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Gathered Vessels

Marguerite E. McCoy

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GATHERED VESSELS

by

MARGUERITE MCCOY

(Under the Direction of Jeff P. Garland)

ABSTRACT

My journey with ceramics is a path paved with the memories of my mother's kitchen, travels across Europe, and a deep love for creating spaces where people can come together. From the warmth of a mug that fits just right in your hands, to the gentle sounds of water playing in a fountain I've crafted, my work is about making those little moments of connection feel extra special. I create ceramics that are meant to be picked up, used, and loved - pieces that carry a bit of my story to join in with yours. Whether it's joining in your morning coffee routine or lighting up your evenings, I'm there in spirit: one glaze, one curve, one drop of water, and one flicker of light at a time.

INDEX WORDS: Ceramics, Memories, Functional, Fountains, Lights

GATHERED VESSELS

by

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B.S., Georgia Southern University, 1993

M.F.A., Georgia Southern University, 2024

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of Georgia Southern University

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

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May 2024

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my family. The inspiration for much of my work, and the deep feelings I hold about the meaning of ceramics comes from the way I was brought up. The time and energy that was dedicated to my upbringing by my mother and my grandparents has made me the person I am today.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you to my husband, Jason and my daughter, Joanna for their support and understanding while I have been pursuing this degree. A big thank you to my mother, Virginia Russell, who has helped to support us in any way that we needed her during this crazy three years. Thank you to my art professors that helped to guide and challenge me in the Georgia Southern MFA program: Jeff Garland, Elsie Hill Howington, Matt Mogle, Marc Moulton, Jason Hoelscher, Robert Farber, Norton Pease, Melissa Huang, Casey Schachner, and many more! A huge thank you to Jane Pleak, who has been an endless source of encouragement and boundless font of ceramic information. Thank you to my peers in the MFA Program for your critiques and questions, you helped me become a better artist. Last but not least, Thank you to Lynn Ivey, Jess Cartwright and Amy Nelson for your unflagging support during this journey.

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CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND: PERSONAL HISTORY AND PLACE

As I breathe in the damp, earthy scent of clay, I am transported back to the very essence of creation - a sensation that is both primal and intensely personal. This is the basis of the sensory tapestry that my work is woven from: ceramics that invite use, that create and hold spaces of warmth and reflection, much like a warm hug or a companion for solitary musings. I make work that is intended to be used and enjoyed. Maybe it comes from being an only child with one parent, but playing alone has been something I can really get into, or inversely, something that reminds me that I am alone. Making ceramic pieces has become a way that I can thrive in an uninterrupted space. It allows me to sink into the pieces I am making, to lose myself in a space of my own creation. Ceramics also allow me to give of myself without being present physically. It gives me a way to show care and nurture others through objects created with heart and soul. Because my work travels, I also feel as if I can tag along in spirit. I attend weddings, engagement parties and am included in the morning ritual of waking up and getting started with a cup of coffee without ever leaving my studio. I put energy and love into the vessel as it is made, and that allows me to send care out into a world where it is needed. My creations also grant others the ability to send vessels that can carry love across miles in a tangible way.

My life has had twists and turns that have led me to where I am now. Here is some personal history that will help explain my love of clay. I grew up in a family of teachers. My life was divided between my mom and her parents. Mom took ceramics in her

undergraduate studies at Agnes Scott; she also traveled and collected ceramics. Because of her love of ceramics, my daily life was filled with handmade and collected vessels. We didn't eat off of Chinet paper plates or Corelle dinner sets, we gathered for dinner around Dansk Stoneware from Denmark. Pancake batter didn't come from a box, it was measured step by step into a handmade bowl. These moments not only gave me my love of cooking, serving, and eating; they also showed attention to detail and a love of handcrafted ceramics. The feelings that were cultivated in me through cooking at home with mom and then traveling to make homemade peanut brittle in a very specific process with my grandfather were nurtured time and time again throughout my early life. And in the same way that I create ceramics to send out into the world, my grandfather shared his peanut brittle with his friends in Statesboro and sent it to friends in Europe and Japan. The handcrafting process of creating ceramics has become a pathway to share my love through making with others, just as my grandfather demonstrated with his handmade sweets. For most people setting a table is just what you do before you eat. For me, each piece of silverware and plate transports me back in time to a time that I knew there would be family time and conversations that mattered: A table surrounded with love.

In my original career path, I graduated with an undergraduate degree in Foods and Nutrition, then crossed the country to attend the California Culinary Academy. At the CCA, I graduated with a Certificate of Baking and Pastry. These were wonderful days in San Francisco, unfortunately the school was purchased and closed during the economic downturn of 2015.



Figure 1 California Culinary Academy

From San Francisco, I moved to Germany to bake for the United States Army with both Armed Forces Recreation Centers and Morale Welfare and Recreation. As I worked in Germany, I was able to travel on my days off. There were so many things to see and do. Great food, art and energy. I found that I was drawn to ceramics everywhere I went, the bright rhythmic patterns of Poland, the expressive drawings on Czechoslovakian pots, but then I went to visit Italy (Figure 2). I was blown away by not only the Majolica Ceramics, but the sculpture. Everywhere I traveled it was mesmerizing. It was here, under the soft glow of natural light and the melodic whispers of ancient fountains, that a seed was planted. The way light played off the water and danced through the spaces between left a profound mark on me, one that I wouldn't fully understand until years later.



