

## Funk Ceramics – the 1960's

Modern and contemporary ceramics are defined as unique clay objects created after 1925 by one or a pair of artists working in a studio environment. A contemporary studio ceramist is the sole creator of a piece, from its initial concept through every stage of its aesthetic development. The history of the ceramic discipline during the period of 1950 to the present can be seen as a series of defining moments – shifts in direction, perception, or philosophy due to the convergence of artists and thinkers.

The counter-culture revolution of the 1960's spawned more than anti-war protests, long hair and flower power. It also impacted all art forms, where rebellion against the status quo manifested new art forms and modes of expression. This movement defined a dynamic period in social, political and artistic upheaval that was influential in the development of contemporary American ceramics.

Blatant, humorous, sometimes gross, "Funk" ceramics delight with substance, narrative and often a good joke. Although these ceramics can present underlying concepts of seriousness, on the surface they communicate that we perhaps needn't take art—and by extension ourselves—quite so seriously.

The Funk modus operandi had a cheeky way of mocking Ceramic's history and obsession with craft while simultaneously celebrating the progressive strides that American ceramics has made via the dedication of individuals and industry alike.

In general, Funk might be paralleled with the Pop ideals of Warhol and such contemporaries. Both movements were turning their backs on "the emotional theater of Abstract Expressionism," and held other things in common such as a fixation with consumer culture, and bringing "low art" to the high-end table by using colors and surfaces informed by industry and design.

The differences between Funk and Pop lay in the specific history of ceramics versus the rest of art history. The conceptual base from which Funk had arisen involved the rejection of ceramic history—not necessarily the rejection of its technical progress but a disregard for the expectation of clay as a material specifically used for the vessel. Another key difference between Funk and Pop was the way that each set of practitioners chose to use these consumer-driven colors and surfaces. The Pop movement was more interested in an overall streamlined approach to imagery; a removal of the hand for an illusory assimilation into consumer culture. Funk was still interested in the craft tradition of ceramics which encouraged a visible sign of the maker. Artists started moving towards commercial glazes for expanded color possibilities such as those that closely matched the bright colors of consumer culture.

### **California Funk**

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.

The fact that the Funk movement in clay began in Northern California in the early 1960s makes perfect sense. During this period, and really for the first time, California artists began producing works of art that were nationally significant, but also specifically local in feeling and inspiration. California itself had come into its own, assuming a central place on the national stage in terms of economics, politics and entertainment. Through a new style uniquely Californian, artists produced work that manifested a profound sense of self-confidence coupled with a daring willingness to take on themes that had until this point been inappropriate for art.

California's artists had never been entirely comfortable giving up subject matter, and Abstract Expressionism's obliteration of the representational left artists inquiring "Where do we go from here?" Californians were among the first artists in the nation to provide the answer by reclaiming the subject.

Beat began with the art, poetry, music and performance that comprised the counterculture taking root in San Francisco's North Beach area. There, artists lived and worked in close cooperation with writers and philosophers, rejected convention and flaunted bourgeoisie norms. Making assemblage from refuse, artists such as Bruce Conner and George Herms recycled the discarded materials of consumer culture, snubbing California's materialism and, at the same time, creating art within their own meager budgets.

These artists frequently imbued their art with humor, spawning progenitors, most notably Funk. The first manifestation of Funk was not about clay, but about art offering a shared subversive and irreverent spirit. Artists fitting the bill held a 1951 exhibition at San Francisco's Place Bar. Called "Common Art Accumulations," much of the art was made from found materials.

Funk became the label for the style of art that developed around Robert Arneson, William Wiley, Roy De Forest and initially Manuel Neri at the University of California at Davis, just west of Sacramento. Representational, witty, irreverent and even kitsch, its playfulness masked an underlying concern for more serious issues.

Ceramist and educator Robert Arneson led the charge of the Funk movement from the University of California, Davis, where, beginning in 1962, he taught ceramics from the infamous TB-9 classroom building. Arneson, known for his work in self-portraiture, brought exciting new ideas and non-conventional attitudes to the field of ceramics that was dominated at the time by more traditional pottery traditions.

Some of Arneson's early pieces were overtly influenced by Pop. Arneson laid claim to the Funk label when he submitted "*Funk John*" to a 1963 exhibition of California sculptors held on the rooftop of the Kaiser Center in Oakland. A toilet complete with fecal matter, Arneson's submission paid homage to Marcel Duchamp's famous "*Fountain*", a urinal that Duchamp signed "R. Mutt" and submitted to the first exhibition of the New York Society of Independent Artists in 1917.

