

# Ceramophile

Alfred Ceramic Art Museum



# Almost There

## A Message from the Director



Wayne Higby

Almost There is the byline for this issue of *Ceramo-phile*. Our last issue, Spring 2015, featured on the cover a picture of our

new facility beginning to take form. At that time, it was just a structural steel outline of things to come. Once again our cover features a picture of our new museum showing this time that, in fact, we are almost there. As our museum has come into view, there is a sense that the whole campus of Alfred University is transforming. Its dramatic glass façade, with its the upper most reaches that glow like translucent jade in the late afternoon

sun, is becoming a landmark signaling that one has arrived in Alfred.

Each time I enter the building to check up on the progress of construction, I am astonished at how magnificent this building is. The extended entrance sight line that leads into the main gallery from the south pays homage to the environment - trees, sky and clouds infiltrate the glass. This entrance then culminates with a framed, long view of the hillside beyond, which celebrates our unique location in the rolling hills of Western New York. Other views inside the building order and reorder a compelling geometry of the interior space. Moving through this space, gathering up the physical realm, is a choreographic immersion into architecture as art.

Everywhere you look there is potential for installing important works from the museum's growing collection. Recently, the museum was very fortunate to acquire a major work by Waylande Gregory, undisputedly one of the legendary sculptors of the early 20th century. The Alfred Ceramic Art Museum now owns Gregory's *Mother and Child*, 1936. This work, which stands 6 feet high, 3 feet wide and weighs approximately 2,000 lbs., is a stellar example of Waylande Gregory's large-scale ceramic work. *Mother and Child* was first exhibited at the Whitney Annual Exhibition, 1941, and was accompanied by sculptures by Theodore Roszak and David Smith. It was later exhibited in front of the Philadelphia Museum of Art.



Cover image and all architectural photos © 2016 Brian Oglesbee



The museum is grateful to Tom Folk who facilitated the gift of *Mother and Child* to the museum from the Gregory estate. Tom Folk, PhD is the acknowledged authority on Waylande Gregory whose important book on the artist (*Waylande Gregory: Art Deco Ceramics and the Atomic Impulse* published by the University of Richmond Museums) served as the catalogue for the major Waylande Gregory exhibition of 2013-14. Waylande Gregory received the Charles Fergus Binns metal for high achievement in ceramic art in 1939.

Other recent acquisitions include an astonishing earthenware vessel by Jamie Smith and a highly unusual tea bowl by Japanese contemporary artist Toshio Matsui. We have also acquired a beautiful and poetic Shoji Hamada

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*As our museum has come into view, there is a sense that the whole campus of Alfred University is transforming.*

through the generosity of a special museum friend Sylvia Rosen. Additionally, our collection of Charles Fergus Binns work was enriched by the gift of three vases from David Weiss in memory of Penelope Weiss and by two bowls from Dick Adams in memory of Rosemary Binns Adams.

As part of the museum's acquisition policy, a new effort will be made to establish a collection of drawings by ceramic artists. Drawing is a fundamental expression of the artist revealing the intimate biography of the hand and mind.

It seems unusual that we rarely see the drawings of ceramic artists. The Alfred Ceramic Art Museum will attend to that neglect. We have now in our collection a number of drawings by Frans Wildenhain and by Alfred University MFA graduates. Pictured in this issue of *Ceramophile* is an extraordinary drawing by Eddie Dominquez (MFA 1983), which was graciously donated to the museum by Graham Marks.

As the museum looks forward to opening the doors to its new building, we are *continued*



busy imagining the first installation of the permanent collection. Curator of Collections Susan Kowalczyk and I have been busy developing an exhibition schedule that will feature our permanent collection and ongoing rotating exhibits. We have begun a file that is rapidly filling with exciting ideas for future exhibitions. Selecting works from the permanent collection is a rewarding task and a daunting one. It is difficult to choose what pieces to feature from a collection with so many highlights.

