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“Inspired Industry”

A Thesis presented to
the faculty of the Department of Art and Design
East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
Master of Fine Arts in Ceramics

by
Amanda M. Dock
December 2005

Don Davis, Chair
Scott Koterbay
Catherine Murray

Keywords: Aesthetics, Inspiration, Industry, Perception,
Ceramics, Thai Carving

ABSTRACT

This thesis supports the Master of Fine Arts exhibition entitled “Inspired Industry” at Johnson City Area Arts Council, Johnson City, Tennessee, from November 14 – December 22, 2005. It is the culmination of studies and research affected by the artist’s own industry vis-à-vis personal inspirations, including discussion of aesthetics and personal use of the techniques learned in relation to both functional and non-functional ceramic forms. This is a self-evaluation of personal preferences and how this body of ceramic work evolved.

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DEDICATION

For my parents, James and Dorothy Dock:

You have been there since the beginning,
as constant voices of encouragement,
even when I thought I couldn't.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my committee, Don Davis, who has critiqued and mentored my growth as a ceramic artist far beyond my two and half years here, Scott Koterbay and Catherine Murray. Your dedication and critical eyes have made me a better artist, and I thank you for your honesty.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

My Personal Industry

Leo Tolstoy defines art as the “capacity of man to receive another man’s expression of feeling, and experience those feelings himself.” (Cahn 378) As an artist working in clay, I often work in a production manner to ensure that my work portrays my inspired feelings. In this discussion, I am employing two terms, “Inspire” and “Industry”, to show the dichotomy I encounter when creating in clay.

On the surface, this is a blending of two conflicting terms. I have merged these two concepts together in an installation that illustrates my personal dilemmas within the ceramic world. My “inspiration” comes from interactions occurring within the daily events of my life that may affect it so profoundly that I feel the need to respond within my work. According to Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, inspire means “to exert an animating, enlivening, or exalting influence on (something).” (Merriam-Webster 605) For many of us who are visually driven, our choice is to express our feelings in physical form. These forms can be manifested in a variety ways. My forms are wrought in clay.

In ceramics there is a fulfillment of basic need through production. Historically, production was fueled by utilitarian need. In today’s terms, the utilitarian need is associated with mass production, which the term “Industry” refers to. One of the many definitions of industry, given by Merriam-Webster, is “an act of systematic labor specifically for some useful purpose or the creation of something of value.” (Merriam-Webster 596) “Industry”, in my artistic work, is represented by the act of performing a repetitive task in the interest of producing a massive quantity of physically similar pieces. In all aspects of systematic creation, the value of the end result is up to the consumer to define. In the wake of the Industrial Revolution, the necessity for humans to manufacture by hand has diminished, causing certain creative fields to redefine their purpose. As an artist working in a field that is traditionally production based, I have to

consider to what degree I am going to let this hyper-productivity affect my work. Early on, the concepts of “industry” and “inspiration” collided within my ceramic work.

Traditionally, the development of clay vessels was dependent upon production; a focus on quantity simply for the purpose of producing wares required in everyday life. All cultures require a way in which to prepare and consume food, each using various types of vessels. Ceramic ware is based in functionality, and since the Industrial Revolution the ease by which more than one object could be created brought quality, affordable ceramics into the market. It is as a result of the use of the machine and mass production processes that contemporary potters have been forced to redefine themselves.

This idea of functionality has weighed heavily on my mind throughout my explorations with clay. I was once asked by a fellow student why I worked with clay. Why would I choose to work as a “craft artist?” I felt these questions hinted that working in clay was somehow a lesser form of art, which caused me to further study the ideas behind clay as a legitimate artistic medium. I see no difference between “art” and “craft” within my medium; I merely see a perceived judgment from others who may be naïve and have a lack of understanding on the subject. Therein lays my challenge; to blur the boundaries of art and craft.

My interest in ceramics is not dependent on whether an item is functional or not. Everything has a purpose in life, whether it is to satisfy visually (filling a void on a wall), or to satisfy a necessity (i.e. a mug that holds a beverage). In my opinion, the artistic success of a piece lies not with its ultimate purpose but with its initial inspiration. Whether I sit down at the wheel to create a utilitarian mug or to create a vessel that will become ornamental, a design process and communication process is completed, similar to the design process that I would go through if I were working in paint. I view the creation of functional and ornamental pieces equally. My work seeks to merge these two concepts, being at once inspired and industrial.

CHAPTER 2

THE EVOLUTION OF MY INDUSTRY

In my study of aesthetics of ceramics I am trying to narrow my focus to its application on my body of work. I have studied many artists, specifically ceramists such as Peter Voulkos and Bernard Leach. I have examined numerous examples of their works and have read extensive analyses on the theories behind their creations. A realization that I have reached is that each ceramist strives for an end result, a goal that is stylistically their own; collectively, they seem to be seeking an inner satisfaction that is pleasing to themselves, which often transcends current trends or artistic periods (even if their final work is to serve or exist for the benefit of others). In discovering this reality, I have come to clearly understand that I must decide what is important within my own work.

