Viktor Schreckengost's contribution to American art as a ceramist spanned three decades (1930-1960) and encompassed sculpture, pottery, commercial dinnerware and monumental architectural reliefs. His particular gifts as an artist found their most articulate voice in two classes of works, in objects whose surfaces were painted in a bold graphic manner, such as his vividly decorated wares from the 1930s, and in three-dimensional sculpture, the former often serving as preliminary sketches for the latter. As his early designs for the Cowan Pottery Studio of Rocky River, Ohio and his late architectural sculpture commissions (for Cleveland's Zoological Park and the city of Lakewood) represent the most familiar aspects of his ceramic work (particularly for a Cleveland audience), this consideration of his career focusses instead on the two aforementioned categories and on some of his other endeavors as a ceramist, particularly his post-graduate training in Vienna, which was fundamental to the form and content of much of his subsequent oeuvre.

Schreckengost was born in Sebring, Ohio in 1906 into a family affiliated with the pottery industry since the 19th century. His father worked as a kiln master for the French China Company, and two of his brothers, Paul and Donald, also went on to distinguished careers as ceramic designers. In speaking of his background, Viktor has said:

Because of my family and where I was born and raised, I always knew the nature of clay and could, therefore, make it do what I wanted it to do. Because of my early background, I could always make clay say what I wanted it to say; what I felt I had to say with my art.¹

Schreckengost's first job was as a water boy for one of the local potteries at 25 cents a week; before graduating from high school, he had already served as unofficial designer for the Gem Clay Forming Co. of Sebring. Anxious to pursue formal study as an artist, Schreckengost enrolled at the Cleveland School (now Institute) of Art in 1925. Despite his by then extensive background and training in the pottery industry, he was determined to pursue a different path. As he stated in an interview several years ago:

I just didn't want to be another working potter. Everyone was that. Where was the challenge in that? I had to find a life outside of the potteries. I had to go to art school. I had to leave Sebring.²

His choice of a school was fortuitous, both for himself and the institution, where he still teaches more than sixty-five years later. During his first two years there, Schreckengost followed the
required foundation course and during his third and fourth years he majored in "decorative design." His only formal study of pottery at the School was during his final term, when he enrolled in the pottery class taught by R. Guy Cowan, president and art director of the Cowan Pottery Studio of Rocky River. He was also introduced to contemporary European ceramics during this period and decided to pursue post-graduate training in ceramics after seeing two exhibitions hosted by the Cleveland Museum of Art in the late 1920s, both of which included works by leading European ceramists.³

The first of these was the 1926 Selected Collection of Objects from the International Exposition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Art at Paris 1925, which included French, Danish and English pottery and ceramic sculpture.⁴ The second and more significant exhibition, not only for Schreckengost but for an entire generation of American ceramists, was the 1928 International Exhibition of Ceramic Art, organized by the American Federation of Arts, which was shown at several American museums, and featured a much broader selection of European ceramics.⁵ Schreckengost still remembers going through the show with Arthur Baggs, whom he met the previous year during Baggs’ brief tenure as a lecturer at the Cleveland School of Art. The ceramic sculpture and pottery by Viennese ceramists Vally Wieselthier, Susi Singer, Dina Kuhn and, particularly, Michael Powolny, had a considerable impact on him at the time:

There was such a freshness to his modelling. There was a feeling of lightness, of spirit to his things; like all the time he worked on them he was enjoying himself. And that’s what I’d been trying to do. Right away I knew I had to work with him. I had to find out exactly how he did it.⁶

Powolny was a well-known Austrian sculptor who directed the ceramic program at Vienna’s prestigious Kunstgewerbeschule and had trained several of the ceramists who worked for the Wiener Werkstätte. Schreckengost’s desire to study with Powolny was facilitated by Julius Mihalík, a Hungarian artist who was chairman of the Cleveland School of Art’s design department and was familiar with European state-run arts and crafts schools as he had trained and taught at the Royal Hungarian Arts and Crafts School in Prague before coming to Cleveland.

