University of Texas at El Paso

From the SelectedWorks of Anne M. Giangiulio

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'Multiplicity: Contemporary Ceramic Sculpture' Exhibition Catalog

Anne M Giangiulio, University of Texas at El Paso

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MULTIPLICITY: Some background

Multiplicity presents sculpture by eight U.S.-based artists who create one-of-a-kind, large-scale works by combining small-scale, repeated, cast clay forms. This is an important trend in the field of contemporary ceramics. Many artists are working in this vein, and just a few of the best are presented here. Our primary intention in curating this exhibition is to lend credence to this method of art making and to illuminate its historical connections, which include the industrial revolution and the Arts and Crafts Movement that reacted against it; the post-war Studio Craft Movement in the U.S., when ceramics first entered the canon of fine art; folk pottery of Japan; and postmodern installation art. Theoricians both distant from and influential to the art world are relevant, from mathematician Alfred North Whitehead (1861-1947), to Soetsu Yanagi (1889-1961) and his philosophy of the unknown craftsman, to Donald Judd (1928-1994), one of the best-known artists to multiply forms.

We would like to thank several people for their help in realizing this exhibition. The Firestone Graham Foundation underwrote the printing of this exhibition catalogue. The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts and the Texas Commission on the Arts provided funding for the exhibition. As always, our colleagues at UTEP lent their support: Gregory Elliott, Chair of the Department of Art; Dr. Howard Daudistel, Dean, College of Liberal Arts; and Dr. Diana Natalicio, President of UTEP. Dr. Stephanie L. Taylor, Assistant Professor of Art at New Mexico State University, co-authored one of the essays and her ideas are invaluable. Dr. Joachim Homann edited this text, Daniel Szwaczkowski expertly installed the exhibition in El Paso, Anne Giangiulio designed this catalogue, and Laura Aragon-Chavez and Veronica Ceballos made it all come together administratively. Without the artists none of this would have been possible or necessary. They have our deepest gratitude.

Kate Bonansinga and Vincent Burke

Curators
It goes without saying that repetition is an effective formal device in visual art, a compositional cornerstone in many forms of expression. The balance of geometry and the predictability of pattern are visually pleasing. They can also be theoretically potent. In concept and structure the ten pieces in Multiplicity are part of a lineage of installation art that began in the 1970s, because they activate space and are large enough to incorporate the viewer. In addition, these artworks draw upon a much older history, one connected to the ceramic vessels of the early twentieth century, which were produced in multiples, designed with consideration and finished by hand. Through their medium and the academic bent of the makers, the works are rooted to the post-war Studio Craft Movement when one-of-a-kind ceramic objects were first given equal footing with fine art. Because of their intellectual potency and physical presence, they are connected to the ideas of Walter Benjamin (1892-1942) and theories and sculptures authored by Donald Judd.

**Historical Framework**

**Arts and Crafts Movement**

In the mid-to-late nineteenth century, with the advent of industry, people migrated from farm to city for employment in factories. After centuries of working the land, humankind was suddenly yanked away from it, and lost touch with its cycles, its beauty, and its power. Englishmen William Morris (1834-1896) and John Ruskin (1819-1900) believed this to be a serious problem, one that art could help to remedy. Their ideas launched the Arts and Crafts Movement and took physical form in interiors that referenced nature and shunned the ugliness of the industrial environment. Morris and Ruskin championed a return to hand-craftsmanship and to times past, which they saw as steps towards a new social agenda, one based on the hope that beautiful domestic interiors would foster responsible citizenry.

The Arts and Crafts Movement took hold in the U.S. just after the turn of the twentieth century. Architect Frank Lloyd Wright (1867-1959), who designed architecture and furnishings as a singular expression, is often associated with the Movement. Art potteries sprang up all around the country, and included Rookwood in Ohio, Newcomb in Louisiana, and Van Briggle in Colorado, to name just a few. At many of these art kilns, decorators, who were often women, hand-painted mass-produced blanks that had been cast in molds. Thus, multiples were the literal underpinning of Arts and Crafts ceramics in the U.S., even if they were antithetical to the English Movement’s original theoretical agenda. In another ironic twist, the decorators often sat in rows, like factory workers.

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A common material is the only obvious connection between Arts and Crafts vases and the artworks in Multiplicity. However, there are less obvious shared concerns. First, both the historical decorator and the contemporary artist begin with a multiplexed ceramic object. The former aestheticized it by painting its surface, and the latter combines and arranges it with replicas of itself to ultimately create a larger work that speaks of more than its individual parts. Second, both the historical potter and the contemporary artist create art that potentially relate to the surrounding interior architecture, that include the viewer (or end user), and are empowered by this inclusion. And finally, these two genres bracket the twentieth century, and serve as the predecessor and successor, respectively, of the hugely important post-war Studio Craft Movement.

**POST-WORLD WAR II STUDIO CRAFTS MOVEMENT IN THE U.S.**

Most of the American Arts and Crafts potteries went into decline between the World Wars, and the post-war Studio Craft Movement filled a void that the potters left behind. This coincided with the rise of ceramics departments in universities in the U.S. and with the consideration of clay as a legitimate material for the creation of fine art. This "art-for-art's-sake" multiplexed the functional and the decorative. Whereas the products of the Arts and Crafts potters and decorators were sold in local five-and-dime stores and in department stores, post-war ceramists regarded fine art galleries and museums as their venues for interface with the public and the art market. When the Museum of Modern Art presented Peter Voulkos’s (1924-2002) solo show in 1960, one of the most respected institutional gatekeepers in the world permitted entrance to contemporary ceramics.

But because the objects in Multiplicity are cast, they are not only rooted in the precedent of Arts and Crafts vases, but also in sculpture cast in bronze or other materials. They share as much with fine art sculptors who employ this process as they do with ceramists, such as Peter Voulkos, who created one-of-a-kind objects through the process of throwing or hand-building. Most of the artists in this exhibition were trained in universities, where they learned to imbue objects with meaning, ground them in theory, build upon history, and create new histories. They are as much a part of the lineage of sculpture as they are of American decorative arts and they build up on the precedent established by fine art ceramists.

