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The Porcelain Groups

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THREE PORCELAIN GROUPS

by

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B.F.A., University of Hawaii, 1972

Submitted to the Faculty of the School of the Arts
of Virginia Commonwealth University

in Partial Fulfillment
of the
Requirements for the Degree
Master of Fine Arts

RICHMOND, VIRGINIA

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All work presented in this thesis was produced by Robert Chance.
INTRODUCTION

My background in clay has emphasized the development of technical considerations in functional ceramics as well as the search for personal images. The past two years have seen an emphasis on the exploration of technical areas chosen to lead to the development of a familiarity with techniques and a solidification of statement. This process has nurtured in me the realization that the objects I produce do not represent an attempt to attain an axiom of art but are personal statements developed through an empirical use of forms and images.
The porcelain work presented for my thesis represents an outgrowth of a series produced earlier. At that time I was dealing with larger stoneware forms which were very rigid and geometric. The group proved to show a lack of fluidity and vitality and led me to the realization that my concern with clay lay not in stark forms but rather in the relationship between the fluidity and the interrelatedness of shapes.

As an outgrowth of my concern for more involved form, I began producing a series of related objects using porcelain, worked on a smaller scale, and with a greater variety of technique. The same construction methods are used throughout this thesis. These techniques are slip casting, extrusion, throwing, press molding, and modeling. Each group, therefore, represents the application of all of these techniques. Slip casting, the technique I applied most frequently, allowed for the uniform reproduction of a crisp image so that the bulk of my time could be devoted to exploring variations and applications to the basic form itself.

An explanation of the objectives of my thesis can best be conveyed by a consideration of three groups into which the thesis is divided. Following a consideration of each of the three groups in turn, I will attempt formulating a number of conclusions to which the thesis has led me. The groups will be presented in chronological order.
II. TUNA FISH GROUP

The three objects in the Tuna Fish Group are an attempt, using the familiar container shape as a foundation, to allow the viewer an insight into a possible metamorphosis of their basic form. The very familiarity of these basic forms makes it possible for the viewer to begin a consideration of the object on which the changes have been wrought. Using the teapot or decanter as the basic form, changes, varying in number, have been used to develop the intended image. Each piece will be treated in turn and the changes to the basic shape elucidated.

In Tuna Fish Decanter the basic form is that of a five-faceted container. The fish head which forms the spout was attached in such a way as to suggest to the viewer that the fish is emerging from the surface of the container itself. This emergence was attempted in such a way as to suggest that the head is protruding from water. The head which forms the spout is the only head with the mouth open. The additional heads, added to each of the remaining four facets, are presented as a continuation of the basic theme of the spout. The stopper was cast in its present form so as to furnish a continuation of the five facet motif of the lower half of the decanter. The Tuna Fish Decanter represents an attempt to handle the technical problems later dealt with in the following pieces and groups.
PLATE I

Robert Chance, TUNA FISH DECANTER 8" Porcelain
The basic shape of the **Starry-Eyed Tuna Fish Teapot** was constructed of slabs using plastic, rippled, roofing material. This material served as a slump mold, and imparted the convolutions seen in the piece. The symbol of the star is the unifying motif of the **Starry-Eyed Tuna Fish Teapot** in that the star surrounding the tuna's eye is repeated on the side and top of the work in an attempt to unify the piece. The image of the fish breaking water is repeated in the spout of the piece portrayed in Plate II. The use of the star motif represented for me an elaboration of the simpler approach used in the **Tuna Fish Decanter**. The addition of the star allowed for the further elaboration of the hat stopper and bowtie and further whimsical effects. These effects could be added without (to my mind) destroying the water-like effect of the porcelain.

