

Stuart Gair

2018 MJD FELLOW



How potters find their way to clay is never the same yet always intriguing. Some are mesmerized by a potter's wheel while others are captivated by a studio art class or random clay encounter. For Stuart Gair, his origin story came as a college junior. A history major seeking employment, he found work as an historic reenactor and production potter in Cuyahoga Valley National Park. A summer of stepping back into the 19th century led him to find his way as a 21st century maker.

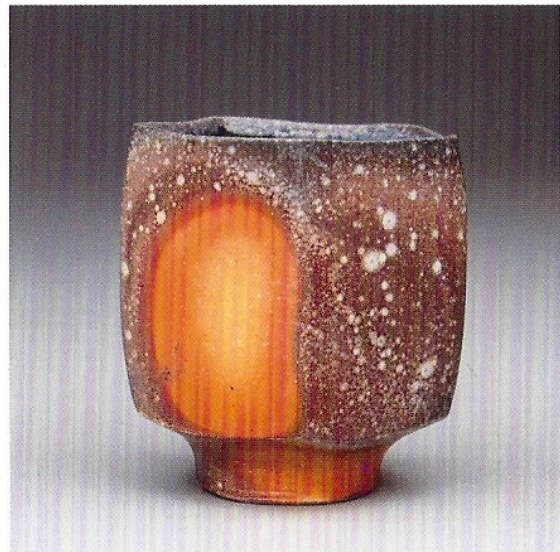
Gazing upon his studio shelves, one senses a timeless quality to his work, as well as a uniquely personal celebration of form and texture and a way of firing (soda-firing) that pairs perfectly with his love of the outdoors. Thrown and altered five-sided paddled teacups, vases of varying diameters and teapots whose bellies beckon one to the table sit side-by-side. Surfaces with earthen-hued, pitted and gritty textures recall forms from nature, to which he is so strongly connected. Many of his pieces are worked on in a series, like families with common traits but also imbued with a strong individual presence.

His work is influenced by the external landscapes he knows and loves. In Nebraska, tilled farm fields etched in his memory work their lines into his cup designs. At the Bray, he points to a lone tree just outside his studio window, its branches silhouetted against the sky, "sitting by itself," creating shadows against the earth and subtly influencing his design aesthetics. Considerations like "silhouette, buoyancy and craftsmanship" make their way into his thoughts as he ponders another type of landscape: the interior landscape created when objects inhabit space. A functional potter with a B.A. and a B.S from Ohio University and an MFA

from University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Gair cares how a piece functions, but that doesn't only mean how a spout pours or how a cup fits in your hand. Functionality also refers to an aesthetic role. "How it sits in your home" matters since "pieces are not made to sit in the dark or for the cupboard."

Seemingly contradictory dualities seem to coexist peacefully in his pieces: strength and subtlety; bold silhouettes with graceful curves; quiet, meditative surfaces that erupt with immediacy . . . all culminating in explosions of color and flashpoints that leave the mark of flame. He articulates a viewer's relationship with a piece which takes on the language of love at first sight. First, you see it from afar, next it's the silhouette that attracts your attention, and thirdly, it draws you in. His animated description of connectivity through art speaks to his awareness of what goes on in space between viewer and object.

As a former Harvard educator, he praises the inquiry from students and the "what if" questions that made him reconsider how his



Yunomi, 2019, soda fired stoneware, 3" X 3" X 3.5"

work relates. Lately, he is on a quest for authenticity. While he admires the cultural legacy of ceramics—from classic Asian ceramic forms to modern Scandinavian designs—he is also seeking to separate admiration for the history of pottery from his own design sensibilities. This aesthetic evolution takes him in the direction of a “less is more” approach as he imbues work with a quiet presence. To achieve this, Gair uses relatively few tools. Perhaps then, it is ironic that he is also attentive to removing throwing lines from his pieces, and in so doing, his work seems born, not made. While Gair has found a way to remove some evidence of his hand from his work, fortunately he retains the essence of his heart in all he creates.



Plate, 2019, soda fired stoneware, 8" X 8" X 1.5"



Jar, 2019, soda fired stoneware, 15" X 15" X 15"