

SHARDS

A Newsletter of the

Volume 7, Issue 1

China Students' Club of Boston

September 2003

Linda Foss Nichols on 'Images in Clay: Continuity and Change in Indian Pottery From the American Southwest' Report by Jeff Brown

The CSC is most often addressed by scholars and collectors speaking on research in a certain field of ceramics. We hear of archaeological evidence, discuss forms and methods of production, factory histories, social usage, etc.. Seldom do we hear of the "spirituality" of the ceramic artist and of the object itself and rarely do we hear from so eloquent an artist as we did in April. Linda Foss Nichols was an artist who despaired of the minimalist movement in the American art scene, before becoming a museum professional. She looked to Native American arts for inspiration in her own work and that is how her intense appreciation of these art forms began.

Geographically, we are discussing the "Four Corners" of the Southwest where four present day states meet: Utah, Colorado, New Mexico and Arizona. Three distinct cultures had formed in the Pre-historic era: the Anasazi, the Hohokam, and the Mogollon (see examples on back page). By the time the Spanish arrived in the Southwest, these groups had settled themselves in pueblos up and down the Rio Grande River. In addition to the Rio Grande pueblos, there were also the Hopi in northern Arizona, the Zuni, and the Acoma. These people settled in agricultural communities in this expansive, rather unforgiving landscape—a landscape so large that Linda described it as making a human feel at its absolute center. The inhabitants of this land are connected to it in ways that are impossible for us to understand.

This huge landscape is rich in clay deposits. The vessels that the people make from this clay are the vehicles that most eloquently express their culture. They produce fine jewelry and textiles, but Linda

thinks that they are first and foremost "clay people." The potter digs her own clay right from the earth. It is believed that clay belongs to women, and potting is traditionally considered woman's work. Clay is referred to as the flesh of Mother Earth, and in the creation legends all mankind comes from this clay, the womb of Mother Earth. Men may assist in the production process, but women really "own" the clay—it is their art. Due to present day economics, this tradition is breaking down and as pots are commanding higher prices men are slowly becoming potters in their own right.

All pots are hand-built without a wheel. After drying, the pot is sanded smooth to receive the slip. Mineral paints are used to decorate the piece. The brushes are made from the leaves of the yucca plants which are chewed by the potter to release the bristle-like fibers. Pots were traditionally fired in an open self-consuming kiln fire. There were four small fires built around this "kiln" to honor the four directions. The clays and slips are red, but pots can be made in either a shiny red or shiny black surface. The black is produced by smothering the fire towards the end of its run. In Acoma almost all potters use electric kilns today. Acoma's pots are known for their intricately detailed painting made possible by the electric kiln: who is going to go to great lengths to decorate a piece and leave it to the vagaries of a virtual bonfire for its firing? The market continues to respond well—people like the elaborate painting and so the trend feeds upon itself and pieces get more ornate. Thereby, Linda thinks that something has been lost.

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Indian Pottery From the American Southwest

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Linda didn't want us to think that all this ritual and tradition has produced a static art form. She thinks of tradition as a skeleton, a foundation upon which each artist builds her individual form.

Birds play an important role in the imagery of the pots, as a bird played an important part in the culture's early creation legend. Given the arid climate and the crucial importance of water, many birds take on a distinct duck-like shape. Certain birds are identified with the different directions, the heavens and the underworld. As women are most often excluded from the community's religious house (kiva) and its ceremonial prayers for rain, it is said that women include birds on their pots as their way of imploring the heavens for rain. Birds could carry these prayers straight to heaven. Birds and other decorative motifs on pots, as well as ceremonial dances, all move counter-clockwise like the sun.

Another decorative motif on pottery is the images of katsina, a group of deities who represent the spirits of dead ancestors who take messages to the gods for the people—invariably pleas for rain. They are known as the Cloud People and they are honored through dance, song, and by being represented on pottery. Pottery images of katsina proliferated by the end of the 19th century not because of any major



**Acoma pot with bird
by Rachel Aragon**

drought but because of the images' popularity with tourists. Other images can be of rain, clouds, and lightning, while other tribes in the area developed more geometric or floral styles. Vessels' forms are made to represent Mother Earth and seeds are stored in them over winter. When the seeds are planted one of the vessels is placed in the earth as well. The next generation is carrying on the tradition, but there are definitely directions of decoration being taken that reflect the influence of the modern world. But one cannot escape the visual expressiveness and powerful images of Southwest Indian pottery.

Amanda Lange on 'Basins, Bottles, and Brushes: Ceramics for the Bedchamber,' and Annual Meeting and Tea: Report by Jeff Brown

The CSC closed out another great year with its annual meeting and tea on Thursday, May 22nd. A brief business meeting preceded the lecture during which we heard a message of appreciation and thanks from President Jim Kaufman to all Board members who worked so hard to make the year such a success. The club, according to our treasurer's report, is in good financial shape (always good news!) and membership is up. Members present voted to approve Johanna McBrien's nomination as our new corresponding secretary—many thanks Johanna!

