THE CRAFT FACTOR

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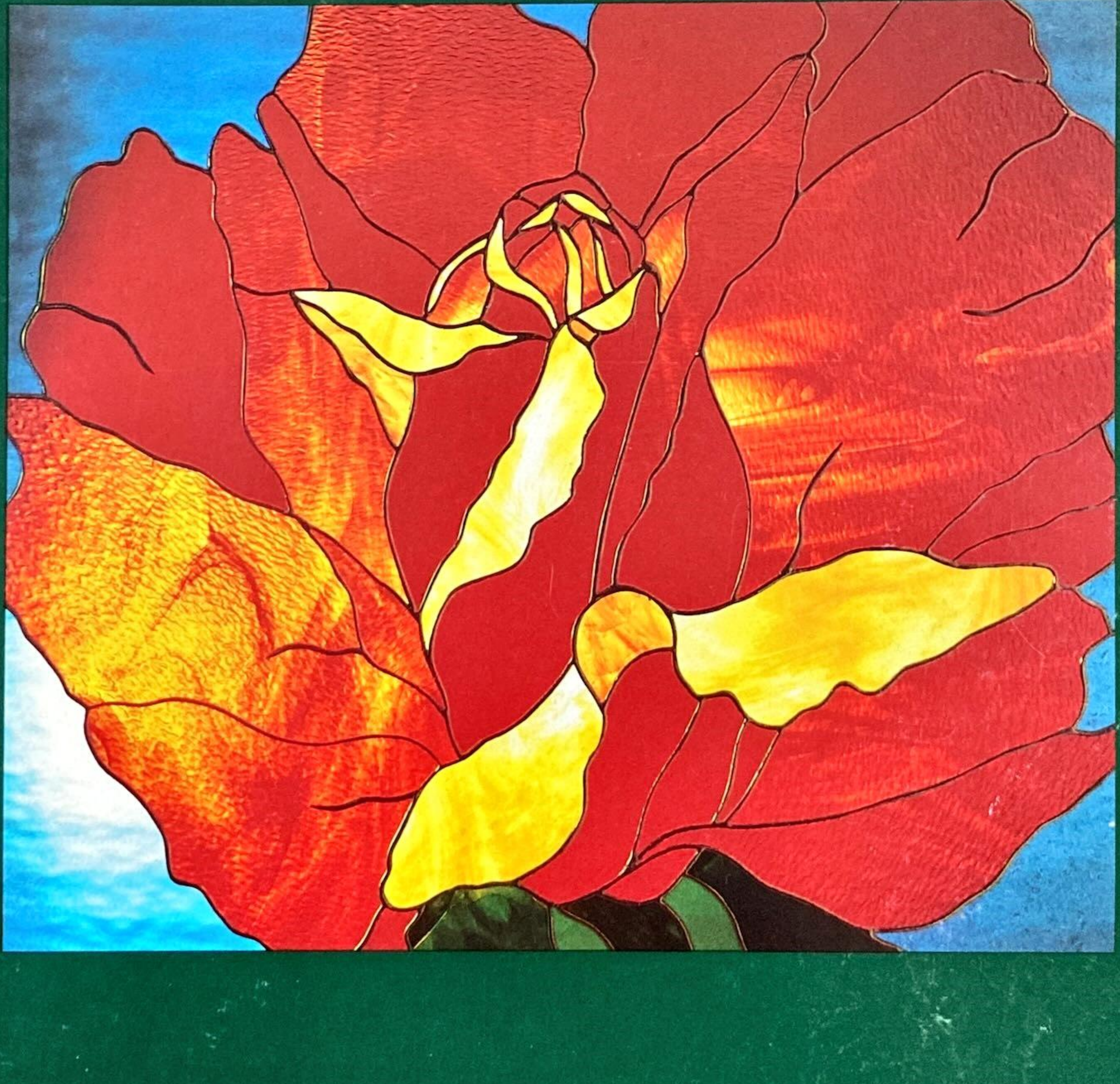

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celebrate the creative work
of the hand.

For more information, contact:
Susan Robertson, Chairperson, ph. 867-8921
Agatha Dyck, South-West, ph. 773-7685
Susan Robertson, South-East, ph. 867-8921
Wendy Parsons, South-Central, ph. 693-4426
Alinor & Lloyd Wood, City of Regina, ph. 545-0557

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Rose Mineau, North, ph. 982-4751
Linda Mushka, North-West, ph. 389-4834
Del & Wanda Canning, North-East, ph. 278-2920
Phyllis Baker, City of Saskatoon, ph. 374-7410
Carmen Beaumont, West-Central, ph. 544-2692

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The Craft Factor

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FRONT COVER Untitled window (1993), glass, lead overlay, copper foil, 73.7 centimetres in height, by Myrna Tyson.

BACK COVER *Running Dog Crossing* (1993), linen warp, wool weft, by Annabel Taylor.

Craft Magazine Publishing

BY PAULA GUSTAFSON

Craft magazines, like this one and the others we welcome when they arrive in our mailbox, are a lifeline connecting us to what's happening outside our studio walls. They reassure us that there are others like ourselves, striving to perfect skills and ideas in clay or metal or fibre. As we flip through each magazine's pages, lingering for a moment at a glossy photo, scanning for news or names we recognize, we tend to believe that craft magazines are marvellous advocates for the craft industry, displaying craft's finest to ourselves and to potential buyers and collectors.

In May 1993, I had the rare opportunity to talk individually and collectively with the editors of four prominent ceramics magazines, which represent an important component of the visual arts world. Australia's Janet Mansfield (*Ceramics: Art and Perception*), England's Eileen Lewenstein (*Ceramic Review*), Alberta's Barbara Tipton (*Contact*), and U.S. editor Bill Hunt (*Ceramics Monthly*) had gathered in Calgary for the International Ceramics Symposium sponsored by Calgary Leisure Learning Services.

Their four magazines range from the very large to the very small and encompass the diversity of the publishing world. *Ceramics Monthly* has a paid circulation of 37,000 subscribers. *Ceramic Review* publishes 8,000 copies of each issue, 600 of which go to members of England's Studio Potters Association (formerly the Craft Potters Association). *Ceramics: Art and Perception* has 3,500 subscribers worldwide and sells an additional 2,000 copies through retailers. *Contact*, the publication of the Alberta Potters Association (APA), is read by several hundred subscribers, mostly within western Canada.

Why a Craft Magazine?

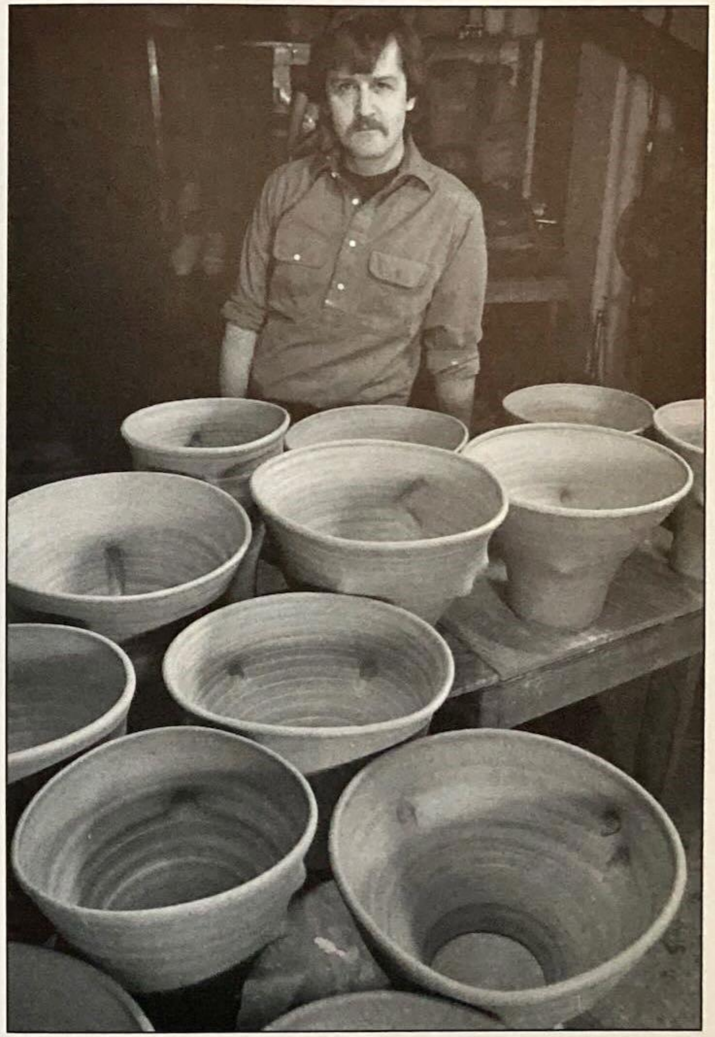
Janet Mansfield:

I started *Ceramics: Art and Perception* three and a half years ago because I saw a need for an international magazine of high quality, a magazine that concentrated on the art side of ceramics as much as on the practical. There are so many books and magazines now about all of that practical stuff. I felt that ceramics needed a bit more concentration on why people were doing things, what they were thinking about, and why they made the things they did. I called the magazine *Ceramics: Art and Perception* because it is about objects made of clay and fired, because I believe ceramics is an art form, and because there are many different ways of perceiving what that art is.

Eileen Lewenstein:

In late 1969, at the end of one of those rather long council meetings that organizations sometimes have, my Coeditor, Emmanuel Cooper, suggested it was time for the Craft Potters Association to do something more ambitious than a mimeographed news sheet for our members. In England this was the beginning of offset litho printing. There were lots of "little magazines" being published. He and I thought newsletters were ghastly, and that producing a magazine would be a wonderful idea. Of course, we knew nothing about publishing a magazine. I think we hoped to broaden the inward-looking English attitude, to draw attention to our readers that there was a world outside.

RIGHT Bill Hunt, Editor, *Ceramics Monthly*
OPPOSITE Eileen Lewenstein, Coeditor, *Ceramic Review*



I should explain that the Leach influence was overwhelming, and it lasted a very long time. The demise of brown clay and brown glazes didn't come until the end of the 1970s. We found it very difficult to interest the members in anything that was happening in any other country, unless they'd been to Japan, or when Michael Cardew came back from Africa. Today there's much more interest in sculpture and figurative work, and *Ceramic Review's* readership extends to an international list of curators, collectors, and others interested in the ceramic arts.

Barbara Tipton:

Canada doesn't have a national ceramics magazine. *Contact* is the quarterly publication of the Alberta Potters Association and, as such, it's received by the membership. The circulation is very small, although it is expanding through retail distribution and out-of-province subscriptions.

Contact has actually been around since 1975, when it began as a leaflet. It's gone through various editorial and design changes and, when I became editor a year ago, it underwent another change in design and in concept. Today it's run by a volunteer editorial board, which may be a different setup from other publications. When we started, the editorial board and I talked about what sort of content we wanted to have and what we thought the APA members wanted to see. We decided we wanted a clay magazine that could be as varied and interesting, and as well-written, as possible. To me, that means showing and talking about all aspects of clay.

Bill Hunt:

Ceramics Monthly started in 1953, so we've been around for a good number of years. In the 1950s, there was very little basic information available on ceramics. There were a few poorly distributed texts around, like the small book by Charles Fergus Binns [*The Potter's Craft*, a 1910 publication reprinted in 1947], and Bernard Leach's *A Potter's Book* [published in 1940]. *Ceramics Monthly* decided it would serve the broadest interests of the people who were willing to subscribe to it. At that time, the broad interests were process: how to make a glaze, or how to throw.

Ceramics Monthly's self-concept hasn't changed one bit over the years, although everything else about ceramics has changed. That's why *Ceramics Monthly* has changed. We spend a great deal of time surveying our readers. Every time a subscriber renews, we ask what he or she thinks of the magazine, and what we should be doing. We also do some large-scale surveys where we ask people about what they want us to do, because we are basically a ceramics news service. We rely heavily on the worldwide ceramics community to feed us.

