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## Coasteering

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# COASTEERING

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
The College of Art and Design  
In partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Master of Fine Arts

In

The Department of Fine Arts

by

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B.A. The Pennsylvania State University, 2004

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## ABSTRACT

Coasteering: (noun) An adventure sport tasked with defining and exploring boundaries and coastlines.

Adam Meistrell's artwork is an invitation to interpret evidence and inspiration through making, investigation, and utility. He utilizes a variety of working methods to interpret evidence and share his understanding.

## **Wonder**

Questioning reminds me that I do not know.

## Sightlines

“The most ubiquitous human desire is to be known,” Jonathan Reed, conversation 2003.

Through exploration I unpack the evidence of the world around me. I adapt my treks into a form of cartography that becomes the threshold for what is and what may be. Cartography is a way of conveying known information as I endeavor to teach and to share knowledge with others.

Cartography is a system of symbols created to express knowledge of the past and inherently builds a structure for understanding the present and future. The beauty of a map is that it is informative only to a point. It can relate significant information, but the vastness of details can only be known once regions are personally investigated. The most engaging feature of a map is an inescapable desire to be known and maps allow for me to relate aspects of my experiences and welcome others to investigate the remainder for themselves. I employ abstracted cartography to display whom I am and where I've been to understand and be understood.

Francis Schaeffer in Art and the Bible contends that all artists make from a worldview, and this should be their worldview. People have inherent value as image bearers of God and objects merely facilitate our lives, they do not live them for us. I use art and objects to share who I am and ask others who they are. Schaeffer speaks about Rembrandt's painting, Side of Beef Hanging in a Butcher Shop.

as an all-encompassing example of how an artist's work can highlight or change the mindset of the viewer (Figure 1). By choosing to depict this object within its context, Rembrandt has initiated a questioning of painting's source. My role as a person and a maker is to employ my skills and abilities with excellence to serve and love others. Functional wares provide a communal space to celebrate our wanderings and span our differences. Through the range of purely utilitarian forms to sculptural works, I speak to the human life as a necessity to take part, whether in direct service or through an advisory

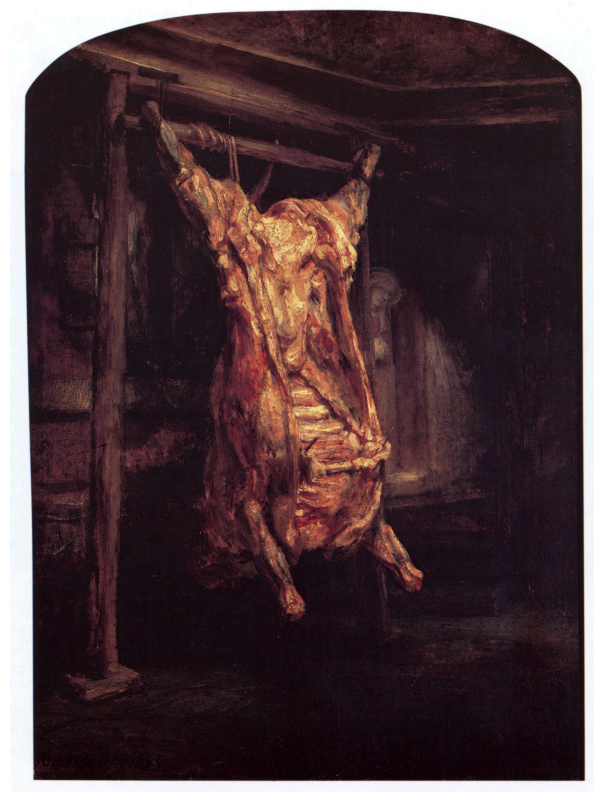


Figure 1 Rembrandt

role. These finite objects serve as a key to stir wonder towards the infinite.

I design and create works in series and phases, each an adaptation of a familiar form. The drawing and patterns in my surfaces are to be read as past or planned routes and as

geoglyphic impressions across the surface of a landscape. Much like maps, my wares are intended to read on a variety of scales with the detail corresponding in relation to that particular plan.

Art and creation are the means for Individual reflection and learning coupled with collaborative interaction. The orange and yellow marks and shapes act as guidance signs and points of communication between the participant and me to indicate my observations and correlations (Figure 2). Large-scale work is employed to convey layers of information while the smaller scale acts as a trail blaze to indicate a path and direction for exploration.



