

Dug Deeper
Jan 27 - Apr 6
2024



VERNON FILLEY ART MUSEUM

The Vernon Filley Art Museum is a cultural center for the purpose of collecting, preserving, and exhibiting art. Our goal is to enhance cultural life in Kansas by providing access to the arts through exhibits and education.

The 4,600 square foot facility was designed by Schaefer Johnson Cox Frey Architecture and was constructed by J A Knight & Sons in 2014. We are located at 421 South Jackson St. Pratt, KS 67124. To learn more about the museum's rotating exhibits, educational programs, events and the Dr Vernon and Emily "Mimi" Filley permanent art collection visit www.vernonfilleyartmuseum.org

Director: Brittany Novotny



Clay has long been a narrative material. For 30,000 years, through its responsive plasticity, clay has given us insights into how people felt, thought, and lived. Today, the field of ceramics is at an exciting moment when artists are using this sensitive material to tell their own stories in more explicit ways. Dug Deeper showcases 12 contemporary ceramic artists who boldly confront their identities head on. These artists specifically use clay to celebrate, investigate, and question themselves and their place in the world, generously teaching us about ourselves in the process.

Qwist Joseph

Conversing, Learning, Growing: Identity in Contemporary Clay Practices

MATTHEW LIMB, PHD

Ceramics is a versatile medium that embraces the weight of tradition yet is constantly reinventing its boundaries and subject matter. The artists of Dug Deeper, curated by Qwist Joseph, demonstrate the sheer range of contemporary practitioners who engage with clay. At the core of this exhibition is a grappling with the question of identity on the scale of the individual to the national. Clay's physicality inspires a deeply personal relationship between artist and material. This relationship—with all its intimacies—has been crucial for the twelve makers featured in this exhibition in understanding themselves and their society.

Ceramics is a potent medium to craft histories and stories of identity. Ceramic objects have played key roles in collective culture practices throughout human history from food to death. The artists of Dug Deeper are bold in their strategies to unearth identities couched within complex issues. These artists traverse hybrid identities and the intersections of gender, sexual orientation, race and ethnicity, nationality, and culture. Dug Deeper explores the social and political potential of clay to tell vital stories. It connects makers and audience through a familiar material. Through this joining, Dug Deeper aspires for a greater understanding of each other, our differences, and our problems. The artists featured herein emphasize the importance of collaboration between clay and person. While the ceramic artist may manipulate the clay into a form, the material is always pushing back. Dug Deeper is an invitation to take part in this conversation and reassess our collective identity and core values.

Ceramists Diego Romero and Shae Bishop are both invested in interrogating the relationship between identity and place. Bishop's *Dual Purpose Hat* (2022) explores the masculinity,

politics, and mythology of the cowboy. This storied icon of the American West endures as a potent symbol of rugged individualism, grit, and determination—values often espoused in American culture and politics. Yet, Bishop's hat when worn acts to cover the face, obscuring the wearer's vision and perhaps nodding to a deliberate blindness toward an accepted fiction over reality. Diego Romero, a Cochiti Pueblo potter, is well-known for drawing upon a wide range of sources from comic books to historical events. In *Amerillo Landscape* (2003), Romero merges ancient Southwestern Mimbres-inspired design with contemporary subject matter to examine the complexities of an indigenous perspective. His work draws upon personal experience and cultural heritage to find a humorous and individual voice. Romero's bowl reflects upon his experience with the ever-changing landscape of the American West and the importance of connecting with a place as a marker for identity.

Tyler Dallis and Sam Mack each explore the personal and structural barriers queer people face in the construction of identity. Dallis's *You Healed My Wounds* (2023) weaves ceramic into a vibrant tapestry of queer joy and pain with contemporary indigenous experience. Dallis, an artist of Cherokee descent, uses biomorphic forms bound in hemp to unearth the fragility and strength found in our connections to family, heritage, memory, and identity. The sculpture acts as a totem to embed these relationships into a solid form. *You Healed My Wounds* is a marker of survival and memory, gratitude and healing. Mack's *Portrait of Bureaucracy* (2023) is a statement on the role of the surveillance state and bureaucratic systems in policing the lives of transpeoples. For Mack, clay is a responsive material that

undergoes transformation through its process. This transformation lends itself as a potent vehicle for carrying the experiences of transgender people and their right to exist. The cracks upon the objects of Mack's work act as a physical record of this transformative process—a diary of experience, change, and survival.

