



Right: Farraday Newsome. *Dark Blue Bowl with Oranges*. 2012. Glazed terracotta. 6.25 x 13.5 x 13.5 in.
Below: Jeff Reich. *Desert Erratic*. 2011. Glazed stoneware. 8 x 15 x 10 in.

Hard Edges and Soft Curves

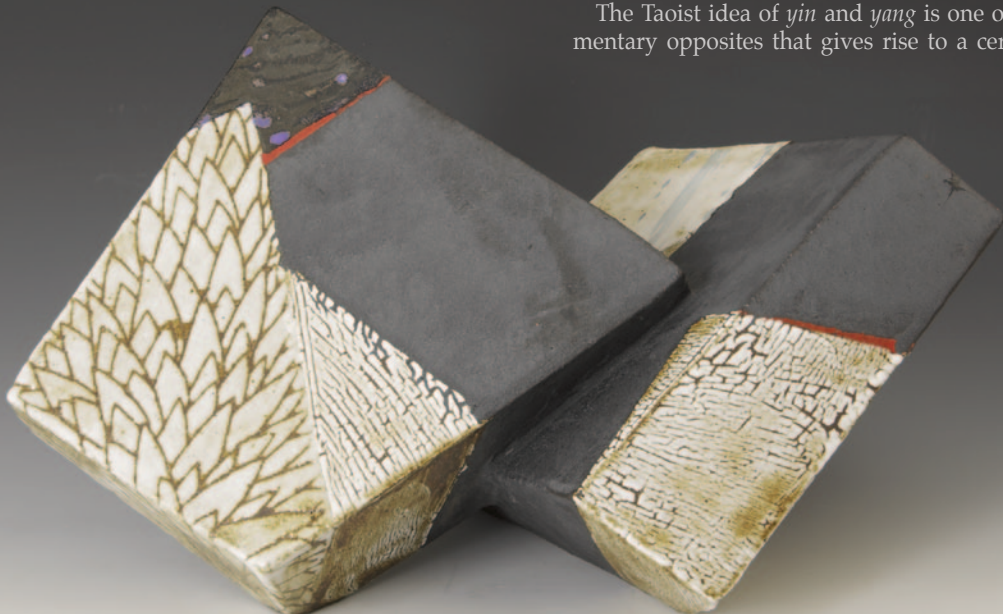
The Ceramics of **Jeff Reich** and **Farraday Newsome**

