

## Exhibition Schedule:

Louise Wells Cameron Art Museum – Sculpture Court  
Wilmington, North Carolina  
April 21 - October 27, 2002

## Acknowledgments:

Mark Hewitt's *bravura* pots have been featured in *Smithsonian* magazine, *Wall Street Journal*, and enjoyed in museum collections across the United States. For the past several years, during occasional visits to homes and gardens of museum colleagues, gallery owners, and art collectors across North Carolina, I often encountered Mark's pots. That experience is a sublime one, and not easily forgotten.

As we were drawing up plans for the sculpture court of the new Louise Wells Cameron Art Museum, it occurred to us that a featured solo exhibition of Mark's ceramics would be most handsome. I am happy to say that decision started a relationship between an artist, a museum and a community that will surely continue for many years. He is a true artist, true professional and friend to this institution.

I wish to thank Mark, his wife Carol, his apprentices Joe Cole, Chris Early and journeyman Martin Simpson, for all their assistance with this exhibition. We are indebted to essayist, Henry Glassie, College Professor of the Folklore Institute of Indiana University for his remarkable essay and to the generous lenders to this exhibition: Bob Kline, Wilmington, NC; Louis Cherry and Teresa Hart, Raleigh, NC; and Lark and Susan Allen, Raleigh, NC.

It is a pleasure to extend a special thank you to volunteers Dick and Mary Boylan and to the museum staff at work on all aspects of this exhibition: Anne Brennan, Curator and Registrar of Collections; Daphne Holmes, Curator of Education; Alan Monteath, Associate Registrar; Bob Uncheater, Exhibition Coordinator; Richard Sceiford, Communications and Outreach Coordinator; Pamela Jobin, Assistant Director; Erin Ottolini, Secretary; Roberta Hawkins, Security and Lynn Lowder, Museum Shop Manager.

— C. Reynolds Brown, Director, Louise Wells Cameron Art Museum

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Cover Image: **Beehive, 1999**. 44" x 24". Ash glaze over white slip dots and incised lines. Red slip neck and lid.  
Wood-fired salt-glazed stoneware. Collection of Lark and Susan Allen.



## Mark Hewitt: *Outside*

by Henry Glassie

Outside: Mark Hewitt makes big pots, so big they can stand outside. Other ceramic confections cower in closets or parade across shelves, but Mark's pots stand outside, braving wind and weather, becoming part of the landscape, like houses, like barns, like temples.

Mark Hewitt throws to the wheel's limit, then, using a trick he learned in Japan, he slithers fat coils from his shoulders, raising the walls of the pot into a squat tower, shaping the serene, clean, inevitable forms that Le Corbusier sought when he went among the folk potters of the Balkans to find inspiration for a new, truly modern architecture.

Monumentally architectural — hollow inside with scope for the soul, flowing outside with happy accidents — the big pot is Mark's signal piece. Size is what others first remark, and it is what he puts first in accounts of his work. Mark is a tall man who makes big pots.

Little pots are for beginners, universally, and the big pot is mastery's sign. C. J. Meaders, a grand old-time potter from northern Georgia, set out to throw an eight-gallon churn on his eightieth birthday, and time and again, in my travels over the globe, potters have introduced themselves to me by throwing mammoth pots.

Size is first. Speed is second. At the pottery of the Cold Well, near Bursa in northwestern Turkey, I watched Sabri Yasar's hands dance above the wheel. Old master of the shop — a wonder as much to his mates in the trade as to me — Sabri gave the wheel a skipping kick, the clay leapt to his touch, and soon another in the

long series of identical flowerpots stood on the plank beside him. Each pot rose, spreading smoothly from a dainty foot to bear a necklace of decorative incisions. Start to finish, each one took thirty-five seconds.

In the moment of performance, speed is proof of command. Speed marks the master, meets the demands of economical production, and it yields lean forms, stable and strong, good to use and good to see.

Dan Garner, a potter at Teague's near Seagrove in North Carolina, told me that speed separates one kind of potter from another. The potter in the studio at a university can lavish time on the single, precious creation, but the potter in the workshop must go fast, priding himself, like an athlete, on his average, on an aggregation of acts — not on one rare pot, but on a whole kiln laden with ware.

