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Tiles to Faith

Master of Fine Arts Thesis

By

Matthew Kimmel

B.F.A. Washington State University, 1999

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts

The University of Montana

2003

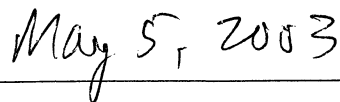
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Kimmel, Matthew J. BFA, May 1999

Ceramics

Tiles to Faith

Committee Chair: Beth Lo



My thesis work combines artistic influences from Jackson Pollock, Frida Kahlo, Sainte-Chapelle, and Susan Steinhaus Kimmel into broken and reassembled, manufactured ceramic tile glazed with vivid color.

I desire to show the peace and grace of my Christian faith through this body of work. My theory and expression is based on faith and its personal intimacy. What I take away from the personal relationship, congregation, and music is the intimacy and the word of God applied to my personal life. I want the viewer to understand my feelings of grace, love, joy, and holiness from the form and gesture.

My work combines architectural and organic elements. I see the hard line of the tile and slab added to the organic gesture and mark of the hand as a beautiful tension. Every direction of line and degree of curve has significance in the composition from its historical origin. The origin of my Christian faith has a foundation in Hebrew calligraphy. Using the apocalyptic books of Daniel and Isaiah, I extrude specific verses and/or stories that portray the mood I desire for the specific piece of work. By abstracting the calligraphy, I make it my own language and gesture. In a sense, I have started over in the expression of my faith, returning to its beginnings for inspiration.

In the end, my primary goal is not to evangelize my faith by confrontation and force, merely portray its effects and significance in my life. My faith is about joy and excitement. As an artist, I need to express myself. I cannot separate myself from my need to create, nor can I separate myself from my faith. Therefore, I am unable to separate my faith from my art. I desire to share my faith with those who understand art, and my art with those who understand faith. Ideally, I want each person to look within her or himself to see how this work affects their heart, both on an aesthetic level or one of faith.

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Introduction:

From the ancient Hebrew language to abstract expressionism, stained glass windows of Gothic architecture to artwork I see everyday encompass the historical, stylistic, and religious influences portrayed in my work. Behind all the influences lies my drive to be a faithful artist. I must express myself, as the gifts I have been given steer me to the fine arts to make a statement of faith. Without my Christianity, there would be nothing behind the work. The end product would be a simple, shallow composition of lines and color over fabricated tiles. Yet, with my beliefs, my work contains direction, unity, and expression held within the medium. I am unable to separate myself from my faith, and therefore, my faith from my artwork.

I desire to show the peace, grace, and energy of my Christianity through this body of work. My theory and expression is based on faith and its personal intimacy. What I take away from the personal relationship, congregation, and music is the intimacy and the word of God applied to my personal life. I want the viewer to understand my feelings of grace, love, excitement, and holiness from the form and gesture.

My work combines architectural and organic elements. I see the hard line of the tile added to the organic gesture and mark of the hand as a beautiful tension. The origin of my Christian faith has a foundation in Hebrew calligraphy. Every direction of line and degree of curve has significance in the composition from its historical origin. Using the apocalyptic books of Daniel and Isaiah, I extrude specific verses and/or stories that portray the mood I desire for the specific piece of work. By abstracting the calligraphy, I make it my own language and gesture. In a sense, I have started over in the expression of my faith, returning to its beginnings for inspiration. I want people to enter it through

experiencing the form, gesture, and color. Ideally, I want each person to look within her or himself to see how this work affects their heart.

Let anyone who has an ear listen...

Historical Influences:

The range of major influences in my work includes Jackson Pollock, Susan Steinhaus Kimmel, the stained glass windows of Sainte-Chapelle, and Frida Kahlo. Pollock and Kimmel are admired for their gestures and color palates, Saint-Chapelle for the modular synergy of the windows, and Kahlo for depicting the reality and truth she lived every day.

Stylistically, Jackson Pollock's work from the late 1940s and early 50s first came into my vocabulary when I saw his work at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City. The Jackson Pollock retrospective show was an eye opening experience to say the least. Since that experience, Pollock has remained in the forefront of my mind as a major artistic influence. "Abstract painting is abstract. It confronts you. There was a reviewer a while back who wrote that my pictures didn't have any beginning or any end. He didn't mean it as a compliment, but it was. It was a fine compliment."¹ Pollock's freedom of expression and loose painting method allowed for a free style and pure articulation. The work is about the paint itself, just as I see the simple beauty of the ink in Hebrew calligraphy. Granted, in my work, I do not simply pick random words because of their aesthetic value. But, as an influence in my work, the gesture is as important as the word itself.

¹ Maurice Tuchman, New York School: The First Generation. Paintings of the 1940s and 1950s, Connecticut: New York Graphic Society Ltd, 1971, p 118.

Additionally, Pollock's style used his whole body to produce the work. The grand scale of the work engages more of the viewer than an "average" size piece of art. It engages the entire field of vision, transforming mere architectural space into art. Pollock's freedom to change space also extended to his choice of medium. Pollock "absorbed and expanded all the materials which he instinctively reached for, and which we later find to be completely pertinent to the work. His method was inclusive: he did not exclude..."² The inclusive method also inspires my use of materials in art. It encourages me to use the resources at hand and to add everything necessary to the surface to complete the composition. This is pertinent to my work as I integrate all the elements/media I have experimented with in the past three years to make each composition.

Like Pollock, I search to find a mythical meaning beyond the surface. All inclusive media incorporates an inherent message and mood into the final product. Pollock painted from the unconscious, which included whatever happened to be on his mind at the time of working. Pollock's methods and theory show me that I cannot separate who I am from the work I produce. The worldview and reality of the artist comes through, no matter if it is a conscious or unconscious effort.

Drawing (page 4) is a simple series of gestures. Pollock would address these as a purely subconscious effect, with no thought to the shape, spacing, or composition. As a viewer, I respond with my conscious to all the elements pouring out of Pollock's inner thoughts. In my mind, I cannot help but see the flowing movement, negative space, and individuality of the forms holding their own, yet reacting to one another. Paint flows

² Frank O'Hara, Jackson Pollock, New York: George Braziller, Inc, 1959, p 78.



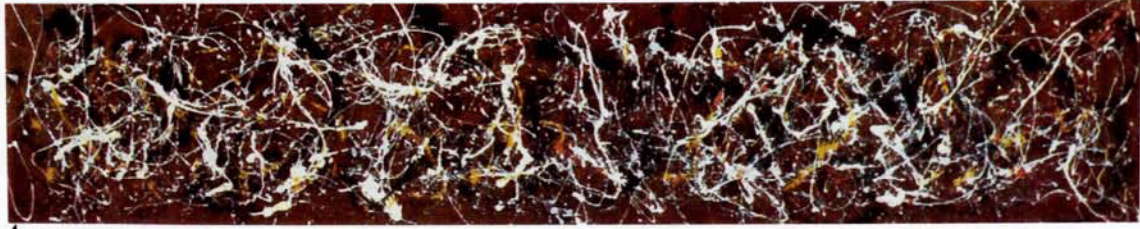
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³ *Drawing*, Frank O'Hara, Jackson Pollock, New York: George Braziller, Inc, 1959, p 79.

across the surface with a sense of grace, gentle curves, specific intensity, and a variety of the line width. The format, black paint on a white canvas, and the spacing of the gestures gives me a sense of language. Later in this paper I discuss the importance of abstracting language in my work, therefore it seems natural for me to see these as letters, words, or even the essence of a word. *Drawing* reminds me of a visual representation of a poem or song.

