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Whiskey Jugs and Tea Bowls: Conversations Between Japanese Mingei and North Carolina Vernacular Pottery

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Abstract

The study of North Carolina pottery is an emerging field within art history. Most texts on the subject were published after 1980 and are generally framed through anthropological lenses focusing on the story of the potters more than the objects they create. Current research also concentrates on potters working before the start of the 20th century and thus, before the beginnings of the studio craft movement (1940s to present). In sharp contrast to this is the study of Japanese pottery, a long-standing area of intensive research. Some recent scholarship has made visual comparisons between early wood-fired Japanese wares and North Carolina pottery, alluding to the growing interest in North Carolina pots as art objects, but little research has been published on interactions between the two artist cultures.

This paper will examine the 1952 Pottery Seminar that took place at Black Mountain College, NC and the conversations between Japanese mingei artists and local vernacular potters that the seminar facilitated. Sources for this inquiry include primary documents from the Seminar, oral histories told by North Carolina potters, and the written philosophies of mingei potters, as well as the pots themselves. Through these references, work by vernacular potters will be re-contextualized with a focus on functionality, process, and aesthetic values.

1. Introduction

In a 1950s issue of the seminal craft-world magazine *Craft Horizons*, English potter Bernard Leach complained that American ceramics were "undigested" and suffered in quality due to not having a "tap-root."[1] This complaint launched a wave of rebuttals from American potters, but also found some sympathizers who agreed with Leach's advice that following the tenets of traditional Japanese potters could give American ceramics the structure he felt it needed.[2] [3] As a man obsessed with the "peasant potter" and the philosophies and forms associated with traditional Japanese and Korean ceramics, it is surprising that Leach did not find the tap-root he believed America needed in the vernacular potters[4] of the Southern United States, in North Carolina especially. The work made by North Carolina potters through the 19th and early 20th centuries closely compares to work made by Japanese *mingei* potters that Leach so admired, but also uses culturally specific forms and imagery to create distinctly American pots.

While North Carolina pottery has only recently become a topic of academic interest, Japanese pottery has long been a subject of intensive research. Some recent scholarship has made visual comparisons between early wood-fired Japanese wares and North Carolina pottery,[5] alluding to the growing interest in North Carolina pots as art objects, but little research has been published on direct interactions between the two artist cultures. The most potent, but still overlooked, instance of cultural exchange between Japanese and North Carolinian potters is the Black Mountain College Pottery Seminar of 1952. Here, internationally successful and renowned potter Shoji Hamada, along with Bernard Leach and Soetsu Yanagi, the creator of *mingei*, visited Black Mountain College in North Carolina to lecture on the "interchange of work and ideas" from "east to west." [6] Local potters came individually and as part of the Southern Highlands Handicraft Guild to hear them speak, and the lecturers also visited regional pottery studios. The

conversations that were facilitated by this seminar made it clear that the two cultures of potters shared a language of both design and process, and both parties left influenced by the other.

The Seminar also popularized the idea of "folk pottery" across the United States, further encouraging the resurgence of interest in craft that later led to the academic texts upon which this paper is based. This similarity in philosophy and work that was fully explored for the first time during the seminar allows for a modern re-contextualization of vernacular potters and a re-examining of their work that has not before taken place. Through comparative analyses of the formal properties of work from both cultures, the work of vernacular potters can be viewed with a new focus on functionality, process, and aesthetic values, and reveal the creative tap-root Leach insisted wasn't there.

2. Craft at Black Mountain College

Black Mountain College was a progressivist liberal arts school that ran from 1933 to 1957 in the town of Black Mountain, North Carolina. Many who attended the college, as faculty or students, are now considered to be key players in the post-1940s modern art scene, such as Josef Albers, Anni Albers, Robert Rauschenberg, John Cage, Merce Cunningham, and Ruth Asawa. Even though these artists are now more associated with the fine art world, craft was an important part of the school as well. The low budget of the school made craft an essential part of the curriculum – weaving, woodworking, and printmaking workshops were used to make essentials that the school couldn't otherwise afford, and students and faculty worked together to produce these items.[7] As evidenced by the lasting impact of Black Mountain College on craft, the workshops were not just places of necessity, but places of design as well. While teaching at the college, the Albers' both wrote multiple essays concerning the value of handicrafts, a belief that only strengthened during their tenure there.[8] This equation of fine art and craft was unusual for the time period, especially in the United States, and could be attributed to the Albers' time spent teaching at the Bauhaus School in Germany.

Founded by architect Walter Gropius in 1919, the Bauhaus (1919-1933) sought to reunite the "architects, sculptors, [and] painters" with the mindset of the craftsmen.[9] As outlined in his "Bauhaus Manifesto and Program," Gropius organized the school in an apprentice, journeyman, master fashion, harkening back to older German traditions. He claimed there was "no essential difference between the artist and the craftsman,"[10] and based the curriculum of introductory classes around material studies. Josef Albers often taught this introductory class, the format of which he later redeveloped for his Black Mountain College Classes. As the Bauhaus grew, it continued to emphasize the value of craft, adopting the slogan "Art into Industry" in 1923 after also rewriting the manifesto to embrace designing for mass production. Workshops taught at the Bauhaus included metalworking, typography, cabinetmaking, weaving, and pottery, many of which were again brought over to Black Mountain by Albers and reworked to fit the structure of the college.[11]

While the general influence of the Bauhaus on Albers, and thus the arts at Black Mountain College, is clear, Albers did not apply all aspects of the German curriculum to his new American position. He did not support a ceramics program at Black Mountain College during his time on faculty because he didn't consider clay a strong enough material to withstand the whims of beginning art students.[12] He apparently referred to ceramics of the American craft tradition as "ashtray art,"[13] while still maintaining respect for the ceramic artists coming from the Bauhaus School, such as Marguerite Wildenhain. This hierarchical ranking of media, based not only on the presumed quality of work but also on the culture in which the work was made, presupposes Leach's "taproot" comment and further illustrates how it is possible for North Carolina ceramics to be excluded from this Eurasian-centric craft and design world.

