

Expatriate Ceramics

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Au

Rebecca
Harvey

Jeff
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Amelié
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George
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Select works by his former students

Emily
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Curator and Essayist: Ursula Hargens
Editor: Elizabeth Coleman

Foreword

Sarah Millfelt, Executive Director

The commencement of *Expatriate Ceramics* marks the mid-point of NCC’s 27th year of life. As a 27-year old, the Center’s behavior is really akin to that of any typical millennial. We invest in ourselves, be it additional staffing or improvements to our building. We are really good at multi-tasking: in the height of the installation of our latest exhibition, we were also prepping and packing some thousand pots to travel to NCECA, while managing the usual artist visits, end of quarter class flow, and fundraising tasks. We are collaborating like crazy and finding new friends and partners with which to share our work and our audiences. We are achievement oriented—we continue to operate with the mantra “good, better, best; never rest!” And, we absolutely love travel! Even if we can’t get ourselves out of the building as often as we’d like, we’ll still celebrate the experiences had by our community of ceramic artists.

Case in point: the *Expatriate Ceramics* exhibition, which is all about the celebration of travel and the exploration of how place informs an artist’s body of work. *Expatriate Ceramics* highlights five artists—four Americans and one Canadian—who spent time in residence at influential ceramic centers around the world or lived abroad for a significant time. Some of these artists launched their careers with this singular experience; others helped to build an institution’s notoriety and to create opportunities for the next generation of ceramists; still others were part of a long lineage of experiential making in places steeped with history and production. The exhibition showcases work created before, during, and after their experiences, demonstrating the impact of location on materials, process, culture, and concepts.

Guest artists include Derek Au, Rebecca Harvey, Jeff Oestreich, Amelié Proulx, and George Timock, with select works by two of Timock’s former students, Emily Connell and Maura Wright.

Expatriate Ceramics was in the works intellectually for a few years with Ursula Hargens taking the reins as curator last spring. Hargens

is a long-time Minneapolis-based ceramic artist, educator, and co-founder and program head of NCC’s MN NICE program.

In addition to actual works, the exhibition features additional influences in the form of mementos, drawings, videos, or pots and sculpture by other mentors or mentees. In conjunction with the exhibition, Derek Au was invited to be in residence at NCC as a McKnight Ceramic Artist Resident, and as such, spent the first three months of calendar year 2018 making work in the McKnight studio, which he shared with his wife, ceramic artist, Huang Nuokon. Au’s lengthy visit enabled additional overlap with select NCC studio artists as part of a series of critiques made possible by NCC. And, George Timock visited Minneapolis for an evening group discussion (joined by Jeff Oestreich and Au), as well as a daylong demonstration (joined by Au), and mentor visits with MN NICE artists.

This particular exhibition was generously supported by our friends, Continental Clay Company, Prospect Creek Foundation, and the Windgate Charitable Foundation. Additionally, this activity was made possible by the voters of Minnesota through a Minnesota State Arts Board Operating Support grant, thanks to a legislative appropriation from the arts and cultural heritage fund, and a grant from Wells Fargo.

Our roster of special exhibitions in 2018 was made possible due to the collective creative brainpower of the esteemed individuals who served on the Center’s exhibitions committee the previous year: Heather Nameth Bren, Kelly Connole, Ursula Hargens, Mark Pharis, and Robert Silberman. Many thanks to this particular group. And, a very sincere thanks to Hargens for her memorable contributions to this particular exhibition and the content of this publication. A heartfelt thank you to Northern Clay Center’s tremendously talented and tenacious ladies of the exhibition department: Tippy Maurant, Director of Galleries and Events, and Emily Romens, Galleries Coordinator. Finally, thank you to Elizabeth Coleman for her editing of this publication.

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Installation view.



Installation view.

Expatriate Ceramics

by Ursula Hargens

At first glance, ceramics seems inherently tied to the earth that supplies the necessary materials—the clays and feldspars from which work is formed. These materials often become identified with a location; for example, the word “China” became synonymous with “porcelain.” But a deep dive into the history of ceramics expands the story. Raw materials, such as Middle Eastern *Mohammedan* cobalt, have been traded and transported across continents. Finished wares were carried far from their origin by travelers and merchants visiting eager audiences. Potters too have been forced to move from one country to another based on the whim or defeat of a particular ruler. Ceramic objects record the history of this intercontinental conversation and show how materials, processes, styles, and people travel the globe.

