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ANNIVERSARY

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northern clay center

NORTHERN CLAY CENTER
PRESENTS

FLORILEGIUM

MAY 6 — JUNE 26

FLORILEGIUM

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NORTHERN CLAY CENTER
MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA

Joan Bruneau • Guy Michael Davis and Katie Parker • Rain Harris
Rebecca Hutchinson • Jae Won Lee • Kate Maury • Julie Moon

Curator and Essayist: Ursula Hagens
Editor: Elizabeth Coleman

Foreword

Sarah Millfelt, Director

In the year *Florilegium* was produced, Northern Clay Center's exhibition program explored the spectrum of ceramic techniques, makers, and influences. From experimental creations by novice and emerging artists, to functional pottery that explored the nature of ceramic education, to wildly imaginative sculpture and gorgeous pottery made by mid-career artists, to ceramic objects and art that employed new technologies at the fingertips of makers, *Florilegium* added to the array of possibilities in clay with its floral-centric subject explored both decoratively and conceptually.

Florilegium was curated by Ursula Hargens, a celebrated ceramic artist, member of NCC's exhibitions committee, a long-time educator, and curator of *A Gilded Age* (NCC's spring 2014 exhibition). The exhibition shared new work from a few artists who have shown in some capacity at the Center in years past, as well as those new to NCC and included: Joan Bruneau, Guy Michael Davis and Katie Parker, Rain Harris, Rebecca Hutchinson, Jae Won Lee, Kate Maury, and Julie Moon.

In conjunction with this exhibition, Joan Bruneau visited NCC for a daylong demonstration and conversation with NCC's clay community. Additionally, Rebecca Hutchinson was in residence from April 28–May 1, working on a new, site-specific installation, titled *Tranquil Burst*. A little background on this wonderful piece: in March 2016, Rebecca was a resident artist at Crane Papermaking Co. within the Crane Museum of Papermaking in Dalton, Massachusetts. She worked with the assistance of Peter Hopkins in recycling one million dollars worth of off-line currency and 10 pounds of recycled blue jeans that were pulped in two different Crane site beaters. With two assistants, she pulled over 4,000 sheets that were then formed into 6,000 bloomettes ranging in color from currency green to dungaree blue, and any combination of the two, to be used in the exhibition. With help from Walter Shaw, Denise Rouleau, Brenda Ryan, and Erin Lowry, this piece took shape at NCC in just a few short days.

Finally, *Florilegium* made possible a presentation by Kathy Allen, director of the Andersen Horticultural Library, located at the Minnesota Landscape Arboretum, during which time she share two volumes of *The Highgrove Florilegium*,

a tome from 2008 – 2009, depicting plants from Prince Charles' garden at Highgrove in Gloucestershire and featuring prints from the best botanical painters in the world.

Florilegium also served as a perfect backdrop for Northern Clay Center's 25th Anniversary celebration, which was held Saturday, June 25, and included an event of botanical dress, floral-infused refreshments, live music, a specially-crafted anniversary ale, and a silent auction featuring vases, tulipieres and other floral-centric ceramic vessels made by generations of ceramic artists who have supported NCC and grown with us along the way. These pots will find homes across the state and the country immediately following the event, but as a way to forever mark their presence, and importance, we've included images of each of these objects on the back pages of this catalogue. A special thank you to each of these artists.

Florilegium and related programming was made possible by generous support and resources from many institutions and individuals. Many thanks to our loyal and long-time exhibition funders: Continental Clay Company, George Reid, and the Windgate Charitable Foundation.

Additionally, this activity is made possible by the voters of Minnesota through a Minnesota State Arts Board Operating Support grant, thanks to a legislative appropriation from the arts and cultural heritage fund, a grant from the Wells Fargo Foundation Minnesota, and a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts.

Finally, thank you to Northern Clay Center's exhibitions committee — Heather Nameth Bren, Kelly Connole, Mark Pharis, Robert Silberman, and, of course, Ursula Hargens, for playing such a pivotal role in the vision and execution of NCC's exhibition programming. Thank you as well to Michael Arnold, NCC's exhibitions manager of 4 years, and his partner in crime on this exhibition installation, Brady McLearn, for the long hours, gorgeous installation, and enthusiasm.



Installation view.

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FLORILEGIUM



Florilegium

Ursula Hargens

Henrietta Dumont begins her 1851 Victorian classic, *The Floral Offering*, with this series of questions:

Why has the beneficent Creator scattered over the face of the earth such a profusion of beautiful flowers—flowers by the thousand and million, in every land—from the tiny snowdrop that gladdens the chill spring of the north, to the gorgeous magnolia that flaunts in the sultry regions of the tropics? Why is it that every landscape has its appropriate flowers, every nation its national flowers, every rural home its home flowers? Why do flowers enter and shed their perfume over every scene of life from cradle to the grave? Why are flowers made to utter all voices of joy and sorrow in all varying scenes, from the chaplet that adorns the bride to the votive wreath that blooms over the tomb?

