NCECA Clay National, 1993

Preview by Susan Harris

Chris Staley. Teapot and cups. Porcelain 20 x 17.5 x 17.5 cm.

EVERY TWO YEARS, THE NATIONAL COUNCIL ON Education for the Ceramic Arts sponsors the NCECA Clay National, a juried travelling exhibition. As Exhibitions Chair for the organization, it gave me great pleasure to serve as curator for this year's exhibition. The 1993 exhibition comprises 49 recent works by 42 members of the international ceramics community. The extraordinary response to the call for entries (more than 950) reaffirms the significance of this comprehensive exhibition. The 1993 NCECA Clay National debuts at the San Diego Museum of Art on the occasion of the 27th annual NCECA Conference in San Diego, California. The theme of this year's conference, The Pacific Rim, provided the impetus to select three jurors representative of this geographical region: Janet Mansfield, potter and editor of *Ceramics: Art and Perception*, from Sydney, Australia; Mary Stoffler, San Diego, California, curator of Modern Art at the San Diego Museum of Art, and sculptor and educator Akio Takamori of Vashon Island, Washington. The show is scheduled to travel throughout the United States through until March, 1995.

*Above: Phyllis Kudder-Sullivan. **Pod 18**. 1992. Ceramic. 31 x 57.5 x 29 cm. Below: Deborah Kate Gruver. **Unsuitcase Gazebo**. Teapot. 1992. Terracotta. Muslin. 38 x 35.5 x 13 cm. Right: Todd Johnson. **Anchor**. 1992. Earthenware. 16.5 x 16.5 cm.*

Don Anderson. **Water Tower Teapot.** 1992. Stoneware. 15 x 27.5 x 14 cm.

"I wanted the exhibition to look fresh. The work represented should be the evidence of our progression and a reflection of our time. Then the work may suggest and even provoke our future directions. We share the same epoch in which to research and develop ceramic art; this is where we have been putting our energy in a serious way."

Akio Takamori made this remark after the final jurying decisions were made. The other two jurors, Janet Mansfield and Mary Stoffler were similarly looking to choose works that showed a contemporary spirit and a resolved intention. With a wide range of work offered for selection including traditional pots, decorative vessels and sculptural forms, the jurors noted new and individual approaches, experimentation with colour, form and materials and the evidence of the personality and purpose. Janet Mansfield said: *"None of the jurors showed any preference for any particular style of work; we were looking instead for work which took an idea further. This could have been an opinion about a current social issue, a philosophical reference either to historical ceramics or current art theories, or providing a deeper understanding of a traditional and functional piece of pottery. Some of the work was confronting, some serene, some used the materials and processes of ceramics in a dynamic or sympathetic way, other pieces denied clay altogether.Without information as to the names or situations of the makers, we had to make our selection solely on how the work presented itself to us and how we reacted to it from our own perspectives, knowledge and backgrounds. No-one would agree that our task was simple. We looked at each slide at least five times and those works that perplexed us, niggled at us, pushed us to argue its merit or otherwise, we viewed many more times. We looked at each individual piece and we looked at the exhibition as a whole, wishing to choose the best of the work submitted."*

Above: Debbie **Sigel. Untitled.** 1992. Egyptian paste, steel wire. 65 x 86 x 15 cm.

Below: Donna Aguirre. **Box.** 1992. Porcelain. Wood fired. 17.5 x 17.5 x 17.5 cm.

Lisa Elrich. **Summer Breeze.** 1992. Clay and steel. 60 x 30 x 17.5 cm.

Eun Kyung. **Opposites Attract Vase I.** 1992. Stoneware, salt fired. 25 x 34 x 14 cm.

Particularly concerned as to how the exhibition as a whole will be presented in San Diego, both from the installation point of view and the viewpoints of the artists and visitors, Mary Stoffler, curator of Modern Art at the San Diego Museum of Art in San Diego and responsible for setting up the inaugural exhibition, summed up the jurying experience. "There were some fine moments during the jurying for the NCECA Clay National; the point at which all the jurors realised out aloud that there were a quadrillion teapot entries; the instant merely two days into the process when it became clear that we all shared a visceral response to the colour yellow; the sublime flash, quite early on, in which we intuitively recognised that, from our diverse experiences, angles of view and geographical origins, we shared a common desire to communicate our particular notions regarding the exhibitability of works in clay and that our selections would add up to a presentation in which we could take pride. There were misgivings as well. 'How will this piece look in the end?' was an oft-voiced caveat. Of course, there will be surprises and yet there was the sensation that we had chosen the best exhibition possible given the limitations of the slides received. Every piece selected seemed to fit into some synchronous, unspoken vision held by each of the jurors. You cannot ask for a better jurying experience than that."

Susan Harris is a ceramic artist from Logan, Utah, USA. She serves on the board of NCECA as Exhibitions Chair. A catalogue is available illustrating the whole exhibition at a cost of $10, postage included. Contact Regina Brown, PO Box 5677, Bandon, Oregon USA 97411.