Preview Chapter 11 Inside!

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PREBLES' ARTFORMS





TENTH EDITION

FLIRTING WITH FUNCTION

WHAT ARE THE MAJOR TYPES AND CHARACTERISTICS OF CLAY?

WHAT ARE THE TWO MAJOR CLASSIFICATIONS OF FIBER ART?

WHO PERFECTED METAL INLAYS IN THE THIRTEENTH CENTURY?

Miriam Schapiro's work *Personal Appearance #3* is large enough to cover a small bed. Its composition includes a large orange rectangle at its center that describes a bedlike shape, and the black square near the top is placed like a pillow. The work is exuberant and vibrant, and made partly from cloth scraps like a quilt. This was certainly part of the artist's intent: to pay homage to quilt makers past and present, by making a work that resembles a quilt in many ways but is not one. The work thus hovers on the brink of usefulness; it takes on the appearance of a useful object without exactly being one.

Many artists throughout history have found stimulation in working along the boundary between art and useful objects. They create works that challenge our notion of function, either by making artworks that resemble useful things, as Miriam Schapiro did, or by creating useful objects of such beauty that to actually use them would seem a crime. In fact, most of the world's cultures have always regarded an excellent piece of pottery as highly as a painting, and a book

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11.1 Miriam Schapiro *Personal Appearance #3.* 1973. Acrylic and fabric on canvas. 60" 3 50". Collection Marilyn Stokstad, Lawrence, Kansas. Courtesy of Bernice Steinbaum Gallery, Miami, FL. Photo: Robert Hickerson. illustration as equal in merit to a piece of sculpture; in this chapter we will consider such works. They are made from various media, including clay, glass, metal, wood, and fiber; and most are three-dimensional.

In a previous era, we might have regarded the works in this chapter as "craft works." But in this day and age (and in this book!) they are all art forms.

CLAY

Clay comes from soil with a heavily volcanic makeup, mixed with water. Since humans began to live in settled communities, clay has been a valuable art material. It is extremely flexible in the artist's hands, yet it hardens into a permanent shape when exposed to heat.

The art and science of making objects from clay is called **ceramics**. A person who works with clay is a **ceramist**; one who specializes in making dishes is a **potter**. A wide range of objects, including tableware, dishes, sculpture, bricks, and many kinds of tiles, are made from clay. Most of the basic ceramic materials were discovered, and processes developed, thousands of years ago. All clays are flexible until baked in a dedicated hightemperature oven called a **kiln**, a process known as **firing**.

Clays are generally categorized in one of three broad types. Earthenware is typically fired at a relatively low temperature (approximately 700°C to 1,200°C) and is porous after firing. It may vary in color from red to brown to tan. Earthenware is the most common of the three types, and a great many of the world's pots have been made from it. Stoneware is heavier, is fired at a higher temperature (1,200°C to 1,350°C), and is not porous. It is usually grayish or brown. Combining strength with easy workability, stoneware is the preferred medium of most of today's ceramists and potters. Porcelain is the rarest and most expensive of the three types. Made from deposits of decomposed granite, it becomes white and nonporous after firing at a typically high temperature (1,250°C to 1,450°C). It is translucent and rings when struck, both signs of its unique quality. Porcelain was first perfected in China, and even today in England and America the finest white dishes are called "china," no matter where they are made.

With any type of clay, the ceramic process is relatively simple. Ceramists create functional pots or purely sculptural forms from soft, damp clay using hand-building methods such as modeling, or by **throwing**—that is, by shaping clay on a rapidly revolving wheel. Invented in Mesopotamia about six thousand years ago, the potter's wheel allows potters to produce circular forms with great speed and uniformity. In the hands of a skilled worker, the process looks effortless, even magical, but it takes time and practice to perfect the technique. After shaping, a piece is air dried before firing in a kiln.

Two kinds of liquids are commonly used to decorate ceramics, though rarely on the same piece. A **slip** is a mixture of clay and water about the consistency of cream, sometimes colored with earthen powders. With this relatively simple technique, only a limited range of colors is possible, but many ancient cultures made a specialty of this type of pottery decoration.

