Beyond East and West to the American South:

The Pottery of Bernard Leach, Shōji Hamada, and Jugtown

Claire Foster Hammen

Abstract

This study investigates the similarities between two important craft phenomena beginning in the early 1920s in the context of the industrial revolution. Potters Bernard Leach and Shōji Hamada worked in England and Japan and were strongly influenced by the *mingei* concept of the famous Japanese philosopher Sōetsu Yanagi. Their position as artist-craftsmen led them on a mission to revive and enhance traditional utilitarian pottery as an important medium, artistically and functionally, and their efforts later brought them world renown status within the pottery field. Concomitantly, a very similar yet much quieter craft revival occurred in rural Seagrove, North Carolina, where artists Jacques and Juliana Busbee established the Jugtown Pottery and master potter Ben Owen gave new life to vernacular North Carolina pottery.

Equally strong as craft revivals and similar in approach in the areas of philosophy, production, and artistic content, these two concurrent pottery movements mirrored each other with no apparent interaction or cross-influence. While Leach and Hamada gained world-wide fame as artist-craftsmen, such recognition came much later for Jugtown. The main questions explored within this thesis are: Why would such disengagement exist between two pottery movements of simultaneous time periods? How did the philosophies of the Busbees, independent of the *mingei* concept, reflect such a similar approach to that of Leach and Hamada in the making of pottery? How did the Busbees' and Owen's understanding of traditional, vernacular North Carolina pottery lead to the incorporation of Asian designs and glazes? How and why did the pots of Owen, Leach, and Hamada so

similarly mark the transition from folk pottery to artist-craftsmanship? How and why did both groups incorporate new treatments of the craft with traditional practices? And ultimately, how did these mutations change, preserve, and even challenge the true meaning of folk craft, and thus ultimately propel these artist-potters forward as new master potters, who hybridized the old and the new, the indigenous and the foreign?

I hypothesize that the unfortunate disengagement between the subjects of this thesis resulted from Japan's and England's disdain for American industrialization and its effects on the rest of the world, combined with a lack of an exchange or existence of scholarship, in particular of vernacular North Carolina pottery. Using the writings of Bernard Leach, Sōetsu Yanagi, Jacques and Juliana Busbee, and astute scholars of pottery of this time period, this thesis illuminates the distinct similarities within the two potting cultures, including their philosophical approaches to potting, artistic and technical applications, education, and entrepreneurship. The Busbees were aware of Asian potting practices and applied it to Jugtown wares, and their philosophy very much mirrored that of *mingei*. This philosophy influenced the production of the pottery similar to the purist approach of the Asian culture. And the Busbees, like Leach and Hamada, capitalized financially on their craft. Ultimately, this thesis will demonstrate how the two groups – Leach and Hamada, collectively, and together the Busbees and Owen, forever changed the craft of folk pottery and thus brought life to a new artist-craftsman, completely independent of each other, but with uncanny similarities and equal impacts, which now continue to share a tremendous presence in the world of pottery today.

Table of Contents

List of Images

Chapter I

Introduction

The Industrial Revolution is by now well known and understood as time of significant change in the manufacturing of goods, thus generating a shift from manual labor to mechanized mass production of objects for everyday use. This transition not only affected the wares themselves, but those who produced them, resulting in a dramatic change in lifestyle and economy. More sophisticated transportation accelerated the spread of industry from the West to the East, thus increasing a global appetite for capitalism. As factories began to pervade China and Japan, rural dwellers flocked to the copious jobs within the cities. And in the American South, tobacco manufacturers and textile mills drew people from the country to small cities in which to live and work for more attractive and consistent wages.[1]

While embraced by entrepreneurial business leaders and progressive technological visionaries of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, this movement sparked in some a rejection of industrialization and a yearning for a return to nature and handmade wares. Japan's *Mingei* Movement of the 1920s reflects a similar but more radical approach to the earler craft revival led by William Morris in England in the

---

[1] The subject of industrialization and its effects on handcrafts has been covered extensively by many scholars in a broader sense. See Wendy Kaplan and Eileen Boris, *The Art that Is Life: The Arts and Crafts Movement in America, 1875-1920* Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (Boston: Little, Brown, 1987); Jackson Lears *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981); Janet Kardon *Craft in the Machine Age, 1920-1945*, American Craft Museum (New York: H.N. Abrams in association with the American Craft Museum, 1995); Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982). Specific to Southern American folk crafts, see Jane S. Becker, *Selling Tradition: Appalachia and the Construction of an American Folk* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998).

1890s. Established by Japanese art critic and philosopher Sōetsu Yanagi, the term *mingei*,[2] meaning art of the people, celebrated the beauty within handmade objects, and challenged what many artists, collectors, and critics of the times considered to be the standard of beauty in art. Yanagi's philosophies concerning the relationship between art and beauty demonstrates his passionate embrace of objects hand-made, his dogmatic rejection of the mass-made items of the machine age, and the preservation of traditional craft practices, including those of folk potters. He lamented the intellectualization of art, and believed that unconsciousness of beauty in the craftsman led to the creation of the most pure, unself-conscious, and therefore beautiful object.

Yanagi's writings in *The Unknown Craftsman*[3] reflect his disdain for America's lack of tradition and dependence on the machine. Potters Bernard Leach and Shōji Hamada followed much of the fundamental *mingei* teachings, and Yanagi's influence is evident in many of Leach's writings. As late as 1950, when Leach traveled to England returning from America, he observed:

> Americans have the disadvantage of having many roots, but no taproot, which is almost the equivalent of no root at all – nothing but their own individual choice to depend upon. Hence their pots follow many undigested fashions and, in my opinion, no American potter has yet emerged really integrated and standing on his own two feet – not as much as Hamada in Japan, or Michael Cardew in England. Nor of painters such as Cézanne, Matisse, Braque, Rouault, nor even Americans such as Ryder and Whistler and the poets Whitman and Eliot. The poem, the painting, the pot, must be the real man. So far no evidence of such genius have I seen today. . . . The problem we face today is this over-conscious, over-educated age, with all its added complexities, its absence of confirmation. A few artists, a few potters, have been able to draw nourishment and

---

[2] Sōetsu Yanagi, *The Unknown Craftsman*, trans. Bernard Leach, introduction Bernard Leach (Tokyo: Kodansha International Ltd., 1972) 94.

[3] Yanagi.

> power through their own pores from the streams that flow beneath the earth.[4]

Although never even having visited Jugtown, not even on numerous trips to the United States for pottery demonstrations and lectures, Leach and Yanagi repeatedly made such statements. Both viewed Britain and America, to which they refer collectively as "the West," as an entity responsible for the decline of handmade crafts and the near extinction of the quality craftsman. Leach lamented, "If the West had only taken as much interest in Eastern culture during this period, we would have been richer for it."[5] And Yanagi continuously felt that Japan was victimized by industry, which he believed cannibalized the cultural and artistic world:

> Most useful objects of the present day are too superficial to answer our daily inner need: they are the victims of the commercialism that characterizes the contemporary artistic world, for commercialism is the enemy of man, extirpating all beauty from his culture. This disaster has become so widespread that a number of awakened people are seeking to counter it by working with their own hands.[6]

Leach on many occasions stressed his belief that Japanese pottery suffered due to cultural intermingling and interactions with the West:

> The standard of Japanese pottery has fallen mainly through contact with the West, and it is quite clear that the whole tendency is towards Western methods and ideals. With few exceptions the examples for study at present from the West are so poor, one cannot be surprised that imitations are yet worse; they should be replaced by the best obtainable, and the finest Japanese pots put beside them for comparison.[7]

---

[4] Bernard Leach, *Beyond East and West: Portraits, Memoirs, and Essays* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1978) 238.

[5] Leach, *Beyond East and West* 75.

[6] Yanagi 144.

[7] Leach, *Beyond East and West* 128.

As Leach and Hamada embarked on their endeavors as artist-craftsmen, they viewed themselves as isolated leaders of the handcraft revival in the East, embracing traditional potting practices as the foundation for their work and rejecting Western influences. Their attitude toward the West was nothing short of dismissive; they approached their work and articulated their ideas as if on a crusade to stop the spread of the Western cultural plague. Leach proclaimed:

> There is no hiding the exposure of cultural sickness pervading the whole of the Western world, and not in music alone. The artist with his exhibitionism, glass cases, and fabulous prices is accused of being far from nature. It was the exhibitionism of concerts and art galleries, especially in city life, which repelled Yanagi in its artifice, not good art. . . . Nevertheless, even in bad periods art does emerge, even as the Lotus blooms in mud.[8]

Little did he know that a lotus was blooming in the mud of rural Seagrove, North Carolina under the direction of Jacques and Juliana Busbee. As Leach, Hamada, and Yanagi wrote, demonstrated, lectured, and traveled, Jacques and Juliana Busbee embarked on their own craft revival. Immersed within the age of American industry, they felt the effects of mass production as intensely, passionately, and independently as their counterparts in Japan. Juliana viewed machine-made objects as cold and generic, lacking in any element of human creativity, thought, or feeling. She valued the past and committed herself to return to what she considered an honorable way of life through the use of handmade wares:

> The craftsman of yesterday, when home made things were produced for use, always said they were "built upon honor." In those past days the dignity & integrity of crafts was honored & respected. Today they are made to sell -- & to sell cheap. So that the jobber – the middle man – the

---

[8] Yanagi 166.

> shop keeper may have ample profit. Hardly a "patron of the crafts" – not producing, or endeavoring to help the producer.[9]

The writings of the Busbees, Leach, and Yanagi demonstrate a shared disturbance toward the effects of mechanized labor. Why did these subjects react so similarly, with no relation to each other? The explanation lies within their own words, and drawing parallels leads to the conclusion that these subjects shared an innate connection to nature and to the objects it can bare with the help of human hands.

While the blame of the handcraft decline seemed to fall on the West, the voices of the Busbees and the pots of Ben Owen unfortunately went unheard and unseen beyond America during the craft revival, while Leach, Yanagi, and Hamada gained modest fame as pioneers of this movement. But Jacques and Juliana proved to maintain an equal awareness of and passion for handmade pottery, and understood the negative impact of industrialization. Juliana stated that, "Handcraft cannot be turned out in quantity production. Handcraft can never be cheap. Crafts must be lovingly, sparingly done – otherwise it has no value. . . . Just because they are hand made, of native material, means nothing. Unless art is a third ingredient, they might as well be factory done & sold in bulk to the china stores."[10]

Jacques and Juliana identified the aesthetic component of utilitarian wares, and represented, as Americans, an understanding of the fundamental beauty in thoughtful production of their wares. Leach echoed the same sentiment:

> So thoroughly have we separated utility and beauty, we have come to think of handicraft as a charming if unpractical pastime – as a frill round

---

[9] Juliana R. Busbee, "Our Native Crafts," ms 1941, Juliana Busbee Collection, Special Collections, Walter Clinton Jackson Library, University of North Carolina, Greensboro.

[10] Juliana R. Busbee, "Art Hath an Enemy Called Ignorance," ms, nd, Juliana Busbee Collection, Special Collections, Walter Clinton Jackson Library, University of North Carolina, Greensboro.

> the hem of industry. In the Middle Ages it was otherwise; then handicrafts were the basis of trade; refinement was for the few. Man and nature were at one.[11]

Furthermore, the Busbees proved their independent vision in explaining their inspiration behind the Jugtown endeavor, when they came upon a piece of North Carolina pottery in a rural store in the early 1900s. Juliana reflected: "That foresaid revolutionary Pie Plate was found in a country store. It was not considered a work of art I assure you. It was difficult to learn where it had been made. The brilliant color was plainly in the clay. We knew there were infinite possibilities in that clay – and in its Potter who made it."[12] Leach similarly looked to the past for inspiration, and found that the traditional potting would serve as the foundation for his and Hamada's practices:

> That these humble, ordinary, unknown artisans of the past help to set us a standard is an encouragement, for it offers prospect as well as retrospect, art as part of normal life, not something separate or reserved for superior people. It tells of a buried potential in us, cut off from expression by our post-industrial way of life. But the overflowing life-force and sensibility of exceptional talent is not thereby excluded.[13]

All of the subjects of this thesis maintained a respect for and a return to the past, and Jacques Busbee's commitment to the origins of North Carolina pottery never wavered, and his vision as early as 1917 was clear:

> We decided on the last named section as the most interesting place to begin our operations, and our reasons were these: Early in the eighteenth century some potters from Staffordshire, England had settled in this section and their descendants [were] still making ware reminiscent of the

---

[11] Leach, *Beyond East and West* 126.

[12] Juliana R. Busbee, "The Jugtown Pottery," ms 1940, Juliana Busbee Collection, Special Collections, Walter Clinton Jackson Library, University of North Carolina, Greensboro. This handwritten article was published in *Fashion Digest* in the fall if 1940 and again revised in the issue of Winter 1941. A reprinted version based on the earliest draft appears in an exhibition catalog. See Douglas DeNatale, Jane Przybysz, and Jill R. Severn, *New Ways for Old Jugs: Tradition and Innovation at the Jugtown Pottery* (Columbia: University of South Carolina, 1994) 28.

[13] Leach, *Beyond East and West* 239.

> old English shapes and glazes which connoseurs [sic] fight over in auction rooms. These potters had remained uninfluenced by the outside world for over a hundred & fifty years and their work had a character and interest unique.[14]

He and Juliana embarked on their own crusade to return the pottery to its original sound quality and enhance its artistic value: "To train the younger men in a sense of beauty, form, fitness; to keep alive the most interesting folk craft tradition in the United States today, seemed to us a task undertaken for our state and worthy of any sacrifice involved."[15] Jacques observed a decline in the quality and quantity of pots since he first examined them in the early 1900s, noting, "The potter had lost faith in himself as well as in his market. He had lost his tradition and was feebly attempting to imitate factory made stuff of the ten cent store variety in the desparate [sic] hope of getting back his market."[16] What Jacques recognized and appreciated within the traditional pottery of North Carolina Leach and Hamada did as well:

> For. . . Hamada, and me, pottery was a vocation in which we sought truth of contemporary expression as artists and as craftsmen, inheriting traditions not only from our respective native backgrounds but also from the other side of the world. . . . We made pots because we wanted to make pots. We saw new possibilities of shape, pattern and glaze in good traditions of hand-craft still extant in Japan mainly in the country potteries.[17]

All of these subjects shared a simultaneous reaction to the age of the machine and clearly set out to make changes in their own ways. This was the beginning of two

---

[14] Jacques Busbee, "Letter to the Editor," ms, ca. 1940, Juliana Busbee Collection, Special Collections, University of North Carolina, Greensboro. This unpublished archived document is transcribed within the exhibition catalog: see Douglas DeNatale, Jane Przybysz, and Jill R. Severn, *New Ways for Old Jugs: Tradition and Innovation at the Jugtown Pottery* (Columbia: University of South Carolina, 1994) 25-26.

[15] Busbee "Letter to the Editor."

[16] Busbee "Letter to the Editor."

[17] Leach, *Beyond East and West* 128.

important craft phenomena: Leach and Hamada potting in Abiko, Japan, St. Ives, England, and Mashiko, Japan over the course of several decades, and the birth of Jugtown Pottery in Seagrove, North Carolina under the leadership of the Busbees and the hands of Ben Owen. Leach reflected on his work and that of Hamada's, stating that

> The background of thought which we brought to the undertaking was that of the artist turned craftsman; or at least of the educated and thinking man perceiving the simple beauty of material, workmanship and general approach to work which had preceded the Industrial Revolution. His desire, as was mine, was to recapture some of the lost values through the use of his own hands. So it was with William Morris, Gimson and Edward Johnston. East or West, this is the counter-revolution, the refusal of the slavery of the machine. The Industrial Movement started here in England. The return wave of artist-craftsmanship from Japan had a character of its own – it had gained richness, a reflection of other and different philosophies and culture.[18]

As Japan embraced Bernard Leach as a bridge between East and West, he and Hamada bridged the old and the new as they developed as potters. The Busbees too launched a significant and now historic cultivation of rich artistic heritage in America, which came to prove that traditional vernacular North Carolina pottery independently embodied pottery practices and techniques of the ancient Far East.

