

Ceramics

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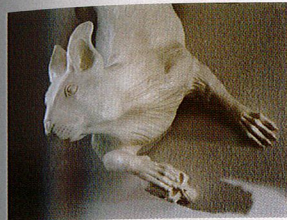


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Contents

ARTICLES

Steve Gorman: Below the Surface	<i>Tanya Hartman</i>	3
Creamware	<i>Gil McElroy</i>	8
Stephen Bowers' Ceramics	<i>Kevin Murray</i>	10
Earthenware of Paula Shalan	<i>Scott Norris</i>	16
Annette Schultz: Post Apartheid Identity	<i>Judy Peter</i>	20
Adrian Arleo	<i>Matthew Kangas</i>	24
The Narrative Knot	<i>Brett Ballard</i>	28
Art, Objecthood and Clay – Harris Deller	<i>Anthony Merino</i>	34
Claudia Lis "Sometimes a chance sets you off"	<i>Tony Birks</i>	38
The Pursuit of Porcelain	<i>Colette Copeland</i>	42
The Sculpture of Rytas Jakimavičius	<i>Anthony Stellaccio</i>	46
Transcendent	<i>Susannah Israel</i>	50
Unbroken – Cheryl Lucas	<i>Andrew Wood</i>	54
Dirk Staschke	<i>Judy Seckler</i>	58
Jim Malone at Goldmark Gallery	<i>Ann Head</i>	62
Grid and Planes: Alexandra McCurdy	<i>Jonathan Smith</i>	66
TableSpace	<i>Janet Koplos</i>	70
Exuberance and Restraint	<i>Léopold Foulem</i>	74
Art and Nature: Ardmore Ceramics	<i>Ingrid Stevens</i>	78
Adil Writer – Working his Charm	<i>Ray Meeker</i>	82
Steven Portigal	<i>Judy Seckler</i>	86
Sten Børsting	<i>Jørgen Steinicke</i>	90
Bone and Verdure – Chris Vicini	<i>Ludmila Hyman</i>	94
Toshiko Takaezu: Expressions in Clay	<i>Dandee Pattee</i>	98
Grotesque Garden: Matt Nolen	<i>Kate Missett</i>	101
Dan Arbeit: A Remembrance	<i>Tony Birks</i>	104
Dan Arbeit: A Retrospective	<i>Andy Christian</i>	107
Push Play – Reinventing the Wheel	<i>Judy Seckler</i>	108
Belinda Fox/Neville French: In Collaboration	<i>Brett Ballard</i>	112
Ken Price – A Remembrance	<i>Karen Koblitz</i>	115



Cover:

Harris Deller

Yellow and Orange Teapot

Geselle Hicks, *and then it was still*, 2012, 50 x 86 x 24", vitreous china. Created in Arts/Industry, a long-term residency program of John Michael Kohler Arts Center, Inc. at Kohler Co.

