

lithophanes: contemporary approaches

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Last summer I participated in a residency at the Archie Bray Foundation. Because of the camaraderie that collaborating artists in residencies share, fellow resident Jen Holt offered one of her recipes for translucent porcelain. During my experimentation with her recipe, I wanted to add my own markings inside the shapes I was slip casting. The lock on my collected-but-unused-discoveries-with-great-potential vault was about to be opened.

I am open to any process that can most powerfully express my ideas and am keenly aware of small discoveries that happen while creating. An example of this is my most recent work, which began a few years ago when casting four-part molds of bones for my thesis installation. Wanting to have pits in the bones, I mixed burn-out material with some of the slip. Being careful to drizzle the slip only in particular areas of the open molds, I then poured and drained the molds in a conventional way. After I opened the cast mold, I found delicate recessed lines around the slip that was dripped in first with the burnout material. While it added a nice subtlety to the bones, I made a mental note to make use of that beautiful subtle edge again whenever it worked with one of my bigger ideas.



"Circus Days," 12 in. (30 cm) in height, slip-cast translucent porcelain, lighting, wood, by Ilena Finocchi, North Lima, Ohio

In opened, multi-pieced molds, I began to trail images with casting slip, letting the absorption of the plaster keep the drawings in place. Closing the molds, I poured the slip in and drained the molds in under a minute to keep the porcelain exceptionally thin. Gentle hands are a must when opening and successfully removing these pieces. To my surprise, unlike my cast bones, there were no visible lines on the outside of the object. Just

as exciting was what the inside of the cast shape revealed. The thickness of the drawing area was double the thickness of the walls, creating a shadow when a light source was placed inside. This gave me the flexibility to create one-of-a-kind drawings and markings in otherwise identical molded shapes.

My father passed away during my stay at the Bray, and I began to use this process in a collection of bottles inspired by his memory. My dad was an inventive builder and had collected thousands of objects, tools and building materials. I began making molds of older bottles that had a particular character and reminded me of the collections of containers my dad used. On a metaphorical level, I wanted to gather and collect memories of my dad through the use of objects and images that are represented as shadows inside each bottle. Currently, I am working on the next phase of this project, which is a solo exhibition. The show will incorporate an installation of the illustrated bottles with mechanical moving shadows. The exhibition will be on display during the 2008 National Council on Education for the Ceramic Arts (NCECA) Conference in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, in the Olin Fine Arts Gallery at Washington Jefferson College.



"Tricycle Life," 12 in. (30 cm) in height, slip-cast translucent porcelain, lighting, wood.