Queer Theory and Contemporary Ceramics

The idea for this topical discussion came out of several emails exchanged between two graduate students, Pritika Chowdhry of University of Wisconsin, Madison, and Erik Scollon of the California College of Arts and Crafts, about Queer theory and contemporary ceramics practice. We realized that the questions we were individually grappling with could be really generative in a group of peers with similar conceptual concerns. Therefore, we would like to propose this topical discussion as a forum to reach out to other ceramics practitioners and scholars to join us for a critical evaluation of queer theory as it may be applied to contemporary ceramics.

We will start the discussion with a quick review of Queer theory, and then move on to the following questions -

1. How does queer theory apply to contemporary ceramic work in general?
   This question is based on the premise that a craft-based practice such as ceramics may be considered as an inherently queer practice. In this context, "queer" may be defined as non-normative, oppositional, and a reclamation of the marginalized.

Suggested reading:
   * Alexander Doty's book "Making Things Perfectly Queer" creates imaginative definitions of queerness as "a quality related to any expression that can be marked as contra-, non-, or anti-straight".
   * Lacey Jane Robert's essay, "In the Making: Rhetoric of Craft", available at http://sites.cca.edu/currents/sightlines/roberts.html. This essay constructs a nuanced argument about the queer and marginalized status of crafts in the arts hierarchy. While this essay is written in the context of fibers, it can easily be extended as a mode of intervention in ceramics.

2. Is there such a thing as "queer ceramics"?
   This line of enquiry would propose "queer ceramics" or a "queer sensibility" or a "queer aesthetic" as manifested in particular ceramic works that directly address gender and sexuality issues. Completely inter-twined with this question is of course, the deconstruction of the term "queer" and how it has evolved in recent scholarship. Productive as it may be to talk about a specifically "Queer aesthetic" one would need to avoid making it an essentialist dead-end.

Suggested reading:
   * Paul Mathieu's "Sex Pots: Eroticism in Ceramics" offers a survey of several ceramics artists and works that engage with sexuality and gender issues. Chapter 3 especially may be relevant to the discussion.
   * Jose Esteban Munoz's book "Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics" is a foundational text in queers of color critique, and a major contribution to minority scholarship in the field of Performance Studies.

In conclusion, we would like discuss specific artists whose works may be located on the continuum of a queer praxis in ceramics. We would like to invite group members to bring information about ceramics artists to the discussion or email it to us ahead of time. We would also encourage group members to discuss their own works in this framework of queer theory.