

Ceramic Review

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DESIGN

Colour & Fire

Ash Glazes

China and Japan

Woodfired Kiln

PROFILES

Kyra Cane

Ashraf Hanna

Wouter Dam

Ewen Henderson



Marcus O'Mahony

Ceramic Review

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EDITORIAL

Anyone gripped by the thrills and spills of Ridley Scott's film *Gladiator* will be fully aware of the history of this ancient event, which is mainly a legacy of the Romans who excelled at such breath-taking spectacle. Much of the excitement is vividly recorded on a wide range of artefacts – most especially on ceramics. The chariot-racing scene depicted on a beaker from Colchester with its team of horses being lashed on by a ferocious charioteer captures the speed of the race in frozen motion. Pots have long been used to commemorate events, whether births, marriages or deaths, and potters have been adept at recognising a potential market. Studio potters today seem less keen to produce such pieces, maybe fearing accusations of kitsch, but Galerie Besson's exhibition of millennium mugs was lively, inventive and often witty. If potters are cautious in responding to topical events, students seem even more so. Few would dream of commemorating graduation in any way associated with clay, but all celebrate the freedom that being a student brings with work that is exuberant and challenging. Any lack of technical expertise is more than made up for by ideas and imagination. The selection put together for the enterprising exhibition *Setting Out*, which features the work of recent art school graduates (page 17), offers a flavour of the state of ceramics at art school, and the chance to identify 'serious' makers. With pieces ranging from practical, wood-fired teapots and tall spiky bottles to mythological figures, the scope is wide and the choices many. The question of who will survive in the market place of post-college life is part of the 'sport' of the show, where punters have the opportunity to pick a winner by purchasing a piece, both to enjoy and, possibly, as part of a long term investment. **CL**



Pottery jar 2nd century AD. A scene of a quadriga race on show in *Gladiators and Caesars*, British Museum, London until February 23, 2001 (© The British Museum).

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Crossing Boundaries

PERSPECTIVE – ELAINE LEVIN enjoys the exhibition *Colour and Fire: Defining Moments in Studio Ceramics 1950-2000*.

