

MASTERS

MAJOR WORKS BY LEADING ARTISTS

EARTHENWARE



Contents

Introduction	6
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THE MASTERS

Steven Heinemann	10
Paul Day	18
Anne Fløche	26
Greg Payce	34
Gudrun Klix	42
Stephen Bowers	50
Cindy Kolodziejski	58
Nancy Selvin	66
Connie Kiener	74
Russell Biles	82
Bennett Bean	90
Duncan Ross	98
Patrick Dougherty	106
Christine Thacker	114
Joan Takayama-Ogawa	122
Richard Milette	130
Marino Moretti	138
Linda Huey	146
Karen Koblitiz	154

Diego Romero	162
Holly Walker	170
Herman Muys	178
Wendy Walgate	186
Phyllis Kloda	194
Alexandra Copeland	202
Léopold L. Foulem	210
Linda Arbuckle	218
Woody Hughes	226
Chuck Aydllett	234
Patti Warashina	242
Sophie MacCarthy	250
Terry Siebert	258
Gail Kendall	266
Lisa Naples	274
Stephen Dixon	282
John de Fazio	290
Wynne Wilbur	298
Richard Slee	306
About the Curator	314
Portrait Photographers	315
Acknowledgments	316
Index of Featured Artists	317

Introduction

Highlighting the achievements of 38 potters and sculptors from around the world, *Masters: Earthenware* offers a glimpse of the tremendous range of imagination, innovation, and technical facility that characterizes contemporary use of the oldest ceramic medium. As the many outstanding examples in this book illustrate, earthenware is distinctive not only for its intrinsic properties as a clay body and the vocabulary of forms that can be readily adapted to it, but also for the broad spectrum of decorative strategies—from appliqué, incising, stamping, and modeling to painting, sponging, and glazing—that can be employed to embellish its surfaces. As a plastic material of widely diverse possibilities, earthenware is clearly second to none; as a ground for color, texture, and applied ornament, it is unparalleled among art media.

Matthias Ostermann, a master of earthenware in his own right, selected the artists for this volume. Taking care to assemble a balanced survey of sculptures and vessels, he has included highly decorative and relatively unadorned objects, forms that pay obvious homage to the past, and pieces that seem determined to sever all ties with it. The works on the following pages span the scale of emotions, ranging from whimsy to solemnity.

Many works are small and intricately designed, while others are monumental—even colossal—in scale. There are objects of captivating beauty, and pieces that were clearly created to needle the viewer's conscience and antagonize certain sensibilities. Although some omissions will be noted—performance art and work with unfired earthenware clay, for example—the pieces collected here represent the established categories of exploration in this unique medium.

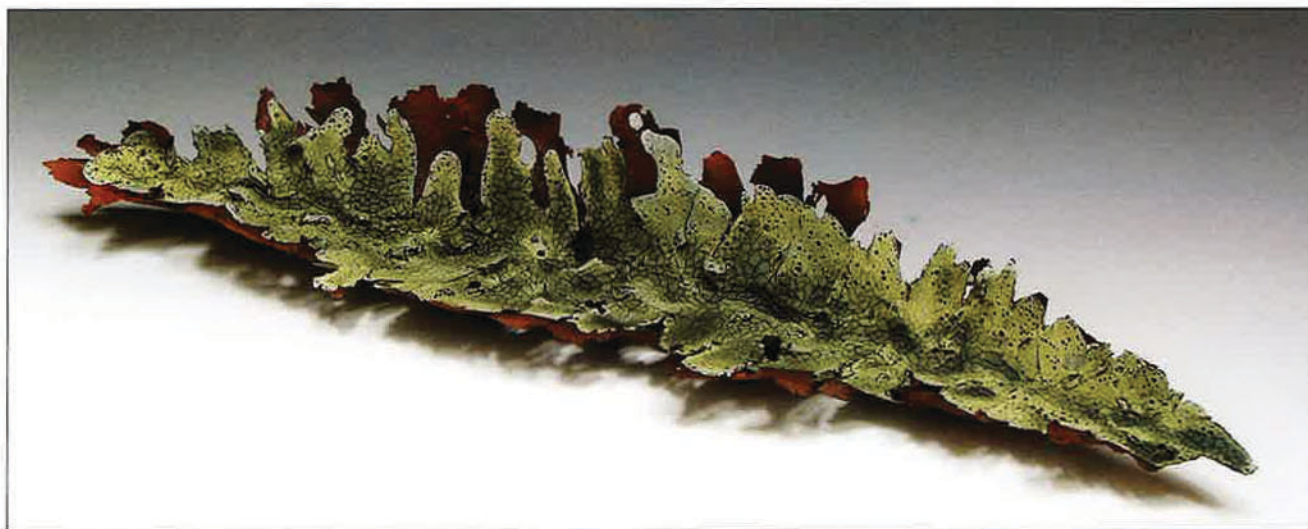
Paragons from history clearly influence artists who work with earthenware and employ its distinctive decorative techniques—practices that have developed over the course of many centuries. With its medieval roots in the Islamic emulation of Yuan- and Ming-Dynasty porcelains and the later European adaptation of those Middle Eastern innovations, the majolica tradition is perpetuated in the painted vessels of numerous contemporary ceramists. Marino Moretti, Alexandra Copeland, and Terry Siebert draw inspiration from motifs found on various historical wares, from Italian Renaissance pitchers and chargers to eighteenth-century English botanical dishes. Other artists freely invent their patterns and imagery as well as ways of applying them. Consequently, style is an evolving aspect of contemporary majolica, embracing in its scope everything