Arneson's sculpture was considered offensive and was withdrawn and so the artist of course wasted no time in producing subsequent versions of the scandalous piece. Arneson's work, along with that of other artists, became known for its ribald humor, scatological and sexual references, and blatant, in-your-face amateurishness. Even the term "funk" came fully loaded, stemming from dictionary

definitions meaning body odor, and something commonly regarded as coarse or indecent. Yet, three years later, what had begun as anti-establishment art was given institutional credibility when it became the subject of an exhibition curated by Peter Selz at the University of California at Berkeley.

As a teacher at Davis for thirty years, Arneson worked closely with his colleagues. Arneson was also in a strategic position to disseminate ideas to his many students—both Funk and not-so-Funk—at the University’s TB-9 studio. During this energetic period, students, having heard of the surge of activity in the art department, transferred from other departments and other schools to join the union. With Arneson’s encouragement, they rejected modernist traditions, finding clay to be an adaptable material free of pretensions and thus a perfect medium for their experiments. Many went on to become important artists in their own right.

Of these, we will look at: David Gilhooly, Margaret Dodd, Chris Unterseher and Peter VandenBerge.

But first let’s take a look at the man - the legend Robert Arneson.



Robert Arneson, *Funk John*, 36 in. in height, ceramic, 1963.

## David Gilhooly



Gilhooly, formerly an anthropology major, was one of the ceramists most closely associated with Funk. Best known for his "frog cosmology," he also crafted other animals and, with deference to Pop, depictions of food.

David Gilhooly is a well-known sculptor, who is recognized primarily for his ceramic sculpture of animals, food, planets and the FrogWorld. A graduate of the University of California at Davis (BA, 1965 MA, 1967), he and his friends, working in the TB-9 studio were The Funk Ceramic Movement of the San Francisco Bay Area.

"I first got into ceramics trying to impress a girl. I had majored in biology and later, anthropology and was in danger of failing German, English, chemistry and other requirements. I met an art major in the spring of 1962 and to impress her, I pre-enrolled in two art classes for the following fall. The first class was beginning drawing with Wayne Thiebaud and the second was to be the first ceramics class taught by Robert Arneson at the University of California at Davis."

"On the first day of class, all prospective students gathered at TB-9. It seemed there were about 50 women, with no sign of the object of my affections, and me. She'd left school that summer to get married! To get the class down to a manageable size, Arneson asked the art majors and minors to identify themselves and for some reason I lied and said I was an art minor. He was glad to have me aboard because as the only other male in the class he saw in me a person who could sweep up and make the clay. That summer during the summer session Bob made me his assistant and I remained his assistant until I received my master's degree in 1967."

At that time UCD was a predominantly agricultural college that secretly harbored one of the most avant-garde art departments on the West Coast. UCD's fledgling art department was spread around the campus from TB-9 (temporary building 9, but it's still there) for ceramics and sculpture, to a large section of one of the oldest buildings on campus, East Hall, which housed painting, drawing and the department office, with print making classes held in yet another building.

TB-9, a metal building with insulation sprayed on the inside that only served to make it extra hot in the summer and extra cold in the winter, was to be David Gilhooly's home for the next five years and every summer until 1977.

It was in 1965, that David Gilhooly, alongside his teacher Robert Arneson, with classmates Peter Vandenberg, Chris Unterseher and Margaret Dodd began making the first ceramic objects which would later be known as Funk Ceramics.

Working 16 hours or more a day in TB-9 the group hardly knew that the rest of the art world existed at all. Arneson showed his students slides of abstract expressionist clay and a very few historical objects. They enjoyed pouring over catalogs of Claes Oldenburg's work. But the opening of the Avery Brundage

collection of Asian Art at the De Young Museum in Golden Gate Park (San Francisco, California) impressed them most.

"It was there that I first saw Tang Dynasty hilltop Jars, little cylindrical lidded pots with little scenes on the lids." David had been making little scenes depicting the Tarzan and other movies of his youth, but was always unhappy with the consequences. Sculpturally they were too flat and even when lifted on pedestals never seemed to work visually. The hilltop jars solved the problem for him and he began making lidded cookie jars, casseroles, and incense burners with movie scenes on the lids. The vessels served to lift the scenes and give them a visual importance. These were some of his first Funk pieces.

"The cleverest thing I made was *Clark Gable and Rhonda Fleming on the Slopes of Kilamenjaro Incense Burner*. When you put a cigarette or incense cone in the bottom, the smoke would come out the top of the volcano."

"I ended up making large, often life-sized, animals by pounding out a slab of clay on a burlap sack to give it texture and draping it over a mound of excelsior which supported the clay while I pushed and pulled it into shape. Then I'd add legs, a tail and other details. The first things I made were a ten foot American Alligator and the Emma Hippo Memorial named after a pharmacist that I had worked for at age 16. All of the African animals I made were named for friends, relatives, teachers or colleagues which often got me into trouble."

