

IN MEMORIAM: PAST MASTERS

Robert Archambeau (1933–2022)

By PJ Anderson

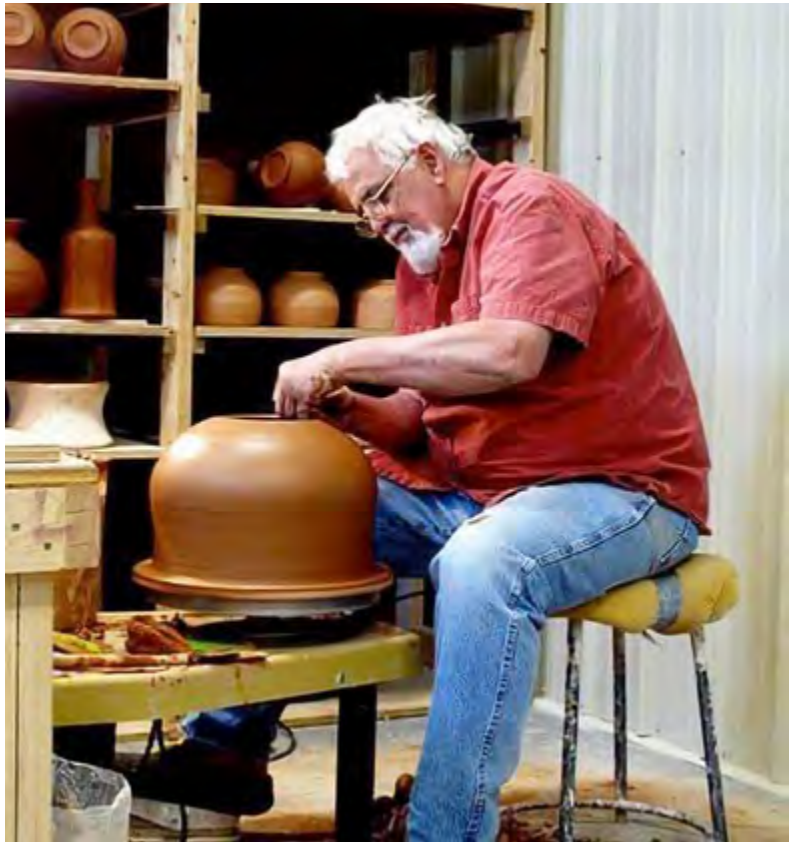
On the 25th of April, Professor Emeritus of the University of Manitoba, Governor General's Award recipient, and Honorary Member of NCECA, Robert Archambeau, died, having reached 89 years old.

Born on April 18 in 1933, in Toledo, Ohio, Archambeau joined the US Marines at 16 before attending Bowling Green State University in Ohio, for his BFA, where he studied biology, drawing, printmaking, and ceramics, themes and skills that would be integrated into his artistic practice. He later earned his MFA from New York State College of Ceramics at Alfred in 1964. After teaching several years at Rhode Island School of Design, he was invited to teach at the University of Manitoba where he taught for 23 years, inspiring generations of ceramic artists from 1968 to 1991. In 2004, he was named Professor Emeritus in recognition of his research and excellence in teaching. He continued to exhibit and lecture widely, showcasing his true love for ceramics and instilling the appreciation for excellence in craft in any who were fortunate enough to spend time with him.

Archambeau leaves behind a legacy as one of North America's foremost ceramic artists. His aesthetic and philosophies draw deeply from that of Japan where he lived and worked with Akio Takamori and Jun Kaneko. He visited artisanal potteries in South Korea and China, incorporating his experiences there into his exploration of the Canadian shield landscape and indigenous flora surrounding his studio in Bissett.

He specialized in wood-fired clay pots, insisting that his functional work be used and not restrained behind glass and metal. Still making into his 80th decade, gathering accolades and awards, he continued to be about the pots, not the recognition. "My aim is not the decorative or didactic, or clay as visual entertainment, it is not political. Instead, I hope my work is, in some measure, a distillation of the magic and mystery that surrounds me on this, my part of the Canadian Pre-Cambrian Shield. It is, at its best, pottery that is serene, rich in detail, detached from the mundane and timeless." His presence will be greatly missed and his influence treasured by many.

