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EXHIBITIONS

2023

2023 NCECA ANNUAL: *I CONTAIN MULTITUDES*
NCECA MULTICULTURAL FELLOWSHIP EXHIBITION
NCECA JURIED STUDENT EXHIBITION



2023 NCECA ANNUAL

I CONTAIN MULTITUDES

Alice F. and Harris K. Weston Art Gallery
Cincinnati, Ohio

March 14–May 7, 2023

Curated by **Garth Johnson**

Jesse Albrecht

Kait Arndt

Eliza Au

Kathryn Baczeski

Jon Bashioum

Shannon Blakey

Jeremy Brooks

Cory Brown

Larry Buller

Uriel Caspi

Joshua Clark

Jim Connell

Heather Cornelius

Stephen Creech

Forrest Gard

Tina Gebhart

Steve Hilton

Bryan Hopkins

Hsinyi Huang

Drew Ippoliti

Peter Christian Johnson

Lauren Kalman

Emma Lacey

Beth Lo

David and Linda Mack

Priscilla Mouritzen

Megumi Naitoh

Jeff Oestreich

Eric Ordway

Dina Perlasca

Neha Pullarwar

Stephanie Rozene

Judith Salomon

Virginia Scotchie

Eric Serritella

Kopal Seth

Taylor Sijan

Natasha Smoke Santiago

Megan Thomas

Colleen Toledano

Britny Wainwright

James C. Watkins

Kirstin Willders

Mary Cale Wilson

Suzanne Wolfe

ChengOu Yu

Bari Ziperstein

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CURATOR'S STATEMENT

Garth Johnson

My name is Garth Johnson. I'm an artist/educator/writer who has always been drawn to clay, but never quite found my niche. After earning my MFA in ceramics, I juggled teaching and a day job as a designer at an architectural firm. I accidentally stumbled into a platform for my writing as "blogs" became popular in the early 2000s. For a decade, I wrote well over a thousand posts for *Extreme Craft*, a tongue-in-cheek paean to artists who used craft materials in irreverent and extreme ways. Over the years, *Extreme Craft* opened my eyes to a bigger picture—ceramics has always provided a home to misfits and rebels. The act of devoting oneself to clay is a form of extreme craft.

In 2011, Namita Wiggers at the (late, lamented) Museum of Contemporary Craft in Portland, Oregon, gave me a chance to curate an exhibition from their permanent collection. The result was *Era Messages*, an assortment of works that unabashedly belong to their respective eras rather than evoking a "timeless" quality. After digging through the museum's archives and storage, I was immediately hooked. I left my tenured teaching gig in 2013 to become the curator at the Clay Studio in Philadelphia, followed by a stint as the curator at the Ceramics Research Center at Arizona State University. In 2018, I ascended to ceramic heaven—as the inaugural Paul Phillips and Sharon Sullivan Curator of Ceramics at the Everson Museum of Art in Syracuse, New York—the holy wellspring of the American Studio Ceramics movement.

At the Everson, I am able to spend my time with some of the most legendary pots in American history— not only Adelaide Alsop Robineau's *Scarab Vase*, but also some of the first pots that brought artists such as Maija Grotell, Karen Karnes, Peter Voukos, and Betty Woodman to national prominence. There is also a 1930s plate by Maria Martinez that was celebrated in one of the museum's first Ceramic National exhibitions, a prize-winning tea set by Minnie Negoro, who left a Japanese-American internment camp to attend Alfred University, and a set of sgraffito plates decorated with surreal sex monsters designed by Sascha Brastoff, a pioneering Queer California dinnerware designer with a side hustle as a drag performer. I knew I had found my niche. These are the stories that I want to tell. That I need to tell.

As my own place in the ceramics world evolved over the course of three decades, I have watched the NCECA Annual exhibition shift from a juried exhibition that tended to give an annual platform to established voices in the field to a more flexible model that allows curators to explore concepts and ideas in dialogue with a wider variety of artists. Perhaps no NCECA Annual moved me more than *The Form Will Find Its Way*—the 2019 Annual held at the Weisman Museum of Art in Minneapolis. Curator Elizabeth Carpenter created an elastic thesis that provided a showcase for several generations of ceramic artists whose work was rooted in abstraction. The resulting exhibition was wildly diverse—ranging from the performative works of Dutch artist Alexandra Engelfreit to the jaw-dropping conceptual work of Brie Ruais, who explores the interface between clay and body as she spreads fixed amounts of clay into expressive constellations.

