# Ceramic Arts in Africa

It has been nearly two decades since *African Arts* published the special issue on African ceramic arts edited by Marla Berns (1989, vol. 22, no. 2). Since then, there has been noteworthy collaborative research on ceramics in particular regions, a number of important localized studies by individual scholars, and several widely distributed catalogues published in conjunction with major exhibitions surveying African ceramic arts. In parts of Africa where ceramic vessels are pervasive some are clearly the focus of artistic elaboration, whether they serve as objects of both utility and beauty in domestic settings or carry symbolic import central to social identity, economic and political status, ritual practice, and belief. Their study reveals the skill and invention of their makers, who are, more often than not, women.[1] And yet, ceramics continue to be underrepresented in Africanist art historical literature in proportion to their importance as a form of expressive culture, and significant gaps remain in our awareness and understanding of historic and contemporary ceramic traditions across Africa.



**1** An installation view of "For Hearth and Altar: African Ceramics from the Keith Achepohl Collection," Dec. 3, 2005–Feb. 26, 2006. Storage containers from Burkina Faso are featured on the large platform in the foreground.
PHOTO: SUSAN HUANG, © THE ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO

This issue brings together the research of a number of scholars whose work exemplifies some of what has been accomplished in the last two decades.[2] The articles foreground important themes in the study of African ceramic arts, most especially documentation and historical reconstruction, iconographic analysis, the elucidation of ritual and social significance, and the celebration of individual artistry. In this introduction we offer some reflections on our experiences researching and writing about African ceramic arts and we signal some of the limitations of the field's current state of knowledge in an effort to spark interest in future research.



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**A CURATOR'S PERSPECTIVE**
*by Kathleen Bickford Berzock*

Curators are often handed remarkable opportunities through the serendipity of their careers. In 1995, when I began work at the Art Institute of Chicago, Keith Achepohl was already committed to giving a large portion of his expansive African pottery collection to the museum and in turn the museum was committed to exhibiting and publishing a selection of works from the collection. The pursuit and culmination of this project would occupy me for ten years and would result in the exhibition and catalogue *For Hearth and Altar: African Ceramics from the Keith Achepohl Collection* (FIG. 1). During this time Achepohl continued to add to his collection with purchases that broadened its representation for a public audience and I made select acquisitions for the museum of pieces that complemented Achepohl's. Because we were looking at the vessels individually and considering nuances of form and embellishment, I wanted my research as closely as possible to reflect each piece's uniqueness as well as where it fit within a cultural tradition. This process made me aware of the wide gaps in the literature for many of the kinds of ceramic vessels appearing on the market. It also drew my focus more sharply to the transition that functional objects such as pottery make when they enter the art market and how this has affected the way pots are represented in private collections and museums.

African ceramics have largely been brought to broad public attention through a handful of publications developed in conjunction with major exhibitions and these stand as important overviews of this field of collecting.[3] They record the growing interest in vessels as art objects from the 1970s through the present day as well as the decreasing amount of documentary information that accompanies them. One of the earliest, *Nigerian Pottery* by Sylvia Leith-Ross (1970), was the result of an ambitious effort to collect and catalogue vessels from across the country for display in a permanent installation at the National Museum in Jos. However, in her introduction Leith-Ross bemoans the inconsistency of the information they were ultimately able to provide for specific vessels, saying, "what information is given can only be regarded as a pointer to what a fuller study of this well-nigh unknown field might reveal. The Catalogue itself should be looked on as no more than a first attempt at bringing to light the unexpected wealth and interest of Nigerian Pottery" (Leith-Ross 1970:15; a more recent project of this type is documented in Gallay et al. 1996). Roy Sieber's *African Furniture and Household Objects* (1980), Arnulf Stössel's *Afrikanische Keramik* (1984), and Nigel Barley's *Smashing Pots: Works of Clay from Africa* (1994) feature work drawn from museum and private collections primarily in the United States and Europe. Working from existing records, they are able to provide documentation for some of the vessels they illustrate. Sieber introduces the pottery of Africa in a general way and addresses the twenty-four illustrated vessels in brief captions.[4] Stössel illustrates more than 400 pots primarily from European museum collections and addresses a comprehensive slate of issues before presenting a geographical survey-style catalogue of the works. Barley features vessels from the Museum of Mankind in London organized around broad themes such as pottery's associations with the earth or the human body, pots as containers for spirits, and the nature of ceramic decoration. Karl-Ferdinand Schädler draws the approximately 300 vessels illustrated in *Earth and Ore: 2500 Years of African Art in Terracotta and Metal* (1997), an exhibition presented at the Museum Villa Rot in Ulm, Germany, from private collections in Europe and the United States though none are accompanied with information about when, where, and by whom they were collected.