Program Director Anne Lanning then introduced her colleague Amanda Lange from Historic Deerfield

who spoke to the group on "Basins, Bottles and Brushes: Ceramics for the Bedchamber."

Amanda admitted that the subject at first did not appear as glamorous as ceramics for the drawing room or dining room, but the objects help tell a story of personal appearance, disease, health, and hygiene in the 18th century. We have to put aside our present day concepts of personal hygiene and privacy to understand 18th century life, for, despite the elegant and refined artifacts that have been left behind, there were many aspects of life that just weren't that pleasant.

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Ceramics for the Bedchamber

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Early New England families were large and extensive and family members and dependents often slept several to a bed and in almost any other available space—kitchens, parlors, halls, and garrets. Most 18th century houses held a bed in almost every room—some of them portable. The bed was the most expensive piece of furniture in the house, combining a straw-filled tick, a featherbed, a bolster and two pillows, covered with linens, crowned with a counterpane, and hung with expensive fabric. When bed curtains were drawn for privacy or warmth, the bed became a room of its own. And just as the great bed told of the family's wealth and status, bedchamber ceramics told of their personal hygiene. And how often did our ancestors bathe? Virtually never. The wash basin was not much bigger than a mixing bowl and people seldom washed beyond the face and hands. Soap was extremely expensive and used primarily for washing clothes. Plus, keep in mind, with several people sharing a room there was seldom the privacy for extensive bathing. People must have smelled of bad teeth, stale perspiration, tobacco, unclean bodies, and dirty clothes. Far more importance was attached to the appearance of cleanliness than to the reality of it. Perfumes, pomades, and scented waters were used to mask odors. Wash basins and water bottles were made in matching patterns not much before the second quarter of the 18th century. The basin's everted rim allowed it to fit into a wash stand. The exterior of the basin, sunken into the stand, was seldom decorated. The bottles, most often associated with water and not wine, were called gugglets for the gurgling sound they made. Most wash sets were of English manufacture, the best were of Chinese export porcelain. By the beginning of the 19th century there is an ever increasing importance placed on personal cleanliness as people were beginning to associate it with better health.

Of course, the most important ceramic article in the bedchamber was the chamber pot—a necessity when a long, cold, midnight trek to an outdoor privy was impractical. Chamber pots were also



Chamber pot, lead-glazed earthenware decorated with slips, the Midlands area or Bristol, England, c. 1700-1750. Historic Deerfield, Inc.

This chamber pot descended in the Spenser-Bishop families of Guilford, Connecticut

known as “jakes,” “thunderpots,” or “nighthawks.” They were tucked out of sight, as society placed such emphasis on politeness, propriety, and decency so that baser functions of the human body had to be hidden. The high mortality of chamber pots due to usage led customers to purchase them in great numbers. The early 18th century pots were made of coarse redware, slipware, pewter, and tin-glazed earthenware. Usually undecorated, they often came with metal lids that seldom survive today. The second half of the century saw the prevalent use of creamware, later to be replaced by pearlware.

By the second half of the 18th century, courtly fashions were trickling down to the “middling sorts” and the emphasis was, as already mentioned, on a tidy appearance and elaborate personal grooming. These elaborate toilettes involved ceramic containers to hold the required pomades, patches, and powders. In addition to apothecaries dispensing all manner of beauty aids from delft apothecary jars, members of the middle class created their own recipes and stored them in delft ointment pots. Scent bottles made of ceramic and glass contained perfumes and scented waters. The early 18th century fashion for heavier musk scents gave way later in the century to

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Ceramics for the Bedchamber

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a preference for floral and citrus scents. The bottles were laid out on the dressing table, carried or even worn. Wedgwood made many in his popular Jasperwares.

Men were almost always clean-shaven, this being achieved either at home or, in urban areas, at the barber shop. Wig wearers also had to shave their heads. Shaving bowls were made of a variety of materials but almost always had the same form—a deep wide bowl whose wide rim had a depression for a soap ball and a curved indentation to fit the customer's throat. Some bowls were decorated with the “tools of the trade” and some with mottos reminding the customer to pay his quarterly bill.

The bedchamber served, finally, as a sickroom for the family and had to be made as comfortable and convenient for the patient as well as for the nursemaid. Ceramic porringers or bleeding bowls were used by surgeons to bleed the patient to restore his equilibrium of humors. Ceramic feeders were used to nourish recovering patients (if they survived the bleeding). Veilleuses were used as combination nightlights and food warmers; a complete one is rarely found today. It is composed of a hollow pedestal that holds a candle on which rests a teapot or covered bowl. Amanda's favorite form—the posset pot—was used in the sickroom to feed the patients. It consisted of a covered bowl with a built-in drinking tube. The posset, a mixture of curdled milk and wine or other alcoholic beverage, was sipped through



Shaving Bowl, tin-glazed earthenware with cobalt blue decoration, London or Bristol, England, c. 1700-1720. Historic Deerfield, Inc.

