

Ceramics Art + Perception

2025

#125

USD	\$20
EUR	€18
CAD	\$27
AUD	\$27
GBP	£15



Coleton Lunt Living Ceramics: Uniting Utility and Sculpture

Written by Denise Massa

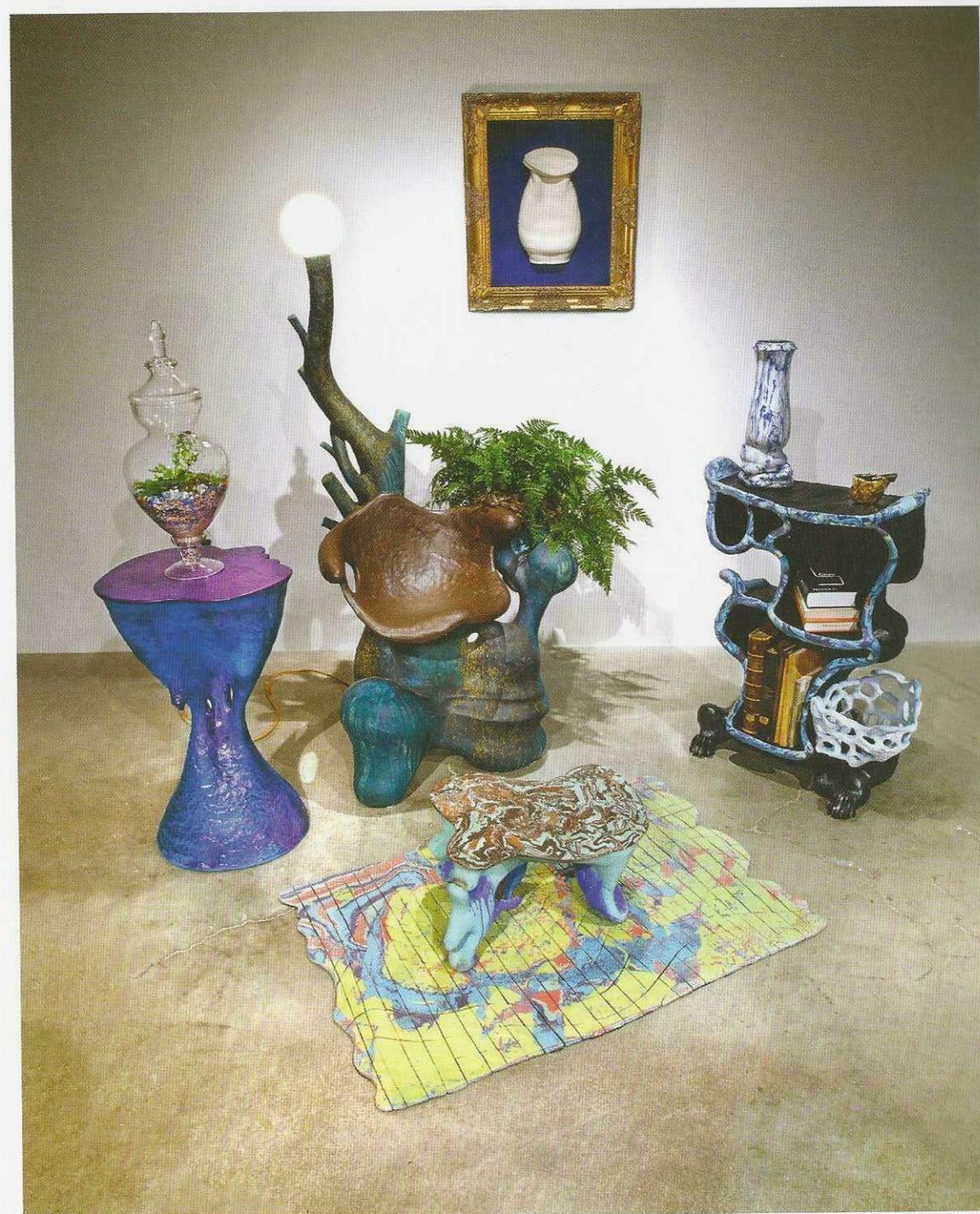
What if a sculpture could light the room, hold your coat, cradle a houseplant, and invite you to sit – all while blurring the line between art and function? Coleton Lunt's latest body of work, *Living Ceramics*, transforms this imaginative idea into reality, merging utility and sculpture into a collection that feels oddly correct or absurdly practical. These pieces are not confined to galleries; they belong in homes, where they shape and are shaped by the lives of their users. Born from Lunt's own domestic needs, this series reimagines ceramics as a medium that is as functional as it is poetic, as practical as it is profound.

In this collection, Lunt examines the enduring relationship between ceramics and utility throughout history and into the present day. While ceramics have played an essential role in daily life – serving functional, architectural, and ritualistic purposes – artists across cultures have long explored its creative and symbolic potential. In contemporary ceramics, some artists challenge traditional notions of function, while others, like Lunt, embrace and expand upon them. Rather than distancing himself from ceramics' practical legacy, he transforms it into a conceptual framework, redefining the medium's potential and demonstrating how art and function can seamlessly coexist in daily life.

