

Momentous

By

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Submitted to the graduate degree program in the Department of Visual Art and the Graduate Faculty of the University of Kansas in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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Date Defended: April 3, 2018

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Date Approved: May 7, 2018

Abstract

The work of Antonio Martinez uses functional ceramics to explore moments of intimacy. By navigating features of surface, color, and form, he creates opportunities for tranquility and reflection. This thesis paper discusses the body of work created for his show in April 2018. Specifically, this paper explores the evolution of the work, as well as the processes, concepts, and history that inspired him to create this current body of work.

Tables of Contents

Title Page.....	i
Acceptance Page.....	ii
Abstract.....	iii
Introduction.....	1
Past to Present Work.....	2
Momentous: Importance of Function.....	4
Momentous: Process.....	5
Momentous: Color.....	7
Momentous: Stacking / Assembling.....	10
Future Work.....	13

Introduction

Since the beginning of my time as a maker, my work has been an evolution of surface and form. At times, it has been hard for me to distinguish whether my work has been a search for a sense of familiarity or a quest to put closure on my own past. My life experiences serve as a lens through which I relate to clay and other objects that hold sympathetic meaning for me.

My two older brothers and I grew up working alongside my father in our family owned business. Most of the work included machine repairs and ornamental iron work. Grease, metal shavings and welding burrs, coated the



Figure 1: People gathered in Shop

floors of my father's small dilapidated shop. Sticks of metal tubing lined the floor waiting to be cut up for future jobs. The walls were lined with machines and tools that proudly showed their decades of use with their surfaces being overruled with rust. It was a place of hard work but it also served as a place of gatherings and celebration after work hours



Figure 2: Guy playing guitar in spray booth.

(fig.1, 2). The shop was going into its third generation when my father's sudden passing forced us to lose the shop and a home. As suddenly as he left, everything that he and his father built left us too.

Growing up in my father's shop, I developed my aesthetics and appreciation of distressed, aged, and decrepit metal surfaces. These qualities are reflected in my functional ceramics works. To understand the evolution of my thesis work, it is best to examine the full spectrum of work leading up to it.

Past to Present Work

My exploration of these types of decrepit, rusted, and spontaneous surfaces began prior to graduate school. The goal was to create a sense of nostalgia by making vessels that acted more as reliquaries for my



Figure 3: *Canteens*, 2011

vessels that acted more as reliquaries for my own memories. These early works were more representational of specific objects such as gas cans or oil cans (fig. 3). During my undergraduate education, I discovered atmospheric kilns such as wood and soda firing. From these kilns, came surfaces that reminded me of the spontaneity of rusted and worn-down metal. These types of firings left a record of what was going on inside the kiln on the surfaces and offered a specific



Figure 4: *Cruet Set*, 2013,

color pallet that I could not achieve with other firing methods. Because my work was autobiographical, it made sense to utilize a process that was autobiographical as well, leaving a story on the surface (fig. 4).

In graduate school, I continued to branch out and explore those same ideas of nostalgia through different forms. Graduate school gave me the liberty to move outside my comfort zone and media while challenging those ideas. Through critiques, I



Figure 5: *Untitled (device)*, 2015

noticed how repetitive and fragmented my work had become. In response, I began utilizing parts and pieces of my work to make them more noticeable, unique, and distinctive. The work took a turn to become less functional and more sculptural. Themes such as attachment and detachment, familiar and foreign, became more important. (Fig. 5, 6). New methods and processes were utilized including video, installation, and found objects.

