A masterful craftsman, Michael Sherrill uses clay, metal, and glass to create large, botanically inspired sculpture. His form, technique, and process allow him to translate subtle details found in nature into dramatic objects of beauty. He has invented new tools and processes to render the “humanity of materials.” His sculptures draw from botanical imagery of the mountains of North Carolina to connect with the deep emotional and psychological states of humanity.

Sherrill’s objects invite the viewer into a state of discovery and wonder. These skillfully wrought, complex natural narratives make Sherrill’s work widely admired and collected and his strong connection to place solidifies his position as a quintessential Southern artist.

To provide a sense of the artist’s evolution, the exhibition is more or less chronological and organized into four sections: Early Work, Teapots, Studio, and Contemporary Sculpture. The sections are introduced by Michael Sherrill himself, via a series of videos commissioned especially for this exhibition.

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Early Works
Raised in Charlotte, North Carolina, Michael Sherrill moved to the mountains of western North Carolina in 1974, where he began his career as a production potter. In 1976, he became a member of the Southern Highland Craft Guild and shortly thereafter opened his first pottery in a humble post-and-beam studio called the Potter’s House. A single parent of three at the time, Sherrill made and sold pots to support his family.

Sherrill is largely self-taught; his curiosity, ingenuity, sensitivity to form, and connection to place are visible in his earliest works. The artist acquainted himself with ceramics from around the world by poring over pottery books. When he saw a form that he loved, he would make copies until he was satisfied with the results. Like the early nineteenth-century American painters who learned their trade by copying the masters, Sherrill learned by copying works by unknown craftsmen of Korea, China, Japan, Greece, and Central America through images.

Because of this approach, Sherrill combined various ceramic and cultural references to develop his own unique voice. His early works incorporate influences from the nearby Seagrove potters, the pre-digital culture of the early 1980s, the gestural painting of the abstract expressionists, and East Asian aesthetics and processes, including the use of porcelain, landscape paintings, and raku firing.

Steins
1977
salt glaze, stoneware
This set of four salt-fired steins with gesturally applied black, white, and caramel-colored glazes is representative of Sherrill’s early works. While their forms draw inspiration from the sturdy, salt-glazed wares of the nearby Seagrove potters, the free application of glaze is reminiscent of mid-century action painting. The set was selected for the Mint Museum’s juried 1978 Biennial Exhibition of Piedmont Crafts: A Competitive Exhibition and acquired by the same institution.

Sphere
1982
salt glaze, stoneware
Collection of Betty Byrum
Largely self-taught, Sherrill would pore over pottery books, acquainting himself with the history of the medium and the many forms ceramics took around the world. This work is an example of how the artist processed and synthesized these influences. The form of Sphere is reminiscent of a Korean moon jar, the landscape motif is a nod to East Asian painting, and the clay body and glazing harkens to the tradition of studio pottery in the West.

Vase with Landscape
1983
porcelain, salt glaze
Collection of the artistSherrill’s early efforts were heavily influenced by East Asian aesthetics and processes, including his use of porcelain and the incorporation of landscape as decoration. On this vase a scruffy tree grows on the side of a mountain, silhouetted by moonlight. The movement of the artist’s hand, implied in drips and splatters of glaze, add a dynamism to the pastoral scene.
**Tanzen Covered Jars**  
ca. 1984  
raku white stoneware with glaze; handle includes wood  
Collection of the artist  
These covered jars were inspired by Oribe ware, a seventeenth-century style of Japanese ceramics that is characterized by irregularly shaped and brightly colored vessels often with bold, hand-painted patterns and designs. They are raku fired, allowing Sherrill to get the vibrant pinks, purples, blues, and greens he desired. The jars are covered in colored squiggles, swirls, and dots. These designs are reminiscent of appliqué or assemblage found in postmodern visual culture.

**Potter's Tongue**  
ca. 1987  
raku white stoneware with glaze; thrown and altered  
Collection of the artist  
The three vessels in *Potter's Tongue* speak what the artist calls “the language of a potter,” by which he means that the aesthetics are a direct nod to the technical processes that went into making the work. The marks on the surfaces of these pots speak directly to the hand (and mind) that made them. In this case, Sherrill was playing with the firing process, situating the pots upside down and on their sides to get the glazes to run in a gravity-defying way, giving them the appearance of “looking at a planet spinning through space.”