### **The FrogWorld And Other Animals**

In 1965, not only was the reputation of TB-9 on the UCD campus gradually being built by David Gilhooly, Robert Arneson, Margaret Dodd, Chris Unterseher, and Peter Vandenberg, but also close relationships and a dedication to the work were being developed. David would get to the studio at 4:00 a.m. and the others would trickle in starting at 9:00 - 10:00 a.m. People would start leaving for home around 5:00 p.m. with Peter Vandenberg leaving anywhere from 10:00 p.m. to 2:00 or 3:00 a.m. It was in this environment that David would make his first frogs using the low-fire whiteware that they had developed.

"I made my first frogs during one of our frequent cup making rivalries. We all tried to make the most far-out, grotesque, unusually handled cups possible while still keeping the cups functional. I made a giant mushroom for a handle and set frogs below it. I also put one in the bottom of the cup itself unknowingly tying myself to a joke that went at least as far back as Babylon."

This inspired David to create FrogNapoleon (a bust) and other cups. He had created everyday normal "Our World" Frogs to go along with some of the large African animals that he had made, but these were the first "civilized" frogs.

A series of lidded pots soon followed, depicting a troop of Frogscouts touring around their world while visiting national monuments like FrogMount Rushmore, but the FrogWorld didn't really get underway until David moved to Regina, Saskatchewan in 1969.

Thinking he had exhausted African animals, he set his sights on making domesticated animals that were also named for relatives, friends, and colleagues. The dogs and cats would often be portraits of real pets whose owners often furnished photographs for David's reference. The dogs were often accompanied by

ceramic droppings, that would sit surreptitiously next to or behind the culprit, or by dog dishes sometimes filled with dog biscuits. Pigs also made their way into the repertoire.

After graduating from UCD with his MA in 1967, David got his first teaching job at San Jose State University in San Jose, California. It was a job, unfortunately, teaching watercolor. Banned from using the ceramic facilities at SJSU, David continued to use the kilns at Davis on Christmas holidays and summers until 1977, when he got the bright idea that he could buy his own kiln and plug it into the dryer outlet of any house. Since he had to teach watercolors and had no such experience, David spent the summer making paper mâché pigs, sloths, crocodiles and anteaters which he watercolored using poster paints.

1969 found the artist in a new position, this time at the University of Saskatchewan where he would teach ceramics. It was there, in Regina, where David's FrogWorld matured.

"I traveled through early Christian and Pre-Christian Greek and Roman Frogs and legends, arriving in FrogEgypt. There was Frog Nefertiti and other assorted FrogEgyptian Gods including several versions of FrogTut."

After reading Herodotus, the artist was disappointed to find that what he thought were the multiple breasts on Diana of Ephesus were in actuality wreaths of dates. Since he was now the creator of the FrogWorld, he decided to "fix this up". "That was the nice thing about clay. If you didn't like the way something really was, you could always fix it up.

After his dismissal from the University of Saskatchewan in 1971, David moved to Ontario and worked part time at York University. He continued to do so until 1977 except for one year away to teach on the other side of the border at his alma mater, University of California at Davis, in 1975-1976.

"I didn't want to miss the Bicentennial Year and all the Frog American historic pieces that it suggested."

During the Toronto winter, in anticipation of moving to the country and living the country life, David made vegetable things and dreamt of the large garden he would have in the Spring. He planned to have a vegetable stand where he would sell real vegetables and small ceramic frogs. To help him foster the hope of Spring in the dead of the Ontario winter, the artist started a series of pieces celebrating the fertility and fecundity of nature. His knowledge of mythology led to the creation of his own in the embodiment of the Honey Sisters. One sister, Black Doris Day Vegetable Fertility Goddess was actually a portable vegetable garden suitable for the mantle of your fireplace. Legend has it that the vegetables on her head could be harvested while others would soon grow in their place and the potatoes and peanuts would plop out of her chest one by one regenerating all year long. Together with her sister, the Fertility Goddess with Asparagus Tips and other frog, pig and hippo characters, the artist created the Frog World's equivalent of our Egyptian Gods.

"The Honey Sisters would go around doing garden blessings, opening supermarkets and starring in their own movies in the FrogWorld. These movies, which to us would seem to be badly produced films on wartime backyard gardens, are considered the epitome of the blockbuster in the FrogWorld." The roles of Gods were obviously different in the FrogWorld. This is true of many of the other seemingly identical characters in The Gilhooly Universe.

