my solo show at Copenhagen Ceramics titled "Study of Monsters", I wanted to examine craft practice and production of everyday ceramic products. I set myself the task of challenging the concepts of the skilled craftsperson at work.

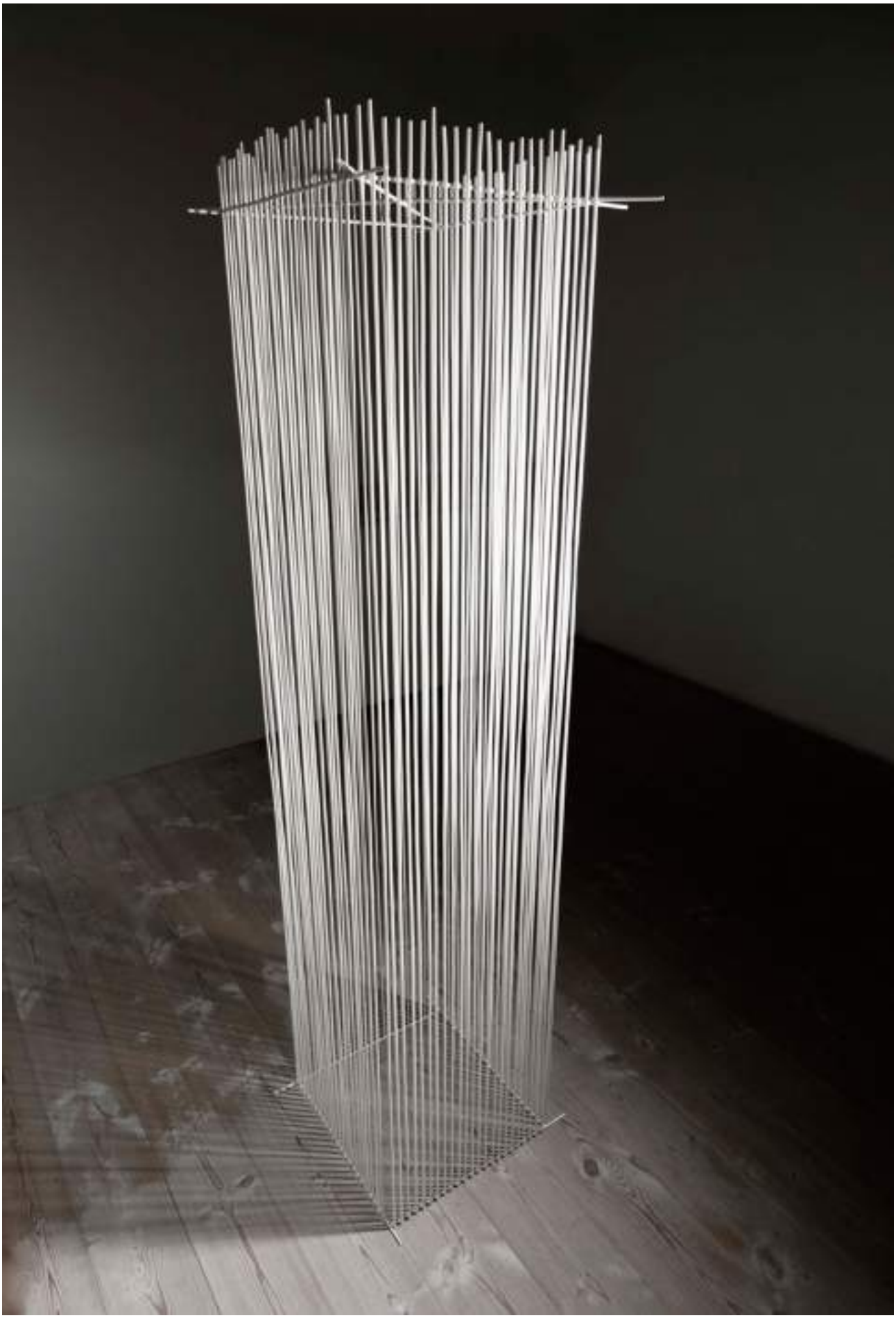
Modern ceramic production is pure, precise and uniform, and the skilled craftsperson is taught to eliminate mistakes and have complete control over the process. Then if an error in fabrication occurs, contradictions between the processed object and the rawness of the material itself appear in the final object.

It was these moments of failure I was working with. I began the production where the material or prototype has failed, or I chose to stop the production in various unfinished phases and let the inherent properties of the material take over. The objects in the exhibition became unique, unexpected results of experiments, a contemplation of the beauty of failure, but at the same time a tribute to the time and labor behind a production line.

Some of your installations explore the way we move in relation to objects. How do we change our behavior when surrounded by fragile things?

A good example of this is the project "State" I made for a solo show at Ann Linnemann's Gallery in Copenhagen. The project examined fragility from different angles through two objects. One was a tall structure made of thin porcelain sticks,

My ideas are always born out of anecdotes, frustrations one meets when working with ceramics, but also rituals and fixed rules about how things are supposed to be done within the ceramic practice.



State, 2012, Porcelain, 78.7 x 19.7 x 19.7 inches / 200 x 50 x 50 cm

Study of Monsters exhibition view, Copenhagen Ceramics, 2013. Photo by Jeppe Gudmundson.

and the other a ready-made clay pigeon. When people entered the gallery space, they stepped onto the wooden paneled floor, which resulted in a shiver from the porcelain structure. The awareness of the material and what was actually happening made people stop and hold their breath, and nobody dared to come closer than about one meter (roughly 40 inches) from the object, afraid that they might destroy it.

The ready-made clay pigeon, humble in shape and material, highlighted by being placed on a plate hanger, is made to be destroyed, made to be fragile and has to be quite porous to be able to break when shot at. In history, there are even stories about shooters complaining that the clay pigeons were fired too high, in order for the spectacle of destruction to happen.

When working on a new project, you contemplate the concept and often make small models. Tell us more about your work process.

My ideas are always born out of anecdotes, frustrations one meets when working with ceramics, but also rituals and fixed rules about how things are supposed to be done within the ceramic practice. I focus on one of the above specifics for a project and aim to illuminate it from different angles to create an exhibition. Which phenomenon I focus on depends on either the exhibition site or for instance a given theme. The objects and situations are then moved from their original context and are instead left as signs and representations, so form and context become the same.

When I make small models of the objects it is most often in relation to the placing of the objects in the specific space. The project "Arcade" was different because I played around with lots of single elements in order to create a whole. It consisted of nine industrial tiled objects, where I had taken tiled elements we see in everyday society and put them together to form new independent structures.

You believe that the material of ceramics evokes different emotions and associations depending on the context where it appears. What emotions do you think your ceramic works evoke for others?

Well, I hope to highlight our awareness of the way we both handle things to the way we move in relation to objects we are surrounded by every day. In some cases, the emotions that are evoked are abrupt and very physical, and in other projects of a more nerdy character I use texts or titles that can lead to a certain way of thought when viewing my work.

At the beginning of your career, you showed an interest in organic structures. When did your focus change and what is your preoccupation now?

Yes, it is true that my focus has changed a lot. I finished my BA in Ceramics in 2001, and from then until 2006 I made smaller abstract organic objects. I wanted these objects to have an industrial look, being perfectly slick, and often ending up resembling plastic more than ceramics. At the same time, it felt important to me that it was ceramics and that it was handmade.

This paradox made me question the foundation of my work more and more. Why was I working with ceramics, what was special about the material, which associations did it evoke, and where was I as a younger ceramist situated in ceramics history and tradition? With all these questions in my mind I went to take my MA at the Royal College of Art in London, and it was not until about two years after I finished this degree that I felt confident enough to focus on precisely these questions. So in some way you can say that my work is about trying to grasp what ceramics is as a phenomenon. This is, of course, a never-ending story.

Piled Prototype, 2013, Earthenware,
27.6 x 11.8 x 7.9 inches / 70 x 30 x 20 cm
Photo by Malle Madsen.

Fragile Bodies

Interview with **Erica Nickol**

Within Reach, 2011, Cone 10 porcelain slip, found objects, wire, steel, wood, 60 x 30 x 12 inches / 152 x 76 x 30 cm Photo by Ken Yanoviak.

I have always felt hyper aware of my emotions and what I perceived to be other people's emotions.

You find something particularly human in porcelain: "it can suggest the weight of corporality as effective as it captures the translucence of spiritual experience". When and how did you discover its capabilities?

Early in graduate school when I began experimenting with sculptural work, I was initially drawn to porcelain for its smooth elasticity that I hadn't experienced in the stoneware and red clays I had been using. It moved nicely in my hands. My first sculptures were very heavy, weighted items. I had very little formal clay training, so it was all trial and error.

I began to study porcelain artists who pushed the opposite end of porcelain's capabilities. They inspired me with very their thin and translucent work. At the time, I was immersed in the writings of James Hillman about the soul of the artist and Milan Kundera's The Unbearable Lightness of Being. Both explored ideas about contradictions of life, how our bodies can be heavy with burden, yet light with the insignificance of being one transitory soul in this great system. I began looking at the contrast between the fragile, translucent porcelain and the heavier weighted pieces I had been creating. I started to explore methods to get my clay to remain structurally intact while thin enough to let the light through. Porcelain slip allowed me to push this even further. I was fascinated by its ability to be both heavy and light, similar to the spiritual experience we have in life.

It all came together for me, however, as I began experimenting with firing. I learned from some very experienced colleagues that the porcelain clay body has this point in the kiln where it will begin to slump. If you manipulate how you place something in the kiln – by setting it up on stilts in precarious situations – you can take advantage of this property, and the porcelain seems to sag or stretch at just the right moment when the kiln reaches its highest temperature. As it cools, this movement is locked in place, and the gesture that I wanted to convey is amplified since it moved beyond where the clay could go prior to firing. This movement is very human, as though the material had a mobility of its own. This corporeality along with the spiritual connection between the heavy and light porcelain transformed the way I saw my work. This is why in my work the porcelain pieces are the body. They are the human element.

What emotional states do you express through visual representations of precariousness, fragility, and tension?

I like to watch people, and their physical reactions to situations they aren't even involved in. If a group of ballet dancers enter the room, everyone seems to sit a little taller, straighten out their backs, a

All it Contains, 2015, Porcelain, wood, nails, 18 x 12 x 7 inches / 46 x 30 x 18 cm. Photo by Joe Nickol.

subconscious reaction to feeling a little insecure in comparison to the perfected postures ballerinas have. If a stack of books sits wobbling on the edge of a table, a viewer will sit on the edge of their seat. They will jump with a start when the books hit the floor, as though they, themselves, were stressed by the pending fall. Our bodies manifest outwardly what we are feeling on the inside. Precarious situations make us nervous, edgy, and uncomfortable. Seeing something fragile may make us feel protective and cautious; or may leave us feeling free, unburdened and buoyant. When we experience tension in a personal relationship, we feel conflicted, tight, heavy with worry.

I think making art, and perhaps being a creative person, in general, can be very manic. Your emotions can waver between complete inspiration and ingenuity to a forlorn sense of being directionless. I have always felt hyper aware of my emotions and what I perceived to be other people's emotions. You can see in their physical demeanor that something is influencing them, but I think people are often unaware of it. We brush these feelings aside to carry on with our day. Putting my sculptures in these physical states is my way of giving significance to these daily emotions and the way we feel them in our bodies. It gives an object that we can pause over and reflect on.

Do you believe the viewers can experience the same tension and physical stress that you do?

This is my intent. But I think that it can differ based on what is going on with your life and your experiences. Many pieces mean different things to me at different times. Often, I am just making, and I don't quite know where it is coming from. Months or years down the road I can look at it and know that a big life change or emotional moment was occurring at the time of creation, and I'm almost embarrassed at how literal it seems to me. I enjoy hearing from people what my pieces bring up for them. Sometimes if someone I know quite well is drawn to a specific piece, I feel quite sure that I know exactly why, based on their personality or what is going on in their lives.

Through the firing process, you preserve and even amplify the human gesture your sculptures take on during their creation. How do you create a new piece? What techniques do you use?

I rarely have an idea of what a piece will be in its final state when I begin working on it. Sometimes it starts with a technique I want to use, or I just

Once the fabric-dipped piece begins to get tacky, you are done, the ability to work the material stops.

The Tie that Binds, 2014, Cone 6 porcelain slip, rope, found objects, steel, wood, 62 x 36 x 12 inches / 157 x 91 x 30 cm
Photo by Joe Nickol

Sometimes if someone I know quite well is drawn to a specific piece, I feel quite sure that I know exactly why, based on their personality or what is going on in their lives.

flow with what I am feeling. My three primary ways of working right now are through slip dipping fabrics and sculpting with them, hand building, or manipulation of slip cast pieces. When I slip dip fabric, I have to be in my creative flow to have any success. It's a pretty subconscious way of working. I have thoughts, feelings, sketches, inspiration of what is emotionally moving me at that moment, and I just create. When the fabric is thick with porcelain slip, it takes on a very skin-like, leathery feel. It's amazing to work with, although very hard. It is also very time-limited. Once the fabric-dipped piece begins to get tacky, you are done, the ability to work the material stops. You can add bits on or make small manipulations, but the big gestures have been set. This limitation inspires me. It reminds me to leave perfection out of it and go where it takes me.

I long ago let go the notion of waste. Many things I create in my studio never see the light of day and my way of working and firing produces much trial and error. However, even a failed attempt can lead to an idea that turns into a great studio success. After I have created many of these pieces, I do a big firing. The fabric pieces are actually at their most durable state when they are bone dry but are far too fragile when bisque fired to be moved, so I just fire everything once. When they come out, there is a period of contemplation in the studio where I try to discover what the porcelain parts – the body – need to be completed. Do I need multiples? Could I add additional parts to put it into a situation that tells me a story or expresses a physical or emotional state? Does it need to be re-fired on stilts in an attempt to manipulate its shape or gesture? This is where a lot of my found objects such as steel, wire and wood play a role. I use these to create an environment for the porcelain piece. My studio is always full of my porcelain pieces. Sometimes they sit dormant for years before they find their home in a finished piece.

There is a contradiction in your work between the precious porcelain and the metal or found objects that you use. What does this contrast reveal?

It started as just an aesthetic that I was drawn to because of my architectural background and the fact that I live in the rust belt, where cities are full of the beautiful detritus of their past mixed in with the new. I love that look, and I love that feel of the clean and dirty co-existing. It didn't take me long to discover that this contrast between the old, rusty, deteriorating elements with the precious, clean and often fragile porcelain provokes the tension that I am often trying to convey. The metal pieces particularly can be oppressive, yet the stark and intriguing porcelain is what draws you closer; it lifts right out of the sculpture. Manipulating the relationship between these parts allows me to decide what the feel of the piece is going to be. Who is dominating, the light, the beautiful? Or will the precious be suppressed, held back, held down by the environment around it?

Before completing your MFA in ceramics, you studied architecture and worked in that field for several years. When did you know what you have a passion for ceramics? What prompted the change?

I highly value my architectural education. The program had a strong art development component. We drew by hand, water colored, visited many museums and studied a year in Italy where I experienced art like I never had before. Upon returning from my year in Rome, I wanted more of that freeing kind of creativity that I was surrounded by there. Architecture is so specific; I decided on a whim to take an elective ceramics course and immediately fell in love with working in clay. I continued to do ceramics as independent studies when I had taken all the formal classes.
After school, I worked four years in urban design and architecture. Although I loved many aspects of it, I didn't find the practice of architecture as creative as its formal education and I began to feel a bit lost and unfulfilled. I think it was the lack of creating things with my own hands that I was missing. During a job change, I took a couple months where I worked only part time, and I spent the rest of my time at the Union Project ceramics co-op that made me incredibly fulfilled and happy. So I decided to take the leap and pursue my MFA. Mostly, I wanted a period where I could concentrate directly on my art and create a body of work. I had no idea how influential school would be in completely transforming my creative thought process and change the direction of my development as an artist. I am a pretty practical person, so it was a big risk for me to get a degree in a field that I knew was financially insecure, but I figured that the pay-off in my happiness and spiritual growth would be worth it. It certainly has been.

Did you have a mentor when you were growing up? How about in your development as an artist?

I've had so many people who have supported me along the way. Growing up my maternal grandmother, Dottie was a big influence on me. She was a very creative person and a pure lover of life. She designed and sewed her own clothes and taught us that if you could make things with your own hands, you would never be bored. My parents always did a god job of creating opportunities to pursue creative endeavors for my brother, sister and me. They found art classes and programs for us to be involved in outside of school, and I tried just about every type of art, dance, or theater class that was out there. I think that creativity can easily get stifled in youth, and I am so glad that was not the case in our family.

In graduate school at The University of the Arts in Philadelphia, I had some fantastic professors, Linda Cordell, and Sumi Maeshima, who pushed me to venture into working sculpturally. They had to work hard at this. I was insistent on continuing to make only functional ceramics. When they finally broke through to me, I found I really enjoyed the freedom of letting go of the need for art to function as anything aside from art. However, the biggest influence on my development as an artist has been my mentor Ed Eberle, an exceptionally talented porcelain artist whose studio is in Homestead, near Pittsburgh. He opened me up to new ways of thinking and introduced me to some reading that evolved my creative process. He also broke down the self-consciousness that was holding me back. He convinced me that just making things, and being true to myself in what I was making was the art, forget about everything and everyone else. Having this support and encouragement from someone I deeply respected and admired as an artist helped me to let go of the doubt that was holding me back. He openly shared his wealth of knowledge on technique, process, and technical skill. Ed continues to mentor me, long after my formal schooling has ended. For this, I am tremendously grateful.

Transient Existence

Interview with **Jamie Bates Slone**

I think that on some level my work has helped others. Many people have shared their experiences with me, with cancer, illness, and the loss of those they love. I have seen that by sharing these experiences with others, and lessening the burden on their heart, the communication creates a release, which can heal.

You recently developed a process to create forms made entirely of glaze. Why did you choose this material and when did you discover its peculiarities?

What was initially a runny glaze disaster, turned out to be the beginnings of the process I use today. Using glaze in this manner was the answer to my problems with the ceramic surface. Instead of applying the glaze to the surface of a ceramic form, the glaze became both the form and surface. I have tested at least 40 different glazes based on their chemical properties and have only found a few that work in the way I need them too. The glazes I use are fragile in appearance, which speaks to the fleeting, transient nature of life. I continue to learn about this process and have recently been introducing other glazes and forms into the mix.

Can you describe the technical process of glaze-casting?

The process of glaze casting comes from my experience with metal casting, slip casting, and glaze chemistry. I start by creating a mold, i.e. a mold of my hand. I usually use plaster bandage because it allows me to make a thin but sturdy mold. I then fill it with a glaze and sand mixture like I would fill it while slip casting, creating a thin layer on the inside. The glaze filled mold then goes into a ceramic cylinder filled with sand. It looks a lot like a mold would during investment casting with metal. This all goes into the kiln and is fired to temperature. When the work comes out of the kiln, the plaster mold breaks off easily due to the chemical water burning out. The result is a piece made entirely of glaze.

Your work deals with suffering and enduring in relation to cancer. Tell us why are you examining this theme.

My family's medical history has always been something that weighs heavily on me. I process the flooding of emotions and anxiety and interpret it into the base of my sculptural work. Earlier in my career I tried addressing these issues in my work and at that time I don't think I was emotionally ready. A few years later a close family member that had cancer that had been in remission for some time had found it had come back. It was then that I had decided it was time to approach that body of work again. Reading books like The Anatomy of

Pathogenesis 5, 2014, Earthenware, glaze, 9.5 x 7 x 8 inches / 24 x 20 x 20.5 cm

Phenotype XXII & XXX, 2014, Cast ceramic glaze, 3.5 x 6 x 3.5 inches / 9 x 15 x 9 cm.

Hope by Jerome Groopman and Autobiography of a Face by Lucy Grealy helped me to properly express these ideas. Making this work has helped me deal with the emotions and anxieties that stem from my history with illness and loss.

Does art have the capacity to heal?

I believe it does. My work has helped me deal with the passing of loved ones and other significant life events. I think that on some level my work has helped others. Many people have shared their experiences with me, with cancer, illness, and the loss of those they love. I have seen that by sharing these experiences with others, and lessening the burden on their heart, the communication creates a release, which can heal.

What role does pathogenesis play in the creation of your work?

Pathogenesis by definition is the development of morbid conditions of a disease. This definition translates in my work through the idea that fears and anxieties develop in the same manner as the disease itself.

There is a striking contrast between the coloring of your work and its meaning. Is this intentional? What significance do the colors have?

The color and texture is very intentional. They resemble those of colorized Scanning Electron Micrographs of cancerous tissues. The colors and textures in both the work and the micrographs are beautiful and repulsive at the same time.

In a 2012 exhibition, you proposed the term synchronistic memory. Can you define it?

This exhibition was in two galleries side by side, and the second gallery exhibited my good friend and fellow artist Gina Adams work. Our work is visually very different, but they both speak of memory in relation to loss. We were simultaneously honoring our pasts in the same exhibition space and felt it was the perfect mirror to the dialogue we shared about our work to each other for the two years prior.

