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Beside | Between

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Thesis Paper

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts

The University of Montana
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Beside|
|Between

“Often she found herself sitting and looking, sitting and looking until she became the thing she looked at — that light for example... it seemed like her own eyes meeting her own eyes... if one was alone, one leant to things, inanimate things; trees, streams, flowers; felt they expressed one; felt they became one.”

-Virginia Wolff, from *To the Lighthouse*

“[M]y gaze pairs off with colour, and my hand with hardness and softness, and in this transaction between the subject of sensation and the sensible it cannot be held that one acts while the other suffers... Apart from the probing of my eye or my hand, and before my body synchronizes with it, the sensible is nothing but a vague beckoning. There is thus a solicitation of my body by the sensible, and a questioning of the sensible by my body, a reciprocal encroachment:

To the sensing body, no thing presents itself as utterly passive or inert. Only by affirming the animateness of perceived things do we allow our words to emerge directly from the depths of our ongoing reciprocity with the world.”

-David Abrams, from *The Spell of the Sensuous*

Artist Statement

The body sits beside the vessel, art sits beside craft, beauty sits beside the grotesque, my work sits between. Ambiguity asks the viewer to examine conventional, categorical ways of thinking.

Obsessive repetition creates form. Pinch after pinch, bead after bead. Volume, born from mass, offers breath. Repetition breaks with marks that grab and gash, offering vitality, aggressiveness and pleasure. Careful moments of touch and curvaceous vessel forms come from a place of soft sensuality. Complexity and simplicity, subtle and strong, attraction and repulsion, present themselves as one. I use gravity to empathetically pull bodies into a close relation to the forms. Running glaze looks wet, mimicking water flow, an essential element for life. I'm interested in beauty's ability to make pulses rise, as it makes us feel alive.

Being both body and vessel, the forms are connected to ceramic art history. There is fluidity in form and surface, as though the forms could continue to morph, from vessel to body and back again. With this transformation halted, the sculptures sit between two states.

Abstract:

Beauty and the grotesque both induce physical sensations in the body. Pleasure and displeasure are two points on the same line. They are not mutually exclusive. Like the body and the vessel, like the self and the other all things exist in reciprocity. The capability of holding brings agency, breaking down perceptions of of subject-object relationships. The works presented in this paper represent a merging and a transformation of perceived separate entities. Craft history and processes inform the work present in the thesis exhibition, *Beside | |Between*.

Introduction

Sweet cherry pink rivulets drip down further, and further. Reaching the belly, the place of physical, visceral impact. My palm hits the almost hardened clay, an effort to explore impact, what it feels like, what it looks like. An opening, like a peep hole to the unknown, wanting more. Full and curvaceous, or hollow and empty. A fullness lending to hips and fertility. Body sized forms sits with space, around them and inside of them, allowing the viewer to enter into a relationship, physically and mentally. Streaks of soft pinks, pale blues, and fleshy ivories, are colors sweet enough to taste, appealing to senses that are not mutually exclusive.

The exhibition *Beside | | Between* represents the merging of two. Duality and non-duality the beautiful and the grotesque, the masculine and the feminine, the body and the vessel, art and craft, ritual and routine, the self and the other. My work rejects categorization, and embraces fluidity between constructed polarities. Through



Figure 1, Brooke Armstrong

sensuous surface and form, the ambiguous sculptures allow one to begin to access ideas of the other. The forms are not one thing, but many. Ambiguity doesn't allow the viewer to categorize the work into a checked box. However, one is able to relate to the work through the senses. Reciprocity exists not only through the interaction of the viewer and the artwork, but between the viewer and the maker, and the maker and the artwork.

Duality/Non-Duality

Two horns, one upright, one fallen, are rooted directly on the gallery floor like our own two feet. *The Function of Form, Attract/Repel: Flourish and Fall* are physically positioned in the center of exhibition and central thematically. *Flourish*, full of repetition and complexity of pattern created by thousands of handmade porcelain beads, embodies beauty.



