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Built to Play

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BUILT TO PLAY

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts

in

The School of Art

by

Forrest Sincoff Gard
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	ii
LIST OF IMAGES.....	iv
ABSTRACT.....	v
1 PLAY.....	1
2 THE GALLERY: A SITE.....	3
3 INTERACTIVE ART.....	5
4 BREAKING: RISK.....	8
5 <i>BUILT TO PLAY, "WELCOME HOME"</i>	9
6 <i>BUILT TO PLAY, "CAN YOU HELP ME WITH THE DISHES?"</i>	14
7 <i>BUILT TO PLAY, "GALLERY WALLS ARE SUPPOSED TO BE WHITE"</i>	17
8 <i>BUILT TO PLAY, "PLEASE PUT THE LAUNDRY AWAY"</i>	18
9 CONCLUSION: OBSERVATIONS FROM <i>BUILT TO PLAY</i> , MPAC: JUNE 1 ST , 2014.....	19
10 CONCLUSION: OBSERVATIONS FROM <i>BUILT TO PLAY</i> , CLOSING RECEPTION MAY 3 RD , 2014.....	21
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	25
VITA.....	26

LIST OF IMAGES

Image 1. <i>"Gallery walls are supposed to be White"</i> Interaction.....	1
Image 2. <i>"Can you help me with the dishes?"</i> An example of escaping reality.....	2
Image 3. An example of dishes at my home.....	2
Image 4. <i>"Can you help me with the dishes?"</i> Game in progress.....	4
Image 5. O'mar Finley wins at <i>Make it/ Take it</i>	7
Image 6. <i>"Welcome Home"</i> A contestant takes a risk.....	8
Image 7. <i>"Welcome Home"</i> Detail of ceramic hats.....	9
Image 8. <i>"Welcome Home"</i> Installation view.....	11
Image 9. <i>"Welcome Home"</i> Detail of foam and wood hat racks.....	11
Image 10. Example of casting foam.....	13
Image 11. Example of casting foam.....	13
Image 12. <i>"Can you help me with the dishes?"</i> Detail of dishes.....	14
Image 13. <i>Built to Play, "Can you help me with the Dishes?"</i>	15
Image 14. <i>Built to Play, "Can you help me with the dishes?"</i>	16
Image 15. <i>Built to Play, "Gallery Walls are supposed to be White"</i>	17
Image 16. <i>Built to Play, "Please put the Laundry away"</i>	18
Image 17. <i>Built to Play, "Gallery Walls are supposed to be White"</i>	19
Image 18. <i>Built to Play, "Can you help me with the dishes?"</i>	20
Image 19. <i>Built to Play, "Welcome Home"</i>	21
Image 20. <i>Built to Play, "Welcome Home"</i>	22
Image 21. <i>Built to Play, "Welcome Home"</i>	23
Image 22. <i>"Can you help me with the dishes?"</i>	24

Abstract

Built to Play is an interactive art exhibition featuring four participatory installations. Each installation transforms non-playful objects and activities into handmade porcelain replicas used for exciting gallery made games. Focusing on *the carry over from child's play to adult play* the exhibition emphasizes the importance of play in our adult lives. As gallery visitors risk breaking handmade ceramic objects for a moment of fun and a chance to win art as a prize, their interaction completes the exhibition.

1 Play

*"At some point as we get older, we are made to feel guilty for playing. We are told that it is unproductive, a waste of time, even sinful. The play that remains is, like league sports, mostly very organized, rigid, and competitive. We strive to always be productive, and if an activity doesn't teach us a skill, make us money, or get on the boss's good side, then we feel we should not be doing it. Sometimes the sheer demands of daily living seem to rob us of the ability to play."*¹

-Stuart Brown, founder of the National Institute of Play

Legally, I have been an adult for almost a decade. During that time I have experienced, more than once, the feeling of having too many tasks and not enough hours in the day to accomplish them. When this happens, a switch inside of me is flipped and I am unable to have fun; I stop playing and I usually become depressed. As Brown asserts, our culture actually makes us feel guilty for the times we are not being productive. As children we are encouraged to play, our parents arrange play dates, and we develop physically and emotionally through play. I am interested in the *carry over from child's play to adult play* and am curious why some adults stop playing while others continue. *Built to Play* aims at providing gallery visitors (the majority of which are grownups) the feeling of being able to play. This shift in the traditional gallery experience allows the viewer to interact with a ceramic object in a new way. My thesis exhibition, *Built to Play*, allows people an opportunity to briefly escape their grown-up realities; a feeling that is often foreign to many adults in today's overly competitive culture.



Image 1. "Gallery walls are suppose to be White" An example of escaping reality

¹ Stuart Brown, *Play: how it shapes the brain, opens, the imagination, and invigorates the soul* (New York, NY: Penguin Group Inc, 2010), 7

I am most interested in exploring (what I like to call) the *carry over from child's play to adult play*. This exploration has led me to make work that is designed for, but not limited to, adults. One of my goals in creating *Built to Play* is to find a way to take a mundane activity, such as dishwashing, and to merge it with a simple and familiar game, such as building blocks, to create a memorable experience.



