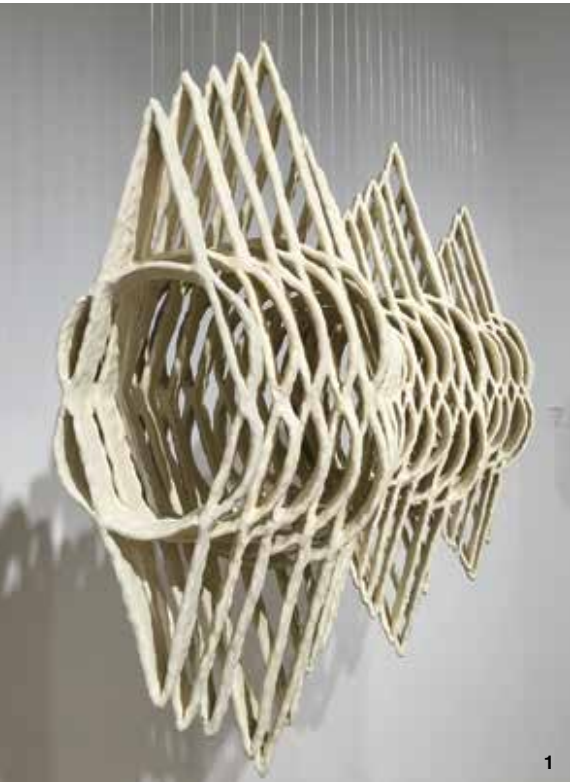


NCECA'S

Emerging Artist Exhibition BY HEIDI MCKENZIE



1, 2 Joanna Poag's *Untitled III (Equilibrium Series)*, 36 in. (91 cm) in height, fired clay, fishing line.

Every year NCECA's jury process sifts through a plethora of candidates and distills six emerging artists to profile, promote, and present to delegates. Every year, I plan my return travel around getting to witness in the flesh the brief speech that each artist painstakingly prepares and delivers from the podium in front of thousands of their peers, mentors, and students. Tough crowd—probably the most judgemental, critical, and savvy audience they will ever face. So in preparing to write about the “NCECA 2016: Emerging Artists Exhibition” at the Leedy-Voulikos Art Center (www.leedy-voulikos.com) in Kansas City, Missouri, I decided to capture and reflect back their remarks, and present to you a review of the works displayed interwoven with an “in their own words” testimony to the makers.

I have to begin by stating my bias: the two works by Joanna Poag, *Untitled III (Equilibrium Series)* and *Flourish*, really spoke to my sense of meaning-making through abstraction, and I felt were among the strongest works in the show. Both pieces' inherent rhythm, unadorned by color, speak softly yet assuredly, and in my view, represent a direct link to Poag's self-professed aesthetics and her sources of inspiration. Poag told us that “art is an inherent expression of play” and that exploration drives her artistic research methodology. She believes in hard work balanced by “disciplined wandering.” Not surprisingly, Poag's interests are eclectic: she is a knowledge seeker. She studied math, physics, theology, and chaos theory, and explained that “she looks for order in the chaos of the natural environment.” A fan of the multiple, Poag takes the basis

for her pattern and edits and refines it to “a simple and elegant living breathing entity.” In the end, Poag strives for “balance that’s living and moving.”

Kyungmin Park uses “the unexpected, what is odd, pleasant, or unpleasant to trigger the audience’s point of view—the stories and emotions hidden inside of them.” She spent the first 20 years of her life in South Korea. Language was a barrier to her when she arrived in America, and so observation became her interface between the newness of the world around her and unlocking her growth and discovery. In her own words, “my works are my personal journals.” Park loves people watching—visual and audio eavesdropping provide the fodder for her sketch pad. Anthropomorphic animals as well as children are featured in her work, where facial expression is key. Park believes “a child’s untamed imagination can create a new and exciting world out of a single object.” The works showcased in the exhibition, *The Guardian* and *The Dreamer*, are both illustrative of her pairing of child and animal and evocative of fantasy, using bright colors to “draw the viewer into the unexpected.”

There is a subversive undertone in much of her work, where the whimsical morphs into universal or political realms. “It’s important to me to make work to make people think,” so that ultimately, “the viewer recreates my work with their own stories.”

