

Ceramic Excellence

Fellowships
at the
Archie Bray
Foundation
2006–2007



Jennifer Allen
Taunt Fellow

Joseph Pintz
Lincoln Fellow

Christina West
Lilian Fellow





Jennifer Allen

Taunt Fellow

Unexpected Moments

From tulip vases and teapots to plates, cups, and saucers, Jennifer Allen's utilitarian pieces drive home the fact that a little embellishment doesn't compromise functionality.

Her voluptuous forms swell and contract, making them comfortable in the hand. Elegantly scalloped rims move seamlessly into handy pouring lips, and bases are pinched like piecrusts. Finials are seized as opportunities for Art Nouveau-style decorative flourishes, as are the seams where handles and spouts meet the body of the pot. Like a skilled tailor, Allen alters the clay after it comes off the wheel, adding folds, seams, and darts that produce slightly asymmetrical contours. She manipulates classical proportions as well, placing an oversized knob,

for example, on a petite sugar jar or a chunky spout on a slender soy cruet. All of this gives the work an appealingly quirky, human character.

Whereas Allen's generous forms assertively inhabit the space they occupy like a gregarious house-mother, the depth achieved in her surfaces is more nuanced. The artist's educational background included painting, and this is evident in the pictorial sophistication of her work. The main bodies of the pieces are glazed in single colors—icy blues are common—with subtle permutations in hue and value. Inspired by natural phenomena such as the aurora borealis and glacial recession, the glassy surfaces have the diffused, atmospheric quality of a Mark Rothko painting. Encroaching on these areas are matte, burnt-orange shapes resembling clouds or flowers. Within these shapes, Allen layers a variety of floral forms derived from postwar textile patterns and Edo-period kimono fabric designs, both of which historically celebrated everyday life. The flowers differ drastically in style and application: Allen uses slip-trailing bottles for those that are graphic and abstract, commercial decals for those with a more realistic appearance, and a brush for the soft silhouettes. These differences in form, along with the layering of the imagery and carefully calibrated variations in hue and value, collapse the illusion of space in some places and articulate it in others, recalling the paintings of Robert Kushner. A filigreed white rose placed over a bold, dark blue chrysanthemum, for example, produces an engaging confusion in the figure-ground relationship.

It is these types of surprising visual contradictions that deepen the complexity of Allen's work. The warm exuberance of the patterned areas abruptly interrupts the cool reserve of the glazes. The whimsy of the embellishments is checked by the orderliness of their application. The dainty politeness of the scalloped rims and arching handles contrasts with the eccentricity of the disproportionate volumes. "I constantly embrace the unexpected and serendipitous," Allen says when describing her work, "and I strive to capture moments of awe that I experience in nature. The wonder I felt when first witnessing the northern lights in Alaska's Knik River Valley. A cluster of violets camouflaged by the moist spring grass. A male cardinal darting past a placid winter landscape. The birth of a baby. The intensity of an earthquake. The vulnerability of human nature." Moments that, in her words, "startle and open your heart."

A 2003 recipient of the Archie Bray's Eric Myhre scholarship, Jennifer Allen received her BFA from the University of Alaska, Anchorage, and her MFA from Indiana University in Bloomington. Her work has been shown nationally and she is currently represented by galleries including the Clay Studio in Philadelphia, the Lillstreet Art Center in Chicago, and the Red Lodge Clay Center in Red Lodge, Montana.

—Casey Ruble

Teapot, salt fired porcelain, decals, 6" x 6" x 4.5", 2007



Cups, salt fired porcelain, decals, 4" x 4" x 3.5", 2007



Thick Bowls,
earthenware, 2007

Muffin Tins,
earthenware, 2006



Joseph Pintz

Lincoln Fellow

Down to Earth

When talking about his work, Joseph Pintz often begins by describing his childhood in Chicago—a place most people associate with urban life. But Pintz’s story differs from most Chicago natives.

The third of four children of immigrants from rural Germany, Pintz was raised to value a close connection to the land: He grew up harvesting crops from the family’s backyard garden, picking cherries for homemade jelly, and baking loaves of sourdough in the drywall mud pans his father brought home from his job as a union painter. This groundedness comes through in Pintz’s personality, as well as in his technically masterful yet deceptively simple work.

