



Women Working with Clay

Ten Years of Telling the Story



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The Valentine Museum, NCECA Venue
March 24-28, 2020

Eleanor D. Wilson Museum
at Hollins University
April 9 - June 10, 2020

Foreword

Jenine Culligan, Director, Eleanor D. Wilson Museum

Donna Polseno and her ceramist husband Richard Hensley have been teaching ceramics at Hollins University since 2004. Since then they have created a legacy of young women artists who have fallen in love with clay. The couple is also renowned in the Southwest Virginia town of Floyd since moving there in the mid 1970s. 16 Hands, a tour of artists' studios in Floyd, of which Donna is one of the originators, has been taking place twice each year since 1998. In 2011, Donna and Hollins University began hosting the Women Working with Clay Symposium, an opportunity to introduce sisterhood and community, with emerging and established women ceramists. Each year since, Donna has brought artists to Hollins and has attracted a following of participants from across the country. When Donna first learned (in early 2018) that the 2020 NCECA conference would be held in Richmond, Virginia, she immediately began planning a ten year celebratory exhibition to include all fifty of the Women Working with Clay Symposium presenters, believing it imperative to have a presence during NCECA and also at Hollins University.

The Eleanor D. Wilson Museum at Hollins University has collaborated with the Women Working with Clay Symposium since the symposium's early years, with museum staff sharing their knowledge as endnote speakers and exhibiting work by the artists presenting and demonstrating their studio techniques. The museum is pleased to help organize this important celebration of *Women Working with Clay: Ten Years of Telling the Story*, the two exhibition venues (Richmond and Roanoke), and the publication of the accompanying fully-illustrated catalogue.

There are many people to thank. First of all we thank all the artists for making such beautiful and amazing work, and their willingness to let us borrow them for the entire spring. I am still amazed that using the one given element of clay there are so many disparate and beautiful outcomes. We thank our funders, the City of Roanoke through the Roanoke Arts Commission, the Virginia Commission for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Arts, and Hollins University for their interest and belief in this two-city/two-venue exhibition and catalogue project. We also send a big thank you to the staff at The Valentine Museum, Richmond, Virginia, especially Sarah Kim, Deputy Director, and Ken Myers, Director of Operations, who agreed early on to be part of this endeavor. A BIG thanks to Chris Powell for her unending help throughout the ten years of coordinating Women Working with Clay symposia, the staff of the Eleanor D. Wilson Museum: Laura Jane Ramsburg for designing this beautiful catalogue, Janet Carty and Kyra Schmidt for coordinating the contracts, photographs, packing, transport, and installation for this exhibit – twice(!), and the BIGGEST thank you to Donna Polseno.

Symposium Director's Note

Donna Polseno

Historically, community has been a part of life for potters. They needed each other to dig the clay and fire the kilns. There is a unique sense of camaraderie among people who work with clay whether a person is a potter, symbolic vessel maker, clay sculptor, or conceptual artist. Perhaps it is just that shared love/hate relationship with the kiln that always gets the last word, or the amazing trials of trying to master the process of working with such a wonderful, yet fickle, material. But community is a common theme or feeling, even more so among women. Therefore, it was easy for me to imagine that a gathering of women all working in clay would have the sense of momentary community that I originally imagined in creating the Women Working with Clay Symposium.

The first idea was to make an event that celebrated the great accomplishments of women in the field that has changed enormously in my lifetime. In the post-WWII era, ceramics departments were dominated by male professors in the United States and consequently there were more male role models. It took a feminist movement to change that scenario, slowly. Women are now equal partners in most cases in the world of ceramics, though not necessarily in the art world at large.

My idea was to create an opportunity for a group of women clay artists to participate in clay demonstrations, lectures, discussion groups, and other events, all centered around the idea that those presenters would facilitate the sharing of stories and experiences. The purpose was to support and learn from each other. I wanted the audience to complete the circle with the presenters rather than be a separate entity. It is a privilege to be able to do this when so many women in the world still struggle for real voices and equality. I think we all understand now, more than ever, that we need to be vigilant in thinking about women as equals, as well as celebrating our successes.

