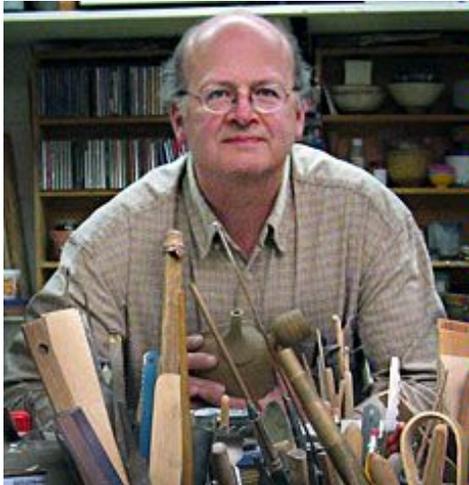


Thursday, Mar. 28, 2013

World-renowned Ceramist John Neely to Receive USU's Highest Research Honor



John Neely, a ceramicist and professor in USU's Department of Art and Design, is the 2013 D. Wynne Thorne Career Research Award recipient.



Neely specializes in tableware, primarily drinking and pouring vessels, which have been described as having a strong, contemporary feel. His innovations in kiln-making have spread worldwide.

John Neely, professor of art in ceramics, has been named Utah State University's 2013 D. Wynne Thorne Career Research awardee by the Office of Research and Graduate Studies. He is the first fine artist to receive this distinction.

"Throughout his career, John has contributed a body of physical work and knowledge that has made a significant impact on the world of ceramic art," said USU President Stan Albrecht. "As he's poured history, chemistry and engineering into his art, he's put USU on the map as a place of innovation and exploration."

Neely is known as a master of atmospheric firing, a category that includes a range of firing techniques. Among these are wood firing (using wood as fuel rather than gas), vapor glazing (introducing sodium compounds into the kiln which vaporize and glaze the work) and reduction cooling (introducing fuel into the kiln during the cooling cycle to influence color development).

"John's focus on the 'mechanics' of ceramics is certainly the legacy that will be associated with his name in generations to follow in his footsteps," said Craig Jessop, dean of the Caine

College of the Arts. "His work is remarkable on an aesthetic level, but his reputation rests also on the wealth of technical information he has disseminated over the more than 30 years of his mature career as a ceramic artist."

Neely is a widely recognized expert in the technology of clay, glaze and kiln firing. In addition to the traditional gallery exhibitions of his pieces, he has taken care to publish the results of his creative and scientific research in professional journals and workshops, many of which have influenced working methods of other artists.

“Any of us in ceramics who are toiling to understand the same questions as John could certainly tell you of forehead slapping moments when John’s insights have helped to explain some otherwise baffling phenomenon,” said professor Peter Pinnell, interim chair of the Department of Art and Art History at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln.

“The [D. Wynne Thorne Career Research] award is based not only on a candidate’s career-length record of scholarly research or creative activity, but also that in the committee’s judgment the candidate has had a major impact on his or her field and moreover has achieved international recognition for that contribution,” said William Schugart, professor of economics and finance and member of the selection committee. “Professor Neely’s development of a ‘train kiln,’ which he generously placed in the public domain, triggered a regime change in science, art and craft of pottery and ceramics.”

Neely’s “train-kiln” has a form that suggests a traditional steam locomotive. This new wood-fired kiln is a modern design that achieves the aesthetic firing qualities of a traditional Japanese Anagama kiln, but which is easier to build, much easier to fire and much more environmentally friendly.

“In order to understand how impressive this achievement is, one only has to consider that mankind has been experimenting with firing clay ever since people began to experiment with fire,” said Chris Terry, associate dean of the Caine College of the Arts. “Thus, it would be safe to assume that it would be nearly impossible to come up with an innovative way to fire clay, but John Neely accomplished just that.”

As a direct result of Neely’s innovative research, hundreds of potters on four continents have changed the way in which they create their work, and they have adopted or adapted his methods and tools for their own uses.

“I would love to see a map of the world pinned with kilns built around Neely’s innovative design — there would be many pins across most continents,” said Owen Rye of Monash University in a profile of Neely.

Even as he's influenced so many in the ceramics community, he has continued to be a prolific artist, well represented in collections around the world, with work in more than 100 collections.

"John Neely is one of the best-known and most highly respected ceramic artists and teachers working today," said Pinnell.

Neely specializes in tableware, primarily drinking and pouring vessels, which have been described as having a strong, contemporary feel. According to a profile of his work in *Ceramics Monthly*, he has never depended upon the development of signature forms to separate his work from that of other ceramists but rather has made a particular inquisitiveness his most distinguishing trait.

Neely has a sustained record of producing and showing his work in the most important and well-recognized exhibition venues in the world. Even a selected list of his exhibitions that includes only more noteworthy venues and solo shows would still be considerable in length, said nominators.

Recently, he has given workshops and lectures at 30 institutions around the world, and his work has appeared in such publications as *Ceramics Technical*, *Ceramics Monthly*, *NCECA Journal*, *Purple Sands Magazine*, *Studio Potter* and *Ceramics: Art and Perception*.

"In the field of ceramics, one of the best ways to disseminate the results of our practical research is through teaching," said Pinnell.

More than 50 students have worked with John at the graduate level and have been inspired by his unique approach to the ceramics process. Because of his reputation in the ceramics community, many more students apply each year to USU's MFA program than are admitted.

"So strongly does he believe in the value of an in-depth knowledge of the nature of clay and the transformation that is undergone in the ceramic-making process that he requires all of his ceramic majors to complete coursework in both geology and chemistry," observed Glen Brown in *Ceramics Monthly*.

"It is a change of pace to name a fine artist as the recipient of our top research award," said Mark McLellan, vice president for research and dean

of the School of Graduate Studies at USU. “But I agree with the selection committee that he is extremely deserving. Through his creative work, John embodies the spirit of research process. He draws on his chemistry knowledge to know how iron oxide affects the appearance of his pottery; he uses his history and humanities background to influence the form of his creations; he employs the scientific method to refine his firing processes. He is a true interdisciplinarian and sets a fine example for all researchers at Utah State.”

Neely will be honored at USU’s Research Gala Monday, April 8, at the Riverwoods Conference Center. The gala is part of the ninth annual Research Week, with five days of events highlighting USU’s best faculty, graduate, and undergraduate researchers. More information can be found at the [Research Week website](#).

Named after USU’s first vice president for research, the D. Wynne Thorne Career Research Award is given to an individual on the USU campus who has completed outstanding research in his or her career. The award is given annually to one outstanding university researcher who is recommended by a committee of peers and all previous award recipients. Nominees are evaluated for the significance and quality of their research and creative achievement, as well as recognition by national and international experts.

More information about the D. Wynne Thorne Career Research Award is [online](#).

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