

LIST GALLERY / SWARTHMORE COLLEGE

Embodied Forms

Donna Polseno and Ellen Shankin





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List Gallery, Swarthmore College

FOREWORD

Friendship, Art and the Muse

by **Wayne Higby**

In her essay, *Common Ground*, Swarthmore's List Gallery director Andrea Packard observes how a first meeting in 1977 between ceramic artists Donna Polseno and Ellen Shankin resulted in their deep friendship and shared pursuit of mutual interests such as their love of nature and the rural environment of Floyd, Virginia, where they have worked and lived for four decades. What sustains such an enduring friendship? I think of: mutual respect, complementary but differently nuanced points of view, and the mystery of kindred spirits. When Donna and Ellen met it was clearly not as strangers.

Additionally, I think of the word *muse*, which is defined, according to my online dictionary, as “the power regarded as inspiring a poet, artist, thinker, or the like” and, more to the point, “any of the nine sister goddesses in Greek mythology presiding over song and poetry and the arts.” *Sister Goddesses*—I will go with that—a friendship that grows from and inspires Art.

I once asked students in a seminar class to answer the question: *Would you still make art if you were the only one left on the planet?* The majority answered yes, with

the caveat that there was always the hope someone would find it someday. We need each other.

Both Donna and Ellen are living in the same landscape, navigating similar surroundings and life styles. Yet their art is quite different. By working in such close proximity, they explain themselves to each other and to the deeper, private self they each know as singular individuals. Imagine a conversation between them: Ellen says, “Look at the light falling on the hillside.” Donna replies, “I love the light at this time of day. The colors are like the glazes on your pots. We should each make something about this light and the landscape.”

There is no art in nature. There is no art in utility. Artists reveal these things to us and, as a result, we know how to think and feel about them. Donna and Ellen are paying attention to each other, continually sharing insight through their work. The disclosure of meaning is deep and rich in its implications.

Donna is a painter. She loves imagery and seduces it into following her plan for shape and surface. 3-D shape for her is the arena of surface. As a savvy sculptor, Donna transports our body's readings of shape and space into an invitation to cross thresholds to realms of memory that are masterfully enriched and focused by pictorial pattern.

We most frequently celebrate the eye and often forget that the body is an accomplished sensor that responds and interprets visual art as well as poetry, literature, music and especially dance. Pottery is an art of the body. A resounding, empathetic energy in Ellen's work



Ellen Shankin, *Red Carved Vase*, 2016, stoneware clay, 9 x 4 x 2 inches



is her deeply felt and powerful insight concerning the body's connection to useful pots. This insight informs all her work. Surface in her work is the direct phenomena of glaze and fire—the light that informs movement and texture resulting in the creation of metaphors concerning time, the figure, and nature.

Both Donna and Ellen address complex tasks. At one point, they each operate as designers addressing given problems: the pitcher, the plate, the figure. At another point, each is the ultimate artist solving those problems with inventive assertion, originality and uncanny skill. One underlying element in all this is an undeniable strength of three-dimensional shape located at the nexus of the whole. They both possess a deep intuition about clarity of shape as structure. They understand where the edges are and how to compress and release them to confirm an object's being in space. I greatly admire that. This aspect of their work gives a clue as to their individuality as artists—each, in her own way, is highly sensitive, perceptive, decisive, and authentic.

Donna Polseno, *Shy Birds*, 2017, mid-range porcelain, 10 x 10 x 2 inches

Donna Polseno and Ellen Shankin have found common ground in a unique, compelling friendship that is sustained in their work as an offering—a buoyant, generous ode to life available to everyone willing to pause long enough to appreciate friendship, art and the Muse.

Wayne Higby is a Professor of Art and the Wayne Higby Director and Chief Curator of the Alfred Ceramic Art Museum at Alfred University. His national touring retrospective titled *Infinite Place: The Ceramic Art of Wayne Higby* was featured at the Smithsonian American Art Museum in 2014. An accompanying eponymous book highlights his major ceramic works as well as his writings on art. His work is held in the permanent collections of numerous art museums around the world including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; the Victoria and Albert Museum, London; the Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo; the National Art Museum of China, Beijing; and the Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg, Russia.



Ellen Shankin, *Pitcher*, 2017, stoneware clay, 12 x 6 x 6 inches

Common Ground: Shared Perspectives and Distinct Approaches in Works by Donna Polseno and Ellen Shankin

Andrea Packard, List Gallery Director

Elaborating ancient traditions with ongoing discipline, functional ceramic works have unique potential to transcend the quotidian and reawaken our sense of wonder. Amid the alienating consequences of technology, industrial waste, and human strife, artists—particularly those who craft objects for daily use—can renew our connection to the environment. Because the hydrous and elastic minerals in clay have been essential to both biological processes and human civilization, potters develop a special appreciation for forms that synthesize elements of both nature and culture. Dug from the ground, moistened with water, dried by air, and hardened with fire, ceramic forms synthesize the elements, harmonizing creative intention with the sometimes unpredictable effects of chemistry. Discovering myriad variations within a relatively limited range of materials and structures, master potters find commonalities between past and present, art and nature.

