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DAILY RHYTHMS

A Thesis

Presented in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts

in the Department of Art and Art History

The University of Mississippi

by

WILLIAM MCCOMB

May 2020

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ABSTRACT

In a time when isolation has become the status quo, *Daily Rhythms* stands as a reminder of the power of human connection. Through careful composition and grouping, the utilitarian pottery in this show suggests that users allow themselves to connect - with objects, with meals, and with company.

Formally, the functional ceramics of *Daily Rhythms* balance strength and grace, curve and angle, stasis and movement. Decoration is minimal and textural, comprised of gestural marks made in the wet clay. Possessing a directional and rhythmic energy, the marks are a visceral record of the process of making. They offer a reminder that another human has reached out through material to serve, support, and enrich your daily life. Matte glaze surfaces amplify underlying textures through dynamic strata of color and finish. Groupings of pots work to evoke the social interactions that unfold around a shared meal.

With dynamic surfaces and forms that explore subtle implied meanings, *Daily Rhythms* is meant to be slowly contemplated, not rapidly consumed. Serving steadfastly, these works are made to be lifelong companions. In an era of ever accelerating consumption, when our experiences are growing more ephemeral, solitary, and disposable I am committed to objects that feel solid in their physicality. As utilitarian objects, I hope that they can bring a sense of humanity and character to user's intimate daily rhythms.

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CHAPTER I:
INTRODUCTION

Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique essence at the place where it happens to be.

-Walter Benjamin¹

In music, rhythm forms the basic underlying architecture that organizes tones into coherent structures. Without rhythm, there can be no melody, and sound descends into chaos and dissonance. In a sense, the life and excitement of a piece of music owes to the dynamism of its rhythm. In a parallel, utilitarian pottery forms the underlying structure to our daily routines involving food and drink. Overtime these routines can even take on ritualistic undertones, needing to be performed with specific objects, at specific times, and in a specific order. Not unlike the score to a piece of music. So how can a pot add dynamism, energy, or interest to routine or does it not carry this mantle? The utilitarian ceramic works in *Daily Rhythms* are exactly concerned with this responsibility. It is the suggestion of this show that the objects we use are both a reflection of and active participant in the richness of our daily lives.

The functional ceramic works in *Daily Rhythms* explore the deeper connections both physical and social, between users and vessels. When arranged as sets, the spatial relationships

¹ Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." In *Art and Theory 1900-2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, ed. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 521.

between individual objects evoke both the intimacy and isolation imposed on people by social gatherings. Some groupings force individual objects into close proximity, while others place objects at a distance from each other. Even in the modular sets, though, the cohesive aesthetic scheme implies a greater unity that supersedes perceived divisions. While the arrangements of objects, such as a group of closely clustered tumblers, initially were conceived as a comment on how we remain firmly entrenched in our own individualities and life perspectives, even while engaged in conversations, *Daily Rhythms* was completed after the imposition of COVID-19 isolation. If seen through the lens of that context, the body of work also expresses the frustration of separation and the yearning for human contact and social engagement again. The work in *Daily Rhythms* is open-ended enough to allow for such interpretive fluctuations, depending on the viewer's disposition toward social gatherings.

Individual pots call attention not only to the meal for which they serve, but also to the material, to the process, and to the hand of the maker. Regular patterns that distort into expressive textures are formed by rhythmic gestural mark-making in wet clay. Glaze surfaces seek to simultaneously emphasize and obscure both surface and form. Obtained through a mixture of both atmospheric firings and standard reduction glaze firings, the surfaces embrace the serendipitous, the varied, and the ephemeral. Just like dynamic rhythms in a musical composition, the variations within patterns and between related objects in *Daily Rhythm* sets up an interplay between expectation and excitement.

CHAPTER II.:

FORM

It is the pervading law of all things organic and inorganic, of all things physical and metaphysical, of all things human and all things superhuman, of all true manifestations of the head, of the heart, of the soul, that the life is recognizable in its expression, that form ever follows function. This is the law.

*Louis Sullivan*²

The works in *Daily Rhythms* explore their topic through the language of utilitarian pottery. Though their concerns, both aesthetic and conceptual, extend beyond the realm of function first and foremost they are objects designed for use. The American architect Louis Sullivan coined the famous phrase “form follows function” in reference to architectural design. His thoughts have subsequently been applied to all genres of design, most notably by functionalism-focused Modern artists and designers engaged in Russian Constructivism and the Bauhaus school. Sullivan’s words often are interpreted as a call for giving form a back seat to purpose. Modernist designers and architects translated Sullivan’s thoughts as a call for minimalist, efficient, and simple forms and structures. But perhaps Sullivan had something grander in mind. A fitting revision of his famous aphorism might be “form *expresses* function.”

² Louis H. Sullivan. “The Tall Office Building Artistically Considered”. *Lippincott’s Magazine* (Philadelphia), March, 1896. p. 403-409.
<https://archive.org/details/tallofficebuildi00sull/mode/2up>

The function-focused work in *Daily Rhythms* remains true to Sullivan's ideas by distilling and expressing both form and finish in service of the fundamental use the objects serve.

Coffee Set 1 (Figure 5) is a good exemplification of this notion. The set is composed of two mugs and a coffee pot displayed on a simple rectangular stand. The scale relationship between the objects immediately implies the mechanics of function. The coffee pot in this set is designed for serving or sharing hot coffee for two people and thus holds roughly 4 times the volume of one of the mugs. That's two cups each - a nice start to the morning. There are, however, more subtle relationships at play. The dramatic upward curve of the coffee pot handle seems to pull against the weight of the pot. It's upper curve points toward the spout, implying the direction the pot will tilt when pouring. The spout mirrors the curve of the handle, expressing the fluid trajectory of coffee when being poured. All three pots have a full curvilinear volume as though the air inside is (or the coffee when full) is pushing out against the walls like an inflated balloon. Imagining the walls of the pot being stretched by air or liquid alludes to the malleability of wet clay. The overall effect is to imbue the forms with a sense of life, like a lung inflated with a full inhalation of air, ready to release, to breath out, at any moment.

Over the course of the production of work for *Daily Rhythms*, subtle evolutions in form took place in order for the effects noted above to take full force. This is aptly illustrated by comparing *Coffee Pot 1* (Figure 6) with *Coffee Pot 2* (Figure 7), the prior being made during one of the earliest making cycles of this thesis, and the latter being made near the end. The economy of line and the subtly arching foot of the earlier pot, *Coffee Pot 1*, draws direct inspiration from the vessels by Dame Lucie Rie (Figure 1), such as *Vase with Fluted body*. This was intended to add lift to *Coffee Pot 1* while highlighting the energetic textures of the upper registers. Rie has

employed a very similar strategy in *Vase with Fluted Body*. While *Coffee Pot 1* was trimmed with gestural lines, the overall impression is one of quiet and restraint.



