

## ***ERIK GRONBORG – (1931 - )***

Danish artist Erik Gronborg has spent most of his life in the United States, primarily on the west coast. His long teaching career included the University of California-Berkeley, Berkeley, CA; Reed College in Portland, OR; the University of Nevada-Las Vegas, Las Vegas, NM; San Diego State University, San Diego, CA; and finally Mira Costa College in Oceanside, CA. He is a noted artist in several fields besides ceramics, including printmaking, woodworking, and sculpture. Since his retirement he has become a full time studio artist and in addition is well-known in the gardening field. His home and garden, an ongoing labor of love for over 30 years, have become a showcase both for how to live harmoniously with nature and how to blend art and plants.

### ***ARTIST'S STATEMENT – ERIK GRONBORG***

"In all my work, ceramics, wood, and cast metal sculpture, and furniture, I try to express the spontaneous gesture of shaping the material: the soft fluid nature of clay yielding to any force, and in the wood the quick, free cut of the bandsaw through a random log. And these gestures are given a sense of order through the emphasis on the construction of the work, both in clay and wood.

In recent years, I have worked on extending these ideas of the random with the controlled to our garden, combining my ceramic forms with plants, with both contributing to the total sculptural expression. I see our house and garden as a constantly evolving work of art."<sup>1</sup>

1. Courtesy of Erik Gronborg, October 2007.

### ***RESUME – ERIK GRONBORG***

1931	Born, Copenhagen, Denmark
1963	M.A. Sculpture, University of California-Berkeley, Berkeley, CA
1963	Biennial de Paris, Grand Prix for Sculpture
1963	Associate Professor, University of California-Berkeley, Berkeley, CA
1964	Artist/Photographer for Archeological Expedition, Cairo, Egypt
1965-1969	Professor, Reed College, Portland, OR
1969-1973	Professor, University of Nevada-Las Vegas, Las Vegas, NM
1973-1975	Professor, San Diego State University, San Diego, CA

1975-2001	Professor, Mira Costa College, Oceanside, CA
2001-present	Retired

## ***BIOGRAPHY – ERIK GRONBORG***

Born in Copenhagen, Denmark, in 1931, Erik Gronborg has made his home in the United States for most of his life.

He received his MA in Sculpture from the University of California-Berkeley in 1963. That same year he was awarded the prestigious Grand Prix at the Biennale de Paris for his sculpture. The following year was spent working in Cairo, Egypt, as an artist/photographer for an archeological expedition. In the years since, he has continued to travel extensively, and the experiences he has had have enriched his art.

His teaching career has taken him from the University of California-Berkeley, to Reed College, Portland, OR, the University of Nevada-Las Vegas, San Diego State University, San Diego, CA and finally to Mira Costa College, Oceanside, CA, in 1975 where he taught until his retirement in 2001. In addition he has given many demonstrations and lectures, taught at Haystack Mountain School of Crafts in Deer Isle, ME; Penland School of Crafts, Penland, NC; and Anderson Ranch Arts Center, Snowmass Village, CO. His work has been featured in more than 45 solo exhibitions and in excess of 150 group exhibitions.

He works in both stoneware and porcelain, and his vessels and plates are noted for their intense decorative surfaces. His pieces are functional – cups, plates, lidded jars, etc. - the glazes low-fire and often bright, rich colors, reflecting in some sense the rich colors of Islamic tile work he has seen in his travels in Egypt and Morocco. In addition he makes use of a wide variety of decorative techniques: impressed patterns, carvings, textures, and seals. He has also used photo stencils of newspapers and advertisements, and added coils and sprigging for emphasis. The human figure shows up prominently in his work, more specifically, the nude female figure. Rudolph Stessel has commented that the nude is Gronborg's muse, but that these nudes are not idealized and sylph-like. They are erotic, like "fertility fetishes,...heavily meated, ..like lumpy seals."<sup>1</sup> They show up as knobs on jars, as angels, torsos. Surface decoration also is used to send his message, sometimes subtly, often not. The political message is ironic, perhaps sarcastic, and is delivered with stamps and transfers of such things as headlines, license plates, graphs, altered by being mirror-reversed.<sup>2</sup> Decorative attention has been given to each part of the piece – a series of teacups focused particularly on the cup handles which were delicate and ornate, almost Baroque in the eyes of some, and the adjective "precious" is sometimes used in reviews of his work.

In addition to ceramics, Gronborg is also a noted printmaker, sculptor, and woodworker, working, exhibiting and teaching in all mediums. Since retiring he has added another dimension to his artistic abilities: gardener. The small tract home on a plain 1/3 acre lot that he and his wife bought in Solana Beach when they first moved to Southern California has been transformed to a showcase that is regularly featured in articles and on tours. Over the years the house has been remodeled – walls removed, windows

pushed out, color added with Gronborg's marvelous tiles as the centerpiece. The furniture has been made almost entirely by him as well.

But it is in the gardens that Gronborg and his wife, artist Irina Gronborg who specializes in botanical color pencil drawings, have truly created a work of art. The entire lot was carefully thought out, choice and placement of plant life and decorative additions of sculpture, pots, the tiles. All the plants were begun as seeds, seedlings, or transplants given to them by friends, and all reflect the Gronborgs' commitment to working with the environment instead of imposing themselves upon it. The result is an incredible collection of bromeliads, succulents, cacti – more than 1,000 varieties in all of drought-tolerant plants with new ones always being added. Among the plants and forming with them the whole are the sculptures and pots – small gargoyle heads guard the hoses, ceramic rocks and pyramids form a pleasing pattern, Gronborg's colorful pots hold yet more plants. Everywhere there is something beautiful to see and it is not possible to take it all in.

"My garden is my art," Gronborg says. "I consider the garden a creative work of art sharing many of the ideas and concepts which go into creating any other form of art. One difference is that a garden is never finished, plants die or grow too big, there are seasonal changes, and we get new ideas and change some part of the garden...Our garden has given me a space to create works dealing with a special interest of mine: the relationship of art and nature. Specifically I make works combining my ceramic sculptural shapes with plants containing related shapes, thus encouraging the viewer to appreciate the sculptural characteristics of many plants, particularly cactus and other succulents.

The garden has its parallels to the traditional art world such as exhibiting. However, instead of exhibiting my ceramics and sculpture in a museum or gallery, I invite people to visit the garden."<sup>3</sup>

The Gronborgs remain active in both the art world and their wider community, and also still enjoy traveling. They continue to live and work in their dream home in Solana Beach, hosting numerous arts and garden tours.

1. Rudolph Stessel. "Irina and Erik Gronborg." *Craft Horizons* 31 (June 1971): 67.
2. Ibid.
3. Courtesy of Erik Gronborg, October 2007

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### **GALLERY REPRESENTATION – ERIK GRONBORG**

Erik Gronborg, Solana Beach, CA

### **WEB SITES – ERIK GRONBORG**

<http://magazine.unlv.edu/Issues/Fall05/48Mace.html>

Erin O'Donnell. "The Mace." A ceremonial object made by Erik Gronborg and Mike McCollum for the university.

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