Image 2. "*Can you help me with the dishes?*" Installation view

Built to Play, as the title to my thesis exhibition is a direct reference to more than my art in the gallery but also reminds us "of all animal species, humans are the biggest players of all. We are built to play and built through play."² It is my hope and ultimate goal that as gallery visitors reencounter activities featured in my exhibition in the future, whether it is days, months, or years, that they remember that moment of fun in the exhibition and are inspired to create their own game to play at home. One game that I play at home with dishwashing is the *Tea Kettle Dish Race*; I put water on the stove to boil for tea and during that time I race to wash all the dirty dishes. If I finish washing the dishes before the water boils, I win, and get to enjoy the double satisfaction of having clean dishes and a hot cup of tea.



Image 3. An example of dishes at my home

² Brown, *Play: how it shapes the brain, opens, the imagination, and invigorates the soul*, 5

2
The Gallery: A Site

“Site-Specific: [Adjective], created, designed, or selected for a specific site.”³

Built to Play is a site-specific artwork that focuses on the gallery as a site. One of my goals for this exhibition is to help change people’s expectations for art in the gallery. I am unsatisfied with the overwhelming amount of hands-off art viewing experiences that make up the majority of today’s exhibitions. Over the last ten years, as an artist, I have visited many galleries and museums and attended a wide range of exhibitions. During each visit I am constantly observing and locking away information, sometimes without knowing. In general, exhibitions tend to be held in sterile environments and the touching of artwork is strictly forbidden.

During a visit to the *Art Institute of Chicago* I was eager to see the furniture exhibition. While admiring the furniture, I kept setting off the alarm because I was getting too close to the work. I quickly adjusted my behavior and stood further away but still managed to set off the alarm with the informational pamphlet I was using to point out specific details. Leaving the exhibition I was upset because a security guard was following me around! My experience in Chicago is an extreme version of this no-touch ideology that most gallery exhibits often portray. This is an area that I am exploring through my touch-based thesis exhibition. I want to reward people for touching and interacting with my artwork instead of policing them.

“For most of its history, art viewing has been perceived as a passive activity. Art was simply envisioned as something which hung on the wall or placed on a pedestal to be appreciated and admired”.⁴

-Katherine Marquette, Exhibition Curator

Each installation in *Built to Play* is a direct result of my research on the gallery as a site, specifically *Glassell Gallery*, Baton Rouge, Louisiana: the location of my thesis exhibition. Galleries have a long history of showing three-dimensional work on pedestals and shelves. The majority of the objects in my exhibition have very specific displays that are uniquely designed and built to hold the object in a way that is approachable for interaction. For example, *Welcome Home* features ceramic hats but instead of displaying the hand crafted ceramic object on a pedestal, I display my porcelain hats on a hat rack similar to the way an actual hat would be displayed in a store or one’s home, it is asking to be worn and later hung up.

My exhibition, *Built to Play*, is in no way the first of its kind. More recently there has been a shift in the demand for interactive exhibitions, both within art and other areas of interest

³ “Site-Specific”, Dictionary.com, accessed on April 15th, 2014, accessed at, <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/site-specific>

⁴ Katherine Marquette, *Interplay: Mechanical Objects* (San Antonio: TX: SSA) 2012, 6

such as history and science. Children's museums, especially natural science, have a long history of providing more engaging installations for children. Engaging the children in an interactive learning experience leads to a more positive and memorable time at the museum. This interactive approach is more recently being used for adults. The *History Colorado Center* opened in 2012 as a replacement to the unsuccessful *Colorado History Museum*. Due to very poor attendance the *Colorado History Museum* closed in 2010. There were many concerns that a new museum would eventually have the same problems so a great amount of research and planning went into the new building. According to the Colorado History Society, it was decided that as a solution to the poor attendance the new museum would be different because it would "loosen up, let the stories keep their drama, make things fully interactive".⁵ Due to the *History Colorado Center's* research on interactivity the new museum received over 200,000 visitors during its first year. This impressive attendance number was a one hundred percent increase to the old museum.

For the most part the displays for my installations stay clear of referencing the traditional gallery. In my dish stacking game, *Can you help me with the dishes?*, I acknowledge the traditional pedestal form and concept through an interactive approach. In contrast to the rest of the exhibition, this particular piece features pedestal inspired shapes, colors, and displays while also referencing the kitchen sink. The piece starts off relatively plain without any volume or form. Through my installation (game) and gallery visitor's (player's) collaboration, non-traditional sculptures are built in a traditional place for displaying sculpture.

⁵ Ray Mark Rinaldi "Colorado History Museum lures visitors with new insights and interactive, fun activities", *denverpost.com*, accessed on April 5th, 2014, accessed at, http://www.denverpost.com/ci_20436908/history-colorado-center-lures-visitors-interactive-fun-activities

3 Interactive Art

Often within the field of ceramics artists are reduced down to two particular categories: potter or sculptor. When people find out I am a ceramic artist they typically ask, “what type of work do you make?” In response, I often continue our conversation with announcing that I make interactive installations. Yes literally installations in which people interact with art. Although interactive art is less common than other art forms, there are a several art legends that helped pioneer this art form.

