



Contemporary American Ceramics:
From the Dean Thompson Collection

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Johnson County Community College • Gallery of Art

Contemporary American Ceramics: From the Dean Thompson Collection

On my first visit to Dean Thompson's London apartment in 1981, I was struck by the range and quality of the ceramic and glass works that he had collected. His apartment was filled with art. Floor to ceiling glass shelves displayed brightly colored and eccentrically shaped works by Clarice Cliff. Equally arresting were severely reductive vessels by Keith Murray, stylized Rene Lalique vases, richly enameled Faure pieces, Georg Jensen silver and delicately colored pate-de-verre works by G. Argy-Rousseau and Almeric Walter. I quickly realized that Thompson was utterly obsessed with art. After accompanying him to various galleries, antique markets and museums, I left London, a bit dazed but thoroughly fascinated with his passion and spirit for collecting art.

The collection that dazzled me in London consisted primarily of works created between 1900 and 1940. It represented essentially a second phase in Thompson's collecting history. His earlier interest in 19th-century Art Nouveau works (especially Galle and Daum glass) had waned, and he had largely divested himself of these pieces in order to finance new acquisitions – a practice not uncommon among collectors. Although he was not trained in art or art history, Thompson, through museum visits, reading and friendships with other collectors, had developed a keen eye for art. He also developed a profound respect for certain art dealers, individuals who generously shared their time and expertise and who helped him refine his own sensibility. He frequented galleries, flea markets and auction houses throughout Europe in search of coveted works.

With his retirement from Amoco Corporation in 1986 and his subsequent relocation to Kansas City, Thompson enrolled in a ceramics course at the Kansas City Art Institute. Initially, he hoped only to become more familiar with technical processes and terms. Within weeks, however, he was happily ensconced in the ceramics department, oftentimes spending five hours a day in



Toshiko Takaezu, *Form #15*, 1990, stoneware, 40" x 15" x 15". Photo: Michael Zagalik



Akio Takamori, *Shadow*, 1989, porcelain, 19½" x 16¼" x 9½". Photo: Michael Zagalik

the studio. Thompson quickly became an enthusiastic advocate of the works of the institute faculty, alumni and students. He also began to purchase their works.

As early as 1983, Thompson had acquired a major work by Akio Takamori, a distinguished graduate of the Kansas City Art Institute. He recalls

that he was "fascinated by Takamori's sensual, graphic images and sculptural forms." Thompson's initial purchases, combined with his involvement at the Art Institute, ignited his interest in forming a collection of contemporary American ceramics. By 1986, as a collector for more than 20 years, he was keenly aware of the complexity of collecting contemporary art. Undaunted, he began to pursue major works by artists such as Betty Woodman, Ken Price, Richard DeVore, Beatrice Wood, Toshiko Takaezu, Kenneth Ferguson and Adrian Saxe. Thompson was once again immersed in a transformation of his collection and home. Beloved pieces from the first half of the 20th century were sent to auction. In their place, he installed works by living artists – many of whom he had visited with or come to know as friends.

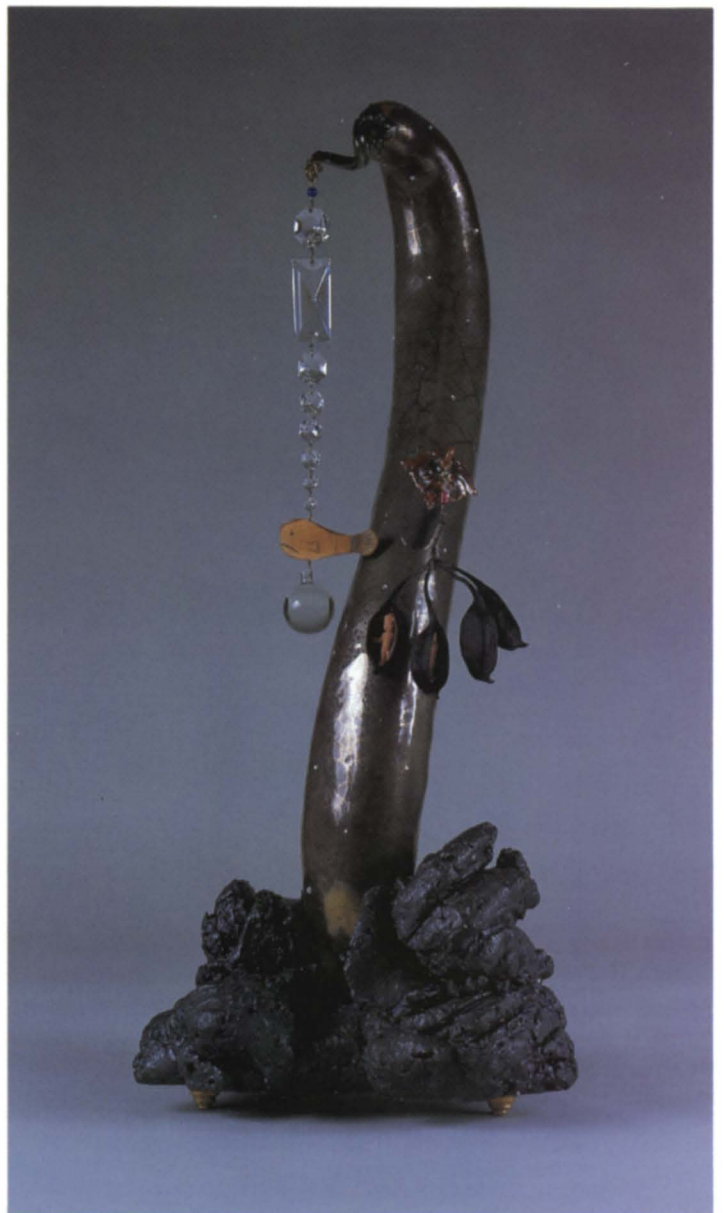
Thompson had embarked on the formation of a personal collection that captures the diversity, energy and conceptual concerns of late 20th-century artists working in clay. While he has primarily acquired works related to the vessel-oriented tradition of the contemporary clay movement, his collection also includes major sculptural pieces by Viola Frey and Ken Price. In this way, the collection addresses one of the central concerns of many clay artists of the past few decades – namely, that content and the artist, not the medium or any perceived function, should serve as the criteria in labeling works of art. As he looks ahead to the 21st century, Thompson's enthusiasm for contemporary ceramics remains unabashed, and he is avidly acquiring works by both established and emerging artists.

