



THE QUARTERLY

50 YEARS OF DOVA

Learn about our upcoming 50th Anniversary and our events we have planned for the year

Chat with DOVA alumni about his career journey and Personal experiences:

DENNIS RITTER



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Meet: DENNIS RITTER



You can follow Dennis at [@dnice_clay](https://www.instagram.com/dnice_clay) or visit his website at dennisritterclay.com

Dennis Ritter: INTERVIEW

1) What's your background?

I received my BFA from Temple University's Tyler School of Art and my MFA from The New York State College of Ceramics at Alfred University. I have taught at the Tyler School of Art, Alfred University, and at Louisiana State University as well as in community arts programs in Philadelphia with The Clay Studio. I am currently a visiting assistant professor in the Art Program at Berry College where I teach ceramics and sculpture. My work has been exhibited throughout the United States and is held in numerous private collections. I have received numerous grants and awards to attend residency programs such as Watershed Center for the Ceramic Arts and The Vermont Studio Center. I currently live in Northwest Georgia with my partner and our two dogs.

2) What media do you prefer and how did you come to use it as your primary one?

I primarily work in clay but my practice also includes digital processes, mold making, photography, and wood fabrication. I fell in love with clay and the ceramic process in community college but didn't pursue it as a career until my early thirties when I started volunteering at The Clay Studio in Philadelphia. Getting to work there gave me the opportunity to be around all kinds of artists working with clay in different ways that I hadn't imagined. From there, I pursued my BFA, MFA, and a career as an educator and studio artist.

As a material, clay always presents a challenge or a problem to solve. I really enjoy trying to breakdown a form or a process and engineering pieces so they will survive the firing process. I'm interested in the history of ceramics, it is one of the oldest art materials and it is also a marker for past (so much of our collective knowledge of past cultures is gleaned from their ceramic objects!). I like to think about the idea that making an object out of clay is akin to creating a future artifact.

3) When did you first become interested in art?

I remember drawing and coloring a lot as a young child but not really knowing what "art" was until about 4th grade when a teacher showed us paintings in a class. I was also really interested in taking things apart, building models, and lived in a house that was always being remodeled DIY style. When I was 13, I went to the Philadelphia Museum of Art with a close friend and his dad. The paintings were cool but I remember seeing the Duchamp room, specifically *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors (Large Glass)* and *Etant Donnes*. I think that was the moment that I knew art was something I was interested in, not because I understood something about what I saw but because those pieces were so different from everything else in the museum that I could not stop thinking about them.

4) What does your work aim to say?

My work explores the role of common objects – house plants, books, appliances, and keepsakes – as foundational markers for personal and cultural identity. These objects are often juxtaposed with one another to create works that reference domestic spaces, second-hand sales, and the personal collection. I see these objects as part of a larger collective memory drawn from personal narrative; signifiers of a time and a place at once familiar but radically different for each person.

I chose clay as my primary material to construct these sculptures because it can be transformed physically, chemically and metaphorically at every stage of the process. My work borders on trompe l'oeil but incidental contact with the clay remain. My intention in working this way is to create an illusion – a perception that what is initially seen is real. Closer investigation reveals the material presence, erasing the illusion. A correlation can be seen between the act of recollection and the transformations of the material as it distances itself from a malleable body to a permanent structure.

5) How does your work comment on current social or political issues?

I am not directly trying to make any kind of social or political comments with my work. However, I think it is impossible to make art without it producing some sort of commentary on current social and political issues.

One theme that is present in my work is nostalgia and how it relates to objects and place (with nostalgia meaning a skewed longing for a past that really didn't exist). After the last two years of political/social upheaval and the pandemic, I think many of us are experiencing a yearning for things to go back to the way they were because it seems more comfortable or better than now even though the past is fraught with many of the same problems we face today. My experience of people viewing my pieces and installations is that many are transported to someplace from the past whether it be good or bad.

6) Who are your biggest influences?

As an artist, I look towards a lot of things outside of the art world, junk shops, flea markets, literature, maps, hardware stores, neglected places, architecture, and the outdoors. The artists that I always go back to are Marcel Duchamp, Daniel Spoerri, Joseph Cornell, and countless still life painters going back to the 15th century. I like to look at ceramic artists as reference to know what has and is happening but I try to draw my influences from other places.

7) How have you developed your career?

