

## ORGANIC DESIGN: THE EVOLUTION OF A COLLECTION

It isn't often a gallerist gets to furnish an entire apartment for a client. Less common still is furnishing multiple residences around the country over a period of a dozen years. I felt lucky to have this happen once, and it gets better: several of the projects involved the restoration of modernist structures, which I got to watch, including homes in Michigan, the Hamptons, and a Richard Neutra house in California. All told, I was able to weave about six hundred vintage objects and artworks into several dozen livable and fresh-looking rooms.

In retrospect, it was obvious that I shared with these clients an affinity for mid-century American design and craft. The often spartan appeal of late 1940's Knoll and Herman Miller furniture pervaded my first gallery, Lin-Weinberg, and it coincided with my clients' desire for a low-key and informal lifestyle. Some of the first pieces I placed into their spaces included a 1946 Florence Knoll credenza, a Milo Baughman desk, and an Eames plywood screen. Added to the mix were corresponding European pieces such as an early Aalto tea cart.

Over time, mirroring Lin-Weinberg's trajectory, my clients' tastes evolved toward the greater confidence and visual flair of 1950's American design. Increasing sophistication was reflected in the elegance of an Edward Wormley even-arm sofa, the fluidity and swagger of Vladimir Kagan armchairs, and the architectural naturalism of a George Nakashima cabinet and a Philip Powell bench. European accents, such as coatracks by Le Corbusier and Osvaldo Borsani, added range and depth. The spaces we designed became abstract compositions in themselves, with greater power to delight.

Inevitably, the mandate to furnish was coupled to the desire to collect. Individual pieces were vetted for rarity and historical significance as well as beauty. Among American designs, we acquired the only known example of Alexander Girard's freeform sofa table for Knoll, produced c. 1947, which was offered at Wright in March 2005. I showed this table to Carl Magnusson, Knoll's design director at the time, and after attempting unsuccessfully to procure it he persuaded Knoll to reissue it.

In two areas—lighting and ceramics—our collaboration yielded museum-quality collections. Lighting allowed designers a particularly free rein for expression. We deployed floor lamps, table lamps, and appliqué as functional sculpture. American standouts include a Greta Grossman "Grasshopper" lamp, procured years before the mania; a mint-condition

MoMA Design Competition lamp by Lester Geis; and scarcely seen designs by Milo Baughman's wife, Olga Lee, and visionary Chicago architect Otto Kolb. European luminaries include the French designer Pierre Guariche, and his Italian counterpart Gino Sarfatti. The highlight of this part of the collection is a Serge Mouille five-arm appliqué, once belonging to Alexander von Vegesack of Vitra fame.

Still, no medium ignited our shared passion for design as much as fired clay. From bud vases to massive vessels, the creativity and artisanship manifested in ceramic art inspired the greatest enthusiasm in pursuit and gave my clients the most joy in ownership. Represented in the collection—and at the auction—are premier pieces by distinguished American potters Gertrude and Otto Natzler, Leza McVey, Claude Conover, Majja Grotell, and Laura Andreson. Groupings of pieces by Scandinavians such as Berndt Friberg and Carl-Harry Stalhane graced shelves in Michigan. The most outstanding pieces came from long-held private collections: two large and stunning Lucie Rie flaring vases from Dame Lucy's friend and hairdresser, and two immense and spectacular Axel Salto vessels from the philanthropist and potter *manqué* Parker Poe, purchased at a small auction house in North Carolina.

Poe's ceramic art collection, assembled in the 1960's and 1970's on trips to New York City galleries and to Copenhagen and London, also included major examples of Bernard Leach and Shoji Hamada. While I didn't expect the pieces to fly under the radar, I also didn't expect the feeding frenzy that took place, testament to the fervor generated by this combination of curatorial savvy and long stewardship. Fortunately, my clients appreciated the opportunity presented here; among the seven lots we purchased was the cover lot—the large Salto budding vessel that remains one of the best examples of his work I've seen.

Sotheby's has selected about eighty lots from my clients' collection, representing a cross-section of the best in ceramics, sculpture, seating, lighting, and decorative art. I view this sale with mixed emotions. On the one hand, many of the wonderful rooms that I helped create, at once stimulating and serene are being disbanded. Pieces carefully placed into dialogue with each other are being wrested out of context. On the other hand, the auction will be an exciting event and a wonderful showcase for my clients' decade-long labor of love. In the end, these pieces have been passed on to others before: disseminating them will permit the conversation to continue.

