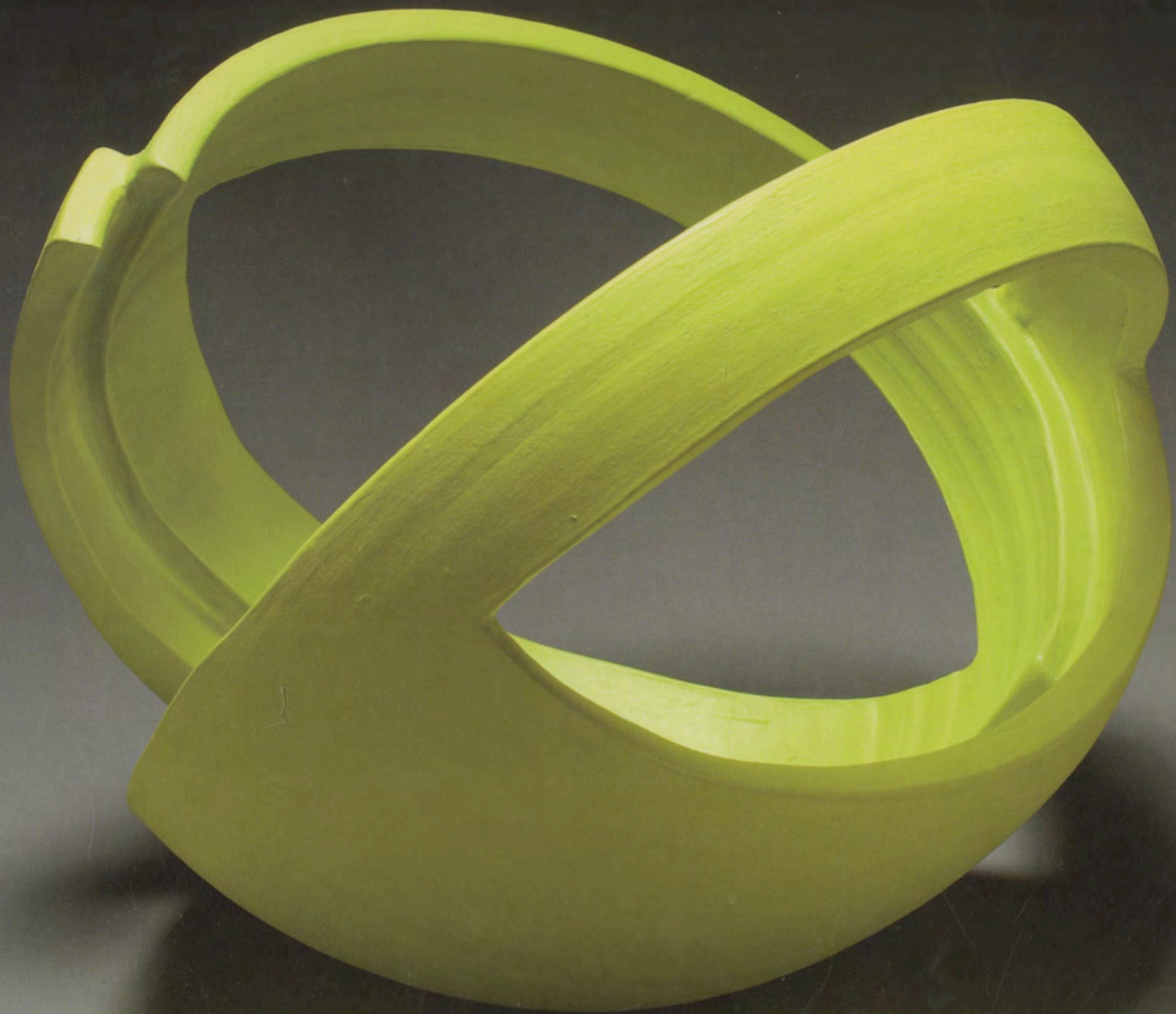


Anne Hirondeille | CERAMIC ART





"Anne Hironelle's
feet are firmly
planted in clay."

