

# Retro*spectives:*


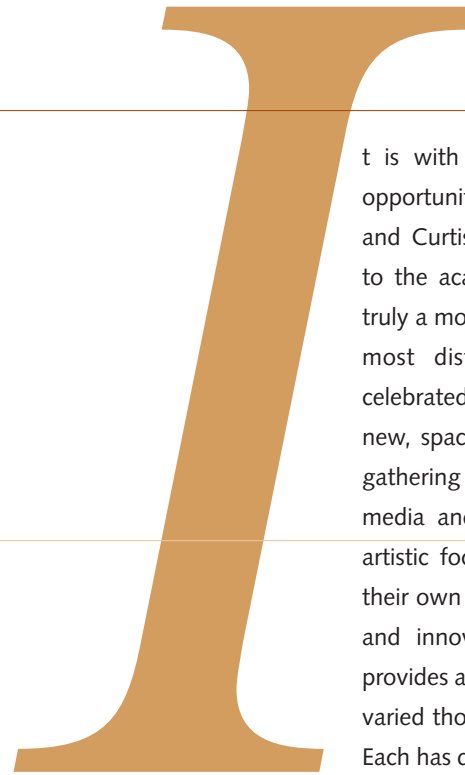
BETHKE, COWETTE, HOARD

*February 22 – March 24, 2005*

Katherine E. Nash Gallery

Department of Art  
Regis Center for Art  
University of Minnesota





It is with particular delight that I am presented with this opportunity to acknowledge Karl Bethke, Thomas Cowette, and Curtis Hoard for their artistic achievements and service to the academic and greater art world communities. This is truly a momentous occasion to have three of the department's most distinguished and creatively accomplished artists celebrated with this tripartite retrospective exhibition in the new, spacious Katherine E. Nash Gallery. This exhibition and gathering of drawings, paintings, ceramics, prints, mixed media and photo-based work is a testament to a level of artistic focus and commitment that spans four decades. In their own way, Bethke, Cowette, and Hoard have forged new and innovative pathways as visual artists. This exhibition provides a unique opportunity to examine and reflect upon the varied thoughts, dreams and visions they artfully bring to life. Each has demonstrated an extraordinary ability to meticulously observe phenomena and to transform their observations into visually commanding forms and objects. What we discover in their work is a personal desire and measure of formal and technical brilliance that has honorably coalesced over the course of time.

Clarence Morgan | *Professor and Chair* | Department of Art | University of Minnesota

retrospectives:

# Karl

The retrospective Karl Bethke selected of his own work displays an artist who began his career experimenting with different media. He ultimately settled his artistic attention on screen prints—an art-making process that is complex and requires close attention to detail and detailed knowledge of technique. Karl's statements indicate a commitment to printmaking as a medium, but his prints are not primarily about technique. He cites incongruity and conflict as the most prevalent forces in his life, and in his art. It is the responsibility of the artist, he said to students during his long career teaching art at the University of Minnesota (1965 to present), to “communicate ideas which significantly address aspects of the human condition in the most universal sense of the term.”

The incongruity starts, perhaps, with the fact that the prints that define his reputation are all the result of very specific images he recorded in South Africa during one year he spent there nearly a quarter century ago. During a 1978-1979 sabbatical Karl worked at the Evangelical Lutheran Church's Arts and Craft Centre in Rorke's Drift, Natal, South Africa. Two hundred twenty

# Bethke



KARL E. BETHKE  
*R.D. Sr. - Returns* | 1993

screenprint  
30" x 22"

color slides, 247 color prints, and 434 black and white negatives he made to record that experience have provided the visual stimulus for his work ever since.