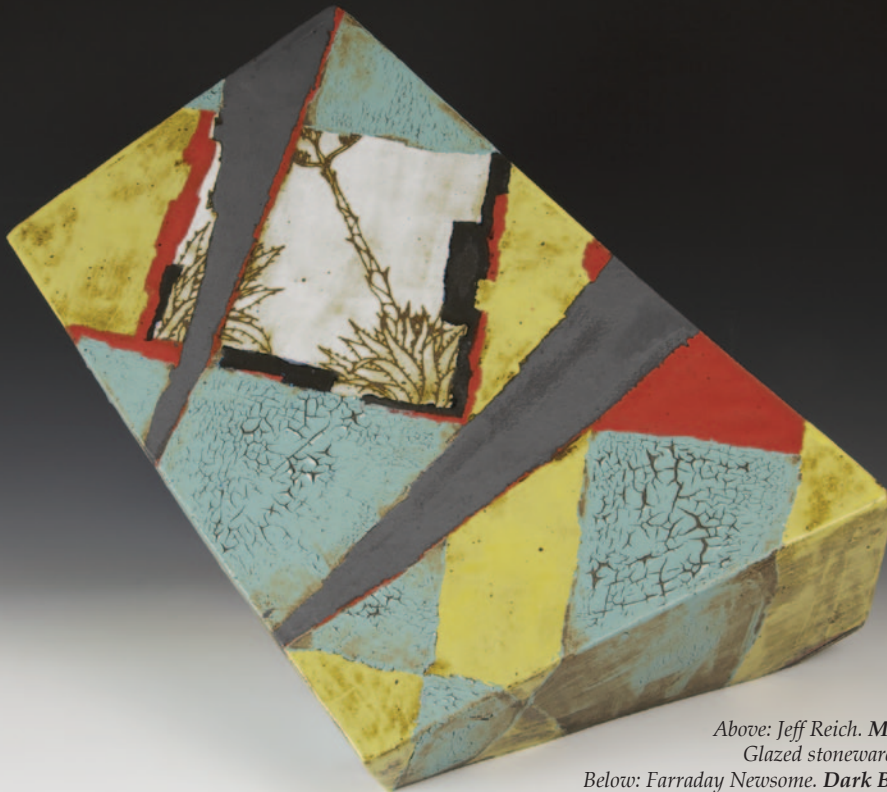
A Review by Linda Kuehne

LOOKING AT THE WORK IN THEIR MOST RECENT SHOW, *Compatible Visions*, at Plinth Gallery in Denver, one feels like an eavesdropper listening in on an intimate conversation between two Arizona

ceramists who also happen to be husband and wife. While each body of work is distinctive and can certainly stand on its own, there is an energy that flows from one to the other, a *yin yang*, that makes it stimulating to see the work together.

The Taoist idea of *yin* and *yang* is one of complementary opposites that gives rise to a certain kind





Above: Jeff Reich. **Monocarpic**. 2011.
Glazed stoneware. 15 x 23 x 13 in.

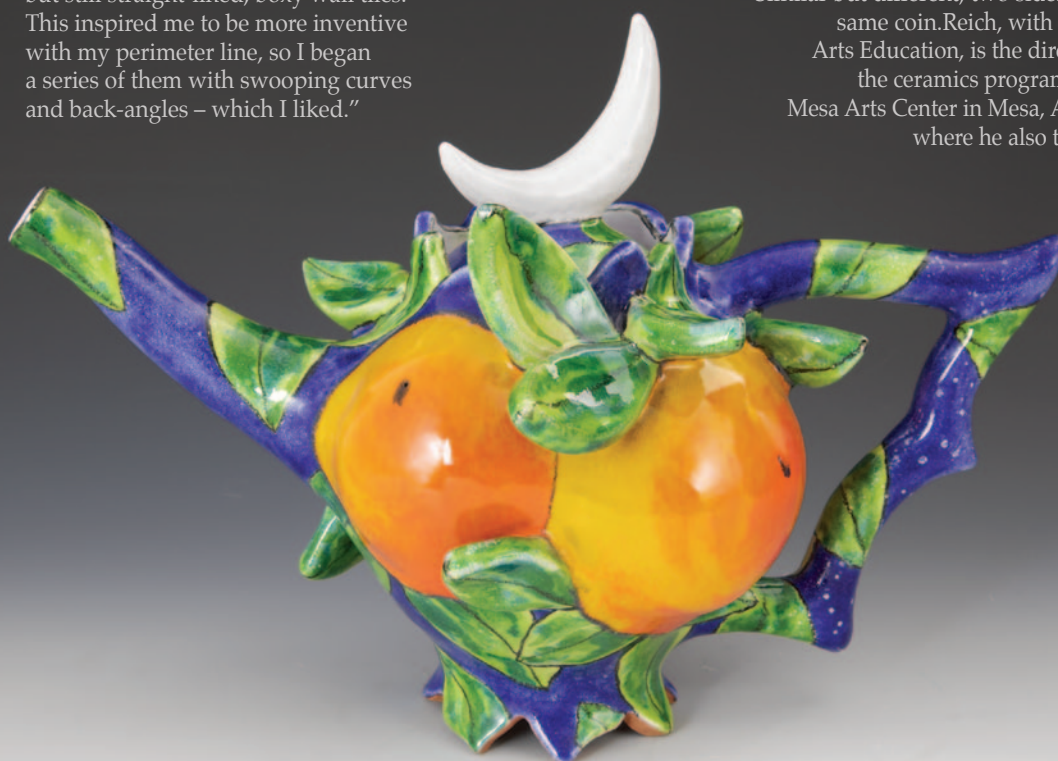
Below: Farraday Newsome. **Dark Blue Teapot with Oranges**. 2009. Glazed terracotta. 9 x 12 x 7.5 in.

of balance. High-fire reduction (Jeff Reich), low-fire majolica (Farraday Newsome); flowing and soft edged (Newsome), hard-edged and sculptural (Reich), their work in this show is not so much in opposition to each other as it is two aspects of the same reality. As Newsome says about her process, "I had been making square or rectangular boxy wall tiles for years.

