



Jordan McDonald is a Clay Studio Resident Artist who makes pottery and vessels that utilize a wide array of techniques and materials. We recently asked him questions pertaining to his work and his 5-year residency at The Clay Studio.

By

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What are you exploring with your art? What issues are you concerned with or interested in telling in your artwork?

When I'm looking at pottery in books or museums, I'll often come across something unexpected about the way pottery was used, or the way it was constructed or decorated, or find a type of pot that I had never seen before. I'm always struck by the way pots can be so accessible, but under the surface there is so much complexity and beauty. There's something about finding something beautiful that makes you want to replicate it, or savor it somehow. So, I think when I'm making things in the studio, I'm really trying to tell the story of that great pot I saw, or read about, or just those gorgeous lines and dots in the middle of that plate in that book I just picked up. I can only hope that my work gives someone else that same feeling of discovery, and that over time the work will keep revealing itself.



When did you begin working with clay?

It was 2002 or so, and I was just starting out at Sheridan College. I wanted to become an illustrator. My route between classes took me through the Craft and Design building where every day I saw people covered in mud and sawdust, sitting on handmade benches, eating their lunches on beautiful plates and bowls. Nobody really carried around the paper Tim Horton's cups — they drank coffee out of mugs. I thought it was wonderful and hilarious. Also, perhaps most importantly, everyone seemed to be working hard, and actually enjoyed what they were doing. So I later enrolled in the Craft and Design program at Sheridan.



Tell us about your experience as a Resident Artist at The Clay Studio. How is the residency supporting you in your current work, how has your work evolved since being here, and how do you see it progressing over the next few years?

The Clay Studio gives me a place to experiment and establish a career in the field of ceramic art. I also think it takes a long, long time to figure out ‘who you are’ as an artist — to find your own voice — so having a such a long residency (5 years) allows me to make that happen in a supportive environment. Although I think my core interests in making work have not changed since joining The Clay Studio, I’ve become more focused and disciplined in the way I articulate those ideas. When my residency started, I think I was making models for the work I wanted to make. Everything was small and there wasn’t that much risk associated with making it. I think I doubted myself somehow and the work was too quiet and too polite, so it was easily overlooked and misunderstood. I think as the work gets bigger and bolder, I feel like it can speak for itself and stand on its own. I’d like to work on more groupings of objects — sort of like installations. I’d also like to try making complete table settings for elaborate meals.

You've referred to the history of ceramics as "largely the story of a pot's portability as it travels to new places and cultures." Where would you like to see your ceramics travel to?



That's a tough question, because I feel it's my job to make the work, put it out there, and see what happens. I do hope that people find my work fulfilling somehow, whether to serve food or to decorate a space. I think that's one of the great things about making pots — their utility can be so specific and open ended.



What is your favorite thing about being in Philadelphia?

It's a great city. It started to feel like home the moment I arrived here. I also met my wife here and we just had a funny little baby boy together. I think that might be my favorite thing about being in Philadelphia.

Do you have a favorite style to work in or favorite object to make?

I really enjoy making baskets. When I was in graduate school, I ran out of money because of a problem with my student loans. So I started to cut holes in pieces as a way to conserve on clay. The cuts became both the decoration and the subject of the work. This is how I started to make baskets; I don't think I would have started cutting pieces otherwise.

Who is your biggest influence as an artist?

Every teacher I've ever had could top that list. I have been very fortunate to work with so many generous people. Probably the one person that I think about the most is Rosanjin. Not only his work itself, but also the way he ran his studio, having other people working for him, and the way he was sort of brash and uncompromising — he just seemed to do everything with gusto. I think he teaches me to be less timid in the studio.

Who made your favorite cup?

Matt Wedel made my favorite cup. He's not known for making cups, but rather for large ceramic sculptures. I was lucky enough to trade with him when I was a student at NSCAD.



Jordan McDonald studied ceramics at Sheridan College in Oakville, Ontario, received his BFA from Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, Halifax Nova Scotia Canada, and in 2011 his MFA from the New York State College of Ceramics at Alfred University, Alfred NY. McDonald utilizes a wide array of techniques and materials in his work — primarily pots that are rooted in the history of ceramics and explore the relationship between objects and function.

You can visit his website and see more of his work mcdonaldjordan.tumblr.com.

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