The List Gallery is pleased to feature two such accomplished potters in *Embodied Forms: Donna Polseno and Ellen Shankin*. The exhibition highlights more than 34 recent works by the artists that convey their shared affinities and inspirations. Although they model contrasting approaches to building and embellishing forms, both Polseno and Shankin create works that are notable for their architectonic presence, rich surface textures, and allusions to natural forms. Both artists were mentored at different times by Wayne Higby, who introduced them to each other in 1977. Their resulting friendship has catalyzed their art, prompting them to live and work for nearly four decades in Floyd, Virginia, where they continue to take inspiration from the surrounding Blue Ridge Mountains. Influenced by the back-to-nature movement that coincided with the Vietnam War era and its aftermath, both artists felt drawn to live and work in a rural area where they could focus on the values and aesthetics most important to them. In Floyd, they have established a close-knit community of artists and artisans who include Shankin's husband, Brad Warstler, a woodworker, and Polseno's husband, Richard Hensley, a ceramic artist. Shankin and Warstler worked for a year in the Polseno/Hensley studio during their first year in Floyd. The families helped each other raise their children, expand each other's home studios, and overcome life challenges. In 1998, responding to shifting trends in art markets, they were among the founding members of Sixteen Hands, one of the first regional craft tours in the United States.

Both Shankin and Polseno have also found community and inspiration through teaching, mentoring apprentices, participating in artist residencies, and regular

travel—particularly to work and teach in Tuscany, Italy. Pursuing their individual visions in the context of interconnected creative communities, they have sustained evolving careers and garnered international recognition. Their contrasting methods offer opportunities for viewers to study the qualities that are intrinsic to their individual approaches and make each artist’s work distinctly personal. As Shankin puts it, *Embodied Forms* “offers an opportunity to experience the varied expression that can arise from common ground: the clay, the landscape, and lives lived in intimate proximity.”¹

Ellen Shankin

Ellen Shankin’s mastery partly derives from her ability to harmonize function, structural integrity, and elegant expression with an economy of means. Works such as *Soy Bottle on a Tray* (2017, page 24) reflect a precept she recalls Wayne Higby teaching during her undergraduate studies at Alfred University: “Whatever you do either contributes to, or takes away from, the pot. Nothing is unimportant.” Shankin has likened such principles to porcupine quills that “enter the body, barely skin deep. Then slowly, over time, they inch their way deeper and deeper into the tissue, till they sometimes reach the heart.”²

While striving to shape vessels in which all parts are essential to the whole, Shankin has also tried to create works that reflect her evolving way of seeing the world, particularly her increasing engagement with nature. In 1992, when Wayne Higby awarded her first prize in a

national ceramics competition, he noted her unusual ability to craft a water pitcher in a way that simultaneously emphasized its functionality and evoked a mountain stream flowing between boulders: “Gravity pulls it on, leaving behind an endless pattern of fluid lines as it conforms to the guiding edges of stone. Edges that now are the spout at the mouth of a ceramic pitcher. Dark and deep in its volume, the pitcher is formed in stone to fit my hand and extend my body into a space between necessity and imagination.”³

Ellen Shankin, *Black Ringed Form*, 2017, stoneware clay, 12 x 10 x 8 inches



Born in New York City in 1952, Shankin was drawn to working in clay from an early age. That fascination led her to take pottery courses at Goddard College in the mid 1970s, where she met the internationally acclaimed Australian artist Gwyn Hanssen Pigott. Shankin not only admired Hanssen Pigott’s elegant functional pottery, but felt a profound affinity with the way she distilled ancient ceramic traditions and modeled a search for meaning that is at once primal and ongoing. Recalling her influence and creative integrity, Shankin credits her as “the reason I am a potter.”⁴

Soon afterward, while attending the Rhode Island School of Design, Shankin studied ancient pottery traditions associated with Japan’s Tamba and Shigaraki regions as well as the archaic vessels and figurines of the Jōmon period (14,000–300 BCE). She also became interested in the way Chinese Han dynasty pots convey a posture or anthropomorphic presence—and this interest continues to inspire her current practice. After her undergraduate studies and move to Floyd, Virginia, Shankin established a home-based studio that has provided a stable foundation for her creative evolution. It lies along a dirt road that winds along a broad creek, then up a mountain ridge, and nestles between dense woodlands and mowed fields. Her forms do not literally represent or illustrate these inspiring surroundings, but rather embody and convey their presence, textures, and dynamism.

