

OTTO NATZLER (1908–2007) & GERTRUD NATZLER (1908-1971)

The partnership of Otto and Gertrud Natzler lasted for 36 years and produced over 25,000 vessels. Gertrud was the potter, creating incredibly thin, exquisitely shaped and deceptively simple forms. Otto supervised the firing and developed the glazes that enhanced and completed the pots. At a time when ornate ceramics was in vogue, the Natzlers produced pure forms. "The form of a pot is the main part of its spiritual substance. Its outline, its proportions and balance, the finger marks impressed on its wall, are the simple statement of its creator, spontaneous and personal as his handwriting."¹ After Gertrud's untimely death in 1971, Otto completed the glazing of the pots she had left behind. He continued working in ceramics, making slab forms and adding to the over 2,000 glazes he developed, until his death in 2007 at age 99.

1. John Ready. "The Work of Gertrude and Otto Natzler."

<http://www.uwlax.edu/Advancement/connectx/03-issues/feb3/natzler-statement.html>

ARTIST'S STATEMENT – OTTO NATZLER

"Man's creations are part of nature and he must at all times work in accordance with its forces...The mysteries of the medium will remain just that. In all we have done we may have penetrated a little beyond the surface. If we did, it was because we tried to do what we believed was in the nature of the medium.

The medium is subtle and unassuming, expressive and responsive in its own way. The art of pottery is to the field of art what chamber music is to the field of music. The viewer should look for form and color, but also into a pot's intricate detail...

I know that it was an extraordinary experience for both of us, working together, devoting our lives to man's most ancient art – an art we thoroughly enjoyed and deeply believed in. In numbers of pots, our contribution may have been rather small. I hope, however, that the best of our work will rank favorably with the best of the past and thus be a worthwhile addition to world ceramic art."¹

1. *Form and Fire*. (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1973), 22-23.

ARTIST'S STATEMENT – GERTRUD NATZLER

"The rhythm of his body, the grace or brutality of his movements, the aristocracy or the commonplace of his thinking culminate in the fingertips of the potter. From there they flow into the clay. Honesty as well as charlatany will be brought into a tangible form.

The potter who is in accord with his world will be aware that his rotating wheel becomes an infinitesimal part of the force that makes night meet day, that sends his blood circulating through his veins. He will be aware that the life he gives to spinning clay may

be as immortal as his very material. There are stillborn pots as well as alive ones, and the alive eye can see the difference. In pottery, form is the content....

There is a spontaneity without parallel while playing the clay. The word 'playing' suggests a similarity to the application of strength in a musical passage – a crescendo, a forte, a pianissimo. But the difference is that the moment the note has been sounded, it has already passed, while the strong pressure or the mere caressing of the pliable clay is retained in its final form...In the end, it will be like a form grown by nature, something alive, as indeed it is, having become infused with the life the sensitive hand has lent it.”¹

“The freedom of movement in which the unalterable proportions of the pot are contained will transmit itself directly from one hand to the other, from the maker to the lover of the pot, wherever he may be, perhaps a thousand years later. It is this immediacy, this intimacy of touch which makes pottery such a personal art form...The true lover of a pot will see a world contained in it and he will never think of himself as the owner, but as the trustee through whose hand it shall pass to the next.”²

1. *Form and Fire*. (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1973), 19.
2. *Ibid*, 23.

RESUME – OTTO NATZLER

1908	Born, Vienna, Austria
1927	Bundeslehranstalt für Textilindustrie, Vienna, Austria, graduate
1927-1933	Textile designer, Fritz Schönwälder, Vienna, Austria
1930	Married Bertha Steinmetz, Vienna, Austria
1933	Met Gertrud Amon
1934	Divorced from Bertha Steinmetz Natzler Student, Franz Iskra ceramic workshop
1935	Established workshop with Gertrud Amon, Vienna, Austria
1937	Silver Medal, World Exposition, Paris, France
1938	Married Gertrud Amon Emigrated to United States
1939	Established workshop in Los Angeles, CA First Prize, 8 th National Ceramic Exhibition, Syracuse Museum of Fine Arts, New York
1942-1944	Plaster Pattern Maker, Dental Technician; essential jobs during World War II

