

BRIDGES

Jason Walker

January 23–
August 22, 2015

Society for Contemporary Craft
2100 Smallman Street
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15222
412 261 7003

www.contemporarycraft.org



Photo: Deb McCunn

JASON WALKER

Born: Pocatello, ID, 1973
Lives: Bellingham, WA

EDUCATION

M.F.A., The Pennsylvania State University, State College, PA, 1999
B.F.A., Utah State University, Logan, UT, 1996

SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

2014

20th San Angelo Ceramic Competition, San Angelo Museum of Fine Arts, San Angelo, TX

Jason Walker: On the River, Down the Road, solo exhibition, Bellevue Arts Museum, Bellevue, WA

2013

Animal Stories, Gardiner Museum, Toronto, Canada

Ceramic Top 40, Red Star Studios at Belger Crane Studios, Kansas City, MO

Uncanny Congruencies, Palmer Museum of Art, The Pennsylvania State University, State College, PA

2012

Blind Admirations, solo exhibition, Friesen Abmeyer Fine Art, Seattle, WA

Corporeal Perspectives, solo exhibition, Cross MacKenzie Fine Arts, Washington, DC

2011

Art Market, San Francisco, Represented by Ferrin Gallery, Fort Mason Center, San Francisco, CA

Artists from the Center, Bray 60th Celebration Exhibition, Archie Bray Foundation for the Ceramic Arts, Helena, MT

Pursuit of Porcelain, Ferrin Gallery, Pittsfield, MA

Sculpture, Objects, Functional Art & Design, Represented by Ferrin Gallery, Park Avenue Armory, New York, NY

2010

The Hemaphrodites: Living in Two Worlds, Wexler Gallery, Philadelphia, PA

2009

Human Made Wild, solo exhibition, Ferrin Gallery, Pittsfield, MA

2008

Cerama A Rama: Soul on Fire, Arizona State University Art Museum, Tempe, AZ

Ceramics Ireland International Festival Exhibition, Kozo Studio/Gallery, Thomastown, Co. Kilkenny, Ireland

Perspectives in Clay, Lucia Douglas Gallery, Bellingham, WA

Starting a Hare in Ceramics, Pewabic Pottery, Detroit, MI

Voices, NCECA National Invitational, Society for Contemporary Craft, Pittsburgh, PA

2007

Nature Seeker, Sculpture, Objects, Functional Art & Design, Represented by Ferrin Gallery, Navy Pier, Chicago, IL

Innovation and Change: Great Ceramics from the Ceramic Research Center, Arizona State University Art Museum, Tempe, AZ (traveling exhibition)

2006

Biomorph, solo exhibition, Ferrin Gallery, Lenox, MA

SELECTED GRANTS & AWARDS

2011—The International Ceramics Studio, Kecskemét, Hungary

2011—Artist in Residence, The Pottery Workshop, Jingdezhen, China

2010—Artist in Residence, Jingdezhen Ceramic Institute, Jingdezhen, China

2010—Artist in Residence at A.I.R. Vallauris, Vallauris, France

2001-03—Taunt Fellowship Awardee and Resident, Archie Bray Foundation for the Ceramic Arts, Helena, MT

2001—Exhibiting Member, The Association of Clay and Glass Artists of California, San Francisco, CA

Website: jasonwalkerceramics.com

This biographical material is selectively compiled and not meant to be exhaustive.

EXHIBITION CHECKLIST

(Measurements are height x width x depth. Measurements are in inches.)

Photos: David Scherrer Photography

Expecting, 2010
Porcelain, underglaze
15" x 9" x 10"
Courtesy of Ted Rowland, Arlington, TX

Standing in the Grass, 2009
Porcelain, underglaze, plastic tubing, resin
19" x 20" x 7"
Courtesy of Ted Rowland, Arlington, TX

Desert Frog, 2008
Porcelain, underglaze
10" x 21" x 10"
Courtesy of Ted Rowland, Arlington, TX

Flash Flood, 2007
Porcelain
17" x 18" x 7"
Courtesy of Ted Rowland, Arlington, TX

Wading, 2006
Porcelain, underglaze
21" x 13" x 10"
Courtesy of Wallis and Marshall Katz, Pittsburgh, PA

Nest, 2004
Porcelain, underglaze
9" x 11" x 11"
Courtesy of Silvia and Alexander C. Speyer, Pittsburgh, PA

