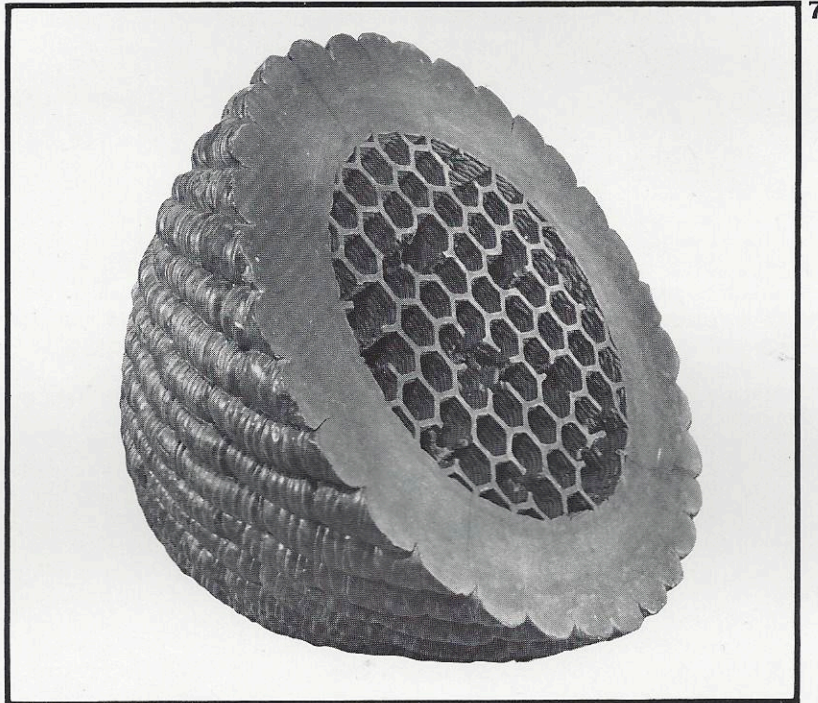


PERSPECTIVES: GRAHAM MARKS



When is a pot no longer a pot? If a form is inspired by, built as, and resembles a container, but cannot be actually used as a container, what is it? If it looks like a pot but is ten times larger than one, is it a pot or is it a sculpture?

These questions are occurring with greater frequency as the work of increasing numbers of contemporary artists has begun to break the barriers between the craft and painting/sculpture traditions, thereby broadening and redefining the nature of each. In a series of one-person exhibitions titled *PERSPECTIVES*, the John Michael Kohler Arts Center brings to Wisconsin the work of nationally renowned artists who have emerged from a craft background and whose work speaks of the "coming of age" of American crafts within the contemporary art world. One such artist is Graham Marks, a New York ceramist whose mammoth vessel forms reflect the traditions and the conceptual and technical concerns of both the potter and the sculptor.

The massive "pots" in *PERSPECTIVES: GRAHAM MARKS* are handbuilt from hundreds of earthenware coils. The thick walls and sinuous bulk of the extruded coils convey an impression of overwhelming weight and mass. Yet contained within this mass are fragile inner structures, intricately patterned and repeated like dozens of tiny beehive chambers. The sculptures are generally created "upside down," the interior grids built first, coil by slender coil, the dense outer walls then constructed over them. These walls give the illusion of solid mass, but are in fact a double-wall construction, supported within by coiled arches. Thus, each sculpture simultaneously fills, contains and conceals space.

The coils themselves are produced by an extruder and then hand-rolled to create surface variation and a visible imprint of human contact. Marks is especially drawn to the coils' capacity to be at once both structural unit and decorative pattern. As a three-dimensional line, a coil becomes a module from which form can be made. The repetition of the module creates a visual texture as well as a larger whole. Coils also have the ability to remind one of many things without

being any one thing. For Marks, this quality of non-specific reference is central to their use.

Marks' early training and experiences were as a potter, and he identifies strongly with the potter's way of "looking, locating and connecting himself to his world." He is also intrigued by the idea of containers and containing. "The pot is a container in the physical sense but at the same time the notion of containing is operating on a more abstract level. It is already full, full of gathering from the environment, both physical and psychic." This symbolic value of the vessel has led Marks away from the specificity of the title "vessel" to a more generalized "container image," an image which has the potential for showing the evocative and resonant powers of form, line and color.

