

## Studio Ceramic Art

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**\*\* Why do we choose to challenge ourselves physically, emotionally and spiritually to develop the knowledge and skills required to make new things - ideas & objects? Why do we create something new then place it in the world? At what risk?**

~~ People, who assume responsibility to challenge the status quo and put forward new ideas & objects, are willing to risk change by transforming themselves in an effort to understand and communicate their own personal humanity, not only in Arts & Crafts but in almost all fields of human endeavor.

~~ It is the individuals who question then challenge the status quo, more often than not in search of new and better solutions, that ultimately move the needle of progress. This is mankind by 'fits and starts'; humanity's search for understanding and meaning - What is it ALL about and what does it ALL mean.

**\*\* The act of making objects out of clay is recognized to be one of the first creative acts of early humans.**

~~ Clay-based statuettes were formed by hand to represent humans, animals, religious objects many millennia prior to written language.

~~The oldest clay figurine ever found, the 'Venus of Dolni Vestonice' is dated 31,000 to 27,000 years ago, from a Paleolithic site in what is today the Czech Republic.

~~While the oldest written symbols Cuneiform, abstract wedge shaped symbols on clay tablets, date back just 10,000 years.

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~~The longevity of these ancient artifacts both figurine & cuneiform tablet is due to the permanent qualities of the earth minerals comprising clay, which transform after being exposed to higher temperatures in fire.

**\*\*Clay, the main material used in pottery and ceramics, has a central role in mankind's journey from prehistoric nomadic hunter-gatherers to modern day space-age explorers.**

**\*\*Ceramic pottery first appeared in Eastern Asia, Jiangxi Region of Southern China about 20,000 years ago. Found in Xianrendong less than 100 km south of Jingdezhen, a main center for Chinese ceramics for centuries. Pottery then spread to Japan and the Russian far East about 16,000 years ago. As early as 11,000 years ago clay-based ceramic vessels were used for liquids, foods & faith based Art objects.**

~~ Early pottery was hand formed in monochrome earth shades and decorated by scratching or painting simple geometric motifs. That said, glazed pottery has been found in Mesopotamia and Egypt dating back 5,500 years. It is believed the Egyptians first discovered pottery glazing when the sand at the bottom of a pit "kiln" melted to form glass.

~~ Sometime between 8,000 and 6,000 years ago the pottery wheel was invented in Mesopotamia, which revolutionized pottery making. The wheel allowed for faster symmetrical forming techniques.

~~ Along with forming and design skills more sophisticated kilns were developed for firing.

~~ All of which lead to pottery becoming objects of expressive, decorative Art as well as utilitarian vessels.

~~The Greeks developed kilns capable of firing in oxidation, an oxygen fed atmosphere, and in reduction, an oxygen starved atmospheres, approximately 8,000 years ago.

**\*\* In Asia, the Chinese developed porcelain from kaolin clay mixed with petuntse (a stone of feldspar, mica & quartz), which when fired to high temperatures reduced porosity to less than 1%. The Chinese developed high temperature dragon tunnel kilns capable of reaching 2,462 F (1,350 degrees centigrade) about the 6th century, suitable for firing porcelain. ‘Porcelain’ derived its name from “porcellana” a term Marco Polo used to describe pottery he saw in China. During the Middle Ages porcelain spread along the Silk Road to Islamic countries and later Europe.**



Han Dynasty Pot  
Silk Road Collection



Unique brown glazed Han Dynasty Pot  
Silk road Collection

**\*\* Europe did not develop kilns capable of reaching porcelain temperatures until the 16th century. It was the development of synthetic materials, refractories, that allowed Europeans to build higher temperature blast furnaces; a development which kick started the ‘Industrial Revolution’ leading to production of coke, cement, chemicals and ceramics.**

~~The English economic historian Arnold Toynbee described Britain’s economic development between 1760 and 1840, as the ‘Industrial Revolution’. It was a transformative or disruptive, depending on how one views this period, for pottery as well as European society.

~~The timeless traditions of the individual potter artisans was supplanted by factories with machinery of mass-production.

~~The role of the ‘Craftsman’ in society changed drastically and most potters and crafts-people found themselves without work. Skill demand shifted almost entirely to mass production designers. Thus pottery became more affordable to the public at the cost of a decline in artistic quality and individuality of pieces.

**\*\* The Arts and Crafts movement of the late 19th and early 20th centuries was in reaction to the depersonalization and standardization of the Industrial Revolution.**

~~. Potters were encouraged to view themselves as artists and to experiment with form, techniques and glazes. A renewal of traditional ceramic skills combined with interest in personal expression through clay, provided the foundation for the vibrant and dynamic ceramic pottery scene we have today.

~~It was not until after World War II that today's Studio Ceramics movement came about first in Western countries from whence it spread and expanding to all parts of the world.

**\*\*Today's Studio Ceramic Art scene is an amalgamation of ancient techniques and contemporary innovations as well as the knowledge gained from everything in-between.**

~~The variety of hand-building, wheel throwing, glazing and firing techniques as done by practicing artisans around the world is nothing short of amazing.

~~Pottery has transcended its utilitarian roots, providing personal and cultural expression. The act of forming objects in clay offers a unique sense of continuity and belonging to one of mankind's most fundamental creative pursuits.

~~It is a conversation that has taken place between cultures and peoples over millennia. Making objects in clay takes time, thought, dexterity, creativity, focus, even vision. It informs us about the culture, the Artist, the ideas of our times well as the past.

~~The meditative and restorative aspects of working in clay can't be omitted here because the effort is to connect with self, create objects and share that creation with others. It is one of the most fundamental of human needs as a social species, the aspirations to be part of it ALL creating and contributing to the ongoing story of mankind.

## GEORGE OHR - American (1857 - 1918)

Active in the late 19th and early 20th century, **George Orr was nicknamed “The Mad Potter of Biloxi”**. He was looked upon at the time as a ‘Nut Case’. Until 50 years later when his ceramics were discovered in a garage. Pottery in his time was conservative, simple, utilitarian & straightforward. Ohr’s Art pottery was wild, both in form and glaze, with wavy, crumpled, undulating shapes and shocking painterly glazes. Ohr knew his sculptural pots were innovative, imaginative and required great skill; but his work was snubbed by the ‘Arts and Crafts Movement’, the ceramics community & the people of Biloxi.

