



GENERATIONS
Ken Shores

April 10 – July 23, 2008

Museum of Contemporary Craft



For over fifty years, Ken Shores has worked in the arts – as an artist, administrator, collector and teacher. This exhibition offers an opportunity to examine Shores’ work in a historical continuum that simultaneously links his work with that of his teachers, mentors, contemporaries and students, as well as his collections. Presenting over 150 works from public and private collections and three large photomurals of his collection on display in his home, *Generations: Ken Shores* is the first museum retrospective to honor an important regional artist and foundational figure in the American Craft Movement. Organized by the Museum of Contemporary Craft, the exhibition is the second in the *Generations* series to examine the history of craft in the Pacific Northwest.

To understand Shores’ legacy requires recognition of how his work connects with the history of twentieth century studio ceramics. Grouped together, the vessels on view created by Shores, Victoria Avakian Ross and Glen Lukens are clearly linked. Victoria Avakian Ross, head of ceramics at the University of Oregon (UO) from 1920–64, taught Shores according to the style of Glen Lukens, her teacher. Lukens, known for his simple molded vessels coated in thick, vividly colored glazes, is recognized as a pioneer of West Coast ceramics.¹ Shores left school in 1946, returning to the UO to continue his studies in 1953.² By this time, molded forms were being replaced with a newfound fascination with the potter’s wheel. In 1952, Shoji Hamada, Bernard Leach and Soetsu Yanagi introduced the Mingei Movement through a series of lectures and workshops held from Los Angeles, California, to Black Mountain College, Asheville, North Carolina. One of the most famous of these workshops took place at the Archie Bray Foundation, Helena, Montana. Peter Voulkos and Rudy Autio participated in that workshop, where they

learned new approaches to using the potter’s wheel, and began to incorporate a loose, expressionistic energy into their work that changed ceramics history.³

Around the same time, Bauhaus-trained Marguerite Wildenhain was teaching summer workshops at her Pond Farm studio in Guerneville, California. Although both Voulkos and Wildenhain visited UO at Avakian Ross’ invitation, it was Wildenhain’s approach that Shores chose to learn. The differences between Wildenhain’s classical form and carved surfaces, and the calligraphic and painterly surface treatment of Hamada’s plate and Voulkos’ wax resist vase, are visible when set side by side. Shores describes spending the summers of 1955 and 1956 at Pond Farm as “one of the greatest influences in my life – not so much the style of pottery, because it took several years to break away from what she taught us concerning a good pot. But learning how to make pots was so important because she demanded so much.”⁴ From Wildenhain, Shores learned how to create a disciplined life as a working artist.

Being a potter, however, was not Shores’ goal; he wanted to create sculpture and he wanted to use clay. His search for a sculptural approach that matched the materiality of clay while engaging history led him to the work of Spanish architect Antonio Gaudí.⁵ Here, Shores found a model for biomorphic form, sculptural hand-built structures and an unapologetic engagement with surface decoration. The building blocks of Shores’ artwork can be traced, in many ways, to his MFA thesis project, awarded with honors in 1957 from UO. In the works from his thesis on view, the glazing techniques of Victoria Avakian Ross, wheel-throwing skills of Marguerite Wildenhain, and the organic modernism of Antonio Gaudí merge into a range of sculptural vessels. Shores created a personal visual vocabulary through the



embrace of the hand-sculpted form that counters the rectilinear lines of industrial modernism.

Skipping his graduation ceremony, Shores instead chose to attend the first annual conference sponsored by the American Craftsmen's Council (now the American Craft Council) at Asilomar, California. Gathered together for the first time were attendees from forty-eight US states, Mexico, Canada, Finland, Sweden, Denmark, Japan and Afghanistan – artists and personalities about whom Shores had read or heard through word of mouth. Over the course of three days, attendees discussed the socioeconomic outlook facing craftspeople, the relationship between design and technique, and professional practices.⁶ This was the moment in which a community coalesced, with the conference and its proceedings serving as the foundation of a new American Craft Movement. For Shores, the experience led to lifelong friendships with artist Toshiko Takaezu, Paul Smith (former director of the American Craft Museum, New York) and Rose Slivka and Lois Moran (former editors of *Craft Horizons* and *American Craft*). It also connected him to a growing national community of artists working with similar ideas and led to exhibition opportunities in which he presented his work to an international audience.

