Ceramic Excellence

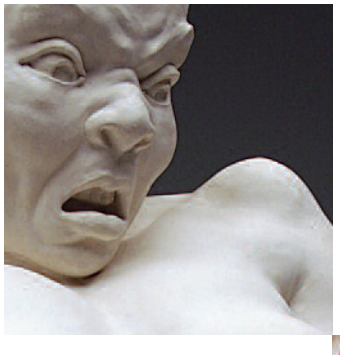
Fellowships at the Archie Bray Foundation
2007–2008

Renee Audette
Lincoln Fellow

Jeremy Hatch
Taunt Fellow

Brian Rochefort
Lilian Fellow

Anne Drew Potter
Matsutani Fellow



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, the Lincoln Fellowship in 2004 and most recently the Matsutani Fellowship established in 2006.

Currently the Taunt, Lilian, Lincoln and Matsutani 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 Young 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 **Ashok Mathur**. Mathur holds a Canada Research Chair in Cultural and Artistic Inquiry at Thompson Rivers University, Kamloops, British Columbia. He works in the fields of artistic research, postcolonial studies and education, and cultural studies, and he is the Director of the Centre for Innovation in Culture and the Arts in Canada, a creative thinktank that supports artists in various stages of their projects. His most recent project is an interdisciplinary novel and installation entitled "A Little Distillery in Nowgong," an investigation of Parsi history and familial generations through fiction and art.

Past Fellowship Recipients

1999
Marc Digeros, Taunt Fellow
Sharon Brush, Myhre Fellow

2000
Eric Eley, Taunt Fellow
John Byrd, Myhre Fellow

2001
Jiman Choi, Taunt Fellow
John Utgaard, Lilian Fellow

2002
Jason Walker, Taunt Fellow
Sandra Trujillo, Lilian Fellow

2003
Jeremy Kane, Taunt Fellow
Karen Swyler, Lilian Fellow

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

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

2006
Jennifer Allen, Taunt Fellow
Christina West, Lilian Fellow
Joseph Pintz, Lincoln Fellow

Renee Audette

Lincoln Fellow

We see them all around us, in our midst, in our families, in our selves. Representations of Twins abound:

Gemini in the sky, Janus in the psyche, Remus and Romulus in mythology, identically-dressed in oh-so-cute outfits on the street, or sinister/demonic in literature and lore. Regardless of what image we bring to the fore, the notional quality of twins is familiar and alluring. A first take of Renee Audette's twinnish figures presents us with an almost-sentimental quality, that afore-mentioned cuteness, a remembrance of twins we have known or have seen represented. This is a Blakeian childhood innocence that is so embedded in the public imaginary. But, not unlike Blake's own binaries, surfacing from the depths are much more complex ways of twinning.

Audette is straight-up when talking about how these twin-images are, for her, variations on the struggle of the self, the inner contradictions or tensions of multiple or dual selves inside a single body. But hers is a work that complicates traditional notions of binaries or alter egos. Taken at face value, certainly, the strawberry twins might be viewed as a manifestation of power—the actor and the acted-upon—as one girl force-feeds a strawberry into the mouth of another. But innocence/experience are not, as we know, quite as simple as that. Audette is interested in allowing questions to surface in her work so that viewers do not fall into complacencies, nor are they mollified for their variegated readings. "Female children are not supposed to have sexual appetites or aggressive behaviours, so this work is a challenge to that," says Audette. Given such a slant, what does it mean for a strawberry to be offered—is it force, is it acquiescence to desire, or is it something far different and far more in-between?

Doggypile
ceramic and mixed media
20" x 16" x 14", 2008

What Audette's work does is make tangible the Keatsian notion of negative capability, that almost-spiritual sense of holding two contradictory notions in mind at a single moment. Rather than identifying with the 'giver' or 'receiver,' in the context of twins who are playing or offering or fighting, the viewers find themselves locked in that most interesting tensive space that plays out in the very interaction. This creates a response of endearment and astonishment, and we cannot help but be caught up in a dreamlike experience of watching the show and participating in the action all at once. The decorative, kitsch-like quality of the work, the type of object-art that might be found in many an antique or collectible outlet, adds to that strange sense of dreamy familiarity that also allows us to enter in close and only then say, "hey, wait a minute," as we reflect on the intensity of the interplay and interaction.

More than anything, Audette's multi-dimensioned pieces allow us access to a place that, while generated from a deep, reflective space inhabited by the artist, also allows us to reflect on our own shadowy interiors, peopled by gestures, thoughts, and actions that are both beyond us and all about us.