Ohr stated in an interview in 1901, **“When I am gone, my work will be praised, honored and cherished,”**. **Today Ohr is recognized as a major pioneer of American ceramics.** The World famous architect Frank Gehry designed a museum in his name.

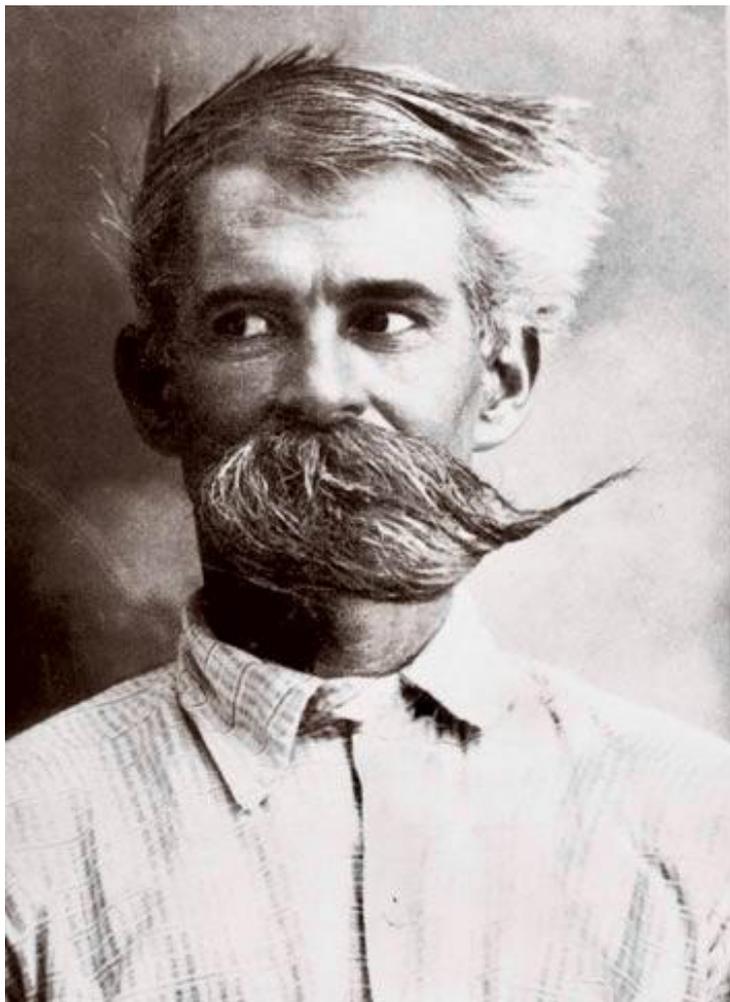
Ohr’s works can be found at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Smithsonian. His work has made a lasting impact on the ceramic’s community and the Art world. **He has inspired generations of ceramic artists to innovate and work the medium in unique ways.**

~Ohr

Born in Biloxi in 1857, he apprenticed at a pottery in New Orleans when friend, Joseph Fortune Meyer, invited him at age 22 to work at his family run pottery. **After learning to throw pots, Ohr spent over a year traveling by train through 16 states to visit other potteries.** In 1883, at age 26, Ohr returned to Biloxi and started his own pottery. It was the first of several studios which Ohr would later adorn with a **BOLDLY** lettered sign, describing himself as the “greatest art potter on Earth,” his work “unrivaled.” Ohr later wrote, “When I found the potter’s wheel, I felt it all over like a wild duck in water.” Ohr predicted, ‘Eventually the Nation will build a temple to my genius’, which was laughable at the time. Well, finally the people of Biloxi engaged Frank Gehry to go exactly that and in 2010 the Ohr-O’Keefe Museum of Art open.

In 1909, Ohr shuttered his pottery and lived off an inheritance for the rest of his life. He died in 1918, of throat cancer. **Today Ohr is recognized as the first to begin to deconstruct the pottery form and approach it as an Artist trying to make an expressive creative statement.** His work has made a lasting impact on the ceramic’s community and the Art world. Inspiring generations of ceramic Artists to innovate and work with clay in unique ways. Some of the many Artists moved by his legacy include Betty Woodman, Peter Voulkos, Kathy Butterly, Sterling Ruby & Takuro Kuwata.

George Ohr



Ohr



Ohr



Ohr



Ohr



Ohr



Ohr



Ohr



Ohr



Ohr



## PETER VOULKOS - American (1924 - 2002)

Voulkos completed his MFA at the California College of Arts and Crafts in 1952. Then went on to teach at the Otis Art Institute before moving to UC Berkeley to establish a Ceramics Department; where he taught until retirement in 1985. **Voulkos is often called the 'father of the American Clay Revolution', also known as the 'Craft-to-Art' movement.**

In 1954, while at Otis, Voulkos just left the constraints of conventional utilitarian ceramics behind and began constructing large, heavy sculptures. His clay constructions took on the 'gestural spontaneity and visual movement' of Abstract Expressionism Art. **There was also a Zen-like acceptance of imperfections characteristic of Japanese traditional pottery.** Perhaps influenced by the famous English Potter Bernard Leach, who lived and made pottery in the Far East - Korea & China but mainly in Japan - for many years before returning to England.

Voulkos combined wheel throwing with slab-building, traditional glazes with epoxy paint, figuration with abstraction and built large clay structures with complex internal supports. **He rejected orthodoxy in technique mixing clay forms** including cylinders, bowls, spheres, plates, clay slabs, which he would pound with a mullet, hand tear, thumb press together and paddle as he constructed his loosely flowing spontaneous pieces.

