

2017

Oblivion

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OBLIVION

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 Department of Art

by
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B.F.A., B.S., St. Olaf College, 2007
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ABSTRACT

I am fascinated by the myriad ways humans construct meaning in the face of existential uncertainty. For the exhibition Oblivion, I endeavor to provide a gallery experience, a body of metaphorically charged functional vessels, and a number of ritualistic accoutrements that address death, futility, and the passage of time as it inexorably flows toward obsolescence.

The process of handcraft and the method of firing that I employ highlights the absurdity of the endeavor of the handmade: the seemingly futile and interminable quest for perfection and meaning. This utilitarian pottery exaggerates the errors of the hand and flaunts artifacts of the intense heat from firing as a metaphor for the human condition. Although the pots themselves may be inanimate know-nothings, they still have much to teach us about the natural and the arcane.

It is my hope to create a body of work that is honest in its connections to the peculiarities of existence and absence: to provide the viewer with an accessible and introspective opportunity to reflect on the desire for understanding those things that lie beyond our control. It is both a liberating comfort and a savage terror that the dead do not return, except in stories and dreams.

INTRODUCTION

I have yet to determine if my motivations for making art ultimately stems from a desire to affect change internally or externally, but it is clear nonetheless that the compulsion for me to make ceramic objects exists. In the madness of my own work, any attempts to seriously and all-encompassingly codify the of meanings and peculiarities in my work have proven to be failures. This is not to say that there is nothing to to say about the work, but perhaps that there is too much. However, for the rest of this thesis, I will attempt to shed some light on the thoughts and experiences involved in my process of making ceramic art.

In dealing with the materiality of clay, I feel acutely aware of my place as a potter in the continuum of potters through history whose works have served innumerable purposes outside of their use as vessels. In the context of this historical lineage—the periodic rise and fall of civilizations and ideas and the interminable marching forward of time—even high fired porcelain that can exist on a geological timescale will eventually transform from an object imbued with meaning by its creator, to an artifact of historical relevance, and finally to a nothing: witness to the inevitable end of humanity as we are familiar with it. It may seem a bit reductive to attribute a lack of inherent meaning and an inescapable futility to this fact alone, but the knowledge of my own death and inevitable obsolescence has nonetheless been a central theme in my search for purpose and meaning in clay. This is not to say that an embrace of futility, impermanence, and imperfection is ,or should be, the modus operandi for the average contemporary ceramic artist (although examples are ubiquitous), but to suggest an examination of meaning in art with a pointed skepticism in acknowledgement of this futility. If we tear down our interpretations of ceramic art and manage to continue in its endeavor, then perhaps we may be able to receive hints at how to negotiate its meaning.

OBLIVION: THE CONCEPT

Ceramics has become a way of life for me. The wheel and the clay have grown into a calling that extends far beyond the studio. In the chemistry of the material, I see connections to our ancestors; in my own ideas, I see an inexorable influence from my contemporaries. I feel an incredible power from the chance to be relevant in the present dialogue of ceramics, but also a hopeless longing to understand the impact of my actions.

As an artist, I strive to find my place among my contemporaries and in the historic cannon of ceramic art, but my experiences outside of my artistic practice have occasionally caused me to doubt that my actions as an artist have the capacity to be meaningfully impactful at all. Working in the studio, I feel a sublime satisfaction in confronting the physicality of the clay. In my research, however, I sense a profound futility in making handmade ceramic art that stems particularly from ideas about impermanence, death, and the search for meaning. I imagine that with some regularity, this feeling of futility washes over many who consider the handmade closely. Like a wave of existential dread and self-doubt, this experience, when resolved, has the potential to allow objects to pierce through the veil of normative thought with some focus and urgency. The goal of Oblivion, then, is to provide an experience of inward contemplation in a gallery setting in reverence of death, futility, and the passage of time.

