Homage

to

Tradition

HOMAGE TO TRADITION

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CHAPTER 1

TRADITION: THE TECHNOLOGY OF LIVING

A technique is a procedure which systematically accomplishes a desired result. We have techniques for transportation, such as automobiles, jets, and trains; we have techniques for communication such as telephones and letters; we have techniques for the mass dissemination of information, TV's radios, books, and magazines. Every desire, for food, shelter, clothing and entertainment is accomplished by a technique so much so that one sociologist, Jacques Ellul, has called this the Technological Society.[1] This age is sustained by the belief that any material reward--even fame or political office--can be acquired if the necessary technology is learned and exploited. Despite our ability to exploit objects, materials and at times even people the world is not enjoying an Elysium of happiness and prosperity. Poverty, malnutrition, and general alienation from life still afflict large portions of the world's population, and are prevalent even in the technologically most advanced societies. Life is beset with problems, and problem solving techniques have not demonstrated the ability to create happy, prosperous, successful lives for individuals. Innumerable desires in the outer world can be achieved, but what is needed is a technology of inner life, a technology of happiness, fulfillment and success for every individual. How to live, how to enjoy, how to act, how to desire--the inner life of man has so far been untouched by the age of technology. This is the greatest tragedy of modern man: that he can accomplish any desire but has lost contact with his inmost self.

The need of our time is to turn inward and acquire a proficient technology of inner space, of mind and heart of man. Man must begin to see the personal, spiritual side of human action, the feeling, thinking, being life which is engaged in the outer activity of the fulfillment of desires. This is a technology in a different dimension. It is not science which can research this field of discovery, for there are no objects to analyze or measure. There are no concrete goals to be achieved. We could call it the technology of intangibles, but it remains to be demonstrated whether the life of the human spirit can ever submit to "technology." Where techniques in the outer, material world have often been labeled "de-humanizing," inner space technology must establish, nourish and foster humanity.

There is one such technology which has been handed down through the ages. Little recognized today because of our mistrust of things that are old and unknown to science, it is progressively losing its influence. But this technology is the perfect complement to our techniques of material gain and can fulfill the need to enrich and sustain the inner life. This technology is tradition.

Tradition is most powerful, least understood today and most suspect in the field of art. This history is due in part to the abuses of the French academy and Salon in the 19th century.[2] But it will be shown that tradition represents a spirit of progress that must not be confused with the monuments and institutions by which people aim to shore up their defences against outer change. Art is the ideal discipline for learning to distinguish the technology of inner space from the myriad techniques and procedures for accomplishing in the material world. Only in art do we find, often if not always, a spiritual content,

a flavor of infinity, a touch of subjective purity which stands fast after all technical manipulations have been abstracted away. Because art strives to make concrete what is spiritual and intangible, an examination of art and artists should give insight into tradition as a technology of inner space. Tradition in art will be the key for us to unlock a few secrets of an age-old technology unmatched and unrivalled in its power and significance for human life.

First we must start with some definitions to distinguish the traditions of art from other words relating to times past. The history of art must be distinguished from tradition because history deals with events, trends and the evolution of ideas. Because the events are separated from the spirit and character of the artists who lived them, this history does not reveal the life of tradition.

Tradition does not involve the techniques of making works of art in any medium. There can be no formula for the creation of great art. The 18th century philosopher Immanuel Kant said "Genius is the talent which gives the rule to art."[3] Greatness comes from the artist's inner genius; there are no conventions, practices or formulas for technique, composition or even subject matter, which will generate art. The conventions, customs and habits of artists change through the centuries. Tradition lends stability in the midst of this change.

The domain of tradition is not the works of art handed down from the past; these we call our heritage. The heritage of art are the monuments, the works of art in canvas, marble, clay or stone. Tradition concerns itself with the artist, not his product: his mind, his sensitivity, his growth and development, his being. The heritage is different for every age and every culture, Greek art is different from

Turkish art. But the potential of the artist waiting to be realized is the same for all men in all times, and this potential and how it is realized is the focus of tradition.

History, heritage, custom, convention, all of these concern themselves with relics of the past. But tradition has meaning only in the present, as it is being lived. Tradition is the spirit of progress, the technology of human growth, evolution and fulfillment. Tradition forms man's link with all the ages, past, present and yet to come. It is the personal, intimate technology of inner space. Fully utilizing the technology of our great living traditions will solve the problems of human happiness and fulfillment more profoundly than is ever possible with techniques for influencing events in the outer world.

H.G. Gadamer, a contemporary German philosopher and student of the German existentialist Martin Heidegger describes tradition as life itself; tradition is expressed in language, it is expressed by the perspective we take on the world in which we live, it is the core of humanness. Tradition, he claims, is the impulse to understand, and the fulfillment of that impulse. It is not something apart from man, but is the structure of his subjectivity, his inner space.[4]

Tradition, as a structure of inner space, is characterized by openness, by "The same readiness for experience that distinguishes the experienced man by comparison with the man capitivated by dogma."[5] Through questioning, which necessarily includes a suspension of judgment, openness is attained, and prejudice and opinion are banished. Gadamer claims, "It is clear that the structure of the question is implicit in all experience."[6] Knowledge, or we could say wisdom, or insight, is superior to preconceived opinion because it is able to conceive of

possibilities as genuine possibilities. "Only a person who has questions can have knowledge."[7] A person who possesses the art of questioning is a person who can prevent the suppression of questions by the dominant opinion. Openness and freedom from the restriction of opinion is the essence of questioning, and are essential features of tradition.

The French Academy in the 19th century failed in its stated goals of maintaining and perpetuating the tradition of painting because it confused tradition with custom. Rather than supporting and fostering openness, it was satisfied with the established opinions of what painting should be, and wanted to preserve the accustomed formulas and standards of past masters. Because the Salon did not represent the vital openness which is the spirit of tradition, the radical changes in technique and approach advocated by the Impressionists had their start outside of the limiting conforms of the Academy's Salon exhibitions.[8]

Time is the best judge of the strength and vitality of a tradition and of the truth and worth of its expressions. While customs and conventions evolve and progress and are refined by each succeeding generation, the openness to questioning which is the truth of tradition is the same for every man in every age. Because it is universal, tradition is the penultimate criterion of truth. The aspirations of any man for truth, for beauty, for fulfillment, uplift that individual's life and place him in the stream of all individuals past who have sought that openness and freedom. The greatest artists of every age devoted their lives to these questions. The eternal freedoms they have uncovered and invested in their work provide a foundation as well as a standard for an artist living today.

Where an artist sets his sights on these highest ideals of universal values, tradition must be owned and mastered as the first step. Standing on the shoulders of the giants of tradition,[9] the great artists of the past, the artist can see what they have seen, and learn how to express it. If more can be expressed than artists of the past have been able to express, that could only be seen from the vantage point of comprehending the full profound meaning in the works of art which are the brilliant successes of their lives.

Freedom depends on the aspiration for truth, depends on continuing progress on the path of fulfillment. Openness to question is not an absolute abandon, but a submission to the ideal and the judgment of truth. The exchange of ideas is the mainstay of tradition, for in this process, carried over time, the character of truth in its expressed values is revealed. That art which survives appraisal and reappraisal year after year, century after century speaks for a more profound truth, one more capable of guiding future generations in their aspirations for fulfillment. But the legacy of works of art are not the tradition, they are the sign posts of the inner lives of the artists whose integrity and vision made their work great.

The traditions of ceramic art are the oldest artistic traditions in the world today. The practical utility and concreteness of the works of art are easy to understand despite the distance of time and culture which may separate us from the artists who made them. This distance helps us to identify the salient features of our own culture as well as explore the mechanics of tradition.

We want to know how a tradition develops and spreads its philosophy and perspective on living; how the fullness of tradition is lived, how

it lends stability to a culture; how it withstands the impact of changing times and circumstances; and how these principles upholding tradition can be applied in society today. We will examine the development of the tradition of The Way of Tea in Japan, and the revival of its philosophy at the turn of the century. How the spirit of tradition is upheld and lived in its purity is exemplified by Shoji Hamada, representative of the Japanese pottery tradition, and then by Maria Martinez the Tewa Pueblo Indian potter. Peter Voulkos exemplifies the essence of tradition, the spirit of openness and questioning as a response and adaptation to the technological age. Through their lives and their artistic achievements, each of these potters is revitalizing and sustaining his own living tradition. The application of these principles of inner space technology is found in the integration of culture through the free exchange of ideas. The final section deals with the annual Supermud Conference at The Pennsylvania State University as an institution that nourishes culture by giving opportunity for the expression and reappraisal of all of our living traditions. Because the United States today is the melting pot of the artistic traditions of Europe and the Orient, these chapters fulfill a dual function, outlining as well the mainstreams of contemporary American ceramics.

FOOTNOTES FOR CHAPTER 1

[1]Jacques Ellul, The Technological Society, tr. by John Wilkinson, Vintage Books, New York, 1964.

[2]John Canaday, Mainstreams of Modern Art, Henry Holt and Company, New York, 1959, pp. 136 ff.

[3]Immanuel Kant, "Genius Gives the Rules," in The Creativity Question, A Rothenberg and C. Hausman, eds., Duke University Press, Durham, N.C., 1976, p. 38.

[4]Peter Freund, "What is Tradition," Term paper on the philosophy of H.G. Gadamer, March 12, 1978.

[5]H.G. Gadamer, Truth and Method, G. Burden and J. Cummings, eds., Seabury Press, New York, 1975, p. 325.

[6]Ibid., p. 325.

[7]Ibid, p. 328.

[8]John Canaday, Mainstreams of Modern Art, pp. 136 ff.

[9]Isaac Newton, in his letters, commenting on his scientific achievements that he was like a dwarf standing on the shoulders of giants.

CHAPTER 2

THE WAY OF TEA

The ceremony of tea originated in an age of isolation and feudal consolidation. Japan, newly united into a single nation, and cut off from the intellectual ferment of the West by the ouster of missionaries and the blockage of trade, set up a strict class system of noblemen and warriors, merchants, artisans and peasants. Social customs were being ossified, peasants were tied to the land, the work of tradesmen was highly favored, and merchants travelled from city to city, often exempt from taxes.[1]

The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were a time when revolutionary social changes in Japan were brought to a standstill. Ambitions were checked, and energies were transferred to the spiritual values of religion and art. The exclusion of foreign influences allowed Japan to deal with its internal problems without reference to the ideas, opinions and habits of other nations. The arts flourished. Drama, woodprinting, poetry and painting all developed distinctive Japanese styles. The traditional patterns of life, enforced by the ruling class, rose to their full dignity, and life was appreciated as profound and rich, if still humble. It was in this context that the ceramic tradition of Japan reached its height: Not as the product of sophisticated and aloof artist-potters, but as art of the people, folk-pottery.

The flowering of Japanese traditions in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries had spiritual underpinnings that were developed by

mature personal leadership. The spiritual underpinnings were the philosophies of Taoism and Zen Buddhism. These religions had captured the imagination of the masses for centuries. They were religions of "salvation" and "enlightenment." They honored the contemplative and reflective life. They fostered the avoidance of ambition, and the appreciation of life in the moment--in its fullest glory.

The abstract, intuitive ideals of these philosophies needed to be lived to be made fully tangible for the people. The Tea Masters provided living examples of a way of life which exemplified the high principles of the religions which inspired them. For the Tea Masters, tea was not merely a beverage. It was the art of leisure. The warmth and cordiality of greeting guests and providing hospitality was given form in the tea ceremony. Strict observance of the ceremony in accordance with inner reflection and attunement with nature was synonymous with the attainment of the highest ideals which religion had set for society.

The tea ceremony was a complete living experience. It was communion between host and guest as well as between man and nature. The Tea Masters were a succession of imperially favored philosophers and connoisseurs. They structured the tea ceremony according to their vision of the ideal perception and experience of living. The pathway to the tea pavilion, the humble three-foot high entrance, the arrangement of guests, the flower arrangement and vase, the teabowls and the tea itself were part of a total message. They conveyed a synthesis of the life of man in appreciation of art and nature, to be shared.

The ceremony which the Tea Masters established was simple, sincere, and honest and yet intricately involved. It made the abstract and profound ideals of Tao and Zen apparent to people all over Japan. The

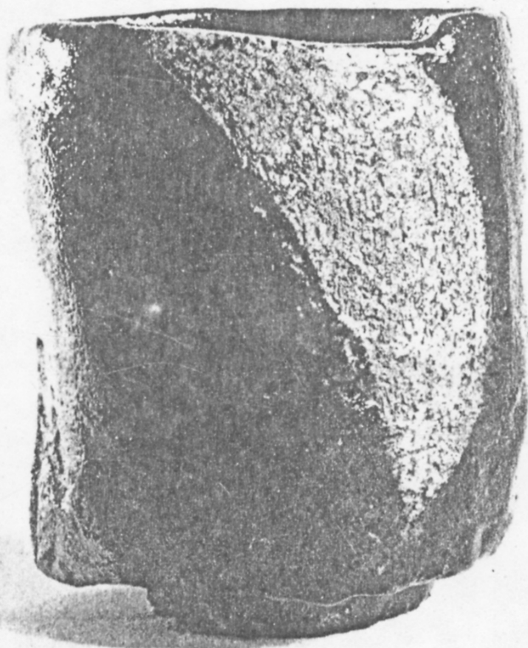

Fig. 2-1. *Winter Moon*. Tea-bowl by Koho, black raku, ca. 1670.

ceremony became popular and spread, becoming "The Way of Tea," an integral part of the national character.

The ideal of beauty, unhesitatingly and innocently applied to every aspect of the experience which they structured in The Way of Tea, was the most precious and long-lasting gift of the Tea Masters of Japan. The forms of the ceremony have changed through the centuries, and will go on changing. The lacquer ware, the flowers, the pottery, the huts may change with the changing times. But the ideal of beauty which they presented to the people captured the feeling of most refined appreciation of nature. The foot-rule of beauty which they established is called _shibui_. It expresses the abstract ideal of appreciation of beauty in nature and in man. _Shibui_ is described by Soetsu Yanagi, in _The Unknown Craftsman_:[2]

> It is the simplest rule in the world. How does it measure? In a single epithet: by the word shibui. Nothing else whatever. This is quite enough to make it function perfectly. The world may abound with different aspects of beauty. The lovely, the powerful, the gay, the smart--all belong to the beautiful. Each person, according to his disposition and environment, will feel a special affinity to one or another aspect. But when his taste grows more refined, he will necessarily arrive at the beauty that is shibui. Beauty cannot rest until it reaches this point. If one seeks depth in beauty, this stage must be attained some day. Many a term will serve to denote the secret of beauty, but this is the final word. Our Tea Masters expressed their conception of consummate beauty with this word as standard.

