



Stark Contrasts: Black and White Ceramics from RAM's Collection

February 24 – May 5, 2013

This exhibition juxtaposes ceramic sculpture from the last 40 years that are in tones of black or white. Whether narrative scenes or abstract forms, these works explore the formal and metaphoric potential of intense color and dramatic contrasts. The variety of approaches reflect the innovation and ingenuity of artists working with clay who are investigating the symbolic and practical use of color and dynamic composition.

Artists such as **David Regan** and **Ed Eberle** combine detailed black and white imagery with shaped surfaces. **Christie Brown** and **Elizabeth Lurie** explore the potential of using all white for narrative or functional forms. At the other end of the spectrum, **Irvin Tepper** emphasizes blended shades of black and white in his dream-like, nonfunctional teapots.

RAM's permanent collection has increased exponentially since the museum's inception in 2003, with hundreds of ceramic works from the mid to late twentieth century forming the basis of an internationally-recognized collection. **Stark Contrasts** is one of a series of exhibitions showcasing work dominated by a black and white color scheme. This show offers a selection that includes established artists who RAM has collected in depth as well as emerging talents of the ceramic sculpture scene.

In order to underscore the impact and possibility of color, works have been included that push the boundaries of black and white in order to show how artists can use tone and shade to emphasize form and content.

The following brief biographies from selected artists underscore the diversity of approaches to ceramic arts as represented in RAM's collection.

Christie Brown (b. 1946) studied General Arts and Pottery at Manchester University and Harrow School of Art. Her practice is informed by the significance of continuity and the relevance of archaic artifacts to a contemporary artist. Brown has a strong interest in the mythological symbolism associated with clay and its relationship with other materials, such as wax, bronze, and plaster. Her work is primarily figurative and is influenced by our relationship with objects, especially those found in museum collections. To Brown, archaeology presents a fragmented narrative of past lives and holds parallels with psychoanalysis where layers are carefully stripped away to reveal hidden knowledge. She first came to prominence in the 1980s with a selection of slab-built, rather than modeled, human torsos. Since then, Brown has gone on to exhibit worldwide and her work can be found in public collections such as the Victoria & Albert Museum in London, Musée Nationale de Céramique in Sèvres, and the Museum of Decorative Arts in Montreal.

Source: [Www.pangolinlondon.com](http://www.pangolinlondon.com)

Whether **Richard DeVore's** (1933-2006) work brings to mind worn, weathered skin, or the roughened surface of a crater or hillside, it is the sensation or feeling evoked that is so significant. The objects DeVore references are starting points, the essence of which he captures through reductive and carefully chosen physical qualities.

For half a century, DeVore has been working with clay and focusing his creative exploration on the formal subtleties and quiet gestures of vessels in two basic forms, the low bowl and the tall vessel. A minimalist, DeVore has pared down his artistic vocabulary to a few essential conventions, which he has invested with the maximum formal significance. The interiors of the vessels have hidden spaces with openings that draw the gaze into unfathomable mysteries. The colors and the unadorned surfaces refer to the earth and the body. DeVore's accomplishment has been the establishment of pottery as an abstract art form in which every surface, contour, rim, and interior is rich in visual meaning. DeVore's pots are in over 40 museum collections including: The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, The Cleveland Museum of Art, the National Museum of Art in Washington D.C., the Louvre's National Collection of Contemporary Art in Paris and the Victoria & Albert Museum in London.
Sources: www.franklloyd.com, www.bellasartegallery.com

Ed Eberle (b. 1944) studied at Edinboro State College and Alfred University. He later taught at the Philadelphia College of Art and Carnegie-Mellon University. Eberle is known for varied, and often complex, vessel forms that are densely covered with drawings of figures. During the late 1980s and 1990s, Eberle restricted himself to black **terra sigillata** on **porcelain**. Eberle draws impulsively, without plan or narrative to organize his composition.

(**Terra sigillata** is a very smooth, lustrous coating of clay which resembles a glaze and is virtually waterproof. The name means "sealed earth" and has been used to refer to the Classical Greek Attic black-figure and red-figure painted pottery. These days, the name terra sigillata is used to refer to an especially fine coating of clay applied to a ceramic piece.)

Source: *Makers, A History of American Studio Craft*

By concentrating on perfecting form, **James Lovera** unleashes upon the "canvas" of his chargers and bowls interpretations of the textures and hues that surround him in nature. His vessels exemplify midcentury **Modernist** concerns for the clarity of form and function, but Lovera has also been a student of **Song Dynasty** (960-1279 ce) ceramics, which are among the highest achievements in Chinese porcelain. Lovera was moved by the regard during that historical period for simplicity and the distillation of form to its essence. He has also pushed the chemistry of his glazes to fit to porcelain like a skin. Lovera is best known for his crater glazes, taking them, beginning in the 1970s, to unprecedented levels of lathered, volcanic definition. Since 2000, Lovera has revisited his longstanding crater formulas, reinventing them as necessary to create surfaces that are now fully dimensional and riddled with thousands of vesicles. Lovera's mastery of both material and kiln is required to prevent the viscosity of the glaze from shattering a bowl's thin walls.

