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2014 Regis Master

Adrian Saxe

A Gilded Age and 2014 Regis Master: Adrian Saxe

May 9 – June 29, 2014
Northern Clay Center, Minneapolis, MN

Gallery M:

A Gilded Age

Chris Antemann

Tim Berg and Rebekah Myers

Shenny Cruces

Jane Irish

Emily Galusha Gallery:

2014 Regis Master: Adrian Saxe

Curated and Essay by Ursula Hargens
Edited by Elizabeth Coleman

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Foreword

Sarah Millfelt, Director

Northern Clay Center's exhibitions program is an exploration of time and place, of materials and technique, of possibilities and limits — much like clay itself. Over the course of a given year, the program showcases vast extremes of the material — from pots made by an emerging local potter and created from locally sourced materials, to figural sculpture influenced by centuries old folklore, to ceramic objects created using the most contemporary techniques and industries. What this means for our viewers is an ongoing exposure to the many uses of, approaches to, and voices in clay.

A Gilded Age and 2014 Regis Master:

Adrian Saxe offer a unique look at contemporary ceramics by six artists employing very different approaches to their work. *A Gilded Age* is filled with shiny and lavish work that dazzles the viewer with surfaces and detail. Curator Ursula Hargens, a member of NCC's exhibitions committee, a ceramic artist, and an educator, assembled a roster of innovative artists whose work is a meditation on value and inquires whether materials, execution, context, or concept make a particular object treasured. "What lies beneath the thin veneer of opulence?" The answer is found in *A Gilded Age*.

And, if the luxury of the objects in *A Gilded Age* is not enough to satisfy your senses, *Adrian Saxe's* retrospect of wares is the most appropriate accompanying exhibition as it too uses materiality to explore ideas of meaning in treasured objects. Saxe is Northern Clay Center's 26th *Regis Master* and is one of two of the ceramic artists bestowed with the title in 2014. The other, *Walter Ostrom*, is featured in an exhibition and catalogue this fall.

The *Regis Masters Series* began in 1997 and continues to recognize ceramic artists, over the

age of 65, who have had a major impact on the development of ceramics in the last century and this century. The artists bestowed with the title of *Regis Master* are from this country and from across the world. They receive an honorarium, participate in an exhibition at NCC, and deliver a lecture about their life and work. In doing so, they add to the limited stock of oral history of a senior generation of ceramic artists. Our partner in this program is the Minneapolis Institute of Arts.

Originally supported by *Regis and Friends*, The *Regis Masters Series* continues today through generous support from *Anita Kunin* and the *Kunin Family*, in honor of the late *Myron Kunin*, a philanthropist and former owner of the *Regis Corporation*. The work included in the *Adrian Saxe* exhibition, and this catalogue, is courtesy of both the artist and *Frank Lloyd Gallery* (Santa Monica, CA). Work by *Tim Berg* and *Rebekah Myers* is courtesy of the *Dean Project* (Miami, FL).

Both exhibitions were made possible through support from many. A special thanks to the *Windgate Charitable Foundation*, *Continental Clay Company*, and *George Reid*. Additionally, this activity is made possible by the voters of *Minnesota*, through a grant from the *Minnesota State Arts Board*, thanks to a legislative appropriation from the arts and cultural heritage fund; by a grant from the *Wells Fargo Foundation Minnesota*; and by a grant from the *National Endowment for the Arts*.

Finally, a very heartfelt thanks to *Ursula Hargens* and NCC's other exhibitions committee members: *Heather Nameth Bren*, *Kelly Connole*, *Mark Pharis*, and *Robert Silberman*.





Chris Antemann, *Love Shack* (detail), 2009, porcelain, 24" x 20" x 20".
Collection of Candice Groot.



