

“Saving Daniel Rhodes” 1911-1989

Celebrating the artistry and historical contribution of contemporary America’s champion of clay, Daniel Rhodes.

May 10 - June 7, 2014 / Kick off event and reception May 10, 5-8pm

A special, one time only fundraising exhibition hosted by River Gallery in support of
The Purple Rose Theatre Company

The Harold and Kay Peplau Therapeutic Riding Center - Home of Therapeutic Riding, Inc.



“Saving Daniel Rhodes” The Story

Everyone knows that the stars align perfectly and beautifully every so often. When they do, we are wise to recognize and act on these moments of glittering possibility, not only for ourselves, but for others as well. When Michael Feeney, Chelsea’s own champion of the arts bounded into River Gallery last summer and exclaimed, “There is a treasure trove of sculptures by one of America’s coolest ceramic artists lying in storage in the basement of a building in Pontiac that is about to be foreclosed. I’m going to rescue these icons of American ceramic art and I need your help.” River Gallery recognized his excitement and the importance of his mission and enlisted on the spot.

Two directors, three interns, a couple of heavy lifters and Michael headed out on a hot summer morning in a 26 foot U-haul to the basement of the former site of the Shaw Guido Gallery building. Two major tasks awaited us: exploration and excavation. Discoveries were non stop. Large, beautiful Japanese inspired sculptures Rhodes calls “Guardians” were the first to make their presence known. They greeted us like awesome and powerful carriers of ancestral spirit. We moved around the basement in semi-darkness, flashlights in hand, calling out to one another as we lifted tarps and opened crates and boxes. We discovered over one hundred wood-fired treasures gathered together in group after group, as if awaiting our arrival. Though there was much to do, it was impossible to rush. Each vessel and pot, every sculpture, large and small, required close examination. As dusty boxes were opened, photographs, catalogues and sketchbooks were revealed. Exquisite, dynamic drawings and paintings by Rhodes from the 1960’s (a totally unexpected discovery!) caught our eyes, holding us captive momentarily. By sunset we had wrapped, carried and stacked every item onto the truck and headed back to River Gallery wondering what Michael would have in store for us and for these amazing treasures of American art history.



Photos taken on site in Pontiac, MI July 2013



“Saving Daniel Rhodes” / Exhibition Statement

River Gallery recognized that we had become stewards of an important body of artwork and materials that contained not only a significant portion of the story of American ceramic arts and education, but also the inspiring story of a determined pioneer who dedicated his artistic life to exploration and learning. It was clear that something unique had to be conceived that would bring his life’s work back into the light of recognition and his innovative art into the homes and spaces of those who remember him and those just learning about him for the first time. The Daniel Rhodes collection was gifted to the River Gallery and a plan was hatched by the benefactor, Michael Feeney and the gallery to produce an exhibit that would create an opportunity for visitors to experience the joy of discovery, the warmth of recognition and the excitement of art collecting. The more we learned about Rhodes from his sculptures, drawings, writings and photographs, the more we were inspired by his intrepid, generous spirit. Doing something joyful and generous with his legacy became important. Therefore, two non-profits, recognized and cherished in our community, **The Purple Rose Theatre Company** and **The Harold and Kay Peplau Therapeutic Riding Center - Home of Therapeutic Riding Inc.** have been selected to receive 100% of the proceeds earned during the “Saving Daniel Rhodes” exhibition.

“Saving Daniel Rhodes” / Ceramic Artworks Available / 1960’s -1980’s

The exhibit will be designed as a contemporary museum experience with one exciting and notable difference: The pots and sculptures, paintings and drawings will be available for purchase with 100% of the proceeds going to **The Purple Rose Theatre Company** and **The Harold and Kay Peplau Therapeutic Riding Center - Home of Therapeutic Riding Inc.** Rhodes’ archival materials discovered during the “rescue” effort have been organized and will be available for review.

The exhibit will display Rhodes’ original writings, copies of his books, articles, and photo albums containing images of the artist, his family, students and friends. Included in this collection of important documents are beautiful black and white photos, taken by Rhodes himself, that give us visual insight and emotional connection to the experiences he had of the villages, kilns, artists and landscapes in Tamba and surrounds during his 1963 Fulbright Year in Japan.

Pots and vessels

There are 18 signed or numbered small-scale pots and vessels. Many of these small treasures exemplify his experimental efforts with scratching and tampering surfaces, conscious deformation of traditional forms and interest in the value of rough, crusty earth-like surfaces. His commitment to discovery and the development of new skills are palpable in these small experiments in clay. Though the viewer may have familiarity with the visual presentation in this collection, it is important to note that Rhodes’ work was on the vanguard of experimentation in contemporary American ceramics expression.



Ceramic sculptures

The exhibit will make available 125 small, mid-scale and large ceramic sculptures. These sculptures are highly constructed, expressive creations of a mature artist in complete command of every aspect of the ceramic process, relying entirely on himself for the establishment of style and meaning. Daniel Rhodes was an accomplished painter, and, as a ceramic artist, he manipulates the clay as if it were paint and splashes, scrubs down or builds up for expressive forms, textures and surfaces. The individual elements Rhodes calls "fortuitous forms" are used in an architectural way to build solid constructs that appear woven, wrapped or bound. The natural clay surfaces are terra cotta in tone with color and value subtly altered by the application of slips. Textures are dramatic and pronounced and pay tribute to the elemental surfaces of mountains, valleys, eroded terrains and the moon. Rhodes' experiences in Japan are evident in many of the pieces especially the ones he calls "Guardians". They are strong in presence, ancient in spirit and look as if they had recently been discovered in some remote village of an archaic Japan, now long vanished. There are numerous large-scale heads that seem to represent and humanize in an immediate fashion the connection between maker and object; a vessel containing the memories of his life, his dreams and aspirations.



