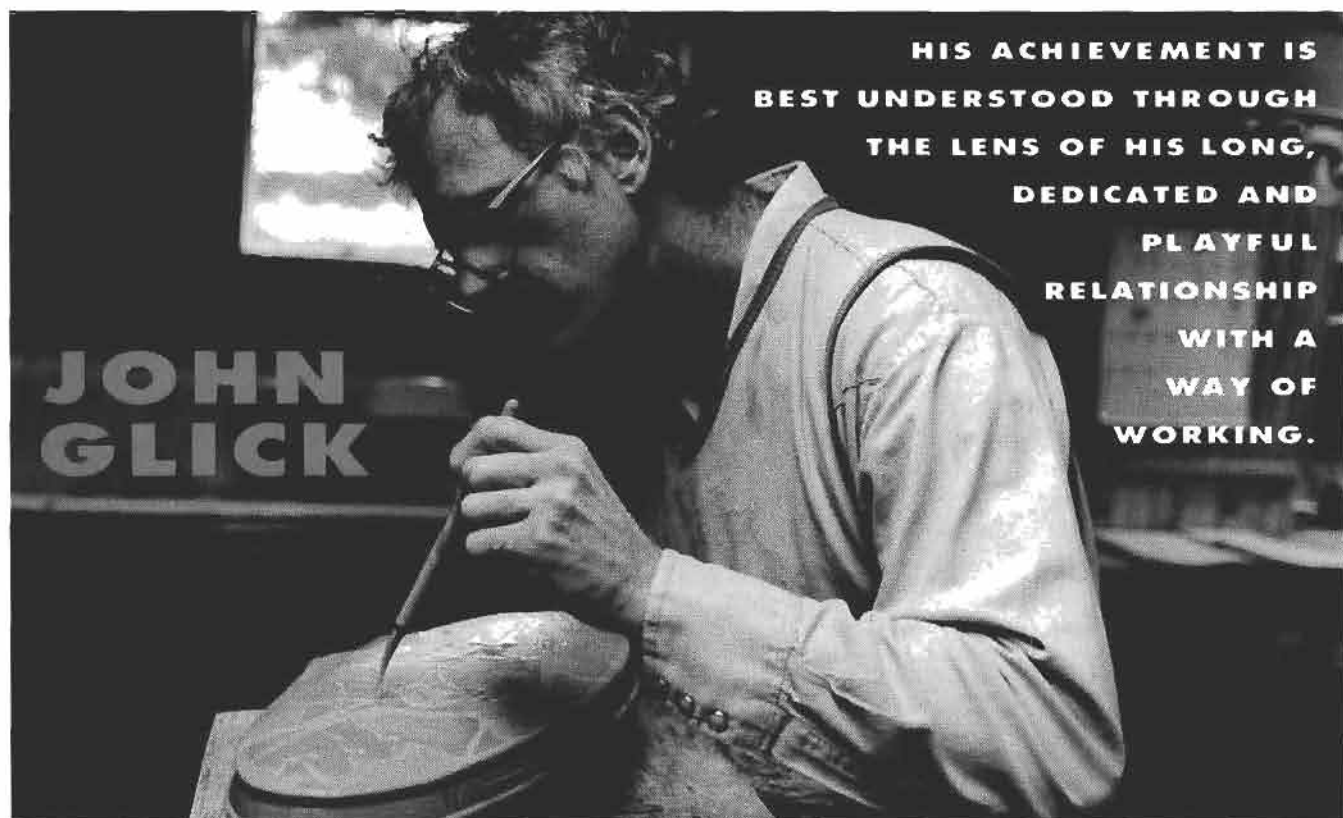


Over the past 26 years, John Glick has maintained a quiet presence as one of America's best known and most respected studio potters. As he describes it, he has been "hiding out" at his studio in Farmington Hills, Michigan, since he began working there in 1964, steadily filling his showroom with the fruits of his explorations, responding to the challenges of commissions, and periodically pausing to follow new inspiration. Glick's thoughtful articulation of what it means to work in clay, promulgated through regular demonstrations, lectures and articles in publications such as *Studio Potter* and *Ceramics Monthly*, has had a defining impact on the field. His pots have been exhibited, collected and published extensively, and salient works, notably his large platters, have been included in nearly every major exhibition of ceramics since the late 1970s.

formal and surface possibilities. His willingness to "keep opening doors," to relax his intent sufficiently to welcome new ideas, has fostered a self-propelling evolution, each sequence nurturing the next.

