

## **SUSAN PETERSON – (1925 - 2009 )**

In an interview with Susan Peterson published in the December 2001/January 2002 issue of *American Craft*, author Robert Silberman stated, "When it comes to ceramics, Susan Peterson has done it all."<sup>1</sup> Over her long career as a ceramic artist she established ceramic programs at no less than five institutions: Wichita Art Association, The Chouinard Art Institute, the University of Southern California, the Idyllwild School of Music and Arts, and Hunter College of the City University in New York City. Further, she helped create community programs, such as the Joe L. Evins Appalachian Center for Crafts in Tennessee, and was featured in an instructional television program whose 54 episodes are now available on tape. Her educational outreach extends to writing as well, and she was the author of a number of books both on individual artists and aspects of ceramics arts. Her outstanding contributions to the field of ceramic arts have been honored by the American Ceramic Society and Alfred University with the prestigious Charles Fergus Binns award; the National Council on Education for the Ceramic Arts with a Lifetime Achievement Award; and the American Crafts Council award with an Honorary Fellow award, among others. As one of the founders of the internationally recognized Ceramics Research Center at Arizona State University, she donated her extensive archives which, once catalogued, will be available to ceramic scholars in The Susan Harnly Peterson Archive.

1. Robert Silberman. "Conversation: Susan Peterson with Robert Silberman." *American Craft* 61 no. 6 (December 2001/January 2002).

### **ARTIST'S STATEMENT – SUSAN PETERSON**

"My clay work concentration has been high-fire reduction stoneware with natural clays and engobe decoration and a lifetime of experimentation with copper oxide blue and red glazes."<sup>1</sup>

"My personal involvement in creating ceramics spans fifty years of working in clay. I still feel that it is one of the most expressive of the art media, but also one of the most difficult. There are many technical problems associated with the ceramic vocabulary, especially for the high temperature stoneware and porcelain work that I do. However, I find it absolutely necessary to transcend technique and focus on the creative passion that is central to the art of clay. The dichotomy of this demanding material and the freedom needed to achieve success with it is part of the mysterious fascination that keeps me working in clay."<sup>2</sup>

1. Susan Peterson. *Contemporary Ceramics*. New York: Watson-Guption Publications, 2000.
2. Susan Peterson. *Pottery by American Indian Women*. New York: Abbeville Press, 2000.

## ***RESUME – SUSAN PETERSON***

- 1925 Born, McPherson, Kansas
- 1943 Hastings College, Hastings, NE
- 1943-1944 Monticello College, Godfrey, IL
- 1944-1946 A.B., Mills College, Oakland, CA, graduated Phi Beta Kappa
- 1946-1947 Instructor, Honolulu Punahou School, Honolulu, HI
- 1947-1949 Instructor, Wichita Arts Association (now Wichita Center for the Arts), Wichita, KS
- 1949-1950 M.F.A., Industrial Ceramic Design, Alfred University, Alfred, NY
- 1950 Max Weil Pottery; variety of jobs as summer replacement
- 1951 Instructor, Los Angeles Community College
- 1951 Teacher, Whittier Union High School, Whittier, CA
- 1951-1952 Part-time, Chouinard Art Institute, Los Angeles, CA;
- 1952-1955 Teacher, Chouinard Art Institute, Los Angeles, CA
- 1955-1977 Professor, University of Southern California, Los Angeles
- 1956-1986 USC Summer Campus, ISOMATA, Idyllwild, CA
- 1967-1968 Television series "Wheels, Kilns and Clay" for KNXT Television
- 1972-1994 Professor, Hunter College, City University of New York, New York, NY
- 1976-1979 Founder, Clayworks Studio Workshop, New York, NY
- 1979-1980 Established the Joe L. Evans Appalachian Center for Crafts, Smithville, TN, with grant from United States Congress
- 1994-2009 Studio Artist, Lecturer, Writer, Carefree and Scottsdale, AZ
- 1997 Outstanding Alumna of the Year, Alfred University
- 1998 Charles Binns' Award for Excellence, American Ceramic Society and Alfred University
- 1999 Lifetime Achievement Award, Arizona State University, Tempe, AZ

