



Color and Fire

Defining Moments in Studio Ceramics, 1950–2000

Color and Fire

Defining Moments in Studio Ceramics, 1950–2000

Jo Lauria

Drawn from the collection of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, *Color and Fire: Defining Moments in Studio Ceramics, 1950–2000* accompanies a major touring exhibition on the history of ceramic art in the second half of the twentieth century. Illustrated with more than 250 color photographs, *Color and Fire* explores the roles of key artists and the major stylistic movements they developed during five decades of pioneering innovation.

Based on the premise that the history of studio ceramics can be regarded as a series of breakthroughs or milestones, *Color and Fire* highlights the moments when talented artists came together to produce work in clay that challenged traditions and promoted aesthetic freedom. In the early years of the twentieth century, pottery was primarily mass-produced in factories, where specialists in wheel throwing, glazing, and kiln firing worked under a system of divided labor. In the 1930s and 1940s, ceramists such as the renowned team of Gertrud and Otto Natzler began to perform all of these exacting functions—from mixing clay to firing kilns—in their own studios, creating one-of-a-kind pots, breathtaking in design and construction. Since that time, ceramic art has followed a metaphorical journey from the earth to the air, as concerns with utility, materials, and techniques have given way to abstract conceptual considerations.

In Los Angeles in the 1950s, Peter Voulkos and his students upset the traditional values of craft pottery and the Bauhaus-inspired “form follows function” doctrine by creating nonfunctional, oversized, off-kilter vessels with cracks and holes, along with massive Abstract Expressionist monuments. In the 1960s in northern California, Robert Arneson and his students shattered taboos against clay as a sculptural medium in the

(continued on back flap)

Color and Fire

Defining Moments in Studio Ceramics, 1950–2000

Selections from the Smits Collection and Related Works
at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art

Jo Lauria

with contributions by

Gretchen Adkins

Garth Clark

Rebecca Niederlander

Susan Peterson

Peter Selz



LACMA in association with
Rizzoli International Publications, Inc.

ISBN: 0-8478-2254-0
LC: 99-69987

First published in the United States in 2000 by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 5905 Wilshire Boulevard, Los Angeles, California 90036, and Rizzoli International Publications, Inc., 300 Park Avenue South, New York, NY 10010, in conjunction with the exhibition *Color and Fire: Defining Moments in Studio Ceramics, 1950–2000*, organized by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

Printed and bound in Italy.
Distributed by St. Martin's Press.

Itinerary of the Exhibition

Los Angeles County Museum of Art
June 4–September 17, 2000

Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art, Kansas City
December 15, 2000–March 4, 2001

The Tucson Museum of Art and Historic Block
April 1–May 30, 2001

Memorial Art Gallery of the University of Rochester
July 29–October 7, 2001

All rights reserved. No part of the contents of this book may be reproduced without the written permission of the publisher.

A portion of Garth Clark's essay originally appeared as "Abstract Expressionism Revisited: The Otis Years, 1954–1959," in *Ceramics: Art and Perception*, no. 29 (1997): 33–40.

All objects illustrated in color are from the collection of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

Most photographs are reproduced courtesy of the creators or lenders of the artworks depicted. For certain documentary photographs we have been unable to trace copyright holders. We would appreciate notification of same for acknowledgment in future editions.

All sketches and studies are courtesy of the artists.

Works by Robert Arneson illustrated on pp. 158, 166–7, 211, and 266 are © Estate of Robert Arneson, licensed by VAGA, New York, NY.

Editor: Margaret Gray
Designer: Katherine Go
Photographer: Steve Oliver
Production manager: Rachel Ware-Zooi

Front cover:

John Mason, United States, b. 1927.
Red X, 1966. Ceramic. W.: 59½ in. Gift of the Kleiner Foundation. M.73.38.11.

Endpapers:

Christopher Gustin, United States, b. 1952. *Teacups*, 1989.

Title page:

Piet Stockmans, Belgium, b. 1940.
Untitled (two views), 1998. Porcelain. Platter diam.: 18½ in. Cup h.: ¾ in. each. Smits Ceramics Purchase Fund. AC1999.6.1.1–113.

