



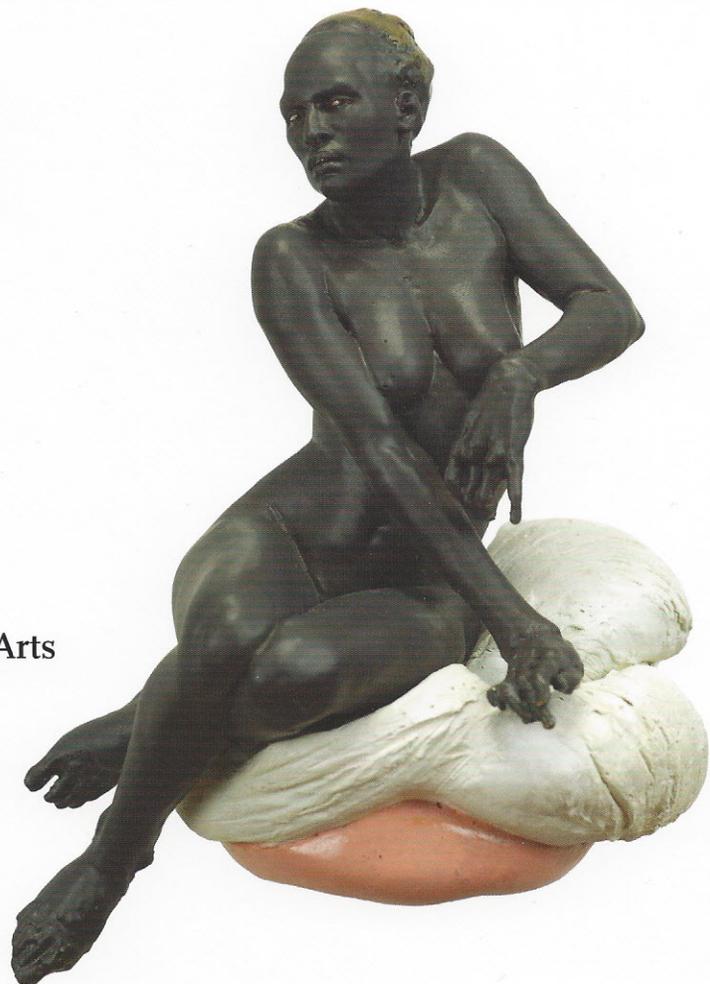
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2012 NCECA EMERGING ARTISTS:

Dylan Beck, Nicholas Bivins, Chandra DeBuse, Darian Johnson,
Peter Christian Johnson, Mathew McConnell

Dylan Beck: An Overwhelming Trust in Progress

My artwork explores the interaction between built space and the natural environment and the idea that manmade landscapes express a society's material and political priorities. There is a great deal to be learned from examining a society's built spaces. When looking at the United States we find a large amount of land devoted to the automobile, retail, and large-scale monoculture farming. This type of land use shows no consideration for the existing natural landscape and environmental processes and systems. Consequently, one could make certain assumptions about the general priorities of Americans.

The lack of consideration for the natural environment has created a myriad of environmental issues, such as excessive runoff, habitat fragmentation, and a general decline in ecosystem health. Though the development of the American landscape since World War II embodies all of the above systemic problems, it has created, until recently, a robust economy and the high standard of living that most Americans enjoy. It is difficult for me to take sides in this argument. Though my personal beliefs tend toward criticism of this kind of land use, I attempt to maintain a neutral perspective in my creative research.

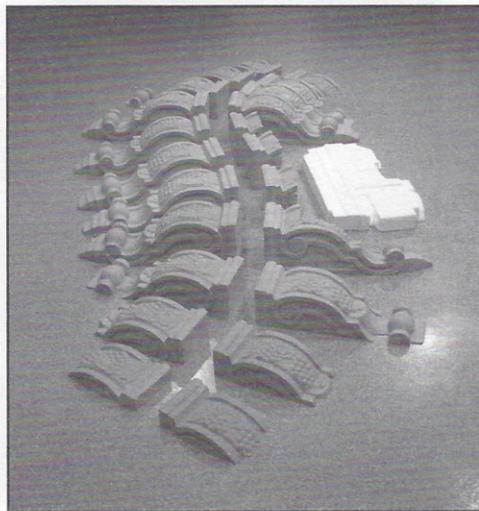
The condition of Hypermodernity has created places that have no relation to the natural environment in which they reside. These places include airports, shopping malls, and various housing developments. Hypermodernity, in brief, entails an overwhelming trust in progress, new technologies, and the future. This blind trust leads to a lack of consideration not only for the past, but for the present as well. After all, in a world of 24-hour news feeds, a never-ending abundance of information on the Internet, and high-speed travel, by the time we start to consider the present there is a flood of new information to evaluate. This makes it difficult to relate to the present, let alone try to situate the present in terms of the past, even the recent past. This is in opposition to the condition of postmodernism, in which

there is an attempt to situate things in relation to cultural and historical information. In terms of our relationship to the landscape and spatial issues, this can have detrimental consequences.