Voulkos



Voulkos



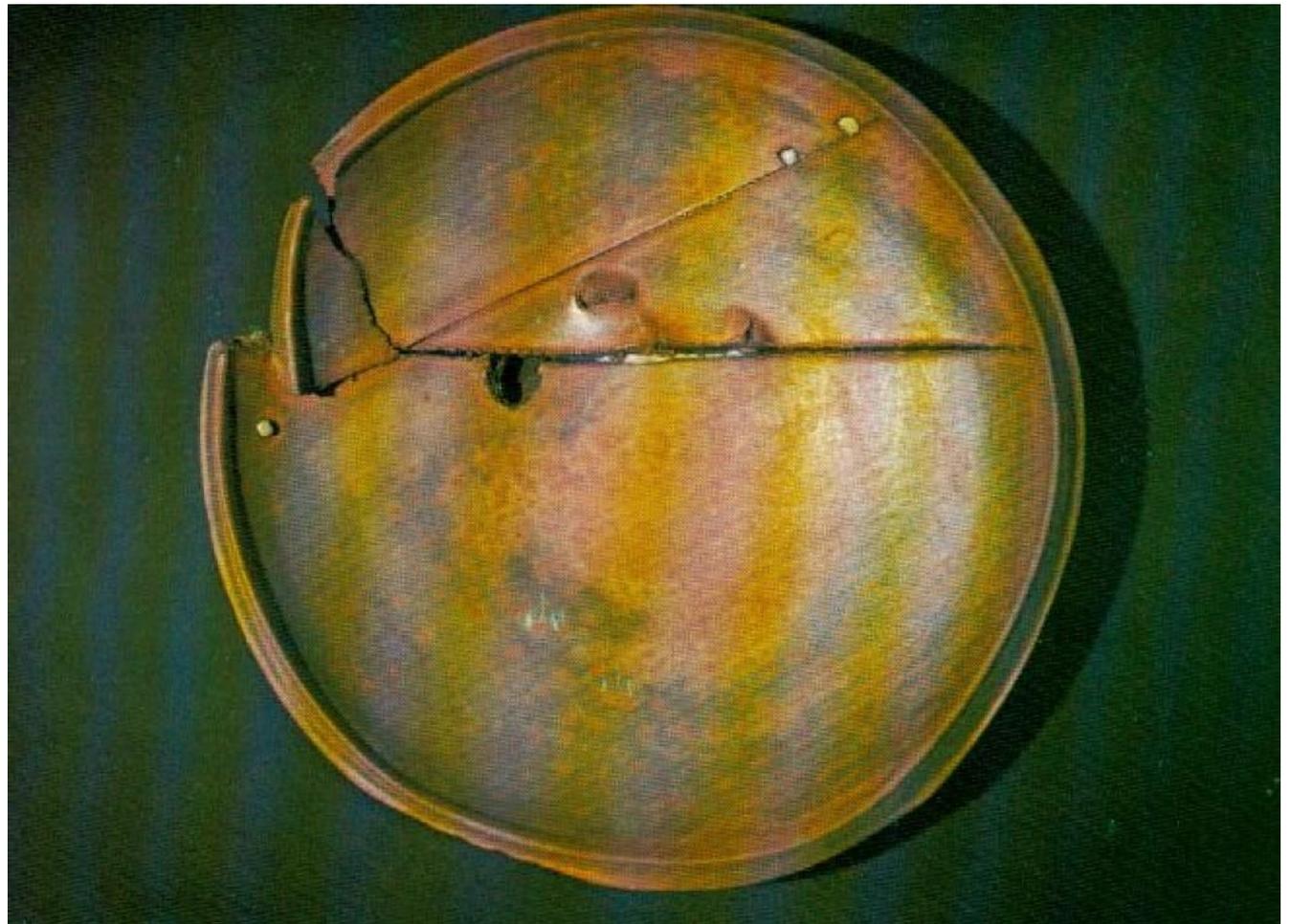
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Voulkos



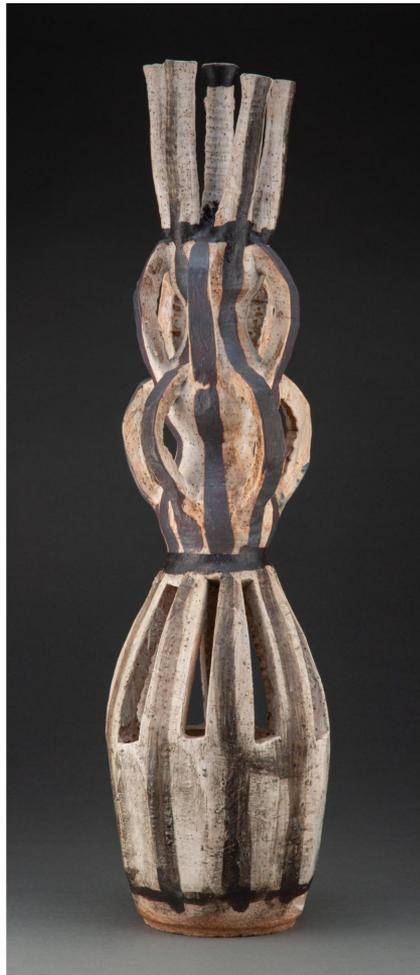
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## JOHN MASON (1927 - 2019)

And I quote, “There were no prescriptions for (clay and Glazes) that I knew about. It was do it and see if it works. If it doesn’t work, change it and make it work.” Mason’s work focused on exploring the physical properties of clay and its “extreme plasticity”. He is known for his groundbreaking, large-scale, ceramic abstractions. While known for his quiet, gentle demeanor, his creative vision smashed historic ceramic conventions. He was a central figure in the development of the Southern California ‘Craft-to-Art’ scene in the 50’s & 60’s, together with Voulkos, Price, Arneson, Nagle & others, when ceramicists broke with the traditional crafts & arts of vessels and decorative objects and moved toward abstraction, monumentality and human emotion.

About 1949 at age 22 Mason moved to Los Angeles to study Art at the Otis College of Art & Design. A few years later he transferred to Chouinard Art Institute, where he met Kenneth Price and studied with potter Susan Peterson. He returned to Otis in 1954, focused on clay and studied with Voulkos, who became both mentor and friend.

