## Magdalena Suarez Frimkess by Ricky Swallow (Magdalena Suarez Frimkess: The Finest Disregard, August 2024)

We just visited Magdalena and Michael this past weekend, Lesley, Marsden, and myself. It's a house in which the dining table is the center of all social engagement, wedged sideways into the kitchen while accommodating a tight passage leading to the back door—one side is allocated for Magdalena and the other for Michael. The banter is always superb, and the side of the table you are allotted can really determine the passage of your visit. Michael's side is densely decorated with tiny colored stickers from produce and packaged foods, plastered upon removal from avocados, bananas, and citrus directly onto the legs and apron of the handmade wooden table (as well as a cabinet door within arm's reach . I remarked to Magdalena that it triggered a memory a friend had relayed about the handrails of a grand stairway in a Shaker village. The stairway was split between the passage of men and women, routing them to separate quarters on the second floor; the handrail on the men's side was considerably worn, while the women's rail still closely preserved the form of its original carpentry. The reply was a near silent giggle from Magdalena, a reward unto itself.

In addition to new ceramic works to admire with each visit, there are often new ways to appreciate older pieces: a large urn rotated in the kitchen cabinet to reveal an image I'd never noticed before, a tile portrait of Michael from a decade ago partly obscured by a stack of commercial dinnerware. The subject matter of family life, events, and travels is of special significance to Magdalena, and the pieces she's chosen to retain often preserve the memory of individuals now gone, and countries and cities now most likely not to be returned to.

Although work is often the very thing many people seek respite from, for the artist it can be a form of self-care, a platform from which one governs the outcome of everything. Magdalena has made it clear over the years of our friendship that the routine of work is very calming to her, a necessary space. I later starting thinking about Magdalena's repeated cartoon subjects as pictorial mantras—things to fix one's focus, things to return to. Repeated and internalized as part of a daily routine with the subject's meaning amplified via the graphic and sculptural revisitations.

Devotional acts.

## Forms of Collecting by Ricky Swallow (Christina Ramberg: A Retrospective, May 2024)

In our house we are fortunate to live with some drawings by Christina Ramberg. A group of them are posted on a narrow swatch of wall that separates our bedroom door from our son's door (see fig. 1). They are stacked in a vertical totem of three and framed identically, with only an inch of space on either side before the door moldings commence. Living here, you are routed by them multiple times a day—sketched forms produced in ballpoint pen and fine marker, which Ramberg has progressively tweaked to fill each small page. The playfulness and possibilities at work here preserve a seemingly endless (and private) practice informing Ramberg's publicly exhibited paintings.1

Hanging high to their right above a closet door are three beautifully shaped wood-handled Carl Aub.ck clothes brushes; to their left is an unusually heavy-gauge hand-formed wire coat hanger found on the grounds of the Chinati Foundation in Marfa, Texas, where German prisoners of war were interned; and directly opposite is a colorful Ken Price drawing of a New Mexican landscape resembling a land before time. An articulated wall relief in the form of a collar by the artist Diane Simpson, a friend of Ramberg's, graces the entrance into this corridor from the rest of the house—a sentinel marking the way.

To me all these specific things live together in a kind of harmony. Perhaps the simple fact that each object is a unique sampling of its maker's output connects them, or their material quality or architectural proximity—but it only now occurs to me, as I'm taking a descriptive inventory of them, what strange neighbors they all are. Punctuating one's home with collected images, forms, and tactile information has always been a necessary activity for me (see fig. 2). Important fuel. In the terminology of the electrician, you're upgrading your panel—adding juice to the available current you can draw upon within the walls of your own home. Our model of living with things is a reflection of who we are and what we want to be around. Much of what I collect comes out of direct engagement with artists, flea-market sellers, ceramics dealers, record clerks, and ephemera hawkers. I like objects freighted with histories of making, ownership, and use. Object variants or "versionized" things intuitively appeal to me, like Zuni Toons—the pop cartoon-character jewelry made by Zuni artists with inlaid colored stones that purposely fragment their trademarked subjects (see fig. 3)—and "Plumber's Nightmare" mugs designed by Jackson Boone that join configurations of plumbing parts into minimalist porcelain vessels. Looking and listening in on objects is an integral part of the artist's life, and elements of this intake, both consciously and ambiently, are returned through the work one produces.

Within the group of Chicago-based artists that Ramberg studied and socialized with and later exhibited alongside, habits of collecting and the integration of these collections into their domestic environments was a shared, at times competitive, habit. The home of Ray Yoshida, an artist and teacher at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC), was clearly a charged and influential site for many of his students, including Ramberg. Within his apartment every surface became a depository of sorts for collected artifacts, folk objects, and artworks. The overarching taxonomy, with an intuitive distribution of objects on walls and furniture throughout various rooms, seemed to reflect an idiosyncratic sense of organization. An exploded cabinet of curiosity. Part of the magic of such personal collections is that the informal formality on display honors an adaptive dynamic present within the very objects themselves, allowing new associations to occur between subjects, diffusing the dusty hierarchy perpetuated by most public museums. Yoshida was interested in "form types" and collected objects that were standardized, yet

available in infinite handmade variations—his quiver of wooden silent butler stands being a classic example (see fig. 4).

This type of engagement with objects made its way into Yoshida's own teaching methodologies, and he was known to encourage drawing excursions to the Field Museum of Natural History and jaunts to the Maxwell Street Market, held each Sunday. Yoshida also challenged his students to question easily comprehensible forms, often asking "Could this be seen in another way?" when reviewing their work.2

As a creative couple, Christina Ramberg and Phil Hanson integrated regular dawn-patrol trips to Maxwell Street into their routine after accepting an initial invitation from Yoshida. Hanson poetically described the density of offerings on display as "objects sifted through the city." There were some proficient "pickers" who sold at Maxwell Street, and the artists had favorite sellers, but much of the attraction was the chance encounter. Hanson and Ramberg collected tin toys, medical illustrations and journals, comics for collaging, Italian votives, and dolls of every form and condition (many notably headless). Ramberg even stumbled upon some of her own earlier student paintings one morning at the flea—work she'd abandoned on their stoop years earlier (the seller offered them back).

In Mary Baber's beautiful photographs of the couple in their Chicago apartment in 1974, we see her doll collection installed as a prominent feature of the decor. Various paintings by peers and self-taught artists as well as their own artworks are distributed throughout the space (see p. 28, fig. 3), including a large early painting by Ray Yoshida that still hangs in Hanson's home today. There's a comfortable feeling to these photographs. They look like people you'd want to hang out with—chill Midwesterners free from the pretension of any prescribed cool. In comparison to the relative density of Yoshida's interior, the apartment shown in Baber's photographs has a lot of space between things. There's an austerity to the installed artworks, a sparse domestic sequencing at work. If one thinks of the more isolated and singular nature of Ramberg's painted figures, this starts to make sense. An interior operates on its own timing in the same way an artist operates on their own timing, and Ramberg never worked in a studio that wasn't part of her home. The orderliness to Ramberg's home-studio nook and the materials pinned to the wall give us a sense of the care and pacing built into her practice. In another photograph by Baber (fig. 5), Ramberg sits in a light-flooded room with a painting that appears to be part of the same series as Tall Tickler (cat. 39) in progress on the table, a mounted lamp hovering low above the work's surface. She was a nocturnal artist; her works were made when the city was its quietest self, when isolated focus could be most assured. What's also apparent in this image is the scarcity of working materials—as condensed as the ingredients appear, their transformative capacity under Ramberg's guidance was extraordinary.

It's remarkable how much work she extrapolated from her archived source material. The medical illustrations, lingerie advertisements, drapery studies, and classified ads for wigs were all absorbed and ready to be transposed into Rambergian script. The subject matter that fed her practice for more than three decades was harvested and largely in place from her time as a student in the late 1960s, and her unique methodologies for processing this material also seem to have been dialed in very early on.

She used both the camera and direct sketching to bring images back to the studio with her. The fluidity she displayed in her notebooks and drawings articulates a sophisticated curiosity for continually questioning, combining, and editing forms. The fact that she used index cards for some of the drawings shows her emphasis on the compact ritual of collating an archive to be conveniently filed away for future

reference. For Ramberg, drawing was a form of collecting, a way to pay attention to a part of something for further expansion and interrogation later on—to clock and register forms in the world.

Fig. 1
Christina Ramberg’s drawings and their surroundings in the author’s home. Photo by Flying Studio.

Fig. 2
Collected artworks and objects in the home of Lesley Vance and Ricky Swallow, Los Angeles, 2023. Photo by Flying Studio.

Fig. 3
A selection of Zuni Toons brooches depicting the Pink Panther, c. 1970–90, from the author’s collection.

Fig. 4
Artwork and objects in Ray Yoshida’s apartment, Chicago, c. 1974. A smoking (or “silent butler”) stand can be seen to the right of the foremost entranceway. Photo by Mary Baber.

Fig. 5
Christina Ramberg at work on a painting, 1974. Photo by Mary Baber.

Notes:

1 Ramberg’s working drawings were not exhibited during her lifetime; they were made as preparatory studies for more sustained artworks and as part of her image-processing practice.

2 Philip Hanson, in personal communication with the author, February 23, 2023.

## Doyle Lane, Hillside Potter by Ricky Swallow (Doyle Lane: Weed Pots, January 2023)

Throughout five decades of living and working in Los Angeles, Doyle Lane maintained a prolific and adaptive practice as a ceramic artist producing pottery, wall reliefs, clay paintings, screens, glazed beads, and pendant jewelry. While the published footprint documenting his endeavors remains relatively small and largely aligns his work with California midcentury design, Lane's impact and appeal as an artist and craftsman surpass any single specific context or categorization that would threaten to narrow its focus.

The stubborn subject of craft versus fine art, which tends to separate functional from non-objective object-making, and which preoccupied many artists working in clay during the 1960s and 1970s, did not rouse conflict in Lane. He sold his work directly to customers at street fairs and from his studio's showroom, which for a period he called the Hillside Gallery. He undertook private and public architectural commissions, often collaborated with other designers, and participated in exhibitions at galleries. During the last decade of his life, he dialed back the scale of his production, focusing on beads and ceramic jewelry, which in turn placed his work in yet another new market.

Lane's modes of making did not follow a clean, linear progression. Many types of work at every scale coexisted in the studio at the same time, with specific trajectories often driven by market opportunities Lane had landed for himself. Heavy tiles with recessed circles filled with blue glass glaze, for instance, were sold as paperweights to some customers and also utilized as compositional elements in larger wall assemblages. In the words of Stanley Wilson, fellow artist and Lane's friend, "Doyle was always looking for the next customer."1 Not privileged with the same opportunities and invitations as his white peers in the ceramic field, he labored tirelessly to create a perpetual market for his objects. Lane secured some of his largest tile-mural commissions by literally knocking on doors, going from one architectural firm to another with his quiver of mounted samples in hand. He produced constantly and continually challenged his own parameters and methodologies. Doyle Lane's work itself asserts an indelible spell, and its quiet magic—familiar to many peers and collectors for decades—is finally reaching a larger audience.

•••

Among Lane's many bodies of work, perhaps the most iconic are the diminutive weed pots about which he wrote, "The fascination of forming bottle shapes on the wheel (or weed pots, as I call them) is that it forces a person to make a simple and direct statement."2 Produced in staggering numbers out of his home studio in El Sereno, on the east side of Los Angeles, over a period of approximately fifteen to twenty years, the weed pots were a reliable moneymaker and the signature unit at the nucleus of Lane's practice. The exhibition documented in this book, held at David Kordansky Gallery from July 22 to August 29, 2020, brought together sixty examples, constituting perhaps the largest gathering of Lane's weed pots to date.

Lane rarely dated his work, though occasionally there will be a year marked on the reverse of a clay painting or scribed into the bottom of a pot. In some instances a specific pot can be lined up with an exact acquisition date or identified through archival photographs; but generally speaking, assigning production dates to the weed pots is a dubious process. Institutions and auction houses alike often loosely refer to "mid-1960s" or "late 1960s," and this is indeed when the weed pots were most densely marketed, largely due to the artist's sales success from exhibitions at the Ankrum and Brockman galleries in Los Angeles

between 1966 and 1970. However, the overall window of production was clearly larger than this.

Architect Rudy Serar (father of Ben Serar, whose prescient photographs of Lane's studio from 1976 appear in this book) confirms that Lane was throwing weed pots as early as 1962, during their studies together at East Los Angeles City College. Of the sixty weed pots that make up this exhibition, only one is dated: "76" is scribed above the familiar "LANE" inscription on the foot.