Figure 1. *Vase with Fluted Body*
Dame Lucie Rie.
c. 1980
Stoneware with Glaze

By contrast, the foot of *Coffee Pot 2* is bolder and more substantial. This work reveals inspiration from Antique Greek amphora such as *Amphora with Musical Scene* (Figure 2), with its powerful rim and foot that act as a frame and counterpoint to the elegant curves of the body. The foot of *Coffee Pot* is well-defined and powerful, splaying outward as it reaches to the table. The foot is intended to express visual strength without feeling heavy, while also reiterating the horizontal divisions of the rest of the pot (particularly the lid). These divisions act essentially as a framing and stabilizing device in both *Amphora with Musical Scene* and *Coffee Pot 2*. The intention was to increase the sense of stability and power to the form of *Coffee Pot 2*. On a functional level, this makes the forms more balanced and less likely to suffer from tipping over, despite the relatively small ration of foot width to body width. Aesthetically it helps to

emphasize, by way of contrast, the curvilinear volume of the body and the gestural movement of the textural marks.



Figure 2. *Amphora with Musical Scene*
460 -450 BCE
Red Figure Type
Terra Cotta
Wheel Thrown

One final change to form occurred only in the last cycle of this thesis and can be seen clearly in *Coffee Pot 3* (Figure 8). In this work, not only do we see the final evolution of the characteristics highlighted in *Coffee Pot 2*, but we also see that a dramatic undercut now precedes the foot. The severity of this trimming approach was inspired by Momoyama era tea bowls from the Mino region of Japan (16th century) – particularly the black and yellow Seto styles and Shino ware. *Shino Teabowl known as “Shinkyō”* (Figure 3) typifies this aesthetic. Its stout cylindrical form seems to have a mass and strength that never gives way to a sense of heaviness. Its dramatically undercut foot allows it to float and dance while embodying a subtle asymmetry, almost as though the clay is still in motion, still being formed by the air around it.

While *Coffee Pot 3* does not strive for quite the same level of asymmetry and its foot is intentionally more substantial, the notion that mass might be made to feel weightless was nevertheless influential in this final body of work. The curve of both spout and handle lead the eye upward and in to the space above the pot. The point of the lid and its knob, as well as the final trajectory of the rim and the path of the body's curve also lead the eye upward. Floating above its foot, the effect is one of lift and elation. Yet, we can still see that powerful foot resting below, grounding the form. In this way, *Coffee Pot 3* combines all the elements of the above influences. It balances strength, with grace, curvilinear volume with angular structure, and mass with lift.



Figure 3. *Shino Teabowl known as "Shinkyō"*
Momoyama Period (1573-1615)
Japanese
Stoneware

The question remains: What point do these visual expressions of function serve? The work in *Daily Rhythms* argues that a pot expresses its physical energy through its visual language, and it also has the power to ground a user's attention in the object, the meal, and in the enjoyment of company. For example, my morning coffee ritual is enhanced by expanding my

collection of pots. I put great care into the quality, preparation, and consumption of my coffee because the pots I use are the products of great care.

The work in *Daily Rhythms* aspires to be put to daily use, to spark in its users memories of cherished meals, and invites them to connect to the work. Fundamentally, pots have a potential to elicit an intimate response from viewers and users because, not in spite of, their essential functions. By serving a function that is hardwired into human survival, the work in this thesis show hopes to elevate that fundamental experience.

Daily Rhythms also plays with the tensions between accessibility for regular use and an art-like presentation. It challenges the notion that functional objects such a pottery ought to disappear when not in use. This body of work is interested in giving these objects the power to communicate and excite viewers even when they are not being used. Sets like *Coffee Set 1* (Figure 5), for example, reframe the usual visual presentation of utilitarian objects. This set can exist as a sort of modular utilitarian sculpture when not in use. In essence it gives these objects a home other than the cabinet and a visual life when not in use. The mugs and coffee pot have a visual hierarchy (explored in more depth in Chapter III.: Gathering), and the stand has an expressive visual power. The relationship between the pots and the stand further expresses the tensions between functional objects and objects displayed for aesthetic enjoyment, because they become both.

The stands in *Daily Rhythms* are designed to be humble objects of service. In contrast to the pots they support, they are quiet and economical in their use of line. In *Teaset 2* (Figure 9) we can see the teapot and yunomi (teacup) have more complex forms, and more dynamic glaze finishes than the stand beneath it. Its simple oval form is a subtle reflection of the volumetric

forms atop it. It acts less as a tray and more as a pedestal. The pots are effectively put on display, asking the viewer to consider them as visual objects. With that being said, the stands are not simply neutral backdrops. They act as compositional elements, suggesting groupings and arrangements of pots. Although their finish and surface are subdued, they are nevertheless carefully considered and share parallels with the pots. These aspects will be elucidated further as this thesis goes on to discuss how *Daily Rhythms* probes issues of interpersonal relationships, the hand of the maker, and the expressive relationships between surface and color.

CHAPTER III.: GATHERING

Meals often serve as moments of repose and reflection. In the rush of daily life, the simple act of enjoying a cup of coffee in the morning bolsters one for the stresses and strains of the day ahead. Brunch with friends can help you recharge and reconnect. Of course, we often neglect the potential of meals to enhance our daily or weekly rhythms, choosing meals prepared with speed, convenience, and enjoyed in contented isolation. Nevertheless, the work in *Daily Rhythms* suggests that well-crafted pots can facilitate the enjoyment of the meal as a space for connection. It explores the notion of intimacy, of sharing a connection, closeness, and vulnerability with oneself and others. These things are expressed in the objects' functions (as usable objects) and their compositions.

Individual objects such as *Teapot 1* (Figure 10) and *Mug with Stand* (Figure 11) speak to a solitary, personal relationship between the object and its user, and to the meal for which it serves. Daily life can sometimes feel isolating and repetitious. Handmade objects help to break this monotony by creating nodes of visual excitement and physical connection, but that may not always be enough. It is essential to be able to connect with other people, to recharge and solidify our networks of love and support. Multiple-user sets such as *Mug Pair* (Figure 12), *Tumbler Set* (Figure 13), and *Dinner Set* (Figure 14) explore the dynamics of a shared meal and of social interactions. A shared meal is an essential part of reconnecting with others. It is a time when

emotional connections are forged over good stories and food. The imposed isolation we are experiencing during the current global COVID-19 pandemic has made this need for social connection even more essential. Physically trapped in our own very limited living spaces, we long for human interaction. Digital resources have attempted to fill the void, and certainly, it is a blessing to be able to see the faces of loved ones and friends. Still, they are no substitute for face-to-face connection, just as an image of a cup is no substitute for the feel of the cup, for the dynamic way that it reveals itself in space.

