

ARNOLD ZIMMERMAN

Where are they? They are everywhere. They manage. Kilns need to be bought or built, clay needs to be hauled. Artworks need to be shipped. And critics, curators and collectors have to be received. Like other artists, men and women who work with clay are scattered throughout the city. Soho, Noho, Tribeca, the Flatiron District. And although New Jersey largely remains alien territory, Brooklyn isn't. After Soho, then the East Village, followed in a small way by Noho and Tribeca, as the real estate market bloomed, Williamsburg across the East River was next. There simply was nowhere else that new artists coming to the city could afford to live and work. It's only one stop on the L train. Williamsburg became one big post-graduate dormitory in a big way, with tiny galleries and skinny young men and young women. Now those very same contenders are being forced out to make room for... co-ops and condominiums.

Next stop Lorimer, the second L station in Brooklyn. Arnold Zimmerman was there years ago and now his neighborhood of garages and one-floor shops is considered part of Williamsburg. The more adventurous have already started colonizing Bushwick—anything to avoid Jersey City.

When I first visited Zimmerman years ago I thought he was in Red Hook. Not so. Red Hook is south, very south, beyond the Williamsburg Bridge, the Brooklyn Bridge and Brooklyn Heights, protected from the fast track by a serious lack of public transportation. Red Hook has spectacular views of Lower Manhattan—you know, where the World Trade Center once was, where there is now a gap through which you can see New Jersey.

On the street, Lorimer is very different from Williamsburg proper. Let's call this neighborhood Lorimer after the subway stop to distinguish it from once totally Polish, totally working class Williamsburg, next to the East River, under, alongside of and bisected by the elevated Brooklyn-Queens Expressway. In Lorimer there are no cyber-cafés, no design shops, and, as far as I can tell, no trendy restaurants or bars.

When I first entered Zimmerman's huge garage space, there were clay sculptures that were Zimmerman-high, but looked... well, had he changed? In the distance Peter Schlesinger, another clay guy, waved from where he and an assistant—both clad in one-piece workmen's cover-alls—were working on Schlesinger-tall vases. Schlesinger years ago was in a film about David Hockney called

A Bigger Splash and is now making a splash of his own.

Although there are still some of the big, signature Zimmermans about, the artist has changed direction. In the meantime, his gigantic walk-in kiln gets considerable use. Not only does he teach private workshops on how to make large-scale ceramics, he rents out his mega-kiln.

He moved from his totemic carved clay sculptures around 1996 and now focuses on the figurine tradition for his inspiration and on modeling rather than carving into the clay. He works in salt-fired porcelain, sometimes with soda ash and increasingly with colored glazes. Pieces like *Fools Congress* are composed of many Bosch-inspired, writhing figures, nearly but not quite allegorical, but more often than not up to erotic hijinks.

"Like life," he jokes, "they are all about sex and violence." He draws a great deal of inspiration from the ceramics pieces in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, one of New York's great resources for artists. The new pieces are small in size compared to his totemic work of the past, but they are not small in scale. If one thinks of Zimmerman's work being about scale rather than size, then the change makes perfect sense.

Zimmerman grew up in nearby Ossining, New York, but always thought the city itself was the place to be: "I sure didn't want to be in Westchester. I was in Kansas City getting my BFA and I sure didn't want to stay. I didn't see myself as the country potter. Later I really hated New Haven." Zimmerman likes the variety of people that you see in the New York streets and the huge amount of art that is more or less at your fingertips. Now, of course, he has discovered internet access to the Met's great collection, but it doesn't look like he'll ever leave.

Where was he on September 11? He, his wife and daughter live in Manhattan and he had just brought Isabel to PS 150, which is close, too close, to what we now call Ground Zero. He saw both planes hit and then went back and yanked his daughter out of school. He stood in the street mesmerized until he began to see people jumping from the upper floors of the tower and had to protect his daughter from that gruesome sight.

Zimmerman, like many, probably has a love/hate feeling about New York, maybe now more than ever: "I always think about leaving. I just don't know where I would go."