**The Americas Series**  
1991  
raku white stoneware, applied color  
Collection of the artist  
These works are reminiscent of Native American and ancient American ceramics in form, yet their surface decoration and vibrant colors may also relate to the graffiti and punk culture of the late 1980s and early 1990s. Sherrill’s early series are testaments to his love of form, skillful execution, and interest in color and surface design that mature throughout the rest of his career.

**Contemporary Sculpture**  
Sherrill became interested in what he calls “the humanity of material,” the visible residue left by the repetitive interactions between humans and things. This indescribable quality of a material worn by time became a driving force in much of Sherrill’s innovation with his materials as he searched for balance and unity between form and color.

Looking back over his advances in glazing, mastery of materials, and innovation in form, Sherrill’s technical career could be summarized as a quest to integrate form and surface. Through his carved and polished color clay bodies, Sherrill moved closer to conveying the “humanity of material.”

**Star Bottles**  
1997  
white stoneware, barium glaze  
Collection of the artist  
The glowing colors and speckled surfaces seen on works like *Star Bottles* were due to Sherrill’s development of a new barium glaze recipe. This glaze allowed Sherrill to achieve bright, iridescent colors.
Right and Left Brain
1994
white stoneware, barium glaze
Collection of the artist
Sherrill thrives on problem solving and thinking with his hands. He is a tinkerer, fixer, and innovator, and his ability to think outside the box gives him a competitive advantage as a maker. As a student Sherrill was diagnosed with dyslexia, a language-based learning disability. Right and Left Brain refers to the artist’s desire to understand the way his brain works.

Turning Leaves
1998
stoneware, alkaline glaze
Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Gift of Gump’s San Francisco
Nine colorful yet spindly forms make up this installation, which expresses many of the artist’s interests. Explorations of color, line, space, and form combine with the artist’s playful aesthetics in abstracted leaves. The word “turning” in the title might refer to both twisting and spinning in space, as a leaf does when it falls to the ground, and the turning colors of leaves in the autumn.

Tango Leaf
1998
white stoneware, metallic glaze
The Mint Museum, Gift of Rebecca Klemm, 2006.96
Tango Leaf is a pivotal piece, marking a shift from Sherrill’s minimalistic, restrained sculptures to lyrical and natural forms. Here two leaf-like silhouettes curve toward one another, as if swaying in a dance, eventually merging into one. Tango Leaf is also an example of Sherrill's interest in and use of negative space. The area around and between the outstretched leaves is activated by the sculpture.

Locust Bottles
1999
porcelain, abraded glaze
Collection of Rebecca Klemm
Sherrill produced Locust Bottles with abraded glazes, achieving the effect of a weathered surface. Using colored engobe, a watery clay substance applied after a piece has been fired to a low temperature, or bisqued, Sherrill would apply coat after coat and then work back through the layers by rubbing, scratching, or scraping, revealing various layers of color.

Tumbling Fishtail Poplar
1999
porcelain, glaze, steel
Collection of Rebecca Klemm
At the end of each summer, the stately poplar tree in Sherrill’s front yard drops bunches of yellow, red, and green flowers, or catkins. Tumbling Fishtail Poplar was inspired by these forms, which land in all sorts of shapes. The sculpture is an abstraction of these catkins, consisting of a series of golden-colored pods organized around a central stem that twists and turns, mimicking the shapes of the poplar clusters.
Honey Locust
2001
porcelain, forged steel
Collection of the artist
Honey Locust is an example of how Sherrill marries materials like metal and glass into his sculpture. Here the stem is hand-forged out of steel; the hammer marks mimic the surface of a branch. Sherrill began using metal to create larger works to avoid putting too much strain on the porcelain clay. Early works tended to hide the metal armatures, but they soon became central features of the work.

Bumbleberry
1999
porcelain, abraded glaze, alloy steel
The Mint Museum, Museum Purchase, Funds provided by Susan and Loy McKeithen, 1999.124
Bumbleberry was inspired by a kiwi plant that grew just outside the door of Sherrill’s studio. Not native to the region, the plant never bore fruit, but each spring its tendrils would reach out, grasping for light and something sturdy to hold onto. The swooping, winding, and unfurling motion of a tiny vine takes on a profound presence when rendered in large scale and mounted to the wall. While Sherrill often works with native and local plants, works like Bumbleberry show Sherrill’s ability to use the local environment as a jumping-off point for more abstracted works as well.

