

Mark of the Potter Says "Newcomb"

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Stoneware platters are being produced in the Newcomb Art Department today and marked with an "N." These platters look vastly different from the famed Newcomb Pottery of the first half of the 20th century, but the platters of today have a specific purpose. A portion of the proceeds from their sale is earmarked to fund travel to conferences by current art students and to support the ceramics studio operations.



Platters like these, produced each year in the ceramics studio for the annual Newcomb Art Department holiday sale, help further the education of budding ceramists. (Photo by William DePauw)

Vintage [Newcomb Pottery](#) is world-renowned. One piece of authentic Newcomb Pottery can command thousands of dollars at auctions. Due in part to its rarity, the historic Newcomb Pottery sells for much more than the new platters created in today's ceramics studio. The new platters, however, have a distinctive mark, a symbol reading "N clay," designed by Jeremy Jerneagan, associate professor of art and head of the [ceramics](#) area.

Jernegan says, "We celebrate the historic name of Newcomb, without suggesting that it's the same ware for sale." Jernegan also is associate dean of the School of Liberal Arts.

He says, "Decorated plates have been the common man's art form, going back to late medieval times. Italian maiolica is a great example. Most people couldn't afford to commission an oil or fresco painting but you could afford a plate decorated with a likeness of a patron saint or their town. The form is domestic and accessible as well as an image-bearing surface."

The platters stamped "N clay" are collectively made as production-studio ware in two weekends prior to the [holiday sale](#), which is held as a fund-raiser by the Newcomb Art Department every December.

The funds are being put to good use this spring when Jernegan and William DePauw, professor of practice in ceramics, will travel with a contingent of ceramics students to the National Council on Education for the Ceramics Arts in Phoenix, April 7-11.

Kate Keelen, a senior from Tinton Falls, N.J., is one of the students attending the conference. Keelen sees it as an opportunity to make contacts with professional ceramics artists.

"I'm excited by the scale of how many ceramics artists will be there," she says. "I think it will be eye-opening and may inspire me as far as what I can do for a living."

Keelen, who will graduate with dual degrees in studio art and geology, is torn between pursuing a career in art or science. She notes that her artistic media ? ceramics and glass ? depend heavily on geology, being made of earth and sand. Her signature motif is a pretzel, "a symbol of brotherly love and also one of my favorite snacks."

For two years, Keelen has participated in the two intensive weekends, working with other students, when the "N clay" platters are produced for the holiday sale. She says that she enjoyed the collaborative effort so much that she went on later to create an urn with Reda Scher, a fellow ceramics student.

"Reda brought a different take to the project, her own elements and style," Keelen says. "I like the product we made."

The collaborative process is one element sometimes lacking in the contemporary “age of individualism,” Jernegan says. “Separate from what students are doing in classes, the group-production studio reinforces techniques while building esprit de corps. Students experience the satisfaction of collaborative effort that is mutually beneficial.”