**2** Pitcher for palm wine (*Mba Molu*), late 20th century
Martin Fombah, (born c. 1950), Nsei, Cameroon
Blackened terracotta, 30.5cm x 20.3cm (12" x 8")
Gift of Keith Achepohl, 2004.742.
PHOTO: ROBERT LIFSON, © THE ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO

Martin Fombah's work caters to the new elite in Nsei, who reinforce their status with displays of wealth including pottery. Like much of Fombah's work, this pitcher brings new sculptural emphasis to traditional symbols of power and authority. Here a man's head, crowned with the two-lobed prestige hat of Grassfields' chiefs and title-holders, sits squarely at front. To the left is a bag with a looped handle used to hold sacred objects by members of the palace regulatory society. Below are stylized renderings of the double gong, an instrument strongly associated with chieftancy and court ritual.

It is clear that today the market for African ceramics is outpacing scholarship. Published research on African ceramics is highly idiosyncratic and uneven in depth and cultural representation. Only a few traditions have been the focus of in-depth study by multiple researchers offering complementary perspectives.[5] More commonly one or two studies must suffice to represent an entire cultural practice.[6] And there are many traditions for which no studies have been published. This means that quite often there is no published source documenting the kinds of vessels that are being introduced on the market. Adding to the sparseness of information on vessels offered for sale, those purchased in towns and villages for resale are rarely accompanied by documentary information. In parts of West Africa this work is dominated by traders who generally have no attachment to the cultural value of these objects and who have little incentive to record where and by whom a pot was made, how old it is, who owned it, and how it was used.[7] This is true even of contemporary wares that take traditional forms. It came as a welcome surprise to me when Silvia Forni identified a pitcher in the Achepohl collection (FIG. 2), which had arrived in the United States unattributed, as the work



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of an innovative contemporary Nsei potter named Martin Fombah. Fombah was among the potters with whom Forni worked during field research in 2000–2001. She has written about him in her dissertation, but beyond that he has not received international attention (Forni 2000-2001:167–8).[8]

Where older wares are concerned, the lack of information is also in part because their local histories may be fading or long forgotten. Douglas Dawson, the most prolific dealer of African pottery in the United States, has remarked that vessels often arrive "encrusted with a patina of neglect not use" (2005:5). Certainly it is easy to find instances of pottery supplanted by mass-produced plastic, aluminum, or enamel containers that are cheaper, lighter weight, less vulnerable to breakage, or more fashionable. Vessels for uses that were once widespread have also lost their relevance because of changes in cultural and religious practices or increasing access to modern conveniences. These changes feed the market, for as the emotional and cultural value of an object wanes, owners become more open to the potential economic value of their possessions.

Still, whether old or new, vessels often are stripped prematurely of important aspects of their unique identities when they enter the market. A case in point: In 2003 Douglas Dawson purchased a group of large, asymmetrical vessels embellished with appliquéd imagery, one of which was acquired by the Art Institute of Chicago (FIG. 3; Berzock 2005:102–104, fig. 54). Dawson reported that these vessels "are probably from the Ewe region of Kpando [Ghana]. According to elderly women there, the pots are no longer made or used, but formerly were placed on altars with each vessel having a very specific symbolic meaning" (Dawson 2003:42–5; for two other such pots see Dawson 2005:36–9). My subsequent research on Ewe pottery revealed little by way of published literature. I located two related, but smaller and less elaborate jars, in the collection of the Linden-Museum, Stuttgart, that were collected in the early twentieth century. Like the Art Institute's vessel, they had small cups attached around their shoulders and one was embellished with an appliquéd snake (Berzock 2005:104 and 196 n. 4). The Ghanaian art historian Nii Quarcoopome confirmed that pots with similar miniature cups are made for a snake cult that is found across southeast Ghana, Togo, and Republic of Benin (Berzock 2005:196 n. 5). A Dutch exhibition catalogue on Vodun arts in West Africa also illustrated pots that appeared to be related and that bore appliquéd imagery (Hubner 1996:130–4, figs. 1, 3, 10, 11, 20, 26, 27). However, I was able to locate no source that illustrated shrine pots of this stature or inventiveness of form. As major shrine vessels, in all likelihood they were too important, too sacred, and too private in nature to be openly discussed in and around Kpando. I wonder how and why this changed, when the shrine stopped being maintained and protected, and who initially sold these spectacular vessels. Equally, I wonder about the gifted potters who made them and what motivated their fantastic forms. It may still be possible through field research to learn something about them. Lisa Aronson's Research Note in this issue suggests the richness of Ewe pottery practice in Ghana today, though she also records the increasingly wide influences that are prompting innovations by potters.