The ideal of _shibui_ was the enshrinement of the religion of the people. It was a philosophy which bound together the real with the ideal. Nature was adored as asymmetrical, imperfect, and unfathomable. (See Fig. 2-1.) The Tea Masters brought attention to the simple common objects of daily life, and showed how life could be enriched by the aesthetic appreciation of their simple glories. The full personality of man could be enlivened by the appreciation of every common object in

Fig. 2-2. Square raku food dish by Kenzan I, ca. 1700.

aesthetic terms. The striving for perfection was turned back to the perceiver, the enjoyer. He was made to be responsible for his enjoyment and appreciation of life. Okakura Kakuzo states in The Book of Tea:[3]

> The Taoist and Zen conception of perfection, however, was different. The dynamic nature of their philosophy laid more stress upon the process through which perfection was sought than upon perfection itself. True beauty could be discovered only by one who mentally completed the incomplete. The virility of life and art lay in its possibilities for growth. In the tea-room it is left for each guest in imagination to complete the total effect in relation to himself.

Every item that the Tea Masters chose to express the search for perfection in the relationship of man with nature and with God became precious throughout Japan, and became part of the national heritage. They chose simple objects, readily available, and so gained the sympathy and understanding of people in all walks of life. Their choice of ceramic tea bowls as implements in the ceremony governed the tastes of the Japanese in ceramics for centuries, and provided impetus to the ceramic industry to live up to their high standards.

The Tea Masters chose pottery in accord with their preference for the subtle, the austere, the simple and the imperfect. (See Fig. 2-4.) The tea-bowls which they chose to complement their ceremony of tea were unusual, not for their sophistication or refinement, but for their simplicity, even crudeness. They first chose Korean rice-bowls, produced in great numbers by simple unlettered folk potters of Korea. The unpretentious and uncontrived nature of these bowls made for daily use by the common people communicated a healthy, natural glow which went beyond the individual personality of the potter. The pots chosen were generally unsigned, and could thus speak for a more impersonal and universal expression of the potter's art. (See Figs. 3-1, 3-2.)

Fig. 2-3. Raku tea-bowl by Kenzan I, ca. 1700.

The choice of folk pottery for the tea ceremony boosted the traditional folk crafts and buttressed them against the future shocks of the industrial age. Japanese potters thrived in the making of tea-bowls for the tea ceremony. (See Fig. 2-3.)

One technique which evolved to meet the needs of the tea ceremony was Raku. Raku is a style of forming and firing tea-bowls which emphasizes the imperfect and natural qualities of clay and of the fire. It is both direct and spontaneous, and it enables the potter to take quick advantage of appealing irregularities in the form and in the surface of the pot. (See Fig. 2-5.)

As Raku developed, tea-bowls were often formed by hand; sometimes work that was formed on the wheel would be thrown in the air and caught in the hands in the way it would be held for tea. The feet of the bowls were trimmed with a knife using a few short strokes. It was said that the personality of the potter could be seen in the way he trimmed the feet of his bowls.

Raku firing was quick and dramatic. A bisqued bowl would be glazed and placed in a red-hot kiln. When the glaze had softened, the bowl would be removed with tongs and then cooled in the air, or more quickly with water. The processes of forming and firing were uncontrollable and unpredictable. Thus the power of nature was felt to exhibit itself in the finished work.

The imperfection of Raku and the dominance of natural and spontaneous effects seemed perfectly apt for a ceremony which worshipped the real, imperfect asymmetric beauty in nature. Raku became a special tradition in Japanese ceramics for the production of tea-bowls suitable for the tea ceremony. The simplicity of the forms combined naturally

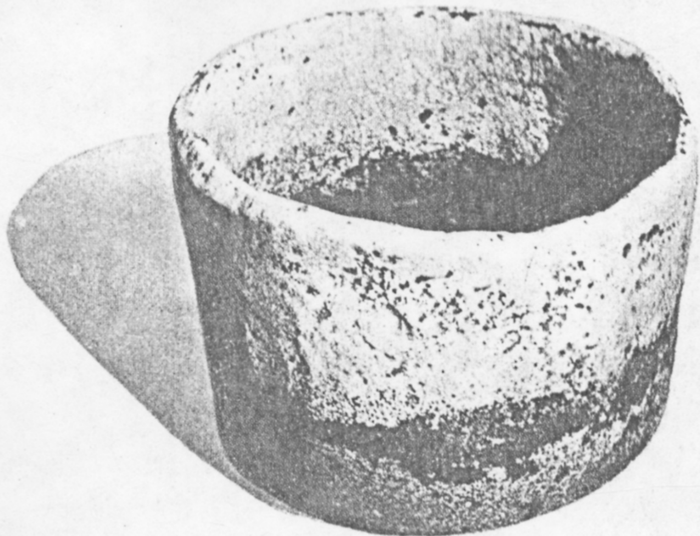

Fig. 2-4. *Fuji*. Tea-bowl by Koetsu Honami, ca. 1600.

with the spontaneous technique of firing to produce ware which was alive in the spirit of The Way of Tea in all the phases of forming, firing, and use. (See Fig. 2-2.)

One variation of the tea ceremony even incorporates the Raku firing process into the ceremony of hospitality. The guests apply their own glaze decoration to a bowl provided by the itinerant potter, and they receive their first cup of tea in water heated by the glow of the freshly fired bowl. It was such a tea ceremony which inspired the British artist, Bernard Leach, to become a potter.[4]

Ceremonial tea bowls for the tea ceremony epitomized the culmination of the tradition of folk-craft pottery in feudal Japanese society. Raku was a consummate blend of philosophy, technology, and way of life. It demonstrated the integrity of a traditional society where the goals and purposes of day-to-day life, the philosophy of life as a whole, and the means by which these various concrete and abstract ideals were realized, were not different, were not even distinguishable. The philosophy of making of the tea bowl was the same philosophy shown in the firing of it. That same simplicity and innocence of appreciation of nature was again found in the use of the bowl in the intricate and carefully designed tea ceremony.

The gift of the tradition of Tea was the gift of a way of life by which every man could find a place in society and in nature. It was a philosophy by which every man sought to govern his whole life. The goals of their religion, the high ideals of enlightenment and salvation, were perfectly integrated into a life-style which reflected whe wholeness of that philosophy in every aspect of living.

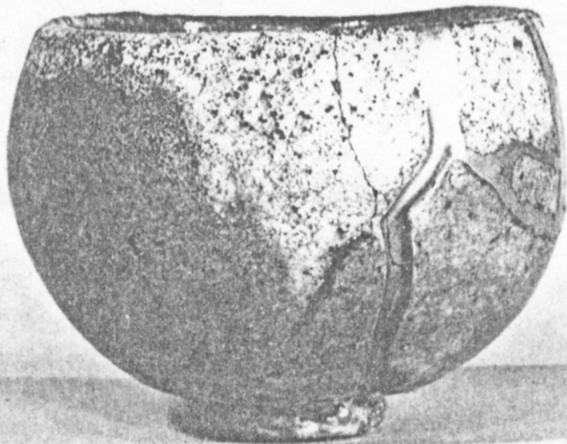

Fig. 2-5. *Snowcap*. Tea-bowl by Koetsu Honami, ca. 1600.

The art of the potter became a natural performance perfectly in accord with the highest ideal of beauty, the ideal of shibui. Kakuzo describes the extension of The Way of Tea to the art of living:[5]

> Great as has been the influence of the tea-masters in the field of art, it is as nothing compared to that which they have exerted on the conduct of life. Not only in the usages of polite society, but also in the arrangement of all our domestic details, do we feel the presence of the tea-masters. Many of our delicate dishes, as well as our way of serving food, are their inventions. They have taught us to dress only in garments of sober colors. They have instructed us in the proper spirit in which to approach flowers. They have given emphasis to our natural love of simplicity, and shown us the beauty of humility. In fact, through their teachings, tea has entered into the life of the people.

The tradition of tea, carried now through four centuries, shows both the domination of society by a set life-style and formalism, and the means by which this formalism can act as a stepping-stone to the achievement of higher aspirations. The Way of Tea exemplifies the coordination of the daily life of man with his highest ideals and aspirations. The tradition of Tea, and the ceremonial formalisms associated with it are, for the Japanese people the basis of the attainment of inner freedoms, in the aesthetic appreciation of art and nature, and in every aspect of life.

Through tradition the Japanese potter found a stable niche by which he could participate in the philosophy and style of living of society, and at the same time contribute to its prosperity and perpetuity. Simple pottery became objects of admiration and adulation of the people. Pottery contributed to the evolution of culture and the uplifting of the human spirit by its rigid adherence to the philosophy and forms of its traditions. When the potter takes his stand in tradition, he ennobles his craft, and he allows his work to gain a universal significance, a significance not found without the long-standing insight of tradition.

FOOTNOTES ON CHAPTER 2

[1]Encyclopedia Britannica, William Benton, publisher, Chicago, 1962, Volume 12, "Japan," pp. 918 ff.

[2]Soetsu Yanagi, The Unknown Craftsman, A Japanese Insight into Beauty, adapted by Bernard Leach, Kodausho International, Ltd, Tokyo, 1973, p. 183.

[3]Okakura Kakuzo, The Book of Tea, Dodd, Mead and Co., New York, 1926.

[4]Bernard Leach, Drawings, Verse and Belief, Noyes Press, Park Ridge, N.J., 1973, p. 5.

[5]Okakura Kakuzo, The Book of Tea, pp. 154-155.

CHAPTER 3

TWENTIETH CENTURY FOLKCRAFT REVIVAL

The great Japanese ideal of beauty, shibui, reflected the mores of a long-established religion and way of life. Society was given a static structure, so that man's energy could be directed toward inner freedoms. Each man had his place in society, and in nature. To go beyond it, to rebel against the customs and conventions of society was accomplished by the appreciation of beauty and fullness in the midst of simplicity and austerity. (See Fig. 3-2.) To appreciate beauty in its most subtle and pervasive forms was the talent of the few, but the goal of all.

The potter was an integral member of society. He was needed. His products were the rice bowls, tea bowls, and general household implements of daily life in every home. He breathed the life of tradition into his craft, and thereby extended its influence into the home. (See Fig. 3-3.) The art of the potter spontaneously glorified the mundane rituals of cooking, and eating and drinking. The life-style, the techniques, and the products of the potter were perfectly integrated into the fabric of the culture. The potter's art was vital to the material and spiritual life of society. (See Fig. 3-1.)

The coming of the industrial age signalled the decline of the trade of the folk-potter. The needs of society for practical vessels were better fulfilled by inexpensive production-line dinnerware produced in thousands by factories. The livelihood of the folk-potter vanished, and his trade with its skills and knowledge arising from a time-honored

Fig. 3-1. Tea-bowl by Kizaemon Ido, Yi dynasty, Korea, Sixteenth century.

tradition almost disappeared also. Society accepted the change from hand-made to factory-made. More people were supplied with better quality pottery at a lower price. Why patronize the hand-made pottery when the production-made pottery was so much more refined, and less expensive as well? Just as backhoes have replaced ditchdiggers in modern times and relieved them from the great sweat and burden of the job, it seemed imminent that pottery as a handcraft would also become extinct.

This was the situation in pottery in the early part of this century. At that time three men met together and shared their vision of the art of pottery. They were able to appreciate a human value in the handmade vessels which was beyond imitation. They saw a vitality and an intimacy with nature in the products of man's hands. The potter's art represented to them a centuries-old evolution of knowledge about life and the relationship of man and nature. They saw that the products of the industrial age were incapable of capturing that knowledge of the vitality of nature brought to life in art. Despairing the loss of an essential ingredient to progress and happiness in society, they devoted themselves to popularizing pottery as an art-form. Ceramic art was seen as a personal art-form, which any family could own and enjoy in their home. It was a means of bringing to light an awareness of the sacred, of the infinite and eternal,[1] in an age dominated by the secular influence of industry and technology. It was an astounding and powerful vision. If they could have foreseen the dominance of technology in contemporary society, they might have thought that their hopes were far-fetched. But they nevertheless dedicated themselves to fulfilling their aspirations. The widespread popularity of ceramic art in the United States and around the world is to a large extent the result of their efforts.

Fig. 3-2. Tea-bowl, semi-porcelain with white engobe, Yi dynasty, Korea, 1392-1910.

It was Bernard Leach and Shoji Hamada who met together in the home of the philosopher, Soetsu Yanagi, in 1918. The life-story of each of these individuals is remarkable, for each has had a profound worldwide influence, each has drawn strength from the traditions of both East and West, and all together have devoted their lives to supporting and strengthening traditional modes and values of living.

Soetsu Yanagi began his career immersed in Christian mysticism. He wrote and published extensively on the works of William Blake and Walt Whitman. After becoming involved in the history of Western art, he turned his attention to his own culture; he became a religious philosopher of Zen Buddhism. Finally he became aware of the need to express an aesthetic of Zen. From this arose his patronage of the folk-crafts, his founding of the Japan Folkcraft Museum, and his life-long efforts to revive and strengthen the arts and crafts movement in Japan. His book, translated into English by Leach, has been called by Hamada, "a sutra of Oriental aesthetics . . ."[2]

Bernard Leach was an artist trained in Great Britain. While studying painting in Japan in 1908, he became enamored of raku and subsequently devoted himself to pottery. He became the apprentice of Shigekichi Ogato, the sixth Kenzan. As a successor, together with Kenkichi Tomimoto, to the Kenzan school, he was called Kenzan VII, and became heir to the tradition of the greatest artists of the Japanese Renaissance.[3] He received the Kenzan densho which are secret pottery notes, forming the certificate of succession within the pottery school. While still in Japan he established a workshop on the estate of Yanagi, and it was there that he was met by the neophyte potter, fresh from technical school named Shoji Hamada.

