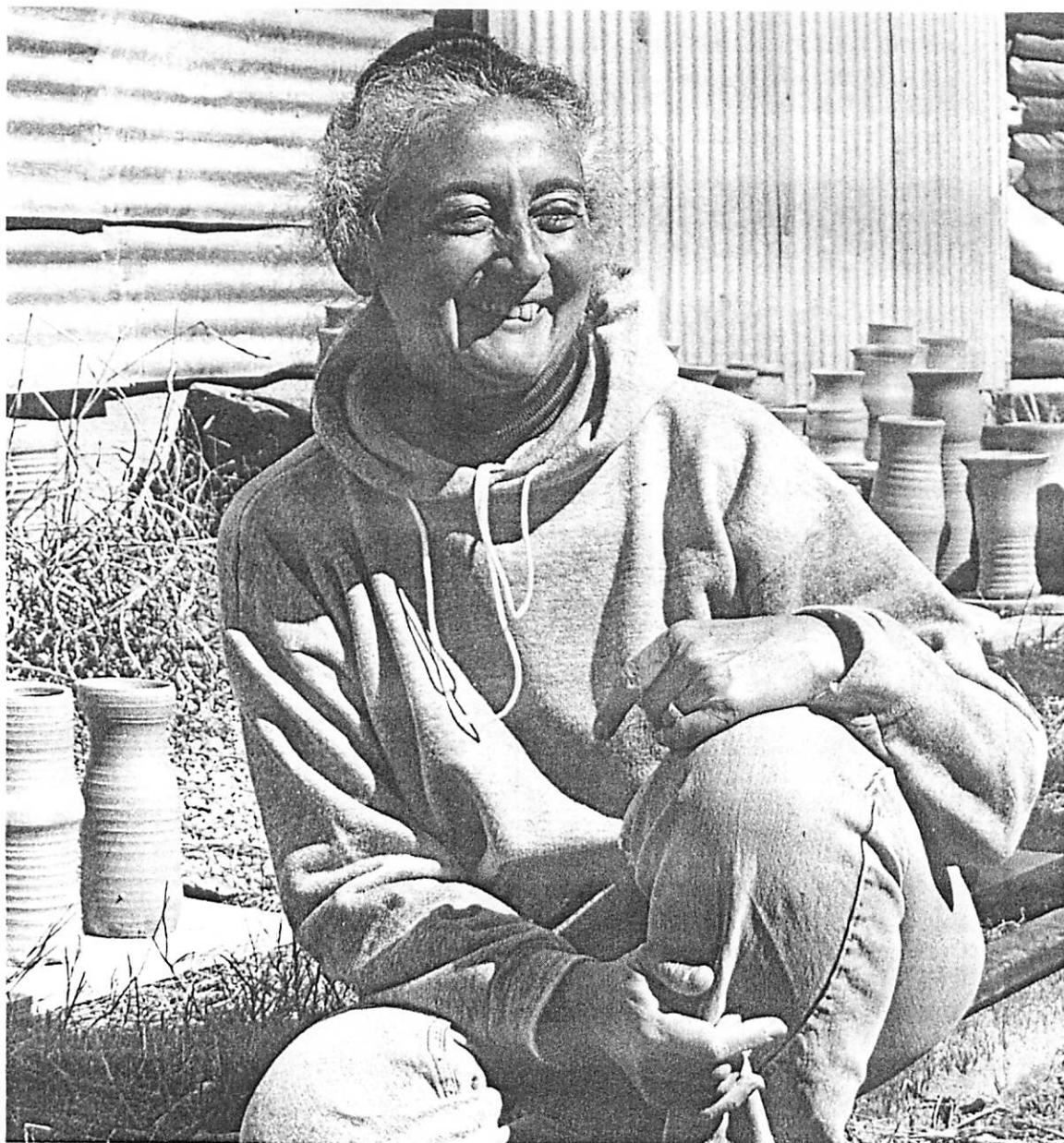


The Hadler Galleries 35 East 20th Street, New York, N.Y. 10003

212 533-4645



Karen Karnes

November 10 - December 3, 1977

Works 1964-1977

Artist's Reception Thursday, November 10th, 5:30-8:30

The Essential Karnes

Karen Karnes fervent quest is for independence—independence of thought and life style. An independence which eschews complexity, superficiality, banality, and popularization. A quest which is unending—for society continuously tempts us with its lures of the exotic and the immediate.

