

Listener

Listener

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Abstract

Pottery making is a meaningful indexical process that records human time.

For centuries, archeologists, anthropologists, historians, artists, and philosophers have studied this art form to understand better peoples of the past and the present. Today ceramics technologies are still used to advance our most sophisticated endeavors, with applications in fields such as space travel and biomedical devices. However, with the advent of plastics, the functional need for the "potter" has changed.

With material poetics, elements of documentary and oral histories, and personal narrative, *Listener* examines this contemporary state of pottery and creates a parallel between idioms of the potter and the worker. With circulating relationships of stillness, repetition, and containment the exhibition considers how the passage of time has brought changes for both the potter and the mill worker resulting in uncertain identities.

Keywords: pottery, ceramics, sculpture, photography, video, oral history

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Introduction

Listener is a site specific installation developed for exhibition at 9338 Campau Gallery in Hamtramck, Detroit. The exhibition stages a series of encounters engaging our basic senses - sense of sight, sense of touch, sense of hearing – building content through relationships, and becoming a unified experience. The viewers engagement with the space choreographs its own presentation, each individual encounter layering and echoing multiple concentric motifs.

At the center of this work is the premise that pottery making is a meaningful indexical process, a process in which the memory of work is recorded onto the material. In *Richard Wukich discussing pottery with text from his 1969 MFA thesis and images from his farm,* the subject of the film discusses encountering an ancient amphora as a visionary experience, one in which he felt some point of connection between himself and an unknown Greek potter. The physical memory of work is captured in this pot in a thumbprint on the handle. This motif of recorded touch and residual influence is echoed throughout the *Listener* exhibition. My throw marks are left in the vessels in *Calendar*, similar marks are discussed in the video, and ultimately, viewer's handprints are left on the steel surface of *Song from a Round Room*.

I hope that this exhibition functions as a contemplative pause, a still moment to consider ourselves in passing time, and to consider, among many things, who and what conditions have left an imprint on us, and who and what conditions we leave an imprint upon.

Literature Review

Many texts have influenced the production of *Listener*.

Harry Davis's *An Historical Review of Art Commerce and Craftsmanship* was studied as a inquiry into the changing social roles of potters (as a specific idiom under the larger conception of "artist") and how that relates to the identity conditions of mill workers, my father for example.

To understand and represent the ethos of my father's culture of work, I considered a series of books produced by one of his coworkers at the Butler ARMCO mill. David E. Todd's *Butler ARMCO "The Mill" A Pictorial History*, and *"We Were Family" Butler ARMCO "The Mill"* illustrate the communal pride of mill workers and act as a memento of the past. *"We Were Family" Butler ARMCO "The Mill"* is particularly effective in representing the downsizing which occurred in the last several decades and the unwanted transformation the community underwent when Kawasaki Steel Corporation and ARMCO entered into a partnership in 1989, officially changing names to AK Steel in 1993.

Studs Terkel's *Working* and Charles Kuralt's *On the Road* demonstrate the potential of oral histories as a means for narrative and poetic expressions of working experience and daily life. These texts were influential in the making of *Richard Wukich discussing pottery with text from his MFA thesis and images from his farm.*

Richard Wukich's 1969 MFA Thesis: Bird-man in the Pot Shop, Or, Can Clay Pigeons Fly? is cited within the artwork and within this text as a means to understand better Richard Wukich's ideas within the frame of the exhibition, and how they relate to my ideas.

Gaston Bachelard's *Poetics of Space* and James Elkins' *The Object Stares Back* both influenced the manner in which I constructed space within the *Listener* installation. These books are cited within this text to describe the phenomenological responses to the artwork in *Listener*.

Relationships

Interconnectedness is an important feature of my work. I consider everything to be a point of connection on a vast web of relationships. *Listener* unfolds in a series of relationships and invites the viewer to consider how these relationships create influence and build content. The exhibition presents relationships between the individual artworks, but also between its site, its viewers, and the artist. The first work a viewer encounters in the exhibition is a portrait of my father. My relationship with my father, his tenuous career as a steel worker, and my family's non-relationship to "art," as one might encounter in a conventional art world setting, have significantly provoked the decisions that shape my work and the conversation that I hope surround it.

"The Mill"

I grew up on a few acres of wooded property in western Pennsylvania. This gave my dad the opportunity to share his value for work. He'd cut trees down into logs, and my brother and I would spend hours stacking these logs into piles. He wanted to teach us that this arduous, repetitive task was fundamentally a good thing.

