clay and the classroom

THE CERAMICS PROGRAM AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA

by H. RAFAEL CHACÓN

Montana is known globally as a place for the study of modern ceramics, in no small part because of the strengths of its academic institutions. Ceramics at the University of Montana is a model academic program with an international reputation and a rich history.

The arts have been a part of the University of Montana's curriculum since the establishment of the state's flagship educational institution in 1895, with the first drawing course offered in 1896. Clay first appeared in 1903 as a subject of instruction, alongside the crafts of rug design, lettering, book covers, basket weaving, and metallurgy. In 1926, after the retirement of long-time chairman Frederick D. Schwalm, the crafts were eliminated from the curriculum only to be restored in 1948 under Chairman Aden Arnold. Professor Walter Hook taught pottery as an "Elementary Craft," in the ground floor of the Fine Arts building, the former Student Union building, until 1957.

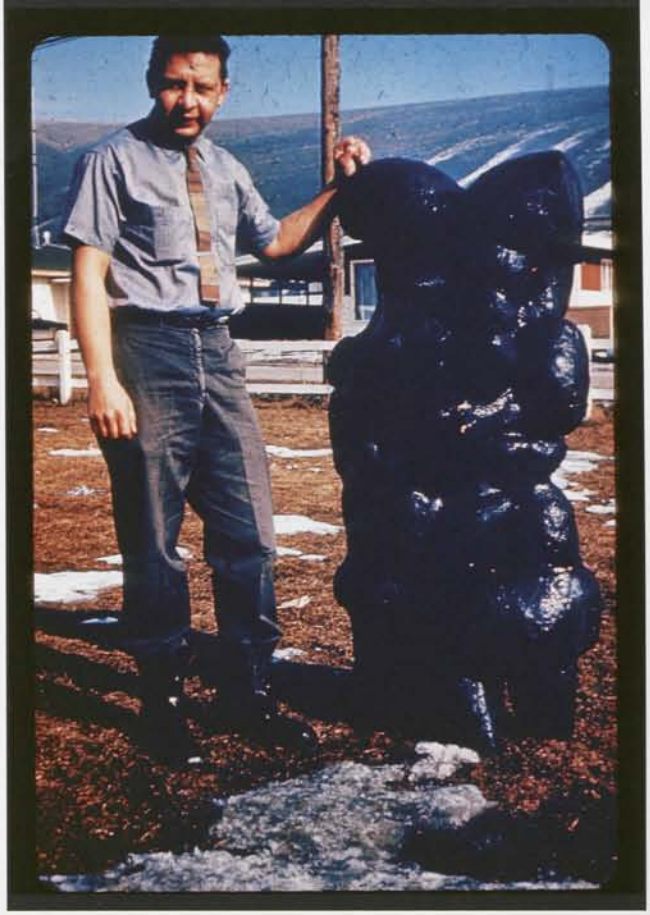
That year was a turning point for ceramics as it became a distinct area within what was then known as the Fine Arts Department. As part of President Carl McFarland's push to modernize the burgeoning university in the aftermath of World War II, ceramics became the new face of art at the university with new facilities and Rudy Autio as the full-time head of the area.

No person was more responsible for the creation of this academic program than Autio. For close to three decades, he exemplified the shared values of teaching and artistic production as well as a tenacious vision of ceramics as modern art. Generations of students and colleagues attest to how this artist-teacher encouraged them personally, certainly through persistent modeling, mentoring, and sometimes subtle cajoling, and how he subsequently transformed the landscape of ceramics in contemporary America.

Autio came to Missoula at the instigation of the visionary President McFarland. In 1952, while shopping in Helena for bricks for his new campus buildings, McFarland found Autio working at the Archie Bray Foundation. Initially hired to design an architectural mural for the exterior of the new Liberal Arts building, Autio eventually accepted McFarland's invitation to create a bona fide ceramics program at the university. In fall 1957, Autio began throwing, firing, and glazing pots and making sculptures in a retired World War II barracks building and later the warming hut of the university's Ice Skating Rink below Mt. Sentinel; these were not the best facilities, but a step up from the soda fountain on the ground floor of the former Student Union building. Convincing students to matriculate in the new classes was a struggle in the first year, but it did not take long for ceramics to be seen as a worthy art form and enrollments increased.

Ceramics at the University of Montana quickly rose to international standing. By the mid-1960s, Montana was among the first-tier institutions in the United States, a list that also included Alfred University, the University of California at Berkeley and at Davis, Otis Art Institute in Los Angeles, Scripps College, and the University of Wisconsin at Madison. The curriculum was decidedly modernist in orientation, reflective of Autio's own education and orientation. What gave this program its open outlook was intimately tied to Autio's personality as an artist, his pedagogy as a teacher, and a university that indulged his idiosyncratic teaching style. Functional pottery was balanced with sculpture. Autio taught the vessel and mural as staples—yet he nurtured experimentation with sculptural form, abstraction and figuration, glazing and firing techniques, and surface decoration, drawing, and painting. According to Martin Holt, the thrust was "to take the work wherever direction captured your interest."

Students Sue Beckman, Dianne Pepper, and Jim Stephanson in the ceramics studio in 1967. All photographs in this section courtesy of Doug Grimm.



Autio's classroom was characterized by its informality. Students, initially loyal to other studio arts, were increasingly drawn to the ramshackle ceramics studio because of its freedom from convention and openness to novel ideas. Autio introduced teaching with color slides of both art history and contemporary art. He inspired students with his discipline, affability, and sense of humor. He worked tirelessly, spending countless hours "knocking off pots alongside his students in the evenings; he taught by osmosis." He invited international artists from as far as Finland and Japan to workshops and lectures in Missoula and encouraged cross-pollination with state-wide institutions such as the Bray. The Autio home in Missoula was a hub of constant artistic dialogue and exchange between professional artists, students, and friends.

Autio's own trajectory as an artist was on the rise; in his first two decades of teaching, he traveled and exhibited extensively; everywhere he went, he recruited the best students to Montana and sought out commissions and job opportunities for them. The Autio legacy carried on in alumni Jim Stevenson and Dave Dontigny at Pennsylvania State University, Fred Wollschlager at the San Francisco Art Institute, Martin Holt, Dave Askevold, and Ron Matthews at the Brooklyn Museum of Art School,

and Doug Baldwin there and at the Maryland Institute of Arts. These artists not only established successful academic programs of their own, but also helped create national professional organizations such as Supermud and later NCECA. UM's faculty and alumni also created private studios, ceramics-based projects, and schools such as the Clay Studio of Missoula, founded by Clare Ann Harff and Mike Kurz in 1998.

