



shaping
space

Stanley
Rosen

Stanley's sculptures draw us into that arm's length mode of attention. In the presence of sculpture it can be a slightly disorienting place to be. Close yet opening up to enigmatic vastness. What Gaston Bachelard called intimate immensity.

—From Mary Barringer's 2017 Dorothy Wilson Perkins Lecture at the Alfred Ceramics Museum.

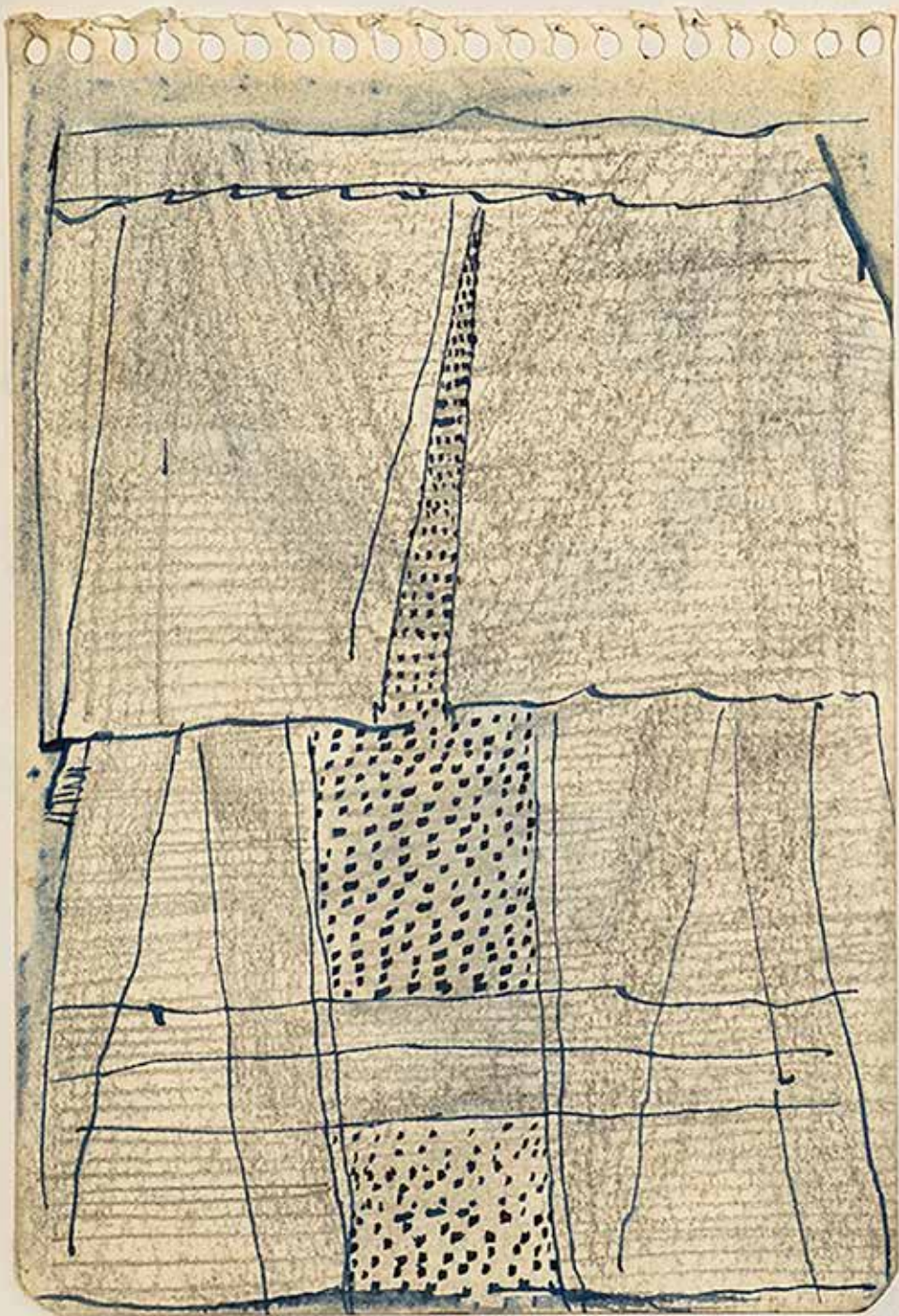
Stanley Rosen (b. 1926), whose work has become known to a larger public in the last five years, is a ceramic sculptor working in North Bennington, Vermont. He was born and raised in Brooklyn before moving to Atlanta with his parents in 1935. In 1944 he enlisted in the Navy and was stationed in Japan at the end of World War II, where he experienced an overwhelming aesthetic sensation in the Japanese countryside. After the war, he attended the Rhode Island School of Design, first studying sculpture and then ceramics, after which he continued his studies at Alfred University where he obtained an MFA in Ceramic Art in 1956. He moved to New York City and became a studio manager and teacher at Greenwich House Pottery. At this urban ceramic center he met some of the important ceramic sculptors working in the late '50s including Peter Voulkos, Hui Ka Kwan and Carlton Ball. In 1960 he began teaching ceramics at Bennington College, where he lived and worked for the next 30 years. He was reticent about showing his work, even to his students, and it was only in 2017 with a solo show at the Bennington Museum and a one-person show at Steven Harvey Fine Art Projects that this master ceramic sculptor emerged into wider view. Alongside this book is a second exhibition at Steven Harvey Fine Art Projects. The book features an introductory essay by well-known poet and art critic John Yau, a consideration of Stanley's early work by painter/scholar Kate Butler, and an appreciation by architect and former student Andrew Bartle.

FRONT COVER:

Untitled (SR#49) 1963-65, unglazed stoneware, 3½ x 11½ x 12½ inches (detail)

OPPOSITE:

Drawing, notebook page 32



Untitled (SR#11)

1990, unglazed stoneware, 15½ x 14 x 6 inches



Stanley Rosen

shaping space



Untitled (SR#141) 1962-63, unglazed stoneware, 14¼ x 14½ x 16 inches

The Undiscovered Ceramic Art of Stanley Rosen	5
John Yau	
Inhabiting the Void: Stanley Rosen's Vessel Sculptures	9
Kate Butler	
The Teacher: Visiting Stanley and Jane	31
Andrew Bartle	
List of Illustrations	48
Chronology	50



Untitled (SR#23)
1966-69
unglazed iron-rich stoneware
19 x 11 x 10 inches

The Undiscovered Ceramic Art of Stanley Rosen

John Yau

There is a persistent and destructive myth that people are born artists, and that they are gifted with natural talent, and that art cannot be taught or learned. The biography of Stanley Rosen, who was born in Brooklyn in 1926 to Polish immigrant parents, is further proof that passion, curiosity, openness, and intellect play a more important role than natural talent.

Rosen's parents worked in a neighborhood grocery store, and he has been described as an indifferent student in his high school years. Stanley had been curious since he was a child but nothing had set him on fire or piqued his interest. Towards the end of World War II, he enlisted in the navy and served in the occupation of Japan. For Rosen, his time in Japan was "overwhelmingly beautiful—a beauty you didn't know what to do with"—an experience whose aesthetic component shook him to his core, despite his participation in the forces controlling a defeated, destroyed, and shamed country.