Awarded the Mary Cushing Page Scholarship for European study, Schreckengost arrived in Vienna in the autumn of 1929, and enrolled as a "guest student" at the Kunstgewerbeschule to study ceramics with Powolny. Before students were allowed to glaze or fire any works, they had to demonstrate that their understanding of the plastic quality of clay, of ceramic structure, was sufficient before being allowed to fire any work in the school’s kilns. Powolny’s teaching methods included slicing through pottery and sculpture with a wire while the clay was still leather-hard to reveal whether or not the walls were of a uniform and sufficient thickness, the bases were correctly proportioned to sides, and so on. This rigid, rather architectural approach to form and the relation of
components to one another has defined Schreckengost’s approach, not only to clay, but to design in general, over the course of his entire career.

The objects he completed under Powolny’s tutelage comprise several distinct groups, indicative of the divergent paths his work would take over the next three decades, and in which he can be seen to be forging his own artistic sensibility. They included a number of traditional thrown bowls and vases with painted decoration of figures and buildings, small sculptures of animals, large decorative heads and several small figurative groups. It is the ceramic heads which reveal most tangibly the inevitable influence of his Viennese milieu. The modelling of life-size heads, which usually involved a combination of wheel thrown, carved and hollowed forms, was one of the projects required in Powolny’s class; not coincidentally such heads formed the basis of much of the ceramic sculpture produced in Vienna at the time, most obviously that by members of the Wiener Werkstätte. Schreckengost’s Chinese Head (1930), for example, suggests that he may have known the oriental figures by artists such as Susi Singer and Dina Kuhn.⁷

Despite the similarity of subject matter and technique between a work like Schreckengost’s Chinese Head and those made by Austrian artists, it was not with these essentially Viennese works that he attained the "freshness and spirit" he had so admired in Powolny’s ceramics at the International Exhibition of Ceramic Art. Schreckengost’s heads lack the topicality of their Viennese counterparts. In contrast to the garishly glazed figures of modish young women, whose ornate hairstyles and headdresses and loudly painted faces give them a doll-like appearance, Schreckengost’s are for the most part genderless and modelled with an almost classicizing stylization which lends them a certain formality and statuesque presence. The juxtaposition and irregular placement of raised bars of clay against the cone-shaped hat and cylindrical neck of his Chinese Head, for example, shows an incorporation of Cubism which, however superficial, sets the work apart from its predecessors and the decorative, rather trivial nature of so many late works from the Wiener Werkstätte. It is hard not to see, even in these very early works, an effort to establish himself as a sculptor first and a ceramist second.

The qualities which attracted Schreckengost to Viennese ceramics are manifest most vividly in another series of objects he produced simultaneously, whose relation to the Viennese aesthetic is rather less obvious. One of these sculptures, Harlem Hoofers (1929), a pair of black male burlesque dancers, employed a pointedly American subject, rendered in a strikingly satirical form of caricature that would become the hallmark of some of his later sculpture. These dancers were among a series depicting black entertainers which brought Schreckengost early notice at the Kunstgewerbeschule. The subject was a natural one for him because of his interest in jazz and black American music; for his Viennese colleagues, however, such Americana qualified as something decidedly exotic. It was in this second group of sculptures that Schreckengost adopted the casual, even crude, manner of figure
modelling used by so many Viennese ceramists, as well as their lavish use of garish glazes. Moreover, in this series of sculptures Schreckengost appropriated the more animated and expressive aspects of Viennese ceramic sculpture, employing them in the service of caricature, thus achieving a spontaneity not found in his works which were more conspicuously rooted in Viennese formulae.

