

TRILLIXALS



TRIAxIAL BLENDs

March 6 – June 21, 2020
Northern Clay Center
Minneapolis, Minnesota

Angelica Pozo, curator and essayist

Foreword

Tippy Maurant, Interim Co-Executive Director

Triaxial Blends, curated by Angelica Pozo, is the first of three special exhibitions for Northern Clay Center's 2020 exhibition series. A triaxial blend is a common method of testing glaze ingredient ratios to develop new colors and glaze effects. Through this method, glaze technicians systematically explore the results of three glazes together in a three-axis format and focus on the balance, chemistry, and art of the glazes. This concept of blending, balancing, evolving, discovering, and creating anew is at the heart of NCC and its goal: advancing the ceramic arts.

Pozo, inspired by the concept of a triaxial blend, brought three pairs of established ceramic sculptors together in collaboration. The catalyst for the exhibition was the desire for friends and fellow clay sculptors, Angelica Pozo and Kristen Cliffler, to work together. They, and the other two artist pairs, Susan Beiner and Christine Golden and Syd Carpenter and Sana Musasama, mined each other's influences and studio processes to produce at least one significant work per pair, with authorship shared by both artists. Rooted in medium specificity, the spirit of cooperation extended the conversation beyond self-reflection. The work featured in *Triaxial Blends* is a combination of previously created objects, to provide insight into each individual artist's discourse and influences, as well as newly-made collaborative objects made collectively by two artists working outside their traditional studio practice.

The celebration of the medium, the documented exchange of ideas, and the ability to present the artistic process as a transferable model of expansion aligns with many of NCC's core values as an organization including: the ceramic arts are intrinsic to the human experience, while reflecting diverse ideas, experiences, processes, cultures, and traditions; the ceramic arts are advanced through the exploration of the full spectrum of the art and science of clay; the field of ceramics is enriched by mutual exchange of active curiosity, dialogue, and learning through diverse partnerships; and every individual benefits from engagement with a wide variety of ceramic art that is beautiful, evocative, challenging, or innovative.

Triaxial Blends related events included two artist talks; one as a public conversation between curator,

Angelica Pozo and Kristen Cliffler, and the other a presentation by Sana Musasama about her work and inspirations. Kristen Cliffler was in residence at NCC making work for a week prior to the opening of the show and demonstrated her techniques and the tools of her trade during a public event at NCC. NCC also worked with a local secondary school to link themes from *Triaxial Blends* to their clay studies. Students visited the Clay Center for a tour of the exhibition and a gallery talk by Pozo herself, who discussed the role that collaboration can play in influencing an artwork.

This particular exhibition is generously supported by our friends at the Prospect Creek Foundation, Windgate Foundation, and Continental Clay Company. Additionally, this activity is made possible by the voters of Minnesota through a Minnesota State Arts Board Operating support grant, thanks to a legislative appropriation from the Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund, and a grant from the McKnight Foundation. This project is also supported in part by an award from the National Endowment for the Arts. NCC sincerely thanks all of these supporters for making this exhibition possible and for supporting NCC and its programs.

Our roster of special exhibitions in 2020 was made possible due to the collective creative brainpower of the genuinely respected Sarah Millfelt and Jill Foote-Hutton. Many thanks to both of these esteemed women. And a very sincere thanks to Angelica Pozo for her ideas, time, and contributions to this exhibition and to the content of this publication. The physical manifestation of this particular exhibition at NCC was impossible without the creativity, skill, organization, and relentless positive work ethic of Emily Romens, Galleries Manager.

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This project is supported in part by an award from the National Endowment for the Arts. To find out more about how National Endowment for the Arts grants impact individuals and communities, visit www.arts.gov.

Additional funding for *Triaxial Blends* comes from Prospect Creek Foundation, Windgate Foundation, and Continental Clay Company.

Triaxial Blends, installation view.



Kristen Cliffler & Angelica Pozo, *Shrine to the Four Winds*, 2020.
Low-fire red clay, white clay, glaze, gold luster, grout, wood, acrylic paint, 23 x 27 x 27.



Essay Angelica Pozo

Triaxial Blends

The idea, or “spark,” for this exhibition grew out of a desire that fellow Cleveland clay sculptor, Kristen Cliffler and I had expressed to each other a couple of years ago. The desire was to find an opportunity to finally work together. As friends and very busy self-employed ceramic artists with our studios merely 15 minutes apart, we lamented that we never get a chance to hang together. Our paths cross often, but rarely do we run parallel long enough to encourage a true exchange between us. Since you could always find us working, we figured if we had a co-project, then we would be compelled to actually make the time. When given the opportunity to curate a show, the idea for an exhibition that showcased artist collaborations immediately came to mind.

By definition, collaboration is the action of working with someone to produce or create something.

Artists entering into collaboration are practicing the complex art of merging two or more creative energies into a hopefully congruent expression. For best results, participants must check their egos at the door and be freely able to offer each other full mutual respect and be flexible in their creative choice to put in equal effort. Ideally each artist’s voice is heard, decisions are mutually agreed upon, and challenges are met with collaborative dialogue and innovative problem-solving. They must get to know and trust their collaborator’s sensibilities as well as have confidence in their own. To get to that point, I think a lot of good honest communication is key.

In the ceramic arts community, I can think of many fine examples of professional collaborative partners who, after years of working together, have developed a language of their own with each partner’s contribution fully integrated into its finely-honed resolution.

However, as frequently as this type of engagement occurs, collaboration, no matter who it involves and the length of time they have worked together, isn’t without its own set of challenges. Asking artists to team up with others with whom they have not previously worked offers elements of the unknown, of risk, and of surprise. In these temporary alliances, artists are given the opportunity to step out of their routine, to experiment, and to meld their creative souls to that of another creative being. It is an invitation to share styles, knowledge, and processes, ideally with each member in equal part learning from, as much as they are teaching, the other.