Peter Morgan adopted a stand-up comedic approach to his presentation beginning with “Emerging or submerging? is a question I frequently ask myself,” and challenging the audience at break-neck speed to keep pace with the rapid-fire fluidity of his ideas. Morgan went on to explain his work using a Venn diagram depicting “an exploration of the world through an investigation of location, representation, perception, taxonomy, and language.” Two of the sculptures on display in Kansas City, *Frederick the Northern Flicker* (*Colaptes auratus*) and *Roxanne the Rock Pigeon* (*Columba livia*) are part of his ambitious *Birds of North America* project where he’s aiming to depict the over 700 regularly occurring species on the continent. Notably, humor, comedy, and puns are important elements in his work. Morgan openly admits that he is “drawn to multiple junctures of failure in ceramic life.” The third piece on display points to his penchant for caricature and Dr. Who-like shifts in scale, where the macro becomes micro—and

vice versa—to make a point. *Carcharodon Megalodon versus Carrus Glandes* (*Shark Eats Car*), a collaboration with Adam Hinterlang, fuses pop culture with the absurd. Aptly, Morgan’s credo is, “to view the world through the lens of the absurd.”

Tom Jaszczak is inspired by opposites, “the coolness of glass bottles and the warmth of wood-fired clay vessels.” Jaszczak told us that the two strongest influences in his work stem from his Minnesota roots and the potters he grew up admiring, as well as the playful, often quirky inventiveness of his father tinkering in his garage. Jaszczak’s functional ware, atypically soda-fired earthenware, is about the conversation between line and volume. Jaszczak always knew he didn’t want to use representational imagery—instead he opts for color blocking as an aesthetic harkening to the minimalist painter Mondrian who exploited simple, straight-lined geometry with primary colors. The juxtaposition of primary colors with the neutral hues of wood-fired ceramics has become one of Jaszczak’s signature elements. He enjoys the rhythm of pattern