A quote by Yanagi, praising the universality of enlightenment, appropriately applies to the circumstances and pioneering of the subjects of this thesis, in Asia, Britain, and the American South:

> We in Japan feel him [Leach] a brother, not a stranger at all, for ours is destined to be a country where, as modern history shews [sic], new and old, high and low, East and West, make their contact day by day. We feel that we in particular were born to solve this problem in some way or other, though in this age of disintegration and divorce in so many directions, it is a task in which the peoples of all nations must collaborate. May I quote here a Buddhist quatrain, which every Japanese pilgrim carries with him wherever he goes:
> Really there is no East, no West,

---

[18] Leach, *Beyond East and West* 144.

> Where then is the South and the North?
> Illusion makes the world close in,
> Enlightenment opens it on every side.[19]

This shared enlightenment marked the beginning of a craft revival that still thrives today.

[19] Bernard Leach, *A Potter's Book,* introduction Sōetsu Yanagi, preface Michael Cardew, (Hollywood-by-the-Sea: Transatlantic Arts, 1970) xx-xxi.

Chapter II

Mingei and the "Clay Pie Plate Quest"

While the craft movement had already gained momentum under the leadership of William Morris in England, there was no real equivalent movement in Asia or the United States until Yanagi and the Busbees began to pioneer their own respective craft revivals. As both parties focused increasingly on handmade crafts, pottery began to emerge as the cornerstone of the two movements.

Yanagi's dismissal of the West seemed to center only around the mechanization of produced goods. His intellectual curiosity extended well beyond Asia, and in the early twentieth century he began studying Western literature, art, and philosophy. He was especially interested in artists, including Rembrandt and Cezanne; he loved Whitman and Blake, and published a book on the latter with a focus on mysticism. In 1929 and 1930 Yanagi lectured at Harvard on Buddhist art and aesthetics, clearly demonstrating his intellectual involvement in the United States. Leach wrote that Yanagi "is a doorway between East and West."[1] Yanagi's interests in Post-Impressionism, Impressionism, European art, and art of the Renaissance led him to focus on primitive art. On this subject, Leach noted, "That took him gradually back to his own East, especially to Korean art and to Japanese folk art, which he may be truly said to have discovered. This

---

[1] Yanagi 93.

was not an intellectual and systematic process with him, but one of intuition dictated by an extraordinary visual perception of truth."[2]

Leach met Yanagi in 1910, the same year that Yanagi started the *Shirakaba,* or "Silver Birch Society," that for thirteen years led progressive thought in the early study of Western literature, art, and philosophy. During this time Yanagi coined the word *mingei*, meaning "art of the people," which has since then become a word in Japanese vocabulary.[3]

In 1923, Yanagi and friends potter Shōji Hamada and Kanjirō Kawai, also a potter, went to the mountain monasteries of Kōya-san and there decided to start a Japanese Craft Society called the Mingei-kai. This movement "led to the growth of a stronger movement than in England, but also to a return wave of cultural influence strengthened by a new content from the Far West." This society was very much influenced by the Japanese tea ceremony, and Leach noted, "Yanagi was not a craftsman in the sense that Morris was, he did not use his hands, but possessed the extraordinary 'seeing eye' of the best masters of Tea, developed in those coteries of fine appreciation – the Tea Rooms of Japan – on the fringes of monastic life."[4]

In 1921, Yanagi assembled a small exhibition in Tokyo of objects from the Yi Dynasty. He then began to focus on Japanese wares and conceived the idea of starting a national collection of folk arts in 1926. This museum, called the Nihon Mingei-kan,

---

[2] Yanagi 10.

[3] Yanagi 93-94.

[4] Yanagi 91.

which means the art of the people, returned to the people; its construction began in 1929. Built onto Yanagi's house, no foreign architecture was employed.[5]

Yanagi's description of the Kizaemon tea bowl, considered to be the finest tea bowl in the world and "is said to contain the essence of Tea," embodies the philosophical concept behind *mingei*. In 1931 Yanagi was shown the bowl by his friend Kanjirō Kawai:

> It was within box after box, five deep, buried in wool and wrapped in purple silk.
> When I saw it, my heart fell. A good Tea-bowl, yes, but how ordinary! So simple, no more ordinary thing could be imagined. There is not a trace or ornament, not a trace of calculation. It is just a Korean food bowl, a bowl, moreover, that a poor man would use every day – commonest crockery. A typical thing for his use; coating next to nothing; made by a poor man; an article without the flavour of personality; used carelessly by its owner; bought without pride; something anyone could have bought anywhere and everywhere. That is the nature of this bowl. The clay had been dug from the hill at the back of the house; the glaze was made with the ash from the hearth; the potter's wheel had been irregular. The shape revealed no particular thought: it was one of many. The work had been fast; the turning was rough, done with dirty hands; the throwing slipshod; the glaze had run over the foot. The throwing room had been dark. The thrower could not read. The kiln was a wretched affair; the firing careless. Sand had stuck to the pot, but nobody minded; no one invested the thing with any dreams. It was enough to make one give up working as a potter.[6]

This epiphany demonstrates Yanagi's love for the Buddhist way of life and how this simple tea bowl reflects simplicity and humility. These concepts hugely influenced Leach and Hamada, but they, just as the Busbees, were educated, artistic-minded individuals.

While the *mingei* movement flourished in Japan, the Busbees and Ben Owen traveled a similar road to their own discovery. When Jacques and Juliana discovered the simple beauty of North Carolina pottery in the early twentieth century, Juliana later reflected on what she called the "country crafts:"

---

[5] Yanagi 101-102.

[6] Yanagi 101-102.

> We came to see them as a modern Primitive expression. After we perceived that idea, life held nothing for us but to see the thing through in our own native state in our own way. So we hypnotized ourselves into believing that the Jugtown Pottery was the one thing in life to work with and for and through. I had always loved the soft grey [sic] pickle jars and crocks and pitchers for flower arrangements – particularly for things from the fields and woods. We believed that a little art direction to the country potter who made these things would bring a new industry to our state and rescue a craft that was fast disappearing.[7]

This observation, though clearly not as dramatic as Yanagi's, demonstrates Juliana's passion for the making of Jugtown pottery, which culminated in the work of Ben Owen and was what Juliana coined as the "Clay Pie Plate Quest."[8]

Yanagi embraced all handmade crafts, including furniture-making, weaving, and basketry, but his writings on pottery particularly influenced Leach and Hamada. In 1939, Yanagi wrote:

> Japan is a land of potters. Smoke rises from kilns all over the country. Potters are numerous, and their pots innumerable. Unfortunately the innate beauty of their work has suddenly deteriorated. The techniques and materials and men remain, but good pots are vanishing. Shape and pattern have become false. It seems that good ware for everyday use, as in the past, can no longer be produced. A small amount of unspoiled stoneware made for local use remains, such as that of Naeshirogawa. But life has altered and the local demand has vanished, so that even in these last strongholds one cannot say how long the local traditions will last.[9]

Yanagi and the Busbees shared the desire to protect and maintain the tradition of pottery during the rise of the machine, and both parties stressed that the craft was not a quaint frill for pastime and sentimentality. Rather, the pots represented real life, from earthly materials for real utilization and use. Yanagi explained:

---

[7] Busbee, "The Jugtown Pottery" 28.

[8] Busbee, "The Jugtown Pottery" 28.

[9] Yanagi 169.

> These qualities spring from their way of life and its honesty and naturalness. For that reason I decry the patronizing attitude with which they have hitherto been regarded. They do not employ machinery to increase output, but they have a natural power absent in modern factories. Time means little to them, and this timelessness releases this natural power. I want to tell everyone that this naturalness ought to be valued and nursed, for it is life itself.[10]

Yanagi remained unaware of the North Carolina endeavor, and continued to decry Western crafts. Little did he know that vernacular North Carolina pottery possessed the simplicity and even irregularity of Japanese hakame pottery. On this subject, Yanagi wrote:

> It has no parallel in the West. One cannot help wondering why, but I think these may be the reasons. Western peoples seem to be repelled by roughness and more attracted by the finished, the smooth, and the regular. The development of Western science might be attributed to this same love of the precise. The Oriental, conversely, seeks the natural, the irregular, and the free, a tendency that finds natural expression in things such as *hakeme*. In short, where the Occidental sees only disharmony in *hakeme*, the Oriental sees harmony.[11]

Jacques Busbee, also not a craftsman himself, similarly described North Carolina vernacular pottery as he found it early in the twentieth century: "Perhaps the most amazing thing about this pottery is its close similarity in shape to the pottery of primitive periods in various parts of the earth. But primitiveness is a state of mind, not a point in time nor yet a place."[12]

Leach, Hamada, the Busbees, and Owen find truth in beauty, an element of Yanagi's philosophy, but not without intellectualism. Leach wrote:

---

[10] Yanagi 170.

[11] Yanagi 172.

[12] Jacques Busbee, "A Colonial Hangover," ts, ca. late 1920s, Juliana Busbee Collection, Special Collections, Walter Clinton Jackson Library, University of North Carolina, Greensboro.

> Throughout these pages there is no distinction between truth and beauty, nor basically, between fine and applied art. In Yanagi's "Kingdom of Beauty" all varieties of art – primitive, folk, aristocratic, religious, or individual – meet in equality at a topless, bottomless, round table. This, I think, has never been stated before and may indeed come to be accepted in a mature and round world.[13]

The fundamentals of beauty held by all subjects of this examination intermingle *mingei* concepts with intellectual craftsmanship, and Yanagi's own writings demonstrate an appreciation of line, proportion, and symmetry while he still defends the irregularity of the unselfconscious pot. Juliana noted that the combination of tradition with an open artistic mind and instrumental potters made Jugtown a success:

> The outstanding quality of these young men is their unswerving loyalty to the Jugtown Pottery in their work – their faithfulness of duty, their open minds and their great ability as artist craftsmen. Under the instruction of Jacques Busbee they are learning the fundamentals of all the plastic arts – sense of beauty in line and proportion.[14]

Yanagi's and Juliana's writings both reflect similar understandings of the importance of pattern, which begins in nature. In 1952, Yanagi wrote:

> . . . so close, I feel, is the relationship between transformation into beauty and transformation into pattern. To divine the significance of pattern is the same as to understand beauty itself. . . . Pattern is not realistic depiction. It is a "vision" of what is reflected by the intuition. . . . Pattern is non-realistic. It may be called irrational. . . . A pattern is a picture of the essence of an object, and object's very life; its beauty in that life. . . . Good patterns are simple; if they are cluttered, they are not yet patterns.[15]

Yanagi believed that the laws of nature defined the laws of craftsmanship. Proportion, symmetry, and order are found in natural things, and thus represent the foundation of man's inspiration:

---

[13] Yanagi 89.

[14] Busbee, "The Jugtown Pottery."

[15] Yanagi 113-114.

> Symmetry is a natural and inevitable principle for pattern, since it has its distant and profound origins in nature itself. In nature a basic symmetry can be observed, for example in branch, leaf, and flower. They represent order. Order means numbers, laws. Laws give a point of repose. . . . Without symmetry simplification cannot be achieved. Good patterns cannot be made without observance of laws.[16]

Juliana Busbee came to the same conclusion after spending an afternoon with a potter from Asheville, North Carolina:

> . . . how one could know – how if beauty was a matter of taste – or merely in the beholder's eye – who was to say what was Right – and what wrong. He gave me a rule that has simplified my entire life. It is a single little rule – consisting of fine words. If what you are judging conforms to these five words, you are safe – unity, rhythm, harmony, balance, fitness.[17]

Jacques Busbee also argued that the fundamentals of form and proportion within beauty:

> North Carolina pottery is of no consequence in itself, without beauty. Being made of N.C. dirt adds nothing to its value unless it is embodied into the forms of Art. For as a matter of fact the whole art *is* form. We call it form in pottery and sculpture: proportion in architecture: good drawing in paintings: feeling or soul in music: style in literature. Pottery without beauty of form cannot be made interesting by color glaze or decoration. The state may accept it from misplaced pride but the world never will.[18]

Yanagi's teachings and philosophies remained a constant influence on Leach and Hamada, as the Busbees infused as much as their own similar beliefs into Jugtown. All believed in the humble character of the craftsman, and lack of pretentiousness in the making and selling of wares. Yanagi wrote that "Expensive fine crafts for the few are not of the true character of craftsmanship, which, being for everyman, are appropriately

---

[16] Yanagi 116.

[17] Busbee, "Our Native Crafts."

[18] Busbee, "Letter to the Editor" 25-26.

decorated with the patterns of everyman."[19] And Leach maintained the mantra in "Good work proceeding from the whole man, heart, head, and hand, in proper balance."[20]

While Jacques and Juliana were not practicing Buddhists, many of their philosophies hinted at the selflessness of the Buddhist practice. Juliana noted, "People who work with their own hands are seldom greedy or grasping. The creation of beauty does something for one's very soul."[21] Yanagi studied the Buddhist thought of jiriki, meaning "self power" and tariki, meaning "other power," reaching a point where the combined difference is fused and therefore cancelled. Leach explained, "That led him to the consideration of beauty and ugliness in art and to the need of an aesthetic that embraces both. Thus he arrived at his Kingdom of Beauty."[22] Leach and Hamada especially appreciated in Yanagi:

> . . . the strength of his vision, his direct eye for beauty. Critics, in general, may be divided into those who collect, and who get bogged down in collecting, and those who split hairs of aesthetics. Yanagi escaped both pitfalls. He employed no intellectual foot-rule. His was an immediate and intuitive faculty of an extraordinary kind. His actions followed fast upon the heels of this perception.[23]

Yanagi did not see knowledge as a necessary means to understanding beauty, writing, "I know many famous art critics who have no feeling of beauty, and cannot therefore respect their knowledge. They may be learned, but it avails nothing."[24]

---

[19] Yanagi 117.

[20] Yanagi 95.

[21] Juliana R. Busbee, notes on lecture at Bennett College, April 20, 1942, ms, Juliana Busbee Collection, Walter Clinton Jackson Library, University of North Carolina, Greensboro.

[22] Yanagi 10.

[23] Yanagi 10.

[24] Yanagi 110.

In 1940, Yanagi wrote:

> In understanding beauty, intuition is more of the essence than intellectual perception. The reversal of these two faculties stultifies vision. To 'see' is to go direct to the core; to know the facts about an object of beauty is to go around the periphery. Intellectual discrimination is less essential to an understanding of beauty than the power of intuition that precedes it. Beauty is a kind of mystery, which is why it cannot be grasped adequately through the intellect.[25]

Yanagi believed that seeing an object without preconceived notions was crucial in understanding the true beauty within an object:

> First, put aside the desire to judge immediately; acquire the habit of just looking. Second, do not treat the object as an object for the intellect. Third, just be ready to receive, passively, without interposing yourself. If you can void your mind of all intellectualization, like a clear mirror that simply reflects, all the better. This nonconceptualization – the Zen state of *mushin* ("no mind") – may seem to represent a negative attitude, but from it springs the true ability to contact things directly and positively.[26]

Not published until 1972, this passage shares an intriguing sentiment found within an article written by Juliana Busbee, also in 1940. In describing how her discovery of an ordinary clay pie plate inspired her quest that led to the creation of Jugtown, she wrote:

> Even though I lost my head, I found a fresh enthusiasm. After all, isn't modern art just that: losing one's head? Haven't artists been using their intellects instead of their eye sight? As I understand the modern trend of Art—it is the impulse to wipe the retina clean—thereby seeing with it instead of the brain. And refusing to be influenced by the art critics—seeing as instructed.[27]

Clearly the Busbees also avoided the pitfall of the critics, and applied their intuition as strongly in their endeavor at Jugtown, when all others thought that it was a lost cause.

