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Agrarian Impressions

Barney M. Durrence

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AGRARIAN IMPRESSIONS

by

BARNEY DURRENCE

(Under the Direction of Elizabeth Jane Pleak)

ABSTRACT

The images and words assembled in this thesis describe and relate experiences from my past that seem necessary to understanding my current body of ceramic and mixed media sculptures. As the title *Agrarian Impressions* implies the stoneware sculptures are based upon memories from growing up on a self-sufficient farm. In addition to my functional work, my sculptures reference tools and machines used to aid the production and harvest of crops and troughs and animal feeders. Problem solving abilities learned long ago and which sometimes appear as humorous make-do solutions, reflect the confidence farming has given me to take chances. In this thesis, I discuss artistic influences on functional and sculptural pieces, my methodology, and I overview the presentation of works to be viewed in my MFA thesis show, *Agrarian Impressions*.

INDEX WORDS: Sculpture, Stoneware, Ceramic Art, Earthenware Platters.

AGRARIAN IMPRESSIONS

by

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Bachelor of Fine Arts, Georgia Southern University, 2005

Master of Fine Arts, Georgia Southern University, 1996

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Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

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2005

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AGRARIAN IMPRESSIONS

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DEDICATION

Thanks to my parents for all their support in this long journey.

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I would like to thank my committee members, Julie McGuire and Patricia Carter for their guidance throughout my tenure at Georgia Southern University. I especially want to thank Jane Pleak, my committee chair for her timeless dedication to her students. Thanks to Linda Whitt Smith and Angela Crow for all their help.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

My father was a tobacco farmer, and for the most part, he leased tobacco allotments from widow farmers' wives who no longer farmed their land. On these farms he would use the tobacco barns to cook the tobacco. My main job during my childhood years was to deliver the tobacco from the fields to the barns miles away. Each year there would be new barns and new discoveries. The barns were like museums, each with their piles of old, cast-off farm machinery in various states of deterioration. The combines, harvesters, wagons and other machines lay wasting under fallen shelters, slowly being reclaimed by natural processes. As a kid, I witnessed the relics of a time when farm work was done by hand or by horse drawn plows. I am moved by these objects, implements, and relics because of the blood, sweat, and tears they represent, and the memories they contained for me. These experiences and memories have informed and inspired my sculptures. I grew up using the agricultural machinery that I reference in my work. Some of my sculptures are about death and memories, and the tools and possessions my father left behind. He left few personal things, making the tools and farm items more valuable to me. In making the sculptures, I'm trying to translate these memories into personal representations that keep my father and the farm with me, somehow cataloging these experiences. In addition, the farm environment allowed me to develop ways of thinking that I bring to ceramics. In my sculptures, make-do solutions, and other problem solving abilities learned long ago (which sometimes appear humorous), reflect the confidence farming has given me to take chances.

Growing up on a farm is like experiencing a microcosm of the whole earth. The whole farm experience played an invaluable role in my creative development as a young man. Exploring the water filled drainage ditches teeming with crayfish, snakes, fish, and clay, hiking miles of trails through pine forest with animals, abandoned shacks to explore, and abandoned railroad tracks, I learned how to appreciate natural beauty. It was here I used to dig white clay, forming it into animals and letting it dry in the sun on the pond's dam. The farmland contains clay, sand, rocks, and thousands of trace elements that still motivate me to experiment. The streams and ponds contain water, plants, animals, and fish that inspire and inform my subject matter. The cultivation of land and planting of crops that occur in a cyclical rhythm fuels my desire to find that kind of repetitious centeredness in my daily routines.

My work is a loose interpretation of visual memories of growing up on a farm when the family was important for team survival nearing the end of the industrial revolution and beginning the technological age. In my functional work, I create shapes that are reminiscent of turn-of-the-century pottery. My sculptures are a loose abstract interpretation of implements and agricultural machinery that refers to the gathering and harvesting of crops and the preservation of food, from canning processes to storage. I am also drawn to the Southern vernacular of clay especially that of Georgia, South Carolina and North Carolina. Potters like "Dave the Slave" and other Afro-Carolinians play an important role in the development of my forms and glaze choices. My sculptures reference the farm landscapes, barns, silos and other buildings. In addition to my own interest in the outdoors, the writings of William Bartram, St. John Crevcour, Wendell Berry and Janise Ray also inspire my work.

CHAPTER 2

Historical Influences on Functional Works

In considering what has influenced me to create my functional art I realize that many of my forms have direct influences. The following four artists have particularly been of great help and have inspired me in my pursuit of making functional pots: “Dave the Slave,” Mark Hewitt, Warren Mackensie, and George Ohr. Each of these artists has contributed to my functional pottery. Dave the Slave and Mark Hewitt are influential in informing the kinds of shapes, surfaces, and glazes that I want to contribute to the southern tradition, particularly in the kinds of large storage vessels for food and other commodities in farming tradition. Warren Mackenzie also influences my sense of the relationship between a pot’s form and its function. Finally, George Ohr suggests directions for altering forms, and ways of connecting sculptural and functional ceramics. I want the functional pots I make to have a feel of the southern tradition, function well, and have a lively color and glaze surface. I try to achieve balance in the pots I create, drawing on the southern folk pottery tradition of solid looking forms but also altering those shapes in ways that reflect other pottery traditions, particularly when finishing the bases of pots.

In the Southern throwing tradition, the slave potter from Edgeville, South Carolina simply named Dave or “Dave the Slave” is an important and intriguing contributor. I admire the large functional vessels, jars, and churns that he created on the wheel for their monumental size and graceful forms. The large vessels were made to store food, seed, and other commodities which particularly interest me because my work

references these kinds of containers. His pots are particularly important in historical terms because of the time and place they represent in pottery production in colonial South Carolina and Georgia. His pots are not only easily attributed to him because of their surfaces but also because of the poetic verses he inscribed on them. He had a distinct style as evidenced in the shapes of the rims, necks, spouts, and handles of his pots. The fact that he signed a lot of his work, which was not common practice at the time, shows that he took great pride in his work. It was unusual for a master to allow a slave to sign and write on his work, and this exception offers us the opportunity to know more about one slave's artistic interpretation. The glazed surfaces of his pots offer a rare look into the history of glaze chemistry in the early 18th century Georgian and South Carolinian pottery traditions. His work with large pieces and the forms he used are inspirational to several pieces in the show. I try to echo the agrarian history of storage in clay vessels, his choices of glaze colors, and I admire the ways that he took production pottery demands yet kept his artistic presence.