After experimenting and branching into new terrain, I realized that these other methods and process were lacking in my own sensibility. I was becoming more detached from the work and felt they lacked the characteristics that functional ware

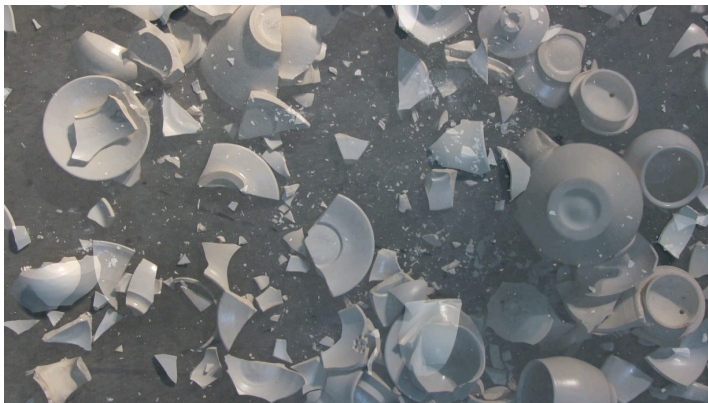


Figure 6: *Tea Party* (video still), 2016

offered such as the invitation to be used. I had always considered the foundations of my work as pottery based. Prior to my thesis, I returned to making functional ware and vessels. (fig.7).



Figure 7: *Oil Cans*, 2017

Momentous: Importance of Function

When I worked for my father, we made ornamental wrought iron fencing and gates. They were works of art, but also had to serve the function of keeping things in, out, open, and closed. I also grew up making low-rider bikes. Though made for show, they still had to serve their function as a bike. This same mentality is crucial when creating functional pottery. My goal is to create work that can integrate itself into a domestic setting and elevate mundane experiences. Through my lens, these objects initiate conversation between user and object by their use. I want my pottery to create an opportunity to construct a sense of familiarity to another material and purpose that transcends their traditional use (fig.8).

Making work that is functional is imperative to me. By making recognizable and experiential objects, I create a personal connection with the viewer. At first glance, the functional nature of the objects draws you in. They welcome the dynamic and contemplative conversation of their use. This type of making is not new to me, whether it

is a low-rider bike for show, heavily ornamental fencing, or a piece of pottery. They all have to form their intended use while also being aesthetically engaging.



Figure 8: *Coffee Stack II*, 2018

Momentous: process

This body of work all starts with utilizing the pottery wheel. My forms are thrown, altered, and hand-built then assembled to appear as if they were made up of multiple parts. Rather than a form where the appendages seem to grow out of the form. I do not try to hide attachments but make them distinguished. I utilize contour, rigid, and repetitive lines throughout my forms allude to the construction of metal industrial objects. This personally allows me to reference the process and order of assembling

objects. It also allows for a slight variation and accumulation in my glazes on their surface.

Like most artists working in clay, trouble-shooting problems with my process has become a norm. Wood-firing has always served as my main tool for finishing a work since it helps to achieve a surface and look that feels familiar. Due to the lack of results of this process and time put forth into preparation, I questioned the validity of the techniques. After trial and constant error, I made the decision to switch to gas reduction at cone 10. This offered less risk and more control. However, with this change I faced a new problem. Prior, the process of atmospheric firing had a big role in addressing the surface of my work. Now with this change in firing methods I needed to find a glaze that would dress up my forms while also having similarities to metal. After a series of tests, I came across a glaze that I had used years ago only in wood-kilns and never in gas. The glaze in a gas kiln offered a texture that I had never gotten before due to the fluxing out of the surface in atmospheric firings. Soda and ash from atmospheric kilns created a smooth black surface that was never really desirable. In a heavy gas reduction, the surface became more of a charcoal, steel gray color. Along with this softer color, the surface began to wrinkle and stipple when applied heavily through spraying. The look resembled wrought and cast iron and gave the familiarity that I sought. Brushing and dipping would cause the slip to crackle and crawl.

To contrast the slip, I wanted a glaze that was the exact opposite. Through trial and error, I found a couple of glazes I modified that were jewel like. They were vibrant and active looking glazes that appeared to still be in liquid form. These glazes helped

with activating the black slip glaze. One was a cone 10 celadon and the other a cone 6 clear glaze with added mason stain (fig. 9).

