



The Mint Museum
Experience Art

From the Melting Pot into the Fire
Contemporary Ceramics in Israel

February 14 – June 7, 2009

Mint Museum of Craft + Design

220 North Tryon Street

Charlotte, North Carolina 28202

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mintmuseum.org

Introduction to Israeli Ceramics: Ceramic Art in a Multicultural Immigrant Society

Initial questions about identity

The beginning of Israeli ceramic art is characterized by a period during the 1930s when ceramic artists were faced with the question, "What is Israeli ceramics?" Many artists grappled with this issue at that time. Hedwig Grossman, Hanna Harag-Zuntz, Hava Samuel and Paula Aharonson, who arrived in Israel in the waves of immigration from Germany during the 1930s and were among the first to establish ceramic workshops there, continued their creative endeavors in the spirit of the ongoing search for the definition of Israeli ceramic art. Numerous next-generation artists, such as Yosef Blumenthal, Gedula Ogen, Pnina Zamir-Amir, Yehudit Meir, Yocheved Marx, Amnon Israeli, Naomi Bitter and Nora Kochavi and many others continued this quest. Until the end of the 1970s, a debate raged about the use of local raw materials and colors that reflect the local landscape (mainly yellow, orange and brown). Furthermore, questions arose regarding a symbolic connection with the land: on the one hand establishing a connection to archeological findings that substantiate our presence in the region and create an awareness of historical continuity, while on the other hand relating to the local landscape and scenes of daily life expressed in terms of Orientalist sentimentality.

At the same time in Israel, an extensive ceramics industry developed that highlighted the issue of what represents Israeli ceramic design. During this period ceramic factories enhanced their lines by employing practicing ceramic artists to design innovative forms and hand-paint decorations on their industrially manufactured products.



MICHAELA ORSTAV, 1977-
Forms 2006
hand-built porcelain
Courtesy of the Artist
Photographed by Leonid Padrul-Kwitosky



Studios established by the first ceramic artists in Israel were influenced by the ramifications of the industrial revolution, mainly by the mechanization and industrialization of manual production methods in the sphere of ceramics, just as in other areas. These artists were also impacted by their European education, which embraced the philosophy that an artist's studio/work reflects the personal expression of the artist as an individual. This stands in stark contrast to the view of an artist as part of a traditional community where material knowledge is passed down from father to son for the purpose of providing a service—in this case to produce utensils for daily use by members of the community—a view embodied in traditional Palestinian pottery that typified local activity in the field for hundreds of years until the mid-20th century. In many parts of the world, a cultural continuum exists that is part of natural changes in the transition from traditional communities to contemporary artistic endeavor. However, from an historical viewpoint, the traditional potter community in Israel is Palestinian while the contemporary pottery scene is a multicultural Jewish one. This development creates a hiatus in the continuum and a different process of change in the transition from the traditional to the contemporary, creating one of the distinguishing features of Israeli ceramic art.

LEA SHEVES. 1947-
Essence of an Ornament (detail) 2006
hand-built stoneware, under glazes
Courtesy of the Artist
Photographed by Leonid Padrul-Kwitosky

From the “Melting Pot” to Ceramic Art in a Multicultural Immigrant Society

Much has been written about the “melting pot,” a concept ingrained upon the establishment of the State of Israel in order to create the kind of collective awareness that transforms a diverse population of immigrants into a homogenous society. This concept was in line with the notion of creating the “new Jew” and erasing all vestiges of the Diaspora. Past attempts to blur dissimilarities through coerced idealization are today subject to severe criticism, both by those who suffered directly from the partial obliteration of the original identity of their countries of origin (such as immigrants from Arab and North African countries, and Holocaust survivors) and by various sociologists who regard it as an artificial concept that is not compatible with the natural inclination of a group or an individual to retain culture, customs, language and so forth as part of a personal code engraved in each of us on the deepest possible level.

The transition in the Israeli consciousness from an artificial society with pseudo-homogenous qualities to a multicultural society, if anything, is indeed significant when we refocus on the question that continues to engage us: What is Israeli ceramic art?

Israeli ceramic art today is typified by the diversity and profusion that derive from the influences of a myriad of cultures from around the world—both those found in the societies of the origin of immigrants who make up Israel's cultural texture, and from the adoption of both traditional and contemporary work methods. Further influences in the field emanate from young design school graduates who are involved

DINA SHAHAR. 1968-
Urban Tiles 2006
 polymer coated ceramic tiles, photos by sublimation printing
 Courtesy of the Artist
 Photographed by Leonid Padrul-Kwitosky



in widespread design activity in Israel and abroad, which impacts the definitions of various crafts, including that of the ceramic arts. This trend was initiated by Siona Shimshi and Lydia Zavatzky at the Bezalel Academy of Art in Jerusalem.

Ceramic art in Israel is led by a group of uncompromising artists who work under complex cultural, political and economic conditions. These circumstances serve to cultivate an original and unique approach that unquestionably justifies viewing this artistic endeavor as having intrinsically outstanding qualities.

Shlomit Bauman

Visiting Lecturer of Ceramic Design, Holon Institute of Technology (HIT)
Ceramic Artists Association of Israel (CAAI) Director 1998-2005

RONIT ZOR. 1952-
Moat (detail) 2005-2006
 hand-built stoneware, brass, threads, iron, water
 Courtesy of the Artist
 Photographed by Leonid Padrul-Kwitosky





Public Programs

Gallery Talks

Contemporary Ceramics in Israel, Mint Museum of Craft + Design

Sunday, February 15, 3:00 pm

Free to Mint members, or after admission

Artist and co-organizer of the exhibition *From the Melting Pot into the Fire: Contemporary Ceramics in Israel* Yael Novak will discuss the dynamic works created by artists in Israel today. Influenced by the melting pot of cultures, faiths and histories in the country, Ms. Novak will help visitors understand how territory and identity are expressed through ceramic sculpture and vessels.