A glaze is a liquid paint with a silica base, specially formulated for clay. During firing, the glaze vitrifies (turns to a glasslike substance) and fuses with the clay body, creating a nonporous surface. Glazes can be colored or clear, translucent or opaque, glossy or dull, depending on their chemical composition. Firing changes the color of most glazes so radically that the liquid that the potter applies to the vessel comes out of the kiln an entirely different color.

Recent works by two of today's leading ceramists will help to show the possibilities of this medium; both are vessels with handles, but they show widely divergent styles. Betty Woodman's

EXPLORE MORE: To see a studio video on Ceramics, go to **www.myartslab.com**



11.2 Betty Woodman. *Divided Vases (Christmas): View B.* 2004. Glazed earthenware, epoxy resin, lacquer, and paint. $34\frac{1}{2}'' \times 39'' \times 7''$. Frank lloyd Gallery, Santa Monica. Courtesy of the artist and Max Protech Gallery, New York.

Divided Vases (Christmas) have an exuberant, free-form look that preserves the expressiveness of spontaneous glaze application. The handles are actually flat perforated panels that still show traces of the working process. She used earthenware, a relatively coarse clay that is conducive to natural shapes like the bamboo segments that the vase bodies suggest. She threw each in three pieces on the wheel, and then joined them before adding the handles. The Divided Vases have a fresh look, as if they just came out of the firing kiln.

Adrian Saxe's Les Rois du Monde Futur (Rulers of the Future World) seems precious and exquisite by comparison. He used porcelain for the main body, working it into a gourdlike shape before tipping it slightly off-axis. The overly elegant handles recall antique picture frames, while the rough base quotes the style of traditional Chinese pottery. The work's title shows the artist's sarcastic mind-set: The Rulers of the Future World are insects, two of which crawl up the cap.

SEE MORE: To see an interview with Adrian Saxe, go to **www.myartslab.com**



11.3 Adrian Saxe.
Les Rois du Monde Futur (Rulers of the Future World).
2004.
Porcelain, stoneware, overglaze enamel, lusters,

mixed media. $26\frac{1}{2} \times 13\frac{1}{2} \times 10^{"}$. Frank Lloyd Gallery, Santa Monica.

The acceptance of clay as an art medium (rather than something to shape into dishes) owes a great deal to the California sculptor Peter Voulkos. He was trained as a potter and had a studio that sold dishes in upscale stores until the middle 1950s. Then he began to explore abstract art, and he found ways to incorporate some of its techniques into his ceramic work. At first he took a fresh approach to plates: He flexed them out of shape and scratched their surface as if they were paintings, thereby rendering them useless in the traditional sense. We see the results of this



 11.4 Peter Voulkos. *Untitled Plate CR952*. 1989. Wood-fired stoneware. 20½" × 4½". Courtesy Sherry Leedy Contemporary Art, Kansas City.

treatment in his *Untitled Plate CR952*. His first exhibition of these works in 1959 caused a great deal of controversy because most people did not think of stoneware as an art medium. Yet none could deny the boldness of his inventions.

Both Peter Voulkos and Toshiko Takaezu were influenced by the earthiness and spontaneity of some traditional Japanese ceramics, as well as by Expressionist painting, yet they have taken very different directions. Voulkos's pieces are rough and aggressively dynamic, but Takaezu's *Makaha Blue II* offers subtle, restrained strength. By closing the top of container forms, she turns vessels into sculptures, thus providing surfaces for rich paintings of glaze and oxide. She reflected on her love of the clay medium:

When working with clay I take pleasure from the process as well as from the finished piece. Every once in a while I am in tune with the clay, and I hear music, and it's like poetry. Those are the moments that make pottery truly beautiful for me.¹

Ceramic processes evolved very slowly until the mid-twentieth century, when new formulations and even synthetic clays became available. Other



 11.5 Toshiko Takaezu. Makaha Blue II. 2002. Stoneware. 18½" × 48". Courtesy of the artist and Charles Cowles Gallery, New York.

changes have included more accurate methods of firing and less toxic techniques and equipment.