Recently I have been concerned with the prevalence of developmental practices and advances in infrastructures (transportation and information) that take no account of the natural landscape, existing architecture, or the public realm. In our hypermodern world there is doubt as to whether history carries any meaning or relevance to the "now." Why would one care about the past when the buildings and products of the present and future are exponentially better than what came before? Americans have stopped caring about formal architecture and arrangement of space in favor of the perceived convenience of auto-centric, single-use development, and, of course, advertising space.

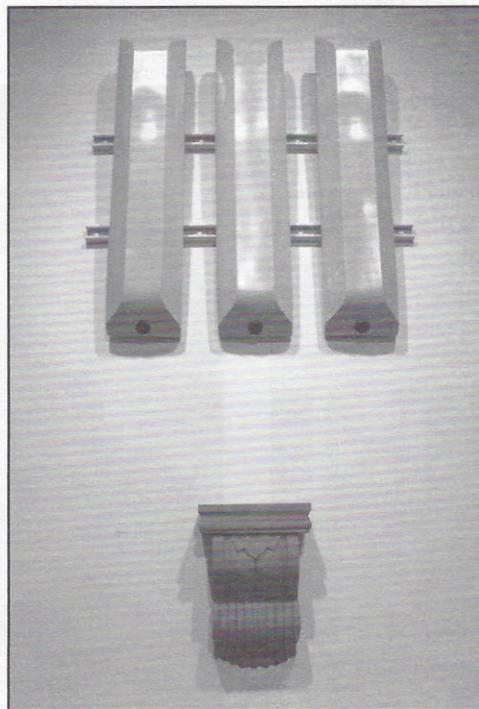
Many decisions regarding spatial relationships within our built environment depend on the flow of goods and consumers from place to place. We have totally abandoned planning that considers the pedestrian, creating landscapes only fit for vehicular travel: non-places devoid of human presence. This is a result of late capitalism. Unmanaged emergent growth, known as sprawl, has contributed to problems with transportation, the environment, and the economy. At the same time, this growth has created new housing and employment opportunities. One only need consider the American dream of owning a home and having a piece of land (while still enjoying the conveniences of the city) to understand how suburban development was born. Suburban sprawl created a glut of affordable housing, promising that the American dream was obtainable. Considering that the notions of fulfillment and universal social desires were manifested in the suburban neighborhood, it is hard to be too critical of so many people's decisions. Therefore, I try to situate my work between criticism and veneration.

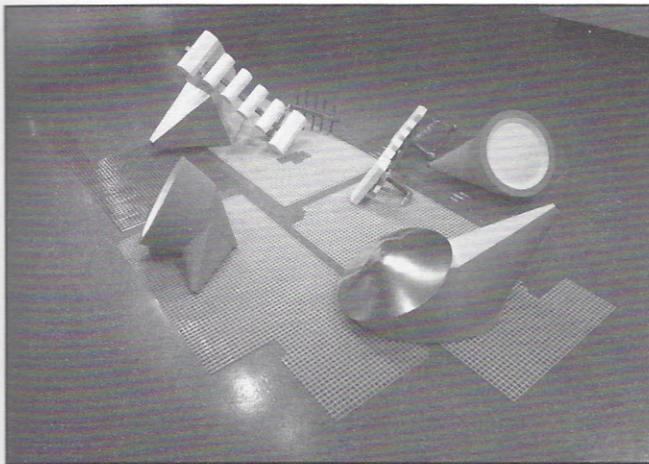
Similarly, there is a dialectic between my aesthetic attraction to images of built landscapes and my feelings toward the issues that they embody. I use several tactics to illustrate this dialectic. My practice is often image-based; images and symbols tend to dominate my creative thinking. Through the examination of the world around me,



Dylan Beck, *Deep Cut*, 2009, terra-cotta, bisque porcelain, 8" x 96" x 36".