As part of the permanent collection installation, works chosen by the art school students will be featured. As the future unfolds the *Mentored Student Curatorial Project* will continually facilitate student access to the collection in the context of their classes. Currently, Meghen Jones, PhD in Art History, is teaching a class in ceramic art history and has used the collection extensively to develop student scholarship. The students in her class chose examples from the collection, which reflected their own individual interest. They proceeded to research these works and report on their findings through writing and verbal presentations. Edits of this material will be used as part of the informational text accompanying the student's choices, which will be featured as part of the exhibition of the permanent collection. This student-curated selection will rotate from time to time as other faculty mentors engage the process with their students.

This particular curatorial process is one of the most exciting initiatives made possible by the new museum building, which can, because of its generous gallery space, feature one or more exhibitions, while allowing for the continual installation of the permanent collection.

In keeping with its focus on students, the Museum recently welcomed Linda Sormin our new Associate Professor Ceramic Art who began teaching at Alfred University this spring semester. For her first assignments with her students, she brought them to the museum so that they could spend time viewing the collection. They then returned to the ceramic studios to make work based on their responses to individual pieces that captured their imagination. It is impressive to see the work of these students come to life now out of the creative chaos of the studio.

Along with the making outcomes of the students and the scholarship generated by student and faculty research, the museum encourages the investigatory engagement of its collection and related University archives by all with a serious interest in ceramic art.

The scholarship the museum generates is reflected in the recently published catalogue, which accompanied the museum's ground breaking exhibition *O Pioneers! Women Ceramic Artists 1925 -1960* curated by Ezra Shales and Susan Kowalczyk. Included in this issue of *Ceramophile* is the essay from that catalogue on Leza McVey by Caroline Cole the Ellyn McColgan Assistant Curator of American Decorative Arts and Sculpture at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts.

In addition to immersion in construction details, acquisitions, exhibition planning, student projects and research we have been working behind the scenes to establish a new advisory board for the museum. We are especially pleased that our major benefactor Marlin Miller has agreed to be chair of our Advisory Board.

The museum welcomes his guidance as well as that of Michele Cohen, Charlotte Herrera, Grant Holcomb and Bob Pfannebecker. Each of these highly experienced individuals brings to the museum a wellspring of insight and information as well as a commitment to the museum's long-range success.

Join us on the threshold of the museum's future. Your interest in our progress and your help in securing the museum's future will be gratefully received. Keep up to date on our social media sites.

There are, no doubt, challenges ahead as the museum moves from its current location and strives to gain its footing in its new beautiful building. The future holds so many possibilities as it beckons the rewards of hard and creative work. Ceramic Art pulsates at the heart of human experience around the world. Its metaphors associated with earth and fire give language to the struggles encountered by all individuals and nations. Ceramic Art connects all cultures to each other in a current of exchange and mutual understanding. We all are of the earth transformed by the fire of life. We all seek security, peace and harmony. The Alfred Ceramic Art Museum stands as a center of cultural appreciation, ancient and current, as art facilitates an enriched dialogue of rigorous outreach and understanding.

We are always Almost There.

**Wayne Higby**



# New Acquisitions

## Artist's Statement – Toshio Matsui

Last year, 2015, a Yayoi Period (300 BCE-250 CE) site on the Kyoto University campus was excavated. I asked my archaeologist friend to get the clay at the site for use in ceramics. At the same time, I found a very interesting, shaped hole at an Edo Period (1603-1868 CE) excavation site. This hole is called the Chuhketsu (architectural, pillar holes in the ruins).

I received permission to use the hole as a mold for the tea bowl. Then I fired it to about 900°C. After firing I painted seven layers of lacquer



*Toshio Matsui, teabowl, 2015, clay and lacquer, 3-1/2" x 5-1/2", museum purchase, Roger D. Corsaw Collection, ACAM 2015.15  
Photo by Brian Oglesbee*

coating on the inside of the bowl.