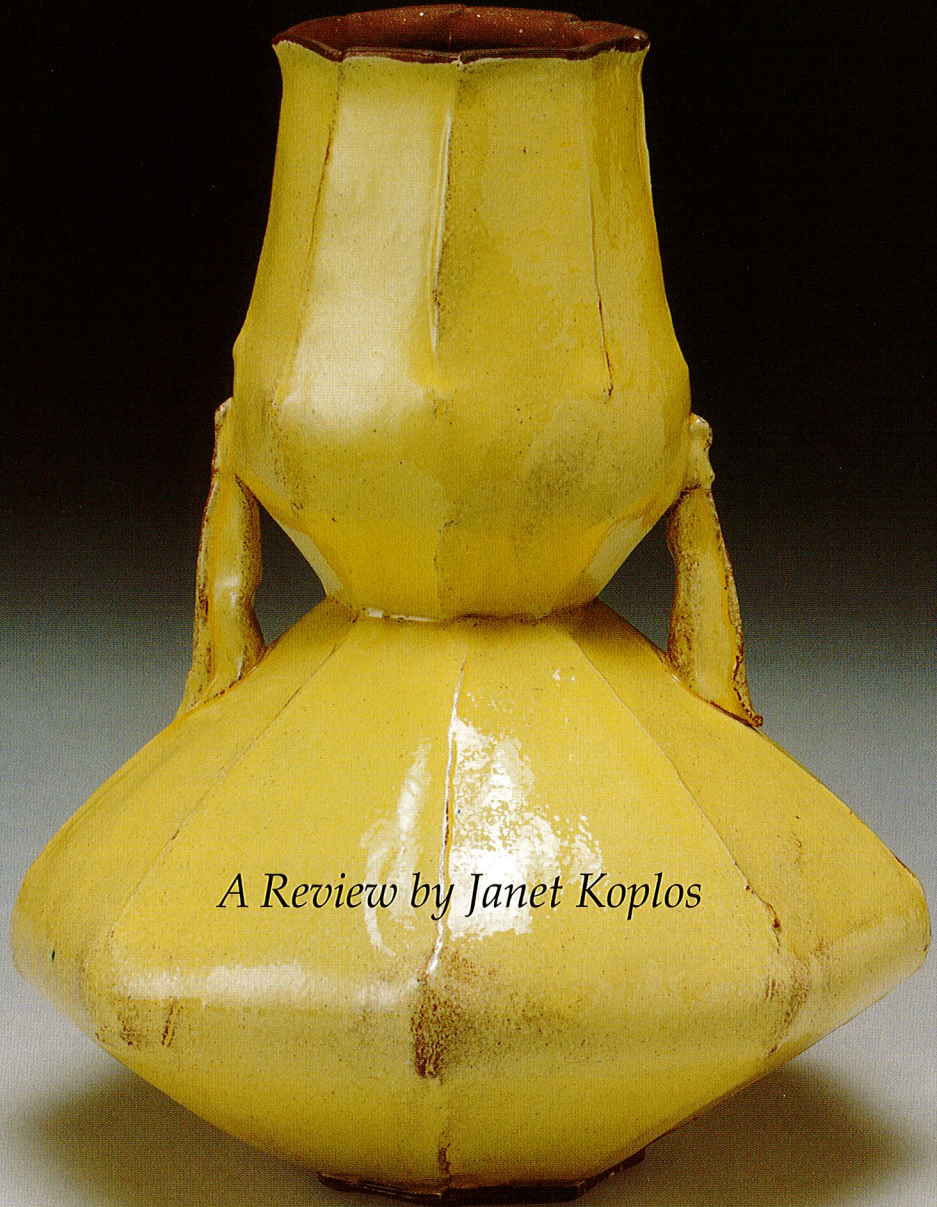
COVET is an exhibition and series of projects by contemporary artists inspired by museum collections and conversations about content, context, social history and patronage. Curated by Leslie Ferrin and Sienna Patti.

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TableSpace

Fosdick-Nelson Gallery
Alfred University, Alfred, New York



A Review by Janet Koplos

A 14-ARTIST EXHIBITION ABOUT FUNCTIONAL POTTERY cannot hope to be comprehensive, yet *Tablespace* stretched far and wide, including one representative each from Denmark, Japan, Canada and Germany in addition to the American participants. In an attempt at balance, the show also reached from woodfire to commercial casting and from simple utility to the

conceptual and the wildly decorative. Amazingly, the exhibition managed to distil the complexity of the subject and was understandable, thought-provoking and visually rewarding. The co-curators were Albion Stafford, an Alfred BFA/MFA now teaching at Illinois State University, and Alfred ceramics professor Linda Sikora. Both are makers working within this range, which might have

resulted in biased presentation yet in fact produced astute choices.

Both in the installation of the show and by concept, Paul Kotula and Ole Jensen play important roles: Jensen's work was the first thing one saw, a range of work from individual to limited edition to mass production arrayed on simple beige tables. His work was striking for its biomorphic tray with an 'eye hole' near one edge (from which it hung on the wall) and for his exemplary way of making familiar usable objects look futuristic: he keeps the volumes conventional and works his special effects of curvature on handles and feet. Single clear colours also make the forms decisive.

Kotula, whose conversation with Sikora was the source of the exhibition title, may also have offered its clearest example. *Tablespace* is the natural context of dinnerware. Kotula presented two 'settings for one' isolated on a rectangular table, one on its short end, the other at a distance on the long side. One setting was creamy white with lines and patches of mid-century hues of brown and gray, the other was all black with tiny incidents of teal. The top black dish was a thick smooth cast form evoking water-eroded rock, the next was a rectangular tray with a low, sharp and thin raised edge and the bottom dish was an irregular oval of considerable length; the ensemble rested on a constructed black wooden tray with a raised segment in the back middle and a turned-down rim at the equivalent place on the front. A black ewer took an approximate double-gourd shape but had an unexpectedly small and taut spout. Kotula's settings sparked a surprisingly emotional reaction in me: they struck me not as a single place setting that



Facing page: Mark Pharis. *Vase*. 2011. Earthenware. 12.75 × 10 × 10 in (32.4 × 25.4 × 25.4 cm).
This page above: Lisa Orr. *Installation of work in TableSpace*. 2011. Earthenware.
Below left: Andy Brayman. *Black Spiral Vase*. 2011. Porcelain. 11 × 10.5 × 10.5 in (27.9 × 26.7 × 26.7 cm).
Below right: Ole Jensen. *Installation of work in TableSpace*. 1994–2009. Earthenware, porcelain, stoneware, Faience Bone China.



wildly decorative. Amazingly,

could be duplicated for a 12-person dinner but rather a declaration of singularity, for one and no more, no distractions to their exquisite positioning, seductive contours and isolating edges. It seemed even that an ornamental colour patterning on the white set represented aloneness: different colors moved along three edges of the rim of a bowl and turned toward the centre, where they terminated without intersecting or in the least responding to each other.

