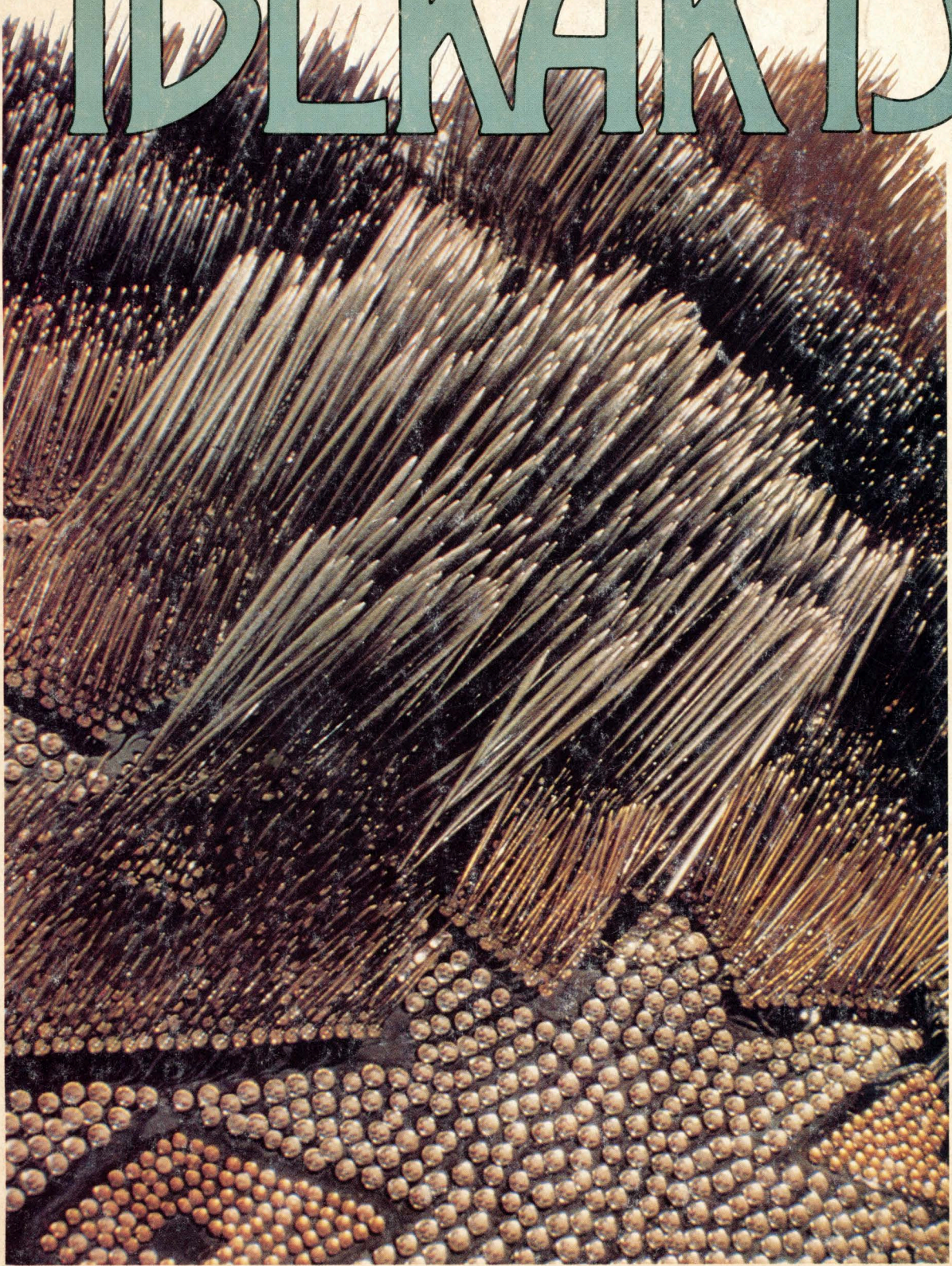
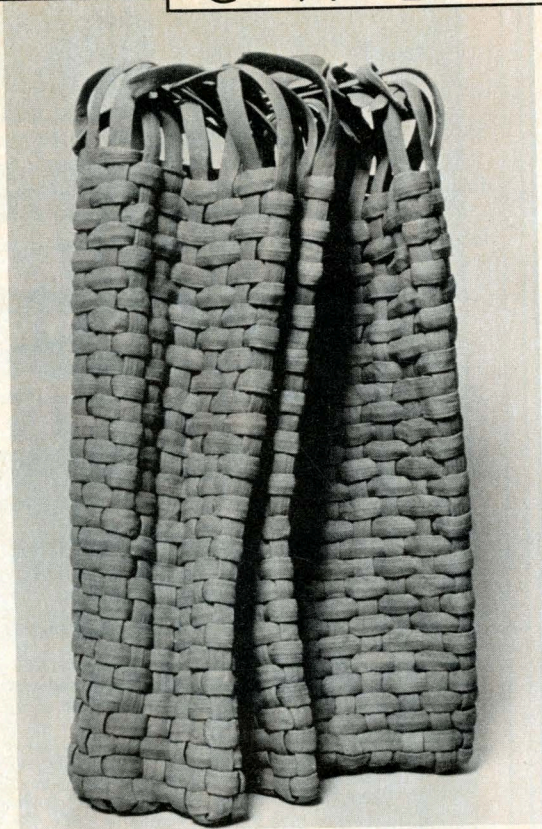


