Evolving through tactile expression and technical experimentation, the memory and reflection at the heart of this exhibition are launch points for this pure state of discovery and invention.

Joshua Green is the Executive Director of the National Council on Education for the Ceramic Arts (NCECA)

ABOUT
James C. Watkins is a ceramic artist who has worked with clay for over 40 years. His work is held in 23 permanent collections, including the White House Collection of American Crafts at the Clinton Library in Little Rock, Arkansas; the Shigaraki Institute of Ceramic Studies in Shigaraki, Japan; the Renwick Gallery of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington DC; the Everson Museum in Syracuse, New York; the Tweed Museum in Duluth, Minnesota; the Eiteljorg Museum in Indianapolis, Indiana; and the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Texas. Watkins’ work has been widely exhibited in 42 solo exhibitions and 165 group exhibitions. Watkins is a Texas Tech University, Horn Distinguished Professor Emeritus. The Horn Professorship is the highest honor Texas Tech University may bestow on members of its faculty. Horn Professorships are granted to professors in recognition of national and international distinction for outstanding research or other creative scholarly achievements.

His awards include the Texas Tech University President’s Excellence in Teaching Award and the third recipient of the Art on the Llano Estacada Legacy Award, presented by Texas Tech University Museum Association. He was a 2005 Senior Fulbright Scholar, teaching in Vietnam at the Ho Chi Minh City University of Architecture. Watkins is the 2019 recipient of the HCCC Texas Master Award presented by the Houston Center of Contemporary Craft in Houston, Texas.


Website: www.jcwclayworks.com

JAMES C. WATKINS
Reflections Made of Memories
Art Museum of Southeast Texas | January 7 — March 19, 2023
We have to sleep with our eyes open, have to dream with our hands, draw lines on the water of rivers seeking their channels, dreams of a sun dreaming its worlds ... 

The exhibition James C. Watkins: Reflections Made of Memories fuses personal history with innovative research to expand on the ceramic artist’s enduring legacies. The retrospective includes vessels, tiles, and drawings, interconnected to twelve stories authored by the artist. The convergence of text, material, and process reflects back in time and outward through the imagination to become materialized experiences and form. The massivedouble-walled formsthat Watkins calls caldrons embody rich metaphorical and feeding the fire for hours as the women seasoned and stirred. “The caldrons approach mythical or dreamlike realms as avian forms emerge from their massive rims, some evolving as gracefully arcing handles. The natural environment is a taproot that nurtures the work’s creation and evolution. During summer months in southwest Texas, winds from storms known as haboobs arise from forces of dying thunderstorms that push air downward, gyrating fine particle clay dusts into the atmosphere over the desert close to where Watkins lives and works. Although potentially destructive, the storms yield inspiration and generate source material that Watkins gathers to formulate terra sigillata and glazes applied to his works’ surfaces. The largest vessels are constructed through a thrown and coiled method involving row upon row of hand-coiled ropes of clay. The forms are expanded and refined at the potter’s body works in concert with the rotating clay and the centrifugal force of the wheel. The massive double-walled forms that Watkins calls caldrons bear roughened and carbon-blackened surfaces, referencing well-used cooking vessels. Other works have iridescent surfaces developed through the use of soluble metallic salts in closed-chambered saggar firings. Earthy and ethereal, these color shifting surfaces result from interactions of heat, time, and atmospheric change on material. They also bear uncanny resemblance to images from celestial phenomena that lead us closer to the universe’s creation.

Transformative and transformed, the caldrons are inspired by childhood memories of the artist’s mother and grandmother working together for hours making souse, crackling or chicharrones. Watkins recalls “tending and feeding the fire for hours as the women seasoned and stirred.” The caldrons approach mythical or dreamlike realms as avian forms emerge from their massive rims, some evolving as gracefully arcing handles. Physical and archetypal, the double-walled construction of the caldrons embodies rich metaphorical meanings. When we observe their exteriors from a distance, as we might a painting or sculpture, we sense that their interiors are corresponding voids. From the proximity of direct physical contact, we realize that although the void is present, an inaccessible volume differentiates the inner and outer surfaces. Our memories of experiences are continually negotiated through reflection on those same experiences. What remains significant and lasting through intervening spans of time is uniquely personal; gaps and inaccessible spaces are forever present.