It is for no other reason than that flowers have in themselves a real and natural significance. They have a positive relation to man, his sentiments, passions, and feelings. They correspond to actual emotions. They have their mission—a mission of love and mercy. They have their language, and from the remotest ages this language has found its interpreters.¹

For millennia, flowers and pots have accompanied humans through daily life. Throughout ceramic history, the two have often been thoughtfully joined—a simple lily brushed in slip on a Minoan jar, a peony symbolizing wealth and honor blossoming on a Ming Dynasty vase, a cobalt blue daisy on a German salt-glazed jug. *Florilegium*, from the Latin *flos* (flower) and *legere* (to gather)—literally a gathering of flowers—brings together the work of seven contemporary artists who continue this tradition

of interpreting flowers through ceramics.

The ceramic objects in this exhibition examine the ways in which flowers are used as symbols, culture, and meaning. We give flowers to mark important moments in life and, at the same time, to symbolize their transience. Flowers are vibrant, structural, and insistent in their growth, and are also rare, fragile, and ephemeral. Flower motifs can represent the worst of vapid, hackneyed decoration, yet, they can also enliven an object. Flowers are seen as novel, exotic, something to be protected, and they also illustrate our human urge to dominate and exploit the natural world.

These artists explore flowers as motif, as structure, as still life, and as landscape. They consider how vessels can work in concert with actual flowers; they create floral representations that range from abstract motifs to painterly compositions, to naturalistic renderings; and they consider culturally-bound floral depictions that capture the values of time and place. Featured artists play with these dualities in their work. They reflect the tensions, complexity, and beauty of our contemporary age and compel us to reconsider the flower as both a poignant and powerful image.

Rebecca Hutchinson's large-scale, site-specific installations are built organically; petals clustered along lengths of willow branches are pegged together to form loose, rectangular scaffolds. She writes, "Installation construction is influenced conceptually by specific growth patterns, but does not replicate nature. Like an animal that uses the vernacular from place, I, too, upcycle humble materials and remake them into what I hope to be exquisite sculptural forms."² Her pieces weave together fired ceramics, handmade paper from recycled currency and blue jean fiber, non-fired paper-clay, and natural elements. The layered, repetitive structures dwarf the viewer. Rather than peering down to

Notes:

3 Kate Maury, "Artist Statement," last modified 3 February 2015, <http://artaxis.org/kate-maury/>.

4 Jae Won Lee, email message to author, 9 April 2016.

carefully observe minute details of a flower, the scaffold of oversized blossoms allows one to walk through and be physically consumed by an imaginary ecosystem. Her pieces evoke feelings of fantasy and wonder, capturing a beauty that is both robust and fleeting.

Kate Maury loosely uses the anatomy of flowers as a guide for her assertively decorative vessels. Using sprigs created from repurposed craft hobby molds, Maury creates vases, candelabras, truffle holders, and flower bricks layered with embellishment. In her pieces, the form and floral images merge; one cannot exist without the other. Her vibrant, dynamic assemblages capture the luminosity and complexity of live flowers—pools of glaze mimic the intense, vivid hues of petals and sprigged textures emulate the detail of actual specimens. Maury describes the feeling she is looking for as one of "visual pleasures, abundance of texture, tactility and lushness of excess."³ She is repurposing the well-worn language of the ceramic hobbyist to create pieces that are vibrant and alive with color and that capture the radiance of a flower in bloom.

Julie Moon's "floral still lifes" are simultaneously sculptures and pots, paintings and decoration, representations and abstractions. Her graphic, reductive shapes acknowledge the pervasive portrayal of flowers in both painting and the decorative arts. Her rounded, closed forms speak of pottery volumes while the surface compositions reference 19th-century impressionist paintings. In *Red Amorphous*, flower heads push out from the interior of the form, drawing attention to the abstracted patterns framed within the flower's center. In *Yellow Vase*, petals and leaves break from the surface and transition from two- to three-dimensional space. Her palette shifts from soft pastels to saturated primary hues and seems to move from Manet's light-filled paintings to

Matisse's bold cutouts. Moon outlines leaf and flower motifs with strong strokes of blue, gray, and gold. She stylizes and flattens the images, bringing them from the language of painting into the language of the decorative arts.

Among the colorful and ornate pieces in the exhibition, sits Jae Won Lee's quiet and questioning work. Her piece, *Blooming, Withering, and Other Thoughts III*, is composed of small, sensitively pinched porcelain flowers threaded together into long, looping strands. Each unit is created from a common, ten-lobed floral element. They are uniform, as if punched out with a cookie cutter, but come to life as Lee delicately shapes each piece of clay. The sheen of the vitrified porcelain, the repetition of a single motif, and the evidence of Lee's hand make her pieces feel precious and personal. Lee tints the porcelain clay, producing color transitions that range from stark whites and milky blues to deep blue-grays. The units are made from porcelain gathered from all over the world, and the clay, Lee explains, "varies subtly in its nuance although it is not easily palpable to viewers."⁴ Lee uses repetition and the accumulation of porcelain leaves and flowers to speak symbolically of the individual experience, alluding to intimate moments, the fleeting traces of one's labor, and the inevitable passage of time.