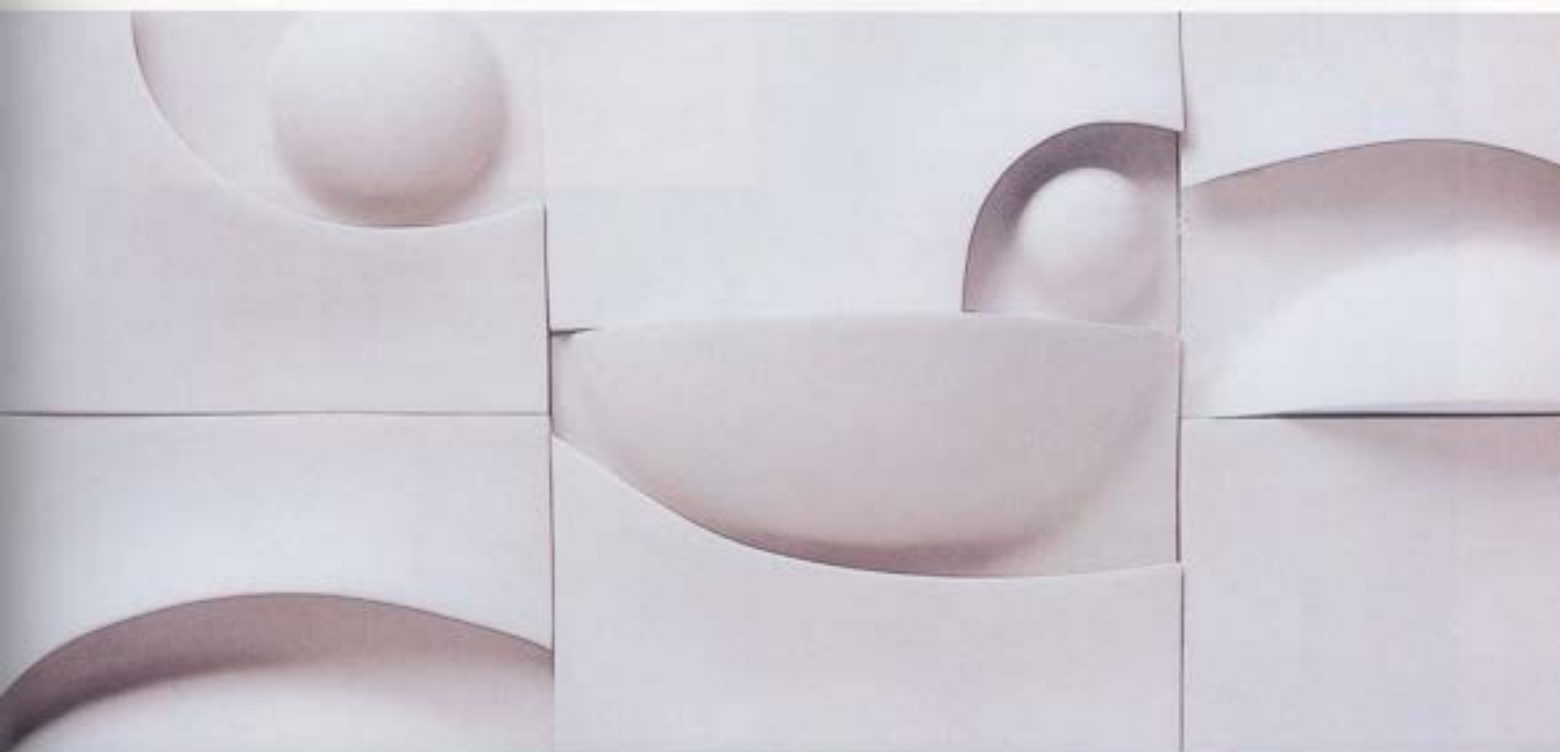


The moments defined by the exhibition *Colour and Fire: Defining Moments in Studio Ceramics 1950-2000* at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art are those circumstances that led to seminal changes in the development of contemporary ceramics. Organised by Jo Lauria, assistant curator of decorative arts, the 175 objects on exhibit by 122 artists cover the full range of the compelling ideas incorporated in vessel and sculpture during the last fifty years. As the first survey of the museum's impressive collection of contemporary ceramics, the show affirms the status of work in clay as an art form. Although the majority of the ware is by American ceramists, representative work from European and Asian artists are included. As a result the show underlines the global aspect of ceramics; geographical boundaries and regionalism no longer appear that important.

John Mason's massive 1.5m high monolith, *Red X* (1966) marks the entrance to the show's galleries, introducing the viewer to the objects that defined the post World War II ceramic generation's break with the past. In spite of the work's alluring, sensuous red glaze, *Red X* extols minimalism and the geometric, a reaction against the rawness and

emotionalism of the previous decade's involvement with Abstract Expressionism. That late 1950s movement which opened clay to a wider vision of its possibilities, set in motion by Peter Voulkos, included Mason's earlier work along with Jerry Rothman, and Paul Soldner. Close-by, the ware produced by American, European, and Asian studio potters honours the groundwork laid in earlier decades by Beatrice Wood, Laura Andreson, Marguerite Wildenhain, Otto and Gertrud Natzler, Bernard Leach, and Shoji Hamada. Although they tied the perfection of form and profile to pottery, it was a gift the next generation could then move beyond.

From this point on the show unfolds into a festival of contrasts and complexities, dramatically illustrating how ceramists used that gift to open the vessel and sculpture to a wider vision. For example, a group of shelves appropriate for the objects they support, are positioned together on one wall giving the vessel a sculptural setting. Elsa Rady's three sleek, white vessels appear to be whirling in place in contrast to Nancy Selvins's still life bottle collection, looking solid and stalwart, with barely readable, provocative words printed on their surfaces as messages on 'responsibility'



and 'consequences. Paula Winokur's layered porcelain shelf for *Excavation Site I* (1990) refers to the delicacy of the earth's stratification as it supports a simple cast vessel. Ruth Duckworth's white porcelain wall compliments this grouping and is a medley of graceful dimensional curves, arches, and circles.

A number of pairings make associations with the artist's use of form or surface. Bennett Bean's bifurcated vessel sets up a dialogue with Lydia Buzio's vessel, a landscape of old New York buildings whose shape is thrown and cut to accommodate their structure. The severe, brown/black geometric lines of Mason's *Pentagonal Vessel* (1995) emphasize a polarity with Lawson Oyekan's white bowl, whose wavy rim and perforated walls express a *Manifestation of Dance* (1990-1996).

The closed form too has its place. Mineo Mizuno's white and black striped orb sits comfortably with Jun Kaneko's perfect dots of colour on a black orb. Homage to Ko'olau Range (1994-1995) is Toshiko Takaezu's life-size monolith supporting sober, gestural glazes. Michael Sherrill's *Turning Leaves* (1998), a set of nine tipsy bottles forms a

rhythmic still life setting. The traditional vessel is transformed into metaphor by Karen Koblitz's colourfully dynamic *Still Life with Pitcher and Hedge Apple* (1985) and Gwyn Hanssen Pigott's cool, assorted, celadon-glazed bottles, vases, and bowls in *Still Life with two Teapots* (1997).