Corporeal Metamorphoses

Interview with **Lucía Pizzani**

Capullo A7, 2013, Stoneware, glaze,
13.4 x 6.3 x 7.5 inches / 34 x 14 x 19 cm
Photo by Oscar Proktor.

Your work is a hybrid of sculpture, photography, drawing and performance that addresses different conditions of the body and suggests ideas of transformation and metamorphosis. When did you become interested in exploring the body and the self? What triggered this investigation?

Since my childhood, I have been close to the arts because both my parents are visual artists. I have participated in video art, performances and attended contemporary dance classes, all that along a permanent interest in photography, which was the first language I used in my early works and continued over the years. My subject migrated from outside to inside, I started with nature organisms and micro landscapes that with time were bodily ones.

The body became more and more necessary; it progressed until it was the subject of my Masters Degree research when I studied at the Chelsea College of Arts in London. From then I have explored self/body and nature looking for their intersections.

How do issues related to feminism intersect with biology?

When the interest in the body grew into an awareness of all the gender inequalities that are happening nowadays, I started working in a more research-based way. I started looking into specific historical moments that I encountered trough the media, tales or popular stories that had gender issues as a central theme.

Nature and art have always been very close. Nature has been the subject for art for a long time, as well as a source of inspiration for other disciplines and many inventions—nature is everywhere. Growing up in a tropical country with wild vegetation and an immense biodiversity it was both a pleasure and a sense of responsibility that made me a permanent collaborator of environmental projects for more than a decade. In that period, I studied conservation biology at Columbia University while living in NY.

In my process, organic shapes, patterns, and textures are all over the place, no matter the media I use. That is why I find so suited to my practice when I find stories where gender and biology are present and intertwined. Like the attack on the Kew Garden's orchids house by Suffragettes in a time when women were not allowed to have these flowers because of their "sexual" appearance. And curiously enough the name Orchids comes from the Greek word for testicle due to the tubercles of the plants! For this project, I developed a series of ceramic work, photography, and drawings

exploring the feminine and masculine formal aspect of the flowers to go along with archival materials of the Suffragettes attack.

The Worshipper of the Image exhibition, held last year at Beers Contemporary, took its title from Richard Le Gallienne's Victorian novel. How do you research your exhibitions?

When I take upon a subject, I try to go a deep as possible. I did my BA in visual communications at the University in Caracas; back there my career was a mix of photography and cinema studies with journalism. This has given me some tools for the methods of inquiry and in communicating ideas both in a visual and written manner.

It is common that one project leads me to another. For example, when I worked with the Inconnue de la Seine, this mask based on a girl that throw herself in the Seine around the late 1880s. I did a whole installation with video, monotypes and newspaper archives for the XII Premio Eugenio Mendoza, exhibition and award in Caracas. I went to Paris and walked in the places where she has been, and I bought the mask from the same house of moldings that made it. During my research, I encountered "The Worshipper of the Image", a novel written about the mask. I used it to develop a completely new project to be shown in the spaces of Sala Mendoza, the art center that hosted the Premio Mendoza that I won. This exhibition also traveled to London and was shown at Beers Contemporary in a revised version that incorporated new works.

To communicate effectively, you must be aware of the cultural difference of the audience you are presenting to. Is there a difference between the works you show in Venezuela and the ones you show in London or New York?

Contemporary art has become an international language. The internet, art fairs, biennales and the many touring exhibition that we encounter nowadays in museums worldwide bring artists and their work from one place to another constantly.

Caracas used to be one the most important art centers in Latin America. Its contemporary art museum holds a vast collection of European masters, including Picasso and Matisse, among others. There is a huge tradition of public art there. The Universidad Central de Venezuela is a UNESCO site due to its combination of architecture and art. It hosts a large number of works by international and local artists in its buildings.

The way I research and produce my projects is a multicultural one, with a mix of references from different historical moments in a variety of places where I have lived and visited. In this way, I create and exhibit, with no country customization, as most of the artists currently do.

You have an experimental approach to photography. Tell us about the techniques that you use.

I use different techniques depending on the project. Most of the time I work with a digital camera with which I have made. I print on cotton and photographic paper and have used aluminum as a surface as well. For The Worshipper of the Image, because I was working on a story from Victorian times I used collodion wet plates. These photos are made directly into a plate and were like the Polaroid of the times. It was perfect for doing a series of portraits for that exhibition.

When did you become interested in the medium of ceramics? How does it contribute you your oeuvre?

Capullo A7, 2013, Stoneware, glaze, 13.4 x 6.3 x 7.5 inches / 34 x 14 x 19 cm Photo by Oscar Proktor.

My experience with ceramics started at an early age. A good friend was the daughter and granddaughter of potters back in Caracas, and we got to play a lot with the material. Then, when doing my Masters Degree at the Chelsea College of Arts, I was fascinated by the possibilities in the ceramic department. I was doing very bodily photography and was more and more interested in sculpture, having produced a few installations with interesting results. I did my first series of ceramic pieces while studying there, in 2009. Since then I haven't stopped. After I had graduated, I joined the Morley College, a great place to explore and create.

I think ceramics has made my practice much more complete. There were things impossible to achieve or communicate in 2D, and the malleable, rich and ever changing nature of clay has open a lot of new aesthetic and conceptual possibilities to me. For each exhibition project I've had in these last years I produced a specific series of pieces in ceramics. It's curious to see how the interest in this medium has grown in the contemporary art world in recent years. In Venezuela, there is a tradition of collecting ceramics. My work has received a good welcome there having the chance to been incorporated in important collections, such as the Patricia Phelps de Cisneros Collection who acquired a group of my sculptures in a solo show I had in Caracas in 2011.

In the lasts years I have done a lot of research and experimentation with glazing in stoneware pieces, producing a series of organic sculptures inspired in the changing phases of a chrysalis that were shown in Caracas and London.

How do you think your work will evolve in the next period? What are you currently working on?

Creating and researching is constant in my practice. Now, I am showing my latest project called "A Garden for Beatrix" at the Cecilia Brunson Project Space in London. The project was inspired by Beatrix Potter and her findings on fungi at a time where women were not allowed to become serious scientific researchers. The decay and recycling that is made possible by the services of fungi in our planet are interpreted in a big mural of photographs with ceramic pieces on top, like a big collage that interconnects trough branches of paper and porcelain sculptures. That same decay also eats the faces of women in a series of old daguerreotypes that I use in a video piece of the show, mimicking what the society of the time made to its female citizens. Working again on gender issues I try to pay homage to the brave characters of our history that were, like me, inspired and touched by nature.

I find it suited to my practice when I find stories where gender and biology are present and intertwined.

Variations of Identity

Interview with **Kevin R. Kao**

There's a bizarre power in knowing that the thing I create today will have an existence that far exceeds my life.

Untitled (Mush), 2013, Ceramic, house paint, polyurethane, 24 x 21 x 16 inches / 61 x 53 x 41 cm.

You use suggestions and double meanings as a metaphor for personal and cultural identity. Why do you explore issues related to identity?

Art making is a personal experience—especially with ceramics. It literally conforms to my touch, which inherently contains my thoughts and ideas. I can translate my own experiences directly into the medium, which in turn becomes a mark of my existence. Because of the changing nature of identity, it allows me to document the things that I'm surrounded by, whether that's the blue onion plate that my grandmother had or the Lisa Frank calendar hanging in my studio.

What do you think about the fact that our individuality and identity is so dependent on the social environment?

I can't say if this is true with everyone, but I certainly act differently dependent on the people I'm with. Sometimes it's more reserved, and other times, not. In either instance though, I still maintain a sense of self that is wholly unique. Part of my interest in figuration is the fact that from a sculptural standpoint, you can only capture a moment – a slice – a bit of personality. Much of my figurative work is emotionally ambiguous, even vacant. It allows for the viewer to fill that social space and project their associations.

How had your studies in biology influenced your work?

I'm so glad you asked this! Well, my undergraduate studies were focused in ecology and biodiversity. I've always been interested in understanding how organisms come to look the way that they do. Why does the toucan have such a specific type of beak, and how does its diet affect it? What about its coloration? Does its tropical environment affect this? If you break it down, it's really a questioning of form, function, and the relationship in between. I'm influenced by this way of thinking—imagining how the body would function under imagined circumstances.

My latest work has been focused on theme and variation through part making with molds. I think of art making as a biological process, where parts combine to create organs, organisms and species. Variation becomes the crucial component in allowing life to occupy as many niches/environments as possible. Function, dictated by environment, yields form. I'm interested in creating many unique forms from the same parts as a way of showing diversity. More importantly, it's a metaphor for individuality, especially within the masses.

Many of the works that you make utilize humor and kitsch to turn aside cultural sensitivities and to allow us to build connections. How does humor change deep-rooted perceptions?

I think humor allows us to look at things that may be too controversial or complicated. It's a way of understanding otherwise complex ideas. From a making standpoint, if I can crack a visual joke that asks viewers to confront something that they're uncomfortable with, then I've succeeded. Asking viewers to question their own assumptions isn't

BUMFACK Co. installation and performance, 2014 (NCECA Conference, Milwaukee, WI), Mixed media, wood, unfired counterfeit ceramic objects, plaster, jumpsuits, acrylic, Dimensions variable.

an easy task, and I just don't think I would be very successful if I were to do it in a serious tone. It's too stuffy. Why not laugh about the things that make us question our beliefs? It certainly helps set up an honest approach to open the conversation.

You are interested in the perception of value and its relationship to history, production, and authorship. What impact do historical narratives have on our perception of value?

There's often an association between time and work in context to value. A 19th-century plate, regardless of how it's made, has gained a certain value through its sheer existence. It's been around for over 100 years! As obvious as it may be, this dumb plate is older than most people, and will likely outlive all of us. There's a bizarre power in knowing that the thing I create today will have an existence that far exceeds my life. Value is inherent through a preservation of a certain time frame. History can be documented and carried into the future through ceramics.

How does clay lose or gain value?

It's in a constant state of negotiating value dependent on its context. Clay, in its raw state, has virtually no value except for its potential to become anything. Its transformation from its lumpy amorphous beginnings is what determines its value. Time, workmanship, materials and methods are all variables that affect value, but it's always in a state of flux.

Tell us about your site-specific installations, which question both space and value.

Many of my site-specific installations are actually collaborative works, which allows me to share ideas in a way not otherwise possible. BUMFACK Co. is a collaborative project between me and fellow ceramic artist Xia Zhang. It assumes the facade of a Chinese ceramic production sweatshop that re-creates "famous" ceramic artists' work. We had the opportunity to present the project at the 2014 National Council on Education for the Ceramic Arts Conference in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Due to the nature of the conference, we felt that the project should directly question authorship, production and value through a specific ceramic lens.

Often times, there's an attraction to well-made, fired, "famous" objects. There's something undeniably attractive about Peter Voulkos' stacks and Ken Price's blobs. This project was a way to sarcastically present the complete opposite of that. Since we created unfired, "room-temperature" glazed counterfeit objects, we questioned the attributes of long-standing ceramic traditions. Certainly, an unfired, acrylic glazed, "Voulkos" vessel that's created by two Chinese-Americans is worth just as much as everything else he made! It's a Voulkos! He's legendary! Perhaps what was most telling about the project was how much people were unwilling to let go of the things they value most.

Clay, in its raw state, has virtually no value except for its potential to become anything.

Self-Presentations

Interview with **Magda Gluszek**

Party Boys, 2013, Stoneware, underglaze, glaze, paint, resin, elastic cord, candy, 12 x 13 x 10 inches / 31 x 33 x 38 cm.

In your figures, you use human and animal imagery to reveal the superficiality and animalistic impulses of humans. What triggers you to create them?

I'm continually fascinated by how people stage themselves. There are often many layers to the self-presentations that we create for each other. Our superficial dressings are captivating because they're easily consumable, like visual candy. Beneath that though, are a multitude of motivations for appearing a certain way. My interest in making art about these impulses is to examine our varying degrees of awareness of them. Some of my figures are illustrating the ideal of what they wish to present and others are revealing the disconnect between that desire and what the viewer actually sees.

Do you think that it is possible to renounce of our preoccupation for self-presentation? Isn't this a habit that makes us modern humans?

I don't think it's possible (or necessary) to renounce concerns with our self-presentation because, as humans, we are always looking at ourselves and each other. We've had evidence of this since the first cave paintings with human figures. It seems to be part of our nature. I'm interested in how this is changing. As modern humans, we have increasing access to methods of displaying very orchestrated versions of ourselves to each other. The phenomenon of social media has created a culture of "selfies," blogs and profile pages that encourage us to post continuous, carefully edited, accounts of our daily lives. This in turn influences our actions offline. Every action is evaluated as a possible post-able moment. If we do something and don't share it visually with others, is it really important? That's not a serious question that I ask myself, but I do find myself thinking more often than I'd like to admit about whether or not I'm documenting something that I'm currently doing.

Oh, Honey…, 2013, Stoneware, underglaze, underglaze pencil, resin, faux hair, paint, felt, 27 x 20 x 15 inches / 69 x 51 x 38 cm.

Small Pond, 2012, Stoneware, glaze, resin, fabric, ribbon, glitter, 13 x 19 x 15 inches / 33 x 48 x 38 cm

Where do you look for inspiration? Often, your characters seem to live in a world of their own. Or is this the world that we choose to ignore?

I'm influenced by things that shake up my typical or expected point of view. I love traveling because everything feels fresh. I'm more responsive to textures, colors, patterns and presentations (whether they feature people or objects) when I'm out of my familiar element. I try to record these influences in my sketchbook either through writing or drawing. Sometimes it takes a while for them to show up in a sculpture. I walk around with them. I spend a lot of time in my head when thinking about these ideas; that's probably why my figures seem to live in their own worlds. Many of their self-expressions are being performed in a specific mental state. Maybe we ignore these internal "worlds," or maybe they're just not accessible to us.

Each of your figures has an accessory that has the potential to cause physical and psychological damage. What is the role of these adornments and how do they affect the figures?

The accessories sometimes reference actual fashion items, but most often they are symbols for something else. Sometimes they are a visual representation for the reasons that a figure is trying to appear a certain way. Other times they represent a failure to present oneself in a socially acceptable manner. Sometimes they reflect the mental state of the figure, so they're more of an illustration of psychological distress.

You categorized your sculptural work into four series. Can you briefly describe them?

The different series more or less determine a shift in my physical location that also reflects a change in my studio work. The first two, "Animal Instinct" and "Sugarcoated" were both created during graduate school. "Animal Instinct" was my first investigation into the ideas of desire. The accessories in that group are more directly related to fashion items. "Sugarcoated" includes most of the work from my thesis exhibition. The figures are almost child-sized and exist within individualized tableaus. The color scheme is pretty muted and reflects a clear division between the figures themselves and the adornments that belong to an imaginary world. The "Indulgence" series was created during artist residencies in the southeast, after graduate school. I began to feel really free with incorporating color, texture, and mixed media into the work. Many of the accouterments became more abstract in both form and symbolism. In "Reflection" I have moved west to Arizona and changed to a new clay body, a white stoneware, as opposed to terracotta. The West has not affected my bright color scheme, but it has made me think differently about space and how our presentation is also related to our physical environment. I've also been working more with figures in pairs, both male, and female.

You sculpt maquettes that help you give the final figures dramatic, performative poses. Tell us why you use this technique.

I think I saw some images of Antonio Canova's clay maquettes while I was in grad school and fell in love. His studies are so raw and filled with a different kind of emotion than the finished marble sculptures. The maquette is like a warm-up for me. I sketch my ideas first. Sometimes those sketches sit around for a long time. They don't often turn into sculptures in the order in which they are drawn. Many times I'm not really sure what I think about them until they get translated into a three-dimensional form. The maquettes are a way of testing them out without a huge time commitment. They also help me plan scale, composition and proportion.

Keeping It Together, 2012, Stoneware, glaze, fabric, wire, ribbon, 15 x 15 x 15 inches / 38 x 38 x 38 cm

Unlocking the Memory of Clay

Interview with **Ken Mihara**

Kei (Mindscape), 2015, High-fired stoneware, 18.5 x 12.6 x 22 inches / 47 x 32 x 56 cm

It can be said about your work that it embraces significant change every three to four years. Where do you find the resources and ideas to create works similar in style, yet very different and exciting for the viewer?

I change with the passing of time, and because I change, my works must change as well. As the works are the expression of my inner self, they will always change, much like the turning of the seasons.

I have always felt that my work can evolve. The wish of seeing something different and new, the new possibilities, is what excites me. My works are like a diary—with each passing day my life changes and so is my work. I don't know where the fountain of my imagination comes from, but I do think the nature and environment that had surrounded me in my youth has greatly influenced me.

Your current series, titled Kei (Mindscapes), is characterized by movement and energy, with features like double-walled interiors that swirl and spiral. What sparked the creation of this series?

I wanted to find new vistas for expression, and my previous series did not allow me enough freedom. The ideas I had for this new series was the removal of the base, and the further removal of functionality and symmetry. I also wanted to express the quality of space that could not be seen.

Kei (Mindscape), 2014, High-fired stoneware, 14 x 13.2 x 18.3 inches / 35.5 x 33.5 x 46.5 cm

Kigen (Genesis), 2013, High-fired stoneware, 29.3 x 8 x 17.3 inches / 74.5 x 20.5 x 44 cm

Form is expression, and there is more to form than what can be seen with the eye. It must be felt in the space itself.

What are the benefits of using the hand-coiling technique over slab-building and wheel-throwing?

Hand-coiling allows for freedom of expression, whereas wheel-throwing or slab-building have formative restrictions.

Why does form by itself play such an important role in your work?

The form is the expression, and there is more to form than what can be seen with the eye. It must be felt in the space itself. Decorative elements such as colors and textures are secondary.

In Japan, everyone knows what a jar form is. Making forms that have never been seen before—this is what I wish to create. The essential qualities of clay are also revealed through form.

When and how did you recognize that the clay found by your house was a material you wanted to work with?

Many years ago, a typhoon swept through Izumo, and a landslide occurred behind my hill-side home. The clay was revealed, and I thought it could be used. It is a typical type of red clay that could have been found anywhere. I found this clay very early on in my career, and I currently use a type that is found about 30 minutes from my home in Izumo. Each clay has its own memory. By unlocking its memory through firing, one can reveal a myriad of colors.

You have experimented with different firing processes, and it took you many years to arrive at the current one. Can you detail the process that you're currently performing?

Quite simply, I first bisque-fire, and then pour silica slip on the surface and begin a main-firing that lasts 40 hours at 1270 °C. After this, I remove the silica and then fire again with a second main-firing of 40 hours at again 1270 °C. I use both reduction and oxidation firing to change the colours of each work.

There is a strong relationship in your work between unpredictability and control. To what degree do you control the firing process and where does chance intervene?

I fire without using data—only memory and experience help guide me, yet in many ways I can substantially control the memories in colour that I wish to express in my work. Of course, the element of chance is the final element that I cannot control, and it adds a final surprise to each work that I cannot predict. This is not only in regards to colour, but in regards to the final form of my work as well, as the works will move within the kiln.

In the last decade, your work entered many public collections and has captivated a global audience. How do you view the relationship between reward and demand? What do you find most rewarding at this job?

Kansha—when I can make the next work, is when it is most rewarding. In the very beginning of my career, I wished to make a living by ceramics, and I had to make works that sometimes I did not really want to make, but that I knew would sell to a Japanese audience, in particular with the element of functionality. Today, it is gratifying to know that I can create works that I truly want to create. I am grateful to everyone who has supported me throughout the years and allowed me to have this freedom in creating what I wish to make.

The collaboration between you and Yufuku Gallery just turned 18 years old. What are your thoughts about this? Can you recall the first exhibition held at their premises?

Meeting Yufuku Gallery was an important turning point for me, for it gave me a reason to discontinue my affiliation with important "craft" organizations in Japan. By exhibiting at Yufuku, it allowed me to not be swayed by winning competitions and receiving awards and helped me develop what I truly wanted to create.

My first exhibition at Yufuku was very special, but it was perhaps my exhibition in 2002 that helped me to become confident in expressing what I truly wanted to create. In this light, I am very grateful to Yufuku's support over the nearly 20 years in being represented by them.

‡ *Translated from the original Japanese by Wahei Aoyama. Special thanks to Yufuku Gallery for their support in the making of this interview.*

Kodoh (Pulse), 2013, High-fired stoneware,
15.9 x 13.2 x 12.8 inches / 40.5 x 33.5 x 32.5 cm

The Vessel as An Abstract Form

Interview with **Akihiro Maeta**

Through faceted vessel-like sculptural works made of white porcelain, you try to reveal the purity of the form. Can you fully express yourself without décor? Why is the form paramount to your practice?

The most effective technique for my creation is throwing. The attractiveness of ceramics is in well-rounded shapes made on the potter's wheel, and I believe I can express myself best through chamfering these pieces. If a work is made of white porcelain, people will mainly see its form. With very little pictures or colors, we naturally watch the shape itself. Making the form plain and simple, I think I can draw more attention to it.

You started making Hakuji when you were a student. Why did it appeal to you? When and how did you recognize that this technique was the one you wanted to pursue for the rest of your life?
Hakuji (white porcelain) looks, even without any colors nor patterns, magnificent as it is—nothing else is needed. This whole concept of Hakuji is what I am aiming at for.