In the last quarter of the 20th century, the program expanded greatly in both the number of undergraduate majors, masters degree students, and faculty. Maxine Blackmer, Ken Little, Miska Petersham, Dennis Voss, Beth Lo, Tom Rippon, Trey Hill, and Julia Galloway joined the full-time faculty, each developing their own themes and styles, but always maintaining that atmosphere of a relaxed, communal, and supportive studio environment. Voss was especially known for encouraging experimental approaches and the engagement with a variety of materials, a tradition that continues today. Faculty members assigned to other areas, including Jim Leedy, gravitated to the medium and a younger generation of talented part-time faculty, including Tapio Yli-Viikari, Eddie Dominguez, Kris Nelson, David Smith, and David Regan, also contributed greatly. For close to three decades, the program has been under the direction of Professors Lo and Rippon (d. 2010), who nurtured all attitudes to clay, from the vessel to conceptual work. More recently, experimental and expressive approaches to functional ceramics have re-emerged as an important thread in the studio.

In 1984, UM ceramics was among the first academic programs in the nation to build an Anagama kiln. The annual loading and firing of the kiln at Lubrecht Experimental Forest has become a ritual for students and faculty and a central part of

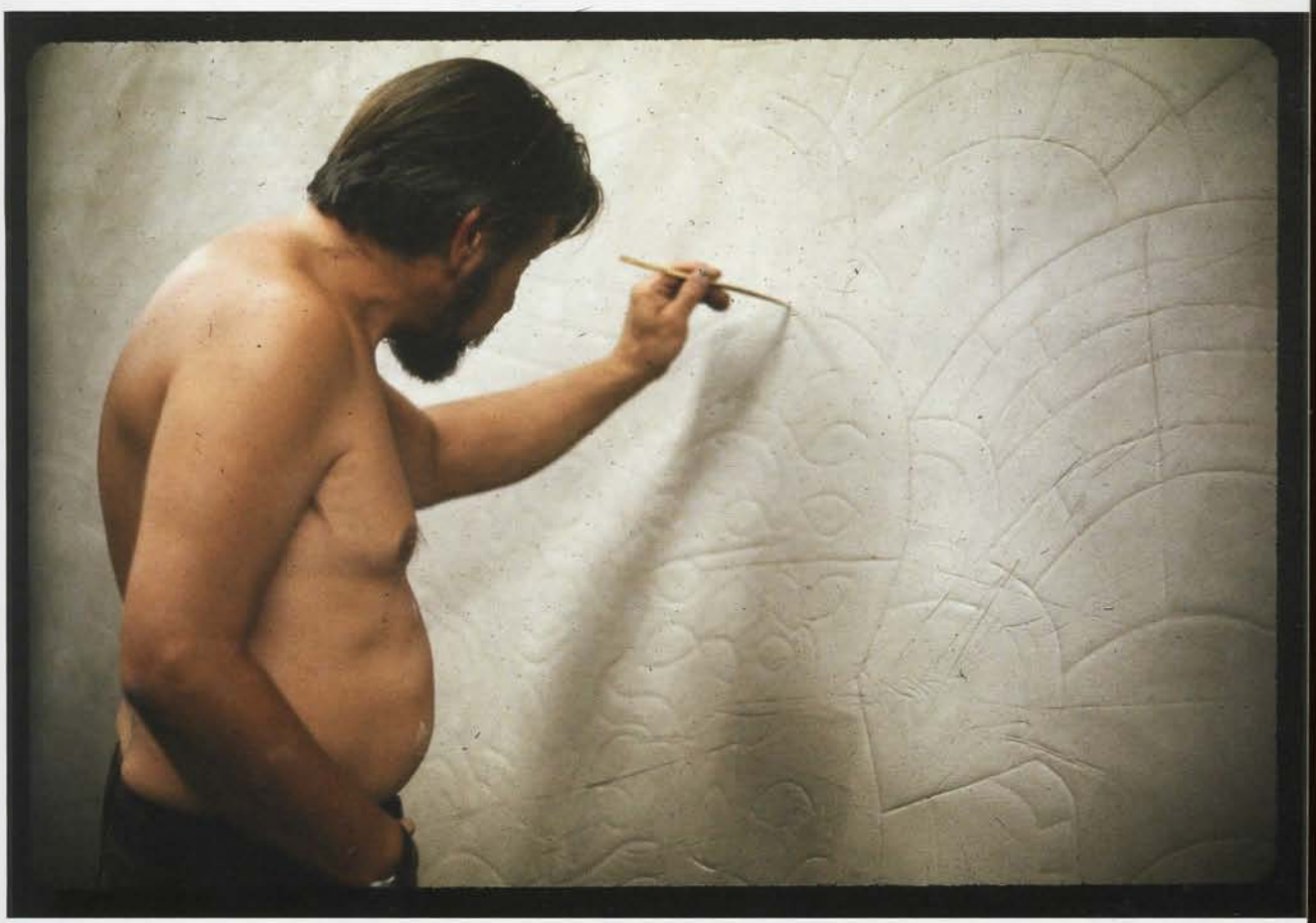
Above: Autio's legacy reached far from Montana: alumnus Doug Baldwin and his students at the Bedford YMCA in New York City, 1966.
Top: Rudy Autio with a ceramic sculpture on the university campus in 1959.

the curriculum. The camaraderie of ceramic students in the School of Art is legendary. The year-end sale of the Starving Students Ceramic Society (now UMECA), for example, is not only a consistently successful fundraiser, but also an annual ritual.

In 1995, ceramics hosted "Woodstack," an international symposium on wood-fired pottery that brought together many of the players who had moved pottery into the mainstream of contemporary art in the second half of the 20th century, including Don Bendel, Pete Callas, Josh DeWeese, Ken Ferguson, Torbjorn Kvasbo, Jim Leedy, Don Reitz, Dave Shaner, David Smith, and Yukio Yamamoto. Perhaps most rewarding for the participants was watching Rudy Autio and Peter Voulkos reunited in the studio after half a century. What became apparent at that significant gathering was the fact that ceramics had matured, not just as an academic subject, with its doors open to countless men and women in universities and colleges around the country, but it had also blossomed as contemporary art. It was also evident, in just about every workshop and panel discussion, that faculty, students, and alumni of the University of Montana had played central roles in that history.

