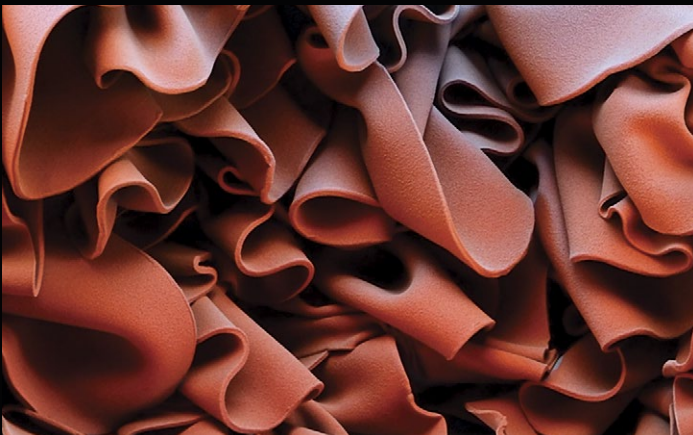
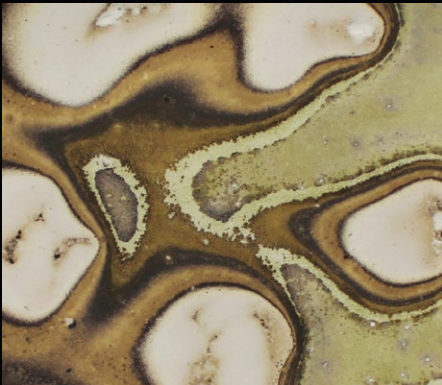


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2024



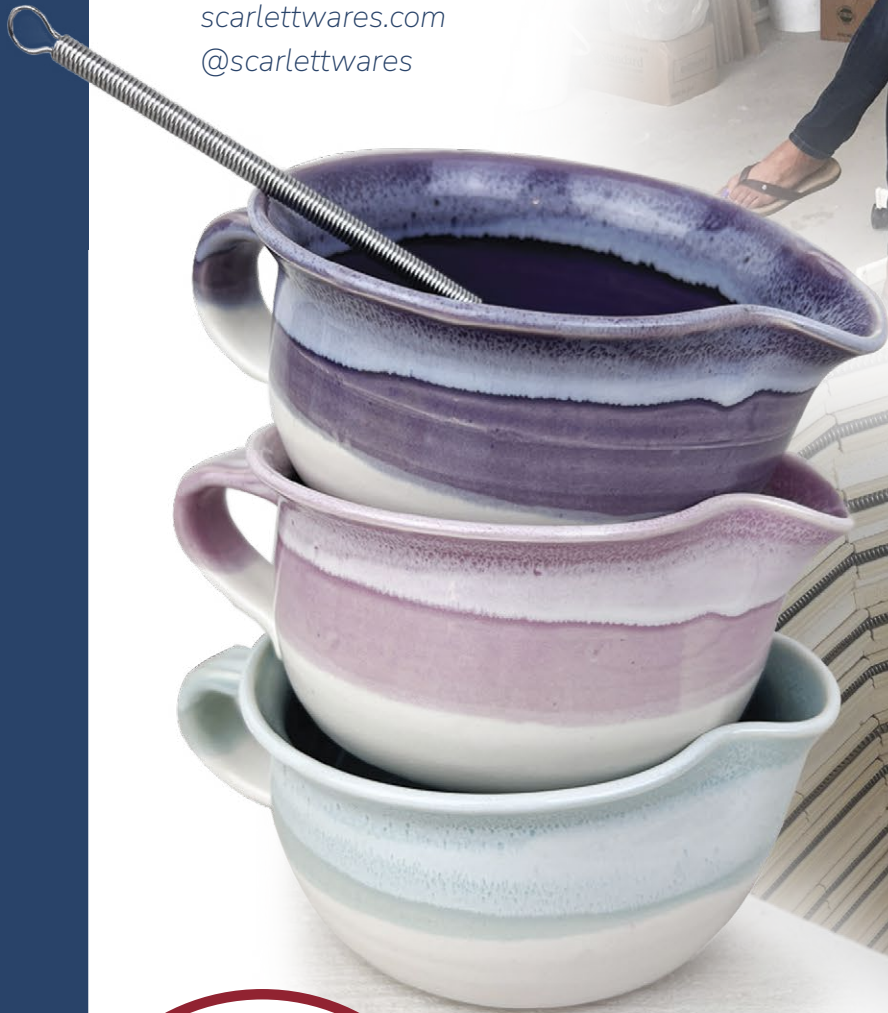
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With inspiration drawn from diverse sources such as Etruscan jugs and Venetian drinking vessels, Casey Beck discusses the rewards of mentorship, personal growth, and the meaningful connections found in the clay community.

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Letter from the Editors

Welcome to the fourth issue of *Studio Talk!* Brought to you by the staff of *Ceramics Monthly* and *Pottery Making Illustrated*, this compendium is filled with articles by ceramic makers to watch and discover. The following pages feature 8 artists who open up to readers about their inspiration, thoughts on ceramic trends, and their role in the ceramics field. Several of these innovative thinkers also take us step by step through the techniques they use and the tools that help them realize their ideas. Others share a sneak peek into their studios and talk about their day-to-day practices. We hope you enjoy this deep dive into the creative minds and lives of fellow ceramic artists.

Katie Reaver
Ceramics Monthly
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CHALLENGING AND TIMELESS

by Charlotte Middleton

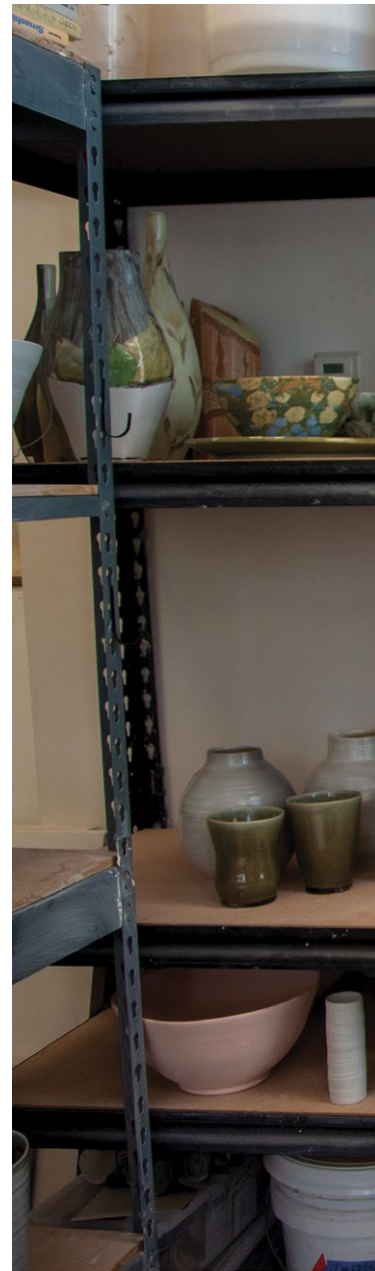
Editors: What is the most challenging aspect of working in clay (either technically or in terms of building a career)?

Charlotte Middleton: While living in Floyd, Virginia, I was part of Clay Talks—a group of multi-generational women potters who met monthly to discuss different topics in the field. Over mugs of tea, we'd cover everything from building careers as working mothers to glaze flaws. Myself and others who grew up in the era of Instagram voiced some of the nuanced and multifaceted pressures we feel. We have been dealt more than the rejection letters and bad-firing heartbreaks typical for previous generations. This generation has the additional pressure to be influencers, environmentally conscious slip casters, as well as socially responsible and active surface decorators. We have grown up in an age of exposure, making us overthink and overdo it, leaving us burnt out.

For me, the most challenging aspect of working in clay is the permanence and impermanence of the material and the environment. Clay is the dust of our earth, with the potential to become objects of desire, beauty, and worth that can last for thousands of years. I was drawn into a life in clay because of these poetic qualities, but I feel a responsibility to build a body of work that acknowledges all of the concerns of being a maker today. Working with clay now brings a flood of new questions: where do these objects live? How do we make this work in a way that isn't harmful to the environment? How do we teach sustainable processes?



Left *Camouflage Teapot*, porcelain, glazes, fired to cone 9 in reduction, 2023.
Above Charlotte Middleton wipes down bisqueware in her studio. *Photos: Eddie Ray.*





Eds: What role does color play in your work?

CM: I use color strategically and symbolically. For both financial and environmental reasons, I use the same base glaze, with six colorants, and reclaimed glazes to achieve a multitude of nuanced colors. My first semester in graduate school, I took a clay body and glaze formulation course with Pete Pinnell and Margaret Bohls. This class changed my work tremendously. With their help, I developed a clay body and glaze that matured at cone 8 but had desirable qualities between cone 6 and cone 10 in both oxidation and reduction. The white clay body is like a blank canvas to paint layers of glaze. I use color theory to bring out certain hues and draw in a viewer, while contrast can move the eye around a form. I often use colorful glazes for patterns and black or white to represent shadows or voids.

“ Clay is the dust of our earth, with the potential to become objects of desire, beauty, and worth that can last for thousands of years.”



Above left Middleton uses a small bucket of water to pull pitcher handles. *Photo: Eddie Ray.* **Above right** *Only Half/Lemons Pitcher in White*, 9 in. (23 cm) in height, porcelain, glazes, fired to cone 9 in reduction, 2023. *Photo: Gabriel Rivera.* **Right** *Table Setting For One*, to 12 in. (30 cm) in diameter (plate), porcelain, layered glazes, fired to cone 6 in oxidation, 2023. *Photo: Eddie Ray.*



Eds: What is the most valuable advice you've received as an artist?

CM: I have been so fortunate to be in the company of many artists and mentors throughout my life. The advice that rings in my ears regularly has to do with who I am now and who I was at certain times in my life.

- As a college student in 2017, my professor, Kelly Goff, taught a class about public art. For this assignment, we prepared installation proposals. We learned so much more than just the technical skills for building. He spoke of how important it is to always do what you say you're going to do, set goals for yourself and work toward them, don't flake out of a commitment, and be a human being. I still have his advice written down on a sticky note on my laptop, and it has taught me so much throughout my early career trying to make art.
- Right out of college, I started interning at Hallowell Clay Works (now Kennebec Clay Works) in Maine. I wanted to be a potter, but I didn't know how to make pots with a voice, let alone have the skills to throw taller than 8 inches (20.3 cm)

(which oddly felt so important). Malley Weber explained that there's room for every voice in ceramics—we're not climbing ladders but standing next to each other side by side. This has proven to be true time and time again.

- I moved to Floyd, Virginia, to apprentice with Ellen Shankin when I was 23. I felt like I was old, like life was short, and I was running behind. I remember vividly, after a bad firing, she found me crying in my studio—cursing myself for every mistake I could've avoided. She told me life is long, and ceramics is a dinosaur of a field. As a woman who has made her living from pots for 50 years, she told me it takes years to learn how to mix glazes just right, to find the right bisque temperature or the right clay body. And even when you think you have it all figured out, the world, the market, and the materials change, so you must keep learning and exploring. I am so grateful for that moment and all of Shankin's advice.