PJ Anderson is an artist of Caribbean/Métis descent from Thompson, Manitoba, Canada. She holds a BFA and MFA from the University of Manitoba. She has shown internationally, as resident artist at the University of KwaZulu Natal in South Africa; in China as a finalist in the International Ceramic Magazine Editors Associations (ICMEA) emerging artist competition and many others. She teaches for the Winnipeg Art Gallery the Manitoba Conservatory of Music and Arts. PJ currently serves as Director at Large for NCECA (the National Council for the Education in the Ceramic Arts).



Robert Archambeau working in his studio



Robert Archambeau

Jennifer Gordon (1976–2022) By Heather Mae Erickson

Jen Gordon was a mixed-media installation artist, creative consultant, public facilitator, arts administrator, researcher, business owner, student, and writer based in Western North Carolina. Jen was a beloved mother, sister, daughter, teacher, student, and friend. She was survived by her dear son Gawain Smith. She earned her BA in 2006 from Humboldt State University in Arcata, California, where she double majored in Art History and Studio Art with an emphasis in interdisciplinary art, minored in German, and earned a certificate in museum and gallery practices. Jen was in her final year of her MFA degree from Western Carolina University (WCU).

Jen was overjoyed to be elected in the prestigious position as the 2022–2024 Student Director at Large of NCECA. She was a promising young emerging artist with more than 15 years of experience in the area of public arts facilitation and administration including exhibitions and curation. It was an honor to watch Jen take this role with a commitment and excitement to meet new people, learn more about the field through this amazing organization, and help to further strengthen NCECA's goals and mission, especially in the areas of diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging (DEIB) and the environmental impacts of our practices.

Jen worked primarily with “found materials from both the natural/physical realm we exist in and manufactured ones that we have created in an effort to defy our mortality.” Mediums focused on included fiber, paper, clay, print processes, photography, and public installation in conjunction with the “natural processes of growth and decay.” Her work “emphasizes the elements of time and process. The process is the work, and it illuminates the relationship between humans and their environment.” Jen was interested in mycology, responsible stewardship of the earth and environment, community building, philanthropy, vulnerability, and was an avid health and wellbeing advocate.

Jen was also an advocate for artists, especially young artists and was “dedicated to creating new opportunities in Western North Carolina to produce, exhibit, and market their creative business endeavors. As an arts administrator my professional goals include creating an all-encompassing production facility for artists, designing an arts immersion program for the tourist market, and to advocate the intrinsic value of building cultural arts into the city's redeveloping infrastructure.” Jen rented a space in downtown Sylva, North Carolina, where she was in the beginning stages of opening up a storefront called The Hive. Luckily before Jen passed we were able to have a few events open to the public. One such event was for a project she was assisting me with called *Pride Pots: Community Conversations*. Jen and I worked together to cultivate spaces for story-sharing and reflection to create deeper human connections by empowering students to develop service learning and community engaged projects that benefit others. *Pride Pots: Community Conversations* is a community-building art experience centered around hard conversations. Before Jen



Jen Gordon with her work at the Cullowhee Community Garden, Cullowhee, North Carolina

passed, she contributed initial funding that will be used to create a scholarship in the WCU School of Art & Design's MFA program. The purpose of the scholarship is to provide financial support to an underrepresented candidate in the MFA program with interest in ceramics, service-learning, and community engagement. Gifts made in her memory will also support this scholarship fund. Proceeds from the sales of the community-painted Pride Pots will help fund the scholarship.

For more on giving to the scholarship: give.wcu.edu/jengordon

Heather Mae Erickson is associate professor and ceramics area coordinator at Western Carolina University. She is a member of the International Academy of Ceramics and founder of the Facebook group Wholehearted Classrooms – Higher Ed Educators/Researchers in the Arts. Please check out the free article, “Cultivating Balance in Life, Classrooms, and Community Through Wholehearted Teaching” by Crawford, Erickson, Ganstrom, and Haag in *The Studio Potter's* January, 2023, issue for more information on the group and the Pride Pots project. The *Pride Pots: Community Conversations* exhibition where Gordon will be honored will take place April 29 through July 3, 2023, at The Clay Studio in Philadelphia during Philly Pride.