- 2002 Donates archives to Arizona State University;  
Ceramics Research Center with The Susan Harnly Peterson  
Archive established to house archives together with ceramics  
collection
- 2009 Died, Scottsdale, AZ

## ***BIOGRAPHY – SUSAN PETERSON***

Susan Peterson was born in McPherson, KS, in 1925, her family members of the Dunkard Brethren Amish Mennonites. Her father was principal of a high school in Grand Island, NE. Her mother was a homemaker but was also a painter, having studied at the Chicago Art Institute, and Peterson's earliest memories of her mother were of her painting and sketching. During the summer vacation months, the family traveled. For several years they spent the summer in Palo Alto, CA, while her father completed work for his doctorate in education at Stanford University and later they spent the summers at various universities while her father taught. Her mother often enrolled in painting classes while her father was working and he would arrange for Susan to take the classes as well. Some years later he would work with various educational organizations and government educational committees, including going to Japan with Douglas MacArthur after the war to democratize the Japanese schools. By then Susan was already aware of the work of Hamada and Leach and was able to add to that the knowledge of Japan that her father shared.

Peterson's elementary and secondary education included art classes, and in her senior year her teacher encouraged her to enter a portfolio in the National Scholastic Magazine competition. She won first prize, a four-year, full tuition, board and room scholarship at Carnegie Institute of Technology, but her father, as an academician, decided she needed to have a liberal arts education rather than attend an art school. She had completed all the requirements for high school graduation by first semester of her senior year and the second semester enrolled in nearby Hastings College, Hastings, NE, completing her freshman year by the end of the summer session. She then enrolled in Monticello College, a two-year women's college in Godfrey, IL, which had a strong art department. She entered as a sophomore, graduating after one year in 1944. From there she went to Mills College in Oakland, CA, as a painting major. Her father insisted she get teaching credentials, which she did through the state of California, and thus was required to take a number of academic courses as well as art courses, graduating Phi Beta Kappa with an A.B. degree in 1946.

Painting majors at Mills were required to take ceramics which she did her final semester. Her teacher was Carlton Ball who was both exciting and interested in experimentation, and Peterson was immediately taken with the clay. She had won the Ella Pierce traveling fellowship and was supposed to spend the summer in Europe and the next two years earning her master's degree at Mills, but instead she chose to accept an offer to join the faculty at Punahou School in Hawaii teaching art. Since the war had just ended there was a lot of work that had to be done there including building and equipping the art

rooms. She stayed one year but then returned to the mainland and enrolled in a glaze class with Clarence Merritt of Alfred being taught at Mills over the summer.

She returned to Kansas in the fall where she found a job with the Wichita Art Association developing a ceramics program, remaining there for a year and a half until she had earned enough money to enroll in Alfred University. She entered Alfred in January of 1949 in the second semester. Originally the director, Charles Harder, had refused her application, but Clarence Merritt told her to come anyhow. She struggled that first semester because the other students had much greater experience with ceramics, but she persevered, earning an M.F.A. degree in industrial ceramic design. Alfred at the time was very technically oriented, emphasizing design rather than art, but the School for American Craftsmen, also in Alfred, showed a different side of ceramics, and Peterson made it a point to be involved.

At Alfred, also, she met and married Jack Peterson. Following their graduations in 1950, Jack Peterson accepted a job with Gladding McBean in Los Angeles, CA. Their first child was born shortly afterwards, and Susan began looking for a design job. At that time there were a number of small potteries operating in the Los Angeles area making dinnerware and decorative objects. Eventually she found a job with Max Weil Pottery working as a vacation replacement, changing jobs every few weeks. She left in 1951 to teach ceramics at Los Angeles Community College as a replacement for a faculty member who was ill. Among her students were Ken Price and Billy Al Bengston, both of whom were actually still in high school. She was then offered a teaching job at Whittier High School, but after the family moved there she had an offer from Chouinard Art Institute in Los Angeles to begin a ceramics program. She completed her obligation to Whittier, using the weekends to prepare the space she would use at Chouinard and to buy equipment. Much of it they ended up designing and making themselves or having made.

