

FORT HAYS STATE UNIVERSITY PRESENTS

VESSEL OF SURVIVAL



JONAH SIMMONS

MFA CERAMICS THESIS EXHIBITION

Reception – July 17, 2026 • 6:00–8:00 PM

On view July 14–17

MT

FORT HAYS STATE UNIVERSITY'S
MOSS-THORNS
GALLERY of ART

& The Patricia A. Schmidt Gallery Lobby

Thesis Statement

Survival is not innate or effortless, but learned, regulated, and sustained through continuous labor, both visible and unseen. *Vessel of Survival* is an exploration of the human body as a site of containment, adaptation, and endurance shaped by trauma, systemic pressure, and the conditions of contemporary life. Through ceramic form, ruptured surfaces, photographic imagery and narrative intervention, this work explores how trauma, chronic illness, and socioeconomic systems inscribe themselves onto the body. Within this framework, the body becomes a vessel that continually negotiates fragility and resilience.

This investigation is informed by my diagnosis with Type 1 diabetes, a condition that transforms survival into an ongoing process of regulation and intervention. Rather than focusing on the specifics of medical management, this work engages the broader condition of living within medical, economic, and social systems that demand constant monitoring, correction, and maintenance. The body exists in a continual cycle between stability and disruption.

Ceramic material processes provide a framework for understanding these conditions. Crater and lava glazes develop through the accumulation of internal gas pressure beneath a molten surface. As pressure builds, tension temporarily contains it until the surface ruptures, releasing trapped material before stabilizing as the kiln cools. These cratered surfaces become visible records of forces that once existed beneath the surface. Rather than concealing imperfection, I embrace rupture, volatility, and transformation. These surfaces mirror the psychological and physiological conditions explored throughout the work, where unseen forces accumulate and eventually break through. Material process becomes metaphor, and damage remains visible as a trace of endurance.

Thesis Statement Continued

This material behavior parallels the instability of the body under chronic conditions. Internal systems operate under fluctuating pressures, periodically destabilizing before returning to equilibrium. Through volatile glaze reactions and ruptured surfaces, the ceramic vessel becomes a material analogue for these cycles. The surface records moments of rupture, instability, and recovery, positioning the vessel not only as a container, but as evidence of survival shaped by pressure.

My practice extends beyond chronic illness and originates in earlier investigations into trauma, addiction, and generational hardship. Influenced by personal experiences, including my father's PTSD and Alcohol Use Disorder, the work engages cycles of damage, reflection, and reconstruction. The studio functions as a site where these experiences are processed through material transformation, allowing identity to be examined and reformed through clay.

The visual language of this work draws from the raw immediacy of Art Brut and Outsider Art. While developed within an academic context, I am influenced by art that has an emphasis on emotional intensity, distortion, and unfiltered expression. Simplified and distorted figures prioritize psychological presence over refinement, communicating internal states shaped by instability and tension. Typically confined to decorative roles, lava glazes are recontextualized here as raw, expressive material, serving as a visual representation of internal rupture, psychological instability, and the cumulative marks of trauma that shape individual human experience.

While rooted in personal experience, Vessel of Survival reflects a broader human condition; the ongoing effort to endure, adapt, and reconstruct oneself in response to internal and external pressures. Survival is not a fixed state, but a continual process shaped by vulnerability, resistance, and the persistent need to sustain life.

Artificial Equilibrium series

This series examines stability as a constructed condition, maintained through constant medical, behavioral, and systemic intervention. The work traces three states: Diagnosis, where instability is identified; For Profit, where survival is mediated through economic systems; and ReForm, which calls for structural change.

Across the series, surfaces fracture and erupt, reflecting the volatility of both the body and the systems that regulate it. Equilibrium is not natural, but imposed, continuously negotiated through pressure, control, and adaptation.



"Diagnosis: Antibodies"
Series: Artificial Equilibrium

Ceramics
4.5" x 4.5"
2025



"Diagnosis: Issues"
Series: Artificial Equilibrium

Ceramics
4.5" x 4.5"
2025



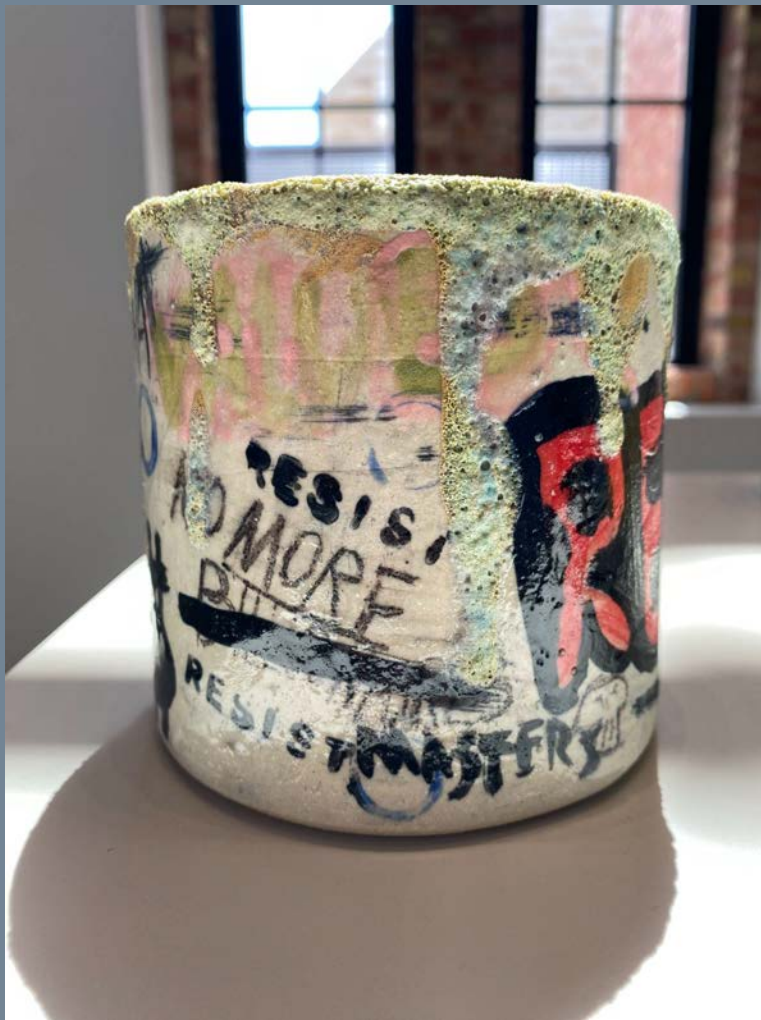
"Diagnosis: WDD"

Series: Artificial Equilibrium

Ceramics

4.5" x 4.5"

2025



"Diagnosis: Reform"

Series: Artificial Equilibrium

Ceramics

4.5" x 4.5"

2026



"Diagnosis: Insulin"

Series: Artificial Equilibrium

Ceramics

6" x 12" x 5.5"

2025



"Diagnosis: LLC"

Series: Artificial Equilibrium

Ceramics

11" x 4.5" x 4"

2025



“Diagnosis: For Profit”
Series: Artificial Equilibrium

Ceramics
10” x 6” x 6”
2025



"For Profit: Novo Nordisk"

Series: Artificial Equilibrium

Ceramics

11.5" x 5.5" x 5"

2026

For Profit: Novo Nordisk
Artificial Equilibrium
Ceramics
11.5" x 5.5" x 5"
2026



"For Profit: UHG"

Series: Artificial Equilibrium

Ceramics

13" x 8" x 9.5"

2026



“For Profit: CVS”

Series: Artificial Equilibrium

Ceramics

13.5" x 7" x 6"

2026



“For Profit: Insulet”

Series: Artificial Equilibrium

Ceramics

10" x 7.5" x 6"

2026



"For Profit: Embecta"
Series: Artificial Equilibrium

Ceramics
11.5" x 6.5" x 4.5"
2026



"For Profit: Centene"
Series: Artificial Equilibrium

Ceramics

9" x 6.5" x 6"

2026



“For Profit: Elevance Health”

Series: Artificial Equilibrium

Ceramics

11.5" x 7.5" x 6"

2026



"For Profit: Sanofi"

Series: Artificial Equilibrium

Ceramics

11" x 5.5" x 4"

2026



"For Profit: Abbott"

Series: Artificial Equilibrium

Ceramics

12.5" x 7" x 4.5"

2026



"For Profit: Kaiser"

Series: Artificial Equilibrium

Ceramics

15" x 8" x 6"

2026



"For Profit: Humana"
Series: Artificial Equilibrium

Ceramics

12.5" x 6.5" x 6"

2026



“For Profit: Lilly”

Series: Artificial Equilibrium

Ceramics

12" x 8" x 7"

2026



"ReForm: I"

Series: Artificial Equilibrium

Ceramics

16.5" x 5"

2026



"ReForm: II"

Series: Artificial Equilibrium

Ceramics

17" x 5.5"

2026



"ReForm: III"

Series: Artificial Equilibrium

Ceramics

17.5" x 10"

2026



"ReForm: IV"

Series: Artificial Equilibrium

Ceramics

19" x 11"

2026

ACE series

This series examines how childhood trauma persists within the body over time. These works treat trauma not as isolated events, but as conditions that accumulate, resurface, and reshape identity across a lifetime.