Syd Carpenter and Malcom Mobutu Smith are both veterans of their field who have carved a space for black practitioners. Carpenter's *A Mind of Its Own* (2006) is informed by her career-long interest in excavating the relationship between black Americans and the land. A prolific gardener, Carpenter's sculpture is a meditative reflection upon the leaves within the patch of earth she has claimed as her own. The changing of the seasons lends itself to a riot of color and a fluid dynamism of the cycle of the earth. For Carpenter, a direct connection with the earth through her ceramics practice and gardening facilitate a grounded-ness and greater sense of awareness. Smith's *Heyo Cloud Scoop* (2023) is a rumination on form and vessel making. The playful swoops and bold lines are evocative of the improvisation of graffiti, jazz, and Hip-hop culture—all important sources to Smith's work. By pairing these aesthetic decisions with the concept of a cloud, Smith ties his practice to a well-established tradition in ceramics history that utilizes cloud motifs and emphasizes the importance of imagination in the building of our reality.

Raheleh Filsoofi's *Bite* (2021-22) and Jennifer Ling Datchuk's *One Tough Bitch* (2019) each center the body as a site of tension and artistic inquiry. In *Bite*, Filsoofi uses her teeth to embed a physical mark onto the surface of the vessel. This repeated action functions as both ritual and as a source of decoration linked to the body of the maker. For Filsoofi, biting is a tactic to assert her identity as

a Middle Eastern woman existing within a world fractured by the specter of colonialism. Datchuk's *One Tough Bitch* highlights the centrality of women's voices to exploring the body as a medium. In this piece, Datchuk creates a metaphorical connection between the body and ceramic object through breakage and repair. Datchuk highlights the ability of scars to tell the body's story as both a marker of past pain and a symbol of survival. She uses ceramic shards along the scar which are coated with kintsugi, or a Japanese technique of mending broken pottery with gold. This act of repair makes the breakage precious and a vital part of the object's entirety, rather than something which denigrates it.

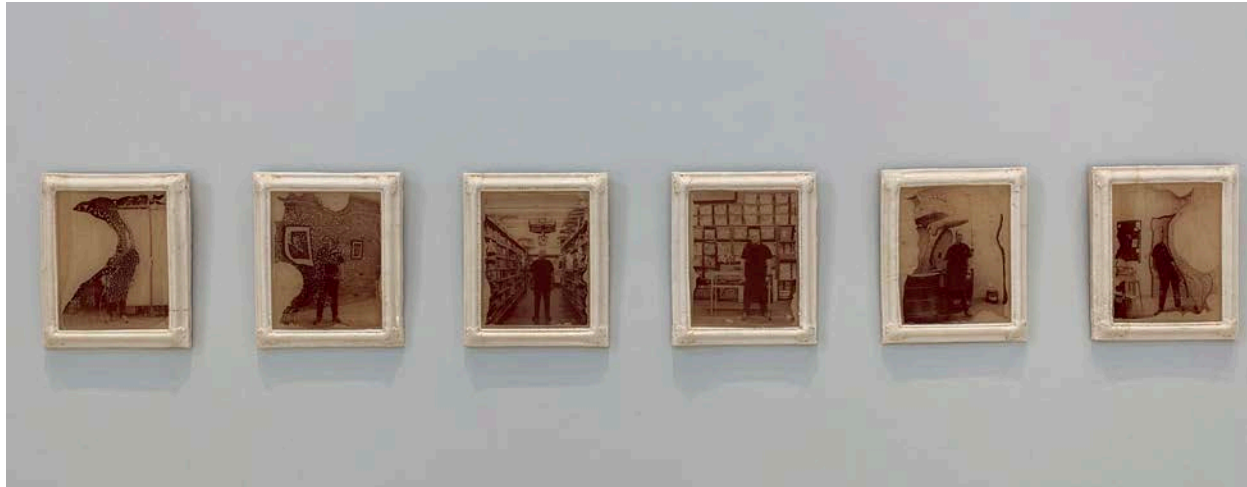
Armando Minjárez Monárrez's *Mexican Planter* (2023) is a playful and pointed critique of identity as a consumable commodity seen through the lens of souvenir culture. Minjárez Monárrez challenges the viewer to check their assumptions and reliance on stereotypes in their understanding of Mexican identity. Reducing the body to interchangeable signs that communicate "Mexican-ness" diminishes the very real experiences of racialized persons. In an era of social media and internet-fueled consumption habits, the human being has become the product to be bought and sold—rendering *Mexican Planter* a biting commentary on the relationship between identity, consumerism, and race.