Arnold Rubin defined content “as one dimension of the effective power and complex of multiple meanings embedded in a work’s contributions in the orchestration of materials and techniques, and transmutes both purely formal qualities on the one hand and comparatively explicit iconographical or symbolic associations on the other.” In Watkins’ work, materiality, making, and meaning are contingent upon one another. At one time, Watkins described his caldrons as “bottle forms, interconnected to twelve stories authored by the artist. The convergence of text, material, and process reflects back in time and outward through the imagination to become materialized experiences and form. The massivedouble-walled formsthat Watkins calls caldrons embody rich metaphorical and feeding the fire for hours as the women seasoned and stirred. “The caldrons approach mythical or dreamlike realms as avian forms emerge from their massive rims, some evolving as gracefully arcing handles. The natural environment is a taproot that nurtures the work’s creation and evolution. During summer months in southwest Texas, winds from storms known as haboobs arise from forces of dying thunderstorms that push air downward, gyrating fine particle clay dusts into the atmosphere over the desert close to where Watkins lives and works. Although potentially destructive, the storms yield inspiration and generate source material that Watkins gathers to formulate terra sigillata and glazes applied to his works’ surfaces. The largest vessels are constructed through a thrown and coiled method involving row upon row of hand-coiled ropes of clay. The forms are expanded and refined at the potter’s body works in concert with the rotating clay and the centrifugal force of the wheel. The massive double-walled forms that Watkins calls caldrons bear roughened and carbon-blackened surfaces, referencing well-used cooking vessels. Other works have iridescent surfaces developed through the use of soluble metallic salts in closed-chambered saggar firings. Earthy and ethereal, these color shifting surfaces result from interactions of heat, time, and atmospheric change on material. They also bear uncanny resemblance to images from celestial phenomena that lead us closer to the universe’s creation.

Transformative and transformed, the caldrons are inspired by childhood memories of the artist’s mother and grandmother working together for hours making souse, crackling or chicharrones. Watkins recalls “tending and feeding the fire for hours as the women seasoned and stirred.” The caldrons approach mythical or dreamlike realms as avian forms emerge from their massive rims, some evolving as gracefully arcing handles. Physical and archetypal, the double-walled construction of the caldrons embodies rich metaphorical meanings. When we observe their exteriors from a distance, as we might a painting or sculpture, we sense that their interiors are corresponding voids. From the proximity of direct physical contact, we realize that although the void is present, an inaccessible volume differentiates the inner and outer surfaces. Our memories of experiences are continually negotiated through reflection on those same experiences. What remains significant and lasting through intervening spans of time is uniquely personal; gaps and inaccessible spaces are forever present.

Arnold Rubin defined content “as one dimension of the effective power and complex of multiple meanings embedded in a work’s contributions in the orchestration of materials and techniques, and transmutes both purely formal qualities on the one hand and comparatively explicit iconographical or symbolic associations on the other.” In Watkins’ work, materiality, making, and meaning are contingent upon one another. At one time, Watkins described his caldrons as “bottle forms, interconnected to twelve stories authored by the artist. The convergence of text, material, and process reflects back in time and outward through the imagination to become materialized experiences and form. The massivedouble-walled formsthat Watkins calls caldrons embody rich metaphorical and feeding the fire for hours as the women seasoned and stirred. “The caldrons approach mythical or dreamlike realms as avian forms emerge from their massive rims, some evolving as gracefully arcing handles. The natural environment is a taproot that nurtures the work’s creation and evolution. During summer months in southwest Texas, winds from storms known as haboobs arise from forces of dying thunderstorms that push air downward, gyrating fine particle clay dusts into the atmosphere over the desert close to where Watkins lives and works. Although potentially destructive, the storms yield inspiration and generate source material that Watkins gathers to formulate terra sigillata and glazes applied to his works’ surfaces. The largest vessels are constructed through a thrown and coiled method involving row upon row of hand-coiled ropes of clay. The forms are expanded and refined at the potter’s body works in concert with the rotating clay and the centrifugal force of the wheel. The massive double-walled forms that Watkins calls caldrons bear roughened and carbon-blackened surfaces, referencing well-used cooking vessels. Other works have iridescent surfaces developed through the use of soluble metallic salts in closed-chambered saggar firings. Earthy and ethereal, these color shifting surfaces result from interactions of heat, time, and atmospheric change on material. They also bear uncanny resemblance to images from celestial phenomena that lead us closer to the universe’s creation.

Transformative and transformed, the caldrons are inspired by childhood memories of the artist’s mother and grandmother working together for hours making souse, crackling or chicharrones. Watkins recalls “tending and feeding the fire for hours as the women seasoned and stirred.” The caldrons approach mythical or dreamlike realms as avian forms emerge from their massive rims, some evolving as gracefully arcing handles. Physical and archetypal, the double-walled construction of the caldrons embodies rich metaphorical meanings. When we observe their exteriors from a distance, as we might a painting or sculpture, we sense that their interiors are corresponding voids. From the proximity of direct physical contact, we realize that although the void is present, an inaccessible volume differentiates the inner and outer surfaces. Our memories of experiences are continually negotiated through reflection on those same experiences. What remains significant and lasting through intervening spans of time is uniquely personal; gaps and inaccessible spaces are forever present.

Arnold Rubin defined content “as one dimension of the effective power and complex of multiple meanings embedded in a work’s contributions in the orchestration of materials and techniques, and transmutes both purely formal qualities on the one hand and comparatively explicit iconographical or symbolic associations on the other.” In Watkins’ work, materiality, making, and meaning are contingent upon one another. At one time, Watkins described his caldrons as “bottle forms, interconnected to twelve stories authored by the artist. The convergence of text, material, and process reflects back in time and outward through the imagination to become materialized experiences and form. The massivedouble-walled formsthat Watkins calls caldrons embody rich metaphorical and feeding the fire for hours as the women seasoned and stirred. “The caldrons approach mythical or dreamlike realms as avian forms emerge from their massive rims, some evolving as gracefully arcing handles.