

## **A Ceramic Manifesto: Toward an Expansive Future** by Lauren Sandler

Contemporary ceramics is a truly pluralistic art form. With a layered and vast history, ceramics has found its way into all genres and corners of the art world. Inspiring artists of various backgrounds to engage with the material, clay guides us through histories past and futures yet unknown, from ancient artifacts to technologically based works. From an intimate handmade cup or an industrial object to conceptually driven works, the material has the ability to dismantle persistent hierarchies and separations, transcend boundaries, and move toward an art form of convergence and collaboration.

Ceramics today is a microcosm of the art of the last century, rooted in expression and possibility. The future and development of our field lie in the diverse worlds we inhabit and our ability to view, discuss, and present all genres as equally valid and significant. New approaches to ceramics must coalesce with our history, value both kinesthetic and cerebral approaches, and encourage experimentation and research. We are creating a field in which seemingly disparate elements have the potential to come together and create something new. This convergence can materialize in a concept, a tangible object, or in collaborative discourse and projects.

We live in a culture of dualities, in which identity and understanding often depend on defining what we are not rather than who we are and what we believe. Within our field, the incorporation of new ideas and ways of working does not have to result in a bifurcation, but could lead to a confluence of thought, discourse, and making. A distinction between those who use new technologies and applications and those who don't has become a symbolic border, separating the new from the old and broadening the gap between romanticism and intellectualism. This is evident in a system where value is tied to an artist's repudiation of the past. If we create out of rejection of the past, we are conforming to an external idea of what ceramics should be, overlooking the field's valency and our opportunity to act as pioneers.

When we succumb to this symbolic border, we trivialize process, material, and the bodily-kinesthetic intelligence. The future of ceramics depends not upon the defacing and avoidance of its history, but rather upon how we reconcile and engage the magnitude of it. Why not focus our energy and intellect on creating a space where materialism and conceptualism equally reside and intersect, where there is no hierarchy between intuition and intellect? An inclusive approach recognizes and expands the possibilities of representation, commentary, and expression – not through negation but through acknowledgment, curiosity, and a reverence for creativity.

Our strength lies in the material's expansiveness – its capacity to capture and eternalize the intimacy of touch as well as to manifest virtual language and design into three-dimensional form. When we sacrifice the parts of our field that seem irrelevant to the future, or when value is gained by devaluing other views, elemental parts of our discipline are lost. A monolithic view of the future risks making ceramics an autocratic art form, rather than a mutable one that moves through space and time, encompassing worlds from the ancient to the digital.

Contemporary ceramics is an intersection of adherence and defiance, where loyalty and reverence for the history of craft collide with the resolve to move out of that history. I see this as an exciting moment of opportunity for dialogue and growth. Let us look ahead with curiosity and with admiration for our community's expansiveness. Rather than judging its disparate parts and succumbing to fragmentation, we strengthen our field by seeking unforeseen spaces of commonality.