

THE STUDIO
POTTER

DECEMBER 2004

VOLUME 10

NUMBER 1



EXPLORING THE DOMESTIC LANDSCAPE: ALLEGHANY MEADOWS AND THE ARTSTREAM GALLERY



Lucy Morgan and her associate Howard Ford on their way to the 1933 Chicago World's Fair with the display booth called the Travelog. Photograph by Bayard Wootten, courtesy Penland School of Crafts, Penland, North Carolina

Aspen Farmers Market

We rise in the dark to drive the forty-five minutes from Carbondale. As we pull in the air is clear and the sun is beginning to warm the red sandstone and brick fronts of downtown Aspen's nineteenth-century buildings. We maneuver into place and unhitch the trailer amidst the groggy camaraderie of those on the producers' side of the counter: farmers, cheese makers, and craftspeople, who from mid-May to mid-October constitute a once-a-week community. Potter Sam Harvey meets us there, and after a trip for coffee I return to find the Airstream coming to life. The metal awning flips up, the outside display counter slides on, the doorstep is secured, and pots come out of their wrappings. Dahlias for the vases are chosen from the crammed buckets in the booth across the way. The chairs are set up; the credit card machine is ready. Here we go.

People are beginning to wander through in a leisurely Saturday-morning manner. This early, the talk is mostly of the Airstream itself. You can watch people coming up the middle of the wide aisle, turning from truck stand to tented booth, and stopping short at the gleaming bulk of the trailer. What is this...? Something familiar, especially in the "outdoor-lifestyle" West, and yet so dazzlingly strange. A step inside compounds the surprise and delight: a homey but elegant space with wooden counters and shelves displaying cups, bowls, and vases. The lettering above the back window has been altered; it reads "ARTSTREAM".

There's a vibrant clay community here: longtime residents such as Paul Soldner and Peg Malloy, the institutional presence and constantly renewing energy of Anderson Ranch and, more recently, Carbondale Clay Center. Add to this the heady local mix of spectacular landscape, forward-looking environmental thinkers, and abundant disposable income, and there is much to attract and support a young potter, especially one with an interest in unconventional fuels, contexts, and alliances. On the strength of old ties with Anderson Ranch, Alleghany Meadows moved back here in 1999 to manage the studio at the Carbondale Clay Center. Though his has been a mobile life, Colorado has been a recurring address in it and he recently bought property in Carbondale. He lives there with his wife Jill and young daughter Lily and is building a studio with a kiln fired with waste vegetable oil from restaurants.

Meanwhile the Artstream rolls on: to the farmers market here every Saturday in the summer and fall, and for one or two long tours at other times of the year, at least one of them coinciding with NCECA. The Artstream is at once theater, teaching tool, and marketing strategy. It displays and articulates young voices in ceramics; it gathers the work, makers, and energies of a new generation.

The following interviews took place in Colorado in July 2004 and at Arrowmont the following September.

—MB



Tales from the Artstream

We called our first long tour "North American Dish Makers", and in New York we parked on 7th Avenue at Barrow, near Greenwich House Pottery. A gentleman in his sixties came in and sat down. He just kept looking around, but finally he introduced himself. He lives in Belgium and New York, and designs displays for museums. He was just grinning at how much fun it was to have work of this quality on the street, something totally out there. Like nobody has seen an Airstream in Manhattan! And they've seen everything in New York, or at least they think they have. It was great and that was some of the first feedback I got. I knew it would be fun and good, but I didn't realize the levels it would go to.

Then in Kansas City we were parked in the taxi lane at the hotel. One morning Doug [Casebeer] was out for an early walk and there were two taxi drivers at the Artstream, peering in the window and talking about which teapot they liked.

The Artstream works well in a venue where there are a lot of people. If it's a small rural town – yes, there's a philosophical need to take pots there, but there just aren't enough bodies. There's a range in here, from \$15 for some of these cups up to over a thousand for some pieces. Most of the pots that sell are under \$200 in price, and very approachable and functional work. The great thing about NCECA is that professors, appreciators, students – no matter what they're working in, they all love utilitarian pots, even if they don't want to talk about it academically.

The warmer climates are better, I think. Although last year we sold a ton at NCECA, warmer places are nice. When we were at Northern Clay Center [in Minneapolis], it was five degrees, colder than we've ever been. I had to call a tow truck to get my truck started, it was so cold! And I have an amazing heater in here. It heats the place up really well but we were outside packing and unpacking. We were numb.