**AMERICAN AVANT-GARDE ART OF THE 1950S**

The post-war era was instrumental in American art not only because of the blossoming of the Studio Craft Movement, but also for the relocation of the international art world’s center from Europe to the U.S. from Paris to New York. The U.S. emerged from World War II with incredible wealth, energy and power. Serge Guilbaut’s book *American Avant-Garde Art of the 1950s* include the viewer (or end user), and are empowered by this inclusion. And finally, these two genres bracket the twentieth century, and serve as the predecessor and successor, respectively, of the hugely important post-war Studio Craft Movement. See Dormer, Peter. In "The New Ceramic Presence," *Craft Horizons*, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1987, 166.

When New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom, and the Cold War

Charles Murray Barre's notion of the link between the Arts and Crafts Movement and the post-war Studio Craft Movement. Barre was an Englishman who began working at the Royal Porcelain Works in Worcester, England, where his father was director, when he was fourteen years old. He then became a founding member of the American Ceramic Society and was the first director of the Department of Ceramic Technology at Alfred University. Today Alfred University continues to be a major force in the training of ceramic artists. See Kardon, 77-82.


For its fierce individualism and entrepreneurship, and when the locus of the art world relocated after the war, that entrepreneurial willingness to take risks fostered a progressive and lively art scene.

It was at Black Mountain College in North Carolina in the early 1950s that the world of the craftsman met that of the artistic avant-garde. In 1943 Robert Motherwell taught there. During the summer of 1943 John Cage (1912-1992) and Merce Cunningham taught music and dance. Karen Karnes and David Weinrib taught ceramics. Jack Tworkov and Franz Kline instructed painting. Cage had begun to introduce chance methods of composition into his music, inspired by his study of Zen Buddhism and his reading of the I Ching. It was at Black Mountain that he staged an experimental performance in the dining hall that was later entitled *Theater Piece No. 1* and recognized as the first "Happening." Art that emphasized immediate experience and dematerialized permanence was appealing in an atmosphere marked by the post-war disillusionment with mass destruction and the loss of life. It was in this atmosphere that temporal art forms such as performance and installation developed.

Several weeks later, in autumn 1942 the college held a Crafts Institute, highlighted by a visit from Japan by theoretician Dr. Sofutsu Tanayag and potter Shoji Hamada (1894-1978), both of whom championed the anonymous craftsman and the concepts of Zen Buddhism, with its respect for the meditative nature of repetitive actions, such as that of the production potter. Tanayag and Hamada were on a U.S. tour that included the Archie Bray Foundation, where they visited in December and where Peter Voulkos was a resident artist. The following summer of 1953, Peter Voulkos taught at Black Mountain, where he claimed his "total commitment kind of formed." (John Cage was a resident artist there that summer, and Merce Cunningham was back teaching dance.) For the first time he realized that skill could be the basis for invention as well as for a highly finished form.

All of the artists in Multiplicity benefit from the connection that was sparked at Black Mountain College between ceramists and practitioners of experimental art, and from their mutual interest in Zen Buddhism and its associated creative practice. Their artwork is influenced by all of these trajectories. The casting process has the potential to remove the hand of the artist entirely, and emphasizes anonymity more extreme even than that which Tanayag proposed. The artistic avant-garde’s embrace of installation art, combined with its guarded interest in ceramics via Peter Voulkos, opened up the possibilities of artwork such as that exhibited here.

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**Notes:**


2. In Black Mountain College also developed his relationship with Robert Rauschenberg, who was a student there working on his black and white paintings. (The two had met in New York but deepened their friendship in North Carolina.)


4. Harris, 214.


Theoretical Underpinnings of Multiplied Forms

ALFRED NORTH WHITEHEAD

British mathematician-cum-philosopher Alfred North Whitehead stated “Art is the imposing of pattern on experience, and our aesthetic enjoyment is recognition of that pattern.” Whitehead is perhaps most famous for his book *Process and Reality*, published in 1924, which introduced process philosophy, an important contributor to modern metaphysics, which since Plato’s time had posited a “timeless” reality. Process philosophy, on the other hand, identifies the real with change and dynamism. Additionally, Whitehead’s rejection of mind-body dualism is similar to that of traditions of the Orient, such as the Buddhism that so appealed to mid-twentieth century American artists such as John Cage.

Multiplicity provides the opportunity to apply Whitehead’s comment literally. All of the artists arrange duplicated forms to create a pattern that imposes order, yet that order is subject to change. The bullet-like forms of Kay Hwang seem randomly placed, scattered across the wall to energize its surrounding space, much like the spontaneous marks that comprise a John Cage drawing or abstract notes in one of his musical compositions. Hwang’s work engages the mind (do these forms indicate destruction or birth or something else entirely?) and the body (its scale invites a physical interaction, simultaneously inviting and foreboding). Additionally, the relationship between the parts, and between the whole and its surrounding space, changes each time the piece is installed. Juana Valdes’s boat forms share this trait. This mutability connects them to Whitehead’s view of the world. Gregory Roberts, Marek Cecula, Shawn Busse, and Bean Finneran on the other hand, have predetermined the shape that the parts will combine to create. Roberts arranges his domes in a circle or a question mark, whereas Cecula and Busse line up casts of human ears and violins respectively, reminiscent of an assembly line or a military march. Finneran piles hand rolled thorn-shaped pieces into a cone-shaped pile that suggests controlled accumulation. The artist states: “We have endless heaps of repeated industrial objects littering the landscape.”

E-mail exchange with the artist, summer 2005.


Marek Cecula, *Interface Set IV*, detail, 2001, vitreous china, gold and wood, each element 9 x 8 x 4.5.


Bean Finneran, *Red Core*, 2004, low fire clay, glaze, acrylic stain, 25 Diameter x 6 H.