Below: Beck, *The Air Must Be Thick With Words*, 2008, porcelain, terra cotta, paint, steel, rubber, 50" x 32" x 8".





Dylan Beck, *Microwave Safe*, 2011, porcelain, underglaze, paint, steel, rubber, plastic, 30" x 100" x 84".

aerial photography, and satellite imagery, I select ubiquitous forms. I then use that information to construct sculptural arrangements, drawings, digital images, animations, etc., employing the same spatial relationships that are inherent in our built environment. As a means of creating a congruous material-to-concept relationship, I construct my sculptures from materials that are found in the retail and domestic setting, along with those used in home construction.

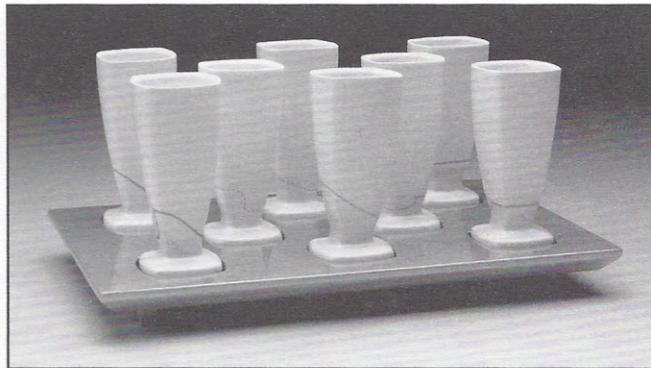
I often employ industrial techniques of fabrication and computer-aided design to create my works. For example, I might select a handcrafted reproduction of a historical architectural element and then create a mold to cast it in multiples. This is a means of illustrating the decline of handmade architectural ornament due to cost-saving measures and efficiencies in industrial methods. My material choices are not solely dictated by my training as a ceramic artist. I am primarily driven by the idea of a material-to-concept relationship. Therefore, ceramics is not always the appropriate material to communicate a particular concept. I believe in a holistic approach to art making, an approach that balances aesthetic judgment, craftsmanship, concept, and material.

I often see beauty in the mundane and sometimes in the very things that embody poor planning and environmental degradation. This condition intrigues me, and I make use of the contradiction in my practice. It is of great interest to me to observe how complex and multifaceted most of the aforementioned issues of planning, development, environment, and the like can be. That is why my work neither condemns nor celebrates the built environment. Rather, it is designed to encourage a more critical discussion of the issues that we currently face due to the encroachment of the built environment upon that of the natural world.



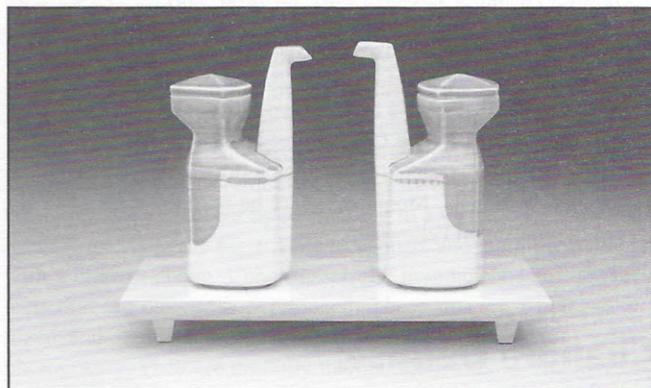
Nicholas Bivins: Methodologies of Utility

I make utilitarian wares using a precise, minimal, and efficient geometric language as I maintain a focused interest in looking for a personal definition of perfectly handmade. It is this fascination that propels me to practice my craft every day while continually searching for a satisfying balance of how much evidence of handwork I put



Nicholas Bivins, *Toasting Cups* (8), 2012, Pots: porcelain, glaze, decals; Tray: MDF, automotive paint, rubber, 10" x 14" x 10".

Below: Bivins, *Cruets* (2), 2012, Pots: porcelain, glaze, decals; Tray: MDF, automotive paint, rubber, 11" x 5" x 9".