Leach took Hamada with him to England as his apprentice in 1920 where they built the Leach pottery at St. Ives. Leach's contribution to ceramic art in the West has been through the quiet dignity of his pottery, and the wisdom communicated in his books, particularly _A Potter's Book_, known in America and elsewhere as a potter's Bible. This

Fig. 3-3. Bucket-shaped vase by Kenzan I, stoneware, ca. 1700.

popular book was principally responsible for bringing the pottery of the East with its techniques and its philosophy to the attention of potters in Europe and America. In the early 1950's Leach, Hamada and Yanagi joined together in a lecture and demonstration tour of the United States which greatly spurred the post World War II revival of the crafts.

Despite his apprenticeship to Leach, Hamada comes closest to epitomizing the ideal Japanese potter. He has immersed himself in the traditional village folk culture, turning his back on the urban industry of modern Japan. Yet he lives in the present, fully aware of all the changes taking place in society. He has been officially designated as the Holder of an Important Intangible Cultural Property, the skill of Folk Pottery, and is therefore acclaimed as a Living National Treasure.[4] He is a bridge to the past. The significance of his mastery of the potter's art lies not in the pottery itself, but in the life-style which he has built around it, its rhythms, its seasons and its philosophy.

There is strength in tradition. Hamada, Leach, and Yanagi have earned an honored place in the history of ceramics because they brought attention to the aspect of the ceramic traditions which was not on the surface: the currency of timelessness which is the life and habit of the potter. Now we see pottery as potentially the expression of the most glorious and vital impulse of nature and of the dignity of man. It took incredible depth of vision--and courage to fulfill that vision as potters, authors and patrons of the arts. Our appreciation of the part they played in the birth of contemporary ceramics is a step towards understanding the role of tradition in art.

FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER 3

[1]Bernard Leach said, "Every artist knows that he is engaged in an encounter with infinity, and that work done with heart and hand is ultimately worship of Life Itself." From the introduction to The Unknown Craftsman by Soetsu Yanagi, Kodansha, Tokyo, 1973, p. 88-89.

[2] Shoji Hamada, "Foreword," in The Unknown Craftsman by Soetsu Yanagi, Kodansha, Tokyo, 1973, p. 10.

[3]Bernard Leach said, "I have spent my whole life between England and Japan. . . . I have had rare opportunities of feeling my way under the surfaces of Japan as the ultimate inheritor of all the cultures of the further East. . . ." in Kenzan and His Tradition, by Bernard Leach, Faber and Faber, London, 1966, p. 27.

[4]Susan Peterson, Shoji Hamada, A Potter's Way and Work, Kodansha International Ltd., Tokyo, 1974, p. 40.

CHAPTER 4

SHOJI HAMADA

Hamada's pottery is located in the village of Mashiko, north of Tokyo. Folk pottery has been the primary industry of Mashiko for a hundred years. Hamada came to this village after his return from England, setting aside all his technical knowledge of clay, glazes, and firing learned while attending college in ceramic engineering, and adopted the techniques of clay preparation, glazing and firing which were customary in that village.

The clay for the potters of the village comes from the side of a nearby mountainside. Here it is pickaxed, sorted by color, mixed with water and screened. The clay is prepared entirely by hand, and it is by western standards a very poor sandy clay. After aging it as much as a year, potters who work for Hamada wedge the clay for two hours, to prepare it for throwing. Hamada has said it took him twenty years to learn to manipulate the Mashiko clay, and that it only took him that short a time because it was such bad clay.[1] It is better he feels, to make a good pot from bad clay.[2]

For glazes, Hamada uses materials found locally: wood ash, gathered from the townspeople's hearth fires, ground limestone, a feldspathic quartz, a volcanic stone, rice husk ash, and iron and manganese for color. He prefers to use nature's complicated mixtures rather than purchase the manufactured pure chemicals which are familiar in the West. The volcanic stone is made into a tenmoku saturated iron glaze for which Mashiko is famous. Hamada's innovation has been to place a

clear limestone glaze underneath it to make the glaze more billliant. The investment of time and energy in these glazes is great for they are difficult to mix, and must be continually stirred and maintained at the proper consistency while decorating the bisque ware.

Firing is done in a 5 chamber hillside beehive kiln of the customary type for the village. Hamada insists on firing with wood, a lengthy and demanding and intricate process. Hamada owns a forest so that he can always be supplied with sufficient wood. The firing takes place without the use of pyrometers or cones. By the color of the heat in the kiln Hamada and his workers gauge the temperature with keen precision. About a dozen men working in shifts stoke the kiln with wood logs for 2-3 days in order to fire the 3000 pots which fill the kiln. Clay preparation, glazing and firing are all traditionally labor-intensive procedures in the village.

Mashiko has grown and thrived in the past 50 years, partly due to Hamada's influence. Its character has changed with the changing market of the industrial age, but the potter's way of life is still strong.

The making of pottery is conceived of as integral to the religious life of the people. The chores of mining the clay, kneading the clay, preparing the glazes from simple ores and ashes, and firing the kiln with hard-stoked wood logs, measuring temperature by the color of the fire alone, as well as throwing and decorating the pots were not secular duties. It was in the tedious repetitious ritual of these activities that the spiritual life was fostered. Truths are found in basic things and demonstrated in ordinary life.

Fig. 4-1. Tea-bowl by Shoji Hamada, 1970.

It was the spiritual life of the village which first attracted Hamada to Mashiko. He perceived this richness and depth in the work of Masu Minagawa, which he saw in a teacher's home while attending school. She painted her motif of a hillside with trees on teapots a thousand times a day for forty years. She is said to have made over six million teapots in her lifetime. Masu Minagawa was a symbol of this style of personal development through repetition. Hamada said, "When you do that many pots it becomes so that the work itself does the work."[3] Through repetition, as well as through the passage of time, growth takes place in the spirit of the artist. This growth results in subtle changes in the expression of the motif. "It's not the same, they're all different,"[4] Hamada explains. It becomes through familiarity an expression of his inner core, of his wellsprings. But it's not the novelty which counts, but rather the continuity between inner man and outer-brush. (See Fig. 4-1.) Hamada has a motif of a broken sugar cane stalk (Fig. 4-6) which he first observed after a typhoon in front of his studio. In the thirty intervening years he has used this motif perhaps 10,000 times. Hamada explains, "It's my painting and I never grow tired of it even though I repeat it. It belongs to me , so it's all right. It's different with people who take someone else's idea and repeat it over and over. That's not all right."[5]

Repetition aims at exposing the artist's deepest levels of feeling. This deep inner feeling ties together the work, day to day and throughout his life. But it is also important to work when the feeling is right: "You have to work when you are not aware of self. If you have a certain kimochi--feeling, disposition--as you work, your work will smell

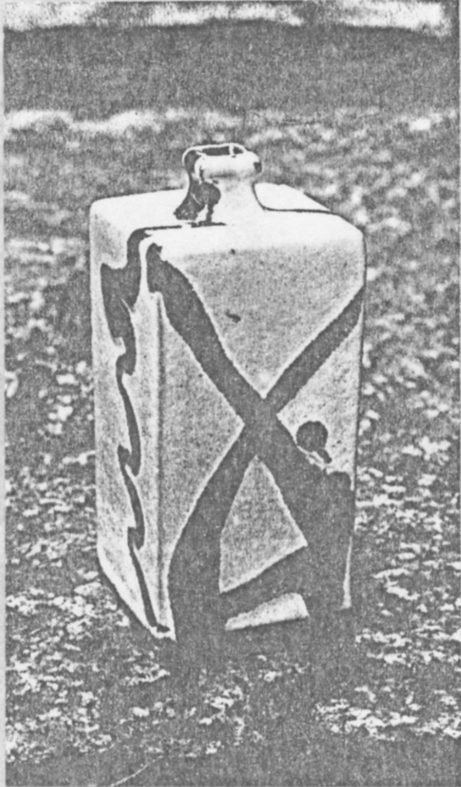

Fig. 4-2. Bottle by Shoji Hamada, 1970.

of that kimochi."[6] When the work is free to do itself, by habit, then the kimochi is stable, and unchanging. As the artist's expression changes, it is the work that is evolving, not he that is bringing about changes. Thus the artist can be confident that the work is genuinely his own.

More than any other form, tea bowls must be accompanied by the proper "kimochi" on the part of the potter. Hamada may wait for days or weeks for the right moment to throw these bowls--usually while the others are busy stacking a kiln and therefore absent from the studio. He says, "These are the best pots, if they can be done at the best times."[7] He strives to achieve the innocence towards beauty and function in the tea ceremony, that the early Korean potters had who didn't yet know about The Way of Tea and thought only of making bowls as vessels for rice. He does this by thinking of other things, anything but the tea bowls themselves, and engaging himself in conversation with guests. The bowls come up from the mound of clay spontaneously, unconsciously, without thinking. It is no longer Hamada, thinking as a Japanese making a bowl for tea ceremony, but the thought of innocence of the simple folk potter without any pride or pretense for his work. The tea bowls are a symbol for Hamada, so his unself-conscious, spontaneous spirit is here at its best. It has been said that Hamada has three legs, enabling him to stand straight and firm, and this is used to describe his tea bowls also.[8]

A great artist may say, "I am not responsible for my work."[9] It is a claim that the individual self is no longer involved, that the work truly does itself. Hamada says, "Having what you call an individual character is not very useful."[10] People who are making things must put

Fig. 4-3. Shoji Hamada painting overglaze enamel, 1970.

out an antenna above everyone else's head and a probe in the earth deeper than anyone."[11] It's a surrender of self into the ideals which the artist holds.

It was this kind of surrender of self which brought Hamada to Mashiko, away from the urban environment with which he was familiar. He had nothing in common with the people of Mashiko. He decided not to use any of the techniques he had learned and began to follow the Mashiko way of life, and way of making pottery. He was not accepted at first, not even given a place to live. But he knew what he wanted to do. "The one important thing," Hamada emphasizes, "is that I was able to have understood this at a young age, to have pursued it, and that I knew the importance of it for my life. . . . I was not searching anymore."[12]

"Not searching anymore" meant acceptance of the pattern of simple life of the folk potter. (See Fig. 4-3.) His time was organized by the routines of living: the demands of the clay and the periodic firings, the routine of throwing production line pottery, and supervising the activities of an extended household. With his family and his staff he established a pattern for living; a flow of productivity conjoined with the seasons and punctuated by the festivals and holidays that link the potters to the community, the tradition and the land. As the year is divided into blocks of time by the seasonal festivals, so each day is broken by tea-time, when all join together for a ceremony of food, drink and talk, a respite from the intensity of the day's activity. Rest is part of the rhythm of work. The workers' general pace revolves around Hamada's working habits. He does his work in blocks to establish and maintain a rhythm for the whole pottery: five large bowls in an hour

Fig. 4-4. Vase by Shoji Hamada, 1970.

in the evening; ten tea bowls the next morning; and another block of time for trimming. It is an effortless discipline of day to day work which plays itself out, year after year. Hamads loves to dive deep into the rhythm of this pattern of life. The life-style captures the flavor of his personality, and he likes what he is.[13]

One of the ideals inherent in Hamada's personality and life-style is the allegiance to tradition. Carrying on the traditional methods of doing things creates a bond between the past and the present. It's a challenge that gives meaning to everything he does. The Japanese tradition of folk art is being perpetuated through the 5 museums for which Hamada raised funds, and through the living tradition of potters who following his example, continue the traditional ways and ideals of making pottery. Folk art past and present is a legacy for the future. The beauty of the ware produced by the anonymous folk craftsmen, is an unself-conscious beauty, devoid of the false pride of the self-conscious artist. (See Fig. 4-2.)

Respect for tradition means the humility to recognize the ongoing wholeness of life which the individual represents. How one views one's position in the chain of history measures the extent to which the ideals of tradition have been taken to heart. "There are two kinds of people: those who make themselves the center, who live as though their ancestors lived only to create them, and bear children only to carry themselves on; and those who make themselves as low as possible, consider themselves nothing in relation to the whole, live in order to protect and cherish what the ancestors lived for and bear children in order to pass that on. Most artists fall in the first classification and artisans in the second one,"[14] Hamada explained.

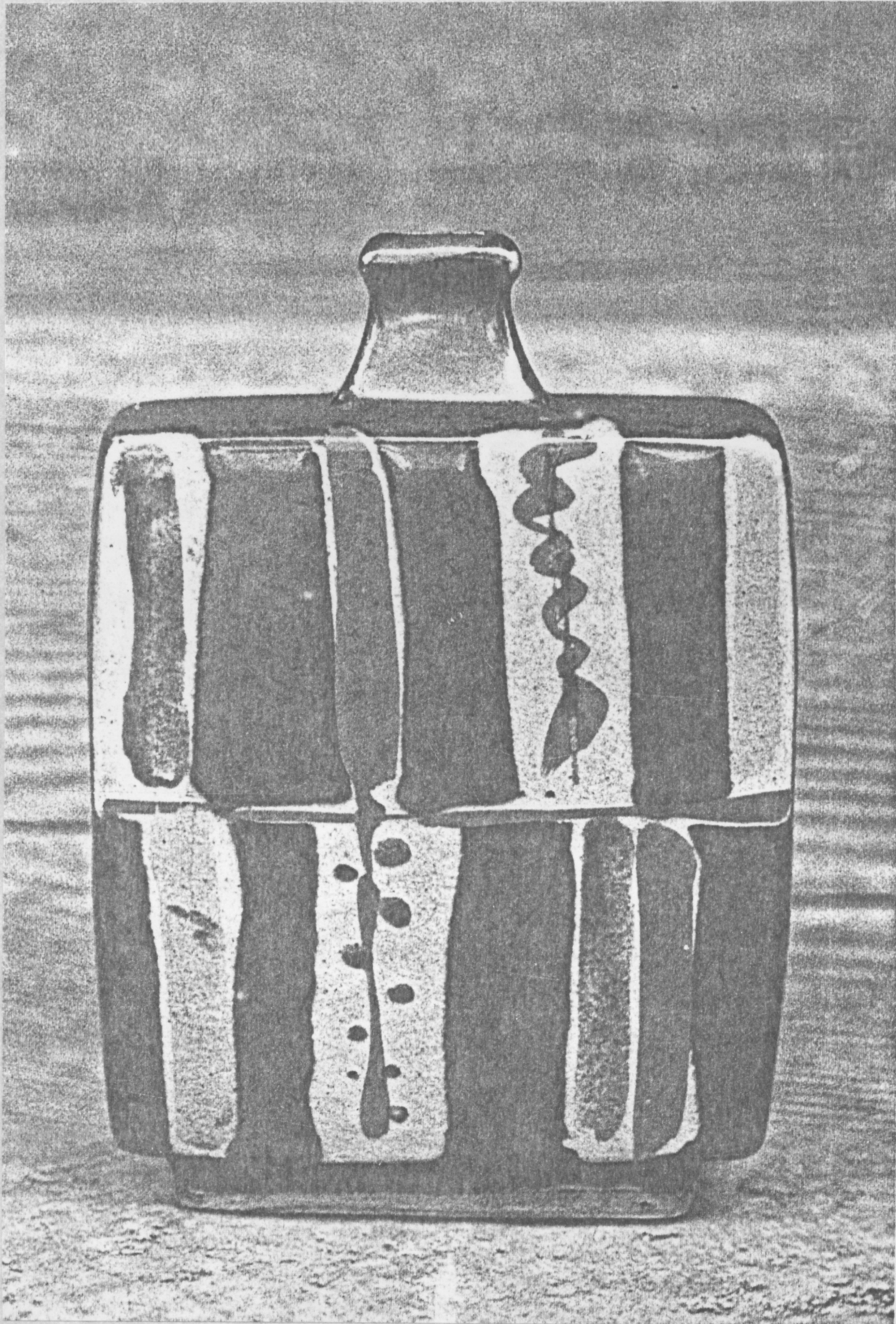

Fig. 4-5. Bottle by Shoji Hamada, 1970.

