CERAMICS NOW

Digital Issue 2

MAGAZINE

Cover (Print)
Ken Eastman, Hold your own
Stoneware with painted coloured slips and oxides
14.9 x 13 x 21.3 inches
38 x 33 x 54 cm

Cover (Digital)
Romana Cucu Mateias, Signs between Heaven and Earth
Earthenware, Metalic oxides
64.2 x 6.7 inches, 75.2 x 6.7 inches
163 x 17 cm, 191 x 17 cm

EDITORIAL

Vasi Hîrdo

Although the number of contemporary ceramic artists is relatively small, the capacity of ceramics to encompass a broad range of concepts, techniques, and materials in comparison with other arts is surprisingly big. In this issue, as well as in our first, we present artists who work with different materials and techniques, but more importantly, each of them displays a distinct idea, a little hint of what he and his passion are made of. Through the interviews and articles we have included, we want at least a part of the artists' ideas to be ridden, passed along, and to contribute to the advancement of contemporary ceramics.

While being creative in a field as diverse as contemporary art, it is almost impossible not to draw parallels between your work and someone else's which was probably created in a media different from the one you use. This happens inevitably, and in my opinion, it always has a purpose – either predefined or not. Even if a parallel is found, each artistic endeavor has its own origin and, at least for the creator, a unique purpose. A new level is reached when the uniqueness of the artistic initiative is recognized and supported by an entire community.

Over the past year, Ceramics Now has become the largest online art platform dedicated to contemporary ceramics, and recently we have opened promotion to artists and galleries worldwide by application. This effort resulted from the wish to offer artists a platform to express themselves, but also from the desire to establish an accessible resource for everyone wanting to research and be inspired by contemporary ceramics. Since the launch of the first issue, we have been cited as a reference by numerous universities and colleges in the United States and Europe. This step was incredibly important for us because it has proven the value of the project and has kept us working hard. Although the current issue was published later than originally planned, what is important is that all the resources we gathered through this process have already traveled the internet in the meantime, creating a powerful community around us.

Our next goal is to become even more active in promoting contemporary ceramics on an international scale. Although we have already organized four international exhibitions, with two being prepared for this year, all of these events so far have been held in Romania. In addition to inviting foreign artists to our beautiful country, we want to visit artists in their home countries and to organize events in as many places as possible for as many artists as possible. Key to our success will be greater financial stability and transitioning to full-time staffing of this project. It is a big step that can be possible with growing support from our readers. (An act of patronage has infinitely more value than a purchase.)

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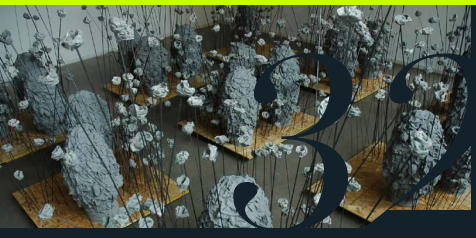
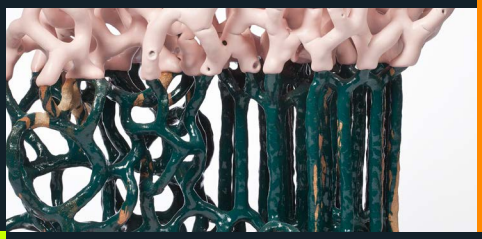
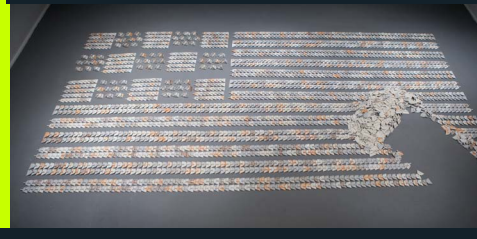






Annie Woodford

By Ileana Surducan

You take your inspiration from nature. You are not just making a superficial observation, but you conduct a research of the things hidden to the naked eye. Tell us more about the universe you have discovered through your explorations.

I am fascinated by the natural world in its widest sense and at all levels. An interest in the nature of time - the past, present and future has led me to investigate multiverse theory and hidden dimensions - concealed worlds. From there I began to examine nature on a microscopic and nano scale. I became fascinated by the concept of the unseen and rendering it seen. One of the subjects I investigated was that of diatoms, especially fossil diatoms. Invisible to the naked eye, beautiful and structurally complex I discovered them to be very significanting in the field of paleoclimatology - they are an important indicator of climate change. I like to select various aspects of the natural world and then examine them on both a macroscopic and microscopic level, considering them in terms of their relationship to time and how they relate to other parts of the universe.

Although your drawings and sketches are proof of an extended research and documentation, the objects you create are not large-scale replicas of natural elements. How far from the mimetic representation of reality do you allow yourself to go with your interpretations?

The objects I devise are always hybrid forms. They often combine the organic with the inorganic, the man made with the seemingly natural. I would like to think that any 'message' might refer to the fragility of our world and the effect man's intervention has had.

Intricate but also delicate, your work seems to be obtained through a very meticulous process. What materials and techniques do you use and how much time does it take to complete a new piece?

Porcelain is the clay I favour - I particularly like 'Southern Ice White' which was developed by the Australian ceramicist Les Blakebrough. In general, the works are handbuilt; occasionally I use slip in a free but controlled way, sometimes combining it with fine glass fibre. I like to push the material beyond its perceived boundaries. The characteristics of porcelain mean that it requires careful handling throughout the making process and control and accuracy with firing and cooling. I often incorporate extraneous materials once the piece is fired such as metal, monofilament, fibre or horsehair. These elements add richness to the work. A new piece can take up to two weeks to make, depending on its complexity and it can take a further week or two to construct and apply other elements. I work intuitively when I am making, drawing on my research and bringing all the experiences together.

Mixing organic textures and precise details, your art is almost always pure and 'white'. Why did you choose to not use color in your work?

I sometimes use black stains and very occasionally other colours but I like the purity of white, its 'otherness' - the way it reflects and transmits light. Those qualities imbue the pieces with a sense of mystery and anomalousness.

In the eyes of the viewer, your objects are a cabinet of curiosity. They seem to be part of a strange natural history museum collection. What sort of reaction do you expect from the viewer?

I would like the viewer to feel inquisitive, to wonder about the objects and to feel unsettled by them. The French ceramicist Claude Champy once said, in describing my work 'Like the Surrealists, you have created your own world' - It's a description that pleases me. Both science and art are a way of looking at the surrounding environment. What do you think is their meeting point? What kind of form of knowledge is art? I often find myself working with scientists on projects and I think the two disciplines have many aspects in common. They both help us to understand the world around us. They both rely on investigation and imagination – the 'what if?' principle. Using creativity to think in a different way about an abstract theory or problem can be a catalyst for discoveries in both art and science. Some of the best artists engage with science, they look at life and the world around them in an analytical way and then integrate that within intuitive way of working. For me the sublime goal is to combine intellect with intuition. Above all artists can help scientists to look at things differently and vice versa.

Tell us about 'Beyond the Surface of Things', your research project conducted in Iceland.

In 2006 I received a research award for a project that required investigating the interface between macro and micro. Iceland was a country I was familiar with and its environment seemed the perfect location to explore that particular concept.

Iceland is a land of breath-taking beauty. Unspoilt, the silent, brooding landscape conceals the raw power of nature, both above and beneath its fragile shifting crust. Horizons merge into sky and the empty fractured vistas contain a dream-like quality, all of it enveloped in the purest, cleanest air. Possessing a magic, invisible - but there -, to cross it is like plunging into an unknown mysterious passage, uncontaminated by man, into a timeless shadowy world. It was twenty-eight years ago that I made my first visit to Iceland. Instantly captivated by the desolate lava deserts, punctuated by luminous rhyolite mountains and adorned with immense glaciers, it has become my favourite place on Earth.

The purpose of my visit last year, was to carry out research for the project Beneath the Surface of Things. For a long time I have been interested in hidden worlds, those places we cannot see, ever present, existing beyond our vision; beyond our dimension. Reveal the concealed and the unseen is seen. Once seen, does it become real, or was it always so? In June 2006, I travelled once again into the empty Southern Highlands towards Vatnajokull and Landmannalaugar, to the black sands of Vik and the stunning Snaefellsnes Peninsula, its glacier dominating the view for miles. Then to Geysir, where the mud pools and striking siliceous sinter formations provided rich material for the study.

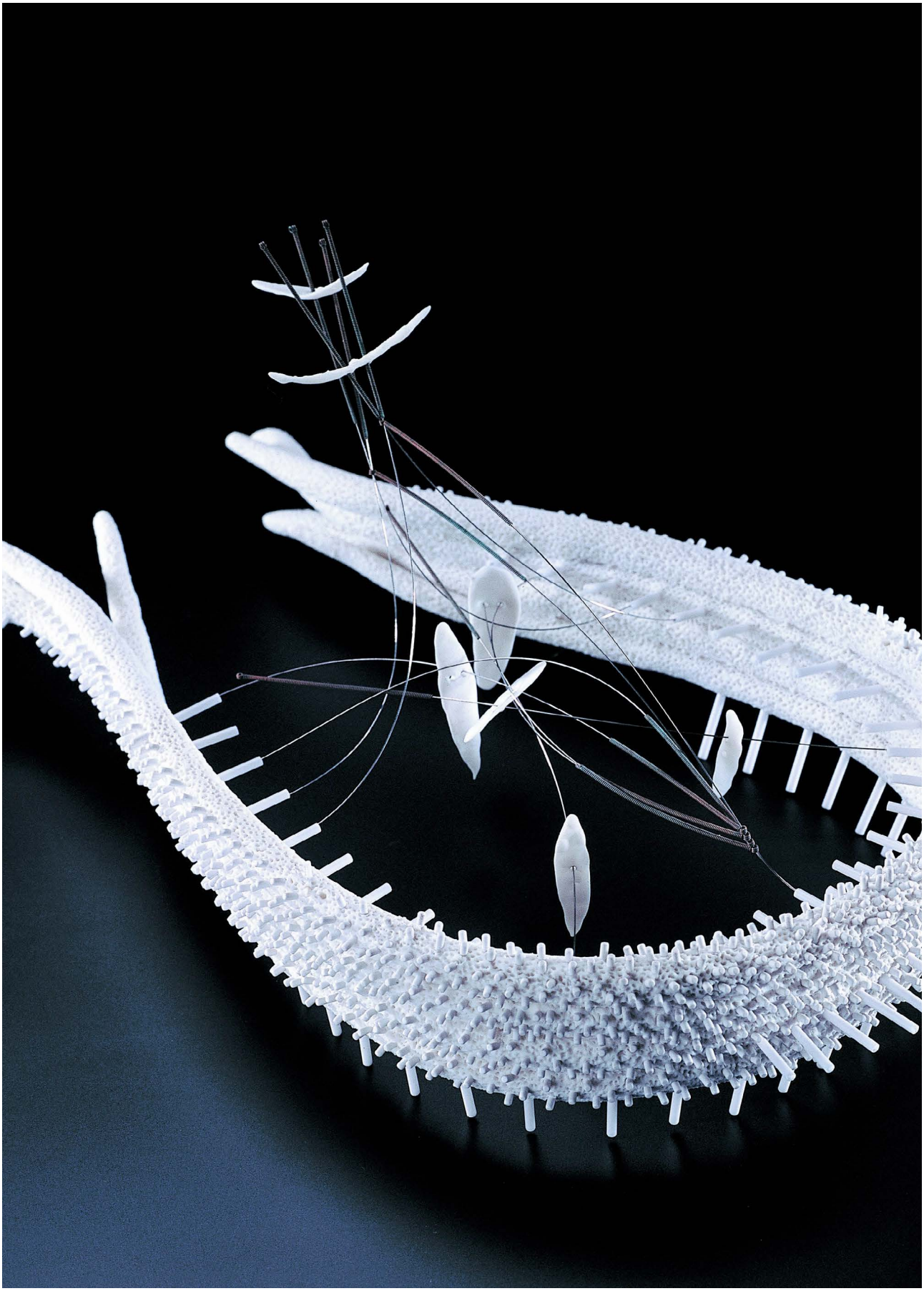
Using a variety of media and equipment, including a portable x100 digital microscope linked to an Apple laptop and using precise map coordinates, I documented specific areas of landscape, taking images and readings. Drawings, video, photographs of place captured the distant view; detailed drawings, macro photos of site - the closer view; finally microscopic readings of the surface the inner view, literally beyond the surface. By adding satellite imagery (courtesy of NASA) 3D becomes 2D, 2D becomes 3D and in effect macro becomes micro, micro becomes macro. The collected data and images will ultimately result in a large-scale installation. The aim is to reflect the haunting atmosphere whilst revealing layer upon layer of shifting, subtle happenings and the conflict between inner and outer forces. Those things we cannot see are often the most powerful and disturbing.

You are currently involved in a number of projects. Please share some of them with us. Where can we see your work in the future?

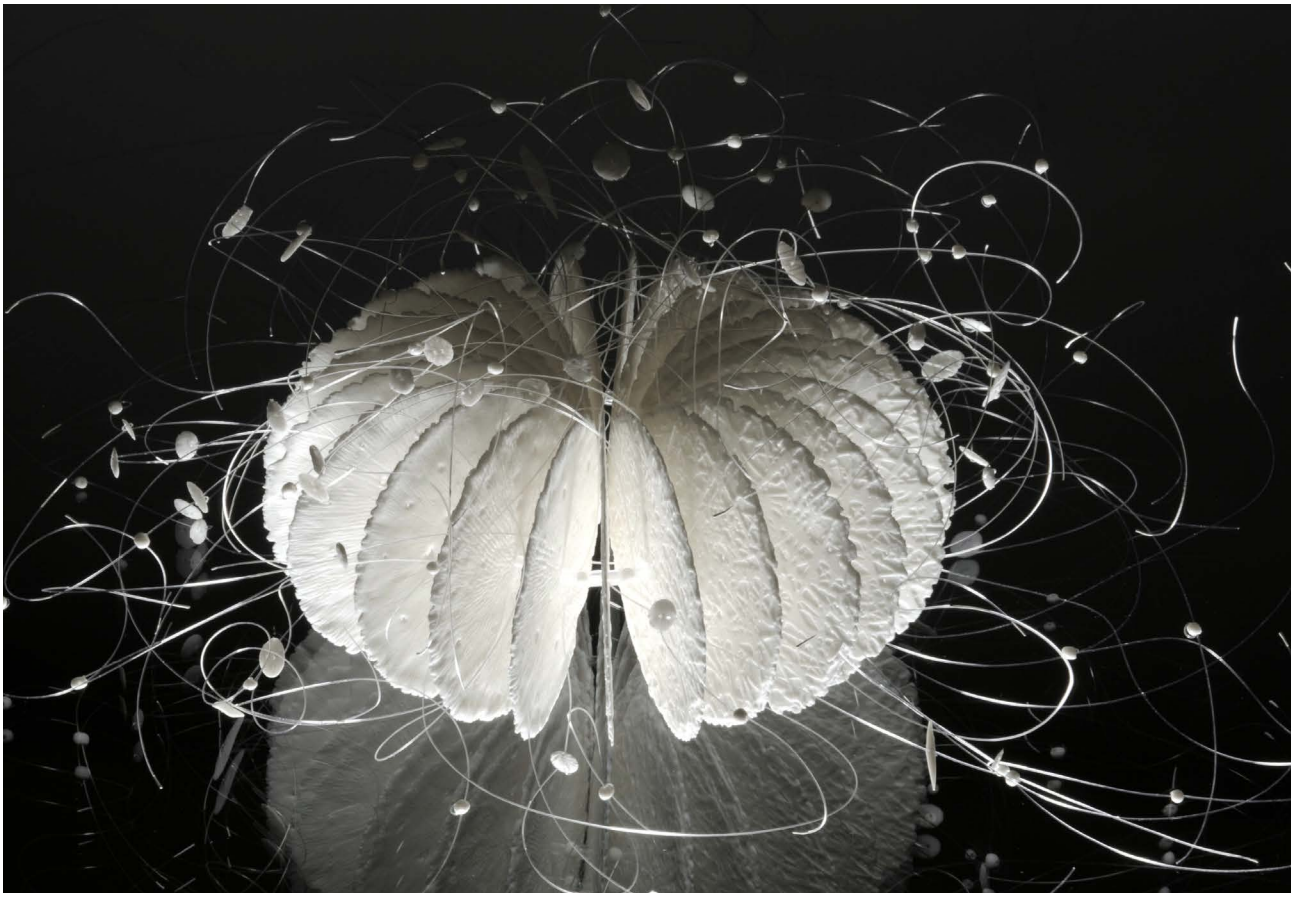
The 'Surface' project is printmaking and artists' books collaboration with the artist Frances Kiernan.This will culminate in an exhibition and short film.Also I am in the process of developing a multi media researchproject about diatoms and radiolarian using the collections housed in The Academy of Natural Sciences, Philadelphia. This will take place this year. Later this year my work is included in a printmaking exhibition at Kyoto Museum, Japan. There will also be a film made about my work, describing concepts, themes and making processes.

We have recently moved from London to Edinburgh, Scotland and are having a house with studiosbuilt in Highland Perthshire so much of my time this year and next will be spent is organising that project.

Piercing Rim, 2007, Porcelain, copper, stainless steel, 28 x 18 x 16 cm



Veiled Core, porcelain, nylon monofilament, 30 x 30 x 25 cm



Slice, 2010, Porcelain nylon monofilament, 16 x 12 x 20cm

Jenni Ward

By Alexandra Mureşan and Vasi Hîrdo

You are presenting yourself as a sculptor even though you have a BFA in Ceramics. What are you currently working on?

Although I've been educated in all aspects of ceramics; pottery, functional hand-building or sculpture, I've chosen to focus on abstract sculptural ceramics. I feel that if I say I'm a ceramicist, people either don't know what I'm talking about or they assume I throw pots, so I feel that introducing myself as a sculptor who works with clay is a more precise description of the work I create. Right now I'm working with organic forms that have holes cut into them and those forms have other ceramics pieces that are trapped inside. This process of trapping forms has manifested itself into multiple series of work. I'm conceptually playing with the balance between trapping and protecting an object and simultaneously exploring abstract ways to express that in clay.

What triggered the passion for ceramics in you?

I have always worked with clay, my parents still have the first coil pot I made as a kid and I just never stopped working with clay. I was lucky enough to of had an in depth ceramics program in my high school. That exposure gave me the experience to explore clay and know that it was going to be my focus at the university level. I also really love the process of working with clay; each stage that you go through from a soft malleable material to a fired finished piece offers the chance that everything can go wrong at any step in the process. Having the ability to balance control over the clay and letting what happens happen is always a battle for me that I'm very attracted to. I'm constantly learning new techniques or possibilities with clay whether it's through taking a workshop or seeing another artist at work. Clay is a very basic, primitive material that can be used in such varied and technological ways; it's a constant learning process.

In your evolution as a ceramic artist, were there any artists that inspired you greatly? Who are you currently admiring?

I take inspiration from all art; street graffiti to fiber arts, everything has something to offer, something to learn from and some bit to use towards my own creations. I look at artists in all different mediums; I love Andy Goldsworthy's nature forms, Georgia O'Keeffe's use of negative space, Dale Chihuly's use of form and color, Chisto & Jeanne Claude's use of space and interaction. Sometimes I just love a palette of colors that an artist uses, a technique, or a texture and I'll take inspiration from those parts to use in my own work regardless of its original medium.

Where do you get your inspiration from? Tell us more about the developmental process of a new series.

Nature in general is my ultimate inspiration, but specifically; I look at forms, textures and colors found in nature. The smoothness and curvatures of bones, shells and stones, the textures of nests, hives and grains of wood are all in my work in some facet. When I start a new series of work, it's a way of focusing on one of these elements and exploring it in an abstract way. I sketch (a lot!) and sometimes it takes me a long time to work out the mechanics of an idea on paper. Then I move into an experimental piece in clay, testing out the building, glazing or installation aspects of a piece. Then I begin to build a series of work, which ultimately becomes the easiest part of the process. I will continue to build in these series until one idea leads to the next and it's so far from the original that I'll go back to the drawing board (literally) and start again with a new series.

You are creating your pieces with a real sense of originality, and you are also constructing geometrical shapes that are completing the spectrum of natural forms. How did the fascination for natural and organic shapes start?

My early work reflects ocean forms; corals, shells, anemones because I spent a lot of time around the ocean and underwater, then I moved into a redwood forest and my work referenced seeds, pollens, insects so now I think that I'm at a point in my work where those worlds have collided and I'm finding a balance between both the above and below sea level sources. Along this journey, I've also discovered the importance of balancing the organic with the geometric. All organic in clay seems too blobby to me, and all geometric seems to be fighting such a supple material so I try play with the balance of both.

In 2005 you opened the Earth Art Studio in Aptos, CA, and more recently HOPE Art – a humanitarian group that brings art to the youth of Haiti. Tell us more about these projects.

Earth Art Studio is my home studio that I share with my students. I teach ceramics and mixed media sculpture classes to kids, teens and adults there. The studio has been open for almost 7 years, but I have been a teacher forever it seems, it comes naturally to me and I get inspired by what my students create and by their comments on seeing my work in progress. I also love the challenge of answering all of their questions. www.earthartstudioaptos.com I'm proud to be a founding member of HOPE Art which brings art to kids in disaster stricken areas as a form of stress relief and self-esteem; we've been working in Port au Prince, Haiti for over 1 year. I've personally been on 3 out of the 4 trips our group has made this past year and it has been life changing. Meeting working artists in Haiti has been an amazing and unexpected experience in itself. But my favorite moments are when I teach the kids how to draw something simple like an animal or everyday object and then the next day they run up to me and show me all the drawings that they've done overnight, perfecting the steps and so proud that they can draw that one thing. It's really incredible to see the pride in their faces, it transcends language and cultures. HOPE Art is based on the idea that "Art is the Universal Language". www.projecthopeart.org

In addition to being the owner of the Earth Art Studio and founding member of HOPE Art, you also work as art instructor, you are organizing workshops and do volunteer work. Somehow you manage to fulfill all your tasks with great pleasure. What is your key to success?

Well, I'm not sure that I'm successful (YET!) but I'm managing to manage it all, just barely. Really, this is my life; it's not a hobby so I'm lucky to get to do what I love for a living but that means that I get to do it 24-7. It's exhausting and a major commitment, but I really wouldn't have it any other way.

You are working on many projects at the moment and you are also creating a new series of works. Where can we find you in the near future?

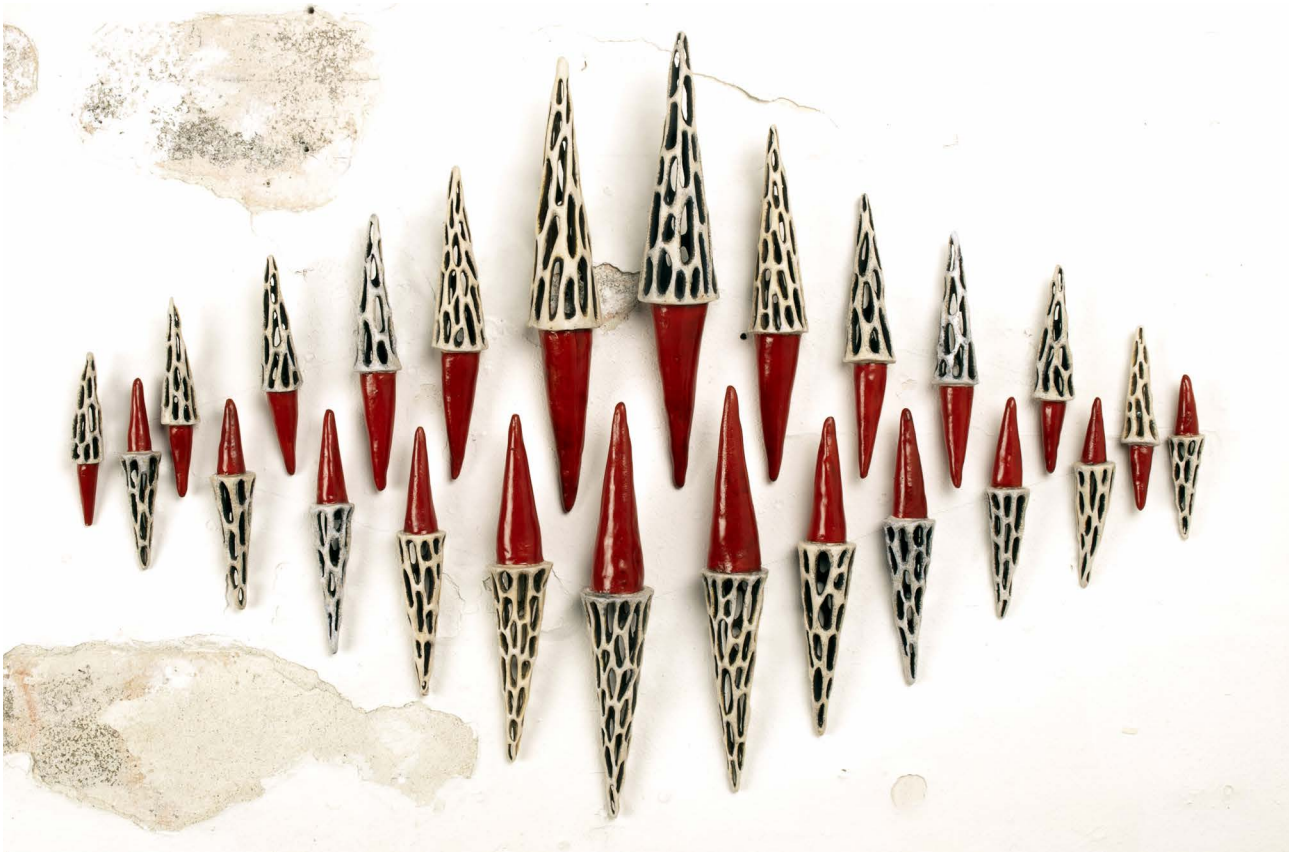
I was recently selected to participate in the Ceramics Annual of America exhibition in San Francisco at the Fort Mason Center in September. I'm really looking forward to this event and meeting the other participating artists. I'm planning to show a new series of work at this event. I also show my work at local venues year-round in the Santa Cruz, CA area and participate in the annual Open Studios Art Tour. And I welcome studio visits anytime! www.jenniward.com

What advice would you give to a young ceramic artist?

Just keep making art, no matter what. If you can't set up a ceramic studio yet, due to space, money, equipment, whatever, look at what you can do; draw, sketch, paint, photograph, build miniatures, explore other materials, work at a studio in exchange for studio space or kiln use. But no matter what; make art – not excuses.

Nest Series III, 2011, Ceramic, 13" x 7" x 7"

Hive Series V, 2011, Ceramic, 24" x 40" x 4"



Branch Series V (installation), 2011, Ceramic & high temperature, wire, variable dimensions

Deborah Britt

By Andra Baban

You have been working with ceramics for more than ten years now; when exactly did it all start? Tell us how you discovered this passion.

My passion for ceramics came rather late. Having been born and raised on a farm in Northwest Missouri, far away from big city influences, exposure to the arts was minimal. Art classes in my small-town school were non-existent past grade school–with a student body of 60 students in grades 1 through 12, resources were focused on the practical skills and knowledge essential to a farming community.

My interest in the arts began in college, where I was first exposed to fine arts through an Art Appreciation course. After earning a degree in Business, and subsequently a Masters Degree, I was firmly entrenched in the corporate world. The spark that ignited my interest in art, however, continued to smolder, but it wasn't until I witnessed a wheel-throwing demonstration at a local art fair that my desire to delve into clay became real. After 13 years in business, I returned to school with a whole-hearted desire to master the art and craft of clay, ultimately earning a BFA degree in Ceramics. I have never looked back.

You are mainly creating pottery pieces. How would you explain your attraction for functional ceramics?

I was initially attracted to the wheel. Learning to throw basic utilitarian forms was a joy to me. The tactile sensation of wet clay is so seductive! However, there are some ideas that cannot be conveyed by functional pots, thus I also do sculptural work. I like the idea of making work that is approachable both on an intimate and intellectual level.

Making functional work appeals to the part of me that wants to connect personally with the user. I love the idea that the work will be handled, and I strive to make work that goes beyond the basic utilitarian form. In other words, I strive to make the work "special" for the user, in an effort to elevate the mundane, e.g., drinking a cup of tea, into the conscious enjoyment of the daily ritual, rather than a routine act.

I love to play with form, so even in my functional work I like to bring in a sculptural sensibility. The functional and sculptural forms play off each other–one idea leads to the next–so for me, the back and forth of sculptural vs. functional is essential.

What is your choice of materials and what techniques do you usually use for constructing your works?

I am currently using Ben's, one of the clay bodies manufactured at The Archie Bray Foundation. It is a type of porcelain that holds up rather well to the rigors of salt firing. Most of the wheel-thrown objects I make are altered, and I incorporate a lot of hand-built elements, so the clay I use has to work well with lots of manipulation.

Do you have your own studio?

Yes! After college I rented a space in the town where I lived near St. Louis, about a mile away from my home. My salt kiln was located at my house, so I had to haul bisqued, glazed pots up a steep hill to my home for firing. An approach I don't recommend if you can avoid it! Lots of touch ups were required prior to firing.

About nine years ago my husband and I moved to Wyoming. For the first three years, I had no place to work, so I attended the local Community college to keep my skills current and improving. Five years ago we built a new house on several acres with a separate studio building. Here I have built my second salt kiln and have been working steadily ever since. It is a dream come true!

There is a remarkable touch of sensibility in your decorations. Tell us more about how you decorate and where do you get inspiration from.

I am intrigued by the fact that we as humans are so connected to the earth, from the food we eat to the ceramic cup we drink from. I am drawn to relatively matte surfaces, perhaps because of their tactile nature or maybe because of their relationship to nature itself.

I want the clay to look like clay, and have been drawn to the salt firing process because of the ability to let the beauty of the clay body speak for itself as it fuses with salt. The element of surprise that arises from firing to firing with the phenomenon of flashing and variation of salt distribution has always held great interest for me.

Peter Voulkos* voiced my sentiments exactly when he spoke about glazes:
"Lost my glaze book. Stole most of it to start with. I used to buy it at the glaze store and put it on real thin, barely fogged on with a spray. It's not how many glazes you use. It's how you use what you've got. I don't like to use glazes. They cover up the detail. I like the clay to pick up on my own fingerprints. I like to put my own marks on it. I don't like pretty glazes; they're misleading. I don't have too much of a glaze vocabulary. If the clay comes out of the fire, it's good if it turns you on."

The glazes I do use are applied sparingly, and as an accent to the form. Prior to decoration, some pieces are slipped, either at leather hard or bisque stage. The form itself dictates which glaze and what decoration will be applied. It is very frustrating for me to look at a form I have made with no idea of how to decorate it. It is a recipe for disaster!

I believe my pieces reflect a sense of place. I am greatly influenced by my surroundings since moving to Wyoming–the Red Butte, Red Canyon, sagebrush and ancient Juniper trees. Unconsciously, these elements seem to find their way into my work. I think as artists, our personal styles evoke not only our personalities, but also our roots. I would be quite uncomfortable at this point in my career trying to emulate the work of younger ceramists.

Pitcher Set, 2011, Wheel-Thrown and Altered, Salt-Fired with Slip and Glaze Decoration, Cone Ten, 9" x 14"

Whisky Flask, 2011, Wheel-Thrown and Altered, Salt-Fired Porcelain with Slip and Glaze Decoration, Cone Ten, 6" x 5.75"

How do you want your work to be perceived by others?

I want the user to feel a connection to one of my utilitarian pieces when using it. I want the piece to be "special" enough that the user is "aware" of the piece and of his/her interaction with it.

As far as my sculpture goes, each has special significance to me, but I prefer the viewer approach each piece from his or her own perspective. I would encourage the observer to interpret the piece as it pertains to his/her own life and experiences rather than me trying to influence perceptions.

Are you a full time ceramist? Would you encourage the following generations to pursue this path?

Yes and yes. After having worked in the corporate business world, I can't imagine going back to it, or to any other calling than ceramics. Most ceramic artists I have met have developed this same, strong connection to the medium. That is not to say it is easy. I have often wished I had come to clay much sooner, so that I could have taken advantage of various opportunities for internships and residences. There are such valuable resources for young ceramic artists today, but there is no mistaking it is all very hard work! The clay artist must not only develop the necessary artistic skills, but also business savvy for this electronic age.

You have joined different associations and groups: how important is a professional affiliation for your personal development?

Very important! They can be a lifeline for technical support as well as a resource for knowledge and opportunities. As artists we must be pro-active in seeking recognition for our work. Some of our most celebrated ceramists have mastered the art of social networking and use the latest technology to promote their work. That being said, good marketing must go hand in hand with quality artwork.

Over the past years I have been involved in forming a group of local ceramic artists, Potters of the Wind Rivers (POWR). Our goal is to exchange ideas, offer technical support, sponsor workshops and most importantly, develop an appreciation for the ceramic arts in our area. This affiliation has been rewarding in so many ways!

What are you currently working on and what are your aspirations? Where can we see you in the near future?

I am constantly testing new glaze and slip recipes, refining old forms and experimenting with new ones. I am anxiously preparing for the next firing, where I will be testing new slip recipes formulated from the clay surrounding my property.

Currently in process is a proposal for a group show of the POWR group with the Lander Art Center. From a personal perspective, my goal for the coming year is to increase gallery representation for my work.

* Rose Slivka and Karen Tsujimoto The Art of Peter Voulkos (New York: Kodansha America, Inc., 1995, p. 60.

Jaunty Pouring Vessel II, 2011, Wheel-Thrown and Altered, Salt-Fired Porcelain with Glaze Decoration, Cone Ten, 9" x 7"

Teresa & Helena Jané

By Vasi Hîrdo

You have been working with ceramic jewelry and knobs for over 10 years. How did you discover the passion for beautifully crafted objects?

I suppose it comes from our childhood. We grew up surrounded by photographs, books, stamps and original objects. Some had been brought up from the place where we're born, Angola, in Africa. Our dad was an architect, and mum was a teacher of arts and crafts. They invested strongly in our education for the discovery and exploration of unique artistic sensibilities, and we always felt responsible for giving them a well deserved response. We studied piano for several years and used to go to classical music concerts every weekend. We also had the opportunity to learn and practice woodwork and woodcut, ceramics and basketry, weaving and dressmaking, bookbinding, painting and engraving, and so many other useful things.

Years later, we set up *THJané* project and, until today, we still live with the feeling of achievement that comes with creating things of beauty, you say, with our own hands.

Working as a group has plenty of advantages, but sometimes it may be challenging. How do you divide your work? Who is responsible for what part of the constructing process?

After 10 years of intense activity, Teresa usually comes to be responsible by the development of ideas and by the exploration of painting techniques. Also drawing and sculpture. And I (Helena), by the choice of materials and techniques of production, studies of color and by the preparation and application of glazes.Sure it can bring some comfort. Yet, new works often requires us to change roles and also to work together. Breaking routines and try new things have always encouraged us. Therefore, any of us can accomplish any task at any time. Besides, it also reduces uncertainty about the capabilities of each other, allowing to have a greater respect for individuality and free expression. This is very important, specially when we seek the necessary consensus in our work.

The objects you create are small and delicate, and necessitate a lot of attention to detail, but equally important – they require quality materials. What materials and techniques do you use in constructing your work?

We're supposed to present contemporary signed pieces, produced and painted entirely by hand. By doing it ourselves, we're alive to the possibilities of change right until the end. As a starting point, we look for alternative ways, questioning previous experience and prior learning, and we also consider that all the materials and manual techniques are valid. So far we've used fine white clay (prepared slip or solid) as a raw material of excelence to express ourselves freely. For terracota objects, we mix and prepare our own plastic clay, as we did it with Plantae. The techniques chosen for the more elaborated pieces are cutting and carving, sgraffito painting, drawing over a fired glaze surface, then re-fired.

We sometimes also paint over unfired crackle glaze, or take advantages of "ceramic defects" (like too or under-fired glazes), pleasing jewel shapes with rhythmic lines and textures. In short, is a question of ends subverting means, bearing in mind that we should always contribute towards a stable environment and a sensible use of raw materials. Can't do without these tools: x-acto blades, toothpicks and cotton swabs.

In 2002 you created the THJané project. What are the main values and characteristics of THJané and how did the project start?

It seemed to be the right time. Teresa was between jobs and I had a flexible schedule as a teaching trainer. We gathered the minimum conditions, which actually have changed little, and took the project forward. It was a great opportunity to fully exploit capabilities, be a decision maker and be able to choose topics and timings, breaking rules or go around them, to do things we had never thought of doing. Also, to get a life with no retirement age, operating in the niche of contemporary ceramics. Similar needs had been already experienced by different generations in family, in areas as different as the manufacture of puddings, the planting of cotton or the design of contemporary author tiles. We made our opening with cabinet knobs collection – actually, art objects pretending to be knobs –, based in conical forms, exploring geometric and organic motifs. At that time, in Portugal there was little offer in ceramic knobs and a growing tendency to re-use and recycling of old furniture in architecture and interior design area.

We concern a great deal with the lastingness of the objects that we make. So, nothing trendy that might be out of date tomorrow, and also have a special attention to detail and perfect finishings, even if not to be seen with naked eye, be it a series of 5 or 50 pieces.

You have established a recognized and creative brand. Does this brand give you more exposure than working as individual artists?

I'm not sure. So far, we have never had the opportunity, neither the need to introduce ourselves individually. We are about "cooking" together, for four hands. Uniting our talents into a single brand seemed to be the best strategy. Besides, since the very beginning, we've been investing in trade channels in which we think it's much easy to succeed as a mark – we've been asked before "But how many are you?!", as if we were a company instead of a micro project. We interpret this as a compliment and, perhaps a sign that THJané is the right choice.