Figure 2, Brooke Armstrong

Controlled and careful. It entrances us like ornate rugs and textiles, objects that allow for transcendence and transformation. The pattern and repetition created by the beads acts physically on the body.

Horns are bodily features of both male and female animals not only for attracting a mate, but for fighting and repelling competition. *Fall*, full of pinch marks and uncontrolled running glaze exemplifies the repelling function of a horn, coming to a fall or a death. *Fall*, offers it's opening for the viewer to mentally enter into a dark vessel of sorts, one not based off of the human body, which questions our human centric beliefs. Both horns represent the necessary features for a continuation of life cycles. If pitted against each other they would seem to be opposites, like the light and the dark. However their positioning references a copulation, a co-mingling, a yin and a yang.

The style of this work, *The Function of Form Attract/Repel: Flourish and Fall* coincide with themes as well as aesthetic appearance as artists Juz Kitson and Zemer Peled. Juz Kitson, using thousands of porcelain pieces, speaks of flora and fauna in her work. The forms are organic and bulbous and look as though they could be growing. While patches of animal hair, human hair,

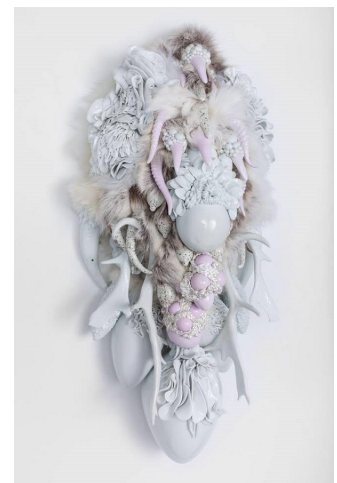


Figure 3, Juz Kitson

and antlers suggest shedding. These forms, along with her process of firing the remains of dead animals in some of the enclosed forms, reference ideas of life and death.¹



Figure 4, Zemer Peled

Peled, also inspired by the natural world, is concerned with beauty. Her work consists of small shards of clay that are then stuck into a form made out of clay and then fired.² The beading aspect of my work is what makes my work unique and different. Although beauty inspires my work, it is not always an inspiration from the natural world, but rather beauty's physical effects on our bodies.

Beauty

In the book, *On Beauty and Being Just*, Harvard Aesthetic Professor Elaine Scarry, defends beauty in our culture and explains how beauty contributes to pleasure and aliveness. “Beauty quickens. It adrenalizes. It makes the heart beat faster. It makes life more vivid, animated, living, worth living.”³ The beholder and the beheld enter a reciprocal relationship with one another. When we speak of something beautiful attention sometimes falls onto the observed, while it can also fall upon the observer. Beauty allows one to undergo a “radical de-centering”. Scarry quotes French philosopher, Simone Weil. “Beauty requires us to give up our imaginary position at the center, a transformation then takes place, in our immediate reception of sense impressions and psychological perceptions.”⁴ When someone encounters beauty, it is a somatic experience, it happens in the body.⁵

1 Jackie Lemmon, “Ceramic Sculptor Juz Kitson: Death Makes All Equal,” *Beautiful Bizarre* (Beautiful Bizarre Magazine, 2017), <https://beautifulbizarre.net/2017/01/14/ceramic-sculptor-juz-kitson-death-makes-all-equal/>.

2 “Artist Zemer Peled Discusses Her Processes of Creation & Destruction in a Short Video,” *Ginkgo Press*, September 21, 2016, <http://ginkgopress.com/artist-zemer-peled-discusses-processes-creation-destruction-short-video/>.

3 Elaine Scarry, *On Beauty and Being Just* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 24.

4 Elaine Scarry, *On Beauty and Being Just* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 111.

5 *Ibid.*

Pleasure

Soft Squeeze, an open vessel, asks to be looked in. Glaze runs from the rim of the bowl to the center, leading the viewer's eye. The form is loosely built with a lip squeezed as in a rapturous ecstasy. The vitality of this work comes from the idea that when we see something we have an affinity for, our pet, our lover, our child, we have a physical body response, want to squeeze it.



