

Arthur Mueller



Concentration and Composure

Antje Soléau

Since 1989, Arthur Mueller has been workshop manager at the Institute of Ceramic and Glass Arts in Höhr-Grenzhausen (IKKG), a department of the University of Applied Sciences in Koblenz. Over this period he has accompanied countless ceramists on their path to become artists. However it is relatively little-known that Arthur Mueller himself has created a notable body of art – he is not one to steal the limelight. On the other hand, he is not short of a healthy sense of self-confidence, which is necessary for survival as an artist in this demanding environment.

Arthur Mueller was born in Newark, New Jersey in 1955 as the son of German emigrants, but his parents soon returned to Germany. It was a time when people were seeking career alternatives when Arthur Mueller attended secondary school in Ludwigsburg. In art lessons he had almost effortlessly become acquainted with clay as a medium and with the potter's wheel – the Canadian sculptor and painter Gerhard Harpe, who taught art and mathematics at the school at that time had a decisive influence on him – so it seemed obvious to train as a ceramist. He learned the potter's trade from the very basics at Kurt Schöffel's pottery in Alfdorf, where traditional, country style pottery had been produced for five

generations, and it had its own clay pit right behind the house, so the clay they used had to be prepared on site. After further training in Herne, Bremen and the Westerwald, where, as he says himself, he learned to appreciate the thoroughness of his training at the Schöffel pottery, he attended the technical college for ceramics design in Höhr-Grenzhausen, where





Photos - Fotostudio Baumann, Höhr-Grenzhausen

Wolf Matthes initiated him into the mysterious world of glazes. After qualifying as a master craftsman, his career took him to the workshop of Hans and Renate Heckmann in Schwäbisch Hall, where he was responsible for the apprentices. It almost goes without saying that over this period, he achieved complete mastery of the art of throwing. The Heckmanns allowed their employees a great deal of freedom to design new series of work to present at exhibitions and tradeshows. At that time, Arthur Mueller rented a house with a workshop in Schwäbisch Hall from a stonemason, which provided him with sufficient space to develop his own forms and glazes.

He says that working at the IKKG since 1989 has completely fulfilled him, but he has always remained faithful to the principle of continuing to develop individual pieces himself. But he has never found the time to step into the limelight himself or with this body of work. In all the years – either at the Heckmann studio or the IKKG – Arthur Mueller has always followed a dual track policy: he has dedicated himself fully to the training of the young people entrusted to him, but nevertheless he has not for-

gotten himself. "Working in the studio all on my own would not have been enough." In this way, he has always been in contact with young people and their ideas. "This keeps you open-minded and on your toes". He first encountered the area of art in public spaces – an exciting field of activity for ceramists – when he was in Schwäbisch Hall. It became particularly important for Arthur Mueller when he was an assistant to Barbara Stehr and the architect, Walter Brunsmann, with their course in architectural and building studies at the IKKG. Evidence of its significance can be found in numerous projects developed by students as part of their courses, and the subject area is considered equally important by Jochen Brandt, Barbara Stehr's successor. The knowledge and skills he acquired during these courses have increasingly influenced his own work.

Before Arthur Mueller started at the IKKG, he had fired exclusively in gas or electric kilns, but the restoration of a traditional, large cross-draught kiln, a "Kannofen" at the IKKG, inspired him to become involved in woodfiring. At a workshop at the International Ceramics Studio in Kecskemet in Hungary, he learned more about controlling the firing and about natural ash glazes. Facilities for using woodfiring at the Institute were considerably enlarged with the construction of an anagama and a fuel efficient woodfired kiln during the guest professorship of Frederick L. Olsen from the USA in 2003.

Arthur Mueller believes that woodfiring makes possible and



enhances contemporary forms of expression. „Woodfiring does not mean becoming totally orientated to Japan, woodfiring gives you greater potential.“ And woodfiring does more than make you lust after impressive surfaces without taking serious interest in overall design – however that is achieved. He calls for different standards to be taught, which should be contemporary and based on the artist’s own cultural background. He also believes that colour should receive greater emphasis in woodfiring. This would be a challenge for the colleges in particular.

