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# Object Landscape

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OBJECT LANDSCAPE

by

Stuart B. Gair

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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## OBJECT LANDSCAPE

Stuart Gair, M.F.A.

University of Nebraska, 2017

Advisor: Peter Pinnell

The ceramic objects I create possess a particular buoyant volume and subtle organic surface variation that enable each piece to stand-alone and yet to allure the viewer in for closer examination. A particular articulation of each form creates an aesthetic that allows the object to occupy a space in such a way that evokes a sense of balance and harmony with a minimal domestic setting. Interests in historical forms that possess a full sense of volume provide a framework me to explore proportion, line, edge, silhouette, and transitions. I pare down these qualities to their true essence while still evoking a historical familiarity. The form and surface of each vessel provides ample opportunity for me to express my interest in elements of the natural world that bring about a sense of calm and inquisition of process. I am drawn to ways in which geological forms are manipulated by external forces in nature and the history that can be unveiled through the result of that weathering.

Each piece serves a utilitarian purpose as a vessel for serving, storing, or displaying and also possesses characteristics that enable it to stand alone as an individual and have its own quiet, yet confident presence. I am drawn to the striking contrast presented by a balancing boulder or bale of hay in an open field. These objects positioned in relation to their surroundings occupy a vast space. I think about a similar placement of objects when I am considering how each vessel poises itself in a domestic landscape. The

minimal quality of the forms enables them to integrate into a space, to complement the room, and yet the command recognition. A vase, decanter, pitcher, or bowl contains volume when displayed and also contain food for utility. These utilitarian objects serve to contain liquid or food, but also serve to contain and express the idea of volume.

An examination of objects used by past cultures has informed the ways in which I consider precise details in my work. My understanding of formal elements has been greatly enhanced by my inquiry of specific Korean, Chinese and Native American wares. There is a historical familiarity embedded in each piece that is far removed from its original context. I remove sundry elements from the original historical forms that I find detract from their true essence. The result is an object that possesses a minimal quality which emphasis balance and volume. I give my work careful consideration; the wheel-thrown forms are taut but not restricted. Each form has a sense of inflation in which proportion is emphasized and there is an uninterrupted line from the base to the upper edge. Particular attention is given to the silhouette of the object, the angle at which it meets a surface, symmetry, and the curvilinear line that flows from the table to the top edge of each object. Lines and patterns accentuate form and further emphasize a feeling of inflation and expansion coming out from within. Surface variation and color are subtle and complex, drawing a viewer in from a distance and prompting discovery of depth upon closer examination. The complementary nature of the studio and the natural world drives an evolving aesthetic and frequently challenges me to think about my work in new ways. This conscious awareness and examination of formal elements and spatial relationships in my immediate environment, and in the larger milieu of utilitarian form, drives the development of my work and my studio practice.



There is an integration of natural lines that are organic and responsive into my work. I am particularly interested in the ways in which lines interact with landscape in natural ways. Tilled rows on farmed land meander around hills, lakes, and tree lines and accentuate the topography of the land. The erosion of rock highlights the path of wind and water to create countless formations and patterns. This movement that is created in and around rocks and dirt naturally accentuates areas and highlights curves and edges in the same ways that I use surface to bring attention to the volume and topography of an object. I enjoy the ways that these lines convey the underlying form of the landscape and inner structure of geologic formations through erosion. In a similar way, I integrate surface into the internal structure of each piece I create. In translating this organic line quality into my work, I accentuate the form of each piece by carving or painting the surface. Lines flow around bulbous areas where the volume of the pot is most prominent and congregate in areas where edges meet, much like water flowing in and around rocks during its decent downward.

My studio practice is influenced by my experimentation with firing processes and materials. I have developed a particular method of firing that enhances each vessel's volume. By placing a raw, unglazed pot in a particular location of the kiln, the flame's current wraps around the vessel and leaves its trace upon the surface, accentuating its volume. Certain choices of clay body, and careful control of atmosphere create a harmony within the kiln in which a range of dark muted hues of gray, navy, and maroon are created, paired with highlighted moments of warm colors. The wall hanging pieces entitled *Flow I*, *Flow II*, and *Flow III* presents the range of color that is achieved through the use of different materials and firing techniques. Surfaces are captured that are

reminiscent in color and variation to natural landscapes that I have encountered which possess a quiet energy. Plates and platters that are hung on the wall speak to a duality of function and display. These forms may be used to serve or observe.

The manner in which I view the world around me and study the history of ceramics contribute to an evolving aesthetic in which I respond to my interests and environment through the pots I make. I find it deeply satisfying to live a life in which there is a reciprocal relationship between what I make and how I observe the world around me.