Appalachian Cutout
1999
porcelain, steel
Collection of Clemmer and David Montague
Colorful leaf forms carefully balance on top of one another in Appalachian Cutout. The shapes evoke Henri Matisse cutouts—emphasizing the colorful, rounded outlines Matisse favored. But unlike the French artist, Sherrill adds dimension to the form and depth to the surface of the leaves. By layering glazes and then sanding back through them, Sherrill creates a worn finish reminiscent of the distressed surfaces common throughout the South. In this way, the artist inserts an Appalachian aesthetic into modern art history.

Yellowstone Rhododendron
2000
porcelain, glaze, steel
Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of David and Clemmer Montague, in memory of her mother Beatrice Slaton and her brother Carson Slaton, Mississippi gardeners
Sherrill’s abraded surfaces reveal strata of color; they allowed the artist to capture “that sense of materiality that we had here in the region where I lived.” This new surface process arose at the time Sherrill began working with botanical motifs.

Appalachian Moment
1999
steel, abraded porcelain
Hickory Museum of Art
By incorporating an anvil into Appalachian Moment, Sherrill makes process visible. This piece was inspired when Sherrill placed a branch he was working on in the pinhole of the anvil and realized, "This needs to be here." The branch seems to grow out of the anvil, suggesting the symbiotic relationship among inspiration, skill, and epiphany in the artist’s work.
New Growth Maquette
2001
abraded porcelain, steel
Collection of the artist
This maquette was a preliminary study for a twenty-six-foot sculpture commissioned by Bank of America and installed in the Gateway Village in Charlotte, North Carolina, in 2003. Sherrill often uses models, a type of sketch in three dimensions, to work out the details of his ideas before rendering them in full scale. New Growth is the largest public sculpture Sherrill has created to date.

Reconciliation between the Light and the Dark
2006
cast gray iron, enamel
Collection of the artist
Reconciliation between the Light and the Dark recalls the minimalist forms the artist was producing in the early 1990s, scaling them to a life-size experience. Produced during Sherrill’s Kohler residency, these sculptures call to mind the abstract sculptures of Constantin Brâncuși, sharing simplicity of form and interest in light and surface. The pair of sculptures has a spiritual effect, making and marking a sort of passageway between the two.

Like Water
2006
cast gray iron, enamel
Collection of the artist
In 2006 Sherrill was awarded a prestigious residency at the Kohler factory through the John Michael Kohler Arts Center’s Arts/Industry Program. This residency provided access to industrial tools and equipment, including large enamel ovens that could fire objects as large as a bathtub. Like Water transforms the rigid qualities of cast iron into fluid, elliptical forms. The translucent aqua blue glazes underline the liquid appearance of the sculptures.

Celadon
2006
cast gray iron, enamel
Collection of the artist
These large wall hangings were made during Sherrill’s residency at the John Michael Kohler Arts Center. The pod-like forms hang open, inviting the viewer to take in the subtle details of the enamel, or layer of glass, that creates the surface. Seeing them side by side, the viewer can compare the surface variations created by different enameling techniques.

Bloom at Night
2008
mokume-style porcelain, silica bronze, Moretti glass
Collection of Anna and Hays Mershon, Promised gift to the High Museum of Art
Bloom at Night is part of a series of botanical studies incorporating sometimes brightly colored clay with glass and metal. Rather than being copies of existing floral species, these fictive studies were invented by the artist. As their titles suggest, they are made to occupy a vivid dreamscape full of bold emotions and heightened senses, all of which is underscored by the dramatic pops of reds, greens, and yellows and the Moretti glass strategically placed at the center of each flower.
How Plants Travel
2003
porcelain, steel, glass
Collection of Marsha Madorsky
In the early 2000s Sherrill’s work became larger, yet more refined, shifting from tabletop items to wall pieces. How Plants Travel is indicative of these new areas of artistic exploration. The metal armature, which is present in other works, here becomes a central design feature, both lending support for the nearly life-size structure and leading the eye up and through the work, connecting all the pieces into one. Like notches in a growth chart, the flower forms are measured in their placement, gradually getting smaller with each new iteration. This has the effect of time-lapse photography, as the viewer is invited to contemplate each stage of growth as parts or a whole.

Mouths to Feed
2009
colored laminated porcelain, silica bronze, Moretti glass
The Corning Museum of Glass, Anonymous gift in honor of the Penland School of Crafts
In Mouths to Feed, the flower’s stamen, or central reproductive feature, delicately ascends from the hefty leaves below. Tiny yellow petals hang precariously off the upright feature, looking particularly fragile and exposed. The top of the tower leans to one side, as if weighted by all the precious yellow petals. Mouths to Feed is an autobiographical work about how to make a living as an artist. As the title suggests, the artistic process is complicated by the pressures of daily life—of those who depend on the artist. The scene is fragile and delicate, bound to induce worry, but full of beauty at the same time.