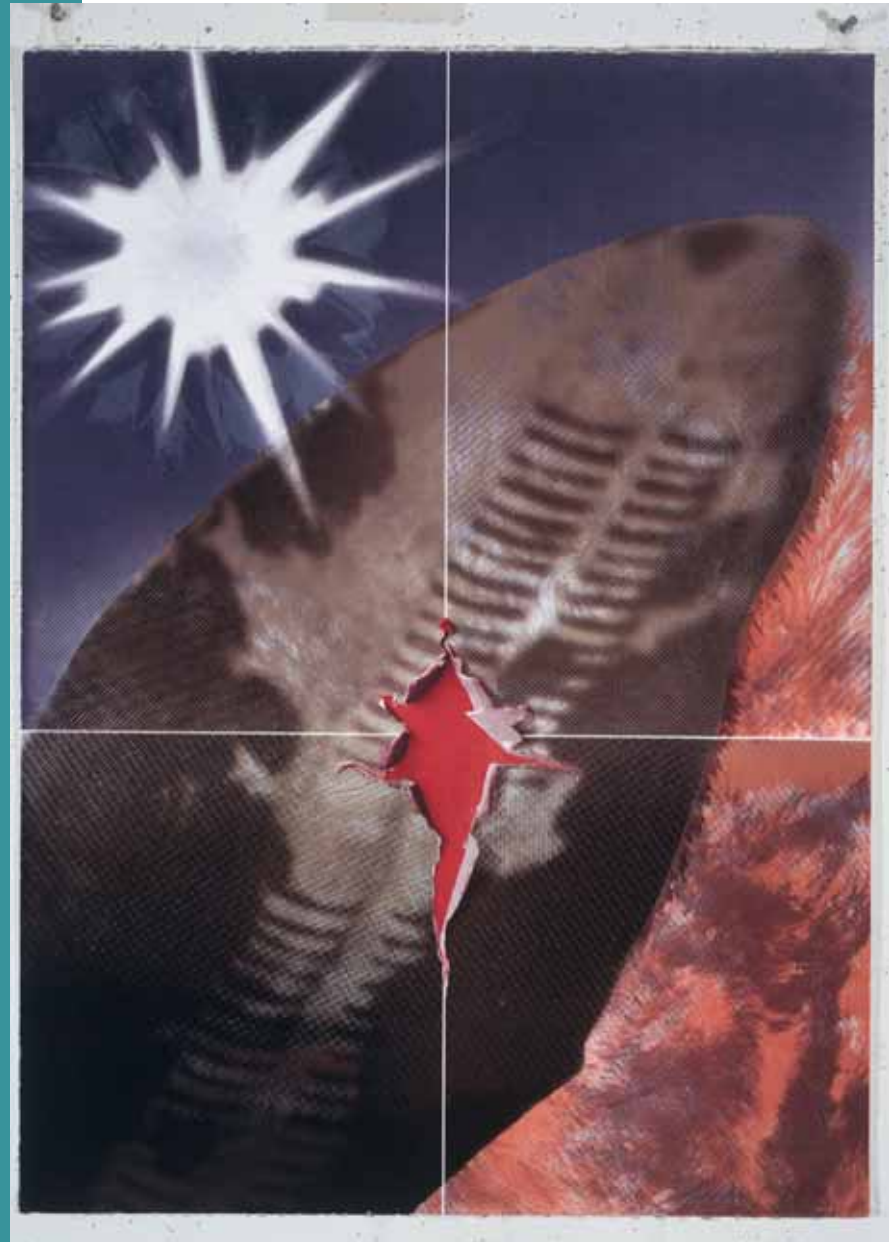
Rorke's Drift is a remote place rich in history. Although it is the site of important rock paintings made by Bushmen, who have inhabited the area since the Stone Age, it is best known in modern times for the 1879 Battle of Rorke's Drift. The British Historical Society still maintains a monument to this strategically insignificant engagement of the Anglo-Zulu war, when 100 British soldiers defended their supply depot against several thousand Zulus. Fourteen British soldiers and more than 500 Zulu were killed in the battle. Karl's prints series evoke the history of this place and his experiences there. The nine prints in his *Bushmen* series from 1979-81 draw on his photographs of rock paintings in the Shiyane Mountains near Rorke's Drift. The 77 prints of the *History of Rorke's Drift* series deal with the history of the place starting with the 1849 arrival of Jim Rorke at the Drift, during the Anglo Zulu war, and into the time of Bethke's experience there. The prints in the series include *Establishment of the Mission, Evangelical Lutheran Church Arts and Crafts Centre, Apartheid, Personal Impressions, and Tourist Experiences*.