Over the years, because of our size, we've been able to do a really amazing job. From the standpoint of economics, *Ceramics Monthly* shouldn't exist, but it does, and it does through the good graces of all the folks out there who feed us information. *Ceramics Monthly* has no photographers, no reporters, so we're dependent on everybody, and it's a wonderful symbiotic relationship. We're doing what every great civilization does, which is make lots of information available to people so they can learn from the achievements of others. I think it's a very important reason why ceramics has developed so much compared to some of the other areas of crafts, which are more secretive or less communicative.

Editorial Policy

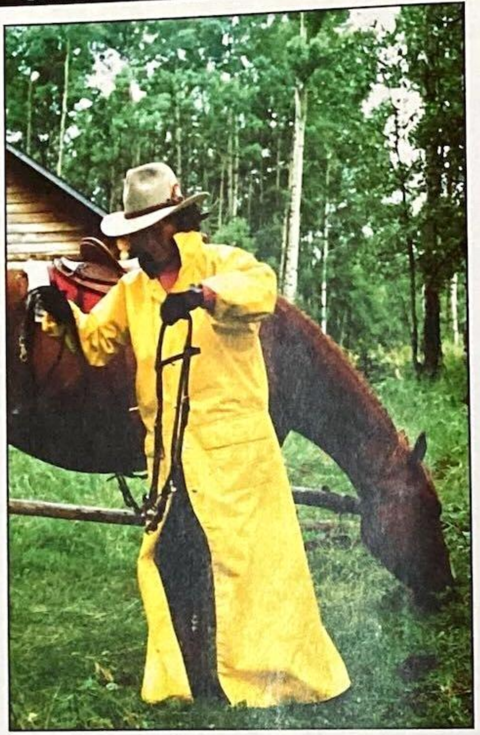
Though the editors all stressed the editorial independence of their magazines, they don't work in isolation.

Janet Mansfield:
I have a list of consultants. If I've got a problem, if it's a technical article and somebody knows about this sort of thing, I send the article to them for review. If it's an article I'm a bit unsure about—say it's about a ceramic artist in Canada—I'll send it to Les Manning and ask him what he knows about this person. There's no point in publishing something that could be inaccurate, so I ask somebody who has that particular expertise.

Eileen Lewenstein:
We found that we did have to clarify the relationship between the Council and ourselves as editors. It was agreed that we would edit the magazine, it would be printed, and if the Council objected to it or thought we were taking the wrong track, we would resign if necessary. We felt this was the only way in which we could work. We could not be held to present every single article to the board and await their decision.

We established our editorial independence, but we've kept one piece of advice from the woman who previously edited the little newsletter. She said, "You must always have a glaze recipe. People become members of the association so they can have the glaze recipe on the news sheet." We have done that. Emmanuel and I are both interested in glazes, so we want to publish recipes too. As for other suggestions from readers, well, it could be something that we're probably not interested in, so we won't try it. Usually the suggestions we get are things that seem to be very much a minority interest.

Bill Hunt:
We differ from the others in that we're pretty big. That allows us to do certain things that the other magazines can't. Our objective is not to present any particular style or kind of work, or even any set of ideas, even though we may have certain ideas ourselves. We try as much as we can not to let those ideas affect what we publish. I'm responsible for putting into *Ceramics Monthly* a certain amount of work that I simply despise from an artistic standpoint, but I know that it's the best of a certain style of work. We want to be a news service for this field, a communications connection between people, and we try to keep as many people as we possibly can involved in the production decision-making, design, selection, everything.



ABOVE Barbara Tipton, Editor, *Contact.*

Eileen Lewenstein:
Sometimes Emmanuel and I are able to convince each other about editorial decisions. In recent years the Craft Potters shop, which is now called Contemporary Ceramics, has had exhibitions. If they are one-person shows, we do feel that we should feature them in *Ceramic Review*. After all, we are a member of the Council that has agreed to the exhibition program.

Barbara Tipton:
Contact is supported by the Alberta Potters Association, but I should also explain that the APA gets its funding from the Alberta government. We have a real need to please readers, and those readers are members of APA.

Bill Hunt:
If you're selling chicken, you cater to the people who like chicken. They're the ones who pay your bills. I work for all my readers. I'm their employee. If we were trying to maximize everything that we do, things would be different. But we're not. If you look at *Ceramics Monthly*, we don't have sales, because sales cheat the full-time subscribers. So you're never going to see us cut the price to somebody new. We don't advertise. We put two little subscription cards in each issue. If you're interested in the magazine, you'll subscribe to it. If you're not, you won't. We're not a maximized publication, and we're happy to serve the people who like chicken.

Janet Mansfield:
Ceramics: Art and Perception also caters to the specialized audience who likes ceramics, but that's not only the artists. It's the people in allied fields. Sometimes you can't keep in touch with everybody, but if you get magazines, then you're in touch with what's happening with other people around the world. It's the way that people interested in similar things contact each other. If you're interested in ceramics, you'll buy the magazine because you want to know what other people are doing.

Bill Hunt:
Our editorial and advertising departments are completely separate. We refuse any attempt to influence one way or the other. If an advertiser calls up and says, "I want you to do an article on slab rollers," I tell him to forget it. But in so doing I give him a better instrument in which to advertise, because readers know that what they get from us is honest.

The Influence of Print

How much influence do magazines have? Should they be advocates? Or just inform and educate?

Bill Hunt:
I'm sure that we influence a great deal. I've seen the results, and it's a very frightening aspect of what we do, because even though we influence, we simply can't spend a lot of time trying to decide whether the influences are good or not. Sometimes it may be bad, it may influence negatively, but everybody has an obligation to be informed. One of the reasons I think we're in such a high point in ceramics today is because we have been handed this entire world history and contemporary scene all at once. For the first time in history, any ceramist can get anything that has ever been made in ceramics. And that better-informed maker of ceramics can stand on the shoulders of other people's achievements, rather than re-invent from the ground up.

Barbara Tipton:
As far as advocacy goes, I think any time we publish an article on what we're doing, we're getting the work out into the world.

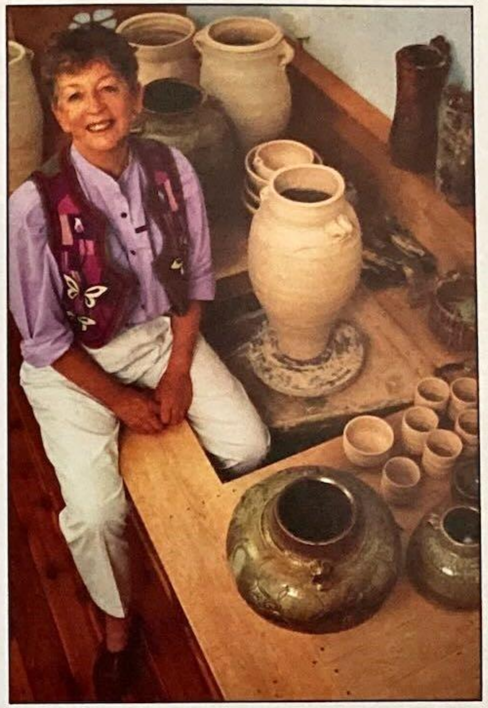
Bill Hunt:
The system is flawed, the whole process if flawed, because any time we present anything, we end up promoting that thing, whatever it is. We just did an article on paper clay, and it's had a tremendous impact everywhere. All kinds of people are now using it. That's the standard result, starting a trend.

You may remember *Craft Horizons* magazine. Rose Slivka, who was the editor, did a terrific job of speaking outside the field. But because she spoke so well, people on the outside came in. *Craft Horizons* switched its name to *American Craft* and changed the direction of the magazine toward the people who would buy the stuff. The result is a magazine that in my view, and I've heard many people say the same thing, no longer speaks to the field. So it's dangerous tinkering with trying to *promote* what we do, as opposed to trying to communicate. We can't be all things to all people.

Eileen Lewenstein:
We are delighted when other people read *Ceramic Review*, but it is a specialist magazine. I don't think that any specialist magazine is of much interest to people outside that specialty. In England, there's *Crafts* magazine. Its aim is to encourage debate and criticism of crafts and to raise the level of craft criticism. That is not our aim. We are a magazine for potters.

Bill Hunt:
In my opinion, the number one promoter of ceramics to the world is the work itself. When your work is spectacular, or when you see someone else's work that just takes your breath away, it takes many people's breath away. If ceramists can produce a more communicative body of work, a more stunning body of work, they don't need us to promote it for them. The world will beat a path to their door.

Editors are the first to recognize the imperfections of the publishing process. Just putting it on paper loses so much of what a three-dimensional object is. The images are gross abstractions at best, but that's all we can do. We can't bring the actual pots to the readers. Only the artist can do that.



ABOVE Janet Mansfield, Editor, *Ceramics: Art and Perception.*

Getting Published

Putting your thoughts down in words is as much of a challenge as making the perfect pot, but the editors encourage you to give it a try.

Bill Hunt:
If you're looking at a magazine, and if you're not seeing exactly what you think you ought to be seeing, then write something. Right the wrongs that you see. The whole field will be stronger for it. Everywhere I go, everywhere I have a chance to speak, I try to tell people how the system works and how you get published. I think it's a real shame when people think it's a closed shop.

Barbara Tipton:
We're publishing a magazine for potters, but in the last issue we used an article about a sculptor who only marginally uses clay. We got a writer to visit him in his studio to talk about that work. It's not something that the average APA member might be exposed to.

Janet Mansfield:
We publish 26 articles in each issue. They come from every part of the globe. I don't think I've produced an issue yet that hasn't had an article from Canada, but certainly because I am in Australia I like to present an Australian content, exposing Australia to the world and exposing the world to Australia. It's a communication that goes both ways.

Bill Hunt:
The whole ceramics field has a problem with people who are good wordsmiths. We should probably expect this, because the field is so talented in the other direction, the visual direction, and I think there's a mental difference between the kinds of people who are great wordsmiths and the people who are great visually—but there are exceptions to this, of course. We not only encourage the work of writers, we would love to do more fiction that is in our subject area—we recently published *The Clay War* by Barry Targan—and we'd love to have articles by people in a variety of other areas, writers from sociology or anthropology. I'm not opposed to anyone from any area participating in *Ceramics Monthly*, providing they are going to deal with ceramic content.

Barbara Tipton:
In the three most recent issues of *Contact*, we've had two articles that generated quite a lot of positive feedback. Both articles were written by people who had never been published before.

Janet Mansfield:
The whole idea of these magazines is to encourage better writing. If people read good writing, they'll understand more about what that artist is about or the issues they're addressing. The more writers see good articles in a magazine, the more they will want to be included. We are in the business of encouraging people to write.

Contact List

Bill Hunt, Editor. *Ceramics Monthly*. Box 12448, Columbus, Ohio 43212 U.S.A.

Eileen Lewenstein & Emmanuel Cooper, Coeditors. *Ceramic Review*. 21 Carnaby Street, London W1V 1PH England.

Janet Mansfield, Editor. *Ceramics: Art and Perception*. 35 William Street, Paddington, NSW 2021, Australia.