I began this journey reading philosophers who wrote on art, the aesthetics of art, and what constituted art. Their writings tended to follow a general theme: Art is a human activity, it represents a human action. My activity is the process of manipulating clay into forms. Specific to this exhibition, multiples of one form were created, tiles. T.E. Hulme put it this way: “Art is the pure contemplation of the idea in a moment of emancipation from the Will.” (Hulme 149) It is a point at which an individual experiences some introspective ‘thing’, something very personal, very moving and then attempts to record it in some physical manifestation, rather than leaving it as a strictly internal event. My exhibition is a result of my “self” dealing with the infusion of creativity in a production environment. Hulme goes on to say, “In each art then, the artist picks out of reality something which we [the viewer], owing to a certain hardening of perceptions, have been unable to see ourselves.” (Hulme 156) As an artist, I go into the world, observing life as I experience it and attempt to depict my reactions (and the resulting emotions that are elicited) in a physical form. In order to depict those feelings, I must separate myself from the general “norm” of society in which I live (without completely extricating myself from its reality) so that I am not jaded or numbed by those things that surround me daily. “The motive behind any art is a certain freshness of experience which breeds dissatisfaction with the conventional ways of expression because they leave out the individual quality of freshness. [We] are driven to new means

of expression because [we] persist in an endeavor to get it out, exactly as [we] felt it,” (Hulme 162) resulting in the importance of the “meaning” for all works of art created; a meaning that is defined out of my personal experiences. It is up to me to separate my process as a whole from the final product, and I have accomplished this through my repetitive efforts of producing clay tiles and finishing each in a different manner.

Developing the concept about the relationship between aesthetics and personal expression in art, Joseph Margolis discusses the idea that art creates an arousal of emotion that should then have some aesthetic significance. (Margolis 45) Margolis’ dissertation relies on what the viewer will actually feel or experience in the work, rather than the specific subject matter the artwork is dealing with or what medium may be used. The large quantity of tiles that I have chosen to incorporate in this installation (which I will further discuss in the following chapters) is meant to evoke an immediate reaction from the viewer who enters this environment. I am motivated by the surprise value that happens when a person is confronted with massive quantities of a similar object.

Immanuel Kant wrote a “Critique of Judgment” and stated that “in order to distinguish whether anything is beautiful or not, we refer to the representation, not by the understanding to the object for cognition, but by the imagination (perhaps in conjuncture with the understanding) to the subject and its feeling of pleasure or pain.” (qtd. in Cahn 146) And, that “the satisfaction in the beautiful must depend on the reflection upon an object” wherein “we must not be in the least prejudice in favor of the existence of things, but be quite indifferent in this respect, in order to play the judge in the things of taste.” (qtd. in Cahn 147) Following his line of thought, rather than allowing the tiles in my exhibition to stand alone and be interpreted individually, I have placed them together, forcing the viewer to imagine my representation of quantity. A feeling of shock is my desire simply by my attempts to create these individual “art works” systematically and not allowing the viewer to see each piece alone, forcing them to interpret the work as a whole.

Art is the action and not necessarily the product, or, rather it is our ability to realize the initial action (or intent) of the “artist” that makes a piece worthy of the title “art”. In dealing with an aesthetic judgment of my art, one must consider that the sole

focus of my work is to portray the initial emotion I experienced. This means my work is not bound by a rule of physical construction, but rather by my initial idea as it was conceived. Thus my medium does not matter in the judgment of its existence as “art” or “non-art”. Leo Tolstoy states that “however poetic, realistic, effectual, or interesting a work may be, it is not a work of art if it does not evoke that feeling (quite distinct from all other feelings) of joy, and spiritual union with another (the author).” (qtd. in Cahn 382) Referencing T.E. Hulme again, “you can define art, then, as a passionate desire for accuracy and the essentially aesthetic emotion as the excitement which is generated by direct communication.” (qtd. in Cahn 163) This is the reason for the quantity of clay tiles.

According to Janet Wolff, “Art is a social product.” (Wolff 28) It is a presentation of a reaction to the happenings of an “artist” in a specific situation or social structure. “‘The Aesthetic’, the separating off of art from other aspects of social and practical life, is a social-historical construct...which combines a reference to the functional relevance of a work with its appreciation.” (Wolff 20) “‘Aesthetics’ is a specific discipline; ‘aesthetic experience’ is explicable in terms of ideology and political values; and ‘aesthetic evaluation’ is nothing but a function of one’s class or other interests.” (Wolff 31) This is not to say that people of different classes can’t or won’t have similar tastes, but rather that there is a high probability that the opinions will differ simply by the types of experiences each has been exposed to; those experiences are often financially influenced. While one individual will value a certain type of art more so than the next, “value is only accorded by those who experience the work.” (Wolff 35) I desire for my work to be seen; this installation is readily accessible to all social classes and interpretable to all who enter the gallery. The quantity of tiles constructed and aligned together is easily seen as an effort of production.

I have attempted to address social and philosophical structures as they relate to the aesthetics of clay and to question whether these theories and thoughts bridge the gap that constantly occurs between the perceptions of what is “art” and what is “craft.” I believe that a new understanding has begun to take shape and that the boundaries between the two are not nearly as clear as they might have been prior to the push of modern art and Marcel Duchamp’s continually debated question of What is Art?

During the fifteenth century the concept of an “artist” arose as an inspired genius, the sole producer or creator of a work, as opposed to and separate from the craftsperson or collective worker. (Wolff 13) In the progression of that separation, it was not until the early 20th century that there were craftsmen, educated in creating one-of-a-kind works, who segregated themselves from the craft “production house” studios, to a more independent and solitary way of working in their own studios.

