

**Questions and Responses from Catherine Hopkins to Cary Esser
October 2011
Narrow Margins: 2011 KCAI Faculty Biennial
H&R Block Artspace**

Can you talk about the importance of the multiple in your work?

The multiple is integral to my working process. For several years my sculpture has derived from arranging and rearranging units of two polygons, one with five sides and another with seven. They can be repeated in a modular system to form a tessellation, which is a plane without overlaps or gaps. I've dimensionalized these polygons to become glazed ceramic tiles of varying heights. With many of these "tall tiles" on my long studio workbench, I create compositions. I select and remove elements, arriving at finalized topographies after several days of activity, observation, and reorganization.

The multiple forms create patterns that spread up and out; they are expressions for the prospect of infinity.

The tiles are not adhered to the supporting surface or to each other. When exhibited, viewers have been curious about their display and often want to move them. There's a potential that they can be endlessly altered. My aim is that this possibility for change will generate a desire to mentally touch and reorder them.

Your work seems to carry with it an inherent reference to architecture through the use of the tile - and yet takes on multiple other references to geography, biology, and geology. Can you talk about the relationships between those things and how they are present within your work?

There is a tension I want to find between an abstracted reference to landscape and the ordered and beautiful aspects of architecture and ornament. My aim is that the decorative aspects appeal to tactile memory and sensory experience, the comfort of the well-defined place, the known. The aspects of topography and landscape in the pieces propose a sense of space and environment, deep time, and deterioration.

I like that the scale of the pieces seems to function as miniature and monument at the same time.

In terms of your practice you seem to have a dedication to the use of clay. What is the importance of this material to you and the work that you make?

My passion for clay includes glaze. Ceramic is the transformation of these raw materials by heat. They are altered from friable to stone-like. This permanent state of ceramic is an important subtext in the use of it; it is inert and resists destruction. Yet, the way I treat surface in the works can connote decay or decomposition. I welcome this contrast offered by our knowledge and expectation of the material.

I use clay for its ability to create mass and bas-relief, for its substance and warmth, and for its relationship to human history and shelter. Earthen material from the landscape composes much of our habitat and decor.

For my glazed surfaces, I want qualities of light reflectivity and transmission, hue, saturation, and texture. These are possibilities offered by molten chemicals on clay forms. Some words to

describe these traits include wet, satin, sugar, crystal, matte, fluid, and crawl. I'm interested in how these features affect perception of surface - how light and texture affect colors' responses to each other. I'm also curious how they may activate our desire to touch them.

An unexpected gratification I've had in the work is that people associate so many substances in the world to its material and polychrome aspects – for example, food like feta cheese, salt and candy, and also brain matter, tooth decay, mold, algae, water. I'm interested in how the response to color, material, and shape identification can be so different. It may provide different entry points into the work.

The geographical references in the surface of your work seem to take on a decorative relationship to the more architectural references. Can you speak about this relationship between surface and form and where your influences for these decisions come from?

The way I make my forms leaves a remnant of the process. To form the individual units, I push moist clay into plaster molds that I've made for each shape and height. This technique creates textures on the tiles that are like cracks, fissures, and strata. It reveals the pressure and tension caused when driving the clay into the molds.

Glaze creates color that is both physical and retinal. I like to use glaze so that it appears to be OF or FROM the form rather than applied ONTO the form.

The aim is that the geographical and decorative references create a tension as discussed above. I wish to confound the natural and artificial associations in the formal qualities of the work.

How would you explain the relationship between your drawing practice and your three dimensional work?

Unlike many sculptures I've made over the years, the Topography series does not benefit from a significant development through drawing or by building scale models. After trying these approaches, I find that the works evolve best from direct manipulation, with the units completed at full size. I have sometimes made drawings in response to the finished works and have more plans for this kind of activity. I'm interested to see if it affects the dimensional work.