To be more precise, the first time I had an opportunity to use porcelain clay was during my junior year at the University. I was interested in the material because it was so much different from earthenware, which I had already learned before. So I started to take every chance to appreciate the Chinese and Korean white porcelain. When I saw the Hakuji works made by Kenkichi Tomimoto, I felt like "this is it". His white porcelain work was very different from work made using industrial white porcelain or Chinese and Korean. His work was achieved in pursuit of a Japanese perspective, involving his artistic individuality as well as the history and culture of Japan. I felt it was very close to what I am looking for. I know this is one of the most challenging subjects, but I hope to continue to make Hakuji and express the beauty of simple forms.

How do you want the viewers to perceive your works, as abstract vessels or as abstract forms? How do you perceive them?

I consider that a vessel shaped on the wheel can be seen in essence as an abstract form. I am aiming to make the form as simple as possible. When illuminated with natural light, the work will show its shade and shadow. I believe that shade and shadow, which vary from hour to hour, make viewers use their imagination and become fascinated by the white porcelain.

At the University, I was taught by professors who make ceramic object wares (abstract sculptures made of ceramics), and it was quite interesting. But while I was struggling with exercises on the wheel, my motivation to make a good vessel became stronger than my interest in such objects. When I say "vessel," I am talking about other things than bowls, pots, vases, or any wares named depending on their intended use. A vessel itself, which is shaped on the wheel, which can contain fluid and which is called "vessel" in general, is an abstract form for me. Its expanding form has less freedom than what is called sculpture but has a different appeal for my creation. Through my expression, I hope to convey a simple and important thing (the feeling of warmth, grace, or openness) on a modest scale, like Haiku poems.

Your sculptural process is driven by sense. Do you intentionally give tactile qualities to your objects?

During my sculptural process, I freehand. I believe that if I commit myself to my body and soul and trust my eyes when making, I can draw strength from the work. The texture is crucial. I want to value not only how you feel when touching an object, but also how pleasant it is to your eyes.

What is your view on the relationship between traditional craft and contemporary art? Should they influence each other?

I think that traditional craft is nothing but art and modern creation that has been influenced by the history of Japanese craft. In Japan, traditional craft has the same level and quality as contemporary art. In other words, craft harmonically united with art but is an intrinsic Japanese thing.

Aren't you afraid of repeating the same form? Tell us about your work process.

I do make similar pieces repeatedly, but every time there are subtle differences in the size, swelling, thickness of rims, largeness or height of the foot.

A vessel itself, which is shaped on the wheel, which can contain fluid and which is called "vessel" in general, is an abstract form for me.

Faceted jar, 2013, White porcelain, 13 x 15.9 inches / 33.1 x 40.3 cm. Photo by Taku Saiki.

Faceted jar, 2012, White porcelain,
11.3 x 8.3 inches / 28.7 x 21.2 cm
Photo by Taku Saiki

I consider that a vessel shaped on the wheel can be seen in essence as an abstract form.

Through these representations and differences, I can express my creativity.

As for the production process, I do not make sketches but I visualize a backbone structure in my mind. While I don't see it in detail, I sketch and envision the elements and my feelings about the work, and then I start preparing the clay. Usually, I keep on throwing for one hour or so, but this operation determines the fate of each work. Metaphorically speaking, Sumo wrestlers, before the fight, take time in stamping their feet and tossing salt around a ring. Sometimes I change my mind in the middle of throwing when, for example, I find the porcelain clay harder than I want.

The firing temperature is usually 1280 degrees Celsius. If it's too high, the surface will be too shiny, and if it's too low, cracks will appear. The material I always use is Amakusa-toseki (porcelain stone mined in Amakusa District), and I make my own glaze. I strive to make my work perfect when throwing but in order to express both my character and the porcelain's individuality, I curve and shape the work's surface after it has dried for a couple of days. Shaping carefully by a rule of thumb will give the work an attractive fluctuation effect, which is impossible to obtain through the use of molding tools. I hope to leave no trace of making, yet to provide the warmth of a human hand.

I developed my style after many failures. For example, soon after my graduation, I had to use a kiln different from what I used at the University, and then for a while, every work fired in that kiln was unsuccessful.

In recent years, your work began to be exhibited and collected outside of Japan. Has this growing interest changed in any way the way you work and present yourself?

My way of working can not be changed by its valuation. Even so, being recognized both domestically and internationally, I feel the confidence to continue my creation.

In 2014, you had a two-person show with Nakashima Harumi at Gallery VOICE. The logical thing that connects your work is the material: porcelain, but this is not the only connection. Can you tell us more about this exhibition?

We held this exhibition together because we both participated as judge members on the 10th International Ceramics Festival MINO. After I had taken on the judge role, I was told that this show that introduced two Japanese ceramic artists from the jury was already scheduled. The reason they decided to do our show is because we both studied at the same university, use the same material, yet make entirely different works. We also attended the symposium at the gallery. I knew we have different opinions, but I thought that I should convey my thought.

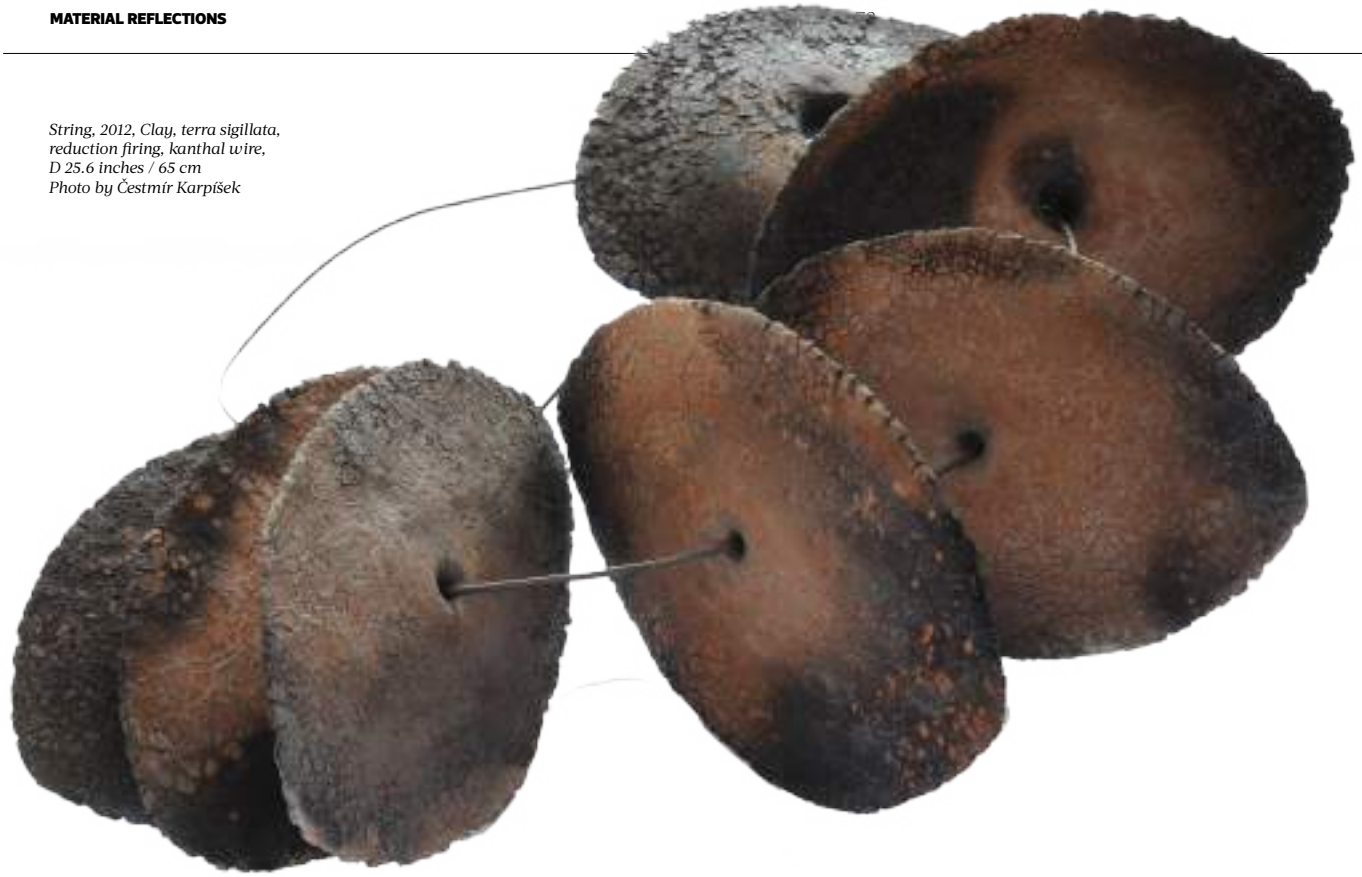
The exhibition had significance in showing our works to various people involved in the ceramic art world. Sculptural objects might have more freedom in size and might make a better show, but the form of the vessel is very intimate, and it will always be needed and appreciated. So I tried to show that vessels could express something more powerful than objects.

You have broad experience with judging ceramics competitions, the latest being the 10th International Ceramics Competition MINO. Your judgment was not made by nationality, size or form, as you selected only the works that show the potential of ceramics and the intense passion of the artist. What advice would you give to those who want to participate in the next edition?

Whether it is a vessel or an object, if you can't capitalize on the charm of the material, people can't feel attracted to it. Besides, by using a process peculiar to ceramic art, I think people feel that that a lot of time and energy has been put into the work. If you could transfer your thoughts into the work, I think the work can be good enough. But actually, I don't think telling advice in words is my job. If I continue to create influential works without giving up, I suppose I can convey something to you through my work.

‡ *Translated from the original Japanese by Nodoka Murayama. Special thanks to Gallery VOICE for their support in the making of this interview.*

Faceted covered vessels, 2012, White porcelain, 3.1 x 2.9 x 2.8 inches / 7.9 x 7.4 x 7.2 cm
Photo by Taku Saiki



String, 2012, Clay, terra sigillata, reduction firing, kanthal wire, D 25.6 inches / 65 cm
Photo by Čestmír Karpíšek

Ceramics Is Nothing More than the Art of Fire

Interview with **Jana Krejzová**

I'm an experimenter. Quite often, I'm not interested in the result, but rather in the process and the searching.

You said that your work "is characterized by the possibilities in its transformation". Can you explain this idea?

Thanks for asking. Rather than the possibilities of transformation, I would talk about a certain variability, fragility, and possibilities of re-action and re-formation. The transformation of my objects lies in the fact that they are a result of firing clay and fired clay is pottery. This fact alone carries within itself the traces of a deep inner transformation of the material.

Parts of my objects, composed of pieces of fired and unfired clay, are unfixed; they depend then on the actual situation, a space, a certain "randomness", which the object itself creates. It's a kind of interplay and game. I just kind of sketch it out and offer possibilities.

When did you recognize that it's your destiny to "revive the earth" and create ceramic art?

I do not have a fixed time, a point where I would have said, now... now I see it, but looking back I can see that ceramics and clay are the pivots around which everything in my life revolves. I have tried, and I do many things: I draw, I write, but I always seem to end up back at the clay. A friend of mine often says that life is about who you meet. And so, at the age of seven, when I was at the Primary Art School, I met my ceramics teacher, Květa Rafailová, who realised that I was able to see more, to feel and mould the material, and so she pointed me towards the study of ceramics. At the age of fifteen, when other girls were growing their fingernails long, I cut mine short to give my fingers more sensitivity and so I wouldn't have to scrub them clean every evening. Since then, I have never let them grow.

Structura, 2010, Clay, reduction firing, smoke fired, 11.8 x 9.8 x 7 inches / 30 x 25 x 18 cm
Photo by Čestmír Karpíšek

You approach the clay humbly, yet you test its boundaries and capabilities. What are the firing methods that you use the most, and why?

Yes, now we come to the point of that transformation—the firing process. When and why and how. Ceramics is nothing more than the art of fire. Whenever I'm about to fire any of my objects, I ask myself what I expect, what are my claims and why I'm going to do this or that. The contact with living fire is necessary for me; not that I never use the options of electric and gas kilns, but a living flame is a living flame.

What advantages and opportunities do you see in using the Raku technique?

I like to experiment, to try and then repeat, and I need to touch everything. That's exactly what the Raku technology allows me to do. To enter the process of firing and be a direct participant in the firing process is magnificent. If you want to learn something about the methods of firing, firing curves and the fire itself, then I would say that this technology seems like a very good way to do so.

How do you source the materials that you use and why do you choose to create your clays and glazes?

Like I said before, I'm an experimenter. Quite often, I'm not interested in the result, but rather in the process and the searching. Yes, I prepare the clay mixtures for my objects myself. I work with simple tools, nothing complicated—slips, engobe, terra sigillata, transparent glazes, oxides, sodium silicate. Or rather a combination of these and a method of working with the fire during the firing process. For this method of mine, the starting material is critical. Not all starting materials react well to live fire, and if you always start off with the same material, you will always get the same or similar result. But you only have to alter the basic formula a little bit and the result will also be altered.

Caring for the environment is one of your implied concerns. What do you do with the discarded remnants of your work?

I'm not a big environmentalist; I'm just normal... It is said that we are responsible for the things that we take upon ourselves. Around my studio, I have a bit of a garden and a little pond (it's called a heavenly pond because it is refilled only by rainwater). I sort my rubbish, and I have a compost pile in the garden. What do I do with the discarded remnants of my work? I try not to have too many of them :) and many of my objects are not too highly fired, so their half-life is only a few winters. The shards are then used to pack down my driveway, or I crush them and use them as fireclay in other objects.

You once spoke about the 'pain' that clay feels when fired and about its transformative ability to go past that. Do you believe that clay reacts in a different manner when handled by different people? Does it choose its master or the master chooses clay?

This is like the question "Do things happen to us or do we bring them about?" or "If two people do the same thing, is it really the same?" You know, it seems that it's only a question of perspective and the ability to expand your perceptions. The question is, to what extent are we able to see any connectedness and unity of things, not only earthly, everyday events, but those things that are beyond our physical touch?

For me personally, clay is a living material with its distinctive possibilities for transformation. But if we want to feel somehow and experience it, it is a good idea to go down to the river with a spade and dig up the clay yourself, strain out the stones, dry it and begin to shape it. And then prepare the wood, light up the kiln and fire it.

It's like the difference between buying a chicken leg in a supermarket or having to go to the yard, kill the chicken, pluck it and cook it. I trust that's not a too heavy comparison. But what is the difference between clay packed in vacuum foil and a chicken leg cut off from the rest of the chicken? What can we learn about the nature of that thing?

In 1994, you started teaching interactive ceramic workshops in your picturesque studio located in the village of Újezdec. Tell us about the studio's history and current activities.

The workshops started only later, in 2001, when I moved to Újezdec, a small village near Litomyšl, a picturesque town listed under UNESCO. In 1994, I returned from my studies in the UK and started teaching at the Primary Art School, where I had met my teacher years earlier. I taught not only ceramics, but also the basics of drawing, painting and graphics.

At that time, I also did training in art therapy and began to devote myself more and more to the practice of my yoga techniques and asanas. I had a small studio in town, but the space gradually ceased to meet the needs of my work. I also began to find myself surrounded by more and more people interested in ceramics, and I started to take on private students, many of whom were teachers and colleagues, as well as members of the general public. The purchase of an old farmhouse, with its traditional East Bohemian design, and the relocation of the studio to the village, was only the outcome of events that took place around me at that time.

I never had any intention to create a ceramic centre or community centre or anything like that. Studio Újezdec is still my private studio, where those interested in ceramics gather from the Czech Republic and abroad. My ceramics classes and interactive clay workshops are educational programmes accredited by the Ministry of Education, and I am their teacher.

One point of interest is our summer ceramic course for "hardcore" ceramics fans, already lasting for 17 years, where a group of participants head off to a camp in the woods. We dig and prepare our clay, build a kiln and fire our objects in the most primitive of conditions. It's ten days of intensive learning and experience.

We also organize ceramic exhibitions for my students as well as for professional ceramic artists. In 2016, together with the newly opened museum and gallery in Vysoké Mýto, we are planning an international ceramics symposium, that will mainly focus on the technique of firing with an open fire and the technique of Raku.

The question is, to what extent are we able to see any connectedness and unity of things, not only earthly, everyday events, but those things that are beyond our physical touch?

Assembling Ornaments to Create Compositions

Interview with **Beatriz Trepat**

Pichet, 2012, Earthenware, glaze,
11.4 x 7.9 inches / 29 x 20 cm
Photo by Thomas Deschamps

You create objects by accumulating tiny molded casts of suggestive elements like seeds, fruits, jewels, metalwork and various other things. When did you begin collecting these components and making objects out of them?

I began experimenting in 2004. I was looking for elements to add texture and enrich the work of the students. I tried stamps that I carved myself in clay in the first time, and after I began taking imprints just by pressing clay on details of the sculptures around the studio.

The pleasure of capturing and transcribing in clay was immediate. Clay is very plastic; it can bring back the tiniest details faithfully, and when bisqued it's stronger than plaster. It was clearly more interesting to reproduce the details and divert them from their sense creating a new composition, like a collage. In a different context, an insignificant detail becomes the center of the plot.

Why do you mix the ornaments together? Do you select them randomly?

I mix the elements to make a composition in the most classic sense. I choose dominants, contrasts and accents. The process of sticking the tiny molded casts together is slow, like needlework or embroidery. I follow a kind of narrative thread, even if most of the time it remains secret.

Is it for your work to be functional? How about the tactile qualities?

Although I'm often inspired by baroque or renaissance vessels, I'm not interested in the functional use of my works. It's the luxurious, colorful, apparently illogical narrative that I find fascinating. The abundance of plates, rich decorations, and sumptuous textures is the grand ceramic feast!

I particularly enjoy the strong contrast between glazed and unglazed surfaces; it provides a tactile feel that enhances a "wet and dry" quality. In any case, I do not recognize a limit between works of art and utilitarian objects.

Untitled, 2014, Earthenware, gold, engobes, glaze,
4.7 x 3.9 inches / 12 x 10 cm
Photo by Thomas Deschamps

Tell us about your work process. Do you work on several pieces simultaneously?

I usually work on several pieces at the same time, even though the nature of the material imposes its own pace. Technically, that allows the clay to harden and the engobe to dry enough before sticking the small elements. The result is that the pieces share the same spirit.

You created a series of skulls a few years ago. Please tell us their story.

The baroque mix of beauty and horror of the Vanitas and Memento mori proclaimed the seductive materiality of things and their inevitable ruin. It is an attractive opposition that I transcribed with brilliant colored skulls and accumulations of black flowers, hearts, etc. that from a certain point of view reminded of swarming insects. I made the first series of three skulls in 2011 to be part of a Mexican altar installation on "Dia de Los Muertos", which is a traditional and a rather happy commemoration of the beloved ancestors. The titles of the skulls "Amour, Gloire et Beauté" (Love, Glory and Beauty) made reference to a television soap opera.

How do you balance holding ceramic classes and creating?

Studio practices are balanced by life outside, and classes are a part of it. I like very much the working atmosphere of pleasure and attention. Teaching can be inspiring, and it's necessarily creative. Personally, I learn a lot by looking for technical and plastic solutions to questions I would have never thought of.

Students have different expectations, and a teacher's job is to be receptive to their requests and provide the means to succeed in their project. And thereby enable them to "become who they are".

How much has your artistic practice been influenced by the time spent in Argentina?

I studied at the School of Fine Arts in Rosario, with a specialization in engraving. There is an obvious connection in my love of minute details in antique engravings. As ceramics and glazes weren't part of the studies, I also took ceramic classes in local workshops. I did experiments with mixed clays, engobes and techniques like sgraffito at that time, which resulted in a series of small ceramics. This research still feeds my work. Shortly before I left, my teacher ceramicist Dante Alberro, organized my exhibition of these miniatures. This work is still relevant today, and I think it will be very evident in my work to come.

Vanité gloire, 2011, Earthenware, glaze,
7.9 x 7.9 inches / 20 x 20 cm
Photo by Thomas Deschamps

The Geometry of the Huerta

Interview with **Enric Mestre**

No title, 2003, Stoneware with calcined clay, decorated with engobe, 14.6 x 14.5 x 14.5 inches / 37 x 19 x 19 cm

Both reason and sensitivity are needed to enjoy my ceramic pieces.

You initially studied painting and worked as a graphic designer for several years. How did you become interested in exploring geometric abstractions through the medium of ceramics?

Now that I can look at my career with what you might call a panoramic view, I can see that from the very beginning form has been important to me. It is hardly surprising then that the painters who have most influenced my work are Cezanne, for his reason, Mondrian, for his accuracy and Rothko for his sensitivity and poetry in his use of color. Each of them has enriched my spirit and has helped me to create my ceramic forms with the simplicity of geometry.

Before working on a sculpture, you create dozens of sketches from which you select only one—the one that enables the maximum expression with the minimum of means. Do your sculptures faithfully reproduce the image and idea that you wished to make?

