

A Heady Mix at the Northern Clay Center

Having completed two residencies at the European Ceramic Work Center in Den Bosch in the Netherlands, and previous periods of work in the USA, Nick Renshaw tells *Trans Artists* he felt pretty comfortable undertaking a residency at the Northern Clay Center in Minneapolis, in Spring 2007.

Did you adjust easily to your new 'ceramic environment'?

Acclimatising is of course an issue when undertaking such a project, though the familiarity of language and my experience in a ceramic facility helped me greatly with this. The practicalities of the Northern Clay Center are certainly aimed at those ceramists with experience already. For example, electric kilns of various sizes as well as large gas and soda kilns when fired are the responsibility of the artist himself to control. Also, the production of large scale work is not so common or catered for as for instance at the EKWC. In these situations experience of the material is certainly helpful, if not crucial.

What about the atmosphere at the Center?

The Northern Clay Center is the center of a thriving community of ceramic art activities of all kinds. The atmosphere is one of a busy working ceramic studio environment and important social center. It is a place to meet all specters of personalities from the city. The center stands in the heart of the Twin Cities: Minneapolis and St. Paul being separate cities, split by



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the imposing Mississippi River, but being very much economically and socially one. In a busy urban environment on the fringes of downtown Minneapolis one quickly becomes part of the rush of daily events. A pleasant housing district on one side and the urban sprawl of enormous University campuses and freeways on the other the Center has its own very social community. Ranging from natural wholefood shops to Native Indian centers, coffee houses, restaurants.

So there was enough cultural activity around?

Yes, in Minneapolis I was confronted with life in a burgeoning American city. A busy mix of industrial heritage, towering office cityscape, sprawling residential areas, stunning natural landscape and National parks. A heady mix. But perhaps the most significant aspect of life here is the almost incalculable quantity of cultural, artistic, and social activities taking place. The area has a number of very well known beacons: The Walker Art Center, The Minneapolis Institute of Arts, The Guthrie Theatre and The Weissman Museum to name a few. And the city has many lesser known but excellent art centers too. In fact for anyone interested in the amazing cultural diversity to be found in North America, Minneapolis is a unique place.

In what way did your career benefit from the residency?

My own period also coincided with the exhibition held for all McKnight Residency and Fellowship recipients of the previous year, and my presence for this was both convenient and beneficial, making a full and complete working experience. It is a place where much energy and care is put in by the staff to make things work well and efficiently for everyone. This uniqueness is something that should be embraced. The combination of the community within and outside its doors make the NCC a great place to spend time and work.

Nick Renshaw

More about the McKnight Residency programme and the Northern Clay Center:
www.northernclaycenter.org