In creating a new piece, you make a lot of drawings and I assume you spend a lot of time on the details. Can you tell us more about the creational process?

Over the years, many things have interfered with our creative process. Today, we can be inspired by anything we see and heard, and we no longer need to force the inspiration. We also give more privacy one another, specially at early phases of work as brainstorming ideas. It's definitely less obstructive, and work flows quite easily. We still work together very intensively but we don't have to do it at all stages. Teresa has been always more independent and more accurate too. She reflects a lot and also draws, she calculates and builds prototypes. The end result is very much like the original design. In my case, I'm a little more disorganized. I can start by the name or by the marketing strategies, and I often ask my sister for her opinion. Most of the time, I can distract myself with clay, check all kind of techniques, and only then, I turn to the drafting of the idea.

The combinations of colors and patterns that you choose are strikingly simple and they emphasize the value of the works. What role does the color play in your compositions?

In our case, always felt that we should treat it with some distance and with suspicion. Until now, we've used the color exactly as we were taught, i.e., at the service of form and function. I don´t want to seem unfair, for color is certainly a strong ally. The knobs collection can be a good example. It seems easy, we know, but it's not. The rich palette of colors which enlivens the objects never overpowers the reliefs, remaining the simplicity of forms. We developed exhaustive studies to find the perfect balance between glaze and colors, calibrations and painting, almost one-month-long labour exclusively dedicated to this subject. These studies helped to create the desired contrasts in terms of brightness, shadow and movement, and also to highlight faces and blur out sides. Everything we had planed and nothing more.

Where can we see your works in the near future? Tell us about your current and future projects.

I suppose there's always one thing that we concentrate on with other projects around it. Right now, we're focused in sculpture. In Portugal, some of the best contemporary design traders used to have full responsibility for the presentation and commercialization of our products. Though it was our bet, it became dangerous in the past few years, specially when you make your art your livelihood. You know, at the Modern Art museum store we already find author objects, side by side, with a wide range of products that easily can be found in drug stores and supermarkets. At the same time, design shops have been replaced with other spaces, in our opinion, obsessively homogenized and sterile.

Today, we know how difficult it's to get work, trying to do things you're not embarrassed about. So, we'll just have to find new ways to keep moving forward. Our main concern is to provide greater exposure to the team and also to spread out our "store front" par excellence, our LookBook blog. It's also very important to continue to fight for Ad space in mags such as yours, fresh, with a new dynamic approach. Finally, we hope to open up a store & studio in Lisbon during this year, where everything will be possible, even teaching.

060710, 2011, CERAMIC AND SOUTACHE, CARVED AND HAND-PAINTED, H 4,5 X 2,4 X 2,4"

Liliana Folta

By Ileana Surducan

What sparked your interest for ceramics?

I was in college taking painting classes and I wanted to learn sculpture. One day I stopped by the sculpture lab to ask the instructor if I could audit the class. She agreed and handed me a piece of clay. I was amazed at the work of the students. A retired engineer was making intriguing ceramic sculptures. The forms were powerful and provocative. At that moment I thought of how versatile and expressive clay could be to express both powerful and delicate ideas. It was, for me, the medium of infinite possibilities. Immediately my brain had an explosion of ideas. I fell in love. I realized I could create 3D from some ideas of my paintings. In fact, I ended up sculpting so many pieces during the class that The Art Department awarded me a grant to do a whole semester and also the first solo show ever done by a student in the college.

Besides ceramic art, you have also created paintings and murals in order to express your inner universe. How does working in three dimensions change your creative process? Do the processes differ a lot between these mediums?

When I work in 3D, the process of creativity is more fluent, very spontaneous and I can communicate with feelings that I didn't know I possessed until I felt them in my hands. I can transform them into something visual for others to see. It is a natural process, born of my subconscious. Back in my childhood, I recall helping my father in the garden and end up making objects with mud. In my paintings, it's me: my surroundings, my past and present, something very personal and intimate expressed through a different tactile experience. As with murals, most of them have been collaborative works I've done with students at schools. The first one I made came out of the blue. A friend asked me for ideas on what to do with a wall where the tiles had been removed. I had the idea to teach the students about mural making and the importance of recycling material to make art. That's how the first mural was born.

You express yourself freely using clay. What are the main materials and ceramic techniques that you use?

I like to experiment, so I have been using different kind of clay, such as stoneware, low and mid-fire with glazes and oxides. When I do mixed media, especially installations, I like to integrate other materials like metal, found objects and fresh water pearls. I use handmade techniques from slab, clay relief, and impressed texture to carving.

Your past experience and your personal history seem to be an important source of inspiration for you. Tell us more about the symbolism of your work.

Maybe that's why I work in different mediums; I am much better expressing my self visually. Sometimes an image will stay with me and I am compelled to paint or sculpt it. Much later, I will realize that these images have a much deeper significance to me, one that transcends the visual. These images become symbols of social-political issues that are at the core of my world views and concerns. For example in the ceramic chains installation, the chains remain unconnected and loose, which symbolizes the right of freedom of the individual; regardless of religion, race, country, and gender. Freedom of expression is something that we, as humans should never have to give up.

Many of your works have an intrinsic femininity. How does being a female artist influence the themes and the ideas you choose to represent?

My themes and ideas begin with personal experiences, past, present, as well as everything that surrounds me: people, places and objects. Sometimes stories interact with different characters in different circumstances. I also like to create surreal landscapes for them.

The white flowers I used in the "Warrior's Series", are images from my bank of memories of my father's garden; he used to mix the flowers in the vegetable garden, which was my play yard during my childhood. "After Chaos", a woman sleeps peacefully. She is able to find tranquility because she is surrounded by "white warrior flowers" - deceptively frail, and yet possessing all of the strength of memories, nature and the power of womanhood. These flowers guard her as she rests before facing whatever trials the day may bring to her.

You come from Argentina, and you define yourself as a Latin American artist. How does your cultural heritage reflects in your creative experience?

My Latin American roots inform my work. I was born in Argentina, my parents were immigrants of the World War II, and so my back ground tradition at home had a strong European flavor. Even so, I grew up proud for the country that welcomed my parents and the country they taught me to love. Moreover, I am also married to a Puerto Rican man, my son was born on the island too and we spent many years there. This is yet another passage in my life, where the colors and details are reflected more in my paintings than in my ceramics. So you see, my cultural heritage is a potpourri of different tradition and experiences, and everything is reflected in my art.

An Abstract Poem of Freedom, 2009, (on going) traveling/interaction/installation: ceramic chain, bullets & bowl; white gesso, ink, wooden chair, white sheets, rug, soldier boots, paper, high temp wire, 3x7x2 ft.

Your interactive installation Abstract Poem of Freedom is a very complex work of art. – "An Abstract Poem of Freedom is an interactive, traveling installation, meant to honor soldiers around the world – both those who currently serve their countries and those who sacrificed their lives in any war." What motivated you to choose this subject, and what was the feedback of the public?

My first motivation was the story of my father during War World II, a prisoner in Siberia and able to escape with his friend. It has been always in my mind and beyond my imagination. The world is constantly at war, this little tiny and beautiful blue dot in the universe. The subject is profound, so the reaction from the public was very emotional and sensitive. Families, friends and soldiers signed the ceramic bullets with respect and admiration for their love ones. When I visited Poland in 2011 to meet my family for the first time, I took with me a few ceramic bullets, now I have signatures from my father's family who are survivors of war.

"An Abstract Poem of Freedom" is an interactive installation and traveling piece initiated in the island of Puerto Rico, honoring Soldiers from around the world - soldiers who have served and are still serving their own country, and the ones who sacrificed their lives in any war in history. The continuity of the project is to call a global collaboration of artists, teachers, or anyone who is familiar with clay. If you are a ceramic teacher, your students can take part in the project. You can also help spread the word by telling your Cultural Centers, art schools etc. about the project. There are many soldiers and veterans to be honored and remembered.

The collaboration consists of collecting signatures of soldier's names to be signed on ceramic bullets. Families and friends can sign the names of those who cannot. I believe in the power of freedom when we work united, and this is a very special project and opportunity to thank all of them - men and women - for their great courage.

I would also like to thank you in advance for giving me the opportunity to talk about the project. I wish this interactive installation can travel abroad and be presented in many places, and one day be a permanent installation. It is not meant to be kept inside a closet.

Are you currently working on a new project that you would like to share with us? Where can we find your works in the near future?

I am currently working with a group show taking place on the island of Puerto Rico; it's an installation with ceramic and mixed media that will be displayed at Puerto Rico's Professional College of Architects and Land Surveyors, July 19th 2012. The same exhibit will also be presented at the Puerto Rico Tourism Company in December 2012.

After all these wonderful events, I am hoping to finally be able to concentrate on my solo project. I've been collecting ideas for a while, because I'd like for this project to be autobiographical. Essentially, it's to portray my life as a suitcase, by showing all the places I've been, all the times I've moved and all the different cultures I've adopted and experienced. Ideally, it would include an installation with ceramic and mixed media, as well as painting.

Cindy Billingsley

By Andra Baban

You are both a painter and a ceramic artist; is one medium closer to you than another?

Both mediums have equal places in my heart. It mainly depends on the subject or idea I have, clay is sometimes better at conveying my passion or idea then paint is. There is nothing like the feel of clay in hand. I can say in ceramics what I can not with paint. Clay is felt with all, the eyes, hands and the heart. No other medium can do this. Clay comes from the earth and has that feeling of being alive if sculptures right. If you look closely at a ceramic sculpture you can see the finger marks, the hand prints – it is made by the hand and touch of the artist. I love in clay that, as an artist, I can take that lump of clay and make it into something magical, something others can touch and see the passion I had for my idea. This is what drew me to clay as my medium.

When did you decide to pursue an artistic career and what was the trigger?

I have always been an artist, even as a young child. There was never any other pursue. An artist is who I have always been, not what I do. As for ceramic sculpting, my french teacher took me to an exhibition of Rodin's sculptures, and that was it – I knew that day that was what I wanted to do. I bought some store bought clay the next day and began my journey with clay, which was about 18 years ago.

There is a visible fascination for the world of animals reflected in your work; where does this interest come from? Tell us more about the subjects you explore.

Since childhood I have had and felt a closeness with animals. I have lived in the company of animals more than in the company of people. So naturally, I would follow that path with my art. In ceramics I could finally convey the gesture and mood of an animal with the strokes of the clay without a lot of detail. I have always been more interested in capturing the spirit of an animal or its essence than making an exact model of an animal. Clay freed me up to be able to do this, with quick clay marks here, and strokes of clay there. Clay has that wonderful freedom to it. And Clay sometimes has it's own ideas about how a piece will come about, that I might not have thought of until I was in the middle of sculpting it. I am drawn to the less familiar animals in my sculptures, like the blue ring octopus, Okapi or fruit bats. These animals fascinate me. Trying to make clay appear like soft fur is the challenge and the fun, like with my Koala sculpture.

You are playing a lot with body language, emotions and instincts of people and animals. In some of your works, the animals are put in humanly situations and humans are somehow dehumanized. How would you explain this relations?

Animals are easier to me to understand and figure out, than humans. Having had a solid anatomy background in sculpting both animals and humans, I like to play and see if I can put the two together and to make the result look completely natural, like it was always meant to be that way. Some of my sculptures are humorous and in some I am conveying an emotion I want the viewer to feel. These are a way for me to let my inner child come out and play, to remember the fun I had as a child and to remember what drew me to clay in the first place.

Your works are incredibly realistic. Before proceeding to work, do you spend much time in the nature, studying animals? Where do you research?

Yes, I spend a lot of time researching my subjects. I am mainly limited to zoos and nature centers. In order for me to convey in clay an animal, I have to know enough about how that animal moves, it's size, it's character, and anatomy. I have always been more interested in the gesture and emotion, which is the main characteristic I want to convey in my sculptures. If you look closely, there really isn't a lot of detail. Yet, I still have to know enough anatomy, like the fact that the middle toe on the back feet of a kangaroo is a lot longer, or or that a Koala's paws and feet are very complicated. I do spend a lot of time sketching and just watching animals at the zoos.

More recently you had two solo shows concerning two different topics: Alzheimer disease in "Within the Mind" and endangered animals in "Endangered". Tell us more about the shows.

"Within the Mind" show came about because my mother is in the mid stages of Alzheimer's disease. I help care for my mother, and noticed it was hard to find out information or the best ways to help her. Also, she had lost her voice and I felt like I could give her voice back with my artistic skills. As a child, my mother was the one person who always supported and encouraged me to be an artist. Without her support, I might have had to give up my dream. It is difficult to see one's mom slowly disappear before your eyes because of Alzheimer's disease. It was my way of honoring my mother while she could still come and understand, plus a place for me to put the feelings I had about losing her. Clay will absorb the emotion of an artist while he sculpts. I had to put those feelings somewhere and clay and paint is the language I chose. All the paintings and sculptures for that show tell a story about different aspects of the disease. As for my "Endangered animals" show, I could show you the depth in a Lion's eyes or the beautiful form of a Koala. It was important to me to take my talents as an artist to try bring more awareness to issues in our society. I am a member of the Artists for Conservation and will continue to help protect animals throughout the world. They cannot protect themselves, so it is up to us.

Are your works from the "Endangered" series a statement for wildlife conservation? How would you like your works to be perceived by the viewer?

Yes, it is a statement towards more protection and conservation. For example, I want to show the beautiful face of a Panda, to bring awareness that in the coming years you might never get to see that face anymore. Animals have earned their place on the Planet, and it is up to us to protect them. In my ceramic sculptures I am drawn to the less familiar animals, the solitary ones. I feel a kinship with those, because as an artist I spend a lot of my time in the studio, in solitary work.

Why do you think that we, as humans, sometimes neglect and threaten the lives of other species?

We think the world is just ours and we can do as we please, and even more tragic, that we have a right on everything. It is important to remember that our species are just a small part of this world and that everything is connected in a way or another. If parts of the environment goes, then insects start to go, then certain animals, and on up the chain to humans. We neglect to think that what we do matters. Humans are the greatest threat to other species. It is up to us to educate the world, protect and save these endangered species.

What are your currently working on and where can we see your works in the next future?

I will be continuing my work on both Alzheimer's and Endangered animals bodies of work. I will team with local Alzheimer's chapters to use art as a way to bring more awareness and help raise money, so that some day a cure will be found. I will also team with the Artists for Conservation, Zoos and Nature center, to make a bound with the community through my art. I have also started a Women Ceramic Sculptors group in which we will be doing traveling shows throughout the US on daily life issues such as the environment, abuses, elderly or children, hoping that this will connect art to the general public. My aim is to make people understand they have a voice, and that everybody can speak through art and through this amazing medium that is ceramics.

Lemur and baby, 2008, 15" x 8" 9", raku clay, hand built solid, hollowed for firing, low fired, cold finish acrylic and wax

Paula Bellacera

By Vasi Hîrdo

You are working in different media such as printmaking, painting and ceramics. Does your work in one medium influence to the other? Do you work as a full time artist?

My work in different media do relate at times. The monotype medium works very well for expressing my love of bees, and that subject matter has filtered into my ceramics with a very different expression. But, in general, I find a particular subject is best expressed in a specific medium.

Fortunately I am able to devote all of my time to my artistic endeavors. My studio is comfortable, but only large enough for me to work in one medium at a time. Gallery and project commitments along with self-assignments dictate my work schedule. I confess that I need that kind of order, otherwise I would be darting about unable to focus on one medium long enough to create a body of work.

Working as a full-time artist includes wearing many hats in addition to making art. I spend time each week promoting my work, looking for exhibition opportunities, participating in online artist forums, reading art newsletters and magazines, and visiting galleries, museums, and other artists' studios. I am consumed by my passion for art – even when sleeping I explore ideas then I wake up with an urgency to try them out.

What was the starting point in your artistic career and how did you discover your passion for ceramics?

It is hard to pick a starting point because I have had a desire to create art all my life. My mother took art classes when I was young, and she encouraged me to explore various media. When I was thirteen, my father gave me his old 35mm camera, and I immediately embarked on a decades-long journey with photography. My embellished Polaroid manipulation work was well received and exhibited in galleries in the USA and abroad. When I could no longer get the Polaroid film, I studied painting and printmaking and began showing that work. I find that creating an illusion of three-dimensional space with paint on canvas is an academic exercise that takes tremendous practice and skill.

Just a couple years ago I was invited to attend a weekly community raku workshop where I finally got my hands "dirty." I fell in love with sculpting clay and was relieved to discover that, for me, sculpting is more an emotional than intellectual process.

Does clay as a medium give you great freedom to express yourself or do you feel it is more restrictive compared to other media?

Clay is plastic, versatile, and immediate. If I have an idea for a three-dimensional form, I can create it relatively quickly. Clay offers great freedom to explore options and to easily make corrections. However, after working with oil and acrylic paints, creating the effects I want with glazes is a challenge.

The animal forms you create reveal various emotions and personalities. What do they express for you? Tell us why you choose to explore this subject.

Many people work with animal forms, and the results are often static. My goal is to imbue each of my creations with vitality. This involves the expression of personality that pet owners recognize in their animals, and at times, these expressions mirror attributes of the owners as well. Often the final sculpture has anthropomorphic qualities blended with purely animal expressions. In this work, my intention is to present the best of humanity through our animal friends and to help us laugh and love our differences and ourselves.

Your creations look amazingly realistic, both in form and in the emotions they carry. What is the process of constructing your pieces?

I am surprised to hear that my sculptures look realistic. Perhaps their perceived realism is a response to various personality cues such as a humorous expression, tilt of the head, or sprightly stance. All my pieces are hand built using coil and/or slab techniques. My approach is straightforward, usually building the head, body, tail, and legs separately then assembling them.

More recently, you began experimenting with raku. What did you learn from this technique?

My raku experience in the community setting is a fun, crazy social event where I tend to be more free form with the glazing, firing, and reduction processes. My results are totally unpredictable. The best part of the group experience is the inspiration I get by watching others as they work and asking how they achieve their enviable results. The big lesson for me is to release control and embrace the mystery. Some of my better pieces were born out of this process where I work looser and create less realistic, more "edgy" animals.

In February 2012 you exhibited three of your dog sculptures at Bark!, which is one of the most important dog art shows in USA. Tell us more about this event.

Last year I was invited to participate in three pet-themed gallery exhibitions. Galleries have come to recognize that animal subject matter is of great interest to both animal lovers and art collectors.

This is my second year participating in the Bark! exhibition at the John Natsoulas Gallery in Davis, California. Pieces from many celebrated California artists were in the show, including: Robert Arneson, Wayne Thiebaud, David Gilhooly, Robert Ransom, Arthur Gonzales, Esther Shimazu, Jeffrey Downing, Stephen Braun, Avery Palmer, Amber Aguirre, Rene Martucci, and many more. The gallery also hosted a solo exhibition by the world-renowned dog artist, Roy De Forest.

The press release for the Bark! exhibition reveals a bit about the history of dogs in art; "Dogs have a long history of being involved in art. Many artists have included dogs into their works including Picasso, Gauguin, and Lautrec. Dogs are beloved to many artists and their patrons. Going back to the 18th and 19th century, nobleman and royals would have their dog companions immortalized by artists. Even going back to 2000 B.C., there have been paintings on the walls of caves featuring dogs with their owners. Dog paintings have helped authors view and trace dog lineage and breed genealogy through the years."

Where can we see your work in the near future?

I primarily show and sell my work through galleries in Northern California. I am actively looking for gallery representation in California and out-of-state, and I plan to show more broadly through invitational shows and by applying to competitions and juried shows.

Bulldog, 2011, Handbuilt, low-fire clay, glaze, underglaze, 14" x 15" x 12"

Kwok-Pong Bobby Tso

By Ileana Surducan

Your work evokes artificial landscapes and strange architectural agglomerations. What is your source of inspiration?

Most of my work inspired by man-made objects; something like a view of building blocks from the sky, transformer boxes out in the field, and strange formations on the roof. Recently I started to add more abstracted objects, like the connection parts of an exhaust fan, pipe or even inside a lock. I am inspired by something that is recognizable but has an uncertain function.

Working with volumes, space, and light give your works a unique appearance. How do you plan your spatial compositions in order to valorize each of these elements?

I believe each material has its own weight; when I am organizing my compositions, I focus on how to balance those "Weights" by playing with the objects and rearranging them. In doing so I am able to achieve the composition that interacts with volume, space and light.

What technique do you use in order to achieve the monolithic, geometrical volumes that compose your work? Take us through the process of creating your work.

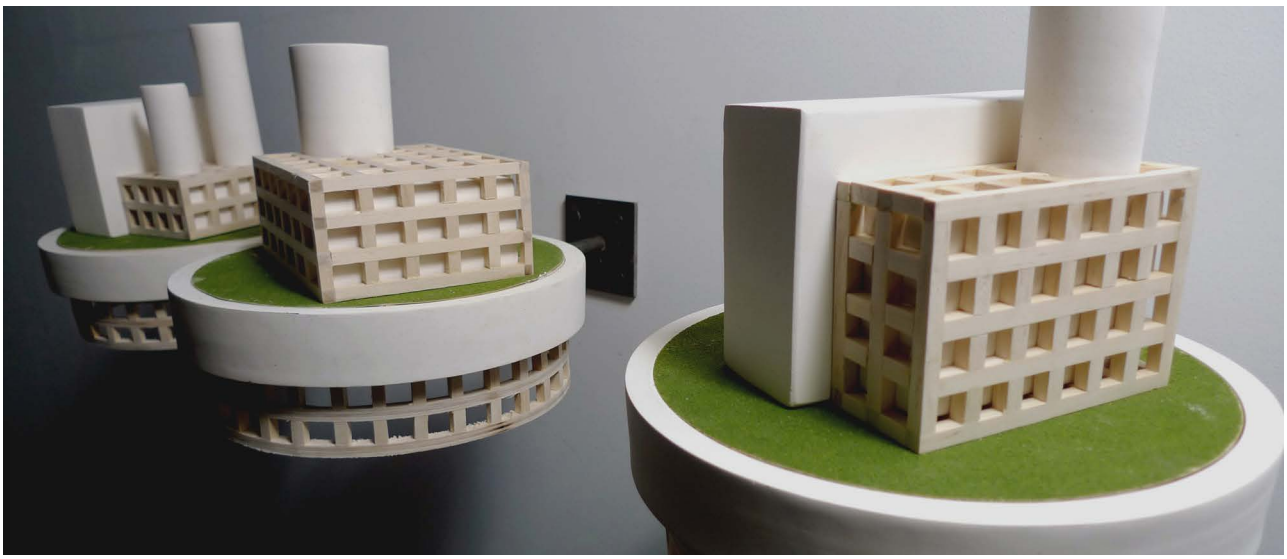
For most of my work I combine hand building, slip casting, and wheel thrown techniques. In terms of surface, I achieve an ultra-smooth finish by using a range of sandpaper from 200-600 grit. I then use a marble polisher to sand the surface till it is as smooth as butter. For my industrial landscape series, "The View From Above," I leave the clay surface as it is this emphasizes the unique qualities found within a raw clay body. For my "Industrial landscape series"; I apply glazes, sometimes paint or enamel to achieve the old sanded look.

The Industrial Landscape series are exploring the mysterious relationship between how one object fits unexpectedly into another and becomes a whole new composition. Tell us more about this relationship.

The mysterious relationship between space and curiosity has always influenced my work. I think those space redefine objects and give those objects meaning. For example, when you have a simple form like a cup, the space created by the handle defines the shape of the cup, when you added a saucer to this cup, the composition has changed. It redefines the function of this cup not only by adding more meaning to it, but also increasing the tension. I believe that one object needs another object and the space in between are the main reason why I am interested in this relationship, it is also what peaks my curiosity and motivates my work.

Your work speaks about the relation between objects. Today's urban landscape is human-made, and yet hard to manage sometimes. In this context, what connection between us and the urban environment we should value the most?

I think we are very used to seeing urban environments, so much so that we have stopped paying attention to them all together. With my work I would love for my viewer to think about what is around them no matter if it's a landscape, environment, or just a simple object. I think that everything in life has its own meaning. Yes, it is true that some objects are more important than others, but I think that a lot of us overlook the simple things. With my work I want to embrace the simplicity of life and its connection between objects and spaces. I think we should ask why objects are put in certain positions and be curious about the relationship between them.



From the ground up, Industrial landscape Series, detail, 2011, White earthenware, cone 4 oxidation, sanded surface, wood, hobby paper and sand, Metal hanging system, H 8, W 28, D 11

Delta, Industrial landscape Series, 2010, Earthenware, underglazes, wood, hobby paper, plastic, metal, latex paint, enamel, H 12 1/4, W 15, D 13 1/2

Besides your ceramic compositions, you also create sculptures from wood. When did you first experience this material and what do you create from it?

When I was an undergraduate student, my professor loved to build sculptures out of wood and I spent a lot time learning from him, and soon I started to add wood into my own work. I think that wood can do something that clay cannot. Not necessary better or worse but in term of "Visual Weight", there seems to be a balancing act between wood and clay. When working in the studio I love trying to bring the two different materials together and I find it to be one of the most exiting yet challenging aspects in my studio practice.

What role does the color, or it's absence, play in your compositions?

I have a simple way of using color, for my "Industrial landscape series", I use brighter colors to accentuate certain parts of my pieces and expose the space that I have created. Until recently I started to use less color and keep my work as minimal as possible as it is in the "The view from above" work. I think that less became more, simple but powerful, and I am being more honest to my materials by keeping them truer; this adds to the "weight" I was talking about earlier.

What are you currently working on? Where do you plan your next exhibitions?

I am currently working on a new body of work that speaks more about organized chaos; it is still about space/curious about space, but in a more playful way and less planned in terms of composition. I also have been informed that I will be having a show in Houston, Texas, USA during the National Council on Education for the Ceramic Arts this year.

Virginie Besengez

By Vasi Hîrdo

Your body of work consists in reinterpretations in stoneware and porcelain of everyday objects. What sparked your interest for ceramics?

Firstly, an attraction toward the household objects led me to ceramic. I am deeply fascinated by clay and the gesture of the hand cupping the bowl.
Beyond the objects, my interest for this art was aroused by a strong link with the origin of humankind, the ancestral tradition of making household objects out of that universal and natural clay. Finally, meeting with ceramists and contemplating their work was a strong incentive to become part of that story.

The refinement and suaveness of your ceramic pieces are given by your attention to detail. Tell us about your educational background and other related experiences.

I had numerous trainings in France and Belgium with ceramists, during which I learned, observed and appreciated the simplicity of the gesture of the first movement. Permanently, I think of the first gestures man performed in order to create a clay or stoneware object.
I love the primitive aspect of this job whose rules have not changed for thousands of years.

How did the architecture of the North of France and the austere aesthetic of the Flemish still-life affected your work?

I am of Flemish origins, I have always lived in the North of France. I don't believe in plain inspiration, it comes through our environment and culture. In my region and in the near Belgium country more particularly, the black colour is omnipresent: in my ancestors clothes, in the colours of the walls, in Flemish paintings. When I walk around cities like Amsterdam or Gand, or along the enbankment in Anvers Harbour, or wandering in Bruxelles, what strikes me is the simplicity and efficiency of architecture, either XVIth century and ultra-contemporary. Streamlined shapes, huge openings to catch maximum light in spite of often grey skies. My country is also a landscape of industrial wasteland. Former silos, unused steel factories, traces of a bygone industry in which concrete and rusty steel beams are the ghosts of that prosperous era.

The monochrome compositions that you create give the viewer a subtle remembrance of the object design of the 60's. Why did you choose not to use color in your works?

Colour makes no sense to me, for me it takes too much space and leaves no room for subtlety and details. You need to have a poetic mind to be moved by the grey sea of the North, by the dull skies of Flanders. Grey and black change according to the light, they are not permanent, thus the object has several lives in one day. I am particularly interested in the numerous shades of grey that light can enhance in a monochrome composition, depending on the clay, its closeness to an immaculate porcelain and the way pieces are laid out. I have been influenced and inspired by Morandi, but also by urban wastelands, steel compression ready for recycling, odds and ends piled up at the back of an old scottish shop.

For how long have you been working as a full-time ceramic artist? Do you feel connected to other artist's works from France and to the cultural heritage of the place you live in?

I have been working as a ceramist for 12 years and have had the opportunity to build ties of friendship with french and foreign ceramists, but also photographers, filmmakers and painters. We have regular meetings during which we share our experience, doubts and questions in an atmosphere of complicity. Those meetings are crucial for me.

How would you characterize the contemporary ceramic art scene in France? Are there enough opportunities for ceramic artists to research and exhibit?

French contemporary ceramics is alive and well, a new generation is arising with a reflection on current design. I believe ceramics has a bright future, if it is associated with other forms of art like designs, architecture, graphic arts, photography. Yes, in France today, some structures and places (notably galleries) welcome contemporary ceramists and are ready to support them. The image of ceramics is changing and this is our role to educate the public to give a new meaning to this activity.

Are you currently working on a new project? Where can we see your works in the near future?

I am currently working on a porcelain installation project, in collaboration with a graphic artist. Our activities are complementary, we debate on our differences and share our feelings. This experience gives a a true meaning to my work, and my aim through my exhibitions is to express, denounce and to raise awareness about subjects that I'm concerned about. I am now turning a new leaf, planning my exhibitions more as a ground for debate, exchange, complicity and dialogue with other artists in common projects.

Brimming Over, 2012, Stoneware and porcelain, Diam. 50 cm x H. 40 cm

Nails, 2010, Stoneware, Variable dimensions

Els Wenselaers

By Ileana Surducan

What made you choose ceramics as a way of expressing yourself? Do you think that the medium you use influences the way you think about art?

Clay is as good as any other medium, it is a material with lots of possibilities but it doesn't influence my personal perception of art. Sometimes because of its limitations in format, in height, due to the measures of my kiln I have to find other solutions than I used before, but that are technical issues. I have also used other materials like papier maché before but the outcome of my figurines would be the same.

What is for you the importance of figurative representation? Why did you choose the human being as the central element of your work?

It's the essence of my work. It wouldn't be possible for me to make work if my thoughts and feelings are not involved. All of them have a meaning and reflect my personal view on society. It's not necessary for the public to understand it, you can enjoy them without knowing the background, but I need to be able to make them. Some of my works have a spiritual dimension. Love, understanding and insight, the meaning of existence - of evil, the happiness of life and the tragedy of death affect us, but are by themselves invisible. You can see it as a spiritual quest in which I will not flee, but indeed want to decompose and play with. The human figure in this case is the most suitable.

Art no longer has to be "beautiful", since the beauty of an object is derived not only from its appearance, but also from it's concept and use. Tell us more about the aesthetic categories embodied by your work, and your motivation in choosing them.

The followers of modernism only repeat a trick, a cheap shock effect - desecrating the beauty. It has been repeated so many times and now it belongs to the popular circuit. An authentic artist is always looking for new styles, new forms to express himself and will not be guided by expectations. The emptiness of existence can contrast strongly with its beauty and vice versa. Beauty, ugliness, two sides of the same coin. It's the perception of it that counts; something very beautiful can be experienced as ugly when you discover the essence, the inner side of it. Art exists in many layers, for those who want to see it. My work can be considered as superficially aesthetic, but the deeper meaning is of a different order. There isn't much beauty in the emptiness of an existence as in the Sisyphus series. "L'existence précède l'essence". Existence precedes essence. (Jean Paul Sartre)

The Human Hybrids series emphasizes a new twist of an old idea. Humans with animal characteristics have been a constant presence in many cultures since thousands of years ago. Compared to their traditional representation, what do you want to express with your works?

Indeed, one of the oldest known is an ivory sculpture, the Lion man of the Hohlenstein Stadel, Germany, a human-shaped figurine with a lion's head, determined to be about 32,000 years old. Anthropomorphism is assigning human (behavioral) characteristics to animals. After reading an article about genetic engineering, I started on human hybrids. You can make goats, produce cobwebs or grow a human ear on the back of a mouse, etc. These techniques don't stay within the walls of a laboratory. Since a number of years, you can find genetically manipulated fish in the aquarium trade. A familiar example is the glowfish: a gene of coral polyps was implanted in a zebrafish so that the fish has become luminous. Wherein ancient civilizations, men thought that they could get the spirit of the animal at their sides in the hunt by performing rituals, men now literally attempt to change certain qualities or appearances of people through genetic modification. Currently one is allowed to blend DNA of humans and animals and keep this hybrid alive up to 14 days, and this with the purpose to investigate the study of human bred organs for organ transplantation. There are both positive and negative elements to this evolution, but you can wonder who will eventually be the freak in the future: modified or unmodified humans. I want to start a dialogue about it with the Human Hybrids.

The Sisyphus series illustrate absurd actions of human beings incapable of accepting or changing the lack of meaning of their life. Should the viewer see these characters as merely amusing, or are they trying to send us a more thoughtful message?

The ceramic sculptures of "Sisyphus work" are doomed to an inevitable and meaningless action. The Grass greener', 'The Air Mixer', 'Madame Odeur', 'Brain Controlled Vehicle', all those titles refer to an existentialism in which an absurd figure has the main role and where the boundaries of vanity are far exceeded. They perform actions during which they realize that life is without meaning, but stubbornly refuse to take the escape routes of death or faith. Spray grass green, refresh the air with a much too small installation, suck volatile odors, channeling thoughts in the hope to get a vehicle moving. Again and again and again. Acceptation of the fundamental emptiness is the only thing left. It is the starting point of existentialism. Every person is considered as a unique being, responsible for his own actions and destiny. The challenge of each individual being is to use his freedom to build his own ethos and by that give his existence a sense, in the absence of a transcendent god and inside his own absurd and meaningless existence.

When it comes to illustrating general aspects of the human society, the female figure, contrary to the male figure, is seldomly used - due to its specificity. Your Sisyphus series illustrate an universal human behavior, yet all the characters are females – is there a reason for it?

Art has long been dominated almost exclusively by men. Artists, art critics, writers and publishers were all men. It is also largely a male gaze one is confronted with to this day and which does not always show respect to the creature, the soul of the woman. Only the nudity or sexuality of woman was exposed, rarely her intellect. In the contemporary art scene more women come to the forefront and fortunately gender equality is an important theme in contemporary society. Masculinity nor femininity are fixed, but are constantly (re)produced, the arts and the media play an important role. How is the comparison between the representation of femininity with the representation of masculinity? What is different in the cultural production of women and what factors play a role? These are important questions that certainly will arise in my future work. The Sisyphus series may perhaps be seen as a statement. Apart from the art historical background, I currently prefer to create female bodies.

How would you characterize the contemporary ceramic art scene in Belgium? Are you in a close relationship with other ceramic artists; do you work in a shared studio?

If you had asked me this several years ago, I would have answered negatively, as not existing. On the one hand ceramics as a medium was not appreciated in Belgium and it is not judged as an equivalent to other media such as stone, wood, polyester, etc. Clay has had a negative image for years, unless it was subsequently cast in bronze, and as an artist you had better described yourself as a visual artist rather than as a ceramist. The evening schools and trade schools flourish while ceramic courses at colleges and academies are being abolished. A missed opportunity to bring ceramics to a higher level in general. On the other hand, there are few initiatives amongst ceramists to be more prominent or to be collaborative with one another. If such a thing as contemporary ceramics scenes existed in Belgium, then they would be islands that stay afloat by the commitment of the parties. But positively speaking, a new wind in Belgium occurred during the last few years, with artists like Nadia Naveau, Tinka Pittoors and Caroline Coolen, sculptors who reinvent ceramics as a medium and that is an evolution that I can only applaud. Because I always want to work bigger, I now work in a rented studio, in a building with other artists. To be able to make my work, besides giving workshops and master classes in my own studio and on location, I also have a normal 4-day workweek. Therefore I am rarely in my studio when there are other people present, but it's always nice when someone jumps in for a tea or to exchange ideas.

Tell us about your current projects. Where can we see your work in the near future ?

Beside the small human hybrids and the Sisyphus series, I'm working on a new exhibition of life-sized ceramic toddlers which are genetically bred among other things for organ transplantation.

My work of art is permanently shown in the Nova Belgica Art Gallery in Sint-Truiden, where I am one of the regular artists. I am also regularly approached by galleries to take part in exhibitions in Belgium as well as in the Netherlands. You can find all contacts about these exhibitions on my website *www.elswenselaers.be*

The Brain Controller, 2009, 25 x 29 x 16 cm, Ceramics, used materials

Suzanne Stumpf

Interactive sculptures

By Vasi Hîrdo

The versatility of your work is very inspiring and makes the viewer ask himself whether he should play with your works or just to admire their universe. When did you begin to create such intricate pieces?

Thank you for your kind words. I began to create interactive sculptural pieces about 7–8 years ago, after I had been working in clay for about about three years or so. From the outset, drawing the audience in to touch and explore has always been a goal. But also, I have intended for each work to have its own strong essence that invites contemplation/reflection.

Modularity and interactivity are two main characteristics of your work. How much time does it take to complete a new work? Do you make many sketches?

My interactive sculptures generally take many weeks. The germination of an idea and realization of each work can also be a lengthy process, particularly when there are complicated construction or even "engineering" issues involved. I can sometimes spend a couple of months in the "head-scratching" stage and work on other projects while I sort out the steps and best approaches. I do keep a notebook with sketches and notes, but I do not personally find it easy to translate some of these projects onto the page. With a fairly good aptitude for spatial relations, I hold much of the planning in my head initially. Because I build primarily in porcelain, extremely slow drying is key – I cannot emphasize this enough. And, of course, this also adds to an already long creation process.

