

VERMONT POTTER
CHARLOTTE POTOK RETROSPECTIVE
BLINKING LIGHT GALLERY
PLAINFIELD, JULY 2 -30, 2009

The heading over Charlotte Potok's obituary reads VERMONT POTTER DIES. But that's not really accurate. The pottery displayed at the Blinking Light Gallery—a small representation of a voluminous life's work—preserves her energy and imagination, her humor, skill and endless inventiveness. Potok lives on in the clay she shaped, decorated and fired into table wear, furniture, wall hangings, planters. She's not dead any more than the ancient and modern masters whose traditions she absorbed and advanced, whose ranks she has joined.

Most artisans have teachers or mentors, but Charlotte was mostly self-taught. Her one instructor was David Gil at Bennington Potters. From Gil, she learned the basics of designing and producing clay pots. Back home in Plainfield, she talked Goddard's president into letting her set up a pottery and start a ceramics program. She loved working with students, her little program flourished—and she had a studio where she could produce her own work. For the next 50 years, in a tool shed, a horse barn, an expanded mudroom, she set up a wheel, a work table, a kiln and made every kind of object that could possibly be fashioned out of clay.

Charlotte's early work was simple and utilitarian, earthenware glazed in muted colors. Then she started fooling around. A bright color here, a set of geometric sculptures there, a porcelain lamp that looked like a sky scraper. Then she looked back into history for inspiration and instruction, as she was to do periodically throughout her life. The first backward glance was at Greek pottery, and resulted in a series of both formal and folk pieces which echoed the ancient Agean civilizations. Returning to the 20th century, she started making stylized copies of paper ware out of porcelain. *The New York Times* called the work "Pop Art in Porcelain" and the Museum of Modern Art bought a set for its permanent collection. Quilted porcelain followed and kids' porcelain drinking cups that looked like alphabet blocks. Those are at the Smithsonian.

A long lasting love affair with pre-Columbian Mayan pottery led Charlotte to adapt their materials and designs to her own work for a while—then back to modern times. She collaborated with Ed Koren to make porcelain kitchenware decorated with his shaggy cartoon characters. Then she produced brightly glazed plates shaped like fish, huge vases shaped like women's torsos, bird baths made out of porcelain. And back again to ancient times, ten thousand, twenty thousand years back to little figurines of women, most likely goddesses. Charlotte made ten simple, moving sculptures based on the small deities. They were her last project.

Written by: ©Anita Landa