



Press Release

Paulette Badgett, Manager · paulette@atomic.net
233 East Avenue · PO Box 531 · Seagrove, NC 27341
(336) 873-8430 · www.ncpotterycenter.com

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THE NORTH CAROLINA POTTERY CENTER OPENS “FIRE IN THE VALLEY: CATAWBA VALLEY POTTERY THEN AND NOW”

From Nov. 10, 2009 – Jan. 31, 2010, the North Carolina Pottery Center will host an exhibition entitled “Fire in the Valley: Catawba Valley Pottery Then and Now.” An artist’s reception will be held on Friday, Nov. 13 from 6-8 p.m., and is open free to the public.

For most North Carolinians, the Seagrove area is the Mecca of pottery production, the place that most embodies historical continuity and native artistry. But just 100 miles due west of Seagrove is the Catawba Valley, the site of North Carolina’s other great pottery tradition. During the 18th century, numerous families, most of German origin, settled what are now Lincoln and Catawba Counties in the western Piedmont. The Catawba River encircles this region, and its South Fork, which meanders through the heart of both counties, has provided superb clays for the potters’ wheels.

Historically, the Catawba Valley produced almost as many potters as Seagrove, but throughout the 20th century it was largely ignored, perhaps because it lay well to the west of the major cities of the Triangle and Triad. Over the last 30 years, however, the Catawba Valley has experienced a remarkable renaissance. Thanks to the tenacity and passion of one man, Burlon Craig, numerous potters now dig local clays and burn the old alkaline glaze in wood-fired groundhog kilns. And many collectors and museums have come to admire the consummate artistry of the early masters of the 19th century, like Daniel Seagle and David Hartzog.

In comparison to the gray salt-glazed stonewares found around Seagrove, the alkaline glaze at first seems uncontrolled, sloppy, even dirty in appearance. It is typically quite thick and murky, exhibits a wide variety of textures and colors, and is rarely decorated. In short, it takes some getting used to. But for all its protean qualities, on the bold forms of masters like Daniel Seagle or Isaac Lefevers or Sam Propst or today, Kim Ellington, it can be stunningly beautiful. And in the words of Georgia folklorist John Burrison, this regional glaze “seems to distill the rustic spirit of the Southern frontier, and speaks eloquently, if humbly, of molasses, moonshine whiskey, buttermilk, and salt-cured foods that were the staples of Southern living.”

This exhibition, curated by Tim Blackburn and Terry Zug, will illustrate the full history of the Catawba Valley from the earliest lead-glazed earthenwares through the great utilitarian tradition of the 19th and

20th centuries to potters who are working today. In addition, a selection of pots will be available for sale by contemporary potters: Michael Ball, Kim Ellington, Walter Fleming, Luke Heafner, and Bob Hilton.

Exhibitions are made possible through the generosity of our membership, the North Carolina Arts Council, and the National Endowment for the Arts Institute of Museum and Library Services. Thank you!

The mission of the North Carolina Pottery Center is to promote public awareness of and appreciation for the history, heritage, and ongoing tradition of pottery making in North Carolina. The Center is located at 233 East Avenue in Seagrove, NC. For more information, please call 336.873.8430 or go to www.ncpotterycenter.com.