—*American Craft*

FRONT: *Re:Form 8*, 2010, painted stoneware, $6\frac{1}{2} \times 7\frac{3}{4} \times 8\frac{1}{4}$ in., private collection. BACK: *Capo*, 1999, glazed stoneware, $21\frac{1}{2} \times 10 \times 7$ in., private collection. DESIGN: Ashley Saleeba

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The Thomas T. Wilson Series recognizes and celebrates those artists of the Pacific Northwest whose work deserves to be experienced by a wider audience.

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Anne Hirondelle: Ceramic Art

Essays by Jo Lauria and Jake Seniuk

ESSAYS BY **JO LAURIA & JAKE SENIUK**

Anne Hironnelle

CERAMIC ART

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FRONTISPIECE: *Measured*, 2008, painted stoneware, 11½ × 9½ × 4 in.; **P. 2:** *Untitled (red)*, 2007, painted stoneware, 11¾ × 13¼ × 4½ in.; **P. 6:** *Abouturn 28*, 2007, painted stoneware, 12½ × 12½ × 10 in.; **p. 16:** *Ibex*, 1991, glazed stoneware, 16 × 10 × 10 in., private collection; **P. 66:** *Remember Stack*, 2008, painted stoneware, cardboard, 32 × 11 × 11 in.; **P. 78:** *Tulip Vase*, 1996, glazed stoneware, H. 22 in. All courtesy of the artist and Francine Seders Gallery except where noted.

Images of Anne Hirondelle's studio in 1986 were originally published in *Ceramics Monthly* 34, no. 6 (June–August 1986): 34–39. Reproduced with permission. © The American Ceramic Society, www.ceramicsmonthly.org. Images of Anne Hirondelle's garden were originally published in *American Craft* 60, no. 6 (December 2000–January 2001): 60–63.

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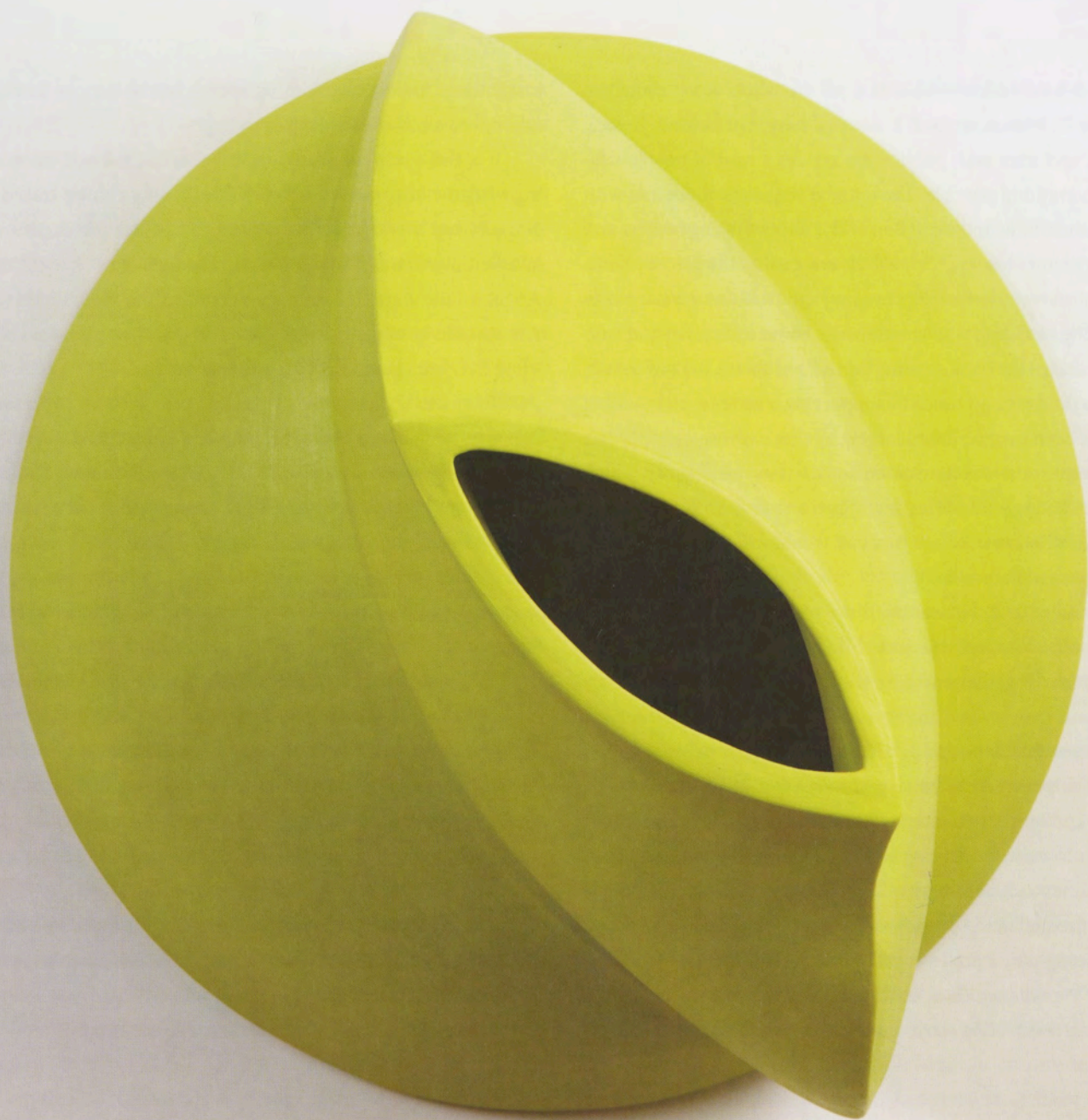
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Giving Voice to Imagination

