



Below: Jacqueline and Jean Lerat's ceramic bowl, circa 1960, from "La Borne, 1940-1980" at the Magen H. Gallery in New York.

Opposite, clockwise from top left: A table lamp, circa 1970, by Hildegund Schlichenmaier. Gustave Tiffoche's sculpture, circa 1975. The Lerats' sculptures flanking Hugues Magen at his gallery. His installation of pottery from La Borne, France, in 2002 at the Sanford L. Smith & Associates fair *Modernism: A Century of Style and Design*. The Lerats' studio in Bourges, near La Borne, in 1961. A vase, circa 1976, by Élisabeth Joullia. Gérard Brossard's vase, circa 1960.

A former lead performer for the Dance Theatre of Harlem, Hugues Magen is enjoying the second act of his aesthetic career. He switched passions to design in the late 1990's—without missing a step—and is now the proprietor of New York's Magen H. Gallery, specializing in modernist decorative arts from his native France. And while perfectly capable of rhapsodizing about Charlotte Perriand and Gilbert Poillerat, Magen reserves his greatest eloquence for *la céramique*. He's about to make his biggest statement yet with a groundbreaking retrospective of ceramics from a hamlet 100-plus miles south of Paris. "La Borne, 1940-1980," running November 8 to December 15, will showcase hard-to-find pieces and be accompanied by a book, *La Borne, A Post War Movement of*

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all fired up

French mid-century ceramics have become a passion for dealer Hugues Magen

Ceramic Expression, that will no doubt become the authoritative reference on the subject.

La Borne is surrounded by densely forested countryside rich in the heavy clays that are ideal for stoneware and was renowned as a "village of potters" beginning in the 1500's. However, the pottery industry was waning by the 1940's, when it experienced both a revival and a transformation with the arrival of artists such as Jean Lerat and his future wife, ceramist Jacqueline Bouvet. They would be joined by a dozen other ceramists over the next 20 years, and a second generation, trained by those pioneers, would follow. Together, these allied groups constituted a distinct movement—its output rivaling that of Vallauris, the much better-known Côte d'Azur village where Pablo Picasso created his vases and plates.

Lerat and Bouvet had been drawn to La Borne by the natural resources, the wood-burning brick kilns, and the chance to learn traditional techniques from one of the remaining master potters. But the couple and the small community that formed around them were far from traditional themselves. Urbane, cosmopolitan, and often formally educated in art and architecture, they may have lived in isolation, but they acted on the world stage. They remained plugged into the avant-garde by reading and discussing current journals and by visiting Paris, where they exhibited at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs. The Musée National de Céramique—Sèvres, the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, and the Kyoto Museum in Japan also showed their ceramics.

Back in the countryside, the rugged local topography and austere communal existence, centered on the rigorous discipline of modeling and firing clay, corresponded with an art that was solidly massed and roughly textured. But the anthropomorphic and geometric abstractions, elemental in their emphasis on material and form rather than color and decoration, were not without nuance and sensuality. Magen, instantly moved by the power and originality of this aesthetic, deems it "brutal in its expression while remaining subtle in its surface effects." If a primary source of inspiration was the caves at Lascaux—any number of pieces conjure up the Paleolithic paintings or even the rock wall itself—another source was ➤

