

From the Archives

In curating this exhibition I hope to showcase some of the Canadian Clay & Glass Gallery's archival holdings. *From the Archives* features materials from Ruth Gowdy McKinley, Gail Crawford, The Five Potters, and Ann Mortimer. These photographs, documents, and tools demonstrate the vital importance of archival materials in understanding the history of ceramic, glass, and vitreous enamel art in Canada. When one views a piece of art on display at a Gallery the work is presented in an ideal state, sometimes obscuring the labor that went into creating the object and the various material circumstances that shape the production of all art. By exhibiting archival materials alongside pieces from the Gallery's collection, we can shed light on how material circumstances have shaped the production of ceramic, glass, and enamel art in Canada.

Ruth Gowdy McKinley was an obvious choice to include as part of this exhibition as her death on March 29th, 1981, provided the impetus for members of Ceramists Canada to conduct a study analyzing the feasibility of creating a national gallery of clay, glass and enamel arts. The archival materials that were donated to the gallery by Gowdy McKinley's daughter, Lauren McKinley Renzetti, provide a fascinating look at the meticulous and labor-intensive nature of her mother's wood-fired pottery. Glaze journals and kiln logs showcase the technical aspects of Gowdy McKinley's work and the diligence and endurance that was required to successfully fire ceramics in the downdraft, catenary-arch, wood-fired kilns that she and her husband Donald Lloyd McKinley designed and built throughout her career. Black and white photographs taken by Donald Lloyd McKinley show Gowdy McKinley at work as she prepares teapots, loads unfired work into her kiln, and throws a jar on a wheel, demonstrating the range of techniques she utilized in her work. Teapots, jars, and bowls – the kinds of functional ware that Gowdy McKinley was known for – are on display alongside the archival materials. These objects show the simple, yet refined elegance of her work as she achieved the often-elusive melding of form and function. Gowdy McKinley's artist statement "The Mark of This Fire" provides an eloquent summation of her philosophy as a potter who valued the unique qualities that wood-fired kilns produced and who was deeply attuned to the physical labor required to successfully fire her work.



Ruth Gowdy McKinley, *Teapot*, c. 1977. Stoneware, glaze. Canadian Clay & Glass Permanent Collection. Indusmin Collection 1991.001.07 4a-b



Top Right: Tim Storey, *Camel Teapot*, 1993. Ceramic, glaze. Canadian Clay & Glass Permanent Collection. Gift of The Estate of Winifred Shantz. 2012.001.04 6a-b



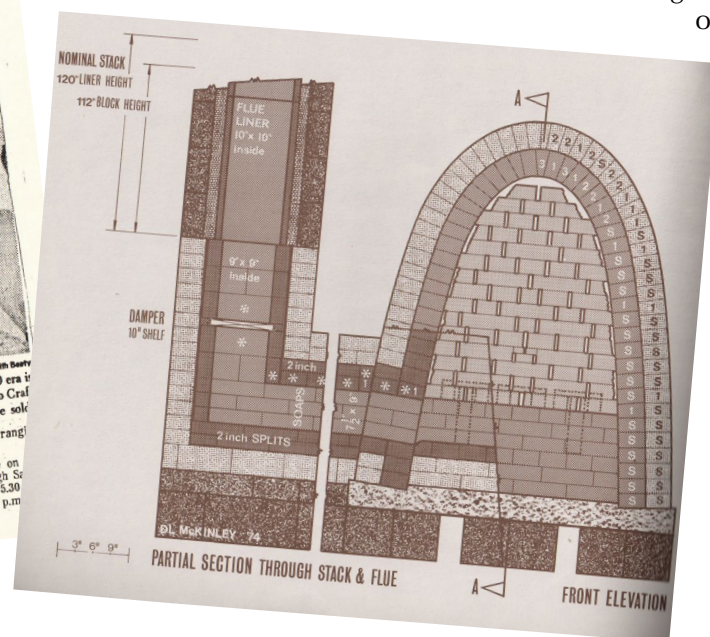
Mayta Markson, *Bowl*, 1978. Porcelain, glazes. Canadian Clay & Glass Permanent Collection. Indusmin Collection 1991.001.057

