

BEAUTY STILL LIVES HERE

*Narratives of  
Radical Self-Love*

Deshun Peoples

BEAUTY STILL LIVES HERE:  
*Narratives of Radical Self-Love*

A thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Fine Arts in Ceramics in the Department of Ceramics of the Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, Rhode Island.

by

Deshun Kelvin Peoples  
2021

Approved by Master’s Examination Committee:

Lesley Baker, Head, Department of Ceramics, Thesis Chair

Anina Major, Assistant Professor, Department of Ceramics, Thesis Adviser

Nicole Cherubini, Thesis Adviser

Glenn Adamson, Thesis Adviser

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Prelude	6
Introduction	7
Granny-Ma	8
Beauty & Value	10
A Song Selection: <i>Even Me</i>	11
Negotiating Value	12
A Song Selection: <i>I’m Getting Ready</i>	15
Repositioning Value	17
A Song Selection: <i>A Song For Mama</i>	21
Reconciling Familial Relations	22
Corresponding Artist Statement Excerpt	25
Of Spatial Importance	26
A Song Selection: <i>Walking in Authority</i>	27
Taking Up Space	29
Corresponding Artist Statement Excerpt	33
Specific Geometry	35
A Song Selection: <i>Dear Mama</i>	36
Perfectionism	39
Corresponding Artist Statement Excerpt	41
The Psycho-Emotional	42
A Song Selection: <i>Colorblind</i>	43
Give Me Back My Color	45
A Poetry Selection: <i>Towards a Suicidal State</i>	48
Corresponding Artist Statement Excerpt	49
Coda	50
Checking In	51
Notes	52
Images	54
MFA Thesis Exhibition	55
Artist Portfolio	68



*Beauty Still Lives Here: Narratives of Radical Self-Love; Rhode Island School of Design MFA Thesis Exhibition (WaterFire Arts Center, Providence, RI)  
Ceramic, Gold Luster, Steel Tubing; 2021*



# Prelude

## INTRODUCTION

The title of this book references *Radical Self-Love*, something that author Gala Darling, who created the first full literary basis for understanding the term, refers to simply as, “fall[ing] in love with yourself and your life”.<sup>1</sup> She goes on to explain how to work through your personal hang-ups and push past negative self talk to fully embrace how amazing you are. She follows this with a discussion of how to expand your love of self out into the universe and onto others to form more positive, substantial and longer-lasting relationships, including platonic and intimate ones. She concludes with a section titled, “Daily Magic” that is meant to aid in manifesting your dreams and desires, as well as providing tips for simple acts and considerations that can help transform a mundane daily life into something more magical and exciting to be a part of. Through this book I attempt to situate a series of narratives and anecdotes into this framework by trying to understand the nuances of my experiences and how those may manifest into not only a reflexive creative practice, but also more appreciation for and love of all of the things that at one point I loathed myself because of.

This thesis exhibition in fulfillment of the Master of Fine Arts in Ceramics degree at Rhode Island School of Design is primarily concerned with the act of taking up physical and socio-political space. Through the use of form, design, color, and installation this work places various histories and traditions of both ceramics and resistance in communication with one another. For example, the red, black, and green of political activist, publisher, journalist, entrepreneur, and orator Marcus Garvey’s 1920 Pan-African/Black American flag<sup>2</sup> are proudly displayed against a warm, calm, pale green backdrop to highlight the importance of mental health in all affairs, especially in the emotionally taxing labor of social, political, and economic protest in the battle for humanity, life, civil rights, equity, access, and decision-making power.

This book is organized into four Movements titled after the four main pillars of my creative



practice and inspirations with an intro (Prelude) and Conclusion/Outro (Coda). Each section (or subsection within section one) is made of three primary parts. Each begins with a song selection relevant to the text that follows. Next, it moves into a selection of semi-narrative anecdotal text meant to reclaim the value of narrative story telling; to proclaim it as a valid, rigorous academic writing tradition and pay homage to the necessity of the oral tradition in the Black community. (The oral tradition has been vital to preserving personal and communal memory as well as teaching accurate lived histories in contrast to doctored accounts in official history books written from the perspective of the elite oppressors in positions of power.) Then it switches to the official academic artist statement writing derived from the previous anecdotal narratives. Last, in the fourth section, there is a section-specific poetry selection following the third primary part. Finally, there is a Coda that concludes the writing for the book followed by a final, full circle, re-viewing of the thesis exhibition, hopefully with a new appreciation for the ideas that grew from the arc of experiences that shaped the content lying beneath the surface of the, at times, seemingly traditional functional wares. Through its unconventional multi-form structure this book serves as an example of a “resistant knowledge project”<sup>3</sup> that sheds light on the emotional labor of reclamation and validation that necessarily burdens the experience of Black ceramists.

## GRANNY—MA

We didn’t have many ceramics growing up. I remember that when we would go to visit my grandmother she had a wall of 2 ceramic masks and a large 20-inch ceramic cutlery set, as well as a few ceramic elephants that adorned her glass living room tables. She also had a china cabinet with a set of porcelain white bone china cups with different color image decals and gold luster. To my childhood self, these objects were priceless, but adult ceramist me knows that they were likely fairly cheap mass produced wares meant to look like the British, Delft, or Chinese wares they referenced. However, to my grandma, who just like myself and the rest of my immediate family was very poor, they were priceless because she had

spent more money on them than she did on any other (mostly plastic) dish in her home. Her China set was mostly a decorative piece, but it was understood that they were to be used only for a special occasion, but nothing shy of then president Barack Obama and first Lady Michelle Obama stopping by for tea, would be a special enough occasion to open the china cabinet and rescue those cups from their prison of only potential use. My whole life, to this day--in the unimpressive, shameful sad turbulence of living in poverty--my Grandma has not known an occasion special enough to use her china set. I was subconsciously predisposed to a deflated sense of value through relationality to domestic ceramic objects and reorienting myself towards these objects would be the primary way that I, as my therapist insisted, charted my path to healing in clay.

# Beauty & Value

## A SONG SELECTION

*Even Me (2009):* Crystal Aikin

I don't deserve, the love you've shown  
The blood you've shed, covers my wrong  
Beyond my faults, Oh Lord you've seen  
And said you'll still use  
Use even me  
Oh Lord I've tried,  
To do my best  
Although sometimes, I do much less  
You called my name and  
And I ran away  
But still you called me, another day

Yes Even me Lord, even me  
Though scarred and broken, and unworthy  
My guilty stains, you washed them clean  
And said you'll still use,  
Use even me

Sometimes I fall, and make mistakes  
But brand new mercies,  
You show every day  
You are my strength, when I get weak  
And out of the darkness, you lifted me

Yes even me Lord, even me  
Though scarred and broken, and unworthy  
My guilty stains, you washed them clean  
And said you'll still use,  
Use even me

Ohhhh, even me, even me, Lord use, even me  
Though I'm scarred and broken, scarred  
and broken, and unworthy  
My guilty stains, you washed them clean  
But you could have used anybody else  
anybody else  
But you still used me

## NEGOTIATING VALUE

Gospel songs of unconditional love, acceptance, and unwavering strength framed my childhood sense of self. They gave me hope that one day the person who I knew myself to be, not the person I desperately tried to convince others I was, would undeniably be enough. Crystal Aikin's words "I don't deserve the love you've shown...Beyond my faults you've seen...you could have used anybody else but you still used me" painted a canvas of vulnerable truth I never dared let slip from my tightly clenched lips in conversation: I felt deeply "scarred and broken and unworthy" of most things, not least of them all, life, but if I believed long enough and prayed hard enough, one day someone would love me as infinitely as the Lord promised to love her.