Figure 5, Brooke Armstrong

Scientifically deemed “Cute Aggression” by a study conducted by Yale University, the study found that when we see images of things that are “cute” it effects our brain’s emotional systems as well as reward

systems. It leaves one with an overwhelmed state with feelings of pleasure and wanting.⁶ “Cute Aggression” is used as a starting point for my understanding of my own emotional and pleasurable mark making experience when it comes to working with clay.



Figure 6, Brooke Armstrong

The material of clay is soft and immediate to responding to the hand. When working with the material to create the expressive mark making, I am alone, uninterrupted and become enveloped in the pleasure of squeezing, poking and prodding the material.

⁶ Oriana Aragón et al., “Dimorphous Expressions of Positive Emotion: Displays of Both Care and Aggression in Response to Cute Stimuli,” *Association for Psychological Science* 26, no. 3 (2015).

The Grotesque

When we see something refined and beautiful, the image fills us with pleasure, a physical bodily reaction. When we see something with openings and gashes, dripping uncontrollably, unrefined in its final state, it makes us uncertain with its “ugliness”, and makes us feel a sense of repulsion, still a physical bodily reaction. It looks as though *Soft Squeeze* halted in its transformation, incomplete and grotesque. Shards of past work pierce the inside of the bowl, referencing the old transforming into something new.

The grotesque makes us feel a sense of unknowing, perhaps leaning towards the feeling of uncertainty or displeasure, while beauty makes us feel pleasure and assured. The grotesque is about being between two states.

The body is an inherent paradox, both contained and container. The openings are the passage ways that represent the boundaries of inside and outside, connecting the two. All orifices have a common characteristic, they are the interchange between the self and other bodies, and the rest of the world. The grotesque body, according to Bakhtin is a “body in the act of becoming.”⁷

The work titled *Connection, from One to The Other* is referencing this idea of openings and orifices of the body and the vessel, that are the point of entry or exit to connect to the rest of the world. The sculpture is hung at approximately the height of a human head, the opening looks as though it could be a mouth or a belly button. With beads, going in or out, not only connects the inside of the sculpture to the outside, but it also connects the wall to the floor. Specifically when talking about the grotesque body it is not inside or outside, but both.



Figure 7, Brooke Armstrong

⁷ Susan Stewart, “The Imaginary Body,” in *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), 105.

Mikhail Bakhtin, is a twentieth century Russian philosopher and theorist that is well known for his work regarding the carnival grotesque.

“The grotesque image reflects a phenomena in transformation, as a yet unfinished metamorphosis of death and birth, growth and becoming. The relation to time is one determining trait of the grotesque image. The other indispensable trait is ambivalence. For in this image, we find both poles of transformation...”⁸

This statement by Bakhtin relates to my work in that the work is exploring polarities, and transformation of one state to another. I’m not interested in either end of the extreme, but the in-between states.

The grotesque accentuates the stomach, buttocks or mouth, referencing abundance and triumph associated with feasting.⁹ Vessels with accentuated belly’s and hips and mouth openings are prevalent throughout *Beside | | Between*. The work titled *Overabundance* is an example of this exploration of merriment and abundance. The voluminous form could be a belly, a bag, a stomach or another internal organ. Being both body and vessel the form is inspired by Pueblo wedding vases. It is adorned with hand made porcelain beads. The beads are spilling off of the body onto the floor offering themselves to the viewer. It is my intention for the piling beads to reference an overflowing and a celebration of the coming together of two entities. However, the weight created by the beads and the gravity of the swelling form creates a question: are concepts of fertility and abundance related to heaviness? It is my intention that the gravity, fullness and voluptuousness of the grotesque body, pull at the viewer in a sensual manner.



Figure 8, Brooke Armstrong

⁸Bakhtin Michail Michajlovic and Iswolsky He le ne *Rabelais and His World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984). 24.
⁹Bakhtin Michail Michajlovic and Iswolsky He le ne *Rabelais and His World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984).

