

CERAMIC DIRECTIONS: A CONTEMPORARY OVERVIEW

Raymon Elozua Margie Hughto Michael Lucero

John Roloff Jeff Schlanger Victor Spinski

Betty Woodman Arnold Zimmerman

JULY 15 — SEPTEMBER 15, 1983

STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK AT STONY BROOK

The exhibition is guest curated by Toby Buonagurio, ceramic sculptor and Assistant Professor, Art Department, State University of New York at Stony Brook, and Chris Dayman, Director of the Stony Brook Union Gallery and Craft Center, to whom special thanks are deserved for developing the exhibition and contributing the catalogue essays.

All of the participating artists are gratefully acknowledged for their helpful cooperation and loans to the exhibition. Thanks are due as well to Carlo LaMagna (O.K. Harris Works of Art, New York), Christopher Ford (Charles Cowles Gallery, New York), Chantal Guillemin (Fuller Goldeen Gallery, San Francisco), Arthur Monroe (The Oakland Museum, California), Theo Portnoy (Theo Portnoy Gallery, New York), and Elsa Weiner (Max Protetch Gallery, New York), for their assistance with needed information, photographs, and loans.

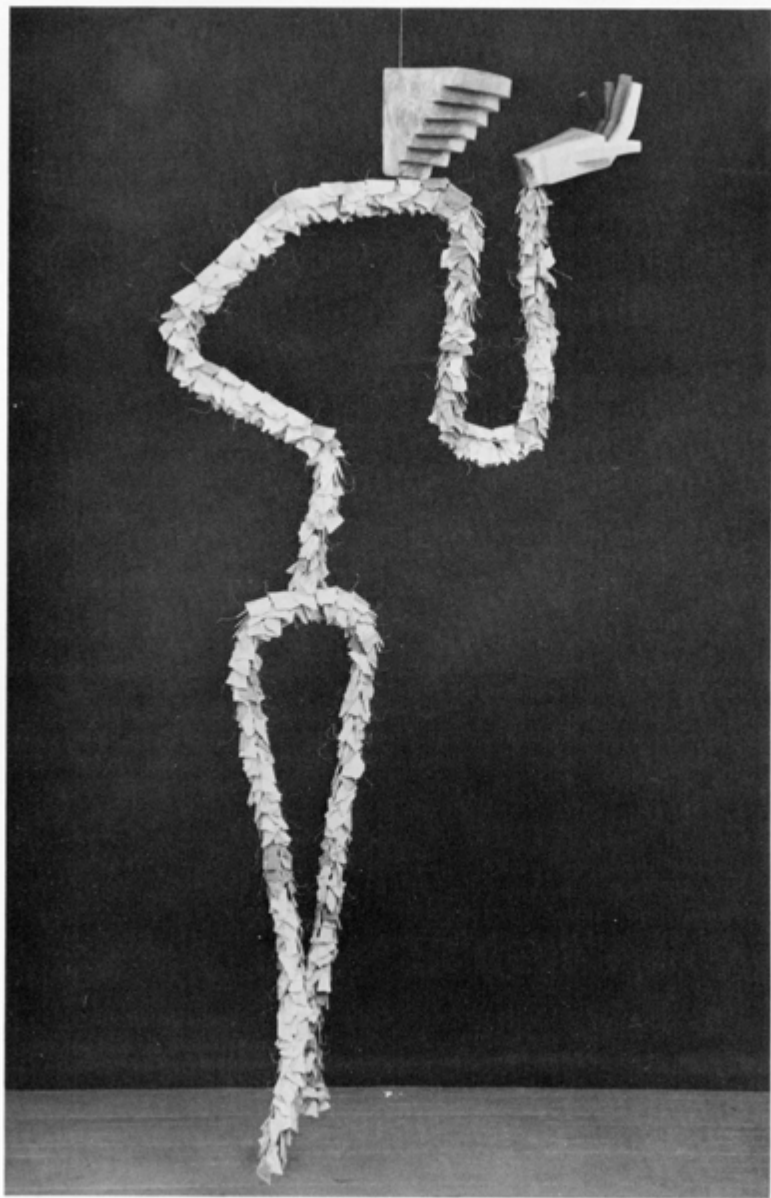
The Stony Brook exhibition is among twenty-seven State University of New York colleges and universities participating in a series of exhibits celebrating the art of clay. This statewide project, entitled I LOVE NEW YORK CERAMICS, is sponsored by the SUNY Programs in the Arts and the Council of Gallery and Exhibition Directors. Patricia Kerr Ross, Director, Programs in the Arts, and Cathy Kimball, Program Assistant, are gratefully acknowledged for their organizational efforts, publicity materials, and enthusiastic support for this unique undertaking.

