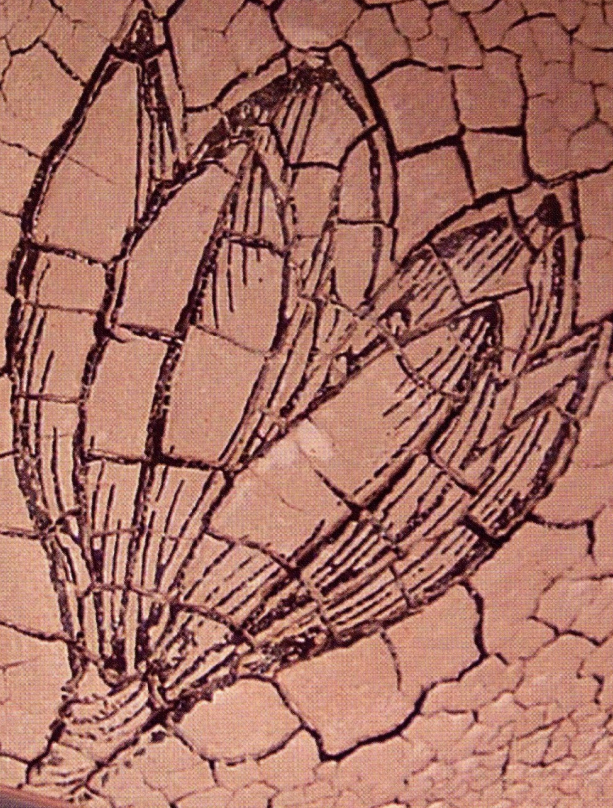


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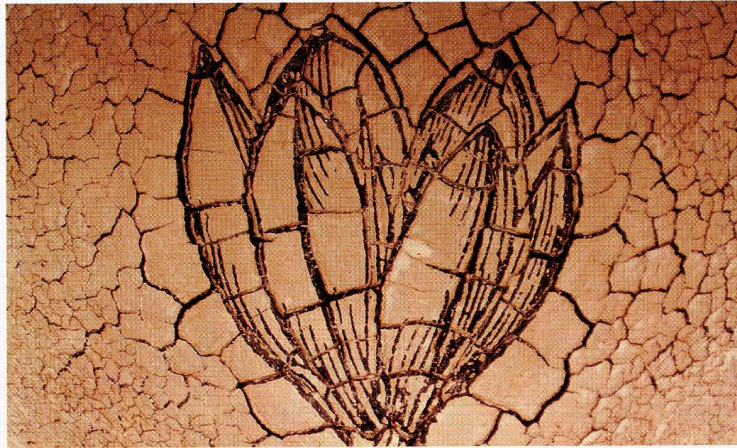
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**A MAGAZINE FOR CLAY & GLASS**



# Recent Work by Steven Heinemann

## A Dialogue Between Form and Surface



By Diana Reitberger

With a career in ceramics spanning over 25 years, much has been written about the work of Steven Heinemann. My own incomplete artist's file is three inches thick with articles, reviews and exhibition announcements. My first exhibition announcement dates from June 1982 for a solo exhibition held at the Ontario Crafts Council, while Steven was still a graduate student at Alfred University. A review of that exhibition quotes Steven as saying "all art involves spiritual thought in some form". Over the intervening twenty-four years, this spirituality has shaped and informed both Steven's way of life and the evolution of his work. It is a constant thread that ties his work together and resonates powerfully in his latest body of work exhibited in Toronto at the David Kaye Gallery in November.

The spare exhibition space and thoughtful installation serve to highlight four distinct groupings of work that carry through on some of Heinemann's longstanding explorations and artistic concerns, and also signal some exciting new directions.

The struggle of any ceramic artist is to manipulate and control the medium, while at the same time letting go and allowing the material to reveal its unique voice. American philosopher Ken Wilber, in chapter entitled "A Question of Balance" talks about the push and pull between these two polarities that provides for thousands of permutations and an inexhaustible response on the part of artists. When the right balance between the two is achieved, the result is magic. The ceramic work of Steven Heinemann is a discourse and attempt to attain this balance - the natural harmony between yin and yang that the ancient Chinese called the Tao. (Ken Wilber, *Grace and Grit*, Chambhala, 1991,2000)

There is a contemplative quality to the way Steven Heinemann lives his life and creates his work. There is a