Your recent body of work, "Nest with Eggs", deals with the symbolism and architectural qualities of nests. Tell us about your experiences as an avid birdwatcher and about how nature has influenced your work.

Being outside in nature has always been incredibly important to my well-being ever since I was a very young child. So many elements of nature hold breath-taking beauty for me and certainly provide influence in my work as an artist–from the micro textures found on plants to the macro textures of stoney beaches and braided rivers across valleys to the sculptural structure of trees and mountain ranges. I can't seem to go for a walk anywhere beautiful without coming home with shells or rocks in my pockets! (In fact, "Rocks in My Pockets" was the title of my first interactive sculpture.) My interest in birds is long and deep, reaching back to my childhood when my parents installed a birdfeeder outside our kitchen window, and I got to see these extraordinary creatures up close and learn their names. I began investigating variety in nest structures after a bird built a nest on a post under my deck a couple of years ago, allowing me to observe the cycle of this fragile and beautiful "cradle" for the creation of life up close.

Some of your works consist in multi-component pieces that, put together, metamorphose each time in different compositions. Do your Interactive Sculptures illustrate the ludic dimension of art? How important is this element for you?

My answer depends on the tenor of the word "ludic". Although the mere invitation to rearrange components may seem a playful act and some of my sculptures may even possess qualities of games, the interaction by the audience has never seemed aimless to me. To the contrary, I witness people being extremely thoughtful about what they are creating as they rearrange components. The idea with these works is that there are nearly innumerable permutations that the viewer can create, all of which will reveal different aspects of the sculpture's essence for contemplation. This interactive component of my work is quite important to me. I feel art should move the viewer away from a type of isolation that has been brought on by the abundance of "personal" technology that has come about during our time. In the evolution of my work, the questions that have guided me (at times, subconciously) have been "what inspires connectedness?" and "what can most powerfully engage our attention?". Thus much of my work is intended to draw the audience out, either in the questions it poses or the interaction it invites.

Changeable Views, 2007, 15.5"w x 6"h x 4.5" d (window structure), handbuilt porcelain; reduction fired to cone 10

The interactive sculpture Changeable Views is a very modular work–the windows may be left open or up to four of the twelve tiles may be inserted to create many varied views. The tiles have colors on one side and patterns of black and white on the reverse. Although the tiles were lined up flat and adjacent to each other when a number of colored glazes were applied (so technically there is an "order" to the tiles), the tiles "dialogue" and create interest in any number of combinations.

Metaphorically, windows offer the opportunities to look outward, inward, more deeply, and in new directions. The interactive play possible in this piece is intended as a meditation for its audience.

Diatoms, 2011, 16"w x 11"d x 3.5"h, handbuilt with wheelthrown components; porcelain and porcelain paperclay; oxidation fired to cone 10

Interactive Sculpture No. 9, 2008, 16"h x 8"w x 8"d, wheelthrown porcelain with handbuilt components; black slip and shellac resist; oxidation fired to cone 10

Although Interactive Sculpture No. 9 appears at first glance to be some sort of game, there are no rules here. It is intended for the playful pleasure of the viewer to arrange the sticks with their different colored tips entirely to their own whim. (When all the sticks are removed the work is a trompe l'oeil with the raised black dots hiding its holes.)

When working on a new piece, do you seek for inspiration within yourself, or do you get influenced by what should be the purpose of your work?

Both. Generally, my pieces arise from some force within me, usually a subconscious one. As the idea unfolds and develops, its purpose is gradually clarified.

Your works are proof that you are a versatile artist who loves to experiment with different techniques. Do you have a favorite ceramic technique, or a ceramic field that you would like to explore more in the future?

I do not have a specific favorite technique. I love all the techniques I have learned and developed so far and find that by combining them, I am able to use the strength of each. Over the past couple of years, I have been exploring building more in paperclay. I sense that I have only begun to scratch the surface of what is possible for my needs with this technique.

You have received international recognition for your ceramic works – multiple awards and many publications, but this isn't the only recognition you are receiving. You are also a professional musician (winner of the Noah Greenberg Award) and you teach flute and chamber music at Wellesley College. How do you manage to find the much needed time for both activities?

That is an excellent question! There are certainly not enough hours in a day or days in a week for all the work and activities I would like to do. My musical performing and teaching have a seasonal rhythm, so my ceramic work tends to intensify during the ebbing of my responsibilities as a musician and educator. That being said, my ceramic work is never completely on hold – even during those days and times when I am not actively building, I am still working through the steps to realize my more complicated projects.

What advice would you give to an artist at the beginning of his career? Is ceramics the right medium for expressing ideas? Or is it music?

In finding and choosing an artistic pursuit, I encourage people to notice to what they are drawn and then to explore it! Listen to your heart and intuition: if you listen carefully and openly, your innate knowledge of what resonates in the most stimulating way in your soul will become apparent. Throughout your life, continue to remain flexible and open, because we are all works in progress, and one's focus will need to adapt to this ongoing personal evolution.

Working on so many sides - wall pieces, sculptural or functional vessels and interactive sculptures, makes me wonder what your next project is going to look like. Would you like to share this info with us?

Sculpture is at the forefront of my work presently. There are a number of interactive pieces currently in progress, including some which will build on the concept of the germination of creative forces, such as experienced in my nest and egg series.

Nest with Eggs V, 2011, 9"w x 2"h, wheelthrown with handbuilt components; porcelain; oxidation fired to cone 10

Max Cheprack

Clay extrusion

By Vasi Hîrdo

You are studying Industrial Design at the Holon Institute of Technology, Israel, and recently you underwent a research project on clay extrusion. What are its concepts? Tell us about the technical process.

The extruding clay project started in the third year of my studies, for B.design in industrial design, when I first met the manual extruder in ceramics course. After learning various techniques in the field of ceramic design, I was fascinated by the option to create clay objects using replication. The Semi-industrial process of extruding clay enables the creation of precise and complex objects easily and quickly. Extrusion allows me to design the inside of the object, something that the rest of the techniques do not allow. Extruding technology allows to produce a closed and complex object, and therefore very strong. This allows the expansion of production beyond the products we know today. In addition, this technology brings new aesthetic to the ceramic field.

As an Industrial designer who is interested in manufacturing technologies, I moved away from the dies that come with the manual extruder Kit, and I began to assemble a set of basic dies with complex shapes. Later, I have built an extruder which works on pneumatic piston, in order to free both of my hands. This allows me to make variety of manipulations on the objects like bending and cutting. In order to explore the limits of this technology, I decided to make a stool. The stool is a challenging product for extruding clay process because it is a relatively big product, which must be strong enough to bear persons weight, and should be able to connect with other materials.

My inspiration is taken from a local element of the Middle East - Mashrabiya. Though the project ended as part of my design studies, for me it was a starting point to new possibilities in ceramic design.

What was the most difficult part in creating the necessary tools for the project? Did you get any help?

The hardest part in this project was to understand the size relation between the size of the die and the amount of power that needed to push the clay. First I played with the manual extruder that we have in our workshop and then I made different dies to check how complex things can be. After realizing clearly how things are working I wanted to make the next step towards an extruder that will free both my hands to make manipulations on the objects while it is being extruded. I consulted with an engineer who just gave me a headache with schemes numbers and stuff that I couldn't understand, so I decided to use a pneumatic piston as my base for the machine and after many trails with different pistons and die sizes I made one small extruder and one big extruder.

Do you see the potential of the clay extruding technique you created? How did the people react to your project; the professors, friends?

I think that most of the potential in the technique of extruding clay is not in the big industries field but as another medium for the ceramic artist. All the manipulation on the object are done by hand, the strongest part in this project is in the shapes that look like created by a machine but the general shape (bending and cutting) is done by hand at the moment of the extruding, so this is a great combination of man and machine - the artist that is putting his emotions into an object which came out of a machine.

Apart from this research project you are also passionate about cycling, or more precisely - about building and reconditioning bikes. When did you discover this interest?

My passion about machines began at younger age. When I was fourteen I got my first true mountain bike, been in a cycling competition a month later, finished with leg crumbs and full of adrenaline. From that point I felt in love with cycling. As a kid I rode every spare moment, worked in a bicycle shop as a mechanic on weekends and holidays and got my abilities there. Later I thought ridding skills and mechanical skills at a mountain bike school. I always had a passion for the old bicycle. they are simple, very functional and usually hand crafted and that is what makes them into unique objects.

How does reconstructing bicycles helps the local community and the youth? Recently, teaching bike building skills became part of the curriculum at a local school in Haifa, the Hewar Democratic School.

A year ago we (Yossi Levin and I) established Nisnas cycles. Nisnas cycle is a small workshop dedicated to bicycle commuters. We build custom lugged steel frames, leather bags and wooden fenders. Every Thursday we teach the children at the Hewar Democratic school in Haifa pragmatic tools for building bikes and throughout the process we teach neighborhood history which is really important given the messy history of the occupation, immigration and general mayhem here. Every kid gets a set of tubes that were cut away from an old bicycle. They learn how to build a bicycle and how to navigate through in the neighborhoods in and around Haifa. Basically this is a living history lesson.

You are currently traveling through India. Which one of your passions got you there?

My passion for traveling, seeing new places, meeting new people, exploring different cultures and the feeling of complete freedom got me to India. This is my second time in India; I have been here 5 years ago for five months and I have chosen to go back to India again so I can explore this country from a mature perspective. India is an extreme country in the sense of the diversity of experience - amazing nature, colorful culture, spirituality, interesting people and many many more.

Being a very creative person means that you will always work on something more. Share with us your future plans.

My sketchbook is getting full with some new ideas from wire jewelry to laminated furniture. I am really enthusiastic to go back to my extrusion research and to expand the research. During my time in India I am trying to collect inspiration for future projects, so I am taking many pictures and I sketch a lot.

Chairs made with the extruding machine

Extruding machine

Extruded clay form, 2011

David D. Gilbaugh

Tectonic Method

By Ileana Surducan

The objects you create realistically mimic the texture and look of wood stumps, roots and branches. What is your connection with this natural element, and why did you choose to investigate it in ceramics?

Human emergence is the overarching theme of my sculptural work; as metaphors for that I use the aging tree as well as the natural land features of the earth. My life connection with trees and land extends from childhood when I remember exploring the woods and mountains of Colorado with my older brother and friends. Today I continue my fascination and exploration with the woods and mountains here in Southern California, where I live a short walk from the local foot trails of the San Gabriel Mountains. Ceramics is the most appropriate medium for me because clay seems to know what I want and interacts with me in a very agreeable way. The characteristics and behavior of clay seems to have a common goal with me as if it wants to behave in a way that yields a pleasing result. Clay naturally takes on the characteristics of wood and earth.

In order to make your work, you use a special process called the Tectonic Method. Tell us more about this technique. How did you develop it and what are its characteristics?

The Tectonic Method is a sculptural technique that utilizes the same tectonic forces that shape and texture the surface of the earth's crust. These forces include stretching, compressing, and twisting. I begin with an idea of the sculptural object I am going to make and the pieces that will make it up. I then cut a piece of clay from the block that is roughly in the shape of what I want. I then use specialized wire hand tools to pre-texture what will be the visible surface. Next, I "naturalize" the pre-textured clay by tossing, slamming, or dropping the clay against the table top in a way that distorts the tooling of the pre-textured surface. The textured surface is not touched by the hand or tools from then on. The result is a dramatically textured form that is very natural looking. I call this a "tectonic form." I then use specialized techniques to join together numerous tectonic forms to create a "Tectonic Sculpture" like "The Imaginist" or "The Bearded Ghoul."

Early in my ceramic studies I began developing The Tectonic Method when I was laying them out on the table top to stretch them out. I could see that stretching clay gave it beautiful patterns of cracks and fissures. I soon discovered that cutting the surface of the clay before stretching it resulted in natural patterns that are easy to reproduce and incorporate into sculptures. The method developed very quickly from there. Since those early experiences stretching clay I have found numerous applications by other ceramists who used stretching as a texturing technique and even a throwing tool designed to apply patterns to vessels thrown on the wheel called the "Steve's Tool." A bit of research reveals that stretching clay to achieve decorative textures in clay is a very old tradition. What distinguishes the Tectonic Method from other stretching methods is that it includes specialized techniques for pre-texturing the clay, numerous tossing methods for naturalizing textures, and construction methods for building large clay sculptures that can be prone to slumping to the side during firing. The Tectonic Method is a start-to-finish method of forming and constructing both small and large clay "Tectonic Sculptures."

Many of your objects are made from paperclay. What are the paperclay's properties and why did you choose to work with it?

Paperclay is extremely versatile clay that works well with my purposes, especially the Tectonic Method. It remains workable even when it is dry. At bone dry it can be drilled, sawed, and even rewetted. Many ceramists try paperclay and find it difficult to use so they go back to what they were doing. This is unfortunate, and I believe it is because it is the change itself that is the real challenge, not the clay. Paperclay is not difficult to work with at all; it is only different and takes getting used to. Before I began throwing with porcelain I was told it was much more difficult than stoneware to throw. However, it is not more difficult, it is only different in its properties, so the artists must be able to adapt their skills and learn new ones to work with it successfully. I also find paperclay is more economical because it can be very easily reconstituted and go from dry to plastic overnight. If a piece is broken it can be reattached even if it is dry - instead of going in the trash, and the list goes on. However, the primary reason I use it is because of the dramatic textures it produces when it is "pre-textured" and stretched.

Some would argue that real art is free from any utilitarian purpose, yet your "Treepots" series state the contrary. Do you think that art and practical use can truly merge into one object alone?

My "Treepots" are sculptures of teapots, just as a sculpted head is a sculpture of a head. That said, most of my teapots will hold and pour tea, some do it well, some don't work at all, but they are all made to be works of art. If one chooses to make tea with it that does not disqualify it as art. Looking at one of my teapots you can not usually tell if it works; regardless - my intention is to make a sculpture of a wooden teapot. So my answer to your question is yes.

When creating a special technique, many artists would rather keep it for themselves. Yet, you have workshops where you teach others your technique. What have you learned from these experiences?

My experience is that some people feel the need to keep their techniques a secret because they don't want others to "steal" them and become competition. This has not been my experience. I share my techniques openly because it is fun to teach and see others share in my experience.

What motivates you as an artist? Do you think that ceramics is a suitable medium for young artists?

What motivates me as an artist is the making of my art itself. Sculpting is fun and a wonderful means to express my thoughts and feelings that I can not put into words.

Ceramics is a wonderful medium for young artists. Clay is inexpensive and very forgiving so it is especially well suited for young artists who are learning from trial and error.

What is your next project and where can we see your work in the near future?

My next project is a ten piece installation that I call "The Imaginist." All of the pieces will be around four feet in height and will be very tree-like. Each piece will have a theme and many of them will be associated with a poem or short story that I have written. The overarching theme of the installation will be human emergence. The installation will be on exhibition at The American Museum of Ceramic Arts in the resident artist gallery in July of 2012.

Sycamore Teappot #3, 2011, sculpted teapot, 11"(H) x 8"(D), hand-built slab, B-mix stoneware paper clay with grog, cone 10 reduction, black stain brushed in crevices, water washed iron and rutile stain over porcelain decorating slip.

Marianne McGrath

By Andra Baban

Before starting a career in ceramics you studied biology. In relation to your line of work, how would you characterize the relationship between Biology and Ceramics?

I believe my study of biology helped create the artist I am today: one that works by questioning what surrounds me, and by creating objects based on observation in a very systematic manner. Artists, like biologists, work from direct observation and immersion in the environment around them, and are forever attempting to interpret this world. Both groups employ creative means to achieve this. I grew up on a farm in Southern California, one my family had farmed for four generations, surrounded by this natural world that was under the direct manipulation of the human hand to serve human needs. I believe I was drawn to study biology in college because growing up immersed in this agrarian landscape and was incredibly interested in the idea that we, as humans, have this ability to define, control, and use the natural world that surrounds us, yet we also have an imperative responsibility as a species to maintain this world.

In my final semester in college, I took a ceramics class, the first art class I had ever formally taken. I was immediately overwhelmed by the questions I found artists asking, by the responses that they drew from their audience, and the simple fact that they were using dirt, one of the most basic components of the natural world, to create. This type of communication and way of thinking drew me in and I decide to completely change the direction of my life. I found that my voice was much more attuned to express my concerns of the livelihood of the natural world through the means of art than through my study of biology.

In the studio today, I find myself working in much of the same manner as I used to in the biology lab: trying to find the answer to a particular question. I also recognize my history as a student of biology in my draw to clay's ability to be manipulated at all levels of its creation, whether its in the mixing and altering of a slip, or in the potential of atmospheric firings. I use this characteristic of clay as the basis of communication in my works.

You use unconventional techniques in very interesting ways, like unfired earthenware and wax. Tell us more about these methods and the creation process.

The medium of clay itself creates a very heavy material metaphor. Artists, I believe, are drawn to it for it's malleability, its ability to record the touch of the human hand, and the sense of permanence it retains once fired. Unfired clay, especially at the bone-dry stage, is incredibly fragile and ephemeral - it can be dissolved or broken down immediately. The impermanence that clay retains at this stage struck me as incredibly meaningful, and I thus employed it to convey the meaning that I wished for in my work.

In my piece "What I See, What I Saw," I am speaking of three different landscapes I have experienced at one physical locale: one I lived in as a child, one I imagined as a child, and how I see the landscape existing today. The 2000+ roses in this work are made of unfired earthenware. They embody the namesake of the ranch I knew as a child, the Rose Ranch, and their arrangement suggests the fields of grain that once grew there. Wax, historically used as a preserving agent, holds these forms in this transient state-just how I hold my memories of this landscape now lost to me. By placing these fragile objects on steel rods that act as stems growing out of the hundreds of plywood house forms, I finally present the landscape as it exists today, covered by tract housing and shopping malls. What results in the contrast of the placement of these incredibly fragile objects paired with these industrial materials are a reflection, an observation, and a conjuring, all combined to form one landscape.

The installations that you've created speaks of lost landscapes. How would you describe the connection between your installations and the surroundings?

My works are made in direct response to the landscape and the change that I have witnessed in this landscape that surrounds me. They develop as ponderings on the combination of what I have experienced and what I imagine could be.

You manage to give your installations a sense of uniqueness and naturalness that makes the viewer to be more conscious. Do you have any clear idea how?

I believe I am able to achieve this due to the combination of scale in which I work, the number, shape and material of the objects that I use in these works, and the forms that I pull directly from the landscape. I take natural forms and recreate them in clay, a material that is unnatural and impossible for them, yet by placing them with forms from the landscape and with industrial materials like plywood or steel, the results become metaphorically heavy yet believable situations and easily recognizable compositions. It is both this displacement and contrast of object and material that forms the core meaning of my work. For example, my most recent work, "Overgrowth," is comprised of thousands of hand-formed porcelain leaves that grow over a fallen telephone pole. The scale of everything in this work is realistic: the telephone pole is 19' long, and the leaves are all life-sized. The fact that the leaves are made of fired porcelain presents a paradox: the leaves that directly symbolize something living and growing are in fact not living, but are permanent, unchanging, and static. They present themselves as both a memorial of what might have been, and a pondering on what could be, and this is achieved by the visual and physical relationship between the objects that I have made and the found object from any modern-day landscape, the telephone pole.

Your works are physical expressions of metaphors. Are some of these metaphors deliberately revealing pro-environmental messages?

By creating works that speak of landscapes that no longer exist, I am directly speaking out against what I see existing there today, yet I understand and acknowledge the need for this change as the human population continues to grow at an astonishing rate. What I find at the core of my desire to speak of this in my work is really my own search for the answer to this question: What can we do about this inevitable change, and how can we do this in a more positive way, one that considers both the human idea and need of home, and our reliance as a species on our natural surroundings? I openly intend for my works to speak of memory and loss in regards to the now suburban landscape that blankets much of what used to be rural lands, but I do try to do this somewhat subtly, by stopping short of very direct pro-environmental statements. I admire artists that are able to work with very straight political or environmental messages, but the intention behind the majority of my work is to present more of a questioning, asking the viewer to question what they see around them, and perhaps see the potential they each possess to positively participate in this change.

Most of your works have a very intriguing title. For example: "Mine, yours & ours, but mostly mine", "Maybe we can grow something on top of it all..." or "What I See, What I Saw". Do you find the titles of the works to be very important?

I do. The titles I choose are very odd at times, and they always evolve as the work does. I never know the title to a work when I set out to create it, and often I need to "live" with a work for a bit before it comes to me, but I always see them as a subtext or a sort of continuation of the meaning of a work given to the viewer. I see titles as just another opportunity to communicate within your work to your audience.

Thoughts on Long Drives (gallery shot), 2009, Porcelain, earthenware, plywood, steel rod, plaster, Variable dimensions

You are also an instructor of art at the Temple College. How do you find the time to work both as an artist and instructor/teacher? Do students inspire you?

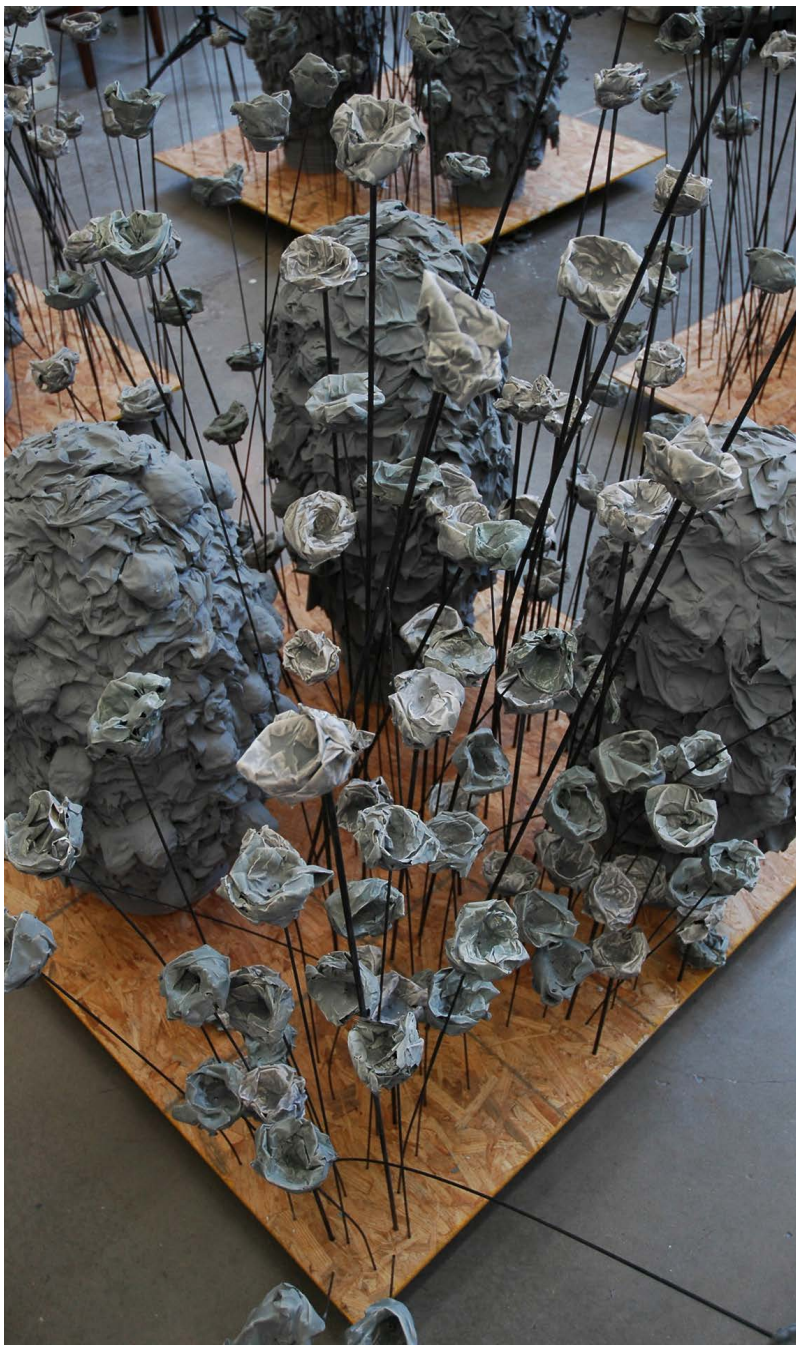
Time is an incredibly valuable commodity for any artist, and as an instructor, time in the studio often is overtaken by time in the classroom. My studio time is limited to my weekends during the school year, but I am able to immerse myself in my work during those valuable breaks. Working at a community college, I have a very dynamic classroom at all times: students from all walks of life, of every age and with amazingly varied amounts of experience. This leads to wonderful discussions and discoveries, and I honestly learn something new from my students every single day. I do my best to show them that I lead this sort of double life as an educator and as an artist, and I include them in this experience as much as I can. I attempt to bring a sense of community into the classroom by often working alongside them as they create their own works, and by recruiting students to work with me as studio or installation assistants. Temple College has been incredibly generous to my students, my work and myself by sponsoring my travel and my students' travel to numerous exhibitions across the country. This allows these students exposure to the functionings of the art world itself, while also supporting my own career as a studio artist.

You have an upcoming show in 2012, entitled "Marianne McGrath: New Works". What can you tell us about it?

This show will be at the Las Cruces Museum of Art in New Mexico in August of 2012. It will include a new 200 square foot version of my work "What I See, What I Saw," two large wall pieces comprised of small porcelain objects and various other materials that will talk about the growth and change of rural America, and a dozen or so graphite drawings based on my observations of the landscape that surrounds me. The drawings are a new endeavor for me, but one that I am excited about.

What inspires you?

Oh, so much I can directly recognize, and so much I can not: landscapes in which I have lived, traveled through or imagined; the human idea and need for home; the intangible and fleeting characteristics of memory and loss; the visual and physical patterns that occur in nature versus those patterns that arise from the hand of man; the endless potential within the medium of clay itself; the opportunity to communicate universally without saying a word... This question is very difficult for me to answer simply, probably difficult for anyone one that creates, and I believe that is the core reason we all continue to make: if we knew the answer to this question, knew exactly what we were looking for and what caused us to look for it, we would be there, there would be no need to wonder, and there would be no more reason to ask. I am thankful that I find the need to ask every single day.



Home Landscape Studies III (detail), 2008, Earthenware, plywood, steel rod, 12'h x 20'd x 20'w

Ken Eastman

By Ileana Surducan

Why did you choose the vessel as the central element of your art? Was there a transition from functional vessels to sculptural ones?

I have been working in ceramics continually since 1980. There have been periods when I have moved away from the vessel, but really it has been at the core of my work for most of the time since then. I do not make functional pots, but rather use the vessel as a subject to give meaning and form to an expression. For a long time now I have realized that my overriding interest is making new coloured clay forms. This seems for me to be the essence of pottery - to make shapes which occupy and contain space and to decorate those shapes. By decorate, I mean to paint slip or glaze, to draw, to make image or line across the skin of the clay.

Does your creative process start from a certain image in your mind, or do you seek for inspiration as you progress?

I have always made things - at first out of Lego and wood and for a long time now, using clay. Working on how to approach creating, so that I can go to work every day and explore shape and colour and move forwards, is always hard. The breadth of ceramic possibilities means that to make any progress it is necessary to build up some strict limitations. I use writing and drawing to approach the spirit of a piece of work, but I do not draw an 'architectural plan' of the piece that I am about to make: ideas that work in two dimensions are often different from those that are successful in three dimensions. Also, if I knew exactly what I was going to make before I started work in clay, there would be little room left for the play and invention that is an essential part of creative work. A large part of the reason for making is to see things which I have never seen before - to build something which I am excited about and wish to show and share with others. So I try not to plan anything except roughly how to proceed within my imposed limitations.

Tell us about the slab building technique that you use. What are the challenges that you encounter and the skills that it requires?

I roll out slabs of white stoneware clay by hand with a wooden rolling pin. Most of the rolling is bashing the clay flat and the rolling smoothens the material towards the end of the process. From the moment I start rolling out slabs I have to start making decisions - not what the piece will look like, which will in time become clear, but the details - how wide, how long, how thin or thick the slab, choices which determine shape. The objects which I make are clearly defined, they have drawn ground plans, smooth walls and clear edges, but this resolution emerges slowly. There are certain curves and curlings which a thin slab can manage better than a thicker one, but sometimes it's the soft fatness of a rim or the weight of a piece which is more important.

Colour is an important part of your work. How do you see the interaction between colour and volume?

As soon as possible in the making process, I begin to make marks on the surface with coloured slips and oxides, whilst the clay is still quite wet. I paint on numerous layers of colour, firing the work repeatedly. I apply it in response to three dimensional form and it is in this way I paint the surface in order to explore and make sense of what I have made. I don't know what colour I want a piece to be until I find it by working - building up layers of colour can often feel more like a stripping away to reveal what was meant. I am interested in the relationship between colour, the illusionistic space of a surface and actual space. This relationship is a complex one - as well as inhabiting the 2 dimensional space on a curving plane of clay, colour can, in a sense fill the actual 3 dimensional space of the vessel itself. Glen Brown in writing about my work said that colour becomes "volumetric, contained, like real space itself, by the vessel walls rather than merely carried on them: it becomes a fundamental content of the work rather than a superficial aspect of it."

Ken Eastman is on the cover of Ceramics Now Magazine - Issue Two
Hold your own, Stoneware with painted coloured slips and oxides, 14.9 x 13 x 21.3 inches / 38 x 33 x 54 cm

Today's contemporary art puts a lot of emphasis on dynamics and interactivity. In this context, what is the merit of an art work that encourages contemplation as an aesthetic experience?

Being a static artwork does not exempt it from being dynamic or profound. Art work which is three dimensional demands that the viewer moves around the work and becomes involved in order to experience it and to contemplate it, which is of course a truly dynamic and interactive experience.

Ceramics is one of the most complex arts, being at the meeting point of sculpture and painting, graphics and design, utilitarian and non utilitarian. And yet, why aren't ceramic artists more present on the contemporary art scene, and in the mind of the majority of the public?

I think it is possible to ask the same question about numerous other disciplines and specialities - right across the arts, literary, musical and visual. The majority of arts activity is not acknowledged by celebrity culture except for a very few names which recur repeatedly across the media. Furthermore the particular profile of the ceramics arts has experienced profound change

Folded Blue, 2011, Stoneware with painted coloured slips and oxides, 31 x 33 x 33cm High

For all we know, 2010, Stoneware with painted coloured slips and oxides, 43 x 31 x 37 cm High

Late morning, 2009, Stoneware with painted coloured slips and oxides, 33 x 37 x 54 cm High

For all we know, alternative view, 2010

in recent years (in the UK and Europe) due partly to changes in Secondary and Higher Education policies. But this situation is changing all the time and it is not mirrored everywhere else either; in many places in the world the ceramic arts are highly respected.

You are a well-known figure in the field of ceramics and an inspiration for many young artists. What are the artists that influenced and inspired you at the beginning of your career?

When I began making ceramics in 1980 I was initially inspired by the material itself - it seemed so open and abstract, so simple and so difficult at the same time. I soon realized you could build pots, sculptures, houses, teeth, basins, sparkplugs, anything was possible; I found that very exciting. At that time I was inspired by the ambition, scale and energy of the US ceramic artists such as Voulkos, Turner, Frey and Autio, but I probably spent much more time looking at twentieth century painting.

What advice would you give to a young artist? Why should one consider ceramics as the right medium for expressing ideas?

Clay is cheap and abundant and covers most of the surface of the earth. The language of building with clay and making ceramics is a universal language, common to all cultures. This is not a precious material neither is ceramics a rarified activity for an interested few. It is commonplace, it is part of all of our lives and relevant to everyone- that's a good start! Practice, keep making and keep exhibiting, and trust your eyes and your intuition.

Kimberly Cook

By Ileana Surducan

Do you remember your first encounter with ceramics? What made you choose this particular way of expressing yourself?

My first encounter with ceramics was when I was a child. During my family's summer holiday, my parents would take my sister and I on a very long drive from Texas to Ohio, to visit my father's family. I remember being so excited when we arrived in Ohio, because it meant that I was going to be able to visit my aunt Coby's ceramic studio. She had an incredible ceramic studio set up in her basement, where she taught workshops. I remember loving the smell of the wet clay, being surrounded by an endless array of colorful glazes, china paints, gold, silver, and pearl lusters, and tools that enabled her students to create anything they wanted out of this wondrous natural material that was easy to form and smelled sweetly of the earth. I was enthralled with the medium, and wanted to learn the techniques of creating both my own sculptural and functional forms.

Another vivid childhood memory of being exposed to ceramics was seeing the traveling King Tut exhibit. I was drawn to the ceramic Bes deity pots and their use in the home as a protector of women and children. For the first time, even in my naiveté, I realized that there could exist a "conceptual" aspect to creating these forms. What also intrigued me were the marl ceramics of the second Naqada period, which were decorated with reddish-brown drawings that developed from the early geometric forms to less abstract images. Among some of my favorite are those that depicted oared boats transporting what has been interpreted as deities, and the decorations that included people and animals. Working in clay has become a cathartic way of expressing myself, and because of this, I will never stop using it as my primary mode of self-expression. From these early childhood memories and tangible encounters, I found a palpable love of ceramic materials, which sustain me to this day.

Besides ceramics, you have also used other mediums, such as textile, photography and film. Compared to those, what are the main advantages - or limitations - of working with clay?

The main advantages in using clay over other mediums are that I can literally make anything with it. If I want to make a dishtowel with clay, I can. If I want to transfer some of my photographic imagery onto the clay surface, I can. I've done a few installation pieces that involved using the ceramic surface as a "film screen", which lends an odd and altered viewing of moving imagery on a stationary object. I have always used imagery on the ceramic surface, and experimented with mixed media; these other mediums have served me well in that endeavor. Currently I am using the surface of some of my newer work as a "canvas" for imagery using underglazes, china paints, and lusters.

The disadvantages of working with clay are unmistakably breakage and weight, and it is not as easy (nor as economical) to ship as a textile piece or a photograph. It also requires that you have access to more equipment – kilns, gas, electricity, space, and proper storage for clay, glazes, and tools.

Your works are figurative and often have a narrative quality. But trying to convey a certain message without using words can be difficult for an artist. Do you sometimes fear that people will fail to understand the meaning of your works? How outspoken should a work of art be?

I use to be concerned that viewers would fail to understand my work, but not anymore. After your work has been censored and removed from a gallery, you start to understand that that is actually a compliment. You have struck a nerve; a message got across to a viewer, understood or misunderstood, doesn't matter. What created that shift in thought for me was the fact that I realized that everyone is going to have their own experience viewing my work, their own perception, and their own opinions. I am okay with that – to me that is what good art is about. If it moves someone, great; if it disturbs someone, great – I want my work to encourage people to go inside of themselves and ponder and reflect before reaching any hard and fast conclusions.

Trying to convey a certain message through my work without using words has never been difficult for me. If communicating via my work was the only way I could communicate, I would be content. Working in a way that is narrative (and figurative) for me is comparable to a politician or a stage actor basking in the spotlight of an enormous crowd waiting to hear him/her speak. I was once described by one of my professors in the MFA program at San Jose State University as having a "quiet intensity". It is with this quiet intensity that I attribute my sensitivity and awareness of the environment around me, one that encourages me to convey thoughts, opinions, and emotions through my work.
My belief is that a work of art can be as outspoken as the artist desires it to be, or as understated as they want. I'd like to think that my work is somewhere in the middle, my desire is for the viewer to extrapolate their own personal story and meaning from my work.

Looking at your works, words such as surreal, eerie and puzzling come to mind. Their appearance and the motifs used could remind one of Hieronymus Bosch paintings, or medieval iconography and bestiaries. Can you tell us more about your sources of inspiration?

You have hit the nail on the head. Hieronymus Bosch has been one of my biggest inspirations, he and Pieter Bruegel. Both artists had a "rebel" quality about them, which is something I feel akin to. Bosch's work was inspired by heretical points of view as well as of obscure hermetic practices. Bruegel was similar in that his work depicted acute social protest, even though he faced political persecution as a possible outcome. I see my work and myself in a similar vein, similar in that I was raised Catholic, but have always questioned the whole idea of religion and social conformity. The idea of conforming to anything throws me into bouts of tantrum-like resistance. This aspect of my personality also affects the work I do in ceramics. I am not what the ceramic community refers to as a "purist". I was rakuing porcelain, applying cold finishes, and adding textile work to my ceramic pieces as an undergraduate in the field. One aspect of Catholicism that I took away was the attraction to the iconography. Being exposed to these depictions of suffering by both humans and animals both traumatized me and intrigued me as a child. Stories of a female saint having her eyes removed with a fork, or another that was stabbed in the throat with a sword (who by the way was transformed into an animal figure, the lamb) were not my favorite childhood bedtime stories. Being such a sensitive child surrounded by images of humans nailed to crosses and saints being martyred both traumatized me and intrigued me as a child. It was like being a sociopathic voyeur surrounded by ornate objects that depicted cruel imagery, but a voyeur who questioned, "do I really want to look at this?", "will this saint who served as a martyr really protect me from psychosis?"

The surrealistic quality of these deities and saints sparked my interest not only in medieval iconography, but also in psychology. The psychological aspects of instilling guilt, shame, and fear via violent imagery are burned in my conscience, and unconscious for that matter. While I do not agree with this method of didacticism, I have realized that the images are unforgettable, which is an indisputable motivator in my creating realistic representations of dream-like states that incorporate facets of religious/medieval iconography.

