

Home	Dining	Movies	Music	More
------	--------	--------	-------	------

 **Back**

Ceramics artists turn Milwaukee galleries into their 'Material World' for NCECA conference



Photo credit: Courtesy Milwaukee Institute of Art & Design - Milwaukee Institute of Art & Design: Sharon McCoy's "Help with Flying," a work made of clay and found objects, will be part of the juried student show.

By [Mary Louise Schumacher](#) of the Journal Sentinel | **Posted on March 19, 2014**

Few artists are as tied to their materials as potters, who work physically with mud, the stuff of the Earth, the stuff of which we're made. Ceramics is a forthright art form in its essence.



This week, one of the largest gatherings of artists anywhere on the planet takes place in Milwaukee, with as many as 5,000 ceramics artists and enthusiasts here for a national conference.

This year, the National Council on Education for the Ceramic Arts will tackle one of the thorniest questions of art — how does meaning become embodied in a material object?

The response to the group's 48th annual conference, called "Material World" this year, comes in the form of talks, panel discussions, regional tours and demonstrations through Saturday and centered at the Wisconsin Center, 400 W. Wisconsin Ave. The cost of the conference is \$300 and \$230 for students (with day passes going for less).

But it also comes in the form of more than 80 exhibitions staged mostly in and around Milwaukee but also across the state, including in Madison, Sheboygan, Racine, Mineral Point, Paoli, Platteville and Verona. Most are free and open to the public.

Often as aligned with contemporary art as craft traditions, these mostly small exhibits explore some aspect of the year's theme and gather artists who are aligned stylistically or conceptually in some way.

They are the result of a national call for artists and are organized for the local galleries by specialists in the field. There are also many locally generated shows, planned and curated by the local venues themselves.

These concurrent exhibits represent what is perhaps the largest citywide collaboration among arts venues, from major museums to small galleries, to date and a rare incursion of curatorial know-how into our city.

There are many exhibits at the Wisconsin Center that are free and open to the public, and the conference often attracts a contingent of ceramics tourists, who come mostly to look and buy.

Most venues are holding receptions, with the majority scheduled on Thursday evening, what promises to be a sprawling, Gallery Night-like, ceramics-centric art crawl.

Of the exhibits taking place around town, here are several that I'd recommend.

DeLind Gallery of Fine Art

450 E. Mason St.

Artists whose work has existed outside of the trends and fashions of the ceramics world will have work on view as part of "Off Center: Mavericks, Misfits and Heretics." The work of these six artists gives priority to content, including politics and social issues. The artists include Barry Bartlett, Eric Hollender, Patrick Loughran, Annabeth Rosen, Lisa Wolkow and Arnie Zimmerman. A reception will be held Thursday from 5 to 9:30 p.m.

Elaine Erickson Gallery

207 E. Buffalo St., first floor

Several notable ceramics artists from across the country will be on view in "Coast to Coast," including Bruce Breckenridge, [Gerit Grimm](#), Rich Hirsh, Minkyu Lee, [Beth Lo](#), Beverly Mayeri, Tom Meuninck, Ryan Myers, Richard Notkin, Richard Shaw and Christina West. I was especially drawn to German-born Grimm's storybook-like figures and Lo's work, which explores ideas about family, childhood, cultural marginality and the artist's Asian-American background. A reception will be held Thursday from 5 to 9 p.m.

Green Gallery

1500 N. Farwell Ave.

Jessica Jackson Hutchins' sculptures "traffic in abjection," or so reported the Portland Mercury some years ago. Wayne Ngan is an internationally known studio potter who also creates sculpture and paintings. New work by these artists will be on view, with a reception Thursday from 6 to 9 p.m.

Greymatter Gallery

207 E. Buffalo St., 2nd floor

This brainy little gallery will present the work of Shannon Sullivan, who explores source material such as fingerprint patterns, ocean currents and cellular forms in objects and installations that combine clay and other materials, such as metal, glass, polymer, wire and acrylic. Sullivan was injured in a car accident in 1999. She broke several ribs, had a collapsed lung, broke her pelvis and had multiple lacerations on her face and neck. Her recovery turned her attention to the workings of the body. She imagined even the smallest parts of her, down to individual cells, as being affected. Much of her work is about cultivating an awareness of these unseen and mysterious internal landscapes. There will be a reception Thursday from 5 to 9 p.m.