Made from a coarse Nebraska brick clay that, in Pintz’s words, “most potters wouldn’t touch,” the artist’s works—plates, cups, and bowls; bakeware and kitchen utensils; feeding troughs for barnyard animals—look like three-dimensional realizations of painter Giorgio Morandi’s still-life objects. Solid to the point of sometimes being too thick to actually use, the works are devoid of decorative embellishment and craftiness; their character is humble, almost crude. Pintz achieves this rough-hewn quality by carving the objects out of solid clay rather than throwing

them on a wheel—a process that, by virtue of the scrape marks and subtle inconsistencies of the hand, accentuates the negative spaces, lending them a physical presence and emotional charge they wouldn’t otherwise have. Pintz’s treatment of the surfaces, which range in color from neutrals to earthy pinks, greens, yellows, and blues, contributes to the handcrafted feel. The artist uses brushed-on glazes for some pieces and terra sigillata for others; in both cases, the rough texture of the clay causes the glaze or slip to go on unevenly, producing a patinated effect in which the red of the clay peeks through in places. The overall aesthetic sensibility seems guided by an appreciation of the materials’ raw form and its possibilities; when looking at Pintz’s “pots,” one doesn’t forget that they, like the food they hold, originate from the earth itself.

Pintz’s forms are mostly inspired by nonceramic objects—the aforementioned kitchen utensils are a case in point—and they range from functional to nonfunctional. But even the nonfunctional objects (his ceramic egg beaters, for example) speak of utility, and the weight of the functional objects renders them unwieldy. Pintz utilizes the installation of his work to further challenge the supposed fault line between sculpture and “mere” pottery: A series of grayish-brown muffin tins hung on the wall read something like Agnes Martin’s spare grid paintings, and a group of troughs installed directly on the floor nod to Minimalist sculptor Carl Andre’s floor pieces. The reductive form, seriality, grid-based architecture, and restrained palette of Pintz’s objects recall Minimalist sculpture and painting, but their handmade quality and embracing of simple, everyday materials and themes pushes them closer to Postminimalism—Rachel Whiteread’s



concrete castings of negative spaces come to mind as an apt comparison. Like many of the Postminimalists, Pintz utilizes an economy of formal means to achieve depth of content. In his work, seriality and uniformity have metaphoric potential, with connotations of community, abundance, and prosperity, and the symbiotic relationship he establishes between volume and negative space reflects the basic nature of sustenance. As the English poet Philip James Bailey once wrote, “Simplicity is nature’s first step, and the last of art.” Pintz’s work embodies this idea with a down-to-earth directness, reminding us that the container is just as essential as what we put in it.

Joseph Pintz earned his BA at Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois, completed postbaccalaureate studies at Southern Illinois University, Edwardsville, and received his MFA from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. His work has been exhibited nationwide at museums and galleries including the Museum of Contemporary Craft in Portland, Oregon, the Society of Arts and Crafts in Boston, and the Holter Museum of Art in Helena, Montana.

—Casey Ruble



Christina West

Lilian Fellow

The Strangely Familiar

The best way to describe the impact of Christina West's psychologically invasive sculptures is to relate one of my own personal experiences—a disturbing dream I had in which a stranger stood immobile in a corner of my bedroom, watching me as I slept.

The dream was so vivid that when I awoke I immediately called a locksmith to add a deadbolt to my front door. West's hand-built, lifelike figures have a similar power: You know they aren't real, but on a gut level you can't help but relate to them as if they are.

The use of hyperrealism in sculpture may be a gimmick, but it's an effective one—employed perhaps most notably in the work of Duane Hanson and Ron Mueck, to which West's pieces can easily be compared. But the eeriness of West's figures stems from more than their extreme anatomical veracity. They are caught in ambiguous, sometimes vaguely devious acts. They are mostly unclothed, even in situations where one should be dressed, such as sitting at a school desk. The color of their acrylic-painted surfaces has little resemblance to

human skin. And they are often, though not always, slightly smaller in scale than the average human body. The net effect is similar to that achieved by Eric Fischl's sexually charged, voyeuristic paintings: One feels compelled to stare but has the uneasy sense that doing so might be taboo.

In the roughly two-foot-tall piece *Entry*, for example, a naked middle-aged man painted dark olive green sits on a lime-green pedestal. His spindly legs dangle off the side, with his ankles comfortably crossed, and his body throws a painted green shadow on the top of the pedestal, incorporating it into the narrative of the piece. In his lap is a woman's purse, which he slides his hand into. His gaze is directed not at the purse but rather sideways, as if looking to see whether anyone is watching him. The precision with which the man's body is rendered makes him seem instantly familiar—his belly has a typical paunch; his receding hairline is one we've seen countless times. But his miniature size, sinister color, and odd pose prompt more questions than they answer.

