

Montana State University Ceramics Program Story

By Josh DeWeese, 2012



Frances Senska working in her studio

The ceramics program at Montana State University started with Frances Senska around 1945. Senska had studied with the German potter Marguerite Wildenhain and brought a Bauhaus aesthetic and sense of design to the small college in Montana after WWII. In the early days the department of MSC (Montana State College) was principally made up of Frances Senska, Jessie Wilbur, and Cyrus Conrad.

They hired Robert DeWeese in 1949. Peter Voulkos and Rudy and Lela Autio were in school from 1947-51, and both Pete and Rudy developed an interest in ceramics. Senska nurtured that interest, and in the summer of 1951 she introduced them to Archie Bray who hired them to work and develop the Pottery in the brickyard.



Peter Voulkos in 1940's

Senska taught up until the early 70s, firmly establishing the department, and designing the ceramics studio in Haynes Hall, which is still in use today. After her retirement, Jim Barnaby was hired to teach and taught for several years. In the early 1970's Michael Peed and Rick Pope were hired and both taught until 2008, when they both retired. Their students include Frank Whitney, Ken Kohoutek, Louis Katz, Gail Busch, Tip Toland, Silvie Granatelli, and many others over a 30+ year career. Josh DeWeese, (Robert's son) was hired in 2008, to work with Dean Adams to develop the program. Adams moved to the Foundations position in 2010, and Jeremy Hatch was hired to teach ceramic sculpture in 2011.

Today, the program is focused on delivering a well-rounded education in the ceramic arts, introducing a broad range of technical skills balanced with critical evaluation and a strong awareness of contemporary issues relevant to the medium. Of special focus is the International Wild Clay Research Project, which resembles the early work of Senska and promotes the research and development of local "wild clays" as relevant material for creating art

