

# The Rosenfield Collection

## Offering Inspiration and Imagination

*Along with developing a career in pottery over the last three decades, Louise Rosenfield spent that time building an extensive and impressive collection of thousands of pieces of functional ceramics. Rosenfield has since donated the collection to the Everson Museum of Art in Syracuse, New York. A portion of these vessels are used at the museum's specialty café, which combines art and creative dining for patrons to experience the work with food, as intended. To date, the Rosenfield collection is comprised of over 4300 works by nearly 1200 artists.*

**Ceramics Monthly:** How does your experience as a maker influence how you select and understand the ceramics you collect?

**Louise Rosenfield:** I think I look more critically at work I purchase because I am so familiar with all the techniques. Many times, I purchase vessels from photos, and when they get to my house and I handle them, I find they don't meet my standards. For example, recently, I purchased a magnificent plate that documented a historical event. When it arrived, I noticed that the decoration was added to the plate in two large decals, and I could still feel and even see the edges of the decals. This plate will not make it into the Rosenfield Collection.



Louise Rosenfield with a selection of collected pottery.



**CM:** Have you ever collected a piece that challenged your taste or pushed you out of your comfort zone as a collector or maker? What were your takeaways from that experience?

**LR:** Yes! Many years ago, at the National Council on Education for the Ceramic Arts (NCECA) conference, I saw a fabulous show with a wood-fired plate that looked to me so sloppy with torn edges on the rim, and the rim torn in a few places, and I asked the artist what he was thinking about. He asked what it looked like to me, and I told him it looked like he was just making a mess. He laughed and jokingly told me that was exactly what he had in mind. (I have no idea what the work was really about.) Anyway, I purchased the plate and tried to live with it for a while. When a great friend admired it, I immediately gave it away, and it is happily hanging on the wall in their house.

**CM:** What draws you to a particular ceramic piece—are there specific qualities or emotions you look for?

**LR:** I need to feel some content. I look for a story. Sometimes, just decoration is enough. And in general, I don't need to understand the content or story; I can make up my own interpretation. The vessels I find most intriguing definitely have some content beyond the form, which often contributes to the content. I don't think my strategy of selecting work is the only legitimate way—some people love cats, so they need to buy anything with a cat on it. And being surrounded by all the different cats makes them so happy and lets them never have to drink or eat or garden without a cat nearby. That's what I love about functional ceramics—there are so many ways to enjoy artists' work.

**CM:** Your collection, documented in tremendous detail at [RosenfieldCollection.com](http://RosenfieldCollection.com), serves as a learning resource for makers, an archive of contemporary ceramics, and shows the breadth and depth of our field. What story do you hope your collection tells—about ceramics, about artists, or about the everyday rituals of life?

**LR:** I hope that people appreciate the most democratic art form: functional vessels. Functional vessels are not static in our environment in the same way that paintings and sculptures are. When we interact with a cup, bowl, plate, vase, spoon, etc., we are taking time to collaborate not only with the artist, but also with whatever food, flower, drink, light, etc., we are purposing. I hope the Rosenfield Collection offers inspiration, a place for imagination, and perhaps problem solving.

**CM:** You've made part of your collection accessible through touch and use in partnership with the Everson Museum of Art's Louise Café—do you see this as a challenge to traditional museum culture?

**LR:** I love the potential for museums like the Everson, who hold major ceramic works (mostly sculptural), to offer the tactile experience of interacting with vessels in the café made by the same artists

**1** View of the Rosenfield Collection Storage Room in Rosenfield's house in Dallas, Texas. **2** View of artistic collaboration between chef Danielle Mercuri Campolito's creative nourishment and various ceramic works from the Rosenfield Collection. In the background, view the top of a 20-foot (6.1-m) tower that holds works from numerous artists.





**3** Louise Café with tables set for an event. **4** Pouring vessel by Christa Assad in use providing the finishing touch to a special-event bruschetta served in a vessel by Liz Quackenbush. Food by Danielle Mercuri Campolito. **5** Tables reconfigured for special event at Louise Café. **6** Jason Bige Burnett's plate with a delicious brunch item consisting of pepper, tomato jam, basil, poached egg, and secret ingredients.

whose works only exist inside glass cases or beyond reach in the galleries. For example, at the Everson, you can see several *Dangos* made by Jun Kaneko. Then, you can drink tea in the café out of a cup made by Kaneko. You can see several pillow pitchers made by Betty Woodman, and then snack from a plate made by Woodman. I think it enhances museum culture in two ways. First, guests can see that artists are rarely one-dimensional, and second, actually using vessels made by artists important enough to have works preserved in a museum can give guests a heightened experience. I think it makes the museum seem more revolutionary.

**CM:** What's one interaction you've witnessed—perhaps in the café—that changed the way you saw a piece in your collection?