For more than 35 years, Shankin’s core practice has been to initially build the classic forms of jars, teapots, bowls, handled jugs, cups, and urns on the wheel, then let them dry until they are leather hard—stiff, yet still pliable. Drawing on her knowledge of the elasticity of

clay at different stages in the drying process, she then alters the structures in ways that take into account each vessel’s function, scale, proportions, gesture, and surface treatment. These secondary shifts transform her initially rounded forms into ones with a more complex architecture. She trims, adds, incises, and twists forms until she arrives at structures that convey both solidity and mutability. She harmonizes her bold geometric structures with elegant lines, curving edges, organic patterns, textured glazes, and an earthy palette.

In 1990, after her ability to integrate form, function, and surface treatment was recognized with a National Endowment for the Arts Visual Arts Fellowship, Shankin looked for opportunities that would further catalyze her development. The fellowship led to teaching opportunities throughout the United States as well as in Chile, Turkey, Canada, and Italy. Her resulting travels reinforced her interest in the art and architecture of diverse cultures and led to her ongoing relationship with the International School of Ceramics, La Meridiana, in Cetaldo, Italy, where she has taught 12 workshops during the past 20 years. On her last trip to Tuscany in 2016, she encountered the work of Isao Sugiyama, a Japanese-Italian sculptor whose asymmetrical stone and wood shrines influenced Shankin’s recent gourd series.

Like many of her mature works, Shankin’s gourd forms command and contain space in ways that invite close attention. For example, in *Black Gourd Form* (2017, page 27), she transforms the static symmetry of a wheel-raised vessel into a more organic and dynamic container. While the work’s title emphasizes its plant-like appearance, the asymmetrical placement of its

upper section is also reminiscent of *contrapposto*, the practice of animating images of figures by placing them in a dynamic pose: when standing with most of the weight on one foot, a model's stance requires a counterbalancing tilt in the shoulders and upper torso. Shankin's gourd forms convey a similarly animated, even anthropomorphic quality.

In works such as *Black Ringed Form* (2017, page 8) and *Red Gourd Form* (2017, page 26), Shankin adds ridges that emphasize both swelling volumes and directional shifts between the upper and lower sections. The lines do not appear to have been applied on top of the gourd, but rather to have been generated from within it, like the protruding veins of leaves. Even where Shankin emphasizes more geometric patterning, as in *Lichen Carved Vase* (2016, page 28) the lines remain subtle. Like undulating ripples in water, the lines add a gentle vibrato and shift in alignment from the symmetrical structure. In works such as *Moonshine Jug* (2015, page 29) the spiraling lines not only accentuate the swelling belly of the vessel but also prompt viewers to imagine flowing water.

In some of Shankin's works, such as *Double Bowl* (2016, page 25), her mastery of curvature and geometric proportion appears effortless. The massive yet elegantly rounded form consists of two concentric bowls joined and sealed at the top by a broad and gently ribbed shoulder. Thus, the vessel contains two interiors—one that is visible and ready to use, and one that is hidden. Her lines and planes appear integrated into a seamless form. Embellishing this structure with a tumult of textured and earthy glazes, Shankin harmonizes complexity with simplicity, openness with enclosure.

Refining her glaze recipes over decades through experimentation and test-firing sample tiles, Shankin has developed a primary vocabulary of deep blacks, reds, greens and ochres. She achieves complex and fluid surfaces with multiple layers of sprayed oxides and washes, over glaze. Fired in a gas-reduction kiln, the sprayed surfaces on works such as *Fish Bowl* (2017, page 22) evoke a foggy mist and other atmospheric states. In contrast, works such as *Deco Vase with Lines* (2015, page 20) emphasize greater viscosity, and recall the molten processes that occur both underground and within kilns. Often providing an expressive counterpoint to her strong trapezoidal, oval, and columnar forms, Shankin's layered and irregular glazes integrate natural imagery into the forms of domesticity.

In works such as *Tomb Jar* (2004, page 19), Shankin has distilled the influence on her of mosques and cemeteries she visited during her travels through Turkey, producing an austere form that is suited to the jar's funereal function. She contrasts the matte coal-colored base and lid with a luminous middle section that she coats with overlapping green and golden-brown glazes. Dynamic drips establish a slanting vertical rhythm held in check by the strong horizontals of the lid and base. Such stark contrasts, and the way Shankin overlaps green glazes with red-browns, recall the passage of summer into autumn and other processes of natural change. Although it serves a more somber purpose than her other works, *Tomb Jar* demonstrates her ability to integrate form, function, and natural processes. Such works convey both enduring beauty and transience.

