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Burnished Souls.

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Burnished Souls

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by

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ABSTRACT

by

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This thesis, in support of the Master of Fine Arts exhibition entitled *Burnished Souls* at East Tennessee State University, Carroll Reece Museum, Johnson City, Tennessee, November 25- December 18, 2004, describes in detail three aesthetic themes that have informed my work; The Refined Sense of Beauty, A Newly Defined Function, and The Artistic Element of Smoke and Fire. These aesthetic themes are discovered and explained through both historic and contemporary influences and are described in relation to their influence on my current work.

DEDICATION

Selena, thank you so much, for without your love and support I would not have been pushed to think about the deeper meaning of my work. With you I have been able to make colors fade, genders equal, and sexes absent. Through you the souls are born, I only create them. We are Forever And Always.

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

A Conversation of Burnished Souls

"Doubtless many would reply that intuitive perception of beauty is incomplete without learning, that without knowledge one does not see a thing as a whole."[1] From Soetsu Yanagi's *The Unknown Craftsman*, this statement speaks to what the author believes is the indivisible relationship between beauty and knowledge. Yanagi goes against theories that assign ungrounded value to pieces of art but also against relying solely on knowledge to determine beauty or worth. Creating a fragile balance between these two realms of knowing, what the author suggests is that it is a special combination of both that allows the individual to fully appreciate and experience a piece of art.

My attempt to search for this fragile combination of beauty and knowledge has been influenced by a variety of sources. While both nature and architecture have proved to be great sources of inspiration, I have also identified those specific historical and contemporary sources that have made an impact on my work. Beyond these sources, I have also identified those unfailing and still mysterious wonders that direct my experiences, inner self, and inevitably my work. The refined sense of beauty, a newly defined function, and the artistic elements of fire and smoke all work together to refine my own definitions of artistic expression as well as my work. I will discuss the elements of these influences more completely during this first chapter. In chapter 2 I will consider historical influences, chapter 3 will look at my contemporary inspirations, and in chapter 4 I will reflect on and explain my personal technique. Following the text will be a

[1] Yanagi, Soetsu. *The Unknown Craftsman*; A Japanese Insight into Beauty. Kodansha International Ltd.1972. pg. 109.

collection of images from "Burnished Souls;" I will end with a conclusion of my thoughts and work.

The Redefined Sense of Beauty

In *The Unknown Craftsman*, Yanagi discusses many different topics related to the interaction between the viewer and the art. Yanagi talks extensively about the concept of beauty and how it is tainted by human classifications. Speaking about collectors he says, "The moment he begins to boast of the quantity, variety, or rarity of his collection, to seek to collect only those objects that are in perfect condition, or to bow to popular opinion, he has subjected himself to bonds that deprive his faculty of intuition, of its freedom to operate…beauty no longer reveals to him its own reality."[2] Thus, when the collector "buys a beautiful object [he] is in reality buying himself, and he who looks at a beautiful object is seeing in it his primordial self."[3] The problem that he defines here is that when society dictates what is popular and sets trends the seer cuts off his ability to interact with art. Yanagi claims that when humans use their intelligence and evaluate on the basis of conceptions and thus pass judgment on the basis of their own experience, then the "I" becomes the master pronouncing on the "object" and the self is kept separate.[4] This is a problem for both Yanagi and for myself because one of the goals of creative art is to communicate with other humans through the work. He uses the words of Theodor Lipps, a German Philosopher, to continue this thought. Lipps claims that, "an awareness of beauty arises from the transference of one's self into the object seen and

[2] Yanagi, 154.
[3] Yanagi, 155.
[4] Yanagi, 153.

from the resulting consciousness of a fusion between the artist and his or [her] guests."[5] Yanagi claims that in order to maximize one's ability to observe and experience art the seer should suspend questions that ask who, when and where and should take time to respond to the piece.[6] Yanagi's distinctions of beauty and his words of advice for the seer have encouraged me to create a deeper and more meaningful connection with the viewer through my work. His words have inspired me to create work that is outside of the regular realm of beauty in order to create new opportunities for conversation that challenge the seer to consider new conceptions of beauty that may go against traditional definitions and reduce the gap between the self and the art.

Another obstacle for the viewer to overcome in his or her search for beauty is the dichotomy that is set up between classifications of "beautiful" and "ugly". Yanagi points out that "if beauty is the antithesis of ugliness…like good and bad or high and low, then it can only be conceived of relatively; but from the Buddhist point of view the "beauty" that simply stands opposed to ugliness is not true beauty."[7] It is from this point of view that he claims that it is necessary to resort to a previous state, before "beauty" and "ugly" so everything "is an integrity that is unique, that is itself, that is without distinction…"[8] This is where he believes art resides. Thus, what Yanagi seems to be suggesting is that typical categories of "beautiful" and "ugly" are not sufficient. What he is saying is that to be classified as "not ugly" is not enough to be classified as beautiful. These distinctions turn into trends and popular concepts and lead the viewer away from being able to interact with art in the way that the artist intended. The potential pitfall for the artist as pointed

[5] Yanagi, 152.
[6] Yanagi, 112.
[7] Yanagi, 130.
[8] Yanagi, 131.

out here by Yanagi, is to fall into the popular trends and not create work that speaks to their personal motivations in fear that it will not conform to the standards set by society. Yanagi speaks to this when he describes beauty as liberation. He claims that "a man who achieves Buddhahood has entered the realm that lies beyond that of duality; by the same token, beauty is that which has been liberated-or-freed from duality."[9] Defined as the freedom from impediment, he uses the term " 'muge' to refer to the state of liberation from all duality, a state where there is nothing to restrict or be restricted."[10] Therefore, according to Yanagi's words I should seek to create art that is liberated from the restrictions that are set by the fashionable trends of society and perhaps any preconceptions.

Newly Defined Function

The distinction between functional and nonfunctional wares can be an obstacle for today's potter. Yanagi addresses this subject when he talks about the placement of pattern. He claims that "if crafts are only judged from a utilitarian point of view, then pattern, for example, is uncalled for, but good pattern adds to the function of that utensil. It becomes an indispensable part of use."[11] Therefore, ancient or previous distinctions between functional and nonfunctional wares are blurred and what was once considered only decoration evolved into an integral purpose and function of the pot. Donald Reitz describes the issues this way.

> I make a lot of utilitarian forms because I like to, but the pot form, I think, must do more than serve a utilitarian purpose. If it is just to be a utensil,

[9] Yanagi, 129.
[10] Yanagi, 129-130.
[11] Yanagi, 197-198.

> then a person is better off buying a commercial import, a pot made by industry, because it's cheaper and usually the clay body is better. For me, when I made a pot I deal with it as an image, and hopefully it will enhance the life of the person who uses it. It is not enough to have a pot just to serve food in – a pot is an object that exists in space. Many times I feel that function follows form. The form must meet all the utilitarian requirements, but there has to be something more, something plus.[12]

What I believe is at stake here is the definition of function. Functional wares are not only those pots that serve useful purposes such as storage or serving, but can also include those pots that kindle conversation or cause one to feel connected with other times, places, and people. Yanagi says "pattern does not explain; it leaves things to the viewer; its beauty is determined by the freedom it gives to the viewer's imagination."[13] Thus, new definitions of function also include the ability to stimulate the viewer's imagination. Yanagi and Reitz are claiming that if pots only serve the basic purposes, then in this day and time they are no more useful than plastic containers or factory-made ceramics. This newly defined function is a central concept in my work. Like Reitz, I also enjoy making functional shapes but find that the piece's full potential is not reached until I give them the something "more".

The Artistic Elements of Fire and Smoke

The something "more" talked about by Reitz is what I give to the pots through the elements of fire and smoke. I enjoy creating large and smooth canvas-like surfaces so that these forces of nature have plenty of space to create their random yet stunning beauty. Gerhild Tschachler-Nagy claims, "only by becoming extremely sensitive

[12] Coyne, John ed. The Penland School of Crafts Book of Pottery. Bobbs- Merrill. 1975. pg. 158.
[13] Yanagi, 115.

towards the fire can one interact with it or respond in the proper way."[14] Therefore, when I am preparing the pot for firing I must take into consideration that regardless of how I arrange the variables, the flame and smoke will remain unpredictable and even uncontrollable to a certain extent. While I can control where the iron sulfate and terra sigillata is placed, and what types of combustibles are used, I have very little control over where the flame comes into contact with the pot and the specific intensity of it. I also have little control over the amount of carbon that is trapped by the pot and can therefore not estimate the resulting black patterns. One of the few forces that I am able to control is the temperature of this natural process, and this allows me to predict a certain range of colors. The final products are inconsistent yet astounding productions of nature's ability. Tschachler-Nagy describes this relationship with nature and her work as "a dialogue [that] evolves between the work and the moment I live in."[15] I create these pots and provide the opportunity for the flame and smoke to reveal their beauty and in the end these natural forces provide a pattern that I am neither able to create or conceive.

