



The large & small of it : ceramics by Don Reitz & Bruce Breckenridge : 26 February-11 April 1971, Elvehjem Art Center, University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Madison, Wisconsin: Elvehjem Art Center, University of Wisconsin, 1971

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THE LARGE & SMALL OF IT CERAMICS BY REITZ & BRECKENRIDGE

26 FEBRUARY THRU 17 APRIL 1971
ELVEHJEM ART CENTER UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

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Elvehjem Art Center
University of Wisconsin
Madison

Conversation With The Artists

[The following conversation between Catherine Brawer of the Elvehjem staff and artists Don Reitz and Bruce Breckenridge was held while the artists were preparing for the Elvehjem exhibition. Many pieces in the show had not yet been started.]

What becomes immediately apparent in talking with Reitz and Breckenridge is that ceramics as an art form affords a totally different experience for each artist. Even more striking is their enthusiasm for each other's work and their delight in analyzing their stylistic differences. In fact, they understand each other's intentions and work so completely that each feels perfectly comfortable in allowing the other to speak for him.

"We'd really like to tell you about our differences," began Reitz. "My work is about what I am inside of me. I'm challenged by natural forces. I'm a romantic about heat and trial by fire — and that's what I'm telling you about — the heat of the fire, the quality of the clay, and the fluidity of a piece.

"And Bruce is just the opposite. He doesn't really tell you about clay at all; he denies the physical qualities of the clay and really offers little chance for physical response to the material."

"I'm not really a potter," elaborated Breckenridge, "I work with clay and I use pottery techniques. Don tries to draw everything out of the materials and his pieces depend on the materials' inherent qualities. He wants spots to come

through. I don't. I wipe the clay out and use commercial materials, like granny china paints and decals and clear glazes that I don't have to calculate."

"You see," said Reitz, "for me clay is tactile, total and immediate. I depend on spontaneity and directness. My next piece is an extension of everything that has ever happened to me."

"For Don it's a physical thing, but for me it's more removed, more contemplated. I've moved away from abstract expressionism. I'm not slashing at the clay to make a point. Everything I put into a piece has already been thought out and digested."

"These differences stem from our backgrounds," added Reitz. "Take Bruce. His background is art history, museums, painting. I started out as a meat cutter. I was the best diver in the navy. Anything I've ever been good at has been physical. My training in ceramics has been more technical than Bruce's, but he can think things through that I haven't got the patience for. Now, I live on a farm with ten horses. That's where I get my work done. Bruce lives in town in an apartment and does most of his work here at the University.

"Our methods of working are really very different," continued Reitz. "I sit down to work and I just feel a piece. I might decide to do pitchers, but I don't have any preconceptions as to whether they'll be tight or bulbous. I work quickly. My pieces are basically thrown. I've gone back to working big and now I'm adding smaller units. But I can still finish a large piece

in one or two days at the most. Whereas Bruce will plan a piece out, throw fifteen separate units and then assemble them. He might work on one piece for two weeks, but he always has more of the end product in mind than I do."

"I think we've touched on another basic difference between us," said Breckenridge. "As Don said, I'm more additive. Don has his roots in functionalism. Now, I would not start, let's say, with a jug, as Don would. But he'll take the jug, or another well-known form, and make it transcend its traditional function."

"Right. I think of a pitcher as a form with anatomical properties. It might have a sculptural feeling, but no possibilities for social or political commentaries as Bruce's pieces might."

"For example," explained Breckenridge, "I've been working with cups now for about six years. I like the cup shape: it's manageable and has great variety. But I'm not really interested in a **cup**; I'm concerned with what I can do to make it precious, like the Fabergé egg, and to get it into the realm of sculpture. I want it to affect the space beyond it in the way the tiny Fabergé egg overwhelms the surrounding space. I want to get the cup to go places, wow! Actually, I'm bothered by the size of the cup in relation to a gallery. I think one reason I started embedding cups in polyester was to get away from the fact that you can handle it."