A Gilded Age

by Ursula Hargens

*To gild refined gold, to paint the lily,
To throw a perfume on the violet,
To smooth the ice, or add another hue
Unto the rainbow, or with taper-light
To seek the beauteous eye of heaven to garnish,
Is wasteful and ridiculous excess.¹*

In 1873, Mark Twain and Charles Dudley Warner published *The Gilded Age: A Tale of Today*. Inspired by the above quote from Shakespeare's *King John*, Twain and Warner satirized the social and political climate of the time. Rapid economic growth and technological progress ushered in an era of vast wealth and conspicuous consumption, a gilded age of "wasteful and ridiculous excess." Today, the fortunes amassed by Hollywood, Wall Street, and Silicon Valley have led to a new culture of excess, often amplified through the lens of media and popular culture. The "richest 10 percent of Americans take a larger slice of the economic pie than they did in 1913, at the peak of the Gilded Age,"² and yet, Middle America has been plagued by record foreclosure rates and stagnant employment. It is in this context that questions of wealth and our relation to it are present and compelling.

What lies beneath the thin veneer of opulence? *A Gilded Age* examines this question through the work of five contemporary ceramists. For these artists, objects hold symbolic meaning, reflecting social and cultural values accumulated over time. Objects we treasure embody hidden and realized ambitions, the search for individuality, a connection to others—who we hope to become. Have we grown richer? More enlightened? Has new wealth led to greater opportunity and for whom? Does peeling back the surface reveal some hidden truth? Each artist

offers a unique perspective on the role objects play in representing our aspirations, in our quest for status, and in shaping the narrative of an age.

Appropriately, *A Gilded Age* runs concurrently with an exhibition by 2014 Regis Master Adrian Saxe in the Emily Galusha Gallery. Described as the "postmodern ceramicist par excellence" by Edmund de Waal,³ Saxe's work eclectically combines materials; cultures; time periods; and visual, written, and encoded languages. He is keenly aware that ceramic objects reflect their social, political, economic, and theoretical context and function as "repositories of ideas and beliefs."⁴

Though of a younger generation, the artists represented in *A Gilded Age*, stem from the same lineage. Like Saxe, they interpret and comment upon the world around them by creating objects layered with symbolism. They mine the history of ceramics and popular culture, using the past to illuminate the present, and provide insight into the process of making meaning through the objects we treasure.

Shenny Cruces' and Jane Irish's social and political critique is both emotional and personal. Using historical ceramic forms as a point of departure, each calls attention to groups marginalized by history and works to recover, and perhaps, reshape the narrative. Rather than play on nostalgia, Cruces instills discarded objects with new life, purpose, and meaning. Irish takes on the

Shenny Cruces, from left to right: *Community Heirloom Project: Boy and the Bottle*, 2013, donated objects, porcelain, paint, 32" x 20" x 5"; *Community Heirloom Project: Baby Clouds Panel*, 2013, donated objects, porcelain, paint, 32" x 39" x 6".



heavy history surrounding the Vietnam War, and quietly, but assertively, commemorates events and individuals impacted by the conflict.

In contrast, Chris Antemann pushes gender roles and sexual taboos to the foreground. Her work is both for and about the decadent classes. She consciously recreates and critiques objects that for generations have signified privilege and refinement. At the other end of the spectrum, Rebekah Myers and Tim Berg use the language of pop culture to create shiny new objects that embody the classic American pursuit of upward mobility and the desire to symbolically distance oneself from the past.

Rebekah Myers and Tim Berg, working collaboratively as an artistic team, adopt the iconography of contemporary popular culture to create a new class of coveted objects that embody our longing for wealth and status. The materials used are not in themselves valuable; the gold luster is only a paper-thin layer of the precious metal, while the vitrines and cases are walnut veneer over masonite and styrofoam. Yet, the meticulous and highly polished surfaces speak of affluence, aspiration, and consumption. The Klondike bar, rabbit foot keychain, and horseshoe, are recast, rescaled, and recontextualized. Whether enveloped in glaze, gold luster, or high-gloss paint, these mundane, ritualistic objects are transformed and glow with an inner perfection. They are gilded, both literally and conceptually.