Personal Path

In the *Unknown Craftsman*, Yanagi uses a quote from Kabir, an Indian mystic poet from the fourteenth century who says, "the drummer and the drum must be one in order to create music."[16] My path to finding this harmony between artist and outcome has been both intense and ever changing. My career in pottery began at Mars Hill College in 1998 where for the first year and a half I worked vigorously to achieve basic throwing techniques. While at Mars Hill College I was limited to electric firing

[14] Perryman, Jane. Smoke Fired Pottery. A & C Black Ltd. 1995. pg. 90.
[15] Perryman, 90.
[16] Yanagi, 131.

techniques and I mostly used cone six oxidation glazes. The first couple of years at Mars Hill College were very beneficial for me in that I learned basic techniques of both glazing and firing.

While at Mars Hill I also received several "out of class" opportunities. In the spring of 1999 I received a scholarship to attend Penland School of Crafts. While attending one of the summer sessions, I studied functional pottery but was introduced to new firing techniques. Mesmerized by raku and salt-firing techniques, I returned from Penland ready to bring these new processes to my work. While continuing to make functional wares, in the fall of 2000 I was awarded a grant from the Southern Highland Craft Guild to build a raku kiln. This provided the opportunity to experiment with several low-fire techniques. Without any formal knowledge or instructor, I began collecting information about how to raku fire. These experiences gave me great exposure to the wider world of ceramics and also provided physical space to work on the technical aspects of the craft.

For my senior exhibition at Mars Hill I explored outside of the functional realm and began experimenting with large-scale sculptural pieces. The resulting pieces were conceived as functional shapes that were stacked on top of one another, creating new forms that I named totems. The size of these pieces made it impossible to fire them in the electric kiln, so after visiting several artists in the community I found a local potter, Terri Guess, who allowed me to use his salt kiln for my work. Although I felt that the pieces in my exhibition were ill constructed, the project encouraged me to look outside of the realm of functional pottery. The time I spent at Mars Hill allowed me to continue to

explore the options in ceramics and provided a solid base on which I would build my career.

After graduation I spent a year in residence at Energy Xchange, a pilot program that transformed a landfill into a residency program for local artists. By tapping into the methane gas being released from decades of waste, the program was able to fuel ceramic and glass studios as well as a greenhouse. While in this program, which intends to cultivate beginning businesses for artists, I continued to work on functional forms operating as a production potter. While at the Energy Xchange I learned a tremendous amount about the making and selling of pots and learned about working with galleries, the public, and with crafts shows and guilds. This newfound knowledge of owning my own business was an integral part of my learning curve and my time there helped me to see that the pots that I was producing were both absent of energy and were not reflective of my driving life force. In the quest to further explore the potential path of my work, I decided that I needed to return to a learning environment where I would not be tempted to merely create work that would agree with the popular demands of the public. What I sought was the space where artistic expression could grow and change my work.

In the fall of 2002 I began the Master of Fine Arts program at East Tennessee State University under the instruction of Don R. Davis. For the first year I experimented with new shapes and forms but still remained within the boundaries of functional wares and continued with high-fire reduction techniques. By the second semester I was introduced to several different low-fire techniques and began to find some of the artistic elements that had been previously absent from my work. Jeff Kise, another graduate student, introduced me to saggar firing, raku, naked raku, and pit firing, and I was

instantly connected with the effects of direct flame, heat, and the immediate results that were produced. Suddenly more concerned with the pattern of flame and smoke, I became more aware of the beauty of the flame and the resulting pattern and found a sense of connection with this natural process. Finally, my work was beginning to speak to my driving life force. I have continued to throw functional forms such as bowls, vases, and plates but have altered their shapes and scale. The form that I am most interested in is the vase. The shape I use the most is the large amphora vase with large surfaces. I find that this is an ideal shape to explore patterns and colors left by flame and smoke.

While my journey has not been a direct road, I feel that all of its steps were necessary. The process of uniting both the "drummer and the drum" seems to include both exciting and intense learning periods. My constant lesson is that in order to seek out beauty I must be relentlessly committed to my vision and be willing to change directions regardless of the uncertainty.

CHAPTER 2
HISTORICAL INFLUENCES

Even though the techniques and processes that I use are primitive in nature, by researching these techniques I am provided with a deeper sense of respect both for the craft in general and artifacts and individual pieces specifically. There is quite literally a world full of influences that I could name as inspirational in my work; however, I have chosen two areas of major influence that relate directly to the work that I am currently pursuing. These areas include primitive pottery and ancient Greek pottery. While not a comprehensive history of these areas is given, the aspects of each that have specifically influenced my work are discussed below.

Primitive Pottery

Primitive pottery was almost completely functional; many of the techniques used also allowed the pot to better serve its function. One such technique is burnishing. In his book, *Ancient Pottery*, Rivka Gonen says that like so many other techniques, this once functional process has now become part of the aesthetic.[17] Sometimes using a pebble, wood, or other hard and smooth materials before the piece is fired, burnishing "has the effect of pressing the faces of the large particles in the clay back into alignment with the faces of the smaller thus consolidating the surface, making it relatively impervious to liquids even if firing only at earthenware temperatures."[18] While this process mainly served to make the pieces less porous and thus more able to store liquids and other goods, another result was that the pots were left with a smooth and glossy surface. Thus, this

[17] Gonen, Rivka. *Ancient Pottery*. Cassell & Company Ltd. 1973. pg. 33.
[18] Gonen, 34.

once primarily functional step soon became part of the decorative history of the work of this era and is the oldest known decorative technique.[19]

While painting was the most common form of decoration, burnishing, glaze, and slips were also used.[20] "On occasion in ancient Iran or India burnishing was completed with a module of hematite, which rubbed off onto the surface, giving it when fired, a strong reddish or black skin."[21] This added color soon became part of the decorative process and it is reported that even though burnishing made the pots more usable, this process was sometimes reserved for the more elegant instead of the everyday pieces.[22] This fusion of the functional and the decorative became commonplace; I use burnishing because it is a way to utilize a natural process and also to connect ancient and modern work. Though I do not line the pots with animal fats in order to increase their functional capability, I work with burnishing because by doing so I can continue to redefine function and challenge the popular concepts of beauty that name only trendy and fashionable pots as beautiful. I redefine function as work that encourages the viewer to consider form, line, and pattern. While my pieces do not comply with the mass-produced functional wares, I try to challenge these concepts of beauty by offering new ideas.

Another technique that has influenced my current work is the primitive firing process. Primitive pottery was mostly low-fired, meaning it was fired using natural combustible material such as sticks, wood, and cow dung. Kilns were not highly accessible, so these firings were done over pits dug in the ground. The pots were soft and porous and because 900 degrees C had to be reached to burn off excess carbon, most of

[19] Gonen, 46.
[20] Gonen, 43.
[21] Rawson, 34.
[22] Gonen, 43.

the pieces were left black.[23] Combustible fuels used to fire the pieces in pits included animal dung and brush. Again, organic and natural processes intersected the decorative aspect of the work as smoke and flame patterns resulted from the firing process. Today, I fire to a higher temperature in order to decrease the pot's porosity but use a thin layer of terra sigillata that retains the smoke and flame patterns. Though my pieces are not functional by today's common standards, I enjoy using flame and smoke as part of the decorative process because it provides space for nature to reveal its random and beautiful patterns. This process gives my pots individual and unique results that contrast the repetitive exactness that is offered through commercial glazes.

Ancient Greek Pottery

Greek pottery left many impressions on the face of history. Some of the most influential properties of this era, from the thirteenth to the twelfth century BCE, are the shapes. While no flat plates, modern-day style drinking cups, or covered containers have been identified with the time period and place, various sized deep bowls have been labeled as pots that served similar purposes.[24]

Several shapes have served as a direct influence on my work; these include the amphora, kylix, and krater.