This technique dates back to the Jomon Period (12,000-300 BCE). Lacquer was used on the surface of pottery in order to prevent water leakage. This technique became obsolete in Yayoi era without resurrection until today.

I have focused on this process for my bowl because it is a pleasing fusion of ceramics and lacquer and it offers contemporary beauty that does not burden the environment. This bowl proposes a new aesthetic for the tea ceremony.



*Eddie Dominguez, Window Box Dinnerware, 1983, drawing, paint on board, 28" x 42" framed, gift of Graham Marks, ACAM 2015.17  
Photo by Brian Oglesbee*

Facing page: Waylande Gregory, Mother and Child, 1936, glazed earthenware, 72" x 33" x 21", from the estate of Waylande Gregory, ACAM 2015.14  
Photo by Randl Bye

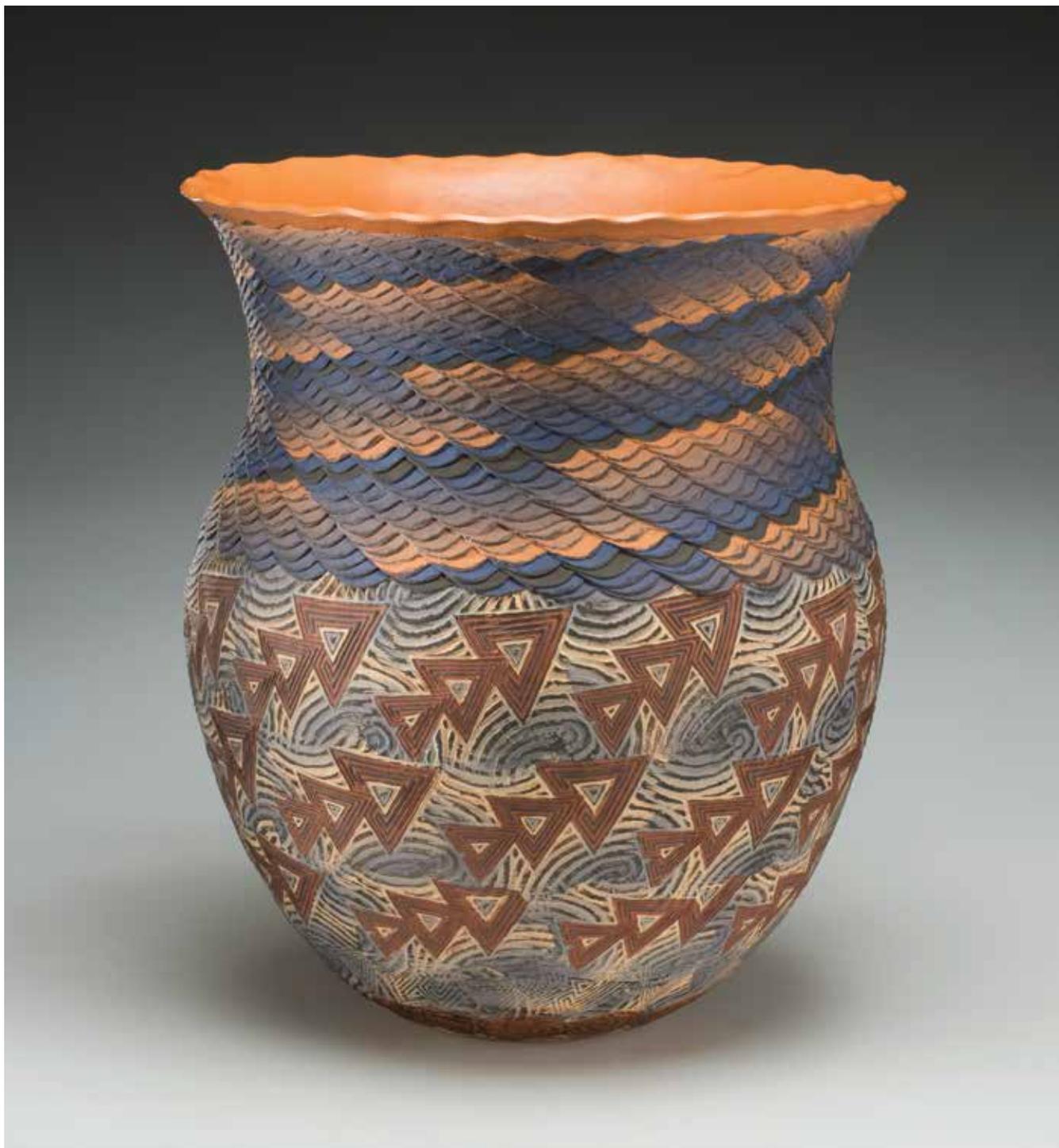


*Shoji Hamada, vase, 20th c., stoneware, glazed, 9" x 6-1/4" x 3-1/2", gift of Sylvia L. Rosen, ACAM 2015.10  
Photo by Brian Oglesbee*

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# New Acquisitions



*Jamie Smith, Trigram Vision, 2015, slips, earthenware, 19" x 14",  
museum purchase, Roger D. Corsaw Collection, ACAM 2015.11  
Photo by Brian Oglesbee*

# Research Visits

## Research in the Collection and the Agency of Ceramic Objects

By Meghan Jones

The thirteenth-century Japanese monk Nichiren wrote in his treatise *The True Object of Worship* (*Kanjin honzonshō*) that all physical elements in the universe—from stones and blades of grass to grains of dust—have a Buddha nature; all have a cause and effect. This notion could be understood as an antecedent to recent developments in art theory and material culture studies. Cultural theorist, critic, and artist Mieke Bal, in her 2002 book *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities: A Rough Guide*, advocates for an empowerment of the object; she encourages a return to close readings that allow objects to “talk back” to us. And art theorist W.J.T. Mitchell, in his 2004 book *What Do Pictures Want: the Lives and Loves of