

## KSU cup show grows in stature

*71 entries are chosen from among hundreds by ceramics artists, many noted for fluidity*

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The last time I looked, this was a tiny little show barely filling a small gallery.

That was 10 years ago, though, and word gets around.

This year for *The 10th Annual National Juried Cup Show*, 300 or so entries were submitted from 120 artists, and of that, 71 cups were accepted.

"I think 70 actually showed up," said Anderson Turner, Kent State University School of Art director of galleries. He curates the exhibit with Kirk Mangus, KSU's ceramics program director, which he has built over the past 25 years into one of the premier ceramics programs in the country.

The show was originally set up by Mangus and Eva Kwong, a noted ceramist in her own right and Mangus' wife, Turner explained.

"When I came along as a graduate student 10 years ago, we wanted a show that would be a nice showcase, national, maybe international in level, to raise our profile. So Kirk said, let's do a cup show."

The show has had a string of noted jurors, including Ted Vogel from Louis and Clark College in Portland; Bill Jones, editor of *Pottery Making Illustrated* magazine; and Lawrence Bush, head of Rhode Island School of Design, said Mangus.

This year, the juror was Dean Adams, an adjunct faculty member in ceramics/foundations at Montana State University, famous for architectonic ceramics and punningly styled everyday objects such as condiment holders.

On Adams' artist page at <http://www.akardesign.com/creators/artists.asp>, he writes about the use of male anatomy in his work and his use of humor as a subversive act. That sensibility is reflected in some of the cups in this exhibit, a few of which can be accurately described as provocative.

"The essence of a cup show, the meaning of it — aside from the jokes we make about raising a little money and making some little pots — is it's about a tangible and approachable art form, an everyday object that's finely crafted and beautifully made, something that's both celebratory and unique," said Mangus. "It's not just a hollow object. It reaches out and grabs you."

Indeed they do. In fact there were several I wanted to take home. Yes, they're for sale, with prices ranging from \$30 to \$800. And even at those prices, a lot of them are already sold.

There are a lot of what some would call "tea taste" cups in this exhibit: rough-looking, squat and often without handles, inspired by those treasured for tea ceremonies in Japan.

Mangus picked out one such cup made by Lucien Koonce of Haydenville, Mass. It's a cup Koonce has titled *Gomabai Yunomi*, an anagama kiln-fired stoneware piece that from the outside resembles a stack of squashed bagels. But as Mangus turned it over, he pointed out the beautifully finished bottom where meticulous attention to the shape and evenness of the foot revealed a potter who knows what he's doing. A *yunomi* is a Japanese term for a form of teacup, usually ceramic, taller than wide, with a trimmed or

turned foot. Unlike the more formal *chawan* tea bowl, which is used during the Japanese tea ceremony, the *yunomi* is made for daily or informal tea drinking.

The term *Gomabai* is another Japanese word for a type of wood-fired glaze, characterized as a "sesame seed ash glaze" with "small spots or freckles of ash deposit that occur most often on the horizontal surfaces of a piece."

The anagama kiln is an ancient type of pottery kiln brought to Japan from China via Korea in the fifth century. An anagama (a Japanese term meaning "cave kiln") consists of a firing chamber with a firebox at one end and a flue at the other.

Another stoneware tea bowl by Nicole Fiume of Tallmadge plays no such games with the viewer's perception. This cup is obviously well made, even to the most inexperienced observer. It's short and wide, beautifully proportioned and glazed and meant to be held in two hands.

A lovely lotus-shaped *Blue Salt Tea Bowl* in porcelain by Jim Connell of Winthrop College in Rockhill, S.C., displays all the hallmarks of a master potter: beautiful shape, perfect form and proportion, lovely, delicate glaze, light in the hand. This piece is emblematic of Connell's love of Chinese ceramics, particularly from the Sung Dynasty, the Prehistoric Neolithic and Tang Dynasty and the teapots made in Yixing.

A small tea bowl by Jake Vinson of Logan, Utah, had a KSU faculty member competing with a university administrator for ownership, according to Turner. The handleless cup, beautifully glazed in green, white and dark brown script, is stamped "confidential" in a long line on one side and is titled *Yeah, forget it . . .* Those who made the cut are a mix of ceramics professionals and students, Turner said.

"Students have applied from around the country," he elaborated. "Two KSU students got in."

"One student and one alum," Mangus corrected. "Lots of alums didn't get in."

One of the things that a show like this is good for is trend spotting. The latest trend in ceramics is something Mangus calls the "Etsy effect."

Etsy is a social commerce Web site focused on handmade or vintage items covering a wide range including art, photography, clothing, jewelry, edibles, bath and beauty products, quilts, knick-knacks and toys. "My students can go on Etsy and sell things they've made. It's reviving a love of the handmade, and that's becoming important to people again, like it was in the 1960s and 1970s.

"That's one thing," Mangus noted. "The other thing is that from a design standpoint, I wouldn't be surprised to find that one of these people would be hired by a large corporation to design things for them.

"From this show you also get a sense of what's hot," he continued. "Technically, what's hot is wood firing for one, then deconstructing and reconstructing, taking ideas and elements from throughout the history of ceramics, design and art and combining them in a new way.

"There's also a fluid feeling in the sense of design in these pieces that you didn't see a decade ago," Mangus added.

"Craftsmanship has gotten a lot better, even since 10 or 20 years ago. If I were to look at American functional pottery from 1969 it wouldn't have the fluidity that pottery made by our young people now has." A lot of craftsmanship had been forgotten by the time the modern ceramics movement started in the mid-1960s, he said. Artists had to relearn techniques, even going to Japan to study.

"Here, look at these two cups," Mangus said holding up a *Pair of Cups* in earthenware by Martina Lantin of Gatlinburg, Tenn.

"Now look at this one," he continued, holding up a *Mug* by Shawn O'Conner of Syracuse, N.Y. "It's a nice wood-fired cup, and it also has this one little thing, and that is that it leans a bit on the side where the handle is. But if you put it down, you can see that the side away from the handle is perfectly straight. He's cut into the side nearest the handle to make it easier for you to hold, but he hides it. You can't tell he's made a cut at all.

"But with the *Pair of Cups* she doesn't hide the cut. She's left it there for you to see, but she's fit it together so beautifully that the cut is there, but it's solid, and it's not thickened where the cut comes together, even though to close that seam she's overlapped the clay."

It's things like this, said Mangus, that tells him that the quality of craftsmanship and artistry in ceramics is the highest it's been since he began teaching.

"Today, any one of these guys could throw rings around those guys," he continued. "But it's the fluidity of the form, the craftsmanship, the quality of the glazes, it's all superb."

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