In my work, I have a completely different reaction and relationship to *Number 2* (page 6). *Number 2* is all about color. I respond well to the vivid background offset by the gesture of the paint. The contrast keeps my eyes moving between background and foreground. Again, the white and black paint bring me back to thinking about language and sporadic writing. Yet, I cannot ignore the overwhelming sense of energy brought about by the color. The simple addition of color adds so much energy to *Number 2* when compared to *Drawing*. This is another aspect of Pollock's work I love. Changing a few characteristics of the composition brings about a drastic change in mood. The technique may be similar as Pollock's works master his medium and resolve, but the outcome is changed. The subtle change is how I see my tiles and colors. Much of the technique is glazing, breaking, and reassembling, but the color holds the vivacity, the life and reality behind the work.

Susan Steinhaus Kimmel is an artist living and working in Eastern Washington. As my mother, her work was the only art that I paid attention to for the first twenty years of my life, simply because it graced the walls of our home. Even though I grew up with an artist, I truly had no interest in painting, sculpting, or spending time doing anything involving the arts. Furthermore, I felt my career would be something in the sciences,



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⁴ *Number 2*, Frank O'Hara, Jackson Pollock, p 73.

therefore I did not take any art classes or soak in any knowledge from Steinhaus Kimmel. Yet, as I write this thesis and analyze my own work, I clearly see the influence she has on me as an artist. The gesture and color in her thesis work appeared as I began to realize my need to create art. Steinhaus Kimmel's MFA exhibit in 1994, along with her work that immediately followed influences my use color and gesture within my tiles. The irony in our respective MFA work is that she began with language and found gesture, while I began with gesture and found language. Both are similar thought processes with parallel paths of exploration. While we express with a similar gesture and language, we have a much different voice, motivation, and resolution to our work. However, her influences on my work cannot be denied.

As seen in *Synergy* (page 8), there are many aspects of the work that I draw to, enjoy, and gather from in my own expression. The two primary elements are the gesture and use of color. The contrast and organic movements of the Sumi ink moving across the page appeal to my aesthetic taste. The lines themselves are graceful with an ever-changing line width and intensity. The tension created by the negative space of the line and the edge of the page keeps the composition flowing. The addition of color only adds to the energy of the piece. The color itself is bold, intense, and flowing as it compliments the initial ink gesture. Without a doubt, I see the gesture and color combinations in Steinhaus Kimmel's work apparent in my own expressions.

The upper story of Sainte-Chapelle, completed in Paris in 1248, is a cathedral built in the late Gothic period. Built for Louis IX, it houses relics captured in the crusades. Sainte-Chapelle is specific to the Rayonnant style from the Gothic era. Rayonnant is a style that emphasized a use of light, and translates into English as radiant, or radiating.

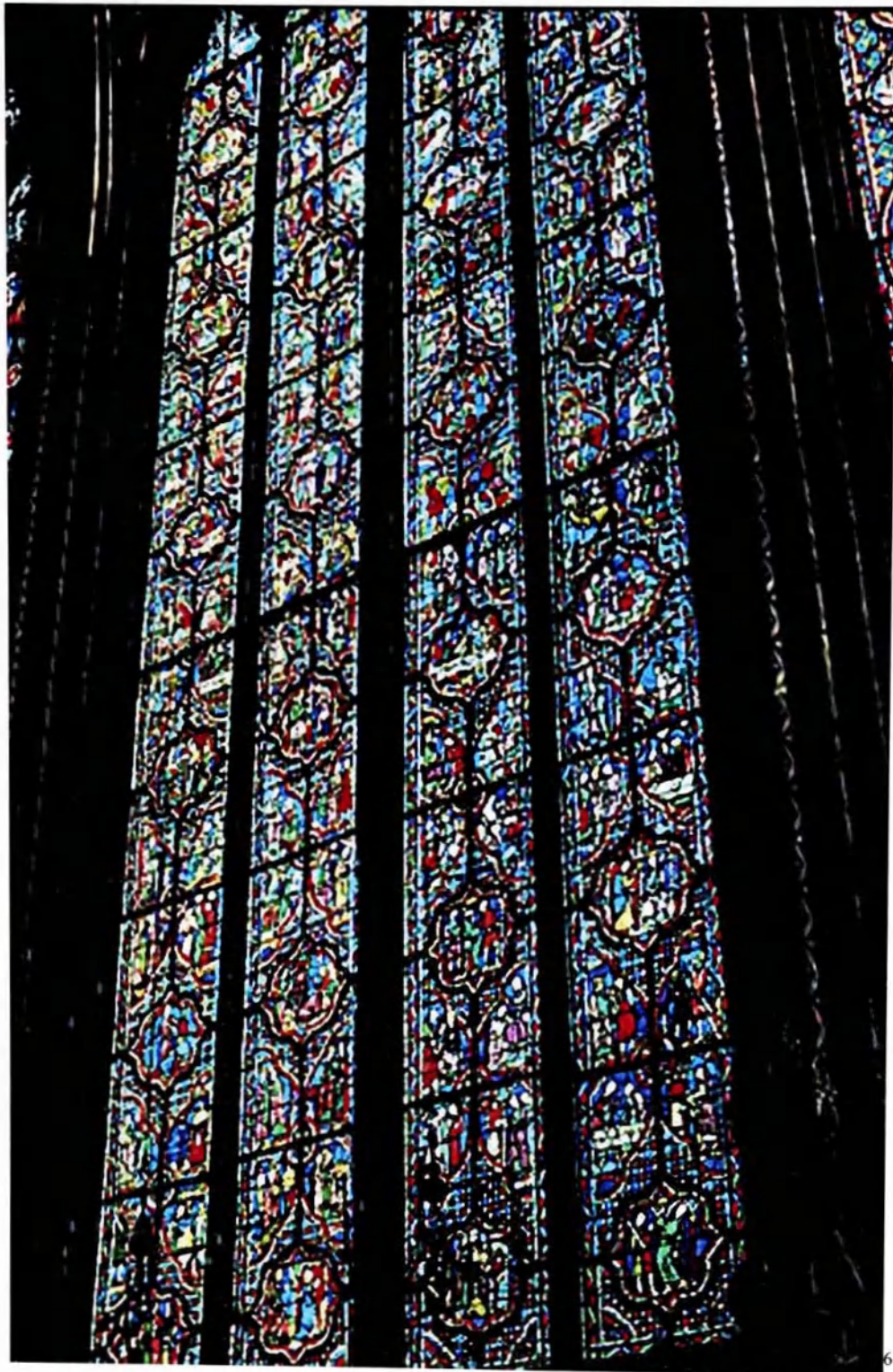


⁵ *Synergy*, Susan Steinhaus Kimmel, 1996, Courtesy of the Kimmel Personal Collection.

