

## SPOTLIGHT

# objective clay

Creative communities can be rooted in physical places, but what if you need something more flexible? We're following up with the artists who presented at the Utilitarian Clay VI Symposium at Arrowmont School of Arts and Crafts last fall, which we covered in last December's Spotlight, who have developed just the thing.

**CM: What was the impetus for forming the collective?**

**Lindsay Oesterritter:** Impetus is a great word for describing

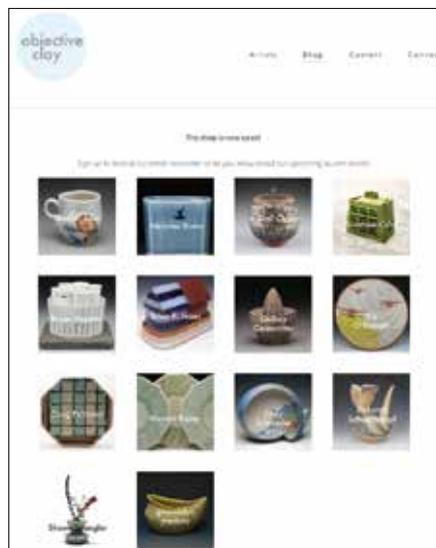
how we, a group of fourteen artists (Jennifer Allen, Nicholas Bivins, A. Blair Clemo, Sunshine Cobb, Bryan Hopkins, Brian R. Jones, Lindsay Oesterritter, Kip O'Krongly, Doug Peltzman, Monica Ripley, Deborah Schwartzkopf, Shawn Spangler, Emily Schroeder Willis, and gwendolyn yoppolo) who knew each other primarily through our work seen in one venue or another, came together during the Utilitarian Clay Symposium VI at Arrowmont School of Arts and Crafts last September. Impetus, being defined as the force or energy with which a body moves, is what I collectively felt during this symposium. As I walked into other presenter's demonstrations, participated on the panel discussions, talked over lunch and then beers in the evening, the ambition and earnestness of the group was quickly evident.

**Jennifer Allen:** Throughout the symposium, a majority of the dialog revolved around the current marketing landscape. As a result, the fourteen of us responded by forming a collective of makers that utilizes the Internet as a means of community building. Since we are all scattered across the country and work somewhat in isolation, we longed for a way to create the sense of togetherness that one finds in regional communities (like 16 hands, the Seagrove Potters, and the St. Croix Valley Potters just to name a few). Using the template of an artist's collective, we started by forming Objective Clay. The website acts as a singular location where our audience can see and buy our work, tour our studios, and read about our interests and our conversations.

For me, being a part of Objective Clay gives me a sense of belonging. It has already had a positive impact on my studio practice, helping to push me creatively to seek new ways to express myself through my work. Surrounded by the talent of thirteen other potters also helps my mission of being an advocate for the handmade. And, it comes as no surprise that working among such productive people sure helps light a fire under your butt.

**A. Blair Clemo:** Like many other presenters and attendees at the conference, I am still at the semi-nomadic stage in my career, hopping from one entry-level opportunity to the next. At this time in my life, working hard to establish an internet market that is not dependent on locale seems like a better move than building a local market and selling studio-direct. There

were many potters at the conference who have established a regional audience and sustainable studio-direct way of selling pots, and based on discussions with some of those potters, I felt like there was something I was missing out on by being so dependent on the internet gallery system. I see a lapse in connection, not knowing who is buying my work and not being able to engage with those people in



The Objective Clay website includes a blog, a shop, and information on the artists.

a personal way. Objective Clay seemed like a way to establish some of that connection even in an online venue, a way of creating our own online platform (online sales gallery, blog, virtual exhibitions, studio visits, and the like) with our own set of goals. Objective Clay was an opportunity to define what an online studio visit would look like; if you stopped by my studio, what would I show you? What kind of conversation would we have? What questions would we ask each other? These are the kinds of things we hope to offer on the website, a personal connection to our pots, studio practice and ideas about clay. Although internet based, it is a venue for marketing our own work in a broad, yet still personal way.

**CM: How is the OC collective structured?**

**JA:** Through a series of conference-call meetings, our group separated into three different committees: administration, website, and marketing/education/outreach. Everyone opted to join the committee they felt they could contribute the most to, with the understanding that

things will evolve and change over time. Like any business, we established a pyramidal structure of checks and balances. We elected co-directors that oversee the entire group, committee managers, project managers for each project in each committee, and so on and so forth. That being said, we also work independently, filling our shops with new work and contributing content twice a year to the blog. We want to make online engagement more meaningful by continually giving our audience fresh content that reflects our current thought processes and studio practices.

**LO:** The models we thought about and discussed included gatherings like gallery hops, art crawls, conferences, symposia, and pottery tours. We are also interested in breaking out of the traditional ceramics-oriented events and working collaboratively with chefs, florists, interior designers, and other fields that parallel our interests as functional object makers.

We are in the very beginning stages of figuring out how to work with one another and how to contribute as a community online. We use online resources like Wiggio, Skype, shipping accounts, email, Instagram, Facebook, MailChimp, and Dropbox to communicate with one another and be visible online. I am thinking of this entire first year as us figuring out how we need to be structured and what is the most efficient way to operate. It is a time to get to know what is important to each team member in the business and as an individual and artist.

**CM: How is it going so far?**

**BC:** The biggest success I see so far is witnessing fourteen individuals

come together, all with unique ideas and visions, and craft something cohesive that adheres to our original mission. Now that the website is launched and the sales system is functioning well, we are beginning to see the next generation of development within the group. We are all collaborating and individually developing content that will be released on the site bi-weekly. This content is unique to each member's voice and provides a good insight into the way each of us thinks about pots, studio life, and contemporary art/craft issues. We have also begun to collaborate together regionally so that we can bring Objective Clay from the virtual to live-and-in-person exhibitions, workshops, and other events.

For more information and to see all of the artists' work, visit <http://objectiveclay.com>.