

ARTS

Ceramist reimagines castaway containers

Who: Sam Dowd

What: "Plane Engineering" ceramics show

When: Opening reception 6 to 8 p.m. on Friday; show hangs through June 30

Where: Teton Artlab, 135 Cache

How much: Free

By Katy Niner

Bottle forms take off in the quirky cosmos of ceramist Sam Dowd.

Teton Artlab hosts his universe of porcelain planes and space shuttles, all composites of bottle casts, from Friday through June 30.

In his last years working toward a ceramics master's degree at Kansas State University, Dowd began experimenting with castaway containers. He initially reimagined them as coral-like sculptures; they later emerged as planes and ships, both of the sea and space. In ceramic, their formal function – to hold soda, wine, water – all but disappeared.

Based in part on Japanese animation, asymmetry and "crazy glazes" play up their hyper-realism.

"They are not typically symmetrical ships that we would build on earth," he said, "but they would probably do well in space or my own little version of a universe."

The smallest is 3 inches long, the largest is 46, a range accentuated by the inches-to-meters scale Dowd created for each piece. The fictional context continues with narratives told by a future commentator reflecting on the crafts' former uses: one ship is all that remains of a larger vessel, another was designed as a one-man plane. He came up with the fictional histories as a way to include viewers in his creative scheme, which he felt



Sam Dowd makes crafts from bottle castings. His show – "Plane Engineering" – will orbit in the Teton Artlab from Friday through June 30.

languished in a previous exhibition themed after a shipping lane.

Dowd grew up in a room wallpapered with space shuttles and littered with Legos. He used to make steel skeletons of dinosaurs, which now populate his mother's backyard in Omaha, Neb.). Recent itinerancy has forced him to sift through or take apart and rebuild possessions, a process that has influenced his use of "junk" in art and nurtured his interest in engineering.

"I look for certain parts and try and put them back together in a way that seems right," he said.

Dowd moved to Jackson a year and a half ago and now teaches ceramics classes at the Art Association, where his wife, Jenny, also an artist, teaches. Artists who use the ceramics studio may have seen his work, but "Plane Engineering" is his first solo show in Jackson and first new body of art in two years.

By resurrecting bottles in sea- or air-borne forms, Dowd hopes to "get people to look at what they are using and consuming in an entirely different way."