**3** Shrine vessel, early/mid-20th century
Kpando or vicinity, Ghana
Terracotta, 58.5cm x 35.5cm x 42.5cm (23" x 14" x 16¾")
Atlan Ceramic Club Endowment, 2003.76
PHOTOGRAPH BY BOB HASHIMOTO. © THE ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO

A potter of remarkable skill made this asymmetrical shrine vessel. Around the shoulder an arcade of buttresses support a series of small, engaged pots, while human arms are rendered in appliqué across the belly, subtly transforming the vessel into a voluptuous standing figure.

When a vessel arrives on the market divorced from its function and its places of origin, it is given a new, more generalized identity—Bamana, Pare, Yoruba; water container, storage container, ritual vessel. It is at this juncture that the lack of comparative studies among interrelated pottery traditions leads to misattribution, with one ethnic label becoming a catch-all for pots exhibiting similar traits. This has been true, for instance, of pottery-rich west-central Cameroon, home to the Grassfields chiefdoms and to numerous smaller, more decentralized ethnicities to their west. While we have two excellent studies focusing on the thriving pottery centers of Nsei and Bamessing in the Grassfields (Argenti 1999, Forni 2000-2001), there is little documentation of other pottery traditions in the region, which are quite distinct from community to community.[9] The Achepohl collection includes a beautiful and austere vessel that had been misidentified as coming from the Grassfields based on its shape. When I sent photographs of it to scholars who had studied Grassfields pottery, they were certain that it was not from the towns where they had conducted research, but they could not tell me where it was from. I was put in contact with Father Hermann Gufler, a long-time missionary in the region, and his colleague Genesis Ghasi. They thought the vessel was probably from the Mambila village of Lip and were able to confirm this by making a visit there (Berzock 2005:144, fig. 88). The fact that knowledgeable dealers, collectors, curators, and scholars did not recognize this vessel as Mambila speaks directly to the limited understanding we have of the scope and breadth of Mambila pottery. These limitations can only be redressed through better documentation when vessels are collected and through research in the field.

In some ways the problem that I have outlined exists across the field of African art. All too often works of art in collections are accompanied by little or no specific information about their origins and functions. However, it is worth asking why ceramics in particular have not been the focus of more attention from art historians even in areas where research on other art forms is richly nuanced. Perhaps the most telling example of this oversight is among the Yoruba, a subfield of Africanist studies with an unparalleled depth and breadth of literature across disciplines, including art history. The origins of Yoruba pottery stretch back to the exquisite vessels and sculptures of ancient Ife. The modern Yoruba are prolific potters, with a stunning array of vessels that run the gamut from daily household to strictly ritual uses,



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**4a,b** Osun shrine jar, early/mid–20th century
Osogbo or vicinity, Nigeria, Yoruba
Terracotta, 59.7cm x 31cm (23½" x 12¼")
Gift of Keith Achepohl, 2005.277.
PHOTO: ROBERT LIFSON.
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Elaborate raised and pierced decoration articulates the entire surface of this long-necked jar, while the application of stylized eyes, ears, nose, and mouth transform it into a half figure. In the region of Osogbo, in the Osun River Valley, jars like this may be placed on shrines dedicated to the diety Osun, the mother of life-giving waters.

