

ARCHETYPE

In a craft where one creation can take a month or more to complete, the artist behind the work must possess the eye, patience, talent and feel for the subject and the individual piece, and have the self-control to know when the work is done. Such is the case anytime a ceramicist sits down to throw a pot, and even more so when those pots are then embellished with imagery and art that adds not only hands-on creative time but also repeated trips to the kiln. The process is well worth the effort, as the resultant pieces hold a uniqueness that speaks to all who experience them.

— Jennifer Quail



PETER OLSON

Building on a decades-long career as a professional photographer, Peter Olson set out to expand his catalogue raisonné with a venture into the craft of ceramics — taking local studio classes to learn the basics and then launching a studio of his own. In doing so, the artist did not by any means leave his camera behind, but rather created an entirely new canvas that would highlight a different angle of his practiced perspective. Olson's work in ceramics has been influenced by everything from street photographers like Robert Frank and Danny Lyon to 18th-century Sevres porcelain, which similarly incorporated imagery of people of the day into decorative objects. "In a sense," Olson says of the time-honored porcelain line, "that's what I'm working to do with these today, but with more topical, more in-your-face people."

peterolson.me

FOR HIS MARKED FOR LIFE SERIES, OLSON SHOT PEOPLE IN A TATTOO SHOP IN PHILADELPHIA, LIKING THE SYMMETRY OF TATTOOS ON PEOPLE AND IMAGES ON POTS.



"IT'S NOT REALLY ABOUT THE TATTOOS THAT ARE ON THEM. YOU SEE THE TATTOOS, BUT IT'S MORE ABOUT THE PEOPLE, AND THEY JUST HAPPEN TO HAVE A MARK ON THEIR BODY."



ARCHETYPE PETER OLSON

My process is like...

Russian roulette. For the pots, I don't test, and I usually have great results. And in places like Times Square, Camden Yards in London or The Bean in Chicago, I just shoot. You can't wait for the perfect shot. I'll come away with 1,000 or 2,000 images from a session. I stand at a crosswalk with my camera posed or in the middle of a crowd... You get all these resting faces and people glaring at you... They're in motion and you don't get out of the way. I see different people, different cultures. A lot of the time, you don't know what you have until you get back, and that's part of the excitement.

A common theme in my work is...

Mortality. It doesn't beat you over the head, but it's there. All the pieces have something to do with life and death.

My favorite design periods are...

Pop Art and Memphis design

My favorite period in photography is...

When the camera came off the tripod. The '50s, '60s, '70s — when the street photography came in.

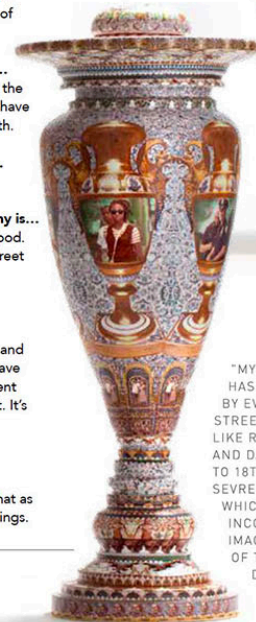
A piece of art or decorative object should...

Make you get up and look at it — and look at it repeatedly. You should have a lot to look at. It should be different from all views and in different light. It's another sense of discovery.

I admire the work of...

Ettore Sottsass. He was big in the Memphis movement and before that as well. He did so many wonderful things.

A TOTAL OF NINE FIRES WERE NEEDED TO COMPLETE OLSON'S MEAN STREETS SERIES. THE DECORATIVE DETAIL BEYOND THE IMAGERY OF PEOPLE IN THIS AND OTHER SERIES COMES FROM OLSON'S VISITS TO VARIOUS MUSEUMS AND OTHER INSPIRATIONAL PLACES. IN THIS SERIES, THE WALLPAPER-LIKE PATTERNED EMBELLISHMENTS CAME FROM THE BORDER OF A PAINTING AT AN EXHIBIT OF PERSIAN ART AT THE HIGH MUSEUM OF ART IN ATLANTA, WHILE THE TIARA-LIKE DETAIL AT THE BASE WAS INSPIRED BY A PIECE AT THE UFFIZI GALLERIES IN FLORENCE, ITALY.



"MY WORK IN CERAMICS HAS BEEN INFLUENCED BY EVERYTHING FROM STREET PHOTOGRAPHERS LIKE ROBERT FRANK AND DANNY LYON TO 18TH-CENTURY SEVRES PORCELAIN, WHICH SIMILARLY INCORPORATED IMAGERY OF PEOPLE OF THE DAY INTO DECORATIVE OBJECTS."