10 E-mail exchange with the artist, summer 2005.

Walter Benjamin

In his formative essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (which is more accurately translated from German as *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technical Reproducibility*), Walter Benjamin used the term “aura” to refer to the feeling of awe created by unique, remarkable objects such as works of art or relics of the past. According to Benjamin, older cultures generate auras around particular objects of veneration, while capitalist culture has the opposite effect, causing the decay of the aura due to the proliferation of mass production and reproductive technologies. Benjamin wrote the essay in 1936, twelve years after the publication of Whitehead’s *Process and Reality*. This was the modern era, which, as previously discussed, was marked by social and economic change due to automation, and to increasingly dependable and quick transportation and communication. Whitehead discusses change and relativity, the antithesis of Platonic timelessness, and Benjamin explores the duplication inherent to industrialization. Yet Modern art, by the likes of, for example, Pablo Picasso, Georgia O’Keeffe and Jackson Pollock, emphasized authorship and authenticity in art, and the individualized genius of the artist. This is its other side; associated with Dada and Marcel Duchamp.

The artworks in *Multiplicity* embrace both trajectories of modernism. They are characterized by the changeability explained by Whitehead, and are the results of a production process, but also emit the “aura” proposed by Benjamin due to their beauty and physicality, and to the fact that they will never exist the exact same way again. The pilgrimage to experience them becomes even more inherent and important because of their relationship to their surrounding space. They demand a new definition of the term “original,” because they are eternally reinvented, always new and authentic to the place and time in which they exist at a given moment.

Donald Judd, Barbara Rose, and the Serial Forms of Minimalism

Donald Judd’s enduring legacy depends equally upon his art and his writings about art. *Specific Objects*, his seminal essay of 1965, is important for its claim that the representative art of the time is neither painting nor sculpture, but threedimensional objects that are something in between. Judd argues, for example, that the power of the works of Frank Stella—in which format, application and materials come together to create a “specific object”—is that “The shapes, unity, projection, order and color are specific, aggressive and powerful.” More than forty years later, this statement applies to all of the work in *Multiplicity*. Drawing upon these precedents established by avant-garde painting and sculpture, the artists apply them to the history and capabilities of the medium of clay. Additionally, many of the works are nearly room-sized installations that respond to their surrounding architecture. Judd advocated this strategy with actions such as establishing the Chinati Foundation in Marfa, Texas, where his 100 aluminum boxes are permanently installed in a former army barracks, representing a clear unity between the austerity of the art, the architecture and the surrounding desert landscape.

Jeanne Quinn, *Porcelain Curtain*, detail, 2006, porcelain and mixed media, 30 x 24 x 1¼.


12 It takes a great deal of time and thought to install work carefully. This should not always be thrown away. Most art is fragile and some should be placed and never moved again. Somewhere a portion of contemporary art has to exist as an example of what the art and its context were meant to be.

Donald Judd, as quoted on www.chinatifoundation.org.

Jesseca Pizza, *Porcelain Curtain* detail, 2006, porcelain and mixed media, 30 x 24 x 1¼.
In 2003 Glenn Brown published *Multiplicity*, *Ambivalence and Ceramic Installation Art*, where he discusses ceramic sculptors’ use of multiplied vessels, a subject related to this exhibition. He states: “Ambivalence is the invariable result when the central, even archetypal, ceramic form of the vessel is integrated into the space of the emblematic vehicle of contemporary art, the installation.” And Brown continues with the warning: “From the perspective of contemporary art there is little question that ceramic installation art—as the marriage of the vessel and the installation format—runs the risk of appearing naïve or opportunistic.”

Of the eight artists presented here, only Denise Pelletier multiplies vessel forms based on historical precedents made in clay and glass. Purgato consists of recasts of individual feeders, douches, bedpans, female urinals and breast pumps, devices that inject fluid into or drain it from the body, connected by rubber and copper tubing used for plumbing, further emphasizing the flow of liquid. But all ten works can be connected to the history of clay vessels, since these precedents enhance domestic interiors and, in part, define them. Many of the works in *Multiplicity* do this, too, by defining and delineating space. They also prompt a visceral response. This is in great part attributable to their scale, but it is also due to our associations with the bodily intimacy and tactility inherent to ceramic tableware, or to the coolness, sterility and optimal hygiene of ceramic bathroom fixtures.

**Bringing it Forward**

Half of the works in the show are rooted in abstraction, including Jeanne Quinn’s patterned “curtain”. Kay Hwang’s enigmatic forms that allude to violence and maleness. Bean Finneran’s arrangements and Gregory Roberts domes. The other four are diversely imaginative: human ears, violins, boats and vessels. This indicates that as a group those artists, and others working with multiples, are equally indebted to abstraction and originality (typically associated with modernism), and to representational imagery, popular culture and impermanence (inherent to postmodernism.) Additionally, the art that comprises *Multiplicity* transcends regionalism. In the recent past the divide between ceramic practices on the two coasts has been distinct. The West was defined by the colorful and imagery-based Funk aesthetic and the East was dominated by the understated pottery and more monochromatic, abstract expressions. The artists in *Multiplicity* represent diversity in geographic milieu in the U.S. Three live on the West coast, four reside on the East coast and one is a resident of the Rocky Mountain West. None of them honor the split established in the last century. In fact, Gregory Roberts, who studied at Alfred University in New York and is now a Californian, produced one of the more somber works in the show. Juana Valdes, born in Cuba and now residing in New Jersey, presents bust forms that are simultaneously elegant, politically charged and playful. This exhibition acknowledges the increasing transience in our world and may signal a new connection between the two coasts.

**Conclusion**

Six of the eight artists included in *Multiplicity* trained as ceramists, two studied sculpture, and most of them have graduate degrees. Each harnesses his or her academic training to exploit the plasticity of clay in the creation of large-scale works that draw upon the history of art and of installation art and, as a result, are conceptually multi-faceted. The multiplied forms reference production, and mutability. Most of them are large enough to achieve architectural scale, potentially surrounding the viewer and physically involving him or her. They reach simultaneously back, to the industrial age, and forward, to increased connections, aesthetic and otherwise, between ceramic artists throughout the U.S.
The striking elements of the ceramic works featured in this exhibition—the large scale, often non-pedestal presentation, the references to nature beyond the clay medium—may be understood as a recent step in the evolution of ceramic art, especially when considered in the context of past art production and contemporary visual culture. The repetitive, hand made forms of a Bean Finneran sculpture, for example, can remind us of both healthy, growing plant material and the Taylor-ized motions of an early-twentieth century factory worker. The industrial techniques of reproduction employed by Shawn Busse, Denise Pelletier and many other artists in this show also connect them to 19th century discourses about the relationship between arts and crafts. These techniques pertain as well to the overarching media culture of the 21st century, where, assaulted by a seemingly endless stream of information, we seldom glimpse a clear view of any situation.