— LARRY WEINBERG, NEW YORK

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## Laura Andreson

### COLLECTION OF SIX VASES

circa 1950s  
glazed earthenware  
each incised *Laura/Andreson* and one dated 1950  
9¾ in. (24.8 cm) high for the tallest

#### PROVENANCE

Reform Gallery, Los Angeles (for two of the vases in the collection)  
Los Angeles Modern Auctions, Los Angeles, October 14, 2007, lots 344, 355  
and 356 (for three of the vases in the collection)  
Sollo-Rago Modern Auctions, Lambertville, NJ, April 12, 2008, lot 162 (for one  
vase in the collection)

#### LITERATURE

Jo Lauria, *Color and Fire: Defining Moments in Studio Ceramics, 1950-2000*,  
New York, 2000, p. 91  
Pat Kirkham, ed., *Women Designers in the USA, 1900-2000*, New Haven, 2000,  
p. 353 (for a related work)

\$8,000-12,000

During a long and productive career as a ceramic artist, Laura Andreson (1902-1999) gained fame far outside her native California, where she founded the ceramics program at U.C.L.A. in 1933 and taught until retiring in 1970. A diligent lifelong student of glazes, Andreson herself was taught to throw a pot by fellow Californian Gertrude Natzler in the mid-1940's. She could hardly have had a better teacher. Andreson's subsequent body of work, characterized by crisply delineated classical forms with subtly modulating matte glazes, place her in the first tier of American studio potters.

The first Andreson pieces to enter this collection came when I was helping my clients furnish a restored 1936 Richard Neutra house in Pacific Palisades, and I convinced them to utilize as many regional works as possible. The group lot offered here provides an excellent introduction to Andreson's oeuvre, showcasing a range of shapes, sizes, and colors.

— LARRY WEINBERG, NEW YORK



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Lea Halpern (1901-85) was a Polish-born potter who studied in Berlin, Amsterdam, and Vienna. She came to New York City in 1939 to exhibit, and remained here, settling down in Baltimore. She considered herself, and was considered, an artist rather than a craftsman, her pieces to be looked at rather than used. With names such as Stormy Sky, Drifting Clouds, Frozen Fire, and Tiger Lily, her pots reveal a poetic and naturalistic bent, as well as Asian inspiration. Her mature works display a mastery over complex reduction glazes, but this seemingly effortless virtuosity was achieved through long hours of study and experimentation.

My first exposure to the work of the woman called “the van Gogh of potters” came during previews of a Doyle’s sale in June of 1999. Over the course of two months, Doyle’s auctioned off over 150 vessels consigned by Halpern’s daughter—essentially, Lea Halpern’s estate. Although Halpern had been exhibited in America numerous times, the last show had been in 1976, and I was unaware of her work. I recall spending hours at the previews, handling each bowl, vase, and dish, and marveling at the range of colors and effects, and at how the compositions shifted as the vessel turned. I was staggered by the sheer amount of material, and by its diversity and quality. From cabinet vases to massive vessels, and Asian-inspired craquelé and celadon glazes to abstract patterning in volcanic textures, this was a body of work to reckon, and an opportunity not to be missed.

I was hooked, but I was not alone. I remember two stubborn collectors who made it almost impossible to obtain any of the craquelé or celadon pieces. Fortunately, there were enough of the variegated and textured vessels I coveted for me to walk away with about 35 of my favorite pieces. Over time, these found their way to collectors and decorators—I now have only one Halpern pot left.

The present lot was featured on shelves in my clients’ mid-century Ann Arbor house, and on tables and window ledges in their Montauk cliffside residence. Offered here is a second chance at a grouping of Halpern’s art from her own collection.

— LARRY WEINBERG, NEW YORK

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## Axel Salto

A SUPERB AND MONUMENTAL VASE

circa 1958

produced by Royal Copenhagen, Denmark

sung-glazed stoneware

incised *SALTO* and 21380, painted with firm's mark

and 91.2320 and with firm's paper label

19¼ in. (48.9 cm) high

### PROVENANCE

Parker B. Poe, Thomasville, GA

Brunk Auctions, Asheville, NC, September 7, 2008, lot 920

Acquired from the above by the present owner

### LITERATURE

*Det Brændende Nu: Axel Salto*, exh. cat., Kunstindustrimuseet,

Copenhagen, 1989, p. 42 (for the next produced example,

numbered 21381)

*Forces of Nature: Axel Salto*, exh. cat., Antik,

New York, 1999, p. 7 (for a related form)

\$30,000-50,000