The Gallery is grateful to staff members Audrey Fuller and Susan Collins for their assistance with the preparatory work for this exhibition, and to Gary Smith for his transportation and installation services.

Lynne Silkman
Acting Director

We would like to thank Lynne Silkman for her professional assistance and outstanding effort in helping us organize this exhibition.

Toby Buonagurio and Chris Dayman



Michael Lucero, *Untitled (Hand Lifted)*, 1982.

Photograph: D. James Dee.

CERAMIC DIRECTIONS: A CONTEMPORARY OVERVIEW

Essays by Toby Buonagurio and Chris Dayman

In *Ceramic Directions: A Contemporary Overview* we have attempted to bring together widely varied work by eight artists who use clay as their primary medium of expression.

Each is represented by major pieces which embody unique philosophical, aesthetic and technical concerns. These in turn portray but a modest sampling of the seemingly infinite, possible approaches to ceramics being exercised today.

It would be shortsighted to recognize these artists only as their work relates to making clay objects. There are more vital issues with which they are involved. Each individual's production may be more fairly surveyed as being associated with broader rhythms, existing or emerging trends in the art world: post-Pop/Funk, Photo-Realism, Decorative or Color Field Abstraction, Figurative Expressionism or even New Wave energy to name a few. With such diverse sensibilities, the work manifests itself as unique personal statements.

Some artists are concerned with the inevitability of passing time, some with poetic, visual metaphors. Others manage to spiritually transport us to fantasized places; still others create useful objects which beckon our imagination. Political innuendo may appear with a cutting edge or couched in humor. Even personal intrigue and classical concerns become the subject for surrealistic synthesis.

Chosen for the broad sweep of "directional" differences, this exhibit presents a momentary constellation of work from successful, prolific artists who produce their own special kind of imagery in clay.

— T.B.

Michael Lucero's large scale figurative abstractions mystify and entice. Suspended from the ceiling his nine foot tall androgenous creatures appear to defy gravity as they hover above the floor. With the mechanism of their suspension almost invisible, they convey the impression of a fragile weightlessness. These "personalities" are the culmination of hundreds of colored clay shards strung on a wire armature. They dangle gracefully, but nervously, like gigantic ritualistic necklaces. Lucero's figures activate the air around them. Each figure, like a bizarre mannequin, postures in a frozen gesture. The abbreviated limbs bristle with bits of colored wire like an electrified skeleton stripped of its flesh. Atop each figure a misshapen, colorfully transformed vessel becomes the head and receptacle from which a stream of ceramic fragments appears to cascade. On each head Lucero makes drawings which, like some magical graffiti, suggest faces and places and states of mind.

Lucero's figurative explorations conjure up a range of fantasies -associations that span from the exaggerated physical gyrations of tribal dance to childhood amusement park experiences where, in darkened corridors, chattering skeletons descended from nowhere, startling, amusing, yet all the while delighting.

— T.B.

Margie Hughto's work represents a link between painting and sculpture. In her ceramic tablets she explores image, color and surface. Each piece is dominated by the presence of a fan-like abstraction — an image which has become a kind of hallmark of Hughto's work. The fans with their luminous colors are like some exotic fossil found compressed in sediment. These thick, ceramic 'shaped canvasses' create a tension between painting and sculpture. Predominately flat in orientation, the manipulated surfaces undulate slightly above and below the picture plane, strategically imprinted with the marks of personal inflection and gesture. This dimensional tease becomes the artist's acknowledgement of sculptural concerns.

