

# Common Ground:

## A Showcase of National Ceramics Artists-in-Residence

by Steven Hill



PHOTO: AL SURRAT

A common question lurking in the back of the mind for many recent graduates in ceramics is “where can I continue to develop my work before moving on to the next stage in my career?” The increasing competitiveness of graduate school demands a top-notch portfolio and most students never actually have a long enough gestation period during undergraduate school for their work to mature. Even those ceramists who are ready to try to become self-sufficient studio artists are faced with the cost of setting up a studio—a much greater cost than with most other media. The increasing number of residency programs at ceramics centers across the United States can offer one solution to these challenges.

A residency can provide a number of benefits for someone at this crucial point in his or her career. School is competitive, full of deadlines and pressure, while residencies tend to offer a more relaxed and supportive environment—just right for the ongoing development of ideas. Conversely, the nonstructured creative studio time of most residencies means that the participant must be self-directed and motivated if their work is to grow. Although working as a resident artist comes with its own set of pressures, these

### Mike Jabbur

Red Star Studios, October 2003–August 2005

Residencies can be the perfect opportunity for artists at a transitional point in their career to further their education, develop their artistic style and assemble a strong portfolio. My residency taught me much about the ceramics world, and contributed greatly to my acceptance at a graduate program. The mentoring of Steven Hill, coupled with the open sharing of ideas among studio members, students and interns, proved to make my residency at Red Star an invaluable experience. The family environment of this studio provides an atmosphere of comfort and exploration, encouraging freedom and growth. Being surrounded by professional potters, and having the opportunity to show work in a gallery setting, provides a taste of the life an artist lives—the diligent work ethic, the stresses of self-marketing, and the joys of a career full of passion and provocation.

Three canisters, to 9 in. (23 cm) in height, thrown and altered stoneware, soda fired to Cone 10 reduction, 2004. Jabbur currently resides in Athens, Ohio.



**Giselle Hicks**

Anderson Ranch Arts Center, 2002–2005

As an artist-in-residence at Anderson Ranch, I had the enormous privilege of working in a community that values the ability to make art in a supportive, non-competitive, professional environment. Through the residency program I had the opportunity to meet both emerging and established artists, working in a variety of mediums. I was consistently exposed to different ways of approaching the creative process. As a result, the past few years as a resident have been some of the most productive years in my education and growth, as an artist and individual. I believe this is a result of working in the supportive community at Anderson Ranch, where the members openly share their perspectives, ideas, techniques and experiences.

**"Ebb," 10 in. (25 cm) in length, handbuilt porcelain, fired to Cone 10, 2004.**  
Hicks currently resides in Pittsfield, Massachusetts.



pressures almost always have to do with the work demands of the job, as opposed to creative growth. A resident could have duties ranging from studio maintenance, to the firing of kilns, to teaching, to any other job that has to do with the day-to-day running of a ceramics studio.

And then there is the need to make a living. Some residencies come with a stipend, but many do not, and this is often at the point when recent graduates must begin paying back college loans and parental support runs out. I have seen residents get bogged down when the need to make a living is added to the requirements of a residency. Being self-motivated and committed to success is of utmost importance if a resident is to fully profit from the experience.

The obvious benefits of a ceramics residency are studio space, materials, firing, and the time and encouragement for work to develop. At the same time, it can be a great opportunity to experience and learn the inner workings of a ceramics studio. In school, one rarely acquires much knowledge about the real business of running a studio, but this can be one of the major focal points of a residency program. Mentoring, although not

**Nathan Lekan**

Red Star Studios, March 2004–May 2005

My one-year residency at Red Star Studios gave me many things. It provided me with the privilege of contributing my knowledge and receiving invaluable feedback in a supportive community of dedicated ceramics artists. I was also given the opportunity to participate in classes and workshops with some of my clay heroes such as Bede Clarke, Randy Johnston and, of course, Steven Hill. However, the most important thing that I was given at Red Star was clay, a space to work with it, and the freedom to express myself and learn.