The building is meant to be overwhelming, bright, and a truly awe-inspiring house for relics. The flying buttresses allow for an incredible amount of the stone wall to be replaced with stained glass. The glass is full of vivid color, with modular parts working together to accomplish a greater work of art. The color from the windows radiates into the space, filling the church with more effect than merely a wall decoration, but encompassing the entire room (page 10).

Additionally, the pictures and words within the glass are not solely decoration, but used as an educational tool. Each window, keeping with the tradition of pilgrimage churches in the Gothic era, has a message for the viewer. Sainte-Chapelle's stained glass is a reminder of who the building is built for, and all His glory and radiance. The glass takes over the space, addressing it as a fully encompassing work of art on an architectural scale. Further, the work is a synergy of glass pieces. Each minute piece by itself is a mere chunk of colored glass. Yet, when combined in a specific order, the small pieces are given a greater meaning. The synergy of the small pieces of glass is the major influence for breaking the tiles in my thesis work. Each piece on its own can be beautiful, yet when combined or altered to show a specific orientation with other similar parts, the work deepens.

The many individual pieces of Frida Kahlo's body of work show how her expression portrays a depth and meaning not completely attainable by viewing one work alone. While the window of Sainte-Chapelle show the reality accepted by the Christian faith, Kahlo's work has her experience and reality. Kahlo painted what she knew to be her perception of reality. Kahlo was affected by dreams, which came out in her artwork as subject matter. She painted the anger, physical pain, miscarriages, and thoughts of



⁶ Prof. Jeffery Howe , “A Digital Archive of Architecture,”
<http://www.bc.edu/bc_org/avp/cas/fnart/arch/high_gothic.html>, 11 April 2002.

death surrounding her every day. She painted her own reality, which was expressed and escaped through her dreams.

“I must have been six years old when I experienced an imaginary friendship with a little girl more or less the same age as me. I breathed on the window of my room and with a finger I drew a door. Full of great joy and urgency, I went out in my imagination through this door until I came to a dairy with the name of "Pinzon." I entered the "O" of Pinzon and I went down in great haste into the *interior of the earth*, where my imaginary friend was always waiting for me.”⁷

Kahlo put her whole being into painting. Her biography and her artwork were one entity. She had the capability to portray exceptionally painful and personal issues in her work without squeamishness or shame.⁸ Her work is to the point, direct, and without need to soften the blow. By putting her pain into a metaphor or symbol, she placed them outside her body in a place where she could privately work through, or ignore the existence of, the issues within her life.⁹

This separate personality diverted pain from the public Kahlo to the painted Kahlo. The separation of personality in her work appeared to be Surrealist. In fact, she was freely accepted into the Surrealist art world. Yet, Kahlo denied her work to be Surrealist, pointing once again to statements that she was merely painting her own reality.

"I paint my own reality. The only thing I know is that I paint because I need to, and I paint whatever passes through my head without any other

⁷ David Dalton, "Let It Bleed. Frida Kahlo: Mexican Visionary," <<https://www.gadfly.org/1999-06/kahlo.htm>>, (17 April 2001).

⁸ Judy Chicago and Edward Lucie-Smith, Woman and Art: Contested Territory. New York: Watson-Guption Publications, 1999. p 53.

⁹ Edward Lucie-Smith, Latin American Art of the 20th Century, London, Thames and Hudson, 1993, p 98.

consideration...My painting carries with it the message of pain...Painting completed my life...I believe that work is the best thing."¹⁰

Kahlo was not painting for sympathy, but painting because she had aspects of her life she needed to express. Her dreams were important, and gave her the inspiration for her compositions as well as an opportunity to show us her reality, what she knew to be true in her life.

Similar to Kahlo, I am sculpting my own reality. As I tackle issues involving my Christianity, I know there are skeptics and people who will not take the work at the level and meaning I wish them to view. Yet, as Kahlo, I cannot do anything different. I am also being lead, whether it is through dreams, discussion, life's experiences, or the simple reading of scripture to sculpt my reality.

Philosophy:

Francis Schaffer, a Christian philosopher, commented on the necessity of the arts in all aspects of faith. Today it seems there is a tragic separation between Christianity and the art world. Yet, Schaffer had the insight to address the issue and educate those who were furthest from the middle. Commenting with a language that spoke to the conservative, he was gentle, yet convincing in an argument that none could argue. The first part of the essay was geared to showing how art and creativity are used in the Bible. The second half of *Art & the Bible* comments on the making and viewing of art. The essay is a wonderful example of combining faith and art, and I include it in my thesis due to its importance and significance to my work.

¹⁰ Kimberly Masters, "Welcome to the World of Frida Kahlo!" <<http://members.aol.com/fridanet/kahlo.htm>> (17 April 2001).

There were four standards Schaffer laid out for the critiquing of art, both for viewer and artist: technical excellence, validity, intellectual content, and the integration of content and vehicle. He breaks these down as the elements of art. Technical excellence is simply the quality of the craftsmanship. The viewer may disagree with the content of the work, yet there is no mistaking the level of execution shown in the mastery of the medium. “Craftsmanship is essential to the artist. He needs it just as he needs brushes, pigments, and a surface to paint on.”¹¹

Validity is defined as the artist’s honesty with himself and his particular view of the world. Fine art does not happen if the art is made solely for the money. This is not to say that patroned work is not art, it’s simply less valid if at all censored by the patron . If the artist is not allowed the freedom to express, and therefore not speaking entirely from the heart, then the work is less valid. Validity comes down to practicing what you preach, in all things, in every work of art.

The intellectual content of the work is the worldview of the artist. As a Christian, I judge my own life based on the scripture within the Bible. Therefore, my artwork must reflect the same values as my personal life. How can a person make art based from another person’s point of view, seeing how they have not, and cannot jump into their shoes to walk that exact walk, feeling the same emotions? As an artist, I feel I am free to comment on any issue, yet it must reflect on who I am as a person. “...the nature of art...the one that really produces great art and the possibility of great art – is that the

¹¹ Maurice Tuchman, New York School: The First Generation. Paintings of the 1940s and 1950s. Connecticut: New York Graphic Society Ltd, 1971, p 116.

artist makes a body of work and this body of work shows his world view.”¹² It is because of this that I include my faith into every piece of artwork.

