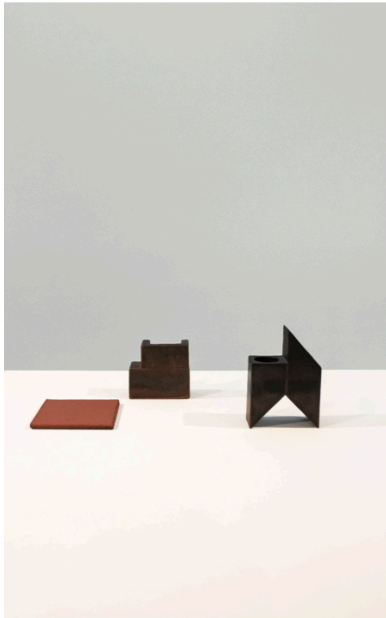


In No Particular Order:

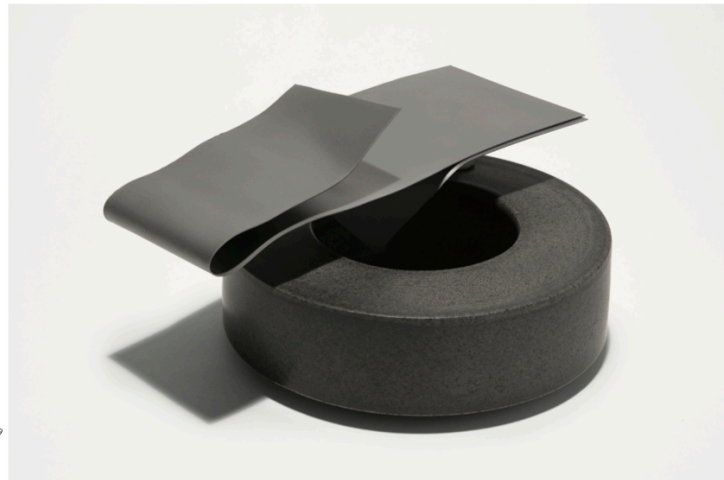


New Work by Ian McDonald

Ian McDonald
(b. 1975 Laguna Beach, California)

Ian McDonald lives and works in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan and is Artist-in-Residence and Head of Ceramics Department at Cranbrook Academy of Art. His work has been shown throughout the U.S., Europe and Japan, including Play Mountain and the Curators Cube in Tokyo, Yerba Buena Center for the Arts and Rena Bransten Gallery in San Francisco, The New Wight Gallery at UCLA in Los Angeles and Patrick Parrish Gallery in New York City. European venues include Nieuwe Vide Gallery in Holland; Sophienholm Exhibition Hall in Copenhagen, Denmark; and the Svendborg Kunstbygning Museum in Svendborg, Denmark. In 2007 he was awarded the "Premio Faenza" from the Museo Internazionale della Ceramiche in Faenza, Italy. He has completed residencies in Holland at the European Ceramic Workcentre, the Museum of International Ceramics in Denmark and the Museum of Fine Arts at the De Young Art Center in San Francisco. His work has appeared or been mentioned in numerous publications including *ArtForum*, *Metropolis*, *Wallpaper Magazine*, *Ceramics Monthly*, *Dwell* and *The New York Times*. From 2003-2015 he was on the faculty at the San Francisco Art Institute in the Ceramics and Sculpture Department.

Tray Round & Floating, 2019
Ceramic, steel



In No
Particular
Order:
New Work by
IAN McDONALD

Cranbrook Art Museum



presents

Cranbrook Art Museum

January 19 – March 10, 2019

Introduction

Andrew Blauvelt,
Director



the masterfully assembled of Ian McDonald's debut exhibition at the Cranbrook Art Museum, I am reminded of quite different exhibition moments from design history. In 1934, Philip Johnson, as the first Architecture and Design at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, his pioneering exhibition *Machine* presented a series of objects produced by hundreds of examples of mass-produced machines, objects, and mechanical parts, the show announced the arrival of modern industrial design as a new and deserving of museum study and collection. Displayed by type—rows of mass-produced beakers, columns of coiled springs, and assemblies of shiny metal rings on simple pedestals, shelves, and tables—it had a decisive leveling effect, dividing between high and low, and handcraft. Relieved from

their ordinary functions and removed from their everyday contexts, these products were now visually consumable as objects—beautiful forms delineating a new, emerging landscape of modern life.

McDonald's varied ceramic forms give an immediate impression of technical skill and mastery in the formation of the shapes and the deployment of glazes. Their precision and exactness fly in the face of much contemporary ceramic art, which embraces the loosely formed, even formless, use of clay and the expressionistic potential of the material to bear witness to the hand of the artist. The tightness of any one particular

object in McDonald's display, however, is countered by the looseness and open-ended nature of the arrangement as a whole. As the show's title—*In No Particular Order*—makes clear, any hierarchies among the objects have been renounced by the artist. Instead, each form is cast into a new role, one piece among others, like parts in a machine, operating together towards a larger aesthetic purpose or composition. It is a division of symbolic labor, a shared representational task that delivers a new order and discipline to the work of art. McDonald also blurs the lines of production with the introduction of found and altered metal components and. In this exhibition, the use of industrially produced terra cotta pipes. The hierarchies are again scrambled; handmade ceramic forms adopt the precision of machine-produced objects, and machine-produced products are reassigned new functions as designed objects—from sewer pipes to lights.