An idea took root the day that I first saw *The Form Will Find Its Way*. In the same way that a specific group of NCECA members rose to the occasion of a show tailored to their work, I realized that, although potters and vessel makers make up the lion's share of NCECA's membership, vessels tend to make up a much smaller percentage of the Annual. I vowed that if I ever got a chance to curate and jury the Annual, it would be an unabashed love letter to the vessel and functional pottery. When the call came from NCECA several years later, I was ready. During the pandemic, ceramics had seen an explosion in demand—from people seeking to remake their domestic environments with something handmade, to long wait times from overwhelmed community studios that could barely keep up with the demand for classes.

During the pandemic, a great number of people turned to Walt Whitman's poetry for solace and inspiration. The multi hyphenate drag ingenue, Taylor Mac, recorded a cinematic series of recitations of Whitman's poems in woodland settings for *Whitman in the Woods*, which was released by PBS. The Everson Museum played host to *Whitman on Walls*, which was devised by Karen Coonrod as a combination poetry slam and drive-in theater. The eventual socially-distanced public performances consisted of collaborative videos of Whitman poems, made over three weeks by more

than 50 performers of all stripes, that were introduced by local poets who were instructed to “talk back to Whitman,” responding to him in their own words.

Just as Omar Khayyam (via Edward FitzGerald) devotes a part of his *Rubáiyát* to exploring the metaphor of person as vessel, in *Song of Myself*, Whitman saves his vessel metaphor for the poem’s penultimate section. As the poem rises to its crescendo of expansive love, buzzing activity, lust, longing, loafing, restlessness, and the celebration of the sublime, Whitman brings it down a notch:

Do I contradict myself?
Very well then I contradict myself,
(I am large, I contain multitudes.)

In his celebration of the sheer human diversity of the US, accounting for both pleasures and horrors, Whitman ultimately throws up his hands, acknowledging his inability to reconcile the messy contradictions of life in America on the cusp of the Civil War. I can only conclude that Whitman became a touchstone during the pandemic because his unique celebration of individuality, of diversity, of expansiveness resonated across a grieving, shut-in nation. His boundless joy, shaded with compassion, struck a mighty chord.

It is in this spirit that I offer *I Contain Multitudes* to NCECA, to Cincinnati, and to the world. I was tasked with selecting six artists to comprise the core of the exhibition. These artists, Beth Lo, Jeff Oestreich, Bari Ziperstein, James C. Watkins, Stephen Creech, and Natasha Smoke Santiago, all approach the vessel from different angles—as storytellers, functional potters, advocates for social justice, mad scientists, educators, and more. Although they are united by their exploration of the vessel form, they embrace a multitude of surfaces, materials, and approaches.

I Contain Multitudes is also a juried exhibition. The NCECA membership responded enthusiastically to this unique call to action with 150 artists submitting 589 works that ranged from functional pots to videos, installation, and interactive social projects. This pool was ultimately narrowed down to 43 artists who represent a sprawling, dare I say *Whitmanesque*

range of ages, backgrounds, and approaches to the vessel. Just as Whitman celebrated America’s bounty of energy and ambition, while still calling out its flaws and inequities, *I Contain Multitudes* strives to do the same.

How can this, the most tangible of objects, serve to connect us in a time of isolation? This is just one of the profound contradictions that reveals how profoundly the vessel is intertwined with our DNA. The vessel represents a radical vision of hospitality. The vessel represents the investigation and declaration of identity. The vessel can be a container for skill and technique, or it can be a barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world. As Walt Whitman cannily observed, it can also do both things at once.

...

Writer, curator, and educator **Garth Johnson** is the Paul Phillips and Sharon Sullivan Curator of Ceramics at the Everson Museum of Art in Syracuse, New York. Before joining the Everson, Johnson served as the Curator of Ceramics at the Arizona State University Art museum’s Ceramics Research Center and the Curator of Artistic Programs at The Clay Studio in Philadelphia. Johnson is a self-described craft activist who explores craft’s influence and relevance in the 21st century. His writing has been published nationally and internationally, including contributions to the recent monographs and catalogs like *Funk You Too! Humor and Irreverence in Ceramic Sculpture*, Raymon Elozua: *Structure & Dissonance*, and Sharif Bey: *Facets*.

Stephanie
ROZENE

My research and art making focus on the exploration of personal relationships through use, and the role that pottery plays in communicating meaning. My utilitarian forms are inspired by and grounded in conceptual, historical, and theoretical approaches to ornament, form, use, and meaning. Through the medium of ceramics, with special attention to specific patterns, architectural ornaments, and forms, I explore the politics of French and American dinnerware and trace international developments in this medium from presidential China back to the reigns of French Kings Louis XV and Louis XVI. In this body of work, I utilize Hungarian textile and architectural patterns in contrast to the extravagance of the Royal French ornamentation. By extrapolating patterns from these source materials I create a new visual rhetoric that speaks not only to national and international identities but also to the extravagances that governments employ in order to maintain their identities.

