



NYC Museum Highlight - “Voulkos: The Breakthrough Years” at The Museum of Arts and Design

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by Hamptons Art Hub Staff

“Voulkos: The Breakthrough Years” at The Museum of Art and Design (MAD) is the first exhibition to focus exclusively on the early career of Peter Voulkos, whose radical techniques and ideas opened up new possibilities for clay that are still being felt today. The exhibition is on view from October 18, 2016 to March 15, 2017.

While trained as a traditional potter, [Peter Voulkos](#) (1924-2002) defied mid-century craft dictums of proper technique and form to completely reinvent his medium. Voulkos combined wheel throwing with slab building, traditional glazes with epoxy paint, figuration with abstraction, and made huge ceramic structures with complex internal engineering.

Rocking Pot, an iconic early example, is a massive upside-down bowl punctured with saber-like forms penetrating the exterior walls. Intentionally kinetic, the sculpture is a mockery of the rule that properly made ceramics should never rock on a flat surface, according to MAD.

“Voulkos: The Breakthrough Years” features approximately 31 examples from a crucial body of early work, most of which have not been exhibited on the East Coast for four decades, according to MAD. Also included are three of the artist’s rarely seen works in oil on canvas, which demonstrate the way Voulkos’s ideas in painting, sculpture and pottery unfolded concurrently. The works on view span the years 1953–1968.

“Nearly everyone involved in ceramic art has a Voulkos story to tell,” stated Glenn Adamson, a co-curator of the exhibition and former director of MAD. “He was a charismatic figure, and his influence was tremendously important for the history of the medium. This exhibition gets past the personality, and follows the progression of his ideas in this crucial period of his career. It is fascinating to see him wrestling his materials into new forms, producing one breakthrough moment after another.”



“Vase (detail)” by Peter Voulkos, 1959-1960. Gift of Jack Lenor Larsen, through the American Craft Council, 1977. Photo by Eva Heyd. Photo courtesy of the Museum of Arts and Design.

Voulikos continued to work in bronze, paint, and printmaking for the remainder of his career but ceramics was the medium he always found the most instinctive: “Now me and a ball of clay, we’ll get together and it’s perfect,” he once said, according to the museum. “I almost feel I could take a pile of rough sand and make a pot out of it.”

“Voulikos: The Breakthrough Years” is co-curated by Andrew Perchuk, Deputy Director of the [Getty Research Institute](#) with guest curator [Glenn Adamson](#) and MAD Assistant Curator Barbara Paris Gifford. After its presentation at MAD, “Voulikos: The Breakthrough Years” travels to the [Renwick Gallery of the Smithsonian American Art Museum](#) in Washington, DC where it will be exhibited April 7 to August 20, 2017.

BASIC FACTS: “Voulikos: The Breakthrough Years” remains on view through March 15, 2017. The Museum of Arts and Design is located at 2 Columbus Cir, New York, NY 10019. www.madmuseum.org.

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