



Ted Vogel

January 23 to
March 9, 2014

Ronna and Eric Hoffman
Gallery of
Contemporary Art
Lewis & Clark College
Portland, Oregon

There is a remarkable consistency and clarity of his vision, subject matter, and materials incorporated, threading together decades of creative excellence. From Vogel's ceramic and mixed-media installations and his ongoing investigations of nature, his artistic sojourns have produced an enduring body of work that mirrors his affinities for the natural world and our place within it.

Peter Held



Altered States, 2010
Earthenware
15 x 28 x 25 inches

Ted Vogel's Migratory Path in Clay

Tree trunks represent a link to nature; they are anchors in the landscape maintaining a safe haven for tired birds to rest and nest. Yet the symbol of the nurturing tree is mitigated by its reduction to stump status, marking the passage of time. Nature is also shaped by human hands, through craft itself, which transforms the natural into the imagined. Ted Vogel's four-decade migratory journey with clay can be envisioned as tree rings, concentric circles that reveal their history with noted patterns of growth and development.

The field of studio ceramics has undergone sea changes since 1950, marked by high and low tides of critical discourse and ever-shifting reactions to the forces reshaping the clay world. Our vocabulary and conversations have evolved over time. Dramatic swings in practice, the marketplace, academia, collecting, and exhibition presentation have been introduced with each successive generation of artists.

During the 1970s and '80s, the ceramics field was shaped, in part, by the counterculture movement, in which youth questioned core values and assumptions of the status quo. Legions of post-World War II baby boomers became disillusioned with what mainstream society represented, yet optimistic that creating art was a worthy pursuit. As droves of students sought deeper meaning in their lives through the practices of art and craft, new idioms of self-expression were developed. There was a surge of students enrolling in art schools, and many of the current leaders of the field today gained their artistic foothold during this time. While their approaches varied, most subscribed to a postmodernist philosophy, with color, pattern,

ornamentation, and cross-cultural references abounding. Idiosyncratic in their practice, many ceramists saw their work aligned more toward the fine arts rather than the craft field.

When Ted Vogel was an art student interested in pursuing a career as a ceramic artist, America was witnessing expansive growth in academic craft programs, a small but developing marketplace for crafts, and burgeoning support groups such as the National Council on Education for the Ceramic Arts (NCECA) that bolstered both morale and opportunities. The clay community was centered on itself, creating a hermetic environment that was reassuring but, in retrospect, constricting. Vogel's worldview, perhaps narrow at the time, was nonetheless exhilarating; he was young and energetic, and the future held infinite possibilities.

Vogel discovered his passion for clay during this epic moment in time. In reviewing his vast accomplishments in the field, I find it uncanny how many ways Vogel's career trajectory in the arts has paralleled and crisscrossed my own: we were art students in the 1970s and early '80s, we both held curatorial and administrative positions, we were resident artists at the Archie Bray Foundation for the Ceramic Arts in Montana, we coordinated the NCECA's national conference in our respective cities (Portland and Phoenix), and we currently hold academic positions. An overarching common purpose has been service to the arts community, a conviction that is deeply embedded and ultimately gratifying.

Born on the windswept plains of Fargo, North Dakota, Vogel in his childhood led a transitory life, as his father's calling as a minister caused the family to

The Word, 2013
Porcelain, earthenware, and dictionary
10 x 24 x 24 inches



move to various communities throughout the western states. Vogel awoke to the lure of nature as a child. Birds assumed a special place as symbols of freedom and wildness. Conversely, he loved the way birds were portrayed as the ceramic kitsch reproductions his grandmother displayed in a china cabinet. This push and pull between nature and its reproduction has marked a path through his life, leading him from academic ceramic studies through a maze of other craft initiatives to arrive at a hybrid art that incorporates a medium appropriate to the situation.

