

DAVID HERROLD

A Retrospective Exhibition





I'm pleased to write this essay for David Herrold's retrospective exhibition. I've been a fan of David's work since he first arrived in Greencastle to teach ceramics at DePauw University, and grew to be David's friend as we both built houses and ceramics studios, and simultaneously raised families. David started rattling the chains of tradition from his first week at DePauw. As a student of Herrold's ceramist predecessor at DePauw, Richard Peeler, my own career in ceramics bridged both Peeler's and Herrold's aesthetic, and I have been, perhaps uniquely, able to truly appreciate first hand the essential talents of both.

David Herrold's work in clay always surprises. In this eclectic, postmodern age when art often can't be labeled, Herrold's own output shows a wide diversity of ideas and process. Whether he's working with functional pots or purely sculptural forms, his work is always inventive, with unexpected twists that keep it alive. If I had to come up with only a few descriptive words for Herrold's work, they would probably be "dreamlike, but formally 'right'." He calls himself a "design engineer," but he's far more than what that modest term suggests, with ideas moving continuously through his work, challenging the viewer with provocative sculpture, questioning images, and poetic pottery. While at times his work touches the edges of surrealism, at others realism, and even occasionally the utilitarian pot, formalist essences of rhythm, color, and shape seem to be a continuing theme that connects all of Herrold's ceramics, and indeed all of his diverse output as an artist.

It's not always a comfortable formalism, however, with quirks of form and balance appearing here, intentionally awkward moments there. Using the power of abstraction, Herrold skillfully uses whatever medium he has chosen to challenge the viewer with a new view of reality. His ceramics often take on figurative or architectonic qualities, and sometimes both. In his recent works such as *Spotted Udder* and *Seashell as Stressed Water Tower* the organic and mechanical are fused in ways that cause us to question the effects of the human hand on the planet. Herrold has a great eye for composition, whether it's in three dimensions in his clay work, or in two dimensions in his computer-assisted prints and photographs. In the latter I choose to use the words "computer-assisted" in that, as he uses the potter's wheel with clay, Herrold uses the computer merely as a tool to move images from his fertile mind to solid, corporeal forms that we can all share. In the best of these computer-assisted images, Herrold shows us a poetically dark view of the world, one that forces us to look at what each of us is all about, yet somehow retaining a quirky sense of humor that can lead us to enlightenment. Overall, it's quite a gift for all of us to enjoy.

Always the innovator, Herrold has at times created his own tools to better create his visions in clay. One of the most complex is the slip jet printer, a delightfully non-digital device that allows Herrold to create richly textured clay forms with complex symmetries, forms that would otherwise be very difficult to produce. The corrugated surface of these intricate spiraling shapes harks back to the ancient coiled ceramics of the Anasazi culture in the American Southwest, yet they appear quite modern as well. Combining the slip-jet printer forms with more architectonic forms of extruded rods of clay, Herrold creates a synthesis that connects old with new, geometric with organic, architecture with the human body. These are truly some of Herrold's more powerful sculptural works.

It seems that clay and art found David Herrold. I'm not sure it was the other way around. It was something he had to do. Herrold has made a lifetime of honest, original work – work closely connected to his life and influences. Herrold ran with it. We're lucky he did.

Richard Burkett, 2007

University of California, San Diego



I grew up in normal, middle-class circumstances, beginning in St. Paul, Minnesota, and ending in Wichita, Kansas, with four years in Fargo, North Dakota, in between. Early on, for what were probably superficial reasons, I was identified by my family as an artist. The label became a self-fulfilling prophecy – taking me to high school art classes where a teacher, Rex Hall, confirmed my vocation. High school was a time of life I am glad to be done with. I had become an atheist, and with growing up and all, I was depressed. At age 18, for no good reason, I enlisted in the Navy. After ten days at the Great Lakes Naval Training Center, a medical discharge for asthma put me back on the street a changed person. I revisited my roots in Minnesota for a couple of years, working minimum wage jobs and enjoying improved mental health.

In 1964 I returned to Kansas to resume my education. Rex Hall had taken a job at Emporia State Teachers College, so I settled there. A few years earlier, before the Boomers arrived, Emporia State had been a forgotten “Normal” on the northern edge of a treeless wasteland called the Flint Hills. When I arrived, the art department was expanding rapidly and bringing in young professors from all over. By the end of my freshman year, I abandoned painting for ceramics, and began working under John Kudlacek.

