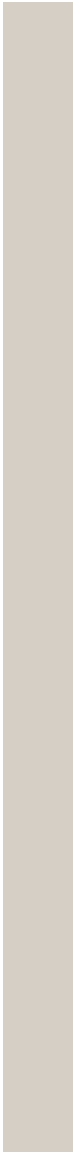


Richard Notkin



Richard Notkin *Another Hard Rain*, 2016
Mid-range stoneware, glaze 13½" x 11½" x 11½"



Richard Notkin's social criticism carries the weight of outrage. Yet his powerful images of nuclear explosions, anti-war themes and capitalist corruption are stealthily presented in an exquisite package of great beauty and almost incomprehensible technical mastery. The power of the greatest of Goya's social critiques delivered in the form of a functional teapot. His new "Hill Jar Series" is based on a marvelous body of work produced during the Han Dynasties.

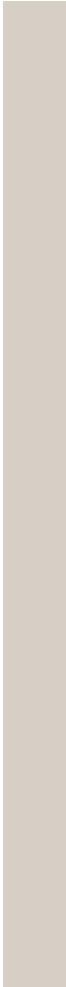
The glazed reliefs on the cylinder walls and sculptural imagery of the lids of the Hill Jars provide the perfect format for my continuing explorations into the human condition, and my ongoing protests aimed squarely at the utter insanity of war. While I utilize the beauty of the execution in the objects I create to lure the viewer in, the imagery which the viewer encounters is purposely challenging – and occasionally disturbing... My intent is to not merely copy these classical works, but to transform the imagery within their aesthetic parameters to reflect our contemporary culture and, in particular, my concerns regarding the many dire threats the human species faces at the beginning of the 21st century... I feel it is of utmost importance that my work has an impact on viewers today, and, hopefully, into our unknown and precarious future.

Richard Notkin received his MFA at UC Davis in 1973 working with Robert Arneson. He has taught hundreds of workshops nationally and internationally, and is currently teaching at the Kansas City Art Institute.

Lisa Reinertson



Lisa Reinertson *Pieta*, 2012
Ceramic, 36" x 32" x 12"
Photo credit: Scott McCue



Lisa Reinertson's large scale ceramic and bronze sculptures express an underlying humanism, from her public sculptures of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Cesar Chavez to her more poetic sculptures of women with children or animals. Her recent ceramic sculptures explore our relationship with the other sentient beings on this earth. Her work combines a realism rooted in the humanist figurative tradition in art with a contemporary expression of social and psychological content.

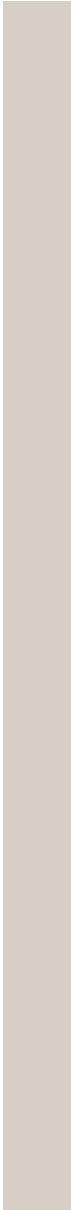
My recent body of work is driven by my awareness of the crisis of so many animals on the verge of extinction. Human figures are portrayed in relation with animals, reminding us that beneath our human built world is the primal natural world that sustains and supports us. Resonating in myth and poetry, the sculptures express an interdependence; an awareness of our responsibility of stewardship for life on this earth, which is ultimately interlinked with our own survival.

Lisa Reinertson received her MFA in 1984 at UC Davis working with Robert Arneson. She has taught in several colleges and universities in Northern California, most recently at the San Francisco Art Institute.

Richard Shaw



Richard Shaw *Three Stacks and Three Stacks Book Jar*, 2010
Glazed porcelain with overglaze transfers, 8" x 11" x 9½"



Richard Shaw's work departed from the overtly Funk scene with a subtle humor, creating exquisite trompe l'oeil ceramic art works that, like pop art, were of everyday objects. And with a title of a book, or the balancing act of his walking objects, he creates an understated observation/commentary that reflects back on our humanity and culture. As Beth Goldberg stated, "Residing amidst the humor and irreverence of Richard Shaw's porcelain sculptures is a quiet sympathy for humanity and its foibles."

I try to stand back and be the absent arranger, creating a poem about a person using humor, irony, and elegance. Sometimes the subject is actually me, as in the watercolor box jars, where I reference my role as the artist, using images from my sketchbooks.