Marks is intrigued by metaphor — the dualities and ambiguities implied by dissimilar images and qualities. In his work, macrocosmic and microcosmic scales exist side by side, a juxtaposition made even more interesting in light of a modern technology yielding both electron microscopes and satellite photography. He also fuses the ideas of permanence and decay, nature and artifice, and the qualities of movement and repose, rigidity and flexibility, shadow and light. Questions he hopes will arise in the viewer's mind are ones of origin: "Where have I seen something like this before?" "Is this thing a geode or an icon?" "Did this grow out of the ground or fall out of the sky?"

One can see several transitions and motifs in Marks' work. His "quartered forms" are the two earliest pieces, the walls sectioned into four parts, the center core fully revealed. While these pieces are similar in general form, they are, in a sense, textural reversals of each other. The outer walls of one piece are a dense confusion of massive coils, while the inner walls are composed of neatly-patterned layers, meticulously spaced and formed. In contrast, the smooth exterior walls of the other form surround a tangled clay mass of gray, writhing "earthworms."

A certain monolithic serenity and distance are conveyed by the two simpler "hemispheres." Here padded top and outer walls are completely whole, with the center cavity filled and quartered. The layers of narrow clay strands form an "X", which spirals gradually downward into mysterious inner darkness like a winding staircase.

In the remainder of his works, Marks fills the inner cavities with increasingly complex shapes and smaller, more numerous recesses. These structures resemble labyrinthine honeycombs or crumbling Indian ruins, evoking the breadth and impermanence of human and animal activity. Magnified in these pieces is the inaccessibility of the inner orifices contrasted with the open expanse of the exterior walls. In three of the sculptures a visual tension is also produced by the tight structure of these interior spaces juxtaposed with the wild, unpatterned movement of the dense outer coils.

Color and its relationship to form and mass are new elements in Marks' more recent work.

"I have recently come full circle in my thinking. What I have mostly dealt with in the past is the color of structure, rather than color on structure. I wanted the form and structure of the pieces to be primary, not to be covered. I have used earthenware for its various natural colors and for those colors to be the clay rather than be on top of the clay. I have now started glazing, accepting the layer, wanting the work to have more of a wholeness that is part of the traditional ceramic expression. I am striving to consider color in its own right — for its own weight, its own ability to refer and suggest — on an equal footing with form. Blue glaze is not 'just blue.' It is not the same as painting it blue. It has a depth visually that is unique and particular. It also has a depth in regard to time. The material has a lineage. Blue is not just blue but a 3,000-year-old blue. A blue with baggage."

The most recent piece included in PERSPECTIVES reveals a shift from the customary vertical vessel position to a diagonal alignment. The shift allows the coil modules to complete their spiral movement rather than be cut off to form a bottom base. Furthermore, by laying the huge forms on a side base, Marks moves even further from a specific pottery image, continuing to make even more ambiguous the distinction between vessel and sculpture.

The John Michael Kohler Arts Center would like to express its appreciation to Graham Marks for his cooperation and substantial assistance in organizing this third exhibition in the PERSPECTIVES series. We would also like to gratefully acknowledge the National Endowment for the Arts for funding in part the first six PERSPECTIVES exhibitions and for continuing to make visible the extraordinary diversity of the contemporary crafts movement. Appreciation is also extended to Alice Westphal of Exhibit A, Chicago, for her advice and encouragement, and to Mr. and Mrs. Ira Epstein of Illinois and the Rochester Institute of Technology in New York for generously loaning works for this exhibition.

Stephanie J. Reith

Note: Dimensions for all objects in the exhibition are height precedes width (or diameter); width precedes depth.

1

UNTITLED

1976

Earthenware, coil built
16 x 22" (40.6 x 55.9 cm.)
From the collection of
Mr. and Mrs. Ira Epstein,
Illinois

2

UNTITLED

1976

Earthenware, coil built; ochre slip
17¼ x 23½" (43.8 x 59.7 cm.)
Loaned by the artist

3

UNTITLED

1978

Earthenware, coil built; white slip; residual
salt surface
15 x 22" (38.1 x 55.9 cm.)
Loaned by the artist

4

UNTITLED

1978

Earthenware, coil built; lithium glaze
18 x 29" (45.7 x 73.7 cm.)
Loaned by the artist

5

UNTITLED

1978

Earthenware, coil built; terra sigillata slip
17½ x 28" (44.5 x 71.1 cm.)
Loaned by the artist

6

UNTITLED

1978

Earthenware, coil built; terra sigillata slip
16½ x 27" (41.9 x 68.6 cm.)
Loaned by the artist

