



Three Potters Retrospective

Artist Statements + Bios

Alex Matisse

Bio

Alexander (Alex) Matisse was raised in a small New England town, by a family of artists, anthropologists, and inventors. He moved to North Carolina in 2004 where he attended Guilford College briefly before beginning three years of apprenticeship with potters Matt Jones and Mark Hewitt.

In 2009 he founded East Fork on an old tobacco farm outside Asheville, NC. He built a large wood-burning kiln and started making pots for a supportive and enthusiastic collector base. With the help of business partners Connie Matisse and John Vigeland, Matisse pivoted the company; the three launched a line of contemporary, gas-fired dinnerware and demand quickly outpaced production.

Today, Alex still gets his hands in clay every once in a while, but most of his time is learning how to lead East Fork's team of 80 (and growing) toward becoming the country's largest manufacturer of quality dinnerware.

He lives in Asheville with his wife and business partner Connie Matisse and their daughters Vita & Lucia. If he weren't busy growing East Fork, he'd be doing a lot more fly fishing.

Amy Sanders

Statement

The physical and creative nature of working with clay satisfies my desire to play, construct, experiment, and to get dirty. Patterns in textiles, architecture, nature and quilting inspire me to create works that invite touch and evoke a sense of nostalgic comfort. Early in the construction process, clay is soft and pliable; I enjoy building pieces that reflect these properties even after the clay has become hard from firing. I often make pieces with the intention of showing them in a grouping, as though they are conversing with each other.

My choice of working with red earthenware, terra sigillata, patina, and glaze is multifaceted. The combination of these materials creates a beautiful depth of surface that's often difficult to achieve in an electric kiln, oxidation firing. The beauty of the red clay shining through the thin layers of terra sigillata, especially when it breaks over a stamped texture, continually excites and inspires me. Intentionally using materials that can efficiently be fired at a lower temperature creates a lower impact on our environment. I also enjoy the connection to potters of the past using similar materials.

Growing up in southern Ohio, I spent my early years watching my mother and grandmothers sew. Upon moving to Charlotte after graduating college, I did not have a clay studio in which to create, so I began to sew myself. Experiences with sewing breathed life into my clay work: patterns, textures and seams from fabrics and textiles inform design and formal decisions.

The isolation of working alone in my studio has heightened my awareness of the importance of people and true community in my life. I experience this community through sharing food, celebrations, worship, teaching, athletic competition, group traveling, and music, as well as interactions with the city itself. My desire for a sense of place and history while living within an urban environment is reflected in my work.

Ben Owen III

Bio

I was born into a traditional pottery family and was first introduced to clay by my grandfather when I was eight years old. My interest in clay grew as I spent time with my grandfather carefully studied the shapes, glazes, and traditions of the Owen aesthetic and learned to appreciate the history and legacy of generations of craft.

During time at Pfeiffer University and East Carolina, my interest in form, design, and color piqued and began to forge my own unique path in clay. Through technical exploration and academic influences, Ben's clay vernacular began to evolve. Travels in the United States attending workshops and conferences along with a fellowship in Japan, extended his continued research. He has said, "My approach to working in clay is inspired by many influences. Tradition and vision merge to forge the future, as I honor the historic Owen aesthetic while creating a new, unique body of work. Culture, blended with influences in nature, inspires my work. With studies in China, Japan, Australia and Europe, as well as in the university setting, I have continued to create a unique identity from culture and nature."

Ben's recent passions have included glaze creation and experimentation. "For some pots, I use a four-chambered wood kiln with a firing process of up to four days. The prolonged exposure to ash and heat develops a wide range of color and texture on the clay. Other glaze techniques have evolved in a gas or electric kiln with a precision in temperature control. Some pieces are re-fired to develop layers and depth on the finish."

Works created by Owen are included in collections including the Smithsonian Museum in Washington, DC, The International Folk Art Museum in Santa Fe, NM, The Schein-Joseph International Museum of Art in Alfred, NY, Mint Museum of Craft, Charlotte, NC

Chris Gustin

Statement

My work explores the vessel form on a human scale, taking simple pottery forms and jumping them up in scale as a vehicle for abstraction. Though my work only alludes to function through the context of the vessel, I am trying to make pots that speak to a "body" reference. This 'body' scale speaks on a subliminal level to the entire histories of our experience.

The surfaces inherent in wood firing that come as a result of the heat, flame, glaze and ash all add a sense of "skin" to the surface of the clay, giving it an almost organic sensibility that plays with the form. How that "skin" holds the interior space of the pot., and how I manipulate my forms "around" that space, constraining it, enclosing it, or letting it expand and swell, can allow analogy and metaphor to enter into the work.

I don't want my pots to conjure up a singular image for the viewer. By inviting the hand to explore the forms as well as the eye, I want to provoke numerous memories, recollection that has the potential to change from moment to moment, provoking connections that go past the intellectual to the innate. By using forms that evoke generosity, sensuality, fullness and humility, I am asking the viewer to make connections on a deeply personal level. This is what I depend on: the desire in all of us to reach out and touch, and by doing so, to trigger memory that is both felt and connected, memory that quietly waits to come to consciousness. This innate connection is for me the primal language of ceramic vessel form. It has the potential to reflect our universal human story, regardless of politics, culture or history.