It was not until after the Albers' departure from the college in 1948 that Black Mountain College started a pottery program. While some of Josef Albers' sentiment concerning the superiority of other materials to clay remained among the students and faculty, the generally craft-supportive nature of the school created a space for a ceramics program to thrive. In the fall of 1949, Robert Turner, an Alfred-educated[14] functional potter was hired and the new studio space[15] was finished. Turner resigned in the spring of 1951 and was replaced by David Weinrib and Karen Karnes, two more Alfred-educated functional potters,[16] in the summer of 1952. Under their guidance, the pot-shop was expanded, and more wheels were built for potential students.[17] They threw dishes for the dining hall in order to demonstrate how the production potter could be useful in the larger community of the college, and continually worked against the post-war idea of crafts as simply "handmaidens of industry" or "a form of therapy."[18] Weinrib and Karnes' continued integration of ceramics into the culture of Black Mountain College set the stage for the Pottery Seminar, a seminal event in the history of the college and southeastern craft.

3. 1952 Pottery Seminar

The Pottery Seminar was initially planned as part of a restructuring of Black Mountain College being orchestrated by Charles Olson, the rector of the college from 1953 until the college's closing.[19] His plan, which he referred to as the "Chinese system," was supposed to translate the success of the school's Summer Sessions into the rest of the academic year by splitting the semesters into multiple short institutes that would be taught by visiting lecturers. Olson understood this model to be the reason for scholarly success in China, and believed it would revitalize the school as it continued to experience financial difficulties and lower enrollment rates. However, enough funds were not raised to fully implement the total restructuring of the curriculum, and so only a few aspects of the original system were realized.[20] In the 1952-1953 academic year, Black Mountain College held four institutes, each lasting for up to two months: a Theater Institute, a New Sciences Institute, a Summer Session in the Arts, and a Crafts Institute. The Pottery Seminar was the "highlight" of the Crafts Institute, and ran from October 15th-29th, marking the approximate halfway point of the Institute.[21]

A connection had been made between Olson and Leach in 1951, when Olson asked Leach for recommendations of potters to replace Turner. In their resulting correspondence, Leach mentioned to Olson that he would be visiting the United States to do a reprise of his successful 1950 speaking tour.[22] [23] Olson and Leach arranged for Black Mountain to become the first stop on the 1952 tour, with Shoji Hamada, a close friend and business partner of Leach, and Soetsu Yanagi, a Japanese art collector and philosopher, as additional demonstrators and lecturers. Marguerite Wildenhain of Bauhaus fame, at this point living in California with her own pottery school, would attend as well, serving as "host potter."[24]

The flyer that was circulated for the event illustrates how Black Mountain College uniquely combined the attitudes of fine art and craft, as well as how the philosophies of "east to west" were combined.

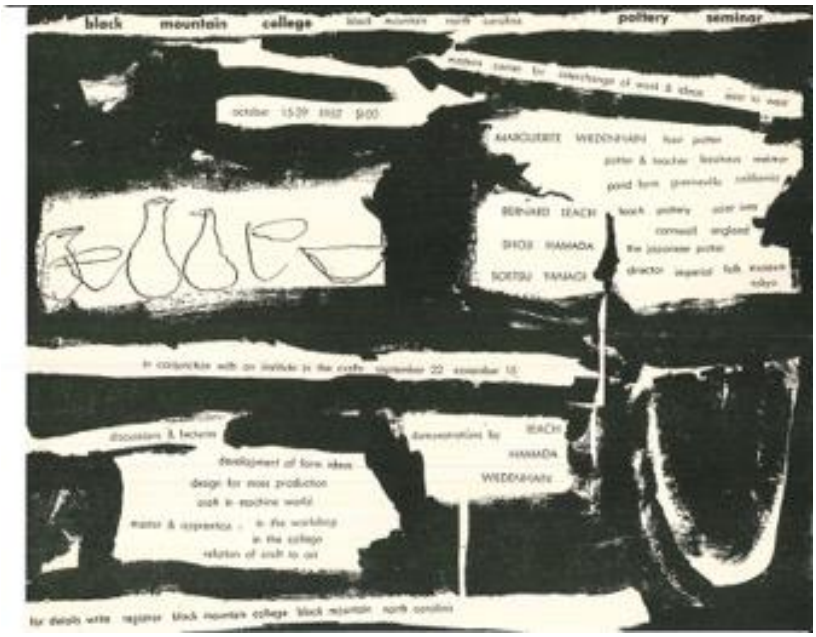

Figure 1. Pottery Seminar Flyer, 1952. Courtesy of the North Carolina Western Regional Archives.