In 1969 several of my Emporia colleagues and I reassembled at Wichita State University as Master of Fine Arts students. This was during the Vietnam War, when the draft call was reaching a peak. Because of my earlier brush with the Navy, I was in the clear, but most of my colleagues were depending on college deferments. Two friends moved to Canada after losing theirs. Another spent a year in combat, returning with his mental health forever damaged. We all gathered at The Blackout, a bar where petty criminals and drug dealers mixed with poets and artists from the university. In the fashion of liberals, we wore our mustaches

with a droop at the corners and revered the Beatles, although we did not regard ourselves as hippies.

At WSU, the ceramics department had a new professor who had recently graduated from Alfred University in New York. Rick St. John was a trompe l'oeil cowboy who embraced his posting in the Old West like a prophecy revealed. He wore rancher's clothing, kept horses, and once made a chair out of cow horns. He ignored most of his Alfred education, making simple, salt-fired pots – like a humble, 19th-century country potter who was really good.

At that time, stylistic guidance in ceramics was limited. A few years earlier, Shoji Hamada and Bernard Leach passed through the country, leaving potters with something more to ground their thinking than straight functionalism. Hamada implied an animist idea of the potter's clay having a spirit. There was also a populist vision of low-cost, functional art for the masses, championed by the Englishman, Bernard Leach. Both were selling an ecstatic lifestyle of monkish labor that was attractive to those who wanted to live independently. The functional side of ceramics still draws social idealists and mystics. My thinking on the subjects of form and content began with the abstract expressionism of my teacher, Rex Hall. Ceramics had the notable example of Peter Volkus, who applied abstract expressionist thinking to clay. I loved the idea, but I wasn't the emotive type. And in the end, it was only Volkus who could make it interesting anyway.

Graduate school became the high point of my life, but finally, I had to graduate. In 1972 I accepted a teaching job at DePauw University, replacing the widely admired Richard Peeler. I arrived like a pilgrim from a backward and distant province – untraveled and unschooled in big-time professional life. Things were a little shaky at first. The vast majority of DePauw students were white, with most from privileged backgrounds. From my blue-collar viewpoint, they seemed alien to me. I turned my attention to teaching and discovered that DePauw's advantaged students still had much to learn. But, it wasn't until years later, when the student body became more diverse, that I felt fully comfortable among them.

Along the way I adopted low-temperature firing techniques with imagery that had the look of Pop Art. I had always been a fan of Dada, and Pop pushed many of the same buttons. However, Dada was anarchist; nothing was sacred. Pop targeted middlebrow culture from a unique perspective – the last “ism” of modernism.

Several other Indiana schools hired new ceramic artists at the same time I joined DePauw. We were all out to introduce modernism to what had been a tradition-bound medium throughout Indiana’s curriculum. Like preachers among the heathen, we spoke dismissively about the old ways. For some of us, there was a living predecessor whose values we were here to displace. For John Goodheart at Indiana University, it was the revered Carl Martz. For me, it was the revered Richard Peeler.

In 1974, by way of announcing our presence, I organized a show called *Indiana Low Temperature* with Goodheart, Dan Engelke from Purdue University and Richard Hay from Indiana State University. Goodheart, ever the unfathomable, showed empty clay bags. Hay indulged his aggressive personality with vulgar objects intended to be offensive to feminists. Engelke sneered at popular taste by taking embellishment to absurd levels of shallowness. The three of them were hardcore – with me looking meek by comparison. Identifying with Pop was like my earlier admiration for Abstract Expression – a cool idea, but I wasn’t the type. For me, low temperature added some flash to otherwise rather quiet, formal exercises. There were puns and technical razzmatazz, but the intent was not confrontational. I thought of what I was doing as design engineering. In the late 1970s, after several years of using talc body clay and metallic lusters, I migrated back to stoneware and porcelain for their more dignified character.

The 1970s were an unhappy time at DePauw. The demographic decline in the number of college-age students had begun, and the country was heading into a period of economic hard times. These pressures exposed weaknesses throughout higher education. At DePauw, inflation eroded everyone’s paycheck, new

student applications were declining and the buying power of the endowment was severely depleted. On top of that, the school was losing competitiveness. There was little in the way of academic support or student services, and there was neglectful leadership at several levels. The academic program operated as a confederation of disciplines with department heads serving for life as if elders of their tribe.

