



PRESS RELEASE

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Exhibition Title: *James Watral (1942 – 2014): Vessels, Elements and Drawings*

Exhibition Dates: November 23, 2019 – December 28, 2019

Opening Reception: Saturday, November 23, from 5:30 to 8:30 p.m.

Cris Worley Fine Arts is proud to present *Vessels, Elements and Drawings*, an exhibition co-organized by Rusty Scruby and Hampton Burwick honoring beloved artist and friend, James Watral (1942 – 2014). This commemorative exhibition, featuring ceramic works and drawings from the artist's estate, will open on November 23rd with a reception from 5:30 – 8:30pm and will be on view through December 28th.

James Watral is most known for his formalistic explorations into ceramic sculpture. His oeuvre includes myriad techniques from slab, throwing, extruded forms and hand-building, to surfaces treated with glaze, terra sigillata, copper leaf and mixed media. Even his drawings, of vessel-like forms or overlapping abstract shapes, seem to emit a frenetic energy that mimics the movements associated with the spinning of clay.

Watral's inspirations were just as eclectic: Egyptian and Etruscan art influenced his forms while intermingling with his own Croatian heritage. In Watral's *Hero Series*, imagery of metal belt buckles worn by Croatian soldiers memorialize friends that the artist tragically lost to the AIDS epidemic. Other inspirations included science and the expanding universe, music, gardening, theater and architecture to name a few.

Rusty Scruby of the Watral estate reflects on the memory of his longtime friend:

“As a young aspiring artist, I was amazed when I first walked into James’ studio. It was filled with decades of his creativity and inspirations. He also lived in his studio, so interspersed with his incredible vessels and drawings were his antiques and collections. Visiting James often meant having a glass of champagne and looking at new glaze tests or experiments with new forms. His cats would interrupt us by stepping into one of his vessels and then James would hear something in the music (usually opera) that he would have to explain. Although technically James was never my teacher, he was always teaching, and I was always learning when I was around him.”

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James Watral (1942-2014) received a Master in Fine Arts from Tulane University in New Orleans, LA and a Bachelor in Fine Arts from Cleveland Institute of Art, Cleveland, Ohio. James taught at many colleges and universities throughout his career including: Texas Women’s University; Southern Methodist University; University of Texas at Tyler; University of Texas at Dallas; East Texas State University, where he served as Associate Professor of Art and Chair of Ceramics from 1968-1980; and Eastfield College, where he served as Professor of Ceramics from 1999-2010. His work has been exhibited nationally and internationally and is held in many private and public collections including the Dallas Museum of Art and New Orleans Museum of Art. His work has been reviewed in *Ceramics Monthly*, the *Dallas Morning News*, *Austin American Statesman*, and *American Crafts*.



James Watral in his studio circa 1990