



Ceramic Excellence

Fellowships at the Archie Bray Foundation 2005–2006

Deborah Schwartzkopf
Lilian Fellow

Melissa Mencini
Lincoln Fellow

Koi Neng Liew
Taunt Fellow

Deborah Schwartzkopf

Blossoming Geometries



Deborah Schwartzkopf, Lilian Fellow

Deborah Schwartzkopf has created a unique ceramic vocabulary of blossoming geometries. Exuding presence and personality, her sophisticated, sculpturally utile vessels initiate a dialogue between the interior and the exterior, the object and the user.

Familial relationships, education, and the environment frame her distinctly Constructivist aesthetic. The daughter of two talented craftspeople, she views patterns as both a welcome point of departure and a source of technical constraint. This interest was augmented during her undergraduate studies at the University of Alaska, Anchorage.

Subsequently working for several Alaskan production potters, she learned the intricacies of efficiency and discovered her ambition to be a functional potter.

As a special student at San Diego State University, Schwartzkopf adopted a distinctly pastel palette. Variations of



folding and unfolding floral forms emerged, inspired predominantly by her studies of Nature, its definitions and boundaries. At the heart of everything," she says, "I am interested in the cyclical nature of growth and the process of refinement."

Graduate studies at Penn State perpetuated her desire to refine her ideas about form and surface, concepts and color, confirming her career aspirations. From the cambered shadows of the low-lying fences lining her pathway home to Frank Gehry's organic architectural geometries, a broad array of influences converged in Schwartzkopf's work and became the foundation for her signature style of elegant yet vigorous forms.

For Lilian Fellow Deborah Schwartzkopf, the Bray has been a catalyst. "The Bray has given me a supportive community. It has been amazing interacting with so many artists and meeting people from all over with so much energy, experience and skill."

The subtlety of the oxidation salt-fired pastel surfaces disguises the complexity of Schwartzkopf's constructions, a combination of wheel thrown, handbuilt

and altered parts. She revels in "clay's flexibility." It "allows me to stretch, bend, cut, fold, stack and attach parts. The roots of these processes grow from my knowledge of sewing, which taught me



to transfer patterned planes into curving hollow forms." Layering underglazes and glazes, which she mixes and alters herself, she fires her work for a full day to cone 10 (2,345 degrees Fahrenheit) in an oxidation-salt atmosphere. Her work reflects an inherent integrity of design and meticulous attention to detail.

Schwartzkopf is driven by her diverse interests in botany, science, philosophy and literature, as well as a fierce work ethic framed by a clear sense of purpose, priorities, and expectations. When asked to describe her aspirations, she responds, "I want to evoke emotion through



association to shape and color and communicate a relationship between organic motion and geometry in surface and form." Taut arcs and counter arcs define Schwartzkopf's three-dimensional canvases, whose dapples and swathes of color elicit emotions ranging from the contemplative to the dramatic.

From tightly rendered mugs to gracefully attenuated vases, her work exudes a synthesis of influences, whose essence she has distilled into her own. Deborah Schwartzkopf articulates her vision of functional pottery, nurturing and



developing a ceramic language defined by its organic geometry and enriching the tradition for the future.

—Melissa G. Post

Teapot, 2006, salt-fired porcelain, 6"h x 8"w x 5"d

Cups, 2006, salt-fired porcelain, 3.5"h x 3"w

Melissa Mencini

Private Parts



Melissa Mencini, Lincoln Fellow

Prep space, wheel, laptop, and shelves—movable and immovable. A typical studio with an atypical twist. Although Melissa Mencini's library occupies only one shelf of her studio, its contents, including titles such as: *Antique Medical Instruments*, *Medical and Anatomical Illustrations*, *Photographic Atlas of Civil War Injuries*, *Joel-Peter Witkin*, *Professional Guide to Diseases And Disorders*, and *Anomalies and Curiosities of Medicine* speak volumes. From these source materials, Mencini derives

inspiration, cultivating her uncanny interests and translating them into uncommonly beautiful, exquisitely rendered sculptural objects, which straddle the line between literal and conceptual.



One: of Four Humors (Scarificator), 2004, earthenware, 14" x 10.5" x 12.5"

Rooted in functionalism, Mencini's relationship with clay began at Ohio's Bowling Green State University. Pursuing her MFA at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, thereafter, Mencini developed

her sculpting skills and her teaching abilities, and broadened her knowledge of art history. Abstracting bowls, which morphed into "tools for measuring large circles" and cultivating interests in medicine, tools and assemblage, Mencini transitioned from functional ceramics to implicitly functional ceramic sculpture.

