

A Shared Journey: The Barkan Contemporary Ceramic Collection at the RISD Museum

September 13, 2025 - March 5, 2028

Remarkably versatile and available around the world, clay has been used by makers for thousands of years. This soft, malleable earth can be shaped into an infinite variety of objects, then transformed by heat into something hard and durable.

Yet, if you think about ceramics, what comes to mind? A teapot, or perhaps a plate? Clay—whether earthenware, stoneware, or porcelain—is typically used to make small functional objects. But why not create something big, bold, and sculptural from clay?

Artists working in the field of ceramics in the 1950s responded to this challenge in powerful and innovative ways. Peter Voulkos, who radically pushed clay beyond the functional, said, “Wielding clay is magic. The minute you touch it, it moves, so you’ve got to move with it. I always work standing up, so I can move my body around. I don’t sit and make dainty things.”

Made by nearly 90 artists, the objects in this exhibition—which continues on the 6th floor between November 8, 2025 and April 5, 2026—present the undeniable embrace of clay as a viable medium for contemporary art. This trajectory continues to gather strength today.

Paralleling artists’ expanding approach to ceramics, Hope and Mel Barkan developed a shared interest in sculptural ceramic forms as they built their collection, part of which was recently given to the RISD Museum.

Elizabeth A. Williams

David and Peggy Rockefeller Curator of Decorative Arts and Design

RISD Museum is supported by a grant from the Rhode Island State Council on the Arts, through an appropriation by the Rhode Island General Assembly and a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, and with the generous partnership of the Rhode Island School of Design, its Board of Trustees, and Museum Governors.

The Barkan Contemporary Ceramic Collection

This exhibition celebrates the power and joy of shared knowledge, creativity, and objects, underscoring the interconnectedness of art and the ongoing impact of those who create, collect, and pass on their knowledge and passion for the ceramic medium.

Many art collectors look upon themselves more as caretakers than as owners. Gathered over many decades by Hope and Mel Barkan, the Barkan Contemporary Ceramic Collection, part of which was recently gifted to the RISD Museum, spans ceramics from the 1960s to the 2010s. This expansive array of works reflects a range of artistic practices, cultural identities, and global perspectives.

Traditionally, when a museum acquires an artwork, its staff is promising to care for that object in perpetuity—for eternity. In addition to donating these works to the RISD Museum, the Barkans also

provided funds for their ongoing care, supporting the museum's promise to safeguard their collection and share it with audiences for many generations.

Ceramics Education at RISD

Many of the artists in the Barkans' collection are or were leading art educators in the field of ceramics. This is one of the reasons that the couple felt that the RISD Museum, as a teaching and collecting institution, is a place where their pieces would be valued and accessible, especially to students.

The RISD Ceramics Department had its start in 1935 with a pottery course in the Teacher's Education Department. By 1938 the class was renamed Ceramics and became part of the Sculpture Department. From 1939 to 1942 the course was taught by Virginia Plummer, who had earned her BFA at the New York State College of Ceramics at Alfred University.

In advanced alignment with the Barkans' affinity for ceramic sculpture, ceramics became a major within RISD's Sculpture Department in 1946. The program was led by Lyle N. and Dorothy W. Perkins, who both received their BFAs from Alfred University. In 1947, one RISD student declared ceramics as their major. The program featured one kiln, one powered wheel, and one kick wheel.

By 1952, RISD's program became a full-fledged independent department, with courses offered to ceramics majors, sculpture majors, and students studying industrial design or art education. The Perkinses remained at the helm until 1963; for the nascent department. From 1965 to 1977—Norman Schulman's tenure as head of RISD's Ceramics Department—the sculptural aspects of clay continued to be emphasized. This focus on sculpture reflected a nationwide trajectory that continues today.

CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

Case 1

Tony Marsh
b. 1954 in New York; works in Long Beach, California
Untitled, 1997
Earthenware with glaze
Gift of Hope and Mel Barkan 2025.39.23



CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

Ron Nagle
b. 1939; b. in and works in San Francisco
Untitled, 1981
Earthenware with glaze
Gift of Hope and Mel Barkan **2025.39.28**



Ron Nagle
b. 1939; b. in and works in San Francisco
Kimberly Timbers, 2004
Earthenware with glaze
Gift of Hope and Mel Barkan **2025.39.29**



Richard Notkin
b. 1948 in Chicago; works in Puget Sound, Washington
Heart Teapot: Metamorphosis IV, from the *Yixing* series, 1999
Stoneware
Gift of Hope and Mel Barkan **2025.39.30ab**



Annabeth Rosen (RISD faculty 1990–1991, Ceramics)
b. 1957 in Brooklyn, New York; works in Davis, California
Untitled (Collage Plate with Dark Amber Leaves), 1997
Earthenware with glaze
Gift of Hope and Mel Barkan **2025.39.35**



CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

Case 2

John Gill
b. 1949 in Renton, Washington; works in Alfred, New York
Ewer, 1978
Stoneware with glaze
Gift of Hope and Mel Barkan 2025.39.52



