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CRAFT DESIGN : CERAMICS

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE WORK OF RUTH DUCKWORTH
AS AN ARTIST AND THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC ASPECTS
THAT HAVE INFLUENCED THIS.

BY

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"...one, all one, but not aware of the oneness..."¹
[Duckworth, 1977, Introduction]

TABLE OF CONTENTS:

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	1
TABLE OF CONTENTS	2
INTRODUCTION.....	3
ILLUSTRATIONS	8
CHAPTER ONE.....	9
ILLUSTRATIONS	16
CHAPTER TWO.....	18
ILLUSTRATIONS	25
CHAPTER THREE.....	39
ILLUSTRATIONS	46
CHAPTER FOUR.....	68
ILLUSTRATIONS	78
CONCLUSION.....	104
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.....	106
REFERENCES.....	111
BIBLIOGRAPHY: BOOKS.....	115
BIBLIOGRAPHY: PERIODICALS/MAGAZINES.....	116
BIBLIOGRAPHY: CATALOGUES.....	117

INTRODUCTION.

Having always been somewhat preoccupied with the effects that the environment imposes on the individual, I have chosen to analyse this by discussing a case history of the society that influences artists and their work. I am concerned with this aspect because basically I believe it is of paramount importance to the moulding of all artistic practices. It is true to say, that we are modelled to some extent by the era in which we live, and that this in turn makes us products of our time.

In this discussion I intend to examine these aspects of historical, social, political and economic influences which are of particular relevance to my own concerns, as a female ceramist in the twentieth century.

I find myself increasingly interested in the area of womens work, but more specifically by their relationship to the fields of the Crafts and the Fine Arts. So having a increasing fascination with ceramic sculpture, I have chosen to write about one woman whose work exemplifies all the essential attributes necessary for this discussion, that of the artist Ruth Duckworth.

My reasons for deciding to use Ruth Duckworth was first due to the fact that I felt a certain affinity with her and her work. Basically, we are both women sculptors working in clay, sharing similar ideals, sources, concerns and entertaining similar codes of practice relating to our work. Secondly because both she and her work defy categorization. She is a pioneer.

In Chapter One I intend to discuss broadly the historical, social, political and economic aspects affecting the current position of women within the field of ceramics, analysing

why it is that the majority of women are involved with the field of Crafts as opposed to that of Fine Arts? Women possess different sensibilities from men, which best explains the notable difference in the work between the sexes. This statement is crucial to a discussion on the exclusion of women to the Fine Art practice and training before the turn of the century in Britain.

Subsequently, women were thought to be 'naturally' gifted when it came to designing for the home, as a result the female artist was primarily seen as only a woman fulfilling her nature in the domestic realm. Consequently women and their work were given little or no credibility when it came to contributing to Fine Arts practices.

In Chapter Two I intend to discuss another significant matter which emerges from this discussion, the question of a hierarchy of materials, how some materials such as stone, steel, wood and bronze are regarded as having hierarchical status, compared to those materials which are more commonly used in craft, for example clay, glass, wool and paper. Those materials are regarded as secondary solely because they were used mainly by women and because they didn't coincide with established modes of practice.

More specific to my discussion is the area of ceramics, as it possesses properties of utility and function normally associated with that of the field of crafts; yet it embodies three dimensional properties pertaining to Sculpture in the Fine Arts. Because ceramics encompasses both these areas, traditionally seen as adversaries it therefore poses arguments that confuse the established hierarchial practices.

Then I aim to focus on the tremendous transformation brought about by the Second World War, how it affected society and its attitudes with regard to the position of women and Fine Art. They could now participate in any realm of artistic

practice.

The ceramics arena was also subsequently affected by the War, it underwent enormous changes in terms of the influx of talented emigres fleeing from Europe. I shall concentrate on one such emigree Ruth Duckworth [fig 1] who succeeded in defying the dictates of established hierarchical practices to become....

"one of the strongest influences on the liberalisation of ceramics in the United Kingdom. She helped to change the English potters outlook by making them aware of the sculptural possibilities of ceramics"¹
[Clark, 1979, p263]

My accounts of her work in Chapter Three, looks at how revolutionary it was in the late 1950's early 1960's especially when one considers the type of work that had strongly influenced and dominated British ceramics since the War, particularly Bernard Leach.

Due to the rapidly changing social and artistic conditions, his teachings and philosophy became inadequate in the face of the more exciting work made by Ruth Duckworth and her fellow European emigres. She was more concerned with an organic, abstract, sculptural way of working; where the materials being used were of paramount importance. Her work defies categorization and remains somehow in a world of it's own; but supported and admired by her many followers.

In the final Chapter, I will discuss how the determination and drive of Ruth Duckworth, in her desire to extend the volume and scale of her work, drove her to reject the restrictive atmosphere in Britain for teaching in Chicago; how her dedication to her work, on being offered a commission proposed by the University's Geophysics Building, caused her to move house and home, to enable her to fulfil her ambition. She soon found that America was for her, the

land of opportunity. Here the American government gave great support to the Arts, because their belief was that the state of the arts reflected the well-being of the American nation! So as they were promoting the notion of a national identity, where innovation and originality was a priority, setting out to aid various aspects of the arts by establishing schemes and programmes, to help artists realise their goals. This created excellent patronage for artists in terms of opportunities and finance.

In the area of ceramics in the 1950's there developed a movement called 'Abstract Expressionism', spearheaded by Peter Voulkos in the United States. He was to clay, what Jackson Pollock was to paint. Voulkos was widely known for his free and expressive work, which took the form of plates which he tore, punctured and scraped. Both he and his work are legendary, regarded by most as being a conduit between pottery and sculpture in America. Voulkos' achievements in America paralleled with Duckworth's challenging of the 'traditional English aesthetic' in Britain.

When she had completed the Geophysics Building commission, she could never look back. This was such a success giving her great admiration from her fellow clay workers. She has received many commissions since and has found the Chicago environment and pace of life equal to her own.

She has now spent the same amount of years in Chicago, as she did in Britain as an emigree from war - torn Europe and has continued to make significant developments in her ceramic sculpture. The variations now apparent in her murals, free-standing forms, bowls and vessel forms suggest a new-found harmony that has enriched the artist and her repertoire.

"Her delicate porcelain abstractions have the natural harmony of growing things. If pots could make themselves: one feels they would grow up out of the earth like Ruth Duckworth's".²
[Birks, 1967, p23]

She has confronted the endless bias and crossed the supposed boundaries between the Arts and Crafts, to prove that they are no longer relevant, as her work sets its own standards: Duckworth has proved her merit and work in the Fine Arts arena, in every respect. She is widely acclaimed in the realms of contemporary ceramics as a pioneer.

"Exhibitions in Europe and America gain status if her work is included, as if Callas had come to sing"³

[Birks, 1967, Introduction]



FIG 1: Ruth Duckworth in her studio, Ravenswood, Chicago, 1991.

CHAPTER ONE

To discuss the importance of the work of the artist Ruth Duckworth and the varying aspects that have played a part in influencing her work, certain factors have to be taken into account.

It is best first to examine different social, political and economic influences that have shaped both art practice and women's relationship to art.

This relationship of women to the Crafts and the Crafts to the Fine Arts is indeed a complex one. A discussion on the practice and execution of the Crafts cannot be examined without referring to the position of women within that context.

"The artist's sense of the creative self as a woman - her concentration on what is generally considered women's realm of experience either because of social pressures or personal choice - may play a greater or a lesser role in women's work, depending on the circumstances".¹
[Nochlin, 1977, p166]

The presence of women in the field of decorative Arts in Britain, especially those of weaving, textiles and ceramics has been a time-honoured one. Women have made significant contributions in these areas throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Nevertheless the traditional relationship, or perhaps relegation of women to the decorative arts has ideological and moral associations especially in Britain during the latter part of the nineteenth century. English women were admitted to the various Schools of Design such as the Royal School of Art Needlework long before they were admitted in any significant

numbers to the teaching facilities offered by the Royal Academy in the mid 1800's.

These schools were mainly filled by working class girls for whom skills such as weaving and decorating ceramic ware were taught and aimed primarily for industry; but also for unmarried middle - class women who had no father, or brother to support them. It also solved the on-going problem of finding suitable employment for those young ladies, at a time that believed working for money was not sociably acceptable.

This attempt to extend a knowledge of the Applied Arts to the lower classes and to women in the 1880's was intended to break the barriers between the Design and the Fine Arts, an ideal that was largely encouraged by two men, John Ruskin [fig 1] and William Morris [fig 2].

They proposed a programme of social transformation in the form of Gothic Revival. It was through this Revival that the Arts and Crafts Movement in Britain began and it was largely women who took part in it, as it offered them the freedom to assume a new authority within the home, this giving them an independent income.

"It was crucial for the suitability of these crafts that they did not entail the supposedly unfeminine traits of personal ambition or the egotism of the Fine Arts; and in the vast majority of cases women were merely executing designs created by male artists".²
[Anscombe, 1984, p28]

Nevertheless we should be reminded that this Gothic Revival had in reality thought little of women and their work, as they did not feature very prominently. They served no great function for either Ruskin or Morris, other than that of an inspirational one, cast as nothing more than mediaeval damsels, encouraged to play their part in what Ruskin thought to be...

"the beautiful adornment of the State".³
[Anscombe, 1984, p16]

So it is evident that this mediaeval notion could not be of benefit to society if its ideals were to be patronising and paternalistic in their approach towards women and their work. After all, most of the women who succeed in making a name for themselves did so only because they were able to enlarge their activities under the aegis of a husband, father or brother, as the women of the Morris/Ruskin circle had done themselves. It is also notable that some women who did strike out and make independent careers for themselves towards the end of the century, did so whilst in their mid-forties or older, when they had both the confidence and freedom from family life to make it on their own.

"Women have always made Art. But for women The Arts most highly valued by male society have been closed to them for just that reason".⁴
[Mainardi, 1981, p58]

As a result, women's participation in Art was a rarity. Art was produced primarily by men who neatly separated and dominated the public sector that controlled it. Therefore men defined the normative standards for evaluation, thus traditionally defining the aesthetic requirements of what has constituted Art.

It was because of these standards that women's work and participation in Art was deemed as something 'nice', 'enjoyable' or 'little', compared to the established male criteria; and women's work was generally thought to be of little significance.

Furthermore the fact is argued that how could Art possibly be women's metier if they hardly ever participated? Was it never questioned as to why this was the case? Could it not be the very fact that women's role in Art was severely controlled and manipulated to suit men's own requirements, dictating what they thought best for women. This only

serves to emphasize the social, political and economic situations women artists found themselves confronted with, in the mid eighteenth century. So women were shunted off to the so-called minor or decorative Arts as they were considered more acceptable for women, less demanding than the Fine Arts and easier to accommodate in the domestic routine.

These points illustrate the irrational reasons why women and their work were stereotyped to the Crafts and how Craft derived its secondary status compared to Fine Art. It also indicates how much the status of the maker has mattered in the evaluation of Art, that this status depends on the sex of the maker...

"not because it biologically predetermines the kind of work produced, but because it highlights the sexual division of our society".⁵
[Hoernes and Menghuin, 1981, p69]

Therefore Art by women was separated from the dominant definition of what constituted 'great Art', and was consigned to a special category as an expression of their femininity and, as a result, seen only to be an extension of the domestic arena.

Since the majority of craftwork is functional to some extent, the fact that 'domestic' implies 'utilitarian' also gives Craft secondary connotations when it is compared with the high aesthetic values of the Fine Arts. This shared intimacy with the materials between the maker and user gives craftwork a specific social activity.

"Women's artistic achievements have been belittled by the idea that is natural for a woman to demonstrate good taste, to be interested in the home and express her personality through it, which has in turn lead to believe that, creating for the home women were professional craftworkers by default".⁶
[Anscombe, 1984, p14]

So the crafts was deemed apt for women, whereas sculpture, requiring ambition, strength and purpose of vision was seen to be consigned to men principally. So while these criteria of 'great art' exist, work produced in the domestic arena cannot be accommodated.

Not only does this highlight the divide between the Crafts and the Fine Arts, but it also points a critical finger towards at the idealised writings of Art history and teaching, as to why women's art was so neglected and misrepresented.

Subsequently it indicates how shallow and insubstantial the structures and ideologies of art history before the turn of the nineteenth century were, in that criticism was from a patriarchal viewpoint and not presented as being universal.

"If we must reject the empty fetishes of 'the External Feminine' or of 'Feminine Nature', we must nevertheless recognise the fact that there are women, and that the fact of being one puts one in a special situation".⁷
[Le Bon, 1977, p165]

These preconceived notions of women being more akin to 'nature' or 'the natural' are probably derived from women's biological make-up and their abilities to reproduce, create life, give birth and motherhood.

"Craft is natural and authentic, Women are the guardians of Nature and authenticity, Therefore women are the guardians of craft".⁸
[Brett, 1989, p16]

Other notions that reinforced this belief were that craftwork possessed qualities linked to a more natural, rusticated life, related to folk traditions, and the land. So the artist was primarily seen, as only a woman fulfilling her nature in the domestic realm.

"To discard obviously mystificatory, essentialist theories about women's 'natural' directions in Art is by no means to affirm that the fact of being a woman is completely irrelevant to artistic creation. Like any other variable, little can be predicated on it's basis in isolation from the specific context in which it exists".⁹
[Nochlin, 1977, p165]

The inconsistent and unsubstantiated Art criticism that womens Art has been subjected to questions the credibility of formalist theories of Art history. Women have displayed a variety of talents, proving their exceptional worth to the field of Art, which illustrates that once women were able to bring their skills into a wider world than their homes, they were remarkably successful.

"Spreading its message beyond the walls of the studio, museum and gallery; into the realms of daily life - a goal devoutly sought by all artists - from the time of Ruskin and Morris to the Bauhaus".¹⁰
[Nochlin, 1977, p167]

The major turning point for women working in the Decorative Arts came not through their new-found exploits in the various areas of the Crafts, but in women craftwork's emergence from isolation or from their respective masters. The Pre-Raphaelite Movement had begun by incorporating women as passive, mediaeval damsels but by the end of the eighteenth century it had created a new sphere of professional activities for the middle-class woman. The advancements women artists involved in the Decorative Arts made in the late 1880's gave rise to the most revolutionary directions - both socially and aesthetically - of their times. Their vital contribution also casts doubt on many of the assumptions made concerning artistic practice. So women's work can be seen in this sphere of culture as well as nature.

Bearing in mind these factors, one can clearly see what must be changed in order that Art by women be considered as such. A radical re-assessment of the values that determine the aesthetics, by both male and female Art writers and practioners as to what constitutes 'great Art' must be brought about. Only then can Art be considered as universal practice.



FIG 1: John Ruskin in old age at Brantwood.

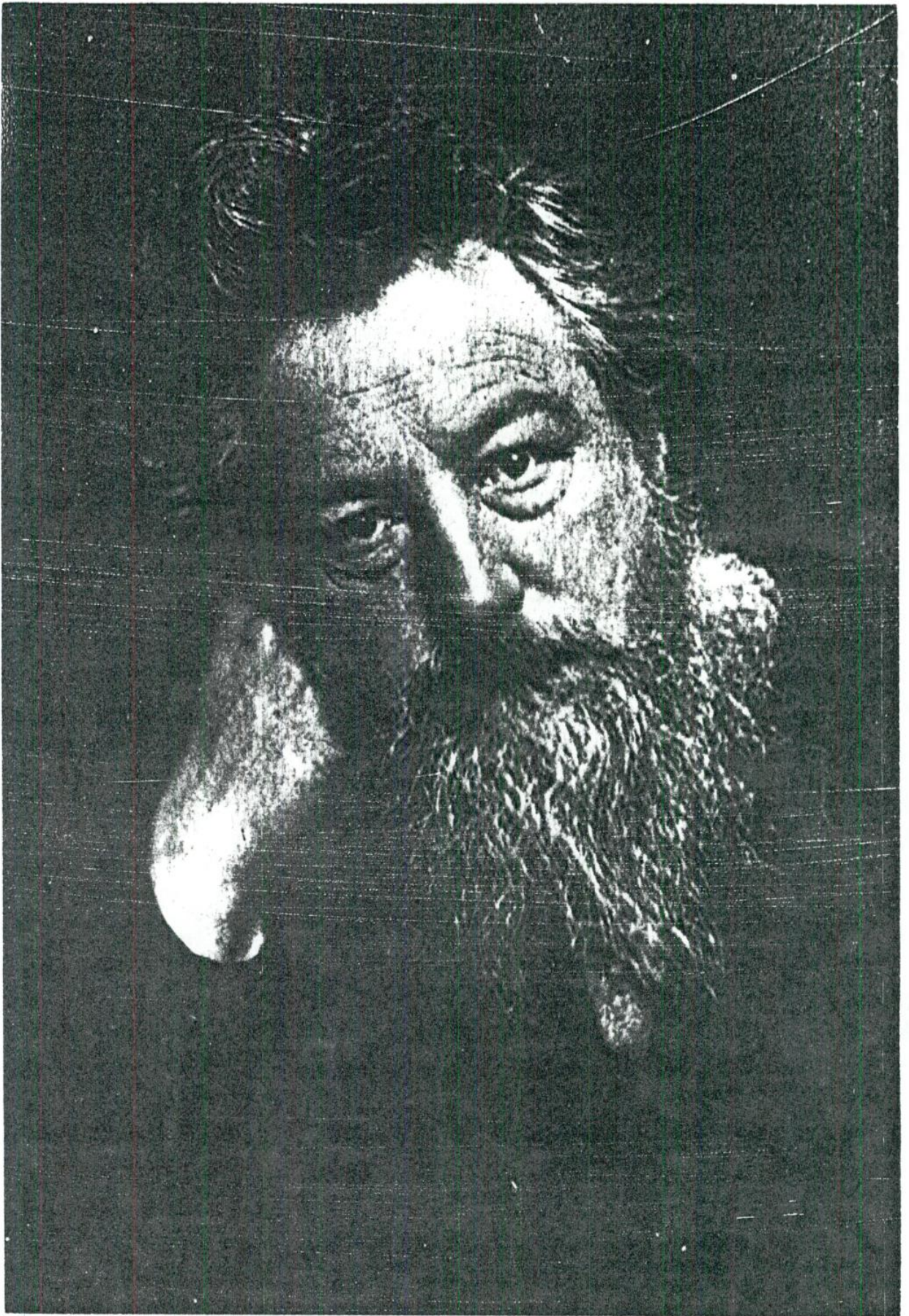


FIG 2: William Morris towards the end of his life.

CHAPTER TWO

One of the most significant points to emerge from this discussion seems to be the question of a hierarchy of materials:

"The derogatory tone which seems inevitably to creep in when talking about wool rather than marble, points back to the patriarchal bias of the general aesthetic norms".¹
[Ecker, 1985, p16].

Without generalising greatly, women had a tendency to use 'natural' materials such as cloth, wool, clay or paper to create their work, implying that these materials suggest a certain warmth, indicating women's attraction towards them. Because women were cut off from the domain of the Fine Arts and resigned to the area of the Crafts, they would use the materials they had available to themselves to the extent that the work created developed on a parallel to that of the Fine Arts. These materials, when compared with those of the well established Fine Arts media, wood, bronze and stone, appear to lack substance of quality. Could the notion of using wool as opposed to marble be considered art?

In my opinion the point must be clearly made, that such materials were rated secondary to the foremost works of art in the modern museums and galleries because it was mainly women who used them because established ideals of what constituted Art.

"A similar bias seems to have been at work in ceramic history with particular consequences for women's role in it"²
[Vincientelli, 1987, p60]

Ceramics create a hierarchical confusion because the single

word 'ceramics' effectively encompasses two art terms, those of 'craft' and 'art'; which are usually seen to be adversarial. It creates problems in that you cannot narrow its boundaries to either craft or art because of its three dimensional properties because it includes utility as one of its functions. It seems apparent that whenever an art form possesses any qualities of utility, doubt sets in as to whether or not it is viable as art.

The only position women filled in the ceramic arena of the mid 1880's was that of decorators in ceramic factories. The prevailing notion of femininity crops up again: women were encouraged to use their 'natural' skills of neatness and precision. China painting, became a fashionable middle-class pastime as well as providing a useful income for women, and it was seen to be less messy than other activities such as modelling, throwing and firing which were undertaken by men.

However the first World War had made some radical changes in Britain, so in order to accommodate the fact that now there were fewer men around, women were allowed into Art training; and art activities were considered acceptable for women.

The tremendous change brought about by the War, radically altered social thinking and as a direct result encouraged a large number of women to partake fully in the challenge of studio ceramics. Studio pottery afforded genuine opportunities for women to find fulfilling and rewarding occupations. This provided a space for women to develop their creative talents as potters or painters, and enabled them to carry out tests of chemical properties, modelling clay, as well as studying the effects of different glaze or clays, tasks previously only delegated male artists.

So by tracing such apparent changes in ceramic history, one can realise the transformation in the status of Crafts in relation to the Fine Arts; and how this also influenced the

changing position of women within this context.

The first World War has provoked many major changes but none more apparent than the revolutionary changes occurring in British art colleges upon the arrival of the European emigres. These colleges were to bear witness to an influx of talented people fleeing from mainland Europe, bringing with them a variety of cultural ideas, skills, and qualities that would enhance numerous aspects of British arts and design up to the present day.