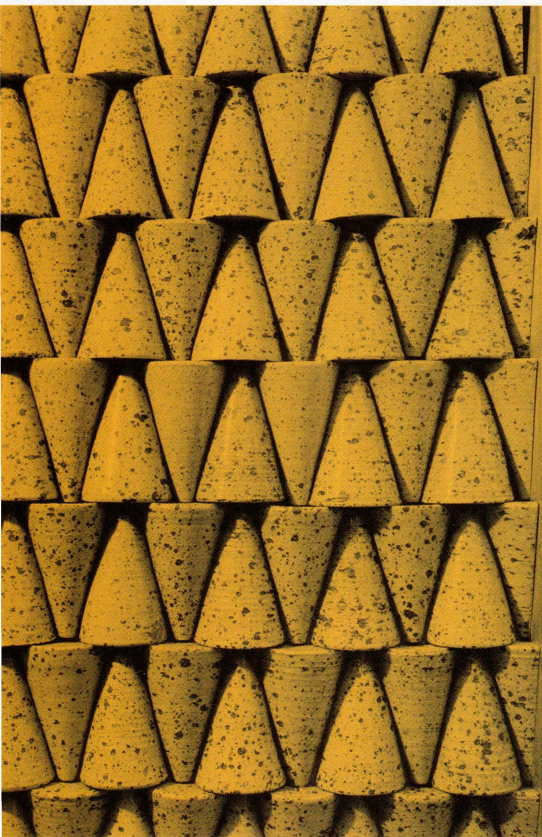


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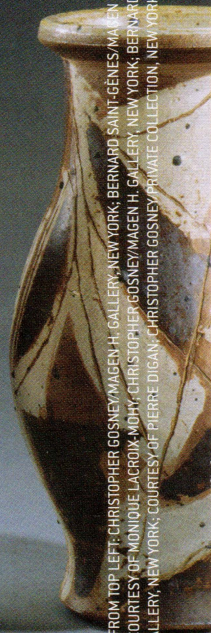
abstract expressionist painting, reflected in the throwing of the clay and even more in its firing. Staying within a limited chromatic range based on raw clay, perhaps with a minimal amount of slip added, La Borne ceramists allowed embers and ashes to fly around the kiln. Their action on a piece could be affected by its proximity to others, but the result was largely serendipitous in a manner analogous to a Jackson Pollock canvas, as was the tossing in of salt. Magen likens the collective experimentation that took place to a conversation about abstract art.



When he introduced La Borne to U.S. fair-goers with an installation at *Modernism: A Century of Style and Design* in 2002, the reaction was overwhelmingly positive. Yves Mohy, whose work creates a dialogue between void and mass, garnered major attention, based solely on visual impact. Another prominent, trendsetting gallerist, evidently impressed, quipped, "How come I have never heard of this guy?" Magen obviously thinks that this guy and his friends were and are important—after all, Magen spent the next decade scouring France for pieces as well as meeting with the remaining La Borne ceramists and their heirs to gain access to archival material. Visitors to Magen H. will now have the opportunity to view approximately 100 furnishings, sculptures, and other objects by a who's who of La Borne. And Magen will have the chance to share a conversation that continues to engage him. —*Larry Weinberg*



Clockwise from top left: A vase, circa 1970, by Anne Kjærsgaard. Yves Mohy's vase, circa 1977. Monique Lacroix-Mohy shaping a bowl in 1959. A pair of vases, circa 1960, by Vassil Ivanoff. Robert Deblander's sculpture, circa 1962. A wall screen, circa 1970, by Pierre Digan. Joëlle Deroubaix's vase, circa 1960.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: CHRISTOPHER GOSNEY/MAGEN H. GALLERY, NEW YORK; BERNARD SAINT-GENES/MAGEN H. GALLERY, NEW YORK; COURTESY OF MONIQUE LACROIX-MOHY; CHRISTOPHER GOSNEY/MAGEN H. GALLERY, NEW YORK; BERNARD SAINT-GENES/MAGEN H. GALLERY, NEW YORK; COURTESY OF PIERRE DIGAN; CHRISTOPHER GOSNEY/PRIVATE COLLECTION, NEW YORK



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: BERNARD SAINT-GENES/MAGEN H. GALLERY, NEW YORK (2); CHRISTOPHER GOSNEY/MAGEN H. GALLERY, NEW YORK (2); HENRI MALVAUX; CHRISTOPHER GOSNEY/MAGEN H. GALLERY, NEW YORK; BERNARD SAINT-GENES/MAGEN H. GALLERY, NEW YORK