For Hamada and his village, pottery making is not merely a profession, it is participation in life (See Fig. 4-4.) Through pottery they fulfill the ideals of their religion, they maintain the continuity of their link to the traditions of their ancestors and they gain an intimacy and respect for the environment, its materials and its natural rhythms.

Fig. 4-6. Bowl by Shoji Hamada showing broken sugar cane motif, 1970.

FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER 4

[1]Peter Freund, "Interview with Warren MacKenzie," Supermud '76, Oct. 23, 1976, manuscript, p. 10.

[2]Susan Peterson, Shoji Hamada, A Potter's Way and Work, Kodansha International Ltd., Tokyo, 1974, p. 37.

[3]Ibid., p. 190.

[4]Peter Freund, "Interview with Warren MacKenzie," p. 7.

[5]Peterson, Shoji Hamada, p. 91.

[6]Ibid., p. 42.

[7]Ibid., p. 80.

[8]Ibid., p. 82.

[9]Ibid., p. 189.

[10]Ibid., p. 189.

[11]Ibid., p. 189.

[12]Ibid., p. 166.

[13]Ibid., p. 66

[14]Ibid., p. 164.

CHAPTER 5

MARIA MARTINEZ

In the life of Maria Martinez, a Pueblo Indian potter of New Mexico, reverence for the traditions of her family and village have led to far-reaching success, personal fame, economic stability for her village, and coherence and integration of the tribe in the face of advancing pressures of modernization. Maria holds two honorary doctorates, countless awards and prizes for her pottery, and she has demonstrated her work at every World's Fair in the United States from the St. Louis World's Fair in 1904 to 1939. Honored by presidents, she has been described as "Unpretentious, unfazed by worldwide acclaim, preferring to exemplify the pure Indian way of life"[1] for the five generations for which she is the matriarch.

The Indian way of life which she exemplifies, and from which she draws her strength, has been made famous and sustained in its simplicity in the midst of the complexities of our modern civilization by the tradition of pottery-making kept alive in her family. The Tewa Pueblo Indians in the village of San Ildefonso had been farmers on this land for hundreds of years. Women made pottery for cooking and for ceremonial purposes as part of their household chores. Now that the land is too arid for cultivation, pottery-making has become more prominent as the economic basis of their village, and the common folk craft has assumed its full dignity as art.

Pottery-making is a cooperative venture. There are six separate stages in making the black-on-black ware. First, the clay is dug and mixed with

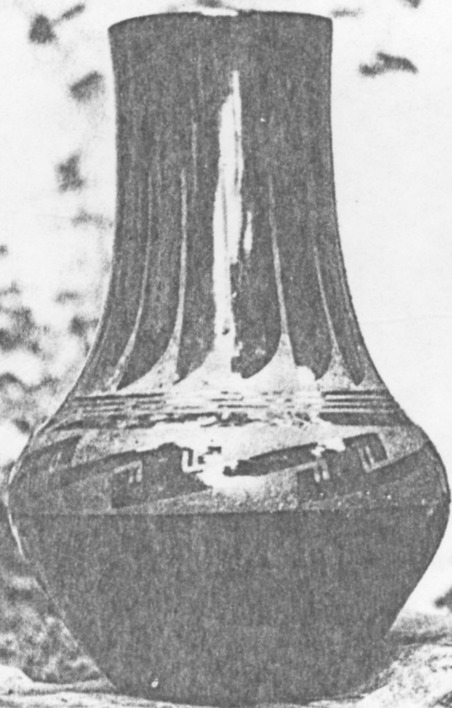

Fig. 5-1. Vase by Maria and Julian Martinez, black-on-black ware, height 30.5 cm., ca. 1922.

ash from deposits on their reservation. Each pot is formed by the coil method on a base mold called a puki. As the pot dries it is carefully scraped and then sanded to remove surface irregularities. An iron-bearing slip is applied uniformly to the pot surface and burnished to a high sheen while it is leather-hard. The pot is then given its matt design using a refractory clay slip and a brush made from the stem of the yucca plant. Finally, the pottery is fired in the embers of a hardwood bonfire which, at the peak of the firing is smothered with dried manure to carbonize the clay and turn it jet black. Some family members specialize in certain stages of the work, such as painting decorations, and all come together for the group effort of polishing and firing the pieces. The men are renowned for their skill in painting, and they contribute to the more laborious processes of mining the clay, burnishing the pots, and firing. This cooperation gives the family a sense of common purpose and provides a central routine to give perspective and order to problems and conflicts that may arise in community life. Today, pottery is made by five generations of Maria's family.

Even though pottery-making now forms the economic base which holds the pueblo together, it is not a full-time pursuit. It is not a profession or trade as we might think of it in the culture of Japan or of non-native Americans. Only a little time is spent in pottery-making--a few days a week during the warm season. One hundred pots might be a potter's output for the year, although Maria, who was a very fast producer, could make several hundred. Still, the necessities of daily life, such as preparing food, sewing clothes, rearing children and preparing for tribal ceremonies take most of their days. With a life-style that is hard at

Fig. 5-2. Platter by Maria and Julian Martinez, black-on-black ware.

best, it is remarkable that Maria and her family have found the strength and the means to uphold their lifestyle and continue the Indian tradition.

The Indian ceremonials uphold the tradition most firmly and in so doing integrate the community. What supports the tradition of these ceremonials? They are not written down or recorded; they are lived and performed. As Barbara Gonzales, granddaughter of Maria explains, "We keep it in ourselves. We live it and that is how we keep it. It's like this. As something gets written down by people there are different interpretations, and each time it is told, more gets lost."[2] The Indians do not give their children formal instruction in their culture, nor do they often speak about it. It is expressed in living, in dance, in ritual, music, art, and in symbolism. Indian culture is handed down by participation in life. Children absorb it with the air that they breathe.

It is in this way that the living tradition of Indian pottery-making is passed on. The descendant learns the skill of living, of making pottery, and is not tied down to records of life lived in the past. When Barbara Gonzales asked Maria for a large pot as a record of her artistic accomplishments, Maria replied, succinctly: "When I am gone, other people have my pots. But to you I leave my greatest achievement which is the ability to do it."[3]

Each new generation of potters learns by watching and imitating. Indian life-style is organized to create many such opportunities for the skills to be demonstrated. In folk traditions of women potters, the secrets of the craft are kept within the family by being passed from mother to daughter or to some other young female relative. Maria went to visit her aunt Nicolasa when she was ten or twelve and watched as she made her pottery

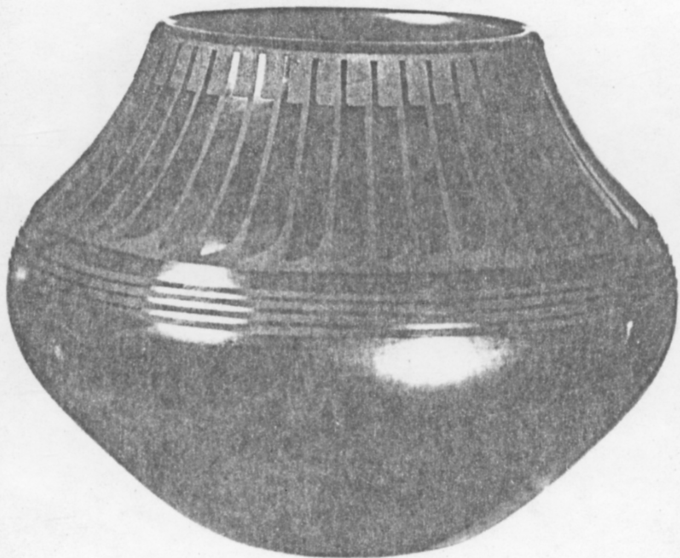

Fig. 5-3. Jar by Maria and Julian Martinez, black-on-black ware, height 17.8 cm., ca. 1930.

in the traditional way. Maria calls Nicolasa "one of the best potters of all,"[4] a position she seems to have also inherited. Each potter develops her own style of expression, but there is always a slight resemblance in each potter's work to that of the person who first showed her. This 'apprenticeship' supported by the living tradition of Indian culture is the formula by which these potters learn the art from the older generation.

The first true Pueblo pottery was made in the Modified Basket Weaver Culture between 500 and 700 A.D. This early undecorated pottery that was made chiefly for cooking, was made by a people who had already been living in fixed adobe dwellings for nearly half a millenium. Decorations of black design on a white background appeared in the eighth century, and polychrome wares were made after the 12th century. The tradition of painting pottery goes back more than a thousand years; pottery processes have remained the same through the centuries.

The work of the Martinez family could be mingled almost indistinguishably among the shards and remnants of potters of previous ages. But there are changes, and there is freedom and innovation in this long tradition. Different clays and decorative slips transform the outer appearance of the work without uprooting its basic traditional character. It is for such an innovation that Marie and her late husband Julian have been most famous. The circumstances of this innovation are extraordinary, and they highlight the peculiarity of a culture which keeps no written records.

In 1908 and 1909, Dr. Edgar Hewett, Professor of Archaeology and Director of the Museum of New Mexico, led an expedition of scientists in an excavation of living sites and burial mounds in the Tyuonyi and Frijoles Canyons near San Ildefonso. Their digging turned up a kind of jet black, polished

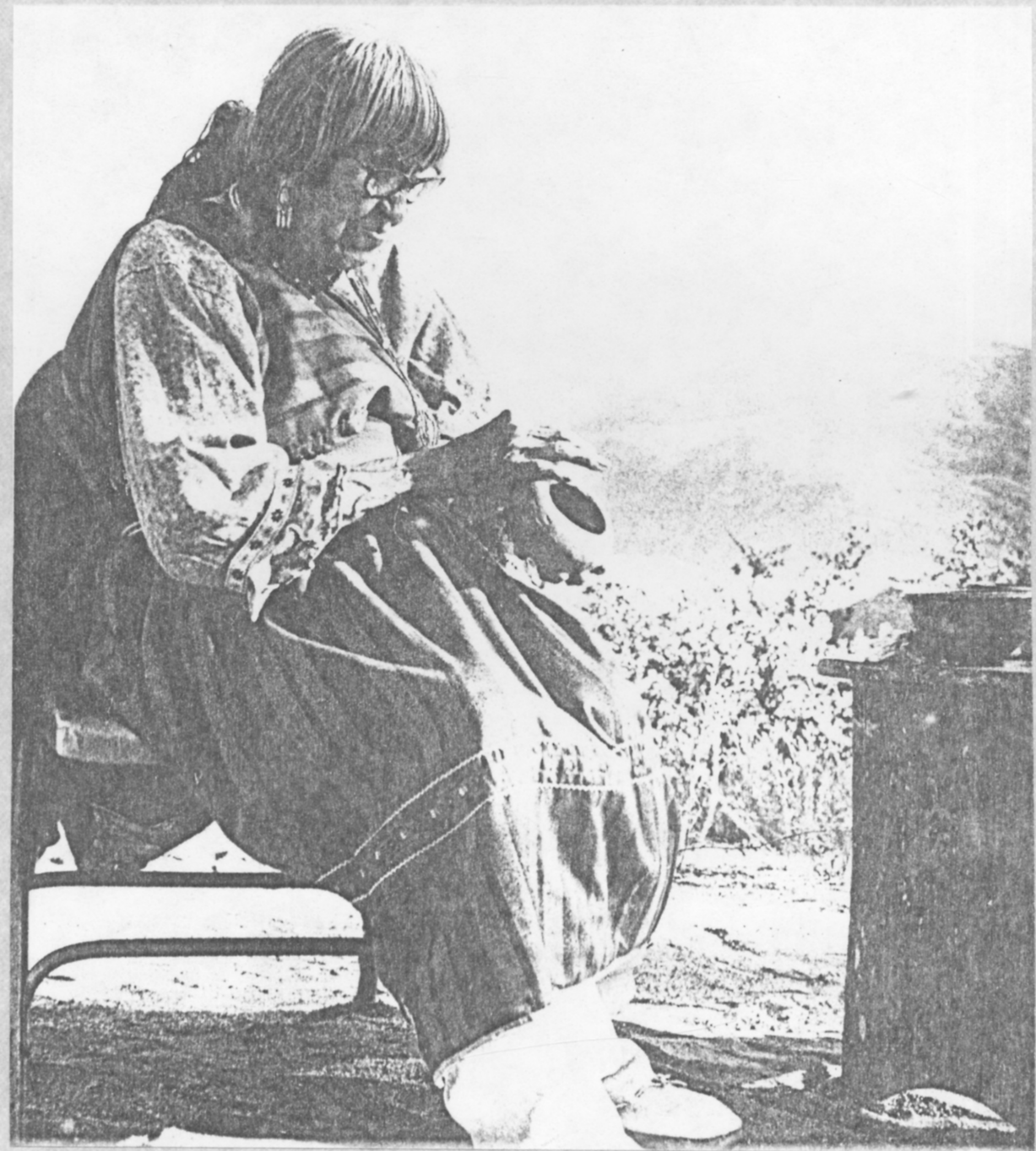

Fig. 5-4. Maria Martinez at a workshop in Idyllwild, California, 1974.

pottery not hitherto found anywhere in the Southwest. Hewett was aware that the Tewa Indians of San Ildefonso were descendants of the occupants of these excavation sites, so he sought out Maria and asked her if it would be possible to reproduce this shiny-black surface effect. After a number of experiments using various clays and different firing techniques, she and her husband Julian succeeded in imitating the novel jet-black surface. The Martinez family did not consider these black ware pieces to be genuine traditional Pueblo pottery. The pieces remained a curiosity on a back shelf in the family pottery for nearly a decade.