The retrospective exhibition of an artist retired from a rich career as a teaching artist—though not retired as an artist—is an impetus to reflect on why, from a life full of conflict and incongruity, this very particular, relatively short experience defined Bethke's art for more than half his career as an artist. Undoubtedly, his personal experience of apartheid was a powerful one. But his life seems full of powerful experiences. He was born in a tumultuous time and place—Germany in 1932—and was orphaned in 1943, at age 11. As a young teenager he was a member of the Hitler Youth and, later, a member of the Communist youth movement in East Germany.

KARL E. BETHKE

R.D. Sr. - *The Battle of Rorke's Drift* | 1986

screenprint  
30" x 22"





KARL E. BETHKE  
*R.D. Sr. - Workshops:  
The Exhibition Hall | 1989*

screenprint  
44" x 30"



KARL E. BETHKE  
*R.D. Sr. - Valalisa Cow | 1979*

intaglio  
42" x 27"



In 1953 he marched with comrades to mark the death of Stalin. He apprenticed two years as a mechanic and escaped to West Germany after participating in a strike. He immigrated to America in 1956, served in the U.S. Army, and graduated from the University of Minnesota with an MFA in art in 1965. He became a U.S. citizen in 1978.

His prints are powerfully layered—rich in narrative and symbolism, and aesthetically satisfying. But they reveal incongruity even at their foundation. The print process, as Karl uses it, allows him to add layer after layer of formal elements and to resolve the conflicts of narrative, meaning, and aesthetics as he builds each print. His approach to printmaking can be seen as in conflict with the medium. The numerous technical steps required to make a print can be stifling and distracting but for Karl they are stimulating—"a challenge of my intentions which keeps the idea under stress until the last proof is pulled." His process increases the risk of accidents that may require time-consuming fixes or, as he puts it, may be "refreshingly enriching."

Karl wrote in 1987 that the leading motive for his work was the integration of conflict and incongruity within an ordered system. Each print Karl makes comprises layers of technical skill and image fragments. Each print requires countless formal, narrative, and philosophical decisions. At this retrospective moment in Bethke's art making, both the history of Rorke's Drift and Bethke's history with Rorke's Drift are overlaid with the retrospect of subsequent events in South Africa and in the universal human disorder he seeks to penetrate and to order with his art. Each print in his series is a stage in his search for "resolution of incongruity and conflict without potential fatalities."

*Lyndel King  
Director and Chief Curator  
Fredrick R. Weisman Art Museum  
University of Minnesota*

*All quotes are from Bethke's written statements about his work over the years, or from personal interviews with me in 2004.*



KARL E. BETHKE  
*R.D. Sr. Kruger Park - Base Camp I 2004*

screenprint  
30" x 44"

tro  
spectives:

