

Bachelor of Science in Art History and Theory Thesis

If Collections Could Speak, What Would They Say?

A Study of Ten Objects from the  
John and Andrea Gill Collection of Ceramics

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## **Introduction**

Ceramic objects from around the globe develop distinctive patterns and characteristics that are born out of specific sets of cultural values, and serve countless functions ranging from the decorative to the utilitarian, and the ceremonial to the political. The materials and techniques involved in making these objects are as diverse as the regions they originate from, and determine the aesthetic value, style, and desirability of each piece. I have selected and studied ten ceramic objects from the much more extensive collection of artists John and Andrea Gill, American ceramicists and professors at the New York State College of Ceramics at Alfred University. The Gill collection includes ceramic works from fellow artists, historical pieces from numerous cultures, student works, and ceramic works by both John and his wife Andrea. The Gills have acquired the objects in their collection throughout their travels and interactions with others working in the field, and the collection harbors influences and inspiration to John's work as an artist, as well as his appreciation for and celebration of the ceramic medium.

This research aims to analyze a sliver of the history of global ceramics. I will first reflect on the theoretical aspects of collections and collecting, and then examine a small selection of pre-modern, modern, and contemporary ceramic objects. Finally, I will argue that the roots of the Gill collection include an intangible accumulation of historical references and cultural influences that fuse

together to become the backbone of the postmodern aesthetic—a collection in and of itself—that defines John Gill's personal style as an artist.

## **Collections and Collecting: An Overview**

I will begin by considering the motivations to collect objects and the significance of uniting works under the parameters of a specific type of collection. What does it mean to be a collector and to have a collection? What does the collection say about the collector and visa versa? How do we make decisions about what to collect, and how do we assign value to a certain type of object or collection of objects? John Gill's collection of ceramics is incredibly diverse, and so are his motivations to collect. How, then, does the collection itself represent and speak for its objects when they have such divergent origins, influences, and histories? In essence, *if collections could speak, what would they say?*

Psychologist Werner Muensterberger investigates the psychological factors involved in the desire to collect in his book titled *Collecting: An Unruly Passion*, and defines collecting as simply "the selecting, gathering, and keeping of objects of subjective value."<sup>1</sup> This definition is at first glance rather broad and obvious, but it provokes a series of deeper and more challenging questions such as *what* do we select, *why* do we gather, and *how* do we assign subjective value? Dr. Simona Mitroiu, Senior Researcher at the Alexandru Ioan Cuza University, Romania, takes this idea a step further and argues that the motivation

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<sup>1</sup> Werner Muensterberger. *Collecting: An Unruly Passion: Psychological Perspectives*. (Princeton University Press, 2014), 4.

to collect is driven by "desire and nostalgia, or salvation and necessity to construct a new system, complete and permanent, that will resist in the face of the destruction brought on by the passing of time."<sup>2</sup> I will derive from these two examples a definition of my own—for the sake of the arguments proposed in this essay—and claim that a collection is a manifestation of the instinct for preservation, both personal and cultural, guided by the specific interests and values of the individual collector. My use of the word "manifestation" here is broad for a reason; I believe that collections are physical and emotional, real and imagined, and tangible and intangible. This research focuses on a real, physical, tangible collection of objects, as well as the intangible accumulation of historical references and cultural influences behind them.

What, then, does it mean to be a collector and to have a collection? I believe that no matter who they are or what they collect, a collector is a lover of history and a caretaker of objects. They find joy, security, value, happiness, solace, intrigue and maybe even magic in the act of accumulation, and the passion to seek and to save contributes strongly to their identity as an individual. A collection serves as a tell-all into the mind of the collector, who has, in a sense projected their very being into the objects they desire and appreciate. A collection is, for example, not only a shoebox full of seashells, but a shoebox full of beaches, of far away lands both real and imagined, of faces and places dear to the heart, and of memories of the collection process itself. In simpler terms, a

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<sup>2</sup> Slmona Mitroui "To Collect in Order to Survive: Benjamin and the Necessity of Collecting." *Cultura: International Journal Of Philosophy Of Culture & Axiology*, 8, no. 1 (June 2011) 213.

collection is much deeper than it appears on the surface; it is more valuable, and more ephemeral. A collection is the story of its collector, and the collector is the storyteller.

At this point I have defined collectors and collections but I will now discuss *why* we collect. Psychologists seem largely to agree that the drive to collect and to preserve begins during childhood, when curiosity and imagination are at their peak, and because children tend to assign value to objects, believing that they hold some sort of magical power.<sup>3</sup> Objects collected during childhood tend not to have significant monetary value, but rather emotional and sentimental value, or security in the sense of a baby blanket or a favorite doll. Children dream up souls for their inanimate possessions, and find comfort in these objects during times of fear, sadness, anxiety, or any other turbulent experience that a child is unable to fully understand.<sup>4</sup> The objects, then, become magical bearers of burdens, and take on the challenges that the child cannot. At the same time, collected possessions during childhood allow children to establish a sense of individuality, a method for comparison to others, and they serve as symbols of personal identity.<sup>5</sup>

When a particular object develops significance during the most formative years of childhood, we can assume, then, that it is not uncommon for that individual to continue to collect into their adulthood, and although the collection

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<sup>3</sup> Muensterberger, *Collecting: An Unruly Passion: Psychological Perspectives*, 9.

<sup>4</sup> Fred B. Charatan "The Psychology of Collecting." *Antiques & Collecting Magazine* 108, (2003): 28-30.

<sup>5</sup> Charatan, "The Psychology of Collecting," 29.

might change over time, the motivations for collecting tend to linger. As Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi explains,

Artifacts help objectify the self in at least three major ways. They do so first by demonstrating the owner's power, vital erotic energy, and place in the social hierarchy. Second, objects reveal the continuity of the self through time, by providing foci of involvement in the present, mementos and souvenirs of the past, and signposts of future goals. Third, objects give concrete evidence of one's place in a social network as symbols (literally, the joining together) of valued relationships. In these three ways things stabilize our sense of who we are; they give a permanent shape to our views of ourselves that otherwise would quickly dissolve in the flux of consciousness.<sup>6</sup>

This description indicates that the objects we collect truly define every aspect of our identity for the duration of our lives.

Children are, of course, not the only true collectors of the world, and our final portrait, then, is of the private collector. This collector makes their own rules, establishes value based on their personal attachment to the objects they desire, and finds unmatched joy in the hunt for new and unique treasures that define both themselves and their collections. John Gill is this collector, and his collection of ceramics is filled with not only historical treasures, but also fragments of his identity, and inspiration for his artwork. At the end of this essay I will discuss one of his postmodern ewers as its own collection of sorts—historical, geographical, and cultural—and discuss how the ten objects selected for this research represent the types of stylistic, formal and conceptual influences that contribute to postmodern ceramic art.

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<sup>6</sup> Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi. "Why We Need Things." In *History From Things*, edited by Steven D. Lubar and W.D. Kingery, 20-29. (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993) 23.