---

[25] Yanagi 110.

[26] Yanagi 112.

[27] Busbee, "The Jugtown Pottery."

Bernard Leach assembled Yanagi's writings for the make-up of *The Unknown Craftsman* to communicate the essence of *mingei* to lovers of craftsmanship beyond the East:

> . . . readers in the Western world may penetrate that which Buddhism contains for the seeker looking for the meaning of beauty in the face of truth. His chapters are addressed, in the main, to Oriental craftsmen and lovers of craftsmanship, but they are concerned with the very nature of human life and work and are therefore of vital importance to men and women all over the world in our present stage of evolutionary change.[28]

Because of his relationship with Leach, Yanagi did recognize the beginning of a broader cultural awareness between East and West. But both maintained the belief that the West needed to understand the fundamental philosophies within the Asian culture:

> The publication of this Buddhist aesthetic is more important because it is a part of that deeper exchange between East and West upon which the pattern of the cultural unification of mankind depends. Many young minds in the West are ripening to feel and eventually understand in their hearts that which moves and inspires Oriental man.[29]

Although he filled himself with a sense of pride and devotion to his native country, Yanagi rejected the "selfish nationalism" that seemed to plague America. He grew to recognize a closing gap between East and West, mainly through his acquaintance with Bernard Leach:

> Happily, each nation has in its own art an expression of its particular perception of beauty. By looking at the art of all peoples, by loving and respecting it, the nations of the world can, I believe, achieve mutual spiritual harmony. . . . there are beautiful objects capable of breaking down the barriers between east and west and between north and south.[30]

---

[28] Yanagi 88.

[29] Yanagi 88.

[30] Yanagi 156.

With the background of the *mingei* concept and the Busbees' philosophies firmly established, an examination of the pots themselves will illustrate striking similarities in fundamental form and artistic intent.

Chapter III

Philosophies Translated in Clay: Nature, Intellect, and Pots

> "The purity of the wild flower and the unspoiled countryside so often puts to shame the high culture of town and court. There is a wild and untamable beauty in man when he is in harmony with nature." – Sōetsu Yanagi[1]

The settings in which the Busbees, Owen, Leach, and Hamada lived and worked are reflected in the natural beauty of their pots. In order to fulfill their artistic visions, all subjects sought lifestyles conducive to hard work of the hands within rural settings. Their pots represent more than utilitarian function: they embody the earth, water, fire, and landscape of their surroundings. To escape an industrialized world, the artists fled to the countryside and established homes where their work would flourish, untainted, and where they could apply their philosophies not only to their pots, but to their entire lifestyles. Where once the country potter simply made pots for everyday use, these subjects returned from the city to the land to satiate what they felt was a dying form of life, nature, and ultimately, art. What they brought to these settings were their intellects, with friends and acquaintances coming and going, resulting in retreat-like communes where ideas, art, and fellowship were shared.

In 1916, Leach constructed his kiln in Abiko on Yanagi's property. Nearly twenty-five miles from Tokyo, Abiko served as the perfect spot for a potting lifestyle, and embodied all that Yanagi and Leach sought away from industrialization. And later,

---

[1] Yanagi 88.

Hamada's visit to Abiko served as his inspiration to become a potter. Yanagi's thatched home overlooked Lake Teganuma, a picturesque body of water, six miles long, that was surrounded by reeds and abundant with fish. Close by lived several members of the Shirakaba Society, including the novelist Shiga Naoya and Mushanokōji Saneatsu, "another writer and educationalist who also looked to the West, whose New Village scheme of agricultural and educational reform was an attempt to provide a unified way of life."[2] Painter Kishida Ryūsei was also a regular visitor. Emmanuel Cooper, a contemporary artist, potter, and biographer of Bernard Leach, described the scene at Abiko not exactly as a commune, but a place where "like-minded artists and writers standing in opposition to contemporary materialist values" could come together.[3]

Yanagi's home contained all objects that he loved from East and West: Chinese, Korean, and Japanese pots, Rodin sculptures, a grand piano with European music scores on the stand, Van Gogh, Matisse, and Blake paintings. He and his family ate their meals from Leach's hand-made pots.[4] Leach's studio on the property demonstrated his own merging of Chinese, Japanese, and European styles. His stoneware kiln from Kenzan was manageable for one man, and Leach also constructed a small raku[5] kiln. Abiko offered Leach a place where spirituality, art, and intellectualism converged with his potting. While he shared a quiet life with Yanagi, Yanagi's artist wife, and their children, Leach's

---

[2] Emmanuel Cooper, *Bernard Leach: Life & Work* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003) 118.

[3] Cooper 118.

[4] Cooper 118.

[5] Raku pottery originated in Japan and is closely associated with wares used in the traditional Japanese tea ceremony. Raku pottery is traditionally hand-built, dipped in a special glaze, fired, and immediately cooled, often producing a cracked surface. The irregularities of the cracks are much revered in this type of pottery.

work at the wheel and kiln led to a deepened knowledge of and a more serious approach to his craft.[6]

Stylistically, Leach began to concentrate on the form of Chinese Sung dynasty wares, which incorporated little decoration. Prior to his time at Abiko, Leach experimented with raku, porcelain, stoneware and earthenware and applied varying shapes and sizes. But form became his main focus, and austere glazes like pale green celadon and black-brown temmokus complimented his tea sets, vases, bowls, and plates.[7]

Hamada first saw Leach's work at an exhibition in 1914 in Tokyo, and was greatly impressed. An educated and technically skilled potter, Hamada was schooled in ceramics at the Tokyo Institute of Technology. In 1919 he wrote Leach at Abiko, asking for an opportunity to visit. Leach agreed. Hamada's visit to Abiko lasted for three days, and would mark the beginning of a partnership in potting that would evolve into a lifetime of shared technique, forms, glazes, philosophies, and friendship. His time spent at Abiko and continued correspondence with Leach inspired Hamada to devote his life to the making of pottery.

Leach's workshop at Abiko was destroyed by fire shortly after Hamada's visit in 1919; all was lost, including notes, glaze recipes, designs, and perhaps most tragically, a perfect potter's lifestyle in the countryside of Japan. But Leach's experience at Abiko ingrained in him a part of Japan that would forever influence his pots. Years later, Hamada reflected:

> . . . . it is from Old Japan Leach drew inspiration for his work, but more than that, for us, the deeper meaning is that he understands the needs of New Japan: he shows in his art what they are. Living with us he felt our

---

[6] Cooper 120.

[7] Cooper 121.

> yearnings, our thirst, our struggles and our labours [sic]: if he had not had such experience how would he be able to understand our innermost needs, or our position with regard to our old ideas, or our respect for the religion and art of other countries, or our self-awakening, or the ideals we embrace, or the things we try to realize?[8]

Hamada's questions would be answered by the remainder of Leach's life as a potter. The essence of Japan would forever remain within Leach, and much later, would penetrate potters of the American South.

In 1920, Leach decided to return to England, where he would establish a pottery at St. Ives, a rural area 300 miles from London. Hamada jumped at the opportunity to join in this endeavor, and Leach enthusiastically accepted. St. Ives greatly contrasted the lush and idyllic environment of Abiko, but shared the fundamental characteristics of solitude, remoteness, and beauty of setting. One could reach St. Ives by train from London, a journey that then took eight to nine hours. The small town was nestled within rolling hills, inhabited by pilchard and herring fishermen and tin miners. The landscape was rocky and dramatic, the streets were winding paths of stone, and had attracted many noteworthy artists over a number of years, including Turner in 1811 and 1813. Other visitors included James McNeill Whistler and Walter Sickert: the town was also considered a gathering place for literary figures such as Leslie and Julia Stephen. By 1920 St. Ives was considered a thriving art community, where its seascapes and landscapes inspired painters and writers.[9]

Leach established for himself a small house, called Providence House but referred to as the Counts House, one mile away from St. Ives and separate from the home of his wife and five children at Draycott Terrace in town. Here Leach created an environment of

---

[8] Leach, *Beyond East and West* 131.

[9] Cooper 139.

his own, again including objects such as Chinese carpets, Japanese pots, English and Eastern furniture: he enjoyed a view of Godrevy lighthouse just across the bay.[10] The pottery studio was built, including a room for Hamada's modest lodgings. As in Abiko, the setting was replete with natural beauty, simple living, and familial interaction. Hamada played daily with Leach's children, and all enjoyed trips to the beach and hikes in the hills.

The pots that Leach and Hamada created at St. Ives consisted of raku, lead-glazed earthenware, stoneware, and porcelain. The shapes showed Eastern and Western influences. Some pieces embody the simple lines as seen in Japanese tea ceremony wares; decoration with foliage was reminiscent of Chinese work, and the traditional slip-decorated ware were inspired by indigenous English ceramics of the traditional country potter. Both potters maintained traditional Japanese potting practices, but became influenced by potter Reginald Wells, who was an English potter of the early 1900s and inspired the two to explore various slip-decorating techniques.[11]

In 1923 Hamada decided to return to his native country and establish a pottery of his own in the rural area of Mashiko, a potting village known for its traditional potting practices, located seventy miles north of Tokyo. Hamada was drawn by the simple beauty of the wares, which incorporated little artistic intent from the potters who created them. Pots were thrown on kick wheels with no mechanical help, and were sold mostly in Tokyo.[12] By this time, Hamada enjoyed wide recognition for his craft and mastery of the traditional Mashiko potting tradition. Leach visited Mashiko in the early 1930s, and lived

---

[10] Cooper 141.

[11] Cooper 147.

[12] Cooper 187.

in a thatched gatehouse on Hamada's estate. His lodgings consisted of one room for living, and one room for throwing. Together, they produced over one thousand pots in the Mashiko tradition. Again, the environment in which they lived and worked embodied the fundamentals of tradition and beauty within natural settings, which surrounded their work in the past in Abiko and at St. Ives. Leach spent time with Hamada and his wife, their children, and Hamada's father. They shared meals together, listened to Japanese music, Gregorian chants, and even Negro spirituals that Leach introduced to them.[13] As Hamada enjoyed tremendous success and became internationally known, he preserved the past, reflected in his estate, which featured five historic buildings that he bought and rebuilt to maintain traditional Japanese architecture and design.[14]

On May 1, 1917, Jacques Busbee arrived at the Seagrove train station in Moore County, North Carolina with the intention of locating the makers of the pottery that Juliana discovered at a country fair in 1915.[15] Aspiring painters and lovers of art, the Busbees had spent one year living in New York City, but the impression of the North Carolina pie plate proved to be more than a distant Southern memory for them. While in New York, their interest and curiosity in North Carolina pottery continued to grow, and Jacques' trip to a remote area of the country would mark the beginning of the Jugtown endeavor.

The locals, very suspicious of this foreigner, feared that Jacques was a German spy.[16] He found the potters languishing, due to prohibition, factory jobs which lured the

---

[13] Cooper 188.

[14] Cooper 266

[15] Jean Crawford, *Jugtown Pottery: History and Design* (Winston-Salem: John F. Blair, 1964) 13.

[16] Crawford 15.

rural dwellers into the larger cities for work, and the availability of mass-produced wares. Jacques became acquainted with a local potter named Josh Sheffield (pronounced Shuffle), who lived in the Sheffield township of Moore County, twenty-five miles from Seagrove, where Jugtown would be established. Sheffield at that time harvested his own clay with the use of a mule, turned on a kick wheel, and fired his wares in a groundhog kiln.[17] He assisted Jacques in researching the local craft, and Jacques later reflected, "We slept on corded bedsteads in log cabins, we ate the simple food that was offered with lordly hospitality, we rummaged in lofts and smokehouses and cellars for ware, and what could not be bought was sketched or photographed."[18]

Jacques' findings filled him with inspiration and a vision, which he carried back to New York to share with Juliana. This vision came to fruition when Jacques moved to Moore County, leaving Juliana behind in New York to run a store to sell the wares. She abandoned the city in 1926 and joined Jacques, Ben Owen, and the rural dwellers of Seagrove for a life of simplicity, community, and pots.

The Busbees established a log cabin and pottery workshop and officially named it Jugtown. Juliana's writings continually reflect how strongly the rural settings and the life of the country dwellers moved her. She noted her observation of the farmers harvesting wheat, "the babies parked on a quilt under a shade tree – boys in faded blue overalls with the large water jug & a gourd dipper. . . ."[19] She equated this scene to a painting from the

---

[17] A groundhog kiln, very much like the Japanese anagama kiln, has a low ceiling and contains a wood-burning firebox at one end with a chimney on the other end, classifying it as a cross-draft kiln. Pots are positioned on the floor for firing, exposing them to wood-ash, which flies through the kiln during firing, leaving markings on the pots. See Mark Hewitt and Nancy Sweezy, *The Potter's Eye: Art & Tradition in North Carolina Pottery* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005) 19.

[18] Jacques Busbee, "Jugtown Pottery: Its Origin and Development – An Intimate Touch of the Local Color That Is Molded Into This Historic American Ware," *The Ceramic Age* October 1929: 128.

Barbizon school. This inspiration was seen within the cabin in which they lived, shared meals with Ben Owen, and entertained droves of friends, writers, artists, and intellectuals. They cooked and ate from Jugtown ware; locally woven curtains adorned the windows, and they slept on a rope bed. Books were everywhere and there was no telephone. Nancy Sweezy, a potter who later ran Jugtown after the deaths of the Busbees, noted ". . . they created an environment that people wanted to be in, wanted to be a part of. They made pottery as it was made in the nineteenth century: potters dug clay and ground it in a mule-drawn pug mill; stood on an earth floor to turn the ware on treadle kick-wheels; used wood to burn it in groundhog kilns." Of the physical buildings, Sweezy noted: "The buildings were all made of hand-hewn logs, heated by fireplaces, decorated with homespun weavings and furnished with chairs and tables made locally."[20]

The lifestyle of the Busbees in their rural environment made many visitors feel a sense of foreignness when they stepped onto the Jugtown property. Betty Graham, a local reporter, best described the experience:

> . . . we pulled up before a charming log cabin built on simple lines so like – and yet so utterly unlike – anything seen in the entire countryside. Floating through the intense summer heat were the strains of Chaliapin's Volga Boat Song and on the long porch across the front of the Jugtown cabin were bright orange flower pots filled with velvety purple petunias, and in a tall floor jar by the door was a branch of pine – the whole thing so native and yet so strangely Japonesque – that it took my breath.[21]

As Jacques Busbee worked with the local potters to revive the local pottery tradition, he began to identify a connection in form and color to Asian pottery, and began

---

[19] Juliana Busbee, "The Discovery of Folk Pottery," ms, nd, Mrs. Jacques Busbee Collection, North Carolina Department of Archives and History.

[20] DeNatale, Przybysz, and Severn 58.

[21] Betty Graham, *News and Observer* 31 August, 1924: n.pag; also quoted by DeNatale, Przybysz, and Severn 17.

to apply Chinese translations in color and form to the Jugtown ware. He and Ben studied Asian potting practices, and traveled to museums in New York and Washington, D.C. to see the wares of these other cultures, which clearly shared many characteristic of Jugtown pottery. As the natural settings of rural North Carolina and the vernacular tradition shaped and colored the Jugtown pots, and as the lifestyle of simplicity combined with a heightened element of intellectual awareness, the Jugtown endeavor began to make a deeper statement that moved beyond North Carolina and became more universal. This observation is equally applicable to Leach and Hamada as they potted in varying environments. The fundamentals of form and color remained steady, but the direction of their thinking culminated in an art form that would become understood beyond national barriers. Sharing in a chosen isolation from urban settings, all of these subjects surrounded themselves within settings of natural beauty, with only books, the landscape, and the clay within it from which to draw inspiration.

