



THE STUDIO
POTTER

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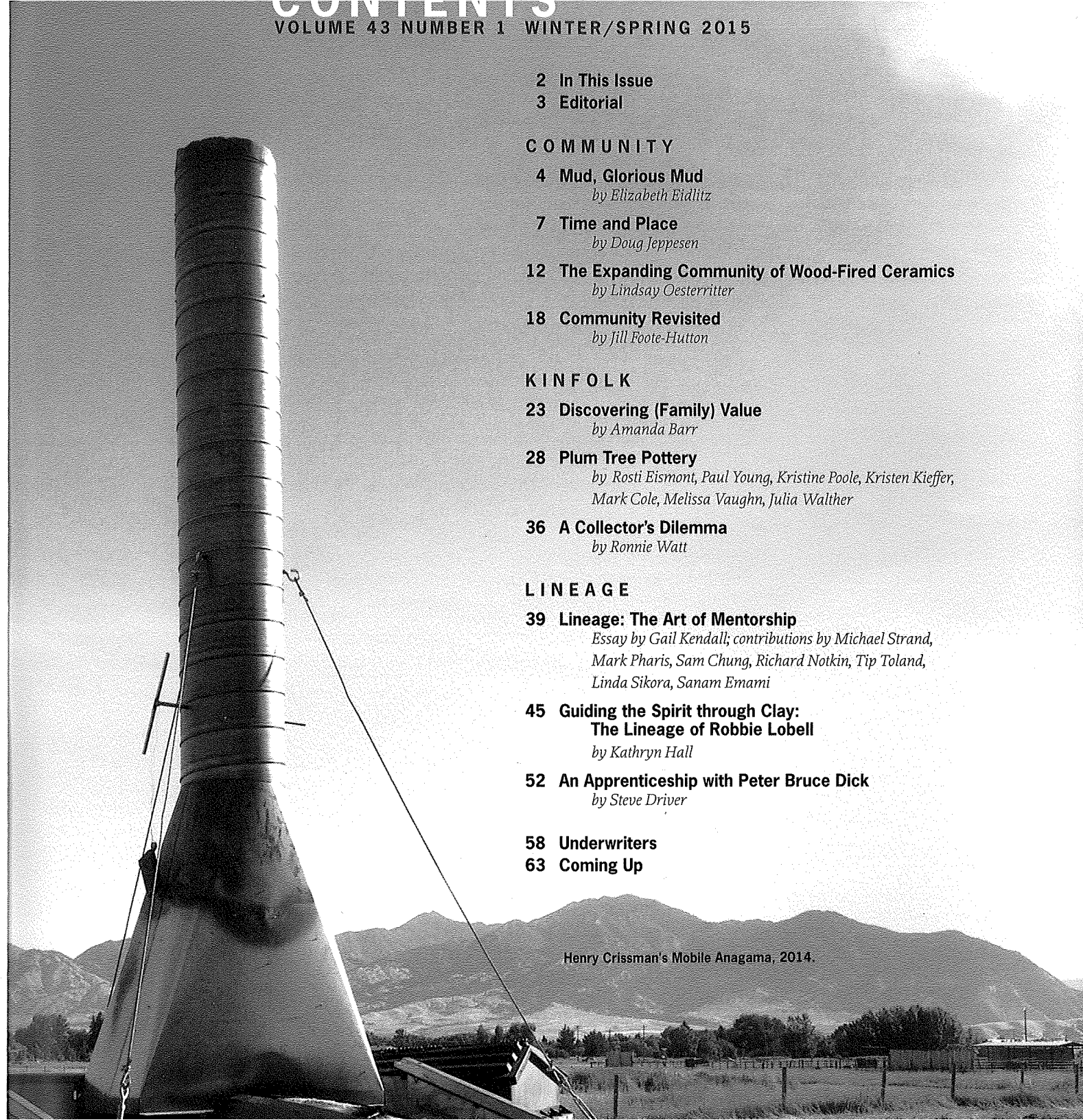
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Henry Crissman's Mobile Anagama, 2014.



