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VESSELS

By

Christopher Robinson

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By

CHRISTOPHER ROBINSON

Approved:

Ted Saupe

Ted Saupe,
Major Professor

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date

"It is the uniformity of perfection that kills" - Beranrd Leach

"The lyf so short, the crafte so long to lerne" - Geoffery Chaucer

Attending the University of Georgia has in many ways connected me to my own past and genealogy. Living in Athens has brought back many childhood memories from growing up in nearby Atlanta. It has even dug up some old stories of the days when my parents attended the University. Moving to Athens has brought me physically closer to the source of my childhood inspiration. My family, particularly my two older brothers, provided the introduction to functional and nonfunctional object making. My oldest brother showed me an artistic perspective with his photography and later film. At the time, this brother acquainted me with a new way of seeing which included negative shapes and not just recognizably outlined forms. With his photographs he described a simple composition of simple shapes out of everyday life. There was a serenity and pensive quality to his photographs that I would later recognize to be influenced by a Japanese aesthetic. My other brother showed me a more functional view by the handmade production of hot-air balloons. This brother's considerations in the making process were similar, but persuaded by elements of function. Seeing the construction of the envelope (canopy) and the basket to a finished functioning aircraft was a true lesson on process. Seeing and experiencing the functioning balloon was truly an expression of use and pleasure combined.

Many family members including cousins, in-laws and grandparents had me as captivated as the next with their respectively revered creations of

art. The direct influence of their work in combination with exposure to museums, art shows and craft sales, shaped my aesthetic at an early age. This astectic began to manifest itself with an introduction to clay during high school. During undergraduate studies, I experimented with functional and nonfunctional approaches to making objects of various materials including clay. The five years between undergraduate school and attending UGA, I was primarily focused on the production of functional pottery. Three of those five years were spent at Penland School of crafts in the mountains of North Carolina. Spending time at Penland offered a wonderfully diverse range of discoveries and influences. Working with a myriad of materials while artists from around the country exchanged information with students, provided a valuable development of interests and ascetics. Penland School was and is considered a craft school, although my personal experience included nonfunctional and functional object making.

During two of the three years spent at UGA, my focus fell on the construction of large-scale ceramic vessels. This pursuit began as a technically driven curiosity with interest in the abilities of the vessel as metaphor. In his article *The Vessel: Denying Function*, artist and teacher Wayne Higby provides the following definition of the term vessel:

"The contemporary vessel is an object that presents the formal essence of the pot exaggerated to reveal a personal artistic vision uninhibited by pragmatic issues of function."

In the case of my most recent work, scale becomes the most exaggerated element, which beyond technical interest is used to provide

some clarity of the intent of the pieces themselves. The visual impact the scale provides is an immediate indication to the viewer that they are not to be considered functional. The categorization of "large-scale" comes from working on such an intimate scale of functional pottery, when actually the pieces stand generally to human scale.

The use of a pottery format to convey "artistic vision" without the element of functionality seems dogmatic in principle. That is, according to Soetsu Yanagi, "the beauty of pottery finds its fullest expression only when it is joined to utility." While I can support this sentiment, I also feel the uniqueness of contemporary ceramics to have provided ample room for the exploration of pottery inspired vessels as vehicles for metaphor. As any other form of art, pottery is a form of human expression. Ultimately the nature of the piece is a reflection of the nature of the maker.

"I said I was not interested in making or creating something novel or refined or acceptable from the standpoint of the usual idea of beauty, but that I was aiming at making correct and healthy things, pottery that is practical and not forced, that responds to the nature of the materials. I did not want to make something outwardly beautiful, but to begin from the inside; health and correctness were more important to me."
This quote by Japanese potter Shoji Hamada reveals the importance of the interior of the vessel and maker.

Three of my early vessels begin to describe the elements and principles of pottery making while not complying with utility (figure 1). At this point the forms start to exude a presence of strength and quietude while the surface is engaging and mysterious (figure 2). Even though these

vessels are displayed on large white pedestals to define intention, the pieces lack a definitive direction and remain unclear. It is the ambivalent zone between functional pottery and the contemporary vessel, which holds deadening results. When considering more recently constructed vessels, the intention of how they are to be perceived is more successfully conveyed to the viewer (figure 3). It is not merely the scale and resolution of form but also the introduction of individualized bases which provide a more clear indication of how these pieces are to be viewed, thought about and experienced. The bases provide visual and physical information of the vessel's status. The materials used to construct the bases include wood, iron, concrete and clay. The materials used for the bases were given surfaces to reflect the clay used for the vessels. Using materials other than clay for some bases simply marks a distinction between vessel and base and an inclination to incorporate multiple materials into my work. These base forms physically elevate the vessels to a sculptural consideration with potential for metaphorical implications (figure 4). Possible personifications begin taking shape when considering the relationship between the pieces in a group and how they exist on an individual level (figure 5). This often seems to be a didactically discussed condition of humanity that ultimately requires individual resolution. Individually, the vessels maintain a definitive presence while resisting an overstated ego (figure 6).

