AN EVOLUTION IN THE CREATION OF
ARCHITECTURAL AND SCULPTURAL CONTAINERS

A Thesis

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree Master of Fine Arts

By

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Many different tendencies exist in contemporary ceramics today and it is difficult to categorize them as the distinctions which exist between them are not always readily apparent. A pot may either be non-functional or functional, or lie somewhere between these two opposing tendencies. The potter who works in the functional style designs his ware with a specific use in mind and usually follows the tradition established by the historical pot. His pottery forms bear resemblance to Grecian, Chinese, Japanese, and Scandinavine ceramics and most of his innovations are in glazes and function. The functional potter is primarily concerned with the way his pot will be used and designs his ware for a utilitarian function. The non-functional potter, on the other hand, does not design his ware with a function in mind and directs his attention toward formal relationships. The objects he creates out of clay are expressions of "form for form's sake" as he is concerned with the relationships of form and color. Form replaces function in his pottery, as form has replaced content in most of twentieth century painting and sculpture. Today, a large number of younger potters design their work along this line, and by so doing, have created a new minor art form, a craft with an aesthetic philosophy. This philosophy, which came into being when Picasso first started to paint on thrown pots, was a complete break with the ceramics produced prior to that time. The pot became more than just a container form and more of an art object. Carlton Ball and Aaron
Bohrod followed Picasso by combining drawing and painting on Grecian styled pots, but it was not until Peter Voulkos came along in the 1950's that this tendency in ceramics really gained momentum. Peter Voulkos combined the old tradition of the craft medium with current abstract expressionistic movements taking place in painting and sculpture. He denied the function or utility of his pots by deliberately distorting them so that they were no longer useful. The potter who works along this line is related to the painter and sculptor as his pots are designed for the sole purpose of viewing. They are collected by others as a painting would be and are displayed for their intrinsic qualities.

Between these two tendencies in the craft medium there exists work which is functional and at the same time expressive. Pottery which can be used, but not in any specific way, is being produced by many young potters. The pots they make are still container forms but their main concern is not with function but rather with form. Their pots can be collected and displayed as decorative objects or used by the owner to suit his own particular needs.

As in other art forms, the artist's manner of working is one of personal preference and is in line with his feelings on form, function, current artistic modes, and his own particular aesthetic problems. This attitude can best be explained in the words of Rene Huyghe.  

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"Without wishing to divide varying temperaments into oversimplified categories, we may observe that certain minds which are inclined to intellectualism and abstract thinking tend to prefer the cerebral and the search for the absolute to the turbulence of life, which they ignore or eliminate. Others, on the contrary, are repelled by the fixity thus imposed on the flux of reality and choose to abandon themselves to life and the unexpected forces of natural impulses, thereby creating, in a sense, disorder but also a lyrical warmth."

When the artistic temperament is applied to ceramics, the feelings of the potter can be easily seen in his basic approach to the material. One potter may work with the plastic quality of the clay and create forms which are organic in appearance. The plasticity of the clay may itself suggest forms to him and he uses them accordingly in his approach. On the other hand, another potter may not use the qualities inherent in clay, but rather, create pots which are inorganic in appearance, and which resemble geometric, hard-edged forms. This kind of potter ignores the natural tendencies of clay and is more intellectual and cerebral in his approach. These two approaches are valid, and in line, with the two mainstreams which exist in twentieth century art and can best be summed up by the following:

"Further, we might stress that, beyond the division into various schools that has become such an essential part of manuals on modern art, there exist side by side two contrasting mainstreams which, though varying in mode of expression with each successive phase, are always in opposition to one another. The first of these adheres in all the visual arts (architecture, sculpture, painting, the minor arts) to static composition, with a preference for

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2 Ibid. page 257
rigid forms that evoke fundamental geometric constructions such as parallelograms, triangles, and circles; this tendency is based on the juxtaposition of elements and the interrelation of their proportions. The second tendency rejects the immobility resulting from these simple fixed elements and employs sweeping lines that evoke tension, elasticity, soaring trajectories, etc."

My approach to ceramics is a visual and functional one. Form is my main concern and I achieve it by establishing interrelationships between shapes and glaze surfaces. I seek to create a perceptual "organization" or "unity" by being aware at all times of the size, shapes, and surface contrasts which exist between the various parts of my pots. I work from a pre-planned idea which develops and changes when the three dimensional relationships which are being formed do not work aesthetically. The intuitive approach, as contrasted to the pre-planned, does not fit into my manner of working as the randomness of this approach only confuses me and I may not end up with the desired result. I can only work successfully by setting up specific problems and in this way achieve a desired effect.