Born 1932, Kaltennordheim/Rhoen Germany

**Education** 1965 MFA, Printmaking, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN  
1962 BA, *cum laude*, Art, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN **Selected One Person Exhibitions** 2000 "Prints from the Rorke's Drift Series: The Tourist Sequence." Winona, MN: Winona Art Center 1989 "Siebdrucke (Screenprints)." Weimar, Germany: Gallerie Schwamm 1988 "Karl Bethke: Intaglios and Screenprints." Hangzhou, People's Republic of China: Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts 1979 "Works by Karl Bethke." Pretoria, Republic of South Africa: North Gallery, Volkskas Center | "Prints by Karl Bethke." Potchefstroom, Republic of South Africa: University of Potchefstroom **Selected Group Exhibitions** 1997 "Karl Bethke and Carlos Cortez, Prints." Chicago, IL: Chicago Printmakers Collaborative 1995 "Together: Six Americans Collaborate." Tirane, Albania: National Gallery of Art 1989 "3rd International Biennial Print Exhibition of the West Lake Festival." Hangzhou, People's Republic of China: Zhejiang Museum | "Minnesota Artists." Modena, Italy: Modena Center for the Arts 1968 "3rd International Miniature Print Exhibition." New York, NY: Pratt Institute **Selected Publications** Hagstrom, Fred. "Karl Bethke: The Rorke's Drift Series." *The Journal of the Mid-America Print Council*, Vol. 5, Issue 1 (Spring/Summer 1997): 16-18 | *Minnesota Artists Look Back, 1948-1988*, exh.cat. St. Paul, MN: Minnesota Museum of Art, 1988 | Hellekson, Diane. "Get Disturbed." *Twin Cities Magazine* Vol. 10, No. 10 (October, 1987): 34-36 | *Visions Shared and Compared*, exh.cat. Minneapolis, MN: University Art Museum, University of Minnesota, 1987 | *8 Minnesota Printmakers*, exh.cat. Rochester, MN: Rochester Art Center, 1967 **Selected Collections** Zian Jiaotong University, People's Republic of China | Minneapolis Institute of Arts, MN | St. John's University, Collegeville, MN | Virginia Bell, Carmel Valley, CA

Karl E. Bethke

Retro





THOMAS COWETTE

*Eclipse* | 1975

acrylic on paper mounted  
on partical board  
16 7/8" x16 7/8"

"From the beginning I've always done whatever seems necessary at the time to arrive at a visually compelling work. My primary concern has always been formal significance, like Whistler for example." *Tom Cowette*

Hans Hoffman said, "A work of art is a world in itself reflecting senses and emotions of the artist's world." The paintings and drawings in this exhibition are a visual counterpart to Hoffman's statement and reveal Tom Cowette's inward spirit, his steady commitment and personal interpretation of universal artistic values.

I have known Tom since we were fellow art students and neighbors in the 1960s, so it was with great pleasure that I sat with him as we went through slide after slide from his enormous body of work dating back to an early still life and continuing on through his most recent drawings. In response to my questions about specific works, Tom didn't offer any lengthy explanation but rather a direction for moving into and around the paintings, a point of departure for navigating the picture plane.

Referring to one large painting from the early 1960s, Tom's comment was "See how those paint dabs at the edge of the canvas activate the whole picture plane?" and, "Look at the edges on these, see how the marks move around from painting to painting forming different structures?"

Those dabs indicate his interest in the process of mark making. While imagery changes over time, the mark serves as a means of exploring and defining the surface and establishing a

# Thomas Cowette

relationship with the edge. We followed that interest from early abstract works to recent drawings where the edge no longer exists as paint dabs but more specific borders that both frame and became part of the structure of the representational imagery. As we looked through various periods of work—paintings, collages, drawings, and three-dimensional paintings—I continued to wonder about motives and sources, “What inspired you here; are you following a tradition?”

“Over the years my work has no doubt been and still is consciously or unconsciously influenced by all sorts of external stimuli, visual and otherwise: from the work of other artists, people, places, and things from something as lofty as a Rembrandt painting or a Beethoven Quartet to as humble as a crack in the sidewalk. The only overt influences on me from the work of other artists I can recall were Giorgio Morandi in my early student days and Joseph Cornell with regard to the collages I did in the mid-1970s.”

In the drawings and paintings of gothic buildings from the early 1990s there is an implied narrative and mysterious undertone that compels one to question content more than with his abstract works. Tom talked about traveling in England and seeing firsthand gothic stone buildings, but the ones in his works are of his own design—imaginative structures. Unlike the linear perspective of the Renaissance, they offer subtle ambiguities and multiple views reminiscent of Persian miniature painting, and decidedly not copies from travel photos.