The first influential shape is the '*amphora*.' "A general term for a shape with two vertical handles, the shape is designated by the word 'kados' painted on the *Attic Black-figure Amphora* of the late sixth century."[25] These large clay containers were used for storage and for the transportation of wine and food, especially grains. With a large range

[23] Gonen, 32.
[24] Gonen, 51.
[25] Sparkes, Brian. *Greek Pottery, An Introduction*. Manchester University Press. 1991. pg. 65.

of possible shapes, the *amphora* is generally narrow at the bottom and wider at the middle in order to maximize the capacity, and has a smaller opening so that the container could be easily closed off.[26] The *hydria*, a smaller form of the amphora, was most often used to carry water. This shape included three handles and again followed the typical amphora shape with a narrow bottom, wide middle, and smaller top opening. This shape is also known to have doubled as a voting urn.[27] These pots were specifically made with very narrow intentions in mind. Although the pots that I make are not used for food storage, I continue to be intrigued by these curious shapes. I have modified the *amphora* form by taking away the large vertical handles but keeping the dramatic lines and expansive surface area. While I feel that these ancient shapes should be approached with a great deal of respect and consideration, I have attempted to alter the shapes while remaining true to the original forms. With exaggerated proportions, I expand the middle sections and reduce the base of the pots in order to create a sense of upward movement and elegance. By altering these pieces I am also met with a critical challenge. While the pieces increase in size, the challenge to give my work the elegant and dramatic line is constant.

Another inspirational shape is the *kylix*. One of three popular types of cup, this shape also served as the popular cup or drinking vessel during this time period. This shape was a shallow bowl that has been found both with and without a stem. Like the *amphora* the *kylix* has a narrow base, but it has a wider opening. Thought to serve typical uses for a cup, this shape, while not offering a challenge because of its size, still

[26] Nicholson, Felicity. *Greek, Etruscan and Roman Pottery and Small Terracottas*. Cory Adams & Mackay. 1965. pg. 13.
[27] Sparkes, 74.

represents a sizeable challenge because the piece is smaller and contained.[28] Within a smaller scale the challenge is to still create an elegant and simple line. Because I enjoy the basic shape of the shallow bowl, I have chosen to not include the stem on my pieces. Like the *amphora*, the *kylix* offers an uninterrupted line that runs from rim to foot and offers a broad space that provides a good canvas for my preferred firing techniques.

Similar to the bowl shape of the *kylix*, the *krater* is a large, deep, two-handled vessel that was used for preparing food. Because the Greeks drank diluted wine, this pot was also often used for mixing wine and water. While archeologists have identified three different types of kraters, the *calyx-krater*, *column-krater*, and the *bell-krater* the shape that I am most intrigued by is the *column-krater*.[29] This piece, also similar to the *amphora*, has a narrow base, a wide middle section, but the *column-krater* has a narrow neck with a wider lip. Again, I have removed the vertical handles in order to simplify the form but am still challenged by the necessary smooth line. Another classic Greek shape, the *column-krater*, also provides a large surface area to work with. Experimenting with this shape, I have both extended the neck portion and eliminated the neck and replaced it with a wide rim.

Similar to the primitive era, pottery in ancient Greece also created a fine line between the functional and the decorative. "The term 'vase', which is so often used in connection with Greek pottery, is misleading in that it implies something purely decorative. In fact the chief purpose of pottery, in antiquity as now, was utilitarian. It was also used for decorative purposes, as gifts, prizes at athletic contests, offerings at

[28] Nicholson, 15.
[29] Nicholson, 14.

sanctuaries and in many instances buried with the dead."[30] Attempting to redefine the functional, I continue to create these shapes because I want the viewer to appreciate their ability to represent both functional and decorative elements. Joining both their shape and decoration, my goal is to defy the separation between purely functional and simply decorative. I aim for my work to combine the two into a cohesive form.

The process through which these pieces were thrown and decorated serves as an influential resource. Because many of these shapes are either large or too angular in nature, much of ancient Greek pottery was thrown in separate sections and then connected with slip, a diluted clay substance that serves as a bonding agent.[31] This allowed the potter to create extreme angles, maintain structural quality, and create dramatic lines. The potters of this era also covered their pieces with a diluted slip in order to give the pots a smooth surface that was then suitable for burnishing and decoration. Because the slip and clay that they used had a high iron content, it fired red or black according to the conditions of the kiln.[32] To achieve similar results I also throw my pieces in sections that are later connected, cover my pots with a layer of terra sigillata (a thin layer of clay), and also use a form of iron, iron sulfate, to obtain a variety of red colors. These separate aspects of ancient Greek pottery allow me to recreate similar yet altered versions while still maintaining the integrity of the form's history. Interestingly, archeologists have determined that smoke patches on these pieces were not part of the decoration but instead reflected the pot's use.[33] I have transformed this once side-effect

[30] Nicholson, 13.
[31] Nicholson, 17.
[32] Nicholson, 17.
[33] Gonen, 51.

into a permanent part of the pot's decoration but feel that it still serves as part of the pot's history.

CHAPTER 3

CONTEMPORARY INFLUENCES

Unlike historical influences that are limited to texts and museums, contemporary influences are easily accessible through studio visits, visiting artists events, and insitutions such as the Penland School of Arts and Crafts. Again, while there are a number of influences that I could name I have chosen several specific contemporary potters whose work has influenced my own style and technique. These potters include Hans Coper, Tjok Dessanvage, and Donald Reitz. The following sections disclose the direct effects of the artist's influence on my current work.

Hans Coper

Born in Germany in 1920, Hans Coper arrived in Britain in 1939 with no experience in ceramics. He began working as an assistant to potter, Lucie Rie, and shared a studio with her until 1958.[34] In Tony Birk's book, *Hans Coper*, he claims that even though Coper lived in Britian from 1939 he had no ties to English ceramics but instead created his own original style.[35] Named the most influential potter of the second half of the twentieth century, Coper taught at Canberwell school of Art and at the Royal College of Art, both of which are in London.[36]

According to Birk, everything that Coper produced was a container, whether for "fruit, flowers, coffee or candles."[37] Believing that his work should be "pottery and not sculpture," Coper used the wheel as the starting point of all his shapes and later

[34] Cooper,Emmanuel. *Ten Thousand Years of Pottery*. University Of Pennsylvania. 2000. pg. 288.
[35] Birk, Tony. *Hans Coper*. Harper & Row. 1983. pg. 8.
[36] www.studiopottery.com/pots.007066.html
[37] Birk, 7.

assembled thrown sections. His shapes were derived from ancient Egyptian or Cycladic pots and bronze forms and included spade pots (envelope-like forms), hourglass-shaped vases, rounded organic figurative shapes "and towards the end of his life, delicate, slender oval forms some ten centimeters in height."[38] Always working in series, his shapes built upon and enlightened one another. Emmanuel Cooper claims, "Coper's work combines the strongest traditions of the craft with a high degree of individual expression."[39]

Beyond his history and the nature of his shapes, Coper also embodied an interesting definition of simplicity. Birk writes that Coper found curiosity in the simple glass on the table and had "no need to travel or see monuments."[40] Finding wonder in simple shapes and things Coper "search[ed] for essence by reduction and simplification."[41] This reduction, according to Birk, gave Coper the ability to reduce the separation between the form and the decoration and writes that his pots have the ability to arouse emotion.[42] Balancing the interrelatedness between the complexity of shapes and simple purity of purpose, I am mesmerized by how Coper fused such a simple and elegant line with such complex ideas and processes. For Coper, pots had to be not only functional but also conceptual. In his own words, he was "like a demented piano tuner…trying to approximate a phantom pitch."[43] Coper encourages the modern potter to step outside of the boundaries that confine functional shapes by creating complex forms without compromising their simplicity. He embodied several of my personal goals as a

[38] Cooper, 288-289.
[39] Cooper, 289.
[40] Birk, 66.
[41] Birk, 66
[42] Birk, 7.
[43] Birk, 8.

potter; to create non-traditional forms that are complex in nature but maintain simple and functional qualities. Working to reach beyond the purely functional, I wish to be reminded of the beauty in simplicity without negating the possibility of complexity in my work.