The pots I create are functional but at the same time are more than just container forms. I strive for the monumental and "sculptural" in concept, and my pots, may or may not, serve a specific function other than the decorative. On a recent trip to Mexico I was strongly influenced by the rectilinear forms and decoration of Mayan architecture. From the Mayan culture I have retained only those things which had a visual impact upon me, and have reorganized them to
create something new and visually exciting. The feeling of boldness and strength which the ruins conveyed to me was unlike anything I had ever seen before. (Plates 19, 20, 21, 22) From this experience I have imbued my pots with a monumental quality. The large size, boldness, and strength that my pots have is a reflection of the emotional impact that this ancient civilization had upon me. (Plates 1, 3, 4, 5, 7, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14) The Chinese potters and Mayan architects designed their artifacts for a specific function; the decoration used on their forms had a symbolic meaning which related to the ritualistic function of that artifact. The ornate character of the ritual vessels and the architectural facades may be linked to the idea manifested in the word, "mana," the spiritual vitality or supernatural power which radiates from an object. The decoration on these objects reflected the amount of mana present in an inanimate object, thus, blank spaces were avoided. The artist who executed the object transmitted his own vitality or energy to the object he was making and maximized its spiritualism by elaborately covering the surface with decoration. In contrast to these historical objects, my work has no ritualistic function or necessarily predetermined use. My work is a visual reorganization of these two influences on a contemporary level. (Plates 1, 2, 3, 6, 8) Elements of art created in the past can be studied, analyzed, and reorganized towards developing new statements which fit the artist's intention. Ceramic wares
are perhaps the most difficult to change and create anew because of the usually prescribed function imparted to them. The only thing that changes in ceramics is the philosophical approach, which is varied if one wishes to analyze the work of different cultures.

The decoration on my ceramic forms is either elaborate or simple. Due to the basic simplicity of the underlying forms, I try to create interest on my pots by varying the kind of decoration I use. This is done by either increasing or reducing in amount and complexity the surface details. (Plates 1, 5, 10, 14) Flanges, reminiscent of Mayan architecture, are added to the basic shape to create a rhythmic effect. Often textured surfaces are contrasted to the flanges to create an interest in surface and a new relationship between the decoration and the form. (Plates 4, 7, 8, 10)

I use repetition on my pots as a unifying device. Repetition establishes a relationship between sides and slight variation within repetition creates interest. (Plates 1, 4, 5, 7) Patterns are similar to those found on Mayan temples and are either curvilinear or combinations of small rectangles and curves. (Plates 1, 5, 7, 13) Often the flange covers the whole wall of the pot or is concentrated on the top section next to a large flat area. (Plate 3) Flanges placed at the corners create a transition between sides and interesting patterns when viewed from an oblique angle. When the flange covers the whole pot it creates dark to light contrasts because of the negative and positive
spaces which are formed. (Plates 1, 5, 7, 13)

Since my work is three dimensional, an interest in planar surfaces is important. I change planes frequently in my work and often use a variation in surface and color to emphasize this fact. (Plates 6, 15) A stamped or incised surface is often contrasted to a smooth one, or else, a contrast in color is used. (Plates 2, 4, 8, 9) In order to heighten the effect established by the forms, the glazes used are whitish or light in color so that the shadows between the flanges help to emphasize the underlying structure. (Plates 1, 13)

Glaze surfaces resemble stone and give the appearance of being hard and dense. The glazes themselves are usually monochromatic with subtle variations and thus establish an identity between the stone and the hard baked surface of the clay. I use textured glazes on broad flat areas to create a warmth which compliments the earthiness of the clay, and at the same time, add a surface sheen which creates a lustrous effect. (Plates 1, 5, 7, 18) When a pot is large and complex, a dry glaze is used that brings out its stonelike quality. (Plate 8)

I use a slab building process to make my pots. I do not allow the process to become more important than the idea as no two pots are alike. Each design requires an individual treatment. After creating the basic forms, the decorative patterns are cut individually out of clay slabs and then applied to the surface. In order to create a feeling of boldness and weight the rims and flanges of my pots have thick
edges. A thin rim would be inappropriate for my pots as the feeling would then be one of delicacy and lightness.