Inova

2155 N. Prospect Ave.

One of Milwaukee's more important sites for challenging art and research, Inova will present the first solo shows for two emerging artists, Benjamin DeMott and Lisa Selby. DeMott will explore the physical and intuitive side of working with clay in an installation, a sort of conceptual, fictional workshop. It is described as a "spirited reflection on the labor integral to creativity." Selby is a London-based artist who explores the performative nature of working with clay in installations that combine found objects, sound, video, clay and performance. An opening reception will be held Thursday from 6 to 8 p.m. with a performance featuring Sarah Buccheri and Kim Miller at 7:30 p.m.

J. Nikolai Art

207 E. Buffalo St., 3rd floor

A family-owned business, the Paoli Clay Company in Belleville, Wis., just south of Verona, is celebrated in "Generations of the Paoli Clay Family." From elementary schools to the studios of fine artists, the family-run company provides materials throughout the state and beyond. A long list of artists associated with the company will have work on view. A reception will be held Thursday from 5 to 9 p.m.

Jewish Museum

1360 N. Prospect Ave.

[Dane Youngren](#) creates ordinary but intricate architectural forms with connections to the Western expansion, structures such as train trestles and mine shafts, in the fragile medium of clay. His work explores themes of obsolescence and deterioration. Another installation, "Food: A Sustainable Table," will explore works related to the food industry. A reception will be held Thursday from 5 to 9:30 p.m.

John Michael Kohler Arts Center

608 New York Ave., Sheboygan

A seminal 40-year retrospective of the internationally recognized artists residency program at the Kohler Co., designed to spark collaborations between fine artists and industrial artisans, will feature nearly 350 works of art. More than 400 artists have worked on the production floor, using the pottery, foundry and enamel shop at the Kohler Co. to make works they likely wouldn't have otherwise in their own studios. A reception will be held Saturday from 6 to 9 p.m.

Katie Gingrass Gallery

207 E. Buffalo St., 1st floor

A tightly juried show of alumni from the Rochester Institute of Technology will be broad in scope. A reception will be held Thursday from 5 to 9 p.m.

Lynden Sculpture Garden

2145 W. Brown Deer Road, River Hills

The Mingei tradition celebrates a kind of everyday creativity, the belief that humble but useful objects made by ordinary people can exalt daily living. "The Mingei Tradition in the Midwest: Warren MacKenzie and Beyond" explores this tradition in the Midwest, through one of its leading practitioners and the work of subsequent generations. A reception will be held Thursday from 5 to 8 p.m.

Milwaukee Art Museum

700 N. Art Museum Drive

"Flow" is a themed and invitational exhibition curated by NCECA's exhibitions director, Linda Ganstrom, and former assistant curator of 20th-century design at the Milwaukee Art Museum Mel Buchanan. This show will explore the idea of "flow" in a broad, physical, historical and symbolic sense, which seems suited to the constantly changing views of light and lake inside the museum's long galleries, where the show will be on view. A reception will be held Thursday from 5 to 8 p.m.

Milwaukee Clay

228 S. 1st St.

This one-night-only pop-up art gallery will feature the work of ceramics artists such as Valeria Tatera, Heather Eiden, Darlene Wesenberg Rzesotarski, Kathryn Miller, Steven Anderson and Linda Wervy Vitamvas. Friday from 4 to 8:30 p.m.

Milwaukee Institute of Art & Design

273 E. Erie St.

MIAD will be host to a juried exhibition of student work, featuring the work of 57 artists from schools across the nation. A reception will be held Thursday from 6 to 9 p.m.

Portrait Society Gallery

207 E. Buffalo St., 5th floor

The artists in the "f(c)" exhibition have all been artists in residence at the internationally known sundaymorning@ekwc in the Netherlands, formerly called the European Ceramic Workcentre.

The "f" in the title refers to function in the mathematical sense, a finite number with an unknown number of output possibilities. The "c" references the material conditions of clay. Ariel Brice, a lecturer in ceramics at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, has curated the show, which features the work of Thomas Müller, Krijn Christiaansen, Cathelijne Montens, Stephanie Davidson and Georg Rafailidis. A reception will be held Thursday from 7 to 11 p.m.