Figure 2 The bold, stamped, traditional ceramics from Poland (ZakladyCeramiczne.com), expressive Flower Drawings on Czech Ceramics (Demčák), and the stunning Majolica of Italy (Issimo).

When I returned to Georgia in 1999, to care for my aging grandmother, I worked at my alma mater, Georgia Southern in foodservice. While at Southern, I began to explore ceramics by taking post baccalaureate classes. The transition to clay from pastry was easier than I thought it would be. I found that the clay needed a similar touch to dough. The process was a request for a partnership with the material to reach the end goal. Neither clay nor dough can be disrespected with the hope of a successful outcome. Knowing the limitations and strengths of the material was my greatest asset. My instructor was a slight, fiery woman that had done everything from ceramics to welding locomotives. She taught me everything I know about ceramics and her dedication to her students and the university was unrivaled. She pushed me to explore every aspect of clay, from the dirt we were sculpting, the history of why we created, and how to take mud and make beautiful pots that we could be proud of. I joined in companionship with the people of the ceramics building, they invited me in, poured out their knowledge, and made me welcome and comfortable. Those days in the ceramics department of Georgia Southern remain some of my best memories.

When I left the university to pursue a different job, I felt like a piece of me stayed back with the others, but off I went thinking of making lots of money and having a job in my career field was what I needed. When I lost that job, clay called me back and gave me a safe space to mentally come to grips with the loss, to mourn and contemplate a new path. The feel of the clay and the attention that you must give it when throwing and shaping took my mind away from my personal troubles and allowed me to escape into the process. Clay

saved me in a time where I felt I had lost my identity by giving me an escape, but also a memory wrapped in a medium that could lead me back to myself.

My earliest memory of making - the smooth resistance of clay between my fingers - is a powerful genesis to my current artistic explorations. Clay has always been more than just earth to me; it's a living memory, a tactile imprint of my journey. The scent of damp Lizella clay as I open a new bag is a prelude to creation, each piece a silent companion through life's daily rituals. The bag of clay holds possibility and untapped potential that is mine to shape. My ceramics are crafted to be more than objects; they are an extension of human touch, a vessel to hold and to share, to give a warm hug, or accompany a friend in a moment of solace. These vessels, created with intention, serve as an extension of myself, reaching out to others and transforming ordinary moments into shared experiences. M.C Richards in *Centering* describes the process as being:

... like a handclasp between two living hands, receiving the greeting at the very moment they give it. It is this speech between the hand and the clay that makes me think of dialogue. And it is a language far more interesting than the spoken vocabulary that tries to describe it,... (Richards 9)

This is an image of the fountain in the Piazza di Spagna in Rome, people were surrounding it waiting for a turn to put their hands in water, so my husband and child joined in the festivities. It is a baroque fountain of a boat built directly at the foot of the Spanish steps and adds greatly to the magic of the area. The fountain was designed and constructed by Pietro Bernini with the help of his son Gian Lorenzo. The third image is of

a more modest fountain found in the Vatican City. These fonts still hold potable drinking water.

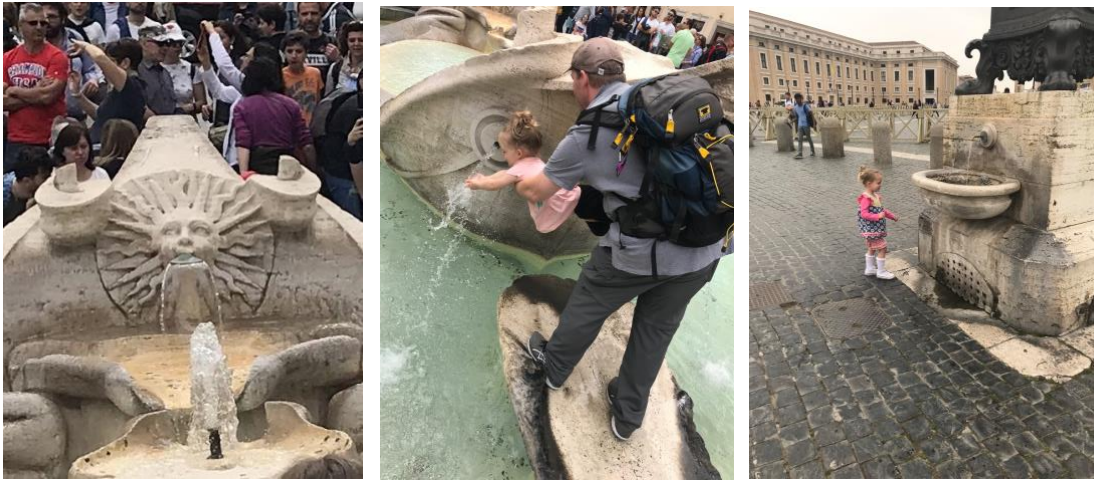


Figure 3 Fountain in the Piazza di Spagna in Rome (Left); my husband and child joined in the festivities (middle); a modest fountain found in the Vatican City (right)

My most recent pieces invite gatherings and echo the communal spirit of marble Italian fountains, now reborn in the gentle hum of water and glistening glow of light over my glazed ceramic creations. During my travels in Italy, I enjoyed the people, the food and the architecture. Wandering through Florence and Sienna seemed to hold visual surprises around every corner. These past experiences of Italian light and water, which I had forgotten, began to flow back into my work, leading me to create fountains and lights that hold echoes of Italian piazzas and quiet corners. I can only describe this sudden remembering of time spent exploring Italy as synchronicity.

