

Andrew Kreps
Gallery

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A black and white photograph of artist Beatrice Wood in her studio. She is seated at a workbench, looking down at her work. She has short dark hair and is wearing a light-colored blouse with a dark, patterned scarf. The studio is filled with various objects: a large window on the left shows a stone wall outside; on the workbench are a balance scale, a bowl, jars, and brushes; in the background, shelves are filled with numerous small jars and containers. The overall atmosphere is one of a busy, creative workspace.

Art Basel OVR: Pioneers Beatrice Wood

ART BASEL OVR: PIONEERS
Beatrice Wood
March 24 - March 27, 2021

Andrew Kreps Gallery is pleased to announce its participation in Art Basel OVR: Pioneers, with a presentation of rarely exhibited works by Beatrice Wood (b. 1893, San Francisco, d. 1998, Ojai.) The presentation will be on view concurrently in the gallery's viewing room for the duration of the fair, from March 24 - 27.

Wood, often affectionately known as Beato or the "Mama of Dada", made significant contributions to the avant-garde, and Dada movements, as well as the rich history of American ceramics. In the early 1900s, Wood immersed herself in the New York scene, befriending artists such as Marcel Duchamp, Francis Picabia, Man Ray and others, exhibiting her own artwork for the first time in 1917. Wood moved to California in the 1930s, where she would spend the rest of her life, and began making ceramics under the mentorship of Getrud and Otto Natzler, eventually developing her own signature style and glazing techniques.

While Wood's ceramic works would garner international acclaim by the 1970s, she maintained a nearly daily practice of drawing throughout her life, which was used as a vehicle to explore the female form, sexuality, and desire. Dating from the 1920s through the 1990s, the drawings included in the gallery's presentation demonstrate their diaristic quality, depicting Wood's relationships, dreams, and politics, often with a humorous bent.

These characteristics carry over to Wood's figurative sculptures, which were developed by Wood in a near-defiance of the technical mastery of her ceramic works. Often dismissed as naive, or "folk" by the ceramics community during her lifetime, these seminal works offered a window into the growing pessimism Wood felt towards her own sexual relationships. Works such as *Not Married*, c. 1965, which depicts a woman seated with a cat on her lap, functions as a self-portrait and takes on an almost self-effacing tone. In using this near-typified depiction of a "spinster", and adopting it as her own avatar, Wood incisively takes on the traditional roles available to women at the time. In doing so, Wood sought to dismantle them, as demonstrated by the bohemian, and independent character that defined her own life.



Beatrice Wood with
Marcel Duchamp
and Francis Picabia,
Coney Island, 1917



BEATRICE WOOD
The Rich Broker
(Beato and
Duchamp), 1923

Graphite, colored
pencil on paper
14 x 12 inches
(35.6 x 30.5 cm.)
(BW21-006)



BEATRICE WOOD
The New Boyfriend,
1928

Colored pencil,
graphite
10 3/4 x 13 5/8
inches
(27.3 x 34.6 cm.)
(BW21-011)



BEATRICE WOOD
*Low-Fire Terracotta
with Figures*, c. 1950

Low-fire terracotta,
glaze
2 x 16 x 16 inches
(5.1 x 40.6 x 40.6
cm.)
(BW21-060)



BEATRICE WOOD
*Barrel Form with
Applications*, c. 1960

Low-fire terracotta,
gold luster
6 x 6.5 x 6.5 inches
(15.2 x 16.5 x 16.5
cm.)
(BW21-061)



BEATRICE WOOD
*Barrel Form with
Applications, c. 1960*



BEATRICE WOOD
Not Married, c. 1965

Stoneware or
earthenware, glaze
16 3/4 x 15 3/4 x 12
1/2 inches
(42.5 x 40 x 31.8
cm.)
(BW20-001)



BEATRICE WOOD
Not Married, c. 1965
(detail)



BEATRICE WOOD
Al Fresco, 1977

Colored pencil and
graphite on paper
13 7/8 x 11 inches
(35.3 x 27.9 cm.)
(BW21-023)



BEATRICE WOOD
As Usual, 1978

Colored pencil and
pastel on paper
13 1/2 x 10 5/8
inches
(34.3 x 27 cm.)
(BW21-018)



BEATRICE WOOD
*Men Are Not to Be
Looked At, 1978*

Graphite and colored
pencil on paper
10 5/8 x 13 5/8
inches
(27 x 34.6 cm.)
(BW21-016)



BEATRICE WOOD
Untitled, 1978

Pencil, colored pencil
on paper
10 3/4 x 13 5/8
inches
(27.3 x 34.6 cm.)
(BW21-010)



BEATRICE WOOD
*He Can Eat Though
my Heart is Breaking,*
1978

Graphite, colored
pencil on paper
12 3/4 x 10 inches
(32.4 x 25.4 cm.)
(BW21-007)