“The creative act is not performed by the artist alone; the spectator brings the work in contact with the external world by deciphering and interpreting its inner qualification and thus adds his contribution to the creative act”.⁶

-Marcel Duchamp

Marcel Duchamp's *Rotary Glass Plates*, in 1920, is one of the first artworks that required the audience's participation to complete the art, making it one of the earliest examples of interactive art. *Rotary Glass Plates* was an optical illusion that only worked while spinning; in order to view the artwork in its intended state gallery visitors were instructed to “turn on the machine and stand at a distance of one meter”.⁷

In the late 1950s Allan Kaprow was starting to explore his ideas on interactive art through *The Happenings*. Kaprow's first Happening took place at the Reuben Gallery in Manhattan, *Eighteen Happenings in Six Parts*, 1959. *Eighteen Happenings in Six Parts* was a complex organized event where participants compiled scripted performances which included, but were not limited to, “readings of texts, everyday activities such as squeezing oranges, choreographed movement, slide projections, live music, recorded sounds, and the scripted movement of the audience through the space”.⁸ Kaprow's monumental step of moving from rectangular paintings on the wall to his *Happenings* started another movement in regards to exhibiting art and what is expected for the gallery.

“Artists shall utilize the specific substances of sight, sound, movement, people, odors, touch. Objects of every sort are material for the new art: paint, chairs, food, electric and neon lights, smoke, water, old socks, a dog, movies, and a thousand other things”.⁹

-Alan Kaprow

⁶ Christian Paul, *Digital Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2008), 5

⁷ Robert Lebel, *Marcel Duchamp* (New York: Paragraphic Books, 1959) 77,78

⁸ Holland Cotter, “Allan Kaprow, the creator of artistic happenings, dies at 78”, New York Times, April 10, 2006

⁹ Frantisek Deak, “In memory, Allan Kaprow 1927-2006”, The Drama Review, 50:4, 2006

Similar to Duchamp and Kaprow, when thinking about my own artwork, I consider people to be a material: and only with their presence and interaction along with their feelings, experience, and emotional reactions is my artwork complete. Each installation in *Built to Play* requires audience participation to complete the artwork. I am trying to create more than just well crafted objects; I am trying to create an event that provokes raw emotion. I am offering people an experience.

The first interactive piece I made was a site-specific artwork in 2008 titled, *Ceramic Skateboards*. In an undergraduate class for a project, I was required to pick a site, research the site, and then create an artwork specifically for the site. I choose the skate park because, as a skateboarder, I had a strong history there. The object that I created as a result from this site was a ceramic skateboard. For me making the object was not enough so to complete the project I rode on the ceramic skateboard. In the end the skateboard broke but that did not matter because the art was no longer an object; it was a performance, an interaction, most importantly it was an experience. The artwork was the act of riding on the skateboard, which meant that only I was able to fully experience, the piece.

Myron Krueger's *Responsive Environments* are also extremely important to the start of interactive art and influential to my thinking about interactive art in graduate school. The first of these responsive environments is *GlowFlow*, 1969. *GlowFlow* is a darkened room with lines of glowing light on the wall. The light was made possible by pumping phosphorescent particles through tubes that passed through columns, revealing the light; in front of each column was a pressure sensitive pad that reacts to footsteps. The reaction of the footsteps allowed the computer to respond by changing the lighting or changing sounds; this creates a direct interaction between the person, computer, and the environment. *GlowFlow* led Myron Krueger to make a number of conclusions; two of which have been very influential to *Built to Play*.

1. "Interactive art is potentially a richly composable medium quite distinct from the concerns of sculpture, graphic art or music".¹⁰
2. "The visual response should not be judged as art nor the sounds as music. The only aesthetic concern is the quality of the interaction".¹¹

Often with my interactive installations, the people in the gallery who are not playing become spectators through the act of watching and reacting to the game being played. Spectators cheer, make noise, and side with opponents; ultimately they become part of the experience. This is extremely exciting for everyone and can heighten the experience further. For me—this is as good as it gets—when and if a body of artwork can create an event that has a shared emotional and physical connection between, artist, object, and gallery visitors. In this moment anything can happen.

¹⁰ Myron Krueger, *Responsive Environments*, Montvale, New Jersey, AFIPS Press, 1977

¹¹ Krueger, *Responsive Environments*, 1977

In my recent work, *Make it/Take it*, I observed *the moment* when reviewing the documentation. I was unaware at the time how many people were involved in that piece through participation and spectating. In a series of photographs of one participant, O'mar Finley, who won three consecutive games, it was surprising to see how many other people in the crowd had their hands up, celebrating. When Finley won, there was an uproar of excitement, everyone looked as if they had won the lottery.