Debra Fritts

Statement

As a child I had dirt under my fingernails as I played in the creek bed. I continue to allow the earth to feed me information for my art and daily living. Working intuitively from pounds of wet clay, forms appear and stories develop. I may be questioning an occurrence or celebrating a relationship or just being present in daily life. The search continues until I reach the core: the spiritual level of the sculpture. Then the work can speak. At the present, I am exploring new territory in the west while embracing my southern heritage. I am touching ground, getting to the basics, and listening.

I hand build each sculpture, primarily using thick coils, and fire three to five times depending on the color and surface I am trying to achieve. I approach color on clay as a painter. My palette is a combination of oxides, slips, underglazes, and glazes. The form of the piece informs how I should approach the surface.

Fong Choo

Statement

"What is so exciting about looking at a sleeping tiger?"

"Nothing. But if you take a stick and poke at it, you will remember that tiger for the rest of your life!"

I feel blessed to be able to pursue the life of a potter -- especially when it requires poking the sleeping tiger...

In many ways, this conversation at the Minnesota Zoo parallels my attitude towards clay. Clay requires poking to awaken it : one must push limits, test waters, search, prod and explore its many possibilities.

These diminutive porcelain teapots shown is the result of over two decades of evolution in color, design and form.

The teapot form continues to challenge and fascinate me: yet I am striving for metamorphosis, for growth, for expansion. I want to retain all that I have learned in these years and apply it on a new scale. In short, I have the urge to make my creations "grow up."

I invite you to become my accomplice as I wake my sleeping tiger. Grow with my teapots and with me.

Jennifer Mecca

Statement

I am a utilitarian potter. I create pots that are visually pleasing and unique in character, but also useful in everyday life. I was born in upstate New York and moved to the Piedmont of South Carolina in my late teens. I earned a BFA in Interior Design from Virginia Commonwealth University in 1989, and returned to school at East Carolina University in 1995 to complete a BFA and MFA in Ceramics in 1999. I have taught college level and elementary level art and ceramics for the last 10 years. I am currently a full-time studio potter and teach part-time at a private school.

I enjoy making serving pieces and tableware that bring delight to the daily activity of eating, setting a table and enjoying a meal. While growing up, I spent many weekends observing and participating in the traditions and rituals of my paternal Italian-American extended family. Among the most prevalent of these traditions were the preparation and presentation of elaborate meals. As a child, I observed how the tableware was as important as the planning, preparation and enjoyment. This served as the foundation for my interest in utilitarian pottery and love of creating elaborate surfaces and forms.

The pots I create reflect the enjoyment I have for throwing, embellishing, creating and using. I enjoy creating each piece with its own unique character and personality, whether I change a spout, foot, rim, glaze color or decorative element. All of my pieces are wheel thrown and altered in some way. Because of the rich color I get from the glazes I use, I enjoy working with porcelain. I

embellish my pots with handmade stamps, colored clay sprigs and have recently started incising drawings with black slip into my pieces. The forms I make are usually organic in nature, which stems from my love of the material I use, and my personal preference for a fluid line. My inspirations for surfaces come from patterns in fabric, paintings, nature and historic dishware pottery.

I currently work from my home studio in Gastonia, North Carolina where I live with my husband Joey, our son Quaid and twin daughters Aydan and McKenna.

Josh Copus

Statement

Clay is a material accepting of impression. It is a record of every process, from its geological formation in the earth to its eventual transformation in the fire. My work with ceramics begins with the clay. My ceramic studio practice is essentially an effort to distill the experiences of my life and infuse them into my work with clay. This practice grew out of an interest in creating personally significant work that communicates my enthusiasm for the material and the process of making, and strongly reflects the influences that inform the decisions I make in my life and in the studio.

By using wild materials dug from the river bottoms and mountainsides of North Carolina, my work gains a connection to place and establishes the materials as a valuable source of influence. Everything I make contains an element of my response to the experience of working with these materials. Every piece is infused with the qualities and character of my clay; whether it is the subtlety of its dark iron body breaking through a white slip or the drama of its diverse particle size exposed through a facet, the qualities of my clay effect what I make and my intention is bring out the inherent beauty of the materials in every piece.

However, my interest in using wild materials is not limited to the influence of their physical properties and extends to the intangible qualities that these materials can bring to the work. The physical properties of my materials are not as unique as my experience of using them and it is the increased participation in the creative process that I have come to value most. Digging my own clay has increased my connection to the area where I live and furthered my relationship with the surrounding community, creating an authentic context for my work to exist in. Most importantly I find a great amount of excitement in digging my own clay and my hope is that the enthusiasm I have for my materials is transferred to the finished product. I want each piece to carry with it the feeling I get when I'm working with wild clay straight from the ground.