And yet, Myers and Berg also speak eloquently of what lies beneath the surface. The Klondike bar, sold six to a pack in the freezer section, now has a nugget of “fool’s gold” hidden inside—a tongue-in-cheek reference to America’s fascination with money and the rags-to-riches story played out repeatedly in American folklore, from Andrew Carnegie and James J. Hill to Jay Z. Is

this uniquely American quest to rise from poverty legitimate, or a game of luck? Are the tokens of wealth genuine, or will these baubles soon lose their luster, only to be replaced by new symbols? Elevating generic, pedestrian objects to the status of high-class art, Myers and Berg create new tokens of wealth that flaunt the status of the new elite while questioning and even ridiculing this effort as an empty, if eternal, quest.

Rather than transforming the banal as Myers and Berg do, Chris Antemann uses the elaborate, sculptural, centerpieces of 18th-century Europe as a foundation for her work. Historically, these tabletop figures were created from sugar, marzipan, or wax. They commemorated allegorical stories and provided entertainment and conversation starters for aristocratic diners. Since these transient materials were prey to insects and rodents and degraded over time, they were ingeniously replaced by Meissen porcelain in the 1730s. At the time, porcelain was called “white gold” and the material itself conveyed extreme affluence and luxury. Rather than simply referencing the work of Meissen, Antemann goes to the source, working at the German factory and using the rich imagery, skilled craftsmanship, and specialized materials of Meissen, co-opting the very materials and processes used to create symbols of status and power for Europe’s elite.

Early in Meissen’s history, the sculptor J.J. Kändler revolutionized the porcelain figurine and created lighthearted, romanticized, and fetishized vignettes for elaborate dinner services that grew more and more popular as the century progressed. In addition to caricatures of “folk types” such as tailors, turners, cooks, and beggars that romanticized the poor and working class, Kändler’s other “great contribution to figure modelling involved the figures relating directly

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Jane Irish, from left to right: *2006 Pattern Book*, 2006, gouache and egg tempera on watercolor spiral book, 14" x 11" x 1";
2008 Pattern Book, 2008, gouache and egg tempera on watercolor spiral book, 14" x 11" x 1".



to court life, and especially the rituals of love and seduction, the so-called 'crinoline' groups, whereby a fashionably dressed lady partakes of tea, or entertains a gentleman visitor, attired in a huge crinolined dress."⁵ These vignettes portray an idealized concept of leisure, free from work and brewing with scandal and latent sexuality.

These lurking tensions are manifest in Antemann's work. She exaggerates and flaunts these entanglements, taking them from the implied to the actualized. The women no longer have ample cleavage but are in scanty lingerie; the men have moved from hand-kissing to imminent intercourse; the twosomes become threesomes. The compositions still speak of complex intimate relationships, power, and excess, but the narratives are now overt, lascivious, and extravagant; the figures have stepped into a voyeuristic, naughty, and carnal present.

Like Antemann, Shenny Cruces' work stems from Meissen roots as she collects figures that were originally created in European factories, but copied repeatedly the world over. "From the early nineteenth century, these figures began to reflect popular culture, eventually becoming the mass-produced 'flat-back,' which adorned almost every cottage mantelpiece in the country. In just over a century, ceramic figures had evolved from aristocratic table ornament to fairground knick-knack."⁶ As Kändler's figures were copied again and again, they degraded in execution, detail, and value and were transformed into the cheap, sentimental, and pejoratively decorative. In a contemporary context, they are collected and cherished by those often disempowered in today's society—women, children, and elderly. These figures are still made of porcelain and often gilded, but these materials today no longer hold value.

Individually, however, these small luxuries memorialize moments, events, and relationships that give meaning to an individual life. Cruces states, "The act of collecting is an intrinsic part of my process and my work. I actively seek out objects that were once loved and displayed within the home, but now reside within junk stores and resale shops. These objects are now empty vessels devoid of the familial memories they once held."⁷ She recasts, gilds, and organizes the objects into large and purposeful compositions. Cruces uses gold to represent, embellish, and restore value that has been discarded and forgotten. She reclaims the narratives, while acknowledging that value is temporal and only has true meaning in expressing our individual experience.