My father's value for physical work is a central feature of his character. He's a baby-boomer from western Pennsylvania. He earned an associate's degree in electrical engineering and worked as a mill worker in his hometown at ARMCO, the American Rolling Mill Company, which later became AK Steel. He is a union man. To my father, working at the mill was not just employment. It was central to his identity.

This identity is excellently described by the work of local historian, David E. Todd. His books, *Butler ARMCO*, "The Mill," A Pictorial History and "We Were Family," Butler ARMCO, "The Mill" demonstrate the communal pride of the mill workers employed at Armco. This steel mill was the keystone of this city. Here, they produced the steel that built the region. It was the place you wanted to work, where you could be proud of what you did, support a family, and stay local.

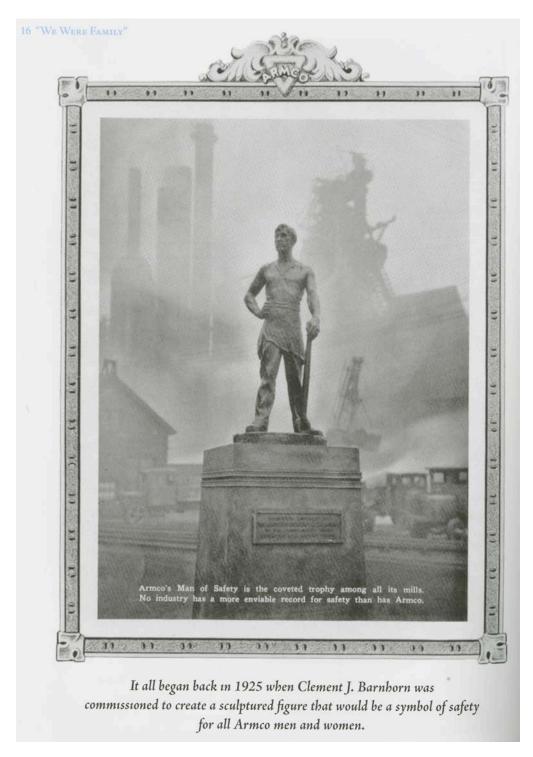


Figure 1: The Iron Man sculpture pictured in David E. Todd "We Were Family" Butler ARMCO "The Mill"

The Iron Man sculpture, picture above, was erected in the late 1920s to celebrate three consecutive years of industry-leading safety records. ARMCO was concerned with physical safety, but working at the mill also represented financial safety and identity safety for many of its employees (Todd, 16).

When my father began employment at the mill on August 29th, 1978, economic decline had already begun to affect the region. Still, it was extremely common for his generation to seek employment at ARMCO.

By 1982, Pullman-Standard, where my grandfather worked, was shut down and AK Steel was dramatically downsizing. In 1999 ARMCO was sold to AK Steel, symbolizing, at least for my father, a fracturing of the system. The Iron Man sculpture was removed and most likely melted down in the AK Steel furnaces that my father was responsible for maintaining (Todd).

By the 2000s, Butler had experienced a greater then 58% job loss (Todd). The system to which my father held a proud allegiance was failing the community. Intense feelings of locality and pride had diminished and were replaced with a sense of uncertainty for the future.

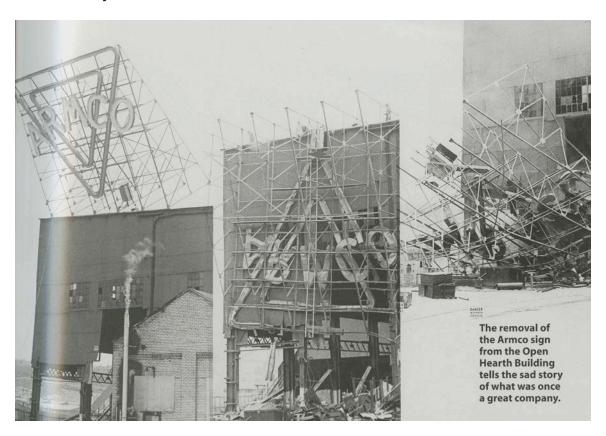


Figure 2: The Removal of the ARMCO Sign pictured in David E. Todd "We Were Family" Butler ARMCO "The Mill"

In the *Listener* exhibition, I examine the similarities between my father's work experience and the work experience of a potter. I see a parallel between the disintegrated social role of potters and the transformation of regional industries such as my father's company. I first began to consider this parallel while studying ceramics in college. Here, I noticed that many of the same tools and equipment my

father worked with at the mill, such as kilns, thermocouples, and pyrometers, were also used to make pottery. Over time I also began to consider how both of these domains have experienced cultural shifts in value.