However, at this moment in his life, Rosen still had no clear sense of his direction, and he certainly did not think of himself as an artist. All this changed through various encounters—including his first wife and various teacher-mentors—until

he chose to go to RISD and Alfred University in upstate New York to pursue an MFA in ceramics. In 1956, he and his family moved to New York City because he got a job at Greenwich House Pottery. He was 30, and soon discovered the work of Alberto Giacometti, Henry Moore, Isamu Noguchi, and David Smith, which changed his life once again. In 1960, he began teaching at Bennington College, where he was on the faculty until 1991, overlapping with better known painters and sculptors: Pat Adams, Anthony Caro, Paul Feeley, Vincent Longo, Jules Olitski, and Tony Smith.

To be honest, until I learned about Rosen, I had no idea that Bennington even taught ceramics, that's how little attention the department or medium were given in any story about the school's role in postwar art, starting of course with Helen Frankenthaler. Some of this invisibility is due to Rosen's self-effacing personality. He belongs to a generation of sculptors working in ceramics that includes Peter Voulkos, James Melchert, Robert Arneson, and Betty Woodman (all born between 1924 and '30), and is the least known of this group, which is largely his own doing. Still, Rosen's ceramic sculptures are a revela-

tion: they are like a country that many of us never knew was there until now.

By all accounts, he was uninterested in gallery exhibitions or the art market. Whatever sense he had of himself was not derived from these measures: he appears to have possessed a self-sufficiency that we rarely encounter in the art world or elsewhere.

Rosen starts at the beginning, with a coil pinched at both ends that is a little more than an inch in length. I don't think you can begin with less than that and build the forms he does. Also, by working with a short coil rather than a long one, which is commonplace when using a potter's wheel, Rosen underscores his intention to build something out of a minute form, while eschewing the wheel. However deliberate and slow the process—and it is hard not to imagine that a lot of time goes into making each piece—the works are not about the labor but about the joy of making: this feeling comes through in all the work.

Few of Rosen's sculptures are higher than twenty inches. They are made of stoneware that is often unglazed: the colors are earthy—grays, tans, dirty whites, dark browns—and might remind you

of different kinds of bread. In all of the work there is a dialogue between the visual and the visceral.

Rosen never lets you forget that you are looking at an object made of pieces of clay, but he doesn't emphasize it either. One piece, measuring only 3 by 8 by 9 inches, might remind you of a section of piled carpet—a field of vertical coils on a slightly arched bed, with a mushroom-like abstract form in the middle.

Rosen has drawn inspiration from vernacular architecture as well as the history of vessels. His sculptures never become purely visual: this is what distinguishes his work from many other sculptors working with clay. His pinched coils and flattened pieces of clay insist on their undistinguished material existence. The insides of his vessel-like pieces are roughly layered. They invite scrutiny as well as encourage physical contact. The coils are like extrusions, something squeezed from a tube or a body. They share something with the rubber tubing penetrating Eva Hesse's "Accession II" (1969). There is a tactility and a sensuality to Rosen's sculpture that feels primordial. At the same time, there is nothing seductive, charming, or witty about any of the works, which makes them even greater.





*Words, after speech, reach
Into the silence. Only by the form, the pattern,
Can words or music reach
The stillness, as a Chinese jar still
Moves perpetually in its stillness.*

—T.S. Eliot, from “Burnt Norton” in *The Four Quartets*

Inhabiting the Void: Stanley Rosen's Vessel Sculptures

Kate Butler

Preface

For the past 60 years, Stanley Rosen has been making ceramic sculptures suggestive of interior spaces of the mind and intangible forces within the concrete world. Few had seen them until a few years ago when the urgency of his old age, the interest of former students and colleagues as well as photos of his work, taken by Peter Crabtree, precipitated a series of three exhibitions which took place in 2017.¹ Prior to recent years, Rosen only showed his work a handful of times, mostly within the institutions where he taught. For most of his career, he was known as a ceramics teacher at Bennington College in Bennington, Vermont, where he worked from 1960 to 1991.

Rosen's practice of ceramic sculpture was fostered at the Rhode Island School of Design and Alfred University where he studied, at Greenwich House Pottery in New York where he was studio manager and at Bennington College where he taught for more than thirty years. While Rosen worked in private, other, better-known artists shaped what would become the narratives of twentieth-century ceramics and sculp-



FIG 1: *Untitled (SR#5)* 1956-59, partially glazed stoneware
10½ x 8 x 8 inches

ture against which we now understand his work. His sculptures reflect similar aesthetic concerns as those of more recognizable figures such as Peter Voulkos, Tony Smith, Paul Feely, Jules Olitski, Vincent Longo and Anthony Caro—and yet they represent more than a missing piece in a familiar narrative. The solitude and heightened attention in which Rosen labored are at the root of his work's divergence from the mainstreams of American ceramic art and sculpture of the mid-twentieth century.

Rosen's body of work, in particular, his vessel-based sculptures of the 1960s and '70s, represent a unique approach to abstraction in the U.S. post-World War II. His works of this period reflect a more contemplative reception of Abstract Expressionism in ceramics, a trend articulated by Rose

Slivka in "The New Ceramic Presence" in 1961. In their allusions to architectural or inhabited space, Rosen's vessel sculptures uniquely engaged with the large-scale sculptures of Tony Smith, who taught at Bennington during Rosen's first two years there. While Smith framed encounters with actual, physical space, Rosen created small-scale spaces that reflect an embodied experience of being. Constructed through a kinetic process involving piecing together pinched clay pieces, his sculptures give form to the emptiness that undergirds physical reality, what Rosen has referred to as "the void." Uniquely among ceramic artists, Rosen found a corresponding motif for his experience of the emptiness in the hollow interior of the vessel. Shaping space as he shaped matter, Rosen transformed the void into something he could live with, something intimately bound up with the nature of dwelling in the world.

A New Ceramic Presence

In the late 1950s, while working as studio manager at Greenwich House Pottery in New York City,² Rosen made a sculpture that, in 1961, would feature in an essay that came to define how the creative public viewed the new wave of abstraction in ceramics: "The New Ceramic Presence" by *Craft Horizons* editor Rose Slivka.³ Alongside the image of Rosen's work, the article pictures visceral experiments with abstraction in clay by prominent California-based ceramic artists, as well as the work of three others with whom Rosen associated during the roughly four years he lived in New York: Hui Ka Kwong, James "Jimmie" Crumrine and Jeff Schlanger. United by their approach to ceramics as a unique form of sculpture and image-making, the four of them had formed a collective dubbed "The Argyle Artists," organizing exhibitions in a private loft in lower Manhattan.⁴

Like a few other small, anthropomorphic sculptures that Rosen made around the same



Untitled (SR#165)
c. 1960, unglazed stoneware, 4 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 9 x 8 inches

time, the one that Slivka featured is a kind of simplified figure, a body of squished-together clay pieces planted on stumpy legs (fig. 1). The impressed-upon surface of the piece speaks to the expressive potential of ceramics as an art in its own right. While Rosen had other reasons for applying his materials in this way, it was his spontaneous manipulation of clay and glaze that likely prompted Slivka to include him in her article.

