

Two students, professor head for international ceramics symposium

10/04/07

Two students and a professor from Alfred University have been invited to participate in the 2007 International Society for Ceramics Art Education Exchange Symposium (ISCAEES) at University College for the Creative Arts-Farnham, Great Britain, Oct. 15-26, 2007. This marks the first time Alfred University will have a presence at the global forum. Dr. Ezra Shales, assistant professor of art history and theory, NYS College of Ceramics, School of Art & Design, will accompany graduate student Shawn Murrey, and Grace Stewart, a senior ceramics art major. They will join other distinguished practitioners and scholars from all over the world. Participating in "Borrowing Heritage: Shifts East & West, North & South" will be professionals, educators, and students from East, West, and South Africa; Australia; China; Germany; Japan; Korea; Mexico; Turkey; and the United Kingdom. "This is an opportunity for Alfred students to broaden their horizons," said Shales, "and for me to do some primary research to make my curriculum more global and responsive to international trends." Shales will serve as a panel moderator during one of the sessions and is scheduled to present "The Practical Value of Pluralist Ceramic History," a talk about how ceramics has been placed into categories - art, design, craft - and how those categories have fluctuated over time. There will be a major focus on kiln technology at the symposium and Shales expects Murrey to be "a very active participant in kiln discussion" since that is his area of expertise. The invitation to attend the international symposium came about through the connection made by Magdelene Odundo, a well-known ceramic artist who was a visiting artist at Alfred University in fall 2006. Odundo, who was born in Nairobi, Kenya, and lives and works in Surrey, England, was working on the symposium with the ISCAEES. Shales earned a doctorate degree at the Bard Graduate Center for Studies in the Decorative Arts, Design and Culture, New York City. He earned a master of fine arts degree in painting from Hunter College of the City University of New York system, and a bachelor of arts degree in Latin and Greek with honors, College of Letters, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT. Shales' fall teaching assignments at Alfred University include History of World Ceramics for both undergraduate and graduate students; Native American Arts & Technologies; Design History I; and Design and the Enlightenment. Throughout the international symposium, participants will be asked to consider the position of contemporary ceramic practice and the teaching of ceramics in universities and colleges as it competes with more popular portable digital and media studies. Additionally, conference-goers will explore: the impact of commercial shifts west to east on contemporary ceramics practice on the teaching and learning of ceramics; whether there has been reciprocity of ideas and practice during these shifting patterns; how these changes are influencing or affecting the artistic practice, design, industrial and the cultural heritage of ceramics universally; who drives the changes, what role universities and colleges have as institutions or whether the institutions adapt to what appears to be inevitable consequences of a vast global shift and trend; and whether global warming and world issues are concerns for the ceramic practitioner.