

IN
SERVICE:
ENGAGING
AND
CONNECTING
THROUGH
CLAY

Curated by Ursula Hargens

On View March 8 – April 28, 2019

Northern Clay Center in Gallery M

FOREWORD

Sarah Millfelt, Executive Director

The old phrase “it takes a village” was never more present at Northern Clay Center than it was over the past 18 months, as all of my staff worked together and tirelessly to manage hundreds of tasks associated with NCECA’s 53rd Annual Conference, *Claytopia*. Five exhibitions hosted under our roof; five more supported and produced out in the community; a major fundraising dinner in the works for the weekend after NCECA; an offsite gallery at the convention center; and support of NCECA’s *Make In* programming spearheaded by potter, Mark Shapiro—the NCECA conference was the perfect opportunity for NCC to showcase the caliber of its programming, the diversity and excellence of its exhibitions, and the talent and boundless commitment of its staff. As of the production of this catalogue, we are mere weeks away from an event of such magnitude in the ceramics world that the National Council on Education for the Ceramic Arts estimates a potential attendance of 6,000 individuals during the March 27 – 30 conference, held at the Minneapolis Convention Center, but trickling out into the community with over 120 exhibitions in over 80 venues across the Twin Cities.

The Minnesota clay community enthusiastically embraced the promise of the NCECA conference over the past 24 months and worked incredibly hard to prepare a unique clay experience and a warm welcome for our NCECA friends. Some 24 years since the last NCECA–Minneapolis, the clay happenings in this great city, state, and region have grown exponentially. More galleries and art centers are embracing ceramic art; more colleges and universities are ensuring future generations of clay makers and supporters; more makers are toiling away in their studios and are being rewarded for their efforts through grants from the Minnesota State Arts Board and local foundations; more community members are getting in touch

with their inner ceramic artist and pursuing lifelong learning opportunities in clay.

With all of the inherent opportunities for engagement that NCECA creates, what better exhibition to be hosted by Northern Clay Center during the conference than *In Service: Engaging and Connecting through Clay*, which is curated by Ursula Hargens, a ceramic artist, talented educator, and passionate member of the local ceramics community.

In Service: Engaging and Connecting through Clay underscores a growing trend in the craft field: creating opportunities for social engagement through the process of making. In this exhibition, we highlight both artists and initiatives committed to creating meaningful community dialogues, and we included ceramic work made by those sitting at the table as well as those who benefit from this outreach.

This show has been percolating in the mind of our curator, Ursula Hargens, for some time. My own desire was to explore the idea of engagement, not just through the lens of the ceramic artist initiating such, but through a more holistic approach, highlighting efforts from the local potter next door, to the grass roots efforts of a community, to organizations whose work has a national and international impact. We spent much of calendar year 2018 developing the partnerships, activities, and engagement that informed and complimented this exhibition.

We pursued a new iteration of a much respected initiative: the *Democratic Cup: Land of 10,000 Stories*, in collaboration with Ayumi Horie, and with Nick Moen of the Bright Angle. We travelled across the state of Minnesota to host community conversations and our stops included New London, Grand Rapids, Winona, and Northfield.

© 2019 Northern Clay Center. All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission, except in the case of brief quotations embedded in critical articles and reviews.

For information, write to Northern Clay Center,
2424 Franklin Avenue East, Minneapolis, MN 55406.

www.northernclaycenter.org

Manufactured in the United States

First edition, 2019

International Standard Book Number
978-1-932706-50-X

Unless otherwise noted, all dimensions: height precedes width precedes depth.



This activity is made possible by the voters of Minnesota through a Minnesota State Arts Board Operating grant, thanks to a legislative appropriation from the arts and cultural heritage fund, and a grant from the Wells Fargo.

Additional funding and support for *In Service: Engaging and Connecting Through Clay* comes from and Anonymous Donor, Continental Clay Company and the Windgate Foundation.

