



Clockwise from top left: Jeanne Quinn's *The Map Precedes the Territory*, 11 ft. (3.3 m) in length, porcelain, wire, pins, paint, 2008. Mia Mulvey's *Aratinga Mellis* (detail), 8 ft. (2.4 m) in height installed, porcelain, 2009. Sanam Emami's tulip vase and dish, 9 in. (23 cm) in height, porcelain, 2009. Jake Allee's *Composite Hammer Head*, 10½ in. (27 cm) in height, stoneware, 2009. Caroline Douglas' *Room With a View*, 36 in. (91 cm) in length, stoneware with slips and glazes, salt fired to cone 10, 2009. Martha Daniels' *Big-eared Wine Cup*, 10 in. (25 cm) in height, varnished clay, 2009. Josh Deweese's basket, 20 in. (51 cm) in height, stoneware, 2009. Emily Schroeder's oval bowl, 8 in. (20 cm) in length, porcelain, 2009.

Continental Divide

by Liz Howe

The Arvada Center (www.arvadacenter.org) in Arvada, Colorado and NCECA (National Council on Education for the Ceramic Arts) (www.nceca.net) partnered in this 'blended' (invitational and juried) exhibition showcasing an array of sculptural, utilitarian, video, and cross-disciplinary work by 47 artists from Wyoming, Montana, New Mexico, and Colorado. The Arvada Center boasts a beautiful gallery space facilitating a thoughtful and spacious installation. The premise of the show (bringing together both professional and emerging ceramic artists in the region) made for an eclectic, though uneven presentation.

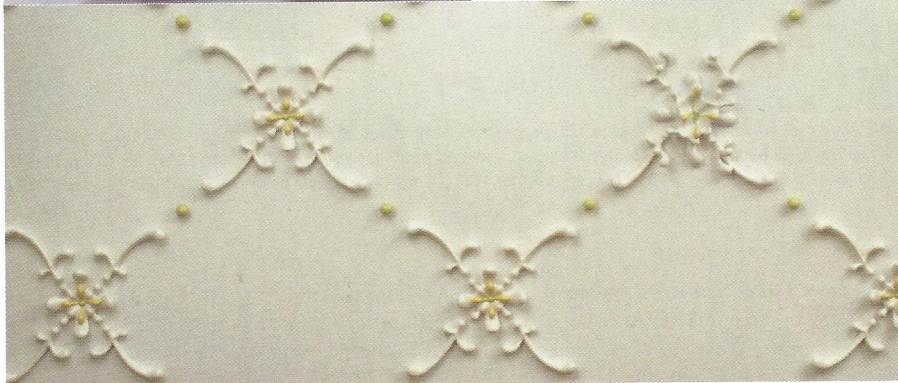
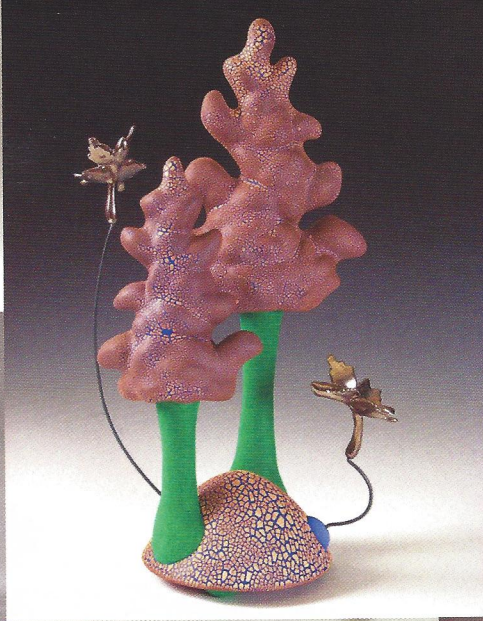
Regional renegade Betty Woodman is represented with one small bowl sharing only cursory glazing strategies with the work in her massive Metropolitan Museum of Art installation. Paul Soldner, the other historically significant participant, weighs in with two beautiful tea bowls from 2002 and one of his classic wheel-thrown and assembled sculptures acting as wise career summarizers.

From there, the show breaks into a rather fragmented survey offering an uneven ride in quality while the 'regional' moniker denotes a mostly happenstance association between participants. The show offers no real emphasis on creating an authentic connection between these artists and their particular 'place'; many of them having only recently settled near the Continental Divide. Semantics and demographics aside, some work stands out as original, honest, and smart.

