

## **PAUL SOLDNER – (1921 - 2011 )**

In his artist's statement, Paul Soldner has stated, "...there is the necessity to embrace the element of surprise."<sup>1</sup> His remarkable career is an example of just that. Originally intending to pursue a career in medicine, he did not study art until late in his college studies. His teaching career similarly began with a "temporary" position and continued for 37 years. In his pursuit of ceramic tools he liked, he invented and constructed devices, founding a company "Soldner Pottery Equipment, Inc." to produce them. He is credited with developing "American Raku" and also a technique known as "low-temperature salt firing." He was the founder and first director of Anderson Ranch Arts Center, a highly regarded center for the visual arts. And finally, but certainly not least, he has produced a body of work that is continually evolving and pushing the edges of ceramic art.

1. "A Weekend Workshop with America's National Treasure Ceramic Artist: Paul Soldner." Manhattanville College. <http://www1.mville.edu/Studioart/soldner.htm>.

### **ARTIST'S STATEMENT – PAUL SOLDNER**

"As an artist, I work with clay, bronze, photos and prints. From these mediums, I make objects for use. But their uses are varied. Some are functional, some are not. They are meant to sometimes surprise. Disgust or delight. Although made to be used, use need not be common. In its highest sense, such use is in the spirit of celebration. Of life enhanced and perhaps, made more special."<sup>1</sup>

"In the spirit of Raku, there is the necessity to embrace the element of surprise. There can be no fear of losing what was once planned and there must be an urge to grow along with the discovery of the unknown. In the spirit of raku: make no demands, expect nothing, follow no absolute plan, be secure in change, learn to accept another solution and, finally, prefer to gamble on your own intuition. Raku offers us deep understanding of those qualities in pottery which are of a more spiritual nature, of pots by men willing to create objects that have meaning as well as function. (Soldner 1973)<sup>2</sup>

1. "Paul Soldner." *CeramicSculpture*. 1999 <http://www.ceramicsculpture.com/Pages-Soldner/artiststatement.htm>

2. "A Weekend Workshop with America's National Treasure Ceramic Artist: Paul Soldner." Manhattanville College. <http://www1.mville.edu/Studioart/soldner.htm>.

### **RESUME – PAUL SOLDNER**

April 24, 1921      Born, Summerfield, IL

1946                B.A., Bluffton College, Bluffton, OH

1951-1954	Supervisor of Art, Public Schools of Wayne County, Wooster, OH
1952-1954	Instructor, College of Wooster, Adult Education, Wooster, OH
1954	M.A. University of Colorado, Boulder, CO
1956	M.F.A., Otis Art Institute, Los Angeles, CA
1957-1964	Visiting Assistant Professor of Ceramics, Scripps College, Claremont, CA
1966, 1972	Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation Grant
1966-1967	Professor of Ceramics, University of Colorado, Boulder, CO
1967-1968	Professor of Ceramics, University of Iowa, Iowa City, IA
1968	Founder and Director, Anderson Ranch Arts Center, Snowmass Village, CO
1969-1991	Professor of Ceramics, Scripps College and Claremont Graduate School, Claremont, CA
1976	Craftsmen's Fellowship Grant, NEA, Washington, DC
1981-1984	Jean Ames Art Faculty Grant, Claremont, CA
1988, 1989	Scripps College Faculty Travel Grant, Claremont, CA
1990	NEA Grant towards "Paul Soldner: A Retrospective."
1991-1992	Artist-in-Residence, Claremont Graduate School, Claremont, CA
1992	Honorary Doctor of Fine Arts, Westminster College, New Wilmington, PA
2003	Honorary Doctor of Fine Arts, Bluffton College, Bluffton, OH
2003-2011	Professor of Art Emeritus, Scripps College, Claremont, CA Studio Artist, Aspen, CO and Claremont, CA President, Soldner Pottery Equipment, Inc.
January 3, 2011	Died, California

### ***BIOGRAPHY – PAUL SOLDNER***

Paul Soldner was born in Summerfield, IL, in 1921. Because his father was originally a minister the family moved several times, first to Souderton, PA, then Goshen, IN, and

finally to Bluffton, OH, where his mother had been born. His father later left the ministry to work as a fund-raiser for a college and subsequently as a mutual fund salesman. Soldner remembers his childhood as that of a typical American boy of his time, joining the Boy Scouts, experimenting with photography, and exploring different avenues. Art was not one of those avenues, however, as a negative experience with a middle school art teacher soured him on art until he went to college.

Soldner entered college as a pre-med major, but he lost interest in medicine after serving as an Army medic in the Army during World War II. When he returned to the US after the war he changed his major to art, choosing photography as his field of interest. Bluffton College did not have a course in photography so he worked on his own, designing his own equipment and setting up a darkroom in a small closet. Similarly, when he decided he wanted to try pottery, he constructed a potter's wheel out of old automobile parts and basically taught himself. He graduated from Bluffton in 1946 with a B.A. in art.

Following graduation he taught art for several years in Wooster, OH, eventually serving as art supervisor. Encouraged to pursue a master's degree, he entered the University of Colorado at Boulder. There, for the first time, he met serious and talented potters, including visiting lecturer Katie Horseman, and his interest in ceramics deepened. While he had planned to return to teaching after receiving his master's in 1954, he chose instead to take advantage of the GI Bill and attain an M.F.A.; that decision led him to the Los Angeles County Art Institute of Design (Otis College of Art and Design) where he met Peter Voukos. In the beginning Soldner was Voukos's only student. As it was a new ceramics department, there was no equipment or physical setup of any kind, and Voukos and Soldner ended up making most of their kilns and wheels and other supplies. From this beginning grew his interest in designing and modifying pottery equipment, leading to Soldner Pottery Equipment.