Barbara Tipton, Editor. *Contact*. Box 5303, Station A, Calgary, Alberta T2H 1X6 Canada. ❑

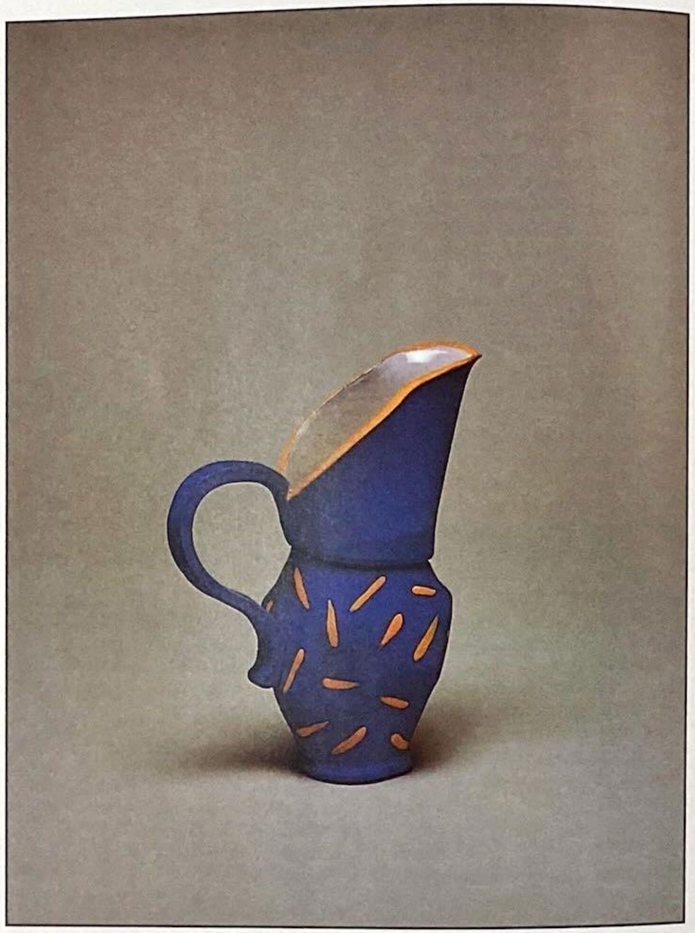
Bring the Outside In

By Susan Robertson

The International Ceramics Symposium, Calgary, Alberta—up until two years ago, I had been blithely unaware of its existence. Presented by Calgary Leisure Learning Services, and hosted by the Alberta College of Art, the Symposium this year marked its fourth anniversary. I had had the good fortune to find out about and attend the 1991 conference. When 1993 rolled around, I was chomping at the bit to go again.

Unfortunately, as with most craftspeople, I am not free simply to do as I please but must deal with the reality of limited resources as well as the needs of my family. Time and money are always an issue: never enough time to produce enough work to sell; never selling enough to live beyond a subsistence level. I was challenged by my husband and partner—how could I justify the expense? Not wanting to spend hours trying to explain the whys and wherefores to someone who would probably never understand, I avoided the issue and said: "I cannot justify it. But I'm going anyway!" Still, a niggly little voice in the back of my head kept saying, "You may not have to justify it to anyone else, but can you justify it to yourself?"

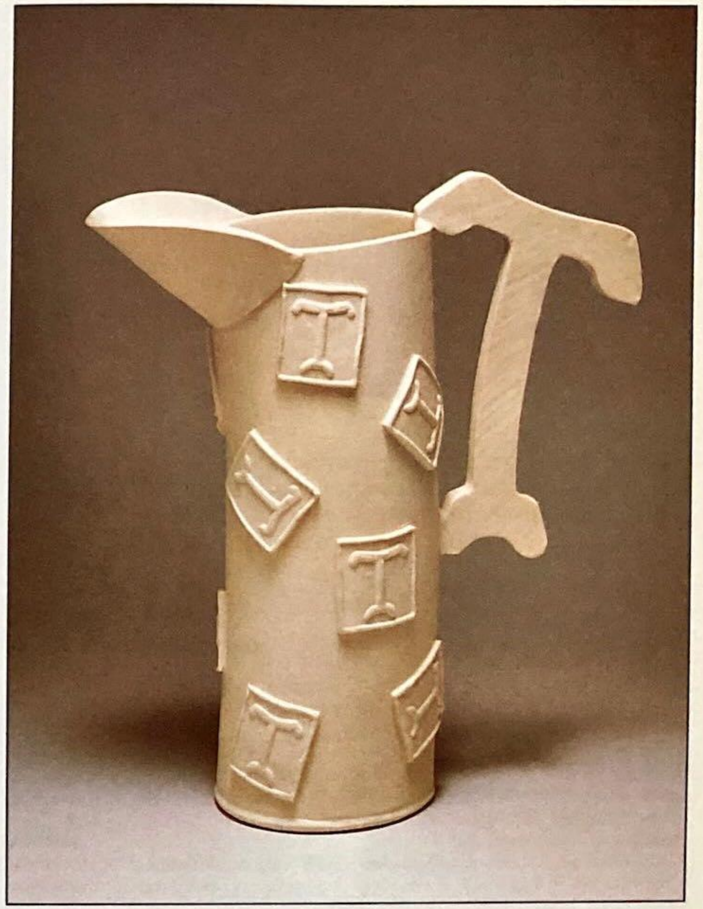
As I wrestled with this thought, I realized that many professions have mandatory upgrading and those that do not, encourage it. Even the government recognizes the value of keeping up in your profession, allowing certain expenses to be deducted from your income tax. Why, then, is upgrading not viewed by craftspeople as being important, even necessary? To allay that little voice, I approached the 1993 International Ceramics Symposium with a new purpose, specifically, to determine what professional benefits I could get out of the experience.



The Symposium is comprised of a series of gallery openings, tours, lectures, workshops, and socials. When I spoke with conference organizer Evelyn Grant, she explained that the "philosophy [of the conference] is to bring the outside in, to bring the world to the people who can't afford to go to the world." The selection of presenters and topics is based on a number of factors, the foremost being the evaluation forms submitted by the previous year's participants. These forms, along with suggestions from an advisory board, are reviewed to determine who will be invited to come, with the goal of providing a balance of techniques, approaches, genders, etc., within an international framework. Through the Symposium, organizers hope not only to expose Canadian ceramic artists to a variety of new philosophies and techniques but also to expose the work of Canadian ceramic artists to an international audience.

The gallery openings and tours present the working craftsperson with three opportunities. First, you get to view a large body of extremely diverse work. This work may trigger an interest in new techniques, colours, or forms. It may be the work of one of this year's presenters, helping to clarify your choice of lectures and workshops to attend. Or it may introduce you to an exciting new artist whom you would like to recommend as a presenter for next year. Second, you are able to view potential exhibition sites. An important step in obtaining an exhibition is matching your work with the type of space and mandate of the gallery, so much more easily done when you realize that your work is similar to that already being shown. Third, you can view potential retail spaces—again, a chance to target your work to specific retailers and their clients.

RIGHT *Tea for Two* (1993), handbuilt porcelain iced-tea pitcher, 34.3 centimetres in height, by Susan Robertson.
OPPOSITE *Intuition* (1993), handbuilt porcelain pitcher, 14 centimetres in height, by Susan Robertson. Photos: Available Light, Regina.



Susan Robertson:
"Normally I perceive an idea, do a drawing, then construct the piece [see above]. After attending the John Gill workshop, I completed a body of work where the only preconceived notion was that the final form would be a pitcher [see opposite page]. I found that this process allowed me to work on a more intuitive, emotional level."

At the last Symposium, I had discovered two retail spaces that I was now interested in pursuing. Armed with my portfolio and the names of the owners, I called ahead and made arrangements to meet with one of them. Direct benefit number one: I now have a retail outlet in Calgary.

The lectures provide new ideas and challenge the old. The slide presentations, like the gallery tours, reveal a dazzling array of forms, colours, and techniques. Some of the lectures focus on the growth and development of an individual, while others present a body of work from another country, again reinforcing the international scope of the conference. Of particular interest to me this year was a business-related lecture that had been added to the program in response to requests from participants, along with a supporting panel of editors who addressed the concerns of craft magazine publishing. The highlight for me was a slide of a pitcher form which I decided to explore in my upcoming exhibition at the Frances Morrison Branch of the Saskatoon Public Library. Inspiration: direct benefit number two.

Many of the activities at the Symposium run concurrently, so it is impossible to take everything in. I tried to focus on workshops that had specific application to my work. While I was able to attend several, one workshop in particular, given by John Gill of Alfred University, Alfred, New York, has had a significant impact on my way of working. Gill has a very spontaneous, loose way of working and is able to work on a direct, emotional level. When I returned to my studio, I created new work based on what I had learned, work that was included in my exhibition. Technique and methodology. Direct benefits three and four.

Finally, there were the social activities. These provide time for relaxation, allowing the mind to stop reeling from all that it has tried to absorb. The socials are also a time to meet informally with other ceramists—in today's jargon, *networking*. Although many times the benefits of networking are not immediately obvious, it can be an important source of information. In meeting this year with Evelyn Grant, I was made aware of the possibility of exhibiting Saskatchewan work at the 1995 Symposium. While organizing such an exhibition will require some effort on my part, it is another opportunity to look into, a possible future benefit.

So, when I sit down at the end of it all to add up the benefits of attending the Symposium, the list reads: retail outlet, inspiration, technique, methodology, possible group exhibition. What followed was that eighteen out of twenty-seven works in my exhibition at the Frances Morrison Library were directly influenced by my experiences at the Symposium. Six out of the seven pieces which sold were, again, inspired by what I had seen and learned there. From those pieces, I have developed a whole new line of work which appears to have retail potential.

There are no guarantees in life. Each conference must be weighed on its own merits. From my perspective, the International Ceramics Symposium achieved its goals. It is very unlikely, for instance, that I would have ever accidentally crossed paths with John Gill. So they have brought the outside world to me. It is a personal victory that I am finally able to put that niggly little voice to rest. I can only encourage each and every one of you to really stop and think before you throw that conference information in the garbage. Can you really afford not to attend? ❑

Craft, Art, & Design

Good design makes life comfortable and pleasant. Bad design is tetrapaks that squirt juice no matter how carefully they're opened.

By Paula Gustafson

Designer fashions. Designing women. We can define each by pointing to examples. But what does design mean in terms of craft? Aren't all craft objects designed? And what exactly is a "designer-craftsman," a term many of us have used from time to time, if only to distinguish ourselves from hobby-crafters.

To try and get and handle on design's symbiotic relationship with craft, I met with Michael Skelton, Curator of the Canadian Craft Museum in Vancouver. Skelton is a design expert. In his case, that means graduate degrees in industrial archaeology, philosophy, and design from Britain's Open University and the University of Lancaster, as well as continuing research in the fields of sociology and anthropology. The reason for this eclectic mix of studies, Skelton said, is because neither crafts nor design fit tidily into the academic syllabus.

Skelton started our conversation by pointing out that, ever since the 18th century, when everything was compartmentalized and given a Latin name, "designers have been categorized as the hard-hat guys, the logical thinkers, different from artists who are supposedly blessed with divine inspiration."

But the relationship between craft and design goes back far beyond the Age of Reason. "Craft has always, always played a component part—in many ways a subservient role—to design," Skelton explained, "Every craftsman or craftswoman in the past was making something that had an exchange value. If they lived in an agrarian society and could make a clay pot, that pot could be exchanged for a bushel of grain, so it served a function beyond its potential use for storage or cooking."

"At the same time, the craftsperson had an important skill that served the community," Skelton said, "The important thing to remember here is that crafted products, whether intended for social or economic purposes, or purely functional, have traditionally been designed for someone else."

Michael Skelton:
"A designer can have a great idea just like an artist can, but like traditional craftsmen, designers don't design for themselves. Their work has to live in the real world."

Looked at in this broad view, it's easy to understand why design isn't wedded merely to an aesthetic definition. In fact, design cannot be separated from commerce, religion, social values, or virtually anything else in human life.

Nevertheless, a different view prevailed at the beginning of this century. The Arts and Crafts Movement divided handwork into three categories: "He who works with his hands only," wrote John Ruskin, "is a mechanic; he who works with his hands and head is an artisan; and he who works with hands, head, and heart is an artist."

