

The Language of Color

The call went out more than a year ago for an issue of STUDIO POTTER devoted to color in ceramics. The theme encompassed, but was broader than, surface decoration and the technologies of particularly prized glaze effects; it invited makers - in a discipline whose primary language is three-dimensional form - to think about their choices and intentions regarding color. Many in contemporary ceramics have used color declaratively, signaling alliance with certain traditions and esthetic values and rejection of others. Leach and his followers, embracing the subtle reduction-fired hues of certain Asian ceramics, employed color as well as form to distinguish themselves from the china-cabinet refinement of Wedgwood and other mass-marketed pottery styles. Throughout the twentieth century this palette, and the attitude informing it, dominated studio ceramics, reinforced by images, glaze lectures, and not-so-subtle signals such as the infamous “Cash-flow Blue” glaze in many art-school studios. In the 1960s, West Coast potters pointedly claimed their own turf by using bright low-temperature glazes, and in recent years a new generation, eager to challenge its elders, has embraced not only diverse historical influences but color references drawn from industrial design and contemporary culture.

The modern world is hyperchromatic, even in places once characterized by limited color: serious newspapers, large appliances, gallery walls. There is also an increased awareness of the psychology and language of color, with marketing and academic professionals studying its effects and uses. So as the articles rolled in, it was surprising to find that, overall, the discussion in ceramics tends to focus on the technical and historical aspects of the colors we use, sidestepping inquiries into the emotional or cultural charge that color can carry for the maker as well as the user. If color is a form of communication, as several contributors suggest, we often use it without clear intent, or couched in terms that mask it behind chemistry, process, or historical reference (magnesia matte, high-fired, or temoku.)

A friend once used the term “pushing the goo” to describe the conversation among painters about the particulars of their medium. STUDIO POTTER has been the vehicle for a great deal of clay-centered and deeply satisfying goo-pushing, but we have also welcomed the *ping!* that comes from applying the knowledge and perspectives of outsiders to what we do. A question to ask ourselves: do we not *see* ceramic surfaces as colors in their own right, or have we lagged in developing a language for them that moves beyond process and places them in the contemporary world we inhabit? In this sense the articles that follow are perhaps only the beginning of “the color issue.” The essay on brown remains to be written – and then let’s talk about orange.

— MB

EDITOR Mary Barringer; ART DIRECTOR Rostislav Eismont; PRODUCTION Jeani Eismont; CIRCULATION Sara Zela; FINANCIAL MANAGER Julie Blake Williams COPYEDITORS Louise Chrysostom, Patricia Hill; PROOFREADER Karin Rothwell; CONTRIBUTING ADVISORS Linda Arbuckle, Frank Boyden, Michael Boylen, Cynthia Bringle, Louise Allison Cort, John Glick, Gary Hatcher, Nan McKinnell, Mark Shapiro, Forrest Snyder; FOUNDING EDITOR Gerry Williams.

STUDIO POTTER is published semi-annually. Articles for prospective publication are welcome. Editorial address: PO Box 257, Shelburne Falls, MA 01370 USA. Phone: 413/625-9200. Editorial email: editor@studiopotter.org. Subscription address: PO Box 352, Manchester, NH 03105 or subscriptions@studiopotter.org. Web site at www.studiopotter.org. Subscription: one year US \$30.00; two years \$54.00. Canada: One year \$33.00 (US), two year \$59.00 (US). Foreign: One year \$35.00 (US), two year \$63.00 (US). Back issues available. Fourth class postage paid at Goffstown, NH. Vol. 35 No.1 (ISBN 978-0-9791912-0-6) Copyright 2006 by STUDIO POTTER. Contents may be reproduced with permission of STUDIO POTTER.

Desktop typesetting by EISMONT DESIGN, 70 Whipple Hill Road, Richmond, NH 03470. Printed by Lew A. Cummings Co., Inc., PO Box 16495, Hooksett, NH 03106-6495 USA.