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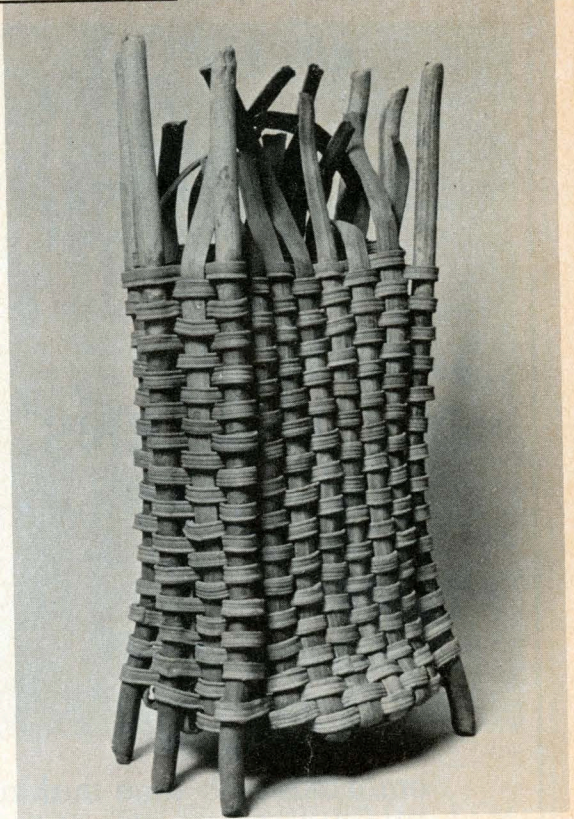


CROSSCURRENTS

INSPIRED BY FIBER: TEXTILE SENSIBILITY IN OTHER MEDIA • THE GARMENT
FORM AS IMAGE • SOFT SCULPTURE: OLD FORMS, NEW MEANINGS •
A CONVERSATION WITH COSTUMER/SCULPTOR SUSAN NININGER