"Bruce is really a fetishist. But I want to add that Bruce's cups, like many of my jugs, have been removed from the realm of everyday use.

"As I started to say before," continued Reitz,

"our methods of working are very different. I guess that my major contribution to ceramics was extending the color range possible with salt glazing, which until about seven years ago, when I began exploring the color possibilities, had been limited to browns, greys and warm tones. The way I work is to put the colored slips on the wet ware. I have a large outdoor kiln, with a 120 cubic foot capacity, so I can fire between three and one hundred pieces at a time, depending on their size. I throw rock salt in the fire box and as it melts, the salt vaporizes, and the sodium combines with the silica in the clay to form a clear glaze over the ware, which then has the texture of an orange-peel. Of course, I fire high — at 2400°. And I constantly experiment by adding foreign materials like bricks, oil, wood or sawdust to increase the chances for accidental drippings and mottling."

"By contrast," said Breckenridge, "my work is too precise to take accidents. I want control. I fire low, in oxidation, to make permanent what I have done so far on a piece. Then I add dots or stripes and fire again, using commercial glaze, as I said."

"With me, firing is a one shot thing," said Reitz. "I'm looking for the kiln accident. The temperature inside is uneven, and I use the hot spots to advantage. I might place two pots so they touch and then pull them apart so there will be a blush spot. But as the artist, I always make the final choice — and I might end up throwing out an entire kiln of ceramics, since I don't know until the firing is completed whether a piece will make it."

"On the other hand," added Breckenridge, "I try to have as few variables as possible. I know well before the final firing whether a piece will work. If Don and I traded studios, the first thing I'd do would be to regulate his kiln!"

"And I'd take Bruce's paints and put dabs of this here and dabs of that there to change the colors. Just to experiment."

"Our use of color is another difference between us," said Breckenridge. "Don deliberately darkens his clay because the reduction during firing also changes colors — it's an educated guess how much. But I work on a white ground, which I suppose you could say is the counterpart of a white canvas. And whereas my colors are labeled and vary little after firing from the way they look in the jar, Don has to work with a completely abstract palate and see the final colors in his head."

"It's interesting," mused Reitz, "that despite all of these differences between us, our philosophies of teaching coincide. We agree that the success of our teaching depends on our remaining producing artists. We both feel students should have broad exposure to different art forms. We want to create an atmosphere in which students are free to develop their own sense of aesthetics and be able to evaluate their own work. They should think about form. They should think about their work conceptually. The product will always come. I love to start a class by passing around one of my finished pieces and when the students have finished handling it, I smash it on the floor. After they stop gasping, I ask them what they remem-

ber about it . . . which qualities of the piece stay with them. . . That's what Bruce and I are both about."

Don Reitz at work.



Donald L. Reitz

Born November 7, 1929. Received B.S. in Art Education, Kutztown State College, Kutztown, Pennsylvania, 1957; M.F.A. New York State College of Ceramics, Alfred University, Alfred, New York, 1963. Served four years U.S. Navy. Mr. Reitz is presently Associate Professor Art, University of Wisconsin, Madison, and lives with his wife and two children in Spring Green, Wisconsin.

Exhibitions (partial list): Mississippi River Craft Show, Brooks Memorial Gallery, Memphis, Tenn.; Wisconsin Designer Craftsmen, Milwaukee, Wisconsin; 18th National Decorative Arts, Wichita, Kansas; 20th Annual Scripps College Ceramic Invitational, Calif.; XXIII International Competition of Artistic Ceramics, Faenza, Italy; Syracuse Ceramic National, Syracuse, N. Y.; Ceramics U.S.A., Invitational — International Mines & Chemicals, Ill.; Miami National, Miami, Fla.; National Invitational, Illinois State University, Normal, Ill.; National Invitational, Ceramic Arts, U.S.A., Skokie, Ill.; Ceramics U.S.A. Traveling Show, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.; Evanston Museum, Evanston, Ill.; Wright Art Center, Beloit College, Beloit, Wis. (One Man Show); Little Gallery, Kansas City, Mo. (One Man Show); L'Atelier Gallery, Milwaukee, Wis. (One Man Show); Objects — U.S.A., Washington, D.C.; Colorado Designer Craftsmen, Denver, Colo.; Invitational Sculpture Show, Sherbeyn Gallery, Chicago, Ill.; National Invitational Craft Show, Northern Illinois University, Dekalb, Ill.; Ceramics "70" Invitational, Everson Museum of Art, Syracuse, N. Y.; Prairie House, Springfield, Ill.; Two Man Show, University of South Dakota, Vermillion, S. D.