Wildflowers, 2015
Porcelain, stoneware, china paint, wood, spray paint
36" x 20" x 20"
Courtesy of Ferrin Contemporary



Flash Flood

The Relationship of Figure to Ground

William L. Fox

The title of this essay refers to how the two-dimensional shape of a person, animal, or other object in the foreground relates to the background in a painting or photograph. The artist Jason Walker systematically subverts what we consider to be the normal order within this relationship by making figures that become the ground for other figures. He also reverses the size of artificial and natural objects, thus making us consider scale of their relationship to one another. And then he complicates this deliberate act of cognitive dissonance by switching mechanical and organic functions. To start with, then, Walker's painted and assembled clay sculptures are fun to contemplate. This is a good thing, considering the serious nature of what he proposes.

A fine example of Walker's ambidexterity with figure and ground is *Desert Frog*, the legs and tail of which are three-dimensional plumbing parts that seem to extrude from the two-dimensional painting on the frog's body. The pipes irrigate an orchard located, incongruously, in a desert landscape. The tip of the tail displays the fractal patterning of desiccated ground, the pipe delivering aridity versus water. Walker has additionally wrapped the frog in a fictional armature of bolted structural elements that are both painted and sculpted, reinforcing the transformation of the frog into a figure both natural and mechanical. The result is an engaging puzzle that also invites the viewer to contemplate the wisdom of watering the desert.

A sculpture fashioned a year later, *Standing in the Grass*, is likewise quietly but deeply provocative. A deer seemingly has a lower body woven from carbon basket-weave strips, and a tail that is a disturbingly rigged distributor cap. This bionic deer sports a faux camouflage hide tattooed with a topographical map of Yosemite. On one side of the deer, the painting underneath has it straddling Chicago, the twin television masts atop the Sears Tower almost tickling its belly. On the other side, it occupies Yosemite, part of which is shown as denuded forest. This complex mash-up of figure and ground generates questions about the interwoven relationships of culture to nature, habitat to home, the urban to the rural.

Walker was born in Idaho, earned his first art degree in Utah, and lives in Bellingham, Washington. He variously hikes, bikes, and backpacks through cities and wilderness areas, and his art often alerts us to the fact that he is a westerner. But he also travels to and works in places as far-flung as France and Hungary, China, and South Korea. He gets around the planet, and works such as *Capsized* derive from that larger arena. The reclining figure of a man that is vessel floats in an ocean which is somehow simultaneously inside the boat. Above this paradoxical body of water is a glowing green sky that hosts a lightbulb surrounded by birds and butterflies and ladybugs. The work is a feast of contradiction that manages to allude to—but does not explicitly state—the rising seas of global warming that is caused in part by burning fossil fuels.

A growing number of artists tread warily along the boundaries of culture and nature as the human footprint becomes increasingly



ABOVE: *Desert Frog*
BELOW: *Standing in Grass*

obvious and inescapable, and the ironies multiply. The narrative paintings of Chester Arnold, the exquisite miniature dioramas littered with plastic debris by Gregory Euclid, and the disturbing taxidermic mashups of Carlee Fernandez come to mind. Often such artists are connected profoundly to their local landscapes yet have a global view, their practices drawing inspiration from both. Walker is easily placed within this group. But he also belongs, by virtue of his chosen material, to a much older cohort.

Clay has been fashioned into pots for millennia that were used to cook and carry water, to store food, and to serve as funerary urns to list just a few of their functions. And those three-dimensional clay objects were more often than not painted with abstract designs symbolizing landscape features and the spirits and deities that were believed to animate them. These markings on pots are attempts to cultivate a relationship with the world, to influence its workings, to mark and make our place in it. And it is this enormously ancient cultural practice that helps explain why, when we look at Jason Walker's work, we feel a comfortable kinship for it even as we can't help but tease out its more serious meanings. Walker's work is a form of public prayer for our safety and preservation. How fortunate and useful it is that the sculptures are also beautiful.

William L. Fox, Director of the Center for Art + Environment at the Nevada Museum of Art in Reno, Nevada, has variously been called an art critic, science writer, and cultural geographer. He has published fifteen books on cognition and landscape, numerous essays in art monographs, magazines and journals, and fifteen collections of poetry.

The *Bridge Exhibition Series* is made possible by the Allegheny Regional Asset District, the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, the Elizabeth R. Raphael Fund of The Pittsburgh Foundation, Ted Rowland, BNSF Foundation, Ferrin Contemporary and other generous donors.



Expecting