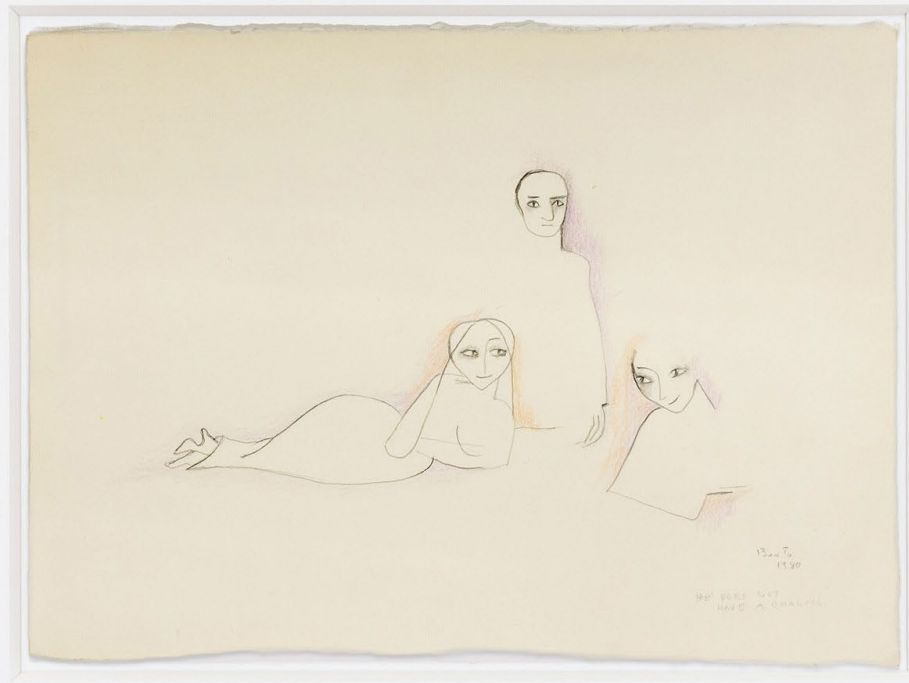


BEATRICE WOOD
Untitled, c. 1985

Low-fire terracotta,
gold luster, black
matte glaze
13 x 4 x 4 inches
(33 x 10.2 x 10.2
cm.)
(BW21-062)



BEATRICE WOOD
Untitled, c. 1985



BEATRICE WOOD
*He Does Not Have a
Chance*, 1980

Graphite and colored
pencil on paper
11 1/2 x 15 inches
(29.2 x 38.1 cm.)
(BW21-017)



BEATRICE WOOD
*The Man Who Made
a Fool of Himself,*
1983

Graphite, pastel, and
watercolor on paper
19.5 x 14.75 inches
(49.5 x 37.5 cm.)
(BW21-026)



BEATRICE WOOD
*Aunt with Rolling
Pin*, c. 1985

Terracotta, black
matte glaze
7 x 4.75 x 4 inches
(17.9 x 12.1 x 10.2
cm.)
(BW21-063)



BEATRICE WOOD
In the Garden, 1983

Watercolor, graphite
on paper
14 1/2 x 19 1/2
inches
(36.8 x 49.5 cm.)
(BW21-003)



BEATRICE WOOD
Untitled, 1985

Graphite, colored
pencil, and pastel on
paper
11 x 7 3/8 inches
(27.9 x 18.7 cm.)
(BW21-029)



BEATRICE WOOD
J'accuse, 1988

Colored pencil and
graphite on paper
12.5 x 10.5 inches
(31.8 x 26.7 cm.)
(BW21-025)



BEATRICE WOOD
Untitled, c. 1985

Low-fire terracotta,
gold luster, black
matte glaze
13 x 4 x 4 inches
(33 x 10.2 x 10.2
cm.)
(BW21-064)

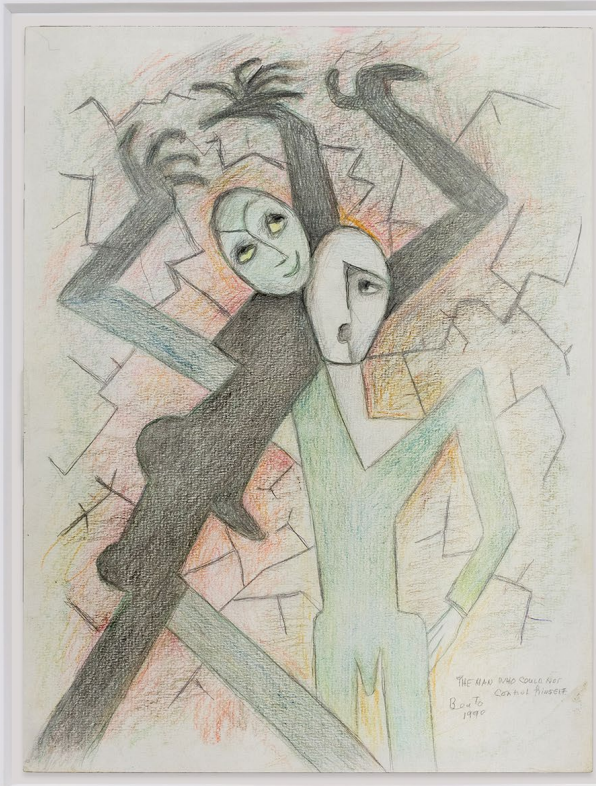


BEATRICE WOOD
Untitled, c. 1985
(detail)