Groups of pots such as *Mug Pair* (Figure 12), while still evoking a sense of intimacy through inviting users feel the texture, also functionally reference the connections between their users. Physical proximity of objects in sets like this one also implies psychological distance between users by the relative placement of objects on their platforms, and/or in relation to each other. For example, the negative space around the vessels in *Mug Pair* may accentuate solitary use, or the sharing of a drink by two people. The pedestals supporting *Mug Pair* appear to fit together like puzzle pieces. Here, they are kept apart, which creates visual tension, a desire by the eye to resolve the space between the two pedestals by uniting them (physically and psychologically). Even while sharing an intimate meal or coffee/tea with a close friend or significant other, a psychological space remains. We only ever get to know one another so much. Some part of our minds and hearts always remains hidden, despite our desires to come together. To further accentuate this intimacy gap, the mugs' stands are not of equal heights. This hierarchy is not meant to imply superiority, but to comment on how conversation might take place. One user is elevated in the attention – or, in the flow of conversation – as they speak or act.

Again, though, at no point is the unity of the gathering broken. Despite apparent hierarchy, both participants are fundamentally connected through gathering.

The larger sets in *Daily Rhythms*, by contrast, force more forms into a smaller space, creating the intimacy of touch and the anxiety of crowding. For example, the objects in *Tumbler Set* (Figure 13) mimic the crowded guests at a dinner party in a modest home with a small table. They also allude to the dense city skyline, as skyscrapers nestle and jockey against one another, competing for visual dominance while blending into the whole. This is not unlike the social dynamics at a small dinner party. Each person strives to contribute and to be heard, while the conversation blends into a (hopefully) harmonious whole. The tumblers suggest use by staging an imaginary version of the psychological state they are intended to facilitate.

Alternatively, the physical closeness could imply intimacy, joy, and/or extreme anxiety, depending on your perspective. *Tumbler Set* suggests that while conflicting states of mind often occur in social situations, engaging in a shared experience ultimately unites people. This interpretation has been complicated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Today, a group of eight people standing this close together would be anxiety-inducing, and may be grounds for arrest. In this context, the tumblers also begin to speak to a yearning for closeness, a desire to be allowed to be together in a small group socially, and stand tall and confident while gathering.

Dinner Set (Figure 14) also explores the visual dynamics of a group gathering. Imagining a small dinner gathering with friends, or maybe a family meal, *Dinner Set* is composed of four plates resting atop four chargers. Like the stands in *Daily Rhythms* the chargers are monotone, dark, and geometrically minimal. They offer a contrast to the more dynamic plates atop. Ultimately though their purpose is to organize the four individual plates into a larger, unified

composition. Each charger is a perfect square, aside from a small square chunk missing from one corner. These corners come together to create a centralized square out of the negative space. Each charger/plate set is separated from its neighbors by a narrow aisle of negative space as well. The visual overall effect is to evoke the ways that we come together through a meal and conversation. Although individual diners are all unique, they blend together through the common motif of the meal to become a part of unified whole, without ever losing their unique identity. In fact, it is the space between them, their differences that allow the composition to be complete. The dynamic variations on the common theme, the black, smoky carbon trapping on the plates, the rhythmic gestures on the rims of the plates and in the inner spirals – these create a sense of excitement and joy.

Although Covid-19 has robbed us of the connection we feel to other people, it has arguably also robbed us of our sense of self. Through pieces like *Dinner Set*, *Daily Rhythms* suggests that in gathering our unique natures are not submerged but put on display. Together, we form a rich tapestry of individual stories unified by a common desire for affection, socialization, and touch – and of course, for food.

CHAPTER IV.:

TOUCH

The pots in *Daily Rhythms* recognize that their function is an inherently touch-oriented experience, and one that must be satisfying to the user. The cups in this thesis, however, add an extra layer. Mark-making acts not only as a visual pattern that provides interest and energy, but also as a textural element, beckoning touch by the user as it references the hand of the maker. Ridges of clay touch the users' lips and meet the users' fingertips as they run fingers along the ridges to explore the rhythm of the gestures. A personal physical connection is made between the hand of the maker and the hand of the user.

Although gestural marks are a way to enabling simple forms to convey more visual and spatial interest, they also speak to the influence of Abstract Expressionist painting and Momoyama era tea wares upon *Daily Rhythms*. Like those precursors, my mark-making records a physical trace of the maker at a moment in time. The prominence of gestural marks ensures that the record and presence of the maker is at the forefront of users' minds. The commitment to these marks of the hand is fundamentally unlike that of industrially mass-produced ceramic wares. These objects are designed and produced in such a way as to obscure process and material, and by and large they have no individual maker to record. The overall effect is one of anonymity and isolation. Each pot in a collection looks just like every other version of itself

owned by any other person. The works in *Daily Rhythms*, by contrast, seek to be individually unique, allowing for a personal and singular bond with the user.

Wet clay is an immediate and physical medium. It records every mark, every movement, and every touch from the potter. It conveys a record of touch, intention, and process. The works in *Daily Rhythms* take advantage of this property in order to create dynamic textural patterns and to record marks of process. To achieve surface textures, pots are marked with gestural patterns while still wet and spinning on the potter's wheel. Variations in the pattern are achieved by making subtle changes in the pressure applied to the clay with a tool, altering the point of contact with the wall of the pot, and changing the angle of the tool. These variations create a dynamic pattern. At various points, the pattern is interrupted to create an intentional sense of uncertainty as to whether it will continue around the form. As noted before, this uncertainty beckons exploration, helping to make the object more dynamic and more interesting.

The mark making in *Daily Rhythms* is perhaps the most literal expression of the notion of rhythm that appears in the title of this show. Being made by pressing into the wall of an object spinning at a fixed rate, they are a metronomic record of pace. Slight changes in the speed of the wheel or in the rate at which the tool is pressed into the wall of the pot change the distance and resonance between one mark and the next. Each mark falls on a beat. By changing this beat, the patterns become more varied and expressive.

