

## ARTISTS' STATEMENT

# Scavengers and Outcasts

Saskatchewan Craft Council Gallery, June 3 – July 9, 2016

Creatures brave enough to enter human habitat are really messengers from the wild, reminding us that we share this earth with all forms of life. Those who do not please us suffer greatly. From the beginning of recorded history potters have worked with images of animals, and we are following in this great tradition, bringing to mind those least loved among us and elevating them to the top of our pedestals.

Although we have lived in Newfoundland and Nova Scotia for most of our adult lives, we were both born and raised in Saskatchewan. We each discovered pottery at the old U of S ceramic “shed” in Saskatoon. The Nova Scotia College Art and Design in Halifax was a formative influence for both of us as well, as was the teaching of professor Walter Ostrom. From him we acquired a deep love for historical ceramics. While Ray went on to graduate studies in ceramics, and a career as a college instructor, Deb attended the Banff Centre, and worked in artist run centres. When we finally started collaborating in 1992, it became clear that Ray would make pots and Debra would focus on decoration and sculpting. That division has persisted while Ray has made forays into mosaics, sculpting and painting as well. Fairly early on we began working with images of plants and animals. Ray's pots, which were influenced by classical Chinese forms became pedestals for various birds, fish, and mammals sculpted by Debra. Since 1999 when we moved to Annapolis Royal, Nova Scotia, we have been full time ceramic artists. While we supplied our own gallery with a steady inventory of mugs, dishes and tiles, we have also managed to produce larger, more elaborate works for exhibitions on an annual basis. This trend culminated in a solo exhibition at the Mount St. Vincent University Art Gallery in Halifax, Nova Scotia, in 2011, which featured our most ambitious work to date. In 2014 we received a Canada Council grant to visit some of the premiere ceramics galleries in Europe, which heavily influenced the work for our next solo show, “Scavengers and Scoundrels” at the Mary Black Gallery in Halifax. That work led to our successful application to exhibit at the Saskatchewan Craft Council Gallery here in Saskatoon.

It is clear to us that the lives of humans and animals have been intimately connected throughout history. This connection has manifested itself in art and craft throughout all ages and cultures. In our current body of work we have focused on animals who are often perceived as pests or nuisances. Most of them are clever survivors. Some have been hunted relentlessly. Still others have attached themselves closely to our urban environments. In any case, we have attempted to present some of them artistically while working within and being influenced by the traditions of historical ceramics. Animals have usually been anthropomorphized, glamorized, or demonized by their presenters. We prefer to present them sympathetically more or less as we see them: living sentient creatures that bring some of the variety and vitality of nature into our urbanized and often insulated lives. How poor life would be without animals other than the ones we eat for food, or keep as pets.

For Ray, pots are completely abstract sculptures which he considers as metaphors for the human body. The surfaces are like skins, especially in the wet stage of production. Debra prefers to work on damp pots because they are more pleasant to work with than hardened or bisque pots. This stage is very intimate and wonderful for ceramic artists. The rest of the process...the firing, glazing, and re firing, while interesting as well, lack some of the tactile immediacy of the damp stage. It is our hope that the final result restores some sense of that fresh and responsive stage of working with damp clay. It has certainly kept our attention for the past 25 years.

This show is a kind of home coming for us. We are thrilled to show here in Saskatoon, and in many ways the work has brought back strong memories of prairie landscapes, and the animals which inhabit them.

Ray Mackie / Debra Kuzyk, 2016



#ScavengersAndOutcasts

**Scavengers &** **Exhibition**  
Jun 3 to Jul 9, 2016  
*Outcasts* **Reception**  
Fri, Jun 3, 7 to 9 pm

 **SASKATCHEWAN CRAFT COUNCIL**  
[www.saskcraftcouncil.org](http://www.saskcraftcouncil.org)