Our conversations were led by ambassadors who were ceramic artists themselves: Bill Gossman, Nathan Bray, Lisa Truax, and Juliane Shibata. Conversations were sparked by imagery from custom ceramic cups, designed by four Minnesota potters — Linda Christianson, Brett Freund, Peter Jadoonath, and Elizabeth Pechacek — and illustrated with decal prompts that highlight current issues facing Minnesotans, created by four Minnesota illustrators — Jaime Anderson, Kim Bogeman, Ann Ryan, and Julie Van Grol. During the exhibition, visitors are provided the opportunity to connect with others in the gallery over coffee and pie, to discuss political and social issues of impact, civility, and its relevance, and the ways pottery can encourage connection. Both the inhouse conversations and those that took place around the state provided a vehicle for people to gather in fellowship, break down barriers, and discuss difficult topics in humane and thoughtful ways. We literally used the power of a single ceramic drinking vessel to encourage engagement between those who wouldn't have otherwise had or made that connection.

In addition to this interactive aspect of *In Service*, NCC's own 20+ year history of engaging community through clay under its *ClayToGo* program is highlighted, and, specifically, the creative results of our multi-year collaborative outreach with the immigrant communities that have settled in the neighborhoods surrounding NCC. Additionally, we celebrate the efforts of an international organization, Potters for Peace, and their implementation of The Water Filter Project in 35 countries, which provides clean drinking water through simple ceramic technology. We shine light on our local community, Powderhorn Potters, and their annual Empty Bowls initiative, which has raised over a quarter of a million dollars to date. We honor local legend and beloved potter, the late Warren MacKenzie, and his philosophy of pots for the people. Finally, we brought Jeff Schmuki (Savannah, Georgia) to the Midwest for an installation of portable hydroponic community gardens, which employ a recycled ceramic substrate.

In conjunction with this exhibition, Jeff Schmuki was on site at NCC to install this hydroponic garden and a custom ball mill, which tumbles bisqued earthenware (waste from our community classroom program) into growth medium for gardens. Visitors in the exhibition are invited to take growth medium home to their own gardens and the greens grown in the gallery during the

exhibition will be harvested to share with our Seward neighbors over lunch. Schmuki expanded the reach of his visit through a public slide lecture, a guest presentation with our adult education program, and overlap with our 2018/19 cadre of MN NICE artists.

Our village of supporters and enablers of *In Service: Engaging and Connecting through Clay* are too numerous to list, but they span the spectrum of financial supporters, teaching artists, community organizations, potters and sculptors, staff, and volunteers.

Generous financial support came from several entities. Thank you to the Windgate Foundation, Continental Clay Company, and the Serendipity Fund. Additionally, support was also 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.

Individual efforts spanned age, artistic media, and ZIP code. A very sincere thank-you to our curator, Ursula Hargens, for her commitment to the development of this show, amidst several other competing projects on her plate. She touched virtually every piece of the planning surrounding this show and navigated the complex concept of social engagement in general. I'm certain that her efforts are apparent in the thoughtful work samples we've included in the gallery.

Thank you to NCC's exhibitions team — Director of Galleries & Events, Tippy Maurant: you remained steadfast in your efforts to enable the success of the curator and the show in general; you seamlessly changed direction midcourse again and again with the utmost grace; you brought a sense of cohesiveness and calm to an exhibition that would have challenged a team of museum installers. Galleries Manager, Emily Romens: you demonstrated repeatedly your broad skillset and uncanny wisdom for your age. The collective assertive and pre-emptive actions of these staff members enabled a remarkably gorgeous and congruent installation despite the overwhelming number of pieces of didactic material, technological additions, and specific needs for each entity of the show.

To the myriad of other NCC team members (you know who you are!): thank you for sharing so

much of your time with this exhibition and all of NCC's NCECA preparations in general; your output far surpassed my personal expectations (which you know are always set ridiculously high). Thank you to Jill Foote-Hutton for her responsive and consistent work from afar and for ensuring Jeff Schmuki's portion of the exhibition was so thoughtfully coordinated and his visit so deeply connected to our constituencies. Thank you to Alison Beech for almost two years of planning and development of NCC's collaboration with our immigrant neighbors. The gorgeous objects featured in the exhibition are a mere snapshot of the magnitude of our programming efforts with this populace. Thank you to the program partners and interpreters who introduced us to new neighbors and who support our efforts in the classroom. Thank you to the best outreach teaching team in the country who brought their compassion and talents to the classroom each day. Thank you to the designers of the ceramic cups and the illustrators: you took a leap of faith on this project and forfeited studio time to enable our efforts with *The Democratic Cup*. Thank you to our ambassadors for risking reputation, giving us hours upon hours of your time, and inviting us into your community. Thank you Ayumi and Nick for sharing your initiative, for trusting our intentions, and for collaborating on this project.

