

# *Ceramics* MONTHLY

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# Neil Tetkowski

by JANET KOPLOS



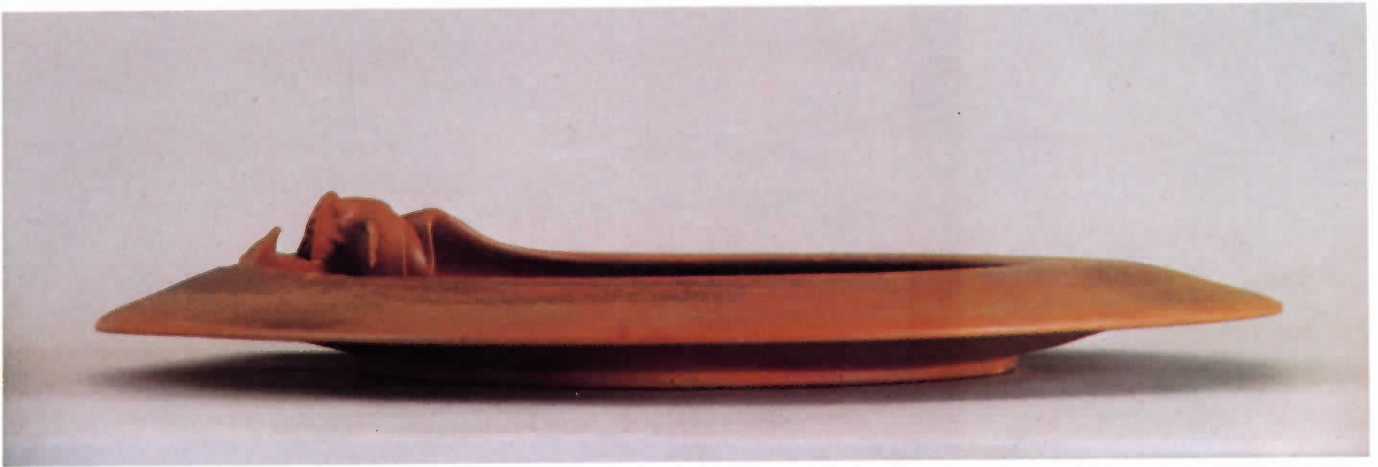
*Neil Tetkowski throwing in the main studio at Denison University, Granville, Ohio, where he heads the ceramics department. With the scale of his work currently increasing, the artist is consistently throwing 4-foot-diameter forms from 250 pounds of clay, and has built a "pizza oven" kiln for low-fire salt glazing one or two pieces at a time.*

NEIL TETKOWSKI, at 26, already has 10 years of ceramic work behind him. He was introduced to clay in high school by a teacher who was not particularly expert but who allowed him unrestricted exploration. His undergraduate years in the New York State College of Ceramics at Alfred University not only provided the necessary technical education but the breadth of art classes required there "drove home to me that clay is just a material capable of making art, like paint or anything else, a material to express ideas visually."

School at Alfred exposed him to the work and ideas of Robert Turner and Wayne Higby, both of whom have influenced his subsequent work. His forms embody a strong sense of the ancient vessel tradition, perhaps a result of having met