The tablets, with their varied pastel colors, are formed by the vigorous pounding together of colored clays and slips. The result of this robust activity is an inlaid appearance — colored clay wedges nestled side by side in a fan-like format. The physically flattened surface is disrupted by folds and ruffles which, though soft looking, are rigid in reality. They provide a kind of topographical relief.

Hughto's stoneware/porcelain pieces are about the physicality of clay. In a sense the tablets document her repertoire of manipulative possibilities — seeming to isolate the organic nature of clay at the stage when it is most pliable and readily altered.

After the tablets are dried and bisque fired, they undergo a second glaze firing which provides an additional surface enrichment. The results are not unlike a slab of unearched strata, partially and perfectly rippled by the metamorphic forces of nature.

— T.B.



Margie Hughto, *Garden Shadows II*, 1983.

Photograph: Courtney Frisse.



Betty Woodman. *Cup and Cup Stand*, 1982

Betty Woodman's functional and flamboyant work pays homage to the fine art of the ceramic vessel. Inspired by Italian Baroque architecture, Woodman pits the notion of art against that of craft. Her devotion to clay's functional potential appears to be just the starting point for sculptural investigations. Tension is created by the temptation to actually use her vessels and the desire to merely enjoy them visually for their striking presence.

Her repertoire is both diverse and highly developed and includes: whimsically ornamented tea services, bloated pitchers and meandering, puzzle-part servers among other things. So uniquely attractive for their own sake, it might seem a violation to actually put them to ordinary use. One might, perhaps, imagine such objects put to best purpose as further embellishments for the already rich and elaborate interior of the Topkapi Palace in Istanbul.

Interestingly, in recent years participation in delicately decorated environmental alterations has seemed as compelling to Woodman as object making. In fact she has collaborated, on several occasions, with Pattern and Decorative artists Cynthia Carlson and Joyce Kozloff in the design and execution of ambitious walk-through installations. Among her more overt contributions to the decorated interiors were colorful, spontaneously glazed ceramic tiles and vessels.

— T.B.

Victor Spinski's humorous trompe l'oeil sculpture challenges the viewer's perceptions of what is real and what is not. Combining the wit of a comic and the eye of a junk collector, Spinski scavenges society's discards for their humorous potential.

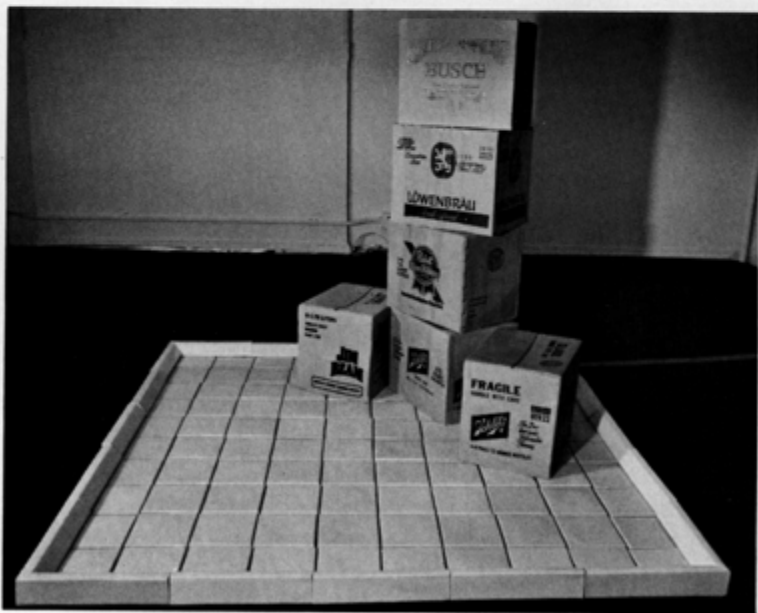
His collection of "Pop" images becomes a common denominator for the viewer. Everyday throw-aways of the type normally found in a trash bin — tin cans, half eaten fruit or broken household items — are an important source of inspiration for Spinski. His life-size ceramic garbage cans brim with clones of domestic refuse. Smaller assemblages of Kentucky fried chicken buckets, lipstick stained cups and greasy looking bones are so perfectly and lovingly detailed that they might at some future time be mistaken for the real thing.

