

Sculptural Vessels Exploring Animal Yoga Asanas

By

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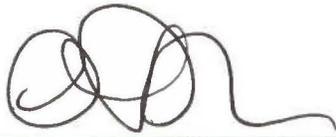
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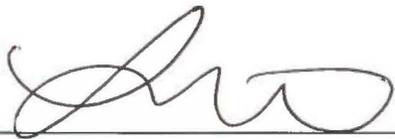
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. Introduction:	page 1
II. Historical Background:	pages 2-4
III. Artistic Influences:	pages 5-7
IV. Theoretical and Conceptual Framework:	pages 7-9
V. Technical Processes:	pages 9-11
VI. Description and Analysis of the Creative Work:	pages 12-23
1. Artwork #1 Crow Pose	
2. Artwork #2 Tortoise Pose	
3. Artwork #3 Horse Pose	
4. Artwork #4 Fish Pose	
5. Artwork #5 Peacock Pose	
6. Artwork #6 Firefly Pose	
7. Artwork #7 Downward Facing Dog	
8. Artwork #8 Upward Facing Dog	
9. Artwork #9 Cow Pose	
VII. Conclusion.....	page 23

Sculptural Vessels Exploring Animal Yoga Asanas

Animal-named yoga asanas are prevalent in yoga culture and practice. The hybridization of humans with animals is an idea that has strongly influenced many civilizations throughout the history of mankind. Many cultures throughout the world, and indeed the yoga asanas, continue to pay homage to these conceptualizations today. Through research, interpretation, and reflection, this body of work connects the viewer with the concept of human-animal relationships as it pertains to the asana. Furthermore, the human-animal relationship concept is combined with traditional functional pottery: bowls, teapots, platters, and an assortment of vessels, which serve as the ceramic artist's primal canvas.

To emphasize the symbolic expressions of these artists, the following analyses is organized into five sections. Discussion in the first section includes historical examples of ceramics from various cultures featuring hybrid-imagery used in combination with the functional-vessel. The second section will identify contemporary artists who have influenced this body of work philosophically, technically, and conceptually. The third section addresses the ideas that form the basis of this thesis exploration, why these yoga asanas are relevant within the yoga community and how these influences are conveyed in *Yoga Asana Series*. The fourth section delves into technical processes utilized in the creative process of the body of work. The paper concludes with a fifth section that offers a description and analysis of how all of the proceeding sections are evidenced in specific works of *Yoga Asana Series*.

Historical Background of Hybrid Imagery Sculpted on Functional forms

Human characters, animal characters, and various hybrid forms of characters, have played an integral part in the art history of mankind; the idea of hybrid imagery is prevalent in the *Yoga Asana Series* as well. Chosen imagery forms impressions about the life, religions, and social relationships of societies. Much like *Yoga Asana Series* reflects a current, American, cultural interest in yoga; ancient pottery also reflects cultural trends of ancient societies.

Around 9000 or 10,000 BC is thought to be when first use of functional pottery vessels for storing water and food were used (History of Ceramics). Creative artists consequently began to combine human-animal imagery with the functional vessel; a common thread with the *Yoga Asana Series*. The Minoan civilization, a Bronze Age civilization from the island of Crete, which flourished from approximately 3650 to 1400 BC gives a glimpse of very early use of sculptural imagery combined with the ceramic vessel (Pre-Columbian Art). The Minoan *The Goddess of Myrtos*, reveals something of Minoan culture: the vessel, found on an altar, is a vessel holding a vessel. In rituals, liquid may have been poured from the pitcher she holds onto an altar. She has the breasts of a female, but the round shape of her body is like that of a turtle shell. The squares drawn next to her sacred triangle resemble patterns on a turtle shell, and the stitching on her sides seems to be attaching the top and bottom halves of a it's shell. Because of the numerous spindles and loom weights found in the same vicinity, it is thought that the cross-hatching on her sacred triangle and the squares drawn on her body may symbolize woven cloth, and the important roles of women as weavers in the community (Christ). The head of the goddess starkly juts upward, much like a turtle's head protrudes from

its shell. Carol P. Christ, a founding mother in the fields of women and religion and feminist theology states,