Expatriate Ceramics examines how this movement across borders continues to impact artists today. Each ceramist in this exhibition spent time outside of their native country. Some worked in residence at influential art centers, while others lived abroad for an extended period of time. Many of the locations hold historical importance, such as Jingdezhen, a Chinese city at the epicenter of porcelain production for over a thousand years. Others, like the Leach Pottery in St. Ives, England, reflect the more recent birth of studio pottery. The exhibition also includes an “expatriate” visiting the United States to work at the Kohler Factory in Wisconsin. Every location provides a unique lens and creates opportunities for innovation and reflection.

Expatriates use the clay, tools, and kilns available at their host sites; they eat local food, meet fellow

craftspeople, and absorb the history of the location. In the process, they free themselves from expected outcomes and open up to new processes, influences, and ideas. The resulting artworks carry an imprint of this experience. For some artists, their time abroad marks a clear shift between distinct bodies of work. For others, new directions taken continue to germinate over time and slowly take shape in the coming years. By exhibiting pieces created before, during, and after these immersive experiences, *Expatriate Ceramics* examines how artists continue to integrate and synthesize influences long after they are back on home soil.

Derek Au first traveled to China while aboard Greenpeace’s *SV Rainbow Warrior* as a radio operator and returned to Beijing a few years later as a web application developer. Au fell in love with China, and when his job ended, he ventured to Jingdezhen to pursue pottery-making professionally. During his ten-year residence, the porcelain, celadons, ancient pots, and craftspeople who lived in the historic city, along with the stream of international artists who traveled through Jingdezhen, shaped his work. Au initially created a series of slab-constructed “tinware” pieces; simple shapes loosely based on tin models but also referencing Song Dynasty precedents.¹ Crisp, paper-like forms glowed under soft blue celadon glaze. Au approached this work as a mathematical exercise, exploring the relationship between two and three-dimensional form within a strict set of parameters. When this body of work came to a natural end, Au began exploring slip as structure.² Thrown porcelain forms were brushed with thickened slip when wet, and later,

¹ Derek Au, conversation with author, 26 January 2018.

² Ibid.

much of the original pot was trimmed away. Rather than using slip merely to hide the clay beneath it, slip formed the piece itself. In the firing, the deep texture created places for glaze to pool, producing visual lines within the brushstrokes. It softened the lobed rims, imbuing them with a delicate, ornate language.

Au returned to the United States in January 2018 as a McKnight Ceramic Artist Resident at Northern Clay Center, leaving the materials of Jingdezhen behind. While in residence, Au attempted to recreate the luster of Chinese clays and glazes using Western materials. As the creator of glazy.org, an open source glaze database, Au places materials testing at the center of his practice. The porcelain clay bodies he developed in the United States were opaque, cracked easily, and appeared dull beneath the celadon glaze. This led Au to explore stoneware bodies for the first time in his career. Stoneware was strong, flexible, and easily thrown, but as Au worked with it, he realized the claybody called for different forms. He simplified rims, thickened walls, and shifted from celadon to an opalescent Jun glaze. While his form and glaze references were grounded in ceramic history, he approached materials from a contemporary, scientific perspective. His newest body of work, made in residence at Northern Clay Center, reflects the impact of place and explores the way materials drive innovation in form making.

Amélie Proulx is a French Canadian ceramist who came to the United States for a residency at the Kohler Co. factory in Wisconsin in 2017. Proulx previously traveled for residencies at the European

Ceramic Work Centre, Netherlands, and Guldagergaard International Ceramic Research Center, Denmark, but her time at the Kohler Co. factory was pivotal in pushing the scale and ambition of her slipcast work. The Kohler Arts/Industry Residency Program, established in 1974, allows artists access to industrial processes and slipcasting facilities. The program is a mutually beneficial collaboration between arts and industry with artists working in the factory alongside Kohler employees.³ Finished work is loaded into huge kilns next to commodes and bathtubs. While in residence, Proulx created plaster molds for casting elongated crow and seagull legs. The legs were gathered into “bouquets” and clustered in porcelain pails. Because of their length and fragility, these pieces would be difficult to produce without the industrial facilities and a perfect casting slip.⁴