IN MEMORIAM: PAST MASTERS

Douglas Alan Jeck (1963–2022)

By Timea Tihanyi



Doug Jeck, c. 2019, Photo credit: Doug Manelski, School of Art + Art History + Design, University of Washington

had talent,” he recalled, “but I was a technician, not a musician.”

In 1983, Jeck began working with clay at the Appalachian Center for Arts and Crafts in Smithville, Tennessee, where Tom Rippon became his ceramics teacher. The trumpet provided an instant connection between Rippon and his student. Jeck stayed with ceramics and earned his BFA in 1986. During a conversation about art, his father, a charismatic teacher himself, made a remark that became a guiding attitude for Jeck’s career: “An artist has his or her eye, finger, and soul wired into society and his job is to either instinctually or conceptually comment on the state of affairs of being human.” Jeck went on to study at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 1987. He earned his MFA in 1989, and rapidly won acclaim in the robust arena of 1980s figurative ceramic sculpture.

Post-graduation, his nearly life-scale works are contemplative and realistic figurations with an attention to the space that the figures occupied. Jeck remarked about these highly individualized yet symbolic male sculptures as “nobodyness turns into something and then he goes to a museum or something like that which is really ironic to me, it’s just clay.” Still living and working in Chicago, Jeck’s breakout 1991 exhibition of six nude male figures at the Connell Gallery, Atlanta, was reviewed in *American Ceramics* with the following description: vulnerable and introspective, the figures are “monumental without being imposing.” Though recalling Greco-Roman statuary, the figures are deliberately antiheroic. Their position, virility, and masculinity are being tested and challenged by Jeck. Using materials like hair, paint, and plaster, Jeck always considered himself “as a sculptor working with clay, not as a ceramic artist.”

His life work is in exploring his (and our) capacity for humanity through a tactile relationship with materials and the psychology of fragmentation. For Jeck, the sculpture’s space is “the reverse of an archaeological site: instead of stripping away layers, they are accumulating thoughts and experiences around the work.” A master wordsmith and neologist, Jeck was unfailingly inspiring with his astute observations and iconoclastic statements on any topic, but especially on the state of clay and ceramic sculpture.

Jeck began his teaching career in 1994, at the New York State College of Ceramics at Alfred University. In 1996, he moved across the country for a tenure-track position at the University of Washington. Following on the footprints of such ceramics luminaries as Patti Warashina, Bob Sperry, and Howard Kottler, Jeck built a nationally recognized ceramics program with Akio Takamori and Jamie Walker at the School of Art + Art History

About his growing up in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, Doug Jeck would recall how he and his younger brother, Steve, used to play with plasticine for hours “making clay guys and having wars with corkscrews and cocktail swords and garlic presses.” Raised by a single father, the siblings grew up “really poor, in projects, lived in the kind of neighborhood that had crack houses.” Jeck started his university studies as a trumpet major at Tennessee Tech University in 1981. “I

+ Design of the University of Washington. Jeck was promoted to Associate Professor in 2000 and served as the chair of 3D4M (ceramics, glass and sculpture) program from 2011 to 2018. Asking his students to tape their thumbs down before making their first object in clay, Jeck would assert that “ceramics still matters, because it’s an aspect of being human.” Clay “helps students register something about their behavior.”

By 1997, Jeck was a rising star of the contemporary art world with exhibitions at Dorothy Weiss Gallery in San Francisco and Garth Clark Gallery in New York City. Throughout the 1990s, Jeck’s sculptural expressions became even more fragmented. During this time, a friendship with Stephen de Stabler, with whom Jeck co-taught a summer workshop, became an important influence. For his 1995 show at the Traver Gallery, Seattle, Jeck described how he attacked the “too beautiful” form of his figure creations, sometimes violently punching and whipping them, sawing parts off and reattaching them in the most jarring manner, dumping slip over perfectly finished parts. About the war with his inner demons that he channeled into the work, sometimes intimately, but mostly violently, Jeck said: “fracturing these things ironically makes what is perceptibly human about them come through, I think more directly.” Undoing time and timelessness, virtue and virtuosity, objecthood and humanity, the figure object became “a playground, torture chamber, self-imposed psychiatrist’s couch” for the artist.

