

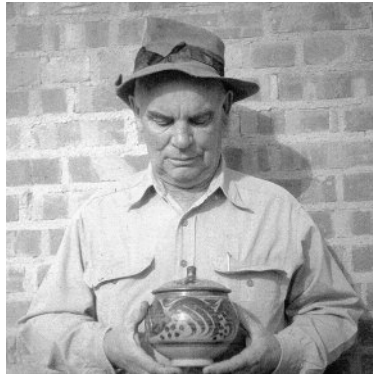


# Ceramic Excellence

Fellowships at the Archie Bray Foundation 2002-2003

# The Archie Bray Foundation

## Nurturing Creative Excellence



**The Archie Bray Foundation is a public, nonprofit educational institution founded in 1951 by brickmaker Archie Bray who intended “to make available for those sincerely and seriously interested in any branch of the ceramic arts, a fine place to work.” Located on the grounds of the former Western Clay Manufacturing Company, the 26-acre site is a unique environment for the exploration of ceramic creativity.**

**From the beginning the Bray has provided an atmosphere of creative excellence for ceramic artists, based on its commitment to artistic expression, the people who come here to work, and the raw potential of the facility. For more than fifty years, the Bray has maintained an environment of artistic exchange, nurturing the ongoing experiment of free and individual expression in the ceramic arts.**

**To encourage this environment, Robert and Suzanne Taunt established the Taunt Fellowship in 1998. Their generosity and vision inspired additional awards to be established, including the Myhre Fellowship in 1999 and 2000, and the Lilian Fellowship since 2001. Currently, the Taunt and Lilian Fellowships each provide \$5,000 for a one-year, non-renewable residency to a ceramic artist who demonstrates exceptional merit and promise. This support gives each fellow the opportunity to focus his or her attention more completely on producing and exhibiting a significant body of work during the fellowship year.**

**As the Bray moves into its second 50 years, the fellowship program helps insure that leading ceramic artists will continue to travel to and work at the Foundation. In this way we will make our future as artistically rich as our past, and continue the legacy that distinguishes the rich heritage of the Bray.**

—Josh DeWeese, Resident Director

### **The Spirit of Fellowship**

My original idea for the fellowship was born out of a frustration I had that we, the Board, simply were not doing enough for the artists in residence. It was not from a lack of will to try and do so, but rather a simple matter of not enough money to go around for all the needs expressed by staff and the artists.

Kurt Weiser and I sat in my small studio one afternoon and talked about the concept of a fellowship. We were both excited about the possibilities that would spin off of such a venture. Not only would this idea provide much-needed financial support to an individual of exceptional talent and potential, it also would encourage the spirit of fellowship in its most generous sense among the resident community.

Kurt wanted to get to what he calls the “experiment of the Bray” and I wanted to insure that at least one person would have some extra cash to explore during their experiment at the Bray. I had long worried about residents having to get a job (sometimes two jobs) just to support themselves and also create art. It seemed humanly impossible. So, Kurt and I worked out some of the details and took it to Josh DeWeese for his reaction. He was delighted at the prospect.

We decided one artist would be picked each year from a separate set of applicants for the Taunt Fellowship at the Archie Bray Foundation as we decided to call it. A rotating selection committee of three artists would always include the Resident Director of the Bray along with two others. To begin, I appointed Kurt Weiser and Akio Takamori. Today, the committee is self-sustaining, electing a new member as an old member rotates off.

The experiment would begin in the spring of 1999 and continue for as long as Suzanne and I could fund the Fellowship. The Taunt Fellowship is a \$5,000 cash award to be given to the beneficiary to use in any manner they choose. The rest is history as the Taunt Fellowship continues to bring a new twist to the “experiment of the Bray” and inspire others in their support of resident artists. Kurt, Akio, Josh and I are grateful the program is working.

Let’s hope for more.