But an Airstream is very hard to deal with on the inside when there are more than ten people in it. We were in Philadelphia at the Clay Studio during a First Friday, and there was a line of fifty people waiting to get in, and so many people walking through and in it that nobody had space to see. We finally closed the door because it was so nerve-racking having that many people in there. Another time I think I'd just limit how many can get in at once; even five starts to get pretty tight. Last year [at NCECA] there was



a line outside. Some people were willing to wait and some didn't want to and just came back another time, but with so many different people's work in it, you can sort of stay in one spot and get lost in one person's body of work, really investigate what they're up to. You might as well – just get lost where your feet are.

I thought about putting in a second door and even went as far as researching it. I found one online – somebody who was taking apart an Airstream – but then decided not to do that because it would encourage people to slide through quickly. That would make it a different kind of temporal experience, as well as a spatial one. I think the way people navigate through an exhibition is really important – to experience certain parts of it and flow through it rather than exit. They have to commit a little bit more.

So things like that are interesting. As a vehicle it's interesting and it also allows me to curate my own shows. That's the other thing about NCECA: I don't have to hunt for a gallery to have a couple of pieces in a show at NCECA every year! I always ask the onsite coordinators if it's okay to bring the Artstream, and they've always said, "Yes, yes, please."

Sometimes, though, people want it to be at a better institution. But the Artstream has got to be at the convention center. Last year on the March tour we did six stops on the way [to NCECA] and two stops coming back. And we also do slide shows and visiting artist demonstrations at most places we stop, which is really fun. It helps sell the work and promote the idea. Some pay us and some just say, "You're coming," and some places try to make us pay to come.

A woman was in here and told me that when she went into a gallery, she felt like she had to have something important to say. But people can approach this, and it gives them a comfort and a conversational opening – like, what year is your Airstream? Whereas if they just looked at the work, they might be afraid they'd be on the spot, having to say something intelligent.

How do you decide on the potters you include?

I pick people in a whole variety of ways. Some people I don't know but are recommended by someone. And then there



Artstream in New York City

are peers and friends of mine, like Sam Harvey and some local folks. And people I really enjoy working with. Some who I have phenomenal respect for approach me, like John Gill – I never would have asked him. There aren't any concrete criteria except that I know I have to show the work. And it has to be work I would want to live with.

The Airstream is a vehicle that is built with great quality and care and attention, and we remodeled it with the craftsmanship in mind. The pots that go in it need to have been made with a similar level of attention and craftsmanship, and be pots that answer to history, that can stand up and be proud and fresh in the face of thousands of years of historic work. Not just copying from before, but also not trying to reinvent the entire ceramic process. Those pots are the ones that I want to show. There are levels of integrity that continue through and through.

And it needs to be utilitarian?

Yes, it does. When I put together a show, especially if I'm taking it to universities, I want it to chase function and process from a lot of angles, and to push function in a different way. There's a lot of space in the trailer for mugs, and everybody can look at a mug and think about what they're going to drink out of it. And then there's the other extreme of function, like Gail Kendall's long trays where it's not so obvious what they are, or a gravy boat that needs a very special ritual-type of dinner to be used. Each person's body of work, as you know, typically pushes certain forms from different aspects of function. Lisa Orr's little candleholders, for instance, with small floating areas for condiments or something else to go in, and how those relate to her platters. Matt Towers will be in the next tour and he's making a body of work just for the Artstream. It's going to be exciting to see somebody pushed towards a very different space – a domestic space, really, because he's been making large sculptures and now he's going to make functional plates. I want to see what it does to an artist to tweak him a little bit, because I know what's it's done to me. It's like in Japan, the way that people have had to live in confined spaces. What do you do with a small space as compared to a large space, and how do you think about how things go together?

I find that this idea is much more successful if I put a bunch of people's work in it than if I were to take it on the road with just my work or even two people's. It just would not be as powerful or accepted by people I respect. For the first tour, there were six of us and a great diversity of work, and people took it seriously. I like to have thirty to fifty pieces from each potter, though on last year's tour Nancy

Barbour sold about ninety pots. Her pots are all very small; people can put them in a pocket and take them on the plane. It's great to see a nice body of work, and every time somebody comes in, there's fresh work; it doesn't get picked over. On the flip side of that I think if I had a group of eight of John Gill's pots and had red dots on three of them, I would sell the rest, because people would think, "Wow, somebody else is willing to pay five hundred bucks for that, I'm getting one too." So there's an interesting psychology that happens with expensive work and a traveling gallery that I haven't quite figured out yet.