By this classification, contemporary men and women who pursue craft as a form of creative expression clearly fall into the "artist" category. (Yes, there are many potters, for example, who remain loyal to the Leach/Cardew school of peasant minimalism; however, the majority of crafts, including the very functional, are intended as forms of artistic expression.)

Skelton makes the same division, based on the intentions of the maker. "There's a big difference," Skelton said, "between the work a traditional craftsman does, and the work of an artist. The traditional craftsman knows exactly the end result he's going to get. There's no such thing as a table that may turn out to be three feet tall or four feet tall. The craftsman knows the dimensions before he starts to work. He knows what materials he's going to use, and he knows how he's going to put it together—unlike an artist faced with a *tabula rasa*, a blank canvas, who has really no idea of how it will turn out."

Stopping for a moment to wonder aloud about portrait painters who presumably know what sort of result awaits them, Skelton then poked a wider hole in his theorizing by reminiscing about a table he had seen that was designed to fold up and hang on the wall. "Hanging up, it looked like fine art, but as soon as it was lifted off the wall and unfolded, it became a functional piece," he said.

But admitting there are grey areas between art, craft, and design doesn't negate any of the fundamental differences, Skelton concluded. Rather, the exceptions merely confirm that design stretches beyond art or industry.

"A designer can have a great idea just like an artist can, but like traditional craftsmen, designers don't design for themselves," Skelton asserted. "Their work has to live in the real world. Good design, workable design, requires discipline and analytical thought—a different thought pattern from artistic expression."

Left-brained designers and right-brained artists? Well, quite a few painters and sculptors might protest that their endeavors require considerable disciplined, analytical thinking.

Let's try another way of subdividing contemporary craft-making to see if we can find where design comes in. According to some theorists, craft practitioners come in three versions. The largest group (who have the least influence) design for a clientele concerned with luxury and adornment. Another group, slightly smaller, but slightly more influential, are craft artists whose work is shown primarily in art galleries. The third and final group, smallest of all but potentially the most influential, are the designer-craftspeople.

The luxury grouping includes the jewellery designers featured in fashion magazines and interior designers who specialize in *faux* finishes. The second group, studio craft-artists making one-of-a-kind objects, often influence our perceptions of visual imagery, but (it must be admitted) their clever ideas seldom spill over into domestic or industrial products. By contrast, designer-craftspeople such as the recent crop of architecture graduates who concoct furniture in rough concrete, burnished sheet metal, and other "industrial" materials have enjoyed a high level of acceptance in the corporate world, if not yet (and maybe never) in the home.

Another group of designer-craftspeople making sporadic and somewhat more successful attempts to work hand-in-hand with industry are ceramic artists who develop prototypes for decorative chinaware, and textile artists designing woven and printed fabrics. However, unlike European or Japan, North America offers only rare art-industry liaisons (e.g., Corning Glass), and in too many instances the artist's designs are watered down to meet middle-of-the-road consumer tastes.

As Skelton pointed out, "Even though computerized design can do in days what used to take months or years, the corporate tendency is to play it safe." Skelton also suggests corporate mindset is responsible for "all that plastic throwaway stuff that archaeologists a hundred years from now are going to dig up and classify as 'culture'!"

While that probably explains the appalling mediocrity of most consumer goods, it doesn't account for the worldwide success of Ikea. Using design as a fulcrum, Ingvar Kamprad overturned the notion that low price was synonymous with poor quality. Kamprad's desire to provide functional, beautiful, well-made, and affordable home furnishings has resulted in 100 million annual customers and 120 Ikea stores in 20 countries.

Skelton agrees that good design has an economic base, "where the value of something magically improves because of good design," but he cautions against market-led design. He points out that "public tastes change rapidly, faster and faster each year." And some, such as bell-bottoms and platform shoes, come back to haunt us!

If my discussion with Skelton didn't disclose any new truths about the relationship between art, craft, and design, it did confirm that design is an integral part of the process of making, and that design and craft are totally intermeshed, extensions of one another. ❑

Beyond the Visual

University of Regina
March 11, 12, 13, 1994

The Saskatchewan Craft Council's 1994 conference, **Beyond the Visual,** will explore issues of expression, function, production, design, and craftsmanship. The keynote speaker will be internationally-exhibited Montreal potter, Paul Mathieu. His paper, "The Space of Pottery: An Investigation of the Nature of Craft," should prove both inspiring and thought-provoking.

This multi-media conference will include workshops with the following instructors:

- Dan Fenton, (glass),
- Karen Selk (fibre), and
- Claudette Hardy-Pilon (metal/jewellery).

Beyond the Visual is being hosted by the Fine Arts Department at the University of Regina.

Further information about **Beyond the Visual** will be made available as our scheduling progresses. Please contact us at the Saskatchewan Craft Council, 813 Broadway Avenue, Saskatoon, SK S7N 1B5, ph. (306) 653-3616, fax (306) 244-2711.

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Wayne Pollock: Prairie Potter

By Myrna Gent

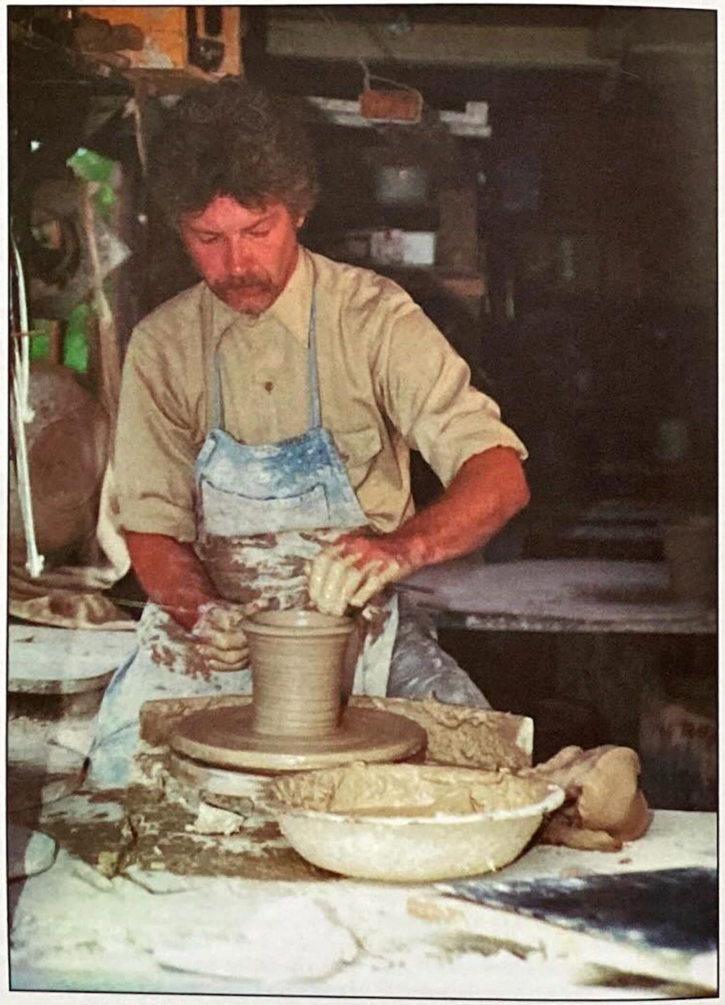
Our province abounds in potters. But very few of them choose to use the materials that our country offers almost free for the taking. One such potter is Wayne Pollock. His pottery is truly Saskatchewan-made.

When Wayne was at the University of Regina, Extension Department, geologist/potter Paul Guliov asked him and the other potters at the University why they were not using local clays in their work. Guliov informed them that the Assiniboia area, from the town of Assiniboia to the American border, was rich in clay deposits, with seven varieties available in all. Soon a small group of potters travelled to the Assiniboia district to quarry their own clay. Approximately fifteen years later, Wayne and fellow potter Gerald Morton are among the few production potters in Canada who use local materials for all their work.

Wayne now obtains his clay by the truck load, ten tons at a time. The three varieties of clay that Wayne uses are willows, flintoft, and rock glen, each of which is named after the community nearest to the deposit—Willow Bunch, Flintoft, and Rock Glen. Each variety of clay has different properties: willows is a ball clay; flintoft is a kaolinized clay; and rock glen is a stoneware clay. Wayne mixes these three clays according to recipes he has developed through trial and error. By obtaining a large amount of clay at once, Wayne is able to keep the quality of his materials consistent over a number of years.

In his quest to produce a purely local product, Wayne has also started to prepare his own glazes. After much work and experimentation, Wayne has settled on using iron scale off ingots from IPSCO, a volcanic ash from the Assiniboia area, and silica from north of Hudson Bay, materials which produce glazes in various shades of browns, greens, and grays. The combination of local clays and glazes give Wayne's work a distinctive earthy appearance.

Wayne now lives in the small community of Frances, where he has built his own workshop, 120 cubic foot kiln, and equipment such as mixers, blungers, and grinders, all out of recycled materials. The kiln, which is large enough to walk into, was made from used fire bricks and is oil fired so that Wayne could make his own burners. The workshop which houses the kiln was built with a high ceiling which can be opened when the kiln is being heated to cone 10 or 2380° F. The large capacity of the kiln means that Wayne need only fire three or four times a year. Some of the mechanical devices Wayne has designed and constructed to process his clay are now on a second or third model, his first efforts having been too complicated. Through experience, Wayne has found that the simpler the design, the less that can go wrong.



Wayne uses his chosen materials and handmade equipment to produce sturdy, serviceable stoneware that is long-lasting and literally stone-like. Everything Wayne makes is functional and traditional. In addition, he always makes sure to carry three or four product lines so that his customers will be able to add to a set or replace broken items over the years.

It is marvellous to watch Wayne turn pots on the wheel. Here is a man who has mastered his medium, able to transform clay into perfectly-shaped objects which are mainly finished on the wheel, with very little tooling done afterwards. Wayne believes that repetition produces excellence and that skill in a craft grows slowly but surely through the years. Wayne can be seen throwing pots in a 1992 documentary drama, *Rupchan: Spirit of a Prairie Potter*, written and distributed by Judith Silverthorne and filmed by Grasslands Productions, in which he portrays Peter Rupchan, a Ukrainian immigrant who became one of our province's first potters. Wayne believes that his life as a potter is not too different from that of Rupchan, who also worked as an anonymous craftsman.

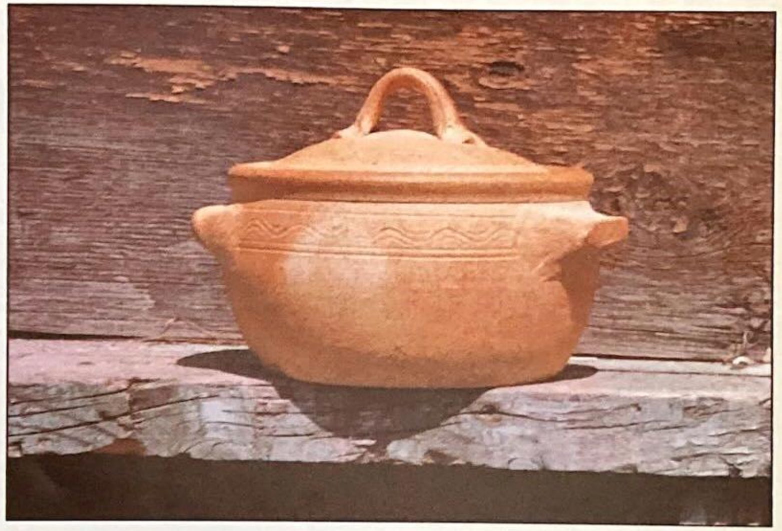
Wayne passionately believes that pottery should be a part of everyone's daily life and not just for the few who can afford costly handmade objects. In an effort to keep his own retail prices down, Wayne markets all of his pottery himself, travelling to various summer and pre-Christmas craft sales and selling out of his own shop. Although Wayne enjoys doing large custom orders, he does not sell his work out of retail shops or show it in the sterile setting of a gallery, preferring instead to place his pieces directly into the hands of those who will use them.

