

# COLOMBIA

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## DESIGN PROPOSAL

### STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

#### Methods of Production in Colombian Material Culture

Whether an object is handcrafted or mass-produced deeply informs our understanding, and appreciation, of that object. In the West, maxims like “they don’t make them like they used to,” romanticize past production methods. I aim to explore the unreality of this situation in the city of Medellin by investigating the ways that traditional and contemporary ceramic fabrication techniques coexist and function in today’s society. Through working with an anthropologist, artisans and visual artists, and two cultural archives, I will create a body of artwork that synthesizes pre-Columbian vessels and modern Colombian home objects. The work will be generated from and in turn stimulate dynamic discussions between the fields of manufacturing and craft, historically and currently economic drivers in Medellin. My intention is to identify and develop an aesthetic vocabulary from Medellin’s unique mix of handmade and factory-produced, and in so doing to recognize and revivify the role of craft in modern mass manufacturing in the region and beyond.

I will build upon my previous research on Antioquia’s hand-built ceramic traditions conducted with Jorge Prieto. Prieto, professor of Anthropology at the University of Antioquia (UDEA), specializes in pre-Columbian production practices and works closely with UDEA’s archive of significant pre-Columbian ceramic artifacts. Specifically, his course “Experimental Archeology” focuses on the artifacts’ cultural context and includes hands-on workshops on pre-Columbian fabrication techniques. The course and the workshops will underpin my field research into both manually produced and manufactured household goods. Using the University’s archive as a reference point, I will collaborate with Ceramicas Renacer, an industrial slip-cast factory in the town of El Carmen de Vival, and with artisans who make low-cost traditional terracotta cookware in Medellin.

Simultaneously, I will undertake a studio residency at the Campos de Gutiérrez Archive, whose mission is to revitalize the region’s cultural and historical past while coalescing that past with contemporary artistic practices. The Archive is a collection of commonplace domestic objects produced in Medellin over the past two centuries, such as terracotta pots and hand tools for processing cornmeal. Daily firsthand contact with such turn-of-the-century kitchen equipment will expand my understanding of industrial production in Antioquia. Particularly relevant is the Archive’s focus on communicating Medellin’s history through material mediums. Director Andres Monzon, with whom I worked closely during a 2012 residency in Medellin, has kindly invited me to affiliate with them and will advise my studio work.

After three months of solidifying personal relationships and institutional connections, and developing a visual language, I will create a body of artwork; I aim to formalize my new understanding through execution and studio collaborations. The material gathered from my investigation of contemporary and traditional ceramic production methods in Antioquia will materialize in the form of sculptural objects that speak simultaneously to aesthetics developed over generations and to modern industrial processes. An example of this work would be one-of-a-kind reproductions of hand-built pre-Columbian ceramics created by factory workers at Ceramicas Renacer.

In addition to making objects, I aspire to initiate and foster dialogue about contemporary art and design in the community. To this end, I will design and lead workshops at the Colombo Americano School that teach students how to use a newly built ceramic kiln at the Campos de Gutiérrez Archive’s studios. Juan Alberto Gaviria, the director of the Colombo Americano Gallery, has invited me to generate a university-level syllabus. The curriculum I design will analyze process, material, and its corresponding aesthetics in Medellin. The workshops will address these issues through slide lectures, the presentation of artifacts from the Campos de Gutiérrez Archive, and moderated discussions with community members who utilize disparate production methods in ceramics and other fields. Specifically, one discussion brings together ceramic practitioners including the aforementioned Professor Prieto; Nelson Zuluaga, a production ceramicist from El Carmen de Vival; and Antioquia-based contemporary ceramicists Jose Ignacio Velez and Rodrigo Callejas.

At the year’s culmination, I will curate an exhibition of works created at Centro Plazarte, a cultural institution focused on fortifying Medellin’s present arts community, and an artery to the city’s young creative community. The exhibition will combine my own work with that of young artists who focus on the dichotomy between the handmade and the manufactured. The displayed objects will illustrate the way material and process inform contemporary views of functional objects in

Medellin, and showcase hidden aspects of the city's material culture. The exhibition will also draw upon my yearlong study of pre-Columbian art history with Professor Prieto conducted during the course of the Fulbright fellowship.

A Fulbright grant would allow me to study physical and social interactions with material in Medellin; develop and deepen my own understanding of human perception of material and process; and facilitate a dialogue between Medellin's academia, the contemporary artist community, artisans from Antioquía, as well as large scale manufacturers. By amplifying actual contemporaneous dialogues as they develop in workshops, my studio work will speak to my longstanding artistic interests and to the remarkable reawakening now taking place in Medellín. A Fulbright grant would offer a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for an artist with my background, enthusiasm, and qualifications to participate in a still-unfolding social transformation in Colombia that carries a message of hope for residents there and beyond. Having witnessed aspects of this transformation firsthand earlier this year during my sojourn in Medellin, it is my profound and genuine desire to return as an active and long-term contributor.