Before the advent of plastics, ceramic objects played a meaningful and functional role in containing our food, wine, beer, oil, and water. Just as Butler, Pennsylvania was once known as a steel-making town, pottery production has long been a communal activity, in pottery villages throughout history. Perhaps most well known are the Onda and Koishibara Villages in Japan, where communal wood fueled kilns require a community to fire collectively. Communities such as this, much like a union, function through sharing and partitioning of labor.

Timed congruently with the spread of plastics, Harry Davis's 1968-1970 lectures, *An Historical Review of Art, Commerce, and Craftsmanship*, (later published in the Studio Potter, 1977) negotiated these terms and modes of production. In these lectures he measured the perceived barrier between definitions of art and craft, stating, "These arbitrary division are post-renaissance phenomena. One might say post-renaissance social irritants, because before the 15th century these distinctions were not made. Men and their occupations were distinguished on the basis of the physical tasks they performed. Painters made pictures. Image makers carved in stone and wood. Potters made pots. Although they made some exceedingly fine things – beautiful things – significant things – exciting things – whichever adjective happens to be fashionable – none of these people were called artists."

He continues, arguing that the factor that segregated art from craft "was of course money – money, the medium by which commerce has become the dominant and all pervading motivating force of society." Davis goes on to describe the diminished role of sculpture, stating, "The fact that sculpture has largely lost its social role as a means of commemorating heroes and saints is no reason for potters to abandon the social role that they still have." Such a loss of faith in the role and purpose of sculpture echoes a similar loss of faith in the ideals my father once held that his work is fundamentally good and that his company was building our future. While I agree with Davis that potters need not abandon the social form of this work, it is evident that the functionality of pottery has changed, leaving potters, not unlike steel workers, uncertain of their role in society and their futures (Davis).

Lineage and Mentorship

In both of these domains a sense of lineage and mentorship drive ethos. Part of the reason the ARMCO mill was so important in the local community was that many generations of individual families were once employed in the same factory. As I stated earlier, my grandfather worked directly across the road from my father at Standard Steel Car Company until it shut down in 1982. My father and his contemporaries represent a transitional generation. While he was expected and encouraged to seek employment in this setting, it became important for him to

encourage my brother and me to go to college and ideally to transcend the state of employment that meant so much to him.

In pottery, lineage is equally important. At conferences and exhibitions I am often asked whom I study under, and my forms are seen in relationship to those of the past. I celebrate this. To establish my point of view in the *Listener* exhibition, I introduce viewers to both my father and my first pottery mentor through photography and video. I hope that the inclusion of both of these two figures, my father, and Richard Wukich, lead the viewers to consider the following questions. How do we respond to the social and economic consequences left by the withdrawing industrial economy, what is the meaning of the potter in contemporary society, and what is the function of labor in today's culture?

I want to emphasize that I am not seeking to answer these questions. My aim is to make these questions tangible.

9338 Campau

Through the recorded throw marks on porcelain vessels, my old teacher discussing his own work, and the patina of visitors' handprints on the sheet metal of *Song from a Round Room*, the concepts of a memory of work and a memory of touch permeates the *Listener* exhibition. These repeated concepts are meant to engage the immediate audience, the visitors to *9338 Campau* in Hamtramck, Michigan.

Hamtramck is an enclave city within Detroit. Home to the first UAW organized plant, Dodge Main, Hamtramck has attracted immigrants from all over the world and has had a rich working class history.

On an even greater scale than Butler, Pennsylvania, Hamtramck has witnessed the effects of deindustrialization. Approaching the 9338 Campau gallery from outside of Hamtramck, you are likely to drive past the looming modernist headquarters of American Axel & Manufacturing. Directly across Holbrook Ave is the site of AAM's Detroit Axle Plant, which was in operation as recently as 2012. Passing by this site today, you see a vacant space where this plant once functioned.