My mentor, Steven Hill, said to me that to be an artist is to be doomed to a life of dissatisfaction: to look back on completed bodies of work with a critical eye, seeing that they are inadequate. He follows this claim with the claim that artists are equally “doomed” to a life of passion, finding constant excitement as we inch ever closer to meaning in our daily practice. In this imagining, the artist is content in a type of Sisyphean tragedy, alone in the pursuit of a personal meaning where nothing is more reliable than the experience of failure. There is hope,

though, because the knowledge of our inevitable death gives rock pushing some meaning that Sisyphus had no access to. In acknowledging the collective futility of the labors of humans, we can understand change, desire, and motivation. We reap the benefits from the labors of antecedent relatives, and we stand a bit higher on the mountain: elevated on the pottery shards of innumerable forgotten potters. We seek out new meanings as quickly as they can be revised by the next wave of artists, and there is an impermanence to even the most lasting objects; the most enduring truths. Indeed, an awareness of futility implicated by death and the passage of time seems to be a prerequisite for the development of the things that betray meanings as we understand them. At the very least, it appears that meaning and futility are so inextricably linked in the endeavors of humans that there can be no possible separation. We do push the rock up the hill every day: 10,000 mugs will be made and all of them are flawed, 500 teapots will be made that could still use a tweak, and a lifetime of glaze testing and research will be conducted and forgotten. We push it with passion! We push it real good!

I describe this paradoxical condition to show that futility is a critical part of the equation of making and being, although it may not represent the whole picture. The apparent idolization of futility in Oblivion does not necessarily illustrate a cynical defeatism, but rather a desire for understanding those things that lie beyond our control. I believe that serious contemplation of death and futility provides an opportunity to experience a release of self from the microcosm of the mundane: to question the authoritative structures that we find to be arbitrary or unsatisfactory, which can be found both in my own work and in the world. To make pots, for me, is to thrive in Sisyphus' microcosm of futility: to plan out a new route to the top of the mountain; to hallucinate that the condition may be beautiful; to strive honestly for understanding derived

from vacuous truth; and to brazenly attempt to wrangle the natural world into placid comfortability.

Although this opinion seems to represent a pretty bleak outlook on the artist's condition, I believe that these observations are, in fact, an affirmation of the role of the artist: a commitment to finding meaning, knowing that one must paradoxically suffer from its delusion. Indeed, there is a sort of meaning to be found in the lack of one, and it is in this absurd and personal confusion that the contemporary functional pot becomes all the more powerful and fascinating. The functional ceramic artist emerges from this epistemological muck as a brand of anti-hero: an acolyte in the school of dedication to personal ethos; and in many cases, as a champion of the "futilitarian".

OBLIVION: WORKS AND LABOR

In Oblivion, the pot serves as a point of access between my audience and me. It carries in its material and history a rich and diverse set of associations not limited to: clay as featured in creation myths, to the the role of ceramic vessels as a critical tool for early agrarian humans, as a symbol of community or consumption, to containers of the spirit, as a metaphor for the human body and even as objects with sexual implications. Particularly in a time when technological advancements in manufacturing have eliminated the primary historical necessity of handmade practices, pottery in a gallery setting strongly beckons for a metaphorical interpretation.

The works are historically referential, a syncretism of inspirations from a certain class of eighteenth century European production ceramic practices that many contemporary Americans may be familiar with from their grandmother's china cabinet, as well as works of a similar style and period that are ubiquitous in Louisiana. This period in European ceramic art history represents a massive industrialization and popularization of ceramic wares, with advances in technology that led to the first large scale porcelain production facilities in the West. Josiah Wedgwood, a big source of formal inspiration for me, was one of the most skilled and proficient potters and industrialists of eighteenth century England. Not only did he vastly increase the quality and variety of ceramic wares being produced at the time, he painstakingly invented his own clay bodies and equipment. Wedgwood transformed basic materials into sophisticated tools of expression, and contracted with other artists to capture the Rococo and Neoclassical tastes of eighteenth-century Europe¹. To me, the works of Wedgwood and his Delft, Sevres, and Meissen contemporaries demonstrate a standard of an exacting, ornate quality. With molds for mass

¹ Graham, John Meredith, and Hensleigh Cecil Wedgwood. *Wedgwood*. Brooklyn: Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences, 1948.

reproduction and hundreds of workers skilled in a particular aspect of the work, the standards set by these production centers are impossible to meet with contemporary hand and wheel studio processes in the convention of the solitary artist. These historical pieces, with their intricately flourished handles, dramatically elevated bases, and optimistic precious metal gilding, these pieces ultimately represent a criterion for perfection that reflects the idealistic virtues of an upper class. Despite their formal excellence, however, these vessels and the concepts they stand for fail to meaningfully satisfy in the contemporary world that the work still gazes out upon.