Looking at *Plate 1* (Figure 16) and *Mug 1* (Figure 17) we can see expressions of this rhythmic variation. In *Plate 1* the rotational nature of the marking is perhaps most evident. This is due in part to the circular shape of the pot, which mimics the circular spin of the potter's wheel. It is not hard to imagine a tool, making swiping motions at a consistent speed, leaving

these imprints in the slowly spinning plate. To emphasize this effect, a spiral was pressed into the plate by applying pressure with a flat tool while moving it horizontally out of sync with the spin of the wheel. The spiral becomes a record of motion, and a record of the hand and tool that pressed it into the clay. By contrasting motion and consistency, the rhythm of mark making is revealed.

Mug 1 on the other hand, because of its vertical nature, cannot as easily display the spin that it was subjected to during mark making. Instead, careful inspection of the textural pattern itself reveals variation in rhythm. We can see, just left of center, how the swooping lines collide with each other, and overlap. Like a dissonant melodic passage in a piece of jazz music, the collision of different rhythms and trajectories eventually resolve back into a synchronous pattern. This tension and release is a manifestation of a release of control and an embrace of the serendipitous, within a consistent and regular structure. That in and of itself is perhaps the core investigation of this entire thesis.

Further, while *Daily Rhythms* makes use of a relatively small and consistent group of textural patterns, variations from one form to another help to create a sense of rhythmic variety throughout the body of work. To see this variation in pattern, we need only compare two similar forms, such as *Yunomi 1* (Figure 18) and *Yunomi 2* (Figure 19). Both forms are essentially identical except for the mark making in the upper register. Close inspection, however, reveals similarities in the pattern as well. Both sets of marks are essentially composed of a series of overlapping arcs that travel up and to the left, traversing the space between foot and rim. Yet the differential between textures, caused by using different tools to make the marks, and by varying the interval between marks, displays a sense of exploration. *Daily Rhythms* is not interested in

uniformity – it is interested in the imaginative leaps that happen in the intervals between variations on a theme.

The foot also is another site for inserting the hand of the maker. Every trimmed foot in *Daily Rhythms* is unique. Each trim line is an eccentric, asymmetric mark that resulted from a wheel turning out of pace with the motion of the trim tool. This intentional and expressive use of a technical “mistake” points out two rhythms moving out of sync with each other, but which come together to form a dissonant harmony that is richer than that of a synchronous pattern. These trim marks are on display in the detail of the foot of *Yunomi 2* (Figure 20) and by looking at the lower register of *Mug 2* (Figure 21). The height of *Mug 2* allows to see the vertical effect of these trim lines, while the foot of *Yunomi 1* allows us to see them as a sort of surprise, a discovered detail. Both reveal a diagonal succession of trim lines reminiscent of an abstract representation of a tornado. They express a spiraling, upward energy. In a sense, these lines constitute another sort of pattern, a frozen record of the syncopated rhythm formed between hand and wheel.

Finally, if we examine the stands in *Daily Rhythms* we find a related sense of touch, albeit more subtle. An examination of the stand in *Tumbler Set* (Figure 13) reveals that what appear to be randomized textural marks. They are actually gestural traces left by the metal scraping tool that was used to refine the surface. These marks are intentionally ambiguous. Care was taken to avoid making the stand distract from the pots it supports. Instead, these marks reveal themselves only through close inspection and exploration, and reward such close looking.

The underlying theme of all of the work in *Daily Rhythms* is human connection. Touch is the most immediate expression of this. I have already described how touch allows the user to be

aware of the maker, but it also helps both user and maker to be more aware on the relationship to material and process. Through rhythm and force, the maker must be in accord with the potential and the physical response of the material. Even a slight failure to be attentive would cause the delicate balance of asymmetry to break. The maker must be utterly accepting of the marks that unfold, of the imperfections that accumulate, without becoming apathetic. A dramatically swooping spiral can capture motion and rhythm, but it could just as well have captured how the spinning clay has left behind the maker. Both are in some sense, acceptable marks if the maker is to accept imperfection. Yet, the mark that is truly desirable is the one that produces the elegant spiral. It is the product, to some extent, of chance, of serendipity. Some plates will not receive the elegant spiral and will have to be set aside, casualties in the search for a rare visual harmony. The notion here is that the exceptional nature of this mark is communicated to the user. It is clear that not every pot receives the same power of mark, and no two pots are identical. Users and viewers are then asked to consider that each pot arises uniquely and fully formed from an underlying pattern of work. The pot before them, or in their hands, is an utterly singular expression of this pattern. In *Daily Rhythms* the work offers users a chance to connect to the utterly unique and rare moment where process and material come together in a harmonious rhythm.

CHAPTER V.:

SURFACE

The color palette and glaze surfaces of *Daily Rhythms* were inspired in equal measure by the rural countryside of the Southeastern United States and by the Abstract Expressionist and Neo-Expressionist paintings of Gerhard Richter, such as *Abstraktes Bild (742-4)* (Figure 4). In Richter's paintings, rich fields of color bleed into one another as rigid lines breakdown into blurry fields of color and implied pattern, like fields that have gone fallow and overgrown, the spaces where man-made clearings give way to forests, or where agricultural structures like barns begin to weather and collapse, merging with the landscape. Richter's abstract paintings speak of this blending as rigid, vertical lines give way to expressive fields of color. The viscosity of Richter's paint is apparent as it catches on, and pulses against, underlying layers.

Furthermore, Richter was concerned with the subtle variations that could occur as the result of using non-traditional pigment applicators. Wiping a massive squeegee across layers of paint or wiping layers of paint away with his bare hands yielded atmospheric fields of color that revealed the materiality of paint and his visceral painting process. Although the colors of my glazes differ from his bright saturated and vibrant color palette I am interested in the ways that base layers bleed into overlapping layers, creating atmospheric effects. They have a contemplative air, but also demand exploration when applied to a three-dimensional object like a cup. The glazes and fired surfaces on the pots in *Daily Rhythms* also interact with the underlying

textures to enhance a sense of material and of glaze surface, while also working to distort and transform the underlying patterns.



Figure 4. *Abstraktes Bild (742-4)*
Gerhard Richter
1991
Oil on Wood

For example, in *Teaset 2* (Figure 22), I used a green crystalline matte glaze that breaks to a rusty brownish red where it is applied thinner on the pots. A similar, but darker, glaze is applied to the stand. The way that molten glaze accumulates and thins over the textural striations of the pot reminds me of the rhythmic variations of Richter's abstract paintings while referencing landscape and the ceramic medium itself. What could have been a monochrome surface treatment, has given way through the variable processes of accumulation to yield a rich field of color. Similarly, the variable application of glaze on the stand has alternately obscured and revealed the material beneath. Although the behavior of a glaze is predictable to some degree, the glazes used in *Daily Rhythms* are highly sensitive to slight changes in application thickness

and firing temperature. When they melt and interact with the variable surfaces of the textural patterns they take on serendipitous configurations of color and surface.