One can see the influences of Dave the Slave and other Southern traditions in the contemporary work of Mark Hewitt whose work in scale and quantity is similar in size to the earlier Southern potters. He was born into the industrial ceramic tradition, and is the grandson of the managing director of Spode China, Ltd and the son of the sales director. Hewitt's own training, however, is in the tradition of folk ceramics. He studied with well revered master potter Michael Cardew in Cornwall, England, and in the folk art centers of Japan and South Korea, places infamous for their ceramic traditions and production methods. Hewitt's vessels are often made of local Piedmont clays and finished in such

colors as blue-black manganese, red iron oxide, golden salt, and alkaline glaze. He has influenced my ideas, forms and surfaces.

Mark Hewitt is an aesthetic and technical master potter. His large-scale planters and vessels have received international acclaim. Difficult to build, using a manual wheel, and more difficult to fire in a wood-fired groundhog kiln, Hewitt's monumental sized pots often referred to as "bravura pots" have been featured in *Smithsonian* magazine and are included in many museum collections across the Eastern United States. Some of his large scale works have influenced my size decisions. His interest in Southern forms such as grave markers and wig stands, follow along the same lines as my interest in folk potters of the South. With these forms of the Southern vernacular Hewitt is not just replicating pieces of ceramic history but is reinterpreting them in his own unique way. By placing small pieces of broken glass in his clay so that when fired it leaves contrasting streaks of colors on the pots. In my own work I have drawn on his salt glazes and use of glass, particularly on face jugs and platters.

While both Mark Hewitt and Dave the Slave participated in the development of Southern functional pottery traditions, Warren Mackenzie's functional pottery reflects different regional influences. Warren Mackenzie is one of America's greatest living potters. He has spent his life extending a craft tradition that draws inspiration from the influential potter Bernard Leach in Great Britain, the Mingei movement of postwar Japan, and traditional American craft. Mackenzie is a traditionalist who makes earthy pots with no frills. His philosophy was similar to Bernard Leach's in that they created pots that both functioned well and paid strict attention to form. They both valued specific qualities about pots and agreed on which those qualities made them good pots. The attention was

given to weight, the handle, the spout, etc, with the belief that form should work closely in tandem with function. Mackenzie's pots are solid and sturdy, giving them a masculine quality that I like. His use of specific types of glazes such as shinos, celadons, and saturated iron glazes makes up a rich, earthy color palette that is similar to mine. Mackenzie often says, "Let the pots speak." He also says: "One of the things which distinguish handmade pots from mass produced pots is the communication between the potter and the user," and suggests "potters statements are made through their hands (Cooper 253)." In functional pottery, performance, as well as appearance shapes aesthetic values.

In addition to value of communication with the user, Mackenzie focused on the Mingei tradition. Mingei is the traditional handmade crafts of Japan that Shoji Hamada and Leach used to form their ideas of solid, well proportioned, enriched ware for the masses. The Mingei style focused on function first and foremost. In their work as artists they wanted to remain anonymous craftsmen, not seeking to create artistic identities that would raise the price of the pottery. While in the end, they couldn't afford their philosophy of providing good, simple, forms for the common people, their shapes and forms remain influential in the field.

In my functional pottery, I share values with Mackenzie and Hewitt, particularly in the masculine look of their pots, and their emphasis on solid, well proportioned ware. I use a lot of my pots at home, and I have personal affinity towards them. Sometimes, I can still remember how I made them on the wheel, why I wanted to decorate them with certain glazes. When I drink from cups I've made, I even feel it tastes better than drinking from someone else's cup.

While Dave the Slave, Hewitt, and Mackenzie emphasize functional ware, and contribute to my decisions about size, glazes, and form, George Ohr dubbed the “mad potter from Biloxi” influences my understanding of altered forms and also has been an influence in my larger sculptural pieces. This potter lived his entire life in Louisiana, but managed to travel to the Worlds Fair and exhibit his pots gaining world wide attention. His style came from his decision to travel around the country working for different potters and gathering knowledge and techniques that he then used to create his own pottery. He used a boat to haul clay he dug from a specific place in the river and brought it forty miles back to his studio. His resourcefulness and determination suggest a way of life similar to that of a farmer and an artist; this is a model I try to follow in my own life. Near the end of his career he decided to no longer sell his pots because he thought that people wouldn’t pay him what they were worth. He just packed them away. Years later in the 1960’s they were discovered in an old garage and he finally started getting the recognition he always wanted during his lifetime. He is increasingly considered an innovator in the ceramic arts for his style and explorations into glaze chemistry and distorted forms that precede modern art. Towards the end of his career, he quit using glazes altogether in order emphasize the form. I have used this concept in several pieces. He was able to push functional work into abstract forms well before more contemporary ceramicist Peter Volkous and Jim Leedy. In my work it’s a combination of these influences that contribute to the vessels in this show.

CHAPTER 3

Historical Influences in Sculptural Works

Five major artists have influenced my sculptural decisions: Bernard Palissy, Constantine Brancusi, Henry Moore, Peter Voulkos, and Jim Leady. Bernard Palissy contributes glaze, surfaces, and notes on how he constructed platters. Brancusi and Moore are major influences to the field of modern sculpture, and I have tried to bring simplicity, elegance, and spatial harmony to my work, drawing on their strategies and influences. Brancusi's stacked pieces, together with Voulkos's stacks influence many of my own stacked sculptures. In addition, Voulkos has suggested ways of working that incorporate a feeling of freedom and spontaneity, and Leady has shaped my ways of thinking about memory, particularly in his platters. Through the aged surfaces and farm machinery my sculptures are based on, I want my work to speak about the memory, experiences, and the disappearance of a certain kind of farm lifestyle. I want viewers to recognize the ways in which these forms look like abstracted farm machinery and other relics of the past, both evoking these images that are familiar to people who have lived these kinds of lives, at the same time that I explore the freedom and spontaneity of abstract sculpture.