Now that I have discussed collections and collectors, I will discuss the specific role of the collected object or objects—ceramics, in this case—and what we can learn from them. By uniting similar objects, the collector, in general, is removing the objects from their original context and instead organizing them for their aesthetic, conceptual, monetary, or sentimental value. Although context might get lost, the unifying of objects under any of the above categories allows for intercultural comparisons, formal qualitative and quantitative comparisons, and personal opinion or preference, all of which are valid and valuable lenses for analysis. Ceramics collections are particularly potent because they are often embedded deeply with cultural history, and can reveal information about time period, social class and hierarchy, politics, style, geography, and material. Well-known and highly respected collections of ceramic objects such as the Percival David Foundation's collection of Chinese ceramics, and the Marer Collection of Contemporary Ceramics are thoroughly documented examples of collections studied by scholars in the field.

The Percival David Foundation is praised for its specificity, as it consists exclusively of Chinese ceramics ranging from the 3<sup>rd</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>7</sup> David's wife, Lady David, clarifies that "With few exceptions Sir Percival limited himself to wares no earlier than the Song, so that he could assemble a collection of quality that would be of unique value to scholars and students."<sup>8</sup> The Marer collection focuses instead on the transformation of ceramics during mid-twentieth century

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<sup>7</sup> Rosemary E. Scott, *Percival David Foundation of Chinese Art: A Guide to the Collection* (The School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1989), 33.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.



America and represents the personal interest of the collector. As Mary Davis MacNaughton writes of the Marer Collection, "The works from this period were not acquired years after the fact, but at the time they were made, and by a collector who knew the artists personally."<sup>9</sup> The Gill collection is a hybrid of these two approaches to collecting, it is comprehensive historically, and also significant sentimentally to the collector as a fellow ceramicist. In either case, the most impressive aspects of ceramics collecting and collections is a keen eye for style and relevance, a breadth of historical knowledge on the behalf of the collector, and a passion for the material and its tradition. The Gill collection is evidence of all of these characteristics.

The next section of this essay examines in detail the ten ceramic objects I chose to study from the Gill collection. The criteria for selecting these objects were as follows: each object must be a container, each object must have a handle and spout, and each object must be able to be filled up and poured out. These parameters are broad and somewhat abstract, but they are intended to be representative of the full collection in its entirety. The objects are organized chronologically and are divided into two sections titled "Pre-modern" and "Modern and Contemporary," respectively. The objects are of Chinese and Euro-American origins, ranging from the 11<sup>th</sup> century to the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Each piece is evaluated in terms of its formal elements and historical context, and can be found in the appendix catalogue at the end of this essay.

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<sup>9</sup> Mary Davis MacNaughton, "Preface" in *Revolution in Clay: The Marer Collection of Contemporary Ceramics*. (Seattle: Ruth Chandler Williamson Gallery at Scripps College in association with University of Washington Press, 1994), 9.

## Pre-modern

The five objects that fall into the "Pre-modern" category of this research are of Chinese and European origins. None of the objects were made by a specific artist, but rather by workshops, skilled potters or manufacturers. They were likely produced in quantity, with the intention to satisfy a specific patron, function, or both.

The first and oldest object in this body of research is an 11<sup>th</sup> century Song Dynasty Chinese ewer (Appendix no. 1). The Jingdezhen kiln site in southern China is well known for making, firing, and distributing fine porcelain for the emperor and the royal family, and though the potters themselves were of a low working class, they remained highly sensitive to the style and quality of porcelain products desired by their wealthy patrons.<sup>10</sup> The Song Dynasty in particular is praised for producing some of the most elegant and refined porcelains to this day, and its aesthetic influence can be found in ceramic examples around the world.

This Song Dynasty Ewer serves as the foundation for all the other objects in this research because it represents the massive impact that China, and particularly Chinese porcelain, had on the global ceramic market. China had discovered the materials necessary to make porcelain long before Europe, and for that reason, Chinese porcelain became a major export and a highly desirable commodity throughout Europe. Trade between Europe and China also led to a

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<sup>10</sup> Li Zhiyan, Virginia L. Bower, and He Li *Chinese Ceramics: From The Paleolithic Period Through The Qing Dynasty* (New Haven & London, Beijing: Yale University and Foreign Languages Press, 2010), 265-267.

dissemination of the styles and tastes of traditional Chinese aesthetics into other areas of European life and culture, and from that point on, European ceramics constantly referenced their Chinese predecessors.<sup>11</sup> The rest of the objects in this collection, whether Chinese, European or American, reference elements of early Chinese ceramic design, and all of these historical references ultimately surface in postmodern ceramics, which I will discuss at the end of this essay.

The piece is made of porcelain and the exterior is evenly coated in a transparent, light green feldspar and wood ash glaze. The body is thrown and has been altered by pressing indentations into the sides of the clay while wet, forming eight distinct lobes and referencing organic forms found in nature such as a melon or squash. The handle and spout bring grace and elegance to the piece that defines Song Dynasty Jingdezhen porcelain, as the curvature of the handle mimics that of the spout, bringing harmony and balance to the entire vessel.<sup>12</sup> The glazed foot of the ewer is a major indicator of value for this piece, because it would have to have been fired on a riser inside of a saggar that protected the vessel from the harsh environment inside the kiln. This extra protection would have ensured the even quality of the surface of the piece, which gives it desirability and even rarity

The next piece from the collection is also Chinese, and was most likely used as a storage jar, perhaps for vinegar (Appendix no. 2). It is possible that this porcelain jar was also created at the Jingdezhen kiln site in southern China,

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 235-241.

<sup>12</sup> Reino Liefkes and Hilary Young *Masterpieces Of World Ceramics* (London: V&A Publishing, 2008), 36-37.

around the same time as the Song Dynasty Ewer, during or after the 11<sup>th</sup> century. The coarse texture of the clay body matches that of the ewer, and the transparent green glaze is similar in appearance. Although this jar was obviously assembled more quickly and with less attention to fine detail, it lacks any sort of decoration and has the same loop feature as the ewer for attaching a cork or lid, as well as a sharply cut spout like the spout of the ewer, observations which could justify dating the jar to roughly the same period of production.

The bulkiness of the jar makes it clear that this object was intended to be handled and used frequently, and it is possible that the jar could have been used for shipping because of the fact that there is no handle, and the spout is comparatively petit and protected inside the curvature of the neck. If the jar were to tip over onto its side, the spout is situated in such a way that it would not make contact with the ground, rendering the whole unit more or less unbreakable and therefore perfect as a shipping container. We can assume then that because the jar is designed in every way to be resilient and utilitarian, that it was used by more than one person. It was handled frequently, filled and emptied, shipped and transported, and perhaps even bought and sold. This jar differs fundamentally, however, from the Song Dynasty ewer in that it rejects style in favor of function, despite the fact that it shares many of the same design features.