To learn more, visit www.middletonceramics.com.

Throwing and Designing a Lightweight, Generous Pitcher

by Charlotte Middleton

My time apprenticing with Ellen Shankin coincided with the early months turned years of the pandemic. The timing was a silver lining that gifted me seven days a week in the studio to work and receive bi-weekly critiques on new forms and techniques. How I think about and design pitcher forms is largely influenced by Shankin's methods and wisdom. My pitcher forms have shifted throughout the years, but my goal is to make each pitcher lightweight and a joy to pour and observe. Clary Illian's book, *The Potter's Workbook*, is a tried and true reference for considering how varieties of this timeless form can communicate your ideas. The following instructions should leave you with a generous and lifelong companion for the table.

A 12-inch-tall (30.5-cm) pitcher with a 7-inch (17.8-cm) belly serves four guests 8 ounces of water. Five pounds (2.3 kg) of porcelain can achieve this after shrinkage, while stoneware may

only need 4 pounds (1.8 kg) to reach the height and width. Before throwing, draw the contour of the form you wish to throw. Keep it close by to reference as you bring the form to life.

Center a 5×5-inch (12.7×12.7-cm) hump of clay, open up the walls, then compress the floor to create a flat foot. Throw an 8-inch (20.3-cm) cylinder, with attention to the extension of the clay on the bottom of the cylinder. Mentally divide the cylinder in half, and throw just the bottom half until the walls have been extended to $\frac{1}{2}$ inch (1.3 cm). Slow the wheel as you pull just the top half of the cylinder (1). This evens out the walls without putting too much strain on the bottom inch of the cylinder. Pull all the way through the form to reach 12 inches (30.5 cm), leaving the lip ample enough to pull your desired spout.

Once the cylinder is formed you can bring shape to the body. Using a wooden rib, bring a curve to the belly of the form. Remove the throwing lines and complete the silhouette of your form using



1 Throw the bottom and top halves of the cylinder separately, extending the belly of your vessel before moving to the upper half to make the total height 12 in. (30.5 cm). **2** Remove the throwing lines and create a smooth surface using a metal rib. **3** Remove slip and create a decisive edge to pull the spout from. **4** Using your thumb and pointer finger, pull the rim upward toward yourself until the clay is thin. **5** Place and center a coil onto the wheel head.

the metal rib (2). With slipped fingers, collar in the neck and soften the edge of the rim (3). Turn the wheel off, but do not cut the form from the wheel head. With wet hands, press and alter the walls of the form. This shifting surface is an invitation to place visual elements in your decoration.

To create the spout, pinch your thumb and pointer fingers together as you gently stretch the rim upward and toward yourself (4). The height of the spout you pull is determined by the thickness of the rim and how many times you pull the spout up. Softly pinch the sides of the rim together to create the edge where the water will flow. Use your sponge to soften this curve. **Note:** Throw small rings or cups with thick rims to practice this motion before applying it to your pitchers. Repeat this motion on the opposite side of the spout, but move the clay inward, over the body of the form. This will create a ledge directly over the weight of the pitcher, and a space for your handle to attach.

Once the form is leather hard, it is ready to trim. Place a coil on your wheel head about 1 inch (2.5 cm) in diameter, then using

your sponge, center the coil (5). Leaving some slip on the rim of your centered coil, place your pitcher on top face up (6). With a slow-turning wheel, trim the excess clay from the bottom using a Surform tool, then smooth with a sponge and metal rib. The bottom will not be trimmed but can be tended to using a red silicone rib later, once the handle is placed.

Pull a series of handles with edges that mirror the lip of the pitcher in both the width and the seam. Handles are pulled in reverse; the ending of the clay will be the top of the handle, and where you cut it from the clay is where it will meet the belly of the pitcher (7). Slip, score, and attach the handle directly in line with the spout, and at the apex of the curve of the belly (8). Feather in the handle to create a satisfying and inviting negative space. The peak of the arch of the handle should be placed above the fullest part of the pitcher, to create a feeling of buoyancy when lifted (9).

To finish the pitcher, bisque fire it to cone 06. I glaze using multiple glazes and wax-resist techniques, then I fire to cone 8 in a reduction atmosphere (10).



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6 Place the pitcher on the center of the coil, then push from the inside down to create a slight suction. **7** Attach the pulled handle in reverse, with the wider cut end creating the bottom connection. **8** Attach the lower part of the handle at the widest part of the vessel. **9** Refine the handle to provide plenty of room for comfortable use. **10** *Half Empty/Lemons Pitcher in Black* (front), 12 in. (30.5 cm) in height, porcelain and glazes, fired to cone 9 in reduction, 2023. **1-10** Photos: Eddie Ray.



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COSMOS

GLAZES THAT ARE OUT OF THIS WORLD

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GLAZES FROM

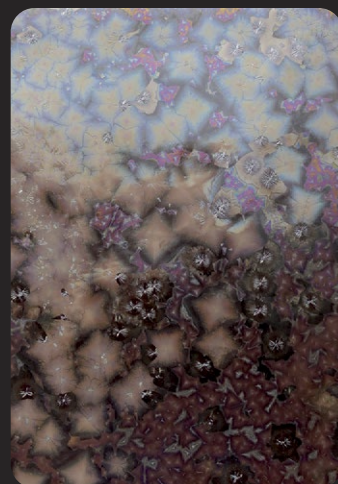
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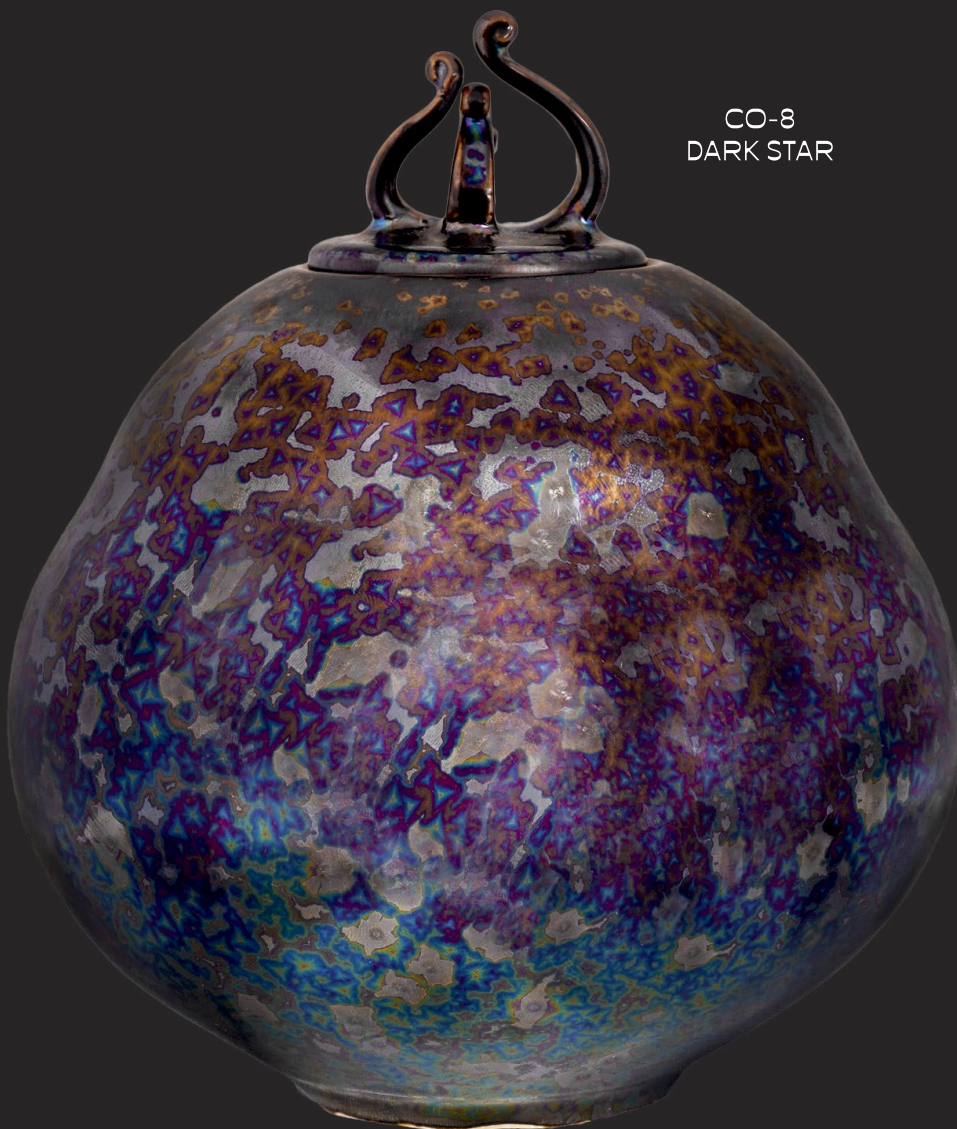
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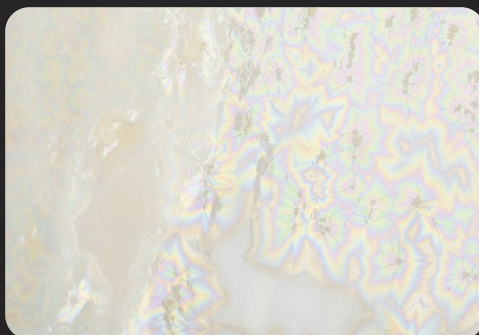
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EMPOWERING INTERACTIONS

by Dan Falby

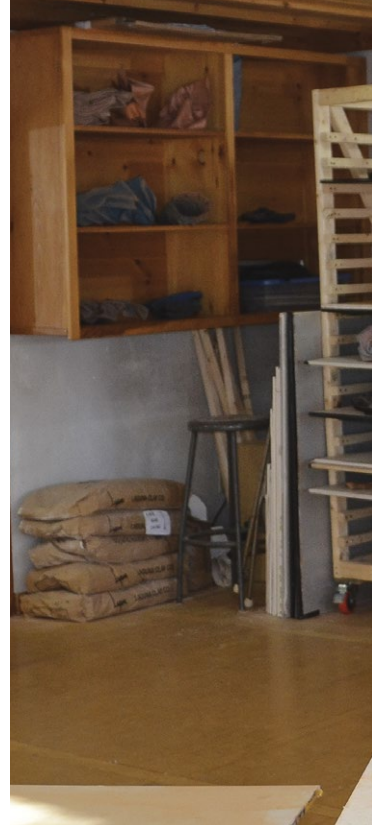
Editors: What do you see as the current trends in ceramics and where do you see yourself in that field?

Dan Falby: One ceramic trend that I identify myself with is the experimental use of materials and firing techniques, where the kiln is used as a forming tool that causes materials to move. It is a trend that has run through ceramics over the millennia, for example in natural-ash and dripping glazes. In its current form, it appears most visibly as the glaze-like clay or gloop trend, but also extends to artists using the kiln as a kind of crucible to over-fire, slump, and fuse clay and glass in fascinating, unpredictable ways. I am working with a similar experimental approach, except that in my process, serendipity and happenstance occur during the wet-clay phase. I invite gravity to shape my work before it enters the kiln.

