Personal Alchemy and the Lifelong Pursuit of Art

Student presenter: Beth E. Johnson
Project advisor: Rie Hachiyanagi

My studio art thesis presents two visually distinct bodies of work that share a dynamic philosophy of creation. This conjoined work represents the dual nature of my position—at a pivot point, a connection between East and West, old and new, peace and war, youth and age, art and craft, human and machine.

One branch of the project, called *Entrainments*, builds abstract sculptures from the barest of materials and methods into complex forms that meld motion and stasis, space and substance, light and shadow. These forms, in leaving the base material exposed, celebrate the fired stoneware corpus while incorporating an abiding connection to nature and a deep understanding of bodies in motion.

The other branch of the project leverages skill in wheel-throwing to build a diverse body of thrown, compiled, and distorted vessels. These *Twisted Sisters* express various moods throughout the thesis year and act as a vehicle for the acquisition of essential ceramic skills, such as the intricacies of kiln operation and the formulation of glazes from raw materials. Installed en masse, they form a small army of engaging yet disquieting witnesses to the culmination of my undergraduate career.

Though these two bodies of work seem quite different, in fact they inform and build on each other. The minimal visual grammar of the *Entrainments* reinforces the shaping and mark-making decisions of the *Twisted Sisters*, and the spontaneity of the *Twisted Sisters* provides darkly humorous relief to the serious work of the *Entrainments*, as well as the technical skills to finish them.

These works and the process of making them recapitulate the experiences of my life and the methods I have developed to navigate its course. The iterative nature of the work itself—and the methodology used to create it—reflects the way in which I strive to continually improve the process of my life and to incorporate lessons learned from disparate parts into an integrated whole—to engage in a personal alchemy that transmutes the base material into a greater form.