These emigrés were greatly influenced by a prevailing European modernism, and the ideals laid down by the Bauhaus in particular; whereby they placed an emphasis on...

"uniting the spiritual content of Fine Arts, with the material skills of the Crafts as part of an architectural whole"³
[Anscombe, 1987, p132]

People such as Lucie Rie and Hans Coper [fig 1], only two of many influential Europeans, who were to succeed in establishing themselves in Britain as valuable catalyst's, evoking major changes in the ceramic arts.

"All had been influenced by European Modernism and found a way to express this sensibility in clay. They made work that spoke of an urban rather than a rural environment"⁴
[Clark, 1990]

However, I have chosen to discuss one artist and ceramist who serves as an exceptional example of a woman overcoming the many difficulties presented to her, by possessing the self confidence to go in her own direction and triumphing over the once distinct division between the Fine Arts and Crafts. Ruth Duckworth [fig 2] established herself as a extraordinary figure in Contemporary ceramics.

Born Ruth Windmüller, the youngest of five children, her

family were a conventional middle-class German family and as she states herself...

"with a higher regard for the males of the family, my father and my brother, than for the females. At one time in my life I remember thinking, how can one overcome so many disadvantages... being German, Jewish and female?"⁵
[Duckworth, 1977, p3]

Many of the dilemmas she experienced growing up in a typical male-centred German family received second priority when she was forced to flee Nazi Germany in 1936, thereby having to fend for herself at the age of seventeen. Later on, in an effort to live down these circumstances, she equates this to her determination, drive and strong motivation.

"Hitler had made life in Hamburg impossible, I was lucky I suffered no physical abuse, but in every other way my life had become very difficult. I was not allowed enter Art school, as that would have defiled German art"⁶
[Duckworth, 1977, p3].

Moving to Liverpool in England to live with her sister, she was determined to study art; she began a sculpture course at Liverpool School of Art. However in these early years in Liverpool she didn't fit in too easily and she was quite poor. The School of Art also posed problems for her as she wanted...

"to paint like Rembrandt, sculpt like Michelangelo and draw like Dürer. If Michelangelo could do it, then why can't I?"⁷
[Duckworth, 1977, p7].

The school principal discouraged her ambitiousness, telling her to choose only one of the three! Already she demonstrated the independence of mind and ambitiousness, she would need to pursue her goal. She left after four years part-time attendance, with no idea of how to earn a living and no degree. She took up various jobs later, as a

travelling puppeteer, then working in a munitions factory, in order to help the war effort against Hitler. It was difficult finding employment in war-time Britain being German.

She moved to London with two friends and took up a part-time job carving tombstones; and the rest of the time doing commissions, from her home in order to earn a living. Times were tough and they took their toll on her; as she suffered a nervous breakdown. Whilst undergoing psychoanalysis, the doctor assigned to her spoke German and, ironically collected work by Hans Coper [fig 3] and Lucie Rie [fig 4]. It was during her rehabilitation, when she would gaze upon these works, reliving her childhood, that subsequently she decided she really wanted to be creative.

So studying and practising sculpture [fig 5] yet again, but this time at Kennington School of Art, she tells of how one day...

"the teacher came along while I was enjoying bashing a piece of stone. His only comment was 'Miss Windmüller, remember your a woman' "⁸
[Duckworth, 1977, p14]

It was about this time that she began an apprenticeship with Henry Moore [fig 6] and he was to become a lasting influence on her work. Other greats in the field of sculpture that she shared an affinity with were, Epstein [fig 7] and Barbara Hepworth [fig 8]. Ruth Duckworth's sheer determination with regard in her wish to be 'an artist', saw her through some lean times and in the face of prejudice or chauvinism she never took a back seat, persisting in the belief that she was an artist first and then a woman! She even went so far as to file for 'loss of education' in 1950 from the German Government. On winning her case she purchased her first Kiln with the money she was awarded.

Leaning mainly in the direction of figurative work [fig 9]

and using various kinds of conventional sculptural media such as stone, bronze and wood; she found that she was beginning to move more towards clay, as a means of expression. This notion of having a 'calling' for clay came to the fore whilst she was visiting an exhibition of the Red Rose Guild in London, where she came across a big round vessel; so strong was her attraction to it that she wanted to wrap her arms around it and hug it! So she began making some figurative pieces in clay [fig 10 and 11].

"I was doing some simple clay sculptures that I wanted to glaze. Sculpture students don't learn much about clay and nothing about glazes, so I rang Lucie Rie to ask her for a glaze recipe. She said 'what do you know about glazes?', 'Nothing' I said, 'maybe you should go to school for a time said Lucie'.⁹
[Duckworth, 1991, p22]

On Lucie Rie's [fig 12] advice, she attended Hammersmith School of Art, but found its teaching too doctrinaire, having being trained previously as a sculptor of an independent mind, she rejected notions of how a pot should be, with a foot, middle and lip, for Duckworth this was all too much, as she was more interested in the type of organic abstract, ceramics; now prevalent in Europe. She moved to the Central School of Arts, she found the atmosphere there, more conducive and stimulating to her way of working and met teachers Ian Auld [fig 13] and Don Arbeid, who were experimenting with free-built forms. In this ideal environment Duckworth quickly developed a language of plastic form and her new experience enabled her to produce some novel results [fig 14], to the extent that she was regarded a valued student. By 1960, she herself was a lecturer at the Central School of Art.

"Her work there was revolutionary and has been regarded as a touchstone in modern ceramics. This rather awesome aura is not confined to her work; it surrounds her too as a teacher and advance notices or even rumours of her lectures arouse

excitement. Yet Ruth Duckworth has none of the outward appearance of a doctrinaire teacher. She is firm in her views about her own work and ready in her response to the work of others but she is unpretentious and unshowy. She is an artist who has gone her own way and happens to have swept many along with her".¹⁰
[Birks, 1967, p23].

The first World War had radically altered social thinking in Britain to the extent that Ruth Duckworth, and many more women to come, could now reap the full benefits of a Fine Arts education and therefore attain the same credibility of those artists practising in bronze or stone. She represented a different aesthetic from the native British ceramic ideals which were greatly influenced by the oriental ceramists. With her determined drive and self assurance, she defied any academic categorization to become a revolutionary in British ceramics.

Ruth Duckworth in choosing to go her own direction regarding the possibilities of clay, ignored the established traditional modes of practice, to instigate tremendous changes in British ceramics unmatched by any other ceramists in the post-war years.

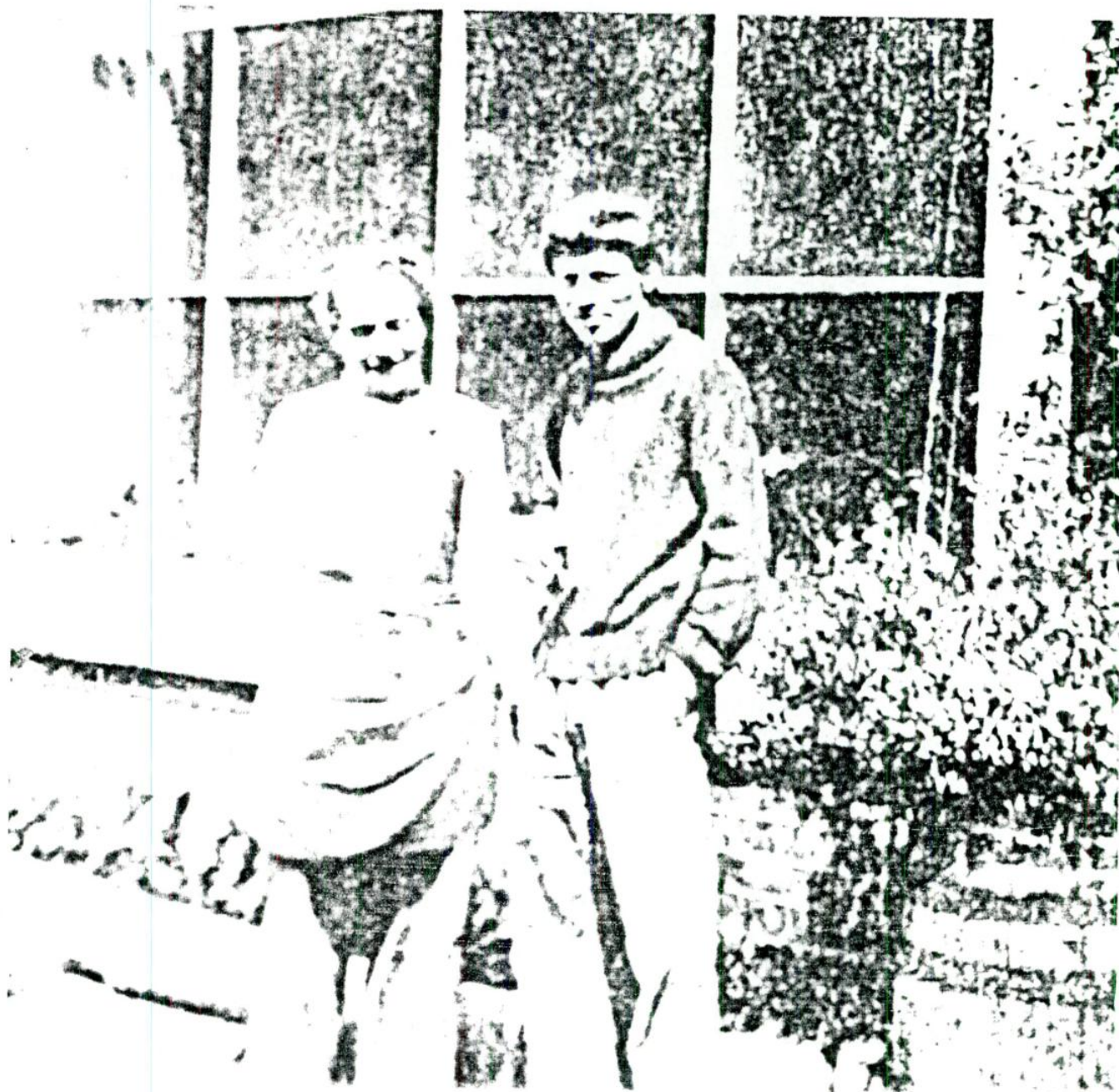


FIG 1: Hans Coper and Lucie Rie at Albion Mews Pottery,
London, 1950's

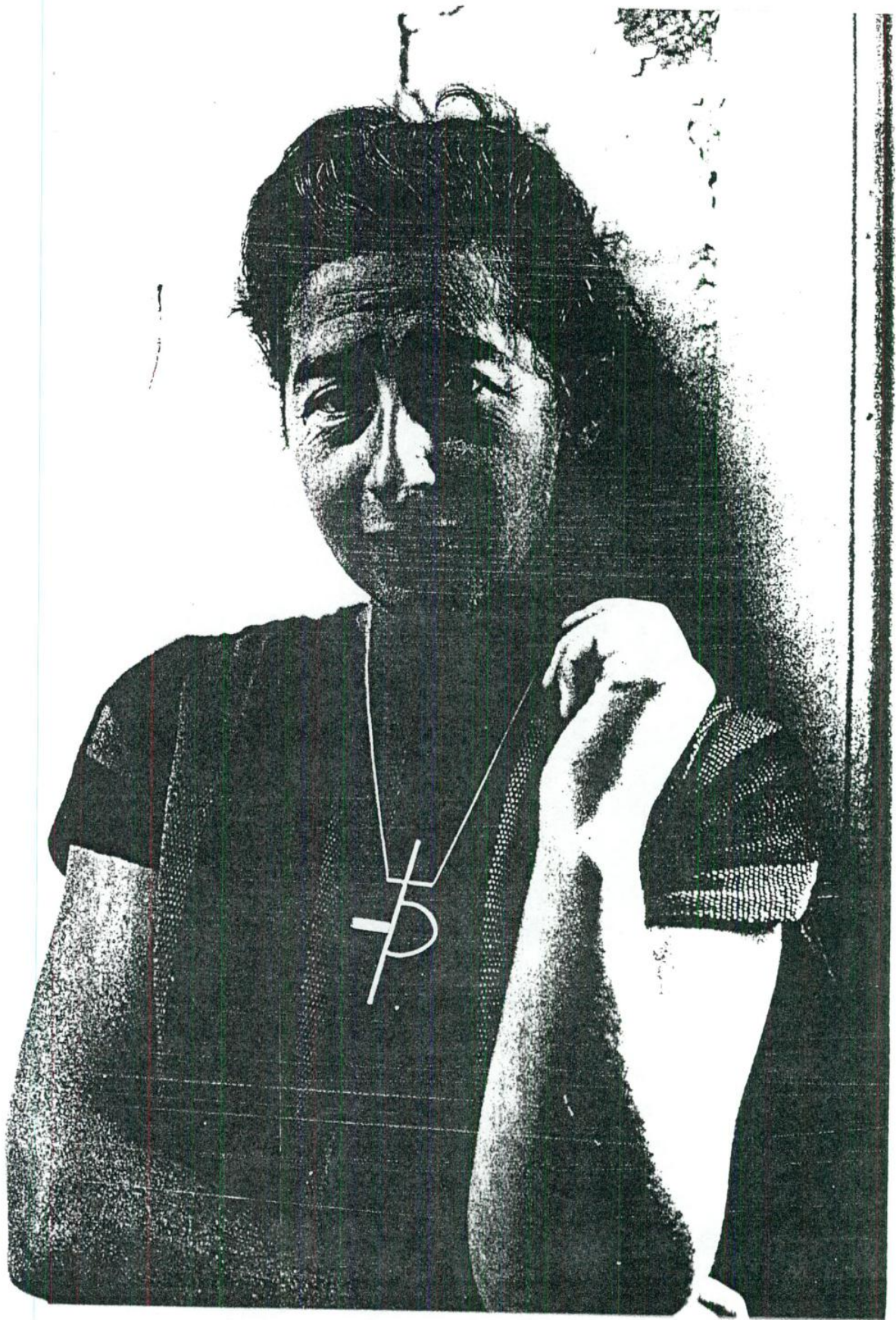


FIG 2: Ruth Duckworth in the 1960's.

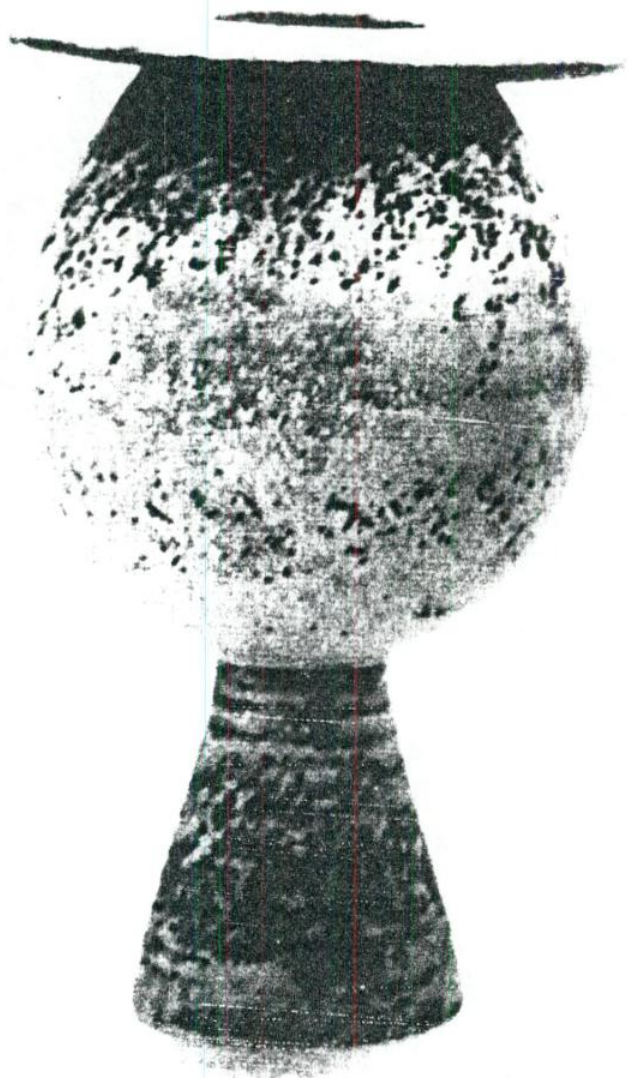


FIG 3:Hans Coper, Spade Forms, Stoneware, 1963-65, 11" x 13"H

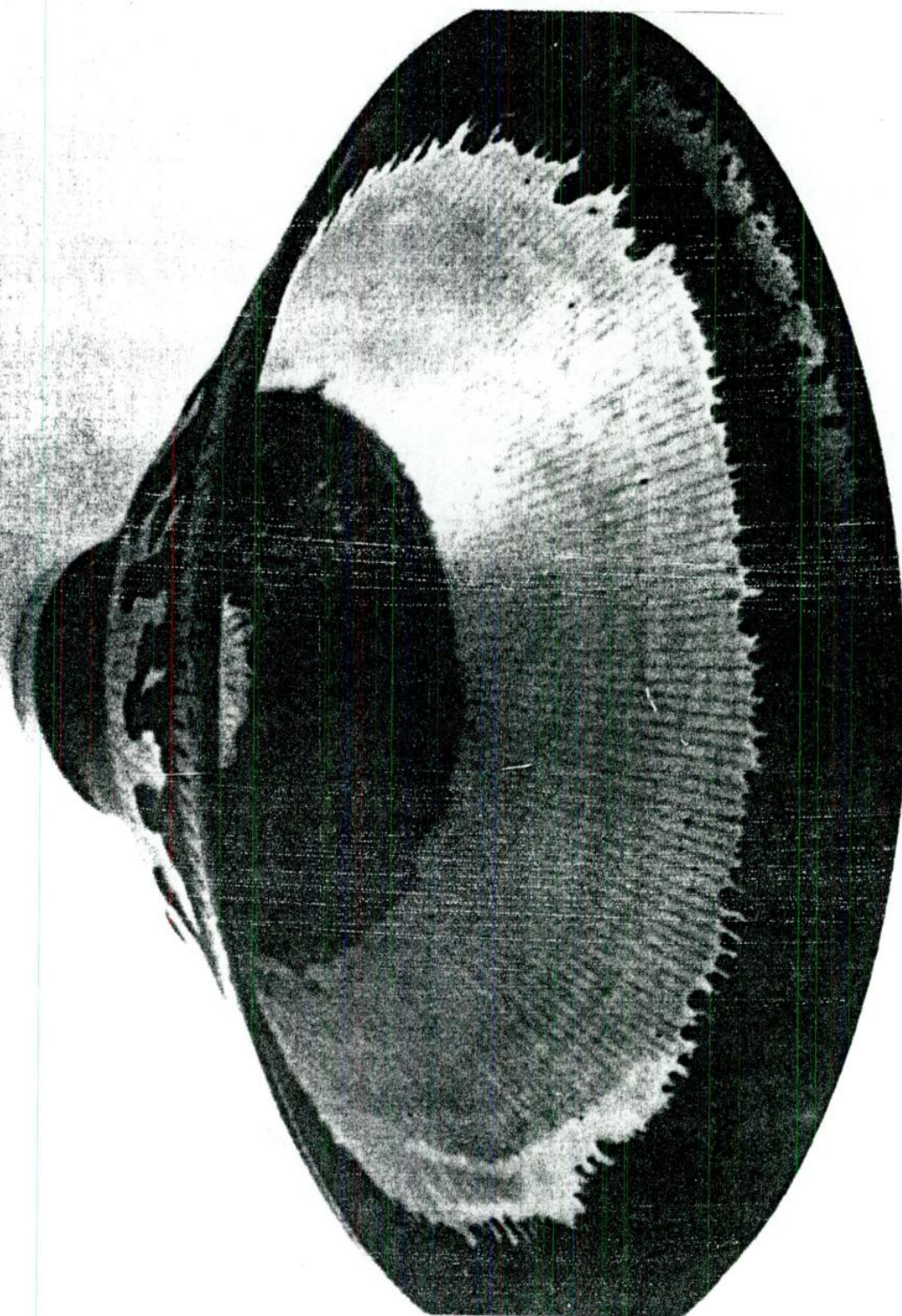


FIG 4: Lucie Rie, Porcelain Bowl with criss cross sgraffito,
1955, 11"d.



FIG 5: Ruth Duckworth working in London 1944.