7

UNTITLED

1978

Earthenware, coil built; lithium glaze
23¼ x 27 x 27" (59.1 x 68.6 x 68.6 cm.)
From the collection of
Mr. and Mrs. Ira Epstein,
Illinois

8

UNTITLED

1978

Earthenware, coil built; lithium glaze
22¼ x 29" (56.5 x 73.7 cm.)
From the collection of the
Rochester Institute
of Technology, New York

9

UNTITLED

1978

Earthenware, coil built; smoked interior
18½ x 31" (47 x 78.7 cm.)
Loaned by the artist

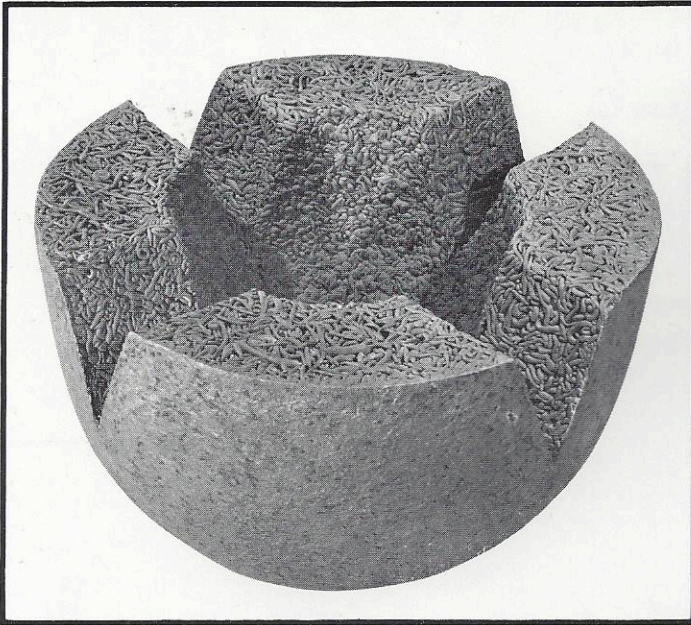
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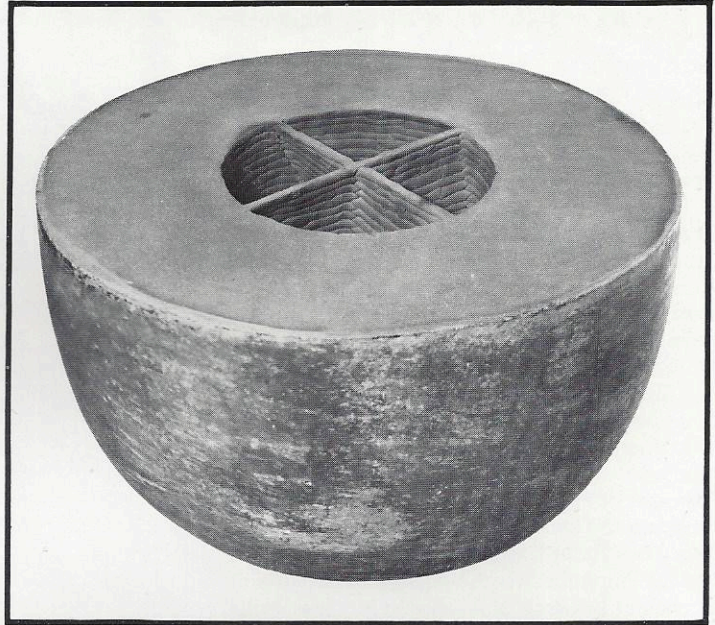
1978

Earthenware, coil built; white slip; residual
salt surface
17¼ x 27¼" (43.8 x 69.2 cm.)
Loaned by the artist