The impact of Proulx’s work is created through assemblages of these slipcast forms. *Du zénith au nadir VI* and *VII* are comprised of disembodied bird wings that overlap to form large wreaths. The ruffled wings lose their visual reference and become abstract building blocks to create form. The porcelain wreaths have graceful profiles and the monumental air of a memorial. Muted colors, reminiscent of cold, autumnal days, reinforce the somber feeling. Proulx exploits the material limits of vitreous porcelain in her *Dactyles* series. Bouquets of bird legs wilt in the kiln and suggest flower arrangements past their prime. The work speaks of dichotomies. Porcelain provides strong units for building, but the material is fired past the edge of its strength; the bodies of birds are dead but eternally

preserved and used to create new pieces; our fragility is both mourned and commemorated. Reflecting on her experience at Kohler, Proulx notes that the quality-controlled slip, glazes, and kilns at the factory allowed her to produce a new body of work that became the foundation of her current studio practice.⁵

George Timock traveled to the International Ceramics Studio (ICS) in Kecskemét, Hungary, for the first time in 2004. He returned for the next thirteen years, leading a group from the Kansas City Art Institute (KCAI), spending a month working with students and a month on his own art. As a professor at KCAI for 43 years, Timock delighted in the opportunity to converse and interact with students outside of a regular academic structure. He found that students often took great risks in their practice and their ideas evolved quickly. *Expatriate Ceramics* includes the work of Emily Connell and Maura Wright, two students who were greatly impacted by their experience at the ICS.⁶ While in residence, artists are permitted to work with the historic and legendary Herend porcelain, often called “the white gold of Hungary.”⁷

Timock’s experience in Kecskemét inspired a marked development in his artwork. His early Raku forms were informed by the basaltic lava fields of Kilauea Volcano in Hawaii.⁸ Between 1968 and 2005, Timock created massive Raku vessels, emulating the swirling movement of lava before it is quick-cooled into solid form. The open bowls suggest the canyons and horizons of this ever-changing, textured topography and metaphorically allude to the inner self. The ICS Residency in Kecskemét was a turning point, as Timock

dramatically shifted from stoneware to pure, translucent Hungarian porcelain. He moved from exploring natural phenomena to examining opulent, detailed surfaces that spoke both of the evolution and decline of human culture. Observing Eastern European religious architecture, Timock created intricate forms that captured the “visual record of past generations in the decayed ornamentation and weathered facade of the Old Parish Church in Budapest.”⁹ The pieces included in the exhibition are tiered, and each section introduces a unique, abstract language with a different density, shape, and direction. Timock creates complex, hundred-part molds of solid forms and then carves the thickly cast pieces over several weeks. He covers the engraved surfaces with gold, masking them with an overlay of gilding. Gold and platinum lusters contrast with luminescent porcelain, activating the surface and competing for prominence. The resulting vessels speak about exquisite control and refinement of materials and processes, as well as our human impulse to emotionally engage with and interpret the world around us.

Jeff Oestreich, at the suggestion of his mentor, Warren MacKenzie, spent two years as an apprentice at the Leach Pottery in St. Ives from 1969 – 1971. At the Pottery, founded in 1920 by Bernard Leach and Shoji Hamada and hailed as the birthplace of British studio pottery, Oestreich fell in love with the material, process, and history of ceramics. As Oestreich describes it, the Leach Pottery functioned like a well-oiled machine with pots flowing in and out of the kiln.¹⁰ His first production piece was a small, lidded soup bowl. When he

³ John Michael Kohler Arts Center, “Arts/ Industry Program.” Filmed [2014]. Vimeo video, 10:33. Posted [February 2017]. <https://vimeo.com/191047186>.

⁴ John Michael Kohler Arts Center, “Amélie Proulx—Arts Industry Resident —Pottery.” Filmed [2017]. Vimeo video, 2:19. Posted [July 2017]. <https://vimeo.com/213698017>.

⁵ Amélie Proulx, email to author, 23 February 2018.

⁶ George Timock, conversation with author, 15 February 2018.

⁷ Debra Sloan, “A Special Place: The International Ceramics Studio in Kecskemét, Hungary,” *Ceramics Technical*, no. 31 (2010) 83 – 87.

⁸ George Timock, “Raku,” accessed 15 February 2018, <http://www.georgetimock.com/page-2/>.

⁹ George Timock, “Bio,” accessed 15 February 2018, <http://www.georgetimock.com/bio/>.