The final basis Schaffer mentions for critiquing work is the vehicle by which the content is delivered to the audience. If the artist uses a language that is completely foreign to the audience, how are they to respond? The content of the work must relate to the audience by means they can comprehend. Even in abstract work, there can be clues by using specific colors and gestures to elicit an emotional response. Without an attempt to communicate, the message and content of the work is lost. If art is made to be more than therapy for the artist, then there must be an attempt by the artist to communicate clearly with the audience by correlating style and content.¹³

Hebrew calligraphy is a major influence on my body of work. The journey to find Hebrew and its relation to my work took a year of experimenting and searching. I began with simple gestures with no direction or specific thought. Yet, I couldn't help but recognize general shapes of words within those gestures. The more I paid attention to this realization, the further I began to explore the possibility of my expression needing a direction that related to language. Moving through Chinese, Islamic, and Aramaic calligraphy, I settled on Hebrew calligraphy as it had a personal significance in my life. The connection to Hebrew first began by selecting words from a dictionary. Picking out specific words to represent, the end product did not seem to hold the personal significance and content I desire in my work.

As a result, I began to construct my own “sentences.” Using Hebrew words in an English sentence structure, I made a series of scrolls that began to abstract the language.

¹² Francis Schaffer, Art & the Bible, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1973, pg 37.

¹³ Francis Schaffer, p 42-47.

Again, I encountered discouragement as I wrote out the art. The sentences continued to fall short of my own standards and voice. I knew Hebrew was the language I was meant to use; therefore I continued to search for its proper expression in my work. I knew this was the language I should focus on for my work because it was held more than an aesthetic beauty. I also explored using Chinese and Arabic calligraphy to express in my art. Yet, both languages fell short as they failed to make a personal connection. The Hebrew came to fruition in the work when I applied my faith to the sentences. Old Testament scripture is written in Hebrew, and thus had an intimate connection to my Christian faith.

Exploring the scripture, I settled on the books of Isaiah and Daniel for their apocalyptic style of writing. These two books explore the Jewish story, and yet both point towards the coming of the Messiah. Seeing how I am a Christian, and believe that the prophecy of the Jewish Messiah happened in Jesus of Nazareth, these books, passages, and simple sentences speak to my soul. Not only are the words themselves meaningful and inherit with symbolism, the culture that surrounds the passages has specific imagery and symbolism as well.

Many of the ideas we carry through today in color theory are present in the Jewish culture of the Old Testament. The specific symbolisms I carry into my work are purple and blue for royalty, deity, wisdom, and mystery, green as life, and white for purity. These symbols are seen over and over again in the Old Testament as well as the New Testament. Seeing how I use specific scripture as a starting point in my work, using the imagery from the time period is very appropriate, and still portrays a similar message to our modern society.

Samuel 3:2-4, 10-11

“At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his room; the lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the Lord, where the ark of God was. Then the Lord called, “Samuel! Samuel!” and he said, “Here I am!”

Now the Lord came and stood there, calling as before, “Samuel! Samuel!” And Samuel said, “Speak, for your servant is listening.” Then the Lord said to Samuel, “See, I am about to do something in Israel that will make both ears of anyone who hears of it tingle.”

In the story of Samuel, God is speaking to him through dreams, calling him into ministry. In a similar fashion, I pay attention to my dreams and the imagery I see. I don't mean to be pompous and claim that God is speaking to me as I sleep, yet I cannot ignore the shapes that appear in my dreams along with my knowledge that God has called me to be an artist. Too many times in my art career I have had the opportunity to be honest about my faith, and yet I have toned down the message or kept quite altogether. I have heard God calling, and yet I did not respond. Now my faith is at a point where I can no longer stay quiet, nor deny where the visions of art and shape are coming from in my dreams. It is a call, and I have chosen to answer in a positive manner, expressing to all who have an ear to listen what my faith in God means to me.

My relationship with God is a personal faith, which I explore and delve into each day. Unfortunately, when I first heard God calling me to be an artist, I said no. At this point in my life, I felt God had used me like Jonah, swallowed by a whale after saying “no,” and spewed forth in the right direction. Every other door was closed off, and I had

no choice but to dive into the art classes of my undergraduate degree. Even today I feel as if I am wandering through the dark, knowing nothing but that I am to make art and follow God. This is my worldview. I believe God created the world and all that is on it, and I believe that Jesus Christ was God incarnate. Believing in this faith does not allow me to continue on my merry way with no regard for direction, thought, or voice. In the book of Matthew 28:19, God asked us as Christians to “go, therefore, and make disciples of all people...” Furthermore, scripture also tells me to follow Him with all my heart, mind, soul, and strength. If God is all that I am, all I desire, and everything that I long for, then expressing my faith in my art is a natural extension of my Christianity.

My art needs to express who I am as a person. I feel free to comment on any issue I deem necessary, yet the voice that comes through the work needs to reflect that I have died to myself, and live for Christ. Galatians 2:19b-20, “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” Seeing how I am in the infancy of my use of the Hebrew language, I remain in the books that directly points to the coming of the Messiah. I don’t want to think abstractly in my choice of verses, I want to be specific and direct. Isaiah and Daniel allow me to use the Hebrew calligraphy and state why I produce specific work. I am focusing on Christ for my thesis body of work.

Do I mean to shout, brow beat, or stand on my soapbox and scream about Christ even if no one wants to hear what I have to say? No. As an artist, I feel so many topics can be discussed through scripture, that I choose to use it to help explain my opinion. I want to comment on my faith and allow it to influence my work by natural means, not

interjected to make the viewer uncomfortable by slapping them in the face. In an MTV interview with Sonny Sandoval and Noah Bernardo, members of the band P.O.D., support my view on faith and its influence in within art.

MTV: You're a spiritual group. Religion plays a big part in it, but you don't really beat people over the head with it.

Bernardo: It's an undertone...

Sandoval: ... We just believe in the relationship we have with God. It shapes and molds our character. I don't have to sit here and chant. I just wake up in the morning and realize that without some type of guidance from the Almighty, it's in our human nature to be nuts. We're not perfect, and by no means do we try to push across in our music that we are and that this is how you should live your life. ...I saw for myself. I saw lives change, our families mended and relationships restored. To me, that's God...¹⁴

In all things, I believe gentleness is the answer. Nothing is solved or accomplished by forcing ideas upon people. I want people to look at my artwork and know that I am a Christian because it has changed my life. It's seems natural for me to express that in the content of my work.

Technical Accomplishments:

Several people have posed the question, "Why clay?" Could my aesthetics and ideas be equally accomplished using a different medium? My response is that I simply love clay. I fell in love with every aspect from my first week in the ceramic studio. The

¹⁴ "P.O.D.: Warrior Souls" http://www.mtv.com/bands/p/pod/news_feature_091501/index3.jhtml
An interview between MTV and P.O.D.

tactile qualities of clay are quite appealing. The challenges to make a wet material with a high plasticity stand up and form a shape is a wonderful trial. Granted, using manufactured tiles takes the fun out of this part of the process, but it also brings the control I needed to complete my work. The mystery of the glazing process also appeals to my sense of adventure. Each time I put a piece into the kiln, no matter how much I understand about the glazes, there is always a little mystery about what the final product will look like. Quirky things happen at high temperatures, and it is next to impossible to ensure that every square inch of the piece has an identical application of glaze. The entire process is an exciting and humbling experience each time the kiln is opened.