I was unpacking John Gill's work, and it's beautiful and exquisite but I was afraid. I'm handling these expensive pieces thinking, "I'm going to pack and unpack this fifteen times in the next month in six states. Am I crazy?" All those factors help me put a show together.

The core group has stayed the same, and then other people rotate in and out. And there are always new people whose work I'm really excited about having. I like it to be three-quarters young people because I think it's a great way to sell work for young folks. Also I try to put together shows that are across the process spectrum. So far I've been wanting a diversity of work and trying not to put just one vision forward – say that a pot needs to be thrown on the wheel and reduction-fired. That really adds an educational aspect, different perspectives on how people work with clay. I'm so inspired and amazed by all the different ways that potters now are working; there's no hierarchy that says things have to get to cone 12. To me that just doesn't exist. Or even a hierarchy that says it has to be handmade, because a wheel-thrown pot can be as stale as a slip-cast pot and a slip-cast pot can be as alive as a hand-thrown pot – all depending on how the person touches and uses the material. Beth Robinson's (see *sr*, June 2004) like that; she's casting those dishes and yet there's variation throughout. She built up her structure and her questions and then has just as much variation as in her thrown pots. Those surface layers and alterations of each form are what I think allow the user access into those questions.

I did a show called "Potters of the Roaring Fork," with just potters of my region: Diane Kenney and Paul Soldner and Barbara Sorensen and Peg Malloy. There were eighteen potters in the show and it was amazing. We have some great work here in the valley and it was great to put that on the road. And if I'm going to a town where I know some potters, I like to include some of them, like when we were going to Lincoln I wanted to have Gail Kendall in it, in her own town.

Another thing that pushes function is that the Airstream itself has this incredible function as a vessel, just like a

building, but the Airstream's function and mythology have to do with going into the wilderness and taking your comforts of home with you. It carries its own baggage in a way, and inspires the pottery to be as utilitarian as the Airstream design. I think most of the work that I'm choosing to be in there is on the same level. It's not produced by a whole team of engineers; we are producing it as a field and as individual artists, but we all inform each other and bounce back and forth off each other as a collective tradition. So there's this wonderful exploration of function in it, and the Airstream itself is something for exploring.

Narrative work seems like something that people grasp very quickly because our culture is so image-heavy; people respond to the images on the pots. Do you have plans to include that type of work in the future?

That's another layer of work that I haven't explored yet. It's not a conscious thing, just a coincidence with the folks that I've had so far in the Artstream. Like anybody starting out, the pool that I draw from is pretty narrow at first. I mean, I am traveling and meeting new people and I'm always looking at new work, but I still feel I'm missing other great peo-

ple who are out there. I would love to have even further diversity; there are high-fired surfaces that were almost over-represented in the last show. It would be fun to move in with some other things. It's already happening, in a good way, that people are approaching me to ask if they can be in. And it's work that's very outside of my experience. I'm consciously trying to open up past what I know. A young woman, an undergrad at Kansas City, approached me last year and I told her to send images of her work. She said, "Well, I brought my work with me." She pulled out of her purse a box that was about 4" x 6" x 1" and opened it, and in it were thirty pots – all exquisite little high-fired porcelain pots strapped in and so well-presented that I thought, "God, this is a show – a body of work – in your purse." A portable ceramic history museum! There was something so wonderful about that, and I thought, "Of course, that would be incredible."

On the Road in Academia

Typically, the Artstream goes to places where there are a lot of students. I think it's important for students to put their hands on functional pots that are very diverse. Even though



most people teach about different techniques and ways of doing things, there are still programs where the teacher is very dogmatic: there's one way a pot has to be made and that's kind of it. They figured out their own questions and now they're making students figure out the same question again.

So it's very active when I'm at a school, talking about all the different ways of making a living, and also trying to put out a lot of possibilities and questions, because these young folks are going to figure out ways to do it I never would have thought of. It's like passing a question onto somebody coming out of school, rather than saying, "You've got to go be a resident somewhere and then get into a gallery." That was maybe an answer for a different generation. And it still might work for some people now but there are just so many other possibilities.

