

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE

Spectrum

A project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the degree of Master of Arts in Art,  
Visual Art

By

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Date

## Dedication

I dedicate this Masters Degree to my parents, family, best friends Jessica Celis and Kortney Sandoval thank you for supporting me throughout this extensive journey. I would also like to thank the wonderful ceramics community Farnaz Sabet, Matthew David Pritchard, Parker Boales, Kimberly Morris, Thomas Dang and especially Christina Margarita Erives for all your help and company through the sleepless nights at the studio. To my professors Lesley Krane, Christian Tedeschi, Rebecca Ripple, and Tanya Batura, thank you for your words of wisdom and encouragements. Your guidance has pushed and influenced my work tremendously. A special thank you to my chair and professor Patsy Cox, your critical eye has shaped and helped develop not only my work but also the artist I have grown to be.

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## ABSTRACT

## SPECTRUM

By

Blanca Elena Guerra

Master of Arts in Art, Visual Arts

Simplicity, elegance, and color define my aesthetic as I create innovative utilitarian wares inspired by contemporary design and color theory. My work is influenced by Minimalism in terms of space and configuration. Functional pieces are combined with cabinetry that serve as correspondingly designed spaces for storage, the units themselves becoming integral parts of the work. My utilitarian wares embody simple and refined designs according to my individual aesthetic concerns. I use a saturated palette and embrace various interpretations of and theories on color, as well as its relevance to utility and everyday environments. The viewer's intuitive response to color and design motivates me. I'm particularly interested in the audience's desire, the interaction between the viewer and the work, and the connection that is made between them.

## Introduction

Focusing on Minimalism, aesthetics, and color theory, I craft my functional wares with special attention to design. Form and storage play equal roles in the final display of my work, in which aesthetics and function are combined. These features reflect society's adaptation to smaller, more cost effective spaces. The development of technology and architecture identifies a society as it evolves. With these advances, everyday living is transformed; I'm interested in the solutions functional ceramics offers and its placement in daily life.

## History of Ceramic Design

The history of ceramic design is indispensable to the progression of my work. The practice of ceramics is unlike other art forms. People think they know about ceramics; they handle them everyday, they welcome them into domestic life, and they place them at the center of ritual customs. Ceramics are often an unremarked constant in the background of every day. Oftentimes, austerity is the reflection of a belief that the form of a pot is primary, and that glazes, surfaces and decoration should not overwhelm it. This is not an arid, conceptual view of form, rather it is a rich, and sometimes seductive, way to explore form. This purist, austere approach is regaining momentum; it is a new austerity that finds a counterpart in contemporary minimalist architecture and sculpture [12].

A focal point in daily rituals, ceramics' importance influences and enhances innovative designs. A Hungarian ceramics artist, Eva Zeisel created elegant, simple, and eccentric designs for dinnerware in the 1940s and 1950s that helped revolutionize the way Americans set their tables. She was the first female ceramics artist to have a one women exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, and is one of the most significant designers of the 20th century. One of her first designs in the U.S. was for Sears, Roebuck. She has since designed for Hall China, Red Wing China, Castleton China, Norleans Meito (Japan), Western Stoneware, Hyalyn, Phillip Rosenthal (Germany) and others throughout the world [13]. Zeisel's designs address various household needs, with ceramics and furniture being the focal points. Like Zeisel, American artist Heather Mae Erickson has inspired and contributed to contemporary designs. Erickson's work reflects the forefront of a trend in which industry and design

play vital roles in production. By designing functional tableware, she seeks to direct the eye, hand and mouth to approach food differently [14]. Her designs are inspired by architecture, nature, geometric and organic shapes, and non-ceramic design. Though Erickson utilizes molds, her work is not mass-produced like Zeisel's. However, both Erickson and Zeisel influence my work through their distinct visions of designed dinnerware, and I have created my own practice to reflect this movement in ceramic design.



