INTRODUCTION
Gregory Elgstrand, Visual Arts Manager

ARTIST STATEMENT BY KEITH RICE-JONES
Exploring Ideas
The Precious Contained
Pursuing a Theme
Pure Form
Addressing Function
Off The Wall
Chance Associations
Working the Edge: A (Mostly) Ceramic Journey features 112 works that Keith Rice-Jones has made over the past almost forty years. This exhibition, though, is not exceptional because of the quantity of work within it nor because of longevity of Keith’s practice, though these are no small feats on their own, rather, what really strikes about this exhibition is that Rice-Jones has maintained such a sustained and exceptional level of creativity and curiosity about his medium throughout these years.

This exhibition is not about the “idea” of a journey; it is the journey – a creative journey or better, a journey of creativity. But the creative journey of any artist is also about the journey that shapes and is shaped by living, by the people, places and things that give that life meaning and that in turn, make the creative process even more meaningful. It is “mostly” about ceramics, but it is also about the creative life of Keith Rice-Jones.

Fittingly then, the artist’s voice also appears in the text panels that provide a context for and add to the content of the work on view. Ever the teacher, Rice-Jones provides viewers with a unique insight into the creative process of an artist with his “Studio in the Gallery” sessions that he held on Saturday, November 23rd, November 30th, and December 7th from 1 – 4pm. And, running for the duration of the exhibition is a short, insightful film by René Ter Linden that features Rice-Jones at work in his home studio and discussing his approach to making work in ceramics.

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Visual Arts Manager
Evergreen Cultural Centre
EXPLORING IDEAS

Initial work with conceptual containers moved easily into the containers themselves becoming the subject of their own conceptual form. Relationships (Burnaby Art Gallery, 1978) used rectangular forms as symbols of “the self” that have either been acted upon by outside influences or as reflections of inner growth. These ideas were further explored in Worlds in Clay (Surrey Art Gallery 1978) and a series of later pieces.

All pieces are about ideas in some way. Pursuing a Theme explores the idea of variations on a single form. The pieces comprising the group Pure Form are concerned primarily with formal ideas about plane and line, balance and rhythm.

Essentially the work in Exploring Ideas begins with a concept, a quotation or an observation about life leading to explorations of different ways these ideas may find expression in concrete form.

Spoken in Jest, 1978
Oxided Stoneware
36.8cm x 35.6cm x 36.8cm
The precious contained

It is really where it began. The little black box was my first piece of sculpture – a container for some fragments of white shell collected on Third Beach in Vancouver.

After encouragement from my first mentor, Hiro Urakami (his “House of Ceramics” was the meeting place for anything ceramics related), this first container spawned a series of pieces for my first show. These were containers for beach debris referencing either the shape of the material they contained or other conceptual ideas the material may have inspired. One example was a collection of flat pieces of rusted metal that I filed under “beaches where found” in the manner of recipe cards with porcelain file card separators. I was lucky to get a summer apprenticeship with Richard Hawbolt that year, in 1976 on Galiano Island, and made most of the pieces for the exhibition while there.

The collecting continues, as does the fascination with containers. The opening of any container, where what it contains is hidden, is an act of discovery. The form of the container may be suggestive or evocative of what it contains.

At times the collecting shifts focus and leads into new directions. My period of living in Revelstoke led to a lot of stick collecting along the Columbia River. These become bundles and the bundles found their way into combinations with the clay either as handles or as three-dimensional line drawings complementing the form.

There were many early influences for my abiding interest in rituals and exotic cultures. I grew up in a post-war, make-do Britain with a practical father who had a shed full of salvaged nuts, bolts and grommets. We had family outings to castles and ornate houses, and there were Saturday mornings at the Birmingham Art Gallery and Museum which was a treasure trove of objects from places far away from my home. There were also the Scouts with their campfire rituals, canny knots and backwoods structures.

Perhaps the most direct illustration of these deep influences is illustrated by Bob’s Last Flight Reliquary for a pilot of small planes who wants his ashes to be his last flight. I used ideas from the Melanesian cargo cult to fashion a sort of fetishized idea of a plane reflecting how the Melanesians built sympathetic magic planes from scraps to encourage a return of the planes that had become common during the war.

Box for shells, 1976
Basalt clay, 17.8cm x 10.2cm x 3.8cm
PURSUING A THEME

Most artists work in series in some way or another, exploring the possibilities of an idea or a particular form.

The vase form lends itself to a variety of interpretations of form. It must exist not only as a sculptural object in its own right but it must also function to complement or enhance a flower arrangement.

All the Same (Gallery of BC Ceramics, 1992) took its title from the fact that all the vases began with the same size and shaped slabs of clay. (The pattern is pinned to the wall in the "Studio" area of this exhibition)

Another aspect of working in a series that I often use is to self-impose a set of rules within which to work. Far from being a limitation, it is a stimulus to creativity. These vases are mostly re-creations of pieces from the original exhibition. It has been a stimulating exercise to revisit these ideas and to find new directions and nuances in the work.

Separate Skins (Gallery of BC Ceramics, 2005) explored the idea of the inner and outer form of the bowl by contrasting smooth glazed interiors with rough and stony exterior forms. These were really sculptural supports for the actual bowl. While remaining functional, they hint at ceremony or exotic ritual.

Works:
Vases (all 2013)
Various Media
The essence of making objects is captured in form: how the parts relate to each other and become complementary elements of the whole. It doesn’t matter whether it is a humble mug or a sophisticated sculpture – the concerns are the same.