Traditional ceramics, in terms of functional wares, is often romantically cast as a bridge between maker and user. In this view, pottery is not complete until it has been put to use. This is one of the more unique and endearing qualities of hand made objects. After so many decades of industrialization, however, we have worked our way toward a new standard. And it is time for our traditions and our understanding of ceramics to begin to acknowledge not only the intimacy and power inherent in hand made crafts, but also to extend toward and embrace such ubiquitous experiences as the feel of a ceramic bathtub on our body. For artists who choose to work in ceramics today, it is no longer an either/or, craft/fine art situation, where the traditions and cultural history of clay and the historical prejudices against craft may exist and commingle with mechanization and industrial production.

The aim of this brief essay is to contextualize the featured artworks within strands of contemporary and historical thought and art production, which allow us to connect these works to one another and to the cultural and historical past from which they all spring.

SCALE

Through the repetition of form, the artists in this show have achieved works on a much larger scale than is usually seen with ceramic objects. The unique material nature of these works reference the powerful experience often felt through the intimate scale of the traditional ceramic object: hand-held objects that can be closely observed, easily lifted, cradled, touched and treasured. The scale of the works in this exhibition speaks to the powers inherent in the act of accretion. Like a coral reef, the cells of a human body, or grains in a sand dune, the accumulation of small and unassuming particles often leads to the production of a spectacular and unexpected whole. The larger works that result from this aggregate process engage the audience in both a physical and an optical way, causing them to move in wide arcs through the gallery space to avoid colliding with art or each other, or to stand at long distances to take in the whole of an object.

Ceramic artists have made the leap from small to large scale in the past, particularly in the post-war era, when Peter Voulkos, John Mason (1927- ), Stephen de Staël (1933- ) and Viola Frey (1933-2004) were supersizing everything from platters to figures. Mason’s wall sculptures of the early 1960s seem to embody this notion, encouraging the audience to perceive his work as architecture, painting, and relief sculpture, all in outsized forms that completely encompass the viewer. What has been described as a reaction to the macho posturing and style of Abstract Expressionist painters and the scale of their works—despite Frey’s inclusion in the above list—can be read as an impulse that is in direct opposition to much of what
ceramics production has meant to viewers in the past. The medium has been seen as fragile, small-scale and decorative, suspect feminine adjectives that don't address either the actual or the metaphorical heft and weight of, say, an eight foot-tall ceramic figure.

Echoing this enthusiasm for large scale work, many of the artists in this show have expressed an admiration for the way in which the multiplication of their forms has allowed them to achieve work on a much more impressive scale. Shawn Busse, for example, is drawn to installation art and says that he respects artists who use it because of their "ambitious use of space" and "physicality." Bean Finneran notes that working in multiples allows her to "really occupy a space" because of the scale of her work, and she feels that such works have a site-specificity that connects with the gallery space in a way that other objects don't.

Kay Hwang is attracted to the "weight" and beauty of repeated forms, which she uses in sculptures and drawings. To her, weight implies a serious quality that she often finds missing from contemporary art. It must be noted, however, that it is a short step from 'weighty' as a metaphor for serious thinking and the actual heaviness and grave danger that large scale works of art may imply. Busse’s earlier works, such as his stacks of porcelain bricks displayed in the tall tower forms of his installation/performance piece Reconstructed Nostalgia at the Athens Block Project (Athens, OH, 1997), have a menacing, totalitarian quality that can overwhelm the audience, regardless of the fact that the scale is achieved through the repetition of smaller objects. Hwang claims outright that she wants to invade the viewers’ space, and challenge them on a visceral level, "by which," she says, "I would like them to ‘feel’ the work as a challenge to all of their senses."

It’s hard to tell if this desire to overwhelm and awe is good or bad. For the workers who were injured while installing works from Richard Serra’s series of Skull Ocker sculptures, the answer would appear obvious. From the point of view of ceramic artists who are seeking to challenge the pejorative meanings that the word ‘decorative’ may imply, the scale and conceptual nature of such pieces may also be a way to present their work in a different light, one that doesn’t allow them to be labeled as ‘simply’ decorative objects.

Denise Pelletier acknowledges that there are many advantages to working with multiples rather than in a single monumental form. From a purely practical viewpoint, she notes, lifting small forms doesn’t hurt your back, and their modest scale doesn’t challenge the size of your kiln. More importantly for Pelletier, the multiple is how we normally approach the ceramic form, finding it stacked on our kitchen shelves, or as a collection of heirlooms in the family china cabinet. She gains pleasure from taking a small unit and using it as a building block. She likes to collect small objects, ruminate over them, and figure out how things work together, both physically and conceptually.

The satisfaction evident in Pelletier’s creative approach is clearly felt by many of the artists invited to participate in this show. "I spend countless hours [in the studio] so the process itself must be pleasurable," writes Bean Finneran.

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2. Bean Finneran in email correspondence with Kate Bonansinga, 16 September 2005.
3. Kay Hwang in email correspondence with Kate Bonansinga, 1 August 2005.
Shawn Busse is usually in a meditative state when creating multiple forms for his work—for example when he blew out thousands of eggs for an installation—and both Jeanne Quinn and Kay Hwang concur that working this way often became a creative/meditative act for them, too. The repeated form can be visually seductive, and may be seen as more visually generous than an object that stands alone. Multiple parts seem to signal that a piece can be put together conceptually, like a puzzle, and also taken apart, allowing its meaning to be discovered/uncovered by the viewer. For Juana Valdes, the idea of multiples gives her forms just this range of possibilities, a “versatility of meaning” that allows her to change her narrative through the accumulation of repeated objects. Thus, in *The Journey Within* (2003), a single iconic ‘paper’ (actually, porcelain) boat suggests a leisure activity, while a dozen or more imply the uncomfortable and potentially perilous story of an exodus or, even more menacing, an armada.  

