

For Immediate Release

**Ruth Duckworth (1919-2009)**

***Modernist Sculptor***

July 2 - August 28, 2010

This summer Bellas Artes will present an exhibition of sculpture by Ruth Duckworth. In 1986 Jack Lenor Larsen featured her work in a show he curated for the gallery. Bellas Artes has represented the artist since that time. The 2010 exhibition, ***Ruth Duckworth Modernist Sculptor***, will include porcelain wall reliefs, pieces from her porcelain cup-and-blade series, and sculptures in porcelain, stoneware, and bronze. Her last work—a porcelain wall relief—and a 1993 porcelain bird from the artist's private collection will be highlights.

Ruth Duckworth was born in Germany in 1919. Since her father was Jewish, she was not permitted to attend art school under the Nazi regime. She moved to England and attended art schools there. Although she found formal education stultifying, it did not diminish her passion for sculpture. Her independent spirit pioneered a new way of thinking about ceramics. A teaching position in Chicago brought her to this country. She was given opportunities in the US to create large scale clay murals and standing works that did not seem possible for her to realize in Europe, so she settled in Chicago and lived there until her death in October last year. She was 90 years old.

Although Duckworth began her career as a stone carver, after visiting the British Museum where she was moved by Cycladic, Mexican, and Indian figures, she turned to clay and became one of the most innovative and important ceramic sculptors of the twentieth century. Manipulating clay like a sculptor, not like a potter, she became an "alchemist of abstraction," creating forms based on shapes and patterns found in the human body and the natural world. Primarily hand built, these radical ceramic pieces were asymmetrical and visceral, playing on the soft arcs, flowing planes, and continuous surfaces and volumes that characterize the medium.

Brancusi's words, "Simplicity is complexity resolved," describe Duckworth's oeuvre. The three never shown before cup-and-blade sculptures in this exhibition portray the artist's virtuosic ability to evoke fragile, luminous surfaces from smooth unglazed, vitrified porcelain. These works illuminate Duckworth's investigations of perceptual space and her ability to balance thin angular forms (blades) with curvilinear organic shapes (cups). By revealing the tension and contrast between the two, the artist

permits a choreography of light and shadow, volume and space that creates, as Duckworth states, "a feeling of solidity and delicateness; the cups are earthbound, and the blades are airborne."

The theme of earth and sky has resonated through many of her sculptures, especially the large wall murals and smaller wall sculptures. Her first large commission in the US was a suite of murals for the University of Chicago where the artist taught for many years. ***Earth, Water and Sky*** depicts topographical illustrations of Mt. Fuji and satellite photos of the Earth, along with porcelain clouds suspended from the ceiling. The small wall sculpture at Bellas Artes is Duckworth's last realized work. It is a composition of abstract elements, yet the fertile physicality of the wall sculptures combined with an airy delicacy also brings forth the ethereal and the sublime.

Duckworth's ability to transform concrete observations of the natural world into a graceful, yet abstract expression of the sublime also is evident in her "birds." As mentioned above, a bird from her personal collection will be in the gallery. The poetry of this work captures the artist's profound ability to blend abstraction and fantasy to express emotion and meaning. As Duckworth said, "Play is the essence of creativity. Creative play and gut reaction, instinct...You have to be spontaneous and trust yourself."

Duckworth's exhibition record, both nationally and internationally, is extensive. A 2005 retrospective traveled to seven American museums.

Among the museums that have collected her work are the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C., the Art Institute of Chicago, the Museum of Modern Art in Chicago, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the Museum of Arts and Design in New York, the National Museum of Modern Art in Tokyo, the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, Windsor Castle in England, and the Stuttgart Museum in Germany.

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