I try to address these criteria for beauty—or at least highlight the absurdity in the attempt—with work that is inspired by, but anachronistic to, both eighteenth century Europe and my own time and place. By referencing these historical pieces, I desire to emphasize change: the fickle nature of established meaning as it is inevitably lost or retooled to stay relevant. As a result, I refer to many of the pieces in my thesis as Lost Age pots: works that could have been made by some civilization unknown within our microcosm of knowledge (Figure 1. Lost Age Mug, Figure 2. Lost Age Mug). In this way, the work speaks to the ebb and flow of cultures and ideas, the labors of humans realized and subsequently lost—as has demonstrably happened numerous times in the course of human history.

I (and many of my contemporaries) undertake the incredibly laborious task of creating individual objects one at a time by molding them with our hands, more tediously and inaccurately than is possible with other widely available processes. I use methods like slip trailing (the technique of squeezing wet clay or glaze from a syringe onto the surface of a form), handle pulling and hydro-abrasion (the erosion of bone-dry porcelain around a painted resist that leaves a raised pattern) that betray, upon close inspection, the obvious nature of the handmade, evident mainly in failings of precision and consistency. The overarching metaphor of the vessels

in Oblivion, that fall supremely short of Wedgwoodian quality and availability, then, is that they are representations of the futility of my labors and of human labors as a whole as they endure the passage of time.

I employ a method of soda firing that strongly affects the work. Soda firing was developed at Alfred College in New York in the 1970s to mimic and replace the less environmentally friendly historical method of salt firing². There are many different nuanced approaches to soda firing, but in my process, I inject a solution of soda ash and water into the kiln around its final temperature of about 2300° F. This soda ash vaporizes in the immense heat and is carried around by convection currents and water vapor where it comes in contact with the ware, complexing with the silica in the clay and glaze to form a soft, glassy surface. If the kiln is reduced at key points in the firing, the soot and carbon that results from the combustion of fuel in the absence of oxygen is locked into the amorphous crystalline matrix of the glaze as a result of the property of soda ash to “carbon trap”. I add wood to the firing during reduction periods to further exaggerate this effect and incorporate wood ash deposits into the glaze. The heat from the firing and the softening power from the soda ash, wood, and glaze greatly affect, even contaminate, the pristine porcelain that the work is made from: in some cases causing cracking, warping, unexpected flowing of glazes and incidental drips from the material of the kiln itself. I also use layered microcrystalline glazes that are dramatically affected by the rate of cooling in the kiln which may exhibit considerable position-dependent variation of the ware in its interior. These microcrystalline base glazes chaotically discolor, mate, or crystallize the modifying glazes that they contact. These processes can be controlled somewhat in the methods used in the glazing of the work and the firing and loading of the kiln, but there is an incredible variation in

² Britt, John. *The complete Guide to High-Fire Glazes: Glazing and firing at cone 10*. New York: Lark Books, 2007.

the surfaces of distinct works in even a single kiln firing. This renders each individual object unique, in stark contrast to historical production porcelain. Uniquely affected by the multivariable chaotic systems of glaze and fire, and relating to other pieces in the collection primarily through shared formal aspirations, these pieces find themselves alone in their existence as solitary objects: the story of their most dramatic transition obscured by the thick, refractory walls of the kiln.