This exhibition, all of NCC's NCECA-centric programming, and my time in general spent as an onsite liaison for the NCECA conference planning, have yielded the most learning moments for me professionally and, equally, the most pride. I sincerely hope you enjoy this publication and its encapsulation of what is one of the most amazing exhibitions I've been part of in my tenure at NCC.

Potters
for
Peace:
Water
Filter
Project

Jeff
Schmuki

The
Democratic
Cup:
Land of 10,000
Stories

Northern
Clay
Center's
Seward
Neighborhood
Outreach

IN SERVICE: ENGAGING AND CONNECTING THROUGH CLAY

Warren
Mackenzie

Powderhorn
Empty
Bowls

Notes:
1 Jeff Schmuki, copy for 2019 NCECA Journal, "In Service: Engaging and Connecting through Clay."

IN
SERVICE:
ENGAGING
AND
CONNECTING
THROUGH
CLAY

Ursula Hargens

What actions have meaning? How can an artist be a catalyst for positive change in the world? Looking back over the past few years, it feels like we are in a moment of crisis — reports on the changing climate are dire, the debate on immigration rages without resolution, the gap between rich and poor continues to grow, discrimination and human rights abuses persist, and our country is increasingly politically polarized. For artists in every medium, the question of how to reflect these pressing issues is ever-present.

The artists and initiatives featured in Northern Clay Center's (NCC) *In Service: Engaging and Connecting through Clay* view this challenge through a ceramic lens. They use clay strategically by taking advantage of its material properties, its role as a social object, and its power to engage people in the process of making. Collectively, their efforts present models for social engagement that mirror the diversity of our field. Powderhorn Empty Bowls and Northern Clay Center's Seward Neighborhood Outreach show how ceramics can affect one's immediate, local community; Potters for Peace's Water Filter Project illustrates social impact on a global scale. Timelines vary; the duration of Jeff Schmuki's hydroponic gardens is determined by the life cycle of the leafy greens he grows and harvests while Warren MacKenzie's influence is carried into the future by generations of makers he influenced and people using functional pottery in their homes. In *The Democratic Cup: Land of 10,000 Stories*, Minnesota potters and illustrators, local ambassadors, host sites, and town residents unite in a collective effort to create civil conversations reflecting issues critical to Minnesotans.

The initiatives are organized by individual artists, non-profit art centers, and grassroots organizations. They build upon networks of

longstanding relationships and represent weeks, years, and decades of energy and hard work, often without fanfare. Their efforts may enter the spotlight for a moment, but the glow often fades. Yet, they continue to push forward, finding ways to expand their practice and effect change. In a field always looking to the vanguard, these types of initiatives are arguably the most relevant and impactful work being done today and represent an enduring legacy for our field.

Jeff Schmuki
In 2005, Jeff Schmuki's life and work were impacted, cataclysmically, by Hurricane Katrina. His home, in Gulfport, Mississippi, and the small liberal arts college where he taught were both destroyed by the storm. Losing his home, job, and neighborhood within the space of a few days marked an abrupt transition in Schmuki's life. In the aftermath, he fought with insurance companies and lost, got to know his neighbors for the first time, and nursed abandoned gardens back to life. In the years immediately following Katrina, Schmuki became an itinerant artist and professor, traveling from place to place like many in his Mississippi community who were displaced by the storm. This devastation and dislocation caused him to become an activist, and his artwork shifted to focus on initiating conversations around humans' environmental impact, sustainability, and individual action. Regeneration became a central theme of his work and a way of combating his loss.

