

Historical Ceramics Market Strong

While prices for paintings seem to be in a slump, the market for historical ceramics continues to hold its own, with no end in sight for increases in values, particularly when considering significant works from both East and West. In fact, historical ceramics has consistently been one of the best forms of investment.

Still, dealers and collectors were amazed when prerecession records for Rookwood pots were blown away at an auction of some 1200 pieces in Cincinnati last June. Much of the private collection sold for double its high-end estimate, but the show-stopper was a Rookwood vase (decorated by Kataro Shirayamadani) that sold for \$198,000 (\$180,000 plus the standard 10% buyer's premium). Altogether, the auction grossed over \$2.4 million. Evidently, art buyers have finally come to realize the value of American art pottery and are acting on their feelings in lieu of investing in the traditional art markets of fine painting and sculpture.

Nor has buying of substantial historical ceramics been limited to the auction scene. Earlier in the month, half a world away, dealers were pleasantly surprised by brisk sales at the annual "International Ceramics Fair & Seminar" in London. Within the first 20 minutes, Robert Kleiner & Company sold two of its most important pieces—a Chinese turquoise-ground famille rose vase decorated with bats and scrolls (Qianlong seal, mark and period), and a Song-dynasty bulb bowl (Jungyao)—for approximately \$74,000 each to Far Eastern collectors.

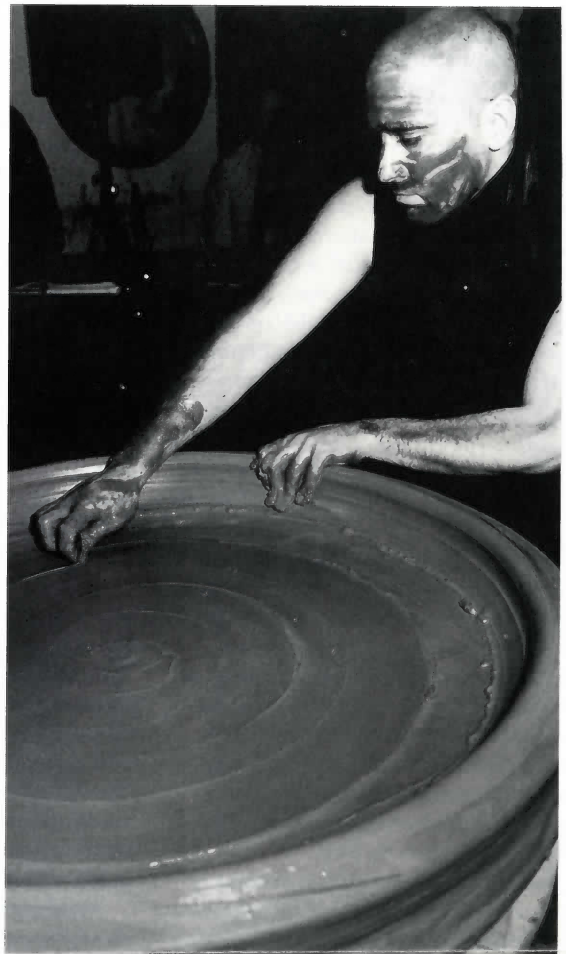
Antik West A.B. sold Oriental ware to a number of museums, including a (Chinese) Jingdezhen tureen to the Peabody Museum of Salem, Massachusetts, for approximately \$28,000; and a (Chinese) Qing-dynasty bowl to a Finnish museum for approximately \$9500.

English and Continental ceramics also fared well. Dragesco-Cramoisan sold a (French) Sèvres teapot, circa 1759, for approximately \$21,400, while Kate Foster Limited sold a (German) Bottger stoneware teapot, circa 1710, for around \$32,900; Alistair Sampson Antiques Limited sold a (British) Leeds creamware centerpiece, circa 1775, for approximately \$15,600.

Alistair Sampson summed up the dealers' surprise and delight in the four-day sale: "No dealer ever does as well as he would like, but most did better than they had hoped."

Tetkowski: Ground War

Did the Persian Gulf War come and go without artistic comment? Where are the Desert Storm/Shield visual statements? Are modern wars over so fast that no one has



Neil Tetkowski performance: Smeared with a bloodlike substance, head freshly shaved, he pounded and threw clay on a 3-foot bat to live jazz accompaniment.

time to translate opinions into a major body of work—pro or con or somewhere in between?

Have contemporary artists lost their political or social consciousness? Little Panama art has surfaced. Have you seen any Grenada-influenced art at all?

Even the less-emotional impact of the recession on the arts doesn't seem to have generated impassioned art from anyone. Do ceramists share this seeming indifference toward social/political content?