Donna Polseno

Like Shankin, Donna Polseno creates functional vessels that engage viewers with clearly defined curves and geometric volumes, but she also makes pottery in tandem with interrelated bodies of work—sculptures of archetypal female figures and still-life tableaux. While both artists take inspiration from nature, Polseno's approach to structure and surface differs markedly from Shankin's. In contrast to the more rounded forms Shankin begins on the wheel, Polseno primarily creates her pottery by using plaster molds that allow her to develop square dishes, wide ovals, and irregular platters and vases. Over the past few decades, Polseno has created an extensive inventory of molds, and has focused on slip-casting. Pouring viscous clay into the molds, she creates a series of identical forms that she can then add onto, alter, and embellish in myriad ways. She decorates her forms not only with multi-layered glazes but also with illusionistic representations of flowers, leaves, birds, and other natural motifs.

Polseno's eclectic interests emerged early on, when she was studying ceramics with Ken Ferguson at the Kansas City Art Institute. While in Kansas City, she often visited the Nelson Atkinson Museum. Her impressions of its collection of Yuan- and Han-dynasty ritual vessels, along with more recent opportunities for her to teach in China, have encouraged her ongoing exploration of

Donna Polseno, *Black Birds*, 2017, mid-range porcelain,
10 x 4 ½ x 1 ½ inches



sculptural forms that can simultaneously convey human experience and ritual practices. Her interest in sculptural ceramics developed as a result of Wayne Higby's mentoring and her experiences during her graduate studies at the Rhode Island School of Design, where she concentrated on bas-relief still-life wall pieces.

After establishing her studio in Floyd, Virginia, Polseno initially supported herself by creating functional ware, but she also gained critical recognition for hand-built vessels—severe architectural structures that she embellished by air-brushing glazes through stencils and using Raku firing processes to create irregular surfaces. Alternating between her more idiosyncratic Raku work, and stoneware forms that were more practical and marketable, Polseno also experimented with tall whiteware vases that tilted and torqued like vines or bending figures—works that became acclaimed for their integration of the vessel form with traditional figurative and sculptural motifs.⁵

Recent works such as *Morning Glories* (opposite) reflect Polseno's sophisticated experimentation with the interrelationships between form and decoration. As in many of her works, she softens her muscular structures with delicately painted images of flowers and richly layered surfaces. In *Morning Glories*, the corners of a rectangle of yellow glaze teasingly coincide with the bowl's curving rim and contrast with its oval form. The rectangle also calls our attention to the interior of the bowl, where Polseno has positioned three black flower blossoms asymmetrically so as to keep the viewer's eye moving. She represents their stems with unusually slender lines that provide dramatic shifts in scale, and uses the same

green glaze to represent the flowers' centers and leaves as well as the "background" that surrounds the yellow rectangle. In doing so, she challenges expectations with a dynamic interplay of positive and negative shapes.

Like Shankin, Polseno adds further nuance through an inventory of glaze combinations and recipes she has developed over decades. However, in contrast to Shankin, Polseno uses wax resist and latex to build up multiple layers with glazes, and she fires her forms in an electric kiln. She modulates vibrant underlying colors with waxy satin finishes that absorb light, integrating precise images, elegant lines, and bold contrasts.

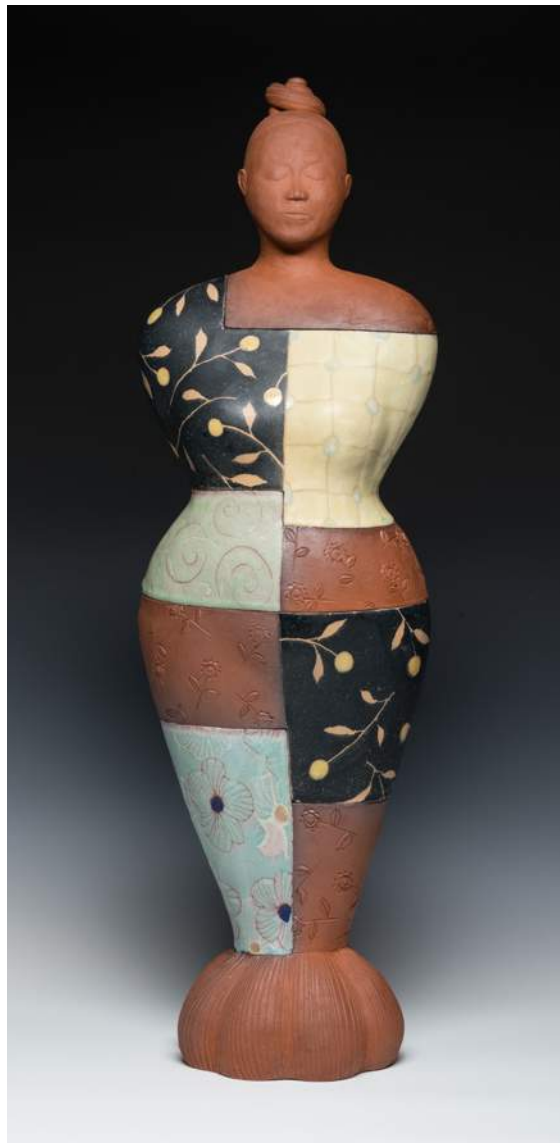
During the mid-1980s, while she was also creating functional pottery, Polseno's vessels evolved from their earlier anthropomorphic forms into more explicit representations of the female figure. This more explicit focus on the body was catalyzed by a car accident in which Polseno was badly injured and lost sight in one eye. After returning to work in her studio, she was especially drawn to working on sculptures of torsos, and the forms became more voluptuous and dynamic.⁶ Departing from the static or stiff poses associated with Cycladic and other ancient fertility figures, her "goddess forms" from this period twist, lean, and bend. She brushed completed forms with a thick coat of slip to add directional movement, texture, and depth. This work helped her earn her second grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, in 1986; and that funding enabled her to build a private studio space where she could create larger figures while still producing functional pottery.



