

# CERAMICS NOW

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Digital Issue

M A G A Z I N E



**OVERTHROWN**  
DENVER ART MUSEUM

**JAPANESE ARTISTS**  
KEIKO GALLERY

**ROXANNE JACKSON**  
COVER STORY

**ARTHUR GONZALEZ**  
FEATURED ARTIST

SPECIAL  
FEATURE

# OVERTHROWN

The Overthrown: Clay Without Limits exhibition was on view June 11 through September 18, 2011 at the Denver Art Museum, and was part of Marvelous Mud: Clay Around the World, which includes eight exhibitions, live artist demonstrations, and hands-on programming.

The twenty-five artists in Overthrown: Clay Without Limits took on adventurous challenges to make the works in this exhibition. Most were made especially for Overthrown and many are in direct dialogue with our dynamic Daniel Libeskind-designed architecture; they move beyond the pedestal to the wall, the floor, and even the ceiling. A few extend beyond the Anschutz Gallery, across the entire museum complex. They break boundaries that are physical, technological, conceptual, and spatial.

Some push the forms of functional objects. Others push the limits of fragility. They take risks that draw on material chemistry and maverick kiln techniques. Some of their works include not only clay, but also found objects such as metal, plastic, and abandoned industrial materials. Overthrowing our expectations of ceramic art—its size, its context, its methods, and its meaning—these artists show us new ways of using this versatile and timeless material.

Location: Anschutz Gallery, Level Two, Hamilton Building / Denver Art Museum  
Curator: Gwen F. Chanzit

[www.denverartmuseum.org](http://www.denverartmuseum.org)  
[www.ceramicsnow.org/overthrown](http://www.ceramicsnow.org/overthrown)

Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art and the Herbert Bayer Collection and Archive, Denver Art Museum

Gwen Chanzit is curator of modern and contemporary art and the Herbert Bayer Collection and Archive. She has organized many DAM exhibitions including Bonnard, Matisse from the Baltimore Museum of Art, Martha Daniels Grotto, Vance Kirkland: The Late Paintings and Color as Field, as well as numerous exhibitions on Herbert Bayer. Her rotation in the modern and contemporary art galleries for Marvelous Mud is Focus: Earth and Fire.

Among her many publications, Chanzit has authored two books on Herbert Bayer; contributed essays to DAM exhibition catalogs, RADAR: Selections from the Collection of Vicki and Kent Logan and The View From Denver; served as editor and authored essays for the 2009

exhibition catalog, Embrace!; and published an essay in the Austrian exhibition catalog, Ahoi, Herbert: Bayer und die moderne (2009).

For Marvelous Mud, Chanzit is curating Overthrown: Clay Without Limits, an exhibition in the Anschutz Gallery that features new work by 25 contemporary artists—most of whom work very large scale. She is also preparing a catalog and organizing a related symposium in September 2011.

Chanzit is a frequent lecturer locally, nationally and internationally. She often serves as juror for art competitions and exhibitions and has been a guest curator at the Aspen Institute and the University of Denver. Chanzit holds a Ph.D. in art history and contributes to the future generation of museum professionals as director of the graduate program in museum studies at the University of Denver's School of Art and Art History.

**How did you find the artists for Overthrown: Clay Without Limits exhibition? Was it hard or you already had their names in mind?**

I spent many months researching, talking with artists in the field, and visiting artists in their studios. I also participated in symposia at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London and in Santa Fe, New Mexico, where I was introduced to the work of additional artists.

From well over 100 file folders with research on the work of individual artists, I narrowed my selections by reviewing these regularly, moving the folders into piles that grew into “yes,” “maybe,” and “no.” I was particularly interested in showing the breadth of work that ceramic artists are accomplishing today. Sometimes when I made a studio visit to see one artist, I discovered another artist or two.

**What are the criterias on which you selected the artists for this exhibition?**

I look for quality, inventiveness, and artists who are pushing the limits to develop new methodologies.

Working in all scales, from architecturally expansive to almost impossibly small, the artists in Overthrown employ twenty-first-century technology hand-in-hand with standard modeling and molding techniques. They use digital cameras, computers, laser cutters, 3-D printers, and computer-controlled mills along with more traditional tools. Some push the forms of functional objects. Others push the limits of fragility. They take risks that draw on material chemistry and maverick kiln techniques. Some of their works include not only clay, but also found objects such as metal, plastic, and abandoned industrial materials. **Overthrowing our expectations of ceramic art — its size, its context, its methods, and its meaning** — these artists show us new ways of using this versatile and timeless material.

**Did the exhibition space offered many obstacles? How did the artists adapt to the space?**

The exhibition space is a dynamic Daniel Libeskind design with angular walls and interesting spaces that are wonderful for exhibiting three-dimensional work. The soaring ceilings provide particularly good opportunities for large scale work. Each artist was encouraged to utilize these exciting spaces—which they did.