Of the five artists that influence my sculptures, Bernard Palissy's (1509-1590) work with glazes has influenced my own decisions in terms of surfaces. Palissy was a writer, architect, chemist, and devoted artist. He is the most famous figure in French ceramic history for his period. He had a close relationship with nature and used extensive mold making techniques to cast dead lizards, snakes and plants and then attached them to

plates, ewers and basins made of earthenware. He then glazed them using runny lead glazes to further create a watery look. These pieces became known as “rustique figurlines” and are significant to my work because I draw inspiration from the color combinations of glazes he used. For example, *Delco* (figure 4, page 47) employs earthy muted tones in the background together with glass melted into the recessed parts to give a more brilliant contrast in color, echoing the rustic effects that Palissy achieved. In addition, his notes, illustrations, and working methods have helped with construction techniques. One of the challenges in creating platters comes in the difficulties of drying, and his strategies helped me to better problem solve the issues I encountered.

Palissy is an early influence on my notions of glaze and construction, and my work is equally influenced by Constantine Brancusi whose simplified abstracted forms speak volumes about the physical truths of his materials. As a result of his many successful sculptures, his forms illustrate principles of design, of scale and relation. His pieces sometimes have repetitious forms that are stacked, and in those vertical pieces, I’ve drawn inspiration for my stacked work. His stacked pieces suggest what is possible in the construction of larger ceramic sculptures. Brancusi is highly influential, in part, because he is able to achieve a “visual elegance and sensitive use of materials, combining the directness of peasant carving with the sophistication of the Parisian avant-garde” (<http://www.brancusi.com/bio.html>). That combination is particularly successful in his piece *Bird in Space*. The sophisticated economy of form works because he uses the abstracted feather shape to suggest a bird in flight. When I make my sculpture I always pay attention to proportion, simplicity, and elegance.

In addition to Brancusi's influences, Henry Moore offers a more recent influence. Brancusi was influential in creating modern art, and is considered more of a precursor, whereas Henry Moore's work is more of a modern master's contribution. He contributes to modernism the abstracted human figures that are impressive, not only because they are large in scale, but also because of the organic quality of curves and lines. They also manage to have sophisticated kind of gracefulness. According to art critic Bach, "the use of tunnels and holes in his sculptures became something of a trademark for the artist during his lifetime (Bach, 81). The use of holes, this use of negative and positive space opens up the forms so that despite their weight and bulk, they come across as flowing. Moore contributes two additional ideas that my work benefits from, "truth to materials", and revealing the "full potential of the sculptural form." The materials matters because the clay sculptures are best in clay. My work has unglazed parts so that the audience knows that the sculpture is made from clay and so that it maintains the intrinsic qualities of the properties of clay. In addition, I don't want to do stuff with clay that isn't feasible with clay. Clay works for certain kinds of art, but it's not necessarily the best medium for other art. For the work that I'm creating, the farm specific objects, clay works the best because of its relation to the earth. Its earthiness represents the kinds of message I'm trying to suggest, the feelings I'm trying to evoke. I want the audience to see, in these objects, something of the way memory works, and clay records shapes and impressions of shapes because of its malleability and then frozen in time through the firing process, creating a permanent record, but a record that evokes impermanence.

In addition to the contributions Henry Moore makes in terms of size, in terms of lines, and in terms of his use of positive and negative space, Peter Voulkos and Jim

Leedy both bring abstract structures into the field of ceramic art. They allowed people to express themselves abstractly in clay. Before their presence, work in clay was mostly devoted to functional pottery. With their contributions, clay artists became more able to participate in conversations about art for art's sake, which advocates formal elements over function.

After my 30 hour review I began working in a larger scale. It was then I began to look at the works of the abstract expressionist painters and sculptures from the early 60's. The Volkous Leedy Museum in Kansas City houses many of their sculptures, and having seen that collection was a significant inspiration on my work. Seeing Voulkos's sculptures changed the way I think about art because the scale allows his carved and torn gestures to have a tremendous power. The information contained in his clay stacks and ice bucket sculptures influenced my artistic direction. The apparent freedom and spontaneity that he worked with opened doors for me, it's what I strive for in my own art. Like the Abstract Expressionist painters William DeKooning and Jackson Pollock, the Abstract Expressionist ceramic artists, such as Voulkos, rejected the importance of utility in their work in favor of greater expressive qualities. Peter Voulkos was a leader in this new movement in ceramics. Clay was a perfect vehicle for this method. His process involved using his hands or whole body squeezing, slashing, tearing, slabbing and throwing clay. The key word to describe this method is process. Art Critic Hugh Merrill describes:

“what to the uninformed viewer is a shapeless lump of accidents, a useless pot full of holes, to an audience, familiar with abstract clay works, “the piece is a graphic record of the physical forces that shaped the work, a sense of spontaneity and of time and the distinct differences between a cut and a torn edge (Cooper,235).

Voukos credits jazz, Abstract Expressionism, Zen philosophy, his teaching stint at Black Mountain College, Picasso and other influences as the forces that fueled his innovated work in clay (Silva and Tsjimoto, 121). His innovations let him concentrate on the aesthetic potential of his forms. His forms were larger in scale, initially the surfaces were crude, throwing rings were scraped and forms were assembled. His *El Paso Collection* features twelve bronzes that illustrate these kinds of expressive forms. “The chimney-topped vessels recall a cross between a classical jar and firing kiln. Each piece has the look of a once sleek vessel that has shattered and been put together again (Cooper, 356).”

I liked his worked because of the apparent energy that happens from the scale. His method of construction was bold. Peter Voukos was a world renowned ceramicist who has been acclaimed as the father of abstract expressionism in sculpture. In my own work, I use his method as a means to access memory.

Along with Peter Voukos, Jim Leedy helped forge the style of art in the 20th century. Leedy made art outside the boundaries. His representation and abstraction was accomplished in clay paintings, prints, assemblage and installations. During his life he has been an admired teacher at the Kansas City Art Institute for over thirty years, with a background in Asian Art history. Art critic Hugh Merrill writes about his work:

“he (Leedy) created a hybrid of abstract expressionism and oriental pottery which is central to his best works in clay. Chinese tripod bronzes and Japanese folk pottery were interpreted with an informal American twist that established him as an early leader in the American clay revolution. Never satisfied he never stopped taking chances to break new ground in processes, materials and subject matter that is unique to his times and personal life (Cooper,234).”

Jim Leedy's platters I admired for their strong use of color and distorted form. The way his platters protrude from the wall and their substantial in size and weight give them an impressive presence. Looking at his platters that are constructed with torn, ripped and punctured slabs results in negative and positive spaces that are important contributors to the overall intrigue of this artwork.