Looking on the dark side of this ‘more is more’ mindset, there are questions that should be asked about the possible implications of such repetitious activity. Is it inherently negative to overwhelm the viewer with so much? “We have endless heaps of repeated industrial objects littering the landscape.” says Finneran, and Busse wonders if this practice just adds so much more “visual noise in our already consumer-driven and highly mediated culture”? The large scale of these art objects may also be tapping into a zeitgeist that has an impact on contemporary viewing practices. The larger-scale installation works seem to feed a bigger/better/more mentality among contemporary viewers, which is in contrast to the contemplative skills that once allowed us to appreciate the beauty of a single teacup.  

Another question to ponder while considering the works in this show is how these contemporary artists are engaged, if at all, in a dialogue between other ceramicists and the traditional practices of the medium. Of particular concern is the manner in which these contemporary artists either embrace or reject the notion of their ‘presence’ in the ceramic work that they produce. For example, while Peter Voulkos, like the artists in this exhibition, worked on a large scale and forcefully expanded the concept of ceramics from vessel to aesthetic object, his touch was always meant to be unique and self-evident. Evidence of his manipulation literally could not be repeated from piece to piece, nor could it be copied by others. Even though Voulkos used assistants later in his life when it became physically difficult for him to make his work alone, the concept of individual touch and expressive gesture was still applied to his production from this period, and it continues to be a hallmark of his critical reception. We tend to fetishize the notion of the artist’s touch. Anecdotally, Shoji Hamada is another example of this phenomenon. He did not always sign his work, which allowed him to occasionally take credit for some of the best pots made in Mashiko, the small Japanese village where he lived and worked. His touch was not visible, but his implied authorship had great impact on the desirability of these objects in the market.

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9 *Juana Valdes in email correspondence with Kate Bonansinga, 12 August 2005.*

10 E-mail exchange with the artist, summer 2005.


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**Traditional Ceramics Culture, 21st Century Style**

Juana Valdes, *The Journey Within* detail, 2005, porcelain (cast porcelain), dimensions variable, each element 4 x 2 x 6.
The struggle between expressive touch and egoless finish still exists in the ceramics field to-day. In fact, it could be argued that this split is now more complex, more fraught, and even at times politicized. People who make things with their hands often feel marginalized because they are ignored or overlooked by the mainstream art world. However, these artists may also feel as if they are making more viable art because they are working within the parameters of a craft aesthetic, championed by such figures as Hamada, Bernard Leach (1887–1979), and Marguerite Wildenhain (1896–1985), among others.

Ceramic sculptors from the other end of the spectrum find that industrial techniques allow them to create multiples of objects, while at the same time removing the precious quality of ‘touch’ from the surface of their works.

The term ‘unknown craftsman’ has new meaning in the 21st century. The artists in this exhibition represent a contemporary take on this traditional dichotomy between ego vs. egoless, individual hand vs. universal aesthetic. Shawn Busse ironically references “accidentally” occurring fingerprints or evidence of the hand in his finished surfaces, while others represented here avoid the hand altogether. Instead of tapping into the cosmic craftsperson celebrated by Leach, et al., these artists are utilizing industrial technologies that wipe out evidence of the hand in a perverse twist on the Mingei tradition.

This reference to mass production, of course, has resonance with contemporary life beyond this highly rarified and specific tradition of early-modern ceramics history. We all live in a world of mass production and mass consumption, where a lather-rinse-repeat cycle of industrial existence is marked by affordable and easily discarded goods. Many of the artists in this show question or comment upon this general cultural trend through their art.

Gregory Roberts, for example, has worked with recycled industrial ceramic honeycomb. The refashioned catalytic converters, which he reclaims from discarded car engines, become reborn through his work. Shawn Busse is interested in and explores the history of manufacturing in many of his works, which have focused in the past on the mass-production of everything from bricks to musical instruments. “I am bored by the proliferation of quick replication, mechanization and computer coding systems,” Busse writes. He pointedly explored notions of “uniformity and repeatability” in the work he created when invited to participate in the prestigious Kohler arts/industry program, an industrial partnership with which several of the artists in this exhibition— including Jeanne Quinn and Denise Pelletier—have been involved.

Marek Cebula has been prolific in both the fields of individual art production and industrial design for much of his career. In the mid-1990s, with such works as the repeated bucket forms of the Hygiene series, he began to blur separate lines of thinking: from precious singular to mass-produced multiple. His molded porcelain pieces, described by one critic as “a vision of industry [that] is almost frighteningly pure,” repeatedly cross the line between industrially produced objects (hospital wares, etc.) and handmade objects of beauty.


14 The John Michael Kohler Arts Center is a not-for-profit enterprise that was established in 1967 in Sheboygan, Wisconsin. According to its online mission statement, it is meant, “... to encourage and support innovative exploration in the arts. The Arts/Industry Residency Program at Kohler allows ceramic artists, among others, to spend several months at the Kohler factory working with industrial materials, equipment, and specialists. For more information about the program visit www.jmkac.org.

and more personal, artist-created objects. "My intention," states Cecula, "is to disassociate the appearance of the work from any handmade processes and avoid the quasi-uniqueness of art studio production. The accumulation and multiplication of the objects suggest industrial mass production, a strategy to make the work to appear as utilitarian devices or objects, rather than typical sculptures."

Cecula’s objects invoke the personal in such a specific manner (especially through associations with the forms of the human body) that we are forced to relate to them in a much more direct and individual way than we would if ‘normal’ rules of mass-production and industrial design were at play. The vision that Cecula ultimately presents in these works is one of individuality, despite their regimented industrialized appearance. His objects remain art—sculpture, vessel, non-functioning—despite his objections.

Denise Pelletier’s forms also deny their historic function, while at the same time standing for ideas beyond their originally intended use. Pelletier takes the object from real to ideal through the repetition and manipulation of obsolete sick cups and other utilitarian forms. We observe meaning multiplying in the nostalgic, banal, tragic and elegant forms of such paraphernalia in her work, all of which were in use before the introduction of modern feeding devices, such as plastic straws, or even the more direct and invasive Intravenous Unit.