The third object from the collection is small porcelain Chinese teapot, also likely produced at Jingdezhen (Appendix no. 3). The teapot is made of thin,

transparent porcelain with a light bluish-white glaze that emulates the simple, delicate aesthetic of Qingbai ceramic wares of the Song and Yuan Dynasties. Porcelain from this time, most commonly plates, bowls and assorted ewers, are known for their incised and molded floral designs as well as the jade-like appearance of the qingbai glaze.<sup>13</sup>

Qingbai wares of the Song and Yuan Dynasties, although prized by the royalty, were also used frequently by the working class because of the sheer volume that was produced at this time.<sup>14</sup> It is not unreasonable then to suggest that such an item could have been owned and used by an average, working class family. Tea was and still is an incredibly formative aspect of Chinese culture and ceramic wares, and this teapot, though tiny, is no exception. It would have been part of a set used for serving tea, where each person would receive their own individual teapot with the tealeaves inside. Hot water would then be poured from a larger container into each teapot, and once the tea had brewed, the individual would pour their tea into a separate vessel for drinking.

This particular teapot was made by pressing the porcelain into a mold, shaping the body of the pot, including the decorative relief aspects of the piece. Along the base of the pot is a lotus petal design, commonly found in qingbai wares of the Southern Song Dynasty during the 13<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>15</sup> A floral motif, possibly referencing a peony design, wraps around the center of the pot at its

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<sup>13</sup> Stacey Pierson *Qingbai Ware: Chinese Porcelain of the Song and Yuan Dynasties* (The Percival David Foundation of Chinese Art, 2002), 11-12.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 7-9.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.

widest point; this particular design would have indicated royalty and virtue. The spout is short and straight with a diagonally sliced tip, and the handle is formed into a graceful loop with two decorative incised lines running along the edges. The lid of the teapot has a hand-build lip that fits loosely into the opening, and has a small knob in the shape of a flower bud on top.

The fourth object in the collection is a Renaissance water jug from France or Spain, which was most likely created between 1550 and 1600 (Appendix no. 4). This water jug, which is nearly identically to a jug belonging to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, would have been the same type of jug used by farmers in France and Spain during the Renaissance era.<sup>16</sup> Workers would carry this type of jug with them while laboring in the fields, and it would have served as a canteen, providing them with the water they needed in order to stay hydrated.<sup>17</sup> Most of these jugs were unglazed for practical reasons; the raw clay would sweat in the hot sun, keeping the water inside cold through the process of evaporative cooling, just as sweat keeps our skin cool on a hot day. The most likely reason that the jug from this collection is glazed on the upper half is simply so that it could be more easily wiped down and kept clean. It would have been filled from a well in the morning and carried with a worker in the fields throughout the day, and is large enough that it would not necessarily need to be refilled, providing the luxury of relatively cold water to working class farm laborers. This

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<sup>16</sup> Ian Wardropper "Ceramics in the French Renaissance" In *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000- April 2008) [http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/cera/hd\\_cera.htm](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/cera/hd_cera.htm).

<sup>17</sup> J. Ilorens Artigas and J. Corredor-Matheos *Spanish Folk Ceramics of Today* (New York: Watson-Guption Publications, 1974), 180.

particular water jug design remained popular in rural areas of France and Spain until the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>18</sup>

This thickly thrown jug is made of a red terracotta clay, and the upper half, including the handles and spout, has been dipped in a white slip and then again a shiny, dark green lead glaze, while the lower half remains unglazed. The body of the jug is round and full, and the uneven throwing lines are visible in the surface of the clay. Attached to either side of the short, thick neck is a pulled handle for carrying, and between the neck and the shoulder is a smaller pulled handle for pouring. The spout is relatively short and straight, with a blunt but smooth edge, and is glazed on the inside. The base of the piece is roughly finished with numerous scratch marks, and is coated in a thin layer of shellac to minimize leaks.

The fifth object from the collection, a William Brownfield & Sons coffee tureen brings the workshop mentality of production into the commercial sphere and the domestic space. The tureen was manufactured in Cobridge, England in 1861 (Appendix no. 5). The William Brownfield & Sons pottery company was originally established in 1808, and in 1836 belonged to Robinson, Wood and Brownfield until it became simply Wood and Brownfield in 1841. Then, in 1851, Wood left the company and William Brownfield was the sole owner until his sons joined him in a partnership in 1871.<sup>19</sup> During these twenty years William Brownfield produced mainly molded jugs made of stoneware with the initials

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<sup>18</sup> Marc Pillet *Potiers et poteries populaires en France* (Paris: Dessiain et Tolra, 1982), 9.

<sup>19</sup> Geoffrey Godden *Staffordshire Porcelain* (New York: Granada Publishing, 1983), 400.

"WB" inside of a Staffordshire knot, along with the name of the particular pattern. After the partnership in 1871, the company produced a wide variety of porcelain plates and majolica that are significantly more popular due to the large quantity that was produced.<sup>20</sup> In 1892, the company became the Brownfield's Guild Pottery society, which lasted only a short time and went out of business by 1900.<sup>21</sup> Since the tureen from the collection was produced in 1861 during the years when William Brownfield had full ownership over the company, it is much more rare than some of the later porcelain wares, and is in turn very valuable and collectable today. The Victoria and Albert Museum collection owns the same "Donatello" tureen in blue, indicating that this piece is of a high quality and rarity in the larger scheme of Staffordshire pottery during the mid to late 19<sup>th</sup> century in England.<sup>22</sup>

The tureen is made of molded, smear-glazed stoneware with a vivid pink luster. The outer surface is pitted with a matte finish, and decorated with a raised, Victorian style floral motif around the bottom, and a band of vertical columns that accentuate the tapering around the neck. The tureen has a pewter ormolu lid (ormolu refers to any added or attached metal accents to ceramic objects) and a lever that was likely attached at a later date, and printed with the marking "40 James Dixon & Sons Sheffield." This particular design is titled "Donatello," and was available for order in several colors and color combinations.

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 400.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> V&A. "Donatello I Brownfield, William I V&A Search the Collections <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/0151166/donatello-jug-brownfield-william/> Accessed March 3, 2016.



Each of the five pieces in this section reveals the pre-modern interest in producing ceramic products that would represent the status of their owners. The early Chinese examples were meant to adhere strictly to a particular era of style that was popular among the royalty, while the Renaissance jug is purely a functional, mass produced object. The Brownfield tureen falls in between, combining elements of popular style and mass production. The next section examines five objects of Chinese and American origins that focus instead on the role of the artist, and the cultural functions of ceramics wares.

### **Modern and Contemporary**

The sixth piece in the collection is a Chinese teapot from Guangzhou that dates to around 1950, during the early years of the People's Republic of China (Appendix no. 6). This type of teapot would have been used for serving tea to passengers on trains, and was in fact considered disposable. After they had finished their tea, the passengers would simply discard the pot because it was faster and more efficient to make a new one than to clean and store a collection of tea wares on the train. It was not necessary, then, for this type of teapot to have delicate or refined features, as the entire life of such a teapot was dedicated to a single tea service aboard a train, where only the most necessary components—the container, the handle, and the spout—were taken into consideration.

