

# Surface Dreams & Superstructures

WORKS *by* ROBERT HARRISON

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Paris Gibson Square  
Museum of Art

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This is an exhibition catalogue for *Surface Dreams & Superstructures, Works by Robert Harrison*. The catalogue features essayettes by the artist, curator, and guest authors in the field of contemporary ceramics. This solo exhibition is featured at Paris Gibson Square Museum of Art from June 30, 2023 through January 12, 2024 and highlights selected and new works by artist Robert Harrison, celebrated for his ceramic sculptures and architecturally inspired site-specific installations. The work is presented by the museum and is showcased in the Wylder gallery, as well as the museum's Sculpture Garden. The exhibition explores interactions between the built environment and interior domestic space—real, implied, and imagined. Reused, repurposed, and newly fashioned fragile ceramic works are situated in contrived groupings that ask us to question the meaning and purpose of images and material culture, as well as negotiate the personal experiences we create through these objects.

The catalogue includes a Forward by Sarah Justice, Executive Director of Paris Gibson Square Museum of Art and a Curator's Essay to *Surface Dreams & Superstructures* by Nicole Maria Evans, Curator of Exhibitions and Collections at Paris Gibson Square Museum of Art. Contributions by Robert Harrison, featured and celebrated exhibiting artist from Helena, Montana. He has built his 40+ year career in the site-specific large-scale architectural sculpture realm along with smaller-scale studio activity; Randi O'Brien is Associate Professor and Head of Sculpture and Ceramics at Irvine Valley College, in Orange County, California and Editor of Studio Potter journal; Nicolle Hamm is a ceramic artist, and Administrator & Community Program Manager at the Missoula Art Museum; and Eliza Weber is a ceramic artist and Director of Education at Paris Gibson Square Museum of Art. The exhibition catalogue is designed by Eric Heidle, a designer, photographer, and writer living and working east of Montana's continental divide. He is Communication Director for the Montana Arts Council, Montana's state arts agency. Full color images of the exhibition and featured images of individual works are included, including a complete list of works exhibited. Contributors to this catalogue participated in an expert discussion panel with the artist and curator. Additional educational programs led by Eliza Weber, Director of Education, include 3rd Grade docent tours with hands on activities, and a community artist workshop.

Project Supporters: Montana Arts Council, a state agency funded by the State of Montana, and the National Endowment for the Arts. We are funded in part by coal severance taxes paid based upon coal mined in Montana and deposited in Montana's cultural and aesthetic projects trust fund. Additional funding is provided by museum members and the citizens of Cascade County, Davidson Family Foundation, D.A. Davidson, Horizon Credit Union, a generous anonymous donor, and Kelly's Signs & Design.

Not all works featured in this exhibition are included in this catalogue. For a complete list with images contact the museum's Curatorial Department. For a catalogue raisonné of Robert Harrison's work and a list of publications please visit <https://robertharrison.co/>

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## 4 CERAMIC ARTS: NEEDED AND WANTED *Sarah Justice*

## 5 ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

## 6 LET THE GAMES BEGIN *Nicole Maria Evans*

## 14 MUSINGS ON SURFACE DREAMS; PAST, PRESENT AND BEYOND *Robert Harrison*

## 22 ROBERT HARRISON—BRICK BY BRICK *Randi O'Brien*

## 28 RE-ACCESS, REFOCUS, REIMAGINE *Nicolle Hamm*

## 32 TELLING IN CONTEXT *Eliza Weber*

## 36 SELECTED DETAILS *Robert Harrison*

## 48 CONTRIBUTORS

## 50 ABOUT THE SQUARE

## CERAMIC ARTS: NEEDED AND WANTED

On behalf of my love for the arts, my love of clay, and the field of ceramics throughout the history of mankind, I write you this letter. Ceramics have served as both functional and ornamental objects to people of all classes. Ceramics do not discriminate; they serve as a necessity for survival as well as a luxury for people all over the world. As time has passed, artists have experimented, recreated, revised, and repurposed the ceramic object and its uses. Having ceramics in a museum setting, for the public view, gives the audience time to contemplate these many uses. How do ceramics serve you? What ceramic objects do you use or display in your home? Do you collect objects or know people who do? Material culture is alive and well. Many pride themselves on their personal collection of objects.

The exhibition *Surface Dreams & Surface Structures: Works by Robert Harrison*, gives the viewer time to contemplate ceramics' historical lineage, material culture (from fine china to collectibles), architecture, overabundance, prestige, and to examine once loved objects that have been discarded. This exhibition holds something for everyone and brings a sense of nostalgia for many. The Square has created a scavenger hunt for adults and children alike to connect with the work and look—really look—at all that there is to discover in the complexity of this exhibition. Robert Harrison includes original ceramic sculptures mixed into the exhibition for you to explore, find, and reflect on. What does material culture look like to you? Does this exhibition evoke any long-lost memories? Do ceramic objects bring you a sense of comfort and happiness or do they bring up memories that you just want to discard?

There is something for everyone in this exhibition and we hope you will find the artist's statements and the audio accessible tour in the gallery illuminating as you explore. In conjunction with this exhibition the museum has organized events including a lecture panel featuring Robert Harrison with essayists from the catalogue, as well as an exciting workshop taught by Harrison himself. These opportunities allow us all to enjoy and learn something new about the field of contemporary ceramics, about ourselves, and the material world around us.

With gratitude,



Sarah Justice, Executive Director

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We are extremely grateful to our featured artist Robert Harrison for his dedication to the Montana ceramic, artist, and museum community. Especially for his longstanding and ongoing support of Paris Gibson Square Museum of Art throughout the years. His outstanding commitment to the arts is made visible not only through his exhibitions and site-specific artwork but also because of his unabashed championing of Montana art institutions, especially The Square. Harrison has worked enthusiastically with the exhibition's curator, Nicole Maria Evans, to give careful attention to lending and shipping requests, dedication of time and travel for installation, while being available to give of himself through written words and spoken discussions. As well as the time and effort made to approach new educational opportunities through in gallery curatorial learning moments, and the coordination of an exciting artist workshop which he developed with Eliza Weber, Director of Education. Every detail in the presentation of the work is meaningfully structured and thought provoking.

An important acknowledgement to those within our institution: to Executive Director, Sarah Justice, who has built support, found solutions, and encouraged the success of the exhibition in every way imaginable; to our Board of Directors, thank you. Without their continued patronage of the museum the exhibition, sculpture installation, and catalogue would not have been possible; to Nicole Maria Evans, our Curator of Exhibitions and Collections, for working closely with Robert Harrison to organize *Surface Dreams & Superstructures*, and for moving through every detail of the exhibition process with grace and skill. This includes managing and coordinating the exhibition and sculpture installation, panel discussion, gallery learning, and catalogue project to completion; to Eliza Weber, Director of Education for managing all community educational programming including the coordination of hands-on art activities that correlate with this exhibition. Robert Harrison worked with Eliza Weber to create an artist workshop that helps build connections between the visual and the tactile. Giving the community an opportunity to work with the artist using materials and methods featured in the exhibition.

Thank you to all our contributing writers, Nicole Maria Evans, Robert Harrison, Randi O'Brien, Nicolle Hamm, and Eliza Weber. We thank them for their enthusiasm and commitment to the ceramic arts as scholars, educators, or practicing artists in the field of ceramic art. Their combined perspectives on Robert Harrison's contributions have enriched the understanding and discussion of his work within and beyond the context of the exhibition.

It is with deep gratitude that we thank our special anonymous donor for supporting this publication's production. The museum deeply appreciates this important community patronage, which has made the printing of this catalogue and all related exhibition materials

a reality. The catalogue is a permanent record of the exhibition and is proof of the museum's significant contributions to the arts and humanities. The museum is profoundly grateful.

Sculpture installation is a process and takes many hands, minds, and machines. Thank you to Robert Harrison for his detailed attention and willingness to transport and oversee his sculpture installation. To Sarah Justice, Executive Director, and Nicole Maria Evans, Curator of Exhibitions and Collections for reaching out and acquiring community investment in the sculpture project through donations. To Mark Harant from Harant Heating, Cooling, and Remodeling who donated time, manpower, skill, and equipment for the concrete work. Another thanks to Tom Harant from H & H Enterprises for donating his time, skill, and equipment for the crane work needed for the lifting and placement of the sculpture. To Geoffrey Stocking, Chief of Exhibitions and Collections at the CM Russell Museum for lending a hand and giving needed guidance in the installation of the sculptures. To Danny Schaak, Facilities Manager, for prepping the space and physically removing all the plant overgrowth in preparation for the installation of new landscaping that would be beneficial to the museum's historic building and the sculptures. Tilleraas Landscaping and Nursery, for their donation towards the landscaping of the northside of the building in preparation for the sculptural installation. Thank you all for your support.

Thank you to Eric Heidle, catalogue designer, for his keen eye and thoughtfulness in making this catalogue. His enthusiasm for the arts and the efforts put forth by the museum and artist community are energizing. To Sara Johnson, Operations Manager, for her work photographing the exhibition galleries and artwork, and managing the marketing initiatives. Without their combined effort the catalog would not be. Natalie Woodson, Curatorial Assistant, has put forth earnest effort and joy in carrying out the completion of the in-gallery education opportunities such as the audio tour and scavenger hunt. Her ability to take direction, create, and collaborate produced wonderful additions to the exhibition experience. To Kelly's Signs and Designs for their commitment to donating time and effort towards gallery vinyl creation and installation, as well as graphic signage for the exhibition and museum projects as a whole.

To our museum team at The Square who dedicate their time and expertise to making this exhibition a success. Thank you for all their hard work preparing the galleries and educational programming, especially Danny Schaak, (past) Facilities Manager; Rob Kellenbeck, Education Assistant; Brent Viste, Gift Shop Manager; Julie Easton, Director of Development; Marty Cappis, Bookkeeper.

Finally, we have deep gratitude for the arts, humanities, and education in Montana. Thankful to our community, and our friends and family. For their joy and encouragement.

Introduction by  
Nicole Maria Evans

Curator of Exhibitions and Collections,  
Paris Gibson Square Museum of Art

# Let the Games Begin

*“I attempt to work as sustainably as possible. Specific choices of previously fired material that retains a historic context along with surfaces that combine expressive painterly qualities along with the use of collaged ceramic decal imagery form a unique surface on the artwork. Each work is individual and expressive and tells a story. I work intuitively when choosing materials and creating the surfaces and ask the viewer to interpret each work individually.”*

—Robert Harrison, 2023

*Surface Dreams & Superstructures, Works by Robert Harrison* highlights selected and new works by artist Robert Harrison, celebrated for his ceramic sculptures and architecturally inspired site-specific installations. The work is presented by Paris Gibson Square Museum of Art and is showcased within the Wylder Gallery as well as the museum’s Sculpture Garden. The exhibition explores interactions between the built environment and interior domestic space—both real, implied, and imagined. The intent of the exhibition is to address intermingling dichotomies of meaning between the swirling decal dreamscapes, agglomerations of objects, architectural forms, and space, all while emphasizing society’s relationship with wealth, waste, and history.