The artists featured in Dug Deeper demonstrate the potential of contemporary ceramics to broaden the cultural conversation about identity. Clay is a unique and powerful carrier of meaning with great power to subvert our expectations and generate dialogue. The stories presented here offer an opportunity through clay to learn, investigate, grow, and rejoice together.

Dug Deeper

Tyler Dallis	08
Syd Carpenter	10
Raheleh Filsoofi	12
Shae Bishop	14
Jennifer Ling Datchuk	16
Sam Mack	18
Diego Romero	20
Nicholas Lenker	22
Armando Minjárez Monárrez	24
Claudia Alvarez	26
Anabeth Rosen	28
Malcolm Mobutu Smith	30

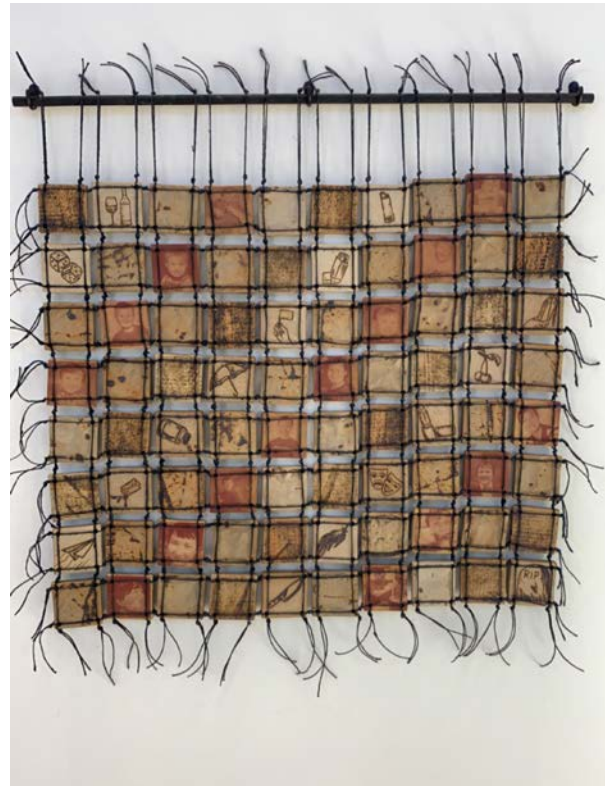
Tyler Dallis
They/Them



The Places I've Been
2021
Paper, Ceramic Decals,
Resin



You Healed My Wounds
2022
Half and Half Clay, Porcelain
Slip Dip, Hemp



Fragments of My Life
2023
White Stoneware, Ceramic
Decals, Black Hemp

I like using clay because it grounds me to the earth. I weave my own personal experiences and memories into the clay as I build. Embedding them into the clay strengthens and solidifies the memories into reality, making them less likely to be forgotten.

My garden is an extended studio where I imagine form, texture and color, just as I do with the clay sculptures.

Syd Carpenter
She/Her



A Mind of Its Own
2006
Clay, underglaze

I have been making ceramic sculpture for over 25 years. Much of that work is inspired by a garden that I have tended for just as many years. I see the best gardens as works of art in themselves. My garden is an extended studio where I imagine form, texture and color, just as I do with the clay sculptures.