My ceramics create quiet corners where my pots can hold space, through the tranquil embrace of a fountain's gentle sound, the enveloping warmth of light that turns a room into a haven: a vessel to extend to a friend, a gesture that brings them into the safe

space that only friendship can create. Are my ceramics magical? Not in the ‘cape and top hat’ category; more like the warm slippers that you wear in the morning when you wake up, or the soft sweater that makes you feel strong and safe when you leave the house.

It isn’t obvious, but we are all surrounded by ceramics—from our toilets, sinks, stove tops, and brake pads. In addition, by the soothing sounds of water and the guiding presence of light, they make space in our lives that we don’t even realize exists. I want people to relax in those spaces, to feel that my dishes, fountains, and lights are proud centerpieces of spaces that spark conversation and create atmosphere for friends and family.

When I create objects for use by others, my intent is that they will incorporate them into their lives. In many cases, that adoption may be subconscious: I want to drink coffee. Look, this cup can hold the amount I want, and I can pick it up and sip from it. But to some individuals, the appreciation runs much deeper, akin to the experience of observing the quiet performance of a fountain or the dance of light across a room. I want to drink some coffee. Wow, I chose this cup because that color is nice. Wow, it feels great in my hand. It is as if someone knew my hand when they made it, the surface of the cup feels nice under my fingers, and the lip feels nice when I drink.

Just as a fountain's sculptural form must consider the flow and containment of water, and a light must consider the play of shadows and brightness, so too must my ceramics attend to the subtle details that elevate daily use into an art form. My desire is to

provide an experience that a person didn't even know they were seeking, a natural fit between user and vessel. Kent McLaughlin, a North Carolina potter said this about the relationship between artist and patron in his artist statement:

I have made this object with my hands with the intention of you using it with your hands. Your touch embracing my touch. The direct connection between maker and user. This is an essential and fundamental consideration I enjoy when I work.

(McLaughlin)

I make work for both sets of individuals, but I take the time and put in the effort to really please the second user. I fall in the second set of individuals, so I think of all these points when I create. I believe that you feast with your eyes in all circumstances, but beyond that, ceramics should function in the scope of what they were created for, much like how a fountain should harmoniously interact with its environment, or a light should enhance the mood of a space. If a cup has folds inside that are hard to clean or a plate has raised decoration on the serving surface that makes it impossible to cut your food, then its function has been dismissed in the process. This dismissal of function can serve a purpose when making vessels that will only be viewed, but my intent is that the function be protected when creating, ensuring that each piece, whether it's a cup, a fountain, or a light, fulfills its purpose with grace and fluidity.

My ceramics are not merely objects; they are invitations to pause, to savor, to gather. Whether it's the quiet morning coffee, the soothing sound of water trickling through a fountain, or the ambient glow of light casting patterns across the walls, my pieces are

participants in these moments. They are crafted to be enjoyed, not hidden away - to be part of moments that matter, much like the fountains that draw people together with their serene sounds, and the lights that create an ambiance of reflection and peace.

Through the transformative touch of my hands, clay becomes more than a medium; it is a vessel of connection and memory. My ceramics—infused with the warmth of personal history and the essence of communal gathering—are crafted not merely to be used, but to be experienced and enjoyed. They are tangible extensions of care, meant to enrich the rituals of daily life and to transport a piece of my spirit into the lives of others.

CHAPTER 2

PROCESS, MATERIALS, AND METHODS

The ritual of measuring pancake batter into a handmade bowl passed down from my mother's collection instilled in me a love for the handmade and the functional. Early influences like this one led me to attend culinary school for Baking and Pastry. My need to use touch and care pushed me to create items that could be tasted and enjoyed.

Transformation is an essential ingredient in both cooking and ceramics. The feel of dough and clay create a similar reaction in my mind. They fuel a desire to take this soft pliant material and create something that when placed into an oven, or kiln, emerges as something that can be enjoyed in the moment or for a lifetime. This tactile memory infuses my current ceramic practice, where I include materials from Georgia – Lizella (pronounced with a long ‘I’, by the way, lie-zella) and Kaolin – for their ability to embody these early sensory experiences. Clay is more than a mud that is shaped and fired for use. Suzanne Staubach in *Clay* describes the way in which clay is formed. Starting as stone, molten magma that slowly cooled and crystalized into a hard layer of mostly granite became clay. Through being broken down by wind, rain over billions of years, this material became available to humans as a way to evolve and create much of the world we know today.

When we subject the clay to fire, we in essence return it to stone, and the ceramic material produced lasts forever. Fragile but firm, clay can be used to date civilizations when all other clues of existence have been broken down and absorbed by the earth. (Staubach xiii)

It is a unique material; some scientists believe that clay played a critical function in the origin of life itself. Clay is readily available; you can walk out onto almost any property and dig it straight from the ground. Wild clay is plentiful, but it is also unpredictable. Depending on the type of vessels desired, it may need to be worked with and refined, so that it can be used for finer utilitarian wares. However, it can be used to create more rough items right from the ground. The clay has been under the ground long enough for rocks to be transformed into the plastic material we call clay. Clay is malleable and able to be shaped over and over, but once fired its path is set, it is here forever. The durability is unmatched even by metal. Civilizations are dated by their ceramic vessels either whole or in shards; it has been transformed back into a rock-like structure when exposed to high heat.