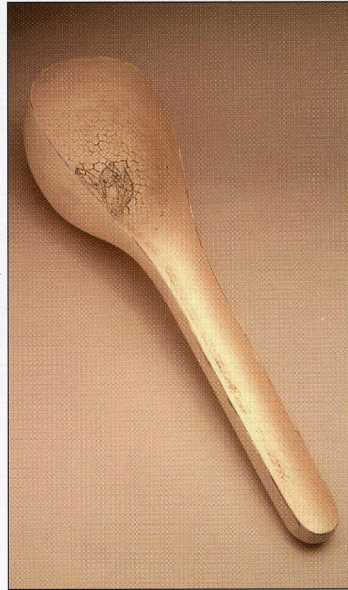
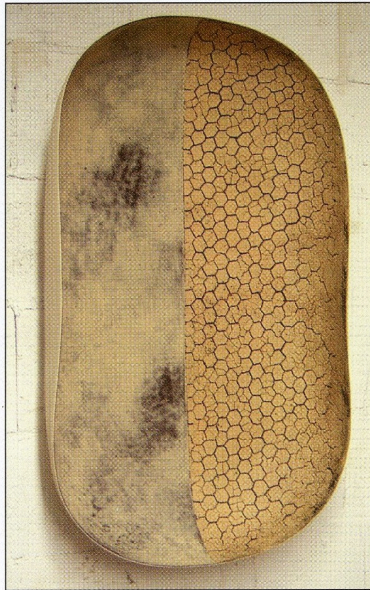
thoughtfulness to the selection of every word, every action. This is reflected in each individual vessel, which relates to other pieces in a series, and those that came before, but also can stand-alone and give expression to the deepest emotion.

Two pieces - *farawaysoclose* and *Field* - were exhibited apart from the main gallery and adorned the entrance window to the Gallery. Both pieces were presented as wall plaques and focused on surface treatment. In *farawaysoclose*, Heinemann split the visual field, contrasting two different types of pattern and texture. This piece continues his interest in the notion of decorative patterning suggesting natural phenomena as opposed to man made decorative patterns. As always, Heinemann is interested in something more evocative, and both these pieces served as springboards to the vessels forms in the main exhibition space.

The three strong sculptural pieces exhibited in the main gallery are titled *Fluorescence*, *Residuum* and *Floralis*. These titles neatly capture the three significant themes that permeate the exhibition - the containment of light, the imprint of man, and the flower as an evocative symbol.

Heinemann continues to contrast the smooth, pristine treatment of the exterior surface of his vessel forms with highly textured interiors reminiscent of a dry salt bed. However in two new pieces - *Residuum* and *Floralis* #3 he pushes the vessel form in a sculptural direction, thus integrating the interior and exterior both visually and thematically.

Both pieces are evocative of giant hooded flowers - a jack-in-the-pulpit or lady slipper come to mind - and there is the pleasure and intimacy of looking inside the forms and what they contain. In both cases we see the subtle outline of a single blossom seemingly emerging from the pattern of the cracked glaze. The play of light and shadow on both pieces is extraordinary and the form changes as one moves around each



piece. In fact, the exterior of the form takes on a figurative nuance, with its smooth polished surface subtly referencing marble sculpture - Goddess Flora perhaps? These pieces have taken Heinemann into new territory and successfully integrate the sculptural form with the surface imagery on a new level.

This continuing dialogue between the two and three-dimensional is the thread of continuity that weaves throughout Heinemann's newest work. In conversation with Heinemann in 2004, he remarked, "The painter and the sculptor in me are duking it out". It is an attempt at a marriage - at least they are on speaking terms." Each piece exhibits this tension, with the relationship between the interior and the exterior sometimes contrasted, sometimes supported and sometimes contradicted.

*Fluorescence* which adorns the exhibition invitation, is a delicate petal caught at a point where it could be opening or closing. One can clearly view the textured surface while viewing the smooth outer surface. Inside is a spare drawing of a crocus-

like flower, with its petals etched in black against the white surface. This same image is used again in *Floralis #2*, an elongated ladle shape which rests on the floor. Heinemann continually plays with contrasts - the black against white, the image of nature imposed on natural materials, fragile image against fragile material, the impermanence of the floral image against the permanence of the vessel. *Floralis #2* is especially potent as the shape evokes the culture of man, using the oldest of materials, and is adorned with man's replication of nature.

In vivid contrast is the series of four small deep blue bowls on pedestals, whose titles denote earth and sky. The interior surfaces of *Constellation #1* and *#2* visually communicate eternity, with deep fissures connecting fragments of sky. White speckles have pushed through the glaze and appear like luminous stars. *Geologue #1* and *#2* by their very names represent the earth, with the incised patterns of man drawn on their interior surfaces.