The flyer was created by one of the painting students, and then mass-produced in the school's print shop. The painterly style reflects the popular Abstract Expressionist- style of the time, but uses the style to subtly accentuate the craft theme as shown by the sketched pots, rather than drawing attention to itself. The thick black brushstrokes also could be a reference to the art of calligraphy, visually combining the American Expressionism with traditional Japanese practices.

The list of lecture topics includes "design for mass production," "craft in machine world," and "master & apprentice: in the workshop, in the college." These ideas harken back to the Bauhaus slogan of "Art in Industry," and also reference the core practices of *mingei*, the craft philosophy with which Hamada and Yanagi were associated.

Letters from interested participants came in from across the United States, and one list of participants included twenty people from twelve states.[25] Representatives from local artisan groups, such as the Southern Highland Craft Guild and Jugtown Pottery, were also in attendance for parts of the Seminar.[26] Although the local visitors to the Seminar often did not stay for more than a day, the diverse population to which the Seminar reached created rich dialogues between the fine art students from the college, the studio potters who came for the whole seminar, and the vernacular potters who visited. Karnes and Weinrib also brought Leach and Hamada to local Buncombe county potteries, knowing how interested Leach was in "peasant pottery." They also drove to the Jugtown in the Piedmont.[27] However, this seems to have been an unusual interaction with the local pottery community for Karnes, as she states in her interview with Black Mountain College scholar Mary Emma Harris that "we didn't really associate [with any North Carolina Potters.]" She also claims to be one of the first stoneware potters to sell at the Southern Highlands Craft Guild,[28] although stoneware had been fired in the area for approximately 100 years prior to her arrival. Perhaps Black Mountain College's unfamiliarity with the local vernacular practices came from their unconscious hierarchical ranking of fine art and craft, or more specifically the ranking of craft practices within the broader genre. Regardless, the interactions between the studio potters and vernacular potters that occurred as facilitated by the Seminar provided a long-needed education for both groups.

The timing of the Seminar worked out well for the vernacular North Carolina potters as their business had begun to die off by the middle of the 20th century. Supplies for building kilns and pot shops that had been abundant at the beginning of the century were lacking after both World Wars, and the heavy industrialization of more remote areas as a result of war production made functional ceramic vessels more outdated than ever. Potters had begun to explore more decorative routes, creating forms based on the requests of Northern tourists, but the interest of tourists was often based on a nostalgia for the Pre-Depression was of life, rather than a respect for the history of the craft.[29] The Pottery Seminar brought more awareness of the North Carolina pottery traditions to the rest of the country as Leach, Hamada, and Yanagi continued their tour, and provided much needed validation of the craft's inherent value. The aesthetic similarities shared by North Carolina and Japanese pots created a scholarly interest in the philosophical connections between the two, applying an art world lens to the vernacular pots that had previously not been associated.

4. Philosophies in Japanese Ceramics

While the tradition of ceramics in Japan goes back many thousands of years, and has consequently gone through many styles and approaches, two ideas stand out as being most applicable to the processes and wares of North Carolina potters: the aesthetic principle of *wabi-sabi* and the 20th century *mingei* movement. The term *wabi-sabi* is difficult to translate into English, and the Americanized concept does not embody the complexity of its Japanese origins. *Wabi-sabi* is commonly understood as a design principle in the contemporary United States, and has even been expanded into somewhat of a lifestyle trend in recent years.[30] This basic American translation and understanding centers on the idea of embracing the beauty in imperfection. In a current ceramics practice, this may manifest as a celebration of a chipped mug for the visible history the chip shows, or a purposefully off-center pot, thrown in a way that accentuates the mark of the potter's hand. Early North Carolina potters would not have actively striven for anything that would have affected the functionality of the pot, but they also didn't seek perfection. Impurities in the clay, fingerprints on handles, and other such visible marks of the potter's process were all left.

Philosopher Dr. Kenneth K. Inada defines *wabi-sabi* in reference to D.T. Suzuki's *Zen and Japanese Culture* (1938), one of the many texts instrumental in the introduction of Buddhism and Zen to the West in the first half of the twentieth century. *Wabi-sabi* comes out of the traditional Japanese practice of *cha-no-yu*, or "tea ceremony," which is an aesthetically precise performance of Japanese etiquette. Inada also notes that *wabi* and *sabi* are actually two separate concepts that have been joined into one word because of their similar connotations. Inada notes the "various nuances" of each word, connecting *wabi* to ideas of "tranquility, rest, peace, aloneness, simplicity, death, poverty," and mostly, "emptiness." *Sabi*, he claims, is interchangeable with *wabi*, but is more objective. Aesthetically, Inada believes that *wabi-sabi* can be boiled down to the "appreciation of absolute poverty."[31] While North Carolina potters may not have such a specific word for their aesthetic goals,[32] this appreciation of imperfection and simplicity can be easily applied to their work.