Sensuality

Beauty and the grotesque both pull at one in a visceral manner. Both act on the body and can create a physical reaction. Although the works are abstract there is a sensuality expressed.

In *Eros Presumptive*, Lucy Lippard discusses abstract eroticism, and how the abstract, rather than narrative images, can elicit a purity of sensation. Sensuous

abstraction isn't particularly about eroticism as much as it is about a bodily sensation. Because sculpture has a physical presence it is more suitable to act on our bodies. Artists working in this manner fuse formal and evocative elements, and in this way form and content become an "obsolete dualism,"¹⁰ Ceramic artists Elsa Sahal and Scott Chamberlin use abstract eroticism through their forms to convey a sensuality in their work. The union of both form and content are important aspects to abstract erotic art. Biomorph



Figure 9, Scott Chamberlin



Figure 10, Elsa Sahal

forms, that swell relax, are bag like, full of volume and beg to be caressed, induce a physical reaction.¹¹

10 Gregory Battcock, Anne M. Wagner, and Lucy Lippard, "Eros Presumptive," in *Minimal Art: a Critical Art Anthology* (Berkeley CA: University of California, 1995).

11 Gregory Battcock, Anne M. Wagner, and Lucy Lippard, "Eros Presumptive,"

Abstraction / Ambiguity / Ugliness / The Sublime

The works presented in Beside | | Between are ambiguous in form. The sculptures are not one thing, but many. They have masculine and feminine traits, they are both beautiful and grotesque, and reference body and vessel. Abstraction allows the viewer to approach the work using a different mode of cognition than representational works.¹² Ambiguity allows for a sense of mystery in the viewer. The forms are not easily read, however as the viewer spends time in the presence of the piece, beauty or a pleasurable response emerges. Kant's aesthetic theory of pleasure and displeasure is relevant when viewing these forms.

First, Kant determines that aesthetic judgement is not based on empirical knowledge. One can think something is beautiful, without knowing what the object is. In fact when one becomes too familiar with a form, the aesthetic pleasure can actually go unnoticed. When an object is not understood immediately by a viewer, the viewer begins to use cognition to make sense of the object.

The object might at first be displeasurable, but then through making sense, through the subjective purpose of the object, pleasure can arise. Kant explains that pleasure is achieved through the sublime, but only indirectly. Pleasure can arrive through displeasure by self reasoning. However, this can only happen after there has been initial displeasure, and then an intuition to unify a form through subjective reason.¹³

For example *Sweet Lick* is not classifiable as body or traditional vessel. It is contorted in form. Its rough mark making, gashes, and grotesque qualities, can evoke a displeasurable sensation in the



Figure 11, Brooke Armstrong

viewer. However, when one begins to intuitively make sense of the object, they may notice a

12 Ceilia Durkin et al., "An Objective Evaluation on the Beholder's Response to Abstract and Figurative Based Art on Constructional Level Theory," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 117, no. 33 (August 3, 2020).

13 Theodore A. Gracyk, "Sublimity, Ugliness, and Formlessness in Kant's Aesthetic Theory," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 45, no. 1 (1986): pp. 49-56, <https://doi.org/10.2307/430465>.

curvaceousness that resembles hips, and a dripping pink glaze that reminds them of melting cherry ice cream. This reasoning, and association, may bring them to a sense of pleasure rather than displeasure.

Kant does not speak much of ugliness however, to him an ugly object would be something that has no sense of unity. “The sublime, on the other hand, consists of a class of objects which would be dismissed as unpleasant for related reasons if developed sense of moral ideas were not capable of resolving the relative failure of unity.”¹⁴ In the case of *Sweet Lick* one instance of creating a subjective unity is the understanding of the relationship of body and vessel.

Body/Vessel: Self and Other

Both body and vessel have an inside and an outside. Both can hold and carry, can hold and be held. The work in the exhibition is exploring the metaphor of vessel. The vessel-like forms are human scale. The vessels’ bellies are able to directly relate to the viewer’s own body. By working at this scale, I want the viewer to confront ideas of a subject-object relationships. However, the similarity in scale to a human body aims to evoke a sense of reciprocity, allowing to not only have the object impacted by the viewer, but to have the viewer impacted by the object.

