



PHOTOS: JOHN WOODIN, JOHN MARTINELLI AND JOHN CARLINO

Alan Willoughby and Linda Shusterman at work in their adjacent studios in Deptford, New Jersey.

SHARED VISIONS

by Alan Willoughby with Linda Shusterman

Despite the significant media coverage on the millennium, I am sure that by the time our computers get past the Y2K problem, and we've donated to the many worthy causes that are claiming 2000 as a pivotal point in their organizational history, and we've had our fill of parties and champagne, life will go on. Actually, making the transition from one century to the next is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to step away from our normal routines, take a little time off, and take stock of where we have been and where we are going.

As we enter into the new millennium, Linda and I will have been making pots for over 30 years. Probably

the greatest challenge we have faced is maintaining the sense of excitement that originally attracted us to claywork. The mystery of creation, the transformation of chaos into form through one's imagination and the strength of one's hand are the romantic concepts to which we (as products of the 1960s) were drawn.

Over the years, the question we found ourselves frequently coming back to is: How can we maintain a relationship with an earlier time as we continue to move forward? As time goes by, what begins as new and original has a tendency to become repetitive and monotonous—especially when you add the reality of having to earn

a livelihood.

In the early 1980s, our path took us to graduate school at Clemson University in South Carolina. Several years as studio potters had brought us face to face with the need for more time for experimentation. Additionally, we recognized that to intensify the learning process, we needed to withdraw from the pressures of earning a living. Immersion in art history, drawing, ample time to experiment with firing ranges, clays, forming methods, design issues, and constant feedback and critiques from both faculty and peers accelerated our growth as ceramics artists.

Completion of M.F.A. degrees led us to Frostburg University in western



"Teapot with Caribe Pattern," 11 inches in height, wheel-thrown porcelain with slips and incising, fired in a neutral atmosphere to Cone 10–11 in a gas kiln, by Linda Shusterman.

in maintaining our individual identities in clay. At times, use of porcelain (Linda) and red earthenware (Alan) necessitated this separation, but it has always been a keystone of our studio careers. For many years, I have assisted Linda by mixing clay, throwing large platters and bowls, loading and firing kilns, and attending wholesale and retail shows.

Linda's work is made primarily on the potter's wheel. She produces curvaceous teapots, tall vases and vessel

forms, sugar and creamer sets, pitchers, mugs, bowls and platters. Polychrome slips are brushed on the leather-hard forms. After the bisque firing, clear glaze is applied, and the pots are loaded into a 65-cubic-foot gas kiln to be fired to Cone 11 in oxidation.

The wheel-thrown porcelain forms are approached as three-dimensional surfaces for the study and use of color, pattern and composition. Her influences include contemporary pattern painting, and travels in Mexico

and the Caribbean. The seascapes and lush vegetation of the Caribbean in the Yucatan and Jamaica are seen in the "Caribe" series, which uses bold leaf patterns floating in a rich bermuda green and lavender. Repetition of spiral shapes, which are symbolic of constant change and evolution in life, was inspired by the carving seen in the art and architecture of the Mayan ruins in Yucatan and Oaxaca, Mexico.

Since becoming director of Perkins Center for the Arts, I have returned



Teapot with cups, to 10 inches in height, wheel-thrown porcelain with washed, brushed and trailed slips, fired to Cone 11 in a wood/salt kiln, by Alan Willoughby.



Ewer, 10 inches in height, wheel-thrown porcelain with slips and glaze, fired to Cone 11 in a wood/salt kiln, by Alan Willoughby.



Covered Jar, 12 inches in height, wheel-thrown porcelain with washed, painted and trailed slips and glaze, fired to Cone 11 in a wood/salt kiln, by Alan Willoughby.

Maryland, where I taught and Linda was an artist-in-residence. Along with gaining teaching experience, we also established Linda's wholesale business. It proved to be a good time to enter wholesale shows—the Reagan spending spree of the '80s was in full swing. It was a new experience and a welcome respite from our earlier years earning a living as artists. It seemed as though the pots nearly flew out of the studio!

The '90s brought a crash back to reality. My wholesale business dropped to near zero and Linda's was significantly reduced. This was a good time to evaluate, adapt and change. Additionally, the experience brought

to the foreground such questions as: How far does one go with production? How does one deal with the inherent isolation of working in a small studio? What is the role and importance of education, both professionally and in one's life?

In looking back, the answers seem clear and intentional, yet the reality of the time was much more about trial and error, trial and success. So, Linda continued with wholesale marketing, plus she added several retail shows and increased her adjunct teaching in nearby colleges, and I became the director of Perkins Center for the Arts, a community arts center in Moorestown,

New Jersey. Fortunate at the onset to establish a four-day work schedule at the center, I have been able to maintain my involvement in Linda's business and redirect my ceramic work as its economic viability took a back seat.

What has evolved through these career changes is a studio/working environment in which we each maintain autonomy as artists, while collaborating on work in Linda's wholesale and retail show repertoire. Overall, the strength of this arrangement is in the diversity and continual evolution of work facilitated through an understanding of our priorities as artists.

