Acknowledgment vessels

Andrew Denney

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Rochester Institute of Technology

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the College of Imaging Arts and Sciences in candidacy for the degree of Master of Fine Arts.

Acknowledgment Vessels

by

Andrew M. Denney

February, 1998
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INTRODUCTION

I have recently learned and have only just begun to practice a philosophy that art is an attitude toward living one's life. Pursuing an artistic life has become a spiritual mission for me to find greater meaning within my life. Clay has become the medium upon which I record and express my desire to find spirituality within my everyday existence. The ceramic process has given to me a disciplined source that allows me to express myself artistically while fulfilling my spiritual needs at the same time.

The following thesis is a written documentation of my journey while conceiving, making, and preparing my thesis body of work, "Acknowledgment Vessels" for my thesis exhibition.

The paper begins with the development of my aesthetic attitude. A personal study of Asian art and philosophy combined with a great appreciation for American vessel makers and Jazz music has provided the foundation of my growing artistic attitude. The paper continues to describe how I attempted to pay tribute to these influences, while searching for a personal ceramic style in my work. The paper concludes with the technical information needed to complete the pieces, followed by photographs of my exhibition and work.

Six months after my thesis exhibition, I was privileged to visit Kanazawa, Japan. I spent four months studying Japanese ceramic art under the guidance of the Ohi family, who have been producing tea ware since 1666. I have included photographs taken by me during this study to illustrate concepts and inspiration borrowed from Japanese culture in my work.
CHAPTER ONE

Developing My Attitude

The Japanese are known throughout the world for their long and rich ceramic history. The quality of work that has emerged from Japan has set a high standard for all people working in clay. During my undergraduate years, Japanese ceramics and the meaning behind the work has had a significant influence on my approach toward making ceramic objects. Not only because of their beautiful ceramics, but Japan's unique cultural sensibility toward an artistic life. The concepts within the Japanese Tea Ceremony and the Japanese Garden are the two main resources I investigated for developing my personal ceramic aesthetic.

The Way of Tea (Chado) is based on three Japanese insights into nature that were associated with the practice of Zen beliefs. The first insight is described as Wabi. Wabi is best translated as profound simplicity. The second Shibui refers to something that is quiet and unassuming. Lastly, Sabi pertains to things that are mature in age, it lacks the qualities of something new. (Hanmitzsch). My work has direct connections to these concepts related to the practice of Japanese tea. (Figure 1.)

The aesthetic principals found in Chado have inspired me artistically on many different levels. The most profound change was in my perception of beauty. Growing up, I was taught the Western ideal of beauty. Beauty in the West focuses on outward form, things tangible and visible. Western aesthetics concentrate on forms that are based on concrete perfection. Forms most celebrated are those with perfect symmetry, elegance, and rely on technique for validity.
Figure 1. Water Basin, Kenrokuen Garden, Kanazawa, Japan.
The aesthetic ideals in the Japanese Tea Ceremony are the opposite. Researching these concepts allowed for me to discover the power of suggestion rather than pure representation. It freed me from my Western intellectual boundaries impressed upon me growing up in the U.S.

"Zen has no need for logic or rationale: jumping the boundaries of the concept, its spirit is most positive. It lies not in ideas but in experience." (Holborn, p. 56). These concepts opened my eyes to a new and wonderful visual vocabulary that I had never experienced before.

As my tea ceremony studies continued, I found myself captivated by the Japanese Tea Garden. The intent of the garden is to prepare the minds of the visitors for the celebration of tea. The garden is an aesthetic experience meant to purify one's soul so that inherent harmonies of the natural world could be perceived. Principles found in Japanese garden design increased my understanding of space. I borrowed many of its concepts in my own work as well as my thesis exhibition.

I recently had an opportunity to visit three of Japan's most famous gardens. I experienced Kenrokuen in Kanazawas and the gardens within Ryoanji Temple and Kinkaku - Ji Temple in Kyoto. (Figure 2., 3., 4.) These moments deepened my appreciation for Japanese sensibilities and strengthened my own personal ceramic vision. My thesis show exhibition was an attempt to create a personal 'garden' that demonstrated the spiritual through the display of ceramic vessels.