Schmuki's installation, *Armagardden*, continues a series of hydroponic community gardens that he began creating in 2009. The gardens use recycled bisqueware that is tumbled in a ball mill to produce a growth medium for plants. Recycled ceramics is, as he states, "a perfect growth medium for hydroponics: pH neutral and lightweight, completely reusable once sterilized, porous, and rich in oxygen for root development."¹

Notes:

- 2

Jeff Schmuki, phone interview with author, 23 Jan 2019
- 3

Jeff Schmuki, email message to author, 2 Feb 2019.
- 4

Jeff Schmuki, phone interview with author, 23 Jan 2019.
- 5

Lisa Blackburn and John Hartom, "Empty Bowls Project," *SchoolArts*, October 2007, www.davisart.com/Promotions/SchoolArts/PDF/EmptyBowls_10_07.pdf.
- 6

Lisa Blackburn and John Hartom, "Empty Bowls Project," *SchoolArts*, October 2007, www.davisart.com/Promotions/SchoolArts/PDF/EmptyBowls_10_07.pdf.
- 7

Sarah Bagwell, Powderhorn Empty Bowls President, email message to author, 17 Dec 2018.
- 8

Robert Silberman, 1999 *Distinguished Artist Award Catalogue*, McKnight Foundation, p. 15.
- 9

David Lewis, *Warren Mackenzie: American Potter*, Unicom Management, Inc., 2006, p. 195.
- 10

As quoted in "Remembering Warren," accessed 22 Jan 2019, www.northernclaycenter.org/remembering-warren.

The recycling of failed ceramic projects not only reclaims the energy it took to fire a piece but also imbues it with new life. Hydroponic gardens use up to 300% less water than regular gardens and, as a result, make agriculture viable in places where it is not usually found.² The gardens are intentionally constructed using egalitarian, accessible materials from the hardware store. The NCC gallery installation of *Armagardden* has a running ball mill that recycles bisque ware from Northern Clay Center’s community classes; visitors are welcome to take a bag of growth medium with instructions on how to establish their own gardens.

These fully-functioning community gardens blur the boundaries between utility and aesthetics, and between functionality and symbolism, to incite curiosity and spark conversations.³ They prompt viewers to pause, ask questions, and engage. The gardens represent a renewal of life and raise questions about sustainable food production, equitable access to resources, and our connection to nature. Schmuki asserts, “Issues of climate change and sustainability are stacking up. Simple actions can lessen our footprint, and our individual choices and daily actions add up and make a difference. Real change takes a community.”⁴ *Armagardden* is designed as a community collaboration, which builds and renews ties between people and creates spaces where open discussion and collective action can happen. This iteration of Schmuki’s ongoing project will be tended, harvested, prepared, and eaten in a shared meal as a partnership between Northern Clay Center and Soup for You! Cafe, located in Bethany Lutheran Church, across the street from Northern Clay Center.

Powderhorn Empty Bowls

The Empty Bowls Project is a grassroots effort, started in 1990 by Lisa Blackburn and John Hartom, as what they thought would be a one-time fundraiser for their Detroit school district’s food drive. They enlisted Hartom’s high school ceramic students to make 120 bowls, prepared a meal, and asked for a \$5 donation. After the meal was over, they told their guests to keep their bowls as a reminder of all the empty bowls in the world.⁵ Hartom writes about their reaction, “People clutched the bowls to their chests. Some wept. We knew that something very powerful had happened and that we had both the opportunity and the responsibility to see that the magic of that moment not be allowed to end.”⁶

The energy Blackburn and Hartom captured

that day grew, and the Empty Bowls Project has become a mainstay of ceramic programs around the world, raising tens of millions of dollars to fight hunger over the past 29 years. The project provides a broad framework, and institutions and community groups are free to organize their meal provided that they: use handmade ceramic bowls, serve a meal of soup and bread, collect donations, donate funds raised to organizations in their local community combating food insecurity, and send guests home with their bowls. The bowls perform both a practical and a transactional role during the event itself, and they continue to function in these roles as they travel into people’s homes. They serve as a call to action and a daily reminder of the inequity that persists within our communities.

Powderhorn Empty Bowls was established in 2006 in South Minneapolis, and their annual community meal is now woven into the fabric of the neighborhood. As of 2018, they have received 17,270 donated bowls, raised \$283,010, and given funds to 10 different food shelves and soup kitchens. In 2013, they established a Fellows Program that provides support to young, emerging potters, furnishing them with studio space for a year, 500 pounds of clay, and a \$100 materials grant in exchange for making 100 bowls and helping at the event.⁷ The Fellows Program completes the circle of support, so what began as a flow of assistance from potters to their community has looped back to help young artists, encouraging them and confirming their value in the neighborhood.