Vogel planted deeper roots in the Rocky Mountain region when he took a position as director of the ceramics program for the Arvada Center for the Arts and Humanities, located outside of Denver. By default, he became the exhibition designer for the center's gallery and museum, and for four years, he was its gallery and museum director. During his curatorial tenure, his efforts garnered national recognition for the exhibitions he presented, including the Carroll & Hiroko Hansen Collection of Ceramic Art and a Red Grooms survey, as well as focus shows of ceramists he brought in for workshops, such as the masters Rudy Autio, Ken Ferguson, David Shaner, Akio Takamori, and Robert Turner, among many others. After a decade-long tenure, Vogel was ready to refocus his artistic impulses back to studio work by accepting a residency at the prestigious Archie Bray Foundation for the Ceramic Arts.¹

Relishing an opportunity to be immersed in the studio, Vogel commenced creating several bodies of work, drawn from direct experiences of the western landscape combined with personal fictive narratives. Blackbirds,

archetypes of higher intelligence and oracles of the all-knowing, frequently occurred in Vogel's leitmotifs as shadows of ourselves.

It wasn't long before the newly minted director Josh DeWeese recognized Vogel's diverse talents. "Ted was instrumental during the transition between resident director Carol Roorbach (1989–1992) and me; he served as assistant director and assisted me with all the day to day business, being knowledgeable about the Bray's current state of affairs, and having experience working in a non-profit environment. Ted provided the initial vision to establish the Bray's Warehouse Gallery, a defunct raw space previously rented out for storage. Ted conceptualized, designed and oversaw its renovation."² Until that time the Bray lacked an adequate gallery for its resident artists. The inaugural exhibition was *The Legacy of the Archie Bray Foundation: Four Decades of Tradition and Innovation in American Ceramic Art*, organized by the Bellevue Art Museum, Washington.

In 1994, Vogel was hired as assistant professor of art and program head in ceramics at Lewis & Clark College in Portland, Oregon. At this small liberal arts college, during his two-decade tenure, Vogel has instilled in his students the potential of clay as an expressive artistic medium while laying a solid foundation of skill and technical knowledge.

Thanks to his keen interest in documenting the field, the idea of *accessceramics*, an online visual compendium of contemporary ceramics images, was born in 2007. Vogel, along with other associates at Lewis & Clark College, launched the visual database the following year; in a short period of time, it has become a much-needed resource and a model for increasing access to both ceramic art and education. The database now includes more than five thousand images from nearly five hundred artists representing more than a dozen countries.

In a post-9/11 era, many artists who have chosen to work in the medium of clay are now compelled to create for a variety of reasons: personal and private concerns, political and social activism, or the search for a humanistic balance in a seemingly all-consuming technological culture. The cyber highway has accelerated the pace of change, and the rigid boundaries of craft are increasingly ruptured as the field is redefined by engagement with the wider worlds of visual arts and design. We have valued the history of ceramics and embraced its successes, but new ideas and technologies will continue rewriting its future.

Reflecting his illustrious teaching career and studio practice, this exhibition and attendant publication are timely, creating a summation of Vogel's lifelong commitment to his craft. There is a remarkable consistency and clarity of his vision, subject matter, and materials incorporated, threading together decades of creative excellence. From Vogel's ceramic and mixed-media installations and his ongoing investigations of nature, his artistic sojourns have produced an enduring body

of work that mirrors his affinities for the natural world and our place within it.

I ponder the reasons why clay has captivated Ted Vogel throughout his career. Unquestionably, it has provided him with a balance and focus in life, a centering presence informing his worldview. What is it about this seductive material that bonds us with historical and cultural connotations in our everyday lives? This medium, with its manifest associations, is transformative, connecting us at a deeper humane level.

Peter Held

Peter Held is the curator of ceramics at the Ceramics Research Center, part of the Arizona State University Art Museum, Tempe.

¹ For more information about the history of the Archie Bray Foundation, please see *A Ceramic Continuum: Fifty Years of the Archie Bray Influence* (Seattle: University of Washington Press and Helena, MT: Holter Museum of Art, 2001).

² Email dated November 20, 2013 from Josh DeWeese, former resident director of the Archie Bray Foundation (1992–2006).

