

KANSAS CITY'S

# Art Ambassadors

Artist Educators Unite  
with Chinese and Italian Artists

BY CHRISTEL HIGHLAND

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MARK BERNDT



Artist Educators Scott Seebart, Misty Gamble and Jessie Fisher pictured in the kiln room of KCAI's Ceramics Studio.

E lbert Hubbard famously said, "Art is not a thing, it is a way." Artists and educators Jessie Fisher and Scott Seebart live a life dedicated to figurative and representational painting. Of her friends and collaborators Misty Gamble says, "There's a romanticism to the way they work."

Upon entering the home the couple share with their young son Valentine who travels with them to far-flung locations while the artists extend their practice, one gains a strong sense that the two share a life consumed by art. Countless art books, paintings and drawings, sculpture, and an unusual arrangement of objects and color choices define the aesthetic experience. This is not a house being upgraded for resale. This is a home for a focused pair who value time spent in the studio as much as they value a particular way of living. There is also strong respect for the earth. Their home and studios are within biking and walking distance to of Kansas City Art Institute where Jessie Fisher is an Assistant Professor of Painting, and Seebart is a lecturer in figurative drawing, painting, and sculpture. The University of Missouri-Kansas City, where Seebart also is a part-time Studio Art Lecturer is equally accessible.

Misty Gamble's manner of living is similar. Self-care and balanced living are at the center of her life and studio practice, and thus it isn't surprising that upon Gamble's appointment to the Kansas City Art Institute's Foundation department she and Fisher became fast friends. Gamble's living arrangements express a deep devotion to the work as well as her appreciation for order and balance. She cleverly stores years of work within the space, creating a calm industry-devoted home for herself and two cats, Dash and Dot. Gamble's approach to ceramics is deeply rooted in a sculptural sensibility. She meticulously keeps binders full of ideas relating to feminism, fashion, and ceremony, which are a few themes that interest her. With a humorous approach and an alluring color palette, her work has been shown in more than five galleries, including two in Missouri (Sherry Leedy Contemporary and The Duane Reed Gallery in St. Louis). She also has representation in California, Chicago, and Rome. With a strong mutual devotion to figurative work, Fisher's natural organizational capabilities and penchant for big-picture thinking paired with Gamble's previous career in music production, the two started making plans to broaden their art perspective and practice.



Jessie Fisher with Son Valentine in her Hyde Park studio

**THE CHINESE COLLECTIVE**

The budding friendship between Fisher and Gamble marked the beginning of the Studio Nong Collective. The Studio Nong Collective's inaugural residency in the summer of 2013 included Fisher, Gamble, Seebart, and Leandra Urrutia, associate professor of Studio Art, Ceramics and Foundations at the Memphis College of Art. During their stay in southern China, these artists, along with their hosts and Chinese professor counterparts, worked sunrise to sunset for six weeks in an abandoned hotel purchased by a pottery factory, which is undoubtedly the title source for the collective's traveling show, *Sunrise/Sunset: Works from Studio Nong*. Most recently seen at the Memphis College of Art, the work travels to Red Star Studios in September.

They lived and worked in the same building, rarely leaving as the pressure of an exhibition at QinZhou NiXing Pottery Museum at the Olympic Stadium in QinZhou, China loomed. Of that experience, and with respect to their hosts, Fisher said, "We wanted to impress them." Gamble thought, "What did we get ourselves into?" Eventually they settled into the grueling routine and became a family. Seebart says of their hosts, the GuangXi Arts Institute, "They were very Southern. Very relaxed in cut-off shorts and flip-flops." Very accommodating as well, it sounds. Anything the artists required for their work was made readily available.

This summer the Chinese half of the collective travels to the United States to

work at the Kansas City Art Institute as well as the Memphis College of Art. They will join their hosts in an industrious effort of making works of art with in-kind material donations generously provided by Crane Yard Clay. Notably, these scenarios could not be possible without the support of their respective educational institutions.