It is not simply the variation in the work that I find interesting, though: it is the quality of how the kiln and the hand affects the objects. The layered glazes tarnish the surfaces of forms that aspire to perfection, often crystallizing in a foggy nebulous flow of features that speak to me of the passage of the time on a geological or cosmic timescale (Figure 3. Glaze Detail from Call of the Void). The creeping blackness from carbon trapping at immense temperatures attacks the pots around their edges (Figure 4. Ceremonial Ewer with Carbon Trapping). This can expose and create vulnerabilities. In some cases, the firing can even damage the work in a way that impedes or destroys its functionality. The affective qualities of the kiln and the inadequacy of the individual hand suggest a paradoxical struggle in the work's reach toward perfection that is fundamentally dominated by the chaotic and indifferent forces of the external world that is occupied by both pots and humans.

I have chosen to include a few works in Oblivion that provide evidence of these effects as defining characteristics. The Sympathetic Crack presents a large and dramatic crack in the handle of a teacup (Figure 5. the Sympathetic Crack). Similarly, The Crucible consists of three platters: two with drips from shelving, and one with a large crack memorialized in gold (Figure 6. The Crucible, Figure 7. The Crucible detail). These works are, in essence, a call to bear witness to the

failures and destructive forces that are integral to the endeavors of creating pots and investigating meaning as a human.

Metaphorical symbolism is an important aspect of nearly all the pieces in Oblivion. The urn and the skull are reoccurring themes that speak to death (Figure 8. Funerary Urns). There are two central repeating motifs on the ceramic objects in this exhibition. The first is a laurel wreath—which has connections to academia and colloquially symbolizes “victory”—encircling a skull that speaks to “the victory of death”: a reminder that all earthly endeavors must end (Figure 9 Victory of Death platter). The second motif is an empty laurel wreath, which I refer to as the Empty Set in Laurel. The empty set, a mathematical concept, refers to a set that contains nothing—a grocery bag without any groceries, a funerary urn without ashes. In this case, the laurel suggests the “victory of nothing(ness)”: the labors of humans as victories in the aims toward a vacuous goal (Figure 10. Empty Set in Laurel teapot, Figure 11. Empty Set in Laurel charger).

"The Call of the Void" is a translation of French phrase that refers to the common experience of intrusive thoughts, and is the title of the table setting that takes a prominent place in the exhibition. The Call of the Void introduces Oblivion as a contemplation of death. A mirrored tabletop develops the idea of self-reflection and induces a vertigo as one moves around the table—consistent with the most commonly reported intrusive thought: the momentary desire to hurl oneself over the edge of a tall edifice. The Call of the Void is a table setting for two, where the heads of the table experience a view of the work reaching skyward as well and plunging below the table, grasping simultaneously for the heavens and the abyss (Figure 12. The call of the Void). Immediately in front of each setting is a crystal ball, or orbiculum. These orbiculums may tell the certain future: by gazing into the orb, one sees themselves distorted, immersed in a black sphere of nothing (Figure 13. The Call of the Void orbiculum). I chose to

elevate the table setting on sawhorses to enhance the perception of temporality. These symbols come together to suggest a condition of futility, with the passage of time facilitating both progress and obsolescence.

As Above So Below, is likely the most impactful of the works in Oblivion (Figure 14. As Above, So Below). For this sculpture, I endeavored to create a certain gravity to the contemplation of death that I felt would not be effective with ceramic symbolism and representation alone. The work is a ziggurat-like formation that, on the of a glass cabinet, displays a historically inspired five piece garniture set featuring three urns and two vases with the “victory of death” and “empty set in laurel” motifs. Below the garniture sits, enclosed in glass, a research specimen of a preserved dog, likely a chocolate lab, surrounded by flowers and remnants of broken pottery on black sand. When I was a biology student, I had the opportunity to work for the biology department in their preparations lab as a taxidermist. This experience, although initially revolting, provided me with an extreme appreciation for the role the animals unwittingly play in facilitating the goals of people. More importantly though, a familiarity with death and viscera made me acutely aware of my own biological composition. Bearing witness to death in a tangible way affected me profoundly as I realized that the nature of humans and animals is more alike than different. I wanted to also provide a moment of reverence to the plight of those research animals that are normally given an unsanctimonious ending. “As above so below” is a popularized phrase based on an esoteric religious text that asserts a similarity between the microcosm and the macrocosm. Particularly, it suggests that any part of the universe (the microcosm) reflects the whole (the macrocosm). My work, As Above, So Below, seeks to point out the similarities between the broken pots, and the intact; the research animal that is a proxy for humans; and the similarities between a thriving, idealistic existence and a desolate