During his final academic term in Vienna, Schreckengost received a visit from Guy Cowan who brought him the offer of a job upon completion of his studies. Cowan's indefatigable efforts to secure the services of talented young sculptors and ceramists from Cleveland and elsewhere in America are by now a matter of record. By this date, Arthur Baggs, Waylande Gregory, Thelma Frazier Winter, Whitney Atchley and Paul Bogatay were either working for the firm or had done so previously. Before returning to America, Schreckengost received other offers of employment and he eventually accepted a part-time position as an instructor in design at the Cleveland School of Art, in addition to which he agreed to work three days a week as a designer for the Cowan Pottery Studio. The somewhat idiosyncratic nature of his Cowan designs—a combination of cacophonous Viennese patterning and color, art deco stylization, and bold draughtsmanship—though out of keeping with Cowan Pottery's otherwise conservative approach to ornamentation (indeed, with that of most commercial American art pottery of the period), helped to introduce a new modernist aesthetic into American ceramics. His brief tenure at Cowan, which began in the autumn of 1930, ended with the pottery's closure in December of 1931.

Schreckengost's primary focus for the next several years was in the design field. He continued to teach at the Cleveland School of Art and also taught theatre design at Western Reserve University (now Case Western Reserve University). During the same period he began working as an industrial designer, inaugurated the industrial design program at his alma mater, and came to prominence as a designer of commercial dinnerware. Schreckengost was first asked to style a new dinnerware service by the Limoges China Company (later American Limoges) of Sebring, Ohio in the autumn of 1932. His initial submission, a simple coupe shape, was rejected by the firm as "too modern." When one considers the retardataire styling of some of the wares then in production at Limoges such as the Heirloom pattern, introduced in 1926, or Briar Rose, from 1930, their hesitation becomes more understandable. Schreckengost's service did not find acceptance until it was exhibited two years later at the Metropolitan Museum's 1934 exhibition of Contemporary American Industrial Art, in a dining room designed by Donald Deskey.8

By 1933, however, Schreckengost had already convinced the Limoges firm to update their wares, and in January of 1934 his Americana and Diana services were introduced. The impact, particularly of Americana, on the industry is by now well documented. Some indication of the departure from the prevailing American styles that this shape represented is given by the leading article about the new Spring tableware for that year in one of the national trade journals:

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..."Americana"...is a bit hard to describe...as it is so absolutely original. Perhaps it would be best to say that it might have been inspired by the old Pompeian lamps, but so changed and modernized as to be a typically American product, and there is no question that it is a genuine contemporary production of this country. Yet its lines are such as will appeal to the conservatives as well as to the freer-minded people.

The dinnerware shape for which Schreckengost became most well-known was Manhattan, introduced by American Limoges in 1935. This service helped to establish the company in the forefront of the American tableware industry, which was in the midst of a campaign to develop a sufficient domestic market to compete with imported dinnerware. Consumers were continually reminded of the growing prominence of American-designed and manufactured tableware. An unmistakable tone of regional pride was apparent in the widespread publicity generated by American Limoges following the success of the Manhattan service. The announcement in May of 1936 for an exhibition of contemporary European and American dinnerware at a Cleveland department store that was billed as "one of the most important weeks in [the store's] history and an event of international significance, showing new trends," boasted that:

Five persons whose names have a very definite meaning in the world of china...will be at Higbee's next week... Hensleigh Wedgwood,... Frederick Haviland,... Viktor Schreckengost, designer of modern china;...Francis Cortez representing the Spode China Co., and Joseph Massie from Minton China Co.

With the newfound confidence brought on by commercial success, American manufacturers did not shrink from hyperbole in their determination to establish themselves within the pantheon of the renowned European porcelain manufactories.

The other two services designed by Schreckengost before the second World War most notable for their inventive styling and their departure from traditional forms were Triumph, introduced in January of 1937, and Victory, introduced that summer. As all of Schreckengost's designs for Limoges were intended for mass-production and everyday use they were more robust than the refined and attenuated porcelain tableware designed for occasional use by Michael Powolny. When his Victory shape is compared to the service by Powolny shown in the 1928 International Exhibition of Ceramic Art, however, it nonetheless betrays Powolny's lingering influence in its reeded borders, crisp modelling and overall proportions.