In my experience, most of the collaborative work I have seen has invariably been done by studio potters, either for purely collaborative practices, or for the purpose of exhibitions where collaboration is a part of the artistic experience and journey. Sometimes the collaborative work is done at wet stage and surprising new hybrid forms are created. Another example of collaborative work is the process of one potter decorating another potter’s bisqued wares. While these creative interactions have resulted in some wonderful artworks, as well as interesting and eye-opening experiences for the artists, for me this does not fully encapsulate the collaborative experience that I desire, nor does it entirely articulate my personal interpretation of the word. These instances of collaborative endeavours are more of action/reaction or call and response, than a true melding of process, making, and minds.

Taking a look back at the online catalog for NCC’s 2013 exhibition, *Exquisite Pots II: Red-Handed*, I can see how this exhibition aimed to take us a bit deeper down the collaboration journey by offering artist residencies

and getting four out of the eight artists in the exhibition to work concurrently in the NCC studios. They had the opportunity to freely converse and interact through all steps of the making, finishing, and firing processes as they chose. The other four artists worked remotely in their own studios, creating, shipping, and receiving pots from the artists at NCC and to respond to the work and add their particular creative voice. Though the artists working remotely didn't get to meet, they were encouraged to communicate with their collaborators throughout the eight-month process.

Reading the comments from the artists participating in this collaborative exhibition, I feel the artists who were most satisfied with their experience were the ones who got to be part of the in-house residency. They had the most opportunity to communicate and get to know each other as artists and people, not just through the exchange of objects made. Simply, they had the opportunity to know the person behind the pot and were afforded more opportunities for direct dialogue and exchange. The residency group seemed to have greater comfort with the collaborative work, whereas I could sense a bit of disconnect with the remote artists through their comments on the process and work.

As I was formulating my concept for this exhibition, I couldn't recall ever viewing a show that invited ceramic sculptors to authentically collaborate. When considering my own process of making, and my desire for a truly integrated and wholly collaborative process from start to finish, my assumption is that the intensity of collaboration with this exhibition would have to be considerably more interactive than those I had personally seen. Since ceramic sculpture can look, and be about anything, my approach and expectations

for others involved was to come in with honest and open eyes, mind, heart, and soul. I imagined that the collaborators would have to get to know each other's visual vernacular before they could truly mesh their conceptual and visual ideas. They would need to consider, negotiate, and find common ground within content, narrative, scale, as well as clays, building techniques, whether or not to use mixed media, and surface treatment. They would need to truly and honestly communicate.

I realized immediately that this process could, and potentially would, get deep and personal for the collaborators. So as I began to curate the rest of the exhibition, I was mindful that I didn't want to create forced marriages. In this creative process it was important that the artists were comfortable in their collaboration, free to truly experiment, and to push the boundaries with one another and in their practice of making. So, after confirming with Kristen that she was on board, I proceeded to engage two other artists, advocating for them to choose their collaborator. This arrangement gave us three pairs of collaborators, thus creating our "triaxial blends."

For this collaboration, my focus was on initiating a good balance of varying visual styles, content of work, and manners of working. I also wanted to bring new, or at least not recently featured, artists to NCC. I decided to invite Christine Golden and Syd Carpenter to exhibit and to each pick their collaborator. Christine Golden went on to choose Susan Beiner and Syd Carpenter chose Sana Musasama. Each collaborating pair created work together for the exhibition in addition to exhibiting examples of their own individual sculptures. Each pair was expected to invent their own process and

parameters for working, all of which needed to happen within a little less than one year's time.

As the collaborations concluded, I had comprehensive conversations with each of the artists to ask them how their process, studio practice, and conceptualization were impacted by this experience. Across the board, each pair started their collaboration with much conversation including a massive sharing of work, ideas, drawings, interests, and passions before any actual physical work began. We all got to know each other quite intimately as we searched for, and identified, connections and commonalities between us. Christine and Susan didn't know each other at all before starting on this venture, but have become great friends through this process. They've created a connection that seems likely to extend far beyond this project. Syd and Sana have known each other since their undergraduate studies. Syd expressed that, with their busy lives, they had not been afforded the time to reconnect in such a valuable manner as they have during this collaborative process. Syd and Sana were both extremely grateful to have been able to spend this "beautiful quality time together." Similarly, Kristen and I had also been too busy to connect and have truly enjoyed working together on something meaningful and vastly different.

As makers, it is through the process of creating our work that we are happiest. To be able to share that joy of creation with a kindred spirit, collectively working towards a mutual statement on something you deeply care about, has been truly spectacular and invigorating. It was this idea of interaction and total immersion in our practices and passions that guided our collaborative activities. As part of introductions, each pair connected through studio visits as an invitation into each other's

