

## Antiques

Eve M. Kahn

### Experimentation Reigned At Enclave of Ceramic Art

Mid-20th-century experimental ceramists holed up in cottages around La Borne, a hamlet in central France. They had immigrated there from Denmark, Germany and Bulgaria to take advantage of the region's clay and its tradition of producing stoneware food jars and chimney pots.

The artisans laboriously hauled around their own raw materials, water and mud by the bucketfuls. They mixed earth-tone glazes with pyrite specks and fed kilns with logs from hornbeam and birch trees felled in nearby forests.

Elisabeth Joulia, one longtime resident potter, once summarized their routines as "a long step from clay to clay, from kiln to kiln, in which each day of life is inscribed."

Hugues Magen, who owns Magen H Gallery in Greenwich Village, has spent a decade gathering about 100 works for "La Borne: 1940-1980," an exhibition that opens there on Nov. 8 (with prices into the five figures per piece). He tracked down artisans who were reluctant to reminisce about their years of hardship in the French village.

"They didn't even want to revisit it," he said during a recent preview of the show. "They had somewhat blocked it out."

He has studied different styles that emerged in La Borne, based on influences like abstract and Surrealist paintings, Bronze Age Cycladic statues and prehistoric French cave murals.

Ms. Joulia left visible thumbprints on the clay. Jean Lerat and Yves Mohy etched spiraling and crosshatched lines resembling African scarification patterns into their vessels. Anne Kjaersgaard used drippy, creamy glaze formulas that she had learned from the British innovator Bernard Leach, and Solange Garotte molded thin ruffled fronds. Mr. Magen is apt to call the objects "he" or "she," depending on the sex of the creator.

"They all have their own identity," he said, as he walked along a display shelf. "They all have their own conversation."



MAGEN H GALLERY

Stoneware from the 1960s by Solange Garotte is part of the show of ceramists from La Borne, France, at Magen H Gallery.

### Pre-Columbian Works

A Swiss family has withdrawn long-term loans of pre-Columbian artifacts to a Barcelona museum, which closed on Sept. 14. The Barbier-Muellers, two generations of Swiss art collectors active in fields ranging from Renoir and Picasso paintings to African masks and ancient Vietnamese daggers, had planned to sell more than 300 pre-Columbian pieces to Spanish government groups for about \$26 million, but the financing fell through.

The contents of the Barbier-Mueller Museum of Pre-Columbian Art, which had occupied a 15th-century palace near a Picasso museum since 1997 until it closed, have been consigned for a March auction at Sotheby's in Paris. Highlights have been traveling to Sotheby's branches, and 20 will be on view at the New York showroom from Nov. 3 to 13.

On the Barcelona museum's closing day, the newspaper *El País* reported, "There were barely 20 last-minute visitors to the world's largest private collection of pre-Hispanic art."

Estimates at Sotheby's reach into the seven-figure apiece for terra-cotta, stone and wood vessels, masks and statues of deities and animals, made by cultures scattered from Alaska to Patagonia. A few had previously belonged to famous expatriates in Mexico, including the film director John Huston and the French-Canadian collector Guy Joussemet.

Collectors in the pre-Columbian field typically focus on one region. But Jean Paul Barbier-Mueller, the family patriarch, preferred to cover the whole Western Hemisphere.

"He bought against the currents of fashion," said Jacques Blazy, Sotheby's specialist for the sale.