Simultaneously with the introduction of his first dinnerware shape in January of 1934, Schreckengost had returned to decorating ceramics by hand. With very few exceptions, for about the next fifteen years his pottery consisted almost entirely of American Limoges dinnerware blanks with hand-painted decoration, which he exhibited annually in the Cleveland Museum of Art's "May Shows" and in the Ceramic National exhibitions sponsored by the Syracuse Museum of Fine Arts (now Everson Museum of Art). As these objects so cogently demonstrate, the ceramic surface served for Schreckengost as the equivalent of a blank canvas, and the painterly motifs he used for decoration,
fluently rendered in techniques such as shaded brushwork, in turn reveal the graphic underpinning of his artistry.

Schreckengost’s activity as a sculptor during the early 1930s was somewhat sporadic due to his professional obligations. Upon returning from Vienna, he began working simultaneously on two rather disparate groups of sculpture. The first consisted of several, relatively small, cast ceramic figures, made in single-piece molds intended for duplication. His decision to use slip-casting for the ceramic figures he made upon returning from Vienna, rather than the method he learned there, was understandable for several reasons. It was a technique with which he had long been familiar from his work in the Sebring potteries, one that he had used in ceramic classes at the Cleveland School of Art and one that was actually used extensively by the Viennese firms which produced Michael Powolny’s innumerable series of putti and animals. Among Schreckengost’s first group of ceramic figures in fact, was a small colt which was a conscious exercise in emulation, almost wholly derivative of Powolny’s treatment of the same subject in form, size and glaze. At least six versions by Powolny are known, one of which had been shown in the 1928 International Exhibition of Ceramic Art. Despite the limitations imposed by casting, Schreckengost’s slightly hesitant though believably awkward rendering of the young animal predicts the expressive modelling which characterizes his later efforts in this genre. Apart from his desire to duplicate a work by his mentor, his use of slip-casting at this time, and the resulting series of rather undistinguished objects is, however, probably best explained by his employer’s requirements. Guy Cowan, whose stock-in-trade consisted of molded figures, was continually in search of new designs he could reproduce in “limited,” or more often, unlimited editions. Though not all of the cast ceramic sculpture Schreckengost completed at this time was modelled, glazed and fired at Cowan, either trial samples or some part of each edition was done there, suggesting that most of these objects were at least conceived with the Cowan Pottery Studio in mind. None, however, were put into large-scale production or were offered in the firm’s final catalog, issued for the Spring of 1931, shortly after its bankruptcy had been announced. Once the Cowan Pottery closed, Schreckengost only cast two additional, relatively minor, works (Congo, 1932 and Circus Group, 1935), after which he abandoned the genre.

While early cast ceramics (Madonna, 1931, Fish, 1931), aspired to be nothing more than traditional kleinkunst, the second group of sculptures he completed at this time was altogether more ambitious. Comprised of African heads in plaster and bronze, (Jeddu Congo, 1931, Congo, 1933 and Mangbetu Child, 1933) done in a straightforwardly academic manner, the group was based on sketches and photographs lent to him by Paul Travis, a member of the Cleveland School of Art faculty, who travelled extensively in Africa during 1927-28. In contrast to nearly all his other sculpture, Schreckengost’s African figures owe more in finish, presentation and scale to the Beaux-Arts aesthetic, which survived in American sculpture despite the onslaught of contemporary European modernism.
introduced at the 1913 Armory Show in New York. These heads have a clear connection to similarly realized sculptures of the same subjects produced in these very years by American sculptors Malvina Hoffman, Richmond Barthé and Augusta Savage.