My thrown forms have the same feeling of weight as the slab built pots even though the forms are curvilinear and graceful. Bottoms are sharply tapered so that the curve of the pot is widest in the middle. These globular forms have the feeling of being pushed from within as if the clay was being expanded by an internal force. (Plates 16, 17, 18)

Control is very important in my work, and becomes a standard by which I judge my own work and the work of others. The finished pot must exhibit a high degree of skill in workmanship and not look as though it may have happened by accident. The edges of my pots must appear to be sharp and define the clear-cut quality which I seek. The accidental or happenstance does not fit into my manner of working as it does in the abstract expressionistic approach to clay as my pots are not organic in appearance and do not lend themselves to this approach. My pots are made from a pre-planned idea, sketch, or visual image. As the pot begins to take on undesirable characteristics, changes are made which coincide with the visual relationships which I perceive. The finished pot is sometimes different from the initial idea but only in terms of what works best aesthetically in the third dimension. I like the spontaneity that is involved in working with clay and the unique quality of the material which lends itself to easy manipulation and construction. The surprise which exists when a potter
opens the door of a kiln is unlike any other and cannot be produced by working with any other material. I utilize these ceramic properties and qualities to enrich my very controlled and precise forms.

**Conclusion**

New ideas for ceramic forms are not easy to develop as the functional and aesthetic aspects of the pots must be considered. I feel that a potter today should try to decide which approach to the medium he will take and develop it in his own personal way regardless of monetary or peer success. As an artist, he can try to extend the ceramic medium into new directions despite the criticism which he may receive. He should try to open himself up to new ideas and acknowledge the presence of potters who are doing artistic innovations with ceramic materials. His pots should exhibit a high degree of control and good design if the medium is to be raised to a higher level as an art form. In addition to all of this, he must, lastly, remain truthful to himself as an individual, and as an artist.
## Clay Bodies

### Body #1

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<tr>
<td>Missouri Fire Clay</td>
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<tr>
<td>C &amp; C Ball Clay</td>
<td>20 lbs</td>
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<td>Grog</td>
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<td>Raw Umber</td>
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<td>C &amp; C Ball Clay</td>
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<tr>
<td>EPK Kaolin</td>
<td>7 lbs</td>
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<td>Cedar Heights Redhart Clay</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grog (28 mesh)</td>
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<td>C &amp; C Ball Clay</td>
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<td>11 lbs</td>
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<td>Flint</td>
<td>3 lbs</td>
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<td>Grog (28 mesh)</td>
<td>5 lbs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100 lbs</strong></td>
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GLAZE FORMULAS

MT3-C  Matt Glaze Cone 9-10 Reduction

Custer Feldspar 650.0 gms.
Whiting 112.5 gms.
Zinc Oxide 100.5 gms.
Barium Carbonate 263.0 gms.
Tennessee #7 Ball Clay 125.0 gms.

1251.0 gms.

ZG-3  Mat Glaze Cone 9-10 Reduction

Kingman Feldspar 45.0 gms.
Barium Carbonate 29.0 gms.
Tennessee #7 Ball Clay 8.0 gms.
Whiting 18.0 gms.

100.0 gms.

Green Matt Glaze Cone 9-10 Reduction

Nepheline Syenite 20.8 gms.
Whiting 30.3 gms.
ASP Georgia Kaolin 25.7 gms.
Flint 23.2 gms.

100.0 gms.

W-5 Dry Matt Glaze Cone 10 Reduction

ASP Georgia Kaolin 25.5 gms.
Tennessee #7 Ball Clay 20.5 gms.
Wollastonite 35.5 gms.
Opax S 6.0 gms.

87.5 gms.

Y-A-7 Matt Glaze Cone 9-10 Reduction

Dolomite 2.3 gms.
Whiting 26.1 gms.
EPK Kaolin 34.2 gms.
Flint 34.3 gms.
Lithium Carbonate 3.1 gms.

100.0 gms.
CATALOG

Plate 1: STONEWARE URN
15" high, 15" long, 6" wide; Slab Built; ZG-3 Matt Glaze with 5% Yellow Ochre. Raw Umber Wash on Rim. Slab Built. Clay Body #3

Plate 2: STONEWARE URN
11" high, 6" wide; Slab Built; W-5 Dry Matt Glaze with 3% Iron Oxide on Light Areas; W-5 Dry Matt Glaze with 7% Iron Oxide on Dark Brown Areas; W-5 Dry Matt Glaze with 2% Iron Oxide and 1% Cobalt Oxide in Incised Areas; Mishima Decoration. Clay Body #3

Plate 3: STONEWARE URN
22" high, 16" wide; ZG-3 Matt Glaze with 5% Yellow Ochre on lid. ZG-3 Matt Glaze with 10% Iron Oxide on bottom. Slab Built. Clay Body #3.