Harrison’s dedication to invention, innovation, and sustainability within the field of ceramics is indicated through his work and practice. His enthusiasm for researching the historic precedents of Fine china, brick making, ancient structures, and functional and technical innovations in ceramics or architecture goes beyond appreciation. Harrison has built a 40-plus-year career as a leader in the field of ceramics and site-specific architectural installation. He is known across the United States for his work

on sustainable arts, made evident in the 2013 publication of his book *Sustainable Ceramics: A Practical Guide*. His deep connoisseurship and practice reinvigorate appreciation of discarded creations or materials, with a critical yet humorous tone which has transformed the field of ceramics in Montana and the United States.

His commitment and dedication to the field of ceramics is seen in his 35-year association with the Archie Bray Foundation for the Ceramic Arts in Helena, Montana, where he began in the summer of 1982 as a Resident Artist and where he served from 1983–85 as a full time Resident Artist. In 1993, he was appointed to the Board of Directors of the Bray and served as President of the Board from 1998–2004, overseeing the first capital campaign at the Bray and construction of new year-round resident artists’ studios and resident center. He continues to serve on the facilities committee. Harrison holds Bachelor of Fine Arts and Master of Fine Arts degrees in Ceramics and is a member of the International Academy of Ceramics, Geneva (IAC), World Association of Brick Artists (WABA), and Royal Canadian Academy of Arts (RCA). He is a Fellow of the National Council on Education for the Ceramic Arts (NCECA). His exhibition and installation record is extensive and global.



Big Red House & Silver Structural House at the Paris Gibson Square Museum of Art.



Robert Harrison with maquette of *Gibson Gateway* during construction on site at Paris Gibson Square Museum of Art, 1993. Photo credit: Paris Gibson Square Museum of Art

Paris Gibson Square Museum of Art is honored to have Robert Harrison return to the museum as a celebration of the 30th anniversary of the *Gibson Gateway* built by Harrison in 1993. His return to the museum includes a new and exciting permanent feature of *Surface Dreams & Superstructures, Works by Robert Harrison*. Harrison once again presents newly commissioned outdoor sculptures located on the north side of the museum's historic 1896 building. The sculptures are titled *Big Red House & Silver Structural House, 2023*; they occupy a physical place and imply a space of strength and gathering. It has been over 8 years since new permanent sculptures were installed on the museum campus. They are important additions to the museum's permanent collection. Bright, large, and sturdy, in red powder-coated steel and bright aluminum. The sculptures are adeptly balanced on one corner atop a vertical support and represent the basic upper structural portion of a museum, schoolhouse, or home (the architectural term is the superstructure). They represent a space of welcome, strength, knowledge, and acceptance.

*Gibson Gateway*, Harrison's first site-specific sculpture in the museum's Sculpture Garden is located on the south side of the building, and its creation formed part of the inauguration of the museum's Sculpture Garden and related directly to the bigger picture of the museum's early goals as an institution. In 1995, the museum launched its first successful Capital Campaign only two short years after the installation of Harrison's sculpture. At that time, with great community support, the campaign led to transformation and success for the museum. *Gibson Gateway*, 1993, like *Big Red House & Silver Structural House, 2023* reference strength and



ABOVE AND TOP RIGHT: *Let The Games Begin Long House, 2022*, Altered porcelain tiles with china paint, ceramic decals, painted wood; 26 x 19 x 14 inches



MIDDLE RIGHT: Detail: *Flying Goose, Toad & Two Houses; 2020*, Wood-fired hand built houses with white slip, ceramic decals & gold luster, collected & altered porcelain tile, china paint, ceramic decals, gold luster; 21 x 17 x 1 inches



BELOW RIGHT: This display is an educational moment in the gallery with informational description. The display is meant to present a collection of Robert's tchotchkes in their raw material from before they become his works of art.



Installation image of *Surface Dreams & Superstructures* at Paris Gibson Square Museum of Art, 2023. Photo credit: Paris Gibson Square Museum of Art



OPPOSITE TOP: *Kewpie Tea Cup*; 2016, Reclaimed/repurposed porcelain, Lefton Kewpie figure, china paint, decals and gold luster; 12 x 9 inches.

OPPOSITE BOTTOM: *White Rabbit Koi Long House*; 2017, Reclaimed/repurposed, altered porcelain, tile shard, wood fired hand-built architectural element with white slip, ceramic decals, gold luster, 9 x 6 x 7.5 inches.

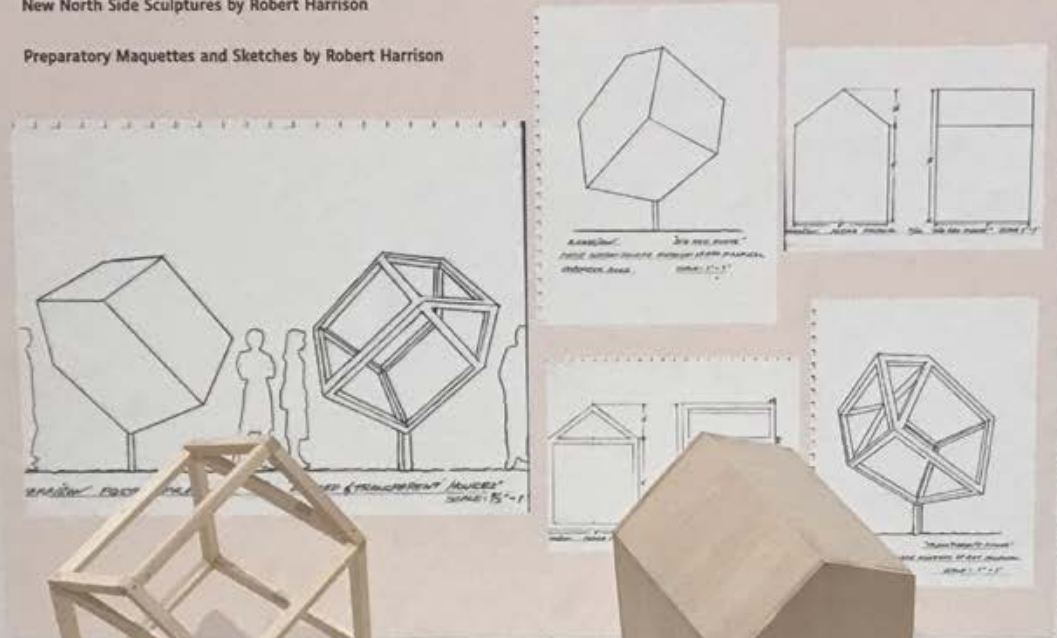
opportunity but through different materials made of brick and mortar, formed into arched passageways that reference the turn-of-the-century Romanesque architecture of Paris Gibson Square Museum of Art. It too is influenced by play or whimsy as suggested by the colorful ornamental pieces embedded into the surface. These sculptures now complement each other and the museum in the round. They unify the beginning phases of the Sculpture Garden on the south side and reveal action towards the future of the museum with the addition of new works on the north side. The new works are integral to affirming the continued importance of the museum within our community as a place for innovation, cultural legacy, and progress.

In juxtaposition, the encounter with the indoor exhibition space of *Surface Dreams & Superstructures* may appear in stark contrast to the sturdy and balanced structures on the exterior of the building. At their core the works offer the viewer the opportunity to investigate complex meaning through the materials and objects that are incorporated by Harrison into the work. The exhibition on the interior of the museum is like entering a lavish surrealistic fine china shop; a luxurious boutique filled with quixotic manmade opulence. The white walls of the gallery glow, showcasing the embellished gold luster surfaces with showy souvenir knick-knacks, mass produced collectibles, fine porcelain figurines, and bargain bin dishes combined with decalomania and the handcrafted touch of ceramic works made by Harrison. The exterior sculptures and the interior ceramic pieces tie together for an inviting conversation comparing strength and fragility represented through objects, structures, interactions, and imagination.



The Design Process for Paris Gibson Square Museum of Art's  
New North Side Sculptures by Robert Harrison

Preparatory Maquettes and Sketches by Robert Harrison



Preparatory maquettes and sketches for *Big Red House* & *Silver Structural House*.

**Big Red House & Silver Structural House**  
The two latest additions to the museum's Sculpture Garden are sited on the north side of the historic building. I was fortunate to win a public art competition in 2022 for Gibson Gateway which grows the south side of the building, where most where I might consider making a new sculpture for the grounds. I focused on the north side of the building, hoping to bring renewed interest and focus to the historic architecture of the old high school and it's two entrances framed by historic stone columns and arches.

I have been working with the basic image of a universal house form for the past four decades. The focus on the universal house form connects both my large scale outdoor and museum installations with my studio activity. I enjoy working on smaller studio works, typically during the winter months and then shift my activity to large scale outdoor activity in the form of commissions and installations in the summer months. One body of work peels off the other. Ideas that come in the studio occasionally are transferred to my large-scale work and vice versa. I am so intrigued with a small hand-held object as a large scale outdoor architectural sculpture.

I typically begin working on a large-scale outdoor sculpture with scale drawings, often followed with scale models. I choose to draw with pencil and paper and make the final wood models by hand. I enjoy the joy of the planning process which gives me the information I need to work up a budget and contract for the sculpture. I close to work with smaller scale steel and aluminum tubing for these two structures taking into consideration durability and low maintenance aspects.

I was fortunate to find a very talented young fabricator to work with to realize, MFC for this project. Colton Schuster of Schuster's Metal Artwork and Welding proved to be excellent to work with and a skilled fabricator. He has a tremendous skillset for a young welder and we weathered a long day for fabricator with modern tools along with a provided welding shop. -Robert Harrison

A blindfolded man in a suit with arms outstretched is featured on the face of *Let The Games Begin Long House*, 2022, one of Harrison's ceramic tile house structures. Without direction or concerns, the blindfolded man finds his way through puzzling, beautiful, and phantasmagoric waves of china paint and precisely placed decals. We as visitors are likened to this experience upon entry into the exhibition space. Our eyes are wide open and able to guide us through the entrancing space, yet the encounter is akin to that of the blindfolded man. Our hands are bound, and the impulse to touch is ever looming. It appears that there is little to no control over what we are facing, as the abundance of visual information overcomes us. Nevertheless, the closer we look, the more we see ourselves and our life stories reflected in the images, objects, and shapes we observe. We see that we are not lost, but we must take the time to understand.