Warren MacKenzie

Much has been written about Warren MacKenzie since he passed away on December 31, 2018. A remembrance of MacKenzie was one of the most viewed articles on Minnesota Public Radio’s website in the week following his death. Not only was he revered in the field, he was also a local hero—a potter Minnesotans knew by name. His pots traveled outside of ceramic circles where they were incorporated into people’s lives and homes. MacKenzie intentionally sold his pots for modest prices because he wanted them to be used in daily life, not placed on the mantle or viewed in the gallery. He firmly believed in making pots for the people—affordable and accessible to ordinary Americans. The thousands and thousands of pots that MacKenzie made in his lifetime have made their way onto dining room tables where people gather for good food and conversation. In the NCC gallery, the table set with his pots displays his work in the way he wanted it to be

seen—in context and in use. Robert Silberman, who has written extensively on MacKenzie, asserts, “MacKenzie holds a democratic view of pots. I suspect that, after the right to vote, MacKenzie would next uphold the right of all citizens to have good, affordable, handmade pots, with their most important civic duty being to use them.”⁸

As someone who made pots throughout his career, MacKenzie understood that craft objects tell stories and link people together through shared history and meaning. They form direct communication between maker and user. MacKenzie believed that getting to know a pot takes time and that a “slow understanding” builds over years between maker and user, creating community and expressing a common human experience.⁹ He once said, “I want to reinforce the sense of traditional values in people. The sense that in our brief tenure on this earth, in spite of the great problems we face, there are larger themes, maybe even timeless themes which transcend us. At the same time, I want my pots to express those themes with immediacy and emotional spontaneity.”¹⁰ In MacKenzie’s view, pots have the ability to connect us—to convey a common humanity, create connections between individuals, and democratize the art experience. The objects themselves are relational objects that carry content and create deep, intangible links within communities.

The impact of MacKenzie’s philosophy and actions have rippled through the generations of studio potters he inspired and mentored. Many potters working today can trace their lineage to MacKenzie, and his influence in the region cannot be overstated. Through his life as a studio potter, teacher, and advocate for ceramic education, he fostered a vibrant ceramic community in Minnesota. The friends and colleagues, who settled near him in the St. Croix River Valley, fired kilns, organized sales, and ate together. They formed an engaged community that considered the way objects carry social value. They incorporated this understanding into their working methods and interactions with the public. MacKenzie’s lifestyle epitomized socially engaged craft through a community-based, object-focused art practice. It was this practice, sustained over decades, replicated by many, that built and transformed communities. Using handmade functional pots to form meaningful human connections is, perhaps, his most lasting legacy. These values, embodied by MacKenzie, continue to inspire potters across America.

Notes:

11 Outreach classes were held at: Seward Tower East, Seward Tower West, Cedar High Apartments, Riverside Senior High-Rise, James R. Heltzer Manor, Village at Franklin Station, Matthews Recreation Center, and Hiawatha Towers.

12 Alison Beech, NCC's Manager of Community Engagement, email message to author, 1 Feb 2019.

13 English Interpreters: Hibo Abdi, Jima Ahmed, Tefsa Balcha, Abdurahim Buse, Ismail Harun, Suleiman Isse, Catherine Lee, Abduselam Mohammed, and Aden Samatar. NCC Teaching Artists: Elizabeth Coleman, Risa Nishiguchi, Claire O'Connor, Angie Renee, Chris Singewald, and Lucy V. Yogerst. Community Liaisons: Deqa Adan, Faisal Aideed, Ahmed Bani, Katie Bartels, Kerry Cashman, Scott Krueger, Marilyn Matheny, Aisha Mohamed, Bill Melton, Andrea Nettles, Nasra Noor, Mahdi Nur, Rhonda Peterson, and Melinda Struder.

14 Claire O'Connor, NCC teaching artist, email message to author, 29 Jan 2019.

15 Risa Nishiguchi, NCC teaching artist, email message to author, 26 Jan 2019.

16 The Democratic Cup Conversation Toolkit, accessed 22 Jan 2019, cdn.shopify.com/s/files/1/1280/4739/files/THE_DEMOCRATIC_CUP_CONVERSATION_TOOLKIT.pdf?5170164826150716874.

