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Back cover images:

Karen Dahl
Box Too Small Teapot, 2000
porcelain
10.75" x 6.5" x 5.5"

Square seal wrapped in cloth teapot
overglaze enamel peony decoration
early 20th century
4.25" x 6.25" x 3.5"



"Through the second half of the twentieth century, as American ceramics developed its own voice—truly eclectic and wildly diverse, drawing from all world ceramic traditions—one of the traditions that American artists found particularly congenial was that of Yixing, China. Yixing is one of three principal Chinese pottery centers whose artisans have, for hundreds of years, produced tea ware of surpassing beauty, ingenuity, and grace. The very first teapot, in fact, was designed in Yixing.

"As is their custom, contemporary American artists have not so much imitated or copied the Yixing pots, but rather have drawn inspiration from them, finding in these diminutive works a kindred concern for the natural world, refined craftsmanship, and objects that are both utilitarian and—as Richard Notkin puts it—'powerful works of art.'

"Like the impact of twentieth-century translations of Chinese and Japanese poems by Ezra Pound, Amy Lowell and Florence Ayscough, and Arthur Waley on modern American poetic practice, Asian ceramics in general have had a profound effect on artists in the West. But as Marvin Sweet (together with essayist William Sargent, an authority on Asian export art) clearly demonstrate in this marvelous book, Yixing ware has had a special resonance for Western ceramists.

"With *The Yixing Effect: Echoes of the Chinese Scholar*, the authors have produced an exemplary work of scholarship, one that will surely serve as the definitive source on its subject for many years to come."

—Rick Newby



THE YIXING EFFECT
Echoes of the Chinese Scholar

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Marvin Sweet



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Many artists—and lovers of the arts—believe that artistic perfection can be found in any time period and within any culture. American ceramic artists are particularly adventurous, continually exploring the vast heritage of ceramic art. With this insightful and beautiful book, *The Yixing Effect: Echoes of the Chinese Scholar*, Marvin Sweet reveals how the Yixing teapot has captured the imagination of contemporary ceramic artists and why it has become a compelling source of inspiration.

From the moment Yixing ware arrived in Europe over three hundred and fifty years ago, the teapot, which was invented in Yixing, has been used as a model by Western ceramists. *The Yixing Effect: Echoes of the Chinese Scholar* offers a brief history of Yixing ware, addressing the collaboration between the Yixing potters and Chinese scholars, including their philosophic and aesthetic influences. The text also offers an overview of the author's collection of historic Yixing ware and culminates with a deeply knowledgeable discussion of the influence Yixing ware has had on contemporary American ceramic art. William Sargent, curator of Asian export art at the Peabody Essex Museum, contributes a chapter on the influence of Yixing wares on seventeenth- and eighteenth-century European ceramics.

The Yixing Effect: Echoes of the Chinese Scholar is richly illustrated with photos of historic Yixing ware, scholar art and works by fifty-nine outstanding contemporary American ceramists. These contemporary artists conclude the book with brief discussions of how Yixing ware has influenced their own work. Their comments reveal divergent personal perspectives and sensibilities—and the richly individual ways in which their encounters with the wares of Yixing have helped expand the teapot tradition.

The Yixing Effect

Echoes of the Chinese Scholar



Marvin Sweet

Foreign Languages Press, Beijing

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Map of Yixing Region



Preface

By Rick Newby

In 1950, when the British potter Bernard Leach declared in *Craft Horizons* that he saw little potential in American ceramics because its practitioners lacked a “cultural taproot,” American ceramists responded predictably. Bauhaus-trained, adoptive American Marguerite Wildenhain riposted in her “Potter’s Dissent,” “It ought to be clear that American potters cannot possibly grow roots by imitating Sung pottery or by copying the way of life of the rural population of Japan.” Out in Montana, Frances Senska, the legendary teacher of Peter Voulkos and Rudy Autio, had her own retort. “We came from so many different places, and could give our own spin to whatever we were doing,” she said. “[In America] you can select any tradition you want and follow it, or make up your own as you go along.”