In the 1920s, the values of *wabi-sabi* were integrated into the Japanese art movement of *mingei*, coined by Japanese art historian and philosopher Yanagi Sôetsu in 1925. Sôetsu was entranced by the works and philosophies of Korean vernacular artisans after first encountering the region's traditional ceramics. He was also inspired by the work of British decorative artist William Morris, and the Arts and Crafts movement (1880- 1910) with which Morris was associated. Yanagi drew from the artistic processes and values extoled by these Western craft movements and artists and applied them to what he had seen in Korea, and then "discovered" the presence of a craft culture already

manifested in Japanese society.[33] Japan did not differentiate between fine art and craft until the late 1800s, when Western influence and the opening of urban art schools began to create more of a distinction. Unlike Western culture, though, Japan placed the same amount of value on craft objects as it did on fine art objects because of the commercial success of exporting craft goods to Westerners. By 1910, however, the demand for such goods began to wane, causing the status of these objects to fade as well.[34]

After beginning the *mingei* movement in conjunction with potter and friend Shoji Hamada, Yanagi began to work to preserve and encourage Japanese craft. He collected what he considered to be the finest examples of craft in the nation, and opened the Museum of Japanese Folk Craft in 1936.[35] He also published guidelines he had written that defined the tenets of *mingei*, within which *mingei* artists were to work.[36] *Mingei* art extoled the following guiding principles:

> beauty of naturalness (natural materials and handmade naturally); beauty of tradition (method and design); beauty of simplicity (form and design); beauty of functionality (form and design); beauty of plurality (objects which could be copied and repeatedly produced in large quantities); beauty of inexpensiveness; beauty of selflessness (made by unknown, unlearned, poor craftsmen); and beauty of health (not fragile).[37]

Hamada's work illustrates these characteristics in its simplicity of form and intuitive decorations.

Figure 2. Shoji Hamada. *Covered Jar*. 1945. 7.5 x 8 x 8" Courtesy of Pucker Gallery. http://www.puckergallery.com/artists/hamada%20shoji/LB1_images.html

His *Covered Jar* is made of stoneware, roughly eight inches in diameter and height, and with a wide belly and a high lip. The form is unassuming, with the suggestion of a sphere deterred by the sharp edges remaining around the edges of the belly. If any trimming was done on the foot after the pot was cut off the wheel, it was minimal – a thin rim connecting it to the body just loosely delineates the foot. The lip of the pot is more defined, and the lid sits below the rim. The surface of the pot is coarse, with a creamy white glaze covering the entirety of its surface, unbroken except for a few quick streaks of brown pigment giving the impression of something floral. This is a simple, functional form, void of any ostentatious elements, and embracing the imperfections valued by *wabi-sabi*. Its quiet beauty is in its natural and effortless appearance, making it an exemplary *mingei* work.

5. Early North Carolina Pottery

The study of North Carolina pottery is an emerging field within art history, and most scholarship in the area focuses on potters working before the start of the 20th century. However, the broader study of ceramics tends to concern the popularity of the 20th century studio craft movement (1940s-present) over more rural practices. This creates a gap in which the work of vernacular North Carolina potters who were creating during the last century is ignored, even as the

potters of the era, aware of this cultural shift towards studio craft, attempted to redefine their role within the clay community. Furthermore, most texts regarding North Carolina potters were published after 1980, and are generally framed through anthropological lenses focusing on the lives of the potters more than the objects they create. Scholarship concerning North Carolina pottery from any time period is usually focused on the historical and cultural implications of the craft – an artistic lens is rarely used.[38]

An artistic lens is revealed, however, when the work of early 20th century vernacular potters in North Carolina is compared to the work of Japanese *mingei* potters. While the North Carolina potters may not have worked together under a collective concrete manifesto as *mingei* potters did, the aesthetics of the pots as well as oral histories shared with outsiders speak to a companionable visual language. Although concrete explorations of these similarities did not occur until the Pottery Seminar, processes and products from both cultures can be traced back to decades earlier. Remarkably analogous geological settings meant that both cultures mixed clays and glazes with the same materials, resulting in wares that are sometimes indistinguishable from their partners across the world.

Not all of North Carolina is geologically fit to support potteries. In fact, most of North Carolina's historical pottery production can be traced to only about ten counties, spread in a circle through the Piedmont, with an outlier of Buncombe County reaching into the mountains.

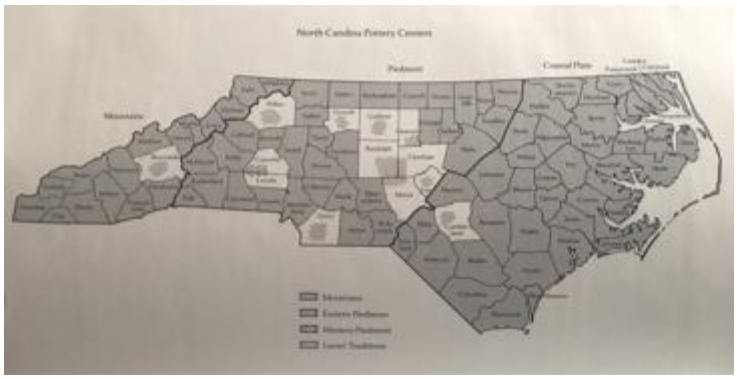

Figure 3. Map of North Carolina Pottery Centers, Scanned from *Turners and Burners* by Charles G. Zug.

The Piedmont has the richest clays of the state, and as it was relatively isolated from external markets, its population took advantage of its natural resources to produce necessary wares.[39] While natives to the area had of course produced pottery since well before recorded history, historian Charles Zug claims that the first widely studied European-style pottery in North Carolina was made in the 1750s by the Moravians, a Germanic Protestant sect. Having just started a settlement called Bethabara in what is now Forsyth County, the Moravians began to produce pottery to support their community.[40] The Moravians were very meticulous in their record keeping, and thus a clear lineage of practice and tradition can be traced from the group's German and English roots to their pots in America.

