

Tight Chain

By Jacob Jackson

Looking at Jason Walker's *Timing Chain* I am immediately impressed by the skill that went into its creation. For the piece this is both a strength and a weakness. It demands to be taken seriously by anyone who has ever worked in clay, but it would not be easily understood by those who don't. It is a star in the "theater of technique"¹, but the production is garish, hermetic and solipsistic. The form itself is an approximation of a teapot that stands atop a serving tray. To someone who doesn't spend much time looking at ceramic art the teapot form would not be easy to discern. I showed the picture to my two-year-old daughter and she asked, "What's that?" I said, "I don't know, you tell me." After some thought she said, "Umm, a bobot." (That's two year old for robot.) When I told my wife about this she admitted that it looked like a robot to her too... a robot doing the "Walk Like an Egyptian" dance.

The pot is a machine/ bird thing with a pressure gauge lid, a muffler handle and a pipe with a bird's head coming out of it for a spout. The whole piece is painstakingly glazed in intricate detail with vines and pipes filling its exterior. A bird is perched at the center of the piece atop a tree branch that morphs into pipes. The serving platter is what gives the piece its name. It is a chain held tightly around two cogs with a pipe handle. The chain, cogs and pipe are all made of clay but have the mechanical fastidiousness of metal. This leads me to ask the question: Other than to impress us clay nerds, why make this out of clay? The tension on the timing chain has been set high which contributes to the impression that this is a precision machine. It is apparent that the artist would like to establish tension between the natural world and the mechanical. In this case the mechanical world is winning. The uptight painting style used for the vines, bird and branches make them no less machine like than the rest of the apparatus.

When contemplating *Timing Chain* as a teapot it imparts some interesting insight into the machine that feeds our social rituals. Tea has become a symbol for the lifestyles of privileged westerners. Having the leisure time to drink tea and the money to own a fine tea set was a way of showing your affluence and good taste. These lifestyles were funded by exploitation and oppression. If we consider tea as a symbolic reference to western excess and industrialization the meaning grows even darker. Walker's piece seems to remind us that our unnatural decadence comes at a great cost. It's an important message that will likely be lost on most people outside the ceramics community. Those who do get it probably don't need persuading. It's a lovely sermon but Walker is preaching to the choir.

¹ Edmond de Waal, *20th Century Ceramics* p. 21