Images*, urges us to think about images as animated, as exerting effects. These texts suggest ways for us to think about the agency of objects and how we approach the study of ceramic objects. When Alfred students encounter works in the Alfred Ceramic Art Museum collection, they are able to investigate what causes an object to come to fruition, what effects the object exerts on viewers, and what social worlds the object inhabits.

Inquiries regarding the agency of objects were at the heart of research projects students conducted for the fall 2015 graduate seminar *Global Flows: Ceramic Art, Craft and Design*. The process began with an introduction to



Robert Graves, left, and Meghan Jones in museum storage with pitcher by Ellen Shankin. Photo by Caitlin Brown

the collection from Curator of Collections Susan Kowalczyk, then each student proposed an object of study—one that may have resonated with individual studio practice as well as offered the chance to explore historical and theoretical topics of interest. The objects comprised vessels and sculptures by Rudy Autio, Charles Fergus Binns, Andy Brayman, Jack Earl, Clary Illian, Jun Kaneko, Richard Milette, Ellen Shankin, Akio Takamori, Takeshi Yasuda, as well as Goryeo dynasty celadon bowls from the collection of Colonel John R. Fox. The next step consisted of a series of discoveries, debates, and discussions. For example, taking a flashlight to peer inside Charles Fergus Binns’s 1929 *Ovate Vase* revealed a sectional throwing method that speaks to Binns’s self-reliance as a modern

studio potter. Study of the celadons involved close examination of their materiality, iconography, and the social worlds of both the Goryeo dynasty and the twentieth century. These research projects also closely relied on primary and secondary sources in Scholes Library and interviewing artists. The result was a series of illuminating presentations and research essays that could only have come about through intensive direct study and consideration of the agency of objects.