This teapot is made of stoneware and is coated with a thick, low-fire turquoise frit glaze that runs and collects in heavy drips around the bottom edges of the pot. The round body was made quickly by attaching two thrown bowls together at the lips, and the handle and spout seem bulky and awkward. The base is finished with a lopsided, circular foot that does not sit flat on an even surface, giving the entire teapot a precarious wobble. The lid is slightly wider than the pot itself, and its rough, jagged edges hang over the sides, scraping along the unglazed portions where it meets the lip. One word that best describes this teapot is "honest:" it makes no attempt to hide its materiality or to conform to a certain style. It functions simply as a teapot, and very likely a disposable one.

The seventh object I will discuss is a Yixing style teapot that embodies all of the traditional elements of yixing tea ware, including precision of design and execution as well as the simplicity and modesty of the yixing aesthetic (Appendix no. 7).<sup>23</sup> The district of Yixing in the province of Jiangsu is the location where the yixing tea tradition originated. According to archeological records, the earliest evidence of these distinctive purple clay wares in Yixing dates to around the 16<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E.<sup>24</sup> Yixing was also heavily involved in the production of tea, which made the teapot a logical design choice for potters hoping to sell their wares. Between the popularity of tea drinking and the availability and beauty of the purple clay found at Yixing, the yixing teapot tradition was born, and it remains

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<sup>23</sup> Song Boyin "Tea Drinking, Tea Ware and Purple Clay Ware," in *K.S. Lo Collection in the Flagstaff House Museum of Tea Ware. Part 2*. (Hong Kong: The Urban Council, 1984), 7.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

popular to this day with very little variation from even the oldest examples.<sup>25</sup> This teapot brings to the Gill collection an ancient Chinese tradition with a modern perspective, as it was a product of the early years of the Cultural Revolution, which brings new political and cultural connotations to its story and history.

This teapot is made of dense and darkly colored shale clay and is completely unglazed. The smooth texture of the surface is achieved during the slab-building process while the artist gently but firmly forms the clay into the rounded shape by patting it with a small paddle as it spins slowly on a wheel. The result is a satin finish that is free of any imperfections or visible joins where separate sections attach to one another. The handle and spout, as well as the loop on top of the lid are all rolled out over a tapered dowel. The lid itself fits so precisely onto the teapot that the seam between the two is virtually undetectable while it is in place. About a fingers length inside the teapot, just above the handle, there is a tiny imperfection in the clay, which was left there intentionally by the artist as a secret signature. The only legible marking on the piece is a production stamp in the center of the base.

The eighth object I will examine is a teapot from the "American Modern" line of tableware by American designer, Russel Wright (Appendix no. 8). In 1939, Russel Wright introduced the "American Modern" line of ceramics, which he believed satisfied the midcentury desire for attractive, stylish, functional, and affordable tableware: he was absolutely correct. Although his previous attempts

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<sup>25</sup> Boyin, 7-8.

at modern furniture design were less than successful, "American Modern" exploded in popularity among the middle class, and eventually became a household name.<sup>26</sup> Consumers were able to purchase the items one at a time or as a full set, which made them accessible to virtually anyone, and since the line was manufactured for eleven years between 1939 and 1950, customers could build their own individual collections over time with the pieces that best suited their needs. The line was available in a series of unexpectedly bold colors, including "Glacier Blue," "Seafoam Green," "Seafoam Blue," "Cedar Green," "Steubenville Blue," "Black Chutney," "Cantaloupe," "Coral," and "Bean Brown."<sup>27</sup> This particular teapot represents the shift in taste that occurred throughout the United States during the 1940s and 1950s, as well as the drive to incorporate stylish and artistic design into the domestic space. In this case, the age-old act of tea service and tea drinking becomes synonymous with stylistic trends, such as streamlined form and bold or unusual colors, made popular by mass media and absorbed by commercial industry of the time.<sup>28</sup>

The teapot is made of slip-cast porcelain with a shiny turquoise glaze in "Seafoam Green," one of the original available color choices. The teapot has a full, rounded body that incorporates the spout, which tapers toward the tip, giving the piece a streamlined, teardrop shape. The handle is a large, sweeping loop that balances with the spout, and the lid is a simple round disk with a knob that

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<sup>26</sup> William J. Hennessey *Russel Wright: American Designer* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1983), 5-6.

<sup>27</sup> Pilgrim, Dianne H, "A Singular Artist." Russel Wright Studios, 2015.  
<http://www.russelwrightstudios.com/russel-wright.html>. Accessed March 27, 2016.

<sup>28</sup> John Stuart Gordon *A Modern World: American Design from the Yale University Art Gallery 1920-1950* (New Haven: Yale University Art Gallery in association with Yale University Press, 2011), 354.

sits securely inside the lip of the teapot with a small tab. The base of the teapot has three unglazed patches where wadding was attached during firing, and the center has the iconic "Russel Wright" signature stamp, found on all of his "American Modern" items.

The last object I will discuss in this section is a Betty Woodman teapot, the ninth object from the collection. In 1975, Woodman came to Alfred University as a visiting artist and made this white, porcelain teapot with a clear, limestone glaze (Appendix no. 9). Her modest white teapot is much more subtle than the colorful and evocative works she is best known for, however, it embodies some of the sentiment of postmodern American ceramic artwork, which challenged the traditional ceramic medium and sought to appropriate and reimagine historical references.<sup>29</sup> In this teapot, Woodman challenges the traditional fine qualities of porcelain by throwing it quickly and thickly, and without attention to detail. She uses the same techniques in her bold and colorful porcelain vases, where fluidity of form and the strategic application of decoration reference motion and action, words that would not typically be used to describe porcelain in a more traditional or historical sense.<sup>30</sup> This teapot, then, brings the rest of the objects I have discussed so far into the postmodern era of ceramics, which is of course a crucial turning point not only for the medium as a whole, but for John Gill as an artist. In the next section of this essay, I will examine the tenth and final object in my

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<sup>29</sup> Jorunn Veiteberg, "The Postmodern Pot," In *Shifting Paradigms in Contemporary Ceramics: The Garth Clark & Mark Del Vecchio Collection*, edited by Garth Clark and Cindi Strauss. (Houston: Yale University Press, in association with The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston 2012), 123-126.

<sup>30</sup> Joris, Yvonne G.J.M and Schjeldahl, Peter and Staal, Gert. *Opera Selecta: Betty Woodman*. (Netherlands: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1990), 12-13.

research, a 1985 John Gillewer, and I will consider the ways in which it is postmodern, drawing heavily from historical references and influences.