The teapot and cup were the most widely explored forms of the 1970s and 80s in America. Numerous exhibits devoted to these basic ceramic forms spurred potters towards an extensive re-evaluation, fantasy, whimsy, *trompe l'œil*, suggestions of landscape and architecture along with geometric abstraction define the range of that fertile period. The teapot as an exercise in implying cultural and social rituals occupies a special section. Examples range from Ann Agee's flamboyant doughnut shaped body upheld by decorative nude figures. These and other attachments and

FROM LEFT: John Mason - *Red X*, 1966, W 151cm. | Shoji Hamada - *Press-moulded Square Bottle*, c.1960, H 24cm | THIS PAGE TOP: Ruth Duckworth - *Untitled*, 1997, W 142cm | BELOW, LEFT TO RIGHT: Karen Koblitz - *Still Life with Pitcher and Hedge Apple*, 1985, W 34cm | Jun Kaneko - *Dango*, 1993, H 68cm | Michael Sherrill - *Turning Leaves* (Set of Nine Bottles), 1998, H max. 80cm.



patterns echo eighteenth and nineteenth century ceramics. In contrast, Peter Shire's collection of balls, circles, and diamonds, in pinks, greens and yellows are combined to defy the relationship of form to function. A seemingly amphibious, reptilian teapot by Sergei Isupov plays with fantasy images, as does Susan Beimer's *Red Shell Teapot* (1997), a form completely covered with tiny sea snails, conch shells, and lobster tails. Autobiographical in its evocation of the artist's childhood memory of seashore visits, the work also suggests a bizarre sea creature.

The small cup in its many manifestations resides in a special case. The museum acquired a large number of examples as a gift from Betty Asher, a former gallery owner and a prodigious collector of ceramics. Before others understood this movement's place in ceramic development, she gave it legitimacy. Opposing the concept of cup as small, dainty, and functional is Ron Nagle's 60cm high *My Compliments* (1988), an abstraction of the form.

The work of Ken Price in the show tells the story of the route from functional considerations to abstraction, to biomorphic forms. *Happy Curios, Unit 3* (1977), part of a

series of a thousand cups exhibited in 1978, is a cabinet pedestal containing fourteen cups bearing a bold geometric design as homage to the anonymous Mexican potter. By 1980, with *Duncan's Primaries*, a hard-edged abstract collage of hollow box-like forms in green, red and yellow, Price's work reflected colour field painting in three dimensions. The emotional element carried by strong colours has been a principal concern for this artist. *Echo* (1997), a flowing biomorphic pseudo organism in an iridescent yellow, returns his work to sculpture. At the same time, the ear-shaped cavity in this vision of energy and movement implies volume, perhaps the last vestige of the cup's character.

Generally, the vessel is the dominant form in this show, challenging precise definitions or requiring new labels. Single examples, such as Ralph Bacerra's celadon, auspicious cloud-like base contrasts with Roseline Delisle's deep blue and white or black and cream tall cylinders with tops like spinning toys. Adrian Saxe's gourds with hanging tassels and gemstones, appear the antithesis of Edmund De Waal's tall, narrow, unadorned lidded cylinders. The museum's collection of vessel-orientated forms has been augment-



ed by gifts from the Howard and Gwen Laurie Smits collection. Although major works from American ceramists were a large part of their interest, they also selected work from Great Britain, Australia, Spain, Holland and Denmark. The show includes the work of Lucie Rie, Hans Coper, Walter Keeler, Geert Lap, Bodil Manz, Claudi Casanovas, and many others.

The gallery displaying contemporary sculpture has a strong figurative representation. Examples range from Viola Frey's 2.4m tall man in a power blue suit, mocking the corporate image, to Doug Jeck's petite, nude male torso with its references to classical sculpture. The irony in Richard Shaw's assemblage of *trompe l'oeil* parts for Happy Birthday (1996) is carried in the striding figure's head, a skull. Death, the artist tells us, is closer with each birthday celebration. Love, not death, is the subject of Akio Takamori's 'figure vessel' *Thousand Years of Love* (1988). Other sculptures add diversity. Takako Arak's charred *Blue Bible* speaks to the disturbing aspects of religious history while Marek Cecula's vitreous china basins suggest the cultural values in high tech hygiene.

For any group show of this magnitude, some generalisations are appropriate. The show's arrangement allows the viewer to contemplate the great distance travelled by work in clay during the last fifty years. As a result, it is obvious that contemporary ceramics has jumped the craft/art barrier to proclaim its ability to embrace diversity and incorporate the widest range of art world concepts. **CR**

The exhibition travels from the Los Angeles County Museum of Art to the Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art, Kansas City, December 15 - March 4 2001; Tucson Museum of Art, April 1 - May 30, 2001; Memorial Art Gallery, University of Rochester July 29 - October 7 2001. A 252-page fully illustrated book *Colour and Fire: Defining Moments in Studio Ceramics 1950 - 2000*, edited by Jo Lauria is published by Los Angeles County Museum of Art with Rizzoli International Publications Inc. (ISBN: 0-8478-2254-0).