When Schreckengost rather belatedly embarked upon ceramic sculpture in earnest in 1937, he did so with considerably more conviction than he had brought to any artistic endeavor since returning from Vienna. In contrast to the academicism of his plaster and bronze heads of African women and children, and even more to the earlier cast ceramic figures he designed while working for Cowan Pottery, from this period forward he conceived his sculpture as unique objects. A decade later Schreckengost recalled:

... the more I worked in clay with bronze in view, the more I realized how much spontaneity was lost between the two. As a sculptor I wanted material that could be worked directly in permanent form.13

His move from casting to direct carving was an important change, not only for the greater spontaneity and the broader range of personal expression it allowed, but because the new technique placed his work more within the domain of traditional sculpture. During the period between the wars, direct carving in stone and wood dominated modern American sculpture, as seen in the works of such established artists as John Flannagan, José de Creeft, William Zorach and Robert Laurent. Schreckengost’s work was allied with the artistic mainstream not only by its technique, but by its form and content. Despite the difference of his medium—the factor which has always resulted in the classification of his work as ceramic rather than sculpture—Schreckengost, like all of these artists, concerned himself with representational subjects, rather than the abstractions employed by the avant-garde sculptors: seen against the backdrop of Cubism’s impact in America during the 1930s, the affinity of his works with the (conservative) mainstream is all the more apparent.

Schreckengost employed direct carving exclusively from 1937 on, to considerable advantage in his animal sculptures, which he produced throughout the late 1930s, the 1940s and the 1950s, such as Taurus (1937), Creatures God Forgot (1938), Anteater (1950), and Bovine (1955), all owned by the Cleveland Museum of Art. Partly as a result of the banal titles assigned to many of these works, this category of sculpture has customarily been dismissed as pure whimsy. Although less well-known than his vividly decorated ceramic wares, his animal sculpture is, as a body of work, one of his most compelling artistic endeavors. As did many of his contemporaries, Schreckengost regarded the genre seriously, well aware of its long and august tradition. While whimsy is certainly an apt description of some individual works such as his sculptural pun titled Spring (1941), it is too facile an explanation for such a large percentage of the output of so many ceramic artists of the period. In Schreckengost’s case, the works are marked by acute observation and sensitivity, seen for example in his Tiger (1943), and Naama (1939), and demonstrate his talents as a caricaturist as well as his mastery of anatomical rendering.
For his sculpture of the human form, rather than continuing in the realistic mode of portraiture he had used for his African heads, Schreckengost reverted to a Viennese vocabulary. Inspired by the decorative masks so ubiquitous on Viennese posters and in ceramic sculpture during the late 1920s, he modelled ten massive hollow masks, commencing with *Niobe* (1937), continuing with the *Four Seasons* the following year and concluding in 1939 with *Keramos* and the *Four Elements*, the latter made for the New York World's Fair. In these sculptures, which were formed in the same manner as the thrown and carved heads he had made under Powolny's tutelage, Schreckengost's maturity as a sculptor is manifest. Though Viennese styling is plainly evident, it is selectively employed, and an unmistakable individualism has emerged in the forthright assurance of his forms and modelling. These masks had a pronounced influence on some of his Cleveland contemporaries, such as Edris Eckhardt and Thelma Frazier Winter, who adopted the mask form for their own work.¹⁴

A more detailed examination of the *Keramos* mask, in comparison with his sculpture of Europa and the Bull, known as *Abduction* and done in the same year, reveals a distinctive feature of Schreckengost's artistry—his fluency in two seemingly disparate realms. This duality of conception was first suggested by his simultaneous work in Vienna on the series of black entertainers and the large stylized heads, and later by his work on the African figures while he was designing cast multiples for Cowan. On the one hand, we see his ability to design works for popular taste, and on the other, works that show a distinctly urbane and cosmopolitan sensitivity. While both *Keramos* and *Abduction*, with their bright touches of glaze and method of facture recall aspects of the Viennese idiom, they nevertheless display an independence from such formulae. In his *Keramos* mask Schreckengost turned away from Viennese practice by leaving the face unglazed except for highlights on the eyes, lips and beard, perhaps appropriate for the personification of the ceramic genre. Where glaze is used more traditionally to cover an entire figure, such as the thick mottled borax glaze covering the bull in *Abduction*, its color and texture have clearly been chosen to heighten the naturalism of the figure, showing the influence of contemporary American figurative sculpture. If we consider the obvious precedents for *Keramos* in the masks made in Vienna during the 1920s and early 1930s by Dina Kuhn, Gudrun Baudisch, Vally Wieselthier and Rudolf Knörlein, just how far Schreckengost had come in his mastery of form becomes apparent. The most notable differences are the expansive modelling of the *Keramos* head, the attention paid to the configuration and proportion of individual features and their relation to one another, and the more selective use of glaze, used to further define the character of the subject rather than merely decorating its surface with color.