It wasn't because it had faults or flaws, was too expensive, wouldn't fit in my luggage, or was made by a marginally committed potter. I declined the pot because I discovered that within this potter's output, it was a *happen-chance* pot. None of the potter's other works came close to having the qualities of this pot. There was continuity in the classical forms that he produced but also ample evidence that he was repeating rather than resolving his technical blunders. Within his practice, there was none of the tension that Mary Barringer had described during one of the many chats we had in her Shelburne Falls studio:

"There are two poles that you tack between when you work in clay. One is the things you don't have control over – the plasticity, the firing, the shrinkage, the sagging, the warping – all the things that clay does. You could never eliminate all of those aspects. On the other hand, there is the control part that has to do with mastery, skill, and intention, with something being what you want it to be rather than just being something random in clay. That is what we recognise when we see good work. [...] There is a fruitful tension. You must allow the material to do what it does, but you also need to impose your idea, somewhere along the line, on it."

I am still agonising over my decision about the happenchance pot. Did I do the pot and the potter an injustice? Should I have focused on the pot and disregarded the who and how of its making? Have



Maureen Mills, Vase. Reduction-fired stoneware. 24 x 6 in.

we not been taught that the pot must speak for itself? Would my buying that pot have been incentive for the potter to aspire to making more of the same?

All of this self-questioning made me reconsider why I collect studio pottery. My collection is not an assemblage of specimens; rather it is the broadest possible collection of potters' oeuvres; it represents those who blazed the pottery trail in my country and those who follow the pioneer potters' ways of thinking and making but not necessarily working within their aesthetic idioms. My all-time favourite South African studio potter is Esias Bosch, who did not hesitate to show his dismay at what did not meet his expectations or aspirations and who would walk into his own studio and sweep the pots off the shelves and onto the floor. He did that not once, but repeatedly. Each time he started all over. The result was pots that were extraordinary in what they represented, both within and outside of their forms and decorations.

My collection represents my country's studio pottery history as much as it addresses the ingrained ethics of the studio potters and the aesthetics they achieved. I have humble pots and grand pots,

but they are all honest pots. Not one is a happenchance pot. And they all *jazz* me.

When I acquire pots made outside of my country, I don't measure them by whether or not they will fit the look and feel of my collection, but by whether they reveal the integrity of the craft and of the potter. The New England pots that I brought home to South Africa all have such integrity. The pot that didn't make the grade may still be for sale. I am sure someone who is not so wrapped up in ethics as I am will fall in love with it for just what it is, and give it a good home.

LINEAGE: The Art of Mentorship

The following is a selection of texts that accompanied an exhibition of the same title curated by artist and educator Gail Kendall and organized by Caitlin Brown at the Clay Art Center in Port Chester, New York, from September 27 to November 15, 2014. Kendall invited the initial twenty-one artists not only because of their mastery of forming objects and ideas, but also because of their role in the tutelage of other artists. Each of those artists in turn invited a protégé with whom they feel a strong connection. The exhibition featured the work of artists from within academia and outside of it, as both have had a profound impact on mentorship in clay culture. Here are the words of Kendall and her chosen protégé, and of six other paired artists about the art of mentorship.

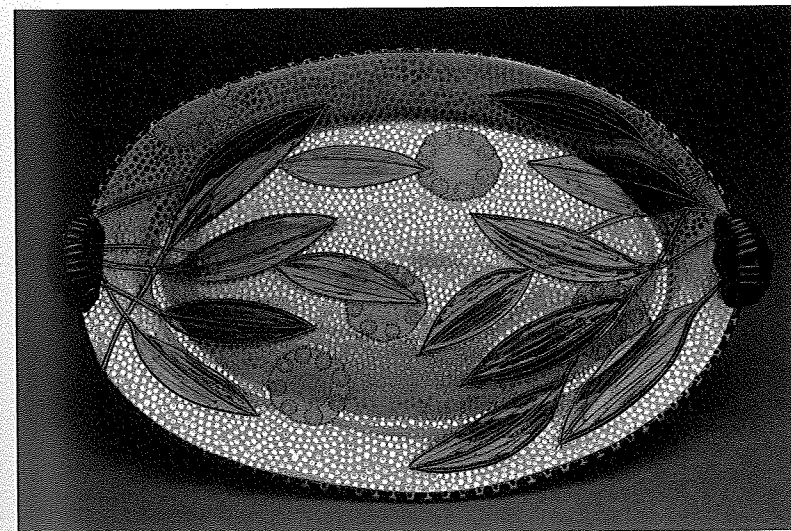
CURATOR'S ESSAY BY GAIL KENDALL

At the core of every significant work of visual art lies a mystery: an ineffable and powerful essence that cannot be described in words. As I contemplate the nature of mentorship, from a personal as well as an objective stance, I feel there is a mystery here as well, one based on the complexity and miracle of human relationships. Fueled by the characters and temperaments of both mentor and mentored, a synergy occurs in which each perceives the other as counselor, coach, leader, friend. These attributes live within and steer the relationship, which may last a lifetime.