What the Eye Sees
2003
porcelain, steel
Collection of Ann and Tom Cousins
Sherrill’s work is often informed by his relationship with and experiences in the Appalachian Mountains. Alma and Ott Avery were neighbors and close friends to the artist. The Averys, avid gardeners and well-versed in the regional climate and culture, had an extensive apple orchard. Apples are a recurring motif in the artist’s work, both a reflection of the importance of Sherrill’s relationship with the Averys and a starting point from which to develop form and meaning. The title, What the Eye Sees, is a statement about how Sherrill wants his work to be interpreted. Despite the deeply personal narratives bound up in each sculpture, the artist is interested in creating space for viewers to bring their own stories, to see through their own eyes.

Heavy with Love
2003
porcelain, steel
Collection of Marsha Madorsky
In Heavy with Love, three apples hang from a branch. The ripe fruit dangles low, pulling on the bough. This piece was made when Sherrill’s three oldest children were going through hard times and he was dealing with the emotional weight of trying to let them be adults. It is an example of how the artist draws on his personal relationships to inform the formal and conceptual underpinnings of a work of art.
**Julesvernium (Seaflower)**
2008
color laminated porcelain, silica bronze, Moretti glass
The Mark Parker Collection

*Julesvernium (Seaflower)* depicts three stages of a single flower—opening, blooming, and waning. The work is similar to the earlier piece, *How Plants Travel*, which also depicts the life cycle of a flower. This work shows how the artist’s ideas clarify over time, enabling him to say more with less.

**Brightly Hidden**
2010
porcelain, silica bronze, glass
Museum of Glass, Tacoma, Washington, Gift of the artist

*Brightly Hidden* was produced during Sherrill’s visiting artist residency at the Tacoma Museum of Glass. It incorporates a central glass feature—the slithering green snake tightly wound around the stem of a gloriously blooming flower. The imagery conjures the Biblical story of the snake in the Garden of Eden, a juxtaposition of good and evil, beauty and perceived danger. *Brightly Hidden* is an example of how Sherrill’s works can be read on multiple levels—as beautiful objects and as narratives.

**Elephant Tea Leaf**
2005
porcelain; bronze handle and glass finial
Collection of Margery Sherrill

*Elephant Tea Leaf* is a testament to Sherrill’s ongoing love of the teapot form and his response to place. Made in 2005 after a trip to South Korea, the teapot appears to be made of a large, folded elephant ear leaf. It is the only teapot that incorporates Sherrill’s abraded glazing technique.

**May’s Apples**
2006
porcelain, abraded glaze, steel
Collection of the artist

*May’s Apples* are formal studies drawn from the flora surrounding the artist’s studio. Smaller in scale than many of Sherrill's other botanical sculptures, the work uses the language of scientific botanical studies. The forms hang side by side, inviting comparison between the two states of the plant. The fruits are rendered as cut-aways, showing the cross section of the interior.

**A Beautiful Death**
2017
porcelain, silica bronze, Moretti glass
Collection of the artist

This sculpture exhibits the artist’s love of line and sensitivity to space. The bronze armature frames the central drama of colorful leaves and blossoms. These showcase the craftsman’s never-ending thirst for material innovation, the carved rhododendron leaves revealing a new surface treatment that renders a smooth, supple texture to the clay. The sculpture presents us with the scene of a rhododendron bud ready to burst into a glorified blossom, all the while surrounded by leaves that are withering and decaying on the branch. We know it is a matter of time until the bud will also wilt, and because of that, the brilliant pink and coral hues of the petals shine that much brighter. Works like *A Beautiful Death* allow us to see through an artist’s eyes—to hone in on the details, to reflect on our experiences, and to find beauty in these moments.
Remnant
2016
porcelain, silica bronze
Private collection
In Remnant, a broken branch hangs by a splinter of wood. Dried and withering leaves cling to the branch that once provided nourishment. It is only a matter of time before a strong wind comes to unseat this heavy mass. But just above the fracture, new growth springs up. Healthy, green, fledgling leaves burst out of the branch, a proclamation of life. Here, in one frame, we are presented with life and death. The past clings, not ready to let go.