Passing (For Dad), 2012
Earthenware, cast glass, gold leaf, dictionary,
chair, suitcase, and mixed media
48 x 36 x 37 inches

Overleaf: Shadow, 2014
Carved porcelain, rose petals, digital images, wood
4 inches x 25 feet x 23 feet





Relics of a Tale

Ted Vogel, head of the ceramics department at Lewis & Clark College, has a studio exercise that he performs with his students. He takes an object—let's say a hammer—and he passes it around the room. He asks the students to describe what the object means to them. In the case of the hammer, students might mention an experience making something in wood, or maybe a student has a grandfather who was a carpenter. Mostly, the memories are sentimental or nostalgic. Then Vogel poses that a hammer can also be an instrument of violence—that according to FBI crime statistics, the number of murders committed annually with hammers (and clubs) far outnumbers murders committed with guns. This simple lesson illustrates the narrative power of an object, but, more importantly, shows how the potential narrative can shift dramatically, depending upon the idiosyncratic filter of the viewer.

Vogel describes himself as always having been a collector of objects and a maker of spare parts. In his studio practice, these “parts” are made of clay, kiln-cast glass, digital images, found objects, and other mixed-media elements. Vogel combines these components into works that “read” as narratives, but whose meanings, like those of the hammer in the studio experience, are left to the viewer to discern. Those who have followed Vogel's career for many years will recall that much of his past work invoked the bird and the tree

Relics of a Tale, 2014
Earthenware, cast glass, cast iron, books,
digital images, silver leaf, and mixed media
Dimensions variable





Passage, 2012
Earthenware, digital image
72 x 60 x 14 inches

stump as central images to explore issues around ecology and, specifically, the interaction between humans and the natural world. In recent years, Vogel's work has subtly shifted from ecological concerns to issues pertaining to living a human life, investigating both personal histories and social injustices. His work is now more meditative and reflective, and often taps into themes of memory and remembrance.

The installation *Shadow* (2014) is a moving tribute to an event in Vogel's own life as well as a watershed moment in twentieth-century history. *Shadow* consists of a large shape of a World War II-era plane, slightly distended, as if the shape were a shadow being cast from a low-flying aircraft. The plane's shape is rendered in blood-red dried rosebuds. Strewn across the plane's surface are scattered ceramic feathers. The aircraft shape rests on a "field" of grass, but upon closer examination, the "grass" is digital photographic prints of grass. Both the plane's shadow and the ground upon which the shadow is cast are simulations of an experience Vogel had while he was a resident at the Zentrum für Keramik, a ceramics center in Berlin. Vogel's studio was located in Pankow, a northern district of Berlin located directly under the flight patterns of the nearby Tegel airport. Every day, hundreds of planes would fly overhead, many passing so low that they cast their shadows on the grounds of the studio.

Intrigued by this daily experience and the fact that it was occurring in Germany, Vogel began to research and explore the history of air warfare in Europe and the Pacific Rim during World War II. He observed

how sanitized war photography could be, casting superficiality on the most heinous events. *Shadow* recounts both the sensation one might have had while low-flying planes strafed the earth and the grisly phenomenon of shadows that were actually burned into physicality from the nuclear blasts over Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The fact that the digital photographs of grass are images that Vogel took in his own backyard conveys an anxious sensation that holocaust is not a distant or disconnected possibility; it could occur anywhere. The roses that make up the plane's shadow impart a sense that this installation is also a memorial, and perhaps each blossom represents a human being who was lost in conflict. The feathers that seem to have fallen over the rose-rendered shadow remind one that the human element, implied by the aircraft, is still part of the same ecosystem that encompasses birds in nature—an echo of Vogel's past ecological work—but the feathers also expose a spiritual context to the work.

In *Relics of a Tale*, the backdrop is a grid of digital photographs of black, bare tree limbs, seen as if looking up into the sky on a winter's day. But the way in which the digital prints have been arranged on the wall deconstructs the feeling of a tree canopy and morphs the imagery into a sort of hybrid, domestic wallpaper. The predominant feature on this field of branches is an oversized birdhouse built from the spines of discarded books that Vogel rescued from a library purge. The "house" is constructed of titles such as: *Political Thought in America*, *Anxiety and Disorders*, *Odyssey of a Liberal*, *Sharing the Wealth*, *Life After Television*, *The Book of Saints*,

Campfire Stories—Tales of the Fallen (detail), 2014
Earthenware, porcelain, cast resin, branches, paint, and silver leaf
12 x 19 x 14 feet



Ted Vogel is an associate professor of art and studio head of ceramics in the Department of Art at Lewis & Clark College, a post he has held since 1994. He has a B.F.A. from the University of South Dakota and an M.F.A. from the University of Colorado. His website is <http://accessceramics.org/results/artist/1/>

Web Style Guide, and *To Help You Through the Hurting*. The titles remind us of our place in time and culture, yet because these are books that have been discarded from a library—a supposed pantheon of accumulated human knowledge and achievement—the value and validity of these “modern” concepts (as represented by the book titles) are called into question.