The built environment and the parts and pieces of the domestic interior of a home, especially its most utilitarian objects or ceramic items of supposed luxury, are key to understanding the passion and purpose in Harrison's work. The teacup, the brick, the arch, the plate, or Hummel figurine produce multifaceted and multilayered meanings connected to our identity as people or individuals.

Meaning appears enigmatic, but what can be observed as central to Harrison's interest is understanding how people bring purpose into their lives through structures, objects, and materials. The power people wield to create or destroy, and the option to do either is enormous. In this way, Harrison can be likened to an urban anthropologist of sorts, studying current archeological ruins and the cultural behaviors of humans by mining the vast



Danny Schaak, Tom Harant, Nicole Maria Evans, Robert Harrison, Geoff Stocking, Natalie Woodson, and Sarah Justice during installation of *Silver Structural House*.

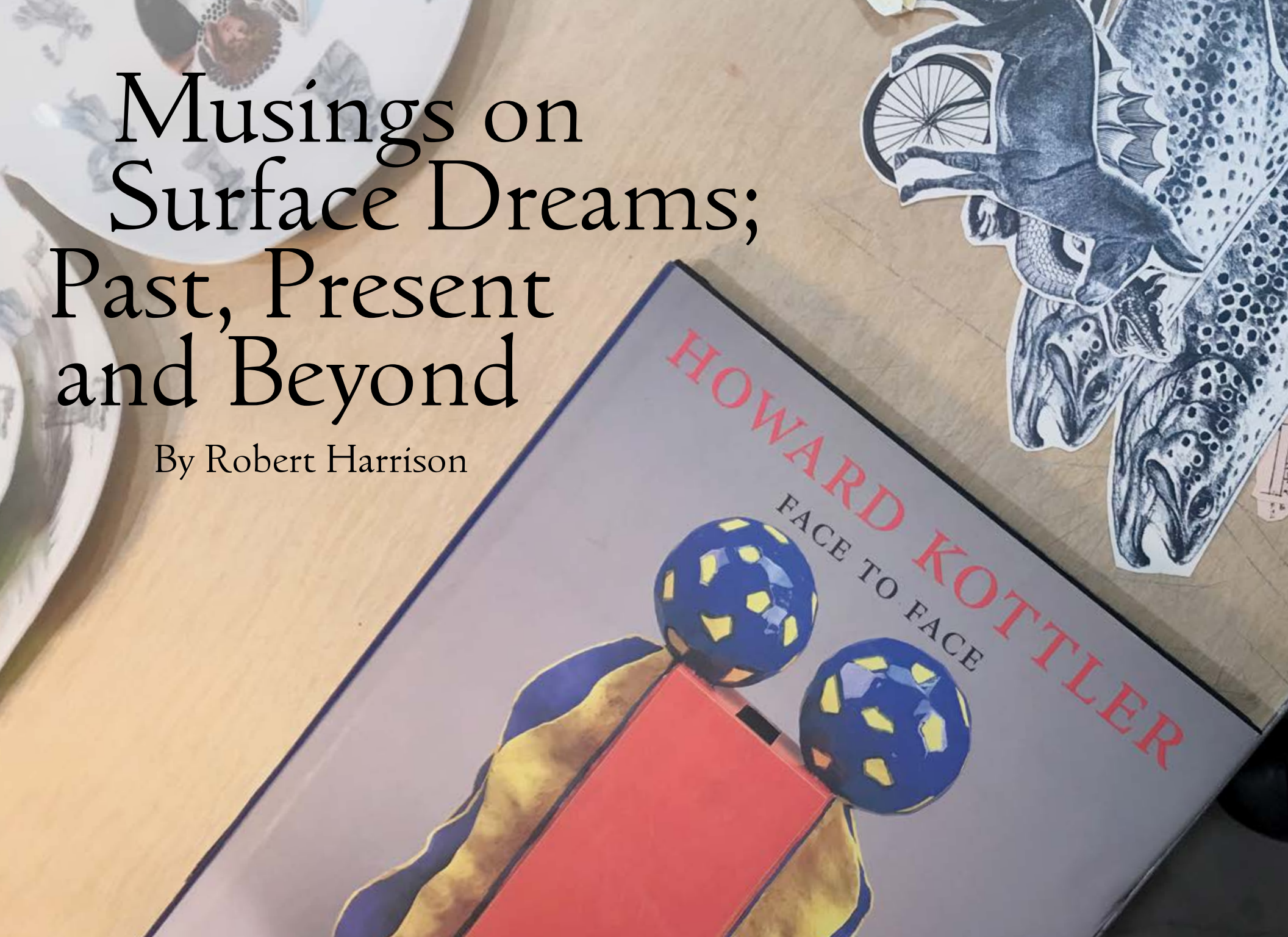
consumeristic remains of contemporary past/present. It is within these fragmented superstructures of relics known today as antique markets or thrift stores, that our discarded dreams and hopes take the shape of tchotchkes, trinkets, and porcelain memorabilia. They sit within a labyrinth of warehouse chambers waiting for new life and meaning.

Meaning and purpose are in perpetual motion in Harrison's *Surface Dreams & Superstructures*—never absent but only waiting to be found and reignited through attention, humor, dedication, and passion. His work emphasizes that nothing is lost, only rediscovered. ■



# Musings on Surface Dreams; Past, Present and Beyond

By Robert Harrison



## FORMATIVE DEVELOPMENT

I am fortunate to have been born into a family that embraced the arts, culture and nature.

The 1950s seemed an era of endless possibilities, quite perfect for dreaming about life's possibilities. The 1960s decade in which young people embraced the concepts of love and peace along with rock and roll were pivotal to my development as a young artist.

I came from a working-class family with grandparents who had emigrated from Northern Europe. I stood on the shoulders of immigrants who like so many others, worked incredibly hard to provide for their families and improve their lives for their children.

The greatest gift my generation was given, was the gift of choosing a direction in life. I have many family members who chose a career in the arts, musicians, actors and visual artists, so the idea of pursuing a career in the arts was seemed natural for myself and my family.

My childhood home was filled with music, musical instruments and all types of visual art.

My parents attended the theatre, opera and musical performances and would often take my brother and I along, exposing us to many forms of creative cultural endeavors.

I have several vivid memories from my childhood, probably from between the ages of 4 and 6.

One memory involved attending an exhibition of Van Gogh's paintings at the Art Museum, and remembering my excitement at seeing the 'Sunflowers' paintings and the bright impressionistic color and thick application of paint in the paintings.

The second vivid memory was watching a potter working on a potter's wheel, throwing pots.



ABOVE: *Silver Structural House.*

OPPOSITE: Exhibition books about Howard Kottler and ceramic decals on Harrison's studio desk.

Like so many others, seeing the magic of working a lump of clay on a kick wheel was completely mesmerizing and life changing.

The other gift my parents gave me was a deep appreciation of nature. Our family took every opportunity to spend countless weekends exploring wild, natural places, with my father fishing in rivers and my mother taking my brother and I on hikes nearby, identifying plants, trees and rocks.

These memories helped my development as an artist, and formed the foundation for my creative pursuits.

## COLLAGE, CHINA PAINT AND CERAMIC DECALS

I can trace my present day use of china paint and ceramic decal surfaces to experience during my childhood, my adolescence and my art school education. There are two important childhood memories that have helped define my focus on the use of ceramic decals and china paint.

One vivid memory from my childhood involves my grandmother who taught me how to decorate Ukrainian Easter eggs. Using a stylus, wax and colored dyes, the delicate handling of the hollow eggs formed an early impression on my creative abilities. The memory of sitting at a kitchen table with my grandmother creating small handheld objects still resonates with me as I continue to enjoy the making of hand sized ceramic art works.

I can trace my development of collage skills to my childhood, when my mother taught me how to carefully cut up Christmas cards and paste the cutout images together. I believe that early activity formed the basis of the collage work I developed during my adolescent years when I combined figure drawings with images cut from magazines. Spending time creating these collages during this time directly connected my childhood to my development as an artist.

Graduating high-school, I stood at the forks in the road ahead. My debate was between going into architecture school or art school. I put together a portfolio and applied to art school. I entered the School of Art as a two-dimensional artist, focused on painting and photography. In my sophomore year a good friend of mine suggested I take a ceramics course, and the rest as they say is history.



*Extruded Round House Towers, 2022, Extruded & altered white clay, glazed, china paint, ceramic decals, gold luster; 12 X 3.5 inch diameter installation)*

I loved the malleability of clay, the complexity of the science and technical aspect of the ceramics medium, the mixing of earth elements and materials, the alchemy of turning earth into art through the use of fire, and the familial aspect of the medium; the friendly, welcoming, comfortable and sharing atmosphere the ceramics program. I had found my people!

Electing to major in ceramics entering my junior year of art school, I recall there were two pivotal moments. The first was an introduction to the use of china paint by a traditional china painter who taught our class the uses and applications of china paint on porcelain objects.

The second moment was, by fortuitous coincidence, an exhibition of exciting new work by the ceramic artist Howard Kottler installed at the School of Art Gallery. This exhibition of industrially manufactured porcelain plates made use of commercially produced ceramic decals that Howard had acquired and altered, then collaged and fired onto the surfaces of the plates. Howard Kottler's use of commercial/industrial material in such a refreshing and contemporary way in the early 1970s had a profound influence on my ceramic art making, which continues to this day.

I never regret the choices I made early on in my career and continue to revel in the ceramics medium and community worldwide. I'm proud of the fact that by the end of the first ten years of working as a professional ceramic artist, I was focused and had gained enough confidence in myself as a maker, to work in two directions simultaneously; pursuing my love of creating large-scale architecturally based sculpture along with maintaining a robust and evolving body of ceramic based studio work for exhibitions in museums and galleries.



*Installation of Hommage Too for August the Strong, Extruded Round House Towers, Round Houses & Folded Octagon Houses.*



*Aquatic Dreamscape Tall House, 2022, Altered porcelain tiles with china paint, ceramic decals, painted wood; 25 x 14 x 14 inches (Tall House)*



**SURFACE DREAMS AND BEYOND;  
LINKING MY LARGE-SCALE OUTDOOR  
WORKS TO THE STUDIO WORKS**

The work in this exhibition at Paris Gibson Square Museum of Art was created in my Granitewood Studio west of Helena, Montana over the span of the last decade. The works ranges from large-scale arch pieces for the wall to small hand altered extruded pieces designed to be presented as a table top grouping, as well as porcelain plates, three-dimensional collage pieces along with architecturally based porcelain tile wall pieces and large porcelain tile Houses.

I have chosen to work with porcelain materials as it provides a neutral white surface which highlights the use of china paint and ceramic decal surfaces. My personal charge is to challenge myself annually, experimenting in some unexplored way, that move my ideas forward.