In the presence of gospel music, I'm transported to lively moments in adolescence of watching the pageantry of church preparation on a lazy Sunday morning. I can clearly see my mother helping my younger sister re-braid a section of hair for an up-do that just had to be perfect because today she was going to have to be front and center leading praise and worship. Or my older sister I affectionately called my "Irish twin" adjust her stockings so that her curves were seamless in her pencil skirt because even though she'd be doing a wardrobe change in the afternoon into robes, hand cloths, and long split pants that would decorate the pulpit with flowy ombres of greens to blues or purples to pinks, she had to look her best for morning service too because no matter how many 12-15-hour days they'd spend at church, no matter how many services they'd be participating in or youth ministry events they'd be hosting that week, each occurrence was new and special. Though it was said by the pastor during a thankfully short sermon that you were to "come as you are" and you came to hear *the word* above all else, it was definitely understood in my house that Greater Omega Missionary Baptist Church was a runway. If you weren't ready to walk, you didn't dare leave the dressing room to go out on stage and embarrass my mother or yourself. My sisters were the belles of the ball and I was the frog "lucky" enough to be forced into attendance.

For most of my life I've struggled with body image issues on multiple fronts. I was taunted for being overweight and overly feminine in middle school which made me feel undesirable and out of place. In a family of supermodels and homophobes, the psychological wounds seemed to be a constant. I was raised primarily by my mother and distinctly remember my siblings commanding notice while my identity remained veiled. I lost count of how many times my classmates inquired about my sisters' relationship status or made an attempt to defend me against (usually verbal) bullies in hopes of that act of protection translating into me making some impassioned plea to whichever sister they were dying to court to reconsider their initial rejection of him. Countless also were the times a girl I thought I had a slight chance at developing a romantic connection with would melt into a puddle of pubescent hormones at the sight of my--smooth skinned, perfectly symmetrical facial features--fit older brother effectively ensuring I'd never develop enough confidence to ask about the possibility of me and her becoming an 'us'.

I was in the third grade when I began to notice the way that the world responded to my body. At 9 years old I had already become painfully aware of the way my body was *supposed* to move in space and recognized that my body's obtuse configurations would not fit the mold of my childhood understanding of an idealized form. I remember feeling a transition in the ease of making new friends and a sharp decrease in the enthusiasm and attempt at kindness that my peers were willing to extend to me. I could tell that this shift was related to my appearance because the undertones of apathy and disgust that crept into the interactions between my most popular peers and I began to mimic the ways they'd talk to "weird" kids, the "ugly" kids, and especially the "fat" kids. This only worsened with time and weight gain. The vicious cycle that leads to childhood obesity had now firmly rooted itself in what would become a new normalcy of my childhood.

By High school, I was consuming sadness, loneliness, and depression by the thousands of calories. I had become so obsessed with analyzing my body and desperately wanting it to change through many failed diets and abandoned exercise programs. I was convinced that if



I were not attractive, I would never be worth anything to anyone. As a self-loathing teenager in high school, I guess it never occurred to me that beauty and value were different things.

# A SONG SELECTION

*I'm Getting Ready*: Tasha Cobbs

Excerpt:

Eyes haven't seen  
And ears haven't heard  
The kind of blessings  
The kind of blessings  
That's about to fall on me, yeah, woo  
'Cause victory is here  
Kicked defeat out the door  
God's doing a new thing, yeah  
Get ready for overflow

'Cause I'm getting ready (I'm getting ready to see)  
Something I've never seen (something I've never seen)  
Prophecy over your life saying (I'm getting ready to see)  
Oh-oh-oh, oh-oh  
Something I've never seen  
Saying I'm getting ready (I'm getting ready to see) oh, oh  
Something I've never seen (something I've never seen)  
Say it again, I'm getting ready (I'm getting ready to see)  
Something I've never seen

...

God, You can blow my mind  
Hey 'Cause eyes haven't seen  
And ears haven't heard  
The kind of blessings  
The kind of blessings  
That's about to follow me  
Oh, 'cause victory is here  
It kicked defeat out the door  
God's doing a new thing, a brand new thing  
I'm ready for overflow  
God's doing a new thing (yeah)  
Get ready for overflow  
Yeah, I'm talking to you, I'm talking to you

God's doing a new thing  
Get ready for overflow  
You been waiting, you been praying, you been pressing, you been fasting  
God's doing a new thing  
Get ready for overflow  
'Cause I'm getting ready to see (yes)  
Mm-hmm, something I've never seen  
Oh, I'm getting ready to see  
Oh-oh  
Something I've never seen

# REPOSITIONING VALUE

Throughout my time as an undergraduate, as I explored questions of belonging, home, psychological center, self-care, and political agency, I was in a constant dialogue with myself about how to negotiate value in all of the spaces that I inhabited. This meant that I often found myself arguing for the validity of perspectives that were adjacent to, but distinctly not, my own. I never knew how important being Black was to me until I had to defend my humanity to an ignorant, insistently anti-Black white or non-Black Latinx person. Participating in many all-white and non-Black spaces mandated that I take another look at how racism, white blight, insubstantial public education systems and facilities, and lack of commercial development or local business support in inner city communities directly led to a self-fulfilling prophecy of selling illegal substances and securing gang protection to sell it in specific communities so that a starving family could eat--so that the teenage son of a single mother could ensure that his siblings could eat dinner every night on their mother's below-the-poverty-line minimum wage salary. I was called upon to enumerate to an "all lives matter" proponent the ways that black-on-black violence was an intentionally stigmatizing trope which failed to account for the fact that most people perpetrate crimes against people who live near and oftentimes share many demographics with them, didn't make clear the distinction between state-sanctioned, tax-payer purchased violence against Black civilians by sworn enforcement and personal intra communal crimes between civilians that, despite media delineation, was common within every cohabitating demographic just to make a bogus case for why "black lives matter" should be invalidated through deflecting the debate to a separate, completely irrelevant issue.

Whilst navigating what it mean to confront personal trauma and understand the ways that my childhood inadequacies manifested themselves in the ways I sought intimate relationships, the ways I viewed my physical body, and my unwillingness to be open about my pain in vulnerable situations with loved ones, I also had to struggle to reconcile how I could begin

to see value in a fat, queer body if the world had already predetermined it to be worthless because of the color of the skin that enveloped it. At that moment I realized the multifaceted nature of accessing my value and eventually making strides to re-conceive and reclaim it.

I do not recall when this was made known to me, but by the time I was sophomore in college, I knew with certainty that my mother had a very strong perspective about what we were to call ourselves in regards to race or ethnicity. We were Black, not African American. It didn't occur to me why she was so adamant about that distinction even though the rest of the world seemed to use the terms interchangeably until a discussion that a number of Black groups on campus had about what was/was not to be considered Black. At that point I was not yet the President of the Amandla: Black Student Union, so I attended as just an underclass member along with the executive board and members of all class years of Amandla: Black Student Union, along with Sankofa (Annual Theatrical Production of Narratives and Lessons from the African Diaspora), Women of Color (Which did sometimes include Latinx identified people and on the rare occasion a very audacious Asian identified woman), the Africana (which that year did include several white South African students), and the Caribbean Student Association (Which did also include--presumably--non-black Latinx identified people).

We had a robust conversation led by Dean James Reese, our beloved Dean of International Students (who was affectionately understood to be the dean of all black and brown people, domestic and international, and he worked tirelessly to earn that moniker) about Blackness as a domestic and international construct, its relationship to nationalities in Central, South, and North America as well as Africa, and the ways that socio-economics played a role in the differences in opinions about particular topics or the way that people oriented themselves around particular priorities within the community. What I remember most about that conversation was a discussion about the ways that we, primarily referring to domestic Black people, chose to identify ourselves. There seemed to be a general consensus about the term "African American" as a catch all term for Black-skinned people (with few exceptions) whose

family lineage could reasonably be traced back to the North Atlantic slave trade. Some contrarian, perhaps Dean Reese, offered the term "Black" as another potential option for what a member of this group could be referred to as, but it was immediately shut down by an argument I'd begin to hear more frequently as I started to pick the brains of other young Black intellectuals awakening to a socio-political consciousness about the role of blackness and conversely whiteness in our society. The sentiment of the argument was this: many of the Black American students liked the idea that with the introduction and wide-scale adoption of the term "African American", Blackness no longer had to be culture-less.