## History of Cabinetry

A key component to my work is the combination of ceramic ware and minimal storage. Cabinets are incorporated to store my dinnerware, and they merge to become one piece. Historically, cabinets functioned as storage units that housed the necessities for baking. In the early 1900's built in kitchen cabinets were rare, and most kitchen cabinets before the twentieth century were freestanding; most kitchens in homes that could afford cabinetry had less storage capacity than what might be considered necessary today [11]. Nineteenth century cabinets varied in size, most falling within the average dimensions of 48 inches wide by 22 inches deep by 72 inches high. The cabinets were most often made of wood, though later versions were fabricated with painted metal [11]. The Hoosier cabinet is generally considered a development from the baker's cabinets found in kitchens of the late nineteenth century [11]. Over time these designs were transformed and utilized in all homes. Built-in kitchen cabinets are, in fact, a relatively recent innovation, dominant only since the 1930s [11]. After cabinets came the pantry, or kitchen storage, an interesting reflection of social, economic, and architectural changes, and the elimination of freestanding storage units. In the 1920's, the Hoosier Manufacturing Company expanded its product offerings into kitchen and dining room furniture. Their tables accommodated smaller spaces and wall adjacencies by folding the round edge down. These modifications of the cabinet throughout history motivate me to develop storage units that satisfy aesthetic and practical sensibilities.

## Process

The artists that influence my work have adopted industrial techniques. However, I choose to construct each piece individually by hand. This meticulous process allows me to interact with each piece. Using a potter's wheel, I start by throwing sets of bowls and plates. After trimming a foot on all pieces, I measure out a half circle on each bowl and plate. I then cut out the half circle and replace the missing wall and foot with a piece of slab. This design allows for the bowls, salad plates and dinner plates to interlock and stack throughout the course of a meal, and then stack when stored. The thrown cylindrical cups sit within the arced cut-out of the stacked bowl, salad and dinner plates. I glaze each bowl and plate with a solid color. Only the cups are glazed at the bottom half with a line that visually connects them with each bowl and plate.

## Color Theory

The second most important element of my work is color. To engage viewers, I use a saturated color palette and embrace various interpretations of and theories on color. In the visual arts, color theory is a useful tool for mixing and combining colors. Colors are grouped into basic categories within the color wheel: primary, secondary, and tertiary. More specific groupings are Color Harmony, Complementary, Analogous, Triad, Split-complementary, Rectangle (Tetradic), and Square. Color theory is an important foundation for my work, and I rely on color combinations and their aesthetic, psychological, and historical significance. The symbolic and iconographic associations among colors and ideas, emotions, and beliefs are potent [1]. Color is natural, permeating everyday life and affecting human psychology. I use vibrant color palettes to enhance the viewer's visual interactions with my work. The name of a color is the term used to describe various visual effects that adjacent colors exert on one another. Expounding on these effects in the 20th century, German-born American artist Josef Albers observed that "in visual perception, a color is almost never seen as it really is—as it physically is. This fact makes color the most relative medium in art." He based his teachings and paintings on "the discrepancy between the physical fact and the psychic (visual) effect" of interacting colors [2]. Using color as a focal point in my work, I create tangible forms of color. Color is stimulating, calming, expressive, disturbing, cultural, exuberant, and symbolic. It pervades every aspect of life, embellishes the ordinary, and gives beauty and drama to everyday objects [3].

## Spectrum

My graduate exhibition, *Spectrum* investigates the bridge between functional ceramics and their storage and uses contemporary design as a point of departure. I combine my ceramic forms with display units that are defined by the size and shape of my functional pieces and become integral parts of the work. My series *Stacking Meal* (figure 1.1) focuses on individualized forms that work together to emphasize space and assembly. Allowing my plates to stack, I reduce clutter at the dinner table and concentrate on the way food is consumed and plates are stored. This concept influences my integrated storage components, which blend the individual parts into one whole. I store the pieces underneath the dining table, which transforms it into the storage unit. Each cup, plate and bowl of *Stacking Meal* is hand thrown on the potter's wheel and hand glazed, making each piece one of a kind. The notion of the gap between art and utilitarianism influences my second piece, titled *A Cup for All* (figure 2.1). I incorporate minimal design to create a space for interactivity with the viewer. *A Cup for All* is a wall installation of vessels; two shelves housing ten cups each. The shelves are displayed horizontally and use the simultaneous gradations of two complementary colors. This piece intends to engage the viewer with its function and form. The shelf becomes part of the piece and merges both elements, the cups and the shelf, into a whole. It functions like a painting; the shelves become the canvas that houses the painted cups that transform it.