BEATRICE WOOD
Why, 1989

Pencil, watercolor on
paper
14 1/8 x 10 1/4
inches
(35.9 x 26 cm.)
(BW21-009)



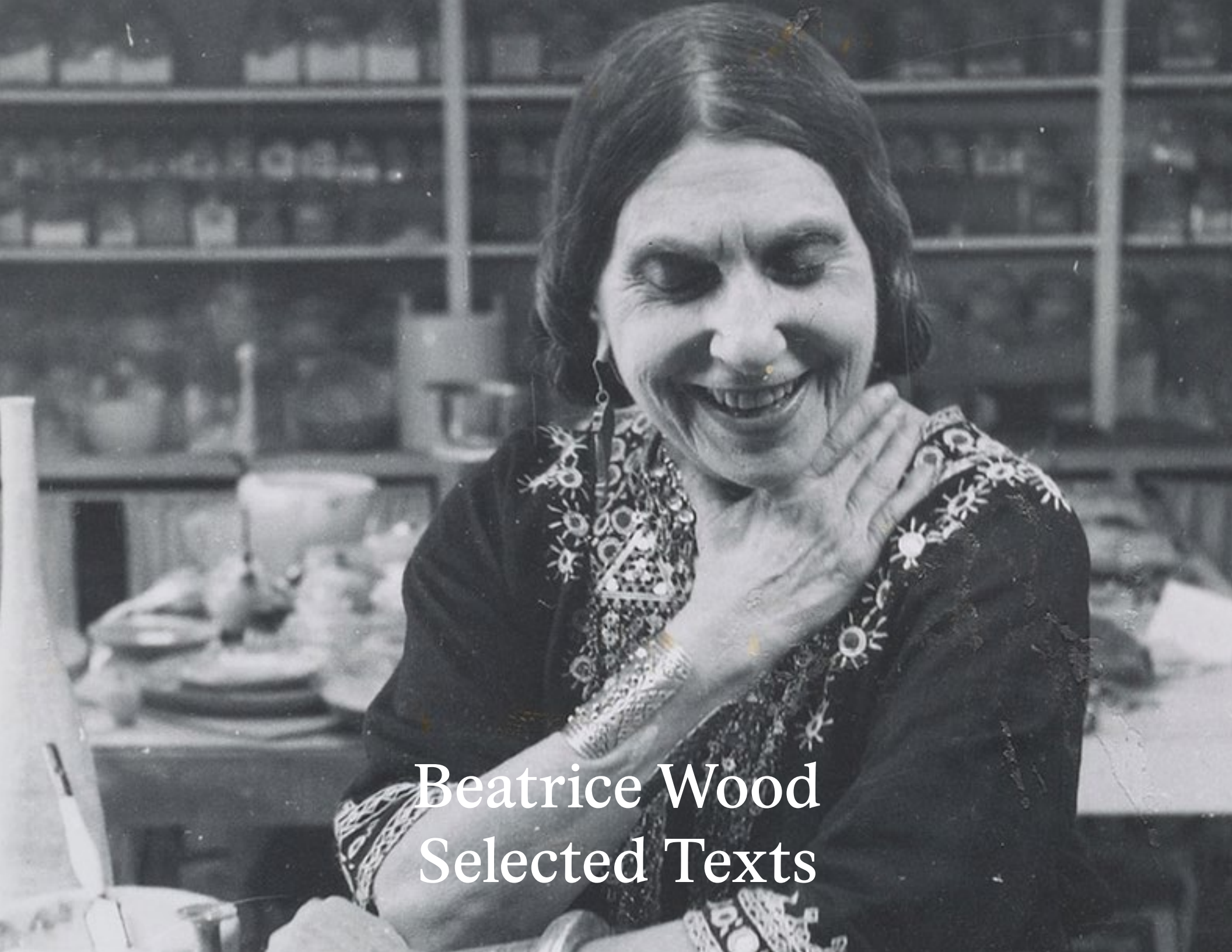
BEATRICE WOOD
*The Man Who Could
Not Control Himself,*
1990

Graphite, colored
pencil on paper
16 x 12 1/4 inches
(40.6 x 31.1 cm.)
(BW21-002)



BEATRICE WOOD
*Discussion on
Abortion*, 1991

Watercolor, colored
pencil, and graphite
on paper
14 x 20 inches
(35.6 x 50.8 cm.)
(BW21-032)



Beatrice Wood
Selected Texts

THE FORGOTTEN LEGACY OF CULT CALIFORNIA ARTIST BEATRICE WOOD

by Alexxa Gotthardt, August 2016

“I owe it all to art books, chocolates, and young men,” Beatrice Wood would often tell those who made the cacti-stippled pilgrimage to her Ojai, California studio before the artist passed away in 1998. There they’d find the fabled artist, in the last years of her life, swathed in a sari while working the potter’s wheel, and flanked by all manner of sacred objects: healing crystals, Hindu icons, and her signature opalescent vessels. There were young male assistants on the clock and stacks of Hershey’s bars in the refrigerator.