Anne Hironnelle is a keen interpreter of the ceramic experience. Hironnelle has found her aesthetic integrity wedged in clay, ready to be molded and shaped by her expressive hands. Choosing the path of the studio artist, Hironnelle tackled a new visual language, experimented, and then pushed the limits of traditional pottery to explore varied modes of personal expression. In the process, she created forthright and exuberant ceramic vessels and sculptures that demand, and reward, close examination and critical attention.

A Song Worth Repeating

Hironnelle's diverse, inspired approach to the medium of ceramics can be seen in the evolutionary development of the work. An overview of twenty-five years reveals the artist's constant dialogue with material and form, and her ongoing relationship with visual concerns driven by rigorous formal logic: the tactile love of materials and emphasis on surface—always a constant; the frequent trading of symmetry for the asymmetrical to play balance against tension; the sensually organic coexistent with the boldly geometric; and the crisp lines and glow of white, unglazed clay objects bridging to the exuberant, color-infused biomorphic sculptures—each distinctive grouping at opposite ends of the optical scale, yet equal in beauty. This progression can be traced through the artist's successive series of works and reprisals of primary forms.

The astute observer can document Hironnelle's major movements through the decades: away from the functional toward the nonfunctional, from the volumetric vessel toward the vessel deflated and deconstructed, and from the mono-

chromatic toward the prismatic. The dynamism Hironnelle has consistently established in her work between spaces—positive and negative, interior and exterior, and between the predictable and the unexpected—keeps the viewer alert. Every new work appears warmly alive, and every new series feels animated by fresh ideas.

Home Is Where Imagination Lives

If one's creativity and artistic experiences could be drafted on graph paper, Hironnelle's ascending arc would chart a dramatic increase in technical virtuosity, confidence, and compression of knowledge. Hironnelle's creative and imaginative life begins and ends at her home in Port Townsend, as she works in her studio. The studio is the nerve center where Hironnelle engages daily in an intensive exploration of materials, testing her ideas and skills against an imaginary bar of ideal beauty that she is continuously raising. And, as an artist working in clay, this space serves as a fortress from whose security she battles against the art world hierarchies that attempt to identify her by the materials she uses rather than by the inspired use of those materials.

