Enumerate / construct

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By
Andrew Gilliatt
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ABSTRACT

I am fascinated how we define and personalize ourselves through the objects we own and accumulate. It is my goal to make a collection of utilitarian pottery forms that through the use of color, form, and pattern, are cohesive in their variety, and are accessible as objects for daily use.
With my functional pottery, I am designing and fabricating objects with the intent to create visibly dynamic forms that with the use of color and imagery are expressive, visually inviting, and easily accessible as objects for domestic use.

My aim is to create a body of work that is, in fact, cohesive in its variety. My hope is that by doing so, I can make pots that you identify with and want to own.

I am fascinated how we personalize and define ourselves through the objects we use and accumulate. The clothes we wear, the cars we drive, the things we decorate and furnish our homes with - all of these objects reflect our personality and aesthetic proclivities both publicly and privately.

I am interested in the phenomenon of how we look and shop for objects. Once the requirements of fit, occasion, and agency have all been established, (a size 11 running shoe that wears comfortably, for example), to what degree are we further attracted to the point of purchase? Is it the pattern of the shirt, the cut of the dress, or the color of the shoe that makes us want to own that object, or is it simply a matter of cost and convenience? This avenue of inquiry has led me to specific changes in how I approach the use of color, imagery, pattern, and form.

Making pottery provides a point of departure from which to explore formal qualities of line, color, surface, and form, in addition to exploring parameters of utility. As a maker and user of objects, I am always curious to rationalize why or how I’m attracted to a particular object. Is it the function of that object, the shape of the form, the line where two edges meet, or a particular contrast of color?
Beauty is difficult to rationalize, as it is never just one thing, nor is it ever one thing to all people. As with pottery it is never one thing we find attractive, rather it is the way these formal and functional qualities work in unison to create a visibly dynamic whole that ultimately engages us with that object.

I look to give myself a seemingly infinite, yet quantifiable amount of variety in the work I make. By defining an interchangeable framework composed around a finite amount of variables I keep myself actively engaged in the work. Through thoughtful analysis I pick and choose multiple combinations of color, form, and pattern in an attempt to discover results that successfully speak to my aesthetic desires as an artist. I want to reach as wide an audience as possible. In doing so I hope to make pots that share a range of ideas and communicate a breadth of expression in order to give my audience an array of possibility in what they can explore, choose, and take from the work.

In order to build a framework that could successfully carry my ideas and influences, I had to first identify the specific variables I wanted to work with and to give voice to them. In making this work, my goal is to define variations of color, form, and surface that independent of one another are engaging. The challenge is to then innovate these variables into successful combinations.

While I continue to investigate pottery through the avenue of formal considerations, what continues to emerge, are the ways in which I think about these formal qualities. This body of work is influenced by and references a variety of historical design movements. Many of the decal patterns and glaze combinations take reference from Art Nouveau and early European Constructivism. The forms themselves are inspired by Modernist design theory as well as contemporary design of disposable
household goods. Additionally, ideas of user participation, occasion, and ceremony present in the work, have been shaped by the phenomenon of collectability, the customization of industrially manufactured items such as cars and tennis shoes, t-shirts, and the signage associated with pop culture.

I aim to make pottery objects for everyday use (cups, mugs, bowls, and plates) that fulfill their practical requirements and whose purpose is evident in their form. As such, they should have appropriate weight and proportional volume to their intended use, handle well and with comfort as regards texture and ergonomics, drink reliably, sit well on a table or countertop, and meet the requirements of the modern kitchen (microwave, oven, and dishwasher safe).

And ultimately, the work must satisfy all of these standards in a manner that is holistically and visually satisfactory.

In devising a methodological framework that revolves around the concept of variables and variations, some parameter of constant had to be defined in order to unify the work. This would come through in the form of the object. For every pottery object (cup, bowl, mug, plate) there would initially be one design of form to satisfy that object's requirement of utility. So while every bowl might have a different combination of color and surface, every bowl would be the same shape.

Recent trends in industry helped frame this methodology. In order to give their customers more options in what they can choose from certain products, many companies have turned towards the idea of “mass customization” in their designs. Mass customization is a system that combines the low cost of mass production processes with the flexibility of customization. As example, “miAdidas” is an entire line of shoes offered
by Adidas that allows the customer to select from a range of athletic and casual shoe ware (golf, soccer, basketball, etc.) and then customize the color, and in some cases, fabric and pattern of the shoe. So while one soccer shoe may be different from another based on that customer’s input, every soccer shoe is the same form.

As forms, utilitarian objects are a designed expression of visual space versus volumetric requirement. In designing pots, I want to present the user with objects that are dynamic in their form - instantly assertive of their function, but at the same time, unfamiliar. A defined volume can take infinite form. Window cleaners, sports drinks, salad dressings and motor oils are all packaged in 32 fl. ounce containers. So while all of these objects contain the same volume, their forms (a result of their utilitarian requirements) possess a variety of expression - even when they may contain the same product. As example, ketchup bottles come in two familiar shapes, the cylindrical glass bottle and the ellipsoid, squeezable plastic bottle. Visually, the two forms function quite differently. Because of its symmetry, the glass ketchup bottle maintains the same amount of visual space when viewed from any angle. Its squeezable counterpart though, (that has the same amount of ketchup) commands twice as much visual space when viewed from its longer flat side as opposed to its narrow round side. This shift in perception, between volumetric and visual space, makes the object a compelling form.

