

ART IN BALBOA PARK

San Diego Museum of Art, *American Ceramics 1884–1972*, February 25–September 3, 2006.

The San Diego Museum of Art (SDMA) celebrates its 80th anniversary with *American Ceramics, 1884–1972*, an exhibit showcasing significant works from its collection of American ceramics. SDMA's founding director, Reginald Poland, acquired many significant pieces from the Arts & Crafts movement and well-known studio potters spanning the years 1884–1972.

Several outstanding San Diego artists are represented in the collection, including Albert R. Valentien and his wife, Anna Marie Bookprinter Valentien, who was an enthusiastic supporter of the Museum. Both had previously been employed by the renowned Rookwood Pottery in Cincinnati. Three Rookwood vases in the early section of the exhibition came to the Museum as a bequest from her estate. Particularly striking is a large vase showing the South American orchid, *phragmipendium*, rendered against a neutral background and signed by Albert Valentien in 1898. The exhibit also includes some of the glazed earthenware produced by the Valentiens in their pottery on Texas Street at University Avenue between 1911 and 1913.

The exhibit also includes a four-tile mural, dated 1913, inspired by the local Torrey pine tree and produced by California China Products Company. Instead of using pressed ridges, the unidentified decorator outlined the composition with thin, broken lines of colored slip, applied by hand with a squeeze bag.

Works produced by Markham Pottery of National City between 1913 and



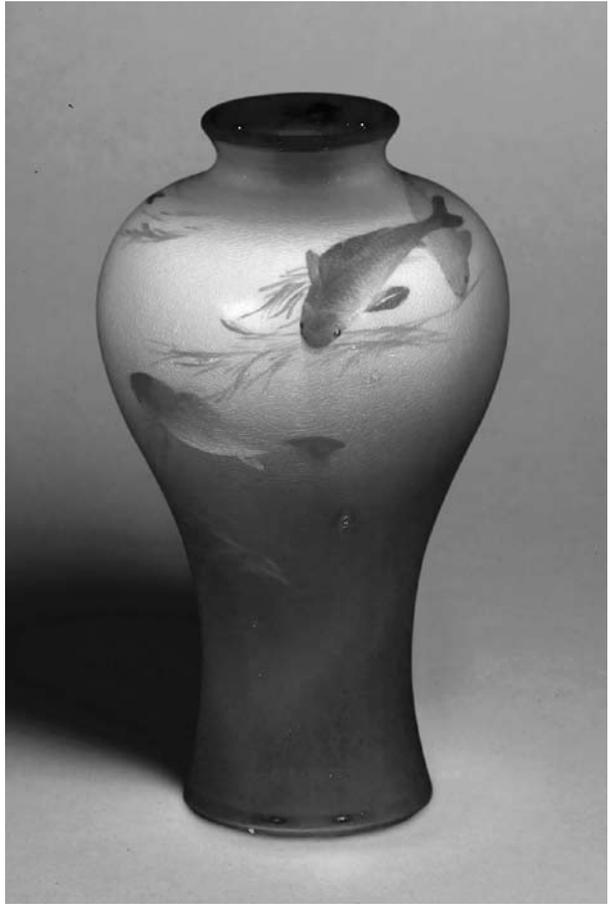
Harrison McIntosh, *Two Bottles*, glazed stoneware, 1972. Gift of the artist, 1973:59; 1973:60. © San Diego Museum of Art.

1921 have simple profiles and oriental forms. A dark, covered jar with slightly raised, web-like veins, provides an example of reseau ware. A nearby vase with a coarser, more irregular surface, provides an example of an effect described by the decorator as "arabesque."

Works by Southern California studio potters began entering the collection in 1933. Among the early acquisitions from this era are pieces by Glen Lukens, Gertrud and Otto Natzler, Laura Andreson, and Beatrice Wood. Soon after meeting the Natzlers, Poland invited them to the Museum for their first solo exhibition, and SDMA became the first museum to acquire their works for a permanent collection. Poland also served as a juror for national and regional shows and brought a number of exhibitions in this field to San Diego.

American Ceramics also includes outstanding examples from a number of key firms associated with the American Art Pottery movement, such as Rookwood, Newcomb, Grueby, and Van Briggie, as well as from the eccentric Biloxi potter, George E. Ohr. The Pewabic Pottery of Detroit, Michigan, is represented by an important group of six vases that came to the Museum in 1941 as a gift from Mary Chase Perry Stratton, who had been the driving force behind the firm. In a letter to Poland at the time of the donation, Stratton noted, "the pieces sent to you have been made at different periods during the past 25 years and put away as 'top notchers,' to be installed someday in distinguished places." The iridescent glaze used by Pewabic Pottery almost glows, an effect achieved through the use of metal oxides and multiple firings.

American Ceramics remains on display through September 3, 2006.



Rookwood Pottery, Harriet Elizabeth Wilcox, decorator, Vase, glazed earthenware, 1896. Bequest of Mrs. Anna M. Valentien, 1951:4.b. © San Diego Museum of Art.