

A Fanciful Notion

Ron Geibel & Lindsay Scypta: Everything is Perfect

Article by Caitlin Brown

SEPTEMBER MARKS THE ARRIVAL of new residents to Clay Art Center, which hosts two residents and two fellows annually. These emerging artists join the Clay Art Center community for a year or more of work and teaching. Each receives studio space, free firing, an exhibition in our gallery and the opportunity to support themselves through teaching in Clay Art Center classrooms. In exchange, they share their experience and expertise with an active community of 50 artists, 200 adult students and countless children. Each holding advanced degrees in ceramics, Residents and Fellows bring with them knowledge of contemporary ceramics and a deep understanding of the material. Their willingness to share what they have learnt inevitably has a perennial effect on the visual conversation in the classrooms and studios.

In September 2013, Ron Geibel and Lindsay Scypta arrived, each fresh from their MFA programs at the University of Montana and the Ohio State University. Despite obvious differences, several days after their arrival it became clear that the two would become good friends.



This is always an excellent sign in the beginning of the year, as compatible personalities often lead to the kind of ideal studio atmosphere many of us crave.

When residents jell, their energies becomes contagious and the entire studio benefits from the force of their creative output. The annual Open House is scheduled for a week after new residents arrive and functions as a means to introduce our student and artist communities to the new residents. During this event, Geibel and Scypta discovered a mutual interest – a love for fantastic studio aprons.

The two new members of our community were scheduled to have their exit exhibition together in June, 2014. Often this exhibition is arranged as two concurrent solo exhibitions in the gallery, separated by a moveable wall. This was the expected outcome when they arrived at Clay Art Center. In fact, the work they continue to make is so different that, at the outset, it seemed impossible to exhibit it together in the same exhibition.

Despite the differences upon first impression, however, Geibel and Scypta soon learnt that what their work has in common outweighs the differences.

The two decided to create a two-person exhibition that highlighted these commonalities.



When Scypta and Geibel arrived at Clay Art Center, they used the momentum of their thesis exhibitions to fuel the work they made during their time as residents. As happens during the course of a year of intensive working, concepts change and work evolves. Life and its circumstances cannot help but interject influence over a studio practice. Geibel and Scypta both moved to the Northeast alone. This move, the time of making isolated from the familiar, and the proximity to one another had an effect on each of the artist's work.

Geibel's overt thesis exhibition *Unapologetic* laid his experiences of coming out of the closet and, through the work, he asked viewers to examine the balancing act we all play between our public and private lives. He questioned the viewer about social norms with colour, installations and interactive elements. "Boys play construction, while girls play house." The work he created while in Montana was a direct response to living in a place where living outside of social norms requires an act of bravery. Riding the line between overt and subtle, the sexual commentary could not be missed.

While in Port Chester, Geibel's personal experiences shifted from living in a place with a small and traditionally conservative population, to living in a place where being gay is a part of the social norm. His work changed in kind. From enormous billboard installations proclaiming his sexuality, Geibel began to make work that is a reference to social norms and how his personal normal might fit within that context. The installation created for the



Facing page: Collaboration Geibel/Scypta. Topiary. 2014. Porcelain, thrown, trimmed, stamped, incised, sprigged, coloured slip trailed dots. 18 x 6 x 6 in. Photo by Lindsay Scypta.

Top left: Ron Geibel. Everything is Perfect (Detail). 2014. Porcelain, wood, acrylic finish. 28 x 36 x 9 in.

Top right: Lyndsay Scypta. Afternoon Tea. 2014. Thrown, trimmed, stamped, incised, sprigs, coloured slip trailed dots and fired to cone 6 oxidation. 20 in.

exhibition at Clay Art Center reflects this change. This culturally relevant installation is poignant in the light of the current social climate. As of the writing of this article, 19 states have legalised same-sex unions. Therefore, there is a lessening in the need to make a choice between taking a stand and hiding in the shadows. The change in Geibel's work in the past year reflects this.

The installation *Everything is Perfect* still entices us to take a close look at the difference between public and private lives. The pastel houses and the perfect arrangement of porcelain topiaries made up of thousands of tiny intimate objects invoke the 1962 satirical song "Little Boxes". Geibel asks the viewer to examine their own personal lives, desires and the decision we all have to make to find happiness.

When Scypta arrived, she came from a thesis year immersed in the history and objects of the Victorian era. Scypta's work is a celebration of the domestic, the ceremony of the table and the flourish of architecture and design of the early industrial period. During her



time at Clay Art Center, Scypta's ideas became more personal and began to reflect her homesickness. Working with similar forms as in her past, Scypta's stacked forms became vignettes to celebrate the private ritual of her home with her fiancé.

As Scypta spent little time with her fiancé during her residency, she created objects to celebrate cherished moments with her loved one. Through groupings of objects, Scypta created objects that hold the promise and the memory of these meals. Stacked, useful forms





become monuments of these moments. Tea services, strawberries and cream, champagne, ice cream bowls and wall sconces all require ceremony in use and a recognition of precious time spent with loved ones.

Interestingly, the Victorian era, so full of the pomp and ceremony that Scypta delightfully references, also gave birth to the women's suffrage movement in the UK. Perhaps this is where the two artists' work begins to overlap. Geibel's question of the difference in public and private does not need to be asked in Scypta's work, the doors are closed, but we are on the inside.

As an installation, the two artists' works are a celebration of the home and all of its complexities and beauty. The use of inviting colour and pleasing arrangement engage the viewer and ask us to think about our own homes. Scypta takes for granted that we all might like to engage in the ceremony and etiquette of a Victorian tea-party. Through this assumption, she invites to viewer to check their own lives at the door and engage in the romance of the work. Geibel's houses and topiaries bring to mind the box stores the middle classes shop in, accessible architecture and the items that we are all supposed to want. The façade of each house arrangement is reminiscent of a movie set into which the viewer may project himself, or stir a desire to find out what might be inside. Together, the two created *A Fanciful Notion*, which opened 7 June, 2014.

Rituals happen in all aspects of the home. From the perfectly groomed exterior to the intricately planned meals that occur on the interior, *A Fanciful Notion* is an exploration of the perception and reality of the home. Scypta and Geibel take their intricate use of ornamentation as common ground to explore these



Facing page, top: Lindsay Scypta. **Strawberries & Cream.** 2014. Thrown, trimmed, stamped, incised, sprigs, coloured slip trailed dots fired to cone 6 oxidation. 15 in.
Facing page, below: Ron Geibel. **Topiaries.** 2014. Porcelain, wheel thrown and individually attached. Photo by Ron Geibel.
Top left: **A Fanciful Notion (Installation View).**
Below left: Ron Geibel. **Everything is Perfect.** 2014. Porcelain, wood, acrylic finish. 34 x 26 x 9 in.
Top right: **Tea Service.** 2014. Thrown, trimmed, stamped, incised, sprigs, coloured slip trailed dots fired to cone 6 oxidation. 12 in.
Centre right: **Ron Geibel.** Photo by Loren Maron.
Above: **Lindsay Scypta.**

ideas. Geibel utilises multiples to create his porcelain topiaries, which disguise intimate objects within the work as an overarching sexual commentary. Ron Geibel questions whether what lies on the interior truly matches the exterior. Lindsay Scypta dissects components of the home, where the table is a place of social intimacy and the dinnerware are the objects that define the choreography of the meal

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All Lindsay Scypta photos by Loren Maron, unless noted.
All Ron Geibel photos by Jessica Ozment, unless noted.