

Statement of Program of Research

Focus

My research is an exploration of the contradiction between physical closeness and emotional distance. My sculpture and installations are manifestations of the experience of sharing space but not intimacy. I explore the various physical, cultural, and social barriers that I feel in my daily life such as the peculiarity of being pressed against strangers on a crowded subway. My investigations are materialized in ceramic sculpture and installations that often imply the presence of the body. For instance, pillows will be stacked invitingly on the floor, but they have been pierced full of holes, revealing they are not solid, but hard, empty shells; a red carpet stretches across a room, but with a closer look, the nubby texture is actually shown to be fingers, complete with individual finger nails, cast from my own hands; a wall is covered with dimensional tiles reminiscent of a frame or architectural niche, containing blank space intended for the viewer to center themselves.

Major Accomplishments/Significance of Contributions

One of my ultimate goals is to lay a ground for interpersonal and cross-cultural understanding. I employ motifs inspired by sacred architecture, particularly Islamic architecture to create a sense of awe or contemplation. I often use multiples and repetition to build pattern and complexity. This is a reference to the intricate geometries I admire in Islamic art which are intended to promote meditation and aid in worship. In 2014 my efforts were recognized when one of my installations, "Skin," was purchased by the U.S. Department of State for display in the American embassy in Sana'a, Yemen.

My large installation, "Continental Drift," consists of 1050 hexagonal bricks glazed in varying patterns of blue and white. The bricks are installed four inches above the floor on hidden wooden posts, filling a room with blocks of interlocking pattern and meandering footpaths. The viewer's experience of this piece is a reflective walk through ceramic history. The patterns glazed onto the bricks refer to the journey of blue and white ceramics as they spread across the world through trade and were adopted through industry. "Continental Drift" was installed in 2015 in Lawrence University in Appleton, Wisconsin, in 2016 in the Leedy Voulkos Art Center in Kansas City, and at the University of the Ozarks in Clarksville, Arkansas. Each time a team of volunteers helped with installation, which becomes an engaging and interactive activity. It is different each time it is installed

Another large installation, "Consumption," is a thirty-six foot long red "carpet" composed of over 700 ceramic tiles, each encrusted with casts of my fingertips. From a distance the piece truly appears to be a velvety carpet, and it slowly reveals itself as the viewer steps closer. A simultaneous celebration and criticism of celebrity-worshipping pop culture, this carpet is too fragile to walk on, and yet it compels viewers to touch it. Observers phenomenologically experience the alienation and intimacies forged between celebrities and their publics by imagining the act of stepping on—and crushing—the hands of those who elevate them. Like "Continental Drift," "Consumption's" modular format allows me to change its layout and respond to varying spaces. Originally installed in 2018 at Living Arts of Tulsa, in Tulsa

Oklahoma, it has also been shown at The Kansas City Artists Coalition, also in 2018, and in the 2019 NCECA Annual Exhibition, *The Form Will Find Its Way* in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Travel

My work is propelled by my curiosity about other people; both my closest neighbors as well as communities geographically far away from me. International travel has enhanced the depth of my explorations. In the summer of 2015, just as I was joining the faculty of KU, I was an invited artist at Foshan International Ceramics Week, in Foshan, China. There I lectured on my art and produced work alongside several other Kansas City area artists and Foshan-based artists in a cultural and artistic exchange which culminated in a group of Chinese artists visiting KU and Kansas City the following spring. This experience launched an extended study into Chinese ceramic headrests, both as sculptural forms and metaphorical paradoxes. My series of ceramic pillow forms evolved through this research.

In 2016 I was invited to be a visiting artist for two weeks at the University of Costa Rica, where I demonstrated my techniques and lectured on my art at two campuses, at UCR San Jose, and UCR Turrialba. I visited numerous Catholic cathedrals and churches in and around San Jose where the practice of leaving *exvotos* in prayerful offering left a deep impression on me. These small symbolic objects are on my mind as I move into a new body of work dealing with ephemerality and permanence. I was also moved by the sacred architecture and tilework and which later connected to my research in Italy and Morocco.

In 2017 I visited dozens of architectural sites in Morocco and Spain. I produced a new body of work based upon this research trip which was exhibited in my 2018 solo show, "To Be Seen," which featured modular wall tile installations designed for the viewer to center themselves, as in a Moorish niche. An unexpected element of this travel was engaging with the story of the Jewish diaspora. I visited numerous sites that changed identities multiple times and in varying orders, from synagogue, to mosque, to church. I found this to be rich ground for further exploration and returned to Morocco in 2018 for an artist residency in the northern city of Tetouan. This was immediately followed by a second artist residency in Rome. Both residencies were chosen because of their locations: two geographically disparate cities, both with well-known historic Jewish quarters. My goal was to produce a series of sculptures exploring connections between absence, intimacy, and the body. In diverse ways, the work I made during these residencies memorialized the ephemeral and display incongruous combinations of material and form. Considered together, I found that they illuminate the tensions of permanence and impermanence, mortality and immortality.