It makes sense that a pitcher Goddess who is holding a water pitcher would be imagined as a Turtle Goddess. It is likely that, as at Kato Zakros, European terrapins were swimming in the pools where the women from Myrtos collected water. The women who were greeted by the turtles every day at the spring could easily have understood them to be the protective spirits of the water source. It is only a small step from there to the idea of a Great Turtle (Goddess) who is the mother of all the protective little turtle spirits. She is also the source of life-giving waters, the Source of Life. (Christ)



The Goddess of Myrtos. 2500 - 2300 BC. Ceramics. Archaeological Museum of Agios

Nikolaos, Agios Nikolaos, Crete, Greece.

From 13,000 BCE until the European conquests, functional ceramic vessels provided the Pre-Columbian craftsman with a canvas to depict a variety of cultural inspirations. Plates, bowls, jars, vases, effigy urns, beakers, whistles, and spout jars were commonly decorated with designs of birds, fish, animals, people, fanged creatures with sun-rayed head-dresses, snakes and eagles. Most functional forms were common and often elaborated: such as *Zapotec Bat God Whistle*, a 4.75" tall whistle figure found in Monte Alban, Oaxaca, Mexico. It is a sculpted replica of the Bat God 'Camazotz' worshipped by a cult among the Zapotec Indians (Pre-Columbian). The creature has the body of a human and head of a bat. In Zapotec culture, the bat was associated with the dark abode of the dead, night, death, and sacrifice. The human-like head displays a hideous expression with bared teeth, piercing eyes, and bat ears. The body is human, sporting a pendant necklace and a loin cloth. One hand grasps a hallucinogenic peyote mushroom, associated with human-to-animal transformation rituals. The hollowed body stands with its back forming a working whistle.



Zapotec Bat God Whistle. 300-500 AD. Ceramic. J. Martinez Collection, San Diego, CA.

Artistic Influence

The functional form such as vase, platter, or teapot is the canvas for the sculptural elements in the *Yoga Asana Series*. Richard Notkin is a contemporary ceramic artist whose philosophies parallel the concept of vessel as canvas. Notkin uses the vessel as his canvas to express his feelings about technology, war, and the environment. He repeats thematic imagery about these topics in his work with imagery such as hearts, skulls, light bulbs, and dice. He is known for combining his controversial opinions with the ancient Chinese Yixing tradition of teapot molding.

In his work *Cooling Towers Teapot Yixing Series*, Notkin juxtaposes the small physical size of the piece with a powerful political and social message about the dangers of nuclear catastrophe. The double teapot is part of the artist's Yixing series in which he refers to the purplish-brown stoneware of late-sixteenth-century Yixing, China.



Notkin, Richard. *Cooling Towers Teapot (Variation #8A) (Yixing Series)*. 1983. Ceramic.

Margaret Pennington Collection, North Adams MA.

In a *Ceramics Today* interview, Notkin emphasizes his intent in combining the traditionally functional teapot with his political statements. He states,

The teapot is a universally recognized object, with strong associations to domesticity and tranquility. As such, it is a 'hook' to lure the viewer - who must then decipher the narrative imagery - in a sort of bait-and-switch fashion. The conveying of tea is secondary to the not-so-hidden message in my 'teapots'... It is of utmost importance, however, that my teapots retain a totally separate cultural identity, that they reflect our contemporary civilization's imagery, and speak of our current situations as we emerge from the 20th century into the 21st.

(Notkin)

Much like Notkin's statement conveys the idea of tea as secondary to the message in his teapots, the piece *Horse Pose* aligns with this idea. The horse pose theme, which in this series reflects the asana and borrows that name, is interpreted with yoga female figures sculpted to serve as the lid. Four hooved feet become the feet of the teapot, and the horse's head becomes the spout. The horse pose theme is further interpreted with spot patterns of appaloosa and painted ponies. *Horse Pose* is evidence that the power of the visual image can be more robust than the functional purpose of the form.