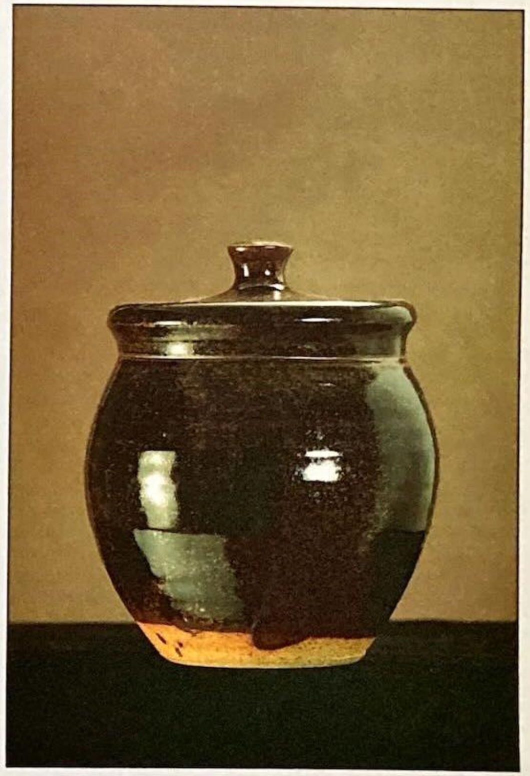
When asked which potters he most admires, Wayne replied Gerald Morton, whom he studied with and assisted at the University of Regina, Extension Department, from 1972 to 1977, and Michael Cardew of England, through his books. Wayne appreciates their generosity of spirit, their willingness to share their knowledge, their way of life. Both Morton and Cardew use local materials, build their own equipment, and adhere to traditional pottery styles.

Wayne continues this tradition of sharing and generosity. He has had two apprentices—Wayne prefers to call them "helpers"—and every year he invites school children and teachers to visit his studio. A number of years ago, a friend built a pug mill for Wayne, and Wayne is now passing on the favour by building one for a new potter presently setting up shop across the street from him.

As the years pass, Wayne feels that his work is becoming both more understated and more expressive of his personality. Uninterested in using decoration for its own sake, Wayne now often applies glazes only when necessary—on the rim of a mug or to seal the saucer of a plant pot to prevent moisture from damaging the surface—preferring to concentrate on the overall form of his pieces. Earthy and robust, Wayne's finished vessels have the timeless quality of pots that were produced thousands of years ago by potters who, like Wayne, used local materials and constructed their own tools.

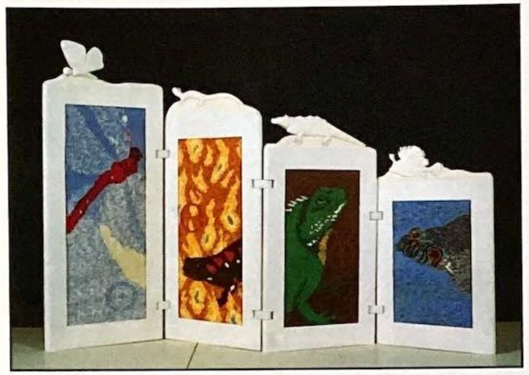
If you were to compliment Wayne, you would suggest that his pots are quiet, easy to live with, and a joy to use. My compliments to Wayne; they are all three. ❑





ABOVE Functional stoneware by Wayne Pollock. Photos: no credit.
OPPOSITE Wayne Pollock on location during the filming of *Rupchan: Spirit of a Prairie Potter.* Photo courtesy of Judith Silverthorne and Grasslands Productions.

Exhibitions



Handmade House

By Stephanie Bowman

"Earth, Air, Fire, & Water"
Handmade House Member Group Show
Saskatchewan Craft Gallery, Saskatoon
May 14 to June 27

Swoosh, swish, swoosh, swish, the sounds of the washing machines would surround me every Saturday. If my mother could not find me wedged between two dryers, or playing with the lint, she did not worry. She knew I was next door at Handmade House, then located at the Grosvenor Park Shopping Centre in Saskatoon. For a young girl of seven, who even then knew she wanted "to make things," the beautiful work at Handmade House seemed an impossible dream compared to my fun-fur Kleenex box covers.

This spring, the members of Handmade House celebrated 20 years of partnership with a group exhibition, "Earth, Air, Fire, and Water," at the Saskatchewan Craft Gallery. The title of the exhibition was chosen to provide a thematic focus for the members as they began to prepare pieces for the show. In the finished works, which were selected by Michael Hosaluk, the elements of earth, air, fire, and water are either inherent in the materials and processes used or are represented by specific images or symbols. Although some of the members said they found it challenging to develop pieces that related to the theme of the show, this requirement also had a positive effect, pulling forth new and exciting work from each participant.

The seed from which the Handmade House has grown was planted over 20 years ago by Henrietta Sietsma, who one day decided that what she and her friends Carol Sanderson and Gail Steck needed was a potter's wheel and that she, who knew something about art, would teach them how to throw pots. Carol Sanderson explains: "We were 60s people. If we wanted to do something, we did it. It didn't occur to us why we shouldn't." Henrietta has since returned to the Netherlands, but she has left behind a legacy.

Once Carol and Gail had enough mugs even for their friends who didn't drink coffee, and new pots for plants they didn't even have yet, they decided to open a retail craft shop, Handmade House, hoping to sell enough work to justify their desire to keep potting. The original members were Marg Foley, Jessie Gordon, Arliss MacNeill, Carol Sanderson, Gail Steck, and Judy Wood. At first, the shop was only open from September to December, but the demand kept growing and soon it became clear that they could stay open all year. At a time when women were often forced to sacrifice their career ambitions to look after their families, the women of Handmade House were having it all.

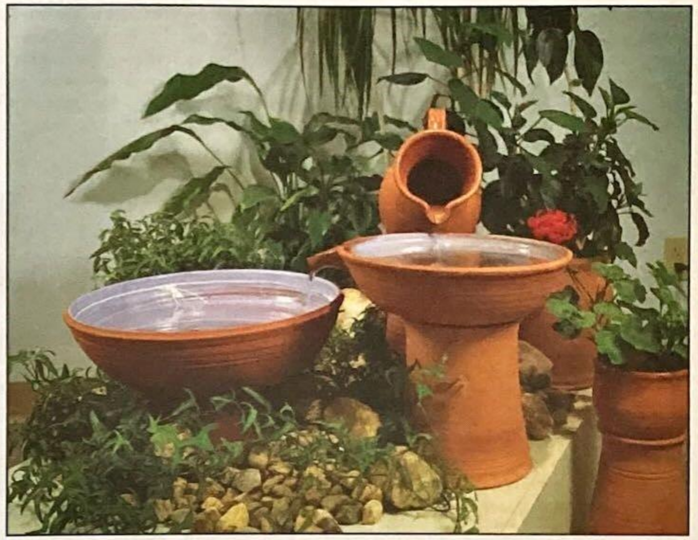
Today Gail, Carol, and Arliss are still members of Handmade House, along with Pat Adams, Fiona Anderson, Myrna Gent, Olive Kalapaca, Kiyoko Kato, Cathryn Miller, Winston Quan, and Myrna Tyson. The members all take turns operating the shop during business hours and meet together once a month to make business decisions, discuss their new work, and review the work of craftspeople interested in selling by consignment through the shop. The success of Handmade House is due, in part, to the members' ongoing commitment to making decisions based on the collective good.

Carol Sanderson says that her initial motivation to help start Handmade House was not monetary gain. But when Carol confided to me how she made enough money that first year to buy the dishwasher she still uses, I silently cheered, certain that the time saved had been put to good use. Carol's contribution to the exhibition consisted of a series of turned clay vessels and cylindrical pedestals that had been assembled into wonderful three-tiered fountain, the music of the falling water making the piece a delight to the ear as well as the eye. The water emerges from the mouth of a jug sitting at an angle on a turned pedestal high enough to allow it to pour into a large bowl atop a second pedestal. The water then cascades from a spout on the side of the bowl into another perfectly-turned vessel, also supported by a pedestal. Surrounded by rocks and plants, the fountain created a contemplative atmosphere that contrasted sharply with the hustle and bustle visible through the gallery windows.

Gail Steck's four turned earthenware vessels, painted with underglaze colours, each referred to one of the four elements: fish tails were applied to the side of *Water Pot with Fish*, gophers peered from the top of *Earth with Gophers*, and an aerial view of a prairie landscape adorned the top of *Prairie Air*, but the most intriguing piece was the *Fire Pot*. The body of the *Fire Pot* is shaped like two low bowls joined at their rims, with carved clay flame-shapes on the shoulders where handles would ordinarily sit. This was a definite departure from the pastel colours and landscape themes seen in Gail's regular work.

The other craftsperson working directly with earth/clay in this show was Olive Kalapaca. Designed to be hung on the wall, Olive's four handbuilt, raku-fired plates, *Trial by Fire*, *Tread Gently*, *Sechelt*, and *Flight*, are each inscribed with a design that refers to one of the four elements. The symbolic meaning of the designs is reinforced by various found objects that have been suspended from holes in the lower rim of each plate. The birds drawn onto the surface of *Flight* convey a wonderful feeling of unconstrained motion and I think that is why my imagination took flight when I saw the piece. At first, the long bird feathers suspended below the plate reminded me of the feathers in a Native headdress. But then the birds began to look more like maple leaves blowing in the wind. Suddenly, the piece was about Canada's First Nations and their struggle to control their own destiny, to free themselves from the tyranny of the white majority in Canada.

Well-known for her porcelain figures, wall pieces, or other clay works, artist Kiyoko Kato challenged expectations and presented viewers with two large figurative paintings, *Fire in Torment* and *Mother Earth and Troubled Waters*. The central image in *Fire in Torment* is of a woman painted with large gestural strokes, with lots of colours running into one another, set in a vertical rectangle separated from the top and sides of the canvas by a wide border. The border is defined at the top and partway down the sides by a wash of green paint that towards the bottom gives way to raw canvas. Beside the figure in the rectangle, Kiyoko has attached some crumpled Japanese handmade paper with Japanese calligraphy to the canvas, the dynamism of the ancient letterforms echoing the loose, thoroughly modern application of the paint.



ABOVE Untitled fountain (1993), wheel-thrown clay, by Carol Sanderson.
OPPOSITE *Seven Dragons* (1993), tapestry weaving, carved and laminated wood, by Fiona Anderson and Cathryn Miller.

When Handmade House first opened, Arliss MacNeill worked primarily in macrame, producing elaborate wall and window pieces that covered huge expanses of space. Arliss's piece, *Eclipse*, continues to do that, but with a technique called needlelace. *Eclipse* consists of two intersecting spheres woven with white and metallic threads interspersed with glass beads. Arliss's needlelace pieces are airy and delicate, and the white threads used here reminded me of snowflakes, though the elaborate patterning is quite irregular. Difficult to describe exactly, needlelace could perhaps be thought of crocheting gone wild.

Myrna Gent's untitled fibre piece is reminiscent of her beautiful production weavings, though the scale has been greatly increased. The piece stretched out would have run the length of the gallery, but on the wall it was divided into sections by three large pleats. The first pleat, which represented earth, was predominantly green and had a circular form; the second, which represented water, was blue and had wavy pleats; and the third, which represented fire, was red and pleated in a fan shape intended to look like flames. The symbolic meaning of each pleat was also reinforced by its weave structure. The earth pleat used a twill weave that makes a seed shape; water, a wave-patterned twill; and fire, a twill that comes to a flame-like point. Finally, the loose sections connecting the pleats used a plain weave intended to represent air.