I think these processes have powerful metaphorical resonances with life and nature. Giving up control and empowering the material to move spontaneously, as governed by chemical and material interactions and physical laws, is a way of working that

feels aligned with the movement of the natural world. It is a means of treading lightly and letting the clay have agency.

This material conversation extends beyond clay. I also do a lot of carpentry, and I take note of how carpenters anthropomorphize the wood they are working with, usually in reference to the inherent imperfections of the material. For example, carpenters will say, “This board wants to be” a certain way when discussing warped or twisting timber. This language acknowledges that we are forcing a natural material to take a certain shape for our purposes, even though it may have its own inclinations due to the specific grain or structure of the tree. Whether it be clay, wood, or anything else, I want to let the material speak for itself and provide an opportunity for forms to appear as they would through natural phenomena.





“ I invite gravity to shape my work before it enters the kiln.”

Eds: What techniques do you use to make your work and why?

DF: I work with handmade slabs. Using a rolling pin and a large flexible metal rib, I roll out slabs and then compress them and flip them back and forth with the goal of stretching the clay to the limits of its plasticity and strength. Once the clay is an eighth of an inch (about 3 mm) or less in thickness, I throw or drop the slab, causing it to crumple and distort on impact. Within this chance encounter with gravity, I play with the parameters of the experiment. My levers of control are the size and shapes of the slabs, their rotation and position when I drop or throw them, and whether they land on a flat surface or slump over some sort of support. Other than that, the shapes that the clay takes at this point are beyond my control.

Relinquishing control is something that I think about a lot. When I am working there is an intriguing contrast between the meticulous job of preparing a slab and the instantaneous impact that gives it shape. It engages me on many levels: the methodical work and flow state, followed by a visceral, momentary abandonment of authority over the clay. It is good practice to let go of my attachments to the results.

My process is also conceptual. I am concerned with how humanity relates to the rest of the natural world. Collectively, it seems that we want to hold ourselves outside of and above the non-human world. This is a delusion that creates a lot of cognitive dissonance in our society and is harmful in many ways. I spend a lot of time outdoors observing the ways that water and wind

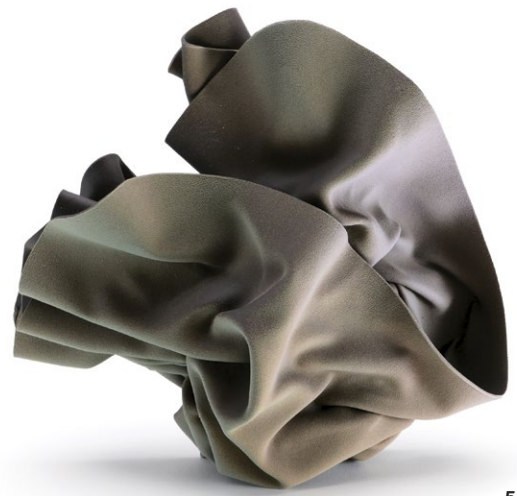


1 *Raucous Garment*, 24 in. (61 cm) in length, cobalt-tinted stoneware, sprayed glaze, fired to cone 5 in an electric kiln, 2023. 2 Dan Falby hand working a slab. 3 Natural light pours into Falby's studio, which provides views of the nearby woods.

move, the life cycles and growth patterns of organisms, and how landscapes have been sculpted over time. There is such a vast web of raw materials and forces, and I think we need to do a better job of being an integrated part of it. We put so much effort into truncating, staving off, and masking the reality of nature: decay, decomposition, entropy, and change. In my ceramics, the effect of gravity becomes a stand-in for all of these things. Making work that allows gravity and the material to collaborate, where I can sort of step out of the way, is an example and a metaphor for a different kind of relating with our environment.



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Eds: What do you do to push yourself to stay engaged and develop within the field of ceramics?

DF: The immediacy and malleability of clay are often touted by ceramic artists. For me, these qualities keep me engaged and motivated every time I enter the studio, and clay continues to surprise me. There is so much play and chance that is integral to my process. At the same time, it takes a lot of patience and practice (and failure) to coax the material to the point that it is able to stretch and flow without tearing. The more I focus on the craftsmanship of preparing slabs and push myself to improve my technique, the more dynamic and compelling the clay's movements become. This creates a positive feedback loop with the clay that pushes me to develop new forms as a result.



6



4 *Wannabe*, 18½ in. (47 cm) in height, red stoneware, sprayed glaze, fired to cone 5 in an electric kiln, 2023. 5 *Shell*, 12 in. (30.5 cm) in height, black stoneware, sprayed glaze, fired to cone 5 in an electric kiln, 2023. 6 An exterior view of Falby's New Hampshire studio, which he shares with his wife. 7 After prepping a slab, Falby drops it onto a lower surface, allowing gravity to crumple and shape the piece. 8 A roll-down backdrop in front of the glaze room door creates a convertible photo studio. 9 Kilns and associated furniture are neatly organized for easy use on the north wall of the space.

Studio Setup

My studio is in a building that is adjacent to our home in rural New Hampshire. The building contains two floors that share an entryway and bathroom. My ceramics studio is on the ground floor, and my wife Cici's studio is on the second floor. She is an herbalist and natural dyer.

The proximity to home is a huge positive for me. I can flow between studio and home life with little resistance, which is even more important now with our one year old. We are surrounded by woods, lakes, and mountains. Nature is an important influence on my work and process, so in many ways, this is an ideal location.

The main working space in my studio is in the east- and south-facing corner, with tons of natural light and views of the surrounding woods and pond. The wedging table, worktable, and

a few low tables for dropping slabs onto or for building larger sculptures are all in this area. Plaster slabs for recycling clay and hand-tool storage are here as well.

My kiln area and drying and storage racks are against the north wall. I built a large shelf rack that allows me to modify the height of each shelf, down to as low as two inches. Many of my wall-hanging pieces are very thin and the shelving can accommodate a lot of work this way, but can also house tall sculptures when needed. I make and store my work on sheets of drywall. These are organized against my storage rack.

My sink and glazing area make up the southwest corner of the studio. In this corner, there is an alcove that I walled off and built into a room dedicated to spraying glazes. To avoid any overspray entering the environment, I designed a closed-loop filtration system



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10 Studio view of Falby's glaze-mixing area with work in progress in the foreground. **11** *Valley 2*, 17 in. (43.2 cm) in length, black stoneware, sprayed glaze, fired to cone 5 in an electric kiln, 2023. **12** *Plummet 6*, 13 in. (33 cm) in height, black stoneware, sprayed glaze, fired to cone 5 in an electric kiln, 2023.

that draws air down into a large floor vent, where it passes through multiple particulate filters and re-enters the spray room through a second vent. This has the added benefit in the winter of conserving the warm air within the building. The spray room is probably my favorite aspect of the whole studio. I've been spraying my glazes for a long time, and I've used various setups in my previous studio and at community spaces. I was never completely comfortable with the amount of overspray that inevitably ended up being vented outdoors. I was especially concerned here because we have wetlands right next to our studio building. Creating the spray room was the most time- and capital-intensive aspect of building out my studio space. While quality particulate filters are an ongoing expense, I'm happy that I made the effort and can spray glazes without any collateral damage to the local ecosystem.

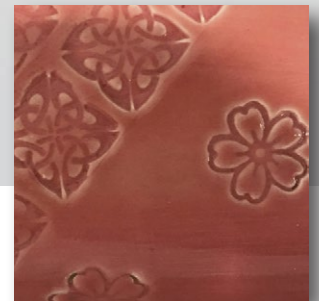
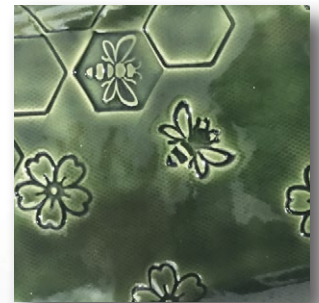
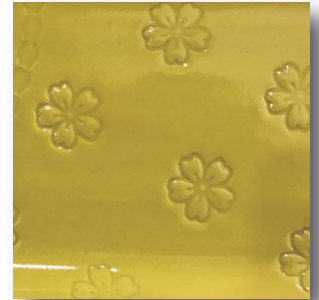
Similarly, my sink is a closed loop and does not drain out to our septic system, preventing any clay or glaze materials from leaching out. Connected to the sink drain are settling tanks and a pump in the basement that re-circulates the water back to the faucet. The other feature that I included for efficiency is a vented duct that brings outside air to the plenum box of my downdraft kiln vent (make-up air, in HVAC parlance). This avoids any unwanted heat loss or pressure differential in the building when firing during colder seasons.

My photo booth is hidden most of the time. When I need to document work, I can roll down a backdrop and light-diffusing fabric that are hung in front of the spray room. I also built an adjustable lightbox for this area that doubles as overhead lighting when not in use for photography. Though I can't access the glaze-spraying room while the photo booth is in use and vice-versa, this is not a problem because I use these two pieces of equipment during different phases of my work cycle.

Next to the main studio building is a shipping container that I use for overflow storage. This is where I keep all my packing materials, extra drywall, and miscellaneous materials for future projects and improvements. These include supplies for building another kiln for firing large wall-hanging sculptures. The plan is to design a low, wide electric kiln that can accommodate four-foot-wide slab pieces. There is always room for improvement in a studio space. As the work evolves, so do the studio requirements. Keeping this in mind, it is helpful to leave space for new tools or furniture, and I try to mount everything on casters so they can be easily rearranged.

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DEFIANCE AND UTILITY

by Ashton Keen



Editors: What excites you about the field of ceramics?

Ashton Keen: I grew up playing team sports. I find similar aspects in atmospheric-firing communities. Over time, I've also found the notion of a chosen family within these communities. When making pottery I think about utility in the form of a gathering, whether it be an intimate moment shared between two people or a large family meal. Closeness and intimacy between the vessel and the user have always appealed to me. My undergrad professor, Matt Long, would always challenge us to make the rim of a cup as soft as possible, posing the question "What are the two things you bring to your lips? Your lover and your mug." This idea of closeness being present in a handmade object really makes me consider every single element of a piece when finishing it.

Left Oil pourer, 6 in. (15 cm) in width, red clay, AP Green terra sigillata, black underglaze, burned cork with bronze finish, soda fired to cone 3, 2023.



“ Closeness and intimacy between the vessel and the user has always appealed to me.”

Eds: How do you come up with the forms (or surfaces) that are prevalent in your work?

AK: My forms derive from a variety of historical pottery. I'm drawn to Iranian spouted vases, Greek amphoras, and Yayoi jars. In my work, I strive to convey both the strong architectural line and the soft curved line I see in these historic vessels. Full volume and strong geometric lines create a sense of strength and energy waiting to be released.

For surfaces, I am drawn to makers like Michael Simon, Will Ruggles, and Douglas Rankin. I enjoy their use of line and the way they create stories using brushstrokes and fluid mark making on their work. I try to emulate a similar sense of storytelling using dark imagery.