Plate 4: STAMPED URN
17" high, 12" wide; W-5 Dry Matt Glaze with 2% Iron Oxide on Light Areas; W-5 Dry Matt Glaze with 2% Iron Oxide and 1% Cobalt Oxide in Stamped Areas; Slab Built; Mishima Decoration. Clay Body #1

Plate 5: LARGE URN
16" high, 19" wide; ZG-3 Matt Glaze with 5% Iron Oxide; Slab Built. Clay Body #1.
Plate 6: STONEWARE POT

20" high, 16" wide; ZG-3 Matt Glaze with 5% Yellow Ochre on Light Areas; ZG-3 Matt Glaze with 10% Iron Oxide in Recessed Areas. Slab Built. Clay Body #3

Plate 7: STONEWARE URN

14" high, 11" wide, 20" long. W-5 Dry Matt Glaze with 2% Iron Oxide (Brown color where thin, Yellow color where thick); W-5 Dry Matt Glaze with 2% Iron Oxide and 1% Cobalt Oxide in stamped areas; Slab Built. Mishima Decoration. Clay Body #3

Plate 8: LARGE URN

25" high, 13" wide, 20" long. W-5 Dry Matt Glaze with 2% Iron Oxide on Light Areas; 2% Iron Oxide and 1% Cobalt Oxide in Stamped Areas; W-5 Dry Matt Glaze with 5% Iron Oxide on Brown Areas; Slab Built; Mishima Decoration. Clay Body #3

Plate 9: STONEWARE URN

23" high, 13" wide; ZG-3 Matt Glaze with 5% Yellow Ochre on Light Areas; Raw Umber Wash in Dark Areas over Glaze; Slab Built; Mishima Decoration. Clay Body #3

Plate 10: FOOTED URN

16" high, 11" wide; ZG-3 Matt Glaze with 5% Red Crocus Martis. (Green Color where Application of Glaze is Heavy, Yellow Brown Color where Glaze is thin); Slab Built. Clay Body #1
Plate 11: JAR and LID
8" high, 7" wide, 11" long; ZG-3 Matt Glaze with 7% Iron Oxide.
Raw Umber Wash over Glaze in Dark Areas. Slab Built. Clay Body #4

Plate 12: YUCATAN POT
13" high, 15" wide; ZG-3 Matt Glaze with 5% Milled Rutile on Light Areas; ZG-3 Matt Glaze with 5% Iron Oxide on Brown Areas; ZG-3 Matt Glaze with 1/2% Cobalt Oxide on Blue Areas; Slab Built. Clay Body #3

Plate 13: STONEWARE PLANTER
10" high, 15" wide; ZG-3 Matt Glaze with 5% Iron Oxide on Outside;
MT3-C Matt Glaze with 5% Milled Rutile Inside; Slab Built. Clay Body #1

Plate 14: LARGE FOOTED URN
18" high, 14: wide; ZG-3 Matt Glaze with 2% Iron Oxide; Slab Built.
Clay Body #1

Plate 15: STONEWARE PLANTER
14" high, 21" wide; MT3-C Matt Glaze with 7% Iron Oxide on Outside;
MT3-C Matt Glaze with 7% Yellow Ochre Inside; Raw Umber Wash on Rim; Slab Built. Clay Body #3
Plate 16: THROWN BOTTLE

6" wide, 5" high; ZG-3 Matt Glaze with 5% Iron Oxide on Bottom;
ZG-3 Matt Glaze with 5% Milled Rutile on Light Areas; Green Matt
Glaze with 1% Cobalt Oxide used for Blue Accent; Thrown Form. Clay
Body #2

Plate 17: JAR and LID

12" high, 13" wide; Green Matt Glaze with 5% Iron Oxide and 1% Cobalt
Oxide. (Blue Color where thick, Brown where thin); Raw Umber Wash
on Lid over Glaze; Thrown Form. Clay Body #4

Plate 18: JAR and LID

12" high; 14" wide; MT3-C Matt Glaze with 5% Iron Oxide; (Brown where
thin, Yellow where thick); Coil Handles; Thrown Form. Clay Body #2

Plate 19: THE NUNNERY

The Nunnery; Uxmal, Yucatan, Mexico.

Plate 20: HOUSE OF DOLLS

House of Dolls, Dzibiltachun, Yucatan, Mexico.

Plate 21: THE NUNNERY

The Nunnery, Kabah, Yucatan, Mexico

Plate 22: TEMPLE OF THE SUN

Temple of the Sun, Palenque, Chiapas, Mexico.
PLATES
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