Japan has a long reputation for absorbing other cultures' beliefs and making them distinctly Japanese. China has been their main source for the development of their own culture. Naturally, I studied Chinese art history. I found myself intrigued by their ancient tools and weapons.

I borrowed visual information directly from ancient Chinese jade funeral weapons and sceptres. These objects (Figure 5., 6.) not only inspired my work in formal terms but in the
Figure 2. Kenrokuen Garden, Kanazawa, Japan.
Figure 3. Ryoanji Temple, Kyoto, Japan.
Figure 4. Kinkaku - Ji Temple, Kyoto, Japan.
Figure 5. Axe, Ko-Daggar, Sword, Late Shang, Early Western Chou period, China
Figure 6. Ju-I Sceptre and Bowl, Late Ch’ing period, China.
surface treatment. “Witness Vessel #3” (Figure 7.) demonstrates my admiration for these works of art through it’s formal composition and varied matte surface.

Tools, weapons, and other ritual objects that functioned during spiritual services have greatly influenced my own work. I used tool-like forms within my vessels to symbolically associate themselves with the spiritual. I was inspired by the reverence that the Chinese held for such objects. "It is more likely that many of the ancient jades were at the outset were really copies of tools and weapons made of bronze or stone, and were probably intended for tomb furnishings." (Goldschmidt and Gobard, p. 92). Celebrating these forms in my work allowed me to share the need for a clearer understanding of the spiritual in today's modern world.

Figure 7. “Witness Vessel #3,” 5½” x 13½” x 3½”, 1996.
The vessel tradition was imposed on me during my undergraduate years. It now has become a life's challenge. One that I have learned to love and dedicated my artistic vision toward understanding its complexities.

At the beginning, I thought it would be easy, but quickly discovered it is extremely difficult. Technical knowledge and experience aside, understanding the elements that make up a good vessel is a lifetime investigation. I'm only beginning to scratch the surface of comprehending the potential of the vessel format.

My personal understanding of the vessel has been accelerated by having the privilege of studying under two amazing contemporary vessel makers. It was not only the formal education I received, but indirect ceramic experiences with them that was most influential. Their energy and knowledge of ceramics continues to inspire me. I was overwhelmed with their ability to communicate to me methods of problem solving and how they used the same methods within their own ceramic vessels. I feel that I have inherited the vessel format from them.

As I stated earlier, making ceramic objects has become a way for me to experience the spiritual. Growing up in an increasing technological society has left me, like many others, yearning for a spiritual experience. I have been taught that the creation of ceramic vessels can set up the context where the spiritual can be perceived.

Contemporary vessel makers have become my spiritual forefathers. These artists has sensitized themselves to the spiritual and have visually articulated their journey for others to experience. "Contemporary icon makers have projected a spiritual need for the things they make, and have built a strong aesthetic around objects to perform metaphysical functions." (Hall, p. 137). Artists such as Marvin Sweet, Rick Hirsch, Robert Turner, Richard Devoe, and Hans Coper have been most influential to my work. (Figure 8.)

Robert Turner’s work (Figure 9.) has been particularly inspiring to me. I have a deep admiration for the way he handles clay. His vessels are simple in form and finish that allows one to discover it’s quiet surface qualities. The simple form alterations juxtaposed a matte surface in his work helped me decide the proper surface for my own vessels.
I also found out that Robert Turner has similar attitudes and influences that I hope to bring to my work. His attitude toward making things has been extremely influential in developing my vessels. In a article he wrote about himself, he states, “It’s a hunting for Thelonious monks blue note – the note between the notes. The moment a thing works is a moment when time disappears, when things join and come together.” (Turner, American Ceramics) Knowing that a respected educator and artist has similar attitudes to my own has strengthened my commitment to the vessel.

Like Robert Turner, music has also had a profound effect on my work. I was fortunate enough to have grown up with a musician. My older brother, as long as I can remember, has been playing music. I remember listening to him become familiar with various instruments. I knew at an early age that music has a very powerful expression that people admired. I have always wanted to express the spontaneity in music within ceramics.

