

STUDIO VISIT

Dirk Staschke

Portland, Oregon



Just the Facts

Clay

cone 10 and cone 6 stoneware

Primary forming method

handbuilding

Primary firing temperature

cone 6

Favorite surface treatment

an overabundance of parts and/or ornament

Favorite tools

wooden modeling tool

Playlist

rock (of various genres) and NPR

Wishlist

more space to store work in progress

Studio

I have had many studios in the past 20 years. My first studio fresh out of graduate school was a 100-square-foot bedroom without a kiln in Queens, New York. For many years driving unfired work all over New York City to fire at various teaching jobs was the norm. My last studio was in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada with a monthly rental price of \$900 for 450 square feet. These are some of the difficult realities of working with ceramics and it is absolutely fantastic to finally have it mostly figured out. When my wife and I were buying our first home in Portland, Oregon five years ago it was important to find a place that had enough space for a studio so that I could eliminate studio rental costs. It was also great to be working from home so I could spend more time with my daughter.

I have a friend who is a professional carpenter and in about six weeks we renovated the 220-square-foot, dilapidated garage into a great working space. We were able to open up the low-hanging roof structure and install three skylights, which illuminate the space with natural light. We also installed double doors so that larger work could be moved in and out of the space. In addition, there is another 400-square feet in the basement for storage, photographing finished pieces, and clean work. It needed less work with the minimal additions



of a photography wall, cabinets, and built-in shelving. The garage space is on the small side, which makes it hard to have several pieces in progress at once.

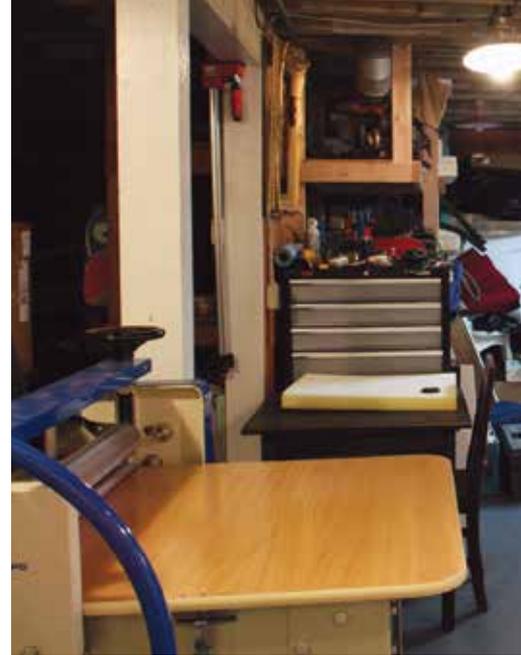
There are plans to expand the outside space by an additional 100 square feet and connect a slop sink. The larger space would accommodate storage of pieces in progress and reduce the number of trips I would have to take to the basement studio to get water. It would also provide some breathing room in a cramped space for assistants who usually come in two days a week.

Paying Dues (and Bills)

I have a BFA from the University of Montevallo in Alabama, and a MFA from Alfred University in New York. When I first left graduate school, I had several teaching jobs and also worked as an assistant for several artists. One of the artists I worked for told me that “making

art was a privilege.” I didn’t understand that at the age of 28 but now I do. Having time to immerse yourself in the creative act is something most artists never get to do on regular basis because of occupational, monetary, or family demands.

I have taught for fifteen years at various schools and universities in the US and Canada in addition to my studio practice. I am extremely grateful for the time spent in the studio as a full-time maker and I usually spend 40 plus hours a week in the studio, depending on deadlines. Now that I am a father, I start much earlier in the morning to make up for family time spent in the evenings. When I was younger, my creative peaks were in the late evenings but now I find the most productive periods to be in the mornings before lunch. All of this extra time has allowed me to move through ideas and experiment at a much greater pace than when there were more outside demands. It has essentially moved my work forward by years.



Marketing

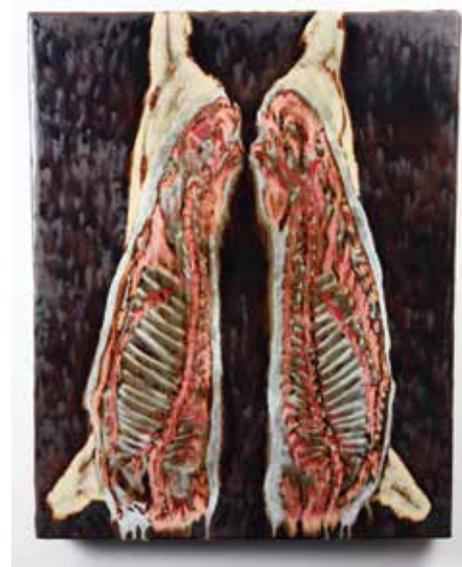
Most of my work is purchased by collectors through galleries. Gallery shows only happen every two years on average, so it pays to have representation at more than one gallery. The down side for a lot of artists is paying to ship their work to galleries that are not within driving distance. I am still trying to figure out how to grow my market by having several reputable galleries represent my work in different states and countries.

I was very late to social media and I recently started using Instagram after much persuasion from other artists. I have yet to have a collector purchase work after seeing it on social media, but it does help bring attention to gallery shows. Initially, I had hoped social media would go away but, it's obvious it is here to stay. Part of my caution is that it is easy to get sucked in to some other place on a screen when you should be making your work instead. I now post

on Instagram when I have new work or feel that there is something worth posting. While it has helped my work get noticed, I think that it's a bit overwhelming for anyone to see through the sheer volume of what's out there.

Research and Inspiration

While it doesn't directly apply to my work in terms of inspiration, I find that surfing, which I enjoy doing whenever possible, and making art both require time spent in the moment without outside thoughts or distractions. I just finished reading *Barbarian Days: A Surfing Life: William Finnegan*. Relevant to art and just a phenomenal book in general was *The Blazing World* by Siri Hustved, which is a hilariously sardonic look at the New York art world.



Most of my inspiration comes from Dutch still-life paintings, specifically of the Vanitas genre, which are concerned with the futility of pleasure and the certainty of death. There is a comical painting by Cornelius Gisbrecht, which is the trompe l'oeil representation of the back of a framed painting, that has influenced my work. Exploring the sculptural possibilities of the back of a two-dimensional image has become central to my work. When it comes to inspiration, I think it is important to not to get overwhelmed by what is contemporary.

Downtime

It can't be work all the time, and when I am lucky enough to get a break from the studio I enjoy spending time at the coast with my family. I enjoy interacting with nature by surfing or

fly fishing. Hopefully, if the waves aren't any good that day, there are fish coming in to the coastal rivers.

Most Important Lesson

I would advise other artists to meet people, network, and form a community. For many years I thought I could do it on my own, but I found that is not possible.

Current Exhibition

Most recently, I have been preparing for a solo exhibition at Winston Wachter Fine Art in Seattle that opened on November 15. It represents the culmination of more than two years of work.

<http://artdirk.com>

Facebook: [Dirk Staschke](#); Instagram: [@dirk_staschke](#)