To me, dandelions represent defiance. As a young child, my mother and I would go out to the front yard and uproot them



Above Plate, 8 in. (20 cm) in diameter, red clay, Tile 6 terra sigillata, soda fired to cone 3, 2024. **Right** Teapot, 7 in (18 cm) in height, red clay, OM-4 terra sigillata, soda fired to cone 3, 2023.



Top Teapot, 6½ in. (17 cm) in width, red clay, OM-4 terra sigillata, soda fired to cone 3, 2024.
Above Plate, 6½ in. (17 cm) in width, red clay, OM-4 and Tile 6 terra sigillata, black underglaze, soda fired to cone 3, 2023.



because she considered them weeds. When I rough up the surface of the vessel in the green stage the texture of the clay reminds me of the mulch running through my hands in those memories with my mother. Resilient, but delicate in nature, dandelions stand as symbols of how coming out changed my relationship with my parents. This event altered the idea of their perfect garden and left me feeling like the black sheep of the family. I like to represent the dandelions in a stark silhouette, invoking feelings of seclusion and being misunderstood. Dandelions are defiant because regardless of their environment they prevail and blossom. Through my work, I seek to mirror my experiences with coming out with that of the stereotypical perspective on dandelions—transforming into a flower representative of resilience, adaptability, and beauty.

Eds: Who is your ideal audience?

AK: I once went to a demonstration by Linda Christianson and she mentioned that she makes for herself, to fill her home with objects of necessity and pieces she loves. When I'm making, I like to think of that romantic sentiment and focus on objects I would use in my home every day. So, in a sense, I'm thinking about my ideal home as an audience. I also want my pots to be accessible to everyone. Every potter has hope their objects beckon to be used. By making functional pots I strive to have these pieces be used every day by those that find the objects speak to them.

To learn more, visit Instagram @ashton_keen7.

Making a Teapot by Ashton Keen

First, weigh out around 2½ pounds (1.1 kg) of clay to wedge. After wedging and centering the clay, start to throw the body of the vessel. Then, pull a flat base giving yourself a hefty amount of clay to trim so you can have a lifted base and foot. Leaving about a ½ inch (1.3 cm) of thickness on the rim, push a third of that down with a wooden rib to create the flange for the lid (see 1).

For me, the knob is the most important part of the lid. It not only has to functionally make sense with the piece but also should relate to the body. Start throwing the lid by making the knob. After feeling satisfied with the shape and height of the knob, push the rest of the clay down to create the rest of the lid. I prefer to do it this way, so the lid is heavy and wants to sit on the flange during the pour. Put a curve on top of the knob with a finger. This helps create volume that relates to the teapot body (2).

After letting the pot set up for a night, and covering the piece loosely with plastic, it is time to trim the body. When throwing the body, I leave about 1 inch (2.5 cm) of clay at the base so I can create a hefty, tall foot when I trim the base at an angle. I enjoy the slip that pools in the grooves of the foot that I make using a

wooden rib. Add a little water to a finger and press gently down along the edges to soften the foot (3).

Next, use about a ½ pound (0.2 kg) of clay to throw your teapot spout. The handle of a needle tool can be used as a throwing stick. Doing this, I can belly out the spout the entire time while throwing it, making sure when I cone it to be careful to keep the volume present. I like to keep the spout in a continuous cone shape so that it appears full when attached to the pot (4). After letting the spout set up for 10 minutes uncovered, bend the front quarter inch forward to make the spout face down. I once attended a workshop with Jen Allen and she talked about the “sink faucet” theory. This is where if the spout faces down the water gets sucked back into the spout after the pour to avoid drips. Do this by using the handle of a needle tool (5). Since the needle tool was used as a throwing stick, it will always fit in the hole and also it has the added bonus of not sticking to the clay when you get it slightly damp.

After cutting the spout out in a triangular shape at the base where it connects to the pot, measure it against the pot before attaching it to see what kind of a hole to cut. I prefer to have the spout take up the full height of the body of the pot. Making sure



1 Throw the body of the vessel on the wheel. The base should be around 5 inches (13 cm) in diameter and the top opening should be 1½ inches (4 cm). **2** Make the lid by first throwing the knob and then refining the flange. **3** Trim base at an angle to give the pot lift, and then compress the foot. **4** Throw a spout, using a throwing stick to belly out and cone in its shape. **5** Twist the spout to shape using a needle tool.

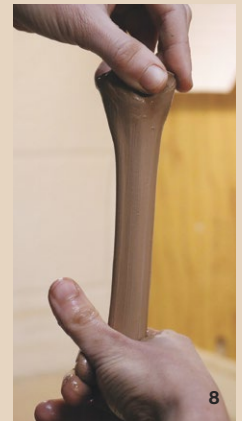
the top of the spout ends at the rim of the lid ensures the tea won't pour out the top of the pot. Leave a ½ inch (1.3 cm) of room for attachment of the spout. After tracing the spout against the pot, measure in about a ½ inch from the traced line and cut your hole. Then slip and score the body and the spout (6, 7).

Once everything is ready, it is time to start assembling parts. Attach the handle last to make sure it meets at the same spot as the spout attachment. I use the pinch-and-pull method to make the handle. Roll out a coil in the shape of a carrot, pinch up the coil to the desired proportion, then pull the handle to smooth it out (8). I always backfill the top of the handle to match the beefiness of the bottom attachment. Attach the handle at the height of the spout on the opposite side of the pot, making sure they both take up the same amount of space on the vessel (9).

When everything is attached, rough up the surface to create interaction between the clay and the slip surface. Finally, I slip

the piece with an OM-4 terra sigillata I make using dry materials following Pete Pinnell's guide to making terra sigillata (10).

After bisque firing, I decorate the piece with Amaco Velvet black underglaze before firing. Using a fine nail-art striping brush, I'm able to get very thin, crisp lines when freehanding the design (11). For my final glazing, I line all of the pots with a clear glaze to highlight the slip inside. I fire my pots in a soda kiln to cone 3. I use the soda-firing process to give my terra sigillatas subtle flashing and create the thinnest clear glaze to seal the surfaces with a slight sheen. Recently, I've kept the kiln in a neutral setting with as little reduction as possible. Then I put the kiln in a light reduction with a soft purple/orange rolling flame coming out of the ports about 4 inches (10.2 cm) for spraying soda. I spray 3 pounds (1.4 kg) of soda ash mixed with 2 gallons (7.6 L) of water at peak temperature. After spraying I let the kiln climb back up to temperature for 45 minutes before shutting it off.



6 Prepare a hole for the spout by measuring the spout against the pot to assess the proportions. **7** Attach the spout to the body, maintaining a continuous curve. **8** Roll out a carrot-shaped coil, pinch to the desired height and thickness, then pull it to soften the pinch marks and make it a handle with even thickness. **9** Attach the handle at the same height as the spout to ensure the proportions match. **10** Slip the pot by pouring to give inconsistencies in thickness for variation when fired. **11** Decorate the pot using a fine nail-stripping brush and Amaco Velvet black underglaze. *Photos: Paige Harper.*



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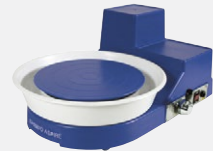
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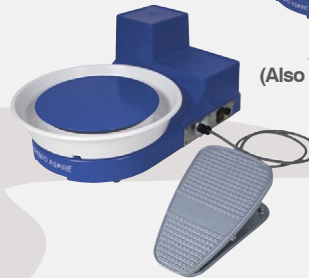
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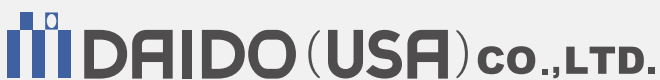
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ASSEMBLAGE: SCULPTURES AND HOME ATELIER

by Sue DeWulf

Editors: What techniques do you use to make your work and why?

Sue DeWulf: Creating whimsical ceramic sculptural pieces has been a journey filled with passion and nostalgia for me. My ceramic art interprets idioms, parodies, and often a recounting of cherished childhood memories.



1 *Dogs and Cats Living Together*, 11 in. (28 cm) in length, low-fire slip-cast assemblage. **2** Sue DeWulf in her garage studio. Photo: Roon Brown. **3** *Just a Wee Cup of Tea*, 15 in. (38 cm) in height, low-fire slip-cast assemblage.



“ My thoughts are if you want to set up a studio, just start in a small area and begin.”

My initial encounter with clay was using cone-10 clay with earth tones in high school. While I immediately fell in love with the medium, I wanted a vibrancy of color I saw in the whimsical California ceramics of the 1940s and 1950s. I found my creative haven in low-fire clay and color. My artistic journey took a turn during a semester at the San Francisco Art Institute with Richard Shaw, where I experienced slip casting and plaster mold making. I began to scour thrift stores and estate sales to hunt for old toys, bottles, and other fascinating found items. I then cast these in plaster, using the poured slip pieces to craft my sculptures.

A significant part of my artistic adventure involves collecting vintage molds from artists who were once ceramic crafters. The respect I hold for these artists is reflected in my use of their plaster doll molds and vintage object molds. Women gathered in small ceramic shops and created together and still do. I have pieces that my grandmother and great-grandmother created in such a shop. Families often share stories about what their mothers, aunts, or grandmothers created with these molds, and my pieces are of my own creation intertwined with a tribute to these ceramic artists.

My studio is now filled with the molds I created from found objects and a growing collection of vintage molds. To bring a piece to life, I start by casting the main structural components, whether it's a toy car or an old perfume bottle. Many of my works take the form of decorative bottles, free-standing sculptures, or wall-hanging pieces.





The process involves casting slip into molds of varying sizes and imagery. After casting over twenty or more small pieces and allowing them to set overnight, I meticulously clean the seams, juxtapose the cast pieces, and cut off or rearrange certain parts. I enjoy creating animorphs or placing a doll's face on an owl's head. If you look closely, you can find all sorts of small combinations. Some of my larger bottles have more than a hundred small pieces attached.

Sculpturally, since many small pieces are attached to larger ones, I often construct my pieces on a kiln shelf atop a banding wheel. Continually turning the piece ensures balance and flow, aiming for a delicate appearance without compromising stability. I refrain from later glazing pieces together, opting instead to score, slip, and sculpt each added piece. Slip that has firmed up as clay is used to add sculptural additions like skirts or bows.

Careful drying is crucial to avoid cracking. I slowly bisque fire to cone 05. After removing the pieces from the kiln, I lightly sand and rinse them before I begin the time-consuming but thoroughly enjoyable glazing process using cone-05 underglazes. I utilize commercial underglazes but mix them together to form varying colors. Depending on the piece, I finish with a clear satin or gloss glaze.

My ceramics have been an ongoing process for many years. I received my BFA from Whitman College in Walla Walla, Washington. I then set off to California to create ceramics. I found other passions along the way in



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marriage, raising a family, and teaching. I taught art for over thirty years, twenty of those years to middle school students. The fascination and excitement for ceramics from students was an inspiration each year.

Eds: Who is your ideal audience?

SD: Creating my ceramics using relatable images seems to resonate with many different age groups. I have done commission pieces highlighting a particular childhood theme or pet. Children are excited by my work but are confused by why they can't touch them since they appear to be toys.

