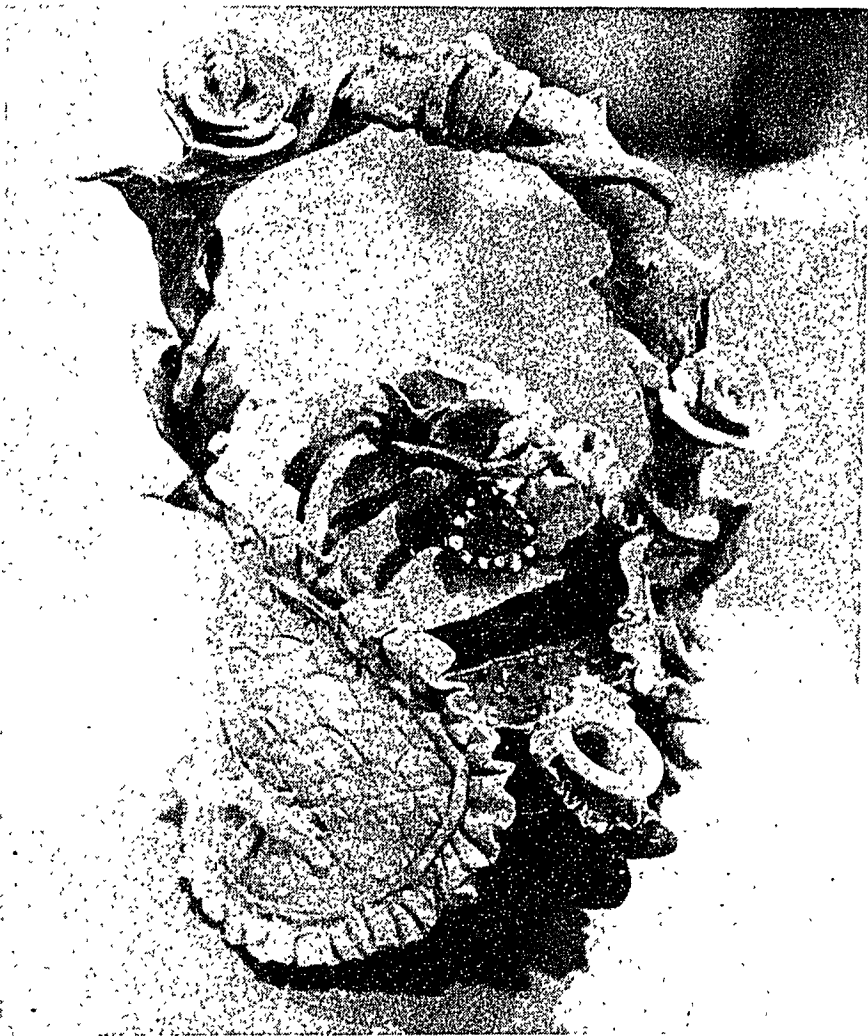
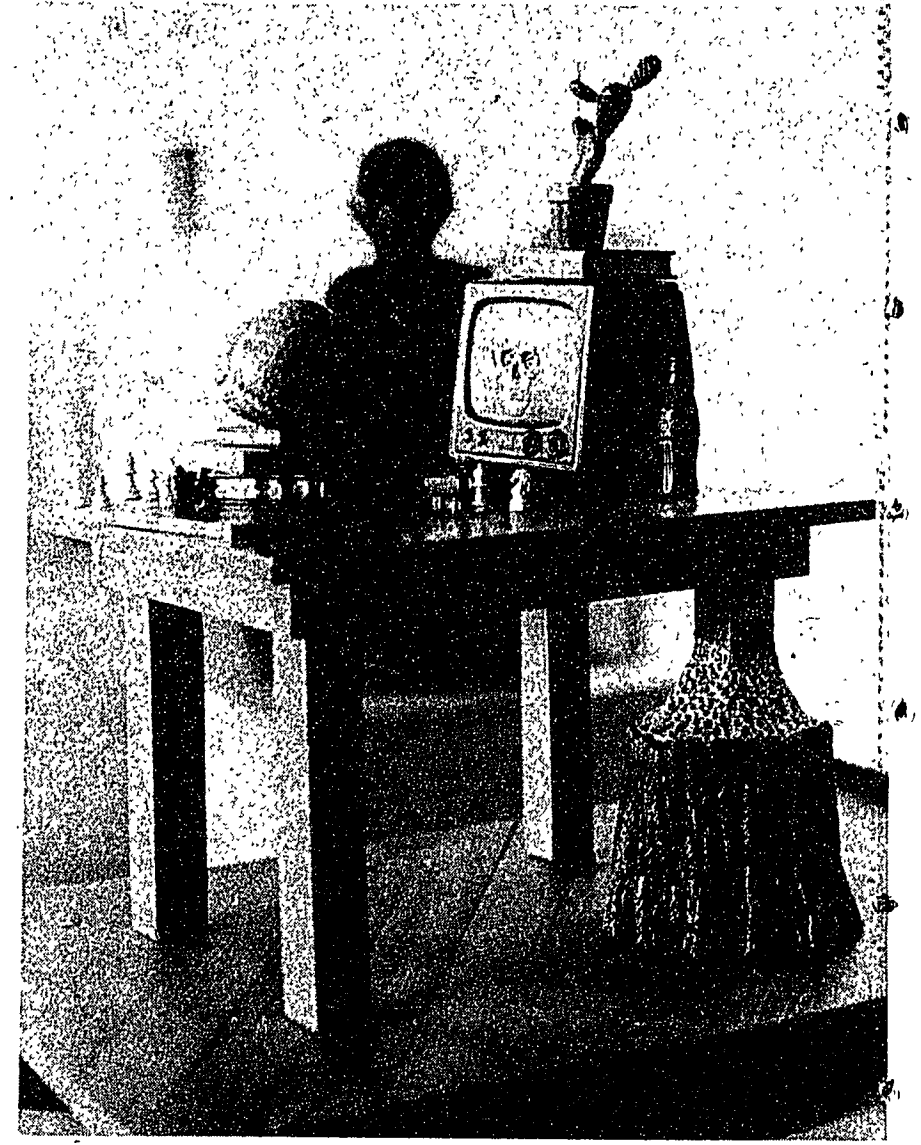