Through the second half of the twentieth century, as American ceramics developed its own voice—truly eclectic and wildly diverse, drawing from all world ceramic traditions—one of the traditions that American artists found particularly congenial was that of Yixing, China. Yixing is one of three principal Chinese pottery centers whose artisans have, for hundreds of years, produced tea ware of surpassing beauty, ingenuity, and grace.

As is their custom, contemporary American artists have not so much imitated or copied the Yixing pots, but rather have drawn inspiration from them, finding in these diminutive works a kindred concern for the natural world, refined craftsmanship and objects that are both utilitarian and—as Richard Notkin puts it—“powerful works of art.”

Illustrated with more than 150 images, *The Yixing Effect: Echoes of the Chinese Scholar* by American ceramist Marvin Sweet, offers the reader (and viewer) many riches: a concise and thoughtful history of the scholar tradition in China, tracing its philosophical underpinnings and the scholars’ ties to the Yixing potters; an illuminating essay on the influence of Yixing ware in earlier centuries in Europe and America; and an insightful overview of the many ways American artists have worked with, played with, and elaborated upon the Yixing tradition.

With *The Yixing Effect*, Sweet - together with essayist William Sargent, an authority on Asian export art - has produced an exemplary work of scholarship that will surely serve as one of the definitive sources on its subject for many years to come.

Introduction

Over the past twenty years, I have been a participant in and observer of contemporary American ceramics. It seems that clay is in my blood, my DNA and every fiber of my body. I love to work with it, read about it, write about it, talk about it, teach it, buy it and stand before beautiful objects to admire their creation. During this time I began to acquire teapots that were made in Yixing, China. Although I had been acquiring Yixing ware for many years, it was not until I was approached by Jay Lacouture, Professor of Art at Salve Regina University in Newport, Rhode Island, that I began to consider more directly what these teapots meant to the greater field of contemporary ceramic art. Lacouture proposed the idea of exhibiting my collection in conjunction with artists he knew who were using Yixing teapots as a jumping-off point for their own work. In February 1997, we organized an exhibition that was held in Newport. I needed to write down my thoughts for a statement to be hung on the gallery wall. This prompted me to consider more deeply how the Yixing teapots I had been acquiring influenced my own ceramic creations as well as how they were an influence on the work of my peers. I began to realize through conversations and observations that many contemporaries not only appreciated, but were influenced by the historic Yixing tradition.

Uncovering the ideas that inspire a work of art is like searching for clues to a mystery. Most often the clues are not obvious. At first I thought it was the teapots, in their myriad shapes, that served as the catalyst for contemporary artists' interest in the Yixing tradition. It was also possible the pristine craftsmanship of these works resonated with artists who were reacting against the aggressive expressionistic handling of clay that had dominated the field for many years. Considering possibilities beyond these initial impressions, I came to believe that the overriding link between contemporary American ceramic artists and historic Yixing ware was the very influence that inspired the Yixing potters—the Chinese scholars.

Like most of the contemporary artists included in this volume, I am one who tries to surround myself with visually interesting things. I own teapots from Yixing, but certainly I have not restricted myself to them alone. The range of objects I acquire as well as those collected by other artists varies as widely as the interests of the individuals. When an artist collects it is not simply an intellectual exercise, a show of

taste, refinement or affluence. Owning wonderful examples can be an intimate and expeditious catalyst for learning. Artists learn from other artists. Among artists of the past century, Picasso collected African art, and its influence launched Cubism. Auguste Rodin collected eighteenth- and nineteenth-century bronze sculpture, Jacques Lipchitz acquired modern European sculpture, Andy Warhol bought Americana, James McNeill Whistler amassed a vast collection of Japanese prints and ceramics. Joseph Cornell not only acquired flea market bric-a-brac used in his sculptures, but he had a passion for collecting nineteenth-century opera librettos and early twentieth-century film. Dale Chihuly has a collection of Native American Indian blankets and subsequently executed, in glass, his *Navajo Blanket Cylinder Series*. The sculptor Richard Rosenblum amassed a collection of Chinese scholars' rocks which specialists call the largest and most comprehensive assemblage of such objects in the world. Rosenblum was subsequently credited with reviving and ultimately reestablishing Chinese scholars' rocks as an important aspect of the scholars' aesthetic.¹