Andrew Lord
b. 1950 in Lancashire, England; works in New York
Mexican jug and double dish in the evening. Angles, 1982
Earthenware with glaze
Collection of Hope and Mel Barkan



Annabeth Rosen (RISD faculty 1990–1991, Ceramics)
b. 1957 in Brooklyn, New York; works in Davis, California
Pair of White Birds, 1996
Earthenware with glaze
Collection of Hope and Mel Barkan



John Gill
b. 1949 in Renton, Washington; works in Alfred, New York
Ewer, 1978
Stoneware with glaze
Gift of Hope and Mel Barkan 2025.39.51



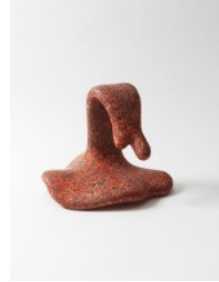
Case 3

Ken Price
1935–2012; b. in Los Angeles; worked in California and New Mexico
Ring of Fire, 1987
Ceramic with paint
Collection of Hope and Mel Barkan



CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

Ken Price
1935–2012; b. in Los Angeles; worked in California and New Mexico
Mildred Venus, 2001
Ceramic with paint
Collection of Hope and Mel Barkan



Ken Price
1935–2012; b. in Los Angeles; worked in California and New Mexico
The True Form, 2007
Ceramic with paint
Collection of Hope and Mel Barkan



Case 4

James Richard (Rick) Dillingham
1952–1994; b. in Lake Forest, Illinois; worked in Santa Fe, New Mexico
Untitled, 1984
Earthenware with glaze
Gift of Hope and Mel Barkan 2025.39.10



Anish Kapoor
b. 1954 in Mumbai, India; works in London
Untitled, 1993
Porcelain and earthenware with glaze
Gift of Hope and Mel Barkan 2025.39.19ab



CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

Malene Müllertz
b. 1949; b. in and works in Copenhagen
Untitled, 2000
Stoneware with glaze
Gift of Hope and Mel Barkan 2025.39.26



Malene Müllertz
b. 1949; b. in and works in Copenhagen
Rattle Sound, 2008
Stoneware with glaze
Gift of Hope and Mel Barkan 2025.39.27



Beatrice Wood
1893–1998; b. in San Francisco; worked in Ojai, California
Two Handled Chalice, 1992
Earthenware with luster glaze
Gift of Hope and Mel Barkan 2025.39.47



Rudy Autio
1926–2007; b. in Butte, Montana; worked in Montana
Two Women and a Horse, 1979
Stoneware with glaze
Collection of Hope and Mel Barkan



CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

Case 5

Alison Britton
b. 1948 in London; works in Yorkshire, England
Pink Jar, 1998
Earthenware with glaze
Gift of Hope and Mel Barkan 2025.39.1



Lawson Oyekan
British Nigerian; b. 1961; b. in and works in London
Passage Pot (Afe Ika Afi Eke) Saworo, 1993
Earthenware
Gift of Hope and Mel Barkan 2025.39.31



Colin Pearson
1923–2007; b. in London; worked in England
Untitled, 1998
Stoneware with glaze
Gift of Hope and Mel Barkan 2025.39.33



Michael Cleff
b. 1961; b. in and works in Bochum, Germany
Untitled, 2000
Stoneware with glaze
Gift of Hope and Mel Barkan 2025.39.5



Lis Ehrenreich
b. 1953 in Denmark; works in Aarhus, Denmark
ALBARELLO, 2003
Stoneware with glaze
Gift of Hope and Mel Barkan 2025.39.12



CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

Kenneth Ferguson
1928–2004; b. in Elwood, Indiana; worked in Kansas City
Untitled (Hare Basket), 1980
Stoneware with glaze
Gift of Hope and Mel Barkan 2025.39.13



Robert C. Turner
1913–2005; b. in Port Washington, New York; worked in Alfred, New York
Ashanti, 1982
Stoneware with glaze
Gift of Hope and Mel Barkan 2025.39.44ab

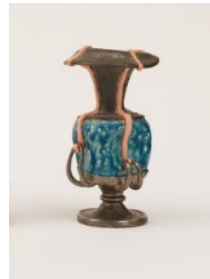


Case 6

Kathy Butterly
b. 1963 in Amityville, New York; works in New York
The Snake Charmer, 1996
Porcelain with glaze
Gift of Hope and Mel Barkan 2025.39.2



Kathy Butterly
b. 1963 in Amityville, New York; works in New York
Return from Venus, 1995
Porcelain with glaze
Gift of Hope and Mel Barkan 2025.39.3



CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

Phillip Maberry
b. 1951 in Stamford, Texas; works in Santa Monica, California
Untitled (PM-16-81), 1981
Earthenware with glaze
Gift of Hope and Mel Barkan **2025.39.25**



Ken Price
1935–2012; b. in Los Angeles; worked in California and New Mexico
California Cup, 1991
Earthenware with glaze
Gift of Hope and Mel Barkan **2025.39.34**



Beatrice Wood
1893–1998; b. in San Francisco; worked in Ojai, California
Gold Balls on Gold Vase, 1999
Earthenware with luster glaze
Gift of Hope and Mel Barkan **2025.39.48**