Donna Polseno, *Morning Glories*, 2017, mid-range porcelain, 2 x 9 x 6 ½ inches

In the mid-1990s, Polseno's figurative work evolved further, with a series of salt-glazed stoneware figures, bearing vessels. Her featureless or greatly simplified heads provide symbolic representations rather than individualized portraits. As such, they call attention to the body as a container of life and the ceramic vessel as evidence of humanity's capacity for cultivation, perseverance, and nurture. Some of Polseno's figures bear vessels on their heads or hug them closely, as if they are integral parts of themselves. The figure in *Reverence* (1997) holds a vessel aloft, studying it intently and prompting us to likewise consider the importance of craft. As Anna Fariello has written, Polseno reminds her viewers of "intangible properties—containment, utility, materiality, tactility, intimacy, domesticity—allowing us to revere qualities once common to and sustaining of more simple times."⁷

The List Gallery's exhibition *Embodied Forms* includes three examples of Polseno's most recent figures which demonstrate her evolving interpretations of the female form. Works such as *Questi Pezzi Insieme* (2015, at right) and *Trapuntato* (2016, page 40) are more hieratic and symmetrical in structure than many of her earlier torsos. Instead of sculpting figures bearing vessels, Polseno embellishes them with the signature textures, colors, and patterns she uses to decorate her functional work. "Dressed" in the distinctive language of her pottery—a patchwork of flowers, leaf patterns, and signature glazes—the figures do not stand on two feet but seem to grow like buds from petal-like bases. Their heads are modeled in greater detail, but their idealized features, closed eyes, and meditative expressions still invite us to read them as archetypes. These figures



Donna Polseno, *Questi Pezzi Insieme*, 2015, Georgia brick clay, 28 x 7 1/2 x 6 inches

present us with contrasting images. Their expressions are serene and self-contained, yet their bodies are divided into disparate puzzle-like fragments. They are solid and voluptuous, yet they perch precariously on narrow bases. Their beauty and fullness therefore seems abundant, yet also contingent and transient.

The archaic qualities of Polseno's recent figures call to mind the vast scope of human history, including a variety of Mediterranean ceramic traditions. Their resonance with tradition made them well-suited for inclusion in *Concreta 2008*, an exhibition of works by six contemporary ceramic artists in the historic Palazzo Pretorio in Certaldo, Italy. That exhibition, co-organized by the International School of Ceramic Art in Meridiana, has led to Polseno's returning every summer since 2007 to work and teach there. Over the past decade, her Italian sojourns have helped her distill diverse aspects of Italian culture, particularly Etruscan ceramics and the paintings of Morandi.

Polseno's love of painting and affinity for illusionistic rendering was first inspired by her father, a landscape painter who supported his family through his artwork. Her painterly sensibility can be seen in works such as *Yellow Birds* (2017, page 39) and *Fan* (2017, page 38). In both works two birds perch atop thin elegant stems. Their boldly colored forms contrast with the surrounding background, drawing our attention from the outer edges to the center of each vessel. Whereas the decoration of the oval platter accentuates its symmetrical shape, the relationship of structure and imagery in the irregular dish is more dynamic. A rectangular indentation on one side, and scalloped handles

at opposite ends, interrupt the fan-like form, suggesting a potential for both encroachment and expansion. Bounded by such a habitat, the birds can be seen as either snug or confined. After the death of her father, who was an avid painter of birds, Polseno's imagery of both sculpted and painted birds proliferated, affirming connections to both family and nature.