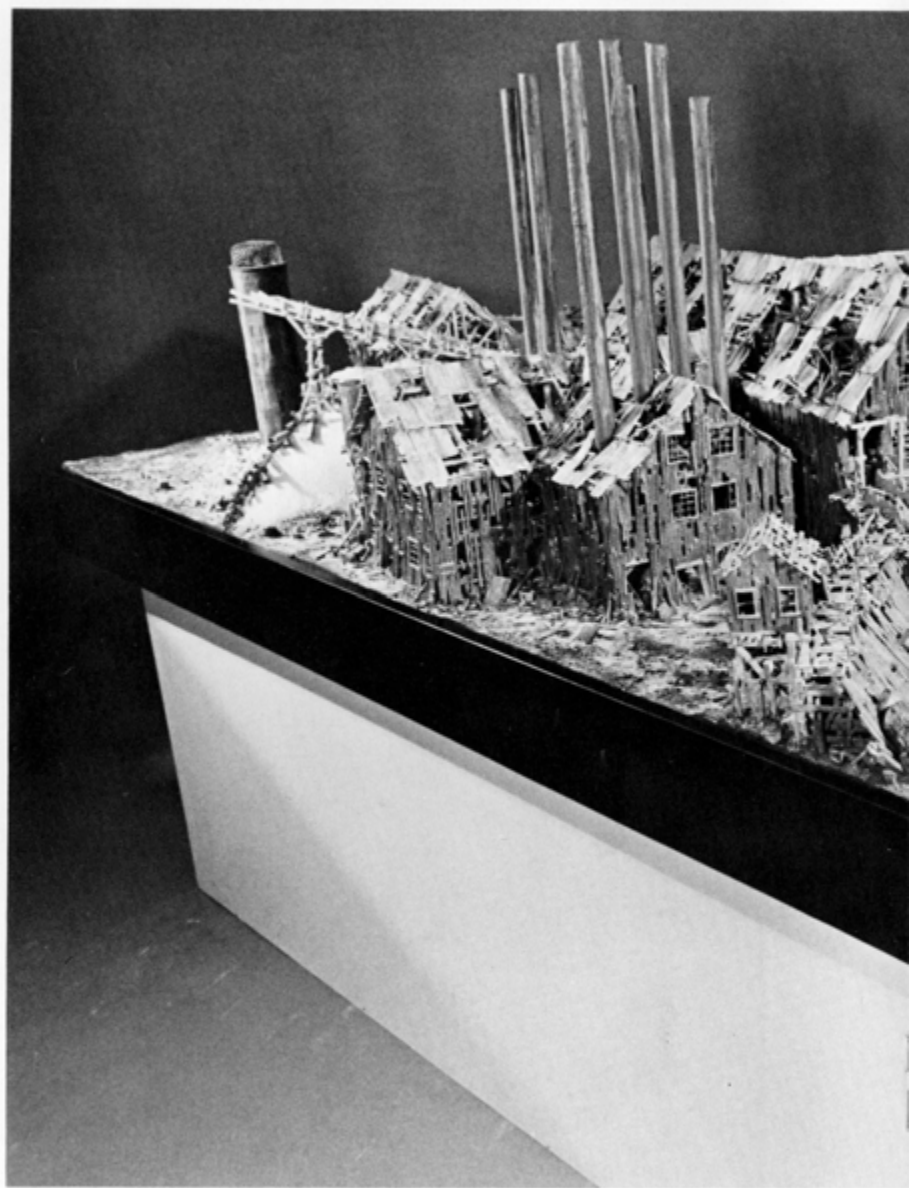
In his most recent improbable fountains, Spinski combines technical prowess with clever conception. In one such work rivulets of water stream down over a stack of convincingly bogus beer and liquor cartons creating the illusion of there actually being damaged contents within — broken bottles spilling out. Since this is a recycling fountain the 'contents' perpetually pour forth.

Spinski forces the viewer to take a second and often a third look at what one would not typically give a second glance. His sculpture is often punctuated with a satirical twist or a note of mild political sarcasm.