Even Rembrandt took some of his best ideas from other artists. Building upon the artistic ideas of others was a regular and accepted practice in Rembrandt's day. The important thing was the fresh ideas and interesting twists that each artist would bring to a familiar subject. In 1995, the exhibition "Imitation and Invention: Old Master Prints and Their Sources," organized by the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., included over sixty works by various artists. Among the works in that exhibit was an etching of the *Virgin and Child* that Rembrandt did in his later years. He based it on an engraving by the Italian painter Andrea Mantegna, created more than one hundred and fifty years before. Rembrandt's etching used the exact same pose as Mantegna's. With the addition of a few variations and personal flourishes, the main figure remained almost the same.

In the Chinese artistic tradition, the fundamental attitudes toward painting, poetry and calligraphy followed a historic continuum. Styles and techniques were refined and elaborated upon, but all art was built upon the past. Song dynasty artists freely copied paintings of venerated masterworks or made paintings inspired by the poems of a previous dynasty. One aspect of copying was its value as a method of technical training. However, each artist aspired to incorporate innovative elements or bring a personal style to the work. Most importantly, this approach was understood as a way to find elusive insights held within the ancient models.²

Like any field of art, ceramics has a dialogue with its past. Due to their sophisticated technical and aesthetic content, Chinese ceramics in particular have long been an impetus to Western ceramists as a source of interest and inspiration. Connections have been documented between the work of Betty Woodman and Tang dynasty three-color glazes, Richard DeVore and Song dynasty bowls, Victor Babu and Qing dynasty glazes and Rick Dillingham with globular pots of the prehistoric Yangshao culture. Included in this volume are Richard Shaw and Rick Hirsch, who before looking more closely at Yixing ware, previously stated an affinity with Han dynasty funerary objects and Shang dynasty tripods respectively.

The advent of Yixing teapots can be thought of as the perfect blending of impeccable craftsmanship and a love of tea, filtered through the highly refined sensibilities of the Chinese scholars and the potters of Yixing. The following pages will describe how the scholars and Yixing potters collaborated to push the artistic and functional qualities of teapots to the highest levels of excellence where almost every pot produced was a masterpiece. The teapot had become a vehicle for artistic expression, as beauty worked in harmony with function.

To understand the spirit of the Chinese scholars' ideals, the succeeding pages will examine the varied perspectives of Confucian, Taoist and Buddhist philosophies, the source of the scholars' attitude towards art and life. For the Chinese scholar, these philosophies were not isolated, but integrated and drew important lessons from each other. Through this triple heritage, the values and awareness of the Chinese scholars became the touchstones of their culture's aesthetic and political climate, setting a tone that influenced a great nation. Their sagacious image confirmed and strengthened the respect Chinese society accords its elders and the educated. They represented knowledge and wisdom and were looked upon as the embodiment of intellectual excellence, moral character, virtue and artistic perfection.