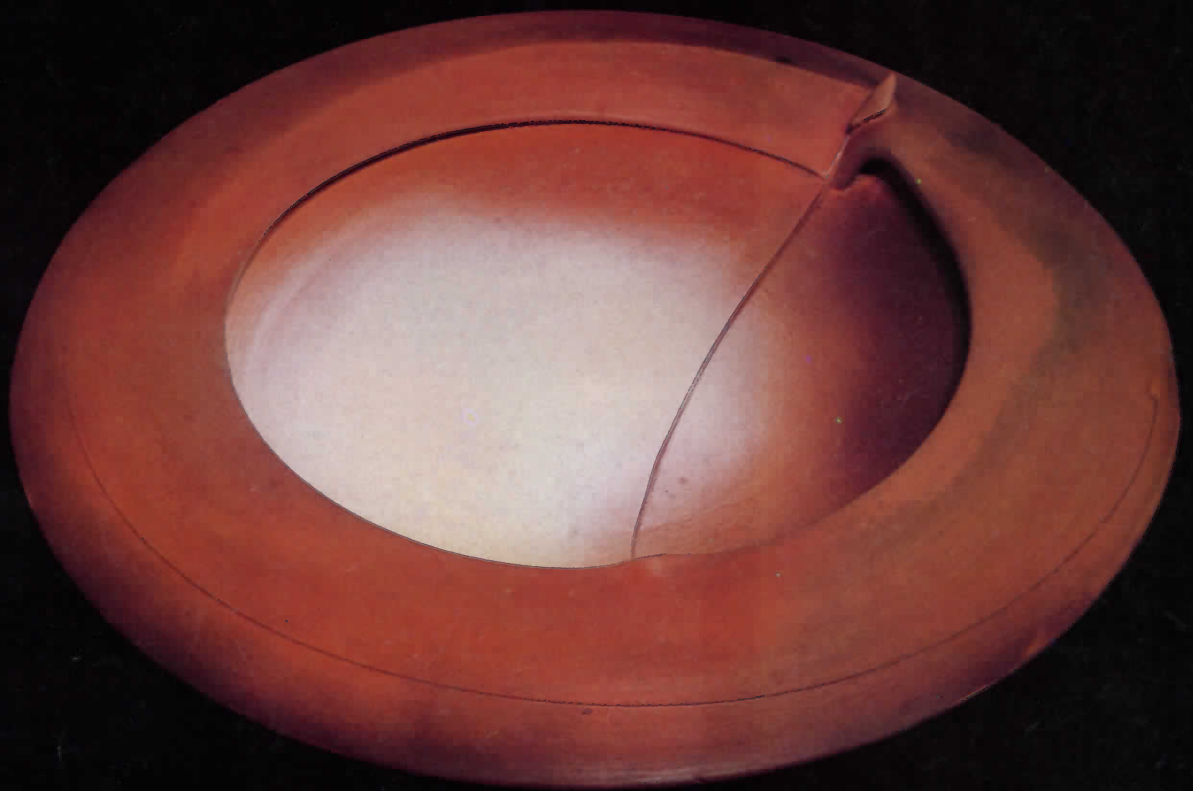
Leach and Cardew during his teenage years, as well as his admiration for the ancient Mimbres pottery of the American Southwest.

Neil is not interested in function, but is fascinated by the vessel as an opportunity to simultaneously explore inside and outside surfaces and space. Images of natural topography are reflected in the thrown and altered earthenware forms. Neil speaks of the carving, powerful flow of the Niagara River near his childhood home; the warm color and rolling contours of the Tuscan hills of Italy where he lived for several years; and the irregular flatness and enormous horizons surrounding Illinois State University at which he earned an M.F.A. under David Tell.



**Above** A side view of one of Neil's forms shows the tapered wall under its rim, which when seen from above, creates the impression that the form floats above the tabletop.

**Below** Earthenware vessel, approximately 19 inches in diameter, thrown, altered, with incising, terra sigillata, low-fire salt glaze.





**Above** Thrown, altered, earthenware form, approximately 13 inches in diameter, incising, low-fire salt glaze.



**Left** Earthenware vessel, 16 inches in diameter, thrown, altered, incised, low-fire salt glaze. At lower firing (Cone 010-03), salt introduced into the kiln atmosphere does not yield a glassy texture, but produces a colorful or muted blush on terra sigillata surfaces.

Preferring the softer, more porous characteristics of low-fire clay in contrast to the tight feel of stoneware, Neil works with the following earthenware recipes:

**Redware Body** (Cone 010-04, oxidation or reduction)

Barium Carbonate	2.0 parts
Talc	12.5
Cedar Heights Goldart Clay	12.5
Cedar Heights Redart Clay	50.0
Pine Lake Fireclay	25.0
Sand or Grog	6.0
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	108.0 parts

**Whiteware Body** (Cone 010-04, oxidation or reduction)

Barium Carbonate	0.5 parts
Talc	15.0
Cedar Heights Goldart Clay	50.0
Pine Lake Fireclay	35.0
Sand/Grog	6.0
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	106.5 parts

His current vessels represent the passive horizons of Illinois in the horizontal axis and low relief. Undulating rims and irregular surfaces suggest river current. The warm colors from various terra sigillatas sprayed overall at the leather-hard state remind him of the earth around the city of Siena, which gave its name to the familiar hue.

