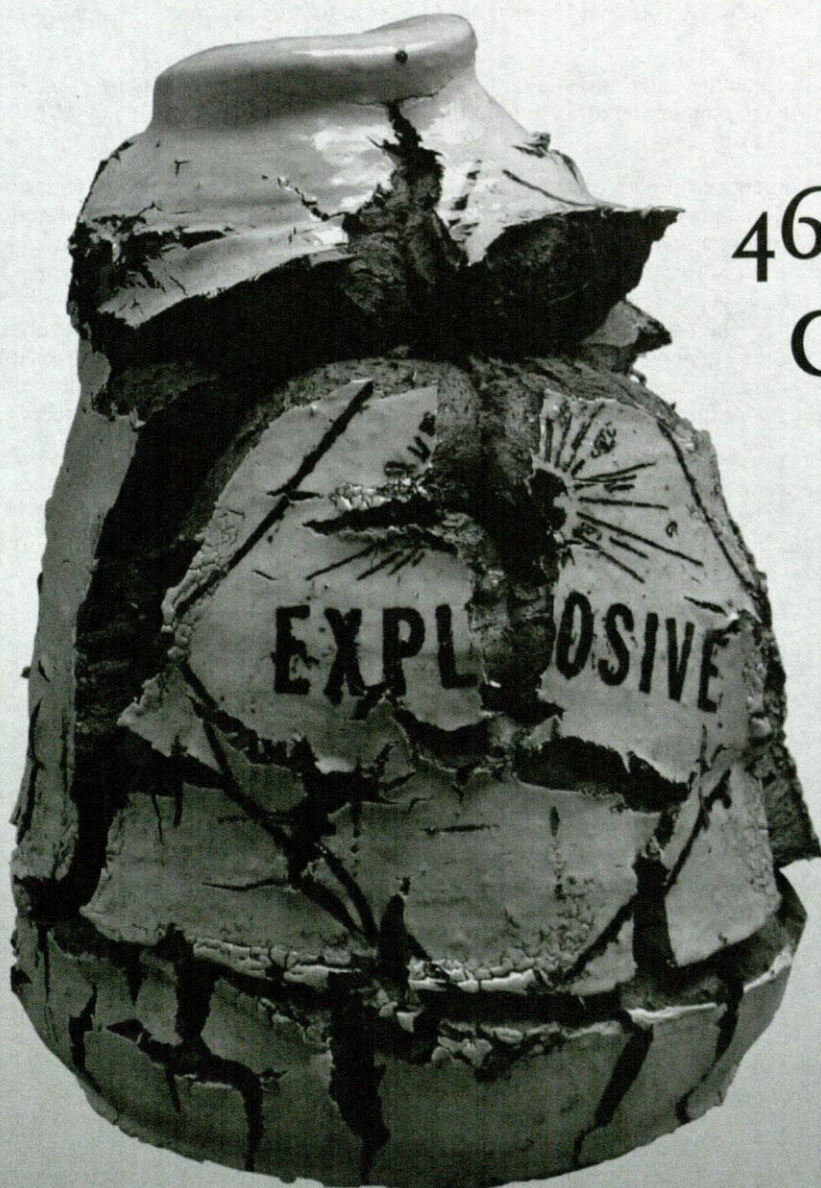


# nceca Journal 2013

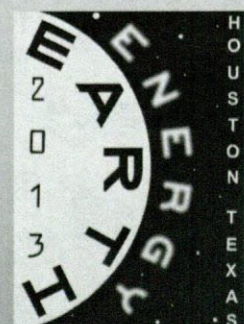
Volume XXXIV



Clayton Bailey

## Chronicle of Presentations

from the  
**46th Annual  
Conference**  
and  
Preceding  
Organizational  
Efforts



nceca



# LECTURE: ORDERED EARTHS / CHAOTIC ENERGY

Brian Molanphy

Over the course of three extended trips to Provence since 2010, I have been studying its earthenware traditions, particularly the marbled ceramics of the towns of Aubagne and Apt. For their support of my time in France, I thank the Camargo Foundation in Cassis, near Marseille, host to researchers from all disciplines; the Dora Maar House, located a day's bike ride north of Camargo in Ménerbes, a residential program of the Brown Foundation administered by the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; the Provost, Dean and Chair of Art at Southern Methodist University, who offered support through a University Research Council grant, a Meadows Fellowship and a Division of Art grant; and most importantly these three musketeers: Philippe Beltrando, the potter of Barbotine; David Challier, ceramic scientist of Aptachrome; and, André Nouaille de Gorce, the potter of La Berdine.

