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CERAMICS

By

Jane Dillon

B.F.A., Rhode Island School of Design, 1979

A thesis submitted to the faculty of the Graduate  
School of the University of Colorado in partial  
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Fine Arts

Department of Fine Arts, Creative Art

1984

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This Thesis for the Master of Fine Arts Degree by

Jane Dillon

has been approved for the

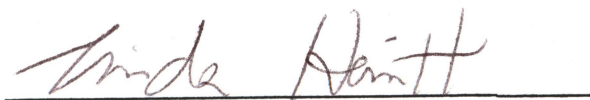
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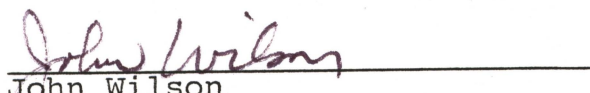
by



  
Anne Currier

  
Linda Herritt

  
Jerry Kunkel

  
John Wilson

Date 12.11.84

### Themes of the Creative Works

For the past two years, I have been expanding my ideas of ceramic function. Initially, I was interested in clay's function as vessel: form, surface decoration, and usage. These concerns have broadened into considerations of the nature of function itself. I have taken the situation of "a table set with ceramics for dinner" and considered the subject on a broader level: a situation to be investigated in an art context.

The decision to expand my perspective is based partially on new discoveries made during work in sculpture, painting, and drawing. I am intrigued by the work of John Buck. His shaped canvases on the wall interact with the sculpture placed in front of the paintings. Tables, branches, and found objects are utilized to create a personal logic. Along the same line, I have found inspiration from the stage work of David Hockney. I admire his ability to pull ideas from many historical and contemporary sources; to combine elements in a dramatic, quirky, sophisticated manner. This quality exists for me in

the paintings of Hollis Sigler. I also admire the clashing crashing constructions of Phillip Mayberry, who piles ceramic shape-on-shape and color explosion atop texture. Overwhelming, elaborate, and profuse objects contribute to a unified message characterized by intense visual and emotional content.

I am combining recognizable ceramic images and symbols into large constructions. Ideas are related to my place as a potter/artist. The boundary of the construction is a set of five solid color vases strung on bright satin ribbon from a height of 16 feet. The traditional function of these vases is destroyed by their diagonal hanging configuration, and pattern (often used and abused in ceramic art) is created not within each piece, but in the repetition of the vase shape. Next to the vases, a nine foot tall three dimensional figure in clay is attached to the wall five feet off the ground. He kicks back his leg, and with an arm outstretched, hurls colored clay spirals as if throwing horseshoes. He hurls, yet covers his eyes. The spirals swirl around the main gallery wall, surrounding ten yellow crowns. This

describes my feelings about the risks and aspirations of the ceramic artist and potter. The spiral, constantly spun off the potter's wheel, is an attempt to achieve formal beauty through repetition. The crown/prize is always within reach, yet difficult to obtain. Below the crowns are five shelves which hold one hundred cups. These represent the potter's understanding of form through repetition.

On the floor below the figure is a clay table and chair. Proportion is exaggerated, brightly colored beads on a steel frame make up the legs, and an unlikely ceramic tablecloth flutters. This is a chair just vacated, a meal uneaten, a situation/relationship empty or unsuccessful. Atop the table, a vine springs from a bright red heart. Success follows failure, and there is spritely hope for the future. Diagonally across the floor from the table, humps of two intensities of blue are placed. They poke out pink and yellow spikes and grow in height and width as they hop/hump across the floor toward a five foot ten inch box of stacked clay sticks. Within the box is a papermache black cone. This configuration relates to human situations whereby spirits are encased in the



mind. The viewer can sense an interior which is partially concealed. Six thirty inch tall urns are placed in front of the box in a woven oil-on-canvas rug. The urns, flower-filled, relate to success/failure in art and can be likened to spiritual trophies of art. They move in procession toward a 16-foot tall ladder which leans against the wall. The ladder leads to a tall shelf with flower-filled pitchers. Too highly textured to hold, too rickety and light weight, the ladder would offer a dangerous climb. This configuration personally addresses the problems and successes, dangers and joys of life.