Upon leaving the ceramics lab at the University of Washington, where she had studied with the renowned teacher Robert Sperry from 1974 to 1976, Hironnelle and her husband, Bob Schwiesow, reclaimed a small outbuilding next to their house for a studio. The whole evolutionary line of Hironnelle's artwork can be traced back to this marker—her modest first studio created in 1977, then an expanded version built adjacent to it in 1994. As Hironnelle asserts, her entire discovery process has been “through doing and experimenting” in her studio. It is there that the formal sculptural properties of line, space, volume, and mass have been investigated and learned through her hands as they shape the clay. Additionally, through calculated trial and error, it is there that she

has mastered glaze technology and formulated her original glazes.

The artist's first inclination immediately after leaving the safety net of the university ceramics program was to further develop her skills and become a production potter. The years 1977 to 1979 were a concentrated period of production. The artist refers to this time as finding her way “through thrown forms.” She rigorously investigated the requirements of form and function by shaping utilitarian stoneware pieces on the potter's wheel. Functional vessels based on cylinders comprised her standard line of serving ware and baskets, a design direction that continued through the early 1980s. In hindsight, Hironnelle's discerning eyes are critical of the work she produced at that juncture. The vessel shapes borrowed heavily from traditional forms, and the decorative treatment remained safe and conventional, much as her selection of Asian-inspired glazes resulted in handsome but familiar surfaces.

By 1981 Hironnelle had exhausted the repertoire of functional forms and was searching for a new challenge, one that would lead her to a more authentic expression in clay. Above the whirl of the potter's wheel, the artist kept hearing the words of her teacher, Bob Sperry, resounding: “If you want to do anything that is distinctly your own you're going to have to break the rules.” During this decade, potters who worked with raku were considered risk-takers and rule-breakers. Hironnelle enthusiastically joined their ranks when she built a raku kiln and decided to “let go of the whole notion of function.” The artist was heeding the voice in her head. Freed from the tyranny of utility, Hironnelle began to make vessels with extruded additions built at a larger scale (beyond functional size), and she decorated them with one of the four unique raku glazes she had developed. These custom glazes were formulated with different oxide combinations to produce a varied palette, and their deliberately high lithium content provided the result Hironnelle was seeking: a rough, matte, and non-glossy surface. The production potter had suddenly gone rogue.

Fig 1 *Druid Vessel*, 1984

Raku

18 × 14½ × 8 in.

Collection of Steve and Rhonda Scharf

Looking through the long lens of time, Hirondele sees this both as a period of fervent experimentation and as a crucible of her commitment. The raku forms evolved from 1981 through 1985 and become increasingly more constructed and architectural. Although most of Hirondele's pieces were intended for pedestal display and were finished with fired glazes, she also tried new formats, including wall-mounted constructions that were airbrushed with white acrylic. This venturing into paint as the preferred decorative option would resurface in Hirondele's later works, beginning with the *Go* series (plates 27 and 28).

Turning Points and Signposts

After four years of working with raku, Hirondele started to question its durability and permanence and decided it was time for a change. As the smoke cleared, the artist considered her development. Raku glazes and the smoking technique of raku firing had yielded a desirable charred and matte surface that captured and held her interest; raku's surface qualities seemed endlessly variable and mysterious. Even so, as equal parts artist, chemist, and scientist, Hirondele set out to formulate a new stoneware clay body and complementary glazes that would simulate the textures, colors, and mottled effects of raku while providing the strength and intransience of high-fired stoneware. After innumerable glaze tests, Hirondele devised a single base glaze—extremely high in soda ash—that she could vary by using four different oxide combinations. Each of these four variants produced unique colors—she called them “patinas”—and surface textures, depending on the thickness of their application and the firing atmosphere in the kiln (reduction versus oxidation). Although unpredictable, these glazes offered a rich palette of colorations as well as dynamic surface effects that were original and exciting.



Hirondele then began to create a new body of work to showcase the recently formulated glazes. This series was based on functional vessels built at more or less functional scale. The artist's past experience in working with raku had a direct influence, as evidenced in the coarse surfaces, exaggerated scale, and more sculptural character of these new stoneware forms. But Hirondele also began to document this work through working drawings executed on graph paper. These blueprints, as she called them, mapped the creative process from initial sketch to the final drawing of

Fig 2 Coffee Server, 1985

Glazed stoneware

9 × 10 × 8 in.