The Camargo Foundation overlooks the port of Cassis on the Mediterranean Sea. A semester here afforded me the opportunity to study in nearby Aubagne, a traditional ceramics town. Though Provence boasts a rich ceramic history, beginning before the Roman Empire, its bright color came from Al-Andalus (Islamic Spain) and Sicily. The Marseille History Museum preserves several thirteenth century kilns for *faïence*, or fine-quality glazed earthenware, the oldest kilns of this kind in France. Often glazed ware was loaded upside down on ceramic bars, so the glaze ran from the inside center of the pots to their rims. When the Catholic Church headquartered in Avignon during the fourteenth century, local production of colorful ceramics increased, and continued to grow through the following five centuries.

The towns of Aubagne, and nearby Biot, produced the largest single portion of pottery in France from the mid-eighteenth to mid nineteenth centuries, mostly large shipping and storage jars to furnish the colonized world. Aubagne's Ravel Pottery still makes large jars, now mostly used in gardens, from its own clay pit as it has done since 1837. The potter uses a steel arm, like a giant rib, to press the clay against the inside wall of the fast-spinning plaster mold, a process called jollyng.

The French language has several words for glaze, referring to ceramic glaze. *Vernis* means 'clear glaze', usually colorless. Color in terre vernissée mostly comes from the colored clay beneath the glaze. I was fortunate to meet Philippe Beltrando, who welcomed me to work in his studio in Aubagne for glazing and firing. His studio, Barbotine, is recognized by the French government as an EPV (*Entreprise du Patrimoine Vivant*), or a national cultural treasure. Philippe is one of the founders of the Argilla Biennial, the largest recurring ceramics event in Europe. Argilla is a trio of an international contemporary ceramics invitational group exhibition, an historical or archaeological exhibition of Mediterranean ceramics, and a street market open to all cera-



Cup, unattributed. 3.5" Marbled earthenware with glaze. Apt (France), late 18th century. Photo by author.

mists by a jury process. Philippe's current production includes *jaspé*. *Jaspé* means jasper, a milky quartz, often streaked, or marbled. Jasper and other colorful rocks like malachite had been carved since antiquity to make luxurious vases, for example, the *Demidoff Vase* in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, about four feet tall, made by Pierre-Philippe Thomire in Paris in the early nineteenth century. The *Demidoff Vase* is made of malachite, a copper mineral. So the vase is carved from a relatively hard rock, compared to clay which is a soft rock, therefore carving malachite or jasper is a relatively dif-

ficult process. As is often the case, a ceramic process is sought to mimic the look of another, more precious, material, like jasper or marble. In Philippe's studio plastic clay is decorated with a coating of colored slips to resemble the marbled pattern in stone. As with many other practices in mimicry, once Provençal potters accomplished the look of marble, then the practice of the gesture led to aleatory, or creative stylization or expansion of the motif. It's about knowing when to stop, and then seeing what more



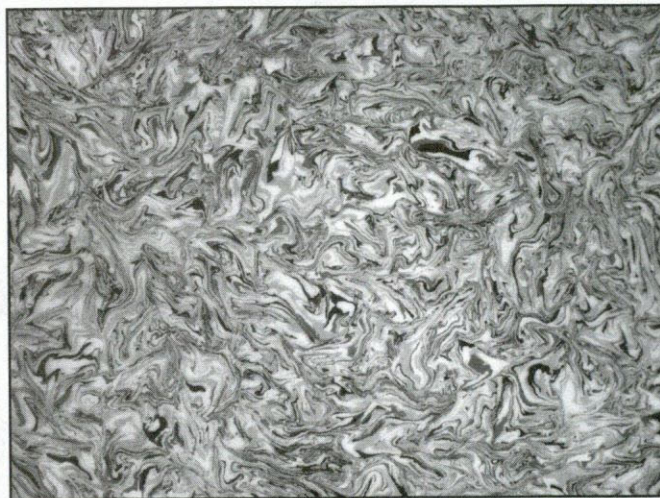
Brian Molanphy, *carrés encadrés*, installation view. Each tile 8". Earthenware with slip & glaze. 2010. Photo by artist.

could be done if you don't stop.

I made a series of 8-inch cubic marbled tiles in the Camargo studio. Previously I was making pots, whose forms are basically drawn from the circle or the conic section. Often I tried to compromise the dominance of the third dimension in the vessel by flattening mine, highlighting the two-dimensional profile. Beginning with the 2010 trip in France, I wanted to work in one of ceramics' other two principal traditions. Shying away from the kind of representation of the body that the figurine implies, I chose architecture. The basic ceramic architectural form is the brick for walls and the tile for floors. The decorative extension of the brick is the tile and the basic tile form is the square.