In works such as *My Father's Studio* (2017, page 16) Polseno stretches farthest from her functional vessels and combines the languages of sculpture, painting, and pottery. Arranging functional vases and a bowl on a narrow base alongside sculpted pears and peaches, and employing a pale and earthy palette, she creates a shallow tableau that recalls the soft and intimate atmosphere of still lifes by Giorgio Morandi—paintings in which bottles and bowls huddle together in a manner that suggests both vulnerability and yearning.

Embodied Forms

One can readily see how Polseno's imagery represents natural and figurative themes explicitly, whereas Shankin's references to nature remain implicit in her seamless integration of structure and surface. Less apparent is something both artists share—an awareness that their art is sustained in part through attending to their own physical conditioning, particularly through the practice of movement disciplines that coordinate body postures, motion, and breathing. During the past decade, Shankin and Polseno have taken classes from the same teacher of the martial arts discipline Ba Gua,



which involves engaging in multiple circular forms and patterns of movement. While Shankin has continued to practice Ba Gua, and currently teaches an introductory course in it, Polseno more often practices Yoga. Both artists are guided by principles that are at the core of Ba Gua, Yoga, and artistic practice: harmonizing individual movements or parts to a whole, making gestures fluid, and eliminating extraneous distractions or activity.

Both artists have found that such physical conditioning contributes to their artistic growth and productivity. Polseno has noted that Shankin’s “awareness of breath and posture in sustaining and conveying energy translates into her forms—which provide strong gestures or attitudes of being and hold space and air in a way that is palpable to the viewer.”⁸ Similarly, Shankin has observed, “The energetic systems of the body, not the curving voluptuous shapes of the flesh, compel my interest in breath, posture, bearing, vitality and vigor—a sense of expansion contained. And while the language of pottery is always referencing the human form, it is the human inner dynamics that resonate for me in my work.”⁹

As often noted, when potters refer to the “belly” of a bowl, the “lip” of a cup, and the “neck” of a vase, their vocabulary reflects the importance of the body as an image, metaphor, and generative force in ceramics. Whether referring to human experience explicitly, like Polseno, or implicitly, like Shankin, potters create forms in part by translating their awareness of their

own bodies into their work. Most seasoned artists do not simply illustrate physical attributes, or focus solely on functionality; they also imbue their structures with compelling ideas, qualities, or emotions. Although their works reflect divergent approaches to building and embellishing ceramics, Polseno and Shankin are alike in crafting forms that hold both personal and universal resonance for viewers. Sustaining their evolving practices through physical discipline, creative experimentation, and engagement with their surroundings, they create artworks that embody community and nature.

NOTES

1. Ellen Shankin, email to Andrea Packard, Nov. 10, 2017.
2. Ellen Shankin, interviewed by Shirley Clifford in “Exploring Form, Keeping Function, an Interview with Ellen Shankin,” *Contact Magazine*, January 1997, issue 107, pp. 16-19.
3. Wayne Higby, “Juror’s Statement,” describing Ellen Shankin’s *Pitcher*, a thrown and carved stoneware vessel, to which he awarded first prize at the Seventh Annual San Angelo National Ceramic Competition, 1992.
4. Ellen Shankin, email to Andrea Packard, January 4, 2017.
5. Vicki Halper, *Clay Revisions, Plate Cup Vase* (Seattle Art Museum, Seattle Washington: 1987), pp. 57-58.
6. Donna Polseno, “Accepting Change,” *Ceramics Monthly*, March 1990, pp. 29-34.
7. Anna Fariello, “The Container as Metaphor, Figurative works by Donna Polseno,” in *Ceramics: Art and Perception*, No. 37, 1999, p. 32.
8. Donna Polseno, email to Andrea Packard, Nov. 10, 2017.
9. Ellen Shankin, email to Andrea Packard, Nov. 10, 2017.

Donna Polseno, *My Father’s Studio*, 2017, Georgia brick clay, 18 x 17 ½ x 6 ½ inches

Ellen Shankin, *Craftsman Vase*, 2014, stoneware clay, 13 x 10 x 3 inches



Ellen Shankin, *Tomb Jar*, 2004, stoneware clay, 19 x 8 x 8 inches







Ellen Shankin, *Fish Bowl*, 2017, stoneware clay, 8 x 12 x 12 inches



Ellen Shankin, *Teapot, Cup, and Saucer*, 2017, stoneware clay, 8 x 10 x 8 inches



Ellen Shankin, *Soy Bottle on Tray*, 2017, stoneware clay
 Tray: 6 x 4 ½ x ¾ inches; bottle: 5 x 3 ½ x 3 ½ inches