His vessels many times appear as abstracted human bodies that I respond to emotionally. As Leedy states, "Seeing is an expression of memory, it is experience and knowledge that individualize perception. The memory allows past information to interact and distort the present. New thoughts are assimilated by existing patterns of seeing (Kangas, 75). In ceramic works of Jim Leedy the past and the present are inseparably combined to create new visual worlds. His work illustrates the chance and discovery attitudes I'm seeking to explore in my art.

CHAPTER 4

Methodology

The past few years my studies in ceramics have included functional ware, sculpture, glaze calculation, and kiln building. In this chapter I will discuss the technical research and how it supports my creative involvement with ceramics.

Functional Works

Clay Body Decisions:

I create functional pots using a buff colored stoneware body. The clay body is very important in the kind of pots I'm making and the tradition I working within. Jugs, bottles, and vases wouldn't have the right aesthetic if I worked with a more refined body like porcelain. I want to use a clay body that works well with the forms and resembles the clay bodies used by folk potters in the South. Characteristically these clay bodies were more open, contained more particle sizes and impurities, and were rougher and crude. Each potter's stoneware body was unique to the kinds of clays that were available to them. Most used clay from their own property or very nearby. Pots made of these local clays possess distinctive qualities and integrity that Michael Cardew sums up perfectly:

“A good Potter cannot treat raw materials merely as a means of production; he treats them as they deserve to be treated, with love. He cannot make things as mere utensils; he makes them as they have a right to be as things with a life of their own. When a potter not only knows his job but delights in it, when technique and inspiration become identified, the glow of life will begin to appear in his pots. Nobody can say in rational terms exactly what this glowing consists of, or how the inanimate can be capable of transmitting life from the maker to the user, but it is a fact of

common experience (if not describable in terms of common sense). This aspect of pottery is not always discernible to first casual inspection; but provided it is in daily use it will gradually become visible, just as good character comes to be appreciated only through continued acquaintance. Its presence will fill the gaps between sips of tea or coffee at those moments when the mind, not yet focused on activity, is still in an open and receptive state; and will minister to the background of consciousness with a kind of friendly warmth, even perhaps on some occasion with a kind of consolation” (Pioneer Pottery, 250).

By mixing my own clay and varying the grog particle sizes, using iron rich clays, and adding more fire clay, I am able to get a suitable body acceptable to the ones I admire.

Greenware manipulation/firing:

My pots are thrown and handles are pulled by hand and applied, once they have time to dry to the leather hard stage. At this time I sometimes carve, facet, or decorate them using the slip trailing method. I allow pots to dry to the bone dry stage before I bisque fire them to cone 08 (1751°F) in an electric kiln, which removes all the chemical water from the clay. The bisque process allows the pots to be handled easier because they are no longer as fragile and have more strength, though the bisque pots remain porous which facilitates absorption of the glazes.

Glazes:

Most of my glaze color decisions are made based on the pot’s form. I use various methods of applying glazes sometimes, dipping, pouring, or brushing. Glazed wares are then fired to cone 10 in a natural gas fired salt kiln or natural gas Alpine updraft kiln. For pots in the salt kiln, I usually leave the outside unglazed and use a satin glaze on the insides.

Salt Firing:

In a salt firing, small balls of wadding (made of equal parts EPK and alumina hydrate) are attached to the bottom of wares to separate them from the shelves. Once the salt is introduced into the kiln the vapors will coat everything with a clear glaze, including the shelves, posts, and pots. Placement in the kiln is important because all kilns have hot spots and cold spots. While chance is always involved in the firing of a salt kiln, potters try to place pots in the best spots for the best chance of a good outcome. Salt is introduced into the kiln at about cone 9 (2340 °F) using an angle iron to place it directly into the spy holes. The sodium volatilizes, the draft then disperses the sodium throughout the kiln glazing everything in its path. Test rings are used to gauge the amount of salt glaze that is getting on the pots. Once the test rings indicate the desired results the kiln is turned off and allowed to cool for thirty six hours. Once the inside temperature has reached 451°F or lower the kiln can be opened and the pots removed.

Platters

Building Considerations:

I work mainly throwing on the wheel, but my large platters are sometimes thrown and sometimes they are handbuilt from slabs. My clay body for the platter is a stoneware clay body that contains at least twenty percent grog to prevent cracking and excessive shrinkage. I like to vary the size of grog used, about half fine grog and half coarse grog. In addition nylon fibers are added to the clay to add strength and prevent further cracking. Using a large slab roller, I first roll out a 2 inch thick slab about twenty two inches in diameter on a larger piece of canvas. The edges of the canvas can then be used to manipulate and carry the slab. The slab is then placed on a sturdy table and rolled in one

direction and then in the opposite direction with a large rolling pin to about one and half inches thick. The slab is then held about a foot above and dropped into a large steel disc plow that measures about 32 inches across. This disc I use as a mold to create the concave platter shape. Once the clay has stiffened a little I'll then, with help from another person, I flip the platter out onto a foam covered bat to lessen the stress and cushion it from the excess weight of the clay. While the platter is inverted, I attach a thrown ring of clay to the back that will serve as a foot and provides a support used as a hanging edge.

Manipulation of platters:

It is important that the slab be thick, so that I can push the found objects forcefully into the surface leaving a deep imprint. I enjoy this process of manipulating the pieces while paying close attention to design and composition. I like to collect objects from the same place like fragments found in the dirt road in front of my house, or from the sheds and barns on different farmsteads. By collecting and imprinting in this way, I feel I'm making a record of a certain memories, places, and keepsakes that can be preserved in stone.

Glaze considerations and Firing Processes:

While the clay is still moist I start the glazing process by sprinkling dry clay pieces, sand, and dry clear glazes to create a foundation on which to build additional layers on. Next, I impress these into the clay using a brayer or the palms of my hand so that they make good contact with the clay and stay in place.

After these steps the platter is bisque fired to cone 06. I layer more glazes and broken glass on the platters in the recessed shapes so that when it melts it is contained to

that one area. The platters are then glaze fired to cone 04 (2120 ° F) to assure that the glass melts completely and is soaked at this temperature to anneal the glass. Proper cool down is important to prevent shattering of the glass. After the maximum temperature is reached and the soak is completed I seal the spy holes with plugs to prevent the cool down from happening to fast. Once the kiln has cooled completely and the platter is removed and evaluated for color and texture, they are sometimes re-fired to add additional color and texture. The platters are fired in an electric kiln most often but sometimes I salt-fire them in a gas kiln to achieve a warmer more complex appearance. The firing process may take days or months because I need to look at the platter and live with it to see if it reveals itself and whether I feel it communicates its intended purpose.