with many of the most spectacular made specifically to be placed on shrines (FIG. 4). Robert F. Thompson's seminal 1969 article on the Egbado-Yoruba potter Àbátàn remains the most in-depth study of an exceptional potter's work and the meaning and significance of a particular kind of shrine vessel. In 1972 Maude Wahlman published a valuable comparative study of pottery techniques in two Yoruba regions. This was followed in the 1980s and 1990s with multiple publications (including Beier 1980, Ojo 1982, Isaacs 1988, Fatunsin 1992, Ibigbami 1982 and 1992, and Allsworth-Jones 1996) which survey various techniques and uses for pots; however, none of these studies approach the depth of critical inquiry presented in Thompson's work. Likewise, the captions for the four shrine vessels illustrated in the catalogue of the landmark exhibition *Yoruba: Nine Centuries of African Art and Thought* reveal intriguing details that remain unexplored in larger studies (Drewal et al. 1989:161, fig. 177, and 226, figs. 267-9). We are told for instance, that the shape of one lidded pot is found most often on Erinle shrines, but its iconography is usually associated with Sango (ibid., 160-61). Another describes "a ritual vessel possibly for Yemoja, goddess of the river Ogun … transformed into a woman's body whose breasts sustain life in feeding a child" (ibid., p. 226). These tantalizing descriptions suggest the great, untapped potential of Yoruba pottery as an area of research, just as the remarkably varied vessels in the Achepohl collection hint at the artistry that can be found in pottery from many other parts of Africa.

## FIELD RESEARCH AND MAKING OBJECTS SPEAK

*by Barbara E. Frank*

If we wish to understand better the social and spiritual meanings of individual pots, then we need to know something of the women and men who made them and the social, economic, and spiritual contexts within which they were conceived, created, and used. As already suggested, all too often objects enter museum and private collections with their unique histories silent. Making objects speak requires the concerted and collaborative efforts of art historians, anthropologists, and other scholars from a wide range of disciplines.

Some of the most intense, sustained, and interdisciplinary research on ceramics in Africa has been in the Inland Niger Delta region of Mali, where pottery production remains a major industry (FIGS. 5–6). Following a number of important individual studies (Gardi 1985, LaViolette 1987, 2000) and in close collaboration with the Musée National du Mali and the Institut des Sciences Humaines, Allan Gallay led a team of archaeologists on a series of ethnoarchaeological projects in the Inland Niger Delta region between 1988 and 1994, in an effort to link styles of technology and object styles and types with demographic information about gender, family heritage, and ethnicity (Gallay and Huysecom 1989; Gallay, Huysecom, and Mayor 1998; Gallay et al. 1996, 1998). In these studies careful recording of individual artist by patronym as well as artisan class, ethnic affiliation, and location provides evidence of the structured coherence of different social systems, as well as revealing instances of the variability of identity and status (see LaViolette 1995). They have identified distinct technologies used to form pots and located them within specific regional and ethnic contexts[10] and documented the range and depth of ceramic assemblages. Similarly, art historian Christopher Roy (1975, 1989, 2000a, 2000b, 2003) has focused much of his research defining different forming technologies and identifying them with particular ethnic contexts in Burkina Faso. His recent DVD *African Pottery Techniques* (2003) offers nine distinct forming and firing sequences, remarkable for the skill and dexterity of the artists who make what they do seem effortless. What emerges from these studies is not only insight into the archaeological record, but also an unusually rich picture of the relationship between ethnic diversity, craft specialization, and the technology of production.[11]



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**5** Water container, late 19th/mid–20th century
Mali, Somono
Terracotta, slip, and kaolin, 60cm x 42cm (23½" x 16½")
Gift of Keith Achepohl, 2005.222.
PHOTO: ROBERT LIFSON. © THE ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO

A Somono woman is often given a capacious and beautifully decorated water container upon marriage and it remains an important part of her household furniture throughout her lifetime. The patterns on this vessel are impressed with combs, sticks, and stamps. Though a few potters still practice such time-consuming techniques, slip-painted designs have been gaining in popularity in recent days.

This approach has been especially influential for my own research. Like my earlier work on Bamana and Maninka potters, my current project examines the historical links among ceramic traditions by mapping social identity, ceramic technology, and objects in a comparative regional framework. In my essay here, I focus on a group of women potters in southeastern Mali who do not fit the blacksmith-potter paradigm so prevalent among Mande peoples elsewhere. Instead I look to the south and east, adopting a broad geographical frame of reference that has provided me with important clues to the origins of these women and their ceramic technology.

The association of blacksmiths and potters is part of what led the sculptor Janet Goldner to the community of Kalabougou, Mali. Although she was interested in learning about how they made pots, she also wanted to understand something of the context of their lives. Her photo essay documents aspects of their practice at the same time as it provides a personal and intimate perspective on the lived experience of these women as artists, craftswomen, mothers, and wives.