For Wood, who lived to the age of 105 and made work up until her penultimate year, “art books, chocolates, and young men” became the trifecta to which she attributed her longevity, and an abbreviation for the rich ingredients that made up her life. But the tagline, as her devout fanbase will tell you, doesn’t do Wood—or her work—justice.

Wood was a member of the New York Dada group and a pioneering sculptor. As a woman artist primarily working in ceramics, she also represented a demographic and a medium that were both marginalized during her lifetime. “More people know her for sleeping with Duchamp than for making her own work,” the artist Arlene Shechet told me when we discussed Wood’s

legacy. “That needs to be rectified.”

“Mama of Dada”

Wood was indeed a lover of Duchamp, who she met in New York in 1916. They were part of a legendary ménage-a-trois with Henri-Pierre Roché that would go on to inspire Francois Truffaut’s French New Wave film, *Jules et Jim* (1962). More significantly, though, they had a lifelong creative dialogue that, in its first year, helped shape Dada.

Though a 1993 documentary later dubbed Wood the “Mama of Dada,” she is rarely listed among the movement’s pioneers. But in 1917, both she and Duchamp submitted works to the Society of Independent Artists’ first exhibition, which would double as Dada’s coming out. While Duchamp’s contribution to the show—a found urinal turned on its head and titled *Fountain* (1917)—would later be seen as a watershed moment in the history of modern art, it was Wood’s *Un peut (peu) d’eau dans du savon* (1917) that caused public uproar at the time.

“She was sort of the sensation of the show,” explains Francis

Naumann, a Dada scholar, dealer, and dear friend of Wood's. "Her work was attacked by the press." The offending painting showed a woman's naked torso with a real piece of soap affixed "at a very tactical position," Wood would later explain. She and Duchamp also founded the seminal Dada journal, *The Blind Man*, with Roché. In one issue, Wood penned an article defending Duchamp's *Fountain*. "The only works of art America has given are her plumbing and her bridges," she mused. The quote is often erroneously attributed to Duchamp himself.

While Duchamp no doubt served as a mentor to Wood, her rebellious creativity didn't start—or end—with him. "Beatrice was a romantic, but she never allowed a man to control her life—ever," explains Naumann. "She paid her own bills from the very beginning to the end."

Her Own Path

Wood was born into a wealthy San Francisco family in 1893, but in her 20s she renounced their fortune, setting into motion a life of autonomy that was rare for women of her generation. She also distanced herself from Duchamp's orbit. After her irreverent debut in the New York art scene, Wood relocated to Montreal then California, where she began making the shimmering ceramic vessels and satirical figurative sculptures that she's become known for—at least in some circles.

"She could have been doing a lot of other things that would have gotten her recognition earlier, but ceramics was then, and really still is, a marginalized material, language, and form," explains Shechet. Wood started using clay, somewhat haphazardly, at the age of 40. Spurred by a desire to create a teapot to match a set of plates she owned, she enlisted in a pottery course at Hollywood

High School, then went on to apprentice with ceramicists Gertrud and Otto Natzler. Wood was soon applying her signature panache to the medium, forging vessels and chalices jeweled with hand-hewn details (little blobs of clay arranged into intricate, uneven patterns; naked figures pared down to silhouettes) and coated in glazes that give the effect of churning crystal balls.

"I just loved how it was very basic and very exotic at the same time; that each piece seemed to be hard-won," Shechet recalls of her initial attraction to Wood's work. "She was also taking a somewhat Persian aesthetic and glaze technology at a time when the information that American potters were pulling from, if it was from the East at all, was from Japan. She was just on her own path."

Figuration and Feminism

It was a path that led Wood to Ojai, a hippie town east of Santa Barbara nestled against the Topatopa mountain range where Krishnamurti, a leader of Theosophy (a mystical philosophy that Wood ascribed to) also lived. There she began a new body of work: knobbly figures that drew from the Dada spirit, the folk art that she collected voraciously, and her experience as a woman. "Now, in pottery I make figures," she once said. "And a lot of people think they're perfectly horrible. Maybe they are. I've no idea. But I purposely keep these figures unschooled."

In one work, *Career Woman* (1990), three nude ladies, smiling ear-to-ear, stand atop the comatose body of a man wearing a suit. In another, *Men and their Wives* (1996), couples gather around a table—but the symmetry is off. Four traditional duos bookend a threesome: a woman (said to be Beatrice herself) flanked by not one, but two men. The sculptures are both hilarious and incisive.

Today, they also read as ardently feminist—mini manifestations of the independent life Wood led.

