

Aristotle's Artists

By Kate McGraw / For the Journal

It was the Greek philosopher Aristotle who described science (and art) with “The whole is greater than the sum of its parts.”

The man knew what he was talking about. Eight ceramic pieces going on display at Santa Fe Clay today illustrate his point perfectly.

A show inspired by and featuring art made of components has been a longtime goal for Santa Fe Clay owner Avra Leodas. “It’s something I’ve been thinking about for a long time – work that is made up of components,” Leodas, a well-known expert in fine ceramic art, said. “The problem was picking my favorite eight artists.”

She chose eight internationally known artists, each of whom contributed one piece to “The Sum of Its Parts.” Artists attending today’s reception also will give short gallery talks, beginning at 5 p.m.

If you go

WHAT: “The Sum of Its Parts,” group show by eight international ceramic artists
WHEN: Today through June 1; artist talks, 5 p.m. today; reception 5-7 p.m. today
WHERE: Santa Fe Clay, 545 Camino de la Familia (in the Railyard)
CONTACT: (505) 984-1122/santafeclay.com

The pieces in the show, whether stacked, woven, strung together or combined, deserve the label sculpture, Leodas said.

“There are only eight pieces in the show, but some of them are pretty large-scale installations. These sculptures become monumental through the arrangement of modules and parts to achieve a larger vision.

“It’s a very beautiful show,” she added.

The eight participating artists include Eliza Au, based in British Columbia, whose sculpture is composed of eight cast ceramic modules; Nathan Craven from Roswell, whose tiny extruded pieces are being stacked into a backlit wall installation; Heather Mae Erickson, who slip-casts delicate functional tableware that nestles into a completed sculpture; Del Harrow of Colorado, who builds complex abstract ceramic sculptures displayed on hand-made tables; Elizabeth Hunt of Santa Fe, who weaves clay into a wall tapestry of tight coils resembling an oversized blanket; Maren Kloppman of Minneapolis, who creates crisp, pillow-like modernist wall sculptures; Jae Won Lee of Michigan, whose fragile, feather-like porcelain sculptures are strings of hundreds of tiny segments; and Julie York of Vancouver, who makes small domes with interior arrangements of ceramic parts that appear to have come from an underwater landscape.

Del Harrow

Harrow, of Fort Collins, Colo., has been building forms with coils of clay for almost as long as he has been working. "It's a process that had an immediate and very strong resonance for me, which I think comes from both the pace of building/making and also the scale that one can achieve through this process," Harrow said in an email interview.

He said his piece "really grew out of just thinking about different types of shapes that would be interesting to hand-build with coils."

"Alongside the ceramic forms, I also built the table they sit on," Harrow added. "The table works as something between a table, a pedestal and a 'frame.' I also wanted the table to have a feeling of almost fragile delicacy to suspend the ceramic forms and also to complement them: talk to their qualities of volume or line."

Nathan Craven

Craven lives in Roswell. He said in a telephone interview he began working with extruded clay as "kind of one of those lucky ah-ha moments."

"I was a grad student and was working with long extrusions and slabs as stacked stuff, and I noticed how it looked and thought I'd look at it later. 'Later' came and I broke up all the extrusions and stacked them in a little cubby, and it was a hit. This was at the Rhode Island School of Design."

For this show, he created a piece that is stacked against a backlit wall.

"I've done a lot of wall installations," he said. "I've found light varies greatly and affects the pieces greatly. Santa Fe Clay's space has no windows and I wanted something strongly backlit. I really like the reflection of the light coming through the extrusions. So I decided to try my hand at creating my own light. It's just another exploration."

Maren Kloppman

Kloppman said in an email interview she originally trained as a potter to work on the wheel. "I was introduced to hand-building in art school. The technique I am currently using to create my wall pieces is called 'hand-building with slabs.' I work with drape and slump molds to shape soft porcelain slabs before assembling forms with leather-hard components. A limited color palette of surfaces provides my perimeter for a reductive vocabulary to emphasize volumes and edges," she explained.

Her piece is called "Shadow Wall Pillow Stack."

"This piece encapsulates my concept of balancing a visual dialogue between archetypes and architecture," the artist said. "As archetypes, the wall pillows relate to abstract shapes of birds in flight or hulls of boats. They can also be interpreted as fragments of architecture and, through the shadows they project, convey aspects of space otherwise imperceptible."

Jae Won Lee

Lee lives in Michigan and creates fragile, feather-like pieces arranged in strings. "I use a pinching technique to make multiple parts of small petals, pods, or flowers. Most often, I poke holes in the parts to thread them together to make hanging units," she said in an email interview. "I enjoy the tactile experience of handling wet, soft clay in my hands and I remember how the plastic, malleable nature of clay had a great impact on me when I worked in clay the first time in college. The repetitive process of my work in clay is meditative and mindless."

For Santa Fe, Lee created a series of objects the artist called "frail hope, internal distance."

"I engage in a repetitive act of making multiple parts of petals, seedpods, or buds in yearning for belonging,

wholeness and rootedness,” Lee said. “This reductive tendency regarding forms, coupled with stripping colors to subtle modulations of white, reinforces their mystery. Segments gather into a narrative or healing force; then dissipate to the non-specific.

“I live close to the earth with a Romantic’s reverence for nature and nature is my subject in terms of distilled, restrained, minimal expression infused with spiritual implications,” she said.

Elizabeth Hunt

Hunt lives and works in Santa Fe. She created a white piece that looks like it was woven. “I started working with this series about 10 or so years ago, copying a small seed pot,” she said in an email. “They are usually a closed form and have a small hole in them. After making several of them, I was playing around with what I could do with them. They looked so beautiful as a group I ended up making more and more. I loved the relationship they had with each other, the small nuances that crept in as I worked each one and the pattern they formed as a whole.”

“The Sum of Its Parts” will remain up through June 1.

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