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## Form in Place

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FORM IN PLACE

by

NORMANDY ALDEN

A THESIS

Presented to the Faculty of  
The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska  
In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements  
For the Degree of Master of Fine Arts

Major: Art

Under the Supervision of Professor Peter Pinnell

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## FORM IN PLACE

Normandy Alden, M.F.A.

University of Nebraska, 2014

Adviser: Peter Pinnell

There is a 200 acre farm in central NY state where I am building a house, a business, a family, a life. My vision for these extends beyond my own capabilities and lifespan. It is a vision of elegance, simplicity and utility. My pots are reflections of this vision, and embody the qualities of the life I seek. They are both exuberant and quiet, expansive and constrained.

The landscape surrounding my farm swoops and recedes with grace. Lines of windrows curve over hayfields, beautifully articulating undulations in topography. Nothing about this agricultural landscape is incidental. The lines and textures I appreciate aesthetically describe farming practices, cultural values, and histories of tax code. The diagonal lines on the exterior of my pots operate similarly to the windrows they reference: they describe and enhance form, as well as reveal how we are circumscribed by our tools.

I make cups with comfortable handles and soft curving volumes to invite use. Tiny feet maintain a sense of balance and delicacy. Handleless cups further underscore the soft cradle of the human hand. A cradle is an apt metaphor for the home and land. It inspires the large bowls I make. The fermentation jar directs the viewer to both ancient, practical methods of food storage as well as the contemporary food movement's interest

in understanding and making our own foods. My work encompasses a broad definition of vessels, from the very practical coffee cup to the nearly sculptural landscape bowls. This range reflects the many dimensions of my relationship with the land. The beauty of a sweeping hill out my window and the reality of working its field pairs an ideal and a practical in a way which leaves me riveted.

My work is influenced by historical pottery forms particularly from the 10-14th century Iran, the Goryeo dynasty of Korea, and the Chorerra pots of Ecuador. These references share carefully composed positive and negative spaces. I see an all-encompassing sense of balance and a lasting tension in these old pots. I align myself with the anonymous potters of the distant past who achieved mastery through repetition knowing that this alignment is full of contradiction. Porcelain, as a material of refinement and purity, is somewhat at odds with the humble and domestic activities associated with rural farm life. This exquisite material elevates this work and the mundane tasks of everyday and I choose it for its strength, whiteness and sensuality.

My intentions are made explicit by the refined and regular quality to my work. The looseness of the color application, (and the random crystals in the glaze when color is not present) bring an important dissonance to the rigidity and refinement of my forms. The kind of volume I want is ample and beginning to succumb to gravity. I like generous curves constricted by a delicate foot, or waistband-like hip. I am interested in spaces which create visual tension only satisfied by physically interacting with the pot: lifting a lid, turning it over.

The landscape, homes, people and businesses which compose a place carry power. This potency is our own, when we make our homes truly expressions of our values. Our character is both reflected in our surroundings, but also shaped by it. I see my work as offering a vision of a future yet unrealized.