It is these three qualities of clay- its abundance, its plasticity and its durability- that has made it so valuable to the progression of culture and the rise of civilization. Writing began on clay tablets; clay ovens and pots enabled the development of cookery; fired and unfired bricks made the building of houses and whole cities possible; and clay figurines have had a vital role in religious practices and in the play of children.... montmorillonite, is a particularly fine-particled kind of clay, is the key to the transition between the nonliving and the living-that perhaps life began in a sort of muddy soup of clay and water, “energized” by a bolt of lightning. Indeed, the idea that the first humans were made of clay predated the scientific thought. Adam is Hebrew for red earth, or clay. (Staubach xii)

I sincerely have an ongoing love affair with clay. I love the smell; I walk into my studio or open a bag of clay, and I breathe deeply to take in the smell of the damp earth. The feel of it in my hands is amazing; smooth, pliable, but also strong and stubborn. I enjoy the anticipation of what will become of each piece of earth as I take it in my hands and begin the process of reimagining what it will become. Because I am deeply rooted in Georgia, I have begun to include Lizella clay in all my stoneware clay. I have always had Kaolin clay, but that is not exclusively from Georgia, though as a state, we supply much of the kaolin produced, it can come from a vein of white clay that is mined from anywhere in the world. But Lizella? It is a clay that comes exclusively from Lizella, Georgia, specifically from the Lizella Clay Company, located on Pottery Road, in Lizella, Georgia. A family business that has dug, dried, and bagged this gorgeous material for decades. Mike Mitchell is the sole proprietor of Lizella Clay, so for native Georgia clay, it fits the bill. This attention to the combination of ingredients in my clay is another part of what makes my work relatable in a different way. The respect of the specific materials joined with my dedication to the forms and finishes I use is one of the ways I set my work apart from other potters.

CHAPTER 3

THE WORK: GATHERED VESSELS

My thesis work is a series of composite creations, using hand built and wheel thrown pieces. A combination of different processes is needed to bring to life the images in my head. Throwing for round vessels and hand building like slabs, coils and pinched pieces help to add variety to my vessels. After assembly the pieces are then transformed using small tools to create patterns and texture on the surface of the clay. Variety in texture is created with holes and carving deeply along with moments of soft texture keeps surfaces lively and interesting to look at and feel. Cuts and carvings that will direct the movement of the glaze during firing and subsequently direct liquid and light in the finished work. The work is a history of my career as a potter: it tells my story. When it changes hands, it becomes a vessel to carry forward the user's memories and story.

Each piece is different: some are strictly for use, and others are made to be viewed and heard. All my pieces are intended to create and hold space; a solitary cup of coffee for a quiet morning contemplation which can influence the coming day, or serving pieces to bring people to a table for a fantastic meal with family and friends. Lights to illuminate a space for gathering, or maybe a special spot for story time and bedtime giggles. The space created by light, water, and vessels functions as a place for enjoyment of companionship and a meal.

The spirits of happiness and joy surround us much of the time and in our over scheduled, hasty lives, we either fail to recognize it or refuse to take time to embrace this energy. With my

work, I create moments worth taking a pause to savor this quiet, yet continually changing, stillness of time. *Joy Chose You* by Donna Ashworth illuminates the magic of the unseen:

Joy does not arrive with a fanfare
on a red carpet strewn
with the flowers of a perfect life

joy sneaks in
as you pour a cup of coffee
watching the sun
hit your favorite tree
just right

and you usher joy away
because you are not ready for her
your house is not as it should be
for such a distinguished guest

but joy, you see
cares nothing for your messy home
or your bank balance
or your waistline

joy is supposed to slither though

the cracks of your imperfect life
that's how joy works

you cannot truly invite her
you can only be ready
when she appears
and hug her with meaning
because in that very moment
joy chose you. (Ashworth 9)

This is the joy I want to share with the world through my work—joining in a quiet morning ritual of a hot steaming beverage, held in a mug that feels nice in the hand. My work doesn't need to be loud and obvious; the thought that it could just sneak a little joy into someone's day creates an amazing feeling of accomplishment for me.

CHAPTER 4

FOUNTAINS: FORM MARRIES FUNCTION

The first fountain I made ended up being a miss rather than a hit, but it opened a new line of exploration that I wouldn't have discovered without the attempt. I was trying to find a path that would allow me to use the skills I had prior to graduate school in a way that would elevate my work beyond my current comfort zone. I began to take functional forms; cups, bowls, and plates, and put holes in them and stack them up on a metal rod. It was my first foray into fountains. At this point my path was not about what to make or how it would stack, nor how the water would move on my forms. I was working in a way that was familiar to me, but not yet in a way that focused on the elements that make fountains work.