Ellen Shankin, *Double Bowl*, 2016, stoneware clay, 13 x 13 x 3 ¾ inches







Donna Polseno, *Spring Leaves*, 2017, mid-range porcelain, 2 x 9 x 6 ½ inches



Donna Polseno, *White Lilies*, 2017, mid-range porcelain, 1 x 11 x 7 inches



Donna Polseno, *Avatar*, 2017, mid-range porcelain, 2 ½ x 11 x 11 inches



Donna Polseno, *Spring*, 2017, mid-range porcelain, 3 x 7 ½ x 9 ½ inches



Donna Polseno, *Kimono*, 2017, mid-range porcelain, 5 ½ x 13 x 1 ½ inches



Donna Polseno, *Night Blooming*, 2017, mid-range porcelain, 10 x 9 x 2 inches

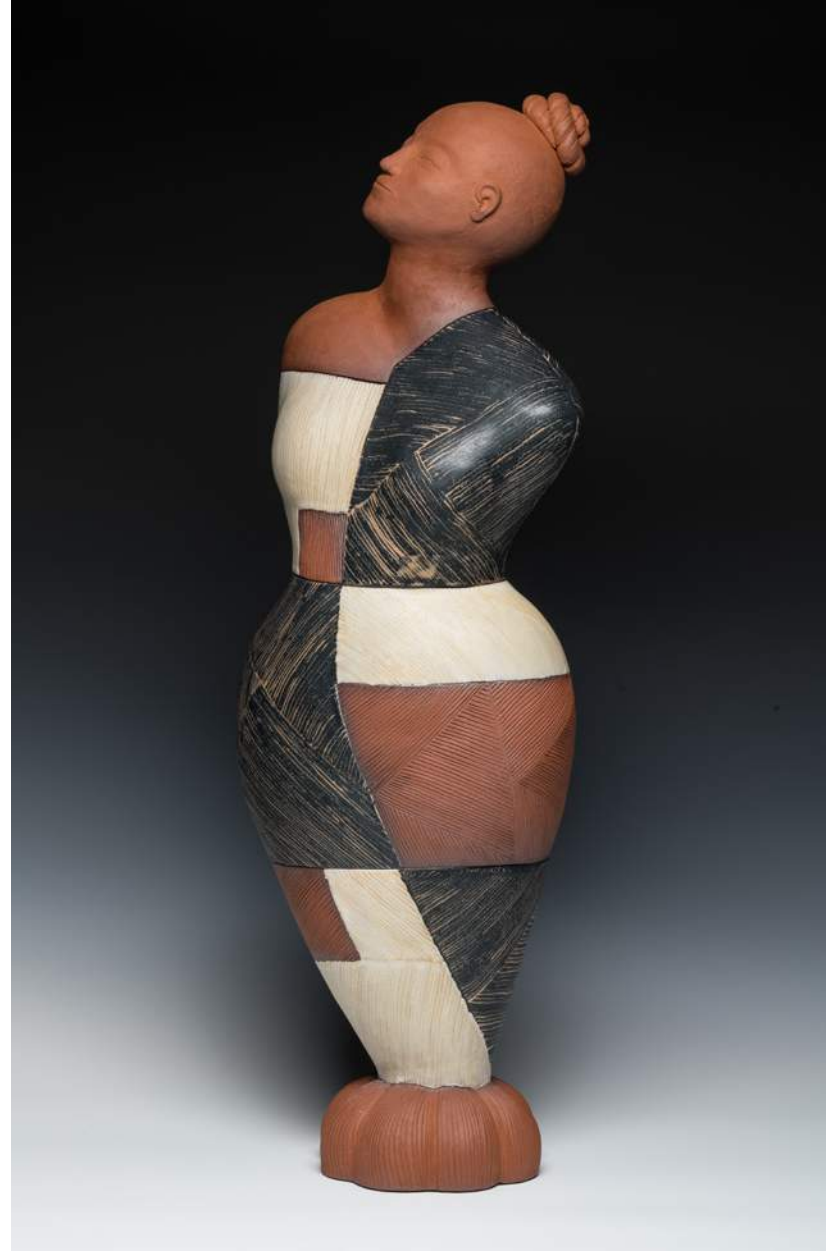
Donna Polseno, *The Space Between*, 2017, mid-range porcelain, 12 x 17 x 6 inches