Chapter IV

Technical Similarities within Vernacular North Carolina and Ancient Asian Potting

> "Technical knowledge is the necessary foundation on which the future artist potter must build." – Jacques Busbee[1]

While Leach, Hamada, the Busbees, and Owen absorbed the traditional potting practices embedded within the cultures in which they lived and worked, all strove to build upon those fundamentals as they incorporated an artistic element into their pots. All felt that the entire process, digging the clay, turning it and then burning it, embodied the essence of art. Color, form, and function came together within a final product from their kilns. At this time, Leach and Hamada focused on the potting practices of their native cultures, with no mention or even knowledge of the North Carolina traditions. Potters and enthusiasts looked to Leach and Hamada's work for the true eastern essence of potting, while Jacques Busbee made the connection almost instantly. On his discovery, Jacques noted, ". . . . as he [the North Carolina potter] turns, almost all of the shapes of antique Chinese pottery flicker before you in the technique of hand turning. What I mean is that Chinese and Japanese shapes are structural in the sense that they are the forms almost automatically developed by the technique employed."[2]

---

[1] Busbee, "Letter to the Editor."

[2] Jacques Busbee, Letter to Juliana Busbee, quoted in Breese, Jessie Martin. "Jugtown, N.C." *Country Life* October 1922: 64.

Mark Hewitt, a contemporary North Carolina potter and scholar, has drawn parallels between North Carolina and Asian pottery, citing similarities in form, function, practice, tradition, and history between the two potting cultures. He has investigated the strange disconnect that, until recently, has existed between the study of North Carolina pottery traditions and those of the Far East: "It is curious . . . that the spectacular and peculiarly similar ceramic heritage found in our own backyard has largely been overlooked. Rather than travel west to find the East, I suggest, rather, that potters head South."[3] In a recent exhibition catalog entitled *The Potter's Eye: Art and Tradition in North Carolina Pottery,* Hewitt notes that "The revival of North Carolina traditional pottery in Seagrove in the 1920's paralleled the impact of the *Mingei* Movement in Japan, but was less zealous and ideological, favoring a more pragmatic, adaptive, and entrepreneurial approach." What knowledge Leach claimed that he needed to spread to those in the West, North Carolina potters and the Busbees already had:

> Models of the very types of pots that Leach so admired in Japan and elsewhere in Asia were already in America's own backyard but were consequently largely ignored by contemporary potters . . . . the Asian component of Leach's style was already part of the North Carolina tradition, having been absorbed independently during the revival in the 1920's at Jugtown through the Busbees and, most interestingly, much earlier in the first part of the 19th century, when elements of East Asian pottery, including glazes and similar kilns, became an integral part of American vernacular pottery. The South did not need Leach, for it had already absorbed some of what he was preaching 150 years earlier.[4]

Hewitt is perhaps the first scholar to refute Leach's observations on the pottery of the West.

---

[3] Mark Hewitt, "The Poetry in North Carolina Pottery," essay in the museum catalog *North Carolina Pottery: The Collection of the Mint Museums*, ed. Barbara Stone Perry (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2004) 29.

[4] Mark Hewitt, "The North Carolina Tradition in the Twentieth Century," *The Potter's Eye: Art & Tradition in North Carolina Pottery* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005) 167-168.

Michael Cardew, a potter who studied under Bernard Leach, observed that Leach and Hamada, and many potters for that matter, looked to ancient Chinese and Japanese potters in order to learn the "secrets" of those traditions. But those traditions and those in vernacular North Carolina pottery simply demonstrated how rural people once utilized their natural resources, available materials, and skills for practical, utilitarian purposes.[5]

Once Jacques Busbee discovered Ben Owen as a potter who grasped the traditional North Carolina potting practices, he helped young Ben hone his skills. The Busbees' vision never wavered: they intended to preserve and enhance what they found in North Carolina and build upon the existing product. Technique remained a top priority in Ben's training, and Jacques recognized that his youth served as an advantage in the Jugtown endeavor. He described the older potters as "hard-baked" men who were set in their ways with little or no interest in the aesthetic component of the pots. He found that Ben and the other young potters in the area were more malleable, open to "art training," and capable of producing pots worthy of recognition beyond the Jugtown shop.[6]

Charles Zug, a scholar of North Carolina pottery, noted that Jacques' decision to incorporate styles inherent in the pottery of the Han, T'ang, and Sung Dynasties resulted from an innate recognition of the connection of these pots to those of North Carolina folk pottery. Ben Owen comprehended these Asian models, which embodied strength in form, monochromatic glazes, and little surface decoration.[7] These characteristics of North Carolina pottery were then unknown to Sōetsu Yanagi, who in 1954 wrote, "Western pots

---

[5] Leach, *A Potter's Book* xxiii-xxiv.

[6] Busbee, "Letter to the Editor."

[7] Charles G. Zug III, *Turners and Burners: The Folk Potters of North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1986) 393.

are almost always decorated with pattern. The beauty of the plain pot was almost unperceived, and shapes were rooted in symmetry."[8]

Lucille H. Owen, Ben's widow, recalled in an interview the impact that Jacques' training had on Ben and on the entire potting community. Until the Busbees arrived in Seagrove, only utilitarian pottery was produced, including jugs, crocks, and "demijohns," but Ben's exposure to Asian wares through the studying of books, traveling to museums with Jacques, and applying the techniques of these cultures greatly influenced the area and other potters. Ben and Jacques worked together to develop new glazes, and the Owen family embraced these activities as an opportunity for Ben, the community, and for their vernacular craft.[9]

While introducing new forms and glazes into the pottery, the Busbees maintained the traditional ways of producing the pottery, using the old pug mill and a mule for grinding clay, turning on the treadle wheel, and firing in the groundhog kiln. These tools produced true handmade pots at a time when modern machinery could have been used in production. Zug labeled Jacques a "true classicist" who did not succumb to the temptation to apply thousands of forms and colors to Jugtown pottery. Rather, he adhered to a restrained palette which was applied to traditional North Carolina and Asian forms. Zug stated, "I think that Jugtown made is more distinctive and probably aesthetically superior to anyone else."[10]

From the Busbee's collection of books on Chinese pottery, Jacques became most interested in the pots of the Han, T'ang, and Sung dynasties, and the ware produced at

---

[8] Yanagi 124.

[9] Lucille H. Owen, interview, DeNatale, Prsybysz, and Severn 39.

[10] Charles Zug, interview, DeNatale, Prsybysz, and Severn 32.

Jugtown began to include both foreign-inspired glazes like Chinese blue, and traditional North Carolina glazes, including dogwood, and frogskin. A mirror-black glaze was applied on shapes including Han jars, dragon vases, Chinese wine jars, Persian jars, and Chinese urns, among the more traditional Southern vernacular bowls, plates, and jars.[11] Brilliant orange pieces reminiscent of the Busbee's original discovery of North Carolina pottery were a staple of Jugtown, which highlighted the brilliant color of the clay. Other glazes included "tobacco spit," yellow, white, and salt glazes.[12]

Jacques' interest in Asian wares came naturally due to the technical connection between North Carolina and Asian potting. The salt glaze tradition in North Carolina came from German vernacular pottery, which spread to England and then to North Carolina when the English settled in that area of the United States. These southern potters, like Japanese rural potters, fired their wares in wood burning groundhog kilns, producing pots with wood-ash and salt drippings. Medieval Japanese kiln sites of Shigaraki, Tamba, Echizen, and Tokoname shared many similarities with those of North Carolina,[13] and served as inspiration to Leach and Hamada. It is important to note the similarities between Japanese anagama and Southern groundhog kilns: both structures, built closely to the ground, have low ceilings and contain a wood-burning box at one end for wood firing, and a chimney on the opposite end, creating a cross-draft. Pots are placed on the floor before firing, and become exposed to flying wood-ash during firing. This process results in the creation of beautiful markings on the pots.

---

[11] Charlotte V. Brown, "Tradition in Transition: Art Pottery in North Carolina, 1900-1940," Perry 20.

[12] Crawford 81-82.

[13] Hewitt, "Poetry in North Carolina Pottery" 28.

The potting practices employed at Jugtown began to distinguish North Carolina as a place of rich artistic and cultural significance. Leonidas Betts, curator of ceramics at the North Carolina State University Visual Arts Center stated, "Jugtown is an important part of the arts and craft movement in the twentieth century. It has great significance because it utilized a moribund technology that it somehow miraculously rescued and then wonderfully integrated with an oriental aesthetic."[14] Although the Busbees and Owen were clearly aware of Asian potting traditions, no connection is apparent between them and Leach and Hamada. Sharing in an endeavor so similar yet so far apart, these subjects dug clay from the riverbanks, threw on the traditional potter's wheel, fired their pots in wood-burning kilns, and never crossed paths.

[14] Leonidas J. Betts, interview, DeNatale, Prsybysz, and Severn 64.

Chapter V

Beyond *Mingei*: Education, Artistic Consciousness, and Entrepreneurship

> "A new kind of studio- or artist-craftsman has sprung into existence. He belongs neither to the peasantry nor to industry." – Bernard Leach[1]

The subjects of this thesis synthesized the essential, basic fundamentals of utilitarian pottery with intellectualism, resulting in practices and endeavors beyond an unconscious creativity of wares. Education ultimately separated Leach, Hamada, Owen, and the Busbees from the country potters who originally inspired them, and their pots began to represent a triadic relationship between function, art, and entrepreneurship. They were not the illiterate country potters whom Yanagi so affectionately described as the embodiment of *mingei* philosophy. The *mingei* concept guided Leach and Hamada in the nascent stages of their craftsmanship, just as the primitiveness of North Carolina "dirt dishes" inspired the Busbees. But their knowledge of art and the context in which they lived and worked generated a transcendence from the resolutely simple approach to potting to the purely erudite, flavored with an entrepreneurial spirit.

Had Leach, Hamada, Owen, and the Busbees not been educated, it is reasonable to surmise that none of them would have become craftspeople of world renown. They applied their knowledge of art, philosophy, and history to their pots, creating a hybrid of old and new, functionality and aesthetics. They preserved tradition while incorporating a sense of artistic consciousness to their work; this consciousness was what Leach

---

[1] Leach, *Beyond East and West* 225.

identified as a troubling conflict between Yanagi's *mingei* philosophy and Leach's responsibility as a potter to preserve those fundamental practices. Clearly, it was impossible. The educated craftsman, self-aware and conscious of a standard of beauty, cannot escape his own mind in order to reach the essential *mingei*. On the educated potter, Leach reflected, "In many cases, as in my own, the training has been that of an artist and has been preceded by a reasonable degree of education and possibly culture. The result has been a great widening of outlook in the world of pots and the consequent birth of personal synthesis in form and pattern."[2]

Bernard Leach was a highly educated and well-traveled individual. Born in Hong Kong in 1887, he began his life of travel and education early, due to the prominence of his family, his father being a High Court judge in Singapore. In 1897 Leach attended Beaumont Jesuit College, and later in 1903, he attended Slade School of Art, where he studied drawing under Henry Tonks. Realizing a desire to become a painter, Leach pursued an education in art, but family pressures directed him to more practical professional endeavors. In 1905, Leach studied in Manchester for entry into Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank. However, his experience in the banking business left him bored and deprived of his artistic tendencies. In 1908, he studied under Frank Brangwyn at the London School of Art. In 1910, Leach met friend and potter Kenkichi Tomimoto and the following year, he met Yanagi and members of the Shirakaba Society, including potter Ogata Kenzan. It was these interactions that served as the beginning of Leach's career as a potter.[3]

---

[2] Leach, *Beyond East and West* 225.

[3] Leach, *Beyond East and West* 311-312.

Hamada too enjoyed the benefits of a sophisticated education beginning at a young age. His father encouraged him to study English, and Hamada cultivated a keen interest in and knowledge of Western art, both fine and applied. [4] He purchased many fine pieces of Western furniture, with which he decorated his homes throughout his life. While both Hamada and Leach admired Western (primarily European) painting and furniture, their interest did not extend to Western ceramics, other than the English influences they encountered while at St. Ives.

Hamada's interest in Japanese ceramics led him to study at the Tokyo School of Technology.[5] Under the direction of potter Itaya Hazan, Hamada learned the technical practices of contemporary ceramists. While he learned the scientific components of glazing and firing within the classroom, he began to take notice of Leach's work, which Hamada viewed in exhibitions at the Mikasa Gallery in Ginza, the Ruisseau Gallery and at the Sankaidō in Japan.[6] Hamada practiced his throwing and firing skills until he graduated in 1914, and then contacted Leach to request a visit to Abiko.

Together, Hamada and Leach embarked on their lives as intellectual potters, interacting with members of the Shirakaba Society, lecturing, and exhibiting. Their rural lifestyles embodied simplicity, but their education and artistic awareness propelled them to a status beyond the country potter. They educated others on the philosophies behind their craft, and they also realized the importance of their own livelihood. They were savvy in their approach to selling and exhibiting their wares, and they gained an audience

---

[4] Cooper 128.

[5] The Tokyo School of Technology was later named the Tokyo Institute of Technology.

[6] Cooper 128.

of buyers that continued to grow, and they continued to profit. Leach's publications provided supportive intellectual materials to his pots.

Leach's first one-man show occurred in 1914 in Tokyo and was accompanied by his first publication entitled *A Review, 1909-1914*. In 1919, Hamada exhibited with Leach, again in Tokyo, prior to the destruction by fire of Leach's Abiko kiln. Leach's exhibition in Japan was accompanied by another publication, *An English Artist in Japan*, which continued to showcase him as a leading potter who bridged East and West. With each exhibition came additional exposure, and thus a higher demand for his pots. Once in England, Leach began exhibiting his wares in London, at the Artificer's Guild and at the Cotswold Gallery in London in the early 1920s. Throughout the decade, Leach and Hamada exhibited in both London and Japan, and the publicity surrounding their artistic partnership continued to grow.[7]

In 1934 their fame as potters was well established, and Leach was invited to Japan by the National Craft Society. He traveled with Hamada and Yanagi to seek out country crafts to demonstrate to the public the beauty of handmade wares. Hamada and Leach exhibited at Matsuzakaya and Takashimaya department stores; these exhibitions also featured country crafts representative of the *mingei* movement, organized by Yanagi. The flurry of publicity was significant, and these three men found themselves as leaders of a significant craft revival. Of the twenty thousand objects that they gathered from small villages, all sold at these Tokyo department stores within three days. On this phenomenon, Leach wrote, "Yanagi's *Mingei* Movement had begun to make a dent in the attitude of these large stores regarding the preservation of traditional crafts."[8] In 1934,

---

[7] Leach, *Beyond East and West* 312-313.

Leach and Hamada held a kiln opening in Japan at Hamada's workshop in Mashiko; over one hundred people came, including reporters, Japanese businessmen, and the governor from the prefecture.[9]

In 1935 with Leach's return to England, he and Hamada continued to enjoy fame and recognition as potters on an international scale. Exhibitions abounded, as did Leach's writings. The publication of *A Potter's Book* became a popular reference for potters, and in 1949 Leach began exhibiting in France, Spain, Sweden, Norway, and Denmark, the latter where he was a guest of the Danish Arts and Crafts Society. In 1950 Leach toured the United States for four months with a traveling exhibition organized by the Institute of Contemporary Art in Washington, and he was awarded the Binns Medal by the American Ceramic Society.[10] By this time, Jacques Busbee had passed away (in 1947), and Juliana's health was in serious decline.

