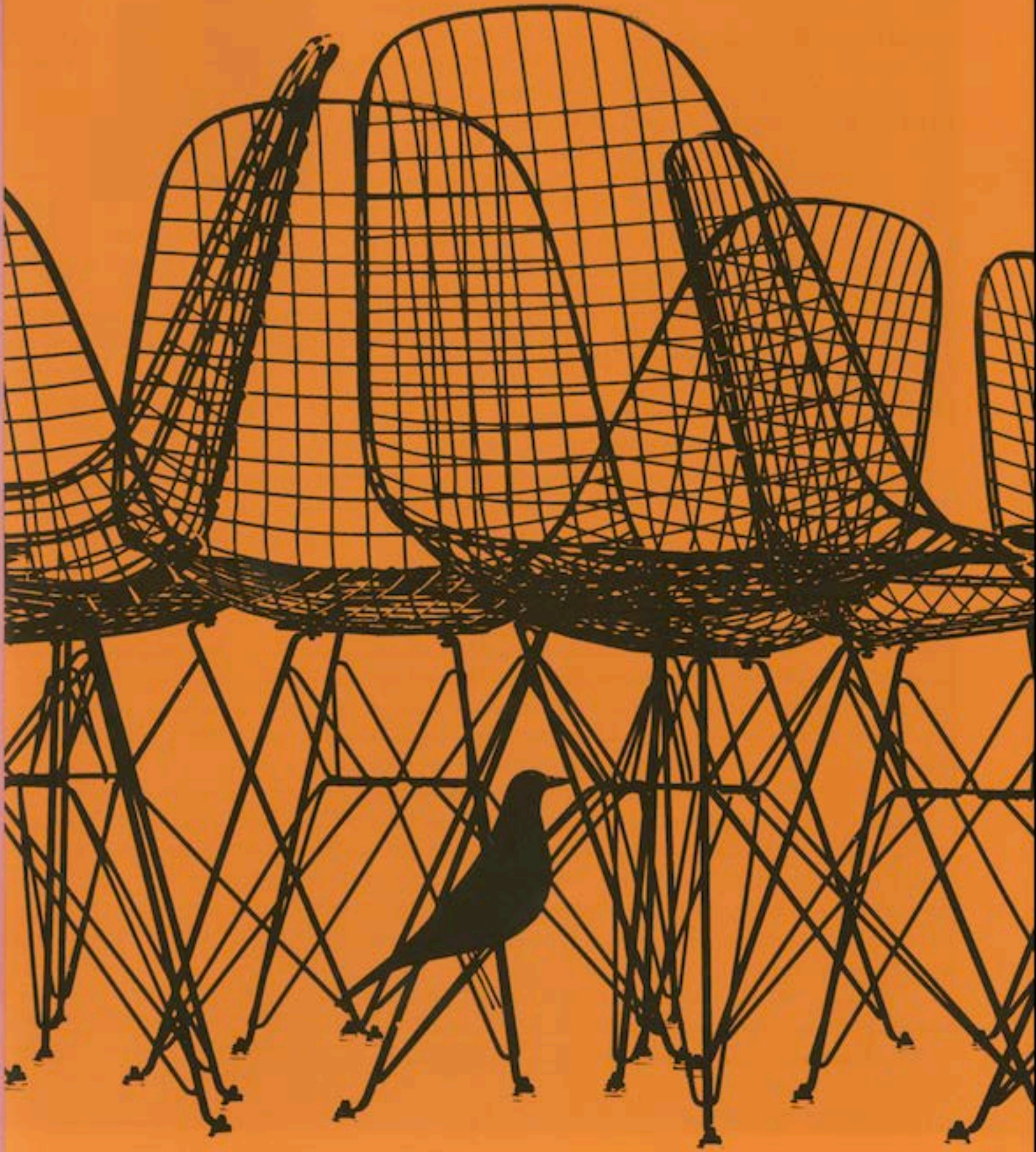


June 2000

at the **Museum**

The Monterey Peninsula Community Museum of Art



Defining Moments in Studio Ceramics, 1950–2000

CERAMICS in the second half of the 20th century can be seen as a series of defining moments, points in time when artists came together and, through their philosophy, research, experiments, and art, forever redefined the field. *Color and Fire: Defining Moments in Studio Ceramics, 1950–2000*, the first comprehensive survey LACMA has organized from its extensive holdings in this area, charts and celebrates the latest chapter in the history of an ancient art form.