17 Ayumi Horie, "Introductory Letter to Participants," emailed to author, 7 Sept 2019.

18 The Democratic Cup Conversation Toolkit, accessed 22 Jan 2019, cdn.shopify.com/s/files/1/1280/4739/files/THE_DEMOCRATIC_CUP_CONVERSATION_TOOLKIT.pdf?5170164826150716874.

19 Our creative partners are all residents of the state of Minnesota. Ambassadors for this project included ceramic artists Nathan Bray, Bill Gossman, Lisa Truax, and Julianne Shibata. Form makers included Linda Christianson, Brett Freund, Peter Jadoonath, and Elizabeth Pechacek. Illustrators included Jaime Anderson, Kim Bogeman, Ann Ryan, and Julie Van Grol.

Northern Clay Center's Seward Neighborhood Outreach

The Seward and Cedar-Riverside Neighborhoods, in which Northern Clay Center is located, are the center of East African immigration in the United States. The Cedar-Riverside neighborhood is often referred to as "little Mogadishu," and Minnesota's Somali population is considered one of the largest Somali diasporic communities in the world. NCC has a history of creating deep-rooted outreach programs, especially in historically underserved communities. In 2014, NCC set out to increase access to the ceramic arts among the East African refugee and immigrant populations in the immediate neighborhoods. Teaching artists held multi-week workshops at NCC and in the nearby apartment towers where many East Africans live. NCC's efforts continued on a larger scale in 2017 and 2018, and they partnered with three local organizations, Seward Neighborhood Group, Matthews Recreation Center, and the VOA High-Rise Social Services.¹¹ With funding from a Minnesota State Arts Board Arts Access Grant, NCC hired translators to work with its outreach teaching artists since participants from Somalia and Ethiopia speak many languages including, Somali, Arabic, Oromo, Amharic, and Tigre.¹² Additionally, activities drew participants of Korean, Indigenous American, and European American descent. The translators were critical in cultivating connections between instructors and participants, conveying content, enabling discussions, and sharing jokes within the group. The pieces in the NCC gallery exemplify work made in 94 ceramic classes held over a 12-month period.

The rewards of this type of outreach are hard to quantify, but it is clear from interviews that the experience of working in clay opened avenues for cultural interaction and exchange between teaching artists, translators, participants, and, by extension, with NCC.¹³ As teaching artist, Claire O'Connor, recalled, "Weekly, as we worked, I heard [from participants] about pastoral lives in their homelands, about refugee camps where many were forced to shelter from chaos and violence, and, finally, about immigration and settlement in a new and very different culture." As teaching artists listened to the life stories of these immigrants, participants engaged in clay as a way of sharing in local cultural values. Since many immigrants don't have a lived experience with ceramics, they learned to appreciate a material and way of working that are part of Minnesota's local culture.¹⁴ Clay became familiar, and NCC became a welcoming place with which they had a new connection.

The classes also encouraged teaching artists and participants to reflect upon assimilation and cultural adaptation. In interviews, one man spoke about the novelty of working side by side with women — something he would never have experienced in his native country. Another discovered joy in a material and process he had previously dismissed as lower-class. A woman spoke of fostering friendships in her building and of worrying about her neighbors if they missed a session. Teaching artists adapted projects to reflect participants' interests and values. Teaching artist, Risa Nishiguchi, described her experience after an interpreter suggested making Somali incense burners called "Unsi." "As participants watched my demo, I saw their faces light up with fascination and curiosity to try it themselves. The 'Unsi' not only demonstrated the challenge and joy of cultural exchange but also the beauty and individuality that emerged when creating. There is so much energy when they get their work back — they laugh, joke, and praise each other. I don't know what they are saying, but their voices communicate warmth, community, and happiness."¹⁵ Clay, an inherently engaging material, becomes a vehicle for connection and community. It is used, not for its potential as an object, but for its ability to transform the relationships that surround it.