It would be good to follow through, though, and hear from some of the teachers what students do with the experience. I mean, there's something about the Airstream when it comes in that – it's fun. And maybe students see that and have a different idea of what it means to make pots and put them out into the world.

I feel like we're alive now at a phenomenal time for the

handmade pot in our culture. Educators have put an incredible amount of time into research, and now there are the younger generations coming out and feeding back and making amazing work. Mostly schools are physically pretty isolated, and you never actually get to touch good pots except maybe by going to a couple of shows. It's really hard, because potters are so spread out. So this little traveling gallery with eighteen to twenty different potters in it can be really invigorating, and students get to touch and see how people are working, instead of just seeing photographic images.

On the tour in Kansas City we did a workshop where Andy Brayman was throwing and pressing into molds and using other materials to create the pots; Steve Colby was working with slabs and painted surfaces and showing how painting can start flat and become three-dimensional and wraparound; Sam Harvey was coil-building a jar and also using some simple mold shapes that he would press into for vases; and I was throwing pots that were slightly oval and really using the fluidity of the wheel. We all showed slides as well, and we did all that in four hours! It was great to have a few of us show our touch and the questions we're asking ourselves. And then the students came out to see the Artstream – our work plus another fourteen people's – and





Alleghany and Sam Harvey

they could start to glimpse the possibilities.

In school I was able to watch Bob Turner work when Voulikos came to Alfred for three days. They played off each other; Pete said, "Make a pot," and so he did. And it was like watching somebody make love (not that I've done that!), this amazing process of taking two, three hours for one piece. Understanding that it's the cellular structure of the clay creating the tension and life in the piece, as well as in the surface. By his working it over and over and over again, the pot would breathe – exhale and inhale and exhale – until he had the mallet-shape form he wanted. I felt I was seeing deep into the structure of the pot. An image or a slide show – or even seeing his studio – none of it made anywhere as much sense as seeing him make that thing. I think if we could've watched Jackson Pollock paint and seen that aspect of his work, it would have fed a different level of understanding.

Context

The Artstream is a great marketing device. As an object it's one of those things that is very appealing, and gets people interested. From the outside it feels distant but you come inside and it's this intimate space that utilitarian potters are often striving for because their work is appreciated in the home. The Artstream is warm and cozy. Something about the rounded corners is a lot more soothing than the angles in a traditional home, or in a gallery. It's just a different context for viewing.

As an undergrad I had already started to ask whether a gallery was the appropriate place to exhibit utilitarian work. There was an old Craftsman-style house on campus that was the café, and for my thesis show I made all the dishes for it. Whoever ate there, that's all they got to use; they didn't have a choice. Then there were two gallery rooms upstairs, one with beautiful wooden tables where I displayed the work as if it were a dining room. The other had white walls and track lights and I put up a plastic membrane and stretched it tight. The work was behind it on pedestals, very well lit, but you couldn't actually get to it. And then the last part of the show was to serve dinner for thirty people; each one brought a story, a song, or a poem and they took home their dishes at the end of

the show. So there were all these levels to try to understand pots in different contexts.

Recently I was using one of the cups that I had kept from that night and I remembered an amazing professor of mine standing up in full voice and singing an Irish song. I started to realize that the pots we make have this patina of memory that comes through use and is connected to the individual user. When you take the object and move it out into somebody else's space, does it really retain any of that patina? Like if you left it in a room and somebody picked it up: suddenly the pot gets to start fresh. But maybe the layers are still in the work.

Brook [LeVan] had done a project cooking dinner and serving it in a gallery, and documenting it. He was asking me hard questions, and so I followed through and really put pots to use to see what would happen. And that laid the groundwork for something like this, a gallery that presents the work as if it's in a kitchen. The countertops are not countertop height; they're actually tabletop height, and the shelves are designed after shelves in my own kitchen. I very consciously made those choices. We tried to set up a richness of texture and color – color I would love to paint a kitchen, that would feel warm and sunny – and with cherry wood floors. And yet at the same time it's this hilarious silver shiny bubble that's not at all what you expect when you go inside. And it's an icon that people are drawn to even if they don't know anything about pots or even are interested in pots. They see this and maybe find themselves in here looking at something that they would not have looked at.