The experimentation was resumed in 1918 when these pieces were rediscovered by visiting Indianologists from Prof. Hewett's Museum of New Mexico. The archaeologists were fascinated and encouraged Maria and Julian to revive this forgotten art in their own pottery. Their first trials led to matt black backgrounds with polished designs. The difficulty in selectively polishing the design led them to experiment with polished background and matt decoration. The perfection of this technique resulted in the style for which their work is famous today.

Black-on-black is an elegant modern innovation for which Dr. Hewett and the archaeologists at the Museum of New Mexico may claim some small part. In addition to transforming Tewa Pueblo pottery styles from polychrome decoration to black-on-black, Dr. Hewett made another significant contribution to the art work of the Martinez family. When Maria and Julian were developing decorative patterns to paint on their pottery, they visited museums and studied Indian-pottery designs throughout the American Southwest. Dr. Hewett convinced them to adapt the designs from pottery excavated from the ruins of Tewa villages near San Ildefonso. This is how Julian discovered and developed

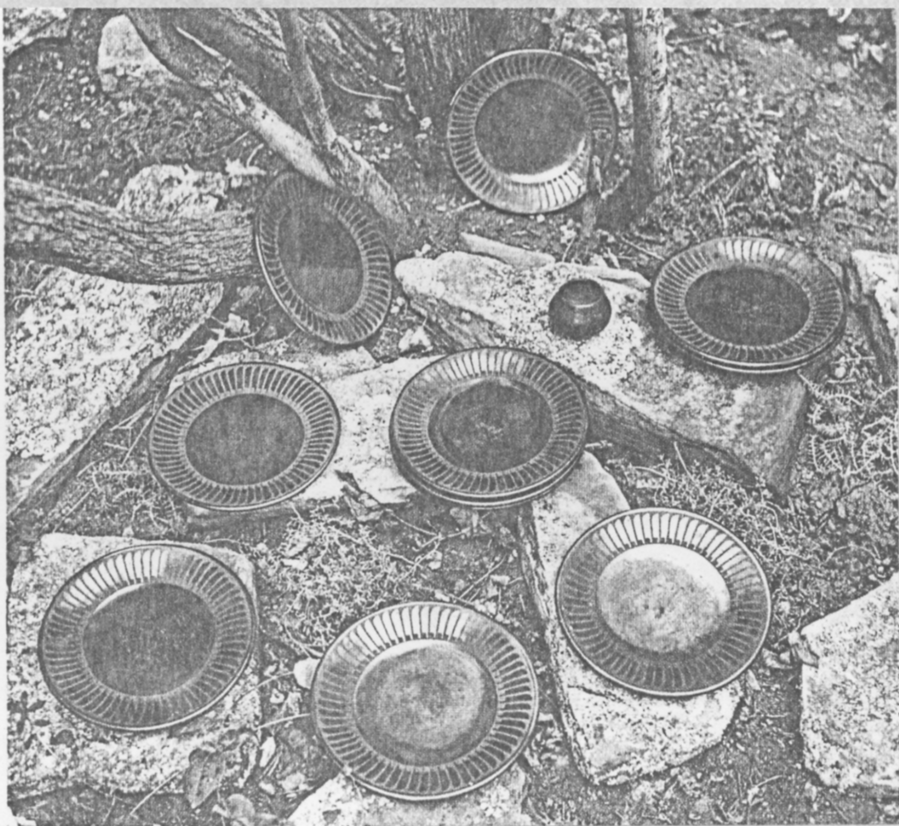

Fig. 5-5. Set of Dinner Plates by Maria Martinez and Santana, black-on-black ware, diameter 30.5 cm., ca. 1950.

the famous horned-water-serpent design[5] which has become a hallmark of many Southwest-Indian-pottery decorative styles. 'Foreign' inspiration and encouragement has played a crucial role in elevating Pueblo pottery to the rank of a contemporary art form.

Despite the intervention of Dr. Hewett, the San Ildefonso potters consider their work to be essentially traditional in derivation and in execution. Indeed, the Martinez family's supposed innovation of the matt black design on the polished black surface has been put in perspective by the excavation of 800 year-old black-on-black pottery from Pueblo Bonito. Their innovation is more accurately a rediscovery, a turning back to more ancient patterns of expression. Nevertheless, the influence of Dr. Hewett demands that we pose the question of how a tradition may consider itself vital and living when its designs and firing methods are adapted from archaeological excavations rather than being communicated in completeness from teacher to student!

Tradition has more to do with a style of living in the present than with any particular discovery or accomplishment in the past. What the student learns from his teacher is an attitude toward life. Such a learned perspective is reflected in Maria's personality, described as a "joyful combination of humor and quick wit with a positive attitude towards life."[7] A relationship to the environment, a relationship to the clay, patience, a penchant for experimentation, an ideal of perfection, all these are carried from teacher to student in a living tradition. Techniques can be forgotten, mines of clay can be exhausted, but if the spirit of the tradition has been fostered, these will be replaced by new discoveries, new directions which sustain the vitality of the community.

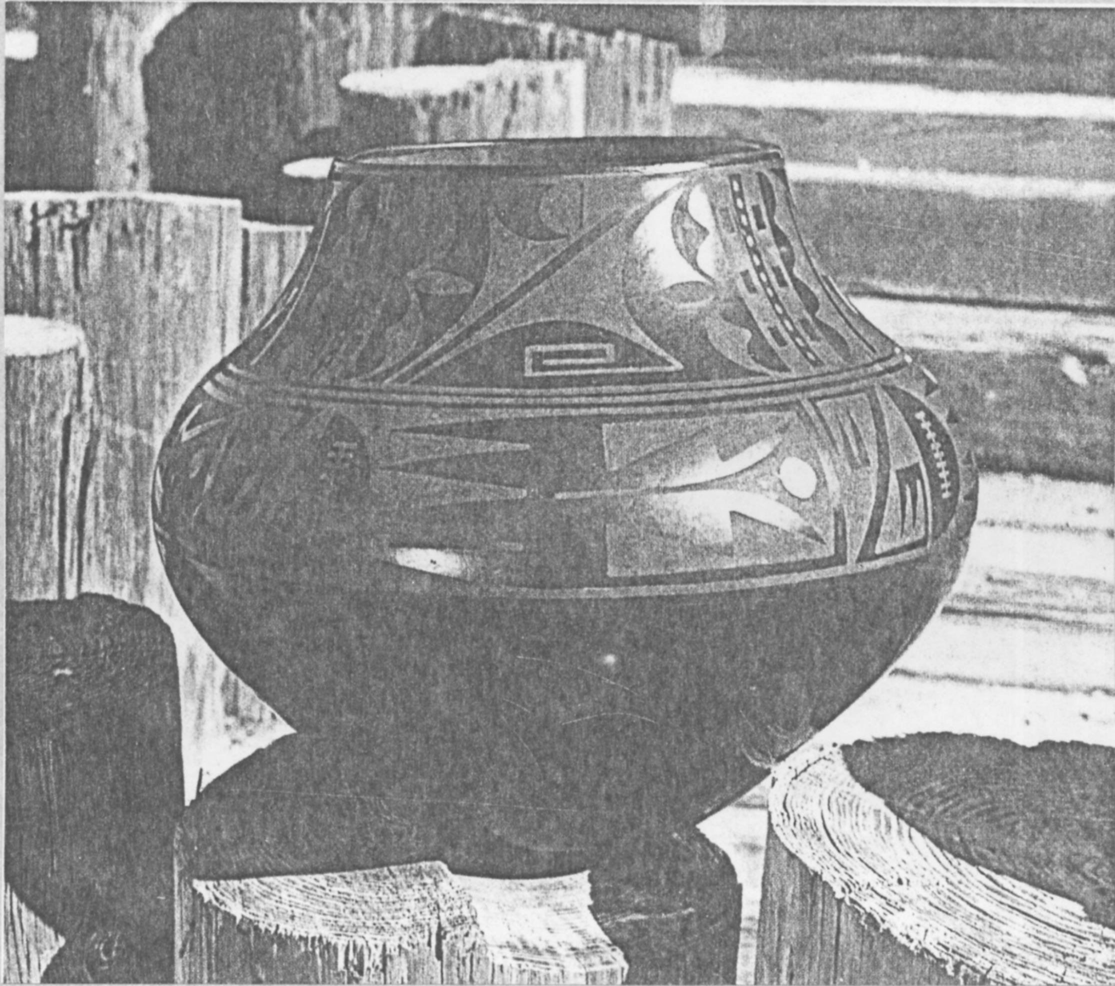

Fig. 5-6. Jar by Maria and Julian Martinez, black-on-black ware, height 45.7 cm., ca.1939.

Black-on-black ware has revitalized the tradition of pottery-making in the Tewa Pueblo Indians. Maria has demonstrated her innovative techniques to all the women in her pueblo, so that it has become an institution in the village. Pottery-making provides a link with the outside world which is at the same time not destructive of their own traditional values. The technology has been a gift of the Martinez family to all the Indians of their Pueblo. But the pottery she and her family and her village have made is a far more profound gift to the world: the gift of symbols of a vital living tradition.

As a pillar of her community and a representative of her tradition, Maria is great. But these accomplishments could not have come into focus without Maria's great achievements as a first-rank artist. Maria perfected the process of polishing to give an unblemished surface with a sheen far brighter than that found in the excavated pottery or in other black wares from around the world. Maria made larger pots with more perfect symmetry even though she used the traditional coil techniques of forming without the aid of a potter's wheel. But most of all, her high standards and her attention to the quality of line and form have endeared her work to collectors the world over and have established her as the spokeswoman for the tradition of Indian pottery. She is an individual who sublimated her individuality in service to her tradition. In so doing she gained a character, a personality going beyond the boundaries of her long life: a representative of a hundreds-of-years-old tradition. Her affirmation of tradition became an affirmation of a much larger self, and so she stands now as the matriarch of a culturally revived and strengthened generation. Maria's perspicacity

was to distinguish between the spirit of progress and success which was the essence of her tradition, and the external, superficial and changing forms which expressed the tradition at one particular time. Placing her emphasis on the spirit of her community, she gave a new direction to its outward expressions which will unite and maintain it for a long time to come.

FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER 5

1. Susan Peterson, *The Living Tradition of Maria Martinez*, Kodansha International Ltd., Tokyo, 1977, p. 77.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 190.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 191.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 83.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 117.

6. Bertha P. Dutton, "A Brief Historical Note on Black Burnished and Matt Pottery," in *The Living Tradition of Maria Martinez*, by Susan Peterson, p. 272.

7. Susan Peterson, *Maria Martinez*, p. 74.

CHAPTER 6

PETER VOULKOS

Ceramics was popularized by Hamada, Leach and Yanagi, but it was given a distinctive American character and vitality by Peter Voulkos. Voulkos inspired new dignity and freedom in his craft by breaking every boundary and limitation of customary craftsmanship and denying the well-established Bauhaus maxim, "Form follows function."[1] For Voulkos, "To look at,"[2] is a legitimate function, and a pot is successful, "If it turns you on."[3] Voulkos achieves a pure unstifled expression of personality and world in the gesture of his clay. An unceasing, uncontrived, relentless pursuit, "trying to make the greatest pot in the world,"[4] characterizes Voulkos' work.

Voulkos's background and development in the fifteen years after World War II demonstrate both his growing accomplishments as an artist and his critical role in revitalizing American ceramic traditions. Peter Voulkos was trained in the traditional potter's craft in the class studio of Frances Senska at Montana State University, in Bozeman, which he attended in 1946-51. Beginning as a student of commercial art with the help of the GI bill, he applied his painting skills to create handsome brush and surface decorations on superbly crafted production pottery forms. From 1949 on, he won numerous prizes in ceramics shows, including the prestigious Potters' Association Prize at the Ceramics National Exhibition in Syracuse, New York. He rapidly became accepted as a brilliant master of the potter's craft.

Fig. 6-1. Soup tureen and lid by Peter Voulkos, made at Archie Bray Foundation, diameter 20 in., 1952.

After receiving his M. F. A. from the College of Arts and Crafts in Oakland, California, in 1952, with a thesis on lids, he worked as a production potter at the Archie Bray Foundation in Helena, Montana. He conducted workshops for students while his own pottery was gaining a nationwide clientele, and he claims that, "If I were still at it now, I would be doing very well financially. We developed a good trade."[5] (See Figure 1.) The pottery prizes which he won, and the technical innovations he achieved already foreshadowed the dynamic revolution his career in clay was to engender. One of his discoveries was the wax-resist glaze application technique which is now an institution in almost every glaze room. Borrowed from the textile-dyeing craft, this discovery shows Voulkos's willingness and capacity to step outside the boundaries of his discipline to borrow any technique or idea that could be usefully applied to clay.

Voulkos was a rapid, facile thrower, and he made thousands of individual and production pieces. He explains, "Throwing became an intuitive thing....But now my intellect demands something in addition to this primitive energy in pottery. Primitive is the intuitive approach, the tactile approach. I decided this wasn't all I was after."[6] The bounds of the traditional craftsman's world had been exploited and exhausted. Now other influences began to work in him.