This protean term, "Chinese scholar," refers to those people the Chinese call *wenren*, which translates to "cultured people." Their basic training was in literature, the understanding of which was honed through oratory. However, the primary goal of a traditional Chinese scholar was to be well versed in the Four Arts. They considered the study of the Four Arts—music (*qin*), chess (*qi*), calligraphy (*shu*) and painting (*hua*)—an essential and integral part of higher learning. The Four Arts were not looked upon as the attainment of social refinement. Instead the scholars thought of them as the elements needed to achieve

mastery of one's self.³ The intent was to bring into being a personality that placed great weight on self-discipline and reflection. The Chinese word *xuezhe* approximates the Western concept of scholar; that is, one who is regarded as learned in a specific academic discipline whether it is science, theology or the arts. Compared with the majority of the population, which was illiterate or semiliterate, the *wenren* were scholars. But few of them would qualify for that description in the strict Western sense.⁴ Westerners would consider the Chinese scholar, although erudite and cultured, more an artist than scholar by virtue of his activities. The definition of *wenren* seemed to be flexible enough to include several types. However the scholars' major achievements were in most cases artistic, mainly in the disciplines of poetry, painting and calligraphy, although their influence permeated all the arts as they were clearly the aesthetic leaders of their culture.

Although Yixing ware represents a pinnacle in ceramic artistic expression, it garnered little interest in America until recent times. Americans, especially in art and design, have long followed European tastes. In Chapter 3, William Sargent's essay reveals how Yixing teapots first exerted their strong influence in Europe over three hundred years ago and how they were used as models for the first European-made teapots. In the early nineteenth century, ships of the China trade were bringing to the United States consignments of tea along with literally tons of ceramics, among them teapots made in Yixing. However, interest in the unglazed, rustic and rather sober Yixing teapots (and the European imitations) waned. Europeans had begun to fancy shiny glazed blue-and-white or brightly colored porcelains. Americans predictably followed suit.

The simplest purpose of art is to describe the outer world. At the same time, it can show us that others have existed as we exist. In searching to express this understanding, many influential American teachers have taught their students to look beyond America's brief ceramic tradition and to thoughtfully consider the vast heritage of ceramic art. Within the last quarter century, as the contemporary ceramic art movement has grown, a renewed interest in Chinese Yixing ware has developed as artists explore elsewhere in the world for creative sources, new ideas and fresh perspectives.

At the core of this catalogue is the effect Yixing ware has on contemporary American ceramic artists. As I have come to see it, there are several reasons for the current interest. The linchpin is the Chinese scholars. They invented the Yixing teapot, nurtured the tradition and patronized the artists who made them. But it was their philosophy,

attitudes and training that are the basis for the kinship that exists between artists in America and the Yixing tradition.

The training of students to be professional visual artists at American colleges and universities is a relatively recent phenomenon. Colleges and universities have offered art classes, including ceramics, since the early part of the twentieth century. However, their numbers were small and there were relatively few major art programs. Those who aspired to be great artists would need to go off to study in Europe. The proliferation of visual arts programs in American universities only gained momentum after the end of the Second World War. During this period, many European artists fled their homelands to live, work and teach in the United States. This effectively brought the energy of contemporary European art to America's shores. Among the many painters and sculptors who arrived, the list of ceramists included Otto and Gertrude Natzler, Frans and Marguerite Wildenhain and Ruth Duckworth to name a few. Concurrently, the enactment of the G.I. Bill enabled thousands of veterans to pursue a college education. It is fair to suggest that many would not have gone to college otherwise. Financing their education only played one part. One might suggest that students who were more adept at expressing themselves visually (i.e. artists) often were less proficient at expressing their knowledge through standard testing. In all likelihood the change in societal attitudes and financial climate allowed more students a chance to attend a university. Many found themselves gravitating to the visual arts. As a result art departments expanded. Consequently, since the 1950s, there are more Americans with advanced degrees in the arts than there had been previously.