Collection of Kay Rood



the design as it was actualized in clay. Hirondelle discovered that the working drawings began to inform the work, serving both as points of reference and archival records.

Hirondelle exhibited this new work at the Northwest Craft Center and Gallery in Seattle in 1985. Seeing the vessels in a different context, that is, in a gallery versus in her studio space, provoked a revelation for the artist: for the first time she recognized the sculptural potential of her work in clay. This was a moment of deep lucidity for Hirondelle. Not belonging to any formal community of ceramic artists—Hirondelle preferred isolation—she had learned to trust her instincts and now was excited by the results. Wanting to share her discovery, Hirondelle sent a selection of transparencies of these new pieces to the two key publications in her field, *Ceramics Monthly* and *American Craft*. Her efforts

were rewarded with a feature she was asked to write about her work for *Ceramics Monthly* and a profile piece in *American Craft*.¹

This was the first national exposure of Hirondelle's work, and she found the response overwhelmingly encouraging. Her pieces were referred to as simple, strong, and architectural. They were praised both for their classical, restrained grace and for their vanguard break with tradition: the surface of the glaze was unlike any other in ceramics, past or present, and the formal presentation of the vessels on ceramic bases introduced a new idea. Hirondelle was lauded as an artist capable of embracing many of ceramics' diverse threads. From this point forward, Hirondelle was no longer viewed as a regional Northwest artist but one of national prominence. In this field her work now became a benchmark for others to emulate, clearly being deemed worthy of publication, exhibition, and acquisition. This also marked the point of origin, the beginning, of a remarkably consistent climb up the aesthetic chart for the artist, characterized by intensifying sophistication, refinement of form, and sculptural complexity.

In the succession of series that followed through 2000, Hirondelle narrowed her focus to vessels that referred to function, endowing them with greater scale, sculptural presence, and amplified visual stature (see, for example, plate 1). These forms become amalgamations of a main "body" with additions and extrusions, mainly handles, bases, and knobs. These handles and bases become important compositional elements, and the ceramic "trays" on which the works stand integrate with the vessels to form one silhouette.

The multiple series generated during the next fifteen years followed a trajectory from cylinder-shaped pitchers with single spouts and handles to double-spouted (plate 2) and double-handled forms (see, for example, plate 13); from single objects such as teapots and bottles to teapot multiples (plate 10) and *Bottle Dwellings*; from bells to ceremonial vessels to cups; and on

Fig 3 Anne Hironelle in her studio, 1986

Fig 4 *Bottle Dwelling: Five*, 1992

Glazed stoneware

17 × 34 × 18½ in.

Collection of Iris & B. Gerald Cantor Center
for Visual Arts at Stanford University



Fig 5 *Turnpool*, 2001

Glazed stoneware

8 × 13½ × 13 in.

Courtesy of the artist

and Francine Seders Gallery

through a series of Greek-named groupings such as the *Aquaria* (large architectonic pitcher forms; see plates 15, 16, and 17), *Kardia* (a pod shape created by two thrown bowls married rim to rim, with an opening at the top; see, for example, plate 20), and *Ocarina* forms (larger versions of *Kardia* pods such as those illustrated in plate 21).

Along the points of this course, certain distinctive themes were introduced, developed, and refined. For example, handles become important structural elements that defined form by their positive-negative space relationship to the body of the vessel (see, for example, plate 8). Also, the “space between” the vessels began to emerge as a potent sculptural concept (see, for example, plates 3, 6, 10, and 14). These themes were most evident in the *Dip-tychs*, *Triptychs*, *Multiples*, and *Dwellings*: the arrangement of the composition became the primary focus, chosen to exploit the negative spaces between the multiple pieces of a grouping. These in-between, empty spaces were deployed as strategy to move the eye around and through the compositional elements. Further, the crafted ceramic bases now became lacquered wooden trays; it was no longer Hirondele’s intention to simply elevate these pieces but rather to *frame* them as an edged composition. Aesthetically, this compositional direction echoed the still-life paintings of the Italian artist Giorgio Morandi—both in its formal presentation and in its stillness and serenity.