In 1952, Leach, Hamada, and Yanagi toured the United States and lectured on potting and the concept of *mingei*. During their travels, they visited Alfred University in New York and Black Mountain College in North Carolina, but no evidence of a visit or even mention of Jugtown exist within Leach's notes which recorded these travels. Leach lamented that American ceramics students underwent training far too quickly, and seemed too focused on individualism, exhibitionism, and prize money,[11] an interesting and somewhat hypocritical observation from someone who benefited a great deal from his own fame and influence in the potting world.

---

[8] Leach, *Beyond East and West* 190.

[9] Leach, *Beyond East and West* 178.

[10] Leach, *Beyond East and West* 315.

[11] Leach, *Beyond East and West* 240.

The trio of Leach, Hamada, and Yanagi continued with potting, world tours, and lectures throughout the 1950s and in the 1960s. Hamada was declared a Living National Treasure in Japan in 1955, and Leach received numerous awards, including the Japanese honor of Order of the Sacred Treasure in 1966. In 1972, Leach stopped potting due to loss of eyesight. In 1974 he received the Japanese Foundation Cultural Award.[12]

While Leach and Hamada incorporated *mingei* into their teachings, demonstrations, and pots, their intellectualism and entrepreneurial savvy enabled them to profit from their practices and gain a fair amount of fame. In actuality, fame and good fortune were not in line with the humble and un-self-consciousness fundamentals of the *mingei* philosophy, and these two men were certainly not "unknown craftsmen." This divergence raises the issue of their struggle as preservers of a universal craft while the presence of their own intellectual and entrepreneurial pursuits inevitably began to take center stage.

Jacques and Juliana Busbee shared a distinct characteristic with Bernard Leach: they desperately wanted to live as artists, as painters. Their transition into pottery happened somewhat by a happy accident, and they led a craft revival of their own, based on the passion they developed for North Carolina pottery and their intellectual interpretations of the pots.

Jacques Busbee was born from a prominent family in Raleigh, North Carolina; the Busbee family was known for producing talented and prestigious lawyers. Jacques' parents were of the upper social echelon of the South, and Jacques benefited from educational and social opportunities from the start. His passion for art led him to study in New York at the National Academy of Design, the Art Students' League, and the Chase

---

[12] Leach, *Beyond East and West* 316-317.

School, where he focused on portrait painting. In 1907, the Historical Commission invited him to paint North Carolina coastal scenes for the Jamestown Exposition. Jacques was a prolific writer and lecturer on the topics of art and subjects specific to North Carolina.[13]

Prior to changing her name, Juliana Busbee was known as Julia Adeline Royster, who was of the same social and economic ilk as Jacques, whom she married in 1910. She attended St. Mary's Junior College, studied photography under the direction of her uncle, and worked as an illustrator at the beginning of her career.[14] Her passion for painting fueled her desire to become a professional artist, and her interest in the arts remained with her throughout her life. She wrote, lectured at local colleges, and would later become the main spokesperson for Jugtown.

Juliana began promoting country crafts as early as 1915, when she served as Chairman of the Art Department for the Federation of Women's Clubs in North Carolina.[15] Focusing on basketry, weaving, and pottery, she felt a strong connection to handmade crafts, and was extremely sensitive to the effects of industrialization. According to the Busbees' account of their inspiration for Jugtown, they became entranced by an orange clay pie plate while Juliana was judging objects at the Davidson County Fair in Lexington.[16] The natural beauty of the clay stirred their artistic natures, and thus they began to seek out the origin of the pottery.

---

[13] Crawford 10-11.

[14] Crawford 11.

[15] Crawford 11.

[16] Crawford 12.

The endeavor at Jugtown is revelatory of several aspects of Jacques and Juliana as artists, intellectuals, entrepreneurs, and even visionaries. Their excitement surrounding their discovery of the pots resulted in their efforts to energize the North Carolina market. Jacques traveled to Seagrove, the future home of Jugtown, and began collecting the wares. When they found that North Carolinians were not highly interested in the pots, they moved to New York City in 1916 with the intention of introducing North Carolina pottery to the New York market. On the endeavor, Juliana explained:

> He [Jacques] believed that art should be a democratic expression, & that if we as North Carolinians were to develop a native art, the handicraft must be reckoned with – and that fine art should be the flowering of a folk art. And – when no one else would revive the pottery craft – & it was a craft – not an art – he would be very grand & do the work in a year or so & present it to the State & then return to portraits. . . . Then he came to realize that it was a better contribution to our state to help the country potters & show them a new way for old jugs than to paint portraits of dead & gone heros [sic] & dignitaries from photographs.[17]

In 1917, Jacques traveled to the area of North Carolina where the pots were being produced. The older potters creating the wares for the New York market included Rufus Owen (Ben's father) and Jim Owen, but they were difficult to train, and Jacques would eventually incorporate Asian influences into the pottery with young Ben Owen. Jacques and Juliana took their endeavor so seriously, that he moved permanently to North Carolina to direct the potting, while Juliana established the Village Store in New York.

A truly ingenious project, the Village Store, a tearoom at 60 Washington Square in Greenwich Village, opened in 1918 under the direction and management of Juliana Busbee. With the help of several young southern women who visited New York in the summer, Juliana served North Carolina food within a setting where she recreated a rural North Carolina kitchen. The unique idea became a hit within some New York circles, and

---

[17] Juliana Busbee, "For Lawrence of Lumberton," ms, nd, Crawford 13.

Juliana successfully featured Moore County objects, all for sale, as the highlight of the Village Store experience. On the spectacle, one reporter wrote, "Practically everything in the Village Store is a Moore County product and much of the food served there is from 'down home.' The pottery, split-bottom chairs, the rugged tavern tables, the hand-woven jeans, the shuck door mats, the hearth brooms, the gingham table covers . . . ."[18] Juliana knew how to recreate a scene and evoke a certain mood, and much of the success of the Village Store was due to her theatrical ability. The tearoom became popular amongst intellectuals and young literary figures, including Eugene O'Neill, and Juliana became a person whom New Yorkers sought out to befriend.[19] When it moved to a larger location at 37 East Sixtieth Street, it was noted that even more prominent people frequented the Village Store, including Rockefellers, Mrs. Henry Ford, and Eleanor Roosevelt.[20]

In the years that followed, Jacques built the log cabin in which he and Juliana would spend the remainder of their days. The older potters began to phase out as Jacques focused on training the younger men to fulfill the artistic vision of Jugtown. Charles Teague, the first potter at Jugtown, turned ware under the direction of Jacques Busbee for eight years and then moved on to other work. Ben Owen's beginning at Jugtown in 1923 marked the beginning of the fulfillment of the true Jugtown vision. Only eighteen years old, he knew how to throw pots, and was open to broadening his artistic awareness with Jacques' direction. Ben lived in the Jugtown cabin and studied Asian pottery with Jacques, and in 1926 Juliana moved permanently to Seagrove to help oversee the

---

[18] Mildred Harrington, "Village Store is Moore County," *Greensboro Daily News*, nd, Crawford 20.

[19] Crawford 19.

[20] Crawford 27.

operation. Ben continued his stay until 1936, when he married and established his own home nearby with his wife, Lucille. The trade name "Jugtown Ware" was established in around 1922 or 1923, but an official trademark was not issued until 1959, then registered as Jugtown, Incorporated.[21]

Juliana's business savvy enabled her to sell the North Carolina pottery to the New York market, and after ten years at the Village Store, she was confident that the market was established well enough for her to join Jacques in Seagrove. As Ben and Jacques explored more glazes and shapes inspired by Asian pottery, Juliana marketed the wares and maintained a constant flurry of publicity and newspaper coverage. The North Carolina market finally demonstrated a desire for Jugtown ware, and the local academic institutions also began to take notice. Ben Owen recalled that ceramic students from North Carolina State College visited Jugtown to learn his potting techniques.[22] Jacques and Ben traveled throughout the state giving demonstrations and lectures. Their activity ultimately revived the local craft, and other surrounding potteries benefited from the popularity of North Carolina pottery.

Following Jacques Busbee's death in 1947, The University of North Carolina held a memorial exhibition of Jugtown pottery at Person Hall. The exhibition brochure described Jacques Busbee in the following passage:

> Jacques Busbee was by profession a painter; but by choice he was a hobbyist – landscape gardening, taxidermy, orchids, mushrooms, first editions, book-binding, chickens, music, Greek Drama, and Caroliniana are a partial catalog of his hobbies. . . . He believed that art is not an esoteric utterance but a democratic expression,

---

[21] Crawford 24.

[22] Crawford 29.

> that North Carolina should develop a native art, and that from folk art, truly understood and expressed, fine art springs.[23]

This brochure captured Jacques' true spirit and described his dynamic personality, and demonstrated his belief in the importance of North Carolina's crafts. The Busbees' passion for the handmade undoubtedly echoed that of their counterparts, Leach, Hamada, and Yanagi.

By the 1960s, long after the Busbees and Ben Owen began their endeavor, Jean Crawford, the first real scholar of Jugtown Pottery, set out to tell the Jugtown story. Her research included uncovering the venues where Jugtown ware was exhibited, and what museums held Jugtown ware within their collections. Records at that time reflected few museums as owners of the pottery: three museums in North Carolina, one in South Carolina, and one in Ohio; the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC owned three pieces.[24]

Records of exhibitions and lectures featuring Jugtown pottery during the time of Crawford's research indicate a mostly regional coverage of these crafts. The Busbees and Owen conducted many lectures, demonstrations, and exhibitions within North and South Carolina. Areas of activity beyond those areas included a Southern Exposition of crafts in New York City in Grand Central Palace in New York City, 1925; a lecture by Jacques Busbee at the Suffolk, Virginia Women's Club, 1928; a Jugtown display at Lee Plaza Hotel in Detroit, Michigan, 1930; an art club exhibit in a private home in Pawhuska, Oklahoma, 1931; an exhibit at Binyon Garden, Washington, DC, 1935; A National Exhibition of Rural Arts, organized by the Department of Agriculture, Washington, DC,

---

[23] Brochure, Person Hall Art Gallery, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, Crawford 36.

[24] Crawford 56-57.

1937; an exhibition at the Howard University Gallery of Art in Washington, DC, 1940; an exhibit, "Contemporary American Crafts" in Baltimore, 1944; and an exhibit at the University of Virginia Museum of Fine Arts in Charlottesville, 1951.[25]

While the recognition of Jugtown grew consistently under the leadership of the Busbees, its success can mainly be attributed to their tireless efforts in gaining publicity as they showcased Ben Owen's excellent craftsmanship. The same could be surmised of Leach and Hamada; their craft was truly exceptional, but would they have been as successful had they lived the lives of the quiet and humble potters who inspired them? The philosophical complexity surrounding these famed visionaries lies within the fact that they all embraced the simple and the handmade while utilizing the vehicles of the media and the market. In the end, they capitalized, but in doing so, they left an indelible mark on their craft which still resonates today.

[25] Crawford 58-61.

Chapter VI

Conclusion

> "We learn from each other, and there's the pleasure and camaraderie of working together. I'd rather we potters just work together. It gives a new direction in what we do now and will do in the future. . . ." – Ben Owen III, potter[1]

Bernard Leach, Shōji Hamada, Ben Owen, Jacques and Juliana Busbee – all are now gone, but the fruits of their artistic endeavors still thrive and flourish today. Their influences on the pottery craft remain strong, in the places where their pots originated, in the academic and technical study of ceramics, in living, working potters of today, and in museums throughout the world. Presently, serious potters look both to Jugtown and to the traditions of St. Ives and Mashiko for inspiration, therefore proving the fundamental solidity of the philosophies and techniques employed within those cultures. And now, current potters and scholars demonstrate a keen awareness of the connection between North Carolina and Asian pots.

Jugtown changed hands several times following the deaths of the Busbees, and after thirty-seven years at Jugtown, Ben Owen left to establish his own Old Plank Road Pottery in order to continue his growth and development as an independent potter while maintaining the fundamental Jugtown approach to his craft. His reason for leaving was mainly due to a disagreement with John Mare, who ran Jugtown for a short time beginning in 1959. Mare's intention to mass-produce Jugtown wares resulted in an

---

[1] Ben Owen, III., quoted in Hewitt and Sweezy 218.

artistic conflict of interest between himself and the master potter, whose dedication to the Busbee way forced his stance against mass production.

Upon the death of Mare in 1962, members of the administration at The Smithsonian were concerned about the future of Jugtown Pottery, and in 1968 endorsed the purchase of Jugtown through a Cambridge, Massachusetts-based organization called Country Roads. Nancy Sweezy and North Carolinian Vernon Owens, both potters, oversaw the project. During the time between 1968 and 1983, Owens and Sweezy, along with members of the Seagrove community, continued the production and marketing of wares, incorporating an apprenticeship program into the operation. In 1983, Vernon Owens purchased Jugtown, and still operates it today with his wife Pamela.[2]

Vernon and Pam Owens maintain the same fundamental approach that the Busbees instilled at Jugtown in the 1920s, with a focus on strong, simple forms, complimentary glazes, and occasional decoration. The traditional glazes remain intact, coupled with Pam's innovative new glazes. Jugtown continues to receive national recognition, and Vernon Owens has been awarded the North Carolina Folk Heritage award and the National Endowment for the Arts National Heritage Fellowship.[3]

Ben Owen III, the grandson of Jugtown potter Ben Owen, Sr., is an accomplished potter who operates his own Ben Owen Pottery in Seagrove, North Carolina, at the same location where his grandfather operated the Plank Road Pottery. The younger Ben learned to pot as a small child, working closely with his grandfather; he later studied ceramics at East Carolina University, and in 1995, studied pottery in Tokoname, Japan.

---

[2] Hewitt and Sweezy xv-xvi.

[3] *Jugtown Pottery*, 2008, Jugtown Pottery 10 April 2008 <www.jugtownware.com>.

He has managed and expanded the pottery since 1994.[4] Ben Owen III views the similarities between North Carolina and Asian pottery as mere coincidence, stating:

> After all, potters, even half a world and several centuries apart, had similar clays to work with and developed similar techniques and firing methods to make the containers that people needed. Whether they're shaped slightly different or not, they still have the same purpose. Whether it's a jug for vinegar or a jar for *kimchi*, the language or vocabulary of the vessel is the same.[5]

Ben combines his technical knowledge and own creativity to his pots, but maintains many of the fundamentals of potting that his grandfather practiced at Jugtown. Relying on the fire to do the work, Ben III appreciates in his pots what happens to them within the kiln. He is a living example of a continuing North Carolina potting tradition that Ben Owen, Sr. and the Busbees revived.

Shōji Hamada, perhaps the quietest of all of the potters examined within this thesis, died in 1978 at Mashiko, where in 1974 he established a museum of his own collection of folk crafts. Mashiko remains today a destination for lovers of pottery, where Hamada's studio now stands as a museum. His legacy will share in a continuous connection to Bernard Leach and the Leach pottery.

The influences of Leach and Hamada have by now extended directly to the making of North Carolina pots. Mark Hewitt, the noted North Carolina potter and scholar, years ago read Leach's *A Potter's Book* and then decided to become a studio potter. He trained for three years beginning in 1979 under Leach's first apprentice, Michael Cardew, who potted with Leach at the St. Ives Pottery in the early 1920s. Cardew's career enjoyed great success in the England in the 1930s, and then in West

---

[4] Hewitt and Sweezy 204.

[5] Ben Owen III quoted in Hewitt and Sweezy 204-205.

Africa in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s. Following his training under Cardew, Hewitt traveled to Mashiko to study the pots produced where Hamada himself lived and potted. Upon returning to the United States, Hewitt established his own pottery in 1983 in Pittsboro, North Carolina.[6] Hewitt's work has traveled to exhibitions throughout the United States and abroad, including New York, London, and Tokyo. Museums holding permanent collections of his work include The Renwick Gallery of the Smithsonian, the National Arboretum, the Chrysler Museum, the Mint Museums, and the Minneapolis Institute of Art, among others. Hewitt's pots demonstrate a combination of his formal training with traditional North Carolina potting traditions, and his living and working environment, nestled within the rural North Carolina hills, is reminiscent of the homes of his predecessors who continue to influence him.

