

Rudy Autio  
work  
1983-1996

Raphael —

Many thanks for your good  
words

— Rudy

11/18/96

# Woodstack '95

On May 25-28, 1995 roughly 300 ceramicists, students, and critics gathered at the University of Montana in Missoula for *Woodstack '95*, a symposium on wood-fired ceramics. For the participants this gathering was no less significant than its Rock and Roll counterpart on the opposite of the country. The symposium was the brain child of Autio and his lifetime friend and colleague Peter Voulkos. They recognized how important woodfire has been for generations of artists since the 1950s. Woodfire, with its rituals of process and aesthetics of chance, was a necessary bridge between a medium still treated as craft by the critics, historians, and art-loving public and the realm of the fine arts, smitten with the values of Abstract Expressionism and Minimalism. Although Autio generally does not fire with wood, he felt that woodfire needed to be reevaluated because, while popular, it is increasingly perceived as archaic, costly, and



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- 1 Autio placing neck strip on pot
- 2 Voulkos and Callas throwing foot for stack
- 3 Autio and Warford building walls for piece in #4
- 4 Autio decorating piece entitled "Chimera"

ecologically unsound. The symposium was also intended as a benefit for the Archie Bray Foundation in Helena, an institution that continues to nurture the American ceramic renaissance.

Autio teamed up with Beth Lo of the UM Department to organize a forum in which the seminal ideas of woodfiring and its relevance, particularly in the studio and classroom, were critically addressed. Don Bendel, Josh DeWeese, Ken Ferguson, Torbjorn Kvasbo, Jim Leedy, Don Reitz, David Shaner, David Smith, and Yukio Yamamoto were among participants. Their slide presentations allowed the audience to reflect on

their past accomplishments and to question their relationship to woodfiring. An exhibition featuring the works of these artists and those of current residents at the Bray was held at the University.

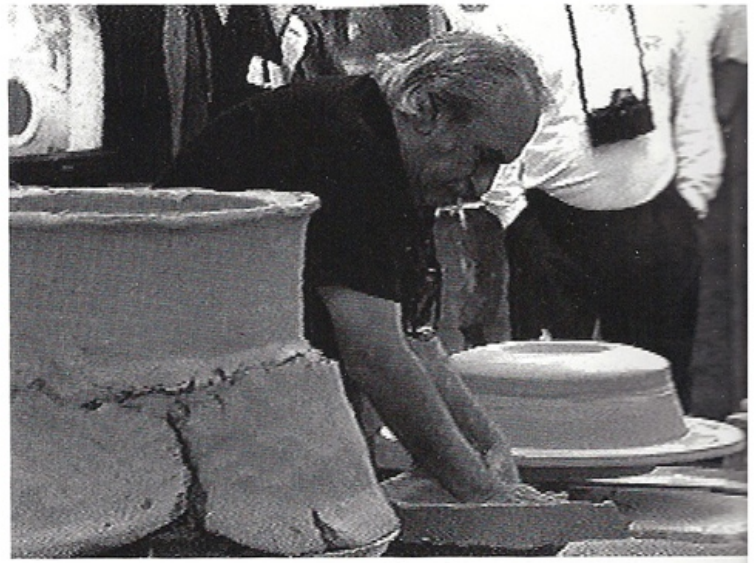
The symposium was a true meeting of minds where students and artists could informally discuss their works and ideas. The most enlightening and entertaining forum for these discussions was a demonstration throughout the symposium in which Autio and Voulkos worked side by side in the studio, literally throwing pots and barbs. The demonstration showed the congeniality shared by these two artists over the

Voulkos throwing base for stack piece





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- 1 Voulkos adding pieces to stack
- 2 Voulkos throwing parts for stack
- 3 Autoio evaluating his design
- 4 Callas, Voulkos and Autoio at a panel discussion
- 5 Autoio painting figures on a piece



Left to right: Jim Leedy, Peter Voulkos, Peter Callas, Beth Lo, Josh DeWeese, Gaither Smith, David Smith, Don Reitz, Ken Ferguson, Don Bendel, Torbjorn Kvasbo, Rudy Autio, Yukio Yamamoto.

course of some three decades and the ways in which their ideas have fed and stimulated each other's creative processes. Their finished works were donated to the Bray.

*Woodstack '95* climaxed with a panel discussion which addressed the questions: "Why Woodfire?" With a healthy dose of self-criticism and a fair amount of light-hearted bantering, the panelists addressed issues such as the balance between the artist's manipulations and the primacy of the elements, the pedagogical value of woodfire, and its economic and ecological ramifications.

Yukio Yamamoto's eloquent statement about woodfire received a standing ovation, evidence not only of the audience's admiration for this master kiln-builder's advocacy of the *anagama* kiln, but also of the sustaining role that the Japanese aesthetic tradition plays as the philosophical underpinnings of the field. A deep fondness and admiration for the artists was felt by the participants, many of whom studied with them, read about them, or know their works from museums and galleries. As Autio stated, this workshop and the symposium as whole was "all about the passage of time."

H. Rafael Chacón