The human aspect of the still life or assemblage acts as a person memorializing their identity using the objects from their personal narrative. The narrative itself reveals their tastes, pastimes, intellectual pursuits, sins, habits good and bad, obsessions, etc.

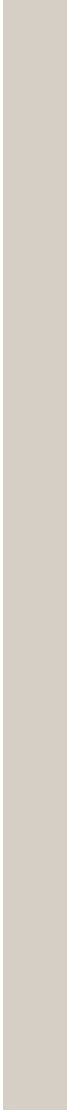
Identifying as another person in the arrangement of objects allows me the freedom to make unconscious decisions and to act spontaneously, to experiment and take chances, and to let the conflict of self-imposed rules go.

Richard Shaw received his MFA at UC Davis in 1968 working with Robert Arneson. He had a long career heading the ceramics program first at San Francisco Art Institute, then at UC Berkeley, until he retired in 2012.

Ehren Tool



Ehren Tool *Three of Many, Cups*, 2016
Porcelain



Ehren Tool, a veteran from the first Gulf War, has been making (and giving away) thousands of porcelain cups; cups imbedded with images of war, of soldiers, of the glamour and horror of war imagery that we carry in our society. The cups are a powerful form of anti-war activism presented as installations, in battalions or troops; as conceptual works, and as just, “cups”. They have been exhibited nationally and internationally and gifted to people from the President and Pentagon officials to anyone who goes to his shows.

I just make cups. The gap between the stated goal and the outcome of my war and my service has been a great disappointment. I have dreams about what I am doing and what the cups mean but I don't feel comfortable putting those dreams on paper. I hope the cups can be the start of conversations about unspeakable things. Any power the cups have comes from the conversations. I am sure there is a doctor that would diagnose/medicate me for making and giving away so many cups.

Ehren Tool received his MFA in 2005 at UC Berkeley working with Richard Shaw. He has taught classes and has been the Senior Laboratory Mechanician at the Ceramic Department at UC Berkeley for many years.

Monica Van den Dool



Monica Van den Dool *Chunk*, 2010
Ceramic and mixed media, 30" x 24" x 9"



Monica Van den Dool's

work can be simultaneously experienced as a metaphor of the human condition, and as a jarring confrontation for the viewer to consider our “stewardship” of other living beings on this planet.

The work in this series deals broadly with humanist concerns about the past, present, and future of the human condition and our inability to comprehend or express our connections to the natural world.

Inspired by the conventions of still life painting and our troubled interactions with this animal/natural world, simplified representations of animals are contrasted with cartoonishly glazed and artificially bright and vibrant elements (dripping oranges and apples, celebratory bows and ribbons, flowing colors). The jarring compositions are intended to correlate with the complexity and strain of our attempt to understand mortality in its entirety, and play upon our persistent separation and alienation from any “natural” state.

Monica Van den Dool received her MFA in 1995 at Montana State University. She has taught at several colleges in the Bay Area and has been on the faculty at San Jose State University for 18 years.

Stan Welsh



Stan Welsh *Messenger*, 2016
Ceramic and photo panel, 46" x 48" x 8"



Stan Welsh's

new "Migration" series

causes one to reflect upon the timeless crisis of refugees. These three-dimensional travelers, weighed down by the burdens on their backs, are juxtaposed with large two-dimensional planes of color or images that create a sense of vast and anonymous isolation and homelessness.

Formally, I would like this work to portray a sense of clarity, simplicity, beauty and balance. Conversely and conceptually, I am trying to create a feeling of apprehension that suggests that things are not what they appear to be. In this series titled "Migrations" I place the ceramic figures into a landscape dominated by water, paying homage to man's precarious and tenuous relationship to the overwhelming power of nature. I am trying to create enigmatic spaces that evoke a perception of distance and emptiness where nature rules supreme.

Stan Welsh received his MFA in 1978 at Alfred University and has been a professor in the Art Department at San Jose State University since 1981 where he headed the Ceramics Program.