Each form is subjected to both controlled and uncontrollable forces. Clay is physically fractured through ballistic intervention, while unstable structures and eruptive glazes produce surfaces that crack, rupture, and deteriorate. The body is presented as a site of impact, where pressure is carried, released, and never fully resolved.



"Shells, Seeds and PTSD #1"

Series: ACE

Ceramics

8" x 7" x 8"

2023



"Shells, Seeds and PTSD #2"

Series: ACE

Ceramics

8" x 7" x 8"

2023



“Shells, Seeds and PTSD #3”

Series: ACE

Ceramics

8” x 7” x 8”

2023



“Shells, Seeds and PTSD #4”

Series: ACE

Ceramics

8” x 7” x 8”

2023



"Shells, Seeds and PTSD #5"

Series: ACE

Ceramics

8" x 7" x 8"

2023



“Shells, Seeds and PTSD #6”

Series: ACE

Ceramics

10” x 10” x 7”

2023



"Shells, Seeds and PTSD #7"

Series: ACE

Ceramics

10" x 9" x 6"

2023



“Shells, Seeds and PTSD #8”

Series: ACE

Ceramics

8” x 6” x 5”

2023



“Shells, Seeds and PTSD #9”

Series: ACE

Ceramics

8" x 8" x 7"

2023



“Shells, Seeds and PTSD #10”

Series: ACE

Ceramics

7" x 6" x 7"

2023



"Shells, Seeds and PTSD #11"

Series: ACE

Ceramics

7" x 5" x 5"

2023



“Shells, Seeds and PTSD #12”

Series: ACE

Ceramics

10” x 8” x 6”

2023

Personas and Shadow series

This series draws from Jungian psychology, using the mask as both persona and performance. Layered emotional states, anger, grief, anxiety, joy, create instability, reflecting the complexity of lived experience. Black glaze emerges as the shadow, suggesting internal pressure and the presence of the unconscious.

In later works, this pressure becomes material, as volatile glaze reactions rupture the surface. The masks shift from representation to event, where internal tension manifests as physical disruption.



“Anger/Disgust”

Series: Personas and Shadow

Ceramics

10” x 7” x 3.5”

2022



“Anxiety/Wonder”

Series: Personas and Shadow

Ceramics

10” x 7” x 3.5”

2022



“Disgust/Anger”

Series: Personas and Shadow

Ceramics

10” x 7” x 3.5”

2022



"Grief/Terror"

Series: Personas and Shadow

Ceramics

10" x 7" x 3.5"

2022



"Joy/Surprise"

Series: Personas and Shadow

Ceramics

10" x 7" x 3.5"

2022



"Sadness/Surprise"

Series: Personas and Shadow

Ceramics

10" x 7" x 3.5"

2022



“Sadness/Anger”

Series: Personas and Shadow

Ceramics

10” x 7” x 3.5”

2022



"Surprise/Joy"

Series: Personas and Shadow

Ceramics

10" x 7" x 3.5"

2022



"Terror/Grief"

Series: Personas and Shadow

Ceramics

10" x 7" x 3.5"

2022



“Wonder/Anxiety”

Series: Personas and Shadow

Ceramics

10” x 7” x 3.5”

2022



“Anger/Disgust (Eruptive Variant)”

Series: Personas and Shadow (Eruptive Variant)

Ceramics

10” x 7” x 3.5”

2023



“Anxiety/Wonder (Eruptive Variant)”

Series: Personas and Shadow (Eruptive Variant)

Ceramics

10” x 7” x 3.5”

2023



“Disgust/Anger (Eruptive Variant)”

Series: Personas and Shadow (Eruptive Variant)

Ceramics

10” x 7” x 3.5”

2023



“Grief/Terror (Eruptive Variant)”

Series: Personas and Shadow (Eruptive Variant)

Ceramics

10” x 7” x 3.5”

2023



“Joy/Surprise (Eruptive Variant)”

Series: Personas and Shadow (Eruptive Variant)

Ceramics

10” x 7” x 3.5”

2023



"Sadness/Surprise (Eruptive Variant)"

Series: Personas and Shadow (Eruptive Variant)

Ceramics

10" x 7" x 3.5"

2023



“Sadness/Anger (Eruptive Variant)”

Series: Personas and Shadow (Eruptive Variant)

Ceramics

10” x 7” x 3.5”

2023



“Surprise/Joy (Eruptive Variant)”

Series: Personas and Shadow (Eruptive Variant)

Ceramics

10” x 7” x 3.5”

2023



“Terror/Grief (Eruptive Variant)”

Series: Personas and Shadow (Eruptive Variant)

Ceramics

10” x 7” x 3.5”

2023



“Wonder/Anxiety (Eruptive Variant)”

Series: Personas and Shadow (Eruptive Variant)

Ceramics

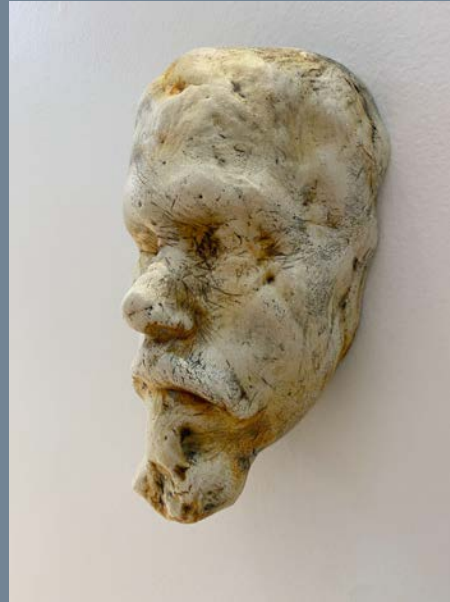
10” x 7” x 3.5”

2023

Forty Years Unmarked? series

This series consists of forty masks, each representing a year lived prior to diagnosis. What was once understood as an “unmarked” body is reconsidered as one already shaped by trauma, addiction, and inherited psychological strain. The body was never neutral; it was always under pressure.

Surfaces shift between restraint and rupture, reflecting the instability of both physical and psychological conditions, as well as the inconsistency in how they are recognized. Diagnosis does not mark a beginning but reframes what has long been present. Each mask operates as a fragmented self-portrait, where visibility and misrecognition coexist.



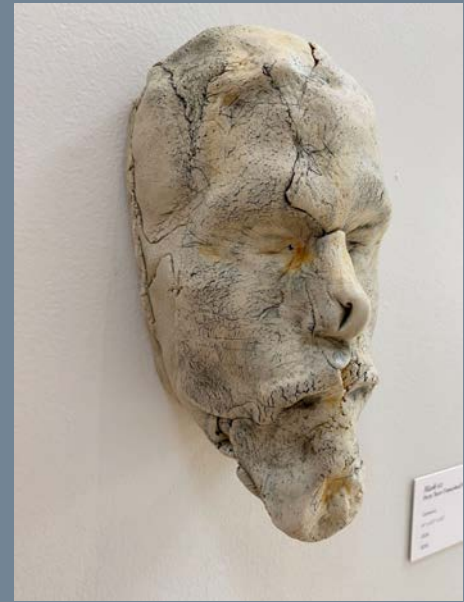
"Mask 01"

Series: Forty Years Unmarked?

Ceramics

8" x 4.5" x 4.5"

2026



"Mask 02"

Series: Forty Years Unmarked?

Ceramics

8" x 4.5" x 4.5"

2026



"Mask 03"

Series: Forty Years Unmarked?