Eds: What is the most valuable advice you've received as an artist?

SD: I understand my sculptures are unusual, but I have listened when people advised, "create what you love." I certainly find my center creating these ceramic assemblage sculptures.

Studio Space

My studio is conveniently situated within my Southern California home, taking up half of the garage space plus a glazing room inside my home. The 17×10-foot (5.2×3-m) area in my garage allows me to delve into my sculpting. Within this space, I've set up three tables—one for slip casting, another for sculpting and glazing, and the third for tools and press molds. Along an entire wall, my tools and molds are set up on storage shelves.



8

4 DeWulf preparing a ceramic piece for a kiln firing. *Photo: Roon Brown.* **5** Mendelssohn's *Turtleneck Magic*, 15 in. (38 cm) in height, low-fire slip-cast assemblage. **6** *Every Strike Brings Me Closer*, 12 in. (30 cm) in height, low-fire slip-cast assemblage. **7** DeWulf working in her garage studio. Her plaster mold collection is stacked on shelves behind her. *Photo: Roon Brown.* **8** *Partyline*, 10 in. (25 cm) in length, low-fire slip-cast assemblage.



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10

9 *A Day at the Museum with Blueboy*, 12 in. (30 cm) in height, low-fire slip-cast assemblage. 10 DeWulf underglazing a slip-cast assemblage in her garage studio. Photo: Roon Brown.

The beauty of my studio lies in its adaptability. On warm days, I can raise the garage door, inviting in natural light and ventilation. For colder days, I rely on a mounted heater to keep the studio warm and aid in the drying process. With an extensive collection of molds that I've cast and collected over time, organization is the key. I've found that storing them thematically makes locating specific molds much easier and quicker. I purchase slip in gallon quantities for convenience and easy storage. I use a drill with a mixer attachment for slip mixing. Plastic storage boxes and assorted strainers serve as makeshift pouring tables allowing me to recycle my slip, making a gallon go a long way.

My electric kiln, mounted on casters for mobility, is stored next to the wall. I roll it out to load and fire it with the garage door ajar. The rhythm of my creative process involves sculpting and creating a kiln load in a span of two weeks or so. Subsequently, a bisque firing marks the transition before I move indoors for the underglazing and glazing phases.

While working in my garage studio, which is attached to my home, I've adopted the habit of sculpting in slip-on shoes, leaving them before entering my living space. Daily dust maintenance is crucial, and I've embraced the task of keeping dust at bay. Creating an open space in my garage studio makes it inviting to share my process with neighbors and friends.

Before moving indoors, I employ a systematic cleanup routine. A shop vacuum, strategically positioned outdoors, expels the dust, followed by a thorough wet mopping of the entire space.

Storing equipment on the garage wall, despite its occasional inconvenience, proves to be a valuable strategy in keeping the space with manageable dust levels.

Transitioning to the glazing phase leads me to another creative space—a studio/guest room that serves dual purposes. Acting as both a glazing studio and a welcoming guest room with a fold-out bed, this room adds to the versatility of my creative spaces. A trolley stocked with underglazes and ample shelf space for bisqueware sculptures makes this room a functional extension of my creativity. I set up a table along the couch and glaze, listening to music or audiobooks while painting on underglazes. The tiled floor space, which is 10×10 feet (3×3 m), has a large window and a lighted ceiling fan allowing for plenty of light. Moving back out to the garage for the glaze firing of my decorative pieces is a careful process. All of my firings are done to cone 05. Fortunately, we installed solar panels years ago to help with the cost of electricity.

I surely would enjoy a designated, single studio space, but I have made these two ceramic studio spaces work for me. These two areas have certainly expanded over the last few years. My thoughts are if you want to set up a studio, just start in a small area and begin. Over time, you can assess your needs and branch out and adapt as needed. Just don't let the lack of a fantastic studio space stop you from creating your own atelier.

To learn more, visit dewulfceramics.com.



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FLOWING, PUSHING, CONNECTING

by Jing Huang



Editors: What role does color play in your work?

Jing Huang: In my work, color serves as more than a mere aesthetic element; it functions as a secondary layer of communication, intertwining with the form to deliver messages for me. Particularly in ceramics, the glaze surface offers both visual and tactile qualities related to the material, carrying even more powerful information than the colors alone.

The soft color palette in my work draws inspiration from Chinese pigments, evoking memories of my early experiences practicing Chinese painting. Those colors have become a bridge that connects the traditions and my memories with the contemporary expressions of my artistic journey, exploring the scenery in the liminal space between my past and present.

Clouds Flow #6, 18½ in. (47 cm) in height, handbuilt stoneware, glaze, fired in oxidation to cone 04, slow cooled, 2023.



“ I see my work as a process of seeking a deeper understanding of my identity and experience in the world.”

Above *Loop #12*, 18½ in. (47 cm) in height, handbuilt stoneware, glaze, fired in oxidation to cone 04, slow cooled, 2023. **Right** *Swirl*, 30 in. (76 cm) in height, handbuilt stoneware, glaze, fired in oxidation to cone 04, slow cooled, 2021.

Elements like mountains, clouds, and rivers emerge as recurrent motifs in my work. While the forms of mountains and clouds are visually evident, the runny glazes with mixed colors serve as crucial tools for conveying the essence of “river” in my work. Guided by gravity and form, those colors, with their fluid movement and convergence, bring a dynamic flow and a sense of nature into the work.

Eds: What do you see as the current trends in ceramics and where do you see yourself in that field?

JH: I believe that being aware of the current trends in contemporary ceramic art is important. Understanding the context of the dialog and learning about the history, evolution, and insights of the ceramic art field are necessary for propelling it forward. Artists are exploring various ideas based on their interests and research, with some directions aligning more with the current trends and movements.

I see my work as a process of seeking a deeper understanding of my identity and experience in the world. It doesn't aim to represent my hometown or a specific location but rather exists at the intersection of traditional and contemporary, natural and artificial, East and West. While I pay attention to what is happening in the field, I do not strive to conform to trends or popularity. My focus is on creating authentic and honest work infused with 100% of my passion.



As an artist, I position myself as a contributor to the ongoing dialog within the ceramics field. Rather than following trends for the sake of alignment, I want to make a meaningful impact by remaining true to my artistic vision, pushing boundaries, and offering a unique perspective in the ever-evolving landscape of contemporary ceramics.

Eds: What is the most valuable advice you've received as an artist?

JH: My professor and mentor, Linda Sormin's advice: "Enjoy the moment and take time to celebrate." As an artist, it's easy to become immersed in self-critique and to overanalyze every work and decision. This advice reminds me to step back and enjoy the creative process in the studio. It has allowed me to connect more authentically with my work, appreciate my artistic journey, and maintain a healthier mindset.



Above *Loop #3*, 16 in. (41 cm) in height, handbuilt stoneware, glaze, fired in oxidation to cone 04, slow cooled, 2022. **Left** *Void Spaces*, 5 ft. (1.5 m) in height, handbuilt stoneware, glaze, fired in oxidation to cone 04, slow cooled, metal, 2021.



My recent body of work, the *Loop* series, reflects on this idea through the use of an amorphous shape that indicates no beginning nor end and instead places emphasis on the winding path itself. Its Chinese title, 回, has several meanings in Chinese: to circle, to step back, to turn around, to return. This unique pictographic Chinese character not only interprets the form of the work but also symbolizes the return to the process itself, to celebrate my identity, past, and culture. By celebrating each moment, I've found a deeper connection to the passion that drives my art.

To learn more, visit www.jinghuangceramics.com.

Creating a *Clouds Flow Sculpture* by Jing Huang

Begin by preparing several slabs about $\frac{1}{4}$ in. (6 mm) thick. One slab will serve as the base for the main sculpture (the mountain), while the others are kept wet for making the add-on cloud parts. First, cut an organic shape from the slab as the base for the main sculpture (1). Attach coils to the base and continue adding coils to build height (2). Blend the coils and shape the form simultaneously once it reaches about 4–5 inches (10–13 cm) in height (3). Repeat this step until the form is too soft to add another coil. This is about the time to wrap the edge and work on the additional parts while the main sculpture firms up.

Take another slab and place paper templates in the shape of clouds on it. Use a pin tool to trace and cut each cloud shape (4). Attach coils to the base of each cloud and build them up. After eight to ten rounds of coils, close the top of each cloud by attaching a small round slab (5). When finishing the form, blend the coils of each cloud using a serrated rib, then switch to a smooth-edged rib for a smooth surface (6). I repeat this process to make more cloud attachments whenever I am waiting for the main sculpture to firm up.

Once the main sculpture is ready, connect the walls with a pinched slab—I call this step building a bridge (7). Add coils to



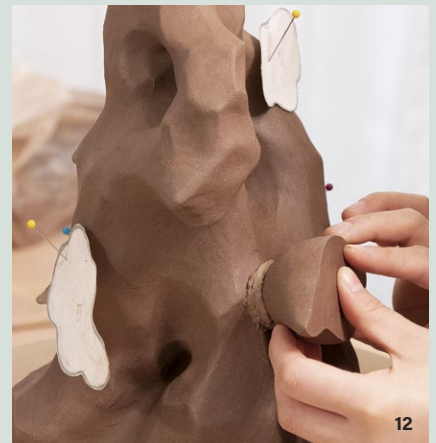
1 Cut an organic shape for the mountain's base. **2** Attach a coil to the base and keep adding coils to build height. **3** Blend the coils and shape the form. **4** Trace and cut cloud-shaped paper templates on another slab. **5** Close the top of each form by adding a small, round slab. **6** Blend the coils using a serrated rib, then finish with a smooth rib.

support the slab and alter the shape as needed. Create additional bridges on top of the first one to mimic the hollows found in the mountains and Chinese scholar's rocks I reference (8). Keep coiling and repeat, adding more bridges to create more negative spaces (9).

Reach the top with several rounds of added coils while altering the shape, then attach a small slab to close the top opening (10). I use pins and the same cloud paper templates to design the flow of clouds on the mountain sculpture, adding more layers to create a dynamic flow within the sculpture (11). Mark the placement of each

cloud, slip and score, then attach the small cloud sculpture (12). When you are finished attaching all the clouds, clean the excess slip and reinforce all connections (13). I leave the greenware with attachments covered overnight for the moisture levels to equilibrate. Switch to covering with a cloth to slowly dry the work the next day, especially for large-scale sculptures.

After bisque firing, I apply multiple layers of glazes, underglazes, and oxides in different rounds, firing multiple times to cone 04 until I am satisfied with the result (14).



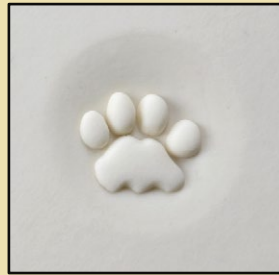
7 Connect the walls of the main sculpture with a pinched slab. **8** Add coils for support and build up the form. **9** Continue adding coils and altering the shape. **10** Attach a small slab to close the top opening. **11** Use pins and the cloud-shaped paper templates to design the layout of the cloud parts. **12** Slip and score to attach the clouds to the sculpture. **13** Finish attaching all the clouds, clean the slip, and reinforce all connections. **14** Similar finished form with multiple layers of glazes, underglazes, and oxides, fired several times to cone 04.