Audrey Davies' piece *The Hat* is featured alongside a 5-minute excerpt from the documentary "Our Hands to Yours" *The Life Story of Gord and Audrey Davies*, a documentary filmed in the early 1990s that recounts the life and work of the husband-and-wife Gord and Audrey Davies. In this excerpt, Audrey Davies discusses the series of ceramic women's hats she began working on in 1975 to commemorate International Women's Year. 1975 was declared International Women's Year by the United Nations in order "to remind the international community that discrimination against women continued to be a persistent problem in much of the world."¹ The first World Conference of the International Women's Year was held in Mexico City from June 19th to July 2nd, 1975, and identified three objectives to be worked towards in the following decade: full gender equality and the elimination of gender discrimination; the integration and full participation of women in development; an increased contribution by women towards strengthening world peace. Audrey chose to illustrate the changing nature of women's fashion – which often reflected changes in the social status of women – through a series of sculptural hats based on historic examples made between the late 18th and late 20th centuries.

Davies primarily took inspiration from "western" fashion, drawing on French and British fashions in particular for the 18th and 19th century pieces. *The Hat* is displayed alongside a Toronto Star article from 1977 that discusses the creation of the hat series and that illustrates the recognition that the work received from the ceramic community as the hats were displayed at the Ontario Craft Council Gallery.

Gail Crawford Archives, *The Mad Hatter works in clay*, Published in The Toronto Star, Thursday, September 15th, 1977.

Ruth Gowdy McKinley Archives, Kiln Drawing by Donald Lloyd McKinley.





Ann Mortimer Archives, Canadian Connections/les connexions canadiennes, Audio Cassette Tapes & 35mm Photographic Slides.

The final archives featured in this exhibition is the Ann Mortimer archives, specifically the “Canadian Connections – Les connexions canadiennes” presentation, an audio-visual lecture featuring 475 curated slides showcasing a wide array of Canadian ceramics dating from the mid-19th century to 1979, the year that Canadian Connections was first presented. This presentation was created and delivered by Ann Mortimer & John Chalke with funding and support for the project provided by the Clifford E. Lee Foundation and the Canadian Crafts Council. The 35mm slides are mounted in plastic and cardboard housings and were displayed using an Electrosonic Q Slide Dissolve Unit ES69 which allowed for various transitions to be utilized. As well, this unit allowed for the synchronization of the slide presentation with an audio component by recording a variable tone onto an audio tape which corresponded to specific slide transitions, creating an exact record of a given slideshow and its transitions. The Canadian Clay & Glass Gallery has been in the process of digitizing the slides and the audio cassette tapes which contain narration for the presentation. A combined digital audio-visual presentation will eventually be compiled and made available to the public as an educational resource.

It is quite rare that an archivist is given the opportunity to showcase the vital work they do to the public. Archives are typically utilized by individuals conducting scholarly research who are already aware of the importance of them. I sincerely hope that visitors to the Canadian Clay & Glass Gallery enjoy the *From the Archives* exhibition and the insight it provides into the essential role that archives play in maintaining and understanding cultural history.

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¹ “World Conference of the International Women’s Year 19 June-2 July 1975, Mexico City, Mexico,” United Nations | Conferences | Women and gender equality, The United Nations, accessed November 20th, 2023. <https://www.un.org/en/conferences/women/mexico-city1975>

² Gail Crawford, *Studio Ceramics in Canada* (Fredericton, New Brunswick: Goose Lane Editions, 2005), 126.



Artwork on the Cover:

Audrey Davies, *The Hat*, 1976. Porcelain glaze. Canadian Clay & Glass Permanent Collection. Indusmin Collection. 1991.001.138

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