Modernism has been replaced by post-modernism and the debates between craft and concept, functional pottery and fine art, and theory and practice continue in the field. UM's program in ceramics, to the benefit of its students, is no less engaged today than it was fifty-four years ago when it gained its decisive independence from the "Elementary Crafts."

Hipólito Rafael Chacón is Professor of Art History and Criticism in the School of Art at the University of Montana-Missoula. He received his B.A. in art from Wabash College and Ph.D. in art history from the University of Chicago. He researches, teaches, and lectures on a variety of art historical and critical subjects, and has published on architectural history, historic preservation, as well as regional history and its intersection with the visual arts, particularly the development of modern and contemporary art in Montana.



Rudy Autio working on the Polson bank Mural, 1971.

home, home, on the range

CONTEMPORARY CERAMICS IN MONTANA

by STEPHEN GLUECKERT

In 2008 the MAM Board of Director's adopted the following as its governing mission:

Missoula Art Museum serves the public by engaging audiences and artists in the exploration of contemporary art relevant to the community, state and region.

MAM's exhibitions are driven by this governing mission. This calling makes clear our responsibility to broadly represent that which reflects the essential cultural fiber of this place. Undeniably, *Persistence in Clay: Contemporary Ceramics in Montana* is not only the result of an institutional responsibility, but also of the groundswell of a home grown movement.

I would be negligent if I did not mention that the germ of this exhibition was brought to the institution's exhibition review process by two local ceramic artists and University of Montana Art Professors, Julia Galloway and Beth Lo. They appealed to MAM to host an exhibition celebrating the importance of the clay medium alive today in the region. These two individuals helped identify most of the contributing artists, and were sensitive to step back and allow the institution to do what museums do: select work, conduct studio visits, interview artists, and pontificate about the importance of the story to the identity of place.

Significantly, the exhibition is intended to coincide with two important regional events. First, the milestone 60th birthday for the Archie Bray Foundation and second, to draw attention to something unique to our region at a time when NCECA (National Council on Education for the Ceramic Arts) is meeting in the Pacific Northwest. The stars have aligned in the sky, allowing us to draw these 19 artists together for this very special exhibition.

Education Curator Renée Taaffe and I visited each of the selected artists to conduct interviews and choose works for the exhibition. The purpose of these interviews was to gather important information for an interactive element for the exhibition and beyond, recorded and edited by video artist Geoffrey Pepos. In all of these visits, not one artist failed to mention the Archie Bray Foundation.

Since the 1940s the Archie Bray Foundation for the Ceramic Arts has had a tremendous impact on the region. The first two residents were Peter Voulkos and Rudy Autio, who in turn had a profound influence on the American Crafts-as-Art movement. "Pete" and "Rudy" as they are commonly known saw the Bray as a touchstone for the beginnings of their careers, and subsequent visiting artists have cemented in their collective conscious a proud history that can seem at times infectious. The author Rick Newby has spent a great deal of time highlighting the legacy of the Archie Bray Foundation over the years and continues to address this with his essay included in this catalogue. Additionally, MAM is grateful to Rafael Chacón for graciously writing about the important world class ceramics legacy perpetuated at The University of Montana School of Art. But I wish to focus on some additional thoughts about clay in Montana.

Persistence in Clay: Contemporary Ceramics in Montana is intended to celebrate not only the Bray's milestone birthday and The University of Montana's legacy, but to confirm a sense of pride in a regional artistic strength. The exhibition also celebrates artists who have worked and continue to work outside of any institutional legacy. One must not forget that the clay history in the state is deep and rich. The Plains Indian and Métis cultures have a long tradition of low fire ceramic vessels. Charlie Russell's small clay figures show he experimented with firing ceramics. In fact,

Adrian Arleo and Stephen Glueckert in Arleo's studio, 2011.

Frances Senska, the influential Montana educator who introduced Rudy Autio and Peter Voulkos to ceramics.

his family roots were in the brick business in St. Louis, and he clearly understood the vitrification processes of firing clay. According to Frances Senska during an interview in 2001, the first kiln specifically for ceramic use was brought to Montana by Sister Trinitas in the 1930s. Trinitas, originally from Missoula, was a versatile artist educated at the University of Washington, St. Catherine College, Chicago Art Institute, and Catholic University in DC. Trinitas shared the design of a basic blast furnace with Frances Senska who incorporated the process into her educational program. Trinitas later worked with engineers from the Anaconda Copper Company to build a railcar walk-in kiln which was significantly ahead of the times.

These early clay pioneers experimented freely, and had to be part engineer, part scientist, part historian and part visionary. There were no artist's catalogues or online web sources for information. Artists wandered far and wide, shovel in hand, searching for the materials necessary for art making. This spirit of resourcefulness and freedom to explore has never gone away and was certainly carried on by Senska and passed on to her students Pete and Rudy.

Clay artists have found a home in Montana for myriad reasons. Importantly, this region has a welcoming art community and many resources readily available. The natural environment is wide open. The hills and valleys, and the plateaus and river breaks are constant reminders of the make up of the earth, and the elements of a clay body. While mining and other extractive industries are ever present so too are the traditions of "getting your hands dirty," working the land, an identity cemented in labor and soil. Strong, independent and forward thinking individuals brought ceramics to this place, and worked hard to ensure that it had a future. The 19 very different artists featured in *Persistence in Clay* carry on this spirit of visionary autonomy.

Incredibly, there is not a characteristic look to this Montana school, if I dare call it that. There is no remnant of an "Autio look" or a "Voulkos look." The only characteristic that seems to tie everyone together is the integrity of creative independence, or what I like to call, "Montana eclectic." There is dignity in finding your own voice, and perhaps Montana is a great place to make the discovery. Clay just happens to be the most readily available and regionally identified medium. So while many other regions of the country are known for the mastery and influence of other mediums, in Montana, the ceramic arts are the centerpiece of arts and culture. *Persistence in Clay* identifies some of the disciplined clay artists who are also currently recognized leaders in their communities.