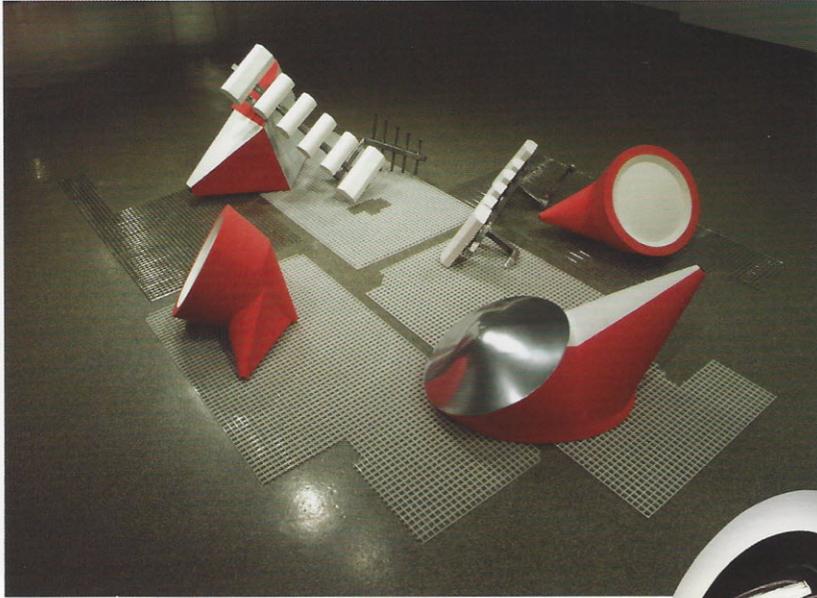


in, and how much handwork I take out.

My approach to making objects is greatly influenced by my experience in athletics. Repetition, reduction, and precision are methodologies I used in sports that I now translate into my aesthetic sensibility. It is through the making process that I determine the degree of tension between perfect and handmade in my work. I keep a rhythm that is informed by my idea, my patience, and my knowledge of ceramic process that compels me to complete each task and move forward to the next step. This rhythm is a balancing act as I try to stretch my desire for tightness and precision with my requirements for forward motion and productivity.

The roots of my ideas involving sets stem from looking inwards at my life and noticing reoccurring needs. I then imagine how others share these needs with me as a way to work outwards and connect to my audience. I combine my observations of the particular need I want to fill, with my imagined ways of solving that problem better. In doing so, I work with perpetual questions about how to find a balance with my aesthetic goals, functionality, versatility, and ergonomics.

Through use, the connection between maker and user stimulates the body and mind by providing a dynamic experience that helps keep life from becoming anonymous and mundane. During the use of my work, the simultaneous attention of the user on the objects and the attention of objects on the user reveal the unique nature of personal production for personal use. The act of use is then enriched by objects that require the viewers' attention while at the same time allowing them to enjoy the experience of replenishment. This perpetual shifting in focus shows that through function, the object holds power in its passive waiting for an active participant. This precise collaboration with the viewer/user then allows a more conscientious operation, thus presenting questions about what occurs when the perceived traditional definition of handmade is denied, the ambiguity of perfection, and the role that objects play in our lives.



Microwave Safe, 2011, porcelain, underglaze, paint, steel, rubber, plastic



Deep Cut, 2009, terra-cotta, bisque porcelain

“I often see beauty in the mundane and sometimes in the very things that embody poor planning and environmental degradation. That is why my work neither condemns nor celebrates the built environment. Rather, it is designed to encourage a more critical discussion of the issues that we currently face due to the encroachment of the built environment upon that of the natural world. Therefore, I try to situate my work between criticism and veneration.”

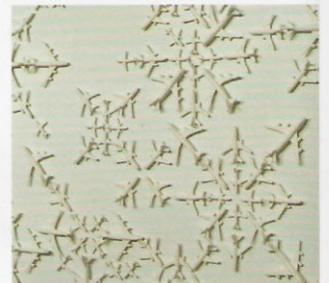


Normal-Field Instability, 2011, porcelain, underglaze, resin

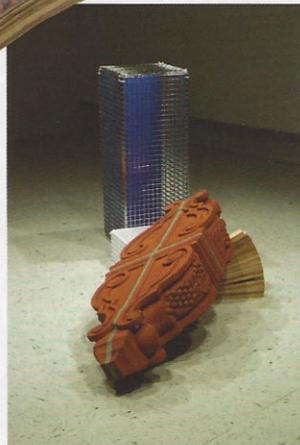


Laminate Filigree, 2010, porcelain, carpet padding, plywood

National Monument, 2010, colored porcelain, Astro turf, carpet padding, plywood



Domestic Conglomerations (detail), 2011, bisque porcelain



Yesterday's Tomorrow, 2011, terracotta, grout, wood shims, plastic, air filter



The Air Must Be Thick With Words, 2008, porcelain, terra cotta, paint, steel, rubber