Curators' Tour, Mint Museum of Craft + Design

Thursday, March 5, 2:00 - 2:45 pm

Space is limited, registration requested: 704/337-2098 or programs@mintmuseum.org. Free to Mint members, or after admission

Tour *From the Melting Pot into the Fire: Contemporary Ceramics in Israel* and *The Miniature Worlds of Bruce Metcalf* with Annie Carlano, Director of Craft + Design and Allie Farlowe, Assistant Curator of Craft + Design.

Photograph of the Dead Sea by P. John Palmer.

Film

Knowledge is the Beginning, Mint Museum of Art

Tuesday, February 24, 7:00 pm

FREE, space is limited, registration requested: 704/337-2098 or programs@mintmuseum.org.

Pre-screening in conjunction with 2009 Charlotte Jewish Film Festival

Complementing themes such as identity within the exhibition in *From the Melting Pot into the Fire: Contemporary Ceramics in Israel*, *Knowledge is the Beginning* is the story of the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra, where young Arabs and Jews perform and live side by side. It is a film about what music can do; the way it can transcend cultural barriers, bring people together, defeat prejudice and overcome religious and political differences. For Daniel Barenboim, founder of the ensemble, the orchestra is a symbol for what could be achieved in the Middle East.

Artists' Demonstrations

Taste of Art Fridays, Hearst Plaza beside the Mint Museum of Craft + Design

Select Fridays, 11:30 am - 1:00 pm

FREE!

Bring your lunch and meet your friends at the Hearst Plaza alongside the Museum Shop at the Mint Museum of Craft + Design. Enjoy area artists demonstrating their crafts at lunchtime. *Weather permitting.*

MARTHA RIEGER. 1964-
My Melting Pot 2006
 wheel-thrown white clay, paper stickers,
 terra sigillata, Raku firing
 Courtesy of private collector
 Photographed by Leonid Padrul-Kwitosky



April 17 – Julie Wiggins, Potter

Wiggins' utilitarian wheel-thrown and hand-built creations combine Eastern and Western influences, while her distinctive gestural lines reflect the inspiration she finds in architecture and the environment.

May 8 – Adrienne Dellinger, Potter & Executive Director of Clayworks Studio

Dellinger's pots are made from hand-dug native North Carolina clay and are fired in a traditional Catawba Valley ground hog kiln built in the 1930s. Her glazes consist of wood ash, native clay and recycled glass. To learn more, visit clayworksinc.org.

June 19 – Leon Nichols, Potter

Known for his large pots, Nichols has been working with clay since 1970. Sections of Nichols' pots are stiffened with the help of a torch, then molded together and decorated. To learn more, visit leonnicholspottery.com.

Special Workshops

Clay Workshop: A Sense of Place

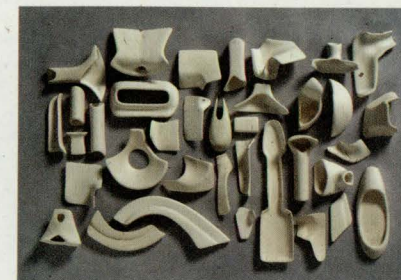
Front Lawn, McColl Center for Visual Art, 721 N. Tryon St.

Saturday, March 21, 9:00 am – 3:00 pm

Tuition: \$45 Mint or McColl Center member, \$65 non-member

This collaborative clay workshop with McColl Center artist-in-residence Hedi Schoebel and UNCC ceramic sculptor Keith Bryant complements the exhibition *From the Melting Pot into the Fire: Contemporary Ceramics in Israel*. Participants will explore the way a sense of place reflects cultural as well as personal identity. The workshop will culminate in an installation piece which will be left on the front lawn of the McColl Center. The workshop is limited to 18 participants. Materials will be provided.

ADA YOELS. 1977-
SixOy 2006
 mold-cast stoneware
 Courtesy of the Artist
 Photographed by Leonid Padrul-Kwitosky



The Butterfly Project, Mint Museum of Craft + Design

Sunday, April 19, 2:00 pm & repeated at 3:00 pm

FREE, space is limited, registration requested: 704/337-2098 or programs@mintmuseum.org.

In partnership with the Levine Jewish Community Center

Using the butterfly as a symbol of transformation, hope, faith and religious freedom, and inspired by a poem written by a child during the Holocaust, *The Butterfly Project* started with a group of students at the San Diego Jewish Academy. Now participants around the world are creating ceramic butterflies towards a goal of 1.5 million, representing the 1.5 million children who died in the Holocaust. In this workshop led by a team from the Levine Jewish Community Center, families will learn some historic background and then decorate a 5-6 inch bisque-fired butterfly that will be added to a community wall of remembrance in Shalom Park later in 2009. Join this special opportunity to honor Holocaust survivors, celebrate the exhibition *From the Melting Pot into the Fire: Contemporary Ceramics in Israel* and bring the Charlotte community together through this meaningful and inspiring hands-on ceramic art project.

From the Melting Pot into the Fire: Contemporary Ceramics in Israel is organized by The Ceramic Artists Association of Israel (CAAI).

This exhibition is sponsored by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Israel, Association of Israel's Decorative Arts (AIDA) **AIDAarts.org**, and The Founders' Circle Ltd., the national support affiliate of the Mint Museum of Craft + Design.

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