It is a pleasure to be able to publicly exhibit selected works from his collection, and we are deeply appreciative of Dean Thompson's generosity. His collection is not only a celebration of the achievements of contemporary artists working in clay, but it is also a tribute to his vision and discernment as a collector.

Bruce Hartman
Director, Gallery of Art



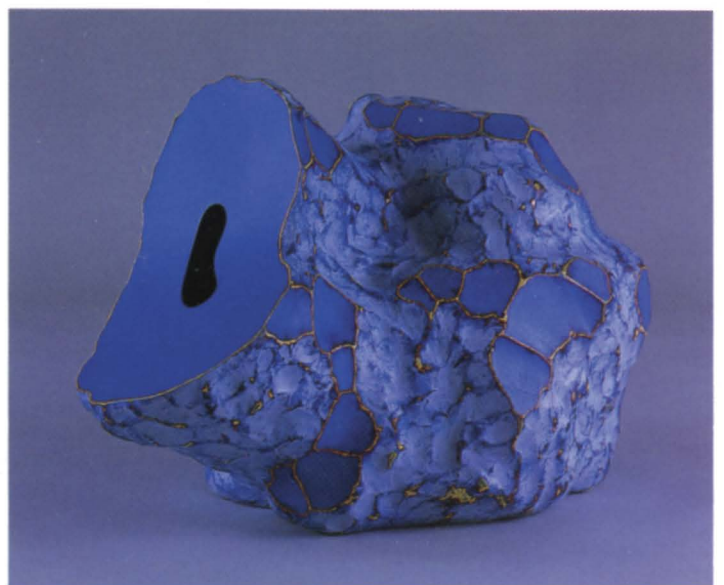
Beatrice Wood, *Untitled*, 1986, earthenware, lusters, 18¾" x 8".
Photo: Michael Zagalik



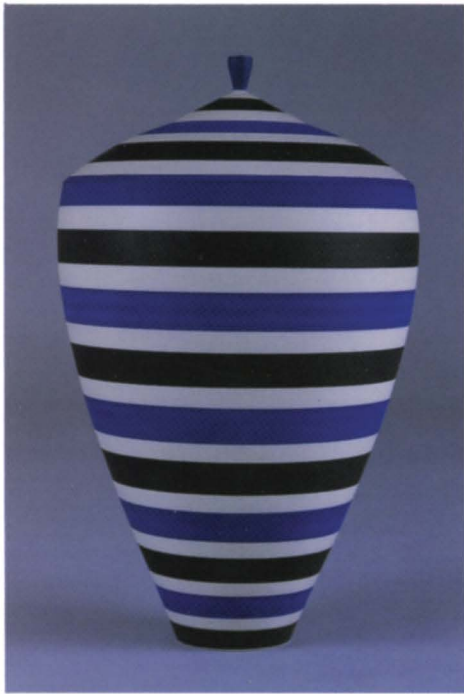
Adrian Saxe, *Before and After: Come on Baby! Light My Fire Hydrant*, 1993, porcelain, seed pod, glass, plastic, 30" x 12" x 9". Photo: Michael Zagalik