One of the most monumental of Jeck’s sculptures, *Access* (2000), is a Christ figure on the cross. It is the artist’s acknowledgment of himself “as being merely clay, yet fully alive,” a prelude to a darker phase of self-searching and finding ultimate peace in religious faith. His 2011 second solo show, *Early Works*, with Gasser & Grunert Gallery in New York City, picks apart the tropes of figurative sculpture: its materials, its space and its permanence. By now almost monstrous, Jeck’s creatures amalgamate human, animal, and religious iconography, clay with hair, plastics, plaster, wood, and found objects. In the meantime, Jeck is already moving on to performative works, developing these sometimes in collaboration with former students, sometimes on his own. Always with a smirk, he often would reenact a kind of frozen state between living and dead, between creator and his monster, sinner and savior, penitent and jailor, lunatic and sage, exploring human condition as theater. He detested the term “figurative sculpture” because it removed what is human and turned it into mere symbolic representation. Instead, Jeck called his work a “human object.”

One of his final series, *Duett* (Eutectic Gallery, Portland, 2017), is a dialogue of gestures with collaborator Christine Golden in the form of a suite of clay heads. Here again, Jeck’s “human object” is a kind of container shaped from both the inside and the outside by opposing forces of physical and psychological pressure. For him, clay, in this way, was always symbolic. A complicated and complex individual, Jeck had an enormous ability to relate to people from all walks of life. In his final years, he volunteered as a resident manager at the Salvation Army’s Charis Place, a transitional housing program for men in Seattle. Fractured, ravaged, and reformed, Doug Jeck’s sculptures reveal layers upon layers of accumulated selves that “ask the future to complete them.”

Timea Tihanyi is a ceramic artist, educator, and director of Slip Rabbit, a cross-disciplinary digital ceramics research and mentoring studio in Seattle. A teaching professor at the University of Washington, Tihanyi worked with Doug Jeck for 22 years, as a graduate student and later as a colleague and friend.

Leroy Johnson (1937-2022)

By Genevieve Carminati



Leroy Johnson, Photo credit: Patricia Yanez

Leroy Johnson said that when he found clay, the molecules in his brain were rearranged. He was in his 20s then and had always been an artist, ever since as a little boy he heard God's voice proclaim that it was his destiny and responsibility. He had worked in other media, but clay made him totally rethink his life and its trajectory. This was not easy or simple, especially as there were others who thought they knew what

his life should be as an African American man in Philadelphia, born in 1937. Privately, he called himself "The Lone Ranger," as he was often the only artist of color in a show or at an event, and he took that representation seriously. Largely self-taught, he felt not being affiliated with an arts college was freeing. He said that he didn't know "what not to do," so he was uninhibited in experimenting and innovative in the ways he used materials, including found objects. "Like children do when they make art," he added. Johnson enjoyed working with children and was an educator and a counselor in special-needs education as well as in arts education, including The Clay Studio's outreach programs. He earned an MS in human services at Lincoln University. An effective technique he employed to calm upset children was to have them sit still while he sketched their portraits in quick line drawings, talking to them all the while. There was a certain magic in it, a master therapist who knew how being his focal point relaxed the children and made them feel heard. In the meantime, they were willing models, enabling him to practice drawing as he earned his living.

Why should we honor Leroy Johnson as a Past Master? One aspect of his unique importance is his focus on the inner city as a theme in his work, but more than that. He wanted to document his community in ways that most other artists were not doing. That is not to say that he ignored its issues. Johnson was a historian and a social scientist, and was concerned with matters of race, gender, gentrification, violence, inequity, ecology. He wrote: "From my perspective, the 'unbeautiful' can be as powerful/ attractive as the professed beautiful. As an artist, I am trying to give meaning to what is beautiful and extend its parameters. Currently, my work has landscape at its root. However, I am not trying to create a record of the landscape, but a good piece that satisfies me. The inner-city landscape I depict is both map and metaphor for the actual landscape and the contents of the collective unconscious." He called himself an Urban Expressionist and an Urban Folk Artist, as well as a Philadelphia artist.