**BODY + ART = ENCOUNTER**

In speaking of these pieces, we find ourselves at times using terms based on the human body. We are still emerging from Modernism and our vocabulary keeps dragging us back into obsolete responses generated by the Modernist paradigm that art is meant to embody human qualities and attributes. Despite its abstractions, Modernism was predicated on using the human form as the point of departure and projecting human desires into the object.

The viewer’s physical and visceral response, more than simply visual or intellectual, is clearly being analyzed and challenged by the artists in this exhibition. One message in these works is clear: While it is fine to ponder the meaning of a teacup, it is much more enriching to consider the full experience of connecting with a large-scale work that reminds us of the many ways our bodies, as well as our minds, interact with ceramics.

With her revivification of sick room accoutrements, Denise Pelletier encourages us to remember the ways our bodies associate with ceramic objects. We speak of the hand of the maker, and the viewer’s eye is crucial, but what of a handle in our grip and the rim of a cup on our lips? What of the probing of various orifices by medical instruments made of ceramics, or the feel of a ceramic bathtub or toilet on our skin? In reality, our bodies relate very personally to ceramics beyond the cool, intellectual appraisal of a ceramic form. Our intimate interactions with the objects imbue the piece of industrial mass production with personal history.

16 Marek Cecula email correspondence with Vincent Burke summer 2005.

Denise Pelletier, Purgáre, detail, 2006, porcelain and mixed media, dimensions variable.
Jeanne Quinn’s sculpture is, she says, “inherently multisensory” and memory based, assuming most viewers have some history of using ceramic objects in their past. She plays on this notion by presenting familiar objects in ceramic form, as she did in her 2001–2002 site-specific installation of over 2,500 Q-tips (some real, some cast and glazed porcelain), entitled Perfect Lover, at the John Michael Kohler Arts Center in Sheboygan, WI, which she revisited with Suspended created specifically for Multiplicity at the Rubin Center. The intimate act of utilizing cotton swabs brings us back to the sensitive body areas that are impacted by ceramics, in reality (as with the medical probes mentioned above), or in fantasy (as in this sculpture by Quinn). The insignificant size of an individual cotton swab, whether real or simulated, is blown up to comical proportions in this case: Perfect Lover comprised a symmetrical pattern over ten square feet of wall space when it was displayed. And while the work made reference to such delicate precursors as lace or Victorian wallpaper, the overall effect was quite powerful.

Quinn’s sculpture encapsulates many of the impulses that we’ve described in this brief essay. For while the artist blurs the boundaries between real and fake with the Q-tips themselves, Perfect Lover also denies the pejoratives that may be found in references to patterning, decoration, or diminutive scale. She worked at the Kohler Art/Industry Program to mass produce the multiple forms that make up this whole, and yet she still hand casts pieces for her installations as well. Like so many of the artists in this exhibition, Quinn illustrates the contemporary ceramics artists’ disregard of the “either/or” of high art versus craft tradition. To us, her work, and the work of the other seven artists in this exhibition, embody this burgeoning “freedom of the field,” making exhibitions like this one evidence of an exciting move forward in contemporary ceramics.
SELECTED RECENT EXHIBITIONS

Solo
2000-1 Metronome, John Michael Kohler Arts Center, Sheboygan, WI
1998 Anticipated Futures/Reconstructed Pasts, Blackfish Gallery, Portland, OR
1995 The Anxious Object, Central Art Gallery, Ashland, OR

Group
2005 Faculty Biennium, Schneider Museum of Art, Ashland, OR
2003 National/Group Exhibition, John Michael Kohler Arts Center, Sheboygan, WI
1998 Faculty Biennium, Schneider Museum of Art, Ashland, OR

AWARDS
1997 Albert Murray Fine Arts Grant, Arizona State University, Tempe, AZ
1992 Danforth Award, Southern Oregon University, Ashland, OR

EDUCATION
MFA, Ohio University
BFA, Southern Oregon State College

“I REPEAT FORMS BECAUSE MY WORKING METHOD IS A MEDITATIVE ACT. I DO MANUAL LABOR OVER AND OVER AGAIN.”

(TH. 1971, ROSEBURG, OR; RESIDES, PORTLAND, OR)
MAREK CECULA
(b. 1944, Kielce, Poland; resides, New York, NY)

SELECTED RECENT EXHIBITIONS

Solo

2006
Garth Clark Gallery, New York, NY

2004
Garth Clark Gallery, New York, NY

2003
Racine Art Museum, Racine, WI

2002
Grand Arts, Kansas City, MO

2001
Garth Clark Gallery, New York, NY

2000
Galeri Ram, Oslo, Norway

Group

2005
The 3rd World Ceramic Biennale 2005 Korea: Icheon, Gwangju and Yeojo, Korea

2004
Corporal Identities—Body Language, Museum of Art and Design, New York, NY

2003
Formed to Function, John Michael Kohler Arts Center, Sheboygan, WI

2002
Groundswell, Garth Clark Gallery, New York, NY

2001
Handmade by Design, American Craft Museum, New York, NY

AWARDS

2001
Grand Arts, Project Grant, Kansas City, MO

1999
Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation Fellowship Award, New York, NY

1998
European Ceramic Work Center, S’Hertogensbosch, The Netherlands

COLLECTIONS

Le Musée Royal de Mariemont, Mariemont, Belgium

Newark Museum of Art, Newark, NJ

Norton Museum of Art, West Palm Beach, Florida

Oxenhall Ceramic Museum in Tynemouth, Norway

Smithsonian National Museum of Art, Washington, DC

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA

Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, PA

Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art, Kansas City, MO

National Museum of American Art, Washington, DC

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA

Cooper Hewitt Museum, New York, NY

Museum of Applied Arts, Vienna, Austria

“THE ACCUMULATION AND MULTIPLICATION OF THE OBJECTS SUGGEST INDUSTRIAL MASS PRODUCTION, A STRATEGY TO MAKE THE WORKS APPEAR TO BE UTILITARIAN DEVICES OR OBJECTS, RATHER THAN SCULPTURES.”