Momentous: Color

Surface, color, and form are the three main components that I use to compose pieces that are analogous to metal and architecture. Color has always played a big role in creating that relationship to materials other than clay. Also, it is my favorite element since it draws me into the work at first glance. Typically, my color pallet in past work has been earthy, dark, and metallic tones that are complimented with flashing, soda, and

wood ash from atmospheric firings. With this change in process, color and surface no longer recorded the past but allowed the work to take a new direction. From the beginning, I used this dark slip because of its similarity to metal and my attraction to the texture it created. Formally, it allowed me to not focus so much on the individual pieces but the entire composition of the stacks. It also was a strong, bold color that gave the work presence while simultaneously a feeling of absence.

Conceptually, the color did a lot more than anticipated. I was unaware of how

<p>Virden Wrinkle, Cone 10 Barnard slip (Blackbird) – 75% Minspar 200 – 25% (Apply heavily through sprayer until the texture appears to be a heavy dusting)</p> <p>Choy Blue Celadon, Cone 10 F-4 Feldspar – 52% Silica – 21% Barium Carb. – 17% Whiting – 6% Grolleg – 4% Tin Ox. – 3% Red Iron Ox – 2% (To achieve best color, apply heavily through dipping or pouring. For additional flux of glaze add: 3% Soda Ash.)</p> <p>Bates Clear (modified), Cone 10 Barium Carb. – 8% Gerstley Borate – 18% Whiting – 8% Minspar 200 – 35% Grolleg – 10% Silica – 21% (Add: 5% Mason stain for color, I used Robins Egg 6376. Add: 3% soda ash for additional fluxing.)</p> <p>Seth's Gold, Cone 10 Redart – 55% Silica – 5% OM4 – 5% Manganese Dioxide – 45% Cobalt Carb – 10% (Goes on best when applied in 2-3 even coats)</p> <p>Figure 9: Glaze and slip recipes</p>
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impactful a body of work in a uniform color would have on my outlook. Making functional work that suggests another material and which relates to objects from my own past has been important. Metal as a material offers a sense of stability. It is strong yet can be altered. Metal shows its age and use while It keeps its contents concealed, safe, secure, and contained.

In the past, I utilized these ideas when working in clay to create vessels that looked more industrial and had parts that resembled specific objects. These works were more about concealing the contents of its interior and keeping safe my own personal memories. With this thesis work, I noticed the black playing a similar role. Color and surface has always played a role in representing decay, and my own past and memories of a home that no longer exists. As I reflect on this new work, I see black as possibly a mourning, or laying to rest of old memories as I approach new, more current concerns. Another meaning I find in this black ware is a lack or absence of comradery or place. I may not always fully understand my reasoning for my choices but I do feel a deep, intuitive need to do them. I feel compelled to pursue and continue to explore this lack of color within my forms.

While the black can play many roles, I also utilize two other types of glazes that have just as much importance. I use a bronze glaze which acts more subtly than the rest as seen in *Liquor Set* (fig. 10). This is usually only used as an accent. It serves as a surprise for the viewer that conveys richness when analyzing the work. I normally utilize this bronze glaze on the lids of individual pieces within the stacks where they are not as noticeable until de-constructed or investigated. This glaze visually does not look polished and new but has more of an antiqued bronze look.



Figure 10: *Liquor Set, 2018*

The last glazes that I use to contrast the black and bronze are the celadon and fake celadon. I tend to categorize these two separate glazes as one because they both play the same role regardless of color. They are vibrant, usually either robin's egg blue or jade green in color and are usually only used to accent the interiors of all vessels and the exteriors of the bud vases to celebrate their contents or potential. When visualizing the finished product, I wanted a glaze that was active in color both conceptually and physically. These modified glazes act as focal points that either blend in or define their

place. For example, when they are placed the bulbs of the bud vases, where you would put flowers, they reference flourishing growth. (fig. 11)



Figure 11: *Bud Vase / Jar*, 2018 (1 of 5)

Momentous: Stacking / Assembling

Stacking the wares was strictly to make them feel more monumental, ritualistic and important. In my thesis show, stacks were placed on pedestals that were all at least four feet tall. Most stacks stood over twenty-four inches which allowed them to tower over people. By stacking, I hope to transform the perspective of the viewer along with the other elements of my work to evoke an emotional response or familiarity. They can be playful in their action while assembling and their parts can be interchangeable. Each



Figure 12: *Coffee Stack I*, 2018

piece within a stack serves a specific duty. For instance, in *Coffee Stack I* (fig. 12), from top to bottom you have a centerpiece for flowers, sugar jar, a coffee pot with pour over, and jar for coffee storage. In *Tea Stack I* (fig. 13.), from top to bottom, you have a teapot and caddie, a jar tea, then a tulipiere for an arrangement of flowers that add to the experience.