Yet another influence in the *Yoga Asana Series* is Adrian Arleo and her figurative teapot series. In this series, Arleo focused on combining animal imagery with the human figure through the teapot form. The work alludes to a relationship of connection or understanding between the human and animal realms. The combination of animals and humans reveals

something hidden about the character or primal nature of the human (Arleo). Much like Arleo has combined animal imagery with the human figure, *Yoga Asana Series* has merged portions of both humans and animals. Both of these teapot series have a strong reflection on the qualities of the animals, which humans strive to emulate in their daily lives.



Arleo, Adrian. *Spotted Dog with Small Green Figure Teapot*. 2000-2005. Ceramic. *Adrian Arleo.com*. web. 22 Nov. 2016

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

As Notkin and his ancient western and indigenous predecessors combined the functional and the abstract with their vessels using spiritual and political symbology, so too did ancient Hindu practitioners of yoga combine the practice of their asanas with the mythology of the animals the poses symbolize. The spiritual and mythological connection between animals and the asanas are steeped in yoga tradition, symbolism, and Hindu fables. To children of Indian culture, the heroes, animals, saints, and sages found in their tradition are as familiar to traditional myths and legends as Batman is to Western cultured children. Indian classic tales

from books such as the *Mahabharata*, the *Ramayana*, and the *Puranas* are the source for many of India's legendary heroes. Learning about these myths and legends can provide insights into the deeper meanings behind yoga poses including crow pose, tortoise pose, and fish pose.

When meditating on the animal characters as well as assuming the pose, one's yoga practice might come to embody additional attributes. By assuming the postures associated with these animals, yogis create relationships with these forms of life and remind students of the lessons in the stories. It is possible that a viewer of *Yoga Asana Series* may contemplate the mythological meaning of the name of the yoga pose to enrich understanding the artist's interpretation of the pose.

Several poses in *Yoga Asana Series* have little reference to tradition but are strongly associated to the symbolic qualities of the yoga name. The horse pose portrays a modern symbolic view of the animal. In today's culture, horses symbolize strength, power, stamina, and grace. In English literature, *Black Beauty* shows readers the ability to get through hard times, even mistreatment and abuse, with a warm heart and love. The downward dog pose seeks the simple quality of the dog that trusts its owner. The challenging firefly pose encourages the yogi to use determination, confidence, and the ability to let go, to help lift the body into the balancing pose.

Several poses in *Yoga Asana Series* borrow from both tradition and symbolism. *Crow Pose* shows the yoga practitioner the importance of the crow's ability to abandon the fear of falling yet also refers to a well know story of a legendary hero from the *Mahabharata*, an important source of information regarded by Hindus as a text about moral law and history.

Similarly, *Tortoise Pose* in *The Yoga Asana Series* mimics the tortoise's ability to withdraw its senses from distracting objects as well as a legendary battle between demigods and demons.

In yoga, it is also taught that the practice of asanas helps the individual develop the habits of concentration and discipline, that can facilitate meditation. When humans accomplish this escape from outside senses, they are able to focus the mind toward a state of meditation. While creating *Yoga Asana Series*, the development of a deeper understanding of the poses becomes a vital source for inspiration.

Technical Processes

Ceramics is an art form steeped in science and process. Clay body choices, methods of creating the form's structure, surface decoration, choice of underglaze and glazes all play an integral part in the outcome of the final works of *Yoga Asanas Series*. The initial, technical decision for the series was clay body choice; a complicated decision that not only impacts color, glaze and texture, but clay body choice also has a great influence on the way the piece is constructed. Two specific clay bodies were chosen for pieces in *Yoga Asana Series*, that complemented the visual aesthetic qualities and method of construction intended for the piece. The primary clay of choice gravitated toward Laguna's Redstone, a warm, red, sculptural clay that contains significant amounts of sand, little grog, and a low shrinkage. It's designed to accommodate large handbuilt, wheel thrown, or sculpted projects. It is listed at cone 5, but for this series, it was fired lower for sculptural purposes and to retain its red color. This clay body stood firm with very little slumping while sculpting, worked well for throwing smaller pieces, and afforded the desirable detail in the faces of the figures such as those found in *Crow Pose*, *Peacock Pose*, and *Firefly Pose*. The second clay of choice was Laguna's Whitestone, a

creamy white, midrange, porcelaneous body with medium (60 mesh) grog, which is responsive on the wheel, for sculpture and handbuilding. This clay body was more responsive than the redstone for throwing the round, bulbous shapes of the horses' bodies in *Horse Stance*, and the white qualities provided a bright surface for the *Fish Pose* underglazes.