With the granting of the term "African American", Black folk could now trace their lineages beyond a mass of unspecified black slave identity. Now, Black Americans could have claims to other Africa-specific cultures, and could refer to themselves as, for example, the descendants of royalty instead of descendants of an unnamed slave who had their specific ethnic identities stripped generations before an immediately traceable grandparent. I could accept the rationale and thought that it did allow for a sense of closure and revitalized image of self-worth for many, but for me--and my mother--the term seemed a bit inaccurate and did not quite do justice to the lives lost during the years that the institution of slavery persisted in the America and many specific cultural developments by Black folks descended from the cultural conglomeration of many African cultures that now constructed a domestic Black Identity. For my mother, African American implied a sense of otherness or non-nativeness to America. While the history of land ownership in America is fraught with conquest and genocide of many groups (most deadly being Native Americans who are the only truly native, non-immigrant group in the United States' stolen territory) if we, as both an American and a global society, extend to ethnically jumbled European [white] Americans the identity of 'American'--usually without qualifier--then we must also extend to descendants of African slaves the unqualified title of [Black] Americans as well because they were the only other *native* group inhabiting the land since the United States' colonial inception. This means that



Any group with a specific qualifier added to their American identity would be reserved for persons whose family/ancestors immigrated from a different country to the United States in recent history and they and or their children and grandchildren, or so on, had later acquired citizenship. This includes Mexican Americans, Nigerian Americans, Chinese Americans, and Russian Americans to name a select few.

Not only was the term “African American” at odds with the Modern American Immigrant naming system that governed most other identity specifications in the United States, but it also devalued the strife, generational trauma, and persistence of my enslaved Black ancestors to attain freedom, at least in writing, and ignored the distinct culture that has become Black American culture. This Black culture includes music (most notably Gospel and its roots in the sometimes codified survival lyrics of Negro Spirituals of southern plantations,<sup>4</sup> Hip Hop/ Rap as direct response to and expression of anguish and frustration with white supremacy in urban centers, and Jazz), food, language, shared experiences, and specific generational traditions such as jumping the broom at a wedding. Through my explanation of the ways that *Black American* ought to be worn as a badge of honor and integrity, I convinced myself that despite my personal struggles with mental health and body image issues, I saw an undying sense of self-worth in my blackness. Despite not believing myself to be beautiful, I had finally begun to see the ways I had inherent value and delineated the difference between beauty and value in my life and in a larger cultural context.

# A SONG SELECTION

*A Song For Mama:* Boyz II Men

Excerpt:

You taught me everything  
And everything you’ve given me  
I always keep it inside  
You’re the driving force in my life

There isn’t anything  
Or anyone that I can be  
And it just wouldn’t feel right  
If I didn’t have you by my side

You were there for me to love and care for me  
When skies were grey  
Whenever I was down  
You were always there to comfort me  
And no one else can be what you have been to me  
You will always be  
You will always be the girl in my life  
For all times

Mama, mama, you know I love you  
Oh you know I love you  
Mama, mama, you’re the queen of my heart  
Your love is like tears from the stars  
Yes, it is  
Mama, I just want you to know  
Lovin’ you is like food to my soul  
Yes, it is

## RECONCILING FAMILIAL RELATIONS

Although I didn't think too much about what my blackness meant to me as a child or most of my adolescence, my experiences at Bates College clarified my positionality. I am damn proud of being Black. My Blackness, if nothing else, tethers me to the two people I looked up to most, my mother and maternal grandmother. They are both pillars of strength and resilience. All of the best parts of my character come from the lessons they've taught me and the sacrifices they've shown me how to cultivate into determination and compassion. Through researching and writing about the Black [Queer] Ancestor -or lack thereof- for my Bachelor's thesis in Rhetorical Theory and Criticism--as well as participating in various forms of on- and off-campus [black]tivism--I came to realize that I saw immense value in my Blackness. There was power in the narratives of resistance and protest, there was strength in proudly boasting of the resilience of my enslaved ancestors, and the rich cultural advances in literature, music, and the fine arts were all mine to revel in; *we* did that!

Reminiscing on my undergraduate career, besides the friendships and lasting "fictive kinship"<sup>5</sup> bonds, the only other thing I remember is how unrelentingly difficult it was. It was hard being poor, and Black, and queer, and from a big city transplanted to a small town, and reasonably conscious to the structural inequities prevalent in the predominantly white institutions around me. My mother and my grandmother had prepared me for so much. To quote Boys II Men, they "were there for me to love and care for me when skies were grey... whenever I was down [they] were always there to comfort me" and I am forever grateful for our close relationships. They inspired a sense of self-love on the bases of race and character. Through their sacrifice and support, I had carved out many impressive and unheard of opportunities for myself--at least within our neighborhood/community including opportunities perhaps seemingly common to other communities such as graduating high school to opportunities as nationally rare as traveling to China twice on full scholarships. However, despite my mother and grandmother's best efforts they could not prepare me to navigate the world as a queer,

Black man, nor could they be sources of knowledge and empathy when I encountered new problems in College because neither of them had gone (initially) graduated high school much less gone to College. I will note that my mother did go on to get her General Educational Development diploma (G.E.D.), became a Certified Nursing Assistant, and recently acquired an Associate's degree in Healthcare Administration. I was a first-generation-to-college student which meant that most of my playbook would have to be written in real time with a dull-tipped, slightly broken pencil.

Every aspect of being at Bates was challenging. It was difficult to express the humiliation and depression that I experienced when struggling to afford meals during breaks, and having to meet with support services to beg for additional loans and hidden sources of funding to buy a new winter coat or help afford plane tickets so that my family could attend my graduation. It wasn't the case that I couldn't lean on my family as a source of support through these pressing experiences, but I did not want to. I did not want to burden my mother with the stress of knowing how badly I was mentally struggling while also balancing intense studies and personal/professional opportunities. The most disheartening part was knowing that there was almost nothing she could do to help. I couldn't tell her that I was hungry and needed money for food because I knew she didn't have any to give and my heart did not need to feel her shame when expressing that she had no money, was behind on her own bills, and struggling to afford my younger sister's high school fees. I always hated asking my mother for things I knew she did not have, and being at Bates--surrounded by money and privilege--exacerbated my feelings of inadequacy and amplified the complex relationship between poverty and education as the only route I knew to achieve upward social mobility.

Through all the tough classes, all nighters to finish 15-page essays for Rhetoric seminars, serving on various committees with faculty, staff, and administration that all seemed to all require me to simultaneously wear the indignity of my destitution and the guilt of receiving educational grants that many others (middle class, upper-middle class, and well-off peers)

did not have, what I remember most about college was crying alone in my bedroom during my first thanksgiving break because I had no money to go to the grocery store to buy food for the week-long break and I knew the dining hall would be closed. While everyone was celebrating the holiday with good food and the warm company of family, I was depressed, hungry and trying my hardest not let a complaint of discontentment slip into conversation with my family when I called to wish them happy holidays because the last thing I was prepared to take on psychologically was knowing that I contributed to my mother's tears or thoughts of being an inadequate parent. I kept silent as I had become accustomed to doing, holding on to hope that in the words of Tasha Cobbs, "I'm getting ready to see...something I've never seen....get[ting] ready for overflow".

During my first couple years of College, I struggled to find avenues to reference my autobiographical content in a visual context. Through both my BA, and now MFA, thesis work I begin to seriously ponder abstract ways to engage with the labor of discerning my own value as a Black queer man from an impoverished inner-city Chicago community and making sense of this nuanced, essential, and deeply personal subject matter.