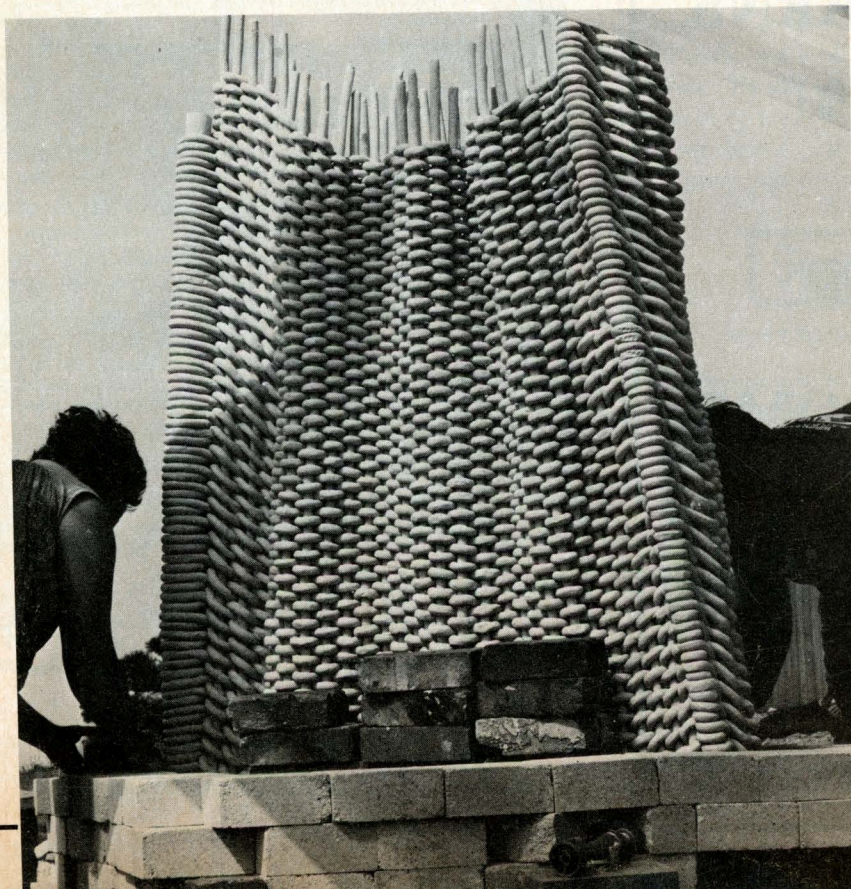


Brown Art, 1982; 41 by 22 by 9 inches. Below, constructing a kiln around a large work ready for firing at Artpark in 1982. All photos: the artist.



Red Art, 1981; 30 by 15 by 9 inches.