**"Cruet Set," 6 in. (15 cm) in height, thrown and altered stoneware, with slips and Shino glaze, fired in an anagama, 2004.** Lekan still resides in Kansas City, Missouri.





to be counted on, often will naturally occur between the resident and the more experienced potters and/or business people working at the studio. This mentoring is potentially the single most valuable aspect of a residency. Anyone considering a position should interview current or past residents and pay close attention to what they have to say about the relationships they developed with those in charge of the program and with the studio in general.

The following questions and many others pertinent to the life of a young artist are often addressed and sometimes answered over the course of a residency: Am I suited to the demands of being a studio potter? Do I have the drive and stamina to make enough pots to support myself? Where can I find potential markets for my work?

Do I enjoy teaching, or am I happier just making and selling pots? Do I need to be around a community of like-minded potters, or do I thrive on solitude? Does it mean more to me to be able to help others, or do I want to spend that time developing my own work? The questions are endless and all of the answers won't necessarily be revealed during a residency, but there should at least be the opportunity for an ongoing dialog about these and other important issues.

The show, "Common Ground: A Showcase of National Ceramics Artists-in-Residence," which ran through January 2005 at the Leedy-Voulkos Art Center in Kansas City, Missouri, featured the work of sixteen young ceramics artists from nine ceramics studios across the United States: Angela Cunningham, Michelle DeVaul,



### **Shanna Fliegel**

The Cub Creek Foundation, October 2002–October 2003; and Greenwich House Pottery, February 2004–July 2005

The Cub Creek Foundation was founded with the notion that it was to exist because young, emerging artists require it. It is an intermediary place for people who need time to develop their work. The year I spent working there in my spacious studio gave me more time than I've ever known to practice, make mistakes, learn how to fire wood and salt kilns, experiment, and talk about art night and day. Located in rural Virginia, entertainment is limited and studio time is maximized. Beyond learning technical matters, I was exposed to the work and lifestyles of local and international artists. That time was valuable and precious. After completing the residency at Cub Creek I decided to move to an urban area and became a resident assistant at Greenwich House Pottery in New York City. I worked fifteen hours per week in exchange for private studio space, materials and firing. My job as a resident assistant consisted of mixing clay, glazes, loading and firing both gas and electric kilns, and assisting students. It gave me a real feel for how to run a large ceramics studio. These two residency programs enabled me to produce a mature body of work. I am now attending Southern Illinois University in Edwardsville to obtain my M.F.A. in ceramics.

**"Savannah Tumblers," 5 in. (13 cm) in height, thrown earthenware with black-and-white slips, and low-fire glazes, 2004. Fliegel currently resides in Edwardsville, Illinois.**