Tjok Dessauvage

Featured in the September Issue of Ceramics Monthly in 2003, Tjok Dessauvage is a Belgian potter who is well known in Europe for his double-walled vessels. Dessauvage creates wheel-thrown pieces with flat upper surfaces. These flat surfaces provide ample space for the interaction of flame and smoke. Using three layers of terra sigillata and burnishing, his pieces have a brilliant shine. He achieves bright colors by using colored terra sigillata, which is applied when the piece is bone dry. Each layer is burnished with a plastic grocery bag before the next layer is applied, making this an extremely time-intensive process. Dessauvage also uses sand blasting, photographic decals, and various other texture techniques, but geometric designs dominate his style.[44] This artist bisque fires at different temperatures, thus controlling the pot's porousity and as a result he is better able to control the exact hue of his end product. For example, if he is making a black surface, he bisques the pot to approximately sixteen hundred an fifty degrees to seventeen hundred an forty degrees F. This leaves the pot extremely porous and able to soak in large amounts of carbon during the saggar firing, which results in a black surface. Likewise, to achieve brighter colors, the piece is bisqued to a higher temperature in order to reduce porousity and therefore make the pot less able to absorb carbon during the firing process. During the second firing process, Dessauvage saggar

[44] During, Nesrin. *Ceramics Monthly*. 09/03. pg. 62-65.

fires in a gas kiln with a metal trash can serving as the saggar, the container that traps the carbon during the firing. Firing only one piece at a time in a process that takes about two hours, this kiln reaches approximately one thousand one hundred degrees F. Because this is a saggar firing, the combustible material, in this case only a handful of fine wood shavings, is not meant to serve as the heating method, but instead is merely part of the decorative technique.[45]

Although Dessauvage credits his inspiration mostly to architectural design, I have incorporated small double-walled vessels into a series entitled, The Souls. This section of my work is based on the idea that every living thing has a container in which they hold their spirit and their inner essence. Because we are all individuals but yet affected by one another, these containers can provide either messages of everything from encouragement to rage, but all are contained within the individual. This series is meant to be a reflection of various souls and I have collected them into pairs and groups in order to clarify their purpose. I am able to create these pieces by using some very similar techniques used by Dessauvage such as colored terra sigillata, sandblasting, and saggar firing.

Donald Reitz

A late starter into the world of ceramics, Donald Reitz is best known for his large wheel thrown pieces. Using an unusual throwing technique, Reitz throws his pieces upside down and in sections that are later connected. Reitz also defies another norm by randomly throwing shapes, such as cylinders and bowls, and later arranges them into shapes.[46] Reitz claims, "I want each piece to retain its own identity, though together they

[45] During, 65.
[46] Coyne, 160.

must add up to be a unity."[47] Reitz's work seems utterly concerned with the importance of detail. Giving careful consideration to his technique, he claims that his goal is to resist creating complex forms that lead the viewer to only focus on how the objects were put together. Instead, his work is meant to appear a seamless piece that invites the viewer to take notice of the fitting detail. [48]

What I find most inspiring about Donald Reitz's work is his process of joining pieces thrown separately that contains their own identity while still creating work that maintains unity. His strict attention to detail, such as the placement of handles or the angle of a lip, give his pots the "something more" that blurs the line between the purely decorative and purely functional. I am encouraged by his work to continue to push the boundary between these two realms and create work that serves both purposes.

[47] Coyne, 169.
[48] Coyne, 179.

CHAPTER 4
TECHNICAL PROCESSES

In this chapter I will discuss the technical aspects of the firing process used in my work. These processes include saggar firing, flash firing, naked raku, smoke firing, and pit firing. My vases, bowls, and plates are all thrown on the wheel. The "form studies" combine both throwing and hand-building techniques. With the exception of the "form studies," all of my pots have been burnished while still in the leather-hard stage. I then apply two to three coats of terra sigillata after the pots are bone dry. While the last layer of terra sigillata is still damp I use plastic to again burnish the pot. Even after the bisque firing this last step gives the pot an almost glass-like finish and provides a smooth surface that is ready for the final firing process. To enhance color in some of these firings I add iron or cobalt sulfate which produces a variation of reds and yellow hues. After the firing these pots are washed to remove any debris and are then waxed with a heavy floor wax to maintain their glossy surface. The "form studies," on the other hand are not burnished nor do they have coats of terra sigillata, but instead are sand-blasted and carved while in the leather hard stage. In contrast to the smooth surface that is the result of the terra sigillata and burnishing, this technique gives the pot deep texture.

Saggar Firing

For my purposes the term "saggar" refers to an encasement of hard bricks and kaowool built inside of the kiln. Once the pieces are placed in the saggar organic materials such as sawdust, sticks, and sometimes larger pieces of wood are added as combustible fuels. While the saggar isn't exposed to direct flame, the temperature

reaches about 1400F to 1500F degrees inside the kiln. This high temperature ignites the fuel inside of the saggar and the flames and resulting smoke saturate the pots, turning them completely black. After the fuel has diminished and while the temperature of the kiln is still rising, the carbon that has soaked into the pots begins to burn off. By controlling the temperature of the kiln, I also control how much of the carbon is eliminated. What is left are pots with various patterns from the flame and the reaction of any iron sulfates that I may have added prior to the firing. Because much of my work includes larger pieces, I will often use bricks inside of the saggar in order to pile the combustible materials near the upper portions of the pot. By doing this I am able to better control the flame patterns and am thus more able to control the outcome. While I find the results of this process to be rewarding, the building of the saggar in a high traffic studio setting is both tedious and time-consuming. Because of this inconvenience I have modified the process by eliminating the saggar and lowering the overall firing temperature. By lowering the temperature I can better control the amount of carbon that is burned off and am thus able to achieve the same results. What I enjoy most about this process are the random flame patterns and the natural process of decoration.

Flash Firing

After attending a summer session at Penland School of Arts and Crafts during the summer of 2003 with James Watkins, I was introduced to low salt firing techniques. In this process, ferric chloride is used to achieve a variety of vivid colors. Upon returning to East Tennessee State University in the fall, I began experimenting with ferric chloride. By chance I altered the process that I had learned from James Watkins and instead began

using ferric chloride in a small raku kiln instead of a large downdraft kiln. With a digital pyrometer, I was able to better control the temperature range to a specific degree and by controlling the temperature I was able to achieve a different and brighter range of colors. Before the pot is placed in the kiln, I paint on a layer of ferric chloride, place it on a large sheet of aluminum foil, place small pieces of paper on the foil, and then wrap the foil tightly around the piece. Encased in foil, I then place the pot inside of the kiln. Depending on the desired colors, the temperature of the kiln ranges from 850 degrees F to 1400 degrees F. The lower temperatures give yellow and red colors, while the higher temperatures give deeper red and purple hues. This process usually takes from ten to twenty minutes and when doing multiple firings the kiln can reach temperature even quicker. I enjoy this process because it offers instant results and a shocking range of colors.

Naked Raku

This process begins by taking the burnished and bisqued pot and dipping it into a slip, a diluted and liquid form of clay. After the slip dries, the pot is then dipped into a raku glaze. The layer of slip creates a barrier between the pot and the outer glaze. Once the slip and glaze dry I then carve through both layers to the pot's original surface, thus creating a pattern. The piece is then fired to at least 1000 degrees F. When the pot has reached temperature it is removed from the kiln and placed into a container of saw dust and closed, creating a reduction atmosphere. Because the pot surface that has been exposed by the carving is more porous than the glazed surface, it soaks up the excess smoke from the reduction atmosphere causing the pattern to turn black. Once the pot has

cooled, which typically takes about twenty-five minutes, both the slip and glaze layers are scraped from the pot. Underneath these layers is a pristine white surface that was unaffected by the reduction atmosphere. I find this to be a rewarding process because of the sharp color contrast and also the ability to specifically control the final pattern on the pot. Unlike the saggar or flash firing, this process allows for specific and more consistent results.

Smoke Firing

This process begins by wrapping the pot in several layers of toilet paper. I then place the piece into a metal trashcan and the trashcan is placed into any type of kiln. The kiln is then fired to 1400 degree F. At this temperature the combustibles ignite and create a heavy smoke inside of the container. Because the pot has a porous layer of terra sigillata, the pot easily traps the smoke in its outer layer and a flat, smooth, black surface results. Unlike the other methods, this method does not use flame patterns or carbon removal in order to achieve the end result. This process has been most useful in the decoration of my sculptural form studies because it provides a solid palette of color that does not distract the viewer from the piece as a whole.

Pit Firing

Commonly, pit firings are done in small to large pits dug in the ground and do not include any sort of containing lid. However, for convenience, I have built an above-ground pit out of fire bricks and use a piece of sheet metal to cover the pit that assists in the reduction of oxygen, which prolongs the firing process. In order to prepare the pit for

firing I first lay down a thick layer of sawdust. The burnished and bisqued pot that has been coated with iron sulfate is placed directly on the sawdust. The iron sulfate reacts differently to different temperatures and because the heat in this firing is so uneven, I often have pots with a variety of colors. In order to maintain this uneven heating environment, I use newspaper, lighter fluid, bark, and wood to create hot spots within the pit. Then, I again cover all of the pots with another thick layer of sawdust. Once the sawdust is lit and begins to form coals, I cover the pit with the sheet metal to stall the burning process, which gives the firing time to produce uneven heating and various flash patterns. The final step is very similar to the other processes; the pieces are removed, cleaned, and coated with a heavy wax to maintain their glossy surface.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

I believe in the words of Kabir, the fourteenth century poet, who claimed that the "drummer and the drum must be one in order to create music." I have learned that my art must be an extension of my self and the life-force that propels my existence, regardless of the traditional concepts of beauty that Yanagi warns separates the viewer from the art. He also claims, "A true awareness of beauty is to be found where beauty watches beauty, not where "I" watch "it." The "I- it "relationship cannot reveal beauty in its entirety, but only a small part of it." [49] Therefore, my goal is to encourage the viewer to not only expand their conceptions of beauty and function but to recognize the parts of them selves that connect with the piece. My goal for *Burnished Souls* is to connect the inner beauty found in the individual to a work outside of themselves, and therefore diminish the I – it relationship

[49] Yanagi, 152.