Superstition of Security, 2011, Stoneware, glaze, mason stain, gold luster, 33.5" x 23" x 16"

Divided Kingdom, 2011, Porcelain, copper, electrical wire, Variable dimensions

Animals or zoomorphic characters, golden chains, child-like figures and elements of Christian iconography – this can all be regarded as universal symbols, but is there a personal motivation of choosing them to express your ideas?

The child-like figures are autobiographies of myself. Early English bestiaries have also been a source of inspiration for me. The Physiologus, a collection of moralized descriptions of animals, both real and mythical, was one of the most popular books during the Middle Ages. "Physiologus" is often translated into "the naturalist", but this is misleading. The authors intent was not to describe what was known about nature at the time, but instead to illustrate a deeper meaning, one being that because of the belief that animals were also part of God's creation, they were the equivalent to humans, and therefore used as depictions of humans intended to provide examples to humanity as the "correct" way to live.

Using this type of imagery as personal motivation for expressing my ideas comes partially from observing human behavior and interactions around animals, as opposed to our behaviors and interactions with other human beings. What I see is that while humans can be cruel and lack understanding and empathy for other humans, these "inhuman" behaviors seem to dissipate when interacting with an animal. What is it about an animal that melts away our tendency to be guarded and aloof? Why is it that we can watch violence against humans on TV, or in film as an everyday occurrence without flinching – but we wince and look away when an animal is in harm's way? Case in point: my work was once rejected from a show in a gallery because the gallery owner "had pet rabbits". At least she was honest. I am in no way advocating harming an animal. Just the thought of it causes extreme uneasiness and loathing. This type of reaction to my work reverts back to my comment about being both traumatized and intrigued by the suffering depicted in religious iconography as a child. However, as a member of society who is now also desensitized by an influx of violent imagery, using a human bound by chains and ropes just isn't going to affect a viewer in the same way that a bound or distressed animal will. My animal imagery is simply a metaphor for the human psyche, one in which we share the same characteristics as animals: pack mentality, aggression, territorial inclinations, and isolation. By transforming these animals into human psychological portraits, I am hoping that they strike a nerve.

Tropophobia is a very interesting piece of art, static by definition, yet full of tension. While contemplating it, the viewer experiences mixed feelings such as anguish and tranquility, and it's filled both with awe and uneasiness. Where did the idea for this installation come from?

So much of my work comes from a very personal, intuitive place. These mixed feelings that you have proposed to describe Tropophobia – "anguish/tranquility, awe/uneasiness", are indicative of both human and animals' personalities. We all have varying degrees of moodiness, some of us more mercurial than others. I am very in tune with my own neurosis, which inspires and propels my creative process. With a background that includes an undergraduate degree in Psychology, I have studied human behavior, and as a result I am sensitive to the diversity of individual

Trophy, 2011, Ceramic, mason stain, gold luster, 35" x 23" x 20"

personalities in various social environments. This increased sensitivity is beneficial in the creative process, but it can also be a hindrance in day-to-day situations. At the time that I came up with the idea for the Tropohobia installation, I was going through many anxiety-producing transitions, including moving from California to Michigan for an artist/teaching residency. Relationships felt like they were dissipating, friends became insecure about my departure, I had a "fear of the unknown" – yet I proceeded, with what felt like all the weight of the world dragging behind me. Moving is not easy for everyone. Change is not easy for everyone, yet we are all faced with it at different times in our lives. It was also at this point that I came to the realization that I owned too much "stuff". How was I supposed to move and bring all of the "things" that I "needed"? Hence Tropophobia, by definition the "fear of moving and change", was created.

Some of your sculptures could be described as satirical, others relate to a darker side of the human psyche. Do you see them simply as results of an artistic exploration, or is creating controversy a purpose for you as an artist?

My intent is not to create controversy, although some of my work has. One of my pieces (not featured in this issue) was censored and removed from a show because a viewer was offended by the imagery. My work is extremely personal. The satire comes from mocking my own vulnerabilities, not in a way that is destructive, but cathartic. I am extremely self-aware in this sense. I have a dark sense of humor, one that is not easily disclosed in conversation, or in my interactions with others, but instead in that "quiet intensity", via my work.

Do you have any future projects, or maybe a work in progress that you would like to share with us?

Yes, I have and will continue to have more sculptural work in progress that is similar to the imagery depicted in my two newest works "Deflowered" and "The Acts of St. Blaise". Also, I recently started teaching at West Valley College in Saratoga, CA. My hope is that my work inspires and transfers a visual language to my students.

Steve Belz

Twisted Synthesis, 2011, Low fire ceramic, washes, glazes, rubber cords and steel fasteners, 14H x 27W x 13D inches.

By Alexandra Mureşan and Vasi Hîrdo

You are strengthening your career as a ceramic artist year by year. What was your first contact with ceramics and when did you realize you have a passion for it?

I took a ceramics class in my junior year in college, and that changed my world instantly. I was constantly in the studio. I had worked with wood and metal prior to clay, but it was amazing to find one material that possesses the qualities of many materials. Throughout its various stages, clay is plastic at first, then flexible and strong like wood, then hard like steel. This is over simplified, but basically I love the metamorphic qualities of clay. It is an incredible material that twenty years later, I am still very passionate about.

Do you remember the theme of your first works? Did your works have any environmental message back then?

I began as many people do, with an interest in throwing pottery. While I continued to work on the wheel, I started to make large hand built vessels. With these pieces I was interested in expressing the simple beauty of nature and the human form in an abstract way.

What is the most difficult part in constructing a new piece? Tell us about your creative process, from sketches to the final display.

I usually work on multiple pieces at one time, so that they feed off of each other as a series. My work is often an amalgamation of forms and details from mostly natural objects and landscapes. I have a lot of natural objects and photographs around my studio. I use these details as a starting point for the forms and surfaces that I create, often manipulating the scale or color of the details that I am interested in. I often start by sketching in a notebook to quickly work through ideas, then I move to a large chalkboard for some full scale sketching. My sketches are often covered in words that inform the themes I am working on. Once I can visualize the form I want to create I move on to construction, my favorite part.

The most difficult part of constructing my larger work is managing the appropriate humidity. I allow certain areas to dry enough so that they have strength to support the form, while other areas are wet enough so that I can continue adding more clay. All of this happens while maintaining a smooth gradation of humidity between those areas to avoid cracks. I spend several weeks working on one piece, often jumping between other pieces while I wait for one to dry enough.

I rarely build my work in the position that it will rest. This does two things. It makes it easier to move the piece around to work on it and it keeps the orientation of the object open until the end of the building process. I can have most of the form completed and then cut and dart areas to modify the form. Once the main form is completed I smooth and refine the surface. This step is very meditative for me. It has a rhythm and fluidity that I enjoy. I do get a little bit stressed when I go to load the kiln. The more time I put into something, the higher the level of stress I feel. I fire most of my work multiple times in the low fire range 1800-2000 F / 980-1100 C). The first glaze firing is the highest with each successive firing happens at lower temperatures until I get my desired surface. Once I am done with the glaze firings, I start incorporating the manufactured elements.

You have been working with all sorts of techniques and have experienced different themes and subjects, but above all, you are also teaching college level courses. How do you find the right balance between practice and teaching?

I love sharing my knowledge and experience with people. Seeing the students' excitement and being a part of their progression as artists is very satisfying. Teaching has defined parameters and time to work with the students. When I am not teaching I am in my studio every day and available to the students. I enjoy being in the studio so much that my more difficult balancing act is between studio time and personal time with outdoor recreation. Not giving my self enough time to play and recharge has been difficult during graduate school.

You are approaching a very contemporary subject in today's world - the natural environment. Have you been determined by a particular experience to choose this topic? How important is the conceptual component for your work?

I have always had great admiration for the natural world. I have a long history of backpacking on the coastline and in the mountains of the Western United States. My undergraduate degree is in environmental studies, which reflects my interest in the natural world. I eventually became interested in knowing where my food comes from. Through this investigation I became aware of the dramatic changes that have taken place in the food production systems in America over the last 20 years. Organisms are being modified in ways that would not be possible without the intervention of scientists. Here in the U.S.A. genetically modified food is not labeled. I feel it is important for people to know what they are eating.

It is important to me that my work sustains a balance between beauty and concept. I hope that my art will encourage viewers to educate themselves about the food production system. However, I have little control over what each person will pick up from my work conceptually. If they are pleased with the form and find it visually interesting then I can feel satisfied. Ultimately, I would like the viewer to be affected by my work and compelled to ask questions and about their relationship with the environment, thereby becoming increasingly proactive in assuring a sustainable future.

Bound, 2010, Low fire ceramic, glazes, slip, rubber cord and copper wires, 10H x 19W x 9D inches

How do you feel about modern society's view regarding a clean environment and its never-ending problems? Do you feel like we are succeeding in resolving some of the problems we created, or is it too late?

It is never too late, but I feel that much of our society is disconnected form the natural world. We need to fundamentally change the way we understand our relationship to the environment. We are dependent of the Earth and all of our actions affect the Earth. Likewise, the Earth affects us; therefore, the healthier the environment the higher our quality of life. I feel we are succeeding in resolving some of the issues we have created, such as restoring natural river flows for salmon habitat and supporting the organic food market. We must continue to work on creating a healthier planet. Increasing awareness is the key.

Your pieces distinguish themselves by the subtlety and elaboration of their shapes, colors and textures. The choice of materials bound with each other and gives your work an emphasized simplicity. How significant is the natural and organic feel to your works?

The organic nature to my work is a very important quality of each piece. I use ceramic materials to create a soft organic plant like beauty to draw the viewer in. The organic form appeals to our innate interest in beautiful things. I use geometric forms within the clay and manufactured elements such as metal and rubber cords to create a tension. This contrast is meant to compel the viewer to contemplate why the tension is present and what factors may contribute to it happening in real life.

Pulse, 2011, Ceramic, glaze, bronze and powder coating, 9H x 14W x 10D inches

G.E.M. Genetics X Environment X Management, 2011, Low fire ceramic, washes, glazes, slips and resin, 9H x 17W x 12D inches

What are you working on next and where can we find your works in the near future?

My most recent work incorporates a larger percentage of metal with ceramic materials and examines genetic modification. I am currently working on a series that investigates people's perception of the storage, use and consumption of energy sources. This work will be in my thesis exhibition. You can find one of my sculptures at the National Student Juried Exhibition in Seattle Washington as part of the National Council on Education for the Ceramic Arts Conference from March 6th – 31st 2012. Additionally, my Master of Fine Arts thesis solo exhibition will be at the William T. Kemper Gallery in Manhattan Kansas U.S.A. from April 16th – 27th 2012.

What advice would you give to a young ceramic artist?

Make a lot of work. Experiment! Try a lot of different techniques and try to master each one. This will open your work up to its full potential. Listen to your professors' and colleagues' advice – then decide what is important to you and make up your own mind. Don't be afraid to use other materials. Keep your mind open to new ideas. Don't be afraid to fail. Take really good notes. This will help you learn from your mistakes. Work really hard and then enjoy your time away from the studio. Most of all have fun!

Assisted Nucleation, 2011, Low fire ceramic, washes, glaze, rubber cord and steel fastener, 20H x 30W x 10D inches

Brian Kakas

By Andra Baban

There is visible consistency in your creation. What was the starting point in your investigation with ceramic art?

The starting for my works comes from the traditional vessel and understanding the primary elements in design. I have taken the elements of the foot, body and lip of a pot and applied them as more structural elements within my sculptural designs. Development of a language within these components has allowed the works to maintain continuity through the progression of forms. The works become more refined as I focus on transitions of lines and volume. Complexity in the structures are inspired from marine life, geological formations, buildings, bridge design and armor. With the creation of all my works I try to stay true to the inherent properties of the materials.

Your works reveal a very rigorous methodology. Tell us more about the process of constructing them. Do you make preliminary drawings?

I used to draw blueprints for my pottery and sculptures. But the works always seemed to lose something in the translation from 2D to 3D. I think the spontaneity of the sketch and energy never quite translated. Once I began using slump and drapes molds I began to only sketch gestural drawings with ink. This allowed me take an idea (not a concrete design) and began to find new forms through exploring hidden lines within objects while only maintaining the idea of the gesture. I apply the gestural line I am looking for onto the X, Y and Z axis of the object in order to maintain flow and control of the entire 3 dimensional space it occupies. I am working with a modular mold system, which allows me to create an inventory of parts to pick and choose from freely. This system allows me to maintain being in a "state of art" while exploring new forms. The sculptures are hollow and all have an inherent strength as I complete lines whether circular or elliptical, symmetrical or asymmetrical. Then I construct a lip on the vessels using armature, just like ribs in an airplane wing or in a boat hull. The ribs create a template to be covered with slabs, which accentuates the forms I have already created. The tensile strength of this element keeps the hollow forms from warping or moving during the firing process.

What materials you prefer to work with and why?

Clay is my preferred material when fabricating works. Yet at all stages of my studio projects there has always been a need to work with and understand processes with other materials such as: wood, metal, fibers, plaster, resin. One of the reasons I gravitated to ceramics was the variedset of construction techniques one needs to execute projects from cradle to grave that go beyond the walls of ceramics. Through working and experimenting with these materials I began to relate their individual properties to clay. My sculptures are primarily made from clay because I find it to be the most versatile material capable of mimicking all other materials through an understanding and use of its inherent properties.

You have created a series of sculptural ceramic vessels; how important is the utility for your works?

The early years of my training was focused in utilitarian pottery. As my technical skills and understanding of the material progressed I started to begin a new visual language, which spoke more about architectural structures than that of utility. Though utility is of no concern in current works, the notion of the vessel is the foundation for all designs and varying formats.

Tell us more about large scale fabrication. Taking the size into consideration, have you confronted with some particular technological problems?

I found through many accidents, the importance of the foundation you build on. There were many cracking issues early on in the high arches of the sculptures. I thought it was uneven displacement of weight that could be resolved by building additional supports that were fired with the works. But with continual cracking at the point of the supports I began reviewing the overall movement of the pieces throughout the shrinkage stages, from cone 04 to cone 10 the problems were the same. I have since figured out the most important component for success is in the shrinkage slab. My pieces are built on a piece of gypsum board and a 3-5 cm thick clay slab. The gypsum board has two strengths; it helps dry the shrink slab evenly and allows it to shrink evenly with little friction during the firing process. When fired to a range of temperatures the gypsum board can protect kiln shelves by catching any glaze accidents and as it is fired it breaks down consistently keeping the slabs from warping.

A second issue I deal with at large scales is in the firing process. I have witnessed that you can fire any scale and any thickness of work as long as you go slow for the important stages of the firing where out gassing of the materials occurs. I used to be terrified of quart inversion but realized that my issues were occurring during much earlier stages of the firing. I have since dramatically slowed down the preheating of the work and kiln. The most delicate stages are between 90 degrees Celsius to 400 degrees Celsius. As this is when physical and chemical gases are released. The thicker or more complex the work the slower I go. My bisque firings are generally a 3-4 day firing. By slowing down these stages, the other benefit is that the kiln and all posts/bricks/shelves heat up more evenly and allow for more control of temperatures from top to bottom which can be very difficult in kilns that are over 1.5 meters in height. I have also recorded less fuel usage in this longer firing as it leads to a more efficient firing with preheating the kiln sufficiently.

Your creation derive from methodologies and theories within different fields of study such as mathematics, architecture or design. How these interests are contributing to your works?

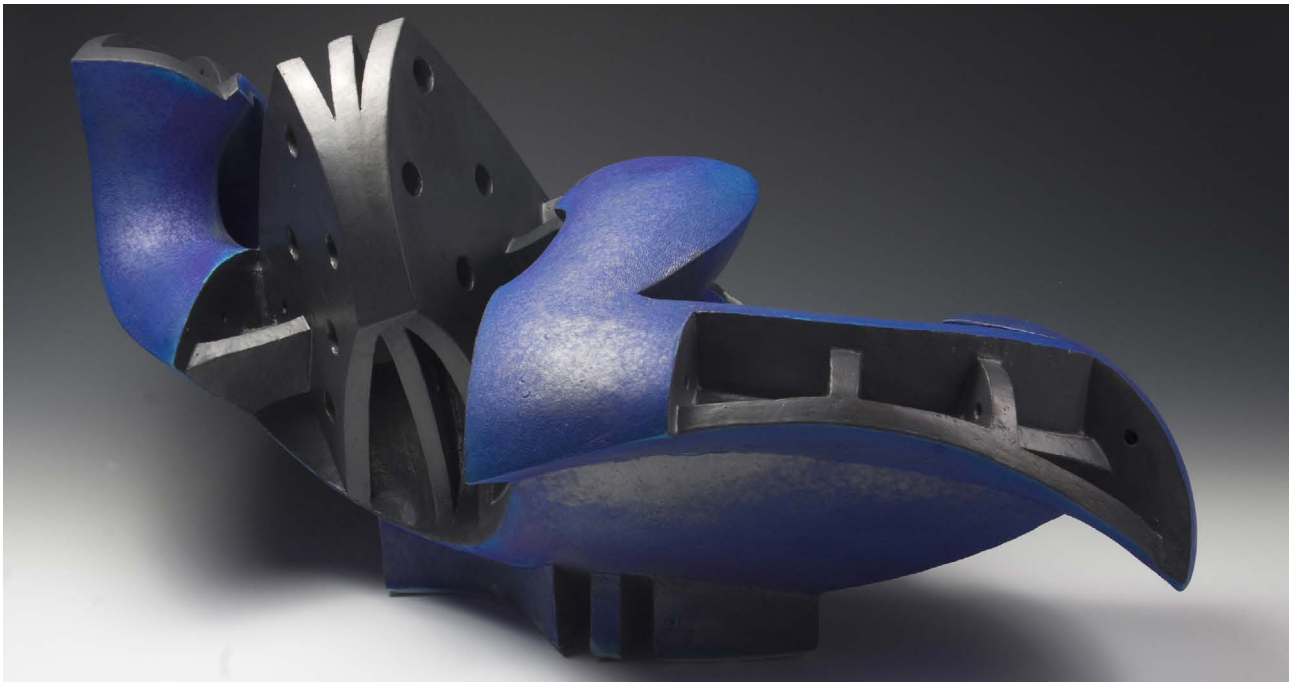
The visual language in the works is derived from a wide variety of influences ranging from both man made and natural elements. The human figure is a major influence for both the internal and external components in the body of the sculptures. Many lines originate from x-ray and cat scan imagery that depict cross sections of internal organs, muscular or skeletal structures. Components of fabrication within the lip construction, comes from exploring boat hull and airplane wing designs in relation to forms. Repetition of lines, shapes and surface textures are influenced by studies from such interests in engine blue prints, roller coaster schematics and exoskeleton of insects.

Combinations of these elements and forms hinge on the designs and proportions of the modular molds that were developed from principles within sacred geometry. Molds are developed from three-dimensional realizations of two-dimensional representations of gnomic spirals and fractals. Proportions and dimensions of the individual molds come directly from Fibonacci number sequencing. I've applied such growth equations to the proportions of my forms that relate to our own physical construction in order for the works to be not recognizable but understood through our own hard-wired preconceptions of space.

Between industrial and handcrafted ceramics, where do you place your works? How do you relate to mass-production?

My aesthetic has also been greatly influenced through mass production industries. I have been fascinated by systems and production practices in large-scale factories creating objects ranging from extruded roof tiles, slip cast figures and jiggered vessels. There is a visual power in both multiples of an object and the consistency of sharp details. I also find a great beauty in the molds themselves and maintain a vision that sees the objects as parts, not finished pieces. Though, the removal of the human hand from the object within most industries leaves the work lifeless. I have developed my studio practices by taking the elements of industry that allow for efficiency in production but also allowing a freedom within the final designs. During construction, the sculpture itself becomes a mold for making other components of the piece. I enjoy making works that are one off and not designed for mass production, while maintaining a balance with aesthetics related to machine made objects. Through this process of invention the work is allowed to continually evolve.

Architectonics – Hull Improv, 2011, white stoneware, slab built, 38”L x 18”W x 17”H, Cone 04 Oxidation



What challenges you the most in ceramics practice?

“Learn to work within your limitations” was written on the wall at the University of Montana when I was in undergrad. I would look up and read it everyday, but I think it took years for it to settle in and for me to gain an understanding of the importance in the statement. Limitations seem to have a negative connotation, but I have found in my studio that parameters are strengths. Parameters can be determined by factors such as: the physical environment (studio space, kilns, materials) and/or our own body (physical disabilities, mental states, accumulated skill sets & knowledge). The challenge within my work and goals in ceramics has been to seek out creative and innovative solutions that allow projects and concepts to become a reality.

What are you currently working on? Tell us about your future goals.

Recently I have taken a position running the ceramics program at Northern Michigan University. Most of my focus has been on the development of new curriculum and establishing an international study program. The program will have yearly trips to such facilities and studios as Gaya Ceramic and Design in Bali, Indonesia; Da Wang Cultural Highlands Park in Shenzhen, China, Pottery Workshop in Jingdezhen, China. With this also brings the expansion of the classroom/glaze facilities and experimental kiln construction for ceramics students to take part in kiln design and firing.

In my own studio, I have been expanding my modular mold system with the next evolution of forms. Revisions of the molds are allowing for more efficient construction and also helping me get a little closer to finding a good one. The works have been focused on trying to give tangible form to gestural lines. With experimentation of the installation of sculptures I have been honing in on the vision of the works and realizing the next body of work is contained within the negative spaces. The dialogue between sculptures contains elements of form and design that are missing in the final objects and has become the focus of the new works.

Architectonics – Nautilus Improv 2, 2011, white stoneware, slab built, 26”L x 23”W x 33”H, Cone 04 Oxidation

Patricia Sannit

By Ileana Surducan

How did your experience in working on archeological sites in Jordan and Ethiopia influenced your work?

My work in Jordan and Ethiopia profoundly changed my work. I went to Jordan between my undergraduate degree and my graduate degree. At that point, I was already serious about clay, and although my early training had a functional emphasis (the well known American potter Warren Mackenzie was a teacher and influence), I had become more interested in sculpture. But my work had little focus and I was frustrated by what I saw as the triviality of my work. It didn't seem to have a core or substance.

Before University, I had been an exchange student in Norway and had learned a lot about history, arts and culture there, but had not put it to any good use. However, when I went to Jordan, two things happened. I travelled all over the region – into Syria and Israel, and throughout Jordan, notable the amazing Petra. I was deeply impressed by the ancient culture and the design of the buildings and tombs and the handmade objects resonated with me. I understood finally that there was a connection between people and cultures and it was in a way manifested through the visual vocabulary around me. It related to the textiles of Scandinavia and the work that I had done as a kid. The desire to create some order, through geometry, on the natural world, and on roughly hewn stone and constructions seemed universal.

My other experience there that had a huge and lasting impact on me was the excavation itself. At Ain Ghazal, working in a "square" (archeological sites are frequently divided into precise squares so as to map out the location of a find onto three points in space) and seeing how the layers of the earth marked time and culture, hiding, or harboring, the evidence of past people was exciting to me. I recognized and felt awed by all of the people who had come before me. Ain Ghazal was first settled about 7250 B.C., during the so-called Pre-Pottery Neolithic B (PPNB) period. The result of our excavation was the discovery of a diverse assemblage of symbols including tokens of many shapes, animal and human figurines, modeled human skulls, "monumental" statues and mural and floor paintings. My square had a beautiful floor painting of iron oxide on plaster. During the final days of the field season, I worked to uncover the floor. As a ceramic artist, discovering a plaster floor painted with iron oxide, the same Iron oxide that I used so often in my work, was a thrill. But more significantly, as I knelt, sweeping the dust from the floor, I felt a profound sense of connection to the women who had lived there 9000 plus years before. I knew that we had shared many of the same feelings and concerns; I felt connected and understood that there was a huge chain of humanity of which I was a part. I still get goose bumps thinking of it. And that sense of our common humanity is what still informs my work today.

My subsequent adventure was in Ethiopia. I am very fortunate to have married a man who works at what is called the "Lucy" site in teh Afar region of Ethiopia. Lucy is an Australopithicus afarensis, and her species populated that part of Africa between 3 and 4 million years ago. She is pat of our species ancestry. As one scans the ground for fossils, walking in the same rough wadis where our earliest ancestors walked, the sense of our history coming to surface is very powerful. It's a beautiful place, though drier now than it was when Lucy lived there. It is very quiet and empty, and potent with history.

Coming from a Western culture, how did you relate to the history of those ancient places?

One of the most important means of education is travel. Through travel, the perspective that I gained on my country of birth and its relationship with the rest of the world changed my way of thinking and being dramatically. I think that it is too easy to see the world only through the lens of your own country's issues and attitudes. The depth of history in the Near East, the long tradition of arts and scholarship that influenced the world long ago made me so much more respectful of that culture and aware that my own perspective was very narrow.

You work with great delicacy and rafinement. How long does it take to create a new piece; what materials do you use? Tell us about how you prepare, manipulate and make the finishing details.

I work on a few pieces at a time. I work almost exclusively with found, reclaimed, and repurposed clay. As I am interested in conveying a sense of shared history in my work, the notion that I am using clay which another artist has already manipulated feels right to me. I gather slop clay from art centers and schools, break the clay down and spread it on large plaster slabs to firm up, or pour/push it directly into tar paper, wood or plaster forms. I live in Arizona, where it is very hot in the summer. This heat helps the drying process go fairly quickly, but the larger forms sit up to a month before that are ready to carve. Small forms are ready the same day. I like to take advantage of the heat and its effects on the drying process. The shrinkage and cracking that happens seasonally are part of my process.

After the piece is firm, I use trowels, scrapers and sculpture tools to refine the form, then paint on a white or light colored slip. When the piece is leather hard, I use a fine stainless rib to incise lines and carve out my marks. I work in response to the form, without a plan or template. After the piece is bisque fired I usually apply iron oxide and manganese dioxide washes and sometimes spray it with a frit before firing a final time.

The objects you create illustrate the contrast between rough surfaces, broken old walls, and subtle decorations gently glazed. What is the meaning of the secret geometry that adorns your work?

My geometry is the same geometry that people have been using for eons. I respond to the inherent order in nature, the Golden Mean, crystal structure, Vitruvian Man and the marks found on surfaces everywhere. I think that in applying marks and fine lines to my rough forms, I attempt to make some order out of the apparent random quality of nature.

Your recent project, "Citadel", is inspired by the Citadel of Erbil, the capital of Iraqi Kurdistan, one of the longest most continuously inhabited city in the world. Tell us about the concept of the project.

The Citadel is inspired by the Citadel in Erbil, Iraq. Erbil is now the capital city of the Kurdish Autonomous Region. A citadel incorporates, protects, covers, and stratifies generations. It is a potent visual symbol and living historical artifact that motivates my work.

The region of Erbil was initially settled by the Sumerians, as long as 10,000 years ago, and there is archeological evidence of habitation of the Citadel as old as 8,000 years ago. The Citadel has been continuously inhabited ever since. Five years ago, I saw in the New York Times an article about Erbil, its historical significance and its vulnerability. When I saw an aerial photo of the Citadel, I knew that I would be incorporating that image into my work. The Citadel itself sits in the center of the modern city of Erbil, which has grown around it in an exponential fashion. The roads leading away from the Citadel, spiral away in larger and larger circles. Erbil is a living example of a community that has grown through time. It has absorbed the cultural artifacts of innumerable inhabitants and has been in the pathway of many of the great developments in human civilization.

As the concept for Citadel began to take shape, I imagined a room size structure, comprised of many layers and bricks that would reflect the

growth and development of culture and technology, not just in Erbil, but of human culture more broadly. I used the stratigraphy I imagined at Erbil to represent a universal layering of information and history and memories. The fact that the area around Erbil was clay bearing and that there had been a ceramic industry in the area for centuries further intrigued me. I imagined the earthen walls that support the Citadel at Erbil were full of pottery and artifacts made by potters through the centuries.
As I began to understand that this was going to be a large project, I applied for an Arizona Commission of the Arts Project Grant. I was fortunate to receive this grant, and with the financial support that the grant provided, bought the materials necessary to begin. I looked at different locations to start construction and looked into exhibition opportunities. And also, I contacted everyone on my mailing lists and my students at Phoenix college. I told people what I was planning and invited them to participate.

"Citadel" was an interactive work – it's "making of" could be considered an extended happening. How did the volunteers contributed to the installation?

The community participation turned out to be the most rewarding aspect of my project. It was a critical part of the project since its inception. We worked from a beautiful Spring through the blazing Arizona summer and into winter, making bricks using traditional methods of pushing clay into wooden forms. We used clay recycled from community art centers and schools, so if I were to cut one of the bricks in half, you might see a cross section of another artist's pot or sculpture. I love having the anonymous contributions of so many individuals as part of this project. The conversations and discussions that we had while working connected us with the builders of the original site. While we worked, people talked of love and family, hard times and challenges. A baby was born, a woman lost her home to foreclosure, jobs were lost and found. We built in layers, week by week, each layer fully carved and finished. As each level was finished, it was covered by the work of the next week's volunteers. In a small way, we recreated the many cultures that created the Citadel at Erbil over time.
Eventually, the Citadel was complete. I fired it over the period of a month, again with the help of many individuals who helped move all of the bricks and then moved them again. Eventually we installed the Citadel at the ASU Art Museum Ceramic Research Center in Tempe, Arizona. It was exhibited there along with a 609 cm by 240 cm aerial map of the original site.

From a teacher's point of view, why do you think students choose ceramics as a medium for expressing their ideas? Is it just experimenting with a new medium or do they consider it as a carrier choice?

I think that most students are looking for a creative outlet, and because of clay's craft history they see the material as non threatening and easy to use, unlike learning the intracasies of oil painting, lithography, or casting and finishing bronze. Once they are students, the endless challenges and variations presented by working with clay become apparent. I feel that an important part of my job is to release the student from their preconceived notions about what to make with clay and open them up to the sculptural possibilities.
In every class there is usually one, perhaps two students who understand especially well the properties of clay; and they are the ones who fall in love with it and perhaps pursue it professionally.

Are you currently working on a new project that you would like to share with us?

I have just completed two new bodies of work and am hoping to start a new installation with a working titled "Walkways". I am applying for grants to help fund what I expect to be a large, community based project. "Walkways" will explore the immigrant experience and transitions of people between places.

CITADEL, 2011, FOUND AND RECLAIMED CLAYS, SLIP AND STAIN

ELY GLACIER, 2012, CAST, CARVED AND INCISED FOUND AND RECLAIMED CLAYS, SLIP AND STAIN, 6"X12"X11"

ELY GLACIER, 2012, CAST, CARVED AND INCISED FOUND AND RECLAIMED CLAYS, SLIP AND STAIN, 6"X12"X11"

Atom Model 61311, 2011, cast, carved and incised found and reclaimed clays, slip and stain, 6”x11”x11”

13 WAYS OF LOOKING AT "NATURAL GREAT PIECE"

*Meditations on a performance in clay by **Cybele Rowe** and **Lauren Ari***

By Daniel Fleischmann

1 "Natural Great Piece" is an intricate, intimate, communal performance in the medium of clay. Like a dance or a concert, it is more overtly bound to time than most sculptural artwork, and it ends dissolved into the past.

2 Cybele Rowe and Lauren Ari make a large and detailed clay sculpture. It emerges from an improvisational score fed by their combined 60 years of art making experience. Passersby are invited to create self-portraits in clay to be incorporated into the artwork. Its surfaces become covered with these figures, which are painted with underglaze.

At a certain point, the construction is complete. Its size is such that it can easily conceal a large adult from view. The words of Tibetan lama Nyoshul Khen Rinpoche are carved into the unfired clay:

Rest in natural great peace this exhausted mind,
Beaten helpless by karma and neurotic thoughts
Like the relentless fury of the pounding waves
In the infinite ocean of samsara.
Rest in natural great peace.

A brief performance marks the culmination of the process. Then the Natural Great Piece is dismantled.

3 Rowe and Ari first manifested "Natural Great Piece" at the 2nd Ceramics Annual of America in San Francisco, October 5–9, 2011. They were joined by singer Bridget O'Keeffe and dancer Juliet Lin. In addition, roughly 250 fellow artists, ceramics aficionados, art students, and visitors contributed small figurative moments to the sculpture.

Circumnavigating its concave exterior or squatting in its embrace, you could see a red dragon, a female figure growing from yellow coral, a gnome pouring a jug of water over a balcony, a bloody ghoul, a colony of barnacles, a waiter bringing a head on a tray, a cluster of pink faces on a blue man's torso, and countless more visual poems and paragraphs.

The chaotic and fascinating fresco captured the essence of the eternal cycle of birth, differentiation, suffering, death and rebirth—in short, samsara. Yet as varied as the details were, all came together in the single, curved wall. Reminiscent of both cave and womb, it described approximately three quarters of a circle and measured about 3m in circumference, 2.5m in height at its apex, and 900 kg in weight.

4 There is no reason to believe that "Natural Great Piece" has a quintessential appearance. Rowe notes, for example, that the moisture in the air at Fort Mason, which sits on a pier above San Francisco Bay, forced her to build a stockier wall. One wing of the sculpture even threatened to collapse on Saturday, calling for quick reinforcement. In a drier clime, the taller shape could easily emerge given Rowe's gift for stretching the proportions of clay.

For another example, because the venue was a ceramic conference, many participants were artists themselves. Rowe and Ari conceive of this work having an expression in a space where most passersby would not have artistic training. It would yield something quite different and perhaps more compelling to Ari, who says, "The point is that art is for everyone. Everyone gets to express. For me, it's very powerful to invite people to art making in a way that makes them say yes to the process."

5 "How do you fire it?" is the number one FAQ. The answer is simple, but few can hear it without questioning further.

"So you're not going to save it?"
"Then what are you going to do with it?"
"Are you going to take it apart and then fire it?"

You have to have compassion toward these reactions because it's clear that great effort has gone into building this mother cave. The structural ingenuity, the input of so many people, even the cost of the clay—surely it must be saved. But when a saxophonist stops blowing, or a monk rises from a meditation of pure surrender, or a trick pilot pivots a plane like a beached fish in midair and then recovers, nobody questions why the transcendent emergence has to end. Nobody asks the pilot, "How will you save that moment?" And even fired clay is only a pause in this fluid reality.

(The second most common question is asked by people who have given Rowe and Ari their clay self-portrait: "Where is the piece I contributed?")

6 Last summer, Ari and Rowe got together at Rowe's studio in the hills southeast of L.A. Together, they built two small structures to explore the way their languages combine. They also painted two large drop cloths in prismatic colors to serve as a foundation for the sculpture. Their daughters, Galatea and Mirabai, fast friends, played together while their mothers worked.

The artists first met the previous year at the First Ceramics Annual, but even before that, Ari had seen Rowe's work and recognized a kindred spirit. "When I saw [it], I thought to myself, 'If I were to make something big, I'd want it to look like that."

Rowe had also been instantly attracted to Ari's work, and had actually set one of Ari's images as her computer's desktop graphic before the two ever met.

"So when we met, we quickly started talking about collaboration," Ari relates. "We had similar energy and ideas." Over the year, these ideas coalesced, leading them to Fort Mason on October 5, 2011, where they spread the canvases, poured a ring of sand for a base, and began to grow the artwork from the ground up.

7 It is a secret den inside the sculpture, child's hideout, where you might get away from regular life and be somebody else for a while. One woman who enters the sculpture sings pure tones into it, exploring how each one resonates. Some people tentatively press a finger against a wall to test its solidity or to feel the vitality of the wet clay facing them at eye level.

This is clearly not sculpture alone. There are certain expectations about clay and how it gets treated whether it's coming out of a riverbank,

being worked in a pottery class, or on display at an art exhibition. There are certain common opinions about what clay is and what it can do. "Natural Great Piece" gently ignores most of these. Meanwhile, the artists who work on it from Thursday through Sunday wear monogrammed lab coats as though involved in some weird science experiment.

"Love the questions," said the poet Rainer Maria Rilke.

8 As she works texture into the clay that now surpasses her height, Rowe improvises a description without a pause: "We're making a collaborative, interactive artwork that is a performance happening over three days. It culminates with a dancer and a singer performing around and inside of it. It is about beauty and storytelling. It is unfired and has something to do with the fragility of being human."

Rowe's description is surprisingly matter of fact–surprising because the experience of "Natural Great Piece" is so unlike anything else at the show. While many artists work intuitively and collaboratively, there aren't many places in the art world where the surrender to process is so complete.

9 Then there's the question of value. As working artists, Rowe and Ari share the eagerness of every artist at the Ceramics Annual to make money from their passion. But "Natural Great Piece" rises from the exhibition floor into an uncertain relationship to the commerce of clay. The business of art is strange enough compared to the production and sale of rubber washers, motherboards, corn tortilla–prosaic widgets like that. This piece feels even stranger. To buy it would be to purchase both its creation and its destruction. You would be paying for the singer's song, the dancer's dance, and the input of 250 anonymous artists–and in the end, you would have no sculpture. You would be buying the experience and the right to film. Clay collectors might not be the audience. Perhaps theater sponsors would be more likely to support an emergence of "Natural Great Piece." Or maybe the St. Louis Chamber of Commerce or Beijing City Hall would commission the work for some civic event.

10 All day Saturday and Sunday, planes roar through the air above Fort Mason. Trick fliers from around the world have come to town. It's Fleet Week in San Francisco, and mobs of people pack all the piers, the park, and the parking lots to see the air show above the bay. In truth, the Ceramics Annual does not register for most visitors to San Francisco this weekend.