Looking at a detail of *Mug 3* (Figure 24) we can see that the variegated glaze is working in concert with the vertical swoops of the surface texture to create an atmospheric colorfield reminiscent of Richter's *Abstraktes Bild (742-4)*. Pulling back to look at *Mug 3* (Figure 23) as a whole we can see that the appearance of various color effects is variable and not entirely predictable. Where it has thinned and changed color to a rusty orange along one ridge, it has remained thick and green, or even pooling into a dark blue along other ridges. The final effect is to suggest a sort of directional movement of glaze that mimics the arcs of texture and amplifies the variability of the pot.

Daily Rhythms embraces uncertainty and the release of control. It seeks processes and glazes that are not entirely predictable. The serendipitous creates more opportunity to emphasize the hand and creates visual excitement. It also allows more space for individual experience. In the pristine and the predictable we can only find sterile outcomes. One viewing is enough. The works in this show strive to be explored, to reveal more with each look, each use.

On soda-fired works such as *Teapot 2* (Figure 25), this directional and variable quality is even further emphasized. The surface of this pot is alternately dry and then shiny, the color palette subtly shifting from orange to burgundy to gray-blue to cream. The driest areas are the brightest, with high points such as the tip of the spout being a light, crusty, grey-blue, and the area of the body just inside the handle is orange fading to a dark brick red. This change of surface results from the inherently inconsistent and directional build up of sodium glass that occurs during a soda firing. A mixture of sodium carbonate (a cousin to baking soda), baking

soda, and water is sprayed into the kiln at peak temperatures, instantly becoming a vapor and being pulled through the kiln along natural draft lanes. Where it hits the red hot pots, it sticks to and forms a glaze with the molten silica in the clay body. Where the right amount of sodium builds up and sufficient heat is achieved in the kiln, a shiny glass is formed. If the sodium is too thick or the temperature is insufficient a crust of partially melted glass forms on the surface. When it is too thin, an effect known as flashing takes place, causing the reds and oranges to form. Each piece comes out completely unique, and no square inch of the pot is entirely the same as the adjoining area.

Wood-fired works such as *Serving Bowl* (Figure 26) are similar in their variability. Though it is wood ash from combusting wood in the firebox, the notion of directionality and inconsistent accumulation is the same. The extra element in a wood kiln is that the wood ash begins to melt and flow, further emphasizing and interacting with underlying textures creating a dynamic drippy effect. The cratered surface of the glaze gives it a skin like appearance. It is in fact a modern recreation of the shino glaze found on *Shino Teabowl known as "Shinkyō"* (Figure 3). The same glaze type is found on the plates in *Dinner Set*. Fired in a different kiln, this version of the glaze develops its surface patterns, shifting from smoky black to cream to orange, by the accumulation of free carbon particles in the kiln. The effect is known as carbon trapping and is notoriously difficult to reproduce or predict. With so many variables, it is essentially impossible to perfectly predict how any given piece will come out of the kiln. This uncertainty is precisely the goal of the glaze surfaces in *Daily Rhythms*.

CHAPTER VI:
CONCLUSIONS

Daily Rhythms is a meditation on human connection expressed through the visual language of utilitarian pottery. It is an attempt to explore how people relate to one another, to themselves, and to daily routine through the objects they use, in specific for eating and drinking.

Certainly, this thesis has not achieved all that it set out to do, and its goals have shifted through the making. The work was originally more minimalistic and modernist. It grew to incorporate historical influences (such as Greek pottery), and to become more defined in its formal relationships (most notably the foot ring of trimmed pots). This led to the realization that rim and foot are not passive endpoints, but active participants in the aesthetic of the piece. As that happened, visual tensions were brought into higher relief and new explorations on the nature of harmonious contrasts were suggested. Moving forward, I would like to further refine the tension between soft curve and rigid angularity in my forms.

Touch was always an essential component of the work in *Daily Rhythms* but became an increasingly central point as the work evolved. Especially with the plates in *Dinner Set* I finally came to a realization of how mark, rhythm, pressure, and form can all work in conjunction to add a lively asymmetry and energy to work. This is something I would like to dig more deeply into. My tendency has been to hold back, to lean toward control. Moving forward I would like to focus on making works with an even greater sense of intentional abandon and gestural asymmetry.

Originally concerned mainly with atmospheric firings, the work grew to embrace glaze surfaces. Through their fluidity and color, it began to engage with the rich history of abstract painting that had been a latent influence on the work since the beginning. It was something of a revelation for me when I realized that glazes had this potential.

As I begin the next body of work I will also be investigating new ways to bring energy and variety to my glaze surfaces. Intentional surface contrasts (ie: gloss v. matte) could enliven the visual effect through contrasts Color saturation and vibrancy, as well as surface variegation, are all qualities that could enhance the relationship to painting. Clay body choice could also influence this. Through all of this I hope to reinforce the dynamism of the work and embrace a freedom from absolute control. It is a thrillingly open field of investigation.

Stands were a later addition to *Daily Rhythms*, originally just a way to display sets. As they developed they revealed visual relationships that were proxies for social relationships. The proximity of objects as they stood together on a single stand began to speak of distance, or lack thereof. This led to the notion that pots need not occupy the same stand, but that a unified composition of multiple stands for multiple pots could imply physical relationships without physical touch. Through form and surface, they began to speak of architecture and of nature - and those dialogues influenced the pots. The pots became more crisp and structural, while their surfaces became more bold and asymmetrical. Both stand and pot moved ever further toward an embrace of marks of the hand. These changes grew the work's expressive powers by breaking them out of the monotonous uniformity of consistent reproduction. Each piece can be approached as a unique variation on a consistent theme.

While the exploration of stands as metaphors for human interaction is fertile ground, I am also interested in exploring the aesthetics of hand-built minimalist ceramics in and of itself. An investigation of this sort would begin a dialogue about the limits of utility, and how a utilitarian object may begin to drift into a more sculptural or visual realm. I could see serving vessels, vases, and centerpieces all being made with the same coarse, minimalist language. These objects occupy an unusual interstitial space within the realm of utility, being almost as much visual functional. In that users don't drink from them, and only briefly lift or move them, some of the concerns of weight, comfort, and finish that apply to tableware like cups and plates are lifted. Instead they form a sort of visual and ritual architecture for the act of eating. Therefore, even if other pots aren't literally sitting on top of them, they are still creating a dynamic display structure for the utilitarian objects.