GLASS

Glass has been used for at least four thousand years as a material for practical containers of all shapes and sizes. Stained glass has been a favorite in churches in cathedrals since the Middle Ages. Elaborate, blown-glass pieces have been made in Venice since the Renaissance. Glass is also a fine medium for decorative inlays in a variety of objects, including jewelry.

Glass is an exotic and enticing art medium. One art critic wrote, "Among sculptural materials, nothing equals the sheer eloquence of glass.

AT THE EDGE OF ART

Boolean Valley

MANY PEOPLE MIGHT think that ceramic arts, with all of their earthiness, would be incompatible with computer mathematics, but a 2009 exhibition proved them wrong. The potter Adam Silverman collaborated with architect Nader Tehrani on an installation called *Boolean Valley* that used mathematical logic to create an abstract landscape of pots in a gallery. The potter made 195 tall cones and then split each of them in two, creating

195 cylinders and 195 cones of varying heights—or domes and hoops, as the artists called them. The architect then applied Boolean mathematics to arrange these parts in waves along the gallery floor. Boolean logic tracks the geometry of intersecting forms, and is used in computer searches. It yielded a mysterious-looking array that suggested organic growth, as if pots were rising and falling through the surface of the floor.



11.6 Boolean Valley. 2009.
Installation by Adam Silverman and Nader Tehrani.
390 glazed ceramic pieces. Maximum height 24".
Installation view at Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles.

It can assume any form, take many textures, dance with color, bask in clear crystallinity, make lyrics of light."²

Chemically, glass is closely related to ceramic glaze. As a medium, however, it offers a wide range of unique possibilities. Hot or molten glass is a sensitive, amorphous material that is shaped by blowing, casting, or pressing into molds. As it cools, glass solidifies from its molten state without crystallizing. After it is blown or cast, glass may be cut, etched, fused, laminated, layered, leaded, painted, polished, sandblasted, or slumped (softened for a controlled sag). The fluid nature of glass produces qualities of mass flowing into line, as well as translucent volumes of airy thinness.

The character of any material determines the character of the expression; this statement is particularly true of glass. Molten glass requires considerable speed and skill in handling. The glassblower combines the centering skills of a potter, the agility and stamina of an athlete, and the grace of a dancer to bring qualities of breath and movement into crystalline form.



11.7 Dale Chihuly. Mauve Seaform Set with Black Lip Wraps from the "Seaforms" Series. 1985. Blown glass. Courtesy of Dale Chihuly. Photograph: Dick Busher. The fluid and translucent qualities of glass are used to the fullest in Dale Chihuly's *Seaform Series*. He produces such pieces with a team of glass artists working under his direction. In this series, he arranged groups of pieces and carefully directed the lighting to suggest delicate undersea environments.

Chihuly is one of many artists today who treat glass as a sculptural medium, but Mona Hatoum returns us to the contemplation of usefulness with her provocative work *Still Life with Hand Grenades*. She researched the design of various sorts of small explosive devices that the world's armies use, and re-created them in colorful pieces of solid crystal. She placed these precious-looking objects on a gurney as if they were specimens of some kind, which they are: specimens of humanity's tendency to violence. She used the beauty of glass to represent "useful" objects of a lethal sort.



11.8 Mona Hatoum.
Still Life with Hand Grenades (Nature Morte aux Grenades).
2006–2007.
Crystal, steel, rubber.
38" × 82" × 27".
Alexander and Bonin, New York.

METAL

Metal's primary characteristics are strength and formability. The various types of metal most often used for crafts and sculpture can be hammered, cut, drawn out, welded, joined with rivets, or cast. Early metalsmiths created tools, vessels, armor, and weapons.

In Muslim regions of the Middle East in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, artists practiced shaping and inlaying with unparalleled sophistication. The d'Arenberg Basin, named after a French collector who owned it for many years, was made for the last ruler of the Ayyubid dynasty in Syria in the mid-thirteenth century. The body of the basin was first cast in brass; its extremely intricate design included lowered areas into which precisely cut pieces of silver were placed. Although most of the silver pieces are only a fraction of an inch in size, they enliven a carefully patterned design that occupies several finely proportioned horizontal bands. The lowest band is a decorative pattern based on repeated plant shapes. Above is a row of real and imaginary animals that decorates a relatively narrow band. The next band depicts a scene of princely pleasure, as well-attired people play polo. The uppermost contains more plant shapes between the uprights of highly stylized Arabic script that expresses good wishes to the owner of the piece. A central panel in this upper row depicts a scene



11.9 d'Arenberg Basin.
 Syria. Mid-13th century.
 Brass with silver inlay. 9" × 20".
 Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC. F1955.10.

from the life of Christ, who is regarded as an important teacher in Islam.