Woodman's fast throwing technique is visible in the bulky, uneven texture of the clay surface, but there is also a degree of precision evident in the diagonal cuts along the exterior of the pot. This teapot has a boxy, square silhouette and the base is thick and heavy in proportion to the rest of the piece. Impressions from the artist's hand are embedded in the spout, which Woodman cut so sharply that it almost appears to be broken. She chose to add a commercially available bamboo handle that references certain Asian precedents, and allowed her husband, painter George Woodman to decorate the surface of the teapot with an abstract design in a moss-green glaze. The base of this piece is flat, roughly finished and unglazed.

In the next and final section, I will discuss the last of the ten objects, evaluating it as a representation of postmodern ceramics, and examining its role as a collected object.

### **Postmodern Influence: A Collection Within A Collection**

In the quest for all things new and better, Modernist artists and designers rejected art and design with historical references, and instead revered the concepts of minimalism of form for the sake of functionality. Postmodernists, in response to this attitude, supported a fundamental shift toward embracing the lineage and multiplicities of culture and the arts, and sought to glorify the old and

the forgotten in order to reinvent traditional mediums.<sup>31</sup> Throughout the postmodern era, makers of all types began to question the structures and values of the art world. Postmodern ceramicists, whose medium was so heavily engrained in the craft tradition, were interested in how they could reflect on the past in order to reshape and redefine the medium.<sup>32</sup> The 1980's in particular was a decade where ceramics took on a new role entirely as art objects, and this shift happened, ironically, because instead of rejecting the "craft" qualities of their medium, ceramicists appropriated these aspects into their work, celebrated them, and in turn gave them new meaning.<sup>33</sup> John Gill is an example of a postmodern artist who employs these tactics in his work.

John Gill's 1985 ewer (Appendix no. 10) is a stoneware vessel that is composed of both geometric and organic forms, with patches of color that accent various areas of the surface. The work stays true to its postmodern identity and incorporates elements of pattern and decoration, historical vessel forms, architectural features, and an attention to material and texture. The bottom of the vessel is covered in an opaque, periwinkle glaze and the rest of the vessel is left raw, except for a patch just below the spout that is covered in a thick, rose-colored matte glaze that was applied with a stencil, emulating the abstracted floral designs of Matisse. The elongated spout, a feature commonly found in ancient Iranian ceramic forms, is highlighted with a bright yellow glaze coating

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<sup>31</sup> Linda Hutcheon *The Politics of Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 1989), 13-14.

<sup>32</sup> Jorunn Veiteberg, "The Postmodern Pot" 25-131.

<sup>33</sup> Hal Foster; Rosalind Krauss; Yves-Alain Bois; Benjamin H.D Buchloh. *Art Since 1900: 1945 To The Present*, "1984b." Volume 2 (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2004).

the entire lip, and is extremely large in proportion to the rest of the piece. The handle is glazed with a glossy, semi-transparent deep green glaze that mimics that of Japanese Oribe ware dating to the sixteenth century. As a whole, John Gill's ewer is a playful, colorful, and asymmetrical vessel that relies heavily on form with special attention given to the way that contrasting design elements interact, and consideration to the functionality and utilitarian aspects of the traditional ceramic vessel.

The most obvious postmodern aspects of the ewer are its colors, especially the fact that the nontraditional glaze colors give the piece vibrancy and liveliness. In his book titled *Chromophobia*, David Batchelor explores the ways in which Euro-American cultures understand and interact with color, and how there is a pervasive sense of fear surrounding bold or unnatural colors and instead a preference for whites and neutrals, which he attributes the Self/Other relationship where white represents the known, or the self, and color represents the unknown, or the other.<sup>34</sup> Color, therefore, was an extremely important aspect of the postmodern Pattern and Decoration Movement, which embraced decorative practices and materials as an art form.<sup>35</sup> The John Gill ewer references this movement in the patterning on the surface of the vessel, as well as in the geometric designs visible in the glazing of the piece. Because modernist aesthetic tastes found color, pattern, and decoration to be superfluous, superficial

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<sup>34</sup> David Batchelor, *Chromophobia* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd, 2000.) 22-40.

<sup>35</sup> Glenn Adamson, *Thinking Through Craft*. (New York: Berg, 2007).



and secondary to form, postmodernist aesthetics adopted and celebrated these qualities in order to inject them with new value.<sup>36</sup>

Postmodern ceramicists also challenged the medium by addressing functionality in their work, and the Gill ewer is no exception. The ewer is still a vessel, and in this sense, it speaks to traditional ceramic forms and the expectation that they have the potential to function, or serve a utilitarian purpose. This piece, however, is proportioned and designed in such a way that its potential for functionality is questionable at best, and doubtful due to its weight, shape, and its lack of the ability to be handled in a utilitarian way. When function is disrupted by form, the object seems more ambiguous, sculptural, and conceptual, and far less obvious as a *vessel*, in every sense of the word. John Gill's ewer engages in an aggressive confrontation towards ideas about the ceramic tradition by questioning the concept of the container. The materials are familiar but the execution is not, especially in comparison with the nine other objects involved in this research. The ewer is full of the self-awareness and self-consciousness that define the values of postmodern art, questioning itself as a vessel, and perhaps even as a ceramic object.

How, then, can we interpret this piece as a collection of historical references? If we refer back to my original definition of a collection, which is *a manifestation of the instinct for preservation, both personal and cultural, guided by the specific interests and values of the individual collector*, then this John Gill

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<sup>36</sup> Garth Clark. Introduction to *Postmodern Ceramics*, by Mark Del Vecchio (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2001), 17-18.

ewer is the product of his desire as an artist to preserve both his personal inspirations and also significant historical and cultural influences in the form of a ceramic object. That makes sense, considering that his extensive collection of ceramics is clearly both a personal passion and a cultural treasure. To quote author Jules David Prown, "objects made or modified by man reflect, consciously or unconsciously, directly or indirectly, the beliefs of individuals who made, commissioned, purchased, or used them, and by extension the beliefs of the larger society to which they belonged."<sup>37</sup> In this case, John Gill is a postmodern ceramicist, drawing influence from his collection of objects, and then making an object of his own that represents greater aspects of this "larger society." The ewer is simultaneously part of and representative of a collection.

The next question we need to address is *why* does the ewer function in this way, and *how* does it communicate with the other objects I have addressed in this essay? John Gill's ewer serves as a visual conversation about the very definitions of its materials, makers, and histories, and it will be helpful to illustrate these conversations between the objects. The John Gill ewer looks first to the early Song Dynasty ewer of the pre-modern era and contrasts its elegance and harmony with bold texture and bright colors. It then connects with the vinegar jar, and again challenges ideas of functionality. Next, the ewer encounters to the tiny, delicate Yuan Dynasty teapot and reconsiders process. This molded teapot is virtually the exact stylistic opposite of the Gill ewer, and yet they exist next to

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<sup>37</sup> Jules David Prown "An Introduction to Material Culture Theory and Method" *Winterthur Portfolio*, 17 (Spring 1982) 1-2.

each other in the same collection. The ewer then makes friends with the Renaissance jug, emulates its fullness, and celebrates its simplicity of form and rugged design. The Gill ewer looms over the fussy Brownfield tureen, critiquing it as a mass produced object, and instead flaunts the imperfect and the hand-made.