**6** Somono potter Niamoye Nientao finishing a water jar. Jenne, Mali. PHOTOGRAPH BY ADRIA LAVIOLETTE, 1983.

My research has made me realize how important it is to begin with careful documentation of all aspects of ceramic production, including the tools and processes of production as well as the range and variation in ceramic assemblage. Marla Berns' research note provides just such a description of pottery making processes by Mo women in Bonakire, Ghana, at a particular moment in time. In her subsequent research in the Benue valley of northern Nigeria (1986, 1989b, 1990, 2000) Berns combines an art historical attention to the style and iconography of ceramic forms with contemporary linguistic and anthropological data on ritual practice and meanings. She argues that ceramic arts in this region are conceptualized as active participants in maintaining and legitimating social relationships not just in this world, but between the living and the ancestral dead. There is no easy division between sacred and profane, thus the symbolism of figurative vessels embedded in ritual contexts is inseparable from the material symbols of daily life.

Iconographic analysis is also central to Christopher Slogar's research. His contribution to this issue examines contemporary Calabar visual culture in order to interpret the corpus of recently recovered archaeological ceramics from the region. What he finds is a close correspondence between the ostensibly abstract decoration on many of the archaeological vessels with the ideographic script known as *nsibidi*. His research offers the possibility of a much greater time depth for this visual language, if not its symbolic associations.

While there may be many places in Africa where changes in religious beliefs and practices has led to the abandonment of some pottery forms, there are other places where the ritual significance of pots seems to endure. Judith Sterner, Nicholas David, Gavua Kodzo, and Scott MacEachern (David 1992; David et al. 1991; MacEachern 1994; Sterner 1989, 1995) have documented the central role of ceramics in all aspects of ritual and social life in the Mandara mountain region of northern Cameroon. Their research explores the strong and vital association between pots, people and the spirit world.

Similarly, Silvia Forni's work with potters in several communities in Cameroon (2000–2001) is based on close observation of all



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aspects of pottery production and marketing, but is also informed by an anthropological focus on the meaning and significance of pottery within the social and spiritual lives of her informants. The focus of her article is on pottery production and use in the Grassfields kingdom of Babessi, where she argues that from birth to death and beyond, pots are important agents in social life. Their role shifts from humble to official, from male to female, from individual to communitarian according to the specific setting and occasion in which they are placed in the center of action.

Laurel Aguilar was conducting research on Chewa men's initiation practices when she became aware of the parallel mythic and symbolic significance of women's pottery production. She describes some of the metaphorical associations embedded in the making of pottery and reflects on how these illustrate Chewa social values.

Similarly, Lisa Aronson went to Ghana to do research on Ewe vodun body arts, only to find that pottery production provided a useful entrée to understanding vodun practice. She documented the unusual technique the Anlo-Ewe of Ghana employ for building their everyday and ritual (*Vodun*) pots, which can be understood as a visualization of the spiritual world, especially when seen in concert with the iconographic embellishment of the vessels. As she suggests, this domain offers a great deal of potential for further research.

While as researchers we may be drawn to a particular potter whose abilities seem to rise above the level of the others, most of the concern of art historians has been on understanding the larger cultural tradition within which they operate. There have been very few studies that focus on individual potters recognized for their exceptional artistry. When the British potter Michael Cardew first encountered the work of Ladi Kwali, a Gwari potter of Northern Nigeria, he was impressed by her skills manipulating clay:

> To watch Ladi Kwali building her pots by hand is an enlightening experience, quite as stimulating as one's first sight of a good thrower at work. You realize with surprise that it is not necessary to have a potter's wheel in order to achieve pots which have the appearance of perfect symmetry. One also experiences … the exhilaration of watching a craftsman who seems to be doing the impossible and to be always on the brink of disaster, yet is entirely unafraid, and entirely confident with the confidence that comes from a lifetime of devotion to the craft. Crowning all this, her personal charm irradiates all her art and everything she does and seems to be the epitome of the deep-seated culture of Africa (1972:35).



**7** Gwari potter Ladi Kwali demonstrating how she was taught to throw pots on a wheel by Michael Cardew. Abuja, Nigeria. PHOTOGRAPH BY MICHAEL CONNER, 1978.

Ultimately, Cardew taught Kwali how to throw on a potters' wheel (FIG. 7). Her glazed stoneware pots now in museum and private collections stand as an odd hybrid of African creativity and European intervention.