Following the conference, Shores became the Artist-in-Residence at the Oregon Ceramic Studio (ocs), Portland (now the Museum of Contemporary Craft). Shores would spend the next ten years balancing his own work with his growing responsibilities at ocs. Many artists who are now recognized as leaders of their generation exhibited their work at ocs, one of the few venues that showed contemporary craft. Through conversation with other artists, such as Betty Feves, Ken Ferguson, Erik Gronborg, Howard Kottler, Henry Takemoto and Robert Sperry

(whose works are also on view), Shores continued to clarify ways to express his ideas. Exhibitions of his own work – from Japanese *Haniwa*-inspired portraits to pre-Columbian inspired “people pots,” classical Italian portraiture to painted slab sculptures – convey the energy surrounding ceramics during the sixties.

When ocs founder Lydia Herrick Hodge died in 1960, Shores served as acting director until named the first paid director in 1964. Under Shores' directorship from 1964–68, the newly renamed Contemporary Crafts Gallery (ccg) expanded its exhibition and gallery spaces, and continued to further develop national connections. At this time, Shores also began service on the board of the American Craftsmen's Council as a Northwest Craftsman Trustee from 1966–70.⁷ As ccg flourished, Shores faced a difficult decision of whether to devote himself to directing the organization or to making his art. It grew increasingly difficult to do both.

In 1967, Shores began teaching part time at Lewis & Clark College while transitioning from his director's role at ccg. From 1968–95, Shores built and established the art department, using Wildenhain's methods as the foundation for the ceramics program. His legacy continues through the work of his many students, including Ted Sawyer, Gary Smith, Skeffington Thomas and Steve Schrepferman, who have provided examples of their work for this retrospective. Teaching freed Shores from the constraints of producing work to make a living, and his artwork flourished. Following a World Crafts Council trip to Peru in 1968, he began creating his internationally acclaimed “Feather Fetishes,” a series he continued to develop for the next fifteen years. These luxurious and exquisitely crafted objects evoke imagined functions and rituals, although they remain out of reach, completely enclosed in vitrines atop mirrored bases.



As Rachael Griffin, former curator at the Portland Art Museum noted, the work runs on an independent course: “There is no funk here, no austere hard-edge, no non-sensuous conceptualism.”⁸ What *is* here is a series layered with complexity and meaning, objects that speak of an imagined social life that connects simultaneously with the historical tradition of the vessel and a critique of contemporary fetishization of the art object.⁹ As Shores continued to teach, he began to travel extensively, visiting and collecting work from Europe, South America, Morocco, Thailand and, in particular, India. To address the deep interconnectedness between Shores’ artwork and his collection, the “Feather Fetishes” constitute the largest area of the exhibition, and are juxtaposed against photomurals of Shores’ collection as displayed in his home.

Generations: Ken Shores is the first museum exhibition to focus on this central figure in the history of ceramics in the Pacific Northwest. Placing his work in context with that of his teachers and contemporaries, the exhibition reveals Shores’ role in the historic shifts that moved clay from a strictly functional to conceptual medium. The exhibition also highlights the theoretical underpinnings of his undeniably exotic “Feather Fetishes.” A frequent world traveler and a collector of “egoless” art for decades, Shores’ inspiration is drawn from the unsigned religious and spiritual art from Europe, India and East Asia that saturates the walls and spaces of his home, work from outside the Western cannon of art and contemporary art’s conversation with itself.¹⁰ Much like Lukens, Shores believes, too, that “the new in art is incredibly old and the old is still vastly new.”¹¹ Living in a culture where virtuosity and self-proclamation prevail, Shores, a student of Vedanta since 1958, focuses instead on unity.¹² Because Shores is quick to divert a conversation away from himself, this is a

special opportunity to place his work at the center of an ongoing dialogue about craft and its history in the region and beyond. To present this exhibition and accompanying publication as a tribute to Ken Shores is a pleasure and a privilege.

Namita Gupta Wiggers

CURATOR, MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY CRAFT, APRIL 2008

1. Dietz, Ulysses Grant. *Great Pots: Contemporary Ceramics from Function to Fantasy*. New Jersey: The Newark Museum, Guild Publishing, 2003.

2. Interview between Ken Shores and Namita Gupta Wiggers, March 2007. Shores left school after his first year, spending the next few years working in the display departments of department stores in Portland, San Francisco and Los Angeles. He attended classes at the Art Center in Los Angeles, as well as one more semester at uo before enlisting in the US Army in 1951. After serving his tour of duty from 1951–52 during the Korean War, Shores returned to complete his undergraduate and graduate degrees at uo on the GI Bill.

