

David Kordansky Gallery is pleased to present Betty Woodman: Conversations on the Shore, Works from the 1990s, an exhibition that brings together a group of thirteen important ceramic sculptures from a crucial, career-defining period in Woodman's development as a genre-defying artist. Betty Woodman: Conversations on the Shore, Works from the 1990s marks the gallery's first presentation of the artist's work in collaboration with the Woodman Family Foundation since announcing the representation of her estate earlier this year. The exhibition is on view in New York at 520 W. 20th Street from October 29 through December 17, 2022. An opening reception will be held from 6 – 8 PM on Friday, October 28, 2022.

Betty Woodman (1930–2018) is recognized not only as one of the most important artists to work in ceramics—and one of those most responsible for its inclusion in contemporary art historical discourse—but also as an iconoclastic figure whose advances in several mediums made her a major voice in postwar American art. She transformed the functional history of clay into a point of departure, engaging in bold formal experiments in which she acknowledged the central role of the vessel even as she deconstructed, reassembled, and expanded upon it.

As a snapshot of Woodman's work during the 1990s, this exhibition synthesizes many kinds of conversations and gives viewers a sense of the ongoing conversation that Woodman had with herself about the ability of ceramic-based art to synthesize modernist ideas about painting and sculpture. It is anchored by Conversations on the Shore, a major installation from 1994 that has not been exhibited since the late 1990s, when it appeared in a traveling solo show which originated at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam. Featuring floor- and wall-mounted elements, the installation finds Woodman addressing the relationship between negative and positive space with virtuosic aplomb, evoking impressions of architecture, landscape, and the figure while maintaining intense focus on the inherent qualities of her materials. It also telegraphs many of the innovations that would characterize the artist's later work, which increasingly grew in psychological reach and formal variation as she began to distinguish less and less between two- and three-dimensional composition.

As the exhibition makes clear, however, this expanded vision was not limited to Woodman's most expansive works. In other objects from the 1990s—such as the diptych of vases, Still Life Vase #15 (1991), and the wall-based Balustrade Relief Vase sculptures—she created increasingly complex juxtapositions of sculptural form and painterly glazing. This often meant bringing representational imagery of vessels, flowers, and plants into conversation with bold, geometric patterns, or dynamically combining vessel-like objects with glazed ceramic fragments that appeared to surround, animate, or emerge from them. Such diversity of intention, execution, and reach defines the show as a whole, and also exists in each of the exhibited works, including pedestal-based objects like the paired diptych Seashore (1998), whose two sides reveal not only two different ways of rendering images of vessels on the vessels themselves, but distinct ideas about negative space—even though the wings and cutouts that define their silhouettes are exactly the same.

As she continued to expand upon discoveries she made in installation and collaborative projects produced in the 1980s, which have been studied and shown alongside art associated with the Pattern and Decoration movement, Woodman asked ever more probing questions about how space functioned both inside and outside of artworks. If she had long treated the lines between life and art—like those between history and the present, or sculpture and painting—as permeable divisions, in the 1990s her work began to embody that permeability more fully. It was during these years that her interest in rearticulating the formal achievements of modernist painters became fully embodied in objects that both acknowledged the wall and extended out from it; that revealed the possibilities of color when applied to three-dimensional form; and that examined how formalist ways of looking could not only enable people to become more sensitive to humor, curiosity, and pleasure, but to actively cultivate them throughout the cycles of everyday life.

Works like Balustrade Relief Vase #52 (1992) demonstrate how, towards the beginning of the decade, Woodman was already combining approaches to floor, wall, and relief in

single artworks. By juxtaposing her forms and the rich coloration of her inventive glazing against the white wall of the gallery, she allowed them to be viewed within the framework of modern painting. While the cylindrical vase itself has a restrained and straightforward silhouette, the flat ceramic elements installed around it echo the expressive gestural mark-making that unites the work's ten components. Woodman was never content to rest within a single interpretive mode, however, and this same mark-making also evokes floral forms. The sculpture becomes a three-dimensional picture, transforming its section of the gallery into an abstract domestic scene in which the artist's sophisticated understanding of baroque architecture, as well as her deft handling of perspective and spatial depth, are in plain view.

As such, this exhibition allows audiences to grapple with—and revel in—the way that Woodman's work can be viewed in light of the broader conceptual currents that surrounded her at the time, which tended in the direction of video, institutional critique, and political urgency. As someone who was based in New York for part of each year, who was a voracious viewer of all kinds of art, and who was aware of the latest developments in all mediums, Woodman nonetheless continued to advocate for her unabashed love of visual beauty and to assert that her radical approaches both to ceramics and to depicting the feelings and spaces of domestic life constituted profound and necessary statements about the contemporary world.

Betty Woodman was born in Norwalk, Connecticut, raised in Newton, Massachusetts, and studied ceramics at the School for American Craftsmen in Alfred, New York from 1948–1950. She was the subject of numerous solo exhibitions worldwide during her lifetime, including a 2006 retrospective at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York—the first time the museum dedicated a survey to a living female artist. Other solo shows have been presented at K11 Art Foundation, Hong Kong (2018); Institute of Contemporary Arts, London (2016); Museo Marino Marini, Florence, Italy (2015); Gardiner Museum, Toronto (2011); American Academy in Rome (2010); Palazzo Pitti, Giardino di Boboli, Florence, Italy (2009); Denver Art Museum (2006); and Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (1996). Recent group exhibitions include [The Flames: The Art of Ceramics](#), Musée d'Art Moderne

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de Paris (2021); Less Is a Bore: Maximalist Art & Design, Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston (2019); and Liverpool Biennial, England (2016). Woodman's work is in numerous permanent collections worldwide, including The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; Museu Nacional do Azulejo, Lisbon, Portugal; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Museum of Modern Art, New York; National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto, Japan; Philadelphia Museum of Art; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; Victoria and Albert Museum, London; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; and World Ceramic Center, Incheon, Korea. Woodman lived and worked in Boulder, Colorado; Antella, Italy; and New York.