



DEREK HARDING AND JASON GREEN

Bannister Gallery
Rhode Island College
600 Mount Pleasant Avenue
Providence, Rhode Island

April 2 through 28

Ceramic artists Derek Harding and Jason Green share a friendship, a medium and a common vocation; they are both Massachusetts high school art instructors. This exhibition, curated by RIC Associate Professor of Art Bryan Steinberg, positions these two artists, working in such parallel realms, at the fork of a seemingly common path diverging in the results of their labor.

Both artists employ creative mold-making techniques derived from historical industrial practices. Harding’s modular “Saddle” was created while in residency at Kohler Co., the nation’s leading manufacturer of plumbingware. Green discovered an affinity for brick-making while in residence at Maine’s Watershed Ceramics Center, the site of a former brick factory.

While the word “clay” evokes images of messy handprints and the warm mud of wheelwork, Harding prefers things smooth — his medium of choice is slip cast porcelain. The casting process enables Harding to create pristine forms devoid of fingerprints, in a fine balance of precious vs. industrial. To achieve this finish, however, he employs many hand-

intensive methods; throwing positives to be cast on a wheel, or turning plaster on a lathe. Once cast, glazed and fired, Harding’s modular components are fitted with rubber tubing and steel bolts, allowing them to be assembled into a variety of sculptural entities.

“Saddle” is an iteration of the components Harding created while taking part in Kohler Co.’s Arts/Industry residence in 2005. Cast in their signature industrial porcelain, the piece is strongly suggestive of sanitary piping. Its gleaming white form suggests an unidentifiable function, evoking intrigue and inviting manipulation. “Saddle’s” gently curved porcelain piping is edged in black rubber tubing, allowing it to sway like an imaginary science lab rocking horse.

In his work, Harding often employs the antiseptic quality of white “to remove the evidence of maker from the experience of the object.” For all of the distance Harding seeks to place in between himself and the experience of his work, there is a keen sense of play inherent in “Saddle’s” ability to be manipulated, and in the curious absence of circuitry and fluids that seem to belong coursing through its hidden interior.

When asked about shaping the craft-loaded medium of ceramics through an adaptation of industry, Harding cheerfully admitted, “(Clay) happens to be the thing I know how to use. If I knew how to do (what I do) in another material, I would.”

LEFT: Derek Harding, *Saddle*, 2006, porcelain, rubber, steel.
ABOVE: Jason Green, *Variant*, 2008, terra cotta, slip, glaze.

Among the antiseptic playground of Harding’s manipulatables, Jason Green’s modular constructions ooze the lurid and lush colors of organic decay and overgrowth. In contrast to Harding’s efforts to remove evidence of the hand, Green celebrates it, deftly applying floral surface patterns to his undulating dimensional tiles. To achieve his complex surfaces, Green wields a variety of hand intensive methods ranging from brushworked glaze to textured slip, carefully pressed onto tiles from sheets of embossed Victorian wallpaper.

Green once labored in building renovations, which informed a process redolent of memory, layered information and decay. In thesis work completed at Alfred University, Green constructed temporary environments, creating walls frosted with unfired bone china slip that would crack and peel into the patterns of time. A residency at Maine’s Watershed Center for Ceramic Arts spurred his interest in the historic application of brick molds to terra cotta.



Using a variety of modular plaster inserts, Green now constructs his own molds, pressing sets of patterned relief tiles which are then glazed and assembled into wall-mounted or freestanding sculpture.

In "Variant," Green's wall-mounted grouping of square, low relief tiles retains sculptural pendant drips of glaze, crystallized in the kiln's heat as they cascaded over the clay's edge. On its surface, op-art peaks and valleys play against a retro floral scatter, hand-painted in underwater hues suggestive of a place below the flood line.

In a celebration of surface, Green wields pattern with an eye for opposites — through his use of color, in the intersection of positive with negative, in the play of concave and convex forms. For the patterns used in "Variant" and other recent work, Green turns to out-of-print source books for fabric and wallpaper, now available online. The familiar mid-late 20th century patterns are over glazed in gradations suggesting mildewed age — lightening where the tiles join to evoke the feeling of a residence wall, breathing at the border of a disaster that has receded.

Green refers to his wall-pieces as "snapshots of a memory," whereas his freestanding floor pieces evoke the ruinous sensibility of having once been a part of something larger. Unlike Harding's work, the presence of Green's hand is evident, with finger and fist marks gouged into unglazed voids backing joined tiles. Wall-mounted pieces boast raw edges like cracked earth, a residue of Green's process and a reflection of the source of his medium.

Like the "bones of Adam," clay comes from the earth. In our worship of the finished product, it's easy to overlook the legacy/destiny of all things organic, and it is interesting to note how differently Green and Harding position this fact. Green allows nature to emerge past the crust of his intensive patterning through raw edges and coloration reminiscent of body fluids and bone. In stark contrast, Harding's polished, machined forms may not physically echo the fine mud from whence they came. But, by alluding to the vessel of the body and the fixtures we rely upon to funnel its waste, this legacy/destiny is likewise implied.

| Meredith Cutler



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Wendy Maruyama, *Mickey Mackintosh Chair*, 1988, courtesy of The Bennett Collection. As featured in *Craft in America*.

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