graveyard. Just as humans attempt to dominate and shape the natural world that they have the ability to control (the microcosm above), so does the natural world render human labors futile with the passage of time and oblivion from death (the macrocosm below). However, it is perhaps less meaningful to be confronted with death unexpectedly than it is to make the calculated choice to consider it. In this sculpture, one must crane their body over the glass table, to break through the barrier from above in order to glimpse a visage of the animal's sardonic grin (Figure 15. As Above So Below detail). When I prepared the specimen for exhibition, I felt loss and empathy: I saw myself.

The Urns of Abandonment series is a grouping of urns adorned with the “empty set in laurel” motif, and loosely inspired by Alberto Giacometti's Four Women Standing in Space. Giacometti's style of portraying figures that are rough, eroded, and pummeled with gesture was precipitated by an existential crisis when his former idealism was shattered after witnessing the horrors of war³. Giacometti's figures are standing alone in space appear abandoned, hollow, and affected with their beaten and smushed appearance; yet they are still standing upright. My urns have similarly been affected by circumstance, with a slight lean, a crystalline stain, and a pallid green glaze augmented with the ashes of fuel wood (Figure 16. Urns of Abandonment, Figure 17. Urns of Abandonment detail). Although they are not figures, and they do not speak about war, these urns betray an isolation as empty vessels—skeletal, ornate, and solitary.

For Oblivion, I endeavor to present an exhibition that is honest in its investigation of death, meaning, and the passage of time. I desire to provide the opportunity to these themes in a way that is accessible and reverent. (Figure 18., Figure 19., Figure 20. Oblivion gallery views).

³ Juliet, Charles. Giacometti. England: Art Data, 1986. Print.

In doing so, I hope to empower objects and thoughts that have the ability to enhance or destroy traditional structures of meaning in their confrontation of existential questions.

FIGURES



Figure 1. Mike Stumbras. Lost Age Mug with Skull Cameo. Cone 10 soda fired porcelain, water etched and slip trailed with multiple layered glazes. 5" x 4" x 3.5". 2017.



Figure 2. Mike Stumbras. Lost Age Mug with Skull Cameo. Cone 10 soda fired porcelain, water etched and slip trailed with multiple layered glazes. 5" x 4" x 3.5". 2017.



Figure 3. Mike Stumbras. Glaze Detail from Call of the Void. Cone 10 soda fired porcelain, water etched and slip trailed with multiple layered glazes. 2017.



Figure 4. Mike Stumbras. Ceremonial Ewer. Cone 11, reduction soda fired porcelain, multiple layered glazes, wheel thrown and handbuilt with slip trailed and water etched embellishments. 15" x 6.5" x 6.5". 2016.



Figure 5. Mike Stumbras. The Crucible. Cone 10 soda fired porcelain, water etched and slip trailed with multiple layered glazes, gold luster. 16" x 16" x 2.5" largest platter. 2



Figure 6. Mike Stumbras. The Crucible (detail images). Cone 10 soda fired porcelain, water etched and slip trailed with multiple layered glazes, gold luster. 16" x 16" x 2.5" largest platter. 2017.



