

# ZOLLA/LIEBERMAN GALLERY INC.

## **Smoke Remains**

by Frank Paluch

Dennis Lee Mitchell spent his formative years exploring the outdoors. He was born in the rural town of Larned, Kansas where he connected with nature every day. His inherent inquisitiveness led him to pursue the sciences as he entered Kansas State University. However, similarly to the story of Peter Voukos, Dennis was required to enroll in a studio art class to fulfill requirements for his major. From that day forward, ceramics became Mitchell's passion.

The fluid quality of the material worked in his favor. He looked to nature for inspiration, but discovered, as many artists do, that it is fleeting. However, he was able to manifest his love of nature into tiny ceramic "particles" such as peeling bark on a birch log covered in lichen. His innovative techniques and precise application allowed him to execute the smallest of exquisite details in clay.

Ceramics can be a volatile medium. The constant change and unpredictability inspired Dennis to experiment with unconventional tools such as gas torches. An errant flame led to Dennis' first "smoke drawing." He realized the immediate visual impact. The torch familiarly responded like a ceramic glaze, often fickle and always unique. His passion for art-making revitalized as he explored a new visual language.

As Dennis continues to master drawing with smoke, his imagery evolves to further investigate the connection between artist, material and subject. The allure of his work is a familiar material taken beautifully out of context.