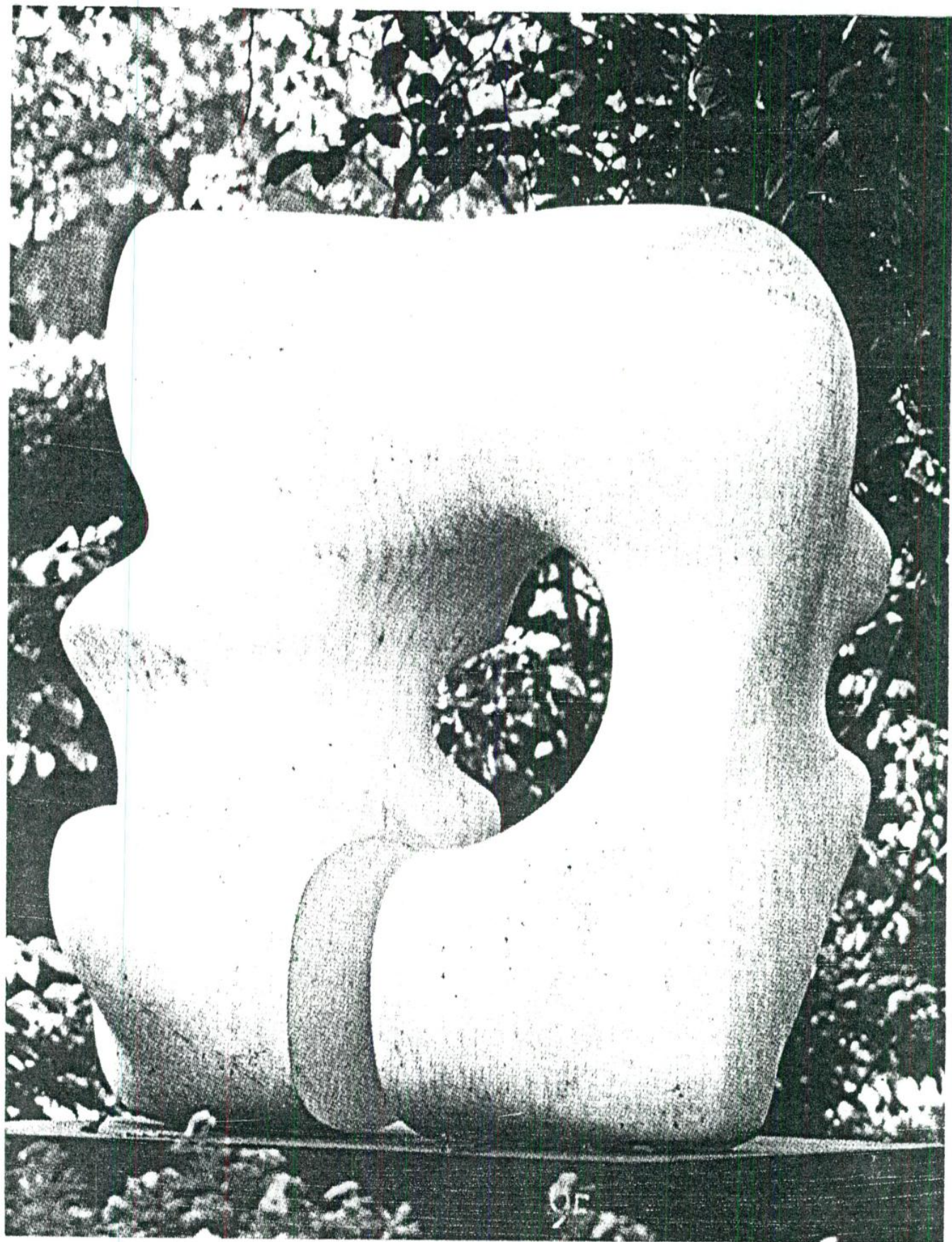


FIG 6: Henry Moore, Square Form with cut, Limestone, 1961, 41"h.

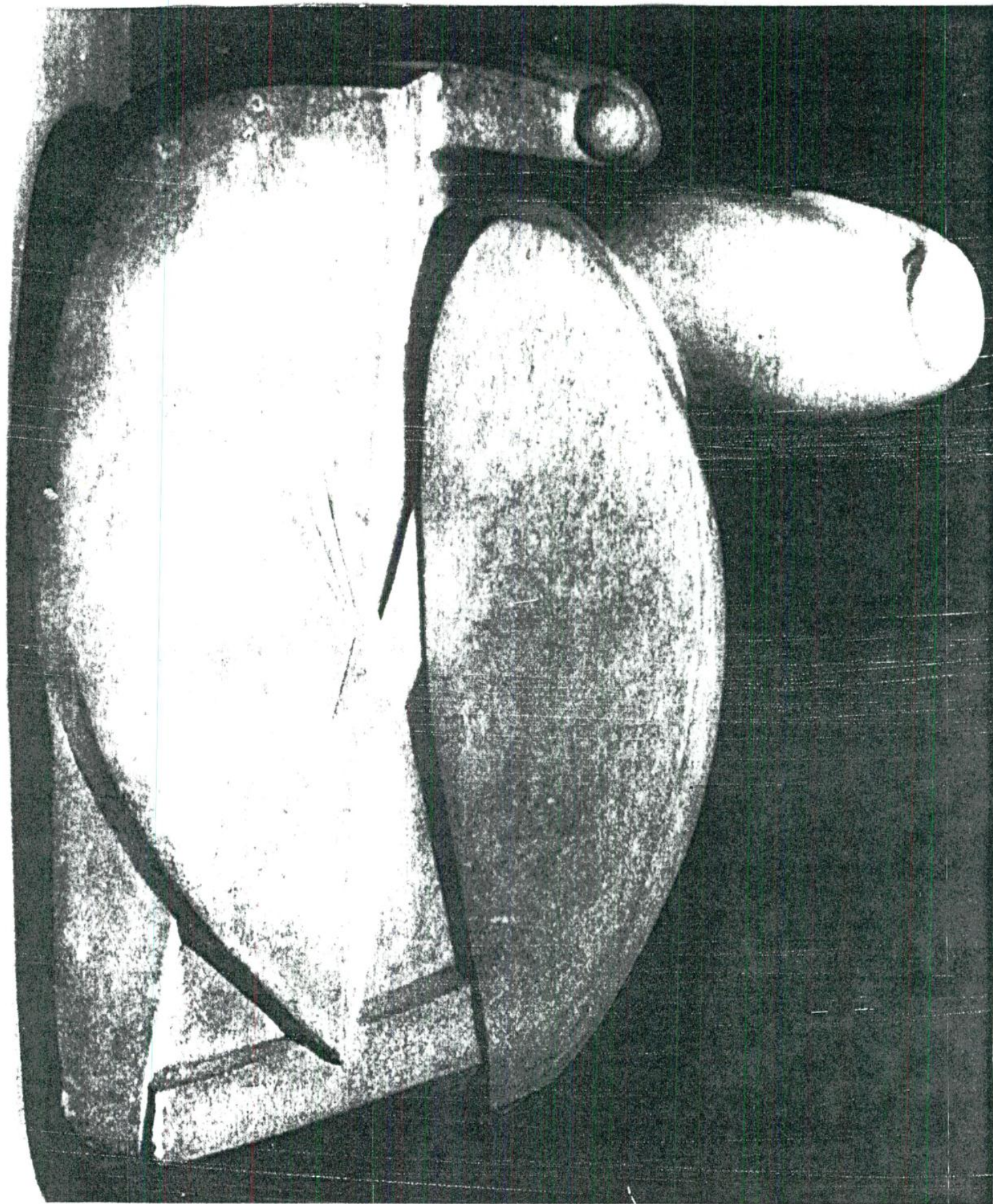


FIG 7: Epstein, Doves, Limestone, 1947, 13"h.



FIG 8: Barbara Hepworth, Pierced Form, Pentellic marble, 1963 - 64, 56"h x 38".

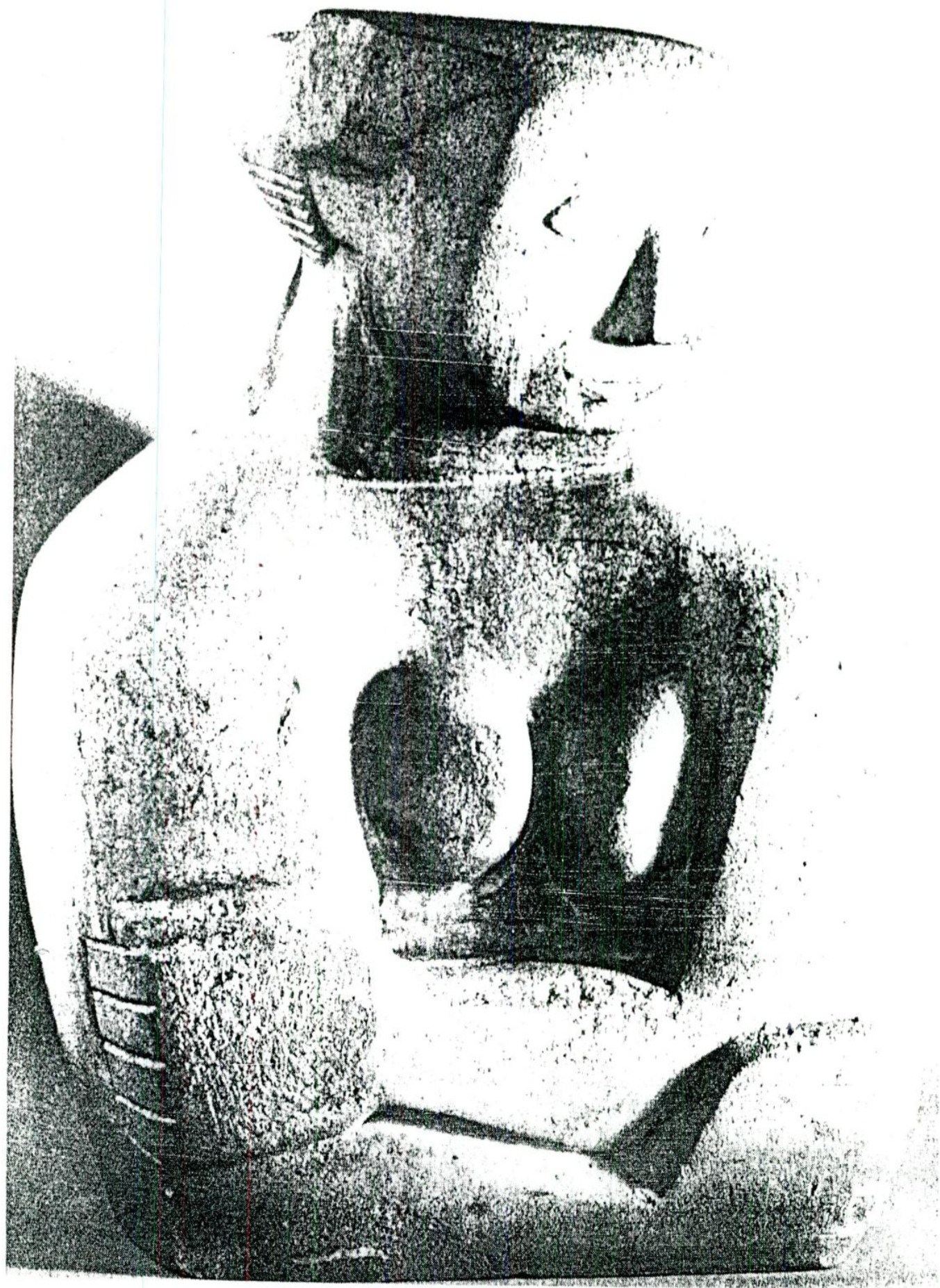


FIG 9: Ruth Duckworth, Figurative Form, Hoptonwood stone, 1949, 15 x 10 x 8"



FIG 10: Ruth Duckworth, Terracotta form, 1983, life size.



FIG 11: Ruth Duckworth, Terracotta form, 1941, life size.



FIG 12: Lucie Rie, The artist potter.

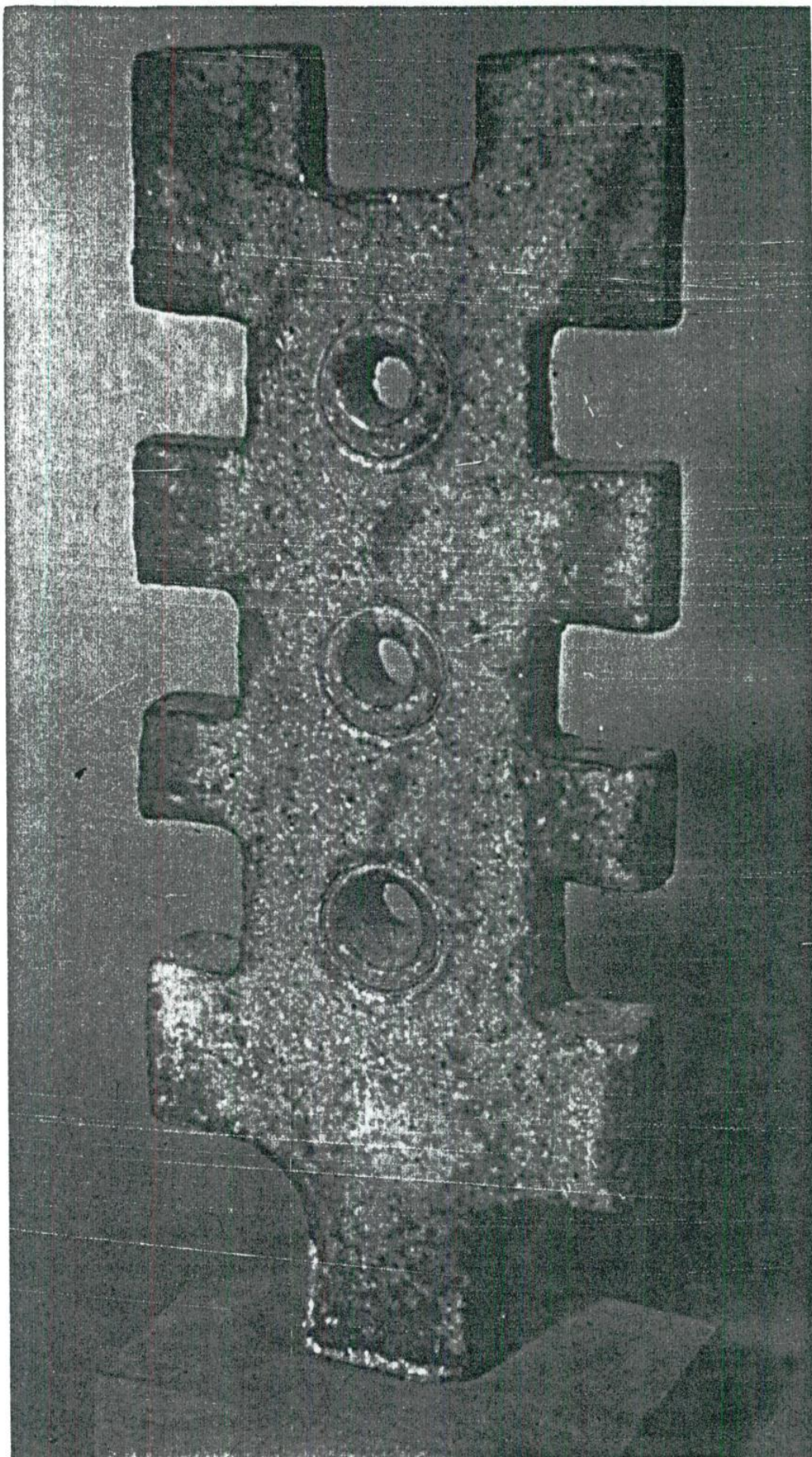


FIG 13: Ian Auld, Flat Handbuild form, 1966, 22"h.

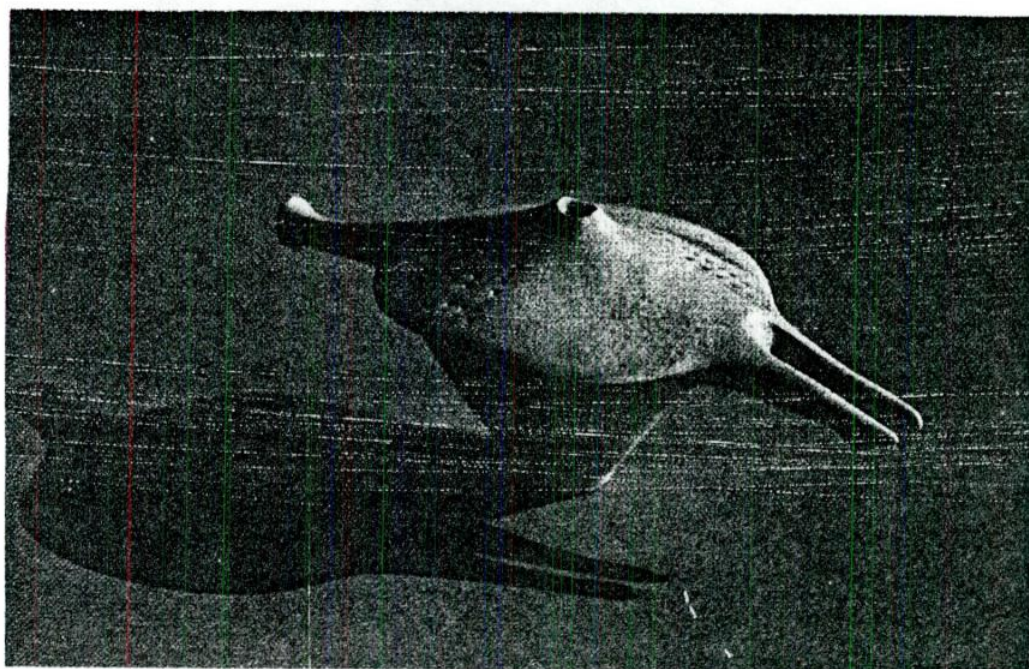


FIG 14: Ruth Duckworth, Porcelain form, 1961, 7 x 5".

CHAPTER THREE

"In order to understand the considerable legacy of Ruth Duckworth's influence, one needs to understand the status of British pottery during the fifties, a decade dominated by Bernard Leach and his disciples".¹
[Clark, 1990].

Known to be the progenitor of the English studio ceramic movement, Bernard Leach was responsible for initiating a revival of early English pre-Industrial handmade wares. Like other Arts and Crafts movements heirs, he was put off by the lack of creativity evident in the commercially available ceramics made after the first World War. He believed that handmade wares were symbolic of a return to a greater quality of life and that the artist/potter who lived close to the soil in rural simplicity was the ideal.

"To him a pot only had integrity, if the potter had integrity and whatever was inside the potter's sole would be expressed in the work"²
[Drexler - Lynn, 1990, p19]

The appeal of his ideas and the passion with which he preached them attracted and gathered many followers. Although Leach was the most important figure in pottery during the 1940's and 1950's, it must be stated that he did not invent studio pottery. It was simple because he was able to formulate a philosophy justifying what he did, that his ideals were so appealing, taking hold of the studio potter's imagination. Leach's aesthetic was derived primarily from the Far East with an emphasis on Sung Forms and brown Tenmoku glazes [fig 1].

"Borrowing from the Oriental point of view, he envisioned the potter as an anonymous artisan who made simple functional often brown vessels; did not need to aspire to be an artist, for to be a potter itself was a noble calling"³.
[Drexler - Lynn, 1990, p18]

He is deeply connected with the potters of the Orient such as Hamada and Matsubayashi, and in most of his work he practised traditional pottery methods of brushwork [fig 2] and techniques [fig 3].

However because British ceramics were so influenced by the Orient, they differed greatly from European work and as Leach's philosophy was so firmly rooted in the English tradition, it left other ceramists with contrasting work feeling stifled.

It was ironic that Ruth Duckworth's work differed so much from the dominant aesthetic, because this actually worked in her favour. Instead of being discouraged, her work was greatly admired by her fellow ceramists, as they too were bored by these 'brown pots' of the Leach aesthetic and welcomed her innovative spirit.

"Ruth Duckworth's ceramics have a semblance of classic harmony. The fact that the unrest and change she showed in the solid tradition of British ceramics in the early sixties, and later elsewhere too, proceeded from her compelling need to develop a formal language of her own; one no longer based on the accepted ways of throwing and glazing pots".⁴
[Wardle, 1979]

From the outset, Ruth Duckworth's work as a potter was varied in terms of technique. Skills such as coiling, pinching and slab building, taught as mere exercises at the Central School of Art, she translated into her own personalised and sculptural means of building. Her hand built forms [fig 4], which seemed to grow and burst out in all directions, were very different from the formal, refined and familiar qualities of reduced stoneware being produced by other potters at the time such as Michael Cardew for example. Nonetheless some of her work is not what you might call beautiful, its most important aspect in my opinion, since this was my main reason for choosing her work as a

topic for my Thesis, is the way her work fills the gap between sculpture in the fine arts and ceramics in the crafts. Considering the full extent of this statement, Ruth Duckworth's work can only be regarded as...

"a cornerstone of modern ceramics".⁵
[Clark, 1991, p23]

Even when compared to the works of fellow European emigré's, like Lucie Rie [fig 5] and Hans Coper [fig 6], Duckworth's work is without question quite different in its sense of what a vessel could be, very unconventional in its form, surface texture and glazing; all of an organic abstract nature [fig 7].

"Her sculptural way of handling clay, even when making vessels had a profound effect on other clay artists. In England she first gained renown for her functional stonewares and large sculptures. Along with Hans Coper, Duckworth lead a new generation of clay artists that turned ways from the symmetrical Japanese-inspired aesthetic's of Bernard Leach to embrace a more plastic, sculptural style".⁶
[McTwigan, 1992, p22]

Ruth Duckworth's work has taken shape in objects that assume the form of pots, and she can be a traditional potter if she likes, but essentially she is a sculptor who has chosen the pot form as her language. It is generally agreed that these sculptural pots or vessels are abstractions of pots. Not only the forms, but also the liveliness of the surface [figs 8;9 and 10] and the riot of colours and motifs [fig 11].