SuperMud 1979



Mondale visit highlights ceramic conference

By LYNNE MARGOLIS
Daily Collegian Staff Writer

People usually leave Happy Valley in droves during term break, but this time, things were different. Cars bearing license plates from all over the country were popping up around town last week, bringing almost 2,300 artists, students and teachers here for the biggest ceramic convention of them all—SuperMud '79.

The 12th Annual SuperMud Conference, hosted by Penn State, was combined this year for the first time with the National Council on Education for the Ceramic Arts.

Besides attracting the most revered artists in the world of ceramics, the event drew such notables as John Hartford and Joan Mondale, wife of vice president Walter Mondale. Hartford, representing "an artist from another discipline," played to a lively audience Wednesday night at Eisenhower Auditorium.

Mondale, a beginning potter, asked to come to the University to learn raku firing, so her visit was arranged to coincide with SuperMud. She also was given an honorary membership to NCECA. Mondale was one of three so honored at the awards presentation which opened the conference Wednesday.

When Mondale was called out to receive her award for furthering the cause of the arts in America, she made a few comments about clay. "When I throw on the wheel, I center myself as well as the clay," she said. Working in clay, one must take responsibility for failures as well as successes, she noted, adding, "You can't pass the buck very far when you're a potter."

Hartford, a country-folk musician who gained recognition as a regular on the Glen Campbell Show, alternately played fiddle, banjo and acoustic guitar. But Hartford's best sound effects were not displayed on stringed instruments. I was convinced he wore metal cleats as he tap-danced on plywood, but the soles of his hiking boots were made only of rubber. He played his cheeks, clicked his tongue, sang in falsetto, and gave perfect renditions of sun-warped record albums and dying washing machines.

Hartford, who has a riverboat pilot's license, will take time from his summer job on an Illinois River excursion boat to appear in July for a Nittany Mountain Summer concert.

Thursday morning, Mondale and her Washington

colleagues got their raku firing lesson. In jeans and tennis shoes, they watched intently as ceramics professor David DonTigny demonstrated the glazing and firing processes.

