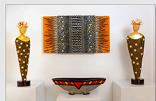


**PLEASE NOTE:** This review will appear in *Ceramics Art & Perception* magazine, May/June 2021 issue. As soon as it is published it will be posted on my website. Here are text and photos that were submitted by the author, although all photos may not be used by the magazine.



On Wall: **AMBER FLURRIES** 2018 17x30x2 Ceramic, Fused Glass, LED Lights

Center Pedestal: **HARVEST BOWL** 2019 5x22x10 Ceramic, Fused Glass

Figures: **CROWN OF CONES** 2021 25x8x5 (each) Ceramic, Pyrometric Cones, Copper, 23 karat Gold Leaf, Stone Bases



Detail: **CROWN OF CONES** 2021 8x6x5 Ceramic, Pyrometric Cones, Copper, 23 karat Gold Leaf. This piece is in the collection of AMOCA, The American Museum of Ceramic Art.



**FLAMING FINGERS - ART HANDS** 2021 12x9x3 Ceramic, Copper  
Hands in exhibition have different words in various languages and scripts.



Beatrice Wood in 1979 showing Trudy her folk art collection and Ojai studio.



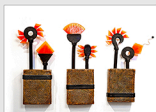
**MYANMAR MOMENTS** 2021 20x18x6 Ceramic, 23 karat Gold Leaf, Stone Base  
Pattern on this piece was made with the paddle from Myanmar.



A potter in Myanmar gives Trudy a hand-carved wooden paddle.



**CYCLADIC JESTERS** 2021 24x16x5 Ceramic, Fused Glass, 23 karat Gold Leaf, Stone Bases



**SCEPTERS** 2021 22x40x3 Ceramic, Copper Wire



**AQUAMARINE** 2017 23x27x9 Ceramic, Fused Glass, Wooden Shelf



**MYSTERIOUS KIMONO** 2021 19x19x6 Ceramic, Fused Glass

In his book *Time and Narrative*, French philosopher Paul Ricoeur posits that we come to each intersection or experience preconfigured, the experience configures us, and we go forward reconfigured (Ricoeur, 54). A passionate world traveler, Trudy Chiddix divulges, through the work in this exhibition, that her international experiences have irrefutably reconfigured her and will, potentially, reconfigure her viewers.

### Connections

Chiddix's exuberant personality is magnetic, her enthusiasm contagious. She is not only interesting, but she is also sincerely interested. She absorbs. She absorbs the symbols and forms of the cultures with which she has connected, and then she gifts the viewer with objects that marry those cultures with her unique language. According to Ricoeur, "Because we are in the world and are affected by situations, we try to orient ourselves in them by means of understanding; we also have something to say, an experience to bring to language and to share" (Ricoeur, 78). Through the work in this exhibition, Chiddix shares the connections she has made during years of travel, years of collecting, and years of connecting, into a language that is her own. These connections link all of the works in the exhibition—visually, technically and metaphorically.

When I first experienced this work through a virtual studio tour, some work completed and some in progress, the word "ritual" came to mind, with reminiscences of indigenous cultures, but not one culture in particular. The juxtaposition in Plinth Gallery of *Amber Flurries* with *Harvest Bowl*, flanked by *Crown of Cones*, with their formally symmetrical placement and relationship to an altar, all came together to reinforce this sense of ritual and ceremony.

The work is primarily in black and white, with glyptic surfaces (although made with a combination of stampings and carvings), and splashes of color created by the inclusion of glass elements. When we talk about things being 'black and white,' we think of right and wrong, one way or another, no grey areas; but Chiddix is not about black and white. She is an explorer, and the inclusion of color and glass in the works brings an element of transparency and lucidity to her content. She acknowledges that life isn't just black and white, but that there is diversity at every turn, and despite that diversity, we are connected.

The title of the exhibition, *Flaming Fingers*, refers to the eight hands that grace the gallery, each bearing a word of positive encouragement, and sending healing energy to the frontline workers who continue to fight for each of us during the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, hands as symbols permeate multiple cultures and Chiddix confesses a long-term attraction to hands and their symbolism, collecting hands from Morocco in varied materials and mounting them in a frame to feed her love of that part of the human form. Ronnberg and Martin refer to the hands as "primary instruments of the creative" (Ronnberg, 380), another way in which we have connections with our fellow human beings, worldwide. Ronnberg and Martin further state, "hands are specifically employed in language as supplement or substitute for lips and mouth" (382). Chiddix's hands carry the words of "Hope, Joy, Health, and Art," in English on one side and in various scripts on the other. Like her travels throughout the world, the pandemic is not just an issue at home. It affects every country, every culture, and reminds us again of our connections.

Chiddix has been working in clay for decades, with an impressive list of educational and residency experiences that have taken her from New York to Hawaii in the US, in addition to her international travel. She earned a BFA at the University of California – Santa Barbara, in 1974, and subsequently taught classes and workshops in the area. In 1979, she took a group of students to visit ceramics icon Beatrice Wood (1893–1998), where Wood talked more politics than ceramics. Chiddix has attended several of the General Assemblies of the International Academy of Ceramics (IAC), which take place every other year; she never misses a conference of the National Council on Education for the Ceramic Arts (NCECA), which happens every year (in person, until the pandemic). Chiddix has not only built relationships internationally, her connections run broad and deep in ceramics in the US.