Figure 7. Mike Stumbras. The Sympathetic Crack. Cone 10 soda fired porcelain, water etched and slip trailed with multiple layered glazes. 5" x 4" x 4". 2017



Figure 8. Mike Stumbras. Funeral Urn Garniture with Skulls. Cone 10 soda fired porcelain, water etched and slip trailed with multiple layered glazes, gold luster. 10.5" x 8" x 7" ea. 2017



Figure 9. Victory of Death large wall platter. Cone 10 soda fired porcelain, water etched and slip trailed with multiple layered glazes, gold luster. 16" x 16" x 3". 2017



Figure 10. Mike Stumbras. Empty Set in Laurel Teapot. Cone 10 soda fired porcelain, water etched and slip trailed with multiple layered glazes, gold luster. 9.5" x 7.5" x 7". 2017



Figure 11. Mike Stumbras. Empty Set in Laurel Charger. Cone 11, reduction soda fired porcelain, multiple layered glazes, wheel thrown and handbuilt with slip trailed, water etched elements. 11.5" x 11.5" x 1.5". 2017



Figure 12. Mike Stumbras. Call of the Void. (photo from Oblivion). Cone 10 Soda fired porcelain pottery, mirror top table, obsidian orbs, galvanized steel sawhorses, wood. 65" x 45" x 36". 2017



Figure 13. Mike Stumbras. Lost Age Orbuculum. from Call of the Void setting. Cone 10 soda fired porcelain, slip trailed with multiple layered glazes, gold luster, obsidian orb.
8.5" x 4.5" x 4.5". 2017



Figure 14. Mike Stumbras. *As Above, So Below*. (gallery view from Oblivion). Cone 10 soda fired porcelain, gold luster, glass, canine research specimen, flowers, pottery shards, volcanic sand. 4' x 5' x 3.5'. 2017



Figure 15. Mike Stumbras. *As Above, So Below* (detail). Cone 10 soda fired porcelain, gold luster, glass, canine research specimen, flowers, pottery shards, volcanic sand. 4' x 5' x 3.5'. 2017



Figure 16. Mike Stumbras. Urns of Abandonment. Cone 10 soda fired porcelain, slip trailed with multiple layered glazes, gold luster. 24" x 8" x 6" ea. 2017



Figure 17. Mike Stumbras. Urns of Abandonment (detail). Cone 10 soda fired porcelain, slip trailed with multiple layered glazes, gold luster. 24" x 8" x 6" ea. 2017



Figure 18. Mike Stumbras. Oblivion gallery view (daytime). 2017



Figure 19. Mike Stumbras. Oblivion gallery view (daytime). 2017



Figure 20. Mike Stumbras. Oblivion gallery view (at night). 2017

TECHNICAL CONSIDERATIONS

I seek to take ownership of the entire process of making from raw material to finished object. The esteemed astrophysicist and writer Carl Sagan said in his made-for TV series “The Cosmos”, that “If you wish to create an apple pie from scratch, you must first create the Universe”⁴. Although I do mix all of my glazes and clay from raw materials, and utilize very few whole pre-prepared commercial components, the line between “my” glaze and glazes researched by my colleagues and compatriots in the field is quite thin. I have adjusted the chemistry or adapted the glazes and clay from a variety of sources that I use in my work to fit my own needs. Some recipes have been adapted enough to warrant a name change, in my opinion, and some have received minimal intervention on my part. What is quite clear to me, though, is the profound connection that I feel to my raw materials: the more familiar I become with material chemistry, the more conceptual linkages I see between the elements that come together to compose a pot and the elements that compose the things we use and the things we are.

I use the program Digitalfire INSIGHT for its versatility in glaze calculations and its excellent library and database of materials. Every firing is a test, and every test warrants a response; so although these recipes are the newest version of glazes, they may not comprehensively cover the exact glazes used in the exhibition.

Death on a Pale Horse ^10

Cornwall Stone	37.8
Calcium Carbonate	5.0
EP Kaolin	19.0
Light Magnesium Carb	4.7
Wollastonite	27.4
Sodium Carbonate	1.0 (optional)
Ferro Frit 3124	4.7 (optional for melting fluidity)

⁴ Sagan, Carl, Ann Druyan, Steven Soter, Adrian Malone, Tom Weidlinger, Geoffrey Haines-Stiles, David Kennard, et al. 2000. *Cosmos: a personal voyage*. Studio City, CA: Cosmos Studios.