## CORRESPONDING ARTIST STATEMENT EXCERPT

My work explores the interaction between form and minimal surfaces/colors that elicit specific emotional responses, in order to interrogate personal and societal standards of beauty and value as they relate to notions of equity, representation, and lasting impacts on mental health. I've always found comfort in abstraction. Through abstraction, my work explores issues of social justice, mental health, equity, and access. Clay as a material and abstraction as a visual vocabulary both afford the ability to reconstruct reality. To mold clay is to exert one's own will onto the physical earth around them, and through glazing and firing make real and permanent the object of one's imagination. Using non-representational lines and shapes to make meaning invites the possibility of a single stroke to invoke an infinite number of historical, contemporary, societal or personal narratives in service of building a complex tapestry of conceptual actualizations that continues to reveal themselves to the viewer and the maker overtime. Making meticulous forms reclaims the agency stripped by being marginalized in institutions that work to entrench the unrelenting societal doctrine that my existence is less valuable than that of my "majority" counterparts.

In addition, I am grappling with new questions around materiality as content as I continue to develop myself as a maker of ceramic things. My mother's words, "you [as a black person] have to work twice as hard to make it half as far", and "no matter what you decide to do in life, be the best at it" ring in my ears as I delve into the significance of using porcelain and my attraction to ancient Chinese ceramics. For me, Chinese ceramics symbolize an elegant beauty and a strong sense of unquestioned value that was reserved for an imperial ruling class. Making very refined porcelain bottles has been my unconscious way of ascribing an undeniable value to my work, forcing me to work tirelessly at perfecting form to ensure that my work will do justice to the sources it references (Song, Yuan, Ming, Qing Dynasty Imperial Wares) while occupying a similar imperial/ruling class space as some of arguably the best ceramics in history.



Of Spatial Importance

A SONG SELECTION

*Walking in Authority:* Donnie McClurkin:

I'm walking in authority  
Living life without apology  
It's not wrong, dear, I belong here  
So you might as well get used to me  
My mother may not be a queen  
But my father's king of everything  
I'm adopted into the family  
So I guess that makes me royalty  
And he's given me dominion yes  
Power over men, them yes  
Everything I do is blessed  
Promised me some great success  
I am the authority  
God of the majority  
Livin' in my liberty  
So you might as well get used to me  
I'm walking in authority  
Living life without apology  
It's not wrong, dear, I belong here  
So you might as well get used to me  
We're children of the most-high God  
Understand and believe his word  
We never have to beg or plead  
For our father will supply our needs  
And he's given me dominion yes  
Power over men, them yes  
Everything I do is blessed  
Promised me some great success  
I am the authority  
God of the majority  
Livin' in my liberty  
So you might as well get used to me  
I'm walking in authority  
Living life without apology  
It's not wrong, dear, I belong here  
So you might as well get used to me  
I'm walking in prosperity

Living life the way it's meant to be  
It's not wrong, dear, I belong here  
So you might as well get used to me  
Get something in your hand  
Get something in your hand  
Get something in your hand  
Get something in your hand  
And wave it in the air  
And wave it in the air  
And wave it in the air  
And wave it in the air  
I said 1, 2, 3  
1, 2, 3  
1, 2, 3  
So you might as well get used to me  
I'm walking in authority  
Living life without apology  
It's not wrong, dear, I belong here  
So you might as well get used to me  
I'm walking in prosperity  
Living life the way it's meant to be  
It's not wrong, dear, I belong here  
So you might as well get used to me  
Get something in your hand  
Get something in your hand  
And wave it in the air  
And wave it in the air  
I said 1, 2, 3  
1, 2, 3  
1, 2, 3  
So you might as well get used to me  
I'm walking in authority  
Living life without apology  
It's not wrong, dear, I belong here  
So you might as well get used to me  
I'm walking in prosperity  
Living life the way it's meant to be  
It's not wrong, dear, I belong here  
So you might as well get used to me

# TAKING UP SPACE

Being confident in my right to belong is something I struggle with often. Feeling largely out of place as a child in various ways, and feeling either tokenized or ostracized in adolescence and early adulthood, it was difficult for me to unapologetically embrace the multifaceted, and intersectional identities I held. Throughout most of my life, to exist in a space and declare my unalienable right to be here inhabiting all of who I am seemed so radical and confrontational. I suppose since taking on more leadership roles in college and living and researching in China independently (at least structurally and organizationally) taught me that this act was not as radical as I once believed. More importantly though, was my new, almost paradoxical to my previous stance, understanding of the dire need to be radical. Being radical didn't have to mean being combative and constantly angry, though that would certainly be a part of how it is often perceived. It was more about standing firmly grounded in a belief that opposes the status quo and calls for a reimagining of reality in ways that more accurately accounted for non-majority and non-normative experiences. In fact, for Black people to have the audacity to engage in self-care and self-love has always been a radical act because to believe that blackness is worthy of love, not less than, inhumane, or akin to animals or darkness/destruction is a particularly controversial and progressive belief in the wake of a resurgence of open justification of police brutality and state-sanctioned violence against the Black body. It took me a long time to feel that my presence in academia, specifically a predominantly white private liberal arts school, was "not wrong dear" and that "I belong here, so you might as well get used to me", and every step of the way I still grapple with questions of qualifications and perceived readiness by my peers and students/advisees. I harbor a great deal of anxiety around my capabilities and whether or not my performance exceeds the personal and institutional expectations set for different endeavors.

In working with a group of students of color who formed a coalition of resistance and accountability against the administration at Bates, affectionately called "the Concerned Stu-

dents of Color”, I was forced to confront my ideals around exceptionalism, tokenization, and a politics of respectability. In high school, the way to obtain new opportunities was to be better than all of your peers. Because educational opportunities were so few for inner city youth, being the best was the only way to guarantee admittance into a college preparatory program, summer math and science camp, or Arts-focused after school group, particularly if funding was offered. After being positioned against my peers for so long, it was a new experience for me to have to reconsider the ways that external circumstances affected our ability to achieve the same goals or complete the same tasks in a similar time frame. Exceptionalism rested solely on the idea that in order to accomplish goals and be viewed as a worthwhile person, one needed to be exceptional, not good, great, or better than, but the best in order to be accepted by majority culture. For Black people in white spaces this meant that one needed to be an almost unrealistically talented outlier to be granted humanity and respect, and sometimes not even that was enough. Above all was the not stated, but largely understood expectation that you were not supposed to let anyone ‘see you sweat’ as my therapist cleverly noted to point out the phrase’s double meaning to my personal circumstances. I could not allow people to see me physically sweat because it exemplified all the things I did not like about my own physical body and drew attention to my weight and discomfort in communal space, but metaphorically it meant that I could not allow people to see how hard I had to work to keep up with peers and how defeated and inadequate it made me feel at times. Not only was this unsustainable, it was also an unfair and inhumane way to access the value of marginalized, underrepresented people.

I was no smarter than my peers in elementary or high school; I had the resources necessary to succeed when many of them didn’t, I was a little better at standardized testing than some of them were, but with more preparation or tutoring (which I received from the Collegiate Scholars Program at the University of Chicago, a college readiness program that I tested and interviewed my way into) they too could be just as competitive in their college applications.

I had more co-curricular experiences, but with fewer part time jobs to help pay bills because their parents were laid off and needed them to pick up some of the financial slack, they too could have had a nicely padded resume. I can admit that I was an impressive intellectual, sharp thinker, usually an effective and charismatic speaker, a hard worker, personable, and had a strong sense of integrity that allowed me to carry myself with an unyielding conviction to my values and morals.

These praises, however, were not outliers. My peers also possessed a lot of these same qualities but weren’t given the necessary support to hone them into what would equate to a strong application for college or another education/professional position. I began to realize that I would be called to speak for Blacks, Queers, Desititutes, and Chicago South Siders often. The more aware I became, the more I tried to resist. In response to being tokenized, I’d often illuminate the audience of eager, attentive white faces with stories of different perspectives and validate the humanity and complexity of them all. The communities I represented were not a monolith and I refused to be the sole *chosen* one to speak for them. The members of my communities spoke differently, acted differently, cared about different things, and chose to engage with their aggressors through vastly different actions than I did.

