

# Ceramic Art from the Other Side of the Big Pond

Marc Leuthold and Peter Callas  
from the USA at Galerie Marianne Heller

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It has become rare for contemporary ceramics from overseas to be presented to the well-disposed eye of the German public. There are few galleries or specialist museums and institutions that are able or who desire to take on the risk and the expense of making such a far-reaching excursion into the realm of the international by presenting ceramic artists from distant parts.

One of the exceptions is Marianne Heller's gallery in Heidelberg, which has made a principle of internationalism, exhibiting other European countries as a matter of course, but first and foremost from Japan, as well as Australia, South America and now once again from the United States, with two artists who have in common their vibrant artistic independence and their lavish materiality but could otherwise scarcely offer a greater contrast.

Peter Callas was born in Jersey City in 1951 and now works outside town (photo lower right), and is without doubt one of the founding fathers of the younger ceramics scene in the USA: he has something of the position of a pioneer in North America similar to Horst Kerstan in Germany. It is historically no coincidence that both set off for new ceramic shores at around the same time, which they found in Japan. These two Japanophiles were the first to return to their respective home countries with the technique of woodfiring as practiced in Japan, and they released waves of enthusiasm for the raw naturalness in ceramics so foreign to the domineering European spirit that strove for perfection, by surrendering the wares to the vagaries of barely controllable fire at high temperature with its natural ash glaze.

In the early 1970s, Callas travelled to Japan looking for a position as an apprentice on the island of Kyushu with the famous porcelain town of Arita. He was not looking to become a porcelain user, though, instead he was drawn to the legendary Six Old Kilns, and in particular to the ones that fired in an anagama. In 1976, he built the first kiln for this ancient firing technique in the USA. Very different from his woodfiring German colleague,

who probably remained unknown to him with his moderate, restrained approach to form, from the first Peter Callas directed his energy to a stark, uncommonly powerful nature-like aesthetic, he charged with a highly personal expressivity. And today, the anagama avant-gardist sees himself as a ceramic sculptor and heir to a tradition of ceramic Abstract Expressionism in sculptural works that only hint at their origin in the vessel and that unite a Western ego-centred artistic identity with a humble Eastern egolessness.

In contrast we see the porcelain and stoneware sculptures of Marc Leuthold (photo right and cover), which in spite of their dimensions might almost be called delicate. Leuthold was born near New York in 1962 and is now a professor at the State University of New York. With his subtly creative intellect, he gives his delicately worked pieces a shimmering poetry that makes them metaphors for change in all materials and forms. Marc Leuthold, whose work is not limited solely to ceramics but also includes bronze and glass sculptures, installations and drawings, has a preference for certain forms: he repeatedly returns to funnel, wheel or circle shapes into which he delicately incises sharp-edged, radial fins.

The masterly passion of these works never degenerates into handicraft: with an intuitive sureness of touch Leuthold dematerialises by his craftsmanship the almost relic-like forms that emerge, which neither hide nor highlight the fact of their making but simply retain the transitory nature of their material form as their theme and beguilingly elude the conventional terminology of opposites – neither natural nor artificial, neither representational nor abstract, in motion yet unyielding, both alive and anorganic, vortex-like, seemingly rotating forms filled with internal movement, resembling fractals, of great potential associative force, perfect and opened at once.

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Marc Leuthold & Peter Callas

Porcelain Sculptures -

Woodfired Vessels

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