I have gone through a lot of different phases and let myself try a lot of different ways of making and thinking about my studio practice. When I was in school I made as much stuff as I could, if I had an idea I tried it. Sometimes it was good, other times not so much. But I learned how to persevere and also learned who I was as an artist and what I wanted to say. Now that I am out of school, I like to think of my studio practice as a long game. For example, the body of work I am showing at UNG has been in various stages of progress and been exhibited in different stages over the last 5 years.

- Advice would you give for students -

8) How do you seek out opportunities?

There are a lot of online resources like Juried Art Services, CAFÉ, Ceramics Arts Daily, and following other artists and galleries on Instagram/social media that make it easy to find opportunities to show work. I try to apply for things that fit closely to my ideals as an artist and not try to force my work into somewhere it doesn't fit or make work that I don't feel honest about.

Another thing that I have done is to make opportunities for myself and my peers in a DIY style, looking for spaces to have small group shows

shows at school or other places in the community. This is especially good if there are other larger art events like conferences or festivals going on that you can tie into.

9) How do you cultivate a collector base?

I think this depends on what kind of work you are making and what your goals are. My studio practice isn't really focused on making work to sell, it is more about exploring ideas and research. If someone buys something that's great but it doesn't matter. It allows for a kind of creative freedom that making work for the collector's might not.

If you are interested in making work to sell there are some things that are important to consider. The first thing is making something that you enjoy and that you have spent time refining in terms of craft and concept. You also need to consider if you want to self-market through sites like Etsy or Faire, or if you want to work with galleries to promote and sell your work. The latter takes more time but you do make more money, while the galleries typically take 30-50%.

10) How do you navigate the art world?

I have tried to build a community of people and organizations who I trust. I try not to get disappointed by rejection, it's part of the process of getting shows and residencies and it happens to everyone. Being a good communicator is important. Respond to everyone's emails promptly even if it is something you are not interested in participating in. Also, if there is an artist that you are really interested in and you have a question about their work, email or message them. Most people are flattered and happy to reply.

11) Which current art world trends are you following?

I try not to follow art world trends. The only thing I would say is be responsible about what you are making, know your sources, know why you are making it, know why it might look like someone else's work, and be careful of and understand cultural appropriation.

To add to that, I think social media, google searches, and the library are great for discovering new art and artists. However, social media can be misleading. It's easy for someone to make it look like they are successful and getting lots of opportunities when in reality they are not. I always follow up by looking at an artist's website or gallery if I find them on social media. It's also important to read things relating to your work and current events as well as looking to fields like anthropology, sociology, and other humanities to help ground your ideas in something other than art.

12) How do you speak to the ways art is important to society?

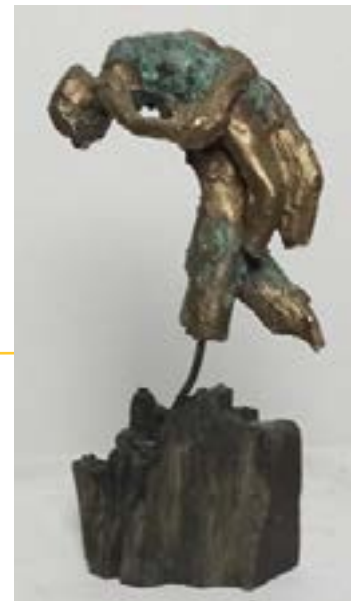
Art is an individual expression of the times and cultures we live in. Some of the best art doesn't make a lot of sense in the moment, it's only when you look back at it that it becomes apparent what the artist may have intended.

DOVA'S 50th Anniversary

The 2021–2022 academic year is a momentous occasion for the Department of Visual Arts (DoVA) — the celebration of the 50th anniversary.

Over its 50-year history, DoVA has been recognized for academic rigor, the professional preparation of students, and the serious integration of artistic practice and cultural heritage. This historic year will be a time to reflect on a golden legacy of achievement, the tremendous growth the department has witnessed, and to celebrate all those who helped to facilitate it.

This important 50th Anniversary milestone will be marked by a yearlong series of events that aim to honor the past, celebrate the present, and envision the future. We welcome you to join us in Celebrating 50 Years of Creativity, Commitment, and Community!



For a full calendar of events and other information about our 50th Anniversary, please visit our [website](#)

Gallery Dates

Our shows and artist talks are back! More to see in Dahlonega, Gainesville, and Oconee! Visual Arts Gainesville has moved to the Arts & Technology building!