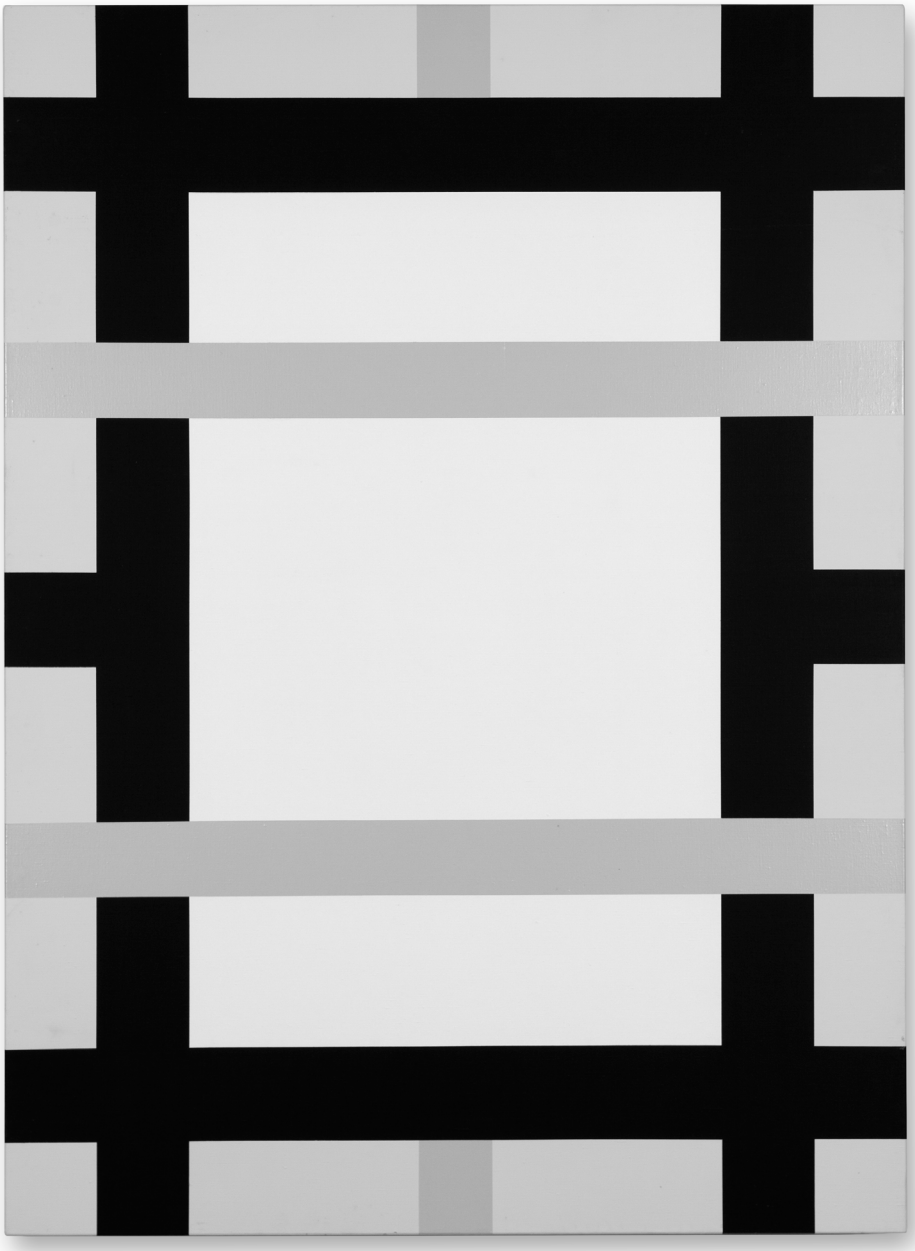
Working with a number of drawings allows me to save time and gives me the possibility to choose the one that best represents my idea—the one that has neither too much nor too little. When it is a complex form, I prepare a small clay model to see the piece accurately with volume. That said, accuracy is a difficult concept in ceramics as the kiln always has the last say.

How do you achieve the perfect contrast and complementarity between color, texture and shape?

A sketch is just a design for a piece and while physically making it you need to be open to any potential changes that that may seem necessary for your work.

Sometimes I know from the start what the texture and colour of the final piece will be. So I color all the paste to avoid covering it later with an engobe, as that usually results in a more superficial finish. This is also the moment to think about whether a change in texture on a part of the piece would enhance the aesthetic result being pursued.

I work in the same way with colour, trying to ensure that it benefits or highlights the volume of the piece and doesn't spoil it. Knowing a lot about glazes and engobes does not mean that a piece needs all of them. Austerity is usually beneficial in art. I work with the eternal premise that less is usually more.



The garden of silence, 1990, Acrylic on canvas,
38.4 x 51.4 inches / 97.5 x 130.5 cm

Painting and creating murals have always been part of your oeuvre, along with sculpting. Which one of these mediums do you find the most rewarding now?

Although I have never stopped painting, my ceramics are what have always attracted the most international attention. Ceramics is costly, even physically, which is why I have spent the last years focusing much more attention on painting.

Reason and logic, which dominate in your work, are notions that few ceramic artists embody. Do you believe that through mental analysis is the only way to transport us in the metaphysical world that you're creating?

Both reason and sensitivity are needed to enjoy my ceramic pieces. Work that lacks these qualities would have difficulties in speaking to the spectator, but the latter also needs to be prepared to understand the piece and see what it is trying to express.

What role do your feelings play in your work?

I try to make all the artistic factors; the form, the texture and the color an extension of my sensitivity for it to speak to people who feel as I do. I can't expect everyone to like my work.

Your sculptures provide shelter for space inside their volume and invite us through channels and openings that lead the light. Can they provide shelter and harbor for our thoughts, too?

Using channels of light to pass through the block is something that has been in my work since the first geometric pieces and something that I still work with. Openings are always intriguing and create fascination and mystery. I think the spectator should answer this question.

In the past 35 years, you made a decisive contribution to the training of many ceramists by teaching at the School of Applied Arts of Valencia. What is the most important lesson that artists should always remember?

If you were to ask each of my students, you would get different answers. I would say it was an almost personalized training.
A doctoral thesis has recently been written on teaching at my school, and students have been asked practically the same question you have asked me. The answers are always different, and each student has said what has most influenced their work: accuracy, integrity in your work, effort, analysis of the forms, teaching how to see, etc. Many of them are renowned ceramists.

What challenges will the medium of ceramics pose to the future generations?

Every new generation wants to and "has to" change everything that has been done before. Ceramics is the same as all the arts and is feeling the revolutionary impact of ideas and forms. In art, all kinds of materials and techniques can now be mixed, which causes a kind of chaos that is difficult to assimilate for an artist.

In the end, I would like to ask you something personal: Where do you find your faith?

My greatest references have always been the characteristic landscape of my hometown (the vegetable gardens of Alboraia), the rationalist architecture of the modern movement and ancient cultures such as Egypt and Mesopotamia.

No title, 1995, Stoneware with calcined clay, decorated with engobe, 29.3 x 13.8 x 11 inches / 74.5 x 35 x 28 cm.

Constant Discovery: Beating and Stretching Clay

Interview with **Ester Beck**

It became even more physical, and an interesting dialogue emerged: how much could I impact the clay and what limits does it set for me? How would this be expressed in the shapes that would result? I wanted more force, more drama, more sensuality, and more abstraction.

You create sculptures from heavy blocks of clay by beating and stretching it with your bare hands and some basic tools. Why did you choose to attack clay as a means of expression?

Did you see Japanese or Chinese potters centering big pieces of clay on the wheel? They beat the clay in beautifully rhythmic movements. The beating, among other ways, helps me stretch it when I have to face a heavy lump otherwise too difficult to "open up". It adds a means of obtaining a more spontaneous, dynamic result.

How do you know when to stop? Clay lets itself be stretched only to a point.

This is often the million dollar question for many makers, and that point is not always clear. In my case, I found that often I could stop forming the sculptural object at different points, and I would have an interesting sculptural result. But I am curious about that "limit", about those carved lines on the outside. I am watching them how they extend in different directions, sometimes ripping and collapsing. They allow me to go into unexpected territory by working from there and giving the form an additional twist, incorporating holes and rips. Since my way of working is very spontaneous and in one go, it is a process of constant discovery of judging the emerging shape from all sides. Sometimes I fail, go too far, don't like the result and will just rebuild the whole thing and start anew.

You began creating free-form sculptural work in the 2000's. Why did you free your work from the potter's wheel and stop using glaze?

My explorations on the wheel, which had been my sole medium for almost 20 years, went through a search of freeing and loosening the wheel-thrown shape. This led at one point of me challenging the very concept of a centered piece of clay as the starting point and working with square blocks of clay on the wheel. When those blocks eventually became too big and opening up their inside needed too much physical strength, I realized that I was sticking to the wheel out of inertia because of my love and faithfulness for it. It dawned on me that I could beat the block open, with my fists, and then thought of rubber hammers, wooden sticks and tools, anything that would accomplish the act. It was a big relief, and a means of a new kind of shaping, away from the forcefully round wheel-thrown centrifugal force. It also made the interplay of the deep outside carved lines with the stretching from inside so much more dynamic and exciting, giving me more space of decision-making in the shaping process.

Incorporating porcelain into stoneware bodies is a more recent development in your work. Do these materials work together? How do you choose their type and color?

For many years, as was true for the wheel, I saw glaze as a component of my work. I hadn't freed myself from this element that was so integral to my research in clay and to the effects I had always sought as a potter. As often, things happen by accident: I had different clays left over and recycled in my studio, and suddenly thought to see what would happen if I wedge them together and form shapes from these mixtures. A new awareness was born: that the clays themselves have so much "color" that I didn't need the glazes any more. It also left the lines in the pieces looking much sharper and more dramatic. Then I started working on controlling the mixture of two or more colors so that it wouldn't just be marbled but would actually create a design, lines. This was totally planned in the Black and Beyond series where the contrasting clay – porcelain or other colored stonewares – would become a sort of calligraphic line or vein meandering through the black clay body. The porcelain was especially attractive to me as a sort of "tour de force" of incorporating the total opposite in color and consistency into a groggy rough black clay, making it more dramatic and technically challenging as well.

What is the inspiration behind the Black and Beyond series?

In Black and Beyond, I also challenged myself, besides the aspect mentioned above, creating more massive and imposing objects. As a result, they've lost their association with the usefulness that might sometimes still have existed. It engaged my whole body in a different way with the clay. It became even more physical, and an interesting dialogue emerged: how much could I impact the clay and what limits does it set for me? How would this be expressed in the shapes that would result? I wanted more force, more drama, more sensuality, and more abstraction.

Untitled, 2012, Stoneware, oxidation firing, 17.7 x 15.7 inches / 45 x 40 cm. Photo by David Garb.

Considering that your sculptural objects go through processes of abstraction, why do you see yourself as a craftsperson?

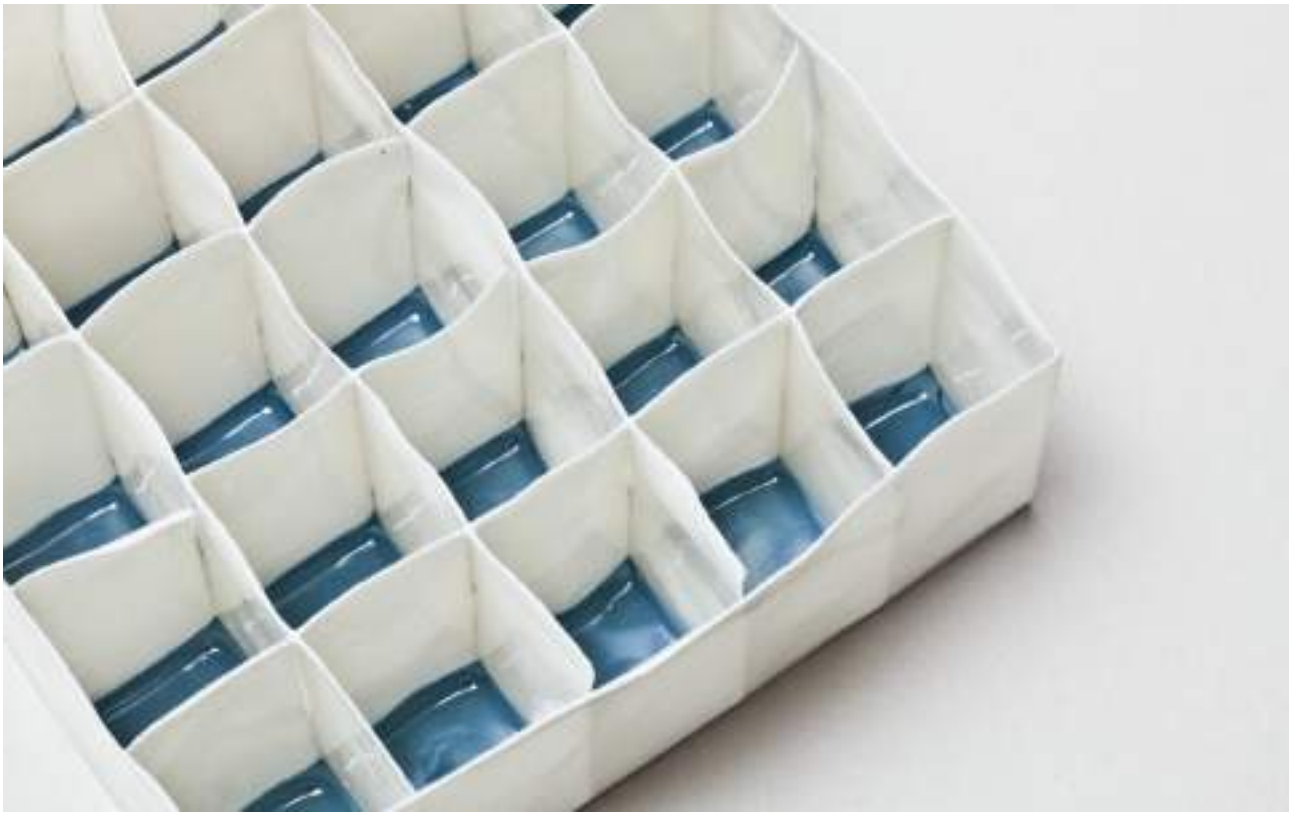
I still feel closest to the ethos of the Craft field, I have a very fond spot for this world, as I have for my chosen medium of clay. Maybe it suits my personality better since I feel it is so much less pretentious than Art. I love art and have always studied it, it is important to me and my training of esthetics and understanding of good and bad and limits and possibilities. But I don't feel that I want to assume the name of artist. Although lately, to become more in tune with a suiting definition of my current work, I am willing to call myself a "Ceramic Artist". Somehow, the mentioning the medium tones down the "artist" part, and it emphasizes the place I give to clay as an art medium – legitimate as any other – if it meets the esthetic and conceptually relevant standards.

Tell us about your work at the Benyamini Contemporary Ceramics Center, Tel Aviv, of which you're also an executive board member.

I have always been prone to volunteering, something that satisfies me deeply and seems to be in my nature of how I see the world. I was involved in the Israel Ceramics Association for many years, where I held different functions, till the Benyamini Contemporary Ceramics Center came into the scene. I was asked to be on the board from the beginning and am still there. My particular project was the establishment and running of the Ceramics Library in all its aspects. The project brought about the establishment of the Archive of Israeli Ceramics – again my responsibility – a project that didn't exist in any other Israeli institution. This was needed: to collect and archive everything that happened in Israel in the field of ceramic arts.

The Benyamini Center is a vibrant place open to the general public as well as artists of all kinds interested in ceramics. The center has two gallery spaces, a very active studio and school, an extensive library, the offices of the Israel Ceramics Association. It also runs many programs, lectures, demonstrations, seminars, and conferences. I feel privileged to be involved in this very successful venture that has created the much-desired discourse between ceramics, art and craft in Israel.

Untitled, 2012, Stoneware, oxidation firing, 17.7 x 15.7 inches / 45 x 40 cm
Photo by David Garb



Abandonment (detail), 2012, Porcelain, 2.4 x 7.7 x 7.7 inches / 6 x 19.5 x 19.5 cm Photo by Ole Akhøj.

Translucency and Imperfections Becoming the Object

Interview with **Heidi Hentze**

An interesting element found in your work is the intrinsically honeycomb structure, which appears to be fragile, but it is holding the pieces together. When did you start making these structures, and why?

I am captivated by the thin porcelain, and feel myself inspired to direct my traditionally thin walled vessel structures towards a more architectonic expression. In the fall of 2011, I achieved this by developing an internal wall matrix that enabled me to build on a larger scale. It also became possible for me to create subtle patterns within the internal wall structure of the form.

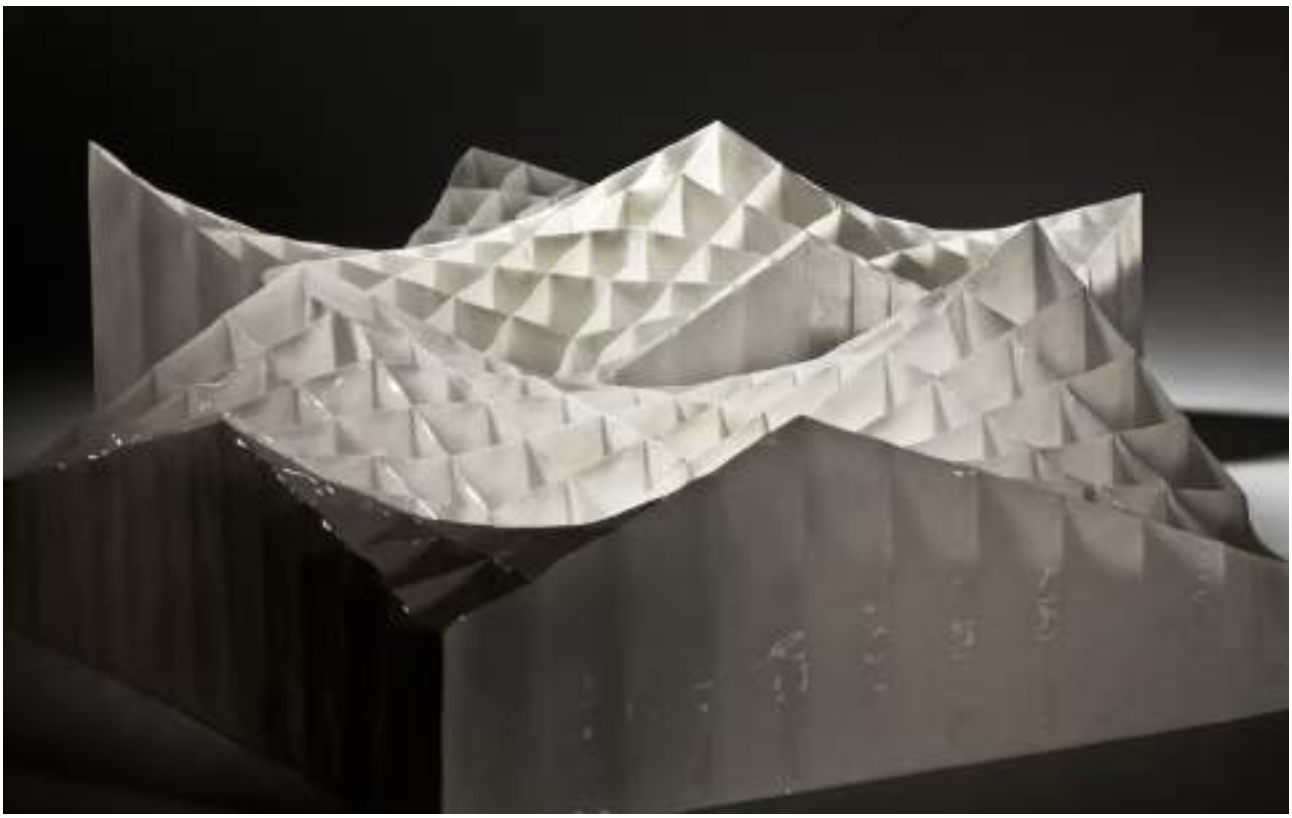
I have become fascinated with the inner shadows cast by the daily solar cycle on the translucent ceramic walls, and I started to observe the umbra and penumbra apparitions on the outer walls of the paper thin porcelain. This awareness of light and shadow has justified me to alter my vision of form via raising and lowering the intrinsical wall structures.

Can you describe the process involved in the making of thin porcelain walls?

First, I create a cardboard model structure by hand, using a pencil, ruler and knife; then I create all the sections with interlocking joints later to be dismantled and used as templates. My works are slab built. I create my clay sheets of porcelain and fiberglass. They are approximately 0,2-1,0 mm thick. After I cut the sections, I assemble the form with slip and a lot of patience, getting the construction as straight as possible.

What technical difficulties do you encounter when creating a piece?

The technical difficulties are part of the challenge. It is an ongoing process, always using empirical



Epicenter, 2012, Porcelain,
each 6.3 x 11.8 x 14.2 inches / 16 x 30 x 30 cm
Photo by Ole Akhøj

research to develop and push the technique and materials to their limits.