In “The New Ceramic Presence” Slivka defined a predominant approach to abstraction in ceramics, one that followed the emergence of Abstract Expressionism post-World War II. She observed that emerging ceramic artists, much like Abstract Expressionist painters, ascribed “artistic validity of spontaneous creative events” — such as the artist’s impulsive construction or accidents in glazing or firing — during the “working process.”⁵ She went so far as to compare Abstract Expressionist painters to ceramicists, contending they “physically [treat] paint as if it were clay—a soft, wet, viscous substance responsive to the direction and force of the hand and to the touch or with tool; it can be treated as both fluid and solid.”⁶

Indeed, the dawn of abstraction in painting and sculpture had transformed how ceramic artists and their audience valued the aesthetic qualities of their work. Sequoia Miller observed as much in an essay for the exhibition “The Ceramic Presence in Modern Art,” on view in late 2015 and early 2016 at Yale University Art Gallery, writing “at one end of the spectrum, pottery forms could adopt new meanings as abstract objects, appreciated solely for their visual qualities. At the other end, abstraction allowed artists to sidestep traditional applications of the material to create artworks less encumbered by the historical associations of clay.”⁷ In 1952 the Ceramic National, an annual juried exhibition at the Syracuse Museum of Fine Art (now the Everson Museum), initiated a



FIG 2: Peter Voukos' *Vase* (1959) and *Artforum* cover with Voukos' *Rocking Pot* (1959)

separate award category for ceramic sculpture, distinct from pottery, marking ceramic sculpture’s legitimization as an independent category within the discipline.⁸

Peter Voukos (1924-2002), two of whose works were featured in “The New Ceramic Presence,” was a repeat participant and prizewinner of the Ceramic National. A prominent figure in the burgeoning field of ceramic sculpture in the 1950s, Voukos had exhibited widely in addition to founding the ceramics program at California’s Otis School of Art, the home of what would become the Otis Group. The emphasis his work placed on the spontaneous, visceral act of transforming weighty clay elements into expressive, totemic ceramic sculptures served as a key point of reference to critics and historians like Slivka who were making sense of the emergence of abstract ceramic art in the decades after World War II. “Vase” (fig. 2)—which Slivka featured in her book on the artist, embodied the very performative, process-oriented approach to ceramic sculpture that she outlined in “The New Ceramic Presence.” The sculpture’s rough-hewn surface attests to Voukos’s active stacking of and slashing into clay, clusters of

which he allows to hang off the sides, emphasizing the material's inherent weight. Poised upright as if in triumph, "Vase" celebrates Voulkos's unbridled transformation of material into abstract form.

In comparing ceramic artists to painters in "The New Ceramic Presence," Slivka suggested the vessel was a sort of canvas—a backdrop for artists' actions upon and experiments with the material. As we see in "Vase," as in other works of ceramic art of the post-war period, cancelling out the functional space of the vessel served to assert the artistic validity of clay and glaze. Aside from Voulkos, other ceramic artists throughout the twentieth century took their own approaches to negating the vessel's functional capacity. In the 1980s, Ruth Duckworth (1919-2009) bisected her porcelain cups and bowls with upright slabs, transmuted them into abstract sculptures. Hawaiian painter and ceramic sculptor Toshiko Takaezu (1922-2011) created vessels that would serve as canvases for painting by nearly sealing off the openings of their voluminous, wheel-thrown forms. These are just a couple of the many ceramic artists in the post-war years who negated the functional hollow of their vessels in order to emphasize the aesthetic autonomy of color and shape.

In the vessel-based sculptures Rosen would go on to make in the decade after the publication of "The New Ceramic Presence," he too would form them in ways that negate their functional capacity—by lining interiors with rigid clay pieces, inserting tall slabs into a central hollow or leaving them unglazed and thus incapable of holding liquid. Yet more than to create abstract form, Rosen composed his sculptures in this way to expand and deepen the scope of his vessels' containment. In giving space as much expressive value as matter, Rosen's sculptures embody a different expressionist approach than Slivka presented—

one more existential than visceral, more grounded in concentration and in risk than in uninhibited formal experimentation.

When in 2019 I asked Rosen why he made sculptures, he described confronting his solitude. "What comes up is being isolated," he said, "alone... only you. It's beyond confinement. It's trying to live in the void."⁹

The piece Slivka included in her article hints at such an experience of solitude through the enclosure of space hidden within the outer shell of pinched clay rolls. However much the work's formal play is typical of the "new presence" of mid-century ceramics, to Rosen the impressed, partially glazed surfaces were not ends in themselves but rather a means to express a reality of his existence. In the vessel sculptures that Rosen would go on to make throughout the 1960s, he would bring architectural patterns in dialogue with such evocations of embodiment—through imprints of clay pieces forming walls that, like sensitive membranes, divide outer surface from internal cavity. Alternately hiding and revealing zones of space and matter, his sculptures would increasingly implicate visible surfaces with the presence of a vast unseen.

Contouring the Void

Rosen began making his open-formed vessel sculptures in the early years of what would amount to a 30-year tenure at Bennington College. He was hired there to teach ceramics in 1960 following the retirement of a functional potter, Herta Moselsio. At the time, the fine arts faculty, abstract painters and sculptors with ties to New York City, were in the midst of re-forming their curriculum to reflect new thinking in art, with an emphasis on abstraction.¹⁰ Rosen brought the sculpture included in Slivka's article to his interview, which, he recalled, showed the faculty that he was the guy for the job.¹¹



Untitled (SR#49) 1963-65, unglazed stoneware, 3½ x 11½ x 12½ inches

Bennington Museum curator Jamie Franklin described the artists teaching at Bennington College from the early 1950s to the mid-1970s as a “disparate group united only by their embrace of abstraction and a common desire to move beyond Abstract Expressionism.”¹² Their shared desire to move beyond the previous decades’ visceral expressions nevertheless manifest in some defining characteristics. Painters at Bennington during this time, notably Jules Olitski, Paul Feely (see fig. 3) and Vincent Longo privileged formal openness and restraint, in paired-down geometric compositions and expansive fields of color.¹³ Rosen’s sculptures of the 1960s, with their defined planes delineating zones of hollowness and shadow, attest to the influence of these artists, whom he tangled with in passionate weekly faculty meetings.

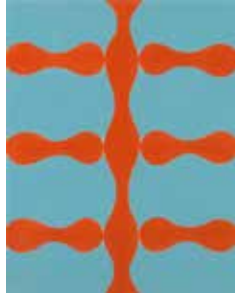


FIG 3: Paul Feely
Minoa (1962)



FIG 4: Tony Smith *Bennington Structure* (1961)

Of the sculptors with whom Rosen rubbed elbows at Bennington in the 1960s—notably Anthony Caro and Lyman Kipp—the one whose sculptures were most aesthetically in dialogue with his own was Tony Smith, a former architect who taught painting and sculpture at Bennington from 1958 to 1961. Smith’s more contemporaneous engagement with site specificity and minimalist design may have been at odds with Rosen’s more intuitive, craft-based approach, but his ideas nevertheless left a lasting impression on Rosen, who would explore similar themes of containment and modular construction on very different terms.¹⁴

In 1961, during Rosen’s first year at Bennington, Smith created “Bennington Structure” (fig. 4) an approximately forty-foot long and nine foot tall structure of eight linked hexagonal modules composed of plywood, metal, and concrete. Much like Rosen would do on a smaller scale, Smith composed “Bennington Structure” from a balance of “empty” space defined within intersecting physical planes, acknowledging the emptiness that exists in balance with concrete reality. The structure offered a physical encounter with the environment, permitting visitors to step inside and to look out into the surrounding landscape and up at the sky through square openings at the top of the modules.