Stacked Sculptures

Building Tall Structures:

Tall stacked sculptures are assembled from elements that are hand built using the coil method and wheel thrown cylinders that are usually stacked. The slip and score technique is used with a slip made from the same clay body to assure the clay melds together at the seams and stays together during the firing. To this core or base I sometimes attach extruded pieces and torn and broken sections of clay. I again use a clay body that contains a lot of grog in order to lessen the shrinkage and cracking during the drying and firing process. I also like the rougher more rugged look it gets from using extra grog.

Additional Building Considerations:

Special consideration is given to the stacked pieces, first I check to make sure how tall the kiln will allow me to build vertically, some pieces like *store trash* are made

and fired in sections because of these limitations. The sections are then thrown about half inch thick for aesthetic reasons and to allow for carved surfacing and for added strength. I then allow the thrown cylinder usually 24 hour to stiffen to the leather hard stage before beginning to build any further. Next I start to work randomly manipulating and carving the surfaces. Often I use extruded clay parts and attach them by slip and scoring them to the base. Drying here also takes special care to prevent cracking. Pieces are usually covered with a layer of moist towels and then plastic to promote slow and even drying. This method I have found works for me because the attachment where I have slipped and scored has ample time to dry evenly and meld together. The piece is then bisque fired before any glazes are applied.

Glazing Considerations:

Sometimes I use engobes and glazes on the green ware sculptures before they are bisqued and fired. I also like to use broken glass pieces on shoulders and on top of handles and rims. This creates glass runs or streaks of contrasting color a method sometimes used by early potters in the South. Holes and openings are placed, punctured and torn to add interest in a haphazardly way to suggest the shape or feeling of the piece. The sculptures are fired to cone 10 (2380° F) in a cross draft salt/soda kiln.

My glazes choices are made to try and communicate and support the idea of the passage of time and how it affects the surface of objects. The different sections are then sometimes fired in different kilns using different methods and glazing techniques to achieve various patinas and overall surface color and added texture. Building the stacks in one piece is sometimes convenient but I like the ones built in sections too, because it

allows them to be reassembled in different ways to make new or different pieces like building blocks.

Post-firing Manipulations:

After the pieces are removed from the kiln, additions or found objects are sometimes added. These relate to the meanings or concept of the pieces and are attached using various methods. They are sometimes wired to the sculpture in previously placed strategic holes. Copper or rusted fence wire, barbed wire, and ropes are sometimes used to suggest the materials a farm is held together with. These are glued using an industrial strength construction adhesive. At this point the sculptures are complete.

CHAPTER 5

Presentation of Works by the Artist

My work can be divided into five subcategories: platters, the trough series, stacks, the trio of slabs, and functional pots. All contribute to my overall intent of speaking to concepts about farm and memory.

Functional Pots

I started throwing on the wheel ten years ago. Initially, my pots were inspired by Ohr, Hewitt, and Mackenzie. At this point, my pots have evolved into a style that is more my own. The rhythm of throwing on a wheel seems to suit me. I like to think that some people were instinctively meant to work with their hands and that I am one of those that is happier doing this kind of work. I like something about the daily routine that seems to fit with farming. I consider throwing on the wheel and pulling handles like playing the violin; it takes lots of practice before you gain some level of mastery. During my time spent in graduate school my forms and handles have progressively improved.

For making the best use of my time I tend to make things in series, like twenty cups, ten jugs, and 30 bowls. Serving pieces, casseroles, baking dishes I also make in this manner. I have used a lot of traditional folk forms that I have researched from the web, books, and magazines. I have gathered ideas for face jugs, flower frogs, and Rebecca jugs, to name a few. The Mint Museum in Charlotte, North Carolina, has also informed my pottery decisions because of the great quantities of different regional styles of Southern pottery I've observed in their permanent collection. I have also collected

some of these forms and find the first hand experience invaluable in terms of handling, judging weight, and evaluating closely the clay bodies and glazes of the individual pieces. Of the various functional pieces that I routinely create, I've chosen to include my jugs, storage jars, and vases which best illustrate the link between my work and the traditions of folk pottery from the Southern United States.

Jugs:

Whether decorated as face pots or just plain functional, jugs are my favorite forms to throw. I find them the most challenging to form on the wheel because of the severe collaring at the top of the form, which is necessary to make the shoulder and neck. Before the advent of glassware and tin enamel ware, jugs were a necessary staple for food storage. The jug was prevalent in the South and was made by many of the Jugstown potters because it was used for many purposes: storing molasses, moonshine, and cider vinegar. My jugs are similar in form to jugs made in the Edgefield District of South Carolina in the early eighteenth century. Their bodies are slightly stout in the middle and is somewhat tapered down to the foot. Their neck is formed with double rings that are similar to those made by Dave the Slave. With the advent of glass jars, tin enamel wares, and cheaper mass-produced pottery from the North, the Southern jug was all but dead. By choosing to make this form, I feel that I'm a part of continuing this tradition.

Historically, face jugs are exclusive to the South and were first made by Afro-Carolinians slave potters. The reasons for their purposes are many. Some scholars have suggested that they were meant to store poisons, and the ugly faces were to warn children of their contents. Because many broken face jugs have been found on African American graves, scholars also believe that the jugs were used to break the chain of death by

breaking them on the graves of recently deceased family members. The superstitious stories and mystery surrounding these early forms make them all the more fascinating to me. *Untitled Face Jug* (figure 1, page, 41) is salt fired giving it a glossy overall sheen and a characteristically orange peel-like surface texture. Its various hues of brown color are also typical of salt fired stoneware at cone 10 temperatures. A heavy body reduction around cone 08 for 45 minutes contributed to bringing out these rich brown colors, colors that are produced by the impurities in the clay.

