

SPOTLIGHT

# taking risks



**Ceramics Monthly:** As a gallery director and curator with a 37-year career in the business, what excites you most about the field?

**Leslie Ferrin:** That must be a record in the gallery business—I started at age 20 as an artist and morphed my business model with the evolving marketplace. As an independent entrepreneur, I have the fortune of following my interests, taking risks, and changing directions. When the market no longer supported one model, I followed new paths that served artists' and collectors' needs.

Ferrin Gallery, now Ferrin Contemporary, has always been in Western Massachusetts. In 2014 we opened our sixth public space on the growing campus of MASS MoCA in North Adams. Unlike previous retail locations, we are in the midst of a dynamic contemporary art scene that also includes Williams College Museum of Art and The Clark Museum. Our proximity to Williams College, and Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts, provides a steady stream of educators and interns. Artist residencies, a constant influx of art professionals, and international visitors, mean that because of our rural setting we can support the production of new works, develop exhibitions, and organize long-term projects at a relatively low cost.

Ferrin Gallery began as an extension of our group studio with an adjoining pottery store, later added crafts, then changed focus to all media when we moved to the Berkshires. We scaled back when we moved to North Adams and now as Ferrin Contemporary, focus entirely on ceramics from 1950–present, showing primarily sculpture. In addition to showing current works from artist studios, we also work with both artists and collectors to manage their collections, archives, and legacies.

The biggest change over the years has been the use of the Internet and other types of media to communicate from a remote location. We have always depended on the Internet and participated in fairs in major cities—Miami, Chicago, and New York to establish contacts with geographically diverse collectors and artists. We now publish catalogs and offer artwork for sale to a global community through social media and the various coordinated platforms of Wordpress, Instagram, Facebook, Mailchimp, Issuu, and Artsy. We work internationally with artists, art professionals, and collectors using Skype, Facetime, and email. The playing field is much more accessible for artists, who can present work and access the marketplace, buyers, and professionals without gallery representation. Our role has changed from primarily a selling venue to one that expands on what artists can do for themselves, offering a greater network to achieve long-term goals.

**CM:** What motivated you to create Project Art 10 years ago?

**LF:** I started my career at the Clay Art Center in Port Chester, working in a group studio. That model always stuck. The Project Art live/work space owned by myself and artist Sergei Isupov (whose artwork is pictured above), is a renovated 19th-century mill building in Cummington, Massachusetts. The flexible, shared work spaces, library, office, and gallery areas are of use to each of us as our family and professional needs have shifted over time. This fall, Isupov will take over a larger area as he builds a solo exhibition for the Erie Art Museum. Paul Scott will work there as well, maintaining a US studio for his long-term project *New American Scenery*. We also provide studio space for artists who work in various capacities for the gallery.