Pritzlaff Building

333 N. Plankinton Ave.

A dozen shows curated by ceramics specialists will fill this old warehouse, just across the river from many Third Ward exhibition sites. "Great Lakes," for instance, explores the geology and mined minerals of the Great Lakes and the Milwaukee context. "Prenda and Sopera" highlights the use of pottery in African and African diaspora religious traditions. This, along with the Marshall Building, promises to be among the more essential stops. A reception will be held Thursday from 7 to 11 p.m.

Racine Art Museum

441 Main St., Racine

With an extensive collection in ceramics and one of the leading institutions in craft traditions in the region, the Racine museum presents "Magic Mud," featuring works from the collection and important loans from the across the country. A reception will be held Friday from 6 to 8:30 p.m. with Russian-born artist Sergeilsupov, who is known for pushing the narrative possibilities of clay. The reception is free for museum members and conference attendees wearing badges. Admission is \$10. A book signing will take place at 7 p.m.

Timothy Cobb Fine Arts

207 E. Buffalo St., 1st floor

Artist StephanieRozone is interested in conceptual, historical and theoretical approaches to ornament, particularly the patterns and politics of European and American dinnerware. She creates her own visual language, inspired by the plates of presidents and French kings, that addresses issues of consumerism and excess. Also on view will be terra cotta helmets based on animal forms and inspired by Etruscan decorative art objects by CarrieChimenti. A reception with the artists present will be held Thursday 5 to 9 p.m.

Timo Gallery

270 E. Buffalo St., 1st floor

Phoenix-based MichaelPrepsky has been teaching ceramics to high school students and others for more than 40 years. When he retired in 2007, friends built a studio for him, where he could concentrate exclusively on his own work, both sculptural and functional. This solo show features the work he's made during those years. Receptions will be held Thursday and Friday evenings from 5 to 9 p.m.

Tory Follard Gallery

233 N. Milwaukee St.

"The Figure in Clay" is a show co-curated by the gallery and artist Chris Berti, which features figurative sculpture by artists recognized nationally and internationally. Also on view is "Concerning Nature," a show of Berti's quieter works made from a variety of recycled materials. Artists on view include Chris Antemann, Tom Bartel, Mark Chatterley, Lisa Clague,

Laszlo Fekete, Debra Fritts, Arthur Gonzalez, Michael Gross, Beth Lo, Ron Meyers, Laura O'Donnell, Heidi Preuss Grew, Kevin Snipes, Richard Swanson and Sunkoo Yuh. Antemann, known for re-imagining 18th-century decorative arts, will give a talk on Friday at 3 p.m. A reception will be held Thursday from 5 to 9 p.m.

Vanguard Sculpture Services

3374 W. Hopkins St.

While a little out of the way, the two shows at this full-service bronze foundry are among the more anticipated. "A Complicated History" features the work of 10 artists who attempt to reflect on and explain something about the past, whether personal, historic, cultural or social, in their work. The artists include Ben Ahlvers, Mark Burns, Pattie Chalmers, Jill Foote-Hutton, Kathy King, Linda Lopez, Mathew McConnell, Peter Morgan, Matt Nolen and Mariko Paterson. "Rift" is an installation about metamorphosis by Brad Evan Taylor. There will be a reception with the artists on Thursday from 6 to 10 p.m.

Villa Terrace Decorative Arts Museum

2220 N. Terrace Ave.

The "Species & Specimens" exhibit will showcase the work of 11 artists from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee's ceramics program, both faculty and alumni. The roster includes John Ty Bender, Angela Biederman, Dana Childs, Christopher Davis-Benavides, Karin Davis, Karen Gunderman, Namim Kim, Deborah Rael-Buckley, Barbara Reinhart, Charles Timm-Ballard and Linda Wervey Vitamvas. A reception will be held Thursday from 6 to 8:30 p.m.

Mary Louise Schumacher is the Journal Sentinel's art critic. Follow her coverage on:

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More Online

- To see a photo gallery of images from several regional shows, go to Art City: www.jsonline.com/artcity.
- For more information about the conference, go to the NCECA site: www.nceca.net.
- The Twitter hashtag for the conference is #nceca2014.

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