Vases:

The vases I make reflect more of an Asian influence in their forms, and some folk pottery influences in the manipulations. The *Iris vase series* (figure 2, page, 42) are more like folk pottery in the way in which the irises are formed or rolled by hand and then appliquéd to the pot in a traditional folk method. The copper blue glaze used on these vases breaks green where applied thinly, around edges of stems and petals, providing needed contrast and perception of depth. These kinds of vase and appliqué techniques were generally employed more by women than men in the folk tradition of the South. There is a parallel in this method between the use of scraps in quilting and the use of scraps of clay. I have a keen interest in quilting and the quilt making process, and I have investigated, collected and admired quilts. In creating these vases that use techniques that echo the quilt making process, I try to bring something of the memories of quilts to this form.

Storage Jars:

This type of vessel interests me because they have been used for thousands of years to store food and beverages. They provide a link to civilizations from the past and tell us

valuable information about the contents and use of these jars. Since ancient times, they have been so important to the survival of mankind, protecting and preserving food from insects and rodents. In the American South they also were important in the growth and colonization of the country. People in the rural areas depended heavily on a good supply of sturdy crockery to provide for the storage needs of food and beverages. Although I grew up well after the electrification of rural Georgia, I still have memories of large stoneware jars being used for, soaking cucumbers in lime for pickles, fermenting grapes for wine, and churning cream for butter. I find making storage jars brings these memories back and keeps them alive. *Jars* (figures 3, 4, 5, pages, 44, 45,46) are salt fired and have blue glass drips running down from handles. The handles are typical to those of Georgia crocks of this type made in the 1800's, with one handle forming a loop on one side and the opposing handle being more of a strap type. This handle arrangement made it easier and more efficient to carry the jar when it was full. This feature is unique to Georgia pottery and is often used as an identification mark to identify earlier unsigned pottery.

Jugs, jars, and vases are only a few of the hundreds of forms produced by early folk potteries. They are my favorite forms to create, and they provide me with a real sense of connectedness to the traditions of my southern heritage. My intentions are to share this connectedness with my viewers and fingerprint the forms adding my imprint to this tradition as it evolves.

Platters

The platter series in general is a kind of abstract narrative that records certain times, places, and experiences in my life. Individually they represent different places and

serve to preserve these specific environments. Clay is the perfect medium to faithfully record impressions of objects. The platters are meant to be displayed by hanging on the wall.

Delco (Figure 7, page, 47) represents the shed behind my home and contains the imprints and fragments of glass that were collected from that location. The shed served many purposes: it was a smoke house, a food storage house, and contained a large cast iron boiler used in making sugar cane syrup. The muted colors I used were chosen to represent the past and the romantic idea that the work of gathering, preparing, and preserving food is now just memories of a past life. Glaze is used here like a painter would use paint and the platter is my canvas. Impressions of tools and cogs combined with organic materials such as vines and plant stems have been used to compose my composition.

Drought (Figure 8, page 48) is a platter that is more expressionistic in nature, representing the earth and the eroded fields that form similar landscapes as a result of floods and burst pond dams. The orange overall color of the platter mimics the kind of red clay found in abundance locally in South Georgia, a type of red clay that I grew up playing with as a child. The broken pieces of pottery arranged randomly in the floor of the platter are metaphorically symbolic of the broken spirit, stresses, and heartaches that one suffers when a drought seems never ending and catastrophic. This platter serves to remind me of the temporary nature of life on a farm and the ever-changing landscape that is in constant flux and the challenges that result.

Trough Series

The trough series was inspired by the numerous troughs and feeders I observed recently that lay decomposing, in a large barn that once housed mules, cows, and other animals. The forms represent the reliance and relationships that existed between animals and people in an agrarian environment in the first half of the twentieth century. Farm families depended religiously on these animals to plow their fields, and to provide milk and food for them. The fissured interiors of these forms are designed to create a more visually interesting focal point for viewers. My intent here was to have the scummy leftover feed expressed in a kind of perpetual state, with a bronze glaze that would forever preserve the unpleasant experience of having cleaned these troughs daily. The trough series is a memoriam to the animals and serves as a kind of reliquary (Figure 13, page 50).

Stacks

Grinder (figure 14, page, 51) represents a sugar cane grinder that is in my backyard. It was not my intention that the sculpture be recognized as a cane grinder but merely takes its inspiration from this machine. Several years ago Kirk Varnadoe, then director of the Museum of Modern Art, offered similar support when he advised a graduating class at Stanford to:

"abandon the security of tradition ... Art doesn't offer predictable messages, but is most powerful when it orchestrates perplexity, fails to confirm what you already know, and instead sends you away temporarily disoriented but newly attuned to experiences in ways that are perhaps even more powerful because they are vague, rogue, and indeterminate (Varnadoe, Commencement).

The goal with these pieces was to create more abstract forms, removed from reality, encouraging viewers to see the vague echoes of those farm implements. I want viewers to have that vague experience so that they can bring their own memories to these images, interpreting them in their own way. A white sculpture clay body high in silica was used for this piece. It was soda fired to achieve its golden shiny surface. The spout above the cup is where the juice comes out and is reflective of the bountiful gifts of the good years of farming. The encrusted cup perched on a ledge gives some clue to the viewers but will no doubt steer them to many different conclusions. The stick-like projections at the top suggests sugar cane stalks that are being sucked down with the grinding and rotating gears of the machine.

Store Trash, the second stacked piece is made up of three main segments that were constructed separately, then stacked vertically with spacers between pieces (figure 15, page 52). The piece was inspired from fifty five gallon steel drums that were commonly used as trash cans in this area. My aunt ran a country store, and she had several that she burned trash in almost daily. With such daily use the cans over time would rust and start to fall apart and separate especially at the rings on the out side of the can, this piece is in response to my memories of this and the way the cans would separate or fall apart when my dad and I would try and remove them from my aunt's backyard. The bottom piece or base is pierced with small holes to resemble the bottom of the trash can that usually had holes to facilitate the burning. The second section rests upon a criss-crossed layer of wooden sticks and has gaping holes in the side that mimic the rusted out areas of the trash can. The finial is made up of small bottles and jars in a deliberate arranged pattern as sort of a comical twist to the trash can's function. The piece comments on the

impermanence and throw away society in which we live in today in comparison to recent past.