—Robert O. Taunt

# Things of the Spirit

## Jason Walker's Interrogation of Technology

For Idaho native Jason Walker, his two-year stint at the Archie Bray Foundation has been a kind of coming home. Born and raised in Pocatello, Jason finds the wide-open spaces of Montana, and the equally wide-open Bray community of artists, congenial and welcoming. "This has been the perfect place," he says, "to cultivate my transition from teaching to setting out on my own, as a studio potter." And in receiving the Taunt Fellowship for his second year, Jason has found his Bray experience greatly enhanced. "Getting the Taunt means I don't have to find a job," he notes. "I have more time to experiment, more time in the studio—and that's what the fellowship's designed to do."



Growing up in southeastern Idaho, Jason came to love the surrounding natural world. From a young age, he "pushed out into the wild," hiking, backpacking, biking, crosscountry skiing, and snowboarding. At the same time, he was exposed to technology at its most rarefied. His father worked as a technician at the top-secret Idaho National Engineering Laboratory, built in 1949 for the construction, testing, and operating of nuclear reactors. And Jason quickly came to associate technology with danger, secrecy, and the forbidden ("we could never visit my father at work").

It was years later, during his time in northern California, immediately after graduate school at Penn State, that Jason began to combine his love for nature and his questioning of technology in the drawings that are integral to his ceramic work. He was teaching at Napa Valley College and living directly across from the Napa River. "That poor river," he says. "You couldn't swim in it; it was pretty foul." The immediacy of the polluted river, the density of population

(after the relative emptiness of the Rocky Mountain West), the relentless traffic, and the proximity of Silicon Valley pushed him to an ongoing questioning: "how do mechanical devices alter our relations to the world?" He was reading the writings of Neil Postman, especially his *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology*, and "wondering about the future of humanity." It was, in his words, "a fruitful but lonely" time.

Out of this time of searching came Jason's distinctive take—darkly ironic, beautifully rendered, and unsettlingly thoughtful—on the American dream. He creates his drawings with black underglaze, wielding a long-bristled watercolor brush, on every surface of his porcelain plates, bowls, covered jars, and boxes. Birds and satellites (flying things represent, for him as they do in many shamanic cultures, things of the spirit), power plants and light bulbs, pipes and plugs, insects and wildly proliferating leaves mingle in his tableaux. Signs warn us that we're never secure,



Jason Walker, Taunt Fellow

that we're perpetually under surveillance. "Danger," reads one. "Wilderness is a state of mind with economic potential."

Jason insists that his work is more "sociological than political"—he does admit to being a Luddite "at heart" (the original Luddites, in early 19th century Britain, destroyed the newfangled machines that put skilled craftspeople out of work)—but his works, beautifully handcrafted, with their ambivalence and urgency and clear intelligence, do what the best of political art must do: draw us in, challenge our preconceptions, keep us aware—and therefore truly human.

Jason Walker's greatest strength may lie in his masterful deployment of drawings across three-dimensional surfaces. In talking about a 1997 study trip to Japan, he notes that the experience confirmed his



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desire to bring together the Japanese passion for the object, to be looked at, and Western illusionist perspective, to be looked into. During his time at the Bray, he has taken to applying, to his wheel-thrown pots, handles and spouts—slipcast light bulbs, plumbing joints, electrical plugs, and gauges—that echo the obsessive images in his drawings, rendering ever more seamless his integration of two- and three-dimensional space.

Whatever Jason Walker embarks upon after his Bray residency, he will doubtless persist in unsettling us, with witty and powerful works that quietly question the ever-increasing gap between man-made and natural, between technologically driven "disembodied activity" and the inescapable "pain of mortality."

—Rick Newby

Rick Newby is co-author of *A Ceramic Continuum: Fifty Years of the Archie Bray Influence* (Holter Museum of Art/University of Washington Press, 2001).