"Mentorship" is a popular subject in contemporary culture. With a focus on leadership, too, pundits support the notion that with the correct handout and weekend workshop we can all become gifted leaders and mentors. With this exhibition I intended to address a more poetic or artful set of elements informing mentorship, which go beyond setting, opportunity, ambition, or achievement. I aimed to put together a list of ceramic artists I know to have affected the lives of others in our field through their nurturing hearts, passionate love of ceramics, and individual qualities that communicate in intensely emotional and acutely intellectual ways. The path is not always

upbeat and positive and at times obstructed with frustration, irritation, anger, and perhaps grief. It is the wholeness of experience involved in mentorship that leads to the ultimate place: friendship.

Objectively, in our field there are important avenues in which a young voice in clay may be mentored. One is certainly higher education, where many art students find their



Gail Kendall, Platter: Leaves and Seeds, 2014. Slipped terracotta, sgraffito, clear glazes, transparent colored glazes, china paint, 22K burnished gold luster. 17 x 13 in.

“Tell me and I forget, teach me and I may remember, involve me and I learn.”

— Benjamin Franklin

way to the ceramic studio and never leave academia, perhaps going on to an advanced degree, and even into professorships. That was my route. I continue to value the mentorship of my two major professors from Michigan, John and Susanne Stephenson. As artists and teachers they still inspire me.

Other valuable avenues for the passionate student of clay who wishes to make a life in the medium are to be found in apprenticeships, assistantships, and residencies. Fortunately, there are a good number of intense and exceptional versions of this path to professionalism. Through them, emerging ceramists can find the knowledge that is often left out in the academic environment: how to be an efficient worker who wastes neither time nor materials in the studio, how to pack and ship work, how to interact with an all-important public, how to price work in a way that rewards both the buyer and the seller. Important and intertwined with the apprenticeships, assistantships, and residencies are the situations in which directors of ceramic programs at art centers such as Anderson Ranch may work with summer or yearlong assistants in ways that lead to a mentorship bond.

When curating *Lineage: The Art of Mentorship*, I sought to include individuals serving as mentors in each of these avenues. From the beginning, I focused on mentors who have served for decades in this arena. I also focused on artists whom I know personally and whose altruistic side I have seen. Some of these artists are great friends and colleagues, others I have met in passing. Many other mentors with a proven track record of influence and nurturance were not represented in the exhibition simply because of space limitations.

There is an added, deeper realm of mentorship that consists of those individuals who mentored the mentors and others who mentored those mentors. When possible, we should refer to those artists, thinkers, and makers during our instruction and in conversations with our students, apprentices, and assistants. I shall use one artist from this exhibition as an example of mentorship moving back through time, and I hope I get it right. In the 1970s, Mark Pharis was mentored by the great and still-working ninety-year-old potter Warren MacKenzie, who was the teacher and mentor of a group of young art students at the University of Minnesota. Through Warren's mentorship, they aligned themselves with the Hamada-Leach philosophy of pottery making and critique. Bernard Leach was Warren's mentor at the Leach Pottery in St. Ives, England, in the nineteen-fifties. Who mentored the young Leach, who was born in 1887? Certainly William Morris, who founded the Arts & Crafts Movement, did. John Ruskin, a contemporary of Morris, influenced Leach through his ardent writing on the nature of art, craft, and architecture. At that point, one runs into a cul-de-sac because Ruskin's "mentors" are anonymous craftsmen, builders, and designers working in the Middle Ages.

It is through looking back in time, investigating from where we have sprung, that we understand our individual and collective paths. We perceive how the wheel relentlessly turns and various philosophies, aesthetics, and technologies are revised and revisited. The result is the lineage we inherit and build upon. That lineage needs to be acknowledged and revered so that we may all be stronger: individually, in communion amongst ourselves, and with the larger art world.