Such animation in form is also achieved through a stressed emphasis of vertical and horizontal planes. With my work I want to accentuate planar form, oftentimes, by creating transitions that are activated through the intersection of vertical and horizontal plane. The design of the small bowl, for example, is highlighted by a soft swooping horizontal curve that is abruptly met by a steep vertical wall. The resulting line created
from this intersection undulates around the ellipsoid form, invoking a sense of movement that is then contrasted by the flat horizontal line of the rim. Because the ellipsoid form is both horizontal and vertical, it is unfamiliar in shape but instantly recognizable as a bowl. The bowl, independent of color or surface, is an engaging form.

In defining a vocabulary of form, this body of work has a thematic cohesion that is further enhanced through variable options of color and surface. With the use of color, specifically the amount of potentially available varieties, my goal is to simply keep the amount of options down to a manageable figure while still offering a wide range of selection and breadth. But my investigations into surface, on the other hand, are quite the opposite.

Although I’ve never considered myself a maker of images, I am fascinated with an image’s capacity to convey complex or straightforward ideas with much the same efficacy as the written word. Moreover, I am intrigued by the idea of the pictogram, in which a graphic symbol replaces the physical object through pictorial representation. More importantly, I am fascinated with an image’s potential to communicate ideas across far-reaching scopes of ethnicity, culture, time, and language. The beauty of the pictogram is that its success is dependent on its ability to communicate ideas quickly, and with complete economical visual clarity, in order to avoid confused misinterpretation. These types of images are everywhere and ever increasing.

My decision to incorporate imagery with my pottery is an attempt to both document and communicate the world around me. The real challenge in doing this is to be able to give myself free authority of license to reference anything at any moment - because I want the ideas and the influences behind the images to be able to change and
evolve, to be a reflection of my personality and (so that the work doesn’t become too contrived) a response to what I’m thinking about at any specific given moment in time.

The ideas behind the images are varied and aren’t necessarily rooted towards any specific place or theme. An idea for a graphic might come from a private conversation with a friend, an inside joke, a ride on the bus, a walk through the park. Often times I’ll have a specific person in mind – tools for a carpenter, scissors for a seamstress, or dinosaurs for my nephew. Other times it might be an occasion or an activity that gives rise to an image – a vase for a wedding, an ice cream bowl for a birthday, a coffee mug for a desk job you hate, a rainy day, eating pizza, doing the dishes. Or sometimes I’ll have no idea what image to put on a pot and will just respond to the object at hand – bananas on a yellow bowl, circles on a dot.

The entire process in making these pots, in devising a framework that allows for flexibility, options, and variety, is the excitement that comes from taking all of the paired down variables, responding to them, and then constructing them in a way that is visually satisfactory, engaging, and accessible. The challenge then becomes a process of recognizing what combinations are more successful than others.

With my thesis show I wanted to present a large amount of work in order to highlight the inherent thematic variations and to present the pots in a way that seemed manageable and comprehensible to the audience. And with such a large body of work present, my goal was to implicitly suggest the possibilities for further and future permutations that otherwise were not represented.

Most of the wares were displayed in sets of groupings whose forms were different but whose surfaces were identical (see image 1). With other groupings, I presented
variations on a theme – identical forms, with identical patterns, but with different colors (see image 2 and image 3.) By displaying these pots in separate groupings but in the same gallery space the potential for variation was readily identifiable. While one grouping of pots may only have been available in yellow, the fact that other pots were available in different colors implicitly suggested that the yellow pots could also be produced in different colors.

In other displays, a specific surface treatment was presented in a dinner set format in order to illustrate all of the available pottery forms (image 4.), while another grouping was presented through only one specific form, but in a variety of different color and surface treatments (image 5.) The intent between these two types of display is to represent both the potential focus and breadth available in the work to illustrate what one design might look like on all of the forms and additionally to imagine what one surface might potentially look like on other forms.

My goal is to evoke a sense of participatory experience between my audience and myself - whether that’s through an experience of walking through a gallery and investigating the work, a conversation for an idea, a commission for a piece whose options are available but maybe not present at that moment, or if the experience is as simple as someone enjoying the moment of seeing or using something that I made.

My greatest desire in making these pots is that they become an honest reflection of myself – evidence of an idea or a feeling, a marker of thought. I hope that through their variety, that the work can change and evolve and that these pots continue to be pieces that I enjoy making and sharing with others.
And in making this work, I truly hope that in some way, whether it is the shape of a bowl, a cup in your favorite color, or an image that makes you laugh, that the pots I make become a genuine reflection of you and your experiences.
IMAGE LIST

Image 1 – Bird grouping

Image 2 - Cassette Grouping
Image 3 - Turntable Grouping
Image 4 – Dinner Set
Image 5 – Tumbler Grouping
VITA

Andrew Gilliatt was born in Richmond, Virginia, in 1979. His father is a retired art educator and his mother a retired elementary school teacher. As a child, along with his older brother Tom, Andrew grew up traveling around the United States and Mexico visiting cultural centers and museums, imbuing him with a lifelong interest in travel. Andrew received his Bachelor of Fine Arts in Graphic Design in 2003 from the University of Virginia Tech where under the instruction of David Crane, he was first introduced to clay. In 2004 Andrew moved to Kansas City, Missouri to pursue his interests in ceramics. From 2004 – 2008 he was an intern and resident artist at Red Star Studios. In 2008 Andrew came to Louisiana State University to work towards a Master of Fine Arts in ceramics.