"She has not deliberately deprived the pot of it's function as a container, but it is simply irrelevant to her way of thinking and working, the hollow form being expressive and fascinating enough to be its own justification".⁷
[Wardle, 1979]

The colour used in her work she describes having a tangible quality more than a visual sense.

"My colour sense consists not of the appreciation between one colour and another, nor in colour as such, but between its greyness and clarity, paleness and strength. The colour is more felt than seen".⁸

[Duckworth, 1977]

Some of her forms can be viewed from the inside as well as the outside; her bowl forms [fig 12] are more expressive inside and the pot forms can be viewed through holes in their walls [figs 13 and 14]. However in many pieces, from her porcelain works with their inserted keys [figs 15 and 16], to her signature or more renowned works, 'the mama-pots' [fig 17]; where the volume is dissected into two parts. This creates a spatial puzzle of interrelating sections. In other pieces such as her smaller bowls [fig 18] the interior of the vessel is divided into several compartments, often making the core quite complex. Because Duckworth works mainly from intuition, she finds that these 'split-volume' works are the most recurring element throughout the breath of her work. Yet she finds it difficult to explain why.

"At times I think I am making a statement about the left and right lobe of the brain. I am responding to a deep urge somewhere between my hands and my mind"⁹
[Duckworth, 1990]

References are constantly made to her love of nature and the organic character of her work. There appears to be an almost fertile quality in the work, which is sometimes, according to Duckworth, mistaken for a specific sexual content. Seemingly this mistake appears to disturb Duckworth, as she will happily discuss the strength and flaws of her work; she is nonetheless unforgiving to those who try to categorise her art. Recently she found herself in a similar position to the late Georgina O'Keefe, fighting

the label of being a femininist artist. While Duckworth may well be regarded as a feminist in her 'day to day' life, she does not intend her work to be seen as a manifesto. Despite this proclamation, the critics adamantly claim that her work is about a woman's sexuality, adopting the belief that nature is feminine and that her vessels are symbolic of vaginas and wombs. These shortcomings on behalf of the critics echo the familiar argument of 'women and nature' discussed in Chapter One.

"The critics do not seem to know much about nature. Certainly nature is sexy but it can be male, female or a sexual. It can be all three at once, I don't approach my work from a point of sexual politics. I think that it is more important to be known as a good artist than as a good woman artist"¹⁰
[Duckworth, 1990]

The kind of Art which I associate most with Ruth Duckworth cannot be precisely described as feminist, but it nonetheless appeals more to the feminine part of the psyche. Her strength is in the manner in which she works with her materials; her methods of building and manipulating soft, pliable clay, as opposed to carving or chiselling hard stone or wood, has no doubt left her to work with a new found spontaneity and freshness.

On seeing a piece of her work in an exhibition entitled 'Craft-Today USA', last Summer in Barcelona, I was first of all struck by the size of the platter-type form, its thickness and sheer volume, approximately two feet in diameter [fig 19]; secondly the strongest quality apparent in this work was not a tangible quality, but a sense of her understanding of her materials, that was so evident. The piece was glazed heavily, yet just over the rim and down a little on the outside, the glaze stopped, so as not to disguise the natural colour of the clay body underneath, as if this would be a denial of the qualities of the materials with which it was created. You become so aware of just how

important it ^eas to this artist that she was honest to her materials.

Duckworth works with a similar set of ideals, to those in that vital sculptural tradition pioneered by Brancusi and followed by Moore, Jean Arp and Barbara Hepworth; to name but a few. These artists believed that their materials were not inert but vital.

"Every material has its own individual qualities. It is only when the sculptor works direct, when there is an active relationship with his/her materials, that the material can taken its part in the shaping of an idea"¹¹
[Moore, 1992, p24]

When you work alongside a particular material long enough, you begin to know it, become familiar with what it is you can subject it to. I also work with clay and try to allow it play its part in the forming of my work. I am particularly preoccupied with the various textures I can achieve with the one clay body. This highlights the two principal areas of my forms, the interiors which are burnished, while the exteriors are more rugged in texture [fig 20].

This open and pitted surface is achieved by continuously stretching the clay, until the natural grogs in the body tear away from each other, resulting in a natural fresh textured clay slab. With the use of plaster moulds, I make my forms [fig 21] by a process called 'press-moulding'. Although they have the possibilities of vessels, if you take the term 'vessel' literally, my interpretation of them is 'abstract', derived from the geometric lines and forms, most apparent in seed forms [fig 22]. Like Ruth Duckworth, I see my work as a personal form of expression and prefer it not to be categorised. Having first discovered Duckworth's work, I soon realised that this was the joy with which both her and her work radiates.

"Such attributes conspire to place these pieces in a world of their own. They reject academic categorization and are therefore naturally nameless"¹²

[Vanderstrappen, 1991, p36]

This best explains my affinity with Ruth Duckworth.

This unassuming, candid and energetic woman, having no affiliations with any School, no degrees from any institution, no association with any group of artists, any movement or any world establishment has affected people in so many places of the world just by her presence and work? What accounts for her variation in form, scale and visual detail?

"No pronouncements come from her, no critical analyses, no formal stands. Only the impact of her work on all kind of people sustains her worldwide acclaim as a ceramic artist"¹³

[Westphal, 1977, Introduction]



FIG 1: Bernard Leach, Thrown Pot, Stoneware, 1923, 10"h



FIG 2: Bernard Leach, Tree of Life, Stoneware tile, 1929,
5 x 6" h

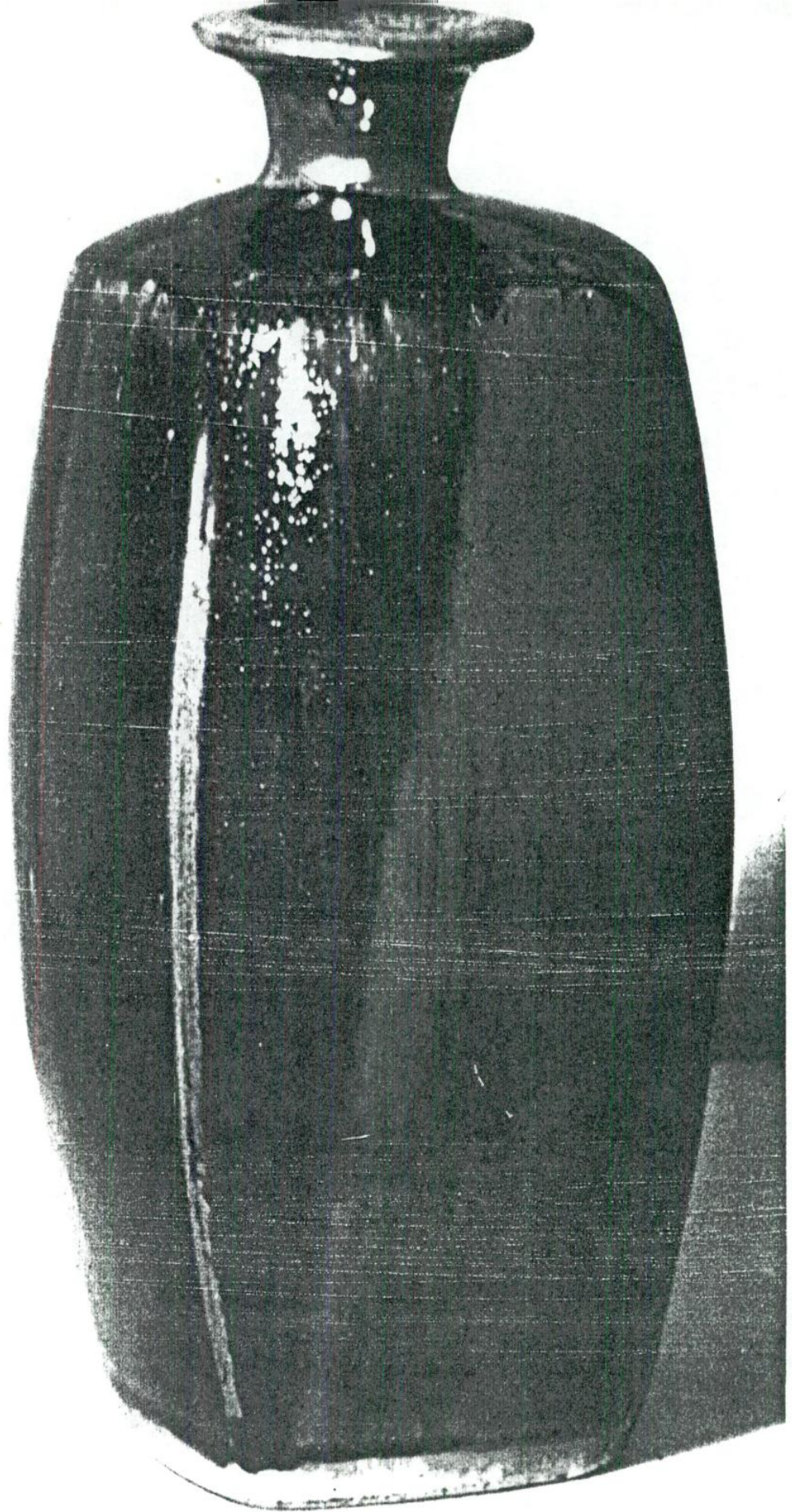


FIG 3: Bernard Leach, Tenmoku Bottle Form, Stoneware, 1927,
13"h



FIG 4: Ruth Duckworth, Free-form Vase, Ash glazed stoneware,
1967, 21"h

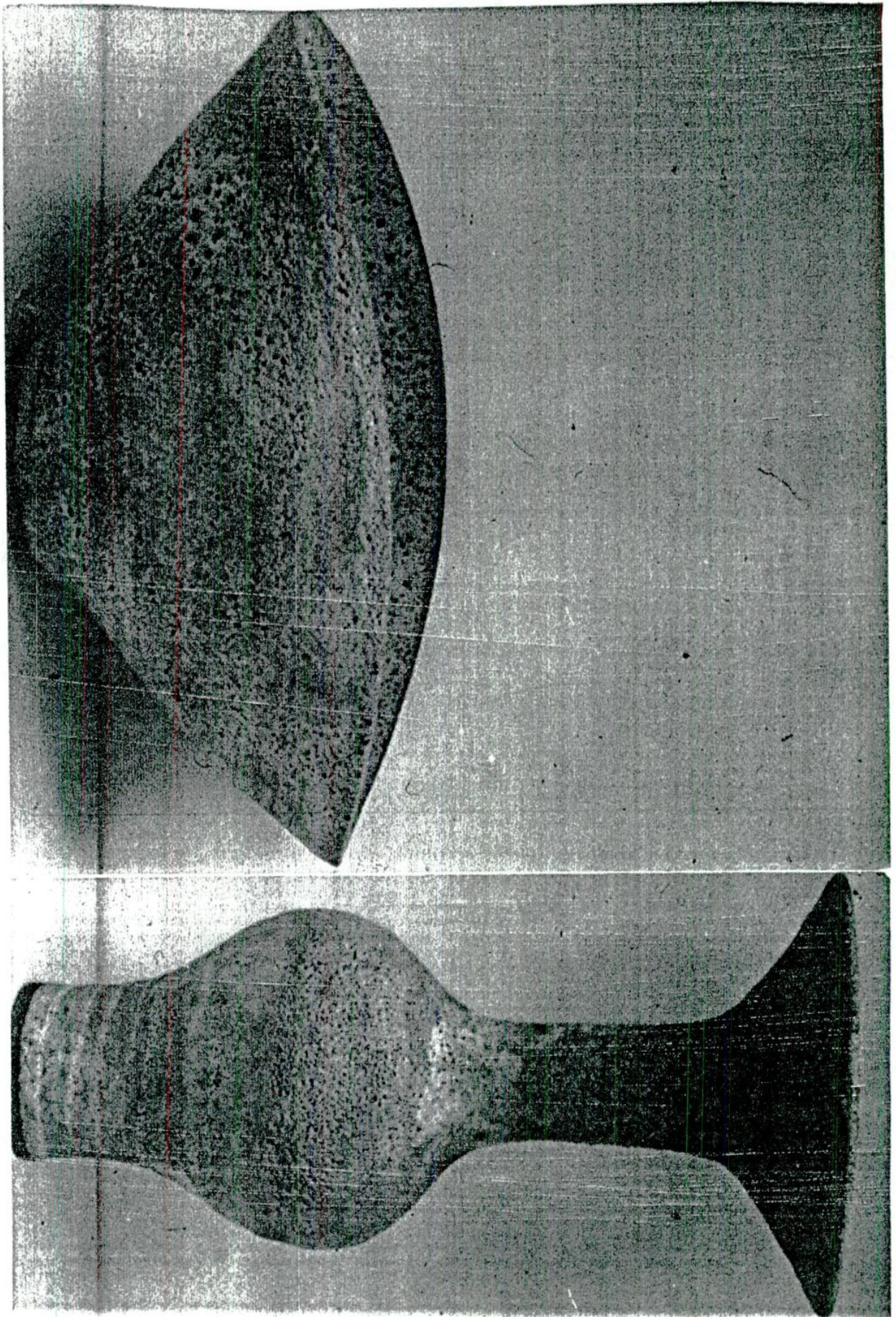


FIG 5: Lucie Rie, Bowl and Bottle, stains and oxides, added to stoneware clay, then thrown resulting in spiralling cues, 1971, 10"d bowl, 11"h bottle.