Rhythm into Line, Words into Vessels: From *Turnpools* to *Outurns*

Ultimately, Hirondele took her permutations of vessel-bound forms and the concept of arranged compositions to their logical end. Casting about for a new direction, in 2001 the artist developed a series of *Echos* and *Turnpools* that she exhibited at the Foster/White Gallery in Seattle. The *Turnpools* were comprised of



two conjoined bowls, the bottom bowl inverted to serve as the base to hold the bowl stacked on top. The *Echos* were wall-mounted forms. The similarity of the series was in their surface treatment: the *Echos* and *Turnpools* were both decorated on the interior with shiny black glaze and on the exterior with golden pewter.

After the 2001 show, Hirondele brought these pieces back to her studio and pondered. She felt that the “leap into the unknown” she had hoped for with this transitional work had not materialized. Although she had subverted the perfect roundness of the bowl shapes through the subtraction and addition of clay—variously cutting away and coil-building extensions onto the bowls—she felt the forms were somehow unresolved. Further, she determined they were too comfortable in their skin; they wore the same glazes that had been used on earlier bodies of work, but now these glazes seemed ineffectual.

Fig 6 *Outurns* installation
at Anne Hirondelle's studio,
October 2002

Seeking clarity, Hirondelle entered a period of frenzied production and made multiple pieces based on the *Echo* form. An inverted bowl attached to a thrown disk was the base from which a coil-built body grew. To resolve the glaze treatment, she hung several of these “naked clay” forms on her white studio wall and contemplated them. As Hirondelle looked at this grouping of unglazed pieces, she experienced an epiphany: the all-over whiteness of the exposed clay revealed shadows and curves and emphasized the sculptural shape, bringing into focus the dimensional form uninterrupted by any surface application. Viscerally feeling the conveyance of energy from these rounded forms derived from the organic shapes of nature, she decided they were more exciting

hanging on the studio wall in this raw, undecorated state. This realization sparked a new direction that led to a series of unglazed wall sculptures that the artist titled *Outurns* (see plates 24 and 26).

Walking the Wire—Crossing into Unknown Territory

Beginning with the *Outurns*, Hirondelle invented new forms as well as a new vocabulary to describe her sculptural objects that had jumped from the pedestal to the wall. This series demarcated a departure from the formal language of pottery and entered the discourse of contemporary sculpture. These forms, and the consecutive series that followed, demanded to be understood on their