At the beginning of the 1970s, Lane was injured in a freak accident while pushing his pickup truck up his street. The vehicle rolled, pinning the artist's hand, and he suffered the loss of his right index finger as a result. Many people remember the severity of the accident, but its exact date is unclear. There is also varied opinion as to how much it impacted Lane's throwing ability and subsequent studio work.3 In photographs that document a throwing demonstration by Lane at Ankrum Gallery, taken sometime between 1965 and 1967, we can clearly see his intact hand raising the bands of a ceramic cylinder. In one of Ben Serar's photographs from 1976, we see the injured hand at work mixing glaze with a large paddle. Other photographs by Serar indicate that Lane was throwing weed pots and larger vessels during the mid-1970s; the dozens we see in progress in the studio are for the most part spherical. The most delicately scaled of Lane's weed pots—some are as small as 1. inches tall and 2 inches wide—are notably absent.

The earlier weed pots are often more classically modern in form than later examples. UFO- or disc-like, some have minute collared openings; others Lane trimmed flush, leaving tiny apertures. Turning the pots over, the scribed "LANE" signature is also quite delicate and usually has a slightly tilted flair or lean to it as well as a noticeably taller "A"; one can trace a marked rhythm in the application of the impression (p. 9, left). The weed pots that can be confidently dated to the late 1970s are usually larger with a comparatively rudimentary signature—there is more spacing between the letter forms, which are clunky and less compressed in appearance (p. 9, right). It's my hunch that we can use these signatures to estimate the dating of individual weed pots. Writing without an index finger, let alone carefully manipulating the plasticity of the clay at such small scale, would seem to require both adaptation and an adjustment of expected outcomes.

Another photograph from the Ankrum Gallery demonstration (p. 11), an overhead shot of Lane throwing at his wheel, provides a rare glimpse into his weed pot production (most shots feature him throwing larger vessels). On either side of the wheel head we see an amassed tray of trimmings as he shapes the surface of the pot with a wooden tool. In this delicate choreography, there's a discernible specificity of pressure transferred from his fingers to the tool. The sensibility required and the role of his entire hand in this process are poignant indicators.

While we cannot assuredly credit Lane with having coined the term "weed pot," he was its biggest proponent and the term has been synonymous with his name since the mid-1960s. (Comically, "bud vase"—a more popular term for a small ceramic pot—describes both a slang term for marijuana and a botanical form with more positive associations than "weed.") Every so often a Lane pot shows up with a tiny, aged rectangular sticker printed with the words "WEED POT," consistent with much of the artist's DIY promotional ephemera in its economical design (see p. 94).

In a 1967 Los Angeles Times article titled "Suddenly it's the season to pick weeds!" and featuring Lane's work, the writer states, "The weed pot has come into its own; weeds now have a life that is distinctively

their own. The best arrangements are those in which dried plants are sparsely used.”4 The weeds Lane placed in his pots were most likely collected from the hillside neighborhood where he lived. His own property had a large garden that stretched back beyond his outdoor working area. He was an avid gardener, known to share trimmings, seeds, and flowers with his neighbors. In two different photographs of Lane installing an exhibition at Ankrum Gallery, we see him setting dried weeds into a pot and holding a quiver of sprigs in hand as he converses with gallery founder Joan Wheeler Ankrum. A large percentage of the photographic documentation and press images of the weed pots, which Lane would have overseen at his studio, include arrangements of dried weeds. This botanical ritual of display, clearly an important element for Lane, completed a still life code inherent in the domesticity of the forms.

•••

The perfection of the weed pots emerges from their sensibility and resolve more than their technical tightness. Lane accepted and integrated elements that might, in another potter’s work, read as flaws (see p. 49). As a production potter he completed the pieces with efficiency. Using a kick wheel retrofitted with a motor, Lane would produce each pot on an individual wooden bat, which allowed him to shape it with tools and come very close to a final form, thereby minimizing the need for extensive trimming. In the lowest section of each pot the trimming is evidenbelow the settled lip of the glaze; we can see the tool’s fine drag lines and a dime-size recess that both articulates the foot and creates a clear spot for Lane’s signature. The weed pots are alternately fruit-like, pod-like, flying saucer-like, or urchin-like, with openings so small they can appear as if they are holding their breath. In the larger dimpled pots we register the artist’s hand expelling this breath, carefully crumpling the symmetry and allowing more contours for glaze interaction (see pp. 61 and 100). In terms of surface, for the most part the weed pots are smooth. Pots with applied material texture were produced in fewer numbers; patterned, impressed, or craggy, these examples break up the overall field and demonstrate variations in glaze behavior over their surfaces (see pp. 56, 73, and 98). Throwing lines register through the glaze on some vessels, with ridges capturing the light and revealing the circulatory process of their making. The hand of the maker is still entirely present and intact in each completed pot, and so to hold one in the hand or eye is to register that palpable circulation.

Lane was a master glaze technician. His simple forms owe much of their uniqueness, and their esoteric qualities, to the colorful performances taking place on their surfaces. Lane crossed paths with some amazing teachers during his studies in Los Angeles—Otto and Vivika Heino, and Glen Lukens, to name a few—from whom he no doubt gleaned much technical knowledge. It was, however, his position as a glaze calculator and artist at the industrial chemical company L. H. Butcher that deepened his knowledge and enabled him to develop the unique formulas for which he would become known. For eight years, beginning in the early 1950s, Lane created glazes for commercial sale to potters and the industry. During this time he had access to chemical ingredients in amounts that would otherwise have been cost-prohibitive, allowing him to experiment unfettered and integrate this knowledge into his own studio practice. Lane was proud of his tenure at Butcher; it bolstered his credibility within ceramic circles. It was also the only sustained employment and revenue source outside of his 12 own clay practice that anyone recalls him undertaking.

Lane’s iconic glazes, which include his own versions of existing glazes, are rarely seen outside of his work. A whole spectrum of orange and red glazes run through the weed pots, for instance. By using predominantly low-fire glazes, Lane achieved exceptionally bright colors; occasionally these are uniform

hues, but more often they behave as if aglow with hot spots, or with crazing or crawling effects that activate the pots' surfaces. Light blues and turquoises coat other pots with a thicker, almost confectionary feel, while more subtle beige and gray glazes with dispersed iron specks produce quieter pieces. In Lane's version of a lava glaze (see pp. 52 and 79), the bubbles reduce back into their crater-like geometry instead of becoming fixed in a more recognizable, foamy form. Glazes shrink, retracting back from the clay's surface to startling patterned effect.

Discussing Lane's virtuosic glazing during a visit to this exhibition in the summer of 2020, artist and Brockman Gallery co-founder Dale Davis pointed to a crystalline red pot and remarked, "He knew all the spots." The reference was to the potter's preternatural understanding of firing processes and kiln placement.5 Interestingly, Lane utilized a limited range of glazes on the weed pots, and certain glazes sync up with specific shapes most conducive to showing off their characteristics. Lane's inventory list of weed pots submitted to Ankrum Gallery in October 1965 (see pp. 144-147) gives a glimpse into his personal terminology for identifying the glazes. It also accounts for why certain weed pots turn up with more frequency than others; those he lists as "Egyptian Blue," "Black Silver," and "Sea Urchin," for example, are repeated many times in the document. In this invaluable resource, we see a consistent use of descriptive terminology related to the natural world. "Granite Stone," "Desert Red," "Desert Rock," and "Black Lava Bottle" are convenient (and accurate) descriptors that also associate the pots with the earth and its igneous activity.

We know that Lane, due to health issues, retired from wheel throwing to favor less arduous means of clay production at some point in the early 1980s, but there is no firm consensus on when the throwing of the weed pots ground to a halt.

•••

Doyle Lane moved to Los Angeles from New Orleans in 1946 with the intent to study art, following several years of military service after high school. The earliest published record of his creative endeavors in California appeared in the July 16, 1950, Sunday arts section of the Los Angeles Times, under the event listings: "Doyle Lane abstract and non-objective relief sculpture. Lobby 1999 W Adams Blvd through Thurs." The West Adams Boulevard building, designed by Paul R. Williams, had opened the previous year as the ambitious new headquarters of Golden State Mutual Life Insurance, one of the country's largest African American–owned insurance companies. Lane's exhibition at Golden State is particularly significant because it positioned his work in this iconic and symbolic structure at a moment when the company was expanding its reach. In 1957, Golden State would appoint the artist William Pajaud as its art director; when the company started a progressive art collection a few years later, Pajaud was able to route support directly to his peers by acquiring works from exhibitions at Brockman Gallery.6

By the time Lane was invited to exhibit at Brockman Gallery in the late 1960s, he was considered something of an elder statesman—a veteran maker whose work provided assured sales. That Lane had for decades survived by selling his work independently and securing large architectural commissions as a Black artist in Los Angeles both puzzled and impressed Dale Davis and his brother and gallery partner, Alonzo Davis.

Brockman Gallery's press release for a two-person exhibition by Lane and Alonzo Davis in November 1971 states: "Doyle Lane will have recent clay paintings done on earthenware tiles and famous glazed weed

pots.” In relation to Davis’s collage paintings constructed from discarded billboard materials, the same document observes that a “great deal of [Davis’s] work is a reflection of black people in this society and their limitations because of the wrong direction.” Much of the art shown at Brockman was political in nature and direct in its message; this was nota prerequisite as much as it was a necessary response to the racism and social inequities (“the wrong direction”) that the gallery’s artists were confronting at the time. While Lane never sought to politicize his work, he also refused to be sidelined by racist mechanisms. He remained firm in his belief that his assiduous work ethic—and ultimately the quality of his art—allowed him to hold his ground.7 In an audio-recorded interview from 1988, in which he reflects on the impact of racism on Black artists in Los Angeles while recalling his beginnings as a potter in the city,Lane says, “You know why I used to love to go out and sell? Because I was very naive about racism and prejudice. I had no real understanding of it. It would have inhibited me to do something I needed to do. I didn’t think of all the disadvantages, I’m going out into the world and I’d knock on any door.”8

As a result of his exhibitions at Ankrum Gallery, meanwhile, Lane’s work entered the collections of architects, museum trustees, professors, performers, artists, and designers. Joan Wheeler Ankrum, who started the gallery in 1960, came from an acting background. Her program was among the first to consistently include artists of color. Based on records housed at the Smithsonian, we know that between October 1965 and April 1966, Ankrum sold 230 weed pots, remitting payments of $1500 to Lane (after the gallery’s commission). Considering that the artist continued working with the gallery for another two years, we can conservatively say that these numbers repeated severalfold. While the prices of individual pieces were affordable—they ranged from $5.00 to $20.00— the sheer volume sold amounted to significant income for Lane. The weed pots were also marketed to an upper-class clientele in Santa Barbara through Ankrum’s association with Galeria Del Sol.

Many collectors purchased groups of works and were return buyers, which explains the frequency with which groupings of weed pots have appeared at auction over the years. Craig Ellwood, one of the architects of the famed Case Study House program, purchased seven weed pots that remain with his family; Elwood’s wife, actor Gloria Henry, remembers him excitedly bringing the group of vessels home. Ankrum Gallery artist Lorsner Fettinger features repeatedly as a supporter in gallery statements, as does Jerome Gould, the graphic designer responsible for the logos of Pepsi and the speaker company JBL. Stage and screen actors Dorothy Dalton, Mildred Dunnock, and Naomi Caryl Hirshhorn also purchased Lane’s work.

Brockman Gallery’s clientele might not have competed with Ankrum’s in terms of fame or illustriousness, but the Davis brothers regularly sold Lane’s pots, often to first-time collectors, and they consistently pursued his pieces for gallery inventory. Dale Davis, who had recently completed his own ceramic studies at the University of Southern California, understood the quality and currency they possessed. In addition, selling Lane’s work enabled the gallery to mount exhibitions of more radical, less marketable art.

Lane’s inclusion in the traveling exhibitions Objects: USA, which originated at the Smithsonian’s National Collection of Fine Arts in 1969, and California Black Craftsmen, held at Mills College Art Gallery in 1970,9 as well as his presence in the second volume of the seminal publication Black Artists on Art in 1971,10 suggest that greater public exposure to his work was afforded through Ankrum and Brockman. Samella S. Lewis and Ruth G. Waddy, the editors and publishers of Black Artists on Art, were artists and activists affiliated with the Black Arts Council and the group Art West Associated, which both petitioned for and worked toward greater representation of Black artists in Los Angeles’s institutions. Acutely familiar with

the community of artists around Brockman, Lewis and Waddy would have most likely experienced Lane's work there, where it was often on display in the ground floor gallery specializing in crafts, prints, and more affordable works.11 His appearance in such survey publications created a critical foothold for researchers and collectors over the decades. He was one of the few artists to not include an artist statement in the second volume of Black Artists on Art; Lane's otherwise full-color spreads begin with a somber black-and-white portrait, followed by staid photographs of his weed pots, appearing like an insert from another publication amidst the dynamic content of the book.