Jane Irish's vessels are clear descendants of 18th-century Sèvres porcelain, a close relative of Meissen. However, in contrast to the crisp, architectural, Rococo forms, Irish's pieces are pinched, uneven, and asymmetrical. In *Souvenirs*, panels of decoration loosely follow the jardinière's squared structure. Decorative borders between divisions are fluid and traverse uneven ground. Using china paint and luster, her bright, pastel palette creates surfaces that are delicate, sensitive, rich, and painterly. Words of a poem trail around *Katz Pearl Vase*, mimicking the flowing line of the pinched rim and weaving through the exterior space. Irish references classically refined forms that speak of the power, control, and perfection sought by Europe's dynasties. Yet, she chooses to remake these structured shapes and show direct evidence of their creation. The gold luster no longer streams in a perfect line but wavers, revealing the speed and pressure of the artist's hand. She humanizes these symbols of privilege

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Tim Berg and Rebekah Myers, *better an ounce of luck than a pound of gold (expanded edition)*, 2014, gold lustered glazed ceramic, maple, acrylic, wool felt, Styrofoam, 6½" x 15½" x 15½".



through her act of interpretation as an artist and individual maker.

It is the imagery and words Irish uses, however, that give her work layered and deep impact. Irish fills the empty panels and spaces with poems by Vietnam veterans, such as W.D. Ehrhart and John Stulett, drawn in a relaxed script. Other vessels contain political, anti-war imagery within the decorative frames: Lyndon Johnson repeated and turned on his head, Vietnam Veterans Against War rallies, scenes of the Vietnamese countryside post-conflict. Irish's imagery speaks of injustice, fear, and oppression, but her portrayals are once removed; veterans have returned home, lush vegetation has retaken the fields of Vietnam, direct experience has been transformed into poetry. The Sèvres forms stand as symbols and reminders that powerful and affluent empires are built from individual sacrifice, both in the factory and on the battlefield. Her pieces act as a commemoration and a critique of one of the most vilified conflicts in US history. Against the veneer of luxury, Irish nimbly and subversively inserts heroic resistance, war poetry, and the narratives of individuals. Her politics infuse each of these charged and symbolic forms.

In a world of 24-hour news cycles, ubiquitous phone apps, and the omnipresence of the Kardashians, the permanence of objects is compelling. We are bombarded with images, analysis, and opinions and have seemingly unlimited access to data. But, the objects we surround ourselves with continue to reflect our aspirations, values, and experiences and to help us integrate meaning into our lives. Each artist in *A Gilded Age* investigates the cultural politics embedded in these objects, from the glittering novelty of Rebekah Myers and Tim Berg to the overt political commentary of Jane Irish.

Combining historical and contemporary points of reference, the exhibition examines the tokens of a new gilded age and the mercurial nature of value as it shifts in relation to time, place, and context. In the process, *A Gilded Age* asks us to explore and reflect upon our own intimate role in this narrative.

END NOTES

- 1 William Shakespeare, *King John*, IV.2.
- 2 Eduardo Porter, "A Relentless Widening of Disparity in Wealth," *New York Times*, 11 Mar. 2014.
- 3 Edmund de Waal, *20th Century Ceramics*, Thames & Hudson, 2003: 202.
- 4 Adrian Saxe, Artist Statement, 2013.
- 5 Howard Coutts, *The Art of Ceramics: European Ceramic Design 1500–1830*, Yale University Press, 2001: 97.
- 6 Robin Hildyard, *European Ceramics*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999: 66.
- 7 Shenny Cruces, Artist Statement, 2014.

Chris Antemann, *Rosolio*, 2012, porcelain, 10½" x 16" x 7".
Collection of Ted Rowland.





Tim Berg and Rebekah Myers, installation view.





Shenny Cruces, installation view.





Jane Irish, installation view.





Chris Antemann

I attribute my obsession for Baroque curves and ornament to my father and his love of chamber music, which fluttered and tapped with precision into the atmosphere, giving a sense of movement and life to the delicately modeled and lyrically painted world of the porcelain figure.