Death on a Pale Horse is a celadon-like pale blue glaze. I adapted it from a “David Leach Celadon” recipe, and the glaze works wonderfully in atmospheric firings. The original recipe had an addition of iron oxide and used grog as a primary source of clay. I replaced the grog with the inexpensive and more iron bearing EPK and removed the iron addition for a much more subtle color. It is also the main modifier that I use layered over a crystalline glaze. I added Frit 3124 to lower the melting temperature a bit, sourced a considerable amount of silica and calcium from wollastonite instead of whiting to prevent loss on ignition and encourage microcrystallization in some cases. An addition of soda ash can help promote carbon trapping, which is necessary in a cone 10 reduction firing, but less necessary in atmospheric conditions.

Strontium Crystal Magic ^6-10

EP Kaolin	14.6
Custer Feldspar	22.4
Strontium Carbonate	12.3
Lithium Carbonate	5.7
Nepheline Syenite	22.4
Whiting	16.9
Frit 3124	5.7
Add: Titanium Dioxide	12.0
Add: Bentonite	2.00

Strontium Crystal Magic is a legendary microcrystalline glaze used by many contemporary potters and routinely published in Ceramics Monthly magazine. Its popularity can be attributed in no small part to its use and development by my mentor, Steven Hill. The glaze originally came from potter Tom Coleman, as a barium bearing “Yellow Crystal Matte”. This is a recent recipe that has been tweaked here and there, but not significantly enough to warrant a name change from SCM. This glaze is brushed or sprayed as an undercoat below Death on a Pale Horse to encourage warm discoloration and matte crystal growth.

Mike's Crystalline Glaze—Galactic Indifference ^6-10

EP Kaolin	11.8
Lithium Carbonate	5.0
Calcium Carbonate	17.9
Frit 3124	4.0
Titanium Dioxide	12.0
Bentonite	1.8
Minspar 200	42.4
Dolomite	7.3

This glaze occupies the same niche as Strontium Crystal Magic, although the recipe is my own. Galactic Indifference represents research to replace strontium carbonate in Strontium Crystal Magic to address possible or perceived health concerns, as well as to improve glaze durability. I replaced strontium carbonate with a combination of calcium and magnesium, sourced both from whiting and dolomite. I also replaced custer feldspar, a potash feldspar, with minspar, a soda feldspar to improve color quality in the absence of strontium. I have recently used this glaze exclusively in place of Strontium Crystal Magic for the last few months, but there still may be many pieces with “SCM” in Oblivion.

Helmer Porcelain, Alfred recipe ^9-10

Helmer	23.53
EPK	15.69
F-4 Feldspar	21.57
Silica	17.65
XX Sagger	7.84
White Bentonite	1.96
Old Hickory FC340 Bal	11.76

I use this helmer porcelain recipe watered down for slip trailing. I do not deflocculate the slip, because I like to use it thick and have it flatten considerably when it dries. The excess iron in the slip from helmer clay causes this slip to carbon trap more dramatically than my porcelain clay body does.

Margaret Bohls Porcelain (altered) ^10
Code Number:

Grolleg	28.42
Tile #6 Kaolin	24.99
Custer feldspar	19.74
Silica	13.00
Pyrotrol	11.85
Bentonite	2.00

This is the clay body recipe that I used in the majority of the work in Oblivion. I pulled this recipe from my archives, and have done some minor alterations in terms of the ratio of ingredients to help objects with narrow bases keep their integrity for a ^10-^11 firing. This clay body is vitrified, white, strong, and slightly translucent when fired hot. Glazes flow over this clay body fluidly, and it allows for some dramatic carbon trapping in heavy reduction firings.

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VITA

Mike Stumbras grew up in Chicago, Illinois, where he developed a passion for ceramic art. Stumbras formally studied ceramics at St Olaf College, where he received his BFA and BS in Biology. He has studied extensively with his mentor Steven Hill where he learned about layering sprayed glazes, glaze chemistry, single firing and ceramic art education. Stumbras has been an active member of ceramic communities, seeking residencies and employment in Chicago, Kansas City, and New York and Colorado, and he continues to maintain an active national and international exhibition record.