At one point in my career I made a range of wheel-thrown, functional pottery but hand building and sculptural ideas were always there too. My interest in aspects of diverse cultures and architecture led to the creation of a variety of architectonic semi-functional pieces.

The genesis of working with pure form with no aspect of functionality (but still in the vessel tradition) initially took forms that I had previously used in semi-functional pieces (see Amphora, which used two types of pyramid). The first piece happened when I was working in Japan (2001) and led to Primary Energy (Gallery BC ceramics 2003).

The parameters of “the game” were drawn by the limitations of the size of the kiln and the existing moulds I had made for the pyramids (Amphora) and later spheres (hemispheres used for bowls). These were combined into a rectangular matrix, giving me the basic elements of three-dimensional geometry. I am still working with the same elements years later.

My next shift was to address ideas of carving that had been hovering in the background in the form of maquettes that had been gathering dust on some studio shelves for some years. The break to act on this idea came while being in another different environment, this time Australia where I had a residency (Sturt, 2006).

My organic pieces begin as small direct carvings, which I then scaled up and built with coils and pinching. Compared to working with slabs this is a slower more contemplative process not unlike carving.

The larger totemic/inukshuk inspired pieces are, in a way, combinations of processes with some of the forms cast from original Styrofoam carvings and the individual parts built largely from slabs but also sometimes coiled. Assembling the separate elements into a larger whole around a steel core allows me to transcend the size limitations of the kiln.

Growth of Opportunity, 2012
Glazed stoneware, 67.9cm x 21cm x 44.5cm

PURE FORM

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ADDRESSING FUNCTION

When I discovered clay in 1973 it was all about pots. There were few learning resources then. Apart from my intoxication of making work on the potter’s wheel, I made slavish copies of work from Tony Birk’s book British Studio Pottery, being particularly drawn to Ian Auld’s slab built vases. (It wasn’t until 2011 that I actually handled one in the magnificent Ismay Collection at York Art Gallery.)

Always short of money, the work in sculpture took a back seat as I could always sell functional work and I made a range of thrown pottery for several years. When Celia, my wife and partner, and I formed Wildrice Studio together in 1989 I was still teaching and decided to focus my studio energies on hand building and leave the throwing to the vastly more talented Celia! I still throw occasionally – I particularly like making jars but will usually find a way of working with slabs even for mugs, plates and bowls for the quotidian table. Hand building lends itself towards larger more feast type bowls and platters which can be sculptural. Functional vases remain a constant vehicle for invention.

Square/Round Dish, 2013
Oxided and Oribe glazed stoneware
36.8cm x 36.8cm x 9.5cm, 2013
OFF THE WALL

Though wall sculptures may not dramatically transform a space in the way a three-dimensional piece will, they offer a place for work that is beyond the flatness of a painting.

Working with over 450 people from the community on a “mural” project for the City of Burnaby’s Millennium, I translated the nature and structure of the traditional mural into three square sided poles with sculpted relief images on the faces. Much flatter relief was necessary for the floor “mural” in the Lougheed Mall which was a collaboration of 6 other artist connected with the Shadbolt Centre for the Arts supported by Shadbolt staff. The mural was about the Arts in Burnaby and each artist created a 6.7m long section about an aspect of the Arts.

The huge (4.3m x 7.7m) mosaic mural in the foyer of the Michael J. Fox theatre in Burnaby was a two-year project with my partner Celia. We worked in conjunction with staff and students at Burnaby South Secondary School, to help them realize their ideas.

The individual wall pieces in the exhibition explore concepts and sculptural ideas. The material limitations of clay mean that pieces have to be made in sections and assembled into a larger whole.

Over the Horizon, 2006-2010
Oxided and glazed stoneware
182.9cm x 147.3cm
I have always been a maker. My initial training as a woodworker in the Arts and Crafts tradition and with later huge influences from modernism and the Bauhaus was essentially about the making of objects. I didn’t go to art school and never developed formal drawing skills though it is interesting to look at how I do use drawing as a sculptor.

I am not sure how I discovered collage as a way of working two dimensionally. Certainly the Constructivists, the Surrealists and particularly Kurt Schwitters, Max Ernst and John Heartfield were influences.

I continue to work in collage but primarily as a private activity made often with particular individuals in mind and just as often given away. I have included some examples of my collage work along with some examples of my sketchbook pages in a book at the entrance to the gallery. I remain fascinated by the chance associations and juxtaposition of imagery and of form - it is a play with text and with shape at the same time.

Once a collage piece is underway, my formal design concerns and considerations are identical to those of my sculptural work: the edges and lines that guide the eye, the balance and rhythm of the elements – and with the collage, there is also the added complication of the suggestive subjective values of the found parts that make up the image. This is very similar to my methods of working with the elements I use for my Geometric sculptures and for series like the vases.

In what could be considered clay versions of my collage technique, I bring together textural panels, randomly torn and assembled within a more formal framing. It is about the play of different shapes and different textures arranged with a nod to chance and my own ceramic call-and-response that give these works their unique distinction.
ART GALLERY AT EVERGREEN
1205 Pinetree Way, Coquitlam, BC V3B 7Y3

Curator
Gregory Elgstrand

Gallery Hours
12-5pm, Monday-Saturday
Free Tours: Saturdays, 2pm

Website
evergreenculturalcentre.ca

Words and Images by
Keith Rice-Jones

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