

## ***Margaret Bohls***

### ***Artist's Statement***

Pottery affects us subtly. It affects us through physical interaction, as part of our daily or occasional rituals. We are alternately conscious and unconscious of its presence, as when we are arranging flowers in a vase or setting the table, idly sipping from a cup or rinsing dishes at the sink. Pottery is also an element of visual display. We arrange it in the breakfront, on a sideboard or mantle. It becomes part of our immediate visual environment. It can be an object of contemplation, a network of formal relationships. It can be a symbol of beauty.

I consider the pieces I create as functional forms. Functional forms are about touch, both real and implied, and about communication over time, through use. They are defined in relationship to the demands of use. How much can a volume hold? How does a handle feel in your hand? How does liquid emerge from a spout? I think of my pieces as sculptural objects. The interplay of formal elements within each piece is very important. I observe and enhance the visual and physical relationships between two or more forms when they meet in a pair or grouping. The contours and volumes, colors and surfaces of the objects I create compose a dimensional image. This image is at once concrete and abstract. I see my pieces as ornament; objects intended to visually engage and enhance their environment.

I see the pieces I make as communication. Each pottery form carries a cultural and historical text. Many of the sources for my work lie within the long and complex history of ceramics. Chinese and Korean celadons, Iranian tin glazed earthenware, and designed pottery of the Modernist era; these are just a few of the historical genres that have inspired the development of my work. When creating functional forms I also consider the vernacular. Each of us has an inherent understanding of functional forms that is embedded in our culture. I engage in a dialogue with that vernacular when articulating each specific form. Working primarily with porcelain, I am also interested in European porcelain from the 18th and 19th century such as Sevres and Meissen. I have a curiosity for the culture of hobby ceramics, and its connection to the women's tradition of decorating on porcelain that has existed in the United States since the 19th century. In my use of porcelain I reference its particular history. Thus material also carries meaning.

### ***Process***

Process is also a primary source of inspiration for me. A sense of inventive play while folding, cutting, and assembling clay slabs or pinching soft forms provides a stream of new information with which to work. My pieces give strong evidence of the way in which they were made.

Each piece is hand-built using porcelain slabs. The slabs are first pressed onto a flat plaster slab mold carved with a grid pattern. They are then cut to an appropriate size and shape (some pots start as a simple rectangle so many squares across and so many down; some templates are much more complex) and turned onto a large piece of soft foam. The "bumps" that create the illusion

of volume are pressed out one by one from the back into the foam support. The slabs are allowed to dry just a little and are then curved and folded into shape and the seams are joined. Feet and handles are pulled and attached. Finally the pieces are decorated with individually pressed sprigs created in shallow plaster or fired-clay molds. These “sprigs” are the raised leaves and flowers that cover many of the pieces. The work is fired to high temperatures (2300 degrees F) in an electric kiln.

The trays, trivets and caddies are all also hand-built using red earthenware slabs and coils. These are fired to low temperature (about 1930 degrees) coated with a lustrous glaze.

### ***Diagonal Grid Ware***

Interior volume is a key element in functional forms. It defines the potential for containment. My current body of work combines a strong sense of interior volume with a net- or grid-like surface of textural lines that contains and shapes that volume, creating buoyant, full, yet architectural forms. These seemingly upholstered forms are draped with a series of rich, complex glaze surfaces, many of them crystalline, lustrous, or having deep visual texture. These surfaces are sometimes further adorned with sprigs, floral glaze decals or metallic lusters. Porcelain forms are often placed in or on earthenware baskets or trays. The result is a layering of disparate and complex elements that become integral. These pieces, in form and in the details of form, are created to visually communicate their use or function. Their complex shapes and rich surfaces embellish and enhance this use.

### ***Black & White Ware***

Process is a primary source of inspiration for me. A sense of inventive play while folding, cutting, and assembling clay slabs provides a stream of new information with which to work. This group of work is made simply and assembled relatively quickly giving it a soft, casual simplicity. For me, each pot is like a three-dimensional gesture drawing. Each form is defined by the edges of the slabs from which it was created. These edges or lines create a drawing in space that defines each form. When making each piece I am conscious of the quality of each of these lines defined by its weight and direction. I am inspired in this work by the direct clarity of modernist ceramics designed by Russell Wright and Eva Zeisel. My work, like theirs, is designed to be easy to use and to integrate into your home environment. The form language is simple, and soft, satin and matte glazes allow one to see and feel the quiet nuances of shape and shadow.