Forerunners to present day, contemporary ceramics were potters such as Shoji Hamada and Bernard Leach. They desired a connection between the artist, the object, and the consumer. As a result of their example, a new possibility developed in the production environment. If man, not a machine, is making the product then there is a greater chance for there to be a connection and feeling in the replicated form, revealing the hand of the artist. Professional potters began to strive for the artist’s mark; a mark in the same vein as that which has been seen in eastern work since the wave of Buddhism entered Japan in the early sixth century. “Pottery making was an art not a trade under the influence of famous Cha Jin (tea masters) [where] individuality was encouraged in the potters.” (Gorham 14) In the late sixteenth century, the

“Cha Jin [were] the accepted judges of what constituted good taste in Japan. The “tea-men” of those days were discontents and pioneers, dissatisfied with the crash of materialism of their day and its gaudy, ostentatious art. They went to the other extreme and in revolt they preached the doctrine of beauty in imperfection and the joy of living in harmony with nature. They entertained their friends in surroundings suggestive of poverty, not wealth; drank their tea from bowls that had been discarded by Korean potters; arranged their flowers in crude earthen pots that had been used by farmers to store seeds in.” (Gorham 26)

“It is an essentially Japanese trait to scorn the obvious, the easily understood beauty of a perfect thing and the prefer the subtle pleasure that comes of finding of aesthetic beauty in imperfection, or in a thing not beautiful in itself but because it fulfilled the purpose for which it was made or because it has answered a need of man for many long years.” (Gorham 29) This Japanese trait has migrated to other areas of the world and, as a potter, I too desire the “imperfect” mark, the mark of my hand.

The Cha Jin eventually died out and are no longer the purveyors of social and religious aesthetic trends in Japan. Because there has been no group to replace them that has had anywhere near their impact on ceramics, my perspective on aesthetics

seems to parallel those of the late sixteenth century Japanese artisan. It is through this perspective of aesthetic values that I have created my tiles.

In this need to scorn the obvious, and desire an imperfect form, potters and consumers are finding works that are deliberately showing the mark of the maker. Potters tend to work individually, attempting to create works that are true artistic impressions of their perspective and, by doing so, carry their mark. This mark is established in the carved marks on the surface of each of my tiles. While they all appear to be carved the same, each mark is its own gesture, one that often becomes “imperfect” throughout the creation, my own creation in “beauty of imperfection”.

CHAPTER 3

INTERACTIONS WHICH INSPIRED THE INDUSTRY

Throughout my experience working in clay I have been exposed to a number of amazing ceramists, historical and contemporary, who have had an impact on my artistic development. Beyond these master ceramists, I have also investigated artists who work toward creating thoughtful and beautiful works of art. The number of influences that have affected me during this development are many and so I have limited my focus to the major contributors.

In my introductory art classes, an artist who held great interest for me was Leonardo DaVinci. The preliminary sketches for his paintings immediately stood out from all other works I had seen up to this point. DaVinci was able to abbreviate a form while not eliminating the visual detail necessary to communicate the form he was depicting. He specialized in the human form through medical observations and drawings. Each of the figures was, for me, complete, without the necessity of paint. The “Study for Virgin of the Rocks” (Giunti 36) drawing uses the basic necessities in two-dimensional design to portray a young girl. The minimal lines and cross-hatching portray all necessary details without the need of heavy graphite. This simplicity and ease with which the image appears is what draws me to DaVinci’s work. From the beginning I have found it pleasing to attempt to create works that appear to be simple on the surface but, in reality, require much thought and consideration in the development processes. Though my replications may not be in pencil, my marks and forms are abbreviations of more complex compositions.

Contemporary Influences

Contemporary artists who have influenced my work include Christo and Jeanne Claude. Their ability to make me realize how small I really am and how I truly don’t see things until I change how I perceive them is extremely commanding. Their piece that wrapped of the Reichstag government building in Berlin, Germany with cloth, forced all individuals to pause at the change in appearance. Within the same realm of personal influence is Claus Oldenburg and his ability to create a false perception of size. Both Christo and Oldenburg place either humans or objects into a scale relationship that

forces us as observers to take a moment to consider our scale within the world in which we exist. This is why quantity is such an important factor in my exhibit. Traditionally, clay work has based itself in quantity, even if the intention is to produce a single art piece. This endeavor is my exaggeration of a process I must complete in order to ensure that final artwork.

The idea of scale in art and its application to my chosen medium began to dawn on me rather slowly. In various travels abroad, I often found myself waiting in airports, train, and bus stations or sitting in unfamiliar facilities. While in these settings, I had the opportunity to observe the interplay of structures and their ornamentation that occurs within such locations as Italy, England, and Norway, with the respective architecture chosen for their edifices. Most notable to me are the tile decorations often found in these places; it is fascinating to think that across cultures and vast distances, the simple clay tile appears to be the designers' choice to articulate significant elements of the creation. Yet while the basic tile seems to be used universally, each application seems to hold a different purpose. The style of decorative tile application varies in each location depending on the trends, cultures, and religious views of the specific region and the time of its creation.

“The term tile is bewilderingly vague in the English language. In its widest sense, it can refer to any sort of material, whether it is stone, vinyl or even carpet, which is used in a (usually square or rectangular) modular form.” (Herbert Huggins 7) In my references, I am specifically talking about ceramic tiles that are used in a mosaic pattern on surfaces of architectural structures. One of the first and more memorable places I observed these tiles was in the New York City subway system. It's not often that a city environment quiets long enough for someone to observe such a common element, but when you are a visitor in that place—when you observe or experience a destination for the first time—your senses are heightened and common place things become foreign, rare.

Throughout the construction of modern cities, ceramic tiles were used for various purposes, but their intent in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were to “Keep buildings cool....and as a means of keeping buildings both clean and hygienic.”