The experience of working with wild materials has contributed greatly to my growth as both an artist and a person. It has confirmed my belief that the more highly developed a maker is as a human being, the better their work in the world will be. There is no real beauty without character and like the clay that I

use to make it, my work is a reflection of my character. As a human being, I am accepting of impression and each piece I make represents my personality, experiences, and my dreams.

Kyle Carpenter

Statement

As a studio potter, I work diligently to make well-crafted wares for everyday people. It's seemingly less about the "ritual of the table" and more about respecting a long tradition of craftsmen before me and discovering my own voice. As a contemporary potter, I often look to past traditions for inspiration. I'm interested in folk pottery of many origins. My native state of North Carolina, of course, offers a deep well of talented potters, both folk and contemporary, to look towards for inspiration.

Simplicity in form offers a broad surface for me to embellish with lines, patterns, and drawings. Before I was introduced to the ceramics arts, I did a fair amount of illustration before and during art school. The combination of three-dimensional forms and two-dimensional drawings was a natural fusion of both my love of drawing and pottery, art and craft. It is my intention to bring together clear and abstract markings to engage the viewer to look closely at how design relates to the form of the pot.

Michael Kline

Statement

Despite the many tangents that lead me this way and that in the course of making pottery, the ideas, desires and excitement of clay remain very close to those at the very beginning of my career. To be sure, the outcome of experience and effort, trial and error has evolved through the years. But the process still begins with the simple, ecstatic response to a ball of soft clay. Hopefully, the successful pot elicits a similar response in the context of the home.

The mountains of North Carolina provide plenty of inspiration with their wildly exuberant flora, geological variety and the pottery history that sprang from these geological circumstances. Strong pottery form and patterns evoke the complexity of this natural environment. By some combination of optimism and risk, my collaboration with the natural properties of clay and wood fire continues to lead me through this potter's life, at times exasperating and at others, exhilarating.

Michael Sherrill

Statement

I am compelled by the sensation of seeing things fresh; as if for the first time. It is as if I have been asleep, and when I wake up, I am surprised by the things that surround me. In my case, it is the flora and fauna surrounding my studio that continue to surprise me. For me, these discoveries are epiphanies. My desire is to create something that might bring its observer to the same place of discovery. It's one thing too for me to respond to a stimulant and then to make work. It is another thing for that work to go the next step and bring a likewise response from the viewer.

I started using my extruder to extrude tubes and then pull tapered, long spouts for my sculptural teapots. My involvement in using an extruder has totally changed my thinking about it as a tool. It widened my view of what I can do with clay. Instead of the extruder being a static tool, just to make an object, I now see it as a workstation like a potter's wheel. It is a place to make and manipulate forms. This is the thing I would like to communicate and share with others. These techniques can open up new possibilities for any one working in clay.

Nancy Kubale

Bio

Nancy Kubale is a full-time ceramic and mixed media artist living 50 miles southeast of Asheville in the foothills of Rutherford County, NC. She earned her BFA in Mixed Media from Minneapolis College of Art and Design. In addition she studied clothing construction at the Fashion Institute of Technology in NY, ceramics at Penland School of Crafts and sculpture at Florence Academy of Art. She lives with her husband, who manages a performing arts center. Her current work attempts to find ubiquitous truths; transforming sight to insight. Kubale exhibits regularly at high-end Art Fairs throughout the Eastern and Midwestern U.S., including SPECTRUM during Miami Art Week, the Philadelphia Museum Fine Craft Show, The Milwaukee Art Museum Lakefront, The Mint Museum Potters Market Invitational, American Craft Exposition, CraftNEWYORK, the Washington & West Palm Beach Fine Craft Shows, as well the Baltimore and Atlanta American Craft Council shows. She participates in numerous group and solo gallery exhibitions throughout the U.S. , has works in several permanent museum collections and is published in six books, as well as numerous magazine articles. Kubale is represented by Blue Spiral 1 in Asheville and Abel Contemporary Gallery in Wisconsin. She is a 2008 and 2011 North Carolina Regional Artist Grant recipient.

Ron Meyers

Statement

My interest in clay has always been in making useful objects. I have been influenced by and attracted to cultures or individuals that produced useful work in a relaxed or casual manner, work in which the end product reflects the process with which it was made, as well as the individuals touch and human qualities that were left behind by the maker.

The pieces that I make and am most pleased with are those that come closest to integrating form and surface, are spontaneous and reflect the object's use.

Shikamaru Taskeshita

Bio

Shikamaru Taskeshita was born in 1977, as a son of Mashiko potter. He learned pottery making from his father, and also from Industrial Technology Center of Tochigi Prefecture (Ceramic technology center) in 1997-1998. He built his Anagama at his pottery studio in 2000, since then he focuses on unglazed, Anagama firing. In 2011, at Tohoku Earthquake disaster, his Anagama was completely destroyed, but his friends and supporters from many places include overseas helped his kiln rebuild. His wood fire works are widely shown at exhibitions, pottery festivals and galleries nationally and internationally.