Cal Lane combines some of the intricate metalwork of Middle Eastern pieces with ideas ripped from today's headlines, in works such as Untitled (Map 3). She worked for years as a welder, a woman in a traditionally male occupation, and she used those skills on a 55-gallon oil drum to create this work. First she flattened it, and then she cut it to show a map of the world, with the lid and base of the drum forming the poles. The oil drum has tremendous symbolic significance as a source of much of the world's energy, wealth, conflicts, and pollution. This work, with its sunshaped form at the upper right, suggests the global dominance of oil in our economy and our energy. It also creatively transforms a useful object into an artwork that comments on its own significance.



11.10 Cal Lane. Untitled (Map 3). 2007. Plasma cut steel. 78½" × 71½". Samuel Freeman Gallery, Santa Monica.

WOOD

The living spirit of wood is given a second life in handmade objects. Growth characteristics of individual trees remain visible in the grain of wood long after trees are cut, giving wood a vitality not found in other materials. Its abundance, versatility, and warm tactile qualities have made wood a favored material for human use and for art pieces. Like many natural products, wood can be harvested in a sustainable manner or a wasteful one. Many woodworkers today have moved toward sustainability by using wood that is already down or harvested in certified forests.

Henry Gilpin generally makes furniture on commission, but when he heard about a huge elm tree near his studio that had died because of encroaching construction, he secured a piece of it. He found that the crowded conditions caused the wood grains in the tree to cross and twist, so that when he dried the piece it emerged contorted. He decided to make this casualty of progress into a table by mounting the warped plank atop a frame. The surface is so uneven that this work titled *Curiously Red* is barely usable. To honor the tree's



11.11 Henry Gilpin. *Curiously Red.* 2006. Elm, pigment, magnets. 36" × 76" × 18". Museum of Arts and Design, New York. Courtesy of the Peabody Essex Museum. ISP001 Photo: Dean Powell.



11.12 Maya Lin. *Terra Table*. 2009. Red Maple. Commissioned by the Nature Conservancy.

sacrifice of its life, he poured red stain over it, and left the drips to show at the bottom of the legs to resemble bloodstains. What might at first glance appear to be a side table thus becomes a meditation on life and death.

The Nature Conservancy in 2009 commissioned Maya Lin to create a piece of furniture from a forest that is certified by the Forest Stewardship Council, and she responded with the *Terra Table*. It is actually a bench built of red maple. She made it by piecing together lateral slices of the wood, and leaving their tops mostly uneven to remind users that they are sitting on a tree. The grain of the wood is visible at the ends, and she used a transparent stain to further show the richness of the maple planks.

FIBER

Fiber arts include such processes as weaving, stitching, basketmaking, surface design (dyed and printed textiles), wearable art, and handmade papermaking. These fiber processes use natural and synthetic fibers in both traditional and innovative ways. Artists working with fiber (like artists working in any medium) draw on the heritage of traditional practices and also explore new avenues of expression. Fiber arts divide into two general classes: Work made with a loom, and work made without one.

All weaving is based on the interlacing of fibers. Weavers generally begin with long fibers in place, called the **warp** fibers, which determine the length of the piece they will create. Often the warp fibers are installed on a **loom**, a device that holds them in place and may pull them apart for weaving. They cross the warp fibers at right angles with **weft** fibers (from which we get the word *weave*). Weavers create patterns by changing the numbers and placements of interwoven threads, and they can choose from a variety of looms and techniques. Simple hand looms can produce very sophisticated, complex weaves. A large tapestry loom, capable of weaving hundreds of colors into intricate forms, may require several days of preparation before work begins.

