OUT OF THE ASHES

NOTRE DAME CERAMIC ART SYMPOSIUM
This symposium was made possible in part by support from the Henkels Lecture Fund, Institute for Scholarship in the Liberal Arts, College of Arts and Letters, University of Notre Dame.
Sometimes collaboration occurs in the making of objects or through the sharing of glazes. In the case of wood firing, there is no escaping collaboration. Philosophically, the artists collaborate with the kiln, wood, and the ancient process. Practically, they collaborate by putting their artworks within another artist’s kiln and by allowing others to fire their work. Whether the artist wishes to acknowledge it or not, work realized through wood firing is never the product of one’s sole sensibility.

These artworks were fired within the Notre Dame anagama kiln, which is located at the Michigan studio of ND Professor of Art William Kremer. In most situations, the preparation for a wood firing is more time consuming than the actual firing. This can require several days or weeks to cut, split, and prepare the wood for its use as fuel. The firing process lends itself to an amazing happening of sorts. Aside from the tangible goals—accumulation of melting ash and temperatures reaching nearly 2400 degrees Fahrenheit—there is typically a rich range of creative interaction between the artists from firing strategies to aesthetic/conceptual discourse. The end result is a smattering of earthen tones and ubiquitous patina over the work.

Selected works created during the symposium and fired within the Notre Dame anagama kiln are the focus of this exhibition.

The thirteen participating artists are Bede Clarke; Keith Ekstam; Dale Huffman; Howard Koerth; Bill Kremer; Dick Lehman; Tony Marsh; Scott Meyer; Dan Molyneux; Lindsay Oesteritter; Ann-Charlotte Ohlsson; Dennis Sipiorski; and Zach Tate. The artists generously lent their artworks to this exhibition and all artworks are stoneware, except where noted on the object label.

Bill Kremer and Zach Tate, November 2016
What do we mean when we speak of a wood-fire aesthetic? Can we push our meaning beyond technique and process? For me, the essence of the wood aesthetic is direct, honest expression - freedom from affectation. Firing with wood is not inherently superior to any other way of working with clay. However, possibly more than any other firing method it is inherently opposed to clever artifice and the superfluous. It has little tolerance for the elaborate lie. Why advance wood-firing? Surely not so that all clay will be wood-fired (imagine that aesthetic landscape), but so that the work of our hand will be always authentic. We can measure our success by the amount of wood burned, the length of our firing, even the amount of ash accumulated. Better to establish a standard that gauges the work’s caliber of compassion and intelligence - the liveliness of its response to being a human.

Bede Clark is Professor of Art at the University of Missouri. His work is some of the most recognizable in contemporary ceramics.
I describe my work as sculptural vessels. These forms relate to reflections of both classical pottery vessels and the abstracted human figure. The works are composed of gestural lines combined with convoluting planes. Painted brush strokes integrate the vitality of line and form. Because of the large scale of the sculptures, an interactive perception is formed with the viewer. Both the relative scale and the awareness of the inside volume resonates the structural skin of the forms from the outside to within.

Bill Kremer is a man of many talents. When he is not writing and performing his own music or sailing on a lake, he teaches ceramics at the University of Notre Dame.
I am an object maker. An “object” has an origin, a source, a beginning. By choice, alteration and/or re-presentation the object exists beyond its literal definition, becoming something else. It serves as a visual connection, individually interpreted and simultaneously referencing and transcending beyond its common origins. In its re-invention it becomes unique, an individual expression. My major influence has been non-western ritual objects, their blending of mystery and common connections, which has always been the basis of good story telling.

Howard Koerth is a Professor of Art at Rose State College in Oklahoma. His work has been exhibited both nationally and internationally.
Ann-Charlotte’s fantasy-inspired biological forms are repetitive in nature, yet are singular pieces, identical to none. Her process is a contemplative experience – time is not of the essence, but is wisely used in managing her artistry and life – and is best described by the Chinese proverb, “Be not afraid of growing slowly, be afraid only of standing still.”

Ann-Charlotte Ohlsson’s fantasy-inspired biological forms have been exhibited internationally. She currently lives and works in Rønne on Bornholm in Denmark.
“My work explores meaning through dimensional play and a sense of duality between the geometric and the organic.”

[My work] deals within the crossroads of elemental form, profile and line. It explores meaning through dimensional play and a sense of duality between the geometric and the organic. My intention is that this work aspires not only to a visual engagement, but also to a physical one.