As time went on, I was challenged to focus on fountain design—to incorporate an intended path for the water. How could I control the flow in a way that would enhance the elements I was using to build the structures? Solving this problem brought the strength of the pump into play and what the full form needed to look like to make the water flow in certain areas and not others. This evolution removed some of the spontaneity I had used in my early fountains and made planning even more important. Form and function go hand in hand for me. I don't want to make vessels that look amazing, but do not function properly. And if I was going to go with an artform that would be reliant on a natural and limited resource, water, I needed to get it right: less spray that left the fountain and landed on the ground; a vessel that could catch water during rain rather than being reliant on a hose to keep the fountain full and functioning. Could these fountains function as a way to catch water from a house gutter, or could the force of the water break the

fountain? These concerns became important considerations in my design. Attending the Floriade near Amsterdam in 2022 gave me the chance to see first-hand how different countries are working on sustainability. The way the people of the Netherlands are capturing and reusing water is fascinating and inspired me to think more deeply into how to make these fountains self-sustaining. I knew I needed to be part of the solution: using solar pumps to eliminate having them connected to the grid; using pumps that stop working when there isn't enough water in the reserve, but then start pumping again when rain fills the reservoir. I haven't figured out all of this, but what I have learned has remained in the back of my mind and considered with each fountain I create.

All but the Kitchen Sink I, II & III, were my first stacked fountains (Figure 4). I used an assortment of functional pieces which I stacked in different ways on copper pipe. These all took turns being featured on the built-in fountain in the courtyard of the Center for Art and Theater at Georgia Southern. I found that the pump in that fountain was too strong to control, and that I needed a smaller pump or a larger structure to control the water flow. This realization pushed me to make the current fountain in the courtyard, *Untitled I* (Figure 5). This was my first attempt at pushing the boundary of what a functional piece should look like. I took bowls and altered their rims, a platter that couldn't hold food because it was filled with ruffles; all the while considering for the first time what it would look like from all sides. With my functional pieces, the fountains looked good from all angles, but when I considered taking relatively flat pieces and putting holes in them, it changed the dynamic. All of a sudden, I had the foot/base of a platter or bowl that would be exposed to being viewed from all angles. Making sure that the bottoms would be worth looking at was a new feature to take into consideration.



Figure 4 *Everything but The Kitchen Sink I*, Margo McCoy 2022



Figure 5 *Untitled I*, currently installed, Margo McCoy 2023

After I installed *Untitled I*, I realized that I could no longer rely on a readymade base for all my fountains. I needed to consider how I could make a base that could function as a place to hold water for the fountain, but also hold the pump and the structures I needed to make the water flow. After walking past this fountain for over a year, I also saw that it can survive both being frozen and the chemicals that the grounds people put in the water to keep it free of algae. In my research, I consulted with people at the Botanic Garden on campus to find out why they didn't have fountains. I found out that the fountains had become too much trouble for them to maintain, so they had been removed. I took all the information that I received from the garden staff and attempted to apply them to my next fountain. The piece that came next was *After the Rain* (Figure 6), which became one of my favorites. I was able to choose a pump that would flow so slowly that the water dripped off on the flower and its leaves. The scene I created was one of a

flower after a big rain in which you could just see the remaining drops shimmer and fall. With this fountain I was not only controlling the water, but also creating a base that could protect the cistern from leaves that could clog the pump. I had begun to transform my fountains to a more sustainable form: a form that would hopefully make them more attractive to the Garden and to patrons of my work.



Figure 6 After the Rain, Margo McCoy 2022

Exploring the world of fountains has been really fascinating. My intent is to create a space that invites people to gather. The sound of the water draws people in, but then the colors and surfaces of the structure them to stay and enjoy the spectacle. Water cools the air, the sound of it calms the soul. The fountains themselves have allowed me to extend the small, intimate space of a cup of coffee to a range that is only limited by sight and sound. A larger space, but a space that can also be inviting and personal in its own way.

The combination of the sound of the water, the form and color of the structure draws people into a space carefully curated to hold them. The size of the fountain directly affects the viewer and the space. Larger fountains create a space that is equal to its range of sound and spray of water, but a smaller, quieter fountain actually holds more power with its intimate space. I created several smaller, less intrusive fountains and what happened with each one is that the viewers were drawn to the fountain in a different way. The quiet was treated as a fragile melody, one that drew people closer to the piece. To see people leaning down to listen more deeply, and the hush of the space was really amazing. The power of that small compact vessel quietly demanded silent admiration from a group. Even sharing a calming space with someone you don't know can result in a sense of communality. Our need for human connection is real and just sharing a space can help recharge our human battery.

CHAPTER 5

LIGHTS

Lights were a natural transition from fountains: fountains of water led to fountains of light. Light fixtures can be invisible, purely utilitarian, or they can stand out and shine, literally lighting up a room with their form and function. Lights gave me a new puzzle to solve. When designing a light fixture, I first take into consideration its purpose. Can it be soft, or does it need to be bright? What size space does it need to illuminate? Once the parameters of the lighting have been established, surface design can be addressed. It is important to me that the fixtures are beautiful in daylight as they are when in use. Some surface design factors to be considered are the shape of the globe, texture on the surface, and color. I pierced some light globes to create another image on the ceiling and walls. Through these holes, light is transferred to the surrounding surfaces; not always a direct image, but many times a soft reflection of the light itself. The lights, as with the fountains, have the power to hold space. Sometimes that space is harsh and bright and other times the light wraps us up and creates a special place to unwind and reflect. Lights have the ability to open and hold space.