After graduate school I was thinking about how important it is for me to be in nature exploring wilderness and landscape: how that feeds me spiritually. I also thought about how as a potter what I do and the way my kitchen is laid out is a type of exploration. And so I taught a workshop called "Exploring the Domestic Landscape"; this is before the Artstream ever came about, but it's so funny now to look at how connected the two ideas are, and maybe this is the embodiment of domestic landscape: it's a domestic space on the interior and yet it goes through the landscape of our country, and these two threads are intertwining.

Pots and Food

The Artstream is one innovative way to sell work but I'm interested in others, and in how they inform what I make. The man who was just here is a chef and the head teacher of the Aspen Cooking School, and I have work for sale there on his recommendation. Sam and I also did a benefit sale there for Gay Ski Week; Glen cooked and presented his food and we provided the dishes. We had one hundred fifty people coming through and it was so lively. Someone would come up to him and he would serve them an appetizer on one of our plates – so people were walking around seeing the show and using our pots. I like putting pots in a different setting, so people experience them not in the formal space of a gallery but in an interaction with a chef who's performing and using them as a tool for performing.

So the pots are like a supporting player rather than the aesthetic focus that they would be in a gallery.

Right. I've been working with another chef, Mark Fischer here in Carbondale. He talks to me about a dish he wants to cook and it pushes me in a direction that I would not have gone. For instance, he uses sugar in cubes and packets, and he wanted a container to hold both. So I made some little bowls that I threw and altered into rectangles with a divider and little handles. I never would have made this form without such an "assignment". He also asked me to make some outdoor candleholders that wouldn't blow out. I fired these candleholders upside down, so the glaze drips could come off the rim. They didn't work at all for that because they were still too opaque for the light – but when I brought them in he looked at them and said, "Oh my God – those are the greatest sugar cube holders. I can put the packets in the middle and the cubes around this outside trough." Then I made this double form which was two bowls together with

handles on the side, and he would serve mussels in one half and the shells would go in the other. So it just pushes my ideas.

What's the number of pieces that he needs to have?

It varies. He needed fifteen teapots – or, like the cream and sugar sets, fifteen sets of those. But when I do serving platters, he'll just come to the studio and start picking stuff out for these dinners he calls "random acts," where he puts together a group of dishes. Then we tried an experiment: he wanted a large "tea bowl" for coffee – huge. Handles always break off the commercial ones so he wanted one without handles. I brought him in a dozen and they didn't work at all, because people wouldn't touch them without a handle. There are so many fine points. It just never ends, really.

I had a commission to make about eighty place settings for a benefit. It didn't work out, but it had forced me to figure out how to make all those pots. I started out with commercial plate molds, put them on the wheel and just went after them with a rasp and carving tools, working on the profile and the design. I really learned a lot about plates from doing this. I carved twelve different jigger molds and had a great time working out a raised pattern for my plates. I had a rough profile for the bottom and then I'd come back and tool it and throw the foot. You know, it took me so much longer than if I'd just thrown eighty plates, but now I have the technology worked out to take it to another level. It's not that it's faster, but it's definitely less clay, so it's less clay preparation. I used four pounds instead of six, and I found I could really compress the clay using those forms – and I also enjoyed the fluidity of the line I'd get on the underside of the foot. The first couple of molds I did were really just renditions of my thrown forms, but then I started to go back in and really carve them. And I could see doing a series of them. They'd all stack, but I could have twelve or fifteen different patterns and alter each mold after each plate, like a monotype.

I've done home shows and gallery shows and commissions, and every one of those informs me in a different way. Something like arranging for a show, then arriving for the opening and seeing how the staff there had installed it, can really affect the way I look at certain pots. For one show, at Northern Clay Center, I had sent a spiral bowl set with very specific instructions on how to set it up, and then another bowl with twenty-five cups that were just to be tumble-stacked like fruit. I wanted them next to each other so that people could understand and compare. Well, they read the instructions wrong and spiraled both of them. Those led me to making bowls with multiple layers of cups supporting

each other. And originally those spiral bowl sets came out of having to fit into the Airstream; I would not have been packing bowls in that manner. So it just pushes my ideas.