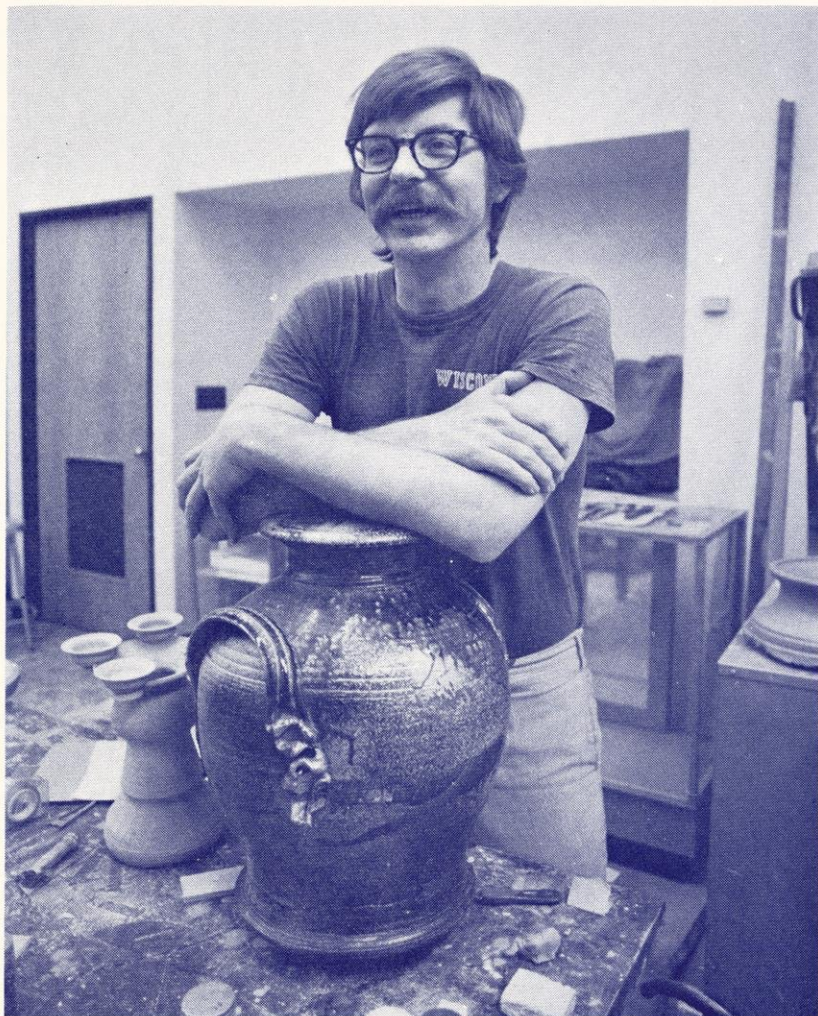
Lectures and Workshops (partial list): Toledo Museum, Toledo, Ohio; Sheridan College, Toronto, Canada; Penn State University, University Park, Pa.; Kutztown College, Kutztown, Pa.; Ohio Designer/Craftsman; Wisconsin Designer/Craftsman; Michigan Designer/Craftsman.