Some of the world's most spectacular carpets came from Islamic Persia during the Safavid dynasty

in the sixteenth century. Here, weavers employed by royal workshops knotted carefully dyed wool over a network of silk warps and wefts. *The Ardabil Carpet*, long recognized as one of the greatest Persian carpets, contains about three hundred such knots, over fine silk threads, per square inch. Thus, this carpet required approximately 25 million knots!

The design of the carpet is centered on a sunburst surrounded by sixteen oval shapes. Two mosque lamps of unequal size share space with an intricate pattern of flowers. At the corners of the main field, quarters of the central design are repeated. A small panel at the right gives the date and the name of an artist, who must have been the designer. Another inscription is a couplet by Hafiz, the best known lyrical poet in Iran: "I have no refuge in this world other than thy threshold. My head has no resting-place other than this doorway." The carpet originally covered the floor of a prayer chapel.



11.13 The Ardabil Carpet. Tabriz. 1540.
Wool pile on silk warps and wefts. 34' × 17'6".
V & A Picture Library.



Fiber can be worked in infinite ways, and Chicago-based Nick Cave has likely used them all at one time or another to create his ongoing series of *Soundsuits*. These extravagant costumes are all wearable, and over the years they have included such offbeat materials as human hair, twigs, toys, garbage, buttons, dryer felt, stuffed animals, fake fur, feathers, and flowers, besides sequins and beads of all kinds. In the *Soundsuit* shown here, a cloud of ceramic birds surrounds a body suit of crocheted yarn pieces. Cave

11.14 Nick Cave.
Soundsuit. 2009.
Mixed media. Height 7'.
Courtesy Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

(who is not related to the Australian musician of the same name) grew up in a large family where he personalized the hand-me-down clothing he often wore. However, the *Soundsuits* do the opposite: most of them completely hide the wearer, thus conferring an alternate identity. The roots of these pieces are in New Orleans Mardi Gras costumes and African ceremonial garments, but in Cave's hands they become both exuberant and mysterious.

In some African-American communities, women have carried on a traditional of quilt making for generations. One of the most active groups has been meeting in Gees Bend, Alabama for over a hundred years, where the quilters gather to share fabric, discuss neighborhood news, and encourage creativity. Jessie Pettway made *Bars and String-Piece Columns* from leftover pieces of cloth. This quilt, like many produced at Gees Bend, resembles some kinds of African textiles (see Chapter 19). Many Gees Bend quilters create their work with only a minimum of advance planning, and this lends their work a look of spontaneity and exuberance. The coincidental resemblance to modern art also attracts the attention of collectors.

Faith Ringgold uses the quiltmaking tradition to speak eloquently of her life and ideas. Memories of her childhood in Harlem in the 1930s provide much of her subject matter. Commitments to women, the family, and cross-cultural consciousness are at the heart of Ringgold's work. With playful exuberance and insight, she draws on history and recent events to tie her own history to wider struggles about gender, race, and class. Her sophisticated use of naiveté gives her work the appeal of the best folk art, but her work has also dealt with more urgent themes such as unemployment and discrimination. In the biographical essay on the following page, we consider one of her most famous quilts, *Tar Beach*.

LEARN MORE: For a closer look at Tar Beach, go to www.myartslab.com



^{11.15} Jessie Pettway.
Bars and String-Piece Columns. ca. 1950s.
Cotton. 95" × 76".
©2003 Tinwood Alliance collection, Atlanta.
Photo: Steve Pitkin/Pitkin Studios.



11.16 Faith Ringgold. *Tar Beach.* 1988.

Tar Beach. 1988. Acrylic pieced and printed fabric. $74'' \times 69''$. Collection: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York. © Faith Ringgold Inc.

Faith Ringgold

A PROLIFIC CREATOR of many art forms, from paintings to quilts to children's books, Faith Ringgold has taken the reality of racial discrimination and made from it uplifting stories about finding sustenance and overcoming adversity.

Born in Harlem to workingclass parents, she was encouraged as a child to succeed by their example. Acknowledging the double disadvantage of being an African-American woman, her parents taught her that "you have to be twice as good to go half as far."3 Her mother was a seamstress and fashion designer, her father a sanitation truck driver. After receiving bachelor's and master's degrees in art from City College of New York, she taught in New York City public schools from 1955 to 1972. She later recalled that the experience of teaching children encouraged her own creativity: "They showed me what it is to be free, to be able to express yourself directly."