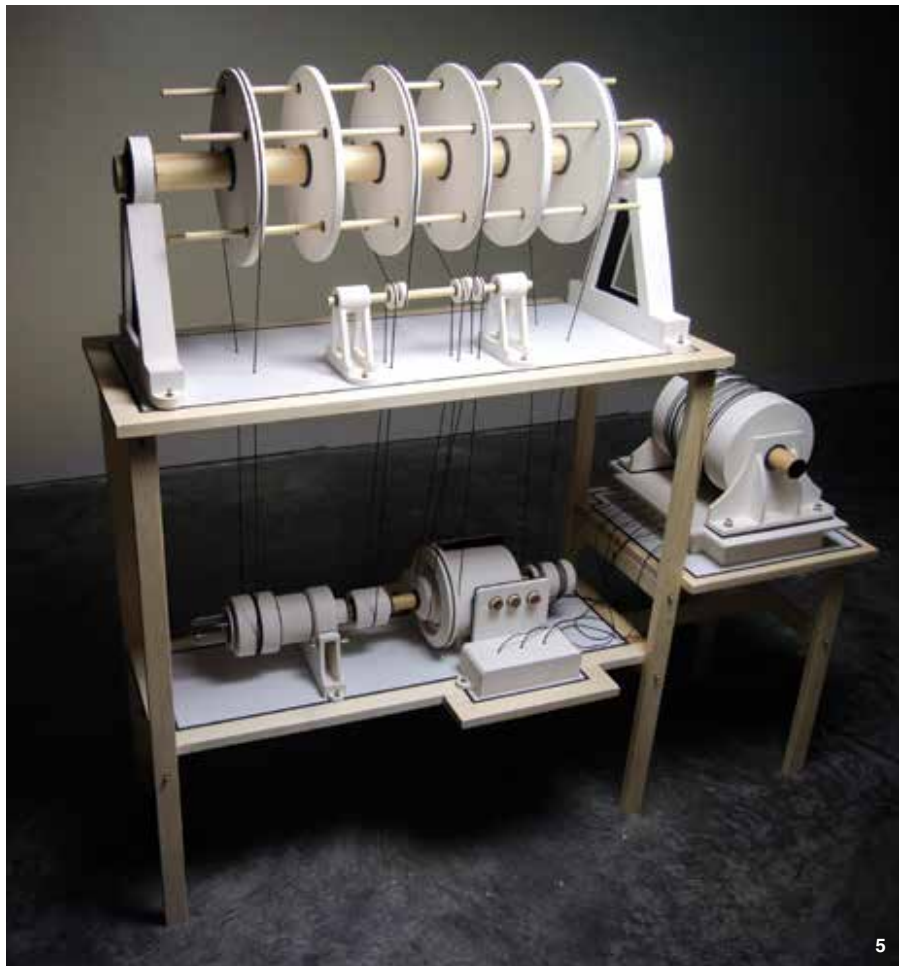


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3 Tom Jaszczak’s condiment tray, 10 in. (25 cm) in length, wheel-thrown, altered, and handbuilt earthenware, fired in a soda kiln to cone 3. 4 Grouping of Tom Jaszczak’s vessels, to 18 in. (46 cm) in height, wheel-thrown, altered, and handbuilt earthenware, fired in a soda kiln to cone 3.



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and the phenomenon of simple human curiosity. His current décor palette has grown out of his attraction to the sheer simplicity of traditional children's toys like "a square peg fitting in a round hole." He relishes bringing "hand-made energy" to his work.

Kwok Pong (Bobby) Tso considers himself an object maker who positions his investigations in relation to the environment: "I ask questions and think; invent and reinvent; construct and reconstruct." The work is rooted in man-made machinery and an inquiry into how parts become a whole. Tso spoke candidly about how strongly impacted he was by the radical paradigm shift from having grown up in Hong Kong and then having moved to Iowa. From the intense density to the limitlessness of vista, "it was a whole different relationship to space." He started to really think about the space between two objects or between two people and how that defines the status and relationships between both people and objects. "In a world where everything is already made," he feels it's important to understand process and its relationship to history. Tso aims to "revise, rewrite, and re-contextualize the vision and possibility of clay." His monochromatic creations, *The Moment of "Re" inventing—Motionality* and *Armamentarium* challenge the viewer to puzzle at their assembly and disassembly. He hopes that his work will be a gateway for the viewer—keeping its meaning far from the explicit, the mystery of the objects he makes obligates the view to take responsibility for their own fantasy or reality.



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5 Kwok Pong (Bobby) Tso's *The Moment of "Re" inventing—Motionality*, 4 ft. 7 in. (1.4 m) in height, white earthenware, wood, plastic, paint, fabric, glass.
 6 Peter Morgan's *Frederick the Northern Flicker (Colaptes auratus)* and *Roxanne the Rock Pigeon (Columba livia)*, to 24½ in. (62 cm) in height, low-fired ceramic.
 7 Peter Morgan's *Carcharodon Megalodon versus Carrus Glandes (Shark Eats Car)*, 5 ft. 6 in. (1.7 m) in length, low-fired ceramic, wood.



8 Kyungmin Park's *Guardian*, 3 ft. 8 in. (1.1 m) in height, stoneware, underglaze, glaze, resin, milkpaint. 9 Kyungmin Park's *Dreamer*, 34 in. (86 cm) in height, stoneware, underglaze, milkpaint. 10 Sean O'Connell's jars, wheel-thrown porcelain, underglaze, glaze.

Sean O'Connell's thesis is that "making is thinking." Not surprisingly, the haptic and tactile are paramount to his understanding the long tradition of potters that have come before, or as he frames it, "the shoulders that I'm standing on." He views his practice as an "alchemical experiment and exploration" that employs "intuition and planning, success and failure," exploiting the "field of curiosity" and "the interplay between questions and speculation." O'Connell told us that he believes in the simple beauty of handmade objects, and that making pots is a way for him to slow down and connect to a deeper well. Color, markings, and the relationship of elements are of prime concern for O'Connell. "I use my sensibility as an artist to find the thread of connection that moves between images, interprets, and understands the work I make." O'Connell exhibited 30 patterned jars in Kansas City. A self-professed "pattern junkie," O'Connell believes that "pattern is hard-wired into our brain." He cites as an example our experience of the first snowfall of the season—"the patterns are mutable, moveable, a feast, an infinite source of possibilities." He finds inspiration in all places, and often references Arabic script—pointing to the fact that words are not necessary for expression. O'Connell's parting axiom: "nature guides pattern... God is in the wind."

The NCECA 2016: Emerging Artists Exhibition was juried by Eva Kwong and Jim Melchert with board member Jane Shellenbarger, and ran from March 4–27, 2016 at the Leedy-Voulkos Arts Center in Kansas City, Missouri.

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