1944 U.S. citizenship granted

1956-1960 Artist-in-Residence, Brandeis Institute, Santa Susana, CA

1960 Nominated Life-Fellow, International Institute of Arts and Letters, Zurich, Switzerland

1971 Death of Gertrud Natzler, June 3, 1970

1973 Married Gail Reynolds

1989 Nominated Fellow, American Crafts Council

2007 Died, April 7, Los Angeles, CA

RESUME – GERTRUD AMON NATZLER

1908 Born, Vienna, Austria

1926 Vienna Handelsakademie, Vienna, Austria, graduate

1926-1938 Secretary, Vienna, Austria

1932 Studies in drawing and painting

1933 Met Otto Natzler

1934 Student, Franz Iskra ceramic workshop

1935 Established workshop with Otto Natzler, Vienna, Austria

1937 Silver Medal, World Exposition, Paris, France

1938 Married Otto Natzler
Emigrated to United States

1939 Established workshop in Los Angeles, CA
First Prize, National Ceramic Exhibition, Syracuse, NY

1939 First Prize, 8th National Ceramic Exhibition, Syracuse Museum of Fine Arts, New York

1944 U.S. citizenship granted

1956-1960 Artist-in-Residence, Brandeis Institute, Santa Susana, CA

1960 Nominated Life-Fellows, International Institute of Arts and Letters, Zurich, Switzerland

1971

Died, June 3, 1971, Los Angeles, CA

BIOGRAPHY – OTTO AND GERTRUD AMON NATZLER

Otto and Gertrud Natzler were both born in Vienna, Austria, in 1908. His early ambition was to become a musician but his parents enrolled him in a class in textile design. He continued to study the violin, but when his admission to the master class at the Academy for Music was denied, he began working as a textile designer designing neckties. The company was blacklisted and closed by the Nazis in 1933 and Natzler found himself looking for another job while at the same time, his brief marriage to his first wife was coming to an end. At this point he met Gertrud Amon, the sister of a friend of his, who was working as a secretary but also interested in ceramics, and he expressed an interest in ceramics primarily as a way to get to know her better. After briefly studying with Franz Iskra the two established a workshop in Vienna and started a collaboration that would continue until her death. Although they were primarily self-taught, they were already getting some commissions and exhibiting their work. In March of 1938 they were awarded the *Medaille d'Argent* in the Paris Exhibition, but their success was overshadowed by the German conquest of Austria. "We knew we could not remain,"¹ Otto has said, and within a few months the couple married and began the difficult process of emigrating to the United States. They left Vienna in September, 1938, arriving in Los Angeles six weeks later, along with their personal belongings including their potter's wheel, kiln, 20 kilos of uranium oxide for glazes, and a box of ceramics.

The Natzlers settled in Los Angeles where they established a workshop and taught classes. "We worked very hard – much harder than in Austria," Otto said. "We felt an urgency to stay alive."² During the war years Otto also worked as a plaster pattern maker for an airplane parts company and a dental technician. Although he was only able to work on the ceramics in the evenings, the Natzlers continued to produce work and exhibit. They became United States citizens in 1944 and a few years later bought a home and studio in the Hollywood Hills.

