

Regional

Technology can aid an artist, not create one

Ceramics is an art form almost as old as human civilization itself, and has been a mainstay of daily human life. These objects have been found within human burial sites dating nearly 30,000 years old. Yet, through their function and artistry, they remain important to contemporary life and culture. Someone who teaches the art of ceramics is Joe Page, an assistant professor and area head of ceramics in the department of art and design at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville.

A native of Evanston, Ill., he obtained his bachelor's of arts, studio arts and anthropology from Knox College in Galesburg, Ill., and his master's of fine arts with a specialization in ceramics from New York State College of Ceramics at Alfred University in Alfred, N.Y.

"I had started in anthropology, more particularly archeology," said Page. "And I had always been interested in the history and sort of the potency of objects. Even thinking about the history of how things were made and the context of how they traveled across the world and now sit here today. And I think with archeology you think of these things that you don't know the history of right away, you are finding it and you kind of have to unpack and unravel and learn about who made this and what was it used for, or what was the cultural context." He learned early on that the connection between archaeology and ceramics is a historical one.

"You can think as a historian or as an anthropologist about the culture where they came from," he said of ceramic objects. "You can even measure things like the drift of culture across continents over history. The way you see blue and white porcelain in China and blue and white earthenware in Iran, and measure how that idea and that aesthetic came over from China to Iran."

Like many other artists, Page is very active in presenting solo exhibits of his art. What most people do not realize is not only how much time and effort it takes to put a show together, but also how the artist has to take into consideration the environment in which the works are presented.

"I think with my work the solo exhibition sort of operates as an opportunity to bring parts together," he explained. "My work is not like paintings or sculptures that sit on a pedestal or drawings that hang on a wall. I