In *Twisted Sticks: Counting Down 'til Spring,* Cathryn Miller wanted to connect the materials and techniques she uses in her weavings with the elements as they exist in nature. What she did was take five twigs, which needed earth, air, and water to grow and could themselves be used as fuel for a fire, and wrap them with fibres she had hand-dyed using earth, air, fire, and water. Four of the twigs were arranged roughly parallel to one another, with the fifth set at an angle across them. The pastel colours of the dyed fibres suggested the colours of spring, and it seemed as if the mummified twigs might burst forth at any moment.

Winston Quan was the first man to join Handmade House. Marg Foley invited Winston to join the group fifteen years ago, after he had decided to stop teaching to become a full-time jeweller. Winston now instructs stones, silver, and gold to display their beauty according to his designs. In Winston's untitled necklace, a trapezium-shaped setting holds a composite stone made of a slat of opal bounded on the left and right by slats of purple sugallite. On top of the setting was a small pillar with a pearl on either side and a hole at the top for a chain. The combination of subdued colours and uncomplicated shapes was very lyrical, reminding me of an ancient temple or adobe house.

Myrna Tyson has worked for many years in stained glass. Early on, she learned all she could from books at the library, so that when classes were finally offered in Saskatoon, she found she already knew most of what the instructors had to teach. Myrna's independent spirit has enabled her to work out some fabulous designs from a variety of sources. Myrna's portfolio is bursting with creative examples of all the things they try very hard to teach in art schools: rhythm, repetition, contrast, etc. It came as quite a surprise to me when Myrna mentioned that she finds it difficult to do "abstract" pieces, for it is precisely her ability to use abstract design elements in her work that makes it so striking. In Myrna's untitled window, [see front cover] for example, the lines of a rose are pulled and twisted into a design that is recognizable as a flower, but is also wonderfully expressive, the lines extending to the edge of the picture plane, producing interesting shapes throughout the piece.

Many people are familiar with Pat Adam's perfectly-crafted, sumptuous weavings that depict the prairie landscape, and at first glance it would be easy to assume that *Earth-Saskatchewan 1880-1993* is simply a wonderful example of Pat's past work. In fact, the piece makes a strong ecological statement about how we are destroying the soil of Saskatchewan. As usual, we recognize the overarching blue prairie sky, the distinct and unbending horizon, and flat landscape; but then, as our eyes travel from left to right across the terrain, the scene becomes more disturbing, the colour of the earth changing from opulent green to infertile grey. The change in colour is intended to alert viewers to the ongoing environmental damage caused by over-cultivation and the excessive use of fertilizers, herbicides, and pesticides in Saskatchewan.

The collaborative piece by woodworker Fiona Anderson and weaver Cathryn Miller, *Seven Dragons*, is comprised of four framed weavings joined together to form a tabletop screen, the panels of which decrease in size from left to right. The frames are made of holly wood, chosen because it is dense enough for carving, and finished with an off-white lacquer that gives the piece a smooth, ivory-like appearance. The top of each frame includes a carved creature selected to complement the imagery used in the weavings; from left to right, the carved creatures include a butterfly, a salamander, a lizard, and a fish. In the butterfly frame, a red dragonfly with translucent white wings hovers against a blue and white background; in the salamander frame, a brown and red salamander, an ancient symbol for fire, walks amidst orange and gold flames; in the lizard frame, a fierce green lizard is silhouetted against dark brown earth; and in the fish frame, a Chinese dragonfish peers out from his watery home. All of the creatures were chosen because of their connections to dragons.

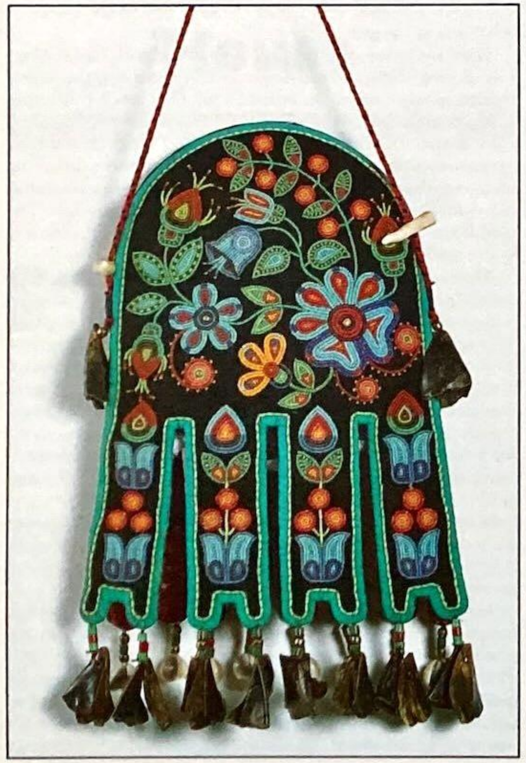
Fiona's wooden frame represents a real departure from the small carved jewellery pieces she usually produces for sale. The carvings on the frame are much more sculptural than the carvings Fiona does for her jewellery and achieve a nice balance between lyricism and sophistication. The success of the frame is all the more astonishing when you consider that this was the first time Fiona had used many of the tools necessary to do the carving.

Fiona explained how this exhibition piece had been a real opportunity for her to stretch beyond the boundaries of her regular working style. I think this was the case for everyone in the exhibition and I feel that they all met the challenge, producing some excellent, interesting, and though-provoking pieces. ❑

Making Connections

By Greg Beatty

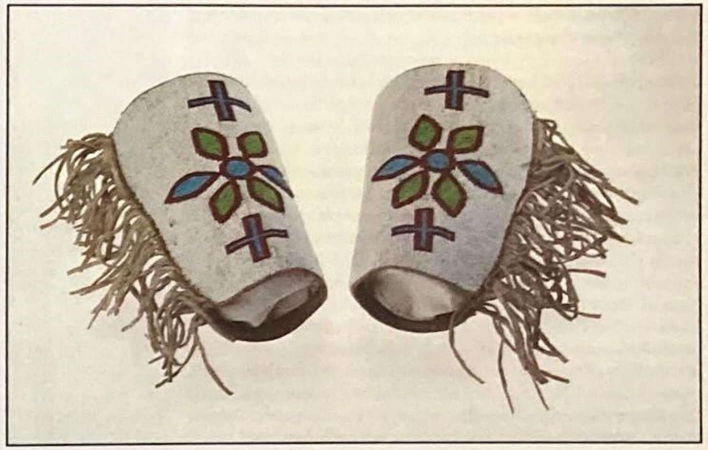
"Traditional Images/ Contemporary Reflections"
Curated by Carolyn Acoose and Douglas Bentham
Moose Jaw Exhibition Centre, Moose Jaw
August 17 to September 26, 1993



At the time of its settlement in the early twentieth century, when the province's original inhabitants, the First Nations, were joined by settlers from eastern Canada, the United States, Britain, and eastern Europe, Saskatchewan was among the most ethnically diverse regions in the world. In "Traditional Images/ Contemporary Reflections," co-curators Carolyn Acoose and Douglas Bentham present an exhibition of craft objects designed to examine the impact of our historical diversity on contemporary Saskatchewan artisans of both Native and non-Native ancestry.

Carolyn Acoose is a professor of Art History at the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College (SIFC) in Regina. In selecting the traditional native craft for this exhibition, Acoose has focused on work which dates back to the early period of Native assimilation into the dominant Euro-Canadian culture. The artifacts on display, which include a Beaded Fire Bag (pre 1905), Cree Beaded Cuffs (pre 1905), and a Siouan Belt (c. 1930), all three fashioned from semi-tanned hide, represent the type of practical craftwork that has long been an integral part of First Nations societies. While documentation of these artifacts is weak—a reflection, perhaps, of the ethnographers' assumption that First Nations cultures were timeless and unchanging—tribal affiliations can often be identified on the basis of the design patterns and colours, stitching techniques, and materials employed. First Nations that lived in northern Saskatchewan, for example, often used soft colours which seem to echo the effect of sunlight filtered through the trees, while Plains Indians generally employed brighter colours and sharper imagery which reflected the brilliant sunshine of the open prairie. While a degree of individual expression was allowed, First Nations craftspeople were generally expected to respect social conventions, producing high-quality objects that enhanced the status of both the maker and the owner.

In examining the work of contemporary First Nations artisans, two overlapping trends emerge. The first involves First Nations artisans resurrecting traditional forms of craft production as part of a more general revival of First Nations cultural traditions and religious practices. In Saskatchewan, the Fine Arts faculty at SIFC has played an important role in researching traditional techniques, teaching students to work with natural materials such as porcupine quills, wood, and bone, and to respect traditional First Nations imagery and symbols. To the untrained eye, the objects produced may sometimes seem derivative; but to the men and women who make and use them, those same objects are often immediately identifiable as the work of a particular craftsperson.



ABOVE Cree Beaded Cuffs (pre 1905), cotton, glass beads, semi-tanned hide, 23 centimetres long, artist unknown. Collection of the Saskatchewan Museum of Natural History, Regina.
OPPOSITE *Octopus Bag: Firebag*, beads, broadcloth, fabric, 35.6 centimetres in height, by G. Raymond McCallum.

The second trend involves the incorporation of non-traditional materials and techniques into the First Nations artistic repertoire. In pre-settlement days, First Nations people would gather for pow-wows and other celebrations where innovations in craft design and technique would be exchanged. With the arrival of the European settlers, barter gave Native people access to manufactured goods such as glass beads, silk thread, and cotton. More recently, many First Nations artists have graduated from academic programs that emphasize the European tradition of art. In *Kevin Haywahe, Men's Traditional Dancer* (1992), Richard Agecoutay presents a cibachrome photograph of a young participant at a pow-wow. While photography is definitely not a traditional First Nations craft medium, it does possess the same narrative potential as traditional First Nations tipi and hide painting. In addition to celebrating the strength and resiliency of contemporary First Nations culture, Agecoutay's photograph also comments on the naive view that photographs can be relied upon to provide an objective view of other cultures. Through the use of costumes, props, and contrived poses, early white photographers reinforced preconceived notions of First Nations people as a dying race of noble savages. By moving behind the camera, Agecoutay takes control of the representation of his culture and begins to shape his own cultural identity.

In an era when First Nations people are exerting a proprietary interest in traditional images, symbols, and myths, some might accuse First Nations artisans such as Agecoutay, who adopt Western motifs and technology, of reverse appropriation. But much of the controversy surrounding this issue focuses on the highly insensitive nature of market-driven appropriation. As a minority culture, First Nations people have had to develop a strong understanding of Western cultural traditions as a means of resistance to the dominating influence of those traditions. In fact, the ability of First Nations artisans to incorporate new ideas and materials into their work provides compelling evidence of the ongoing vitality of First Nations cultures.

As Carolyn Acoose notes in her catalogue essay, First Nations people have never made a distinction between "high art" and "craft." Thus, "It is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to evaluate the aesthetic form of a work [by a First Nations artist] in isolation from its practical function." Yet, with European settlement on the prairies, and subsequent slaughter of the buffalo and creation of the reserve system, the traditional lifestyle that had given meaning to Plains Indian art was lost forever. What followed was a culturally dormant period wherein Native artistic expression was limited to decorative bead and feather work and reproductions of historical artifacts for collectors and tourists. While many First Nations are undergoing a cultural renaissance today, it will be interesting to see whether contemporary Native artists will be able to infuse their work with the same spiritual intensity that distinguished the work of their ancestors.

Douglas Bentham is a Saskatchewan artist who has been collecting ethnic craft for twenty years. Like Acoose, Bentham was concerned to examine the impact of traditional craft practices on the work of contemporary Saskatchewan artisans. But because European settlement culture did not experience as wrenching a dislocation as First Nations culture, Bentham's curatorial thesis that there is an essential continuity between historical and contemporary works was much easier to demonstrate. Contemporary artisans of European heritage are essentially operating in an environment of their own making; it is to be expected that their work would be informed by traditional ethnic craft.