Formal beauty and an enigmatic presence characterize her work. From crude contraptions to highly sophisticated

implements, Lincoln Fellow Mencini immerses herself in a world of intensive independent inquiry. She says, "The opportunity and environment that the Archie Bray Foundation provides

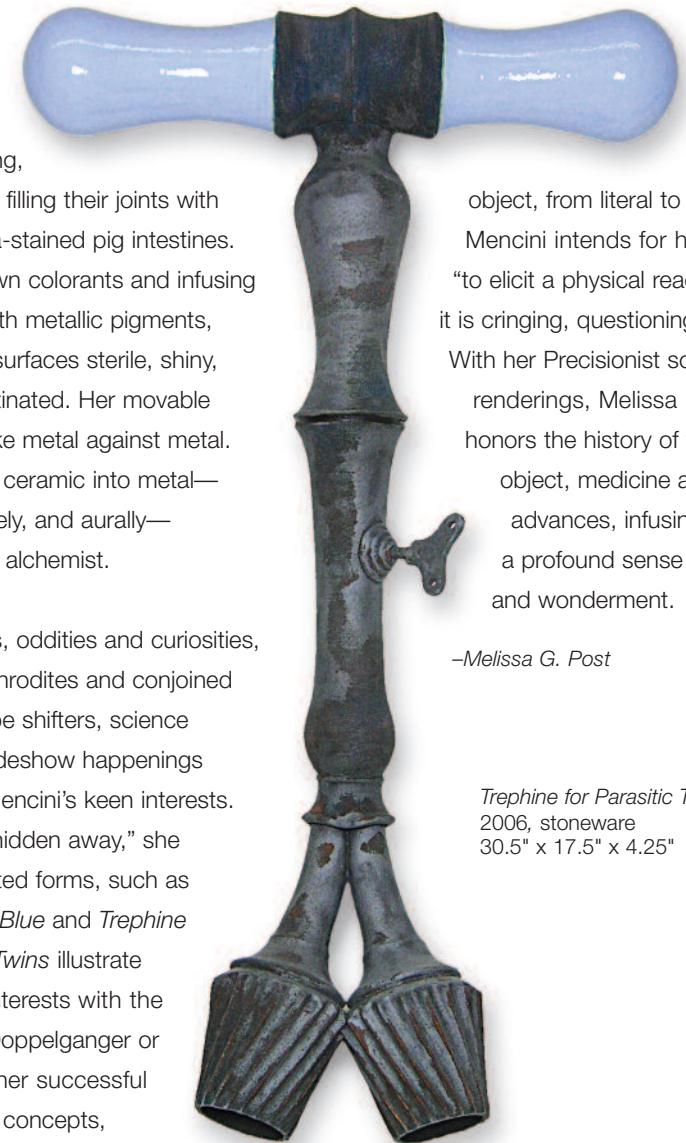
is beneficial for me to continue with my uninterrupted research and production of my work." Old surgeries, successful and otherwise, and quackery all intrigue her.

Her fascination lies in "rooting out fact versus fiction" and discovering the simple solutions achieved with seemingly primitive instruments. Formaldehyde Disinfectors, Toothkeys, and Scarificators are among Mencini's repertoire of antique medical instruments, which reveal as much about her own interest in the them, their successful design and utility, as they do about her empathy towards others, their fear of doctors, of being naked and vulnerable. Viewer becomes voyeur as they examine her dilators and retractors. Navigators of hidden canals and conduits for viewing secretive chambers, they offer the promise of being privy to parts unseen.

Scaling her immense photorealistic forms from actual tools, Mencini constructs her work by throwing most of the individual

segments, coiling, altering, trimming and filling their joints with coffee- or tea-stained pig intestines. Mixing her own colorants and infusing her glazes with metallic pigments, she renders surfaces sterile, shiny, rusting or patinated. Her movable parts grind like metal against metal. Transforming ceramic into metal—visually, tactilely, and aurally—Mencini is an alchemist.

Abnormalities, oddities and curiosities, from hermaphrodites and conjoined twins to shape shifters, science fiction and sideshow happenings are among Mencini's keen interests. "People get hidden away," she says. Bifurcated forms, such as *Conjoined in Blue* and *Trepphine for Parasitic Twins* illustrate her intense interests with the idea of the Doppelganger or double, and her successful translation of concepts,



from human to object, from literal to conceptual. Mencini intends for her work "to elicit a physical reaction, whether it is cringing, questioning or smiling." With her Precisionist sculptural renderings, Melissa Mencini honors the history of the medical object, medicine and medical advances, infusing us with a profound sense of curiosity and wonderment.

—Melissa G. Post

Trepphine for Parasitic Twins, 2006, stoneware 30.5" x 17.5" x 4.25"

Koi Neng Liew

Character Development

Born in 1975, the Year of the Rabbit, Koi Neng Liew was raised in Singapore. One of three sons, he grew up in a close-knit, traditional Chinese family. Family, schooling and the army framed his life experiences, which alternated between imposed periods in authoritarian environments to self-chosen periods in progressive environments. Assuming the role of observer, Liew shaped a stable world of his own.

During his youth, Liew pursued arts, crafts and drawing, escaping an otherwise austere environment, by immersing

Grasshopper Man, 2006, ceramic, 8'h x 3'w x 2'd



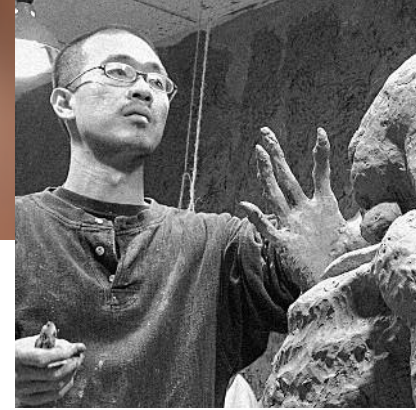
himself in the world of comic books, Japanese animation, Hong Kong Kung Fu and the Martial Arts. The discovery of a muscle man drawing on a school desk triggered his interest in the idea of humans as characters, fueling his desire to become a comic book artist.