Keep in mind that solid clay programs have existed outside of the Archie Bray Foundation and The University of Montana for years. Marcia Selsor labored for over 20 years at Eastern Montana College in Billings establishing and supporting ceramic artists in eastern Montana. In addition to mature programs at The University of Montana and Montana State University, many small college institutions such as the University of Great Falls, Flathead Valley Community College, and The University of Montana, Western in Dillon have nurtured thousands of students. Extensive high school art programs with clay elements exist in Great Falls, Helena, Billings and Missoula.

Museums throughout the state have been creative in their support of the medium. The Custer County Museum in Miles City developed a remarkable program in which a resident artist conducts outreach to rural schools using

Spring 2011 residents with director Steven Lee at the Archie Bray Foundation.

a raku kiln hauled on a trailer. At one time, the Yellowstone Art Museum and Paris Gibson Square Museum of Art hosted extensive clay programs. At Paris Gibson Square, Dean Borchers had a faithful following for years. Ceramic studios and classes have thrived in art centers and community centers throughout Montana. This does not even take into account the private studios which exist in every corner of the state.

It is undeniable that we live in a time when the interest and passion for clay in Montana is intense and growing. In recent years The Clay Studio in Missoula and The Clay Center in Red Lodge have carried on a creative presence which is such an important part of this place. They have helped establish important residency programs which are a significant part of the sharing of an international language, and helped promote the notion that the arts are essentially about community as much as they are about individual expression.

After surveying the participating artists, it is easy to see that many, while working here, do not frequently exhibit within the region, often relying on commercial support and attention from engaged galleries and collectors outside the region. Drawing these artists together and celebrating their local connection to community provides an educational platform to affirm their creative contributions. The group of artists selected for the exhibit is not exclusive. This exhibition could easily be tripled or quadrupled in size with ceramic artists who are equally vital and competent. This profound fact speaks to the strength of the medium in the state and the legacy of the pioneers who laid the groundwork for the future generations of many clay artists yet to come. *Persistence in Clay: Contemporary Ceramics in Montana* is as much a challenge as it is an exhibition, and that challenge seems obvious: "Support one another and the world will support you."

The works included in the exhibition by 19 celebrated ceramic artists run the gamut of content and approach. The expertise of Sarah Jaeger and Julia Galloway confirm the roots of clay in the "utility" of the medium. Both produce refined, wheel thrown works, with surfaces that are richly informed by study and research. Both readily articulate a deep understanding of the complex and rich American ceramic history.

The works of Alison Reintjes and Rosie Wynkoop reference tradition and utility, yet explore sophisticated pattern and design approaches as part of their language. Reintjes uses cast porcelain vessels which are then assembled into a

composition, each a part of a greater whole, while Wynkoop uses wheel thrown forms as a canvas for engobes (glazing technique) and intense, low fire glazes.

Both Josh DeWeese and Tara Wilson have a distinctive aesthetic language that is uniquely their own. Each produces works that have a characteristic form, coupled with an often experimental surface. Both artists produce wheel thrown vessels which are then manipulated to an expressive end. They have a clear understanding of the wood firing process in the production of their work.

Using the vessel as a point of departure, David Hiltner, Steve Lee and Beth Lo, stretch these larger traditional forms to tell more of their own story. Each artist applies a combination of wheel thrown and hand built techniques; they incorporate metaphors into their works such as agricultural legacy and cultural identity. Their surface choices include Lee's non-traditional automotive paint and incised cobalt blue lines, Hiltner's texture of the furrows of farm fields, and Lo's use of a celadon glaze to suggest water levels.

While working within the clay medium, Robert Harrison, Trey Hill, and Hannah Fisher have a purely sculptural approach. Their wheel thrown, hand built, and assembled works include powerful references to architecture, furniture, figure, and in the end to a psychological tension in the space in which we live.

Dean Adams and David Smith also have a sculptural approach, yet carry their works into another realm by adding media besides clay into their expressions. Adam's hand built sculptural forms stretches clay through the inclusion of steel rods. This allows him to increase the volume and presence of these fantastic machines. Smith's cast porcelain incorporates backlighting which dramatically changes the appearance of the media.

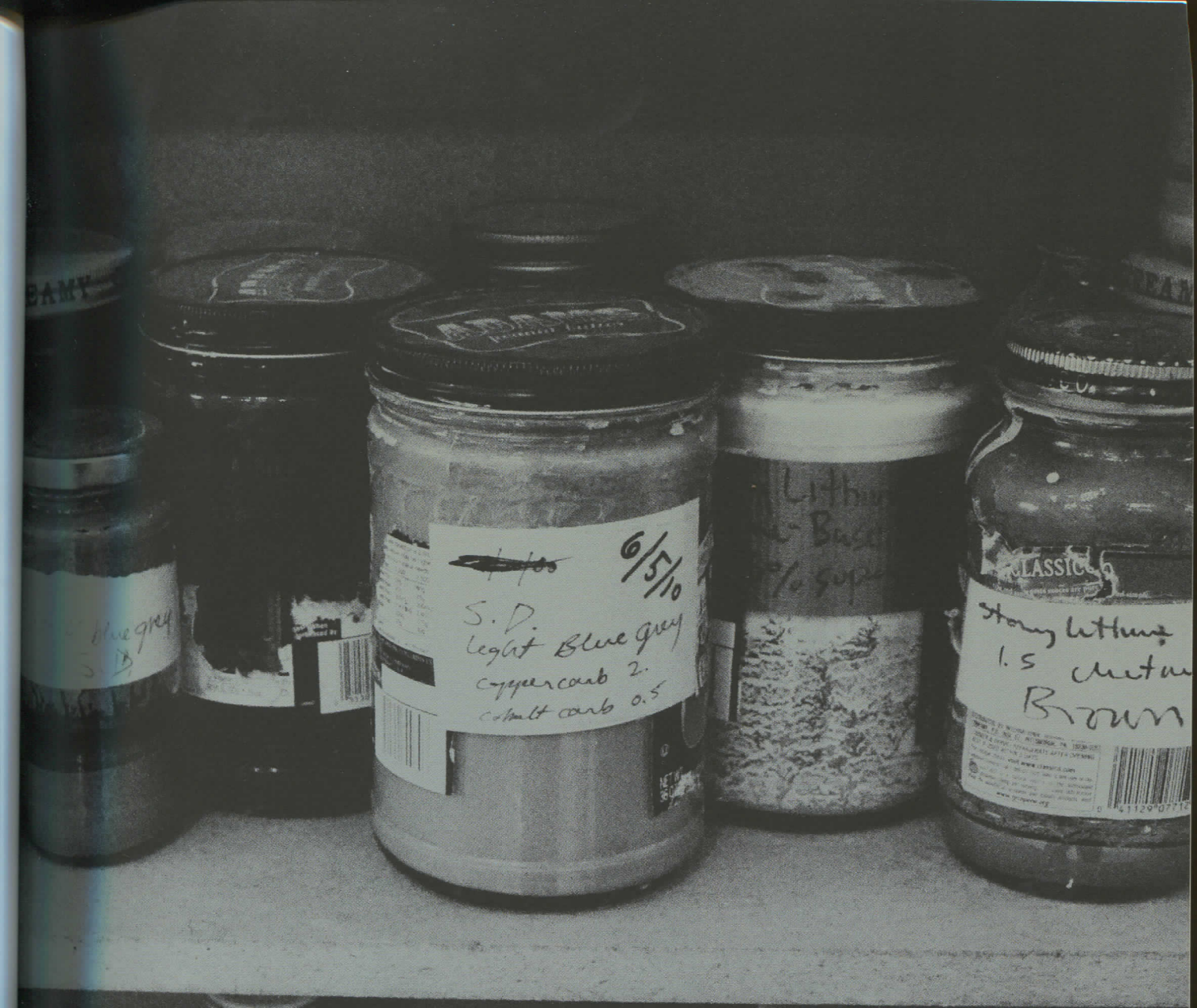
Adrian Arleo, David Regan, and Shanna Fliegel's works include suggestive narratives and stories. By using powerful hand built forms and combining and contrasting related symbols, these artists provide an experience for the viewer that is both real and surreal.