(Herbert Huggins 93) While they satisfy these two requirements, they often “contributed a great deal to the architectural decoration” as well. (Herbert Huggins 99)

Further in my travels, I discovered that the buildings in which I found myself often did not reflect their exterior environment. They tend to be designed to serve a specific function. For example, not only are glazed surfaces installed to be easily cleaned (in places like a subway,) tiles are often positioned in specific geometric patterns as a location indicator or as a directional guidance element. “As nineteenth-century buildings became larger and more densely grouped together, so the multi-functional value of tiles became apparent. Their glazed surfaces not only helped spaces such as basements, internal courtyards and narrow passages to look and stay clean but in addition, because of their reflectivity, increased the amount of natural light reaching these potentially gloomy places.” (Herbert Huggins 110)

In these observations, I started to record the pattern variations, the repetition of patterns, and the sheer quantity of clay squares that were used to cover the structures. I was fascinated by the fact that rarely would a person appear to give pause at all to the sheer number of tiles required to make up one wall. I began to wonder if both size and numbers were the issue. We work and live in a world where things are large, we move fast, and we do not place a great priority on detail. So in the construction of my own tiles, I thought perhaps an increase in tile size would be the first step to focus an individual observer, cause him/her to pause and reflect on the efforts.

Another contemporary influence for me began in my undergraduate studies at Berry College in Rome, Georgia. As a student, I focused on two-dimensional creative forms. It was not until my third year there that I first experienced clay. Jere Lykins, Associate Professor of Art, taught all the clay classes at Berry. He taught me how to throw and manipulate clay as though it was an empty canvas on which I could create. I started with hand-building techniques and progressed to the wheel, using both methods to create functional and non-functional forms. Lykins followed a strict tradition of “un-attachment”, the Buddhist ideal that nothing is permanent. He showed me there is always another form to be created and, if created once, could be created again.

Lykins demonstrated the necessity for an artist to edit and critique his/her own work, both with an open eye and a calculating eye; to never be happy with the first try (or even the second or third). Many of the forms I produce today are still based on the fundamental philosophy of execution I was exposed to through him. It was at a faculty show at Berry that I experienced my first “clay on wall” event. Lykins created pyramidal forms, designed specifically to be hung on a wall. I was intrigued by the concept of hanging clay; I had only considered it in vessel or sculptural form. This “aha” moment, caused me to look beyond Berry College and Professor Lykins to find other inspirations with clay.

In my early explorations in clay, I sought out all possible resources. I scoured through books, magazines, and the internet. In the process I eventually discovered another contemporary influence in a book that also became a major focus for me. It is a book titled “Wheel Thrown Ceramics” by Don Davis. One of the first things I read in his book that has forever burned itself into my mind is, “No other material accepts and preserves our impressions quite like clay, and each person’s touch is unique.” (Davis 6)

This “uniqueness” is a goal for any artist. In pursuing this goal, we attempt to discover our own signature as artists. While Davis’s book was intended primarily as a “how-to” book, what I was affected by most was the volume of examples and pictures in this book that were used for reference. Using the book as an inspirational guide, I returned to the process I understood, replication. I began throwing and creating the forms I saw there over and over again. My previous instructor had taught me to throw, but Don Davis’s book started to provide ideas on how to make the action of creating in clay my own.

What attracted me most to Davis’s style was the same fascination I had with the simple use of the line in drawings done by Leonardo DaVinci. I was fascinated with how Davis employed this simplicity in his work. Most of Davis’s pieces have a spiral line that progresses up the vessel, starting at the base or center and flowing upward and outward, mimicking the rhythms of a rotating wheel. This simple augmentation, similar to the technique of DaVinci, allows a line, not confused by extraneous details, to hold as much power as the form itself. This has manifested itself in my Thai carving technique that I use in all of my work.

Another influence that I have found and resourced for inspiration is the potter and sculptor, Peter Voulkos. His inspirations, aspirations, and pursuits in clay were unheard of when he began, but he encouraged new thought channels and discussions about where clay stood as a medium in the twentieth century. “Voulkos’s great contribution to modern ceramics is his “non-technique” technique. Previously the ceramics medium has been too precious, or too humble or too industrial, too laden with technical no-no’s and virtuoso traps to encourage artistic freedom; the daring Voulkos challenged the medium to creative adventure.” (Slivka 101)

At first glance, his works appear to be rough and heavy. Pausing to observe them more discerningly, you realize they are canvas pieces through which Voulkos explored the raw emotions that took over when he was creating in clay. Peter Voulkos started out as a painter. It was in a mandatory clay class his last year at college where he discovered the medium of clay and fell in love with it. “They are all interrelated, although they all demand different disciplines and different kinds of think.” (Slivka 87) The interrelatedness he refers to is the dissolving of the separation of the art of painting and the art of dealing with clay. “If Pete’s doing a pot, he does what a pot needs....he enjoyed the process in everything.” (Slivka 11) Even in his creations in clay, he managed to do what each creation required—the same way a painter might react to the evolution of a painting. I find myself attempting to nurture that freedom, to approach clay in a similar manner; allowing the medium and the idea to dictate how the clay will be handled.

As Peter Voulkos progressed and continued to teach, his theories evolved in what he wanted his students to focus on. “My purpose was for the students to become aware not only of everything around them but of themselves, to find themselves....to make them aware just of themselves.” (qtd. in Slivka 25) He wanted them to understand that the creation of an object begins within them. While we are indeed affected by external experiences, at the core it is the “self” and how we can depict that in the clay. A honing of the senses develops an ability to focus the attention inward in order to project the end piece of work outward. “There is real intimacy between Voulkos and his clay” (Slivka 77) and his desire is that, as students, we have the same intimacy and vigor.