During my junior year in college, I was exposed to Jazz music for the first time. I was immediately hooked. Listening to artists like John Coltrane, Charles Mingus, Charlie Parker, and Miles Davis changed my life forever. It was like hearing music for the first time. I became addicted to Jazz music, its performers, history, and as a participant.
Figure 8. Richard Devoe, "Tall Bowl" 15½" x 10¼" x 8½", 1979.
Figure 9. Robert Turner “de Chelly,” 10” x 9”, 1983.
It is the attitude of certain Jazz artists and their music that has been most meaningful to me. John Coltrane’s recording, *A Love Supreme*, had a huge influence on the conception of my thesis work. Within the liner notes, John says “During the year 1957, I experienced, by the grace of God, a spiritual awakening which was to lead me to a richer, fuller, more productive life.” (*Coltrane, A Love Supreme*) Raku provided a similar experience for me and it is my hope that my work reflects the same attitude as Coltrane.

Over the years, I have seen many Jazz artists perform live. I have experienced Sonny Rollins, McCoy Tyner, Max Roach, San Ra, Freddie Hubbard, and was given a personal demonstration on Blues harmonica by Blues legend, Junior Wells.

These musical experiences were and continue to be spiritual for me. I am deeply moved emotionally by live Jazz music and always come away inspired. "It is more important to read poetry than books about pottery. Such manuals are helpful for technical data but they do not provide the essence, the elixir of life beyond God and the wind." Trans Wildifdenhain (Levin, p. 18). The direct power of Jazz music reminds many ceramists and myself of Raku firing.

As my knowledge and experience with Jazz music increased, so did my understanding of ceramics. I discovered Raku firing provides me the experience to express my ideas in ways similar to music. Raku, like a live Jazz performance, allows the artist to be direct and free to express ideas. The process demands my full attention to avoid breakage, but more importantly, allowed ideas to intuitively. Neil Leonard has this to say about Jazz improvisation, "Given the mysteries, uncertainties, and the challenges of improvisation, performers had to sharpen their skill, bring the proper ingredients together, and hope for best. The magic could not be commanded only coaxed by those with talent and the proper frame of mind, receptive to unexpected paths to transcendence." (Leonard, p. 74). Raku firing gave me an experience filled with uncertainty, intensity, and magic that was critical to the development of my work.

My artistic attitude continues to grow and deepen. A recent study in Japan has further enhanced my visual vocabulary and provided a firsthand experience of its culture. The experience strengthened my commitment to explore the vessel. My personal feelings about Jazz
music has also evolved. The artists I choose to see perform and listen to has become more specific. I believe listening to music continues to help me strengthen my own ceramic conceptions.
CHAPTER TWO

The Work

This section of the paper will concentrate on how I attempted to incorporate my personal ceramic experience with clay into physical form. I will explain my working process and influences that were critical in helping me make decisions, take risks, and formulate a cohesive working strategy through a combination of technical skills formulated to increase an intuitive attitude towards making ceramic vessels. So why make vessels.

The vessel format provided me with formal parameters that have been historically known to communicate spiritual concepts. The formal language of the vessel is known for providing all cultures ways to symbolically record spiritual beliefs. My entire working strategy evolved out of a desire to express universal ideas concerning spirituality within an increasingly technological society. Making ceramic vessels has become a way to share my personal insights into spirituality, while continuing to explore the mystical power inherent to the vessel tradition.

As my thesis show date became closer to becoming a reality, I realized my work wanted to be more specific visually. I decided to work within a self-imposed formal language. My design components became the bowl, a symbolic form to suggest a function, and a visual device to lift the vessel into space. Simplifying and setting formal limitations was the first step forward in creating a coherent body of work.

Working within a specific vessel language helped the evolution of my work become clearer. From that point on, I was able to solve visual problems faster because my work now had direction. I was able to see my concept visually grow in slow motion. Problem solving became easier now that I had made a family of vessels to study. For the first time in my ceramic career, my work and I started a meaningful dialogue.

My first and most difficult formal decision was the scale of my work. Scale, in my opinion, is the most critical decision in one's work, especially with the vessel format. The space
activated between the work and the viewer is determined by scale. Japanese teabowls had the greatest influence on my decision to work within a small scale.

I started to carve small bowls shortly after I participated in a teabowl workshop with Rick Hirsch and Toshio Ohi. I learned that teabowls are intimate, tactile, and symbolically associate themselves to things performed with human hands. I also learned how simple carving methods can create meaningful character within a bowl. All the pieces in my thesis show have a direct connection to that experience.