Now in our tenth year, I almost feel exclusionary in exhibiting only fifty artists – all of the artist/presenters so far – knowing that there are so many incredible women that, with the constraint of time, have not yet been a part of the symposium. Nevertheless, these fifty women represent highly accomplished individuals, and their work represents a provocative diversity of objects. If the symposium is a safe communal place for sharing ideas, the works themselves that these artists create are broad in range and unrestrained by such a concept of safety. The art speaks to a whole range of psychological, emotional, political, edgy, social, beautiful, and contemplative issues.

These wonderful clay objects, seen as a group, are a voice of recognition for the accomplishments of women working with clay and a manifestation of a symposium that represents and promotes ideas about empowerment, teaching, inclusion, inspiration, community, and mentoring within the diverse family of all women.

At the Women's Table

Mary Barringer

The June air is lush in the Shenandoah Valley as women gather at the stately old campus, travelling from near (many from the southeast US) and as far away as Canada and Montana. They have extricated themselves from complex lives – kids, aging parents, deadlines and jobs – to form a temporary community-within-a-community. Donna Polseno, our founding mother, darts around the parking lot and registration table, dispensing hugs, welcomes, and answers. Talk at the beginning is a warm murmur, but the volume will swell as the days go on, gaining power and urgency.

In the early years, a faint whiff of defensiveness wafted through the conversation. The question “why a symposium for/about women in clay?” seemed to need addressing, and underneath it lay an understandable, even demonstrable conviction that we had outgrown the need for such a thing. Now that women’s accomplishments and perspectives were so much more visible within and outside the field, it seemed as though the struggles of the 60s, 70s, and 80s had achieved their aim. Weren’t women making their way into nearly all the highest positions in public life, albeit still, sometimes, as tokens? Hadn’t the old (male) guard in ceramics– including the professor who told Donna he’d given her an “A” because she didn’t wear a bra – either died or ceded their positions, often to one of the vibrant younger generation of women? At that first symposium in 2011, I spoke about how much the field I had entered in 1972 had changed. Thinking back to the pivotal 1971 exhibit “Objects USA,” whose 87 featured clay artists included just fifteen women, it seemed that one measure of progress was the sheer number and range of women who could now be considered headliners for a clay symposium: public exemplars of expanded opportunity and diversity. The tone, at those early gatherings, was one of pride and celebration in the progress we had collectively made.

No need to detail or belabor the things that have changed in our public life since 2011. The arc of the past decade has altered the backdrop against which women come together, and complacency, we have ruefully learned, was always misplaced and ill-advised. In recent years the celebration has been braided with anger, anxiety, and for many, a reawakened activism. We understand the purpose and potential of women’s gatherings differently now, and feel a new urgency in claiming some space for ourselves.

So what *are* the reasons, now, to devote a symposium about clay to women? Always, it is worthwhile to create avenues of support and inspiration for young women new to the field, and mentorship in many forms has been a constant theme of the symposium. Hollins University is that increasingly rare thing, a women’s college, and Donna, mother of sons, has been a steadfast encourager of young women, both in her studio practice and as a teacher here. Although women have been crashing their way through walls of invisibility and marginalization for decades, it is important that young artists see multiple and various examples of women successfully navigating the field – and a field it most

definitely has become, with grad programs and residencies, scholars and collectors aplenty.

What used to seem like a *calling* has acquired the external trappings and measurements of a career path –the fruit of an earlier decade’s exuberant ambitions. But the professionalization of ceramics has perhaps been a mixed blessing. To be sure, it is not as institutionalized a path as, say, engineering or nursing; but framing our passion for clay in these terms imposes an expectation of forward or upward motion, measurable accomplishment, and a ranked community that bestows recognition and validation upon some of its members and amateur status upon others. Our clay world has become more stratified as a result. The symposium, through its intimate scale and deliberate combination of formal presentations and studio demonstrations, softens the boundaries between the podium and the audience.

That this boundary is contingent rather than fixed is a fact of women’s lives, and might even be one of the hidden themes of *Women Working with Clay*. Over the course of several days of formal and informal talk, participants glimpse the complexity behind the polished achievements of the presenters, and presenters have ample opportunity to respectfully encounter the dynamism and impact of many women whose reputations are nascent, local, or regional rather than national. I have shared inspiring mealtime talk with savvy businesswomen, committed activists, and young artists with big dreams. Flowing beneath the formal structure of the symposium are the live elements that can make the convening of people memorable or transformative: the questions that elicit from a recognized star an unexpected moment of vulnerability; the shared stories of mothers and caregiver-daughters; the late bloomers whose determination and urgency illuminate for young women life’s unpredictability. How hungry we are to hear one another’s stories, and how surprising women’s lives can be.