Separate yet connected studio spaces have played an important role



"Tea Set with Jazz Pattern," 12 inches in height, wheel-thrown porcelain with brushed and trailed polychrome slips, and incising, fired in a neutral atmosphere to Cone 10 in a gas kiln, by Linda Shusterman.

to my roots. Function, an affinity for the potter's wheel and the mark of the fire, were ideas I had to put on a back burner during the time I was wholesaling my work. This was necessary for a variety of reasons, not the least of which was that wholesaling requires a fairly reliable and consistent product.

I am drawn to clay because of its tactile and physical properties. It is a welcome respite from our 20th-century world of mechanization and super-technologies. When I work with clay, there is a connection to something deeper and stronger, more primal. On days when I enter my studio, I leave behind the violence, the pollution, the global warming and the consumption

propagated by our modern-day icons, and begin a quest to understand the deeper meanings in life, the connections to all things.

My new body of work focuses on a series of porcelain vessels thrown on the potter's wheel, and altered after the clay has stiffened for several hours. Surface treatment includes firing in a wood and salt kiln, where the wood ash and sodium interact with the clay, slip, glazes and soluble salts. Firing with wood is a purifying ritual. It is the "trial by fire" of ancient myths, a process engaging full thought and sense, a collaborative effort between man and fire. The flame licks patterns across brushed slip decoration and

ash falls upon the shoulders of pots. To open the kiln door several days after the pots have cooled and we have rested is a moment filled with intense anticipation and excitement.

Approaching the potter's wheel as a tool rather than an end in itself has given new life to my forms and opened a broad terrain for exploration. The labor and mental intensity of wood firings have reconnected me to the "trial by fire" of my pots.

In looking toward the future, we are not so concerned with specifics as we are with our attitude and approach to doing things. In this perspective, I am confident that both Linda and I will continue working collaboratively.

Recipes

Willoughby/Shusterman Porcelain

(Cone 10–11)

NC 4 Feldspar.....	45 lb
6 Tile Clay	25
Edgar Plastic Kaolin	25
Plastic Vitrox Clay.....	4
Tennessee Ball Clay (10).....	50
Flint (200 mesh)	40
Pyrophyllite.....	4
Molochite (200 mesh).....	4
	197 lb

The following slips are applied to leather-hard ware. Adding 0.25% Calgon as a deflocculant permits the use of less water for working consistency.

Shusterman White Slip

(Cone 10–11)

Soda Ash	4.85 %
Custer Feldspar	19.42
Frit 3195 (Ferro)	7.77
6 Tile Clay	14.56
Edgar Plastic Kaolin	14.56
Tennessee Ball Clay (10).....	19.42
Flint (325 mesh)	19.42
	100.00 %
Add: Zircopax.....	9.71 %

Shusterman Base Slip

(Cone 10–11)

Soda Ash	5.13 %
Custer Feldspar	20.51
6 Tile Clay	12.82
Edgar Plastic Kaolin	12.82
Tennessee Ball Clay (10).....	25.65
Flint (325 mesh)	20.51
Pyrophyllite.....	2.56
	100.00 %

For color variations, add 10–20% high-temperature Mason stains; make pastel versions with the addition of Mason White Extender.

Shusterman Clear Glaze

(Cone 10–11)

Whiting	20 %
Custer Feldspar	38
Edgar Plastic Kaolin	10
Flint (325 mesh)	32
	100 %

Apply thinly. Shusterman fires in a propane kiln to Cone 11.

Willoughby uses the following recipes on work to be wood/salt fired:

Wood/Salt Flashing Wash

(Cone 9–12)

Nepheline Syenite	20.0 %
6 Tile Clay	80.0
	100.0 %

Add: Bentonite

Willoughby White Slip

(Cone 9–11)

Soda Ash	5.56 %
Whiting	16.67
Nepheline Syenite	22.22
Calcined Kaolin	16.67
Edgar Plastic Kaolin	5.56
Tennessee Ball Clay (10).....	11.10
Flint (325 mesh)	22.22
	100.00 %

Add: Zircopax..... 11.10 %

For color variations, add 5–25% Mason stains.

Vinny's Green Glaze

(Cone 9–11)

Whiting	21.39 %
G-200 Feldspar	41.18
Edgar Plastic Kaolin	21.39
Flint (325 mesh)	16.04
	100.00 %

Add: Copper Carbonate..... 1.60 %
Rutile (light)..... 3.21 %

Transparent 1-2-3-4 Glaze

(Cone 9–10)

Whiting

NC 4 Feldspar.....	40
Tennessee Ball Clay (10).....	10
Flint (325 mesh)	30
	100 %

Ben's Blue Glaze

(Cone 9–10)

Gerstley Borate.....	3.23
Whiting	26.88
Custer Feldspar	32.26
Kentucky Ball Clay (OM 4)	10.75
Flint (325 mesh)	26.88
	100.00 %

Add: Cobalt Carbonate..... 0.54 %
Manganese Carbonate

3.26 %
Red Iron Oxide

1.08 %

Rob's Green Glaze

(Cone 9–11)

Whiting	19.12 %
Nepheline Syenite	39.64
Edgar Plastic Kaolin	11.11
Flint (325 mesh)	30.13
	100.00 %

Add: Black Copper Oxide... 3.95 %
Copper Carbonate..... 0.75 %
Bentonite

2.14 %



"Platter with Tropical Pattern," wheel-thrown porcelain with polychrome slips and incising, fired in a neutral atmosphere to Cone 10–11 in a gas kiln, by Linda Shusterman.