Returning to a group of paintings from 1962 to 1965, with their wonderful calligraphic brush strokes, I pondered the possibility of a private language hidden in a secret script. This is something I had attributed to Tom’s work from that period. As a freshman student at the Minneapolis School of Art (now MCAD) where Tom was in his senior year, I recall two large studios side by side stacked with student paintings, everyone crowded in together. That kind of elbow rubbing fomented humorous discussions about artistic style,

THOMAS COWETTE  
*Bernini Number Three* | 1962  
oil on canvas  
20" x 16"





THOMAS COWETTE

*Old Church and City Hall Tower* | 1990

acrylic on canvas

19" x 22" unframed, 25" x 28" framed

and shared ideas that generated a similar "look". Amidst that colorful jumble of paintings was a tranquil island of soft gray tones brushed with linear forms that floated over the surface. Tom moved in his own direction, writing his own visual language.

When I asked about the calligraphy, Tom's response was, "Yes, there is a calligraphic-like quality in a number of the pictures from the early and middle 1960's. Believe it or not the stimulus for this came from (of all things) sculpture. I saw a photograph in *Life* magazine showing a close-up of the marble statues on top of Bernini's Colonnade that surrounds St. Peter's Square in Rome. There were a lot of cracks in the statues that had been patched with what appeared to be tar. This resulted in linear relationships with very interesting possibilities and had an effect on my work at the time. I really looked forward to seeing them when I went to Italy in 1963."

A series of small paintings with attached three-dimensional elements, done in the late 1960s, is somewhat of a departure from the earlier non-representational paintings, yet they bear a "family resemblance" to them. The imagery of these works is abstract yet with a quality evocative of the natural and man-made environment. This is not art that jumps out at you and demands attention. It quietly draws you into a world of expressive elements, familiar and unfamiliar, engaging the viewer in a mental (re)adjustment of what we normally perceive as reality.

Those fortunate to own a Cowette, and there are many in private and public collections, have the opportunity to experience close-up and overtime a view into this very special world.

His more recent works, 1990 to the present, are representational-based drawings. The intricacy and layering of these works pulls the viewer in as if looking through a microscope; the surface depth revealed is in contrast to earlier paintings where the intensely worked paint is minimized to a few simple elements yet the mystery that lies beneath the surface is as important as what is left on top.



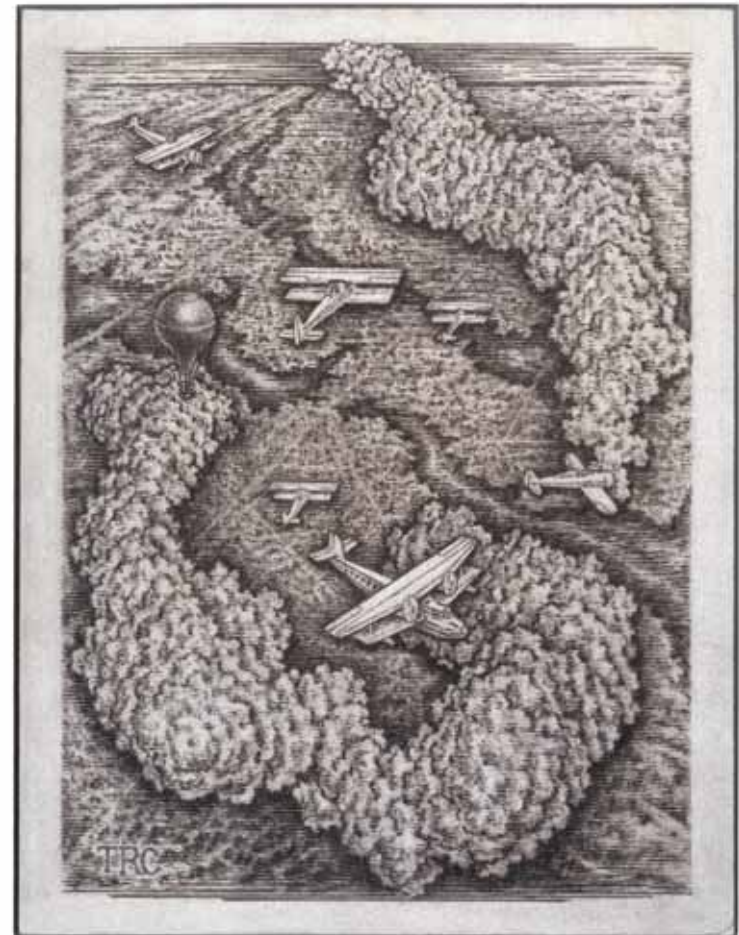


THOMAS COWETTE  
*Red, White and Grey* | 1965

acrylic on paper  
9" x 7 11/16"