KENDALL'S PROTÉGÉ, MICHAEL STRAND

I met Gail Kendall on a trip to Lincoln, Nebraska, after being accepted into the graduate program at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL). That year was Pete Pinnell's first at UNL; Gail and Pete were ready to launch the first class that would usher in the new UNL era. We were having lunch at a *pho* joint in downtown Lincoln, and the subject came up of where else I was applying. I said that I had been accepted at two other schools, one for painting and one for ceramics. Gail let me finish, then exclaimed, "Well, I can see why you would want to attend either of those schools, but if you do decide on that it will be a big mistake . . . and here is why: You want to go to a school that is on the rise and not living off prior success. . . . In five years UNL

will be one of the top ceramic programs in the country, and that is where you should be." Gail was respectful of the other two institutions, but she knew where her program was going. I was immediately inspired and knew where I was going. More than her words or directness, her absolute confidence in what she said confirmed my decision. It was clear to me, as an unsure, wandering soul (with some talent), that Gail would be an anchor.

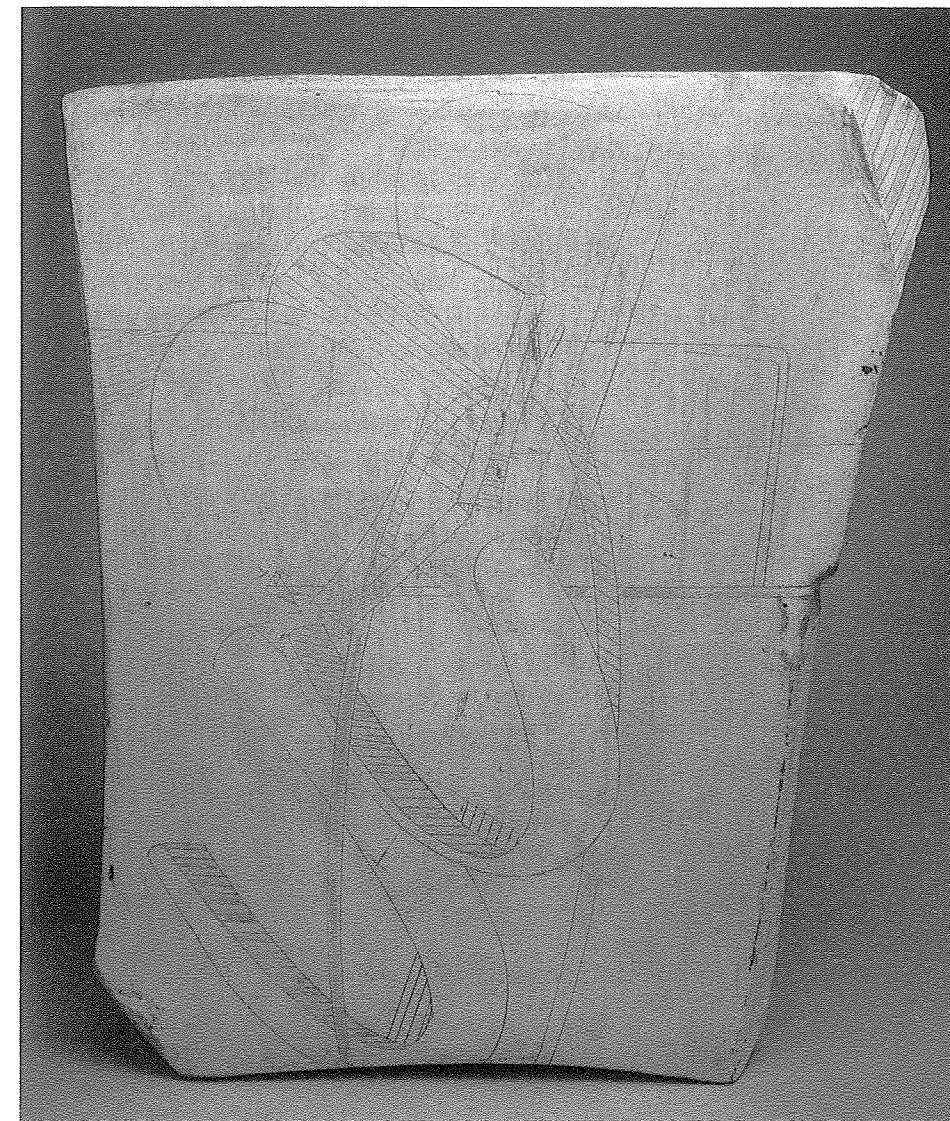
And she has been. For twenty years. Far, far more than I could have imagined that day over marginal Vietnamese cuisine.