*Dr. Meghan Jones is Assistant Professor of Art History in the School of Art and Design of the New York State College of Ceramics, Alfred University. Her research and teaching center on the histories of ceramics, East Asian arts, and craft in transnational perspective.*

# Research Visits *continued*



Gabrielle Graber with sculpture by Akio Takamori.  
Photo by Caitlin Brown

*“Having the opportunity to study Akio Takamori’s double sided figure vessel, 1996 was a unique experience for me. Being able to physically examine how Akio touched the porcelain was an insightful and intimate moment that alluded to the mystery embedded in his personal narrative. Overall, this experience granted me a chance to discover the vitality that embodied this work of art.”*

– Gabrielle Graber



Will Newman-Wise with Ritzy Fritz by Jack Earl.  
Photo by Caitlin Brown

*“This project was a wonderful way to cap my first semester here. It gave me an opportunity to approach Jack Earl’s Ritzy Fritz within the framework of ideas and vessels covered in Meghan’s class.”*

– Will Newman-Wise



## Linda Sormin's junior sculpture class

*The Alfred Ceramic Art Museum offers a vital opportunity for students to interact with ceramic history. For me, the Museum's potential comes to life through this query: How do we forge new relationships with the past, and incite conversations that shape contemporary ceramic practice in fresh and meaningful ways?*

– Linda Sormin, Associate Professor of Ceramic Art

*Linda Sormin, kneeling, with members of her junior sculpture class researching objects with Susan Kowalczyk, second from right.*



*Brianna Burke, junior art student*

# O Pioneers! Women Ceramic Artists 1925 – 1960

## Leza McVey's Vital Forms

By Caroline Cole

The ceramic forms of Leza McVey (1907-1984) are graceful and engaging, standing proudly, if slightly askew. Building by hand, McVey produced unorthodox and surprisingly animated vessels, fitted with whimsical, cock-eyed stoppers and sometimes feet. Despite the vitality of her works, McVey has only recently figured largely in the history of mid-century studio ceramics. Cited in most surveys as an innovator of abstract shapes, she is often described as a “forgotten potter” whose career was curtailed by her poor health and arguably by the success of her sculptor husband, William McVey (1904-1995), a casualty of the inherent sexism of the period. Martin Eidelberg’s *The Ceramic Forms of Leza McVey* (2002) did much to put her work in context.<sup>1</sup> While it is clear that McVey was engaged in finding transcendent forms, the classification of her work as “pottery” remains somewhat ambiguous. Though frequently exhibited alongside artists who defined themselves as potters, McVey insisted on using the term “ceramic form” for her works, numbering each piece in the mode of modern sculptors. Negotiating utility and abstraction, McVey’s stoppered vessels continue to complicate traditional interpretations of pottery versus ceramic sculpture.

Born in Cleveland, Ohio, Leza Marie Sullivan trained at the Cleveland Institute of Art from 1927-1932. She married

her husband William McVey (Bill), also a student at Cleveland, and the two moved from cities in Texas to Colorado, in a trail led by Bill’s career. In 1947, Bill McVey was offered a position in the sculpture department at Cranbrook Academy, and for the next six years, the couple lived and worked on the campus where Bill gained renown as a teacher. It was during this period that Leza developed her uniquely hybrid “ceramic forms.”



Leza McVey, Ceramic Forms No. 34 (left) and No. 33, 1951, stoneware, glazed, h: 16" and 10-3/8". Collection Everson Museum of Art, Purchase Prize given by Harshaw Chemical Company, 16th Ceramic National, 1951, PC 52.635.1, .2 Photo by Dave Revette

Two stoneware vessels from 1951 in the collection of the Everson Museum, illustrated here (see following page), are well known examples of this type. Each maintains the anatomy of a traditional bottle—body, neck, and corked stopper—but in this case, they

have sprung legs. *Ceramic Form No. 33* is round, squat, and alert, balancing an ovoid body on tripod legs with a distinctive beak-like stopper. Its neighbor, *Ceramic Form No. 34*, is an irregular oval, rising tall into an attenuated neck and an off-center top that tilts upward with an air of ease. Both gleam like the oily undercoat of an aquatic bird, in a gunmetal glaze, with hints of red under the black.