The fiberglass is a troublemaker—the shrinking of the clay versus the non-shrinking fiberglass during the drying phase. Other difficulties appear during the firing process: containment of the geometric shape, one dot of slip missing, walls bending, air bubbles in the clay that explode during the low glaze firing... you name it. Some of the problems I have solved, some of the shapes I have just given up with, and others I have ignored because of the impossibilities.

The translucency of porcelain allows the viewer to perceive the subtle imperfections of your objects. Are these intended imperfections?

I thrive for the translucency, and the subtle imperfections are a crucial part of the piece. In this strict order of geometric creation, they become the object. I work with imperfections that are given by the process and materials. I can not say that I intentionally plan all the imperfections, but I always use the given possibilities. Some of them become intended, as to when I have discovered an interesting structure, which I like to develop further.

The fiberglass gives a lot of technical challenges, but it also adds a texture I could never have achieved in the bare clay. I build the ceramic walls perfectly straight, but after the firing, I look at the objects and use the subtle imperfections making them part of the story and the title.

Some of your works have a matte surface while others are glazed and colored. How do you choose which one to glaze, and what is the significance of the colors?

The matte and glazed surfaces have developed with the shapes and new ideas. I have often decided on the surface after the first high firing, depending on the shape and material structure. I work with various ideas for coloring the objects. The glaze makes the material stronger. At first I worked with the vessel form and usually used glaze to emphasise the ceramic tradition, but this has changed. My work is high-fired and becomes dense in the first firing, and because it is thin, it is quite difficult to glaze afterwards. This process influences many of my later decisions and ideas.

A few works are transparent inside and colored outside, but mostly, I apply the oxide colors and then use a transparent glaze. The colors are often chosen by intuition, but they become significant for the way I think about the object, and about what comes next.

How do you view the relationship between aesthetics and functionality?

It is a recurrent subject that often comes to my mind. I appreciate the function and aesthetics of an object, but in my work I am more intrigued by the tension between the material, form and surface. The coloring has become a new interest. I do not know what comes next. I would like to develop the material further in the sense of strength and stability, but I am not interested in the direct function of my objects. I am constantly challenged by other ideas. What interests me more is how we perceive the piece in front of us, its story and how the piece reflects that idea that sometimes unconsciously I am thriving for. The case of aesthetics versus functionality is one of the ongoing questions that I ask myself, and I always find me working with existential questions more than aesthetic and functional qualities.

What interests me more is how we perceive the piece in front of us, its story and how the piece reflects that idea that sometimes unconsciously I am thriving for.

Meditative Lineations

Interview with **Masaru Nakada**

SEN (Line) Series, 2014, Porcelain, glaze, pigments, Dimensions variable

More exhausting is the mental toughness one needs to have the focus and determination to complete hundreds upon hundreds of lines.

You spend an excruciating amount of time etching thin, straight lines upon the surfaces of your works, using a metal needle. Then you spend even more time inlaying colored glazes into each etched line. How do you find the psychical resources to do this? What are you thinking at during the process?

The process is physically draining, in that one's hands and wrists can only etch a few lines per day. However, more exhausting is the mental toughness one needs to have the focus and determination to complete hundreds upon hundreds of lines for exhibition works. In a different light, the process is very meditative as well. I try and keep a tranquil state of serenity as I work in the still of the night.

For how long have you been creating these pure, geometrical forms? Tell us about the beginnings of your career as a ceramic artist.

I have always been interested in pure lines, but it is only with my debut with Yufuku that I focused predominantly on minimalistic, geometric forms.

I do not come from a family with a ceramic background. In elementary school, I took a class in pottery and found it very soothing. I jumped straight into technical college and trained from the very beginning in porcelain, especially as my home prefecture of Ishikawa is famous for Kutani porcelain. For this reason, I have worked predominantly in this material, yet used a variety of glazes, techniques, and forms that are very different from my current style. Kutani is known for its enamel overglaze, and this is what I learned in school.

Where did you look for inspiration back then? Do you find the same stimuli now?

It is hard to say what my inspiration was back then, as I was only creating what I was told to, rather than creating what I had wanted to create. Today, my inspiration comes from a wealth of things.

You create contemporary porcelain objects using traditional techniques such as zogan inlaying. Who did you learn this technique from and how much it took you to get accustomed to it?

This particular technique I had taught myself, and thus I have no teacher in this style. I began with it five years ago because, at the time, I wanted to decorate my porcelain with a technique that was not traditional to Kutani. It became an original style that I call my own.

Why do you choose not to bisque-fire your pieces?

Because there is no need to bisque-fire my works. As I slowly raise the temperature within my kiln during the main firing, my works will not crack, even without a bisque-firing. And, above all, I enjoy the colour, the crispness, the sharpness of my glaze when it is fired in one-go. If bisque-fired, I find that my glaze becomes less vivid and flatter.

In your solo exhibitions, you group the objects in order to create an installation-like ambience. Do you have a set of rules that you apply?

Not at all. The installation is quite a random process, and I just pair works that go well together.

Both functionality and aesthetics are ingrained in your work, but which one plays the dominant role?

Although my works retain functionality through the vessel form, I do not make them for the intent of being used for flowers, for example. Rather, the aesthetics of the vessel form is where I currently find beauty, and this is what I try and express through my porcelain objects.

‡ *Translated from the original Japanese by Wahei Aoyama. Special thanks to Yufuku Gallery for their support in the making of this interview.*

Empowering Glaze

Interview with **Lauren Mabry**

Curved Plane, 2013, Red earthenware, slips, glaze, 24 x 60 x 15 inches / 61 x 152 x 38 cm

I was becoming a potter who didn't care that much about making pottery.

You combine drops and pours with linear markings and swaths of color to create expressive abstractions. How did you discover the seductive and complex nature of glaze?

Glaze is simply alluring; it is lively and sumptuous. The way I use glaze now evolved out of my obsession with expressive experimentation combined with precise, in-depth glaze testing and firing. While I was in graduate school, glaze became the subject of my work and that's when my process shifted. Instead of using glaze as a treatment for a form, I began making compositions with it. I pay incredibly close attention to the way various glazes melt into each other, and I listen to how colors cause me to feel when observing the finished surfaces. Though I am highly intuitive, I am prolific and methodical, which enables me to take a lot of creative risks while I simultaneously work on the technical aspects of glaze formulation. I started seeing glaze as its own thing, and that opened me up to using it in a new way.

Why do you use round and cylindrical forms?

Making round forms was something I did automatically since I was trained as a functional potter from a young age, but the forms were utilitarian: curvy vases, cups, and bowls with bellowing volumes. When I began to indulge such active, bright glazes, I felt the need to work on a form that would recede and just become the canvas. I asked myself, "What form does this glaze need?" It was though the ritual process of making and thinking that I came to understand why the Cylinder with its vertical, straight walls, is so critical to my work. It is an elemental form; when viewed in profile the edge becomes a rectangular frame for the composition. Furthermore, there are infinite compositional viewpoints to the painting. The ellipse that opens the painting to the interior grabs the eye and pulls the viewer in, like the gravity that pulls the glaze cascading down the walls. The innate human impulse to look into open objects keeps me interested in painting the interior floor.

My other forms are variations on the Cylinder; some are open-ended pipe forms, and others are frontal, curved slabs. The surfaces and pallet evolve more quickly, but my forms make gradual shifts.

What variation is there between the interior and exterior of your works?

Sometimes the exterior and interior echo one another. The exterior usually tells its story, but there is often a compositional element that will pull the eye to the interior where I tend to place moments of rest or conclusion. In other cases it is quite the opposite; I may glaze the exterior of a form with a dark, watery, monochromatic scheme, yet the interior is bold, colorful and frenetic. The relationship between the interior and exterior varies from piece to piece.

The results of the firings are unpredictable, yet you can approximate how a surface will look in terms of color and movement. Do the outcomes of the firings always meet your expectations? What happens with the 'flawed' works?

I know the characteristics of the glazes very well, so in that sense: yes. I know how they will look, but I never paint the same composition twice, so there are always things that don't meet my expectations. Sometimes colors fight too much, or an area will be overrun with too much black. All these things happen in the process of traditional paintings, but since glazing is a "one shot deal" I have to make my decisions carefully as I apply the glaze. Relinquishing control to the firing process adds another layer of abstraction to my work.

In regard to otherwise cracked and broken forms, or spilling glazes: it is what makes ceramic an exciting, abstract medium. Materiality plays a significant role in my work, so rather than shying away from the matter, I tend to emphasize the capricious nature of ceramic. I think of those elements traditionally considered as flaws instead as opportunities that create marks, color, contrast, and evidence of my process.

Have you ever been interested in creating utilitarian objects?

Yes: I began making pottery when I was 14 and continuously made functional ceramics until I was halfway through graduate school. Since my introduction to clay was so early in my life, making pots was an ingrained habit. As a grad student, I struggled to ask myself what about ceramics was so important to me; it was just part of my life. When it came to understanding my authenticity as an artist, I came to the difficult realization that I didn't have much attachment to making functional objects. I was becoming a potter who didn't care that much about making pottery. While digging around for the importance in my work I began to understand glaze as my subject, and I realized I had to eliminate utility. Wheel-work and vessel traditions are still present in my work, but the significance has become obscured.

You said that your work "may be understood in relationship to Post-Minimalist and Process Art". What is it about these movements that interest you?

Post-minimalism and Process Art are movements that I relate to my work. Similarly to minimalist work, I use a lot of repetitive forms, and I focus on formal elements of composition. However, in stark contrast to Minimalism I work with an incredibly warm, expressive material; hence, my attraction to other artists that work in this mode. It is just in my nature to be drawn to work that evokes emotion through experience without necessarily talking a lot about identity, narrative, or other modes of expression.

Pipe Form, 2014, Red earthenware, slips, glaze, 11 x 22 x 22 inches / 28 x 56 x 56 cm

Ceramics is inherently based around a technical process. There is a somewhat linear, ritualized way of making ceramic and a general focus to control the medium and predict the outcome; however, I allow room for the process to become the subject. A good example of that would be the Spilling Pipe works. The glaze breaks beyond the frame of the object during the transformation and melting in the kiln, which calls attention to materiality and character of the glaze itself. Conceptually, the spill of glaze is evidence of the process but also a counterpoint in the composition of the sculpture, which stands as a formal entrance to the work.

Last year, you created very large works using industrial ceramic pipes produced by Mission Clay Products. Tell us about that experience.

I was invited to be a guest artist at Mission Clay Products located in Phoenix, Arizona; it's one of the world's only and largest remaining industrial ceramic pipe factories. The manager of the program, Bryan Vansell, became aware of my work and asked me to participate in the project, which he describes as an "arts and industry collaboration". On a routine basis, the factory extrudes and fires massive cylindrical clay pipes that are traditionally used as water and sewer lines in cities. The program allowed me to utilize the factory facilities to make my work on a scale that I had only fantasized about in the past.

Since the Cylinder is a familiar form, it was a smooth transition into the work once I arrived in Phoenix. The scale of the pipes was very large: measuring up to 6' tall and 3' wide, weighing close to 2,000 lbs each. The sheer size of them was so exhilarating; it freed me up to paint easily without overthinking the differences in process. The factory clay body and firing method is dramatically different than my own, so I had to adapt to a new set of glazes and color pallet. The privilege of working in an industrial environment brings a new set of challenges, but also inspiration for large, public installation work and outdoor sculpture. I'll be returning to Mission Clay Products in the future on an ongoing basis.

When I began to indulge such active, bright glazes, I felt the need to work on a form that would recede and just become the canvas. I asked myself, "What form does this glaze need?"

New Aesthetics Influenced by the Culture of Consumption

Interview with **Karin Karinson**

A Medium Size Pile Of Objects, 2014, Readymades, porcelain, stoneware, earthenware, glass, glaze, 23.6 x 23.6 x 43.3 inches / 60 x 60 x 110 cm

Clay, readymades, glass, glaze and dust are all mixed to form your sculptures. Why do you combine these materials and how do you select them?

I build sculptures of hard objects, readymades that are given to me by friends or bought at flea markets. My interest lies within the mass produced, and highly consumed items, where the aesthetic expression is often perceived tasteless, and the material value is low. As a child, I appreciated knick-knacks, and I loved all things pink, shiny and glittery. These treasures led me into a dreamland where everything could happen, and the boundaries were set only by my imagination. This somewhat shamefaced enthusiasm for mass produced objects is still a great passion of mine. Although these objects have no practical function, we choose to include them in our homes and lives for various reasons—deeply emotional or just decorative. I am attracted to readymades for how they portray scenes from a life far removed from my own, a romantic view of life. Their anonymity makes it possible for me to fill them with a new purpose of my choosing. I fill them with dreams, longings, lust and desire.

I aim to create new aesthetics by combining dream filled materials. My work is influenced by a culture of consumption. I combine industrially produced readymade objects with handmade elements, abstract shapes and real objects into amorphous sculptures glazed in various colors. I want to form different aspects of our lives that appear and disappear at different angles or perspectives. My work is never complete, it's always in change. It is a constantly changing intellectual process and a manic play with the material.

You started to make objects in the late 2000's, having previously worked as a sociologist. What sparked your interest in art and, in particular, in ceramic art?

For as long as I can remember I've built things, made drawings, paintings and collecting objects. Being a creative child, I also found psychology and sociology a passion of mine early in life. Reading books in the subjects, trying to find answers of who we are and how we became who we are. The

Brick A Brack Said the Lamb to the Boy (detail), 2011,
Readymades, porcelain, stoneware, earthenware, glass, glaze,
9.8 x 3.9 x 15.7 inches / 25 x 10 x 40 cm

passion for art was always there but growing up in a right winged society were education and a good job where more important factors than art I aimed for a career in sociology.

After some tragic events in my personal life, I lost the very essential trust in society, and my belief system crashed. It took some time to rebuild who I am but now I am an artist. I think deep down in my heart I've always been an artist as I also continue to be a sociologist. For me, it is the same. When I choose to work with ceramic materials, I do it for its physicality, its constant ability to change, its beauty, rawness and contradiction. Ceramics gives me a mental and physical wrestling match that connects deeply to my inner core.

Tell us about how you create the sculptures and what technical difficulties you encounter.

My process starts out with an observation in the surroundings of my life. For example, during visits to the recycle station I noticed a constant stream of people throwing away piles of nice and functional things—everything from building material, furniture, refrigerators and cell phones. Rolf is the name of a man working at the recycle station. I asked Rolf what he thought about this. He said; "Couples meet and start a home and family together. They feel a need to set their character to the home they bought together, so they start to throw out everything that is old in the house. Kitchen cabinets, tiles and wallpaper are all replaced with something new and fresh. When there is nothing more to replace, the couple split up and start a new family and buy a new home to remodel." It made me wonder.

I also collect objects. I constantly seek and collect lots of things. Collecting is an action of mixed emotions—wonderful but at the same time disgusting. Some of the materials I use are found. I find materials in the streets—such as bricks, dust and glass. A couple of years ago I cleaned out some clay that had been in my studio for too long. I tossed it away in my parent's garden compost and forgot all about it. Years later my father comes up to me with this lump of clay in his hand. "Do you want this piece of clay I found it in the compost? I didn't think this kind of clay existed here in this

Sea Foam Desire Left In Tide, 2011, Readymades, porcelain, stoneware, earthenware, glass, glaze, 7.9 x 7.9 x 7.9 inches / 20 x 20 x 20 cm

part of Sweden. I thought it was mainly found in the southern part of Sweden. Maybe you can use it in one of your sculptures?" It was a beautiful lump of clay all covered in brown/black soil and inside there were a grey and white core. It had transformed into something new and exciting—just as my artwork transform objects into new shapes. This lump later played an important part in an exhibition of mine.

To empower my work, I think of a title while building my sculptures. I sculpt with hard objects inside a prebuilt mold. This requires focus and intensity. Then I fire the kiln, so the materials melt together. When the temperature cools down, I break open the mold. Now I repeat the process and do so until I'm pleased with the piece. Some technical difficulties can appear in limitations of the laws of physics such as the size of the kiln and weight of the material.

How does the decorative purpose of an object change after it goes through your recontextualization process?

My sculptures embody the symbolic, aesthetic and cultural values that the objects in themselves possess, but by transferring these objects to alternative contexts I create contradictions and challenge the normative view. I want to raise issues that revolve around tradition. What happens when we move away from these traditions? And what happens in the encounter between the spectator and the object when the object doesn't look as expected? The ceramic material is charged with particular feelings, standards, and values, which have a significant influence on my work. I take the liberty to enhance and overthrow set conceptions. By using readymades in my sculptures, I make use of these preconceptions and enhance the feelings I have for the objects. My strategies are disturbing, and I want to destabilize our thinking pattern.

You believe that the system that requires continuously increased consumption is cracking, and this is visible through our psychological and emotional displacement. How did you become concerned with the changes in our consumption habits?

By being human.

As humans, we tend to collect more objects as we grow older and, as societies, we tend to "consume" more objects as we progress. Why do you think that we live off and through material things?

Consumption has a greater implication than just being products simply changing hands. A process has begun, where the consumer adapts the object by infusing meaning and symbolism by placing it in an environment that complements or enhances an already existing scene. The consumer re-

This Was Not A Sneak Attack, 2012, Readymades, porcelain, stoneware, earthenware, glass, glaze, 18.1 x 13.8 x 14.6 inches / 46 x 35 x 37 cm

contextualizes the object, i.e. creating new meaning by placing it in a new environment. Human beings actively construct, organize, regulate and change the world through consumption. Objects can, for example, create a symbolic presence of absent family members and past lives. Environmental psychology states that the individual mentally and emotionally incorporates the home and its objects, developing identification between them and the ego—an act that encompasses both aspects of security and self-fulfilment. In the relationship between humans and their environment, there is an ongoing interaction where the environment is affected by human needs and values while in turn the environment affects humans by giving stimulus, safety and comfort.

We develop close relationships with objects because they offer us stimulus, familiarity, safety, and comfort. What is the difference between how we connect to mass-produced items and how we connect to objets d'art?

Mass produced objects raise strong feelings of recognition, bringing associations, narratives and notions of time and existence. Many of these objects have been kept around us for generations, things we have encountered in different scenarios and contexts. Objects are not static but exist in a constant shift through time, trends, settings and people. The difference is also in the question of taste.

I am attracted to readymades for how they portray scenes from a life far removed from my own, a romantic view of life. Their anonymity makes it possible for me to fill them with a new purpose of my choosing. I fill them with dreams, longings, lust and desire.

Artificial Manipulation

Interview with **Lung-Chieh Lin**

Serialized Organism I, 2012 (Honorable mention at Talente 2012, 64th International Handwerksmesse, Munich), Stoneware, Iron, 41.7 x 29.5 x 18.9 inches / 106 x 75 x 48 cm

Visual experience dominates the way we interact with our surroundings.

You said that digital media has infiltrated our lives and altered our sensory experiences. Do you believe that the evolution of digital technology has diminished the quality of our lives, or it has improved the way in which we experience things?

I think two different situations exist in mind and body. While connecting to the digital media, my mind is more like floating on "The Information Ocean". I get things fast, there is no boundary, the world being open to everyone as well. But, in fact, the body lacks something real, such as flavor, move, sweating or sound. Visual experience dominates the way we interact with our surroundings. Our original bodily system of sense is changing, it is full of visual stimuli and less physical touch. I can't say it is good or bad to us, we just go with the flow.

Why did we allow and empower the online to become the principal method of exchanging information?

I believe that it comes from the primitive desire of human beings to communicate. We all want to know what happens around the world and also like to let other people know about ourselves. When the internet became a powerful platform for exchanging information, it became natural.

There is a constant battle in your work between the organic and the artificial, where the artificial manipulation incessantly creeps into the systems of living organisms. When did you start to explore this subject, and what is the reason?

I began to think this about this issue in 2009 when I found that these two symbols frequently appear in my work. I considered that the social standards and the traditional culture's customs were both frames for our growth and evolution. I am wondering what will we become without these artificial frames that provide our purpose? Do we follow these rules spontaneously or are we forced to do it? Then I imagined pictures of organisms growing up with an artificial structure, and I continue to make this kind of works, expanding the idea of frames. To be more precise, the media objects we use are also parts of artificial things that influence our organic body sense. In my thoughts, my life exists in an artificial and natural space. The relationship between me and the surroundings is

Plankton Sea, 2013, Porcelain, iron,
118 x 59 x 17.7 inches / 300 x 150 x 45 cm

full of possibilities, such as symbiosis, resistance, fusion or conflict.

Why do you think that most people dislike or are afraid of insects and other small organisms? Do your creature-like objects exhibit those fears?

It is not my purpose to create these fears. I am not sure whether people like insects or not. The reason I choose these small organisms to be my work's images is because I liked to study and observe them during my childhood. They played an important role for my emotional memory. My works represent my sensory experience, so the insect form is a kind of attachment for me.

An interesting feature found in your structures is the plug receptacle. What is its role?

In a living being, there are many devices that operate with a plug. I directly use the functional symbol and insert it into my works. The object that combines the machine with the organism has a chaotic form, is an unknown creature that sits between reality and imagination.

Last year, you exhibited a suspended installation titled The Plankton Sea. Tell us more about it.

