



After kneading, Voulkos goes to work on a potter's wheel . . . which turns the clay to give it the desired shape.

Peter Voulkos Wows Students With High-Rise Pottery Skill

By Jean M. White
 Staff Reporter

It took Peter Voulkos eight minutes yesterday to take a hunk of wet clay and create a tall, twisting cylinder.

Then it took him 22 minutes to tear it apart.

This was one of the country's top potters at a demonstration for ceramics students at the Corcoran School of Art. Voulkos, a handsomely-mustachioed man of 39, proved to be quite a performer at the wheel and table.

"Only a few potters can throw a form that high," observed Richard C. Lafean, head of the Corcoran Ceramics Department.

Voulkos's feat, it seems, is something like clearing

the 16-foot bar is to a pole-vaulter. At the turning wheel, he took the big lump of clay and "threw" a column two feet high in a few minutes.

Voulkos, who is as free-wheeling in performance as in art form, had a standing-room-only audience yesterday. Before a half-hour was over, he had been on his knees on the floor and had jumped on and off the table a few times.

The Corcoran students watched as the brown clay rippled upward and came alive under the master potter's powerful hands. Voulkos scraped, scored and slashed the form and then placed it on a base made the day before. Then he stepped back, considered his handiwork, and said:

"Already I don't like it. Where in the hell do I go from here?"

As it turned out, the answer was nowhere. Voulkos tore off some hunks from the tall column, slashed it with the knife, and finally tore it apart. Then he chose another form to top off the base and was off again. He poked a pumpkin face on the surface.

"I guess that's blasphemy," he chuckled, obviously relishing the blasphemy.

Voulkos has brought some refreshingly fresh—and at times controversial—views to the ancient art of pottery-making.

"Pottery was so pedantic and dull for centuries," he explains. "I just want to expand the form a little bit."

He is one of the leaders of the so-called "clay movement" in California, where he teaches at the University at Berkeley. Some have called his rough, large-size "clays" more sculpture than pottery, but he disagrees. Recently Voulkos, who once worked in an iron mill, helped set up a foundry and now works with bronze castings.

As for his pottery creations, Voulkos doesn't mind seeing them used because they are still a "container form" as in ancient times.

"Pick them up and use them and get fun out of them," he said. "I can imagine eating off the damnest-looking plate you ever saw. It's like drinking out of a tin cup outdoors."



Photos by Tom Kelley, Staff Photographer

Peter Voulkos, one of America's most talented potters, works on the floor during a demonstration here in which he transformed a hunk of clay into a column.



Voulkos winds up with a hollow form, two feet high.