The role of creativity within the traditional context of an individual artist's work was the focus of Robert Farris Thompson's eloquent study of the Yoruba potter Àbátàn Odefunke Ayinke Ija. He writes:

> I hope to demonstrate that two aspects of art, tradition and innovation, normally held to be antithetical, form in her works a dynamic unity, that is, her art is embedded in culture and yet is autonomous. The problem of the expression of her individuality is perceived in time. Artistic development happens when an individual, after the mastery of the skills of his métier, surmounts this basic competence with continuous self criticism and change. In a world of non literate conservative bent, these innovations are perforce discreet, so as not to disturb a necessary illusion of the continuity of ethical truths in their abstract purity (1969:121–2).

The existence of multiple examples of Àbátàn's work along with pieces created by other potters within the same context allows Thompson the unusual opportunity to assess the creative range of the artist's work and change over time within her oeuvre. As he himself notes, however, "artistic biography depends on more than a few isolated samples just as a film cannot be considered where but two or three frames of the print survives" (ibid., p. 123).

Artistic biography is the focus of Barbara Thompson's essay. She was engaged in doctoral research on Tanzanian healing practices when she encountered the potter Namsifueli Nyeki and her work in the market. In her essay, she describes how she became aware of the innovative way in which Nyeki adopted and transformed various traditional pottery forms, and how her friendship with this extraordinary woman ultimately came full circle to connect with her research on traditional healers.

Our solicitation of Gary Van Wyk's interview with South African potter, Clive Sithole, for this volume reflects our concern for how scant information is on contemporary ceramic artists from Africa.[12] The interview opens a window into a particular artist's inspiration, his curiosity and passion for the medium of clay, and his self-conscious respect for both tradition and innovation.

In sum, the essays included in this issue bring attention to a field of study that is rich with potential, offering a range of approaches as models for future research. We end our introduction not with answers, but with questions. What as yet unknown relationships might be realized through the documenting and mapping of existing ceramic traditions? To what extent can we reconstruct the histories of vessels and of the potters who made them? Where do pots fit within changing symbolic systems of belief? Do they continue to embody myths and metaphors of the past? Do they remain no more or less important than their predecessors, do they take on a greater role in embodying memory in the decline or absence of figurative sculpture (on shrines, for example), or have their ritual associations become obsolete? In



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a given cultural context, what is the nature of the relationship between ceramic arts and other expressive art forms such as body ornamentation, performance, and displays of status within the home? Where do the ceramic arts fit within the broader visual culture of contemporary life in Africa? What might we learn from knowing more of the life histories of individual potters, of variations in apprenticeship and learning patterns, of attitudes towards creativity and innovation? Within differing cultural systems what motivates exceptional potters? How is their artistry received within their own community? How might we better understand the intersection of ceramics with global markets today? When and how do vessels enter these markets and with what agency do potters engage with them? ●

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***Notes***

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**1** With some exceptions, women dominate the craft of pottery production across Africa in historically known periods. The gender of potters and of the makers of figurative sculpture in the archaeological past is not known; however, both Berns (1993) and Frank (2002) have suggested that we should at least recognize the possibility that women may have played a role in the production of archaeological ceramics.

**2** The impetus behind this special issue was the symposium "For Hearth and Altar: Artistry and Action in African Ceramics," held February 4, 2006, at the Art Institute of Chicago in conjunction with the exhibition "For Hearth and Altar: African Ceramics from the Keith Achepohl Collection." Organized by Kathleen Bickford Berzock, Marla Berns, and Barbara E. Frank, the symposium had two foci, one on individual artists and the other on ritual as a locus of meaning and memory. The participants were Lisa Aronson, Marla Berns, Kathleen Bickford Berzock, Silvia Forni, Barbara Frank, Barbara Thompson, and Gary Van Wyk. The exhibition was on view at the Art Institute of Chicago Dec. 3, 2005–February 20, 2006.