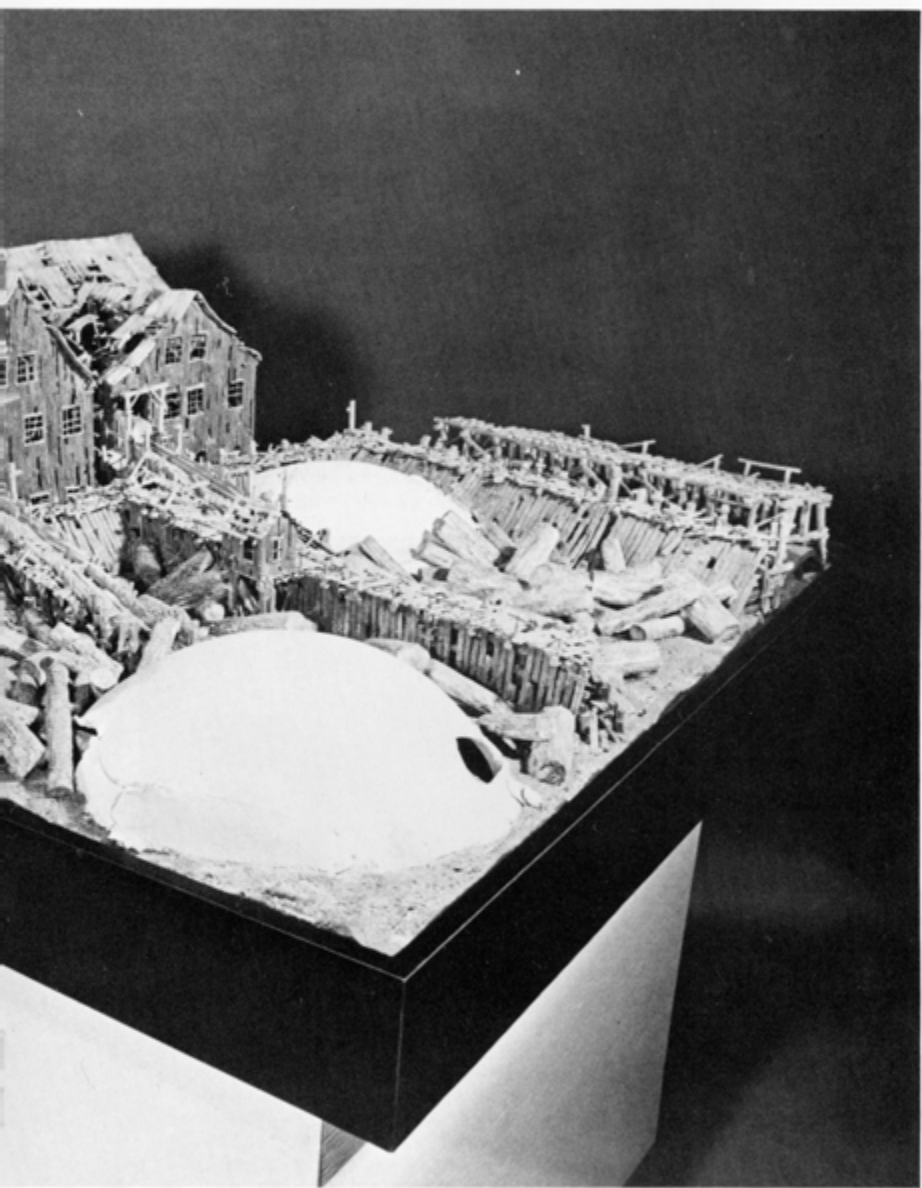
Victor Spinski elevates common place images — things which exist in each of our everyday lives but which we do not normally glorify — to a new level, utilizing the mundane as a vehicle for tongue-in-cheek humor.