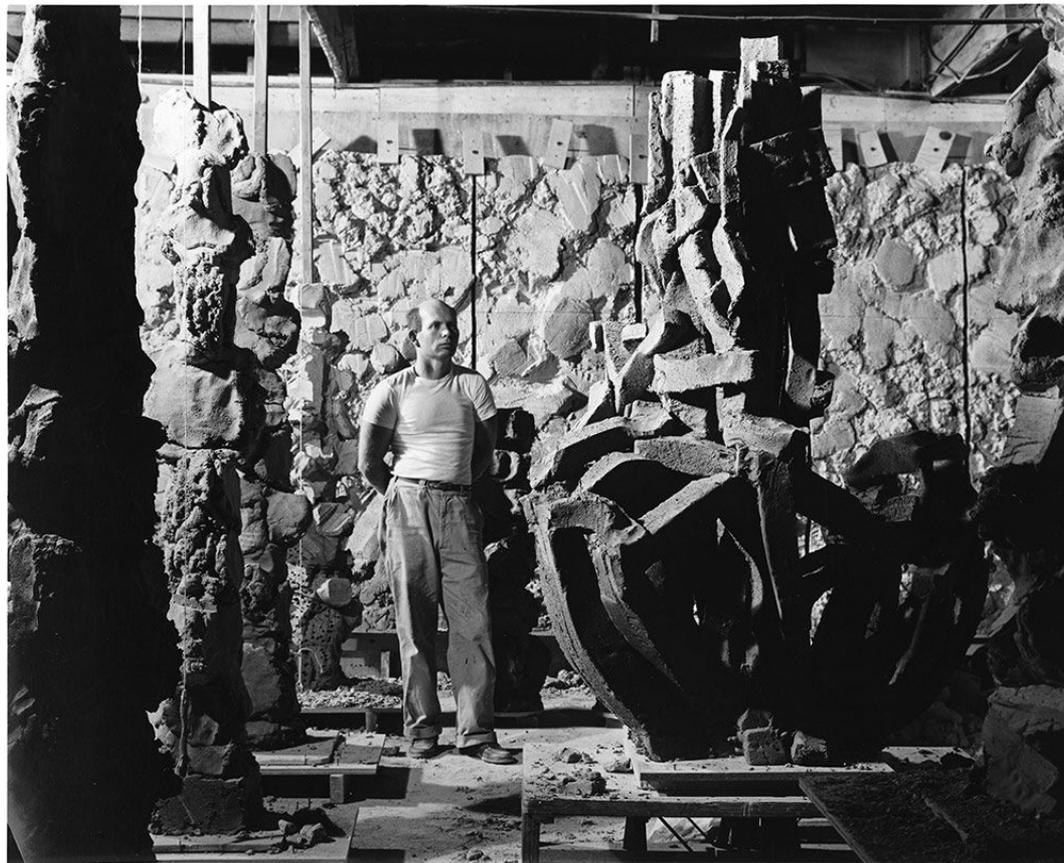
In the late 50’s & 60’s Mason showed at the influential Ferus Gallery in LA. He had three solo shows which led to a solo exhibition at LACMA in 1966. Mason taught sculpture at Pomona College, at UC Irvine and was a visiting professor at UCLA and USC.

~Mason

In 1974, Mason left for New York, where he taught at Hunter College. In 1978, he produced his ambitious “The Hudson River Series”, organized by Hudson River Museum. The project’s 10 site-specific firesbrick installations appeared in six museums. Mason returned to LA in 1984, where he resumed making fired clay works. **Mason continued making ceramic art until he was 90 (2017)**, his last exhibition was in 2018, at the Ruth Chandler Williamson Gallery at Scripps College – “Meditation on Material”.

John Mason moved clay off the wheel and onto the wall, onto the floor, constructing sculptures that might span 30 feet and stand 5 to 7 feet tall. He told the LA Times, **“It was more than just liking it. I knew I had found something important and that I would be able to realize something. It was not just sensual pleasure. ‘This is a material that has meaning for me, for a long time.’ That insight was important, and it’s what really maintained my interest.”**

Mason



Mason



Mason



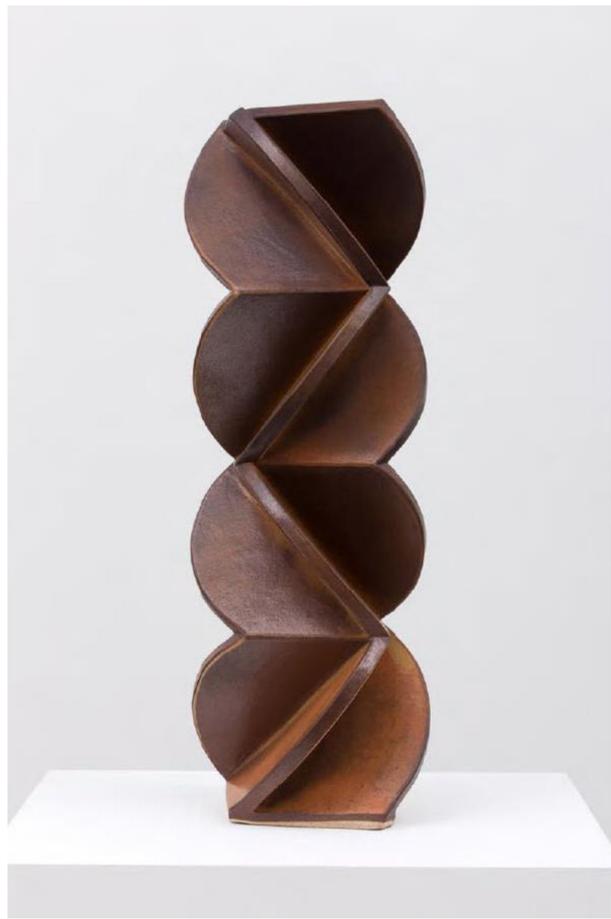
Mason



MASON



MASON



MASON



MASON



MASON



# MASON



© Jim McHugh Photography

## **ROBERT ARNESON - American (1930 - 1992)**

Arneson was an artist, sculptor and professor of ceramics who taught at UC Davis for almost three decades. He became part of the 1960's interest in abandoning functional ceramics in favor of making artistic statements using clay - a unique style & movement he helped to develop called 'Funk Art' - an anti-establishment movement that incorporated an incongruous collection of found objects, autobiographical subjects and humor. He is widely considered the "father of the Funk movement". Arneson was known for his many self-portraits where he caricatured himself through exaggerated facial expressions, bright colors, props, and darkly direct humor.

Arneson started as a cartoonist for a local paper and attended the California College of the Arts at a time when ceramics was not commonly recognized as a 'Fine Art'. Collection of his Art is wide-reaching in public and private collections around the world.

~Arneson

In the 1960's Arneson's subject matter was banal everyday objects such as typewriters, toasters, and toilets which he transformed into eccentric objects often with a surreal feeling. In the 1970's he transitioned to portraiture. This began with self-portraits but soon expanded to include many of his artist colleagues. Arneson brought artistic skills, insights, politics, social comment and humor to his work. He was unhesitating about presenting his ideas and personal views in his work. His work moved boldly into the 'Art' side of the 'Craft-to-Art' movement.