There is no doubt where Steve Braun's and Richard Notkin's work lies, nor what their intent conveys. The magic of their hand built work is that their content dictates not simply the message, but the form. They are both driven by a polemic in an attempt to make a statement. Each has a strong point of view that leaves no mystery as to how they feel about the injustices in the world.

The diversity of these very different artists, their strengths and approaches, in this space, at this time testifies that perhaps there is something in the Montana water that has created such an opportunity. Each artist has a willingness to share and be part of an exhibition and educational milieu, and more importantly see themselves as part of a larger community of clay artists.

Thanks to the support of the WESTAF (Western States Arts Federation), the National Endowment for the Arts and the Paul G. Allen Family Foundation MAM has created an extensive educational outreach program and exhibition with a regional touring capacity. The exhibition will travel to the Nicolaysen Art Museum, Casper, WY and the Crossroads Carnegie Art Center, Baker, OR in 2012.

Stephen Glueckert was born in Missoula, MT and received a BFA from the University of Idaho and an M.Ed in Art Education from Western Washington University. He has taught throughout the Northwest, the University of Papua New Guinea, and The University of Montana. He has been a recipient of a Montana Individual Artist's Fellowship. In addition to being a practicing studio artist, he has written extensively about contemporary artists of Montana. He has been Exhibition Curator at the Missoula Art Museum since 1992.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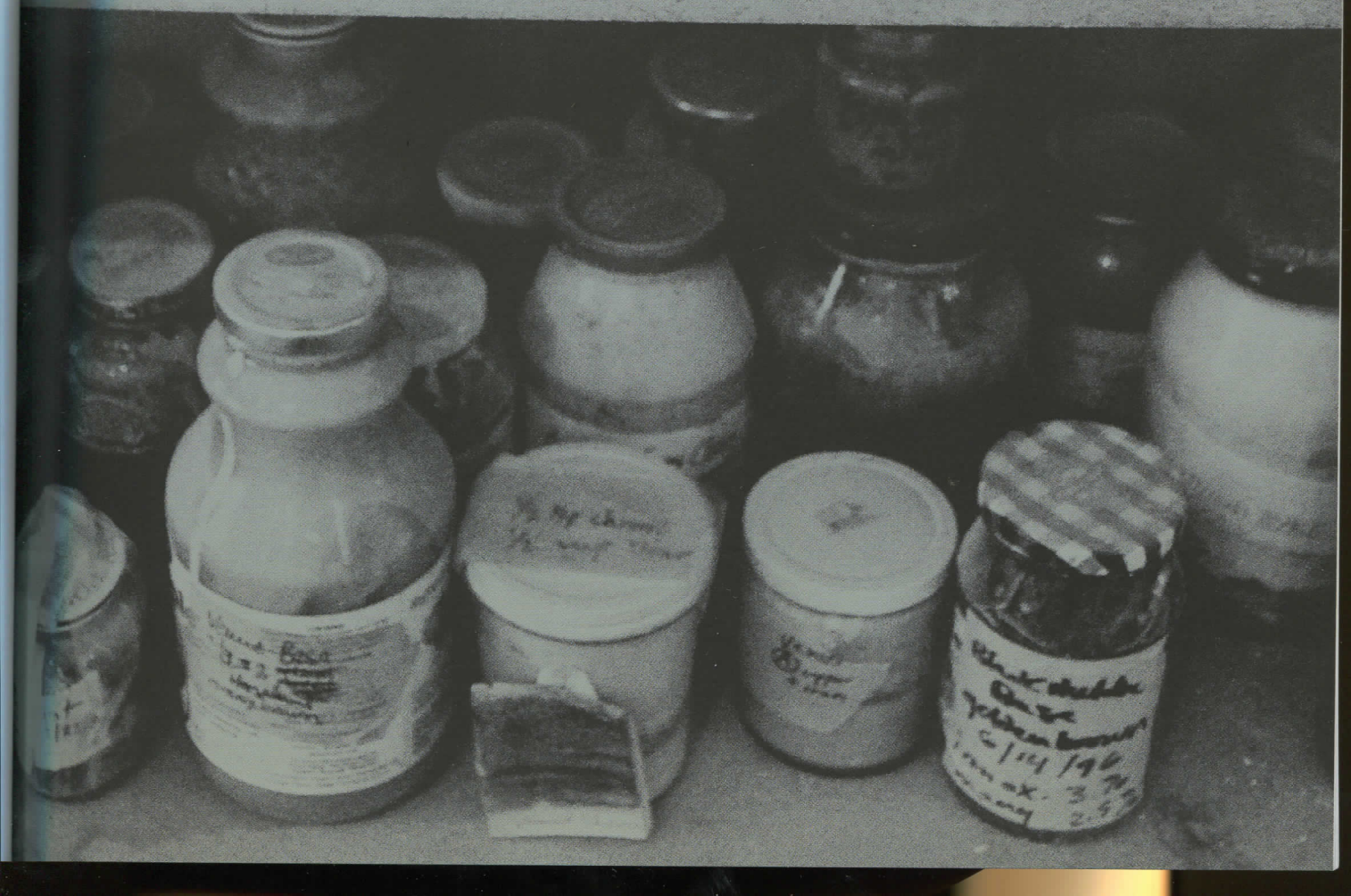