While the frogs are us, because the frog body responds to its environment differently than the Homo Sapiens body we do use, the artist reasoned that history and lives would sometimes parallel those in our own world but would at other times, diverge greatly. This explains why the Gods and Goddesses of the FrogWorld had the status of our world's famous movie stars or sports heroes.

The anticipation of Spring in Aurora was, however, dampened. During the thaw, David discovered that his house had been built on the shores of the glacial Lake Ontario. He had no soil, but he did have the ability to "fix things up". The completely clay Frog and Vegetable Stand made its debut at an outdoor art fair in downtown Toronto that summer. David sold frogs and vegetables in various sizes and bunches. For the first time, donuts, pizzas and pizza slices and assorted potted cacti also made an appearance. When things sold out, he merely restocked the stand. The experience of selling things out of a cart so entertained him that he eventually went on to another piece of mercantile art, the donut cart.

"The donuts were so fun that eventually I made two Frog Fred Donut Carts. Frog Fred was my counterpart in the FrogWorld, having much the same hopes and desires as I did. He generally wore blue coveralls and a straw hat."

Much to the consternation of gallery employees, David would allow people wanting a souvenir of the show to buy a donut out of the cart at \$5.00 each if they couldn't afford the whole piece. Many of his openings would feature donuts and milk instead of the usual wine and cheese with gallery employees complaining about crumbs left on carpets. To this day, children of that time, now in their 40's and 50's, remark to the artist how "child friendly" his openings were and how for many of them, his openings were the art shows they were allowed to attend and enjoy with their parents.

"At that time a lot of people involved in The Arts were complaining about the lack of funds for museums, shows, public art, etc. One of the main problems with The Arts is that they can be so child-unfriendly. You can't take a child to a concert because you're afraid they'll make noise, they don't think of making an enclosed room for children or even mothers with babies, they're simply excluded from the experience. You can't take children to a museum because you're afraid they'll touch something. Rather than exclude them, why not have paintings or sculpture that they can touch and if they've touched enough, maybe they'll be ready to just look a little later. If we don't educate our children by taking them to concerts, allowing them to come to openings, or taking them to museums, why would they want to support The Arts as adults? That's why I wanted to make it possible for children to attend my openings, especially with their parents. I wasn't trying to address children as much I was trying to include them."

Meanwhile, outside the studio in the real world, meat for the first time in Canada and the US was becoming quite expensive. People were used to \$.30 US for a pound of hamburger and were now asked to pay over a dollar a pound. Since meat was the antithesis of vegetables and because the media were constantly bombarding the public with this issue, David began work on A Real Meat and Potato Man, an actual frog leader disguised in meat and potatoes to go out among the people. The common frog was also besieged by meat in Beaten by Ur Own Meat. Contemporary issues and politics had always influenced David's work but he was always careful not to let the issue date the piece.

"You have to be very careful about political art. In order for a piece to survive in the continuum of time, a piece must first survive as a communication of multiple ideas esthetically presented, not as a singular statement about the times. The viewer shouldn't have to know what was happening during the particular time the piece was made to appreciate it. It does enhance the enjoyment of the piece, but it shouldn't be necessary. I use humor in my work to get people's attention. Whether they know what

was happening during the time I made the piece or not they can respond to the humor. It's like a refrigerator door. It's very hard to open a refrigerator without the handle on the door, but there is some really great stuff inside. My refrigerator door handle is humor, but many people don't really understand that the piece is addressing something often quite serious, even dark. Often, my humor softens the blow of the real message too well and people don't get beyond the light heartedness. Someone once called it 'Soft Horror'."

So as not to miss The United States' Bicentennial Birthday, David moved house back to Davis in 1975. For the first time in many years, he had access to large kilns which gave rise to the many busts of frog historical characters. Besides the Bicentennial inspired pieces he again balanced his own universe by also creating pieces influenced by his life in Canada as in FrogVictoria in Her 100th Year as Queen. He would also create one of the extremely rare toad pieces, Mao Tse Toad on a Ming Base.

After the prolific years of the mid-seventies, David Gilhooly, having a growing dissatisfaction with clay, animals and even, three dimensional forms sought to terminate the FrogWorld and his accustomed way of expressing ideas and opinions. In 1982, Gilhooly started exploring the media of Plexiglas, but still produced a multitude of ceramic pieces. In 1996 he officially gave up clay to work on what he calls the shadow boxes, which are a much evolved form of the Plexiglas pieces.