Marek Cecula, Interface Set IV, 2001, vitreous china, gold and wood, each element 9 x 8 x 4.5.
“REPETITION IS INTRIGUING RIGHT NOW. WE HAVE ENDLESS HEAPS OF REPEATED INDUSTRIAL OBJECTS LITTERING THE LANDSCAPE, SO THEN TO HAVE [MY] MULTIPLE OBJECTS ALL ROLLED BY HAND AND HAND PAINTED FOR NO PRACTICAL REASON IS, I HOPE, FASCINATING TO THE VIEWER.”
SELECTED RECENT EXHIBITIONS

Solo
2007 Schematics: Drawing Installations and Small Works on Paper, Delaware Center for Contemporary Arts, Wilmington, DE
Schematics: Works on Paper, Kiang Gallery, Atlanta, GA
2006 Drawing Project, Gary Contemporary, Baltimore, MD
2004 Drawn Into Light, Works on Paper (with Lisa Houghton), Second Street Gallery, Charlottesville, VA
2003 Generation, Maryland Art Place, Baltimore, MD
2002 Schematics, Temporary Contemporary, Baltimore, MD
2000 The Purlin Project (with Richard Beckman), The Delaware Collection, Agnes Scott College, Atlanta, GA
1999 New Work (with Lisa Houghton), Kiang Gallery, Atlanta, GA

Group
2005 Summer Splendor, Gary Contemporary, Baltimore, MD
2003 Nude at 57, Studio Artists Biennial: School 33 Art Center, Baltimore, MD
2002 Fun at 30, Art Center, Baltimore, MD
2002 Clay, Minnesota Museum of Art, Hayward, WI
2002 Celebrating 30 Years in Atlanta, Neiman Marcus Salutes the Arts, Neiman Marcus, Atlanta, GA
2000 Do It! Art Gallery, Atlanta College of Art, Atlanta, GA
2000 Personal Conversations, Georgia Artists at the End of the Century, Spruill Art Center, Atlanta, GA

COLLECTIONS
University of Georgia President’s Permanent Collection, Athens, GA
Atlanta Hartsfield International Airport, Atlanta, GA
Arnold Baldwin, Atlanta, GA
King and Spalding, Atlanta, GA

AWARDS
2006 Individual Artist Grant, Maryland State Arts Council, Baltimore, MD
2005 Artist Registry, Drawing Center, New York, NY
2004 Flatfile, Pierogi2000, Brooklyn, NY
2003 Individual Artist Grant, Maryland State Arts Council, Baltimore, MD

EDUCATION
MFA, University of Georgia, Athens, GA
BFA, Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, Carbondale, IL

KA Y HWANG
(b. 1968, Seoul, Korea; resides, Baltimore, MD)

“FORMALLY I AM, AT SOME LEVEL, ALWAYS ATTRACTED TO REPEATED FORMS. THERE IS A CERTAIN GRAVITY THAT IS CREATED BY THE REPETITION OF FORMS WITHIN A LARGER STRUCTURE.”
“THERE IS A SENSE THAT CERAMIC OBJECTS IN GENERAL ARE COLLECTED, USED, STORED, TRANSPORTED. I AM INTRIGUED THAT WE CAN TAKE THIS UNIT AND BUILD BIG THINGS IN UNIT FORM.”

**SELECTED RECENT EXHIBITIONS**

**Solo**
- 2004: Denise Pelletier, Garth Clark Gallery, New York, NY
- 2003: Field, Installation, Watershed Center for Ceramic Art, Newcastle, ME

**Group**
- 2006: Material Things, Sawhill Gallery, James Madison University, Harrisonburg, VA

**SELECTED COLLECTIONS**
- Museum of Arts and Design, New York, NY
- Schein-Joseph International Museum of Ceramic Art, Alfred University, Alfred, NY
- John Michael Kohler Arts Center, Sheboygan, WI
- Kohler Company, Kohler, WI
- National Council on Education for the Ceramic Arts (NCECA) Erie, CO

**AWARDS**
- 2005: Professional Development Grant, Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, RI
- 2004: Archipalago Foundation Paved Residency, Watershed Center for Ceramic Art, Newcastle, ME
- 2003: Purchase Award, NCECA Clay National Exhibition, San Diego, CA

**EDUCATION**
- 1994: MFA, Alfred University, Alfred, NY
- 1979: BFA, University of Connecticut, Storrs, CT

**CURRENT POSITION**
Assistant Professor of Art, Connecticut College, New London, CT
JEANNE QUINN
(b. 1966, Lemore, CA; resides Boulder, CO)

SELECTED RECENT EXHIBITIONS

Solo
2005
Perfect Lover, John Michael Kohler Arts Center, Sheboygan, WI

2002
Tracing What Air and Sky Look Like, Formagruppen Gallery, Malmö, Sweden

Dishes, Gallery of Visual Arts, University of Montana, Missoula, MT

2000
I Am Penelope, I Am not Penelope, Foster/White Gallery, Seattle, WA

Group
2005
Diverse Domain: Contemporary North American Ceramic Art, The Conran Museum, Taipei, Taiwan

Strata: New Perspectives on Ceramics from Scandinavia and the United States, Skogsmuseet Blus, Stockholm, Sweden

White as White, Elaine L. Jacob Gallery, Detroit, MI

2003
Dichotomies, Robischon Gallery, Denver, Colorado

Faculty and Students of the University of Washington Ceramics Program, 1965-1995, The Clay Studio, Philadelphia, PA

2002

Objekt og Installation, Grimmerhus Museum, Middlefart, Denmark

Das Beste Aus Four, Tendence Design Fair, Frankfurt, Germany

AWARDS

2005
Artist in Residence, Zentrum für Keramik, Berlin, Germany

2004
Junior Faculty Development Award, Council on Research and Creative Work, University of Colorado, Boulder, CO

EDUCATION

MPA, University of Washington, Seattle, WA

BA, Oberlin College, Oberlin, OH

CURRENT POSITION

Associate Professor, Department of Art and Art History, University of Colorado at Boulder

“USING SMALL COMPONENTS GIVES INTIMACY AND VISUAL DELICACY TO THE WORK, BUT I CAN STILL MAKE SOMETHING THAT TAKES UP YOUR ENTIRE FIELD OF VISION. I FIND THAT CERAMICS IS A DIALECTICAL MATERIAL (SOFT/HARD, PERMANENT/FRAGILE, ETC.) AND THIS DELICATE/MONUMENTAL WORKS WITH THAT NATURE.”