¹⁰ Jeff Oestreich, conversation with author, 1 February 2018.

returned for a residency in 2014, he used the form as a point of departure, keeping the underlying structure but modernizing it to reflect his forty-year evolution as an artist. Back in residence, Oestreich wedged clay on the same concrete table in the corner and revisited other pieces from that time. Looking at a William Marshall cake plate, which in his memory had been a large, formidable piece, he now found it quite small and only the size of a contemporary dinner plate. He was struck that his sense of scale had changed over the years to reflect a “bigger is better” American sensibility, and yet, the architecture of his forms was still guided by his early experience in England at the Leach Pottery.

A residency in Auckland, New Zealand in 1995 helped Oestreich find the surfaces he needed to cover the “bones” of his pots.¹¹ New Zealand, a country he has returned to a dozen times, has become a second home. In New Zealand, Oestreich began to explore surface through color and geometry, inspired by a visit to the seaside city of Napier. Much of the city was destroyed in the Hawke’s Bay Earthquake in 1931. It was rebuilt primarily in Art Deco style with linear structure and touches of ornamentation like chevrons and zigzags.¹² While the town itself was captivating, he realized that his attraction to Art Deco began many years earlier in the Harris tweeds from his childhood, a set of heirloom Mexican silver bracelets, and dress patterns he’d seen his mother lay out to sew. After this revelation, he began using glaze resist, cutouts, and stamping. The clean, geometric lines and matte glazes organize and divide the space within the frames of Oestreich’s vessels. These techniques

define the aesthetic of his work, and his pots are a true cultural hybrid, traveling through time and space to link ancient Chinese pots, German salt-glaze ware, and Art Deco to contemporary studio pottery.

Rebecca Harvey’s work in *Expatriate Ceramics* varies dramatically in style because it was made during three residencies spanning two decades. In 1997, she traveled to Europe for the first time to the Dresden Porcelain Factory. While in residence, she mined the factory’s vault of plaster molds and began combining slipcast and handbuilt forms. The elaborate molds often contained 50 numbered pieces. Without knowledge of how the pieces fit, she puzzled and pieced the parts together. Harvey searched the plaster forms for a bird wing or branch, and rather than using the mold as a complete unit, she cast sections. The resulting bird cups, *For Rachel Carson*, are compositions of forms that stack, bisect, and perch on top of one another. The assemblages perhaps reflect the particular time Harvey was there; it was not long after German reunification and a period of cultural upheaval and transition from Soviet to Western influence. The birds are descendants of Kändler’s Meissen menagerie and acknowledge Dresden’s role in the birth of European porcelain. They also reflect a European understanding of decorative language where proportions, profiles, and meticulous details are all considered and integrated.

Harvey describes the Dresden pieces as exploring form as a “void” or “skin.”¹³ During residencies at the Zentrum für Keramik-Berlin in 2012 and a c.r.e.t.a. Rome Residency in

Italy in 2015, she wanted to capture a contrasting solidity. To create forms with “bulk,” Harvey knew she would have to incorporate a significant amount of grog into the clay body. She brought grog with her, but when her suitcase was lost, she started the process of making grog herself. Harvey took daily walks to Lake Bracciano in Italy and collected ceramic shards from the bottom of the lake. The shards themselves had been buffed and rounded through centuries and were interesting abstract shapes. Harvey kept some shards and smashed others into grog, literally reabsorbing the ancient ceramic into a body of new work. The resulting work is dense and weathered and seems to exist outside of time. Travel, for Harvey, permits her to let go of familiar processes, materials, and daily habits. It challenges her to innovate and opens a creative space of “not knowing.”¹⁴ Free from responsibilities and expectations, she can notice, reflect, and interpret her environment with a renewed perspective.

At first glance, *Expatriate Ceramics* is a meditation on place and on the way the materials, people, culture, and history of a location can impact the artist. Yet, this exhibition can also be viewed as a meditation on time, as significant experiences continue to transform an artist’s creative practice for years into the future. *Expatriate Ceramics* records, in physical form, these intangible but profoundly influential experiences. In the process, the exhibition demonstrates that crossing boundaries, both physical and personal, continues to strengthen and expand the artist’s voice—as it has done for millennia.

¹¹ Oestreich, conversation with author, 1 February 2018.

¹² Jennifer Nalewicki, “How an Earthquake Turned this New Zealand Town into the Art Deco Capital of the World”, *Smithsonian.com*, 19 February 2016. Accessed 1 February 2018. <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/travel/earthquake-helped-turn-city-art-deco-capital-world-180958081/>.