Glick continually renews his vocabulary of form and glaze treatment by recycling and overlapping shapes, gestures, patterns, textures and color values through each series in turn. It is an unpredictable, at times uncomfortable, process. His recent wall pieces—investigations of landscape and a delineated horizon on thickly glazed slabs—mark a radical departure from the layered, calligraphic color field of his mature pottery. This development has brought him both an overwhelming elation and regret at having moved away from familiar territory. Despite the internal conflict and discomfort provoked by these changes, Glick is philosophically com-



The prolific, divergent and experimental approach that characterizes contemporary studio pottery challenges us to consider not only individual masterpieces but the potter's larger context of theme and variation, repetition and digression, movement and return. Glick's achievement is best understood through the lens of his long, dedicated and playful relationship with a way of working—a relationship that has engendered objects of profound depth and uncommon grace.

The earliest pots are exceptionally workmanlike and deeply conservative. Inspired by Scandinavian design and Oriental stoneware, they are subdued in tone, generously proportioned and minimally decorated. Between the scrupulous restraint of these pieces and the decorative exuberance of Glick's mature work lies a meandering traverse of

mitted to pursuing them, and describes his gratitude for the surprising manner in which "something you know so well gives more than you had imagined."

Growing up in Detroit, Glick studied ceramics and metal-smithing in high school, and received his B.F.A. in 1960 from Wayne State University. He was uncertain of his direction as an undergraduate, and he credits Olga Constantine, a member of Wayne's design faculty, with giving him a pivotal nudge to "do more." Encouraged by her confidence in his potential, he continued to pursue both pottery and metalsmithing. His ceramics instructor, William Pitney, instilled in him a serious regard for functional ware, solid workmanship and formal clarity, a grounding that was to serve Glick well in his studies with Maija Grotell at Cranbrook Academy of Art,



**ABOVE:** Wall panels with landscape theme, 1991, stoneware, multiple slips and glazes, 36"x18" **OPPOSITE PAGE:** John Olick inlaying colored glasses over a constructed wax-resist lidded box at his Plum Tree Pottery in Farmington Hills, Michigan, 1989.





**ABOVE:** Teapot, 12" high, and cups, reduction-fired stoneware, in Glick's thesis exhibition at Cranbrook Academy of Art, 1962.  
**BELOW:** Dinner bowl, 1966, stoneware with oxide wash decoration, 7" diameter. **OPPOSITE PAGE TOP:** Basket, 1973, reduction-fired stoneware, freehand and mold made, 10" x 18".  
**BOTTOM:** Lidded box, 1976, reduction-fired stoneware, layered glazes with multiple oxide washes, mold made, 3 1/2" x 12 1/2".

where he received an M.F.A. in 1962. Grotell expected her students to have already mastered the nuts and bolts of technique. Teaching by example and gentle exhortation, she insisted upon the primacy of artistic challenge and inquiry.

Following his studies at Cranbrook, Glick was drafted into the Army and sent to West Germany. His interaction with several small, traditional salt-glazing potteries in Hohn-Grenzhausen (Rhineland-Palatinate) reinforced his intent to pursue full-time studio work. Upon returning to Michigan in 1964, he immediately began searching for an appropriate location, eventually settling on the former farm that is now Plum Tree Pottery. Glick's romantic, even naive ideal of a studio and showroom from which he would sell to the public was initially sustained by enthusiasm, his first wife's income, sales at art fairs and his own methodical work habits. Within a few years he had established a broad and loyal audience whose support has remained relatively constant.

Glick's approach to showroom management developed from his desire to communicate directly with his audience and to balance production with the risk taking central to his life as an artist. In his M.F.A. thesis, Glick stressed the importance of a "strong bond of understanding" between producer and consumer. He conscientiously avoids intimidating or misleading purchasers of his work. For example, to prevent accidental damage should they be used, he designates his recent oversize, nonfunctional teapots as such on an accompanying card. Dinnerware commissions, a mainstay of his production since 1965, offer an occasion for intense interaction with clients. Striving to meet their requirements while informing them about his methods and aesthetic approach,

Glick has shown a powerful commitment to fostering that strong bond of understanding, and he has thrived on the challenge.

What Glick's first pots—uneven, tentative and visually weighty—lacked in passion and originality was compensated for by the solid foundation in proportion and stance they laid for his later experimental forays. Their craftsmanship consistently reflected Glick's attention to detail: teapots have thumb hooks to ease pouring, knobs are well sized, lids fit neatly. The relationship of parts is carefully considered and well executed, but somewhat sterile: smooth, exaggerated spouts and unobtrusive lids flow seamlessly into the pot bodies. The teapots from his Cranbrook years—bulging, inflated, tense—seem complete unto themselves, in a manner foreign to Glick pots dated after the mid-1960s. They exude a self-conscious, swaggering quality, like young protégés flushed with success.