“A Mind of Its Own,” is from my leaf series. The form is the result of imagining a leaf expanded from within, going from something flat, to something 3 dimensional. In this sculpture, the leaf becomes animated, resembling a fully independent creature.

ی فوسلی ف دلح ار
Raheleh Filsoofi
She/Her



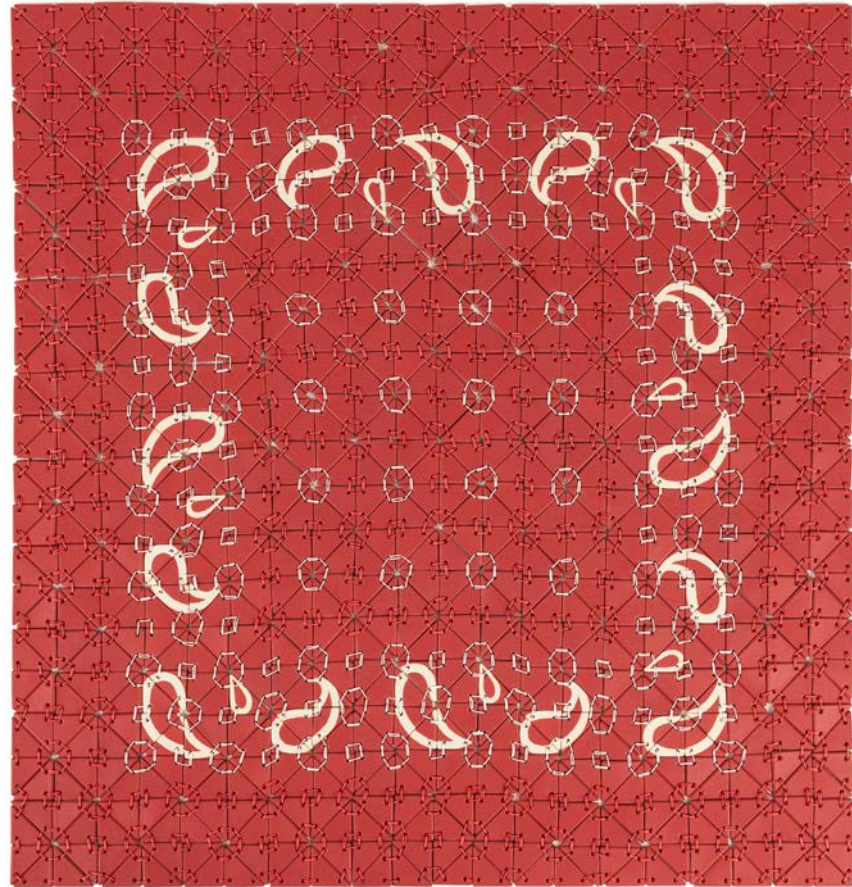
rahelehfilsoofi.com



Bite
2021 - 2022
Varied Materials

*I use my body as a tool to imprint
its unique mark on clay, with
respect to past knowledge and
values. Both labor and ritual, the
physicality of the action, provokes
attention to the internal.*

Shae Bishop
He/Him



Bandana
2023
Ceramic, underglaze,
PE fiber

I'm interested in the history and myth of the American cowboy and how the cowboy ethos still colors culture, politics and gender to this day.