Sometimes artistic influences can present themselves in unlikely places. I found one of these unusual influences in Thai fruit carving, the art of ornate carving on edible items to make them more appealing. Thai fruit carving is a task I was exposed to while working at Druid Hills Country Club in Atlanta, Georgia, under the guidance of head chef, John Nishiyama, a skilled food artist. I started exploring the technique on the traditional fruit but now, over the past couple of years, have attempted to replicate the process and its end effect in my clay forms. I have attempted to create a visual signature, something that has solely evolved to be mine. The visual signature I have chosen has come out of these explorations. It is an adapted mark that I apply to my clay forms. It is this mark that is seen in each of my tiles. The carving on the tiles is the same style that I use on my functional ware. This abbreviation is my attempt to use the simple, and yet complex, tendencies of clay to complete a refined form.

CHAPTER 4

THE METHODS BEHIND MY INDUSTRY

In my exploration and development within this Master of Fine Arts program I have had the opportunity to research and experiment with several different methods in clay. The installation that I have created is a culmination of this exploration and is a visually exhaustive representation of clay “tests” that reflect the nearly overwhelming variety of techniques that have unfolded before me. My choice in displaying these “tests” was to re-engage all aspects of clay, glazes, firing processes, and finishing techniques that I have encountered throughout my studies. This installation seeks to introduce the viewer to the massive amount of choices an artist has when working in clay.

Types of Clay Bodies

Clay is one of the planet’s most basic substances and is abundant throughout the world. The quality of fired clay is determined by the mineral variations found in the earth where the clay originated. For instance, a red earthen-ware (a clay body that can only be fired to a low or mid range temperature) is red due to the high Red-iron content found in the material. Earthenware clay can also be yellow, white, blue and brown, again for reasons related to mineral content. All of the various colors are determined by the raw elements that are found in the natural clay body. These elements are often permanent markers that have an unalterable impact on the end result. Colorants may be added later, actually anytime after the clay is extracted, but often the clay is so color indicative of the land from which it is dug that the basic hue is unalterable or so strong as to be difficult to overcome.

The consistency of the clay can be judged according to how smooth and/or rough the clay body feels to the touch. A clay that has a high “grog” (a sand-like substance that allows the clay to be literally stretched further in its initial manipulation) content will feel rough on the skin, while a porcelain clay body will feel extremely smooth to the touch (hence lacking the “grainy” grog). The reason for this is again found in the clay’s makeup and often its origin. The amount and size of refined materials found in the makeup of the clay determines its consistency. In porcelain clay bodies for example, the

particles are extremely fine and its content lacks the iron that would change the color, therefore maintaining its white nature.

Each clay body reacts differently to the method of firing and the method of finishing the piece. When dealing with glazes, a rough clay body will require a glaze decision based on a desire to mask the roughness or augment it depending on the desired result. On the other hand, with a smooth clay body, the ceramist may not want to cover the smooth surface completely with the glaze and would rather allow some of the surface to show through.

Temperature is the determining factor in the final result of all clay work. Clay must be fired to the point of vitrification (the point at which a substance is converted into a glass or glassy substance by heat and fusion). (Merriam-Webster 1322) To measure this temperature within the kiln, a system of cones is used. These cones are made of various clays that melt when they reach a specific temperature. The lowest cone number I use in my processes is a cone 024, and the highest temperature I use is a cone 9. The difference in temperatures between those two cones is about 1300 degrees Fahrenheit. There are different mixes of clay that are used for specific treatments. For example, if I were to glaze a piece that would be fired to a cone 9, I would want a clay body that would both meld with the glaze at that higher temperature and at the same time seal itself. The same would need to be true if I desired to fire clay at a lower temperature, I would still want a clay body that would seal itself under these lower temperature applications.

Firing Techniques

In my installation, I have attempted to include as many of these treatments mentioned above as possible. I have managed to include the following firing aspects: cone 9 reduction, cone 6 oxidation, cone 9 wood-fire, pit-firing, flash-firing, raku, horse hair raku, and cone 02 oxidation. Within those firing methods, I have included the following types of clay: cone 02 red earthenware, cone 02 white earthenware, cone 6 red earthenware, cone 6 white earthenware, cone 9 stoneware, cone 9 stoneware with a high iron content, cone 9 stoneware with a high grog content, cone 9 white stoneware, and cone 9 porcelain clay. To these clays and firing methods, I have applied various finishing

techniques, whether it is by glaze, terra sigillata, or simply the atmosphere within the kiln.

I have used many commercially made products, as well as my own recipes. I have discovered that neither one is necessarily better than the other (especially at lower temperatures) though each one does indeed generate a different result. With the commercial glazes, I have used them in the conventional manner. I have also used the carved markings, painting only the recessed areas. At higher temperatures, I tend to mix my own glazes for greater variety of results, which will be discussed later.

Blending glazes has significant impact on clay work. For example, I have used a blending technique I learned from a process developed by the Chinese potter, Fong Choo. This process starts with a cone 6 base glaze over which I can then layer a lower temperature, cone 04 glaze. The result is a blending of two different glazes into one. The cone 04 glaze begins to melt and shift creating trailing marks on the piece. As the cone 6 glaze starts to melt, it absorbs the cone 04 glaze, creating a blended effect that is reminiscent of paint on a pallet. I have also used commercial glazes that can only fire to a temperature of cone 02. The application is the same as the cone 6 glaze, though I do not add the cone 04 glaze over the top of it. Not only do I play with the various combinations of the glazes, but I also make use of the various combinations of the glazes as they are applied to various clay bodies. The results of these mixed choices are limited only by imagination.