Wanxin Zhang



Wanxin Zhang *What's Up? II*, 2011
Fired clay with glaze, 15" x 17" x 47"
Image courtesy of Catharine Clark Gallery



Wanxin Zhang

brings a contemporary cross-cultural and international perspective to his powerfully engaging large figures that juxtapose imagery from Chinese art and culture with the visceral impact and influence of the Bay Area Clay artists.

I believe that “revitalization” of artistic concepts through the past, present, and future is a very challenging task. Regardless of the cultural implications, space, and time between these acts of recreation, one must also keep in mind that art is not the only motivation behind them. More importantly, the spirit and content of today’s society is the true source of these attempts... My pieces are about finding my personal identity, while sparking a contemporary dialogue about social, historical and political issues.

Wanxin Zhang, born and educated in China, graduated from the LuXun Academy of Fine Art in Sculpture in 1985. In 1992 he relocated to San Francisco and received his MFA at the Academy of Art University. Zhang has been on the faculty of the Academy of Art University, UC Berkeley, California College of the Arts, and the San Francisco Art Institute.

CERAMICS, ACTIVISM AND THE BAY AREA: A PERSONAL JOURNEY

Richard Notkin, January 2017

The 1960s decade was a time of deep division and strife in America. This dark period in our nation's history brought us the assassinations of John Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Jr., Robert Kennedy and others. We watched in horror as the disastrous and unnecessary war in Vietnam spiraled out of control. It was not just an ill-conceived distant event, but one in which all American men had a stake, as mandatory military conscription was sending many of us to fight in the jungles of southeast Asia. Even if we weren't sent into this muddy, blood-soaked meat-grinder ourselves, we were directly affected by friends and relatives who were returning damaged – mentally and/or physically – or in flag-draped coffins. So we demonstrated in the streets in massive numbers, suffering teargas grenades, arrests and violence – Kent State was the worst incident – to protest this crime our nation was committing on the other side of the world. I am not stating that my generation was any more altruistic than any other, only that we were motivated to action because it was our asses that were on the military's burner.

We not only questioned our leaders and our nation's priorities, we questioned everything. This included some revolutions in the art world, spawning such movements as Pop and Funk. I

began working in clay as a sculpture student at the Kansas City Art Institute in the late 1960s, inspired by these art movements to create such low-fire ceramic pieces with humorous one line titles such as "Peas March in Washington," "The Erection of the Washington Monument" and "Washington Baloney," which depicted a bologna sandwich on a plate, with the various D.C. landmarks morphing from the surface of the bologna, complete with an extruded squirt of mustard. I was, like most of my peers, a bit of a hippie, but I was also seriously hooked on both clay and commentary. Hopefully, the work has evolved over the succeeding five decades of my life as an artist. The point is, we all have to begin somewhere.

The National Council on Education for the Ceramic Arts (NCECA) held its fourth annual conference in Kansas City in 1969. It was hugely attended by 300 ceramic artists and students, the largest NCECA gathering ever. A bunch of wild and

crazy ceramic artists from the West Coast attended, and the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art had an exhibition with the theme West Coast Ceramics. It introduced me to the work of now iconic artists like Robert Arneson, Jim Melchert, Patti Warashina, Clayton Bailey, Howard Kottler, Michael Frimkess and others who were stretching, bending and questioning the current state of the ceramic arts and our culture. Jim Melchert sent



Richard Notkin
The Last Syllable of Recorded Time, 2010
Stoneware, 77½" x 51½" x 2½"



Richard Notkin *Heart Teapot: Petrol Hostage*, Yixing Series, 2013
Stoneware, 6½" x 11½" x 5¾"

two plastic bags of wet pugged clay with a label attached that read "Pre-sculpture" and gave a rambling multi-media keynote address that included alternative film clips and Albert King's signature recording, "Born Under a Bad Sign." I went bananas...

When I received my BFA in Ceramics, Ken Ferguson had a direct pipeline in which he sent a few students each year to the NY State College of Ceramics at Alfred. He wanted to put me into this pipeline, but I was headed west, to the Bay Area of California, where the type of work I was pursuing was happening and hot. I spent the early 1970s working towards my MFA under the tutelage of Bob Arneson, in his revolutionary program at the University of California at Davis. The spirit of rebellion against all manner of authority was in the air, and in our music and hairy lifestyles. We broke every rule of our culture and even some laws, but, damn it, we were going to make art and change the world. Some of us are still trying, and over the years we have been joined by many more, many of whom are represented in this exhibition.