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BEAUTY IN LIMITATIONS

by Wes Brown

Editors: What techniques do you use to make your work and why?

Wes Brown: I use the potter's wheel and slab building to make my work. The wheel was my first love in ceramics, and it is still magical to me how fast it can create a form. The forms I like to make are typically smooth with little curvature. The rotation of the wheel holds, for me, a circular predictability. I couple my wheel-thrown parts with heavily textured slabs, which are handled in a way that is completely foreign from my wheel approach. For slab making there is little grace, and it is more about the capturing of dynamic movement on the clay's surface than making a predictable part. It took me some years to develop my skill in handbuilding and I was making sculptures with slabs. The idea had not occurred to me to combine the two until my yearlong residency at Baltimore Clayworks. Away from a university studio, I needed to make something that I could sell. So, I combined my first slabs with wheel-thrown elements and have been enjoying it ever since. The result is pieces that are a mix of the familiar and the unknown or the manufactured and natural.



This way of working is exciting to me because it presents unique hurdles or problems for which I need to come up with new solutions for every piece.

Because I am starting with a vessel form in mind, I can throw a part to be the center and then use my slabs to work around it. There is great contrast between the smooth-surfaced wheel parts and the textured slabs, and I love it. As I key one piece into another, there is the natural border of the parts and I work constantly to overstep. The goal is to make work with an interesting composition so that the once-predictable wheel-thrown center is enmeshed with continually changing parts.

The functionality of the form is of high importance to me. So, on top of making a piece that has internal complexity and interesting composition, I also have to keep at the forefront of my mind how well the piece will function at a task. Utility introduces all kinds of new rules and I like working within a ruled system. The limitations might seem restrictive (and they are) but because of those constraints, I have to get creative. I believe creativity does not come from endless possibilities, but from solving a problem. My process is set up to make each piece a new composition with new solutions. It keeps the work active and engaging to make and view, as no two pieces are the same.

Eds: Who is your ideal audience?

WB: My ideal audience is people who have some dirt under their nails. I know it sounds cliché, but I make work from a place of laboring. I am trying to best communicate my reality, which is: that the world is a rough place and it's going to put pressure on you, and you need to work to make something useful of yourself. I create a set of problems and then need to work to solve them. There is a large gap on this side: do I fill it in with soft clay, do I edit it out, do I add a new slab, do I add multiple slabs? A single gap has several fixes and the solutions I come up with sometimes simply fix it, while other times create something unexpectedly beautiful. I think this creative problem solving is attractive to people who have had to try and make do with what is versus what might be ideal. To some degree, we all at points are cobbling things together as we go along due to limitations. If people can look at my work and see the cobbling together and see the beauty of it, then I'm happy.



“ It’s important that you make the work in the way that best matches your intention.”



1 Large Jar, 15 in. (38 cm) in height, stoneware, fired to cone 6, 2022. 2 Wes Brown’s studio with teapot bodies lined up ready to be assembled. 3 Brown refining the handle connection on a teapot in his studio.



4 Interior view of the Penn State University Ceramics Annex with Brown's studio and office located off the corner. 5 The exterior of the Ceramics Annex. 6 Teapot, 8½ in. (21.6 cm) in height, stoneware, fired to cone 6, 2022.

Eds: What do you think is the role of a maker within our current culture and how do you think you contribute to it?

WB: I really like the words of comedian Peter Holmes, “Art is highly sensitive people, reporting back to the group what reality is for them.” The role of an artist is to be human and honest about that fact. And to that end, my work communicates what I understand of the world and my place in it. I have been through some struggles; with family, friends, marriage, mental health, making, etc. So, I have a good understanding of struggle. And to some degree, we all struggle with something. And I mean struggle in the sense of grappling with the gap between what we want or need and what we are presented with. Many of my struggles come from the consequences of my actions, but some come from my inheritance as a human.

As an artist, it is incumbent on me to make work that best reflects my understanding of the world. And I trust that as I speak something true to myself it will reverberate in the center of someone else who has lived something similar. I believe that no human emotion is so personal that it has never been felt by another. Art is a way to put forward that feeling or philosophy and see if it rings true in another.

My hope is that people who see my pots see that reality and those who hold my pots feel it. Even if my work is dark and brutish, it is also beautiful because ultimately it still offers something.

New Studio Space

Right now, I am adjusting to my new job at Penn State University, and it affords me an office that doubles as a studio. It's the first place I have had a private workspace in about four years and it feels good to have something that is mine. My little studio is housed in the annex just off the main ceramics studio space on campus, so I am still using the same kilns, glaze lab, and potter's wheel to make my work.

The location is ideal for me and provides a great balance between having privacy and getting to be a part of the larger studio community. By having a studio so close, I can have impromptu “water cooler” conversations walking around the studio during



7



8



9

7 Brown fitting a lid on a freshly assembled teapot. **8** Bowl, 9 in. (23 cm) in height, stoneware, fired to cone 6, 2022. **9** The studio provides ample shelving for his teaching vessel collection, finished work storage, tool boxes, and packing supplies, as well as a desk for computer work. *All studio photos: Jack Pence.*

breaks in my process. And that is how I can relate to my students because even with the gap in our skills, I still have to put in the time. Having a studio close to students helps me live what I preach which is, “You have to work at this.”

The studio itself is a really nice size at about 12×10 feet (3.7×3 m) with 10-foot (3-m) ceilings. My studio houses just about everything I need to make my work. In it is my desk and printer for sitting and doing the daily tasks of emailing, grading, and writing. For food, I have a microwave and mini fridge, which

allow for lunch/dinner and snacks. For water, I brought over the old Brita pitcher my wife no longer needed when we upgraded at home. Directly above my desk is a series of shelves that hold papers, handouts, a few art books, sketchbooks, and a bit of my ceramic collection. I split my ceramic drinking vessel collection between home and the studio. The mugs, cups, and bowls kept at the studio are used when I teach about different techniques, and they give me something beautiful to drink my tea out of (for which I have an electric kettle).

The room came with a series of very tall silver shelving units, on which I mostly keep completed works that are awaiting packing and shipping. I like having a visible inventory. I chose two canvas-covered narrow tables, one to work on and one to store things in process (though it often becomes a catch-all for things I forget to put away). I built a series of shelves that I'm quite proud of despite their rough appearance (I am a ceramic artist and not a carpenter after all). I needed something to hold the various toolboxes, packing materials, and bulky items I use on a semi-regular basis.

The largest perk of the space is its location. Being off the main studio space means I don't have to worry about heavy traffic. And because all classes this year are being taught in the main studio space, I am allowed to house my larger volume of making overflow into the annex area. If I were to stay within the bounds of my own office, I would need to build several additional shelving units.



The greatest challenge within the space is a lack of temperature control. The ceilings are high and there are two sealed windows on the west wall, up near the top. This is my first winter here and the heating is good, and I am grateful for the very well-insulated walls. However, the combination of heated air high in the studio and no way to circulate it makes the studio a sweat lodge in weather above 80 degrees. If I could change out the windows for two that open or was able to put an A/C unit in one, I think my studio quality would jump up tenfold.

Studio Suggestions

When it came to setting up my studio, I thought about what I needed to make my work, and I would encourage anyone setting out to set up their studio to do the same. When setting up a studio, think about what you need absolutely to make your work and begin acquiring the necessary tools or equipment. I thought to get a slab roller as I don't like rolling the large slabs necessary to make my work, but the cost of a slab roller coupled with its footprint in my space feels unfeasible. But, even with a slab roller in the main space I still find myself rolling them out by hand, so I will admit I may not like it but it makes sense to do it this way.

There is an old adage on buying new versus old equipment that says to go buy the cheapest tool of any new equipment. Use the equipment to accomplish your task and if/when it breaks or becomes inoperable, then evaluate its worth to you and go and buy the newest state-of-the-art thing if it is really that helpful. Certainly, this approach may have you grow slowly as new technologies, when implemented correctly, should make processes more efficient and increase productivity. To this, I will say: You are an artist. Make objects in accordance with your soul by the working of your hands. If there is more demand than there is you, rise to meet it but never forget this is yours. It's important that you make work in the way that best matches your intention. Never get so caught up in the numbers that you forget why you started making in the first place. Let your studio be the place where you reaffirm who you are—joys, struggles, redundancies, and all.

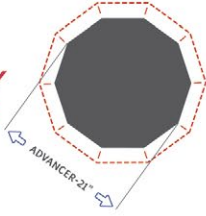
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Top Mug, 4 in. (10.2 cm) in height, stoneware, fired to cone 6, 2021.
Above Silo Jar, 18½ in. (47 cm) in height, fired to cone 6, 2023.

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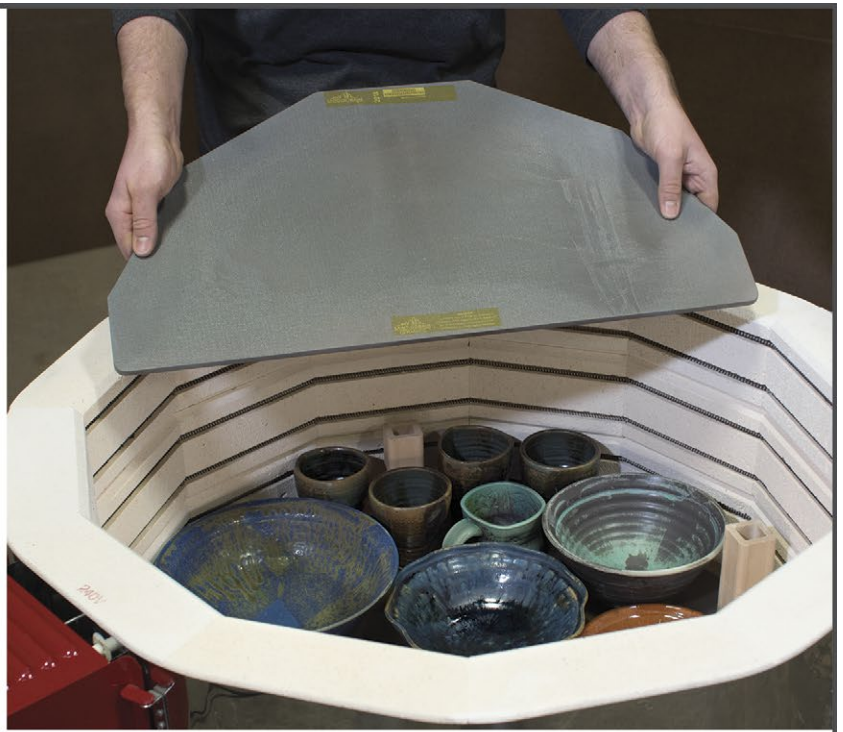


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A FUSION OF INFLUENCES

by Anshula Tayal



Eds: What do you think is the role of a maker within our current culture and how do you think you contribute to it?