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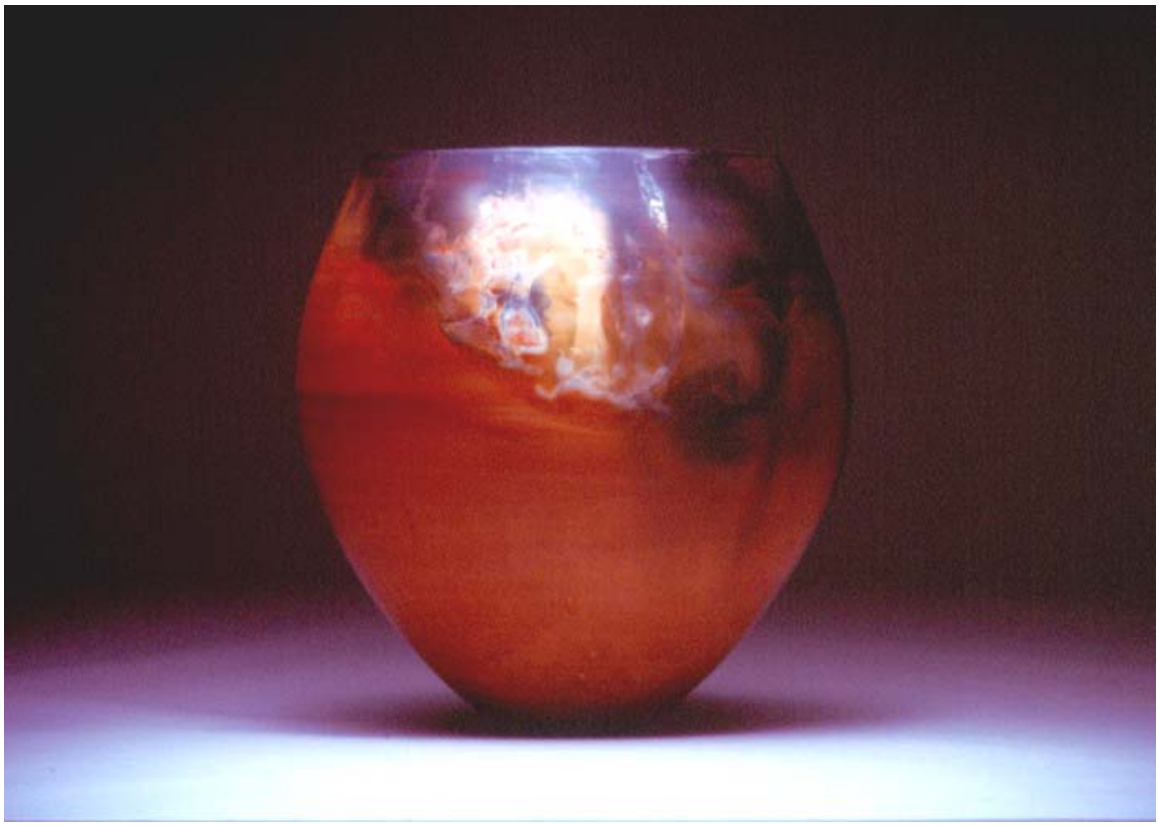

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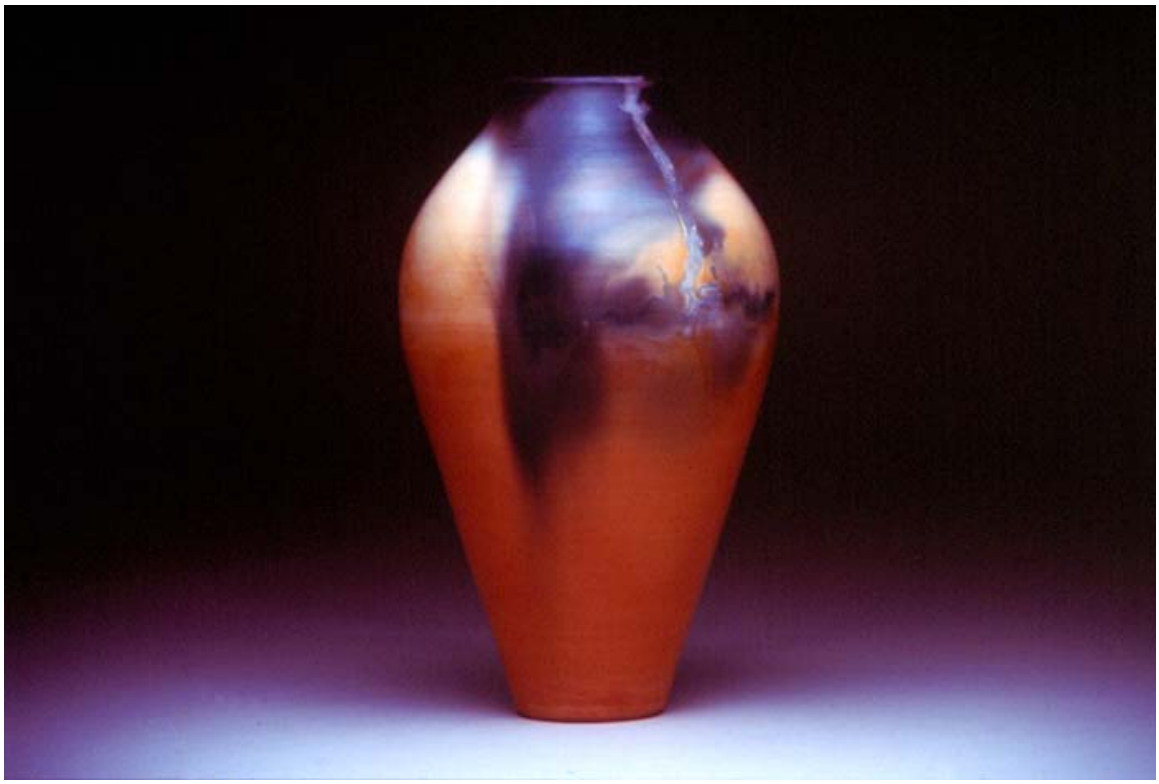
#3 Smoke Fired White Vase 2004

#4 Saggar Fired Vase 2004



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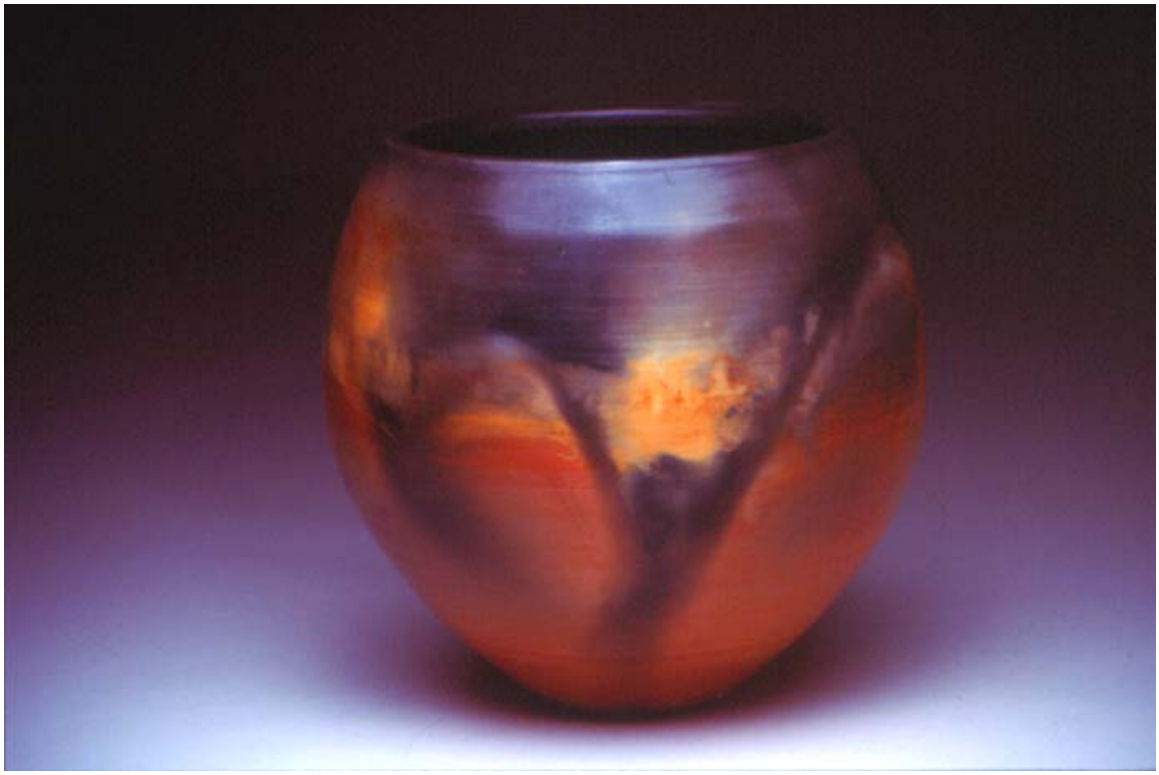