The clay body choice compliments the process in making the pieces. Most of the pieces in the *Yoga Asana Series* were constructed with a combination of wheel-throwing and handbuilding techniques. Each piece began with sketches that explored sculptural combinations of the animal and the human figure, along with the functional form as an integral part of the piece. Once the plan for the piece was in place, clay choices and method of construction were considered. *Crow Pose*, was sculpted in detail with Redstone clay, and after the form became leatherhard, it was cut apart and hollowed out. The bowl counterpart was thrown on the potter's wheel. All horse body parts in *Horse Pose* were wheel-thrown with Whitestone. Thrown cones resembling feet and neck were combined with a thrown bulb form, which mimicked the body of a horse. The human figured lid was sculpted and hollowed. *Fish Pose* was a conglomerate of sculpted head, arms, tails, and fins, combined with a textured slab, employing Whitestone. After sculpting several faces at this point in the series, it became apparent that a press mold for the face would expedite the sculpting process. A bisqued press mold was created from a *Fish Pose* face and served as the mold for several components in this piece, including *Peacock Pose* and *Firefly Pose*. For *Tortoise Pose*, the human head, legs, and arms were sculpted separately and then attached to the Whitestone wheel-thrown bowl. *Peacock Pose* was sculpted from Redstone, then hollowed from the base to the figure's waist. At this point, a wheel-thrown vessel was attached to the figures and altered to become the

feathers of the peacock. All subsequent pieces in the *Yoga Asana Series* were created using these techniques.

It is essential that the clay and glaze combination create the desired effect. After establishing the use of the Redstone and Whitestone clay bodies, glaze testing was performed on any combinations that had not been utilized in previous bodies of work. For *Crow Pose*, three black glazes, an underglaze, and a stain, were tested to assure the glaze fit the Redstone with a desirable sheen (See figure 1).



Fig. 1. Left to right: Mayco Foundations Black Velvet Matte Cone 05, Licorice Black Cone 5, Black Gloss Cone 5, Black Velvet Underglaze Cone 05, and Copper Carbonate/ Gerstley Borate Stain Cone 05.

For detail painted pieces, such as *Horse Pose* and *Fish Pose*, traditional glazes were abandoned in favor of underglaze, which offered detailed surface painting control and a larger color palette. The predictable Amoco's Velvet Underglaze Series, offered the ability to paint with layers of underglazes, mix colors of underglazes, and the option to fire multiple times between coats in order to stabilize the color before adding or changing colors. After the decorative surface was established, the piece could be stained and glazed with either a glossy or matte clear coat.

Description and Analysis of Creative Work



Elston, Jody. *Crow Pose*. 2016. Ceramic. Artist's Collection. Steamboat Springs, CO

Crow Pose

In the first piece of the *Yoga Asana Series*, *Crow Pose* alludes to the inner qualities of focus and confidence required to achieve balance. Perching the 9” tall figures on the edge of the bird bath bowl persuades us to believe that the yogic figures are indeed focused and confident as they contemplate drinking from the water-filled bowl form. There is no doubt that this balancing yoga asana resembles a bird, but a powerful benefit of practicing this asana is the contemplation of a powerful myth. In an epic Hindu story from the *Mahabharata*, the symbology of the crow and water combine to tell the moral trials of King Yudhisthira, whose strength of character ensured that he had the leadership skills needed to overcome his unrighteous cousins. A condensed version : There are five good brothers exiled into the forest. The oldest and wisest brother, Yudhisthira, was the emperor, before they were exiled. Yudhisthira sends each brother in turn to fetch water from a nearby lake. None of the brothers comes back, and Yudhisthira later finds all of his brothers dead along the bank of the lake.