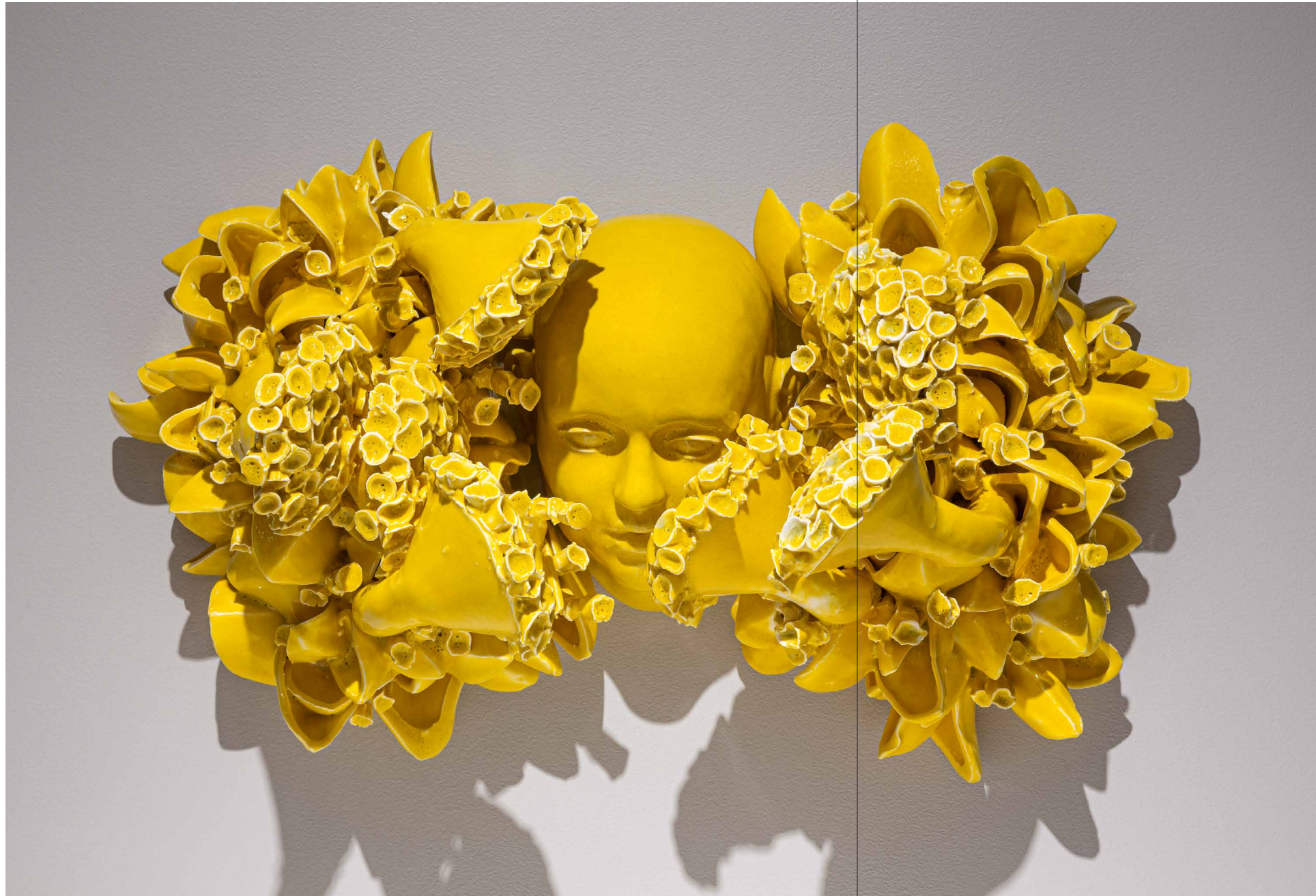
private space. During this time, and throughout the experience, the mutual respect that each artist held for their counterpart was evident through the love of their work and for the clay arts.

After initial introductions, the collaboration processes for each pair started to individualize and deviate a bit, informed by their conversations, ideas, and inspirations. Each pair proceeded feeling that they were synchronized and focused to a singular goal.

Christine and Susan found their common ground and mutual passion to be environmental issues and concerns about the future. They each represent that concern very differently in their individual work. Susan's lush botanic forms readily refer to our natural environment, but one might not have picked that up from viewing Christine's work. Christine's expression of environmental concerns leans towards representing social aspects. The more they conversed, the more they discovered how very similar they were with their philosophies and concerns.

There were a few mitigating factors that influenced Susan and Christine's collaborative process. While they visited each other's studios on more than one occasion, and would spend full days together talking, sketching, and generating ideas, Susan and Christine were not able to work together in the studio. This was due to various factors including Susan's teaching responsibilities in Phoenix, and Christine's parental responsibilities in Tucson, dividing them by a one-and-a-half-hour drive. This separation did affect how they formulated their collaborative process. They were also newly acquainted with the institution of this project, causing them to need a bit more time to get familiar with each other, before they felt comfortable enough to proceed with work.

Susan Beiner & Christine Golden, *Solis*, 2020, Porcelain, 14 x 25 x 12.



Along with the initial studio visits, they traded a piece of each other's finished work to live with for a while.

Because of their circumstances, the first two collaborative pieces Susan and Christine made were more of a call and response, similar to the tradition of a potter's exchange. To get started, each artist made a sculptural component for the other artist to complete as they saw fit. However, there was one difference in their collaborative process from the concept of a potters' exchange, Christine and Susan proactively discussed and coordinated what each piece was going to communicate.

A great example of this forethought is evident in their piece, *Solis*, where they predetermined that the piece would be about the sun's effect on us. They mutually decided that Christine would make a head for Susan to take to her studio and finish within the mutually agreed upon themes and concepts. Susan went on to add the pod-like forms and then glaze in that bright glossy yellow glaze, which Christine calls "a fun surprise," as it was totally opposite of how she is finishing her work these days. For their final two pieces, they decided on a different approach, collaboratively making decisions throughout all stages of design, making, and completion.