Image 5. O'mar Finley wins at *Make it/ Take it*.

4
Breaking: Risk

Almost everyone at some point has probably flung his or her hat as if it were a Frisbee. In contrast to this belief, few people have ever flung, thrown, kicked, or catapulted a fired ceramic object, mostly due to the fact that ceramic objects, although able to last thousands of years, are breakable. As my exhibition title and gallery presentation both suggest, the ceramic objects featured in the gallery are objects used for games: they are *built to play*. Each game asks participants to risk the life of a ceramic object through playful interaction while offering the object itself as prize. Making the objects out of ceramics is an important aspect to the work due to the risk of the objects breaking.



Image 6. “Welcome Home” A contestant takes a risk

Risk is an important component of most games—stealing a base in baseball, challenging the spelling of an unfamiliar word in Scrabble, losing a pawn in Chess, getting caught while running home in Hide and Seek. My games involve the risk of an object breaking. Risk is what gets the heart beating fast—the excitement, the tension, and the hope that one can do it. Who will win and who will not win is always unknown in any game. Winning involves taking a risk, which leads to an array of emotions—tension, hope, joy, pride, disappointment, and shock. These emotions are what makes one play a game over and over. Games are not boring because the emotions and the outcomes are always different. The amount of risk from using a ceramic object in an unconventional way increases the thrill and excitement of the playing activity. I want each person’s interactive experience to be unique and individual, and by providing the element of risk, I believe that I am allowing the experience to unfold for each person. I have simply provided the objects and the environment, but the experience contingent upon risk will be completed only through interaction.

"Welcome Home" is a hat tossing game. The object of the game is to toss a ceramic hat safely onto a foam hat rack without breaking it. If the task is completed the winner is able to keep the porcelain hat as a trophy. The name "Welcome Home" is a reference to my original source of inspiration, my day. I often wear a hat and the first thing that I do when I get home is to hang my hat on the wall. This daily activity of mine has the potential to be much more: it could be fun, it could be a game, and it could be a moment of play. As if the gallery is my home, *Welcome Home* is the first installation visitors see upon entering the exhibition.

The porcelain hats are the most important aspect to "Welcome Home". When people hold these objects, I have discovered, that they are hesitant to throw them due to the risk involved. I use the fear associated with breaking a ceramic object to make people hesitate and think about their actions. I do not want this feeling to be too overwhelming or strong enough to steer people away from the interaction, as I have learned it can be. Knowing and understanding this has led me to create *trompe l'oeil ceramics*, ceramic objects that look like another material. For example, my ceramic hats look like soft fabric hats rather a hard glossy object. Making my ceramic objects look real help visitors with the overall comfort of the actions that I am asking people to do. With my porcelain hats there are several different things that I did to help comfort and encourage participant interaction: I made them look real as possible using comfortable, recognizable, and fun colors.



Image 7. "Welcome Home" Detail Image of ceramic hats

To make the hats as real as possible I created or at least taught myself (I've never seen or heard of anyone doing this before) a process that I have been calling *still-life-fabric-casting*. It took several attempts to master this process. The basic process is to harden fabric, to hold a specific form, and then make a mold of the object. I discovered this process after rubbing polyurethane on some wood, the following day I noticed the rag was stiff and held a specific shape. I took this knowledge and used it to create a plaster mold of a ball cap. Before applying the polyurethane, I took the time to shape the hat exactly how I wanted it. Since real hats are flexible and are able to bend I wanted to show bends and curves in my ceramic hats. When thinking of how to form the hat before molding I considered that I wanted my ceramic hats to be displayed on hat racks and if the game is won they will land on the hat rack at the end of the game. I wanted the hats to have specific wrinkles and bends to represent the position in which they would be resting. If the bends are not correct and that hat appears to be too stiff then it will appear to be ceramic and less realistic. I like to think of the curves and wrinkles as giving life to the form. Once I create the right amount of life in the hat, I carefully apply multiple coats of polyurethane. On the first hat that I molded I brushed on the polyurethane too thick and it took away a great amount of the detail from the hat. The mold also had a number of additional problems that led to the hats cracking where the bill met the rest of the form. The mold had some flaws but it gave me enough information to understand the problems and to ultimately make another, better, mold.

I did manage to finish and fire a few hats from the first mold. After the firing, the hats shrunk more than I had hoped and this made the hats appear to be too small for one's head and therefore less realistic. I managed to find a very large hat to use to make a new mold.

When I remade the mold I applied multiple coats of spray-on polyurethane. Spraying on the application allowed me to carefully control the thickness of the polyurethane. After applying many coats over the course of a couple days the hat was stiff and held its form. There was still some evidence of polyurethane and to reveal all the hats true texture I next sanded the entire hat with fine-gritted sand paper. When making the plaster mold for the second time I decided to make the mold more complex and made the mold in seven parts, four more parts than the first mold. I have learned through experience with mold-making and slip-casting that oftentimes more complex molds are easier to open. I did not want the hat to show seam lines from the mold so I also made the parting lines in the mold follow the stitch pattern in the hat. The result of the second mold creates a perfect cast of the ball cap hat.