Moravian pottery is visually distinct from other North Carolina vernacular pottery of the period, but the extreme detail of the records kept by the town allows for the creation of a more in-depth comparison of the two making styles. The stark aesthetics and no-nonsense philosophies of the vernacular potters are also made clearer when compared to the more decorative style of the Moravians. Lists of wares produced in the Moravian pottery shops show a variety of forms, from the more commonplace "'jugs, jars, [and] bowls'" to the more unusual: "'lighting devices, miscellaneous forms, and pressed ware.'"[41] North Carolina potters outside of the Moravian tradition produced less varied forms, and almost never decorated their pots to the same levels that the Moravians did. While simplistic in comparison to some of the painted Chinese porcelain pieces and related art pots popular at the time, the Moravian style is still ornate when placed next to the work of other North Carolina potters.

Compare, for example, two jars made in neighboring counties, one by a potter in the Moravian guild in Forsyth County, and one by an individual working in a family pottery in Guilford or Randolph County.[42]

Figure 4. Rudolph Christ. *Moravian Jar.* c. Early 1800s. Wood-fired earthenware with slip.
https://www.antiquesandthearts.com/rt-in-clay-masterworks-of-north-carolina-earthenwareat-mesda/

Figure 5. Henry Watkins. *Earthenware Jar.* c. Early 1800s. Wood-fired earthenware.
http://mesda.org/item/collections/jar/1627/

The Moravian jar is attributed to Rudolph Christ, and can be dated to the late eighteenth century. It is fairly large and bulbous, meant to hold a sizable volume of food or water, and has a tight fitting domed lid with a small thrown knob. Two strap handles, precisely pulled with small ridges present on the outer edge of each, protrude from the neck of the pot. Slip line work in three colors – white, green, and brown – covers the pot. The decoration was attuned to the shape of the pot, as shown by the repeated pattern of horizontal lines in brown and white that encircle the belly of the pot and accentuate its volume. Abstracted flower designs mark the connecting points of the handles to the body of the pot, possibly serving a double duty of adding decoration while also disguising the point of attachment. This softens the transition between the pieces, which the potter also considered in his matching of the lid to the body. The lip of the pot and the lid are both outlined in brown slip, with a zig-zag line sitting respectively above and below each of the brown lines, mirroring each other. The surface decoration of this pot, while not excessively extravagant, still shows how the Moravians valued their crafts beyond just their functionality.

The earthenware jar by Henry Watkins is just as precise in form as the Moravian jar, but pays much less attention to intentional surface decoration. The shape of this jar is similarly globular, with a defined foot and lip that appear to be the exact same width as each other – proof of a skilled potter who is very aware of the form he is making. The handles on this jar are lug handles, which sit vertically on the shoulder of the pot and hug the neck. Watkins has not

bothered to disguise the point of attachment of his handles, and two dips on either side of the handles are evidence of his fingers smearing the clay together. While this rough mark of the potter's hand could be considered a flaw, it in fact speaks to the superior functionality of the pot, as such a strong attachment means that the handles are far less likely to break off. The only decoration on this pot echoes the circumferential lines on the Moravian jar, but is far simpler. Two incised horizontal lines enclose a wide wave pattern that could have easily been made by turning the pot on the wheel while still wet and gently pressing a thin tool into the clay and moving the hand up and down. This kind of simple and quick embellishment shows that the vernacular potters of North Carolina did not view their work as purely decorative pieces, and instead saw themselves as workers mainly filling a need in their community. These details gleaned from the pot itself speak to similarities in material and purpose between the early North Carolina potters and their Japanese contemporaries.

6. Earthenware, Stoneware, and Glazes

Stronger similarities developed as North Carolina potters started to work more with stoneware, rather than earthenware – a switch that heavily affected the functionality of the pot as well as the surface appearance. Until the late eighteenth century, virtually all potters in North Carolina worked in earthenware because of its ready availability. Earthenware is reddish-brown when dug and fired, due to its high iron content and other impurities. It is fired to a relatively low temperature of approximately 1800 degrees Fahrenheit, and because of this low maturation temperature, earthenware is generally more brittle than its high-fire relative, stoneware.[43] While stoneware becomes vitreous when mature and doesn't have to be glazed in order to be watertight, earthenware requires a glaze to be functional. The glazes used by earthenware potters also had to account for this low firing temperature, and generally were lead-based, taking advantage of lead's low melting point.[44] While the dangers of lead were known internationally, and warnings had been published as early as the seventeenth century, potters continued to fire with lead glazes, especially in the more rural areas of North Carolina.[45]

Other, safer options were available, however, and had been explored in the northeastern part of America as early as 1718.[46] Stoneware, a clay body that fires at a temperature of 2300 degrees Fahrenheit, does not require glazing to be water-tight which makes dangerous lead glazes unnecessary.[47] It is also much less fragile than earthenware and resists scratching by utensils, making it a much more valuable media for functional ware. Potters often had difficulty firing the kiln to a temperature high enough to prevent any seepage of water in finished wares, but changes in glaze technology helped to change this.