Grief-stricken, Yudhisthira sees the crow, and it states that the brothers were warned that drinking the water without the crow's consent would make the water turn to poison. The brothers saw the crow as an enemy and defied his word, thus all were now dead. Yudhisthira, quiets his grief and anger and judges the situation. The crow challenges Yudhisthira to answer questions to gain access to the water. The questions and their answers are a summary of the yogic path. It begins with the realization that we often forget to recognize our divine nature, which causes us to suffer. The more we connect with our divine nature, the more we experience inner peace, which is the core of yogic belief. The crow is pleased with Yudhisthira's answers and tells him to drink as much water as he needs and brings all the brothers back to life (Srinivasan 11-20). The yogic philosophy asks us to consider if we are capable of creating enemies in our minds, and if we confront the enemy's intentions, we may find them to be our ally instead. Just like Yudhisthira stayed calm and focused on his duty, the figures in *Crow Pose* have dropped their fears of balance and calmly contemplate drinking from the body of water.



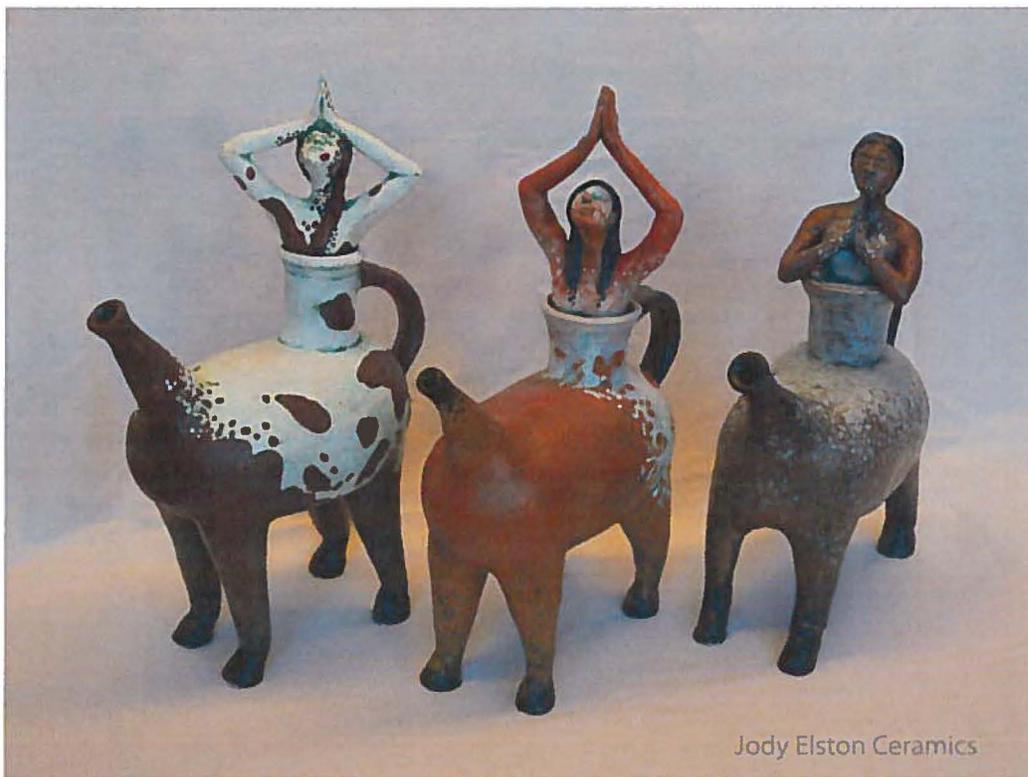
Elston, Jody. *Tortoise Pose*. 2016. Ceramic. Artist's Collection. Steamboat Springs, CO

