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University of New Mexico Associate Professor John Zimmerman will be taking his expertise in ceramic sculpture and his interest in landscapes and geological history to the Fuping Pottery Art Village in the Shaanxi Province of China as part of an international engagement project funded by the UNM Research Allocation Committee (RAC). John is the first branch campus faculty member to have been awarded a RAC grant and he will utilize the funding to conceptualize, build, dry, glaze and fire original works of art which will be exhibited and may join three of his previous sculptures that are currently on display at the on-site museum in the Art Village.

Currently on a sabbatical, John is looking forward to his second trip to China and the enjoying the artistic inspiration he experienced on his previous trip. “I have to technically figure out what makes sense. I usually have a general idea of shape, but unintended things happen. You have to go in the direction the material takes you.” On his previous trip, John was commissioned by administrators of the Fuping Pottery Art Village to create an 8’ X 10’ sculpture that is currently displayed on the outside grounds of the Village.

In reflecting on the process of acquiring the RAC funding, John noted that the process of applying for the RAC grant was not that difficult and his application clearly detailed how his work will benefit the University. Forty applications were submitted and only ten selected for these highly competitive grants. “Awards are contingent on doing something different. Many of my previous objects were based on a stratified style. Some of my newer pieces use mountains, newer colors and pixelated stratifications. I enjoy taking something new and making it look old.”

In one of John's recent exhibits Stratified Series, he took items that exemplify current pop culture and combined them with his interest in geological timeframes. By taking everyday items such as traffic cones, cinder blocks, and fire hydrants, and encasing them in multicolored rings of ceramic he created an exhibit that combined the landscape of the local area, historical depiction of changing geological eras, and the bringing together of earth and everyday society.

His most recent exhibit, Scapes, continues to carry forward the relationship between prehistoric forces, climate phenomena and erosive landscape changes. Branded by the frequent use of the color blue, Scapes hints at the presence of water in the once-arid desert ecology. While the Stratified Seriesproduced objects which were more life-sized, Scapes exhibits objects that are extremely large and symbolic of mountains and rock formations.

John recognizes the benefits of his travel as it relates to his students at UNM-Gallup. He hopes to either take students to China or bring Chinese students to New Mexico as part of an international exchange. "When I was a student, I was inspired by faculty doing something new. I want to be that source of inspiration for students that is different than what they are used to."

John left for China May 4 and will return June 9.