Leroy Johnson participated consistently in solo or group shows since the late 1960s, when he was involved with the Black Arts Movement, some of the venues being: Philadelphia's Magic Gardens; Tirza Yalon Kolton Ceramic Gallery (Tel Aviv), Gloucester County College (Sewell, New Jersey),

"In my art, I bear witness. I attempt to express not only aesthetic issues, but social, moral, and spiritual ones as well. My influences are many: clay, naïve art, collage, combining painting, and jazz, and the spirit with(in) which it was created."

~ Leroy Johnson

University of Pennsylvania, Society for Contemporary Craft, now Contemporary Craft (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania), Tiger Strikes Asteroid (Brooklyn, New York), Gross McCleaf, as well as numerous other galleries and locations over the years. He received grants from the Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation, the Independence Foundation, and the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts. Johnson was a 2014 Pew Fellow and was chosen as the Directors Highlight in the Let's Connect Competition at the Barnes Museum. He was a participating or resident artist for many community-based art projects, including at Ile Ife, The Village of Arts and Humanities, Taller Puertoqueno, the Church of the Advocate, and St. Francis Academy. Additionally, he was the inaugural resident artist at the Art Barn in Amaranth, Virginia; was the 2019-2021 Peter Benoliel Fellow at The Center for Emerging Visual Artists; and was a Mural Arts Studio Artist-in-Residence at the Barnes Museum. He was a frequent guest lecturer for a variety of programs.

Even in his late years, Johnson was exploring ways to bring clay to more people, particularly people of color in low-income communities. He proposed a project with the Philadelphia Parks system that involved utilizing native clay within the West Philadelphia community. He saw it as environmental, therapeutic, educational, and an opportunity to bring together generations for the good of their neighborhood. Before the pandemic, he was in discussions with park officials about his proposal. He was also researching the historical relationship between clay and African Americans in the early years of the city, and theorized that they were the master brickmakers at the time. He felt it was a short step from there to making pots. He was in the midst of this research when his health began to fail.

Leroy Johnson admired the autobiographical aspects that Dave Drake (the ceramicist sometimes called, dismissively, Dave the Slave), worked into his pots. Johnson employed these techniques, too, often marking his work with the written word or his thumbprint. We can feel his presence in his work. Through it he endures.

Genevieve Carminati is executor of the late Leroy Johnson's estate. She was honored to know him for almost 50 years and acted as his representative in more recent times. She is a Professor of English and Women's and Gender Studies at Montgomery College in Maryland and a writer and poet.

IN MEMORIAM: PAST MASTERS

Kari Marboe (1984–2022)

By Arthur Gonzalez



As I think about my friend and California College of the Arts colleague, Kari Marboe, my thoughts bounce between three strong qualities: Kari's love for historical research and informational investigation, her spontaneous free-thinking studio practice, and her joyous personality. I realized that she actually had just one large quality: a joyous life discipline

that fueled a love for the historical research of others' lives and primed a free-thinking studio practice.

On a pedagogical level, a favorite theme in her classroom was the fascination with the hidden treasures of information within a library's archives. She was a giddy investigator looking for lost stories that rested dormant in file rooms and old, bound books that feared they had been forgotten. She brought back the actual act of physical travel to rendezvous with print on paper. For the students of today, who only know about search engines, Kari, with her love of games and her infectious behavior for fun, awakened another kind of engine within her students.

Her exhibition at the Mills College Art Museum, *Duplicating Daniel*, is a perfect example of her unique practice. The premise of the exhibition was to display the evidence of Kari's sleuthy process of trying to find out as much as possible about a lost piece of art, a Daniel Rhodes work that was missing from the Mills College art collection. A vintage photocopy of the piece was the only evidence of its existence. She managed to turn the fact of a missing sculpture into a celebration of form, space, text, a wide range of stories, and collaborations. With the missing sculpture acting as her MacGuffin, she created a multitude of interpretations that were influenced loosely by the blurry image of an idea of a missing work of art. Acting as a kind of alchemist at play, she aestheticised study. She gamified studio practice. She humorized abstraction and, perhaps, through her procedural humor, was on the way towards a new Conceptual Funk Art movement.