To assume that there was a *correct* way for marginalized persons to engage with blunt attacks and not-so-subtle microaggressions from a privileged white figure in a position of power over them was problematic at best, condescending and dehumanizing at worst. A politics of respectability urged for a light enforcement of these notions. Unless people of color, for example, spoke in the right ways and expressed their grievances with the appropriately mild and cordial tongue, they were not to be granted respect or a podium upon which to speak. Through the Concerned Students of Color, I learned the importance of rejecting those premises and we worked tirelessly to make sure as many voices and perspectives were heard by administration no matter how vexed and unapologetically fed up their tones may have been.



It was important that we were all allotted space to exist in meetings with administration and felt reasonably comfortable sitting in the main area of the dining hall talking freely about our experiences. We needed to take up space in whatever way was most authentic to our individual selves; that was most important!

## CORRESPONDING ARTIST STATEMENT EXCERPT

Among other things, my MFA thesis work does a seemingly simplistic yet crucial action: takes up space. Through this body of work, I speculate on the socio-political dimensions to my current mission to ‘take up space’. Taking up space is an act of resistance, disruption, and reclamation. It interacts with ideas of self-discovery and identity development that I’ve been investigating for many years now. Taking up space in galleries and art spaces not traditionally known for, or welcoming to, functional ceramic artists reclaims these spaces for contemporary potters and posits that there is power, validity, and importance in a functional vessel. My most recent work explores sculptural ceramic table settings for pottery to physically inhabit more space than is usually allotted for it as well as inconvenience those who use it, catalyzing a conversation about the place of new ideas and representation in traditional rigid systems.

This exercise of taking up physical space is directly related to what it means to navigate the intersectional identities I hold, all at the same time, taking up metaphorical, political, social, and intellectual space. I give voice to the perspectives of many and my work seeks to engage people in dialogue about difference and inclusion. Not only does a functional vessel in a non-traditional, or perhaps even hostile, environment speak volumes to the necessity of handmade craft in today’s increasingly distant human interactions, but it also illuminates the narratives of people in spaces that have historically been unavailable to them. I am hopeful that my work grants me access to spaces and people and conversations that allow my truths to reach audiences who have never fully engaged with them before. The idea that a beautiful vessel might bring the story of my grandmother’s humble, tumultuous, Mississippian roots to the table of a wealthy, white socialite for an honest conversation about power, privilege and inequality re-inspires within me a need to create. In uncertain times of the corona virus pandemic and state-sanctioned unapologetic disposal of Black lives I need to make my voice heard; I need to reclaim my own power, dispel feelings of hopelessness and

insignificance, and interrupt the comfort of institutions that had no intention of ever granting me the dignity of being wholly included or being responsive to the needs of my respective communities. I need to take up space for every Black, Queer, Poor, Urban, Studio Potter, Ceramic Artist, Disenfranchised, Discarded, Ignored and Underrepresented community that I either call my own or stand in solidarity with.

*Specific Geometry*

# A SONG SELECTION

*Dear Mama:* Tupac Shakur

You are appreciated  
When I was young, me and my mama had beef  
Seventeen years old, kicked out on the streets  
Though back at the time I never thought I'd see her face  
Ain't a woman alive that could take my mama's place  
Suspended from school, and scared to go home, I was a fool  
With the big boys breakin' all the rules

I shed tears with my baby sister, over the years  
We was poorer than the other little kids  
And even though we had different daddies, the same drama  
When things went wrong we'd blame Mama  
I reminisce on the stress I caused, it was hell  
Huggin' on my mama from a jail cell

And who'd think in elementary, hey  
I'd see the penitentiary one day?  
And runnin' from the police, that's right  
Mama catch me, put a whoopin' to my backside  
And even as a crack fiend, Mama

You always was a black queen, Mama  
I finally understand  
For a woman it ain't easy tryin' to raise a man  
You always was committed  
A poor single mother on welfare, tell me how you did it  
There's no way I can pay you back  
But the plan is to show you that I understand  
You are appreciated

Lady, don't you know we love you? (Dear Mama)  
Sweet lady, place no one above you (You are appreciated)  
Sweet lady, don't you know we love you?

Now, ain't nobody tell us it was fair  
No love from my daddy, 'cause the coward wasn't there  
He passed away and I didn't cry, 'cause my anger

Wouldn't let me feel for a stranger  
They say I'm wrong and I'm heartless, but all along  
I was lookin' for a father, he was gone

I hung around with the thugs  
And even though they sold drugs  
They showed a young brother love  
I moved out and started really hangin'  
I needed money of my own, so I started slangin'  
I ain't guilty, 'cause even though I sell rocks  
It feels good puttin' money in your mailbox

I love payin' rent when the rent's due  
I hope you got the diamond necklace that I sent to you  
'Cause when I was low you was there for me  
And never left me alone, because you cared for me  
And I could see you comin' home after work late  
You're in the kitchen, tryin' to fix us a hot plate

You just workin' with the scraps you was given  
And Mama made miracles every Thanksgivin'  
But now the road got rough, you're alone  
You're tryin' to raise two bad kids on your own  
And there's no way I can pay you back  
But my plan is to show you that I understand  
You are appreciated

Lady, don't you know we love you? (And dear Mama)  
Sweet lady, place no one above you (You are appreciated)  
Sweet lady, don't you know we love you?

Pour out some liquor and I reminisce  
'Cause through the drama I can always depend on my mama  
And when it seems that I'm hopeless  
You say the words that can get me back in focus

When I was sick as a little kid  
To keep me happy there's no limit to the things you did  
And all my childhood memories  
Are full of all the sweet things you did for me  
And even though I act crazy  
I gotta thank the Lord that you made me

There are no words that can express how I feel  
You never kept a secret, always stayed real  
And I appreciate how you raised me  
And all the extra love that you gave me

I wish I could take the pain away  
If you can make it through the night, there's a brighter day  
Everything will be alright if you hold on  
It's a struggle every day, gotta roll on  
And there's no way I can pay you back  
But my plan is to show you that I understand  
You are appreciated

Lady, don't you know we love you? (Dear Mama)  
Sweet lady, place no one above you? (You are appreciated)  
Sweet lady, don't you know we love you? (Dear Mama)  
Sweet lady  
Lady (Dear Mama)  
Lady, lady

# PERFECTIONISM

Tupac's Dear Mama elucidates the harsh material realities that created his unstable childhood, and how his mother's love was the constant that helped him to make it through the abysmal circumstances. In relating this to my own unstable childhood and the anxieties surrounding that, I must also praise my mother and grandmother for their constant love. Even after I came out as queer/gay--though the transition was not easy and there was and often-times still is unintentional homophobia in many of our interactions--we've grown together significantly, our relationship is closer than ever, and their love is still an undying constant in my life. Besides love, everything else in my life was inconsistent and fleeting. From an early age, I was drawn to rigid shapes and clean lines. In elementary and high school I loved math, especially geometry. I liked problem solving and knowing that every problem had a solution. Even if one could take a million different routes, the road would always lead to the same conclusion. The answers felt predestined in a way that was similar to how I understood my spirituality. The structure of geometric precision was a retreat from the chaos and perhaps even the constant of love, though fraught with imperfection and homophobia, was a manifestation of that structure so I sought it out in other ways especially through abstract geometric art.

Growing up in an impoverished inner city Chicago neighborhood, my siblings and I had very visceral experiences that illuminate the lyrics of Tupac's *Dear Mama*. Though neither my mother nor my maternal grandmother who raised me had ever been arrested or involved with drugs, and my siblings and I were always well behaved and studious, we and other extended family members did have many similarities to the material realities discussed in *Dear Mama*. The five of us were raised by a single mother who was poor and fought hard to support us with her below-the-poverty line salary. Three-and-a-half absentee fathers, and children forced to grow up sooner than expected. I remember struggles with food insecurity, being afraid to leave my home because of gang activity and gun violence on nearby blocks,



and the countless stories of young school-age kids who were “in the wrong place at the wrong time” and no longer had an opportunity to bless the world with their smiles and ambitious spirits--buried in a hole six feet deep with a once vibrant, promising life now permanently extinguished.