THOMAS COWETTE  
*Air Traffic* | 2004

graphite on paper  
11" x 8 1/2"



Tom did one lithograph and when I asked "Why not more? Your work lends itself so well to that media." He said, "There was too much technical manipulation that gets in the way." What I believe is that each work is special to Tom; that the hand on the paper or the brush on the canvas is where the connection to his imagination and private world occurs. Taken as a whole, this exhibition represents a forty-year commitment and a marvelous achievement.

*Rochelle Woldorsky is an artist and adjunct faculty in the Department of Art at the University of Minnesota.*

# Thomas Cowette

*Born 1938, Minneapolis, Minnesota*

**Education** 1962 BFA, Fine Arts/Painting, Minneapolis School of Art, Minneapolis, MN 1961 Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, Skowhegan, Maine 1960 Grand Marais Art Colony, Grand Marais, MN **Selected One Person Exhibitions** 2000 "Tom Cowette Recent Drawings." Winona, MN: Paul Watkins Gallery, Winona State University 1999 "Tom Cowette Recent Drawings." St. Paul, MN: Unity Church | "Desengi Capriccioso." St. Paul, MN: Beaumage Fine Arts 1996 "Tom Cowette Recent Drawings." Collegeville, MN: St. John's Art Center, St. John's University 1994 "Cowette Painting and Drawing." Fridley, MN: Banfill-Locke Center for the Arts **Selected Group Exhibitions** 2004 "Kuhr/Cowette Recent Work." 55 Mercer Street Gallery, New York, NY 2001 "Nature in Process." Sioux Falls, SD: Eide/Dalrymple Gallery, Augustana College | "Tom Cowette and Wayne Potratz, Drawing and Sculpture." St. Paul, MN: Macalester College Art Gallery 1999 "New Work: McKnight Artists." Minneapolis, MN: Minneapolis College of Art and Design 1976 "Invitation 76." Minneapolis, MN: Walker Art Center 1966 "Thomas Cowette, Painting, Alexander Hunenko, Sculpture." Minneapolis, MN: Walker Art Center **Significant Awards and Grants** 1998 McKnight Foundation Artists Fellowship 1964 Ford Foundation Award | First National Bank of Minneapolis Award 1963 Ford Foundation Award 1962 Ethel Morrison Van Derlip Award **Selected Publications** Riddle, Mason. "Two U of M Artists Tell Private Stories in Different Ways." *St. Paul Pioneer Press*. (April 9, 2001): D-1 | Hanson, Doug. "McKnight Winners Display Variety of Techniques." *Minneapolis Star Tribune*. (March 26, 1999): E-6 | Mullin, Diane. "New Work MCAD McKnight Artists." exh.cat. Minneapolis, MN: Minneapolis College of Art and Design, 1999 **Selected Collections** Minneapolis Institute of Arts, Minneapolis, MN | Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN | Various Private Collections

# Retro



# Curtis Hoard

Although Curtis Hoard makes more than functional pots, his creative production is a direct expression, even a physical extension of events in his personal life, underscoring the observation of the renowned British potter, Bernard Leach. Hoard is a creator of both ceramic ware and hand-built sculpture and, through these two pursuits, he has revealed himself to be a peripatetic artist, a ceramist who has embraced a restless and evolving path of both style and content. This need to explore new content has caused Hoard to establish and then address self-imposed technical challenges and find ways to overcome them in order to express an idea. Through this process of investigation, experimentation and resolution, he has identified new or alternative ways of thinking about and working with clay, mastering his craft both aesthetically and technically from a unique point of view. As a teacher of ceramics since 1967 at the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, he has encouraged his students to do the same: to set obtainable goals, work like hell, and then achieve them.