Figure 2 Meistrell Mezzo Jars

Through investigation, I see intrinsic order in the universe that speaks to a Creator. Ceramic materials and glaze calculation are based on the table of elements and the

structure and boundaries therein. There is an immense variety in beauty and complexity that stems from these underlying structures and by highlighting specific aspects of creation; I leave breadcrumbs of these evidences for the viewer to trace. DNA is another model for a structure that allows for immense variety and diversity. In Signature in the Cell, Stephen C. Meyer says that without the proper boundaries “the longitudinal axis of DNA would be peppered with repetitive sequences of ACGT. Rather than being a genetic molecule capable of virtually unlimited novelty and characterized by unpredictable and aperiodic sequences, DNA would contain sequences awash in repetition or redundancy—much like the arrangement of atoms in crystals.”<sup>1</sup> The DNA language is vast and filled with potential only because of the structures and boundaries that it works within.

I am intrigued to learn of human ingenuity, such as Josiah Wedgwood’s ceramics and Gutenberg’s printing press, and love to be reminded of it in nature. An extraordinary example of structure in nature is bees. Of the three naturally tessellating shapes, triangles, squares, and hexagons, bees choose hexagons. Marc Chamberland, in Single Digits, speaks about the mathematics behind why hexagons are the most efficient in ratio of volume to container and allow for a regulated industrial production. This organization culminates in beautiful honeycombs that are functional and aesthetically pleasing. My hexagonal lunch plates stem from this systematic idea. They originated from a digital 3D model that was CNC milled and then cast in plaster. The CNC milling process was stopped prior to the complete finish pass to show the steps of refinement in each subsequent casting. From the foot to the finished edge, this press mold is designed to produce similar, but not identical, plates that become canvases for individualized information. This system builds a structure

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<sup>1</sup> Meyer, Location 4234 of 12682

for me to experiment with defined variables and allows for the participant to rearrange and interact with individual or sets of plates.

The large Mezzo jars incorporate a layered hexagonal grid of colored terra sigillatas that interact with each other (Figure 3). Geoglyphic-like lines and shapes draw attention to varying aspects of the forms and surface interactions. The undulating latitudes emphasize a desire to do more than meet in the middle. The faceted lids speak to an interest in mental flexibility and a willingness to refine our thinking. Going back to the emphasis on people, there is a need to show grace and forgiveness, to collaborate and do more than just meet in the middle. What structures and boundaries allow for understanding and collaboration?



Figure 3 Meistrell Mezzo Jars



## Prospect and Praxis

"An *expert* is a man who has made all the mistakes which can be made, in a narrow field." -

Niels Bohr

My son tossed an egg onto the floor and, after seeing it splat, he enthusiastically reproduced these results. It was a joy to see this crystallized moment of learning and I am intrigued by the sometimes-messy cycle of investigate, understand, and respond. Improvisation with respect to prior knowledge and experience influences my working methodology.

Creating is a heuristic process through which I learn as I go and build upon prior foundations. Play, as an investigative tool, is an integral part of my work as I employ intuition and detailed rendering. The immediacy of crayons on paper and wet clay in the hand spur me on to experiment and discover further adaptations of form and surface. Spontaneity and planned execution are employed in tandem to investigate and create my works. I see expectation and iteration of experiment as a call and response to the scientific method with a goal of understanding. This creative methodology is characterized by the steps of observe, contemplate, formulate, make, assess, make, reassess. I design and create works in series and phases, each an adaptation of a familiar form. I take a period of reflection to evaluate each edition before moving onto the next. This gives me direction and boundaries to work within. Properly set boundaries focus my mind and allow me to explore the many facets within the set parameters. Coasteering is the exploration of a defined boundary between land and sea, or the division of country and culture. These boundaries ease my understanding of where I am and allow me to decide where I want to

be, which requires action on my part. The variety found amongst my teapots (Figure 4) is an example of the use of parameters to define a series that is similar but continues to explore. From this series I can and will again assess my results and reevaluate the boundaries for the next series.



Figure 4 Meistrell, Various Teapots

The adventure of trying something I have not done before is both frightening and inviting. Mnemonic symbols and patterns allow me to revisit and create memories in combinations that help me correlate evidences. Within the surfaces of my pottery, I recall prior experiences and combine them into a new experience. To invite investigation, I add ambiguity to my imagery through the combination of multiple instances across time and

space. This allows for the participant to reference and remember his own experiences and create common ground.

My ceramics stem from playing with crayons and pencils and move towards construction. I often combine a variety of thrown, hand built, and molded ceramic forms. I inscribe lines across forms and surfaces to act as geoglyphs and records. Architecture and landscape inform a compromise between geometry and variety. The surfaces of my wares integrate moments of visual rest, exercise, interruption and play through layers of lines, texture and spirited colors. I approach woodworking with the same beginnings as I do ceramics, while continuing the thread of an additive and subtractive process (Figure 5). The results are forms with defined boundaries and fields of information. I find I can best appreciate complexity when it is housed within context and parameters.