In the late 1940's, Pablo Picasso had begun to work in ceramics, and his legendary artistic vision was turned to the medium of clay. Picasso's career had begun much like Voulkos's with an early facile mastery of representational painting. In a movement called 'cubism' he led the break away from the traditional format of representation, in analytic studies of distorted and abstracted forms during the first decade of the century. This freedom had evolved and matured in the intervening years, and when Picasso applied his insights gathered over the years onto clay, he created a new image for

Fig. 6-2. Covered Jar by Peter Voulkos, stoneware with light brown glaze, height 15 in., ca. 1954.

clay as a medium. This painter's freedom impressed Voulkos deeply, although he claimed it did not influence his work directly. "I didn't like his pots, but I liked the way he did them. I liked his attitude....I admired the fact that he did what he wanted to do, what he thought was right. Looking at Picasso's painting and ceramics I became interested in the powers of color on three-dimensional form and how to destroy a form using color. This hadn't occurred to me before."[7] These insights were not the result of cursory observations. Voulkos felt he needed to live with these pieces to really absorb all they had to say.[8] Whatever he absorbed awakened him to new possibilities, but he was still seeking "the spiritual inventiveness of a new form."[9] (See Figure 2.) Many of Voulkos's pots from the early 50's show Picasso-like drawings and surface treatments.[10] But the catalysts that were to foment the new revolution in clay were still missing.

The first catalyst was a perceptual fluke in Voulkos's vision of scale. Growing up among the Big Belt Mountains of Montana, he had no opportunity to experience art in galleries and museums. He had to settle for reproductions published in books and magazines. Consequently he maintained an innocence in his perception. He was, as he described himself, somewhat of a "farm boy."[11] He was greatly impressed by the magnificent scale of several Swedish pots which were illustrated in large blown-up photos in Craft Horizons in the early 1950's.[12] Voulkos thought the pots were three feet tall, and he was inspired to learn to make pots in that scale himself. So he struggled to master 50 and 100 pounds of clay, to pull up the two-foot and even 3½-foot cylinders for which he became known. Years later, he discovered that the Swedish pots were only about six inches tall; but by then he had mastered the skill of throwing massive quantities of clay.

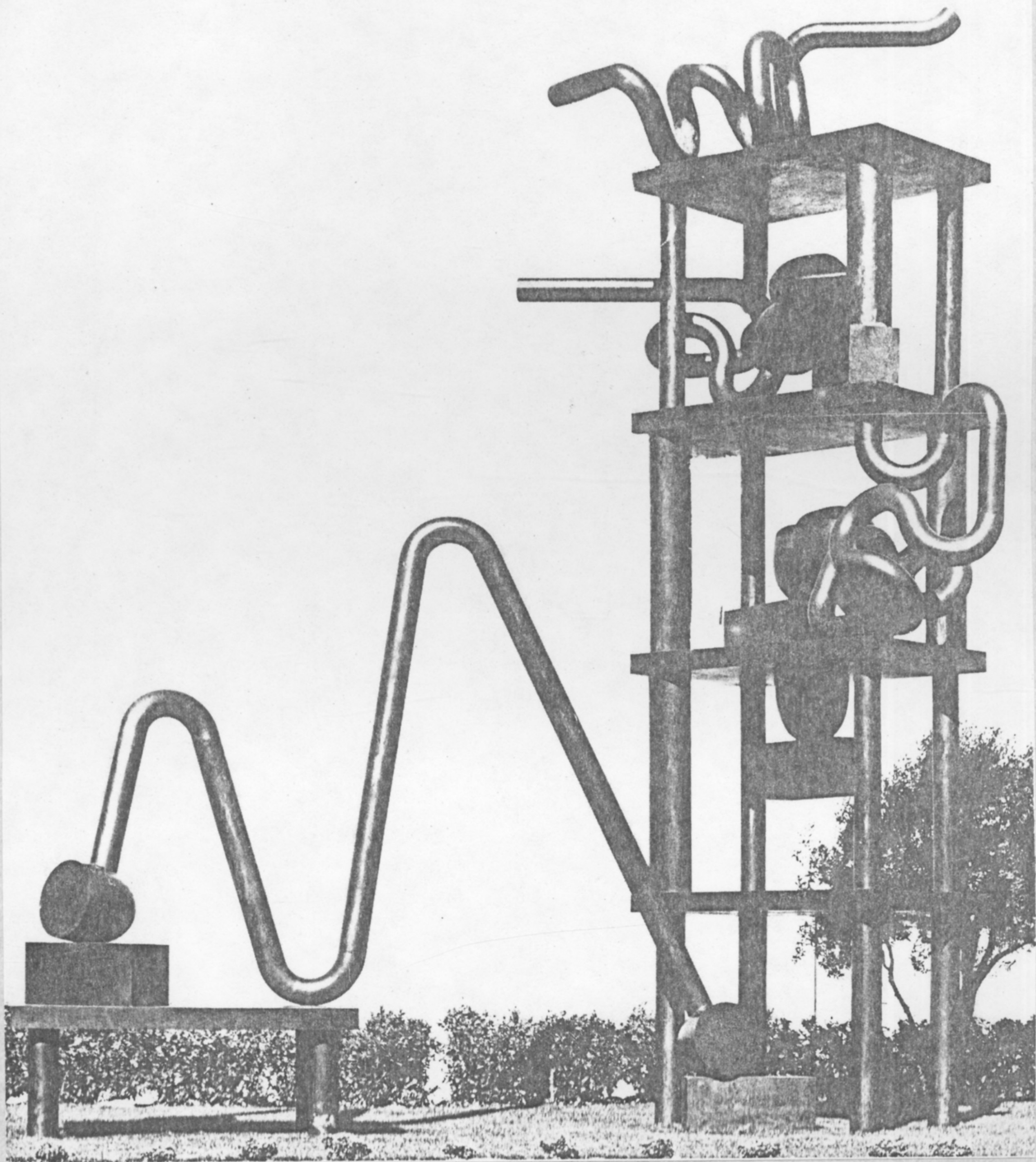

Fig. 6-3. Bronze sculpture by Peter Voulkos, commissioned by San Francisco Hall of Justice, height 30 feet, 1968-1972.

The increase in scale pushed Voulkos out of the realm of pure production pottery. He entered a new dimension where clay could reveal its full versatility as sculpture, as painting, and as pottery. Voulkos, commenting on his scale at a demonstration many years later, said, "I always liked the large things. Take New York skyscrapers. Those are more awesome to me than mountains (sic!). You take a mountain for granted. But a skyscraper just blows my mind. You can put a little thing in the middle of a mountain and it shows up. But make it work in the middle of New York--that's something else. Man-made is a different trip."[13] (See Figure 3, an example of his later bronze casting.)

Man-made is very different, and with the increase of industrial mass-production, the difference between the man-made and the natural world was becoming more marked. But few artists, and, till that time, no potters could claim the innocent sensitivity and acceptance of the man-made world which was Voulkos's trademark. Voulkos's attitude towards the technology of the modern world, its skyscrapers, its machines, its weapons of destruction,[14] was unique because he considered all of these to be precious parts of his world. The craft movement was largely reactionary, attempting to phase out the increasing dominance of manufactured goods by a return to hand-crafted work. The Arts and Crafts movement which spread to America from England in the early part of the century, through its magazines supported the doctrines of Ruskin and Morris, which were reacting against mechanical production.[15] Likewise, the inspiration for crafts provided by the lecture tours of Hamada, Leach, and Yanagi in the United States in the early 1950's supported the aesthetic of the asymmetrical, irregular work of the hands, which was unavailable in machine production, and was therefore to be sought-after in the potter's craft.[16]

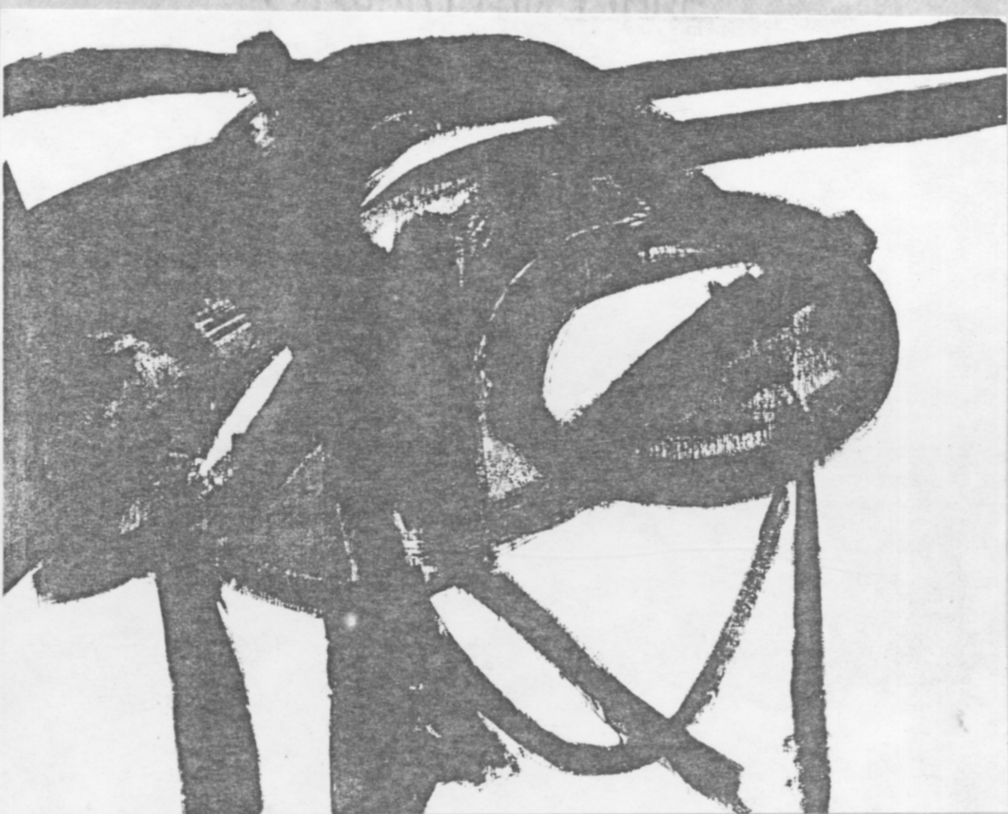

Fig. 6-4. *Chief*. Painting by Franz Kline, black and white on canvas, 1950.

As a master craftsman within a movement founded on precepts which rejected machine technology, it is all the more remarkable that Voulkos was entranced by the work of machines. He learned to exploit the spirit of machines and of the technological age in an art which, despite its links with the past, masterfully conveys the image of American life at its best. "I love machines," Voulkos says. "They perform miracles. They make me feel like a dolt." For the world, technology has come to symbolize the most brilliant achievements of Western culture. By innocently accepting and internalizing the ideals of the technological age, Voulkos was capable of expressing an unforeseen synthesis: the indomitable human personality and the sheer unmitigated power of machines. Developing an enhanced perception of scale was the first step to accomplish this. But he also had to absorb the flowering new movement in the art world which was searching through the personal implications of the burgeoning technological age. These were to provide a further catalyst towards the coming revolution in clay.

Abstract expressionism was the culmination of a two-centuries-long movement in art which sought to accommodate the tempestuous political, social and cultural changes which were accompanying the incessant march of industrialization. The action painters sought to evoke a mood in their paintings through sheer gesture, intimate color, and the intense immediacy of the feverish act of painting. (See Figure 4.) The need for a representational subject was obviated in the search for a medium to communicate the freedom and the tension of the internal emotional state. The artist Robert Motherwell described "the history of modern art...as the history of modern freedom."[18] The abstract expressionists were inspired by the ideals of the ancient classical and Judaeo-Christian

tradition, but they maintained only the humanistic values of classical art, not its forms. To generate an authentic American art, they attempted the extraordinary synthesis of the contemporary American experience of "dynamism, flux, violence"[19] with these classical ideals, in order to become "the spiritual heir to the entire complex of Western culture."[20] The first generation of abstract expressionists developed this synthesis "on one hand, by rapidly executed sweeping gestures, and on the other, by large fields of resonant color."[21]

Voulkos first contacted this group of New York artists, in an atmosphere charged with intensity and the spirit of experimentation, while teaching a summer workshop in Black Mountain College near Ashville, North Carolina, in the summer of 1953. Later that year he visited the artist ghetto in New York City. Rudy Autio, a friend and coworker at the Archie Bray Foundation said of Voulkos, "He came back to Helena, but he was never the same again. It must have been about the most important thing that had happened to him up to that time."[22] Voulkos had been transported into the milieu of contemporary art. The experimentation of these artists, including the musician John Cage, the painters Franz Kline, Willem de Kooning, Jack Tworkov, and others was contagious,[23] and became an animating spirit in all of Voulkos's subsequent work. These events made Voulkos the spiritual heir of the long established, centuries-old tradition of European and American painting. Now he stood in a line with Michelangelo,[24] Rembrandt, David, Cezanne, Picasso, and de Kooning. He was no longer a mere craftsman. All that remained to be done was to integrate the many influences into his personality and his work.

The final catalyst was the move to the Los Angeles County Art Institute in the fall of 1954. Voulkos says, "The biggest thing that ever happened to

me was moving to Los Angeles. Then I became aware of everything. Everything started falling into place. I began to go to all the shows....painting shows and sculpture shows I had never been to before, and I really got turned on to painting like never before--work by New York painters especially."[25] For Voulkos, the place to be was in the midst of everything, the melting pot of culture, the center of the universe. Voulkos and his students would start each class by going to galleries, then visiting construction sites, and finally, after they had absorbed the vitality of all the diverse activity and culture in the city, they would get down to work. Voulkos wasn't teaching the techniques of pottery, painting, sculpture or architecture in isolation: "My point was to make them aware just of themselves."[26]

The first one-man-shows of Voulkos's work that reflected the new mood and heralded the revolution that was taking place in clay came in 1956. A reviewer for Craft Horizons, Rose Slivka, writing about his show at Bonnier's in New York perceived already at this time the significance of Voulkos's work and summarized the direction of the avalanche of change which was to challenge the staid world of traditional ceramics. She wrote, "The influences of Picasso, Japanese raku pottery, and the American "action" school of art are there along with Peter Voulkos who emerges as a truly magnetic experimentalist. This fine and accomplished potter, searching his craft for new solutions more related to the explorations taking place in modern art today utilizes these elements: The new consciousness of spontaneity as a force, and the deliberate effort to achieve it; the charm of "accident," the violation of precedent in order to disturb old ideas and stimulate new ones; the new freedom of the artist to express his particular personality and psyche with directness and depth."[27] (See Figure 5.)