Figure 3: American Axle & Manufacturing headquarters www.aam.com

The same uncertainty and the same change in values that my father faced with the downsizing of his company may be felt in Hamtramck. The *Listener* exhibition is juxtaposed with the vacant Detroit Axle Plant, just down the road. I intend the exhibition at 9338 Campau to serve as a contemplative space where the memory of work, one that is both personally related to my father's experience and meaningful for the surrounding community, is told through a story of pottery, creating a dialogue in the space.

Creative Work

Listener is a unified site specific installation constructed in three rooms with artworks titled Imperfect Spheres (a portrait of my father), Calendar, Song from a Round Room, and Richard Wukich Discussing Pottery with text from his 1969 MFA thesis and images from his farm. The works present themselves in correspondence to our basic senses.

- 1 An image that suggests sight
- 2 Objects that suggest sight and touch
- 3 A tone heard and seen that attracts touch
- 4 A video that you see and hear and that draws upon all the previous encounters with sight, hearing, and touch

Imperfect Spheres (a portrait of my father)

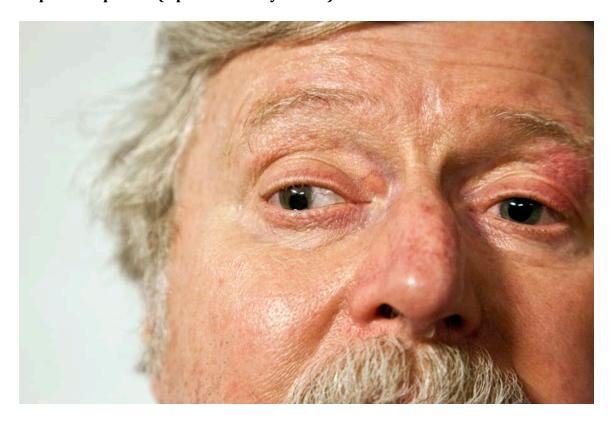


Figure 4: Imperfect Spheres (a portrait of my father)

Imperfect Spheres (a portrait of my father) is a backlit photograph mounted in the wall at my father's height. It was the first artwork I made within this body of work and the first artwork that viewers encounter. The photograph and its installation are meant to pierce the space in front of it, creating the sense that the image in the photograph is staring back.

The photograph is a picture of time. The image registers the atrophying of my father's blind eye. Seen on the left side of this image, the iris has drifted and is no longer centered within the cornea. This physical condition has had serious impacts on my father's life. For example, it was the reason he was not drafted during the Vietnam War. It was also the reason that he could have never found a job in the same line of work if he were laid off. (New safety regulations prohibited hiring individuals with his sight condition for work in the steel industry.)

The photograph is intentionally oblique and intentionally cropped, limiting the viewer's information. To many, I'm sure it appears as a picture of *someone* looking at them. It suggests the physical impossibility of feeling what it is like to be another person.

The photograph is a studio portrait, shot on a white backdrop, suggesting that the subject is a man without context, a person in undefined space. This correlates with my father's employment situation, where he was uncoupled from the surrounding work place that defined him. Now retired, he lives with the pride he once held for ARMCO, but at the same time is discouraged by our region's economic disintegration and thoroughly distrusts AK Steel.





Figure 5: Two Self Portraits, Rembrandt

Rembrandt's self-portraits, known for their careful depiction and striking presence, act as a record of a man as he ages (Kren and Marx). *Imperfect Spheres (a portrait of my father)* is both an index and an allegory of time. My taking this portrait of my father is a speculation, an attempted glance into my future.

The photograph's installation within the gallery space gives viewers a mutual sense of presence and absence. Edward Hopper's American Realist masterpiece, *Nighthawks*, is full of symbols of isolation and loneliness. The work uses light and space to pronounce the distance between the figures in the painting and the vantage point of the viewer (Koob). *Imperfect Spheres (a portrait of my father)* uses the actual storefront window of the gallery to refer to this painting, and to consider this sense of isolation. Figure 7 shows this work as seen through the storefront window of the 9338 Campau gallery at night. A pawnshop and an onlooker's shadow are reflected in the window.



Figure 6: Nighthawks, Hopper



Figure 7: Imperfect Spheres (a portrait of my father)
Installation View from Outside of the Gallery

Art historian James Elkins argues, "vision is forever incomplete and uncontrollable because it is used to shape our sense of what we are" (Elkins, 237). The basic contradiction that sight is defined by what we cannot see is suggested by my father's independent blind and seeing eyes. I hope that those who stare at this portrait consider that vacancy of the unknown and the unknowable.