Marrying the technical appearance of tile and glaze with the theory behind the work has produced many challenges. I began the journey with clay, as would be expected from a ceramist. Over the first year and a half of this degree, I began to see the need to work with tile. My sculptural pieces were becoming thinner and flatter by the day. I became obsessed with the thought that thinner is better for a clay body. Eventually, I needed to make each piece four or five times because the work broke in the kiln. The process would involve making the clay bend and warp in the kiln by propping it up with kiln bricks, allowing it to bend over the pressure points as the kiln temperature pushed the clay to its structural limits. The effect was fantastic, but the timetable to produce one piece was stifling my creativity.

Additionally, the move to tiles was further encouraged by my sketching style. The Hebrew calligraphy has a specific look, and the sculpture did not capture the beautiful arching, swinging motion of the writing. As I translated my sketching onto the clay, my brush selection and application of the glaze became more painterly. Again, I did

not feel I had the control and craftsmanship I demanded from my work as an MFA student. The tiles provided a smooth, predictable, constant surface, which allowed me to complete my sketch onto clay.

Unfortunately, I found that spending weeks making tiles wasted my time. This took up valuable time that could be used work out the finer points of my theory. The endless frustration of the tiles warping and breaking in the kiln did not help the situation. Preventing warping is nearly impossible. Yet, to fix warping simply involves putting the tiles back into the kiln to fire the clay past its recommended temperatures. After several additionally firings, I found the proper temperatures to push the clay towards its melting point. During the weeks of making tiles for one piece of work, I would find inspiration for five more. This problem put me further and further behind with each passing day. I wanted to produce work with great craftsmanship, therefore a crack or blemish was not acceptable. Working slowly and fixing mistakes in the clay body only made the process more frustrating.

I accomplished flat tiles, yet was now pushing two to three weeks before I had begun to dive into composition and glazing. Time is money, and the Home Depot answered my time problems with a little money. Selling in bulk brings prices down, therefore for less than a dollar per square foot I could purchase generic floor tile. The tile was a lifesaver, as it allowed me to spend two hours getting tile for a piece, as opposed to two weeks. Additionally, the selection of tile was immense. I could drive to the store with a piece in mind, pick out the base color, texture, and size, and return to studio and begin working immediately.

The store bought tiles did not compromise my aesthetic choices for the work. The variety was so eclectic, that I could find a complimenting tile for each specific piece. The variety actually brought ideas for new pieces. The inherent square shape of the manufactured tile did not bother me, either. Most of the time spent struggling in studio to produce my own tile was for nice little squares. It is easy to see what an incredible idea perfect, manufactured tiles became. The tiles are consistent in size, color, reaction to heat, taking of glazes, and do not warp. I found the tiles that performed the best were from Dal Tile.

The tiles will withstand temperatures through cone 04. Low fire glazes, therefore, are the best solution to creating the colors I need to create. Not only do the glazes stick well to the tile, the glazes mix like paints. The glazes are made to work with a wide tolerance for temperature and overall evenness. If a color I needed was not available at the bookstore, it was simple to find two or three colors that would mix to make the desired end product. A little practice was necessary to think not about the colors that were in the bottle, what their fired colors would be, and how those might combine. I did not make an attempt to push the tiles to high fire temperatures. I choose the low fire glazes for their color consistency, and for the ease of obtaining a wide range of color. I did not experiment with high fire glazes once the low-fire glazes produced the desired results.

After understanding the end colors being applied, I have found that specific colors respond better to specific firing temperatures. For example, the green, blue, and yellow glazes need to be fired slowly to cone 06. On the other end of the color wheel, reds and oranges respond better to a fast fire to cone 08. The recommended temperatures for all

the glazes falls between 06-04, yet my experience finds the best results always fall on the cooler end of the recommended temperatures, if not a touch below. To combine these colors into one piece, the greens and blues must be fired first, followed by the reds and oranges. The warm colors must be applied last, as they gradually burn out with additional firings.

After the tiles come out of the kiln, the construction of the piece begins. The initial breaking of the tiles began by accident, becoming a wonderful discovery. As the tiles broke, I began to search for different methods for breaking the tiles in a semi-controlled manner that retained a random pattern. Initially, I used a railroad spike to break the tiles. Yet, too many of the breaks were looking similar. Sitting on a shelf in the kiln room was a brick with a forty-five degree corner. The brick provided all the control I was looking for to break the tiles.

Once broken, the tiles were further shaped by way of grinding and sanding. The edges of the tile were sharp fragments of broken rock and glass. I grew tired of my hands being cut, and I was worried someone viewing and touching the work in a gallery would also be cut. The broken tiles were taken to the grinder to knock off the major corners and sharp elements, and then sanded to bring a smooth, finished edge.

The problem still remained that the work had to hang on the wall. The first solutions involved awkward screws and lots of Velcro. Neither solution proved itself worthy of withstanding the torsion of a levered tiles hanging from a piece of wood for large-scale work. The Velcro does work well for suspending tile that hangs flat against the wall or suspending small tile chunks (4"x4"). The sticky Velcro is the most proficient if given twenty-four hours to adhere to the wall before weight is added. For gallery

purposes, most directors do not want you to ruin the finish on the walls with the sticky from the Velcro. Stapling the Velcro to the wall, leaving the protective layer of plastic on the back of the Velcro, solves this problem. Obviously, the sticky back is applied to the work giving the same 24-hour cure time to the Velcro.

For the larger works, the final solution came by raising the tiles off a piece of plywood. The plywood has a wedge cut out of the back, which is screwed into the wall with sheetrock screws. For a small work, 1'x3', a small 2"x4" wedge is necessary to suspend the work on the wall. As the work size increases, without a guarantee of a stud to hang the work, the wedge must also increase. One of the pieces is fifty pounds, and the wedge is 20" long to ensure plenty of holding strength, and, in hopes of a wall having proper stud placement, allows for two of the six screws to be placed in studs on a 16" center.

The Work:

Praise (page 24) was the first piece that incorporated the wedge hanging system. The work is backed with plywood, cut in the middle at 45 degrees to allow for a 3"x6" oak wedge. The wedge has two screws 4" apart with one drilled into a wall stud. Technically, each 1"x4" section will hold with two sheetrock screws simply screwed into bare sheetrock. For most people's sanity, I put one screw into a stud. Although, what people don't know, is that all of these works hung in my studio in simple sheetrock without stud placement for months without falling. This is important to note, as I made sure each piece was over-engineered. The large-scale work makes people nervous to hang. No matter this is caused by the fragile appearance of the work, or the sheer scale



Praise. Matthew Kimmel. Ceramic. 2002

and weight, it is a concern that must be addressed. Therefore, I felt it was important to assure my audience of the security of the work.

Praise was the first piece with the industrial tile to be broken. *Praise* was first in many aspects of this body of work. The piece took many firings, was the first large scale work, and the first to put all my influences into one piece of work. *Praise* was fired twice, because I did not have a complete grasp on the firing and glazing process. Initially, it came out of the kiln burned out and dim. The glaze was applied too thin, therefore the outcome was not as vivid as I demanded.