ARNESON



ARNESON



ARNESON



ARNESON



ARNESON



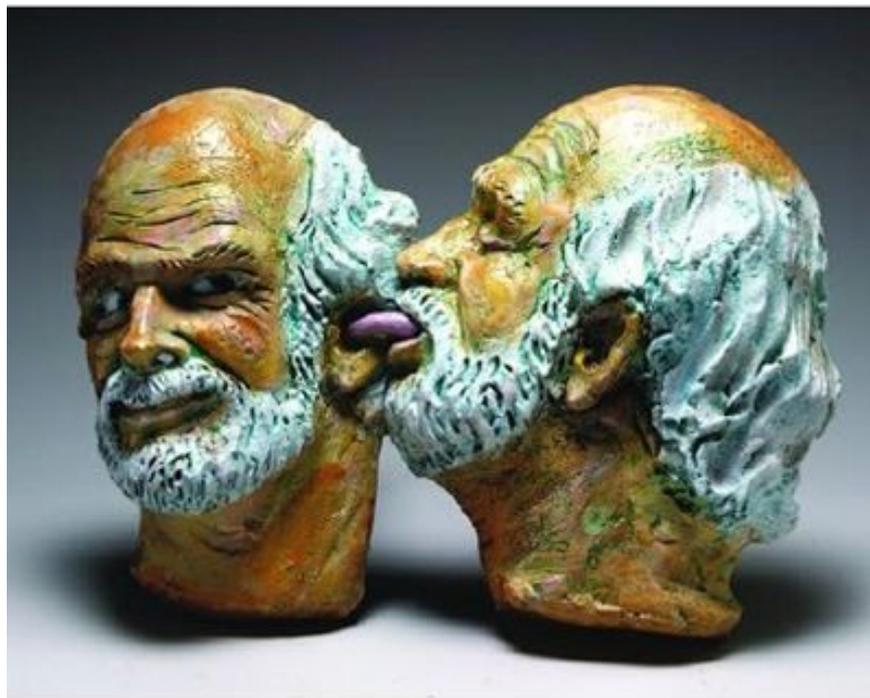
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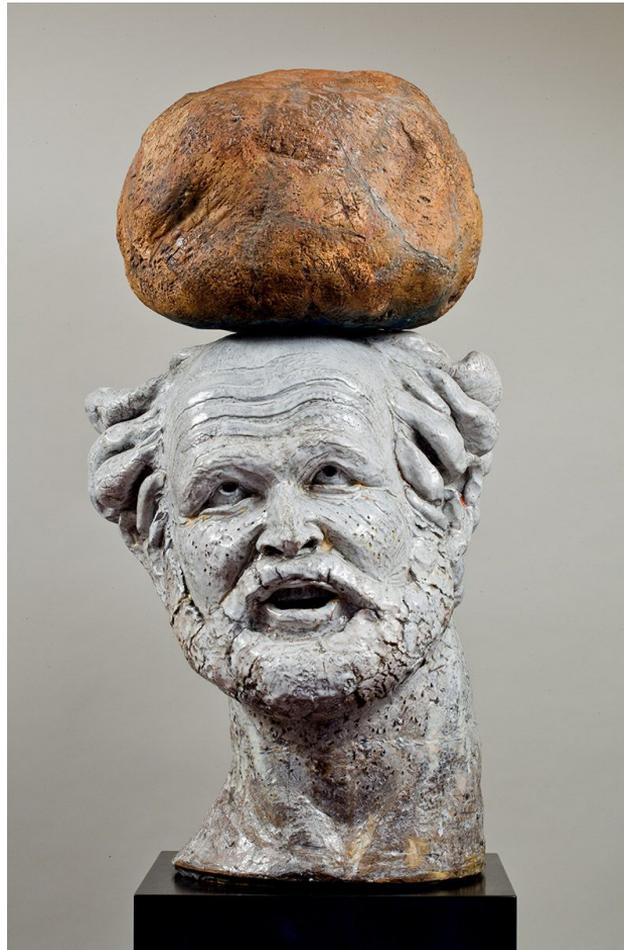
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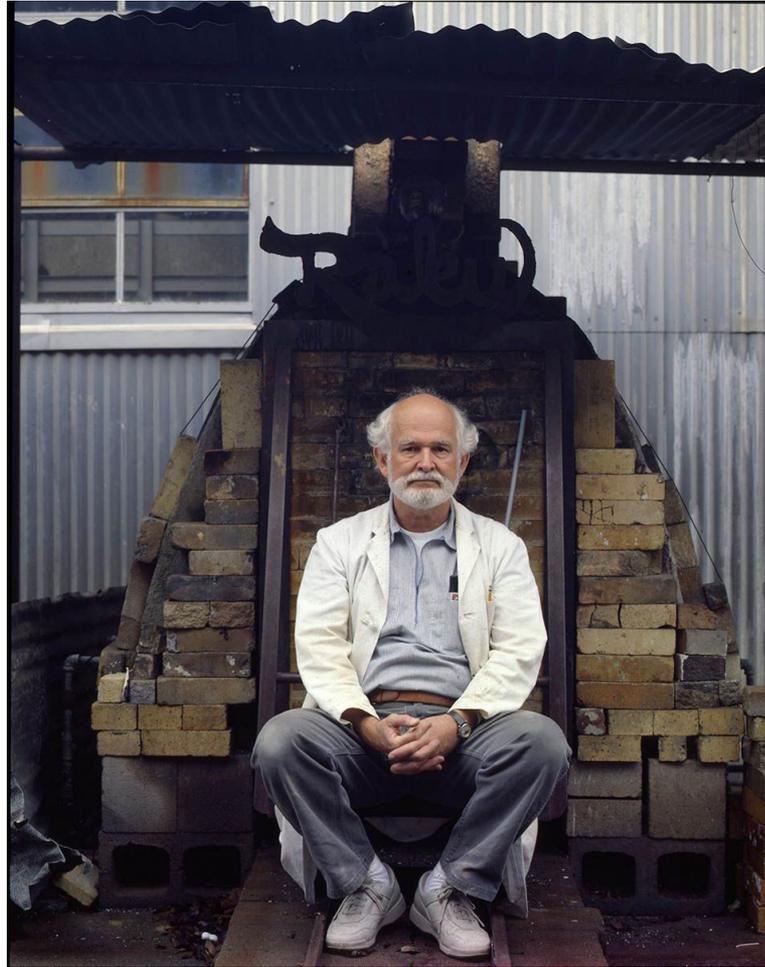
# ARNESON