Calendar



Figure 8: *Calendar*Detail View

Calendar, the second work in *Listener*, is a series of forty-two wheel-thrown porcelain vessels, fired with a raw clay surface. Each vessel was made by forming two bowls then joining to make a single form. The 17th century potters of the Choson Dynasty in Korea developed this method with the creation of elegant white porcelain "moon jars." Choson dynasty moon jars were made to store water and rice, and later influenced the Japanese *mingei* movement. The austere finish of the moon jars demonstrates Confucian values of purity, simplicity, and harmony (Portal).



Figure 9: Korean Moon Jar

The particular vessel shown above, which I saw at the British museum (and partial catalyst for the work *Calendar*) has had its own narrative history. The English potter, Bernard Leach, purchased this particular vessel in 1935, in Seoul. The work and writings of Leach, like those of Harry Davis, were seminal in the development of the English studio pottery movement. Esteemed for expanding the canon of western ceramics, Leach studied pottery in Korea and Japan, and is credited for bringing the influence of Japanese aesthetics to England. Leach gave this vessel to fellow potter Lucie Rie to store during World War II. Rie kept it until her death in 1995 (Portal).



Figure 10: Lucie Rie with the Korean Moon Jar Photograph by Lord Snowdon



Figure 11: Detail Views of Imperfect Spheres (a portrait of my father) and Calendar

Phenomenology, or the philosophical study of the structures of experience and consciousness in relationship to materials and objects, is fully applicable to the appreciation and understanding of ceramics. In the foundational phenomenological text, *The Poetics Of Space*, Gaston Bachelard deconstructs the house in phenomenological terms. His study shifts in the final chapter, moving from the subject of the house to the more organic matter of life. He concludes this work with an examination of roundness with a suggestion that all of life is round (Bachelard, 238). The human character of the Korean moon jars is derived from their roundness, which is a quality much different from the spherical. Their intentionally asymmetric form relates to the human body, demonstrating human imperfection. Similar asymmetry is photographed in *Imperfect Spheres* (a portrait of my father). In fact, the first half of this title, *Imperfect Spheres*, could also be used to describe the vessels in *Calendar*.

The pots in *Calendar* are containers, like the bodies that contain our spirit. Like our bodies these pots have a foot, a belly, and a neck. The anthropomorphic qualities of the vessels within *Calendar* remind viewers of human traits and postures. They have a presence in their stillness and silence that I believe comes from the unique throwing process used to make them.

In the video work *Richard Wukich discussing pottery with text from his 1969 MFA thesis and images from his farm*, Professor Wukich explains that bowls should support the universe. This was a lesson I first heard in his courses years ago, and my loose interpretation of this statement was partially responsible for the generation of this work.

I have always thought that the statement, "a bowl should support the universe," meant that somehow the line of the curve in a bowl could carry all content and all

meaning. Our deep instinctual aptitude for recognition extends, like the curvature of a bowl, outward beyond our immediate view. How many times have we been in a crowded public space, and seen somebody we know a hundred yards away? Somehow our minds and our eyes can calculate the posture in their walk and pull them into focus. *Calendar* is meant to instigate this experience.

Another intention for the vessels in *Calendar* is to serve as physical indexes of a lived moment, a material memory of the moments in which they were made. Pottery making is a meaningful indexical process that records human time, literally embedded within the responsive nature of the material. Clay as a material is unlike any other artistic material because it does not require mediated touch for production. Pottery is formed with bare hands.



Figure 13: Calendar



Figure 14:Video Still of Richard Wukich discussing pottery with text from his 1969 MFA thesis and images from his farm

The title for this work, *Calendar*, comes from a specific portion of dialogue where Richard Wukich describes the potential for pots to measure time – to record the event of pot making -- in the video *Richard Wukich discussing pottery with text from his 1969 MFA thesis and images from his farm.* While holding one of his pieces he states, "I mean it's absolutely a calendar. It's absolutely a mark in your life that, hey, you know when I was making this, on this particular day, you know, this is where my fingers were, right here, I had one hand inside and I had one hand outside... it's a recording, it's a calendar."

