



Print and Clay

THE NOTION OF IMAGES ON CLAY IS NOTHING NEW, BUT its advancements in ceramics are becoming a popular movement. A recent exhibition curated by Charlie Cummings focused on this growing trend. *Print and Clay* ran from 31 August through 2 October 2013 at the Fort Wayne Museum of Art in Fort Wayne, Indiana, US. Cummings, himself a practicing clay

artist employing images in his work, spoke with Paul Andrew Wandless and Thomas Lucas (both invited artists for the exhibition) at a panel discussion before the exhibition's closing. Cummings and Wandless both expressed their openness and a push for more exploration into this emerging entity of ceramic art. Each artist highlighted his particular interest and resolve for using imagery with his clayworks.

Though print on clay is becoming ever increasingly popular, imagery has been found on ceramic wares for thousands of years. It can be understood as mere

decoration or a narrative. From the Greeks, Romans and Chinese drawing on their wares with iron and cobalt rich slips to modern fired-on industrial decals, innovations in technology over time have drastically opened the conversations that have been held in clay. Most dramatically, since the 18th century, various

printmaking technologies have been used by industry on a mass scale to put

imagery on factory made ceramics. These have given way to more modern means of printing and applying images other than drawing.

Using imagery effectively on a 3D surface (or even on a 2D surface) is no easy feat. Today, the ceramic decal can be a 'fix all' for mediocre work. 'If you can't make it good, make it blue. If the blue looks bad, put a decal on it' (as the amended adage goes). When initially thinking about imagery on clay, the idea does not seem so daunting or overwhelming. Though many forget that the form that you are

A Review by Zach Tate



Facing page: Les Lawrence. *Money Teapot*.
Above: Israel Davis. *Baby and Daddy Dreaming*.

putting images on demands a certain amount of attention when viewing, as does the image itself and the process that you choose to transfer it. With all of these factors to juggle, no simple solution or haphazard technique will save a piece and make something worth viewing. A sophistication and tempered lexicon for this synthesis of visually communicating is needed by the artist who chooses to take on the 3D canvas with any sort of success.

Les Lawrence's *Money Teapot* carried a timeless power. Lawrence is not exactly new to the clay or the print scene. He has been making these iconic teapots for more than 30 years. He represented some of the modern history of the craft. His synthesis of the teapot with images of George Washington's dollar bill portrait works to push the emphasis of prestige and power associated with both the object and image. It is with this combination that Lawrence has created a piece that needs both object and image to carry its power to the viewer.

Equally as interesting were Israel Davis' *Babies Bath Dreaming* and *Baby and Daddy Dreaming*. Like Lawrence, Davis utilised the screen-printing process to transfer his imagery. But in contrast, Davis is using multiple colours, woodfiring his wares and unique imagery created by Davis. This lends the work to a unique and, inherently, subjective patina/finish with the kiln, ash, reduction and other factors having a dramatic say-so in the outcome of each piece. The metaphorical significance in choosing woodfiring helps to enforce Davis' thematic interest in investigating "the symbols, people and objects that have affected perceptions of growing up, the subconscious and life experience". This inherently creates a unique vocabulary found in Davis' ware.

In juxtaposition, taking a relative history and applying a modern context to what has come before is what Forrest Middleton is able to achieve with





his vessels. Middleton's works are adorned with homemade decals: a process adapted by Middleton himself. The designs that Middleton uses are inspired by Middle Eastern and Asian cultures. His meticulously thrown vessels are deeply rooted in history as well. Regardless of Middleton's proclivity to derive his work from a historical context, he is well minded of the current political and social contexts to which his work harkens. "To this end I am able to achieve results that accentuate an aesthetic that is key in my works emphasising of history, both in content and physicality."

The forms of Erin Furimsky take a different approach to the use of decals than that of the formerly mentioned. Furimsky's abstracted forms are departures from the functional (or the functionally related) forms of many artists featured in this exhibition. Additionally they do not overtly portray a narrative. These small and meticulously crafted objects that swell and bulge, become complex canvases for an array of commercial and homemade decals to be applied. Furimsky's fetish-like objects which "beckon to be held in the hands" are well thought out investigations into form and design (both 3D and 2D). This work partakes in the array of surface adorning options as well.

It is nearly impossible to encompass every facet



Facing page, top: Forrest Lesch-Middleton.
Thrown Vessel with Homemade Decals.

Facing page, below: Erin Furimsky. *Come Into View*.
Above left: Erin Furimsky. *Loom*.
Above: Meredith Host. *Bottles*.

of print and clay with an exhibition. And although there were no artists from the *trompe l'oeil* faction of our field (who generally employ a slew of printing techniques), a large swath of clay's true contemporaries were represented. It is crucial to remember that trends will forever rise and fall. Inevitably through these periods a renewed understanding will be established within the field. During these times, a new group of artists will take the old and remake it for themselves. Technology certainly plays a part in this constant rebirth but, moreover, it is the inherit evolution of our field that sparks our development.

Zach Tate is a ceramics artist, writer and adjunct professor residing in Goshen, Indiana, US. Tate has travelled and exhibited his figurative sculptures throughout the US, Europe and Asia.