



STATE OF CERAMICS *.edu edition*

Everyday Archaeology
a discussion guide by Kari Marboe

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Everyday Archaeology

What is undervalued in ceramic history? How do things become devalued? What is overvalued? And who decides what is valuable? To answer some of these questions, Kari Marboe has taken on the role of ceramic detective, flattening as many data points as possible about the history of ceramic objects in order to create new narratives about their true history, and to intertwine that history with our present moment. Might we all have a responsibility to become some version of a ceramic detective?

In this State of Ceramics we will consider the importance of engaging with information of all kinds as equally related—oral histories, documents, photographs, quick questions answered by strangers in a shipping office, a drive-by of a ceramic textbook writer’s house without stopping the car, or a pile of clay by the side of the road that’s perfectly plastic and ready to become something. Using Kari’s practice (and serious research-based shenanigans) as a starting point, we will discuss and brainstorm strategies for uncovering and filling gaps in contemporary ceramic history.

Kari’s Perspective / How Narratives are Created

When we investigate ceramic objects from our everyday experiences what can we find? Bricks, toilets, a piece of tile you found at a demolition site, a doorknob, a frying pan, a mug that came from your grandmother, a sculpture that you’ve had but haven’t gotten to know--- they all hold information.

Example 1:

I started thinking about the stories surrounding ceramic objects when I took an archaeology course as an undergrad student and was asked to figure out where a shard came from for the final exam. The shard I was given ended up being from Target, but it also came from my instructor’s decision of purchasing a mug with a rutile glaze with a floppy handle that at some moment was dropped onto the floor. The assignment stuck with me. Later I read an article about Folsom Lake receding due to drought, revealing remnants from the town that was destroyed to create it, including ceramic mugs from the 1950s. I drove to Folsom and spoke with park rangers, looked at hand drawn maps with Folsom Historical Society volunteers, and a local newspaper to piece together the history of those mugs. I then silkscreened the story onto watercolor paper using clay from the floor of the lake.

Example 2:

An investigation called *Duplicating Daniel* (a work first exhibited at A-B Projects) involved returning a missing Daniel Rhodes artwork to the Mills College Art Museum through a series of attempts at accurately duplicating the original work. The only evidence of that work appeared to be a murky copy of a black and white photograph, so each of my attempts at duplication relied upon different forms of information and exploration -- a discussion with John Gill, a gesture by Arthur Gonzalez, a relationship with Minnie Negoro, a photograph of the missing work from Alfred that I found on a trip I took there during spring break, Nancy Selvin's description of the color brown, and quotes from the artist/author himself. The duplicates manifested in many forms - sculptures, silkscreens, oral histories, collaborations, and exhibitions. My detective work (or research-based shenanigans) forged new community connections and positioned me at what Nathan Lynch refers to as the "edges" of ceramics and its potential. My continual pursuit of finding and surpassing those edges (and then finding them again) is encapsulated by this early quote from Rhodes:

Ceramics, even after thousands of years of development, remains endlessly fascinating and a field of activity in which a variety of creative insights can find expression.

-Daniel Rhodes, *Clay and Glazes for the Potter*, Chilton Book Company, 1973

More about this project: <https://karimarboe.com/artwork/4697283.html>

Questions

Who or What is undervalued in ceramic history?

How do information, objects, or people become devalued?

Who or what is overvalued in ceramic history?

Who decides what is valuable?

Is the field of ceramics lacking in open questions? What open questions can we ask?

What are we missing in current approaches? What do we need more of?

What does inclusivity mean for ceramic history, both for and beyond identity?

Are stories different from histories?

What is the relevance of archives? What responsibility do we have for archives?

How do we merge history with the present?

What do we do about the prevalence and prioritization of white men in the narrative of contemporary ceramic history? Is it possible to use that lens as a starting point for dismantling that very same lens?