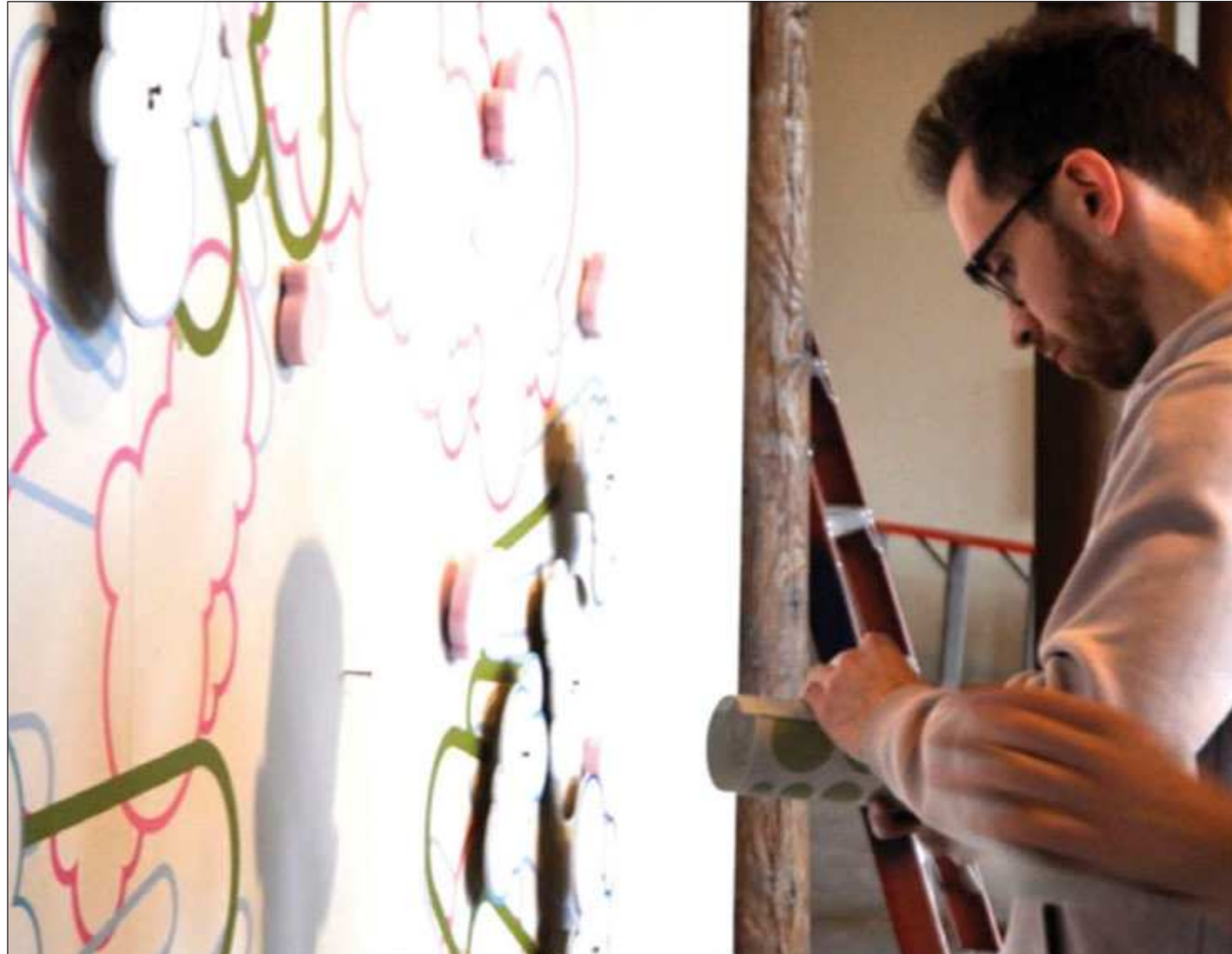


Photo courtesy of Joe Page

Professor Joe Page works on a piece of art.

kind of liken it to something like a Lego set where I have all these little parts and you could put it together any number of ways and you could take it apart and put it together again and it would be completely different." He added that for artists it is essential to understand the space in which the exhibit is going to take place.

"Sometimes I will be painting elements on

the ceiling or on the walls. I use an adhesive vinyl that goes on the floors. So you have to think of how the viewer enters the space and how they are really kind of immersed in the space. So these elements come together to transform a pre-existing space. And I have had a lot of people tell me there are certain things they have never noticed about the gallery before until after seeing my work in

the gallery," said Page.

He said that it is important that his students understand the historical context of ceramics.

"When I am teaching students about pottery and functional ceramic forms, we talk about the archetypal forms that still persist today," he said. "You think of Greek and Etruscan ceramic forms, you think of African

Aldemaro Romero Jr. College Talk

pottery forms and then you see a form that looks just like that pot from 27,000 years ago in a William Sonoma store that you can buy." He said that inspirations from ancient ceramics can even be seen in everyday items like bathroom tile and even toilets and sinks.

He also makes his students aware of how new technologies are transforming the way ceramics are produced today and how they will be produced tomorrow.

"It's interesting to think about if the absence of something like a 3D printer could cripple a modern-day Auguste Rodin from being the greatest that he possibly could. I'm not sure that that is true."

He said that he thinks that what really matters is how great ideas are translated through the tools and the materials of the time in which they are made.

"There are a lot of people who are using these technologies who are still making work that is not very interesting," he said, adding that technology can help, especially when visualizing how a work will turn out. "It's about being able to exploit that process or tool in a way that is maybe uniquely yours. You can see something in the 3D printer that is possible that you might not otherwise be able to see. And I might see something different that you might not see."

"I think that as an educator when you have to introduce a new technology or new tool there is something that gets left behind," Page said. "And there is something that is perhaps lost in the teaching of that tool. Students now are very familiar with being able to use a tablet and look things up on the Internet, but when it comes to maybe finding things that are a little bit nuanced or more unquantifiable that can be somewhat of a challenge to them."

Aldemaro Romero Jr. is the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville. His show, "Segue," can be heard every Sunday morning at 9 a.m. on WSIE, 88.7 FM. He can be reached at College_Arts_Sciences@siue.edu.