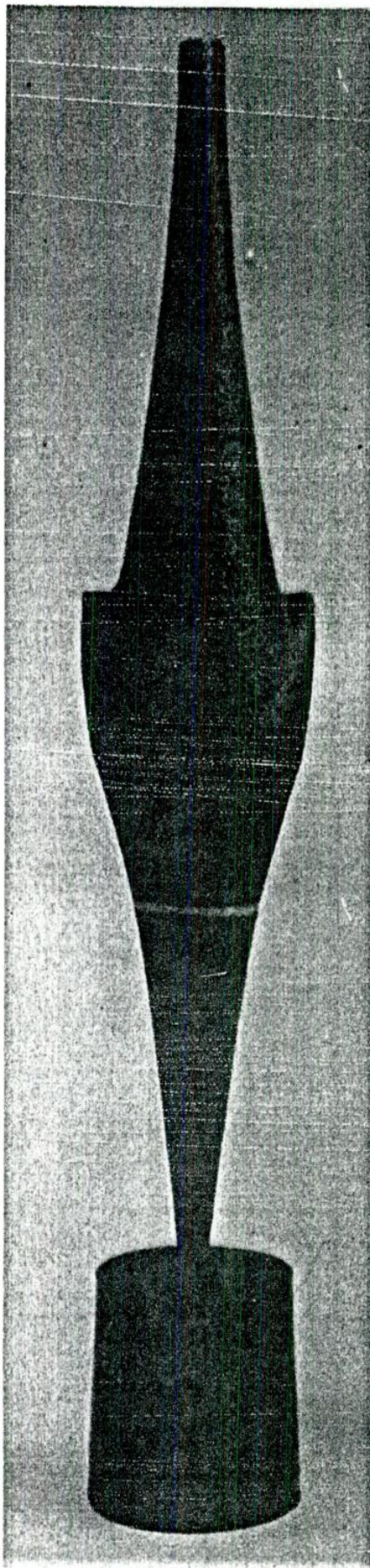


FIG 6: Hans Coper, Cycladic form, stoneware, 1962, 42"h

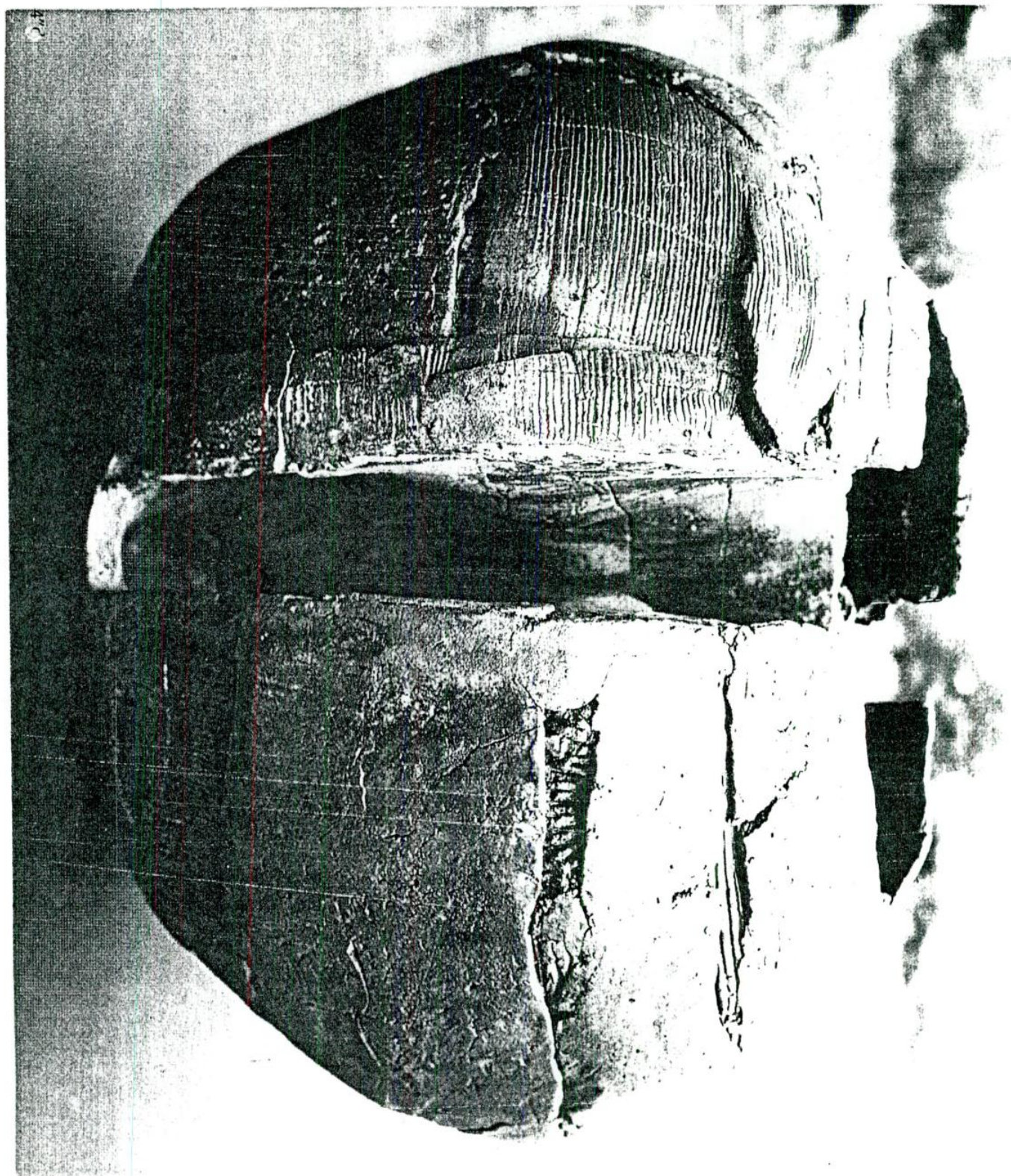


FIG 7: Ruth Duckworth, Vessel, stoneware, 1975, 24"d



FIG 8: Ruth Duckworth, Untitled, Stoneware, 1979, 16 x 19"h

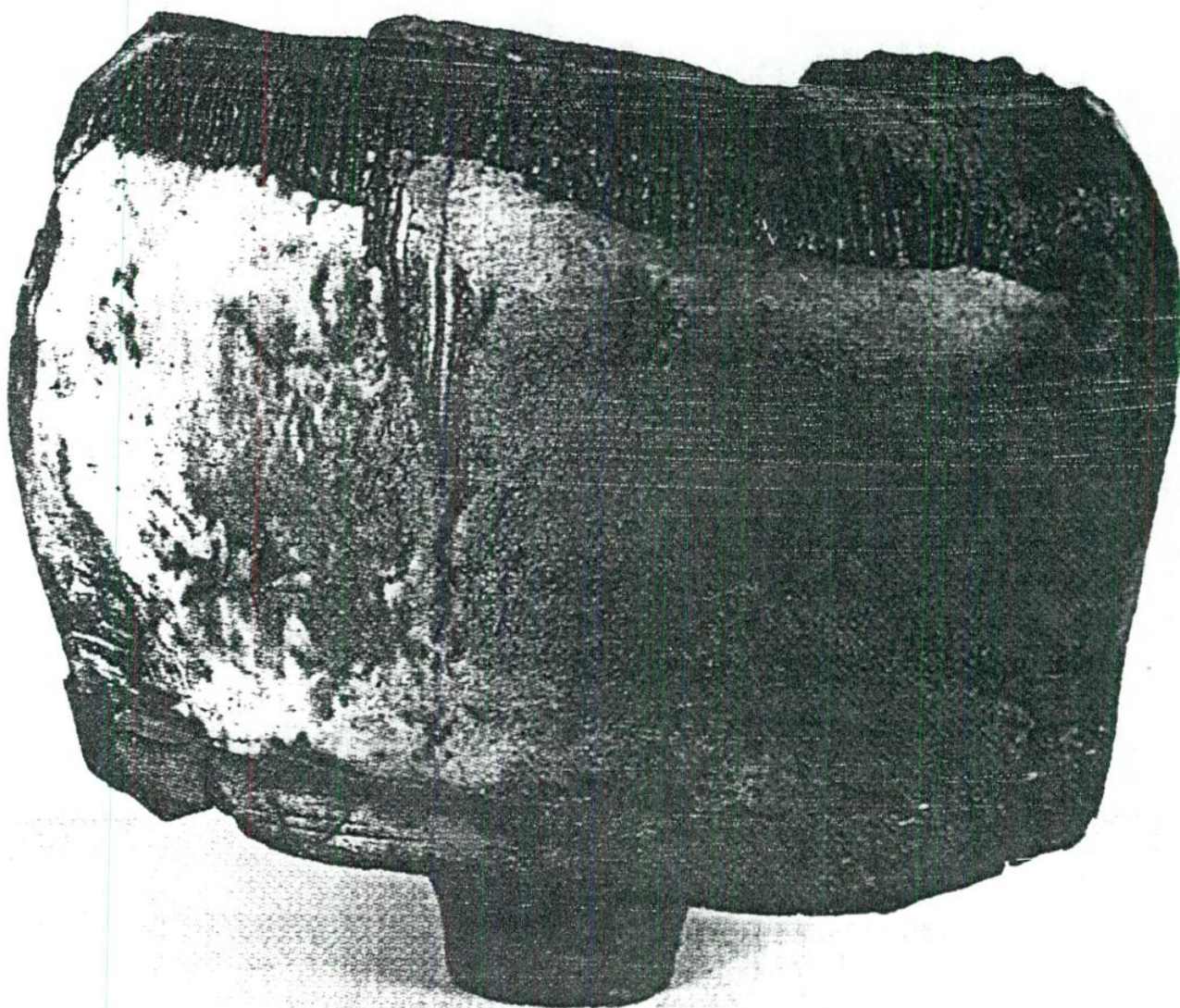


FIG 9: Ruth Duckworth, Untitled Form, stoneware, 1978,
15 x 15"h

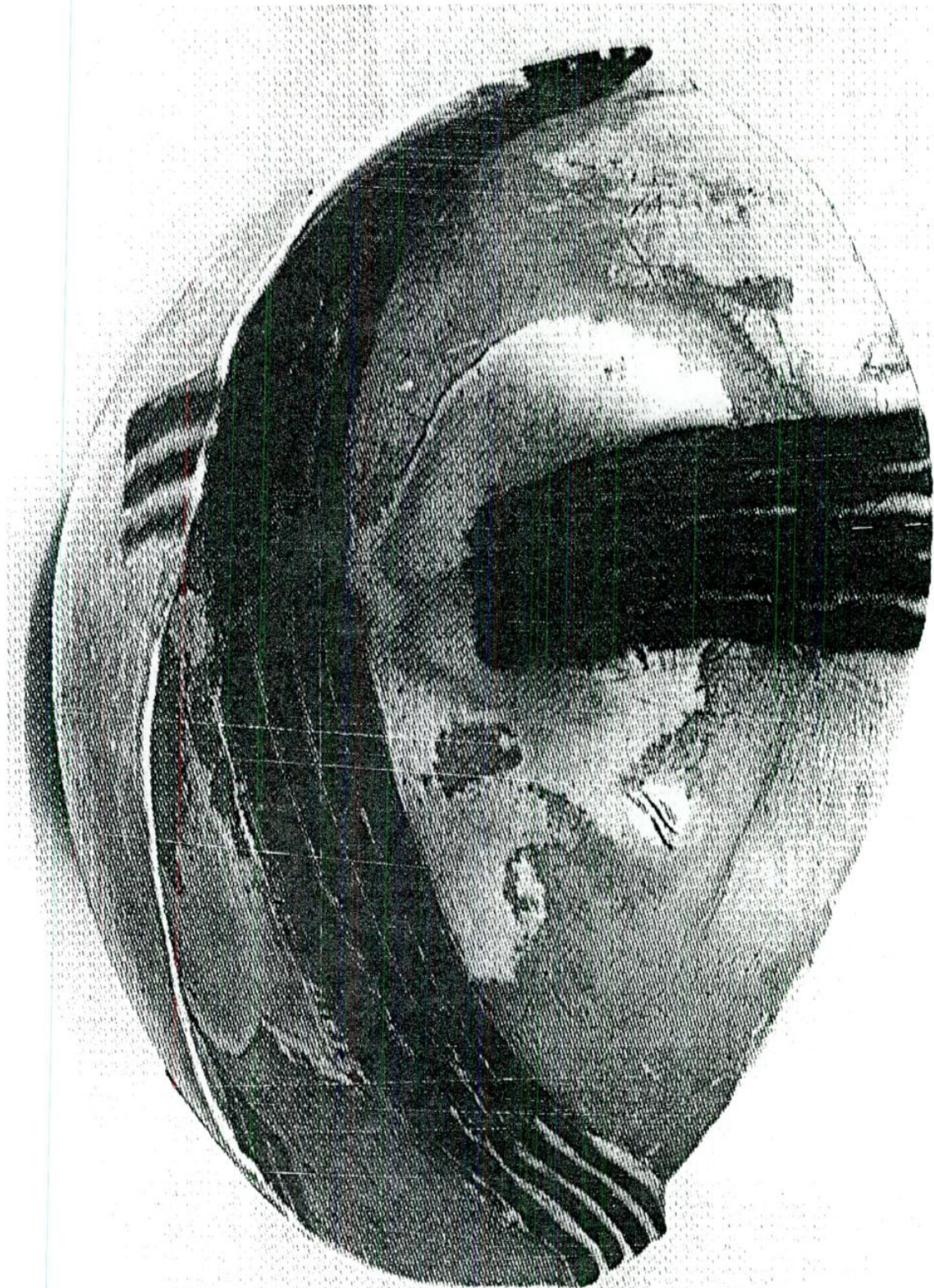


FIG 10: Ruth Duckworth, Untitled Form, Porcelain, 1979, 13"d

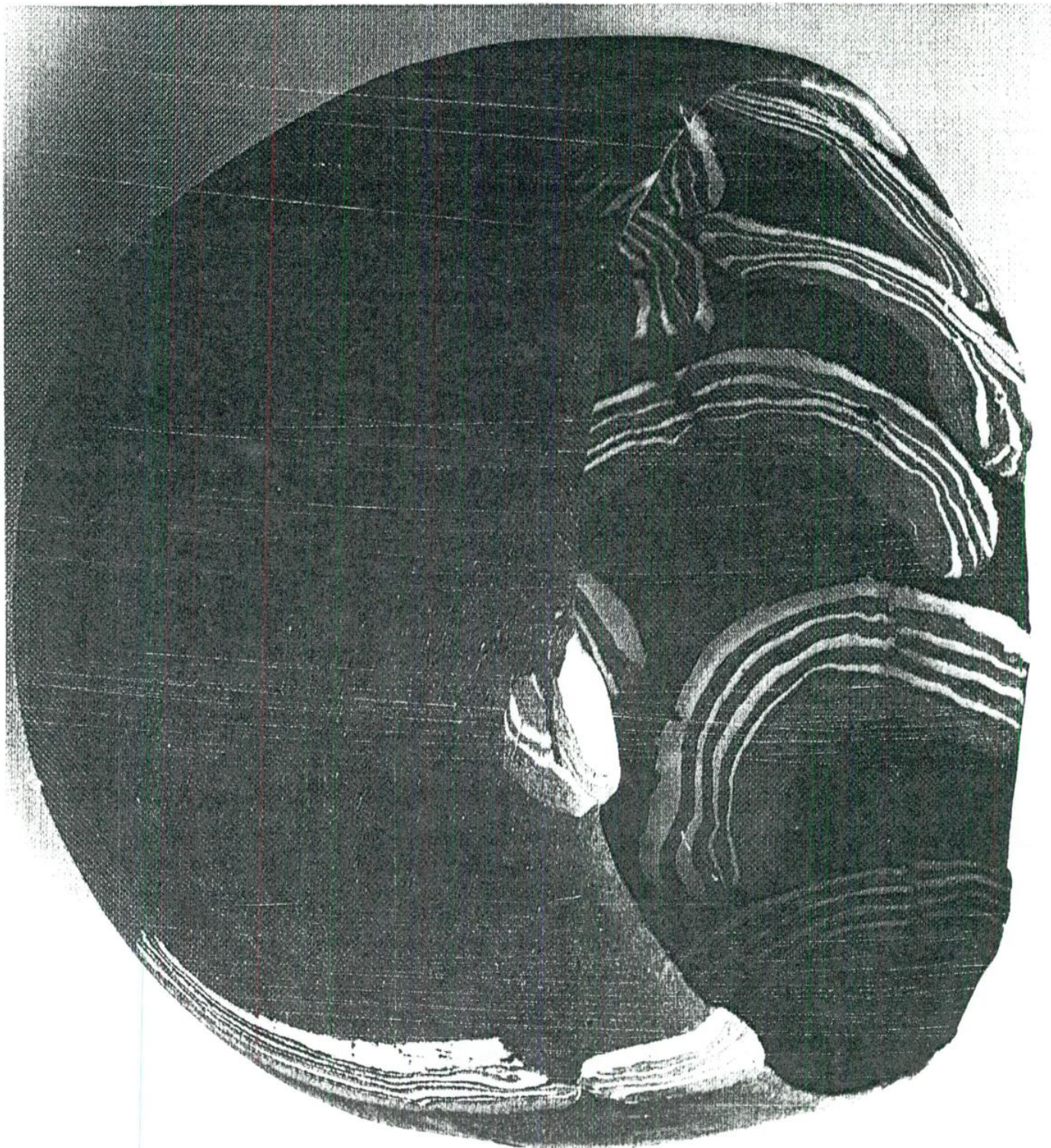


FIG 11: Ruth Duckworth, Untitled Form, Porcelain with inlay
1979, 8 x 10"d



FIG 12: Ruth Duckworth, Bowl Form, Porcelain with metallic staining, 1979, 13 x 10"h

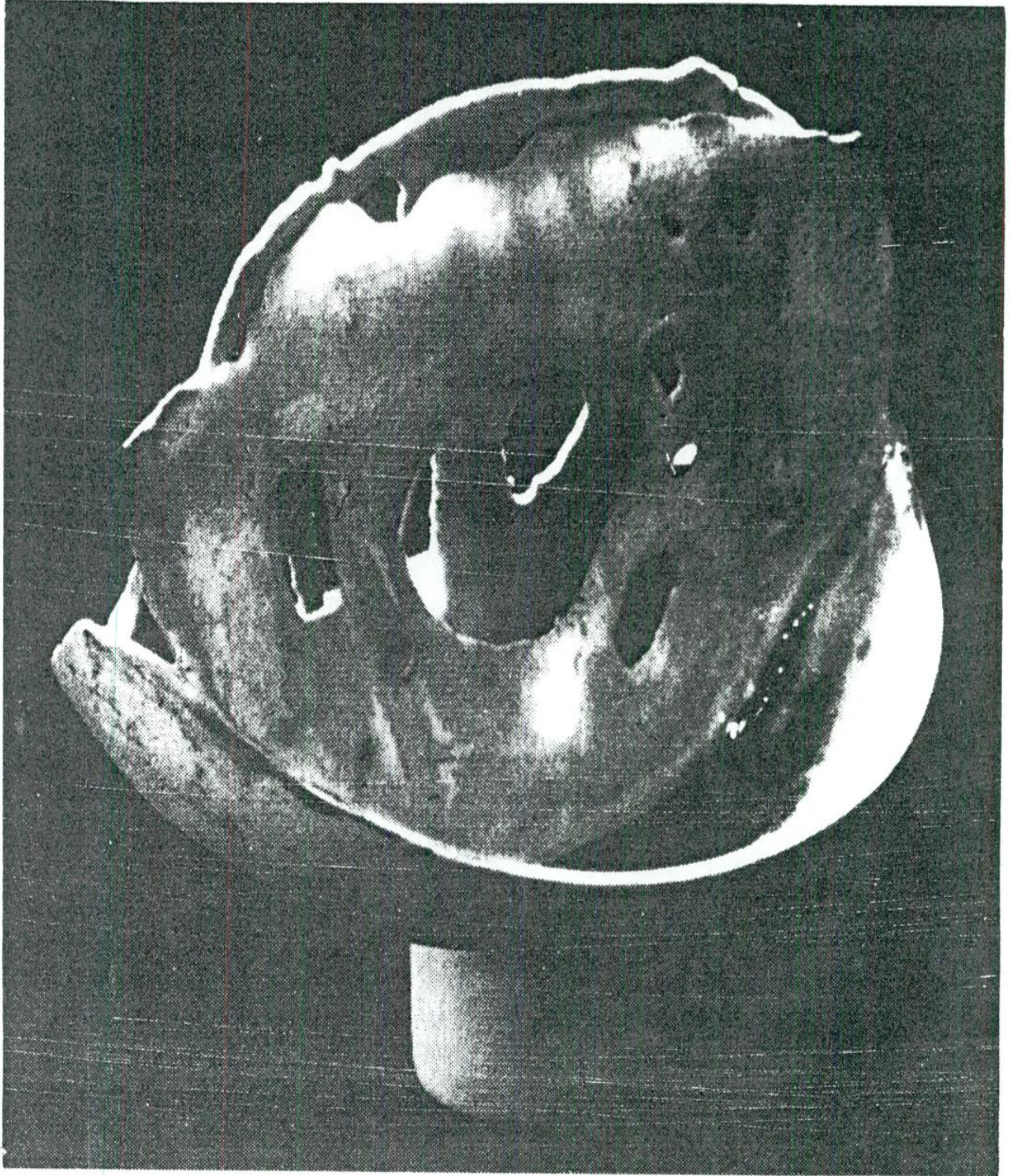


FIG 13: Ruth Duckworth, Untitled Form, Porcelain 1974, 5"h.



FIG 14: Ruth Duckworth, Untitled, Stoneware, 1987,
14 x 16"h x 15"