This bowl is decorated with the tools of the barber's trade.

the tube, the curd eaten with a spoon. Posset as a social drink was surpassed in popularity by tea and punch but remained a recuperative drink well into the 19th century. Pap was a mixture of bread and milk, sometimes with honey or egg, that was usually administered to infants through a pap boat or ceramic feeder with an extended spout.

These were some of the ceramic articles found in the 18th century bedchamber—a place of far greater social status, public use, and family activity than today's bedroom.

Promotions at Historic Deerfield

As everyone knows, the CSC has strong ties to Historic Deerfield, with an enthusiastic contingent from there present at almost every meeting. So it is with enormous pleasure that we congratulate two CSC members who have recently been promoted at that venerable institution: **Amanda Lange** has been named Curator of Historic Interiors and **Anne Digan**

Lanning, our Program Director, has been named not only Curator of Interpretation but also Chair of the Curatorial Department.

Their hard work and research has never gone unnoticed by the CSC, and we extend to them our heartiest congratulations on their new positions!

Jeff Brown

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Upcoming Ceramics Events

Auctions:

British & continental ceramics:

10/9, Christie's London
11/6, Christie's London (19th century)
11/27, Christie's London
12/1, Sotheby's London
12/11, Christie's London
1/20-21, Christie's NY (English porcelain)

Chinese:

9/17, Sotheby's NY
9/18, Christie's NY
10/26, Sotheby's Hong Kong
10/27, Christie's Hong Kong
11/4, Christie's Amsterdam
11/5, Sotheby's Amsterdam
11/11, Christie's London
11/12, Sotheby's London
11/13, Sotheby's London
11/14, Christie's London

12/11, Sotheby's London

1/22, Christie's NY (export)

European ceramics and Dutch Delftware:

10/14, Sotheby's Amsterdam
11/11, Christie's Amsterdam

Japanese:

9/16, Christie's NY (+Korean)
11/4, Christie's Amsterdam
11/5, Sotheby's Amsterdam
11/11, Sotheby's London
11/12, Christie's London
12/4, Christie's London
12/11, Sotheby's London

Miscellaneous ceramics:

10/15, Sotheby's Paris
12/2, Sotheby's Paris
12/2, Sotheby's London
12/16, Sotheby's Milan
12/16, Christie's Paris.

This and That

The Law vs. the Auctioneer:

The following is based on a story that appeared in the Cape Cod Times on 8/12/03.

About three years ago, the Margaret Woodbury Strong Museum of Rochester, NY, mostly famous for its collection of 70,000 toys and dolls, decided to de-access some Asian art in its possession. It chose the Cape Cod auction house of C. Eldred Co., known for its Asian art sales, to dispose of these pieces. Among them was the elaborately decorated yellow-ground 23-inch Chinese vase depicted on page 6. Eldred judged the vase to be of 19th century vintage and appraised it at \$800-1200. At the December 2000 auction it actually sold for \$23,000. The Museum was, undoubtedly, happy with this result—until the vase resurfaced at Christie's Hong Kong April 2001 auction, identified as dating from the Qianlong period (1736-1795), and appraised at \$380,000-520,000. The Museum's chagrin rose even further when the vase ended up fetching \$1,550,000 at the auction! They are now suing Eldred's for breach of contract and negligence in misidentifying the vase and underestimating its value. Such a suit appears

to be unprecedented, and the entire auction world is awaiting its outcome with trepidation.

According to Christie's catalog, "Few vases of this impressive size can rival the present lot for the sumptuousness of decoration." Yet, given the difficulty of dating Chinese pieces (remember Bill Sargent's lecture about Jingdezhen last year!), who knows when the vase was actually made?

Auction record:

The first piece of European porcelain to fetch more than a million at auction was sold by Christie's in London on 6/13/02. Lot 350 of the *Furniture, silver and porcelain from Longleat* sale was a Meissen white figurine of a fox, modeled by J. Kirchner and J. J. Kändler, ca. 1732. Eighteen inches tall, it was one of several large animal models made for Meissen's patron, Augustus the Strong. Early Meissen technology was not adequate for such projects, and the result is that the figures are all marred by firing cracks, as can be readily seen in the illustration on page 6. The piece was knocked down for exactly £1,000,000, or \$1,051,650 including the buyer's premium.



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Mogollon (left, 1030-1200)
and Anasazi (right, 1200-1300)
pottery from the Logan Museum
of Anthropology, Beloit, WI



Chinese vase
Subject to litigation
(see page 5)



Million-dollar Meissen fox
(see page 5)