The second application of glaze taught me about the amount of glaze necessary to produce a quality red and how the colors could be freely mixed to produce the color desired. The second application also allowed me to use my whole body to lay down the glazes. This movement freed my gestures, giving me the opportunity to put feeling and freedom into the work. In this sense, *Praise* shows my affection for Pollock's use of color. The piece is as much about the energy in the color as anything else. The mood of the piece is about a verse of scripture that includes, "make glorious His praise." Therefore, I need to explore glazes to reflect this energy. Freedom in application and color representing this mood was vital to the piece. Once I realized this connection, the second application went quickly. My brush applied an abundance of reds and oranges with a vigor reflecting the verse.

I needed the color to be bold due to the scripture and feelings it portrays in my life. *Praise* is about the simple act of praising God. For me, this means something that is exciting and full of energy. As the worship leader of my church, it is my job to lead the congregation in praise. Similar to art, the process can be a struggle. Everyone has a

different opinion about what should happen at church. For me, it should be a celebration. *Praise* directly reflects this feeling. Everything about the surface treatment says energy and fun. The glazes are bright and applied liberally with vigor and energy; “make glorious His praise.”

Praise originally broke, not by my hand, but due to the second kiln firing cooling too quickly. After realizing the connection with Pollock, and the success in application, my first impression was that the piece was ruined. It turned out to be a wonderful accident that forced me to think of the tile in a new manner, and push the element of sculpture further than previously thought possible.

The broken pieces reminded me of a critique I had a year earlier with my professor, Beth Lo. I was making tentative marks in the surface of some clay work, when Lo said if I was going to make a mark, mean it. This inspired me to go with the broken tile, and push it beyond the accidental splitting. I broke each square foot tile into fifteen to twenty chunks. The more I played in my studio, and researched to understand this latest aesthetic, I was brought back to my architecture education in my undergraduate work. The random pieces brought together to make a bigger composition were derived of my favorite Gothic cathedral, Sainte-Chapelle. The intense color of the Pollock’s influence matched the vivid color of a window highlighted by the sun. The broken tile was a break through, and now made perfect sense as I saw the art influences of my life coming out in the work.

I spent weeks working on different methods for hanging broken tiles on the wall. Originally, most of the tiles were broken into two pieces down the middle. Most of the systems I used involved a lot of process: custom cutting angles on wood doweling

multiple times for each tile piece. This was frustrating, and I continued to explore different means. Eventually, I found the small scraps of wood leftover from the cutting were the best solution. If I needed a piece to be raised, two scraps glued together worked perfectly. I also experimented with the work put back together with gray grout to emulate stained glass windows, yet it did not emphasize the broken tiles to the extent that I saw necessary. Again, I was thinking that if I was going to break the work, I should constantly attempt to take it a step further so as to make it a very intentional element of the work.

The construction process furthered my connection to Sainte-Chapelle. *Praise* was reassembled into the six vertical sections to emphasize the window connection. Seeing the wall between the sections of tile reminds me of the verticality of the Sainte-Chapelle windows and further emphasizing many pieces working together.

The calligraphy is slightly abstracted and layered for emphasis. The yellows and reds are used for their intrinsic energy. The red calligraphic representation of the Hebrew word for “praise” is placed atop the yellow writing. These colors feel energetic with red containing the most visual strength and vitality. Later pieces in this body of work contain the same color theory, yet the calligraphy becomes more and more abstract. I wanted *Praise* to be an introductory piece, as the writing is easy to see and understand as such. The Hebrew is easily grasped in this work to coincide with Schaffer’s theory of using a proper vehicle for introducing the content to the audience. The Hebrew needs to be evident for every audience member to easily connect with the work. This piece is the introduction of that vehicle. The abstraction is kept to a minimum to help the viewer understand the movements created by the language.

Assuredly (page 29) continues this theory of keeping the abstraction of the Hebrew to a simple, understandable standard. The wax used to abstract the Hebrew was applied simply with little variance in line width. The simple line is easy to follow across the tiles. As with *Praise*, I wanted the viewer to be introduced to the movements and language of my interpretation of the Hebrew language. The other aspect I used to bring the viewer into the work is the familiar layout of the wax on the tiles. I put the wax on the tile from right to left, just as the Hebrew language is written, and kept the rows of tiles separate as I put the wax down. When put together, the rows of tiles are clearly their own interpretation. I wanted this direct reference to the writing to be apparent to emphasize the Hebrew.

Assuredly's final presentation is to lie on the floor of the gallery. The bold colors are meant to reflect the windows of Sainte-Chapelle. An aspect of stained glass that really appeals to me is the effect of more than simply being beautiful on the wall. When the sun shines through the glass at the right angle the light fills the floor with color. I wanted to portray this effect in a windowless gallery. I also wanted to challenge the way people experience art. I hate going into a gallery and not being able to touch the work, or experience it on a different level than merely looking. *Assuredly* and the other pieces of this series lie on the floor and cover the entrance of the gallery. I knew that laying them in the middle of the gallery would give the essence of the light hitting the floor. Yet, no one would walk on the work like they walk across the light in a cathedral due to how we have learned to interact with art. This series is meant for people to experience the art in a new way, and I want to make sure it is experienced as such. Placing the work in the doorway forces people to walk on the work. It may prevent some of the audience from

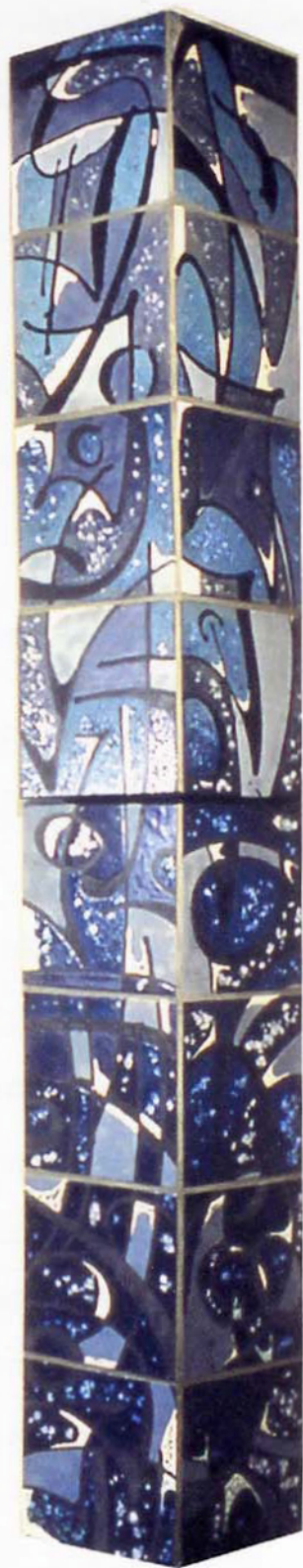


Assuredly. Matthew Kimmel. Ceramic. 2003.

entering the gallery, or at least make them uncomfortable, but that is the point. I desire to shift the paradigm for interacting with work in a gallery.