But Wood was a complicated and contradictory figure, and she would never describe her work as feminist. “She was a feminist on almost every level,” explains Naumann. “But she would never admit to that because of her connection to the romantic period. Part of her held onto the 19th-century ideal of a relationship—a husband, a white picket fence, all of that. But that never happened for her.” One day, Wood went so far as to tell the Hollywood actress Bette Midler, who had made her own pilgrimage to Wood’s studio, that women should sit at the feet of their men. “Apparently Bette Midler hit the ceiling, started screaming, and flew out of there—to Beatrice’s delight,” recalls Naumann. “She loved to provoke.”

A taste for provocation was a character trait that Wood owned up to. In 1985, she wrote an absorbing autobiography called *I Shock Myself*, which tracks the many turns of her life, propelled by an inexhaustible joie de vivre. “She wanted to publish her diaries, too, and give them the title *Diary of a Red Hot Mama*,” says Naumann, laughing. “She thought that would really draw attention.”

An Uncertain Legacy

In the last 20 years of her life, between the late 1970s and her death in 1998, Wood’s work did receive attention, thanks to support from several influential dealers—namely Naumann, who was based in New York, and Garth Clark, in L.A. Her prices rose, and for the first time since relinquishing her family’s fortune, she was making a healthy income. “In her diary, up through her 70s, she worries about infrequent sales, even having enough money for groceries,” explains Kevin Wallace, the Director of Beatrice Wood Center for the Arts, a small museum run lovingly out of Wood’s

former Ojai home and studio. “But, by the time she passed away, her estate had about \$3 million in it.” It was during this period of prosperity that Midler paid her visit, and that Jasper Johns bought one of Wood’s works.

But the momentum wouldn’t survive the artist’s death. After her passing, the prices of her work plummeted. “The success was great for Beatrice, but it also encouraged speculation,” explains Naumann. “Amateur speculators realized that she would soon die, so they just kept buying her work. Then of course, they flooded the market as soon as she died, and the prices went down staggeringly. In fact, I bought one of her chalices at auction for less than \$10,000—the same type that were sold for over \$100,000 during her lifetime.”

The Beatrice Wood Center for the Arts, which Wood envisioned as a museum and residency based in her home, was also starved of funds. Wood left her \$3 million to the struggling Besant Hill School, a progressive high school next door to her studio. The Center’s “Hail Mary” was meant to be a cache of Wood’s works that would be sold strategically to support the museum. But because of the artist’s unstable posthumous market, by 2005—the year Wallace came on board to manage the museum—the profits were all but spent and the works gone, save for 20 pieces kept as part of its permanent collection.

Today, Wallace and his wife, Cheryl, live in several rooms adjacent to Wood’s former home and studio. Their bedroom is a few steps from a library that houses Wood’s incredible collection of art books, and their kitchen table is covered in vessels made by the current artist-in-residence. The two greet visitors excitedly, brimming with fascinating anecdotes about Wood’s life. While only a handful of Wood’s works are on view—a elaborate chalice, a funny duo of figurative forms called *Mr. and Mrs. Teapot*

(1980)—the artist’s lust for life and art are palpable throughout the space, especially in her former studio, which is still stacked with the minerals she used to concoct glazes (labeled “borax,” “green jewel,” “bone ash”).

“There’s a very strong sense of her presence here,” says Wallace, “and although I of course don’t have the answers about what happens to us after we die, I think that somehow her spirit merged with the place.” Perched on a shelf above jars of minerals that once housed sliced pimentos, there is a shrine to Wood; an image of her smiling face—framed by plaits of gray hair, elaborate earrings, the top of a pink sari—is draped with a lei of orange flowers.

It isn’t easy to see Wood’s work in person these days. The trip to Ojai is a long one for most, and the museums that do own her work rarely show it. But Wood’s passionate tribe of supporters, like the Wallaces, Naumann, Shechet, and many more, are committed to resurrecting her legacy—as a Dadaist, a pioneering sculptor, and an irreverent feminist of her own design.

Naumann, for his part, is growing a collection of Wood’s work, part of which he exhibited in a group show at his New York gallery last year. His cache includes chalices, figures, and one very unusual piece. After Wood died, in her bed overlooking Ojai’s Happy Valley, half of her ashes were scattered across her beloved Topatopa mountain. The other half was mixed into a luster glaze that coats three vessels by the artist Nancy Martinez—Naumann owns one.

“If you touch the surface, you can feel these little bumps, which are actually her bones,” he explains, affectionately. “It might be a little creepy, but it’s something that she allowed to happen.” Perhaps the gesture was another example of Wood as provocateur. Or maybe it was an act of self-preservation—a reminder that her

legacy is more than a provocative one-liner, that it is inextricably linked with the groundbreaking work she made and the staunchly independent life she led.