Hewitt also has pondered Leach's written reflections of his 1950 visit to the United States, when he recalled that American pots had no appeal. Leach felt that this lacking was due to the fact that "Americans have the disadvantage of having many roots, but no tap root, which is almost the equivalent of no root at all. Hence Americans follow many undigested fashions. . . ."[7] Hewitt argues that Leach's disdain for American pottery was the result of a simple lack of knowledge; at the time of his visit to the United States, little mainstream scholarship on the subject of American pottery existed. Public and private collections were not well known, and Leach was literally unable to do any research on North Carolina vernacular pottery.[8]

---

[6] Hewitt and Sweezy xvi-xvii.

[7] Leach, *Beyond East and West* 238.

[8] Hewitt and Sweezy 167.

The only knowledge that Bernard Leach ever revealed of Jugtown surfaced late in his life, when Nancy Sweezy and Vernon Owens visited him in 1976 at St. Ives. Leach was then quite feeble and completely blind. Sweezy and Owens presented him with a Jugtown pot created by Vernon Owens, Leach constantly explored with his hands as the three of them had tea. While holding the Jugtown pot and hearing about the work of Sweezy and Owens to keep Jugtown alive, Leach stated to each of them, "This *is* tradition. I told them at Alfred [University] in 1952 when Hamada and I were on the lecture tour that Jugtown was important, but I don't think they listened to me. And now I tell you that to keep this tradition is the most important thing that can happen in pottery in America."[9] Leach strongly advised Sweezy and Owens to continue to write about pottery and communicate its importance in the world of handmade crafts: "Do what you can with pots, but also write and try to increase understanding."[10]

At the conclusion of their meeting as Owens and Sweezy stood to leave, Leach asked that the Jugtown pot be placed "where it looks best in my collection, and there it will stay."[11] Bernard Leach died three years later in 1979. Since then the potter's wheel has come full circle to embody East, West, and the American South, and all of the subjects of this thesis equally contributed to the preservation and advancement of this important craft in their own unique ways. The work of their hands, combined with their powerful written words, left an indelible, universal mark on the philosophies and practices of potting.

---

[9] Bernard Leach, quoted in Hewitt and Sweezy xvi.

[10] Hewitt and Sweezy xvi.

[11] Hewitt and Sweezy xvi.

Fig. 1. Bernard Leach in a Museum in Japan, ca. 1965 in Cooper, *Bernard Leach: Life & Work*.

Fig. 2. Bernard Leach and Sōetsu Yanagi in Tokyo, ca. 1912 in Cooper, *Bernard Leach: Life & Work.*

Fig. 3. Bernard Leach. Jug and Tankard, 1949, H. 24.6 and 12 cm, Victoria and Albert Museum. Rpt. in de Waal, *Bernard Leach*.

Fig. 4. Bernard Leach. Large Jug, 1960, H. 32.5 cm, Buckinghamshire County Museum. Rpt. in de Waal, *Bernard Leach*.

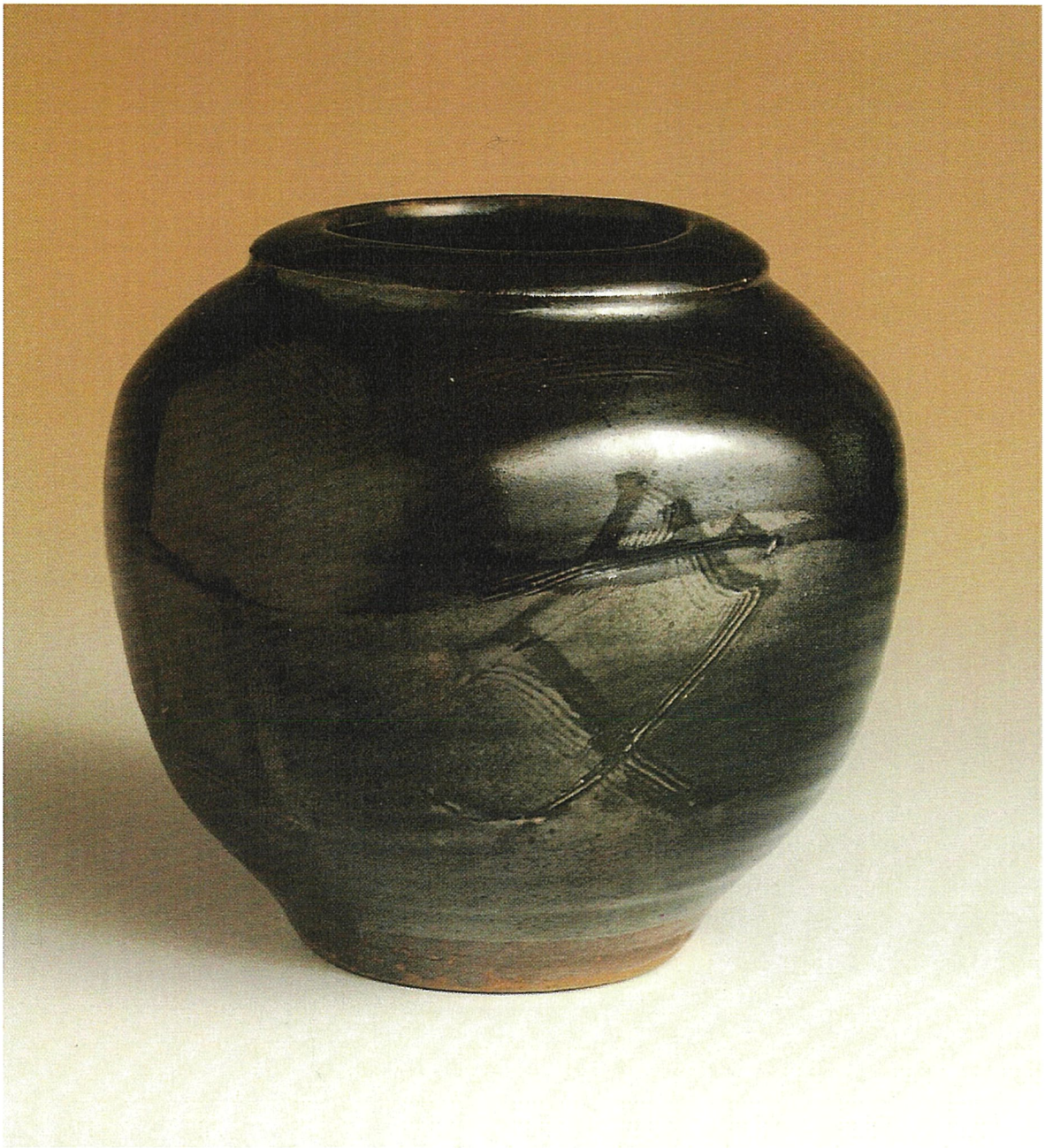

Fig. 5. Bernard Leach. Squared-off Jar, nd., H. 16 cm W. 18 cm. Rpt. in Birks and Digby, *Bernard Leach, Hamada & their Circle*.

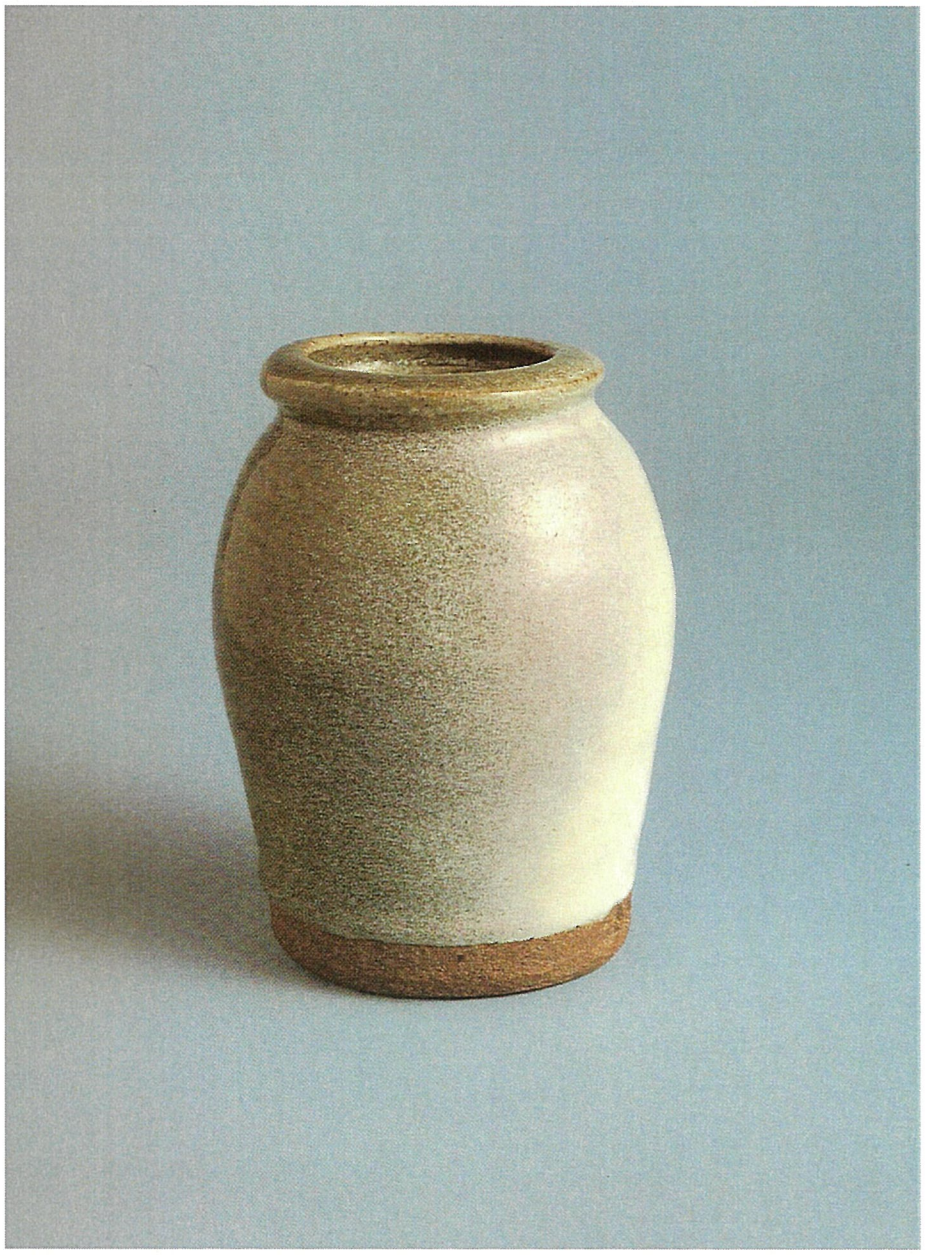

Fig. 6. Bernard Leach. Vase, nd., H. 14 cm W. 10 cm. Rpt. in Birks and Digby, *Bernard Leach, Hamada & their Circle*.

Fig. 7. Bernard Leach. Bowl, ca. 1930. H. 10.5 cm W. 18 cm. Rpt. in Birks and Digby, *Bernard Leach, Hamada & their Circle*.

Fig. 8. Bernard Leach. Vase, nd., H. 28 cm W. 15 cm. Rpt. in Birks and Digby, *Bernard Leach, Hamada & their Circle*.

Fig. 9. Bernard Leach and Shōji Hamada in Japan ca. 1965. Rpt. in Cooper, *Bernard Leach: Life & Work*.

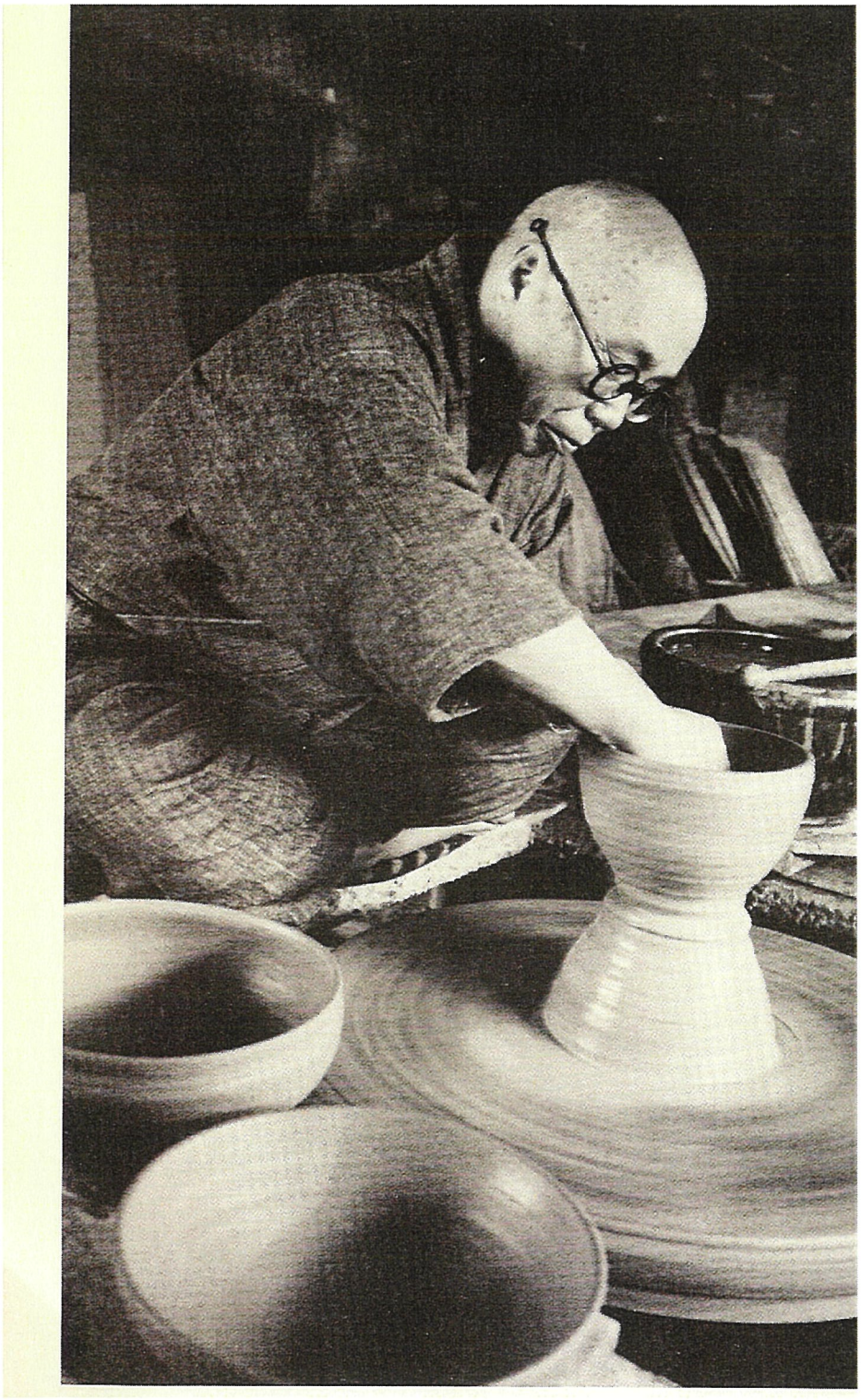

Fig. 10. Shōji Hamada. Rpt. in Yoshida's *The Retrospective Exhibition of Shōji Hamada*.

Fig. 11. Shōji Hamada. Vase, 1958, H. 27.5 cm W. 15.3 cm, Agency for Cultural Affairs. Rpt. in Yoshida's *The Retrospective of Shōji Hamada*.

