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Growth

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GROWTH

by

Taylor Sijan

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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Growth

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University of Nebraska, 2021

Advisor: Peter Pinnell

I craft functional pottery that is richly decorated with layers of abstracted botanical imagery. While working within the parameters of function, I explore the possibilities for expressing and evoking beauty through altered porcelain forms and lush surfaces. As a potter, I create forms that inspire curiosity and interaction through a balance of originality and suggested function. I connect myself to others through the intermediary of the vessel, conveying my reverence for plants, nourishment and beauty. People then interpret how to use my work, adding their own sentiments as it becomes part of their lives.

Pots live in the home, bridging the gap between purely visual art and daily rituals, and between artist and appreciator. When the COVID-19 pandemic abruptly forced me out of my consuming studio practice, I spent months at home among the pottery my partner and I had collected from friends, colleagues, and mentors over the years. I noticed the objects around me appeared to remain the same as the day I first obtained them, but with time they had accrued deeper meaning through use. These vessels triggered memories of people or events that were deeply personal and sentimental. In the absence of new experiences with loved ones, the objects I associated with them became more precious as poignant mementos from those times.

For my thesis exhibition, I have crafted an abundance of joyous, functional pottery and utilized several different strategies for display to communicate with the audience. There is a handmade, walnut table easily capable of seating six people, which has been intentionally set for breakfast for two. It symbolizes the intimacy and domestic life I experienced during the initial pandemic lockdown. The missing place settings signify the absence of the people I wished to be able to share the most important meal of the day with, my family or closest friends. The pots displayed on walnut shelves are intended to promote a sense of being present in a home amongst a collection of individualistic pots. By displaying them against the wall, the viewer is encouraged to pick them up in order to see the entirety of each piece. The celebratory sets elevated on black pedestals are expressive of my bittersweet nostalgia: for moments spent with friends and family around the table, having conversations centered around a meal or a drink. They are elevated this way to communicate that they have been set aside as if in mourning, temporarily divested from participation in their intended purpose until the day we can once again gather and celebrate with those we care for.

Beauty can carry us through even the darkest of times. Beauty provides a pleasurable emotion which overwhelms, gives us pause, and causes us to focus our attention. It is necessary, not frivolous, to seek such experiences and hold onto objects which evoke those moments. It is a transformative feeling which gives one's life deeper meaning and compels us to love and cherish that which we find beautiful.

Decorated pottery historically depicted that which was valued or revered by the culture that produced it. Ephemeral beauty could be frozen and preserved in ceramic for thousands of years. I find beauty in nature, particularly in plants, and am fascinated by

medicinal herbology and the cross-cultural history of utilizing plants as medicine. It is through working with plants and clay that I have been able to cultivate who I am. I decorate each pot with abstracted botanical imagery as an homage to my sentiments about beauty and my identity as a participant in these traditions.

It is human nature to desire to elevate a mundane object into something that can be celebrated as special. Decoration increases the potential for emotional connection to a handmade object because it indicates that the object has had time and skill invested into making it unique. However, for many people, decoration can be a signifier to not touch because it implies preciousness and value. I attempt to get people to overcome this initial reaction and physically engage with the work because my pots are intended to participate in either the solitary rituals or celebratory events in someone's life. To encourage interaction, I have developed strategies to encourage a person's eyes and hands to move around the form, into the interior, and underneath. Every step of my process relies on layering to create visual and tactile depth to encourage this experience. My method for constructing combines throwing, altering, and handbuilding to build vessels that are then adorned with dynamic, asymmetrical surface design. Seams resulting from adding or subtracting from the form are often intentionally left to signify the handmade nature of the work and its intentional construction. I aim for complexity to inspire curiosity about how it was crafted and beckon a person in closer to investigate. The compositions on each pot feature abstracted plants in service to creating movement around the piece by weaving painted, slip trailed, and stamped motifs around the surface. My technique for layering underglaze colors involves collage with laser cut paper resists and additional hand-painted details. The resists are cut from digitally manipulated silhouettes of real

plants, either pressings or photographs. This allows me to employ specific plants symbolically on my work, focusing on evoking a sense of dense foliage rather than a naturalistic representation. I create a sense of harmony by balancing quieter spaces for contemplation with abundant areas of celebratory color. Visual complexity is further explored in the translucency of porcelain as light shines through it, the sparkle and softness of sugary, crystalline glaze, and the movement of glossy glaze resulting in drips of glass off the undulating forms.

The works I have displayed communicate my ideas about beauty and function, and speak of my identity as an artist living through the COVID-19 pandemic. By challenging the predictable symmetry of wheel-thrown pots and emphasizing visual depth with abundant colors and textures, my work entices the viewer to explore these unique objects and imagine how they might be used.





