"Frog San Sabastian"  
1967 4" tall



"FrogNefertiti"  
1970 20" high



"FrogWedgie"  
1970 25" high 17" wide





"Artemis, Vegetable Fertility Goddess"  
1972 15" x 23"



"Frog Buddha in Han"  
1976 34" high 25" wide



"Frog and Vegetable Stand"  
1972 10' x 2' x 4'



"FrogFred's Best Gift"  
1973 11" high



"Drowning in the Consumer Market"  
1974 48" diameter



David Gilhooly, *Frog Buddha*, 16 in. 1975

## Robert Arneson 1930 – 1992



(Robert Arneson poses in 1991 with the first of his five *Egghead* installations, Bookhead, in front of Shields Library. The professor died the next year.)

Robert Arneson was born in Benicia, California, northeast of San Francisco. In high school, he seriously began to consider a career as a cartoonist and contributed a weekly sports cartoon to a local newspaper. He studied at the College of Marin, Kentfield, California, from 1949 to 1951 and received a B.A. in Art Education from the California College of Arts and Crafts in Oakland in 1954. While teaching art in a Bay Area high school he became a proficient potter (He signed his pottery "Arne"), keeping at least one step ahead of his students so that he could teach them.

He enrolled at Mills College where he earned his M.F.A. in 1958. After extensive experience as a teacher in several California high schools, working as an assistant to Tony Prieto at Mills College, and teaching at Santa Rosa Junior College (1959), Bob accepted a teaching position at the University of California at Davis in 1962.

During a demonstration at the California State Fair in the summer of 1962, Bob threw a stoneware clay bottle, capped it with a clay bottle cap, and labeled the bottle *No Deposit, No Return*. It looked like a short, fat, old Canadian beer bottle, about 12 inches high. Although he would occasionally return to the functional form, this gesture closed the door to functional ceramics and transformed clay from a crafts media to an aesthetic one. He would do a number of versions of this piece including bottles in six-packs.

Emil Mrak the chancellor of the University of California at Davis at the time, happened to see one of these demonstrations and the budding art department gained a huge supporter. Davis was primarily an agricultural college with an art department – not an art college. With too few art students to support the entire Art Department staff, many of the staff were officially teaching in the College of Agriculture in the Design Department. Through careful planning and direction, Nelson was able to build an innovative art department year by year and bring together a group of largely unknown teachers and students who would later become well known artists.

Thus, Bob was added to the roster of teachers at Davis. When he first came to Davis, the now famous TB-9 (temporary building-9) had only one room for clay. A small part of the building was for sculpture which included Ralph Johnson's traditional sculpting classes and Tio Giambruni's bronze casting facility. The rest of the building was the police department, the sign painting department and most of all a storage area for experimentally canned peaches and tomatoes. Bob worked at his Alice Street home until the sign painters moved out.

Bob's first important works at UCD were female torsos wearing bras and girdles which were cast in bronze. Influenced by Abstract Expressionism and in an effort to become distanced from the traditional vessel form, he used stoneware for making pots which, when taken off the wheel, were rolled on the floor, beaten, pushed in or otherwise abstracted. These led to the stoneware trophies, his first funk ceramics at UCD. It is important to remember that with its alluring grain and warmth of color, high fire stoneware has its own almost classical beauty. The medium is inherently anti-funk. Stoneware has a high iron content which bleaches out bright colors like red, yellow, and orange. Obscenely bright colors are achieved at low fire temperatures. Bob's desire to use color in his work led to the re-firing of the high fire stoneware at low fire temperatures using low fire glazes thickly applied on the clay body. Enamel paints were also applied to add color to the work.

The use of stoneware posed other problems. Bob made some stepping stones only to have them blow up in the kiln. He added vermiculite to the clay which also blew up. It wasn't until 1965 that he would use low fire earthenware. Low fire earthenware didn't have the classic beauty that stoneware had and the formula that was developed had a white body (half kaolin and half talc with 30 mesh silica sand added for "roughage"). It looked cheap even after firing and was difficult to throw. It was common, like funk, but a vast pallet of color was now available because of the commercial craft glazes that could be purchased at any ceramic hobby store.

With Peter VandenBerge's suggestion of adding perlite to the clay body, it became possible to make absolutely anything as thick as desired without having the piece blow up. Commercial glazes made life easier in TB-9. Prior to being able to use these, glazes were had to be made by the artists for the stoneware body using highly toxic chemicals.

The subject matter of Bob's work drew from Pop Art during the mid-1960's. Common, almost predictable objects were formed from clay in the lumpy, organic, sexual, style that had become Bob's. These objects were often anthropo-morphed with body parts as in the typewriter and the series of toilets.



Armed with punning titles, the humorous veneer of his work often wore thin to reveal hostile, sneering comments on everyday life and the objects and people in it. This attitude would become more pronounced in the work toward the end of his life.