Song from a Round Room

"...the most important piece-thing about this piece is the dark space that you can't see, the dark air that is in it that you can't see. "

-Toshiko Takeazu



Figure 15:Song from a Round Room

The third work is a steel sculpture titled *Song from a Round Room*. The structure is approximately 10'x8'x8'. The sculpture uses surface transducers and an amplifier to resonate sound through the sheet metal surface. The hum emitted from the structure originates from audio recordings of the interior spaces of various vessels in *Calendar. Song from a Round Room* sonically maps the dark interior space of the vessel, a volume described above by Toshiko Takaezu.



Figure 16: closed form Toshiko Takaezu

The resonating hum coming through the steel fills the space of the gallery in a continuous and repetitive loop. Within this repetition subtle dynamics of the changing frequencies are extremely important. When a steady low frequency that once filled the space fades out, a listener may become aware of the vacancy and quiet of the space. At other points, when the rhythms and tones take on a mechanical repetition, the listener may feel like they are *within* something, perhaps a very large vessel, like being in the hull of a ship.

There are no pictorial marks on the surface of this metal apart from small scratches of its own material history. My hope here is that this object shifts from being something looked at to being something physically encountered and looked *into*, much like Toshiko Takeauzu's work above.

The angle iron structure is reminiscent of the ARMCO sign pictured in Figure 2. The work is a counterpoint to the vessels, which are shown in the same room, and is a continuation of the homage to my father's steel working past. The sheet metal surface of this sculpture is one of the products that AK Steel manufactures.

Repetition is a significant part of a potter's work, and the repeated tones of this piece create a correspondence with the repeated forms in *Calendar*. Repetition calls attention to the vastness and potential within any subject. Terry Riley's *In C* is a good example. Minimalist, systematic and spontaneous, *In C* is composed for an indefinite number of musicians. The score consists of 53 musical phases that may be played extemporaneously, while one musician is designated to play the note C repetitively. The result is somewhat jarring, and suddenly something you sink into. These patterns within the composition happen through changes in the amount of sound rather than changes in pitch, which gives listeners a heightened awareness of shifts from one phase to the next.

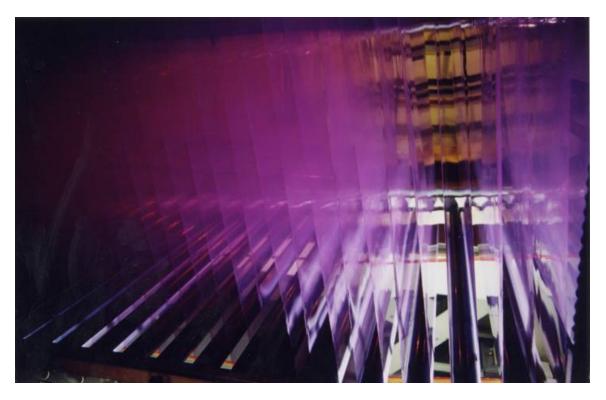


Figure 17: Still From Kodak Tacita Dean

British artist Tacita Dean also emphasizes repetition and silence in her 2006 film *Kodak*. In this 44-minute work, Dean captures the production process of Kodak film just as its production is being discontinued. Beginning in black and white and shifting into vibrant abstracted color, the work creates a mesmerizing look at the machinery and factory through which the film stock weaves. The end of the film shows the abandonment of the factory. Viewers witness empty spaces, desk chairs strewn about, and the film fades out to black (Manchester).



Figure 17: Listener Installation View

Within *Listener*, the resonating hum literally vibrates an otherwise still object. This physical movement creates a timbre while playing the lowest frequencies attracting viewers' haptic attention. It is not uncommon for a viewer to touch the work, leaving handprints as a patina on the surface, similar to the throw marks a potter leaves on a vessel.

Richard Wukich Discussing Pottery with text from his 1969 MFA thesis and images from his farm

Richard Wukich Discussing Pottery with text from his 1969 MFA thesis and images from his farm is a 22:07 single channel video loop shown on a monitor in an isolated portion of the gallery. The video documents an interview with my undergraduate ceramics instructor, Richard Wukich.

Part documentary, part oral history, and part visual narrative, the video was filmed in the fall of 2014, the video includes the following text from Wukich's 1969 MFA Thesis: *Bird-man in the Pot Shop, Or, Can Clay Pigeons Fly?*

In my work I want to touch someone (or everyone for that matter). This does not necessarily mean physical contact but rather a mental joining of the minds. Maybe to some this would sound preposterous. Nevertheless, from my observations of other and reflections on my own past actions this would be the highest form of being; to be able to observe through the senses of others. This

would not be empathy but complete realization of another being's desires, obsessions, fears, loves, etc..