Ceramics

8" x 4.5" x 4.5"

2026



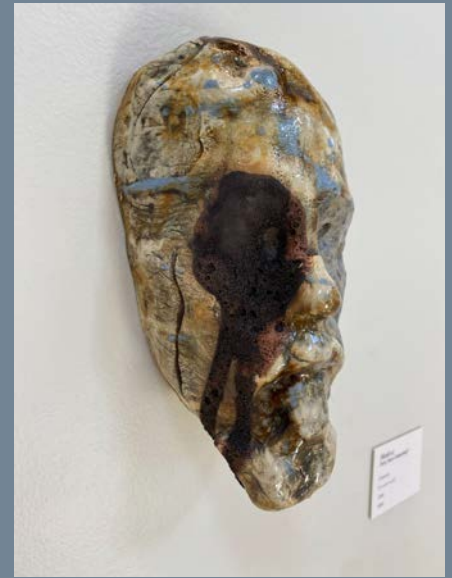
"Mask 04"

Series: Forty Years Unmarked?

Ceramics

8" x 4.5" x 4.5"

2026



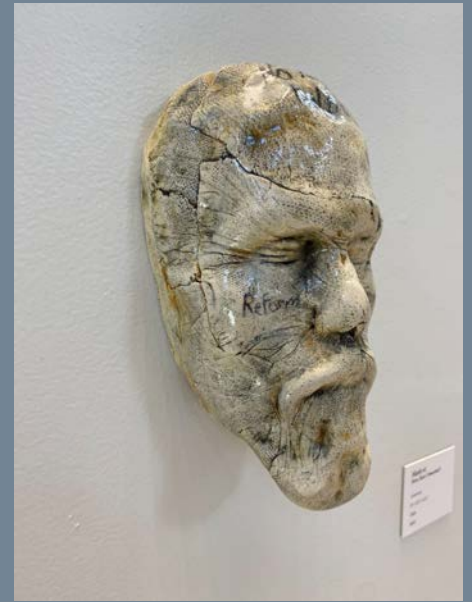
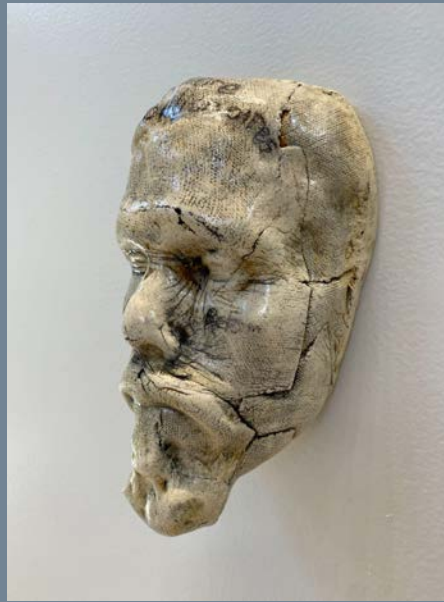
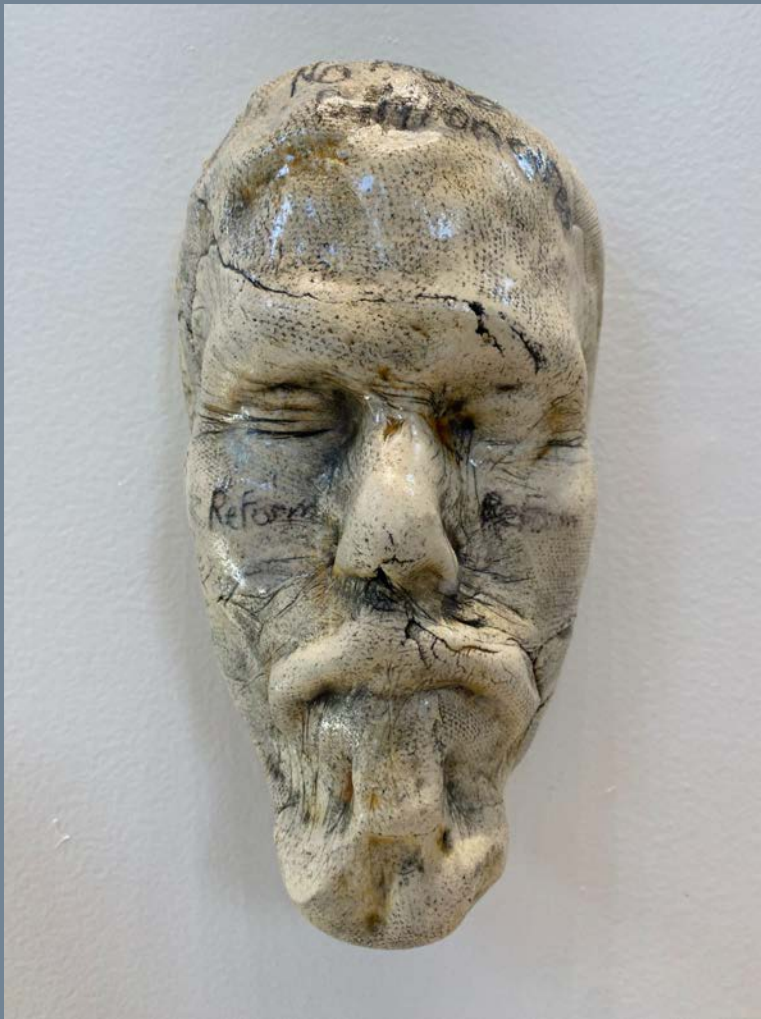
"Mask 05"

Series: Forty Years Unmarked?

Ceramics

8" x 4.5" x 4.5"

2026



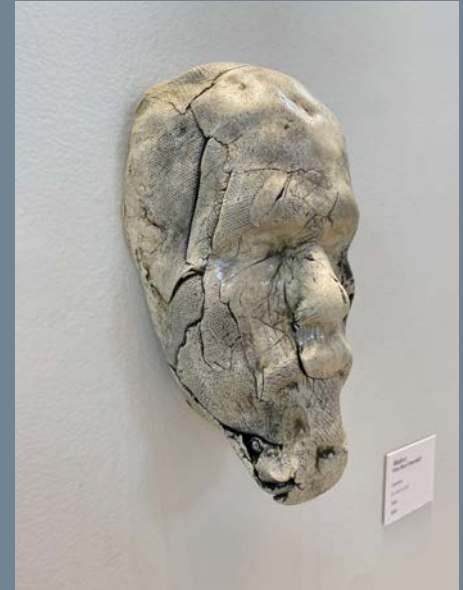
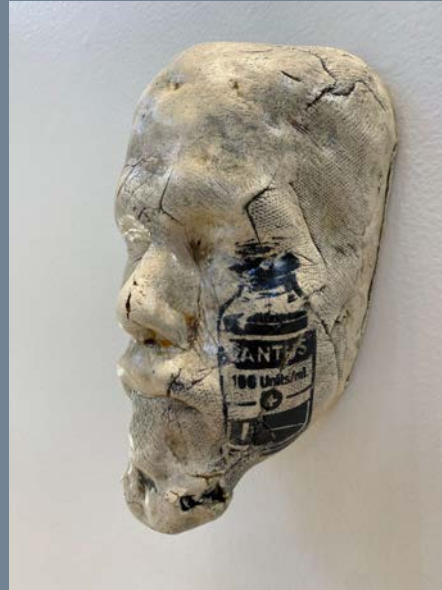
"Mask 06"

Series: Forty Years Unmarked?

Ceramics

8" x 4.5" x 4.5"

2026



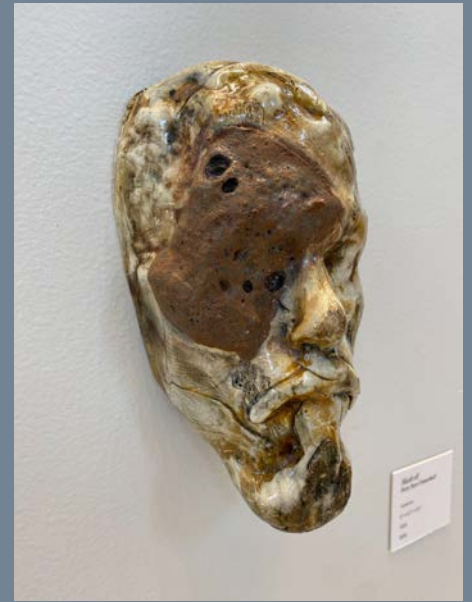
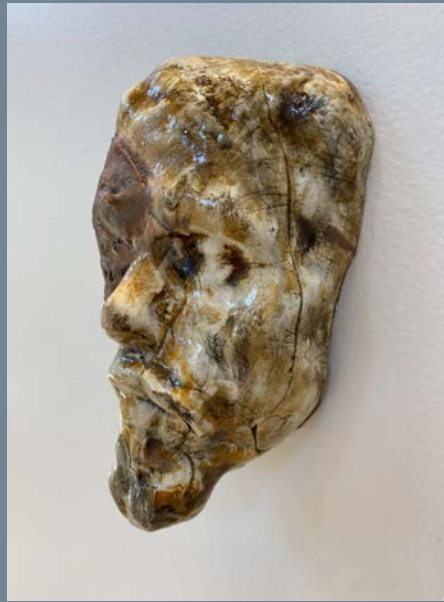
"Mask 07"

Series: Forty Years Unmarked?