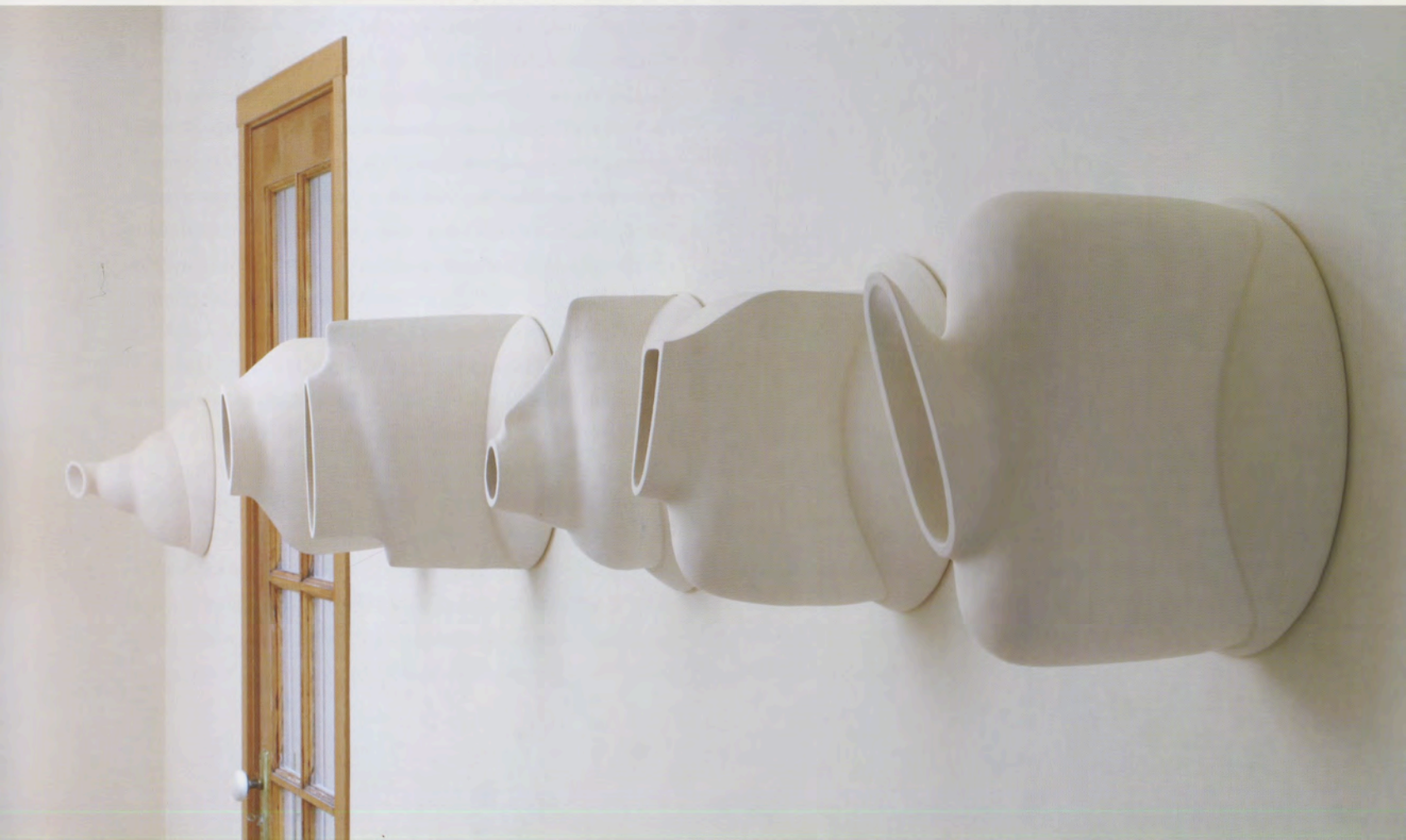


Fig 7 *Go 1*, 2005

Painted stoneware

10½ × 6½ × 9 in.

Collection of Francine Seders



own terms, regardless of material and technique. For the artist, it was a time of letting go of what she knew and what she had mastered, and even an attempt at changing perceptions of who she was. No longer wishing to be defined by her materials but by her inventiveness, Hironelle began to create imagined forms through an intuitive way of working. She acknowledged that she would not know what the forms would ultimately look like but believed that she would enjoy the experience and excitement of the process.

From 2002 to 2004, Hironelle created *Outurns* of exposed clay, sanded and waxed, and mounted on the wall. The first formal presentation of this work was in 2004 at the artist's one-person show held at the Francine Seders Gallery in Seattle. The show also included drawings of the *Outurns* (plate 25). Announcement of the arrival of this work outside the Northwest occurred the same year, when an *Outurn* was included in the *Scripps 2004 Ceramic Annual* at Scripps College, in Claremont, California; and also when this work was shown at the Snyderman-Works Galleries in Philadelphia. These introductions signaled to a national viewership that Hironelle's work had taken a definite turn in a new direction, a direction more aligned with trends in contemporary art that forecast a fresh sampling of different craft materials, techniques, and display strategies for artists working with three-dimensional objects.

For the last seven years, Hironelle has continued to exploit the basic bowl form (and to a lesser extent a barrel shape) through cutting, altering, sanding, painting, accreting, nesting, reconfiguring, deconstructing, reconstructing, and grouping in grids. Having begun her career as a vessel maker of functional containers, she now denied interior space in her vessels but demanded—as do sculptors—visual space around them. Further, the tradition of applying glazes to ceramic forms was overturned with the *Abouturns*, the first complete series of sculptures to be surfaced with paint (plates 29 and 30). Hironelle's recent wall and pedestal pieces have experienced the full spectrum of color, going from works with no added color to colored surfaces (from the white, undecorated *Outurns* to the high-keyed, custom-mixed paints in primary colors applied to the *Abouturns*), along with a full array of tonal effects, ranging from intense, saturated directly applied color to the soft, diffused glow of reflected color. (The *Go* forms, *Go Pillows*, and *Tumbles* all played with the effects of color as it reflected on the wall and pedestal.)