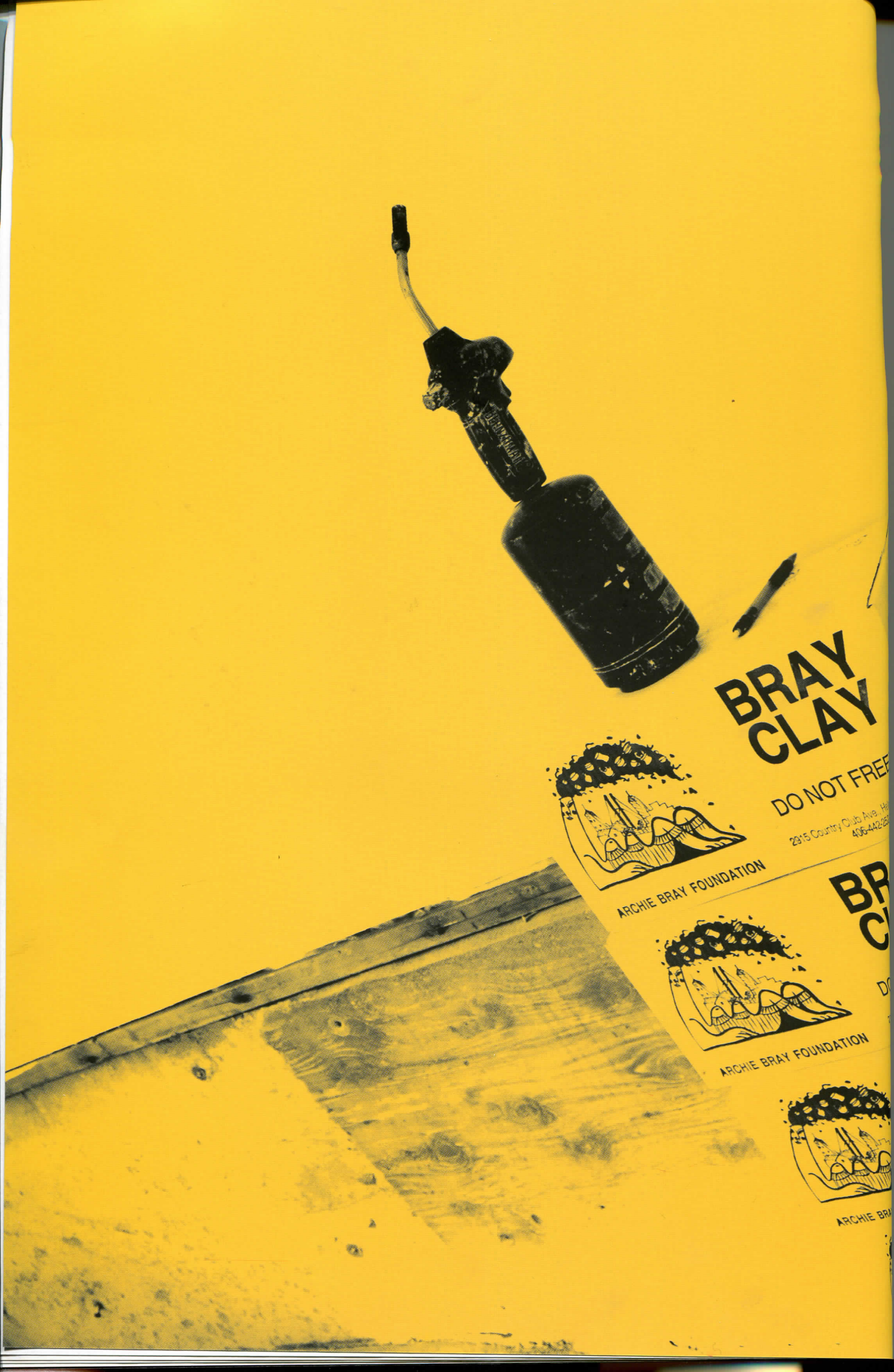
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montana's archie bray foundation for the ceramic arts

ORIGIN AND IMPACT

by RICK NEWBY

Archie Bray, Sr., did not build a monument to himself. He built a workshop for potters.

—David Shaner

A place, an idea, a set of experiences shared by hundreds, if not thousands, of ceramists: The Archie Bray Foundation for the Ceramic Arts—affectionately known as the Bray—has had a profound impact on the development of ceramics in Montana, in the United States, and around the world. As preeminent ceramics historian Garth Clark has written, "The Bray was without doubt the incubator for . . . the 'new ceramic presence,'" the modernist revolution in ceramic arts that emerged in the 1950s, primarily in the western United States. Montana's own Rudy Autio, one of the founding artists at the Bray (together with Peter Voulkos), once noted that "it all began in Montana," and specifically at the foundation headquartered in an old brickyard in Montana's capital city.

The Archie Bray Foundation for the Ceramic Arts was launched in October 1951 by Archie Bray, owner of the Western Clay Manufacturing Company, together with Peter Meloy, a Helena attorney and potter, and Branson Stevenson, Montana branch manager for Socony Vacuum Oil, a potter, painter, and printmaker. The foundation had been the brainchild of Bray, a hardheaded businessman who supported the arts and loved to garden, a member of Helena's cultural and business elites who delighted in meeting visiting celebrities dressed in his dusty brickyard clothes. Archie expressed his vision for the foundation in an undated letter to Branson Stevenson:

"Somehow let's keep it all on the plane we dreamed. A place to work for all who are seriously interested in any of the Ceramic Arts. Each time we walk in the door to walk into a place of art, of simple things . . . lovely people all tuned to the right spirit. That somewhere through it all will permeate a beautiful spirit . . . carrying on and forwarding the intentions, the aims and the life of the Foundation. Can we do it? What a joy it is to do it."