Above all, it was Kari Marboe's ability to show through her actions the simple wonder of joy. She was famous for her ability to make anyone feel special when they entered a room. She would see a friend come in and then shout out their name at least three times as if she was the president of their fan club. She was a truly joyous person. In these times of massive cynicism, how great is the loss to no longer have this practitioner of optimism and humor in your life. It is appropriate to feel loss, but it is also important to respect Kari's legacy. I for one now have to step up and include that which I used to depend on Kari Marboe to do. I must remember to include a spirit of game in my life, and to surprise myself by accessing "wonder" and "creativity" as I boldly interact without cynicism, including the world around me. I will be more Kari-like.

Arthur Gonzalez has exhibited his work for more than 40 years. Among his awards, he has twice received the Virginia Groot Foundation and is a four-time recipient of the NEA Fellowship. He is included in more than 80 public collections and is the author of *The Art of Rejection*. He has been a professor at the California College of the Arts since 1991.



KARI MARBOE, *Duplicating Daniel Series*, 2018

Anthony Merino (1965–2022)

By Melanie Shaw

Anthony Merino, 57, of Adams, Massachusetts, passed away suddenly on August 8, 2022. He was born in Worcester, Massachusetts, on June 16, 1965. He graduated from Augustana College with a BA in English, Ceramics, and Art History and from the University of North Texas with an MFA in Ceramics. Tony was one of a kind. His generous spirit, wry sense of humor, and observations of the world around him will be dearly missed. He was a rare individual whose path included writing, curating, and making art. He presented at workshops and symposiums throughout the US and internationally including Turkey, India, Denmark, Finland, Croatia, and Australia. He curated ceramics exhibitions throughout the US and internationally. Some highlights include the large scale exhibition for the 50th NCECA conference and ongoing Facebook page—*50 Women: A Celebration of Women's Contribution to Ceramics*, American Jazz Museum, Kansas City (co-curators Alex Kraft and Melanie Shaw), and *Domestic Mysteries: Ceramics Group Exhibition*, New Taipei City Yingge Ceramics Museum, Taiwan. He was an active

member of the NCECA community, often reviewing exhibitions and promoting emerging artists. Although he might jokingly tell you he had Machiavellian tendencies, he was the complete opposite, always finding ways to lift others up in his articles and exhibitions. He was a prolific writer, publishing his first review in the January, 1993, issue of the *New Art Examiner*. In the decades since, he published well over 100 reviews on ceramics, fine arts, and television criticism. He is survived by his wife, Tugba Bagis Merino, of Adams, Massachusetts, his extended family, and friends all over the world.

Melanie Shaw earned her BA from Hunter College, New York, with a double major in Digital Media and Film/Studio Arts, graduating summa cum laude. Her curating experience includes *Personal Universal, Funk: American Dada; Critical Function, Pittsburgh; 50 Women: A Celebration of Women's Contribution to Ceramics*, Kansas City; *Jewels of Earth and Fire*, Pittsburgh; and *Critical Function II*, Richmond.



Anthony Merino with his ceramic piece *The Unbearable Lightness of Ceramics*, 2013

IN MEMORIAM: PAST MASTERS

Lynn Peters (1955–2022)

By Stephanie Silk, Cary Esser



LYNN PETERS, *Headshot*, c. 2019

sculpture, Lynn's creative offerings invited both engagement and interpretation, often with a wink and a nod.

Lynn was a tenured professor of Sculpture, Ceramics, and Design at Moraine Valley Community College near Chicago, where she taught for 25 years. A fervent advocate for her students, she also served as chair of the Art Department, providing imaginative vision to the arts and design curriculum, and steadfast support to her colleagues, holding steady particularly through the first year of the pandemic.