Fig 8 *Re:Coil 5*, 2010

Painted stoneware

16¼ × 16 × 12½ in.

Courtesy of the artist and Francine Seders Gallery

In 2007, Hirondele showed the *Tumbles* (plate 31), *Go Pillows*, *Abouturns*, and *Ready-Set-Gos*, along with more abstract graphite and Prismacolor drawings of these forms on layered tracing paper, at the Port Angeles Fine Arts Center. This daring new work received critically favorable reviews in national magazines.²

The positive response motivated Hirondele to explore and exploit further her practice of delimiting sculptural space by using simplified forms, whether ganged together or united in geometric grids, resulting in the *Remembers* (plates 35, 36, and 37), *Reaches* (plate 39), and *Re:Forms* series (plates 40, 41, 42, and 43).

Continuing a Life's Work: The Song Repeats

Currently Hirondele has cycled forward to another fertile period of trial and reflection. A flurry of graphite and Prismacolor drawings on layered tracing paper based on the *Re:Coils* (plate 47) has opened up new possibilities for continuing work in this most recent series. The *Re:Coils* (plates 46 and 48) are the first collective group of sculptures in the last ten years that are *not* based on the thrown vessel: here the potter's wheel has been displaced by the extruder. As the extruder pumps out clay coils, Hirondele takes them in hand and curves, loops, knots, and allows them to meander into freestanding and wall-mounted objects that resemble line drawings in three dimensions.

Hirondele's endless interest in the interactions among line, surface, and space prompt her to repeatedly rethink the sculptural potential of clay. What new series or recast groupings might next appear on the walls, tables, or floor of Anne Hirondele's studio can only be left to the freedom of the artist's imagination. Considering the consistent inventiveness and vigor of her past work, one can expect her new sculptures to be graced with structural finesse, clarity of vision, and perfect pitch.



1 Anne Hirondele [author], "Deliberations," *Ceramics Monthly* 34, no. 6 (June–August 1986): 34–39; "Portfolio," *American Craft* 46, no. 1 (February–March 1986): 45.

2 Important reviews and articles included Matthew Kangas, "De-Constructing Anne Hirondele," *Ceramics Monthly* (May 2009): 70–73; Beverly Sanders, "Zoom, Preview, Small Revolutions," *American Craft* 68, no. 5 (October–November 2008): 42; Christine Hemp, "Anne Hirondele," *American Craft* 60, no. 6 (December 2000–January 2001): 60–63; Jake Seniuk, "Outurn, Abouturn and Go," *On Center* 19, no. 4 (Port Angeles Fine Arts Center, July–September 2007): 1–2.

Anne Hironnelle | CERAMIC ART

Essays by Jo Lauria & Jake Seniuk

For three decades, nationally renowned ceramist Anne Hironnelle has pushed the boundaries of traditional pottery, producing beautiful works that appear warmly alive and visually engaging. From her early majestic urns to her architectural impulse for sedate forms to her bright ropes of clay coiling to the sky, she keeps exploring new possibilities without rejecting the traditions of her chosen material.

Hironnelle's Port Townsend studio is the nexus of her creative and imaginative life. The works she has produced in that space have been exhibited in numerous one-person shows throughout the United States. Among the many museums whose collections include her work are the Crocker Art Museum; Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco; Museum of Arts and Design, New York; Tacoma Art Museum; and the White House Collection housed at the William J. Clinton Library in Little Rock, Arkansas.

Jo Lauria is a curator and design historian. Her most recent publications are *Craft in America: Celebrating Two Centuries of Artists and Objects* and *California Design: The Legacy of West Coast Craft and Style*. She lives in the Los Angeles area. **Jake Seniuk** is an artist and executive director of the Port Angeles Fine Arts Center and Webster Woods Art Park.

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