The figure of *Keramos* represents, more than any work by Schreckengost, a synthesis of his past and future as a sculptor. It pays homage to what originally attracted him as a young student to Viennese ceramics a decade earlier—the instinctive respect, even reverence, for the medium of clay.
Throughout much of the first quarter of the century, there had been a marked tendency on the part of American artists to deny the very aspects of clay here celebrated by Schreckengost, by transforming its appearance into that of bronze, wood or marble. In this work, we witness him boldly stating his allegiance to the medium, literally and figuratively. In sum, Schreckengost's aesthetic has evolved from the Viennese idiom into a personal and somewhat unconventional stylization informed by an individual approach to sculpture and subject. For here in the Keramos head is that most characteristic element of American ceramics of this period—the confluence of high art and low art—Greek myth reformulated in an American idiom. The use of bold lettering as part of the decorative scheme (identifying the three protagonists of the myth—the Greek god Keramos, his father Bacchus and his mother Ariadne) places the work within the American tradition employed by artists such as Stuart Davis and Charles Demuth. The use of names, as well as the shorthand treatment of the beard, the encrustation of the head with identifying attributes, and the detached hand, all betray a debt to the schematic design and abbreviated forms common to the comic strip. Finally, the head is almost certainly self-referential—the ascendency of the sculptor over the potter manifest in its very form.

Abduction, which also draws its subject from the classical tradition, nevertheless completely lacks the self-consciousness and solemnity of the Keramos head. Here, the approach to mythological deities is as pointedly light-hearted as it is solemn with Keramos. In depicting Europa as an African, Schreckengost fashioned a rather unorthodox interpretation of the myth, a not uncommon practice in American ceramic sculpture between the wars, particularly among his Cleveland colleagues such as Russell Aitken and Thelma Frazier Winter. In this instance his reformulation of the myth is not entirely surprising considering his long-standing interest in black culture. Much of his sculpture from the late 1930s on portrayed black figural subjects, particularly in relation to his interest in jazz and spirituals—such as Glory, Glory (1938), in the Smithsonian's collection, Rhythm of the Soil (1947), owned by the Cleveland Museum of Art, and Shadrach, Mesach and Abednego (1939), the Old Testament group owned by the Metropolitan Museum, a subject which was undoubtedly suggested to Schreckengost by "Shadrack," a popular song played by many African-American musicians, most notably Louis Armstrong.

While Schreckengost's portrayal of Europa was unorthodox, it cannot be coincidental that numerous artists (including Vally Wieselthier, Waylande Gregory, Paul Manship, Carl Milles, and Russell Aitken), turned to this particular myth on the eve of World War II. Curiously, none of these works bear the mark of political statements. Political commentary was not far off, however. In the following year, Schreckengost's reaction to his third trip to Europe in 1937 found form in his Dictator (1939), for which he was severely criticized for daring to mix politics and art. Indifferent to the catastrophe about to engulf him, a slovenly Nero indolently plucks his lyre while an undoubtedly British lion, perhaps also suggestive of Churchill, sleeps at his feet, and Hitler, Stalin, Hirohito, and
Mussolini, in the form of putti, cavort about the throne, each brandishing the attributes of their regimes. Schreckengost was not alone in making the move to political commentary. At precisely this moment the sculptor David Smith was completing his brilliant and similarly controversial anti-Fascist Medals for Dishonor, a set of fifteen bronze reliefs. Both artists expressed their outrage at the rising threat to freedom with an uncompromising vividness, tempered by a mordant wit at least partially derived from the cartoon.¹⁵