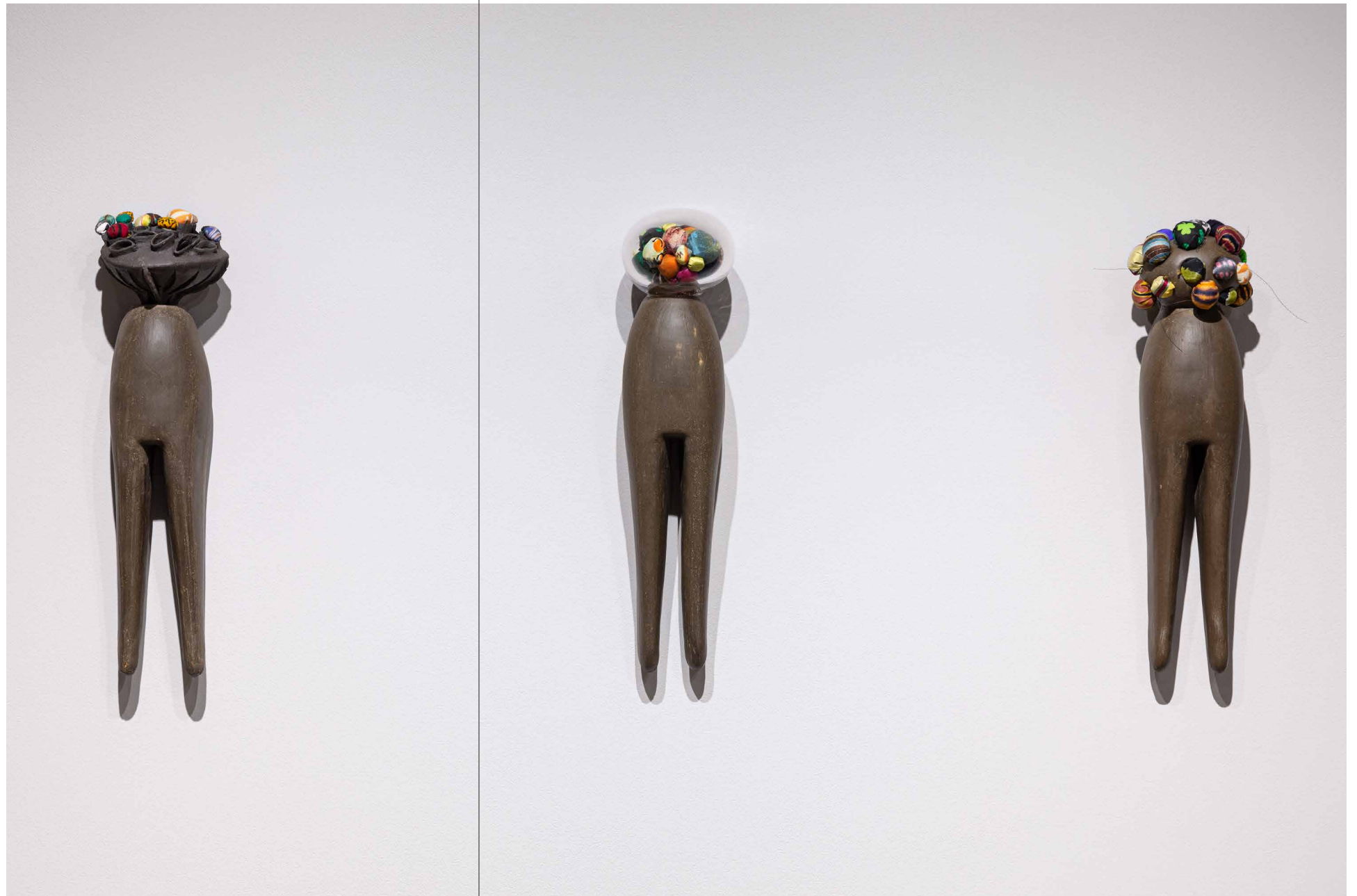
Syd and Sana also live in separate cities. While all the collaborative work time took place in Philadelphia at Syd's larger studio, the collaboration began with her visiting Sana's studio in New York City. While there, Sana shared the newest work she was exploring, which incorporated fabric with her clay forms. This work included dolls whose mechanics Sana was still working to resolve. There was also a second series of pincushion forms that Sana was creating as terms of endearment for her mother, who kept a collection of them. Sana's work

Syd Carpenter & Sana Musasama, (Left to Right) *Mother Pin with Seed Heads and Pin Cushions*; *Mother Pin with Glass and Pin Cushions*; *Mother Pin with Pin Cushions*, 2020, Clay, cloth, glass, 17 x 5 x 5 (each).

immediately struck a chord with Syd, as she was working on a sculpture series based on the form of the old-fashioned solid wood clothespins that her mother used to have. During these interactions, they discovered two commonalities: first, they were both reflecting on their mothers; and second, they were both trying to make iconic work out of common objects that are normally dismissed.

As Sana and Syd conversed and brainstormed further, a hybridization of their concepts developed. The concept of Sana's pincushions started turning into push pin/pincushion hybrids to be stuck into Syd's clothespin forms making them now the conceptual pincushion. Syd's clothespins have their own elongated feminine effigy and doll-like qualities, which then refer back to Sana's other new series of work. With these thoughts in mind, Sana spent about four days in Philadelphia working with Syd to get their collaborative work started. They chose a rich, "dark-skinned clay," as Syd described it, for the clothespin forms. Sana's colorful push pins would pop against it, which Syd found to be quite a revelation. She had never thought about introducing color to her forms. She hasn't acted upon it yet, but says that juxtaposition has opened her eyes to new possibilities in her own work. Similarly, Sana has been so inspired by the collaboration that it has transformed her own work. She revisited some old forms and gave them new life for the work shown in this exhibition.

On more personal notes, Syd shared that the collaboration planted the seed for something that had been long overdue — reconnecting with her longtime friend Sana. Syd further mentioned that she feels we all are too often ships passing in the night and that we should not take for granted our connections with people we hold dear. She expressed great gratitude for this



opportunity. Similarly, Sana loved every fun and laughter-filled minute of their time together, wishing that there could have been more. I wouldn't be surprised if they went on to repeat this collaborative work in the future on their own.

Of the three collaborations, Kristen and I had the greatest opportunity to work together, because of our close studio proximity as our studios are only 15 minutes apart. We often alternated whose studio we worked in at each meeting. Once we started to work, we tried to get together or communicate at least once per week and work for two to three hours at a time. After our in-person sessions, we'd continue on our own until the next meeting, communicating back and forth in the interim.

