

Visual Arts: Steve Schaeffer

Website:

www.artaxis.org/ceramics/schaeffer_steve/steve_schaeffer.htm

Steve Schaeffer's sculptural ceramic work is visually stunning. Schaeffer juxtaposes the clean, simple lines of soft white, cast porcelain with the rough, heaviness of gritty, iron rich fireclay. A particularly memorable sculpture of Schaeffer's, Offering, is that of a three foot long, heavily pock-marked, dark brown, oblong vessel form cradling a grouping of incredibly delicate, four foot long, cast porcelain twigs and branches.

Schaeffer's work speaks on many levels of man as vessel juxtaposed with this fragile and precious environment we live in. While simple in form, Schaeffer's work transfers a generosity of scale to the viewer. "The forms define space, and their weight is connected to the landscape they are inspired by. Within these works an entire canyon can be created with one line slicing through its surface." Schaeffer works with thick solid masses of clay shaped into bases or vessels, which are technically incredibly difficult to fire in one piece. The fragile, natural elements are cast from porcelain, which is a real challenge to achieve a high rate of success as Steve does.

Schaeffer is influenced by the natural world around him from a walk in the woods to a river expedition. The boat or vessel is a reoccurring form in Schaeffer's work and is the inspiration core of his ideas. Schaeffer is intent on creating work that "offers the notion of hope and the embodiment of strength". Schaeffer's work has a quiet simplicity and a commanding presence like that of stepping lightly on a soft dirt trail on the San Francisco Peaks.

Schaeffer has received the Juror's Award for Best in Show in Ceramics for the last two years for his work in It's Elemental Fine Craft Exhibition, and was juried into the Florence Biennial in Florence, Italy.

Schaeffer just created a 20x20 foot ceramic wall mural, Ensemble,

which now adorns the walls of Ardrey Auditorium. Also this year Schaeffer has exhibited in Potsketch, Clay Studio of Missoula, Missoula, Montana, Pioneers at the prestigious National Ceramics Conference in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and at Old Main Museum, Northern Arizona University, Flagstaff.

Steve Schaeffer currently teaches at Northern Arizona University in the Ceramics Department, one of the most prestigious Ceramics Programs in the country. Steve is a phenomenal teacher giving back that which he has absorbed. He is constantly organizing exhibitions to highlight and showcase the work of his students. Steve has setup many exhibits as a platform for his students to showcase their art including: Youngfire, an exhibition of student Wood fired ceramics work at Earthenware Clay Gallery in conjunction with the International WoodFire Conference in Flagstaff, as well as Clay & Paper at the Shy Rabbit Gallery in Pagosa Springs, Colorado. Steve is active on the BFA committees at NAU, giving guidance to students in their culminating semester of their thesis work. Schaeffer feels lucky to be able to make art and teach. He loves helping people realize that they can create art if they are willing and open to trying new ideas.

Schaeffer gives back to the community not only by teaching. Schaeffer donates bowls to the Empty Bowls project, a fundraiser selling handmade ceramic bowls to the community raising money to donate to the food banks in Flagstaff and the homeless shelters in Flagstaff. Schaeffer donates his work to fundraisers throughout the year including ceramic centerpieces to the annual Flagstaff Leadership Academy fundraiser. Steve also lends his technical skills to his own community of ceramics artists as well. He has built several kilns, and helps local potters in town to build kilns of their own. Steve Schaeffer should receive the Viola Award for Visual Artist not only for his quiet, contemplative zen like Ceramics sculptures, but for his many contributions to the Flagstaff community.