Art historians, because they are in effect social scientists, are accorded the respect concomitant with scholarship in the arts. Can bias, however, exist towards visual artists by academicians and society in general who are unfamiliar with the academic/artistic process? Do they not know or fail to acknowledge the rigors of studio work in conjunction with general curricula, advanced art studies, art history courses and the capstone exhibition meant to display a cohesive body of work, all of which are needed to fulfill graduation requirements? Although a high degree of scholarship is not endemic to every undergraduate's experience, the conclusion can be drawn that students' educations expose them to scholarship. At the least, art students can avail themselves to a range of technical, aesthetic, historical, cultural and philosophic precepts. Certainly the best and the brightest take full advantage. The acceptance of this proposition leads to what I suggest is the key factor for Yixing ware

gaining its level of prominence among contemporary American ceramists. It is their university training. Throughout history most ceramic ware was designed by self-taught potters and those trained through an apprenticeship or as industrial designers. Chinese scholars received formal training as artists and were awarded degrees at schools of higher education. Of the fifty-nine contemporary ceramic artists represented in this volume, forty-one hold a Master of Fine Arts degree, three have earned a Master of Arts and the remainder have undergraduate degrees representing a Bachelor of Fine Arts or Bachelor of Arts. The sophisticated tea wares designed during the Ming and Qing dynasties were the collaboration between Chinese scholars and the ceramists of Yixing. Now, Western ceramists are empowered by personal scholarship. The teapot maker has come of age!

Because the first vessel that can be called a teapot began in Yixing, every teapot made thereafter evolved from a Yixing prototype. Therefore anyone who makes a teapot and has not encountered Yixing ware has missed the root source. In recent years, many American ceramic artists have realized the need to visit Yixing. To date, one-third of the artists represented in this catalogue—Susan Beiner, Bruce Cochrane, Jim Connell, Annette Corcoran, Philip Cornelius, Barbara Frey, David Furman, John Glick, Carol Gouthro, Chris Gustin, Leah Hardy, Rick Hirsch, Coille Hooven, Jeff Irwin, Geo Lastomirsky, Richard Notkin, Peter Pinnell, Richard Swanson, Jason Walker and myself—have made the pilgrimage.

A teapot is the most complex composition of all pottery forms because of all its component parts: the base, the body, the rim opening, the spout, handle, lid and knob on the lid. It has always been a true test of an artist's skill to try to bring a harmonious equilibrium to this vessel, whether it is functional or not. But this is not a catalogue of teapots. When I selected artists who I felt followed the Yixing tradition, I never used the teapot as my sole criterion. What I tried to recognize in each artist's work was the presence of the Yixing tradition or the underlying spirit of Chinese scholar art, work that had appropriated that piece of the culture, departed from it and transformed it into something new.



14

*Pear-shaped teapot
famille rose decoration
"Canton enamels"
19th century
carved mark: Mengchen Zhi
3.25" x 5.75" x 3.5"*