Our first few meetings comprised a lot of drawing and writing, as we shared ideas and looked for the common themes in each other's work. Our first point in common was our connection to nature. My studio work is invariably inspired by nature, mostly botanic. Kristen often incorporates natural imagery as part of the metaphoric narrative of her sculptures. A second commonality was our desire to express universal narratives of our journey as women, albeit in very different ways. As we talked and shared, we started to take stock of where each of us were on our various journeys of life including our work, the passage of time, cycles of life, and forces of nature. We decided we wanted to somehow express these shared experiences in our piece.

With these themes in mind, Kristen and I started to brainstorm about what to make. The path to our final sculpture was quite circuitous. At first, we planned to make three sculptures. At one point the planned piece was huge and, in retrospect, getting a bit unwieldy. We

were spinning our wheels a bit and decided to just get our hands in clay and start making components for the direction we thought we were headed. We started off in another direction making new components, but were still feeling not quite there.

Then, after a somewhat longer break, our months of exploration started to solidify, and our path became clear. "This long gestation period that our ideas went through was nourishing," Kristen offers. She said that she "too often goes quickly from concept to creation" and doesn't give herself this much time to really let the metaphors in the piece knit together and sink deeper into her sensibilities. I, too, found this languid pace to be helpful in establishing a comfort level for our collaborative decisions, which gave me time to digest them.

Kristen was grateful for the assignment I gave us, which presented the opportunity to really get to know each other, and as Syd mentioned above, not coexist as just ships passing in the night. For my part, I am grateful for this assignment. Working and talking with Kristen, I feel that I learned as much about my own work as I learned about Kristen and hers.

Collectively, everyone had a wonderful experience, and I could not be more pleased at the outcomes. I want to thank all the artists in this exhibition for their dedication and commitment to this assignment. It's been an amazing experience. In addition to Sana, Christine also mentioned that the collaborative process has informed her own work. Likewise, I, too, am making various changes to how I make certain components of my work based on tips I learned from Kristen's building techniques.

In the end, I think what everyone most enjoyed was the time they shared with their collaborator, the giving and receiving of inspiration and information,

the opportunity to float ideas and get critical feedback about our processes and work, and the opportunity to either make a new friend or to re-energize relationships already in place. It was a big commitment, but everyone expressed gratitude for their involvement in this exhibition. It afforded us all an opportunity for growth and an opportunity to create community with another artist.

I would highly recommend that artists give themselves this assignment, to collaborate with an artist friend you want to reconnect with, or with one you want to get to know better.

Open your eyes and heart and commit to collaborate with someone. I think you'll be glad you did.

Susan Beiner

Susan Beiner, *Leaf Block*, 2019, Porcelain, wood, 10 x 16 x 10.

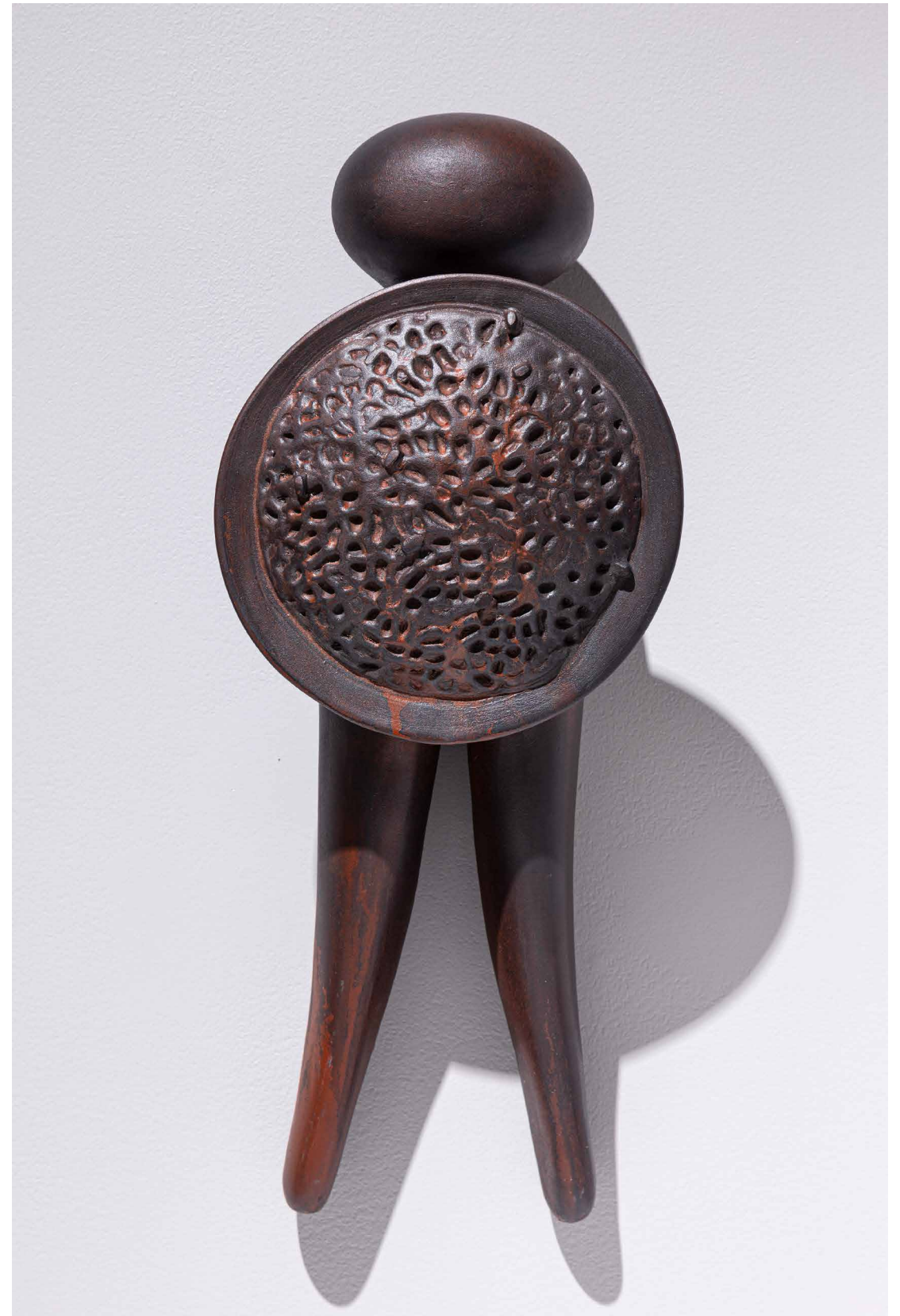
Susan Beiner explores what we perceive as authentic, or not, by embracing the unavoidable cacophony of manufactured and artificial materials in our world and introducing those elements into her ceramic work. She lends equal consideration to the installation process and creates expanses of space designed to envelop and engage the viewer. Beiner earned her BFA at Rutgers University, New Brunswick, New Jersey in 1985, and her MFA in Ceramics at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor in 1993. Her extensive career in ceramics encompasses exhibitions, both national and international, permanent collections, residencies, awards, lectures, publication, and professorship. Since 2006, she's served as a Professor of Art at Arizona State University, Tempe, Arizona, where in 2015 she was named the Joan R. Lincoln Endowed Professor in Ceramics.