Tortoise Pose

The tortoise pose is a challenging pose which asks us to take inspiration from the tortoise who carries his body like a passenger inside his own shell form. The large platter form represents the turtle's shell and the human body core. Limbs protruding from the rim of the platter replicate the body's position in this yoga asana. Assuming this position gives the yoga practitioner the feeling of moving inward mentally. Beyond this asana's obvious physical resemblance to the tortoise, there is reference to a Hindu legend: The gods were once cursed because they insulted a sage. Out of this curse came a war with the demons in which many gods were slain. Normally gods possessed mystical powers that could bring life back to the dead, but with this curse came the inability to do this. They were told to seek out Vishnu, who had the ability to take on the tortoise form, as he could help them acquire the elixir of immortality by churning the depths of the ocean. First they would need to move the ocean to the great mountain Mandara and use it as a churning rod. They did this, using the king of serpents, Vasuki, as a rope. The demons pulled the tail and the gods pulled the head of the serpent. As it began to churn, the mountain started to sink. At this point Vishnu appeared in his tortoise form and held the mountain on his back. The churning continued. Instead of nectar though, poisons came from the ocean. The gods and demons called on the powerful god, Shiva, to help. He did so by drinking the poison, which turned his throat blue. The ocean returned to its divine state. From the ocean came precious gifts along with the nectar. Immediately the demons stole it. But then, Vishnu came on the scene not as a tortoise, but in the form of a beautiful woman who enchanted demons and gods alike. She said that she would distribute the nectar evenly among them all. By the time she came to the demons, though, the nectar was

gone (Kaivalya 56). The path of the yogi is to churn the body with the rope of the mind through daily practice. While cleansing, much garbage comes to surface. Stick with it though, as the good will follow. When assuming this difficult tortoise pose, the challenge becomes sticking with it, as the benefit will follow.

The symbolic and mythical qualities of the turtle are found throughout history, as evidenced in this Hindu legend, as well as the Pre-Columbian, *The Goddess of Myrtos*. The *Tortoise Pose* created in the *Yoga Asana Series* is intended to evoke the mythology of these legends, while capturing the physical qualities of the turtle and this challenging yoga pose. The symbolical and physical combination of the human and tortoise elements remind us of this asana, and of these fables.



Elston, Jody. *Horse Pose*. 2016. Ceramic. Artist's Collection. Steamboat Springs, CO

Horse Pose

The horse pose when performed, looks similar to a horse, and therefore, it derives its name. The beginning yoga student might not be able to hold the horse pose for 30 seconds without becoming wobbly and the mind becoming restless. The trick is not in the muscles holding one in the posture, but rather in keeping the four corners of the feet rooted, letting the bones and gravity hold one up. Once the yogi is able to release the muscle in this posture, he can hold it for 20 minutes and beyond. This pose requires intense focus and is considered an “earth” pose because it is grounding, strengthening and balancing by nature. When contemplating *Horse Pose*, the notion of suggesting stability and strength is paramount. The teapot form came to mind as a strong and stable form, which afforded the ability to hold the stance of a horse. Much like Notkin and Arleo used the teapot as a canvas for their messages, the teapot was used as a canvas to sculpt the qualities of the horse pose.

Creating three horses offered the opportunity to incorporate three different meditative hand mudras into the piece. Hand mudras are simply placing the hands and fingers in a pattern in order to redirect energy. Bringing our hands together at the center of our bodies symbolically connects both sides of our bodies, often symbolising uniting the masculine and feminine energies (Madani). One piece in *Horse Pose* holds her hands in a prayer position at her heart: her heart energy radiates. Another piece in *Horse Pose* places this mudra near her mind; this can reduce anxiety, and the third piece in *Horse Pose* reaches this mudra toward the heavens; this can allow connection with the world.



Elston, Jody. *Fish Pose*. 2016. Ceramic. Artist's Collection. Steamboat Springs, CO