Some of the first pieces Bob made with the new clay were large, cabbage-sized roses that sat on the floor. These later evolved into large press molded pots of flowers in 1967. Sometimes the pots would be three-dimensional with flattened flowers. The visual pun, a pot with the flowers painted on the side of the pot came from this series. After the roses, came a series of large coins that hung on the wall which featured the artist's head rather than an eagle.

The Funk years of Bob's career mark a spontaneous, almost careless use of the medium. His use of shocking, almost insulting imagery, grabs the viewer's attention and contributed to the re-evaluation of clay as an artistic medium.



By 1971, portraits of famous and historical people and self-portraits were being produced. The work had become very carefully crafted, often monumental and realistic with a classical approach; very un-funk, while retaining its sneering and cynical aspect.

Arneson continued along this path, creating self-portraits and trophy busts of famous people until his death.



Smorgi-Bob, The Cook – 1971



The artist in his studio - 1978



Nasal Flat, 1981



A Likeness of Francis B. -1981



Trophy Bust, 1981



Kiln Man



Although plagued since 1974 with cancer, friends said Mr. Arneson worked actively until very recently. In 1991, he did a painting entitled "Wimp Dip" which showed a cringing George Bush doused with crude oil.



Chemo 1  
1992

Robert Arneson, an internationally known sculptor, died Monday of cancer in Benicia. He was 62.

Two decades before he died, Mr. Arneson wrote about what he wanted to happen when his end came. He said he wanted his body glazed, fired up to 2,000 degrees "and when it's cool, roll me over and shake out my ashes. . . . Make a glaze and color it bright."

Mr. Arneson is survived by his wife, Sandra Shannonhouse, of Benicia, and five children -- Leif, Kreg, Derek and Kirk by his first wife, Jeanette Jensen, and a daughter, Tenaya, by his second wife.

Arneson's fame is far-reaching, and his works can be found in public and private collections around the world.

## Margaret Dodd

Although she has an extremely important place in the history of “Funk” artists, little is mentioned about Margaret Dodd.

One of the frustrations encountered when researching Margaret is that you are faced with using newspaper, magazine and catalog sources for Margaret's work and that the commentary is often reduced to only three or four lines that simply state that Helen Dodd was from Australia, she made "Baroque" cars in TB-9, and was the only woman of the TB-9 group. Add to this the fact that she was a woman, creating work in a male dominated art scene.

“Art is a very daunting and demanding commitment to make for anyone. You're taking a really big jump off a really high cliff when you commit your life to making art for a living. People will tell you that you won't make it because you don't have enough talent. Your parents will tell you to major in something where you'll make a living or at least have a back up in teaching. They may even tell you to get back to reality because nobody makes a living in The Arts. Add to all this being a woman who wants marriage and children as well as a career in the arts and you have major obstacles. But I didn't expect the media to be a contributing factor to these obstacles. I expected the show catalogs to at least provide a little more information on the work or at least as much information as was provided for the other artists.”

A final reason that researching Dodd is difficult can be clearly seen in her following statement. “I think one reason there's not much about me is because I came back to Australia and was wiped off the US ceramics map. I know this because Lee Nordness\* came round buying work for Objects USA, must have been in 1968. He got the Club Car (the Kombi with the women), and the Cadillac and the wrecked Passat. But when they found out I had left the US they disqualified me from the show... I think... don't know really..I wasn't there. Art seems to be a very tribal national business at times... (\*Lee Nordness was a New York gallery owner who went to the West Coast to buy art for the Johnson Wax Collection.)

I came to be at Davis because my husband got a job in the physics dept. We drove to Davis from New Haven Connecticut, arriving on Independence Day, 1965, after he had been at Yale for a year, with John, about to turn 1, in the back of the Rambler American. I had been an art teacher in Australia for 4 and a half years and wanted to do more study. Margaret came to TB-9 in the fall of 1965 and took a throwing class from Robert Arneson. At first I audited courses, then got credit for them. She officially enrolled in 1966 and earned her BA in 1967



Margaret made cars by first starting out with the chassis and building up and out. Because Margaret was married and had a child at home, she would make it to class and work in TB-9 during class hours and go home. (This may account for the reason so little is written about her and her work. She was at home working and not as accessible as the other TB-9 people.) Dodd set out to capture California's love affair with the automobile, having a particular penchant for Volkswagen Beetles.

“TB9 was exciting because there were people from all over the arts dept, and University in there, not just potters and sculptors but painters and poets and jazz musicians, conceptual artists and they all did things together.”

"I wanted to do an MA, but my husband took a job back here in Adelaide, and we left at the end of 1968, to my great disappointment. Being in the 1966 Museum West (chocolate factory) exhibition and having a one person show at the Davis Union Gallery in 1967 or 8 were great experiences, and gave me confidence to have more shows in Australia. My ceramic heart is still in California."

