

Daniel Johnston - Large Lidded Lotus Vessel

Daniel Johnston is a potter in the Seagrove area of North Carolina. Daniel's "Large Lidded Lotus Vessel" represents one of his primary styles. Daniel is a very repetitious in his overall design, but yet none of his works are exactly identical. I selected the "Large Lidded Lotus Vessel" because I find both its height and broad shoulder to be appealing. I originally became familiar with Daniel's work after seeing a demonstration of his techniques at a Carolina ClayMatters guild meeting. During the meeting I became intrigued with his inverted stacking of bowl forms [1A] to create a seamless vessel[1B]. Daniel's coiling [1C] also interested me, as I had never before seen coils used in throwing. The respect Daniel has for traditional ceramics is very inspiring. It is refreshing to see natural glazes used instead of glazes that have been laboratory formulated. Daniel is involved in his work from the digging of materials for clay and glazes, to chopping wood for the kiln and finally pulling the work from the kiln [3].

"Large Lidded Lotus Vessel" is a form about 24 inches tall. It is described as a six gallon vessel. Its glaze is a very deep caramel color [2], with a very highly glossy surface. Like many of Daniel's tall pieces, it has a wide shoulder, with a relatively narrow foot. The piece is designed to be functional, but has significant amounts of decorative work compared to similar pieces. The texture of the lotus design breaks the glaze to almost white. Other pieces in the series have similar designs, but most of them do not break the glaze so distinctly. The lid is a gentle curve that compliments the rest of the piece, leading to an overall fluid feel to the piece. The curve of the shoulder of the vessel is very stiff, and abrupt, which leaves the piece feeling a little incomplete, as if the potter ran out of clay just before the neck. Most of Daniel's other vessels do not suffer from this flaw. For example, the pieces that were used in the Carolina ClayMatters guild newsletter to publicize Daniel's presentation [3A], as well as the piece thrown at the presentation [1B] have much more gentle curves, making the pieces feel more comfortable and appear more complete. The piece I selected has a light color of glaze compared to some of his other work. The darker glaze is more traditional for the area, but the lighter glaze seems to make the piece itself seem lighter and less serious, perhaps lending itself more to decorative purposes than utilitarian.

"It is important to me to create pots that are timeless but reflect the culture and times in which I live"[3]. With that quote, Daniel summarizes everything that I admire about his work. His attachment to the traditions of

the southeastern United States, as well as southeastern Asia, make his style one that can always be appreciated. Daniel approaches his vessels with the utilitarian mindset of southeastern Asia that he was exposed to during his apprenticeship in Thailand, as well as the present aesthetic values of the southeastern United States. Daniel has a unique way of taking what he has learned from his mentors, Mark Hewitt and Sawein Silakhom, and transforming it into his own style. Some of Daniel's smaller pieces have a respectable resplendence to the work of Mark Hewitt. Daniel Johnston's style has caught my attention because of the amount of unique methods he uses in his work. Daniel states that he has difficulties switching between large forms and small forms [1], this is a problem I identify with and hope to overcome eventually in my own ceramic career. Overall, Daniel's style is very simple and seems to be a cleaner interpretation of southern pottery of the early twentieth century.

I personally find the work of Daniel Johnston very refreshing. I don't feel like he is trying to impress anyone with his work. His work is very natural, doesn't come across strained or in any way forced to adhere to any sort of mainstream standard. I think Daniel's work is very beautiful. The naturalness of his pieces is backed by the casual attitude he has towards his work. Daniel has a complete mastery of ceramics. He understands his forms, his kiln and his materials.

Works Cited

[1] Carolina ClayMatters Guild Meeting - Special Presentation with Daniel Johnston, February 18, 2007

[2] Mint Museum of Craft and Design, visit February 16, 2007

[3] "Artist of the Month - Daniel Johnston", Carolina ClayMatters Newsletter, Carolina ClayMatters, February 2007

[4] "American Folk", <http://www.amerifolk.com/pottery/DanielJohnston/index.php>, Retrieved March 15, 2007

[5] "The Collectors Gallery", <http://www.thecollectorsgallery.com/searchresults.php?artistId=1118>, Retrieved April 01, 2007



[4] Large Lidded Lotus Vessel

[3].[A] Two of Daniel's Vessels



[1].[A] Daniel Stacking a Vessel

[1].[B] Completed Demonstration Vessel



[1].[C] Coiling A Planter



[4] Strongly Stripped Bowl



[5] Jar 3