Salt glazing, and the later introduction of alkaline glazing, created a stronger seal on the clay without having to worry about the difficulties associated with glaze formulation.[48] The practice of salt glazing is understood to have begun in Western Europe in the 1500s. It was especially popular in Germany and England, and immigrants to the colonies brought the tradition with them.[49] Salt glazing is superior to lead glazing for many reasons: it is less labor intensive, requires fewer materials, and also adds a unique decorative element to the surface of the pot. During the firing process, salt would have been added to openings in the top of the kiln when it had almost reached it maximum temperature.[50] This creates a chemical reaction on the surface of the clay, causing the silica within the clay body to melt into a glaze that seals both the interior and exterior of the pots.[51] This atmospheric glazing process removes steps from the production process that were previously necessary to create functional pots: that of glaze mixing, an arduous process in the pre-industrial age that involved lengthy grinding and sifting of materials; and that of dipping the pots in the glaze, which added drying time to the production schedule. Additionally, the surface texture and rich tonal variations created by the firing process add to the visual appeal of each piece.

There is speculation as to how North Carolina potters began alkaline glazing, a process that began in China. Some sources posit that the knowledge came to the United States through the letters of a French missionary who described the glazing process he witnessed during his time in China,[52] but it is just as likely that North Carolina came across the formula on their own through experimentation with available materials.[53] Alkaline glazes are created by combining wood ashes – probably from the woodstove in the house of the potter or from previous kiln firings -, clay, and ground-up glass.[54] While the process of preparing this glaze would have added time to the potter's production process, it would have been easy to gather these materials for a low or nonexistent cost. Furthermore, it speaks to a certain aesthetic desire, especially as potters would have been aware of the simpler process of salt-glazing, but chose to apply this method instead. Alkaline glazing results in a smoother, glassier appearance than salt-firing, and often comes out as a creamy green-blue, accented by long drips of more concentrated color.

Comparisons between the salt- and alkaline- glazed wares of North Carolina and Japan can illuminate the similarities between the two in both material and intention. While evidence of salt-glazing has not been found in Japan, and

alkaline-glazing is associated more with China than Japan,[55] the style of wood-firing used by Japanese potters resulted in surfaces comparable to the pots of North Carolina potters. The forms of rural Japanese pots through many centuries are also similar to the pots produced in 19th and 20th century North Carolina, understandable as both craft cultures were creating work for the purpose of food storage and preservation. The shapes needed for these processes are similar no matter where in the world the pottery is located, and thus comparisons between the two cultures of pots can be easily made. These jars from Japan, associated with *Tokoname* and *Seto* ware respectively, represent the ancient wood-firing and glazing traditions that later *mingei* artists drew from. These jars would have been the type of work Yanagi would have begun collecting in Japan in the early 1900s, after being inspired by similar wares made in Korea.

Figure 6. *Tokoname* Jar. c. Fifteenth century. Stoneware with ash glaze. 22 x 18 ½" Courtesy of the Art Institute of Chicago. http://www.artic.edu/aic/collections/artwork/159536

Figure 7. *Seto* Jar. c. Twelfth-fourteenth century. Glazed stoneware. Courtesy of the Kyoto National Museum. http://www.kyohaku.go.jp/eng/dictio/touji/52seto.html

The Tokoname jar has a strong coating of glossy ash glaze covering its shoulders and dripping down onto the rest of the pot. The rest of the pot is a rich red-brown, reflecting the color of the flames in which the pot was fired and accenting the rough, dimpled surface of the pot. These attributes anticipate the later salt-firing practices of the North Carolina potters, even though no salt was used. The Seto jar resembles the glazing coloration and textures found in the later alkaline glazes of North Carolina. Here, the Seto glaze has run down the entirety of the pot in a scattered pattern, with drips overlapping and fading, creating a sense of depth and highlighting the natural texture of the clay.

The "Bird and Fish Potter," assumed to be from Guilford or Randolph County,[56] is a prime example of the North Carolina salt-glazing tradition. His work is also some of the more decorative in the region, anticipating the aesthetic of the later *mingei* movement. A one-gallon jar, decorated with the image of a bird standing on a perch, is indicative of popular forms in the region, as well as what a traditional salt firing looks like.

Figure 6. Attributed to Chester Webster, or the "Bird and Fish Potter," c.1870s, salt-fired stoneware, approx.. 12 in. in height. https://new.liveauctioneers.com/item/14077124_nc-pottery-chester-webster-stoneware-jug

The jug is about a foot tall, and has its volume capacity written on its shoulder, a common practice for production potters. This marked regularity in size allowed for potters to sell their work at standardized prices and in bulk, as seen in legers that mark a potter's sales by the gallon.[57] The pot is fairly tall for its capacity, and has a gradual curve to its walls. The neck is thin, which when combined with the thin shape, would have kept the liquid that would have been stored inside cooler and fresher for longer. This was a common shape for North Carolina potters, until the arrival of Prohibition impacted the market for whiskey jugs.[58] It is the surface of the pot that makes it so unique, with the combination of the "orange-peel" texture of the glazing and the scratched bird image. The melted silica has pooled seductively in the incised lines around the neck of the pot, dripping down to the widest part of the belly in some places. There is also a darkened mark on the belly of the pot directly underneath the edge of the bird's perch, which probably occurred when some of the salted ceiling of the kiln dropped onto the exposed surface.[59] This was a lucky accident for the potter, as it accents the evenness of the pot's form – the verticality of the number, the bird, and the salt drip enhance the strong balance of the shape. The silica has also collected in the lines creating the shape of the bird, which the potter must have anticipated. The deep brown lines highlight the delicate line work. While not accurately identifiable, the bird is ostensibly a species native to the region in which the pot was made, marking it as definitively North Carolinian in shape and decoration.