Just as I had done with vessels, I also wanted, with tiles, to privilege the underdog dimension, so I inflated the tiles into cubes. I made about forty *car-rés*, or tiles. There are three different decorative strategies, however all of the tiles feature one marbled face. The first one uses sgraffito squares to make drawn edges on the tile's surface that are more prominent than the tile's own edges. The second has a planished or hammered surface. Some faces are unglazed and some faces have a shiny opaque white glaze (*ma-jolica*). The third approach has



Brian Molanphy, *coupe de veine*, detail. Marbled earthenware with glaze, 2012. Photo by artist.

a rougher relief with some surfaces coated in blue and green transparent glazes. About twenty-five of them were shown in the Camargo amphitheatre. Camargo has many decorative tiles and mosaics created by the founder, Jerome Hill. I was very fortunate to be able to contribute to that collection at the end of the residency. I decorated sixteen tiles, now installed on the rooftop terrace outside what was my apartment during the residency, the same terrace where I had spent so many days marveling at the rocks and sea.

After working in the Camargo amphitheatre, I wanted to bring back a prominent curve into the ceramics. I started combining plastic colored clays instead of a slip coating, generally called *terre mêlée*. So the coloring is in the mass of the clay, not only on its surface. The mixture that resembles marble, *terre marbrée*, knew its apogee in Apt, a market town in Provence. Ochre, a source of iron, was exploited in this region, mined for coloring paint, plaster, or clay. In 1776, the Moulin brothers used these ochres with other minerals to produce the first French marbled wares. Apt potteries were regarded as the finest producers of this marbled ware.

I worked in the village of Ménerbes in an 18th-century house purchased in 1944 by Pablo Picasso for Dora Maar, the artist who was Picasso's companion & muse in the late 1930s and early 1940s. Dora Maar owned the house until her death in 1997, after which the Brown Foundation transformed it into a retreat for writers, scholars and artists, now administered by the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston. As French villages go, Ménerbes is remote. While other residents of the Dora Maar House were less mobile, I traveled by bicycle to and from the town of Apt, to a studio called Aptachrome for firings. These trips trained me for the one-day amateur Tour de France bike race, which took us amateurs two, three, or four times longer to complete than the professional racers. Other excursions led me through cherry orchards, fields of lavender and past quarries of ochre. Most romantically, I rode to Fontaine de Vaucluse, which was, for Petrarch, the 'dearest place on earth'. To experience this prodigious spring, as well as village fountains and especially holy water fonts in village churches, the basins at church entrances that contain holy water, showed me a way that small containers, like a pot, extend from big ones, like a building. The holy water fonts are often carved from one piece of stone, so they are both a brick in the wall and the font that extends from the wall. These led me to make fonts with marbled clay for an exhibition in a

thousand year old chapel near Clermont-Ferrand in the volcanic region of France. The exhibition was called *les fontaines*, which means 'fountains', at the church called Notre Dame de la Rivière, which means 'Our Lady of the River'. These ceramic fonts are dry, there's no water in them, holy or not. Some are full already, the cavity replete, no room for water. They rely instead on the fluidity of the marbled motif.

The paper presentation at the NCECA conference concluded with thirty images and a short film that show a process for making

marbled clay. André often told me that the potter accomplishes the final appearance of disorder and chaos in the marbled motif because of the strictly ordered processes that preceded to it.

**Brian Molanphy** is Assistant Professor of Ceramics at Southern Methodist University (SMU) in Dallas and is recently a Fellow of the Camargo Foundation in Cassis and of the Brown Foundation in Ménerbes, both in France. He organized *From Yellow Clay to Black Gumbo*, a Texas ceramics educators' group exhibition at the SMU Pollock Gallery which travelled to Houston's Winter Street Studios as an NCECA concurrent independent exhibition.



## Ceramics Program

- Classes • Exhibits
- Workshops • Residency Program

### Upcoming Exhibits/Workshops:

**3rd Annual Clay National**  
 Exhibit-July 31-September 8, 2013  
 Juror-Virginia Scotchie  
 Application Deadline-May 8, 2013  
 Apply online at: [www.juriedartservices.com](http://www.juriedartservices.com)

**Curis Benzle**  
 Exhibit-September 14-October 27, 2013  
 Workshop-October 25-27, 2013

**AMACO Professional**  
 Development Workshops for  
 K-12 Art Educators  
 with Diana Faris-June 1  
 & September 21, 2013

**Steve Loucks and Lynnette Hesser**  
 Exhibit-March 12-April 27, 2014  
 Workshop-April 25-27, 2014

9601 Ox Road, Lorton, Virginia 22079  
 703-584-2982  
[dalemarhanka@workhousearts.org](mailto:dalemarhanka@workhousearts.org)  
[www.workhousearts.org](http://www.workhousearts.org)  
[www.workhouseceramics.org](http://www.workhouseceramics.org)