

Warren MacKenzie

# A Potter's Life

**1924**

Born February 16 in Kansas City, Missouri.

**1941**

Enters the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, intending to become a painter.

**1943-46**

Serves in U.S. Army as a silk-screen technician working on training charts and maps.

**1946**

Returns to Art Institute and, finding the painting classes full, takes ceramics instead.

**1947**

Graduates from Art Institute marries Alix Kolesky, who shares his passion for pottery and with whom he will collaborate until her death in 1962.

**1948**

Moves to St. Paul to teach ceramics, sculpture, and design at the St. Paul Gallery and School of Art.

**1950-52**

Warren and Alix apprentice with renowned potter Bernard Leach at St. Ives, England. In 1952, they meet Shoji Hamada and other influential potters at an international conference in England.

**1953**

Purchases Stillwater farm to establish a pottery studio and begins teaching ceramics at the University of Minnesota.

**1954**

First exhibition of pottery from the new studio at Walker Art Center in Minneapolis.

**1966**

Promoted to full professor at the University of Minnesota.

**1973**

Included in American Craftsman's Council Traveling Show for the U.S. Information Agency, which tours for three years in Europe, Asia, South America, and Africa.

**1979**

Invited to show in "100 Years of American Ceramics" at the Smithsonian Museum, Washington, D.C., and version Museum, Syracuse, New York.



Decoration by  
Alix MacKenzie

# Selected Collections

**1981**

Chosen one of world's 12 best potters in a survey by Ceramic Monthly magazine.

**1981-85**

Chairs Department of Studio Arts at the university.

**1982**

Selected as honorary fellow by the National Council on Education in the Ceramic Arts.

**1984**

Named a regent's Professor and a fellow of the International Academy of Ceramic Arts marries Nancy Stevens, a fiber artist.

**1986**

First to receive the Minnesota Governor's Award in the Crafts.

**1990**

Retires from the university.

**1991**

Book Warren MacKenzie: An American Potter, by David Lewis, published by Kodansha Publishing, Tokyo, Japan. Solo exhibitions in Seattle, St. Louis, Chicago, Arvada, Colorado, and Pittsburgh group exhibitions in Denver and New York.

**1995**

Another major year for exhibitions, showing in New York, Tokyo, Cleveland, Pittsburgh, Minneapolis, St. Paul, and Northfield, Minnesota, and LaCrosse, Wisconsin.

**1997**

Receives Lifetime Achievement Award from Minnesota Crafts Council.

**1998**

Receives Gold Medal from American Crafts Council.



Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn

Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh

Museum of Applied Art, Helsinki, Finland

Victoria and Albert Museum, London, England

Smithsonian Museum, Washington, D.C.

Person Museum, Syracuse, New York

Minnesota Museum of Art, St. Paul

Joslyn Museum, Omaha, Nebraska

Tokyo Folk Art Museum, Tokyo, Japan

Chunichi Shimbun Collection, Nagoya, Japan

Weisman Art Museum, Minneapolis



# About the Award

Minnesota is often cited as a special place to live because its citizens have access to such a wealth of cultural activities. Theaters, museums and galleries, dance programs, music, and films enliven our stages and concert halls, our storefronts and street corners. But we often forget who set all this activity in motion.

The Distinguished Artist Award, now in its second year, recognizes those who, individually and collectively, laid the foundation for what we enjoy today. Although they had opportunities to pursue their work elsewhere, they chose to stay, and by staying made a difference. These artists have founded and/or strengthened Minnesota's vibrant arts organizations, mentored and inspired younger artists, and attracted audiences and patrons who enable art to thrive. Most of all, they are working artists who have made the most of their formidable talents.

Many of these artists have received national or international honors. But, despite the state's rich cultural history, there was no appropriate tribute for them at home. The Distinguished Artist Award—a Minnesota award for Minnesota artists—seeks to fill that gap.

This year's Distinguished Artist, Warren MacKenzie, has had enormous influence on the arts in general, and on ceramic arts in particular, in Minnesota and beyond. Because of his work in his own studio and with students at the University of Minnesota, a large community of potters carries on the tradition of making functional, affordable pieces for people to enjoy in their homes every day. Although MacKenzie drew his primary inspirations from Japanese and Korean folk crafts, the tradition itself is as old as civilization. As more than one person said in nominating MacKenzie for the award, if the United States honored Living Treasures, as Japan does, he would surely be among them.

One artist each year receives the award, which includes a \$40,000 stipend. Anyone is welcome to nominate an artist. Nominations received by March 31 will be considered the same year. A panel of people appointed for their knowledge of Minnesota's cultural history reviews the nominations, may suggest others, and selects the Distinguished Artist.

The 1999 panelists considered more than 100 artists from all over the state before reaching a unanimous decision. Our thanks to Linda Hoeschler, executive director of the American Composers Forum, St. Paul; Linda Myers, executive director of The Loft, Minneapolis; Thomas O'Sullivan, curator, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul; and Mike Steele, staff writer, Star Tribune, Minneapolis. They have set a high standard that makes the award all the more meaningful in documenting Minnesota's cultural history.

Neal Cuthbert  
Program Officer Arts  
The McKnight Foundation