As it turned out, DePauw’s trials of the 1970s became the beginning of an ongoing renaissance that continues to this day. Presidents Thomas W. Binford and then Richard F. Rosser, after much torment, succeeded in reorganizing the school according to more modern thinking. Since then, programs and governance have continued to evolve.

By the early 1980s, it was becoming evident that modernism had run its course and art had become postmodern. I lost my muse. Apart from the spiritual question, I’d made a lot of art that was hard to get rid of. I spent a few years building an earth-sheltered house and didn’t get back to clay in a serious way for more than a decade.

In the meantime, something new turned up. In 1982 I bought a Texas Instruments home computer, and a Macintosh two years later. The implications of things such as Random Access Memory were momentous – every thought could be reconsidered, every error could be corrected. I reckoned that the art department needed digital expertise and made a number of trial runs at introducing computer imaging into the curriculum.

The first computers produced pictures so abbreviated that they were of marginal usefulness. But when motion and sound were added, as in animation, the crudeness became much less restrictive. While on sabbatical in 1986, I contrived a way to transfer computer images to 16 mm movie film, which in turn was converted to video, where a soundtrack was added. The result was a five-minute animation titled *Burnout*. Like most early computer animation, the piece was a series of technically ambitious sketches hung on a thin storyline. The following year, gray scale became accessible,

and the laser printer was introduced. Animation called for skills in music and narrative that I didn't have, so I returned to the still image.

I used the computer to edit photography. The idea was to preserve the impression that, like analog photography, the image was a witness to something real. If the geometry of light source and perspective was kept reasonably consistent, many photographs could be assembled to produce a fictional form of realism reminiscent of the Magic Realism style of painting.

In 1993 I went to San Miguel de Allende, Mexico, for a semester with the idea of working in clay again. Two fellow travelers and I drove the length of Mexico to Belize and back. Typical of the strangeness of the country was a rural church in Chiapas, with no seats or furnishings, but a thousand burning candles set in the floor. In another church, we found a large, elaborately crafted glass box half-filled with tiny, yellowing shoes from babies long gone to heaven. It made me want to be an expressionist. Back in San Miguel I made another of several efforts to master the figure.

Meanwhile, I was becoming disenchanted with the computer. I had a great affection for my machines so long as they remained a distinct entity. But, in the 1990s, they were networked – first e-mail, then the Internet, advertising and a flood of worldly ugliness. A show opportunity at Wichita State University and another at the Ruschman Gallery in Indianapolis brought me back to clay. At Ruschman I showed the *Udder Series*, the basic form which I especially liked.

In 2001 I built a machine I dubbed the "Slip Jet Printer." It was inspired by a demonstration of three-dimensional printers I had seen in England a year earlier. A computer-controlled system like those was beyond my resources, so I considered how a hand-operated clay printing device might work. The solution was nostalgic in the sense that its archaic mechanical technology strongly resembled early 19th-century machines, such as the Jacquard loom.

The process produced a unique surface signature of layered strata. Up close, a Slip Jet pot resembled a coil-building technique done by a person with doll-sized hands. For a series, I settled on the water tower as the design premise, with trusses playing counterpoint to the vessels they elevated. The machine was strong on spiraling seashell forms but could also make animal-like shapes. In practice, I was happily surprised by how well it worked – although practicality was compromised by the slowness of the process.

In 2005, as retirement approached, I asked Goodheart, Hay and Engelke to show at DePauw with me once more.

All of the others were still doing low temperature, but had dropped the radical stuff. Hay's work was still emphatic with strong color and intrusive size, but offered no further offense. Engelke and Goodheart were like aged alchemists, now with vast knowledge, but still looking for a way to turn common clay into something worth keeping on a pedestal.

In graduate school, I figured if I was to achieve fame, I needed to be on the lookout for a signature style like Warhol's screen prints or Van Gogh's dots and dashes, or maybe even something huge like Cubism. I never found it. Eventually, just about everything becomes redundant. The age of "isms" is over anyway.