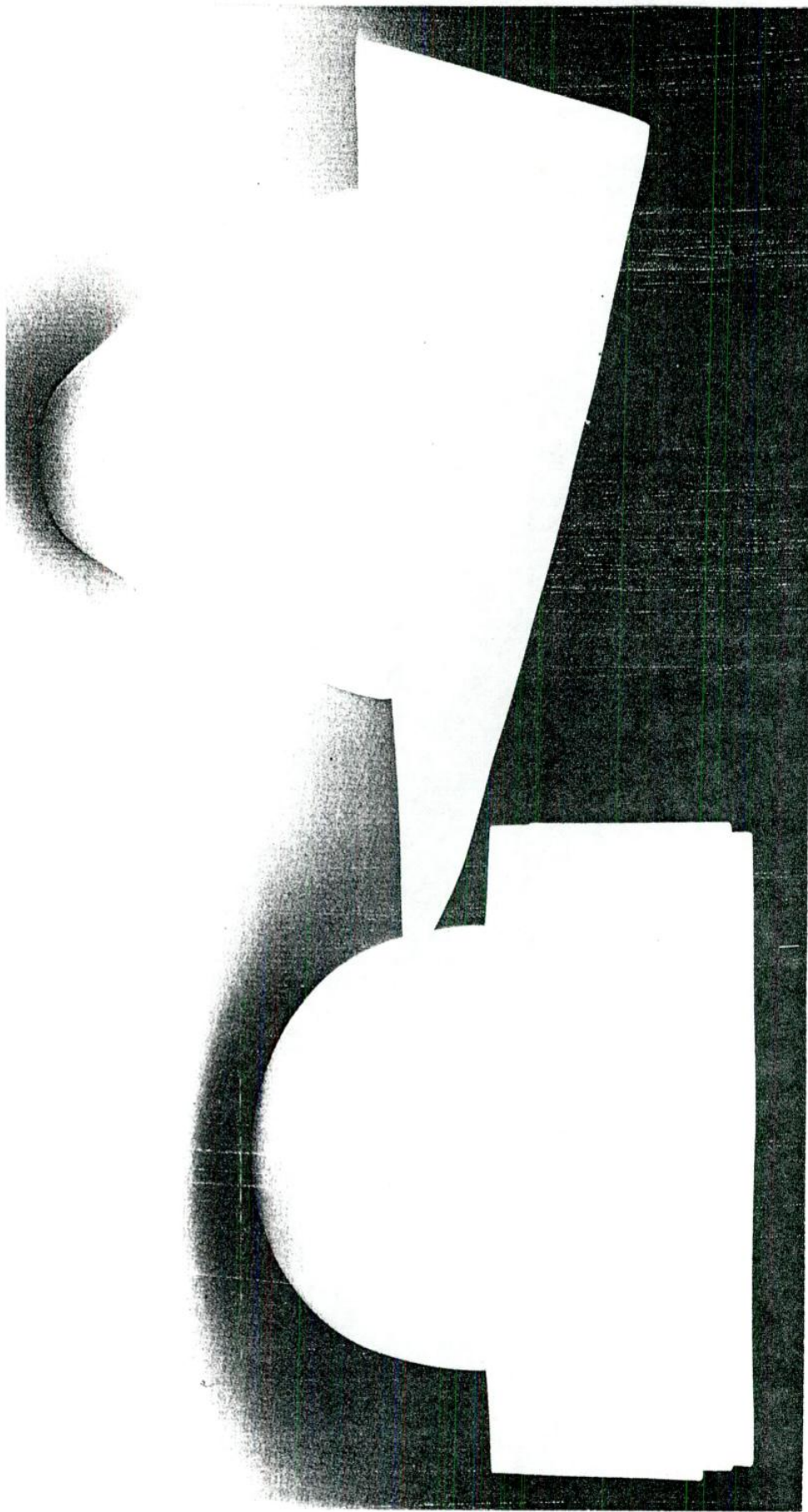


FIG 15: Ruth Duckworth, Key Forms, Porcelain, 1991, 6"h x 9"w

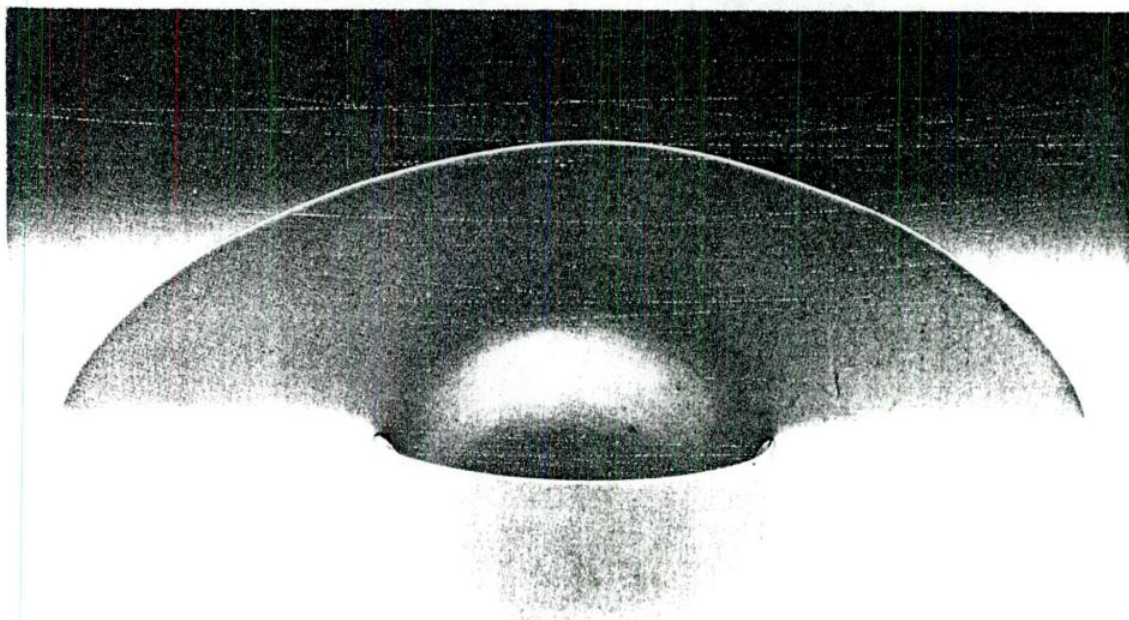


FIG 16: Ruth Duckworth, Key Form, Porcelain 1990, 6"h x 9"w

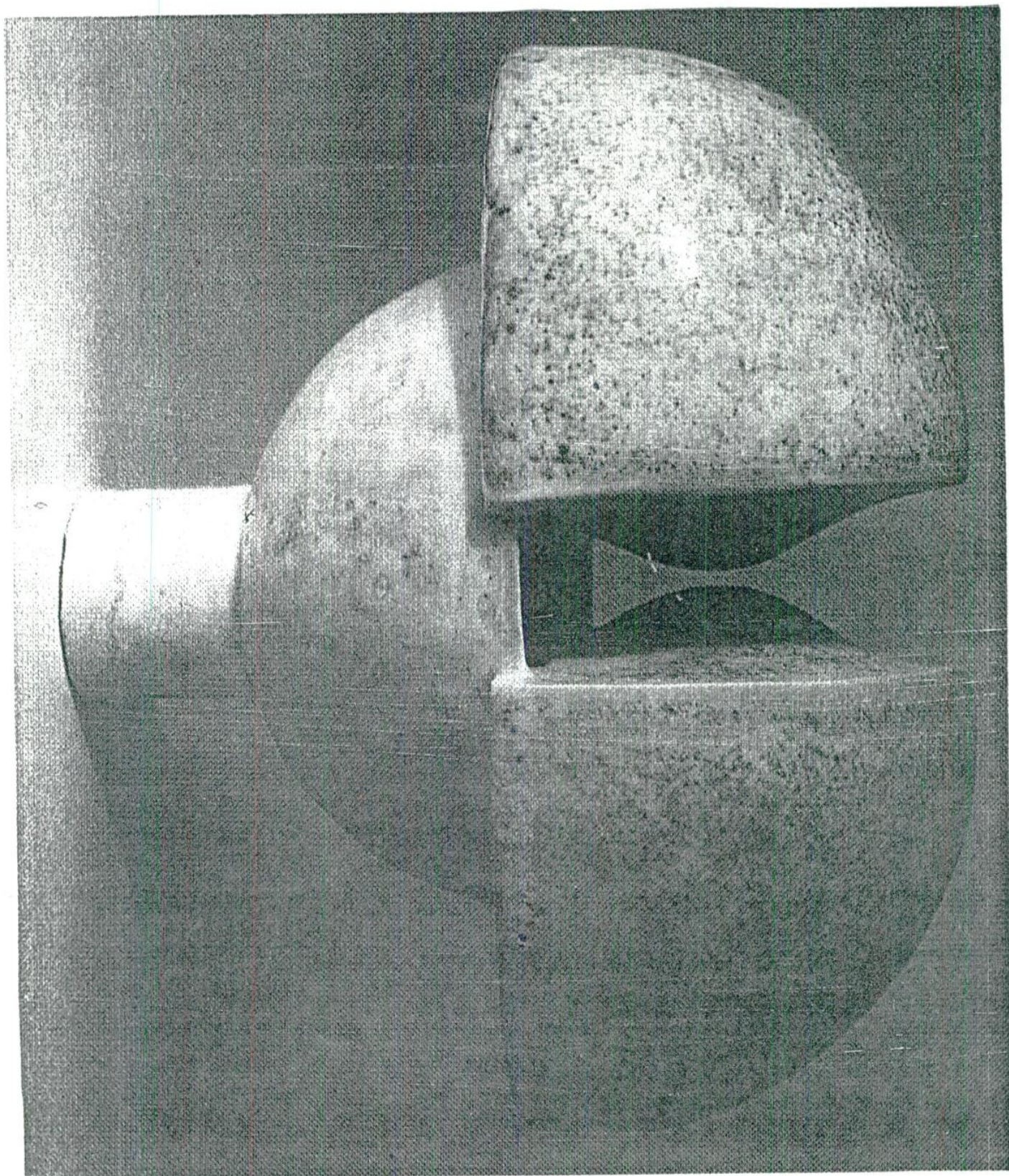


FIG 17: Ruth Duckworth, Mama-Pot, Porcelain, 1979,
5" x 7"h x 4"

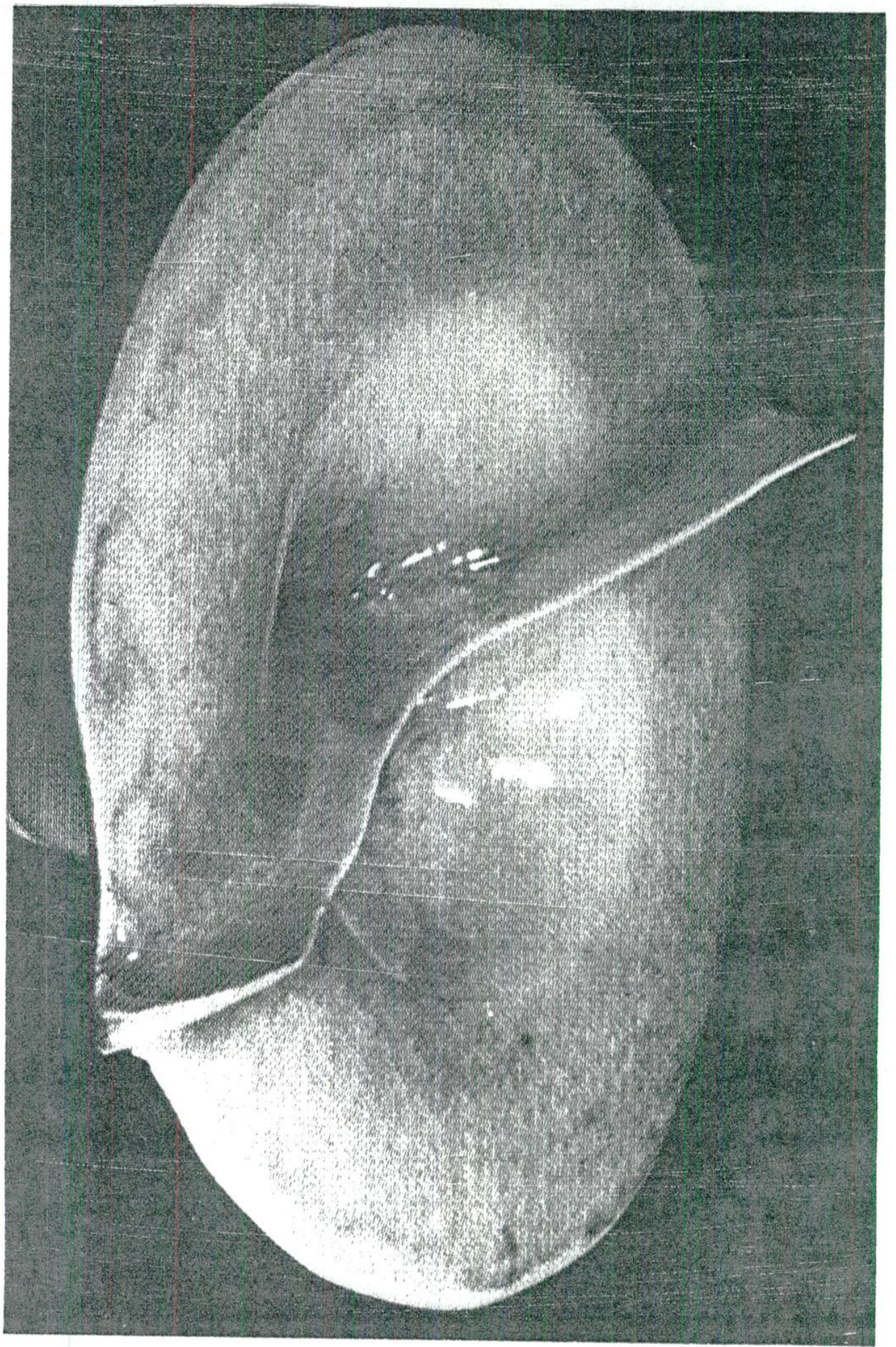


FIG 18: Ruth Duckworth, Untitled, Porcelain, 1973, 7"d

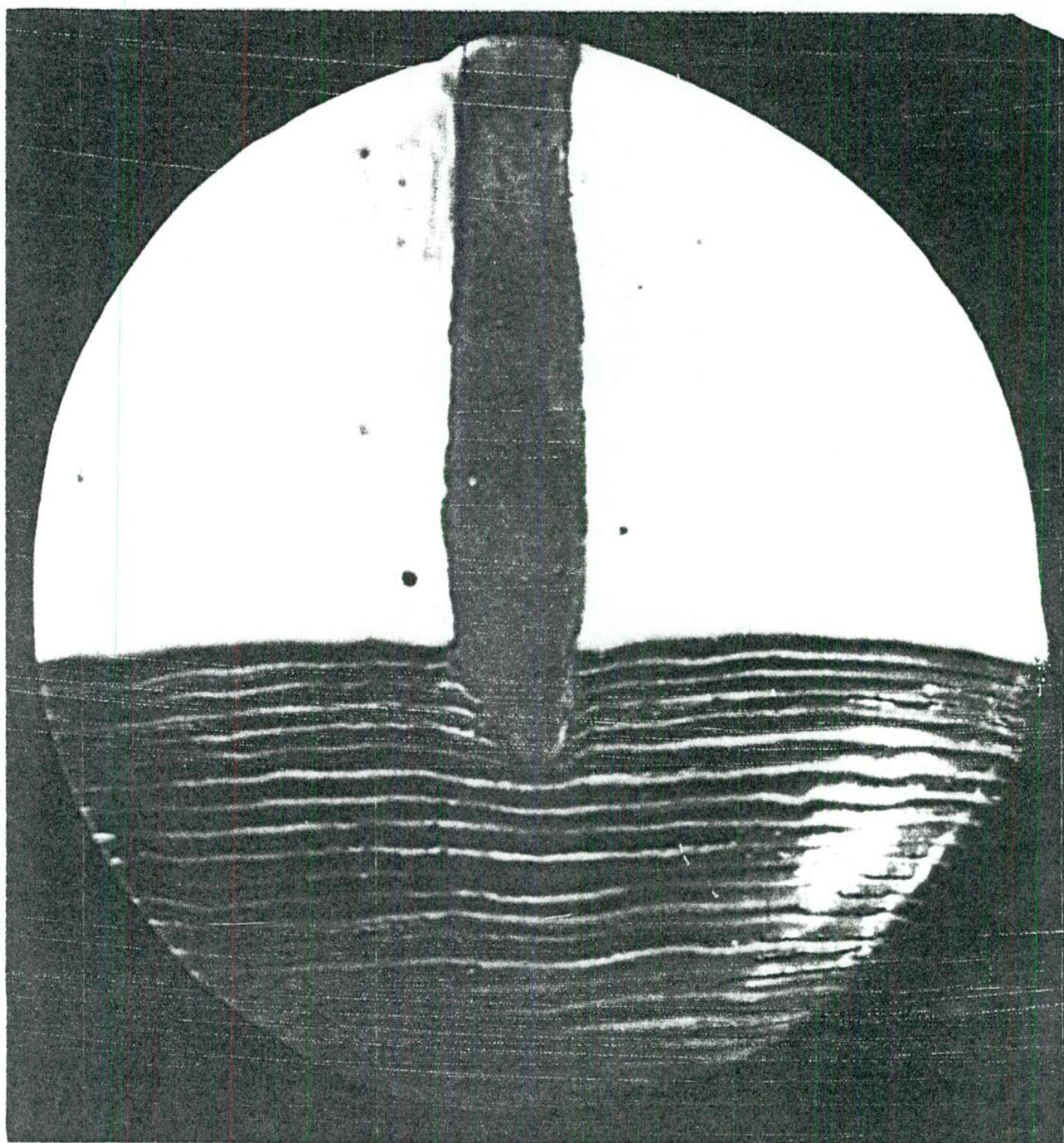


FIG 19: Ruth Duckworth, Patter Form, Stoneware, 1987, 25"d
Exhibited at Crafts-Today USA, Barcelona 1992.



FIG 20: Elizabeth Caffrey, Crank Form,
Terrasigillata and smoke fired, 1992, 13"h.

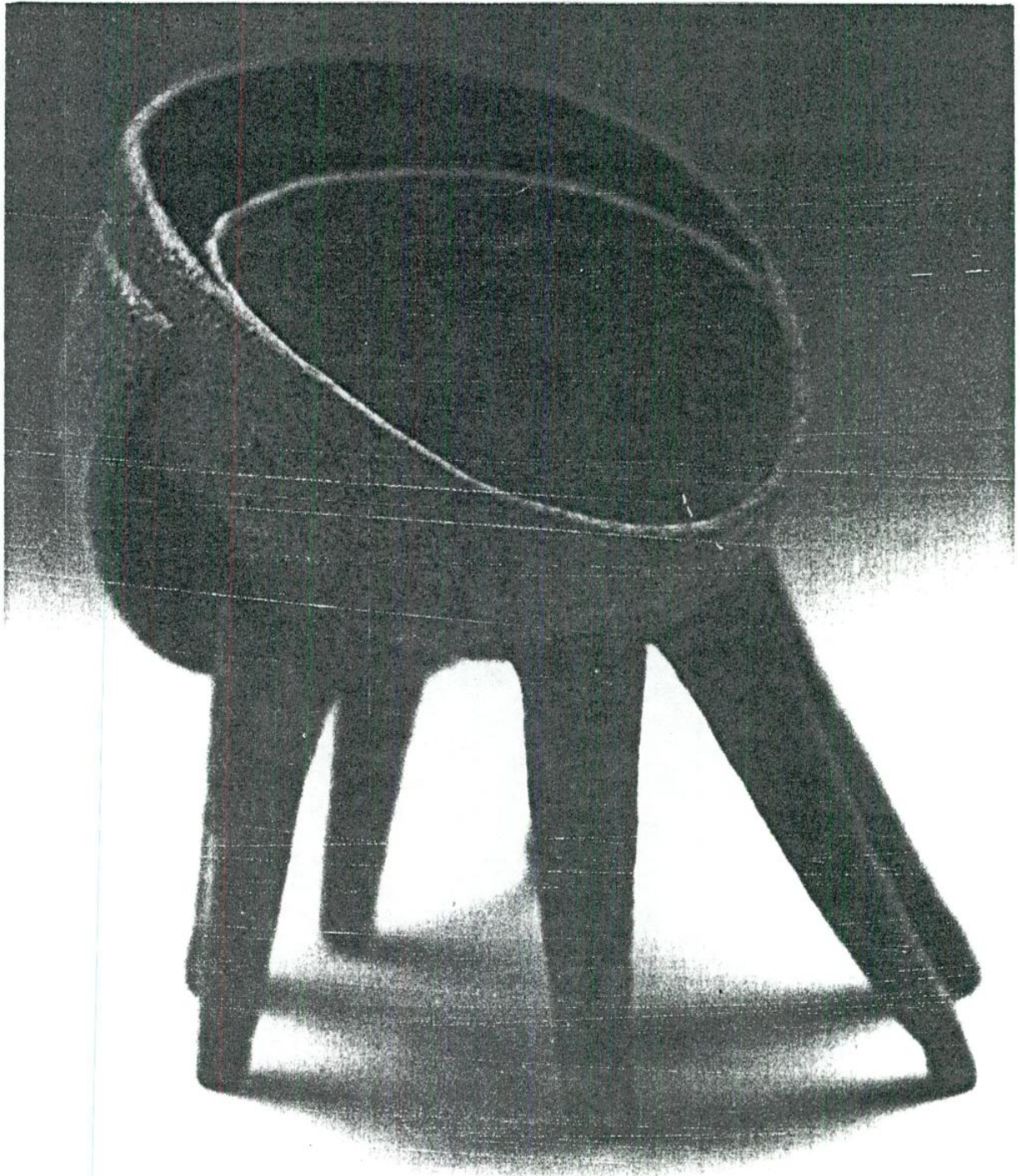


FIG 21: Elizabeth Caffrey, Crank Form, Terrasigllata, Crater Glaze and smoke fired, 1992, 7"h

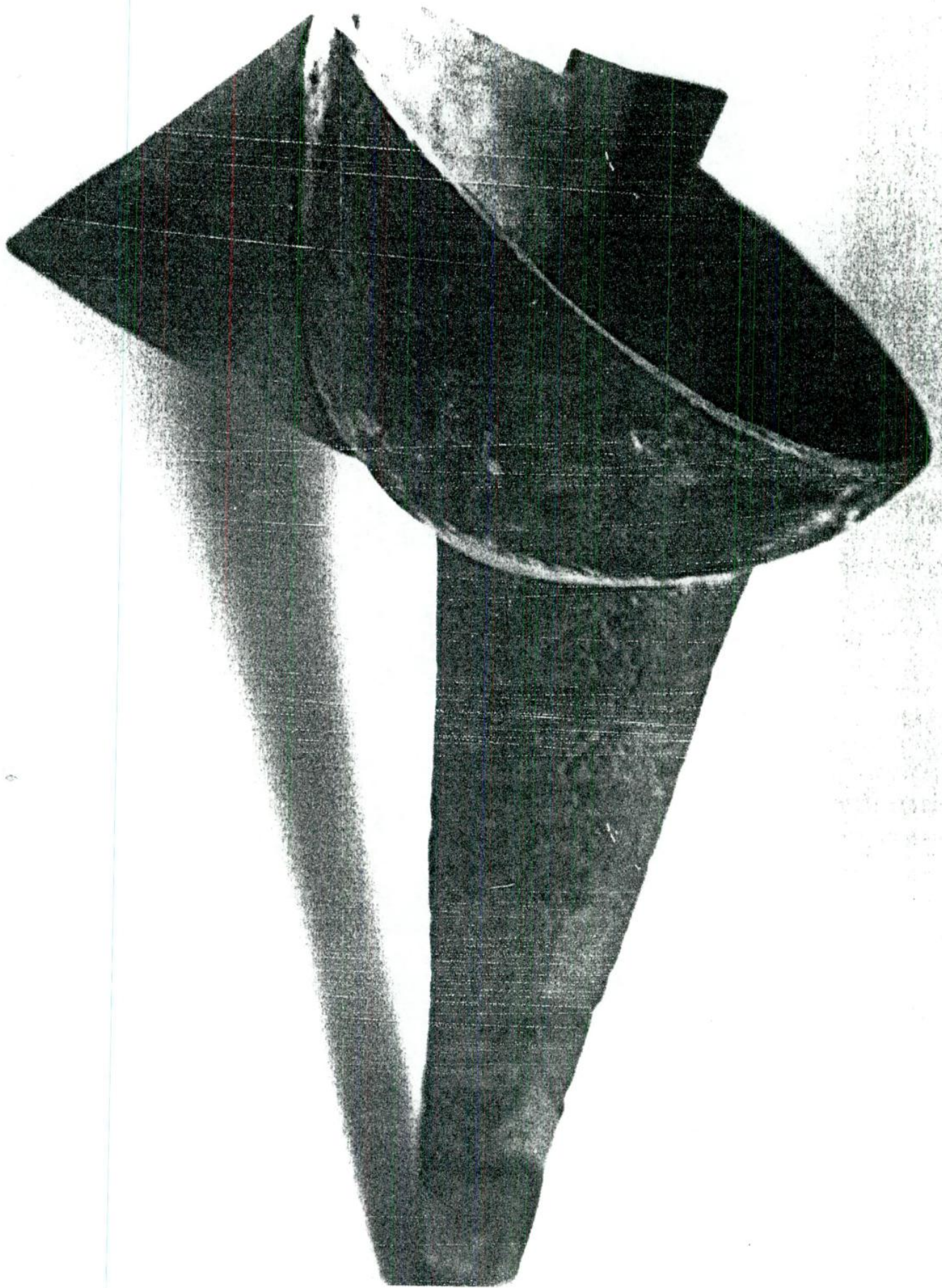


FIG 22: Elizabeth Caffrey, Crank Form, Terrasigllata and smoke fired, 1993, 18"h x 15"l

CHAPTER FOUR

Ruth Duckworth's life as a sculptor began in Britain, but it was always difficult to find patronage in her profession, aside from her teaching; and as a direct result of this, the scale of her work was always limited. There were very few gallery outlets that could handle, not to mention sell, large scale work in the 1950's. Although she earned a living from her ceramics, selling successfully while she was still at studying at the Central College of Art, she was still dis-satisfied with this kind of the restrictive atmosphere in Britain.

So when she was offered the job of a teaching post at the University of Chicago in 1964, she took it. For Ruth Duckworth America was to be the land of opportunity.

"I had some hesitation but finally said yes because I was curious to see the United States and Mexico, and to find out why people made those ugly pots that I so often saw in Craft Horizons!"¹
[Duckworth, 1977]

Before she had left, she concluded that ambitious large scale work was virtually unsellable in Britain due the poor patronage for the arts and few good commercial galleries; where as in America she found that it was both possible and welcome. After the Second World War, America emerged with immense wealth and power. Its success was based on practicality - Americans were making their money with their hands and their machines; they didn't philosophize or speculate, but did! This was part of an effort on behalf of the Government to heighten the awareness of American national identity. They believed that when a country's economy is doing well it is then reflected in the promotion of the Arts, amongst other state bodies.

"The Art that was to spearhead this Americanization was not in any sense 'traditional' - the key was innovation, innovation and yet more innovation"²
[Dormer, 1986, p19]

The American government had set up certain programmes to support the Arts in every aspects, such as the New Deal art programme, the Federal Art project and the Public Works of Art Project, to name but a few. The social conditions for patronage had never be better. Their aim was to create a relatively fair system of supporting and encouraging the arts! So in this bid to contribute to national identity the ceramic arena, of the Arts for instance, brought to the fore their unique form of 'abstract expressionism'.