The Democratic Cup

The Democratic Cup began in the run-up to the divisive 2016 presidential election by potters Ayumi Horie and Nick Moen. It was conceived as a "slow activism" project designed to create positive social change in the world by using cups to encourage civic discourse.¹⁶ Northern Clay Center invited *The Democratic Cup* to explore a Minnesota-based iteration of the project for *In Service*. Potters, illustrators, and ambassadors from around the state collaborated to create a series of porcelain cups with illustrations highlighting issues critical to Minnesotans. The cups were shared during conversations held in four towns in greater Minnesota (Winona, New London, Grand Rapids, and Northfield) during the 2018 midterm election season. NCC selected ambassadors from the greater ceramics community, who then invited people from across the socio-economic, racial, generational, professional, gender, and political spectrum to meet and discuss topics significant in their community. The cups traveled home with participants to serve as a catalyst for future interactions with friends, neighbors, and even strangers.¹⁷ In the gallery, the cups are shown

alongside audio and photos of the sessions and serve to document the conversations. During NCECA, a private discussion space will allow ceramic conference-goers to meet and talk with locals over a cup of coffee and a slice of pie, providing a unique opportunity for personal connection while visiting the Midwest.

Minnesota is, in many ways, a perfect location for the project given its strong support of functional pottery and its tradition of gathering with neighbors around a cup of coffee. Building on the assertion — long held in the ceramic community — that handmade objects help us notice and appreciate the world we inhabit, *The Democratic Cup: Land of 10,000 Stories* invests this sentiment with renewed urgency. Horie asserts, "At the most fundamental level, we believe that conversations have the power to forge relationships and that functional objects, like the kind we are making, foster the success of this interaction. Being civil should not be taken as a superficial attempt at niceties, but as a genuine way to honor someone's full humanity through understanding."¹⁸

In scheduling conversations this past autumn, many individuals invited to participate were reluctant to sit down and talk to people they disagreed with since they were anxious about inflaming discord within their local communities. A few people canceled on the day of the event. Their reticence revealed an underlying fear present in our current political climate and illustrates the need to create safe spaces for honest discussions between diverse groups. In the community conversations held in each town, participants spoke openly and earnestly about values instilled by their parents, challenges confronting disrespectful language, and the role of fear in political discourse. They discussed the effort required to listen to and empathize with others and the connections made in everyday places, like the hardware store or coffee shop. Reaching across political and cultural divides is a goal often touted but difficult to achieve. *The Democratic Cup: Land of 10,000 Stories* provides a vehicle for people to gather in fellowship, break down barriers, and discuss difficult topics in humane and thoughtful ways. It harnesses the power of a ceramic cup to stimulate social engagement.¹⁹

Potters for Peace: Water Filter Project

Potters for Peace (PfP) established its first water filter factory in Nicaragua in 1998 to meet a desperate need for clean water in the aftermath of Hurricane Mitch. PfP used a ceramic filter

Notes:

20 Potters for Peace, "About Us," access 19 Jan 2019, pottersforpeace.org/?page_id=8.

21 Robert Pillers, Nicaraguan Water Filter Coordinator, email message to author, 6 Nov 2018.

22 "Water," accessed 19 Jan 2019, www.un.org/en/sections/issues-depth/water/.

23 "An Economic Crisis," accessed 19 Jan 2019, water.org/our-impact/water-crisis/economic-crisis/.

24 "Water Filter Project," accessed 19 Jan 2019, pottersforpeace.org/?page_id=63.

25 Robert Pillers, Nicaraguan Water Filter Coordinator, email message to author, 25 Jan 2019.

designed in 1981 by Dr. Fernando Mazariegos of the Central American Industrial Research Institute (ICAITI) in Guatemala.²⁰ Since this time, the Water Filter Project has helped over 50 craftspeople in 35 countries set up sustainable businesses to produce the filters using local labor and materials. The factories run as independent businesses owned by organizations and individuals and range from "mom-and-pop pottery families to semi-industries capable of producing a thousand filters a day."²¹

Every year 1.5 million children in developing countries die from diarrhea caused by unsafe water.²² A lack of potable water not only determines mortality rates but accounts for billions of dollars in lost economic opportunities as women and girls spend hours each day collecting water.²³ Demand for clean drinking water is expected to increase as the global population rises and climatic change disrupts the water cycle. Ceramic water filters are a highly effective, inexpensive, low-tech way to combat this crisis with local materials and labor. The terracotta pots, treated with colloidal silver, are capable of removing 99.88% of all waterborne disease agents.²⁴ The filters do not require electricity and last for an average of 24 months. PfP provides training and a wealth of resources for establishing water filter production factories, including clay testing protocols, necessary machinery and equipment, burnout material selection, kiln firing, and packaging finished filters for transport. The organization uses an open source manufacturing model that can be replicated around the globe to share information and increase its potential to help people in need.