I remain committed to the utilitarian ceramic vessel as a potent means of communication and visual expression. Pottery allows me to connect to the active life of an art object that I was unable to find in any other medium. The thought that these pots might find a second life in someone's home is thrilling. In some sense the objects only become fully realized when they go into use. Users complete the art in the most literal sense. Interestingly, pottery has been engaging with this aspect of contemporary art since its inception. That maker and user are ultimately co-creators in an artistic experience that centers around food and family has been the inspiration for *Daily Rhythms*. My hope is that the exploration begun here will sustain my practice for many years to come.

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APPENDIX A: FIGURES OF WORK

Figure 5



Coffee Set 1

12”h x 14”w x 6”d

Cone 10 Reduction

Stoneware with multiple glazes

Figure 6



Coffee Pot 1

10”h x 6.5”w x 5”d

Cone 10 Soda-Fired

Stoneware with Flashing Slip and Glaze

Figure 7



Coffee Pot 2

8”h x 6.5”w x 5”d

Cone 11 Soda-Fired

Stoneware with Flashing Slip and Glaze

Figure 8



Coffee Pot 3

7”h x 6.75”w x 5”d

Cone 10 Reduction

Stoneware with glaze

Figure 9



Teaset 2

12''w x 8''h x 6''d

Cone 10 Reduction

Stoneware with Glaze

Figure 10



Teapot 1

6" w x 6.5" h x 5" d

Cone 10 Reduction

Stoneware with glaze

Figure 11



Mug w/ Stand

5”h x 5”w x 4.5”d

Cone 10 Reduction

Stoneware with multiple glazes

Figure 12



Mug Pair

8" w x 5.5" h x 4" d

Cone 11 Soda-fired and Reduction Fired
Stoneware with Flashing Slip and Glaze

Figure 13



Tumbler Set

14”h x 12”w x 12”d

Cone 12 Wood-fired Stoneware

Cone 10 Reduction-fired Stoneware

Glazes and natural woodash

Figure 14



Dinner Set

24" w x 4" h x 24" d

Cone 10 Reduction

Porcelain and Stoneware with multiple glazes

Figure 15



Dinner Set (alternate view)

24" w x 4" h x 24" d

Cone 10 Reduction

Porcelain and Stoneware with multiple glazes

Figure 16



Plate 1 (detail from Dinner Set)

11" w x 3" h x 11" d

Cone 10 Reduction

Porcelain with glaze

Figure 17



Mug 1

4" h x 4" w x 4" d

Cone 10 Reduction

Stoneware with glaze

Figure 18



Yunomi 1

4”h x 3”w x 3”d

Cone 10 Reduction

Stoneware with multiple glazes

Figure 19



Yunomi 2

4”h x 3”w x 3”d

Cone 10 Reduction

Stoneware with multiple glazes

Figure 20



Yunomi 2 (detail of foot)

Figure 21



Mug 2

4”w x 4”h x 4”d

Cone 11 Soda-fired

Stoneware with Glaze

Figure 22



Teaset 2

11" w x 10" h x 8" d

Cone 10 Reduction

Stoneware with Glazes

Figure 23



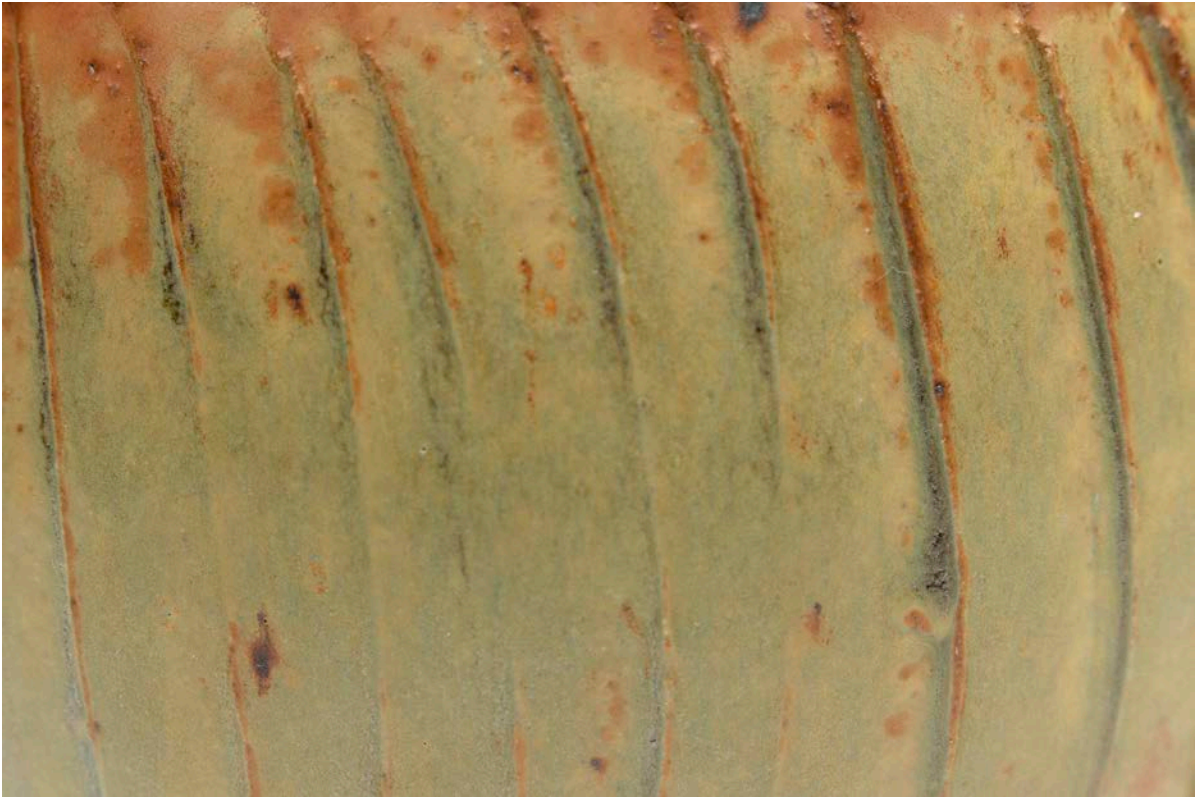
Mug 3

4" w x 4" h x 4" d

Cone 10 Reduction

Stoneware with glaze

Figure 24



Mug 3 (detail)