BEATRICE WOOD

by Annie Buckley, February 2015

Santa Barbara Museum of Art
1130 State Street
May 11 - August 31, 2014

Beatrice Wood is best known for her lusterware pottery, so this exhibition of nearly fifty works on paper, made over the course of a staggering eighty-seven years, is surprising and also gratifying. Despite drawing on styles that veer from commercial illustration to delicate abstraction and Cubist figuration, Wood's distinct visual stamp and sensibility persist through changing influences and decades. The drawings have the combined openness and intimacy of a daily diary, revealing the wit and humor, pathos and joie de vivre for which Wood's so well known. For example, works from "Touching Certain Things," 1932–33, depict sexually tinged interactions between women with a directness and sweetness that remains, despite a quaint illustrative style, radical for our times. Though less overtly sexual than the other works in that series, . . . *how lucky men are!*, 1932, suggests closeness and comfort between the two women depicted, here propped in bed on fluffy pillows and clad in filmy negligee, leaning in towards each other.

A number of drawings explore dream and emotional states through abstract figuration. The outlined figures in *Meeting of*

four women who hated each other, 1983, sway to and fro as if in a dance, surrounded and connected by a rush of red lines. Organic shapes in shades of pink make up the fleshy bodies that encircle the woman in black at the center of *Nun's Dream*, 1996. Amid the drama and caricature, narrative and humor, several figurations of a more minimal bent provide quiet moments, including *Untitled (intertwined legs)*, 1977, in which a thigh, pointed toe, and rounded rear hover gracefully in the center of a page torn from a sketch pad.

ART IN REVIEW

Beatrice Wood: 'Drawing for Life'

by Roberta Smith, March 1999

Achim Moeller Fine Art
167 East 73d Street
Through April 17

This exhibition of watercolors, drawings, lithographs and related memorabilia from 1910 to 1996 could easily have been subtitled "the artist tells all," so clear is the picture it provides of Beatrice Wood. The images are mostly delicate in line and color and variously perfumed with Cubism, Surrealism, American modernism and commercial illustration. But the underlying scent is romance. Overtly or covertly autobiographical, the images are dominated by beautiful, sometimes bare-breasted young women; lean, brooding young men, and references to betrayal, lovers' tiffs and reconciliations.

Wood, who died last year at age 105, will be best remembered as a late-blooming ceramic artist who developed a seductive palette of smoky, iridescent lusterware glazes in her studio in Ojai, Calif. Her drawings are something else entirely: a happy, somewhat mindless mix of art, life and persona, the latter of a free-living bohemian. Born in 1893 in San Francisco to a well-to-do, overly protective family, Wood nonetheless got herself to Paris by age 17, studying drawing at the Academie Julian. (There is a competent

nude here from this period.) Returning to New York in 1914, she joined a circle of avant-gardists that included Walter and Louise Arensberg, Francis Picabia, Man Ray and Edgar Varese.

She was closest to Marcel Duchamp and his friend Henri-Pierre Roche, a diplomat and writer. The three founded *The Blind Man*, an early Dada journal, and conducted a triangulated love affair that inspired Roche's novel "Jules et Jim," and, in turn, the film by Francois Truffaut.

Duchamp encouraged Wood to modernize her drawings. One, of a nude torso, even includes a readymade, a little shell-shaped bit of soap, as a fig leaf. From 1917 come a series of diaphanous diagrammatic drawings about women, distantly reminiscent of Picabia, including "Journee," "Meres/Fin" and "Dieu Protege les Amants" ("God Protects Lovers"). A cryptic line drawing, verging on caricature and predictive of James Thurber, portrays a soiree attended by Picabia, Duchamp and Albert Gleizes.

Elsewhere Wood contends with an overly possessive lover named Reg, is trampled underfoot by three women in black, awakes in Duchamp's bed with several other people on the morning after the Blindman's Ball (held on May 25, 1917, at Webster Hall on

East 11th Street in Greenwich Village) and, moving to California, keeps New York friends abreast of her work with a small album of snapshots of her drawings.

Mostly she simply seems to have enjoyed being a girl, in a way that may bring to mind any number of young women painting and photographing today. Like theirs, her works on paper mix feminism and femininity and are alternately revealing and self-indulgent, but are rarely outstanding. Frequently they substantiate Simone de Beauvoir's outrageously sexist pronouncement that women had trouble having careers because their narcissism obstructed the forgetfulness necessary for serious work. Luckily this impression is dispelled by Wood's ceramics, a few of which are also included in this fascinating show.

BEATRICE WOOD, 105, POTTER AND MAMA OF DADA, IS DEAD

by Roberta Smith, March 1998

Beatrice Wood, a ceramic artist known as much for her irreverent quips, beauty, bohemian life style and famous lovers as for her luminous luster-glaze chalices, and who inspired at least two movie characters, died on Thursday at her home in Ojai, Calif. She had celebrated her 105th birthday on March 3.

An independent woman inclined to say whatever was on her mind, Ms. Wood famously attributed her longevity to "chocolate and young men" and just as memorably titled her 1985 autobiography "I Shock Myself." In fact she was a lifelong vegetarian who neither smoked nor drank and remained clear-minded enough to take up the computer at the age of 90.