My work exploring the vessel is inspired in part by phenomenologist Martin Heidegger’s essay, *The Thing*. In this essay he rejects the dualistic stance of subject-object relationships. He explores the properties of a jug, and questions how we look at objects. He declares that “The emptiness, the void, is what does the vessel’s holding. The empty space, this nothing of the jug, is what the jug is as the holding vessel.”¹⁵ We do not pour wine into the walls of a jug, the walls are the barrier. The empty space, the void between the walls, is where the wine is poured. The potter shapes this void, but it is not the potter, nor the walls of the jug that does the act of holding, it is the empty space.

¹⁴ Theodore A. Gracyk, “Sublimity, Ugliness, and Formlessness in Kant’s Aesthetic Theory,” 55.

¹⁵ Martin Heidegger, “The Thing,” in *The Craft Reader*, ed. Glenn Adamson (ed.) (New York, NY: Berg, 2010), 408.

By drawing a relationship between what is typically seen as a mere object and our own bodies, I hope to highlight the capacity of holding and allow for a vitality to emerge. It may be romantic to think that this positioning will in turn create a broader dialog between notions of perceived subject and object, and even further enrich a dialog between perceived notions of self and other.

Influence of Craft History

Towering above the viewer, while its full stomach is in relation to the viewer's stomach, it's breath in relation to one's own breath, *The Two and the One* is an abstract form based on the ideas of duality and non-duality. It is inspired by the form of a Pueblo wedding vessel, in which the bride and the groom would drink from the vessel ceremoniously to exemplify their unity. It is an object that represents an abstract concept. Monumental in scale, *The Two and the One* is about a larger more romantic hope. A wedding vessel's form, two openings with one larger shared body,



Figure 12, Brooke Armstrong

invokes the idea of two separate entities sharing one body. Although traditionally this form is used to communicate the coming together of two people, abstractly this form represents duality and non-duality. It represents the idea that two things are part of a larger whole. The black color references the sense of mystery surrounding these concepts. A handle on top references an arch, creating a circle or an oval, another reference to unity between the two sides. The handle on top, as well as the handles on the sides hold shards of past work, again transforming the old into something new.

Created by methodical repetition of coil building and pinching, the satin surface asks to be touched. On this undulating convex and concave form, there are holes cut from the outer wall that are

transferred to the center or “heart” of the vessel. The remaining pieces, from the roughly cut out holes, are placed on “the chest” as a reference to adornment. A transformation occurs, the by product of a hole becomes a surface adornment. Through the cutouts light shines through from the other side. Tiny flecks of silver decorate the center of the vessel, referencing stars, or the sky, relating to wishful thinking of a more non-dualistic culture. According to artist Tony Marsh, good pottery portrays the hopes and dream’s of its culture.¹⁶ *The Two and The One* is as a poetic cultural offering for a less polar culture.

The story of Marguerite Wildenhain’s *Milk Pitcher* is an example of how a piece of pottery can be used a a symbol for cultural yearning.

Wildenhain was born in France in the late 1896 to Jewish parents that were of German origin. *Milk Pitcher* was made at the Weimer Bauhaus in Germany in 1920, when Germany’s economic condition was deteriorating.

Wildenhain recalls food insecurity near starvation, they survived on oatmeal and home grown swiss chard three times a day. “Slightly pot

bellied, the form of *Milk Pitcher* suggests the humble abundance of raw, fresh milk,” when there was none to be had. “It likely represented the hope and future promise of basic sustenance.”¹⁷ Wildenhain was deemed a “master potter” in Germany in 1925. She traveled as a refugee to America in 1940, the only vessel accompanying her was *Milk Pitcher*.¹⁸

After arriving in America, Wildenhain worked fiercely as a potter and gained recognition from the craft world. She eventually created a community of her own, Pond Farm, that focussed on a process driven approach to ceramics. Pond Farm, was located in Sonoma, CA. In the 1960’s California became a hub for American Ceramics. Wildenhain’s ideology centered around process, labor, and community. At Pond Farm students would throw hundreds of pots on the wheel and leave with



Figure 13, Margaurite Wildenhain

16 2019 NCECA Closing Lecture, Tony Marsh, 2019. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M4LSBIUFJOU>.