LYNN PETERS, *Surface Decoration for low-fire ceramics*, 1999, Lark Books

As an artist, Lynn Peters' focus was on ceramics, but her true element was motion. In her practice and in her life Lynn embodied movement, strength, and the rhythmic gesture. An ardent swing dancer whose *joie de vivre* and creativity inspired others to "go for it," she continually refined and reshaped her vision. From functional forms with highly decorated surfaces, to sculptural pieces that evolved into wall-mounted narrative

Born in Ontario, Canada, the oldest of three sisters, Lynn's peripatetic childhood in a Canadian military family instilled an ability to travel light and set up camp anywhere. This early-gained skill would come in handy later as she traveled to residencies around the globe, or spent extended visits with family in Canada.

She began serious art study in her teens at Sheridan School of Design in Toronto, along with an apprenticeship at a production pottery, and went on to earn a BFA at New York State College of Ceramics at Alfred University, and an MFA at Rutgers University. Taking up residence in the New York City area, she began teaching at various universities, colleges, and art centers, while founding a wholesale pottery business through the American Craft Council and American Craft Enterprises, producing a line of original goddess-inspired works and museum-quality reproductions.

Lynn is author of the book *Surface Decoration for Low-Fire Ceramics*, published by Lark Books, a well-illustrated primer designed to inspire experimentation and innovation with a wide range of surfacing materials and methods applicable to both functional and sculptural ceramics.

Lynn participated in numerous residencies, including A.I.R. Vallauris, Archie Bray Foundation, Belger Crane Yard Studios, and Watershed Center for Ceramic Arts, where she was a member of the Board of Trustees.

Referring to her work as "spontaneity made concrete," Lynn began creating a series of tableaux during the last decade, incorporating a wide range of images and phrases plucked from her journals, visual archive, and mid 20th-century ceramics. In Dadaesque / Joseph Cornell-like constructions seemingly disparate elements coalesce into a playful, provocative examination of cliché, history, and the accidental nature of daily life, designed to upend social norms and conventional narratives. The human condition, and women in particular, were elevated in her exhibitions *Stolen Moments*, *Writing on The Wall*, *Slice of Life and Ordinary Heroes*, and *All My Friends Are Superheroes*. "The process of making art connects me to this nostalgia for a collective memory of a utopian past, and a longing for continuity in a fragmented world."

Her love of art was only equaled by her passion for dance, and Lynn sought out opportunities to dance in every city she visited for each of the numerous NCECA conferences she attended. An esteemed member of the *Chicago Chorus Girls Project*, accomplished Balboa dancer, and regular at dance clubs in Chicago, New York City, and Toronto, her favorite venue was the legendary Greenmill Tavern in Chicago.

Ardent feminist, connoisseur of butter crust pastry and red lipstick alike, Lynn's personal style was unmistakable. As exacting with the angle of her beret as she was with her meticulously carved sculptures, Lynn believed in approaching any creative endeavor as a life practice with equal parts discipline and enthusiasm. Rather than limiting, Lynn found mastery (as defined by Malcom Gladwell's 10,000 Hour Rule) provided a foundation for true freedom, be it in ceramics, dance, or teaching. Her work is held in private and corporate collections in North America and Europe and can be seen at lynnpetersart.com.

Stephanie Silk is a New Jersey-based freelance writer/actor/dog trainer who had the great fortune of Lynn's friendship for more than 30 years.

Cary Esser was lucky to attend New York State College of Ceramics Alfred University with Lynn Peters in the 1980s. Esser is professor/chair of ceramics at the Kansas City Art Institute.

Ruth Margaret Rippon (1927–2022)

By Rachel Gotlieb



Ruth Rippon in the ceramics studio at the California School of Fine Arts, San Francisco, 1952–1953

Born and raised in Sacramento, Ruth Rippon was encouraged by her mother to study stenography in case her career as an artist did not pan out. Fortunately for the clay community in Northern California, she did not have to resort to plan B. Emerging in the 1950s, Rippon became a leading figure in the region, championing the transition of clay from craft to art,

vessel to figurative sculpture and, ultimately, helping the Sacramento region transform into a center for ceramics through her teaching and advocacy.