Kathy Butterly
b. 1963 in Amityville, New York; works in New York
Bon Bon, 1999
Porcelain with glaze
Collection of Hope and Mel Barkan



Kathy Butterly
b. 1963 in Amityville, New York; works in New York
Wanderer, 2013
Porcelain with glaze
Collection of Hope and Mel Barkan



CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

Jun Kaneko 金子潤 (RISD faculty 1973–1975, Ceramics and Glass)
b. 1942 in Nagoya, Japan; works in Omaha, Nebraska
Chunk, 1973
Stoneware with glaze
Collection of Hope and Mel Barkan



Richard Slee
b. 1946 in Cumbria, England; works in London
Boy in Field, 1997
Porcelain with glaze
Collection of Hope and Mel Barkan



Case 7

Chris Gustin
b. 1952 in Chicago; works in South Dartmouth, Massachusetts
Untitled (Teapot), 1982
Stoneware
Gift of Hope and Mel Barkan 2025.39.15ab



Irvin Tepper
b. 1947 in St. Louis, Missouri; works in New York
Alert, 1999
Porcelain with pigment
Gift of Hope and Mel Barkan 2025.39.42



Irvin Tepper
b. 1947 in St. Louis, Missouri; works in New York
New Beginnings, 2004
Porcelain with pigment
Gift of Hope and Mel Barkan 2025.39.43



CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

Gillian Lowndes
1936–2010; b. in Cheshire, England; worked in England
Dark Scroll II, 1998
Porcelain with glaze and wire
Collection of Hope and Mel Barkan



Philip Cornelius
1934–2015; b. in San Bernardino, California; worked in California
Teapot, 1981
Porcelain with glaze
Gift of Hope and Mel Barkan **2025.39.6ab**



Jun Kaneko 金子潤 (RISD faculty 1973–1975, Ceramics and Glass)
b. 1942 in Nagoya, Japan; works in Omaha, Nebraska
Untitled, 1982
Stoneware with glaze
Gift of Hope and Mel Barkan **2025.39.17**



Peter Voulkos
1924–2002; b. in Bozeman, Montana; worked in California
Untitled, 1962
Stoneware with glaze
Gift of Hope and Mel Barkan **2025.39.45ab**



Peter Voulkos
1924–2002; b. in Bozeman, Montana; worked in California
Elephant Foot, 1985
Stoneware with glaze
Gift of Hope and Mel Barkan **2025.39.49**



CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

Kenneth Ferguson
1928–2004; b. in Elwood, Indiana; worked in Kansas City
Teapot, 1978
Stoneware with glaze
Gift of Hope and Mel Barkan **2025.39.50ab**



Case 8

Babs Haenen
b. 1948; b. in and works in Amsterdam
Troubled Walls, 1996
Porcelain with pigment and glaze
Gift of Hope and Mel Barkan **2025.39.16**



Bodil Manz
b. 1943; b. in and works in Copenhagen
Untitled, 2006
Porcelain with transfer print
Gift of Hope and Mel Barkan **2025.39.21**



Bodil Manz
b. 1943; b. in and works in Copenhagen
Untitled, 2006
Porcelain with transfer print
Gift of Hope and Mel Barkan **2025.39.22**



CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

Bodil Manz
b. 1943; b. in and works in Copenhagen
Untitled, 2006
Porcelain with transfer print
Collection of Hope and Mel Barkan



Bodil Manz
b. 1943; b. in and works in Copenhagen
Untitled, 2006
Porcelain with transfer print
Collection of Hope and Mel Barkan



Case 9

Akio Takamori 高森昭夫
1950–2017; b. in Nobeoka, Japan; worked in Seattle
Boy, 1996
Stoneware with glaze
Gift of Hope and Mel Barkan **2025.39.39**



Akio Takamori 高森昭夫
1950–2017; b. in Nobeoka, Japan; worked in Seattle
High School Boy, 1996
Stoneware with glaze
Gift of Hope and Mel Barkan **2025.39.40**



CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

Akio Takamori 高森昭夫
1950–2017; b. in Nobeoka, Japan; worked in Seattle
Boy Urinating, 1997
Stoneware with glaze
Gift of Hope and Mel Barkan 2025.39.41



Case 10

Richard DeVore
1933–2006; b. in Toledo, Ohio; worked in Michigan and Colorado
Untitled, 1990
Earthenware with glaze
Gift of Hope and Mel Barkan 2025.39.7



Richard DeVore
b. in Toledo, Ohio; worked in Michigan and Colorado
Untitled, 1993
Earthenware with glaze
Gift of Hope and Mel Barkan 2025.39.8



Richard DeVore
1933–2006; b. in Toledo, Ohio; worked in Michigan and Colorado
Untitled, 1978
Earthenware with glaze
Gift of Hope and Mel Barkan 2025.39.9



CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

Richard DeVore
1933–2006; b. in Toledo, Ohio; worked in Michigan and Colorado
Untitled (Torso), 1980
Earthenware with glaze
Collection of Hope and Mel Barkan