Gail has scolded me for writing in a passive voice and at the same time nurtured my ability to think about the world through a poetic lens. We have cried over Paul Wellstone and celebrated Obama. We have talked about pots, their feet, undercuts and bevels, and our shared love of Clive Bowen pots. We have had tea in her studio at Woods Hall or in South Lincoln. What has grown from those experiences is the unmistakable connection that only mentorship can provide. Mentorship is about the heart, about loving someone and being vulnerable enough to hear the things you may not want to hear, but trusting that person enough to listen.

I have had the great fortune of having Gail Kendall either thirty feet away in her studio, or thirty seconds away via cell phone. And now, as we talk as colleagues during our phone calls, I am moved to close our conversations in the same manner I will finish this homage to a great mentor: "I love you, Gail."

Michael Strand. Drift, 2014. Porcelain, glazes, high fire. 8 x 10 x 4 in.

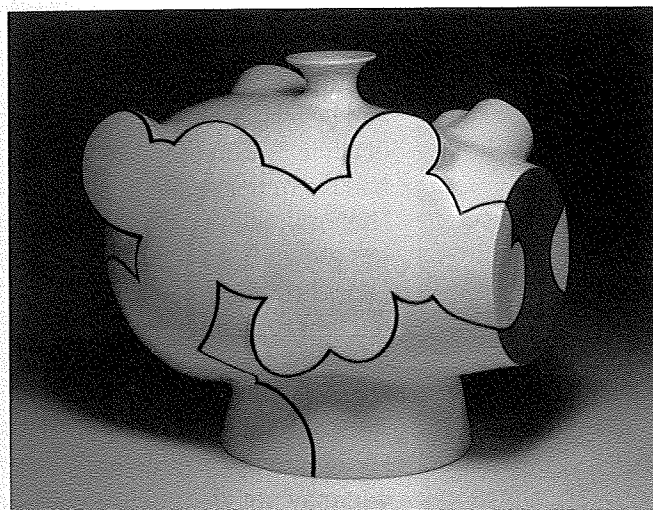
Photograph by Loren Maron.



MARK PHARIS AND SAM CHUNG

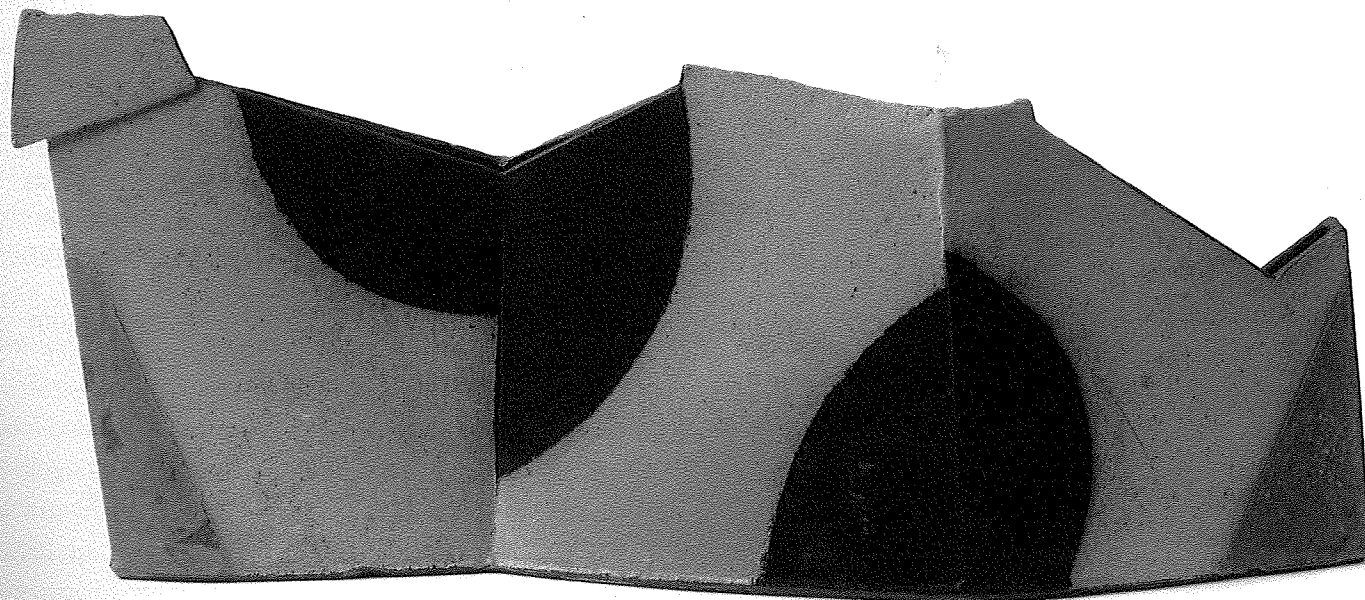
Sam came to the University of Minnesota in the mid-nineties. He was planning on applying to graduate school and needed studio space and time to develop his portfolio.