In his writings, Mark Hewitt stresses size and quick, trim forms. His athletic values position him with the production potter, and they divide him from the professors in the art schools Mark calls prisons. He stands, along with his pots, outside, distanced from the system of the MFA and the unusable ceramic ornament.

In school, Mark Hewitt studied geography. His career in art has followed the course of the potters and weavers and smiths who work beyond the confines of the university. His interest began at home, in the family. His father and grandfather were directors at Spode in Stoke-on-Trent, a cradle of English industry. The house was full of pots, old and new, native and foreign, and he

visited the works as a lad, but it was not until he read *A Potter's Book* by Bernard Leach that he was called to the potter's art. Mark apprenticed himself to Michael Cardew, who had apprenticed himself to Bernard Leach (and who, in one of history's twists, had once worked for Mark's grandfather). After three years with Cardew in Cornwall, Mark worked in Connecticut with Todd Piker, another of Cardew's students, and then in 1983 he took himself and his bride, Carol, south to North Carolina, where the old pots harmonized with the English and Japanese masterworks that stimulated Leach, where the tradition of handmade pottery had not yet been snuffed by industrial capitalism. Mark bought a

*Shroud*, 1998. 44" x 24". Manganese slip with celadon glaze wavy lines. Wood-fired salt-glazed stoneware. Collection of the artist.





farm, built a shop and an immense kiln, based on a model from Thailand. There he wrought, and, in time, trained apprentices, one of whom, Daniel Johnston, has demonstrated his skills as a potter, and Mark's as a teacher, in a handsome one-man show.

Mark Hewitt belongs to a tradition — a continuum, he says — leading from Bernard Leach to Michael Cardew, from Cardew through Mark to his apprentices. The philosophical foundation of his tradition lies in the anguished English reaction to industrialization, to an oppressive system of labor that spawns heartless commodities. Announced by John Ruskin, crystallized by

**Yellow Dog**, 2001. 44" x 24". Ash glaze with blue stained glass drips from shoulders. Wood-fired salt-glazed stoneware. Collection of Cameron Art Museum.



William Morris, the English idea has traveled the world, going from William Morris through Carl Larsson to Sweden, through Ananda Coomaraswamy to India, through Zainul Abedin to Bangladesh, through Soetsu Yanagi and his colleagues — potters all: Bernard Leach, Shoji Hamada, and Kanjiro Kawai — to Japan. The Japanese redaction, called Mingei, blending a Buddhist concept of selfhood with the Morrisian critique, gaining intensity from the tradition of the tea ceremony, has profoundly conditioned appreciation of the potter's art in the West as well as Japan, and it has given Mark Hewitt a name for his tradition, which he enjoys calling mingled, mangled Mingei.

Practitioner of Southern Mingei, Mark Hewitt stands outside the academy's tradition, but he does not slide into the class of the outsider, the category writers have contrived for artists who cannot be comfortably qualified as academic or folk, artists who are isolated and self-taught. In fact, artists from different traditions tell me, all artists are, at last, self-taught. Norio Agawa is a potter in Hagi, Japan, a master of tea ceremony ware. He learned the rudiments of the trade from his father-in-law and received hints from many along the way, but Norio Agawa says that only simple things can be taught, and the artist rises to excellence by studying admirable objects and experimenting with tools and materials, trying again and again, struggling until the clay comes to incarnate desire. All artists teach themselves through study and practice. But some — call them outsiders — go alone, drifting with the illustrations in popular magazines for sources and no direction for action save the yammering racket in the skull, while others, like Mark Hewitt, work in a received tradition

— not outside, solo, but inside a web of social connection. They have collaborators who offer assistance. They have customers who pay for what they like.

Mark Hewitt's works are traditional, based in precedent, like all great art, for precedent is requisite to excellence and effective communication. His works are traditional, but the tradition, he insists, is neither academic nor folk. Like Bernard Leach and Michael Cardew before him, Mark Hewitt is an excellent writer. We know what he means when he uses the adjective "folk." It implies rooted-ness, an emplaced, circumscribed belonging.

