

# ZOOM

An up close guide to books, galleries, people & places



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## Radar Ceramic Appropriations

Stephanie DeArmond's sculptural letterforms are not easily defined by art-school limitations of sculpture, vessel and design. Her work humorously appropriates text from American subculture and abstracts it into aesthetic form, as in *Cross-stitch T* ❶. DeArmond's sculpture evokes the preciousness and innocence of your grandmother's china cabinet, yet a closer reading reveals unexpected phrases, like that in *Best/Beast* ❷. The artist often cites lyrics taken directly from American pop-cultural forces like hip-hop and indie rock. "I use rap lyrics because I am interested in connecting that kind of culture to fine china," she says. "I love the idea of rappers with gold rings and baggy pants with a grandma drinking out of a teacup. I love how culturally distant they are from each other, but I personally have interest in both."

DeArmond's contrast of material meaning with cultural content is just one of many

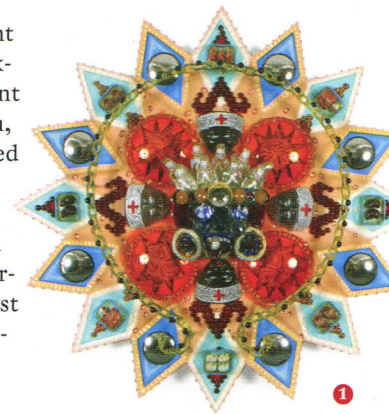
layers of the high/low juxtapositions employed in her work. Fueled by an interest in reflecting her cultural experiences, DeArmond sets out to revitalize ceramics as a medium fit for art, design and craft. "I am compelled by that argument of art versus craft," she says. "I am putting energy into a field that some people think is not an American cultural force. Then you look at the current craft movement [in America]—all these young people doing cross-stitch and ceramics."

In 2008, DeArmond made an influential move to Holland for two years. Her time there changed how she thinks of ceramics as a material. "In Holland all the objects made were slip cast. [This industrial process] sidesteps the whole art/craft debate in ceramics because it's a different way of working from the very beginning. It changed how I think of the materials I work with. The materials don't have to have baggage; ceramics can have connections to other fields that are legitimized and valued as they are in Dutch culture."

By employing simplified forms, modern fonts and a brighter palette, DeArmond is

taking a new direction. "I want the work to be more like an extruded block," she says. I want it to be read as sculptural form, something plain. I'm interested in it being an abstraction."

With its sources in youth culture and its departure from the floral decals used in her earlier work, DeArmond's newest work points less to the decorative arts and converses more directly with contemporary industrial ceramics and design. Exhibiting internationally has been exciting for the artist because of the language and cultural differences, which further abstract the content of her work. "In Europe, it's funny how they appropriate hip-hop culture and how it sifts through their cultural filters. It comes out as this weird thing you don't recognize. I find that really inspiring, like people with a T-shirt with an English phrase on it that is slightly mistranslated. There's humor there. It's not always perfect. I think it's funny outside of my own experience how someone else reads the work. It becomes most interesting when it is taken out of context." —**MOLLY HATCH**  
*Molly Hatch is a ceramist and writer living in Florence, MA.*



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## Hot Spots Lookers

Gallery shows, listed A–Z by state. View complete calendar: [americancraftmag.org](http://americancraftmag.org)

**AZ / Tempe**  
**Arizona State University Art Museum Ceramics Research Center**

*A Chosen Path: The Ceramic Art of Karen Karnes*  
to Jan. 8

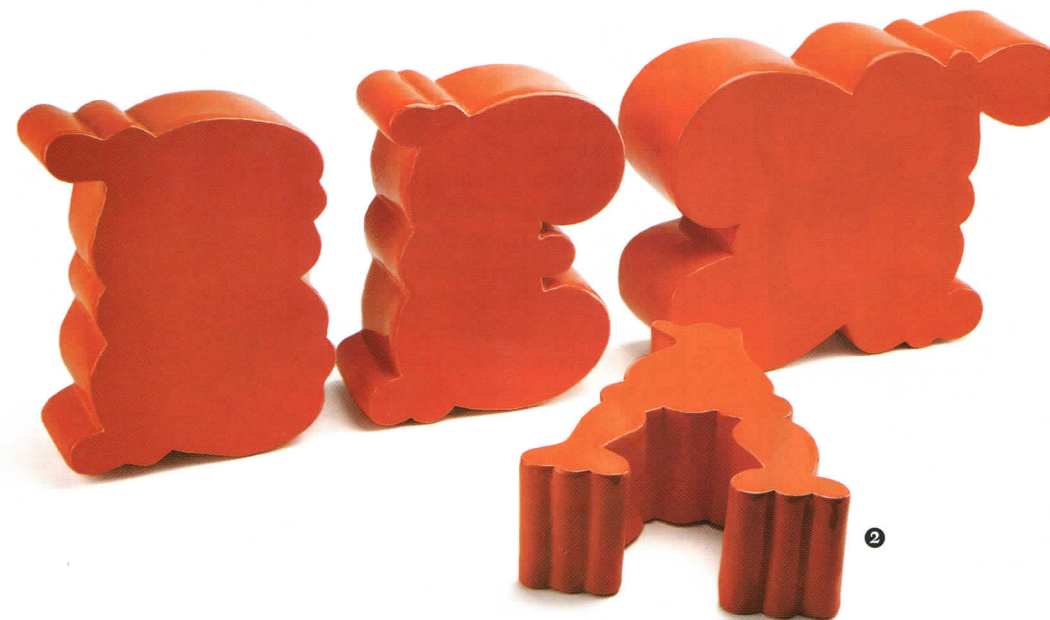
[asuartmuseum.asu.edu/ceramicsresearchcenter](http://asuartmuseum.asu.edu/ceramicsresearchcenter)  
This touring retrospective exhibition features 69 works by Karnes, a seminal artist of the studio pottery movement.

**CA / Graton**  
**Art Honors Life® / The Gallery at FUNERIA**  
*Ashes to Art®*

Oct. 23–Dec. 18  
[funeria.com](http://funeria.com)  
Memorial art celebrates life in this competition.

**CA / Los Angeles**  
**❶ Craft and Folk Art Museum**  
*Borderlandia: Cultural Topography by Einar and Jamex de la Torre*  
to Jan. 9  
[cafam.org](http://cafam.org)

In glass sculpture, the brothers tackle issues of cultural duality in Southern California.



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