Two nearby displays were opposite. Sarah Jaeger's bowl-and-plate sets, tureen and teapot solely in celadon-tinged white had generous curving contours and notches in the plates that made them almost quatrefoils while the notches in the squared bowls made a more modest inflection. And, even more, her decorated sets of plates, jug, jar and large bowl presented patterns evocative of festive times or other cultures, with an all-blue leaf pattern and a blue-with-white leaf motif intermixed sociably. Lisa Orr's dishes were shown on a variation of the rectangular table format: it was something like a work bench, a shorter table with an inset shelf below and a wall shelf above it. Quite in keeping with Orr's effusive high-colour decoration, she had literally dozens of objects piled high: stacks of plates, cups stashed within bowls. The lumpy relief surfaces and free perimeters, in their numbers, magnified the noisy festivity. These pieces do not want to be alone.

Also profuse and exuberant were the dishes of Kari Radisch. She presented two extensive place settings, in blue/green and pink/orange, both with appliqué flowers and balloon-like circles with decals of flowers or spots. Radisch represented the quantities of cheerfully child-like pottery being made nowadays, mostly by women. She included a full complement

Below: Paul Eshelman. Installation of work in TableSpace. 2011. Red Stoneware.

Facing page, top: Kari Radasch. Pink and Orange. 2011. Terracotta and rubber. 5.25 × 28 × 21 in (13.3 × 71.1 × 53.3 cm).

Facing page, below: Paul Kotula. Setting For One. 2011. Porcelain, stoneware, glass and wood.

7.5 × 23.5 × 20 in (19.1 × 59.7 × 50.8 cm).

of dishes for the adult table, although in the youthful context both her shot glass and espresso cups looked like something extracted from a doll-house tea set. Paul Eshelman, on the other hand, presented two long tables filled with casseroles, sets of plates, and the full range of tableware, all in smooth, sturdy cast earthenware banded or centered with a single strong, pure colour. The work is reductive yet sensuous, efficient yet unhurried-looking and serene. He also showed a set of three vases, their strong-coloured front and back faces embodying the square-triangle-circle of a famous 18th century Zen ink painting by Sengai. It is amusing and modern looking, yet quite in harmony with the rest of the work.

Andy Brayman's offerings, a small number of bowls and plates plus one vase, are surely not meant to evoke harmony. There is an edgy restlessness to all the works, along with a sense that these are conscious comments on functional form, about it more than of it. A large bowl calls attention not to form but to the plotted structures, probably worked out on a computer, that dot the inside surface. Two smaller bowls are concentrated expressions of irregular planes and edges, rather than the continuity that characterises a conventional bowl. The vase is a dark, slightly receding cylinder of facets, appearing chipped out of some intractable material. It looks as if it would be fascinating to touch and its idiosyncrasy is not likely to interfere with use.

Mark Pharis, like Brayman, occupied a middle ground here. His set of eight plates raised on feet that make them reminiscent of Japanese *geta* sandals are angular but neutral beige in colour and entirely usable. But to some degree his teapots and even more his trays are deliberately oddified. The two trays are oversize and irregular in contour; they would sit well at the centre of a table or buffet and clever food arrangement could play off their unexpected colour patches. The teapots are marked with segments of colour but never ones that reinforce the form as Eshelman's do. Rather, they seem placed



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to dislocate. The deliberate arrangement is actually congruent with Pharis's method of designing patterns for his pieces on a computer and building them accordingly, but that is not something one would guess without special information. Instead placement, like the hue of acid yellow that he uses on a vase and teapot where it hangs on the form like an ill-fitting cloak, seems intended to create an imbalance and tension in the object.

Also represented in the show were Sandy Simon's food-centered functional ware, both in the white for which she is known and in a new brushed green that confuses the forms; Tomoo Hamada's work representing the lineage of his grandfather Shoji Hamada; fine woodfired functional ware by Sam Uhlick; icy

porcelain trays and vases by Takeshi Yasuda; 18th-century-inspired form and decoration by Sonngard Marcks; and two large storage jars with evocative crackled surfaces by Robert Sutherland that did not quite fit the theme. All in all, with strong works, surprising choices and a coherent but sensitive installation, this was a stellar show of its type. It is unfortunate that Alfred's location means that a relatively small number of people could see it.

Janet Koplos, a former senior editor at *Art in America* magazine and guest editor at *American Craft* magazine, is the co-author of *Makers: A History of American Studio Craft* (2010, University of North Carolina Press).

All photos by Brian Oglebee.