Old Man’s Beard
2014
porcelain, silica bronze
Collection of Brad and Judy Chase
The title, Old Man’s Beard, is a reference to a wooly lichen that can be found growing in Appalachia. However, the work is an abstraction: it does not seek to replicate the natural form, as some of Sherrill’s works do. “What I see in this piece is the movement of the wind, the flow of water, and the vascular form of all growing things,” says Sherrill. It is his largest work featuring an imaginary botanical form.

A watershed moment occurred when Sherrill began using the extruder to organize colored clays. He could systematically layer and fold the clays in the extruder, push them through a die, and create the vibrant and layered surfaces he was longing for. At last, Sherrill did not have to apply color to form—it was incorporated.

Black Medicine
2014
silica bronze, Moretti glass
Collection of Fleur Bresler
Metal and glass become the focal point in Black Medicine, one of Sherrill’s most delicate sculptures. Its intricate components invite the viewer to look more closely, appreciating the craftsmanship of the metalwork and subtle shifts in color of the Moretti glass and porcelain berries. The shadows cast by the branch system are as much a consideration as the sprawling form itself, adding depth and complexity to the work. Black Medicine is based on an elderberry bush and the title refers to the Appalachian tradition of making remedies from plants and herbs. Elderberry is thought to boost the immune system and is used to treat symptoms of influenza and other illnesses.

Descending Rhododendron
2006
porcelain, abraded glaze, silica bronze, Moretti glass
Collection of Biltmore Farms, LLC
Unlike many American landscape painters of the nineteenth century who wanted to capture the beauty of nature in its grandeur, Sherrill seeks to capture beauty in its infinite detail. Descending Rhododendron singles out one branch from this native species and places it on the wall where a painting might hang. The work captures the splendor of nature in the angles of the branch and the bright colors of the leaves.
**Undressed Magnolia**  
2003  
porcelain, glaze, steel  
Collection of Ann and Tom Cousins  
Nature is a dramatic affair. Life, death, sex, struggle and beauty all play out over the seasons, offering an abundance of actions that can become metaphors for our own human experience. In *Undressed Magnolia*, supple petals gently unfold in a moment of fragile tenderness.

**Stormy Rhododendron**  
2005  
porcelain, abraded glaze, forged steel  
Collection of Larry Brady  
In *Stormy Rhododendron*, the porcelain leaves are caught in an agitated state, as if a strong burst of wind has just come and disturbed their peace. The work captures a moment of change, frozen in time for the viewer’s contemplation and wonder. The work imbues a single instant with meaning, as if asking, “How fragile is this life?” and “How quickly can things change?”

**Shadow**  
2014  
colored laminated porcelain, silica bronze, Moretti glass  
Collection of William and Marianne Berry  
*Shadow* and *Dutch Solomon* are a continuation of the series of small-scale botanical studies completed in the 2000s. They are imaginary forms created in the mind of the artist. However, these works are much more complex in their stem structure and showcase the artist’s skill in metalworking and his new advances in colored porcelain. The forms are delicate and restrained, the porcelain is light and translucent.

**Temple of the Cool Beauty (Yucca)**  
2005  
porcelain, silica bronze, Moretti glass  
The Mint Museum, Gift of Ann and Tom Cousins, 2014.78A—B  
Other non-native varieties slip into the rotation: honey locust, poplar, magnolias, and more. Sherrill’s teaching, residencies, and artwork have taken him all over the world. Works like *Temple of Cool Beauty (Yucca)* and *Elephant Tea Leaf* underline how attuned he is to the natural environment. Wherever he goes, he is inspired by the landscape.

**Flourish Rhododendron**  
2008  
porcelain, glaze, bronze  
Collection of Carol and Shelton Gorelick, Charlotte, North Carolina  
In *Flourish Rhododendron* the leaves droop, conveying a stillness reminiscent of a languid summer afternoon in the mountains. The color palette does not match the natural realism of the form, but rather captures the feeling the artist wishes to convey. The blues, yellows, reds, and greens express a vibrancy, a consciousness of being alive and thriving.
**Bringing Up Babies**  
2003  
porcelain, glaze, steel  
Collection of Abbey Chase and Manny Palgon  
Like *Heavy with Love* and *Mouths to Feed*, *Bringing Up Babies* reflects the artist’s experience raising children. A father of six, Sherrill explores his own relationships and experiences, inviting the viewer to identify and share in these emotions. In this work small, round fruits are nestled in the form, camouflaged by the surrounding leaves. The title of the work combined with the placement of the fruit suggests this work is not just about raising the young, but about how to bring them up in the world, in a tradition, and in a community.