Keeping the temperature in a near-constant range, I have also experimented with a few different techniques of firing; such as Flash-firing, Raku Firing, Pit-Firing, Horse-hair firing, and Naked Raku. Beginning with Flash-firing—a technique explored by Jeff Kise and Tommy Williams (two ETSU graduate students) in which an etching solution (ferric chloride) is painted on the surface of a burnished pot (a pot with applied terra sigillata and the surface rubbed until it shines) and then heated at a very low heat—between 700 and 1000 degrees Fahrenheit. The color variations of the surface will be significantly different based on the temperature reached during the firing. For example, the lower the temperature, the more vibrant in color. Hit a higher temperature and the surface color moves to a deep red or cranberry.

Once the surface is painted, the object is then wrapped in its own, individual “saggar” (a smaller chamber in which pots are placed, often to protect from the elements within the kiln) of tin-foil that may contain steel wool or paper. The foil itself adds variety to the surface of the piece. Where the foil touches the piece’s surface, the colors are more intense (cranberry), and where it does not touch, the colors are brighter (yellow). The steel wool adds a similar affect on the color, though the patterns are of a finer quality. The paper’s purpose is to act as a combustive material that will give off carbon that is trapped within the clay. This trapped carbon causes a black mottled pattern on the surface of the piece.

Raku firing is the process by which glazes are applied to the surface of the clay and fired fairly quickly in a kiln to cone 06. Once at this temperature with the glaze slightly melted, the piece is removed from the chamber and immediately placed into a container that contains either sawdust, newspaper, wood chips, or other combustible materials. In this process the vessel absorbs the carbon that occurs when the hot piece being fired touches the combustible material. A lid is placed over the top to seal the container, forcing the object heated to absorb the carbon that is trapped within the container. This causes the pot to go black in all areas where the bare (un-glazed) clay is exposed.

In the raku method, there are two techniques that I have used: horse hair raku and naked raku. Horse hair raku works in a similar way to that of the pit-firing method (discussed below). The piece is heated up to a specific temperature and, while hot, is removed from the kiln. At this point horse hair is literally placed on the surface by hand. Wherever the hair touches the pot it turns black. The resulting image is a shiny, burnished surface with black, “squiggly” lines all over it. Naked raku is fired the same way as a normal raku firing except the surface of the pot is burnished and a thick clay slip is applied before the glaze is over-applied. Once fired, placed in the reduction chamber, and after the piece has cooled, the glaze is scraped off of the surface of the piece to reveal the carbon that worked its way under the surface of the slip-protected glaze. The glaze will not stick to the surface because the slip has been applied before the glaze and so it acts as a resist. The glaze protects the piece from the atmosphere, and thus the final form is not completely consumed by the carbon. The glazed areas are shiny and colorful, while the contrasting bare clay is a rich black.

Pit-firing is similar to the raku process without the pieces being glazed. The piece to be fired is burnished to a shine, placed into a chamber that contains wood chips, sawdust, or paper, and then is covered with the combustible material. The material is set on fire and a lid is placed over the top so the open flame goes out, but the materials surrounding the piece continue to smolder. The effect is a “flashing” of black that contrasts the color of the clay to create a mottled finished piece. Once the container burns all the way down and the smoke stops, the fired piece is removed, washed, and a paste wax is applied to the surface to enhance the shine.

As I mentioned in my opening comments on glazes, I find that as I increase the temperature at which I am firing, I prefer to use my own glaze mixtures, either researched from various book sources, discovered from work with other potters, or have created myself. I have extensive journals of these recipes and their desired results that I started compiling in my undergraduate work, continued through this graduate process, and maintained in my apprenticeships under various master potters.

There are limitless options to creating one’s own glaze. By simply taking a pre-fabricated glaze and changing one element, you are left with a completely new glaze (and a new effect). My journals started with standard glaze recipes. But many of the recipes that I have now created are from my work with my professor Don Davis, along with various publications from the Art-Annex library, book stores, (both U.S. and foreign) and the internet. All of these sources provide endless ideas on clay and glaze recipes. I have tried many glazes, attempting to find glazes that I feel are most appealing when placed on my work.

From this study of standard and existing glaze recipes I have also begun the formulating my own glazes so that I am no longer limited by what other potters have found before me. This has allowed me to search for and create any color and/or affect on the clay surface that might be possible and to seek the best application for the piece being created. Many of the glazes that I use at these higher temperatures are applied by pouring, spraying, or brushing.

Within the cone 9 temperature range, I use a firing method called reduction firing. This process uses an abundance of natural gas in order to reduce the amount of oxygen in the kiln's atmosphere. This forces the flame patterns to search throughout the kiln for extra pockets of oxygen before exiting the kiln. Due to the lack of oxygen within the chamber, the flame will use the oxygen within the clay body (on a chemical exchange level), forcing the clay to become a "toasty" warm color as the clay body gives up some of its oxygen content. All of the various elements contained within the clay material lose their oxygen, and in this process the base colors of the elements are brought to the surface.

Parallel to this cone 9 reduction firing, is the wood-firing method. This method is similar in principle to the reduction method, using wood as a source of energy instead of natural gas. Various woods are thrown into the fire pit of the kiln in a systematic fashion for a series of days to create an atmosphere high in ash that will bind to the surface of the clay to form "flashing". Flashing is one visual way of recording flame permanently. The surface of the clay pot mimics the flow and the movement of the flames through the kiln in its hunt for an escape route toward the chimney. Glazes are typically applied to the interior of the vessel while the exterior may be left plain or a "slip" may be applied to the surface. This slip is essentially colored clay that lacks the melting qualities of a glaze. However, when a slip is applied to a piece and placed in a wood kiln, the ash binds with the slip, functioning as a catalyst, causing the slip to melt. The surfaces that are created are volatile and unpredictable. There is educated guessing before the firing but definitely no guarantee as to what the surface of the pots will look like. While unpredictable, it is a beautiful expression of flame.