Sculptures that Rosen made around the same time similarly concentrated zones of space within forms that took after the planar construction of buildings. While obviously differing from Smith’s work in size and medium, more meaningful distinctions becomes clear when considering how their work relates to the beholder. Whereas the hollow zones within Smith’s “Bennington Structure” anticipate the presence of a physical body to activate it, the spaces within Rosen’s sculptures expand in the mind. In fig. 5, for instance, Rosen directs our attention to the wall of the internal cavity through a rectangular opening



FIG 5: *Untitled (SR#56)*
1966-69, ash-glazed stoneware, 13¼ x 9½ x 10 inches

at the side. Unable to perceive the actual space it holds within, we are prompted to imagine the scope of its contents, far beyond the dimensions of the physical hollow. The central hollow in fig. 6 is yet another example of such a liminal space in Rosen's work, straddling the visible and invisible. The hollow measures no more than a few inches deep, and yet, implicated by the unseen space and elements in which it is embedded, charged by the poetic implications of the visual patterning and pinched surface, it extends into the imagination. By withholding space and elements from view, Rosen's vessel sculptures of the 1960s invite beholders into the introspective state of mind that he himself brought to the process.

Containing "more space than they have objectively," to paraphrase Bachelard,¹⁵ Rosen's sculptures embody what has defined many works of art throughout history: the transformation

of inert matter into something seemingly alive; something somehow other than what it is.¹⁶ Yet in the mid-twentieth century, even more so than today, a work's medium, more than its manner of engagement, was the surest indicator of a work's status as art. In the '60s and in the decades following, the fact that Rosen's pieces were ceramic, and many of them vessels, put them at a remove from the contemporary discourses around sculpture. Whereas sculptures by the likes of Smith, Caro and Kipp tended to be large in scale, composed of industrial materials and often in response to a specific site, ceramic forms remained small, portable and earthy. They connoted daily use instead of aesthetic autonomy and domestic life in contrast to a gallery's detached space of contemplation. Art historian and theorist Rosalind Krauss (b. 1941) summed up the perceptions of ceramic craft around this time in a preface to a 1978 exhibit of John Mason, a ceramic sculptor connected to the Otis group: "to be a ceramicist sculptor in the 1950s and '60s was in some essential way to be marginal to 'sculpture'...It was that the medium had craft associations. And these associations were intolerable to sculpture."¹⁷ As Storr observed of Smith, the artist "shunned the role of craftsman, preferring instead to think of himself as a designer, the only professional label he ever fully accepted."¹⁸

Like Rosen, Smith regarded the act of building to be a "fundamentally poetic, rather than simply pragmatic process."¹⁹ But whereas Smith took a conceptual approach to his sculptures' construction, Rosen's expression of architectural patterns was intuitive, if informed by his own interest in vernacular structures of eras past. Indeed, it was the hands-on building of vernacular architecture that he identified with. In our interviews he referenced cathedrals, igloos, Stonehenge and the nuraghe, a hive-like network of towers in what is now



FIG 6: *Untitled (SR#48)* c. 1968, partially glazed stoneware, 3½ x 10 x 10 inches



FIG 7: *Untitled (SR#58)* 1966-69, ash-glazed stoneware, 14½ x 15 x 13 inches

Sardinia, which to him evidenced the depth of connection afforded by such an approach. Rosen emphasized that like those ancient builders, “I am physically engaged. I am not so much thinking about it; I am more in the making of it. I need that kind of approach, because that’s how I make clay alive.”²⁰

Indeed, it was hardly possible for Rosen to create his sculptures any other way. His haptic approach to construction was by and large a consequence of his learning style: it was necessary for him to feel through an idea in order to understand it. He viewed the physical concentration that he brought to his process as an adaptation to what he would later understand as dyslexia. In grade school, Rosen recalled, he struggled to keep up with other students academically, because, as he put it, he was “wired differently.” As his wife Jane observed, “he had to learn a way to make things not being able to make things the way other people would make them...So it was a blessing, but I think a very painful one.”²¹

This suggests yet another level at which Rosen connected his experience of interiority to inhabited space. His vessel-based sculptures’ resemblance to ancient habitations point to his own need for shelter and containment. The work in fig. 7, for instance, while it recalls a monument from an era past, affords not an escape for the body but for the mind. While we cannot physically inhabit the interior hollow, we are invited to gaze down into it through the opening at the top. Inside, we are met by a sensuous interior surface of layered ceramic elements, which seem to fill that interior space like a choir of cicadas at night.

Ceramicist and writer Mary Barringer, in her lecture on Rosen’s work at Alfred University, located the tension between the monumentality of what his sculptures represent and the fact of their small size in philosopher Gaston Bachelard’s

notion of “Intimate Immensity,” explored in *The Poetics of Space*. As Barringer explains, the idea “is that certain conditions and experiences operate, in essence, at two scales simultaneously: the physical one and the symbolic or psychological one and that they foster a kind of dreaming state that transcends the limitations of bodily reality.”²² As expressions of vast spaces of architecture and landscape through forms the size of “objects intimately bound up with our creaturely lives,” to borrow Barringer’s words, Rosen’s sculptures compel us to identify that vastness within ourselves. For Rosen, such introspective enclosures not only expressed his experience of inhabiting the world but accommodated it, giving form to the space of introspection he sought.

The Void as Source

The artists with whom Rosen most identified—post-war European sculptors such as Henry Moore, Alberto Giacometti and Jacques Lipchitz—portrayed their material as a source of their sculptures’ form. As Rosalind Krauss wrote in *Passages in Modern Sculpture*, published in 1977:

If Henry Moore or Jean Arp made conspicuous use of eroded stone or rough-hewn wooden block, it was not to serve this material, untransformed, to the viewer of their work. Instead, they wished to create the illusion that at the center of this inert matter there was a source of energy which shaped it and gave it life...In using sculpture to create this metaphor, they were establishing the abstract meaning of their work; they were saying that the process of creating form is, for the sculptor, a visual meditation on the logic of organic growth itself.²³

For Moore and Arp the material in question was stone, heavy and dense, which they each shaped

to bulge and bend like the body. Rosen, by contrast, located the energetic source of his forms in the emptiness within them. In fig. 8, for instance, Rosen creates the impression of organized matter emerging into light from a central, obscured core. That this, like other of Rosen's sculptures, is small in scale allows us to see it not merely as a physical reality but as an analogy, perhaps to the unseen realm of the artist's mind. As such, the hundreds of rigid pinched pieces lining the walls of fig. 7 assume symbolic value. They suggest not only the primacy of sensation in Rosen's working process but also the privacy of those sensations, the pinched analogues of which are protected within the vessel's interior walls. Intimate as these finger-pinches of clay may be, they also functioned as the building blocks of Rosen's sculptures. Stacking thin clay pieces into weight-bearing walls was by nature risky—and for that very reason an integral part of Rosen's process. It was the risk that commanded his attention, the attention necessary for him to activate his material.

Speaking to both the level of risk and heightened attention that defined his process, Rosen referenced an essay titled "The Tightrope Walker," written in 1955 by French poet and critic Jean Genet. In the essay, Genet described the tightrope walker's practice as both an act of self-expression and survival, requiring a devotion to the thin rope tasked with holding his weight. "This love, almost desperate, but loaded with tenderness, that you must show your thread, it must have as much strength as the wire will show in carrying you," Genet wrote. "I know objects, their malignity, their cruelty, their gratitude, too. The thread was dead—or, if you will, dumb, blind. You are here: it will live and speak."²⁴

Like Genet's tightrope walker, Rosen mastered his craft not by coercing the material to his will but through a dialogue by which he acknowledged the urgency as well as the risk

involved, perhaps even required, to create something with the sensation of life. Clay, his hands, and the vastness of his solitude: this is where Rosen begins and this is where he leads us.

