

Dennis Parks: Land, Language and Clay

Dennis Parks is a ceramist who moved to the rural ghost town of Tuscarora in northeast Nevada in 1966, where he established the internationally-known Tuscarora Pottery School. Although Parks undertook formal academic studies in English at Rutgers University in New York (where he studied poetry with John Ciardi) and the University of North Carolina, and participated in the renowned *Writer's Workshop* at the University of Iowa, he also enjoyed taking undergraduate studio art classes.

Parks' interest in sculpture led him to the Claremont Graduate School in southern California, where he became involved in the nascent clay movement of the 1960s. It was during this time that the art world began to value the medium of clay differently; ceramics were no longer relegated to the world of craft, but could also be valued as fine art. Leading this trend were renowned ceramic artists Peter Voulkos, Paul Soldner, and John Mason who began to make studio artworks as opposed to functional vessels. Parks studied with Soldner and Mason, and was eventually hired to start the pottery program at Pitzer College, one of the other Claremont Colleges. While on sabbatical in 1971, Parks took his family on a trip to the remote mining town of Tuscarora, Nevada. He was so moved by the possibilities that Tuscarora offered that he resigned from his position at Pitzer and moved to Nevada. He founded the Tuscarora Pottery School in 1972, and over the past 40 years, over 1,000 students from around the world have studied there.

Parks pioneered a process of making ceramics using native clays that are single-fired in kilns fueled with recycled crankcase oil. (Crankcase oil is a common product used for vehicle engines.) He published a book titled *A Potter's Guide to Raw Glazing and Oil Firing* (Scribners, 1980). Recognized for his innovative use of text, Parks often imprints written fragments from classical literature, political puns, and poetry onto his ceramic works. His stoneware has been honored worldwide for its wide range of inventive forms and his work has been exhibited in museums in over twenty countries around the world.

Many of the items on view in this exhibition are drawn from the Dennis Parks Archive Collection that is housed by the Center for Art + Environment at the Nevada Museum of Art.