“Saving Daniel Rhodes” / Paintings and Drawings 1960’s

One of the most surprising, moving and aesthetically exciting discoveries in the Rhodes rescue mission were boxes containing hundreds of paintings and drawings from the 1960’s. Rhodes was a highly trained and successful painter before he experimented with clay at the Colorado Springs Art Center in 1941. He attended the Art Institute of Chicago and the University of Chicago in the 1930’s. He studied painting at a time when older established modes of expression were being discarded for newer ones. His studio work and art studies were forged at a crucial time in America (before, during and immediately after WW II) when radical innovation and experimentation was on the rise. He studied at the Art Student’s League in New York and traveled to Mexico to study mural painting. He worked closely with Grant Wood and John Stewart Curry at Woods’ Summer Colony in 1941 and was inspired by their commitment to the value of regionalism. He received 5 mural commissions for the U.S. Treasury Department and was the supervisor of the WPA Iowa Art Project. His paintings were included in exhibitions of American paintings at the New York Worlds Fair and the Golden Gate International Exhibition in San Francisco. One can easily observe his core ideas and impulses taking shape and being developed in these wonderful ink and painted images. They demonstrate a skillful handling of form and have a strong sculptural feel. His paintings and drawings are full expressions of the dynamism of his era and exquisite representations of freedom.



“Daniel Rhodes in his life and work represents and documents the evolution of the contemporary American ceramic movement and is considered a central figure in any serious consideration of contemporary expression in the medium of clay.” Harold Traux

“Saving Daniel Rhodes” / Biography

“Daniel Rhodes is a highly trained individual who has complete control over the whole ceramic process and depends entirely upon himself for the establishment of style and meaning. He is a unique studio-ceramist in that through his work with clay, his writing and his teaching, he has accomplished many things that place him in a central position of leadership in the field of studio-ceramics. He brought new dignity and respect to ceramic sculpture as a valid and significant art form. Because of his sound knowledge of clay, the ceramic process and its technical aspects, Daniel Rhodes has been able to bring through his writings an understanding of materials and processes to individuals throughout the world who are interested in clay as a vehicle for artistic expression. Often in his work we see the exploration of a new idea and the development of innovations involving new technical possibilities for the expression of an idea in clay. He produces forms that are original and innovative and are considered classic examples of ceramic expression for the period in which he lived and worked. Daniel Rhodes became a spokesman for contemporary American studio-ceramics through his writings, lecturing, and participation as a juror in many national, regional and international ceramic exhibits. There is not an art library, a ceramic laboratory, or the studio of studio-ceramist that does not contain his writing. He contributed significantly to ceramic writing in the 20th century and he set a standard for all publications to follow. He also made an impact on the field of studio ceramics through his work as a teacher. His graduates from Alfred University and elsewhere are now working and teaching in every section of this country and some are the leading studio-ceramists of today. Daniel Rhodes in his life and work represents and documents the evolution of the contemporary American ceramic movement and is considered a central figure in any serious consideration of contemporary expression in the medium of clay.”

Harold Traux, 1935 -1996, Professor Emeritus; Associate Dean, Museum Director, Miami University, Oxford, Ohio

Exhibits / Permanent Collections

Museum of Modern Art, The Whitney Museum of American Art, The Museum of Contemporary Crafts, Smithsonian Institution, The Los Angeles County Museum of Art, The Schein-Joseph International Museum of Ceramic Art at Alfred University, Victoria and Albert Museum, The Museum of Modern Art Kyoto. The National Council on Education in Ceramic Art awarded Rhodes a prestigious Medal of Citation, 1973.



Daniel Rhodes 1963, Tamba Japan



The Purple Rose Theatre Company (PRTC) is the home of world-class, original American theatre. The PRTC is a professional theatre company with roots in the Midwest that takes a handcrafted, artisanal approach to producing new and classic American plays that are nothing less than one-of-a-kind experiences. The PRTC is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit professional theatre operating under a Small Professional Theatre agreement with the Actors' Equity Association.

Mission

To create fresh, original productions that get our audiences talking among themselves and feeling something new.

Promise to Artists

Achieve your professional and creative potential doing work that you love.



The Harold and Kay Peplau Therapeutic Riding Center - Home of Therapeutic Riding, Inc. is a volunteer-based, non-profit organization which provides the opportunity for personal growth through the horseback riding experience to Washtenaw County, Michigan, area youth and adults with disabilities. Our mission is to provide recreational and therapeutic riding which develops physical, cognitive, and emotional capabilities and enhances self-esteem.

Who are we?

TRI is a 501 (c)(3) non-profit organization that was founded in 1984 to provide children and adults with disabilities with the opportunity to experience the joy of horseback riding and equine assisted activities. Since moving into our beautiful new facility in 2010, we can now offer many different programs – group and private riding lessons, ground lessons (grooming, tacking, and showmanship), day tours and day programming for groups, and many more.