– Ashok Mathur

Tied to Myself
ceramic and mixed media
16" x 34" x 14", 2008

Jeremy Hatch

Taunt Fellow

What would happen if the everyday items of our world were all awash in white?

Evoking some sort of dreamscape made notable not by an abundance but an absence of colour, Jeremy Hatch's associative clay-works read like an inventory list at a shipyard: shipping palettes, heavy rope and knots, industrial pulleys and clamps, but all slip-cast in porcelain, an unlikely substitute for the raw materials of wood, fibre, and steel.

There is a subtle but intense labour aesthetic at work in Hatch's various simulacra. The inspiration for making such objects came for the artist when he was in a residency in Holland and observed the infrastructure surrounding the restoration of an old cathedral. These items, so much part of daily labour, are also invisiblized ghosts, part of a backdrop, so to speak, of the 'real.' A viewer might be excused for passing by Hatch's work as ephemera or remnants of a workday were it not so solidly framed by the gallery itself. Situated thusly, Hatch's work brings to mind the history and context of ceramics, from the legacy of colonial trade routes to the cultural references toward *chinoiserie*, whereby traditions of Chinese porcelain were co-opted and adopted for the European market.

But the overwhelming impression created from a Hatch installation is an evocation of memory and a re-ordering of those cultural memes. His slip-cast technique reminds us that the objects are not modeled, but are instead a testament to frozen moments in time. And unlike earlier work, where a treehouse or a swingset might reference a collective childhood, Hatch's current project is an insistence on the intersections of form and function. Ropes meander amongst pulleys, clamps set beside knots, but in a disordered manner that suggests both a dysfunctionality and an exhibition that suspends our previous notions of those objects themselves. In this way, the artists' work is an exercise in phenomenology, encouraging viewers not to address an idea about the thing, but the thing itself.

Above all, what is most striking about Hatch's work is the manner in which narratives are simultaneously created and dismantled—there are endless untold stories in every object, and yet these narratives remain undeniably open, as textured and yet unfixed, a leveling alluded to by the muted monochromatic surface. When we walk through Hatch's work, we fall *into* objects and yet in that falling, those objects themselves fall away. It is only then we realize that the depth resides within those interstitial spaces, a meditative contemplation as we try to make sense of objects that are not what they appear, are less than they are, and, ultimately, are very much more than we expected in the first place.

– Ashok Mathur

Reconstruction Site
bone china
dimensions variable, 2008

Waiting
bone china
8" x 26" x 60", 2008

Brian Rochefort

Lilian Fellow

They are accidents waiting to happen, these sometimes luscious, often lava-like, and always lyrical creations that Brian Rochefort calls his Rock Star Energy Gloops.

In fact, they come into being by accident, quite literally, when the artist takes the half-formed mounds of clay and pushes them off a table, letting them reside, settle perhaps, for some period of time before resurrecting them and continuing to work them, allowing himself to be informed by the rolls or shifts the fall has initiated.

Rochefort came to this form when, as an undergraduate student at the Rhode Island School of Design, he first started to experiment with firing combinations of glass and clay.

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porcelain,
auto paint, magic
22" x 13" x 11"
2008

He was fascinated by the drips and how they shaped themselves, watching the process through the kiln peephole and, when a desired effect was nearing, turning off the kiln only to re-fire the piece five or six times in succession to morph the work into something aesthetically pleasing. His modus operandi was, and still is, to create visually striking work that both satisfies and amuses—if he can put a smile on someone's face, he says, then his art is working as he would have it. But that does not mean some variation of a truth/beauty argument, since much of Rochefort's current work is rife with what he calls loud and annoying noise, edgy imagery, a type of alternative exploration of self. He acknowledges that in social settings he is preternaturally quiet, though clearly his work explodes onto the scene talking its own language, being, as it were, the life of the party. Instilled in the process itself—Rochefort handbuilds his gloops, then quite literally shoves them off a table, allowing the randomness of volume, gravity, and impact to shape the work—is a type of play that effectively decries the precious relation-ship between artist and art object.

This intriguing contrast is further accentuated through Rochefort's glaze and paint process after the work has reached its dimensional finish line. Some of the gloops are simply patterned, but even those are done with a type of panache and gaudiness, the celebrity status of eccentricity that comes with wearing a zoot suit to a formal wedding. Others are abundant with pop culture iconography—emoticons, symbols, MSN lingo—like an excess of media dripping off the face of a new canvas, waiting to be controlled, contained, but always running ahead and refusing such boundaries.