The noise of the jets permeates "Natural Great Piece." Maybe it's what compels Ari to spend so much time within the sanctuary of the structure inventing the intricate stories there. Perhaps it spurs Rowe to build the wall high and thick as she marvels at the cost of the jet fuel burned up for the sake of entertainment.
By some grace, the sound of planes does not interrupt the culminating performance on Sunday. On that afternoon the headline act of the air show, the world-famous Blue Angels, cancel after just one high-speed fly-by. The weather is deemed too foggy for safety. Which is San Francisco for you. As the crowd begins to disperse, there is a sudden influx of visitors to the Ceramic Show. But by then "Natural Great Piece" is already coming down.

11 On Sunday, October 9 at about 1 p.m., Rowe and Ari stop adding to the structure. A hand gong sounds nearby. The shake of a rattle. Bridget O'Keeffe generates a slow rhythm as she and the dancer Juliet Lin move deliberately through the gathered audience, arriving at the edifice, and within the frame of filmmaker David Silberberg's camera.

O'Keeffe sits inside the sculpture on a low stool–a tuffet, I want to call it–and it becomes an opera shell, its acoustics sending her operatic voice into the surrounding space. Lin circumnavigates the structure multiple times in a slow Butoh-style step. "This image is of Buddha walking on Lily pads across a pond," Lin explained to me later. "I feel meditative when I use that walk. I also hope the audience begins to join me in a sort of meditation, which can lead to a sense of oneness between the audience and the performance."

At length, O'Keeffe begins to sing the words and phrases of the Rinpoche quote while Lin enters different phases of her dance including a fetal crawl, a herky-jerky abandon and, near the end, a beautiful dervish rotation. When the performers reach a mutual silence and stillness, the audience applauds.

The word that keeps coming to me is grace. Both performers embody it, as do the contours and chaos of the sculpture.
(Silberberg's film runs approximately 16 minutes.)

12 At about 2:30 on Sunday, the denouement begins unceremoniously. Rowe takes a clay cutter and begins to slice the wall into chunks that are tossed back into the plastic bags from whence they came. By 5, nothing remains.

13 The clay is donated to the National Institute of Art and Disabilities in Richmond, California, where Ari works as an instructor. NIAD provides a visual arts studio program for adults with developmental and other disabilities. The clay will be made into other forms, perhaps a vase that might be fired after all. It could be sold at the NIAD store, filled with flowers and set on a table, serving for years until one day, an earthquake or a rowdy Doberman topples it from a shelf, and it shatters on a slate floor.

That's how "Natural Great Piece" is: huge and nebulous but also intricate and finely specific. It is a celebration of inclusion, of yielding, of not knowing. It is an open-ended dialogue about surrendering to the song that pours through you, and through us all.

Daniel Fleischmann is a poet, writer, performer, musician, writing teacher and copywriter in California's Bay Area.

Jill Beute Koverman

CHIEF CURATOR OF COLLECTIONS AND RESEARCH, MCKISSICK MUSEUM, ON WALTER STEPHEN'S WORK

By Vasi Hîrdo

You have been working at the University of South Carolina's McKissick Museum for over ten years. What are the main responsibilities and attributes of being the Chief Curator of Collections & Research?

As Chief Curator of Collections and Research, my responsibilities include overseeing the research and care for the permanent collections. The permanent collections include natural science collections (rocks, minerals, fossils, meteorites and shells) and material culture collections which include fine art, furniture, textiles (clothing, quilts, other domestic textiles, baskets, shoes, accessories), ceramics, glass, metal objects, political materials, silver and objects relating to the history of the University of South Carolina. I guide and implement the collecting activities of the museum in terms of new acquisitions and research, identify long-term care needs of the collections in terms of conservation and storage, and work with my colleagues on various exhibition projects. My research focus is on Southern pottery but I'm knowledgeable about traditional basket traditions of the South, South Carolina history and politics, and University history. In a mid-size institution like McKissick Museum, and particularly at a University, it is important to constantly learn about the various types of museum collections.

During the 26th of May and the 27th of July, USC's McKissick Museum will host a very important exhibition of rare 20th century ceramics made by Walter B. Stephen. Tell us about the heritage of Walter's work.

Walter Stephen was born in Nebraska in 1876. His family moved to 100 acres of land in Shelby County, Tennessee in 1897. It was on this property where he discovered layers of pink, white and yellow clay. His intellectual and creative curiosity was fostered by his mother. Nellie Stephen was an amateur artist who taught blackboard art and painting. Walter did not begin working with clay until he was twenty-seven years old. Together, Walter and his mother began experimenting with the clay and the decorating process. It is also possible that the two had seen George Ohr, "the Mad Potter of Biloxi," demonstrating his pottery skills at the Louisiana Purchase Exposition in 1904. Originally named, "Stephen and Son," they renamed their pottery "Nonconnah" after the local creek. The forms were typical decorative vases and pitchers of the period. The decoration was different as Mrs. Stephen's painted layers of porcelain slip onto the wares, often adding colored oxides for leaves and branches. This paste on paste, or cameo, technique was similar to the original method employed by Josiah Wedgwood for his Jasperwares. In 1910, Walter's parents died and he continued to operate the Nonconnah pottery in Tennessee until 1912. A year later, he moved to the Skyland community of North Carolina, south of Asheville, and established the Nonconnah Pottery in partnership with Mr. and Mrs. Clarence Pine Ryman. At this iteration of the Nonconnah Pottery, Stephen continued to work at the potter's wheel, creating matte glazed cameo wares until 1916. The Ryman's operated the Nonconnah until 1918, producing molded and slab constructed wares with simple blue and brown glazes.

It would be almost a decade after Stephen's departure from Nonconnah before he established the Pisgah Forest Pottery. During this period, he became closely associated with Oscar L. Bachelder of the Omar Khayyam Pottery. Walter worked for a short time with Bachelder but did not want to make utilitarian pottery. It was also during the early 1920s, that he was experimenting with local clay, glazes and firing techniques. Fragments from his Arden home indicate his interest in the Chinese celadon and red glazes.

The Pisgah Forest Pottery, which officially opened in 1926, had a good sized pottery shop where one room was a work area with his wheel, and a second which was the sales and kiln room. A large updraft, bottle kiln was built a few feet south of the shop. As the years progressed, Stephen expanded the pottery and hired additional men to help with clay preparation and the firing. The forms and glazes show the heavy influence of Chinese ceramics, particularly the Han and Ming dynasties. Glossy greens and copper red glazes were produced as well as beautiful "Persian turquoise" and "Aubergine Wine." These colors were exceptionally vibrant over the white porcelaneous body. The crystalline glaze was another area of interest for Stephen. His undertakings were aided by his step-son Herman Case. According to Grady Ledbetter, who began working at Pisgah Forest in 1929, Herman Case helped Walter develop the finest crystalline glazes from 1931 until his death in 1936. Rodney Leftwich states, "Case experimented by adding various oxides, such as copper, iron, cobalt, manganese and uranium to the formulas, and thereby developed a wide variety of crystal colors, which included white, yellow, blue, green, brown, gold, silver, and violet." The results were exceptional.

Many others worked with Stephen over the years. In the early 20th century china painting tradition, women such as local artist Nancy Jones, who would take the green ware from Pisgah Forest and decorate it. She and her students would carve the unfired pottery or apply underglaze decoration. The decorative motifs, similar to those of Nellie Stephen, included rhododenrons, roses, dogwoods, irises and local landscapes. Grady Ledbetter became a potter in his own right. Thomas Case, Stephen's step grandson, joined the pottery in 1948. These two men worked with Stephen until his death in 1961. They operated the pottery as a partnership until Ledbetter's death in 1998. Case operates the pottery on a very limited basis today and is assisted by his wife Dorothy.

This is a very brief overview of Stephen's work. A more definitive explanation can be found in Rodney Leftwich's book, "Pisgah Forest and Nonconnah: The Potteries of Walter B. Stephen" which was published in 2006. It details the different glazes, production marks, values of the pottery, and Stephen's marketing strategies. Black and white historic photographs of Stephen working in his shop are accompanied by beautiful studio photographs of the pottery.

The exhibition, titled "Pisgah Forest and Nonconnah: The Potteries of Walter B. Stephen", presents 76 works, from the first pots that he fired near Nonconnah Creek in Tennessee to crystalline vessels produced at Pisgah Forest near Asheville. Do you find yourself connected to a particular stage of Walter's outstanding career?

I became familiar with Pisgah Forest Pottery after learning about Asian porcelains and English ceramics while working with Nancy Lester, who was the Decorative Arts Curator for the Phillip Trammel Shutze collection at the Atlanta History Center. The cameo works are the pieces that I was first drawn to many years ago due to similarity of technique to Wedgwood's Jasperware. Stephen's regional scenes made it very American. Aesthetically, I appreciate the gracefulness of the Asian forms with the glossy and crackle glazes. The combination of the turquoise blue with the wine is a favorite. It is exciting to make connections between Asian ceramics and the Arts and Crafts traditions found in the South. Potters are always looking at the work of other potters; some share ideas and collaborate. Many potters are able to travel to other countries to share and create; others like Stephen travelled through books and visits to museums and expositions. He was constantly learning, working and exploring.

Where was the exhibition first exhibited at and what was the public's reaction to the pieces? How do you think the McKissick Museum's public will respond to the exhibition?

The exhibition was organized by Stanton Thomas, Curator of European and Decorative Art at the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art in Memphis, Tennessee. According to Stanton, "I'm fascinated that we have an exhibition by a largely undiscovered and incredibly innovative art potter who began working in Shelby County around 1900. Stephen is a little idiosyncratic and very much an individualist, and at the same time, he's part of the larger Arts and Crafts movement, when artists were getting away from mechanization and focusing on the handmade."

McKissick Museum's audience will be excited to see these beautiful works. I think many of our visitors know about North Carolina's pottery traditions as they relate to folk art, but might not be aware of the wide ranging ceramics being made outside of Asheville during most of the 20th century. Many generations of South Carolinians have travelled to the North Carolina Mountains; I think this exhibition will have them think back onto those experiences. Do they have one of these beautiful pieces of "America's Finest Pottery" at home? Did their grandmother buy a piece during a summer or fall trip to the mountains? We hope that the visitor will appreciate Stephen's creativity and his place as an important American potter/ceramic artist.

Walter B. Stephen, Pisgah Forest stoneware teapot with slip decoration and gloss and crackle glazes, 1947. Courtesy McKissick Museum, University of South Carolina.

What events are planned in connection with the exhibition?

On Thursday, June 21st we will have an exhibition reception along with a gallery talk and book signing with Rodney Leftwich, ceramicist and author of "Pisgah Forest and Nonconnah." The time is 5:30 – 7:30 at McKissick Museum.

On Friday, June 22nd, McKissick Museum will present an all-day ceramic symposium, "The Art of Collecting Southern Pottery: Curiosity and Inspiration." The program begins at 10:00 a.m. and concludes at 4:00 p.m. I will moderate the symposium and our presenters include Rodney Leftwich, Karen Swager of Brunk Auctions, Frank Neef, crystalline potter, Winton and Rosa Eugene of Pottery by Eugene, and Barbara S. Perry, Ph.D., noted author on American Ceramics. Dr. Perry's keynote is titled, "Beyond the Pale: Southern Pottery in Context." Rodney will speak about his experiences collecting Pisgah Forest pottery and his interactions with Grady Ledbetter and Thomas Case, who continues to operate Pisgah Forest Pottery on a limited basis. Karen Swager will speak to the ins and outs of working at an Auction House that specializes in North Carolina ceramics. The mid-day keynote by Dr. Barbara S. Perry will provide the art historical context for Nonconnah and Pisgah Forest Pottery along with the work of other Southern potters, past and present. Potters Winton and Rosa Eugene and Frank Neef will discuss and demonstrate the techniques associated with their works. Neef will focus on the crystalline glaze and its origins in the United States. The symposium will end with closing remarks about the presentations and how the ceramic symposium functions within McKissick Museum's collections and exhibition goals.

What will be the biggest challenges of organizing the exhibition? Tell us about the organizational process; how many people are and how many will be involved in the making of?

The biggest challenge in organizing the exhibition at McKissick Museum was where to store the pottery while our galleries and storage areas are undergoing environmental upgrades. The pottery will arrive from off-site storage in mid-May and it will take a few hours to bring the boxes inside. Later, a team of four people (myself, the Curator of Exhibitions and Collections Management, the Curator of Exhibitions and a Graduate Assistant) will unpack and check the condition of the pottery and then install the pieces in the gallery. The Curator of Exhibitions will print out the labels and light the cases once everything is in place. Three to four staff members have been involved with the programming, public relations and marketing efforts. Postcards and advertisements have been created to promote the exhibition, the opening and the symposium.

Do you think that the modern society is doing enough to research and preserve its artistic heritage, like Walter B. Stephen's work? You have published a number of remarkable publications that enrich and give value to the pottery of the 19th and 20th century.

There are so many topics and ideas that bombard our modern society – from the wars and conflicts to the lifestyles of the rich and famous. I do think that more could be done to support the collective arts and cultural heritage. Additionally, artists of all types along with museum and historic preservation professionals are doing more to advocate for their programs and research. The "creative class" does much to increase the quality of life for our communities. That said there are many artists whose work would benefit from additional research and examination. Stephen did much to promote his pottery when he was living. Tourists to the Asheville area bought Pisgah Forest Pottery and took it home with them, taking North Carolina pottery to all parts of the country. It is often a focused individual, or community/specialized group, who provide the initial spark and research that will then lead to an article, a book, and/or museum exhibition. In many museums, there are artists, objects, and subjects that would benefit from additional research of a master's thesis or doctoral dissertation. With funding challenges and the shrinking of curatorial staff, museums are turning to alternate methods for having research conducted on the collections. "Crowdsourcing" is a recent buzz word for engaging and utilizing outside experts or even volunteers to research objects or even to conduct transcriptions of diaries and primary documents.

The University of South Carolina's McKissick Museum is undergoing major upgrades and renovations. What are the future plans of the museum and what are its main goals for the next years?

The improvements to McKissick Museum include upgraded HVAC systems for our gallery spaces and new HVAC systems for our storage areas. The "horseshoe" of the University of South Carolina campus is a designated historic district, as it dates to 1801. The museum is situated at the top of the horseshoe. Because of this designation, the exterior windows are being refurbished. The original metal frames are being sand-blasted and repaired. New thermal glass will replace the old single panes. Together, these changes will improve the long-term, environmental conditions of our galleries and storage areas. They should also improve our energy efficiency. The galleries had to be closed for these upgrades to take place.

McKissick Museum will reopen with the exhibit "Pisgah Forest and Nonconnah" in the second floor North Gallery. Our annual fundraiser exhibition will open a few weeks later. In the fall, the exhibition, "The Ultimate Vacation:" is a result of several years of collaboration between Dr. Allison Marsh of the Public History department, research conducted by graduate students in Public History and the University's Museum Management courses, under the direction of Dr. Lana Burgess. Another fall exhibit will focus on the dynamic relationship of Students and the Athletic Programs at the University of South Carolina. The title "Get Cocky" is a word play upon the University's beloved mascot.

2013 will bring exhibitions drawn from graduate student research into the history of the Mitchellville community after the Civil War, along with another exhibition that looks into Sideshows and the related communities surrounding circuses and fairs. The year will also see the opening of a permanent folklife gallery which will allow the Museum to continually present objects from our strongest collections, those developed from original research and fieldwork about traditional arts of the South. Communities of potters to be featured include those working in Edgefield, South Carolina, the North Georgia mountains, part of Alabama and Kentucky, and the many areas of North Carolina including Buncombe County, the Catawba Valley and Seagrove. Some of the featured artists and subjects can be found on the website *www.digitaltraditions.net*

RESIDENCE OF GROWTH

Allison Luce at the Zentrum für Keramik-Berlin

By James Romaine

Since its inception in 2005, the Zentrum für Keramik-Berlin has been an oasis of cultural exchange for ceramic artists in one of Europe's principal artistic centers. Founded by Thomas Hirschler and Kaja Witt, the residency program provides a creative sanctuary in the midst of an exhilarating city where artists from around the world can create artwork stimulated by their surroundings and experiences. Developed after the couple spent time at the Archie Bray foundation in Helena, Montana, the Zentrum für Keramik-Berlin welcomes artists to a city that is, at once, standing in history and bursting into the future.

Ceramicist Allison Luce, who lives and works in Charlotte, North Carolina (USA), participated in a residence at the Zentrum für Keramik-Berlin between May and July 2010. Inspired by a city with such a tumultuous past, Luce was amazed at the beauty and resiliency of life that was Berlin. This residence allowed her to experience the city in a different way than previous trips that were characterized by quick visits to the main tourist sights. By taking bike rides along the Mauer Weg, following the path of the Berlin Wall, she was able to weave between the former East and West Berlin in a way that was impossible for 30 years and experience where the wall divided the city. Since Luce was there during the spring, she saw the quiet garden of the residency transformed into a blossom of life. As the weather warmed, she also went to various monuments and landmarks around the city, such as the Soviet War memorial, which is tucked away in a quiet residential neighborhood. Luce was amazed to experience a city's metamorphosis woven from a web of history into something thriving and beautiful.

In Berlin, Luce developed a body of sculpture, collectively entitled "The Serpent Tree". Referencing nature as well as the body, "The Serpent Tree" works, such as Mandrake and Echo, as vessels of birth, growth, death and, even, life through death. The theme of residence has been a central theme of Luce's ceramics for many years. Her work materializes the twisted processes of organic growth. One of the advantages of clay ceramics, born of earth and fire, is its potential material affinity with the viewer. Luce's work takes full advantage of this affinity. Working in clay, the material out of which all of humanity was created, her sculptures explore the ephemeral nature of our existence and the belief in the promise of life. Just as the body is the residence of the soul, Luce's sculptures are residences of presence and meaning.

The forms of Luce's work, such as Cleave (2007) have, for many years, been inspired by that of the shell. The shell has a long and rich history, one that transcends boundaries of time and cultures, in ceramics. This may be, in part, because the shell evokes themes of both birth, since it echoes the feminine form of a womb, and death, since it recalls a grave. The fragile shell reminds us of life's brevity. At the same time, Luce's work reminds us of the potential for new life bursting forth from within the shell. As forms of life, Luce's vessels are, like each of us, shaped and refined by a tension of internal and external forces. Although works such as Echo (2010) are not figurative, they address issues of the body, specifically how a person's appearance begins to be shaped by experience. Luce's fragile forms represent a unique and distinct vision for an art that is at once elegant yet unpretentious. Her elemental constructions and radiant surfaces move sculptural issues of form and process out of the realm of the theoretic and into forms of everyday encounter.

During her Zentrum für Keramik-Berlin residency, the forms and processes of Luce's ceramics evolved significantly. She let go of the austere color palette that had characterized works such as Eve (2008) and added watercolor to the fired pieces as the base for further stains. Undoubtedly influenced by the changing of the seasons and the brightly colored graffiti coloring the sides of many buildings, her work became brighter and more focused on nature. Mandrake (2010) is an example of this. Handbuilt with a heavily grogged sculpture clay, this piece was created by rolling textured slabs of clay into tubular forms resembling the stems of flowers that reference nature as well as the body. Once the sculpture was leather hard, an oxide wash was applied, adding depth and dimension by highlighting areas of texture, similar to the illusion of depth created by charcoal in a drawing. After the work was fired, Luce added a layer of watercolor paint to certain areas of the piece, similar to an underglaze effect. At this point the surface was still chalky, and she added layers of cream shoe polish as the final surface treatment. The shoe polish provides color and sheen, while still letting the surface of the clay be seen. This allows the sculpture to "breathe" and shows the flesh like qualities of the clay that would not be visible with a standard glazing technique.

At the end of her residency, Luce had an exhibition showcasing the eight pieces that were not only made in Berlin but were directly born out of that residency experience. The works Luce created at the Zentrum für Keramik-Berlin are not only conceptual, technically, and visually stronger but they evoke within the viewer a strength to change, a strength to go forth. The dichotomy of Berlin is the existence between the old and the new. Luce's memory of residing in this city's life between the past and the present will likely influence her ceramics for many years to come.

Dr. James Romaine is an Associate Professor of Art History and Chair of the Department of Art History at Nyack College in New York. His books include The Art of Sandra Bowden and The Art of Guy Chase. He has authored numerous articles, in the Art Journal of the College Art Association, American Arts Quarterly, Books and Culture, and Image: A Journal of the Arts and Religion.

ALLISON LUCE ARTIST STATEMENT
"The Serpent Tree"

Conceptually, this work is based upon the notion of the human body being a shelter for the soul. I work primarily in ceramics, connecting my artwork made in a post-modern context to the rich and ancient history of clay. Drawing inspiration from nature as well as art historical sources, I am attempting to rectify my current presence with a visual history from the past. I am particularly interested in iconography and the concept of a symbol or object conveying a meaning larger than itself. Beginning with the concept of clay as a metaphor for the body, these pieces are hand built and are hollow inside while mostly appearing to be solid. The hollow interiors of these pieces are symbolic of the soul, while the clay exterior references the delicate and ephemeral nature of life.

"The Serpent Tree" explores concerns about fragility and femininity and its relation to the concept of eternity. The idea for this body of work comes from the story of the Garden of Eden and explores issues regarding the frailty of the body and the fallibility of man. Referencing nature as well as the body, these sculptures are about growth, temptation and the passage from innocence to experience.

In Plenty, 2012, 29" x 17" x 4 ½", Fired Clay, with oxides, mixed media. Photo by Mitchell Kearney.

Allison Luce explores the ephemeral nature of existence and the mystery of eternity through her ceramic sculptures and monoprints. Luce graduated with dual BFA degrees in Painting and Art History from Ohio University and her MFA from Hunter College, City University of New York. She currently lives and works in Charlotte, North Carolina where she is a studio artist and an adjunct art instructor at Mitchell Community College. She has shown her work in solo and group exhibitions and her work is included in private collections. Over the past two summers she has been a Resident Artist at the International Ceramic Research Center in Skaelskor, Denmark and the Zentrum für Keramik Berlin in Germany. During 2011, she was a Visiting Artist at Baltimore Clayworks during the month of July. She currently has a solo exhibition at Baltimore Clayworks and was recently awarded a $2,000 Regional Artist Project Grant from the Arts and Science Council of Charlotte to purchase a kiln for her home studio during 2012.

MUNGYEONG TRADITIONAL TEA BOWL FESTIVAL

By Shamai Sam Gibsh & Stephanie Young

A movie set, created in the style of a sixth century village, within forests and farmland, cherry blossom and azaleas, in valleys and mountains centrally located in South Korea, is the stage for this amazing Mungyeong Tea Bowl Festival. The City of Mungyeong and the South Korean government sponsor the festival, now in its eighth year, and focus on reviving Korean Tea ceremony traditions, as well as the ceramic ware made for it.

Ceramic artists (28) from all over the world were invited this year to participate in this festival, and to display their tea bowls and demonstrate their techniques, as well as to join local artists in various activities related to the traditional Tea Bowl ceremonies. Our tea bowls were available for show and sale, and some selected tea bowls were entered into a competition and are now part of the Mungyeong Tea Bowl Museum's permanent display, alongside the local artists collection. The museum also includes a large studio and teaching center and an impressive traditional Korean Noborigama kiln.

There were many buildings filled with about 50 local masters and potters, selling traditional or modern artistically interpreted Korean wares. There were of course many buildings holding traditional tea ceremonies, for the casual afternoon sip or a more extended, fully traditional affair.

We watched artists fire a Noborigama kiln as it has been fired for thousands of years. Local clay and raw materials transformed into wares of the same timelessness as it has been done for centuries. The Mungyeong area is the center of tea bowl making in South Korea and there are many very talented masters, each with his own studio and at times a large display room and even a museum.

One such artist is Oh Soon-Taek, a self taught ceramicist who originally began his creative endeavors as a painter; he learned the nature of the medium "from the world". Some of the most striking pieces among his collection were the very small, almost miniature tea sets, each executed with perfect craftsmanship. We were fortunate to join Oh Soon-Taek for tea ceremony on a number of occasions, to see the inherent beauty of his work as it fulfilled its function. He masters a variety of glazes and forms in his collection, leaning more to simple aesthetics, so one can admire the form and function of his meditative work, and appreciate his respect to traditional ware, in spite of the adaptation to modern life. Oh Soon-Taek makes his own clay and glazes from the nature around his house, and he built his own kiln. He sells his work only from his house and workshop and has a solo exhibition once every 10 years.

Our hosts went to a great effort to bring us to a number of potteries and kiln sites further spread through the countryside. One such visit was to the studio of Han-Bong Cheon. Our busload of international artists came upon a small, slight man of 80, stocking an enormous Noborigama kiln with the ferocity of a teenage apprentice. Han-Bong Cheon, who became an Intangible National Treasure in 1996, and his daughter Kung Hee Cheon have been making tea ware at their home outside of Mungyeong for 64 years. Tea ceremony has been historically conducted by monks in the Buddhist temples, where Han-Bong Cheon learned and mastered it. Han Bong's mission was to reintroduce to South Korea the know how of the old Koryo tea bowl tradition, that was at its peak production during the 17th century and was lost during the introduction of mass production.

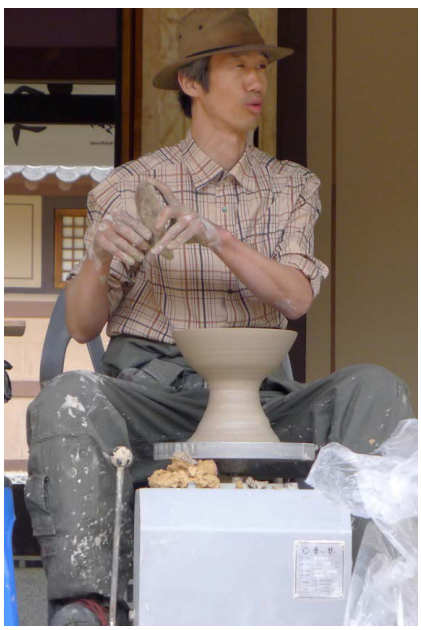
He is also considered today as the artist who revived the Maksabal - "Bowl for Anything" - made for all purposes. Koreans use Maksabal as a bowl for water, soup and tea, appreciating its endless and enduring value. In addition, in order to perfect it, he traveled to Japan to learn the making of tea wares from Mr. Tokuro from Setto Mino. Han-Bong Cheon's work masterfully explores the reserved aesthetics of Korean tea ware. His daughter Kung Hee Cheon displayed and sold both hers and her father's wares at the festival. Her work adds a feminine touch and an additional dimension to the traditional male craft.

Another, of many, amazing places we visited was the home, studio, and gallery of Professor Tae-Keun Yoo. Professor Yoo, as we call him, teaches ceramics at the local university, and at most times was accompanied by a group of devoted young potters-students. Unlike many of the self taught or apprenticed potters in the area, Professor Yoo added a hard won university degree in his pursuit of ceramic mastery. As a child from an undeveloped farmland with an amazing desire to learn and develop, he managed to study and graduate high school, go to university and to Japan. The vast display of his work in his gallery encompassed many intertwined aesthetics of traditional Korean wares, Japanese forms and glazes, and a more westernized exploration of color and design. Professor Yoo took the strong foundation of traditions of Korean ceramics and used it as a springboard for creative exploration. When searching for inspiration, he spends a lot of time among monk friends, mainly in the Bongam temple, one of the most amazing sites, which he showed us. His work varied from tiny bowls to moon jars, luster to unglazed raw clay. There were sculptures displayed casually amongst tea wares. Professor Yoo seems to be exploring the ceramic arts, as much so as the ceramic function, a concept commonplace to us though radical for the area.

The Mungyeong Traditional Tea bowl Festival is an incredible learning experience for all those fortunate enough to be invited. Beyond learning the traditional Korean aesthetics and admire the efforts of the South Korean government to keep ceramic tradition alive, each artist has the tremendous opportunity to learn from their accompanying colleagues, some of the best ceramic artists in their own country. Finally, it is important to mention Mr. Charlie Young who is a ceramic collector and an enthusiastic person that makes it possible for the foreigners who are invited by the city officials and the local Ceramic Society to have the best of times during this festival.

List of International participants in 2012: Adam Frew (Northern Ireland), Antonella Cimatti (Italy), Douglass Black (USA/Japan), Genevieve Meylan (Switzerland), Katsutaro Kikuchi (Japan), Partricia Cassone (France), Roland Summer (Austria) Touri Maruyama (Japan), Andrew Walford (South Africa), Craig Edwards (USA), Elena Renker (New Zealand), Jeff Brown (USA), Lee Love (USA), Matthias Kaiser (Austria), Phillip Pollet (USA), Shamai Sam Gibsh (Israel), Stephanie Young (USA), Anne Mette Hjortshoj (Denmark), Dicle Oney (Turkey), Fergus Stewart (Scotland), John Baymore (USA), Lui Xiao Yu (China) Michael Alan Martino (USA/Japan), Rebecca Maeder (Switzerland), Stephan Schwarz (Austria), Tom Decker (USA).

Shamai Sam Gibsh and Stephanie Young are both affiliated with the Harvard Ceramic Program in Boston, Massachusetts, USA.



Professor Tae-Keun Yoo

Copenhagen Ceramics

PREVIEW

Copenhagen Ceramics is a new exhibition platform aiming to showcase and demonstrate the high quality and great diversity of Danish contemporary ceramics.

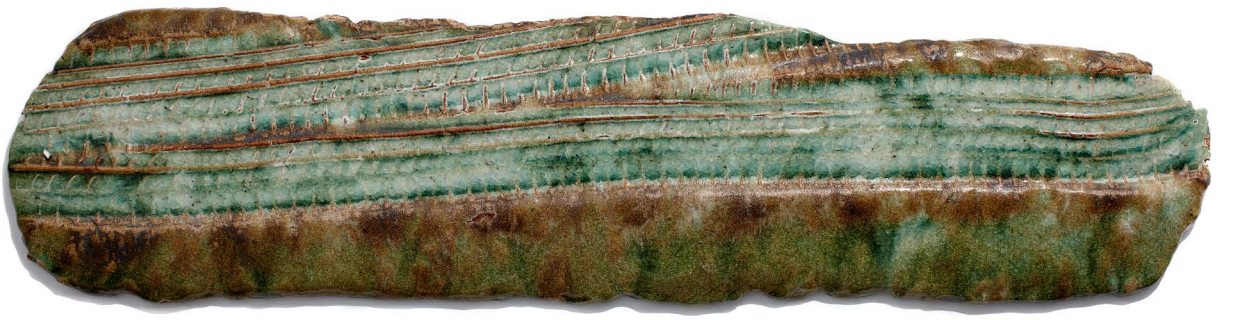
Copenhagen Ceramics is initiated and directed by Danish ceramics artists, Steen Ipsen, Bente Skjøttgaard and Martin Bodilsen Kaldahl. The initiative is generously supported by Danish Crafts, OAK Foundation Denmark, Danmarks Nationalbanks Jubilæumsfond af 1968, and the Ellen and Knud Dalhoff Larsen Fund.

In this issue, Ceramics Now Magazine makes an introduction of this project by interviewing ceramic artist and founder, Bente Skjøttgaard, and by presenting the profile of Danish ceramist, Bodil Manz.

An extensive feature will be showcased in Ceramics Now Magazine - Issue Three.

www.copenhagenceramics.com
www.ceramicsnow.org/copenhagenceramics

Bente Skjøttgaard



Frieze P7 no 1215, 2012, Stoneware and glaze, 176 x 43 x 7 cm. Photo: Jeppe Gudmundsen-Holmgreen

By Andra Baban

As a Danish ceramic artist, do you consider the living climate an important influence in your work?

I think it's fair to say that my works have a certain Nordic nature component. Danish nature is not wild and magnificent – more one that offers quiet experiences: a misty morning over the ploughed fields; an old, dead tree; rainy weather that starts as dark streaks on the horizon; the weather clearing up after rain. Danish weather is changeable and often a cold, clammy affair, but this makes one more keenly aware of the light and small shifts in nuance.

Your work have been described as highly experimental. From the slip-cast rigorous design to the hand-built structures, you have been experimenting different body of works over the years. How do you find yourself shifting subjects and manners? Is it a continuous change?

I have never personally felt that I undertook dramatic shifts. I see my work as an on-going development, where one thing leads to the next. I will never completely finish – fortunately. While working, new ideas emerge that have to be tested. One could say that the experiments themselves ask the next questions. Ceramics has so many possibilities, and I like challenging the material and myself.

What influences and inspires you the most in your creation? How would you describe your current body of work?

With my background as a ceramist I nearly always have my point of departure in an idea to do with material or form. This can, for example, be new form expressions achieved by special compositions, or through cuts or glazing experiments that result in strange surfaces and textures. I often gain inspiration from nature's formal principles and phenomena. Work takes place systematically and always on the premises of the ceramic material, but the investigations often develop into something that is reminiscent of large, amorphous nature-abstractions, with plenty of glaze. The fantastic thing about clay is that what is nature's own material can constantly be transformed into something new and relevant.

Delicacy and sensitivity are two powerful characteristics of your work. How much do you rely on intuition and how much on unpredictability?

I make use of both in my work. Ceramics has an innate unpredictability, especially because it is out of one's hands during the firing at high temperatures. This unpredictability is a challenging co-partner and opponent. All the time, one gets something more or less intentional for free, and from there one has to decide if and how it can be used. My intuition has probably been honed by many years' experience of this process.

Besides a very playful approach in manipulating clay, you ingeniously use colors and assets of glazes in your work. Tell us more about the importance of color and its use in your creations.

Previously, I was mainly interested in the ability of glazes to interact and behave differently, according to the thicknesses involved. At my 'Interglacial Period' exhibition in Galleri Nørby in 2005, it was mainly green/turquoise, because copper is very good at producing that sort of thing. Then came the exhibition 'Elements in White' at Galerie Maria Lund in Paris in 2008, where I almost washed the slate clean and experimented with various textures within white glaze.
It was not until the more recent works 'Clouds' that I seriously explored selecting more precise colours. Here I have thought more in psychedelic colours, the colours of the sky, sunrise, violet, pink and yellow. It has been interesting to include these more 'un-ceramic' colours.

You are one of the initiators and directors of the Copenhagen Ceramics platform. How did this project start? Tell us more about the objectives of this new Danish movement.

The project Copenhagen Ceramics has been implemented by the ceramic artists Steen Ipsen, Bente Skjøttgaard and Martin Bodilsen Kaldahl, based on having noted that there was no longer any exhibition venue in Copenhagen where the best of the great diversity of ceramic expression existing in Denmark could be shown and experienced 'live'. Another important aspect of the project is the Internet platform www.copenhagenceramics.com, which we wish to use to disseminate knowledge of Danish ceramics internationally.
We have planned the 10 exhibitions for 2012: 4 solo exhibitions, 5 two-man exhibitions and a single group exhibition with six of the best ceramic artists from the younger generation. The individual artists have been selected and linked together in new constellations that enable completely new artistic facets in all of them to emerge – also among those already more established.

What has been the biggest challenge of starting Copenhagen Ceramics?

The greatest challenge was time and money! All three of us are practising ceramic artists in full mid-career, so it was also with a certain amount of hesitation that we threw ourselves into yet another ambitious project. For the time being, we have also only planned one year with Copenhagen Ceramics. That is what we feel we can keep tabs on. And when people ask us: What about next year? We answer: We don't know! Financially speaking, we have been fortunate enough to have gained initial funding from Danish Crafts and later also from OAK Foundation Denmark, Ellen og Knud Dalhoff Larsens Fond and Danmarks Nationalbanks Jubilæumsfond af 1968.

One of the events organized by CC was a co-exhibition entitled "Cuts and Interventions", where you exhibited together with Bodil Manz. How would you describe the exhibition, and your collaboration with Bodil?

At first glance, Bodil Manz and I might seem to be diametrically opposed – Bodil's sophisticated, wafer-thin porcelain works against my rough-hewn, expressive experiments with glaze. But there are also common denominators. The title of the exhibition, 'Cuts and Interventions' points towards the way in which we both control materials and the working process.

White turquoise cloud no 1003, 2010, Stoneware and glaze, hand built, 23 x 53 x 34 cm. Photo: Ole Akhøj

Pink white cumulus no 1034, 2010, Stoneware and glaze, hand built, 34 x 45 x 23 cm. Photo: Ole Akhøj

What are you currently experimenting in terms of new ceramic approaches and what are your plans for the future?

At the exhibition 'Cuts and Interventions' in Copenhagen Ceramics I displayed my latest project: Frise P7.

The frieze is a classic within ceramic decoration that I first felt like referring to in this project, where we are talking about friezes with relief patterns from car tyres – Pirelli P7 tyres, to be precise. Using these, I have explored the possibilities of creating a modern frieze ornamentation.

Stoneware clay with chamotte and fibre are thrown down to form a long track. After that, a car drives slowly through the clay in a single track. A direct imprint. Glazed and fired at 1,280°C. The project was realised at Tommerup Keramiske Værksted on the island of Funen.

Frise P7 is a perpetuated imprint in fired clay of our own Fiat Multipla, and at the same time a very recognisable trace of our own age. The P7 tyre pattern forms a beautiful relief in the clay. The length of the relief is important, bearing in mind that it is to be a frieze, but also because we are dealing with a track, a trace. The relief pattern forms a basis for the ceramic glazes. They can run down into cracks and pull away from edges and thereby accentuate the pattern. In other, the track can be partially camouflaged by a thick layer of glaze. It depends completely on the nature of the glaze to what extent the tracks become prominent. Some more directly than others. Others perhaps more like a pattern that an actual car track. What also interests me is the clash between this mechanical, industrial imprint and the clay. Apart from the ability of clay to perpetuate the imprint, it is a soft, sensual and tactile material. One can also speak of an intervention when the clay is exposed to being directly driven over by a car. Despite this, the friezes are not only violent and expressive but also provide food for quiet contemplation.