**3** There have been other exhibitions of African ceramics of varying scope, among them: "The Potter's Art," Museum of Mankind, London (Picton and Fagg 1970); "African Terra Cottas South of the Sahara," Detroit Institute of Arts, 1972; "Nupe, Kakanda, Basa-Nge: Gefässkeramik aus Zentral-Nigeria" (Stössel 1981a) and "Keramik aus Westafrika: *Einführung* in Hersterllung und Gebrauch" (Stössel 1981b), Gallerie Biedermann and Galerie Fred Jahn, Munich; "Anthropomorphic Terracotta Vessels of Zaire" (Polfliet 1987a) and "Traditional Zaïrian Pottery" (Polfliet 1987b), Galerie Fred Jahn, 1987; "Fired Brilliance: Ceramic Vessels from Zaire," University of Missouri-Kansas City Art Gallery (Darish 1990); "African Ceramics: Ancient and Historic Earthenware Vessels" (Dawson 1993), "Of the Earth: Ancient and Historic African Ceramics" (Dawson 2001) and "The Art of African Clay: Ancient and Historic African Ceramics" (Dawson 2003), Douglas Dawson Gallery, Chicago; "Women's Art in Africa: Woodfired Pottery from Iowa Collections," University of Iowa Art Museum, 1994; "Earthen Vessels: Central and West African Works of Fired Clay," Anderson Gallery, Drake University, 1996 (Anderson Gallery 1996); "Hier et Aujourd'hui: des Poteries et des Femmes," Muséum d'histoire naturelle, Genève and Musée National, Bamako (Gallay et al. 1996); "Earthen Elegance: African Ceramics from the Newark Museum Collection," Newark Museum, 2004–05; "West African Ceramic Vessels," Indianapolis Museum of Art, 2006–07; and Indiana University Art Museum's rotating series of African ceramics installations, 2001-present.

**4** Sieber's catalogue (1980) and the exhibition it accompanied were also pivotal for presenting ceramics and other utilitarian forms as aesthetic objects in their own right.

**5** Mali's Inland Niger Delta is perhaps the most richly treated in this fashion. Zulu pottery, from South Africa, is also beginning to attain a critical mass of studies.

**6** For instance Frank 1994, 1998; Roy 1989, 2000a, 2000b, 2003; and Schneider 1986, 1990, 1993, 1997. It is interesting to note that in many instances studies from the 1970s or before remain the standard in their area. Notable examples include Dias 1961, Lawton 1967, Trowell and Wachsmann 1953, and Waane 1976.

**7** In his detailed and illuminating analysis of the African art market, Christopher Steiner (1994) discusses the role of art traders as cultural brokers who benefit from maintaining the separation between the sellers and buyers.

**8** Forni also discussed Fombah in her paper "Improving Tradition Through Innovation: Martin Fombah and the Contemporary Potters of Nsei" presented at the Art Institue of Chicago symposium "For Hearth and Altar: Artistry and Action in African Ceramics," February 4, 2006.

**9** Koloss's definitive consideration of the chiefdom of Oku (2000), with its numerous photographs and descriptions of ritual, is also a valuable record of pottery use. Gebauer (1979) suggests the complexity of interconnections among the arts of the closely related cultures in Western Cameroon.

**10** Some of the techniques identified include pounding in concave mold: Sonrai, Dogon (Tireli), Dogon (Ka-In Ouro); pounding in concave mold and molding over convex mold: Peul, northern Bamana; pounding and modeling in concave mold: northern Somono; modeling over convex mold: southern Bamana, Dogon (Modjodje), Dogon (Sarnyere); modeling in concave mold: southern Somono; and pounding out a lump: Bobo, and Dogon (Niongono)

**11** Similar sustained collaborative ethnoarchaeological research has been undertaken in the Mandara region of Cameroon under the direction of Nicholas David and Judith Sterner from the University of Calgary in the 1980s and 1990s (David and Sterner 1987, 1989, 1998), and by Olivier Gosselain, Alexandre Livingstone Smith, and their colleagues in northern Cameroon on the Ceramic and Society Project 1994–99 under the direction of Pierre de Maret at the University of Brussels (Gosselain et al 1996; see also Gosselain 1998, 1999, 2000). Important individual ethnoarchaeological studies have also been done in Senegal (Guèye 1997–1998, Sall 2000-2001).

**12** Magdalene Odundo remains the perhaps the only artist of African origin whose name is widely associated with contemporary ceramic arts (Berns 1995). There is also some information on El Anatsui's early work in clay (Oguibe 1998), although he is much better known for his more recent signature works in wood and multimedia. Ethiopian artist Etyié Dimma Poulsen is known as a sculptor rather than a ceramic artist per se, even though her primary medium is clay (see Harney 2003).

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