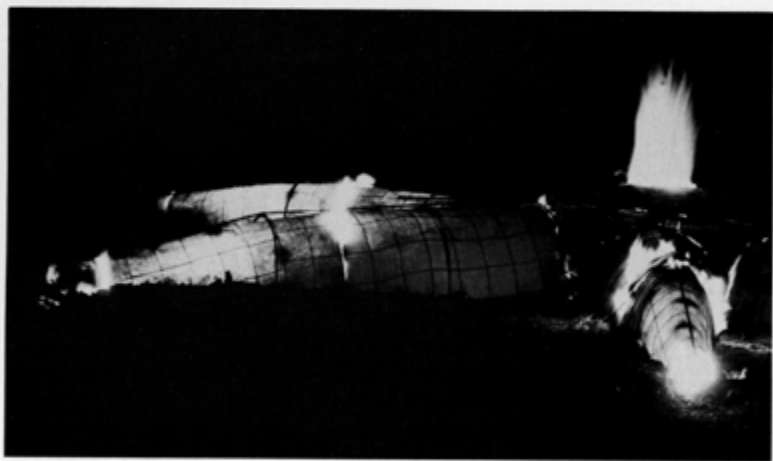
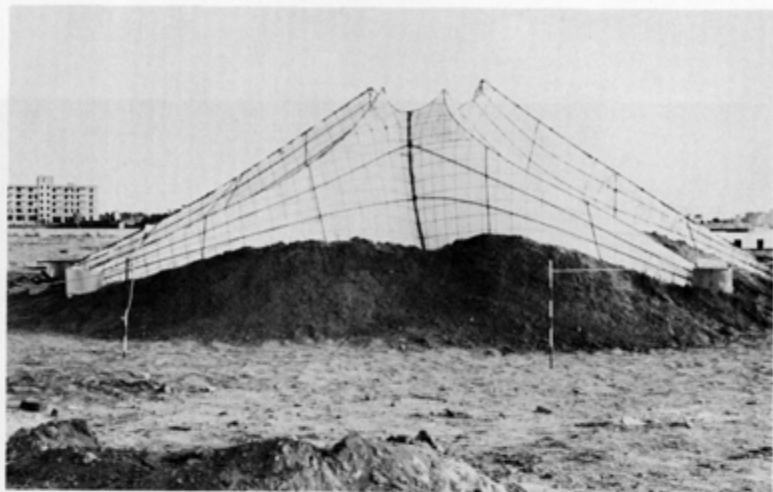
— T.B.





Raymon Elozua, #17 *Western Sawmill*, 1982.





John Roloff (top) *Mountain Kiln/Black Orchid*, 1982. (Detail, pre-fired state, kiln in place.) Steel, ceramic fiber blanket, earth, glaze materials, propane. Length: 60 feet. Oakland, California.

Photograph: Mufley Kibbey

(bottom) *Prairie Starfish/Glacial Epoch*, 1980. (Detail, night firing.) Steel, ceramic fiber blanket, glaze materials, propane. Diameter: 20 feet. Craven, Saskatchewan, Canada.

Raymon Elozua builds ambitious ceramic miniaturizations inspired by Industrial Americana. Abandoned saw mills, ship yards, amusement parks and drive-in movies are among the memorabilia from which Elozua works.

Complex and quite large, these 'models' are fascinating for their size and obsessive detail. One important difference however is that Elozua's buildings are perhaps more appropriately scaled to a Lilliputian world than to our own. Constructed in much the same way a carpenter builds, each plank and board is cut, assembled into larger structures, dried, eventually fired and painted. When first built the tiny environments appear new. As they evolve, each piece is maneuvered through its own aging process: warped, cracking 'boards' and the breakdown of clean geometric form create a speeded up version of real physical deterioration. This aging process halts when the piece has acquired its appropriately ripened appearance. Feelings of desolation and obsolescence whip through these tiny, defunct worlds and remind each of us of memories past. The work conveys a chilling sadness, a feeling of disappointment like a visit to a fondly remembered place where now the reality of ruin and decay serves to tarnish nostalgic memories.

In Elozua's pieces there is a prevalent sense of finality. Each structure appears frozen in its decay, balancing on the verge of physical collapse. The distinct absence of life is particularly disconcerting. Unlike a sterile model where the primary purpose is to replicate, Elozua's edifices not only emote but have an eerie presence which lingers.

— T.B.