Figure 5 Meistrell Handmade Draw-leaf Table and Wares

I encourage interaction by creating utilitarian objects of both grand and modest sizes. Functional wares provide a communal space to celebrate our wanderings and span our differences. Like undulating rock strata, the asymmetrical details reveal truths through successive visits of the form and surface. These revelations are best when shared. The quest for these new discoveries beckons me to explore again.

My wares have a sturdy, trustworthiness. This is brought about by the weight and dimension of each aspect. I leave mass in the handles to detract from a sense of delicacy. I work with a theoretical Venn diagram of mass, fluidity and fragility to seek out the balance between being too dense and feeling actively robust. In physics, mass is the measure of resistance to change. This, both aesthetically and practically, lends to a sense that these objects will endure use and a reason to consider what change may bring.

## Discretion

I find I am most drawn to artwork that demonstrates a level of restraint, standing in a middle-ground between order and chaos in both form and surface. Through observation I have come to realize aspects of artwork I am drawn to and see in my perceived successes. In ceramics I am drawn to Jeff Oestreich, Tom Jaszak and Mark Pharis's work, which demonstrates restraint from extravagant decoration but utilizes depth of surface to add interest and variety (see figures 6-8). I feel a need to fight the urge to work like Mike Helke



Figure 8 Jaszak



Figure 6 Helke



Figure 7 Oestreich



who shows restraint in his depth of surface but freedom in form and decoration. I find exhilaration in the immediacy of Helke's exploration of forms but feel let down by his abandoning of refinement. Oestrich's and Jasczak's works demonstrate the reliable strength and sturdiness I look to convey but their's is not playful enough for the work I desire to produce. Pharis seems to fluctuate between these two sides, though he tends to be more on the latter (see figure 9).



Figure 9 Pharis

Art and architecture are demonstrations of imposing our will on the world around us. In the best examples, it shows off the vision of the maker as well as the natural beauty of the world around it. The patterns of my Mezzo storage jars are reminiscent of Laszlo Moholy-Nagy's and Paul Klee's painting processes (see figures 9-10). Moholy-Nagy's constructivist paintings demonstrate his agency through planned color blocking and purposeful color changes, while Klee's layering of colors revealed something new to discover with each brush stroke. I see my surfaces as successful when there is a mingling of these methodologies. These Mezzo jars speak to a local activity on a global scale. The surface and

form demonstrate the positive effects of going beyond meeting in the middle. By understanding which art forms I am drawn towards I have been able to define some boundaries for myself to explore within.

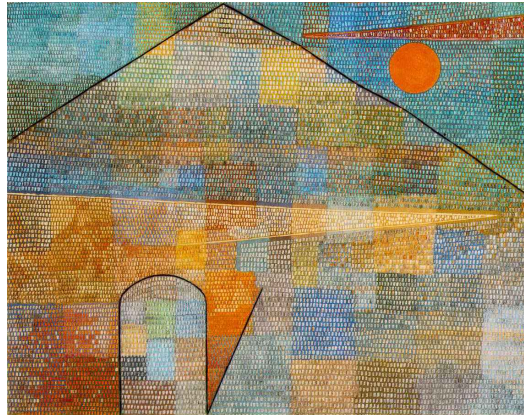


Figure 11 Klee

Mid-century modern furniture and ceramics were informed by the ideals of the Bauhaus. My ceramics show expression and color blocking across soft forms and edges but the furniture tends toward simple geometry with directional lamination and inlay. Ecclesiastes



Figure 10 Moholy-nagy

1:9-10 says, "What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun. Is there anything of which one can say, 'Look! This is something

new'? It was already here, long ago; it was here before our time." This statement clearly acknowledges that the objects of this life, in themselves, are without substantial value. The value comes from the facilitation of human interaction that they represent. We have much to learn from the past but are individually encumbered to navigate the present. The archaic look of my works is combined with modern bright yellow and orange lines and shapes that respond to the old form but shift and move towards something new. This speaks to a desire for understanding what has been before and an attempt to respond.

I leave evidence of the process of refinement by allowing intrinsic imperfections to remain. This is indicative of a desire to continually achieve better than I have before and a desire to keep my life in perspective. Reminders of what I have to learn from become breadcrumbs for participants to follow. My artistic practice is characterized by a desire to learn and be known. The methodologies I employ provide a structure to investigate the wonders of this life and provide perspective in relation to the rest of my experiences. The evidence I leave is a communication for others to explore.



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## **Vita**

Adam Meistrell was born and raised in Naples, Florida. His first memories are of making art and traveling. After graduating from Penn State, he spent a few years seeking out adventure: driving to Alaska, jumping off cliffs in Italy, and surfing in Costa Rica. Adam's work experience has been as varied as his travels. He has extensive teaching experience in K-12 Art, along with adult and community education and professional photography as well. Throughout this time, Adam maintained his ceramic art studio.