Donna Polseno, *Fan*, 2017, mid-range porcelain, 1 x 11 x 9 inches



Donna Polseno, *Yellow Birds*, 2017, mid-range porcelain, 1 x 11 x 7 inches



Ellen Shankin

Born 1952, New York, New York

Ellen Shankin studied at Goddard College and Rhode Island School of Design before receiving a BFA with honors from the New York State School of Ceramics at Alfred, New York in 1977. Her awards include a 1990 National Endowment Visual Arts Fellowship and a 2001 Virginia Museum Grant. She has exhibited her work in more than 150 exhibitions nationally including *A Culture of Pots* at the Weisman Art Museum, Minneapolis, MN; *From this Earth: Ceramic Arts of Virginia* at the Portsmouth Museum, Portsmouth, VA; *Pots with Purpose* at the Ohio Craft Museum, Columbus, Ohio; and *An Accessible Art* at Alfred University, which she co-curated at the invitation of Val Cushing to commemorate his retirement. Her works have also been exhibited at Adnan Franko Sanat Galerisi in Izmir, Turkey and Kjarvalsstaðir, Reykjavik Art Museum in Reykjavik, Iceland. Since 1992, she has been a guest lecturer and instructor at more than 50 universities, art centers, and leading craft schools in the United States and abroad, including Certaldo Italy; Santiago, Chile; and Victoria, British Columbia. Her works are in the collections of numerous museums, including the International Museum of Ceramics at Alfred, Alfred, NY; The Minneapolis Institute of Art, Minneapolis, MN; The Mint Museum, Charlotte, NC; The Taubman Museum, Roanoke, VA; the Sidney Swiddler Collection of the Contemporary Vessel at the Crocker Art Museum, Sacramento, CA; and the San Angelo Museum of Art, San Angelo, TX. Her work has appeared in many periodicals, including *Studio Potter*, *Ceramics Monthly*, and *American Craft*. Her pottery has also been featured in 15 notable surveys of ceramic art, including

The Ceramic Design Book, by Val Cushing; *Functional Pottery*, by Robin Hopper, and *The Art of Contemporary American Pottery*, by Kevin Hluch. Shankin is a founding member of *16 Hands*, a regional craft tour, and served six years on the board of directors of *Round the Mountain: Southwest Virginia's Artisan Network*, trying to effect positive change for craftsmen in her region.

Ellen Shankin, *Soy Bottle*, 2017, stoneware clay, 5 x 3 x 2 inches



Donna Polseno

Born 1950, Bridgeport, Connecticut

Donna Polseno received a BFA in 1972 from Kansas City Art Institute, where she studied with Ken Ferguson. She studied informally with Wayne Higby before receiving a MAT from Rhode Island School of Design in 1974. Her awards include two National Endowment for the Arts Visual Arts Fellowships (1986 and 1978) and a Virginia Museum Artist's Grant (1984). In addition, she has been awarded numerous artist residencies at leading institutions, including the Archie Bray Foundation for the Ceramic Arts, Helena, MT; Dokuz Eylul University in Izmir, Turkey; and the Jingdezhen Institute for Ceramics, Jingdezhen, China. She has exhibited her work in group exhibitions at museums and other distinguished venues throughout the United States, including the Seattle Art Museum, Seattle, WA; the Renwick Gallery, Washington DC; the California Museum of Art, Santa Rosa, CA; the Kennedy Museum of Art, Ohio University, Athens, Ohio; and the Taubman Museum, Roanoke, Virginia. In 2008, she was invited to participate in *Concreta-Sculpture Ceramiche* at Palazzo Pretorio in Certaldo, Italy. Polseno has taught ceramics at the University of Michigan, Alfred University, and Ohio State University, as well as at leading craft schools throughout the United States, including Penland School of Crafts, Bakersfield, NC; Anderson Rach, Snowmass Village, CO; Arrowmont School of Arts and Crafts, Gatlinburg, TN; and Haystack Mountain School of Arts and Crafts, Deer Isle, ME. She currently teaches part-time at Hollins University, where she conceived of and directs *Women Working in Clay*, an annual symposium. Every summer since 2007, she has also taught at La Meridiana School of Ceramics in Cert-

aldo, Italy. Her work has been written about in dozens of articles, in publications such as *Ceramics Monthly*, *The Studio Potter*, *The Art of American Contemporary Pottery*, *American Crafts*, *Sculptural Ceramics*, and the *New York Times*. Her work is held in distinguished collections, including the American Museum of Ceramic Art, Pomona, California; The Joan Mannheimer Collection, Iowa, The St. Louis Museum of Art and Kansas City Art Institute, both in Missouri; and the Mint Museum of Contemporary Crafts, Charlotte, North Carolina.

Donna Polseno, *Trapuntato*, full image: page 40.



Acknowledgements

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Since 1991, The List Gallery, Swarthmore College, has mounted exhibitions of both established artists and emerging talents. For more information, please visit: <http://www.swarthmore.edu/list-gallery>

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Cover
Left: Ellen Shankin, *Bottle*, 2017, stoneware clay, 12 x 6 x 2 ½ inches
Right: Donna Polseno, *White Crane*, 2017, mid-range porcelain, 10 x 4 ½ x 1 ½ inches

Back cover
Donna Polseno, *Avatar*, detail, full image: page 32.

Inside front cover
Ellen Shankin, *Deco Vase with Lines*, detail, full image: page 20.

