



For Immediate Release

## **Peter Voulkos: *Stacks* (1969 - 2001)**

**26 June - 28 September, 2019**

**515 West 29th St., New York**

**Burning in Water** is pleased to present a solo exhibition of sculptures by Peter Voulkos in both bronze and ceramics. Organized in collaboration with the artist's estate and Artworks Foundry of Berkeley, *Stacks* features a series of monumental bronze sculptures including ten large-scale examples of the artist's renowned "stacks" works. The bronze sculptures in the exhibition were cast from some of the artist's most important ceramic sculptures, and the show thus serves as a unique presentation of the artist's work in his two preferred media: ceramics and bronze. *Peter Voulkos: Stacks* is the inaugural exhibition of the gallery's new two-level exhibition space at 515 West 29th St. in New York. To mark the opening, a group exhibition of works by gallery artists will be presented on the mezzanine level of the gallery concurrently.



Widely acknowledged as the progenitor of a profound transformation in American ceramics known variously as American Clay Revolution or the California Clay Movement, Voulkos is considered the seminal figure in the development of contemporary ceramic art in America. As both a working artist and educator, Voulkos was instrumental in unleashing a transformative wave of creativity in clay. As the originating force behind a novel, uniquely American movement in ceramics,

Voulikos' legacy and present-day influence on the medium cannot be over-stated. As Elissa Auther has noted:

***The rupture Voulikos enacted with his abstract, non-functional, ceramic sculptures in the mid to late 1950s was, like all ruptures in the history of art, a singular act. Voulikos owns his breakthrough in ceramics, just as Pollock owns his drip technique.<sup>i</sup>***



Peter Voulikos, *Anasazi Stack*, 2010, bronze

Born in Bozeman, Montana in 1924, Voulikos began working with clay in 1949 as an undergraduate. He was trained as a traditional ceramicist, achieving fluency in both European and Asian traditions. After graduating with an MFA in 1952, Voulikos worked alongside the renowned Japanese ceramicist Shoji Hamada at the Archie Bray Foundation in Helena, Montana. Although he had been influenced by images of the ceramic works of Picasso and Miró, Voulikos had very little exposure to modern or contemporary art through 1952.

Voulikos' perspective on art-making would undergo a profound transformation the following year, beginning with his service as a faculty member Black Mountain College, where he developed relationships with pioneering modern artists working in diverse media - most notably the painters Josef Albers, Jack Tworkov and Robert Rauschenberg; the composer John Cage; and the choreographer Merce Cunningham. Voulikos subsequently travelled to New York where he developed a close relationship with Franz Kline.

Voulikos entered the social sphere of artists centered upon the Cedar Street Tavern in Greenwich Village and engaged with key figures of the New York School including Jackson Pollock, Clyfford Still, Robert Motherwell and Philip Guston.

Invigorated by his exposure to the artists at Black Mountain and the Abstract Expressionists, Voulikos moved to Los Angeles and assumed chairmanship of Ceramics department at the Otis Institute of Art. It was in Los Angeles that Voulikos adopted a singular, experimental approach to ceramics that would instigate an epochal shift in artists' approach to the medium:

***The biggest thing that ever happened to me was moving to Los Angeles. Then I became aware of everything. Everything started falling into place. I began to go to all the shows, all the openings at galleries and museums—painting shows and***