David Herrold, 2007



Lidded Jar with Crater Glaze, 1967
stoneware
14 in (h)



Opossum Pot with Cast Animal Heads, 1970
stoneware
10 in (h)



Portal, 1973
hand-built stoneware with fiberglass and slip
20 in (h)



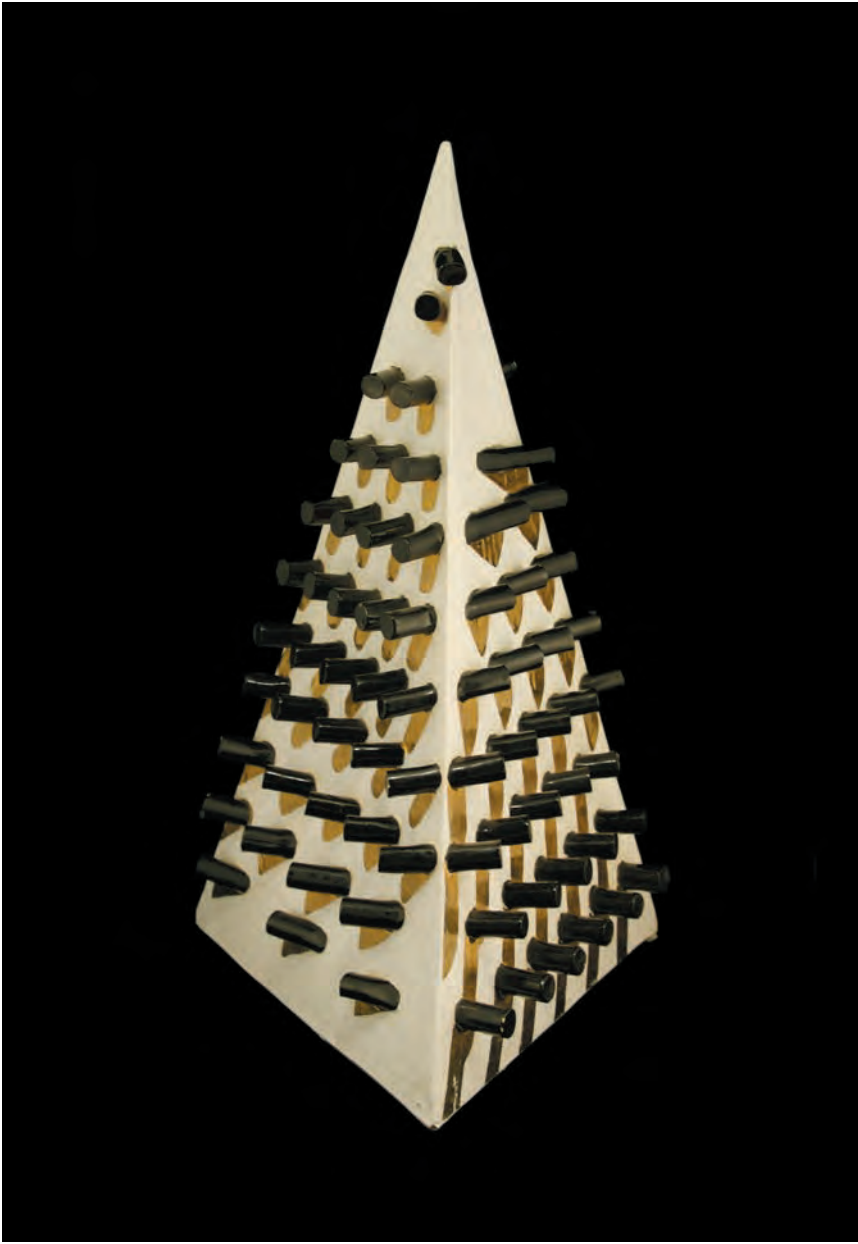
Landscape, 1973
hand-built stoneware with fiberglass and slip
15 in (h)



Wave, 1974
talc body with low-temperature glaze
9 in (h)



Porthole, 1974
talc body with low-temperature glaze
19 in (h)



Pyramid, 1974
talc body with low-temperature glazes and luster
23 in (h)

Bottle, 1980
stoneware with Rutile glaze
9 in (h)



Double Wall, 1981
stoneware with Temeku glaze
11 in (h)