In the course of his work at the Institute, Arthur Mueller has had a unique opportunity to experiment with various types of kiln and the results of firing in them. „I love taking various materials to the limits!“ He throws several examples of his simple, forceful jugs, bowls, dishes and vases – you could almost speak of serial production –, making them if porcelain or fine stoneware, then glazes or slip coats them and fires them in a gas kiln, an anagama or the Kannofen. The results are astonishing: the same form looks completely different depending on the kiln type and the firing as well as its position in the kiln. This is what Arthur Mueller is interested in: diversity in restraint, restraint in diversity. Of course a part of this is glaze research.

He himself describes his urge to research as somewhat playful. „I like receiving gifts from the kiln.“ The element of fire, with a power that can only be controlled to a limited extent, can still regularly surprise even an experienced ceramist like Arthur Mueller. He is glad to accept these surprises as gifts, although they are only revealed when the kiln is opened. But he is also fully aware of where the pot has been standing in the kiln, how the flames may have passed around it and which colouring oxides and salts may have been volatilised from the various

ashes and glazes, then to settle on the vessels in the immediate vicinity. A detailed kiln log is kept as a record and makes the firing procedures more readily comprehensible. But only up to a point, because the flames are unpredictable.

In the recently published book, „Keramik Leben – Collection Peter Siemssen Stiftung“, Arthur Mueller describes his concept of ceramics as follows: „The more experienced I became, the more the view that rotational symmetry was limited created in me a sense of composure, far removed from any insecurity... Ideas such as calm, peace, distance, lightness and heaviness, serenity, joie de vivre, tension, relaxation and freshness can all be easily expressed and the viewers recognise them.“ Arthur Mueller’s vessel sculptures radiate an inimitable sense of grandezza and seem to be on a plane above all the inhospitality in this world.





ILLUSTRATIONS

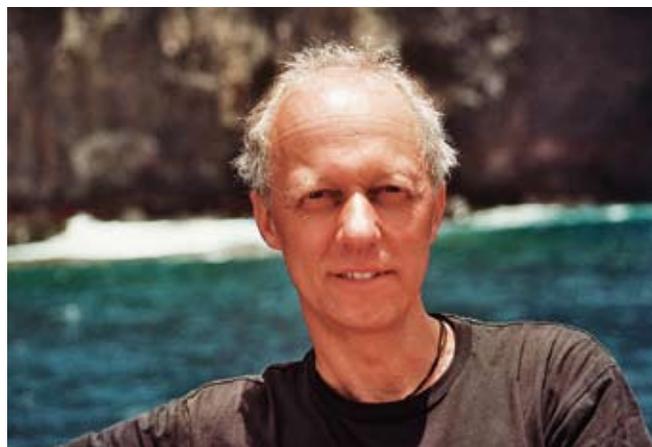
top - opposite page
jugs
h 17 - 26 cm

above left
blue bowls + bowl
with celadon glaze
h 13 - 23 cm

above right
vase
h 44 cm
bowl
d 46 cm
bowl
h 14 cm, d 25 cm

left
bowl
h 18 cm, d 28 cm

UPCOMING EXHIBITION
„Cups only“ - 2-26 April 2008
Crusoe-Halle Bremen
Böttcherstraße
D-28195 Bremen, Germany



Arthur Mueller was born in 1955 in Newark, New Jersey USA in 1955; 1973 – 1976 training as a ceramist Werkstatt Kurt Schöffel, Alfdorf; 1976 – 1979 journeyman potter in various potteries; 1978 – 1980 student at the Fachschule für Keramikgestaltung, Höhr-Grenzhausen; 1980 qualification as master craftsman, commendation at the Rhineland Palatinate State Prize and Young Talent Competition; 1981 – 1989 master potter at the Heckmann pottery in Schwäbisch Hall; since 1989 workshop manager at the Institut für künstlerische Keramik und Glas der Fachhochschule Koblenz, Höhr-Grenzhausen; since 1990 member of the crafts association, Bundesverband Kunsthandwerk; 2006 Deutsche Meisterkeramik competition – prize for design and vessel. Lives and works in Höhr-Grenzhausen.

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