In 1974-5 Margaret found herself working in Den Haag (Struktuur 68) in The Netherlands, with two children and her husband, where she made boats. Then it was back to Australia.

"Australia has never consistently nurtured a culture of ceramic sculpture the way TB9 did, along with the galleries in Calif. and the rest of the US. I love going back. My best ceramic pieces in Australia have been the iconic (now) Holden cars of the 40's and fifties, especially the ones I made for a film, "This Woman is Not a Car", which were a Holden Bride, one with hair curlers, and so on. I still do ceramic sculpture, as well as video and film projects. Live and work in Adelaide, South Australia."

During the 1970s and 1980s, Margaret Dodd's series of small ceramic FJ Holden sculptures became famous beyond the world of fine art and craft. Dodd's sculptures feminized the FJ, grafting elements of women's identities and roles onto the leading automotive symbol of Australian identity.



In her ceramic sculptures Margaret Dodd playfully claims for women one of the most celebrated symbols of masculinity in Australia, the Holden car. The FJ and FX Holdens' of the early 1950s become a metaphor for the female body, for male and female relations, and for women's political concerns during the 1960s and 70s period of second wave feminism.

Margaret Dodd, 1998

Her work is held in major collections around the country as well as institutions in the US and Canada.



Title: Holden with lipstick surfboards



Title: Bridal Holden



Title: Steve Kaltenbach and his Yellow Flab Rambler



Title: Zip-zap punk FX



Title: "On top of old faithful", 1972



## Chris Unterseher

Chris Unterseher was born in Portland, OR in 1943.

A surfer from Santa Barbara" he came to Davis in 1965 after receiving his B. A. from San Francisco State University.

Some of the first things that Chris made at Davis were The Boy Scout and National Geographic plates, tea trays and sculptures. These were glaze-painted and sculpted scenes with captions or explanations stamped into the wet clay. The scenes were chosen from National Geographic Magazines and The Boy Scout Manual. Chris eventually used a plate mould because throwing plates can be tedious and "if-y" especially with a wide rim that serves as a sort of frame and a place to stamp text. He was then able to concentrate his effort into the actual creative part of making the scenes. The use of the plate form worked well as a blank canvas.

Chris graduated Davis and left to teach at the University of Cincinnati in 1968. The university had a mould making facility and while there, Chris created a series of multiple sculptures still using whiteware. He'd make the piece, make a mould of it, and then turn out about a dozen or so. These were mundane everyday items with a self-portrait somehow incorporated into it. The Unterseher String Dispenser, The Unterseher Planter, and The Unterseher Bookends were some of the examples of that period. While Chris' work had always been very finely crafted with well drawn elements they were now scaled down as if to concentrate the intention of the artist.

In 1970, Chris was in Reno, Nevada, teaching at The University of Nevada. His work went through a further refining with the use of porcelain. Pieces were now further scaled down, often with off-scale elements emphasizing certain aspects of the piece. Many of the pieces were matchstick or toothpick holders.

"Most of the material I've seen on the work of Chris Unterseher talks about the souvenir aspect of his pieces. How he makes the cheap, kitschy nature of souvenirs more precious by very finely crafting porcelain, working in small scale and using muted colors; sort of the "anti-souvenir". Or how he's making fun of souvenirs."

Chris gets interested in a subject and experiences it by "going on vacation". Once there, he researches and looks and reads and listens and whatever else. He comes home for brief forays, maybe with a souvenir or two and revisits and finds out a little more. He continues this process until he knows all he wants to or is interested in something else. But when he really comes home from his vacation, he has a set of souvenirs to show you where he's been.

Chris "has come home" and is now back in The Bay Area of California, living, teaching and working.

Unterseher made narrative vignettes of daily life.



## Peter Vandenberg



Peter Vandenberg was born in The Netherlands in the city of Voorburg, a suburb of The Hague, in 1935. His father was a geologist working for Royal Dutch (Shell Oil) and was sent to Java to work. The family joined him in 1936 when Peter was 6 months old.

Some of Peter's earliest memories are of the flat shadow puppet and the “wajan” puppet (three dimensional puppets) shows in Indonesia. These puppets would often turn to the audience and ask questions, talk directly to or otherwise involve the audience to move the story along. He also recalls that they went into houses and things happened in the houses. Not only was there interaction between people and animals, but objects also seemed to interact. This imagery would later manifest itself in Peter's work.

WWII reached Indonesia and in 1942, at the age of 5, Peter and his family were imprisoned in the first of three concentration camps.