Butchering Table, 1990
talc body and low-temperature glaze
13 in (h)



Table Cloth, 1990
talc body and low-temperature glaze
12 in (h)



Mexican Female, 1993
raku
25 in (h)



Tornado, 1998
stoneware
22 in (h)



Blue Water Dory Entering a Fog, 1999
porcelain
17 in (w)



Platter with Boiling Glaze, 2001
stoneware
14 in (d)



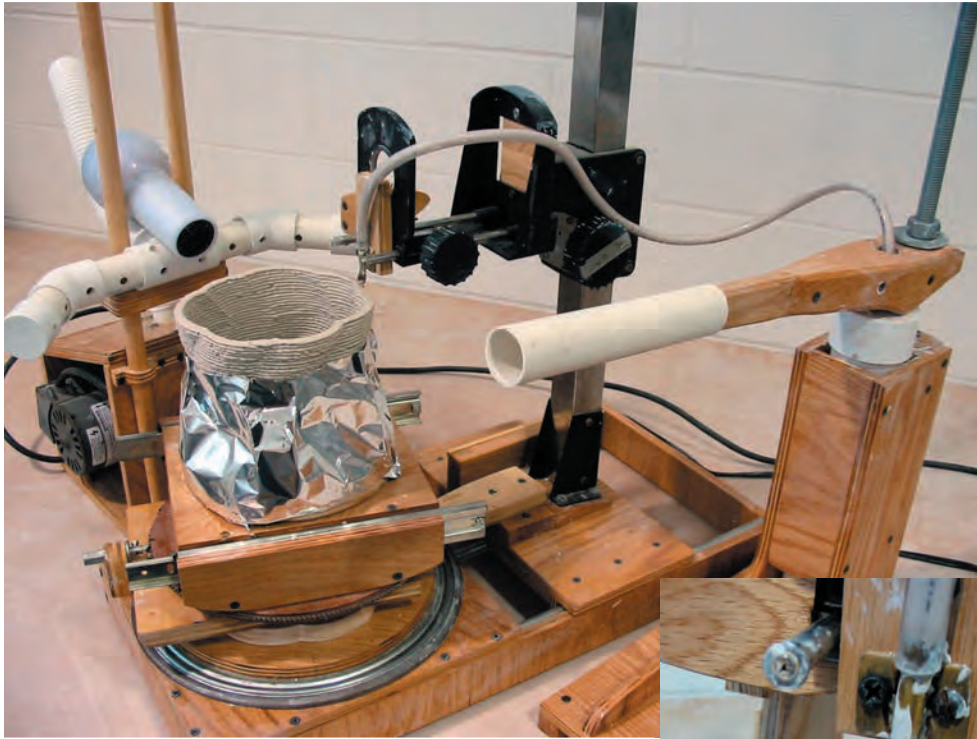
Platter with Crawling Glaze, 2000
stoneware
12 in (d)



Spotted Udder, 2002
porcelain with crawling glaze
15 in (h)



Crawling Udder, 2002
porcelain with crawling glaze
17 in (h)



Slip Jet Printer

The slip jet printer is a device that builds a three-dimensional shape by depositing successive layers of slip clay to the rim of a hollow form (insert). The slip is delivered to the nozzle by a hand-operated piston pump (the object to the right in the photo). The nozzle's position in space is controlled by cams and ratchets that allow four variables of shape – lathe, extrusion, offset and twist. The object to the left in the photo blows hot air to dry and stiffen the soft slip. The machine is operated by raising the height of the nozzle for each layer and then rotating the table by hand. While the table is rotating, pressure is applied to the pump handle, causing the slip to extrude in a ribbon along the edge of the rotating rim.

For example, the shape of the “extrude” function is controlled by an interchangeable plywood cam visible just above the bottom-most turntable. A cam follower (small wheel) is mounted on a sliding platform in the base of the machine. A spring holds the follower against the cam as it turns, pushing the platform back and forth according to the shape of the cam. The vertical beam that holds the nozzle is mounted on the sliding platform and moves with it. As the table is revolved, the nozzle traces the shape of the cam at the rim of the object being made. The shape is made bigger or smaller with another adjustment that moves the nozzle incrementally inward or outward at each layer (the “lathe” function).



