

Story and photos  
by Todd Paris



# Spheres


10 months.

3,000 pounds of clay.

1,200 bowls exactly the same height.



# s of Influence



The bowls are laid out in tight rows on the floor and covered with sheets of Plexiglas. Interspersed on top of the glass are five large pots 4 to 5 feet tall, stuffed to overflowing with rice. Sprinkled in the 1,200 bowls below are just a few grains of rice, or none at all. Walking on top of the bowls represents the disparity between them.

“When you walk on it you can hear and feel the changes as the bowls adjust to your weight,” senior art student Ian Wilkinson says. “Your gravity is absorbed by their strength. The idea just came to me, kind of in a giant tsunami wave, of being able to make this tier system of economic inequality where the less fortunate population below can’t get past this ceiling, which is a glass floor to the privileged few above.”





The installation fulfilled the requirement of a senior thesis for Wilkinson's bachelor of fine arts degree (he graduated in May 2013), but the artist and student-athlete had other ambitions for it. "I thought, why don't I use my project to try to demonstrate that you can do something more meaningful with your art than just showing it off? It's more meaningful to me to remind everyone that there is a struggle in our own community, and around the world, and you can do something about it."

Wilkinson got to the point where he could throw up to 30 bowls an hour. Each bowl had to be bisque-fired, glazed and then kiln-fired, a process that took days for each batch. The repetition and monotony of

the work is where his physical training paid off. "I've been on the cross country ski team for five years, and we have to train for an outrageous number of hours. It takes months of training to get where you want to be in order to compete, so I looked at this the same way. By ... keeping a regimen and discipline and working on it no more than four hours a day, I was able to stay focused, keep my wits about me, stay consistent and maintain my technique."

Wilkinson donated the bowls to the Fairbanks Community Food Bank, where they were sold for \$15 each as a fundraiser. In less than an hour, the 1,200 bowls were gone and \$18,000 raised to help combat hunger in Fairbanks.



**“ Seeing human hands and flesh helped carry the viewers’ eyes up off the floor and helped establish the relationship with the whole hunger issue. ”**





“The whole reason I chose pottery as a concentration is because it often has a function behind it,” Wilkinson explains. “Oftentimes that function is to nourish people by serving as a vessel to hold food.”

“I’ll always have a wheel at my back door,” he promises. “Always. I plan to continue making functional pottery for people to use to make their days better. I’m never going to give it up.” 🍵

Todd Paris, '83, is the campus photographer for Marketing and Communications. You can see more of his work at <http://parispub.smugmug.com>.

Watch Ian Wilkinson at work at [www.uaf.edu/aurora/](http://www.uaf.edu/aurora/).

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