Already they had settled into the pattern that would prove so successful, with Gertrud throwing thin, beautifully shaped forms and Otto decorating them with rich and imaginative glazes and supervising the firing. Gertrud's pieces were classically simple bowls and vases in contrast to the ornate work that was in fashion at that time. Over time, Gertrud's forms became more refined and Otto's glazes became increasingly rich and textured. His glazes arose out of experimentation, initially using a high-school chemistry text. "You can't imagine how these things looked emerging from the kiln. They had bubbles and blisters and holes – all wrong," he said.³ But those "all wrong" glazes intrigued him, and through continued experimentation and meticulous note keeping he developed the crater and lava glazes which are so valued today. Over his long career he developed over 2,000 glazes, each chosen to enhance a particular vessel. "As a team the Natzlers were unparalleled in 20th-century ceramics. Their synergy proved they were much better working together than alone."⁴

In 1964 Gertrud was diagnosed with cancer. She was able to continue to work for several more years, and their work continued to receive favorable notice. In the fall of 1970 she had a period of feeling well and renewed energy. She produced over 200

vessels which many consider to be among her finest work and which were planned for an upcoming exhibition at the deYoung Museum on San Francisco. She would not live to see that exhibition. In the spring of 1971 her condition worsened; she made her last pots in April and died on June 3, 1971.

Devastated, Otto did not return to work for several years after her death. Ultimately family friend and sculptor/photographer Gail Reynolds convinced him to return to work, initially to glaze the numerous pots Gertrud had left. Gail photographed his return to work and continued her documentation of his work until the end of his life. Two years after Gertrud's death, in 1973, Gail and Otto were married. In addition to glazing Gertrud's pots, Otto began making his own ceramic pieces, but they were very different from hers. Instead of using the wheel, Otto created slab forms, menorahs and sculptures, and continued developing new glazes. As before, he kept detailed notes of each step of the process, from the formulation of the clay through the firing. He continued to work and exhibit until well into his 90's. Otto Natzler died at his home in Los Angeles on April 7, 2007, at age 99.

The works of Otto and Gertrud Natzler are included in many of the finest collections, both in the United States and internationally; among them the Cooper-Hewitt Museum, the Everson Museum of Art, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the Victoria and Albert Museum.

1. Gertrud and Otto Natzler. *Gertrud and Otto Natzler*. Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1968.
2. Rita Reif. "Arts/Artifacts; Theirs Was a Blissful Marriage of Innovative Form and Finish." *The New York Times* (August 1, 1993).
3. Ibid.
4. Janet Kardon, quoted in: Rita Reif. "Arts/Artifacts; Theirs Was a Blissful Marriage of Innovative Form and Finish." *The New York Times* (August 1, 1993).

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY – OTTO & GERTRUD NATZLER

Books and Catalogs

Andreson, Laura, Glen Lukens et al. *From the Fire, Three Exhibitions in Clay*. Palo Alto, CA: Palo Alto Cultural Center, 1993.

Earth and Spirit. Los Angeles: Hebrew Union College Skirball Museum, 1987.

Gertrud and Otto Natzler, Ceramics. Springfield, MA: George Walter Vincent Smith Art Museum, 1970.

Hayes, Ann L. *For Clay Pots and Other Memories*. Pittsburgh, PA (?): The Author, 1988.

Hughes, Edan Milton. *Artists in California, 1786-1940 v.2*. Sacramento, CA: Crocker Art Museum, 2002.

In Honor of the Los Angeles Olympic Arts Festival Art in Clay Exhibition. Beverly Hills, CA: Louis Newman Galleries, 1984.

Isenberg, Barbara. *State of the Arts.* New York: W. Morrow, 2000.

Levin, Elaine. *Movers and Shakers in American Ceramics.* Westerville, OH: American Ceramic Society, 2003.

Merrill, Peter C. *German Immigrant Artists in America.* Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1997.

Münter, Gabriele. *Gabriele Münter.* Los Angeles: Dalzell Hatfield Galleries, 1963.

Natzler, Gertrud, Charles Counts, et al. *Contemporary Works of Art.* New York: Sotheby's, 1992.

Natzler, Gertrud, and Otto Natzler. *The Ceramic Work of Gertrud and Otto Natzler.* Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1966.