John Roloff's work in ceramics is both peripheral and fundamental. Although he makes nothing like traditional ceramic objects, his interest is in the basic processes needed in ceramics. Indeed, it is through the contrasts and interaction of basic phenomenon, treated both literally and symbolically, that Roloff's work achieves its drama. Paranthetically, since Roloff's kilns are fired "on location," that is on the earth itself, they are here exhibited as documentary photographs or preliminary drawings. A kiln, made of a refractory blanket material that is attached to a metal rod and wire frame, is then fired at night, using gas as the fuel; the result, after the kiln has destroyed itself in the firing and has been cleared away, is a large shape of fired earth, a scar on the land. This scar is eventually recycled by natural processes, reabsorbed by the earth. Through this activity the instruments of change are dramatized and often brought into juxtaposition. Thus, for example, his *River of Glass/Vein of Fire* contrasts and expresses the nature and effect of water, earth and fire. John Roloff's kiln events are theatrical; team built and executed, fired at night, located on primitive land sites. The fire, then, not only identifies the shape, but forces an air of mystery and drama upon the event and the basic processes at work.

— C.D.



Arnold Zimmerman, *Untitled*, 1982

One's first reaction upon seeing **Arnold Zimmerman's** pieces is often to their exhilarating, monumental size. In fact, there are other works in this exhibition which actually have greater dimensions; it is in their references, their contrast with our expectations, that Zimmerman's works have such monumental scale and impact. After all, they are pots, are they not? Yet many are so frustratingly tall that one cannot look inside, but must instead deal with other realities: the obvious weight, the surfaces, the thickness and muscularity of coarse, fired clay. Many ceramic artists today attempt to embrace the language, forms and purposes of both art and craft, which Zimmerman's pieces do particularly well. His forms, his "pots," are extremely suggestive; one wonders, do the patterns and shapes have symbolic meaning, or are they simply decorative marks? Zimmerman, a young ceramicist, spent two summers working in France as a stone carver. The vigorous quality of the carved surfaces of his pieces recalls a poetically archaic way of working. The vocabulary of marks and patterns not only identifies the work and suggests its precedents, but also reveals the pleasure of the task of creating the pieces. Ceramics is an activity, as well as a body of objects. Arnold Zimmerman's work effectively reveals the pleasure of this activity.



Jeff Schlanger. *Tombstone*, 1980, and *Companero*, 1980 (detail).

The work of **Jeff Schlanger** is provocative and uncommon because of its impact and content. There seems to be few other ceramicists who share an expressed interest in the issues Schlanger explores. He was not always a "political potter," however his early forms, made during the 60's and early 70's, shared a philosophy which is perhaps most strongly expressed in the political pieces of the last ten years. Schlanger has always been interested in the rhythms, interdependence, connectedness, interaction of parts which create and characterize the whole; in other words, the "organic" nature of things. That philosophy informs Schlanger's political pieces which cry out at the destruction of that organicness, that need for mankind to understand and cherish its consciousness, its connectedness, its humanity. Although the serious and ongoing crisis in Chile has been, for about ten years now, the particular issue which Schlanger has chosen to discuss with his art, we may obviously apply the meaning of his work to other situations. The extent to which such issue-specific political art can sustain its impact is related to the degree in which the philosophy expressed has enduring and applicable meaning. The continuing brutality of contemporary events, which feature the domination of power and wealth over fundamental human and earth needs and integrity, suggest that Jeff Schlanger's work will have that enduring meaning.

EXHIBITION CHECKLIST

RAYMOND ELOZUA Born Stuttgart, Germany, 1947; resides New York City.

#5 Talc Conveyor, 1978-81
Ceramic with acrylic, 19 x 24 x 48 inches

#17 Western Sawmill, 1982
Ceramic with oil, 32 x 50 x 98 inches
Courtesy O.K. Harris Works of Art, New York.

MARGIE HUGHTO Born Endicott, New York, 1944; resides Syracuse, New York.

Gardenfall, 1983
Colored clays, slips, glazes, 30 x 40 inches

Sunlit Tapestry, 1983
Colored clays, slips, glazes, 30 x 40 inches

Whirling Blossoms, 1983
Colored clays, slips, glazes, 30 x 40 inches
Courtesy of the artist.

MICHAEL LUCERO Born Tracey, California, 1953; resides New York City.

Untitled (Hand Lifted), 1982
Ceramic with wire, 109 x 50 x 9 inches

Untitled (Cow Skull), 1982
Ceramic with wire, 99 x 37 x 30 inches

Untitled (Night), 1982
Ceramic with wire, 100 1/2 inches (height)
Courtesy Charles Cowles Gallery, New York.