The work of Jeanne Quinn, a large scale bold-colored map painted on the gallery wall layered with small and delicately pinned porcelain pieces, is an evocative meditation on globalization. Though Quinn's conceptual links are decorative and installation art, the emotional pulse of the work begs to speak of continental crowding and other larger concerns. Her imaginary maps and 'territories', symbols of global rather than local lands, stand ready to serve as telling metaphoric representations of our contemporary cartography.

Elliot Marquet debuts here with a more diminutive approach to landscape. His two strikingly original figurine-sized dioramas assert a playful mix of color, texture, abstracted form and sheer whimsy. Titles such as *I Was Enjoying the Night Sky* and *I Remember It Was Just Before Noon* draw a personal narrative connection to work whose visual tidiness distances itself from the actual physical world. These stylized mediations on landscape through his Cartoon Network lens draw the viewer immediately in and could make for some powerfully impish satire if pushed just a bit further.

Mia Mulvey's *Aratinga Mellis* seeps with sweet sadness. Her roughly two dozen white porcelain birds are caught frozen in a futile attempt to drink clear glass drops of water. The wall hung scene is poetic though somewhat heavy-handed and verging on the saccharine. Still, her handling of each individual bird, the quiet hush of subtle color and gesture makes for a clean, charming display.



Clockwise from left: Martha Daniels' *Cloud Tower*, 72 in. (182 cm) in height, raku clay, 2007. Collection of Kirkland Museum of Fine and Decorative Art, Denver. Betty Woodman's *Untitled*, 5 in. (13 cm) in height, stoneware. Paul Soldner's *Untitled #227*, 33 in. (84 cm) in height, stoneware, salt fired to cone 10, 2005. Elliot Marquet's *I Remember... It Was Just Before Noon*, 20 in. (51 cm) in height, earthenware, luster decal, mixed media, 2009. Katie Caron's *Wire Animations* (detail), stoneware, wire, stop motion animation, projection, 2008. Ryan Mitchell's *Button*, 36 in. (91 cm) in height, stoneware, porcelain, wood, 2009. Tsehai Johnson's, *Field #11* (detail), 10 ft. (3 m) in length, porcelain, 2009. Courtesy of Plus Gallery, Denver.

In the realm of utilitarian potters, through which the region flows with talent, there are several fine inclusions. Sanam Emami and Emily Schroeder both build strong, smart work of drastically different styles representing two current and lively trends. Schroeder's obsessively 'touched' hand-built pots exude a graphic designer's eye for subtle decoration while Emami's wheel-thrown work explores more formal and symmetrical pattern-making and repetition. Jake Allee shows some deft and clever forms touting technical prowess though perhaps trading in on function. For a real treat in the utilitarian pottery category though one need look no further than the work of Josh DeWeese. This full bodied work marries the magic of material manipulation with hearty exuberance and confident clarity. From platter to pitcher to vase DeWeese's work speaks of home, generosity, tradition, and spontaneity.

Two of the most daringly original works in the exhibition come from artist Martha Daniels. The first, a small colorful trophy-shaped cup-form sculpture entitled *Big-Eared Wine Cup*, stretches the American ceramic 'vessel' format a touch further by drawing inspiration more from the likes of the 1950's CoBRA group and Dubuffet than from Peter Voulkos and crew. The neighboring *Cloud Tower*, a glistening pink three-sided tower, deftly employs raku in the service of abstract sculpture. This ancestral cell-tower stela serves as a mysteriously symbolic beacon installed fittingly just left of center in the gallery and offers a fresh, unpredictable addition to the survey. The combination

of obsessively repetitive clay handling, extreme verticality, implied or actual fragility and metallic pink smoke-tinged finish conspire to create a non-literal monument ripe for associations and contemplations far outside much of the mainstream conversation in ceramics. The variation between Daniels' two pieces intimates a deep well of resources and ideas from which the artist draws leaving this viewer wanting more clues with which to unravel the alluring mystery.

Other notable pieces in the show include Ryan Mitchell's massive stoneware *Button*, Tsehai Johnson's *Field #11*, Katie Caron's *Wire Animations* video, and Caroline Douglas' *Room with a View*. Many other pieces in this show cast a dated shadow over the exhibition while others rely on studio tricks or techniques devoid of real depth and content. The work heavy on 'tricks' does however serve as entertainment, presenting wow factor delights and illustrating the spectrum of studio ceramics practice for the casual viewer.

Overall, Continental Divide offers the greater Denver area a valuable survey of current regional ceramics. It offers an honest indicator of the vast expanse of practices within the larger field. The show serves NCECA's mission well, linking artists of divergent interests, aspirations, and abilities together through their interest in the material of ceramics.

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