The Frise P7 project is of course a continuation of my contribution to the Danish Arts Foundation project 'Art along Hærvejen' in 2010, where I let cows of the 'Jutland cattle' breed, which used to be driven along the ancient road Hærvejen in the old days, leave imprints of their cloven feet in an approx. 40 sqm red-clay relief, which has now been put down at the Hærvejen nature trail, close to the village of Bække in Central Jutland. And behind this, there is of course a greeting being sent to Asger Jorn's large-scale ceramics relief from 1959 at Århus Statsgymnasium upper secondary school, where Jorn, as is well known, rode his scooter through the clay while making the work.

Pink Cloud no 1033, 2010, Stoneware and glaze, hand built, 48 x 49 x 29 cm. Photo: Ole Akhøj

Bodil Manz

Bodil Manz, world renowned for her paper-thin cylinders in porcelain, sets out to investigate her own ceramic history. She takes her casting- moulds, used for earlier works, to pieces and re-uses and re-interpretes these shapes and tools into new works that are sampled and juxtaposed with completely new form-parts, as kinds of traces from her studio through time. In other works she arrives at new graphic ornaments on her porcelain cylinders, inspired by the jumble of squared off-cut-shapes gathering around on the floor during her job of applying transfers, ceramic colour and laquer, to the glazed clay body. 'Recycling of my own work', these pieces might be called, she reflects. In this process Bodil Manz, in a poetic manner, puts a stop to parts of her former work, yet opens doors to a new universe that organically grows out of her life-long investigations into the material.

The works of Bodil Manz are characterized by their strong graphic patterns, often geometrically based, that bear witness to her mastery of a refined material and an aesthetically sovereign, contemporary interpretation of a modernist heritage.

Bodil Manz was born in Copenhagen in 1943. After graduating from the Arts and Craft School, Copenhagen in 1965 she went on to study at Berkeley University´s Art Department, California. She lives and works in north-west Seeland, Denmark.

Her work is represented in Museums such as the Denmark Design Museum; V&A Museum; Stockholm National Museum; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; The Israel Museum; Musee des Arts Decoratifs de Montreal; The Houston Museum of Fine Arts; Gifu Museum of Modern Ceramic Art; Neue Pinakothek Munchen; National Gallery of Australia; world Craft Forum Tokyo; Museum Boijmans-van Beuningen Rotterdam; Seattle Art Museum.

Construction, 2011, Porcelain, 15 x 18 cm. Photo: Brahl Fotografi

Romanian Contemporary Ceramics

SPECIAL FEATURE

Written review of Romanian contemporary ceramics through interviews with internationally-renowned and emerging Romanian artists.

In December 2011 we have witnessed the rebirth of Romanian contemporary ceramics through the opening of Galateea Gallery, Bucharest, the first gallery in Romania that promotes contemporary ceramics. The exhibition was titled "Ceramic rendez-vous", poiting out the fact that it brought together fourteen artists from all over the country: Arina Ailincăi, Bianca Boeroiu, Cristina Bolborea, Adela Bonaț, Vasile Cercel, Gherghina Costea, Georgiana Cozma, Marta Jakobovits, Romana Mateiaș, Aniela Ovadiuc, Monika Pădureț, Cristina Popescu Russu, Ioana Șetran and Simona Tănăsescu.

In this issue:
Arina Ailincăi
Marta Jakobovits
Romana Cucu Mateiaş
Aniela Ovadiuc
Oriana Pelladi
Eugenia Pop
Cristina Popescu Russu
Bogdan Teodorescu

The feature is an ongoing project developed by Ceramics Now Association in collaboration with the Romanian Fine Arts Union, the University of Arts and Design Cluj-Napoca and the National University of Arts Bucharest.

www.ceramicsnow.org/romanianceramics

Arina Ailincăi

By Vasi Hîrdo

What was your first contact with ceramics?

The first meeting with ceramic took place when I entered the university, as I decided to take the admission exam for the Ceramics Department. The reason for this option was the liberal reputation held by the Ceramics Department, mainly due to the young teachers of various formations, who were encouraging the free investigation subordinated to an "interdisciplinary" that at that time was quite attractive.

Because originally I had a sentimental inclination for graphics - I was more familiar with expressing myself through lines and white / black tonal values. My way of perceiving the world and building volumes remained indebted to the graphic vision.

After graduation, due to my job as a designer at the porcelain factory in Cluj, I familiarized myself with the subtle expressivity of porcelain and its processing technology, practicing with this material for a long time, and ending up loving it.

You have participated in many competitions and international group exhibitions. What are the most important things you have learned by taking part in these events?

For me they represent a form of self-assessment and validation of my personal approach to ceramics in a context of ongoing dialogue with other colleagues. As for the residences and symposiums, they are extremely benefic cultural exchanges for the refreshening of one's ideas. They also bring the sense of being an ambassador of one's own culture and historical traditions who makes a personal contribution, no matter how small, to the international artistic context. These kinds of events are especially significant for Romanian artists who have suffered, as we all know, from a period of political restrictions that had made the direct contact with the cultural world outside the Communist Bloc almost impossible.

What message or feeling do you want to convey to your viewer through your works? The portraits and the imprints that constitute your work are part of the artistic approach, or they are simply the result of a process of searching?

I find it hard to give a clear answer to this question, because it implies a number factors of which an artist is not always aware. Maybe is best to say that my works are the imprint of my inner trials and tribulations. In other words, they are a way of sensitively relating to the sociocultural climate that surrounds me.

How the viewer can "read" my work, depends on one's cultural heritage or current state of mind, and on other many things... but the perception with its various interpretations will always remains an open question. But oh, what joy we experience when the viewer interpretation comes close to the intended meaning, proving that our discourse is not just a monolog lost in void.

From all the themes approached throughout the time, which are your dearest ones?

I do not know! You tend to like each one, and to confront them at the right moment. But undoubtedly, the subjects and the themes are interconnected, and they follow you like a red thread, and come back to you in time, only to be interpreted from a different perspective. Perhaps the most consistent and fascinating theme that never stops to concern me is "presence through absence". I started working on it many years ago at "Banff Center for the Art" in Canada, when I intended to build a "poem in space" (installation) with this title - a dialogue between our inner self and external environment. This project materialized as a dialogue between different disciplines, techniques and materials (ceramics, drawing, photography, video art and sound).

Clay is a universal material which gives the artists the possibility to express themselves in many ways. A ceramist knows its properties, its limits, and its drawbacks.

How should the relationship between the artist and the material he uses work?

Clay is a magic material that can easily go from one state to another: from liquid-good for casting, to something more consistent- malleable, flexible - good for modeling, for receiving the imprints of the artist's hands, up to the petrified state after passing through the adventure of fire.

The artist's attitude and the relationship with the ceramic material are different from one culture to another. In the Western world in general, its use is placed under the sign of pragmatism – whether the result is an artisan product, an artistic or an industrial one. In the Eastern Asian world the artist approaches the material religiously, just like a lover that values the subtle and delicate latencies that result from its behavior.

Besides figurative ceramic sculptures, you also create ceramic objects, installations and graphic drawings. What is the relationship between these works and the notion of experiment?

The world of the artist is an ongoing experiment, such as our entire existence. Early in my career, the decorative/ functional ceramic objects and the graphic drawings developed separately. Over time I have "married" them in installations - in which each one had a distinct contribution - or conjugated in one work, the inserted graphics having a textural and semantic role in the body of the sculpture.

In fact, I could say that drawing and photography have helped me to get beyond the decorative functional ceramic, to the exercise of figurative sculpture and helped me make the transition from object to installations. Still, in my figurative sculptures, the graphic signs and the writing have a great weight. In conclusion, I could say that using a wide range of materials and techniques, and crossing boundaries between artistic disciplines is beneficial to the development of the artistic language which puts the idea more easily in circulation.

Are you currently working on a project? Where we can see your works in the future?

The projects create one another and come back to you in time with a cyclic recurrence. Lately, I've been working with representations of fragments of the human body. Fragments are a concentration of the vital expression, each one symbolizing the whole (synecdoche); they are an independent sculptural entity, which contains a formal expression and symbolic weight.

My current favorite theme, "Janus" – the Greek myth of the two heads, is important for me because of its ambivalent connotations that can be found in different cultural backgrounds.

Plural consciousness, 2012, Porcelain, Glazes.

Marta Jakobovits

By Ileana Surducan and Alexandra Mureşan

What determined you to choose ceramics as a career path?

Ceramics has always fascinated me and gradually, from a profession, it turned into a very strong passion, an addictive one, one that I would never want to shake off.
Ceramics is, in my opinion, the most generous field of expression. The possibilities that open and call you are infinite - from the multiple techniques of modeling and generating the form, to the different materials and textures that one can use, the different types of burning, and the diverse range of glazes etc. It is the most beautiful profession in the world. Every angle of it is captivating. I am only sorry that I don't have more lives, because I would never get bored of it.

What message or emotion do you want to convey to the observer through your works? Is your artistic undertake based on a certain idea, or is it more of a searching process and experimentation?

For me, this process is never conscious, programmed or preconceived. It is more of a constant experiment that is absolutely instinctive. My only guides on this path are those primal, undefined sensations generated by touching and feeling the malleable and permissive clay. Only afterwards I come to realize with wonder that a kind of actualization takes place - a humble identification, like a translation of some archaic, immemorial message. When I stop and "read" the pieces that I created, and I analyze the way I created them, I marvel and realize that an actualization was already in me, that translation was made through me. Good or bad, this is my path; through it I try to understand, not in a rational way, but rather through sensations and feelings, some of the facts of my existence, trying at the same time to leave some signs behind, signs that have meaning only if they are perceived by others.

From all the themes and subjects that you approached throughout the years, which are the dearest ones to you? Which moments do you find to be the most fulfilling in the creational process?

The happiest moments are when I feel like I have entered in the strange world of the essential secrets, of the miracle of primal existence, in which our fate, invariably the same from ancient beginnings, unravels as an inevitable path. Man lives and struggles to exist but, whether he wants it or not, he will disappear from this visible world. In moments like that, I feel simultaneously anachronistic and contemporary, and my creation appears to me timeless and metaphysic.

Many of your works are created in raku – a technique that is not the most convenient for everybody. Why did you choose this technique? What are the advantages and disadvantages that it presents?

Raku is a technique that allows one to obtain very special and organic effects, both surprising and discreet. The expressive potential of the surface is greatly enhanced and can vary according to time and to different types of materials used in the burning – crumbled paper, sawdust, grass or dry leafs. Because of the strange appearance obtained through the ulterior reductions, the objects that are born through raku seem to me to be part of an ancient world, they appear timeless.

The process of preparing the clay for the object that will be raku fired is special and equally important to me, because this offers just as many possibilities. The preparation involving different salts, oxides, engobes or glazes, in diverse combinations gives the final piece a special and unique visual individuality.
Throughout the years I tested many of these possibilities, and through numerous repetitions I tried to understand and feel the spell of prompt intervention and immediate decision. These interventions can give you the impression that you work directly with the magical proprieties of the ceramic material.

Clay is perceived by many to be a docile and easy to manipulate material, but a real ceramic artist knows its potential and limits. In your opinion, what should be the relation between an artist and the material he uses?

Clay is a material that is very open to the tactile dialog of touches, and this opening is very important to me because it creates a link to a world full of miracles and secrets. Through the material I am capable to connect with messages from ancient times. Clay seems to transport me into a different time, a different dimension. This is the reason why, whenever I find myself face to face with clay I try to reach the highest level of sincerity.

Tell us more about your project Action-Interaction. What was its basic concept and how did it develop?

The action took place in 2000, in a stone pit near the Romanian-Hungarian border. Alongside me, Găina Gerendi Dorel, Găina Gerendi Aniko and Miklos Jakobovits, three artists and friends, assisted and took pictures for documenting the event. That is where the name of the project originates from: INTERACTION G+G and J+J, which refers to the initials of the participants names.

The action was aimed at relocating the art works in nature, observing how they "live" in this environment and, of course, the documenting of every single one of its moments. Repositioning my works in nature was, and still is a very important personal protocol for me. It is just like a sign of gratitude; a ritual of thanking, respecting and admiring nature and the Great Creator. An homage and in the same time, a sort of dialogue while observing with surprise the way my works respond in nature. I can feel that I received and I continue to receive very much from the natural environment. I have learned and I am still learning from hills, rocks, stones, tree arms, shells, etc. The resetting of my works in nature, as gratitude, homage and thankfulness, has been for me a unique and unrepeatable experience. In this action, of placing the works, I let myself be guided by the sensorial feeling that that place generated, and I tried to respond to these sensorial challenges. Under the vast sky, in the odd landscape of the stone pit, it was only me and my works; and in the perfect and harmonious silence of the selected surroundings, they seemed to generate new meanings.

The documenting of the creational steps was very important because the photos that my colleagues and friends made as witnesses and participants at the action, reveal the most significant moments. They reflect singular moments, in which something that can be hardly expressed in simple words. In the magnetic atmosphere of that place, an incredible connection was formed between the created works and the natural surroundings, the heaps of sand, those rocks, the pools, the Heavens and the Earth.

How is your next project going to be?

What is coming, the next step, is always very interesting. Because of my instinctive and spontaneous dialog with clay I know only the kind of area I am in, but I never know for sure what could be next. The only thing I know is that the dialog, the pilgrimage will go on.

Action-Interaction installation detail

Ceramic Diary, raku-fired ceramics

Romana Cucu Mateiaş

By Andra Baban

As a contemporary artist with extensive knowledge in the field of ceramics and with numerous participations in exhibitions, symposiums and conferences, can you share with us a significant experience for your career?

There is no doubt that growing up in a family of artists had a major influence on my life and artistic career. The chance to develop myself in an artistic environment, to be in contact with different genres of art, cultivated my taste for diversity. As a defining experience, I can say that the time spent in the ceramics studio during high school was the most interesting for me. In that period, the studio was an experimentation lab and I was encouraged by my teacher, Judita Crăciun, to discover new things, and so I gathered knowledge that further helped me build my artistic identity. A similar stage was during doctoral studies when I had the opportunity to reshape and enrich my knowledge and vision regarding ceramic art.

What inspires you and how do you start a new project?

New projects usually occur after reflecting on certain subjects, items or concepts that caught my attention and which I want to integrate into the work. Other ceramic projects come as a response to a challenging and interesting thematic for a special event or exhibition. What I particularly like is to closely observe plants, animals and insects, and to study their surfaces with a special attention to the countless details, drawings, textures or structures. The miniature elements extracted from the vegetal and animal world are translated into my work through a personal alphabet of shapes. Besides this, in my work I often use details and anatomical fragments as inspiration. In some works, these fragments lose their original identity and transform into volumetric expressions and complex reliefs.

There is a visible preoccupation for texture in your work; how do you make it and how important is texture and surface for the message you want to send?

The decorative elements are completing the volumes and have an equal importance for the ensemble, the details becoming in this context a work by its own. The texture makes the work more pretentious and transforms it into an object that requires more time and close inspection in order to be discovered. The structures are completing the volumes with nature inspired shapes, vegetal and zoomorphic elements. These graphic traces, reliefs or applied elements on the works' surface are growing together with the shape. Some of the reliefs are taking form in the process of constructing the work by pressing the material on textured surfaces, and other work surfaces are transferred by imprinting, cutting and etching, or by applying mixed glazes to the surface. It is a big pleasure for me to collect in my kit of tools items that can help me later on with my work. This kit, made over the years, consists of lots of items that are indeed a small treasure – a chest with instruments out of the ordinary and tools made by me for the purpose to obtain new textures and more complex patterns.

You are an artist with interests in many areas of research: design, digital art, video, performance, installation and curatorial experience. From all these directions, with which one do you identify yourself more?

My art works are contingent with many areas of interest in art, and I try to express myself using different artistic techniques and genres. In general, regardless of theme or artistic style, I tend to integrate ceramic elements in my work or adapt the work to different techniques, technologies and materials of that specific medium.

In 2010 you held a conference in Paris on the topic of Romanian contemporary ceramics. In this context, what can you say about the context of Romanian ceramics? Do ceramist artists have opportunities in Romania?

The presentation of Romanian contemporary ceramics was part of a larger project together with a Romanian contemporary ceramics exhibition with Cristina Popescu Russu as curator. The exhibition, held at the Romanian Cultural Institute in Paris, was one of the most important events for the Romanian contemporary ceramics in the recent years, being included in the program of the 44th General Assembly of the International Academy of Ceramics (International Academy of Ceramics – ICA). Fourteen artists attended the exhibition but 46 Romanian ceramists were promoted through the materials presented throughout the ICA events. Following this exhibition, new contacts were established between artists.

The visibility of Romanian contemporary ceramics, both nationally and internationally, plays an important role in creating a professional, competitive and creative-stimulating environment which can generate exchanges between renowned and emerging artists, and arise new opportunities for collaborations. Following the records of contemporary ceramists from different generations, with a very original vision in this field, we can notice big differences in the thematic approach, style and forming of ceramic material. The various concerns of the artists for materiality, color, scale or accuracy, and the simplicity of shape are building the identity of Romanian ceramic art. An overview of Romanian contemporary ceramics makes us notice the multimedialism, the interdisciplinary dimension of it, and the new forms and ways of artistic expression generated by new materials, techniques and technologies.

You are a founding member of the Center for Research and Artistic Creation in Public Space: what are the goals of this research center and what are its current projects? Personally, do you have projects particularly conceived for public space?

The Center for Research and Artistic Creation Art in Public Space is one of the research centers of the National University of Arts in Bucharest. It was open at the initiative of Ms Professor Marilena Preda Sânc as part of the Mural Art Department at the Faculty of Decorative Arts and Design. The center is dedicated primarily to bachelor students, master students, doctorate students, teachers and artists interested in public art space. In this center, the main focus is making art projects in relation to a given environment and integrating the work of art in indoor or outdoor public spaces. Public Art projects are available through grants, exhibitions, conferences and publications. The Mural Art Department is currently running several projects involving particular mural art, and which will be implemented by undergraduate students. Interventions take place in public spaces being coordinated by teachers.

Regarding the personal work, I made a couple of ceramic sculptures and mural pieces that can be integrated in public or private, indoor or outdoor spaces, and also some Light Art installations.

What projects are you currently developing and what are your future plans?

I am currently preoccupied with creating a series of works that combine the ceramic techniques and Light Art. The installation will be built from small scale ceramic elements side by side, forming a rhythmic surface, a kinetic play of light and shadows. As future plans, I decided to translate some sketches and ideas that took birth during doctoral studies into ceramic projects, and to compose a solo show as a result.

Ceramics Now Magazine – Digital Issue Two Cover
Signs between Heaven and Earth, Earthenware, Metalic oxides, 64.2 x 6.7 inches, 75.2 x 6.7 inches / 163 x 17 cm, 191 x 17 cm

Buds, 2012, Earthenware, Metalic Oxides, 1200˚C, 10 x 2,5 – 20 cm x 2,5 cm.

Waves, 2011, Stoneware, 950˚C, 50 x 50 x 10 cm.

Aniela Ovadiuc

By Vasi Hîrdo
Translation by Andra Baban

How did you discover the passion for ceramics?

By accident! When I was in high school I studied painting and I believed that nothing could rise to its value; that painting was part of my soul and the only way of expression for me as an artist. But this had changed when in university I have met ceramics, felt in loved and couldn't separate since. This is mainly due to my professor, Ernest Budeș, the person who showed us all the ways of expressing through this medium, using clay, stoneware, earthenware or porcelain, each with its specific techniques. He taught us that ceramics is made with a lot of patience, dedication and most of all, love. He also enlightened us to love what we do because an object made with all these "ingredients" cannot be otherwise than good: it lives, vibrates, transmits.

Is ceramics for you an opportunity for introspection?

Art in general is an opportunity for introspection. Ceramics is a material that creates many possibilities for transposing artistic ideas, therefore can be both two-dimensional (decorative tiles, painting, graphic, photography) and three-dimensional (sculpture, installation). Conclusively, clay has a wide range of artistic forms that can help you translate almost any idea. Unlike other mediums, ceramics implies using all the primordial elements -earth, water, air, fire- to get the final result; this gives you a lot to think about. To give shape to earth you need water, to dry it you need air, but then, giving it to fire (and I say giving because from this point the fire detains most of the control and often is the best adviser and critic that reveals your mistakes and never forgives them) for objectification, fixing, vitrifying, finality.

Tell us more about your creative process. Is there a balance between concept and execution?

The important thing is to have the idea; the rest will follow naturally. When you master the ceramic techniques, you automatically consider the idea in connection with the realisation possibilities; it is like the relation thought – word – grammar. You own the concept, the idea, the thought, and can transpose them using a grammatical structure. The same is with ceramics: you visualize the whole process to the ending, and you start to work, meanwhile transposing your thoughts.

It may happen to change the idea in the process – mainly because the difference of time between thought and action is longer than in other artistic media – for example in painting everything happens almost simultaneously (thought, gesture, action and result) but in ceramics, the completion time is slower and the mind begins to process - the reason why changes can occur in the initial idea but also in technique. Usually, I try not to diverge too far from the main idea, but I have to be very careful because if I let myself flow in experiments, I can easily derail and fail to reach the destination; in other words to get far from what I wanted to convey. Ceramics doesn't give you the chance to step back in the process, instead it forces you to take it again from the beginning.

What message or feeling do you want to transmit through your works?

The artist is a creator. He creates a world and gives it to analysis, meditation, introspection, like a book or song. As an artist, my focus is the man in the complexity of his being (culture, civilization, evolution, feelings, judgments, instincts). My works translate my thinking in opposition with the existential essence of human beings. I try to find meaning and then analyse the different facets of existence (faith, love, culture, history, reason and connection between them). Therefore, I am not trying to achieve technical performances but to give a piece of what I believe, feel and think.

The book is a recurrent element in your creation. What are the origins of this passion?

During Master degree studies I had the Library (Bookcase) as a research subject - the sum of human preoccupations. If Schopenhauer names the book "the paper memory of mankind", my work "The Library" (Bookcase) wants to put in light the human – library relationship. The library has the meaning of a book depository where the books reflect the man himself. To understand this I had to ask myself: What is a library? - A book depository; What is the book? - The memory of mankind in the shape of words, images and signs; What are the words? - Language, signs, symbols, gesture. And still, what is the library? – Is purely a human product, which stores all its history and emphasizes the development path, all thoughts, feelings and human desires. All these are in the Universal Library, and man carries it with himself all the way. The library and the man go together, have a common, inseparable route, like a carried and projected shadow. So from then on, I remained faithful to this theme, because it is very complex and inexhaustible, because we are in constant motion and evolution, but especially because the book as an art object is as Daniela Frumușeanu said - "an exhibition itself!"

From the subjects and themes that approached throughout the years, which one do you feel more attached to?

I feel attached to all of them because they are connected to the human nature and its complexity. Through the book and implicitly the library, I can synthesize the information, but particularizing, I think love is the secret of our existence, the most powerful energy - the secret of life- as Marin Preda said in "The Most Beloved of Earthlings", "- There is nothing without love!" Following this idea I approached the Androgynous theme, actually the Androgynous Myth, where the man and women can discover themselves and become one, perfection, a sphere but only through love. The rest, whether is the library, the book, the introspection, the monologue or the letter, have the man at their origins, and implicitly love.

As a Romanian artist, what is your opinion about the status of Romanian contemporary ceramics and the possibilities of affirmation in this country?

If by the 90's, the Romanian contemporary ceramics were easily confused with traditional ceramics - because there were no magazines, catalogs and galleries in which to publish information, to promote and exhibit, through the years 2006 to 2009 a group of ceramic artists started to promote Romanian contemporary ceramics. After a so-called census we have found that, compared with the international ceramics, we have good artistic expertise, a well-defined value and various personalities, ideas and concepts - but all this could not be promoted due to financial shortcomings and organizational problems.

In 2009, at the initiative of ceramist Cristina Popescu Russu, as Aurelia Mocanu said, "an artist with a vast international experience and because of this with a big interest to maintain the group awareness of Romanian creators", started a promoting process for Romanian contemporary ceramics. The first step was Mogoșoaia Palace Exhibition in Autumn 2009, where 33 artists from all over the country exhibited their works. Their ages ranging from 25 to 75 years, it was a true panorama of Romanian ceramics.
This exhibition was completed with a trilingual

Introspection, 2011, Stoneware, Metalic oxides, Glazes, 100 x 100 cm.

catalog published by The "Brancovan Palaces" Cultural Center and took into consideration the display of Romanian ceramics in the French capital, in September 2010. The Romanian Cultural Institute in Paris hosted a selection of 14 ceramists in two conferences. All these events and artistic gatherings were mentioned at the conference and General Assembly of the International Academy of Ceramics in Geneva, the most exclusive forum for this field. Following these events we formed a group of eleven ceramists, and started the Galateea project. After two years of effort we managed to open the doors of Galateea Gallery in December 2011, being the only gallery for ceramics in Romania, included in the international circuit, which aims to promote Romanian contemporary ceramics.

Now, with the steps outlined above, we were able to shape the image of Romanian contemporary ceramics, which starts to be visible after almost 20 years of shade. We are at the beginning and the outcome of our efforts are slightly noticeable, but from now on is very important to maintain this attitude, to integrate and arise Romanian ceramics in an international context, and here I want to applaud the initiative of my colleagues from Cluj for launching an international ceramics magazine. I am very confident that we can accomplish the projects we set in mind, and happy to see so many reactions both to strengthen the Romanian ceramics but also to promote and appreciate it.

Do you have a project you are currently working on? Where can we see your works in the next future?

Yes, I am involved in the Galateea project together with the group that had this initiative. Through Galateea we want to create a space for starters, for supporting the young ceramists but also a place where renowned artists from this field can showcase and be celebrated. This gallery is the perfect place for gatherings and debates on the perspectives of Romanian ceramics in the international context; a vivid place, a dialog generator between artists and the public.

Oriana Pelladi

By Vasi Hîrdo
Translation by Anca Sânpetrean

You are a young ceramist who had started her artistic endeavor early on, during college. How did you discover the passion for ceramics?

I guess it was while working. From one work to another you get new ideas; you get excited, you make things. I remember that at the beginning, in high school, I was fascinated to discover how a crude glaze that was a washy orange became dark green after the firing. When you are applying glazes, a significant part of the process is a mental/imaginative one. While you are mixing and combining them, you need to imagine their true colors, revealed by the firing process.

What message or feeling do you wish to convey to the viewer through your works? Is the goal of your artistic process one of searching and experimenting?

Absolutely! It's an experiment which starts from the early stages of the work, and includes the viewer's reaction to the finished piece. The message is open to various interpretations, depending on the power of understanding and interiority of the viewer. It is important for me to create a starting point for a debate.

The refinement and elegance of your works are the result of the techniques that you employ, together with the subtle interventions on the shape. Tell us more about the creative process of your works.

There isn't anything new or unusual to it. First of all there is the idea. For me it's important to know if what I'm going to produce is suitable to be made from ceramic material, that the idea will be best expressed with this medium. Then I carefully choose the material, so that it matches and supports my idea. Most of the time, I prefer white clays or sandstone. The majority of my works are composed of more than one piece, so I usually make plaster molds, in which I press the paste, and then I interfere with the form, depending on what I want to do. When I made the ceramic boats (No Direction Home, 2010), I had to do various tests, including testing the paper's reaction with the ceramic slip. It had to be not too glossy, but neither too rough or to absorb much water. Furthermore, it is essential to know where and when you should stop.

In 2010 you were an artist in residence at Fule International Ceramic Art Museum (FLICAM), China. What was the result of this residence?

China is a fascinating country. I lived within a culture with a rich and vast history, one that relates significantly to ceramics. The residence at Fuping has been perfect for me. First of all, I was taken out of the daily context in which I live, away from the little mundane things that interfere with the work. I had my time, I could think and create. I could choose freely from several types of ceramic paste, with high plasticity, provided by the local ceramic factory. It was incredibly nice to work there. Beside this, I experienced working in a studio together with other Romanian and also foreign artists from all over the world – from different generations and with different points of view. It was challenging in terms of creativity, which is a good experience. The residence in which I took part ended with the opening of the Museum of Eastern Europe. Over several years, numerous residences amounted to the creation of the International Museum of Contemporary Ceramics; the museum was composed of several pavilions representing different countries or areas: Scandinavia, America, Australia, Asia, etc. It was a wonderful project, and I was lucky to be part of it. There are many events which deserve to be mentioned. It was captivating. China inspires you.

As an emerging Romanian artist, what do you think is the status of Romanian contemporary ceramics? What do you think is the next step that needs to be done?

It's growing! It's taking major steps. Since the time of Romanian Neolithic, ceramic was in good hands. Then the traditional pottery followed, authentic and differentiated according to regions (I must mention at least the black Romanian ceramic), which also had its charm, but unfortunately is disappearing. We are proud of it, but at the same time we neglect it. What I'm trying to say is that traditional ceramics lacks promotion, and the contemporary ceramics also needs support and encouragement. It is true that we (the artists) don't have good managerial skills, and this blocks our professional approach. As you can see, we know how things should work in theory. Overall, I think it's important to be consistent in what you believe.

You are in a time of transformation of artistic discourse and approach. Can you tell us more about this transitional period?

Yes, I like to think so. I hope to remain in this continuous state of transformation, to be awake to everything new, to see what is happening around me. I started with the work "The dowry" (which to some measure has to do with my mother) and I intend to develop one or two works, all based on some family memories. It seems that in this time I am closer to this kind of inspiration.

Do you have a project that you're currently working on?

I started from the phrase "Where you stroke and where it cracks" (a Romanian proverb meaning that an action has an unexpected result, similar to "He struck at Tib, but down fell Tom"), a saying that resonates with our daily experiences. The ceramic material and the chosen form help me to point out the paradox of expression. It's a work in progress.

The dowry, 2011, Stoneware, White glaze, Wooden pillow

Emptiness, 2007, Ceramics, Video projection

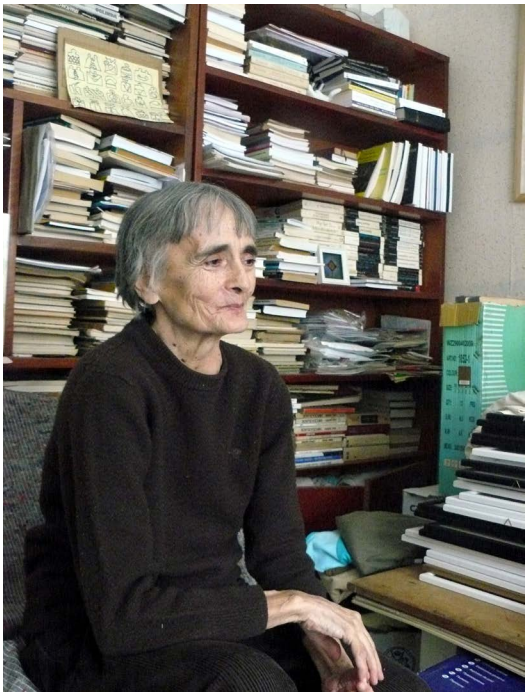
Eugenia Pop

IN MEMORIAM

Eugenia Pop lived and worked in Cluj-Napoca, Romania, where she graduated from the Ceramics Department of "Ion Andreescu" Arts Institute in 1971. Over the course of the past 40 years, she had exhibited in many countries and has been awarded for her career by the Romanian Government (Order of Cultural Merit) and the Fine Arts Union.

Two days after our meeting in February, Eugenia Pop went to the Copăceni alms house, near Turda, to read in peace a book by Zhi Gang Sha. She wanted to learn how to communicate better with her guardian angel. She told us that the spirit must be cleaned more frequently.

We thank Jeni from our hearts and promise to carry her optimism.



By Alexandra Mureşan and Vasi Hîrdo

How did the fascination for ceramics start?

I graduated Ceramics at the Fine Arts Highschool in Cluj. In the twelfth grade I had an excessive curiosity to do work as much as possible, that's why I chose ceramics. I was a colleague with Arina Ailincăi for 6 years. We were also six in the department. Our personalities were very different, and they remained the same. A sculptor inoculated me the idea of versions. He gave me a theme, a ceramic piece in an architectural environment. After a few sketches, he told me to do more versions. I didn't like the idea – why make more versions when the first one was good enough? But, if the master told me, I had to do it. I did lots of versions and sketches, from bad to worse. He chose from the first two, and I remained very sad because I worked so hard on so many. After a while, the seed sprouted in my mind. I was at a Communist party meeting, and I got very bored. I had my sketchbook at me and I was doing all sorts of sketches and drawings. The expression was changing with little diversity if terms of form. I showed the sketches to my professor. It remained my method over the years.

Now I stopped doing more versions on a theme. I read books, for example those written by Rudolf Steiner, and I make illustrations on the pages. When reading a book twice, the images speak to me a lot more and I feel the text very differently when it's illustrated, just like a plastic commentary.

What are your main sources of inspiration?

I broke up with the illustrative image of the exterior form. I adhered to the archetypal forms, which are interior forms of the soul, forms that kids use when drawing, but also used in the antic culture.

Mihai Oroveanu said "Look how monumental your works are," even if they were very small. Dan Hăliucă said the contrary: "That's how it should be – plenty and small." I used this thing with plenty and small a lot, because that's how the image of the soul is. The soul is very capacious. From it's ampleness you can make plenty and small.

A moment of crystallization appeared when I found my personality – when I said that this is how I want to express myself. It was the humanity theme, the man. The mother man, the old man, the child man. Mother Earth. These are themes that I feel I synthesized.
When I was young, my mother used to call me "little golden thorn" – she couldn't tell me that I was not right, but I was also very determined. I was telling the truth.

What is your dearest part in elaborating a new work?

Each part has its own magic. The first one is sketching the idea and choosing the right drawing, then follows the modeling and making the negative. After that, the fascination of the firing starts. It is like when a mother gives birth – she doesn't know how the child will look like or what color his eyes will be. It is just like that after the firing, when you remain charmed by an object, and you say to yourself that this is mine! – its color has changed and it shrank. After you inspect it for a while, you adopt it or not. Sometimes you have to say I'm sorry – this is not mine.

I dream of the moment when someone will give me a studio and tell me to just work and forget about anything else. I had chances like this when I had good working conditions. At Faimar, in Baia Mare, I had a ceramics laboratory where I worked with some amazing chemists. It was filled with glazes and kilns. I was working all day long.
In the summers I was making a lot of negatives at Iris, a ceramics factory in Cluj. After the school started I worked there with students from the Fine Arts Highschool.

Can you tell us more about "The Culture and Agriculture" and "The Apple - The Food" performances?

Actionism was a family game. My grandmother loved to take care of the neighbors children; she formed a choir and they did gymnastics and little shows for the neighbors. My mother was part of my grandmother's team. When I grew up we were three, so my mother did the same thing as my grandmother. We learned to play the harmonica. Two of the kids owe my mother their artistic career. She used to photograph flowers with a zoom device, for the eye. I later met those two, Karcsi and Istvan Felechi.

The passion for cultural activism and artistic manifestation is of old. I think it came from the German part of the family, from my grand-grandmother. She only spoke German. In German families (Transylvanian Saxons) there was the tradition of studying music, poetry, drama and masquerade – to have an artistic activity, the need for culture.

The Culture and Agriculture photography project: I have just moved on this hill (in Zorilor neighborhood, Cluj), and there were no houses by then. I did a film. Ion Grigorescu proposed me to build a house from clay. I made myself a white cloth costume. There was a clay pit not far from here, where I found a fen filled with water. I started battering the clay, I built a citadel, and he was filming quietly everything that looked interesting. Olga Bușneag saw the movie and said it looked like Ion filmed the labors of birth. He captured only my legs and the white curtain. It was really dramatic, it had weight; abnormal fragments of the body were depicted. I still have that costume which looks like a mélange between a judo and a folklore singer's costume. Ionică (Ion Grigorescu) told me there will be a photography exhibition at the Schiller House. I did a composition because I wanted to redeem the nature its ideas. Art is a divine composition.

How the contact with the young generation influenced you? You actively participated in the evolution of many ceramic artists.

Right after I started teaching I discovered that I was very angry, the students managed to give me unpleasant feelings. I had to control myself. In Toca's class, who was older than me, I found a calm, intelligent boy. I was telling him to tell me if I'm raising the voice, but he kept on laughing. I first professed in 1972. It was a very hard experience because I had the ideal to teach the students a lot of things. Those who supported my exigency were the happy ones, but the others suffered. The ones who suffered never wanted to do ceramics. Zmic for example (Gavril Zmicală), with Maramureş origins, learned to work since he was a child, he had no caprices. For him it was important what I said, how I said and how I opened his horizons. I visited him after he graduated the Art Institute in Cluj. The people from Maramureş are very hospitable. He showed me the loft of his house where he kept a mountain of croquis drawings. I saw his native talent in a portrait sculpture depicting his brother and made our of nut wood. It resembled with Brâncuşi. The portrait had a fantastic anatomy, an excessive detail and accuracy. I had the sentiment that the student has surpassed his master. At his diploma in the twelfth grade he did a series of work depicting frogs, which were very expressive, each with unique details. I was very happy by the outcome, but he said it's not a big deal. It was a good year.

I learned that school is like an orchard. In one year it has good fruitage, but in the next year there is nothing to press out.

What advice would you give to a young ceramic artist?

My only Christian advice for them is to love ceramics. With love you can do anything. If you don't love, it disarms you of many things.

Life always offers you projects. Impulsions come on very strange ways, but there is always a kind of deep will.