Since that time, scale of my work has been small. My decision to work small caused a rapid development in my personal understanding of the vessel. Working small increased my knowledge of the architecture within the vessel context. I had more control during construction which increased the number of pieces I made. I become free to 'mine' ideas, terminate bad ones, and focus on the forms that had the most potential.

All the bowls in my work were thrown and altered on the wheel. Each ball of clay thrown weighed little over a pound. I would throw about a dozen bowls at a time. When they become leather hard, I had many bowls to work on at the same time. Once leather hard, I used various carving methods to add character to my work.

Carving usually began by removing clay from the interior walls of the bowl using wooden and metal ribs. I used the ribs to increase volume by pushing the clay outward. This also created exterior surface textures that could not be achieved by other methods. Using wooden tools and sticks I found in nature, also created layers of subtle textures on the surface. Sticks were useful in creating surfaces that production tools could never achieve. Their best use, however, was in creating lyrical line quality within my work.

The other formal component that make up vessel design are a variety of abstract tool-like forms and several variations of a handle. Their intention is to symbolically suggest some function for the vessel. Not in an utilitarian sense, but as symbols associated with ritualistic practices. Like my bowls, I would make several of these forms at the same time, allowing them to dry at a similar rate as the bowls.
When both components were leather hard and carved, I would then construct the entire vessel.

Working this way during the wet clay stage of ceramics imposed a creative urgency upon myself. I approached the work with the attitude of laying down an idea in an unrestricted manner. I attempted to create a situation where ideas could develop naturally rather than imposing myself onto clay. A conversation evolved between myself and the clay that permitted a flow of ideas to emerge.

I feel that signs of my own personal ceramic style started with my thesis work. My decision to work within a small scale began the process of understanding the architecture of the vessel. "Ron Nagle has said that his encounters with specific Japanese teabowls taught him of the power inherent in small objects. His own work shows this source in its subtlety, scale, and attentiveness to surface texture." (Figure 10.) (Halper, Keramos, p. 33). My own recent exposure to teabowls in Japan reaffirmed and strengthened my appreciation for small objects.
Figure 10. Ron Nagle, "Untitled." 7¾" x 3¼" x 3½", 1983.
Once my pieces were thoroughly dry, I introduced color by spraying terra-sigillata on the surface. Like my formal language, color also needed to be simple and direct. I limited my colors to black, red, and green. Terra-sigillata was used to add color to the clay so that when a clear glaze was applied over later, subtle shades of color would emerge beneath.

Red, black, and green were chosen to strengthen the form symbolically. Red was used to symbolically suggest the use of fire during the creation of the vessel. When applied on the interior of vessel, its function is to suggest blood. Black and green were used to enhance the aged character of my work and increased the visual depth of the surfaces.

**Terra-Sigillata Recipes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Red</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Green</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ball Clay</td>
<td>Ball Clay</td>
<td>Ball Clay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red Iron</td>
<td>M.N.O.</td>
<td>Chrome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water</td>
<td>Water</td>
<td>Water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calgon</td>
<td>Calgon</td>
<td>Calgon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>400</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Terra-sigillata was applied to the surface by using an air powered spray gun available at school. Spraying color on my vessels was appropriate for technical and expressive reasons. It was crucial that terra-sigillata was layered lightly because I learned that if applied thick, glaze wouldn't adhere to the surface. The other reason for light spraying was that during the Raku firing, colors would burn out, leaving only subtle tones. Under a clear glaze, these colors became rich and have greater visual depth. The qualities from spraying enhanced the forms by making them appear as if they were objects of antiquity.

Spraying terra-sigillata helped develop my attitude toward surface application. The process allowed me to build up a natural surface appropriate for my work. I rarely washed the spray can between colors. I would just add another color directly in the can. The process allowed for a natural patina to develop in each of my colors. Working within these conditions allowed for that creative urgency and intuitive decision making to play a role in my experience.
It forced me to work fast, gain confidence in my own experience, while enhancing the character of my work.