Despite late nineteenth-century government propaganda which described Saskatchewan as a veritable land of milk and honey, wealthy landowners had little incentive to emigrate to Saskatchewan. For the most part, immigrants to this province were either landless peasants or victims of political or religious persecution in their homelands. Only able to bring with them whatever belongings they could carry, and lacking money for store-bought furnishings, clothing, and household accessories, these pioneers had to rely on their craft skills to fashion what they needed. As might be expected, utilitarian concerns generally took precedence over aesthetic innovation, with many of the furniture pieces appearing somewhat spartan and uncomfortable to modern eyes; but the quality of the craftsmanship is high and decorative touches were often added to brighten the harsh reality of early prairie life.

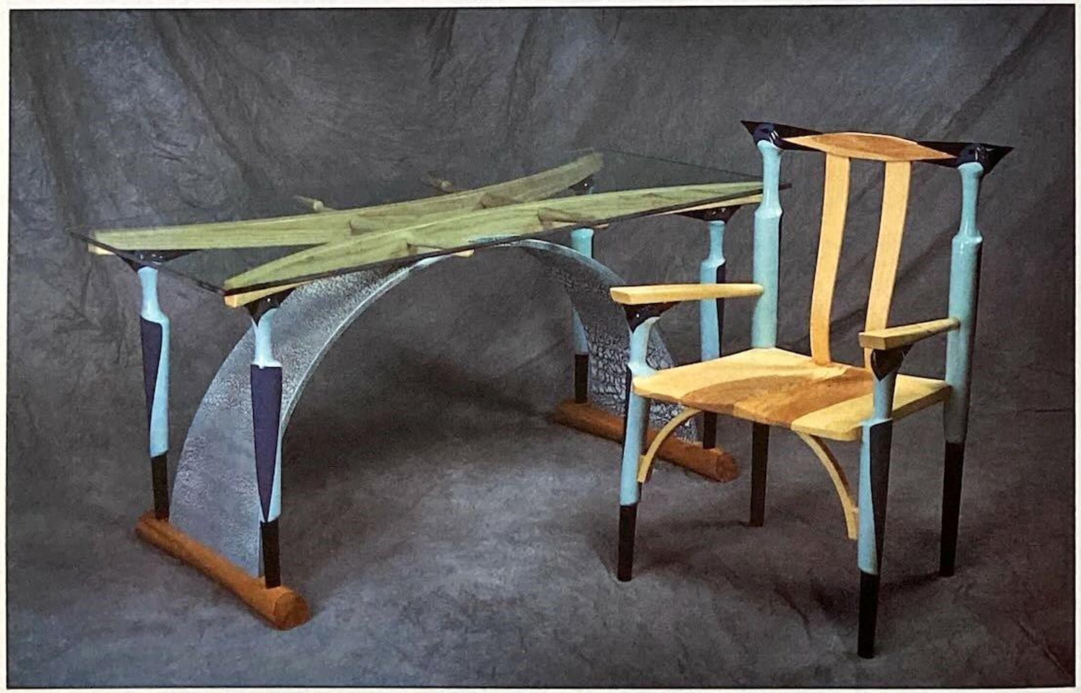
This blend of function and form is beautifully realized in the Doukhobor Rug (c. 1923) on display in this exhibition. Due to the labour-intensive method of their production, such rugs were extremely rare. While the more elaborate pile rugs, or *kovri*, were used for ceremonial occasions such as weddings and funerals, the flatwoven tapestry rugs, or *polas*, were used primarily as undercovers for sleeping benches in Doukhobor homes. When the bed was not in use, the bedding would be rolled to one side, with the rug providing a warm place to sit or play on chilly winter days.

As with traditional First Nations craft, ethnic craft has a certain "tribal" character. As Bentham states in his catalogue essay, "For reasons of nationality, language, faith, and cooperativeness, many [immigrant] groups held firmly to structural and decorative craft styles, establishing communities on the prairies that were indistinguishable from those in their homeland." The distinctive mustard yellow and black colour scheme of Mennonite furniture and the concentric square pattern of the "log cabin" quilt are both examples of craft production in which collective cultural values outweigh individual artistic expression.

In this post-modern period, when boundaries between different forms of art and craft have been progressively blurred or obliterated, contemporary Saskatchewan artisans are much more inclined to make craft production an expression of their personal identity. As mass-produced goods have replaced handcrafted objects in the home, artisans have been freed from the constraints of functionality, enabling them to explore a wider variety of aesthetic and conceptual issues in their work. Brian Gladwell, for example, presents a Wall Cabinet (1991) that recalls the type of small wall-mounted cupboard that might have been found in a cramped settler home. By making the cabinet out of cardboard, however, he challenges conventional ideas of what constitutes the proper material for making furniture. Similarly, the delicate construction of Lee Brady's slumped-glass vessel, *Family Carousel/Fate of Arion* (1992), immediately discourages any thought of everyday use. Incorporating references to the Greek myth of Arion, who was born a stallion out of the equine mating of Poseidon with his wife Demeter, the images on the vessel comment on the repressive nature of family life in patriarchal culture.

Public criticism of art and craft production usually becomes more strident when producers appear to be operating in an arbitrary manner, adding a dab of paint here, or a string of beads there, without regard to a coherent design strategy. By bringing together contemporary native and non-native craft objects with their historical antecedents, exhibitions like "Traditional Images/Contemporary Reflections" enable the public to better appreciate the essential continuity of technical, aesthetic, and conceptual discourses within the art and craft community. ❑

BELOW *Heron Table* and *Heron Chair* (1993), bent laminated plywood, birch, ash, crackled lacquer, by Jamie Russell.



Animal Act

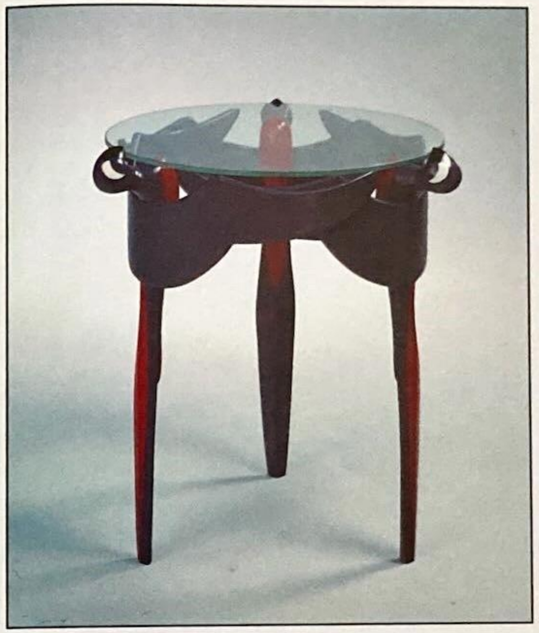
By Derek Thompson

Jamie Russell
"Animal Act"
Saskatchewan Craft Gallery, Saskatoon
June 30 to August 3, 1993

Jamie Russell has gained wide recognition and respect as a furniture designer and builder. Over the years, Russell's work has evolved from basic cabinets to more elaborate pieces incorporating bent and carved elements. In his recent exhibition "Animal Act," Russell has deliberately moved even further afield, adding a variety of new techniques and forms to his already extensive repertoire.

In terms of technique, Russell's new work includes the use of highly-refined carved and painted elements. Russell has touched on both carving and painting before, but this exhibition displays a body of work that has left the world of utilitarian furniture and has entered the realm of functional art. This transformation involves taking a well-developed craft and introducing soul.

The exhibition's soul is manifested through the animal imagery common to all of the pieces. Virtually every ancient culture has left a legacy of animal imagery, works of art revealing how cultures venerated the animals that touched their lives. Visual representations of various Palaeolithic herd animals, for instance, have been discovered adorning the walls of caves in the north coast of Spain and south-western France, while early Egyptian works quite often depicted either a human form with a beast's head, or vice versa. Russell combines observation and imagination to produce complex animal forms that convey a sense of reverence for the ancient traditions, often combined with a wry sense of humour. The *Heron Table* and *Heron Chair*, for example, both refer to a bird which the ancient Egyptians regarded as sacred, a possible home for a human soul. Similarly, *The Pack*, a relative of the *Heron Table* to the extent that both are "arc tables" and are among the more conceptual pieces in the exhibition, uses images rooted in Celtic pantheism.



LEFT *That's Not a Pair-a-keets That's a Trip-la-keets* (1993), bent laminated plywood, ash, acrylic paint, glass, by Jamie Russell.

The main difficulty involved in transporting furniture into the realm of functional art is that functional, and hence structural, considerations are quite often at odds with purely aesthetic and conceptual considerations like completeness of form and message. *The Pack*, in its simplicity, is more resolved than the *Heron Table*, the black lacquered arc of the former serving both to complement the natural finish of the two birch rails and to increase the dynamic of the dog heads carved on the rail ends. The dogs, with their ears back and windblown facial expressions, appear to be in full pursuit on a tangent from the arc, introducing an element of urgency and mystery beyond their function as parts of a table. The difficulty with this piece is that the legs of the table, which extend vertically from the somewhat heavy bases up into the throats of the dogs, tend to weaken the sense of movement that is otherwise successfully conveyed. These vertical supports are structurally necessary; if the supports were removed, the table could easily be tipped over by someone absent-mindedly leaning on one corner of the top. But it would be interesting to see this piece with the supports extending a little farther back to where one would visualize the front legs of the dogs, perhaps following an arc from lighter bases carved to look like extended paws. No doubt easier said than accomplished.

Luke "The Voyeur" Murphy is one of Russell's more playful pieces and, in Russell's view, the "magnum opus" of the exhibition. The piece consists of a beautifully designed and crafted full-length mirror supported by a large, somewhat menacing lizard who insists on peering around the side of the mirror at the viewer. The mirror frame is made of naturally-finished walnut crafted with shallow arcs for sides that define each corner and endow the piece with an Egyptian mythological presence. The mirror stands alone as a fine piece of work and is a perfect complement to its holder. The lizard, a complex exercise with its laminations, joinery, and animated carving, successfully conveys a lewd curiosity which is good for an initial chuckle and tempts the viewer to investigate a little further. After several visits to the gallery, it became apparent to me that *Luke "The Voyeur" Murphy* was drawing a lot of attention. Every time I was in the gallery I observed the large lizard, the main attraction, and his cohorts *Little Luke* and *Hold'er Newt Holder Newt* being examined by smiling and chuckling people. *Little Luke*, the study for *Luke "The Voyeur" Murphy*, seems more fluid and agile than his larger counterpart, and, if not for his smaller size, would appear more menacing.

One concern I had with some of the work was the sometimes inappropriate treatment of colour. Some of the pieces, like *The Blue Bird of Happiness Meets the Duck of Despair, Kissy Fishy Table,* and *That's not a Pair-a-keets That's a Trip-la-keets* would have been enhanced by a more subtle blending of the tones of colour or perhaps should have received a more deliberately expressionistic treatment. *Howling at the Demi Lune* is a very successful piece in its form and concept, but the naturally finished birch did not contribute to its success. The uninteresting grain and inherent flaws in the wood detracted from the completeness of the animal forms. Some surface treatment appropriate to the message would serve this piece very well.