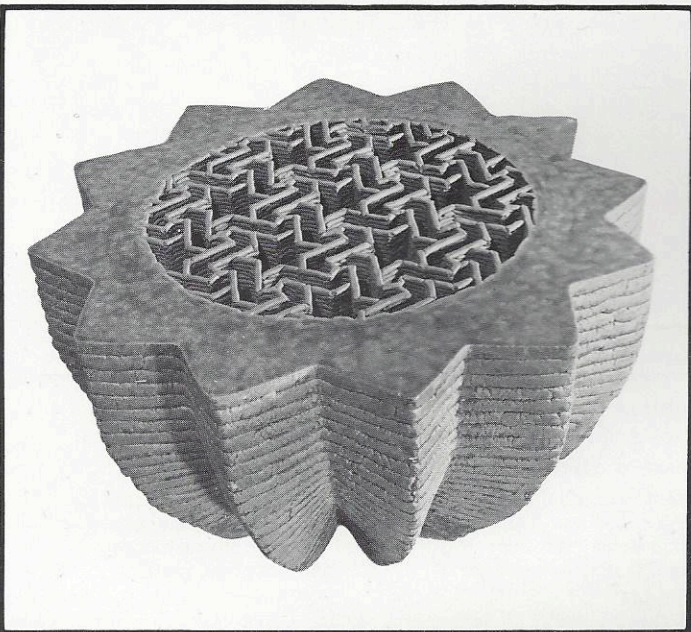
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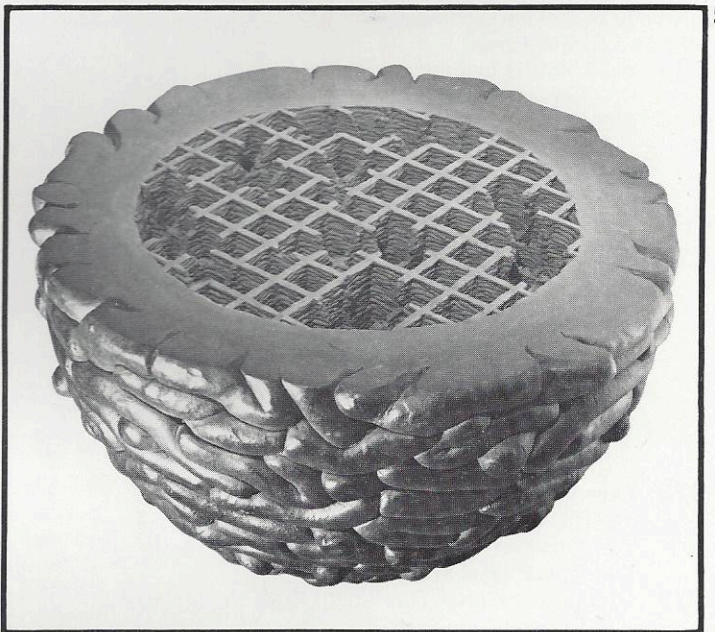
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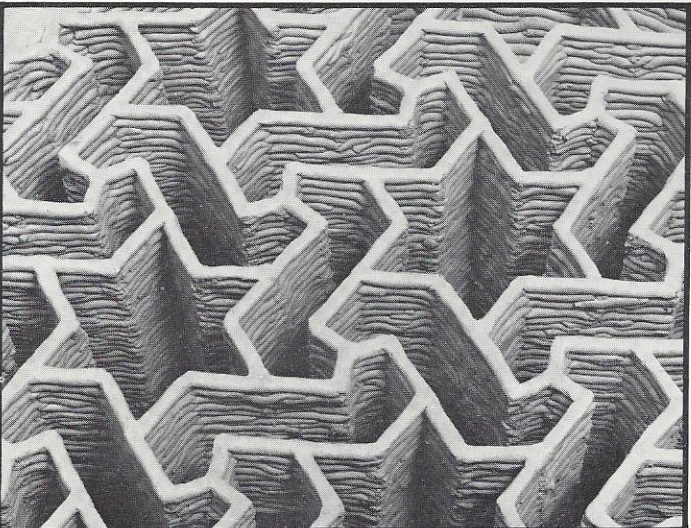
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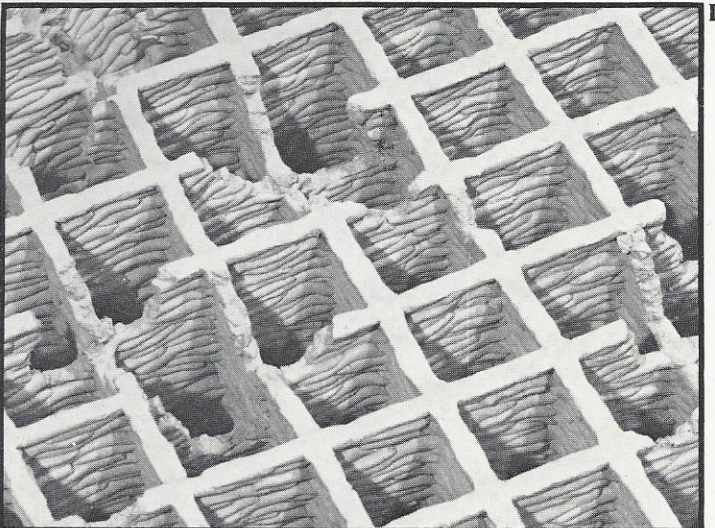
5



Detail



Detail



GRAHAM MARKS

Scottsville, New York

Birthdate: November 18, 1951

Education:

Philadelphia College of Art, B.F.A., 1974.
New York State College of Ceramics, Alfred University, Alfred,
Division of Art and Design, M.F.A. in Ceramics, 1976.