I created four types of small organisms using a casting method. Three organisms constituted a creature-structure, a sort of unit. In the end, I set up these units on an irregular iron net that was suspended from the ceiling. The Plankton Sea is like an experiment to me; the entire production process is more meaningful than the result. By this way, the organisms form a module that generates a cluster of beings. I ask myself what happened to me that I found myself living in an environment full of information?

What is your opinion on artificial intelligence—will it be superior to human intelligence?

I believe that AI will become real in the future. As a functional device, it will be superior to human intelligence. But I think it is still a mechanism, not a living intelligence. Knowledge and information could be systematized to advance our life, science or technology. However, the mystery of being is the fundamental reason we are here.

The Deconstruction of Flowers

Interview with **Siang-Syuan Zeng**

I believe that flowers convey a powerful message and speak about the interaction between art and people.

Why did you choose flowers as the main subject of your artistic research?

Flowers have made a bridge between people and nature since ancient times. Tradition says that they can tell us about the meaning of someone's life, so I believe that they convey a powerful message and speak about the interaction between art and people.

Through deconstruction, grouping and replicating, you aim to reproduce flower structures in a contemporary way. What do you want to transmit through your work?

Flowers have always been measured in units and elements. The linear arrangement highlights the response that I have to industrialized information technology—this can also be seen in the works made of tubular units. The floating balls represent the pollen in the air and the expansion of the population, and the extending phototropism of the cone represents the desire of outward contact and the compulsion of germination.

My creative works express environmental worries. The sharp but hollow tubular flowers show that IT is real, but also virtual (and non-natural). The structures can stimulate the viewer to feel important endogenous and environmental signals. I want to transmit the viewers the perception of interaction.

Why do you use such vibrant colors?

I think that the significance of flowers as a link between arts and people is triggered by interaction. The deconstruction of flowers represents the visual dominance that IT has in this era. Colors symbolize the youthful vigor of my generation, but their brightness is also a hidden warning.

How does technology change our relation with nature? Why should we explore the connection that we have with our natural environment?

The expansion of the construction sector and overall urban developments will increase because of our consumerist desires are endless. There are more and more buildings in the city, but fewer parks and trees, yet the urban population is growing exponentially. The effects are severe. The green is disappearing, but we call this economic prosperity. I often wonder if it is right.

You graduated from the National Taiwan University of Arts in 2013. In relation to your work, what was the most challenging moment that you went through since graduation?

The biggest problem that I am facing is between the valuation judgment of the tangible and intangible. The tangible value refers to the actual price of the work, but the work itself has an intangible value because it includes the creative process as well as the innovative concept that it offers. Artistically, I am challenged by the design process, and I am trying to find that perfect balance between practicality and art.

In 2012, you founded the Siang-syuan Crafts & Design Art Studio, where you work mainly with young artists to create original objects. How and why did you start this venture?

The Studio is a creative space for the younger generation, but it also provides an opportunity for artists to sell their work and buy time for their artistic creation. We receive a lot of encouragement when we sell something or when people participate in our activities. It gives us strength and inspires us to be even more creative.

Pollen receptor, 2014, Ceramic, glaze,
13.8 x 13.8 x 13.8 inches / 35 x 35 x 35 cm

Black Holes: Life and Death, 2012, Red clay, sesame, brick, 11.8 x 15.7 x 13.8 inches / 30 x 40 x 35 cm

Digital Creation

Interview with **Ufuk Tolga Savaş**

In the end, there is the artist, his or her thought, and there are the materials to express that thought.

You use traditional and familiar forms in your quest to explore "the practical universe". How would you define this universe?

The universe is the reality in which we live in. It is big, very big. No one knows where it starts or where it ends. The information about it is very limited. The observable universe is only 4% of the total. We observed it for just a few thousand years while the universe has nearly 13 million earth years. The measurements of it are beyond our comprehension. The distance between galaxies are thousands of light years. We can't imagine its distances or sizes. A part of it is accessible to us, and this is the practical universe—in which the human civilization can develop. But there is another universe – the micro universe – that includes atoms, quarks, photons. This area is also not comprehensible by human senses. And last, there is a virtual universe that was created by computers.

Questions about time, space and emotions arise in your work while some of your series allude to the confined spaces that we live in. Why do you explore these themes?

I have questions for myself. But these questions are also for other people: "why do we exist?" or "what is the necessity of human beings in the universe?". In other words, I am looking for an answer to the ultimate question: "the answer to life, the universe, and everything". And the answer is not simply "42", as Douglas Adams referred. I also know that I could not find an answer to this question, but the quest for this question gives me inspiration to work and shape clay, and it opens new paths to expressions. That's why I like to use this theme.

Some of your works make use of seeds. What do they symbolize?

Seeds are, in a way, the origin of life. They are tough, they can survive so long. They have the

Home, 2007, Red clay, 3.5 x 3.1 inches / 9 x 8 cm.

potential of transmitting life to other places. I use them on my wheel thrown forms. These forms are somehow capsules that carry life to other places. In a way, they represent the question of "how life came to Earth". I also used seeds in my Black Hole series, to express how life exists at a very close distance from the destruction of a black hole.

Has drawing always been a central element in your art?

Drawing is important, but I rarely draw the first design of my ceramics. Usually, I built up my ceramics directly. The drawing that I make is a genre of painting. In other words, I draw or paint for other artistic purposes, not to design ceramics.

Personal access to technology became a dominant part of society about 10 to 15 years ago. How has technology influenced the way you work?

Technology is an important part of human life. It starts with driving a car, watching TV or using the internet to design something through computers. It can be said that technology is dominant in human life. The artist is also a human being like anyone else. So the artists' life is affected by technology too.

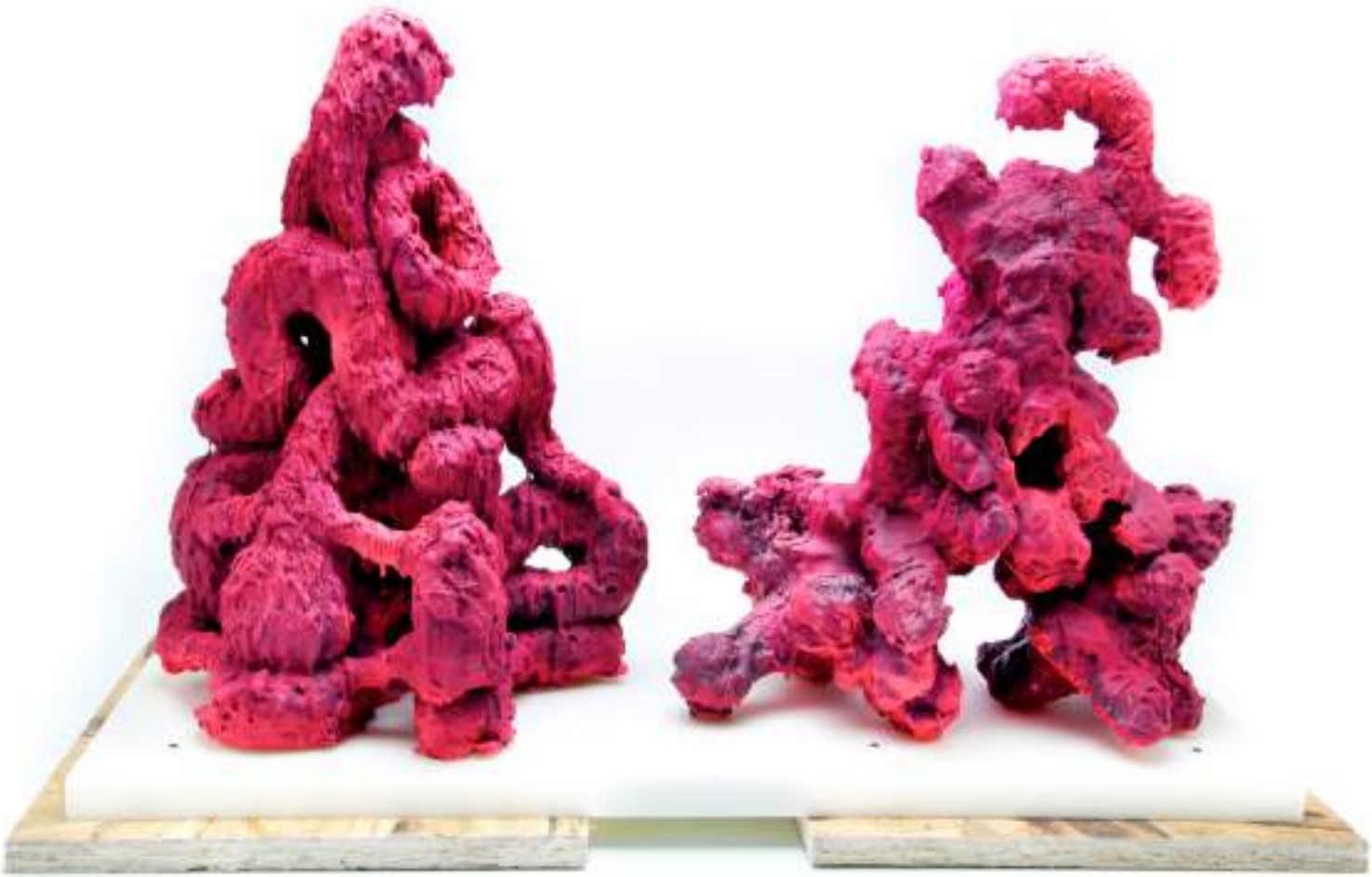
The effect of technology on me and my art is mostly based on influencing and digital creation through computers. Influencing for me is to follow art websites like behance.net and see new possibilities of expression, but digital production is much more interesting. I like to draw with computers, but not to just draw with a digital pen on a digital paper. I shape different expressions through software like AutoCAD, 3ds Max, Photoshop, Illustrator; they have unique ways and languages of expression. It can be said that drawing for me is important not for designing ceramics, but for exploring new ways of expression.

What advantages do you see in designing ceramic objects with the help of computer programs?

I design my works through a computer—that's true, but not with a desktop or a laptop; it's a shoulder top computer—my brain. After I design it, I make it. By making it, I have new experiences. After this new experience, I sit in front of my computer and design alternative experiences. That's how I use a computer to create. It a has lot of advantages. The things I draw with a computer can be called "virtual art things".

You investigated the phenomena of installation art in Turkish ceramics. Do you believe that this media will get acknowledged and capitalized upon in the next years? If yes, why?

Installation in ceramics is a natural phenomenon, and of course it will be more used and capitalized. The reason is exemplified by contemporary art, by finding ways of expression through new means. The way in which artists express themselves through the medium of installation is fascinating. So why do ceramic artists stay away from its possibilities? In the end, there is the artist, his or her thought, and there are the materials to express that thought. That's how art works.



Assemblage 65, 2014, Ceramic, rubber, wood, acrylic, hardware, 33 x 15.5 x 19 inches / 84 x 39 x 48 cm.

Finding Beauty within Conditions of Disorder

Interview with **Andrew Casto**

You are investigating and analyzing to what degree stress and responsibilities shape us physically, mentally and emotionally. How do you translate the findings of this investigation into your work?

Everything I do seeks to find beauty and purpose within natural conditions of disorder. On a personal, narrative level, this work attempts to reinterpret negative forces of stress and emotional weight as tools for refinement and purification. When translated visually, the work attempts to reflect these interpersonal forces on a macrocosmic level through the language of geologic erosion. I borrow design elements and strategies from rock, ice, coral, and other natural formations and hope to draw formal parallels within this methodology. I build pieces from handbuilt, slip-cast, and mixed media parts. These parts are coated in a thick layer of porcelain casting slip. The mixed media parts burn away in the firing. It's kind of like working with Greek Yogurt.

You believe that what we perceive as an inconvenience or annoyance in our daily routine might illuminate the power of the present moment. Can you further explain this concept?

It's a way of saying that what is often most real are our hardships, and that these things put us in touch with presence and who we are in a way not much else does. I want the work to be a formal depiction of this.

I'm no better than anyone at seeing the good in bad situations, but I do believe that personal and artistic growth happen as we fumble through the struggles of life. It is my hope that this work speaks to the grit and grime of our trials and tribulations, and to the beauty found in wading through the muck of life. There is a nod to positivity and perseverance in clay's amazing ability to slump, crack, drip, and cling, and somehow still survive.

The structures that you create seem to be formed through some geological process. What techniques do you use and how do you combine the materials?

I embrace a practice that favors the reduction of a recognizable form (which often begin as slip cast, handbuilt, or burnable objects that are joined with casting slip) into nuclei of sorts. A practice that integrates these nuclei into disparate and dynamic assemblages, without preconceived notions of the results of the process (as much as I can help it). Everything is completely coated in a cone six porcellaneous casting slip. The slip I use is formulated to be extremely thick and viscous and, as a result, it keeps a good record of the movement that occurs from interaction with gravity... much the same way a cliffside or lava flow might be geologically "frozen" in a state of change.

Do colors play an important role in your work?

Yes! I love bright, bold colors, but also the interaction of color with the translucency of the white glaze I use. I'm happiest when a combination of color from mixed media additions interacts with subtle muted colors peeking out from the forms in ways that highlight and further illuminate the contours and changes within the forms I make. I want the color to help your eye see things you might otherwise look past (if that makes sense).

What significance does the gold luster have?

I think of the work as being resolved in the application of gold luster because it creates a tangible link to the iconography of gold as a standard for purity throughout history. It suggests that these moments of near collapse can signify the great worth and opportunity they possess. It's a way of highlighting the preciousness that the making of this work holds for me.

You sometimes appropriate the discarded remnants of others' work into your own, creating objects that are entwined with the sentiments of those around you. Did this ever lead to a collaborative project (or do you envision one)?

Sure - I think of all of it as collaborative - although maybe not in the way that people usually collaborate. I believe that truly original ideas and moments are complicated and hard to find in post-modernity. And so much of what we experience is by nature collaborative, nuanced, and full of influence from sources upon sources, upon even further sources. When I work in the studio, I think it's disingenuous not to acknowledge where I am, who's around me, and what I've seen because all of those things factor into what I make. The more I've explored this idea over the years, the more right it seemed to just openly use parts of other people's work (I do try to get permission first). I like that it's an open dialogue that acknowledges what's going on around me and lets it play a central role in the work. It also forces me to make decisions in new and fresh ways, and that can be helpful for variation in the work.

I do have plans for a collaborative exhibition this fall with my colleague in Ceramics at Kansas State University, Amy Santoferraro. We haven't started working yet, so I'm not sure yet what type of collaboration will occur, but I'm looking forward to experimenting in this way.

When I first saw your works, I felt the need to touch and even taste them. Why do they have these palpable qualities?

People often say that—I get comments and comparisons to desert items, frosting, sausage casings, and many other edible and non-edible substances, some of which are probably best unmentioned. I think we generally see things as related to experiences we have, and I suppose that white, translucent, seemingly liquid things just look like desert to people? Who knows. People often want to touch them too—which is fine with me. I think both impulses are responses to visual stimuli that seek to understand further what the viewer is observing... and I like that the work provokes that response in people.

Assemblage 61, 2014, Ceramic, luster, rubber, multiple firings, 12 x 10 x 15 inches / 30 x 25 x 38 cm

Exploring the Beauty of Decay

Interview with **Wilma Bosland**

Sleeping Beauty, 2013, Temporary installation

Starting to work on new series doesn't begin with a definite plan or a theme, but with a kind of restlessness, an absolute need to do something.

Clay is not only a media of expression, but the primary subject of your work. What triggered your interest for the materiality of clay?

Funny enough, being born on one of the Dutch islands – a landscape of clay, color, and texture – has triggered my interest for this material. However, I started to be aware of that, once I had left that landscape. Maybe I took it for granted?

Later, after studying art, I started throwing on the wheel and fell in love with the colour of French grès. I remember throwing an object and enjoying its deep shade of dark grey, almost black, but totally losing its gloss after drying and even more disappointing after firing. Since then I am always looking for ways to finish my work to look like freshly made. But I also like the possibilities of transformation, dust to dust, ashes to ashes. Could clay act as a metaphor for life?

You stretch the plasticity of clay as far as possible, causing its failure[1]. Has the clay ever failed you? Does it have the capacity to fail?

I think clay never fails, it reacts to my actions, to what I do with it. I surely do not always adore what happens with it. A kind of association has to flow from it, and that depends on my moods, states of mind, etc. In fact, it's a kind of dialogue with the clay on the wheel and later on the table or ground. I push the clay to its limits, but I also react when it starts moving. You could call that failure, but here is where the adventure begins. And, of course, sometimes you go too far, and you are left with a pile of formless mud. "There is a crack in everything. That's how the light gets in." said Leonard Cohen in one if his songs that I like.

In some of your series, you explored the beauty of decay and the concept of ageing bodies. Why is the passing of time a recurring theme in your work?

I don't know; it could be that my work acts like a diary. Starting to work on new series doesn't begin

Me, Myself, I, 2013 (Galerie De Witte Voet, Amsterdam)

The making of Pieta, 2010 (Trans/formation, Landesmuseum fur Kunst und Kulturgeschichte Schloss Gottorf, Schlesswig)

with a definite plan or a theme, but with a kind of restlessness, an absolute need to do something. What else is life other than a representation of the passing of time? I see this as a metaphor in my work with clay. Also, being 58, your children grow up, your parents die, your capabilities diminish. It brings you to the strong awareness that life is not forever. That is not something to be sad of, on the contrary, for that you only have to read "Tous les hommes sont mortels" by Simone de Beauvoir. Having read that early on in my life, I was kind of relieved and that feeling just stayed with me.

The association of birth and death, beginning and ending has always been present in your practice. Tell us about your work's life cycle.

In the temporary installations, I think that it is possible to act in the cycle of life. My work always starts with throwing on the wheel. I like the process of wedging, throwing and deforming the clay. Wedging is the moment I choose to empty my head and focus my thoughts on my work and maybe come up with some vague idea about what I will do. I like to throw my pieces because it is the only way for me to have the whole clay object in the same state of plasticity. It also allows me to create an object with a strong tension and give it tactile qualities.

The thrown shapes have a strong bodily sensation. I don't know for sure if that is what it is or if I consciously work on that. I like the traces of my fingers in the clay so much that I am not even able to throw a smooth surface. Before the whole process starts, the choice of material that I will work with has been made. Maybe that could be the most important consideration: Till now I preferred to work with heavy groggy clay that has a rough texture since I like to work on life-sized pieces. At the moment, I prefer to work with porcelain because it allows me to control the size and the skin of my works, but also for the atmosphere of the pieces. What I like in porcelain, besides being delicate and light, is that it looks almost the same in a wet or a fired state. It also looks good in its pure state, without glaze. It is a totally new material to master.

I have several series of works that deal with the idea of birth and death. In 2000, I created a series called Hanged, but I think the first strong work that spoke about this was Bodies, or u(nidentified) p(ersons) from 1994. The inspiration came from the Rwandan genocide—the bodies of Tutsis' floating in a river. A terrible, shameful part of history, but to my astonishment these images gave me a very disturbing sensation of beauty, which I still cannot explain. This leaded to a series of cocoon-like floating objects. They resembled dead, hollow body, but also the egg from which new life can start. This was my first awareness that the most terrible events could create ultimate beauty, but this is not a popular statement I think. It sounds like abracadabra but since then, this is what I am searching for in my work, to show both life and death in the same object. I showed this installation after a few years in Villa Eksternest, Roeselare, where one of the biggest front lines in World War I is located. This morning, the same kind of awareness came to me because of a picture on Facebook that showed the bodies around an immigrant boat that came from Africa and sank off the coast of Sicily.

There was a body of work titled Pieta, from 2006, which began after I saw the German movie "Das Leben der Anderen" by Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck. There is a moment in this movie when the Stasi officer loses his girlfriend. This made me think of the classical Pieta subject, as being at the same time a moment of denial and acceptance or awareness of loss. The Pieta series and performances were held at Schloss Gottorf in Germany.

Once fired, the ceramic material has the quality of being eternal. In your opinion, is this an essential feature?

I already said that firing is not my thing, or better to say that I like my works most at the moment I recognize them as finished. Maybe one day I will have to bear the consequence of this thought and only to work on that. I think it is a radical move, and still I do not dare to take it entirely. When a work is temporary, you don't have to carry it or store it, or to hammer it—which brings me to another of your question. When I start to work on a new piece, I clean up my studio, store the things that I still like, and leave in sight the works that I would maybe like to go on. I also live in the city and work in a relatively small studio. Maybe porcelain is the solution. But no, making my work eternal is not my goal. I don't even like to write too much about it because when it's printed it could become real. I am always afraid to pin myself to something. When I say now that porcelain will be my material, I will have to and will be less free during my working process... On the other side, it would be nice to integrate the firing into the work as a part of it and not as a necessarily evil.

Why do you want to withdraw from making figurative representations?

Withdrawing from figurative representation is not a conscious act. For me, the material already offers powerful expressions. I mostly don't feel the need to create figures, but I don't refuse them when they "happen" during the process. In the series with the heads from around 2012, I made portraits from inside thrown shapes, pushing the clay from inside while looking at my image in the mirror. In this period, I also made lots of pictures of my mother, just before and just after she died. I didn't look at them while working, in fact, I never looked at them one time after that, but one of these sculptures for me appeared to be my dying mother...