I collect vintage porcelain that have the potential to be altered thorough cutting and reassembly along through the additions of china paint and ceramic decals fired onto the surfaces. Vintage materials

bring a built-in history to the work and creating with this material has had the added benefit of periodically being contacted by individuals who want to donate work to my collection for use or to commission a piece utilizing porcelain collected by them or their family.

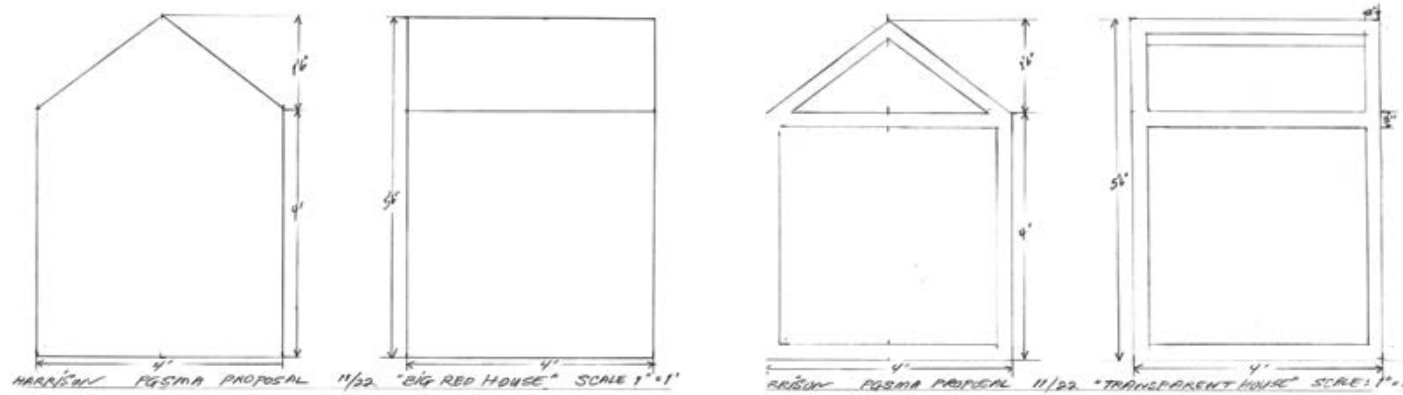
I enjoy combining vintage and more recently produced industrial porcelain pieces, some functional and some sculptural. My love and fascination with functional objects come from my early training as a potter, and my love of both historic and contemporary vessel forms. I think of these works as 3-D collages.

My love of architecture and the influence of classical Greco-Roman architecture ranging to Postmodern architecture is ongoing and an elemental aspect of my work. I made a conscious decision years ago to strengthen the relationship between my large-scale outdoor work and my studio activity. The change of scale and use of materials creates ongoing challenges which continue to help evolve my ideas and work, with working in one scale often feeding ideas in another scale.

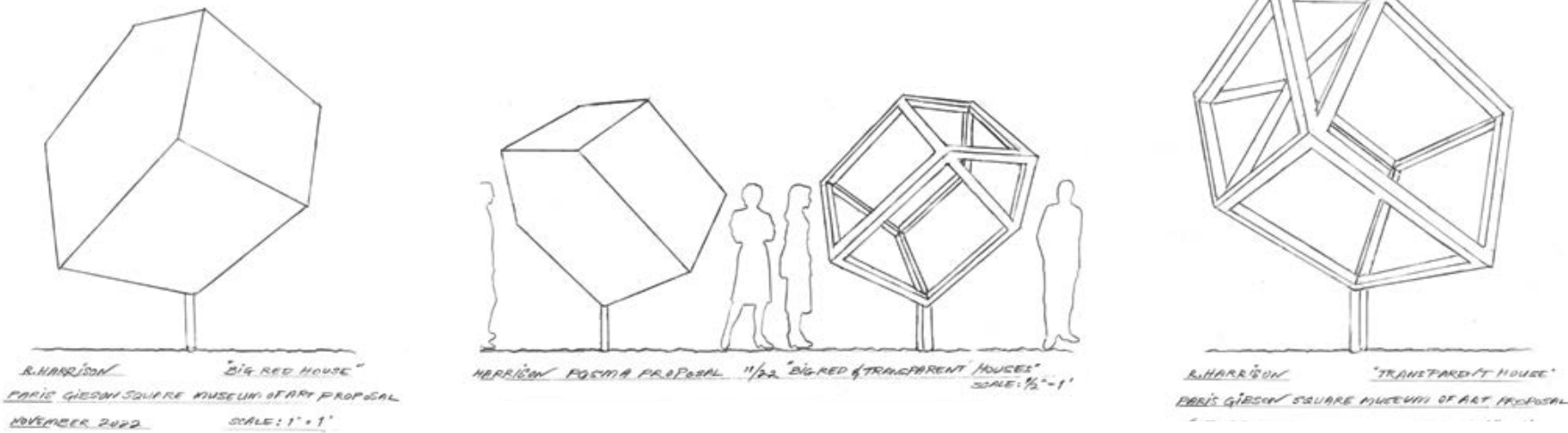
A few of the hundreds of porcelain figurines collected in Harrison's Granitewood Studio.



The Granitewood Studio in Helena points to Harrison's love of both small-scale and architectural work.



Preparatory sketches for Big Red House & Silver Structural House.



Installation of Big Red House at Paris Gibson Square Museum of Art, 2023.

and knowing the influence Howard had on my early ceramic development, generously offered to send me a number of his collected decals. Needless to say, I was excited beyond belief, but also felt a real responsibility to honor Howard with some porcelain plates made in my own style using both china paint and his vintage decals. I recently finished this series of plates and will have them on display at my Granitewood Studio this summer.

### BIG RED HOUSE AND SILVER STRUCTURAL HOUSE

The indoor exhibition at PGSMOA coincides with the installation of two new permanent outdoor sculptures gifted to the museum

collection. Fabricated in Helena earlier this year, the *Big Red House* and the *Silver Structural House* were designed specifically to complement the beautiful Montana sandstone entrances on the north side of the museum. Architect William White's 1896 Central High School is one of the crown jewels of historic architecture in Montana and my goal was to bring renewed attention to this part of the building.

I worked with fabricator Colton Schluter in Helena to execute the 2 large house forms, one in aluminum channel stock and one in powder-coated plate-steel. ■

May 20, 2023

# Robert Harrison Brick By Brick

by Randi O'Brien, Associate Professor, Irvine Valley College, and Editor for *Studio Potter* Journal

The Paris Gibson Square Museum of Art's commitment to creativity has been integral to Robert Harrison's story since the beginning. Despite his global recognition and national prominence, Harrison has always remembered the support he received from the Paris Gibson Square as he pioneered architectural, site-specific, and large-scale ceramic installations.

Coming from a cultural and philosophical background of repurposing, recycling, and sustainability—all hallmarks of his art—Harrison arrived in Helena, Montana, in the summer of 1982 with his wife, Christel, after receiving a residency invitation from the then-director of the Archie Bray Foundation, Kurt Weiser. The Bray was still a relatively small pottery at the time. Harrison came to Helena as a trained potter and head of the ceramics program at Gonzaga University in Spokane, Washington. In 1984, midway into Harrison's residency, the Bray family brickyard was purchased, and the Bray footprint expanded across multiple acres of land with access to tons of raw material. "I was unexpectedly able to explore some of the larger-scale, on-site issues I was infatuated with. That experience really did it for me in terms of building my confidence and establishing credibility for some of my big outdoor works," Harrison reflects.

The brickyard acquisition and the timeliness of Harrison's residency gave rise to rapid developments



for both The Bray and Harrison's career as a sculptor. While many of Harrison's Postmodernist counterparts received notoriety for their role in developing the Bray's history, Harrison has gone somewhat shadowed. His humble and selfless demeanor is contrary to those of his forefathers. The romantic myth of the isolated artist genius—private, exempt from societal responsibility, a symbol of individualism—has crippled art's effectiveness and influence in the social world. The Postmodernist aesthetics of the past seventy years have conditioned us and has gone hand in hand

with individualism, marketing, and consumerism, celebrating art objects that are not created for moral, practical, or social reasons—speaking nothing of the community the art might serve. While many historians and critics scrutinize this myth, artists like Robert Harrison have not fallen victim to this cultural trance. Instead, he has built a career—a socially rich practice—that is intrinsically interwoven between community and creation, between producer and product, and between self and society.

The Bray campus teems with Harrison's sculptures; his work is an icon of the Bray landscape and appears in every book, catalog, and tourist snapshot. Though Harrison has received acclaim for his sculptures, he has yet to be actively contextualized as a figure who, brick by brick, set the steadfast foundation for site-specific experimentation in the 1990s and program stability throughout the Bray's continued growth. Although Rudy Autio was the first to explore architectural ceramic by means of tiled murals on the Bray campus in 1952, Harrison was the first to explore actual architectural structures, towers, walls, and arches freestanding from conventional buildings. Harrison is the first Bray resident to unite his art within the surrounding environment, and Harrison has set a visual legacy and the literal foundation for the next generation of artists to experiment on the Bray grounds.

ABOVE: *Hungarian Arch*, 2006, Site-specific architectural sculpture; brick, ceramic elements, steel, concrete, 10 ft. High x 10 ft. Wide x 3 ft. Deep. International Ceramic Studio, Kecskemet, Hungary. Photo credit: Robert Harrison

OPPOSITE: Robert standing in threshold of *Gibson Gateway*, 1993, Site-specific architectural sculpture, brick, mortar, concrete, steel, wood, ceramic elements, 50 ft. Long x 25 ft. Deep x 18 ft. High. Paris Gibson Square Museum of Art Commission, Great Falls, Montana. Permanent Collection 1993.13. Archival Photo: Robert Harrison. Harrison was the winner of a nationwide competition organized by Paris Gibson Square Museum of Art to inaugurate the beginning of the museum's Sculpture Garden.