Dan MOLYNEUX

Dan is completing his MFA at Bowling Green State University by way of India, China, Virginia, New York, and Massachusetts, to name a few. He lives in Boston.
From my earliest years as an artist I have been compelled by our political discourse. Like Robert Arneson and R. Crumb, my work functions as a means to visually chronicle and comment on this political climate.

As one of the oldest art making and chronicling materials in modern civilization, the ceramic vessel continues to carry cultural significance. It allows for a deeper exploration into the figure due to its flesh-like qualities before it is fire and its inherent fragility post firing. It is through these ideas and this material, I push to understand these movements in politics and to draw lines of correlations throughout history to better understand our current time and place.

Zach Tate is a ceramic artist, author and Research Associate at the University of Notre Dame. Originally from the Ozarks, he lives in Goshen, Indiana.
To choose clay is to make so many other choices as well... to choose learning more than understanding; to choose marveling more than knowing; and to choose to become a receiver, more than a maker.

Whatever this material produces... whatever this process offers... whether capricious or consistent, cantankerous or considerate, contrary or controlled, it always happens in the context of a working community; a collaboration of the generous, the curious, the intrepid.

Here... here, work is transformed... and so, when I commit to it, am I.

Dick Lehman’s work has been exhibited both nationally and internationally. He lives and works in Goshen, Indiana.
My work is inspired by the inseparable relationship between time and place, and form and surface.

River stones, worn leather, and antique industrial objects are all uniquely changed by the environment in which they exist. When I work with clay I convey a similar narration of time and place. I work in an intentionally straightforward manner, choosing the clay and combination of processes for the marks that will be left behind. The processes of making are recorded on the surface of the object and begin to reveal the qualities of the material and tell a visual story.

I utilize the wood firing process and reduction cool techniques to continue to highlight form and surface variations, and reference the slow and continuous passage of time. Through wood firing, the form and surface become unique to the singular object.

Lindsay Oesterritter is a full-time studio artist based in Virginia. Her work has been exhibited both nationally and internationally.
The pieces in the exhibition are influenced by concepts surrounding Chinese Scholar Rocks. Scholar Rock is the most common English name given to the small, individual stones that have been appreciated by educated and artistic Chinese since at least the Song dynasty (960-1270). These rocks are generally viewed as small landscapes which embody utopian ideals. I view my work as landscapes that reference Scholar Rock ideas, acting as a staging area where I employ a diverse range of forms. These are as far reaching as children’s toys to tools, architectural elements to geology, exalted objects to everyday mundane items.

Keith Ekstam is Professor of Ceramics at Missouri State University. Originally from the “Land of 10,000 Lakes”, he currently resides in the Ozarks.
Scott’s fascination with contemporary applications of tradition began at Penn State where he did simultaneous work as a scholar and a studio artist earning a PHD in 1985. This interest, along with his affinity for collaboration, eventually led to the construction of the anagama kiln at UM and the assembly of the team that fires it. He has always been drawn to industrial objects particularly as they manifest process and use over time. His current work involves crucible forms (both in industrial and alchemical contexts) realized alone as well as in combination with other collaborative artists currently known as the Crucible Project.

Dr. Scott Meyer is Professor of Art at the University of Montevallo. He is also author of the biography, With Fire, Richard Hirsch, A Life Between Chance and Design, published by the Cary Graphic Arts Press at RIT.
The ceramic vessel has always been my primary vehicle of artistic expression. I am fascinated by its deep and unparalleled history and position between nature and culture. While the vessels that I make are not utilitarian nor do they explicitly refer to a historical pottery type or style, I believe that I use them as a device to address the essential. On a simple level they do attempt to pay homage to what pottery from around the world has always been required to do: hold, preserve, offer, commemorate and beautify.

Marriage, fertility, creation, death and the difference between the numinous and pure materiality are the essential primary subjects related to human experience that occur and reoccur in my work.

In the end, whether it might be a vase on a table, an empty coin bank, the bowl on the night stand, a burial urn or a ballot box, what could be more natural than to put something......meaning...... in a vessel?

Originally from New York, Tony Marsh lives in southern California and teaches ceramics at California State University in Long Beach.
“I see myself as a conduit....as much as an artist.”

Dale Huffman is one of the most prominent woodfiring ceramic artists in the United States. He teaches at Carlow University in Pittsburgh.
My process throughout the workshop was to use thrown parts and press molds to create ceramic objects. These objects tell a story about who I am and the things that are important to me. I also collaborated with the other artists to create objects that ask questions but have no answers.

“Tell a story about who I am and the things that are important to me.”

Dennis Sipiorski is Professor of Ceramics at Southeastern Louisiana University. He is an avid Elvis impersonator.