Speculating on Rochefort's art, the processual practice and the ultimate ends, I cannot help but think of what happens when chaos theory applies to ceramics. From conception, from the initial handbuild to the toss off the table, to the rebuild and dressup, it is as if a magnificent and unpredictable butterfly effect is brought into play. Although in this case, a monarch's wings on one side of the world results not in a tornado an ocean away, but a gloop that sings and laughs and dances, if such is at all possible for works of clay.

– Ashok Mathur

hijiñx_4Ø¹_³Ø9_98²5
earthenware, sparkles, auto paint
34" x 14" x 14", 2008

Tar Baby II
ceramic and paint
26" x 18" x 20"
2008

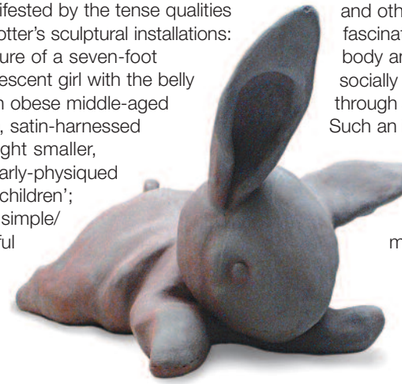
Anne Drew Potter

Matsutani Fellow

There is something about the tension of the gaze, the way one looks upon another, the manner by which we interact, judge, critique, engage.

It would be easy to say that the world of Anne Drew Potter is a corpus of the grotesque, the body writ absurd, a parlance that belies our spectacular interest in the freakish, but such a reading would disserve the complexity that lies within her work. True enough, on the surface there is a lurid fascination with the way we "look," used operatively as a verb ("I look at the object") and as an ontology ("how do I look?"), manifested by the tense qualities of Potter's sculptural installations: a figure of a seven-foot adolescent girl with the belly of an obese middle-aged man, satin-harnessed to eight smaller, similarly-physiqued 'girl-children'; or a simple/playful rabbit figure of stuffed-toy quality surrounded and stared down in judgment by three gargoyle-ish figures apparently intent on simultaneously possessing and destroying the subject of their derision. But installations such as "Fecundity: Safety in Numbers" and "The Judgment of Br'er Rabbit" are steeped in attempts to both address and redress social tensions of the body.

Potter engages the viewer with large questions: how is the body supposed to look (again, in both senses of the word), and how do we catch ourselves looking? Her work crosses thresholds of identity, whether it is gender, transgender, racialization, or other formations of the self and other. She admits that her fascination is with the 'aberrant' body and how it is located, socially and politically, mostly through a constructed gaze. Such an interest locates itself in her installations, sometimes disturbing and always challenging, manipulating viewers into positioning themselves alongside the figures: are we part of them, or are they part of us? By using a three-dimensional form, Potter takes these figures both into a 'real' and an 'unreal' space, making them a force with which the viewers must contend. We walk in and amongst these figures, watch both their gaze and the object of their gaze, wonder if we might cast ourselves as both the lookers and the looked upon. It is an unsettling process, but a fertile one. For if we can allow ourselves such discomfiture—in a sense, step outside of ourselves and feel the newness of that 'look'—then we can allow ourselves to see not just a different world but to see a world differently.



Br'er Rabbit
ceramic
4" x 6" x 6", 2008

Potter says she wants to create a space that is nonconfrontational but not 'watered down,' that is, made perfectly palatable. The uneasiness instilled through her installations are, in fact, mental landscapes as they allow us into a different psychic space, allow us to explore emotional and psychological realities from which we might otherwise 'protect' ourselves. But the crass fact is that these elements of the different, the strange, the grotesque, are not at all what they seem. Rather, in a macabre "Madame Bovary, c'est moi" manner, we are forced to relate to these figures, to the installations, not as the amorphous and perhaps extant 'Other,' but as integral, however hidden or denied, to the Self. It is this eventual realization that creates an awareness of the actual delight and aesthetic thrill of Potter's work, moved past first blush from a space away, to a space inside.

– Ashok Mathur

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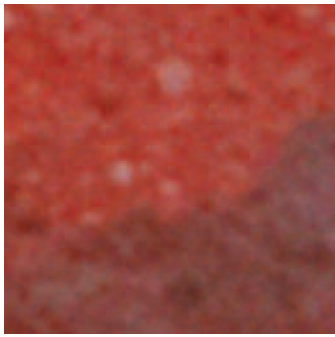

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