Trio of slabs consist of three slabs on platforms that are comments of the land and color that exists in the earth (figure 16, page53). They are made of stoneware, porcelain and earthenware clays similarly to emphasize the different textures and subtle color nuances of the earth like samples. They are similar in size and shape. To recall the passing of time the slabs were rolled with a large rolling pin to create broken edges and areas which are stretched and stressed, generating their own feeling of history. They are presented nestled in rusted chicken wire that contains shards and sticks and branches of plants to suggest a comfortable environment with history. Dry surfaces are the results of low-fire salt fuming. The nestled slabs are presented near ground level to suggest being of the earth and to allow the viewer to see them the way they see the ground. Imprinted forms on the surface resemble cracked soil on a hot summer day. The textures are rough and earthy in tone, which helps to create the effect of barren farm land. To further create the rustic look, the clay is chipped and chiseled.

CHAPERTER 6

Conclusion

When early potters worked with clay, they dug it out of the ground, milled it, and sifted it, then remixed it with water and materials to make it malleable. After they shaped pieces on a foot powered wheel, they waited for them to dry and then fired them. The water in the clay evaporated during the drying process. Fire made plastic clay harden into stone, and transformed ground bottle glass and clay into flowing glazes. Fire was the vehicle for clay's transformation, the magical, that allowed them to create objects of beauty and function. This is the romantic story that still inspires me. Of all the creative processes, ceramics still retains the possibility of chance, of the unexpected. It is exactly this characteristic that leads artists to use this medium and process to express themselves.

I like to experiment and to take chances, because it's a way to mature and grow as an artist. My pots and sculptures are a reflection of who I am, and all that makes me unique. Graduate study has been a great experience for me and this thesis marks the completion of years of study. It also marks a new beginning for me. I want to have my own studio and continue to make art. The first time I worked with clay I fell in love with it. Working with clay gives me a feeling of being connected to southern potters from past and present. There is always so much more to try, create, and explore. I like the unlimited and inexhaustible possibilities of clay. Happiness is to be fully engrossed in the activity that you enjoy and believe in. Clay is so directly related to the earth, that it's a perfect and logical choice for me.

Sometimes it's hard to explain to some people why I want to make art. Art is a reflection of the human experience. I want to make things that for me have integrity and

truth. I want to create work from the heart; I want to discover what's inside me, and what excites me as a ceramic artist. In these years of study, I learned not only about design concepts, and technical development, but I also learned more about myself spiritually and intellectually.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Color plates