Flip and Flop, 1970  
Polychrome glazed earthenware  
Gift by Collection of Heidi and Ross Park, L. 38.2.1

lacks a neck and appears casually  
tossed or flopped into position, in violation

ARNESON



## KENNETH PRICE (1935 -2012)

Kenneth Price studied ceramics at the Otis Art Institute with Peter Voulkos, but transferred to USC and graduated in 1956 with BFA. Price returned to Otis 1957 for a year to work with Voulkos. Then he decided to transfer to Alfred University and continue studying, receiving his MFA in 1959. **He is best known for his small-scale abstract shapes constructed from fire clay.** Instead of glazing and firing his work repeatedly as artist Kathy Butterly does, **he chose to intricately paint many layers of bright acrylic paint and then sand the pieces to reveal the colors beneath.**

As a graduate student at Otis in 1957, he wrote about the ceramicists he studied with, **“We’ve been cited as the people who broke away from the craft hierarchy and substituted so-called ‘total freedom! Actually, we were a group...committed to clay as a material and wanted to use it in ways that had something to do with our time & place.”** This group included John Mason, Paul Soldner, Henry Takemoto & Jerry Rothman among others. In 1958, Price left Otis for Alfred University to develop brightly colored low fire glazes & to escape the dominating influence of Peter Voulkos.

## ~PRICE

Price returned to Los Angeles in 1960 became involved in the newly developing Art Scene on the West Coast. In 1962, he spent 6 months in Japan, then returned to LA until moving to Taos, NM in 1970. In 1983, he moved to coastal Massachusetts; only to return to LA in 1992. He then became a Ceramics Arts professor at USC for 10 years before moving back to Taos permanently. In 2001, Price became professor emeritus at USC.

During his 5-decade career Price was a very creative artist who altered the forms, textures, colors, and shapes of his sculptures. In the 60's & 70's he focused on creation of small-scale unusual forms challenging conventional ceramic shapes. In the 80's & 90's he switched completely to acrylic paint instead of glazes. Sprayed onto his bulbous clay forms then sanded revealing the vivid multicolor hues below. In his later years working together with his son, he took up a much larger scale of work connecting with the viewers' bodies. The smooth surfaces of his sculptures are lacquered with iridescent colors amplifying their appeal even more.

In 2007 Price was diagnosed with cancer. He received treatment in LA then moved back to Taos. He spent the last 2-1/2 years of his life working on the "Ken Price Sculpture: A Retrospective". Price contributed extensively to preparations for the show, which was organized by the LA County Museum of Art and designed by Frank Gehry (the worldfamous architect), the artist's friend since the 1960's.

~PRICE

Price died at age 77 at his home in Taos, NM. His 50-year retrospective show open at LACMA in September 2012. We were member of LACMA at the time and I took my family to see the exhibition. I recall how impressive his work was and how we all enjoyed it.

PRICE



PRICE



PRICE



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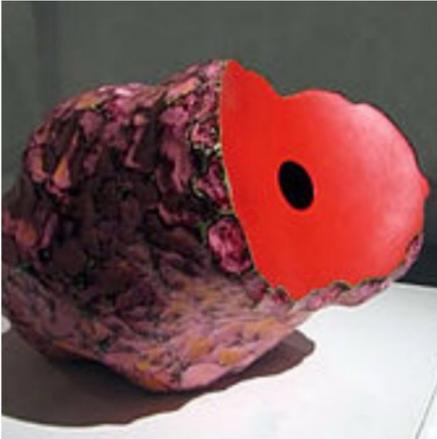
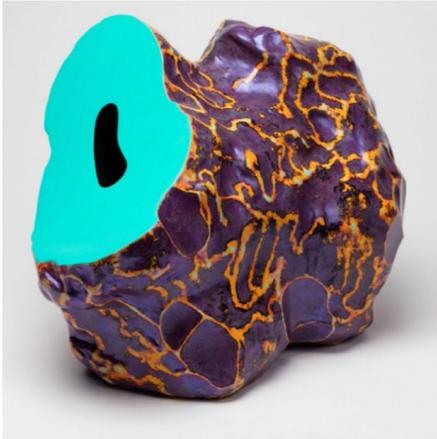
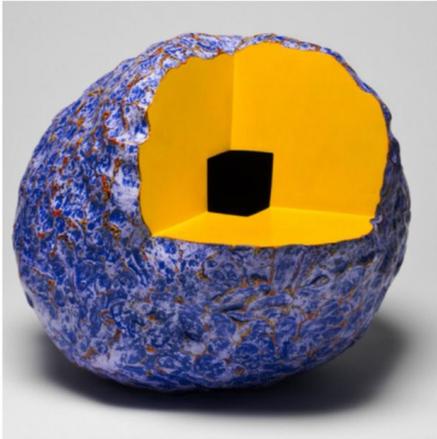
PRICE



PRICE



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## **RON NAGLE - American (1939)**

Ron Nagle is a ceramic sculptor, musician and songwriter. He is known for intimately scaled sculptures made of slip-cast ceramic elements, embellished with epoxy, metal & other synthetic materials that allow him to expand his forms beyond the limits of clay. Some are glazed to a 'hot-rod' finish, others textured like stucco and then airbrushed.

Nagle is one of the most important sculptors in America today. He has jokingly described his career and those of his contemporaries who work in clay as "second-class citizens of the Art World". His work is widely collected both in private & public collections in the United States and abroad.

Nagle was born in San Francisco 1939. In 1961 he apprenticed with Peter Voulkos at UCB. Within a decade he was a professor of ceramic Arts at Mills College, where he taught for 30 years.

His involvement in West Coast culture - surfing, rock music, hot rods - is integral to his art & music. From the late 70's Nagle was exhibiting with Peter Voulkos, Ken Price, and John Mason all known for their unorthodox methods of working with clay in postwar California. One of the seminal Artists in what became known as the West Coast Studio Ceramics scene from Craft-to-Art.

NAGLE



NAGLE



NAGLE



NAGLE



NAGLE



NAGLE



NAGLE



NAGLE



NAGLE



NAGLE



## KATHY BUTTERLY (1962)

Kathy Butterly received her BFA in 1986, from Moore College of Art before earning an MFA in 1990 at UCD, where she studied and was a studio assistant to Robert Arneson. She lives and works in NYC alongside her husband, artist Tom Burckhardt. **Butterly describes herself as a painter who happens to work in clay. With 30 years experience casting porcelain forms and using hundreds of glazes, she has a unique mastery of form and color.** Butterly works on a small scale usually 6” to 12” but imbues each piece with meaning & complexity.