Fish Pose

It is taught in yoga practice that the first yoga student was the fish. In this piece it became significant to convey the sense of multiple fish in representing a yoga class. *Fish Pose* is comprised of a multiple array of tapa dishes that can individually sit on the tabletop with a functional purpose. In the story of the first “student” of yoga, the Hindu God Shiva ends an intense ten thousand year meditation to enjoy a picnic by the river with the Goddess Parvati. Shiva tells Parvati he had discovered the secret to salvation and “discovered yoga, the path to ultimate union between the individual self and the divine source”(Kaivalya 141). Unknown to Shiva as he explains the practices and potentials of Yoga, a special fish with a gift for listening was swimming in the river nearby, paying close attention. “And as he listened, something magical began to happen. He felt the techniques and theory of yoga begin to take hold of his body and live inside of him. Through his perfect listening to Shiva’s instructions, Matsya became enlightened by the conclusion of Shiva’s Discourse” (143). Thus, the story of how the

fish becomes the first “student” of yoga teaches the importance of perfect listening and the practice’s sacredness of animal symbology and the oral tradition. The focus on using the correct posture while in fish pose in order to correctly align the body’s chakras reinforces importance of perfect listening to one’s teacher in yoga, and further illustrates the connection between the mythological, symbolic and the physical.



Elston, Jody. *Peacock Pose*. 2016. Ceramic. Artist’s Collection. Steamboat Springs, CO

Peacock Pose

The peacock pose has strong connections to both Hindu mythology and symbolism. The Hindu mythology is evident in the legendary tale of Shiva’s son, Kartikeya, who led an army of gods and demigods into war in order to allow the gods to return to their heavenly homes. He led and won this battle on a steed that equaled his strength: the glorious peacock

(Kaivalya 153). One Hindu symbolic quality of the peacock is that it is the only enemy capable of striking fear into the venomous cobra snake because of its immunity to the poison venom. The relationship between the peacock and the cobra symbolizes poisonous human situations and relationships that form negativism. The ability of the peacock to not only resist negativity but assimilate it into beauty, is a processes we all strive to posses. The peacock also represents faithfulness, because upon the death of its mate, it remains alone and often dies of a broken heart (Kaivalya 155).

In *Peacock Pose*, a vase form depicts five female yogis, sculpted in the peacock pose, encircling the form. In the peacock pose, the chest and head mimic the peacock's body, while the body balances upward, representing its regal tail. The inclusion of five female yogis circling the vase form, narrates an additional symbolic quality. The number five has strong symbolism in Hinduism belief that the earth body is a slave to the five senses: skin, eyes, ears, nose, tongue. Humans function through these five senses to interact with the world. Numbers can serve as a means of concentration and meditation and lead the yoga body to self realization and higher awareness (V).



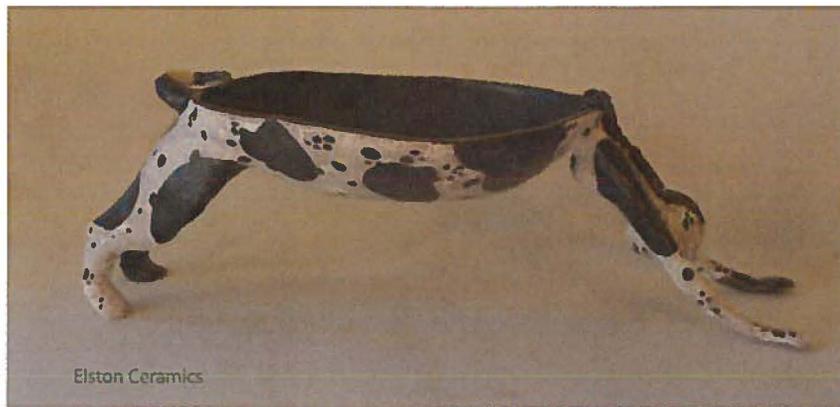
Elston, Jody. *Firefly Pose*. 2016. Ceramic. Artist's Collection. Steamboat Springs, CO

Firefly Pose

The firefly embodies symbolic meaning associated with light, and illumination. In *Firefly Pose*, several fireflies are suspended from above. Each bug serves the function of providing light, which is in the form of a small battery operated light which slowly brightens and fades. This light is a symbolic message that although human physical appearance may seem one way, it is one's spirit that shines from the inside out. An ordinary looking creature during the day, the firefly is a most impressive sight when it glows at night.

The messages that *Firefly Pose* relays while her light is off may be most profound to one's spiritual growth. Each bug, like every person, has the ability to light up from within and to shine radiantly. And unlike the firefly, whose light appears programmed to blink on and off, humans possess an inner glow that never waxes or wanes. It shines brightly, even in dark times, whether one is aware of it or not.

