



**Kristen Cliffel**  
The Sweet Life

Right: *Home Sweet Home*  
2007

Low Fire Clay, glaze  
and lustre, polychrome  
handcarved wood;  
28 x 20 x 16 in.



Far right: *Up, Up and Away*  
2007

Low Fire Clay, glaze  
and lustre, polychrome  
handcarved wood;  
28 x 15 x 15 in.



Right: *Safe at Home*, 2007

Low Fire Clay, glaze  
and lustre, polychrome  
handcarved wood;  
19 x 20 x 20 in.



Far right: *Wish You Were Here*, 2007

Low Fire Clay, glaze  
and lustre, polychrome  
handcarved wood;  
17 x 13 x 13 in.



Cover:

*I Do, I Do*, 2007

Low Fire Clay, glaze and  
lustre, polychrome  
handcarved wood.

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The Sweet Life

Feb 1–Mar 15, 2008

William Busta Gallery  
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Cleveland OH 44115

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## The Sweet Life

### Kristen Cliffl

A lusciously frosted birthday cake that has carousel animals in place of candles is supported by three garishly gilded women who happen to be headless. A mysteriously waterlogged sailboat languishes on a manicured lawn guarded by a worryingly incomplete picket fence. A quaint suburban house, ominously spewing a large cloud of smoke from its chimney, perches atop a cupcake. A red wagon, planted with grass, transports a giant wedding ring and a kiddie ride in the guise of an absurdly happy duck. These marvelously surreal scenarios are part of a new series of ceramic and mixed-media sculptures—collectively titled *The Sweet Life*—by Cleveland-based artist Kristen Cliffl.

A self-proclaimed third-generation feminist, Cliffl has long-explored domestic themes in her work, and she focuses particularly on roles that have been traditionally assigned to wives and mothers. An autobiographical dimension arises out of Cliffl's conscientious desire to maintain a home with her husband, son, and daughter, while sustaining her career as a studio artist. Many of her recent pieces, including several of *The Sweet Life* sculptures, incorporate the imagery of pastries and desserts—a clever reference to her personal and professional lives, for she views the making and baking of dough as akin to the modeling and firing of clay. (Perhaps it is not surprising to learn that rolling pins, spatulas, and cake frosting bags are among her arsenal of studio tools.) Images of children's toys also make frequent appearances in *The Sweet Life*, and their inevitably over-the-top cutesiness and cheery coloration generate grins and groans in equal measure. On a number of occasions, Cliffl's compositions feature precarious stacks of disparate objects, undoubtedly a metaphor for the tricky balancing act she finds herself negotiating.

Cliffl is a painstaking and admittedly obsessive artist who has superb technical skills, yet she allows herself improvisation and revision if it more successfully advances her ideas. From start to finish, a given sculpture can take up to four years to complete. Cliffl conceptualizes each sculpture beforehand, and carefully develops her compositions through preparatory sketches. Sometimes the actual execution entails trial-and-error to achieve a desired effect; in fact, her studio contains a handful of components she fabricated but ultimately decided were the improper scale, color, or tenor for their intended destination. Although Cliffl primarily works with clay, she is not averse to enlisting other media: these include cast glass, gold leaf, and carved wood elements, all of which she implements herself.

Full of guilty pleasures and pleasurable guilts, *The Sweet Life* series is both appealing and disconcerting, reflecting the artist's dual attempts, in her words, "to embrace and overthrow." Intellectually, emotionally, and visually sumptuous, Cliffl's sculptures are serious and silly, celebratory and indignant, sincere and ironic—all uncannily and provocatively at the same time. *The Sweet Life* is evidence of an exceptionally talented and dedicated artist who thrives on having her cake and eating it too.