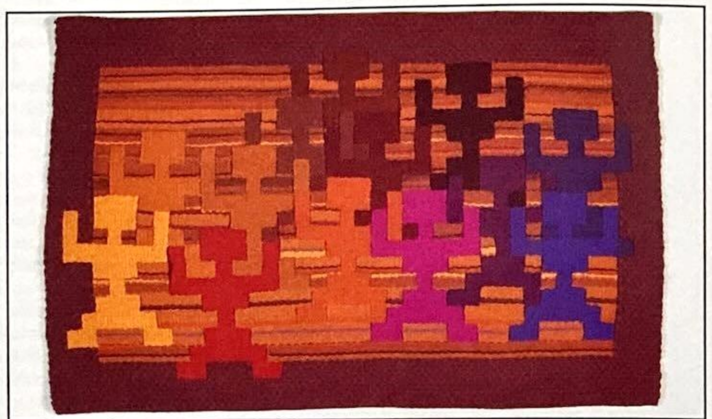
Jamie Russell approached "Animal Act" as an opportunity to expand his craft into new areas that were sparking his interest and to have some fun in the process. The result was a visually arresting and conceptually challenging assemblage that can only serve to enhance the artist's growing reputation. ❑

Recent Tapestries

By Linda Mushka

Annabel Taylor
"Recent Tapestries"
Saskatchewan Craft Gallery, Saskatoon
June 30 to August 3

Tapestry-makers enrich our environment with functional and aesthetically pleasing carpets and rugs from which we not only gain both physical and psychological warmth but also sometimes learn something about historical or contemporary events. Some may think the same effects could be achieved by simply painting the designs on a flat surface, thus avoiding the painstaking, if not tedious, task of manipulating weft over warp. However, the impact of this art form extends beyond the two dimensional arrangement of colour and shape combinations into the third dimension of depth created by using yarn as the medium of choice.



ABOVE *Wild Women Emerging* (1993), cotton warp, wool weft, by Annabel Taylor.

In her exhibition "Recent Tapestries," Annabel Taylor emphasized the three-dimensional aspect of tapestry by using the "slit tapestry" technique, which creates slight shadow lines between colour changes. Although there are no raised relief techniques in the series, one still has the urge to run one's hands over them. It is this tactile quality that "feels natural" to Annabel, and although she has tried many other forms of artistic expression, she is most comfortable with weaving.

The success of this exhibition lies in the artist's sensitive use of colour and design motifs and superb technique. Although Annabel was working from a limited palette of Lemur four-ply yarns, all of middle value and very few of the same colour range, she admits that this limitation in fact compelled her to try new combinations of colours and so to expand her range as an artist. *Garden for Winter* displays two sizes of brilliantly-coloured, expressive flower-like shapes that are reminiscent of summer. Combining these shapes with a colourful border, darker inside frame, and light and dark green diagonal stripes, Annabel has here produced a most striking and uplifting work, one I could comfortably live with for many years.

The dark rich red used in the background of *Garden for Winter*—a colour which Annabel says "typifies my ideal in rugs"—also provides a warm luxurious base for *Paradox in Time*. The border style is also similar to that used in *Garden for Winter*, with the colourful arrow shapes framed on the edge by red and internally by a dark blue/black. The diagonal lines in *Paradox in Time* are stronger, vary in width, cross one another, and occasionally run parallel. The flower shapes are limited to two sections of this puzzle, one very crowded and the other sparse. Perhaps combining one inch squares into pleasing patterns serves Annabel's desire and/or need to simplify and sort through the complexities she observes in our world. The series began with this piece which is the most complicated in pattern formation.

Segue is striking in its difference from the other pieces in the show. Woven on a cotton warp, the weft is natural tones of beige and brown. Although the panels were inspired by African strip weaving, the configurations are Navajo in style. Various traditional patterns are used: horizontal and vertical stripes, diagonals, diamonds, pyramids, and humanoid figures. As well, an unusually-shaped frog-like creature appears near the bottom of one of the panels. Initially I felt these panels may have been Annabel's starting point, knowing that she began weaving in the mid 1970s in the Navajo style. To my surprise, Annabel stated that this piece in fact emerged in the middle of the series, hence the title, which means "interlude or bridge." Though the piece seemed somewhat disconnected from the other works in the series, perhaps it enables us to ground our perspective of this show more solidly in the appropriate tradition.

Pink Lady Running provides an excellent example of Annabel's ability to blend a traditional image with current experience. The large central *mirhab* shape, which will remind any prairie person of a grain elevator, was commonly used in prayer rugs in middle-eastern countries. Placed against a green backgropund framed in navy blue, the *mirhab* contains a small, simplified figure, the "pink lady" of the title. Both the peak of the *mirhab* and the pink lady are accentuated with bright yellow and turquoise as well as a darker green and blue. The design is almost entirely symmetrical, the only exception being seen in the pink lady, who has one foot extended out further than the other. The unlikely colour combinations bring a feeling of joyful exuberance to this work.

My least favourite work in the exhibition, *Wild Women Emerging*, interestingly, best illustrates the direction in which Annabel will most likely be moving in the future. The numerous stylized figures covering the work are framed in a rusty orange and placed on a horizontally striped background. Even though the figures range in colour from yellow to purple, they are predominately shades of brown and blend into their background. This gives this work an overall mottled effect, quite unexciting compared to the major colour shifts seen in the majority of pieces.

Identified by its unique border, *Running Dog Crossing* [see back cover] is grounded in a large navy rectangle cut by two large yellow and one small purple diagonal V. Framed in light blue, the piece successfully uses colour to create the illusion of three dimensions. Two fish-eye shapes peak from the edge, one accented in red and the other in green. The squares form universal patterns, patterns that seem familiar, patterns we imagine we have seen before.

To conclude, the works included in Annabel Taylor's exhibition, "Recent Tapestries," successfully blend traditional techniques with individual experiences. In her attempt to deal with a very complex world, Annabel has produced a series of nine relatively simple and comforting works that not only reflect our own experiences with images we can interpret easily but also tie us inescapably to the future. I look forward to viewing again the results of Annabel's ongoing creative endeavors. ❑

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[*continued from page 22*] I realized I had committed a heinous act of blasphemy, somehow managing to strike to the core of this man's artistic sensibility with one swift blow. It was not until twelve years later, when I attended art school in Canada and encountered the same attitude, that I seriously began to question where this elitism originated.

The Modernist notion that equates art with a male domain of creative exclusivity, an ivory tower which exists independent of the world of art consumption and denies any association with menial paid labour, has recently been examined by a new generation of marxist-feminist critical writers. In attempting to deconstruct elitist structures, these writers have examined the historical development of the public's perception of art making and have attempted to rewrite the traditional narrative of art history from a socio-economic standpoint. During medieval times, tapestries, ceremonial vessels, paintings, windows, and so on were commissioned by churches and patrons, and the work was carried out by a number of artists, both male and female, often under the supervision of a senior craftsperson. The Renaissance saw the rise of the male-artist superstar, and the industrial revolution further altered class structure and attitudes towards creative status of men and women. In her book, *The Subversive Stitch*, Rozsika Parker explores the development of an ideology of the feminine stereotype, which she relates closely to the emergence of a clearly defined separation of art and craft:

> This division emerged in the Renaissance at the time when embroidery was increasingly becoming the province of women amateurs, working for the home without pay. Still later the split between art and craft was reflected in the changes in art education from craft-based workshops to academies at precisely the time—the eighteenth century—when an ideology of femininity as natural to women was evolving. (p. 5)

"Rather than acknowledging that needlework and painting are different but equal arts," writes Parker, "embroidery and crafts associated with the 'second sex' or the working class are accorded lesser artistic value" (p. 5). Parker speaks of the entrenchment of gender assumptions and divisions fostered by school curricula, "which still direct boys to carpentry and girls to needlework" (p. 5), and which naturally carry over into adulthood. This literature came as a godsend to me, appearing when I needed it most.

It was not until the last five minutes of discussion that the issue of gender and status came to the forefront and would have developed into a heated debate had Meszaros not reminded us our time was up. It would certainly make for a lively debate at a future forum.

A number of other points were raised which gave audience members considerable food for thought, such as the way in which financial remuneration for the sale of art, within our current commodity system, tends to pit artists one against the other in a battle for market share and status. This was in contrast to the idea put forward by one participant that art should be "morally responsible" and thereby offer a "path to the spiritual self." Thus, the discussion moved back and forth between the production and the consumption ends of art/craft until someone duly reminded us that we are all in the business of creating objects which enrich people's lives. It should therefore be our business to support one another in our creative endeavours through the sharing of ideas, with the ultimate aim of exposing more people to artistic production of all kinds.

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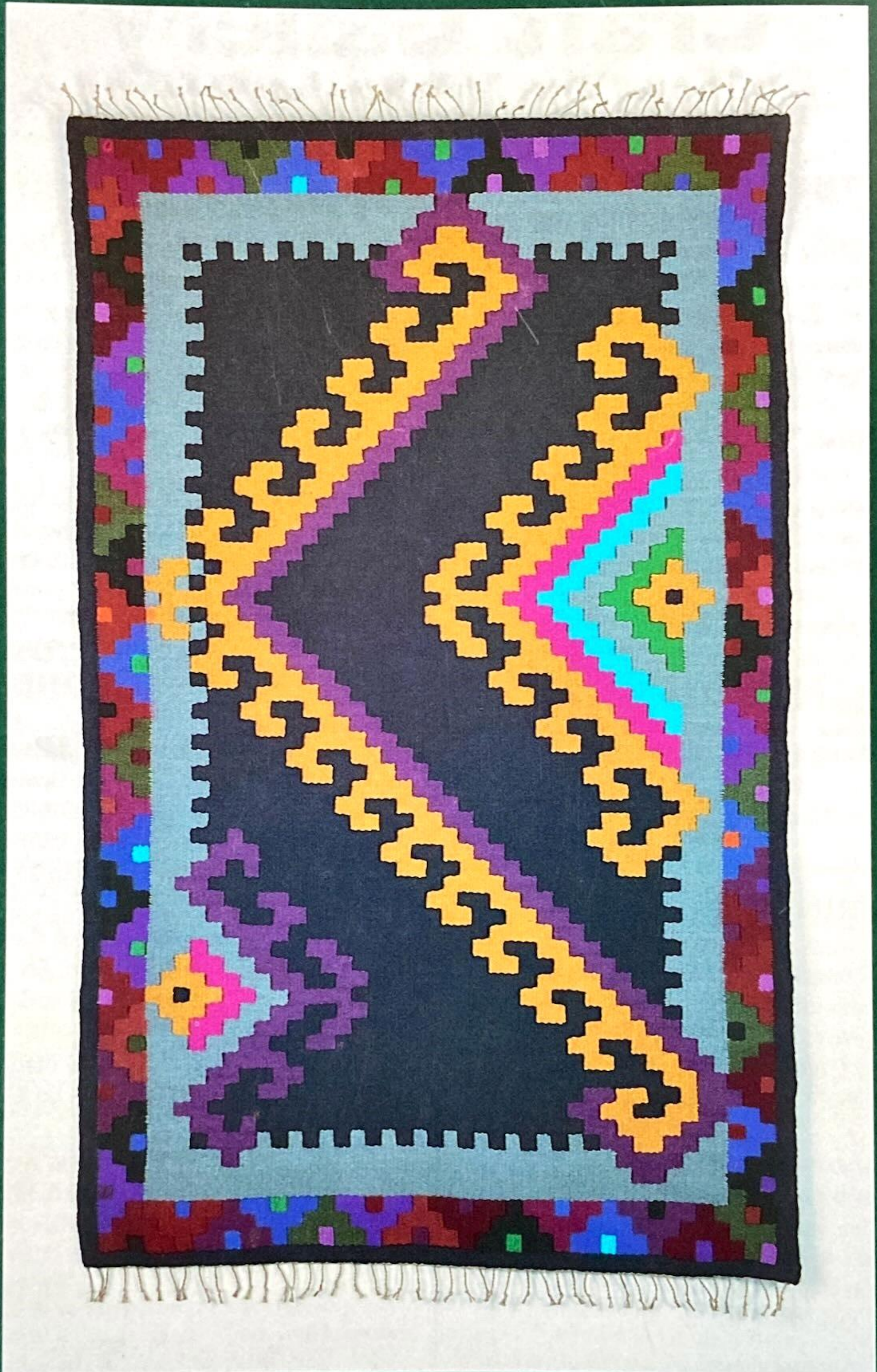

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