Ms. Karnes has the strength to resist these temptations. Her life and work are pared simplicities. Her home reflects a spartan freedom from many of the so-called 'necessities' of life; her work shows an economy of concept, execution, form and decoration which are best described as timeless.

Over the years there have been just a few basic forms that she has chosen to use. One of these is the covered casserole. Philosophically, the major rationale for this form is the manipulation of an interior space of an eminently practical nature to which one has access at will. Her work has always been involved with the practical, the utilitarian, rejecting the purely sculptural. While at the same time, it is clear that her useful objects are, and have been, carefully conceived within the constraints of a highly-evolved sculptural sense.

Another form which she has chosen is that of the vase. It is a form which possesses an exaggerated upward-thrusting swell—a concept which represents a relatively new direction—in that her forms have traditionally thrust laterally but never laterally and upward simultaneously. In a sense, this is a form of nature—the upward swell of the tree being the archtypical model.

As her forms have been limited, so too have the surface treatments. In 1969, she started a new direction by building a salt-glaze kiln which enabled her to "see the fire on the pots." In salt glazing, the raw ware is colored with slips of various oxides. The slips are used to accent the underlying form. When the work is fired to stoneware temperatures; salt is introduced into the kiln to interact with the flames to produce a vaporous atmosphere which often settles on the pieces in unpredictable ways. The results are the rich, mottled, and striking effects which are characteristic of the process.

The true potter is concerned with controlled unpredictability—for up until the firing, the artist has a great deal to say about the form and color, but within the firing a certain randomness always prevails. This uncertainty, which, in a sense, parallels the uncertainty of life, contains within it the elements of surprise, disappointment, and delight which both pique and sustain the artist. A sense of expectancy accompanies the opening of the kiln after the firing—and the delights which emerge therefrom nourish this activity and provide the artist with an unending sense of novelty and discovery.

The great Japanese potter, Hamada, has profoundly influenced her personal philosophy and work. Producing ceramic ware of a simple, practical, and elegant nature, this man has, for over a half century,



devoted himself to the repetitive mastery of his craft. There is, as Ms. Karnes states, "a pleasure in the rhythm of work"—from the execution of the original form, to its surface coloration, to the firing—there is a cycle which, in a sense, represents a microcosm of the cycle of creative life. Within the Zen philosophy there is much newness to be found in working repetitively within the disciplined constraints imposed by the elements provided by nature. The dictates of such a philosophy are clear. Live simply, work with nature, limit yourself to a narrow mode of expression, and work repetitively—to find a universe of novelty, richness, and peace—emerging from within.

And live in the real world at the same time—that is, produce works that are saleable, but not at the expense of personal compromise. Work not to sell, but work well so that people buy. Shun the commission. Work to be independent.