Source: www.beatricewood.com

Matthew Metz (b. 1961) is a ceramic artist in Minnesota. His influences include Asian pottery traditions, Greek and Roman pots, early American decorative arts (quilts, face jugs), and other folk traditions. His pots are carved and drawn. They are decorative, and still "relevant to contemporary life." The images are often abstract, yet deeply personal. Metz received a BFA from Ball State University in Indiana and a MFA from Edinboro University of Pennsylvania. He has been a guest lecturer and teacher throughout the country. His work can be found in the Arkansas Arts Center, Minneapolis Institute for the Arts, and the Archie Bray Foundation.

Of his work, the artist states:

My work is influenced by a variety of sources: Asian pottery traditions, Greek and Roman pots, early American decorative arts, face jugs and other folk traditions. The images on my pots are decorative. Our culture tends to look at decoration as embellishment without meaning – frosting on the cake. While I resist-apply direct narrative and literal definition to my iconography, the patterns and images I choose come from my life and experience. Interest in the natural sciences (evolutionary biology, ethnology) and history (archeology, physical culture) find their way, obliquely, into the work. A coffee cup has as much capacity to carry meaning as any other form of expression.

Sources: www.craftinamerica.org, www.artceteragallery.blogspot.com

American ceramist **Richard Notkin** studied under **Ken Ferguson** at the Kansas City Art Institute, earning a BFA in 1970. He studied with **Robert Arneson** at the University of California, where Notkin earned an MFA in 1973.

Of his work, the artist states:

Although the vast majority of my work created between 1983 and 1995 consists almost entirely of teapots, I consider myself a sculptor with a strong commitment to social commentary. My chosen medium — the material I love to work with — is clay. The vessel is the primal "canvas" for the ceramic artist, and my vessel of choice is the teapot, the most complex of vessels, consisting of body, handle, spout, lid and knob. This allows me the widest latitude in juxtaposing the many images I use to set up my narrative pieces. In addition, the teapot is a universally recognized object, with strong associations to domesticity and tranquility. As such, it is a "hook" to lure the viewer — who must then decipher the narrative imagery — in a sort of bait-and-switch fashion. The conveying of tea is secondary to the not-so-hidden message in my "teapots"...Although I closely imitate the scale, formats, colors and textures of the unglazed Yixing teapots, my intention is to borrow from these formal qualities with honesty and a sense of homage. It is of utmost importance, however, that my teapots retain a totally separate cultural identity, that they reflect our contemporary civilization's imagery and speak of our current situations as we emerge from the 20th century into the 21st. The pieces in the "Heart Teapot" series explore the origins of conflict in human culture — both the collective conflicts between various nations, ethnic groups, religions, etc., and those inherent in relationships between individuals.

The seeds of all conflict are to be found in each human heart...the message of each piece is intended to outlive its respective moment in history. The spirit and power of art are exemplified by a work of art's ability to transcend time and cultural boundaries.
Source: www.ceramicstoday.com

David Regan's tureens and teapots are luscious—not owing to color or ornament, but to form (notable shapes include a deer giving birth, a snake who has swallowed a reclining human, and a car with smashed hood and smoke pouring out) and content (complex sgraffito with narratives emphasizing social issues and broad topics of human concern). Because the imagery and the form of the vessel are symbiotic (content actually establishes form and not the reverse), there is a dynamic and inventive exchange of information.

Source: Lena Vigna, *Innovation and Change*,
Ceramics from the Arizona State University Art Museum

Kurt Weiser, trained in ceramics at the Kansas City Art Institute and the University of Michigan, originally worked in an abstract, non-representational style with minimal surface decoration. While director of the Archie Bray foundation in Helena, Montana, from 1977 to 1988, Weiser began to feel limited by this approach and contemplated new ways of working. Around 1990, he took the first step towards his current style when he covered a porcelain teapot with intricate botanical imagery using black and white **sgraffito**.

Of his work, the artist states:

For years, the work I did in ceramics was an effort to somehow express the beautiful nature of the material. As interesting as this exploration was, I always had the vague feeling that the best expression was if the material only came as a gift of nature. The problem was, nature and I never got along that well. Somewhere in the midst of this struggle, I realized that the materials are there to allow me to say what I need to say, not to tell me what to say. So I gave up trying to control nature and decided to use what I had learned about the materials to express some ideas about nature itself and my place in it.

Source: www.franklloyd.com