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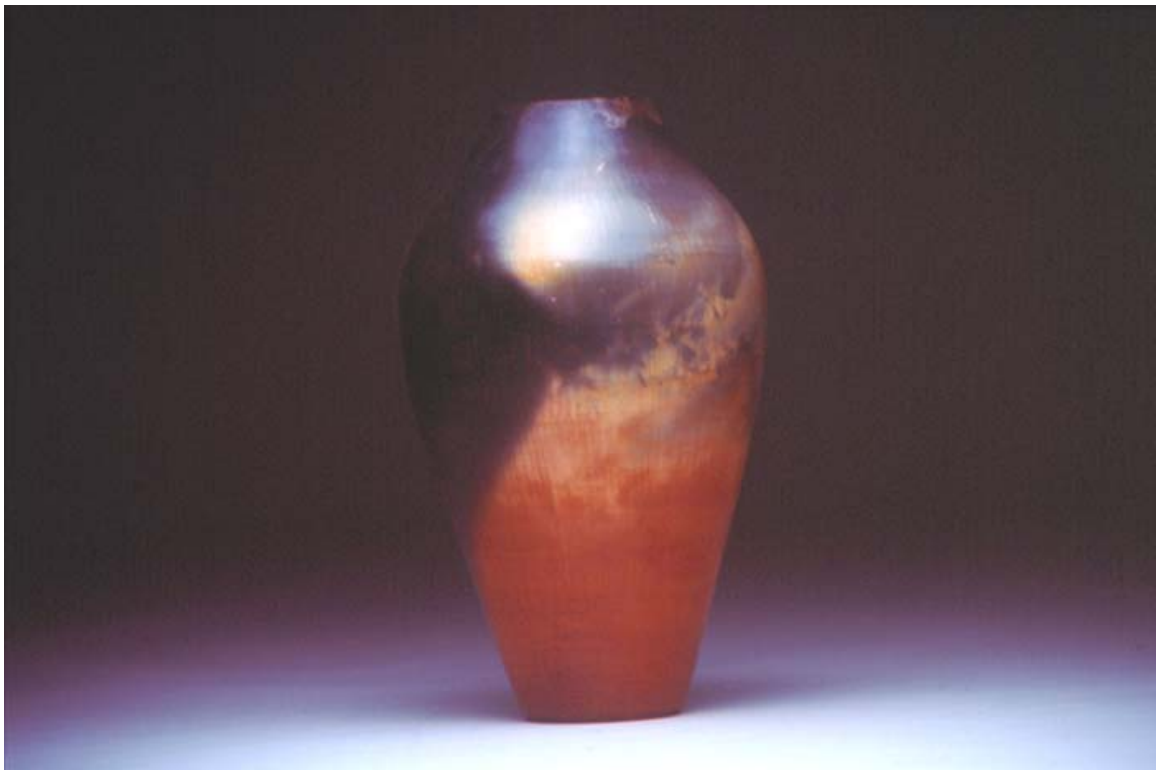

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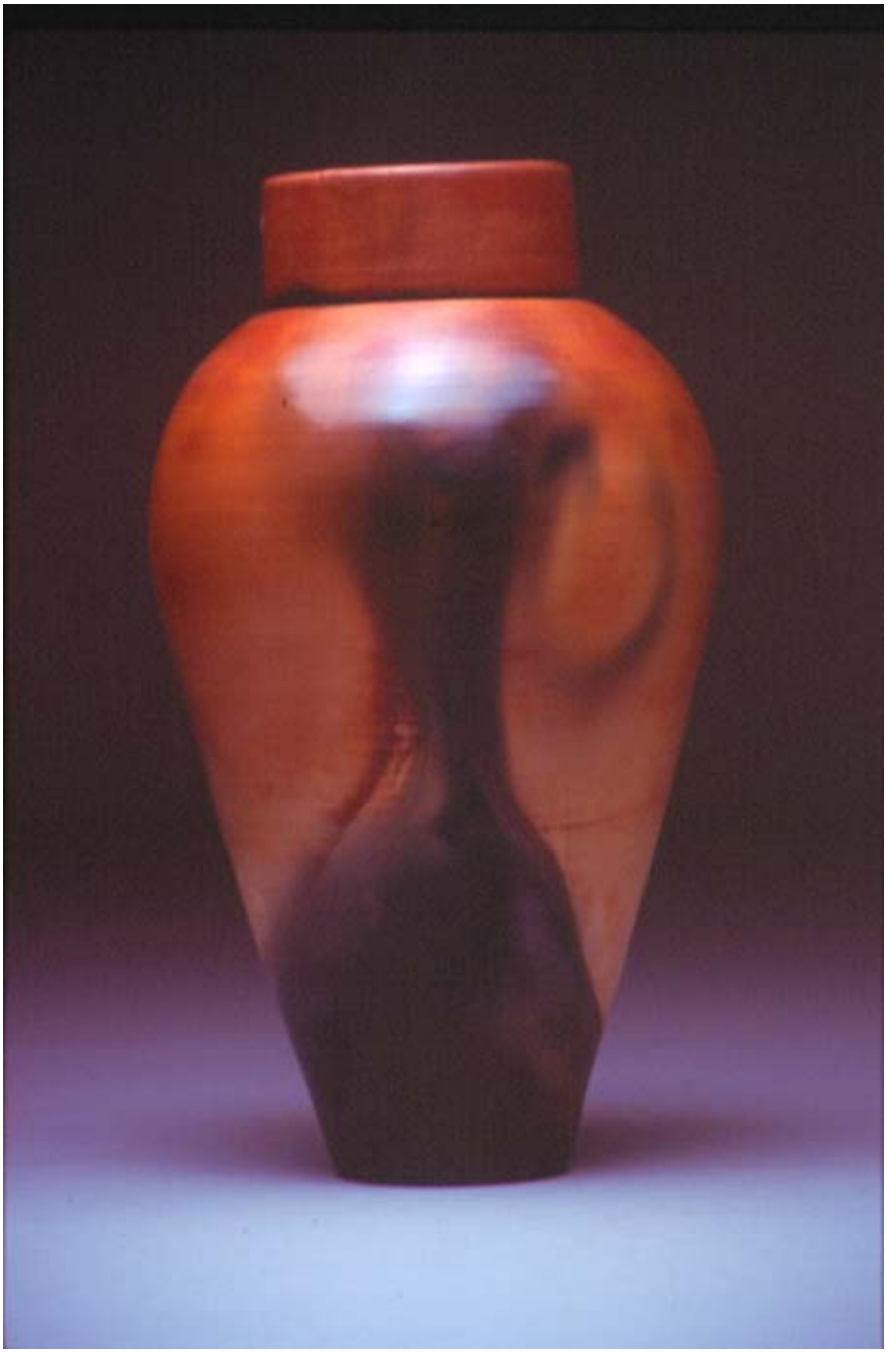