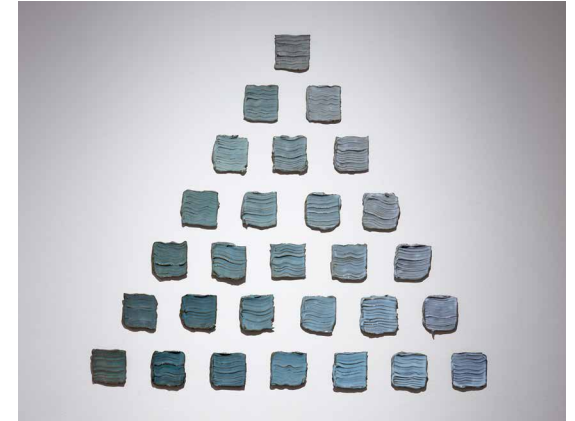
¹³ Rebecca Harvey, conversation with author, 9 February 2018.

¹⁴ Ibid.

Artist Bios

Derek Au

Derek Au's current body of work springs from a renewed focus on traditional Chinese ceramic materials and techniques, including slips, brushwork, and carving. With respect for centuries-old process, such as slip decoration, he challenges the technique to be more and creates the vessel form of an artwork by painting with slip. During his residency in Jingdezhen, China, which began in 2008, he utilized the results of his research into process and the collection of antique wares to develop an open source ceramic recipes website. Au completed his residency in China at the end of 2017 and was a McKnight Ceramic Artist Resident at Northern Clay Center from January – March, 2018.



Floral Dish, 2017
blue celadon glaze on Jingdezhen porcelain
2.75" x 8" x 8"

Above:
Triaxial Blend, 2018
porcelain, celadon
34.5" x 39" x 1.5"



Rebecca Harvey

Rebecca Harvey incorporates architectural details into her forms after launching from a study of 18th century Creamware, Japanese ceramics, and 1920s Enamelware. She draws from “the strong but simple sense of form in these traditions” to create functional wares. Harvey received her BFA from University of the Arts, Pennsylvania, and her MFA from Cranbrook Academy of Art. Her international residencies include Germany, Sweden, China, and Iceland.



semaphore, 2016
ceramic, collected shard grog from Rome, Italy
6" x 36" x 12"

Above:
Shards & Beach Glass from Amalfi Coast, 2015



Jeff Oestreich

Jeff Oestreich is well known for his functional, stoneware, wheel-thrown, and altered pots. The minimally-glazed work is fired in a soda kiln at his residence and studio near Taylors Falls, Minnesota, and evokes Art Deco themes and often incorporates jewel-like sprigs born of small mementos from friends. He received his BA from Bemidji State University, Minnesota (1969), and studied further at the University of Minnesota, as well as apprenticed at the Leach Pottery, St. Ives, England.



Diamond Dish, 2017
stoneware, glaze
6" x 6" x 4"
Photo credit: NCC

Above (left to right):
Lidded Soup Bowl, 2015
stoneware, glaze
5.5" x 5" x 5"

Lidded Soup Bowl with Lugs #14, 1969
stoneware
4.5" x 4" x 4"



Amélié Proulx

Amélié Proulx explores the very properties of clay and challenges the limitations of the medium in her work. While soft, mutable clay becomes static and permanent when fired, Proulx delves into the idea that the object can slip back into a soft state through technology and creates sculpture that represents this “slippage” in both language and nature. She received her BFA at Concordia University, Montreal (2006), and her MFA at Nova Scotia College of Art and Design University (2010). She has completed residencies in the US, Denmark, The Netherlands, Quebec, and Belgium.



Dactyles - Corvus IV, 2017
vitreous china, glaze
12.5" x 11" x 8"

Above:
Du zénith au nadir VI (in progress), 2017
vitreous china
Photo credit: Kohler Co.



George Timock

George Timock's current work is inspired by his research and time in Hungary. Hungarian porcelain, with its purity and clarity, provides the canvas for examination of the influence of Eastern European architecture and culture. Opulence and decay receive equal consideration in his deeply layered and textured vessels. Timock earned his BFA (1968) and MFA (1971) at Cranbrook Academy of Art, Michigan. He spent the summers of 2004–2015 at an international residency in Hungary. Timock taught for 43 years at Kansas City Art Institute; he retired in 2015.