**LR:** I have a few stories about this. One about a customer at a craft show who was looking for a pencil cup. The customer asks the artist, "Do you have any pencil cups?" The artist, who has a whole display of tumblers, juice cups, mugs, and vertical-walled vases, replies with a straight face, "No. I don't make pencil cups, but perhaps the artist at the next booth will have some." Another unfortunate story about a pot I thought was well made, with great content, just the kind of piece I would normally treasure, only to discover several years later that the artist was a person I would normally not be interested in supporting. I think this is a struggle with art in general. To what degree is the artist the art? How should technically good art be considered when the artist is a known murderer or a reckless criminal or a person devoid of conscience?

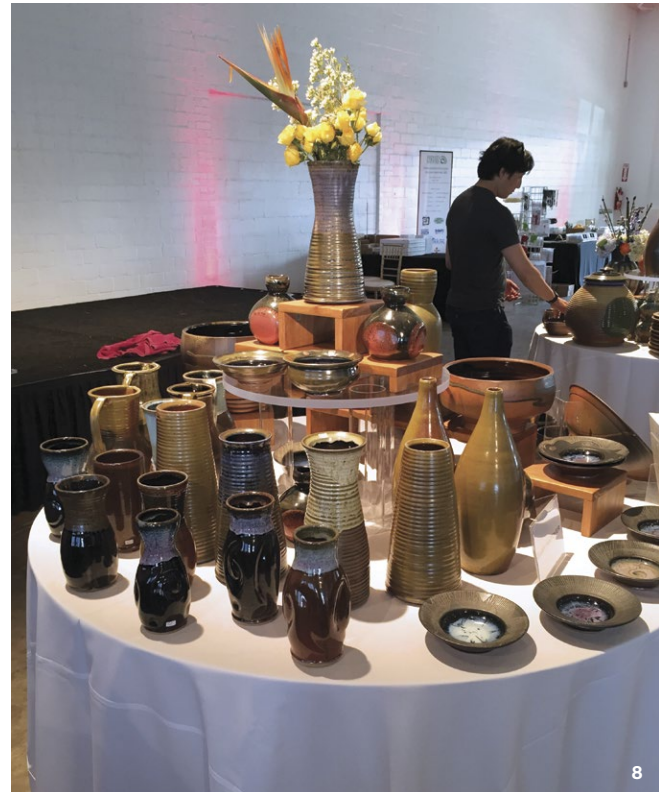


**CM:** The annual Dallas Pottery Invitational has grown tremendously since its founding in 2008. How has the Dallas Pottery Invitational shaped your making, collecting, and your relationship with the ceramics community?

**LR:** The Dallas Pottery Invitational has allowed me to meet some of the best artists making functional work, and has allowed me to be able to purchase their work that might usually be scarce. I think we all make sure the artists have such a great time when they come to Dallas that they remember and even adopt some of our ideas for their own group sales in other parts of the country.

**CM:** What advice would you give to young collectors or artists starting to build a collection—especially one centered around use, not just display?

**LR:** Archive everything you buy! Archive all the work you get from other artists when you trade. Build a spreadsheet or a file. Have a photo of the piece, note who created it, where you got it, when you got it, and what you paid for it. Most people cannot believe that they won't remember the artists' names until twenty years or so passes, and then it is too late and a person has to really go to a lot of trouble to figure it out.



**7** Dallas Pottery Invitational table display of Daphne Hatcher. Photo: Karla Barfield. **8** Dallas Pottery Invitational table display of Gary Hatcher with floral work by Sage Blooms, a flower design studio in Richardson, Texas. The designers provide floral arrangements in many vessels for the weekend-long show. Photo: Karla Barfield. **9** Gallery view of the exhibition "Curious Vessels: The Rosenfield Collection," at Everson Museum of Art, in Syracuse, New York, 2022. Part of the gallery was devoted to presenting functional vessels on tables where people could both look and touch.



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Every potter I know has a collection, and most don't think about the consequences of passing it to someone else who may have to figure out what it is worth. Archiving makes it so much easier. You know the story of someone's grandparents leaving all their Chinese pottery in the attic, so they had a garage sale, and someone spent \$5 on a cup that turned out to be a fabulous Ming Dynasty piece worth \$10,000. Yes, the grandkids knew their grandparents went to China and brought home pots, but they never asked, and it was never written down.

**the author** Louise Rosenfield is a Dallas, Texas, potter. In her spare time, she enjoys playing with clay and making functional vessels for daily use.

**10** Akio Takamori's cup, wheel-thrown porcelain, 4 in. (10 cm) in height. Currently at Louise Café, Everson Museum of Art, Syracuse, New York. **11** Louise Rosenfield's *I will not look away*, 6 in. (15.2 cm) in diameter, handbuilt porcelain, mid-range firing, 2025. **12** Jason Walker's cup, 5 in. (12.7 cm) in width, handbuilt and high-fired porcelain, underglaze, glaze, luster. Currently at Louise Café. **13** Mark Pharis' vessel (2022) with flowers from Sage Blooms.