Figure 25



Teapot 2

6.5”w 6.5”h x 5.5”d

Cone 11 Soda-Fired

Stoneware with Flashing Slip and Glaze

Figure 26



Serving Bowl

11”w x 11”d x 5.5”h

Cone 12 Wood-fired

Stoneware with Glaze

Figure 27



Mug 4

4" w x 4" h x 3" d

Cone 11 Soda-fired

Stoneware with Flashing Slip and Glaze

Figure 28



Mug 5

4" w x 4" h x 3" d

Cone 11 Soda-fired

Stoneware with Flashing Slip and Glaze

Figure 29



Mug 6

4" w x 4" h x 3" d

Cone 11 Soda-fired

Stoneware with Flashing Slip and Glaze

Figure 30



Mug 7

4”w x 3.75”h x 3”d

Cone 10 Reduction Fired

Stoneware with Glaze

Figure 31



Mug 8

4" w x 4" h x 3" d

Cone 10 Reduction Fired

Stoneware with Glaze

Figure 32



Mug 9

4" w x 4" h x 3" d

Cone 10 Reduction Fired

Stoneware with Glaze

Figure 33



Mug 10

4" w x 4" h x 3" d

Cone 10 Reduction Fired

Stoneware with Glaze

Figure 34



Mug 11

4" w x 4" h x 3" d

Cone 10 Reduction Fired

Stoneware with Glaze

Figure 35



Mug 12

4" w x 4" h x 3" d

Cone 10 Reduction Fired

Stoneware with Glaze

Figure 36



Mug 13

4" w x 4" h x 3" d

Cone 10 Reduction Fired

Stoneware with Glaze

Figure 37



Mug 14

4" w x 4" h x 3" d

Cone 10 Reduction Fired

Stoneware with Glaze

Figure 38



Coffee Pot 4

7.5”h x 7”w x 6”d

Cone 11 Soda-fired

Stoneware with Flashing Slip and Glaze

Figure 39



Coffee Pot 5

8”h x 6”w x 5”d

Cone 11 Soda-Fired

Stoneware with Flashing Slip and Glaze

Figure 40



Coffee Pot 6

8''h x 6''w x 5''d

Cone 11 Reduction Fired

Stoneware with Glaze

Figure 41



Coffee Set 2

12''h x 10''w x 10''d

Cone 11 Soda-fired and Reduction

Stoneware with Flashing Slip and Glaze

Figure 42



Coffee Set 3

12”w x 8”h x 5.5”d

Cone 11 Soda-fired

Stoneware with Flashing Slip and Glaze

Figure 43



Teapot 3

7" w x 6.5" h x 5.5" d

Cone 11 Soda-Fired

Stoneware with Flashing Slip and Glaze

Figure 44



Teapot 4

7”h x 6.5”w x 5.5”d

Cone 11 Soda-Fired

Stoneware with Flashing Slip and Glaze

Figure 45



Teapot 5

7”h x 6.5”w x 5.5”d

Cone 11 Reduction Fired

Stoneware with Glaze

Figure 46



Yunomi 3

3.5"w x 3.5"h x 3.5"d

Cone 12 Wood-fired

Porcelain with Flashing Slip, Glaze, and Natural Wood Ash

Figure 47



Yunomi 4

3.5" w x 3.5" h x 3.5" d

Cone 11 Soda-fired

Stoneware with Flashing Slip and Glaze

Figure 48



Yunomi 5

3.5" w x 3.5" h x 3.5" d

Cone 11 Soda-fired

Stoneware with Flashing Slip and Glaze

Figure 49



Yunomi 6

3.5" w x 3.5" h x 3.5" d

Cone 11 Soda-fired

Stoneware with Flashing Slip and Glaze

Figure 50



Yunomi 7

4”h x 3”w x 3”d

Cone 10 Reduction

Stoneware with multiple glazes

Figure 51



Yunomi 8

4”h x 3”w x 3”d

Cone 10 Reduction

Stoneware with multiple glazes

Figure 52



Yunomi 9

3''h x 3''w x 3''d

Cone 10 Reduction

Stoneware with multiple glazes

Figure 53



Yunomi 10

4”h x 3”w x 3”d

Cone 10 Reduction

Stoneware with multiple glazes

Figure 54



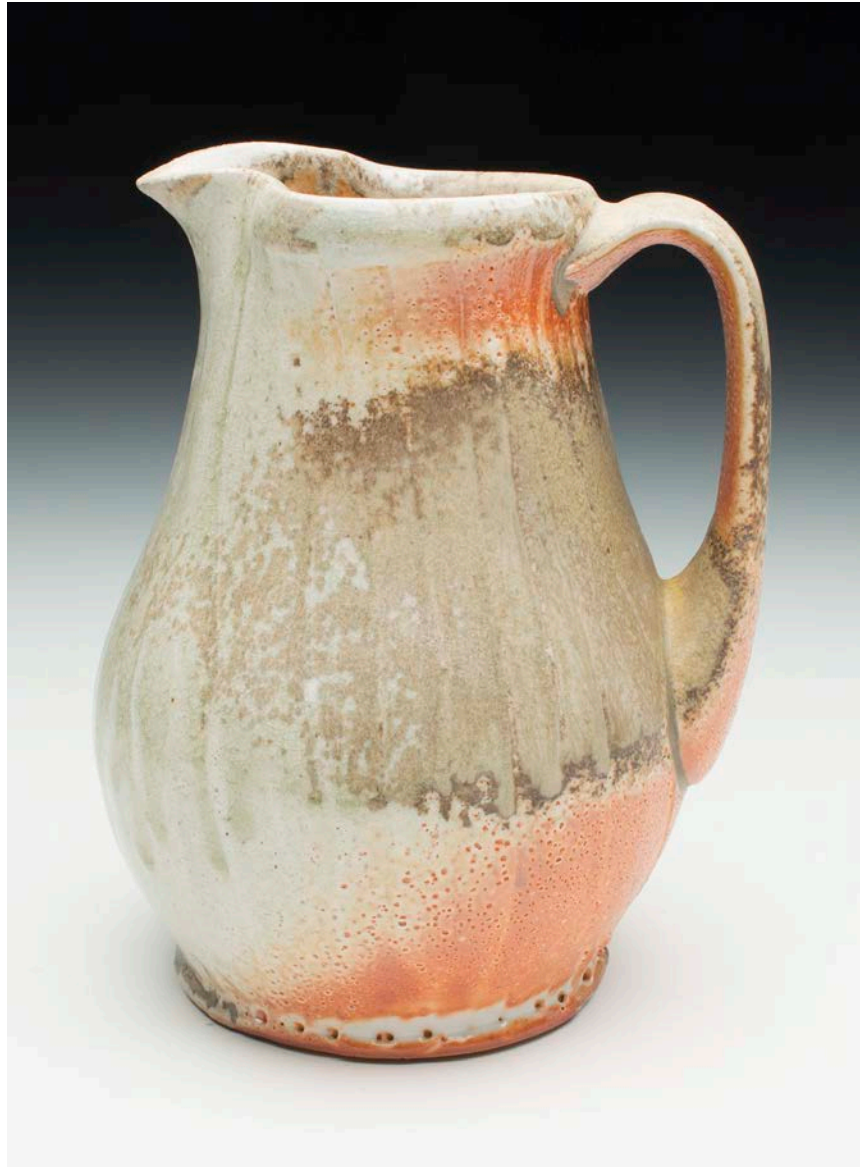
Yunomi 11

4”h x 3”w x 3”d

Cone 10 Reduction

Stoneware with multiple glazes

Figure 55



Pitcher 1

9.5”h x 6”w x 4.5”d

Cone 12 Wood-fired

Porcelaineous Stoneware with Glaze

Figure 56



Pitcher 2

8.5”h x 6.5”w x 5.5”d

Cone 12 Wood-fired

Porcelaineous Stoneware with Glaze

APPENDIX B: RECIPES

Clay Bodies

EZ-Flash Stoneware (cone 11)

#6 Tile Clay	25
Sagger XX Ball Clay	25
Hawthorn Bond (40 Mesh)	25
Custer Feldspar	15
Pyrotrol	5
Kyanite	5
<hr/>	
Grog (35 mesh)	5
<hr/>	
For sculpture add:	25
Grog (20 mesh)	

Porcelaineous Stoneware (cone 11)

Edgar Plastic Kaolin	25
OM-4 Ball Clay	25