I have attended perhaps half of the *Women Working With Clay*’s decade of gatherings—as a presenter, a participant, and sometimes as a sounding board during the planning. Each year has had its own unique chemistry - the aggregate of the people who are there and the flow of conversation that ensues - but over the years, I have watched apprentices become teachers, teachers become elders, and beginners become masters. And I have had ample opportunity to savor the blend of individual and collective richness that inheres in any group of women. The name itself – bland though it seems, and an unwieldy mouthful to boot – is, when parsed, quite accurate. *Women working with clay*: what diverse trajectories this describes. Working with clay to investigate the deepest levels of their creative selves. Working to reach and unlock creativity in children, immigrants, marginalized people, amateurs of all kinds. Working to infuse daily activities with elegance, mindfulness, gratitude. Working to create common purpose, conversation, and community. Working to commune across time, across culture, across difference.

Mary Barringer has been a studio artist, making both sculpture and functional pottery, since 1973. She has exhibited her work internationally, at venues of all kinds, and taught at craft centers, universities, and community colleges. In addition to her studio practice, she has taught and lectured on the history of ceramics, and from 2004-14 she served as editor of *The Studio Potter* journal. She lives in western Massachusetts.

Women Working with Clay

Symposium Presenters 2011-2020

2011

Andrea Gill
Silvie Granatelli*
Dara Hartman*
Donna Polseno*
Kari Radasch
Kala Stein
Jeri Virden

2012

Mary Barringer*
Lisa Clague
Ellen Shankin
Tip Toland*
Alice Hohenberg Federico

2013

Adrian Arleo
Charity Davis-Woodard
Sandy Simon
Stacy Snyder
Cheryl Ann Thomas

2014

Meredith Brickell
Raheleh T. Filsoofi
Giselle Hicks
Suze Lindsay
Linda Sikora
Gwendolyn Yoppolo

2015

Linda Christianson
Cristina Cordova
Shoko Teruyama
Linda Williams
Amythest Warrington

2016

Syd Carpenter
Michelle Erickson
Liz Quackenbush
Tara Wilson

2017

Lale Dilbaş
Julia Galloway
Gerit Grimm
Ayumi Horie
Patti Warashina

2018

Sunshine Cobb
Rebecca Hutchinson
Eva Kwong
Winnie Owens-Hart
Deborah Schwartzkopf

2019

Jennifer Allen
Cynthia Bringle
Beth Lo
Liz Lurie
Lydia Thompson

2020

Margaret Bohls
Beth Cavener
Cary Esser
Christine Golden
Lorna Meaden

* denotes a multi-year presenter



Jennifer Allen
Flower Brick, 2019
Porcelain
10 x 8 x 4.5"



Adrian Arleo
Broken Branch, Tree of Life, V, Cradle, 2019
Clay, glaze, wax encaustic, gold leaf
10.5 x 20 x 13"



Mary Barringer
Tray, 2018
Stoneware, hand built, with multiple slips and glaze
14.5 x 8 x 2"