The pots of Daniel Seagle, who is considered to be the "patriarch of the North Carolina alkaline glaze tradition,"[60] reveal how alkaline glazing could be used to create intentionally decorative surfaces while still putting functionality at the forefront. This four-gallon jug, made by Seagle in the 1850s, showcases the practice of placing glass scraps across handles and rims of pots, which would then create thick streaks of glassy color as the pot was fired.[61]

Figure 7. *Four-Gallon Jug*, Daniel Seagle, c. 1850, Lincoln County, 16 5/8 x 12 in.
http://www.unc.edu/ackland/collection/?action=details&object_link_id=82.19.2

Here, Seagle has chosen to accent the high, expertly looped handle on his bulbous jug with glass streaks. The glass melted into three stripes, each curving with the thick body of the pot until almost touching the foot. The streaks are a light gray-green, fading into a fuzzy white around the edges and end of their paths. This distinctive coloration offsets the darker, dappled, brown-green surface of the rest of the pot, which was a common color for wood-fired alkaline stoneware. The shape of the pot is similar to the jug attributed to Webster, with the high shoulders and thin neck again created with the purpose of food preservation. This pot combines functionality with decorative elements in such a way that makes clear how vernacular potters thought about how the customer would experience their pots on all levels, aesthetic and functional.

7. Conclusion

Although the scholarship of Japanese pottery can provide some of the academic vocabulary needed to describe North Carolina pots, the works are uniquely of their place and time. The geological materials available to the potters, as well as the specific needs of the region's population, make the work produced by North Carolina vernacular potters valuable as a record of history and community value. The pots also deserve to be analyzed as the works of artistic prowess they are. Their makers intended them to be not only works of functional necessity, but as aesthetic objects that added to the daily lives of the owners.

In "The Potter's Eye," author Nancy Sweezy humorously refers to the North Carolina tradition of the "Iced Tea Ceremony" as the inspiration for much of the modern work produced by the area's craftspeople.[62] North Carolina may not have a practice as rigid and demanding as the Japanese tea ceremony to create stylistic requirements for its ceramic art, but it does have its own unique rituals that influence the food and drink vessels produced by its participants. Thanks, in part, to the inclusion of vernacular potters at the Black Mountain College Pottery Seminar, the ceramic practices of North Carolina have been preserved, and continue into the modern era through multiple regional potteries. Seagrove, in particular, seeks to continue the traditions begun by the first North Carolina potters. Perhaps if Bernard Leach had spent more than just a few days in the presence of the vernacular potters of North Carolina, and shared in more of the rituals native to the area, he would have seen that the "tap-root" he complained about was indeed present.

8. Acknowledgements

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9. References

1. Bernard Leach, "American Impressions," *Craft Horizons*, Winter 1950, vol. 10, no. 4, 18.
2. Martha Drexler Lynn, *American Studio Ceramics: Innovation and Identity 1940 to 1979* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 170.
3. In the May/June 1953 issue of Craft Horizons, Marguerite Wildenhain addressed the "many voices [that] have risen in opposition and in doubt as to the value of what [Leach is] trying to convey" in a letter to the editor. She claimed, "tradition is only good when it is alive, when no one is conscious of it and when it needs no praise."
4. Lynn defines "vernacular ceramics" as such: "functional work connected to historical patterns of making and forming, learned from master potters, who taught their trade through an apprenticeship system that passed empirical knowledge from one craftsman to the next in a generation steam." While other descriptive terms applying to this genre of ceramics exist, including "folk," "rural," and "traditional," vernacular best describes the social structures of the North Carolina potteries as well as the values held by the makers in this system. *American Studio Ceramics*, 356.
5. For the most in-depth exploration of this relationship to date, see: Mark Hewitt and Nancy Sweezy, *The Potter's Eye: Art and Tradition in North Carolina Pottery*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005).
6. "*Black Mountain College Pottery Seminar*," Flyer, From Western Regional Archives, *Black Mountain College Research Project.*
7. Mary Emma Harris, *The Arts at Black Mountain College*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002), 20.
8. See Josef Albers' "Art as Experience" (1935), "The Educational Value of Manual Work and Handicraft in Relationship to Architecture" (1944), and "Art at Black Mountain College" (1946), as well as Anni Albers' "On Weaving, Handweaving Today: Textile Work at Black Mountain College" (1941), and "Black Mountain College" (1943).
9. Alexandra Griffith Winton, "The Bauhaus, 1919-1933," Last modified October 2016, Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/bauh/hd_bauh.htm.
10. Walter Gropius, "Bauhaus Manifesto and Program," 1919, http://mariabuszek.com/mariabuszek/kcai/ConstrBau/Readings/GropBau19.pdf.
11. Winton, "The Bauhaus."
12. Harris, *The Arts at Black Mountain College*, 188.
13. Jenni Sorkin, *Live Form: Women, Ceramics, and Community*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 180.
14. Currently called the New York State College of Ceramics at Alfred University, this program was and still is the most prestigious education path for a ceramic artist. For Black Mountain College, a school that never granted official degrees but was still concerned with the cultural capital that university attendance provided, it made sense to hire someone with a master's degree rather than someone educated in a vernacular system, although skill levels could have been comparable. See Harris, *The Arts at Black Mountain College*, 188.
15. The space was colloquially referred to as "the pot-shop," which shows the emphasis the program had on creating functional pots rather than sculptural pieces. See Harris, *The Arts at Black Mountain College*, 192.
16. Weinrib later moved away from exclusively creating functional pots, but still considered functionality in his work, exploring the heat efficiency properties of large illustrative clay tiles. Ibid.
17. Mary Emma Harris, Interview with Karen Karnes, April 9, 1972, Black Mountain Spool 165, transcript, Black Mountain College Research Project, Western North Carolina Regional Archives.
18. Harris, *The Arts at Black Mountain College*, 192.
19. Ibid., 174.
20. Ibid., 172.

