

SPOTLIGHT

Cups to go



Ceramics Monthly: How has the Ron Gallas Cup Library evolved since its conception?

Kate Fisher: The library, named after a beloved retiring professor, was born through a St. Olaf College Collaborative Undergraduate Research and Inquiry (CURI) project, which provides opportunities for students from all academic disciplines to work closely with a faculty member in a professional research framework. I worked with students Emily Tani-Winegarden and Liam Hannan to build the library. Along the way, CURI provided numerous chances for non-clay researchers to learn about the ceramics through both informal and formal conversations over cups.

Cups to Go, which uses cups from the library, is a way to interject an art object into a familiar context, such as a reception, social gathering, or meeting. We arrive early, remove the paper cups, and park a cart full of handmade cups and bio cards for participants to use at each event. It becomes a directed interaction, as a representative from the cup library is always present. It is often a welcome surprise that spurs unique conversations about where ceramics intersects with the lives in our campus community.

Approximately 2% of our students take a ceramics course in any given year. Clay courses are in high demand. Broadening the reach of the tactile education stressed in ceramics courses, this library is a way to expand the number of students, faculty, and staff exposed to clay.

CM: How has the Cup Library transformed the public's interest and interaction with ceramics?

KF: The library opened in November of 2015 and moved in the spring of 2016 to a highly visible public area with more campus traffic. This has increased the interest in the library and made it a unique stop on campus tours.

Initially, many non-makers are wary of using the ceramic cups because previous interactions with art, usually in museums, stressed not touching work on display. The cup library provides a unique opportunity for users to learn about handmade objects through handling and using the cups.

Cup librarians explain the process of lending, using, fabrication, and firing to students/faculty/staff at checkouts and events. Fascination with object lending and the ability to use the cups draws borrowers to the library. Library users have equal interest in who made the cups and how they were made. Individuals who repeatedly check out cups are able to self identify various methods of construction and firing. Borrowers have continued to pursue pots outside of the cup library. Librarians have fielded questions about where artists' work may be purchased and many of our library enthusiasts are now following contemporary clay artists on social media. Anecdotally, there is a noticeable trend of recent graduates starting their own cup collections. *Above: Erika Terwilliger checking out a mug from the collection. Photos: Stuart Yurczyk.*