Starting with a simple slip cast traditional vessel form, **Butterly alters each one by folding inward and/or outward, poking through the clay, contorting and distorting the form.**

She creates abstract porcelain cups & vessels whose forms are inspired by the body, by children’s toys, Asian religions, & pop culture.

## ~BUTTERLY

Butterly has created distinct, evocative sculptures for more than three decades now, contributing to and expanding the tradition of Studio Ceramics. **Her work is intense & her methods idiosyncratic.** Butterly starts with mass produced objects, makes a plaster mold for slip casting, then pours porcelain slip to create the initial form. **Butterly fires her pieces up to 40 times as she applies layers of glaze in a painterly manner.** In the end her pieces speak for themselves and the impact can be quite surprising & visceral.

BUTTERLY



# BUTTERLY



BUTTERLY



BUTTERLY



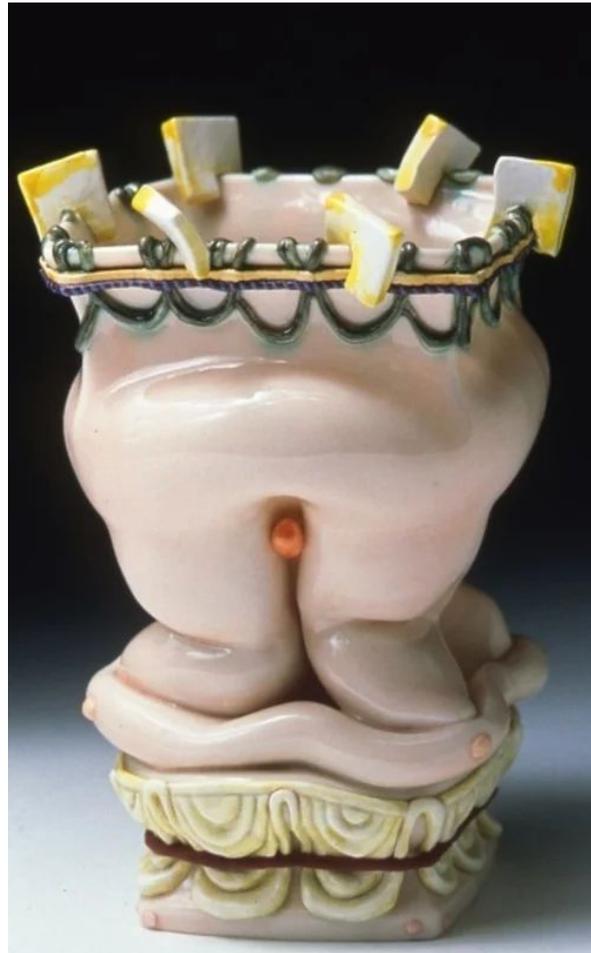
BUTTERLY



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BUTTERLY



BUTTERLY



## Beth Cavener - American (1972)

Beth Cavener is a classically trained sculptor; her process involves building complex metal armatures to support massive amounts of clay. In her hands, clay is transformed into mesmerizing, life-size animal figures charged with raw emotion and vitality. Cavener's menagerie includes hares, foxes, goats, and other common mammals. Their large bodies are flowing forms, curvilinear suggesting gothic form, then trapped in situations. Some recoil in fear; others appear paralyzed by an unseen terror. The terror draws you in, but empathy holds you back. These sculpted animals illicit a deep sense of emotional urgency - a sympathetic pity.

Cavener fantastical animal figures, which embody the complexity of human emotion & behavior, take us on an unexpected inner journey while observing & discovering them. In Cavener's words, "The sculptures I create focus on human psychology, stripped of context and rationalization, and articulated through animal and human forms." She continues ...

~CAVENER

“On the surface, these figures are simple feral & domestic individuals suspended in a moment of tension. Beneath the surface they embody the impacts of aggression, territorial desires, isolation, and pack mentality.” And according to Cavener, “There are primitive animal instincts lurking in our own depths, waiting for the chance to slide past a conscious moment.”

Cavener’s clay ‘menagerie’ is at once shocking & relatable.