Represented In Collections: Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.; David Campbell Memorial Collection, New York, N. Y.; Antonio Prieto Memorial Collection, Mills College, Oakland, Calif.; Sybil Laubenthal Memorial Collection, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada; Canadian Potters Guild, Toronto, Canada; Gillette Collection, Sparta, Wis.; Alverno College, Milwaukee, Wis.; University Galleries, University of Southern Illinois, Carbondale, Ill.; Gilmore Art Center, Kalamazoo, Mich.; Sheridan College, Toronto, Canada; Clarke College, Dubuque, Iowa; Johnson Wax Collection, Racine, Wis.

Ceramic Commissions: Ceramic Fountain — Smithsonian Institution, Science & Industry Bldg., Washington, D.C.; Ceramic Foyer Sculpture — Kutztown State College, Kutztown, Pa.; Ceramic Baptismal Font — Lakeview Lutheran Church, Madison, Wis.

Recent Award: 1970 Wisconsin Governor's Award in the Arts.

Bruce Breckenridge with a pot by Don Reitz.
"Although these new pieces retain the look of a container, they become encounters with sculptural forms."



Exhibitions: Cranbrook Academy of Art, 1953; Richmond Art Center (Calif.), 1962; Hansen Gallery, San Francisco, 1963; San Francisco Museum of Art; Olivet College; Brooklyn Museum, 1965, '66, '67; LaJolla Art Center; Calif. Palace of Legion of Honor; Museum of Contemporary Crafts, 1968; National Ceramics Invitational, Wis. St. U-Whitewater, 1968; First National Ceramic Arts Invitation, Nelson Gallery; Atkins Museum, Kansas City, Mo., 1969; Brooklyn Museum, 1969; Edward Sherbeyn Gallery, Chicago, 1970; Museum of Contemporary Crafts, Sept. 30, 1970-Jan. 3, 1971, (**Coffee, Tea and Other Cups**); University of South Dakota, Vermillion, Jan. 1-31, 1971.

Lectures, etc. (partial list): Oakland (Calif.) City College, 1963; LaJolla (Calif.) Art Center, 1963; Berkeley (Calif.) Gallery, 1963; Calif. College of Arts and Crafts, 1963; Univ. of Calif. College of Arts and Crafts, 1963; Univ. of Calif.-Berkeley, 1963; Alfred (N. Y.) Univ., 1964-65; Hartwick College (Oneonta, N. Y.), 1966; U.W. Center System (throughout), 1967-68; Brooklyn Museum Art School, 1968, 1969; Maryland Institute, 1969.

