

Nancy Selvin

The Sybaris Gallery
Royal Oak,
Michigan

When artists are lucky, their mastery of their chosen media improves with age. Many choose to flaunt this increasing skill by creating ever more technically and aesthetically complex work. Others, like mixed-media sculptor Nancy Selvin, realize that artistic simplicity is often the most sophisticated device of all.

As a student of Peter Voulkos and Ron Nagle at the University of California, Berkeley, in the late 1960s, Selvin learned never to be afraid of muscling the clay—or letting it have its fickle way with her. By the early 1980s, Selvin abandoned the free-standing form for involved ceramic tea bowl still lifes on trays and shelves. Through this early experimentation and exploration, the artist revealed her infatuation with media and an awakening to the issues of content and composition. A recent show explored some of the savviest Selvin work to date, work that takes her ongoing vocabulary and cranks it up a few notches.

Her earlier, composition-oriented still lifes have given way to more spiritual concerns. In *Still Life with Three Tea Bowls*, three carefully choreographed tea bowls seem to perform the ancient Japanese ritual of tea time by themselves, while at the same time battling the intrusion of garish, gold leaf English letters interspersed throughout the piece.

Happily, Selvin's style still nods to her expressionistic mentors via an almost primal emphasis on process over product. To understand, one must notice how the artist lustily gouged into the rim of a shallow bowl with her fingertip in *Still Life with Fork* or see the spontaneous manner in which a swatch of taupe glaze licks the inside of a jet-black raku tea bowl in *Black & White Still Life with Two Bowls*.

It's too bad that Selvin's titles for her works aren't as tantalizing as the works themselves. But never mind; as she matures, Selvin provides us with plenty of beauty in other details.

Veronica Pasfield

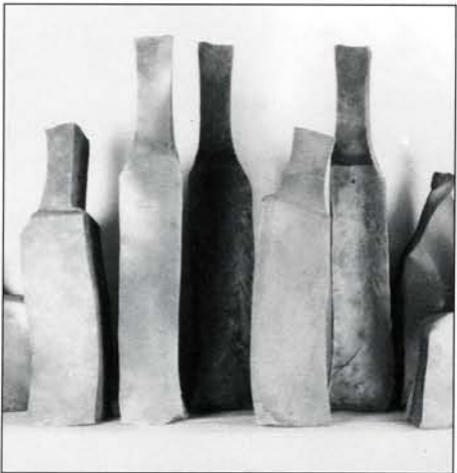


Photo: Steve Selvin.

Still Life: *Ledge with Bottles* (1992), 16" x 36" x 5", raku, mixed media.