The firefly primarily uses its light as a mating ritual. Light signals are used to attract the mate. This also is a symbolic message that if humans are to attract certain people, places and things in their lives, they must plan accordingly, lay down the groundwork, and be persistent in their ideals. *Firefly Pose* embodies the symbolisms of this pose as the illuminated yogic ladies slowly spin and glow.



Elston, Jody. *Downward Facing Dog Pose*. 2016. Ceramic. Artist's Collection. Steamboat Springs, CO



Upward Facing Dog Pose. 2016. Ceramic. Artist's Collection. Steamboat Springs, CO

Upward Facing Dog Pose and Downward Facing Dog Pose

Upward facing dog pose, and its' sibling downward facing dog pose are often practiced in the same yoga flow. These two opposing poses are paired together so frequently that it can be difficult to separate them in yoga practice. The most obvious symbolism of the pose refers to the dog as a loyal friend. The importance of loyalty to our yoga practice by idolizing this wonderful creature is the focus in *Downward Facing Dog Pose* and *Upward Facing Dog Pose*.

There is a mythological connection as well in a beautiful story about a dog in the *Mahabharata, Book 17*; After an epic battle, five brothers, led by the oldest brother Yudishthira, who was the same brave hero associated with the crow pose, set off walking north to the mountain of Heaven. A dog joins them and refuses to leave. One by one, Yudishthira's companions fall along the way until he and the dog are the only ones to reach Heaven's gate. The ruler of Heaven greets them and tells them that the dog is not allowed into heaven. Yudishthira argues that the dog who had many opportunities to leave, did not, and instead remained devoted. It is a sin against *dharma*—right conduct—to abandon those who are devoted to you. Yudishthira refused to abandon the dog. With that, it is revealed that the dog is an incarnation of Dharma itself, because Dharma is not just a principle, but a model for embodied action(Mahabharata). By protecting the dog, Yudhisthira stayed true to his destiny as a great leader. This was yet another test.

Upward Facing Dog and *Downward Facing Dog* serve as a reminder of the routine the yoga practitioner embodies as they return to their practice day after day, again and again. Like the role model dogs, humans crave routine. These pieces in the *Yoga Asana Series* symbolize all of the dog's qualities to which we are drawn: routine, loyalty, love, and persistence.



Elston, Jody. *Cow Pose*. 2016. Ceramic. Artist's Collection. Steamboat Springs, CO

Cow Pose

Cow pose is usually paired with cat pose to warm up and stretch the spine, creating a smooth asana flow sequence. Practicing the opposing Cat and Cow poses may improve posture and promote a healthy spine. In the creation of *Cow Pose*, homage is paid to the cow as a symbol of wealth and as sacred animal. Cattle are considered sacred in world religions such as Hinduism, and in most states of India, the slaughter of cattle is prohibited and their meat considered taboo. Additionally, the cow has been a symbol of wealth; The cow was possibly respected because mankind relied heavily on it for dairy products, tilling the fields, and a source of dung for fuel and fertilizer. Hinduism is based on the concept of the presence of a soul in all creatures, including the cow. Therefore, killing any animal would be sinful, and if the animal were killed, the creature would have to be reborn in that same form because of its unnatural death. Cows are associated with many gods, for example Krishna was a cow herder. The Goddess Usha rides a chariot driven by seven cows.

Conclusion

Potters from the beginning of recorded time have left evidence of human's primal urge to create functional ceramic ware combined with impressions of cultural trends. Like these historical pieces, the *Yoga Asana Series* has combined the functional pot with a sculptural impression about yoga culture. This series was influenced by yoga practice culture and the mythical and symbolic qualities of animal named asanas. The functional entity of the piece becomes a metaphorical canvas as the description of the animal asana becomes the dominant concern, The technical process engages problem-solving in sculptural, form-making, and surface treatment aspects that further emphasize the animal qualities of the piece. The resulting dynamics ask the audience to contemplate the animal asana reference and to develop a deeper understanding of the meaning behind the asana name which in turn can lead to a deeper connection to spiritual philosophy.

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