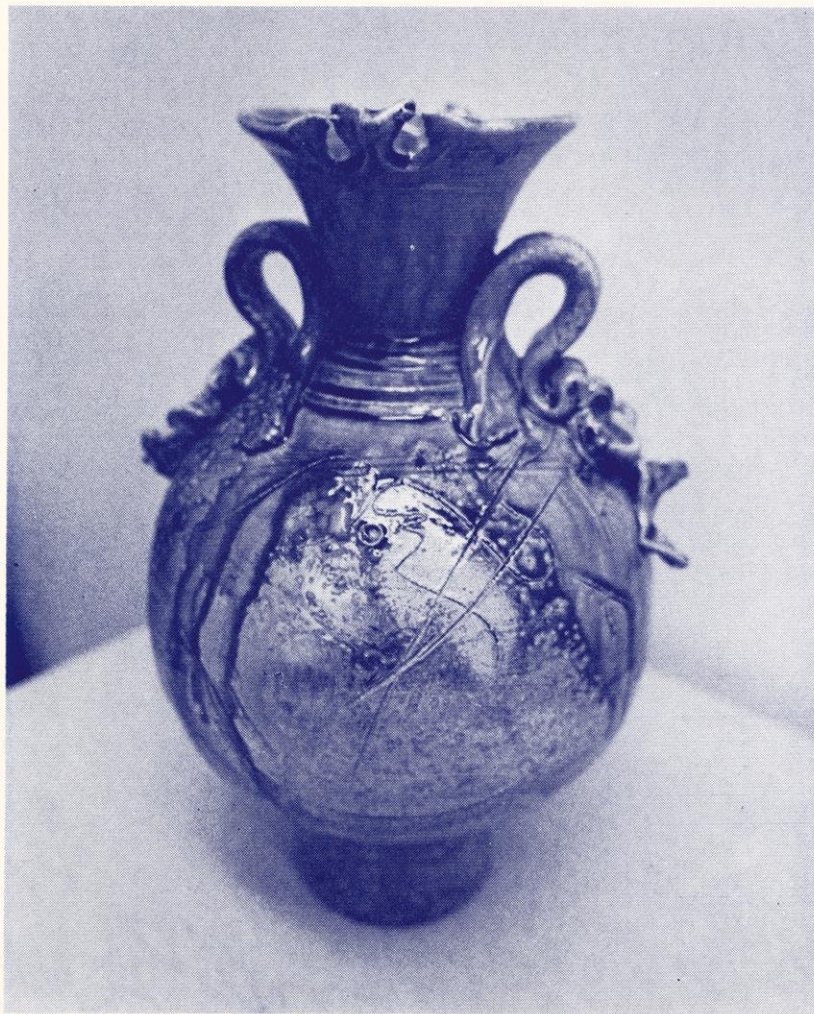
Bruce Breckenridge

Born October 29, 1929 in Chicago. Received B.S. in Art Education, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 1952; M.F.A. Cranbrook Academy of Art, Bloomfield Hills, Mich. 1953 (painting-ceramics); lecturer and instructor at Hunter College, New York (1964-67), Brooklyn Museum Art School (1965-68), University of California-Berkeley (1967); assistant director of Museum of Contemporary Crafts, New York (1964-66). Mr. Breckenridge has been Assistant Professor of Art, UW-Madison, since the fall of 1968.

Represented in Collections: Mr. & Mrs. George Hanson; Jack Marks; Mr. & Mrs. Sam Schaaf; Mrs. Jeanne Parsons; Miss Laura Schaaf; Mr. & Mrs. Henry Pohlman; John Merrill; Peter Voulkos; Miss Renita Hanfling; Tom Doyle; Mr. & Mrs. Jack Beal; Mr. & Mrs. William Giles; Nick Krushenick; Mr. & Mrs. William Weege; Mr. & Mrs. James Krauss; Mrs. Claire Zisler; Dr. & Mrs. M. Fraeman; Edward Sherbeyn.

Don Reitz,

"This piece says a lot about the material — the flashings of the kiln and the tremendous heat trial. I like the opposition of the free, lyrical quality of the handles and rim to the classical form. The beginning orientation is the traditional pot form which, I feel, has been transcended."



Don Reitz

All pieces are stonework ceramic with salt glazes, and measurements are for height, except as noted.