While this clay won't match the spectacular qualities of the impressive NiXing clay (rarely, if ever glazed due to its spectacular color and dense material quality, fired at low temperature, burnished and polished) available to them in QinZhou, China, Gamble was working hard testing clay samples at the time of this publication to find something suitable for the Chinese half of the collective.



Clockwise, from top right: Misty Gamble at work in China with two assistants; Gamble in her West Bottoms studio; Bust of Valentine created in residence in China by Fisher with the NiXing clay





Scott Seebart at work in his Hyde Park studio. *Self Portrait*, 2014, below.

Regarding the Chinese clay's particular quality, Fisher said, "It's like working with oil paint." Gamble notes, "I was surprised at the size of the work without grog or sand at the Chinese work studio." The practice of figurative sculpture in China also impressed them as educators and now Seebart teaches a figurative course split into two terms, one in painting and the other in sculpture at KCAI.

#### THE ITALIAN COLLECTIVE

Fisher quotes Edwin Dickenson on her website: "The more influenced I am, the more original I become." This idea rests squarely at the center of the mission behind the collective's work, which obviously celebrates each member's individuality and strengths. Fisher spends every other summer in residence at Studio Art Centers International with her family. This was how *Dialoghi Dell'Arte* came into being, which translates into *A Discourse on Art*. The products of the collective's work celebrate this conversation:

a group of extremely talented figurative and representational painters, dedicated to their craft and its' history, gathering together for painting and international group exhibitions, all curated and organized as traveling shows by Fisher. Artists Seebart and Fisher have the upmost respect and admiration for their Italian colleagues. Fisher says, "Their lives revolve around the practice of painting."

Fisher and Seebart, both with impressively large, organized and efficient studios have intense admiration for this larger collective of 16 artists. One cannot help but appreciate the strength of will and purpose required to coordinate such a large group of talented individuals. There is also a sense that there is a great deal of time spent enjoying good food and wine, after hours in collective practice. Fisher says, "It was a large family; it's about growing through these exchanges." The pair (with Valentine) will once again travel to Italy this summer. For the better part of May

through July, Fisher will accompany KCAI students to Florence SACI with this year's program titled *An Exquisite Corpse*. Afterward, the trio will travel to International Center for the Arts, Montecastello di Vibio, Italy where Fisher will be a visiting lecturer and critic. The excitement surrounding this leg of their travels is palpable. Fisher discusses a magic in the beauty of the area, an intense beauty in the



light, a love for the cuisine, and most importantly, a deep affection for the collective she will encounter there.


With incredible attention to every detail, Fisher paints the figure in Florentine Renaissance fashion. She and Seebart both paint a beautiful self-portrait defying the current trend to glorify the self. These are honest depictions driven by a desire to paint, and without a subject, a figurative artist must look in the mirror. Seebart is more of a representational worker, often with several still life arrangements in the studio at once. His figurative work, explored more fully as an artistic exercise in drawing, is many times inserted behind or in the midst of his still-life paintings which also have an environmental element giving them place and time and tumult. Both artists will show at the Leedy-Voukos Art Center in October, with Seebart in the front gallery space, and Fisher filling the large adjacent gallery space.

Find information regarding the couple's grueling international lecture and exhibition schedule at [www.jessiefisherstudio.com](http://www.jessiefisherstudio.com). The Kansas City exhibition schedule is available there as well. Seebart's work is online at [www.scottseebart.com](http://www.scottseebart.com) and Misty Gamble's website is [www.mistygamble.com](http://www.mistygamble.com). Do not miss the chance to view the world-class work of the Studio Nong and *Dialoghi Dell'Arte* collectives. These Art Ambassadors represent the future of Kansas City's presence and influence art historically.




Above: Allen Feltus, Artist with *Dialoghi Dell'Arte* Collective  
Below: *The Studio Nong* Collective





*All human evolution is based on creativity.*

—Master Chef Ferran Adrià



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Curated by Brett Littman. Organized by The Drawing Center, NY. Dom Pérignon is the presenting partner for this exhibition.