Portrait of the Artist as a Young Nomad

I was born in Berkeley in 1972. My mom was a part of the Hog Farm, a hippie commune, and we were nomadic – we were mobile. She had a school bus that was converted into a living space and for the first four years of my life we all lived in it (I have two older brothers) and moved around a lot. We then moved to Colorado to be part of a little back-to-the-earth commune in La Veta. We were there for about a year and it didn't quite work out, but my mom wanted to stay in the area. So we lived in various houses and she made a living as an artist, doing mostly sign paintings and some portraits – there was this Texas Longhorn ranch nearby and she would do portraits of the bulls for the proud owners. She got paid very well for them, so she'd do a couple of those a year, and then she painted landscapes.

We lived there until I was about to start high school and then she realized that she had to get me out of there. It was too late for my brothers, but she wanted me to have more choices. So the summer after my eighth grade year she built a camper on the back of our '51 Chevy pickup, with beds for us to sleep in, and gave away everything that wouldn't fit. We went to the coast, knowing that we wouldn't be back, and landed in Santa Cruz right before school started. We lived in the truck almost that whole year, which was very, very hard. Eventually she went up to Mendocino and landed a house-sitting job in a really beautiful house there. I spent the summer in Colorado with my brother and in the fall moved back out to California, to be with her and go to school.

I had taken a pottery class in Santa Cruz – did raku with some friends who were surfers – so in Mendocino I took another and continued with it. From there I went to Pitzer College and studied with Paul Soldner and then Brook LeVan, and spent a year in Japan where I worked with Takashi Nakazato for part of it. And in my last year I received a Watson Foundation grant to go to Nepal after graduation.

So it's deeply engrained in me, in a frightening way sometimes, to be on the move. And there's another part of me that's calling for the sanity of being at home and really enjoying a cup of coffee. My wife still has her same bedroom, in the same house she was born in. But until the last house we lived in, I had never lived in a place more than twelve months. So there's a great desire to put down roots, and yet the childhood that I had opened up the possibility of creat-

Bill, Lily, and Alleghany Meadows



ing something like the Artstream and thinking, "Oh, sure, I can take it to New York City; that'd be fun." They play back and forth off each other.

Nepal

After college I received a grant from the Watson Foundation to go and do a sort of cultural immersion in another country. Having worked with a potter in Japan I wanted to go somewhere as different from the material culture I had known as I could possibly get. I picked Nepal because a friend I had great admiration for came back from there, looked at me, and said, "You've got to go there. You have to go there." I didn't know what I was going to find, but I knew the technology the potters used was very ancient and unchanged, a couple-thousand-year-old tradition that hadn't been influenced because there wasn't a tourist trade; they weren't trying to make anything for export, as far as pottery goes.

I spent the first six months in an immersion program affiliated with Pitzer and lived with a farming family. They weren't potters, but I wanted to see how the pots were used. I went to school during the day, and farmed with them and participated in a lot of the ceremonies. I was interested

in the way vessels were used for ritual and spiritual as well as physical nourishment. Clay was never used for eating or drinking, only for cooking and food preparation. You eat with your hands, and if the unglazed clay touched your mouth they believed it was then unclean, and would have to be thrown away; it couldn't be washed or refired. They used metal vessels for eating.

The pots are made by the men, but the women always decorate them, as well as doing things like gathering the wood for firing. In an urban area called Thimi, near Kathmandu, there are about a thousand families making their living as potters. They go out to get their clay and bring it in, and they go out to get their fuel and bring it in, and they make pots and then put them on semi-trucks and drive them to another area of the country and a couple of potters will go there and sell them. The potters organize the distribution network themselves; four families will rent a semi and go out to the end of a road, unload, and spend the next three weeks carrying pots out to where they trade them for an equal volume of rice. Then they bring the rice back to the city and sell it for more than if they had sold the pots there. So the barter system, which was the way that it was always done before, is shifting because rice is so expensive and because city people are buying plastic and have refrigerators now. They aren't required to have water jars any more, which were the potters' mainstay and which people needed to keep their water cold whether they were rich or poor.

I spent three months in the rural area in the western Terai near India, where they make what I consider to be the most beautiful pots in Nepal, pots with a different level of craftsmanship. They have great pride in their craftsmanship, and their pots reflect the nature of clay in a very different way from the urban pots which are basically a clay rendition of a beaten-brass water jar. These potters are migrant farm workers in the rice fields during the summer. The kids can't wait for summer, because they get to leave the village and travel and work and learn songs, and then they come back to the village to make pots and tell stories in the winter months. In each village the potters make exactly the same pot as the other potters, because they don't want to stand out.