The two forms are frequently shown together, underscoring their personable charm like a pair of nested birds or a couple mid-conversation. They were exhibited together as McVey’s initial entry in the 16th Ceramic National competition in 1951, sponsored by the Syracuse Museum of Fine Arts. Awarded the “Purchase Prize,” the pair was acquired for the permanent collection and remains in the Everson Museum, a gift of the Harshaw Chemical Company, which was based in McVey’s hometown of Cleveland. McVey returned to these designs several times. Eidelberg’s book shows related sketches for stoppers that are variations on the pointed face of No. 33, unmistakably resembling a chicken’s head.<sup>2</sup> Four years later, in the Cleveland Museum of Art’s *May Show* from 1954, the form gains a modified neck.<sup>3</sup> In *Everyday Art Quarterly* in 1953, a version of No. 34 has a slightly different stopper.<sup>4</sup>

Her forms are inarguably anthropomorphic, but as Eidelberg notes, the notoriously reticent artist did not directly address this aspect of her work. In her limited

explanations, she focuses on the historicizing influence of traditional ceramics. In *Everyday Art Quarterly* in 1953, McVey explains: “My approach is purely personal—quite frankly I am more than a little weary of the pseudo-Oriental. No vital period in history has been content to express its needs in the quotation marks of a previous period.”<sup>5</sup> Profiled alongside Bernard Leach and Warren and Alixandra MacKenzie—artists guided by the Japanese tradition—one wonders if such a statement amounted to antagonism.

Her articulate aversion to tradition likely fueled her move into hand-built asymmetry, away from the potter’s wheel. She uses very little in the way of surface embellishment. Her applied textures, a repertoire of raised polka dots, incised lines, or geometric patterns, are always in the same muted earthy tones. “Glazes, to me, should do no more than enhance the basic form and lend visual and tactile appeal,” she writes.<sup>6</sup> Her attention to form could also be the effect of a lifetime struggle with her eyesight, which perhaps heightened her attention to the tactile experience.

The language of classification becomes particularly poignant when considering that, from 1952 onward, both Leza and Bill consistently exhibited at the Cleveland Institute of Art’s May Show where Bill’s work frequently placed well in the class of “Ceramic Sculpture” while Leza’s was exhibited in the class of “Pottery.” A reviewer described her entry to the pottery field in 1952 as five

pieces in which “the artist is consciously endeavoring in her use of free form, to bring her work close to the condition of sculpture.”<sup>7</sup> So, how did the couple consider one another’s artwork? Did they purposefully submit to separate classes to avoid direct competition?

One could argue that Leza McVey was in essence always a sculptor as a result of her formal training in Cleveland. Her early interest in animal sculpture (a subject historically deemed appropriate for female sculptors) never fell away. Leza continued to model cats, for instance, well into her late career—stylized, attenuated, and slinking creatures in the same natural tones frequented by the artist.

Contemporary taste has selectively resurrected McVey’s zoomorphic vessels as sculptural forms, whereas her animal statuary is all but ignored. While museums are taking notice of Leza McVey’s work, not one major institution boasts a McVey ceramic cat. What remains clear is that Leza McVey played a transformative role in blurring the boundaries between sculptural and functional ceramics, creating provocative and powerful works that are not going to be forgotten.

*Caroline Cole, Ellyn McColgan Assistant Curator of American Decorative Arts and Sculpture, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, graduated with a B.A. from Georgetown University in 2005, and received her M.A. in the history of decorative arts and*

*design from the Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum in 2009. She worked as Curatorial Assistant at Rienzi, the house museum and collection of European decorative arts and paintings at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, before joining the Museum of Fine Arts in 2013.*

<sup>1</sup> Martin Eidelberg, *The Ceramic Forms of Leza McVey* (New York: Philmark Publishers, 2002).