Anshula Tayal: Makers in current times play a crucial role by crafting unique, handmade items that go beyond commodities. In a world where mass production dominates, a maker's commitment to creating personalized, handcrafted art adds a refreshing touch to daily life. Makers like me contribute to the movement against homogeneity, offering individuals the opportunity to connect with objects that bear the mark of human craftsmanship. This personal touch enhances the sensory experience for users, fostering a deeper connection between the maker, the user, and the functional art they interact with daily.

My journey as a potter intertwines with my Indian cultural roots and architectural background. I have lived in several cities in India and the US. I explore several forms of art—painting, printmaking, and pottery. Creations from my home-based studio in Portland, Oregon, reflect the cultural vibrancy of the city. The fusion of these influences with my interest in diverse Indian art forms is the essence of my creations. I infuse everyday items with the rich heritage of Indian art and culture,

transcending mere functionality into a canvas for storytelling.

Wishing that the pieces serve as more than just objects: they become gateways to cultural exploration, preserving and showcasing India through my unique perspective. My pottery is a combination of self-expression, vibrant colors, and intricate designs contributing to a broader cultural dialog.

I want my pottery to become a catalyst for conversations and interactions, fostering cross-cultural connections in a world that is becoming multicultural and interconnected. I want my work to not only bring joy and vibrant aesthetics to people's lives but also serve as a medium for cultural preservation and understanding.

In a globalized world, makers become cultural ambassadors, introducing people to different traditions and stories through their craft. In essence, the role of a maker in our current times extends beyond creating objects; it involves shaping experiences, fostering connections, and contributing to a diverse and dynamic cultural landscape. I hope to achieve that goal through my creations.



Editors: What is the most challenging aspect of working in clay (either technically or in terms of building a career)?

AT: Working with clay demands meticulous attention because of its memory and sensitivity to moisture. Treating the built piece with care and storing it properly is crucial to slow drying and achieving the leather-hard stage for optimal workability. The post-building process is equally vital—ensuring slow, even drying prevents warping and cracking. Firing at the right temperatures is important for achieving perfect vitrification without risking cracks during this final stage. The careful journey from creation to completion demands continuous attention and expertise.

I combine wheel-throwing and handbuilding techniques to form my pieces, demanding a delicate balance of moisture content and thickness of clay to avoid cracks at all stages. Once my piece reaches readiness, I dedicate a substantial amount of time to creating intricate surface decorations. My palette consists of colored slips and underglazes and I use sgraffito tools to enhance the designs. I am careful to maintain the perfect moisture content of my greenware, which is crucial for the slips to adhere seamlessly. At the leather-hard stage, I use carving tools to create precise lines.

I find joy in crafting larger, cantilevered pieces, inspired by architectural designs, thereby adding a unique touch to my work. However, the challenge lies in avoiding the pitfalls of overambitious

“ I infuse everyday items with the rich heritage of Indian art and culture, transcending mere functionality into a canvas for storytelling.”

Opposite *Paithani Vases*, to 13 in. (33 cm) in height, underglazes, clear glaze, fired to cone 6, 2022. Vase inspired by the Paithani brocade. **Above** *Water Play*, 18 in. (46 cm) in length, underglazes, clear glaze, fired to cone 6, 2023. Painted panel inspired by Pichwai paintings.



Left Sangneri Jars, to 24 in. (61 cm) in height, underglazes, clear glaze, fired to cone 6, 2019. Jars inspired by block-print fabrics. **Right** Kantha Jar, 16 in. (41 cm) in height, underglazes, clear glaze, fired to cone 6, 2019. Jar inspired by the Kantha embroidery.

forms, where the weight of the clay and memory can lead to slumping. I utilize slabs and molds for platter forms. To avoid warping, I carefully compress the slabs on the mold. However, despite these efforts, occasional warping during glaze firing remains a reality. Balancing the need to keep the slab at the leather-hard stage for work and ensuring proper support during making and decorating becomes crucial for maintaining structural integrity.

I love crafting painted flat panels as wall pieces and a canvas for storytelling. These pieces are usually large and flat, sometimes measuring 18×12 inches (46×30 cm), presenting a challenge as they often tend to warp and sometimes even develop cracks during the glaze-firing stage. To mitigate warping and cracks, I spread enough grog on the kiln shelf, below the tiles—the grains of the grog act as ball bearings, allowing the tiles to slide during firing. Unfortunately, the final result remains uncertain. In these moments, a prayer to the kiln gods becomes a humble plea for a favorable outcome!

Drawing inspiration from diverse sources like textile art and the art and architecture of India, I incorporate a vibrant palette of

colors in my work. To test out how the colors and the glazes look after being fired, I create test tiles—a crucial step in the process. However, the final pieces may exhibit variations due to their size and the nuances of firing. The dynamic interplay of elements adds an unpredictable and unique dimension to each piece, sometimes this is good, and sometimes not.

I use a spray gun to glaze larger pieces, ensuring a consistent application. To create more depth in some of my pieces, I partially glaze them, highlighting the surface decoration. In doing so, there is an element of unpredictability due to the uneven expansion and contraction of glaze during firing leading to the added risk of cracking. In this intricate dance with clay, my creations become a testament to patience and skill. The challenges encountered are not hurdles but steppingstones in a continuous journey of creation, learning, and improving my craft.

To learn more, visit anshula-tayal.squarespace.com or on Instagram at [@anshulatayal](https://www.instagram.com/anshulatayal).

The Goddess by Anshula Tayal

My 16-inch (41-cm) round platter with a foot ring and intricate surface decoration is titled, *The Goddess*, featuring a peacock as its central theme—the mount of Goddess Saraswati, who is the deity associated with knowledge, music, and art.

Begin by rolling a $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch-thick (10-mm) slab of dark clay on a slab roller, ensuring it forms an 18-inch-diameter (46-cm) circle (1). I use Dundee Red stoneware from Georgies in Portland, Oregon. Using a red Mudtools rib, compress the clay thoroughly from both sides, smoothing out any canvas marks and eliminating air bubbles. Once compressed, firmly lift the slab using both arms to prevent excessive stretching, which may lead to warping during firing. Next, slump the slab onto a plaster mold (2)—I made mine from an old wooden tray sourced from Goodwill. I drilled two pin positions on the plaster mold, to use the mold as a drape bat on the potter's wheel with bat pins, utilizing the wheel's power to center, compress, and shape the platter.

With the slab on the mold, use a red rib from Mudtools, a wet sponge, and a small roller to thoroughly compress the slab onto the plaster mold. With a needle tool, cut and remove excess clay,

ensuring a perfect round platter on the wheel. After an hour, which is enough time for extra moisture to be absorbed by the plaster, craft a foot ring for the platter. Roll a thick coil with a diameter of about $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches (3.8 cm), and long enough to make a full ring circle. Use a scoring tool to score both the backside of the platter and the coil and then, with a bit of water, attach the coil to the platter. By pushing and pinching the coil, you ensure a secure attachment and proceed to create a slightly taller ring, elongating it using the spinning of the wheel (3).

After covering the platter loosely with plastic to ensure the joint cures well, allow the moisture to evenly distribute, integrating the platter and the ring into a cohesive unit.

On the back of the platter, I create a sgraffito design using colored slips, adding texture and pattern to enhance the aesthetics (4). Once the platter reaches a leather-hard stage and can support its own weight, flip it onto a bat and remove the plaster mold. Using a clay shredder from Surform tools, smooth out the rim.

Next, apply three coats of white slip to create a smooth, blank clay canvas (5). Start by hand drawing designs on thin tracing paper, which is convenient due to its moldable nature and transparency.



1 Roll the slab $\frac{3}{8}$ inch (10 mm) thick and around 18 inches (46 cm) in diameter. **2** Drape the slab over the plaster mold. **3** Attach a coil to the formed platter, and then throw a foot ring using a coil. **4** Decorate the backside of the platter while on the mold. **5** Brush an even layer of white slip over the concave curve to prepare for surface decoration. **6** Transfer a drawn design from tracing paper onto the platter using a ballpoint pen.

Using the tip of a ballpoint pen (nothing sharp), trace the design onto the platter while it is still at a hard cheddar-cheese consistency, lightly engraving the patterns (6).

I prefer to use Amaco Velvet underglazes and fill small applicator squeeze bottles that have fine precision tips. Using the bottles, squeeze the underglaze onto the design and use a brush to spread it evenly. I repeat the process 2 to 3 times based on the thickness of the underglaze (7).

After completing the painting, use DiamondCore Tool's FP1 and a Kemper Wire Stylus as a sgraffito tool to carve out precise lines, highlighting the outlines (8). After you brush off the excess clay with a large soft brush, loosely cover the piece in plastic or

cloth until it dries completely. Once fully dried, the piece is ready to be bisque fired.

Once the bisque firing is complete, let the kiln cool down completely to room temperature. Meticulously remove any extra clay shards and dust from the platter using water and Scotch-Brite scour pads. After allowing the platter to dry completely, glaze it using a compressor and a spray gun (9). To achieve earthy tones that complement the inspiration drawn from the Indian Kalamkari textile, I use a celadon glaze with a hint of iron. This choice of glaze creates a sage effect, similar to the fabric's natural dyes with their earthy undertones. I fire the glazed piece to cone 6 in my Skutt electric kiln at a medium speed (10, 11).



7 Paint the design with various colors of underglazes or slips, then use a squeeze bottle fill in larger areas. **8** Use DiamondCore Tools and Kemper carving tools to sgraffito the outlines. **9** Bisque fire the piece, then use a spray gun to glaze the platter. **10, 11** *The Goddess Platter* (front and back), 15 in. (38 cm) in diameter, underglazes, celadon glaze with iron, fired to cone 6, 2023. Platter inspired by Kalamkari painting on fabric.



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EXPERIENCES WITH FORM

by Casey Beck

Editors: What excites you about the field of ceramics?

Casey Beck: The growth of our field is what excites me the most! Whether it is the growth of techniques, form, and content historically, the exponential growth of a beginner student, or the steady growth of my peers. It is a pleasure to learn about the history of ceramics and how it has ebbed and flowed throughout time. The more I know, the more I know I don't know, creating further curiosity and appreciation. Being a part of the first new growth in a beginning student is rewarding and humbling. There is nothing more special than seeing someone find and understand clay through both the making and use of ceramics. I remember some of my first impressions well and how influential they were in the ways that I see and use ceramics. That joy and excitement are like no other; unique and special. Furthermore, seeing the growth of my peers who have been doing ceramics for years is exciting and influential. As a graduate student, I am aware of this firsthand and it is so special to see the excitement of my peers in their individual growth. Of course, I am also very excited about the development of my work and the research that I have been able to do with soda firing. Each of my firings yields new results and further questions to look for answers to.

Eds: How do you come up with the forms (or surfaces) that are prevalent in your work?