3. Slivka, Rose. “The New Ceramic Presence,” *Craft Horizons*, July–August 1961, p. 30–37.

4. Interview between Ken Shores and Lamar Harrington, January 29, 1976 for Harrington, LaMar, *Ceramics in the Pacific Northwest: A History*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1979.

5. Hitchcock, Henry-Russell. *Gaudi*. New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1957.

6. Conference proceedings of the “First Annual Conference of American Craftsmen, sponsored by the American Craftsmen’s Council,” Asilomar, CA, June 1957, p. 5

7. In 1980, Shores was elected a Lifetime Trustee Emeritus to the National Board of the American Craft Council.

8. Griffin, Rachael. “Earth and Air Find their Magic in the Ceramics of Ken Shores,” *Craft Horizons*, August 1970, p. 26–29.

9. Appadurai, Arjun, ed. *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988.

10. Interview between Ken Shores and Namita Gupta Wiggers, June 2007.

11. Clark, Garth. *A Century of Ceramics in the United States 1878–1978*. New York: E.P. Dutton, 1979, p. 303.

12. Vedanta is a spiritual philosophy based on the Upanishads, and the idea that all religions strive towards universal truth.



RELATED PROGRAMS

EXCELLENCE IN CRAFT LECTURE

Paul Smith, *Reflections: Twentieth Century Studio Craft Movement – Current Observations*
Thursday, April 10, 7 PM, The Lab. \$5 general (free for members and students), tickets at the door.
Director Emeritus of the American Craft Museum (now the Museum of Arts & Design), Smith will present a personal account of twentieth century craft based on over five decades of involvement.

SCHOOL'S OUT!/ART'S IN!

Journey to the East
Friday, April 11, 9:30 AM–3:30 PM.
\$45 general; \$40 members at household level or above, The Lab. Pre-registration required.
Form available at: museumofcontemporarycraft.org/programs_soai.php
Shores is a world traveler and a collector of art from India, China and Thailand, among other places. Art from these places inspired his work and is on view in photos of his home. Looking at Shores' work and collection for ideas, kids will create special travel memoirs.

EXHIBITION TALK

The Curator Walk-Thru
Tuesday, April 15, 12 PM.
Talk convenes and the front desk. Free.
Get the curatorial perspective from Namita Gupta Wiggers as she leads an hour-long walk-through of current exhibitions.

FAMILY DISCOVERY SUNDAY

Feathered Extravagance
Sunday, April 27, 1–4 PM The Lab.
Free and open to all ages.
An interactive afternoon at the Museum for the whole family! Ken Shores' "Feather Fetishes" serve as inspiration for using feathers to transform everyday objects into something more.

CURATOR'S TALK

Generations: Ken Shores
Sunday, May 4, 2 PM, The Lab. Free.
Namita Gupta Wiggers, Curator, will discuss how Shores' works relates to modernism, the historic shifts in ceramics from function to concept over the past fifty years, and his synergetic lifestyle as an artist, administrator, teacher and collector.

PUBLIC DIALOGUE

Kaffeeklatsch
Tuesday, June 3, 12 PM, The Lab. Free.
Bring your lunch and join Museum staff for a casual social gathering of coffee and topical conversation. This month's topic: Why collect? What does it mean to have a collection?

PUBLIC DIALOGUE

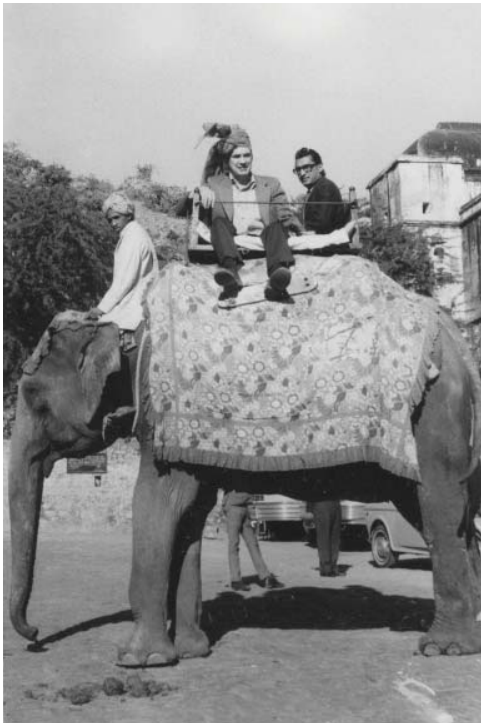
A Conversation between Friends
Sunday, June 8, 2 PM, The Lab. Free.
Mija Riedel recently interviewed Ken Shores for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Join her as she continues their conversation about Shores' life and his role in the American Craft Movement.