The Brockman program in particular positioned Lane to make critical connections to other Black artists. Charles White became a good friend (and collector).12 Through Brockman, Lane was introduced to John Outterbridge, as well as Stanley Wilson, with whom he maintained a close working friendship. Both Wilson and Outterbridge eventually sought Lane's technical expertise on specific ceramic projects of their own. The artist endeared himself to everyone with whom he came into contact. His ready smile and kindness dominate every account of his character.
Despite Lane's sociable personality, those close to him describe him as a very private person, someone who gave a lot while never giving too much away. He was gay, though not openly so, and his orientation, however discreet during him lifetime, is significant to many of Lane's gay followers and collectors today. Lane was an outlier in many regards, and his contribution sounds some dissonance in an established West Coast ceramic field in need of more visible diversity.

•••

Doyle Lane lived and worked in El Sereno, a predominantly Latinx neighborhood northeast of downtown Los Angeles, for all of his five-plus decades in the city. His three known addresses in El Sereno—listed on business cards, invoices, and design catalogs—are within a quarter mile of each other. We can map Lane's trajectory over the mid-1950s to the late 1960s: from South Huntington Drive, at the bottom of the hill, up to his preferred perch on Kewanee Street, the site of his home studio for the last thirty years of his life.

Starting in the mid-1950s, Lane maintained a storefront showroom on a quiet stretch of South Huntington, where he kept semiregular hours for about ten years.13 Rudy Estrada, who met Lane as a teen, recalls this as something of a curiosity for El Sereno, with Lane frequently extolling the benefits of the creative life to those who visited. "I don't believe he intended to generate trade out of his Huntington Drive establishment," he observes, "but to socialize his endeavors with the neighborhood, which probably did not have the financial capacity to commission private work. But Doyle loved the people in the community."14 Estrada maintained a long friendship with Lane and later became a significant collector of his work. He still 16 17 regretfully recalls smashing a number of weed pots against a wall in a vacant lot for the juvenile thrill of hearing the resounding pop and admiring the resulting shrapnel(!).

Lane went on to occupy a live-work residence on Cato Street, directly downhill from his future property on Kewanee, which he purchased in 1970. For a time both locations were in play, and there is reason to believe he rented Kewanee before buying it; in any case, it was there that the artist really dug in and established himself.15 When the Cato Street property was razed for redevelopment years later, Lane unearthed a red bowl and gifted it to Ben Serar.

Kewanee Street was and remains a close-knit community. Lane probably found his way there through connections to a few different individuals. Henry Baker, an old military acquaintance from New Orleans

and a union carpenter, lived a few doors down. He and his family hosted Lane for a Southern meal every Sunday. Baker's grandchildren still recall Lane's generosity with affection; they tell of visiting the studio and returning with beautiful beads. Across the street lived Ramon Lopez, a painter who had a studio on South Huntington Drive close to Lane's showroom, and his partner, Paul Ferguson, who dealt in real estate and ran a gay bar. The couple would often make friends aware of property opportunitiesin the neighborhood.

The street is its own secluded pocket of El Sereno; its meandering,narrow dirt road fringes a steep hillside and tests the resolve of visitors. Theview, looking across to the neighboring hills of Montecito Heights and MountWashington, is beautiful (see p. 108), and the open space on either side of theproperty afforded Lane the privacy to work uninterrupted, both on his ceramicsand on episodic renovations of his home and studio buildings.

Characterized by some as a "shack," the original house was very modestin scale and built above a street-level garage on a terraced lot accessed via asteep set of stairs. Lane boasted in jest to neighbors that his annual propertytax was affordable because it was calculated to the square footage of theestablished garage structure only. He added a showroom off the stairs in theform of an improvised plywood structure, and expanded into the deep yardto accommodate his kilns. He lived austerely, prioritizing space for his workareas. Friends recall that his only indulgences were his camera and the hi-fiequipment he used to play his immaculately filed jazz and classical record collection.For all its haphazard levels, the working spaces were highly organizedand laid out efficiently for the various stages of Lane's studio practice, includingthe dedicated showroom where he could display his clay paintings, weed pots,and jewelry in an approximated gallery setting. Direct sales were made fromthis space; when driving eventually became a concern for Lane, bead storebuyers would visit the showroom, make their specific selections, and settle upat $1 per piece. The affordability of the work made it accessible to many levelsof collectors and craft enthusiasts. As such, the distribution of much of Lane'sproduction during his lifetime was very democratic.

Toward the end of his life, Lane became increasingly religious, readingthe Bible daily and on occasion exhorting its values to his visitors. He died suddenlyfrom respiratory failure in 2002. Estranged from his family and withouta will in place, his house and its contents fell under probate auction after hispassing. The house was purchased by a contractor, remodeled, and quicklyflipped. The word in the neighborhood is that a worker found a box of rolledbank notes under the floorboards to the tune of twenty to thirty thousanddollars. Lane's remaining ceramic works and jewelry were sold at auction asconsolidated lots in bankers boxes. Those in attendance recount his recordcollection and Eames DCM chairs eclipsing his pottery in bidding activity andrealized results. The house on Kewanee, which retains much of its modifiedfeel, is now owned by an old friend of Lane's who still occasionally discovershis ceramic beads dispersed in the garden's soil.

It's fitting that any deep study of Lane's work requires digging, sorting,and following clues. Thankfully there are still people around who knew himand are eager to share their knowledge of his practice. Exchanges with suchindividuals were essential to his happiness and financial stability; they are nowessential to our understanding of Lane himself. A reluctant steward of his ownlegacy, Lane knew he was making a lasting contribution to his field, but thecultivation of his aesthetic approach—with its philosophical and even ethicalovertones—kept him immersed in the daily rhythms of the potter's life. His personalarchive, which he gifted to the California African American Art Museum in2000, is housed in

repurposed plywood boxes from his studio and consists of amodest assortment of largely unlabeled photographs and 35mm slides. Assumingthe sum of its contents reflects the extent to which Lane kept records of hisown achievements, the indication would be that he measured his work's valuein ways that ultimately had more to do with his ardent sense of self-sufficiency—and his quiet focus on his craft—than any external markers of fame.16 His primaryfocus was his engagement with his medium as a maker, a perpetual worker, amarketer, and an occasional mentor. That Lane's work is proving more influentialwith each passing year is a testament to the timelessness of his commitmentand the tangible integrity of his concentrated forms. ●

1. Stanley Wilson, conversation with the author, Los Angeles, August 26, 2020.
2. Exhibition placard, Artmobile Exhibit 1: 33 Living Local Artists, Artmobile roving exhibition space, Los Angeles, 1967.
3. See Lee Whitten's account in this book, p. 115.
4. "Suddenly it's the season to pick weeds!," Los Angeles Times Home Magazine, September 24, 1967.
5. See also Doyle Lane's conversation with Stanley Wilson, introduced by John Outterbridge, in "Black Artists of Los Angeles," Studio Potter 9, no. 2, June 1981, 16–25.
6. Kellie Jones, introduction to NOW DIG THIS! Art and Black Los Angeles 1960–1980 (Los Angeles: Hammer Museum, 2011), 17.
7. See Lane and Wilson, "Black Artists of Los Angeles."
8. Lane interviewed by his friends Cynthia Jackson and Theresa Williams at his studio, March 1988.
9. "MCAG," which stands for Mills College Art Gallery, is written in marker on the foot of the occasional Lane weed pot, followed by a number. These pieces were more than likely part of his contribution to California Black Craftsmen. It's unclear if they were labeled this way by Lane or the institution.
10. Samella S. Lewis and Ruth G. Waddy, Black Artists on Art, vol. 2 (Los Angeles: Contemporary Crafts Inc., 1971), 70–73.
11. Samella Lewis exhibited at Brockman Gallery alongside George Clack in a show that ran from May 9 to June 8, 1969.
12. Charles White helped secure Lane a mural commission at the International Children's School, where he was a board member. See Kellie Jones, South of Pico: African American Artists in Los Angeles in the 1960s and 1970s (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), 36.
13. At the same moment, ceramicist Tony Hill had a showroom and studio across town on West Jefferson Boulevard. Hill was a successful commercial ceramicist and his modern works—including vases and lamps slip cast from designs by fellow Black artists that he employed—were sold in department stores. See the conversation between Dale Davis and Stanley Wilson in this book.
14. Rudy Estrada, email correspondence with the author, February 21, 2021.
15. In Lane's handwritten October 1965 inventory of weed pots for Ankrum Gallery, both the Cato and Kewanee addresses are listed, with Kewanee specified as his "mailing address." This suggests that Lane might have been living at the Kewanee property years before he purchased it, while still working out of the Cato location.
16. Lane addressed the futility of seeking fame as an artist in conversation with Stanley Wilson; see note 5.

## Ricky Swallow at David Kordansky Gallery by Andy Campbell (Artforum.com Critic's Picks, December 2018)

Following the tangle of rope comprising Ricky Swallow's sculpture *(0),* 2016–18, is both a demanding and rewarding task. Twenty-six feet of the braided cotton material, cast in bronze and painted the light wheat color of ship rigging, functions like a portal onto Swallow's meticulous process. Look in the tiny crevices of the twisting rope and sense (*see* would be too strong a word) the bronze underneath—a dark jumble under a light exterior. The work's casting is as convincing as its disavowal: Rope? Nope. In *Floor Sculpture with Pegs #1 and #2* (both 2018) cast bronze Shaker pegs are lined up on their rounded points and attached to coursing, curvilinear banisters; the sculptures' monochrome treatments formally suggest that these two handily recognizable domestic embellishments are a new, quixotic thing. Installed on the floor, they relay a centipede-like energy (each has close to a hundred pegs)—playfully recalling Louise Bourgeois's many-legged wooden composite, *The Blind Leading the Blind*, 1947–49/1989.

Swallow's most rewarding and confounding sculpture here is *Cap #2*, 2018—a coffee cup cast in bronze, patinated silver, and installed with its base flat to the vertical wall. Four perfect spheres are affixed like compass points inside the cup's rim. A small, shallow abstract diorama in the midst of much larger gestures, *Cap #2* calls attention to the artist's signal material substitutions via the linguistic transit from *cup* (vessel) to *cap* (costume), leveraging the doubt inherent in acts of sculptural and linguistic representation.

## Ricky Swallow at Maccarone by Alex Bacon (Artforum.com Critic's Picks, April 2017)

For his first solo exhibition in New York since his 2006 survey at MoMA PS1, Los Angeles–based Australian sculptor Ricky Swallow embraces an unprecedented degree of abstraction. The artist has made bronze casts of configurations of studio scraps—cardboard, rope, leather, wood—that could be called a kind of found or incidental abstraction. On several occasions, Swallow has talked about his “built-in moral resistance” to abstract modes, yet his *folk* version of the genre, for lack of a better term, complicates our understanding of what abstraction can do. Swallow is, above all, most interested in the beauty and emotional charge everyday objects can carry, as he elevates their humble functions and properties aesthetically and empathically.

The verisimilitude and craftsmanship of his painted and patinated bronze pieces invite careful and extended looking. Swallow’s newer works here play with balance, weight, and tension. In *Split (with ball) #5* (all works cited, 2017), for instance, white rope has been looped through what look like four small sections of red tubing. The object, a soft parallelogram, stands on a pair of rounded corners and a gold-colored ball bearing. The whole composition is bound by a single piece of taut string. Such considerations of physics are also present in *Bow/Drop #2*, which asks us to contemplate a length of rope that does not slacken from the pull of gravity—a force that has been neutralized by the bronze. Throughout the exhibition we constantly question how these sculptures came to take on these particular arrangements. Perhaps it is because Swallow is a bricoleur—an uncommon mind with the unique skill to cull the marvelous from the ordinary through playful and surreal transmutations and juxtapositions.

## Ricky Swallow by Jen Hutton (Made in LA, June 2014)

From his early, uncannily real vanitas carved from wood to his wide range of works on paper, Ricky Swallow readily demonstrates his technical skill as a fabricator and draftsman. Perhaps not surprisingly, Swallow is also a first-rate looker and collector who relies on a sizeable physical and virtual archive of forms as source material. His current work, a series of “object studies” fabricated from cardboard and cast in bronze (2010– ) perhaps best illustrates these inclinations. Each small sculpture nods to an item on Swallow’s hefty list of references: Werkstätte tableware, Memphis décor, Hans Coper’s vases, Alberto Giacometti’s early Cubist sculptures, Robert Therrien’s reductive domestic forms, Christina Ramberg’s typologies of chairs and other everyday objects, and so on.