**Studio**  
Nestled in a small valley in the town of Bat Cave, North Carolina, is a large, barn-like structure connected to a log cabin by a charming path that winds over a tributary to the nearby Solola Creek. This is Michael Sherrill’s studio. Inside, the space is industrial, with machines lining the walls of every room. Over the years the room has acquired character; large fragments of old advertising posters cover one wall, on others paint peels away to reveal a visually satisfying and highly graphic surface—much like Sherrill’s art.

Before YouTube and access to how-to videos, Sherrill was able to envision the work he wanted to make and then invent or acquire the tools, skills, or processes he needed to make that vision a reality. Almost every tool he owns has been modified in some way—from ribs and wire cutters to extruders—constantly evolving to meet the artist’s needs. These modified tools, it turns out, developed a large following. In 1997, Sherrill founded Mudtools, a line of hand-held ceramic tools produced in the bright color palette for which Sherrill is known. They are bought and sold internationally and today the company supports thirteen employees.

Place and space are an important influence for Sherrill’s work. The studio is part laboratory (a place where the artist can test new ideas) and part source of inspiration (a place for collecting and displaying objects and curios accumulated over the years). Seen on the wall behind you an image of Sherrill’s studio, capturing the environment the artist created for practicing his craft.

**Dividing the Light**  
1991  
white stoneware, barium glaze  
Collection of the artist  
A testament to the artist’s interest in the formal qualities of sculpture, *Dividing the Light* uses a restrained color palette of black and white to accentuate the two monolithic forms. The verticality of the twin pillars contrasts with the repetition of the horizontal bands that make up their bodies. The surface is an important formal aspect of the work, while layered and speckled glaze adds tone, dimensionality, and movement.

**Minimalist Jar Black**  
1991  
stoneware, metallic glaze  
Collection of the artist  
Like the thrown and altered forms of Sherrill’s teapots, *Minimalist Jar Black* explores line in three dimensions. The matte black finish accentuates the sharp edges of the form, allowing Sherrill to draw in space.
Minimalist Jar White and Black
1991
white stoneware, barium glaze
Collection of the artist
Like the stacking structure of Minimalist Jar Black, Minimalist Jar White and Black explores how surface, worn as if by time or use, conveys what the artist calls “the humanity of material.” The quality of a material seemingly worn by time is a found throughout Sherrill’s work.

Teapots
During the last quarter of the twentieth century the market for craft grew rapidly. No object represented this moment in studio craft like the teapot. Droves of artists were making them, and an equivalent number of consumers wanted them in their collections. The teapot offered a format for artists to question the categorical definition of craft as a functional object.

Michael Sherrill’s teapots are emblematic of this vibrant time. Over the course of the 1990s his vessels grew in scale, brightened in color, and emphasized image over function. Works like Jacob’s Ladder (1998) and Incandescent Tea (1997) epitomize this transformation. These objects assert themselves first and foremost as sculptures—while they also happen to be teapots.

In some cases, Sherrill pushed the form to its extreme, creating objects that were no longer recognizable as teapots. Green Tea (2000), covered in a bright green, dual-tone barium glaze, illustrates this trompe-l’oeil effect. Consisting of two intertwining leaf shapes, the vessel hides its functional aspects; no clear handle, spout, or lid is indicated in the form.

From formal explorations of line, shape, color, surface, and negative space to conceptual questions of “what is or isn’t tea,” the teapot provided Sherrill with a design springboard from which he could play, innovate, and question. Sherrill has said, “For potters, the teapot is the point–counterpoint of everything we make. It provides that ultimate challenge….. I’m not interested in whether it pours or not, but does it work visually?”

Fire Box Tea
1988
porcelain, ash glaze; handle: silver, bamboo
Collection of the artist
Fire Box Tea was produced during the Penland workshop where the artist met his wife, Margery. During the firing process, the teapot was knocked into the hottest part of the kiln, causing the body to distort into an irregular form. For Sherrill, the relationship between this pot and the kiln came to symbolize something mystical or metaphysical about life.

Aqua Bottles
1995
white stoneware, celadon glaze
Collection of the artist
Inspired by seeing the relationships among the greenware (or unfired pots) on the shelves of his studio, Sherrill began creating installations of bottles. These installations are an early indication of the artist’s interest in the relationship among objects and the spaces between them. The Bottle Series also brings to the foreground Sherrill’s desire to create or control the context for how his art was displayed. Like three-dimensional still lifes, these arrangements can be read as precursors to the scenes he depicts in his later botanical works.