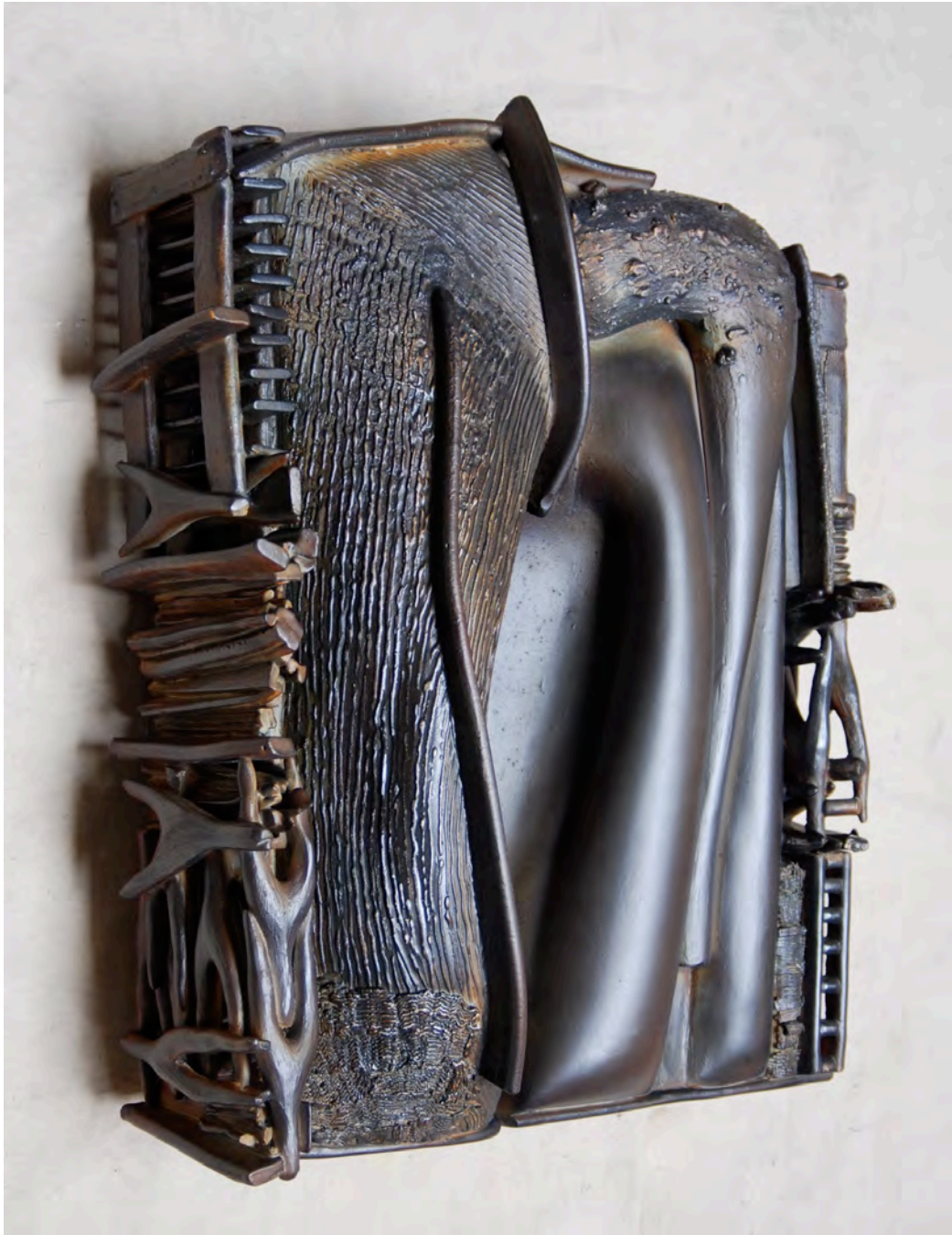
Margaret Bohls
Bronze Art Nouveau Beverage Set, 2018
Stoneware
11.5 x 33.25 x 20"



Meredith Brickell
Clouds, 2019
Porcelain, brass, wood
8 x 18 x 22" (dimensions variable)



Cynthia Bringle
Turtles on the Move, 2018
Stoneware, woodfired
19 x 13 x 13"



Syd Carpenter
Buddy and Rosena Burgess, 2010-2019
Graphite on clay
26 x 24 x 6"



Beth Cavener

Bolt, 2009

Stoneware, paint, cast iron bolt and washer

32 x 11 x 6"

Collection of the Huntington Museum of Art, Huntington, WV



Linda Christianson
2 Ewers, 2019
Woodfired stoneware
6 x 4 x 3.5" each



Lisa Clague
Bee Queen, 2017
Clay, metal, glaze, resin, luster
49 x 26 x 20"



Sunshine Cobb
Onion Box, 2017
Mid-range red clay, glaze
10 x 12 x 7"



Charity Davis-Woodard
Anagama Serving Bowl, 2012
Wood-fired porcelain
5.5 x 9.5 x 9.5"



Lale Dilbaş
Pain, 2006
Earthenware and porcelain
32 x 4 x 4"



Robert Hunter

Michelle Erickson
Patriot Jug, 2019
Earthenware and porcelain
9.5 x 9.5"



Cary Esser
Disclosure (crystal series) from left: *Disclosure (w1)*, *(w2)*, *(w3)*, 2019
Red earthenware, glaze
7.5 x 6 x 2" each