Truth or Spectacle? II is part of my series titled *Les motifs de la politique rhétorique – Truth or Spectacle?* They build upon my investigation into 18th-century European porcelain and American politics, with particular focus on the offensive rhetoric being employed by politicians worldwide. Using the rich history of porcelain in Europe to demonstrate wealth and power contrasted by 19th-century Hungarian textile patterns created by the working class, I ask the viewer to investigate the pattern as a visual language reflecting culture, use, spending, consumerism, conflict, and excess promoted through offensive rhetoric. Through symbolism, history, and political rhetoric I am raising the question of money's corrosive use in politics and whether or not our politicians are representative of the electorate.

These works are thrown on the wheel, altered, and handbuilt back together. They are then sprigged with hand-carved stamps and hand-painted platinum luster. The intensive process itself is a metaphor for our collective obsession with politics and our inability to make change.



Truth or Spectacle? II, 2018

Porcelain, thrown, altered, and sprigged
13" x 7" x 7"

CERAMIC TOP 40



Ferrin Contemporary

■
Red Star Studios at Belger Crane Yard Studios

■
Ceramics Program, Office for the Arts at Harvard

catalog © 2014 Ferrin Contemporary

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Each of the artists statements were created by a combination of the artists themselves, friends, and the catalog production group.

CERAMIC TOP 40

This survey exhibition of contemporary ceramic art features work by both established and up-and-coming artists working on the cutting edge of current processes, ideas, and presentation concepts in conceptual, utilitarian, and sculptural ceramics.

Red Star Studios at Belger Crane Yard Studios in Kansas City, Missouri, hosted the inaugural show in 2013. Selections from this show as well as new work was exhibited at the Ceramics Program, Office for the Arts at Harvard, in Boston, in 2014.

The shows were curated by Leslie Ferrin of Ferrin Contemporary.

THE ARTISTS

Susan Beiner

Robin Best

Stephen Bird

Stephen Bowers

Jessica Brandl

Andy Brayman

Beth Cavener

Craig Clifford

Mark Cooper

Cristina Cordova

Doda Design:

Aya Margulis and Rae'ut Stern

Thomas Lowell Edwards

Michelle Erickson

Sean Erwin

Leopold Foulem

Future Retrieval:

Katie Parker and Guy Michael Davis

Alessandro Gallo

Misty Gamble

Gerit Grimm

Rain Harris

Giselle Hicks

Peter Christian Johnson

Brian R. Jones

Ryan LaBar

Steven Young Lee

Linda Lighton

Daniel Listwan

Robert Lugo

Lauren Mabry

Walter McConnell

Sara Moorhouse

Ron Nagle

Kate Roberts

Stephanie A. Rozene

Anders Ruhwald

Michael Schwegmann

Paul Scott

Richard Shaw

Adam Shiverdecker

Bobby Silverman

Linda Sormin

Shawn Spangler

The Spoon Project:

Vipoo Srivilasa

Dirk Staschke

Emily Sudd

Tip Toland

Clare Twomey

Shalene Valenzuela

Jason Walker

INTRODUCTION

Ceramic Top 40 (CT40) is one of those “get what you give” or “be careful what you wish for” projects that began as a fairly simple idea and then proceeded to chart a course of its own. From idea to realization, the more I gave, the more it took. As I look back now, I know I got more than I gave. It seemed like a good idea at the time and in the end, it was.

The idea for CT40 was inspired in 2012 by the efforts of another curator, Nicholas Bell, who produced *40 under 40: Craft Futures* to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the Renwick Gallery. Bell’s show was an ambitious, well-funded survey of studio craft across all media, featuring works by artists born after 1972 who were said to not only represent the current moment in the studio craft field, but also to imagine its future.

When I reviewed the exhibition and the list of artists, I was struck by the ratio of ceramics within the survey: just three out of the 40 artists were connected to ceramics, and only one artist physically made the work herself. The category of “clay” or “ceramics” historically made up a larger and more significant segment of all-media surveys and was possibly the dominant medium at this moment in the history of the post-1950 studio craft movement. The lack of attention to this category in *40 Under 40: Craft Futures* came at a time when ceramic art was entering the fine art world through the front doors of New York’s Chelsea galleries, was fully integrated into the international art fair scene, and was featured on the cover of major publications such as *Art News* and *Art in America*.