Ceramics

8" x 4.5" x 4.5"

2026



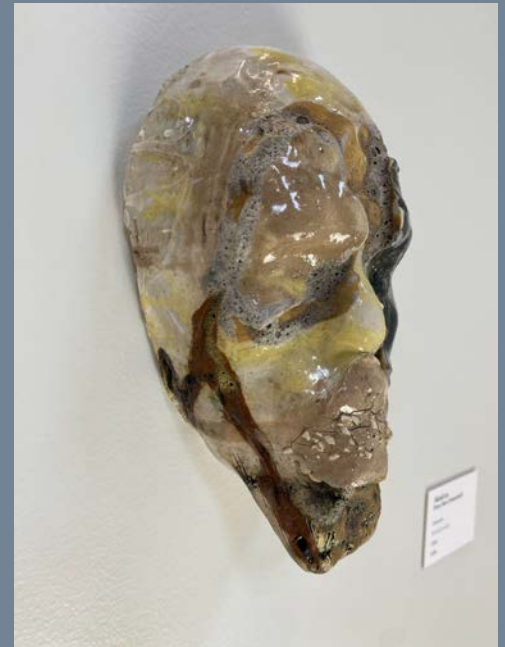
"Mask 08"

Series: Forty Years Unmarked?

Ceramics

8" x 4.5" x 4.5"

2026



"Mask 09"

Series: Forty Years Unmarked?

Ceramics

8" x 4.5" x 4.5"

2026



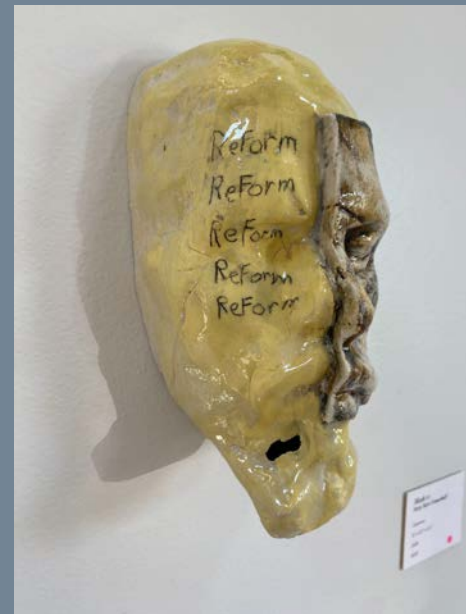
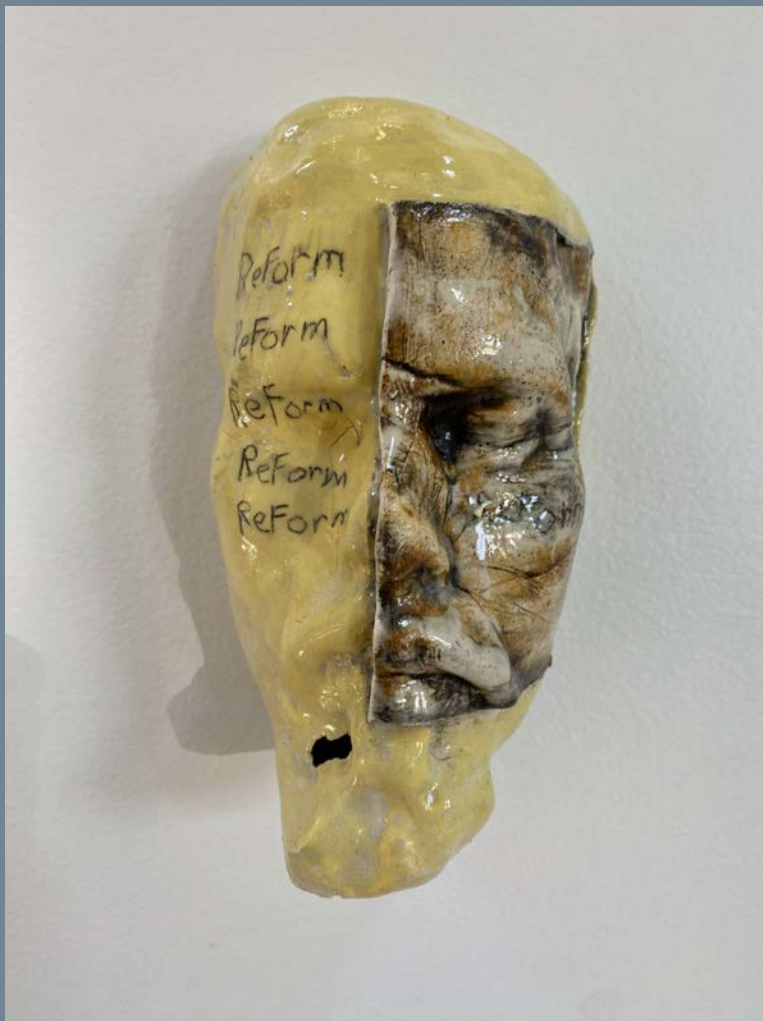
"Mask 10"

Series: Forty Years Unmarked?

Ceramics

8" x 4.5" x 4.5"

2026



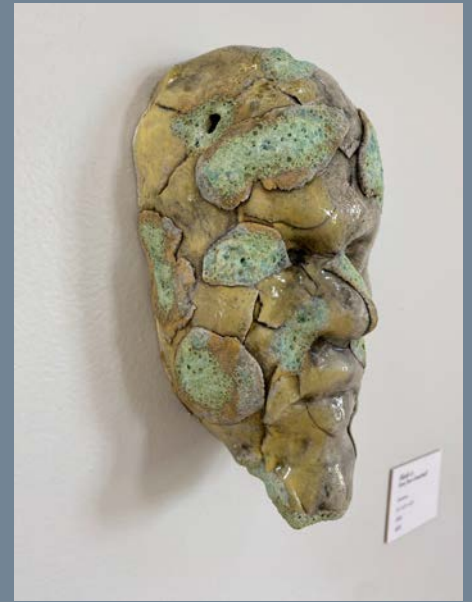
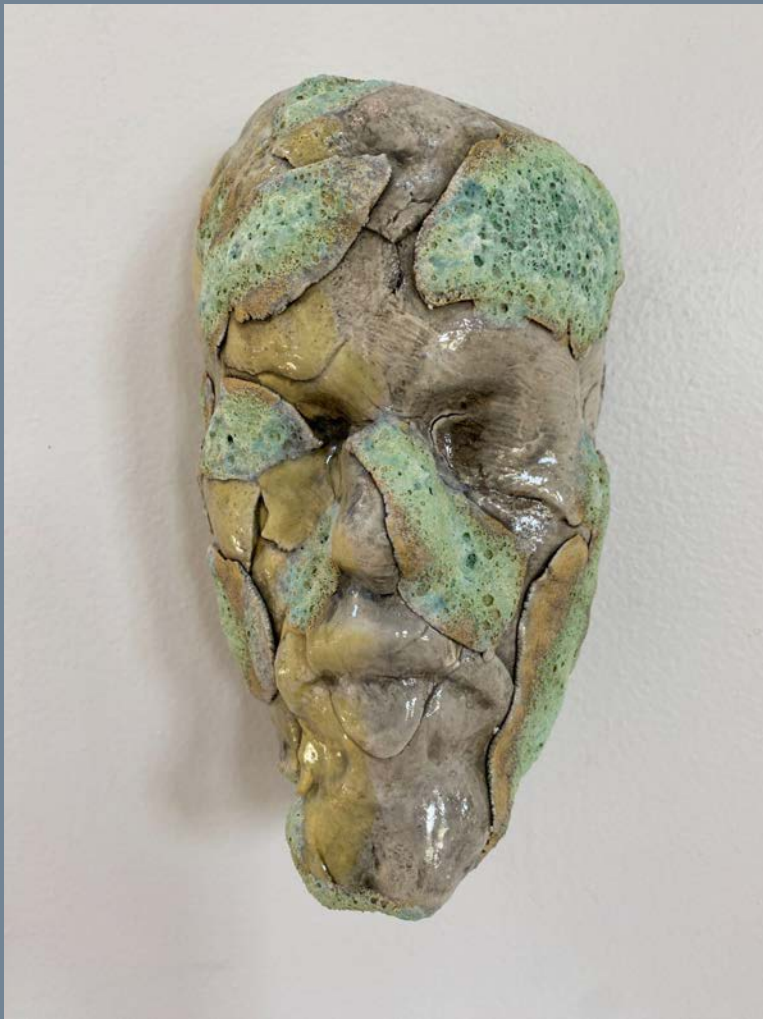
"Mask 11"

Series: Forty Years Unmarked?