In **Tuna Fish Teapot**, convoluting shapes are used to a lesser degree. The convoluted patterns on the pot are similar to those used by the Japanese to suggest water. The convoluted pattern is repeated in the handle which serves as a frame for the stopper and spout. The negative space created by the handle in contrast to the base acts as a summation for the treatment of handles in this group.
PLATE II

Robert Chance, STARRY-EYED TUNA FISH TEAPOT 12" Porcelain
PLATE III

Robert Chance, TUNA FISH TEAPOT 10" Porcelain
The Tuna Fish Group is the first and last to use the consideration of function as a unifying motif. The image of the fish as an artistic comment was superceded by the more personally compelling image of the blimp.
III. BLIMP GROUP

The flexible hose which was cast and employed in the Luna Fish Teapot (Plate 4) was used as the basic structure for Blimp Stand One and Blimp Stand Two (Plate 5). The highly decorative effect imparted to the blimps themselves was achieved by using an orange strainer for the shape of the blimp in Blimp Stand One and by using an art deco pattern for the blimp in Blimp Stand Two. The striated effect of the stand in Blimp Stand One is continued in the blimp itself. This continuation of pattern was done to give the blimp lift and the illusion of lightness and flight. Blimp Stand Two, while it has all the basic elements of Blimp Stand One, is more decorative in that it embodies detail, i.e., a jello mold was used for the base, extrusions and modeled stars decorate the top and for the tip of the stand, a finger was modeled emerging from a lawn. The blimp itself possesses an excessive amount of rudders and fins modeled in the shape of stars. The star, as a celestial object, is suggestive of the air, the natural element of the whimsical blimp.

The next three pieces form a unitary whole, the first two plates picture sequential pieces. Plate 6 continues the motif of the blimp as well as that of the star. It shows the blimp soaring above the stars being quite self-consciously a blimp. The word "Blimp" emblazoned on the base of the piece is prideful in that the viewer experiences the piece proclaiming itself; the blimp is, as it were poetically beyond the reach of the earth, in it's own element.
PLATE IV

Robert Chance, **BLIMP STAND ONE** 16" Porcelain
PLATE V

Robert Chance, BLIMP STAND TWO 14" Porcelain
PLATE VI

Robert Chance, *STARSHIP* 7' Porcelain
In Plate 7 the blimp is crash landing in water, the poetic moment of Plate 6 is broken, reality reasserts itself. The fins of the blimp are transformed to golden hearts, the water is treated as droplets. The gold line on the base emphasizes the solidity of the mass of water below the droplets. Submergence is emphasized by the contrast between the droplets and the solidity below. The treatment of the self-contained entity of the blimp merging with the self-contained entity of the water to form a unified image constitutes the satisfaction of the piece.

The Tsunami (shown in Plate 8) employs the same basic motif as the Star Ship and the Crash Landing put into parts of the same piece. Water is, however, depicted differently. The piece was divided into two parts to maintain the identical sense of scale subsisting in Plates 6 and 7. The waves and the breaking of the waves were modeled realistically.
PLATE VII

Robert Chance, SPLASHING 6" Porcelain
PLATE VIII

Robert Chance, *TSUNAMI IN TWO PARTS* 12" Porcelain
IV. SPIGOT GROUP

The three objects of Group III combine aspects of the two other groups.

The forms which compose the bases of each piece were shaped on a potter's wheel and were thrown low and wide so as to allow sufficient surface on which to compose the scones. For a greater facility in decoration of the bases, the sides of each base were cut and faceted.

The theme of the spigot, common to each of the pieces in this group, was chosen as suggestive of an animate object (i.e., the head of a bird) and because of the association of spigots with water.

In My Back Yard, (Plate IX) the scene was constructed using the spigot and the flexible hose as the idea foundations of the piece. Water is presented initially in the form of droplets emerging from the spigot; the droplets then are portrayed bursting onto the lawn. This piece was an experiment which employed the elements of the hose and water droplets used in Group II. The intention of the piece is to present a microcosm of a large whole in the sense that the piece is nothing more than a small "slice of life."

Eight Spigots (Plate X) continues the basic exploration of My Back Yard only in this case eight spigots instead of one are used in the piece. The multiplication of the spigots is intended to emphasize the underlying form nature of the spigots themselves. I feel I cannot give an indepth subject matter analysis of this piece.
PLATE IX

Robert Chance, "MY BACK YARD 10" Porcelain
PLATE X

Robert Chance, **EIGHT SPIGOTS** 10" Porcelain
In *Tunas* and *Spigot*, (Plate XI), two water symbols and water itself were combined. The scene itself is set higher on the base than are the other scenes in this group because the intention was to give the entire presentation more "lift." The water which flows from the spigot is sufficiently copious to suggest a pond, i.e., there is enough water to suggest depth. The necessity to impart a feeling of depth to the water was an additional reason for making the base higher in this piece.