Although one could imagine each ceramic object as a discrete work of art, it is far more rewarding to contemplate the interplay of objects as a whole—the arrangement greater than the sum of its parts. This potential for variation and recombination overturns the seriality of the individual consumer product—a theoretically limitless production of identical goods that was, after all, the core promise of the industrial revolution. Perhaps ironically it was the mass production of pottery introduced by Josiah Wedgwood in eighteenth-century Britain that gave rise to the industrial revolution and to its division of labor on the assembly line. Without it, there could be no *Machine Art*. However, unlike Wedgwood, McDonald eschews the efficiency of molds in favor of the potter's wheel, and like Johnson he revels in the formal logic of a system, albeit one of the artist's choosing. By doing so, McDonald pieces together elements of art, craft, and design—in no particular order.

In No Particular Order

Jon P. Geiger,
Curator

Ian McDonald's practice is that of a true studio ceramicist, a mindset in which ideas are born and generated from the act of making within the studio. For the artist, this is arguably the natural way to work with the ceramic medium, shared by artists as diverse as Warren Mackenzie, Majja Grotell, and Annabeth Rosen. It is from this manner of making that McDonald is able to displace a sense of hierarchy inherent in most practices—to focus solely on each moment of making and be free to see where it takes him. With every aspect of McDonald's practice treated equally, he is able to create a seamless relationship between parts, pieces, objects, and the space between.

The beauty of McDonald's work goes beyond the disruption of hierarchy among the semi-monochromatic ceramics he produces. It is the manner in which he conducts himself within the studio that starts the process of achieving balance, later to be echoed and instilled in the work that is presented. The majority of McDonald's work is produced with ceramics' most noble of tools, the potter's wheel. These works are then often built upon, chopped up, and reassembled with a combination of extruded elements and hand-formed clay during the work's greenware stages. Notches are cut out and ledges formed, anticipating some future element or simply holding the space around it. It is during these initial stages of making the work that a conversation between starts and stops begins to take place, and the steps toward balance inch forward.

Soft stoneware dram, 2018
Ceramic

This marrying of both physical add-ons and absent space can be seen predominantly in McDonald's *Low Works* and *Tray* series. With both bodies of work, the alternating of ceramic and steel components creates layered senses of time. On one hand there is the ceramic form and material—its very essence is that of patience, longevity, and the eternal. On the other side is the steel—its soft and malleable nature is hand-bent in quick fashion or simply plucked from the scrap yard to be left as is. The time to make either varies, yet nonetheless McDonald's focus is the same.

Perhaps what makes those moments so prominent is that they are offset by the artist's newest works, *Midwest Tubes*. Unlike the rest of the ceramic components within the exhibition, these two massive terra cotta lights did not come from McDonald's hand. Instead, these works were produced by an industrial ceramic sewer pipe company in Ohio. McDonald worked with the factory to glaze and alter these preexisting extruded tubes. By doing so, the role of ceramics in the artist's practice has arguably swapped places with that of the steel components—and it is during this role reversal that any sense of material hierarchy is disbanded. Like the steel elements, the two large terra cotta pipes are slightly altered with a clean cut and a puncture hole. They operate within a middle ground that is unique to ceramics



as a medium—an ability to be linked to a multitude of philosophies and processes.

Much in the way McDonald's *Low Works* reference "the bowl," *Midwest Tubes* hovers around an idea that it is one thing to reference something, and quite another to do to it for real. The tubular light pieces float between being a found object, designed product, and a sculptural form.

Whether one is a true ceramic enthusiast or a first-time viewer of McDonald's work, the glaze has an equal impact. McDonald's use of cone 10 reduction glazes in most of the works allows for unique moments of color to happen within each piece. This process of using a gas kiln reduces the amount of oxygen during the firing, causing carbon atoms to snatch up any existing oxygen from the clay and glaze. This results in unique variations within each work. Through this process each piece is to be handed over to chance as McDonald surrenders power of the material to something as simple as chemical process and heat. The artist continues to use the kiln as a platform for chance when he down fires some of the works a few hundred degrees to cone 1. This lower temperature of firing produces what McDonald refers to as "soft stoneware." The pieces have a luscious visual velvety and leathery texture that breaks away from an association with ceramic being hard and rigid.

Yet perhaps McDonald's most transformative use of glaze is when applied to large square slabs within the *Tray* series and the long rectangular bars scattered throughout the exhibition. Here, the artist dips back into his mindset of working with the steel and sewer pipes by shifting the appearance of kiln shelves and posts. He integrates the very element always seen merely as a support during the firing process into an equal component of the final piece. This non-hierarchical approach to every aspect is mirrored throughout the exhibition. It is seen in relationships between steel and ceramic mediums, kiln shelves and vessel forms, and empty spaces and ceramic coils.



Tray Works (Shelving), 2
Ceramic, kiln shelf, steel

All of this returns us to the Cranbrook campus as a whole. The series of objects that exist on the pedestals and shelving units echo the mentality of both Saarinen's architecture and the Academy of Art's philosophy. The Academy functions as a place where departments commingle—where one medium's pedagogy does not take precedence over another, but in fact enriches and elevates its neighboring discipline. At Cranbrook, McDonald's personal studio practice is an example to his students. The act of making and exploring in the studio is key, allowing for a space to find opportunity and strength in

a material as a strategy for ideas. McDonald's installation recalls the moments of balance created by the within his architecture at Cranbrook. A campus that exudes architectural perfection, order, and structure by subtle moments of difference. The Academy Library and Art Museum doors, the seemingly random plaques on facades, and Saarinen's hieroglyphs disrupt a predictable symmetry. What is seen in the exhibition *In No Particular Order* is the pure possibility of working through ideas, exploring of ceramic possibilities, and the space that surrounds us.

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