Until two years ago, she worked at the potter's wheel every day, following a strict daily regimen in a studio that was listed under "Places of Interest" in Ojai. A member of the Theosophy movement since 1923, she had moved to Ojai in 1948 to be near its leader, the Indian sage Krishnamurti. For the last four decades of her life, she dressed exclusively in bright Indian saris and wore large amounts of silver-and-turquoise jewelry, even when throwing pots, with her thick, hip-length gray hair twisted into braids or a bun.

She was born in San Francisco and reared in New York, and demonstrated an early affinity for art and nonconformity, much to the dismay of wealthy parents. She once said that she was 23 before she got free of her mother and her lady's maid, but she was allowed to go, chaperoned, to Paris when she was 18, where she studied painting at the Academie Julien and acting at the Comedie Francaise. Back in New York she fell in with some of the most adventurous artistic characters in town.

Her friends included Man Ray, Francis Picabia, Charles Sheeler, Walter and Louise Arensberg, Edgard Varese and Mina Loy. She was closest to Marcel Duchamp and his friend, the diplomat and writer Henri-Pierre Roche. The three founded Blind Man, a magazine that was one of the earliest manifestations of the Dada art movement in New York. (In the second and last issue, Ms. Wood defended Duchamp's infamous urinal, rejected by the jury of the 1917 Independents exhibition, with a sentence usually attributed to Duchamp himself: "The only works of art America has given are her plumbing and her bridges.") Duchamp encouraged her to draw; the results were fey, often autobiographical caricatures.

Her life was already the stuff of movies. Roche's novel about a

The New York Times

menage a trois, "Jules et Jim," would inspire Francois Truffaut's 1961 movie of the same name, with the character played by Jeanne Moreau based in part on Ms. Wood. In 1993, she was the subject of a documentary, "Beatrice Wood, the Mama of Dada," directed by Diandra Douglas. And more recently, she inspired the 101-year-old character of Rose in the movie "Titanic," directed by James Cameron, a neighbor in Ojai.

Ms. Wood liked to say that she had loved seven men she didn't marry and married two men she didn't love, saying that neither marriage was consummated. Her first, in 1919, to a theater manager from Montreal, resulted from family pressure and soon ended in annulment when it was discovered that the man already had a wife in Belgium. In 1938, while living in Los Angeles, she married Steve Hoag, an engineer, after a house they owned together in North Hollywood was swept away in a flood, on the correct theory that married people were likely to get Red Cross relief more easily. He lived with her until his death in 1960.

She was a late-bloomer as an artist and did not encounter ceramics until the 1930's, when she failed to find a teapot to match some neo-Rococo luster-glaze plates she had bought in Holland.

She enrolled in a pottery course at Hollywood High School, and began to research the lusterglaze process in a local library.

She never made that teapot, but became fascinated with the process. Her first works -- small glazed figures whose whimsy echoed her drawings -- sold easily, helping her make it through the Depression. It was not until 1940, when she studied briefly with the Austrian ceramicists Gertrud and Otto Natzler, that she began to appreciate the beauty and possibilities of ceramics as an art form.

After settling in Ojai in 1948, she began develop her own version of the unpredictable luster glaze technique, extending a process that embedded the metallic iridescence in the glaze itself, rather than painting it on. While she didn't invent the technique, she did create a unique palette in an extraordinary range of metallic pinks, golds and greens.

At first Ms. Wood supported herself by turning out large quantities of dinner sets, but after the mid 1970's, she was able to concentrate exclusively on more ambitious decorative vessels: chalices, bowls and vases. Her most complex pieces, which had elaborately decorated surfaces, came only after the mid-1980's, when she was in her 90's. These elaborate, radiant works dominate her most recent retrospective, held last year at the American Craft Museum in New York. The show opens in Florida at the Lake Worth Museum of Contemporary Art on March 27.

Ms. Wood had her first exhibition in 1949 at America House in New York. Her museum exhibitions include a retrospective at the Phoenix Art Museum in 1973. Since 1981, she has had repeated exhibitions at the Garth Clark Gallery, first in Los Angeles and then in New York, where an exhibition of her work will close on April 4.

In 1994, the Smithsonian Institution named Ms. Wood an Esteemed American Artist and Pete Wilson, Governor of California, declared her a "California Living Treasure."

DADA TO POTS OF GOLD
At 104, the View Back Is a Long One

by Grace Glueck, March 1997

NOT many artists live to celebrate a first New York retrospective at the age of 104. But in ceramics, at least, one has, the potter Beatrice Wood. Something of a late bloomer, she didn't begin to mess around with clay until the age of 40, and then it took a while to earn a reputation.

Now famous for her luster-glazed vessels, as well as for her long, full life, she's the subject of 'Beatrice Wood: A Centennial Tribute' at the American Craft Museum, a show of her wicked little drawings, kitschy comic figures and shimmering pots. Meanwhile, at home in Ojai, Calif., she's still hard at work in her studio.