As we move into the Modern and Contemporary eras, the "honest" Guangzhou disposable teapot and the ewer together celebrate materiality: neither object makes any attempt to disguise its medium. At first glance, the perfected yixing teapot and the Gill ewer could not be less alike, but upon closer inspection, the two realize that they in fact share process: each is slab-built—an ancient technique—resulting in two incredibly different and beautiful aesthetics. The Russel Wright teapot and the Gill ewer are both visionaries in the sense that each of their makers intended to develop an object that would challenge the role of the ceramic medium. The Wright teapot embodies the Modernist aesthetic that the postmodern Gill ewer attempts to dissolve, and in this case, the teapot was necessary for the modernist/postmodernist rivalry and stylistic evolution. Finally, the Woodman teapot is like a big brother to the Gill ewer. It sets the scene for postmodern experimentation, appropriation, and materiality, and embodies the self-consciousness and self-awareness of postmodern ceramics.

The ten objects in this research represent only a small sliver of the entire Gill collection as a whole, but they shed light on the types of historical and cultural influences that are important to the evolution of the ceramic medium

during the postmodern era. John Gill's ewer is at the same time a part of the collection, and the result of the collection. In the past, each of the objects was as new and innovative as the Gill ewer, and now it too, is now part of the history of ceramics that is documented within this collection.

## **Conclusion**

I began this research with the following question in mind: *if collections could speak, what would they say?* In order to tackle such a question, I chose to examine a selection of ceramic objects, and what this collection had to say, then, was about its collector, its history, and its implications for the future. The ceramics in this collection are man-made objects, and serve as evidence of the desire to create for the sake of both aesthetics and function. They reveal cultural and stylistic trends, the value of form and functionality, and the evolution of design on a global scale. As it turns out, this tiny selection of ten objects has an incredible story to share, and one that continues to unfold alongside the development of the ceramic tradition.

The Gill's objects, which are situated in the same realm as the other private ceramics collections discussed at the beginning of this essay, inform not only other historical and artistic collections, but also sheds light on the nature of collections and collecting on a broader scale. What do we now understand about the collector, and how can we interpret the nature of the objects we collect? One of my initial goals was to discover how the collection speaks for its objects, and I

feel that the answer, for the objects in this research, lies in the postmodern creative decisions of the collector and artist. All the objects and their stories are visible in the *manifestation* of the postmodern inspirations that drive John Gill's work—represented here by a single ewer—which engages in dialogue with each of them. We are left now to wonder what comes next. Where will these objects live many years into the future? How will the dynamic of the collection change if items are added or lost? What historical information will surface with time and how will it shape new understandings of the items? Ultimately, collectors will continue to collect, and their objects will continue speak for the past and the future alike.

**Appendix:**  
**Object Catalogue**

Object Catalogue  
Appendix no. 1

*Object Title:* Ewer  
*Artist:* Unknown  
*Creation Date:* c. 11<sup>th</sup> century  
*Culture:* China  
*Period:* Song Dynasty (960-1279)  
*Medium:* Porcelain



*Description:* This ewer reflects the elegance and harmony of 11<sup>th</sup> century Jingdezhen porcelain, with a transparent, light green glaze made of feldspar, wood ash and silica that has developed distinctive crazing over time. The interior is unglazed. The body is a thrown and altered eight-lobed form that references a melon or squash, and a second piece has been thrown on top to form the narrow, girdled neck that flares out at the top. A small clay loop at the top of the handle would have originally secured a lid inside the neck attached with a string. The glazed foot indicates that the piece was fired on a riser inside of a saggar, meaning that the jar is of a high quality and needed to be protected inside the kiln environment. A ewer like this would have been produced and then likely shipped north for the emperor or the members of the royal family, where it would have been used to serve wine or similar beverages to guests as part of a formal table setting.

*Dimensions:* Height: 21.5 cm  
Width: 15.5 cm

*Inscriptions:* N/A

*Provenance:* Purchased in Shanghai in 2000

*Artist Biography:* N/A

References:

Freestone, Ian and, David Gaimster. *Pottery In The Making: Ceramic Traditions*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997.

Liefkes, Reino and, Hilary Young. *Masterpieces Of World Ceramics*. London: V&A Publishing, 2008.

Zhiyan, Li; Bower, Virginia L.; Li, He. Editors. *Chinese Ceramics: From The Paleolithic Period Through The Qing Dynasty*. New Haven & London, Beijing: Yale University and Foreign Languages Press, 2010.



Object Catalogue  
Appendix no. 2

*Object Title:* Vinegar Jar  
*Artist:* Unknown  
*Creation Date:* c. 10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> century  
*Culture:* China  
*Period:* Song Dynasty (960-1279)  
*Medium:* Porcelain



*Description:* This spouted jar is made of porcelain with a transparent, light green glaze throughout. The body was made by attaching two thrown bowls at the lip, creating a slight bulge at the center where they have been joined. The neck is thick and sturdy, with a funnel shaped opening for easy filling. The opening in the neck is narrow and shaped to fit a cork to secure the contents. The spout is small and situated above the shoulder, so that if the vessel were to tip it would not break off, and a string attached to a small loop of clay between the spout and the neck would have once held a smaller cork in place inside the spout. The end of the spout was cut sharply after glazing but before firing to expose the raw clay. The jar has no handle, and was once fired directly on the kiln shelf, as the foot is unglazed. There is a small cobalt blue marking on the shoulder that is likely an accidental contamination.

This type of container would likely have been used for shipping or storing vinegar or other liquids that would be used in small amounts at a time for cooking.

*Dimensions:* Height: 23 cm  
Width: 16.5 cm

*Inscriptions:* N/A

*Provenance:* Purchased in Shanghai

*Artist Biography:* N/A

*References:*

Freestone, Ian and, David Gaimster. *Pottery In The Making: Ceramic Traditions*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997.

Liefkes, Reino and, Hilary Young. *Masterpieces Of World Ceramics*. London: V&A Publishing, 2008.

Zhiyan, Li; Bower, Virginia L.; Li, He. Editors. *Chinese Ceramics: From The Paleolithic Period Through The Qing Dynasty*. New Haven & London, Beijing: Yale University and Foreign Languages Press, 2010.

