

A woman with long brown hair and glasses, wearing a purple t-shirt and a black apron, is working with a piece of white clay in a studio setting. She is looking towards the camera with a slight smile. The background is a blurred workshop with various tools and equipment.

SPOTLIGHT

# mystery and spontaneity

**Ceramics Monthly:** After your atmospheric-fired work was shown in *Ceramics Monthly's* Emerging artist feature in 2002, you moved to England and switched to slip-decorated earthenware. What made you decide to switch, and why did you stick with earthenware when you returned to the US?

**Martina Lantin:** Firing an atmospheric kiln was the experience that drew me deep into ceramics and brought forward a mystery that I felt compelled to explore, but as other opportunities drew me away from kilns I could easily access, I set out to develop an understanding of earthenware—as it was the clay body and temperature range that seemed best suited to the electric kiln I had access to. The challenge however, was to bring a similar mystique and spontaneity into this predictable method of firing.

Earthenware became the clay body of choice for me as I set up my first solo studio in England in 2004 and, with a few returning flirtations with atmospheric firing, low fire is where I have stayed ever since. Upon returning to the US, my studio life has been a series of transitions—and I have been able to transplant my materials and methods easily between the five places I have since called home.

**CM:** How have subsequent studio locations and experiences had an effect on your work?

**ML:** While a resident at Baltimore Clayworks, the focus on my studio work and exposure to the feedback and work of many other artists helped me to develop my glaze palette and decorative strategies. With this in my back pocket I arrived at NSCAD University for graduate school and was prompted to contextualize the surfaces of my work around ideas of imperfection, chance, similarity and difference. Through this intensive period I began to understand the materials and my own motivations.

The central reason though, that I continue to work in earthenware, lies in some early advice I was given. When complaining about the static results of the electric kiln compared to the spontaneity of wood firing, it was suggested to me that I needed to become my own lack of control. I continue to explore this challenge through a variety of making methods, surface techniques and materials. The portability of earthenware has provided me with the consistent development of work and each new kiln offers up surprises and pleasures much in the way each wood kiln was a celebration.

*Photo: Christina Hills.*