Contemporary ceramics are defined at LACMA as objects made after 1925 by an artist working in a studio. Before 1925, during the Arts and Crafts era, art pottery was produced in a factory or workshop by teams of artisans who specialized in different areas of production. A studio ceramist, in contrast, is the sole creator of a piece from its conception through every stage of its evolution. By positioning ceramic objects as fine art, and their creators as artists, the studio ceramics movement laid the groundwork for the diverse aesthetic expressions represented in this exhibition.

More than 275 works illustrate the dramatic development in studio ceramics, from a focus on functionalism at midcentury to the gradual emphasis of ideas over materials and technique. The early pioneers who began working in the 1930s and 1940s laid the cornerstones of new traditions. The postwar generation that came of age in the 1950s and 1960s undertook radical experiments that subverted those traditions. Today, contemporary artists around the world mix traditions in a postmodern dialogue that crosses historical and international borders.

The works selected range from the classical to the cutting edge, from intimately scaled, beautifully profiled pots [pretty, humble, elegant], to weighty sculptural vessels [organic, volumetric, gestural, architectonic], to monumental, freestanding sculptures [figurative, abstract, nonobjective]. Although highly individual, these objects share the common elements of earth, color, and fire. Other connections are also visible: the vessel—a shape as old as recorded history—continues to appear both as a functional container to hold water and as a metaphorical one to express ideas.

Color and Fire's journey through the history of ceramics includes sections on British and American pioneers of studio pottery; Asian and European traditions and their contemporary reinterpretations; the sculptural innovations of the abstract expressionist, funk, and figurative movements; and teapot and teacup forms. By presenting objects within comprehensive thematic groupings, the exhibition documents the strategies ceramists have used to extend the possibilities for art in clay and affirms the intersections of ceramics with the history of contemporary art in this century.

LACMA's long-standing commitment to the acquisition and exhibition of contemporary ceramics has resulted in a collection acknowledged for its great depth, diversity, and quality. The museum's holdings were significantly strengthened in 1987 by gifts from Howard and Gwen Laurie Smits, who had assembled an important grouping of primarily American and British studio pottery. Subsequent gifts and a purchase fund by the Smitses and gifts from other donors have enhanced the collection, enabling LACMA to exhibit a comprehensive histori-

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cal survey of traditional vessels and large-scale sculptures from America, Europe, Scandinavia, Australia, Asia, and Mexico. Particularly rich in the work of California artists such as Robert Arneson, Ralph Bacerra, Viola Frey, Glen Lukens, John Mason, Harrison McIntosh, Ken Price, Adrian Saxe, and Peter Voulkos, the collection also includes the most extensive representation in any public institution of vessels by the internationally acclaimed Viennese artists Gertrud and Otto Natzler.

CATALOGUE

This historical survey is accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue published by LACMA in association with Rizzoli International Publications, Inc. The publication includes an essay by exhibition organizer Jo Lauria and contributions by art historians Gretchen Adkins, Garth Clark, Rebecca Niederlander, Susan Peterson, and Peter Selz.

This exhibition was organized by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. In-kind support was provided by Le Meridien Hotel at Beverly Hills. *Color and Fire: Defining Moments in Studio Ceramics, 1950–2000* was curated by Jo Lauria, assistant curator in the Department of Decorative Arts. It is on view in the Anderson Building, Plaza Level, Kendall and Point Galleries.

Left
Beatrice Wood (United States, 1893–1998)
SUSPICIOUS WIFE PLATE
1952, earthenware, diam. 16 1/4 in.,
Los Angeles County Museum of Art,
gift of Howard and Gwen Laurie Smits

Far left, below
Viola Frey (United States, b. 1933)
SKY BLUE SUIT
1982, ceramic on steel base,
h. 98 1/2 in., Los Angeles County
Museum of Art, Smits Ceramic
Purchase Fund

Below
Magdalene Odundo
(Kenya, active England, b. 1950)
VESSEL #11
1995, red earthenware, hand built,
burnished, and reduction fired,
h. 22 in., Los Angeles County Museum
of Art, Smits Ceramics Purchase Fund