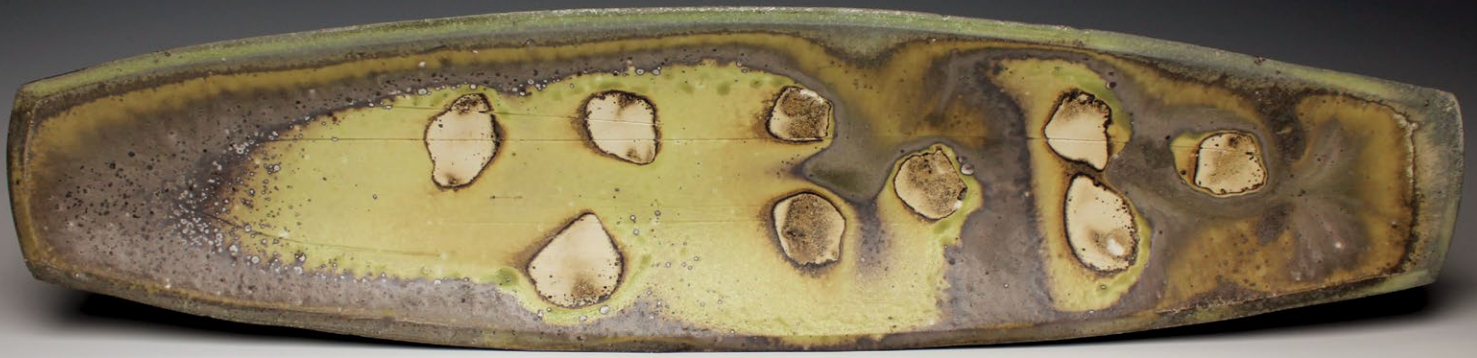
CB: The forms that I make reference so much. I primarily look at historical vessels, spending hours in museums or on museum websites looking at vessels, then sketching iterations of what interests me. I mostly take note of proportion and the language of how the elements of an object work together—like how a handle works on a jug form. Lately, after a very influential trip to Italy, I am intrigued by and referencing Etruscan jugs and Venetian stemware in my work. I try not to limit myself to ceramic objects and also look at glass, metal, and wooden objects made throughout history. Furthermore, these forms continuously go through iterations in my studio and transform from one to the next in a series and from firing to firing. I tend to work in a series of 8–15 pots focused on one set of formal ideas at a time. Each pot in the series will relate to one another based on their volume, buoyancy, line, etc., but have slightly different proportions. As these pots move through the making cycle, firing them offers further information on how they can interact within the environment of the kiln and after seeing their relationships within the kiln, the form may be further tweaked to evoke desirable effects from the soda firing.





Opposite *Thistle Cups*, 5½ (13 cm) in height, white stoneware, fired in a soda kiln to cone 10, 2023.
Top Serving bowl, 14 in. (36 cm) in diameter, white stoneware, fired in a wood kiln to cone 11, 2023.
Above Snifters, 4½ in. (11 cm) in height, white stoneware, fired in a soda kiln to cone 10, 2023.

“ The more I know, the more I know I don’t know, creating further curiosity and appreciation.”



Above Tray, 23 in. (58 cm) in length, white stoneware, fired in a wood kiln to cone 11, 2023. **Left** Sling, 7½ in. (19 cm) in height, white stoneware, fired in a wood kiln to cone 11, 2023. **Right** Jug, 14 in. (36 cm) in height, white stoneware, fired in a wood kiln to cone 11, 2023.

Eds: What do you think is the role of a maker within our current culture and how do you think you contribute to it?

CB: In my eyes, the role of the maker is to make and educate. Of course, the work needs to be made thoughtfully and with a high level of craftsmanship. The work should be able to speak for itself, convey the ideas of the maker, and hold its place in someone's life. For the maker to make though, there needs to be others that can appreciate the work. Through making meaningful connections with others, makers are able to share their craft, informing others about both the extraordinary amount of work that goes into something like making pottery, and also the deeper meaning that using handmade pottery and handicrafts every day can bring to one's life.

As a graduate student, I have been so very lucky to have the opportunity to teach beginner wheel-throwing classes to undergraduate students. There are many important things I hope to convey through my instruction, including the making and craftsmanship, technical aspects, history, appreciation, and the daily

use of pottery. One of the projects I have recently introduced into my curriculum is "Diaries of a Cup" in which students can either borrow a cup of their choice from my collection or purchase one from a local or online gallery or maker. Students are required to use the cups on a day-to-day basis, and then write about them, sharing the technical details through online class forums and personal experiences through individual, open-ended writing prompts. We also bring the cups to class, share the experience each student is having with others, and discuss the cups formally. I have found that this project evolves for each student. I received a lot of unsure responses at the beginning of the project, but toward the end, the cups became a vital part of their daily lives. This project isn't to just teach students to use pottery but also to appreciate the small details of life and how bringing thoughtful objects into one's life can enhance ordinary experiences.

To learn more, visit www.beckpots.com.

Creating Stemware by Casey Beck

Begin with $\frac{1}{2}$ –1 pound (0.2–0.5 kg) of clay, center and open, leaving about $\frac{1}{4}$ – $\frac{1}{2}$ inch (6–13 mm) for the base (1). Pull the walls up with the intent of getting them as thin as possible. The more weight that the containing part (bowl) of the cup has, the more likely the stem will bend in the firing. With a rib, shape the side of the bowl. For this form, I am shaping the side to be flat and tapered in toward the top. Each series of stemware I make requires a different shape, so others may be formed to have a belly or to taper down toward the foot. The surface is smoothed with a rib to compress the clay. Once finished, take the bowl section off the wheel to begin drying.

While the bowl portion of the cup is drying, you will start work on the stem. For the stem, you will need about $\frac{1}{4}$ – $\frac{1}{2}$ pound (0.1–0.2 kg) of clay. Center this clay low and open all the way

down to the wheel head. Leave the opening about 1 inch (2.5 cm) in diameter all the way to the wheel head (2). Start pulling the wall inward and upward, leaving the base thick, and the stem narrow, much like throwing a spout, but thicker. Leave the wall of the stem about a quarter of an inch thick for support. As the stem is pulled upward, the top may get uneven, so cut off the very top with a needle tool if this happens (3). Gently support the stem with one hand while compressing the very top of the stem downward to flare it out. This will create a larger connection point when combining the bowl portion and stem. Gently float the stem off of the wheel head and put it aside to dry (4).

I typically work in a series, throwing 10–15 cups following the same formal considerations. Once the bowl sections and stems are leather hard, clean up the bottom of the cup. At this point, you do not trim it yet, as the clay needs to remain thicker to support the



1 Pull up the wall of the bowl section of the cup with the intent of getting it as thin as possible. 2 For the stem, center low and open the clay all the way down to the wheel head. Leave the opening about a inch (2.5 cm) in diameter. 3 Cut off the very top of the stem with a needle tool if it becomes uneven. 4 After shaping, gently float the stem off of the wheel head and set aside to dry.

application of the stem. Score the middle of the underside where the stem will be applied. Wet the scoring marks, using just enough water to make slip, but not saturate the clay.

Take a bit of soft clay and pinch it onto the middle of the underside of the bowl. Form this to fit the negative space of the inside of the stem that will be applied (5). Score the side of the stem that will be applied and wet it (6). Then, place the stem on the bowl section and gently center it. Gently smear the stem into the cup (7). Compress the exterior attachment point with your fingertip. Next, compress the interior attachment point with your finger or the handle of a needle tool (8).

Completely wrap the assembled cups in plastic and allow them sit overnight. This will bring the bowl portions, stems, and

attachment points to a more homogeneous state of dryness and help prevent the stem from ripping off while trimming it.

Once the cup is at a hard, leather-hard state, center the cup upside down on the wheel and gently trim the base flat (9). Trim the side of the base to your desired diameter (10).

Trim the stem. Finally, trim the excess clay off the bottom of the bowl section. As an optional step, the foot can be faceted. With the cup on a flat surface, cut into it with a fettling knife (11). Clean up the facets with a rasp (12, 13). Dry the completed cups with plastic gently draped over top. These cups will be lined with a blue celadon glaze and fired to cone 10 in the soda kiln. After firing, the cups are sanded with 200-grit sandpaper to ensure a smooth surface for the user's lip and hand.



5 Form a small piece of clay to fit the negative space of the inside of the stem that will be applied. 6 Score the bit of clay and side of the stem that will be applied and wet it. 7 Gently smear the stem into the bowl section of the vessel. 8 Compress the interior attachment point with a finger or the handle of a needle tool. 9 Trim the side of the base to the desired diameter. 10 Trim the excess clay off the bottom of the bowl portion. 11 With the assembled cup on a flat surface, cut facets into the foot with a fettling knife. 12 Use a rasp to clean up the facets. 13 A grouping of finished greenware stemware.



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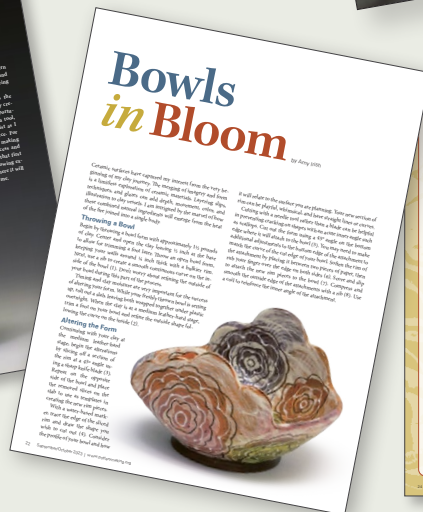
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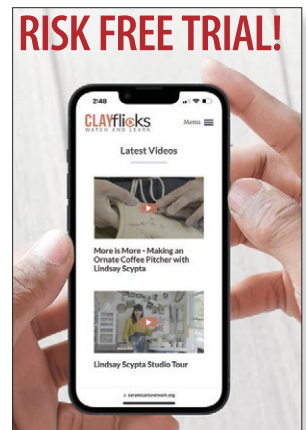
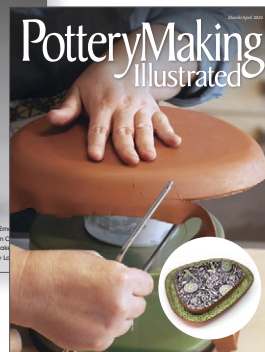
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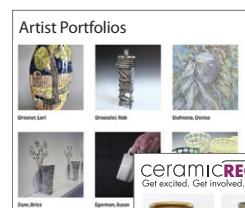
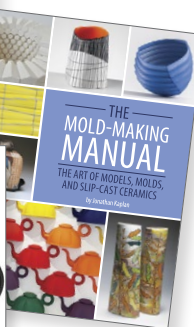
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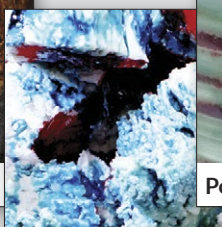
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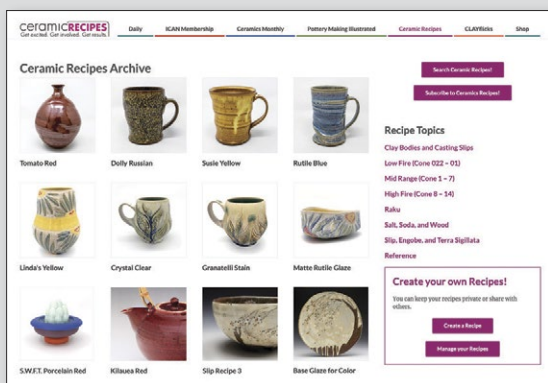


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