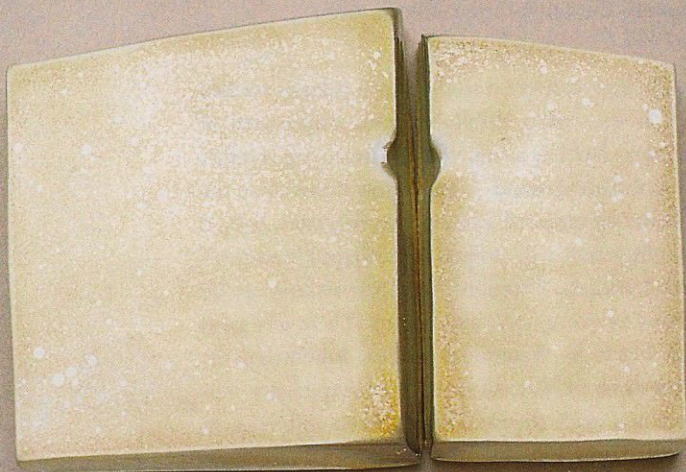
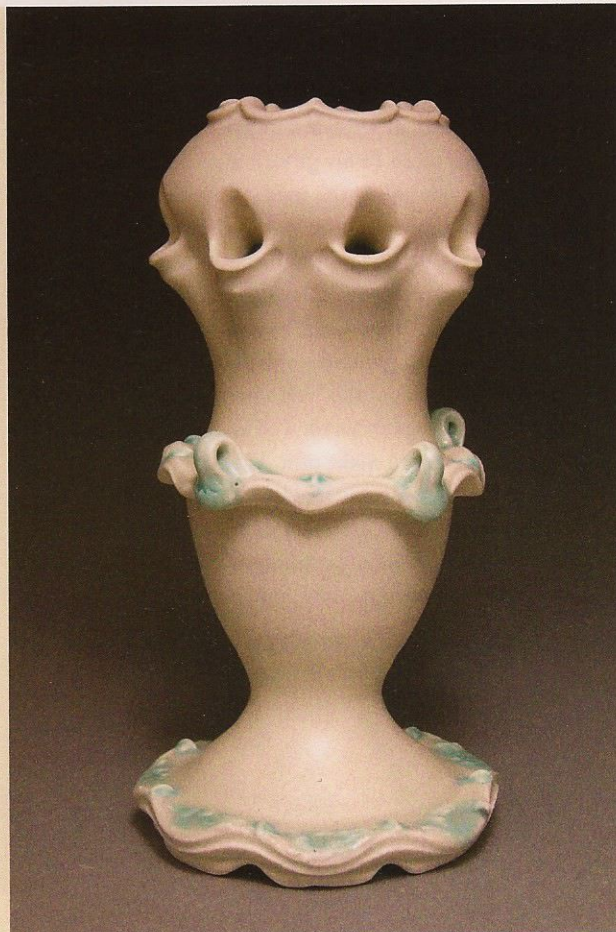


**Michelle A. DeVaul**

Arrowmont School of Arts &amp; Crafts, 2004

After spending eight years making pots in various university programs, I was eager for a new type of learning experience driven by my own self-motivation. My experience as a resident artist at Arrowmont goes way beyond my pots and how they have evolved—it has changed my life forever. Arrowmont invites some of the best artists from around the world to teach each class session, and the opportunity to work with these people is an amazing gift. Assisting faculty for my obligated ten hours a week was a great way to get to know the face and personality behind the artwork which had, in all cases, inspired me for years. After asking very politely, and even sometimes with an occasional bribe (a cold beverage), I was fortunate enough to hold a critique with nearly every ceramics artist that came to teach a workshop. These intimate meetings were extremely encouraging and inspirational. For an eleven-month resident living on campus, Arrowmont becomes a vital support network—it becomes your family. I have never felt so completely supported, nurtured and fortunate.

**"Bud Vase,"** 9 in. (23 cm), thrown and altered porcelain, with glazes, fired to Cone 6 in an electric kiln. DeVaul currently resides in Fairbanks, Alaska.

**Jill Oberman**

Anderson Ranch Arts Center, October 1995–May 1996 and October 1999–May 2005; Archie Bray Foundation for the Ceramic Arts, October 1997–May 1999 and June 2005–October 2005; Arrowmont School of Arts & Crafts, September 1996–May 1997

I have been dramatically affected by the residency experience, both as an artist and as a person. I have had the privilege to work as an artist-in-residence at three art centers. They all offered me the opportunity and support to focus on my work while engaging in the lives and studio work of other artists. By being surrounded by a variety of artists who are committed to a lifestyle of artmaking, my own energy level and enthusiasm for growing as an artist has been nurtured. The dialog is always there, and I am grateful to all of the artists who have shared my studio space over the years.

**"Home,"** 10 in. (25 cm) in height, slab-built porcelain, soda fired to Cone 10, 2004. Oberman resides in Helena, Montana.