Mark Cole  
Associate Curator of American Painting and Sculpture, The Cleveland Museum of Art

# Kristen Cliffl

kristencliffl@adelphia.net

## Education

- 1990 BFA, Cleveland Institute of Art, Cleveland, OH  
1985–86 Skidmore College, Saratoga Springs, NY

## Solo and Two-Person Exhibitions

- 2008 *The Sweet Life*, Solo Exhibition, William Busta Gallery, Cleveland, OH  
2001 *Happily Ever After*, Two-Person Show, Zygote Gallery, Cleveland, OH  
1997 Gallery Dorita, Atlanta, GA  
1995 The Clay Studio, Philadelphia, PA  
1994 The Sculpture Center, Cleveland, OH  
1991 The Other Galley, Banff Centre, Banff, Alberta, Canada  
1991 *Garden Party*, Two-Person Show, Ninth Street Studio, Cleveland, OH  
1990 *Two Cleveland Artists*, Bonfoey Gallery, Cleveland, OH

## Selected Group Exhibitions

- 2008 *6 Degrees of Separation, A Convergence of Voices in Clay*, Sandusky Cultural Center, OH  
2007 *The Contemporary Drinking Vessel*, River Gallery, Rocky River, OH  
*Screw Factory Art Show*, Lake Erie Screw, Lakewood, OH  
*Revive*, Zygote Press, Cleveland, OH  
2006 *Into View, 15 Years of Windows to Sculpture*, Cleveland State University Art Gallery, OH  
*An Extravagance of Salt and Pepper*, Baltimore Clayworks, MD  
*War, What is it Good For?*, BK Smith Gallery, Lake Erie College, Painesville, OH  
*National Arts Project*, City-Wide Exhibition, Kelly Randall Gallery, Cleveland, OH  
2005 *Cleveland Craft Biennial*, Cleveland State University Gallery, OH  
*Ingenuity Salon de Refuse*, Ingenuity Gallery, Cleveland, OH  
*Fashion Show*, BK Smith Gallery, Lake Erie College, Painesville, OH  
*On a Pedestal*, The Sculpture Center, Cleveland, OH  
2004 *Dessert Show*, Santa Fe Clay Gallery, NM  
*A Sense of Identity: Contemporary Ceramic Art in the Midwest*, Indiana University/Purdue University, Fort Wayne; University of Indianapolis, IN  
2003 *The Teapot Redefined*, Mobilia Gallery, Cambridge, MA  
*Chataqua National*, Ceramics Award, NY  
2000 *Transcending Traditions, Ohio Artists in Clay and Fiber*; Riffe Gallery, Columbus, OH; Kent State University, OH; Southern Ohio Museum, Portsmouth, OH  
1999 *Cleveland Institute of Art Retrospective*, Avante Gallery, Cleveland, OH

- 1998 *SOFA Chicago*, Chicago, IL  
*Anderson Ranch Alumni Ceramics Show*, Evelyn Siegel Gallery, Fort Worth, TX  
1997 *Young Sculptors, 4 From the North Coast*, Cleveland Center for Contemporary Art, and Sculpture Center, Cleveland, OH  
1996 *Explorations in Clay*, Studio B, Lancaster, OH  
*Ohio Perspectives: Explorations in Clay*, Akron Art Museum, OH  
*Women*, Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, OH  
1995 *Materials Hard and Soft*, Denton Arts Council Gallery, TX  
1994 *Faculty Invitational*, Anderson Ranch Arts Center Gallery, Snowmass Village, CO  
*X-Sighting*, Anderson Gallery, Buffalo, NY  
*Best of 1994*, Ohio Craft Museum, Columbus, OH  
1992 *Sculpture Invitational*, CCC Metro Gallery, Cleveland, OH  
1990 *May Show*, Cleveland Museum of Art, OH

## Professional Experience

- 2001–08 Ohio Arts Council, Arts in Education Program Artist  
2007 Residency Artist, Young Audiences of Northeast Ohio  
2005 Notre Dame College, South Euclid, OH; Visiting Artist The Cleveland Museum of Art; Ceramics Faculty  
2004 Anderson Ranch Arts Center, Snowmass Village, CO; Visiting Artist/Instructor  
2003 Akron Art Museum, OH; Miller South School, Visiting Artist  
1997 The Cleveland School for the Arts, OH; Visiting Artist Cleveland Institute of Art, OH; Visiting Artist  
1993 Kohler Company, Kohler, WI; John Michael Kohler Center for the Arts, Sheboygan, WI; Artist in Residence  
1990, 91 Banff Centre for the Arts, Alberta, Canada; Artist in Residence  
1990 Haystack Mountain School of Crafts, Deer Isle, ME; Studio Assistant

## Award

- 1995 Ohio Arts Council, *Individual Artist Fellowship*