Distressed Water Tower with Trestle, 2004
porcelain and slip jet construction
18 in (h)



Seashell as Stressed Water Tower, 2004
porcelain and slip jet construction
18 in (h)

Mailbox on a Trestle, 2005
porcelain
11 in (h)



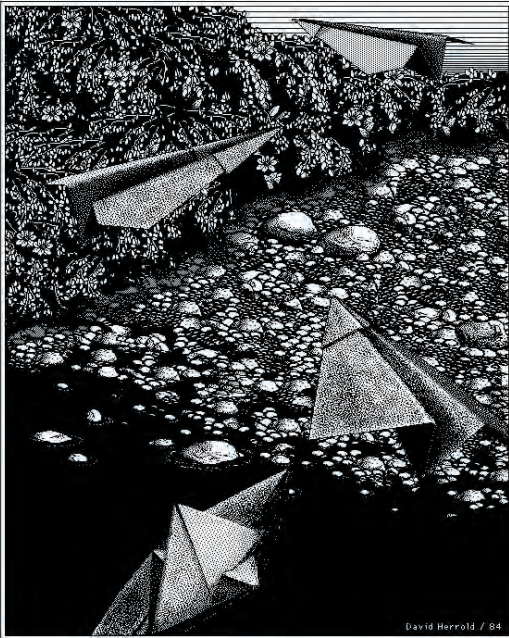
Dancing Table, 2005
porcelain
15 in (h)

Oil Drilling Table, 2005
porcelain
13 in (h)

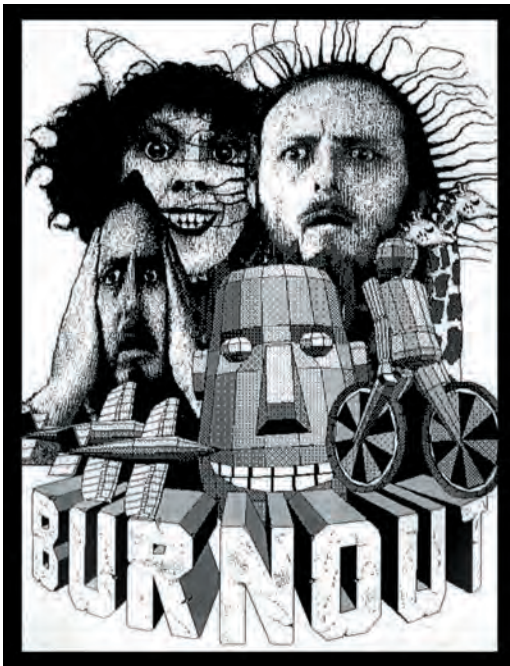




Combined Thrown and Hand-Build, 2007
stoneware
24 in (h)



Paper Airplanes, 1984
10 X 8 in



Poster for *Burnout*, 1987
10 X 8 in

Digital Photo Composites and Animation

Image making on the computer progressed from the barely possible. One-bit images in 1984, to gray scale about five years later, and to full 24-bit color five years after that. These images are from this period of the technology's development. At the time, it seemed obvious that the computer was destined to have a profound impact on visual communication, but how this would unfold was not clear. At first, the artist's only new tool was the infinite editing made possible by Random Access Memory (RAM).

Except for the MacPaint example (*Paper Airplanes*), the images here are composites of many photos assembled in such a way as to disguise their disparate origins. The first five color images are from what became known as the *Road Kill Series*. Dead animals were photographed while suspended by wires and posed like puppets. The following four images explore other techniques, such as three-dimensional surface mapping.

The animation *Burnout* is five minutes in length. Still images were created on the computer and then photographed from the screen with a 16 mm movie camera at 15 frames per second. Some of the techniques include rotoscoping from live video and three-dimensional modeling.