The order that specific geometry offers found a particularly fitting new home in my artistic practice. Part of my MFA thesis work is made from a process of slip casting which allows for the repeated exact replication of a specific form (positive) through pouring liquid clay slip into a plaster mold. Most of my thesis is made from this process, with some of it still being made on the potter’s wheel, and some a hybrid of the two. I made the decision to slip cast, in part, because of my desire to have specification and exact replication. I wanted to make sure that the spherical cup stands<sup>12</sup> were perfect spheres. Through slip casting, I could incorporate computer 3-D image modeling and 3-D printing in plastic to create exact forms to use as positives for the plaster slip casting mold. I have always been a bit of a perfectionist, but slip casting from plastic 3-D prints allowed me to really obsess over perfect form in a more structured way. I think that part of my perfectionism derives from my exceptionalist necessity to excel at everything I do and the unspoken burden of being the sole representative for my family, race, sexuality, and place of origin that I have often felt directly placed onto my shoulders; So, I needed my work to be perfect. I needed my wheel-thrown cups to be perfectly centered. I needed my forms to be exact. I could not fail to accurately execute the design. The pressure of circumventing that failure to execute resonated with me on many different levels. When learning to make pottery, an unintentionally wonky cup was not just an off-centered pot, but a testament to my inability to transcend my circumstances and societal position--proof of my lacking the adequate dedication to force material transformations in the world around me.

## CORRESPONDING ARTIST STATEMENT EXCERPT

A sphere is perhaps the most important form in my work. I consider a sphere the basic building block for many of my other functional and sculptural forms. I activate different ways to distort spheres to create distinctively new shapes for cups, bottles, bowls, and even plates. A sphere is perfect, symmetrical across every axis, infinite, demanding, and complete. Perfect spheres are rigid and strict in their dimensions, yet soft and inviting in their appearance. Being influenced by spheres, the contours of my pots are round, continuous, and particular. Growing up, many aspects of my life felt uncertain, insecure, insubstantial, and readily subject to change. By utilizing meticulous, round forms, I attempt to exert control over a highly variable medium, forcing a sense of closure and completeness in my work that eases the tension of not having this control in other aspects of life. I also employ bright color lines in my work, which has a positive psychological effect by inspiring a sense of joy and fulfillment that relates to larger issues of empathy that I explore in my practice. In endeavoring to make conscious the act of being empathetic, I am contributing to an overdue societal resurgence of investment in mental health and stability.

# *The Psycho-Emotional*

## A SONG SELECTION

*Colorblind* (from “Glee” Soundtrack): Amber Riley

When the world is seeing yellow  
I only see gray  
When everybody sees the rainbow  
I’m stuck in the rain

You take a little piece of me  
Every time you leave  
I don’t think that I’ll  
Ever find that silver lining  
Or a reason to smile

You know I used to paint such vibrant dreams  
Now I’m colorblind, colorblind  
When did my heart get so full  
Of a never mind, never mind  
Did you know that you stole  
The only thing I needed  
Always black and white in my eyes  
I’m colorblind

Ain’t it funny that you managed  
To just wash away  
Even pictures that you’re not in  
Have started to fade

I try to play my favorite songs  
But I can’t sing along  
The words don’t feel the same  
You’ve taken all the best things from me  
And thrown them away

You know I used to paint such vibrant dreams  
Now I’m colorblind, colorblind  
When did my heart get so full  
Of a never mind, never mind  
Did you know that you stole  
The only thing I needed

Always black and white in my eyes  
I'm colorblind

I'll wait  
For roses to be red again  
And I hate  
That you took my blue from the ocean

**Give me back green greens and goldens**  
My purples, my blues, you stole them  
How long will I be broken?

You know I used to paint such vibrant dreams  
Now I'm colorblind, colorblind  
When did my heart get so full  
Of a never mind, never mind  
Did you know that you stole  
The only thing I needed  
Only black and white in my eyes  
I'm colorblind

It's only black and white in my eyes  
I'm colorblind

## GIVE ME BACK MY COLOR

I am someone who is deeply concerned with empathy. It is increasingly important that people are compassionate to one another and find ways to draw connections through shared lived experiences and nuanced research about and engagement with people from different backgrounds than their own. In a quickly changing, mostly digital age, I notice myself and loved ones becoming more insular and our collective mental health is on the constant decline. Through my art and social practice/political engagement in the other aspects of my life, I have begun to find avenues to speak about mental health and to center self-care. I participate in community with others with whom I can share joys and sorrows and be *not okay* around; I can be sad, and angry, and depressed, and apathetic, and disillusioned, and frantic, and anxious, and even suicidal. Suicidality is not a foreign concept to me. Rather, it has been an ongoing struggle that I have had to overcome in a more urgent sense a number of times.

In seventh grade, I distinctly remember what it felt like to hold a blade to my hand for the first time. I had a friend in school who told me that cutting the hand was the best way to go about it-- a strategy that she had employed one day when our group of four did not complete our project for our "Intro to Music" course in hopes that her hand injury would buy us some time to finish preparing our performance. Much like her plan, the cutting was not a success. She got sent to the nurse's office and the rest of us were still required to perform on schedule and with the music teacher playing her part instead. The cutting, fortunately, did not feel right to me. I had heard her and many others say that the physical pain of cutting provided a distraction from the intense emotional pain of depression and loneliness, but for me it did not. I still felt just as sad and now my hand throbbed incessantly on top of it. I couldn't compartmentalize the different types of pain in any way, and the act of cutting myself only made me feel foolish. I am thankful for that experience because if it had not gone so awry, I might have added occasional cutting to an already damaging routine of binge eating and frequent negative self-talk.

While I did not decide to try cutting again, I did continue to struggle with suicidality. There was a moment when the sadness started to fade and apathy set in, and numbness shortly after. I strongly identified with the words Amber Riley’s character Mercedes Jones from the television series, *Glee*, sang to her boyfriend Sam Evans (actor/musician Chord Overstreet) , “I used to paint such vibrant dreams now I’m colorblind”. Though this episode did not specifically relate to suicidality, the show did deal with a number of similar topics, including an attempted suicide by the once bully turned bullying victim Dave Karofsky. I always found the fantastical world of William McKinley High School--where the most unsuspecting foes became lifelong friends through the power of song and performance--to be at once triggering and hopeful because real life was not usually a happy musical where everything works out in the end, but maybe one day it could be as long as I kept choosing to “see the world not as it is but as it should be”.<sup>6</sup>

My reality at that time was excruciating and my feelings of apathy and numbness were sometimes much worse than those of perpetual sadness and loneliness I had become accustomed to. Everything felt useless and any attempt at doing something to change my perspective felt futile, so I started to not care whether I lived or died. I spent many evenings alone curled into a ball, wrapped tightly in a cocoon of several blankets, obsessing over ways to end all feelings permanently. I wrote several suicide notes that in hind sight are quite humorous to me because they usually were in the form of a “will” despite the fact that I did not own anything but “a few art kits and some drawings” which I decreed to “leave to my [younger] sister Dooby” in one of the letters. I suppose I have my spirituality, then informed by a somewhat strict Baptist religion, to thank for my abstaining from attempting suicide. I was taught that death by suicide was the only truly unforgivable sin--the ultimate ‘fuck you’ to god from his creation; everything else could be forgiven with repentance. I also loved my family and honored my mother’s sacrifices far too much to have her live with that guilt for her remaining days, having a heavy morbid presence haunt her relationships with her other children forev-

er. I was lucky. So many others don’t have the luxury of being in a sound enough or uplifted enough state of mind to reason themselves out of attempting, sometimes successfully, suicide.

I struggled with similar thoughts for much of high school and finally began to find relief in college as after I found the space to embrace all of who I was and choose more friends who truly cared about my mental well being. I gradually gave myself permission to reach out to family and allow them to be more robust sources of support. In my senior year of college, I began to explore the ways that my mental health impacted my ceramics studio making and other school work (writing as well as other abstract intellectual endeavors). By that point, my investment in mental health and desire to inspire empathy and compassion sat at the core of most of my work. As I conclude my MFA thesis I find it once again dictating the aesthetic and conceptual decisions I am making, largely on the basis of color.

