

nceca

JOURNAL

VOLUME 41



nceca
RIVERS
REFLECTIONS
REINVENTIONS
MARCH 17-21
2021

1ST EVER VIRTUAL CONFERENCE OF THE NATIONAL COUNCIL ON EDUCATION FOR THE CERAMIC ARTS

Suze Lindsay

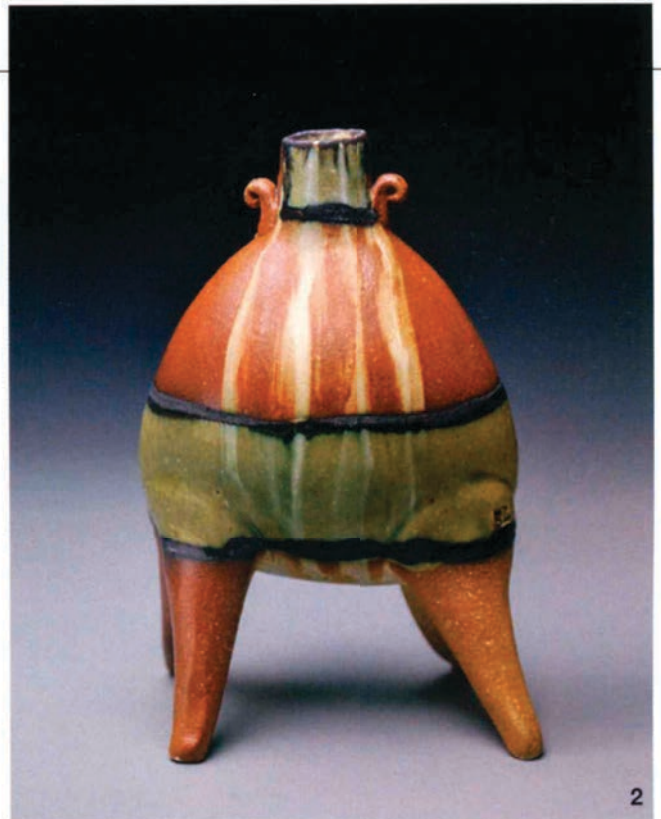


Form Development: Going Vertical

My career in ceramics is centered around the studio, and it continues to be a place of inspiration, exploration and wonder. I am fortunate to have had amazing educational opportunities that continue to nourish my life as a full-time studio potter. I was able to study with some of the most prominent ceramists in our field. Additionally, the interaction and inspiration I received from fellow students was invaluable to my personal and professional development as an artist. I feel incredibly fortunate to have experienced two parallel “camps”—the craft school and the university. That said, it’s essential to recognize and acknowledge the teachers on whose shoulders I stand.

My dedication to clay started at Penland School of Craft. At Penland, functional utilitarian work is an important aspect of its clay program. Penland studios are open 24 hours a day and students take advantage of that, pursuing their passion. It’s common to see studio lights on at all hours of the day and night. Because Penland’s diverse programming is set up to serve as a workshop environment, teachers and students work side-by-side in the studios. Exposure to full-time studio potters nurtured and fed my desire to also become a studio potter. I was awarded a two-year-long CORE fellowship, and focused on training with potters who came directly from Bernard Leach’s apprenticeship or were “second generation” Leach potters. Exposure to these potters, their ways of working, and their commitment to functional pots was the impetus for embracing Leach’s vision of living with beautiful objects intended for daily use. Those potters included Clary Illian, Jeff Oestreich, Warren MacKenzie, Michael Simon, Will Ruggles and Douglass Rankin, and Randy Johnston. I was introduced to new ways of thinking about form and design, and through shared conversations and critical feedback, I began to see and understand a wide range of formal and informal approaches to art-making and contemporary craft. It was an educational experience that brought both the technical and the aesthetic together. I learned of the “cult of the slow wheel”—the Leach treadle wheel. This tool, along with soft clay, have been an important part of my practice for 30 years. Process, use of materials, and craftsmanship fed my ideas. I learned about raw glazing and once firing in atmospheric kilns. I continue to fire in a salt kiln.

