

Vessel

From the MJM&AG Permanent Collection

Bruce Anderson, Lorne Beug, Mel Bolen, Donovan Chester, Victor Cicansky, Zach Dietrich, Cara Gay Driscoll, Charley Farrero, Robert Froese, Folmer Hansen, Ray Hearn, Franklin Heisler, Beth Hone, Ann James, Sandra Ledingham, Marilyn Levine, Jeannie Mah, Judy McNaughton, Don Parker, Wendy Parsons, Brian Ring, Anita Rocamora, David Ross, Peter Rupchan, Christy Schweiger, Jack Sures, Martin Tagseth, David Thauberger, Judy Tryon, Zane Wilcox, Randy Woolsey, Russell Yuristy



Featuring a survey of historic and contemporary ceramic works by Saskatchewan artists in our permanent collection, the exhibition explores the vessel form, from the more conventional to the sculptural. Defined as a container that is characterized anthropomorphically by its lip, neck, body, belly and foot, the vessel is the principle ceramic form. Whether an open vessel in the form of a cup, bowl or vase, or closed, like a bottle or sculpture of the human body as vessel, the exhibition presents diverse variations and playful interpretations of this form. **Vessel** in its diversity offers an overview of the development of ceramics in Saskatchewan,

spanning from the wood-fired vessels of Peter Rupchan, our province's first known potter, in the 1920s, to the Regina Clay movement's sincere engagement and experimentation with the clay medium, to creative and playful expressions of prairie regionalism of the Funk Art period to contemporary innovation in clay.

There are a number of factors that led to an embrace of ceramics in Saskatchewan beginning in the 1950s and nurtured a creative explosion in clay in the 1960s and 70s. With a vision for developing a professional craft industry in the province, the Saskatchewan Arts Board supported adult education programs in craft, as well as purchased a building in Fort Qu'Appelle in 1954 to house an artist in residency program, where a full-time working craftsperson could make work and engage the community in the arts. David Ross and Folmer Hansen launched their pottery practices in Saskatchewan through this residency, eventually buying the building to establish their own pottery business, Hansen-Ross Pottery, which operated until 2005¹. Combining a Scandinavian aesthetic, from Folmer Hansen's home country, with a prairie sensibility, Hansen-Ross produced beautifully handcrafted pottery and influenced not only audience appreciation for the craft but mentored a younger generation of potters, including Don Parker, Brian Ring and Connie Talbot, who all worked at the HR studio. The 1950s era also saw a pottery program developed as part of the art school curriculum at the University of Saskatchewan, Regina Campus, through instructors Patricia Wiens and Beth Hone.

Clay became a significant medium to contend with in contemporary art in the 1960s and 1970s when a group of artists, connected to the ceramics department of the Regina Campus, began experimenting with the possibilities of clay as a sculptural medium. Jack Sures from Winnipeg was hired in 1965 to establish a ceramics program, where he encouraged students to not only absorb the lessons of functional pottery, but to explore clay's

¹ Heather Smith, *Fertile Ground, Hansen-Ross Pottery: Pioneering Fine Craft on the Canadian Prairies* (Moose Jaw, SK: Moose Jaw Museum & Art Gallery, 2012), p. 20.

sculptural potential. Early students of Sures' included Marilyn Levine, Ann James and Victor Cicansky, who became future colleagues. These artists, as well as Joe Fafard, Russell Yuristy and David Thauberger, along with California-import, David Gilhooley, began to see ceramics as the perfect vehicle to challenge the pervading focus on universal values of New York-style modernist art, and, instead, turned to clay, an accessible and unpretentious medium, to respond to their own regionalist experience within mainstream contemporary art, making work that was situated in this place and not the larger urban centres. Inspired by California Funk ceramics, which had an affinity for surrealism, found object assemblage, personal narrative and humour, the Regina clay artists pushed their medium in new directions and onto the contemporary art world stage².

Our province's leading clay artists have not only carved a significant place for ceramics in contemporary Canadian art but mentored and influenced generations of other artists. The ceramics community in Saskatchewan is intrinsically interlinked, with lineages and legacies that impact contemporary ceramic practices today. This exhibition opens, sadly, after the recent passing of Jack Sures on May 12th. Internationally renowned, Sures has been recognized as a clay artist of exceptional skill and exquisite work, in both functional pottery and sculptural forms. He has been at the centre of Saskatchewan ceramics as an artist and mentor for five decades, significantly impacting generations of ceramic artists in this country, including the majority of artists in this exhibition. In March, Sures received the General Governor's Award for the Visual Arts, national recognition for his longstanding and long-reaching legacy in the contemporary ceramic art world.

² Regina Clay: Worlds in the Making, Virtual Museum of Canada, http://www.virtualmuseum.ca/sgc-cms/expositions-exhibitions/regina/english/history_california.html, accessed May 18, 2018.