Ceramics

8" x 4.5" x 4.5"

2026



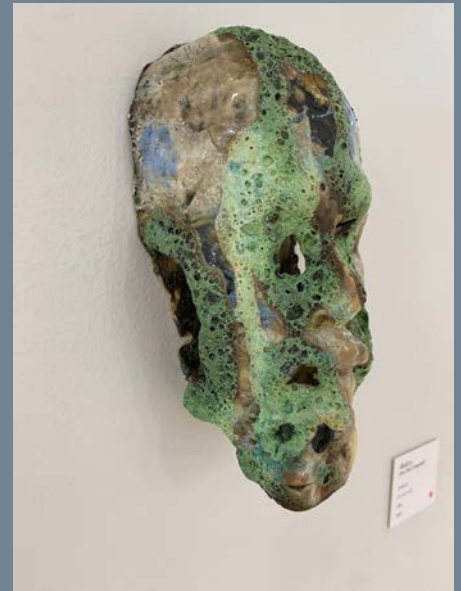
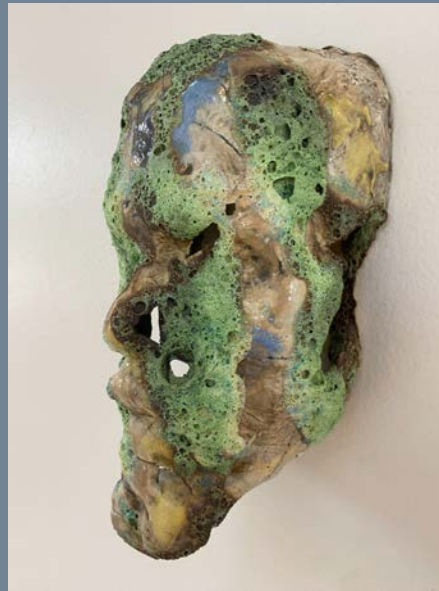
"Mask 12"

Series: Forty Years Unmarked?

Ceramics

8" x 4.5" x 4.5"

2026



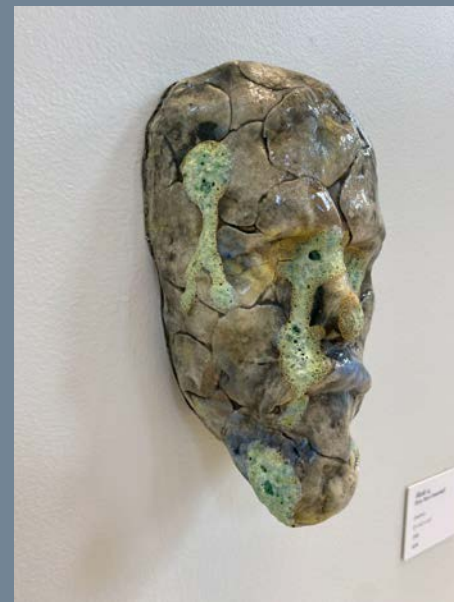
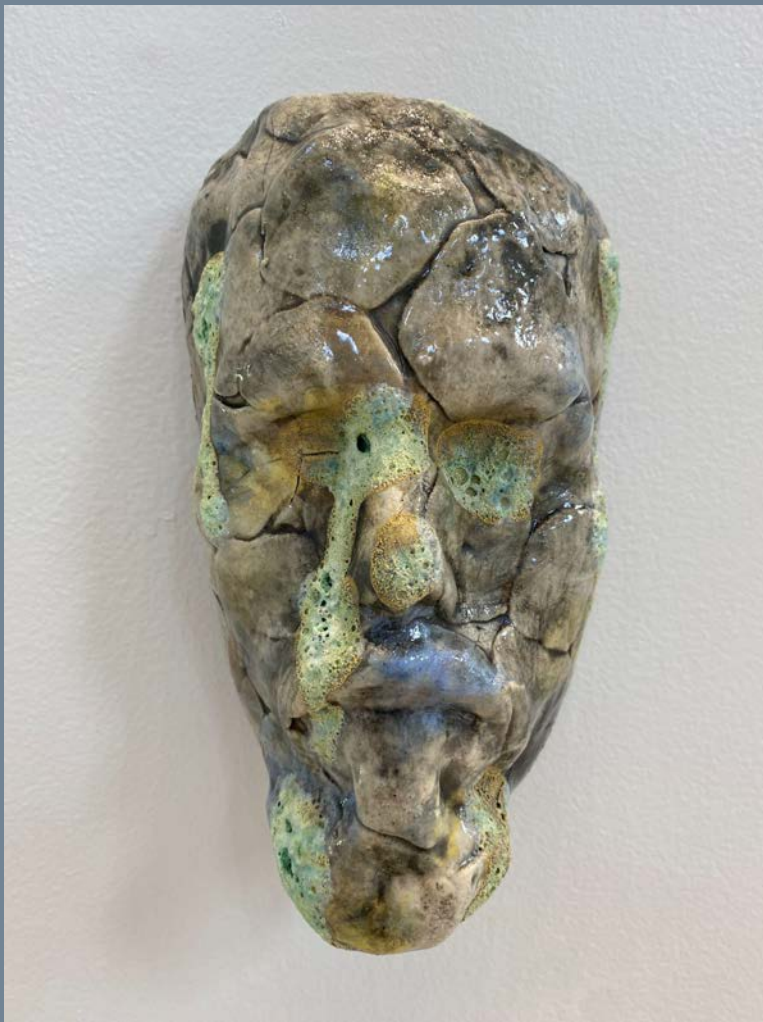
"Mask 13"

Series: Forty Years Unmarked?

Ceramics

8" x 4.5" x 4.5"

2026



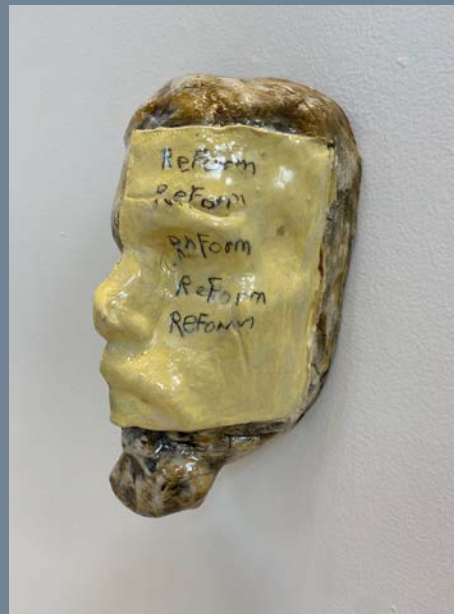
"Mask 14"

Series: Forty Years Unmarked?

Ceramics

8" x 4.5" x 4.5"

2026



"Mask 15"

Series: Forty Years Unmarked?

Ceramics

8" x 4.5" x 4.5"

2026



"Mask 16"

Series: Forty Years Unmarked?

Ceramics

8" x 4.5" x 4.5"

2026



"Mask 17"

Series: Forty Years Unmarked?