One of the factors that pulled me to lights was Ingo Maurer's chandelier shown at MOMA. Ingo Maurer, *Porca Miseria!* (Figure 7) was a burst of broken ceramics, suspended from the ceiling. This chandelier has incredible movement, and the form is beautiful. I knew this was something that I wanted to explore deeper. Using Maurer's piece as inspiration, the first light I made (Figure 8) started, again, as functional ceramics and became a light. Small pinched forms were pierced and then assembled within a bowl with a colander as an anchor. With or without

additional lighting, its effect was powerful. I learned a great deal from this first light: what worked and what didn't work with the structure. Brainstorming about what could have been done better and how the colors could support or detract from the concept. I moved on to designing and creating pendant lights. Using screen printing techniques, I was able to create interesting surfaces on the ceramic globes. First using engobe, a liquid, colored clay, I began to use the screen-printing technique to make designs on newspaper, but then the frame of the screens became too restrictive, and I eventually began to burn the screen and then cut them from their frames. This new, more flexible screen allowed me to print directly onto the clay forms whether curved or flat, opening up a new way to combine it with my work. The combination of printmaking and ceramics has become something I want to continue to explore.

I have merely scratched the surface of designing fountains and lights. I make a conscious attempt to make vessels that I haven't seen made. My plan is to continue this exploration after I graduate. I want to see how far I can push the fountain designs while protecting the environmental guardrails. My exploration of lights is in the early stages, and I know it is something that I can continue to research and shape into something fresh and new.



Figure 7 Porca Miseria! Chandelier, Ingo Maure, 1994 (Antonelli)



Figure 8 Fountain of Light, Margo McCoy 2023



Figure 9 Pierced Pendant Light, Outside and Inside views, Margo McCoy 2023



Figure 10 Screen Printed Light fixtures, Margo McCoy 2022

CHAPTER 6

RESOURCES AND REFERENCES

Clay is a medium that has been used in many ways over time, its possibilities are limitless and only restrained by the imagination. In my experience, the generosity of clay artists is unmatched. Their willingness to share building techniques and surface design along with both clay and glaze formulas has allowed me to discover my voice in clay. Having had the chance to observe other artist's work and methods has helped to challenge my forms and build my studio practice. As a fledgling potter in my first ceramics classes, Jane Pleak supplied me with regular demonstrations of how to use the wheel and what it took to make a pot that would stand up to transformation by heat and fire. Her work holds forms that are translated from shapes of pots throughout history. She also creates surfaces that can celebrate the form, but also provide whimsy that is fun to look at. Linda Smith reinforced what Jane taught me, but because I shared a studio space with her, she was willing to support my growing knowledge with her style of creating. Working with fragile porcelain and creating different surfaces, Linda helped broaden and deepen both my knowledge and respect for different clays and processes. Both Jane and Linda were my first teachers in clay. Their support and willingness to coach me when I needed it, kicked off my personal journey in making ceramics. They are the reason I have the skill and knowledge to create ceramics.

At my first National Council on Education for the Ceramic Arts (NCECA) Conference, I was exposed to a ceramics world of wonder. Demonstrating artists, Panels about "How to" and "How not to" do just about anything I could think of surrounding me and a room filled with just

about any tool you could ever imagine to browse and/or purchase. The demonstrations by successful, well-known artists in the ceramics field took up most of my time. All at once, a tall, gravelly voiced man with enormous hands took the stage to start demonstrating. This was my first-time seeing Bill Van Gilder create. His narration guided his hands as they moved masterfully with the clay, creating a well-choreographed dance of production (Figure 11). He employed tools I have never considered using and created vessels that were new to me. As I sat in the audience, I struck up a conversation with a potter sitting next to me. Talking about how wonderful I thought the work was that Bill was creating on stage. I also happened to have my cups that I had purchased at the annual NCECA Cup Sale sitting at my feet. I reached into my bag and pulled out a cup to show the potter next to me and told him how I was so inspired by the surface and the shape of the cup. He smiled at me and said, “Thank you so much, that is the cup I donated to the sale.” This is when Mark Issenburg (Figure 12) came into my life. Another potter I now call friend and whom I do actually call to ask questions about kilns and glazes rather regularly. I went home from the conference feeling fired up and ready to create.

There are so many other potters that influence my work. Gay Smith’s whimsical forms and surfaces that appear to mirror the material of fancy dresses in motion (Figure 13), and Michael Kline’s basic forms that hold amazing techniques of stamping the surface and filling in the voids with different colored slips, this process is called Mishima. John Britt’s glaze books have always been ones that I use for research when trying new glazes (Figure 15), and I have also attended a workshop he was presenting, and it was mind altering. When I question how long I can continue this very physical work, I look to Cynthia Bringle (Figure 14) who is in her eighties for confirmation of longevity in this field.