In these works, Swallow also presents a romanticized version of modernism, or more specifically, a set of design concerns rooted in domesticity. Each object’s multiple views are pulled more tightly together, becoming a deliberately un-grand piece suited for tabletop or pedestal display. His borrowed forms sit comfortably in their typicality in as much as they effortlessly point to specific genres (modernist- style vases) or loaded subjects such as pipes and guitars (René Magritte and Pablo Picasso). As Swallow puts it, “As an artist, you are a guest to any material.” His newest bronzes delve further into abstraction, resulting in playful variations on his vocabulary of forms. For example, the edges of Cup/Unraveling’s (2013) hollow half- sphere peel away like the skin of an apple; and Staggered Vessel with Rings (2013), with its cascading shallow bowls, is a gravity-defying mise en abyme.

While the bronzes’ smaller scale applies more pressure to formal decisions such as color and shape, ultimately, the germinating idea for this work was about flipping a familiar process. Unlike his earlier carved-wood sculptures, these “object studies” allowed for more play: with the discarded cardboard, Swallow can build quickly, folding and gluing to construct simple forms or vignettes. Likewise, the medium offered a “readymade” surface that the artist had previously sought in his carved works.

## In the Studio by Leah Ollman (Art in America, May 2014)

“QUIET SCULPTURE” reads a sheet of paper on the wall of Ricky Swallow’s studio in Los Angeles. The words, stacked one atop the other and encircled by lightly drawn dashes, double as a declaration of intent and a wry, cautionary plea. They add their charge to the wall’s dense collage of images, notes and objects, a continually circulating pool of source material that currently includes two beaded panels that Swallow guesses are the unsewn sides of a Sioux tobacco pouch; a dozen sculptural sketches in bare and painted cardboard; a newspaper article on Donald Judd; several small Hopi Kachinas; postcards of work by Duchamp and Picasso; pages of rhythmic patterns (featuring letters, circles, tadpoles, variations on the shapes of wooden chair backs) painted by Swallow in bold gouache.

Beyond the fertile clutter, the rest of the studio is white-cube-gallery spare. A few pedestals hold humbly vibrant sculptures, cast in bronze from objects “scratch-built” in cardboard and tape. Several other pieces are mounted on the walls. One, a broad, undulating ribbon of black, about eight inches high, unfurls like a makeshift flag. Another, in white, riffs on a pair of staggered arches and hints at de Chirico.

The alteration of familiar, everyday forms (from guitars to cups to clocks) has been a through-line in Swallow’s work since 1996, when he graduated from the Victorian College of the Arts, Melbourne, in his native Australia. He learned to work with wood from a how-to book on carving realistic birds, but is weary of telling the story, however amusing and unlikely it is as an introduction to the refined still-lifes in wood that followed. He has long used cardboard, initially as an end material in itself, and later as the basis for bronzes alluding to Cubism’s fracturing of space and time, Futurism’s exaltation of motion, Surrealism’s unlikely marriages. Smoke in the form of a French curve rises from a pipe in one recent bronze sculpture. In another, a hammer meets the body of a guitar with a surprisingly gentle kiss.

Swallow moved temporarily to Los Angeles in 2002 and ended up staying, interrupted only by a 2004-05 sojourn in London. He’s emboldened, he says, by the prolific history of small-scale sculpture in L.A., citing work by Ron Nagle, Ken Price and the early Robert Therrien. He will be included in the Hammer Museum’s “Made in L.A. 2014,” opening in June.

On a warm, late February afternoon, Swallow, 39, sat down for a conversation in the Eagle Rock studio adjacent to that of his wife, painter Lesley Vance. He had just returned from New York, where he installed his work in the Whitney Biennial. On our way to his broad worktable, stacked with books and paintings on paper, we passed the cardboard genesis of Stair with Contents, which, at 22 by 35 by 22 inches, is the largest and most complex of his five pieces in the show. Perched upon the four-step, angular cascade are variants of shapes basic to Swallow’s visual lexicon—a multi-spout pitcher, an abstracted cross form that he calls “a spinning P,” and a zigzag snake with three hissing S’s resting between its jaws. The setup, he says, falls somewhere between a flea market display, a tableau and an altar.

LEAH OLLMAN  Stair with Contents is a relatively large piece for you. You tend to work on a more intimate scale.

RICKY SWALLOW  I arrived at working small fairly intuitively, but it feels like a position in some way, to not pander to scale. Inherent in sculpture is an expectation of monumentality. Working smaller provides a concentration of looking. There is some reciprocal relationship between the concentration of making at

that scale and how you receive the piece, or how you hope an audience receives the piece. In all the art that I admire and that I'd say was an influence, it's all about the energy an object or painting can give off. Much of that work is on a smaller scale, what I'd call a Morandi scale of things.

OLLMAN  What was the visual landscape like in the small coastal town of San Remo, in Victoria, where you grew up?

SWALLOW  Now that I live in a bigger city, where everyone is a stranger, I think of the town that I grew up in as almost a folkloric place. It was a narrative-rich town, everybody knowing everybody. My father was a fisherman. His father was a fisherman. A lot of the colors I've been introducing into the bronzes in the last couple of years, a combination of white, black and red, which can be read through the lens of Russian Constructivism or modernism, also relate to the heavy gloss enamel used on fishing boats and fishing equipment.

My dad was always managing or maintaining his fishing boat, and those projects seem now like my first idea of sculpture. You weld rope baskets from stainless steel tubing and they kind of look like Sol LeWitt forms. Pouring lead into molds to make anchor weights in the backyard or upkeeping the nets through weaving—I was around a lot of that craft. There's an honesty or accountability in it that I like and is related to the kind of work I chose to pursue in the studio.

OLLMAN  In art school, you majored in drawing. Were you also working in three dimensions then?

SWALLOW  I happened to enroll in the drawing department, because that was the focus of my portfolio when I began. You could opt to do one other subject once a week and that subject for me was sculpture, so more and more I'd introduce sculpture into the drawing process. It was fun to learn in that backdoor way, having access to materials but not necessarily the lectures or techniques. That was an important step in terms of learning to be self-sufficient, or realizing that sometimes it's important to approach materials more intuitively.

OLLMAN  The language you use in talking about your work usually has to do with change in status or identity, transformation, even alchemy.

SWALLOW  I've always been involved in a process of object translation. Before I started making the wood carvings, I was making replicas out of cardboard much the same way an architect would make a model of a building. They were of first-generation handheld computer games, old stereos—things I took for granted, that I was feeling some nostalgia for as technology was changing. I thought of the finished things still existing as a proposal. I like that space of the industrial prototype or the monument, where something is being suggested or remembered—not being used, but looked at as a form.

OLLMAN  When, in 2008, you discovered some card-board archery targets cratered with arrow punctures, you started working with them, casting the panels in bronze and also casting vessels and masks fashioned from fragments of the targets. What was it about that material that resonated with you?

SWALLOW  The cardboard I was using before was dense. It was like a mat board you'd use for framing. It was chosen specifically for how uncharacteristic the surface was. When I found the first few archery targets, they were the opposite. They were these very active, abstract panels—of a texture and materiality

that I was completely not responsible for. Something felt nice about that. I wasn't really attracted to them as objects that had been produced through weaponry. It was more their abstract, [Lucio] Fontana quality.

OLLMAN  For the last several years, you've been building forms—cups, pitchers, notebooks, human figures—mainly out of cardboard tubing of different scales and gauges. You've referred to these pieces as "bootlegs." Is there something illicit about them? What are you trying to smuggle?

SWALLOW  I never think of a bootleg as an unauthorized thing, but as a private rendition of something. I collect what I consider a lot of bootlegs, like Native American Zuni Disney character pins, for example, which are weird, crude, messed-up versions of cartoon characters. I like when versions become more and more removed from their origin but they still stubbornly hold on to a source image or a source object. Sometimes I'm even bootlegging my own things.

OLLMAN  You also collect pottery, and many of your patinations derive from ceramic glazes. What other points of intersection are there between your work and work in clay?

SWALLOW  One of the things that's been instructive about looking at wheel-based ceramics or pottery is how inherently abstract the technique is, as a meditative or ritualistic, repetitive task. You learn to throw a cylinder or tube and from that you pull everything. It's the mother form, this singular form from which you're able to produce an array of objects or vessels. That's how I treated the cardboard tubing form, not as limited, but as malleable, despite its being an industrial readymade material.

OLLMAN  "Grapevine," the show you curated for L.A.'s Kordansky Gallery in 2013, was an homage of sorts to a constellation of ceramic artists in Southern California [Ron Nagle, Magdalena Suarez Frimkess, Michael Frimkess, John Mason, Peter Shire]. Each of them, you wrote in your catalogue essay, approached clay with an irreverence toward tradition.

SWALLOW  There's something about ceramics as a material that can both acknowledge itself and disguise or contradict itself. All the artists in the show dealt with that in different ways. In their work, there's a respect for and technical understanding of what clay can do. They don't use clay to make pottery but to make sculpture, which seems very much a straightforward proposal now, but it's easy to forget how radical a lot of that work once was.

Like bronze, ceramics goes through a process where you start with an earthen or natural substance. You try to micromanage all the steps in order for the firing to produce a certain effect, but there's all this stuff you can't control, and those embellishments, those subtle fluctuations in color and material, end up being part of the success of the finished object. You succumb to them. Each of those artists really followed through with an object's conception and finishing, and that's a dated idea that I like. You're not surfing while something's being made. You're staying up all night watching the kiln.

OLLMAN  What is shared by the sculptures you make and the objects you collect, including basketry and furniture, is a strong sense of visual integrity. You seem very committed to the culture of artifacts, the ritual objects of everyday life, and, ultimately, to William Carlos Williams's notion "no ideas but in things."

SWALLOW  I've always believed that the ideas your art contains should extend from the making of them and what the object is doing, not something that's overlaid. Meaning should be extrapolated out of the thing, rather than an object extrapolated out of meaning.

I have a romantic notion of what the studio is as a place and what it's capable of. There's a famous Coco Chanel quote: "Look in the mirror and remove one accessory." It's to do with elegance and removing anything that is extraneous to your successful look. That can be applied in sculpture, too. Ron Nagle and Ken Price had this saying, "TMT," which means "too much touching," if they felt something wasn't working and was being fussed with too much, or if you went too far. I think with sculpture it is also about removing stuff and knowing when to stop.

OLLMAN  You're avid about music, and certain players crop up in your conversations—[the English guitarist] Derek Bailey, especially. But what about the underlying affinities in your work to structural elements in music—repetition, for instance, and rhythm?

SWALLOW  That's a tough question. Music to me is so abstract. I'm such an absorber of it. It's almost inhaled in the studio, but it's not something I understand. I think all artists ultimately envy the effects of music, the indelible effects. That would be the ultimate compliment, for a sculpture to stick in somebody's head in the same way that a song does, for someone to associate a sculpture with a particular time or event or vacation or something like that.

OLLMAN  In Looking at the Overlooked, Norman Bryson's 1990 book about still-life painting, he discusses the distinction between rhopography, the depiction of so-called unimportant things, and megalography, the depiction of grand events—history with a capital H. Rhopography, he writes, has the "potential for overturning the scale of human importance." That rings true of your work with mundane subjects.

SWALLOW  I don't see any limitations in humble objects. A lot of the things that I've remade in sculpture are things of ritual to one person, a small personal reading lamp or one cup. Something you have a direct relationship to, that you use in a daily way. There's something about selecting those things that have a one-to-one relationship with someone and then having a one-to-one relationship with the making of them. There is a meditative quality to overlooked things that allows them a different kind of energy or power.

The guitar, or certain cup forms—they're veterans of art in terms of still life. They are forms that have been pushed through every strainer. That makes them durable. They're not exhausted, they're not closed. To me, the most natural way of participating in art-making is to accept that you are a visitor to all this material, you're reinterpreting standards.

OLLMAN  Your most recent work strays confidently from familiar, recognizable referents to more fragmentary, less functional subjects. But you're wary of the A word. You're on record as having a "built-in moral resistance to abstraction" that you've tried for years to overcome. Where did that resistance come from and why the need to transcend it?

SWALLOW  Some of my older work is so narratively drunk. To go completely cold turkey was impossible. I've always been attracted to abstraction but never thought it was something I was supposed to do or the work that I was supposed to make. Part of the new pieces becoming more formal or abstract is about

enjoying and accepting the terms of what the pieces want to do, or appreciating a different way they can lean.

It’s an abstraction I feel OK about, because it comes from manipulation of tactile materials in the studio. It’s not pre-ordained. It’s a cause-and-effect thing—nurture, not nature. As abstract as some of the recent things are, they have a vulnerability to the surface; they have creases or dents; they’re not quite hard-edged. They look like used abstraction. Like abstract sculptures that have been badly treated.

## Doyle Lane by Ricky Swallow (Clay Paintings, May 2014)

Doyle Lane was nothing if not systematic. His name—usually an all caps LANE incised into the dime sized foot of his coveted weed pots, or written with marker clarity on the reverse side of one of his clay paintings—is familiar to a growing number of hard core followers and collectors who are all scrambling after the same thing: another Doyle Lane.