17 Jenni Sorkin, *Live Form: Women, Ceramics, and Community* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2016), 55.

18 Jenni Sorkin, *Live Form: Women, Ceramics, and Community*.

nothing. Although Bauhaus trained, she was rejected by the fine arts community as “not intellectual enough.” Life on Pond Farm rejected the convenience of modern suburban life. Students farmed together, ate lunch together, made pots together and would attend art lectures put on by Wildenhain and other visiting artists. Wildenhain states “one doesn't find place, one makes place.”¹⁹ Wildenhain didn't find community, she made it. Wildenhain trained hundreds of students from the 1950's through the 1980's. Although Wildenhain and her school were largely ignored by the art world, she trained many modern ceramic artists including Peter Voulkos.

Voulkos has influenced my work from early on in my making. His rough, large scale works were some of the first ceramic works to be considered Fine Art. He was one of the first known artists to work with clay at a human sized scale, or larger. His work is abstract, roughly handled and pieced together. Not only for its scale, but also the style, his work became associated with a sense of masculinity.²⁰

In a lecture, artist and educator Tony Marsh has created a list of polarities about the difference in mindset of artists and crafts people.

He states that art and craft are two different ways of approaching

making, in the ceramics studio both are tolerated, both are practiced. I am influenced by both ways of thinking, and in turn my work does not fall beside either, but rather in between.

“An artist doesn't know what they are making, and thats okay. A crafts person needs to know. For artists there is an “unknown” quality that can be addictive, for a crafts person there is a sense of relief based on repetitive tasks that is also addictive. Art is a cultural critique. Craft is a cultural affirmation. An artist serves their own ideas, a crafts person serves the culture. Artists are influenced by beauty, but don't like to talk about it because its hard to define, crafts people engage notions of beauty. Artists are more interested in the meaning of their work, crafts



Figure 14, Peter Voulkos

¹⁹ Jenni Sorkin, *Live Form: Women, Ceramics, and Community*, 77.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

people are more interested in how it is made and what it is made out,”²¹

This list of polarities helps place the way I think and make. My work falls somewhere in the tradition of “Sloppy Craft,” work that is engaging ideas of craft, without the refinement, so the only thing left to talk about is the meaning.

Process

“Art isn’t a product, its a process,” says ceramic artist Annabeth Rosen.²² Rosen’s works speak to accumulation. Her style of working inspires my own. Her works are large scale, abstract, and speak about craft, beauty and the sublime.²³



Figure 15, Annabeth Rosen



Figure 16, Brooke Armstrong

The work *The Function of Form: Attract/Repel, Flourish*, is created and adorned with handmade porcelain beads. The beads represent ideas of abundance, decoration, craft based work, and labor. In *Flourish* the form appears to be entirely made out of beads, the decorative is creating the form, rather than an added on element. The repetition of the process of making and stringing beads relates to accumulation and repetition of craft processes.

²¹ 2019 NCECA Closing Lecture, Tony Marsh, 2019.

²² *In Conversation: Artist Annabeth Rosen and Valerie Cassel Oliver*, YouTube (YouTube, 2017), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fA-jdY51Fo8>.

²³ Kay Whitney, “Annabeth Rosen: Five Conversational Fragments,” Sculpture, May 2, 2019, <https://sculpturemagazine.art/annabeth-rosen-five-conversational-fragments/>.

When I think about craft and labor and time. I think about another female predecessor, who is not talked about often in craft or fine art, Adelaide Robineau. Robineau spent one thousand hours creating *Scarab Vase*. Carving bone dry clay, a thimble full a day. A scarab was a reference to labor. Robineau's work, as well as my work rejects ideas of efficiency as a mode for making.²⁴



Figure 17,
Adelaide Robineau



Figure 18,
Brooke Armstrong

Creating *Flourish* took about 300 hours.