Figure 11 Lidded Jar, Bill Van Gilder (Van Gilder)



Figure 12 Ash Glazed Mug, Mark Issenberg



Figure 13 Ceramic Teapot, Gay Smith



Figure 13 Ceramic Sink, Cynthia Bringle (Bringle)



Figure 15 Ceramic Set, John Britt (Britt)

Ceramics have always been a prominent part of my life. In some households, a plate is merely a plate, not mine. My family's love of setting a table and inviting everyone to come together for a simple meal or a grand celebration has been very impactful on my life. Being raised in part by my grandparents put me in touch with a generation of people that did not spend money frivolously. Everything was purchased with care and thought, then passed down from generation to generation. People still registered for fine china when they married. This was prior to Frederick Hurten Rhead (1880–1942) designing Fiesta tableware. Fiesta was the first widely mass-promoted and marketed solid-color dinnerware in the US. With its introduction, everyday tableware was brought to the masses (Homer Laughlin China Company). With so many choices of tableware, there were specific choices made for each gathering, how fancy do we feel tonight? The table settings were used to set the mood for the evening. Even when we were just having a quick dinner before homework and bed, this still happened in a proper way: table set, plates chosen, and food served. Even now, my family sits down to meals with plates, bowls and tumblers that I have made or have acquired from artists that I love.

I often think of Catherine de Medici when we set a table or sit down together. Without her Italian guidance, France might still be dining with their hands from troughs. The joy and extravagance of setting a beautiful table isn't lost on anyone who gets the chance to enjoy the meal. There is a giving of self that comes with the careful curation of the serving vessels you use for entertaining guests and/or family. Eating from handcrafted plates transforms an occasion, elevating the whole experience. The surface of the plates adds to the picture you are painting on the canvas of a table. Each piece of ceramics, or morsel of food contributes to or detracts from the table which becomes the completed tableau. Do the images tell a story? Or do the colors and

textures humbly present the beautiful food? These are always considerations when I put together the place settings for a meal. My culinary background requires that the food and plates come together in a picturesque way. You feast with your eyes, so the food must be inviting, but the serving vessels must fit into that first taste. Even when there are only three of us eating on a normal night, I set a table that elevates everyday food to a position of higher significance.

CHAPTER 7

EXHIBITION: GATHERING VESSELS

This exhibition of my work gives me an opportunity to take people on a journey through not only my graduate school work, but into a living example of what inspires my work. Walking into my show is like walking into a very special part of me as an artist. The garden provides an enchanted backdrop to provide the feeling of being transported through time to a special place. We met at the entrance to the garden to begin our walk down the brick path, which transforms into a passageway leading you from moment to moment (Figure 16).

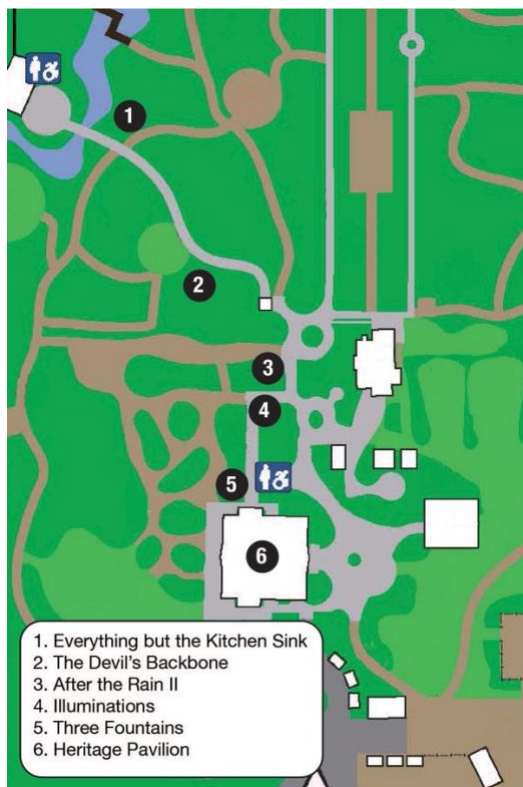


Figure 16 Map of thesis show at the gardens 2024



Figure 17 Everything but the Kitchen Sink II, Margo McCoy 2022

Starting with *Everything but the Kitchen Sink II* (Figure 17), Each piece created a deliberate space to allow a pause in the journey, to reflect before continuing onward. The fountains created

a welcoming melody breaking the silence and calling you forward, especially *The Devil's Backbone* (Figure 18). Each fountain signals growth and evolution in my creative process as we follow the path. *After the Rain II* (Figure 19) is nestled in a flower bed, on top of a decaying stump looking as if it belongs there. When we reached the rose arbor, the path was lined on both sides by *Illuminations* (Figure 20) a collection of pendant lights. The last trio of fountains (Figure 21) created a quiet ensemble of sound that made a small oasis to absorb the splendor of the garden.



Figure 18 *The Devil's Backbone*, Margo McCoy 2023.



