

American Porcelain:

*New Expressions
in an Ancient Art*

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Lloyd E. Herman

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Preface

What is porcelain and what gives it special appeal to artists, in comparison to other clay bodies? Why should it be a suitable focus for a separate study? After discussions with many ceramists who work exclusively in porcelain, it became clear that they had chosen to work in porcelain for very specific reasons. They value the fineness and purity of porcelain clay, properties that permit them to mold or carve the clay in ways impossible with less refined materials. They like the possibility of building objects of paper-thin construction, which is unique to porcelain. When porcelain is vitrified at high temperatures the surface is "sealed," which can obviate the necessity for glazing, although the surface of porcelain invites decoration quite distinct from that applicable to other clays. Some ceramists value its "crisp, natural whiteness and translucency." There is no doubt in the minds of the artists that they work with a distinctive medium on which the special qualities of their work depend. An investigation of the unique quality of their porcelain creations promised therefore to be a worthwhile undertaking.

So the Renwick Gallery set out to discover just what was being produced by American craftsmen in porcelain, and to present the results of the investigation both in an exhibition and in a publication. Three hundred and fifty artists and potters answered our announcements, placed in national magazines, requesting slides for review and selection before we extended invitations to send the objects themselves for consideration. Their slides were examined by the staff, with technical and historical consultation given by porcelain artist and author Jan Axel, and curator David McFadden of the Smithsonian's Cooper-Hewitt Museum in New York. Approximately one hundred and thirty objects were chosen for examination prior to a final selection. Trips to New York City; Penland, North Carolina; San Francisco and Los Angeles made it possible to examine objects selected from the slides to ensure that the workmanship was equal to the photographic image. Other pieces were brought to Washington for examination.

The final selection of examples for exhibition and for publication was made in accordance with our desire to include a range of various forms and decorating techniques, and to show the relationship of contemporary porcelain objects to historical examples and to modern works in other media. Because of the dictates of space, the final selection was limited to 108 works (including sets and coherent groupings) by as many artists.

In addition to the friendly and talented individual artist-craftsmen who created the objects included here, the author's deep gratitude is extended to the Renwick Gallery staff members, especially Kristin Olive, Raylene Decatur, and Anne Halpern, whose attention to detail and interest in the project have made it successful, and to Jan Axel and David McFadden for their advice and encouragement.

L.E.H.

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History of Porcelain

Porcelain. The name alone has been equated with treasure—silver and gold. The secret of its manufacture was closely guarded in Europe by those who discovered it in the eighteenth century. Louis XIV melted down his silver service to replace it with one of Chinese porcelain. The precious medium was democratized in the nineteenth century through industrial production, and today, revived and renewed, it is a material specially chosen by artists who work in clay as appropriate to their individual expressions.

Legend has it that the Venetian traveler, Marco Polo, invented the word porcelain when he first saw the magical material in the Orient while on his journey to the court of Kublai Khan. He called it porcellana, or cowrie shell, because of its glassy, hard surface. The Chinese are credited with the gradual development of porcelain between 600 and 900 A.D.

Porcelain is distinguished from other clays in that it is white, extremely creamy in consistency, and virtually free of impurities. Its translucence, when thin and fired at high temperatures, and its resonance, when struck, are often cited as distinguishing characteristics. Although the classic Chinese formula for making



Bowl, T'ang dynasty, 9th C.

H: 4.0 cm. (one and nine-sixteenth in.) D: 15.9 cm. (6¼ in.)

North China white ware is the earliest known Chinese porcelain. This bowl, a typical example, is heavily potted with a thick rim and a broad foot.



Courtesy Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution

Plate, Imari, ca. 1688. 1704

H: 7.8 cm. (three and one-sixteenth in.) D: 52.5 cm. (twenty-one and three-sixteenth in.)

Imari ware was made at the Arita Kilns in Kyūshū, Japan, for Japanese and Western markets. This bold design, in blue underglaze and enamel and gold overglaze, is typical of Imari export ware. Imari ware produced for the Japanese market was more subtle in design and color.

porcelain would not be duplicated by present-day ratios of the principal ingredients, those basic ingredients are unchanged, as described by Jan Axel and her coauthor Karen McCready in a book they are preparing for publication:

“Porcelain is composed of comparatively few ingredients: *kaolin*, the actual clay within the clay; *silica* or glass; and *feldspar*, the fluxing agent which causes the materials to fuse. High kaolin and silica content contributes to porcelain’s unique quality and, ultimately, to its shining, glassy surface. The fact that clay and glaze mature together at high temperature, forming an interlocking entity, is one of the traditionally held definitions of porcelain. This relationship gives porcelain its exceptional character among ceramic materials.”

It has been speculated that the development from the fabrication of stoneware in China to the production of porcelain took 1,500 years. Beginning with the Han dyansty (206 B.C.–A.D. 220)

China grew as vast and mighty as the Roman Empire during the same period. Trade connections were made and extended, and large sums were spent on luxury goods traded throughout Arabia, India, China, and the West. "China," as porcelain wares eventually were called, became an immensely important trade commodity between China and the outside world. In later centuries it caught the interest of traders from England, Islam, Holland, Portugal, and ultimately Spain. After making an early



Tankard, Meissen, ca. 1715

H: 21.4 cm. (8 $\frac{3}{8}$ in.)