Leafy *fleur-de-lis* and circular motifs composed of radiating blossoms float across Joan Bruneau's functional pitchers, platters, and flower bricks. A crocus that appears as a simple line drawing around a rim is reinterpreted in the center as an abstracted "sprouting seed" motif. Bruneau thoughtfully combines glazes, pairing matte and translucent surfaces to create both textural contrasts and associations with the plants themselves. While her color palette often shifts to reflect the season, her illustrations are defined by a graceful sgraffito line that moves from rich black to feathery copper-green. Her

pots mediate between domestic and natural space; vases and flower bricks create a temporary home for flowers, allowing one to bring nature inside. As a person arranges flowers in one of Bruneau's pieces, they are composing—layering live flowers on top of illustrated buds and blooms. In doing so, the user is actively engaging with both real flowers and flowers as decorative motif. This dual engagement acknowledges the role of flowers as domestic ritual and shows our enduring attraction to their image.

Rain Harris' highly composed, formal arrangements combine black porcelain, silk flowers, and resin on small, plywood stands. Synthetic silk flowers, which in a contemporary context are often viewed as inferior, lower-class substitutes, are transformed through a glittering coating of resin. In many ways, the resin covered flowers hold the place that the glazed surface traditionally does, introducing shiny, translucent color into the composition. Harris contrasts the resin surface with naturalistically modeled, unglazed porcelain flowers. In doing so, she creates a circle of mimicry—the clay feigns live flowers and the resin imitates glaze. In her artist statement, Harris refers to the compositions as “stylized landscapes or still lifes.”⁵ She mentions *Wunderkammern* or Cabinets of Curiosities, and the compositional and thematic links to these types of collections are clear. These cabinets often juxtaposed man-made objects with natural specimens, and through their contrast, evoked insight into natural history, scientific discovery, and the reflection of human experience through cultural objects. Harris' tightly orchestrated vignettes illustrate that this conversation between nature and its cultural interpretations is still active and relevant today.

The pieces created by Future Retrieval, a collaboration by ceramic artists Katie Parker and Guy Michael Davis, are a hybrid of ceramic processes and influences. Five *Bonsai*, and

three pieces from the *Life On* series, appear as curated clusters of botanical specimens. A trio of abstracted bonsai sit firmly in futuristic planters, and another bonsai group decorates a slick, contemporary console table. Future Retrieval uses an eclectic assortment of decorative and firing techniques, from stony wood-fired and soda-fired surfaces to bright enamels and gold lustres. They embrace both the beauty of ceramic materials and its defective counterpart; lustrous celadons are coupled with rough crater glazes. They disregard traditional definitions of successful glazes and fluently move through the history of ceramic processes, capriciously picking, choosing, and combining surfaces within their pieces. As a result, their pieces are rooted in a ceramic lineage, but simultaneously reach to define a future aesthetic—one where beauty is, perhaps, blistered and crusty. Their choice of bonsai also reflects an understanding of botanical beauty as culturally bound and subjective. Bonsai, traditionally representing a simple, harmonious beauty, also capture the human urge to curate, manipulate, and re-shape the natural environment. Future Retrieval's futuristic landscapes call on us to question our role in this human-environmental narrative.

Gathered together, the artists in *Florilegium* form an eclectic bouquet. Their approaches to the flower are wildly diverse. They celebrate the importance of flowers in social rituals, speak of our ever-evolving relationship to the natural world, and reference the familiar language of craft. They invoke art history, from Modernism to the lexicon of architecture, and draw upon our associations of flowers with life cycles and the passage of time. The artists use flowers as imagery, as symbol, and as metaphor. Collectively, they affirm the continued relevance of Henrietta Dumont's “language of flowers” and its ability to illuminate the concerns, beliefs, and sentiments that define this current moment in time.

Notes:

- ⁵ Rain Harris, “Porcelain, Resin, and Black Clay Flowers,” accessed 5 May 2016, http://rainharris.com/section/382474_Porcelain_Resin_and_Black_Clay_Flowers.html.

Rebecca Hutchinson, professor of art at the University of Massachusetts–Dartmouth, received her BA in ceramics from Berea College, and her MFA from the University of Georgia. Working in both large-scale sculpture and in installation, her work is typically site-specific, addressing her observations of place and ecosystems. Exhibitions include solo shows and installations at San Francisco Museum of Craft and Design; the 2012 Taiwan Ceramics Biennale, Taipei, Taiwan; Keramikos Internazionale della Ceramica D'Arte, Bracciano Museum, Bracciano, Italy; Racine Museum of Art; Fuller Craft Museum, and others across the world. She has been awarded numerous grants and fellowships from the Puffin Foundation, the Pollock-Krasner Foundation, and the Virginia Commission for the Arts Award. In addition, her work has been published in over 80 publications.





Tranquil Burst, 2016, porcelain, paperclay, handmade paper, adhesive, adobe, willow, 11' x 13' x 11'.

Northern Clay Center

Northern Clay Center's mission is the advancement of the ceramic arts. Its goals are to promote excellence in the work of clay artists, to provide educational opportunities for artists and the community, and to encourage the public's appreciation and understanding of the ceramic arts.

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