The centerpiece of the series, *Lamp Chair Coatrack Planter (with Foot Stool)*, epitomizes Lunt's concept of "hyper-functional sculpture." This piece, an amalgamation of utilitarian objects pushed to a playful extreme, anchors a larger installation that transforms domestic routines into poetic encounters. Similarly, *Bookshelf Basket Keyrack Ashtray (with Vase)* balances sculptural presence with practicality, offering a space to hang keys, store books, and unwind. These works do not pit utility against beauty; instead, they show how one can amplify the other, inviting harmony into the everyday.

Lunt's visual language draws from nature's dichotomies. Organic forms evoke branching vines, cellular structures, and human anatomy, while geological textures ground the works in earthy familiarity. Yet these references are disrupted by surreal, electric hues that propel the pieces into new realms of possibility. This interplay mirrors the collection's conceptual heart: the synthesis of utility and sculpture, land and life, organism and environment. Each piece contributes to a larger dialogue, not only within the installation but also in the lives it will ultimately inhabit.

Living Ceramics
(left to right):
Side Table,
Terrarium with
Ceramic Soil, Lamp
Chair Coatrack Planter
(with Footstool),
Ceramic Rug,
Porcelain Pot Painting,
Bookshelf Basket
Keyrack Ashtray (with
Vase). 2024, porcelain,
stoneware, wood, resin,
polyacrylate, steel,
gold, velvet, neoprene,
glass, plastic, books, and
plants. 216 x 191 x 196 cm





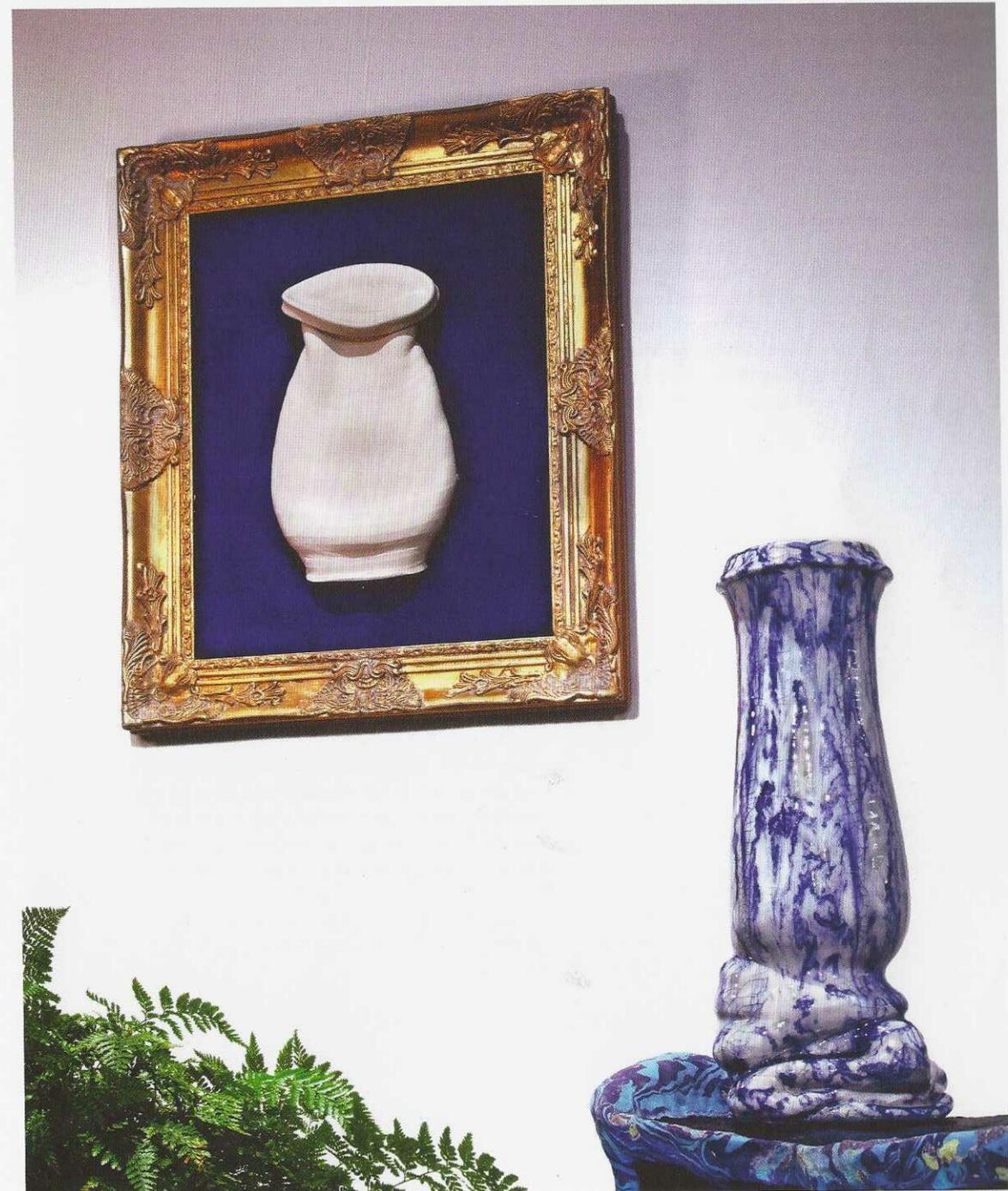
Process is central to the narrative of the series. *Porcelain Pot Painting*, the catalyst for this body of work, immortalizes a serendipitous moment when a wheel-thrown pot slipped from Lunt's hands and collapsed on the floor. Captured in a video on Lunt's Instagram feed, this uncontrived moment of creation became a turning point. Lunt preserved the flopped pot, framing it in gold with a blue velvet backdrop as