Undeterred by criticism, and in response to the strike on Pearl Harbor, Schreckengost created another, more potent sculptural satire, Apocalypse '42, depicting the onslaught of Fascism in the guise of the biblical Four Horsemen. Hitler, Hirohito and Mussolini, supported by a skeletal figure of Death dressed as a German soldier, sit astride a horrific horse whose legs are engulfed in flames, the whole entourage supported by a diminutive globe. A testimony to its success as political commentary is that it was temporarily removed from exhibition at the Cleveland Museum of Art in response to objections from the city's Italian-American community, some of whom had been officially recognized by Mussolini for their support. In representing the fascist leaders as contemporary riders of the Apocalypse, an analogy seized upon by several prominent artists, including George Grosz and William Gropper, Schreckengost invoked two of the principal topoi of anti-fascist art of the thirties: totalitarian dictators, and their attempts to obliterate democracy.¹⁶ By formulating their works in an allegorical rather than a strictly topical visual language, these artists broadened the theme beyond a straightforward depiction of evil dictators, resulting in imagery that has retained its force a half century later.

A year after completing Apocalypse '42, Schreckengost enlisted in the Naval Reserves, where he became head of the design section of the Special Devices Division of the Bureau of Aeronautics. After the war, he resumed teaching and industrial design work as well as his position as art director for the Salem China Company. His post-war studio ceramics, first exhibited in 1947, are a personal reflection of a profoundly changed world. While the duality of vision was still evident in his work—as his sculptures of Ichabod Crane (1948), a humorously rendered composition of the frightened schoolmaster clinging to the neck of his wild-eyed steed, and Peter the Fisherman (1954), a monumental and masterfully carved image of the saint holding aloft a net of fish illustrate—his most lasting contribution from this period was of a different nature, though no less controversial than his pre-war sculpture. If the war years had been, for many artists, a period during which established practices were maintained as a form of security in the midst of widespread destruction, resulting in escapist works of whimsy or fantasy as references to more rational times, the war's aftermath spurred artists to examine reality. In Schreckengost's case, this is evident in a group of objects in which he explored the inherent characteristics of the medium of clay, and allowed the material to express itself in a startlingly direct manner. His own words serve best to explain the transformation of his methodology:
I was stymied by mechanical methods and tried to imagine pottery not as a handicraft, but as a fine art. I wanted to get away from the normal medium that dictated utilitarian shapes, and looked for a method where form, rather than utility, was of primary interest.\(^\text{17}\)

Though the resulting forms, such as *Quadrature* (1948), *Heyoka* (1949) and *Fusion* (1951) look tame forty years hence, they generated heated controversy at the time. In August of 1947, *Craft Horizons* magazine featured Schreckengost’s "hewn" ceramics and described his new method as:

"a technique which we venture to think may cause controversy and be anathema to those potters who hold deeply to tradition and are devotees of the wheel and its circular results...Mr. Schreckengost’s credo that pottery need not be functional but should be sculpturally fine enough to justify its existence by its beauty of form alone...is a somewhat challenging statement on which we’d like to hear from our readers.\(^\text{18}\)"

Despite such skepticism, the works won numerous awards over the course of several years and Schreckengost was invited to exhibit one in the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s first national sculpture competition in 1951, an invitation which astounded colleagues such as Russel Wright. But, as Schreckengost has explained:

"Up until the end of World War II, ceramic artists had great difficulty in getting their work into legitimate art shows. Ceramic art was considered fit only for craft shows. We tried to break into art exhibitions by making huge pots with very small holes in them—they were really abstract pieces of sculpture and thereby sneaked into the shows.\(^\text{19}\)"