Susan remained at Chouinard until 1955, when she received an offer from the University of Southern California to start a new curriculum in ceramics, both undergraduate and graduate. Once again she was designing and organizing the space and equipment for a new department. The summer following her first year at USC, Peterson was asked to start yet another ceramic program, this one a summer program at Idyllwild, CA. At this same time Peter Voulkos arrived in Southern California bringing with him the radical departure from traditional ceramics that was to revolutionize the field. Working at Otis, with Paul Soldner his only student, Voulkos changed the Los Angeles scene, attracting other young ceramic artists, and forming a dynamic ceramic community.

Peterson remained at USC until 1972, when she was offered a position with Hunter College in New York. The offer came at a crossroads in her life. She had spent nearly a year very ill, often in the hospital from a disease she had picked up in South America: her marriage to Jack Peterson had ended: and she had reached a point where she felt she had done all she possibly could at USC. The new president of Hunter wanted a ceramic department and Peterson was ready for a new challenge, particularly one that would bring her back to New York City. Once again she was designing and equipping a ceramics school and starting up both an undergraduate and graduate program in ceramics. The classes were immediately popular and more new opportunities opened up. Among those was the Clayworks Studio Workshop which Peterson founded in 1976. She envisioned a place where non-clay artists could work with clay artists. The program was for three-week sessions, live-in, and the artists would collaborate. Some of the

collaborations worked, others didn't, and after three years when Richard Yelle introduced glassblowing to the program, effectively taking over the space, Peterson left. Another program she helped establish was the Joe L. Evins Appalachian Center for Crafts in Smithville, TN in 1980. Operating with a Congressional grant, a craft school was opened, a campus set up, faculty hired, and the program started. In addition to studios, the complex included an art gallery, dormitories, and other buildings for the 80+ students. Ultimately a B.F.A. program was established and today the program is still active.

Peterson expanded her teaching reach beyond the classroom during the 1960's with a television series "Wheels, Kilns and Clay" that aired on KNXT, a local CBS affiliate serving 11 western states. She did three 28-minute programs live each week, and covered a wide variety of ceramic topics including techniques, equipment, history, artists, etc. The program was very popular and ultimately Peterson was able to purchase the 54 tapes made of each half hour program. The tapes are now for sale with the originals archived at the Ceramic Research Center at Arizona State University in Tempe, AZ.

Peterson traveled extensively throughout her life and met and worked with most of the noted figures in ceramic art. She shared her knowledge of some of these artists with her books, among them Shoji Hamada, Maria Martinez, and Lucy Lewis. In addition to books about individual artists, she also published classic works on ceramic arts including *The Craft and Art of Clay*, and *Contemporary Ceramics*, among others. Perhaps one of her greatest gifts to ceramic art scholarship is that of her extensive archives which she donated to Arizona State University and which are housed in The Susan Harnly Peterson Archive at the Ceramics Research Center, an internationally recognized museum and research center which she helped found. The archives are now being organized and will eventually be made available on-line to all ceramic scholars.

Susan Peterson received a number of awards which include the prestigious Charles Fergus Binns Award from the American Ceramic Society and Alfred University: a Lifetime Achievement award from NCECA: Honorary Fellow of the American Craft Council: a National Endowment for the Arts Grant: Knight of the Order of the Lion of Finland: and Outstanding Alumna of the Year, Alfred University, 1997. She was equally proud of her three children all of whom are successful artists as well. Following her retirement from teaching, she settled in Arizona where she remained active as an artist, lecturer, and writer until her death in 2009.

## ***SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY – SUSAN PETERSON***

### Books and Catalogs

Held, Peter, Susan Peterson, and J. Robert Wills. *Shared Passion*. Tempe, AZ: Arizona State University Art Museum, 2003.

Lauria, Jo, and Gretchen Adkins. *Color and Fire: Defining Moments in Studio Ceramics, 1950-2000*. Los Angeles, CA: LACMA in association with Rizzoli International Publications, 2000.

Lauria, Jo, Susan Peterson, Garth Clark, et al. *Standing Room Only: 2004 Scripps 60<sup>th</sup> Ceramic Annual*. Claremont CA: Scripps College, 2004.