1. **Footed Jar**, 8 in.
2. **Footed Jar**, 11 in.
3. **Covered Jar**, 8 in.
4. **Covered Jar**, 14 in.
5. **Covered Jar**, 9½ in.
6. **Covered Jar**, 9 in.
7. **Covered Jar**, 9½ in.
8. **Covered Jar**, 7½ in.
9. **Covered Jar**, 19½ in.
10. **Covered Jar**, 19½ in.
- 10a. **Covered Jar**, 7½ in.
11. **Footed Jar**, 12 in.
12. **Platter**, 17½ in. in diameter
13. **Platter**, 16½ in. in diameter
14. **Platter**, 17 in. in diameter
15. **Platter**, 16½ in. in diameter
16. **Slab Platter**, 15¾ in. long
17. **Pitcher**, 13 in.
18. **Pitcher**, 13½ in.
19. **Pitcher**, 13½ in.
20. **Vase**, porcelain, 20 in.
21. **Vase**, 18¾ in.
22. **Vase**, 12½ in.
23. **Vase**, 16 in.
24. **Vase**, porcelain, 15 in.
25. **Vase**, 13½ in.
26. **Covered Jar**, 16 in.
27. **Vase**, 16 in.
28. **Vase**, 14½ in.
29. **Vase**, 18 in.
30. **Vase**, 19 in.
31. **Vase**, 20 in.
32. **Vase**, 15½ in.
33. **Covered Jar**, 11 in.
34. **Vase**, 18 in.
35. **Vase**, 20 in.
36. **Bowl**, porcelain, 17 in. in diameter
37. **Urn**, 17 in.
38. **Urn**, 24½ in.
39. **Urn**, 16 in.
40. **Urn**, 17½ in.
41. **Covered Jar**, 27½ in.
42. **Urn**, 13½ in.
43. **Flattened Bottle**, 8 in.
44. **Bottle**, 8 in.
45. **Vase**, 8½ in.
46. **Thrown Form**, 21 in.
47. **Planter**, 8 in.
48. **Organic Form**, 5 in.
49. **Covered Jar**, 25 in.
50. **Four-Box Form**, 20 in. long
51. **Ovaled Box**, 15 in.
52. **Slab Planter**, 12 in.
53. **Covered Jar**, 23 in.
54. **Altered Bottle**, porcelain, 6 in.
55. **Covered Jar**, 8½ in.
56. **Flattened Cylinder with Coils**, 23 in.
57. **Floor Vase**, 29 in.
58. **Flattened Cylinder with Coils**, 24 in.
59. **Vase**, 21 in.
60. **Flattened Cylinder with Coils and Box**, two part, 19 in.
61. **Cylinder Extruding Coil and Slab**, 23¾ in.
62. **Urn**, 13 in.

Bruce Breckenridge, candy dish, unfinished.

"I want to parody the sweet form of an English porcelain candy dish that I've had a photo of for six years but never done anything with. Each of the cup shapes will be filled up like a Botticelli lake with protruberances, and the top cup has waves. I've played down the obvious sexual allu-

sions, but it will be full of sexual parts. And I don't know what the spaghetti is all about, except that it's a formal consideration, the way it comes down over the space. I'm using contemporary color. When I have four or five of these dishes around me, they will become more meaningful."



Bruce Breckenridge

All pieces are low-fired ceramic with lustre glazes.

1. **Yellow Spotted Cup**, in polyester block, 7 x 4 x 10 in.
2. **Yellow Flowered Whale**, in polyester block, 12 x 12 x 10 in.
3. **Purple Pretzel Cup**, in polyester block, 7 x 4 x 10 in.
4. **Silver Houndstooth Cup**, in polyester block, 6 x 6 x 9 in.
5. **Pink Spotted Silver Cup**, in polyester block, 6 x 6 in.
6. **Green Lustre Cup**, in polyester block, 6 x 6 x 8 in.
7. **Purple Cup**, in polyester cylinder, 6 x 6 in.
8. **Ginger Sweetmeat Stand**, 22 x 15 in.
9. **Mona**, 22 x 17 in.
10. **Sherry**, 21 x 10 in.
11. **Bambi Sweetmeat Stand**, 22 x 16 in.
12. **Cindy Sweetmeat Stand**, 23 x 16 in.
13. **The Shadow Knows**, unglazed, 11 x 11 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 13 $\frac{1}{8}$ in.
14. **Heidi Sweetmeat Stand**, brown, 20 x 15 in.
15. **Louanne Sweetmeat Stand**, blue, 21 X 13 in.
16. **Darlene Sweetmeat Stand**, yellow, 21 x 12 in.
17. **Old Kiln Cup**, 8 x 6 x 10 in.
18. **Grass Valley Cup**, 6 x 7 x 17 in.
19. **After Dinner at Sears**, 10 x 7 in.
20. **Homage to Soledad Fault**, 4 x 6 x 7 in.
21. **All the Ships at Sea Cup**, 4 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 7 x 9 in.

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