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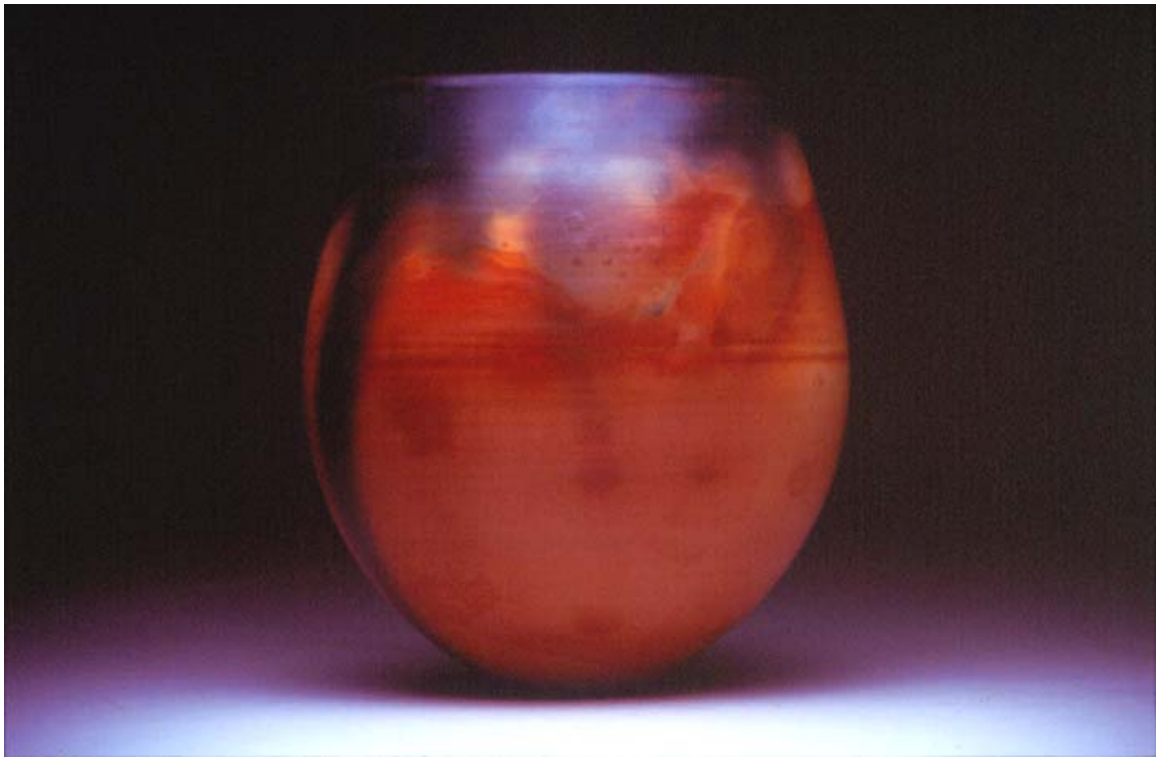

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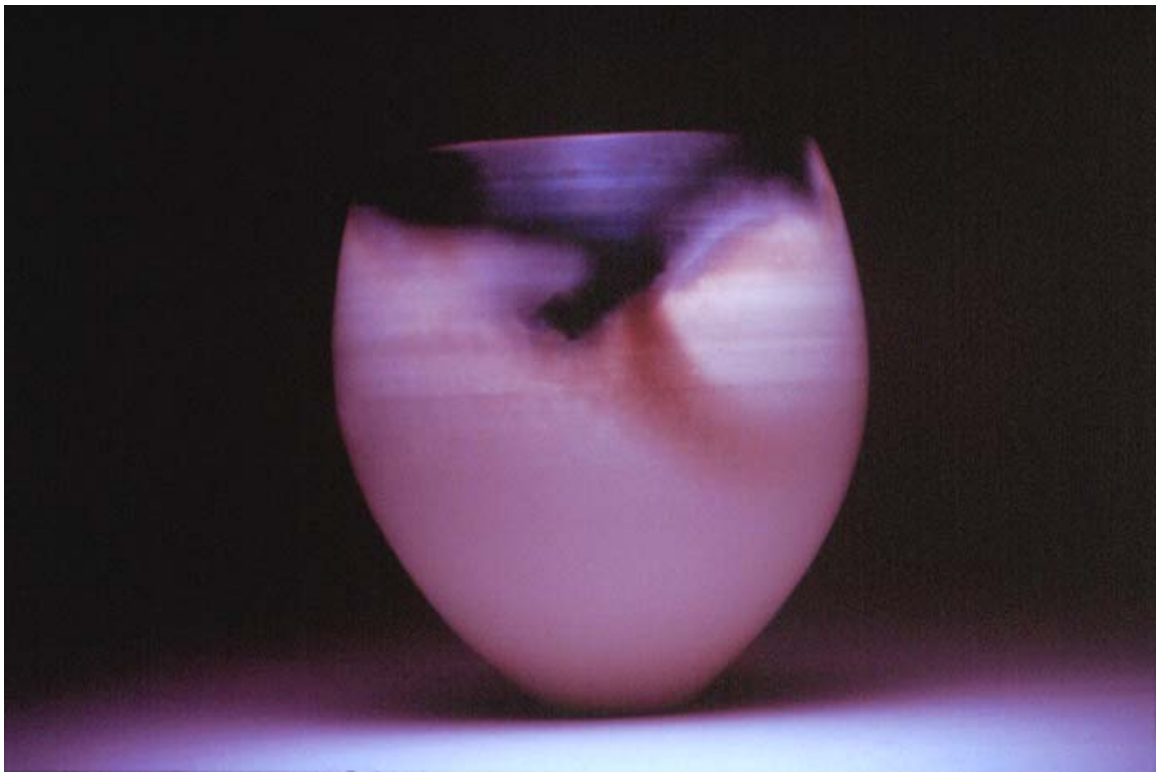

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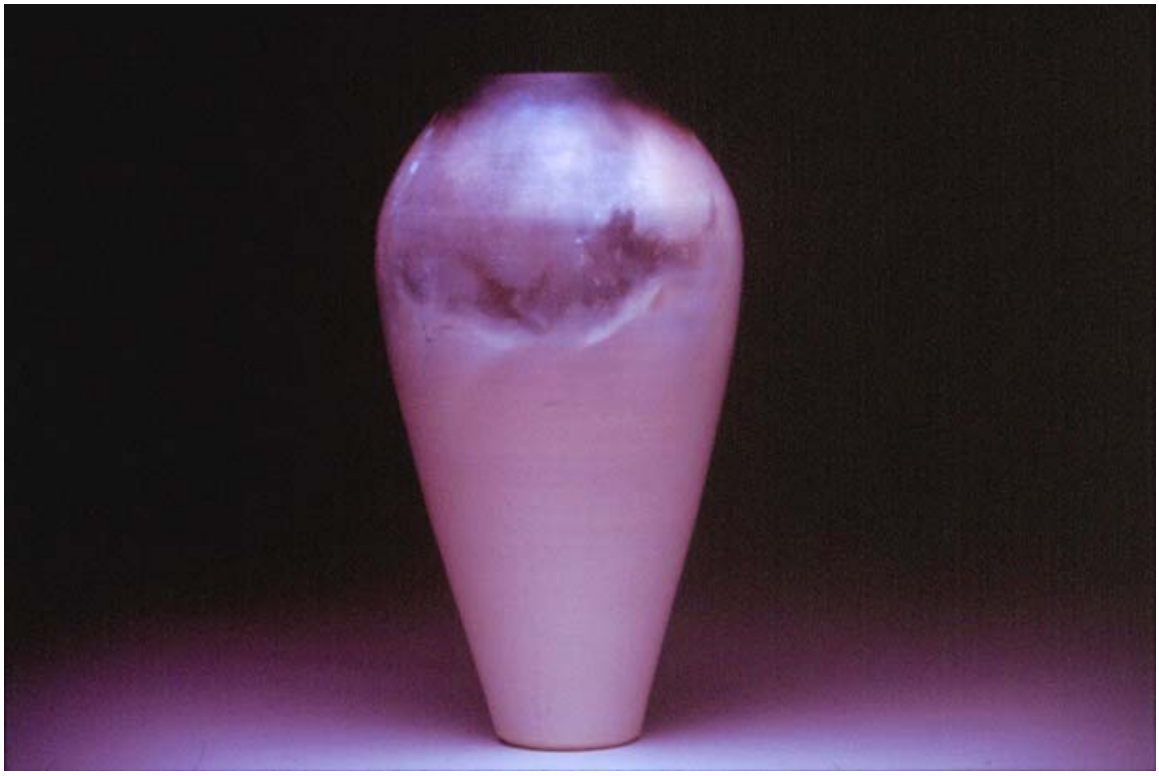