Back cover:

(Left)

Magdalene Odundo, Kenya, active England, b. 1950. *Vessel #11*, 1995. Red earthenware, hand built, burnished, and reduction fired. H.: 22 in. Smits Ceramics Purchase Fund. AC1995.90.1.

(Right)

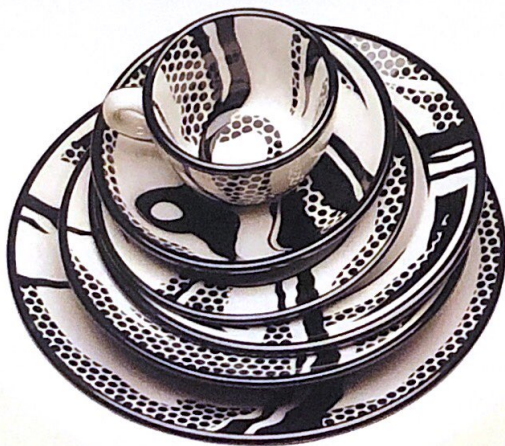
Gertrud Natzler, Austria, active United States, 1908–1971. **Otto Natzler**, Austria, active United States, b. 1908. *Double-Curved Bottle (J276)*, 1957. Earthenware with cherry-red glaze. H.: 22 in. Gift of Howard and Gwen Laurie Smits. M.87.1.103.

Opposite:

Roy Lichtenstein, United States, 1923–1997. *Six-Piece Place Setting*, 1966. Stoneware. Cup h.: 2½ in. Dinner plate diam.: 10 in. Gift of Howard and Gwen Laurie Smits. M.87.1.83, M.87.1.84. © Estate of Roy Lichtenstein.

Contents

| | |
|--|-----|
| Foreword | 6 |
| Acknowledgments | 7 |
| Mapping the History of a Collection: Defining Moments in Ceramics at LACMA Jo Lauria | 13 |
| Ceramics in the West: The Explosion of the 1950s Susan Peterson | 87 |
| Otis and Berkeley: Crucibles of the American Clay Revolution Garth Clark | 123 |
| The Figurative Impulse in Contemporary Ceramics Peter Selz | 159 |
| Better Living through Tea: Contemporary Artists Investigate the Teapot and Teacup Rebecca Niederlander | 195 |
| Gwen Laurie Smits: Tribute to a Collector Gretchen Adkins | 241 |
| Selected Bibliography | 247 |
| Index | 250 |



(continued from front flap)

hands of potters with their radical, irreverent, and satirical "Funk" pieces. Today, no longer confined to the decorative arts or other craft categories, ceramic artists around the world explore an unlimited range of influences, styles, and ideas, engaging in a graceful and inventive dialogue with centuries of ceramic tradition.

A celebration as well as a valuable art-historical survey, *Color and Fire: Defining Moments in Studio Ceramics, 1950–2000* showcases the finest works from the unparalleled collection of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Accessible to the novice as well as to the enthusiast, the book includes essays by Gretchen Adkins, Garth Clark, Jo Lauria, Rebecca Niederlander, Susan Peterson, and Peter Selz.

318 illustrations, 259 in color

Jo Lauria is assistant curator of decorative arts at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. She holds an MFA from Otis College of Art and Design, an MA from Loyola Marymount University, and a BA from Yale University.

Published by
Los Angeles County Museum of Art
in association with
Rizzoli International Publications, Inc.
300 Park Avenue South
New York, NY 10010

Distributed by St. Martin's Press

Printed and bound in Italy

Front cover:

John Mason, *Red X*, 1966. Ceramic. Gift of the Kleiner Foundation.
Photograph © Museum Associates/LACMA.

Back cover:

(Left) **Magdalene Odundo**, *Vessel #11*, 1995. Red earthenware, hand built, burnished, and reduction fired. Smits Ceramics Purchase Fund.
Photograph © Museum Associates/LACMA.

(Right) **Gertrud and Otto Natzler**, *Double-Curved Bottle (J276)*, 1957. Earthenware with cherry-red glaze. Gift of Howard and Gwen Laurie Smits. Photograph © Museum Associates/LACMA.