an ode to mistakes and the opportunities they can present. The collapsed pot relates to the upright *Vase* atop the *Bookshelf*, created during the same studio session. The cobalt glaze on the upright Vase echoes the velvet background of the *Painting*, connecting the two works in a shared dialogue about becoming – an unfolding journey where clay and consciousness shape one another in continuous evolution.

Above:
Ceramic Rug, 2024,
porcelain and neoprene,
1.5 x 80 x 115 cm.

Opposite:
Porcelain Pot Painting
and **Vase** (detail),
2024, porcelain, wood,
gold leaf, velvet.

Rather than existing solely as objects to be observed, Lunt's pieces cultivate a relationship with the viewer, dissolving the boundaries between art and utility.



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This body of work also ventures into uncharted utilitarian realms. The ceramic soil in *Terrarium*, alongside the *Coatrack*, *Basket*, *Keyrack*, and *Rug*, redefines ceramics' potential, introducing roles it has rarely, if ever, occupied. *Terrarium* and *Side Table* delve further, presenting a conceptual exploration of ecological intervention. The ceramic soil, made from crushed and fired clay remnants, sustains plants in a controlled environment, highlighting the increasing human mediation of natural ecosystems. The *Side Table* subtly casts a shadow of a human face upon the floor, reinforcing its influence on this small ecosystem.

The *Ceramic Rug* subverts expectations of both material and function, inviting viewers to step onto its surface and experience ceramics in an unexpected way. Composed of brightly

About the Artist

Coleton's process merges tradition with innovation, advancing ceramics as both utility and art. Raised near Zion National Park on the ancestral lands of the Puebloans, Coleton draws deeply from the natural rhythms of the American Southwest. Over 20 years, he has worked in more than 16 studios worldwide and completed residencies at Pottery Northwest, Belger Crane Yard Studios, Watershed Center for the Ceramic Arts, and the Association of Craft Producers in Nepal. Coleton earned his MFA from the University of Notre Dame, where he currently teaches and manages the ceramics studio, continuing to explore clay's limitless potential as a contemporary art form.

About the Author

Denise Massa, M.S. Ed., earned her degrees from Indiana University and Penn State University, respectively. She is currently a Visual Resources Curator at the University of Notre Dame, specializing in visual pedagogy across numerous disciplines. Her work encompasses all aspects of visual literacy and content, with a focus on research services, emerging technologies and instruction.

colored clay tiles adhered to a flexible neoprene backing, the piece shifts and clinks subtly underfoot, in a nod to the physical engagement of Carl Andre's floor sculptures. Like Andre's work, it dismantles traditional barriers between art and audience, transforming the act of walking into a means of interaction. By encouraging direct engagement, Lunt challenges the common perception of ceramics as fragile and untouchable, instead presenting it as dynamic, resilient, and deeply embedded in lived experience.

This invitation to engage – whether by walking, sitting, or using – extends across the entire body of work. Rather than existing solely as objects to be observed, Lunt's pieces cultivate a relationship with the viewer, dissolving the boundaries between art and utility. His collection embraces paradox, existing in dialogue with ceramics' history while carving new pathways for its future. By engaging audiences in tactile, lived experiences, Lunt bridges the gap between art and audience. His work doesn't argue for form over function or function over form – it embodies a seamless balance where neither is sacrificed.

Through *Living Ceramics*, Lunt challenges viewers to rethink the role of ceramics in contemporary art and design. His work honors the medium's rich heritage while embracing its potential for reinvention. These pieces celebrate ceramics as a medium to be utilized and embraced, not tiptoed around. Bridging the familiar and the unexpected, the practical and the poetic, Lunt inspires a renewed appreciation for the boundless possibilities of clay. ■

Terrarium and *Coatrack* (detail), 2024, stoneware, wood, polyacrylate, glass, plants.



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