At MEISSEN, I am able to work directly from the archives, mining new ideas for my sculptures. The proximity to these early models and objects, touched by the hands from the past, brings me to my original source of inspiration. Underneath the brilliant invention and charming humor of these figures, I find subtle, enchanting motifs in the delicate details, in which I read clues to social customs, romantic relationships, and gender roles. In my own work, I have always played with these types of themes and finding them present in the archives of this 300 year-old porcelain manufactory, I am compelled to return to them in my collaboration with MEISSEN. In the ANTEMANN DREAMS collection you will find the tales of trysts and treasures, the tug of war of master and servant, and the pairing of the floral-clad maid with the dominance of patriarchal desire.

Chris Antemann is an American artist known for her contemporary parodies of 18th Century porcelain figurines. Before starting her collaboration with the MEISSEN Porcelain Manufactory in 2011, she lived and worked in the US in the mountains of Eastern Oregon on the grounds of the LH Project, an international residency program for the ceramic arts begun by her husband, Jacob Hasslacher. Antemann holds an MFA from the University of Minnesota and a BFA in Ceramics and Painting from Indiana University of Pennsylvania; she has exhibited extensively in the United States, Europe, Korea, and China. Her work can be found in many private and public collections, including the Museum of Arts and Design, The 21 C. Hotel Museum, The KAMM Teapot Foundation, The Archie Bray Foundation, and the Foshan Ceramic Museum in China. Her artist residencies include The Archie Bray Foundation and The John Michael Kohler Arts Center. Antemann continues to work with MEISSEN in an ongoing collaboration, creating Unique Artworks as well as a collection of Limited Editions, under the brand of ANTEMANN DREAMS. For more information, check www.chrisantemann.com.

Tim Berg and Rebekah Myers

Our work for *A Gilded Age* examines value, both intrinsic and extrinsic. Included in this exhibition are pieces from several different bodies of work, yet each piece overlaps in speaking to the complex nature of luxury, wealth, and status. Parallel to this inquiry, and equally compelling to us, are notions of luck, collecting, and authenticity. Whether it is an attempt to control fate through the coercion of objects or rituals, fetishize the past in systematic and easily digestible ways, or look towards the future with the hope of happening upon something for nothing, our objective is to distill the stereotypical perceptions and associations within our culture into visually compelling objects, sculptures, and installations. Our iconography is drawn from the animals, objects and/or situations that operate as commonplace tropes within our culture. We take these generic stand-ins and invest them with multiple meanings through humorous allusions. The aesthetic decisions we make are informed by the consumer culture we inhabit and our desire to create ultra-smooth forms and high gloss finishes that seduce the viewer. We provoke the audience to consider a world driven by our insatiable desire and our place within that world.

Tim Berg and Rebekah Myers, a studio art collaborative based in Claremont, California, have worked together since 2006. Together they have exhibited both nationally and internationally, most recently in the solo exhibition, *Honest to Goodness*, at Santa Barbara City College in 2014. Other recent exhibitions include *An Embarrassment of Riches*, Dean Project Gallery, New York, New York (2013); *As Luck Would Have It* at Nääs Konsthantverk Gallery in Göteborg, Sweden (2009); and *Affinity*, Icheon World Ceramic Center, Kyunggi do, Korea. Tim Berg holds a BFA from the University of Colorado, Boulder, and an MFA from the New York State College of Ceramics at Alfred University. Berg works as Assistant Professor at Pitzer College in Claremont, California, and has curated a number of exhibitions, most recently, *Tannaz Farsi - Crowd Control* (2012). Rebekah Myers holds a BFA from the University of Colorado, Boulder, and attended the California College of the Arts for additional studies in graphic design. Myers works as a full time studio artist in their Claremont studio.

Shenny Cruces

The act of collecting is an intrinsic part of my process and my work. I actively seek out objects that were once loved and displayed within the home but now reside within junk stores and resale shops. These objects are now empty vessels devoid of the personal and familial memories they once held.