*Gimhae Arch*, 2009, fired in dustrially produced materials; brick and densely fired, glazed ceramic electrical insulators Gimhae, Korea, 8 ft. Wide x 2 ft. Deep x 9.5 ft. High, Gimhae ClayArch Museum - Gimhae, Korea. Photo credit: Robert Harrison

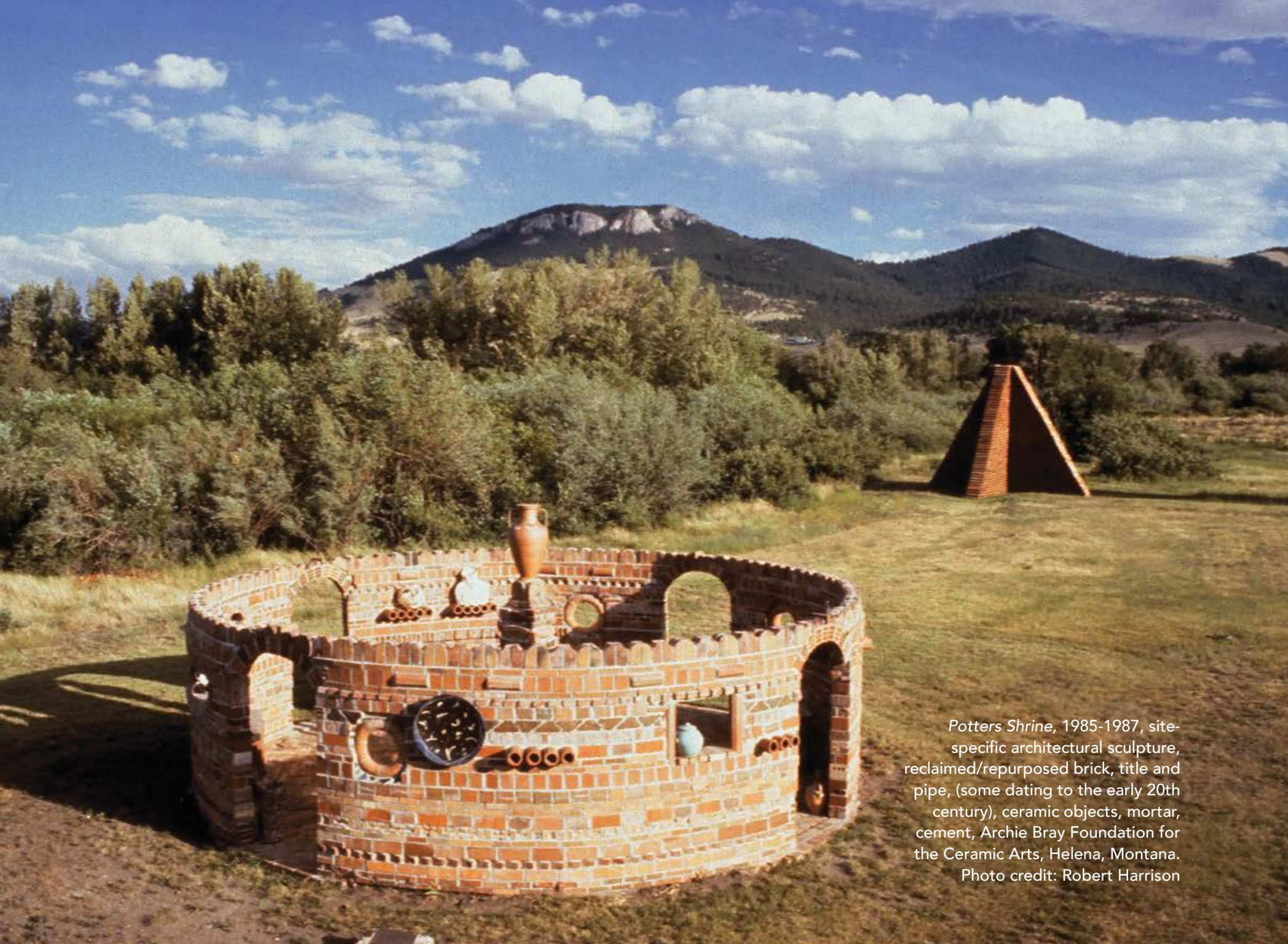
Harrison's uncontextualized, undervalued service is largely attributed to his gentle nature; nurturing, patience, and building stability are often hidden gifts, but Harrison is generous. In his forty-year tenure at the Bray, starting as the materials manager (1983–1984), serving as the board president (1998–2004), and currently serving on the facilities committee, Harrison has focused his efforts on an integrated mode of connection, focusing on the relational nature of the organization rather than his site-specific installations or his singular contributions. When he spoke of his presidential board service for the National Council on Education for the Ceramic Arts (NCECA), as well as his service to the Green Taskforce within the NCECA organization, and his international service as a founding member of the World Association of Brick Artists, his response was the opposite of the self-assertion and power-oriented notions that we are conditioned to expect from successful artists.

Harrison is genuinely considerate and un-pretentious. Spain, Ireland, Latvia, Korea, Denmark, Canada, and China, among others, pepper his public works record. Still, when asked about what works he considers most notable, his 1993 commission, *Gibson Gateway*, for the Paris Gibson Museum of Art ranks at the top of the list. "The Paris Gibson Square is where I did my first major outdoor public art piece. It was a seminal moment in my career. The opportunity came as a competition, and I later learned that some of the people who applied were people I greatly admired. For me, at the time, receiving the commission was a fantastic self-confidence boost; it was another step up, confirming that public art was where I was headed. Those kinds of moments are seminal and validating."

From the onset of his sculptural career with his first site-specific architectural installations, *Tilex* (1985) and *Potters Shrine* (1985–1987), and his commissioned work for the Paris Gibson Square (1993), Harrison embraced the geographic and communal dimensions of his sculptures. A career bolstered by the freedom of space and connectivity of community in Montana. As Harrison describes it, "Montana has been so incredibly receptive." Although living in urban city centers might offer exposure and visual inspiration for architectural sculptures, Harrison was intentional in his decision to call Montana home: "Being in the country is an entirely different experience from being in the city; there is a connected experience between people when they are dealing with the reality of the land."

Aerial view Potters Shrine, 1985-1987  
underway at Archie Bray Foundation  
for the Ceramic Arts, Helena, Montana.  
Archival photo: Robert Harrison





*Potters Shrine*, 1985-1987, site-specific architectural sculpture, reclaimed/repurposed brick, tile and pipe, (some dating to the early 20th century), ceramic objects, mortar, cement, Archie Bray Foundation for the Ceramic Arts, Helena, Montana. Photo credit: Robert Harrison

Art itself—and, by proxy, artists—are not ancillary solutions to the ecosystem of dysfunctional relationships like consumerism or environmentalism. By contrast, Harrison has repositioned himself as a laborer, listener, and educator. Harrison's site-specific sculptures become conduits for the community's experience, wherein he witnesses, listens, and feels the reality taking place around him and applies regionally specific materials to create a socially responsive work of art.

Although Harrison's work is exhibited and publicly commissioned in over fourteen countries, four Canadian provinces, and over twenty-four US states, he has been a thread of continuity in the Montana art community. Visually, his works are spread across the state at over twenty-six locations, but more importantly, in the connective aesthetics that Harrison promotes is how his communal legacy will represent the keystone of his art practice. Harrison affirmed, "The Bray and the State of Montana are important places. They connect to your heart, and you keep these memories and spaces in your soul; they become part of you. The Bray radiates energy and gives and radiates energy to the community. There's the community, obviously, of ceramics, but then there's the landscape, environment, and other social communities. Choosing to live here is an investment we made, and we want to see our investment grow in the healthiest way." Harrison is humble when he recounts the accolades that make him a mentor, educator, and one of the world's most prominent architectural ceramic artists.

Harrison's selfless service and connective aesthetics will be an active contributor to seeding a new consciousness—a new canon of artists—attuned to nurturing and caring for the human experience. ■

<sup>1</sup> Peter Held and Rick Newby, *A Ceramic Continuum: Fifty Years of the Archie Bray Influence* (Holter Museum of Art, 2001), 55.



Harrison building pillar for *Potters Shrine*, 1985-1987, Archie Bray Foundation for the Ceramic Arts, Helena, Montana. Archival photo: Robert Harrison



# Re-access, Refocus, Reimagine

By Nicole Hamm

Ceramic Artist, and Administrator & Community  
Programmer at the Missoula Art Museum

Brick piles at the Archie Bray Foundation  
for Ceramics Arts, Helena, Montana,  
2012. Photo credit: Robert Harrison

The early days of humanity are recorded in clay. The craft is ancient, perhaps the longest-standing form of human expression, a record, not only of art and history, but of the earth. Contemporary clay artists continue the chronicle, one that expresses the transformation of the art post Industrial Revolution. Ceramic art now exists in a world of globalization, in vast contrast to the lives of early potters, who dug their clay from the ground beneath them and hand-processed it to create precious objects.

Generations of growth and industrialization have altered the craft. As ceramic tableware grew in popularity among the upper class, competition between trade routes began to affect the world of clay; white porcelain was highly sought after, other styles were co-opted, and the locality of materials no longer determined regional production. The extraction industry continued and persisted, fueled by aesthetic trends. Ceramicists today question the morality of using finite, resource-intensive materials to create new objects in a world where commercial ceramics dominate the market, and mechanized processes produce mugs by the millions.

Many artists are now aware of the environmental cost of their materials, energy-consumptive firing techniques, toxic glazes, and other issues of sustainability in the field. Robert Harrison was an early advocate for creating solutions to these problems and providing others with ways to mitigate their carbon impact. His interest in sustainability arose from necessity, reared by a family who had experienced the Great Depression and were consequently frugal. Raised as a careful consumer, it was only natural for Harrison to carry these values into his career.

Academically trained as a potter, he was, and remains, a fan of functional high-fire porcelain works, but was an early advocate of reduced firing temperatures due to his awareness of the energy crisis. Though most ceramicists at the time did not ruminate over the effect of temperature on carbon impact, Harrison saw this as a solution to reduce it dramatically. He began creating more sculptural work and incorporating other materials while lowering his firing temperature, escaping the academic pedagogy that clay is everything.

After taking an interest in large-scale, outdoor sculpture while in graduate school, Harrison explored the subject while in residence at the Archie Bray Foundation for the Ceramic Arts. In an act of fate, the Bray purchased the brickyard while Harrison was in residence, giving him an unparalleled opportunity to explore the use of brick, which opened up a myriad of possibilities for the repurposing of materials. This time at the Bray cemented his use of upcycled materials, inaugurating a career of reducing, reusing, reclaiming, and recycling.

Robert is now known internationally for his interpretation of ceramic art and has influenced the way many artists approach their own practice. Harrison has broadened the horizons of what can be considered artistic material, using what is at hand rather than acquiring new. He explores all expressions of the ceramics industry—commercial and industrial, including tile, brick, and handmade objects that have been discarded. He forces the viewer to confront the number of objects already existing in the world, scouring thrift stores all over the country for remnants of American consumerism that is still present today.





Harrison, Robert. *Sustainable Ceramics: A Practical Approach*. London, Bloomsbury, 2013.

He fires onto commercial porcelain pieces—industrially fired to cone 13 or higher—at a lower temperature, keeping his energy consumption minimal and saving ceramic objects from the landfill. Harrison is a true appreciator of the magic of clay objects and has created techniques to extend their lives.