Link, Sarah, and Leopold Foulem. *Edges: in Thought, in History, in Clay*. Toronto, Ont., Canada: Ontario Clay and Glass Association, 1987.

Peterson, Susan. *Ceramic Classics: Shoji Hamada*. London: A&C Black Publishers, Ltd., 2004.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Complete Pottery Course*. S.I.: Ebury P., 1992.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Contemporary Ceramics*. New York: Watson-Guption Publications, 2000.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Craft and Art of Clay*. Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice Hall, 1992.

\_\_\_\_\_. *The Living Tradition of Maria Martinez*. Tokyo, Japan: Kodansha International, 1989.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Lucy Lewis: American Indian Potter*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Rev. Ed. Tokyo, Japan: Kodansha International, 2004.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Maria Martinez: Five Generations of Potters*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1978.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Pottery by American Indian Women*. New York: Abbeville Press, 1997.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Shoji Hamada: a Potter's Way and Work*. Westerville, OH: American Ceramic Society, 2004.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Smashing Glazes: 53 Artists Share Insights and Recipes*. Cincinnati, OH: North Light, 2001.

Peterson, Susan, and Jan Peterson. *Working with Clay: An Introduction*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, Inc., 2002.

Peterson, Susan H., Jerry Rothman, Garth Clark, et al. *Feat of Clay*. Laguna Beach, CA: Laguna Art Museum, 2003.

### Periodicals

Cooper, Emmanuel. "Feat of Clay." *Ceramic Review* no. 211 (January/February 2005): 58.

Held, Peter. "In Memoriam: Susan Harnly Peterson (1925-2009)." *Studio Potter* 37 no. 2 (Summer/Fall 2009): 91-92.

Kruckemeyer, Kate. "The Legacy of Generations: Pottery by American Indian Women." *Journal of American Folklore* 113, no. 447 (Winter 2000): 94-96.

Peterson, Susan. "Bernard Leach and Shoji Hamada: Fifty Years of Memories." *Studio Potter* 27, no. 2 (June 1999): 6-8.

\_\_\_\_\_. "A Matter of Influence." *Ceramics (Sydney, Australia)* no. 37 (1999): 55-58.

\_\_\_\_\_. "A Selection of Smashing Glazes." *Ceramics Monthly* 50, no. 1 (January 2002): 65-71.

Silberman, Robert. "Conversation: Susan Peterson with Robert Silberman." *American Craft* 61 no. 6 (December 2001/January 2002): 58-63, 72.

"Susan Harnly Peterson: A Legend—A Legacy, 1925-2009." *Ceramics (Sydney, Australia)* no. 76 (2009): 110-111.

Williams, Gerry. "Susan Peterson: The Craft and Art of Writing Books." *Ceramics (Sydney, Australia)* no. 61 (2005): 100-105.

### Video and Other Material

New York State College of Ceramics at Alfred University. "Perspectives on a Century: a Conversation with Binns Medalists." Alfred, NY: New York State College of Ceramics at Alfred University, 2000.

Peterson, Susan. "Wheels, Kilns and Clay." Carefree, AZ: S. Peterson, 1997. Multi-video set.

## **GALLERY REPRESENTATION – SUSAN PETERSON**

### **WEB SITES – SUSAN PETERSON**

<http://www.cla.purdue.edu/WAAW/Peterson>

Series of essays from exhibition "The Legacy of Generations."

<http://www.ceramicart.com.au/gallery/peterson/peterson.htm>

Exhibit of works by Susan and Jan Peterson with notes by Frederick Olsen

[http://ceramicmuseum.alfred.edu/perkins\\_lect\\_series/peterson/](http://ceramicmuseum.alfred.edu/perkins_lect_series/peterson/)

Transcript of talk given by Peterson at Schein-Joseph International Museum of Ceramic Art.

<http://www.criticalceramics.org/articles/highway.htm>

Article by Karen Koblitz on The International Ceramic Highway symposium with a talk by Susan Peterson.

<http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/oralhistories/transcripts/peters04.htm>

Transcript of interview with Peterson conducted by Paul J. Smith on March 1, 2004.

October 2007