Coda

The art world of New York City and its outposts, the one in which Stanley's work has begun to gain attention, is a much different world than the one in which he came into his own as a sculptor. The collapse of hierarchies between media that helped create space for ceramic sculpture in the 1950s and 1960s, today has rendered the distinction between craft and art to be, if not irrelevant, then at least less important than it was back then. Contemporary artists are more often questioning the limits of art than seeking to define it. As Tom Morris observed in an introductory essay for *New Wave Clay* (2018), ceramics "is art, craft and design all at the same time: finally the boundaries and labels of who makes what and what it's called have disappeared."²⁵

As a hybrid discipline, as a medium that can be manipulated, by the same processes, toward the creation of sculptures or traditional craft forms, ceramics may always exist in a category of its own. But the medium or format itself need not define whether a thing is art or something else. Rosen shows us how the artist engages with their material and consequently, how their work asks us to relate to the space it holds.²⁶

Today, when Stanley makes sculptures, he does so at the table in his living room attached to the kitchen where I interviewed him. There, he works in the natural light from the windows on both sides, warmed by the wood stove and amid books, drawings and objects that he and Jane have collected through the years. His studio, across the garden and down a path from the house, is used mostly for storing work and for firing sculptures in an electric kiln.



FIG 8: *Untitled (SR#34)* c. 1968, unglazed stoneware, 10 x 7½ x 7 inches

Toward the end of my visit in February 2019, I watched from across the table as Stanley worked on one of his sculptures. It looked something like other of his forms from the 2000s—a blend of a small volcano and the mast of a ship. A video I took shows Stanley laying out a base of clay rolls, taking off pieces and putting on new ones, reaching his hands inside and cutting off sections with a butter knife; paddling it on the sides with a wooden mallet, his eyes locked into the clay form. Although he has been doing a variation of this process for years, he has retained an attitude of discovery and play, of intense focus tempered by humor. At one point he stops, mallet in hand, and glances toward Jane.

“Thank god,” he muses, “that we have a place for the ugly.”

Before I left, Stanley gave me a couple of books. I opened one of them on the train back to

New York—*Centering* by M.C. Richards—to find a note he had left inside, perhaps a thought he’d had while reading: “Offerings, not exhibitions.”

With this, Stanley suggested a different way to think about exhibiting. Whereas an exhibition connoted exhibitionism, an offering meant something quite different: a gift, a contribution, a gesture of humility.

Stanley’s sculptures have so much to give. Perhaps if he had been the type of person to seek approval his work would be less inward-looking and less profound. As an artist, I want to believe that to cultivate one’s practice without concern for acclaim would be enough. Stanley’s body of work is evidence to the fact that, in the end, the depth of one’s contribution will depend on the quality of attention brought to the process, a process to be revised and revisited throughout a long life.



- ¹ Just prior to his solo exhibition, "Beginnings" at Steven Harvey Fine Arts Projects in 2017 Rosen was the subject of two other shows: at the Bennington Museum, and at Alfred University, where he earned his MFA. The year before, the Museum of Arts and Design (MAD) in New York, at the recommendation of sculptor Arlene Schechet, acquired six of his pieces for their permanent collection. Since 2017, Rosen's work has been featured alongside the painting and sculpture of contemporary artists at Peter Blum Gallery in Soho and at Thomas Erben Gallery in Chelsea, in July 2018 and April 2019, respectively.
- ² Rosen worked at Greenwich House Pottery from 1956 to 1960.
- ³ Slivka, Rose. "The New Ceramic Presence." *Craft Horizons*, 1961. Craft-council.org. <https://www.craftcouncil.org/post/new-ceramic-presence>.
- ⁴ In *Holding the Line*, Jamie Franklin speculates that this was connected to a network of avant-garde co-operative galleries during the 1950s and 1960s known as the "10th Street galleries," 21. Bennington, Vermont: Bennington Museum, 2017.
- ⁵ Slivka, Rose. "The New Ceramic Presence," 34.
- ⁶ In her emphasis on the "spontaneous accident" over artists' more deliberate transformations, Slivka's construction of "Abstract Expressionist Ceramics" resembled critic Clement Greenberg's interpretation of the Abstract Expressionist painting of Jackson Pollock. In the essay "American-Type Painting," published in 1955, Greenberg characterized Abstract Expressionism much like Slivka would several years later, observing "the pictures of some of these Americans startle because they seem to rely on ungoverned spontaneity and haphazard effects." Clement Greenberg, "American-Type Painting." *Partisan Review* 22 (1955): 179–96
- ⁷ Sequoia Miller, *The Ceramic Presence in Modern Art, Theoretical Connections: Postwar Ceramics and the Historical Avant-Garde*, 22.
- ⁸ Jenni Sorkin, "Los Angeles and Postwar Ceramic History." *In Live Form: Women, Ceramics and Community*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016, 31.
- ⁹ Stanley Rosen, Interview with the author, February 11, 2019
- ¹⁰ Mary Barringer, *Intimate Immensity: Reflections on the Work of Stanley Rosen*, 5.
- ¹¹ Rosen, *Holding the Line*, *ibid*.
- ¹² Wall text, *Bennington Modernism*, Bennington Museum, Bennington, VT. <https://benningtonmuseum.org/portfo-lio-items/bennington-modernism-2/>
- ¹³ Clement Greenberg, who had developed ties with Bennington in the 1950s, had been instrumental in defining Abstract Expressionism, and he also helped define the subdued styles of painting that emerged in reaction to it. In "After Abstract Expressionism," Greenberg contended that the Abstract Expressionist painters emphasized the flat surface of the canvas by "[repudiating] value contrast as the basis of pictorial design." Many painters that proceeded them, by contrast—he cited Clyfford Still and Barnett Newman—embraced color's value contrasts, drawing attention to the picture plane by way of "zones and areas and fields of color."
- ¹⁴ Franklin, *Holding the Line*, 13.
- ¹⁵ Gaston Bachelard: "To give an object poetic space is to give it more space than it has objectively; or, better still, it is following the expansion of its intimate space." *The Poetics of Space*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1994, 202.
- ¹⁶ Alberto Giacometti put it plainly: "contrary to objects that claim to be just what they are, a sculpture, a painting always claim to be something else than what they are." *Why I Am a Sculptor*. Fondation Giacometti: Hermann, 2017, 22.
- ¹⁷ Rosalind Krauss, "John Mason and Post-Modernist Sculpture: New Experiences, New Worlds," *Art in America*, June 1978.
- ¹⁸ Storr, *ibid*, 24
- ¹⁹ John Kellen, *Tony Smith: Architect, Painter, Sculptor*, 36
- ²⁰ Stanley Rosen, Interview with Tom Fels, *Holding the Line*, 51
- ²¹ Jane Sobel, Interview with the author, February 10, 2019
- ²² Mary Barringer, "Intimate Immensity: Reflections on the Work of Stanley Rosen," 5.
- ²³ Rosalind Krauss, *Passages in Modern Sculpture*, 253.
- ²⁴ Jean Genet, "The Tightrope Walker," in *Fragments of the Artwork*, ed. Werner Hermacher (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003)
- ²⁵ Tom Morris, *New Wave Clay*, 5
- ²⁶ See: Heidegger, Martin. "The Thing." *The Heidegger Reader*, Indiana Univ. Press, 2009, pp. 256–258. "What makes of the vessel a thing does not reside by any means in the matter which constitutes it but in the emptiness it contains." 257.