Glick's mature decorative vocabulary was seeded in the mid-to-late 60s, as his confidence and curiosity stimulated an ever-increasing diversification. Deeply moved by the formal rhythms of 18th- and 19th-century Japanese ceramics, Glick gradually began integrating elements of teapots, baskets and boxes from that tradition into his own work. The crisp, elegant cyma-curved spouts and lobed pot bodies introduced during the late 60s marked a distinct break with the massive, rounded forms of his previous years, and Glick's intoxication with the change is still palpable in work from the early to mid-70s. The taut, mold-formed shapes provoked a new complexity, with their grooves, facets and edges that invited emphasis and articulation. The challenge of embellishing these composite forms sparked a remarkable period of growth and continues to hold Glick's interest today.

During this time Glick's attention to details took on a new primacy: handles were squeezed, wire-cut, crimped and sprigged with decorative pads; knobs faceted, stamped, modeled or incised; bellies and shoulders textured to catch pools of glaze. Concurrently he began to incorporate an aesthetic of pattern rooted in Japanese Oribe pottery and Ukiyo-e wood-block prints, expanding his palette and mark







**ABOVE: Pitcher, 1980, salt-glazed stoneware, 11 1/2" high.**  
**OPPOSITE PAGE TOP: Lidded box, 1991, extruded stoneware, 3"x18".**  
**BOTTOM: Plate, 1989, reduction-fired stoneware, multiple slips and glazes, glaze painting, wax resist, 24" diameter.**

making with great fervor. This heady mix of shape and pattern formed a matrix upon which Glick still draws, recombining elements, refining nuances, nurturing the dormancy and liberal reseeding of ideas and gestures.

Partly through reliance upon mold-made forms, partly as a relic of his training, most of Glick's pots from the late 60s and early 70s retain a slight stiffness and formality. Thin faceted spouts, inverted U-shaped handles, and long swelling knobs strain upward, adding a particular tension to the stance of teapots and covered jars. This changed gradually, almost imperceptibly, throughout the 70s as many of Glick's pieces became looser, funkier, almost lush. Boxes, soap dishes and baskets were lavished with scrolled appendages of coiled clay, curving wire-cut handles and feet, and asymmetrical latticed openings. Culminating in 1974-75 with a remarkable series of handbuilt lattice constructions, Glick's unfettered pursuit of form seemed to have reached a natural limit. New variations continue to emerge—most notably muscular extruded boxes and the large, angular nonfunctional teapots—and familiar themes are refined and rededicated. It is important, too, not to disregard the parallel streams which have developed alongside the general trends in Glick's work. His powerful pitchers and covered jars, for example, in which

subtleties of proportion precede decoration, deserve more recognition than they have received. From the late 70s on, however, the exploration of surface has been the real locus of his attention.

Glick included several details of wax-resist designs in his M.F.A. thesis (tight swirls clustered in islands on teapot bellies), and these hint at a fascination with glazing. Throughout the 60s he glazed certain forms, particularly plates and bowls, with loose, calligraphic brushwork. A gradual progression can be traced from simple articulations of border and well to a freer, broad use of color across the entire surface. As Glick's inquiry into pattern blossomed in the next decade, these unpretentious marks steadily coalesced with elements of the Oribe ceramics he admired, evolving into the foundation of a rich personal vocabulary. As the extension of this vocabulary became the dominant focus of his work, Glick developed forms which serve primarily as carriers of pattern and color. Arguably the most powerful of these are his celebrated large plates and his long extruded boxes, whose smooth curves and simple proportions allow uninterrupted sweeps of exuberant pattern.

Two features of Oribe pottery decoration have had a lasting impact on Glick's approach. By dividing the planar surfaces of his pots with alternating light and dark areas of poured glaze, he creates a ground which does not refer directly to form. Second, by floating snippets of overt pattern in that indeterminate ground, he suspends layers of imagery that partially erode the solidity of his forms. Given these elements as a basic foundation, Glick's inquisitiveness has moved him progressively beyond his initial inspiration. His prolonged and fruitful exploration of visual depth, subtle commingled color and calligraphic line, steeped in ceramic history and applied to solidly proportioned forms, has resulted in a unique and deeply intelligent body of work.

**A**t their most successful Glick's glaze treatments become whole cloth. Visually penetrating the skin of the pots, his glazing opens windows into a partially translucent depth. Yet the sensitive scale of his marks remains intuitively responsive to form and keeps the structure from being dissolved in the overlaid pattern. His mature works often seem to have been formed from some rare, decorative substance, rather than having had pattern and color applied to their surfaces. (For this reason, it can be disappointing to examine the underside of Glick's large plates and bowls, which is generally left undecorated.) The impression of elemental substance is enhanced by his continual experimentation with techniques affecting the physical interaction of slips and glazes. Such techniques, combined with his extreme color sensitivity and facility with line, support a consummate vocabulary of depth and suspension.