## Conclusion

The synthesis of function and storage drives and influences my work. Color theory, the history of design, and cabinetry inform the modifications and decisions that I use to create my work. Color entices memory, and ceramics have purpose, and I want to stimulate visual and psychological connections through the use of my pieces emotionally and physically.

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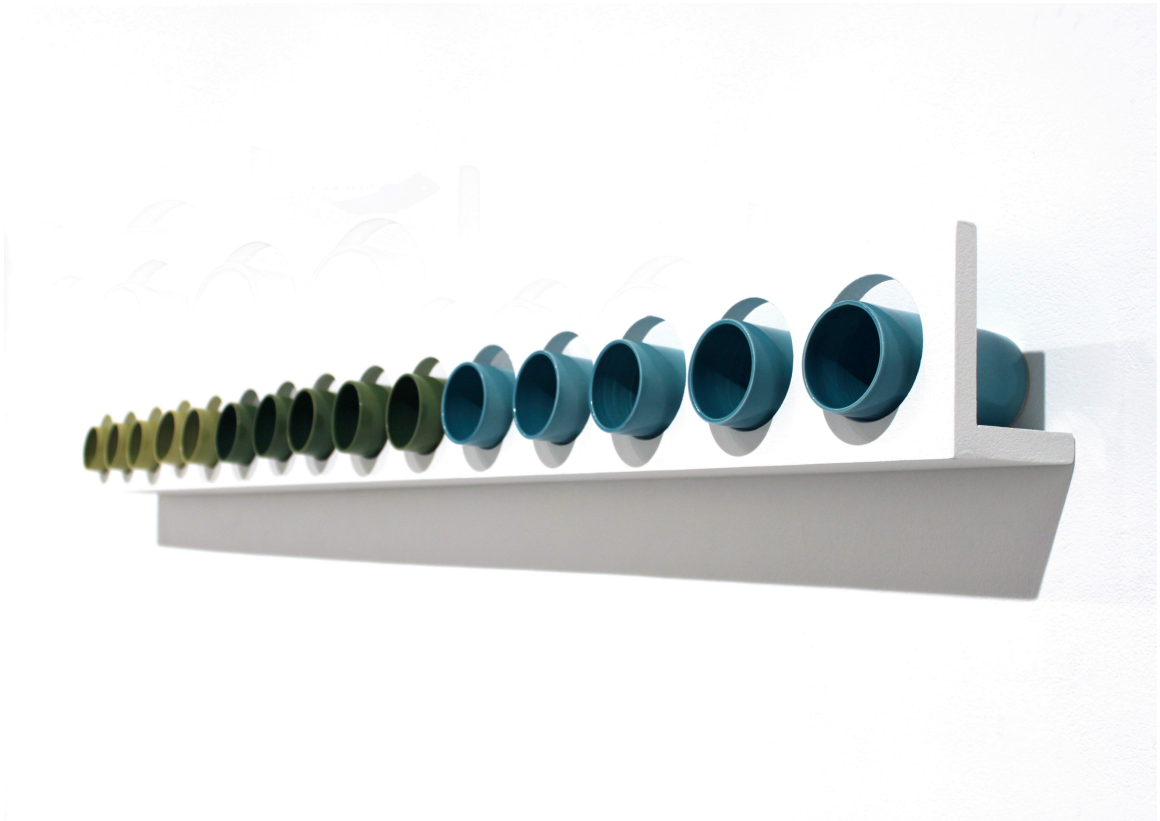
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Images



**Figure 1.1** *Stacking Meal*, 10 x 6 x 13", Porcelain





**Figure 2.1** *Storing Cups* (example of *A Cup for All*), 68 x 5.5 x 5",  
Installation Images, Porcelain and Wood



**Figure 3.1** *Stacking Meal Series*, 10 x 6 x 13", Porcelain



**Figure 3.2** *Stacking Meal Series*, 40 x 6 x 13", Installation Image, Porcelain and Wood



**Figure 4.1** *Stacking Bowls: Second Series, 5 x 2.5 x 10"*, Porcelain



**Figure 5.1** *Extract*, 20 x 10.5 x 3", Porcelain