***sculpture shows I had never been to before, and I really got turned on to painting like never before.***

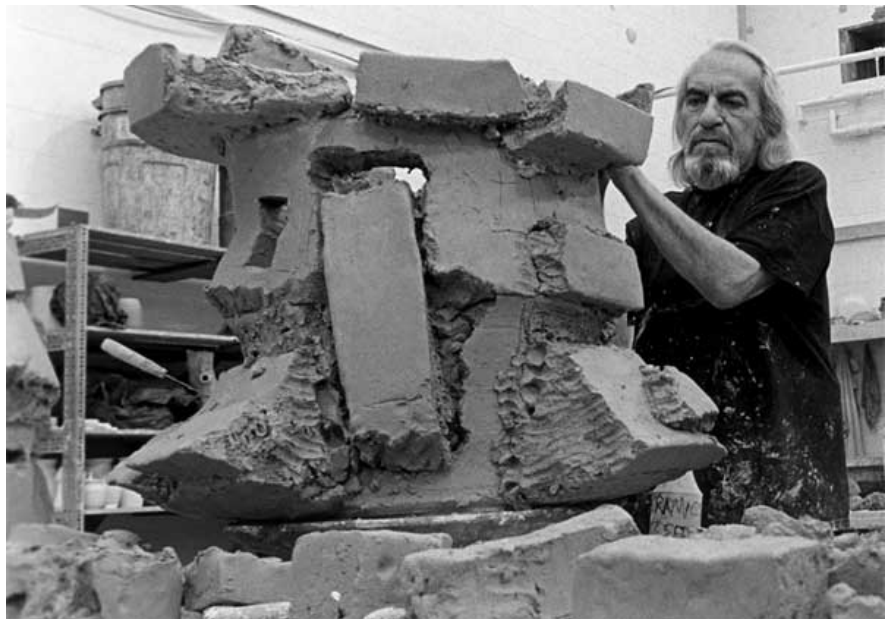
Drawing upon an eclectic array of influences including modern jazz, *avant garde* cinema, flamenco music, Zen philosophy and Japanese calligraphy, Voulkos begins to engage clay in a manner that was heretical by the standards of traditional ceramics: slashing and punching holes through surfaces, cutting bowl forms in half and integrating slabs of clay with hand-thrown elements. Violating the sanctity of the surface was revolutionary in its implications. In committing these actions, Voulkos rendered a decisive break with both European and Asian traditions - eschewing the functionality of ceramics, rejecting its decorative associations and claiming a role for clay as a medium for modernist art. Regarding the decade following Voulkos' first engagement with clay in 1949, the ceramic historian Rose Slivka declared the following:

***In those years, [Voulkos] produced a massive body of work that was to start a whole new ceramics movement in this country. He became the acknowledged leader of a revolution in clay.***<sup>ii</sup>

During his later years at Otis, one aspect of Voulkos' iconoclasm involved his striving to create works in ever larger scale. He would throw massive amounts of clay - up to 150 pounds at a time - in the effort to create bigger works. This drive for ever-larger scale played a key role in the development of his "stacked" forms in which he would cut, overturn and pile thrown forms upon one another to fashion tower-like sculptures.

Another inflection point in Voulkos' career occurred in 1959, when he assumed a faculty position at Berkeley after being fired from Otis. At Berkeley, Voulkos shifted his focus away from bronze. In

fact, Voulkos' experience with bronze predated his work with clay; he began casting bronze in 1942 for the Western Foundry Company, where he fabricated engine molds for American Liberty Ships. Spurred by his desire to work on an even larger scale and his access to various foundries in Northern California, Voulkos focused almost exclusively on bronze,



reserving ceramics for teaching and the raucous, anarchic performances in which he fashioned large ceramic works at universities across the country. For the remainder of his career, Voulkos modulated between his interests in clay and bronze - paths that stopped and started, diverged and, occasionally, converged.

Between 1960 and 1962, Voulkos poured over 10,000 pounds of bronze. As he had at Otis, Voulkos attracted a constellation of assistants, students and artists that orbited around his workshop. Of his time at Garbanzo Foundry in the early 1960s, Slivka noted that,

***The foundry and its fiery moment of the white-hot pour became the center of a new bronze culture, no less than a cult. Many gifted artists and students came around to watch the bronze pour and participate in the party, which was part of the work atmosphere.***<sup>iii</sup>

Voulkos had begun experimenting with lost-wax casting techniques as early as the 1960s. In 1986, however, he met the Italian-born Piero Mussi. Mussi had trained in building and metallurgy in Italy before moving to the US in 1976 and subsequently establishing Artworks Foundry. Mussi was skilled in advanced lost-wax techniques - expertise that enabled Voulkos to further expand his technical range. Thus began a collaboration between Mussi and Voulkos that continued until the artist's death in 2002. One product of this collaboration was a series of bronze sculptures based on a number of Voulkos' key works in ceramics, including select examples of his "stack," "ice bucket" and "plate" forms. A selection of these works constitute the core of the current exhibition. Not merely copies of Voulkos' ceramic works, these pieces are singular amalgamations of Voulkos' skill and artistic sensibilities in both media. They represent an elaboration upon previous ceramic pieces informed by the unique characteristics of bronze and constitute a merging of Voulkos' decades-long engagements with the two media. Although he employed perceived affinities between clay and bronze in these works, Voulkos maintained that the forms maintained roots extending back to his first engagements with clay:

***There's a lot of difference between clay and a five hundred pound casting. [But] my ideas, you know, still come from feeding back on the clay when I first touched it, and everything that happened between then and now.***<sup>iv</sup>

---

**Peter Voulkos (b. 1924, Bozeman, MT; d. 2002, Bowling Green, OH)**, widely regarded as the founder of the American Clay Revolution, or California Clay Movement, was a West Coast sculptor known for incorporating an array of modernist influences into his ceramics practice.

Voulkos studied painting and printmaking under the GI Bill at Montana State College after serving as an airplane gunner in the US Army in World War II. He soon discovered a passion for sculpture, graduating with an MFA in 1952. An influential educator with a lengthy career at various institutions, Voulkos established the ceramics department at the Los Angeles County Art Institute (now the Otis College of Art and Design), where he taught from 1954 to 1959, and at the University of California, Berkeley, where he taught from 1959 until his retirement in 1985. He also taught at Black Mountain College and the Archie Bray Foundation. Voulkos toured universities throughout the United States conducting live ceramic workshops to audiences until his death. Notable students of Voulkos include Paul Soldner, John Mason, Ken Price, Billy Al Bengston, Ron Nagle, Stephen de Staebler, and James Melchert.

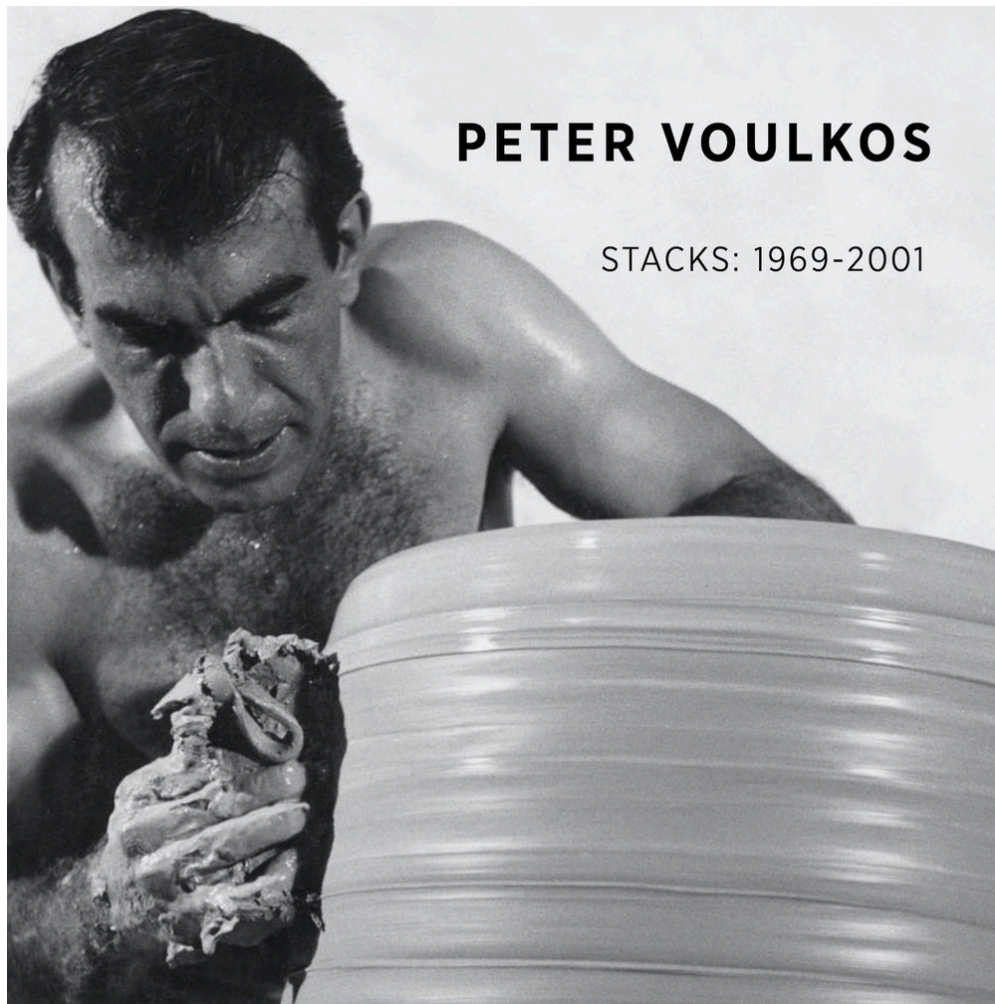
Voulkos was the recipient of many awards throughout his career, including the Gold Medal at the International Exposition of Ceramics (1995, Cannes, France); The Rodin Museum Prize at the First Paris Biennale (1955, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, France); a Guggenheim Fellowship (1984); a Gold Medal from the American Crafts Council (1986); The Louise Nevelson Award in Art (1992, American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, New York); a Ceramic Lifetime Achievement of the Year Award (1997, Friends of Contemporary Ceramics); a Distinguished Artist Award for Lifetime Achievement (1997, College Art Association); and honorary doctorates from four American art schools.