During the early years of her teaching career, she painted landscapes. But the civil rights movement of the 1960s encouraged her to address directly in her art the issues of inequality that seemed then to be present everywhere. She sought advice from the elder African-American artist Romare Bearden (see page 8), who included her work in a group show in Harlem in 1966. She also took part in several protest actions at New York museums, urging greater inclusion of African-American artists and more outreach to ethnic minority neighborhoods.

Leaving her teaching position in 1972, she began to devote full time to art. She also began a ten-year collaboration with her mother in the creation of works on cloth. Quilt making had been a family tradition as far back as her great-greatarandmother, who had made them as a slave in Florida. Now the mother-daughter team collaborated on a new type of textile art that included images and stories on the sewn fragments. In addition to continuing ancient African textile art traditions, these cloth works were also portable.

Her themes are highly varied. Some are personal and autobiographical, such as *Change: Faith Ringgold's Over 100 Pound Weight Loss Performance Story Quilt.* Others expose injustice, such as *The Slave Rape Series*, which dealt with the mistreatment of African women in the slave trade. Some are about important African-American cultural figures, such as *Sonny's Quilt*, which depicts the jazz saxophonist Sonny Rollins, performing as he soars over the Brooklyn Bridge.

A standout among the artist's "story guilts" is Tar Beach, which tells the story of the fictional Cassie, an eight-year-old character who is based on Ringgold's own childhood memories. She would go up to the asphalt roof of her apartment building ("Tar Beach") with her family on hot nights, because there was no airconditioning in the home. Cassie describes Tar Beach as a magical place, with a 360-degree view of tall buildings and the George Washington Bridge in the distance. She dreams that she can fly, that she can do anything she imagines, as she lies on a blanket with her little brother. She dreams that she can give her father the union card that he has been denied because of his race. She dreams that she can let her mother sleep late, and eat ice cream every day for dessert. She even dreams that she can buy the building her father works in, and that her mother won't cry when her father can't find work. The guilt depicts the two children on the blanket, and her parents playing cards with the neighbors next to a table set with snacks and drinks. Tar Beach was later made into a children's book, one of

Stitched into History



11.17 Faith Ringgold. With detail of *The Purple Quilt*. 1986.
© Faith Ringgold, Inc. Photographer: C'Love.

four that Ringgold has written.

The combination of fantasy and hard reality in this work, with imagination the key to overcoming obstacles, is typical of Ringgold's work as well as her life. Near the end of her memoir, she said, "I don't want the story of my life to be about racism, though that has played a major role. I want my story to be about attainment. love of family, art, helping others, courage, values, dreams coming true."



 11.18 Polly Apfelbaum. Blossom. 2000.
 Velvet and dye. Diameter 18'. Photography: Adam Reich. Courtesy of the artist and D'Amelio Terras Gallery, New York.

> Most fiber art is divided between works made on a loom, such as the *Ardabil Carpet*, and **off-loom** pieces such as quilts. Over the last generation or so, fiber arts have gone very far off the loom, as Nick Cave's *Soundsuits* show. Note also *Her Secret Is Patience*, the large piece illustrated at the beginning of Chapter 1.

> Polly Apfelbaum dyes off-loom fabrics to create installations that show the influence of both modern abstract art and feminism. She said that she wanted to do a contemporary version of the traditional crazy quilt, in which random fragments of leftover cloth are stitched together in dazzling patterns. In this way she claims descent from the women who have traditionally woven and sewn most textiles. In *Blossom*, she used bright colors to stain oval-shaped pieces of velvet.

She attached them together to heighten the resemblance to quilts, and then installed them on the floor of a gallery. The resulting work resembles a quilt, a carpet, and a luxurious bed of flower petals. She applied fabric dye to each part with a squeeze bottle. For this piece, she prevented the dye from reaching the edge of each oval, leaving a white border that sets each color apart. Her dyeing process resembles painting, but the works she creates are closer to sculpture and textile art. She sometimes calls her works "fallen paintings," because placing the work on the floor allows viewers to interact with the work from more angles.

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