

Ron Abram, Chair  
Studio Art Program  
Bryant Arts Center  
Denison University  
210 West College  
Granville, OH 43023

Dear Ron Abram and Search Committee Members,

I am writing this letter to convey my interest in the Assistant Professor of Ceramics position, in the Studio Art Program at Denison University. My experience as an artist and professor, my contributions to the field of contemporary ceramics, and my ability to work with colleagues in collaborative environments make me a valuable resource for the students and faculty at Denison University. My application materials can be found at <http://www.brianharperstudio.com/denison-university-application/>

I am an Associate Professor of Fine Art and Head of the Ceramics program at Indiana University Southeast. During my nine-year tenure at IU Southeast, I have developed and maintained an active ceramics program that has fostered student growth for hundreds of students. While I am proud of my accomplishments at IU Southeast, I am eager for opportunities that will allow me to explore a broader range of my academic potential. I am drawn to the integrated learning environments at Denison, and in particular, the focus on interdisciplinary approaches to teaching art in a contemporary context. The high percentage of students living on campus, the ways in which Denison supports those students, and the off-campus learning opportunities Denison provides, mimic my own interest in engaged learning environments. I can see that the faculty are driven to provide an education that reaches beyond the traditional silos of academia to address the need to graduate active and informed citizens of the world. The values I hold as an educator, a colleague, an artist, and a citizen, mirror those of the academic mission of Denison University.

My pedagogy is grounded in multidisciplinary, proficiency of craft, and conceptual analysis. Encouraging students to experience a range of media and processes in the development of their artistic practice allows them the tools they need in their search for conceptual and material focus. The expertise of the faculty and range of courses offered in the Studio Art Program at Denison, including sculpture, installation/site-specific art, and fiber arts, is impressive and would be a welcome community after being the sole 3D professor at IU Southeast for many years.

I have designed my ceramics curriculum to be flexible to the needs of students as they grow and evolve as artists, while providing experiences with as many processes and exposing them to as many approaches as possible. In addition to presenting techniques and processes, I mentor my students by listening and understanding, and by engaging with them at every step of the process, from ideation to finished work. I find that one of the most exciting aspects of teaching is being able to work with a student for an extended period of time as they progress through their degree path, and to foster their success in the field after they graduate. Many of my students are still working in the field today, and graduates of my Post-Baccalaureate and Bachelor of Fine Arts in Ceramics program have been accepted to many of the top ranked graduate programs in the country, including Ohio University, West Virginia University, Indiana University Bloomington, the University of Colorado Boulder, UMass Dartmouth and others.

As the Head of the IU Southeast Ceramics program, I manage a 3,000 square foot studio with ten gas, electric, wood, raku, and soda kilns. I personally built four of our kilns and secured funding to purchase and install three of them. I designed and built a plaster mold-making area, revamped the glaze mixing room, updated the material inventory systems, secured better air ventilation and safety systems, and raised funds and oversaw the development of an outdoor kiln pavilion for atmospheric firing. In total, I've secured over \$200,000 in funding for these improvements, nearly all of which came from campus and university-level budget appropriations.

An important aspect of my pedagogy is broadening the students' perspectives of what they can achieve through a life of art making. In support of this mission, I founded a Resident Artist program at IUS that employs one artist, usually a recent MFA graduate, to work in the studio and teach beginning ceramics and 3D design. This artist engages with students on a regular basis and acts as an additional role model in the IUS Ceramics program. In the six years since the program's inauguration, I have brought in artists from around the country, including Ian Shelley, Bill Wilkey, Chanda Zea, Matt Ziemke, Mallory Wetherell, and currently, Lindsey Dezman. I have also built and fostered a robust visiting artist program, bringing in 35 visiting artists since 2008 to work and lecture in the Ceramics studio, including Malcolm Mobutu Smith, Linda Swanson, Shreepad Joglekar, Linda Tien, Didem Mert, and others. These achievements introduce my students to the broader ceramic and contemporary art community, and have fostered important connections between professional artists, professors, and students.