In the intervening sixty years, the Bray has carried forward its founder's vision intact, particularly the notion that the foundation is a fine "place to work" for ceramic artists of all persuasions. In those first years, the Bray established several other qualities that continue to distinguish it today. Almost by happenstance, Archie Bray invited two students from Bozeman's Montana State College (MSC) to spend the summer of 1951 at the brickyard, making pots in the drying shed, building kilns, and helping to lay brick for a new pottery building. As luck would have it, these young Montana natives, Rudy Autio and Peter Voulkos—the first in a long line of talented resident artists at the Bray—proved to be two of the greatest ceramic innovators of their generation.

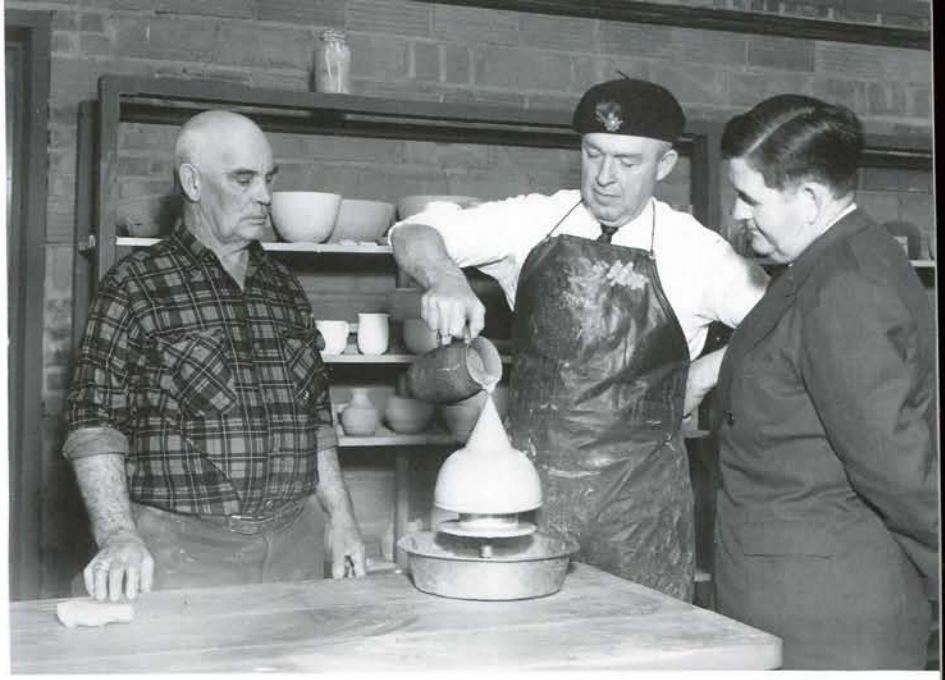
World War II veterans Autio and Voulkos, having studied with MSC's Frances Senska (whose own teachers included Bauhaus masters László Moholy-Nagy and Marguerite Wildenhain), embodied the diversity of interests that remain a signature of the Bray. Autio saw himself as a sculptor, not a potter, and while in Helena, he created large-scale ceramic sculptural reliefs for architectural projects throughout Montana. Voulkos was a masterful potter—winning numerous national awards during the early 1950s—who would spend the summer of 1953 at renowned Black Mountain College in North Carolina (another incubator for American modernism). There (and in New York City) Voulkos encountered Abstract Expressionism, and upon

his return to the Bray in 1953 and subsequently during his enormously influential teaching career in California, he devoted his talents to a profound exploration of the expressive sculptural qualities of clay. Meanwhile the founders of the Bray, Archie Bray, Meloy, and Stevenson, remained passionately committed to time-honored pottery traditions.

Branson Stevenson was particularly influenced by the work and thought of Bernard Leach, the British artist-craftsman whose *A Potter's Book* introduced many westerners to the pottery traditions of Great Britain, Japan, and Korea. In early 1952, Stevenson learned that the British potter, together with Shoji Hamada, Japan's leading potter, and Soetsu Yanagi, director of Tokyo's Museum of Folk-craft, would be touring the United States later that year. Stevenson promptly invited Leach, Hamada, and Yanagi to visit the new Archie Bray Foundation in Helena and present lectures and demonstrations. The trio agreed, adding the Bray to an itinerary that included Black Mountain College, St. Paul (Minnesota) Gallery and School of Art, and Chouinard Art Institute, Los Angeles.

While the impact of that first workshop at the Bray has been hotly debated, one thing is clear: It established, at the very beginning, traditions of bringing acclaimed ceramic artists to teach workshops and of extending the foundation's reach to the full range of international ceramics. Autio and Voulkos, though they didn't think much of Leach's stuffy Arts-and-Crafts approach, were inspired by Soetsu Yanagi, who introduced them to a cultural tradition in which, as Autio noted, "pottery making has been for centuries regarded as a true art, of equal dignity with the fine arts" and by Shoji Hamada, who demonstrated prodigious technique at the wheel.

With Archie Bray's death in 1953, with Peter Voulkos departing for Los Angeles, where he started a new ceramics program at the Otis College of Art and Design, and with Rudy Autio coming to Missoula to teach at The University of Montana, the Bray entered the next stage of its development.



Left to right: Archie Bray, Branson Stevenson, and Peter Meloy in the Foundation pottery building, November 1951. L.H. Jorud, photographer (ABFA).

In the following decades, a series of enormously accomplished and hard-working resident directors left their marks on the place.

Ken Ferguson (director 1958–1964) developed community classes and made many thousands of pots for sale, keeping the Bray alive during its leanest times. David Shaner (director 1964–1970) did much to professionalize the Bray, relying upon the very first artist grants from the National Endowment for the Arts to bring nationally known ceramists, including Val Cushing, Wayne Higby, and Jun Kaneko, to work at the Bray. Heroically, Shaner also managed to purchase the pottery grounds when the brickyard went bankrupt.