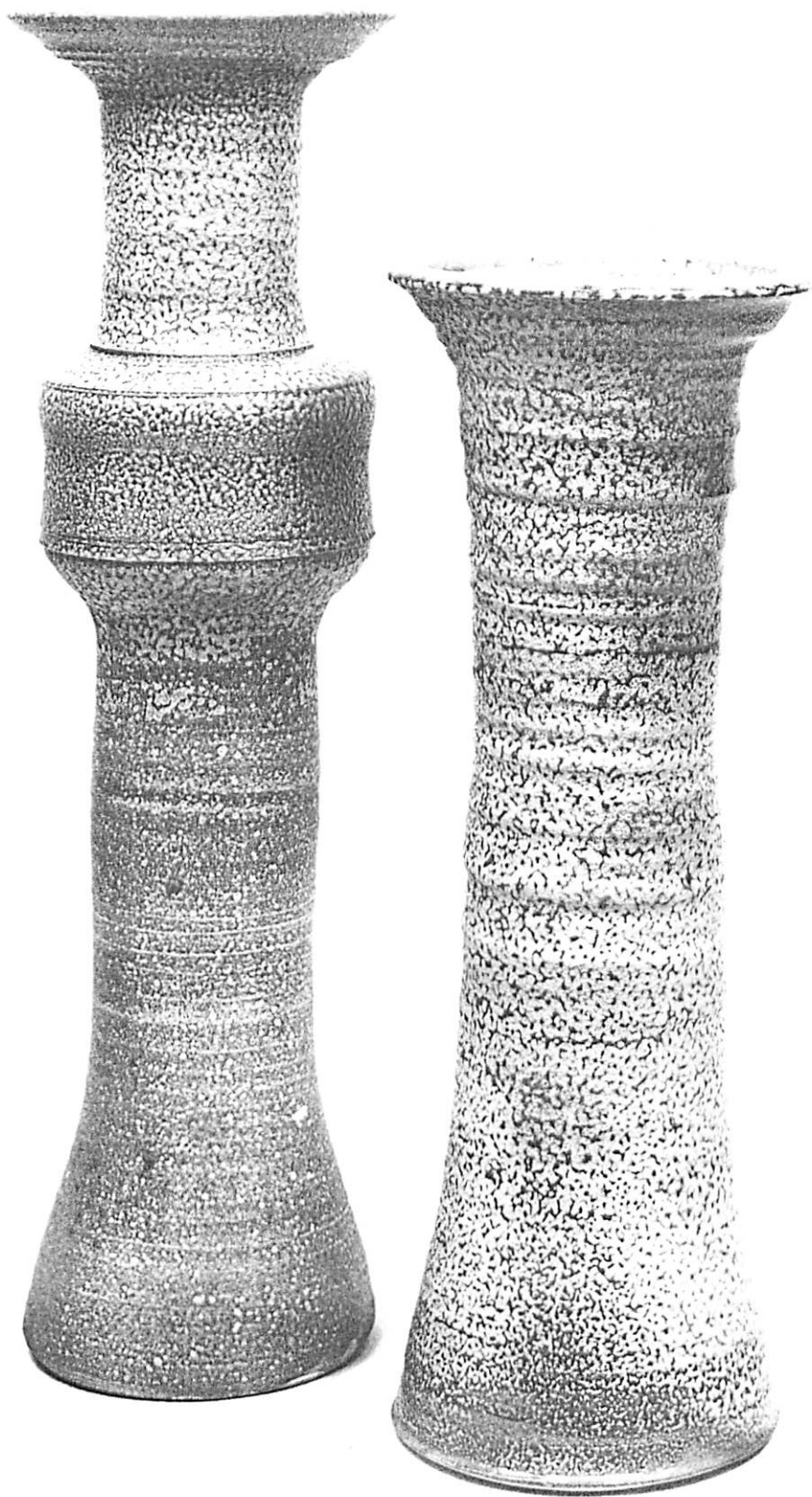
This is Karen Karnes' first one-woman gallery show in New York. Although her work has been available to the public for years—as a

craftsperson—with the history and tradition implied therein—her works have been available largely in shops specializing in finely-crafted objects.

This show is a retrospective. It represents the essential Karnes. In it are most of the forms that she has worked with for years—the covered jar, the casserole, the bowl, the vase, and the chair. These works represent a refined expression of each of these forms. For example, the casserole is the transcendent model for all casseroles. Its design is eminently practical while, at the same time, distinctively compelling—the work can be used and understood by all peoples and at all time; it truly transcends both time and place and does so beautifully.

In an age of plastic icons, throw-away bottles, consummable values, and mercurial fashions, it is comforting to know that there are those among us who, in independent, peaceful, and disciplined ways create works which are, at once, practical, beautiful, and timeless, and, in so doing, enrich us all. Karen Karnes is one of these people.

Judith Schwartz



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