Lane's “weed pots” are diminutive in size yet perfectly proportioned and balanced. Their graspable scale is satisfying, and there’s a covert energy about them. Rudimentary, beautiful, with no fuss, they are as iconic and recognizable in ceramic circles as Rose Cabat’s feelies or Harrison Mackintosh’s graphically decorated pieces. Like these two artists he was a glaze specialist, developing and enlisting his own specific family of glazes to define his pottery made from the early 1950’s through the 1970’s. The term “weed pots” alludes to Lane’s practice of arranging delicate sprigs and dried flowers in the pots.

Where the forms of the pots are staid even classical, the glazes are anything but—they crawl, bubble, crack and thickly undulate to a thick edge preserved by gravity toward the foot of each piece. The glazes all carry nicknames, both affectionate and descriptive handles of categorization for collectors and potters alike: orange peel, gun metal, poppy seed, robin’s egg, mustard, white crackle, and uranium red.

These jewels of California modernism are most credibly understood and appreciated when viewed in groupings, which is how Doyle conceived and marketed them in both gallery presentations and architectural commissions. In this context one can see the subtle shifts in scale and form of the pots, some plump and spherical with tiny collared throats, some wider—more UFO-like (think Nelson lamp) with flattened openings just large enough to support a single twig. This combined with the matte-satin glazed surfaces, varying in color and activity, creates a real rhythm in the groupings and gives one an abridged glimpse into the working nature and diversity of Lane’s talents.

This type of rhythm created across the scale and form of the pots can also be seen with the mosaic surfaces of Lane’s largest Murals—including the Orange Wall, an 18 ft. mural commissioned for 301 E. Colorado Blvd., Pasadena, by Welton Becket & Associates in 1964. This phenomenal field of tiles is the largest realization and endorsement for Lane’s methodology—the medium is the message. The buzzing field of literally hundreds of rectangular clay tiles in burnt orange to red is beautifully overwhelming as a physical passage of information—a thing as solid in its intention as the building it was housed in. The prominent signature scribed into the lower right side of the piece, one letter per tile is an endearingly simple tag. It floats a little high rather than resigning itself to the bottom corner of the piece, as if to say DOYLE LANE was here.

Rarely will you find embellishment or extraneous detail in Lane’s pieces. The format seems carefully planned- a honed and familiar weed pot, a circular disc or unit of simply cut tiles loaded up with glaze and allowed to do its thing—with both trialed results and more expressive reactions during firing. The few exceptions to this rule are Doyle’s pots with applied sleeves of texture, or the surfaces of rudimentary shaped fish and bird tiles which demonstrate a repeated impressed pattern. These I would chalk up to a kind of interchangeable modern aesthetic looming at the time, one exploited by many ceramicists. The most identifiable and specific gift Lane offers us is his beautiful glaze work, placing him confidently in the

company of Glen Lukens, Otto Natzler and Otto Heino—all dedicated glaze technicians working in the greater Los Angeles area at the time.

Unlike these esteemed potters, Lane's ambitions pushed him to utilize an aesthetic closer to abstract and formalist painting, and to locate a scale and immediacy outside of the traditional realm of pottery. Lane's entry in the Objects USA catalog published in 1970, reveals a linear progression from his functional pottery, to the large murals through to the slab-based clay paintings. Whilst this makes developmental sense in terms of Lane's creative arc, it's impossible to say whether Lane was still working on commissioned murals and weed pots once he'd began the clay paintings. Much of his work (and virtually all of the weed pots) are undated, but the resourcefulness in his approach would suggest the various bodies of work continued and overlapped.

One can find hand typed labels on the reverse of many of the smaller framed square clay paintings and tile assemblages:

DOYLE LANE, Ceramic Murals- Clay Paintings
4470 KEWANEE ST. 225-4585 LOS ANGELES (EL SERENO) CAL. 90032.

It's almost as if the smaller more marketable tiles were calling cards, samples to generate interest in larger projects and potentially larger income for the artist. Lane emerged in a modernist era in which a domestic appetite for ceramics complemented newly devised interior schemes, including furniture, textiles, and so on. He managed to be included in several of the early California Design shows organized by Eudora Moore at the Pasadena Museum, but is noticeably absent from subsequent shows. His pots pictured in those early catalogs gel graciously with the overall aesthetic of that time, whereas the later clay paintings have a more authoritative presence both in physicality and expression.

With little information printed about Lane, friends, and colleagues provide much of his story. Doyle was known to market his pots (and later in life his beaded jewelry) at craft shows as well as literally knocking on doors with a tray full of weed pots in wealthier neighborhoods such as the Pacific Palisades. An elderly architect I purchased a pot from sold pieces on consignment out of his office on Larchmont, noting Doyle would come and arrange them on their wooden block bases, bringing new pots to replace those sold. Photos of Doyle Lane taken in his El Sereno home studio by Ben Serar in 19?? reveal a focused, camera shy man going about his craft. In one image we see Lane at the wheel, with neatly stacked boxes of glazing materials behind him; in another he is carefully a line up of freshly fired weed pots in their beautifully blank bisque state on the ledge of the kiln. The modest contents of his archive, gifted to the California African American Museum before his death in 2002, contains staged photographs of his weed pots (El Sereno Ikebana), various murals and a few grainy gallery installation shots, all housed in Doug-fir ply boxes constructed and labeled by Lane. A treasure to any follower of his work, there's something intriguingly private about this archive, with no literary information to accompany it—no user's guide. It fuels as many questions as it answers in relation to Lane's professional trajectory.

As Jenifer Munro Miller points out in A Handbook of California Design, "Doyle Lane succeeded in making a living from his craft—a notable achievement for any craftsperson, particularly an African American working at mid-century." Lane definitely had both loyal individual supporters and architects who commissioned his work. Rudy Estrada, a long time friend and collector, recalls an incident in which Lane was arrested and restrained by police on his property when he arrived with his tool bag to install an

outdoor mural. With very few galleries willing to show black artists at the time Lane eventually connected with Dale Davis and Alonzo Davis who had opened the Brockman gallery in Leimert Park in 1967, hoping to solve the problem of where to show their own work, and the work of their peers and immediate community in Los Angeles. By participating in the exhibition program at Brockman and later Akrum gallery on La Cienega in the early 70's, Lane's was able to show his work in a fine art context at a mid-career stage in his practice.

Lane's  circular clay paintings, most recognizably shown at the Los Angeles City College art gallery in October of 1977 all follow a similar format in which cut slab rolled circles are fired and mounted onto a white painted board. Some are solid discs of clay in which the glazes seem to literally react, and create their own preserved Weather Systems—grounds over which malleable graphic compositions are applied in what appears to be iron oxide.

Other groups of clay paintings are cut into geometrical compositions with the individual pieces glazed separately and then assembled back into their circular format on the panel. With much brighter and solidly blocked complementary colors—these perhaps later compositions further evidence the important role that painting played in the work. Whereas the more expressive examples show the influence of Clyfford Still the patterned and assembled clay paintings echo the shaped canvases of Leon Polk Smith and the blocked geometry of Frederick Hamersley and John McLaughlin, West Coast pioneers of hard edge abstraction whose work Lane most likely would have seen first hand.

It's interesting that the influence of painting registers as a purely visual, linear and color blocked atmosphere in Lane's clay paintings, and quite sobering if we think about the abstract expressionist ceramics movement in Southern California, rife with physical gesture and texture—"fast and bulbous" to quote Beefheart. There is a formal parallel between Lane's clay paintings and John Mason's modular tile configurations and geometrical sculptures from the past two decades. A radical turn from his early work—these pieces replace expressive gesture and surface grit with glazed hard edges shapes and lines as a means or visual circulation.

Lane's quiet compositions seem to direct all their energy inward; they are beautiful compact things to take in, and hard things to describe. Measured and methodical in their conception, the results are anything but. As objects of our focused looking (and Lane's focused making) the circles mounted onto the square boards operate like tactile Mandalas, creating their own radial balance and approximating a type of spiritual space. There's a fluid fervor looming in everything Lane produced. Both his weed pots and his ceramic beaded necklaces seem like their own planetary constellations, and the clay paintings echo this in a pictorial format. The way glaze is fused and covers the surface of clay is very different to paint, and the way it receives light is also more complicated. Lane envisioned the clay paintings could be hung outdoors to provide an ever-changing compositional experience for the viewer. Lane's unique means of putting things together provides a sophisticated simplicity, and expresses a confidence in form and color to carry the content of a work. The rest is up to us.

Los Angeles May 2014

## Matt Connors speaks with Ricky Swallow (2014 Whitney Biennial, January 2014)

Matt Connors: I was pondering your recent work last night, while making a cup of tea with my sort of ritualized hot-beverage setup (favorite teakettle, favorite mug), and it got me to thinking about how the body and (its) perception (vision, touch, taste, etc.) can relate to proportion and material (real or idealized), like how the weight or shape of an object (when held) can determine an emotional reaction or attachment to it.

I feel like your recent sculptures play with these ideas. For one, you're taking on actual vessels (cups, vases) and other kinds of very human-shaped forms that immediately illicit a kind of muscle memory in the viewer's brain. In a way you are reducing them to pure form and proportion, radically limiting material and color. Do you feel like you are playing with a kind of semiotics of forms, shapes, and colors? Especially since most viewers are not able to touch the works, they become almost signs or ciphers . . .

Ricky Swallow: Proportion and a series of reductions seems key; perhaps "abbreviation" is the right term because it proposes a type of editing of the object, without forfeiting a comprehension of that object. I really like this idea of a viewer's mental/emotional "muscle memory" in relation to certain objects. I see my process in part as a means of returning objects, so that the object can assert itself in an autonomous way, have its own singular logic, yet retain some associations of use or function, and at times historical references. The subjects themselves arrive riddled with narrative histories and I think remaking the thing that abbreviation, redirects the object into more formal territory. When a sculpture isn't working, sometimes it's falling too heavily on a reference or function. In approaching certain subjects you have to be aware that you're a guest, and for me personally there is a predetermined freedom in that, as well as some responsibility to act/make/behave well.

The material change from cardboard into bronze seems like a way to finalize the form without losing its studio-built logic . . . despite the industrialized process they go through, they are still rooted in a very personal or individual place. I'm glad, too, that you mentioned color. It's still the most stressful thing for me ("I'm new here"), specifically because it can change the associations of the sculptures so much, or, to take a hit from Robert Morris, increase the "intimacy-producing relations."

MC: I think this seesawing between visual representations and indications of function, zooming in and out from a concrete sense of scale to a ridiculous disjointedness, contributes to an overall sense of destabilization—of logic, of form, of narrative even. There's a certain sense of authority that one immediately feels when encountering a beautifully made, well-proportioned object, that gets sort of derailed when its sense of function is contradicted. The result, for me, has a hyperpersonal, sometimes dreamy logic. Do you think this puts you into some sort of relationship with surrealism?

RS: A useful way for me to think about surrealism is to relax any understanding we have toward an object or subject, to allow for transformation. I think of the work of Christina Ramberg, Robert Therrien, Konrad Klapheck, Domenico Gnoli, or Roy McMakin, for example. Each has produced experiential works rooted in a certain amplification of daily materials, forms, and imagery, with a sense of transformation and peculiar material tightness that I admire—a "dreamy logic," as you put it.

I started practicing Transcendental Meditation this year, and one of its strangest effects happens when looking at objects as you come out of the rest period following meditation. For a brief moment you have absolutely no associations with these things. You just see the structure, form, and color with an accentuated materiality that's more alien than abstract.

MC: I like the idea of a sustained, defamiliarized focus—it's telling of the evolution your work has undergone over the years. It seems like you experienced a moment of permission, allowing barriers between your personal and professional fascinations to disappear. Even though, for artists, these barriers are pretty amorphous to begin with.

In the bronzes, I can feel the impulse that we share as obsessed lookers and collectors, a kind of taxonomy of fascinations, all being fed into the process of making. In a way this permission is also a realization that there are no unworthy avenues for artistic inquiry—the humorous, the narrative, the surreal, not to mention teacups, pinch pots, chair backs, or kachinas . . .  Does this moment of synergy between private and professional strike a chord at all?

RS: I'm drawn to objects that are rudimentary in form and color, things that "say it simple." Many of the objects I collect have either been made with a type of material economy related to the maker's familiarity with the form through a repetitious practice, say a potter's, or due to a reliance on limited materials and palette, as in earlier Navajo and Pueblo jewelry. The aesthetic produced by such conditions, the authenticity and magic of the forms, is awesome, and so is their energy. Functional items of ritual—used for ceremony, healing, sitting, drinking—appear so free of any prescribed ego or extraneous design.

