RIPPLE EFFECTS: The Dynamic of Ebb and Flow in the Ceramic Art of Liz James

A 2014 ceramic sculpture titled Urban Landscape II by Liz James is a prime example of this artist’s innovative approach to the possibilities of porcelain as an art material. Her work builds on a tradition of wheel-thrown pottery but takes a decidedly different turn into the realm of conceptual considerations and work in a series format. Liz James is an Assistant Professor of Art at the School of Fine Arts at UMD and she is Ceramic Studio Head as well. A current show of her work is now on display at the Kruk Gallery on the campus of the University of Wisconsin Superior until April 1st.

In the 1950’s and 1960’s in California and Montana and in several Midwest centers of ceramic activity and teaching, a revolution took place that challenged ceramic traditions and broke long-standing rules about the function and the place and ultimately the importance of ceramic art in art historical terms. Liz James’ work though highly personal fits this art trajectory in several ways. Her work exists within a setting or a conceptual overall design that anchors the various elements and insists on a dialogue - often with opposing shapes - within the sculpture itself. Urban Landscape II has two parts and two bases as it were along with tall cylinders that establish a sense of scale and a balance of horizontal and vertical directions. In a short artist statement Liz James suggests an inspiration from aerial views of industrial sites that might have tall towers along with smaller hubs and solid or closed structures. Color and multiple glazes and even some that incorporate stones or dirt add intense visual interest to the simplified form in each of these “clayscapes” as James calls them.

Liz James has a BFA degree from Boise State University in Idaho and an MFA degree from Kansas State University, and she has also taught at the Glasgow School of Art in Scotland.