JOHN ROLOFF Born Portland, Oregon, 1947; resides Oakland, California.

Documentation of **Prairie Starfish/Glacial Epoch**, 1980
Photographs (series of 3); 102 x 41 inches, 64 1/2 x 41 inches, 102 x 41 inches

Drawing of **River of Glass/Vein of Fire; Tributary Kiln**, 1981
Pastel and pencil, 116 x 42 inches

Courtesy Fuller Goldeen Gallery, San Francisco, California.

Documentation of **Mountain Kiln/Black Orchid**, 1982

Photographs (series of 3); 30 x 40 inches each

Photography by Lee Fatheree and Mulley Kibbey

Courtesy The Collection of The Oakland Museum Archives, Gift of Kaiser Aluminum & Chemical Company.

JEFF SCHLANGER Born New York City, 1937; resides New Rochelle, New York.

Survivor, 1980
Ceramic stoneware, 50 x 20 x 15 inches

Compañero, 1980
Ceramic stoneware, 50 x 21 1/2 x 12 inches

Tombstone, 1980
Glazed ceramic stoneware, 48 x 27 x 6 inches

Courtesy of the artist.

VICTOR SPINSKI Born Kansas, 1942; resides Newark, Delaware.

Bear Box Fountain, 1981
Ceramic, 5 x 5 x 4 1/2 feet

Sink Fountain, 1983
Ceramic, 5 x 5 x 4 1/2 feet

Courtesy Theo Portnoy Gallery, New York.

BETTY WOODMAN Born Norwalk, Connecticut, 1930; resides New York City.

Cathedral Facade Holder, 1982
Lowfired earthen ware, 9 x 29 x 8 inches

The Tea Ceremony, 1981
Lowfired earthen ware, 11 x 32 x 9 inches

Improbable Pitcher, 1982
Lowfired earthen ware, 8 x 19 inches

Rippled Pillow Pitcher, 1982
Lowfired earthen ware, 19 x 24 x 13 inches

Cup and Cupstand, 1982
Lowfired earthen ware, 7 x 12 x 12 inches

Courtesy Max Protetch Gallery, New York.

ARNOLD ZIMMERMAN Born Poughkeepsie, New York, 1954; resides New York City.

Untitled, 1981
Clay, 60 x 25 x 25 inches

Untitled, 1982
Clay 84 x 36 x 36 inches

Untitled, 1982
Clay, 84 x 36 x 36 inches

Courtesy of the artist.

PREVIOUS EXHIBITIONS AT THE ART GALLERY

- 1975** FACULTY EXHIBITION
- 1976** MICHELLE STUART
RECENT DRAWINGS (AN AMERICAN FEDERATION OF ARTS EXHIBITION)
SALVATORE ROMANO
- 1977** MEL PEKARSKY
JUDITH BERNSTEIN
HERBERT BAYER (AN AMERICAN FEDERATION OF ARTS EXHIBITION)
- 1978** LEON GOLUB
WOMEN ARTISTS FROM NEW YORK
JANET FISH
ROSEMARY MAYER
THE SISTER CHAPEL
- 1979** SHIRLEY GORELICK
ALAN SONFIST
HOWARDENA PINDELL
ROY LICHTENSTEIN
- 1980** BENNY ANDREWS
ALEX KATZ
EIGHT FROM NEW YORK
ARTISTS FROM QUEENS
OTTO PIENE
STONY BROOK 11, THE STUDIO FACULTY
- 1981** ALICE NEEL
55 MERCER: 10 SCULPTORS
JOHN LITTLE
IRA JOEL HABER
LEON POLK SMITH
- 1982** FOUR SCULPTORS
CECILE ABISH
JACK YOUNGERMAN
ALAN SHIELDS
THE STONY BROOK ALUMNI INVITATIONAL
ANN MCCOY
- 1983** THE WAR SHOW

STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK AT STONY BROOK

THE FINE ARTS CENTER



art gallery

I LOVE NEW YORK

Ceramics

SUMMER CERAMICS EXHIBITIONS 1983 / STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK GALLERIES

THE FINE ARTS CENTER ART GALLERY