The valley I lived in was seventeen miles across and the man I lived with, who was about my age, had never left it. This was such an incredibly different worldview; one evening he asked me how long it would take to walk to my house from his. The children are educated through the second grade and then they have to pay, so potters' kids never go to school past then; nobody had any extra money. The local king – he was the one who had introduced me to the potters – was sort of blown away that an educated foreigner would

come all this way to meet the lowest-caste people in his kingdom.

This king wanted to do something for the potters and his daughter was getting married in a couple of weeks, so he said "I need a huge, huge pot, the biggest you've ever made, and I'll pay two bucks for it." Everybody thought "Omigod!" – they were used to twenty cents – so it was a contest. All the older men just laughed and kept working, and the younger ones in their late teens really couldn't make a big pot yet, but the ones in their mid to late twenties started cranking. The pots were a good thirty inches in diameter. They were thrown with the neck finished and then paddled on a low-momentum type of wheel. Everywhere there was the sound of paddling these huge pots; potters were paddling by oil lamp at night trying to finish. Two weeks later everybody was trying to fire at the same time and the village was full of smoke with all these pit firings going on. Two brothers unloaded theirs first. They pulled out the pot and it was still hot – they're grabbing it with shirts – and it's good, it's good. They took off running the couple of miles, carrying it to the king, and so they got the two dollars.

They walked across the valley – a good ten miles – to the market and had a couple of drinks, and then they bought... a plastic jug, like one of our antifreeze jugs, and brought it back to the village. That was their booty, their trophy, a symbol of the latest technology. It was on display, and it was very much used because all the women go to the well, so everybody saw and admired it. It had a rectangular oblong-shaped bottom, and it was funny to see the women try and balance it on their heads; I wondered if over time they tried to make an adapter to make that easier. They would bring the water home and pour it into a terra cotta pot because that's how they keep it cold, but out in public this jug was just the latest thing in the village. It got dirty pretty quickly, but it's going to last for years and years as a status symbol.

I went to Nepal with a one-way ticket and an incredible amount of money, from the grant. I really didn't know what the future would bring, and while I was there I was there; it was a soul-searching time for me. But ultimately, when I realized that I could stay, I knew I had to leave and come back to the U.S. to understand what the experience had been about.

Birth of the Artstream

In the spring of 2001 I saw an ad for an Artstream trailer. I wanted to buy it for my mom to fix up so she'd have this great place to live, so I went and checked it out. I was the first to call and first in line, and a woodworker friend said,

if she doesn't want it I'll buy it from you for whatever you paid. So how could I lose? I bought it for three thousand dollars, but my mom didn't want it; it was in really bad shape and just too much for her. And then my friend changed his mind. So I ended up with this funky old Airstream trailer. And right after that I went to Penland to teach with Sam Clarkson.

Sam and I had traveled around in 2000 and done some home shows in a big old Dodge van that his father had given us. We went around the country doing sales and workshops, so there was that in my history, plus watching people in Nepal taking pots to market. And then at Penland there were these postcards of Miss Lucy Morgan, the founder, going to the World's Fair in Chicago with all these wares from North Carolina. It's this great image of a van just loaded and heading off – you know, the traveling showroom. I had sent these out to friends, and so all these things were just milling around somewhere in my subconscious.

One night Kim Ellington had come up to Penland as a visiting artist for our class, and he brought along some peach moonshine. We were sitting around playing music and talking, and the idea just popped out. I said, "I should make the Airstream into a gallery and take it to NCECA." Sam said, "Great idea," and then he just kept on me. We talked about it some more, and we were inspired by the fact that when you go to NCECA you see all this great ceramic work but you never really get a chance to buy good pots. To be able to do that in an aesthetically beautiful way – and to bring a range of work of young people who are trying to make a living as potters – started to seem like a pretty great idea. So Kansas City [NCECA] became the deadline, which was five months away at that point.