Attending graduate school at Louisiana State University made me dig deeper and ask questions about why I was making what I was making, confirming my commitment to functional pots while also encouraging me to look beyond my own sensibilities. My professors Linda Arbuckle, Joe Bova, Cary Esser, Kate Blacklock and Bobby Silverman pushed and challenged my ideas and perceptions. My peers were exceptionally talented, working long hours in the studio, inspiring one another. Those of us making the functional pot used a variety of approaches, each special and personalized. My skill and technique became more refined, running parallel to my ideas about content and meaning. At LSU, I began altering forms, manipulating pots out of the round, playing with exaggerated proportions, and being literal in representing the figure in functional work. I wanted pots to be approachable and have personality. Classes in art history, and my exposure to and experiences of working in other media, especially printmaking, nourished my ideas and encouraged me to define the choices I made about what I was making. Then my journey brought me back to Penland, and it once again played a pivotal roll in my career. Because of my desire to be a studio potter, I applied for and was accepted to the three-



SUZIE LINDSAY 1 Stacked Candlesticks, 2018, salt-fired stoneware, 15" x 6" x 3", photo by Silvia Ferrari Palmer 2 Footed Bud Vase, 2018, salt-fired stoneware, 5.5" x 4" x 2" 3 Leaf Candelabrum, 2019, salt-fired stoneware, 14" x 10" x 3", photo by Sijan/Hargraves 4 Fan Tray, 2019, salt-fired stoneware, 1.5" x 10" x 9", photo by Sijan/Hargraves 5 The artist and her kiln



year residency at “the Barns.” Being part of Penland’s resident artist program enabled my development and growth as a professional studio potter. The program provides rich experiences and offers financial support for artists striving to create a sustainable lifestyle that promotes their studio work. It was a generous gift of time to create work, evolve, and launch into the life of a studio potter.

Inspiration for my work comes from studying historical pots from many cultures. These cultures inhabit Japan, Crete, Chile, China, and native North America. I especially respond to pots ranging from quirky Pre-Columbian animal ewers, to Mimbres bowls with sophisticated designs. I am curious about what these pots reveal about the times and cultures in which they were made. As a potter in the 21st century, I think about what my mark making suggests about my time and place. Because I’m an avid gardener, I pay attention to the geometric arrangement of patterns with plant motifs, thinking about positive and negative space while watching the effects of changing seasons.

Sketchbook and writing are my way to record ideas for the future, and develop my personal vocabulary. Writing and drawing permeate the analytical processes that help my work to grow. My friend, Paulus Berensohn, called the sketchbook his “portable studio.” I continue to look through old sketchbooks, finding great delight in how each idea feeds into the next and can result in small changes to my forms. I train my eye in museums, study form in books, and draw inspiration and ideas from the pots I have acquired and love. All are recorded in my “portable studio.”

My focus is on creating and interpreting altered pottery forms that function well. Working with stoneware clay, I subtly suggest figure and character by manipulating forms after they are thrown. I roll out clay slabs and use them to hand-build elements that are then assembled with thrown parts. This creates pieces that can be perceived as anthropomorphic or zoomorphic. Those forms are described by some of the same characteristics: lips, feet, and shoulders. Their personality can be expressed as being open, warm, generous, rotund, sensuous, loose or jolly. Many forms are raised on a pedestal-like foot that serves as a “skirt,” while others have

added feet that look as though they might walk away. I like the idea of combining different elements and joining unlikely components while also playing with proportions and relationships, symmetry and asymmetry. Although I make pots in a series, no two are the same. I find great pleasure in creating a new dialogue with each one. I love that the dialogue keeps changing, morphing, and being refined.

An integral part of my work includes surface decoration to enhance the form by patterning and applying slips and glazes for salt firing. When I decorate the surfaces, I am very interested in making the marks and designs exaggerate the volume of each piece. I then respond to the form by finding the parts of the pots I want to accentuate. The use of line and pattern emphasizes the mood or nature of the pot and may suggest its use for specific occasions. I have a limited palette and use a white stoneware clay body that blushes warm brown to compliment the slips and glazes. These techniques allow me to create each pot with a personality of its own.

In addition to its straightforward usefulness, pottery has the capacity to invite the user to take pleasure in everyday activities, encouraging participation and promoting hospitality. When thinking about how pots function in a household, I consider whether they are for informal or formal occasions. It is important for my pots to be used in cooking, eating and sharing. Pots, including vases filled with flowers, lit candlesticks, and candelabra, can intensify people’s memories. With this in mind, I endeavor to continue the work of making pots that add utility, beauty and meaning to the lives of those who use them.

Suze Lindsay is a studio potter in western North Carolina. Her formal training started as a core fellow at Penland School of Craft, followed by an MFA from LSU. She was awarded the 3-year residency at Penland, then settled nearby at open Fork Mountain Pottery with her husband, Kent McLaughlin. Suze is a passionate educator and has presented numerous workshops and lectures nationally and internationally.

