



Kristen Cliffl
Salty Sweet

Cover:
Hurry Up, Let's Go, 2010
Low fire clay, glaze,
19 x 25 x 9 in.

This page:
The Dirty Dozen, 2010
Low fire clay, glaze, lustre,
wood and lucite,
32 x 23 x 23 in.

Of Course I Love You (Really/Mostly True)

Wish It Was Bigger

(No)

Where's my Crown? (Take it Off)

You Drink Too Much

Can I Get A Time Out?

How Long is Forever?

Does This Make Me Look Fat?

What Was I Thinking?

Can I Get A Do-Over?

(Always/Right)

Is That All?



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Sep 10–Oct 9, 2010

William Busta Gallery
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Exploring and exploding the sphere of domesticity

That is why marriage is so much more interesting than divorce,
Because it's the only known example of the happy meeting of
the immovable object and the irresistible force.

I Do, I Will, I Have. —Ogden Nash

For decades, every American girl with access to television and magazines has been bombarded by the imagery that makes up Cliffler's visual vocabulary. She populates her work with images—white picket fences, suburban homes, meticulous lawns, bluebirds, wedding rings, cupcakes—that are emblematic of an equation which is broadcast in a continuous loop so that it has become deeply embedded in every woman's subconscious:

Marriage + motherhood = fulfillment + happiness.

This simple formula acts as a promise held out to each of us from infancy on. But the simplicity of the equation belies its profound complexity as well as the real work that sustains all of our relationships with lovers, partners, husbands, and children.

Cliffler is a wife and a mother, so her commentary of these roles comes from direct experience. Her complex ceramic objects can be functional or dysfunctional while their forms amplify the symbolic and narrative structures depicted on them. For example, Cliffler created a groaning pastry stand with huge, opulently decorated cupcakes: it is a seductive tower of treats that entices us to approach. But closer inspection reveals that the messages scrolling across the luscious surfaces do not celebrate childhood milestones. Rather, we are surprised to read declarations of desperation, insecurity and neediness. Commitment is rendered by Cliffler as both a gift and a curse.

Several of her more monumental recent works examine the bitter-sweet nature of parenthood. How do we teach our children about the world while protecting them from it and prepare ourselves to let them move into it without us? Cliffler's work seeks to understand how we can sustain our own dreams and those we have for our children, when uncontrollable external forces threaten the peace we have worked so hard to establish.

The home is a symbolic form that Cliffler has used frequently in her work. The angles of the walls of her idealized dwellings reveal the stability or instability of the family within. Her recent work inverts the home entirely to show it as a threatened and insecure place, but one that nonetheless still supports the fragile dreams that bob and sway above it. This work is personal but resonates strongly in Cleveland, a city that has been particularly hard hit by the recent housing crisis.

Just as she celebrates and questions the happiness promised by domesticity, Cliffler celebrates the nature of the materials she uses while transforming them. In her hands, clay becomes cake, wood, water, grass, sugar and metal. When we study one of her pieces we are engaged first by the beauty of the overall form, but it is the surface detail that provokes extended and engaged viewing. In this way the works themselves act as a metaphor for relationships that seem at first to be perfect in their simplicity but with time are revealed to be beautifully and/or monstrously complicated.

Laura D. Gelfand
Associate Dean, Honors College
Professor of Art History
The University of Akron



Under Water, 2010
Low fire clay, glaze,
overglaze, wood and
polychrome resin;
27 x 19 x 12 in.

Kristen Cliffl

Born 1967, Akron, OH
Resides in Cleveland, OH
<http://kristencliffl.com>

Education

1990 BFA, Cleveland Institute of Art, Cleveland, OH
1985–86 Skidmore College, Saratoga Springs, NY

Solo and Two-Person Exhibitions

2008 *The Sweet Life*, William Busta Gallery, Cleveland, OH
2001 *Happily Ever After*, (2 Person Show), Zygote Gallery, Cleveland, OH
1997 Gallery Dorita, Atlanta, GA
1995 The Clay Studio, Philadelphia, PA
1994 The Sculpture Center, Cleveland, OH
1991 The Other Gallery, Banff Centre, Banff, Alberta

Selected Group Exhibitions

2010 *Form, Figure, Function, Contemporary Ohio Ceramics*, Canton Museum of Art, Canton, OH; Zanesville Museum of Art, Zanesville, OH; Springfield Museum of Art, Springfield, OH
2009 *Spoon It, Fork It, Cut It Up...*, Baltimore Clayworks, Baltimore, MD
Let Them Eat Cake, Southern Ohio Museum, Portsmouth, OH
Convergence of Voices in Clay, Borelli Edwards Gallery, Pittsburgh, PA
North Meets South, Indigenous Gallery, Cincinnati, OH
2008 *A Compact Competition, 20x20x20*, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA. Honorable Mention
NCECA Exhibit, Borelli Edwards Gallery, Pittsburgh, PA
OBJECTions, Michael Berger Gallery, Pittsburgh, PA
Echoes from the Rust Belt, Planet Art, Pittsburgh, PA
Six Degrees of Separation, A Convergence of Voices in Clay, Sandusky Cultural Center, Sandusky, OH
2007 *The Contemporary Drinking Vessel*, River Gallery, Rocky River, OH
Revive, Zygote Press, Cleveland, OH
2006 *Into View, 15 Years of Windows to Sculpture*, Cleveland State University Art Gallery, Cleveland, OH
An Extravagance of Salt and Pepper, Baltimore Clayworks, Baltimore, MD

War, What is it Good For?, BK Smith Gallery, Lake Erie College, Painesville, OH
2005 *Cleveland Craft Biennial*, Cleveland State University Art Gallery, Cleveland, OH
On a Pedestal, The Sculpture Center, Cleveland, OH
2004 *A Sense of Identity: Contemporary Ceramic Art in the Midwest*, Indiana, University/Purdue University, Fort Wayne, IN
2003 *The Teapot Redefined*, Mobilia Gallery, Cambridge, MA
Chautauqua National, Ceramics Award, Chautauqua, NY
2000 *Transcending Traditions, Ohio Artists in Clay and Fiber*, Riffe Gallery, Columbus, OH; Southern Ohio Museum, Portsmouth, OH
1999 *Cleveland Institute of Art Retrospective*, Avante Gallery, Cleveland, OH
1997 *Young Sculptors, 4 From the North Coast*, Cleveland Center for Contemporary Art, Cleveland, OH and Sculpture Center, Cleveland, OH
1996 *Ohio Perspectives—Explorations in Clay*, Akron Art Museum, Akron, OH
1994 *Best of 1994*, Ohio Craft Museum, Columbus, OH

Professional Experience

2001–10 Ohio Arts Council, Arts in Education Program Artist
2007–10 Residency Artist, Young Audiences of Northeast Ohio
2005 The Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland, OH; Ceramics Faculty
2004 Anderson Ranch Arts Center, Snowmass Village, CO; Visiting Artist/Instructor (also 1994, 95)
1997 Cleveland Institute of Art, Cleveland, OH; Visiting Artist
1995 Ohio Arts Council, Individual Artist Fellowship
1993 Kohler Company, Kohler, WI; Artist in Residence