136
Kurt Weiser
Inspection, 1996
porcelain, china paint
11.5" x 12" x 4.5"



42
Bamboo shape
early 20th century
3" x 7.25" x 4.5"



43
Hexagonal
bamboo-bundle
teapot
late 19th century
4" x 6.5" x 4.25"



58

Richard Notkin

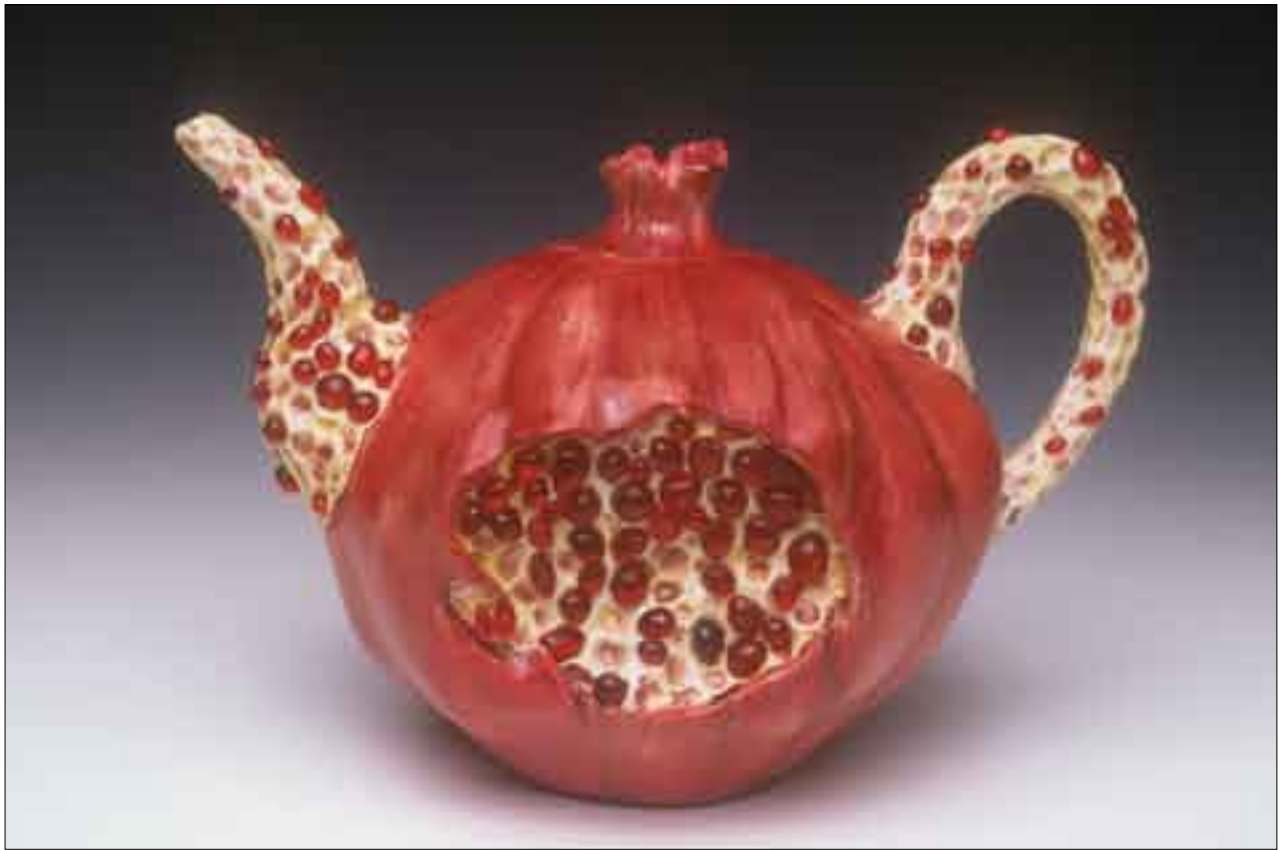
Hexagonal Curbside Teapot: Variation # 17, 1988

stoneware

5" x 8" x 4"