Prior to developing the first true hard-paste porcelain formula in Europe, Johann Böttger produced a red stoneware that was given his name. The Böttger stoneware surface was hard enough to be engraved with a diamond wheel. This tankard is decorated with a cypher in a framework of scrolls and is mounted in gilded brass.

Courtesy Cooper-Hewitt Museum, the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of Design; Purchase in memory of John Innes Kane



Courtesy Cooper-Hewitt Museum, the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of Design; Purchase in memory of Commander Henry H. Gorringer

Plate, Meissen, ca. 1737-41
D: 37.3 cm. (14³/₄ in.)

Count Heinrich von Brühl (1700-1763) commissioned the 2,200 piece "Sulkowsky" (swan) tableware service while he was administrator of the Meissen factory. Meissen's renowned decorator Johann Joachim Kändler modeled the porcelain pieces that were embellished with the Brühl-Kolowrat coat of arms in gilt and enamel.

appearance in the Spanish colonies in the Americas, imported porcelain had reached the Dutch and English colonies by the late eighteenth century.

As early as the fifteenth century, European alchemists set out to discover the secret of making porcelain, but met with variable success. In fact, it was not until the early eighteenth century that the German experimenter Johann Friedrich Böttger, working at the court of Augustus the Strong, Elector of Saxony and King of Poland, succeeded in fusing a true hard porcelain. He recorded the event as occurring at five o'clock on the afternoon of January 15, 1708. In 1710 the Royal Saxon Porcelain Manufactory was established in Meissen, some twelve miles from Dresden, and the production of European porcelain began. Although Böttger's formula was closely guarded, by mid-century porcelain factories appeared throughout Europe.

Artists and Their Work

Dick Evans



Leslie R. Lacktman

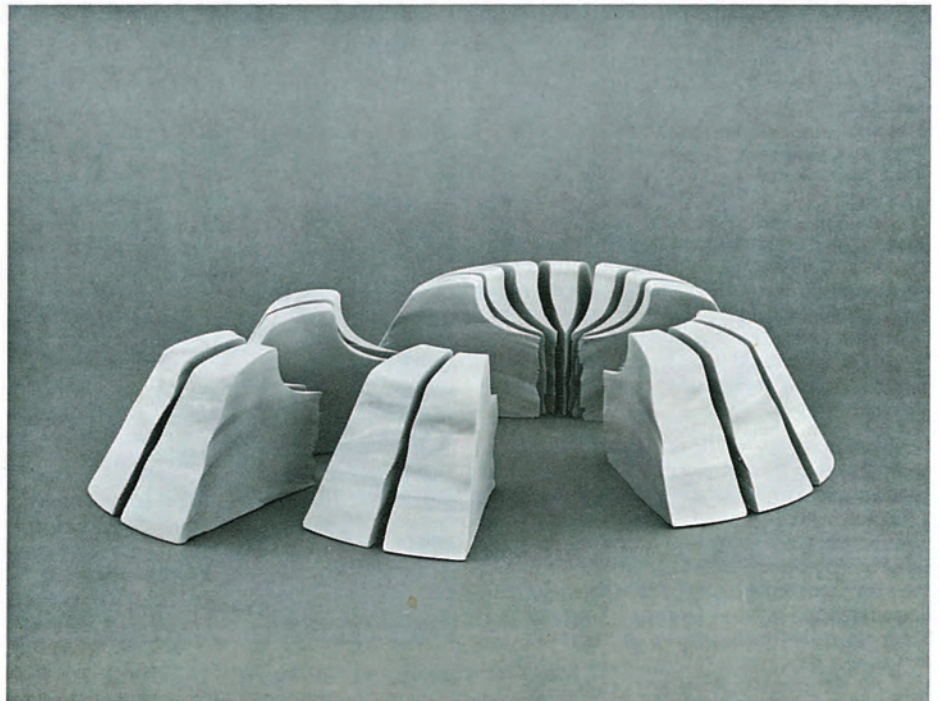
Biography

Born in Roswell, New Mexico, 1941. Received B.F.A. (1964) and M.F.A. (1966) from the University of Utah, Salt Lake City. Taught at the Texas Tech University, Lubbock, 1966-70; the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, 1971-72; and the University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, 1972-75. Has since taught at the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee. Began exhibiting in 1965 and has been included in many national juried and invitational shows in Illinois, New York, Indiana, California, and Wisconsin. Received purchase awards from Ball State University, Muncie, Indiana, 1974, and from California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, 1974. Has had solo exhibitions in several states, including Nevada, Texas, Colorado, and Wisconsin. Lives in Milwaukee.

Statement

I am drawn to porcelain in particular because of its visual softness and because of the painterly possibilities its smooth, white surface presents. The texture of porcelain has an elegance that seems perfect for rich, sensual, dreamlike colors. Porcelain also has the strength to make possible the use of very thin, intricate edges.

For the past several years I have been involved with the idea of creating objects that trigger sensations within the viewer in such a way as to carry that person into another environment within the mind. The intent is not that the piece be looked at merely as a landscape, spacescape, or the like, but that it should aid the viewer in exploring those aspects of the subconscious that may not be experienced in everyday considerations.



August Memories 1979
porcelain with underglazes; cone 4 oxidation
4 high x 15 wide x 20 deep (10.2 x 38.1 x 50.8)