The folk potter uses local materials. So does Mark, adamantly. The folk potter is born into the trade. Mark was, but not all folk potters are. While the notion of a family tradition fits the southern United States, in many places the line runs through masters in workshops, rather than parents at home, and Burlon Craig, who has become the very model of the folk potter through the sterling research of Terry Zug, learned from a neighbor, not his father. Two other qualities of folk pottery, as set forth in Mark Hewitt's prose, invite further discourse. More words, it is to be hoped, will bring us a little closer to understanding Mark's marvelous achievement. Folk pots are functional, and they are the flower of a rooted, restricted experience.

Function does not reduce to mere utility, to an instrumentality void of the aesthetic. Whatever human beings make, William Morris said, must be beautiful or not, and in creation, Morris wrote, ornament is necessary, for it provides pleasure to the worker in making and pleasure for the consumer in use. In the case of pottery,





***Purgatory***, 2001. 42" x 24". Stamped neck and handles with pale glass runs from each handle. Wood-fired salt-glazed stoneware. Collection of the artist.

different forms meet identical needs, proving that form is shaped out of taste. Rendered in the world's materials, visible, palpable, form always displays color. Glazed and fired, impervious and durable, the pot becomes luminous.

Mark Hewitt raises usable forms, bold forms, graceful in profile. He mixes glazes for color and texture, carefully placing his works in the kiln, risking them to receive surprising gifts from the lick of the flame and the fall of ash. Lifting them out, warm in his hands, he responds first to the beauty of the surface, the streaks of glass, the

clot and flow of the glaze as it broke and ran to thrill the eye. In a layer between shape and glaze, he enhances the pot's beauty with ornament, with stamping or bossing, with slip trailed in the English manner or swung into the swoopy swags he borrowed from the old pots of South Carolina.

Mark Hewitt's pots, like the folk pots that inspire him — from England and New England, from Japan and the southern United States — embody human fullness, fusing use and beauty. As buildings do, they fill two functions at once. They serve the body, sheltering, containing, helping on the quotidian round. They delight the eye, exciting the mind to meditation.

Function entails pleasure. Yet, in the tradition received from Leach, and in the folk pots chosen as models, there abides an inclination to austerity, a suspicion of pleasurable excess, a rejection of the whimsical and pictorial. Bringing utility and ornament into union, Mark Hewitt remains true to his tradition. And he affirms his disjunction from the academy where artists urge ceramics toward sculpture in an effort to lift themselves in the art critic's hierarchy of value.

Folk potters are not always so restrained. Potters in India suavely alternate in their work between useful vessels and representational sculpture. So do potters in China and Japan, but follow the logic to its end and you will rediscover the rationale of the commitment to function. The figurative works of the Asian folk potter might be toys, but usually they are images of gods. Connecting creation and consumption, the potter's functional creation is a part of life, whether it is a toy in play, an icon in worship, a crock full of pickles in the basement, or the

swirled, salt-glazed mug that Mark Hewitt made and I use every morning to drink my coffee.

Mark Hewitt makes functional pots, pots that belong to life, standing at the human center where the common and astonishing come together. In this, he resembles the potters called folk.

He digs his own clay, fires with wood, and turns out functional pots. What separates Mark, it seems, from the folk potter is experience. The folk potter creates out of a life passed in place, among a limited range of models. Like the shapers of his tradition, like Leach, Hamada, and Cardew, Mark Hewitt has traveled the world, gathering ideas in England and Africa, in Taiwan, Korea, and Japan, before settling in North Carolina. The difference has nothing to do with creativity or personal expression. All artists, folk or fine, outside or inside, synthesize diverse models in a way that suits the inviolable self. Their creations are always cultural documents, records of inheritance and influence, and they are always embodiments of individual spirit, self portraits.

Mark Hewitt's tradition was developed in England and Japan; his career carried him out of England and across the world. He came to North Carolina as an outsider.

North Carolina was ready for him. The English critique of industrialization, formulated into the Arts and Crafts Movement, had already stimulated the revival at Jugtown, first in the days of Jacques and Juliana Busbee, then in the days of Nancy Sweezy and Ralph Rinzler. At Jugtown, Ben Owen had discovered the congruence of the Southern and Asian pottery traditions, prefiguring Southern Mingei, and today his grandson, Ben III, has deservedly gained fame



for pots that echo the antiques of China and fit the Carolina vision.