I use recognizable objects associated with collecting and china cabinets to engage with the viewer's sense of home and memory. I collect, cast, recreate and alter existing porcelain objects into sculptural forms to expose the underlying issues of class, sexual identity, memory and the meaning of objects in our lives.

Shenny Cruces received a MFA in ceramics from San Francisco State University, a BA in art from Illinois State University, Normal, Illinois, and a BA in English from Sonoma State University, Rohnert Park, California. She has lectured, taught, and exhibited throughout the US, and currently resides in Vacaville, California. She most recently had a solo exhibition, *Community Heirloom Project*, at the Palo Alto Art Center, Palo, California (2013), and was part of the *NCECA Biennial* at the Houston Center for Contemporary Craft in Houston, Texas (2013). Her work has also been featured in numerous publications, including *500 Figures in Clay, Volume 2*.

Jane Irish

I am inspired by a contemporary fascination with the past and its relevance for the present. What does it mean to re-enact past events, and to re-interpret history through the ever-changing lens of the contemporary? My gift to the audience is to use my imagination to mediate the memory of others; my new combinations contribute to a new narrative meaning. Still, I am a representational painter by nature and intellect, interested in light and space, determined to seek out landscapes from which I can extract living and antic images at first hand. Painting on site in the ineffable lights of Vietnam and along the trails of a troubled America singed by acts of protest and resistance has given me a pallet, created of memory and imagination, mixed as though from actual pigment. Including photographic documentation by artists who are little known, yet made the original journeys, offers both a commentary and a coda.

Jane Irish received an MFA from Queens College, City University of New York, and creates work in both painting and ceramics. She has exhibited extensively on the east coast, particularly in New York and Philadelphia, with her work traveling to the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, Minnesota, for the exhibition *Dirt on Delight, Impulses that Form Clay* from the Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia. Irish's work has been written about extensively and she has been the recipient of numerous grants and fellowships, receiving a National Endowment for the Arts painting fellowship and the Joan Mitchell Foundation Painters and Sculptors Grant. Her work can be found in the Museum of Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, and the Smithsonian Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden. She currently resides in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, where she works for the University of Pennsylvania.

Adrian Saxe, *Untitled Ewer (French Curve)*, 1992, porcelain, gold luster, 11" x 10" x 2".



2014 Regis Master: Adrian Saxe

Born in 1943, Adrian Saxe was exposed to art at an early age. His mother was a colorist for the Walt Disney Studio in Burbank; his parents shared with him their respect for handmade objects. As a child, he experimented with clay from his backyard; he later had his first formal experience with ceramics during a summer session at the Otis Art Institute in Los Angeles, in 1957. For several years, in academia and on his own, Saxe continued his clay exploration and later attended the Chouinard Art School in Los Angeles, CA, from 1965–1969. He was an Instructor of Art at California State University in Long Beach for a year in 1971. He later received his BFA from the California Institute of the Arts in Valencia, CA, in 1974, and prior to completing his BFA, he became Professor of Art (and later Head of Ceramics) at the University of California, Los Angeles, where he still teaches today.

An artist of many honors and distinctions, Saxe was the recipient of a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship; he was named a Fellow of the American Crafts Council, and a Guggenheim Fellow; he was awarded a 2013 Masters of the Medium Award by the James Renwick Alliance of the Renwick Gallery at the Smithsonian American Art Museum in Washington, DC.

His work is collected and exhibited extensively by dozens of museums, including the De Young Museum in San Francisco; the Gardiner Museum of Ceramic Art in Toronto, Ontario; the ASU Museum of Art at the Herberger College of the Arts in Tempe, AZ; the Smithsonian CooperHewitt at the National Design Museum in New York, NY; the Racine Art Museum in Wisconsin; the National Gallery of Australian in Canberra; the Museum of Contemporary Ceramic Art in Shigaraki, Japan; and the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. His solo exhibitions

date back to 1973 with such highlights as the Frank Lloyd Gallery in Santa Monica, CA; Garth Clark Gallery, New York, NY; and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. His work was previously exhibited in the Twin Cities at the Walker Art Center as part of the *Dirt on Delight: Impulses that Form Clay* exhibition, originally produced by the Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA) in Philadelphia, PA.

