"The Effect of the Funk Art Movement on the Development of Contemporary Ceramics and Sculpture"

Cody Lee (Virginia Catherall)
Department of Art & Art History
University of Utah

A regional style of art began in California in the 1960s that affected the development of contemporary American ceramics and sculpture. Concentrated near the San Francisco Bay Area, Funk Art resulted from artists’ changing attitudes regarding Abstract Expressionism and other modern movements in fine art and also from the unique creative associations that developed among artists on college campuses in the area. Peter Voulkos at UC Berkeley along with Robert Arneson, William T. Wiley and Wayne Thiebaud at UC Davis were among the leaders of this movement whose unconventional works transformed ceramics into a medium of fine art and also extended their own style of Funk Art through conditions that were unique to the Bay Area art schools of the time. Funk Art was a reaction against other more formal "schools" of art and provided new perspectives that changed the status of ceramics from that of a craft into a medium that could be exhibited and considered in the world of fine art. This effect is seen in the works of Viola Frey, David Gilhooly, Marilyn Levine, and other students of Funk artists from these schools who continue to create works in ceramics that reflect this significant departure from other styles of sculpture. This paper will explicate the history and style of Funk Art and discuss the significant artists whose works transformed ceramics and contemporary sculpture.