It is important to capture the emotional quality of my life as an artist in this work. My nature, my situation in the world, creates inherently paradoxical feelings. Through subjective preoccupation, these self-contradictions I see in life become clear and can be objectified as tangible objects and symbols. I am discretely disturbed by the artist's obscure position in society: to exist in the world, but still be somewhat apart from it. Sustenance of art life requires artists to develop mutually supportive friendships and to make use of contemporary inventiveness. Tantamount to the struggle to survive

is the acquisition of an attitude of exuberance, optimism, and a well directed, healthy idiosyncronism. Life is a tenuous affair. Art is a vulnerable depiction of the delicacy of life. Risk, failure, determination, and expansion are art's and life's inherent qualities. I need to understand and scrutinize myself and my feelings: a formidable task! Self-scrutiny may slowly uncover the answers to some of the following concerns:

The longing to live fully and forever on the earth/the opposing feeling of being a prisoner of human nature.

The need to expend energy--to emote/ the opposing feeling of frustration and pain due to the difficulty of expressing emotion positively and effectively.

Self-knowledge through work with art materials and ideas/the opposing questions, "Am I honest? Am I being direct? Am I really developing an understanding of myself?"

The desire for complete and unfettered altruism/the opposing feeling of my own dreams, efforts, wishes, and ambitions.

The love and endless search for human love/the fear of love and primitive emotions, i.e., anger and hate.

Many believe that self-scrutiny is only a troublesome urge to make more complex a subject of already more than adequate potential confusion. I believe it is the artist's job to explore the human temperament, to explore the labyrinth of the human mind, to uncover reasons for human strength, love, sadness, truthfulness, perseverance, and spirituality.

#### Reasons for Themes' Selection

The images I have chosen to illustrate my concerns are a diverse group of objects, a synthesis of ideas from earlier work, of ideas derived from readings on Modernism, of ideas developed from the study of clay vessels. A new experience in amalgamation for me, but not a new idea in art, since the expansion of artistic boundaries has always been inherent in the creative process. Expansion of image choice provides for the attainment of a pictorial clarity not dependent on "focus," but related to the ways in which certain objects interreact. Tensions and resolutions

result from the opposition of flat and dimensional objects; and object juxtaposed with symbol compound the polarities of three dimensionality and painted illusion. Object and symbol to me represent reality and imagination. When the two converge, the result is a lively, felicitous, problematic image. Issues are raised, yet unresolved. Reality is created through recondite fantasy. The realms of reality and fantasy mingle inextricably; observation and invention create airy swirling rhythms animated by weightless, breezy dynamism. This work is both serious and lightheartedly outrageous: a secular shrine dedicated to the celebration of the many vagaries of life on earth.

I have a trust in and appreciation of the intuitive, unself-conscious manner of object making. A line here, a decorative configuration there; at first sight, simple and arbitrary, yet the story behind the action unfolds and resonates with a personal mythology. A difficult task: the combination of naivete and sophistication. Crude detail, staccato spiral rhythms, pop/jazz/funk combine in what might be called a subversively camp sensibility. Privacy and emotionalism are turned outward toward the viewer and the result is

unpredictable. Meaning is occasionally suggested and, as often, discarded. The plot here may not be discernible immediately, but on a visual and textural level, it doesn't matter because object movement and juxtaposition tell their own eccentric story. So, here we have ideas of reality/illusion, art/life, success/failure, alienation/affection.

#### Processes in the Development of Themes

I respond to bright colors and compound shapes which encourage the imagination and set the mind in gear for personal interpretation. I want forms and surfaces to be active through courageous, aggressive use of building techniques, color and texture. These pieces were built quickly, coated directly with thick slip and mat, textured, and shiny glazes. I believe that craftsmanship can be exchanged with painterliness and expression. The expressive surface falls into the amalgam of qualities necessary in the artmaking process: risk-taking, "pushing limitations," taking liberties.

I have attempted to redefine the intrinsic organizational properties of the preordained two and three dimensional design structure. Composition

is used to reflect idea, to reflect perceptions of the mind. I have chosen a shallow exhibition space with the intention that theatrical placement would underscore the implicit drama and narration. Just beyond the viewer's reach, I have placed symbolic bits of idea and emotion. Woven into the fabric of this painting-in-ceramic is reality; experienced, reexamined, and reinterpreted in a manner which alters the natural scale and intensifies meaning in order to stir responsive chords in the imagination. The viewer becomes a denizen of a most unusual world. The viewer witnesses an unexplained exchange outside of everyday life between figure, object, and idea. This exchange is insinuated through placement, movement, and object/symbol choice.