Custer Feldspar	25
Silica (200 Mesh)	12.5
Pyrotrol	12.5
<hr/>	
Bentonite	1
Grog (35 mesh)	10

EZ-Red Stoneware (cone 10)

#6 Tile CLay	25
Sagger XX Ball Clay	25
Hawthorn Bond (40 mesh)	25
Custer Feldspar	10
Pyrotrol	10
Kyanite	5
<hr/>	
Newmann Red Fireclay	10
Bentonite	1

Glazes and Slips

Will's Red Flashing Slip V2 (cone 11 soda)

EPK	70
Nepheline Syenite	30
<hr/>	
Zircopax	15
Yellow Iron Oxide	1
Epsom Salts (for suspension)	2

Will's Yellow Flashing Slip (cone 11 soda)

EPK	70
Nepheline Syenite	30
<hr/>	
Zircopax	5
Titanium Dioxide	10
Epsom Salts (for suspension)	2

Will's Strontium Matte #2 (Cone 10/11)

Minspar 200	45
Dolomite	25
Strontium Carbonate	15
OM-4	10
Silica	5
<hr/>	
Zircopax	15
Rutile	2.5
Epsom Salts	2

Salt White (cone 10/11)

Nepheline Syenite	71.6
Dolomite	23.6
OM-4	4.8
<hr/>	
Zircopax	18.8
Rutile	1.1
Bentonite	4

Otto's Swedish Matte - Strontium (cone 10)

Custer Feldspar	53
Strontium Carbonate	16
OM-4	10
Whiting	9
Zinc Oxide	8
Silica	3
<hr/>	
Red Iron Oxide	4
Rutile	2
Epsom Salts	2

Swedish Matte Yellow (cone 10)

Custer Feldspar	57
Dolomite	17
Strontium Carbonate	16
OM-4 Ball Clay	8
Silica (325 mesh)	2
<hr/>	
Zircopax	15
Red Iron Oxide	4
Rutile	2

**Scherzer Matte Iron Red (simplified)
(cone 10)**

Grolleg Kaolin	36
Whiting	25
Silica (325 mesh)	18
Potassium Carbonate	11
Custer Feldspar	7
Bone Ash	3
<hr/>	
Bentonite	2
Red Iron Oxide	10

Pinnell Weathered Bronze (cone 6-10)

Nepheline Syenite	60
Strontium Carbonate	20
OM-4 Ball Clay	10
Silica	9
Lithium Carbonate	1
<hr/>	
Titanium Dioxide	6
Copper Dioxide	6

**Totally Awesome Sweet Alabama Liquid
Snake (cone 10)**

Nepheline Syenite	60
Minspar 200	10
Spodumene	10
#6 Tile Clay	20
<hr/>	
Soda Ash	3

Malcolm Davis Shino (Cone 10)

Nepheline Syenite	40.9
Minspar 200	9.8
EPK	18.2
OM-4 Ball Clay	13.8
Soda Ash	17.3
<hr/>	
Redart	6

VITA

Will McComb was born in Lexington, Kentucky in 1988. He graduated from Henry Clay High School in 2006. He received a Bachelor of Arts in Studio Art with an emphasis in Ceramics from the University of Kentucky in 2010. After graduation he pursued his ceramics education through workshops at Penland School of Crafts and Arrowmont School of Arts and Crafts, as well as an internship at Kentucky Mudworks. In 2012, he met Stacy Haynes who he married in the summer of 2016. In January 2015, they moved together to Jupiter, Florida where Will began a two-year residency as Ceramic Artist at Lighthouse Art Center. There he also studied with nationally renowned woodfire potter and kiln builder, Justin Lambert. In his job as resident, he taught community ceramics classes, helped maintain the daily operations of the clay studio and assisted six workshops with nationally renowned ceramics artists such as Susan Filley, Lorna Meaden, and Matt Long. As an assistant to Justin Lambert he learned how to build kilns and fire an anagama-style woodkiln. In 2017 he was accepted as a Master of Fine Arts candidate at the University of Mississippi, graduating in May 2020. He served two terms as the President of the University of Mississippi Muddaubers, a student run organization committed to the furthering of the ceramic arts at the University. He has exhibited in numerous Juried and invitational exhibitions. He was twice accepted into the National Council for the Education of the Ceramic Arts National Student Juried exhibition, where he won the Studio Potter Merit Award. His other awards include a Purchase Award at the 27th Annual Strictly Functional Pottery National Juried Exhibition.