Called the “postmodern ceramicist par excellence” by Edmund de Waal,¹ Saxe weaves the past and the present, tradition and pop culture, and ceramic process and function into his forms. Saxe’s career in clay has been cyclical, having explored in his early years site-specific sculpture, later the vessel, and still later a combination of the two. He began his work in clay in the 1960s, with the creation of site-specific sculptures that included multiple, large modular ceramic objects. Later, in the early 1970s, he became interested in the social, political, economical, and theoretical context of pottery and has since focused his efforts on the creation of ceramic vessels. In the early 1980s, he received a French Ministry of the Arts Fellowship at L’Atelier Experimental de Recherche et de Création de la Manufacture Nationale de Sèvres in Paris, a surprise to Saxe as the award typically was made to painters, architects, and sculptures. His work was described as “sculpture whose subject is pottery”² by the French Ministry of Culture. This yearlong fellowship afforded him with concentrated time away from life distractions, time in which to re-evaluate work with the vessel form and his “attempt to redefine the relevancy of ceramics and the decorative arts in contemporary art.” Of particular interest and influence to him during his study was the rococo art form of ormolu, an 18th-century process for the application of fine, high-carat gold to a bronze object.

Adrian Saxe, *Hi-Fibre Chicken In Every Pot Magic Lamp*, 1997, earthenware, stoneware, and mixed media, 16" x 11½" x 4½".



Saxe's interest in "objects with implied or imagined capability to facilitate the attainment of one's own desires" led to the creation of a body of work in the 1990s that included magic lamps and mixed-media fetishes that explored irrational desire in objects of agency (wishing wells, fortune-telling contraptions, chalices employed by the Roman Catholic Church, and good luck talismans, among others). Later, he returned again to his interest in small objects "best experienced as an intimate encounter in private spaces"—objects whose own viewing requirements are much different from Saxe's large and theatrical works from earlier years.

Today, his work is a marriage of sorts between these small, intimate objects, wildly ornate in nature, and his earlier, larger sculptures and installations. This contemporary body of work explores Saxe's fascination with the ways in which people define value and keep score, and "how our society constructs meaning in its visual culture and how it rewards irrational significance."

My most ambitious early work in the 1960s was concerned with site-specific sculpture that included large arrays of modular ceramic elements on the walls (and sometimes the floor) that affected and distorted perceptual readings of the space they occupied. Among other things, I was also making small pots, like mugs and oil lamps, to make a living. While these seemed at the time to be mutually exclusive projects, I soon realized I enjoyed a range of approaches to working with clay.

A lot of my work of the last few years has been a return to my early interests in making smaller objects that are best experienced in an intimate encounter in private spaces. This work is in contrast with the didactic and theatrical "court porcelains" associated with me that operate best in dedicated public spaces like the white-walled arena of the museum gallery. My recent objects, like my magic lamps, must be touched, smelled, and animated by indeterminate on-going adjustments of their physical elements accompanied by ambient changes in the light they emit and receive — tactile, fractal, and haptic. I also am using Quick Response codes and Augmented Reality digital enhancements to additionally emphasize the interactive nature of the encounter with the works. I spent most a year scaling up these concerns into a large commissioned installation for the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles, where the viewer physically becomes the variable element moving through the object. I am excited about continuing to explore these previously separate and unreconciled aspects of my work.

END NOTES

- 1 Edmund de Waal, *20th Century Ceramics*, Thames & Hudson, 2003:202.
- 2 Adrian Saxe, Artist Statement, 2013. All further quotations are from this artist statement.

Northern Clay Center

Northern Clay Center's mission is the advancement of the ceramic arts. Its goals are to promote excellence in the work of clay artists, to provide educational opportunities for artists and the community, and to encourage and expand the public's appreciation and understanding of the ceramic arts.

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