Object Catalogue  
Appendix no. 3

<i>Object Title:</i>	Small Qingbai Teapot
<i>Artist:</i>	Unknown
<i>Creation Date:</i>	c. 11 <sup>th</sup> -12th Century
<i>Culture:</i>	China
<i>Period:</i>	Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368)
<i>Medium:</i>	Porcelain



*Description:* This small teapot was likely made at Jingdezhen, and reflects the aesthetics of Qingbai porcelain wares, which typically have a jade-like quality and floral details. It is made of thin transparent porcelain with a celadon glaze on the outside of the pot. The teapot was pressed in a mold, and has ridges left over above the handle and spout where the clay was not smoothed out after it was molded. The inside of the piece is unglazed, and rough finger markings are visible from the mold pressing process. A delicate floral pattern covers the body of the teapot, while the spout and handle have a smooth undecorated finish. The lid was molded as well and fits loosely in the opening of the pot, and the floral element on top of the lid was hand-built.

This type of teapot would have been used as part of a tea ceremony where each individual tea drinker was given their own small teapot filled with tealeaves. The server would then pour hot water into the pot, allowing the tea to brew before then pouring it into a tea bowl or cup.

<i>Dimensions:</i>	Height: 10.5 cm Width: 13 cm
<i>Inscriptions:</i>	N/A
<i>Provenance:</i>	Purchased in Beijing

Artist Biography: N/A

References:

Pierson, Stacey. *Qingbai Ware: Chinese Porcelain of the Song and Yuan Dynasties*. The Percival David Foundation of Chinese Art, 2002.

Object Catalogue  
Appendix no. 4

<i>Object Title:</i>	Water Jug
<i>Artist:</i>	Unknown
<i>Creation Date:</i>	c. 1550-1600
<i>Culture:</i>	France or Spain
<i>Period:</i>	Renaissance (1300-1600)
<i>Medium:</i>	Terracotta earthenware



*Description:* This large water jug was likely made between 1550 and 1600 in France or possibly Spain. It was thrown on a wheel and made of red terracotta earthenware. The top half of the jug, including the handles and spout, has been dipped in a shiny, green lead glaze. The bottom half of the jug is unglazed, and since this type of object was used by farmers while working in the fields, the unglazed clay helped keep the water inside cold through evaporative cooling. The base is coated in a thin layer of shellac to prevent leaks. On top of the neck of the jug is a thick pulled handle for carrying, and a smaller pulled handle on the side for pouring. The spout is relatively short and straight, and sits at the shoulder of the jug. It could be used either to pour, or to drink directly from the jug.

This type of water jug is representative of the lifestyle of the rural working class during the Renaissance in Western Europe. This utilitarian vessel is an example of ceramic form designed specifically to increase functionality. Such an object would have been mass-produced and fired in large quantities, and it would have played a significant role in daily aspects of rural farm life.

*Dimensions:* Height: 36.5 cm  
Width: 25 cm

*Inscriptions:* N/A

*Provenance:* Purchased in Providence, RI

*Artist Biography:* N/A

References:

Artigas, J. Ilorens; and J. Corredor-Matheos. *Spanish Folk Ceramics of Today*. New York: Watson-Guption Publications, 1974.

Pillet, Marc. *Potiers et poteries populaires en France*. Paris: Dessain et Tolra, 1982.

Poncetton, François; Salles, Georges. *Les Poteries Françaises*. Paris: Les Editions G. Crès et C, 1928.

Wardropper, Ian. "Ceramics in the French Renaissance." In *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000-. April 2008. [http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/cera/hd\\_cera.htm](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/cera/hd_cera.htm).

Object Catalogue  
Appendix no. 5

*Object Title:* Coffee Tureen  
*Artist:* William Brownfield & Sons  
*Creation Date:* c. 1861  
*Culture:* Cobridge, England  
*Period:* N/A  
*Medium:* Smear-glazed Stoneware



*Description:* This coffee tureen was manufactured in 1861 in Cobridge, England by William Brownfield & Sons, and the pewter ormolu lid was added later to the tureen by a company called James Dixon & Sons. This particular design and pattern is called "Donatello," and was available for purchase individually or as part of a full matching table service. The design emulates the aesthetic tastes of the Victorian era, which favored decorative floral motifs and elaborate detailing. This vibrant rose and cream-colored design is just one of several color combinations available in the "Donatello" line. The surface of the tureen is pitted with a matte pink luster made with gold, and the floral detailing is finished with the same clear glaze as the base and the inside of the piece. It is in excellent condition.

*Dimensions:* Height: 20.5 cm  
Width: 14.5 cm

*Inscriptions:* Inside lid inscribed "40 James Dixon & Sons Sheffield," base of tureen inscribed "Donatello" and markings "R," "K," and "WB" inside of a Staffordshire knot.



*Provenance:* Inherited from family as an heirloom

*Artist Biography:* N/A

*References:*

Godden, Geoffrey A. *Jewitt's Ceramic Art of Great Britain 1800-1900*. London: Berrie & Jenkins, 1972.

Godden, Geoffrey. *Staffordshire Porcelain*. New York: Granada Publishing, 1983.

Peak, Tim H. "Brownfield Plate Design: Earthenware 1848-1871. In *Antiques & Collecting Magazine*: November 1998; 103, 9. ProQuest Central. 59-61.

Taggart, Ross E. *The Frank P. and Harriet C. Burnap Collection of English Pottery in the William Rockhill Nelson Gallery*. Kansas City: William Nelson Rockhill Trust, 1967.

V&A. "Donatello I Brownfield, William I V&A Search the Collections." Accessed March 21, 2016. <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O151166/donatello-jug-brownfield-william/?print=1>.

Watson, Francis. *Mounted Oriental Porcelain*. Washington, D.C.: International Exhibitions Foundation, 1986.



Object Catalogue  
Appendix no. 6

<i>Object Title:</i>	Disposable Teapot
<i>Artist:</i>	Unknown
<i>Creation Date:</i>	c. 1950
<i>Culture:</i>	China (Guangzhou)
<i>Period:</i>	People's Republic of China (1947- )
<i>Medium:</i>	Stoneware



*Description:* This type of disposable teapot from Guangzhou, China would likely have been used for tea by passengers on a train. They would usually discard the pot after use. It is constructed of two small thrown bowls that were attached at the lips, and the handle and spout are simple rough coils that were attached very quickly and without attention to precision. The inside is unglazed, and the outside is coated in a thick, low fire turquoise frit glaze that formed drips under the handle and along the bottom. The inside of the lid has a hand built ring that fits loosely inside the pot. There are several sharp chips along the edge of the lid where it makes contact with the pot.

*Dimensions:* Height: 14 cm  
Width: 18.5 cm

*Inscriptions:* Illegible inscription in black on base of teapot.



*Provenance:* Purchased in Cape Cod in 2000

Artist Biography: N/A

References:

Object Catalogue  
Appendix no. 7

<i>Object Title:</i>	Yixing Teapot
<i>Artist:</i>	Unknown
<i>Creation Date:</i>	c. 1950
<i>Culture:</i>	China
<i>Period:</i>	People's Republic of China (1949- )
<i>Medium:</i>	Shale Clay



*Description:* This yixing teapot was made during the Chinese Cultural Revolution, but mimics the traditional techniques of much earlier examples. The pot is entirely slab built from a dense and sturdy shale clay, and is unglazed. The distinctive smooth surface is due to the texture of the clay and the building technique. Although it was unacceptable to sign work in China at this time, the teapot has a small imperfection on the inside lip, which was left intentionally by the artist as a virtually undetectable signature. A pot such as this is specifically designed to be warmed and cleansed before serving in order to bring out the optimal flavor of the tea.