In the gallery, ceramic filters are stacked alongside several water receptacles created by Nicaraguan potters. The receptacles hold the filters and marry life-saving ceramic technology with local ceramic traditions. The local potters use their clay-forming methods to integrate the filtration system into personal, domestic spaces. The receptacles on display also represent connections built over decades between potters living in both developed and developing countries. This 20-year effort continues today, and, collectively, the factories manufacture over 1/2 million filters per year worldwide.²⁵ It demonstrates how networks of potters can use their deep material knowledge, technical expertise, persistence, and strong work ethic to directly impact the health and well-being of millions of individuals globally.

Each of the six partners represented in *In Service* leverages the unique properties of clay and its role as a social object to engage communities and effect social change. These initiatives, installations, and pots illustrate the creative potential and enduring impact of ceramic materials. Clay is transformative. It opens avenues for meaningful exchange and interconnection. When raw clay is transformed into a ceramic object, it connects us to the most fundamental aspect of our shared experience as humans—the need to grow, store, serve and share food. But clay is also a technology with transformative health and economic benefits. It is entwined with our sense of community, humanity, and purpose. *In Service* calls upon us, as ceramists and as human beings, to examine and renew our commitment to forging connections, imagining new possibilities, and using our talents to create a brighter, cleaner, more equitable, and just world.



Jeff Schmuki, *Armagedden*, 64" x 41" x 70"
(Garden), 44" x 37" x 14" (Ball Mill)



*"My work is not really meant for exhibitions anyway.
It's meant for the home."*



Warren MacKenzie, Dinner Table installation,
20.5" x 96" x 36", individual artworks vary in
size, Nancy MacKenzie, *Weeping Willow Abstract*
centerpiece, date unknown, 18" x 24" x 14", courtesy
of the LaNasa Family. Photos: Bouky Labhard



Northern Clay Center's Seward Neighborhood
 Outreach, 2018, 40" x 96" x 6", individual artworks
 vary in size



Democratic Cup: Land of 10,000 Stories, 2018,
Brett Freund (form) with Jaime Anderson
(illustration), Liz Pechacek (form) with
Kim Bogeman (illustration), Peter Jadoonath
(form) with Julie Van Grol (illustration), Linda
Christianson (form) with Ann Ryan (illustration)



Potters for Peace, 2018, *Water Filters*,
47" x 49" x 12"

28

NORTHERN
CLAY
CENTER

Northern Clay Center’s mission is to advance the ceramic arts for artists, learners, and the community, through education, exhibitions, and artist services. Its goals are to create and promote high-quality, relevant, and participatory ceramic arts educational experiences; cultivate and challenge ceramic arts audiences through extraordinary exhibitions and programming; support ceramic artists in the expansion of their artistic and professional skills; embrace makers from diverse cultures and traditions in order to create a more inclusive clay community; and excel as a non-profit arts organization.

Staff

Sarah Millfelt, Executive Director
Tippy Maurant, Director of Galleries and Events
Emily Romens, Galleries Manager

Board of Directors

Bryan Anderson	Bonita Hill, M.D.
Nan Arundel	Mark Lellman
Mary K Baumann	Patrick Kennedy
Craig Bishop	Kate Maury
Heather Nameth Bren	Brad Meier
Evelyn Browne	Debbie Schumer
Nettie Colón	Rick Scott
Sydney Crowder	Paul Vahle
Nancy Hanily-Dolan	

Director Emerita

Emily Galusha

Honorary Directors

Kay Erickson

Legacy Directors

Andy Boss
Warren MacKenzie
Joan Mondale

northern claycenter

2424 Franklin Avenue East
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55406

612.339.8007
www.northernclaycenter.org