Though Schreckengost makes light of the effort, the departure these objects represent from his own previous work, as well as from the classic shapes and perfection of form pursued by most potters in the 1940s, predicts the revolution in American ceramics that occurred in 1950. It is in these forms that we witness the full Americanization of Schreckengost’s Viennese foundations. While still exemplifying the Hoffmanesque doctrine of architectonic form—the basic tenets of which had by then become indistinguishable from his own artistic credo—these works are the most advanced statements Schreckengost would make within its confines, as he reduced the Viennese architectonics to their purest form—abstraction. The greatest departure of these works from established practice, of course, lies in the fact that they are carved rather than thrown. In this they point the way to the liberation of form and surface that would result in the negation of the vessel as functional artifact in the work of ceramists such as Peter Voulkos and John Mason. Thus these works signal a reconsideration of long-sanctioned ceramic traditions, and represent the turn away from Western obsession with carefully balanced neoclassical form, that would find its most vivid expression in the ceramic work of Picasso and Miro, and, in America, with Voulkos. Appropriately enough, they were the last ceramics produced by Schreckengost.
Endnotes


2. Ibid.

3. In addition to the Viennese objects he saw at the Museum, Schreckengost almost certainly would have seen other examples in local shops, judging by advertisements for Austrian and other European ceramics in local magazines such as The Bystander. For example, see the ad for The Rorimer-Brooks Studios of Cleveland showing Austrian ceramics and fabrics, The Bystander, XI (June 8, 1929), p. 49.

4. The exhibition was shown at the Cleveland Museum of Art from April 2 - 20, 1926. Although the Paris Exposition included many Viennese ceramics, none were selected for the travelling American exhibition.

5. The exhibition was shown at the Cleveland Museum of Art from February 21-March 21, 1929, during Schreckengost’s final term at the Cleveland School of Art.

6. Amata, op cit., p. 14. Powolny exhibited two small animal sculptures and a tea service. Schreckengost’s recollection suggests he was responding as well to the large selection of clay sculpture by members of the Wiener Werkstätte which was also included in the exhibition.

7. For a Chinese figure by Singer and a head attributed to Kuhn, see Claudia Breede and Achim Hofmann, Expressive Keramik der Wiener Werkstätte 1917-1930, (Munich, 1992), p. 50 and p. 47 respectively.


9. "The New Spring Styles," The Pottery, Glass & Brass Salesman, XLVIII (January 25, 1934), p. 7. The article also discusses Schreckengost’s Diana shape as "perhaps a little bit more conservative than the Americana...and...somewhat more ornate."

10. Advertisement, Cleveland Plain Dealer, May 10, 1936 (Schreckengost Papers).


12. The majority of the Cowan production seems to have been produced in unlimited editions. Beginning in about 1928, some figure groups were offered in limited editions of 25, while others were offered in editions of 100 to 500. In January of 1930, limited edition works were offered separately from the firm’s "commercial" pottery as the "R. Guy Cowan" line. See The Cowan Potter’s, Inc., Spring 1930 Catalog.


14. For example, see Eckhardt’s head of Earth from 1939, illustrated in American Ceramics, The Collection of Everson Museum of Art, Barbara Perry, ed., (New York, 1989), fig. 158, p. 135. A stylized bust of a woman made in 1940 by Winter is owned by the Cleveland Museum of Art (39.231). Both artists would of course also have become familiar with the form through Winter’s husband, H. Edward Winter, an enamelist who studied at the Vienna Kunstgewerbeschule from 1931-1932. For a mask by him see Design, XXXVIII (April, 1937), p. 2.

15. Smith took a correspondence course in cartooning in 1923. For the most complete discussion of this set of reliefs, see David Smith, Medals for Dishonor 1937 - 1940, exh. cat. (The Henry Moore Centre for the Study of Sculpture, Leeds City Art Gallery, Great Britian, December 5, 1991 - February 1, 1992.