Alice Hohenberg Federico
It's About "Time" (#1813), 2018
Cone 6 stoneware
14.5 x 12.5"



Raheleh Filsoofi
Halal, 2019
Ceramics and LED light
24 x 24 x 8"



Julia Galloway
American Bury Beetle Urn, 2019
Listed Critically Endangered 1989
From the *Endangered Species Project*
Porcelain and underglazes, 7 x 6 x 8"



Andrea Gill
Shanley 1, 2012
Terracotta, majolica and engobe surface
33 x 16 x 16"



Christine Golden
Red and Blue, 2018
Sand, clay, mixed media
19 x 8 x 9"



Silvie Granatelli
Carved Bottle, 2018
Porcelain
10.5 x 5.5 x 4"



Gerit Grimm
The Flight into Egypt, 2018
Stoneware
29 x 23 x 15"



Dara Hartman
Pierce, 2019
Porcelain
36 x 11 x 4"



Ayumi Horie
Helmeted Birds, 2019
Porcelain with luster
1.25 x 10.5 x 10.5" each



Rebecca Hutchinson
Two Part Baby Blue, 2017
Fired and unfired porcelain paper clay, handmade paper, organic material
26 x 38 x 2"



Eva Kwong
Filopodia, 2019
Stoneware, wheel-thrown and assembled, painted with underglazes and glazes
17.5 x 12 x 12"



Suze Lindsay
Bottle Vase, 2019
Salt-fired stoneware
18 x 15 x 5"



Beth Lo
After Kiahsuang, 2019
Porcelain
14 x 11 x 11" each
From the Collection of Bruce Linderman and the Missoula Art Museum



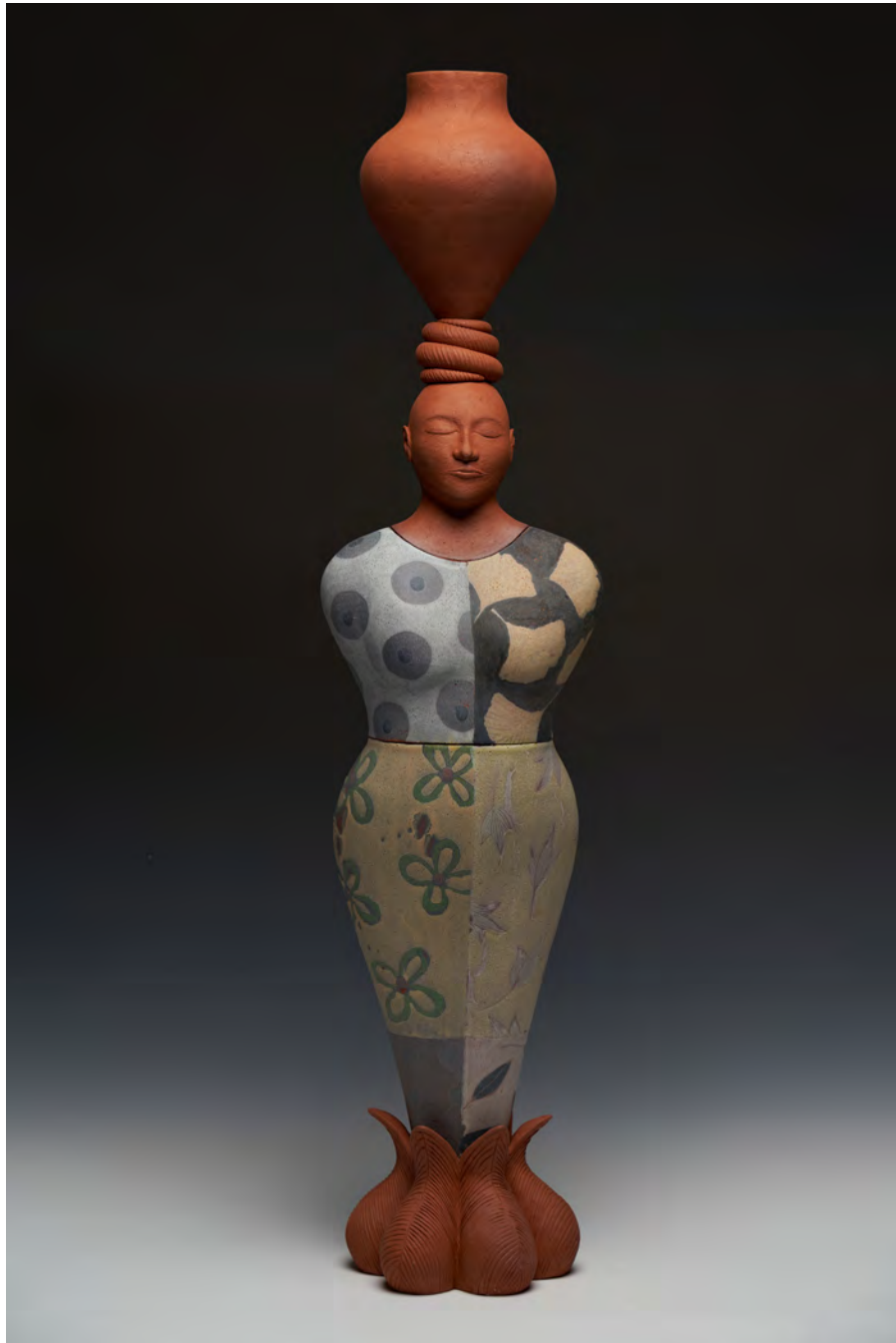
Liz Lurie
Jar, 2019
Stoneware wood-fired, thrown and carved
10 x 9 x 9"