Construction Techniques

All of the techniques discussed here have been used in this installation. They have all been used in various combinations or by themselves on each one of the "tiles" that I have created. These tiles were constructed in sixteen 10 inch by 10 inch slump molds that created the uniform shape of the tiles seen within the exhibition. In the slump mold method, the clay is first rolled out to form a flat, uniformly thick slab similar to a large pancake. The clay is then cut to lie over the top of a mold made from a solid, stable non-absorbent material. The clay slab will then sink into the mold, causing the surface to

“slump”. The slump molds I created were covered with Spandex© so that when the clay was draped over the open hole, the clay would be allowed to “slump” but not fall through. This process insures that the edges of the tiles (the surface that would touch the wall) are smooth and flat and reduces the waste of extra clay. Once the clay was draped over the Spandex© covered mold, I used a sponge and pressed the clay down into the mold so it better mimicked the square shape of the mold’s opening and enhanced the concave shape of the slump. Once the piece was slumped completely and smoothed out, I attached two “hanging lugs” to the concave (back-side) surface, using balls of clay, scoring and slipping the surface to attach them securely. Holes were then made through the sides of each lugs to allow wire to pass through once the tiles were fired and finished. I signed the back of each tile at this stage with a special cutting tool and then set the 16 molds aside to dry to a stage that each would hold its shape (roughly one full day, or 12 hours).

Once the clay was hard enough to hold its shape, though not so hard that it couldn’t be worked, the “tile” was removed from the slump mold, turned over, and set on a ware-board to finish the process. Once flipped (so that the slumped square now becomes a hump), the clay surface was rubbed with a sponge and smoothed with a rib (a flat-sided metal tool that is dragged along the clay surface to align the particles). I then carved the convex surface of each tile using the technique adapted from the traditional native Thai art style of fruit carving. I have developed my own variation of this Thai style of carving and have established a specific mark of carving, attempting to explore the best application that would showcase this adapted technique.

The carving done on the surface of each of the tiles in this installation is an abbreviation of the carving that is typically done all over my pieces. It is more of a “signature” mark, rather than a true example of the carving. So into the surface of each tile, I carve seven diagonal scribes, progressively getting smaller as they work their way out to the corners. The tiles are then trimmed at the edges to ensure a clean looking edge, and a sponge is wiped over the whole surface to complete the smoothing process. They are then left to dry completely before entering the bisque firing and finishing processes.

This, fundamentally, is what has gone into the evolution of the methods behind my industry.

CHAPTER 5

MY INSPIRED INDUSTRY

This is an installation of inspiration and personal industry. Upon entering the gallery, the viewer is confronted with a massive quantity of square tiles, hung in an orderly fashion (Figure 1 and Figure 2). The first observation is the quantity of tiles, while the second shows how they are hung in a systematic pattern. This pattern is meant to mimic the patterns found in an everyday, tiled environment (for example, a subway). By using the repetitive nature of tiles within a gallery context, I am forcing those who enter this environment to pause on an idea of mass.

A gallery is a place for art to hang, not an environment in which a person would expect to be confronted with a large quantity of the same form. Ceramics is typically considered a medium of production, but by housing the products in a gallery, the work takes on a different meaning. No longer are the forms found in a home or on a table, rather, they are hung on a gallery wall.

There are more than eight hundred tiles in this gallery, each carved with my unifying mark. This carving is my adaptation of a Thai fruit carving technique discussed in Chapter 3 (Figure 3). The carved lines are meant to be the constant variable to all the pieces within this exhibition. Each tile is carved the same (at a diagonal from the upper



Figure 1. Inspired Industry Installation, view 1



Figure 2. Inspired Industry Installation, view 2

left corner and trailing to the bottom right corner), and crafted to be a similar size. It is in the surface treatment where the pieces differ. The difference in surface application is meant to act as a summary of all techniques I have learned while attending East Tennessee State University for the last three years. The techniques I have learned are numerous, and are all aesthetically pleasing for different reasons. Each clay and firing process requires a different application, and depending on my final ceramic forms, those processes allow me to choose the appropriate application methods. These tiles are, in essence, a sampler.



Figure 3. Tile Detail

At the entrance of the gallery, I have chosen to display a grouping of sixteen, a four by four composition (Figure 4). I have titled this grouping “Inspired Industry”. The title is representative of this installation of work. These tiles are the “final product” of this show, being what I believe is the optimal arrangement of tiles as an autonomous piece of artwork. The methods and results within this display are a sample of clays, firing temperatures and techniques that I used throughout the gallery.



Figure 4. “Inspired Industry”
Mixed Clays, Mixed Firings

The quantity of tiles is a representation of an extreme. This extreme is the production process inherent in each of my artistic undertakings. My desire in creating this installation is to provide an opportunity of awareness in an effort behind any work of art.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS TO MY INDUSTRY

Industry, as it applies to this exhibition, is the systematic reproduction of one type of form in an attempt to display an effort of personal production. Constant creation has prevailed throughout my exploration of this Industry and Inspiration. As a potter, I am bound by the nature of my medium and forced to replicate similar forms to ensure a completed piece. There are many chances for the original object not to survive, and so I begin my endeavors with the assumption that I must make more than one— a personal Industry. The inspirational aspect comes from the initial design and conception of those items to be reproduced. This is how these two conflicting terms have come into unison within my work. This is the duality that plagues the decisions I make—utilitarian or creatively driven?