Untitled (SR#81) c. 1979, unglazed stoneware, 4 x 10½ x 10½ inches



Untitled (SR#17) 1962-63, unglazed iron-rich stoneware, 16 x 15¼ x 3¼ inches



Untitled (SR#124) 1970s, unglazed stoneware, 5 x 11 x ½ inches



The Teacher

Visiting Stanley and Jane

Andrew Bartle

I met Stanley at Bennington, in March 1973 on a wintry day in the new, isolated concrete ceramics studio. The beginnings of the Visual and Performing Arts building, an immense wooden frame stretching into the horizon, was under construction and separated us in the studio from the campus. I was 21, had been out of school for 3 years, driving a cab in NYC the last year, taking occasional ceramics courses, sometimes chiseling sculptures out of wood in my parent's top floor, from green, thick, smelly wood pallets I found on the streets. I was barely cogent, quite lost, had been for years, with, as the Dylan song goes, "no direction home." Going to college, even Bennington, seemed a crazy bourgeois idea, but spending 12 hours at the wheel of a grimy checkered cab, in a crime-ridden city, with no purpose, was something I could let go for the moment. Stanley was one of the first people I met at Bennington.

Stanley's class was about 12 or so people, it was an introductory studio class, so most people started with learning the wheel. He didn't say much during most days in the studio. He would often be around, a serene and helpful presence, sometimes making an amusing or cryptic comment that would catch you unaware—until the mid-term review. Then he would sit and talk one on one about the work

each student was doing with clay in the studio. He took the work seriously. He took everybody's work seriously. Stanley wound up leading me to taking myself seriously for the first time in my life, making art, reading philosophy, writing, joining an active joyful, passionate studio culture, with people, to this day close friends, all felt to me like I was moving in the right direction, and becoming a productive human being, purposeful. This was due almost entirely to Stanley, the rest to maybe eating regular meals or the attractive women. I was in a class with Stanley for 4 of 5 semesters straight before moving to painting and architecture; in the ceramics studio we all worked like maniacs, sometimes 12-15 hours a day; our hands were in wet clay for hours, followed by nights of firing kilns, a group of young artists; we felt a sense of belonging and becoming and our work being cared for.

The process of my finding and feeling a way home, becoming productive, I have always attributed to Stanley. His love of clay, and the stories it can tell, was contagious. Stanley was changing the way I saw everything; both art and life. Clay is a humble material, not solid, not liquid, usually wet, warm. Working with this material under Stanley's guidance was beyond therapeutic, his sensibility appearing as ancient wisdom came often with humor; always

a focus on process and his personal observations, (though often there was a lot of space between them) taught us how to listen, observe and learn.

I never thanked Stanley when I graduated in December 1976. I always believed and often told people he was the best art teacher I ever had at Bennington. He taught in the opposite manner of many art teachers, who offered their work as a starting place for their students. Stanley's ceramic work, now accessible to many, largely because of Jane Sobel, Beth Kamenstein, Kenji Fugita and Steven Harvey, was unknown to me, and the stories his pieces tell, of material, order, space, sensuality and eroticism I had never seen, except the "pot," an elegant stoneware cylinder with a narrow neck, that was so light that when you picked it up, it urgently tried to float to the ceiling. It was probably left inadvertently by Stanley on a shelf by the kiln.

Fast forward almost 40 years later: I had become an architect, and seemed to still be taking myself seriously, trying to make things with ideas, and with care. However, the passage of time and the inevitable losses we all share caused me to reflect on what is most valuable and vivid in the past; memories that can appear fully realized, vibrant with smells, sound, people's voices, intense feelings—this realization memories told me, I just had to tell Stanley the significance his teaching held for me. I was then 61 years old—crazily 11 years older than Stanley was when he was teaching us. I had left Bennington without doing the right thing.

To go to North Bennington and say, "Stanley, I am grateful for our time together, you may not know it, but you made my life better, and I would never have accomplished what I have without your teaching and support." That was going to be enough, not a big show, a few words. Stanley was mysterious. At school his personal life was never known. We knew he lived in a small house with a table and chairs, no upholstered furniture, an ascetic life, an artist; mirroring what I imagined his

work to be about – and had a beautiful girlfriend who was slightly intimidating. This was not to be a big gesture. In and out.

I concealed the reason for my trip by combining it with a lecture at the school, and arranged to meet with Stanley and Jane, who suggested breakfast the next morning at their house. Stanley Rosen had always been known to me as a teacher in the studio, I knew it would be surprising to see him at his home and I wondered if he was going to even remember enough about me to talk, or if he would even say anything at all; I was coming to deliver a message, over forty years late! But I had forgotten how humor was mixed with his sensitivity, and along with his intimate relationship with Jane, was clearly an essential way Stanley relates to the outside world. After a few awkward moments, and gentle prodding from Jane, we did laugh, and laughed hard for what seemed a long time, about shared memories of events and I was able to leave with more "treasures in my memory palace," as Matteo Ricci would say, many more than I brought.

Almost nobody that I knew from the ceramics studio had ever seen much of Stanley's ceramics work, me, nothing, except the "pot," so after an amusing breakfast, and seeing an entirely different Stanley than I had imagined existed, he kindly let me wander through his small treasury. About 100' from his house, and sometimes called a studio, it was a room full of miracles I had never imagined existed. It was like discovering Le Corbusier at 61. I saw the early work that shows the joys of process and gravity, and the pieces with surfaces that showed his love of touch, a topophilia. I see in his work his love of negative space combined with love of surface and technique, which he creates in vessels, constructions, and drawings especially. Some pieces show a pure process that results in objects, often built with brilliant techniques I could never have imagined. Suggestive often of architectural space in clay, conscious of both the inside and

the outside surfaces, a series of pieces with stories about systems and order, process, bodies, the work felt profound and beautifully accomplished, and often give a wink and a nod to humor that only serious artists can do well. Along one shelf were vessels floating, spreading sails, perfuming the wind with their affections, traveling in the direction of love giving delight, a thousand and one nights.

The "Sacred and the Profane," this duality that Gaston Bachelard declared defined the space of our world, was undone in front of me; by the topophilia, the love of touch, the love of multiplicity, stories emanating from his objects telling us about gravity, weightlessness, love itself - nature can be cruel or beautiful, but it is never sentimental about time passing.

When Stanley walked over to join me after I had been absorbed and overwhelmed, I looked at him and said, "After seeing your work, I'm not sure that I do take myself seriously," he laughed, and then agreed with me.

When I think of the magical worlds of Stanley's creation, the words of another great artist come to mind: Vladimir Nabokov, also with a sense of humor, who wrote this passage in *Speak, Memory*, at the age of 40.

I confess I do not believe in time. I like to fold my magic carpet, after use, in such a way as to superimpose one part of the pattern upon another. Let visitors trip. And the highest enjoyment of timelessness in a landscape selected at random is when I stand among rare butterflies and their food plants. This is ecstasy, and behind the ecstasy is something else, which is hard to explain. It is like a momentary vacuum into which rushes all that I love. A sense of oneness with sun and stone. A thrill of gratitude to whom it may concern to the contrapuntal genius of human fate or to tender ghosts humoring a lucky mortal.



