

DIRT POETS

Curator's Statement by Zoé Strecker

In March 2015, the Morlan Gallery hosted an exhibition called "Works that Contain" curated by Mike Frasca. He invited contemporary studio potters who make vessels in the functional tradition. For this companion exhibition I selected and made artwork that is driven by ideas rather than by form or function. As a group, we are clearly fascinated by raw materials, ceramic processes and the history of clay objects. Our works make oblique reference to the rich functional tradition and also engage the conventions of figuration in clay in fresh and surprising ways.

This show is all dirt and stories about our relationship with dirt. Dirt spun, dirt cast, dirt flung and poured and clawed and dropped and carried gently like the precious treasure it is. Dirt as metaphor, dirt as shipping container, dirt as currency, as record-keeper, reminder, dirt as filth, as intellectual puzzle, dirt as fertility, as gathering place, dirt as home.

Ashley Lyon's figurative fragments and body analogues are both delicate and stark investigations of human fragility. The hyper specific qualities of an individual limb or a domestic object have the power to evoke the universal.

Brian Harper's witty explorations of home as a construct invite us to think about the elaborate architecture we create to support that most fundamental of social spaces, the dinner table. His reversal of the handmade elements (not the plate but the plate rack) is quirky and provocative in a comedic way.

David Cushway's balletic video of a shattering teapot, an innocent and deeply British symbol of domesticity, is a different kind of meditation on home and loss and hope for redemption. His disintegrating self-portrait is mesmerizing and horrific in its clarity.

Sharan Elran invites appreciation for the clean refinement of slip cast modular forms while also revealing quirks of the fabrication process that are the usually hidden. Clay, in his treatment, is less dirt and more an industrial material from which he coaxes a subtle earthiness and a touching humanity. Repetition is gorgeously soiled by the artist's refusal to sustain uniformity.

Tetsuya Yamada's gestural landscapes made of clay, minerals, and banal building materials like plywood, deftly upend parallel traditions in painting. His branch piece also plays with a common trompe l'oeil image in the revered Yixing teapot custom.

In my work I continue to be fascinated by the elemental nature of clay as dirt. As dirt, clay is the foundation for all life, from the complexities of wild ecosystems to the sprawling webs of human cultures and economies. My interactive sculpture of porcelain hearts is a tribute to my late mother, Chris Strecker, who was a potter and a gardener deeply bonded clay. Feel free to hold one in your hands. It's okay, it's just dirt.