Ben Owen III was one, Vernon Owens, Dot Auman, and Burlon Craig were others. From them Mark Hewitt learned, naturalizing his art to his adopted place, and with them he has worked to bring — through conferences, exhibitions, and beautiful pots — a new energy to the tradition of North Carolina.

As William Morris wrote over a century ago, the natural state of tradition is change. Forever in flux, traditions are constantly stabilized by recursion and recentering, constantly pulsed and convulsed by ideas brought in by outsiders. The ceramic traditions of Arita or Hagi in Japan would be unimaginable without the contributions of immigrants from Korea. The ceramic

*Rune, 1999. 34" x 24". Cross-hatched red slip and white slip dots under celadon glaze. Wood-fired salt-glazed stoneware. Collection of the artist.*



tradition that has continued since the fifteenth century in Kütahya, Turkey, has not run smoothly through time in line with natural or supernatural principles. It has faltered or flourished in fallible human hands. We cannot know the names of the masters who raised the tradition to its peak in the sixteenth century and lifted it again in the eighteenth, but I know the names of the men who are to be credited for the major successes of the late nineteenth, early twentieth, and late twentieth centuries. Some were born in the city, others were not, but none of them came from old pottery families. All were, in some measure, outsiders.

Outsiders are necessary to the preservation of excellence in artistic traditions. They pull others into their tortured, exhilarating acts of adjustment, rearranging the lineaments of the little world, questioning the status quo, finding new directions, making the tradition healthier, fresher, better.

Outsider no more, Mark Hewitt belongs to North Carolina. His pots would not be as they are without North Carolina. The North Carolina tradition could not be as it is today without Mark Hewitt.

Robust and beautiful, Mark Hewitt's pots disturb distinctions, disrupt dichotomies. Inside and outside, folk and fine, old and new, native and alien, art and craft, the utilitarian and the aesthetic — Mark's pots mix and merge categories in centered courage. They stand in the midst of life, where academic antinomies eliminate fade away, and work is good and true and human. ■

— Henry Glassie is College Professor  
of Folklore at Indiana University.

## Mark Hewitt

### Background

Born in Stoke-on-Trent, England, his grandfather and father were Directors of Spode.

**1976-1979:** Apprenticed with Michael Cardew at Wenford Bridge Pottery, Bodmin, England.

**1979-1982:** Apprenticed with Todd Piker at Cornwall Bridge Pottery, Cornwall Bridge, CT.

**1978, 1979, 1982:** Independent study of traditional potteries in West Africa, Korea and Japan.

### Education

B.A. in Geography, 1976, University of Bristol, England

### Select Permanent Collections

Renwick Gallery of the National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC

Louise Wells Cameron Art Museum, Wilmington, NC

Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum, Minneapolis, MN

Chrysler Museum of Art, Norfolk, VA

Mint Museum of Art, Charlotte, NC

Mint Museum of Craft + Design, Charlotte, NC

Ackland Art Museum, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, NC

United States National Arboretum, Washington, DC

### 2002-2003 Exhibitions

"Mark Hewitt; Outside," Louise Wells Cameron Art Museum, Wilmington, NC, April 21 - October 27, 2002.

"Mark Hewitt and the Iced Tea Ceremony," Gallery Yufuku, Tokyo, Japan, May 1 - 28, 2002.

"Bennett Bean and Mark Hewitt," Ferrin Gallery, Lennox, MA, July 20 - August 11, 2002.

"Australian National Clay Conference," Melbourne and Bendigo, Australia, April 7 - 16, 2003.

### Recent Exhibitions

"Four Hands: Clay on Fire/Mark Hewitt and Jeff Shapiro," Gallery Dai Ichi Arts, 57th Street, New York, NY, June 12 - June 30, 2001.

"Ceramics by Southeastern Artists," Hodges Taylor Gallery, Charlotte, NC, March 2 - April 28, 2001.

"Different Stokes," International Woodfire Conference, University of Iowa, September 11 - December 31, 1999

"Variations in Clay: Vessels from Three Continents," Kent State University, Kent, OH, February 4 - March 17, 1999.

### Select Reviews

Morrison, Jim. "Fired with Finesse." *Smithsonian*, Vol. 29, Number 7 (October 1998): 108-119.

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- . Mark Hewitt: Stuck in the Mud. Cullowhee: Belk Gallery, Western Carolina University, 1992.