Of all my service activities, from programmatic and School service, to service to the campus and the community, I found that the most rewarding experiences have directly benefited our students. For example, I founded our Fine Art program-wide BFA critiques, which initiate all of our BFA majors to graduate-style critiques across disciplines. Many of our students that have gone on to graduate school have returned to say that these critiques were imperative for their preparation for graduate studies. In addition, teaching courses across the Art Program, including 3D design in our Foundations program, Social Sculpture in our rotating special topics program, and our Senior Seminar capstone course, a year-long interdisciplinary course for graduating BFA majors, has allowed me to incorporate a wide range of media, professional development, and theoretical discourse in my pedagogy. I founded, built, and continue to manage the SpaceLab, an experimental exhibition space for students from any discipline that has hosted over 100 exhibitions in six years. Reflecting on my accomplishments at IUS, the SpaceLab is certainly one of the highlights. Many students have had career changing breakthroughs in the SpaceLab because they had the chance to take a risk and discover something new about themselves and their work.

In addition to my academic accomplishments, I work diligently to play an active role in the discourse of contemporary ceramics through Artaxis, an organization I founded and manage, that has grown to include over 550 members in almost 40 countries worldwide. Artaxis' website, [Artaxis.org](http://Artaxis.org), is visited thousands of times every day from people all around the world to find a vast array of work relevant to the critical discourse in contemporary ceramic art, to view current and upcoming opportunities in the field, and to find ways to contact professional artists directly. In addition to being a resource for curators, artists and students, Artaxis allows me to stay connected with the international ceramics community, connections I use to bring visiting artists to the IUS Ceramics program, recruit students to the IUS Fine Art program, and integrate cutting edge ceramic practices into my curriculum.

As a peer reviewed organization, Artaxis serves as a unique portal for viewers to see what artists currently working in the field regard as significant and influential. Among other projects in the organization, I have played an integral role in founding and managing the Artaxis Fellowship, where we send an artist from an underrepresented group to a summer residency

each year; Artaxis Conversations, a global live streaming video event that has reached over 300,000 people over the past two years where the public is able interact with artists from around the world; and exhibitions such as "Sight Unseen" in Kansas City, and our upcoming Artaxis Nasty Women exhibition in Pittsburgh in March, 2018.

My teaching and service to the field of ceramics have allowed me to harness my lifelong dedication to learning from others, and my creative practice is an extension of this conviction. My ceramic and multimedia sculpture has long been focused on ways in which humans structure the unknown. Whether through myth, science, data analysis, or information theory, human beings have always searched for new ways to categorize and define the world around us. I investigate those methods, whether utopian or pragmatic, and over the past ten years, my work has moved through four distinct bodies of work, including the most current body of work, the Scaffolding Series. This series investigates the relationship between the hand and machine-made, merging the two into forms that function as a whole. Referencing domestic architecture, the scaffold structures "house" industrial utilitarian ceramic objects such as dishes from JCPenney's Home collection. These works highlight the stark white surfaces that are at odds with the intangible qualities and characteristics of lived-in spaces, and question the ethicality of the corporate branding of the word "Home." Part of this series of work has also included 3D printed objects and reflects my passion for learning and integrating new technologies into my work.

Influenced by chaos theory and systems that dynamically change through time, the Oscillation Series includes sculptures where each section or junction plays a role in the form of the whole, and, more importantly, each part defines the direction of the whole. Even a small change in the angle of one section would expound to create an entirely different form. As a corollary, all single moments, even the infinitesimally small moments in our experience of being alive build to continually modify our individual perception of our known and unknown surroundings.

I bring my professional experience into the classroom, not just as theory, but as the practical knowledge and skills gained through mentorship and professional practice. I am dedicated to building community through teaching, service, and scholarship and I believe I would be a great fit for the Studio Art Program at Denison University.

Thank you so much for your consideration. Please review my website, [www.brianharperstudio.com](http://www.brianharperstudio.com) to learn more about my qualifications and professional experience. Additional information about my teaching practices and the IU Southeast Ceramics program can be found at [www.claybucket.com](http://www.claybucket.com). I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Brian Harper", written in a cursive style.

**Brian Harper**

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