"Then Jeff began making some great trapezoidal and other oddly angled, but still straight-lined, boxy wall tiles. This inspired me to be more inventive with my perimeter line, so I began a series of them with swooping curves and back-angles – which I liked."

As with the bird torsos, they offer an open, interesting surface to paint on." Reich, citing his wife's influence on his work says, "I had always thrown large platters for wall work. After making small flat tiles I started to make them more three-dimensional after Farraday's boxy wall-tiles. Mine became more tilted, architectural and angular. Now they have become actual 'floating' cubes on the wall. I felt the angular work suited my glazing but I still throw platters for wall work too."

Similar but different, two sides of the same coin. Reich, with a BA in Arts Education, is the director of the ceramics program at the Mesa Arts Center in Mesa, Arizona where he also teaches.





Newsome, a long-time studio potter with a BA in Biology and an MA in Art, also teaches majolica classes there. Both do their personal work at home in their joint studio, Indigo Street Pottery, situated on one and a half acres of wildscaped-desert that they landscaped themselves.

Newsome describes her work in this show as primarily vessel-oriented. While this may be true, one is struck by a strong sculptural aspect to her work.

Using the traditional forms of teapots, plates, jars and bowls as canvas, she frequently incorporates high relief imagery along with drawings and paintings onto a majolica surface. Newsome grew up in the redwoods of California but now lives in Arizona and has been strongly influenced by nature.





She collected shells and pressed wildflowers as a child and one can still see those influences in her work. As an adult, however, she finds herself drawn to the psychological and emotional associations one makes with different natural forms. Her *Dark Blue Bowl with Oranges* in this show has the oranges in high relief fairly bursting off the surface with a life-giving energy. Fertility, sustenance, health, along with temporal concerns are some of the themes found in Newsome's work. Seashells, another motif of hers, she sees as a combination of *memento mori* – a reminder of what is left when a creature leaves its shell; as well as fertility and life. With their soft, rounded edges and closed hinges they suggest the protective nurturing qualities of the gestating female waiting to give birth.

Several years ago Newsome started combining unlikely man-made imagery related to chance and the passage of time with objects from the natural world on her pots: eyeglasses, dice, watches and playing cards juxtaposed with fruit, birds and shells. More recently, as in her *Night Drift Teapot* in the current show, images of a snake, shell, leaves and warped playing card, wrapped around a traditionally shaped teapot, have been transformed into a high relief stream-of-consciousness Jungian dream-scape. Fate, chance, danger: these are some of the colliding metaphors of the piece that challenge the viewer to make sense of a new reality.

Approaching her work in a painterly way, she chooses to paint either a coat of white or black glaze on red terracotta bisqueware, depending upon what

Facing page, top left: Jeff Reich. *Keeping My Balance*. 2008.
Glazed stoneware. 18 x 3 x 7 in.

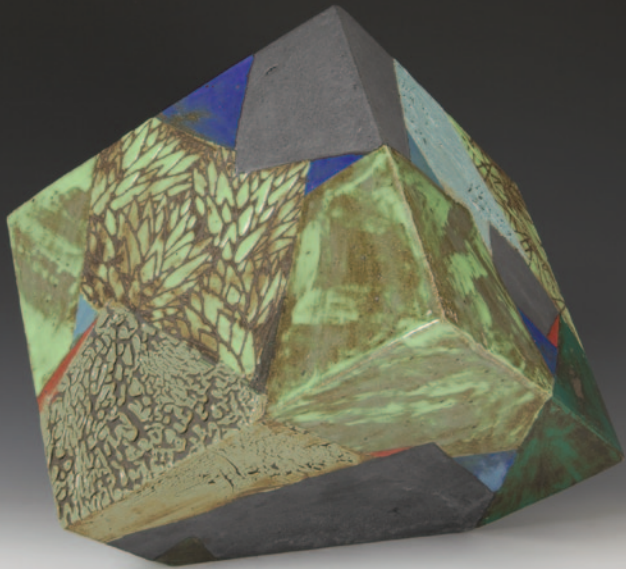
Facing page, top right: Farraday Newsome. *Genetic Drift*. 2007.
Glazed terracotta. 29 x 18 x 15 in.