Occasionally there's a sculpture I can see coming out of a specific form at home. This black flag relief I'm working on relates to a Tobia and Afra Scarpa brass sconce in our entrance—its curve, the way it hugs the wall with grace and weight equally. The first vessels I cast from collated pieces of cardboard into bronze were literally formed around cups, bottles, and crucible forms I had collected. The patinas I've developed often approximate a ceramic glaze I like or the pigmented quality of mineral paint evident in Native American artifacts, specifically Hopi.

Collecting things is a habit, and making things is another, and I treat them as equally instructive rituals. I really believe in learning an object: its identifiable characteristics, provenance, and chronology, especially via dialogue with those more familiar with the material. Within the crowd of veteran vendors at flea markets and Native American antique shows, which I frequent, there's a generosity of information buzzing around. The history behind these artifacts often goes unrecorded, so there's a constant reassessment of physical characteristics, an obsessive object-reading.

MC: I see this transparency in your bronzes, revealing a process and materiality, as a kind of generosity, similar to what you referred to in communities defined by their elective affinities (which ideally would be true among artists and art audiences, right?). It makes these pieces really legible, referring to objects or functions in the physical world. But at the same time they are quite mysterious and incredibly fluid. How do you think such a determined clarity leads to the undefined, multivalent presence of the finished pieces? Do you think your work gains mysterious steam, so to speak, from reading the pieces over time, or as sequences in an exhibition constructing their own formal vocabulary or grammar? Or do you think "ours is not to wonder why"?

RS: I always aim for clarity in the sculptures, but never a clarity that could occlude any subjective “walkabout” the object could take. So much of the success of any work is intuitive, it’s exciting when improvised behavior produces a form that can be further developed into a sculpture or series. I hope there is a developing formal vocabulary to what I do, and as far as gaining “mysterious steam,” who could hope for more, right? I really dig it when someone responds to the work in a way outside of my own logic, or makes a connection to another artist’s work or tradition of objects I’d never considered.

I like this line from the psychotherapist Adam Phillips: “We are always too daunted by who we are.” I think by making things, making art, you get to offer something that’s so connected to yourself, yet ultimately has the capacity to form an identity beyond your control.

Ricky Swallow, b. 1974, San Remo, Australia. Lives and works in Los Angeles.

Matt Connors, b. 1973, Chicago. Lives and works In New York and Los Angeles.

## Cardboard Age by Michael Ned Holte (Ricky Swallow: Bronzes, June 2013)

A tall, bone-white candle with a matching white flame; a black top hat doubling as a spouted pot; a red pipe issuing smoke in the shape of a French curve; a turquoise vessel, patchworked and porous: all visual conundrums assembled from corrugated cardboard sheets and shipping tubes in varying sizes, then cast in bronze and patinated to arrive at compact but densely-layered objects Ricky Swallow has referred to as “bootlegs.” The term implies duplicitous behaviour, and indeed, the artist’s recent sculptures in bronze eagerly await viewers with complex interplay between the second and third dimensions, sly allusions art historical and otherwise, and other sleights of hand: Sometimes, as Magritte emphasised, a pipe is not actually a pipe.

Despite the presumptive historical references – the Deco-ish curves of a yellow “lamp,” for example, or the “candle” that inevitably recalls one of Richter’s Kerzen – these bootlegs are not appropriations, but approximations. And for a material as reliably stable as bronze, Swallow’s bootlegs are remarkably unreliable proxies for originals that may have never existed. Material misapprehension has always been central to Swallow’s concerns, regardless of material. In his near-hallucinatory wood sculptures, which comprised most of his output from 2002 to 2009, blocks of limewood or jelutong were intricately carved to imitate the forms and surfaces of a diverse range of substances – animal, mineral, and vegetable – and often in startling juxtaposition. The artist’s transition from wood to bronze was largely pragmatic and gradual, with the earliest bronzes, including a trio of balloons covered with barnacles, following closely from the logic of the wood works.

However, a significant shift in his work occurred circa 2008 when cardboard was introduced into the process with a punctured archer’s target found by the artist – a readymade that he cast in bronze and titled Bowman’s record. A commonplace but versatile material, cardboard is as important to the resulting bronze sculptures as is the bronze, weird as that may sound. In an ongoing series of targets (each is titled “Plate” and numbered), the transition from cardboard to bronze exemplifies the makeshift quality of the former, which also provides each work with a readymade texture and detail – representing a significant shift from the artist’s fastidious (and labourious) fabrication of detail and texture in the earlier wood sculptures.

Casting also affords the artist an opportunity to produce individual sculptures in multiple, but many of Swallow’s bronzes (including each“Plate”) are in fact unique objects, with the cardboard originals lost in the process – “burnouts,” in the jargon of the foundry – though the textural quality of cardboard is maintained. These cast bronze sculptures activate a complex exchange between endurance and ephemerality, between past and present – and, presumably, the future.

The artist also repurposed fragments and scraps of the tattered targets to form patchworked cups, jugs, and crucibles: Literally, none of these “utilitarian” vessels, cast in bronze, holds water. In their archetypal simplicity of form and seeming fragility, these vessels suggest antiquity – occasionally emphasised with a blue or turquoise patina – and reveal the artist’s extensive working knowledge of the vernacular traditions of folk pottery as well as design objects. Field Crucible (Turquoise), 2010, indirectly calls attention to the process of casting – specifically, to the vessel that holds bronze ingots as they are heated to the melting point, with the crucible and liquid metal glowing orange. At the foundry, on an industrial stretch in Burbank, California, Swallow notes the homely charms of several of these silicate objects, encrusted with

evidence of daily use – not to mention a sculptural appeal he likens to a crater-glazed pot by Gertrude and Otto Natzler.

If you have occasion to lift one, you'll find that Swallow's bronzes are heavier than they look – in large part because they immediately read as cardboard or, more specifically, painted cardboard, with the familiar rhythm of corrugation or the coiling seamline of a shipping tube left plainly intact. "Cardboard" is a lay term apparently dating to the end of the 17th Century and generically referring to a wide variety of industrial products made from densely compressed paper pulp. As art material, cardboard entered the picture relatively late and is closely associated with the development of Cubist collage and sculpture, with Picasso's Maquette for Guitar, 1912, as apogee. This assemblage is strung as if an actual instrument, with its strings leading to a sound hole constructed from a cardboard cylinder – an important precedent, one can safely assume, for the younger artist's use of the shipping tube. Not coincidentally, Swallow's bronze Reclining Guitar with Dials and Retired Instrument (Yellow) – the latter recalling Man Ray's Gift, 1921, as much as Picasso's guitar – arrived exactly a century later.

But art history is a point of entry, rather than a landing. In the modernist paradigm, collage and assemblage afforded the potential for radical material juxtaposition; for Swallow, a material (wood, cardboard, bronze) acts a unifying agent for abutting unlikely pairings of objects (barnacle to skull, hammer to guitar body) in order to arrive at a new sculptural presence that transcends the sum of parts.[1] In Swallow's bronzes, cardboard provides continuity, but also versatility. In its everyday plenitude it offers the prospect of modular play and scalability – witness, for example, the stepped, matryoshka doll-like scaling of Staggered Hats (Soot), 2011.[2] If evidence of weighty bronze is skilfully hidden in these works (or lightened, visually), their cardboard origins are in plain sight, present in their absence.

——

In his earlier carved wood sculptures, the human skull played a significant recurring role, positioned in unexpected, provocative juxtaposition with familiar objects – stuffed into a beanbag chair, or swaddled in a folded sheet of paper, or besieged by barnacles. In his transition from wood to bronze, the skull has all but disappeared. The clock – a haunting figure of time, in its relentlessness – might now be said to stand in its place, and unnervingly, these clocks are "faceless," too.

Still, the figure is constantly conjured in Swallow's bronzes, most often via metonymic signs: hats, masks, a splayed book, a pipe issuing "smoke," cups and other vessels – a world of objects, all calling attention to utility and, hence, the absent body of the user. Many of these sculptures are full-scale, which is to say scaled to the human body, and particularly to the hands, offering haptic points of entry for a viewer.[3] "There is something so simple and ritualistic to the making of the sculptures, and they often refer to forms of personal ritual, or portable activities," notes the artist on the intimate scale of these works. "The lamps, for example, are scaled to personal reading lamps as opposed to a room lamp, the jugs imply a kind of pouring oneself, drinking oneself, or handling… the small clock being an alarm clock, to alert-awake oneself."[4]

At this scale, each of Swallow's bronzes seems to address – isolate – an individual viewer. In Magnifying Glass with Pipe, 2011, a lens appears to magnify the red tube on the other side of it when viewed frontally; viewed from the side, the illusion crumbles quickly when it becomes clear that the

“magnification” results from the use of a thicker tube. The simple effectiveness of the trick recalls Roy Lichtenstein’s 1963 canvas Magnifying Glass, which takes advantage of two sizes of Ben-Day dots. (And perhaps I should add that Lichtenstein’s painting is black and white, whereas Swallow’s Magnifying Glass, with its red “pipe,” marks a relatively dramatic shift to applied colour for an artist previously given to sculpture expressing only the inherent “colour” of a given material.) Both works call attention to the viewer, exacerbating the act of looking. Binder with Magnifying Glass, 2011, works according to the same principle, with two sizes of binder rings fashioned from cardboard.

More recently, a series of pedestal-based figures have emerged, assembled from “castoffs” used in other sculptures (top hats, the magnifying glass, French curves) along with sections and scraps of otherwise unaltered paper tubes. The artist has referred to these as sculptures of figures, rather than figurative sculptures, and the difference is more profound than it might sound. Swallow’s bronzes veer ever so slightly toward abstraction without quite crossing that imaginary categorical boundary: A “figure” that is obvious from one angle suddenly collapses into a precarious jumble of parts from others. With the reduced scale of these figures, the viewer’s body is not reflected, yet it is – we are – still implicated, as with the magnifying glasses or cups. The fragments of these figures, maquette- like “studies,” seem barely held together, provisional, as if we might easily reach in and rearrange the parts.

——

Circa 2010, Swallow moved into a house in Laurel Canyon, and the gradual renovation and furnishing of the residence became, by all appearances to those familiar with the process, a full-time occupation. The artist is a diligent, studious, and perhaps obsessed, collector of objects – chairs by Hans Wegner and Walter Lamb; light fixtures by Alvar Aalto; weed pots by Doyle Lane; dusting brushes by Carl Auböck; turquoise inlay jewelry by Zuni metalsmiths; hand carved bird decoys; a pair of paintings by friend Richard Aldrich, and so on.[5] The continual circulation of these objects, both physically and virtually, undoubtedly informs not only the artist’s domestic realm but also the development of sculptures in the studio. But beyond an obvious and overwhelming attention to detail, from (mere) fastidiousness to “wizardry” (a term of respect), it would be difficult to immediately put one’s finger on exactly how the inlay on a Zuni bolo tie or a glazed ceramic snake made by a blind artist finds its way into one of Swallow’s sculptures – if it indeed does. On the other hand, a found candelabra constructed from modified cattle branding irons – loosely resembling a David Smith sculpture, intentionally or not – might have a more obvious influence on the artist’s own genetic coding.

Likewise, Swallow has confided that his bronze patinas tend to follow these bootlegging instincts, whether approximating the “dull manganese blacks of Hans Coper” or the “whites of these Aalto sconces we have – it’s a white that seems warmed up by years of light or dried out- brittle-matte.”[6] The introduction of colour, usually as a monochromatic patina arriving at the end the process, is crucial to the success of these bronze sculptures. Whether bone white, deep cadmium yellow, or “antique” turquoise, colour not only completes each work but activates and structures the whole bootlegging enterprise: Swallow’s patinas are alchemical disguises, transforming bronze back to cardboard or even suspending a sculpture ambiguously between such definitive categories.

The full transition from to bronzes from “woods” also coincides with a shift in working methodology entirely appropriate to the medium in question. If Swallow’s wood sculptures represent a slow and steady realisation of a predetermined form – say, a prone backpack, emerging from a block of jelutong wood

through labourious carving and filing – his bronzes reflect a process closer to the speed of thinking: an additive, accumulative process, hinting at trial and error. While there is still plenty of work that goes into each bronze, the labour happens in fits and starts rather than as a sustained hum. In multitasking, sculptures often emerge simultaneously, evidenced by fragments and details migrating from one sculpture to another – not unlike Wegner chairs, Aalto lamps, Navajo blankets, books, records, and Inuit figurines ceaselessly circulating around the Laurel Canyon house. See, for example, Standing Figure W/ Pockets & Buttons, 2011, with its negative space of a French curve in a scrap of cardboard, deployed as a female figure's flowing hair, or the cardboard rings of comb binding that reappear, somewhat incongruously, to bridge to folded planes in the otherwise abstract Binder Form (turquoise), 2012.