How does your creative process start when it comes to making new works?

Good question. I have always said that I think with my hands and that there isn't a definite plan or theme before starting a new work.

A series called Dresses originated from a shape that made me think "look, it looks like a dress", and the next thought was "I don't like dresses". Which was true, I never wore them. However, it was the start of a fruitful series that made me wear dresses with pleasure the first time in my life, and it made me a follower of haute couture as an art form and historical subject.

At this moment, I don't make it easy for myself. I started to throw with porcelain, and that technically means that I'm back to zero. But, the interesting thing is also that it brings entirely different associations. It is a very smooth and pure material; it's more life than death. Working with porcelain will result in a new body of work, and maybe new themes. Porcelain is soft like a human body, it curls like textiles when wet, and it cracks when it dries. I decided not to fight the material, but to use it. I like the fact that it's fresh after the firing. So, new world, new perspectives, time for new surprises. It feels hopeful and frustrating at the same time, but that is just what I like about it.

Your collaboration with Galerie De Witte Voet began more than 20 years ago. Do you remember how it started?

During my studies at the Academy, we visited lots of galleries during lessons in art critique with Hans Sizoo as a teacher. I liked Annemie Boissevain's Galerie De Witte Voet from the start, being the place where I saw what I wanted to make. When I finished my art studies in 1990, I was pregnant, and I had the feeling that I should not be busy with only that. I was also very sure that I wasn't going to fulfill the prediction of my ceramics teacher who said that people who get pregnant would not be able to work for another ten years. I just thought that I want it all, and I want it now...

I walked around with my portfolio and showed it to several gallery owners, but they were not too enthusiastic, and I thought what I want is to show my work at the Witte Voet. I went there, got accepted with open arms, and they still exhibit my work on a regular basis. I don't know why it was a yes on her behalf because I did what a gallery owner hates: stepped into the gallery with my pictures and see what happens. To be honest, I didn't make my best work in that period, maybe only ten years later. But it feels like being part of a family. And it should be said—I don't know a gallery that is so true and dedicated to its artists, even when the work doesn't sell. Last year we celebrated the gallery's 40th anniversary, and all the artist were there and they were happy hearing Annemie telling that she would like to go on for another five years. She is filling a niche, and, on the other hand, this is her goal in life, she one of the artists and my mother in art.

I push the clay to its limits, but I also react when it starts moving. You could call that failure, but here is where the adventure begins.

1 Orly Nezer, "The Despicable and the Other", in Ceramics: Art & Perception, Issue 85, 2011, pp. 95-99

Revealing Inner Truths

Interview with **Harumi Nakashima**

Central to your artistic creation is the clay itself. Why is the basis of production more important than the result? Do you believe that your role is to give life to the clay?

I take a slightly different view of the material and my creation. The clay, which is a deformable material and which can be biomorphic, is the most efficient means of my expression. If you compare the importance, I should say, finished works are more important than the clay itself.

I don't think that my role is to give life to the material, and I don't think the works come to life when completed. Rather, I feel that a part of me shifts to the work as if it is my alter ego. I think a man seeks for something to risk his life, searching for an outlet for his desire. I think that using clay, such a complex response could be elicited, revealing an unknown aspect of myself.

You create organic shapes where the visible surfaces glide inside, and the inner comes outside. How many years did it take you to perfect this hand-building technique and control the porcelain?

I am not controlling the porcelain, yet. This is the reason I keep on creating ceramic works. Sometimes I try to make it exactly as intended; sometimes the clay even affects myself. If you could fully control the clay, there wouldn't be any dramatic experiences nor thrills. That's what makes it all the more exciting, and my quest for creation is continuing.

In the early 90's you stopped creating cone-shaped forms. Do you consider that moment to be a turning point in your artistic creation?

That's right. I consider that moment to be one of going back to the origins after being lost for a time, but not necessarily a turning point.

The works that you make are extensively exhibited in Japan and throughout the world, which also means that you continually work on new pieces. How much time do you spend creating a piece?

The center of my life is creation. Everyday affairs like paperwork, teaching at the university, getting rest, having family get-togethers, or chatting with my friends, I do them in between my creation. In other words, creation means everything for me.

It takes 4-5 months to produce a piece, but if the impulse to make is considered the beginning, each production period overlaps considerably. Besides, I am making about three pieces at a time, and when I finish making them, I spend two days on cleaning up the studio. If I get bored at work, I go for a drive into the mountains, maybe twice a day, and enjoy the nature around the Kiso River.

You are also working as a professor at the Aichi University of Education. How do you balance teaching and a studio practice?

I think lecturing for postgraduate students is a crucial time that allows me to think calmly and logically. I usually present detailed information on things that influenced my creation, based on my real-life experiences, sometimes referring to artists in the past, sometimes to a newspaper article. On the other hand, during a studio practice, I tell the students to go by feeling. This cycle became the ideal condition for my teaching.

You once said that if scholars pursue the truth through facts, artists approach the truth through fiction. It could be suggested that fiction is the artist's reality. What do you think? Do artists build their reality, and if so, what facts do they present to the viewer?

I think artists have their own reality, but it is more of an obsession or image rather than fiction. Through their "reality," artists approach the truth, I believe. The last time I mentioned this subject I wanted to say that in order to construct a world, it takes not only scholars (or science), who approach the truth through facts, but also artists, who approach the truth differently. In the current era, science has tremendous strength and gets things fixed in a rational way. But human beings, in the course of living, are inevitably going through with an irrational idea or inexplicable phenomenon. I take a different approach than scholars, hoping to expose the truth of humans to the viewers.

Is what you're showing to the public made for them or is it made for you and your spirit? I am asking this because you recently characterized your work as "selfish production".

If I were aware of public concerns, or if I had a conscious desire to sell works, my works would become commercial products. In contrast, if I made it only for myself and considered nothing else, it would be just a little hobby. I should make works for myself, which could be good for society at the same time. In other words, if the clay projects my feelings outward, I wouldn't show the bare facts to the world.

Speaking in concrete terms, when I finish molding, I always polish the piece for sufficient time. This means to me that I'm covering irrational works with the modern human's rationality. In addition, it also means making strong forms that endure the distortions caused by firing. I called my work "selfish production" in order to explain myself that I should make assertive works so that I can indicate my principles to the public. My satisfaction is a bigger priority than the market's demand.

In 2014, you exhibited with Maeta Akihiro at Gallery VOICE. What is your opinion about this juxtaposition of very different works and styles?

Mr. Maeta and I are very different in works or styles, but we both graduated from the same University, and we both pursue a course toward using porcelain. We were both taught by the same ceramic artist. When we were chosen to be judge members of the 10th International Ceramics Competition MINO and had to evaluate the same works together, I thought that I have the responsibility to reveal our different viewpoints and clearly show our different opinions to the applicants. The exhibition was very important for me because we could compare our thoughts in this way.

What can you tell us about your experience as a judge of the 10th International Ceramics Competition MINO, Japan? Was it difficult to evaluate so many different works?

It was a very enjoyable experience to exchange our opinions with various persons, including artists, scholars, and researchers from overseas. It was an opportunity to build relationships with those who have different cultures than Japanese. But I should say there wasn't enough time for investigation regarding the number of works. I wished there was more time to discuss more each piece.

‡ *Translated from the original Japanese by Nodoka Murayama. Special thanks to Gallery VOICE for their support in the making of this interview.*

A Form Disclosing Absurdities #1406, 2014, Porcelain, glaze, 42.5 x 24.4 x 21.3 inches / 108 x 62 x 54 cm. Photo by Tatsuo Hayashi.

The Realities That Sit in the Back of Every Persons Mind

Interview with **Irina Razumovskaya**

Floating houses (detail), 2012, Clay, glass, concrete, resin, 118.1 x 23.6 x 7.9 inches / 300 x 60 x 20 cm

For me, an object has to have a mystery, there should be something that can't be explained with words.

Frequenting the Hermitage Museum while learning Latin and Ancient Greek provided you with insight into ancient objects and cultures. How does this reflect onto your artistic work?

When archeologists begin the excavation, they can mysteriously spot man-made objects, no matter how much time has passed. The human entity can be felt intuitive, and this feeling is a mystery in itself for me. From an early age, I developed a subtle relationship with objects: every artifact that came to me from ancient times has a mystery in itself. We can't be sure of the utilitarian purposes because most often we don't know the maker's name. It is not clear how people felt about the object in the past and what beliefs have been associated with it.

I believe that this has majorly affected my understanding of art in general and my work in particular. I am mostly impressed by art pieces that don't have an absolute meaning—when there is no clear border or limitation of understanding. For me, an object has to have a mystery, there should be something that can't be explained with words. Ancient pieces can be represented poorly with verbal descriptions, but the way they look and have a seal of history can be felt at first sight. That's why I tend to avoid any narrative in my work, letting myself work intuitively using my aesthetic preferences and tacit knowledge.

In terms of how much attention and importance we give to objects, do you feel like there is a dissimilarity between that world and today's world?

There is a very little difference in the amount of attention and importance we gave to objects in the past and now—people have always used objects, paying little attention to some and exalting others. Observing all kinds of utilitarian objects of the past times we see that decorations start to appear even on most ancient ones. This

Floating houses, 2012, Clay, glass, concrete, resin, 118.1 x 23.6 x 7.9 inches / 300 x 60 x 20 cm

demonstrates that at in all times the user needed a ground for admiration. Therefore, a need for beauty is inherent to man, and this unites us with our ancestors in terms of our attitude to objects. However, in a modern-day life, as most of the objects are factory made, the admiration for hand-made and beautiful objects can be felt even sharper. They change the person unconsciously, making one start to value the moment or everyday activity that is related to that object.

Universal symbols assembled into simple shapes give your work archaic features. Tell us about the signs and symbols that you use.

Frankly speaking, I am old-fashioned in my ways of working. Museums have always been a peaceful place for me to rest, think and get inspirations. That's why many of the symbols I use in my work are somehow related to historical objects. Their purposes resemble for me modern-day issues and echo with today's problems. For instance, the house form came from the 15th-century Jewish wedding rings that were made in the shape of a mansion and were worn by the bride during the ceremony. Also, this is the shape of the graves in some ancient Jewish cemeteries, and I have been interested in the relation between the body, the house and the grave.

Inspiration comes from the shape of the lanterns that have been used in Byzantine times, as there was a particular attitude to light as a symbol of belief. Besides that, I used the shapes of Neolithic anthropomorphic figurines that appear in every ancient culture, and for me they are the symbol of both unification and migration.

Sometimes I get inspired by the things that are no longer believed in, like tear vessels, the stones of stupidity, masks of shame and such. Those objects represent for me the need for reflexion and doubt.

These examples are the basis of my ideas. I've come to the opinion that there are a number of symbols that have made their home somewhere in the human subcortex. These images touch the viewer's unconscious strings. That's why I don't want to present the viewer visually bright imagery or new unseen forms, but prehistoric and stable symbols clustered in laconic shapes that sit in the back of every persons mind. These symbolically minimal images create a more subtle relationship between the viewer and the artwork.

Through minimalist forms and symbolic images you enable the viewer to have an intuitional relationship with your work, yet the basis of this relationship is unique to each viewer. Why do you choose to leave open the possibility for variability in the interpretation of your work?

The reason I would prefer the viewer to have his or her interpretation of my work is, as I said before, the fact that I tend to avoid direct statements and concepts. I have in mind that there should be something deep and nonverbal, something that every person could sense and apply to it their experiences and viewpoints.

As some books, films and artifacts enlighten me and leave me with a very light and inspired sensations, I would like my viewers to have the same feelings. My work should encourage an approach to see the life in its subtleties and beauty, rather than leading to a conclusion and exact thought. Despite the fact that every artwork has a personal meaning for me, I prefer it to be a more ambiguous experience for the viewer.

You've worked with various materials, including concrete, glass and resin. How do you combine them whilst revealing their individual materiality?

I believe that this is an intuitive process. I see the materials in their beauty and pureness, and each material get its own outgiving at the end of the process. I haven't been working with those materials for a very long time, which is why I am charmed by their pure condition, and I use them as details for the clay sculptures.

In your paintings, you are trying to capture the "mood" of various objects and people. Aren't these ephemeral moments hard to reproduce?

My paintings are laconic, but it takes quite a number of tries and repaintings to get the feeling that I would like to prompt. However, painting has always been a very personal process for me. I was educated as an academic painter, so I kept my non-academic painting as my private field of self-expression. I was always fascinated by that moment in painting when the work suddenly starts to be explicit. My painting is something I can't explain, and I don't like to talk about as I am afraid to clothe it in words. What I can tell is that I always know when my painting starts to represent a precise moment, and this is when I have to stop.

You are attentive to details and nuances of ageing constructivist architecture. Why do you feel attracted into these type of buildings? Many of them have lost their devised purpose.

Constructivist architecture is a peak of geometrical composition; it is as far from nature as it can be. While it is ageing the dichotomy appears, those severe square shapes that seem to be made in factories and are inhuman in a way start to be covered with beautiful cracks, change their concrete color and age. I find it to be a very strong and inspiring contrast.

Visual Expressions of Divine Conversation

Interview with **Alexa Kus**

Reclaim Series 1 (detail), 2012, Unfired clay, string, paint, 20 x 16 x 9 inches / 50 x 40 x 23 cm

I do not think that vulnerabilities are necessarily something to be overcome. There is something powerful about the vulnerable.

When were you first introduced to ceramics?

My first encounter with ceramics was not one of love at first sight. I was initially introduced to ceramics in high school, and I hated it – the way it felt in my hands and the frustrations it caused as a material. Eventually in college I gave it a second chance because it was one of the few courses being offered in the summertime. It was then that I was truly introduced to ceramics: the transformation of the material through all its stages and the community surrounding it that made the whole process so worthwhile. I realized how alive clay could be, how it changed with and demanded time, and how it took on so many forms and allowed for so many possibilities.

Your work simulates communication through various means. What symbols do you use and where do you look for inspiration?

While studying art, I was also pursuing a degree in communication, so there are undertones of communication theory in my practice. However, I typically draw upon ideas that are less academic. Inspired primarily by personal experiences, my work is a visual expression of conversation and a documentation of dialogue between myself and God as well as other relationships in my life. Captivated by writing, and an obsessive journaler, I often use my own handwriting in my work. Rather than using distant or unfamiliar symbols, this makes the work more intimate and allows me to feel as if I am just writing or simply praying. Visually I am inspired by the way a child scribbles their name before they understand how to form letters or the patterns that are created by tangles of string. I also grew up on and currently live on a farm, so organic forms often come into play in my work as well.

What was the starting point of your investigation into vulnerabilities and weaknesses?

This investigation started a few years ago during the spring. As the snow was melting, I began to notice plants and objects outside that had survived the winter. I was attracted to the combination of their fragility and endurance, so I started photographing and drawing them. As I worked in the studio collecting and studying these pieces, I connected with them. I began to look inward and became aware of the vulnerabilities within myself. Just as the decaying plants were transformed through their weaknesses, I saw in myself the ways my inadequacies influenced my identity. This investigation continued to expand beyond myself and into other areas of interest, such as communication. For example, I started seeing the way that loops inside of letters, and the spaces between words give shape to language.

Speaking about vulnerabilities, do you think that they can be overcome by revisiting our past?

I suppose it could indeed be thought of that way. Personally though, I do not think that vulnerabilities are necessarily something to be overcome. There

Disregarded, 2013, Unfired clay, linseed oil, paper, glue, Dimensions variable

is something powerful about the vulnerable. Instead, I suggest that it is our perspective and definitions of vulnerability that need to be reexamined and possibly readjusted. Revisiting the past can provide insight into weaknesses and inadequacies, but vulnerabilities are not just products of the past. They are also marks of the present and potential barriers or opportunities for the future. Redefining our idea of vulnerability allows us to see the danger of emptiness as the incredible possibility of expansiveness.

Can you describe the thought process you go through when creating new work?

Creating the new work is the thought process. Although this is slightly different every time, it is always an attempt to understand. My thoughts focus on discovering, clarifying, and knowing. Whether from the heart, the mind, the spirit or the senses, I believe that the place where a work is born is the place where it resonates with the viewer. When creating, my thoughts are a series of questions that allow me to develop a closeness with my materials and concepts in order to understand where they came from and what they look like. This is not only fulfilling for me as an artist, but my desire is that my understanding and connection to the process will lead to a richer encounter with the work as well.

How do you choose the materials that you work with?

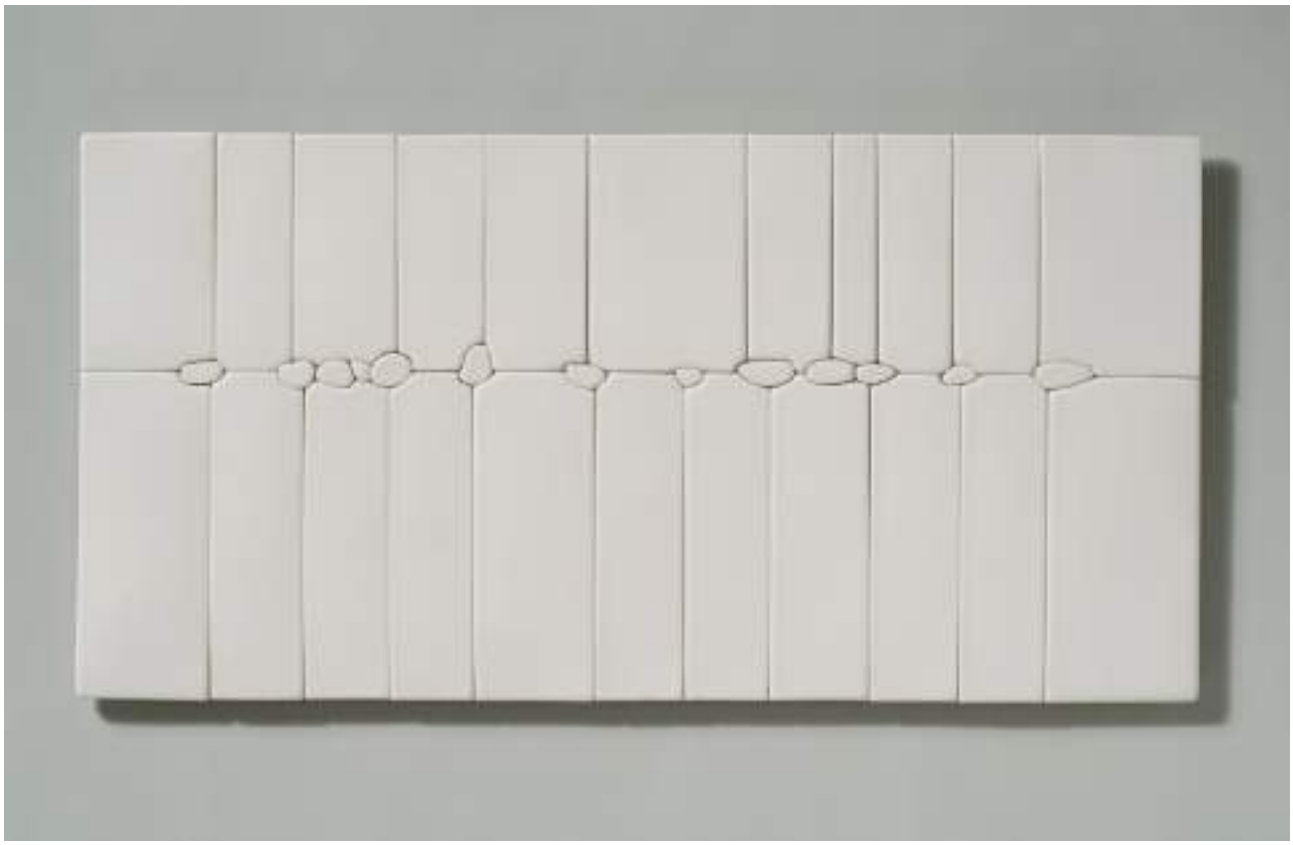
The relationship I have with a material is essential to my work, and my material choices are almost romantic. My decisions are influenced by curiosity, compatibility, and charm. I want to understand a material, feel attached to it, and find connections that are physical, conceptual and spiritual. I am attracted to materials with subtle beauty that tell stories quietly yet have their own secrets to be discovered. Sometimes unfamiliar, other times connected to my personal history, sometimes intentionally sought out, other times stumbled upon, I feel that I choose my materials as much as they choose me.

What did you discover by combining unfired clay with linseed oil? Tell us about the technical process.

The technical process focuses on the temporary and the breakable. Combining unfired clay and oiled paper allows me to create forms that emphasize delicacy and expose fragility. By writing with and layering the clay, I develop patterns out of language and build intimate and intricate frameworks. The transparency of the work reveals the weight these materials hold for and place upon each other. Individually, there is something naturally insignificant and unattractive about these non-archival and unstable materials. However, they are transformed by their relationship to one another. Together I see them as skeleton and skin.

