

Ceramics

By Samantha Russell



Ceramics, in any form, is a creation of the elements. Dug from the earth, mixed with water, dried by the air and hardened by fire. Looking at ceramic forms one is reminded from where it comes, the purpose it serves and its ties to human labor and life.

The oldest ceramic artifact, which was found in 2016 near Brno, Czech Republic, is the Venus of Dolní Věstonice, a statue of a woman dating back to roughly 28,000 BCE, while the oldest pottery found was fragments of a pot dating 18 to 17,000 BCE in the Xianrendong Cave, China

As humans shifted from hunter-gatherers to agriculturalists around 9,000 BCE, ceramics grew in popularity. In 3,500 BCE, the throwing wheel was invented and in 3,000 BCE, glazed pottery was produced in Mesopotamia.

Greek Attic vases, the familiar Greek vases that bear mythological and historical images, became works of art around 700 BCE and are thought to be the apex of ceramic evolution

Around 600 CE, the Chinese created porcelain and high temperature kilns that reached 1,350 degrees Celsius. In Europe in the 1400s, blast furnaces were developed that could reach temperatures of 1,500 degrees Celsius. Refractory materials were introduced in the 1500s leading the Industrial Revolution. The year 1850 saw the development of electrical insulators made of porcelain, then in the late 1990s robocasting was 3D printing ceramics. Now, in the 2000s, we have ceramic composites for hypersonic aircrafts and reusable space vehicles while nanotechnology combined with ceramics produce transparent ceramics, ductile ceramics, hyper-elastic bones and microscopic capacitors.¹

Ceramic builds from history and pushes forward to new and exciting things.

In the arts, the Mad Potter of Biloxi, George E. Ohr, pushed the boundaries of ceramic vessels in the 19th and 20th centuries by creating unusually shaped vessels coated in psychedelic combinations of colors.²

Second-wave feminists of the 1960s and 70s repurposed domesticity, including the ceramic arts, to tell their stories as is visible in Judy Chicago's "The Dinner Party."³

Today, Cristina Córdova creates figures from clay that reflect our shared humanity and question socio-cultural notions of gender, race, beauty and power. ⁴

Sources

¹ A Brief History of Ceramics and Glass, The American Ceramic Society, <https://ceramics.org/about/what-are-engineered-ceramics-and-glass/brief-history-of-ceramics-and-glass>

² The Eccentric Mississippi Artist Who Pioneered American Ceramics, Casey Lesser, <https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-eccentric-mississippi-artist-pioneered-american-ceramics>

³ How Judy Chicago made a feminist masterpiece, Phaidon, <https://www.phaidon.com/agenda/art/articles/2016/july/20/how-judy-chicago-made-a-feminist-masterpiece/>

⁴ Cristina Córdova Statement, Ferrin Contemporary, <https://ferrincontemporary.com/portfolio/cristina-cordova/#1490558804410-d3a7a783-df09>