Exactingly composed, these sculptures often imply a similar temporal (and stylistic) multiplicity – each a circuitous journey from one time to another. When visiting a museum I am similarly reminded of the coexistence of multiple temporal realities. Not the contemporary art museum or modern museum but the comprehensive museum – the musée imaginaire – where a room of ancient Korean pottery gives way to Arts and Crafts furniture which sits unexpectedly across the hall from a gallery of still-fresh photorealist paintings, and so on. The flea markets Swallow haunts are surely just another kind of "museum without walls."[7]

?——

"What is done is done," Dorian Gray tells Basil Hallward, referring to the mysterious death of actress Sibyl Vane.
"What is past is past." The incredulous artist replies to his unaging muse, "You call yesterday the past?"

That question, divorced from its context in Oscar Wilde's gothic novel, becomes the subject of Swallow's wall-mounted Font Study, 2011, which deploys the text in four lines of rounded "type" fashioned from sections of whole and split cardboard tubes, all in white:
YOU CALL
YESTER-
DAY
THE PAST?

The text seemingly marks an unexpected appearance of language in the artist's sculptural work, though for some close observers of the artist's broader output the arcing typography of Font Study surely echoes the bronze house numbers ("2461") Swallow designed for his Laurel Canyon house, by "freewheeling" dowels of red wax and casting the numbers in bronze. Of course the temporal theme borrowed from The Picture of Dorian Gray fits perfectly alongside clocks, lit candles, and dapper accoutrements of a bygone era: A small top hat hangs from a hyphen projecting from the "R" in the second line. The aging portrait of an eternally young Dorian Gray will likely unnerve any artist eager to create timeless works of art.

The relentless work of time is a consistent refrain in Swallow's sculpture, particularly as the artist transforms ephemeral cardboard into the timeless bronze, and comingles past and present: A patina is the visible effect of time, as in aging or weathering, but also the chemical reaction used on bronze and other metals to simulate the visible effect of time – a surface treatment that exists on the surface and somewhat below it, too.

The labour involved in realising Swallow's carved wood sculptures is so immediately apparent – perhaps even hyperbolic – I have wondered if the amount of work invested in the more recent bronzes has become practically invisible. After a trip to the bronze foundry, where the artist maintains a dedicated workstation dubbed the Swallow's Nest, I have no doubt there's plenty of work to be done, though much of the "heavy lifting" has become sublimated in the resulting objects. In fact, I've become convinced that Swallow is never not working, which is to say the swirl of his activity – from the foundry to the studio, from late night eBay scrolling to predawn flea market cruising – is, indeed, all work. When I reluctantly advanced the term "tinkering," a word I can relate to one but some might shun, Swallow replied, "I think part of being a tinkerer is that there is never a true resolution or end to any prescribed activities – activities produce more activities, collecting produces more collecting..."

"I think I've always had a very restless energy – even distracted disposition whilst at the same time being very obsessive about making things and learning about how to make things... When I say there is never any resolution in tinkering, I mean the very nature of it requires you can't leave anything alone – there is always room for tweaking-improving." [8]

A year ago or so, Swallow recommended to me a book by Donald Hall titled Life Work, which is part memoir, part instruction manual – and in total, a meditation on life and death. [9] In it, Hall humbly notes the obvious: "There is only one long term project."

——

[1] Elsewhere I've noted a parallel in Swallow's sculptures to the music of John Fahey, where a solo guitar performance, in that musician's inimitable finger-picking style, unifies diverse compositional elements—Kentucky bluegrass, military waltzes, Gregorian chants, and so on—with no regard to supposed hierarchies. See my text "The Grit and the Oyster," in Ricky Swallow: The Bricoleur, edited by Alex Baker (Melbourne: National Gallery of Victoria, 2009).

[2] In this sense, Swallow's use of cardboard also recalls his use of readymade PVC pipe and other plastic modules, circa 2000.

[3] Here, I am indebted to Michael Fried's understanding of the way readymade handles function in Anthony Caro's tabletop sculptures, which might represent an important precedent for Swallow's pedestal-based sculptures. See "Caro's Abstractness" and "Anthony Caro's Table Sculptures, 1966-77," both in Fried, Art and Objecthood (University of Chicago Press, 1988). The artist also called my attention to his interest in Californian artists such as Ken Price, Ron Nagle,Vincent Fecteau working at a more intimate scale, which provided various models and even tacit approval for the scale Swallow's own bronzes. "Working within the scale that I have the past few years is also a type of reaction... almost consciously, to distance the work from L.A. big boy sculpture—where surface and decisions can seems overlooked or allowed to become more generalized." Email to the author, September 10, 2012.

[4] Email to the author, August 10, 2012.

[5] Swallow's interest in objects is often closely tied to their maker, and in this sense his collecting doubles as a kind of scholarly project, invested in individual artists developing bodies of work over time—often including artists who are anonymous or"flying under the radar." One important example of the latter is Doyle Lane (1925-2002), an African-American ceramicist working in Los Angeles from the mid-1950s through the 1980s, known for his colourfully glazed "weed pots" and tile constellations he referred to as"clay paintings."

[6] Email to the author, July 17, 2012. Swallow also notes, "I think the traditional turquoise patina also came out of looking at early Aalto Paimio-era furniture, Walter Lamb, and ahem, well, turquoise bolos! The yellow, or brighter colours—reds, blues—I can say were most likely triggered by a kind of continual surface envy I have for the ceramics (especially the weed pots) of Doyle Lane."

[7] I am referring to André Malraux's notion of the Musée Imaginaire, sometimes translated as "museum without walls." See Malraux, The Voices of Silence, translated by Stuart Gilbert (Princeton University Press, 1978).

[8] Email to the author, July 18, 2012.

[9] See Donald Hall, Life Work (Beacon Press, 2003).

## Introduction by Ricky Swallow (Grapevine~ Magdalena Suarez Frimkess, Michael Frimkess, John Mason, Ron Nagle, Peter Shire, June 2013)

GRAPEVINE~ was conceived as way of exhibiting a group of artists who have all worked in clay, in California, for more than 40 years. Throughout that time these artists have always sought to contradict the limitations of the medium in terms of its craft parameters. It might sound obvious, but there is something about this work brewing on the West Coast. I can't imagine it surfacing anywhere else with its strangeness paired with such dedication to finish and quality. The show is intended to reflect a fan's perspective rather than an exhaustive attempt to chronicle the history of the ceramics movement in California, as the Pacific Standard Time exhibitions recently performed this function perfectly.

It's revealing to consider the works on view in light of the current state of ceramics in the contemporary art world. Though clay is drawing new attention among younger artists, these 'visitors,' as one ceramics elder described them to me, seem to be focused on bringing out the medium's malleable qualities. Meanwhile the 'permanent residents' are very much still exceeding themselves in the studio, their contributions deserving of a renewed focus. The specific agendas put forward by publications like Craft Horizons in the 1960s and 1970s, calling for the pro motion of new directions in ceramics, could today seem like a fence, limiting any cross-pollination between craft and contemporary practices. The work in GRAPEVINE~, much of it created during the extended 'lost weekend' the medium experienced over the previous decades, resonates more than ever right now as a retroactive influence.

Historically the very nature of the ceramic medium implies the tradition of setting up a studio (or pottery), building the appropriate kilns, and constantly per forming glaze and clay body tests in order to attain the desired effect. To me, this romantic (some might say dated) discipline is the thing that separates the work of the permanent residents from that of the visitors. For instance, John Mason still mixes his own clay body in an archaic industrial bread mixer, and Michael Frimkess develops latex gloves with stainless steel fingernails in order to throw his large vessels to the desired thinness. This rigor results in specific families of forms that can be identified throughout each artist's body of work—in many cases recur ring motifs span decades of object-making—and a sense of serious play is always checked by technical discipline. With Mason, for example, we see the 'X' motif evolve from an applied compositional graphic on early vessels, through to the monolithic form of Red X (1966), and then into a more spatially open plan in his slab-built geometric crosses and orbs of recent years, which function as turnstiles directing space, cycling back to the rotational roots of pottery.

Perhaps even more surprising is the range of cultural information that makes appearances in so many different ways: I'm thinking about how art deco, custom car culture and vernacular architecture inform Peter Shire and Ron Nagle's work; how popular staples of American comic imagery adorn the classic ally-inflected pots of Michael Frimkess and Magdalena Suarez Frimkess; or the way Mason's work has such a Jet Propulsion Laboratory-engineered vibe. The more familiar gestural 'abstract expressionist' style of the 1950s and 1960s, which for many defines ceramics-based work from California, is only a small part of the story. In subsequent decades these artists found their own specific languages, a natural evolution as the medium was applied toward more purely sculptural ends and technical developments expanded possibilities. At the same time, they were crossing paths in studios and universities, influencing each other and the course of the ceramics movement at large. For instance, Nagle was in San Francisco paying close attention to the gang surrounding Peter Voulkos (who is represented in the exhibition by a small work gifted

to Mason during their time as studio mates); this gang eventually became the group of ceramicists associated with Ferus Gallery here in Los Angeles, though I was surprised to learn how influential Michael Frimkess' early works were for Nagle at the time.

Revered by other artists working with clay, Frimkess never received the same ongoing exposure as Ken Price, Billy Al Bengston and Mason, who were his peers studying under Voulkos in the mid 1950s at the Los Angeles County Art Institute (later Otis College of Art and Design). Whilst Frimkess, or 'Frim' as he was known back then, would describe himself as a 'bonafide kook' in his formative years, Mason recalls him possessing an uncanny ability on the potter's wheel from the day he arrived in Voulkos' class. (He had requested entry in the class after receiving the vision of a perfect pot being thrown during a peyote trip.) Michael's paper-thin pots are thrown from hard clay without water and high fired in just under an hour. In solo pieces from the late 1960s and 1970s, scenes of satire, American family values and race politics are depicted in a cartoon narrative format, played out around the con tours of the pots.

Though Magdalena Suarez Frimkess came from a sculpture background, studied in Chile, and never trained formally as a potter, her indifference to her talents, and her incidental predicament within the medium, are refreshing. She began by working collaboratively, glazing Michael's pots from the time they met in the early 1960s in New York, before starting to make her own sculptures and hand-formed pots in 1970. Arriving a few thousand years after the Greek and Chinese vessels they resemble, and a few decades before the pictorial pots of Grayson Perry, these objects occupy a place between many genres and continue a rich tradition of narrative storytelling through pottery. In doing so they collapse any rational expectation between the pot's form and its glazed design; in one pot, Dizzy Gillespie is paired with the repeated font for the stomach medication Tagamet, and Disney characters pose alongside Magdalena's own family members in another.

Peter Shire, some years younger than the others in the show, was also a keen observer, later becoming friends with Nagle and Mason —it was Peter who first introduced me to John. Interestingly, there was already an existing connection between Shire and Frimkess, as their fathers were acquainted through labor unions in Los Angeles in the 1940s and 1950s, and both artists were raised in creative households infused with progressive politics, modernism, and craftsmanship. Since the mid-70s his brightly colored, blocked-assembled vessels and abstracted teapots have allowed him to funnel an encyclopedic passion for design from every angle: automotive, Bauhaus, and Russian Constructivist aesthetics all inform his own mediations of functional domestic forms.

Furthermore, one can perhaps trace connections between Shire's Memphis-associated work and the moment when Nagle's earliest, more malleable cup variations gave way to a pre-Memphis form of architecture. (To fully appreciate the extremity of both Shire's and Nagle's aesthetic is to locate its influence —and humor—in the experimental forms of American potter George Ohr [1857–1918]. 'The Mad Potter of Biloxi' had the weirdness dialed in 70 years before the public was ready to receive it.) More recently Nagle's work has featured stucco-like, spongy, ikebana-core tableaux, and 'archimetric' structures made with a model maker's precision; parts are shaped, adjusted and fitted together, and glazed with multiple firings to wizardly effect. Indeed, they are 'things' that have an abstract pulse, a distilled temperament, asserting themselves with an authority beyond their scale.

The fastidious steps behind all of the works in GRAPEVINE~ remain available to the viewer as tight information, yet always with enough variation and nuance to locate them within the studio environment as

opposed to more familiar traits of outsourced fabrication. The formal training of a potter (a skill which is now weeded out of the few ceramics programs still in place) is visible in all of this work: proportion, the lift provided by a well-trimmed foot, and the energy and circulation of the clay itself are still defining factors.

For the most part all included works have come directly from the artists, and I am grateful to have been allowed such a degree of physical searching and selecting during studio visits. The privilege of this access has both shaped the show in a very tactile and subjective manner, and allowed a greater understanding of the historic, technical, and conceptual conditions that inform each artist’s work.