Then Mondale, her two studio mates, her arts advisor and her "advance person" each took turns firing pots. Prior to SuperMud, the University sent 100 pounds of raku clay to Mondale's ceramics studio so that she could bring her own pots to fire.

Approaching the red-hot kiln gingerly, Mondale learned how to handle the long tongs used to transfer hot pieces from kiln to sawdust.

(The heat from the pot ignites the sawdust, and the smoke from the flames creates part of the raku effect.) The process is finished when the pot is transferred from sawdust to water, where it is cooled and scrubbed with cleanser to remove the soot.

Mondale said she planned to keep all eight of her raku teapots.

Mondale, honorary chairwoman of the National Endowment for the Arts, said she identifies more with people who "dedicate their lives to art" because of her own work in ceramics. "It's much more exciting to be a participant" than to be an observer, she added.

Mondale spends two mornings a week doing pottery. She takes a class one day, and works in her studio the other. "I really need it. . . It's sort of a time for re-inspiring yourself," she said.

As the wife of a vice-president, Mondale said she is not allowed to sell any pots for profit. "It would be questionable whether people bought the pots because they liked it or because I made it. I'm not good enough yet anyhow," Mondale exclaimed. "I'm still a beginner."

The nine artists who demonstrated or showed slides of their work at Eisenhower during the conference were far from beginners.

One or two were traditional potters, but most of them were young, avant-garde artists who have stretched their wild imaginings into unique art forms or humorous statements.

SuperMud's Masterworks Invitational display in the HUB gallery consisted of the work of these nine artists. Some of the best work was also the wittiest. A prime example was Richard Notkin's piece, "Van Imaginings." Sitting atop a miniature table (one leg of

which was still a tree-trunk, partially carved) stood a chess board with several books plopped into the middle of a half-finished game. On top of the volumes (Moth and Rust, By Bread Alone . . .) sat a skull watching television. But the image it "saw" was another skull peering back from the TV. An empty Coke bottle and another book (The Shallow Life) completed the social commentary.

The highlight of the exhibit was Doug Baldwin's "The Great Duck School of Ceramics." Baldwin, one of the most well-known ceramic artists, is also one of the premiere humorists of clay. His "Duck School" is the culmination of a duck theme which runs through most of his work.

Brick by brick, he created an earthenware maze of duck civilization — classrooms, dorms, recreation areas (a pool hall and bowling alley — duck pins, anyone?) There was even a pottery museum and an administration room, with a board meeting in session (and the head duck in the bathroom).

Both the Masterworks and the SuperMud Student Invitational exhibits were much better this year than last. The student invitational, open until March 13, could easily have been mixed in with the professional exhibit, and no one would have known the difference.

Both of this year's exhibits consisted of less traditional pottery and more original shapes and designs. One of the most striking student pieces was by Seth David Seiberman of Texas Tech University. "Untitled #7" was constructed of several hundred ceramic tubes about 12 inches long and less than one inch in diameter. Suspended by thin wires of graduated length and exact spacing, the three side by side angles formed what looked like stairways. The wires looked like a harp, and if you touched them, the rods became undulating windchimes.

The effect was magical. Other student pieces incorporated suede, feathers, and even rhinestones, pearls and cigarettes in beer. Several Penn State students have pieces in the show. One even sold a sculpture to one of Mondale's ceramic partners.

It was unfortunate that SuperMud had to occur during term break. But the student exhibit will remain in Zoller Gallery long enough for everyone to capture a bit of what the 1979 NCECA-SuperMud conference was all about.

Top left, Ceramics professor David Don Tigny, left, explains the raku technique to Joan Mondale, right, and her arts advisor, Elena Canavier. Top right, Richard Notkin's "Vain Imaginings" is social commentary in clay. Above, "Tasteless Teapot," by Kay Thomas, is part of the SuperMud Student Invitational Exhibit in Zoller Gallery.

Photos by Lynne Margolis and Mary Baragar



Left, Don Tigny glazes a raku pot. Center, After being taken from kiln to sawdust bin, the flaming pot is lifted from the sawdust. Right, Water is sprinkled on the smoldering pot to create a crackling or "crazing" effect in the glaze.