Untitled (SR#55)

c. 1965, unglazed stoneware, 13 x 8 x 8 inches



Untitled (SR#addendum B)
1968-69, glazed stoneware, 10 x 5 x 3¾ inches



Untitled (SR#addendum J)

c. 1962, unglazed iron-rich stoneware. 4½ x 4½ x 1½ inches



Untitled (SR#158)

c. 1976, unglazed stoneware, 9 3/4 x 10 x 4 inches



Untitled (SR#72)
c. 1975, unglazed stoneware, 1¾ x 10 x 11½ inches



Untitled (SR#112)

c. 1970, partially glazed stoneware, 5 x 10 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 9 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches



Untitled (SR#87)

c. 1979, unglazed stoneware, 1½ x 6¼ x 6¼ inches



Untitled (SR#109)

c. 1970, partially glazed stoneware, 3½ x 10 x 11½ inches



Untitled (SR#47)
1960s, unglazed stoneware, 6½ x 11½ x 12 inches



Untitled (SR#64)

1960s, unglazed stoneware, 8 x 7¼ x 7½ inches



Untitled (SR#130)
c. 1978, unglazed stoneware, 4 x 16 inches in diameter



Untitled (SR#128b)
c. 1978, unglazed stoneware, 8 x 10½ inches in diameter



Untitled (SR#177)
1970, ash glazed stoneware, 4¾ x 8 x 7¼ inches



Untitled (SR#82)

c. 1975, unglazed stoneware, 1½ x 11½ x 9½ inches



Untitled (SR#123)

1983, unglazed stoneware, 11 1/4 x 11 1/4 x 1 1/2 inches



Untitled (SR#107)
c. 1985, unglazed stoneware. 4½ x 7 x 5½ inches

List of illustrations

All photographs by Peter Crabtree except as noted

- Front cover: *Untitled*, (SR#49), 1963-65
unglazed stoneware, 3½ x 11½ x 12½ inches (detail)
- Inside front cover: drawing notebook, collection of Alfred Ceramic Art Museum
- Opposite title page: *Untitled*, (SR#11), 1990
unglazed stoneware, 15½ x 14 x 6 inches
- p. 2: *Untitled* (SR#141), 1962-63
unglazed stoneware, 14¼ x 14½ x 16 inches, collection of Charles Dee Mitchell
- p. 4: *Untitled* (SR#23), 1966-69
unglazed iron-rich stoneware, 19 x 11 x 10 inches
- p. 7: wood kiln outside Stanley Rosen's studio, N. Bennington, VT
- p. 8: Stanley Rosen, in his living room
- p. 10, fig. 1: *Untitled* (SR#5), 1950s
partially glazed stoneware, 10½ x 8 x 8 inches, collection of Arlene Shechet
- p. 11: *Untitled* (SR#165), c. 1960
unglazed stoneware, 4¾ x 9 x 8 inches
- p. 12, fig. 2: Peter Voukos: *Vase*, 1959, and *Artforum* cover with *Rocking Pot*, 1959
- p. 14: *Untitled* (SR#49), 1963-65
unglazed stoneware, 3½ x 11½ x 12½ inches
- p. 15, fig. 3: Paul Feeley: *Minoa*, 1962
oil-based enamel on canvas, 60 x 48 inches, private collection, Louisville, Kentucky
Courtesy the Estate of Paul Feeley and Garth Greenan Gallery, New York
- p. 15, fig. 4: Tony Smith: *Bennington Structure*, 1961
plywood, metal, lathe and Portland cement
40 feet long overall, each unit approx. 9 feet diameter
© 2020 Tony Smith Estate/ Artists Rights Society, New York
- p. 16, fig. 5: *Untitled* (SR#56), 1966-69
ash-glazed stoneware, 13¼ x 9½ x 10 inches, collection of Paul Bonk and Susan Sobel
- p. 17, fig. 6: *Untitled* (SR#48), c. 1968
partially glazed stoneware, 3½ x 10 x 10 inches
- p. 18, fig. 7: *Untitled*, (SR#58), 1966-69
ash-glazed stoneware, 14½ x 15 x 13 inches
- p. 21, fig. 8: *Untitled* (SR#34), c. 1968
unglazed stoneware, 10 x 7½ x 7 inches
- p. 23: Stanley Rosen in his home
- p. 25: *Untitled* (SR#81), c. 1979
unglazed stoneware, 4 x 10½ x 10½ inches

- p. 26: *Untitled* (SR#17), 1962-63
unglazed iron-rich stoneware, 16 x 15¼ x 3¼ inches
- p. 27: *Untitled* (SR#124), 1970s
unglazed stoneware, 5 x 11 x ½ inches
- p. 28: installation of drawings in Rosen's home
- p. 32: *Untitled* (SR#55), c. 1965
unglazed stoneware, 13 x 8 x 8 inches
- p. 33: *Untitled* (SR #addendum B), 1968-69
glazed stoneware, 10 x 5 x ¾ inches
- p. 34: *Untitled* (SR#addendum J), c. 1962
unglazed iron-rich stoneware, 4½ x 4½ x 1½ inches
- p. 35: *Untitled* (SR#158), c. 1976
unglazed stoneware, 9¾ x 10 x 4 inches
- p. 36: *Untitled* (SR#72), c. 1975
unglazed stoneware, 1¾ x 10 x 1½ inches
- p. 37: *Untitled* (SR#112), c. 1970
partially glazed stoneware, 5 x 10¾ x 9¾ inches
- p. 38: *Untitled* (SR#87), c. 1979
unglazed stoneware, 1½ x 6¾ x 6¾ inches
- p. 39: *Untitled* (SR#109), c. 1970
partially glazed stoneware, 3½ x 10 x 1½ inches
- p. 40: *Untitled* (SR#47), 1960s
unglazed stoneware, 6½ x 11½ x 12 inches
- p. 41: *Untitled* (SR#64), 1960s
unglazed stoneware, 8 x 7¼ x 7½ inches
- p. 42: *Untitled* (SR#130), c. 1978
unglazed stoneware, 4 x 16 inches in diameter, collection of Lauren Olitski
- p. 43: *Untitled* (SR#128b), c. 1978
unglazed stoneware, 8 x 10½ inches in diameter
- p. 44: *Untitled* (SR#177), 1970
ash glazed stoneware, 4¾ x 8 x 7¼ inches
- p. 45: *Untitled* (SR#82), c. 1975
unglazed stoneware, 1½ x 11½ x 9½ inches
- p. 46: *Untitled* (SR #123), 1983
unglazed stoneware, 1¼ x 11¾ x 11 inches
- p. 47: *Untitled* (SR#107), c. 1985
unglazed stoneware, 4½ x 7 x 5½ inches
- Inside back cover: drawing notebook, collection of Alfred Ceramic Art Museum
- Back cover: *Untitled*, (SR#82), c. 1975
unglazed stoneware, 1½ x 11½ x 9½ inches (detail)

Chronology

- 1926 Born November 16 in Brooklyn, New York. Parents sold kosher chickens.
- 1935 Family moves to Atlanta, Georgia. Parents ran grocery store.
- 1935-43 Attends Atlanta public schools.
- 1937-39 Attends Workmen's Circle after school program.
- 1944 Enlists in the Navy. Served for 22 months.
- 1946 Returns to Atlanta. Takes some art classes at the University of Georgia Extension School in Atlanta on the G.I. Bill.
- 1947 Attends pharmacy school on the G.I. Bill. Drops out after one year.
- 1948 Studies agricultural engineering at the University of Georgia in Athens, Georgia on the G.I. Bill.
- 1949 Moves to farm in upstate New York to learn farming skills to join a kibbutz in Israel. Meets Beverly Schwartz.
- 1950 Moves to Providence, Rhode Island.
- 1951-54 Attends Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, Rhode Island. Begins in sculpture and graduates in ceramics. Studies with Lyle Perkins, Gilbert and Dorothy Franklin. Receives BFA in ceramics in 1954.
- 1952 Marries Beverly Schwartz.
- 1954-56 Attends Alfred University, Alfred, New York. Studies with John Wood. Receives MFA in ceramics in 1956.
- 1955 Daughter Brauna born.
- 1956-60 Moves to New York City with his family to work at Greenwich House Pottery. Part of The Argyl Artists collective which includes Jimmie Krumrine, Hui Ka Kwong and Jeff Schlanger.
- 1958 Daughter Jennifer born.
- 1959 Rhodes, Daniel, "Stoneware and Porcelain," 1st edition, Chilton Company, Book Division, Philadelphia, New York
- 1960-91 Teaches at Bennington College. Lives on campus until 1977.
- 1961 Slivka, Rose, "The New Ceramic Presence," *Craft Horizons*, July/August 1961, 33, July/August 1961, 33.
- 1965 Spends fall sabbatical from Bennington College in Florence and Rome, Italy with family.