As I conclude my consideration of aesthetics as it relates to clay, I come back to my original introduction. In this journey it dawned on me slowly that what I am really trying to do is to narrow the focus of this discovery process down more strictly to how it applies to my specific body of work. As I keep coming back to this issue of aesthetics, I have realized that the “mark” of my work emerges from the feeling I get from the piece in its inception and how its execution communicates it to the viewer.

Having studied ceramic artists in their process, both current and historical, the binding aesthetic I perceive in their works is the same. What motivated each of them was what they valued about their own creation. They were affected by philosophies; theirs and others. They were affected by society, what they liked and disliked in it. They were most definitely affected by what was currently in the marketplace. In the end, the artwork seemed to simply boil down to satisfying that portion of his or her own “self” that motivates them to create and dictates the choices they made in the process. I have begun to understand that the aesthetics of an artist’s work begins from within. I accept that it is I who must decide what is truly enjoyable in my work. My own need to produce a quantity of forms is my desire for the final design to survive the creation process. This display of “tiles” is my visual statement to what extreme I would go to ensure a final artwork. I desire the viewer to acknowledge the process and to see that the effort I go

through is more than simply designing and creating a single form, it is an endless creation and a continuous refinement of an original idea. It is the repetition that is to be “Industrial” and it is the final display that is to be “Inspirational.”

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EDUCATION

- 2005 Master of Fine Arts, Ceramics
East Tennessee State University.
Johnson City, Tennessee.
- 2002 Bachelor of Arts, Studio Art with a concentration in Ceramics
Berry College.
Rome, Georgia.
- 2001 Studio Art Centers International (SACI)
Florence, Italy
Merit Scholar
- 1999 University of Oslo
Oslo, Norway
Summer Study Abroad Program
Rotary Scholar

WORK EXPERIENCE

- 2005 TEACHING ASSISTANT (Instructor of Record)
East Tennessee State University. Johnson City, Tennessee
Courses: ARTA 1140: 3D Foundations, ARTA 1110: 2D Design courses.
- APPRENTICE/STUDIO ASSISTANT
Toff Milway: Tewkesbury, England.
Summer Apprenticeship with Toff Milway
Running a personal studio pottery while family is away on holiday
- INSTRUCTOR
Johnson City Area Arts Council. Johnson City, Tennessee.
Working with Kindergarten -5th grade youth in clay
- 2004 GUEST INSTRUCTOR
Libertytown, Fredericksburg, Virginia
Instructing Hand-building and Throwing clay classes to all ages groups
- APPRENTICE/STUDIO ASSISTANT
Dan Finnegan. Fredericksburg, Virginia
Summer apprenticeship with Mr. Dan Finnegan in his studio
Built a double chamber Bourry Box Kiln

- 2000 WINDOW DRESSER and DESIGNER
New Orleans, Louisiana and Los Angeles, California
Commissioned to first repair work done by other artists
Resulted in producing my own work for display cases used at NBC,
MSNBC, and Petopia exhibits
- 1999-2000 STUDIO ASSISTANT
Berry College, Rome, Georgia
Worked for Professor Jere Lykins as Ceramic Studio assistant
In charge of kiln firings, making clay and glazes for all classes
Cleaned and Organized Ceramic Facilities, Built a High-Fire Gas Salt Kiln

EXHIBITIONS

Solo Exhibitions

- 2005 "Inspired Industry" Johnson City Area Arts Council. Johnson City,
Tennessee
- 2001 "Order & Chaos" Rome Area Council of the Arts. Rome, Georgia
- 2000 "National Cable Exposition" 3D window displays for NBC. Mixed Media
New Orleans, Louisiana
"Western Cable Exposition" 3D window displays for NBC. Mixed Media
Los Angeles, California

Group Exhibitions

- 2005 "Berry Alumni Exhibition" Berry College. Rome, Georgia
"Weapon of Mass Distribution" Johnson City, Tennessee. Houston,
Texas(Special Topics Project with Mel Chin)
"Seize the Clay" Nelson Art Gallery. Johnson City, Tennessee
"Mute" Reece Museum and Art Gallery. Johnson City, Tennessee
- 2004 "Seize the Clay" Nelson Art Gallery. Johnson City, Tennessee
- 2000 "Georgia on our Mind" Belfast, Ireland

Juried Exhibitions

- 2005 "27th Annual East Tennessee Bank Art Show" Reece Museum. Johnson
City, Tennessee
Juried by James Hoobler
- 2001 Honors Exhibition. Berry College. Rome, Georgia
Honorable mention
- 2000 Honors Exhibition. Berry College. Rome, Georgia
3rd place

PUBLICATIONS

2005-6 "500 Pitchers" Juried by Terry Gess. Lark Publications
(Due out Fall 2006)

HONORS AND AWARDS

2004 Penland School of Crafts. Penland, North Carolina.
General Work-Study Scholarship

Presidents Pride. East Tennessee State University. Johnson City,
Tennessee

Student Ceramic Association, President. East Tennessee State University.
Johnson City, Tennessee

2002 National Creative Society. Rome Chapter, Rome, Georgia

2001 Studio Art Centers International
Florence, Italy
Merit Scholar

1999 University of Oslo
Oslo, Norway
Full Rotary Scholar

PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS

College Art Association (CAA)
American Craft Council
Johnson City Area Art Council
ETSU Ceramic Association