

THE FIRST THING TO KNOW ABOUT

the exhibition currently on view at New York's Magen H Gallery, is that the catalog pictures don't fully do it justice. The same could likely be said of any show, but in this case, the chasm that yawns between the sensation of seeing the sculptural ceramic objects on paper and seeing them in person - in all their raw, lustrous, organic beauty - is so wide that the point must be made anew.

An exhibition currently on view at New York's Magen H Gallery features dozens of works from the postwar French ceramics movement La Borne, including this large vase, ca. 1969, by Jean and Jacqueline Lerat. All images cour

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amed for the small village in central France, La Borne refers to the output of a pioneering group of ceramicists working there between 1940 and 1980, including Jean and Jacqueline Lerat, who founded the movement, as well as Elisabeth Jouilia, Vassil Ivanoff, Yves and Monique Mohy and Anne Kjaersgaard, among others.

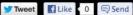
Though revered in France (as well as in Japan, a nation that highly prizes ceramics), La Borne is not widely known in the United States - in fact, this exhibition, which opened November 8 and runs through December 15, is the first of its kind in the US. For Hugues Magen, the gallery's principal, it's nothing less than a personal passion project some 10 years in the making. La Borne pieces rarely come to market, and he's collected more than 100, all in perfect condition.

Uniquely, women were both as numerous and as prominent as men within the La Borne movement. One, Elisabeth Joulia, was known for oreating rounded pieces such as this soulptural vase, oa. 1980.











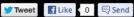
hough varied in appearance, La Borne ceramics share such chief characteristics as geometric, architectural shapes (many of the artisans, in fact, came from architectural backgrounds) and coarse, naturalistic surfaces that reflect the rural, wooded, salt-of-the-earth environs of La Borne itself. (For contrast, picture the smooth, candy-colored earthenware that comes out of the better-known

pottery town of Vallauris in the country's south, which is bathed in warm air and Mediterranean light.) Another characteristic is a sense of timelessness, or rather time-straddling: From one angle, a piece's form will evoke Greco-Roman classicism, but swivel it around and you're confronted by modern architecture. In several instances, a ruddy red-brown glaze recalls the famous Paleolithic Lascaux cave paintings (discovered in

1940 and undoubtedly influential on La Borne, says Magen). At the same time, one can discern the influence of concurrent art movements such as Arte Povera and Abstract Expressionism, with one artist slashing knife marks into his stony "canvas" and others sprinkling salt into the kiln to create a splattered surface.

A long vessel by Yves Mohy, ca.1958, does double duty as a dish and a soulptural object.









s Magen explains it, the appeal of La Borne isn't necessary something that will flatten you outright at least not initially. "It's not flashy or something that screams at you," he says of pieces in which you can visualize a pair of hands at work, smoothing here, pinching there, creating sharp planes and bulging curves, textured surfaces and delicate ridges. "It's something that requires you to be invested in a conversation. But the more you look at it, the more you want to know."