For Neil Tetkowski (Buffalo, New York) the answer to such questions was/is a resounding "No." In fact, Tetkowski found a way to kill two birds with one stone: the need to strongly communicate his feelings about the distant war, and the need of the not-so-distant Arts Council in Buffalo and Erie County for more funding.

He decided to hold a benefit for the arts council in his studio—a reversal of the typical artist/arts council relationship. The council had, after all, helped many artists in times of need. Why not help the council in return?

Stylish invitations were sent out and tickets sold for a ceramic performance piece called "Ground War" at Tetkowski's studio, a reclaimed/renovated bindery in urban Buffalo. There were hors d'oeuvres and cocktails, with mimes serving drinks and staffing the coatroom.

During the first part of the benefit, Tetkowski schmoozed with the well-dressed patrons, then disap-

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Patrons watch as Neil Tetkowsky combines ceramics and performance art about the war in Kuwait.



PHOTOS: IRENE HAUPT, ROBERT L. SMITH, COULTER YOUNG

peared to begin the performance with a video-documented head shaving. Having smeared himself with a bloodlike substance, he reemerged to work at a center-stage potter's wheel surrounded by performing jazz musicians. A 3-foot "disk" was ceremoniously thrown, lowered to the floor, then decorated with ammunition in concert with the music. Marks were made by individual bullets, cartridge belts and full rifle clips being dragged across/impressed in the clay. Even a large mortar round was used to make an impression, as were two small crucifixes.

On completing the disk, Tetkowsky extended the performance by leaving his studio and entering a restaurant next door. Customers sat speechless as they watched the "blood-" and clay-splattered artist move gesturally from table to table before retreating.

After cleaning up, Tetkowsky returned to mingle with the benefit crowd. He was greeted by well-wishers expressing admiration for a brave and sometimes chilling performance. The benefit raised \$5000 after expenses.

U.K. Associations Squabble

by Philip Stanbridge

The figurehead group for United Kingdom craft pottery has been, since 1956, the Craftsmen Potters Association (C.P.A.). Recently, however, the normally quiet "middle English" character of the studio pottery scene has been polarized by criticism and dissent surrounding this institution's role and value in the future of the craft.

First, some background: The early postwar years were characterized by optimism, a real enthusiasm to set to and again build "a land fit for heroes." The rebuilding was not just of homes, new towns and a welfare system, but also of a nation's cultural life, which had gone so long disrupted and discontinued "for the duration of hostilities." A part of that culture was the dormant embryo of studio ceram-

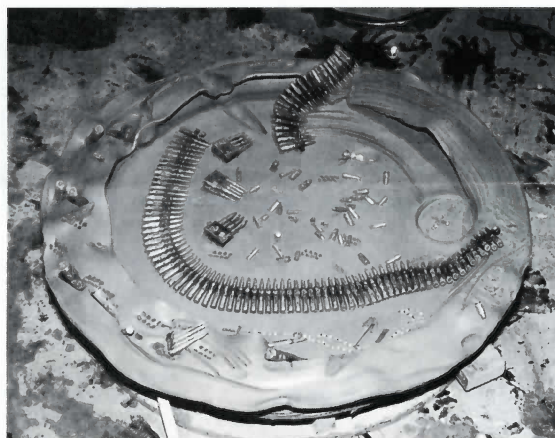
ics, which had at least been fertilized if not brought to full term in the 1930s by the work of Bernard Leach and his followers. As restrictions on fuel and supplies were lifted and everyone returned from fighting and other war work, potters full of optimism and creativity hastened to supply the interesting, vibrant wares that people had been deprived of during the interminable years of dreary, gray, wartime utility.

From this surge of interest and activity arose the need for a voice and representation for these potters; first came a magazine (*Pottery Quarterly*) in 1954, then two years later the C.P.A. was formed. Over the years, the association did a lot of important work in promoting ceramics to the public. By 1970, its newsletter had evolved into a magazine (*Ceramic Review*). Full membership entitled a potter to appear in another C.P.A. publication (a substantial directory called *Potters*), and to exhibit ware at what became the Craftsmen

Potters Shop and Gallery, now in London's famed Carnaby Street district.

Those early days saw a catholic approach to the definition of "craftsmen," so people running production workshops as well as individual potters were welcome. In fact, production people invested much of the early effort in launching the organization. One cannot detect then the strains of studio elitism that were to follow. Indeed, the studio workers seemed at least content to be within an organization containing such small factory concerns.

Ironically, Bernard Leach would not acknowledge this new child of the movement that he had to some extent fathered. The open approach to membership and an early disinclination to claim some aesthetic high ground found no favor with Leach; he refused membership, as he felt that "without selection, unworthy work would be promoted." Because he was a figure of such importance, a number of attempts to secure his support were made, not



The finished disk, gouged and impressed with a mortar round, ammunition and two small crucifixes.