Even though it was my initial feeling that I had exhausted the motif of the tuna fish (in the earlier pieces constructed for the purposes of this thesis), the tunas used in *Tunas* and *Spigot* seemed so correct for the overall feeling of the piece that I employed them.
PLATE XI

Robert Chance, TUNAS AND SPIGOT 10" Porcelain
CONCLUSION

Creation of the three groups of pieces necessary for the completion of this thesis taught me essentially four things:

Given my personal objectives for these pieces, after some experimentation, I concluded that porcelain was the best material to convey the detailed work and imagery necessary for the intended effect of the pieces. Porcelain proved to be the best material because it allowed ease of modeling and workability for detail and because the nature of porcelain possesses highlights and undertones of its own which contribute to great subtlety of effect.

Work on these thesis pieces led to my realization that my porcelain formula could not be worked satisfactorily if the objective was to achieve both great detail and size simultaneously. This is so because the techniques of modeling, casting, extrusion and slab building cannot be satisfactorily used in combination on a large scale. Scale seems to reflect both image and material; the thesis work demonstrated to me that porcelain refuses to be worked within multiple techniques and larger scale simultaneously.

It was my intention to show that whimsical humor can be successfully employed to guide the viewer to the deeper implications of the work itself. In this sense the humor serves only as a focus for the viewer's primary attention; it is intended to suffuse the work with a quiet joy on which the more personal aspects of the work are carried.
I consider whimsicality only a small part of the genre humor. In my work it includes a light and joyful look at scenes and images, a passage into fantasy and dream imagery. It is humor at no expense to others.

In my work, images serve as foundation for creative variation—beginning with an image or simple concept, the artist can bring to bear elaboration, variation, and addition. This process must be combined with an empirically creative eye to produce objects serially out of the same inspirations.

In preparing the work for this thesis I was influenced and helped by Jack Earl. His attitude toward porcelain objects, working techniques and development of ideas have helped me in finding my own path. I wish to thank him for his help.
BOOKS:


APPENDIX I

MASTER OF FINE ARTS THESIS CERAMIC EXHIBITION

My Graduate Thesis Ceramics Exhibition was held from May 29 through June 19 at the Anderson Gallery at 901½ West Franklin Street in Richmond, Virginia. Following are a list of the objects that were shown.

All work in Porcelain by Robert Chance

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<table>
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<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>STARSHIP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>SPLASH LANDING</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>A FLOWER BED</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>TSUNAMI IN TWO PARTS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>A LITTLE BIT OF MR. EARL</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>BLIMP STAND I</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>SPIGOT WITH THREE TUNAS</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>THE BACK LAWN</td>
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<td>BLIMP STAND II</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>DOUBLE-DOG DECANTER</td>
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<td>TWO-MULED STOPPERED BOTTLE</td>
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<td>STARRY-EYED TUNA FISH TEAPOT</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>STOPPERED BOTTLE WITH BOW TIES</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>HERE’S TO THE FALLIN EAGLE</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>DECO BOTTLE WITH ROSES</td>
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<td>PERFUME ATOMIZER</td>
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APPENDIX II

CLAY AND GLAZE FORMULAS

The clay and glaze formulas from which the thesis objects were made were derived from 60 clay and glaze tests. They were calculated to give optimum glaze fit (that is, no crazing, crawling or shivering). All objects were fired at cone 6 (2246° Fahrenheit) in a Paragon electric kiln. Following are the clay and glaze formulas.

CLAY BODY, CONE 6-10 OXIDATION

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<tr>
<td>Old Mine 4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Custer Potash Feldspar</td>
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<td>Flint</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cedar Heights GoldArt Clay</td>
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G214 GLASS TRANSLUCENT GLAZE\(^1\), CONE 5-7 OXIDATION

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