In addition to perfecting the mold to cast perfect hats, I also had to consider the final texture of the piece. I wanted the hats to have color and I have used color very successfully with glazes in the past, specifically glazes that replicate plastic. When I first tried to glaze the hats they looked like cheap plastic hats and most of the fabric texture was covered up. This led me to apply a commercial product from Amaco's velvet underglaze series. I carefully applied the underglaze with a brush and brush in the exact direction as the fabric moves. The velvet underglazes can be applied to the entire piece, which results in a piece that has no visual record of a clay body.



Image 8. "Welcome Home" Installation view

Although many of my ceramic installations result in a number of broken pieces they are actually designed for the ceramic objects not to break. Most of my installations are meant for the ceramic objects to be in a position where they could break, but that is determined by the participant and their interaction. To place my ceramic objects in risk but also allow hope through safety I need to cushion and protect the ceramic objects. In recent works during graduate school, I have tried several different ways to offer protection. On a piece titled *Wall Maze*, I ended the game by having ceramic balls land in a pile of sand. Recently in *Make it/Take it*, a ski ball inspired game, participants ramped large ceramic balls into a foam-padded peach basket. Although both results worked, I knew that I had to create something different for the safe landing required for "Welcome Home". This led me to first briefly explore silicone rubber and then with more success I began to cast soft, flexible foam.



Image 9. "Welcome Home" Detail of foam and wood hat racks

Last semester while admiring a rubber mold that our visiting artist, Jeremy Hatch, brought in, I realized that this material could potentially work for a hat rack. It was strong enough to hold its form but also very soft. During a quick test game session in the fall, I discovered that the rack did work when my classmate, Jenny Hager, successfully tossed a ceramic top hat onto a silicone rubber rack. Even though the rubber worked there were many problems with the material. The biggest problem was the weight. I started to research soft materials that can be cast and I discovered that the popular company Smooth-On sells a product called *flexible foam* that is offered in a variety of densities. Smooth-On's website showed what some of their customers were using this product for and the results (depending on density) included pillows, kid-safe motorcycle replicas, realistic looking prop swords and weapons, as well as cinderblocks that were used in *Spiderman 3* for a fight scene. This seemed like the perfect material and I purchased three different densities to test. In addition to the tests I also purchased colorants, which can be added to create different colors.

After some research, I learned that I was able to use a plaster mold to cast the foam material as long as the mold was non-absorbent. To do this I made a mold of a wheel-thrown form and dried it out completely and then sealed the surface, as if it were wood, with polyurethane. In addition to sealing the plaster I also apply a mold-release agent specifically sold for urethane foam products.

Casting foam is far different than the ceramic process of slip-casting. The foam starts as two separate liquids that when mixed creates a chemical reaction causing the expansion of the foam material. There are a variety of foam densities and I tested three to get a general idea of firmness. Depending on the density my tests expanded up to two, six, and eight times. To improve surface quality, created backpressure at the top of the mold. To force the foam to have backpressure I built a wooden box that tightly enclosed the mold. The top of the box screws to the side walls and has five holes on top, one central hole and four surrounding holes. After measuring the correct volume I vigorously mix the two parts together for thirty seconds and then pour the liquid into the center hole of the box. The foam only fills the mold part way and quickly expands upward. As the foam expands to the top of the board it is partially stopped by the wood and creates backpressure while releasing excess through the five holes in the board. The foam starts to expand immediately after pouring and cures for two hours before it can be removed from the mold. The results of the backpressure greatly improved the surface quality and overall aesthetics of the cast foam from a porous to a smooth surface.



Image 10. Example of casting foam.



Image 11. Example of casting foam.

After the foam was cast for the hat rack I still needed to attach it to the wall. This involved multiple processes in the woodshop. First, I created a collar that would tightly fit around the foam and act as support. To create the collar I used a hand-router to route a circle that had a slight curve equal to the cast piece of foam. To create a perfect circle I used the laser cutter to make a jig that was used to guide the hand router in a perfect circle. The shape of the hat rack, as it comes horizontally off the wall, is curved to read as a similar diameter of the curve in the base of the foam. The distance of the hat rack coming off the wall was determined by the size of the ceramic hats and placement of the foam.

The height of the foam that the hat lands on is important to the game functioning correctly. The first piece of foam that I cast first was six-inches tall. At this height the hat could rest on the foam and not touch the wooden base but it had to be placed perfect to do this. While working in the woodshop, one of my colleagues stated he would be hesitant to play the game because it looks like even if he tossed the hat on correctly; it would break on the wooden base. The foam, which is the area that the hat lands on, needed to be taller. I made a taller prototype and made a new mold, which casts a piece of foam nine inches tall. At this height the hat can come in at an angle and the bottom of the hat will hit completely on the foam.

Built to Play, "Can you help me with the dishes?"