Permanent Collections:

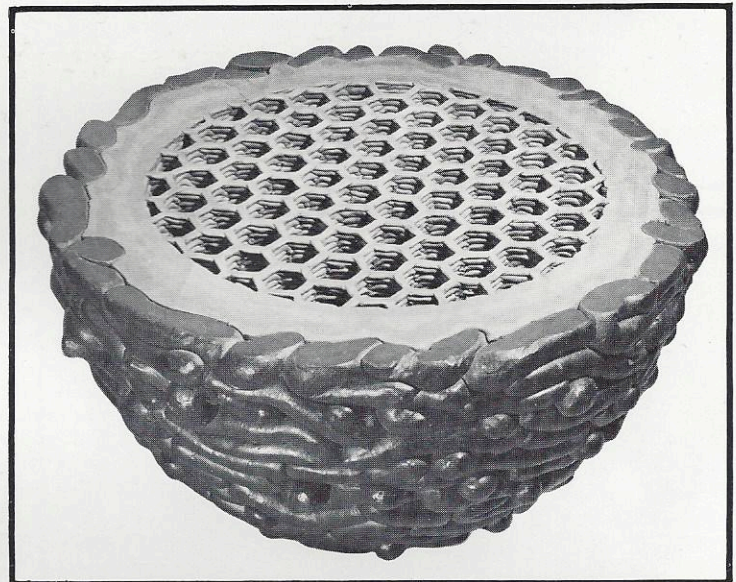
Dr. and Mrs. Jay Cooper, Phoenix
Mr. and Mrs. Ira Epstein, Chicago
Exhibit A, Chicago
Fairfax, Inc., New York City
Mr. and Mrs. Leonard Herzel, Glencoe, Illinois
Mr. Daniel Jacobs, New York City
The Lannon Foundation, Miami
Mrs. Joan Mannheimer, Des Moines
Memorial Art Gallery, Rochester, New York
Museum of Art, University of Iowa, Iowa City
Museum of Contemporary Crafts, New York City
New York State College of Ceramics, Alfred University, Alfred
Robert Pfannebecker, Lancaster, Pennsylvania
Rochester Institute of Technology, New York
Topeka Public Library
University of Colorado, Boulder

Selected Exhibitions:

- 1975 SUPERMUD invitational, Carborundum Museum of Ceramics, Niagara Falls, New York.
- 1976 FRAGMENT SHOW, Carborundum Museum of Ceramics, Niagara Falls, New York.
NEW VIEWS BY YOUNG CERAMISTS, Exhibit A, Evanston.
- 1977 AMERICAN ART '77 — CONTEMPORARY CRAFTS, Helen Drutt Gallery, Philadelphia.
CONTEMPORARY CRAFTS, Marion Locks Gallery, Philadelphia.
SCRIPPS COLLEGE 33RD ANNUAL, Claremont, California.
TEN PERSONAL APPROACHES, Southern Illinois University, Edwardsville.
THE CERAMIC VESSEL AS METAPHOR, Evanston Art Center, Evanston.
- 1978 One-man show, Exhibit A, Evanston.
YOUNG AMERICANS-CLAY AND GLASS, Tucson Museum of Art, and Museum of Contemporary Crafts, New York City.
- 1979 Group invitational, Brookfield Craft Center, Brookfield, Connecticut.
One-man show, Helen Drutt Gallery, Philadelphia.
- 1980 CERAMIC SCULPTURE, Kansas City Art Institute, Missouri.
CONTEMPORARY CERAMICS — A RESPONSE TO WEDGEWOOD, Museum of the Civic Center, Philadelphia (touring nationally 1980-1982).
WESTWOOD CLAY NATIONAL, Otis Art Institute, Los Angeles and Parson School of Design, New York City.
- 1981 CLAY, Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, Providence.
CONTEMPORARY APPROACH TO AMERICAN CRAFT, Pyramid Gallery, Rochester, New York.
RECENT ACQUISITIONS, University of Colorado, Boulder.
Three-person sculpture invitational, Tibor de Nagy Gallery, New York City.

Grant:

- 1978 Craftsman Fellowship, National Endowment for the Arts.



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