Now the questions probably arises how can one man, by making a little clay cookie jar, accomplish something that all the great mystics, holy men, magicians, gurus, and medicine men since the beginning of time have tried to accomplish with nothing to show for their efforts except ridicule.

My answer is simple: I do not think I can do it.

But sometimes, for some unknown reason, I will be sitting in a room with someone and know what he is thinking. This phenomenon has no scientific explanation nor do I hope to give one. I know it happens; therefore, it happens (Wukich, 5).

Mentorship and education play an important role in the ceramics tradition where knowledge is not owned, but rather passed on and carried through history from teacher to student. Learning, in this sense, seeks to observe through the senses of others. I practiced this when studying the forms of the Korean moon jars. In making my own, I try to replicate the ancient movements with knowledge passed through generations of hands, creating a similar space and potentially (or poetically) hoping to observe through the sense of the original maker.

A palpable notion of passing time is at play here; I am discussing my mentor's thesis within my own. The basic question posed in the text, "how can one man, by making a little clay cookie jar, accomplish something that all the great mystics, holy men, magicians, gurus, and medicine men since the beginning of time have tried to accomplish with nothing to show for their efforts except ridicule," is posed by a similar curiosity that drives this exhibition. At its core, it asks, "What can it mean to make a pot?"

Following this sequence the film moves into a conversation where Wukich discusses pots and interiority, history, bowls and the universe, and specific instances of encountering ancient vessels and sensing connections between himself and an unknown maker.

You know at that Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto, I mean they have some amphoras that... you look at the handles.... And those guys were smacking those things out. Amphoras were like the 55-gallon drum of the Mediterranean, you know, the whole trade thing. I mean, they weren't messing around like, "Hmmm do I need to get these throw marks? Do I need to...?" And you look at those.... you look at those handles that are on those amphoras and they are just gorgeous and they're like, "Bip. Bam. Thank you ma'am. Fill this up with olive oil and send it to Phoenicia." So, when you look at that you think, "Wow, man. There was an actual person making these things. Knocking these things out. They worked from dawn to dusk making

these things one after another, one after another. Sure, at some point in time, in 300 BC, this Greek potter, this Minoan potter was working in this pot shop and knocked this thing out. And, yes. It's a recording.

The scenario described here reflects the repetitive work involved in making *Calendar,* the type of monotony described in my father's work, and the sensation of Tacita Dean's *Kodak*.

Richard Wukich Discussing Pottery with text from his 1969 MFA thesis and images from his farm gives viewers patient looks at the interior spaces of Wukich's farm. Here, dust settles on everything and we see the stillness of his pottery collecting this record of passing time. With a long beard and dusty overalls, he appears as one with the setting of the film. His mind is not trapped in the present. As he speaks we wander with him through moments of his own personal history and meditations on the deeper histories of the ceramics tradition.

Despite all of the relationships Wukich describes, he remains a solitary individual. At one point we see him clean a piece of cobweb off of one his thesis works, a chalice with a lid and a bird sculpted on top, while describing the following memory from graduate school:

Now, my friend Gaylord would talk about this thing and talk about this philosopher Bertrand Russell. And that it's impossible for a person to be in, to look out the same eyes, to see the same thing. It's impossible for one individual to see the same thing as another individual. And it's like, "Well, what do you mean?" Well, you know, you could sit there. You could have a brace around your head and be staring straight ahead... and some other person comes and gets in the same contraption, except time has passed, and you wouldn't see the same thing. You'd see something very very similar. You'd see something so similar that you could hardly tell that it wasn't the same thing, but... it isn't. It's physically impossible. Absolutely physically impossible.

This statement alludes to his desire to observe through the senses of others. It reinforces the distancing effect of the portrait of my father, describing the impossibility of seeing the way anyone else *sees*. In this context, a film made between a student and teacher, I am suggesting that the power of art can transcend this physical impossibility. It can provide an opportunity and a place to share one's perspective, and to let others see the way you see.

Discussion

"Behind dark curtains, snow seems to be whiter.
Indeed, everything comes alive when contradictions accumulate"
Gaston Bachelard, The Poetics of Space

The *Listener* exhibition presents a series of contradictions to orchestrate the manner in which information is delivered to the viewer and to delineate the questions posed within the work. In this section I will discuss how two pairs of opposing conditions (stillness and movement, passing time and single moment) create residual influences within the exhibition. It is important to state that I am not trying to engineer a singular response to the artwork, but rather instigate an open-ended reply to the work from each individual viewer's point of view.

