

Maker's Mark: Elegant and Intimate Functional Pottery

Alison Murphy

Abstract

The work Ali Murphy chose to present for this exhibition has taken a much different direction than her work of the recent past. When she began working in ceramics six years ago, she started as a hand builder. Hand building is a ceramic practice that utilizes processes such as rolling slabs of clay, pinching clay, and other hand-manipulation techniques. When Murphy came to school at Millersville, she began to learn and practice the technique of wheel throwing, which is wet working clay on a rotating potter's wheel. She states that she feels the two techniques, while both valid and important approaches to working with clay, are extremely different in not only approach, but also meaning, purpose, significance, and intimacy. For the past three years, she has primarily focused on the technique of wheel throwing. Murphy says this became more of a monotonous task rather than an enjoyable passion like ceramics previously was for her. While searching for her needs as a maker to be fulfilled again, she returned to her roots of hand building due to outside artist influence and fell in love with ceramics again. The approach of hand building has changed the process, intent, and meaning of the work dramatically, and she is eager to share this shift in her practice with others.

I am a ceramic artist that focuses on creating functional pottery through hand building and wheel throwing techniques. In handmade work, I value the remanence of the makers mark, such as indents and curvature created by the artists handling of the material. I allow my work to retain these marks throughout my process and I embrace its presence in my pieces. The memory and reaction of clay plays a large role in my work, and I enjoy the collaboration between medium and artist.

My approach to the work in this particular body has included slab rolling and pinching techniques as well as utilizing "slump molds," which is a process where wet clay is situated in/on/around a solid form so that it will take its shape. I cut and pinch the pieces after they are removed from a slump mold in order to get the exact form and texture that I am attempting to achieve. I focus a lot of time on smoothing out rough/blemished areas while being mindful and careful to retain the ripples, bumps, and divots created by my hands through the making process. I feel as if



these remaining marks tell the viewers a very important story. It lets them know that these pieces were made individually by an actual human with care and intention. Maybe it will ignite questions in the viewers mind such as, "What was the artist thinking when they created this?", "Why did the artist create this work?", "What is the meaning behind this texture, and why did the artist leave it here?" Questions such as these feel successful to me because no matter which question they may be asking, they are usually directing it towards an artist and not towards production sources such as stores, companies, or

factories. The work creates a one-on-one relationship with the artist and viewer, and that makes viewing and utilizing the work that much more personal.

When it comes to the aesthetic choices regarding the final steps in the process such as glazing, I tend to be attracted to monochromatic themes and maybe one or two variant elements. I am certainly more of a minimalistic artist. I often prefer a simple black and white palette. These colors, or the lack of color I suppose, gives me a feeling of elegance, cleanliness, simplicity, comfort, certainty, and stability. In this body of work, I chose to add an element of gold to act as a variant. The touch of gold is my way of adding aesthetic beauty and allure.



This work from start to finish is an embodiment of my process, concepts, opinions, involvement, preferences, goals, and intentions in relation to my ceramic practice. I feel as though I am no longer making work to fulfill criteria, for a grade, for overall approval, or for production. On the contrary, I am making it for myself as a practicing artist, for the needs of artistic impulse, for the craft, for the connection to the ceramics community, and for the connection to those interested in my work whether that may be owning it or viewing it.

My ceramics practice creates a sense of peace, satisfaction, reflection, and pride within me that only occurs when I am creating. The wish I have for my work is for it to be used in home life and for the owner of each piece to assign the work its meaning and function that best suits its use in their lives. I hope my work can be the vessel for your

morning coffee, the platter you serve Christmas dinner on, or the plates used at your grandmother's birthday party. The personal interaction experienced through the creation and use of pottery is my main reason for creating, and I hope that this intended purpose can continue to be fulfilled by my work.

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