

From California to China: Art student transforms debris into dialogue through ceramic practice

By Gigi Konecki-Brazeal, ASU News
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Editor's note: This story is part of a series of profiles of notable [spring 2026 graduates](#).

Any given week, Kendall Traylor can be found making the rounds of ceramic studios across the Phoenix metro area, not to fire her own work, but to collect what everyone else has thrown away. Broken bisqueware, cracked shards, fired rejects that didn't survive the kiln; the fragments most artists sweep into the trash are exactly what Traylor is looking for to create her own art. From this refuse, the Long Beach, California, native has built a distinctive art practice at the School of Art in ASU's Herberger Institute for Design and the Arts.

Traylor is completing her Master of Fine Arts in art at ASU this spring, capping a three-year, fully funded graduate program with a body of work that challenges the ceramics world's culture of perfection and disposal. A 3D design class during her undergraduate years at CalState, Long Beach, pulled her back to ceramics after a two-year break, and once she found her people in the studio at ASU, she never looked back.

"The people were so amazingly talented, and I felt welcome from the moment I arrived," she said.

Since then, she has recycled and reused over 2,500 pounds of unfired clay and more than 1,000 pounds of fired ceramic waste, transforming them into sculptural works that carry pointed messages about sustainability and consumerism.

In 2024, that philosophy earned her an international artist residency in Jingdezhen, China, where she delivered a public lecture at The Pottery Workshop on creating a more sustainable future for ceramics.

Among her many honors: first prize in the Martin Wong Foundation Scholarship, a GPSA Jumpstart Research Grant, the Curran-Bleakney Scholarship from the Arizona Artists' Guild and the 2025 ASU Change the World award with a funded Changemaker Action Grant. Her work has appeared in 11 exhibitions across Arizona, Taiwan and beyond, culminating in "Aggregate Bodies," her solo MFA show at Step Gallery in Phoenix this spring.

Beyond her studio, Traylor has served as an undergraduate studio arts instructor at the Herberger Institute and taught adult special education ceramics at SEEDs for Autism, work she plans to continue after graduation alongside her art practice.

A professor's words have stayed with her throughout: Juan Obando's reminder that "you have to know what you don't like to know what you do like," an invitation to keep experimenting, stay open and never settle.

Question: Why did you choose ASU?

Answer: The three Fs: faculty, facilities, funding. I wanted to feel financially supported by my institution and the faculty. Grant Street Studios is also such a beautiful facility that I understand why so many alumni become full-time teachers at ASU.

Q: Which professor taught you the most important lesson while at ASU?

A: There were so many amazing professors who taught me so much. Working with [Susan Beiner](#) challenged me to work consistently and prioritize my medium.

Q: What's the best piece of advice you'd give to those still in school?

A: Critiques and feedback are amazing. I came out of my undergrad stubborn and set in my ways, and in many ways, I still am. But I love participating in critiques and sharing feedback with my peers. The ideas that have sparked from critiques would have never come to me on my own.

Q: What does the power of design and arts — or ceramics specifically — mean to you?

A: Art scratches that ADHD itch that I have. I am a lifelong crafter. I love working with my hands, and ceramics has such a deep impact on neurodivergent individuals. When I work with clay, all of my senses are stimulated and engaged. Experimenting with materials connects me to chemistry and biology. The material connects me to the Earth and my body.

Q: If someone gave you \$40 million to solve one problem on our planet, what would you tackle?

A: Recycling is something I am passionate about. I go on long walks to pick up ceramic pieces, and I see so much trash everywhere. Strengthening public sanitation and improving access to trash cans and recycling receptacles would make me so happy. Another dream would be a more structured, affordable trap-and-release program for stray animals, statewide and nationwide.

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Text image(s)



Kendall Traylor, courtesy photo