Why weren’t ceramics better represented in this exhibition when suddenly clay was everywhere?

Bell’s interests were less about the skill or material. They leaned more towards exploring a broader ideal focusing on the inherent value of objects. “Craft isn’t necessarily about making an object out of a certain material, or the way you make it. It is about valuing the actual making of things, regardless of how you do it,” Bell explained.

However, many artists and professionals whose careers are entwined with the clay community and craft culture, asked each other: If only three artists affiliated with ceramics were selected, then who were the others, under 40 years of age, who were not included in this exhibition? And in the context of a larger pool, how do Bell’s choices reflect on the questions posed and revealed through *40 Under 40: Craft Futures* for the subset of artists who work primarily in ceramics?

At the same time as Bell was leading his project, artists, galleries, and institutions such as his, whose identities were built around the field of studio craft, were all facing challenges that they had never experienced. With the economic collapse of 2008, many private collectors curtailed their purchases as a result of reduced income or an uncertainty about the future economic climate.

As acquisition budgets for private and public collectors were reduced, the era when sales alone could fuel artists’ careers ended. Exhibition programs shrank. Many collectors, their heirs, and artists themselves chose to downsize or completely deaccession their collections by making

gifts and selling their collections. For institutions, this created a pool of work to choose from which museums and galleries drew upon for exhibitions and building public collections. The auction market grew and the recession continued, prices by still-producing living artists were affected by the saturated marketplace. This left emerging and mid-career artists frustrated by a lack of opportunities and the financial support for new works they were creating.

As faculty retired at art schools and universities, the curricula began to reflect on the history of studio craft rather than the practice of it. A new generation of museum curators with training in contemporary decorative arts began to work alongside those who had first brought studio craft into the institutional collections. As the torch was passed, salaried and benefited positions in studio art turned over to a new generation who could now take advantage of a system of support that allowed their creativity to flourish in new directions, less dependent on incomes driven by sales or a patchwork of jobs.

Faced with expanded opportunities for producing new work and reduced opportunities for marketing it, mid-career artists began to approach the making and exhibition of their work in new ways. Many began to employ new technologies during the five years that followed the economic collapse of 2008. Publications adapted to online distribution models or ended their run. Social media became one of the primary means of communication between artists, patrons, museums, galleries, and the public. Computer assisted design, digital imagery, and 3-D printers became commonplace tools. New systems for selling utilitarian objects shifted towards independent, guerrilla marketing approaches such as DIY, Renegade, and ALT as well as to direct marketing through internet outlets such as ETSY. Sales from artists' own websites and studios began to replace traditional relationships with brick-and-mortar galleries, shops, and the public.

All these forces colliding within just five years presented a challenge for producing artists, their collectors, and the curators who dealt with the objects they made. How were the ceramic artists who were emerging and in the middle of their careers coping with the challenges of the day? How were they embracing new technology, and how were they finding new ways to produce and present their work in this changing world? *Ceramic Top 40* was an effort to answer these questions and fill the gap that *40 under 40: Craft Futures* had left open for discussion.

With that in mind, I turned a blind eye to the sluggish economy and went forward with CT40, applying the usual zeal and passion for discovering new ideas, young artists, and creating another opportunity for art to be made, shown, and sold.

I saw a hole to fill and stepped into it with both feet.

Leslie Ferrin
Director of Ferrin Contemporary
Fall 2014

Stephanie A. Rozene



Oneonta, NY, USA
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b.1980 Portland, ME, USA