At his core, Harrison is a humanist, optimistic about our collective potential and the artist's nature to learn and evolve. He played an instrumental role in the creation of the National Council on Education for the Ceramic Arts's (NCECA) Green Task Force (GTF), whose mission is to promote sustainable practices through community and the sharing of resources. He humbly says that he was simply in the right place at the right time when ceramic artists were defining terms of sustainability and ways to reduce their impact. His decades of leadership and stewardship allowed the GTF to persist through lean membership years, and the group continues to thrive today.

In 2012, after presenting on a GTF panel at the NCECA conference, Robert was asked to write the first comprehensive book on sustainability in the ceramics studio. After six months of research and an equal amount of time writing, *Sustainable Ceramics* was published and remains a leading resource for the entire clay community. It explores working artists' studios and outlines various ways others have stepped out of the box: alternative fuel kilns, material and water waste mitigation tactics, and considerations for working both small- and large-scale. It contains actionable steps and long-term considerations that have influenced and inspired many to reflect on and alter their practices.

Sustainability is in the architecture of his work and being. His consistency, optimism, and encouragement of young artists to continue the charge is a strength for the community. His sustainable efforts come from his tried-and-true studio process—reassess, refocus, and reimagine. He has long been a proponent and disseminator of accessible, digestible information on sustainable ceramics, and is proof that one can help begin a revolution. "Any small step is a forward step." ■



*Albino Bambi Rides Again*; 2015, Reclaimed/repurposed & altered vintage tile & clay pipe shards, collected & altered porcelain, china paint, ceramic decals; 16 x 12 x 6 inches

*Red Chameleon NK Brick Cup (R)*; 2015, Reclaimed/repurposed, altered & glazed vintage tile shard, gold lustered handbuilt shard, collected & altered porcelain, china paint, ceramic decals; 10 x 7 x 5 inches

*Willow Cove*; 2013, Reclaimed/repurposed, altered & glazed vintage tile and clay pipe shards, collected & altered porcelain, china paint, ceramic decals; 12 x 10 x 6 inches



# Telling In Context

By Eliza Weber

Director of Education,  
Paris Gibson Square Museum of Art

Robert Harrison's weekend workshop, *Storytelling with Robert Harrison: China Paint and Ceramic Decals on Porcelain*, restarts the Education Department's visiting artist series at The Square. In a fitting return to the museum with the addition of 2 new works in the sculpture garden, Harrison's coinciding exhibition, *Surface Dreams & Superstructures*, showcases the diversity of material and process within the fields of ceramics and sculpture.

The Square offers quarterly classes and workshops in ceramics, drawing, painting, printmaking, jewelry, textiles, and more for all ages 7+, with ceramics being the most favored. Additionally, five free art programs run on a weekly to annual schedule from the Curative Art Collective for teens, Senior Art Class, Adults with Disabilities, Veteran Arts Program, and district-wide 3rd Grade Tours. Furthermore, other educational tours and activities create opportunities for local and surrounding area schools and community groups for youth to adults.

The Square considers art for all, with the belief that making connects a viewer to exhibitions by learning through hands-on exploration and ideation. The Education Department strives to create a place that encourages exploration, provides an inclusive space, reveres connection, and celebrates play. Robert Harrison's practice and values as an artist follow suit as his works build associations through objects by creating and telling stories regarding time and place.

Harrison's exhibition will be experienced by all educational programs throughout its duration. Clay All Day summer youth camp students witnessed his intricate installations and developed skill by working in clay for a week themselves.



Dream Art, Make Art, Be Art campers considered layers of imagery and story in mixed media. In the fall, Senior Art Class will use hardwood scrap to create wall and sculptural works referencing accumulation and assemblages. Fall quarter, Adults with Disabilities programming will incorporate press molds and various hand-building techniques to create Harrison-inspired ceramic sculptures.

ABOVE: Young student works in clay during a children's summer art camp at The Square.

OPPOSITE: A student contemplates *Hommage Too for August the Strong* and a pair of Harrison triptychs.



**BOTH IMAGES THIS PAGE:**  
Children participating in Clay  
All Day summer art camp.

A recently created project through a VSA program provided in 2022–2023, under contract with the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, involved discussion on collections, found objects, and value by using pinch, slab, and solid methods to create clay objects with the challenge of assembling them collectively all while creating a story. Annual 3rd Grade Tours take place during the winter months in which students create works of art inspired by current exhibitions, including anticipated Harrison inspired superstructures in connection to personal dreams.

With an artist's talk on Friday night of the September 2023 workshop, participants witness 4 decades of an artist's practice, interests, and career. Discussions along this timeline provide an in-depth understanding of why and how artists make, showing connections to self and the surrounding world. Workshop participants use traditional china paint to add layers to their handmade or found porcelain works that evening. This workshop expands ceramic education in the department by introducing techniques of china paint and decals as alternative firings and surface application methods. Workshop pieces will be revealed from the first firing with newly painted surfaces to begin the process of adding layers of ceramic decals. Decals were purchased via phone between Helena, MT and Jingdezhen, China in an effort between Harrison and friend and colleague, Ryan Mitchell, to select a diversity of imagery and color in keeping with traditional materials. Newly altered and surfaced works are revealed from a third firing with discussion and storytelling to follow.

This expansion of ceramic education provides an opportunity for ceramic makers from

beginner to advanced to explore beyond surface and firing techniques by considering the history of ceramics through global education practices and cultural introductions. Additionally, a focus on object identity will lead discussions and making in consideration of collections and kitsch; functional, decorative, and sculptural forms; craft and skill; production and one-offs; assemblage and collaboration. Themes of place



and time will thread through processes and content, while the concept of value will be both challenged and honored.

Educational opportunities for viewing, dialogue, and making work best in conjunction, as perspective shifts create openings, understandings, and questions. Art museum education brings the disciplines of Museum Studies, Fine Arts, and Art History together, providing an encompassing experience where viewer and maker overlap. The Square's Education Department works to create accessible and inclusive spaces that emphasize curiosity and exploration among the playfulness and professionalism of creating and viewing art. ■

# Selected Details

by Robert Harrison



*Hommage for August the Strong (Gold Arch) 2015, Reclaimed/repurposed vintage porcelain, glass, wood, gold leaf, paint; 48 x 96 x 8 inches*



The large arch wall piece was created as a response to a research study trip to Meissen and Dresden, Germany. Over the years I had become increasingly fascinated with the variety of industrially produced porcelain, distributed world-wide. Previously I had traveled to work in and research historic and contemporary porcelain in China, Korea, England and Denmark. Preparing myself for the trip included reading *The Arcanum*, by Janet Gleeson which I highly recommend to anyone interested in the historic development of German Porcelain.

In Dresden I immersed myself in the large museum galleries and spent time studying the ceramic works collected by and commissioned by Augustus the Strong. The trip was a seminal experience and *Hommage to August the Strong* was the culmination of that experience.

The arch was cut with a CNC router and gold leaf applied to the surface. It was assembled with a painted plywood backing and painted wooden shelves. I collected the ceramic pieces over a 3-year period of monthly visits to two thrift stores in Helena, Montana. I was amazed at the variety of porcelain objects that had found their way to Montana; sculptures and vessels, some quite old and some newer. I intentionally included some of my own hand built sculptural pieces, which merged with the collected porcelain pieces.

Each shelf has a story to tell. I encourage the viewer to look at the assembled objects on each shelf and come up with a story of how they relate to one another and exist together on that particular shelf. My personal favorite porcelain piece is the delicate Madonna figure in the middle of the arch. See if you can find it!

OPPOSITE: 14 Plates; 2013-2018, Vintage & modern porcelain plates, china paint, ceramic decals, gold luster; sizes range from 12 x 9 (ovals) to 10.5-inch diameter (rounds)





These two triptychs were conceived after research tours of Greece and China coupled with my life living and working in the American States and Canadian Provinces of western North America.

I was intrigued with the form of religious Greek Icons and the 3-part arch form they often utilized. The arch forms were cut with a CNC router and gold leaf was applied to the surface. Plywood backing was covered with brocade fabric and glass shelves cut and inset into the backing.

I have always been drawn to the juxtaposition of using different materials and contrasting textures, one playing off the other. Shiny and matte surfaces adjacent to one another. Porcelain, wood, glass and fabric mesh in the same contained form. The mix of materials and textures set up a type of tension in the work, which in turn stimulates my creativity.

The collected porcelain objects were carefully considered when choosing the objects for each space. China paint and ceramic decals were applied and then multi-fired onto the surfaces of the porcelain. The pieces were then finally assembled with silicone adhesive onto the glass shelves.

Each triptych has its own story to tell, and each viewer develops their own narrative stories about the triptychs. I encourage you to come up with your own story.

LEFT: *Western Triptych Icon* (upper image)  
*Asian Triptych Icon* (lower image); 2015,  
Reclaimed/repurposed and altered vintage  
porcelain, china paint, ceramic decals,  
glass, CNC cut wood, gold leaf, fabric; 32 x  
18 x 6 inches



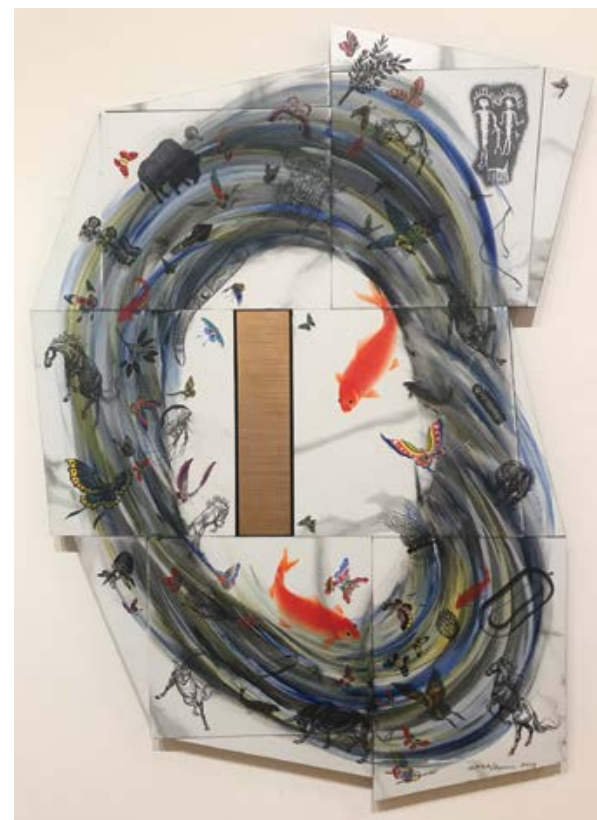
These two porcelain tile collages are a collaboration between myself and Kurt Weiser. Kurt was the Director of the Archie Bray Foundation for the Ceramic Arts in Helena, MT when I was a Resident Artist in the early to mid 1980s. We are good friends and neighbors on property west of Helena, MT.