"Can you help me with the dishes?" is an interactive installation in which participants compete against each other in a game to stack the tallest dish tower. Most people hate doing the dishes, which is why I designed this game. In *"Can you help me with the dishes?"* I wanted to bring new light to the unpopular activity of dishwashing by creating a simple competitive stacking game that awards winners with a gold-rimmed trophy cup or bowl of their choice.

Designing the dishes was the first part of this project that I undertook. From the beginning it was important that this game read as a dish stacking game, which meant that I had to design dishes. The focus and most important part of this piece is the interaction and people stacking the dishes. Knowing that the dishes were not the most important part of the piece meant the dishes could not be a distraction to the piece. What I mean by this is that a cup will stand out if it is overly designed, complicated or interesting or if the form looks weird or is not a dish. After a studio visit with a non-ceramicist I quickly began to understand the best form to make my dish prototypes was round and to have a slight variety in form. This way almost everyone who plays the game can instantly relate to the forms, and together individual pots blend together and are able to read as dishes. This creates stacked dishes, not stacked pottery.

Another important aspect in making the vessels look like dishes is the glaze finish. The glaze in this piece plays the same role as the forms; it attracts the right amount of attention, not too much or too little. I did not want a dominant or visually striking glaze or one with variety in color. I decided on a clear glaze to take advantage of my warm cream-colored clay body. I prefer the slightly off white look because it makes me think of a glaze on a porcelain diner mug rather than the pure white that is found in delicate fine china porcelain. My thought was that people would be more hesitate to competitively stack delicate looking white porcelain pots.



Image 12. *"Can you help me with the dishes?"* Detail of dishes

For the purpose of production, I wanted the dishes in my game to be simple enough to be produced from a one-part mold but to not appear to be overly simple or plain, they had to be convincing forms as cups and bowls similar to those in participants' cabinets. I used the potters wheel to create my prototypes for the dishes and threw solid forms upside-down. I created ten different forms, five cups and five bowls. The dish forms range from tall tumbler to small bowl and vary slightly in form, diameter, and height.

It was important that the piece was presented in the gallery but also for the activity to be viewed as taking place in a kitchen. To accomplish the dishes I designed a counter top to fit around a stainless steel sink while also providing stacking space. This structure is designed to read as a sink and counter in ones home. From the beginning I knew that I wanted a sink involved with this game. I grew up washing dishes by hand and have very little experience using a dishwasher. For this reason, when I think of doing the dishes, the first thought that comes to mind is using a sink to wash the dishes and stacking them in a dish rack.

In the gallery there is a sink countertop in the middle of the room. It is important the sink island be displayed in the center as it opens up the space for other people in the gallery to watch and participate in the interaction, as they become spectators. The sink island is designed for two players. At the center of the sink island is a stainless steel sink that is completely filled with dishes. Participants compete on their own countertop space while facing each other with the main stack of dishes in the middle.



Image 13. *Built to Play*, "Can you help me with the Dishes?"

In contrast to the other games in my exhibition, this game is a multiple player game and requires two people to play. I wanted to add diversity to the game objectives featured in my

exhibition. In *Welcome Home*, participants are challenging their own skill and ultimately competing against themselves (as the person performing a specific skill) and they are competing against me (as the game designer). *"Can you help me with the dishes?"* has participants competing against each other and only one person can be the winner. Inspiration for this game comes more directly from sports and competitions rather than carnivals and casinos. In contrast to winning a bright hat in *"Welcome Home"*, similar to a carnival prize; the prize for winning *"Can you help me with the dishes?"* is a gold lustered trophy cup that relates more to the type of prize that would be won at an intense one-on-one sports competition.

In *"Can you help me with the dishes?"* participants contribute to the artwork through their actions and reactions during the game but they also contribute by physically building something. Every person who competes will stack a different one-of-a-kind dish tower. Through the action of stacking these dish towers become sculptures. As the dishes erupt higher and higher the counter top will hopefully read as a pedestal to a stacked sculpture.



Image 14. *Built to Play, "Can you help me with the dishes?"*

Built to Play, "Gallery walls are supposed to be White"

Gallery walls are supposed to be white is an interactive installation that allows visitors to playfully fling wet-squishy clay against a colored portion of the wall in attempt to color the wall white. In contrast to the rest of the exhibition this installation allows visitors to play with much less pressure. The game was free, there were no written rules, no winners or losers, and no prizes. "*Gallery walls are supposed to be White*" featured three large metal buckets full of white mushy clay, similar; to half melted vanilla ice cream or mashed potatoes. In each of the containers there is a giant spoon to use to hurl wet clay to the wall.

One year on my birthday, I celebrated at a Japanese steak house and one of my favorite memories of the event was all of the tricks that the chef would do. He would build a volcano fire tower with onions and catch my plate on fire. It was during one of these events that I first tried and fell in love with shrimp. The chef would fling shrimp in the air and catch them on his hat or in his pocket. He would then involve us, the guests, and fling food into our mouths. This past experience and my goal of getting adults to play, has inspired me to create "*Gallery walls are supposed to be White*". Rather than having people launch shrimp, and as way to add diversity to the installations in *Built to Play* I changed the activity to serving a wet squishy substance.