David Cornell (director 1970–1976) and Judy Cornell (associate director) continued the residency program and sought, in a short-lived effort, to extend it to other arts, including glassblowing and weaving. Kurt Weiser (director 1976–1988) brought more international artists to the Bray, expanded the clay business, under manager Chip Clawson, to support the foundation's programs, and managed to raise the funds to purchase the old brickyard in its entirety, dramatically extending the Bray's footprint. Weiser also started the Bray's sculpture garden, allowing residents to place large-scale architectural and sculptural works on the Bray's grounds.

Carol Roorbach (director 1989–1992) developed an endowment and brought more women artists than ever before to the Bray. Josh DeWeese (director 1992–2006), together with Development Director Marcia Eidel, garnered strong financial support from the local community and a national constituency of collectors and ceramics enthusiasts. With this support, DeWeese oversaw the construction of a spectacular, 12,000-square-foot new studio building, named after David and Ann Shaner, and expanded the Bray's technical offerings, including new electric, gas, and wood-fired kilns. Steven Young Lee (2006–present), with his strong ties to Asia, has furthered the Bray's international presence and continues to improve the foundation's facilities. Under Lee's leadership, the Bray has completed its $250,000 Comprehensive Kiln Project, introducing an even wider range of firing options, including a 110-cubic-foot sculpture kiln, and it is currently hosting its 60th anniversary celebration, entitled *From the Center to the Edge: 60 Years of Creativity and Innovation at the Archie Bray Foundation.*

Although the Bray will always be known for its origin as a key source for ceramic innovation, perhaps its most important impact has been to offer artists the time, space, and materials to develop their singular voices in clay, whether as potters, as sculptors, or on occasion, as artists in various media. Art historian Patricia Failing has noted that the Bray is not simply an art school (though it offers classes and workshops); it was "not established to nourish and preserve a local craft tradition" (if anything, the Bray ceramic tradition—and by extension, the recent Montana tradition—has been, from the start, pluralist, globalist, truly postmodern in its openness to the multiplicity of traditions); and it is not just a retreat for the already famous. Instead, as Failing writes, it has been "an institutional anomaly . . . an unstable conglomeration of educational services, a small business, and a venue for major artists," both established and emerging.

Many artists become Bray residents soon after completing their undergraduate or graduate studies, and these young artists note that the Bray offers them a supportive, relatively non-competitive, wide-open, but highly rigorous atmosphere in which they can work out their own ideas during one- and two-year stays. Often

it is only after their stays at the foundation that many Bray residents become "major" artists, underscoring again the aptness of Garth Clark's characterization of the foundation as an incubator—a "gentle kiln that warms young life until it becomes independent."

The Bray influence has been, and continues to be, positively viral, elaborating a vast (and intimate) network. Several past directors have become influential teachers, spreading the Bray spirit: Peter Voulkos (Otis Art Institute and UC Berkeley), Rudy Autio (University of Montana), Ken Ferguson (Kansas City Art Institute), Kurt Weiser (Arizona State University), and Josh DeWeese (Montana State University). Among other former Bray residents included in this exhibition who also teach in university ceramics programs are Julia Galloway, who is currently a Bray board member, and Trey Hill (both University of Montana), and Bray board members often teach: Patti Warashina (formerly University of Washington), Akio Takamori (University of Washington), Chris Staley (Penn State), John Balistreri (Bowling Green State), Sally Brogden (University of Tennessee), and Beth Lo (University of Montana).

Former residents have started Bray-like residency programs as far afield as Berlin (Kaja Witt and Thomas Hirschler's Zentrum für Keramik) and Joseph, Oregon (Chris Antemann's LH Project, founded with her husband Jacob Hasslacher); other past resident artists now direct a variety of non-academic ceramics programs, including Wally Bivins (Pottery Northwest, Seattle), Bobby Silverman (the Ceramic Center at New York's 92nd Street Y), and Michio Sugiyama (Shigaraki Ceramic Cultural Park, Japan). Former Bray resident (and past director of Helena's Holter Museum) Peter Held has become one of America's most influential ceramics curators through his position as director of the Ceramics Research Center, Arizona State University, Tempe, and as publisher of important monographs on such former Bray stalwarts as David Shaner, Kurt Weiser, and Akio Takamori.

From a Montana point of view, perhaps the most beautiful aspect of the Bray contagion has been the enrichment of Big Sky country's ceramic culture. Thirteen of the nineteen artists in the current exhibition, *Persistence in Clay: Contemporary Ceramics in Montana*, are former or current Bray residents, most of whom first came to Montana specifically to immerse themselves in the Bray experience—and decided to stay. Missoula, Bozeman, Helena, and the Flathead have flourishing ceramic communities, and Montanans are truly fortunate to have local access to a panoply of world-class ceramic objects, whether they are superbly handcrafted pitchers, cups, and bowls (by such national figures as Sarah Jaeger, Josh DeWeese, or Julia Galloway), or astonishing sculptural expressions (by such luminaries as Richard Notkin, Robert Harrison, Adrian Arleo, and Beth Lo).

In 1966, David Shaner claimed, "What New York is in communications, Hollywood in the film industry, and New Orleans in jazz, Helena is becoming in the field of creative pottery. In this field you can't go any higher than the Archie Bray Foundation." At the time, Shaner may have overstated his case, but by the second decade of the twenty-first century, his claim rings true. The Missoula Art Museum's *Persistence in Clay: Contemporary Ceramics in Montana* offers incontrovertible proof.

Poet and independent scholar Rick Newby is co-author of A Ceramic Continuum: Fifty Years of the Archie Bray Influence *(Holter Museum of Art/University of Washington Press, 2001) and* The Most Difficult Journey: The Poindexter Collections of American Modernist Painting *(Yellowstone Art Museum, 2002). He has also published, in exhibition catalogs and international journals, essays on several artists in this exhibition, including Adrian Arleo, Stephen Braun, Robert Harrison, Beth Lo, and Richard Notkin. His essay on the life and art of Stephen De Staebler will appear in the catalog accompanying the sculptor's retrospective at San Francisco's De Young Museum, December 2011. Newby serves on the Montana Arts Council and, in 2009, received the Montana Governor's Humanities Award.*

Branson Stevenson (right) and Peter Voulkos build the downdraft gas kiln in 1951 (ABFA).