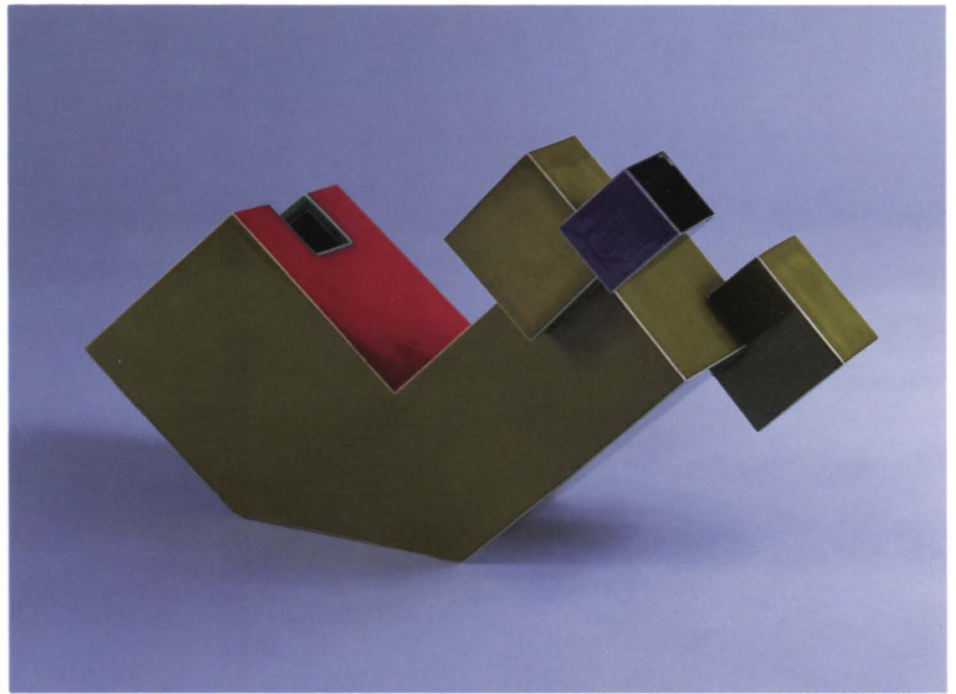
Betty Woodman, *Kiwi Pillow Pitcher*, 1980, glazed whiteware, 16" x 20" x 13". Photo: Michael Zagalik



Ken Price, *Crank*, 1988, earthenware, acrylic paint, 10½" x 16" x 11".
Photo: Michael Zagalik



Roseline Delisle, *Triptyque 50*, 1988, porcelain, 11" x 4½". Photo: Michael Zagalik



Ken Price, *Untitled*, 1980, glazed earthenware, 8" x 15" x 7". Photo: Michael Zagalik

Exhibition Checklist

Viola Frey
Bird Buddha, 1982
glazed earthenware, 65" x 20" x 16"

Viola Frey
Platter, 1980
glazed whiteware, 25½" diameter

Betty Woodman
Kiwi Pillow Pitcher, 1980
glazed whiteware, 16" x 20" x 13"

Betty Woodman
Ostia, 1986
glazed earthenware, 26½" x 17" x 7"

Ken Price
Untitled, 1980
glazed earthenware, 8" x 15" x 7"

Ken Price
Crank, 1988
earthenware, acrylic paint,
10½" x 16" x 11"

Roseline Delisle
Trilogie 14, 1988
porcelain, 10½" x 6"

Roseline Delisle
Triptyque 50, 1988
porcelain, 11" x 4½"

Peter Voukos
Untitled, 1981
stoneware, 22" diameter

Richard DeVore
Untitled Vessel, c. 1979
stoneware, 15" x 12" x 10½"

Richard DeVore
Bowl, 1988
stoneware, 10½" x 14"

Toshiko Takaezu
Form #15, 1990
stoneware, 40" x 15" x 15"

Robert Turner
Red Ife, 1980
stoneware, 10¼" x 6¾"

Kenneth Ferguson
Adam and Eve Platter, 1985
stoneware, 22½" diameter

Adrian Saxe
Untitled Bowl, 1986
porcelain and raku, 9⅝" x 10½"

Adrian Saxe
La Tour Akan Teapot, 1984
porcelain, 12⅜" x 7¾"

Adrian Saxe
Before and After: Come on Baby!
Light My Fire Hydrant, 1993
porcelain, seed pod, glass, plastic,
30" x 12" x 9"

Adrian Saxe
Untitled Ewer, 1991
porcelain, found glass dangle,
16½" x 10"

Beatrice Wood
Untitled Vase, 1986
earthenware, lusters, 18¾" x 8"

Akio Takamori
Shadow, 1989
porcelain, 19½" x 16¼" x 9½"

Jun Kaneko
Oval Platter, 1987
stoneware, 25¼" x 20½"

Jun Kaneko
Oval Platter, c. 1987
stoneware, 24¼" x 20½"

Thom Bohnert
Untitled, c. 1983
porcelain, wood, wire, 27¼" x 4½"

Chris Gustin
Ewer, 1985
stoneware, 20½" x 12" x 7½"

Rob Barnard
Cylinder, 1987
earthenware, 9" x 4½"

Mark Pharis
Soy Bottle, 1988
earthenware, 9½" x 12½" x 2½"

Cover: Richard DeVore
Untitled Vessel, c. 1979
stoneware, 15" x 12" x 10½"
Photo: Bret Gustafson

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