EXHIBITION TALK

Craft in Context: 1960s to the Present
Sunday, July 13, 3:30 PM, The Lab. Free.
Namita Gupta Wiggers, Curator, will discuss the history of the American Craft Movement as seen through the exhibitions presented by the museum over the past fifty years. Connected to *Generations: Ken Shores*, the lecture begins with exhibitions that coincide with Shores' directorship of the Contemporary Craft Gallery in the sixties.

MUSEUM TOURS

Tours convene at the front desk and run 45 minutes. Free. Drop by between 11 AM and 12:30 PM every Wednesday or 1 and 2:30 PM every Saturday for a guided tour of the exhibitions on view.



ON VIEW IN THE MUSEUM

Shores discusses his “Feather Fetishes” and philosophies about art in “SHORES” (1972), a short documentary directed by Mollie Gregory on view in The Lab. Total Running Time: 15:48.

ON THE WEB

Selected interviews between Ken Shores and Namita Gupta Wiggers, conducted March–August 2007, are online at www.MuseumofContemporaryCraft.org. Edited by Heather Craig, April 2008.

A forthcoming oral interview with Shores will be available online at the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, www.aaa.si.edu.

EXHIBITION CATALOG

Generations: Ken Shores will be published in conjunction with the exhibition. The publication includes essays by Gary Smith, Charissa Terranova, and Namita Gupta Wiggers, and an introduction by David Cohen. Rose Slivka’s “A New Ceramic Presence” from *Craft Horizons*, July–August 1961 is reprinted courtesy of *American Craft* and the American Craft Council.

Edited by Anjali Gupta. Photography by John Clark, Aaron Johanson and Dan Kvitka. Design by Katherine Bovee. Published by the Museum of Contemporary Craft, 2008.

This forthcoming publication will be available for purchase at The Gallery at Museum of Contemporary Craft, Summer 2008.

CAPTIONS

PAGE 1: *Detail of Sketch for ceramic sculptures*, c. 1957; Ink on paper; Collection of Ken Shores.

PAGE 2: *Tall Goblet* (detail), 1957; Ceramic; Collection of Ken Shores.

PAGE 3: *People Pots*, 1961; Stoneware; Photo: Courtesy of Ken Shores.

PAGE 4 (CLOCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT):

Pond Farm trio, 1956; Ceramic; Collection of Ken Shores.

Ken Shores as Artist-in-Residence at the Oregon Ceramic Studio, Portland, Oregon, 1960;

Photo: Courtesy of Ken Shores.

Toshiko Takaezu and Ken Shores in the studio, mid 1980s; Photo: Courtesy of Ken Shores.

Tower Temple, 1989; Clay, acrylic paint, glass; Collection of Ken Shores.

Feather Fetish, 1979–80; Ceramic, curly duck feathers, mirror, Plexiglas; Collection of Ken Shores.

Structure Series #19, 2000; Clay, glass; Collection of Ken Shores.

Feather Fetish, 1970; Ceramic, feathers, Plexiglas; Collection of Ken Shores.

Warrior, 1960; Stoneware; Collection of Joan Tripplett.

Tall Goblet, 1957; Ceramic; Collection of Ken Shores.

Green crackle plate, c. 1945; Ceramic; Collection of Ken Shores.

PAGE 5: *Feather Fetish*, 1974; Ceramic, feathers, mirror, Plexiglas; Collection of Ken Shores.

PAGE 6: Ken Shores on one of his many Art & Architecture Tours through India,

late 1970s/early 1980s. Photo: Courtesy of Ken Shores.

View from Ken Shores’ hallway, 2007; Photo: Aaron Johanson.

All object photos by John Clark unless otherwise noted.

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724 Northwest Davis Street | Portland, Oregon 97209 | 503.223.2654
MuseumofContemporaryCraft.org | Tuesday–Sunday 11 AM–6 PM and Thursday 11 AM–8 PM

Museum of Contemporary Craft