#### Methods of Execution

I am a work-ethical artist who invests in meaning through labour. I have made a point of understanding the correct execution of aesthetic dogma, although I have not relied on blind, slavish adherence to the rules of structure and design. I feel that visually literate artists have many modes of representation available to them. Art is, by its nature, expressive, not narrow. I have, therefore, set about to use any material which will

assist in moving ideas out of my mind and into the eyes, mind, and spirit of the viewer. Steel armature, three-dimensional tile, coils in clay, thrown vessels, wood, paint, papermache and canvas have all assisted my idea development. It makes sense, since a synthesis of images naturally requires a synthesis of materials. An added bonus to this method of work is that the struggle to integrate unrelated materials into one piece runs parallel with the struggle involved in developing the message of the work.

In other words, ceramic form, line and color, wood construction, oil paint on twice-woven canvas, oxy-acetylene steel welding are not for me an end in themselves. These processes are the tools used to uncover a deeply buried emotional and metaphysical content. In many ways, my personality will not allow me to summon tradition alone to justify my work. I need to be challenged with new problems and methods of construction. It is not in my nature to take an obdurate stand on material choice. Challenge, failure, struggle, and the uncovering of new knowlege are what I enjoy in the process of art work.

Ceramic FormulaeClay Body: Terracotta Δ08-03

Redart 65

Gold Art 15

Fire Clay 10

Talc 10

1 Handful of Nylon Fiber

Translucent Glazes: Δ08-03  
Batz Clear Base Plus Zircopax

3124 862

EPK 103.5

Barium Carbonate 34.5

Zircopax 10%

Purple 10% Pansey MasonBright Yellow 10% PraeseodymiumBright Blue 1% Cobalt Carb.Green 3% Copper Carb.Black 10% Black MasonAmber 4% RIOLizard Skin Δ04

White Lead 590

Custer Felspar 190

Barium Carbonate 90

EPK 40

Cornwall Stone 40



<u>Red</u>	Potassium dichromate 4%
<u>Yellow</u>	Deep crimson mason 10%
<u>Blue</u>	Cobalt carbonate 1%
<u>Green</u>	Copper carbonate 6%

Crystalline Red Yellow Δ010

Red Lead	80
Flint	8
EPK	5
Chrome	7

Yellow Enamel Δ010

Antimony Oxide	8
White Lead	30
Frit 3419	46
Flint	16

Green Enamel Δ010

Frit 5301	80
Borax	15
Chrome	5

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

Jane Dillon

has submitted this written thesis  
as a supplement to the creative thesis

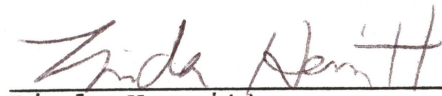
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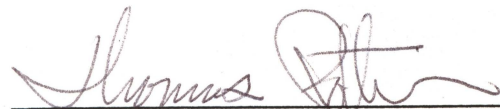
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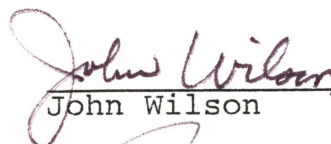
which are in the permanent possession of the  
University of Colorado and recorded with the  
Department of Fine Arts

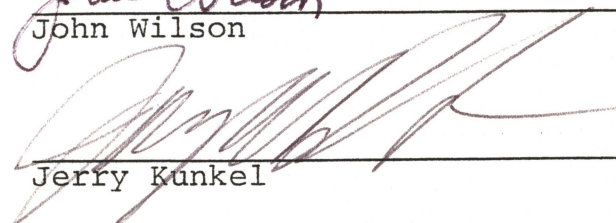
Approved by:

  
Anne Currier, Chairperson

  
Linda Herritt

  
Thomas Potter

  
John Wilson

  
Jerry Kunkel

10 Slides

Clay Steel Wood	16' x 36' x 12'	Installation North View
Clay Steel Wood	16' x 36' x 12'	Installation North View
Clay Steel	66" x 46" x 24"	Table and Chair
Clay	9' x 6' x 6"	My Man
Clay Ribbon	12' x 13" x 5"	Hanging Vases
Clay Wood Canvas Papermache	16' x 36' x 12'	Installation South View
Clay Wood Canvas Papermache	16' x 36' x 12'	Installation South View
Clay Canvas Wood	Rug: 12' x 24"	Vases, Rug and Ladder
Clay Canvas Wood Papermache	16' x 36' x 12'	Installation South View
Clay Wood Canvas Papermache	16' x 36' x 12'	Installation South View