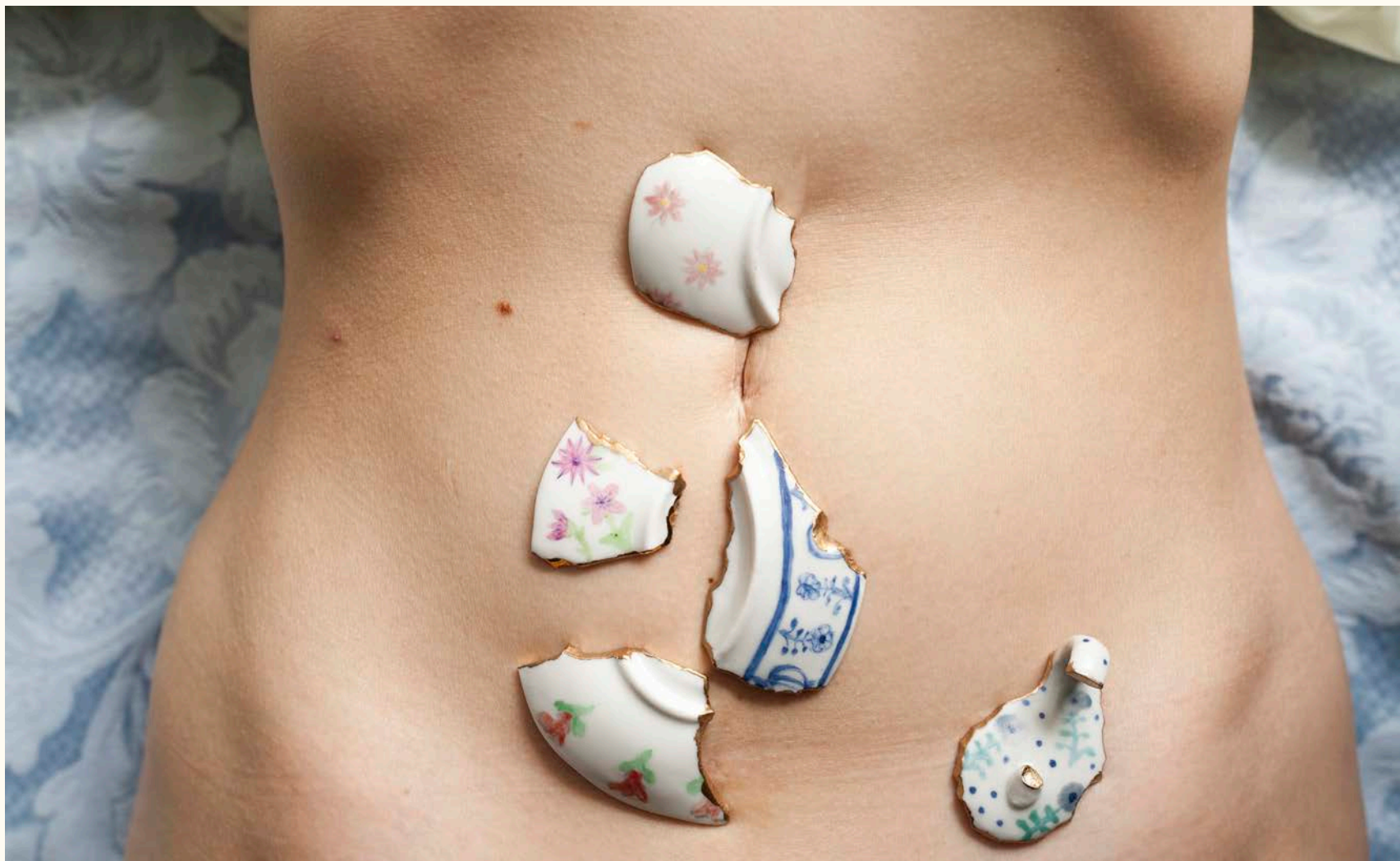
Dual Purpose Hat
2022
Ceramic, leather,
metal

Jennifer Ling Datchuk
She/Her

jenniferlingdatchuk.com
@jenniferlingdatchuk



I work primarily with the materials of porcelain, hair, and mirrored surfaces to talk about the social political and cultural systems that continue to hold women back.



One Tough Bitch
2019
Documentation of porcelain shards, china paints, gold leaf



Fight For Your Right to Parity
2022
Kohler Company porcelain, gold luster

Sam Mack
They/He



Bound
2023
Ceramic, glaze, metal,
sand, lenticular print



Emergent Break
2023
Ceramic, metal



Portrait of Bureaucracy
2023
Ceramic, metal, paperclip
chain, nylon hand loop

Clay has the capacity to take on form and meaning through process and its own transformation. I try to encourage the pieces to crack a bit when I'm making them. I value the cracks, not as a defect but as a record of process, time, etc. As a mark as meaningful and intentional as an applied sprig mold.