Facing page, below: Jeff Reich. *The Insistence of Thorns*. 2011.
Glazed stoneware. 16 x 22 x 22 in.

Above: Farraday Newsome. *Night Drift Teapot*. 2012.
Glazed terracotta. 9 x 13 x 8.5 in.

she intends the final outcome of the piece to represent: a light, lush exuberant celebration of nature as in *Dark Blue Jar with Oranges and Yellow Birds* with its white ground and colorful palette or the use of a black ground with black and white glazes in *Bobcat Moon Teapot* that allows the artist to strike a more subdued note.

Reich has been greatly influenced by the Sonoran desert and the unique plants that grow there. Skewed, sectioned and recombined forms of his teapots, jars, wall tiles and sculptural vessels are influenced by the growth patterns found in desert plants, rock and mountains. "I take pictures of the plants at different times of the year to work into my glaze drawings. Most agaves, yuccas, ocotillos and other thorny plants amaze me with their tenacity to grow even in the harshest environs." Another big influence on his work has been the large masses of rock formations, known as erratics, that he saw scattered over the hills and plains of Michigan where he grew up, as well as in the desert of Arizona, where he now lives. Clusters of boulders that have been transported by glacier-ice and deposited in another location, they are frequently angular and large, precariously perched in the landscape. As one can see



Above left: Jeff Reich. *Agave Fields*. 2012. Glazed stoneware. 14 x 15 x 15 in.

Above right: Farraday Newsome. *Tile with Pomegranate, Card and Shark Tooth*. 2009. Glazed terracotta. 8 x 8 x .5 in.

Below: Jeff Reich (left) and Farraday Newsome with their respective marks.



in his *Agave Fields* and *Desert Erratic* in this show, his sculptural work is directly influenced by these ancient rock formations.

Unlike Newsome who draws more realistic representations of natural and man-made things, Reich's images tend to be a combination of the representational and the abstract. He uses glaze not only as colour but to subtly suggest references to nature that leave the work open to interpretation. One can see this idea beautifully realised in his *Insistence of Thorns*. Geometrically-shaped with an off-kilter stance, the crackle white glaze pulls away from the black surface, like clay cracking on a dry river bed. Triangular shapes with sharp edges are sgraffitoed

through a white glaze; black glaze is painted in great swaths punctuated by hints of a bright red. "Black," he says, "reminds me of night when the desert is cooler," a relief in an environment where temperatures can reach 115°F in the middle of summer.

One can see the evolution that Reich's work has taken over several years from the functional to the sculptural. With his teapot, *Keeping My Balance*, he uses glaze to decorate and enliven the pot in a more traditional approach to pot making. In recent work, *Monocarpic*, he combines the abstract with the literal using both form and colour in a sophisticated way that adds layers of emotional and intellectual complexity to the piece.

This show works because it is each artist's honest effort to address the relationships between the soul, nature and art. Like all good art, there is an inspirational quality to the experience of viewing finely crafted, artfully done objects. It is clear from looking at the work that both have a passion for what they do that keeps them questioning, exploring and creating new work that, while based on their past work, is never repetitive. Through experience, hard work and a finely developed aesthetic sense, they have both reached a point in their careers where they have the confidence to follow both the head and the heart, wherever that might take them.



Linda Kuehne is a photographer, ceramist and writer who has exhibited her work in various galleries and museums in the Northeast and elsewhere, including the Neuberger Museum, the Katonah Museum of Art and HPGRP Gallery in New York City. She has written reviews for various publications including *American Ceramics*, *Ceramics: Art and Perception* and *Neue Keramik*. She is the former director of the Clay Art Center in Port Chester, New York (www.lindakuehne.com).

All photos by Farraday Newsome and Jeff Reich.