Once the terra-sigillata had thoroughly dried, I would slow bisque fire them in an electric kiln between A06 and A04. My clay body is a light gray stoneware given to me by Rick Hirsch.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clay Body</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hawthorne Clay</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toundy Hill Creme</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ball Clay</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talc</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spodumene</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grog</td>
<td>5-7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Work

After the bisque fire, the work was prepared to be glazed. Like all aspects of my working strategy, glazes were simplified. I only used three Raku glazes on all my thesis work. The glazes were a white crackle clear, black, and a high copper glaze to produce metallic finishes. The following are the recipes for my glazes.

**Adams Black**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nepheline Syenite</td>
<td>246</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gerstly Borate</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barium Caronate</td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flint</td>
<td>246</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E.P.K.</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lithium Carbonate</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manganese Dioxide</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Copper Oxide</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Iron Oxide</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Cobalt Oxide</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**White Crackle**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gerstly Borate</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frit 3110</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nepheline Syenite</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E.P.K.</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Calico**

1 part Flint  
2 part E.P.K.  
3 part Gerstley Borate  
3 part 1, 2, and 3  
½ part Tin Oxide  
2 part Copper Carbonate

Glazing my work was completed in a slow and steady pace. It became my time to concentrate on calculating the architecture of the work. My glaze decisions were formulated on
making a clear cohesive unit, while placing emphasis upon the cup. I discovered a simple device to activate the bowl from its tool-like counterpart.

My discovery was an effect I learned from rubbing glazed work with my fingers. I just started doing it with the hope of influencing the character of the glaze. The result was a surface with much more visual depth. I would rub the interior and exterior of the bowls. I also rubbed in the calico into the black to create surfaces similar to aged metal. Rubbing my glazes enhanced the aged look of my pieces which was crucial to its visual potency.

All glazes were made and applied thick, at least three to four thick coats per piece. Rubbing took place as the coats of glaze were beginning to dry. The surfaces of my work were often uneven so that glaze collected on the raised areas. Any sections not covered were smoked black by the Raku firing process. The effects reached enhanced the aged look of my work while suggesting a function that required the use of fire. These combinations of visual information created surfaces associated with objects of antiquity.

The best way to introduce this section of my paper is with thesis statement.

"This body of work is an expression of my emotional and intellectual connection to vessel history. Raku firing was chosen to accentuate the sense of ritual, ceremony, and the metamorphosis both the vessel and I undergo during the firing."

I was introduced to the history of Raku early in my undergraduate studies and was immediately captivated by its mystery. Marvin Sweet, my undergraduate professor, was my first aesthetic influence toward Raku firing. He taught me the intellectual, emotional, and historical importance of concepts associated with Raku.

His own work at the time was mostly Raku fired and being my first ceramic mentor, it became important to me to have similar artistic aspirations. My entire senior project was based around Raku and embracing the contemporary interpretation of its mystery. My investigation of Raku continued throughout graduate school and to this day.

The history of Raku is filled with concepts that function to spiritually enlighten people. The main reason I have chosen to live an artistic life is directly connected with a desire to
communicate spiritual ideas. I feel the concepts expressed within our human spiritual ancestry are the ones most directly felt and the hardest to understand. I believe it is my obligation as an artist to explore and share with others my understanding of the spiritual. Raku firing, like a ritual, has the elements of participating in a spiritual event.

The rhythmic pattern of Raku is similar to a ritual. First, the sacrifice of the work with the lighting of fire. The temperature increased until the critical moment of flux. This is the moment when you bring all of your talent, intellect, and intuition to life. The moment consumes all of your energy while inspiring you to reach beyond yourself into the world where it’s just you and the work.

The process forces you to put trust into things you don't fully understand. My hope is that connections are made that would otherwise be impossible between the work and myself. Thelonious Monk in the movie *Strait, No Chaser* about his life had this to say about recording in studios, "You've got to do it the first or second time around. After that it goes downhill and if you mess up? Well, you have to live with that for the rest of your life." Raku firing provides that creative intensity for me within the ceramic studio.

Like the intent of most human rituals, Raku provides me with profound lessons. If lucky, the firing rewards me with uncalculated beauty that celebrates the experience. If I'm not so fortunate, I receive information needed to meet the next challenge. Either way, Raku intensifies my life by continuing to mystify me, much like life itself.

Pieces that survived the firing were not always considered a finished work. I realized that they still lacked the proper surface and color. All the pieces were too glossy to suggest anything aged. Color on the interior of some bowls was also extremely dull. I used a powerful etching cream and acrylic paints to intensify my work.