Mother Earth, 1985, Soft porcelain

The Temptation, 1994, Soft Porcelain, 5 x 11 cm

Cristina Popescu Russu

By Alexandra Mureşan

In 1975 you graduated Ceramics at the Nicolae Grigorescu Arts Institute in Bucharest. You have been active in this domain for over 35 years, which are marked by a large number of exhibitions, as well as participations to international symposiums. How was this passion for ceramics born? Have you had any masters that marked your career?

In the Music & Fine Arts Highschool in Craiova, the teachers Şopov Cole Nicos, Ion Marineanu and Vasile Buz have inspired me a love for painting as well as for molding. I fell in love with our prehistoric ceramics and from then on I knew I would dedicate myself to this domain.
In the N. Grigorescu Arts Institute in Bucharest I had the privilege of meeting remarkable teachers: Lucia Ioan Neagu, Costel Badea. I learned something from each of them, namely to learn as much arts history as possible, to investigate, to experiment and to be creative at the same time, to not plagiarize, to know that talent had no significance without daily work, and that only the well made work, the passionate one – can lead to performance.
Being fascinated by the renaissance techniques in painting and by the technology of ceramics – like I was then, I used to work all day long in the Institute with the love and the exigency that have been taught to us by our professors.

The material that you most often work with is porcelain. What determines you to prefer it to all others? What are the artistic proprieties of porcelain that makes it more suitable for you than any other material?

In the '70 and the '80 there was collaboration between the arts institutes and the factories in the country that specialized in porcelain, tile, sandstone, glass and other materials. The students used to make their internship and their diploma works there, benefiting from what is vital for an artist: the specific materials and technologies. My love for porcelain was born there as a challenge. Only the ones who have knowledge in the technology of ceramics can comprehend how difficult it is to achieve performance when porcelain is the material of choice. It is a difficult material, hard to manage, because it has a memory and you have to know with precision the distortions, the contractions, the burning curves, when you want to obtain something in particular. Everything is fascinating about this material: the pure white, the translucence gained by the thinning of the fragments, its resonance when it is well burned, its preciousness.

Which were the main themes that you followed during your artistic evolution? Do you think that the theme chooses its material, or the material gives the theme?

The works with which I have made my debut were placed under the mark of a symbolism, conceived as an ideal process. I have been for a very long time influenced by the architecture and the objects that carried religious traits. They inspired me. I almost couldn't conceive a work without bestowing a profound significance on it. The concept was important, and not the decorative element. Everything had to have a sense, to symbolize something. The Labyrinth, the Archetype, the Hearth, the Shrine, the Dome, the Canopy – this were recurrent themes.

Only later I became more preoccupied with porcelain's expressivity, and the themes were spontaneously borne while working; it was the result of studying in the workshop and of experimenting with different techniques with porcelain and sandstone. As for clay, I worked very little with it.

Every artist has a personal way of approaching the material and the theme. In my case there is a spontaneous inspiration that comes from personal feelings, from what surrounds me, from the music that I listen to; but it can also happen that an idea haunts me for many months until transferring it into material. In the last years I preferred the simple forms, minimal, stressing on the relations of form – structure, mat – shinny, with a restricted area of color.

You are the founder of Galateea Gallery, the only gallery in Romania dedicated to promoting contemporary Romanian ceramics. What is the Gallery's history and what are its projects?

In 1953, the Artists Union in Romania is granted the use of the space for an exposition hall. In 1955, arh. Eugen Vernescu arranges it to host painting and sculpture expositions. Twenty years later, arh. Mircea Coradino dramatically modifies its interior and façade, and the art critiques Mihai Ispir and Mihai Drişcu titled it Galateea Gallery.

Starting with 2011, due to my initiative and the concentrated efforts of a group of ceramic artists, whom I want to mention here, Galateea specialized in contemporary ceramics and enrolled in the international circuit. The group that coordinates the Gallery's program is formed from these artists: Georgiana Cozma, Gherghina Costea, Ioana Şetran, Cristina Popescu Russu, Vasile Cercel, Romana Mateiaş, Aniela Ovadiuc, Adela Bonaţ, Bianca Boeroiu, Simona Tănăsescu, Monika Pădureţ. The Bucharest City Hall, The Artists Union in Romania and some other sponsors have sustained the program financially.

Future projects are all directed to promoting contemporary Romanian ceramic arts by developing partnerships and collaborations with international galleries and related centers. We wish it to be a place where young ceramists can make their debut and can be promoted, where established artists can be introduced, and also a space for paying tribute to masters; a place to generate dialog between the artists and the public, holding debates on the ceramic arts perspectives in the international context and on the new concepts born from the relation of ceramics with other domains of visual arts.

The program, which is posted on the Gallery's blog, will include personal and group exhibitions of Romanian and foreign ceramists, as well as of some guest sculptors, painters and illustrators who are working with ceramics.

You are also a member of the International Ceramics Academy of Geneva and of 'International Contemporary Ceramic Art' Vienna. By comparison with the international ceramic art scene, what is in your opinion the status of the Romanian contemporary ceramics?

In 1999 I was invited for the first time at a great International congress of ceramics in Amsterdam, "Ceramic Millenium 99", along with some friends of mine Marta Jakobovits, Arina and Cornel Ailincăi, when I realized that we, the Romanians, were just about nowhere – that we had no visibility. I was impressed by the discourses of some great masters in the art of ceramics, by those of gallerists, museographers, and also by the special films dedicated to ceramics. The Japanese and the Koreans' works were triumphant.

Only a few names of Romanian ceramists were known, and that was due to their international awards, which is not much compared to our potential.

The Romanian contemporary ceramics has made itself known thanks to the promoting it received from those artists who participated in the last years to various international meetings and symposiums in China, Taiwan, Estonia, France, Holland, Denmark, Japan and Turkey.
Solely they were the ambassadors of Romania in the world of ceramics, by their own efforts and with a minimal support from the Ministry of Culture or the Fine Arts Union. I have become a member of the prestigious ICA – Geneva, as well as the ICCA – Vienna, to make the Romanian ceramic art known. In order for us to gain a considerable and well deserved position, we need a state policy that truly encourages and supports this domain.

Where can we find your creations in the near future?

Primarily in the Galateea Gallery and in my workshop, but I might also have an exhibition in Germany this year.

What is your advice to the young ceramists that are now at the beginning of their career?

They should work with passion, with love, and they should not abandon this domain even if it requires great efforts in the beginning. They have to explore and to be themselves, to be creative and tenacious. Ceramics is a therapeutic mean, just as music and painting are, and that shouldn't be overlooked.

Letter(s), 2011, Porcelain

Bogdan Teodorescu

By Vasi Hîrdo

You are a versatile visual artist who works in mediums such as painting, collage, video art, but also ceramics. In the process of creating a new work, do you allow yourself the freedom to change the medium of expression?

Versatility it's not entirely a positive feature, at least not for an artist. To be consequent could be in many cases a better option. Up to this moment, my flexibility didn't create a strong image of myself, but instead surrounded me with an aura of strangeness and ambiguity.

Changing the medium could be an important, valuable quality, mostly when you're forced to work in difficult conditions. For example, if you don't have your own kiln or the brightest and most refined porcelain, you have to improvise, for example to do installations of found or smashed objects. If you record the process on camera, you also have good chances of becoming a video artist or a performer. I don't feel like it's hard to transfer one idea between different types of media, but it is quite frustrating. I have always imagined myself doing heroic jobs, but I have to acknowledge my limitations and therefore pay attention to small or discreet things. From this point of view, things become even more ambiguous.

In 2003 you graduated Ceramics in Cluj-Napoca, and right after that you moved to Bucharest where you received a Master in Visual Arts. What impact had these academic environments on you?

Well, I honestly feel like I haven't learned much and that I wasted a lot of time. Cluj was quite an experience in many ways, not only artistically. I sometimes miss this city very much, but that's just sentimental. The Ceramics department had nothing to show on an international scene. There were circulating only half-modernist ideas, like an excuse for the lack of method. I intended to transfer to the Painting Department, but I didn't because it was too bureaucratic. Nonetheless, Cluj was better for its libraries, for some of the professors, many art events and particularly for the school's efforts to connect with the international scene. It seemed easier to contact other artists abroad than it was in Bucharest, which is a more conservative academy. An objective comparison would be a bit ridiculous. I really can't tell if one is better than the other. I'm not convinced that all the artists from Cluj owe their success to the academic programme. On a personal scale, Bucharest meant quite a lot for my education because of one person - my philosophy teacher, who was the equivalent to another professor from Cluj, a very dear lady who trusted me from the beginning. I wouldn't say that I owe to much to any of these schools. Maybe it sounds harsh, but I've always dreamed of a higher level education that makes people to become interested in contemporary art, not just to play the role of an artist. Almost all of my colleagues abandoned doing art.

Are your creations the results of research processes, or they are on-the-spot transpositions?

Sometimes they are, sometimes they aren't. Let's say I like spontaneous ideas. I don't bother that much with research. I'm always intrigued when someone titles his collection of exhibited images a project, evoking some ideas he is attached to. If you're honest to yourself you will notice how clear everything is. Everything you do comes from a background. I will give you an example: some years ago I developed a project on an accidental idea. I asked two of my friends, a poet and a monk, to start an artistic collaboration, taking advantage of this multidisciplinary friendship. The monk opened a book and picked a word for a theme. The poet had to write something regarding this, and I had to paint or draw. Almost from nowhere, an idea appeared: smashing watermelons! Then I started the research, amazed by all coincidences I had found. This innocent image had a huge iconography and transgressed many cultures. It was like a revelation.

Currently you are working with Wagner - Maison de la Porcelaine, Bucharest. Tell us more about them.

Wagner is a small workshop specialized in decorated white porcelain. I would say it's already a brand on a local scale. The entire business started a few years ago, when Ana Wagner decided to change the medium of her drawings and illustrations from paper to porcelain. Later on, her sister joined, supporting her as manager and PR agent. As far as I know, no one did this before in Romania and I think it's an amazing initiative, simply because it tries to reconsider traditional dishes and because it keeps them up-to-date with the demands of the contemporary market. Most of the people don't pay much attention to the style, shape or label of their dishes. Almost all Wagner products are dishes, but they also make jewelry and lightning accessories. Many of them depict illustrations, but some of them go further and closer to independent art. For me, Wagner was the right opportunity to develop my connection to ceramics, even though I had to remain faithful to the company. Of course, I imagine that one day Wagner could free itself from these constraining economic conditions.

Although not widely practiced in ceramics, the collage technique gives you a fantastic freedom of expression. What was your first contact with this technique?

My first collages were made in my childhood and were, of course, outside any sophisticated concept. Every time I stumbled upon a new object, an interesting color or image, I felt the need to record it somehow. I remember three postcards made of pistachio shells (a rarity in the Romanian 80'), my parrot's fallen feathers, and pieces of one of my best shirts, which I remember as one of my best outfits. The first major experience I took on collage was in the year 2000. It was supposed to coincide with "the end of the world". I made more than two hundred collages, trying to work as much as I could and to save everything I considered worthy to preserve. I cut off tens of magazines - fashion, nature, supermarket advertising fliers, labels taken from my jeans. Collage permitted me to get closer to some of my ideas. These collages were like little projects. Thinking more "economically", collage was the best solution to melt everything without the risk of a disruptive, mixed-up feeling.

Besides your artistic career, you are also a teacher. How important is for an artist to have skills specific to the pedagogical field?

In my opinion, being a teacher is somehow irrelevant for an artist. As a teacher you have to pay attention to your students and to be flexible enough to understand each one of them. I teach theory, which is helpful for my projects and researches. In front of your students you have the chance to improve your communication skills. One of the main temptations as a teacher is to act self-imposing and to create a too personal group. Being a teacher in a high school helped me keep in touch with problems that others avoid. Some artists isolate themselves from the rest and look towards the past with a kind of superiority, specifically those who went from poverty to a wealthy life. I see myself as a responsible teacher. I see my students as people who want to know and to learn as much as they can. I try to introduce them to art manifestations in general and to contemporary art in particular. Being a skilled teacher can be the proof of having a very well structured mind, but also a proof of having a too indulgent perception.

What are your future projects?

I have lots of projects, but I fear they will not come to life very easily. That's simply because I'm not in the right place and maybe not in the right moment. It is impossible to do everything at the same time, and I am aware of it. I dream that at least a small part of my projects will be achieved.

I have two projects planned for this year, and both are already ongoing. The first is titled "Headlines/ The most important," a show of painting and photography related to the subject of perception. The second is a bit more ambitious. Titled "Tiger. Watermelon," the show brings together artists from Romania and Spain. I also plan to do a ceramics show, maybe in Cluj. I would really like to reiterate my connections with this city, which is becoming an internationally renowned artistic center.

Pizza François, 2011, decal and painted porcelain, diam c. 25 cm

Folkloric Hypnosis, 2011, decal and painted porcelain, diam c. 20 cm

Ruth Power

By Vasi Hîrdo

You are a very young ceramic artist. When did you discover the potential of this medium? Did school have an important role in directing you on this path?

Like most artists. makers or craftspeople, I have been interested in art and working with my hands from a very young age. I had a fairly basic art education in secondary school in Ireland (largely based on 2-dimensional drawing work) - quite the antithesis of what we do in third level education. However, I decided that I wanted to attend the National College of Art and Design (Dublin) from a fairly young age and my art teachers in school encouraged me to do so.
The college has a great system, by which everybody does a Core Year in their primary year (four years in total). From here, the student embarks on their first steps towards their professional formation as artists, designers and educators. The student has the opportunity to sample the diverse courses the college has to offer and in turn, discover where their strengths, weaknesses and passions lie.
Many people (such as myself when I began) have no idea what department they wish to pursue when they enter, so this system works really well. Throughout the year, I did a lot of 3D making and intricate work with wire and found objects, so I decided to go into the Ceramics, Glass and Metals Department, specializing in metals. However, when I entered the department I fell in love with ceramics and its diversity. I knew nothing about the material, glazing or mold-making. The only experience I had with clay was when I made a pinch pot in 1993 for Mother's Day. I painted in neon pink and yellow (which was in vogue at the time!) with 'Ruth Power, Age 5' scrawled into the base. I was in instant awe of the abundance of potential of the material, and the infinite amount of creative and scientific exploration that could be done with this ancient medium. Thus, it was only until I was in my second year of college that I discovered the potential of ceramics.

Your works debate subjects like censorship, mainstream pornography or sexual repression: did you choose these topics in the hunt for controversy?

I have identified with being a feminist for many years now and these subjects have been of huge importance to me. I had researched and discussed those topics for quite some time before merging them into my artwork, when I was in Third/Fourth Year. I wrote my thesis on a very similar subject (how pornography is influencing mainstream trends). In Second Year, we focused on skills and techniques and thus, did not get the chance to incorporate much of our own expression. It wasn't until Third Year that we were taking on self directed projects and had the opportunity to entirely immerse ourselves into our own fully developed concepts.

To me personally, the work is not controversial; it is dealing with issues that I believe need to be addressed urgently and discussed more openly. Its just that sexual politics and pornography are not usually deliberated, and the naked body is still taboo in our culture. Moreover, because I have had a considerable interest in such topics for quite some time, any of the initial 'shock' factor had been lost on me a long time ago. So, for me, the work was never really controversial (especially since I have an open attitude towards sex, sexuality and the body). It was bringing to light issues that I believe need to be confronted, issues that affect me personally.

Do you consider that the theme of your works has a bigger impact on the viewer just because of the connotations? Do you see yourself exploring it throughout your career?

I do consider that. Like I mentioned previously, generally in this generation, people are not used to seeing pornography being challenged, questioned, analyzed or discussed, so naturally, it has a bigger impact on the viewer. Pornography is now seen as normal; natural even, a rite of passage - though pornography has become much more brutal and misogynistic since Andrea Dworkin's time (a time when the pornography debate raged on). Also, I am aware that many people are still oblivious to how increasingly degrading contemporary pornography is becoming. What's more is, people from this part of the world are not all too acquainted with the massive sub-genre of pornography that is tentacle rape, thus, I do consider that the theme of my work has a bigger impact on the viewer because of the connotations, and hopefully helping the viewer to gain awareness on the issue.
But I do not think that it is just the theme that has a larger residual on the viewer, I think that the installation and light display further contributes to the impact. I am currently planning to work on something different, but I definitely see myself investigating these topics more throughout my career, as these issues play such an integral part in my life.

Are there any artists that have a particular influence on your work? What are your favorite anime creations?

The porcelain artist Kate MacDowell has had a considerable influence on my work in both her technique and the way in which she amalgamates the human body with nature in a beautifully grotesque way, confronting issues such as the human impact on the environment.
Japanese artist Ryoko Suzuki, who uses highly constructed images to comment on the assigned social roles of women living in Japan has further influenced my work. She too deals with the issues of sexual repression, violence and pornography using her own image and references to anime.
Other influences include Jana Sterbak and her 1987 meat dress, Vanitas: Flesh Dress for an Albino Anorectic and Australian artist Greg Taylor who sculpted in porcelain the vulvas of 141 women in response to censorship and the massive surge in labiaplasty in his country.

Anime productions were something that I had more of an interest in in my teens and my favourites were Bleach, Chobits, Ergo Proxy and of course, the Miyazaki films.

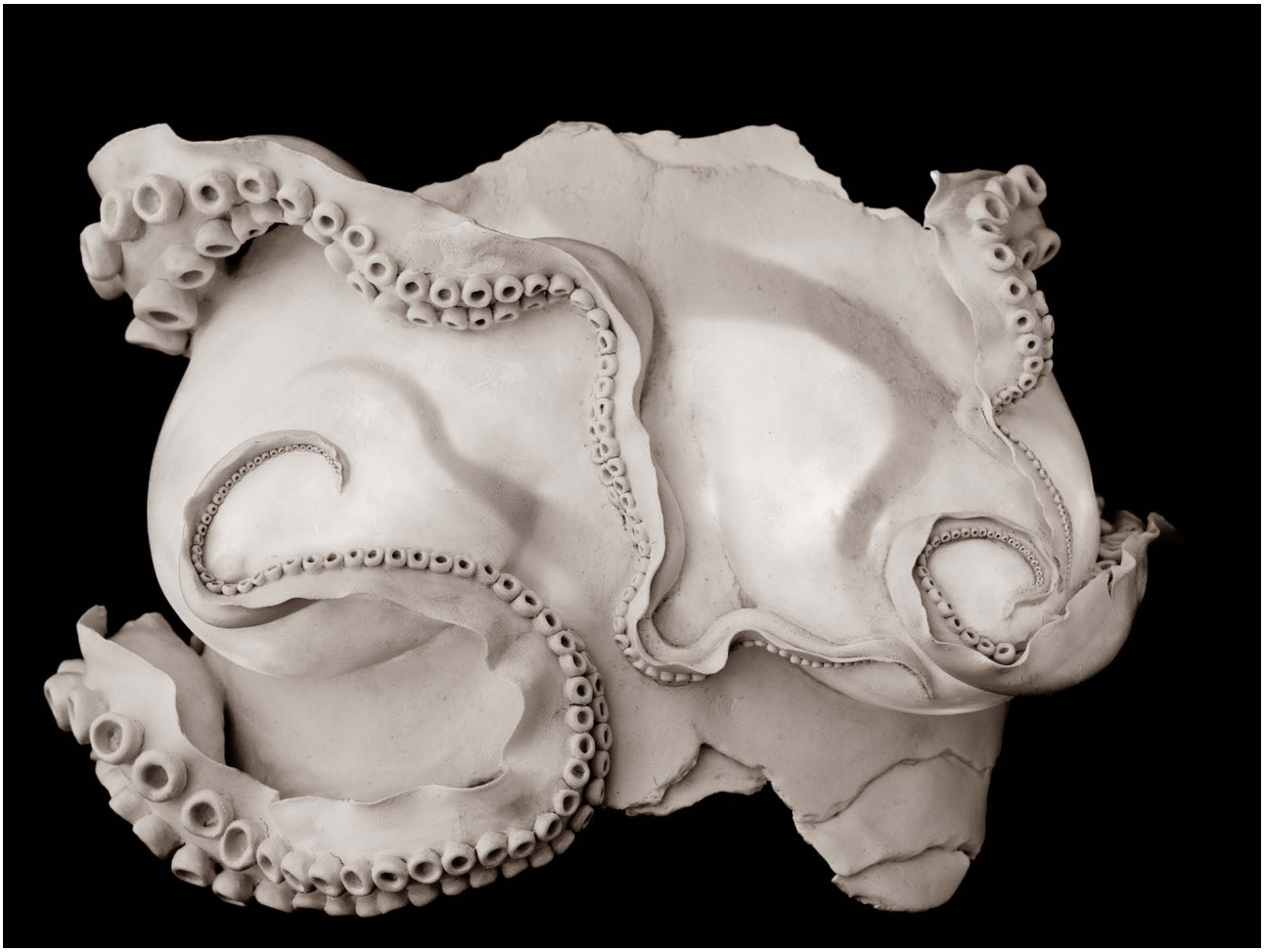
Are you working on any other body of work related or unrelated to your current one? Where do you seek inspiration from?

Currently I am still working on commissions. I have received many commissions for tentacle pieces and will begin a new body of work as soon as they are completed! I have also been creating ceramic and glass jewellery collections inspired by rainwater collected in fungus. I won an award last September at the Sculpture in Context Exhibition in the Botanic Gardens, Dublin (CAST Ltd Award for a work of distinction in any medium for foundry costs to the value of 1,250 euro for casting a work in bronze), which is a great opportunity for me to work on something that juxtaposes both bronze and ceramics. I have been looking at macro photography of insect eggs on leaves and ferns and I believe that the photography would transfer so well into ceramics and bronze. I recently got hugely into photography myself whilst in India (a trip which I have just returned from) and I plan to use the photos as visual research for future work. The country is vastly inspiring (the people, the nature, landscape, architecture etc.). I am also influenced by feminism, sexual politics, travel, nature, culture, opinions, media, ethnic design and Central/South American Pre-Columbian ceramics.

You initially started working with white earthenware clay but now you switched to translucent porcelain. What determined you to change the material? Have you also changed the meaning of your work?

In a way, the earthenware pieces ended up being the 'practice' pieces for the porcelain work. I started the project in Third Year when I still had not much experience in working with clay and molds. Thus, I began the project using white earthenware clay. I began to gain more confidence with the material, and the work became more and more refined. My technician encouraged me to try porcelain at the end of Third Year (in which I made the non-translucent mask). I really enjoyed working with the challenging material and was enthralled by the ethereal, pristine beauty of the high fired porcelain. By Fourth Year I had my general concept and subject matter. This time, I wanted to really technically push and challenge myself, and see how far I could go with this wonderful substance and its unique qualities. I adored the translucent property of porcelain and decided to play around with it and its potential.

Breasts (Cephalophilia), 2011, 48cm wide x 42cm long x 14cm deep; porcelain, LED light, cord, plug, wooden box with black paint and flocked interior (Black and white image)



I researched other artists who use porcelain and came across Kate MacDowell. Using some of my press-molds from Third Year, I began to make very thin casts, starting small (e.g. the single breast) and placed tentacles behind the piece in order to create silhouettes and depth. The piece was left in the mold overnight and then removed. Tentacles were hand-built onto the surface of the piece, with each sucker and frill individually placed. However, there are limits to the material and these had to be overcome. For instance, porcelain slumps when high-fired, distorting the piece, so each piece had to be carefully supported using ceramic fibres and fired in a sagar. Also, I discovered that this work was only possible if I used porcelain paper clay for the super-thin body parts, as regular porcelain would crack very easily. As I gained more confidence and experience with the material and technique, I moved onto bigger and more complex pieces such as the pair of breasts and the two faces. Switching to porcelain totally expanded and enriched the meaning behind the work. The Italian word for cowrie shell, porcellana (the word from which porcelain got its name), derives from the Medieval Italian word porcello, literally meaning 'little pig', but far more usually used as a contemptuous word for vulva. This is very fitting for my work as degrading and contemptuous terminologies are often used to describe women and their body parts in pornography. Moreover, after firing, porcelain shrinks a considerable amount, thus, the body parts shrink. This gives the work a slightly more disturbing angle, for instance, is it the vulva of a woman or a child? Is it the face of a woman or a child? Is it the neck of a woman or a child? This reflects the way in which the media often sexualizes children (e.g. Bratz Dolls, padded bras for 4 year olds for sale in Tesco) and infantilizes women in a sexual manner (the common school girl fantasy in pornography, American Apparel advertisements etc.). Porcelain is an undeniably beautiful material. Why use such a beautiful material for such subject matter? Despite the rather grim conceptual content of my work, aesthetics are important to me. I am fascinated by the conflicting reactions my work evokes; some shudder, some think it is beautiful. All too often, whilst online debating issues such as the ones discussed, I have been dismissed as a 'fat, ugly, jealous, feminist bitch.' Perhaps, in this culture, something needs to be beautiful in order to be heard.

How does the viewer respond to your works? Is your creation interpreted the way you want to be?

There have been different responses to my work. As mentioned above, some shudder, some think it is beautiful. Some also giggle at the image of a vulva or breasts on display, because sex and the body are unfortunately still seen as taboo subjects.

I have gotten some really interesting responses and interpretations such as "My first thoughts were that of female chastisement in the modern world. We have the image of the tentacle which I saw at first as a symbol of man, because the squid or octopus are creatures with some the longest ancestries of any being on this planet. So, this image draped over the female genitals is saying that modern 'man' is constantly trying to drag woman back to one of his most primitive fantasies, which is to be objectified as a single purpose provider of sexual gratification" by Mick Farrelly - utterly different interpretations that I believe still work so well with the pieces.

How do you picture yourself in the future? Share with us your next projects.

In the future, I picture myself traveling a lot! I would love to engage in ceramic and other ancient craft practices with cultures throughout the world, being inspired by the people, nature, landscape etc. As mentioned above, my next projects will involve an integration of bronze and ceramics, creating large and abstract renditions of macro photography of the natural world. I also aim to use my new found love of photography as a contribution to new projects. However, to continue to make money to fund my travel adventures, I will also keep making craft/design objects such as experimental one-off jewellery pieces, wall hangings or vessels, which to me, are just as fun to create as the exhibition based work.

Kathy Pallie

By Andra Baban

When and how did you discover the passion for ceramics?

Growing up, I was always the artsy-craftsy one, making things out of all different kinds of materials, using lots of different techniques. I loved going to my Dad's office in New York City where they produced display products/props used in retail store windows and interior displays. To me, it was a magical, fantasy industry.
Though I never had art classes in high school, I decided that art would be my major in college. As a first year art student, I was introduced to clay. I immediately loved the tactile sense of working with clay and creating 3-dimensional objects.

My interest in clay took a back seat to advertising design which was my major within the art curriculum. This was followed by a very exciting career in commercial art, designing decorative and functional display products for the retail stores, exhibit world and point-of-purchase industries. Most of these products were 3-dimensional, large scale andfabricated from a variety of materials. It was always exciting and challenging to work with materials that had totally different commercial uses and to create products from them that were applicable to the display field. Much of this was done in foreign countries working with cottage industries, sometimes sitting on the ground outdoors with chickens and roosters strutting by.

Years later, when I retired and put my hands back into clay, I realized that this was a material that really excited and intrigued me, and one I had to explore in depth. I was hooked! My "clay play days" took over. Now instead of designing products that had to be marketable or meet a client's design criteria, this was just me, the clay, and the creative process and didn't need anyone else's approval. I played with clay with a childlike approach, investigating, experimenting, and learning, as much and as fast as I could.

Tell us more about your creative process. Where do you get inspiration from and how do you find the journey towards the final outcome?

My inspiration comes from just living and observing and being receptive to what is going on around me. I've always been inspired by the unlimited variety of textures, patterns, and energy found in nature. I love to be outdoors skiing, hiking, swimming, watching the changing light patterns from dawn to sunset, seeing flowers bloom and leaves unfurl. I'll often take photos for reference, pick up pieces of bark to experience the sensation of the surface texture, and closely observe different patterns and details. I interpret my reaction to these things in clay. Though many of my artworks have a trompe l'oeil effect, I am not trying to mimic Nature. Rather, I try to bring the essence of what I have experienced in the outdoors into interior spaces.

Once in the studio, the clay often seems to have a life of its own as it leads me, morphing from one form and concept to another. On other occasions, I can envision the completed piece before even touching the clay.

You create baskets and figures of clay which surprisingly imitate the structure of reeds and grasses. What is the story behind the works and how did you discover this technique?

Observing trees, reeds and grasses, all traditional basket making materials, led to my "Clay Baskets" series. These elements are all vertical, linear forms in nature, but are mostly used horizontally when weaving baskets. I make my baskets using clay coils layered horizontally, forming sculptural shapes. Caught up in the rhythmic, meditative flow of basket making, I realized how involved and interwoven, I, as the artist, was with the piece I was creating. What had started out as an idea to be made in clay had seamlessly evolved into a total integration of the artist and her art.

This realization led to a series of narrative figure pieces. As I learned more about the art and traditions of basket making, it became apparent that most basket makers were women. They were the 'unsung heros' of the tribe or village. While the men, the hunters and warriors, were often away from the village, the women tended the home front as the gatherers, nurturers, and teachers passing on traditions and stories from generation to generation. My basket figures, all women basket makers, tell these stories.

This figurative series made me aware that baskets need not only be utilitarian or attractive artworks, but that they could also tell a story. This turned out to be a much more challenging endeavor than I had anticipated, forcing me to think in the abstract. The series of the '4 Elements - Earth, Wind, Fire and Water' took on a life of its own. As I was struggling with these pieces, someone brought to my attention that I, as the guiding hand, was the 5th element, Spirit, and was an integral part of the artwork. Once again, the artist and her art have become one.

My technique for creating these baskets is not woven at all. I layer extruded clay coil rings, scoring and slipping to make the tightest bond. Then by using a rubber chisel tipped tool, I work around each coil creating a woven effect. Other extruded pieces are surface mounted to give an additional dimensional effect. The pieces are then bisque fired, glazed, and fired.

Texture has a very important place in your style of work. How do you create these natural surfaces?

Texture and surface exploration integrated with a 3-dimensiional form have always been an important part of my work. My hands manipulate the clay by pushing, pulling, pinching, incising and rolling it, creating an effect which evokes both the visual and the tactile senses. Some of my favorite tools are natural elements I find outdoors, such as pieces of bark, nuts, sprigs, twigs and leaves. As much as I am drawn to sleek, burnished, smooth, clean lines, and stark contemporary forms, I seem to be happiest when I'm working the surface of the clay creating all different kinds of textures. I like to leave the mark of the artist's hand in my work.

Is replicating the beauty of nature a purpose of your work? Why do you feel the need to recreate nature in the interior space?

Replicating nature is not a purpose of my work at all. It is the energy I find in nature that I try to bring into the indoors, to be surrounded by it. Most things in nature grow vertically reaching toward the sun. They are also nourished by the earth in which they are planted. Working in clay, a material which comes from the earth, I am reminded to reach and stretch in my thinking and creative process, to nurture my passion for clay, and to communicate my ideas. The four elements of nature: wind, water, fire, and earth, as depicted in my basket series, are the building blocks to help us all grow and flourish.
Recently, someone who had seen my work at an exhibition sent me an email in which she said: "... we looked at each other with amazement to be standing there looking at an artist's work and feeling life's energy coming through them." Learning that my work evoked such a sentiment from a viewer was the ultimate compliment.

Where does professional education stand in your artistic development? Do you have a mentor?

Professional education is an important part of my artistic development. As an art major in college, not only did I learn the tools of the trade, but I was taught to see and to think outside the box, and to always be conscious of design. In a freshman art class, the instructor took the students outdoors and had us look at a tree and describe what we saw. The first answers were the basic brown tree bark and green leaves. Upon further examination, we saw so many other colors and intricate details. The instructor then informed us that never again would we see the way most people did. He was so right! Another wise statement that I recall an instructor saying was that a good designer can design anything, whether it's an industrial product or a fashion garment.
Working in clay, not only do I draw on technical knowledge, but every aspect of design, color theory, drawing, art history etc. come into play.

When I retired and got back to working in clay, I studied with Bill Abright at the College of Marin, here in California. Bill has an amazing knowledge of ceramics, drawing, painting, and art history and is a very accomplished artist in all of those areas. His way of teaching resonated with me. Not only

Wind – movement. Earthenware, glazes, 18" Diameter x 5"D, 2011

Wind – movement. Earthenware, glazes, 18" Diameter x 5"D, 2011

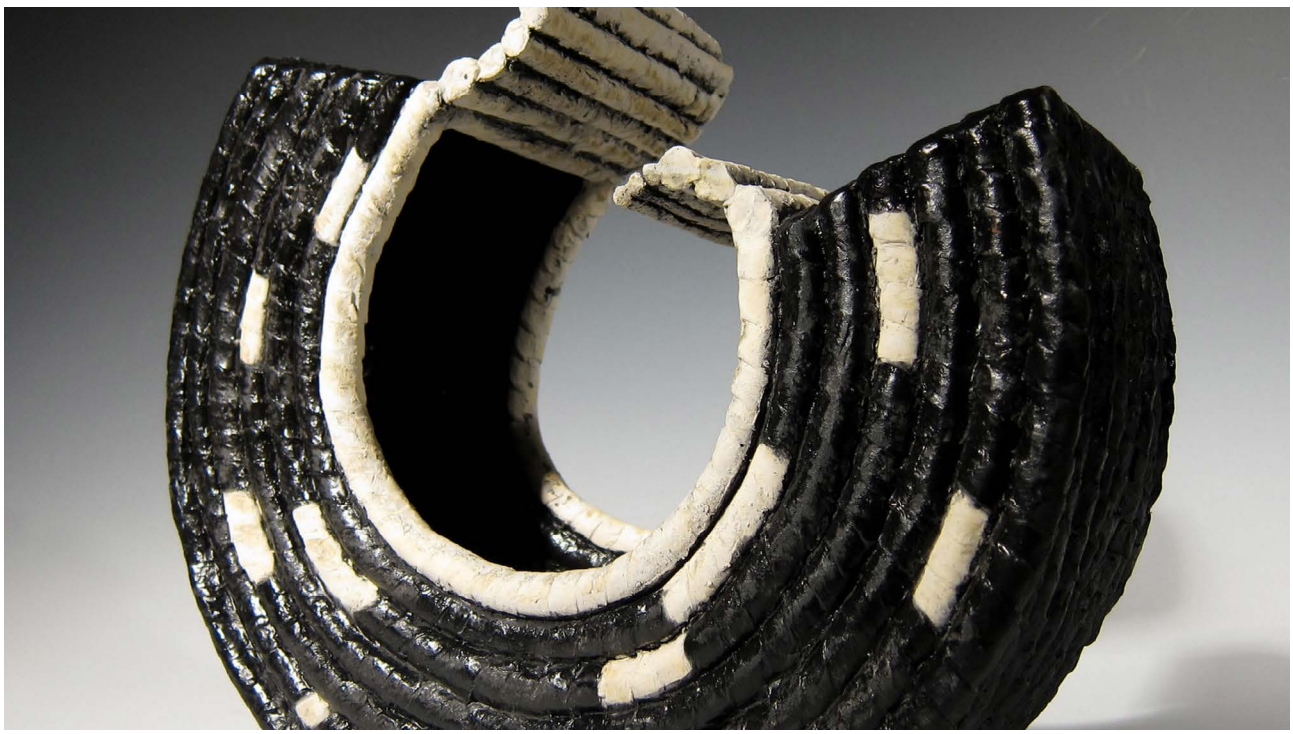
did he teach me so much about ceramics, but he also encouraged me to dig within for my response to class project assignments. Suddenly, I found myself telling a story or expressing ideas through clay, creating sculpture. In all the years of designing pretty or functional things, I had forgotten about expressing myself through my artwork. I don't know if Bill is aware of how much influence he has had on my artwork. I still confer with him when I am challenged with a big commission project, have a technical question, or just need some clay talk. He's my mentor and has become a friend.

It is said that in order to become recognized, an artist has to be a good self-promoter. Do you consider yourself one, and are there recipes for that?

I think it's almost impossible for an artist to succeed today without doing self-promotion. Your work might be great, but if no one sees it, the work and the artist will never have a chance to be recognized. It's hard work and time consuming to market your art. It has to be an integral part of your clay work schedule. With today's high tech marketing tools, you have to have a presence, at least a website. It's important to keep in mind that whatever you do to self-promote should reflect who you are and the quality of your work. All of this adds greatly to the perceived value of your work. Once again, the artist and her art are one.

What are you working on now? What are your future plans?

At the moment, I'm still exploring my clay basket series and am starting to intertwine my tree theme with the basket concept. Also, whirling around in my mind is a new series of wall pieces which I envision will be close-up, abstract interpretations of tree bark. I've been taking detailed photos of many different tree barks and am fascinated by the graphic patterns I'm finding, as well as the variety of bark textures. And so, the journey continues.



Water – emotion. Earthenware, glazes, 12"H x 13"L x 5"D, 2011

Debra Fleury

Barnacle, 2011. Dark Stoneware hollow forms fired to cone 6 (neutral atmosphere), (wall installation). Variable dimensions, 12 x 11 x 8 cm each

By Cora Pojaru and Vasi Hîrdo

Growing up near the ocean around natural diversity and continuous change, you have developed a very finite line of work. Do you visualize your work from the very beginning?

I spend a lot of time sketching and planning. My sketches can be very specific and architectural, or very loose and gestural. But ultimately, I am an intuitive thinker. I rely on feeling and instinct in my artwork. When I sit down with clay the careful preparation is put aside in favor of the moment. Once I have the clay in my hands, I am often swept away by the possibilities I encounter as the clay begins to express its properties.

Do you remember the first ceramic piece that you created? How did it look like and how do you feel about your evolution as a ceramic artist?