**CURTIS HOARD**  
*Say You Will Stay* | 1990  
earthenware clay, underglaze  
and glaze painting  
56" x 24" x 24"

Pots, like other forms of art, are human expressions...and their natures are inevitably projections of the minds of their creators.

Bernard Leach, *A Potter's Book*

Hoard's oeuvre is diverse and expansive. Viewed collectively, it is a study in contrasts, a map of his evolving and idiosyncratic aesthetic. It is a body of work that comprises both large and small-scale sculpture, high and low-fired glazes, virtually all types of clay bodies, and surface embellishments both simple and complex. Hoard is also a colorist whose palette ranges from saturated hues to ephemeral pastels to reductive monochromatic schemes on a neutral ground. When viewing his work chronologically, it is not uncommon to see a large, earthenware sculpture with vivid, poly-chromed surfaces featuring a claustrophobic array of figures rubbing shoulders with a salt or wood fired stoneware platter depicting a single, black pictographic figure on an unadorned surface. His recent functional work, both in porcelain and salt-fired stoneware, is more intimate in scale and made for the table. Teapots, platters, vases and baskets are elaborated with delicate pastel brushwork

CURTIS HOARD

*Teapot With Leaves* | 2004

stoneware clay, salt fire, glaze  
with wash painting

8 1/2" x 9 1/2"



or incised drawing depicting a flower or leaf or abstract patterns. At times, Hoard's work is so ostensibly different that the unfamiliar eye might believe it to be created by more than a single hand. Yet, a simplicity of shape, a muscularity of form and a graphic quality of image infuses all of his work, coalescing the extremes into an aesthetic whole.

What also links this disparate body of work is the notion of narrative, a vein that runs deeply through Hoard's sculpture and pots. The storyline need not be specific or self-evident to the

viewer. Rather, it is this propensity for narrative, found as much in Hoard's approach to an individual work as in its imagery, that lands him the role of storyteller. This story, whether a personal event or a universal tale, unfolds as he draws and paints with glaze around the surface of the work. He even sees a narrative quality in his most abstract surface embellishments. "Whatever is touching my soul, whatever situation I find myself in, finds its way into my work," explains Hoard.

Hoard's early work was influenced by the Funk movement of the 1960s, and revealed classic Funk traits of everyday objects being injected with odd offensiveness, sexual references and (often obscure) political and social content. Several series of work were produced during this period including his *Hershey Bars*, which referenced General Hershey who was then head of the draft, his *Gun* series that explored politics

and sexuality, and his *American Flag* works which questioned the military and political might of our country during the Vietnam war. More humorous and overtly sexual is *Buttercup Assembly*, from his *Object-Idea* series. Here, three common custard ice cream cones are placed in a Lazy Susan-like stand, and are topped with nipples. While such a work may seem clichéd today, it places Hoard firmly as an artist of his time. Later work referenced apartheid and the Sandanistas. "These works were rooted in the social and sexual commentary of the turbulent sixties," comments Hoard. "I was maturing as a political, sexual and artistic person at the time."



**CURTIS HOARD**  
*Figure With Walking Stick* | 1995  
earthenware clay, underglaze and glaze  
72" x 24" x 13"

By the 1970s Hoard was creating large-scale earthenware jars and irregularly shaped sculptures, some more than 3 feet in height. These richly colored works were glazed with abstract passages of color and an occasional floral design. Figurative references began slowly to appear. In the 1980s, Hoard's work had become explicitly narrative: multiple figures in vivid hues that acted out a range of scenarios covered their surfaces. By the late 1980s, the work was highly personal, exploring issues such as his role as an artist, husband and father. In the early 1990s, this cast of quasi-realistic characters began to slowly disappear from the