Syd Carpenter

Syd Carpenter's work celebrates the critical importance of family, home, community, and the earth's bounty. It often relates to the history of African-American family farmers in the South as well as their present lives and contributions. She not only has a dedicated studio practice, but she also cultivates new generations of artists through teaching. "I don't believe artists make the decision to become artists. They are born. The hope is that they find the will to pursue their vision, an environment in which to develop, and a culture respectful of their contributions." Carpenter earned her BFA in 1974 and MFA in 1976 at Temple University, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and has been a Professor of Studio Arts at Swarthmore College, Swarthmore, Pennsylvania, since 1991.

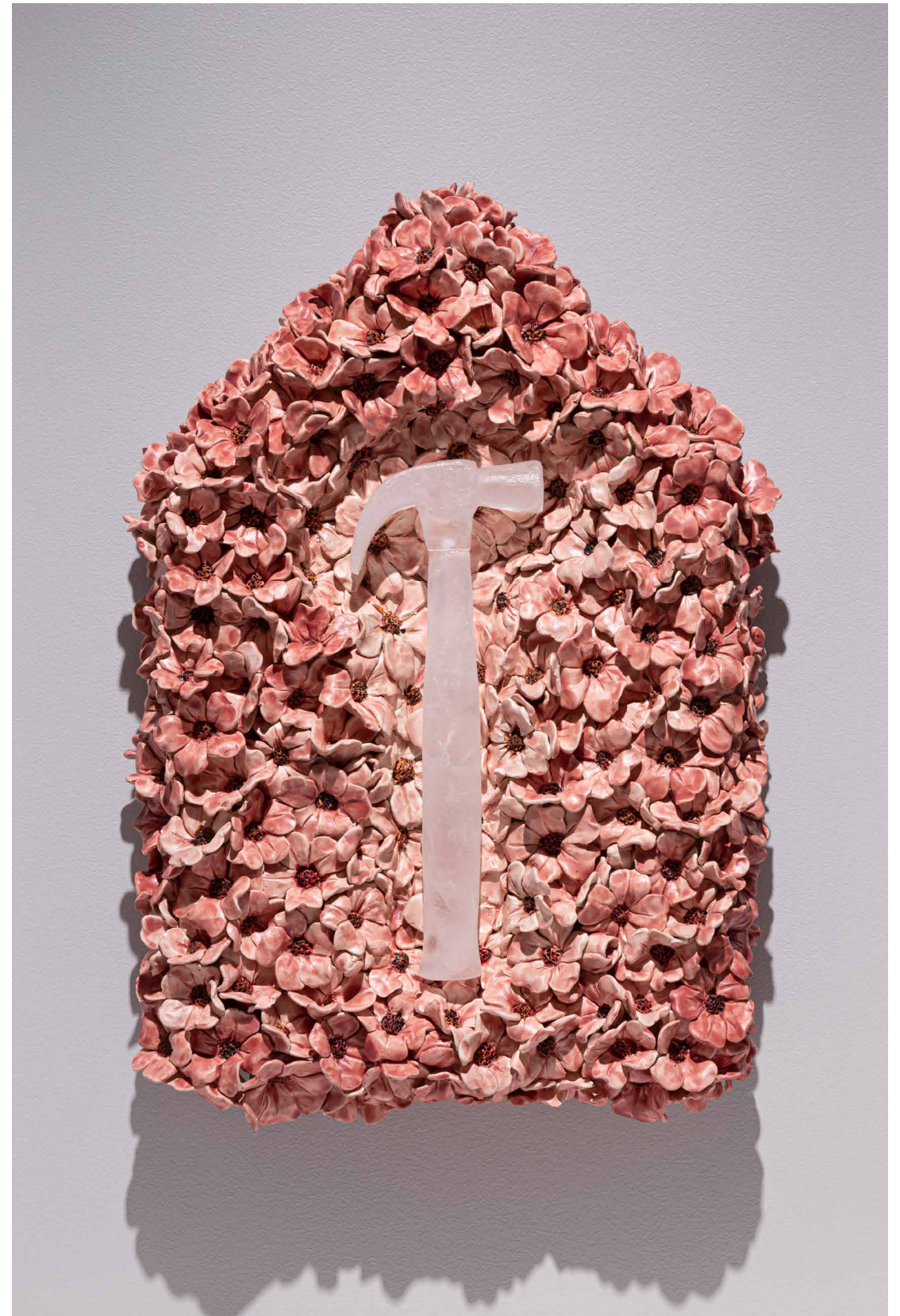
Syd Carpenter, *Mother Pin*, 2018, Clay, graphite, 18 x 7.5 x 5.5.