## A Replacement of Its Former Self by Christopher Bedford (Lesley Vance & Ricky Swallow at the Huntington, November 2012)

In 1950 and then again in 1951, David Smith received a John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship, an award that permitted the artist to set aside, at least temporarily, his teaching responsibilities and commit himself unfettered to the studio. Unsurprisingly, those years proved productive for Smith, yielding at least three enduring masterpieces: *Australia* (1951), *Hudson River Landscape* (1951), and *The Letter* (1950). Variously interpreted as a series of deliberately unintelligible glyphs, a plea to an exlover, a transcription of the famous letter in James Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake*, and a note to his mother about Ohio, *The Letter* is above all and most vitally a translation of one thing into another. *The Letter* is made intelligible as such by an inscription and a salutation that bracket a body of text made up of what Smith called "object symbols."[1] Yet everything Smith achieves in the work turns the traditional function of the letter on its head: the weightlessness of paper is given the heft and rigidity of steel, its fundamental portability nullified, the object tethered to the earth by a base; the letter's opening salutation is reduced to an abstract squiggle in space; and the body of the text does not communicate via a shared language, but dumbfounds with a succession of hermetic symbols known only to the author. The only element that can be easily understood as content is the signature, and not because the words are easily read, but because Smith's autographic mark is eminently recognizable as an image (or brand), making language, in turn, irrelevant. Smith, then, takes a form—the letter—with a standard cultural application defined by language, and denies that conventional utility, making it function only as an image to be looked at.

That the Australian-born sculptor Ricky Swallow would feel a kinship with David Smith and with *The Letter* in particular should come as no surprise to anyone familiar with the former's work. Consider the following quotes, the first from Swallow and the second from Smith:

> Growing up around a more working-class environment, the closest things to sculpture I was exposed to were the crafts related to the fishing profession my father was involved in—cray pots (lobster baskets) made from tea tree limbs, lead net weights poured into molds in our yard, or my father's welded cube structures for storing ropes . . . there was always this anxious necessity to keep oneself occupied . . . So I went off to art school with a fairly limited understanding of what constitutes being an artist, yet this observed daily ritual of work—of stubborn traditions followed and rudimentary materials employed—was something I adopted myself and I still believe in those basic principles . . . "hands out of pockets!" as my father would say.[2]
>
> The mystic modeling clay in only Ohio mud, the tools are at hand in garages and factories. Casting can be achieved in almost every town. Visions are from the imaginative mind, sculpture can come from the found discards in nature, from sticks and stones and parts and pieces, assembled or monolithic, solid form, open form, lines of form, or, like a painting, the illusion of form.[3]

Both artists point resolutely to a philosophy of making that is grounded practically and ideologically in the labor activities of the working class, and to the materials, objects, tools, and processes of that world as the literal genesis of their efforts to forge a new world of images, a world of and about the one we all occupy. Smith believed that work begets work, and Swallow shares that conviction. But while both artists champion the notion of a laboring class, and count themselves as workers, their respective stagings of that position are somewhat different. As a practicing artist, Smith's relationship to the working class ideal was intentionally indexical, hinging on a set of processes and materials that related directly to the physical work done by men in foundries and factories, men with whom he felt a deep affinity. That Swallow shares Smith's investment in the virtues and value of work is clear, but his materials and processes do not parallel the labor performed by working men in the same way. Instead, the link back to "common people and common things" is actuated on the level of imagery, or as Swallow notes, "ritual" acts and objects familiar and accessible to all.

Take, for instance, Swallow's interest in domestic subjects, particularly vessels. *Stacking Cup/Tapered (Bone)*, 2011, is a modest object, measuring 4 1⁄4 × 5 1⁄4 × 4 1⁄4 inches—domestically scaled, one might say—cast in bronze and then patinated, in an edition of three with one artist's proof. Like many of his most recent vessels, the object is sketched from memory using a flexible system of cardboard and tape, its form continually embellished and improvised to eventually yield a splintered vision of its former self. Once cast and patinated—this one a soft, matte white—the surface of the object faithfully captures its deliberately rough means of construction; the imperfect joins in the cardboard and folds in the tape mark out a peculiar kind of facture that has become Swallow's signature. Quite clearly, then, neither mimesis nor trompel'oeil are of interest to the artist. His effort isn't to faithfully reproduce a likeness, but to denote the process of thinking and working from the quotidian to the quietly extraordinary; from the observed world, to something other. The central principle at work here is the same one that governs Smith's *The Letter*, namely translation: the process by which the artist makes of the familiar and useful, an object that is

markedly neither.

While Smith relied on his processes and materials to tether his work to the working milieu that was his intended point of reference, Swallow's approach to the same idea is, as we've already seen, more oblique and less specific. He gravitates to objects defined by what he calls an air of "collective ownership," their utter familiarity as things in the world making them particularly effective as blank canvases for the imposition of new meaning.[4] Though workingclass ethics, craft, and tools may be his point of reference, his objects signify more democratically than that, being everyday and common in the broadest sense. As a result, perhaps, Swallow's work exerts a magnetism that seems disproportionate to his choice of subject matter; one might even say that his sculptures should not be as interesting as they are! *Single Pot with Lid (Bone/Soot)*, 2011, could be a teapot or a shrunken watering can—old, discarded, or hurriedly fixed up to extend its life just a little. But the pot and the lid, both cast in bronze with a delicate white patina, sit atop two bronze pedestals cast from sawn wooden blocks, signifying immediately their status as objects to be looked at. As a still life, *Single Pot with Lid (Bone/Soot)* conforms to the basic conventions of the genre in that it proposes the forthrightly mundane as an object for contemplation. But this sculpture, like much of Swallow's work, scrupulously avoids the laden symbolism associated with the highest achievements of the genre. His assemblies do not, for instance, follow in the footsteps of Netherlandish vanitas painting of the sixteenth and seventeenth century, or the Renaissance memento mori tradition, and nor, for that matter, does he appear interested in advancing the radical formal experiments enacted on the genre during the artistic ferment of the early twentieth century. If Swallow has a kinsman within the ranks of the stilllife tradition, that person might be the Italian painter Giorgio Morandi, who, like Swallow, returned again and again to the same subjects, but even this comparison, while formally apposite, lacks any deeper logic.

*Single Pot with Lid (Bone/Soot)*, and many other works like it, command one's total attention not because they are allegorical, represent a self-evidently important subject, advance a wildly radical formal agenda, are pointedly topical or political, or trade in the easy appeal of modernday spectacle. Rather, they embody the possibility—modestly and simply— of pure invention: a message made all the more accessible, direct, and resonant because Swallow performs his transformations on the most commonplace objects, objects available and used by each of us daily. When he reimagines the form of a lamp in *Table Lamp Study (Cadmium Yellow)*, 2011—casting his cardboard invention in bronze, and finishing the composition in yellow—the resultant proposition is remarkable precisely because Swallow wrings the elusively new from the familiar with the opposite of extravagance. The same applies to the aforementioned *Single Pot with Lid (Bone/Soot)*. Perched atop their diminutive black monoliths, the two components are quiet and unassuming in their scale and subject; yet in the curiousness of their construction and in their subtly orchestrated flirtation with familiarity and utility, they achieve the same autonomy as objects that Smith achieved so memorably with *The Letter*. If one of Smith's objectives was to parlay the life, ethics, and materials of the working man into the basis for a life in art, then Swallow's still-evolving practice might be understood as a comparable effort to demystify artmaking—to strip it of its hermeticism and specialization—and argue through his own subjects and working processes that everyday contexts and the most incidental objects can be the basis for a compelling idea; in other words, to make aesthetic ideas seamless with the common world in a very concrete sense.

Ricky Swallow builds himself into the material world through this method of translation, complicating common objects through his labor, inscribing in them a new order of meaning that has everything to do with his eye, mind, and hand, and little to do with the object's former outward signification. What they were made *for* is now immaterial; what matters now is *how* they were made and that they demand a new kind of attention. The artist himself notes: "this economy of labor and materials toward something that's a translation of a traditional object, a replacement of its former self, is something I love."[5] As Swallow works to further populate *his* world of former selves, the force of his ideas and the reach of his vision into our world become more and more apparent.

1 David Smith, quoted in *David Smith: A Centennial*, ed. Carmen Giménez (New York: The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, 2006), 404.
2 Ricky Swallow, e-mail message to the author, March 12, 2012.
3 David Smith, "Tradition and Identity," transcript of a speech given on April 17, 1959, at Ohio University in Athens, Ohio, which Smith attended for a year in 1924–25, http://www.davidsmithestate.org/statements.html.
4 Ricky Swallow, "500 Words," *Artforum*, Jan. 30, 2011, http://artforum.com/words /id=27455.
5 Swallow, "500 Words."

## 500 Words by Ricky Swallow (Artforum.com, February 2011)

*Ricky Swallow's second solo exhibition at Modern Art, London, features a new body of cast bronze objects created from archery targets the artist found in Los Angeles, where he lives. Presented on plinths and installed on the wall, these works synthesize various references from art history, from British ceramics to California modernism. Here, Swallow discusses his approach to creating the show and his new processes in the studio.*

COLLECTING OBJECTS––such as modern ceramics, Native American pottery, baskets, and Inuit carvings––and arranging them in different rooms in our home has, for some time, run parallel to my art practice. For this show, I wanted to capture that sense of vitality––how collecting has affected my studio logic and the forms of the pieces themselves. There's a quote I like by Ken Price where he talks about working with the cup as a form, and the ways in which it presents formal restrictions that create a structure to work within. He also speaks about the objects' universal quality, how the cup can exist as its own subject matter. That really articulated and echoed some of the concerns I had when I began constructing the vessels, bottles, bowls, cups, and jugs that the other sculptures in this show evolved from. There's a collective ownership and understanding that one brings to such recognizable forms.

I've also been thinking about the individual and handmade aspects of my work. This has led to a concern for the pacing of each exhibition. When I was planning this show, I knew that I didn't want there to be much in the viewer's peripheral vision. It needed to have the kind of breathing room that is there when I actually make each sculpture, even though in the studio environment everything looks kind of crazy and cramped. In the gallery there is that space––that ratio of intimacy of construction and experience that is important to me.

In my wooden sculptures, all of the gestures of composition happened in the very early stages of each piece, I would settle on a subject and then transcribe it in wood. Carving is such a measured act; it's the process of removing information in order to gain a form. With the new works, however, it has been a very additive practice of constructing forms, with more room for improvisation. What I was missing in my previous studio habits, or what I needed now, was a daily routine in which constructing pieces from materials at hand could inform new sculptures and lead to different sets and groupings of works. The idea of a cumulative process for me relates to both a collector's logic and the kind of studio pottery production where the sequence and subtle variation in pieces produce unexpected combinations. I've always been drawn to artists who are prolific while working with an economy of subject, materials, and scale where constant tweaking and rearranging of their established language becomes the most important tool; Lucie Rie, Hans Coper, and Giorgio Morandi are perfect examples.

There's an archery range adjacent to where we walk our dog in LA, and that's where I first found the cardboard targets, which the archers often leave on the hay bales after practice. I've been collecting the targets there for two years now; I feel like one of those weird guys scouting the beach with a metal detector trying to find something of value after people depart. The targets are often in various states of decomposition (and pierced differently based on the experience of the archer). Bringing them into the studio marked the first time I had incorporated a readymade form into my work. And there's been a weird sort of liberation in that––the fact that they are made, composed, and created by someone else and then collected and recast by me. There was an intuitive transition of treating the targets like a base material, in

the same way that I had treated wood or clay in the past. My work has always essentially been about translation, passing a subject through various processes on the way to a fixed or permanent state, with each different material influencing the creation of new forms.

I've been spending time in the flea markets here, looking at "make-do's." Make-do's are antiques that have been creatively repaired or adapted––given an extended life rather than being discarded. I'm also interested in these other folk art forms––mosaic vessels, and furniture that has been clad in tile from broken pieces of other ceramic objects. Again, this economy of labor and materials toward something that's a translation of a traditional object, a replacement of its former self, is something I love.

I took a bunch of photographs of these objects for reference, thinking that there was something in that tradition of gleaning one form from other disassembled forms that I could use. So I made the jugs, which are constructed in the studio from cut-up pieces of the targets and other cardboard. It's interesting to begin with this material that already has a history, the punctured surface providing a sort of vulnerability (rendering the sculptures functionally obsolete from the outset). I wanted to make something that was more structurally sound and permanent out of these pieces and decided to cast in bronze. The patina of the bronze is an important element––it can dictate the form so differently. Most of my patina references come from ceramic glazes. Bronze is a kind of beautiful alchemical wizardry, which I'm learning more about through working with a great foundry here that indulges my experiments—developing new results from tweaked recipes and accidents