In my studio practice, soft colors that created a moment of reflective stillness are being replaced with richer, more vibrant colors that engender different feelings related to the protest and radical determination of the Black Power movement. The pale muted colors of my undergraduate thesis and soft, warm off-white of an oxidation-fired raw grolleg porcelain clay body of my earlier work have transitioned into saturated avocados, deep reflective blacks and rich maroons and burgundys as the psychological content has shifted. For me, color and music alike have a piercing ability to dictate emotional response. I think deeply about them both and they help me construct worlds of possibility and reflexivity in my work. I would like to believe, and desperately hope, that this resurgence of color in my thesis work is indicative of a moment of elevated mood or a movement towards a different, brighter psychological ground on which to build the next chapter of my creative practice and the rest of my life as well.

# A POETRY SELECTION

*(Progression) Towards a Suicidal State:* Deshun Peoples

To know no home, to have no place to call mine,  
A space to come to and go from, yet return to time and time again—  
ALONE

To lose someone so close,  
To hold their hand no more, hear not their warm, raspy laugh again—  
COLD

To be a stranger to one’s own mind,  
To know not that persistent voice,  
He speaks volumes—too many words, at a cadence too fast to grasp, yet too sharp not to feel  
AFRAID

To carry the weight of my shame,  
My morbid thoughts, most salient fears,  
Materialized in the mirrors of a place I thought I knew—  
NUMB

To give myself away constantly, continuously, relentlessly,  
To you whose trust, respect, adoration I’ll never hold,  
This skin abused, this flesh I tote, you can have it now,  
No use—  
USED

To have the will to live fought from me,  
No sun kissed azure skies, no soft puffy clouds, no radiant fragrant flowers, no gentle ever-  
lasting love I want to feel  
DONE!

# CORRESPONDING ARTIST STATEMENT EXCERPT

I need curves in my work. Straight, particularly vertical lines do not excite me unless they’re adding complexity to curved ones. To me, curves are familiar and comfortable; they relate to how I see myself physically, and at its best, a beautiful round pot with continuous curves is an extension of me. As a utilitarian art form that the viewer will physically interact with on a daily basis, it is important to me that my work feels soft and natural in the hand. The off white color of the porcelain clay exudes a sense of comfort and warm ease. The clay feels soft and approachable to inspire an earnest engagement with the viewer that welcomes a space of introspection and moments of pause and reflection.





## CHECKING IN

Today, while I do not purport to have ample self-esteem or even sufficient self-confidence on most days, I do see both beauty and value in my existence and in my physical, mental, spiritual and psychological self. I now know that understanding and coping with my mental health will be a life-long journey with unbelievable highs and devastating lows, but onward I push as I navigate the personal, familial, societal, and socio-political dimensions to my creative practice.

*Coda*



# NOTES

1. Darling, Gala. Radical Self-Love a Guide to Loving Yourself and Living Your Dreams. Carlsbad u.a., CA: Hay House, 2016.

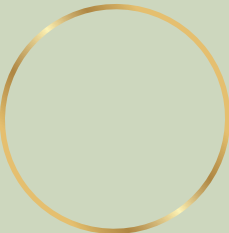
2. “Pan-African Flag.” CSUSM. Accessed May 31, 2021. <https://www.csusm.edu/bsc/pan-afflag.html>.

3. Collins, Patricia Hill. Essay. In Intersectionality as Critical Social Theory, 116–20. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019.  
*By focusing on resistance, such work brings about alternative understandings of critical analysis to theorizing(88)...epistemic resistance or resisting the rules that govern what count as knowledge(118)...race, gender, class, ethnicity, nation, sexuality, ability, and age also signify important resistant knowledge traditions among subordinated peoples whose resistant knowledge criticizes the social inequities and social injustices that they experience.*

4. “African American Spirituals.” The Library of Congress. Accessed May 31, 2021. <https://www.loc.gov/item/ihas.200197495/>.

5. Holloway, Joseph E., and Joseph E. Halloway. Essay. In Africanisms in American Culture, 187–223. Bloomington, IN: Indiana Univ. Press, 2005.  
*Another phenomenon found in the South [ern United Sates] is the tradition of calling older males and females ‘uncle’ and ‘aunty’ as a sign of respect, whether or not they were related to the person speaking...the tradition may go back to the relationships that were established between bond men and women in the coastal African factories that were established on the decks of the slave ships. Mintz and Price point out that this ‘shipmate’ relationship became a major principle of social organization and continued for centuries to shape ongoing social relationships...Found in a society with the absence of close kin, the Africans attempted to reconstruct their African social and kinship system on the plantations(188).*

6. Murphy, Ryan, Brad Falchuk, and Ian Brennan. Whole. Glee. Fox, May 29, 2009.



*Images*

MFA THESIS EXHIBITION



*“Wealth of the Motherland”; Rhode Island School of Design MFA Thesis Exhibition (WaterFire Arts Center, Providence, RI)  
Slip-cast Ceramic, Gold Luster; (8 in x 8 in x 12.5 in each) 2021*









*"Blood Kin"; Rhode Island School of Design MFA Thesis Exhibition (WaterFire Arts Center, Providence, RI)  
Slip-cast Ceramic, Gold Luster; Steel tubing (20 in x 20 in x 9,5 in each) 2021*





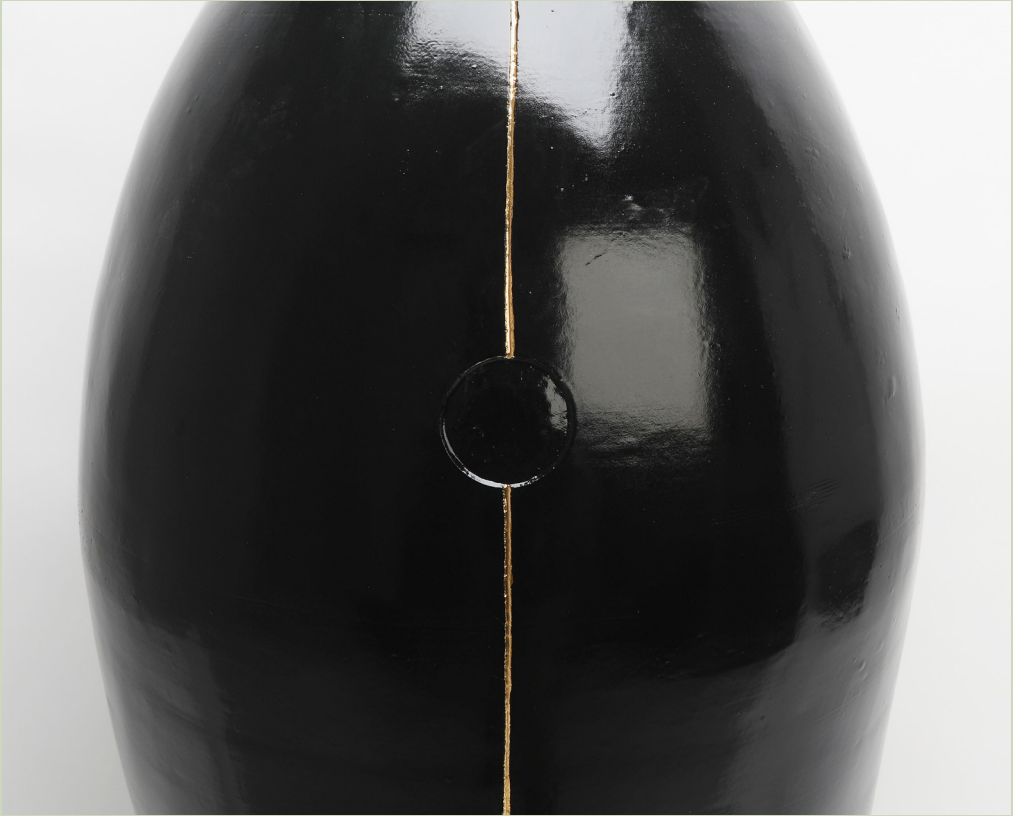




“Dark Precision”; Rhode Island School of Design MEA Thesis Exhibition (WaterFire Arts Center, Providence, RI)  
Slip-cast Ceramic; (7 in x 7 in x 10 in) 2021