Kristen Cliffel

Kristen Cliffel's sculptural work and studio practice revolve around the topics of domesticity and emotional relationships. She investigates the faceted, and often conflicted, messaging we receive about home, fulfillment, expectations, and triggers, and our inherent struggle to reconcile archetypal myths with our daily realities. Cliffel earned her BFA at the Cleveland Institute of Art, Ohio in 1990. In addition to teaching workshops at colleges and universities across the country, teaching sculpture and ceramics to school-aged children, and participating in residencies and exhibitions, she is currently a full-time studio artist in Cleveland, Ohio.

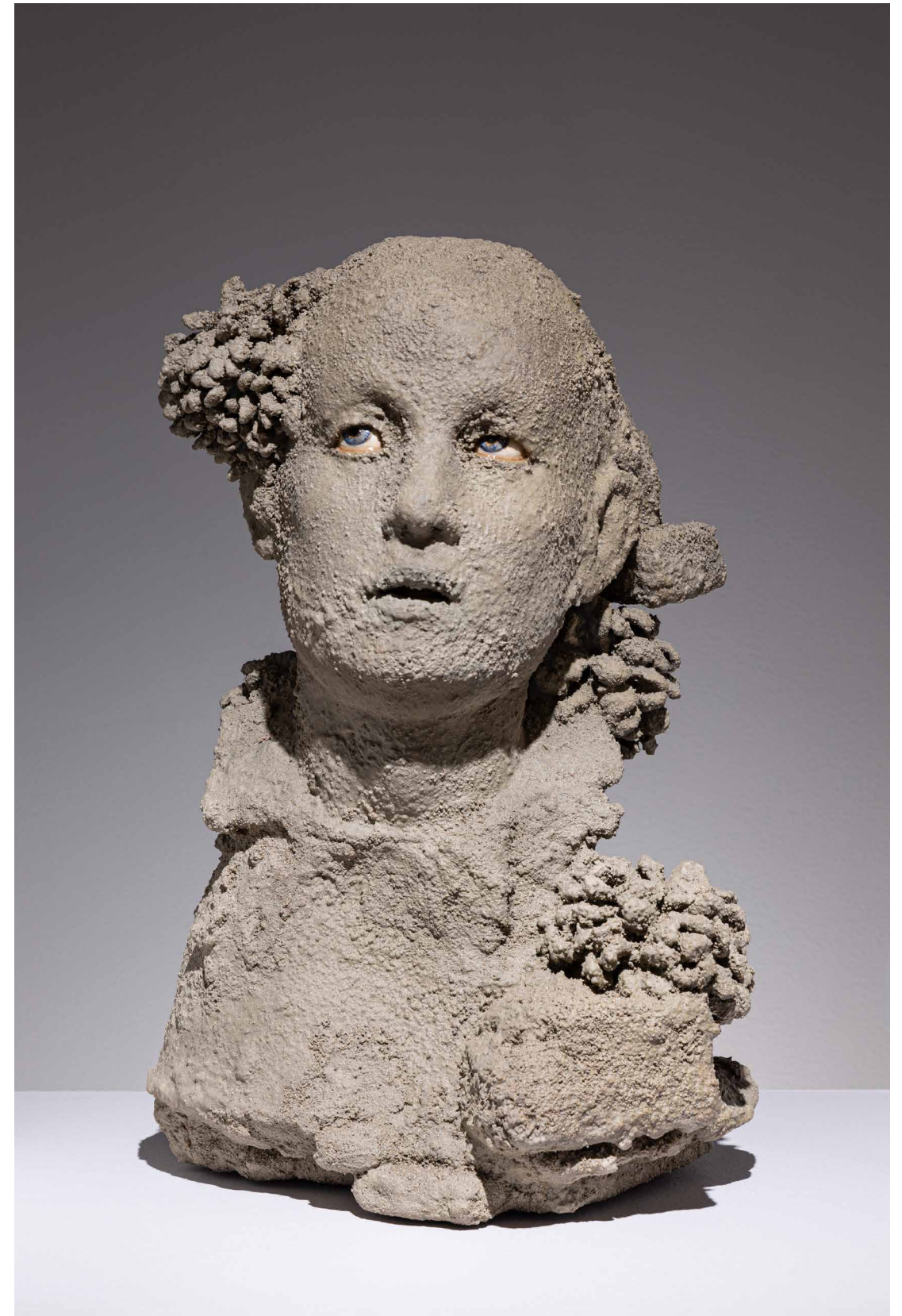
Kristen Cliffel, *Homework*, 2020, Clay, glaze, cast glass, 20 x 14 x 4.



Christine Golden

Christine Golden predominantly creates the human figure in her large ceramic works. Her narrative sculpture draws inspiration from the human experience and combines the influences of culture, adventure, drama, and stories that weave themselves through everyday life. "My sculptures are visual diaries wherein each figure becomes a psychological portrait. I am investigating that fertile ground where the historical and allegorical, and the tragedy and comedy of life intersect." Golden earned her BFA at the University of Utah, Salt Lake City, in 2005 and her MFA at Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana in 2010. Her works have been exhibited and collected nationally, and she continues her teaching career of over 20 years through workshops and visiting artist opportunities while maintaining a dedicated studio practice.