Fig. 12. Shōji Hamada. Teapot, nd., H 17 cm W 14.5 cm, Victoria and Albert Museum. Rpt. in Birks and Digby, *Bernard Leach, Hamada & their Circle*.

Fig. 13. Shōji Hamada. Vase, made in Mashiko, nd., H. 31 cm W. 17 cm. Rpt. in Birks and Digby, *Bernard Leach, Hamada & their Circle*.

Fig. 14. Shōji Hamada. Tea Bowl, nd., H. 8.5 cm W. 12.5 cm. Rpt. in Birks and Digby, *Bernard Leach, Hamada & their Circle*.

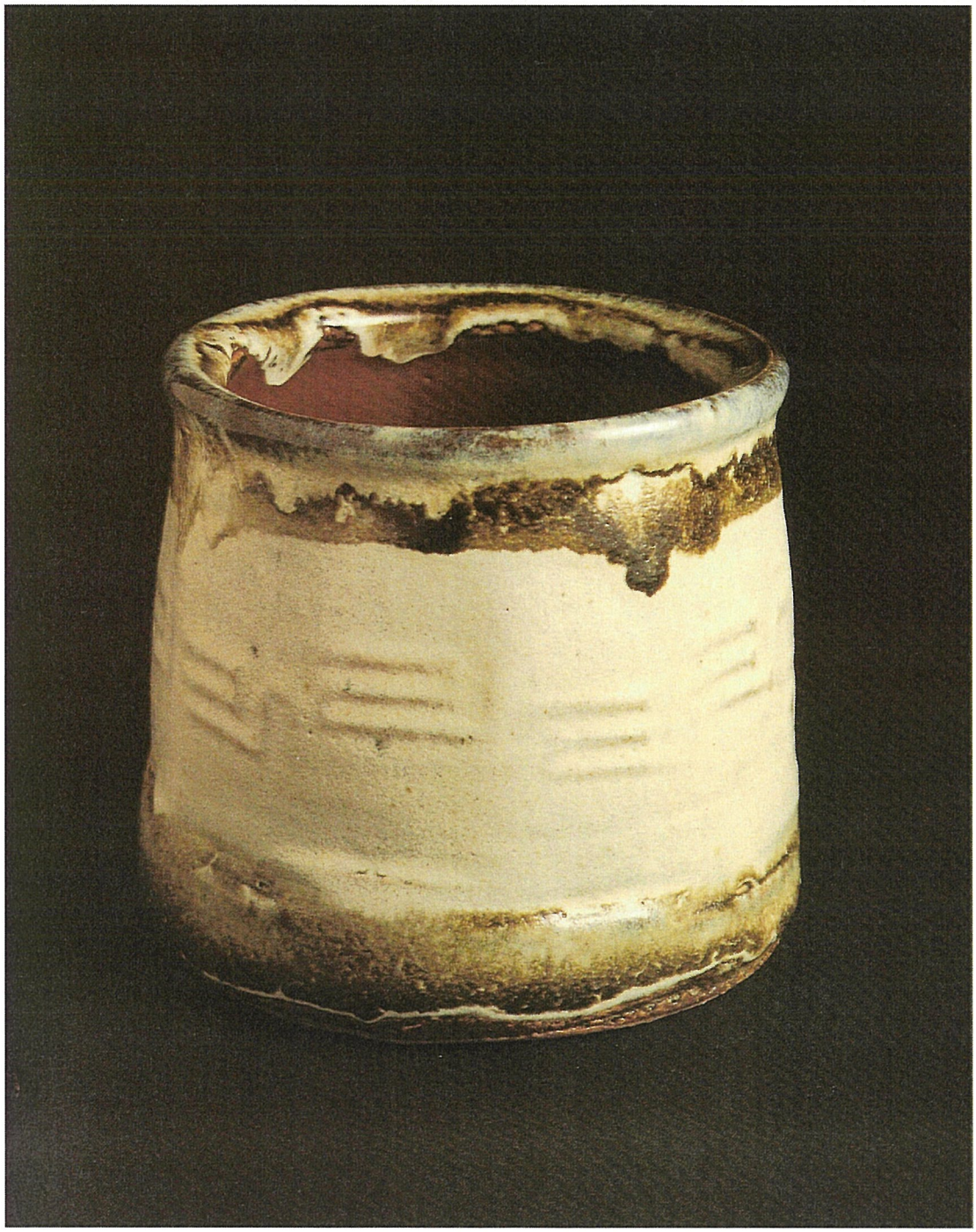

Fig. 15. Shōji Hamada. Brush Pot, made in Mashiko, nd., H. 14 cm W. 16 cm. Rpt. in Birks and Digby, *Bernard Leach, Hamada, & their Circle*.

Fig. 16. Juliana Busbee. Rpt. in Crawford, *Jugtown Pottery: History and Design.*

Fig. 17. Jacques Busbee at his home in Jugtown. Rpt. in Crawford, *Jugtown Pottery: History & Design*.

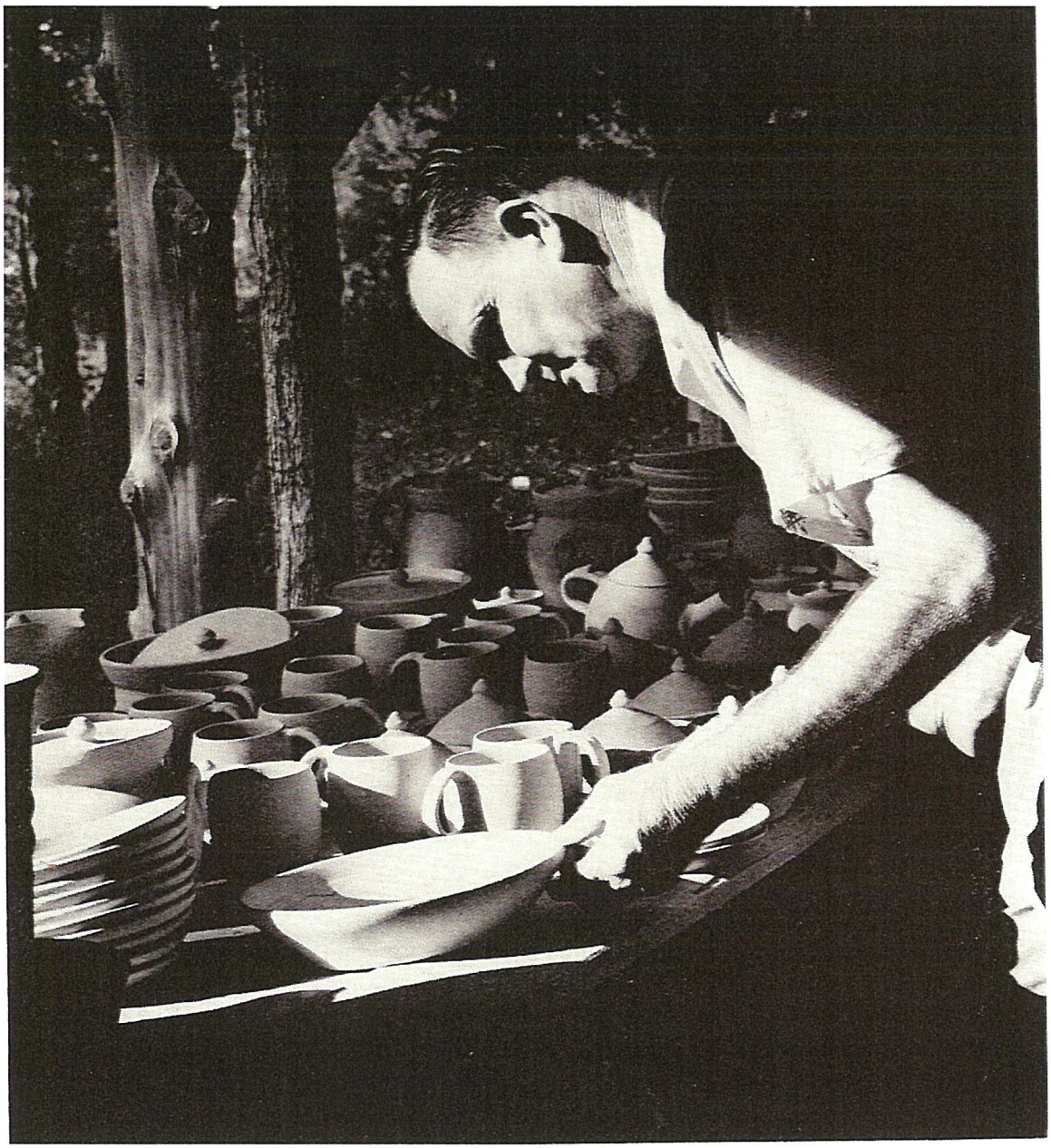

Fig. 18. Ben Owen checking pottery before firing. Rpt. in Crawford, *Jugtown Pottery: History and Design*.

Fig 19. Ben Owen. Glaze by Jacques Busbee. Vase, Ca.1935. 7.625x4.375 in. Rpt. In Perry, *North Carolina Pottery: The Collection of the Mint Museums.*

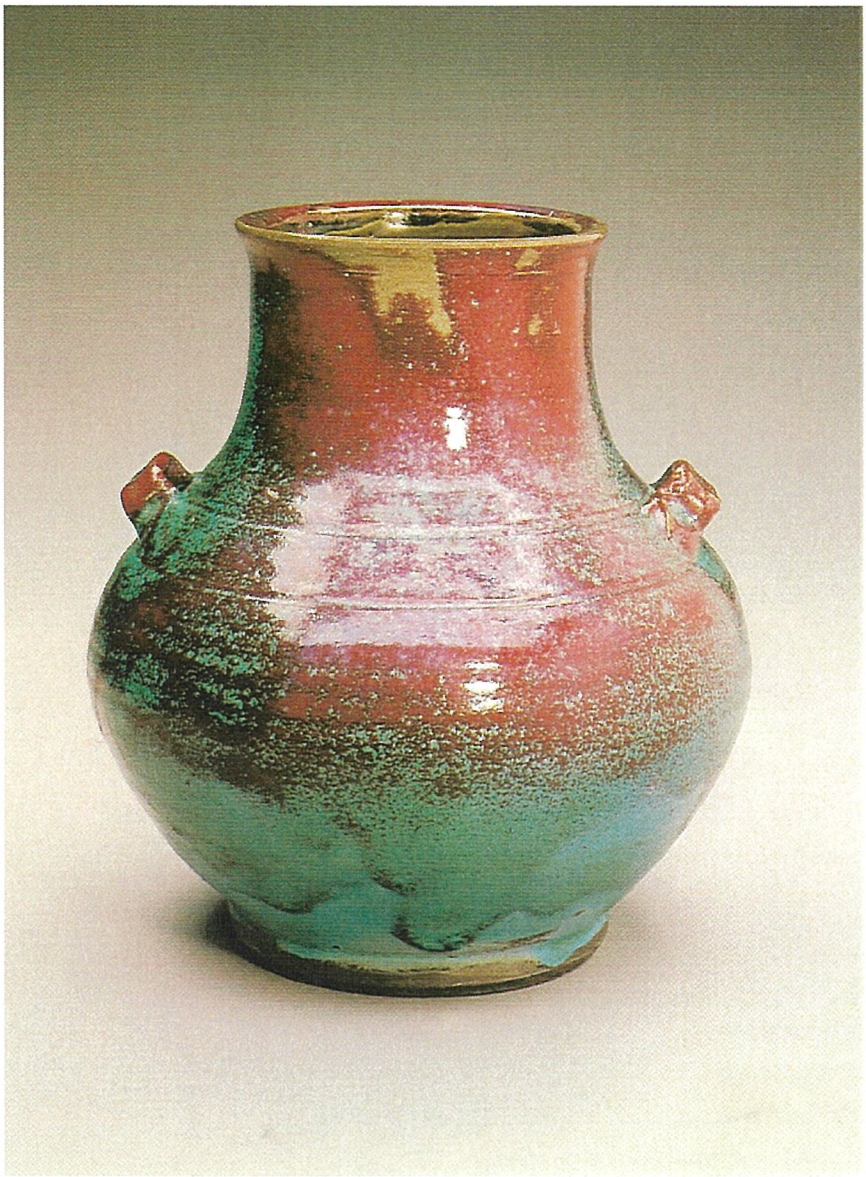

Fig. 20. Ben Owen. Han Vase, ca. 1937. 10.2 5x 9.50 in. Rpt. in Perry, *North Carolina Pottery: The Collection of the Mint Museums*.

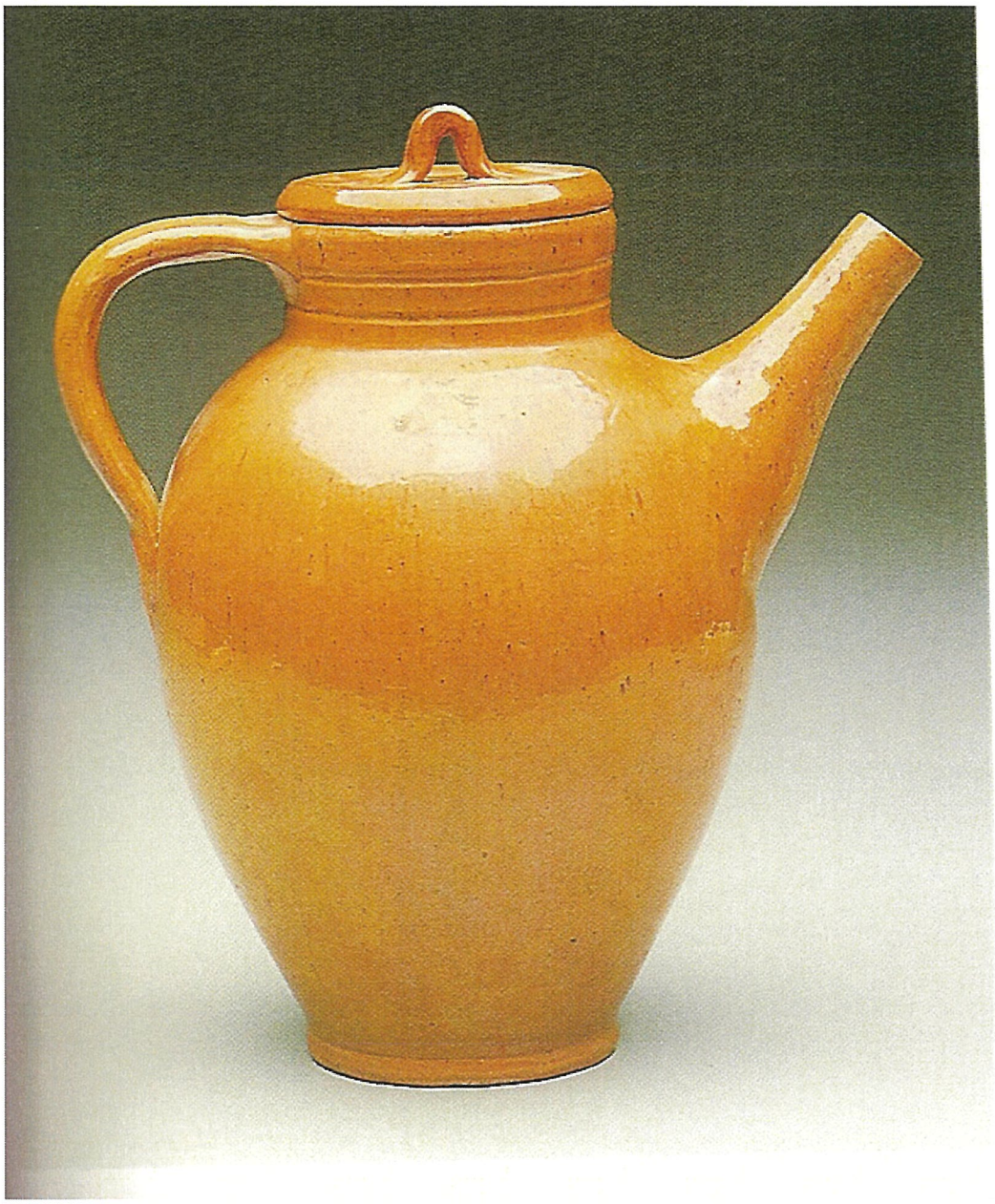

Fig. 21. Ben Owen. Coffee Pot, 1930. 9.5 x 8.5x6 in. Rpt. in Perry, *North Carolina: The Collection of the Mint Museums.*