_____. *Ceramics.* Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1968.

_____. *The Ceramic Work of Gertrud and Otto Natzler.* San Francisco: M.H. de Young Memorial Museum, 1971.

_____. *Form and Fire.* Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1973.

_____. *Gertrud and Otto Natzler.* Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1968.

_____. *Gertrud and Otto Natzler.* New York: The Museum, 1993.

Natzler, Otto. *Natzler.* Los Angeles: The Craft and Folk Art Museum, 1977.

Natzler, Otto, and Hella Hammid. *Direction.* New York: American Craftsmen's Cooperative Council, 1964.

Natzler, Otto, Jeffrey Howard, and Gail Reynolds Natzler. *Otto Natzler.* Beverly Hills, CA: Louis Newman Galleries, 1986.

Natzler, Otto, and Gertrud Natzler. *Earth, Fire, Water & Wind: the Ceramics of Otto Natzler.* Washington, D.C.: B'nai B'rith Klutznick Museum, 1990.

Natzler, Otto, Gertrud Natzler, and Gail Reynolds Natzler. *A Half Century of Ceramic Art.* West Hollywood, CA: MOA Art Gallery, 1990.

The Red Glaze. Los Angeles: Dalzell Hatfield Galleries, 1961.

Periodicals

Clothier, Peter. "Otto Natzler." *American Ceramics* 9 (Spring 1991): 18-25.

"Craft and Folk Art Museum." *Craft Horizons* 38 (April 1978): 67.

Dauer, Paul F. "Color & Fire: Ceramics at LACMA." *Ceramics (Sydney, Australia)* no. 44 (2001): 68-73.

"Form and Fire." *Ceramics Monthly* 21 (October 1973): 45.

Henderson, Rose. "Natzler Ceramics." *Studio* 153 (January 1957): 18-21.

Levin, Elaine. "Interview with Otto Natzler." *Ceramics Monthly* 30 (Summer 1982): 64-67.

Lovoos, Janice. "California Ceramics." *American Artist* 32 (May 1968): 46-53+.

"Natzler Retrospective Exhibition." *Ceramics Monthly* 19 (October 1971): 14-15.

"Otto Natzler 1908-2007." *American Craft* 67 no. 4 (August/September 2007): 18, 20.

Penney, Janice Dolores. "Natzlers, Masters of Ceramic Art." *American Artist* 14 (March 1950): 48-51.

Reichert, D.O. "Obituary." *Craft Horizons* 31 (August 1971): 4.

Rubinfeld, F. "Solo." *American Craft* 42 (February/March 1982): 2-5.

Silberman, Robert. "The First Moderns." *American Craft* 49 (February/March 1989): 46-53+

Spurey, Kurt. "Gertrud and Otto Natzler Retrospective." *Ceramics Monthly* 43 (February 1995): 10.

Video and Other Media

"The Ceramic Art of the Natzlers." 1968. Film

Natzler, Gertrud, Otto Natzler, et al. "The Natzlers." Derry, NH: Chip Taylor Communications, 2003. DVD video

Natzler, Otto, and Steven Kostant. "Earth, Fire, Water & Wind: the Ceramics of Otto Natzler." Washington, D.C.: B'nai B'rith International, 1990-1992. VHS tape

GALLERY REPRESENTATION – OTTO & GERTRUD NATZLER

Secondary market

WEB SITES – OTTO & GERTRUD NATZLER

<http://www.garthclark.com/artists/artists.php?id=Natzler>

Brief biography and photos of Gertrud and Otto Natzler

<http://www.uwlax.edu/Advancement/connectx/03-issues/feb3/natzler-statement.html>
John Ready. "The Work of Gertrude and Otto Natzler."

<http://seco.glendale.edu/ceramics/natzlerbowl.html>
Biography of the Natzlers and photo

<http://www.couturiergallery.com/images/OtherArtists/Natzler/xbio.asp>
Detailed biographical timeline of the Natzlers

<http://artscenecal.com/ArticlesFile/Archive/Articles2000/Articles0600/NatzlerA.html>
Kathy Zimmerer. "Gertrud and Otto Natzler."

January 2008