Most of the works were made especially for this exhibition, and many are in direct dialogue with the site—they move beyond the pedestal to the wall, the floor, and even the ceiling. A few extend across the entire museum complex. They break boundaries that are physical, technological, conceptual, and spatial.

**On what principles do you guide on preparing an exhibition like this, with more than 20 participating artists?**

It's important to show each artist's work with integrity, to enable the work to have enough space to show itself well. It was a particular goal for each work in this exhibition to be seen independently - with the added bonus of long vistas across the gallery from work to work.

**How long ago did you contact and propose the artists to exhibit at the Denver Art Museum?**

I encouraged each of the 25 artists to be very ambitious — not to be hindered by cost of materials or limitations of space. Most artists had just over a year to prepare the work—a very short time in the world of these ceramic installations where challenges of materials and techniques had to be resolved. In some cases, kilns had to be built...

**What expectations do you have from this exhibition?**

I very much hope this exhibition will overthrow some expectations of what ceramics might be. It is a versatile and timeless material that is being used in new inventive ways in the 21st century.

# MIA MULVEY

The scientific and museum context identifies a system based on order, fact and discovery. It is within this system of scientific display, process and ideology that my work exists. Museums of Science and Natural History evolved from the curiosity cabinets of the 16th and 17th centuries. These collections were displays of specimens, oddities, art and inventions. They permitted the viewer to relive the moment of discovery and to inspire 'wonder'. In the 18th century there began a shift, instead of poetic spectatorship objects began to be classified and ordered. Taxonomy gave way to the museums of natural history and the museums of art. I am utilizing the scientific/ museum context to explore the notions of 'wonder' and the 'real'. In my work I am inspired by science and in it our ability to discover wonder. In nature, we are faced with a familiar but superficially understood natural world. It is through such discoveries of wonder and beauty that we deepen our understanding of the inner workings of nature and how they may be applied to our lives.

**Tell us about Mast Year, your work exhibited at the Overthrown: Clay Without Limits exhibition.**

I chose the Oak, America's National Tree, because it has long been a symbol of endurance and strength. The title, Mast Year, refers to the phenomenon in which Oak trees produce a prodigious abundance of fruit. This proliferation has been recreated with emblems of beauty and nature: birds, butterflies and moths. Lacking life and using forms present in death such as bird "skins" and insect mounts, the connection between the tree and the fauna (pins and cable ties) highlight the forced, unnatural attempts to recreate the sublime by using synthetic, man made modes of connection. Historically, swarms and flocks and have been viewed as omens of both luck and death and such sights in nature are rare if not completely absent. The ultimate goal of Mast Year is to invoke something beautiful yet dark that speaks to the fragility of nature as well as the more poetic and undefined feelings of loss and the desire to exert control despite its futility.

**Your works have a very strong connection with nature, and you can almost say that they are part of our natural world. How come you are exhibiting them in museums? Shouldn't they be part of a free, wild space?**

I am interested in creating sculptures that, while realistic in form, are models or copies. Like plaster casts found in both art and science museums they stand in for the original that exists someplace else. They are re-creations that

reveal and highlight our misconceptions, viewpoints and our "understanding" of the world.

**Why did you take this challenge of exploring the nature in a scientific way? Are you trying to replicate the nature?**

The idea of replication and recreation is central to this piece. It is both integral to the concept as well as technically significant. In my work I spend a great deal of time making sure my work is real and factual. I spend a great deal of researching and manipulating my forms so that they are as realistic as possible. I want my work to correlate to a nature "out there" that exists in one form or another. In Mast Year, it exemplifies a nature that we are trying to put back together.

As to why am I exploring nature in a scientific way? I am continually inspired by science, specifically the ideas of discovery and wonder. Albertus Magnus defined wonder as: "Wonder is the movement of the man who does not know on his way to finding out, to get at the bottom of that which he wonders and to determine its cause."

Under this definition, wonder is not a static moment; it is the moment of inspiration through the act of learning and discovering the truth. These ideas are present both as concepts in my work as well as guides for my studio process and research.

**You are inspired by an environment that is eternal (the natural world), but unfortunately, your works (or anybody's works), are ephemeral. Are you disturbed by this, or are you happy with the fact that some day your works will be taken away by nature?**

I view this as opposite really. For me, nature is ephemeral and our understanding of the natural world and science is always changing. Part of the reason I work with ceramics (porcelain specifically) is that it has a history of delicacy and beauty in tandem with strength and longevity. Ceramics hold up remarkably well while many other things decay. For Mast Year I wanted to juxtapose fragility with strength both physically and conceptually.

**What will you be working on in the near future?**

I am very excited to spend the rest of the year back in the studio. I have long been interested in digital tools and how I can use them with ceramics. For Mast Year, I worked with a material called porcelain tape (Keraflex). I experimented with a laser cutter and developed a process for cutting and handling the material to achieve pieces more delicate and exact than I could create by hand (the butterflies and moths). I plan on starting on a series of works which explore these new possibilities and also incorporates 3-dimensional printing.