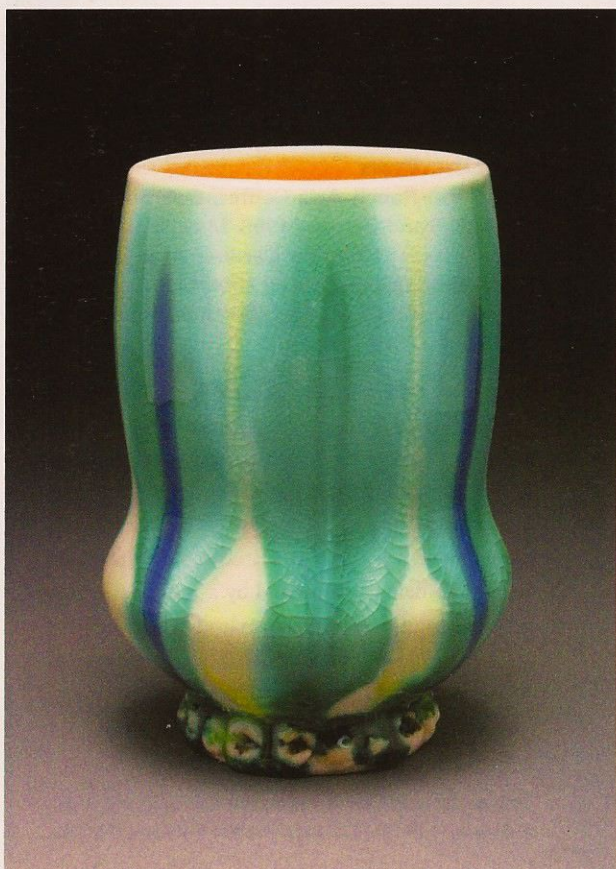
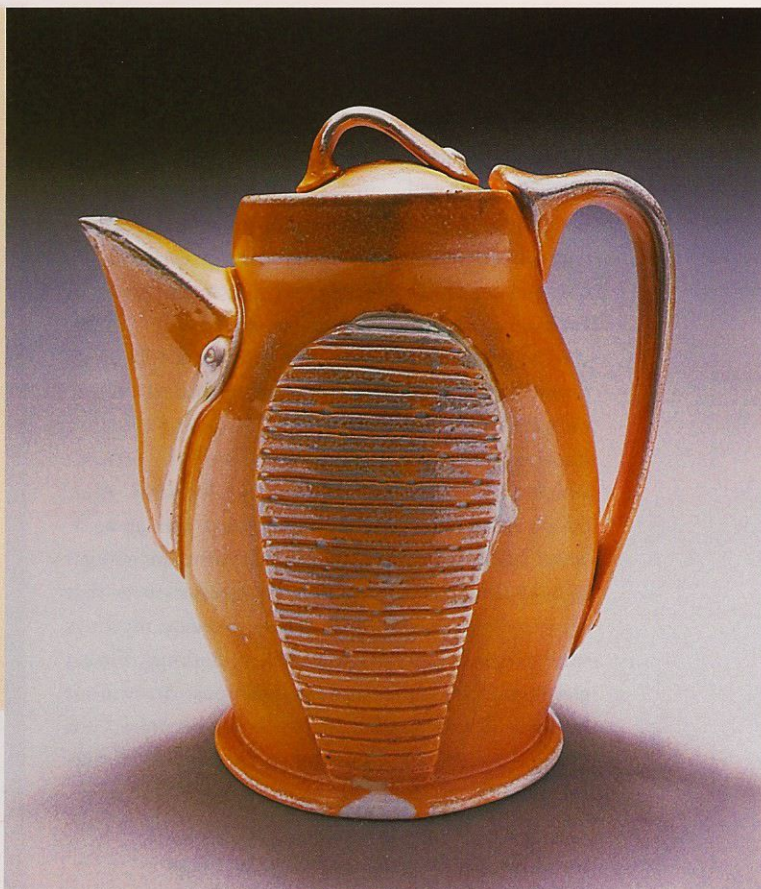


## Nigel Rudolph

Arrowmont School of Arts & Crafts, 2004

My experience as an artist-in-residence has been unquestionably crucial to my growth as a ceramics artist and craftsman. All of the resident positions I have held since finishing school have been profoundly valuable personally and professionally, as well as valuable to the work aesthetic. I'm a huge advocate of the artist-in-residence experience as an opportunity for the artist to get a glimpse—although still a somewhat safe glimpse—of the “real world” of the studio artist. Safety is the key word. The artist-in-residence position is what you make of it. You have no one to tell you when or how much to work in the studio, so it is essential to be motivated and driven in order to take advantage of the opportunity to fine-tune your work between undergraduate and graduate school.