CAVENER



CAVENER

# HUMAN



THE ART OF BETH CAVENER

CAVENER



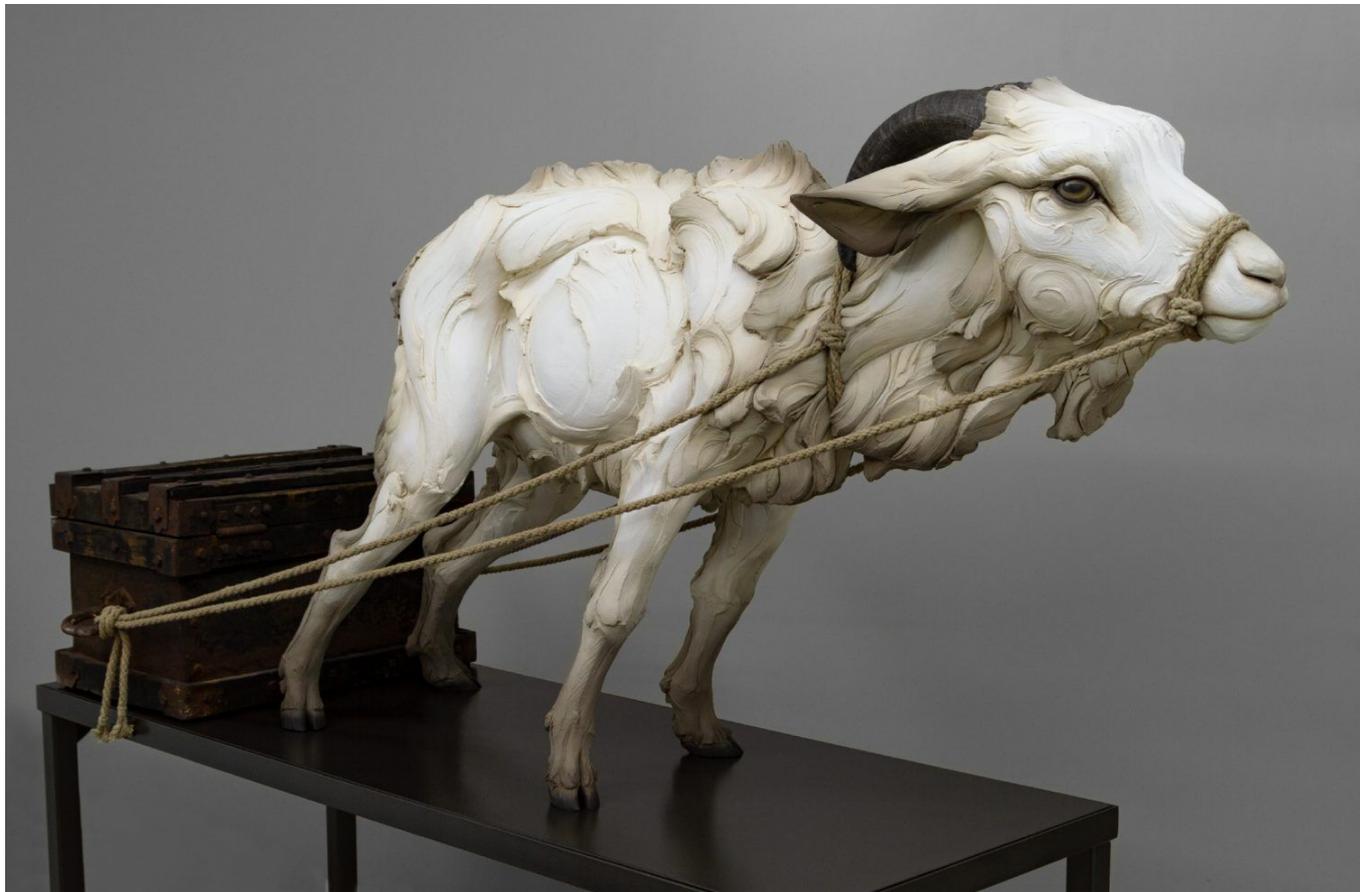
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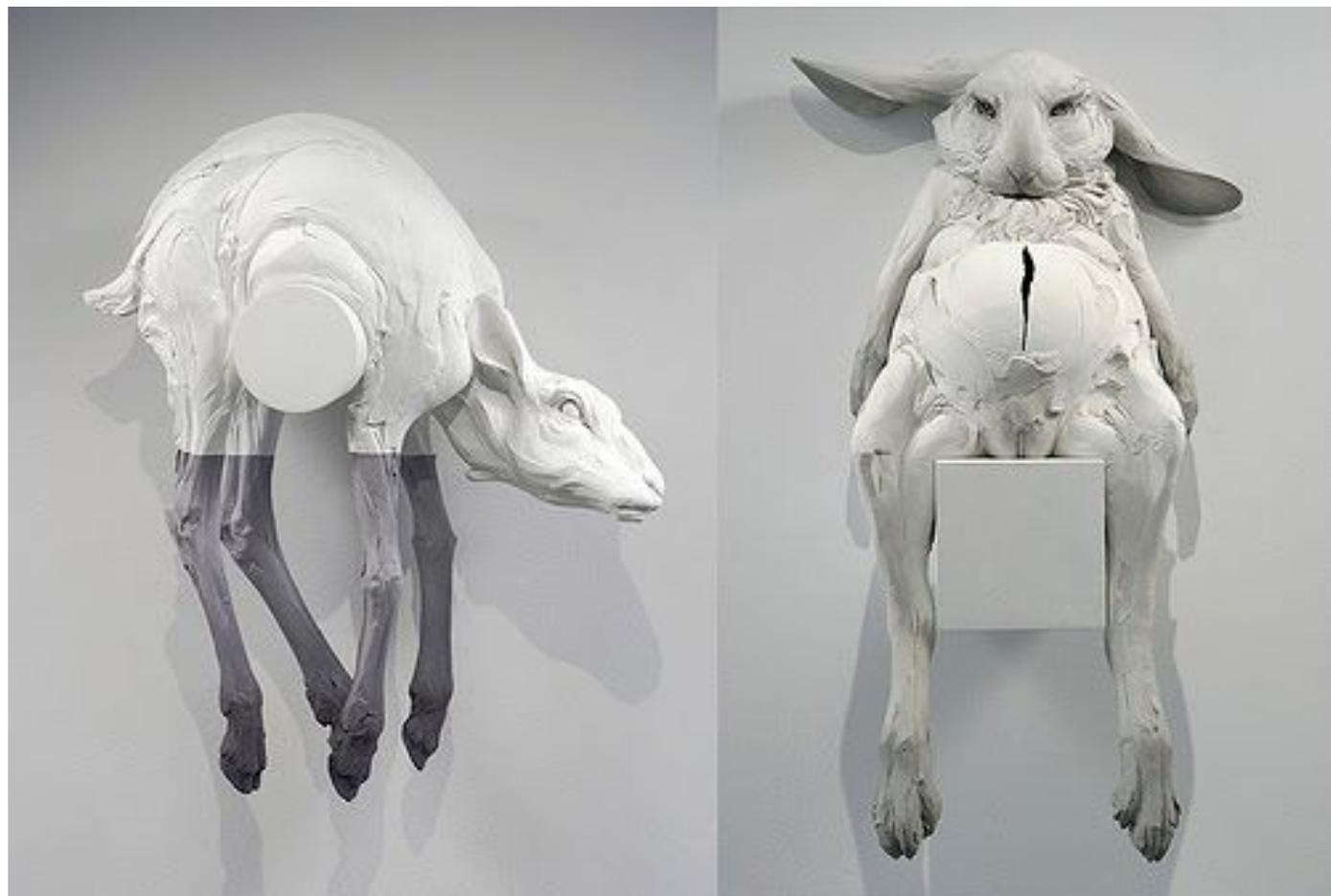
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# A glimpse of Rory's ceramic journey:



Kiln God



Salt Glazed Stoneware  
Vase-1975



Stoneware Vase -2019



Large Stoneware Vase-1975



Red Stoneware  
Sculpture-1973



Beer mug  
-1970



Pinch Pots  
-1975



Set of 4 Goblets  
-1975



Bowl-1970



Round Vase-2019



Pitcher-1970



Two Lidded Jars  
-2019



Blue on White Dragon  
Vase - est 1980 Korea



Bizen Yaki Pottery  
- est 1980



2012 Jindezhen Ceramics  
Exhibition



~~ Thank you ~~