Other emblematic objects are placed on the wall along with the book birdhouse. There are two cast-iron outline drawings of a songbird and a tulip—images that recall the paradox that some aspects of nature are simultaneously both domestic as well as wild. Also in proximity to the birdhouse are two two-dimensional works of art. One is a loose sketch of a bird perched in a tree; the other is a found paint-by-number painting of a wooded path. There is a visual tension between these two images—the freehand impression and a prescribed-by-the-rules rendering, both of which describe an idyllic experience of nature. But there is more going on in this installation. From the perch on the book birdhouse hangs a chain; at the bottom of the chain is a small sculpture of a human head. Just beneath the head, as if prepared to catch it if it falls, is an open human hand atop stacked stumps. This is a precarious assemblage, uncertain of its stability. To the right of the tableau is a theater curtain, and the “ground” is elevated, as if this installation is a diorama or something occurring on a stage. This artificiality—or the posed question, “what is real and what is artifice?”—is a theme that Vogel increasingly investigates, probing, perhaps, what is

real and what is false in both his own personal narrative and that of the collective.

Altered States is an earthenware sculpture by Vogel that both harkens back to his earlier works using birds and stumps and leads to Vogel’s more recent social concerns. The base of the sculpture is a trunk, but the trunk is shaped like the United States of America. Where one would expect to see tree rings on the top of the trunk, one sees a human thumbprint. Vogel concedes that fingerprints resemble the dendrochronological patterns recording tree growth—but the fingerprint also implies human touch, and the thumbprint, specifically, recalls issues of control: being “under someone’s thumb.” The USA-shaped stump serves as a perch for three black birds that hover on the periphery of the stump. The birds—stylized, but perhaps most reminiscent of crows—are both slightly sinister and oddly comforting, as if their presence implies a sense of hope in the wake of peril. But any exact reading of *Altered States* would be a disservice to Vogel’s audience. His installations and sculptures are, after all, constructed from relics, but they do not reveal the ending of the story. The alternative interpretations are up to the viewer.

Linda Tesner
Director
Ronna and Eric Hoffman Gallery of Contemporary Art

Works in the Exhibition

All works are courtesy of the artist.

Campfire Stories—Tales of the Fallen
2014
Earthenware, porcelain, cast resin, branches, paint, and silver leaf
12 x 19 x 14 feet

Object Lesson: Glove
2014
Cast iron and earthenware
32 x 12 x 12 inches

Passing (For Dad)
2014
Earthenware, cast glass, gold leaf, dictionary, chair, suitcase, and mixed media
42 x 30 x 30 inches

Relics of a Tale
2014
Earthenware, cast glass, cast iron, books, digital images, silver leaf, and mixed media
Dimensions variable

Shadow
2014
Carved porcelain, rose petals, digital images, wood
4 inches x 20 feet x 15 feet

The Wave
2014
Earthenware
84 x 63 x 3 inches

Object Lesson: Feather
2013
Cast glass and earthenware
6 x 24 x 24 inches

Object Lesson: The Word
2013
Porcelain, earthenware and dictionary
10 x 24 x 24 inches

Passage
2012
Earthenware and digital image
72 x 60 x 14 inches

Altered States
2010
Earthenware
15 x 28 x 25 inches

Photography
Dan Kvitka: cover, inside front cover-1, 3, 5, 6-7, inside back cover
Robert M. Reynolds: cover, 8-9, 10, back cover

A special thank you and much appreciation to Justin Counts, Cooper Jamieson, Marian Kidd, Ian McNicol, and Jonathan Russell for their dedicated assistance with this project.

On the front and back covers:
Relics of a Tale (details)
2014
Earthenware, cast glass, cast iron, books, digital images, silver leaf, and mixed media
Dimensions variable



Ronna and Eric Hoffman
Gallery of Contemporary Art
Lewis & Clark
0615 S.W. Palatine Hill Road
Portland, Oregon 97219

Recycled paper