Ceramics

8" x 4.5" x 4.5"

2026



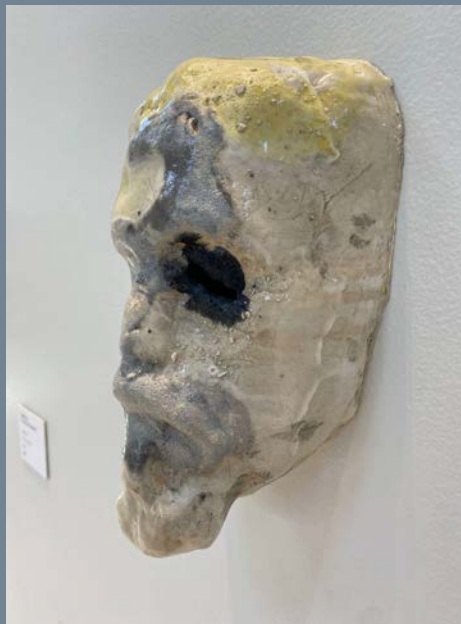
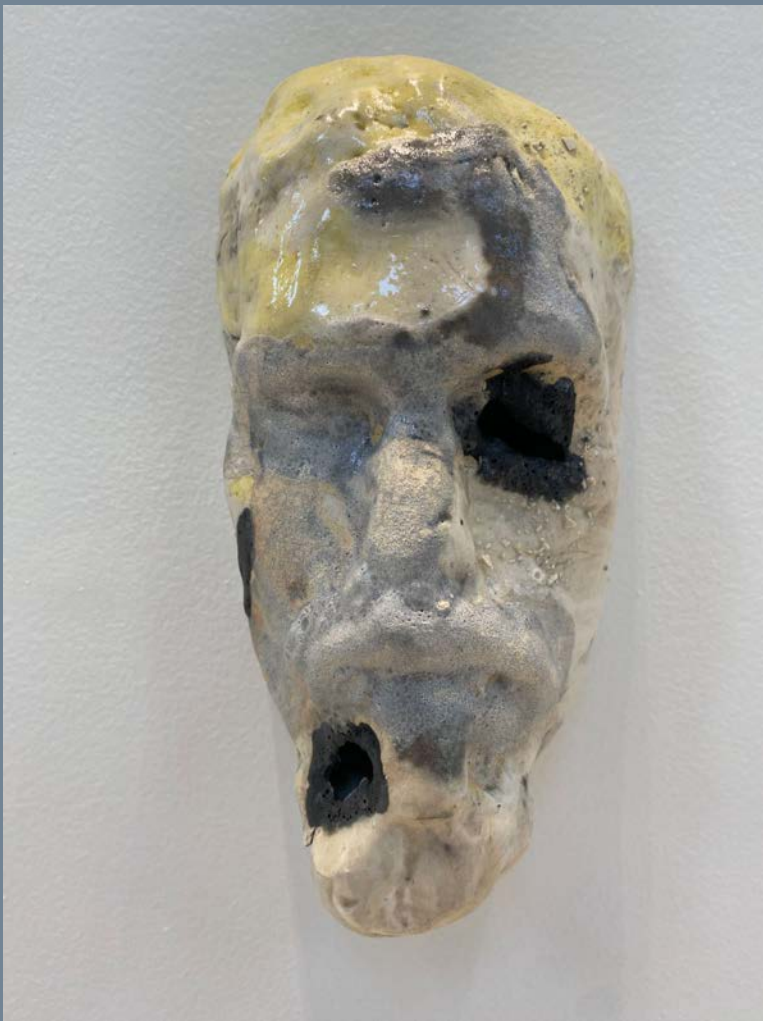
"Mask 18"

Series: Forty Years Unmarked?

Ceramics

8" x 4.5" x 4.5"

2026



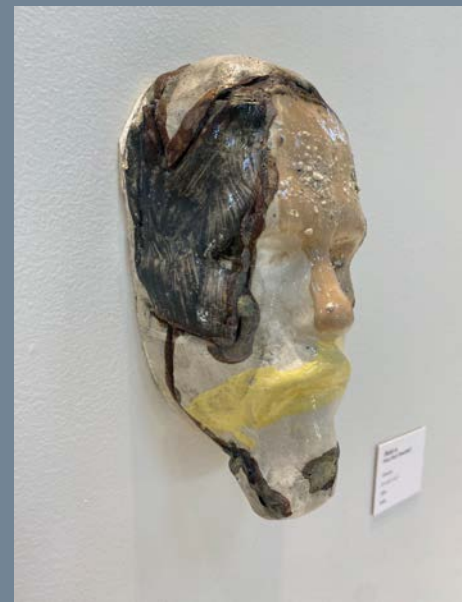
"Mask 19"

Series: Forty Years Unmarked?

Ceramics

8" x 4.5" x 4.5"

2026



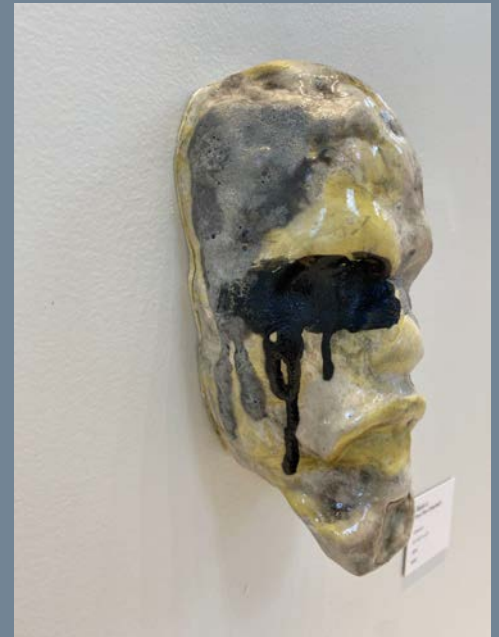
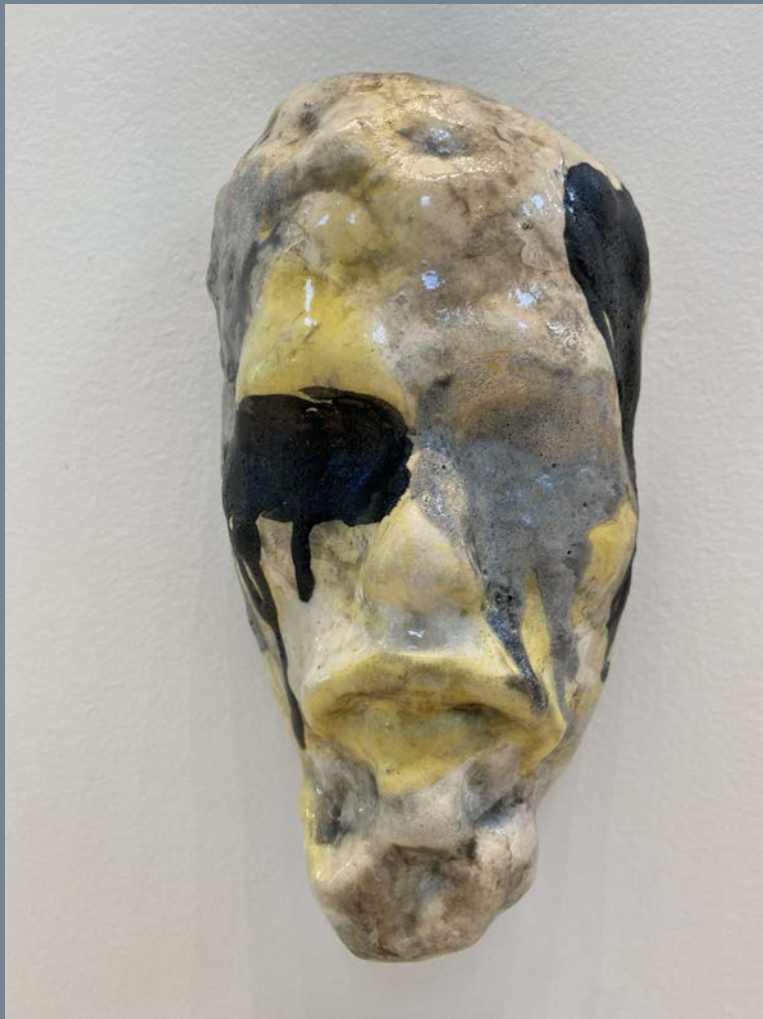
"Mask 20"

Series: Forty Years Unmarked?