Attending the Nan Yang Academy of Fine Art, Liew received classical training in drawing and painting, piquing his interest in Greek and Roman sculpture and fortifying his talents as a draughtsman. He recalls "I got stronger in art school...[because] it was basically for myself. I was comfortable—finally." Pursuing ceramics, he transitioned from wheel-thrown, tri-footed altar forms to increasingly intricate, interlocking handbuilt sculptures, which became the foundation of his oeuvre.

Fortified from his art school experience, Liew served his mandatory 2 1/2 years in the army. Rather than being held captive by army, however, he captured them, through sketches and drawings. Fellow soldiers became his friends and source material.

Returning to school, Liew resumed his lines of aesthetic inquiry, exploring the ideas of segmentation and fragmentation, developing his functional work and installation skills, and refining his ideas. The underpinnings of his academic drawings resurfaced in his successive studies at Alfred University and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Unlike the breathy responses evoked by the flawless marble surfaces, harmonious proportions and impassive expressions of his classical precedents, Liew's rugged, dramatically stylized beings provoke visceral reactions. Seeking disorder and a looser style, Liew leaves the "imperfections on the surface," illustrating that they "have nothing to hide." Coarsely textured skin, massive hands, cinched waists, rippling muscles, and considerable appendages characterize Liew's Mannerist aesthetic.



Koi Neng Liew, Taunt Fellow

Monstrous yet vulnerable, crude yet tender, Liew's formidable figures challenge our judgmental tendencies. From meticulously detailed visages to the more loosely rendered root structures that ground them, the fleeing Grasshopper Man, surreptitious Mantis, and predatory Fire Ant Lady are among Taunt Fellow Liew's current cast of characters. "The new David and Ann Shaner Studio, new facility and big space provided allow me to make more ambitious work." Hewn by shaping, slicing, hollowing and drying the segments to leather hard, the work is then fused, fired and sculpted into one piece.



Working on several figures simultaneously, Liew creates his compositions. Perhaps their metamorphoses are metaphors for Liew's own metamorphosis?

Koi Neng Liew's oeuvre celebrates the triumph of the human spirit over adversity. His powerful personae are mediums, through which he processes his experiences and by which he has unwittingly emboldened himself. Koi Neng Liew is taking risks, and in so doing, redefining our contemporary aesthetic sensibilities.

—Melissa G. Post

Happy Little Men, 2003, ceramic, 7'h x 6'w x 4'd



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Nurturing Creative Excellence

The Archie Bray Foundation for the Ceramic Arts has always been an ongoing experiment, a place and experience with no artistic boundaries. The extensive facilities, the freedom to explore, and the creative exchange that occurs within the community of resident artists provides a profound opportunity for artistic growth, both for individual artists and for the field of ceramics.

To further encourage the Bray “experiment,” Robert and Suzanne Taunt established the Taunt Fellowship in 1998. Inspired by the Taunts’ vision and generosity, others established additional awards, including the Myhre Fellowship in 1999 and 2000, the Lilian Fellowship since 2001, and most recently the Lincoln Fellowship, inaugurated in 2004. Currently the Taunt, Lilian, and Lincoln fellowships each provide \$5,000 and a one-year residency to a ceramic artist who

demonstrates exceptional merit and promise, allowing them to focus more completely on producing and exhibiting a significant body of work during their fellowship year.

Inside, essays by Melissa Post introduce you to the 2005–2006 fellowship artists and their work. Post was selected as the 2006 Jentel Critic at the Bray, a collaborative residency with the Jentel Foundation in Banner, Wyoming, established to promote critical writing and thinking about the field of ceramic art. Melissa G. Post has been in the field of fine and decorative arts for fifteen years. She brings a broad knowledge of the commercial and non-profit worlds to her curatorial position at Charlotte’s Mint Museum of Craft+Design. She holds her Masters degree from the Bard Graduate Center for Studies in the Decorative Arts, Design, & Culture, NYC.

Past Fellowship Recipients

1999 Marc Digeros, Taunt Fellowship; Sharon Brush, Myhre Fellowship
2000 Eric Eley, Taunt Fellowship; John Byrd, Myhre Fellowship
2001 Jiman Choi, Taunt Fellowship; John Utgaard, Lilian Fellowship
2002 Jason Walker, Taunt Fellowship; Sandra Trujillo, Lilian Fellowship
2003 Jeremy Kane, Taunt Fellowship; Karen Swyler, Lilian Fellowship
2004 Trey Hill, Taunt Fellowship; Miranda Howe, Lilian Fellowship; Kowkie Durst, Lincoln Fellowship

Individuals wishing to establish a fellowship at the Archie Bray Foundation are encouraged to contact Resident Director Josh DeWeese.

This publication is generously funded by the Joliet Foundation.