"The freedom of the American potter to experiment to risk, to make mistakes freely, on a creative and quantitative label that is proportionally unequalled anywhere"³
[Slivka, 1986, p20]

And the name that is synonymous with American ceramics and free form of expression is that of Peter Voulkos. His talent for clay is undisputed and with an MA in Ceramics from California College of Arts and Crafts, Los Angeles. Then he worked with a sculptor, Rudy Autio [fig 1] at the Otis Art Institute in Montana, where they both encouraged free form of expression using clay. Voulkos is known to be a gifted and expressive craftsman, with an extraordinary capacity to handle clay.

"Voulkos pushed ceramics well away from functional, utilitarian work and in a sense walloped the vessel into asymmetrical, primeval 'statements'"⁴ [fig 2]
[Dormer, 1986, p22]

Now landmarks in contemporary ceramics, Voulkos main body of work consists of a series of plate forms which are punctured

with holes, blistered with pellets of porcelain, ribbed and strapped across the surface [fig 3]. Although these are still plates [fig 4], they are rendered non-functional by the artists in an effort to move past the initial concept of a plate into another form of expression, one suggested by the action process in tearing and marking the surface.

"Under the onslaught of Abstract Expressionist clay art, function was rendered unimportant and clay was free to be sculptural. Affecting first the perceptions of the ceramics community and then the art world at large, clay became recognised as a vehicle for content once only reserved for particular mediums"⁵
[Drexler - Lynn, 1990, p13]

Voulkos is generally regarded as the force that broke the barriers of ceramic convention in the 1950's, through this 'abstract expressionist' approach in the United States, using his plate forms, like a painter would use a canvas. It seems that he was a voracious devourer of information on ceramics, sharing the respect and reference that the Oriental ceramists applied to their work, yet more compelled towards the ceramics of Miro, Chagall and Picasso [fig 5]. Consequently he became a conduit between ceramics and painting: you could almost say that Voulkos was to ceramics what Jackson Pollock was to painting.

"At the same time Peter Voulkos in America was eradicating established ideas about appropriate uses of clay, Ruth Duckworth was challenging the doctrines about clay held by the tradition - orientated Schools in England"⁶
[Westphal, 1977]

Duckworth had been teaching as a visiting lecturer for a year in Chicago University, when she was offered a commission to make a mural for the Geophysical Sciences Buildings at Chicago University where she had taught previously. This was to become a major crossing over for Ruth Duckworth in both her life and her work. As a direct result of this commission she decided to make Chicago her

permanent studio, as she soon found that this project was to lead her on to many more commissions similar of scale.

"I find the United States a stimulating place for working. You have to keep on your toes - keep producing. You can work as large as you like, or small. It is a challenge, there is so much vitality here"⁷
[Duckworth, 1977]

For, unlike Britain, the United States was supportive of Arts patronage, regarding its projects, incentives and schemes, such as the 'one percent for art scheme', which demanded this percentage of the overall contract price to be devoted to permanent works of art. Within this environment ceramics was an ideal medium, providing an enormous variety of surfaces and durability, as it covered a wide spectrum of the sculptured arena in terms of lending itself easily to wall pieces, floor pieces or free-standing forms.

In this respect Duckworth has found a society which suited her liberal mode of thinking and working. Here her work thrived, so say the least, becoming stronger sculpturally. The opportunities she encountered made it possibly for her to make a living and still continue to create her own work.

These large scale murals in Duckworth's volume of work were a direct result of her move to America. The mural 'Earth, Water and Sky' commissioned for the entrance way of the Geophysical Sciences Building at the University of Chicago consisting of four walls [figs 6 and 7] and the ceiling [fig 8] and a 9' x 9' x 12' room. Based on the subject of geomorphology, which was an area of immense interest to Duckworth. Numerous geological ideas are represented in different degrees of abstraction, serving to sustain the attention of the viewer and also to extend the sensation of space, in an otherwise tight claustrophobic area.

The subject matter of this commission extended into a further series of works, as she made good use of this

mural's rich visual detail. Smaller wall-relief forms made in stoneware were a continuation of this subject [fig 9] illustrating cratered surfaces with perhaps lichen covering it or maybe a view of the earth cloud slowly ebbing over it. Another stoneware panel consists of radiating circles [fig 10] that would suggest sun rays or perhaps rippling water during rain, this contrasting with the linear coils suggesting the current of a stream.

From observing her work from the early Seventies right through to the early Eighties, it seems apparent to me to suggest, that this was the decade in which, finding herself in such a free and easy environment, her work blossomed. This vivacity, in my opinion was responsible for her creation of a broad spectrum of works, varying forms of scale dealing with numerous sources but all with a common link 'nature'. It must be noted that this period spans from her mid fifties to late sixties, so the sheer scale on which she was working was quite remarkable.

During this period Ruth Duckworth also created large free-standing forms [fig 11] that she derived from one constant source, that of bones.

"They are highly refined constructions that draw on the same sources - stones and bones - used by Henry Moore. Rolled, scraped and sanded these pieces are remote and cerebral in shape"⁸
[Harrod, 1974, p34]

These tall, bulky forms with projecting curved arms, have certain similarities with those of her stoneware panels of 1974 [fig 12]. Eight panels lined up one beside the other, each containing various modelled elements connecting visually. The long, arm projections make a pleasing contrast with the circular or nodular type elements.

Certain other forms seem to trail off the perimeters of the panel, giving that impression of continuity, which is always

apparent in nature.

Other wall pieces, which to my mind are her finest [fig 13], as they are so graceful in their appearance, fine curving thin slabs at close intervals [fig 14], and lines closing and opening to reveal crevices and forms underneath [fig 15].

"The viewer is drawn into the mysterious inner reaches of these forms, which express a private, feminine vision"⁹
[Lane, 1980, p113]

In these works particularly, Duckworth needs no use of colour because she

"uses light, rather than colour to define or bring detail to form. No doubt her training as a sculptor working in stone and wood reinforced her own prediction for a limited palette"¹⁰
[McTwigan, 1992, p24]

She made the majority of her murals around the 1960's early 70's as her work for the Geophysics Building at the University of Chicago gave great acclaim and further commissions. One such commission, which was to become her largest and most popular, was a twenty four foot by ten foot ceramic mural designed for the Dresdner Bank in Chicago entitled 'Clouds Over Lake Michigan' in 1976 [fig 16].

This piece of work is fascinating in its sheer scale alone. It is a literal representation of a map of the watersheds of the mid-west around the lower end of Lake Michigan. Overlaid by a grid pattern into which are imposed archaeological fantasies of Chicago as the site of an ancient civilization, abstractions of cloud patterns and other meteorological, geological and geographical features. The variety of shapes and assemblages of cloud patterns also serve to suggest mountain views from one vantage point and of water surfaces from another.

In this work Duckworth uses colour to contrast the waterways, glazed in various hues of blue, the land in various shades of ochre - browns, and then the lighter hues on the erect stoneware slabs, act as cloud.

Each one of the murals are quite different from one another. For instance, the stoneware mural commissioned in 1984 by Congregation Beth Israel Synagogue in Hammond, Indiana, 'The Creation' [fig 17] is done in spiral form, and a lighter relief.

Here the seven days of creation are told as in the Book of Genesis and are sequentially depicted in text. Illustrated in a large spiral, starting at the centre with the unformed universe; the story unfolds with the appearance of mountains, water, light and living things, ending up in paradise with the figures of Adam and Eve. Also the carvings and sculpturing of Roman and Hebrew scripts hark back to Ruth Duckworth's early employment in England as a carver of tombstones.

"This was an unusual excursion for Duckworth. She explored the phenomenal world and transformed it into one of her own, with textures, planes, fluid surfaces, gestures and colours. All function in an exceptional harmony of order in which the organic interactions of living things and their surroundings clearly follow the story inscribed in the spiral"¹¹

[Vanderstrappen, 1991, p36 - 38]

The last mural form I will discuss, is the commission she received from the Dr. R. Lee Animal Care Centre through the Chicago Council of Fine Arts, 1984 and its 'one percent for the Arts programme' [fig 18]. It makes a suitable contrast to previous murals, in that it anticipates the play of the changing light during daytime hours. Here she devised an arrangement of carved geometric forms in deep relief and dispersed them over the panels. The shadows move over and around these shapes, activating the fantastic animal images

drawn into the surface by her friend John Himmelfarb [fig 19].

These few chosen murals, wall panels were cited here to illustrate the acceleration in the work once she arrived in America, to an ideal environment with suitable conditions of patronage.

"The ambitious scale of major works, the wide ranging imagery and the expressive sensibility present throughout the series all serve to illustrate Ruth Duckworth's position as a major muralist of our time"¹²
[Westphal, 1984, p11]

Not only did these wall pieces develop, but also her bowl forms and free-standing work, one can see clearly the vast and varying forms present in Duckworth's work and how they became 'simpler', more abstract [fig 20]. The firing techniques rarely intrude, they compliment and heighten the work. On some stoneware objects oxides are rubbed directly into the textured surfaces of the clay [fig 21]. But in the majority of cases many of her works are 'purely' white [fig 22], where shadow and texture provide contrast and detail.

"Duckworth views colour as a feeble attempt to imitate nature"¹³
[McTwigan, 1992, p24]

Most notable of all her works are her symmetrical forms, or 'Mama-pots', as they have developed a minimalistic appearance. In these and so many other forms, Duckworth presents a dual, split vision. However unlike, for example Brancusi's Bird of 1912 to which her work is frequently compared, Duckworth's piece entitled avian bronze [fig 23] shows a head emerging from between two closed wings, Brancusi's Bird is one solid form. The difference in Duckworth's forms, is the hidden interior, which constantly re-occurs in her work.

"Does this indicate a feminist viewpoint? Duckworth discourages such an interpretation, and her interest in bio-polarity or inside versus outside long predates her familiarity with such artists as Louise Bourgeois or Eva Hesse"¹⁴
[McTwigan, 1992, p24]

Though these works are relatively small, they have a monumental air due to the familiarity Duckworth holds in her materials so they do not have the look of maquettes. This probably has something to do with the fact that in making, she includes details - such as porcelain pins [fig 24] which fastens the form together, a detail which might not work on a form three times in size!

"In both the small works and the large, there is the same monumentality; a secure interaction between a life forever in a flux and a form that catches that life when it stops for a moment to take a breath in the hands of Ruth Duckworth"¹⁵
[Vanderstrappen, 1991, p38]

Some other fine and smaller porcelain works, and her 'spade' inserts in her vessel forms [fig 25], looking more like out stretched arms swelling from resting inside the vessel [fig 26] is almost similar to how a child gestates inside its mothers body.

Out of this amazing body of work one can clearly realise that here is an artist, fully aware of the strength of the medium, fully at one with nature and consequently this echo's in her work. She has now created a harmony with herself and the work. A woman who has linked the world of the potter to that of the sculptor and in doing so has crossed the boundaries once laid, but now are no longer relevant! Her work sits happily in craft or art galleries; and challenges definitions of the established hierarchical practices, to set standards of its own.

She has been a remarkable influence in contemporary ceramics in that she brought about such a tremendous change in

attitudes regarding the potential of clay.

"In the history of the Twentieth Century ceramics, Ruth Duckworth has been accorded her due place alongside Vaulkos, as the driving force behind the renewal that has been taking place since 1960, and her work continues to fascinate, not only for its intense power and conviction but also for the ~~work~~ grace and cool elegance that radiates from it"¹⁶

[Wardle, 1979]

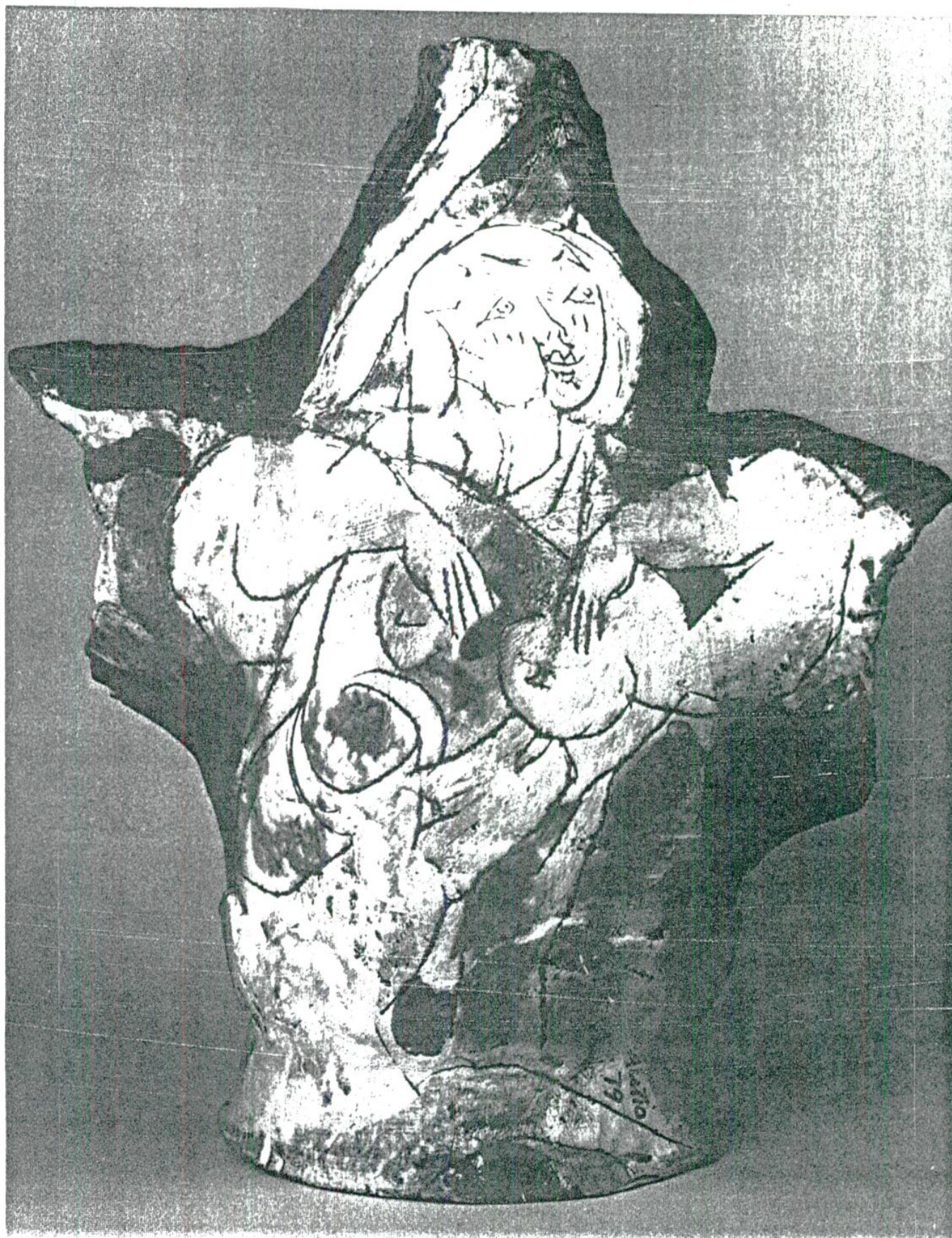


FIG 1: Rudy Atio, Two Floating Ladies and Cow, stoneware,
1979, 30"h



FIG 2: Peter Voulkos, Plaque, stoneware, 1963, 10"h

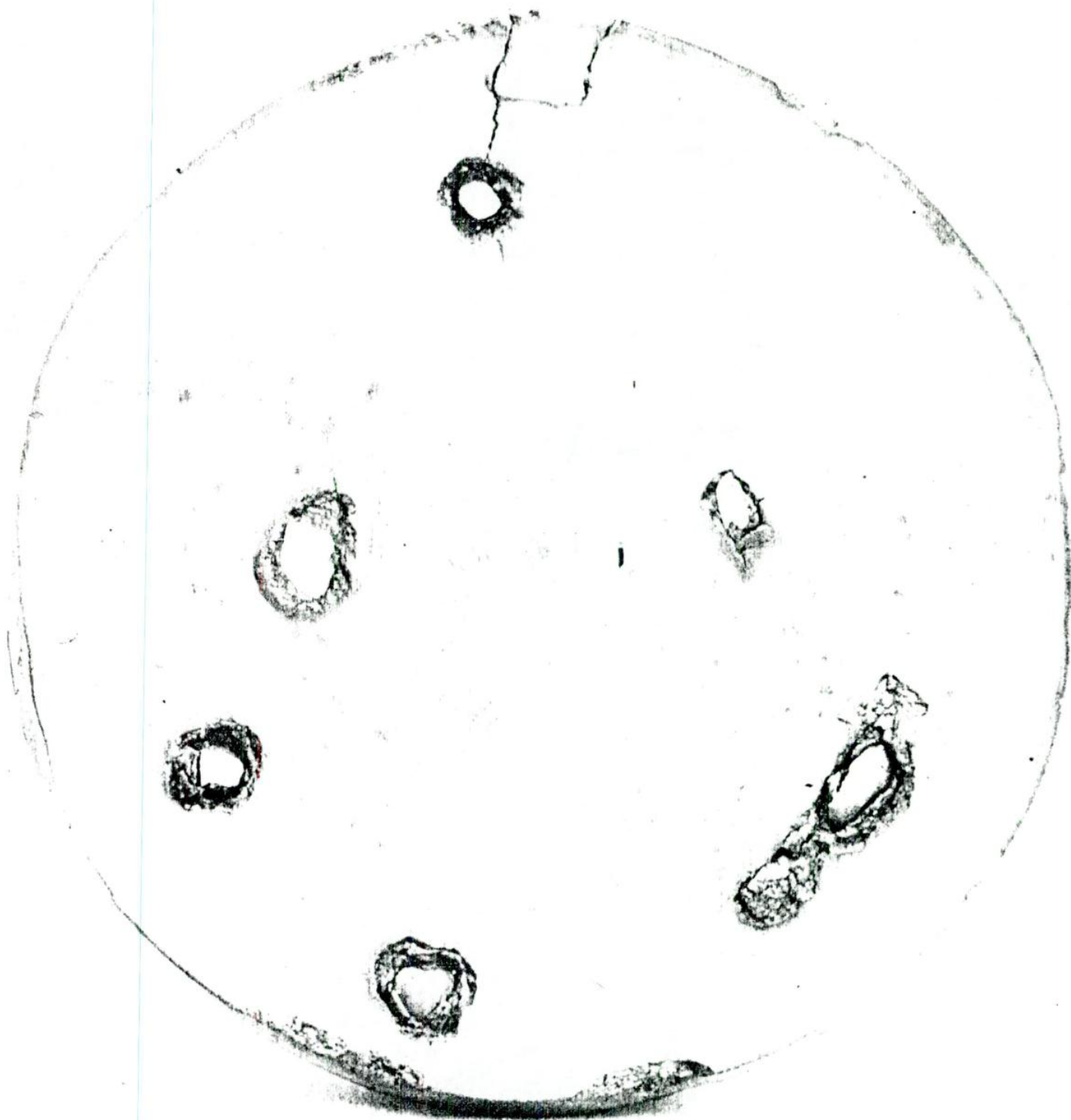


FIG 3: Peter Voulkos, Untitled Plate, stoneware, 1977, 23"d

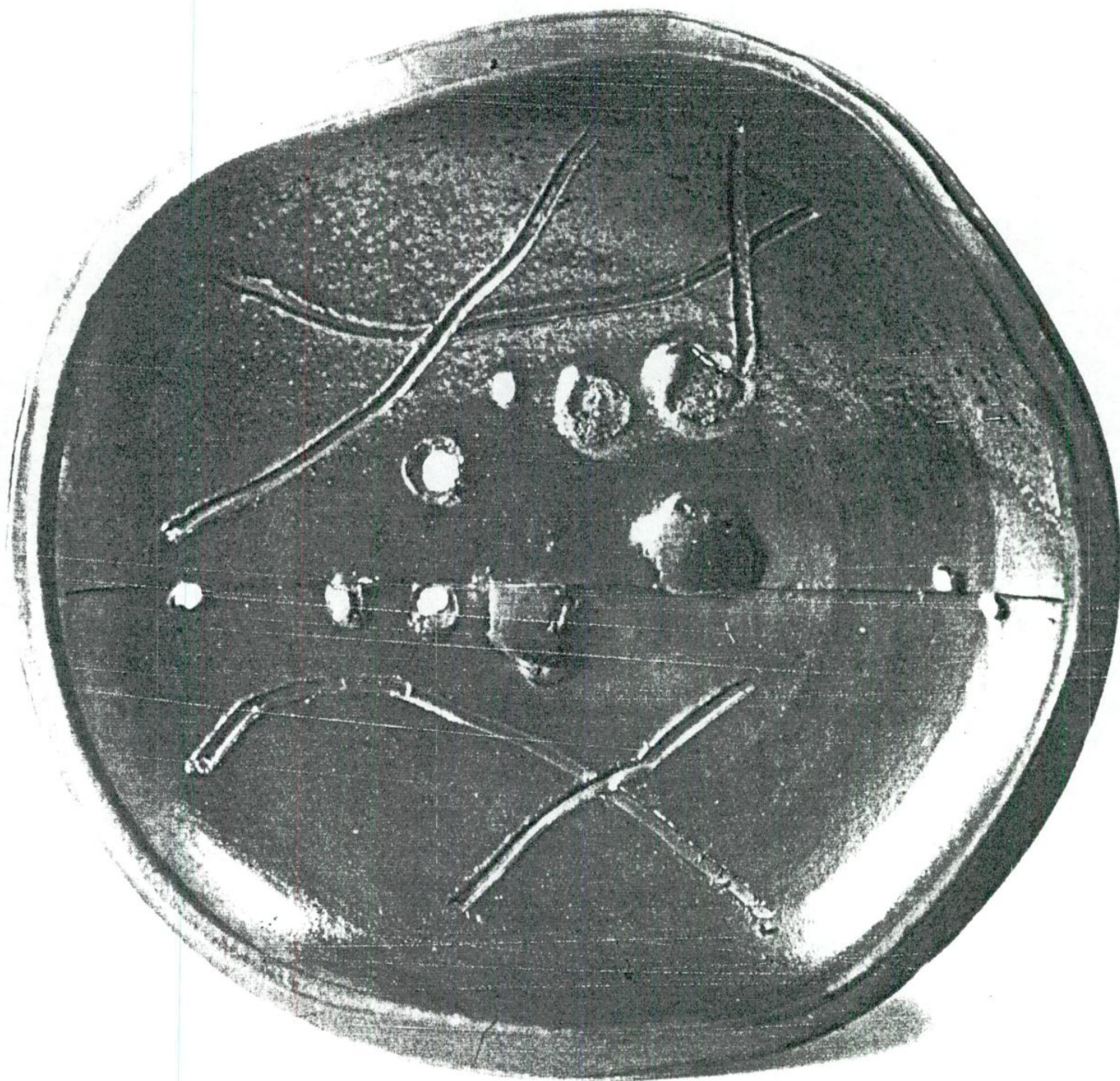


FIG 4: Peter Voulkos, Untitled Plate, stoneware, 1979, 18 x 19"