**“Orange Teapot,”** 7½ in. (19 cm) in height, porcelain, soda fired to Cone 11, 2005. Rudolph currently resides in Bradenton, Florida.



## Merideth Host

Watershed Center for the Ceramic Arts,  
2004–2005

Inside the barn-converted studio, brick palettes stacked as high as the ceiling display projects constructed of native brick clay. The sound of sheep baaah-ing emerges faintly in the background. A warm glow shines upon the fluffy house cat sprawled across the kitchen table, backed by a bright yellow wall covered in a collage of multicolored food stickers. Creations from past visitors can be discovered in every nook and cranny. There is a great deal of charm in Watershed's quirks. Embracing the indiosyncrasies of Watershed made my experience momentous and made the place itself a direct influence on my work. I was fortunate to be a part of this high-energy community and rich tradition that lies within.

**“Cavity Cup,”** 4 in. (10 cm) in height, thrown and press-molded porcelain, fired to Cone 6 oxidation, 2005. Host currently resides in Kansas City, Missouri.



**Michiyo Oishi**

Watershed Center for the Ceramic Arts,  
September 2004–May 2005

Enveloped in the stillness of snow-covered trails, Watershed Center for the Ceramic Arts was the ideal contemplative environment for the conception of my work. In the midst of silence, there was a steadfast rigor in the studio. In the company of sculptors and potters, one is able to observe and contemplate working methods not akin to one's own. Closely knit living quarters played a vital role in understanding one another's personality, and facilitated the discovery of personified work. Most importantly, frank dialog and self-reflection promoted understanding the nature of the work we were creating. The Watershed residency program's vitality engages and feeds not only the artists-in-residence, but the broader ceramics community.

"Stacked Cup Jar Set, 4½ in. (11 cm) in height, thrown and altered porcelain, fired to Cone 10, 2004. Oishi currently resides in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

**Monica Ripley**

Mudflat Studio, 2003–2004

At the end of school, I wanted to find a studio, a community in which to work, and a means of supporting myself. Offering a free studio, teaching opportunities and gallery space, the artist-in-residence position at Mudflat was an excellent transition from graduate school into the professional world. As I adjusted to my new surroundings and nonstudent identity, the Mudflat community was helpful, encouraging and positive. I also had the opportunity to make contacts with galleries and other teaching facilities in the Boston area. I have continued on at Mudflat as a studio artist, and am continually grateful for all that Mudflat provided me as I begin my professional career.

Sugar and creamer, 5½ in. (14 cm) in height, thrown porcelain, fired to Cone 10. Ripley still resides in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Paul Donnelly, David Elchelberger, Shanna Fliegel, Giselle Hicks, Meredith Host, Mike Jabbur, Janice Jakeilski, Nathan Lekan, Susan Muenchen, Jill Oberman, Michiyo Oishi, Monica Ripley, Nigel Rudolph and Bradley Walters. This invitational show was organized, after a national call for entries, by Nathan Lekan and Mike Jabbur, who were resident artists at Red Star Studios Ceramic Center, and Amy Kennedy, director of the Leedy-Voulkos Art Center. Within this group, there was an amazing diversity of styles, along with a technical proficiency and a surprising maturity of artistic vision.

After spending an afternoon with this exhibition, I was struck by the overall sense of promise contained within this group of sixteen potters and sculptors. Their efforts lend credence to the notion that residency programs are a great place to develop a mature, cohesive body of work. I look forward to watching these individuals as they move forward into their professional lives, whether as studio potters, sculptors or ceramics instructors.

The ceramics residency movement is thriving in the United States. If you are interested in pursuing a residency, please refer to the residency listing beginning on page 46.