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Ekin Balcioğlu in collaboration with Max Massey
Em Kettner

The Mortal Coil
February 28 - May 3, 2025

OPENING RECEPTION
Friday, February 28, 5-7 PM, second floor



Left: Ekin Balcioğlu, *Full Bloom*, 2025. Ceramic. 8.5 x 6.5 x 6.5 in.
Center: Em Kettner, *The Potter (Full Moon)*, 2025. Glazed porcelain tile
embedded in oil-sealed cherry. 9 x 15 x 1 in.
Right: Ekin Balcioğlu, *Phoenix Rising*, 2025. Ceramic. 13 x 7.5 x 7.5 in.

(Santa Fe, NM) Taos-based ceramic duo Ekin Balcioğlu and Max Massey partner up with Richmond, CA-based artist Em Kettner to showcase narrative-based ceramic works.

(February 2025) In this forthcoming group exhibition, Balcioğlu debuts her largest sgraffito vessels to date. Several of these new ceramics, like *Desire*, reach heights of 17 inches — large for vessels adorned with sgraffito illustrations. Sgraffito is a centuries-old craft of carving patterns, illustrations, and scenes into objects by scratching through a surface to reveal a substrate. The physical removal of material from the vessel means there is little room for error as Balcioğlu works. The pressure on Balcioğlu to execute her carvings is heightened by the object on which she works, a wheel-thrown pot made by lifelong ceramicist Max Massey. Creating a large wheel-thrown pot can take anywhere from a few days to several, depending on complexity and drying time. The time invested in creating the pots means the stakes are high when Balcioğlu begins her sgraffito, but the process is worth it for both artists, who view their collaboration as the creation of something greater than the sum of its parts.

Their collaboration here extends to a 3rd participant: Em Kettner, a Richmond, CA-based artist and friend of Balcioğlu. Visibility and invisibility, observation and being observed, and communal networks of support and labor are all subtexts of Kettner's broader studio practice. Her series of porcelain vignettes created for *The Mortal Coil* offers an imagined origin story for Balcioğlu and Massey's ceramics and illustrates the at times awkward but humorous relationship between artist and viewer. The small scale of Kettner's porcelain tiles means viewers must get within a nose's length of the work to make out the details of the depicted scene. The intimate nature of Kettner's work is a nod to votive objects left on religious altars as offerings to higher powers for deliverance from illness and misfortune. Unlike their historical equivalents, Kettner's votives aim to reframe problematic stereotypes. In *The Mortal Coil*, Kettner refutes the commercialization of craft by celebrating the transformative power of the handmade.

Today, 'craft' is used as a marketing buzzword for everything from beer to handbags, which is poles apart from what the process of craft has meant since our prehistoric ancestors first carved ceramic figurines circa 24,000 BCE. The medium and underlying friendships of *The Mortal Coil* return to a more historically accurate, pre-mass production definition of craft: the solitary or communal act of creating an object, sometimes decorative, sometimes utilitarian, but often both. Historical craft objects, like quilts from the American South or pots from antiquity, served a function, but they also carried the narratives of the people who made them and the culture they came from. In its humble way, *The Mortal Coil* is a new iteration of a long-standing ceramic tradition that connects us to the material culture of our past.

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For press, image, or video inquiries, please contact Spencer Linford at spencer@formandconcept.center.

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Biography, Ekin Balcioğlu

Ekin Balcioğlu is a visual artist and editor, and the owner of Old Bones - Gallery for Clay and Textiles in Arroyo Seco, NM. She runs Cloud Hands Studio, creating distinctive ceramics and paintings. Ekin is also the cofounder and editor in chief of Hamam, a print magazine focused on the art and culture of bathing and letting go. She writes for Taos News. Ekin holds an MFA in Studio Arts and an MA in Visual and Critical Studies from California College of the Arts (2016) and a BA in Fashion Design from Central Saint Martins (2013).

Biography, Em Kettner

Em Kettner (b. 1988, Philadelphia, PA) is an artist and writer based in Richmond, CA. Recent solo exhibitions include Homebound at François Ghebaly Gallery (New York, NY), Sick Joke at Chapter NY (New York, NY), Slow Poke at François Ghebaly Gallery (Los Angeles, CA), The Eternal Worm at HARPY (Rutherford, NJ), and Play the Fool at Goldfinch (Chicago, IL). Her work has been featured in two-person and group exhibitions at Pipeline (London, UK), Outer Space (Concord, NH), Winter Street Gallery (Edgartown, MA), Candice Madey (New York, NY), and Et al. Gallery (San Francisco, CA), among others. Several of Kettner's sculptures are in the permanent collection of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and are currently on view in the exhibition, "Tender Loving Care: Contemporary Art from the Collection."

Kettner's work has been reviewed and published in *Cultured Magazine*, *ArtForum*, *Art in America*, *Sculpture Magazine*, *Contemporary Art Review LA (CARLA)*, *HyperAllergic*, *Institutional Model*, and *Sixty Inches From Center*. In September of 2023, Fulcrum Arts published her interactive digital storybook, "Doctor, Doctor," an illustrated journey through history, myth, and patient-hood.

Em Kettner earned her BFA from the University of the Arts in Philadelphia, and an MFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. She is represented by François Ghebaly Gallery in Los Angeles and New York.

Biography, Max Massey

My journey with clay began as a child during a trip from Oklahoma to Colorado to visit my grandparents. At Four Corners, they took me to a hogan where a woman was creating pottery. Captivated, I went home and began mimicking her work with red clay from our yard, crafting pinch pots in a mud hole by the side of the house.

I first encountered the potter's wheel as a high school freshman in Kansas. Shortly after, we moved to Missouri, where I started working in a production pottery studio at age 16. Firing a 50-cubic-foot kiln twice a week and spending hours at the wheel daily, I developed a deep respect for the craft. By 20, I was apprenticing with Dennis Thompson, working alongside him for a decade; I've been making pots ever since.

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Biography, Max Massey cont.

My work draws inspiration from East Asian pottery traditions, focusing on simplicity, balance, and timeless forms. I experiment extensively with glazes, layering celadons, temmokus, shinos, and iron-based finishes to create depth and character. My expertise lies in high-fire reduction and gas firing, and I also build my own kilns, ensuring every step of the process reflects my connection to the craft.

Clay has been a lifelong passion rooted in curiosity and sustained by dedication to the art of pottery.

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