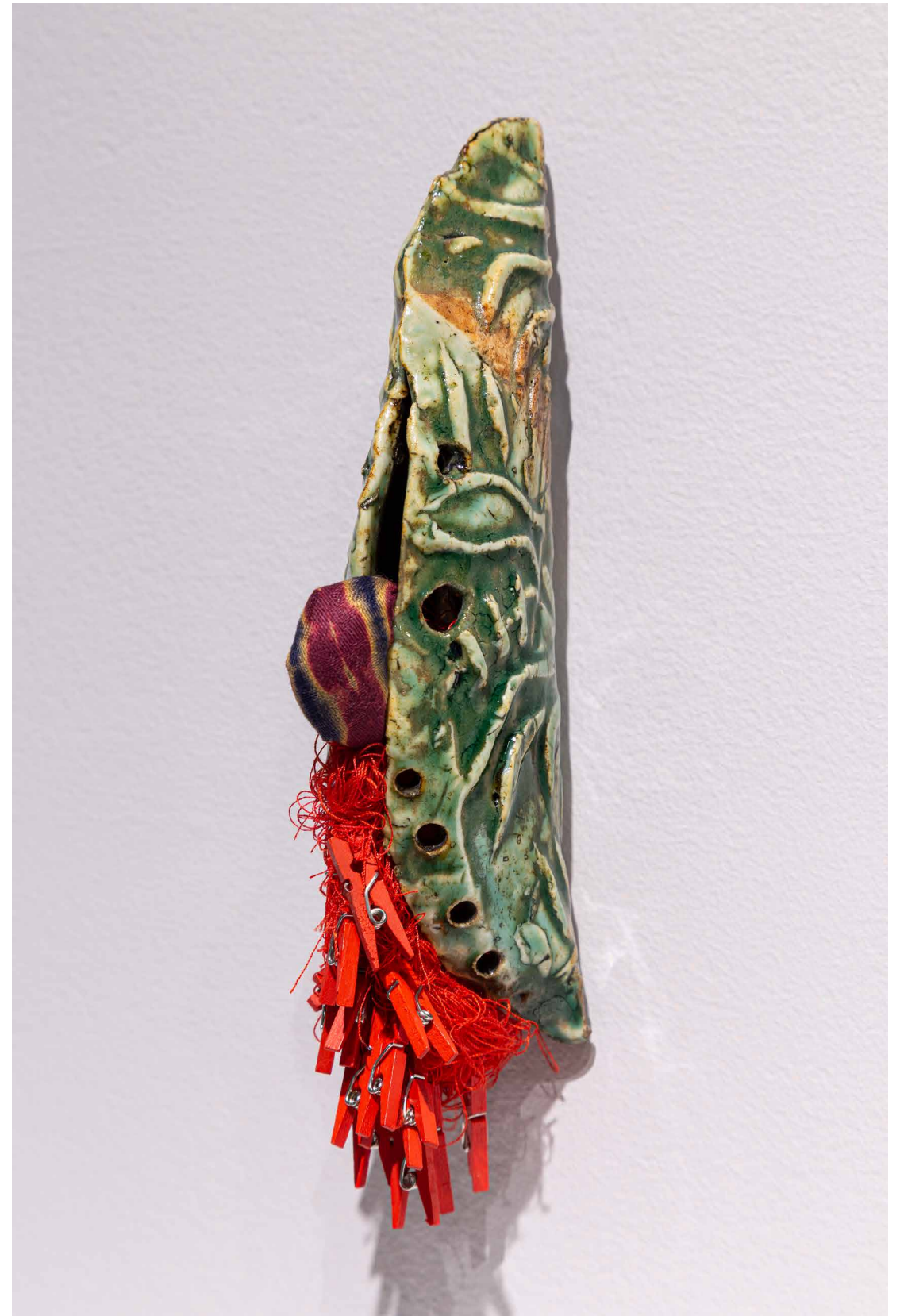
Christine Golden, *Scrutinizing Bloom*, 2019, Clay, sand, paint, glue, glaze, 17.5 x 13 x 13.



Sana Musasama

Sana Musasama says of her work, “Making our art is the purest thing we do. There are no hidden lies. My work is my truth as I have lived it.” Her sculptures evolve from her experiences through travel; through her humanitarian work with the Apron Project reintegrating girls and young women survivors of sex trafficking; and through history and women’s studies. Musasama earned her BA in Ceramics and Education at The City College of New York, New York in 1974 and her MFA at New York State College of Ceramics at Alfred University, New York in 1987. She currently holds positions at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, New York City; New Jersey City University, Jersey City, New Jersey (Adjunct Professor, Ceramics); Hunter College, New York City (Associate Adjunct Professor, Ceramics); Jamaica Art Center, New York City (Instructor); and Facing History High School, New York City (Visiting Artist, Ceramics).

Sana Musasama, *Her Series #1*, 2019, Ceramic, mixed media, 8.5 x 2 x 3.



Angelica Pozo

Angelica Pozo roots her work in the natural world and incorporates themes of femininity, sensuality, fertility, and spirituality. Her latest works leap from the Latin term, *Lusus naturae*, or “freak of nature.” She includes materials such as wire, glass, and cut nails in her works to create sculpture that seems to mock humanity and its reckless treatment of the planet and its environment. It’s as if they scoff, “We evolved past recognition and survived you, and this new and ruined earth no longer supports you, but it suits us beautifully.” Pozo earned her BFA at New York State College of Ceramics at Alfred University in 1976, and her MFA in Ceramics at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, in 1978. She is currently a ceramic public art and studio artist in Cleveland, Ohio, as well as an author, juror, and instructor.

Angelica Pozo, *Arabesque*, 2020, Terracotta, black clay, metal, glass beads, 17.5 x 12 x 7.



Northern Clay Center

Northern Clay Center's mission is to advance the ceramic arts for artists, learners, and the community, through education, exhibitions, and artist services. Its goals are to create and promote high-quality, relevant, and participatory ceramic arts educational experiences; cultivate and challenge ceramic arts audiences through extraordinary exhibitions and programming; support ceramic artists in the expansion of their artistic and professional skills; embrace makers from diverse cultures and traditions in order to create a more inclusive clay community; and excel as a non-profit arts organization.

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