In colloquial parlance, the term uncanny is used to describe things that seem odd or abnormal, but in the context of West's work, psychologist Sigmund Freud's definition is more applicable. Freud notes that the term derives from a German word with two contradictory meanings—the first being “familiar” or “intimate”; the second, “clandestine” or “furtive.” Thus, Freud's uncanny involves a certain ambivalence, signifying things that are frightening not because they are unfamiliar but

rather because they used to be familiar but somehow have become strange¹—like the subject of West's *All in Fun and Games*, an ordinary-looking man wearing a little girl's pink sock on one hand and raising his arms in an “it wasn't me” type of gesture.

This merging of the familiar and unfamiliar runs throughout West's work. Like sculptor Katharina Fritsch, the artist uses incongruous colors to prevent us from fully relating to the figures, but the realism of their details—the double chins, the beady eyes—draws us into their odd narratives. As we look at these figures, they look back at us, implicating us as participants in a world where normal and strange are strangely interchangeable.

A recipient of a 2007 fellowship from the New York Foundation for the Arts, Christina West received her BFA from Siena Heights University in Adrian, Michigan, and her MFA from Alfred University in Alfred, New York. Her work has been shown nationally and is included in collections including the San Angelo Museum of Fine Arts in San Angelo, Texas, Wright State University in Dayton, Ohio, and the Schein-Joseph International Museum of Art in Alfred, New York.

—Casey Ruble

¹Anneleen Masschelein, *A Homeless Concept: Shapes of the Uncanny in Twentieth-Century Theory and Culture*. Image and Narrative: Online Magazine of the Visual Narrative, January 2003, Issue 5. Retrieved from www.imageandnarrative.be/uncanny/anneleenmasschelein.htm

No Way, 38" tall x 24" wide x 43.5" long, painted ceramic and desk, 2007



Nurturing Creative Excellence

The Archie Bray Foundation for the Ceramic Arts has always been an ongoing experiment, a place and experience with no artistic boundaries. The extensive facilities, the freedom to explore, and the creative exchange that occurs within the community of resident artists provides a profound opportunity for artistic growth, both for individual artists and for the field of ceramics.

To further encourage the Bray "experiment," Robert and Suzanne Taunt established the Taunt Fellowship in 1998. Inspired by the Taunts' vision and generosity, others established additional awards, including the Myhre Fellowship in

1999 and 2000, the Lilian Fellowship since 2001, and most recently the Lincoln Fellowship, inaugurated in 2004. Currently the Taunt, Lilian, and Lincoln fellowships each provide \$5,000 and a one-year residency to a ceramic artist who demonstrates exceptional merit and promise, allowing them to focus more completely on producing and exhibiting a significant body of work during their fellowship year.

Individuals wishing to establish a fellowship at the Archie Bray Foundation are encouraged to contact Resident Artist Director Steven Y. Lee.

Annually, the Archie Bray Foundation invites a critic to spend time at the Bray to meet with the artists, experience the Bray's unique environment, and develop essays for the fellowship exhibition catalogue. This year the residency was awarded to Casey Ruble, a New York-based

artist and writer. Ruble works as a freelance critic for Art in America. Her paintings have been included in exhibitions in New York and abroad, and she is represented by Foley Gallery in New York City. She also currently holds an artist-in residence position at Fordham University.

Past Fellowship Recipients

1999
Marc Digeros, Taunt Fellowship
Sharon Brush, Myhre Fellowship

2000
Eric Eley, Taunt Fellowship
John Byrd, Myhre Fellowship

2001
Jiman Choi, Taunt Fellowship
John Utgaard, Lilian Fellowship

2002
Jason Walker, Taunt Fellowship
Sandra Trujillo, Lilian Fellowship

2003
Jeremy Kane, Taunt Fellowship
Karen Swyler, Lilian Fellowship

2004
Trey Hill, Taunt Fellowship
Miranda Howe, Lilian Fellowship
Kowkie Durst, Lincoln Fellowship

2005
Koi Neng Liew, Taunt Fellowship
Deborah Schwartzkopf,
Lilian Fellowship
Melissa Mencini,
Lincoln Fellowship



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