Jeanne Quinn, Porcelain Curtain, 2006, porcelain and mixed media, 30 x 24 x 1 1/4.

Jeanne Quinn, Suspended, detail, 2006, glazed porcelain and Q-tips, 120 x 222 x 1 overall.
Gregory Roberts

Selected Recent Exhibitions

Solo
2005
Julius Natter 2005: A Love Story, Kadinsky Marr Gallery, Santa Fe, NM
2004
Gregory Roberts: Same But Different 1994-2004, Dominican University of California Gallery, San Rafael, CA
1997
Joint Solo Exhibition, Elizabeth Lisk Gallery, Portland, OR
1996
Three Solo Exhibitions, Dorothy Weiss Gallery, San Francisco, CA

Group
2005
The Magnificent Seven: Sonoma County Sculptors, Sonoma State University Art Gallery, Rohnert Park, CA
2004
Faculty Exhibition, Sonoma State University Art Gallery, Rohnert Park, CA
Reduction and Addition, Museum of Craft and Folk Art, San Francisco, CA
2004-4
The Art of Rug: Textile/Gregory Ermey, Sonoma Arts Alliance, Sonoma, CA. Traveling Exhibition
2003
Watershed Residency International, Watershed Center for the Ceramic Arts, New Castle, ME
2002
The Art of Clay, Contemporary Ceramics of the West Coast, Santa Rosa College Art Gallery, Santa Rosa, CA
Formal Beauty, Odyssey Gallery, Ashville, NC
International Infusion IV, Sybaris Gallery, Royal Oak, MI
2001
National Ceramics Invitational, Blue Spiral 1, Asheville, NC
International Infusion III, Sybaris Gallery, Royal Oak, MI
Dots and Dolls, Two-person exhibition with Kim Tucker, Nexus Gallery, Berkeley, CA
2000
SOFA, Chicago, IL. Represented by Ferrin Gallery
Ceramics Soup: New Work from Bay Area Artists, Louie Art Gallery, Fremont CA

Selected Collections
Microsoft Inc., Redmond, WA
The International Museum of Ceramic Art at NY SCC at Alfred University, Alfred, NY
Elegant Washington University Gallery Collection, Chongyi, IA
University Art Museum, Arizona State University, Tempe, AZ
Gene Bailey Fine Arts, San Francisco, CA

Education
MFA, Mills College, Oakland, CA
BFA, Alfred University, Alfred, NY

Current Position
Assistant Professor of Ceramics, Department of Art and Art History, Sonoma State University, Rohnert Park, CA.

Gregory Roberts

"Using multiple forms allows for an element of chance during installations. I can play with the balance of control and random moments."
Juana Valdes


**Selected Recent Exhibitions**

**Solo**
- 2006
- 2002
  - *Juana Valdes/Pedro Velez*, Bronx River Art Center, Bronx, NY

**Group**
- 2006
  - *Assumptions*, Paul Sharpe Contemporary Art, New York, NY
  - *Accessibility 2005: TRANSPLANTED – Latino Artists in the USA*, Sumter, SC
  - *Deep Blue: Caribbean-American Statements*, Diaspora Vibe Gallery, Miami, FL
- 2005
  - *Deep Blue: Caribbean-American Statements*, Diaspora Vibe Gallery, Miami, FL
  - *De Gorter*, Arti et Amicitiae, Amsterdam, The Netherlands
  - *Assumptions*, Paul Sharpe Contemporary Art, New York, NY

**Awards/Grants/Fellowships**
- 2005
  - Lower East Side Print Shop, Key Holder Fellowship, New York, NY
  - The Center for Book Arts, Artist Residency, New York, NY
  - COLON Artist Fund Grant, New York, NY
- 2003
  - Smack Mellon Studio Residency Program, Brooklyn, NY
  - *The Program*, curated by Pedro Noguera for PCA, Chicago, IL
- 2002
  - European Ceramic Work Center, Artists Residency Award, Den Bosch, The Netherlands
  - European Ceramic Work Center, Artists Residency Award, Den Bosch, The Netherlands
  - Studio Art Faculty Exhibition 2002, Bard College, Annandale on Hudson, NY

**EDUCATION**
- 1995
  - Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, ME
  - MFA, School of Visual Arts, NY
  - BFA, Parsons School of Design, NY

**SELECTED COLLECTIONS**
- The Newark Museum, Newark, NJ
- European Ceramic Work Center, Sittardsgen, The Netherlands

**AWARDS/COLLECTIONS**
- *The Newark Museum, Newark, NJ
- European Ceramic Work Center, Sittardsgen, The Netherlands

**Selected Recent Exhibitions**
- 2006
  - *The Journey Within*, 2005, porcelain (cast porcelain), dimensions variable, each element 4 x 2 x 6.
1. Shawn Busse
Metronome
Ceramic, cast iron
2001
Dimensions variable, each element 15 x 6 x 2

2. Marek Cecula
Interface Set IV
Vitreous china, gold and wood
2001
Each element 9 x 8 x 4 1/2

3. Bean Finneran
Red Core
Low fire clay, glaze, acrylic stain
2004
25 Diameter x 6 H

4. White Cone
Low fire clay, glaze, acrylic stain
2004
46 Diameter x 30 H

5. Kay Hwang
Generation II
Porcelain
2001 & 2002
Dimensions variable, each element 8 D

6. Denise Pelletier
Purgäre
Porcelain and mixed media
2006
Dimensions variable

7. Jeanne Quinn
Porcelain Curtain
Porcelain and mixed media
2006
30 x 24 x 1 1/4

8. Suspended
Glazed porcelain and Q-tips
2006
30 x 22 x 1 1/4
Exhibited only at the Stanlee and Gerald Rubin Center for the Visual Arts at the University of Texas at El Paso

9. Gregory Roberts
Same But Different
Glazed stoneware, honeycomb ceramic and epoxy
2004
80 x 60 x 12

10. Juana Valdes
The Journey Within
Porcelain
2005
Dimensions variable, each element 4 x 2 x 6

Dimensions listed in inches, height x width x depth