Occasionally, Peter would drop hints about the desperate conditions in these camps; his mother having to trade a diamond ring for a single egg, or acts of kindness like the guard at the Adek Camp (the second camp the family was moved to), who smuggled paper and pens to Peter and a friend in exchange for the drawings they made, but generally Peter's friends at TB-9 thought it not polite to ask about or press for details of his camp experiences.

In 1945 the atom bomb was dropped on Hiroshima and as Peter puts it, "The atom bomb saved my a\*\*." The Japanese left Indonesia and its government to the Dutch and all the weapons to the Indonesians who then used them in a revolution against the Dutch. The family was free from the conditions in the concentration camps, but were now dodging bullets by revolutionaries who were actively targeting the Dutch population.

The family finally was able to board a DC-3 which took them to Point Darwin, Australia and from there they went to Brisbane and then to Katomba where it was decided that the now 10 year old Peter would go to boarding school at St. Bernard's College, (a Catholic school), to learn English. Peter had a difficult time at St. Bernard's.

"We had to get up at 5:00 am every day, then there was an hour of prayer, a cold shower, a bowl of oatmeal and then school."

Not only was Peter not Catholic but he had no concept of religion, being brought up in concentration camps. His inability to understand what went on at the school went far beyond his inability to understand English. After throwing a brick through a window, he was dismissed.

The family moved back to The Netherlands in 1946. During this time, Peter made "some puppet things" out of clay which he would put on coals overnight to harden. Meanwhile, Peter's father made a series of work related trips to The U.S.

The family moved to The U.S. in 1950 where his father worked developing the oil fields in Bakersfield, California. After attending one semester of high school in Bakersfield, Peter attended Bakersfield Jr. College where he took art classes. He started California State University at Sacramento in 1957 and as a condition of graduating in 1960 with a BA, he student taught at McClatchy High in Sacramento for one semester.

He went back to The Netherlands for about a half year, attended Holland Free Academy, returned to the U.S. and "hung out". He met Robert Arneson at The State Fair. While Arneson was demonstrating throwing and sculpting he said, "Come on over!" So, in 1962, Peter came on over to The University of California at Davis and became Bob's first graduate student.

David Gilhooly describes the first time he saw Peter, "There were a couple of us standing in awe around Peter. We were watching him throw. He did it so quickly and easily. I wanted to say something to him. So, I went up to him and asked if he was a professional potter and he said, 'No.'"

In 1963 he graduated with an MA in painting, even though he had been sculpting his entire time at Davis. The only degree in art offered at UCD, until circa 1967, was in painting. Peter whipped up a bunch of paintings three weeks before his master's show to finish his degree.

He was then hired by Tio Giambruni to help in the foundry in TB-9 until 1966. Perhaps because of the geology background of his father, Peter was able to develop the non-explosive, non-cracking formula for the whiteware clay that he, Arneson, Gilhooly, Unterseher and Dodd used to make the so-called Funk Ceramics. The addition of Perlite to the existing low-fire talc and kaolin formula that Arneson developed not only stabilized, but helped to lighten the otherwise heavy clay body.

From 1966-73, Peter taught at California State University at San Francisco. In 1973, Peter started teaching at California State University at Sacramento with a summer school job at Alfred University in 1974. He taught at CSUS until retiring.

Peter VandenBerge began sculpting food, vegetables mostly. His, however, possessed anthropomorphic features.



Broccoli Head

Eventually VandenBerge left vegetables behind in favor of the human figure, specializing in life-sized standing personages, often sporting hats. Ultimately, like Arneson, he encapsulated his personalities into larger-than-life busts and heads. Although Arneson arrived at an endless array of self portraits, VandenBerge produced a wide range of characters. Peter VandenBerge is one of Northern California's most important ceramic sculptors. His large ceramic busts bear a resemblance to the well-known "heads" from Easter Island, with elongated features and a mysterious tribal feel. Thin and elongated, they show obvious sources of inspiration from Amedeo Modigliani and Alberto Giacometti. Most of VandenBerge's pieces are hand built in the coil method of clay construction with earth-toned underglazes and bright colorful finishes.



Couple Watching Saturday Night Movie



Indjah, 1982



Lindy, 1991

Courtesan - 1988



Claude Among the Lilies, Ceramic, 2007

Elements of Funk have now spread well beyond the Northern California region to achieve international acclaim. The acceptance of silliness, of commercially available glazes and of functionless sculpture for sculpture's sake is now part of the ceramic canon. Artists like Patti Warashina, Esther Shimazu and Charles Krafft, along with numerous other artists just coming out of art school, continue to keep Funk traditions of humor, whimsy and in-your-face social confrontation very much alive.