I remember the first piece I created that had an impact on me. It was a little pinch pot, a half sphere and nicely formed. It was so perfect, likely the best I had made to date. I wondered what would happen if I dropped it while it was still malleable. I decided to indulge this impulse and I let my little pinch pot fall. The perfectly round rim became this very interesting, offset elliptical shape in response to the force of the impact. After it was fired it retained the mark of that force. It looked plastic, but it was solid.

This experience helped me recognize the approach that I wanted to take with this medium – to enjoy the process and avoid feeling that the work is precious. The visual aspect of the work is compelling to me, but the process is the lure.

When constructing a new piece, you are using different materials such as clay, glass and glaze. What challenges you the most by combining these materials?

I love the unknown. I love being surprised by the materials and I love experimenting. Combining clay bodies with different shrink rates, adding glass, or using glaze in an unconventional way are a few of the methods I use when courting disaster or looking for insight. I push the materials toward something that I think will be interesting, but I never really know what will happen. Opening the kiln after a firing can be like meeting the work for the first time.

One of the challenges I encounter when mixing mediums is riding the line between something that doesn't work and something that does. I enjoy a good bit of failure in my work in this regard. The other challenge is repeatability. I take a lot of notes and process photographs so I can go back and understand exactly what caused a particular, interesting result.

You have been influenced by all the little things you saw and the surroundings of the ocean. Interchanging this process, how did your work influenced people that you've met?

Because of the way I work, I often get a strange sense of detachment from the objects once they are complete. Rather than being their creator, it feels like I have come upon them. They are curious to me. I move them about, imagining how they interact and wondering about their nature. When my work is on display I notice others doing the same thing. I find that my work tends to amplify the viewers attitudes toward the natural world. Some of the most interesting leaps in my work were spawned from listening to the reaction of viewers.

Besides you artistic work, do you also create functional ceramic objects, such as tableware or vessels?

I have experimented with making functional objects, but it just feels wrong. For me, clay is synonymous with nature. Making a functional object with clay feels like I am swimming against the tide of my own creative process.

Are there any artists or people that have a particular influence in your work? Who are the people that inspire you?

Andy Goldsworthy is a huge influence for me. I feel a strong connection to his artistic process. He collaborates with the natural world, drawing on and responding directly to the environment. Process and decay are implicit in his work. He travels to a specific site, arranges the artifacts that he finds there, and utilizes the forces that he encounters to reveal something about the landscape.

Beth Cavener Stichter also had an influence on my work. I attended one of her workshops a couple of years ago. During the workshop I learned that Beth began working with clay before she received formal training. She had many failures while she was developing her own techniques, but now her process is highly tuned to the way her ideas develop, allowing her to work on large pieces in a very gestural manner. This was a revelation, inspiring me to develop my own techniques that uniquely support my own way of thinking.

And, of course, I can't talk about inspirational influences without mentioning the artists, teachers, and students at Mudflat Studio who have been so generous in sharing their processes, feedback and advice. I feel fortunate to make art where I do.

You have been working since 2005 at the Mudflat Studio, a modern facility for ceramic arts. Tell us about what you learned there and how is the atmosphere between the 30+ ceramic artists working in the same building.

I have learned most of what I know about ceramic technique at Mudflat Studio. I started as a student, joined the technical staff, and I am now a resident artist.

We moved into a new facility in August of last year. Lynn Gervens, the Executive Director, and her husband Richard worked tirelessly during the 10+ years it took to acquire, design and renovate the new facility. The new open-format building is an inspiring place to work, but the people are the real treasure. Everyone is always milling about, checking out what others are making and sharing feedback. It is a welcoming, collaborative atmosphere.

There is a strong volunteer component to Mudflat, too. We all donate our time to help raise funds, run events and participate in everything from general construction to kiln firing. I think this aspect of the studio helps to make it feel like a large, extended family.

Recently you've been working on wall forms. Tell us about your new project.

I traveled to the Oregon coast last August and spent several days wandering the rocky shores, discovering small pockets of life relying on a little splashes of tidal water to survive. It was shocking to imagine living one's life at the whim of a splash of water. These little creatures had a big impact on me.

Since returning from this trip, I've found myself making a multitude of small forms with various clay bodies. Some of these objects remind me of little creatures, others seem like small fossils or bits of shell. They are beginning to line up in jars on my studio shelving like a naturalist's collection. I like how glass brings life to the clay by attracting light. I am experimenting with the kiln-forged glass, looking for ways to capture even more light by trying new colors, adding bits of porcelain, encouraging cracks and the like. My sketchbook is filling up with larger forms that will pull all of these elements together, but I draw them knowing that new possibilities will emerge when my hands touch the clay.

Exopool, 2010. Porcelain, glass and glazes. Multiple firings to cone 10 (reduction atmosphere) and cone 6 (neutral atmosphere). Dimensions 18 x 11 x 15 cm

Bone, 2010. White Stoneware, Dark Stoneware and underglaze. Fired to cone 1 (neutral atmosphere). Dimensions 41 x 29 x 29 cm

NEW BLUE AND WHITE

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

February 20, 2013 – July 14, 2013

New Blue and White at The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, showcases inventive works in blue and white by 40 international artists and designers.

Contemporary sculpture, ceramics, fashion, glass, furniture, and more offer a new twist to age-old imagery

Over the past millennium, blue-and-white ceramics have become an international phenomenon—familiar as Dutch Delftware, Ming vases, and Blue Willow china, among other forms. Today, the popular ceramic medium continues to offer inspiration, especially to the more than 40 international artists and designers whose works are presented in New Blue and White at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (MFA). On view from February 20 through July 14 in the MFA's Henry and Lois Foster Gallery, the exhibition highlights nearly 70 objects made over the course of the past 15 years across a wide array of media. Many of these works offer a contemporary twist to traditional blue-and-white imagery using abstraction, digital manipulation, contemporary subject matter, and even trompe l'oeil to surprise and delight. They range from small porcelains to room-size installations and include never-before-seen creations by artists such as Mark Cooper, Annabeth Rosen, Pouran Jinchi, and Kurt Weiser, and recent MFA acquisitions of work by fashion label Rodarte and ceramic sculptor Chris Antemann. Also on view are ceramics by Nakashima Harumi, Robert Dawson, and Steven Lee. The exhibition is presented with generous support from The Wornick Fund for Contemporary Craft. Additional support is provided by The John and Bette Cohen Fund for Contemporary Decorative Arts, and the Joel Alvord and Lisa Schmid Alvord Fund.

"The works in New Blue and White deftly show how one remarkable set of material traditions, which have had a profound international impact, can inspire new generations of artists. They make surprising, beautiful connections across time and cultures, helping us understand our history and our present," said Malcolm Rogers, Ann and Graham Gund Director of the MFA.

At its simplest, blue and white refers to the application of cobalt pigment on white clay. It originated in 9th-century Mesopotamia and subsequently captured the imagination of artists throughout Asia. Through a frenzy of trade networks and stylistic exchange, these coveted works made their way to Europe and eventually the New World. With them went multiple narratives focused on ideas as diverse as wealth, power, beauty, family, exoticism, colonialism, and commerce. Inspired by this rich and varied global legacy, today's artists create works that tell contemporary stories incorporating cultural, social, and historical references. To illustrate this, four themes will be presented to guide visitor engagement with the objects in the exhibition: Cultural Camouflage; Memory and Narrative; Abstract Interpretations; and Political Meaning.

Exhibiting artists: Ann Agee (US), Chris Antemann (US), Katsuyo Aoki (Japan), Felicity Aylieff (England), Robin Best (Australia), Stephen Bowers (Australia), Boym Partners [Constantin Boym (Russian) and Laurene Boym (American)], Caroline Cheng (England), Mark Cooper (US), Claire Curneen (Ireland), Robert Dawson (England), Barbara Diduk (US), Michelle Erickson (US), Front Design (Sofia Lagerkvist, Anna Lindren, Katja S'vstr'm, Charlotte von der Lancken) (Sweden), Gésine Hackenberg (Germany), Molly Hatch (US), Giselle Hicks (US), Sin Ying Ho (China), Pouran Jinchi (Iran), Hella Jongerius (Netherlands), Charles Krafft (US), Steven Lee (US), Li Lihong (China), Beth Lo (US), Livia Marin (Chile), Harumi Nakashima (Japan), Rodarte (Kate and Laura Mulleavy) (US), Annabeth Rosen (US), Richard Saja (US), Eduardo Sarabia (US), Paul Scott (England), Richard Shaw (US), Tommy Simpson (US), Caroline Slotte (Finland), Min-Jeong Song (Korea), Vipoo Srivilasa (Thailand), Kondó Takahiro (Japan), Brendan Tang (Canada), Studio Van Eijk & Van der Lubbe (Neils Van Eijk, Mirian Van der Lubbe) (Netherlands), Peter Walker (US), Kurt Weiser (US), Ah Xian (China).

Image credits
Harumi Nakashima, Work 0808, 2008, Glazed stoneware. Collection Samuel and Gabrielle Lurie, New York. Photo by Geoff Spear, New York. © Harumi Nakashima. Courtesy Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

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COPENHAGEN CERAMICS

31.01 – 23.02

Bente Hansen and Morten Løbner Espersen

28.02 – 23.03

Emmanuel Boos and Esben Klemann

04.04 – 27.04

Rose Eken, Fie Norsker, Andreas Schulenburg
and Kasper Kaum Bonnén

02.05 – 25.05

Lone Skov Madsen and Per Ahlmann

30.05 – 22.06

Kristine Tillge Lund

29.08 – 21.09

Pernille Pontoppidan Pedersen
and Christina Schou Christensen

26.09 – 19.10

SuperFormLab

24.10 – 16.11

Yasser Ballemans

21.11 – 14.12

Claydies and Ole Jensen

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www.copenhagenceramics.com
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ANTI-UTOPIAS

Sabin Borş

By Vasi Hîrdo

You hold multiple functions such as curator, associate editor and columnist for different magazines, and you recently initiated a contemporary art platform titled Anti-Utopias. Since you don't have any formal art education, how did you become interested in contemporary art?

Art has always been one of my main interests, ever since I was a kid, and though I did not follow any formal art education, I did follow an MA in philosophy and culture where some of the major topics we discussed were Art, Institutions and Cultural Policies, The Artist's Statute in Post-Modern Culture, or Contemporary Perspectives Upon Culture. I also follow a PhD with a thesis on the future of museums, in terms of art, policies, architecture. Throughout the years I've kept a close contact with art in my readings and references, and I think coming from the "outside" is actually an advantage because it allows me to view art in a broader context and integrate its discourse differently. At the same time, I am also aware of the two perils with philosophers discussing art: on the one hand, they run the risk of subsuming art to a philosophical speech; on the other hand, they can feed art with concepts that only deepen the dilemmas of contemporary art and thus contribute to its fractures. When I started Anti-Utopias, my main concern was to create a thematic platform bearing in mind these two perils precisely, but also the theoretical abundance where art in general claims itself from.

Tell us about Anti-Utopias. Why did you choose the utopian – anti-utopian motive as the theme of your project?

In spite of all the discourses on contemporary art, I think it is still trapped in a false attempt to surpass its own modernity. The artistic discourse still tries to dissect its own foundation and remains somehow captive inside artificial constructions, based on imitation. I am equally circumspect whether discourses crediting the derivative modernities can indeed not only resurrect, but actually redeem the project of modernity. These modernities are based on alter-constructions that complete the same project, though they construct on the margins of modernity. We relate to the same referent, and hope our alter-construction will indeed rescue notions and practices. Art is caught in this paradox: on the one hand, it has to constantly shift its aims outside the marges, because when you construct on the marge, the marge itself becomes a center; on the other hand, art contributes to a global process of territorialization, in which movement precisely it needs to operate. It's like an expanding fissure that deepens the faults. And it is along this fissure that one can understand the exposure of art, in what this fissure draws ahead, but especially in what it leaves behind, not only as a trace, but in that which remains. Art is this rest, this remnant. Art is reversion. And I think this is one of the ideas and concepts that I need to develop further, this idea of art being a reversion.

When I started this project I knew I was placing its theoretical horizon under two major discursive pressures. The first one is this unsuccessful attempt to give an answer to an utopia other than by formulating another utopia, and the second is the use of the prefix "anti-" itself, which does indeed bestir a number of critical reflexes and exercises. Obviously, there is no exit from utopia, and the more we seek to counter this statement, the more we end up in utopias of the refusal or in the utopias of some alter-constructions. From my perspective, anti-utopias don't claim themselves from a refusal or a counter-position, nor are they the expression of a cultural, historical, or political transgression. They do not fall into the metaphysical discourse where anti- would refer to a sort of anti-metaphysics, and I don't see them being shaped as a means of counteracting either. For me, anti- should refer to a state of exposure, to a certain openness which is not only affirmative but also all-embracing, definitive, and which can be understood on multiple levels: over-exposure, exposure to the certitude of death, exposure to a certain risk and impossibility, exposure to its own tragedy, etc. It is an exposure not only to the unpredictable, but also to a subtending dread defining art and life itself – a fear of dying, the interruption of breath. And though this discourse may seem to bear away from the current artistic discourse, I still think it is this dread that art is running away from. And this can be seen in all its diversity, separations, counter-currents, and reconsiderations. Not lastly, I think that the insistence upon difference/differences cannot account for the current state of things any longer, but only perpetuates the discursive and political impossibilities. From one utopia to another. I think art and society are on the verge of a more radical transformation, for which it has no name yet, a transformation we cannot fully appropriate right now.

In the early days of Ceramics Now I had very little data to publish, but with time many artists contacted me and showed their interest in my project. How did you start yours?

Anti-Utopias is first of all a curatorial project launched several months before the online publication of any project. I started by selecting the artists and works myself, individually, without knowing how many artists will respond to my initial call. I am still impressed to see how many artists responded in a positive way, and I think one of the greatest achievements was to create this platform around the works of so many artists using so many mediums of expression. The platform had already published an impressive number of 130 projects when it was launched, and it now counts more than 175. There are many other projects I plan to publish, but I think it is important to publish the projects in a certain rhythm and give people the opportunity to understand each project more closely and see how it relates to all the other projects in a certain category or cross-category. There are also artists who didn't send works at first but sent their works after seeing the online platform published. In the past few weeks I've been quite happy to see that Anti-Utopias follows the same pattern of development as Ceramics Now, with artists contacting me and submitting works. I think more artists join such projects as soon as they see and understand it as an opportunity to feature their works. And in order to do that, one needs to make a different proposition. Everybody asks for images, the main difference is what you want to do with them and how you use them to deliver another content and propose a more diverse space for discussion. Anti-Utopias is not an archive of artists and their portfolios, but an ongoing process of interpretation.

What are the biggest challenges of maintaining a live platform of contemporary arts?

I think there are two major challenges at stake. On the one hand, there are all the technical requirements, many of which you do not even think of when you first start an online project. As the project evolves, you start to invest more and more time in finding technical solutions, new ways of integrating new content and new technologies that help you shape the visitors' experience when surfing a website. Small changes in design, layout or extra modules can radically change the user's experience on the platform and generate an incredible wave of interest. On the other hand, you need to make sure your content is constantly bringing something new, not only in terms of the projects as such, but also in the way these projects are presented and relate to the broader perspective. There are small chances new platforms or new initiatives will be able to counter the large art, design, or architecture platforms, especially when you rely on your own efforts like I did. Yet I think this could also prove to be an advantage, because there is an increasing

number of good online art projects that search for a more "collaborative" approach. Recently, Anti-Utopias signed a partnership with a project in London. My surprise was to see the quality of that project, but also the fact that this partnership relies simply and solely on the curatorial and artistic ideas that underline the two projects. Though separate in their aims, I am sure their connection will prove beneficial for both parts involved. I do think it is this "collaborative" aspect that will shape new approaches in designing the various art projects that lie ahead, and one of the future challenges I see lies in creating a certain network of projects that work separately around a common aim.

On the other hand, Anti-Utopias is not only an online platform. Every year, I plan to publish a comprehensive volume containing a selection of the best works published throughout the year, and also make a few traveling exhibitions and lectures around the world. The online platform is the most visible element of a larger project. I always work around books and catalogs, and I do hope the Anti-Utopias annual catalog itself will be a great work and project in terms of selection, theory, design, editing, print…

What inspired and motivated you to start such an ambitious project?

Anti-Utopias is based on my intention to deliver a project that can establish both a general and a critical platform for discussing contemporary art. There are few local or regional projects that try to do this, and I thought it was necessary to come up with a project that could map certain perspectives that underlie the current art practices. Local projects and platforms are oriented more towards regional enterprises, and few people adventure beyond this border and pursue a broader perspective. I've been inspired by many successful international projects, but I am motivated to deliver a more textual, even conflicting approach, which has yet to further develop.

Why choose deconstructivism as a recurring theme in your projects?

I'd like to make a very small distinction here. The term "deconstructivism" points to a historical and political current or manifestation, whereas "deconstruction" is a method, an ethical intervention into reality, an inner practice if you like, and it is this second acceptance I'd like to insist upon. As a concept, deconstruction already relies on the Heideggerian "destruction" and it already came after, if not too late… But unlike Heidegger's destruction, deconstruction is an abstention and deferment from its violent and disruptive force. It is this deferment and this abstention that characterizes art, and we need to understand this abstention and deferment themselves as art. Deconstruction is, after all, an effort, an endeavor, an undertaking meant to establish the various relationships between an element and its context, and I think this process defines art in the most intimate way before any other consideration. Art is this effort and this endeavor. Art is deferment.
There is a certain negativity in my approach, but it must not be understood as a refusal, but more as an "aesthetic negativity" that goes back to Adorno's negative dialectics and Derrida's deconstruction, to their discussion around the sovereignty of art as a means to subvert the rules of reason. And not only of reason, because art subverts the rules of space, time, politics, representations… It is this subversion that I am taken up with. And since the critical discourse has fallen into the very holes it dug into past histories and traditions, I think it is time to re-evaluate both the critical discourse and art itself, to expose their own utopias, and in this way be anti-. There is no monolithic truth about art, and art is better understood in its distorsions, in its subversions, in its deferment… and especially in its battle with the critical discourse itself. Not lastly, I hope the future developments around this project will come to a point where people understand, even if only by looking at the selected works, that art is no longer a space defining "the works of art" but the facts of art.

You publish projects from artists living in different communities, making this project an international platform. But have you also hoped for a local impact?

I wouldn't say impact… and not even an influence. Since there is almost no project conceived similarly, and other projects are oriented more towards the local, national, or regional art scene, I hope the least this project will do is draw attention to another approach.

Do you want Anti-Utopias to influence the Romanian contemporary art scene in a way or another?

I don't think this project could or should "influence" the Romanian contemporary art scene. Every art scene as such is independent of the projects that try to put it into a certain perspective. And it must remain independent. The most it can do is offer Romanian artists a chance and a space to feature their works and see how they relate to the context created by international artists. The only influence on the Romanian contemporary art scene should be this drive to venture further, because most Romanian art projects – and, curiously, those that pretend to be the most subversive – rely heavily on institutionalization practices and follow "group" interests. On the other hand, I'd like to see more than just this wave of resentfulness, false revolution, and institutionalization of nostalgia. I admire Romanian artists and designers who got over the various forms of resentment, and people who understand that change comes from inside each and everyone of us.

The premise of your curatorial discourse is a very complex one. What is the target of this project? How do you expect or encourage the average art consumer to react?

This is a very good question, because I do see a split target to this project. On the one hand, there are the artists, galleries, theoreticians, curators, art institutions, and art enthusiasts; on the other hand, there is "the average art consumer" as you said. But I don't see this split as a break in the content this project is aimed to deliver, and my intention is to be able to encourage both parts to participate to the overall discourse differently. In doing so, I think one of the most important aspects is to create a more diverse content for everyone, while still bearing in mind the curatorial aims of the project. Those who wish to simply see the works of art and find information about an artist by reading her/his biography or reading an interview will rely on the online content. Those who wish to understand more about the project itself and the way these works of art interact on a deeper level will be able to refer to the annual catalog we publish, which is supposed to contain a more complex content, including exclusive theoretical content, discussions, and projects. I am also planning to make a series of traveling exhibitions and lectures, so that people will be able to interact with this project even more. From my experience, you cannot fully anticipate what people react to, and sometimes people are interested in projects that you didn't think they'd make such an impact. At the same time, I think "the average art consumer" is a very important target because this notion regards the majority of active subjects we'd like to involve more in assessing and understanding art and its role as a performing practice, as a way of living.

How was the project welcomed by the contemporary artists you featured? How do you see the future development of this project?

Given that when I launched this platform I had published the works of 125 international artists, some of whom are well known throughout the world, I think the project was extremely well received by the participants. I received numerous messages at that time and continue to receive encouragements from some artists every time I announce changes or updates to the project. And I think this has been one of the most important aspects in the success of this platform so far – the care and attention in talking to each artist, the attention you put into every detail of the project, from images to design and layout, etc. I also made friends among artists and enjoy the talks I have with them every now and then, which on a personal level counts way more than posting some works of art or trying to come up with a "new" discourse on art. I think it is this personal, intimate bond between artists and a curator that shapes a project. I've found my drive to go even further by talking frequently with some of the artists I feature, and I am grateful I have the opportunity to discuss with them.

I think there is a great deal of things the Anti-Utopias project must further develop and improve, in terms of reach, content, functionality, and access, but also in terms of its aims. Though this project is new, I've started making the plan for version 2.0 and developed an integrative strategy to involve more partners in the project. Hopefully, the results will appear soon and the project will be able to have a more consistent presence on the international art scene. In terms of its aims, the project will continue to build on its curatorial approach and integrate more perspectives. We just opened a section featuring artist interviews, art catalog reviews, and theoretical articles written by various artists, curators or theoreticians. There is so much you can do with such a project that the only thing you can hope for is to have the will to carry on with it even further.

ANTI-UTOPIAS
a contemporary art platform

www.anti-utopias.com

Yoichiro Kamei

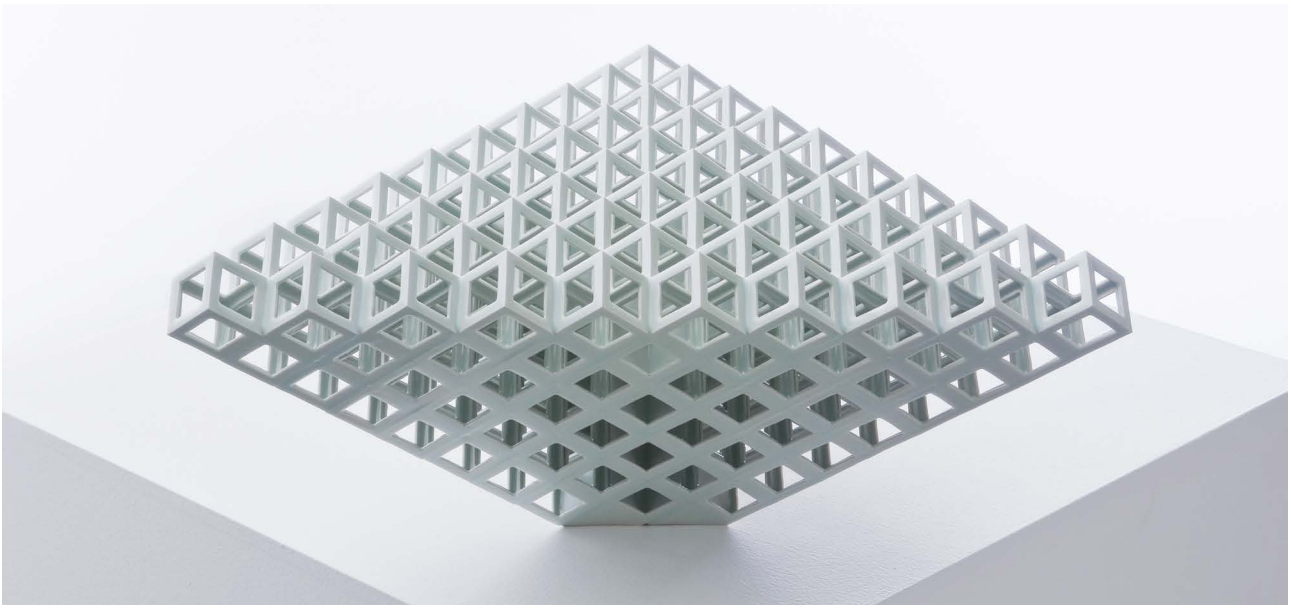
Yoichiro Kamei was born in 1974 in the Kagawa Prefecture, Japan, and completed his Ph.D. studies in Ceramics at The Kyoto City University of Arts, in 2006. His works are exhibited in public collections at several international museums and institutions such as the The Bank of Kyoto, Yingge Ceramics Museum Taipei, Faenza International Museum of Ceramics or Icheon World Ceramic Center, in South Korea.

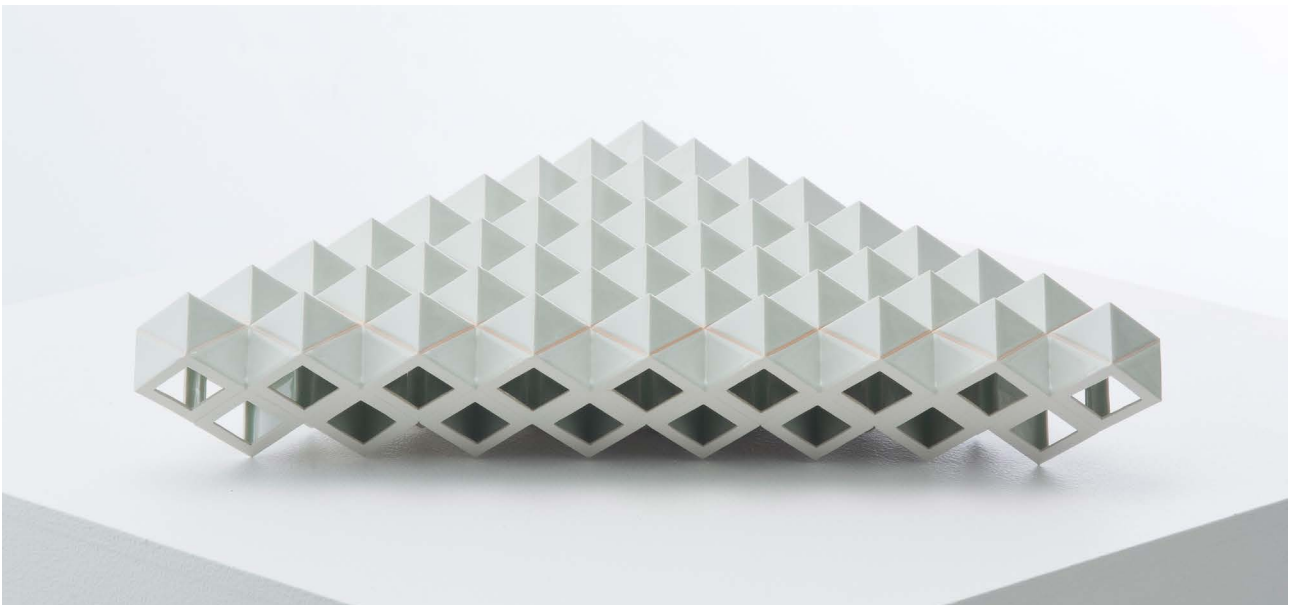
"Lattice Receptacle series is a work of art consisted of porcelain lattice structure as a fundamental form. Its creation is constructed by the accumulation of the base unit (cubic hollow) that is formed regularly using slip casting techniques.

For my expression in ceramics, the form and the internal space are the most important themes. The production method of unit accumulation derives geometric and formative aesthetics that also create the capacity of space in density. The internal space that is opened by lattice structure becomes a device to receive light, and together with permeability of porcelain it emphasizes the aspect of light and shadow.

Every void plays the role of a receptacle, and they may find the meaning of existence by having themselves fulfilled somehow. It is the same principle that underlies the void "on a plate" and the void "in space." I believe that a further development in representing ceramic art holds a potential to satisfy people's open senses, and invites us to the infinite experiences."

Lattice receptacle - Screen of Cone 2, 2009, Porcelain, 63 x 56 x 25 cm.





Lattice receptacle - Screen of Cone 2, 2009, Porcelain, 63 x 56 x 25 cm.

Avital Sheffer

Avital Sheffer is a ceramic artist based on the North-Coast of NSW, Australia. She creates generous ceramic vessel forms, strong in presence and refined in detail. From her native country of Israel she brings a deep engagement with multi-faceted Middle-Eastern culture, history and design - complexities and dilemmas explored in her work. Since 2004 Avital had been exhibiting extensively in Australia and the US. She was a finalist in numerous competitions and won several awards including the Josephine Ulrich prize for excellence at the Gold Coast international Ceramic Award in 2005 and The Border Art Prize in 2008. She is a member of the International Academy of Ceramics.

"I am intrigued by our intimate relationship to the crafted object. The embodiment of utility, divinity and beauty in the vessel form is as ancient as the existence of human consciousness. The process of making my ceramic vessels is animated by ideas of fecundity and containment intrinsic to the human form and the natural world. These notions find resonance in mythology, language and the hand-made object throughout history. My vessels speak of a conversation between ancestry and the present.

Clay - with its malleability and transformations, fragility and endurance - is both an elemental medium and a record-keeper of lived experience and culture. Its mysterious and sensual nature and the fact that it is literally grounded suggest a metaphor for human life."

Avital Sheffer, Seed I, 2011, Hand-formed clay, Glaze, Print, 65 x 45 x 27 cm.

Jason Hackett

Jason Hackett completed his MFA at The Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA, and holds a Bachelor of Science. He has exhibited his works in over thirty national exhibitions and currently works as a Technician in Ceramics at The Virginia Commonwealth University.

"I understand the world in an evocative fashion and view my artworks as both physical and philosophical memorials to 'Closeness'. During the construction of new works in series, I commonly consider ideas such as the value of community and family, the honesty of both gross and tedious labor, and the mysteriousness of the metaphysical.

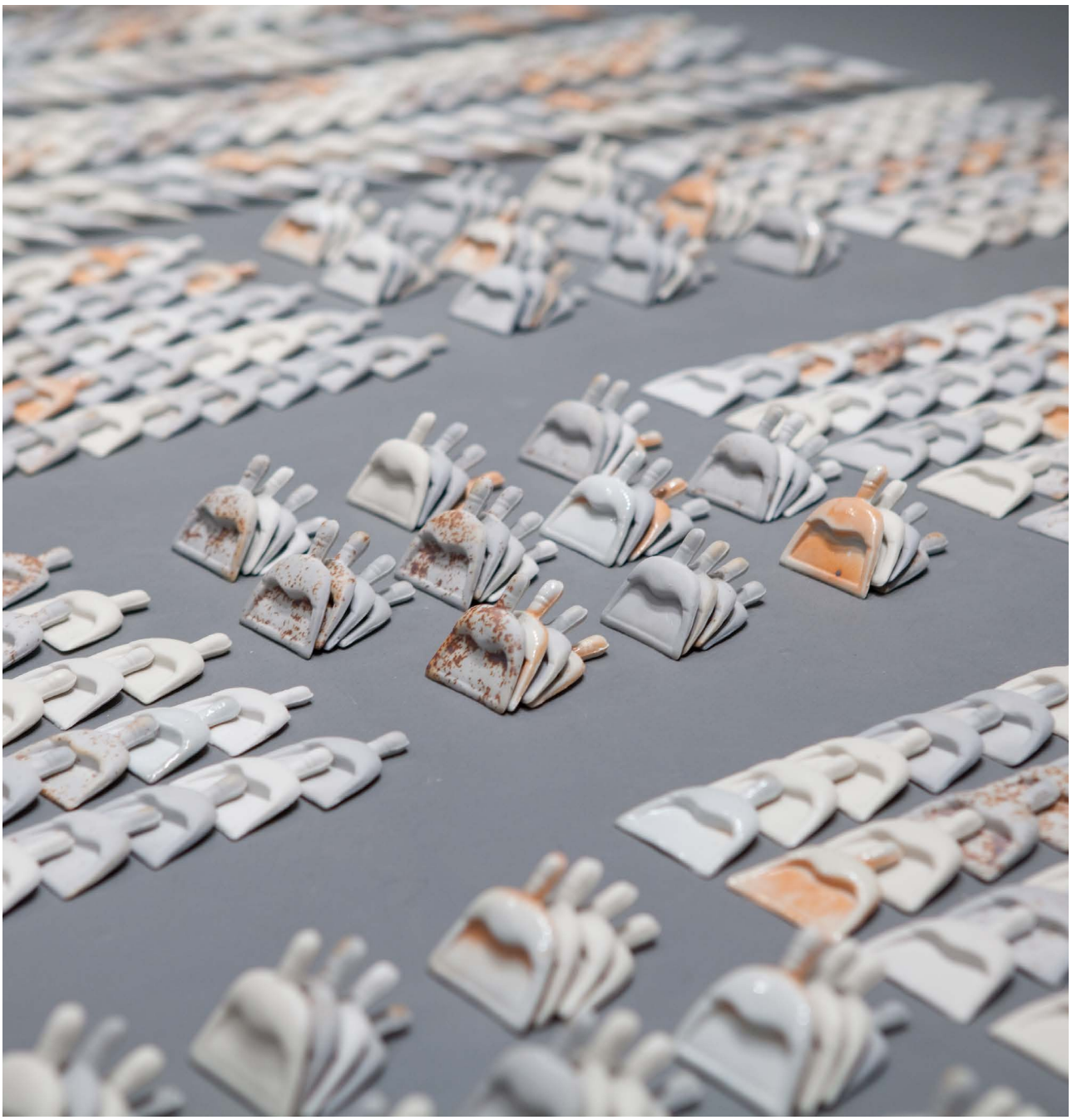
I primarily construct pieces using my hands and molding methods while also using found manufactured ceramics. Captured materials, images and forms; of man and of machine; from immediate and distant pasts are merged in commemorative context where contemplation defines their functional nature. Individually they are cups, plaques, and cultural icons made in clay. Collectively, they are symbols and metaphors simultaneously expressing proximity and distance, material and immaterial, and both the tangible and intangible."

Pollinator, 2012, Ceramic, 9 x 9 x 3 in.

Ryan Blackwell

Ryan Blackwell was born and raised in Indiana - receiving a BA in Studio Art from DePauw University in 2009. Expecting to graduate from the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth in 2013 with an MFA, Ryan intends to move to Brooklyn and continue his journey as an emerging artist.

"My practice is rooted in material investigation. I find my work in a consistent state of flux. Processes change and evolve, imagery comes and goes. This minute I'm steeped in symbolism, say, through the repetition of thousands of dustpans, while the other I'm firmly rooted in geometric abstraction. My fluid framework reflects my experience of American culture - a place where I navigate free choice and inherent socio-political and economic constraints. Through symbols and materials of domesticity my works find some continuity. It is my intention to create works that, in relation to each other, seem as dichotomous as they are connected. Although materials and processes may seem disparate, they find connection through aesthetics and systematic repetition. It is through a controlled failure of my materials and systems that I find consistency. But of course, inconsistency is always present."



Spick-and-Span, 2012, Ceramic, Variable upon size of room. Each dustpan 5.6 x 5.6 x 0.6 cm.

CALENDAR 2013

Contemporary Ceramic Art Competitions, Biennales, Festivals and Fairs in 2013

ACGA National Clay & Glass Exhibition 2013
January 26 - March 1, 2013
Brea, California, USA
www.acga.net

Out of the Blue 2013
February 1-22, 2013
Missoula, Montana, USA
www.theclaystudioofmissoula.org

Alabama Clay Conference 2013
& The Bunting Biennial Ceramics Symposium
February 21-24, 2013
Birmingham, Alabama, USA
www.alclayconference.org

NCECA International Ceramics Biennial 2013
January 26 May 5, 2013
Houston, Texas, USA
www.nceca.net

Clay Push Gulgong 2013
April 28 - May 4, 2013
Gulgong, New South Wales, AUSTRALIA
www.gulgong2013.com

International Competition of Contemporary Ceramic Art
58th Premio Faenza
May 25, 2013
Faenza, ITALY
www.micfaenza.org

COLLECT 2013
International Art Fair for Contemporary Objects
May 10-13, 2013
Project Space, Saatchi Gallery, London, UK
www.craftscouncil.org.uk/collect

The Contemporary Craft Festival 2013
June 7-9, 2013
Bovey Tracey, Devon, UK
www.craftsatboveytracey.co.uk

I***nternational Ceramics Festival 2013***
June 28-30, 2013
Aberystwyth Arts Centre, Wales, UK
www.internationalceramicsfestival.org

British Ceramics Biennial 2013
September 28 - November 10, 2013
Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire, UK
www.britishceramicsbiennial.com

Cluj International Ceramics Biennale 2013
October 9 - November 3, 2013
Cluj-Napoca, ROMANIA
Deadline: May 30, 2013
www.ceramicsbiennale.com

11th International Biannual of Artistic Ceramics 2013
October 5 - November 10, 2013
Aveiro, PORTUGAL
Deadline: April 12, 2013
www.cm-aveiro.pt

Talent Prize of the Nassauische Sparkasse 2013
7th edition - The Figurative
September 27, 2013 - End of January, 2014
H hr-Grenzhausen, Westerwald, GERMANY
www.keramikmuseum.de

8th International Biannual of Ceramics Kapfenberg
September 27 - November 10, 2013
Kapfenberg, AUSTRIA
Deadline: June 14, 2013
www.keramik-biennale-kapfenberg.at

Gyeonggi International Ceramic Biennale 2013
September 28 - November 17, 2013
Icheon, Gyeonggi, KOREA
www.gicbiennale.org

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