<sup>2</sup> Martin Eidelberg, 54.

<sup>3</sup> Henry S. Francis and William M. Milliken, “Review of the Exhibition,” *The Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art* 41 (1954): 92.

<sup>4</sup> Leza McVey, “Contemporary Ceramists: Edwin and Mary Scheier, Bernard Leach, Warren and Alixandra MacKenzie, Katherine and Burton Wilson, and Leza S. McVey,” *Everyday Art Quarterly*, 27 (1953): 20-21.

<sup>5</sup> McVey, “Contemporary Ceramists,” 20.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Henry S. Francis and William M. Milliken, “Review of the Exhibition,” *The Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art* 39 (1952): 86.

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This essay by Caroline Cole is reprinted from the *O Pioneers! Women Ceramic Artist, 1925-1960* catalog; companion to the exhibition of the same name.

To purchase a catalog go to our website: [ceramicsmuseum.alfred.edu](http://ceramicsmuseum.alfred.edu) or call 607-871-2421.

# Museum Advisory Board



*Marlin Miller, chair*

Marlin Miller graduated from Alfred University in 1957 with a B.S. in ceramic engineering and earned an M.B.A. from Harvard University. He joined the Alfred University Board of Trustees in 1972 and served as Board Chairman. Miller founded Arrow International, Inc. in 1975 and retired in 2003 as company president and CEO. Miller was instrumental in building the Alfred Ceramic Art Museum as well as the Miller Performing Arts Complex at Alfred University. Miller resides in Reading, PA.



*Michele Cohen*

Michele Cohen is a graduate of the University of Vermont (B.S.) and Hunter College (M.S.) with degrees in early childhood development. She joined the Alfred University Board of Trustees in 2001 and was awarded an Honorary Alumna Recognition Award in 2006. Cohen retired from Cohen & Steers Capital Management in 2004. She has served as a trustee for Project Keshet and the Museum of Arts and Design (MAD). Cohen resides in New York, NY.



*Charlotte Herrera*

Charlotte Herrera is a trustee of the American Craft Council as well as a member of the Rochester Memorial Art Gallery Executive Committee and Chair of the Gallery's Government Affairs Committee. She is past President of the Memorial Art Gallery Board of Managers. She is the founder and former Chair of the Memorial Art Gallery Fine Craft Show. Additionally, Herrera is a former Vice President of the Arts and Cultural Council for Greater Rochester. Herrera resides in Rochester, NY.



*Grant Holcomb*

Grant Holcomb is Director Emeritus of the Memorial Art Gallery of the University of Rochester. He received his B.A. in History from the University of California, Los Angeles and his M.A. and Ph.D. degrees in Art History from the University of Delaware. Holcomb has been the recipient of fellowships and grants from the J. Paul Getty Institute, the National Endowment for the Arts, the New York State Council on the Arts and the Henry Francis DuPont Winterthur Museum. Holcomb resides in Rochester, NY.



*Robert Pfannebecker*

Bob Pfannebecker is the managing partner of the Lancaster, Pennsylvania, law firm of Zimmerman, Pfannebecker, Nuffort and Albert. He graduated from Franklin and Marshall College and the University of Pennsylvania Law School. He is a nationally renowned art collector. His extensive collection acquired over a forty-year period focuses on Craft/Art and includes a premiere collection of important work by ceramic artists who are leaders in the field. Pfannebecker resides in Holtwood, PA.

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# Friends of the Museum

Listed below are the individuals or organizations who have taken out a new membership or renewed their membership contribution, contributed to an acquisition, memorial, or capital campaign fund, provided in-kind services or contributed ceramic work to the permanent collection, from the period of March 2015 through February 2016.

It is not too late for you to join and help us provide a broader funding base for the Museum. Your membership contribution helps to fund our changing exhibition program, care of the permanent collection, and special educational events. Membership information is located on the back of this issue.

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Almost there, with the help of senior art student Victoria Kue.

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