We have now entered a moment in history in which the strongest nation in the world, both economically and militarily, is governed by a fact-challenged, vulgar, arrogant and egotistical president who has assembled a cabinet and

advisors consisting of power-hungry sycophants. These well-connected millionaires and billionaires will continue to enrich themselves through a denial of science, a severe denigration of our free press, and by thumbing their noses at time-honored ethical standards in our country and long standing commitments to nations throughout this perilous world. Given Donald Trump's adolescent proclivity towards early morning tweeted insults, the world we cherish could end not with a bang, but with a tweet. Not a time to just whimper...

Undeniably, World War III would put a serious crimp in all of our career plans. And even if the human race does not make a sudden exit from the planet as a result of thermonuclear warfare, then our species' demise might be slow and painful as climate change creates droughts and worldwide food shortages, starvation and epidemics.

So, where do we go from here? I would suggest that we need to be aware, alert and active, in a myriad of ways, which, for some, might include art works that embody the spirit of protest. This seems to be a growing trend, for the same reasons that the '60s inspired massive protests. It is now all of us whose asses are on the burner, and this time it is multiple burners. Our children and grandchildren face a very uncertain future, and they will not be complacent in the face of this obvious fact. There is hope, but we must act now if we wish to change direction.

Which brings me back to the ceramic arts. I have never desired to be the "Billy Graham of Political Ceramics," nor have I ever pushed for ceramic artists to embrace the role of social and political criticism in their work. But I have always been an advocate for those who choose and are committed to such a role. While direct political messages in the ceramic arts were not exactly popular or accepted in the 1960s, the numbers of ceramists as activists has steadily increased over the decades. Today that role is no longer questioned.

I would like to relate a philosophical approach that has evolved in my personal journey as an artist. For those of us who choose the role of the artist as activist, we should always remember that to be effective, we must primarily be artists. In other words, we should produce works in our chosen media that are, first and foremost, strong works of art. Works that make people stop and think, works that quite simply knock a person's socks off. The power of our work to attract the viewer's attention is not merely in the message itself, but in the strong conceptual and aesthetic depth of each piece we produce. This is necessary to attract and hold the mind of the viewer long enough to decipher the meanings imbedded in the art. Even if you agree with its underlying message, you might, for example, walk out on a movie that is horribly



Richard Notkin *How Many Times?*, 2016
Mid-range stoneware, glaze,
13⁵/₈" x 11³/₄" x 11³/₄"

scripted, poorly directed, with bad acting and cinematography, etc. So it goes with all forms of the arts. First, amaze me with strong concept and execution, then surprise me with your message.

And if you have chosen the direction of functional pottery, or work abstractly in ceramic sculpture, or in performance or new media approaches, you also need to work at the peak of your evolving capabilities. All artists contribute to a creative spirit we so desperately need to oppose the destruction we see all around us. It is a collective effort, a force, if you will, countering the dark side of our human capabilities. After all, the power of art is not merely in the objects or events themselves, but in how each work of art has the ability to touch and impact – sometimes quite profoundly – the hearts and minds of those who encounter it.

In that spirit, it seems fitting to close with a quote by Andre Malraux:

“Art is a revolt against man’s fate.”

Bay Area Clay: A Legacy of Social Consciousness **2017-2018 exhibition schedule**

Hoffman Gallery of Contemporary Art

Lewis & Clark College
NCECA Conference
Portland, OR
March 2017

Arts Benicia

Benicia, CA
October 2017

Pence Gallery

Davis, CA
April 2018

Addendum:

Much has happened in our country since I first wrote my proposal for this exhibition. Our new administration does not bode well for social justice, peace, or Mother Nature. The challenges we are facing have brought renewed inspiration to stand strong and to speak our truths. It feels ever more important at this time to acknowledge the history of, and give voice to, artists of social conscience.

- Lisa Reinertson
ceramic sculptor and exhibition curator



Photo Credit: Kurt Fishback

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- Richard Notkin -