### Diffusion

On one of her international forays, Chiddix met friend Royce McGlashen, who commented that to him this work reminded him of the work of the Maori people, an indigenous New Zealand culture. Chiddix had not been directly influenced by Maori culture and pattern, at least not consciously. My first impressions were to think of indigenous Australian patterns, motifs in some African cultures, and their connections to rituals, as mentioned earlier. But the work is not Australian, nor is it African, nor is it Maori.

"Similar designs depicted in different contexts and created at different times may result from one of two causes and, on occasion, from a combination of the two: (1) a process of diffusion which may be followed by a degree of independent development or (2) processes of independent discovery" (Hann, 2).

According to Hann, the process of diffusion has long been the subject of scholarly research, and, "Generally cultural traits originate in a particular area and, from there, spread outward. After diffusion and adoption, the trait will invariably not appear identical in its new location" (Hann 4).

In addition to New Zealand, Chiddix's travels included many countries in Europe (including Italy, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Scandinavia, and others); in Asia (Taiwan, China, Korea, India, Thailand, Cambodia, Viet Nam, Myanmar, and Japan) as well as countries in Africa (including Morocco, South Africa, and Kenya). Each, diffused as it may be, has contributed to the patterns and forms in this exhibition.

### Impressions

In the year 2005, Chiddix traveled to India, where she was impressed with the wooden stamps once used to print the silk for saris. Subsequently, in the making of her work she uses the many stamps she brought home, impressing the clay and then working into it with carving and other stamps to make the surface treatment her own, diffusing the initial meanings and uses of the patterns, but keeping the essence of the impressions made on the artist.

In Myanmar, while visiting a young potter and expressing her admiration for the woman's work, and obviously impressing the potter with her enthusiastic response to the work, Chiddix was gifted with a paddle being used by the young woman. The impression of this paddle is one used in its pure form in the vertical disc, *Myanmar Moments*, moments I am convinced Chiddix relives each time she handles or uses that precious gift. Reminiscent of shields, the vertical discs convey the need for a formal setting, further extending the ritualistic atmosphere of the work.

### Sedimentation and Innovation

Philosopher Mark Johnson describes balance as part sedimentation and part innovation. As individuals, we have unique proportions of each that bring balance to our lives. Johnson posits that if we have too much sedimentation, we have stagnation; too much innovation, and we have chaos. Chiddix sifts through her experiences to create reminiscences, connections, and familiarity; but she brings her personal sense of aesthetics to the work, innovating enough to remove the reference to any specific culture.

*The Cycladic Jesters* and *Crown of Cones* are, obviously, nods to the iconic Cycladic figures, their gold-leaf collars are reminiscent of Egyptian adornments; their faces are spirals, which are the "form of embryos, horns, whirlpools, hurricanes, and galaxies, the paths that energy takes when left alone, the path of unfettered yet balanced growth" (Ronnberg, 718). In addition, two of the figures are coiled with spent pyrometric cones. We transform our appearances with our hair, which "tells us something about the 'state' one's head is in" (346). They are Cycladic, but not Cycladic, Egyptian but not Egyptian, impressed with stamps of another culture but not that culture. In addition, according to Li Zehou "every object or work . . . no matter how purely aesthetic it might be, always has 'worldly emotions' sedimented in it (Leitch, 1746). In addition to worldly emotions, these figures, as can be said of much of the work in the exhibition, are a balance of multicultural symbolism and uniqueness.

I could go on to tell you about how we see Chiddix's whimsy in *Scepters*, or her exceptional sense of form in *Harvest Bowl*, but I will leave some of that for you to discover on your own. Gallerist Jonathan Kaplan has uploaded a walk-through video on the Plinth Gallery site, and I encourage you to take that walk with the artist. Kaplan has this to say about the exhibition:

The work in this exhibition *Flaming Fingers*, is influenced by history, current events, and her worldwide travel. Chiddix fluently combines clay and glass, merging both materials with confidence and expertise while blurring the lines of materiality. Her art is a statement in which 'idea' and 'material' do not exist as separate entities; she blends both together in work that is clear, coherent, and visually appealing.

### Conclusion

I started this essay by quoting Paul Ricoeur and recounting how each experience, each encounter, each intersection reconfigures us. Following Hann's theories, the traits in the works in this exhibition are diffused from their origins, sifted to reflect the artist's unique balance of sedimentation and innovation. Travels and experiences reconfigure the life of Trudy Chiddix, and the works in *Flaming Fingers* will reconfigure every viewer.

### Endnotes

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### Author Bio

Elaine Olafson Henry is a ceramics artist, curator, writer and local volunteer. She earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from the University of Wyoming in 1992, a Master of Fine Arts degree from Southern Illinois University at Carbondale in 1995, and a Master of Arts degree in English from the University of Wyoming in 2020, where her thesis topic was "Comparative Rhetorical Analyses of Contemporary Fine Art Criticism and Contemporary Ceramics Criticism."

She served as the President of the International Ceramics Magazine Editors Association (ICMEA) 2014–2016, and the National Council on Education for the Ceramic Arts (NCECA) 2002–2004, where she served on the board for 10 years. She is currently an Honorary Member and a Fellow of NCECA, and a Lifetime Member of ICMEA.

Henry is the former Editor and Publisher of the international ceramics journals *Ceramics: Art & Perception* and *Ceramics TECHNICAL*. As such, she increased the critical discourse in ceramics by working through professional writers and critics to procure articles and reviews. Her work is internationally published, exhibited and collected. Henry is an elected member of the International Academy of Ceramics.