Figure 1 *Untitled Face Jug* 2005



Figure 2 *Iris Vase* 2005

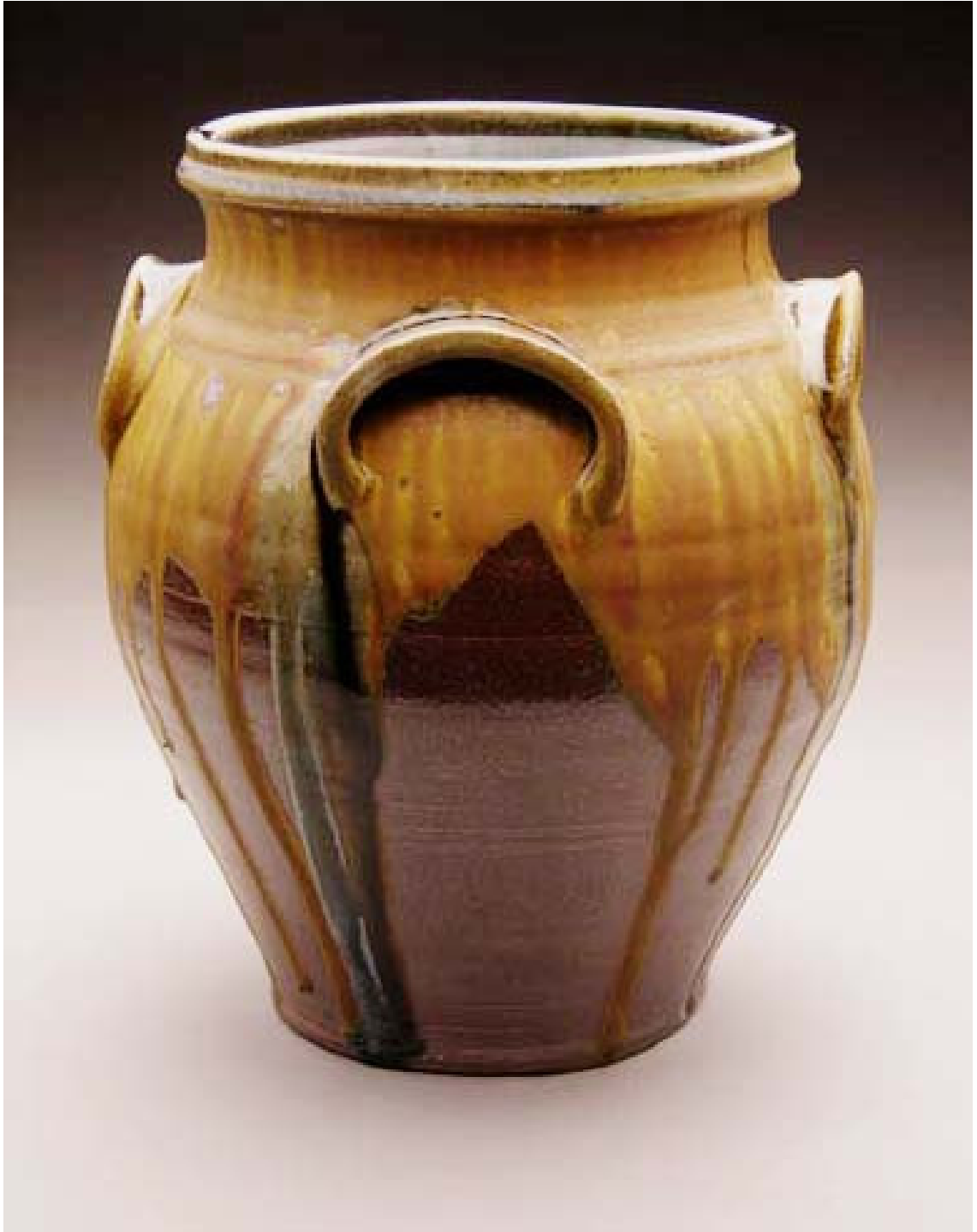


Figure 3 *Storage Jar* 2005



Figure 4 *Salt Glazed Storage Jar* 2005



Figure 5 *Ash Glazed Milk Jug* 2005

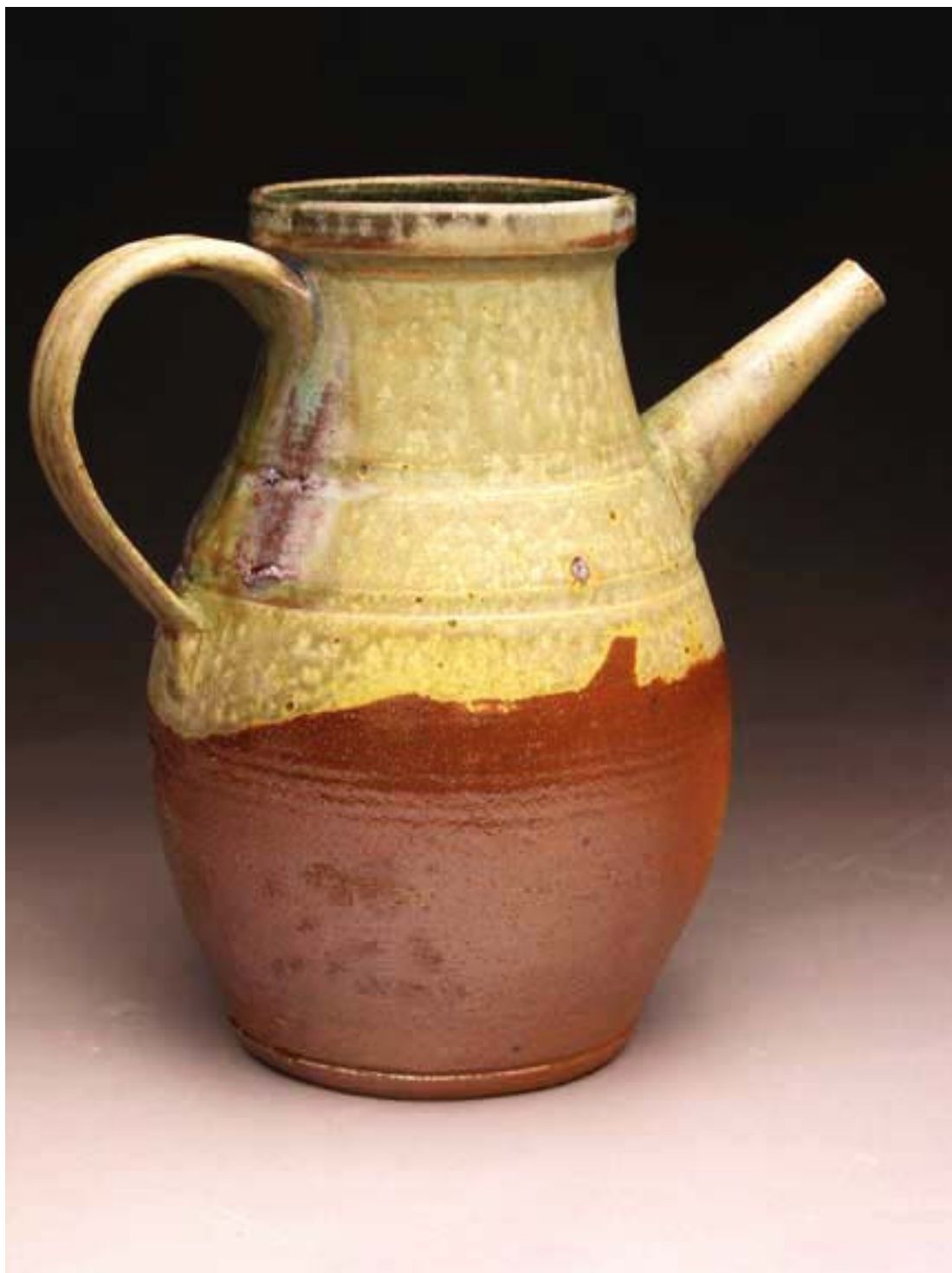


Figure 6 *Coffee Boiler* 2005

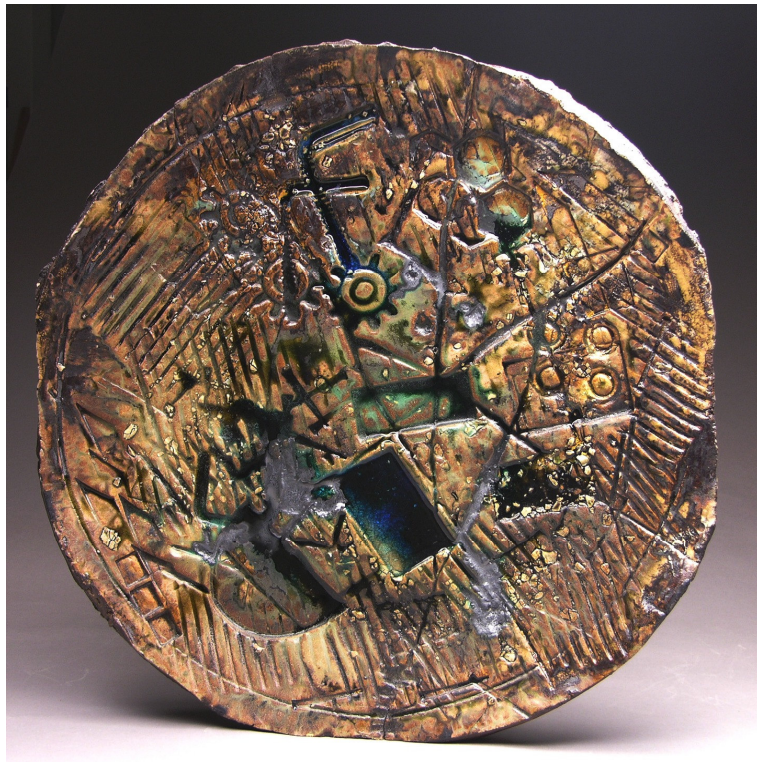


Figure 7 *Delco* 2004



Figure 8 *Windmill Wait* 2004



Figure 9 *Drought* 2003



Figure 10 *Conlley Creek* 2003



Figure 11 *Plow Bottom* 2004



Figure 12 *Plow Disc* 2004



Figure 13 *Trough Series* (with details inset) 2005





Figure 14 *Grinder* 2004



Figure 15 *Store Trash* 2004



Figure 16 *Trio of Slabs* 2005