Searching Out for the Essential

Interview with **Kirsi Kivivirta**



White Stones, 2007, Porcelain, 10.2 x 22.8 inches / 26 x 58 cm
Photo by Johnny Korkman

Your architectural ceramic tiles can span to up to three meters in size. How much time do you regularly spend on a piece? How do you frame the tiles together?

My working process is always affected by the interior space, housing area or another environment where the finished work will be placed, as seen, for example, in my works at the Arabianranta housing project. Sometimes I incorporate visual elements into a mosaic work to help tie it to a particular place. If I don't know the placement of the work when I am building it, I envision a place. This is a necessary prerequisite for my process. Places, things and forms on a monumental scale are inspiring as are monochromatic qualities, continuity and repetition of a certain kind. The same applies to inspiring musical works.

In my series of monochromatic mosaic works, the entire process sometimes takes many months. These rhythmical works mounted on walls are composed of hundreds of different sized pieces. Naturally, at the same time I can be working on smaller projects. The large works are physically very demanding.

My main material is porcelain. I start by rolling clay slabs together to make a large body that will be the final size. I cut the first primary lines and divide the main areas that will later be broken into even smaller parts. I have developed my methods of drawing and cutting clay. After the firing, I glue these small pieces onto large panels of 3 mm light aluminium.

You sometimes include soft details like knots or rings in your tiles. What do they represent?

I aim for simplicity in my expression. There is great joy when things come up easily and spontaneously without forcing them. I am looking for timeless symbols and forms, everyday objects or phenomena that are common and familiar for all of us. For me, they represent the flow of time, a path of our life in general. Repetition is one of my devices.

White Mosaic, 2013, Porcelain, 46.5 x 46.5 inches / 118 x 118 cm
Photo by Johnny Korkman

Tell us about the sculptural work that you're creating.

My sculptures are based on geometrical forms, bricks and cubes from small arrangements to big installations. In the Construction series, I am exploring the idea of the demolition of buildings by cutting away at the clay. The series was produced quickly, in contrast to the prolonged process needed to create works that ponder the purpose of construction. The absence of something is often felt more strongly than its presence. Although the technique of cutting away the clay is rapid and perhaps easier than building it up, it can't be done without focusing on the material as the work progresses. For me, the clay is a partner in the discussion. It responds immediately to the slightest thought or touch, reflecting the different facets of temperament and state of mind. The concept of a house is a metaphor for the human body.

In the Tempo series, I have printed silkscreen images onto either casted porcelain or stoneware. The images are photographs of urban landscapes, often with snippets of nature and often with the silhouettes of bare trees. These organic images reflect my longing for the wilderness, a nature that exists mainly in our memories.

Through references to water, stones and trees, you transmit the viewers a sense of serenity and calm. How much has Finland's landscape influenced your work?

Our country has four distinctly different seasons full of contrast. Obviously the landscape is a very rich source of ideas. Having always lived on the coast, I have an attachment particularly to the landscape of the sea. My palette is limited—shades of white and gray, blacks, natural pigments and metallic oxides. I think an innate calmness arises from the minimalism of the natural tones of my palette.

The Finnish coast with the archipelago has had a great influence on me. We have a summer cottage on an island, and I spend a lot of time there. It is

easy to find harmony there, and I'm sure this reflects in my works.

How did you become drawn to minimalist art?

As I create art, I move effortlessly into a familiar existence. My work is a kind of composition process, moving pieces around, in which various elements look for their places and their dynamics. The intention of my expression is to reduce and eliminate factors and to search out for the essential. I am a part of the Scandinavian design movement that is characterized by minimalism and functionality.

When and how did you learn to embrace the imperfections of your works?

This is a good zen type of question! There is a tremendous potential in raw materials and natural resources. Clay as a primordial raw material is a powerful and expressive medium. As an artist, I am on a journey to explore and understand the natural properties of clay and the firing process. The "ceramic's change" is enormous and can not always be controlled. One must accept it and be humble towards this medium.

You have worked as a teacher for the past 25 years. In what ways has teaching influenced you as an artist?

Teaching has always been an important part of my profession. Working outside the studio helps me to structure my timetable. It allows me to be a part of a greater community; of education professionals, teenagers, children, parents. It also gives me a chance to develop diverse abilities like empathy, teamwork, decision-making, updating skills. Teaching is a two-way street, what I give, I receive back tenfold. It keeps me connected. In the social confrontations and interactions, there are vast reservoirs of potential and opportunity. Teaching is very educational!

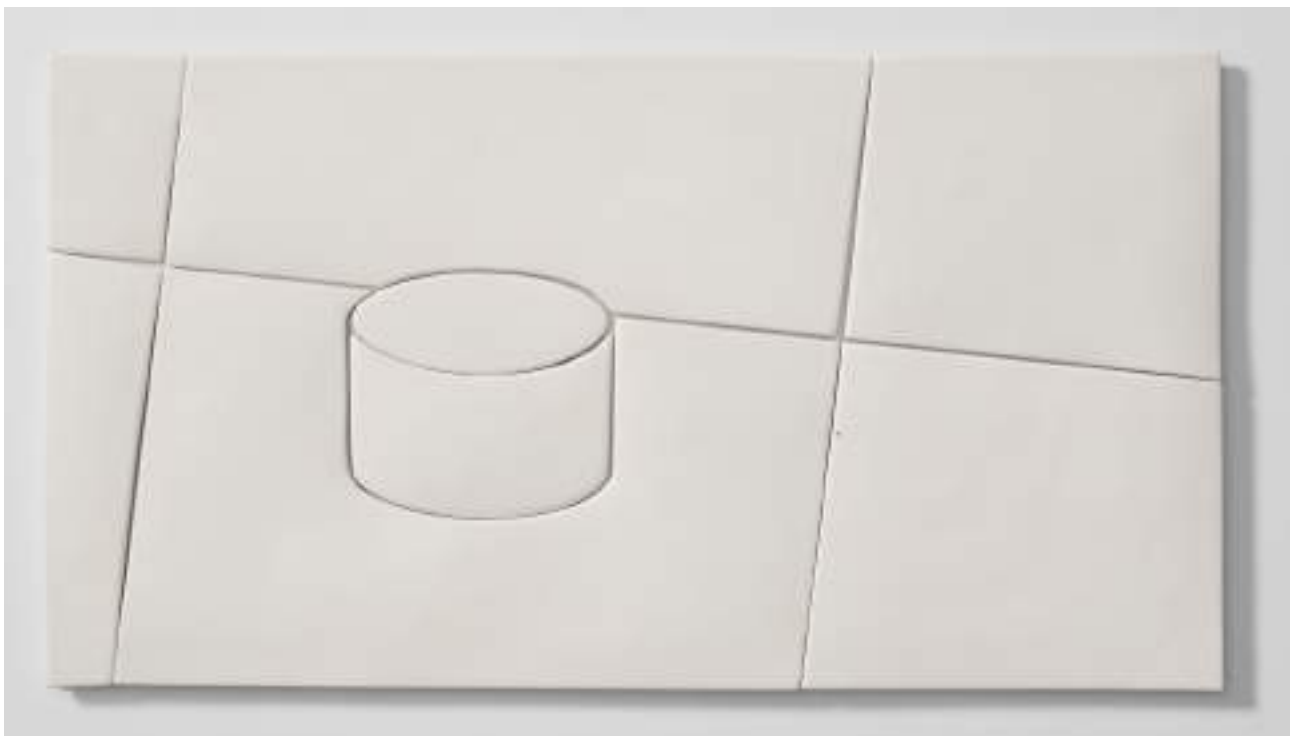
Do you think the media of decorative ceramic tiles will be positively or negatively influenced by 3D printing technology?

Clay can be one of the 3D printing materials which produces an object that is durable and lasting. In my opinion, there are great possibilities in using 3D printing, for example in intricate forms and shapes. This technology would free the artist of the traditional methods, for example of mold making. It could have positive effects in the medium of decorative ceramics and especially on large scale customized tile and brick productions. In the end, artists and designers are responsible for the quality of the output.

Does the public sauna still function at the ground floor of the building that hosts your studio? If yes, do you still meet once a year with other ceramists to bath and discuss important issues?

Yes, the Arla sauna is still operating and has since 1924. The public sauna culture is going through a revival these days. Plans for a public sauna have been included in the new Helsinki Central Library plans. Our group of ceramists meet at least once a year to have fruitful discussions, and sometimes it's at the sauna. The idea of the large Ceramics and Space exhibition at the Design Museum, Helsinki, 2014-15 was born from one of our earlier group meetings.

White Elements, 2012, Porcelain, 20.5 x 10.2 inches / 52 x 26 cm. Photo by Johnny Korkman.



Tempo Series, 2012, Stoneware, silk screen, Dimensions variable. Photo by Johnny Korkman.

If I don't know the placement of the work when I am building it, I envision a place.

Catching the Charm

Interview with **Giorgio Di Palma**

School kit, 2013, Ceramic, glaze, platinum, Dimensions variable.
Photo by Dario Miale

I like to think of life as a jigsaw where each trip or experience is a piece that, fitted perfectly, makes the meaning of existence clear.

You create brightly colored works that replicate the form of everyday objects. When and why did you start making them?

I've never studied art or attended academies. I have a degree in archeology, and the only work experience I had was as a computer technician in Budapest. In 2010, I decided to go back home in Grottaglie to start a little ceramic workshop. I had a few ideas and lots of objects collected from around the world. These objects, which I initially used to set up my studio, soon became my models. I started with vintage items and then devoted myself to everyday objects that sometimes take us back in time and some others that make us smile.

Why do you say you're making unnecessary objects with no functionality? Viewers may contradict you when it comes to your work's usefulness.

Today we surround ourselves with useful things: giant TVs, fast cars, and cutting-edge smartphones. Then we forget about them because they become obsolete, we need something different. We put them in a box and go ahead. I like to go back instead, retrieve that box, look at the items in it and replicate them in ceramics. I catch their charm, not the utility. Up to fifty years ago Grottaglie produced millions of plates and containers in terracotta that were exported as far as Turkey. Then the crisis struck the field. No one needs them anymore because there is a large use of plastic or porcelain from the foreign industry. This is why I make this pottery of which there is no need—to keep alive the charm of the ceramics of Grottaglie.

How do you find the means to always spread joy and simplicity through your work? Can you create when you're in a bad mood?

It may sound strange, but I create my favorite works in difficult moments. When I'm light-hearted, I deal with the most bothering things: photographs, internet, the website, the blog, etc. When I'm in trouble, instead, I drift away from negative thoughts with clay. I enter a dimension in which the different parts of myself magically coexist: joy and sadness, fragilities and securities. Everything falls into place, into the right balance. That's why the final impression suggests simplicity because there is balance.

Ice cream, 2014, Ceramic, glaze,
7 x 3.5 x 3.5 inches / 18 x 9 x 9 cm
Photo by Dario Miale

Ice cream (detail), 2014, Ceramic, glaze,
7 x 3.5 x 3.5 inches / 18 x 9 x 9 cm
Photo by Dario Miale

Tools, 2012, Ceramic, glaze, platinum, Dimensions variable
Photo by Dario Miale

It may sound strange, but I create my favorite works in difficult moments. When I'm light-hearted, I deal with the most bothering things: photographs, internet, the website, the blog, etc. When I'm in trouble, instead, I drift away from negative thoughts with clay.

What moments and feelings are your ceramic reliefs and decals trying to portray?

The reliefs and decals are snapshots of melancholy moments, seen through the eyes of fantastic animals. Their eyes reveal feelings ignored by modern man, every day lost in pursuit of haste. We should learn how to lose time, walk for hours in the countryside or visit towns without any attraction. We may be able to observe, perhaps to reflect. We could look into each other's eyes and maybe feel something.

Tell us about Sano/Sano, the project made in collaboration with photographer Dario Miale.

Besides being a great friend, Dario Miale is an extraordinary photographer. He realizes almost all my photos and my graphics. Besides that, we've been collaborating under the alias of Sano/Sano for three years. We document together different aspects of reality through black and white photographs and colorful ceramics reproductions. We are now working on our third project to be presented at the end of 2015.

You also make illustrations and write a fascinating journal. Are these an important part of your work process?

I started drawing and coloring while I was living in Budapest. My ceramics are a natural evolution of those drawings. I have a sketchbook where, when I travel, I like to illustrate my adventures. It's a deep part of me, and I am ashamed to make it public. The design phase, including the one that requires an initial sketch, it's never been an important part for me, so before creating I never know how and what I will do.

How would you describe the contemporary ceramics scene in Grottaglie, which is known for its traditional pottery?

Despite the crisis, Grottaglie is the only center in the world where there is an entire neighborhood dedicated to pottery with 60 active workshops. Unfortunately, not all of them represent the evolution of our century-old ceramics tradition. The innovation for many artisans has stopped to the import of enamels, electric kilns, and semi-processed products. There are, however, young and less young artists that I appreciate and respect. There are artists who create and masters who reinvent. I'd like to name some of them, but I'm afraid of forgetting someone.

It's been a few years since you moved back to your home city and plunged into ceramics. Have you had time to think how had this move changed your life? What sparked it in the first place?

Every time I left, I did it knowing that I would come back to Grottaglie. Here I have everything but I still miss something, something that still urges me to travel often. I like to think of life as a jigsaw where each trip or experience is a piece that, fitted perfectly, makes the meaning of existence clear.

Lucky and Valeria have influenced you positively over the years. Can you tell us who they are and why are they important to you?

I could use this last question to thank those who allowed me to pursue my dreams and to use clay to describe them: my family, my friends, you (the editor) who have decided to dedicate some of your time to me, the customers and admirers. I owe a special thanks to Lucky, my dog, who taught me that living on dreams is possible. Another special thanks to Valeria, my better half, who reminds me when it's time to wake up.

"Una preoccupante missiva recapitata in data 14 Novembre" (detail), 2015, Ceramic and engobe on wood, 39.4 x 17.7 inches / 100 x 45 cm. Photo by Dario Miale.

Site-Responsive Memorials

Interview with **Jeffrey Mongrain**

Blood Pool, 2006 (St. Peters Church, Columbia, SC), Plexiglass, 86 x 47 x 0.25 inches / 218 x 117 x 0.6 cm

Your works have been characterized as site-responsive because they reference the history and cultural identity of the location in which they are displayed. How do you become familiar with the character of a place?

I enter every new project with no preconceived idea of an image I might produce prior to viewing and researching the new site. Becoming both knowledgeable and acquainted with a new site takes spending time in the space. I try to become familiar with the architectural features, and the history, function, and narratives of the place. I also have found having conversations with the people that administer and those that engage the site is a valuable insight.

There are some artists and curators that do what I call "Parachute Art." They take preexisting work(s) and place it in a public setting. This can occasionally work well in certain public spaces, like perhaps in front of a bank to indicate wealth or prestige, but not the type of work I would honestly consider site-specific.

"Diviner" was created for the crypt of the Glasgow Cathedral in Scotland. When researching the site the Cathedral Curator told me that while an air vent was being installed under the stone floor in this 12th-century space seven skeletons were discovered from the era of the Black Plague. This plumb bob-like figure hangs as a memorial over the place these skeletons were found.

Why is it important for the works to respond to their setting?

Spiritual spaces are highly charged, visually complicated, and deeply personal. Proposing an artwork for these beautiful Gothic-like spaces is always a delicate negotiation with the ministry and congregation. When I began creating site works for Cathedrals and Synagogues, there was a natural suspicion that I may be an artist that would be overtly political or sacrilegious. Now that I have a history and images from over 20 site projects, that I believe are respectful of the spaces in which they are placed, it has gotten much easier.

I'm often asked during lectures how I'm fortunate enough to get the opportunity and invitations to exhibit in these extraordinary religious venues. I have come to realize that the ministry often wants more people from the local community to experience their spaces. Having exhibitions and concerts can further the community engagement beyond the members that attend services.

...The Luckiest Man..., 2005, Clay, black iron, sand, 45 x 45 x 3.5 inches / 114 x 114 x 9 cm.

"The Philosopher's Halo" was sited in the Christus Church in Baltimore MD. It is a piece that was physically attached to the marble sculpture of St. Thomas Aquinas. Aquinas was one of the most noted yet controversial theologians of the Catholic Church. The halo form, traditionally depicted behind the Saints' head, has been repositioned to the front. I placed an optical lens in the center of the halo to create a slightly distorted view of Thomas and, conversely, distort his view of us. This piece responded to the setting both physically and to the history of St. Thomas.

Do you think that because of their setting your sculptures can be perceived differently by non-believers?

I believe I am drawn to the stories related to a spiritual site as one aspect of my artwork because of my upbringing in Northern Minnesota. My father was a liberal thinker and a devout Catholic. At 14, I spent a brief time in the seminary studying to be a Catholic priest. I have always loved the stories and imagery attached to biblical settings along with the beauty of gothic related architecture. I no longer consider myself genuinely religious, but I would also not call myself a nonbeliever. I think the theatrics of these vast and historic spaces is intended to create awe; for the believer, the nonbeliever, and everyone in between.

"Blood Pool" was placed in front of the altar in St. Peter's Church in Columbus, SC. It was a plexiglass form that represented 1.3 gallons of blood. This is the average amount found in an adult human male. Reflected on the surface of the piece from the altar is the rendering of the Last Supper with Christ holding up the chalice proclaiming "you will drink of my blood." I was concerned about how this piece would be viewed. Some people were kneeling in front of the piece praying and gently reaching out to touch it. Others interpreted this piece as a type of DNA human portraiture.

Many historical narratives are used in your work. How do you choose one subject over another?

The subject matter of my discreet sculptures has often derived from my interest in science. I have been fortunate during the last few years to had communication with some renowned scientist. My piece entitled "The Iris of John Daugman" resulted in my discussion with Dr. John Daugman who is the inventor of the Iris Scanning Technology made popular by science fiction movies like the Tom Cruise film Minority Report. While visiting my studio in New York Dr. Daugman allowed me to photograph his eye to be used as the center image of this ocular window.

Another recent collaboration was with Dr. Charles Hirsch, who is the Chief Medical Examiner of NYC. Dr. Hirsch and his team were responsible for the DNA identification after the September 11th attack on the World Trade Center. Dr. Hirsch gave me several drops of his blood for my reliquary-like piece entitled "Januarus and Dr. Hirsch" exhibited in The Objects of Devotion and Desire exhibition. I'm currently working on a text piece that I will call "The Loss of Consciousness" that is based on the equations of neuroscientist Dr. Giulio Tononi. It deals with the moment of the decreased electrical impulses in the brain resulting in the loss of consciousness.

Tell us about the memorial quality of your works.

I think the majority of my works are memorials; whether it's with a capital M or a small m. I was recently asked at a symposium how I differentiated between the spiritually oriented works and those that focused on science. I believe they are both very abstract and also based on faith.

Your sculptures are "intentionally visually quiet," but they invite the viewer to make sense of the resonance of the space. How does the space inform the audience?

I have always admired the intellectual aspects and visual clarity of minimalism. But I also find a lot of minimalist works, although elegant, to be emotively cold and lacking specific content. I consider my discreet gallery-based sculptural works to be reductive and somewhat architectonic. "A Square Yard of Water" is a minimal object that is meant to represent the reflective quality of nighttime lake water.

Some of your forms represent the physical origin of a particular sound. They are "visual sound transcriptions". How does sound take form?

The Sound Translation works began while I was doing a residency in Australia. My studio was near the satellite dish that on July 20th, 1969 was positioned to receive the Earths first transmission from the first Moon landing "the eagle has landed." I took this recording and graphed it to what emulated a visual sound wave, akin to the ripples from a drop of water, on a large ceramic disc.

I now select sound translations related to the different countries and cities where I have exhibitions and have completed nine unique "site-related" pieces. One of my favorites is "...The Luckiest Man..." made for an exhibition in New York City. On July 4th, 1939 Lou Gehrig gave his famous farewell speech from the home plate of the Yankee Stadium. The title words became the sculpted sound translation. Behind the center hole, which is the size of the small end of a baseball bat, is sand I collected from the home plate of the Yankee Stadium where Gehrig gave his speech.

Using cold modeling – a ceramic surface treatment – gives your ceramic works a stone finish. Tell us about this technique and its qualities.

As those of us that use clay are well aware, this wonderful material can warp during both drying and firing, especially at a large scale. While researching architectural ceramics of New York City, I discovered that most of the fired clay attached to buildings was cold modeled. This means that the ceramic modular was likely cut post-firing by a diamond-wet saw. This brings a hard-edged uniformity to each decorative unit prior to being attached to the façade of the building. I find that doing stone-like carving of fired clay, typically fired to cone 10, gives me a similar exactitude and, for me, a visual elegance.

Prior to firing, when the clay is greenware, I carve as much excess as possible to come close to the desired final form. It is a dusty and physical process, but it allows me to correct any warpage that may have occurred during drying. My Pillow and Sound Translation forms require the most post-firing finishing. I have also found that higher fired clay can be sanded to an almost marble-like polish. The cone 1 surface of the white stoneware pillow form entitled "The Weight of Sound and Smoke" was sanded for hours to a near shine. For me, crafting should be done to the point that crafting remains secondary consideration to content.

The Weight and Sound of Smoke, 2005, Clay, wax, nicotine, 8 x 28 x 20 inches / 20 x 71 x 51 cm.