

# INCONTEXT:

Monica Rudquist

## The Space Within, The Space Between

By Janet Koplos

Visitors entering Monica Rudquist's exhibition will be awed by the sight of an installation stretching over the gallery's large wall as if to embrace the room and everything within it. This expansive scale is part of the immediate power of the piece. But simultaneously, viewers are likely to be overwhelmed by the detail and by the extraordinary number of elements. Those who know a little bit about ceramics may find a fast-forward film clip running through their minds as they imagine the artist wedging, throwing, cutting, reassembling, drying, bisqueing, glazing, firing, stockpiling, composing, arranging and documenting—and that's probably an oversimplification of her process on this enormous project.

Yet the work, titled *Intersection*, conveys a sense of fluidity or energy or natural growth, rather than of burdensome labor. In this new body of work she has chosen to alter only



Monica Rudquist at work on her large wall installation, *Intersections*, wheel-thrown and altered porcelain, 2013.

similar forms rather than combine disparate ones, so the installation feels coherent rather than fragmented. It speaks of macro/micro structures, such as spirals or the Fibonacci sequence, found throughout nature in forms large and small. The repetitive throwing marks, the consistently curved walls, the pale tonalities of the double-dipped crackle glaze—all unify the multitudes of elements. The differences in scale—from a foot in diameter to an inch or so—can evoke the infill of traditional decorative patterns, but may also create a sense of perspective, as if you are seeing the same thing up close and at a distance. As a whole, the composition of parts suggests movement, and the delicacy of its porcelain material and near colorlessness give an impression of lightness, like a blizzard of petals.

The kinesthetic experience of the work is amply appealing. And as you think about it, you find more. In naming her show *INCONTEXT*,

Rudquist encourages us to consider where this work comes from: its foundation is pottery and the potter's wheel. All the parts of the installation begin as low cylinders, i.e. cups and bowls, thrown on the wheel. That source carries symbolic meanings: the ancient associations with sustenance, with offerings, with display are inherent in ceramics. The pot is a starting point for any number of things. Rudquist has long been cutting into her vessel walls. That elegant but aggressive act disrupts the sense of volume, which is native to the vessel. She does not restrict her focus to contained space within an intact object, but allows the air to be dispersed or subdivided by turning parts of the vessel wall inside out, in effect. The act is a topological revision or exchange of interior and exterior, emphasizing the space between as much as the space within. Rudquist recalls her mentor Jun Kaneko helping her see that



*Intersections*, work in progress on a large wall installation, wheel thrown and altered porcelain, 2013.

“the juxtaposition of pieces within a space and in relation to each other is as important as the spaces created within the pieces themselves. Lately I have been feeling as if I am in that space between.” The viewer may have that feeling, too. The complexity of this work also derives, she believes, from a trip two years ago to the Netherlands and Spain, where she saw ceramics and patterns everywhere. She carried those impressions into her favored processes of cutting and building.

Rudquist was born in Minneapolis to Jerry Rudquist, a painter known as a colorist and a professor at Macalester College, and his wife Raquel, a longtime architect for Target Corporation. While she extolls her father’s example as a working artist and a teacher, her constructive process and emphasis on form come closer to architecture, as does her pleasure in what she calls logistics: making something of what she has. She came to clay as a teenager, studying with Gail Kristensen, who was a model of independence, and then with Ron Gallas, who got her thinking about working in series. Another important example for her life was Robert Turner, a Quaker, who turned from the service forms of pottery to exquisitely quiet allusive objects. Her own work has a similar subtlety. On the other hand, she also cites the influence of Judy Onofrio and Mike Norman, both of whom follow their passions to ends vastly different in style from hers. Rudquist

attended Macalester and did her graduate work at the Cranbrook Academy of Art in Michigan. She has taught at St. Catherine University since 2008. There, her students could watch the unfolding of the work in this show; before that she was busy preparing for a three-person summer show at Santa Fe Clay in New Mexico, and in addition, she presented smaller installations and objects in a St. Kate’s faculty show in September. As if the creation

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of *Intersection* was not by itself a model of intensity and diligence, it is staggering combined with the other shows and her participation in the American Craft Council shows (St. Paul and San Francisco) as well. Pottery is associated with making numbers of things, and Rudquist seems to have the drive to produce in volume, even when her goal is not utility.

But often, in fact, it is. Rudquist regularly shows her functional work in Northern Clay Center’s sales gallery, from tiny sake cups serenely beautiful in their thrown-and-altered irregularity to pieced-together trays. In this exhibition, she explores both, showing black-glazed appetizer-size plates on the wall, as well as “interlocking” pieced trays of matte black. She also presents a “cup wall,”

offering cups that nest or are paired or joined in other small groupings; vases made of overlapping slices of vases; deeper-cut containers that she calls “intersecting bowls”; and “jewel bowls,” which are cut, individual bowls. She also presents a 13-part work of cut-and-altered vases that she made for the fortieth anniversary of the Women’s Art Registry of Minnesota (WARM) last January. It was at WARM in 1987 that she first showed cut vessels.

From the dense and intense large installation, to smaller and more clearly orderly installations, to these varieties of individual functional forms, all the works reveal an underlying kinship of form and process. They also demonstrate how rich are the possibilities that grow from a simple thrown form and, it is important to note, how disparate are the expressions of pottery here in Minnesota. Rudquist found a voice in clay that speaks gently but assuredly.



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