I have always admired Kurt's ceramic work which has always evolved making him one of the pre-eminent contemporary china painters today.

I initiated the idea of working collaboratively on the tile collages.

I always start this type of work by applying china paint on surface of the repurposed porcelain tile. The tiles are then fired in a ceramic kiln for the first time. Next, I cut and assemble ceramic decals working with the spaces created by the china painted 'energy lines'. I've been working with china paint and ceramic decals since attending art school in the early-mid 1970s. The tiles are then fired for a second time. In this case I was careful to leave open space for Kurt to add his creative china painted elements. Then the tiles are fired for a third time. After evaluation the tiles are either considered finished or additions are made and the tiles fired again.

*Beehive Dreams: Sage Advice* (top) & *Beehive Dreams: River Current*, (bottom) 2017-2019,  
Multi-fired porcelain tile, china paint, ceramic  
decals, KW china paint additions, wood  
frame; 26 x 14 x 1 inches each



*It's Just Life & It's Just Life Too* 2019,  
Repurposed, altered and multi-fired porcelain  
tiles, china paint, ceramic decals, gold luster,  
wood backing; 27 x 40 x 1 inches (L)  
& 25 x 39 x 1 inches (R)

These two large porcelain tile collages began with recycling/repurposing collected porcelain tiles. I had been thinking about the footprints of buildings, of how they look when viewed from above. I knew I wanted to come up with two different wallpieces and proceeded to work with the tiles and design the pieces intuitively.

The porcelain tiles are cut with a diamond tile saw and set on a plywood backing using French cleats as a wall hanging system. Once the tiles are cut I apply the china paint in two different styles. I began with the application of black china paint and fired the tiles. Then I apply the blue and yellow china paint to create the swirling 'energy lines' of one piece and the oval shaped swirling lines of the other piece. The applied china paint in *It's Just Life Too* is reflective of the research into 'black holes' that I continue to be intrigued with.

Once I'm satisfied with the china paint applications and the tiles have been fired twice, I begin to work with the ceramic decals and inserting imagery into the china painted surfaces of the porcelain tiles. Gold luster was painted onto the center tiles and fired a third time along with the decal covered ceramic tiles. If everything seems satisfactory after the third firing the tiles are attached to the plywood backing.

*3D Dreamscape; The Hand of Creativity*, 2020 (right) and *3D Dreamscape; A Sailors Tale*, 2021 (below), repurposed altered and multi-fired porcelain tile, vintage porcelain plate, collected porcelain, vintage Danish brick and flint, handmade architectural elements, porcelain balls, china paint, ceramic decals, painted wood base. 14 x 10.5 x 9 inches.

The concept behind these two pieces was to create a three-dimensional wall piece that combined a two-dimensional tile background with a 'floating' plate (on a shelf) filled with porcelain objects. I think about all of this work as 'collage', be it two dimensional or three dimensional, or as in the case of these pieces as a combination of the two.

The tile is multi-fired, using my technique of china paint (energy lines) firing first, then applying ceramic decals to the surface of the tile. A wooden backing is applied and attached to a painted wooden shelf. The pieces on the shelf plates are combinations of my own work along with collected vintage porcelain objects, stone, historic brick, industrial porcelain balls, etc.





*Aquatic Dreamscape Tall House & Let the Games Begin Long House* 2022, Altered porcelain tiles with china paint, ceramic decals, painted wood; 25 x 14 x 14 inches (Tall House) 26 x 19 x 14 inches (Long House)

I set up the potential storytelling aspect and the viewer interprets the scenario in their own way. My selection of objects and imagery sets up a 3D collage that is open to interpretation by each viewer.

The word *Dream* or *Dreamscape* appears often in the titles of my work. I do dream regularly in my restful periods each day, but I do not write down what I was dreaming about after I wake up. I believe that one's imagination is fertile during subconscious rest and I let the imagery from my dream states resonate during my conscious working periods in the studio.

Both the *Tall House* and the *Long House* were designed with maximizing the use of one-foot by two-foot porcelain tiles. The larger the tiles the more stress there is in the cutting of the tile with a diamond tile saw and the kiln firings. The surfaces are designed when the two *Houses* are flat tiles, before assembly. China painted 'energy lines' fired first, followed by the intuitive decal placement on the second and third firings in the kiln.

The key is to work with the decal design within the two-dimensional space that forms with the china painted 'energy lines'. Each *House* has a painted wooden base and an aluminum 'cap' on the roof ridge.

I have collected ceramic decals since the 1970s and continue to source my decals internationally. Additionally, I continue to make my own unique ceramic decals which I prefer to print with black china paint. The imagery is sourced from copyright-free publications which I collect and produce as needed.



*Extruded Round House Towers, Round Houses & Folded Octagon Houses* 2022, Extruded & altered white clay, glazed, china paint, ceramic decals, gold luster; 12 X 3.5 inch diameter (8 Towers), 5 x 3.5 inch diameter (10 Round & Folded Houses); 60 x 18 x 12 inch (table installation)

I have been using an extruder since my Graduate Student studies at the University of Denver 1979–1981. I had always thought that the extruder was underutilized by most ceramic artists. I continued to evolve my extruder work, focusing on manipulating the wet clay form as it emerges from the expansion box on the bottom of the extruder. I always made my own dies to extrude the clay through and eventually bought a pneumatic version of my Bailey system.

In the fall of 2021, I started extruding white clay circular- and octagon-shaped forms, not really

knowing where the process was leading, but following my intuition and knowing the forms could become architecturally based objects. As the forms emerged, I realized that I wanted them to be shown as a grouping or a potential installation.

The resulting group of round towers and houses along with octagon shaped forms gave me the latitude to invent architectural forms I had not previously explored. Each finished extruded form is fired and brushed with black ceramic stain. Clear glaze is applied and then the pieces are fired for a second time. China paint 'energy lines' are applied next and the piece is fired a third time. Ceramic decals are applied to the surface and the piece is fired a fourth time. I appreciate the challenge in 'wrapping' ceramic decals around a three-dimensional form and have continued this activity in another body of pieces recently. Finally gold luster is applied to the roof lines on each piece and the work is fired a fifth time.





The two latest additions to the PGSMOA Sculpture Garden are sited on the north side of the historic high school. I was fortunate to win a public art competition in 1993 for *Gibson Gateway* which graces the south side of the PGSMOA building. When asked where I might consider placing a new sculpture for the grounds I honed in on the north side of the building, hoping to bring renewed interest and focus to the fabulous architecture of the old high school, and its two entrances framed by historic stone columns and arches.

I have been working with the iconic image of a universal house form for the past four decades. The focus on the universal house form connects both my large scale outdoor and museum installation work with my studio activity. I enjoy working on smaller studio works, typically during the winter months and then shift my activity to large scale outdoor activity in the form of commissions and installations in the summer months. One body of

work plays off the other. Ideas that come in the studio occasionally are transformed to my large-scale work and visa versa. I am as intrigued with a small hand-held object as a large scale outdoor architectural sculpture.

I typically begin working on a large-scale outdoor sculpture with scale drawings, often followed with scale models. I choose to draw with pencil and paper and make the balsa wood models by hand. I enjoy this part of the planning process which gives me the information I need to work up a budget and timeframe for the sculpture. I chose to work with powder coated steel and aluminum tubing for these two sculptures taking into consideration durability and low maintenance aspects.

I was fortunate to find a very talented young fabricator to work with in Helena, MT for this project. Colton Schluter of Schluter's Metal Artwork and Welding proved to be excellent to work with and a skilled fabricator. He has a tremendous skillset for a young welder and an excellent shop for fabrication with modern tools along with a powder coating shop. ■

OPPOSITE AND THIS PAGE: *Big Red House*, 2023, Site-specific, steel with bright red powder coating, 4 ft. Long x 4 ft. Deep x 5 ft. High and 6 inches. Paris Gibson Square Museum of Art. Permanent Collection 2023.4.1

*Silver Structural House*, 2023, Site-specific, brushed aluminum, 4 ft. Long x 4 ft. Deep x 5 ft. High and 6 inches. Paris Gibson Square Museum of Art. Permanent Collection 2023.4.2





## EXHIBITION LIST

1. *Willow Cove*; 2013, Reclaimed/repurposed, altered & glazed vintage tile and clay pipe shards, collected & altered porcelain, china paint, ceramic decals; 12 x 10 x 6 inches

2. *Red Chameleon NK Brick Cup (R)*; 2015, Reclaimed/repurposed, altered & glazed vintage tile shard, gold lustered handbuilt shard, collected & altered porcelain, china paint, ceramic decals; 10 x 7 x 5 inches  
*White Rabbit Koi Long House (L)*; 2017, Reclaimed/repurposed, altered porcelain, tile shard, wood-fired handbuilt architectural element with white slip, ceramic decals, gold luster; 9 x 6 x 7.5 inches

3. *Albino Bambi Rides Again*; 2015, Reclaimed/repurposed & altered vintage tile & clay pipe shards, collected & altered porcelain, china paint, ceramic decals; 16 x 12 x 6 inches

4. *It's the Wild West*; 2015, Reclaimed/repurposed & altered vintage tile shards, collected & altered porcelain, hand-built porcelain object, china paint, ceramic decals; 10 x 7 x 5 inches

5. *Hommage Too for August the Strong*; 2015, Reclaimed/repurposed vintage porcelain, glass, wood, gold leaf, paint; 32 x 55 x 6 inches

6. *Hommage for August the Strong*; 2015, Reclaimed/repurposed vintage porcelain, glass, wood, gold leaf, paint; 48 x 96 x 8 inches

7. *Western Triptych Icon (upper image) Asian Triptych Icon (lower image)*; 2015, Reclaimed/repurposed and altered vintage porcelain, china paint, ceramic decals, glass, CNC cut wood, gold leaf, fabric; 32 x 18 x 6 inches

8. *Long House Mother Goose Dream*; 2016, Reclaimed/repurposed tumbled tile shards, wood-fired handbuilt architectural house with white slip, ceramic

decals & gold luster, vintage collected & altered porcelain, china paint, ceramic decals; 11 x 6 x 7.5 inches

9. *Beehive Dreams; Sage Advice*; 2017-2019, Multi-fired porcelain tile, china paint, ceramic decals, KW china paint additions, wood frame; 26 x 14 x 1 inches

10. *Beehive Dreams; River Current*; 2017-2019, Multi-fired porcelain tile, china paint, ceramic decals, KW china paint additions, wood frame; 26 x 14 x 1 inches