Known for her curiosity and experimentation with clay technique, Rippon was skilled in stoneware, majolica, porcelain, relief, and sculptural modeling. She was equally versatile in throwing, coiling, and slab construction and noted for her sgraffito through engobe. Antonio Prieto, her teacher and mentor, introduced her to clay at the California College of Arts and Crafts (CCAC) in Oakland, where she earned her BFA and MFA. Off to a good start, she won the purchase prize for a hand-formed bowl from the California State Fair and found employment working as a production potter for Jade Snow Wong in San Francisco.

Initially, Rippon focused on vessels featuring modernist surface decoration typical of the era, and she also sculpted figurines in stoneware and fruit in high-fired porcelain. This embrace of the figure and the narrative showed the currency of figuration among West Coast artists in their defiance of abstraction. For a brief period, Rippon adopted exuberant and gestural forms influenced by the prevailing Pop and Funk movement of Northern California that anticipated the sloppy craft of today. Some of these works were politically engaging, such as reproductions of classic children's wooden blocks painted with playful imagery and letters in bold colors and inscribed with words like ANARCHY, BOMB, and CORRUPTION. They demonstrate her whimsical response to minimalism, which favored sleek cubes and other austere forms without narrative.

During the last two decades of her career, Rippon felt confident to work with life-size figures thanks, in part, to the 1982 private commission *Camille*. This led to other life-size commissions in public spaces around Sacramento, notably *Lollies* (short for “little old ladies”) and *Mother and Children* at the Pavilions Shopping Center in 1985.

Above all, Rippon was a teacher, first assisting Prieto at Mills College in Oakland, then in 1956, joined the art department at the newly opened Sacramento State College (now California State University, Sacramento). As the only woman in the department, this was no easy task to establish a new ceramics program, which was still a burgeoning craft and art form at the time. However, she built a strong ceramics department during an era of expanding educational opportunities in the arts and taught hundreds of



RUTH RIPPON, *DEF Blocks: Dog, Elephant, Fish*, 1973, White stoneware with luster overglazes, 9" x 9" x 9"

students during her 31-year tenure, until her retirement in 1987. She shared her passion for clay over potluck dinners in the studio with Lisa Reinertson, Yoshio Taylor, and Peter Vandenberg, who are now important ceramic artists and instructors themselves. She also guided the career of her adored nephew, Tom Rippon (1954–2010), who made hand-built, small-scale porcelain sculptures. That she saw herself as a teacher is often revealed in sculptural self-portraits.

Rippon was famous for her zest for life, enjoying summers of swimming and fishing at her cabin in Lake Tahoe or treks to Italy, Mexico, Greece, Japan, and China, in pursuit of artistic learning. She was comfortable hanging out with “the boys,” having overlapped with Peter Voulkos at CCAC, and participated in throwing demonstrations with Robert Arneson.

A strong advocate of ceramics and crafts throughout her career, she worked as director of crafts at the Presidio in San Francisco. In 1952, she played a key role in founding the Creative Arts League of Sacramento (CALs) and helped organize exhibitions—including several at the Crocker Art Museum. The Crocker was privileged to have a close relationship with the artist, organizing a retrospective of her work in 1971. In the late 1990s, Rippon was instrumental in bringing the Hugh Arnold Collection of modern and contemporary ceramics (over 1700 works) to the Crocker. In 2017, the year of her 90th birthday, the Museum presented *Exuberant Earth*, a major exhibition celebrating her illustrious career. Today, the Crocker holds a collection of Rippon's work, illustrating her breadth of form, technique, and subject matter, and continues to pay tribute with the newly created staff position, Ruth Rippon Curator of Ceramics, which I am honored to hold. I had the pleasure of meeting Ruth in the summer of 2021, where she was surrounded by many of her professional accomplishments, including an honorary doctorate from Sacramento State. I hope to live up to her esteemed reputation during my tenure here.

Rachel Gotlieb is the Ruth Rippon Curator of Ceramics at the Crocker Art Museum in Sacramento. Gotlieb served as Chief Curator at the Gardiner Museum in Toronto. She holds an MA from the Victoria & Albert Museum at the Royal College of Art, London, and a PhD from the Queens University, Kingston, Ontario.