Ceramics

8" x 4.5" x 4.5"

2026



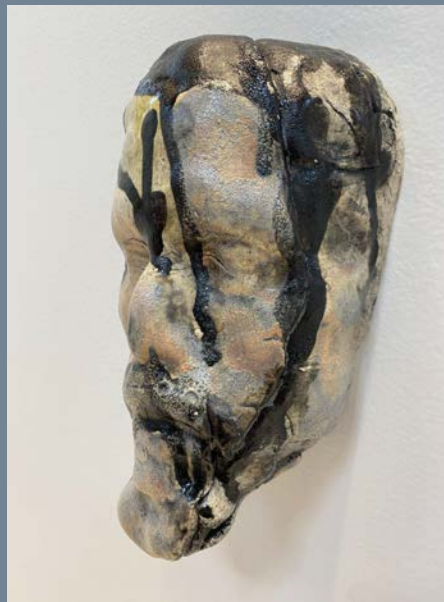
"Mask 21"

Series: Forty Years Unmarked?

Ceramics

8" x 4.5" x 4.5"

2026



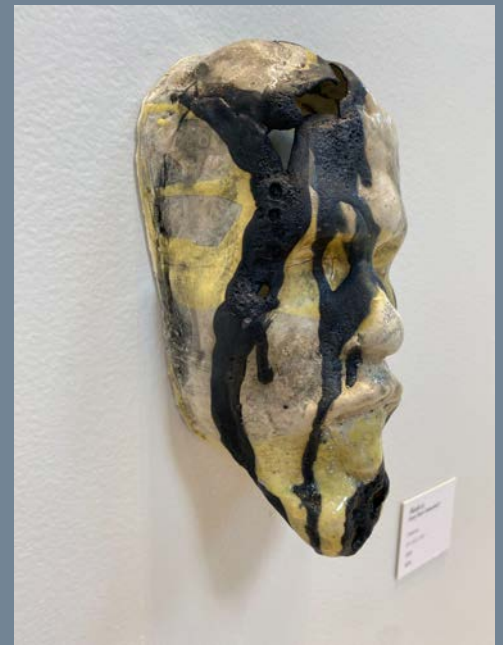
"Mask 22"

Series: Forty Years Unmarked?

Ceramics

8" x 4.5" x 4.5"

2026



"Mask 23"

Series: Forty Years Unmarked?

Ceramics

8" x 4.5" x 4.5"

2026



"Mask 24"

Series: Forty Years Unmarked?

Ceramics

8" x 4.5" x 4.5"

2026



"Mask 25"

Series: Forty Years Unmarked?

Ceramics

8" x 4.5" x 4.5"

2026



"Mask 26"

Series: Forty Years Unmarked?

Ceramics

8" x 4.5" x 4.5"

2026



"Mask 27"

Series: Forty Years Unmarked?

Ceramics

8" x 4.5" x 4.5"

2026



"Mask 28"

Series: Forty Years Unmarked?

Ceramics

8" x 4.5" x 4.5"

2026



"Mask 29"

Series: Forty Years Unmarked?

Ceramics

8" x 4.5" x 4.5"

2026



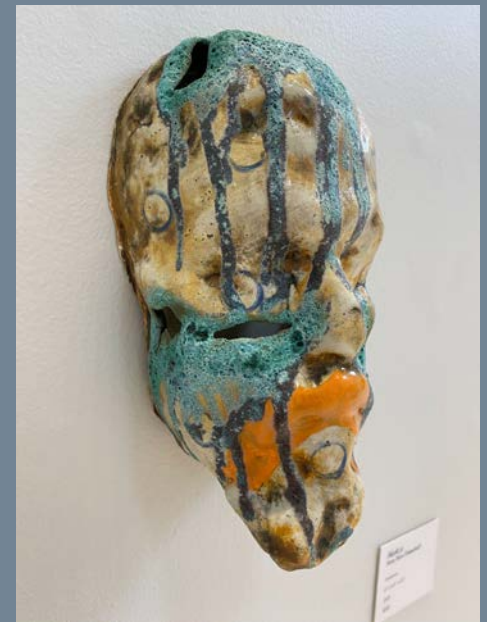
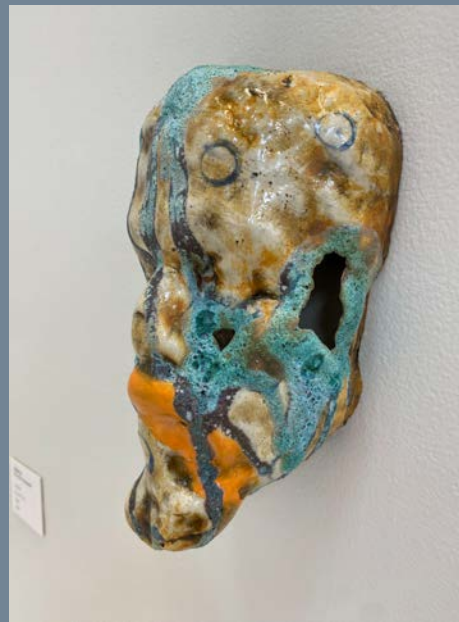
"Mask 30"

Series: Forty Years Unmarked?

Ceramics

8" x 4.5" x 4.5"

2026



"Mask 31"

Series: Forty Years Unmarked?

Ceramics

8" x 4.5" x 4.5"

2026



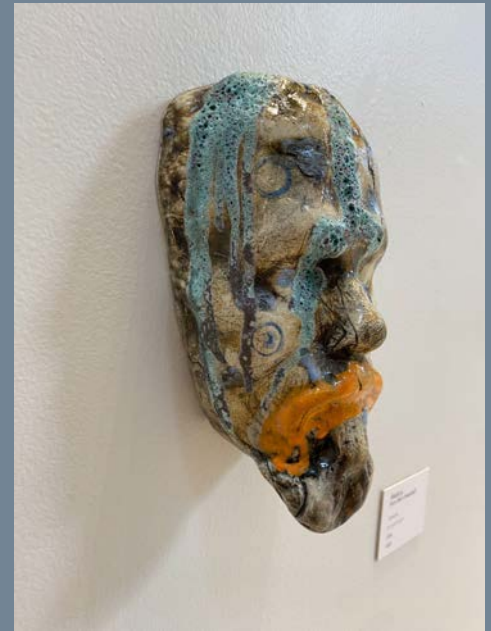
"Mask 32"

Series: Forty Years Unmarked?

Ceramics

8" x 4.5" x 4.5"

2026



"Mask 33"

Series: Forty Years Unmarked?

Ceramics

8" x 4.5" x 4.5"

2026



"Mask 34"

Series: Forty Years Unmarked?

Ceramics

8" x 4.5" x 4.5"

2026



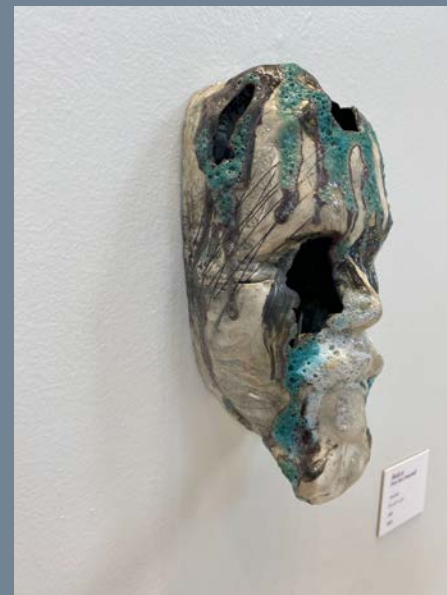
"Mask 35"

Series: Forty Years Unmarked?