With XX Saggar Clay for white, Cedar Heights Goldart Clay for buff, and Calvert Clay for orange, Neil prepares terra sigillata by mixing 3000 grams of clay with 7000 grams of water and 50 grams of Darvan or Calgon. After settling for three days, the fine slip at the top of the mixture is removed and thickened by boiling.

Because the forms are reduction fired in a low-fire salt kiln, Neil simply dusts them with Gerstley borate, or sparingly brushes or sprays on glazes such as those listed in the next column:

**Clear Glaze I** (Cone 010-04, oxidation or reduction)

Gerstley Borate	90%
Flint	10
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	100%

For a saturated iron glaze, add 10% red iron oxide.

**Clear Glaze II** (Cone 010-04, oxidation or reduction)

Frit 3195 (Ferro)	92.8%
Gerstley Borate	7.2%
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	100.0%

Add: Bentonite	3.1%
Macaloid	1.0%

**Worthington's Clear Glaze**

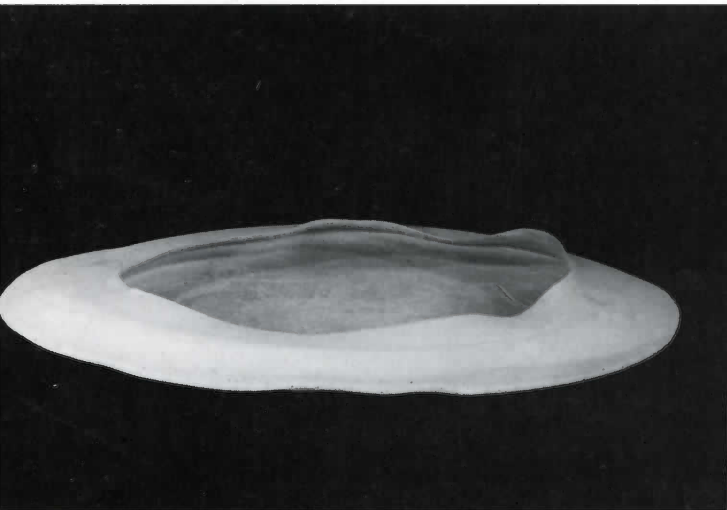
(Cone 07-03, oxidation or reduction)

Gerstley Borate	55%
Edgar Plastic Kaolin	30
Flint	15
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	100%

At the lower firing temperature salt does not yield the typical glassy texture, but produces a bright orange blush on the terra sigillata-treated surfaces. With increased reduction the colors progressively darken, so when Neil wants bright colors the work is not reduced at all. Each kiln load is prepared with the specific type of firing predetermined.

Concerned with subtlety, quiet and a sense of idiosyncrasy, Neil thinks of his vessels as introspective objects with sufficient ambiguity to allow a viewer's individual response. Each variation on the landscape theme integrates form and surface, extending from platterlike bases to broad rims pulled in to almost the point of closure. With the imperfect foot relating to a rippled lip, the salt-blushed vessels sit lightly, almost seeming to hover.

**The author** Janet Koplos is crafts editor for the *New Art Examiner*, Chicago.



*Thrown, altered vessel, approximately 19 inches in diameter, by Neil Tetkowsky.*



*Earthenware form, 18 inches in diameter, thrown, incised, with terra sigillata in low-fire salt firing.*



*Neil Tetkowski with a wall-mounted earthenware form, thrown, altered, incised, with sprayed terra sigillata, low-fire salt firing.*

*Thrown, altered earthenware, 9 inches in diameter, incised, with low-fire salt glaze.*