I'm not clear how a teacher-student relationship evolves into a mentorship or why. A mentoring relationship requires a certain chemistry that doesn't develop with everyone; it's informal and serendipitous. For me, it requires and develops from mutual respect, trust, and shared experiences. Sam's creative work exhibited remarkable potential, and he had the interpersonal skills to lead and "play well with others." Sam and I talked often for many years after he left the department for graduate school and as he entered the



LEFT: Sam Chung. *Cloud Bottle*, 2013. Porcelain, wheel thrown and altered, china painted. 11.5 x 13 x 10 in.

BELOW: Mark Pharis. *Vase*, 2014. Handbuilt earthenware. 22 x 9.5 x 4.5 in.



academic world, embarking on his teaching career. I like to think that some of my experiences in the field resonated with him and became useful; it's rewarding to see my students contribute to the field. As is true of the student-teacher relationship, the intensity of mentorship recedes over time and becomes something else. I think that's what's supposed to happen.

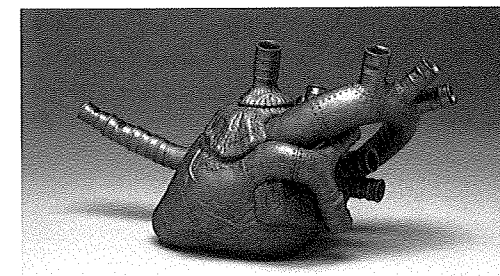
Mark has been a great friend and mentor throughout the twenty-plus years I have known him. He has always been a great sounding board whenever I was at a crossroads in my career. I appreciate his thoughtfulness, intelligence, and support as a teacher, mentor, and now friend. I'm now around the age that Mark was when I first met him, and it's humbling to think that I have moved into what his role was at that time. I'm sure I've passed on many of his valuable lessons to my own students.

As the years have passed, we haven't seen each other as much, but whenever we do meet up, I always appreciate the friendship and humor that have developed between us. I never miss an opportunity to tease Mark, and he is always quick to fire back some good zingers; I am still learning from the master. I am thankful for our friendship and continue to have great admiration for how he constantly seeks new challenges in his work.

RICHARD NOTKIN AND TIP TOLAND

I first worked with Tip at Montana State University in 1981. I was the acting chair of her MFA committee when she received her degree, and she is the best student I've had in my years of university- and college-teaching. Tip and I hit it off immediately because we were both working in narrative sculpture, weaving images into stories we were passionate about. She was one of only two students I ever had with whom my approach was just to sit back and watch. I didn't want to mess with her already strong art, but I did help her technically, and I encouraged her in numerous, fascinating discussions we had about her work. I feel a bit guilty nominating her as my "mentee" because I feel that I probably learned more from Tip than she learned from me. About thirty years after meeting her, I took a two-week workshop on figurative sculpture from Tip, and she became my mentor. We have had a long-term relationship which has been, I hope, mutually beneficial. I know it has been beneficial for me.

Richard T. Notkin replaced Michael Peed at Montana State University during my final year as a graduate student there, and immediately moved into being chair of my MFA committee. My last year was very rewarding because of Dick's encouragement and the attention he paid to my work, and because I was able to watch him make his work. His influence on my work has been



ABOVE: Richard Notkin. *Heart Teapot: Internal Combustion* Metamorphosis – Yixing Series, 2013. Stoneware, luster.

6 3/8 x 12 3/8 x 5 in.

RIGHT: Tip Toland. *Come*, 2014. Porcelain, chalk pastel, wool.

9 x 4 x 2 in.



so enormous and multi-layered, it is difficult to distill into a few paragraphs... I'll do my best.

Dick teaches by example. His commitment to his political and social views and how he translates that into such potent imagery is profound to witness. For an artist to produce imagery in the relentless way that Dick does, is to take the hard road. I admire him very much for it. His post-World War II Jewish upbringing as the son of an immigration lawyer in Chicago as well as his relationships with his mentors at the Kansas City Art Institute and with Robert Arneson at Davis have shaped his artistic career. His art is honest, relentless, and sometimes funny.