from the contemplative precision of Connie Kiener's painted plates to the extemporaneous fluidity of Linda Arbuckle's embellished vessels.

Earthenware's rich history of pattern and form can be observed in the work of many artists. Diego Romero creates intriguing updates of Mimbres bowls, while Christine Thacker produces pieces that bring to mind medieval Rhenish vessels. Stephen Bowers modernizes the classic Staffordshire willow pattern with his eccentric, Australianized plates, and Richard Slee nods to the bright colors and machined contours of nineteenth-century English industrial wares in his bold, glossy sculptural

objects. A number of earthenware artists explore the idea of ceramics history in their work, foremost among them Richard Milette, whose brilliant sculptural references to conventional ceramic forms probe the conceptual nature of "ceramicness" without succumbing entirely to the seductive properties of the forms themselves.

On the opposite end of the spectrum is the work of several ceramists, including Lisa Naples, Woody Hughes, Wynne Wilbur, and Gail Kendall, who explore the conceptual aspects of historical ceramics by making fully functional pieces. Through the work of these artists, history maintains tangible, experiential links with



▲ Gudrun Klix
Lichen Gully | 2007

the present. Kendall, for example, imagines ancestral ties to European village potters as she creates pieces that combine pronounced ornamentation with simple serviceability. Her vessels have a sturdy elegance that's intended to enhance the domestic environment. Vessels created for this kind of existence may share attributes with non-functional pieces, but they make a point of physically engaging their immediate contexts in ways that independent art objects don't.



There is, of course, a value to independence in the realm of sculpture, and a number of the artists in *Masters: Earthenware* invoke it. Herman Muys' provocative reflections on vice and human frailty don't commit to specific interpretations but leave the possibilities for contemplation open to viewers. The powerful bas-relief sculptures of Paul Day function in similar fashion, suggesting certain narratives but slipping adroitly through every loop that threatens to close too tightly around them and confine them to pedagogy or propaganda. Day's works never relinquish their complexity in order to hammer home messages. Neither do the sculptures of Patti Warashina, who employs a mixture of humor and empathy to achieve a complex activist art. Warashina's pieces have a contemplative quality that sets them apart from the shrill, sloganized works the activist genre often produces.

Some of the most thought-provoking contemporary work in earthenware takes as its subject the varied possibilities for perceiving internal and external space in relation to the ceramic vessel. Examples in this volume include the creations of Greg Payce, whose linear arrangements of monumental vases reverse the ordinary relationship of figure and ground to conjure human profiles—not from the material elements of his compositions but from the intervening emptiness defined by them. Cindy

◀ **Woody Hughes**
Inlay Jar | 2008

Kolodziejski's illusionistic-mirror works convey an impression of interior infinitude—a space represented on the continuous external walls of her vessels that potentially recedes ever inward.



▲ Diego Romero
Return to the Mothership | 2007

This type of unprecedented experimentation with spatial properties, both real and illusionary, suggests that—despite its long history—the earthenware vessel may contain other intriguing possibilities yet to be discovered. Whether employed in pursuit of such as-yet untapped potential or oriented toward the precedents of the past, the distinctive styles of the ceramists whose work is represented on the following pages reflect the tremendous variation that characterizes the earthenware medium today.