Working on this new scale provided a multitude of new challenges. In addition to clay body considerations such as plasticity, shrinkage, thermal shock, color, etc., I also adapted a new firing temperature and technique. These "new" techniques (to me) included firing temperature and duration, glazes and slips as well as method of construction. Using a hand building

technique of joining clay coils together with occasional wheel thrown additions, I am able to construct several four feet tall vessel forms simultaneously. I have previously employed the widely used technique of adding clay coils as the piece is formed on the potters wheel. It was not until attending UGA that I was shown the technique of extruding clay through ones opposing palms to produce clay coils for hand building. This became the means of constructing all of my vessels with the occasional addition of a thrown neck or pulled handles. Using this method of construction seems appropriate for the scale and nonfunctional approach.

The vessels were fired first to bisque, then one or two additional firings to "finish" the surface and mature the clay. The bisque firings were generally fired in gas kilns, sometimes electric to cone 04, and took around seventy two to eighty hours. I found it generally helpful to construct a "bag wall" around each piece at least half way up the total height to help keep direct flame off the raw clay to prevent cracking. Subsequent firings were made in gas/salt kilns with two to six pounds of sodium introduced towards the end. These "finish" firings were slightly reduced to bring out some color on the kaolin slip covered surface. The final temperature of cone one or two (2077-2100 F) is reached in approximately twenty-four hours at which time the sodium is introduced. I find this type of firing appropriate to achieve the warmth and subtlety of surface analogous to high fire pots. The mark left by the circulating flame and salt indicative of this type of firing helps unify surface and form. Choosing to emulate this type of sensibility is not only evident through the fire but the materials as well. Many of the materials used to create a suitable clay body for these vessels

can also be seen in a high fire throwing body. To avoid stress, warping, and cracking, I fire them to a relatively low temperature mentioned above. I experimented with three clay bodies with occasional variations.

Clay Body #1	Clay Body # 2	Clay Body #3
Fire.....40	Ball.....20	Fire.....30
Ball.....30	Fire.....50	Ball.....20
T-6.....10	Red Art.....20	T-6.....10
Spar.....10	Gold Art....5	Spar.....5
Talc.....10	grog & fiber	talc.....10
Grog & fiber		Red Art....20

As mentioned before, many of the materials used are commonly used in stoneware throwing bodies except perhaps the talc, red art, and fiber. The talc adds a complex conversion of silica to render a lower thermal expansion and hopefully fewer firing and cooling cracks. The Red Art was added to promote better fusing between clay body and added sodium during the relatively low temperature firing. Also, adding this iron rich clay helps lower the maturation point of the clay body. The fiber was added along with grog to improve green strength and promote faster drying.

The surface texture and marks found on the vessels are derived from several sources (figure 7). One source reflects my brief connection to the process of printmaking. I could find a direct process relationship between inking a plate and wiping the ink back off the "high" spots and staining the clay and then wiping the stain back off the clay surface. The marks are

also a result of the dialogue between maker and material. The physical connection with clays impressionable character is what continually brings me back to its use. Only two glazes (with some variations) and one slip were used for the later vessels (figure 3). The glaze most frequently used was a popular shop glaze, altered to suit my needs. The end result was as follows:

Cone 1 good glaze	T-6 slip
Frit 3110.....650	T-6 kaolin.....85
SiO2.....100	Nph. Sy.....15
EPK.....190	Bentonite.....5
Gerst. Borate..50	The original base for "cone 1
Soda ash.....50	good glaze" known as water clear,
Bentonite...2 – 5	was for my purposes too shiny at the
RIO.....10	temperature I wanted to fire my
Copper.....5	vessels. I therefore lowered the amount
	of flux and increased the amount of
	refractory (in this case epk).

The forms came from various sources primarily derived from historical pottery. After looking at pottery from medieval France, England and Italy I have started to gain a sensibility towards volume and proportion. I am also especially drawn to pots made around the same time in Korea and

Japan. In addition to looking at historical pottery, I've often been enamored with ancient glass bottles and even small glass drug and perfume bottles of the American twentieth century. Although I have long since been interested in glass, it is the essence and dynamics of pottery I wish maintain in these large vessels.