Ceramics

8" x 4.5" x 4.5"

2026



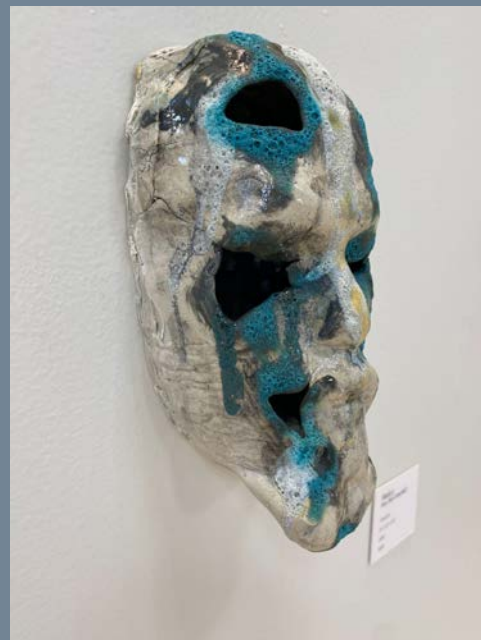
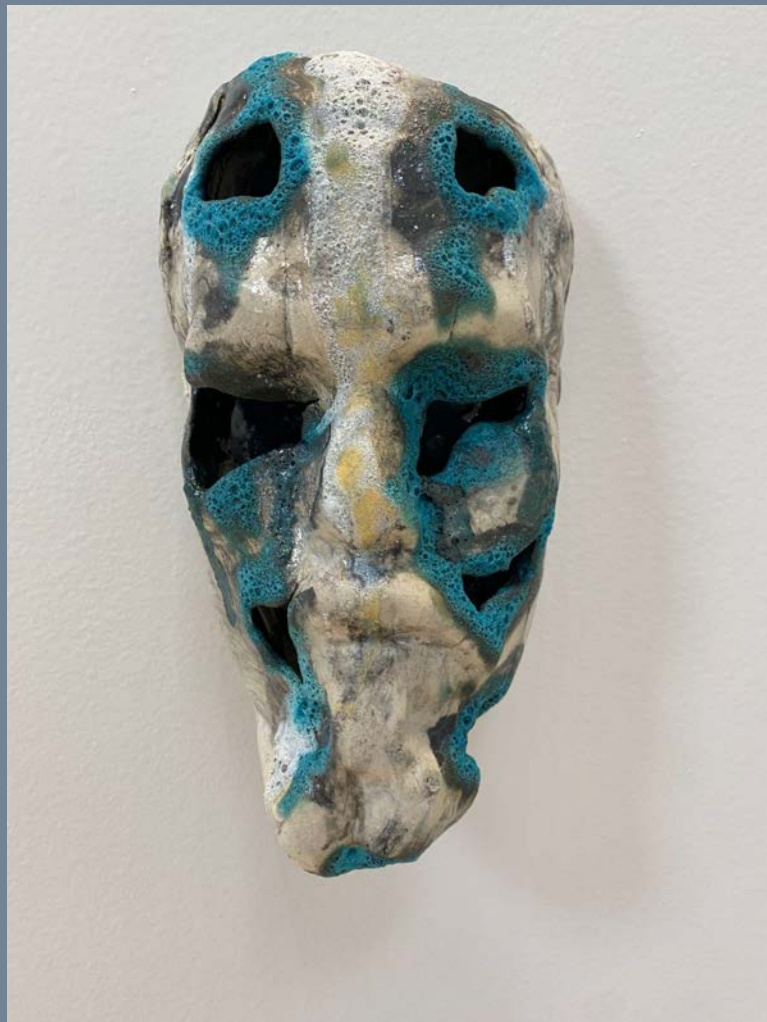
"Mask 36"

Series: Forty Years Unmarked?

Ceramics

8" x 4.5" x 4.5"

2026



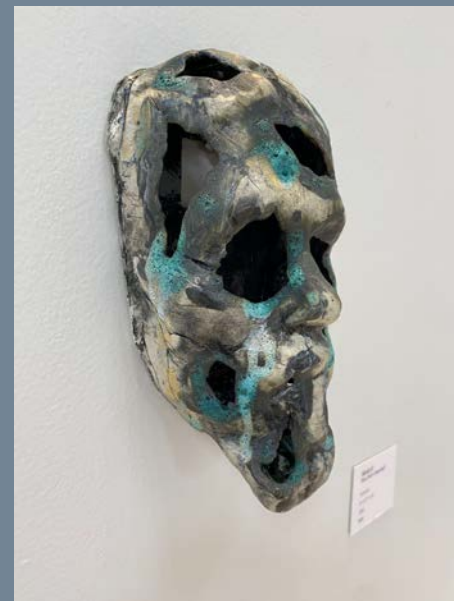
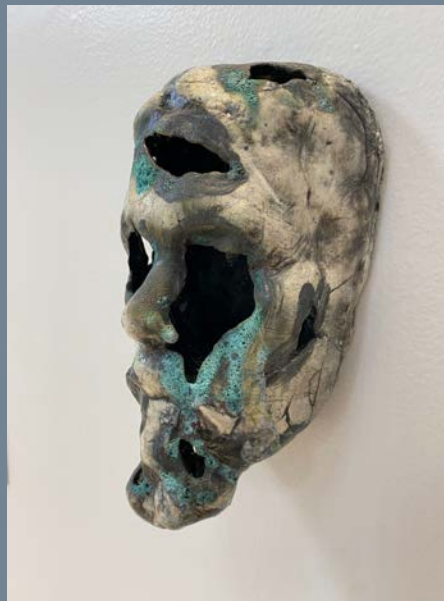
"Mask 37"

Series: Forty Years Unmarked?

Ceramics

8" x 4.5" x 4.5"

2026



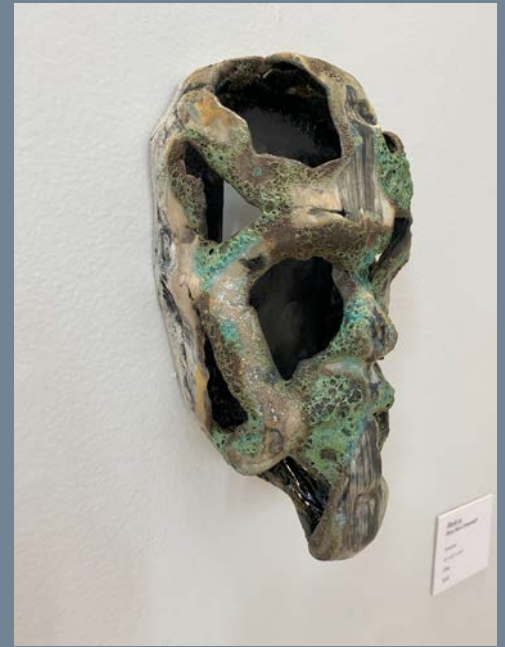
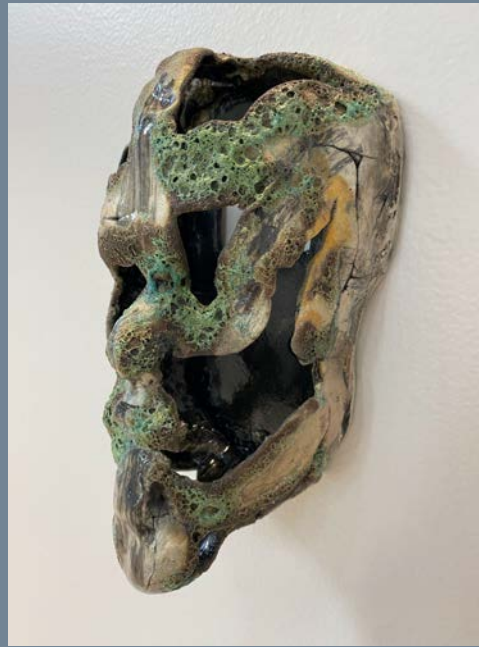
"Mask 38"

Series: Forty Years Unmarked?

Ceramics

8" x 4.5" x 4.5"

2026



"Mask 39"

Series: Forty Years Unmarked?

Ceramics

8" x 4.5" x 4.5"

2026



"Mask 40"

Series: Forty Years Unmarked?

Ceramics

8" x 4.5" x 4.5"

2026

Repeat Exposure series

This series examines how systems of economic, social, and cultural influence shape behavior through repetition. Rather than operating through direct force, these systems become embedded within daily routines, environments, and patterns of consumption until they appear natural. What feels like personal choice is often conditioned through sustained exposure.

Through staged self-portrait photography, the work traces repeated cycles of action, preparation, consumption, and aftermath. Each image reflects behaviors that are reinforced over time, revealing how survival, identity, and routine become intertwined with the external systems that continually shape them.



“Social System”

Series: Repeat Exposure

Ceramics

12.5" x 12.5" Framed

2026



“Preventative System”

Series: Repeat Exposure

Ceramics

12.5" x 12.5" Framed

2026



"Stimulation System"

Series: Repeat Exposure

Ceramics

12.5" x 12.5" Framed

2026



“Survival System”
Series: Repeat Exposure

Ceramics
12.5" x 12.5" Framed
2026



FORT HAYS STATE UNIVERSITY'S
MOSS-THORNS
GALLERY *of* ART

& The Patricia A. Schmidt Gallery Lobby

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Karrie Simpson-Voth

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