Fig. 22. Ben Owen. Footed Bowl, nd. 2.375 x 4.375 in. Rpt. in Perry, *North Carolina Pottery: The Collection of the Mint Museums.*

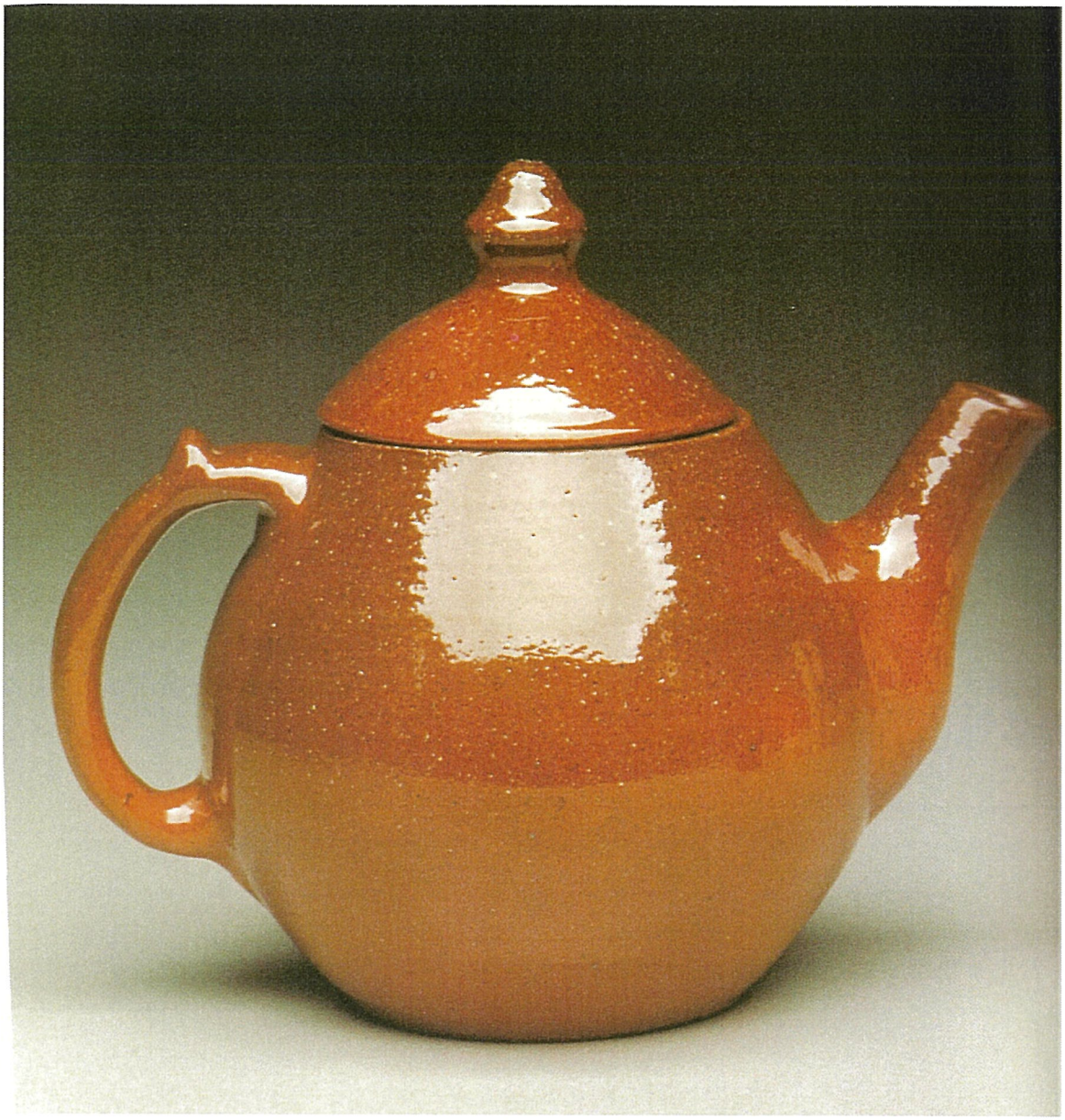

Fig. 23. Ben Owen. Teapot, ca. 1960. 6.88 x 8.25 in. Rpt. in Perry, *North Pottery: The Collection of the Mint Museums.*

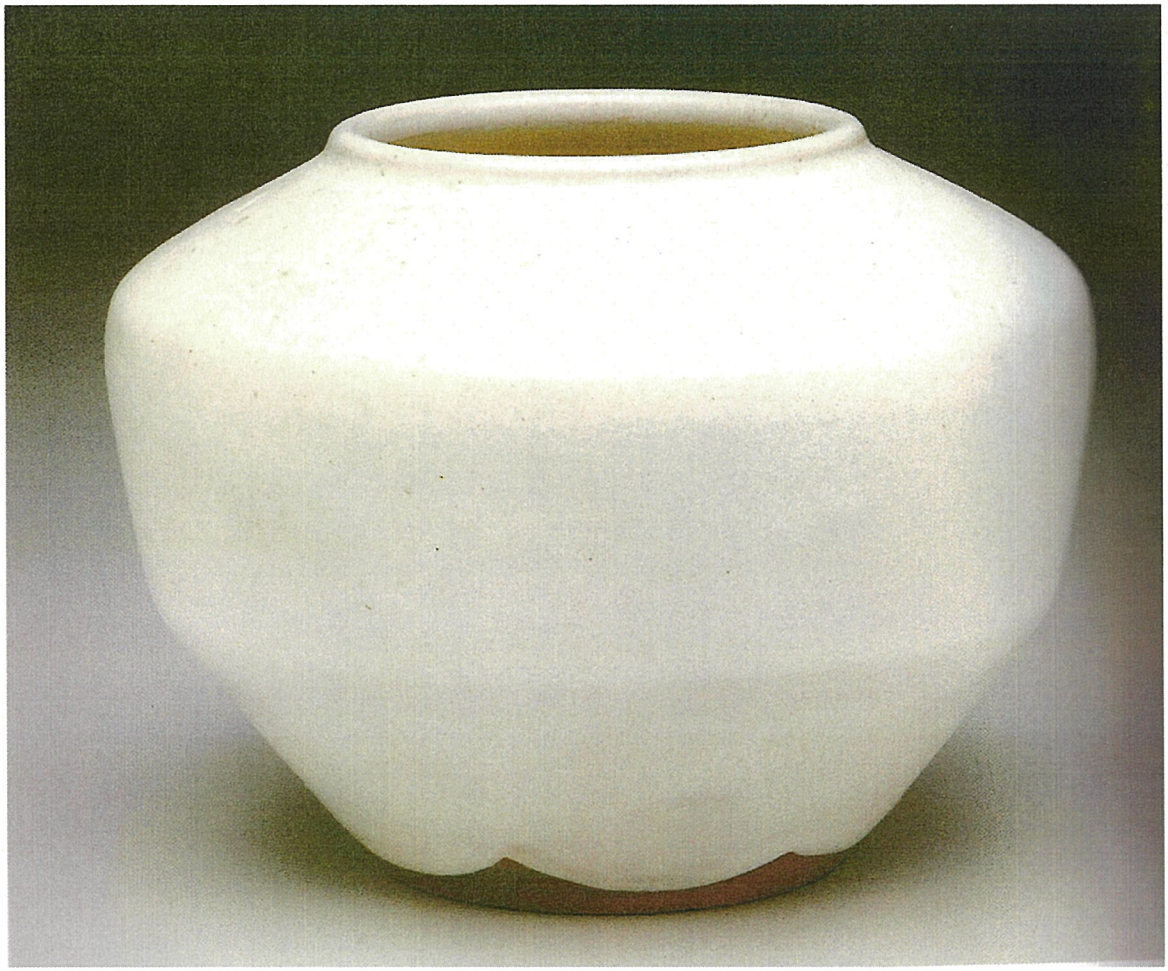

Fig. 24. Ben Owen. Round Low Vase, ca. 1960-71. 5.31 x 7 in. Rpt. in Perry, *North Carolina Pottery: The Collection of the Mint Museums.*

Bibliography

A. Works Cited

Becker, Jane. *Selling Tradition: Appalachia and the Construction of an American Folk, 1930-1940*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998.

Breese, Jessie Martin. "Jugtown, N.C." *Country Life* October 1922: 64.

Busbee, Jacques. "A Colonial Hangover." ts. ca. late 1920s, Juliana Busbee Collection, Special Collections, Walter Clinton Jackson Library, University of North Carolina, Greensboro.

---. "Jugtown Pottery: Its Origin and Development – An Intimate Touch of the Local Color That Is Molded Into This Historic American Ware," *The Ceramic Age* October 1929: 128.

---. "Letter to the Editor." ms. ca. 1940. Juliana Busbee Collection, Special Collections, Walter Clinton Jackson Library, University of North Carolina, Greensboro.

Busbee, Juliana. "Art Hath an Enemy Called Ignorance." ms. nd. Juliana Busbee Collection, Special Collections, Walter Clinton Jackson Library, University of North Carolina, Greensboro.

---. "The Discovery of Folk Pottery," ms, nd, Mrs. Jacques Busbee Collection, North Carolina Department of Archives and History.

---. "The Jugtown Pottery." ms. 1940. Juliana Busbee Collection, Special Collections, Walter Clinton Jackson Library, University of North Carolina, Greensboro.

---. "Our Native Crafts," ms, Fort Bragg, October 20, 1941. Juliana Busbee Collection, Special Collections, Walter Clinton Jackson Library, University of North Carolina, Greensboro.

---. Untitled ms. April 20, 1942. Juliana Busbee Collection, Special Collections, Walter Clinton Jackson Library, University of North Carolina, Greensboro.

Cooper, Emmanuel. *Bernard Leach: Life and Work*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003.

Crawford, Jean. *Jugtown Pottery: History and Design*. Winston-Salem: John F. Blair, 1964.

DeNatale, Douglas, Jane Przybysz, and Jill R. Severn. *New Ways for Old Jugs: Tradition and Innovation at the Jugtown Pottery*. Columbia: University of South Carolina, 1994.

Graham, Betty. *News and Observer*. 31 Aug, 1924: n.pag.

Hewitt, Mark and Nancy Sweezy. *The Potter's Eye: Art & Tradition in North Carolina Pottery*. Preface Mark Hewitt. Preface Nancy Sweezy. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005.

Jugtown Pottery. 2008. Jugtown Pottery. 10 April 2008 <www.jugtownware.com>.

Kaplan, Wendy. *The Art that Is Life: The Arts and Crafts Movement in America, 1875-1920*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1987.

Kardon, Janet. *Craft in the Machine Age, 1920-1945*. New York: H.N. Abrams in association with the American Craft Museum, 1995.

Leach, Bernard. *Beyond East and West: Portraits, Memoirs, and Essays*. London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1978.

---. *Hamada, Potter*. Tokyo: Kodansha International Ltd., 1975.

---. *A Potter's Book*. Introduction Sōetsu Yanagi. Preface Michael Cardew. Hollywood-by-the-Sea: Transatlantic Arts, 1970.

Lears, TJ Jackson. *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1981.

Perry, Barbara Stone. *North Carolina Pottery: The Collection of the Mint Museums*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004.

Trachtenberg, Alan. *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1982.

Yanagi, Sōetsu. *The Unknown Craftsman*. Trans. Bernard Leach. Introduction Bernard Leach. Tokyo: Kodansha International Ltd., 1972.

Zug, Charles G. III. *Turners and Burners: The Folk Potters of North Carolina*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1986.

B. Works Consulted

Birks, Tony, and Wingfield Digby. *Bernard Leach, Hamada and their Circle, from the Wingfield Digby Collection*. Somerset: Marston House, Marsta Magna, 1992.

Busbee, Juliana. "Jugtown Comes of Age." *The State* 19 June 1937: 7.

---. "Jugtown Pottery—A New Way for Old Jugs." *Bulletin of the American Ceramics Society—Communications* 10 (October 1937): 415-418.

---. "North Carolina Pottery and the Pine Needle Basket." *Everywoman's Magazine* 1 (October 1916): 9.

---. "Pottery in N.C." Letter. *News and Observer* 21 July, 1929: n.pag.

Cardew, Michael. *A Pioneer Potter*. London: William Collins and Sons & Co., 1988.

De Waal, Edmund. *Bernard Leach*. London: Tate Gallery Publications, 1999.

Hertzman, Gay Mahaffey. *Jugtown Pottery: The Busbee Vision*. Raleigh: North Carolina Museum of Art, 1984.

Hogben, Carol. *The Art of Bernard Leach*. Boston: Faber & Faber, 1978.

Iden, Susan. "Jacques Busbee Sets Many Potters' Wheels Turning Again in the State." *Greensboro Daily Record* 10 Nov. 1928: n.pag.

Leach, Bernard. *A Potter in Japan: 1952-1954*. London: Faber & Faber, 1960.

Peterson, Susan. *Shōji Hamada: A Potter's Way and Work*. Tokyo; New York: Kodansha International, Ltd., 1974.

Sweezy, Nancy. *Raised in Clay: The Southern Pottery Tradition*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1994.

Trenckmann, Clara. "Jugtown Potters Win Praise in Big New York Exposition." *The News and Observer* 31 May 1925: n.pag.

Whybrow, Marion. *The Leach Legacy: St. Ives Pottery and its Influence*. Bristol: Samsom & Co., 1996.

---. *St. Ives 1883-1993: Portrait of an Art Colony*. Suffolk: The Antique Art Collectors' Club, Ltd., 1994.

IX.

Appendix: Checklist of Pottery

Ben Owen, Sr., *Blue Han Vase*, ca. mid 1920s. Stoneware with Oriental glaze. Ben Owen Pottery, Seagrove, N.C.

Ben Owen, Sr., *White Dogwood Vase*, ca. mid 1920s. Stoneware with white glaze. Ben Owen Pottery, Seagrove, N.C.

Ben Owen, Sr., *Earthenware Teapot*, ca. mid 1920s. Earthenware with orange glaze. Ben Owen Pottery, Seagrove, N.C.

Ben Owen, Sr., *Jugtown Vase with Frogskin Glaze*, ca. 1930. Stoneware with green"frogskin" glaze. Ben Owen Pottery, Seagrove, N.C.

Bernard Leach, Stoneware Jug with Brown Glaze, ca. 1929. made at St. Ives. Leach Pottery, Cornwall, England.

Bernard Leach, Unglazed Lidded Rice Bowl, ca. 1934. Leach Pottery, Cornwall, England.

Bernard Leach, Lidded Urn with Partial Glaze, ca. 1930. Leach Pottery, Cornwall, England.

Bernard Leach, Lidded Japanese Bowl with Brushstrokes, ca. 1930. Leach Pottery, Cornwall, England.

Shōji Hamada, Stoneware Vase with Brown Glaze, ca. late 1920s. Leach Pottery, Cornwall, England.

Shōji Hamada, Stoneware Vase with Brushed Glaze and Brushwork. ca. 1930. Leach Pottery, Cornwall, England.

Shōji Hamada, Stoneware Vase with Signed Box Container, ca. mid 1930s. Private Collection.