While continually intrigued by functional pottery and the intrinsic user/maker connection, I find the potential ability of the nonfunctional vessel a powerful teacher. To me the vessel becomes a vehicle to relate artistic vision and a process that promotes self-discovery. The most valuable function of my recent work has been discovering little bits of who I am and how I fit into this world as a working artist.

"No machine can compare with a man's hands. Machinery gives speed, power, complete uniformity, and precision, but it cannot give creativity, adapability, freedom, heterogeneity. These the machine is incapable of, hence the superiority of the hand, which no amount of rationalism can negate. Man prefers the creative and the free to the fixed and the standardized."

-Soetsu Yanagi

Figure 1


GRADUATE CERAMICS

Figure 2

Figure 3


ne Arts
xhibition

Figure 4

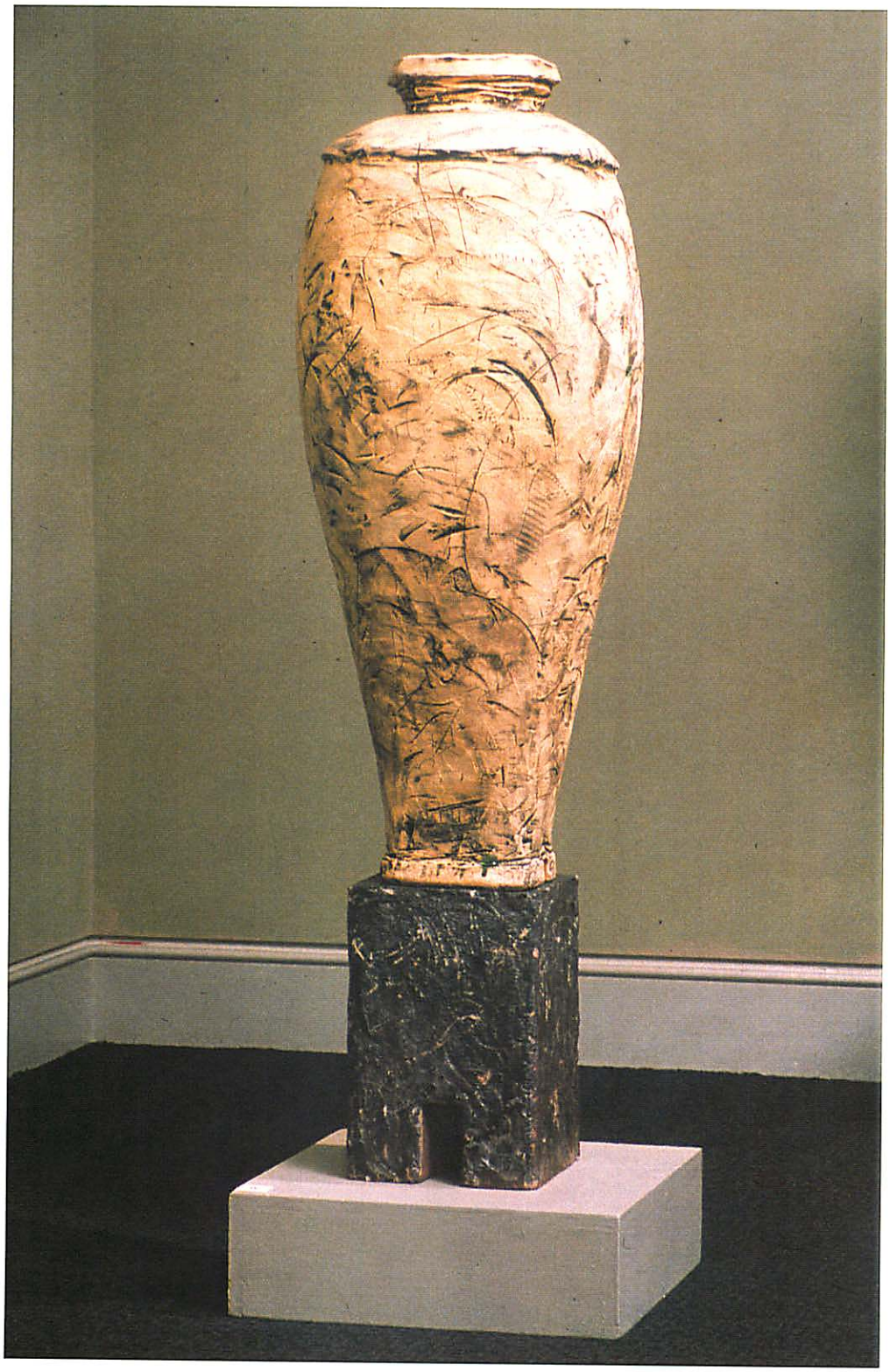

Figure 5

Figure 6

Figure 7