Much has been made of Ms. Wood's Dada connections, but they run more to reminiscence than art. As a young girl in flight from a stuffy family, she studied painting in Paris, became an actress in New York and took up with the frolicsome Dada crowd here. She hung out with the artist Francis Picabia, had affairs with Marcel Duchamp and the writer Henri-Pierre Roche (the movie "Jules et Jim" was based on one of his novels), and frequented the hothouse soirees of the collectors Walter and Louise Arensberg. She became a Theosophist, a follower of Annie Besant and the Indian sage Krishnamurti, exploring comparative religions, Eastern philosophy and the occult.

Encouraged by Duchamp, she made drawings about her life, and the early part of this show is a kind of visual diary from the teens of this century. There are slight but amusing sketches of an Arensberg evening; a heap of people in "Marcel's Bed" (including herself, the painter Charles Demuth and the poet Mina Loy); an impish design for a poster and what amounts to her only real foray into Dadaist art, a take-off on Duchamp's famous urinal, translated into a female torso with a piece of soap attached to its pubic area. Its title: "A Little Water in Some Soap." Today it seems, well, cute, but apparently it was a sensation at the renegade Society of Independent Artists exhibition in 1917.

A trip to Europe with a friend in 1930 (she had moved to Los Angeles two years earlier) is saucily chronicled by Ms. Wood in a series of illustrations, "Touching Certain Things," a sort of "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes" saga that reveals a comic talent. There follow numerous later drawings on the theme of her frustrating relationships with men.

But on the trip, Ms. Wood acquired a set of Persian luster plates that was to change the course of her life. Back home, unable to find a matching teapot, she sought to make one by enrolling in an adult education pottery class at Hollywood High, and met her true

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vocation. Study with master potters followed, and after 15 years and a permanent move to Ojai, where she became involved with a school founded by Krishnamurti and Besant, she refined her glazing method to its present state.

Luster, an iridescent surface produced by the use of metallic oxides, is an ancient technique, going back more than a thousand years to Egypt, Syria and Persia. Among other ingredients, Ms. Wood uses lead and boron to create her light-catching glazes. The best part of the show is devoted to these vessels, which glimmer with gold, burnished copper, green, turquoise and translucent pinkish-white colors, sometimes all at once. No innovator of form, Ms. Wood appropriates shapes from a wide variety of sources -- Indian, ancient Greek, Etruscan and Japanese among them -- to make chalices, kraters, bottles, vases, bowls and teapots.

One of the most beautiful pieces is a small "Turquoise and Copper Luster Bowl" (1984), a simple shape whose radiant fusion of the two colors gives it a dramatic intensity. Another, from 1989, is a big India-style teapot whose glaze appears as a lovely milky white-gold film. Its stout, double-handled body is adorned with raised, hyperactive stick figures and topped by a cushiony round cap.

A stunning display of chalices -- deep cups and vaselike containers in a profusion of shapes and glazes -- is a centerpiece of the exhibition, organized by the art historian Francis M. Naumann, who also put together the excellent Dada show that recently closed at the Whitney Museum of American Art. Among the finest pieces in the chalice display is "Krater With Two Handles" (1980), a big footed cup in a rich bronze glaze. The handles, between the foot and the cup itself, are far from perfect in their symmetry. But such flaws are prized by Ms. Wood and her collectors, who cherish the idiosyncrasies of handmade pottery. Another treasure is "Gold Luster Chalice With 10 Handles" (1982), a bowl in pinkish gold

supported by a high foot blooming with curved grasps.

One of the earliest exhibits is a delicate Persian-style tea set from 1944 in a mustard-yellow glaze, its double-handled pot and accessory pieces embellished with raised rosettes and ribbons of dots. By contrast, a work of 1982-1992 is much bolder, a whole dinner service for eight: glasses, plates, bowls, cups and saucers. It has a kind of hearty Viking amplitude, and its infinite variety of subtly gleaming colors reduces most other table settings to pallid gentility.

But the results are less than wonderful when Ms. Wood amuses herself by making what she calls "sophisticated primitives," crude ceramic pieces that sometimes don't rise above the level of souvenir shop stuff. One wonders why they've been given equal presence in the show with her vessels. True, some of these pieces have charm, like "Clytemnestra and Iphigenia" (1959), a pair of blue ceramic cats with human faces, and "The Last Dessert" (1977), a relief plaque that deploys a dozen people -- all caricatures of Ms. Wood's friends -- in Apostolic poses at a long table.

But for the most part they are too too cute, like "Good Morning, America" (1988), a two-floor ceramic bordello with hookers at open windows on each floor and a madam standing in the doorway (it's one of a group of bordello pieces; Ms. Wood is apparently fascinated by the subject). Of no more than minor interest, too, are a series of ceramic plates she has designed over the years, including three of Queen Elizabeth I (she is also fascinated by royalty) and one commemorating Wallis Simpson and the Duke of Windsor.

It's those pots that give this show its substance.