**CURTIS HOARD**  
*Porcelain Plate* | 2004  
glaze with wash painting  
16" diameter

surfaces of these large-scale sculptures, some of which had reached a height of 6 feet or more. What evolved were reductive sculptural forms with simple figurative references. Eccentric hump-shaped sculptures, suggesting a cloaked friar, bore attached geometric forms and referenced the figure in more oblique or metaphorical ways. By 1996, Hoard was making large, bold, often functional pieces whose palette and imagery were limited to black pictographic figures on slip-glazed surfaces. These platters, candelabra, and hump forms were soda or salt fired giving them a primitive, tactile quality. Their surfaces became a tabula rasa for single or multiple figures who acted out unidentifiable but seemingly symbolic stories. During this period and later, these flat abstract figures evolved into sculptural relief forms; attenuated humans and animals cling tenaciously to the surfaces of this work. In 2003, Hoard turned his vision back to making functional ware that is still sculptural but atypically elegant, work that is defined by gestural markings and floral images that vaguely suggest Asian and European traditions of pottery-making.

For Hoard, his work is unequivocally the physical embodiment of an idea and his challenge is to find the form most appropriate to express that idea. Functional and sculptural forms, abstract and representational imagery, intense coloration or a neutral palette are all seen as two sides of the same equation: rather than conflicting aesthetics, this dichotomy of pursuits is, in fact, complimentary, with each capable of giving physical expression to an idea or relating a story. "When you can find the skill level, that supports the idea level, then you have something," states Hoard.

*Mason Riddle is the director of The Goldstein Museum of Design at the University of Minnesota and writes on the visual arts, architecture and design.*



**CURTIS HOARD**  
*Covered Jar* | 1980  
earthenware clay, underglaze  
and glaze surface  
50" x 13"

Born 1940, St. Paul, Minnesota

# Curtis C. Hoard

**Education** 1967 MFA Ceramics/Glass/Sculpture, University of Wisconsin, Madison, WI 1965 Cranbrook Academy of Art, Bloomfield Hills, MI 1965 BA, Art/Art Education, University of Wisconsin, River Falls, WI **Selected One Person Exhibitions** 2005 "Curtis Hoard/New Work." St. Paul, MN: The Grand Hand Gallery 2001 "One Person." St. Paul, MN: Shepard Gallery, St. Paul Academy 1995 "New Work/New Direction." Minneapolis, MN: Robert Thomson Gallery 1991 "Curtis Hoard/NewWork." St. Cloud, MN: St. Cloud State University 1990 "New Work." Highland Park, IL: Martha Schneider Gallery 1988 "Curtis Hoard, New Work." Minneapolis, MN: Robert Thomson Gallery **Selected Group Exhibitions** 2005 "The National Ceramic Invitational." Sponsored by The National Council on Education for The Ceramic Arts (NCECA) Taipei, Taiwan: The Taipei National Museum 1997 "Korea's Clay Fire, International Sculpture and Ceramics Exhibition." Chonbuss Proumce, South Korea: Maisan National Park 1987 "Clay A-Z." Helsinki, Finland: Arabia Museum | "American Ceramics." Stockholm, Sweden: Gunmeson Gallery 1984 "Curt Hoard and Rudy Autio." Rochester, MN: Rochester Art Center | "Art For The Table." New York, NY: American Craft Museum **Significant Awards and Grants** 1985 Minnesota State Arts Board Individual Artist Grant **Selected Publications** Peterson, Susan. *Contemporary Ceramics*. NY: Watson Guptill, 2001 | Peterson, Susan. *The Craft and Art of Clay*. NY: Prentice Hall, 1998 | Lewenstein, Eileen and Emmanuel Copper. *New Ceramics*. Van Nostrand Reinhold Publishers, 1983 | Troy, Jack. *Salt Glazed Ceramics*. New York: Watson Guptill Publishers, 1977 | Lavine, Nancy. *Hard Core Crafts*. NY: Ballantine Books, 1970 **Selected Collections** Australian Council for the Arts, Sydney, Australia | Arabia Museum, Helsinki, Finland | Dayton Hudson Corporation, Minneapolis, MN | Sara and David Lieberman, Arizona | Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum, Minneapolis, MN

# Retro



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