RICK DILLINGHAM – (1952 – 1994)

Rick Dillingham found his inspiration in the Native American Pueblo cultures of northern New Mexico. For much of his life he studied and worked with the Pueblo potters, and his own exquisite vessels reflect his love and appreciation for their work. His best known pieces are the shard vessels, hand built pots which were burnished and bisqued, then shattered, the shards decorated, the pot carefully reconstructed, and finished with gilding, and paint. Dillingham was also a noted curator, Native American pottery dealer, and author; some of his books have become standards in the field of Pueblo pottery.

ARTIST’S STATEMENT – RICK DILLINGHAM

“No one is a master of ceramic arts, it’s just a matter of how much you can cooperate with the elements at the time. That’s a humbling sort of thing that I like to keep in mind because it gives me the freedom to experiment.

I try to keep the work fresh and fairly intuitive. I keep all the processes as simple as possible to reach the results that I do. And keeping the forms simple as well – spheres, triangles, cones, rectangles – lets me get [away] with visual murder on the surface.

As a painter looks at a canvas, I look at a form and think how can I make it work? I calculate my process, but not my work. The juxtaposition of basic stripes, zig zags, triangles and circles on the surface looks tricky, but is not consciously set out to be a new image. When I put these things together it’s as much a surprise to me as to the viewer.

Ceramic art used to be hung up on the technique rather than the ‘art’ of the piece. I think I’ve done a lot to negate that concept.”

1. Statement courtesy of the artist.

RESUME – RICK DILLINGHAM

1952 Born, Lake Forest, IL
1968-1970 Moorpark Junior College, Ventura, CA
1970-1971 The California College of Arts and Crafts, Oakland, CA
1974 B.F.A., The University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, NM
1976 M.F.A., Claremont Graduate School, Scripps College, Claremont, CA
1977-1978 National Endowment for the Arts, Craftsman’s Fellowship
1982-1983 National Endowment for the Arts, Craftsman’s Fellowship

1994 Died, Santa Fe, NM

**BIOGRAPHY – RICK DILLINGHAM**

Born in the northern suburbs of Chicago, James Richard (Rick) Dillingham II was raised along the central California coast, attending high school in the Thousand Oaks area and then continuing on at Moorpark Junior College in nearby Ventura. His art studies took him to the California College of Arts and Crafts in Oakland and then to the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque where he received his B.F.A. He returned to southern California for graduate school, earning his M.F.A. from the Claremont Graduate School, Scripps College, Claremont, CA, in 1976. He was the recipient of two National Endowment for the Arts Craftsman’s Fellowships and also was visiting artist at the California College of Arts and Crafts among others.

It was in New Mexico, however, that Dillingham found his inspiration and his career in the culture of the Native Americans. Relocating to Santa Fe, where he would remain until his death in 1994, Dillingham pursued a multi-faceted career including dealing in Native American pottery, curator, author as well as artist. As a dealer, he had the respect of the native artists as well as fellow dealers for the knowledge and skill he offered his clients. He also assembled a personal collection of Pueblo pottery, which at the time of his death was given to various museums in New Mexico, Arizona, Hawaii and California. His collection of Mojave pottery is thought to be one of the largest and most complete in the country and is housed at the Indian Arts Research Center of the School of American Research. As a curator he presented a number of exhibitions featuring Native American art, both historic and contemporary. Rick Dillingham, the author, wrote several books which have become standard in the field of Native American ceramic art, including *Seven Families in Pueblo Pottery, Acoma and Laguna Pottery,* and *Fourteen Families in Pueblo Pottery.* His scholarly research was complimented by his personal work with both the artists and the museums that featured their work, working for a time restoring pots at the Museum of New Mexico, Laboratory of Anthropology, in Santa Fe.

Dillingham’s own ceramic work was greatly influenced by the artists he worked among. Garth Clark has stated that Dillingham’s work drew from the Pueblo legacy but that, as an Anglo, he had freedoms with his art that the Indian potters did not.1 Whereas the native potters were tied to the tradition of refinement approaching perfection, Dillingham was interested in the Mimbres burial pots with their piercings, and his work with restoring pots led him to consider the vessel as being composed of shards. “Rick Dillingham’s pots stand as a rebuke to the urge for perfection and a commentary on our fragile impermanence. However, in common with the pierced burial pots of the Mimbres, they also have an optimism seeing loss as an essential part of a life-giving cycle of birth, death, and resurrection.”2 Dillingham first hand built a pot, burnished and fired it. After firing the pot was carefully shattered; the resulting pieces were then decorated and reassembled, the resulting vessel retaining the characteristics of the original but now scarred and fissured. Equally intense is the work that follows the reassembling, the vessel a canvas for the painter’s art, each shard treated both individually and as part of a whole. “This symphony of painted shards, a masterfully directed merging of textures,
shapes, colors (from earthy orange slips to hedonistic gold leaf) is Dillingham’s real gift..”3

Dillingham’s work is included in such prestigious collections as the Los Angeles Museum of Art, Mint Museum of Craft and Design, the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, and the Smithsonian American Art Museum. His work, available on the secondary market, is still highly sought after.

2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY – RICK DILLINGHAM

Books and Catalogs


Clay in New Mexico. Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico, 1983.


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**Periodicals**

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______. “Nine Indian Potters. *Studio Potter* 5 no. 1 (Summer, 1976.)


“Rick Dillingham.” *Ceramics Monthly* 31 (December 1983): 44.


**Video and Other Media**


**GALLERY REPRESENTATION – RICK DILLINGHAM**

Secondary market

**WEB SITES – RICK DILLINGHAM**

Garth Clark gallery biography and photos

Brief description of Dillingham

http://americanart.si.edu/collections/exhibits/renwick25/dillingham.html
Short description and photo of Dillingham’s work

Article on Garth Clark’s exhibition of Dillingham’s work at SOFA New York

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