22
Pomegranate teapot with nuts and fruits
late 19th century
4.75" x 7" x 4"



64
Bonnie Seeman
Pomegranate Teapot, 2002
porcelain and glass
6" h



44
Bottom left: Prunus trunk-shaped teapot
late 19th century
3.75" x 7.5" x 3.75"

45
Bottom right: Prunus trunk-shaped
teapot
late 19th century
4.25" x 7.75" x 4"

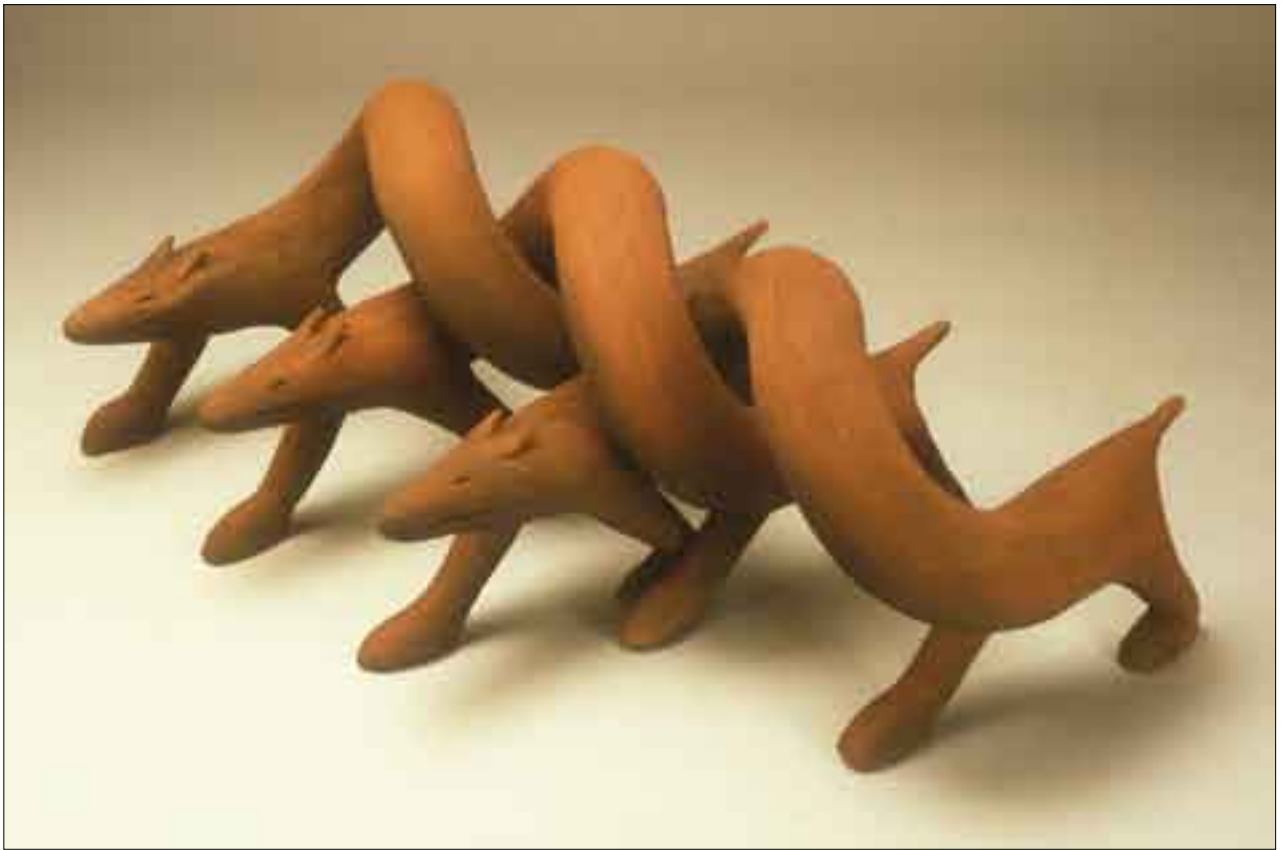
46
Top: Pinus trunk-shaped teapot
late 20th century
2.75" x 5.25" x 3"



104
Dennis Meiners
Shrub Goes
Riding, 2004
stoneware
15" h



13
Bamboo-shaped teapot with overhead handle
20th century
7.5" x 7.25" x 5"



96
Bruce Morozko
Wave Form, 1996
terra cotta
12" x 36" x 12"



106

Michele Erickson

Deity-pot, 2003–2004

porcelain, indigenous clay, black and
red earthenware; handbuilt, thrown and
modeled.

24" h



117

Richard Shaw

Paint Box with Dollar Bill Teapot, 2003

porcelain, china paints, photo decals

10" x 9" x 2.5"



93
Joan Takayama-Ogawa
Tropical Paradise, 1996
porcelain
7" x 10" x 15"



99
Annette Corcoran
Red Shouldered
Hawk, 1996
terra cotta,
porcelain
12.25" x 11.25" x
11.25"

Highlights from the Exhibition

**The Yixing Effect: Echoes of the Chinese
Scholar**

Curated by Marvin Sweet and Organized by the Holter Museum of Art

The
YIXING EFFECT
Echoes of the Chinese Scholar











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