Not only is the placement of the work important, so is my use of color to portray the scripture. Filling in the tile with bright reds and green, the color refers to Isaiah 7:14. This specific scripture is used on a series of work referring to the coming of the Messiah. It is about God sending us a sign of a mother and child. I think of this moment as one of celebration and excitement. It is an exciting prophecy, and that interpretation is why I chose red to portray this mood. To me, red is full of energy and excitement and is one of the modern traditional colors of the Christmas season, therefore, it seemed natural to make the work red, bold, and full of color. Along with the red tiles are randomly interspersed green tiles utilizing the same wax writing technique. The green, as in all my work, represents life. The green tiles represent the new life of the Christ child coming into the world. The green tiles of new life are surrounded by the red tiles of my excitement and joy.

Of the Deep (page 31) takes the abstraction of the language a step further by emphasizing the movements of the language. The curve and brush stroke of calligraphy gives the language a specific quality unattainable by any other means of writing. It is not a dry letter spit out by a printer, but a stylized, graceful movement applied with a flat brush. *Of the Deep* takes this quality and pushes it towards gesture. Each gesture is derived from the movements of Hebrew calligraphy. Taking the scripture letter by letter, I moved through the words emphasizing the specific movements and line widths. Combined with the careful attention to the calligraphy, I continued to pay attention to the line widths and gestures in Steinhaus Kimmel and Pollock's work. The gestures in *Of the*



Of the Deep. Matthew Kimmel. Ceramic. 2003.

Deep draw initial inspiration from the Hebrew, yet from there are treated with more of the freedom and expression shown from Steinhaus Kimmel and Pollock.

I used wax to write on the tiles with these initial gestural letters. The tiles began with a black finish, therefore when I applied and fired the glaze, the wax evaporated off the tile, exposing the original, black surface. This effect was done to further play with the notion of stained glass, and the gaps between the glass fragments. Instead of breaking the tile to resemble the glass, I painted in the gaps with wax, filling in the rest of the tiles with color. Additionally, a number of glazes were needed to complete the work. I set up rules for my process to add interest and challenge. Similar to a map, I decided that no one glaze should be directly across from itself on the tile. I wanted to emphasize the lines and the negative space with the color. Therefore, to break up the space as much as possible, the variety of color highlighting the negative space was important.

Like *Praise, Of the Deep* shows its meaning in the color. The verse in Isaiah talks about the darkness of the sea coming over the land. For me, this verse is not overly cheery, and needed to reflect the feeling of being overwhelmed with water. This verse was chosen specifically for this piece due to its placement in the gallery. I knew the end product was going to be eight feet tall. As you look up at *Of the Deep*, it is a feeling of being overwhelmed, or towered over. Additionally, the work is primarily dark blues. This is a direct reference to the sea and how it can turn into a ranging, unbeatable storm without warning. We are not able to predict the sea, and its ominous presence needs to be respected.

Of the Deep is made for a specific architectural element of the gallery. The walls in the Gallery of Visual Arts at the University of Montana have pilasters. The pilasters

vary in size from one foot to eighteen inches wide. *Of the Deep* was made to hang on the pilaster to emphasize the architecture of the gallery. The more I looked at the space for my thesis exhibition, the more it became clear to me that I needed to work with the space rather than against it. The pilasters naturally divide up the space for hanging work, so I thought it necessary to utilize the element. This train of thought explains the verticality of the piece. The depth was used for two reasons: emphasis and the utilitarian nature of tile. The tile has a tendency to be seen as glorified kitchen tile. When the tile was flat against the pilaster it looked like a mere decoration. The tiles became a simple applied surface that did not use the space to its full advantage.

Additionally, the emphasis of the pilaster was also not being used to its full effect. The flat tile against the surface did not fully draw your eye to the unusual wall element. By propping the tiles up, it brought depth and an extra corner to the composition. The corner gives the viewer a sense of walking around the work to see the entire piece. The corner also adds curiosity, as a corner in the middle of a wall is not a practical design for an average wall. The depth adds interest, as *Of the Deep* is not made of broken tile. The tiles are 12 inches square and easily recognized as manufactured tile. The propping of these tiles is not something typically done, therefore pushing the tile past their regular intended use. The simple, but effective treatment of the tile adds interest for the viewer and emphasis for the pilaster.

Red (page 34) takes every aspect of *Praise* and *Of the Deep* and pushes it to an extreme. The Hebrew language affects every aspect of the work. The vehicle for expression remains the same, yet takes on a new aspect, asking the viewer not to focus on the writing, but the feeling and message behind the writing. The Hebrew language could



Red. Matthew Kimmel. Ceramics. 2003.

simply be considered a series of words with no interior agenda without faith. Yet, the specific scripture chosen has an intended purpose for the work. In my mind, reading between the lines to truly understand the writing is the most important aspect of scripture. It is because of this that *Red* is abstract and more about the color. The consolation I made in the work is on the right side, where I wrote out the verse in Hebrew to help those who have trouble comprehending purely abstract art. Too much of the public does not have the art background to help them enter into fully abstract work. Accepting this societal shortcoming, I cannot forget Shaffer's concept of the vehicle for delivering the message. Therefore, the adaptation was made, and in my mind, does not hinder the final product. In fact, the writing helps the work, as it allows more people to enter into the piece.

The work takes the shape of a specific Hebrew letter contained within the text. Seeing how the work is more about feeling than the direct portrayal of the Hebrew, as in *Praise*, I felt the work needed to escape its intrinsic squared off value held within the tile. As I broke the tile and began rebuilding the piece, I pushed the pieces together with a lot of overlap and freedom. The more I responded to the gestural shape of the letter, the more *Red* moved towards its final shape.

The final shape also includes the depth of the work. *Red*, once the outline was determined, took on a sense of depth greater than any broken piece I had finished. I wanted to see how far I could push the structure behind the work and still feel stable and permanent. I love a cantilever in any design, whether it is art or architecture. Therefore, each piece of tile is supported by one or two pieces of wood. I pushed the wood and glue as far as I felt comfortable in terms of a permanent hold. The piece begins with a shallow rise around the edges, building to a peak in the middle. I felt the middle needed to be the

tallest point to help center the composition. The center of the piece is also the crossing points of the two gestures, giving it an innate point of interest. The lifting of this area would further this point of interest as well as add a little mystery to how the pieces seem to float above the surface.

The white gesture on the tile was executed with a clay consistency between workable clay and slip. With the working capabilities similar to wet concrete, it allowed me to flow the clay over the surface, yet still give it some volume at the same time. The clay was put on the tile surface after it was coated with glaze. In the kiln, the glaze would flux and act as glue for the drizzled clay. The consistency of the clay also allowed me to work with great freedom of movement and expression.

Again, referencing Pollock and Steinhaus Kimmel, freedom of expression and movement with bold colors is important. *Red* is a large-scale work, which forced me to use my whole body in all aspects of the creative process. The work is on such a scale that I wished I could suspend myself from the ceiling directly over the work to really put my whole body into the creation. Nonetheless, *Red* is about the glaze and feeling behind the work. I used brilliant red and white porcelain over a green base. Similar to my influences, I layered the work with many layers and three firings. I wanted the surface to be complex. From a distance, it blends together, yet up close there are many details and variations within the surface. I didn't want the viewer to be able to take in the work all in one sitting. I prefer art that shows new aspects and elements every time I look into the surface.