11. *Nevermore Dream*, 2019, Repurposed & altered porcelain tile, china paint, ceramic decals; 13 x 15 x 1 inches

12. *It's Just Life (L) & It's Just Life Too (R)*; 2019, Repurposed, altered and multi-fired porcelain tiles, china paint, ceramic decals, gold luster, wood backing; 27 x 40 x 1 inches (L) & 25 x 39 x 1 inches (R); 2019

13. *Celestial Dreams; Mabel's World*; 2021, Repurposed and altered porcelain tile, china paint, ceramic decals, gold luster; 21 x 17 x 1 inches

14. *Flying Goose, Toad & Two Houses*; 2020, Wood-fired handbuilt houses with white slip, ceramic decals & gold luster, collected & altered porcelain with china paint & ceramic decals; 12 x 10 x 6 inches

15. *Golden Goose Tea Party*; 2020, Wood-fired handbuilt houses with white slip, ceramic decals & gold luster, collected & altered porcelain with china paint & ceramic decals; 15 x 9 x 11 inches

16. *Sleeping Piggies Piled High*; 2020, Wood-fired handbuilt houses with white slip, ceramic decals & gold luster, collected & altered porcelain with china paint & ceramic decals; 15 x 12 x 9 inches

17. *Dino Dreams Apple Alice*; 2020, Wood-fired handbuilt houses with white slip, ceramic decals & gold luster, collected & altered porcelain with china paint & ceramic decals; 15 x 9 x 10 inches

18. *3D Dreamscape; The Hand of Creativity*; 2021, Repurposed, altered & multi-fired porcelain tile, vintage porcelain plate, collected porcelain, vintage Danish brick and flint, handmade architectural element, porcelain balls, china paint, ceramic decals, painted wood base; 14 x 10.5 x 9 inches

19. *3D Dreamscape; A Sailor's Tale*; 2021, Repurposed, altered & multi-fired porcelain tile, vintage porcelain plate, collected porcelain, vintage Danish brick and flint, handmade architectural elements, porcelain balls, china paint, ceramic decals, painted wood base; 14 x 10.5 x 9

20. *Mastadon Dreams*; 2020, Cut porcelain tile, china paint, ceramic decals, gold luster; 20 x 12 x 3 inches

21. *Aquatic Dreamscape Tall House & Let the Games Begin Long House*; 2022, Altered porcelain tiles with china paint, ceramic decals, painted wood; 25 x 14 x 14 inches (Tall House), 26 x 19 x 14 inches (Long House)

22. *Extruded Round House Towers, Round Houses & Folded Octagon Houses*; 2022, Extruded & altered white clay, glazed, china paint, ceramic decals, gold luster; 12 X 3.5 inch diameter (8 Towers), 5 x 3.5 inch diameter (10 Round & Folded Houses); 60 x 18 x 12 inch (table installation)

23. *14 Plates*; 2013-2018, Vintage & modern porcelain plates, china paint, ceramic decals, gold luster; sizes range from 12 x 9 (ovals) to 10.5-inch diameter (rounds)

*Fuping Gateway*, 2008, Site-specific architectural sculpture; brick, mortar, rebar steel, concrete, ceramic roof tile elements, 15 ft. High x 10 ft. Wide x 4 ft. Deep. FULE International Ceramic Art Museums, Fuping, China. Photo credit: Robert Harrison

To hear Robert Harrison speak about selected works in this exhibition, visit: [www.the-square.org/harrison-audio](http://www.the-square.org/harrison-audio)





**Sarah Justice** is the Executive Director of The Paris Gibson Square Museum of Art. Justice is devoted to the art museum's service to the public and advancing the role of art and education in the community of Great Falls, MT. Since 2019 she has led the museum to focus on its mission to inspire people, support the sharing of diverse voices, and connect communities through the power of art. Originally a self-taught artist and business owner before pursuing higher education gave Justice an opportunity to see the art world from many perspectives. Her artistry focuses on contemporary ceramics with an emphasis on figurative sculpture. She holds a Master of Fine Art from the University of Montana in Missoula and Bachelor of Fine Art from Georgia State University in Atlanta Georgia. In addition to being the Executive Director of The Square, she is currently serving as the chair for the Great Falls Museum Consortium, Sargent at Arms for Great Falls Rotary Club, founded and co-directs the Curative Art Collective (weekly art teen program), teaches evening art classes at The Square throughout the year, continues a studio practice and is an exhibiting artist.



**Nicole Maria Evans** is Curator of Exhibitions and Collections at Paris Gibson Square Museum of Art in Great Falls, Montana. In addition to the featured exhibition *Surface Dreams & Superstructures, Works by Robert Harrison*, her recent exhibition projects include *OBJECT#: A Permanent Collection Exhibition about Museums and The Practice of Collecting Art*; *Il Maestro! Works by Morton Levin, A Centennial Celebration*; *Peter Koch: The Book as a Work of Art*; *Beyond Intention: A Contemporary Fiber and Mixed-Media Arts Exhibition*, featuring the work of Jennifer Reifsneider, Ashley V. Blalock, and Maggy Rozycki Hiltner; *Dr. Charles Smith: Black History Lessons*; *VESSEL: Formative Works by Peter Voulkos*. Prior to her position as Curator at The Square, she held the position of Curatorial Research Associate at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston for the exhibition *GOYA: Order and Disorder*. Evans was a fellow at the Smithsonian Institution Latino Center Museum Program conducting language research and translations for the National Museum of the American Indian, as well as co-founder of the Itinerant Arts Collaborative in San Diego, California.

She has served in curatorial, research and educational roles at the C.M. Russell Museum, Tufts University Art Gallery, deCordova Museum and Sculpture Park, Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego, UCLA Hammer Museum and The Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington DC. Evans holds a Master of Arts in Art History and Museum Studies from Tufts University and her Bachelor of Fine Arts in Art History from University of California Los Angeles (UCLA). Evans holds a seat as Board Treasurer on the Board of Trustees of the Montana Art Gallery Directors Association (MAGDA).



**Robert Harrison** is a practicing artist who lives and works in Helena, Montana, USA. He has built his 40+ year career in the site-specific large-scale architectural sculpture realm along with smaller-scale studio activity. He holds BFA and MFA degrees in Ceramics and is a member of the IAC (International Academy of Ceramics, Geneva), WABA (World Association of Brick Artists), RCA (Royal Canadian Academy of Arts) and is a Fellow of NCECA (National Council on Education for the Ceramic Arts). His exhibition and installation record is extensive and global. His book *Sustainable Ceramics: A Practical Guide* was co-published by Bloomsbury (London) and the American Ceramic Society (Ohio) in the fall of 2013. Robert's 35+ year association with the Archie Bray Foundation for the Ceramic Arts began in the summer of 1982 as a summer Resident Artist and from 1983–85 he was a full-time Resident Artist. In 1993 he was appointed to the Board of Directors of the Bray and served as President of the Board from 1998–2004, overseeing the first capital campaign at the Bray and construction of new year-round resident artists studios and resident center. He continues to serve on the facilities committee. Robert is currently working on several large-scale site-specific projects both nationally and internationally along with his ongoing exploration of studio work.



**Randi O'Brien** is Associate Professor and Head of Sculpture and Ceramics at Irvine Valley College, in Orange County, California and Editor of *Studio Potter* journal. O'Brien is a multiracial ceramic artist, historian, writer, and educator from the Rocky Mountains. She earned both an MFA in ceramics and an MA in art history from the University of Montana. O'Brien exhibits across the United States and globally; selected locations include Kilkenny, Ireland; Valparaiso, Chile; Alberta, Canada; and New York, among other states in the U.S. O'Brien has curated numerous exhibitions and has presented her research on ceramics for the National Cowgirl Hall of Fame, the National Council on Education for the Ceramic Arts conference, and Ceramics Ireland's International Ceramic Festival. Her research has been published in *Ceramics Monthly*, *Ceramics Art and Perception: Technical*, *Ceramics Ireland*, and *Studio Potter*.



**Nicolle Hamm** is a ceramic artist, and Administrator & Community Program Manager at the Missoula Art Museum. After receiving her BFA in Ceramics and minor in Art History and Criticism from the University of Montana, she began researching the mining, refining, and distribution of raw materials as it pertains to the handmade ceramics industry. She exhibits her work regionally and is in the collection of the Montana Museum of Arts and Culture. Hamm serves on the National Council on Education for the Ceramic Arts Green Task Force (NCECA GTF) as a community member. Her research was published in *Studio Potter*, and presented at NCECA 2021, NCECA Clay Week 2021, and NCECA 2023.



**Eliza Weber** is Director of Education at Paris Gibson Square Museum of Art. She completed her MFA at Arizona State University. Originally from Great Falls, she received her BFA from The University of Montana. She has completed short residencies at Medaltain Alberta, Canada and The Pottery Workshop in Jingdezhen, China. Eliza was an Artist in Residence at Pottery Northwest in Seattle, Washington, and afterwards an Instructor at Kansas State University. She served on the board of the Ceramics Research Center for two years in addition to the board for NCECA (National Council on Education of Ceramic Arts) as a Student Director at Large. Presently, she serves as Secretary for the NCECA Green Task Force and as a board member for the Urban Art Project.



**Eric Heidle** is a designer, photographer, and writer living and working east of Montana's continental divide. A graduate of Montana State University's graphic design program, he has worked as a book designer, art director, copywriter, and photographer. His design work has appeared in *How*, *Print*, *Communication Arts*, *Graphis*, and *AdWeek*, and his writing and images have been published in *Montana Outdoors*, *Backpacker*, *Montana Quarterly*, and *Big Sky Journal*. His short story "Ace In the Hole," collected in the anthology *Montana Noir*, was nominated for an Edgar Award by the Mystery Writers of America in 2018. He works as the Communication Director for the Montana Arts Council, Montana's state arts agency.

# ABOUT THE SQUARE

The Paris Gibson Square Museum of Art (The Square) in Great Falls, Montana has been exhibiting art, teaching art and supporting the development of contemporary art and artists since 1977. It is housed in the historic Central School built in 1896 by Paris Gibson, the founder of Great Falls, Montana.

The Square is known for its exceptional exhibitions featuring local, regional, and nationally renowned contemporary artists.

In addition, the museum houses an outstanding art collection and a unique outdoor sculpture garden. Exciting exhibit and outreach programming strengthens our mission to bring art into our community to support an inclusive experience that is thought provoking and welcoming. By extension, the museum celebrates the practice of art making through our studio art education courses in ceramics, printmaking, painting, drawing and more!



[WWW.THE-SQUARE.ORG](http://WWW.THE-SQUARE.ORG)



**The  
Square**

Paris Gibson Square  
Museum of Art

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