

Alfred University Trustees view Miller Ceramic Art Collection

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ALFRED, NY – Members of the Alfred University Board of Trustees on Thursday viewed an exhibition of ceramic art collected over the last half-century by Marlin Miller, alumnus, Board member and one of Alfred University's most generous benefactors.

"Materiality: Masterworks from the Miller Ceramic Art Collection" opened in the Alfred Ceramic Art Museum on Sept. 26 and will remain on view through Dec. 29. The day after the exhibition's opening, on Sept. 27, Miller announced that he and his wife, Ginger, would be donating the majority of the Miller Ceramic Art Collection to the Museum.

Miller earned a bachelor's degree in ceramic engineering from Alfred University in 1954 and also received honorary degrees from his alma mater in 1989 and 2019. He has been a member of the Board of Trustees since 1972, serving as Board chair from 1983-89, and is a successful businessman and noted philanthropist. His gifts to Alfred University have funded construction of the Ceramic Art Museum, as well as the Miller Performing Arts Center and Miller Theater.

The Millers' collection contains more than 200 pieces of ceramic art. Approximately 60 are displayed in the "Materiality" exhibition, including works by some of the most renowned ceramic artists of the 20th century, many of them affiliated with Alfred University. They include Wayne Higby, H '11, director of the Alfred Ceramic Art Museum; John Gill '75 (M.F.A.), professor of ceramic art, and his wife, Andrea '74 (B.F.A.), professor of ceramic art emerita; Anne Currier, professor of ceramic art emerita; and late professors of ceramic art Robert Turner '49 (M.F.A.) and Val Cushing '52 (B.F.A.) In addition, the exhibition contains work by noted Japanese and Chinese ceramic artists.

"This is one of the most important and significant collections of ceramic art in the United States," Higby said at Thursday's viewing. "Every work in this room is by an extraordinarily well-known ceramic artist."

The Miller Ceramic Art Collection dates to 1969, when Miller and his late first wife, Marcianne (Mapel) Miller, a 1955 Alfred University alumna, were in Cape Cod and acquired the first piece of their collection, a lidded bowl by Val Cushing. Miller said he developed an appreciation for art from Marcianne, an art student he met while attending Alfred University. He and Ginger have continued collecting ceramic art over the years.

Miller said during Thursday's viewing the collection belongs in Alfred, where his love for art was born. "After 50 years, I felt this was the right place. It's much better than being in some other museum," he commented.

"We are eternally grateful to Marlin Miller for closing the circle, and allowing these pieces to return to the place where they were inspired," said Mark Zupan, Alfred University president.

The collection is the subject of the book *Materiality: The Miller Ceramic Art Collection*, published in 2019 by art publishers Arnoldsche, of Stuttgart, Germany. The book, produced, edited and co-designed by Higby, contains photographs by Brian Oglesbee. It also includes essays by Higby; Sequoia Miller, chief curator at the Gardiner Museum of Ceramic Art in Toronto, Canada; Meghan Jones, assistant professor of art history at Alfred University; and Michael McKinnell, Miller's friend and the architect of the Ceramic Art Museum, Miller Performing Arts Center and Miller Theater.

Miller's gifts have supported endowed professorships in ceramic art, including the Robert Turner Chair in Ceramic Art and the Ted Randall International Chair. He created the directorship of the Ceramic Art Museum in honor of Wayne Higby, endowed the Fred Gertz Chair in Technical Writing, and established the Fred Gertz Center for Student Success. Miller also created endowed scholarships in honor of two friends, fellow alumni, and colleagues on the Board of Trustees, the late Albert Paladino '54 and Joel Moskowitz '61.

His most recent gifts focused on residence life: one renovated Tefft Hall, in honor of Phillip Tefft '39, Miller's mentor when he joined the Board of Trustees; another created a two-story link between Moskowitz Hall and Tefft Hall.

In photo above, from left: Alfred University President Mark Zupan; Michele Cohen, trustee and member of the Alfred Ceramic Art Museum Advisory Board; Marlin Miller '54, trustee; and Wayne Higby, museum director, at Thursday's viewing of "Materiality: Masterworks from the Miller Ceramic Art Collection."