Diego Romero
He/Him



*I consider myself a
chronologist on the
absurdity of human
nature.*

Amerillo Landscape
2003
Commercial clay and native
mineral pigments collected
and prepared by the artist

Lent by Vanessa & Paul Elmore

Cadillac Ranch is an art
piece that exists just outside
Amarillo Texas. The image of
Chongo playing amongst the
Cadillacs, trying to upright
the tilted vehicles, is a self
portrait of me amusing myself

for a brief respite during my
travels between Oklahoma and
New Mexico. To me, the ever-
changing landscape is a mile
marker of time and place in the
existence of man.

Nicholas Lenker
He/Him

nicklenker@gmail.com
@nicklenker



Realtree
2019
Ceramic, custom ceramic
decals, luster



Firearm (Dark Ride)
2017
Ceramic, custom ceramic
decals, luster

I grew up playing games. Were they real? A projection of self into another world? I wanted to be a part of those places. Touch those objects, talk to those people. I am forcing those things to be more tangible through my creation. Are they real?



Aggression
2016
Ceramic, custom ceramic
decals, luster

I am able to manipulate the material in a way that is forgiving. It's just very elementary, it's soil, it's dirt and I am able to imagine a form and translate it through my hands in a pretty immediate way.



Mexican Planters
2023
Ceramic

Photography provided
by Molly Adams.

Armando Minjárez Monárrez
He/Him



armandominjárez.com
@armando__minjárez



Mexican Planters Deluxe
2023
Ceramic





Lucha Boy (Lil Mo) & Luchito
2012
Ceramic, Mixed Media

The physicality of clay triggers different kinds of stories. They are connected to my childhood memories.

You can only choose from what you know, so your obligation as an artist is to really expand that bank and know about lots of things so when you need it you grab it, it's there for you.

Anabeth Rosen
She/Her



Bemis Ball
2002
Fired Ceramic

Malcolm Mobutu Smith
He/Him



Kest Cloud Scoop
2023
Stoneware, slip, glaze



Pich Cloud Scoop
2023
Stoneware, slip, glaze



Heyo Cloud Scoop
2023
Stoneware, slip, glaze



White Wash
2010
Stoneware, slip, glaze

I have always been interested in the potential of ceramics to engage in art ideas through the lens of pottery and vessel language. I tend to make things that allow space for more personal idiosyncratic making strategies.





About the Curator

Qwist Joseph is a visiting artist and instructor at the University of Arkansas. His work investigates the insidious qualities of masculinity. Through the lens of being a hairless person, he hopes to reframe what manhood can look like for himself and others. After years working alongside his dad at the family bronze foundry, Qwist received a BFA from Colorado State University and an MFA from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. He has completed residencies at the Archie Bray Foundation, the Roswell Artist-in-Residence Program, and Scripps College. In 2019, Qwist

received an emerging artist award from the National Council on Education in Ceramics Art. He has shown nationally and internationally, including Peters Projects in Santa Fe, The Gyeonggi International Ceramic Biennale in South Korea, and the Officine Saffi exhibition in Milan, Italy. He has taught at Chaffey College, the University of Redlands, the University of Denver, and Pitzer College.



We want to extend our thanks and gratitude to Karen and Robert Duncan as well as Trish Bergren, the director of the Clarinda Carnegie Art Museum (CCAM). They have been instrumental in bringing this exhibition to fruition. CCAM has spent the last ten years showcasing many of the Duncan's extensive pieces from their world-class modern and contemporary art collections.

CCAM has now launched its "Art on the Fly" program with a mission to share much of this art collection with museums worldwide. We are lucky to have Claudia Alvarez and Anabeth Rosen pieces on loan through this program. Thank you all for this partnership and your unique support of the arts. A special thanks to the Roenbaugh family.



KERR FARMS