The sense of "skin" evoked by Glick's best surfaces relies on the controlled alternation of overlapped and exposed areas of color and texture. In pieces from the 70s and early 80s he achieved this effect especially through the combination of translucent and opaque glazes. With consistency and consid-





erable subtlety, Glick has exploited wax-resist patterns—brushed, trailed or sponged over a first layer of glaze—to delineate islands of that first application within the sea of an overlaid glaze. Translucent glazes can reveal the color and pattern of slips applied while the clay is wet; opaque glazes flow over the thickly laid slips underneath them. Ridges, incised lines and textures impressed into wet clay or slip create recesses in which glazes pool and darken; Glick uses these to define the architecture of his forms and to extend pattern over them. He employed stamped textures extensively through the early 80s to concentrate and deepen glazes, although he seems to have left them behind for the moment.

The first fully successful work in Glick's mature decorative style, emerging in 1973 and 1974, has a relatively rational character: foreground, middle ground and background are isolated in fairly distinct planes and a thin dancing calligraphy whips over and behind these levels. This ordered interpretation has receded in Glick's most recent series, which evoke, rather than illustrate depth. Over the past five years Glick has reintroduced a technique of glaze "inlay," using wax simultaneously as a medium for glaze or colorant and as a resist. The wide swaths of color and thick, viscous brushwork made possible by this method are gently let into the existing field, interrupting and displacing the layers rather than entering their space. The resulting surfaces resemble both densely woven brocade and unctuous sauces.

The rapid drying of glazes requires quick, certain, even restless application, but Glick's current interest in re-firing

pieces has accentuated the fluidity of his line even more. Applied to a vitrified surface, liquid glaze flows without soaking into the surface. This agile line, now slightly broadened and loosened, has become a constant in his repertoire. It suggests leaf, minnow, petal, ripple and hummingbird, swirling undefined in a realm that is both natural and abstract. Glick's mastery of proportion and measure is evident in the serene, sweeping energy of his line, which seems impelled by wind or flowing water rather than by a human intermediary. The random gesture of his decoration never collapses into chaos but is held in a gentle tension that is deeply compelling.

**N**ow Glick is also exploring sandblasting as a method of reworking fired glaze surfaces. This is inspired by his experience with Harvey Littleton's "vitreography" process, in which intaglio prints are made after sandblasting through resist media applied to glass plates. Glick is extending this technique as a way to go back "into" his glazed surfaces, etching narrow lines or wide bands into his multiple layers of glaze. The color stratigraphy this reveals is incredibly complex and has the soft, muted texture of etched glass. Used as line or broad swath, it introduces a matte break in the shiny glazed surfaces. In many ways, sandblasting brings Glick's exploration of depth full circle—a literal delving into the layers of glaze to rediscover what has been obscured.

Recently Glick's restless, inquiring nature has led him away from pot making and abstract decoration and into an investigation of landscape. His wall pieces from the past year

**BELOW:** Teapot, 1991, extruded and constructed stoneware, multiple glazes and glaze painting, 6 1/2"x12 1/2".  
**OPPOSITE PAGE:** Tray with landscape theme, 1988, stoneware, multiple glazes, wax resist, 19 1/2"x17 1/2".







describe a horizon line, strips of earth and wide expanses of turbulent sky, most often drawn in orange and amber Shino glazes and deep, muddy, cobalt blue. Fat slabs of thickly glazed clay, these are intensely physical objects. Like a genetic sport, they have evolved suddenly, unexpectedly, but are rooted in his previous work; he brings the glaze effects and mark-making techniques developed in his pottery to bear upon these new efforts.

The imagery of the wall pieces is immediately arresting. Swaths of smoky atmosphere typically center upon a nebulous pathway, veiled in a mist of layered color and texture and surrounded by swirling, agitated lines reminiscent of vegetation and the movement of wind. Glick sandblasts calligraphic patterns to suggest cloud patterns and hedgerows, using a subtler contrast of matte against glossy surface rather

than extremes of color. Beclouded, mysterious and dark, they carry an emotional charge that is in sharp contrast to the elegance and serenity of his recent pottery decoration. New enough to be fragile, the direction these landscapes will take is not yet clear. But they mark an exciting transition in John Glick's artistic life, and it is certain that the ripples caused by this change will take him, once again, to the far edges of the pond. ■

1. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from John Glick are taken from interviews the author conducted December 19, 1990 and January 7, 1991.

2. Lane, Arthur, *Style in Pottery* (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1948), quoted in Glick's M.F.A. thesis, "An Examination of Several Functional Ceramic Forms," Cranbrook Academy of Art, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, 1962, page 2.