Image 15. *Built to Play, "Gallery Walls are supposed to be White"*

Built to Play, "Please put the Laundry away"

When I was in high school we were required to learn how to juggle for gym class. We had to complete fifteen consecutive juggles to pass that portion of the class. Ever since, I attempt to juggle anytime I have the chance: three balls, extra fruit, rocks, pinecones, etc. I am not an expert but understand the basic concept. More recently, I have been juggling my clean socks every time I do laundry before I put my clothes away. *"Please put the Laundry away"* is the final installation in *Built to Play*. Participants can attempt to juggle unfired clay socks and those who complete one successful juggle can win one event ticket to be used on another game in the gallery.

I hope that some people will be intrigued by this and want to attempt to juggle my clay socks in the gallery. My hope is that no matter what happens in the gallery, whether someone participates in the game or simply observes, that they will try this at home with their laundry.

For this piece I am going to leave the socks as unfired clay objects. This is for two reasons. One reason is I want my exhibition to explore interactivity with clay in all states of the ceramic material. I already have two games where fired ceramic pieces break, one that uses wet clay, and this game that features bone-dry ceramics. The second reason I want to leave the socks unfired is a pun on clean laundry. I want people to play a game that features an object of clean laundry, a folded pair of socks; we typically do not fold our dirty socks. Since the socks are unfired they will leave clay residue on the hands and that residue might rub off on one's own clothes. So by playing a game that I play with clean laundry some of my guests could dirty their clothes and therefore are creating a need to do laundry.



Image 16. *Built to Play, "Please put the Laundry away"*

Conclusion: Observations from *Built to Play*, MPAC: June 1st, 2014

Making interactive work can be stressful due to the fact that the exact outcome of the artwork is always unknown until after the interactions take place. Lucky for me, I was able to see people interact with two of the installations in *Built to Play* before the closing reception. On June 1st, three days before the reception, was the first time I had people interact with the artwork in the gallery. 225 and *inRegister* magazines hosted a private event in the Shaw Center, MPAC. *Built to Play* was in the *Glassell Gallery*, which is located on the first floor of the Shaw Center. MPAC was on all six floors of the Shaw Center and was a private, sold-out event to 1500 people. Due to a limited number of ceramic hats, which I was saving for the closing reception, I allowed participants from MPAC to play “*Can you help me with the dishes?*” and “*Gallery walls are supposed to be White.*”

It was exciting to watch participants from MPAC interact with my artwork because it was the first time that I had a crowd full of people who I had never met and people who have never seen or interacted with my artwork. The response was extremely positive and everyone who was interacting with my artwork was having a good time. It was especially exciting to watch people interact with “*Gallery walls are supposed to be White.*” At first, I was worried that because of the fancy attire people would be hesitant to throw wet, goopy clay at the wall. Wrong! I noticed that groups of friends that knew each other participated together in what I am calling a session. It was interesting to watch how the sessions followed a similar pattern: one participant from the group usually goes first into the piece by grabbing a spoon and throwing the sloppy clay on the wall. While the first participant from each group’s session is first sticking the spoon into the slip, the other members from the group watch in hesitation. After the first volunteer flings the wet clay at the wall and is obviously having a good time the other members from the group join in.



Image 17. *Built to Play*, “*Gallery Walls are supposed to be White*”

My favorite example of a group's session was a group of five college-aged woman. They were all dressed in extravagant dresses and were wearing high heels. Never judge a book by its cover: these girls had no problem interacting with a messy material. One girl from the group went first, while her other friends stood further back. Two of the girls even video taped all of their interactions with their phones. The girl that went first flung the wet clay onto the wall several times and with a big smile on her face, she turned around and said to the skeptical friend of the group, "Try it!" The skeptical girl slowly walked up and timidly stuck the spoon into the metal bucket full of slip. Slowly and unsure, she flung a small amount of clay on the wall. And then she reached the spoon back in the bucket, and with a little more confidence splattered more clay onto the wall. Again, for a third time, the same girl stuck the spoon back into the bucket and with two arms, as if she was swinging a baseball bat, she hurled the clay as hard as she could onto the wall! This was a very special moment for me, to watch a twenty something year old woman go from frowning at the idea of flinging a messy material at the wall to a full on smile baseball swing at the wall. The skeptical girl, without a doubt, had an enjoyable interaction with my artwork.

The other stand out interactive experience that I witnessed from MPAC was an older couple playing "*Can you help me with the dishes?*" I approached them and asked if they wanted to play. I explained that the trophies were being saved for my actual reception but the winner would be able to keep one dish from their pile. The couple agreed. At the beginning, both were stacking slow but having a good time. About half way through the woman was ahead by almost a foot and the gentleman began to pick up his pace. He was having a good time but the competition was getting the best of him as his expression and actions were serious. Towards the end of the minute both stacks fell and a few pots broke on the floor. I had to quickly calm the couple down and stated that there was no penalty or hard feelings due to the broken pots. The woman was terrified and walked away but that gave me a chance to talk to the gentleman. He was smiling but still a little shook up. I asked him, "did you have fun?" He answered, "well yeah! But, I was so focused on winning that I never once thought the pots could break."