“Black Queen”; Rhode Island School of Design MFA Thesis Exhibition (WaterFire Arts Center, Providence, RI)  
Wheel-Thrown Ceramic, Gold Luster; (20 in x 20 in x 38 in) 2021





## ARTIST PORTFOLIO



**"Softness", Wheel Thrown Cone-10 Porcelain; Carved  
3.5 x 3.75 in (2020)**



**"Soft Reflections", Wheel Thrown Cone-10 Porcelain; Carved  
3.25 x 3.5 in (2020)**



**"Variations in Yellow: Cup", Wheel Thrown Cone-10  
Porcelain; Carved, underglaze inlay  
3.5 x 3.5 in (2021)**



**"Introspection: Cup", Wheel Thrown Cone-10 Porcelain;  
Carved  
3.5 x 3.5 in (2020)**





"Variations in Yellow: Porcelain Bottle with Teal", Wheel Thrown Cone-10 Porcelain; Carved, underglaze inlay  
7 x 15 in (2020)



"Variations in Yellow: Porcelain Bottle", Wheel Thrown Cone-10 Porcelain; Carved, underglaze inlay  
7 x 10 in (2019)



"Introspection: Porcelain Bottle", Wheel Thrown Cone-10 Porcelain; Carved  
6.5 x 11.5 in (2020)



"Calm: Porcelain Bottle", Wheel Thrown Cone-10 Porcelain; Carved  
6 x 15 in (2020)



"Variations in Red: Cup", Wheel Thrown Cone-10 Porcelain; Carved, underglaze inlay  
3.5 x 3.75 in (2019)



"Sugar High: Primary Color Cup and Saucer", Wheel Thrown Cone-10 Porcelain; underglaze inlay  
4 x 3.75 in (2017)



"Fulbright Exploration", CAD Designed, Slip-Casted Cone-10 Porcelain; Carved, underglaze inlay  
5.5 x 19 in (2018)



"Primary Color Plates", Ram Press Cone-10 Porcelain; underglaze  
7.5 in diameter (2019)





"Variations in Yellow: Platter", Wheel Thrown Cone-10 Porcelain; underglaze inlay  
14 in diameter (2019)



"Untitled: Cup", Wheel Thrown Cone-10 Porcelain  
3.5 x 4.25 in (2019)



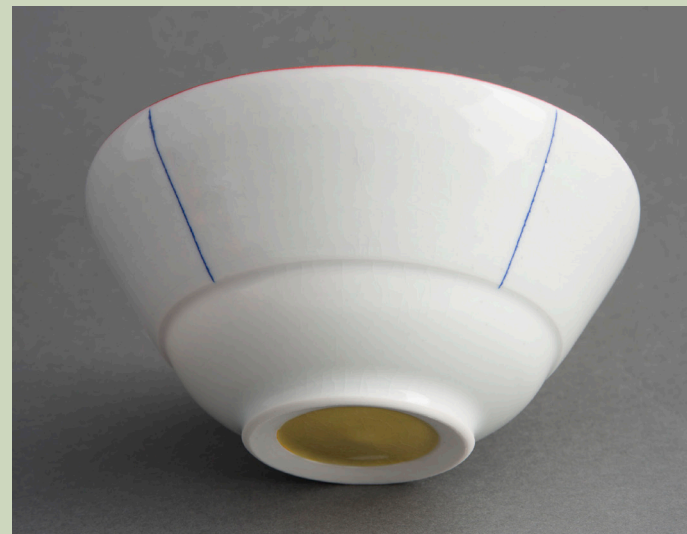
"Untitled", 3-D Printed Cone-10 Porcelain  
8.5 x 10 in (2020)



"Untitled", 3-D Printed Cone-10 Stoneware; Soda Fired  
7 x 12 in (2020)



"Calm: Porcelain Bowl", Wheel Thrown Cone-10 Porcelain  
7 x 5.5 in (2017)



"Sugar High: Primary Color Small Bowl", Wheel Thrown Cone-10 Porcelain; underglaze inlay  
5 x 3.5 in (2017)



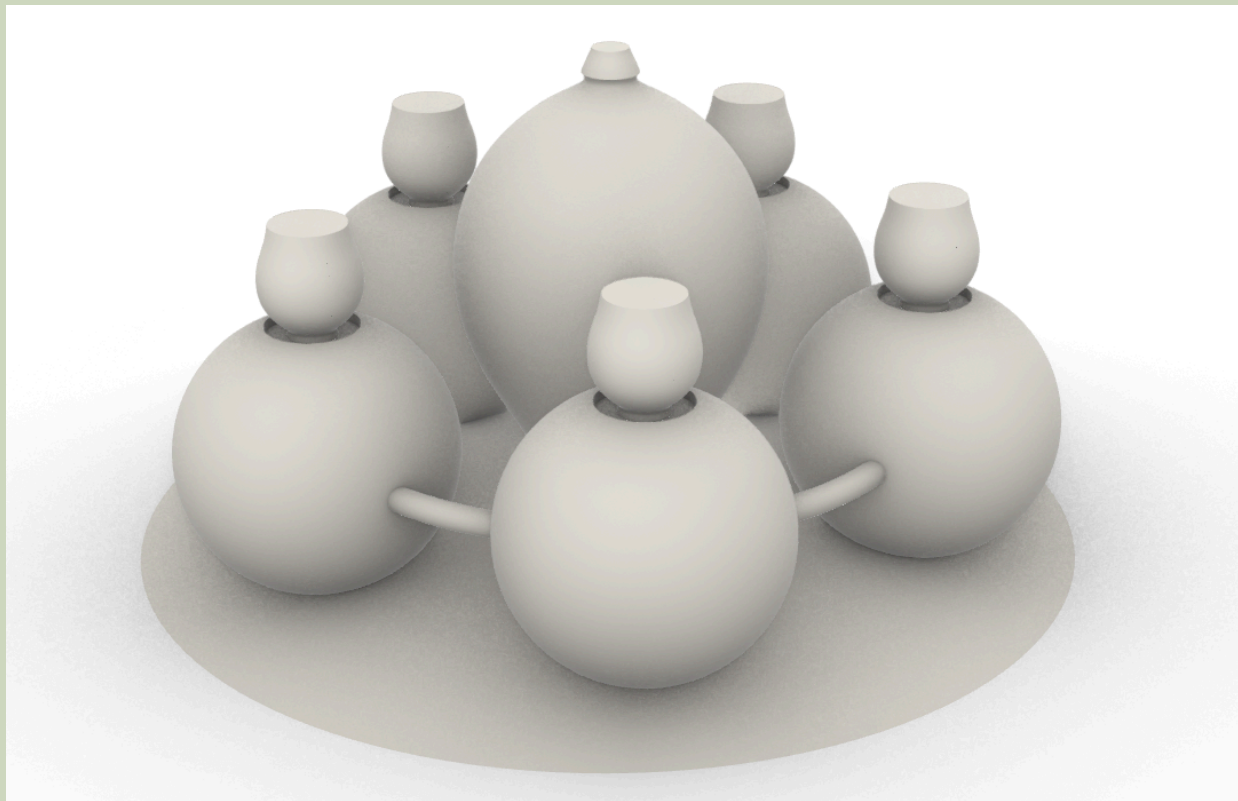
"Untitled", 3-D Printed Cone-10 Stoneware; Soda Fired  
3.5 x 4.25 in (2020)



"Untitled", 3-D Printed Cone-10 Stoneware; Soda Fired  
4 x 4.25 in (2020)



**"Untitled", Rhinoceros CAD Program Design for 3-D Printed Geometric Bottles  
(2020)**



**"Untitled", Rhinoceros CAD Program Design for 3-D Printed Sculptural Table 'Place Setting'  
(2020)**