The red glaze and white porcelain were chosen based off the language in the scripture. As the verse says though our sins be like crimson, we can be made white as

snow. I think this piece can speak to every person, as I see each person as having similar struggles. Like it or not, we are all human and subject to sin. I truly believe that God does not differentiate between sins, and therefore we are all equally guilty of doing wrong. Yet, with the presence of God and forgiveness, we can be clean, pure, and even holy. The red glaze is fully encompassing of the green background. The sin is covering our lives. With the presence of God and scripture, the white letting and gestures, we can be holy and pure in the eyes of God.

Generations (page 38) is quite similar to *Red* in most regards. The meaning behind the work is different, but the construction and final shape follow the same path as *Red*. The consistency of the clay applied to the surface was the same, yet, for *Generations* I mixed Cobalt into the porcelain. This provided a gray blue finish to the exposed clay after firing. When the clay was covered with a splash of clear glaze, the cobalt turned the clay blue and purple. This treatment gave the clay a nice variety as it moves across the work. Again, the main gesture formed by the clay is directly derived from the Hebrew language contained within the text.

This specific scripture speaks of God's kingdom lasting for all time and throughout all generations. The colors used for this piece remain constant and simple. Scripture is said to be God's word written down for all to hear. Therefore, the gesture is blue and purple in accordance with Jewish color theory. Purple is reserved for royalty and to represent anything involving God. This extends into Christianity, as the color for the Lenten season is purple. Seeing how the gesture is derived from scripture and represents God in this work, it seemed natural to make it purple and blue.



Generations. Matthew Kimmel. Ceramic. 2003.

Additionally, the background is green representing life and generations. I applied the color loosely, using many of the same gestures used to write the Hebrew language. This gave the glaze a swirling look as I applied it with an excess amount of water. I added the water for two reasons, to better represent the Hebrew marks as mentioned earlier, and to give the glaze a sense of movement and depth. Each generation builds on the one that came before. Life is a flowing, non-stagnant process. I felt the glaze needed to represent these feelings, understanding that the scripture is speaking of all generations, past, present, and future.

Walk (page 40) is another piece in which the mood of the scripture dictates the color and shape of the work. The scripture speaks of walking by the light of the Lord. *Walk* runs along the floor for 17 feet. I wanted the viewer to discover something new in the piece with each new glance and step. I appreciate work that takes years, or even a lifetime, to notice all the details. A work that comes to an understanding in an instant loses its appeal in a short amount of time. Therefore, I thought 17 feet would encourage them to walk to experience the entire piece. *Walk* also sits on the ground, elevated approximately one inch. Similar to *Assuredly*, I wanted the viewer to experience art on all levels. *Walk* is not meant to be stood on, yet the effect of the stained glass windows lighting the floor is quite influential.

Walk retains all the influences of past work, yet really pulls on Pollock in the initial applications of the glazes. I did not use wax to create negative space to reference Hebrew. The abstractions of the letters were realized with yellow glaze. The areas between the gestures were filled in with other glazes, similar to *Of the Deep*. Yet, gestures in *Walk* are not as evident as in other work. The gestures are as much about the



Walk. Matthew Kimmel. Ceramic. 2002.

glaze as they are about the Hebrew. This feeling reflects how my walk with the Lord is not always clear and distinct. At times, my walk is blurry and takes serious searching to put myself back in line with the light. Therefore, I did not want the abstractions to be clear and distinct. *Walk* needed to be about feeling and pure expression.

I have yet to mention the specific influence of Kahlo on this body of work. In reading the last few pages, I would hope it is apparent that I believe in my faith, and believe it to be truth. Kahlo, as stated earlier, was a painter who, without shame, portrayed her reality and sense of truth. Her ability and eagerness to paint is a large influence on my work and attitude. I only have one lifetime to say all I can through my work, so I might as well make it count, make it strong, and make the most of every work. The faith filled content is my reality, and like Kahlo, I express what I believe. *Walk* is a piece that represents this feeling. Everyday with every step I try to live my life based on what I believe.

The glazes used on *Walk* are yellows, light greens, and whites on white tile. I wanted *Walk* to show the verse full of color and energy. I don't see my walk with God as a restrictive, oppressive process. I see it as a free journey, full of newness and excitement. Because of this, *Walk* uses a lot of yellow. For me, yellow is a free, energetic color promising fun. The white represents the light of the Lord: pure, holy, and distinct from all other colors. The green is a light green representing life. It is intermixed and overlapped by the other colors to represent the positive presence brought about by walking one's life in the light.

Behold (page 42) takes every influence, expression, and method for completing the work and puts it into one composition. Although simple in appearance, *Behold* is



Behold. Matthew Kimmel. Ceramic. 2003.

everything I have learned in producing this body of work. Beginning with a white tile glazed green with blue porcelain slip added for texture, the tile underwent its first firing. The top surface colors are a variety of blues and whites filling in the negative spaces separated by the use of wax for the gestures. After the final firing, the tile was broken and reassembled. The final look is one without rest. The composition is quite busy with varying line weights, texture, and colors. Behind the work is the same verse I used in *Of the Deep*. This piece is quite small, yet the amount of movement and variety is overwhelming for the eye. This is appropriate as it points to life being overwhelmed by the sea.

There is not much to say about the work that I have not already mentioned about previous work. *Behold* is an intriguing piece for me, personally. The work was a tremendous amount of process and detail for such a small piece. It intrigues me to do a piece much larger involving all the same processes. *Behold* has such an incredible amount of detail and resolve, that I must try it again to find the same resolve with different moods and scripture.

Conclusion:

What do I want from this body of work? I want to demonstrate that my creativity is a product of my faith. Throughout this paper I have expressed an interest to reach my audience. During my Pre-candidacy show, I was challenged to define my audience. Two groups of people came to mind to answer this question. I want to be seen as an artist and accepted by the art world. Perhaps it is a misconception on my part, but being accepted as an artist who deals with issues from a Christian standpoint is a long, difficult road with

more than average criticism due to my honesty about faith. I don't see myself as a Christian artist, but simply an artist. I want to show the art world that an artist can tackle issues of faith and make substantial work.

Secondly, I want to speak to the Christian community. Having a foot in both the art world and the Christian world, I feel a responsibility to educate. Because of school budgets and curriculum priorities, many people's art education ends at an early age. The educational opportunity to make and view art has been low in comparison to other subjects. This creates a schism between the public and fine arts. A lack of education and understanding is why I put many clear references to Hebrew in my work. As a Christian, I can gain an ear through a common faith. I want to create an easy way into a conversation with someone who does not understand color theory and abstraction by placing my expression into a familiar subject. I desire to share my faith with those who understand art, and my art with those who understand faith.

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