- 1967 Stanley and Beverly separate.
- 1970 Stanley and Beverly divorce.
- 1970 Solo show at Greenwich House Pottery, New York, New York.
- 1972 Meets Jane Sobel.
- 1972 Travels in Greece during fall sabbatical from Bennington College.
- 1974 Teaches class at Queens College, Queens, New York.
- 1976 Spends fall sabbatical from Bennington College as visiting artist at Alfred University.
- 1976 "Artists at Bennington: Visual Arts Faculty 1932-1976," Bennington College, Bennington, Vermont.
- 1977 Travels in Spain with Jane.
- 1977 Moves from Bennington College campus to live with Jane and daughters Kim and Susan in North Bennington, Vermont.
- 1982 Travels in Florence, Italy with Jane.
- 1987 Marries Jane in the kitchen of their home on Thanksgiving Day. Alvin Feinman writes poem, *Second Marriage Song (for Jane and Stanley): Poems*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ 1990
- 1988 Travels in the Yucatan, Mexico with Jane.
- 1993 "5x7: Seven Ceramic Artists Each Acknowledge Five Sources of Inspiration," Alfred University, Alfred, NY. Robert Turner discusses Rosen sculpture.
- 1995 "25th Anniversary Exhibition," Greenwich House Pottery, New York, New York. Group show.
- 2001 Travels in Sardinia, Italy with Jane and Thelma Bullock. Encounters the nuraghi.
- 2004 Travels in Sicily, Italy with Jane and Thelma Bullock.
- 2014 Brings sculptures up from the basement and into the studio.
- 2014 Peter Crabtree begins photographing Stanley's work for archive and future website.
- 2015 "Clay in a Certain Kind of Way: A Tribute to Stanley Rosen," Peekskill Clay Studios, Peekskill, New York. Group show.

- 2015 "Bennington Modernism," Bennington Museum, Bennington, Vermont. Group show.
- 2016 "New Acquisitions," Museum of Arts and Design, New York, New York.
- 2017 "Holding the Line: Ceramic Sculpture by Stanley Rosen," Bennington Museum, Bennington, Vermont. Show and catalogue.
- 2017 "Holding the Line: Ceramic Sculpture by Stanley Rosen," Alfred Ceramic Art Museum, Alfred, New York.
- 2017 Barringer, Mary, "Intimate Immensity: Reflections on the Work of Stanley Rosen," Perkins Lecture, Alfred University, New York.
- 2017 "MAD Collects: The Future of Craft Part 1", Museum of Art and Design, New York. Group show.
- 2017 "Beginnings," Steven Harvey Fine Art Projects, New York, New York.
- 2017 Yau, John, "The Undiscovered Art of Stanley Rosen," *Hyperallergic*, November 25, 2017
- 2017 Gover, Karen, "Stanley Rosen: Touching Form," *Ceramics Monthly*, December Vol 65, No 10
- 2017 Yau, John, "12 Revelatory Exhibitions from 2017," *Hyperallergic*, December 31, 2017
- 2018 Gover, Karen, "Stanley Rosen: Inside Out," *Sculpture Magazine*, March 2018, Vol 37, No 2
- 2018 "New Acquisitions," *Ceramophile*, Alfred Ceramic Art Museum, Vol XXIX, No 1, Spring 2018
- 2018 "Stanley Rosen: a gaggle of drawings, Ceramic Sculpture and Drawings," NADA Miami, Florida. Steven Harvey Fine Art Projects.
- 2018 "Church Kaminstein Rosen," Steven Harvey Fine Art Projects, New York, New York. Group show.
- 2018 "Excavation," Peter Blum Gallery, New York, New York. Group show.
- 2018 "Vessels: Containment and Displacement, Useful to Grand," Bennington College, Bennington, Vermont. Group show.
- 2019 "Out On A Limb," Thomas Erben Gallery, New York, New York. Group show.
- 2019 "Bennington Modernism," Bennington Museum, Bennington, Vermont. Group show.
- 2020 "Shaping Space," Steven Harvey Fine Art Projects, New York, New York.

Credits

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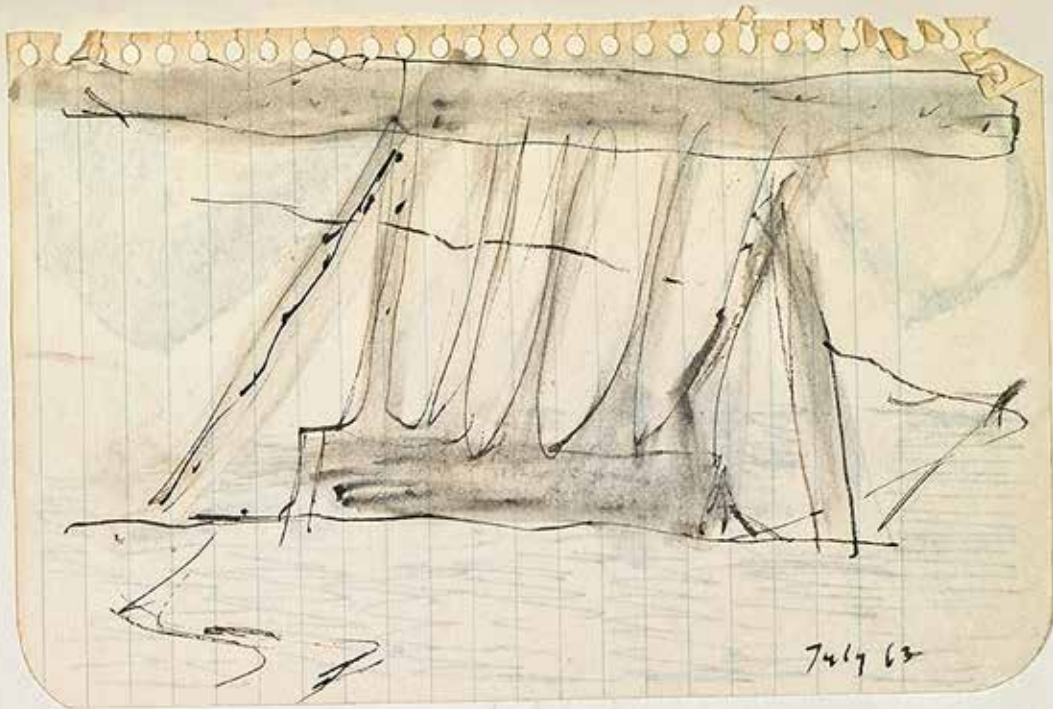
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BACK COVER:

Untitled (SR#82) c. 1975, unglazed stoneware, 1½ x 11½ x 9½ inches (detail)

OPPOSITE:

Drawing, notebook page 18



SHFAP 35