Image 18. *Built to Play, "Can you help me with the dishes?"*

Conclusion: Observations from *Built to Play*, Closing Reception May 3rd, 2014

The closing reception was extremely exciting because I was finally able to watch people try to play all the games in the gallery. All of the games in *Built to Play* were pay-to-play games. My system to have people pay-to-play was to sell tickets for \$10.00. "*Welcome Home*" required two tickets to play. "*Can you help me with the dishes?*" required only one ticket to play. "*Gallery walls are supposed to be White*" was of course free. As a way to allow people to play the two pay-to-play games I made "*Please put the Laundry away*" free to play but offered one free ticket to those who successfully completed one juggle. In the back of my mind I wanted to games to be able to run on their own but due to my excitement and desire to get involved I decided to work that night as the ticket seller. This was also a way for me to monitor the people playing and to make sure that everyone who played first bought a ticket. Having people pay-to-play is an important part to the exhibition as it does remind people that they are taking a risk and playing with breakable art for a chance to win art in normal circumstances, art costs money to acquire.

I started selling tickets at 6:15pm, fifteen minutes after the start of the reception. I sold the first two tickets to one of my friends from Gainesville, Florida who came to the reception, Nigel Rudolph. Nigel decided to practice by tossing his actual hat at the racks before selecting a porcelain hat. Nigel selected an orange hat and stepped up to the line. At this point there weren't too many spectators as not everyone was present at the reception and not everyone was aware that Nigel was going to play. Nigel tossed the orange ceramic hat like a Frisbee and it went soaring through the air. The orange hat landed on one of the foam racks but then bounced off to the right side and broke on the ground, creating a loud sound. The sound captured the room's attention but still some people were hesitant to play.



Image 19. *Built to Play*, "*Welcome Home*"

After Rudolph played everyone's interest and participation dramatically increased. I spent the evening near *"Welcome Home"* and spent the night selling tickets and observing people play. What I found the most interesting was how everyone had a different approach in terms of technique when playing the game. Nigel's technique was to of course practice the motion and to familiarize his body with the correct movement. What actually surprised me the most was that almost everyone held and tossed their hat differently. I designed the game and the hats to be held and tossed like a Frisbee but only a third of the people that played treated that hat as a Frisbee. Some contestants throw the hat underhand in what I used to call in basketball, "a granny shot". Some threw the hat and stuck one leg out and to the side, similar to the motion that bowlers do when bowling. Everyone tossed the hat differently and besides personality, there was no rhyme or reason to why some people choose their techniques.



Image 20. *Built to Play, "Welcome Home"*



Image 21. *Built to Play*, “Welcome Home”

Since I was not able to physically observe “*Can you help me with the dishes?*” I reviewed photographs that were taken at the reception. The game was a big success at the reception and a large number of people played. For the most part the people that competed against each other were friends. This meant that no matter who won, one of them was going home with a trophy, which in my mind altered level of the competition. The most exciting games were the games that involved two random people playing each other. In one particular game a young man, who had visited the gallery earlier in the week with his class, played against one of my colleagues, Jenny Hager. Since both players had played before they already had a strategy in mind and both towers were stacked taller than their bodies, so at the end of the minute they were reaching above their heads.

After reviewing all the photographs from “*Can you help me with the dishes?*” my favorite series of photographs of people playing was what I am calling “The tortoise versus the hare.” The “hare” was a contestant that tried to stack and move as fast as possible. The “tortoise” was a man that slowly pulled out the dishes from the sink and carefully planned out his tower after evaluating his pile. Right before the time ran out, the “tortoise” quickly stacked the tallest tower to win the game.



Image 22. *"Can you help me with the dishes?"*

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Vita

Forrest Gard is a native to Ohio and spent his first twenty-two years of life living, playing, and learning in Athens, Ohio. Gard first touched clay in high school and afterwards pursued an undergraduate degree in Ceramics at Ohio University. After earning his B.F.A he traveled to Montana and completed a short-term artist-in-residence program at Red Lodge Clay Center. After his artist residency, Gard, moved to Gainesville, Florida to continue his ceramic education at the University of Florida as post-baccalaureate student. Gard choose to attend Louisiana State University as a Graduate Student and is looking forward to having an M.F.A. this August (2014). In addition to enjoying the graduate school in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, he also fell in love with college football, crawfish, and catfish po'boys. Currently Gard is living and working in Columbus, Ohio. Gard is currently the Assistant Editor for Ceramics Monthly, Pottery Making Illustrated, Ceramic Arts Daily, and a number of Art Books. Outside of the studio Gard loves nature, hiking, his wife, Jeni Hansen Gard, and his two cats, Mikey and Beast.