Stillness and Passing Time

In sculpture, momentum creates stasis. Whether carving, constructing, or forming, an effort is exerted upon material until it *becomes* a sculpture. The question for the sculptor is when does the work stop? When does the material become sculpture, and how does that sculpture's *being* communicate something about our own *being*?

In ceramic processes, the firing of a work signifies its becoming. This process literally fuses the material in place. The microscopic geology of the material becomes vitrified; individual particles form a whole, and this is the shape of the object for at least a few centuries (unless the object is broken down by nongeological forces).

Time is a corrosive force, and ceramics seeks to resist this.

Stillness and passing time are both crucial elements in the *Listener* exhibition. *Imperfect Spheres (a portrait of my father)* documents one instance of looking and freezes this moment. *Calendar* is a static representation of movement. It's easy to look at all of the vessels as variations of themselves and to imagine one form in an animated movement inflating and constricting. The throw marks wrapped around the pieces winding upward show the use of rotational inertia. One young child responded to this artwork but running in circles around the rectangular grid of pottery and I wondered if this was a response to the stillness of the vessels, capturing the memory of momentum.

In *Richard Wukich Discussing Pottery with text from his 1969 MFA thesis and images from his farm,* patient visuals may at first appear like a still photograph until the viewer sees a leaf moving in the wind, or a bird passing through the scene. Dust reminds us, through the entire film, of the entropy of time. Dust accumulates on Wukich's pottery, and we see the past in the present, and the fleeting nature of that presence.

Passing time is the invisible force beneath all of these works. The history of my father's work experience, the motivation for much of this work, occurred because of a natural progression of economics. The vessels were made through time, repeated human effort, and they develop from ancient tradition. *Song from a Round Room* is a temporary encounter that suggests residual influence, amplifying the resonate chambers of the vessels. Richard Wukich is aging and while he discusses his past, and other images of the deeper past, we see dust settling over his static work in the present.



Figure 18: You Antony Gormley

Listener explores the potential for art to bear witness within a context of impermanence. My interest in the indexical possibilities of artwork was reinforced during an internship with sculptor Antony Gormley. Gormley's works are based on the idea that sculpture can be a record, a registration of the space of a body. Each of his works are made by either taking a plaster mold of his body or a digital scan, capturing this space in a meditative moment.

In *Listener*, I consider the forming of a pot as a similar record of a moment, but rather than focusing on my body I am using the making of a pot as a metaphor for a human action. In the same way that Gormley's plaster molds record the physical edge of his body, clay records the potential of my hands and of my spirit to shape the physical space I exist in.

Conclusion

"From his first cry as a baby until his last gasp for breath, man wants to get out of himself. Art gives him this opportunity."

Richard Wukich

1969 MFA Thesis: Bird-man in the Pot Shop, Or, Can Clay Pigeons Fly?

The title *Listener* refers to my actions through much of the production of this installation. The interview with my teacher, audio recording from the insides of the pots I created, the communication with the material needed to throw a pot, were all acts of listening. But the title is left open for other interpretations. The potential for a photograph to serve as a document, the ability of clay to register the marks of my hands, the possibility of a video to capture ideas imbedded in ceramics represent different capacities for expressing each artwork's potential to be a listening device.

In my work I try to be sensitive and aware of all of the external forces that are shaping and affecting us. The goal is to be in harmony with those forces and to fully sense them in a moment of presence and contemplation. Working on the potter's wheel encourages the type of concentration I want my work to instigate in my audience. The correspondence between my hands, the clay, and water is what creates the vessel. This is a moment of fully embodied being, and the result is a record of the correspondence between my body and that moment.

The circular motion of a potter's wheel is a good representation of the momentum of passing time. Ultimately, it's the stillness of these pots that reminds us of movement. The permanence of pottery and the fact that the forms will remain pots so much longer than the human lifespan help us consider a greater continuum of time. The promise in creating artwork is to make something that extends beyond myself, and is more far reaching than what I can achieve solely with language. The question beneath all of this work is "what does it mean to make a clay pot?" A pot is more than a vessel. It is a place where one can consider the possibilities of action in a given time, the memory and influence of those actions, and the potential to shape the space in which we live.

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