2004 MFA, Nova Scotia
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University, Halifax,
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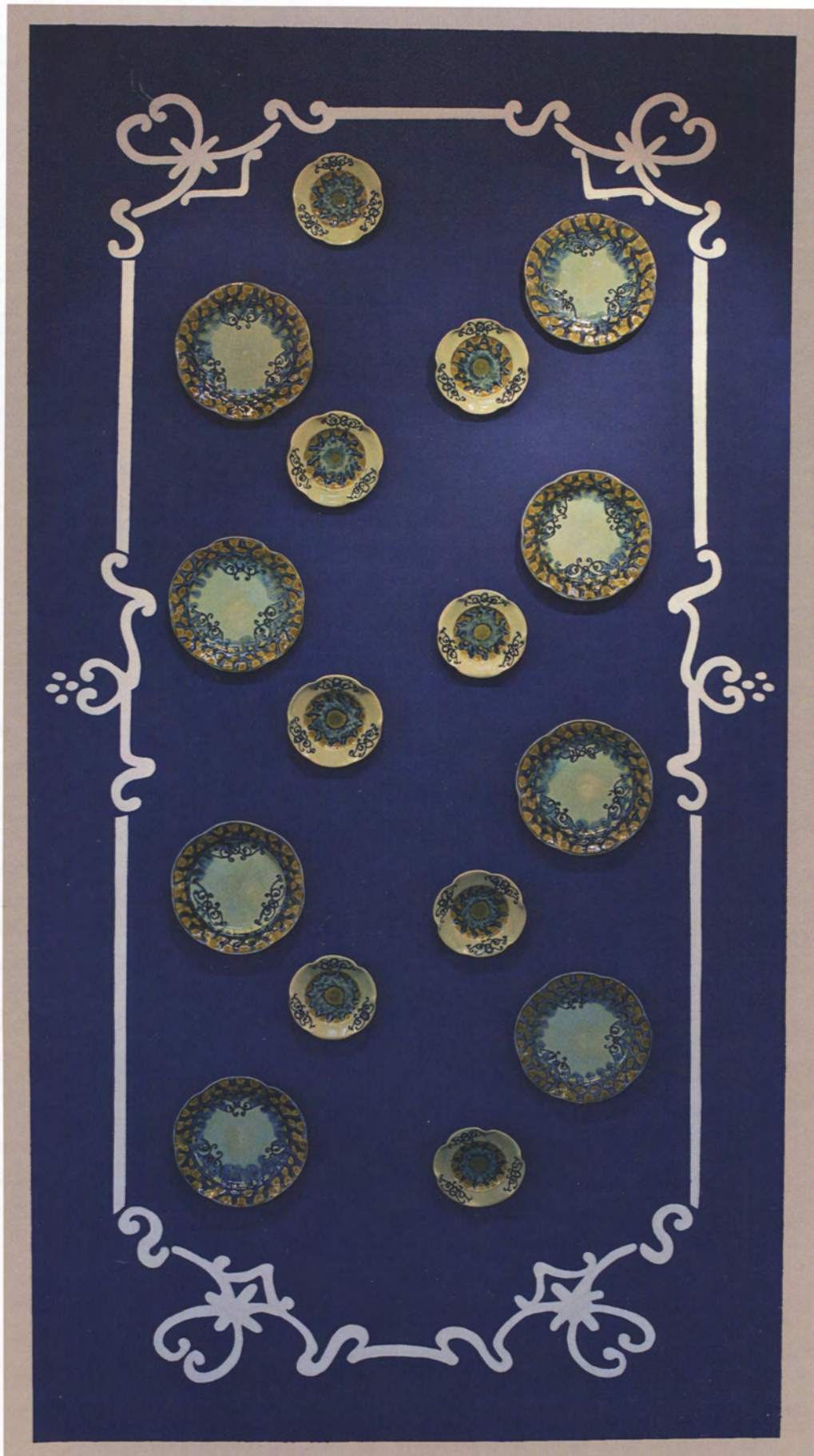
2002 BFA, New York State
College of Ceramics at
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Alfred, NY, USA

The Politics of Porcelain, 2011. Porcelain, glaze, panel 4' x 13', 8 dinner plates 10" d x 1", 8 side plates 6.5" d x 1".

The Politics of Porcelain continues Rozene's investigation into tableware, in particular the way European tableware was used as currency during the second half of the 18th and 19th centuries by European kings and queens wishing to demonstrate their wealth and power to other developed nations. Through the use of pattern, gold luster, and imagery, an ornamental language emerges which is not bound by time and place but reflects the interaction and transformation of cultures through migration, trade, conquest, and the spread of religions.

This is evidenced by several of the most extravagant sets of tableware created for Louis the XV and XVI and their various homes at Versailles, Louvre, and personal apartments in Paris. Additionally they had services of over 2,000 pieces delivered to the Empress of Austria, King Frederick V of Denmark, and Catherine the Great of Russia as ways to disseminate objects of wealth and power across Europe and the East.

The physical installation of this work used porcelain tableware, and forms that are reminiscent of rococo plaster work to create place settings, which hang on the wall, in turn, creating three tablescares on the wall. This act of hanging the china elevates its importance and status to that of a painting. The work seeks to begin a conversation about the importance and power of china.





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Stone Canoe considers for inclusion previously unpublished short fiction, creative nonfiction, essays, short plays, poems, and works of visual art in any medium. Submissions must be sent electronically; we currently use the Submittable.com system. For complete submission guidelines, visit <https://ycny.org/stone-canoe>.

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Stephanie Rozene, *Truth or Spectacle?*, Porcelain, 2018



Stephanie Rozene, *Truth or Spectacle? no. 2*, Porcelain, 2018