Tracks in a Pulp Forest, 1989
digital photo composite
14 X 14 in



Civil War, 1995
digital photo composite
10 X 22 in



No Shelter in the Wilderness, 1995
digital photo composite
14 X 20 in



Awakening to a World that had Changed Overnight, 1995
digital photo composite
20 X 13 in

Worker's Paradise, 1995
digital photo composite
20 X 20 in

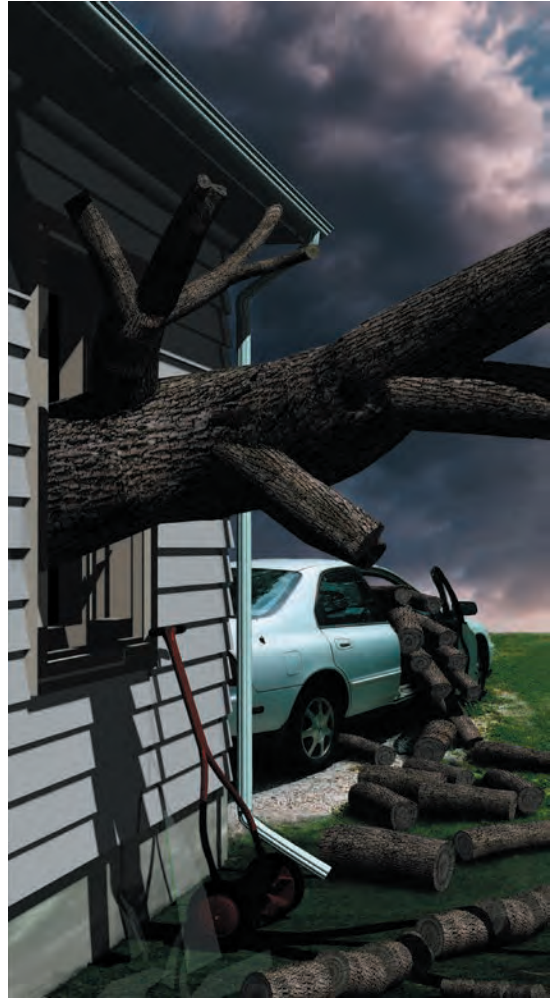


Paradise Burning, 1995
digital photo composite
20 X 20 in





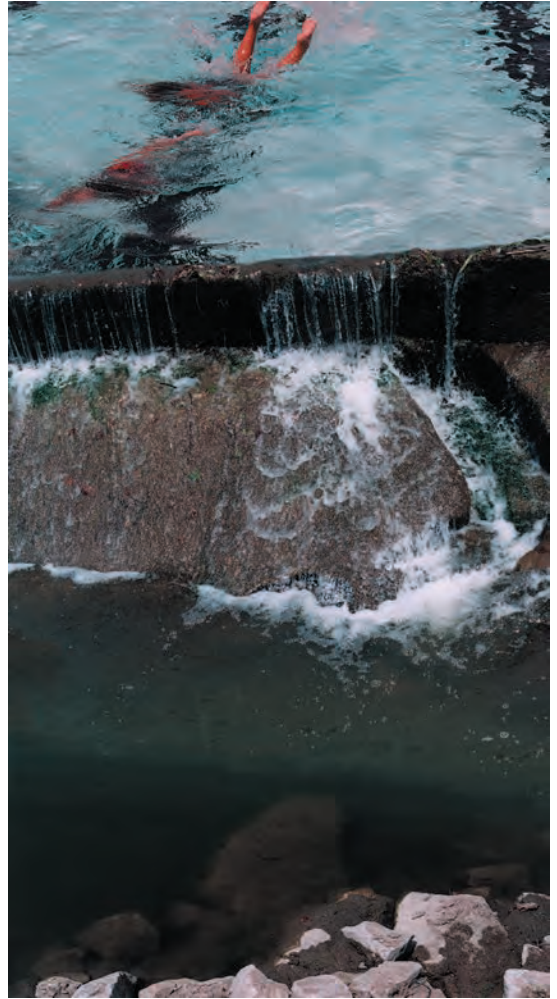
Chlorinated Water, 1997
digital photo composite
22 X 12 in



House Guests, 1997
digital photo composite
22 X 12 in



Wounded Tree, 1997
digital photo composite
22 X 12 in



Waterfall, 1997
digital photo composite
22 X 12 in





David Herrold

A Retrospective Exhibition

January 30 – March 2, 2008

Richard E. Peeler Art Center
DePauw University
10 W. Hanna Street
P.O. Box 37
Greencastle, IN 46135-0037
(765) 658-4336
www.depauw.edu/galleries

Cover image:
Sears & Roebuck, 1975
hand-built stoneware with low-temperature glaze
15 in (h)

January 30 – March 2, 2008

Richard E. Peeler Art Center
DePauw University