Artworks by Voulkos have been exhibited at major institutions around the world, including at the Museum of Modern Art (New York, NY); The Whitney Museum of American Art (New York, NY); The Museum of Art and Design (New York, NY); The Smithsonian Museum of American Art (Washington, DC); The Los Angeles County Museum of Art (Los Angeles, CA); The San Francisco Museum of Art (San Francisco, CA); The Seattle Art Museum (Seattle, WA); The American Craft Museum (New York, NY); and The National Museum of Modern Art (Tokyo, Japan).

Voulkos has artworks in the permanent collections of many major international institutions, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York, NY); The Museum of Modern Art (New York, NY); The Smithsonian Institution (Washington, DC); The Los Angeles County Museum of Art (Los Angeles, CA); The Philadelphia Museum of Art (Philadelphia, PA); The Museum of Fine Arts (Boston, MA); The American Museum of Ceramic Art (Pomona, CA); The Oakland Museum (Oakland, CA); The San Francisco



Museum of Modern Art (San Francisco, CA); The Santa Barbara Museum of Art (Santa Barbara, CA); The Detroit Institute of Arts (Detroit, MI); The Seattle Art Museum (Seattle, WA); The St. Louis Art Museum (St. Louis, MO); The Victoria and Albert Museum (London, UK); The Stedelijk Museum (Amsterdam, Netherlands); The National Museum of Modern Art (Kyoto, Japan); and The National Gallery of Art (Melbourne, Australia).



**Burning in Water** is a New York-based gallery featuring an innovative curatorial program that highlights the work of living artists with reference to broader issues confronting society. Founded in 2015 by Dr. Barry Thomas Malin, the gallery's program conjoins a series of exhibitions by artists represented by the gallery with historical exhibitions of work by American and African artists. The name of the gallery is drawn from a volume of poetry published by Charles Bukowski in 1963.

---

**Burning in Water**

515 W 29th St.  
New York, NY  
10001

+1 646 918.7696  
[info@burninginwater.net](mailto:info@burninginwater.net)

**Principal**

Barry Thomas Malin  
[btmlin@burninginwater.net](mailto:btmlin@burninginwater.net)

**Director**

Anna Hygelund  
[anna@burninginwater.net](mailto:anna@burninginwater.net)

**Associate Director**

Melissa Leigh Carn  
[melissa@burninginwater.net](mailto:melissa@burninginwater.net)

**Gallery Manager**

Jungjoo Park  
[jungjoo@burninginwater.net](mailto:jungjoo@burninginwater.net)

**[www.burninginwater.net](http://www.burninginwater.net)**  
**IG: @burning\_in\_water\_art**

i

ii RS 6

iii RS 57

iv RS 134