# Conjuring Belly Laughs

## The Ceramic Art of Sandra Trujillo

Sandra Trujillo, Lilian Fellow



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While in residence at the International Museum of Ceramic Art in Denmark, Sandra Trujillo received word that she had been accepted as a resident at the Archie Bray Foundation—and was the recipient of the Bray’s prestigious Lilian Fellowship. Her fellow artists-in-residence, Danes, Swedes, and Canadians, “knew it was a big deal for me,” she recalls. “They know the Bray is a true hub for ceramic artists in America—and they helped me celebrate!”

Since arriving at the Bray, Sandra has had reason to celebrate. With the financial support of the Lilian Fellowship, she’s

enjoyed the luxury of uninterrupted time to further refine her art, “especially the narrative aspects, how to employ all the tools I know: wit, economy of line, the element of surprise.” And in the supportive community of the Bray, she’s achieved—with china paints and video and dancing figurines—a cherished goal, “to have people really laugh” when they view her works, “you know, so they have to hold their stomachs.”

Originally from northern California, Sandra combines an acutely contemporary sensibility—and sense of humor—with a love for classical literature and visual narratives from many cultures. She brings together her cavorting modern couple, the loveable and fleshy Vern and Brenda, with china-painting techniques drawn from the elegant eighteenth-century porcelain tableware traditions of Europe. She reanimates ancient stories like the Genesis saga of Adam and Eve and Virgil’s epic poem, *The Aeneid* (her postmodern *Aeneid* has engaged much of her time at the Bray), transforming them into 21st-century frolics that amuse, intrigue, and delight.



Though she augments her narrative-rich installations with video and audio, Sandra considers herself first and foremost a ceramic artist, and more particularly, a china painter. Most often she executes her scenes—nearly always featuring that pleasure-loving pair, Vern and Brenda—on porcelain plates, bowls, cups, and boxes she gathers from sources ranging from rummages to the Royal Copenhagen Porcelain Factory (where she recently visited during a china-painting symposium). And in her latest work, she aims at ever greater density, a story for every surface. On a porcelain box, for example, she paints six scenes (“like stanzas in a poem,” she says), one on each of the four sides, one on the lid’s top, and—a surprise—one inside the lid. And she even paints miniature scenes on the bottoms of teacups. “No matter where you look,” she says, “I’m telling a story.”

In a review of Sandra’s MFA thesis show at the University of Colorado-Boulder, one critic noted that her installation was “magnificently detailed” and “thoroughly researched.”

Educated as an undergraduate in Religious Studies at University of California, Berkeley, Sandra Trujillo brings a scholar’s passion for precursors, both artistic and intellectual, to every detail. And her sources are equally uncommon. For her portrayals of Vern and Brenda’s adventures, she finds inspiration in a medieval health handbook, *Tacuina Sanitatis*, that illustrates household practices on a fourteenth-century Italian estate. And William Hogarth’s series of prints, *The Harlot’s Progress*, offers a source for visual stories wittily told. Whether she has Vern and Brenda visiting a supermarket (today’s equivalent, with its pleasures and temptations, of the Garden of Eden), places them in the midst of a cacophonous

modern-day Rome, or has Brenda primping for her “Big Day,” she brings new life, and a serenely comic vision, to her sources. At the same time, the level of detail for her Lilian Fellowship exhibition at the Bray,

*Trouble with the Hausmaler*—including, for example, miniature portraits, on 400 tiny porcelain disks, of every character in Virgil’s *Aeneid*—lends extraordinary weight and depth, in her words, “serious fun,” to her enterprise.

Fueled by her time at the Bray, Sandra Trujillo, in her inimitable style, continues to create on porcelain her own handbooks for health, solacing us with the power of laughter and Vern and Brenda’s unquenchable appetite for the small pleasures.

—Rick Newby





### Archie Bray Foundation for the Ceramic Arts

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Individuals wishing to establish a Fellowship at the Archie Bray Foundation are encouraged to contact the Resident Director Josh DeWeese.

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