OPPOSITE TOP: Kenneth Price *Duncan's Primaries*, 1980, W 22cm | LEFT TO RIGHT: Sergei Isupov *Two Planets*, 1999, W 50cm | Adrian Saxe *Cacaesthesia*, 1992, H 32cm | Ralph Bacerra *Untitled*, 1997 H 50cm.

Gaynor Lindsell

REVELATIONS – Recently elected as the Chair of the Craft Potters Association, *Ceramic Review* asks Gaynor Lindsell to tell all.



What initially drew you to clay? The Ode on a Grecian Urn by John Keats. I went to the Birmingham Art Gallery to see Greek pottery after school that day and was struck by the idea of the poem that an every day moment can be captured in art and is with us today.

Professionally speaking, how do you describe yourself? A potter first and foremost. At other times – Chair CPA, teacher exhibition organiser curator administrator Director of Contemporary Ceramics.

What item of ceramics do you most frequently use in your every day life? Mugs. When I left the 92nd St Y in New York the faculty all made me a mug. Some were sculptural but the functional ones I use every day and think of them. I have continued to collect mugs from my friends in Britain. Potters work in isolation and it is a bit like reading a letter when you're holding a pot formed by someone else.

What would bring about greater cooperation between maker and the CPA? Understanding that the CPA is its members, what each contributes is important to the whole.

How would you describe the relationship between the C.P.A. and potters? Vocal, lively and strong.

How would you describe the dynamic of a member-led organisation? A broad church – invigorating, but also risks being slow to adapt and cumbersome to administer. Realistic short and long term goals need to be identified, to deliver our aims of encouraging, promoting and developing ceramics of the highest quality.

Which part of the making process do you find most pleasurable? I think of the work as a whole. All the elements of making express the concept behind the work and flow from the sensual qualities of the clay.

Which has been the hardest technical problem that you have solved? Partially re-oxidising a reduction firing whilst maintaining contact carbonisation.

Have you ever had a great disaster in the studio? A kiln programme tripped on full power after a power cut, three days too early. Not one pot survived undamaged.

Is there any piece that you would like to smash? Only pieces of my work which I am not satisfied with – how else am I to fill the 'pot' holes in my drive? Not anyone else's work: everyone is entitled to their voice.

Who is your favourite living potter? Amongst scores of others, Colin Pearson – his work, his humour his humanity and commitment to his craft.

Who is your favourite historical potter? The Amasis Painter and his World, Vase – Painting in Sixth-Century B.C. Athens. An exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum in New York led me to research terra sigillata. I tend to be drawn to early developments in art, sculpture and architecture.

What is your view of the current state of studio pottery? Exciting and diverse. Some are driving forward the contemporary art scene, others are keeping in touch with and developing out of traditional values.

Which pots do you least like? Ones which lack soul.

Do you detect any new directions in ceramics? At the grass roots many think the pendulum has swung too far from craftsmanship. The CPA has responded, with moves to help set up studio apprenticeships, encouraging summer schools, lectures, demonstrations and conferences such as *Salt & Soda* and *The Wheel* and fund projects through the Craft Potters Charitable Trust.

What is the biggest challenge facing studio potters? Surviving and excelling with our craft integrity intact.

If you were not a potter what would you like to be? A professional dancer with Ballet Rambert.

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CONTRIBUTIONS

Ceramic Review welcomes articles, long or short, from readers. *Ceramic Review* is read around the world by potters, students, enthusiasts and collectors. Articles may be practical, technical or experiential, though we also welcome writings which are theoretical and look at the role of ceramics within contemporary culture. Articles should follow the style of *Ceramic Review*, both in length and approach. Copy should be typed on one side of the paper in double spacing, leaving good sized margins all round and also submitted on disc or e-mail to the address below. Do not send original manuscripts without keeping a copy. Articles can be accompanied by good quality photographs, colour transparencies, slides and/or colour prints. Please caption these fully giving title, dimensions in cm, year of making and any relevant technical information. Please ensure they include your name and return address. Payment is at current rates on publication. Whilst every care is taken with material submitted, no responsibility can be accepted by *Ceramic Review* for accidental loss or damage to material submitted.

Ceramic Review

25 Foubert's Place London W1F 7QF

Telephone 020 7439 3377

Facsimile 020 7287 9954

E-mail editorial@ceramicreview.com

Web site <http://www.ceramicreview.com>

Editor

Emmanuel Cooper

Deputy Editor

Julia Pitts

Assistant Editor

Sally Boyle

Design

Richard Bonner-Morgan

Editorial Assistant and Advertising

Kay Hussey

advertising@ceramicreview.com

Subscriptions

Rita Greenwood

subscriptions@ceramicreview.com

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