Etching creme allowed for deeper visual depth on the surface of my work. Without using the etching creme, my work shined like brand new objects. The dull surface on the exterior of my work helped the viewer feel comfortable examining the vessels intimately. I believe that
leaving the surfaces glossy would have been distracting while trying to become familiar with small objects. A softer and duller surface was appropriate for the scale of my work.

Trinity acrylic colors by Winsor and Newton were used to paint the interior of some bowls. Color needed to be strengthened to intensify the symbolic meaning of my work especially on the inside. The interior space color needed to be specific visually for my message to be understood. I used red paint to symbolize blood or a mix of gold and bronze to place special emphasis on the interior. My hope is that the viewer can sense a feeling of witnessing a sacred object. Paint and etching cream were both critical agents in creating a personal character within my work.

Presentation was my challenging aspect of my thesis work. The space around my work had to reflect the same attitude as the work itself. I used many visual devices within the exhibition to activate the space within which my work was displayed. The arrangement of my pieces, pedestals, and choosing to paint my own pedestals played a major role in my attempt to create an environment for understanding my concept.

I painted my pedestals a light blue/gray to create a calming effect under the vessels. Traditional white was inappropriate because the contrast between the work and the pedestal was severe. I also added three different sized wooden blocks on top of some pedestals to alleviate the work into clearer visual space.

Pedestals were placed to create an intimate atmosphere for viewing the vessels. I created a "T" shaped pedestal by placing one horizontally on top of another standing vertical. These pedestals were used to display a group of vessels together. Visual dialogues between pieces were created through arrangement of forms and negative space between them. I used one to block an entrance to my work that reinforced its intimacy while activating the space around the work.

My overall exhibition space was designed to create an intimate climate for viewing small ceramic vessels. Pieces were displayed in small 'family' groups so that people were encouraged to take a close look and understand my visual vocabulary. My intent was to use space and arrangement of my work to enjoy the qualities in small objects. These visual devices were used
with the hope that my audience not only enjoyed a visual experience, but also understood the conception behind my vessels.

Lastly, the titles of the work gave tribute to one of my inspirations as well as my own concept. Witness vessel was the only original title. The rest were borrowed from John Coltrane's album, *A Love Supreme*. Like the music of Coltrane, my hope is to awaken myself and other's spirits through offering personal journeys into my own ceramic quest. My thesis work is testimony of the trust I have for the vessel as means of communicating spiritual ideas. (Figure 11., 12., 13., 14., 15., 16., 17.)
CONCLUSION

My recent studies in Japan have brought closure to a six-year mission of ceramic education. The trip was the culmination of my academic career. I feel honored to have been blessed with such a spiritually rewarding experience through the act of ceramics. I can say with complete confidence that without my Japanese experience, something would be missing from my artistic life.

Although my thesis work was produced and conceived before my trip to Japan, its my hope that my work was appreciated for a sincere tribute to an aesthetic ideal. Absorbing and studying ceramics under the Ohi family in Kanazawa was a dream come true. I feel that my personal experience with Japanese culture has reaffirmed my admiration of tea aesthetics while bringing profound meaning to my own ceramic investigation.

Finally, my thesis exhibition was a tribute to the trust I have in the vessel for embracing spiritual needs. It was my visual dairy of a personal investigation into the importance of the vessel. It is my hope that my thesis exhibition provided the foundation for a lifetime investigation into the vessel format. I am committed to the vessel as means of exploring the universal need for spiritually charged concepts and I am confident that my thesis exhibition was testimony to this desire.
Figure 11. “Acknowledgment Vessel #3” 4¼” x 11½” x 3”, 1996.
Figure 12. “Witness Vessel #1” 6” x 12” x 4½”, 1996.
Figure 13. “Acknowledgment Vessel #7,” 9” x 12” x 3¾”, 1996
Figure 14. “Pursuance Vessel #2,” 8” x 8” x 4½”. 1996.
Figure 15. “Psalm Cup #3,” 6½” x 6” x 4”, 1996.
Figure 16. “Psalm Cup #5,” 5” x 8” x 4½”, 1996.
Figure 17. Thesis Show, 1996.