Dick is a superior craftsman. Every time I think I'm done with a piece, I ask myself if Dick would take it further. The answer is always yes. I press on a little

more, but the perfectionism eventually becomes insane, so I let it stand, but I always think about how Dick might have completed it.

Dick thinks in metaphors and often in surrealist metaphors. I find this MAD magazine sensibility compelling and strongly relate to it. My attraction to it was expressed more in my earlier work, but the influence is still there in recent work.

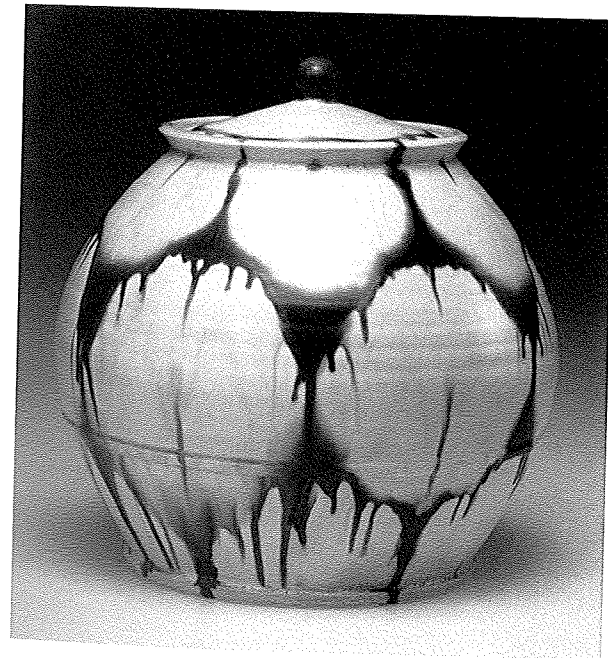
LINDA SIKORA AND SANAM EMAMI

There are valued instances in a lifetime when a passing exchange with an individual provides enlightenment. And then there are encounters with people who are involved in our lives in a steady and constant manner and who bring and accept bounty in many forms over many years, which is the nature of my relationship with Sanam Emami. I met Sanam when I was fresh out of graduate school and in my first teaching position at the University of Colorado Boulder. Sanam had earned her bachelor's degree and was working alongside the graduate class. In a number of ways our professional and personal experience were similar; this closeness may have been part of the glue that has kept us in a dynamic relationship over time. In subsequent years, we found ourselves sharing studios, and classrooms, as student and teacher, then later as colleagues. We became friends, housemates, and travel companions. We share a love in pottery of form, of color, of pattern, of the decorative process, and of material culture. Both in work and life, we have much that connects us and distinguishes our relationship; therein lies the riches of our enduring bond.

This spring, we had a conversation in an airport about a book on pottery that Sanam had read. We spoke about its classicism and its enduring inspiration until my flight arrived. Two weeks later, a copy showed up in my mailbox.

The only way to write about my relationship with Linda Sikora – my mentor and friend for the past eighteen years – is to write from my heart and my gut. Linda has taught me many things over the years, most importantly, to strive to be articulate and think through complex decisions, and to trust my instincts. Her guidance and encouragement always strike the right chord. She inspires me not only to find a balance between doing more and to doing it better, but also to bring conviction and honesty to my studio practice and my life. After a conversation with Linda, I feel the humanity and humility of art-making, and its potential to really matter. Linda is many things to me: an inspiring artist, a generous and committed teacher, a role model, a colleague, a friend, and a travel companion.

A few years after I finished graduate school, I had the opportunity to travel to Iran to see my family after being away for almost twenty years. Linda asked if she could travel with me. This was the first time she had asked me for something, and I felt so grateful to be able to do something for her after all she had done for me. Looking back now, I realize that her presence made the trip an even more meaningful adventure. Our relationship has changed, evolved, and become more reciprocal over the years, and I will always feel that her presence in my life is a gift



LEFT: Linda Sikora. Covered Jar, 2012. Polychrome glaze, wood/oil/salt-fired. 15 x 13.5 x 13.5 in.

RIGHT: Sanam Emami. Pitcher, 2014. Salt-fired stoneware, laser-cut stencils and silk screen transfers. 9 in.
Photograph by Peter Lee.

Guiding the Spirit Through Clay: The Lineage of Robbie Lobell by Kathryn Hall

