

Self-Portrait

1989

Stoneware

Collection of Dennis Parks

Poetry Plaques

1978

Stoneware

Collection of Dennis Parks

Clay is the oldest known writing surface in the world. Marking impressions into clay was first practiced by Sumerians in southern Mesopotamia in 3,000 BC, which marks the beginning of written history.

Dennis Parks' poetry plaques allude to this ancient tradition. But while Mesopotamians wrote on clay to record financial transactions, Parks makes references to poetry, puns, and quotations from classical literature.

From top to bottom:

***To the Last Syllable
Even While the Dust Moves
Desire Itself is Movement***

Mid-1980s

Stoneware

Collection of Dennis Parks

Dennis Parks is perhaps best known to collectors for his signature plates and platters—which are rarely actually used to serve food. His largest platters are inspired by the plates (also known as chargers) made by Thomas Toft, a 17th-century British potter. The diameter of Toft's chargers were often the length of a human arm.

Parks' platters are made from stoneware and glazed with mica (a silica-based mineral). It takes nearly twenty-three pounds of clay to yield a platter 25 inches in diameter.



Nevada Landscape Plates

Mid 1980s

Stoneware

Collection of Dennis Parks

Left to right:

Untitled (*Large Bowl*), Not dated

Stoneware

Collection of Mimi Ellis Hogan

Untitled (*Pitcher*), 1981

Stoneware

Collection of William Fox

***Reduction Jars*, 1981**

Stoneware

Collection of Dennis Parks

Untitled (*Small Bowl*), Not dated

Stoneware

Collection of Mimi Ellis Hogan

Dennis Parks studied ceramics in southern California in the 1960s. It was during this time that the art world began to value the medium of clay as a fine art—rather than as a material to make purely functional vessels.

Artists, including Parks, continued to craft functional utility vessels such as the two large pots on view here, but they also increasingly pushed the boundaries of the medium and made objects that resembled altered or broken vessels. The two small *Reduction Jars* are examples of art objects that Parks crafted to look as though they were dug up from an archaeological site.

Consider for Example the Humble Letter H

circa 1990s

Stoneware

Collection of Dennis Parks

Many contemporary artists work in series—including Dennis Parks. This series of ceramic belts offered him a chance to explore variations on a singular physical form (the belt) while making a references to the alphabet and literature. In Parks' belts, the nickname "Papa" refers to the famous author Ernest Hemingway.

Heroes of the Old Left

circa 1990s

Stoneware

Collection of Dennis Parks

According to Dennis Parks, this series of stoneware belts commemorates, “Left wing utopian thinkers, dreamers and participants,” whom Parks considers important political figures. Parks uses this series to memorialize his heroes as if they were “gunslingers of the Old West.” The artist has always hoped that some of these sculptures would be cast in bronze as large-scale outdoor public artworks.

Executives Drowning

circa 1990s

Stoneware

Collection of Dennis Parks

Blue Warriors

1994

Stoneware

Collection of Dennis Parks

Dennis Parks often refers to these sculptures as human torsos. Parks first used large paper feed bags to form an exoskeleton in which he could quickly build urns, but soon realized that the technique could be used to make sculptures alluding to classical torsos.

For both kinds of work he would form clay on the inside of the bags, then blowing into them to fill out the forms. The exhalation from the torso of the artist into a sort of “body bag” is a metaphor for the transfer of life from an animate to an inanimate form. The mingling of techniques for utilitarian ware and art is common to much of the work produced by Parks.

Please see the nearby case for a photograph of Parks making a torso while working in the former Czechoslovakia.

Unknown Soldiers

1994

Stoneware

Collection of Dennis Parks

Dennis Parks and John Fahnestock

Abacus

2005

Porcelain, metal, and wood

Collection of Dennis Parks

Dennis Parks has traveled and made art all over the world. While in Jinhdezhan, China (known as the birthplace of porcelain), Parks and his fellow ceramic artist John Fahnestock made three works they called the *Abacus Series*. This is one of them.

Parks later wrote about the larger message of the piece, “A modest mathematical peace model finally making a truce possible between apples and oranges: applicable to Israelis and Palestinians, Greeks and Turks, British and Irish and other unbalanced equations around the globe.”

Ben Parks

Joy

1997

Ceramic

**Collection of Nevada Museum of Art, partial donation
by the artist**

Like his father, Ben Parks enjoys incorporating text and alluding to pop culture in his own sculptures. Ben Parks continues to operate the Tuscarora Pottery School each summer.

Postcards

circa 1990s

Stoneware

Collection of Dennis Parks

Dennis Parks has travelled widely to participate in conferences, to teach classes, and to collaborate with artists from other countries. The materials on view here are drawn from Parks' archives and include overseas correspondence, honors he has received, and photographs from countries including Turkey, China, and the former Czechoslovakia. Parks made the stoneware postcards in the 1990s to convey the importance of travel as one of his inspirations.

Governor's Art Awards Plate

1990

Stoneware

Collection of the Phil and Jennifer Satre

Dennis Parks founded the Tuscarora Pottery School in northeastern Nevada in 1966. The materials on view here, including the poster designed the first year the school was in operation, are drawn from Parks' archives. These materials trace the arc of Parks' career – from his time in Southern California and move to Nevada, to the rise of his internationally renowned pottery school, and the impact he's had as a teacher and author.

The plate on view was from an edition commissioned by the Nevada Arts Council in 1989. It was given as an award to that year's recipients of the Governor's Arts Awards—an honor that Parks himself received the following year.