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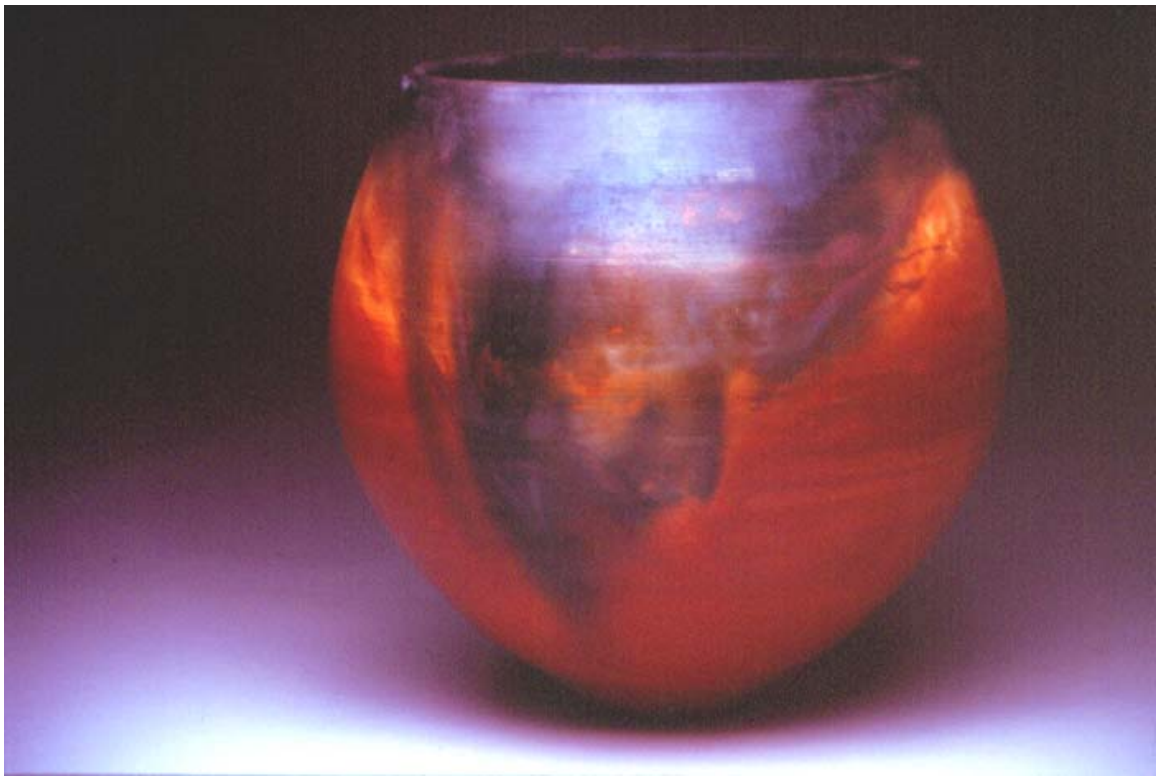

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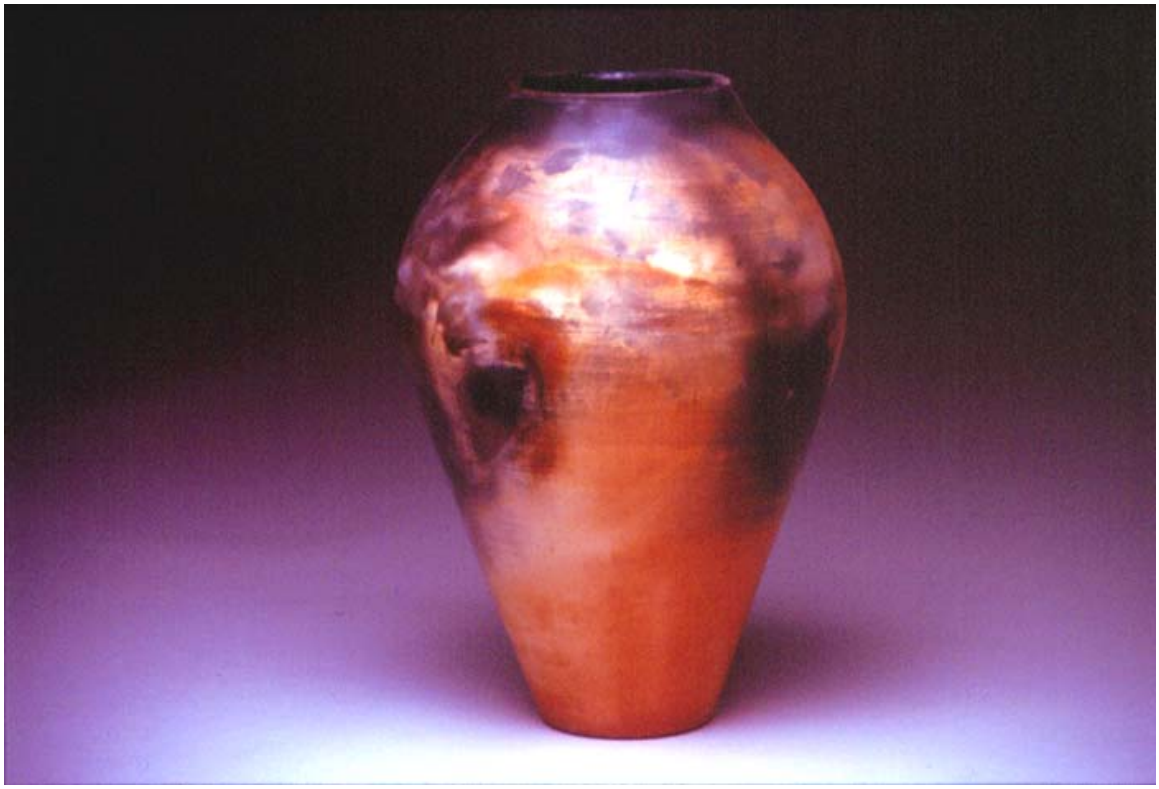

#16 Saggar Fired Vase 2004

#17 Form Study #1 2004

#18 Two Burnished Souls 2004

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VITA

TOMMY WILLIAMS

EDUCATION

1999	Functional Pottery session with Jon Ellenbogan and Becky Plummer, Penland School of Arts and Crafts, Penland, North Carolina
2001	B.A. in Studio Art in Ceramics, Mars Hill College, Mars Hill, North Carolina
	Surface design session with Liz Quackenbush at Penland School of Arts and Crafts, Penland, North Carolina
	Semester abroad in Tucson, Arizona and Nogales, Mexico researching ancient Native American ceramics through Mars Hill College, Mars Hill, North Carolina
	Internship with Robin Chalet and the Tucson Museum of Fine Arts, Tucson, Arizona
2003	Low-fire techniques session with James Watkins at Penland School of Arts and Crafts, Penland, North Carolina
2004	M.F.A. in Studio Art, East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee
	Research trip to India to explore architecture and contemporary artist through East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

1998-2001	Studio Assistant, Mars Hill College, Mars Hill, North Carolina
2001	Ceramic Studio Assistant, The Tucson Museum of Fine Arts, Tucson, Arizona
2001-2002	Artist in Residence at EnergyXchange, Burnsville, North Carolina
2002 –2004	Graduate Teaching Associate, East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee
2003	Summer Session Studio Assistant to James Watkins, Penland School of Arts and Crafts, Penland, North Carolina

SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

1999	"Fall Downtown Street Festival," Spruce Pine, North Carolina
2001	"Mount Mitchell Craft Fair," Burnsville, North Carolina
	"Mountain Made Artist Fair," Asheville, North Carolina
	"Senior Exhibition" B.A. Thesis Exhibition, Weizenblatt Gallery, Mars Hill, North Carolina, *solo*
2002	"Art from Earth," Nelson Fine Art, Johnson City, Tennessee
	"Mount Mitchell Crafts Fair," Burnsville, North Carolina
	"Gallery Opening," Energy Exchange, Burnsville, North Carolina
	Mountain Air Craft Show," Burnsville, North Carolina, Juried Show
2003	"Seize the Clay," Nelson Fine Art, Johnson City, Tennessee

	"Mount Mitchell Crafts Fair," Burnsville, North Carolina
	"Blue Plum Arts and Crafts Festival," Johnson City, Tennesse
2004	"Burnished Souls," MFA Thesis Exhibition, Carroll Reece Museum, Johnson City, Tennessee, *solo*
	"Graduate Student Art Show," The Clay Studio, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Juried Show
	"Blue Plum Arts and Crafts Festival," Johnson City, Tennessee
	"Mount Mitchell Crafts Fair," Burnsville, North Carolina, Best Booth in Show

SELECTED HONORS

1998-2001	Bonner Scholarship, Mars Hill College, Mars Hill, North Carolina
1999	Southern Highland Craft Guild Grant Recipient
	Student Scholarship Award, Mars Hill College, Mars Hill, North Carolina to Penland School of Arts and Crafts
2004	Best Booth in Show, "Mount Mitchell Crafts Fair," Burnsville, North Carolina
	Honorable Mention, "Blue Plum Arts Festival," Johnson City, Tennessee