Lorna Meaden
Teapot, 2019
Soda fired porcelain
6 x 4.5 x 6.5"



Winnie Owens-Hart
Pillow Talk Series: Oppressedepressed, 2014
Porcelain and nylon filament
5 x 13 x 9.5"



Donna Polseno
Precario, 2019
Earthenware brick clay
33 x 6 x 7"



Liz Quackenbush
Vermont Teapot, 2019
Hand built porcelain
9 x 5.5 x 5"



Kari Radasch
Cookie Jar, 2019
Glaze fired earthenware
15 x 10 x 10"



Deborah Schwartzkopf
Tea Serving Set, 2019
Porcelain, wheel thrown and hand-built, cone 6 electric
5 x 19 x 9"



Ellen Shankin
Red Gourd Form, 2017
Stoneware clay
12 x 8 x 6"



Linda Sikora
Constellation Bowl, 2019
Porcelain, underglaze painting, salt fire (cone 8)
7 x 18.5 x 18.5"



Sandy Simon

Minnesota Green, 2019

Red earthenware, porcelain, slip, green glaze, nichrome wire

6 x 6.5 x 4"



Stacy Snyder
Yellow House Jar, 2019
Stoneware
10 x 8 x 3"



Kala Stein
White Vessel, 2019
Slip cast porcelain
17.5 x 7 x 4.5"



Shoko Teruyama
Flower Bowl, 2019
Electric fired earthenware
5 x 11 x 11"



Cheryl Ann Thomas
Pure, 2017
Hand-coiled porcelain ceramic
16.5 x 22 x 19"
Courtesy of Heather Gaudio Fine Art



Lydia Thompson
Post-Migration Omaha Series #1, 2019
Ceramics and wood
24 x 24 x 20"



Tip Toland
And Now Her Own, 2019
Stoneware clay, paint, chalk pastel, synthetic hair
13 x 17 x 9"



Jeri Virden
Hollow Gesture (black), 2019
Hand built earthenware
5 x 13 x 13"



Patti Warashina
Ties That Bind, 2018
Low-fire clay, underglaze, glaze
16 x 17 x 12"



Amythest Warrington
Rose Brick, 2019
Porcelain, stoneware and raku clay reduction fired to cone 10 in soda/salt
9 x 6.25 x 4.75"



Linda Williams
CRAWL, 2019
Cone 6 stoneware, oxides, slip and glaze
10 x 9 x 12"



Tara Wilson
Basket, 2019
Wood-fired stoneware
12 x 7.5 x 4"



Gwendolyn Yoppolo
bone bowl, 2019
Cone six matte crystalline glazed porcelain
5 x 9 x 9"

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The Women Working with Clay Symposium has been held at and sponsored by Hollins University since 2011. In addition to the ceramicists who have participated, the following presenters have brought context and scope to the symposium as keynote and endnote speakers:

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Kathleen Nolan, art historian

Leila Philip, author

Moira Vincentelli, art historian



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