Soldner graduated in 1956 and was asked to temporarily replace a ceramics instructor at Scripps College, Claremont, CA. He briefly gave up teaching and moved his family and studio to Aspen, CO, but found that he missed the interaction and energy of working with the students. When an offer came to return to Scripps, Soldner accepted and remained at Scripps and the companion Claremont Graduate School for 37 years, teaching half the year in California and spending the other half in Colorado. During that time he also taught for short periods of time at the University of Iowa and the University of Colorado, Boulder.

In 1960 Soldner was invited to participate in a crafts fair, and he chose to do a demonstration using raku, based on his readings of Bernard Leach's *A Potter's Book*. While this initial experience did not work out as he would have liked, he continued to experiment, eventually developing his distinctive version of the raku process. He became known for his raku work and the techniques he developed would form the basis for the American version of raku. It was not until he traveled to Japan, ten years after he had begun working in raku, that he found out his version was not traditional. He also learned that in Japan, raku is less a technique than it is a spiritual sense, and he adopted that attitude into his own view.

Around this time Soldner was teaching classes in a rented storefront when he was in Aspen, and when they lost their lease he was contacted by a developer who was developing some ranches outside Aspen and wanted an art program as part of the

development. From this start Anderson Ranch was born with Soldner as its first director; today it continues to operate and is recognized as a leading institution for the visual arts.

In addition to teaching Soldner continued his own work. He said that he works in ten year cycles; the first ten years he worked in high temperature, primarily tall pots but also other functional work. From there he evolved into raku and instead of large pieces, his work became smaller. Raku was followed by what he called low-salt fuming, putting the salt directly in the flame instead of inside the kiln, causing it to volatilize without going to high temperature. Along the way his love of experimentation led to other “accidents” which in turn led to new techniques both in forming the clay and in mixing and firing it.

Soldner worked in other art forms in addition to ceramics, including jewelry, bronze, prints and photography. He continued to work in his studio; to serve as president of Soldner Pottery Equipment; and to give workshops, averaging two to three a month and traveling all over the world. His work has been exhibited in numerous major cities and galleries and is included in a number of prestigious collections, both private and public. He has been honored with grants from the Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation, Craftsmen’s Fellowship, the NEA, and Scripps College. In addition to being a Professor of Art Emeritus at Scripps College, he was honored with Honorary Doctor of Fine Arts degrees from both Bluffton College and Westminster College. Soldner is rightly revered for his teaching, his innovations, and his mastery of clay.

Paul Soldner died January 3, 2011, at his home in California.

## ***SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY – PAUL SOLDNER***

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### Periodicals

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Dunham, J. "Paul Soldner." *American Craft* 42 (October/November 1982): 24-28.

"In Recognition." *Ceramics Monthly* 49, no. 6 (2001): 53.

Koppman, Debra. "Paul Soldner." *Artweek* 35, no. 2 (March 2004): 6.

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Lovelace, Joyce. "A Faith in Serendipity." *American Craft* 64, no. 1 (February/March 2004): 60-63.

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McTwigan, Michael. "A Conversation with Val Cushing and Paul Soldner." *American Ceramics* 7, no. 4 (1989): 36-39.

"Paul Soldner." *Ceramic Review* no. 173 (September/October 1998): 62.

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Riddle, Mason. "2006 Regis Masters Exhibition." *Ceramics Monthly* 54, no. 5 (May 2006): 15-16.

Roberts, David. "Magic Potter." *Ceramic Review* no. 109 (January/February 1988): 34-38.

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Rubenstein, Leonard, and Sam Benson. "Paul Soldner Thoughts on Creativity." Rancho Palos Verdes, CA: American Ceramic Society Southern California Section Design Chapter, 1989. VHS

Soldner, Paul. "A Potters Song." Aspen, CO: Crystal Productions, 198\_. VHS

## **GALLERY REPRESENTATION – PAUL SOLDNER**

Edenhurst Gallery, 73655 El Paseo, Palm Desert, CA 92260

Harvey/Meadows Gallery, Inc., 0133 Prospector Road, Suite 4114A , Aspen Highlands Village, Aspen, CO 81611

## **WEB SITES – PAUL SOLDNER**

<http://www.paulsoldner.com/Soldner.html>

Official web site of Paul Soldner

<http://www.ceramicsculpture.com/Pages-Soldner/PS-resume.htm>

Ceramics Sculpture.com web site; other links to Soldner available from this page

<http://www.playingwithfirethemovie.com/>

Official web site for the movie with links

<http://www.scrippscollege.edu/dept/art/Ceramics/history.html>

History of the art department at Scripps and Soldner's role

<http://www.ceramicmuseum.org/soldner-2004.htm>

Article by The American Museum of Ceramic Art

[http://www.franklloyd.com/dynamic/artist\\_bio.asp?ArtistID=30](http://www.franklloyd.com/dynamic/artist_bio.asp?ArtistID=30)

Biography and resume of Paul Soldner

<http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/oralhistories/transcripts/soldne03.htm>

Link to transcript of interview with Paul Soldner by Mija Riedel on April 27 and 27, 2003

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