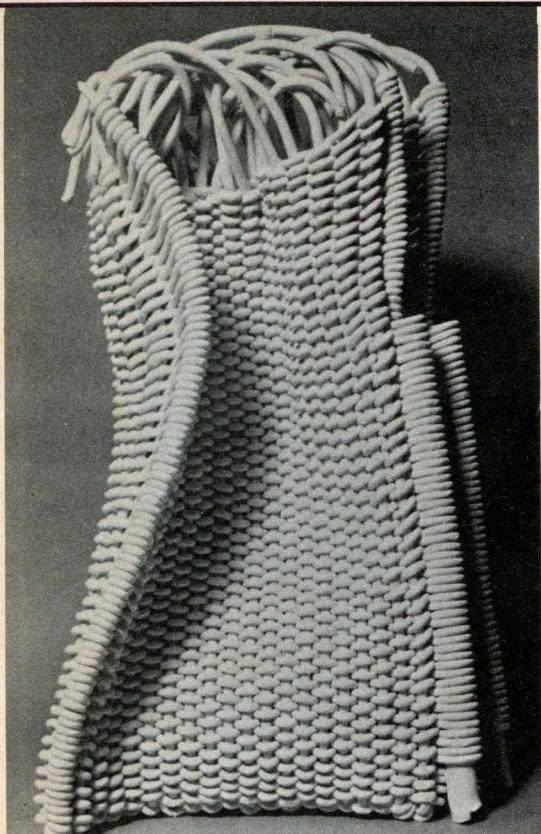
RINA PELEG: Plaiting in Clay



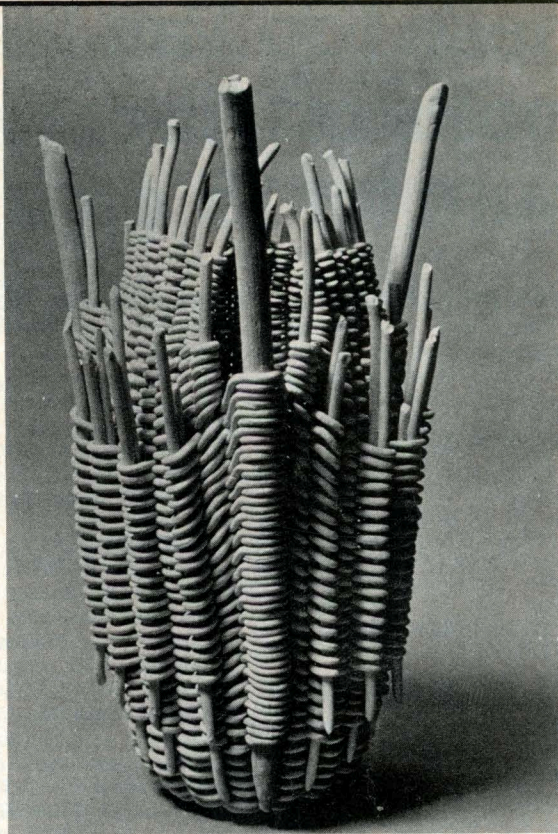
I grew up in Israel on a kibbutz. Almost everywhere I walked in that area, I practically stumbled over pottery pieces, which in the Middle East are sometimes the only remaining evidence of the rich cultures that existed in the past. My first acquaintance with clay was made through these fragments. The actual working with clay came after high school when I discovered the raw material and became aware that it offered a formless mass from which almost any shape could be made.

I first worked with the potter's wheel, making functional pieces for home use. Working with the wheel opened up new directions to explore, and I gradually discovered the many possibilities inherent in the material. Working with clay, in turn, became a way for me to make contact with the world outside the kibbutz and, ultimately, outside Israel.

When I began graduate studies at Alfred University in Alfred, New York, I first worked with hand-coiled clay structures, exploring the play of unconnected coils within these structures. Learning that a coil could be used much like a rope



White Porcelain, 1982; 42 by 22 by 9 inches.



Yellow Gold Art, 1981; 35 by 15 by 15 inches.

or string in weaving and plaiting, I decided to try "weaving" with clay coils. Since these coils are the same as those used for traditional pinching, the transition to clay weaving was simple—a transition that was all the more natural because of weaving I had done in the past. The clay baskets I am now producing are made up of coils that are plaited, not pinched. Their final shape is strong, yet, I hope, light in feeling; and these baskets breathe as do baskets made of natural fibers.

The connection between basketry and working in clay is a very natural one, both because of the natural materials traditionally used in these media and because of their interrelated history. It is commonly thought that the first clay container was produced when a hole was dug in the (clay) ground in which to make a fire. After the fire was put out, the sides of the hole were found to have been fired—making the hole a container for either liquids or solids. The next step in the development of clay vessels was to "remove" the hole from the earth by cutting around it and leaving enough clay to make

the new shape portable and self-supporting.

Eventually people realized that pots were better made by creating the structure from clay coils pinched together. The idea of using coils presumably came from baskets, a hypothesis supported by the imprint of a coiled basket found in the clay floor of a home in Jericho dating from 7000 B.C., when ceramics was in its infancy.

The idea of making clay baskets is also connected to the ancient custom of using mats or other woven material to imprint the surface of clay pots before firing, and coils resembling rope are often found as decorating elements on early pots. Baskets were also used as models that were later burnt when the clay was fired.

The difference between my plaited clay pieces and the traditional, functional works made of clay or straw is that mine are quite impractical. Although at a first glance, my work seems to relate to familiar, functional objects, my pieces are made without any functional purpose in mind. For several years I have been concerned with the "right" of the ceramicist to

create such nonfunctional works. My reason for doing so was, and is, a strong attraction to basic classical shapes. My work clearly arises from accommodating a deep emotional need, not from practical intent.

I began to understand some of the sources of my ideas upon learning about Jung's theory of the collective unconscious. Stated simply, Jung maintains that the whole human race shares a collective unconscious that manifests itself in each individual through that person's dreams, or, as in my case and that of other artists, through creativity. Both the basic shapes of ceramic utensils used ages ago and the technique of their creation also form part of our collective unconscious.

My need to make the shapes I do can be explained in part, if such explanation is necessary, by Jung's theory, my own acquaintance with the history of arts and crafts, and strong personal need. •

Rina Peleg currently lives and works in New York City.



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