Porcelain Vessel QQQ, 2013
Hungarian porcelain, gold luster
11" x 10.5" x 8.5"

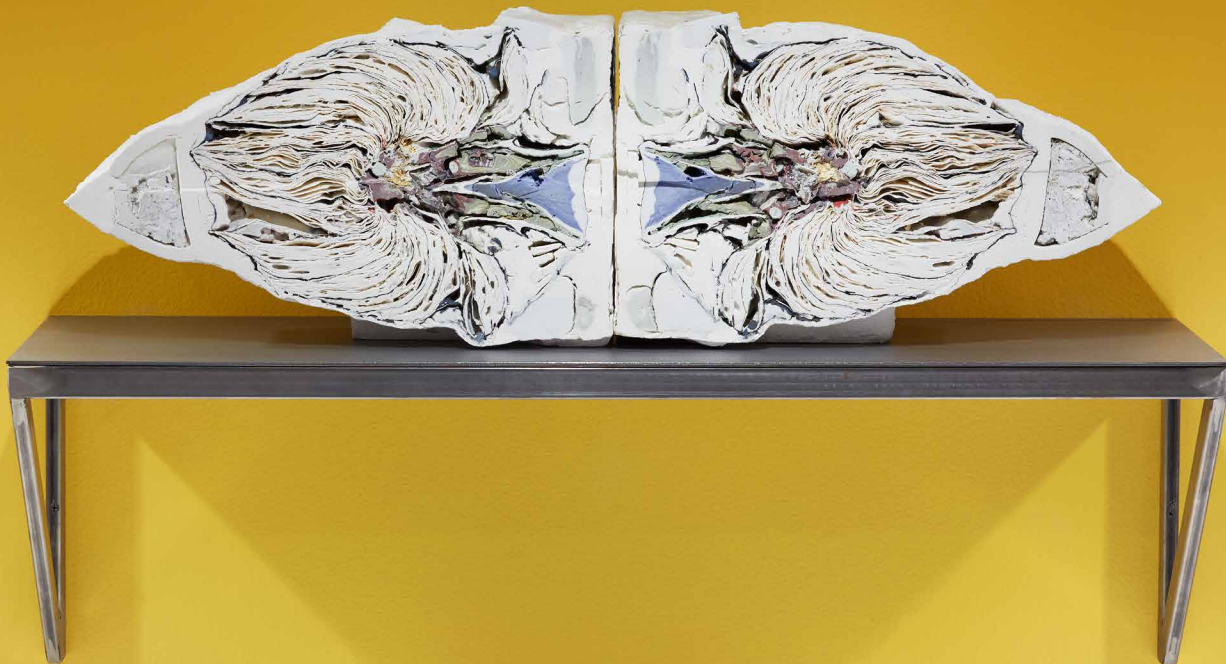


This exhibition included select works by two of George Timock's former students, Emily Connell and Maura Wright.

Emily Connell

Emily Connell's work is rooted in her experience as a child in Catholic schools. She explores the interaction between her own body and the spiritual relevance of ritual practice. Her process happens in conscientious stages to create a permanent ceramic object out of reference books such as bibles or encyclopedias, slip, and plaster. Connell earned her BFA at Kansas City Art Institute (2012) after completing her Fine Arts Diploma at SC Governor's School for the Arts and Humanities in Greenville, South Carolina (2008). International residency programs include those in Hungary and Italy.

The Illustrated Bible for Children, 2017
porcelain, ashes of a book, gypsum, steel
10" x 33" x 6"



Maura Wright

Maura Wright explores the significance and cultural relevance of adornment, including clothing and jewelry, and the evidence of stature or limitation in society those items represent. She uses human forms in her sculptural work and incorporates her memories as well as examines "common perceptions of cultural norms". Wright earned her BFA at Kansas City Art Institute (2013) and is currently pursuing her MFA at New York State College of Ceramics at Alfred University. International residency programs include travels to Hungary and Denmark.

Bernard As Hercules, 2012
Hungarian porcelain, china paint, gold luster
9" x 5.5" x 5.5"



Northern Clay Center

Northern Clay Center advances the ceramic arts for artists, learners, and the community, through education, exhibitions, and artist services. Ongoing programs include exhibitions by contemporary regional, national, and international ceramic artists, as well as historical and architectural ceramics; classes and workshops for children and adults at all skill levels; studio space and grants for artists; and a sales gallery representing many top ceramic artists from the region and elsewhere.

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