The repetition that is created by this process is somewhat addictive and meditative. It alleviates anxieties as I focus on the task at hand, and repeat the same motion over and over again. When making beads, I often lose track of time, I work on one shape at a time. It is sensorial as it is done through touch, there is a visual element as well, especially when attaching the beads. This practice lies between ritual and healthy routine. I'm hesitant to use the word ritual as a ritual is an act that is done to communicate a

shared cultural value to a larger "being" or force, not necessarily religious. If anything, my process and work questions our cultural values of time.

The other forms in the exhibition use a coiling and pinch method of building, that is ancient and is present in most cultures. Often the coiling and pinch method is done and smoothed over, so the pinch marks are not seen. However, inspired by artist Kim Dickey's work and words, touch and pinch marks "charge" the work. The artist's hand remains present, the process is shown, and it can resemble the repetition also present in craft practices such as basketry or weaving. When creating my forms,



Figure 19, Kim Dickey

²⁴ Graduate Student Symposium Keynote Lecture| *Prime Objects: Digital Clay and Its Modernist Origins*, Jenni Sorkin, 2017. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dvsbOmijKdg>.

whether from beads or coils, I rely on my hands as my main tool. The only other tools I use when creating work is a needle tool to punch holes, and a rib tool to compress clay. This hands-on approach allows for a sensuality based on touch between myself and the material. It creates an overall unrefined texture to the work, resembling dimples or imperfections of the skin. When covered with glaze, the resulting pinch marks look like rippling water.

Glaze

Glaze is used on pottery for durability and decoration. Having a glaze that “fits” a clay body is important for potters. As a ceramic sculpture artist I can defy these traditional rules. Glaze is traditionally based on chemistry, is controlled, and applied in a way to get repeatable results. The scientific approach differs from an intuitive approach in that it keeps one’s subjectiveness out of the equation. In general, science is used to categorize and classify. Inspired by the glazing of artist Tony Marsh, I choose to glaze my work in a way that allows for a sense of intuition and surprise.



Figure 20, Tony Marsh

Glaze can have an element of mystery as it is based on physical transformation. When applied, glaze looks chalky. Through heat and time, glaze changes physically and chemically to a glassy hard surface. Glaze recipes are created by understanding the chemistry of materials used. It is possible for one to know exactly what is happening and to get repeatable results, however, I’m not interested in this approach. Partially due to the scale of my work, repeatable application would be difficult, as brushing or spraying glaze will always differ from piece to piece. Having knowledge of materials and what they do is important to my practice. For example, I know that by using a glaze with a lot of zinc will cause “phase separation” and allow for two different types of

crystal structures to form. I use this information to influence results, but not control them. By using multiple glazes with a base layer of a glaze with zinc allows for a lot of variation in color, as the zinc molecules will allow for separation as the glaze melts in the kiln. I layer glazes to instill a sense of mystery and have a less controlled outcome. I get a sense of pleasure when playing with aspects of the unknown. When sculpting a form from clay there is a sense of control. By using glaze in the manner that I do, I am bringing in an element of chaos and lack of control. Like the visual complexity that the porcelain beads offer, the glaze creates a dynamic surface capturing the eye of the viewer. Shiny and wet, or satin and sensuous, the glaze on my forms appeals to one's senses.

Conclusion

Swelling bellies, gravity, complex, ornate pattern, and dripping wet glaze resonate physically in our bodies. The physical properties of these forms creates a type of transformation in the viewer. At first the viewer may feel a sense of repulsion and uncertainty to the unfamiliar forms. However, after engaging with them pleasure arises, as the forms enter into relationship with the viewer. Their voluptuousness, that is the empty space, allows for holding. Being both body and vessel the work asks questions of self and other, and subject-object. The work is romantic in nature as it is offering a less polar, more ambiguous way of viewing the world. Craft history influences the forms and concepts. Overall, the work aims to transform perception.

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