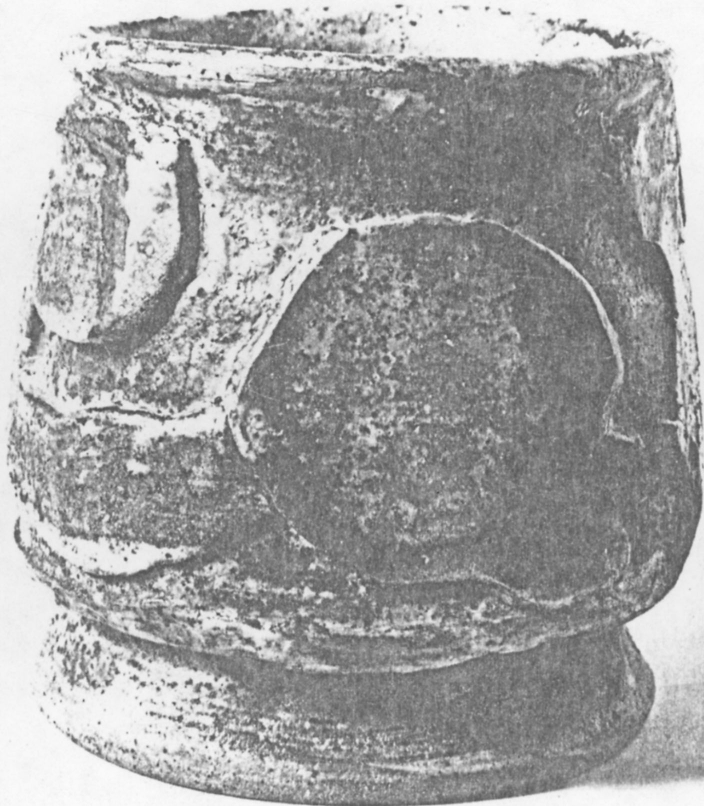

Fig. 6-5. Bowl by Peter Voulkos, stoneware, made in Los Angeles, height 6¼ in, 1956.

There is a temptation to analyze the 1950's revolution in terms of new techniques and ways of handling the clay, such as the slashes and pass-throughs which were symbolic of Voulkos's peculiar style. But the revolution which Voulkos achieved during the years he worked in clay at the Los Angeles County Art Institute, 1954-1959, cannot be limited to particular techniques. Voulkos tried everything, he learned from everyone, and he masterfully exploited each avenue in turn as he sought to develop a new alphabet and a new expressiveness in clay. (See Figure 6.) His revolution regenerated the traditions of hand-crafted ceramics which were incompetent to meet the challenge of technological change.

The attitude and style Voulkos acquired was capable of integrating all the influences converging in his environment and in his life-style, and still remain unquestionably personal. Through doing, working, struggling to master the material, struggling to encompass the ideas and the spirit of his time, he succeeded in carrying his medium a step beyond the limits of craftsmanship. Speed and innocence create an atmosphere of intense involvement that spontaneously integrates the influences of his environment and his personality. He described this style of working while demonstrating at the 10th Annual Supermud Conference at the Pennsylvania State University in 1976: "The quicker I work, the better I work. If I start thinking and planning, I start contriving and designing. I work mostly by gut feeling. The thing about clay is, it's an intimate material and fast-moving."[28] Voulkos's work is uncontrived, spontaneous and immediate. Technique has been subjugated so that the human element shines through boldly, relentlessly, uniquely. Contrary to the vision of Huxley's Brave New World, the man that is exposed already in the revolutionary

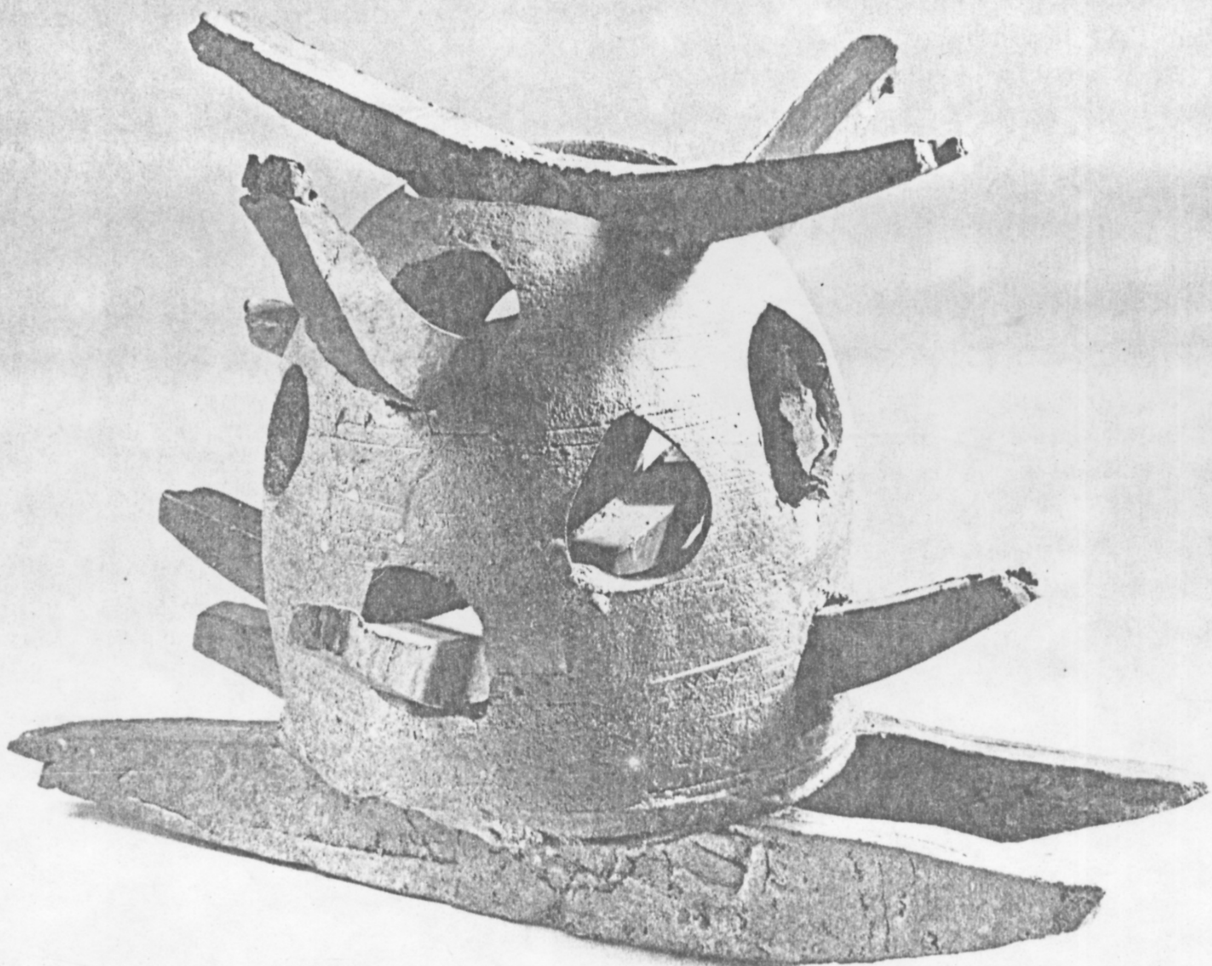

Fig. 6-6. *Rocking Pot*. Pot by Peter Voulkos, stoneware, height 14 in., 1956.

work of this period maintains his humanity through a spontaneous, natural and fulfilling interaction within the man-made environment. His work exemplifies the perfectly integrated response to clay in the age of science and technology. It is in fact a resurgence of traditional ideas.

In her biography, Peter Voulkos, A Dialogue With Clay, Slivka does homage to Voulkos's Greek heritage, describing him as "the one modern Greek who has kept his pact with the Greek past, who gave it continuity and engendered new life and new energy within the components of basic classical forms and traditional techniques."[29] Voulkos' revolution has not overturned tradition, but rather has refined and revitalized its spirit, giving it a dynamic living presence which dominates and transforms the pale repetition and horrifying violence of the technological age. (See Figure 7.)

The synthesis of centuries-old traditions with the vibrance and change of contemporary life is an accomplishment of living,[30] a merging of two disparate cultures.[31] What contributions has Voulkos made to the traditions of contemporary ceramics and contemporary art which earn him a position within our living cultural heritage? James Melchert, commenting on the show at the Quay Gallery in San Francisco in 1968, said, "They're purely hand products. There's a casualness about them, even an abandon, that's transparent to the spirit behind them....One thing about a Voulkos pot is that even when he misses, you know he's been there. The conception is so individual and dependent on him, that each pot works as a complete system in itself. It's not pottery that anyone else could take further."[32] To make each pot work as a complete system, Voulkos broke through the barriers of technique, of scale and of function. He exploded scale into the domain of the monumental, thereby capturing the

Fig. 6-7. *Anaqua*. Vase by Peter Voulkos, stoneware, height 36 in., 1968.

hitherto-ignored monolithic nature of the clay. He discarded the constraining use-oriented aesthetic of the potter's craft and replaced it with the anything-goes painterly aesthetic of the contemporary art scene. And he exploited techniques in a genuinely American mixture of uncontrived spontaneity and professional mastery. Voulkos demonstrated that technique, scale, and function could be governed by the artist so powerfully as to create a living personality, a living legend manifest in clay. He became an exemplar of the ongoing spirit of tradition. (See Figure 8.)

What Voulkos has done for contemporary ceramics can be witnessed in any university ceramics studio in the U.S. t0day. Even though his work is "not pottery that anyone else could take further,"[33] the precedents of scale, clay-handling techniques, and pure aesthetic function which he established, have a wide and continuing impact. Ceramic art will never be the same.

Voulkos's influence on the broader realm of art has been more subtle. He shows the abilit-y to imbibe the experimental, innovational spirit of tradition without getting lost in established conventions. The first generation of abstract expressionist painters, who inspired Voulkos, failed to recognize that the ductility of clay, and its capacity to fill and to create volumes, make it the ideal medium for the abstract expressionist philosophy. Slivka says, "The Los Angeles clay movement, with Voulkos its acknowledged leader, became the counterpart of the New York movement in painting, and its most direct and vigorous response, its natural extension in a material to which expressive action was intrinsic."[34] The vigor and directness of Voulkos' response to the abstract expressionist movement challenged the action-painters'failure to reach a larger audience with their work. As abstract art evolved into the non-objective, it was a steadily more sophisticated cultural elite that alone

Fig. 6-8. *Gallas Rock*. Sculpture by Peter Voulkos, height 96 in., 1959-1961.

could appreciate it. The "traditional forms"[35] which revealed the "heroic, Messianic, humanistic"[36] message for a lay public had been discarded. But when Voulkos expanded the philosophy of the "action painters" into three dimensions, the intimacy of the audience to the work was re-established. How Voulkos was exploiting and manipulating simple pottery forms was apparent to the most unsophisticated viewer; everyone was immediately freed from the analysis of technique to evaluate the Voulkos aesthetic and its message. The action painting manifesto of 'gesture' is a philosophy custom-made for clay. Voulkos arose as the fulfillment of the abstract-expressionist-vision.

Peter Voulkos: The potter, the painter, the sculptor, the musician, has learned to make the arts subservient to the wider aims of fulfillment of human life and culture. His work, and the philosophy behind his work, sweeps away the drudging machine repetition of the production potter. (See Figure 10.) In its place he exhibits unrestrained vitality and innovation as the hallmark of art and the mainstay of his tradition. The goal of perfection, "trying to make the greatest pot in the world," signifies his unshakable bond to tradition. The living force he brings to the time-honored goals of artists helps us to see tradition as a vital, unquenchable life-stream to be recognized, conquered and owned. Voulkos captured the essence of both the traditions of painting and of pottery and created in his art a model synthesis encompassing the full flavor of the contemporary aesthetic of the Western world. In Voulkos, innovation is compatible with the life-spirit of the artistic traditions.

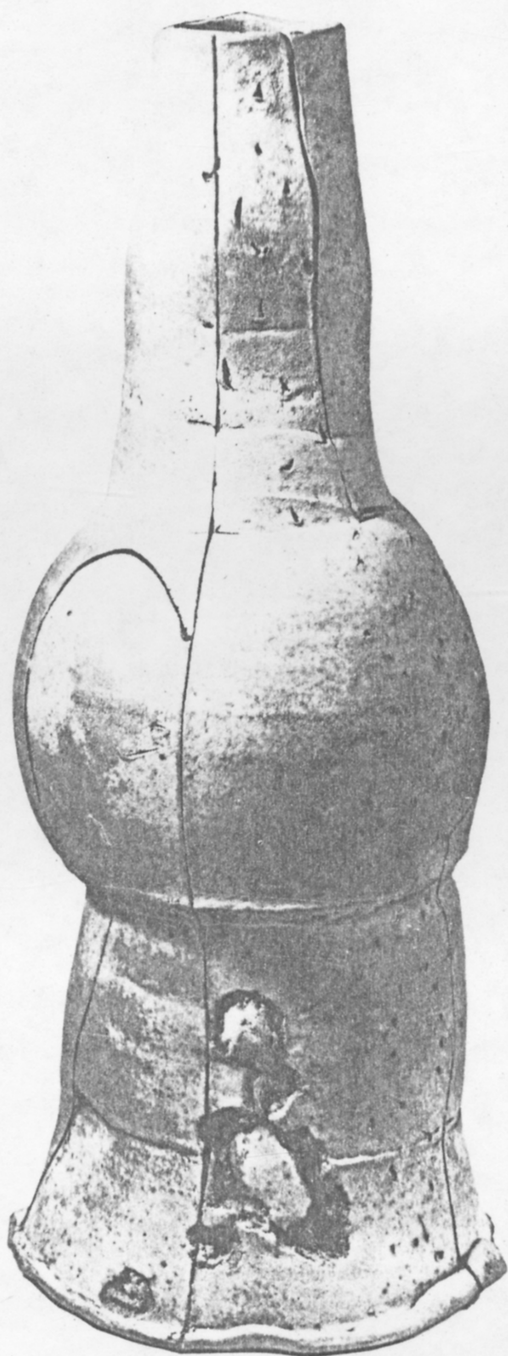

Fig. 6-9. Vase by Peter Voulkos, stoneware, height 40 in., 1977.

FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER 6

[1]John Canaday, Mainstreams of Modern Art, Henry Holt and Company, New York, 1959.

[2]Rose Slivka, Peter Voulkos, A Dialogue With Clay, Little, Brown and Co., New York, 1978, p. 106.

[3]Ibid., p. 86.

[4]Ibid., p. 125.

[5]Ibid., p. 17.

[6]Ibid., p. 108.

[7]Ibid., p. 109.

[8]Conrad Brown, "Peter Voulkos" Craft Horisons 10:12, 1956,

[9]R. Slivka, Peter Voulkos, p. 109.

[10]Paul S. Donhauser, History of American Ceramics, Kendall-Hunt, Dubuque, 1978, illustrations, pp. 150-151.

[11]R. Slivka, Peter Voulkos, p. 16.

[12]Ibid., p. 108.

[13]Ibid., p. 86-87.

[14]Voulkos flew as a nose gunner in the Pacific theatre of the U.S. Air Force during W.W. II, R. Slivka, Peter Voulkos, p. xiii.

[15]P. Donhauser, Hostory of American Ceramics, p. 45.

[16]Soetsu Yanagi, The Unknown Craftsman, Kodansha International Ltd., Tokyo, 1973, pp. 119 ff.

[17]R. Slivka, Peter Voulkos, p. 77.

[18]Barbara Rose, American Art Since 1900, Praeger, New York, 1975, p. 151.

[19]Ibid., p. 160.

[20]Ibid., p. 159.

[21]Ibid., p. 159.

[22]R. Slivka, Peter Voulkos, p. 16.

[23]Ibid., p. 16.

[24]Ibid., p. 67.

[25]Ibid., p. 23.

[26]Ibid., p. 25.

[27]Ibid., p. 33.

[28]Ibid., p. 78.

[29]Ibid., p. 86.

[30]Voulkos is an innovator in life-style as well; see R. Slivka, Peter Voulkos, pp. 62-66.

[31]The liberal arts and the sciences; see C.P. Snow, The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution, Cambridge University Press, New York, 1962.

[32]R. Slivka, Peter Voulkos, p. 74, Craft Horisons, Sept.-Oct., 1968.

[33]Ibid.

[34]R. Slivka, Peter Voulkos, p. 34.

[35]Ibid., p. 160.

[36]Ibid., p. 160.

Fig. 6-10. *Sevillanos*. Sculpture by Peter Voulkos, stoneware, height 57 in., 1959.

CHAPTER 7

SUPERMUD

Hamada's tour of the U.S. with Leach and Yenagi in 1952 brought him into contact with Peter Voulkos and Rudy Autio at the Archie Bray Foundation in Helena, Montana, and also with Maria Martinez at her San Ildefonso Pueblo pottery in New Mexico. Great camaraderie and friendship was established between these potters of different cultures. The work of their hands in clay fixed bonds of friendship and respect despite the vast differences in their techniques and philosophies.

The Japanese folkcraft tradition exemplified by Hamada, and the tradition of Western painting and the abstract expressionists, exemplified by Peter Voulkos, epitomize the extreme polarities of Eastern and Western cultures. What they have in common externally is that their medium is clay, and each stands within a tradition. There is a great tension between these two streams. One demands strict adherence to convention and frequent repetition, advocating use of the hand to express the feeling in the heart. The other demands the creation of the novel, the breaking of boundaries, departure from convention, and the elimination of the alienation which accompanies machine-like repetition. Their standards of beauty are not the same. The Western artist's lifestyle is progressive while Hamada's, in keeping with the tradition of folkcrafts, is reactionary and conservative. Certainly the products of their work are incommensurable.

The divergence of these two traditions would be a mere curiosity except for the remarkable fact that both streams are now feeding together into the contemporary American ceramic scene. The American artist-potter is torn between conflicting life-styles, contrasting ideals, a tradition of simplicity opposed to a tradition of novelty and complexity. Each American potter must take a stand, either in one or another of these traditions, or in some blended integral of the two. Voulkos and Hamada have responded to the twentieth century challenge of the technological age. Their traditions have demonstrated the vitality which sustains them generation after generation. But a new challenge has come forth, namely to reconcile perhaps even unify these two approaches to nature and to clay, and eliminate the tension and conflict through the integrity of a larger wholeness.

The history of ceramics in the past twenty years has been a concerted effort to locate and establish a genuinely American tradition: one that will reflect the customs and the needs of the American people and will be true to the heritage of East and West that has influenced their development.

These artists have contributed in varying degrees: The American Indian pottery is an outgrowth of a culture and life-style not shared by the American people as a whole. Contacts and interaction with the Japanese has been much wider: raku has been absorbed, at least as a technique, into the studio potter's repertoire, and the influence of the Japenese attitude or philosophy of clay has penetrated into the best work of contemporary ceramics in America.[1] And of course Peter Voulkos has become a cultural hero in the world of clay artists, because he has almost singlehandedly brought clay out of the limiting expectations of craft, into the domain of art.

Twenty-five years ago, Hamada, touring the U.S. claimed that studio pottery in the U.S. was still very green. The same could be said today, for the establishment of an indigenous tradition is the work of every generation, not one alone. Because of the polar opposites which are interacting at the wellsprings of American ceramics, it may be impossible to determine what shape a mature American tradition could take when all useful contributions had been accepted and integrated. The pot-pourrie of styles and effects which have flowed out of studios since the Voulkos revolution, are each an attempt to gather together the threads of tradition in a lasting synthesis. Contemporary ceramics, with its willingness to move in any direction and test any fad or whimsy is much like the "democracy" which Plato described--none too reverently--in The Republic:[2]

"Liberty and free speech are rife everywhere; anyone is allowed to do what he likes. . . . That being so, every man will arrange his own manner of life to suit his pleasure. The result will be a greater variety of individuals than under any other constitution. So it may be the finest of all, with its variegated pattern of all sorts of characters. Many people may think it the best. . . ."[1] Plato has pinpointed the source of the diversity of styles and approaches in contemporary ceramics. But what he has not recognized is the role of communication in integrating diverse ideas. Freedom leads to diversity but at the same time communication creates a common basis. Communication, the exchange of ideas, is the most powerful integrating force for the bizarre tensions of East and West afflicting ceramics today. In the following we will examine a 12-year experiment in bringing artists and students together from across the country for the exchange of ideas.

Maturity in the American ceramic scene has its basis not in common techniques or common philosophies about clay, but respect for and acceptance of diversity within a unitary multi-branched contemporary tradition.

Starting in 1967, The Pennsylvania State University art department has brought together 4--12artist-potters from across the country every year for a 3-day conference. They show exhibits of their recent work, and give demonstrations, and slide lectures. After a dozen years, every major ceramic artist in the U.S. has demonstrated at Penn State. The result has been an affirmation of the basic principles of free expression in a field of art known historically for its covert technology and arcane craft.

The public demonstration of each artist at work, making his 'art' is the focus of the conference. The power, energy and success of the conferences is found here, because the artists reveal their philosophy of clay through their approach to their work. The students and teachers are alert to the philosophical value, the teaching value, because it is in the life of the artist that his traditions express their vitality. It is difficult to come to grips with a philosophy made viable by a simple cup. But in the demonstration situation, the artists are expressing their ideas aloud as they work, interacting with the audience. The boldness of the potters to display their working habits in front of a thousand people, and their openness to the challenges and questions from the audience and from their fellow artists makes this exchange of ideas, techniques and philosophies possible. But there has to be a give and take for it to be successful. The audience must be receptive, they

must show a willingness to be involved, to be challenged, to bring their own ideas into question.

What is communicated, what silently passes from teacher to student during the demonstrations is the excitement of creativity. Warren MacKenzie, Professor of Art from the University of Minnesota described the phenomenon this way:

"With all these people you sit down and you start to work. And there is a certain period when things are awkward and jokes are made. But as the time goes on, they became more intent on the particular thing they were doing. Their struggle with that and their achievements and failures which are immediately evident in their gestures and the expressions on their faces--they're communicating. . . . It's very difficult to create anything in front of 1500 people. But still, they're struggling and looking and they get caught up in that if they're really artists."[3] There comes a special moment in their work when the pot springs alive. When all the parts they've contributed to a piece come together and their idea stands forth complete and good for all to see, then their life and their work are communicated in that same unknown, magic moment. It's the excitement of this intimate and quiet communication between artist and audience that draws hundreds of people into the arena of the free exchange of ideas at each year's conference.

The artist doesn't lose anything by explaining his philosophy of work, demonstrating his techniques of handling the clay, or divulging his glazes and technical resources. Technical information flows freely at Supermud in accordance with the organizer's desire to make the information available to all who could use it. It's not the technique which

is the crucial ingredient: a good glaze alone will not make a good pot. What is important is how the techniques are brought together into a personal statement of the individual artist.

Where different traditions are being brought together, there is no correct philosophy, no proper technique, no ultimate value of beauty. Each student must be willing to probe and find the answers for what is right for him. The Supermud conferences, bringing together potters from different parts of the country and different attitudes toward clay provides the framework of possibilities that mature artists are exploring. Seeing the artists involved in their work helps to show the students what questions to ask. The integrity and coherence between the artist's personality and his work characterized all of these potters; and the wholeness of man and work is the starting point for each student's own search.

The effect of the Supermud conferences on the students who attended has been vivid. Their minds are really opened up in a way not possible in a school situation with one or two instructors.[4] Aware of a broader world of possibilities, their work loosens up, and they begin to try different things than before.[5] Warren MacKenzie, commenting on his students from Bennington,Vermont at the close of the 1976 Supermud said, "They're thrilled. They said they'd never seen anything like this. And they're ready to go back and destroy all their work, they find themselves so wanting in what they have seen here."[6] Artists and students, confronted by a variety of approaches and techniques must--if they are open to it--reevaluate their ideas in the light of their new perspective. They may try new things and change their style of working, or they may return to their work more sure of themselves, and with

greater appreciation of their position in the broader scheme of contemporaary ceramic art. In any event, their experience will broaden their awareness of the ceramic world, and the free exchange of ideas will have put them in touch with the life and thought of a diverse group of "practical philosophers."

David DonTigny, Professor of Art at Penn State University and founder of the Supermud Conference said, "Art reflects society."[7] Supermud Conference, bringing together artists from across the country gives the students an intense overview of the style and content of contemporary culture. But most important, by revealing through contact with the artist, the philosophy behind the "simple cup"[8] it makes people aware of the spiritual value that art contributes to society. Art gives meaning, content or substance to the forms of day to day life: "Without art," DonTigny explained, "you have a technological society without meaning, without spiritual value." The communication of ideas at Supermud brings together the many divergent streams in society, relates them to each other and thus strengthens to whatever small extent the coherence and interrelationship of society as a whole. As the culture is integrated through the free exchange of ideas, the traditions which nourish the culture are increasingly harmonized and stabilized. When the integrity and worth of each stream, of each separate approach to clay is recognized, then all traditions are uplifted. A picture emerges of a culture-wide coherent tradition, accepting all the streams, and fostering their growth through open communication and respect for the integrity of each component philosophy.

Shoji Hamada, discussing American ceramics with Susan Peterson in 1970 said, "Four hundred years have passed since Columbus, and that is

enough to develop a quite respectable tradition."The progressive exchange of ideas and the interaction of the different strands of tradition during conferences such as Supermud are bringing the clay culture together into an ever more coherent whole. It may be too soon to talk of a single American ceramics tradition. But already the American attitude towards ceramics has been influencing pottery all around the world. The freedom to hear and examine new ideas, to evaluate them, accepting or rejecting them according to their usefulness, is such a powerful liberty that it can't help but reach out and express its character. This American flavor, if it can be called that, is being increasingly recognized as valid, and people are responding to it. Warren MacKenzie said "I think things that have been happening in America include all sorts of things, such as a sense of discovery, a sense of newness, a sense of "it can be done."[9] This flamboyant free spirit is pushing onward to a new synthesis, a genuine American tradition.

Hamada has described the vital life-source in a tradition as "an underground spring," something inside of each person, if he knows to look for it. "Usually people receive the water from the branch of a river, but there is this underground spring that anyone can probe if he would."[10] When an artist makes his own statement, rather than imitating or copying the work of others, he is drawing from this underground spring. His work contributes to the heritage of his culture and becomes symbolic of the sustenance available in the living artistic tradition. When that self-sufficiency and intimate relationship to the inner source of tradition is more fully established, then the artist's accomplishments in art are taken another step further; "That spring

water becomes your blood. If one comes to that point I think you feel you can do anything."[11]

The sense of it-can-be-done by which MacKenzie describes the spirit of American ceramics points to what Hamada describes as a fully flowered state of life, when the wellsprings of tradition are fully owned as one's own blood and anything is possible. The free communication of Supermud, by opening each individual to new insights, new ideas, new possibilities, is helping to carry our culture rapidly to a field of all possibilities, unrestricted expression. For American ceramics, communication, the free exhcange of ideas, is bringing individuals into contact with their own inner source, and in so doing is breathing life and integrity into the ceramic world. There can be variety in a tradition without chaos, if the variety has a common basis. That basis should be the openness and receptivity to all possible expressions as well as the ability of each artist to express uniquely his own underground spring. And that state may be the genuinely mature American ceramic tradition.

FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER 7

[1]Peter Freund, "Interview with Warren MacKenzie," Supermud '76, Oct. 23, 1976, manuscript, p. 20.

[2]The Republic of Plato, Francis M. Cornford, tr., Oxford University Press, New York, 1950, p. 282.

[3]P. Freund, "Interview with Warren MacKenzie," p. 17.

[4]Ibid., p. 12.

[5]Peter Freund, "Interview with David DonTigny," Dec. 14, 1978.

[6]P. Freund, "Interview with Warren MacKenzie," p. 16.

[7]P. Freund, "Interview with David DonTigny."

[8]See above.

[9]P. Freund, "Interview with Warren MacKenzie," p. 22.

[10]Susan Peterson, Shoji Hamada, A Potter's Way and Work, Kodansha International, Ltd., Tokyo, 1974, p. 190.

[11]Ibid., p. 190.