*Dimensions:* Height: 11.5 cm  
Width: 18.5 cm

*Inscriptions:* Production stamp on bottom center of teapot



*Provenance:* Purchased in Kansas City in 1990.

*Artist Biography:* N/A

*References:*

Boyin, Song. "Tea Drinking, Tea Ware and Purple Clay Ware," in *K.S. Lo Collection in the Flagstaff House Museum of Tea Ware. Part 2*. Hong Kong: The Urban Council, 1984.

Object Catalogue  
Appendix no. 8

*Object Title:* "American Modern" Teapot

*Artist:* Russel Wright

*Creation Date:* "American Modern"  
tableware produced 1939-  
1959

*Culture:* United States of America

*Period:* N/A

*Medium:* Slip-cast Porcelain



*Description:* This teapot was one of the designs introduced by American designer Russel Wright in his 1939 "American Modern Dinnerware" line of functional, mass produced tableware. This collection reflected the modern American taste for clean lines and minimal decoration that gained popularity in the 1940s, and was a household staple throughout the 1950s. The piece is slip cast and streamline in appearance, and satisfied the desire for attractive, stylish, functional, and affordable tableware at the time it was produced. The teapot has a large handle and the lid is secured with a small tab to the rim of the teapot. The turquoise green glaze and smooth surface are in excellent condition.

*Dimensions:* Height: 10.5 cm  
Width: 23.5 cm

*Inscriptions:* Center of base printed "Russel Wright"



*Provenance:* Purchased in Cape Cod in 2000

*Artist Biography:* Russel Wright (1904-1976) was an American designer who was interested in creating commercially available artistic wares that reflected the aesthetics of mid-century modernist design. He is celebrated for his furniture designs and tableware, especially the "American Modern" line, which was manufactured in Steubenville Pottery in Steubenville, Ohio, and intended to merge style with functionality. Wright was educated at Princeton University, but ultimately entered into the world of art and design, and spent most of his professional career working from New York.

*References:*

Gordon, John Stuart. *A Modern World: American Design from the Yale University Art Gallery 1920-1950*. New Haven: Yale University Art Gallery in association with Yale University Press, 2011.

Hennessey, William J. *Russel Wright: American Designer*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1983.

Pilgrim, Dianne H. "A Singular Artist." Russel Wright Studios. 2015. Accessed March 27, 2016. <http://www.russelwrightstudios.com/russel-wright.html>.

Object Catalogue  
Appendix no. 9

*Object Title:* Teapot  
*Artist:* Betty Woodman  
*Creation Date:* 1975  
*Culture:* United States of America  
*Period:* N/A  
*Medium:* Ceramic, Porcelain



*Description:* Betty Woodman created this East Asian style teapot at Alfred University. The teapot is made of porcelain with a clear limestone glaze. The pot was thrown thickly and then cut while wet to produce sharp diagonal ridges on the outside walls. The spout is cut sharply and roughly and has a bulbous, uneven shape. The lid sits flat in the opening on the teapot and has a thin, flat lip that is unglazed. Two small pulled handles attach above the spout and at the back of the pot, and a commercially made bamboo handle is attached to them. Adorning the rim of the shoulder, inner rim of the lid and base of the pot are decorative mossy-green lines of chrome and feldspar glaze, which is also used to decorate the walls of the pot with an abstracted floral design on two sides. The artist's husband, George Woodman, decorated this teapot at Alfred University. The base of the teapot is unglazed and roughly finished without a cut foot.

*Dimensions:* Height: 22.5 cm  
Width: 19.5 cm

*Inscriptions:* N/A

*Provenance:* Traded with the artist in 1975

*Artist Biography:* Betty Woodman is an American ceramicist who was born on May 14, 1930 in Norwalk, Connecticut. Woodman attended Alfred University from 1948-1950, where she studied ceramics. In 1953, she married painter George Woodman, and together they had two children, Charles and Francesca Woodman. She has received numerous awards, including a Fulbright-Hays Scholarship to Florence, Italy in 1966, a national Endowment for the Arts Fellowship in 1980 and 1986, and the Governor's Award in the Arts, Colorado, 1987, among others. She has spent many years living and working in Italy, and has shown her work in countless international exhibitions.

*References:*

Joris, Yvonne G.J.M and Schjeldahl, Peter and Staal, Gert. *Opera Selecta: Betty Woodman*. Netherlands: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1990.



Object Catalogue  
Appendix no. 10

*Object Title:* Ewer  
*Artist:* John Gill  
*Creation Date:* 1985  
*Culture:* United States of America  
*Period:* N/A  
*Medium:* Stoneware



*Description:* John Gill created this ewer in 1985 of stoneware with wood ash, which reflects design elements of several distinct cultures including ancient Iranian ceramics, as well as a spout inspired by Persian ceramics and a handle inspired by Japanese Oribe wares. The pink, stenciled glaze on the body of the ewer comes from Matisse paper cutouts, and the brightly colored glazes give the ewer a playful, vibrant personality. This piece celebrates the aesthetic of postmodernism by drawing inspiration from numerous historical references and accentuating the materiality of the ceramic process.

*Dimensions:* Height: 38 cm  
Width: 51 cm

*Inscriptions:* Bottom signed and dated by the artist

*Provenance:* Collection of the artist

*Artist Biography:* John Gill is an American ceramicist, professor and collector and was born in Renton, Washington in 1949. He received his BFA in 1973 from the Kansas City Art Institute, and then his MFA from Alfred University in 1975. John Gill is currently living and working as a professor of ceramics with his wife, Andrea Gill, in Alfred, New York.

*References:*

American Craft Council. "John Gill." Accessed April 7, 2016.  
<http://craftcouncil.org/artist/john-gill>

American Craft Council. "Masters: John Gill." September 14, 2014.  
<http://craftcouncil.org/magazine/article/masters-john-gill>

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Charatan, Fred B. "The Psychology of Collecting." *Antiques & Collecting Magazine* 108, (2003): 28-31. ProQuest Central. Accessed April 15, 2016.

Cooper, Emmanuel. *Ten Thousand Years of Pottery*. Philadelphia: University Of Pennsylvania Press, 1972.

Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly. "Why We Need Things." In *History From Things*, edited by Steven D. Lubar and W.D. Kingery, 20-29. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993.

Freestone, Ian; Gaimster, David. Editors. *Pottery In The Making: Ceramic Traditions*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997.

Foster, Hal; Krauss, Rosalind; Bois, Yves-Alain; Buchloh, Benjamin H.D. *Art Since 1900: 1945 To The Present*, Volume 2. New York: Thames & Hudson, 2004.

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