A whole group of us worked on it – Nancy Barbour, and Sam [Harvey] and Steve Colby. Andy Brayman got us the first permit because he's from Kansas City. And more people helped: a friend who's a cabinet maker, and about five others. I cashed in a lot of favor chips getting it fixed up. It had to be done beautifully, and it had to be completely legal: parking permit, sales tax, all of it. It couldn't be shooting from the hip and be valid. We could have sold a bunch of work doing it from renegade spots, but we wanted it to become an institution – but one on the fringe, which it still is. We do it completely legally, but we have control of it.

Apprenticeship

I've recently accepted my first apprentice; luckily Havana's been a perfect person to start with. We had talked about her

working here for about a year, but now I'd rather see it be longer, maybe up to four years. In Japan I apprenticed with Takashi Nakazato for six months, but a real apprenticeship there is four to five years, to really learn how to be a potter. So I barely tasted it. I was nineteen years old; I barely figured out what the rhythm was there. This first six months of her time here has been pretty hectic; I've traveled a lot and she helped me move the whole studio. We're just now getting to the educational and exciting parts, building kilns and the rhythm of making pots. I've given her a small separate studio to work in. I can't figure out how she would help with the creative parts of my work, but she's taking on responsibilities that are so helpful to me that if it evolves out of an apprenticeship I may hire her to stay. She does all the business things at the end of the farmers market, like get in touch with the people who have placed orders, things that then I don't have to think about.

So it's working out, and she's fun to be around. This summer she's been coming to the farmers market with me. She wakes up early so I have somebody to drive with in the morning, and then there are three of us there which gives us a break. I feel like it's been so much more successful because she's there.

I can see it evolving to a point where I actually have an apprentice and Havana, maybe somebody who would come in just for the summer – because we're building a two-chamber kiln [fired with wood and used vegetable oil], and it can hold the pots. And for me to be able to fire more frequently and get more information, especially in the beginning, would be great.

I've thought about how I would pass on the Artstream. I'd like to have a business partner who would also drive. Havana and I have talked about it and this Airstream is too big for her, but she wants to learn how to drive it and set it up. I can see a longer apprenticeship where the apprentice would leave with an Airstream – with all the tools, or with some other way of putting their work out into the world and the tools to set it up. It wouldn't be a lot of money; we'd do all the work ourselves, so a two or three thousand dollar investment would do it, if we got a small enough one that you could tow it with your existing vehicle. And she could have one or two other people's work in it or just sell her own pots.

Eventually I'll figure out how to incorporate the Artstream into what the apprenticeship is all about. Another thing I might like to do is teach a seminar in a college, where we'd try and figure out as many ways as possible for students to put their artwork out in the world – some place where the juniors and seniors have strong technical and historical



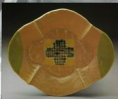
knowledge. The marketing is typically something their teachers don't focus on much; their vision of what's next might be a residency or grad school or a New York gallery, but that's all shifted now. There need to be more options for students coming out of college programs, and apprenticeships add another layer to the educational process for people who want to be studio potters.

The Buffalo Hunt

I have this idea of our society now becoming hunter-gatherers again. We've gone through agriculture and the industrial revolution, and now we're back to a sort of postmodern hunter-gatherer phase where we go all over the world to gather the things we need for our existence. And especially young potters migrating to places around the country, going to universities, residencies, exhibitions, conferences. It's much less about being in one place, working in your studio and growing your own food, and the nomadic quality of the Artstream fully plays off that. When I went to New York on the first big tour we did – two and a half weeks and thou-

sands of miles of driving – I got back home and had this overwhelming feeling, as if I'd just gone on the big buffalo hunt and was bringing back the hides and the meat for the winter. Driving into New York City – the tension and stress and risk involved in that – takes you back to a kind of primal survival adrenaline rush that I couldn't get from sitting around making pots in my studio and sending them out to galleries. It's about going out and coming back home, about figuring out how to survive as a young potter, and maybe about how to reinvent, for my own generation and from my own mythology, what it is to be a potter now: how do you succeed, how do you pay the bills, how do you make what you want to make and get it out there?

Alleghany Meadows
PO Box 781
Carbondale, CO 81623
meadows@art-stream.com



Ceramic art, mixed
 materials, glass, clay,
 wood, 12" x
 12" x 12"
 Glass, wood, metal, aluminum, stainless
 steel, and ceramic, 12" x 12" x
 12"
 Cup and saucer, aluminum, stainless
 steel, 12" x
 12" x 12"

artstream portfolio