Figure 19 *After the Rain II*, Margo McCoy 2024

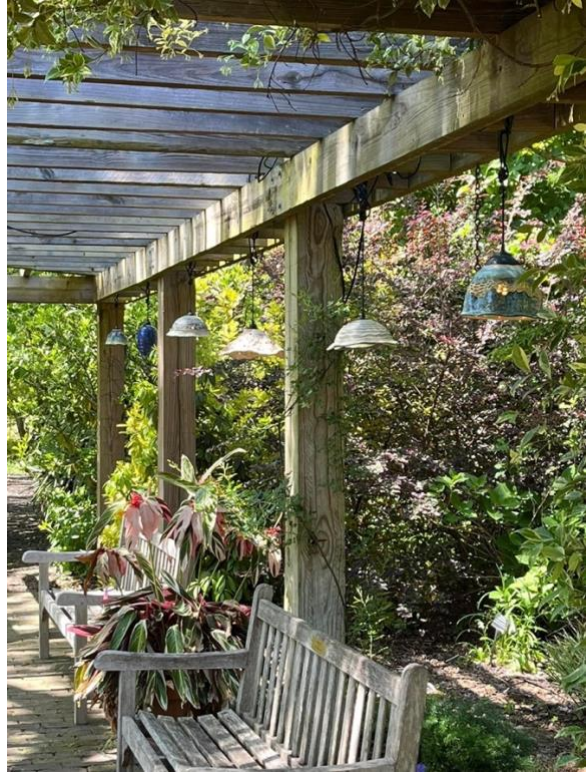


Figure 20 Illuminations, left side and right side, Margo McCoy 2023



Figure 21 Trio of small fountains, Margo McCoy 2023

Each installation beckoned the group forward to the garden pavilion (Figure 22). The combination of lights and tables creates a scene reminiscent of time spent with loved ones. Warm and inviting, the area shows a place to gather, a feast of sights and sounds. And even if this is not a scene you have created on your own, my intention is that it should envelop you in a scene that you feel welcome in and want to be a part of the moment. Much of my exhibition is inspired by my grandmother's love of entertaining. Gatherings at my grandparent's house were rarely small. Grandmother, Virginia Boyce Russell, never let the size of her space limit the size of the crowd she would feed and entertain. She treated her guests just as my Great Grandmother Russell would when hosting a family gathering or a regular meal (Figure 23). No one would ever be turned away. If they were ever lacking in spaces to sit, a chair or two would be pulled in from a desk, and another place would be set for anyone that had stopped by to join. Everyone is welcome.



Figure 22 Tables set in the Pavilion



Figure 23 Patience Russell Peterson, Virginia Boyce Russell, and Dorothea Bealor Russell at Our Russell Family Reunion, 1946

CHAPTER 8

REFLECTION

I came into the program at Georgia Southern to finish something that I had begun years ago. I do not know if I really thought it would help me in creating a career in ceramics, but at the time I knew I needed a space to create and gather my thoughts. I started by showcasing what I knew: functional pots. My ability in ceramics lay in the making of tableware: mugs, plates, and bowls. I was not sure if or how that would carry me through the program. At the first critique of graduate school, I displayed mugs and plates, but unlike other art critiques, they were to be used for cookies and coffee. I drew from my previous experience about putting people at ease and making them feel welcome to create a space for my fellow grad students and professors. From this first critique, I continued to make functional pieces. I was changing how they stacked together or how they functioned as a set, but the overarching theme was still functional ceramics.

During my second semester I decided to stack a combination of functional pieces and freeform pieces. I was excited about experimentation, but I pushed the greenware too hard and it exploded in the kiln. Though I was bummed about the loss of pieces, I didn't want to waste the fired clay, so decided to use the pieces to construct a mosaic fountain. This fountain was not a success, but it opened up a new pathway, and I am still travelling. The lights and fountains have added a very important piece to my ceramic vocabulary. I still make my functional wares to send out into the world as little lights of love, but I now have more complex pieces that have opened up my inventory and given me more variety from which to extract inspiration. I am designing moments that can envelope multiple people all at the same time. I am excited to see where this

new line of exploration will take me in the near future and through the next few years. In the graduate program, I have learned to push my medium much further than I have in the past. I have also attained a higher understanding of my materials and gained the courage to push the boundaries of clay to the breaking point. After my graduate school experience, I now embrace the failures as moments to pivot, regroup and push harder.

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APPENDIX
CERAMIC RECIPES

Buckner White Stoneware Clay

c9-11, smooth cream colored

EPK.....40lbs

Gold Art.....20lbs

Fire Clay.....20lbs

OM4.....20lbs

Custer Feldspar.....10lbs

Silica.....5lbs

Grog.....10lbs

Bentonite.....6lbs

Yellow Salt Glaze (Britt 131)

c8-10

Nepheline Syenite.....71.6g

Ball Clay.....4.8g

Dolomite.....23.6g

Add:

Red Iron Oxide.....1.1g

Zircopax.....17.9g

Bentonite.....4.0g

Anja's Clear Glaze (Kline 164)

c7-10, matte

EPK.....37.63g

Wollastonite.....29.03g

Ferro Frit 3124.....27.96g

Silica.....5.38g

The Juice Glaze (Kline 163)

c9-10, apply thinly

Custer Feldspar.....62.00g

Whiting.....17.34g

#6 Tile Kaolin.....13.88g

Strontium Carbonate....12.72g

Gerstley Borate.....4.62g

Lithium Carbonate.....4.62g

Zinc Oxide.....0.58g

Add:

Titanium Dioxide.....17.34g

Bentonite.....2.31g

Market Blue Glaze (Britt 108)

Custer Feldspar.....50g

Whiting.....4g

Kaolin.....24g

Dolomite.....22g

Add:

Cobalt Carbonate.....0.5g

Commercial Materials:

Amaco Underglaze, <https://amaco.com>

Highwater Clay, Zella Stone, <https://highwaterclays.com>

Highwater Clay, Half and Half, <https://highwaterclays.com>

Silkscreen 80 mesh