As a product of Matthias Ostermann's unique perspective, *Masters: Earthenware* is naturally focused and does not aspire to serve as a comprehensive survey of the field. The works that appear here are wonderfully diverse, yet there are underlying lines of cohesiveness between them, and I invite you to contemplate, as I did in preparing the following essays, not only the captivating objects themselves but also the guiding vision that brought them together in the context of this book.

— Glen R. Brown, Ph.D., Kansas State University



NAPLES

Lisa Naples

ADOPTING SIMPLE MOTIFS FROM NATURE—a crow, an egg, a sprig of leaves pressed flat yet still green with the stuff of life—Pennsylvania ceramist Lisa Naples creates plates, jugs, and cups that express organic energy. In her work, the sweep of a spout, the curl of a saucer's rim, or the bend of a handle imitate the familiar attitudes of branches and leaves. The colors Naples uses evoke memories of earth and plant life, and the tonal arrangements she creates suggest dappled shadow and sunlight on a forest floor.

Today, Naples creates few strictly functional pieces, a shift brought about by a residency in Australia that gave her time to consider a change of direction. Naples' recent creations, which feature images of eggs as symbols of potential, are markedly introspective. To engage the viewer on an extra level, she incorporates prose poems into

these pieces—texts that contemplate a hidden source of creativity. Naples' ever-evolving body of work reflects her fearlessness when it comes to tapping that hidden source. Her work has been exhibited in galleries throughout the United States, including the Philadelphia Museum of Art and the National Building Museum in Washington, D.C.



◀ I Believe in All That Has Never Yet Been Spoken ... | 2008

19 x 19 x 1 inches (48.3 x 48.3 x 2.5 cm)

Slab built, coil built, pinched; poured glaze; textured, underglaze brushwork, oxide wash; electric fired, cone 03

Photos by Jim Griep

Cup and Saucer | 1991 ►

4 x 5½ x 5½ inches (10.2 x 14 x 14 cm)

Thrown and altered; brushed, dipped, latex resist;
underglaze brushwork; electric fired, cone 04

Photo by artist



◄ Olive Oil Pot | 1994

6½ x 6 x 3½ inches (16.5 x 15.2 x 8.9 cm)

Hand built, slip cast, altered; brushed and
dipped glaze, latex resist; underglaze brush-
work; electric fired, cone 04

Photo by artist



▲ Teapot | 2000

8 x 7½ x 6 inches (20.3 x 19.1 x 15.2 cm)

Hand built, slip cast, altered; brushed and dipped glaze, latex resist; underglaze brushwork; electric fired, cone 04

Photo by artist

"When studio life is fresh, unpredictable, scary, and exciting, I'm definitely in heaven."



▲ Salt and Pepper Shakers with Carrier | 1996

5 x 7 x 4 inches (12.7 x 17.8 x 10.2 cm)

Slab built, slip cast, altered; brushed and dipped glaze, latex resist; underglaze brushwork; electric fired, cone 04

Photo by artist



▲ **Soup Tureen with Tray and Ladle** | 2002

13 x 18 x 12 inches (33 x 45.7 x 30.5 cm)

Slab built; brushed and dipped glaze, latex resist;
underglaze brushwork; electric fired, cone 04

Photos by Jim Griep



◀ Cake Stand | 2001

8 x 12 x 12 inches (20.3 x 30.5 x 30.5 cm)
Slab built, thrown and altered; brushed
and dipped glaze, latex resist; underglaze
brushwork; electric fired, cone 04

Photo by artist

“ Slab building allows me to
express my spirit through
geometry in ways that I can’t
with throwing. Discovering it was
like finding a different language.”

Crows on a Wire | 2006 ▶

12 x 27 x 1 inches
(30.4 x 68.5 x 2.5 cm)

Slab built, pinched; poured
glaze; underglaze brushwork,
textured, oxide wash; electric
fired, cone 03

Photo by Jim Griep





▲ Corrid Cake Stand | 2007

7 x 11 x 11 inches (17.8 x 27.9 x 27.9 cm)

Hand built, thrown and altered; dipped glaze; textured, underglaze brushwork, oxide wash; electric fired, cone 03

Photos by Jim Griep



▲ Cake Stand | 1989

5½ x 11 x 11 inches (14 x 27.9 x 27.9 cm)

Hand built, wheel thrown; dipped glaze;
majolica, stains; electric fired, cone 04

Photo by artist