Before these vessels took physical form, they started out as sketches of shapes. This

was important in the visualization of how the stacks would interact with one another and to help create dynamics within the overall forms. I viewed the stacks as silhouettes by blackening out vertical shapes on one another. From here, I was able to look at how each angle and curve would correspond with one another. I can say my focus was primarily on the positive space, the mass of the objects. Then, I followed by considering the impact of the negative space on the overall forms. The sketches also served to define the points in the process where the vessel would start and end. As I started to construct the vessels, I became more aware of the space surrounding the pots and the negative space created due to handles and spouts. At this stage



Figure 13: *Tea Stack I*, 2018

in the making, I started to realize that the negative space was really activating the work. From here, I started to create small and larger cut outs in some of the forms to allow for transparency and to help create more diversity of negative space within the forms. My overall goal within the stacks was to design a system or collaboration of parts that created a whole. This idea of a system of parts was parallel to architecture and construction methods that were important to the posture of the work.



Figure 14: *Installation view from thesis exhibition.*

Within the overall installation of the work in the gallery space, the idea was to allow for each stack to have its own space and not be cluttered around other work. Each pedestal was intentionally placed and measured out. The show consisted of seven pedestals with the largest in the center. They were all four feet in height to add uniformity to the installation. The other six pedestals were broken up evenly into each side of the gallery and accurately spaced circling the center pedestal (fig.14). The negative space in the gallery allowed for each individual piece to become more

activated by giving them “room to breathe” and allowing the viewer to take in each piece.

Future Work

As I continue to move forward, I am eager to keep exploring my black ware. Within this body of work, I feel that certain aspects could be pushed and expanded. For example, I would like to further explore the use of negative space, surface, asymmetry in my forms. Prior to the end of my making cycle for *Momentous*, I began to cut out larger negative spaces in my forms such as in *Tea Stack II* (fig. 15). This started to help open the pieces up and add more of an architectural element. Opening up forms also allowed for more transparency within the work making it visually lighter in weight and more delicate.



Figure 15: *Tea Stack II*, 2018

I would like to explore more complex interactions of surface, line, and parts to allow for more playful engagements. I hope to create greater diversity with the surfaces of my wares either with line, embellishments, and glaze. Also, I would like to make the work more asymmetrical within the stacks and begin to move outward instead of upward. Stacking created instability issues the taller they got. As a functional potter, I would like my work to be as complex as required to get my ideas across but yet be easily accessible and practical for daily use.

Most of my show consisted of pouring vessels, either coffee pots or tea pots with varying components and arrangements. I would like to continue to push those forms while also adding new ones. Some forms I would like to explore would be more liquor vessels, flasks, and lidded containers outside of the traditional forms that most users may recognize. Toward the end of my making cycle, I started to address how my pots met the pedestal. Before, they were either directly on the pedestal or sat inside a saucer. Then I began to create trays that concealed and obscured the view of certain parts such as in *Coffee Pot II* (fig. 8). I was really interested in these trays because of their visual impact on how the stacks started and how you could view into certain cut outs. I would continue to explore this obscurity in the trays by making them taller and deconstructing parts of the tray. In *Tea Stack I*, I placed the tray up at the top of the stack in which the teapot nestled. This gave the stack a different visual weight which I would like to bring down in various parts of the stacks to give my forms more dynamics.

I constantly strive to reinvent my forms and remain aware of my works place in the context of the ceramics field. As I move forward on this path, both my work and I continue to evolve. Using functional ceramics as a vehicle to communicate these ideas

of familiarity, I am enthusiastic to see where this body takes me and what it blossoms into next.



Figure 16: *Pouring Pot Stack.* 2018