21. Ibid., 231.
22. Ibid.
23. Robert Diffendal, "Black Mountain College Holds Pottery Seminar," December 1952, Western North Carolina Regional Archives.
24. Harris, *The Arts at Black Mountain College*, 231.
25. Sorkin, *Live Form*, 118. It should be noted that many more than twenty people sent letters of interest and applications regarding the Seminar, but many of these letters were not answered quickly enough for the interested parties to attend. The College's registrar at the time had fallen ill and was quickly replaced, but even this small transition led to administrative difficulties and many applications and letters were not processed.
26. Harris, *The Arts at Black Mountain College*, 232.
27. Nancy Sweezy, *Raised in Clay: The Southern Pottery Tradition*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 113. The phrase "Jugtown" actually referred to any place where "pottery making became an industry in the South" This can become confusing as most research (like Crawford's *Jugtown*) when referring to "Jugtown" is only talking about the industry in central NC, now collectively known as Seagrove. Sweezy claims that there are actually four well-known Jugtowns: two in North Carolina, one in South Carolina, and one in Georgia.
28. Harris, Interview with Karnes, 9.
29. Sweezy, *Raised in Clay*, 29.
30. See: Tara Gold's *Living Wabi Sabi: The True Beauty of Your Life* (2004), Diane Durston's *Wabi Sabi: The Art of Everyday Life* (2006), Andrea M. Jacques' *Wabi-Sabi Wisdom: Inspiration for an Authentic Life*, etc.
31. Kenneth K. Inada, Review of *Zen and Japanese Culture* by D. T. Suzuki *Philosophy East and West*, 12.2 (1962): 175-177.
32. Hewitt and Sweezy, *Potter's Eye*, 11-12.
33. Kyoto Utsumi Mimura, "Soetsu Yanagi and the Legacy of the Unknown Craftsman," *The Journal of Decorative and Propaganda Arts* 20 (1994): 208-210, http://www.jstor.org/stable/1504123.
34. Yuko Kikuchi, "The Myth of Yanagi's Originality: The Formation of 'Mingei' Theory in Its Social and Historical Context," *Journal of Design History* 7.4 (1994): 247-266, http://www.jstor.org/stable/1316066.
35. "History of the Japan Folk Crafts Museum and Founder Soetsu Yanagi," The Japanese Folk Crafts Museum, http://www.mingeikan.or.jp/english/about/
36. Ironically, most of the work that is associated with the *mingei* movement today comes from artisans educated at the university level who would not have been "unknown, unlearned, poor craftsm[a]n."
37. Kikuchi, "The Myth of Yanagi's Originality," 247.
38. For example, Sweezy's *Raised in Clay*, Jean Crawford's *Jugtown Pottery: History and Design* (1964), and Charles G Zug's *Turners and Burners: The Folk Potters of North Carolina* (1990) focus on the family trees of potters and the technical aspects of the work, but give few visual analyses of wares.
39. Charles G. Zug III, *Turners and Burners: The Folk Potters of North Carolina*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 3.
40. Zug, *Turners and Burners*, 4-5.
41. Ibid., 7.
42. Ibid.,16.
43. Ibid., 112.
44. Ibid., 4.
45. Sven Hernberg, "Lead Poisoning in a Historical Perspective," American Journal of Industrial Medicine 38(2000): 245, accessed 10 December 2016.
46. Zug, *Turners and Burners*, 26.
47. Ibid.
48. Sweezy, *Raised in Clay*, 22-23.
49. Hewitt and Sweezy, *Potter's Eye*, 9.
50. Zug, *Turners and Burners*, 172.
51. Hewitt and Sweezy, *Potter's Eye*, 21.
52. Ibid., 9.
53. Zug, *Turners and Burners*, 71.
54. Hewitt and Sweezy, *Potter's Eye,* 20.
55. Ibid.
56. Scholars disagree on whether the maker of these pots can be accurately identified. Mark Hewitt and Nancy Sweezy claim the "bird and fish potter" is Chester Webster, harkening from the Webster family of potters, but as all

of his pots are unsigned, Charles Zug refers to him only as the "bird and fish potter." See *Potter's Eye*, 63, and *Turners and Burners*, 36.

57. Zug, *Turners and Burners*, 263.
58. Ibid., 304.
59. Hewitt and Sweezy, *Potter's Eye*, 21.
60. Ibid.
61. Ibid.
62. Ibid., 141.