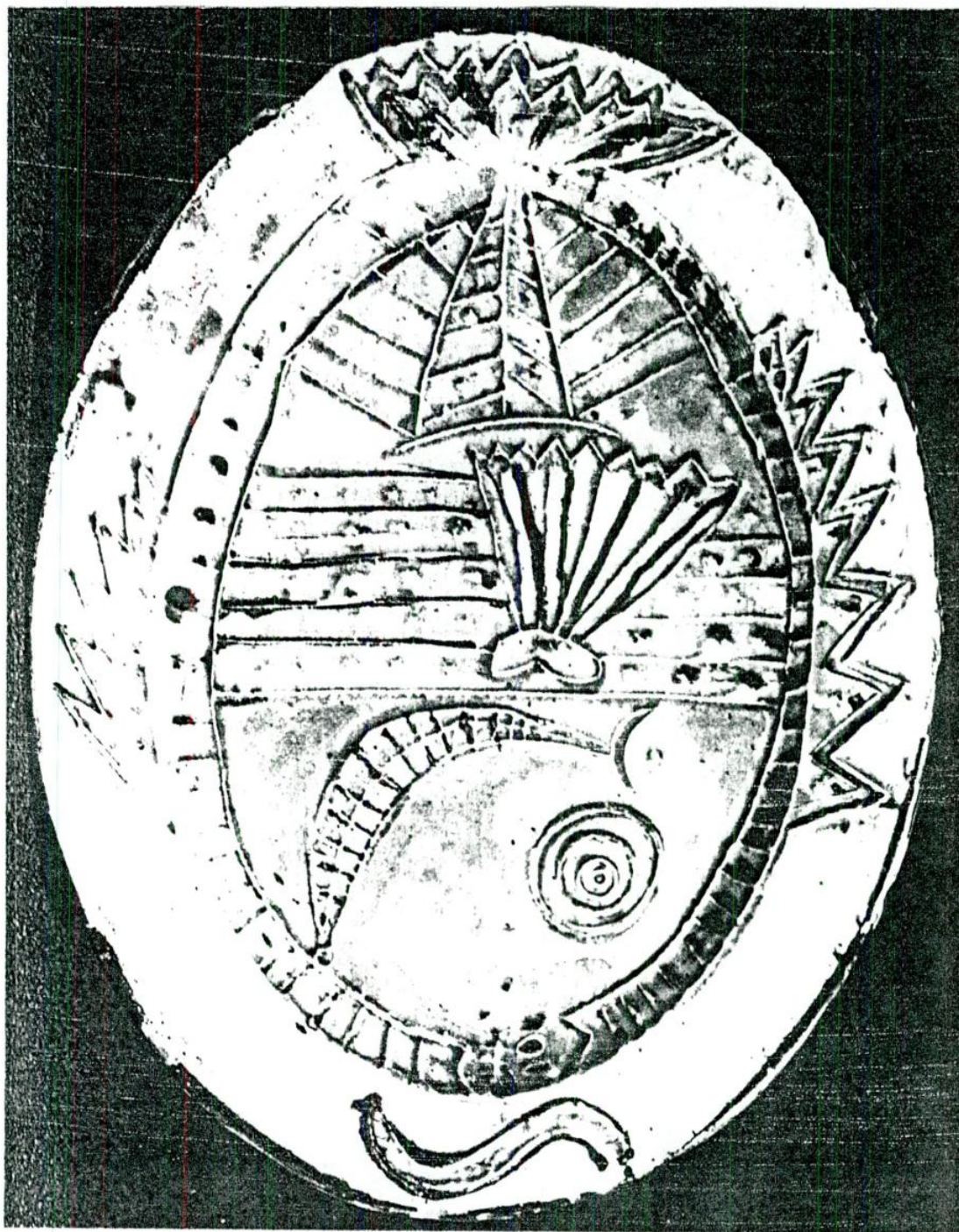


FIG 5: Pablo Picasso, Fishing Profile, White earthenware,
1951, 20 x 15"



FIG 6: Ruth Duckworth, Earth, Water and Sky, stoneware mural, 1968, Corner detail.

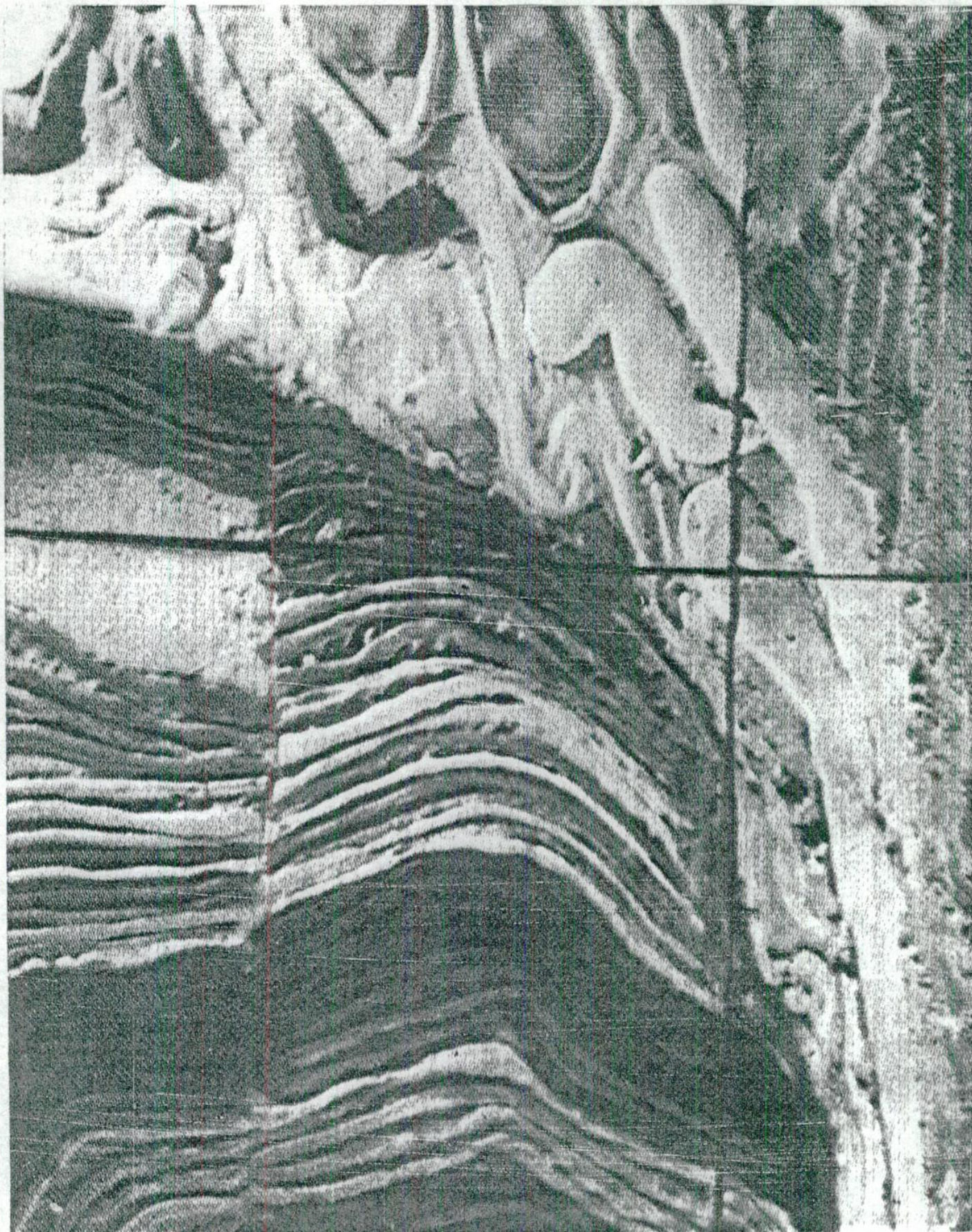


FIG 7: Ruth Duckworth, Earth, Water and Sky, stoneware mural, 1968, east wall detail.

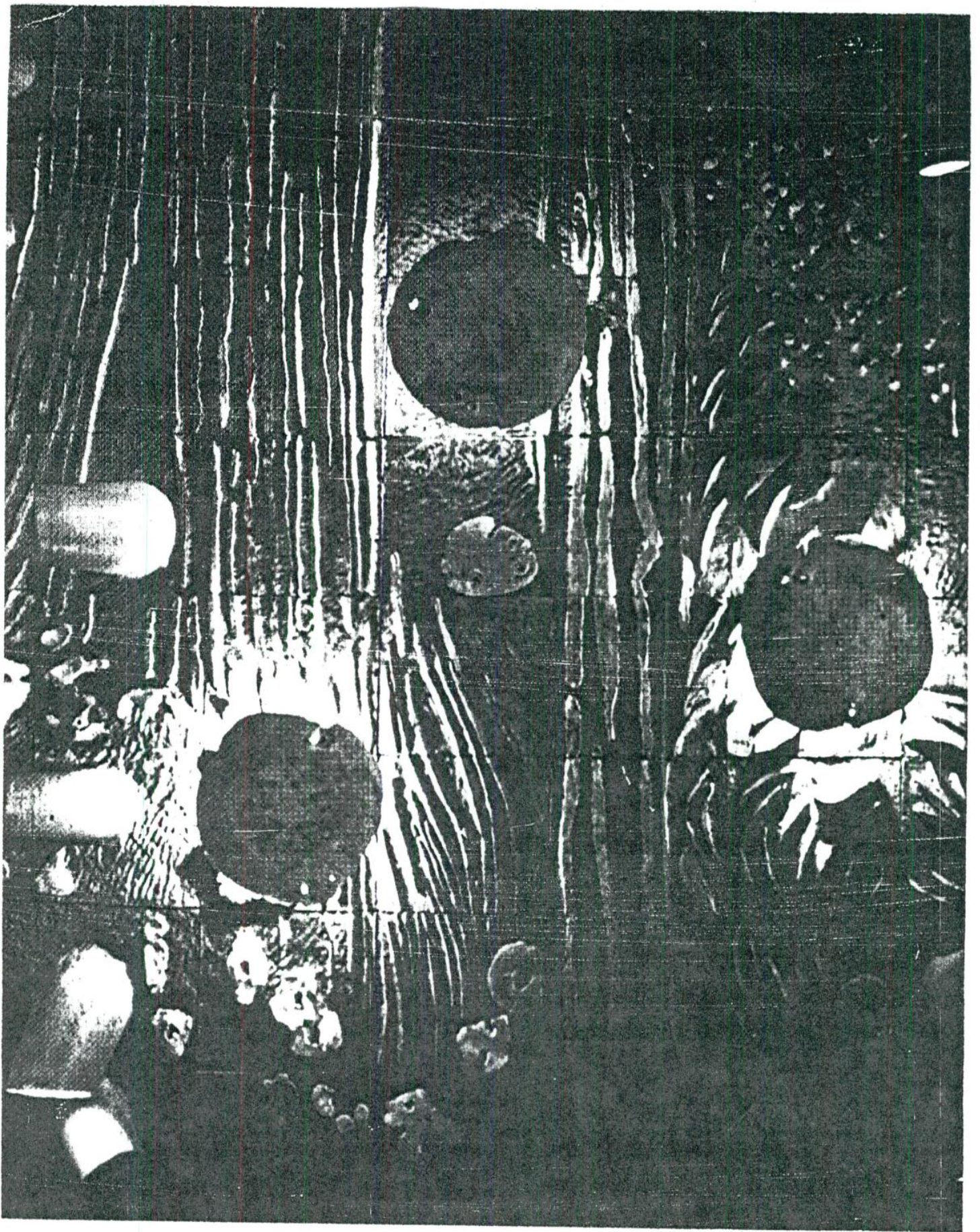


FIG 8: Ruth Duckworth, Earth, Water and Sky, stoneware mural, 1968, ceiling detail.

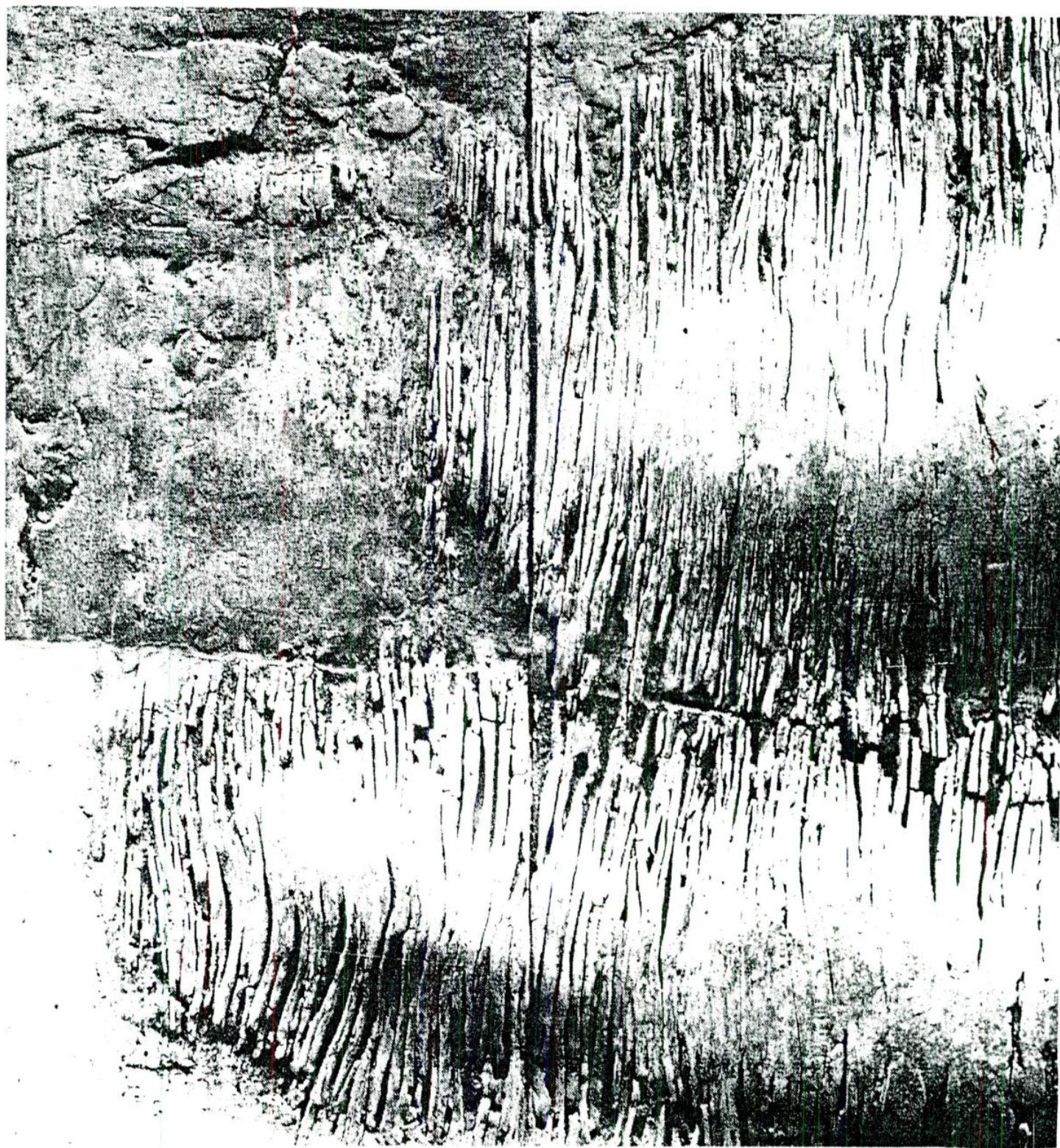


FIG 9: Ruth Duckworth, Untitled, stoneware panel, 1969,
27 x 27"

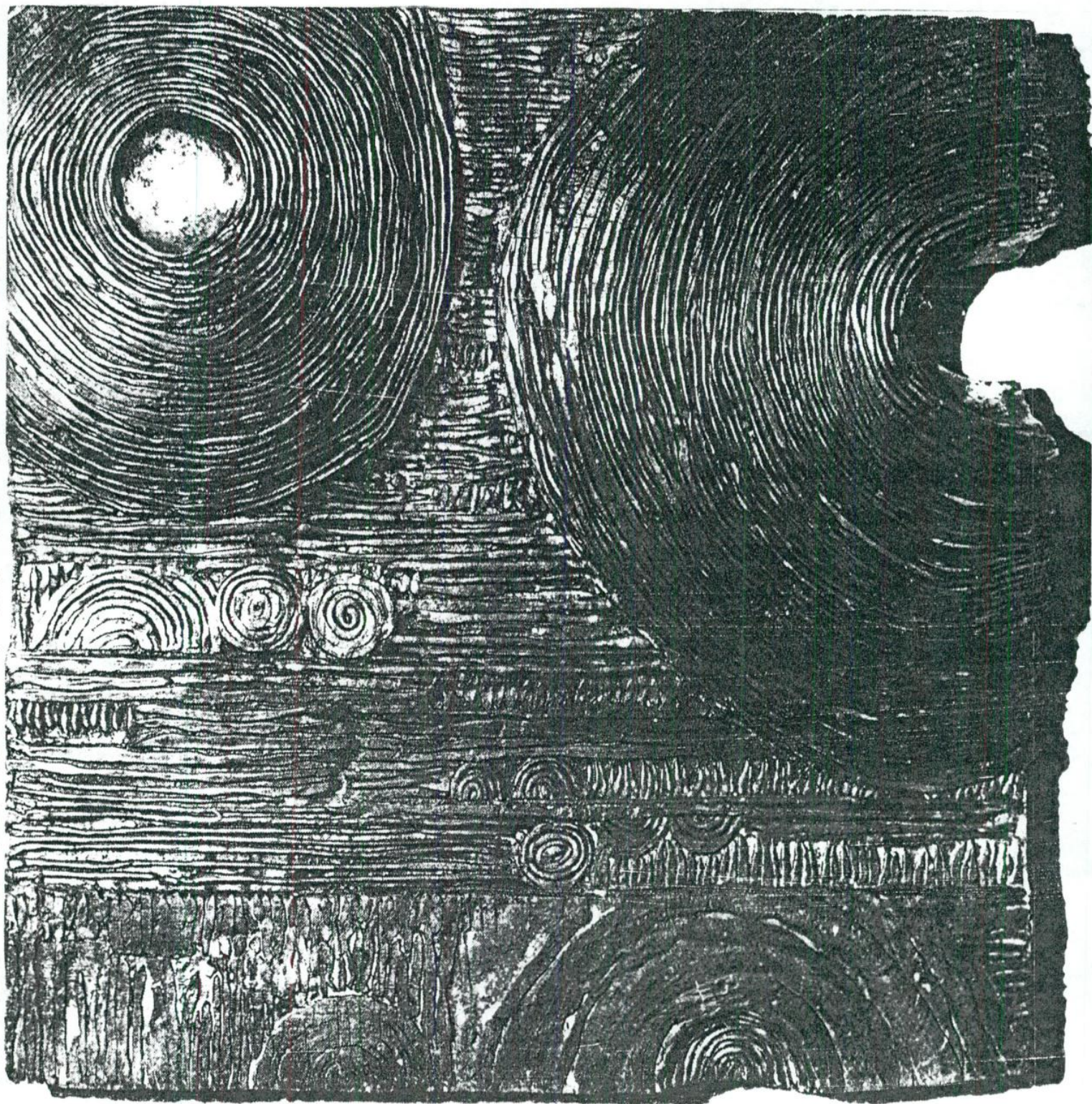


FIG 10: Ruth Duckworth, Untitled, stoneware panel, 1972,
24 x 24"

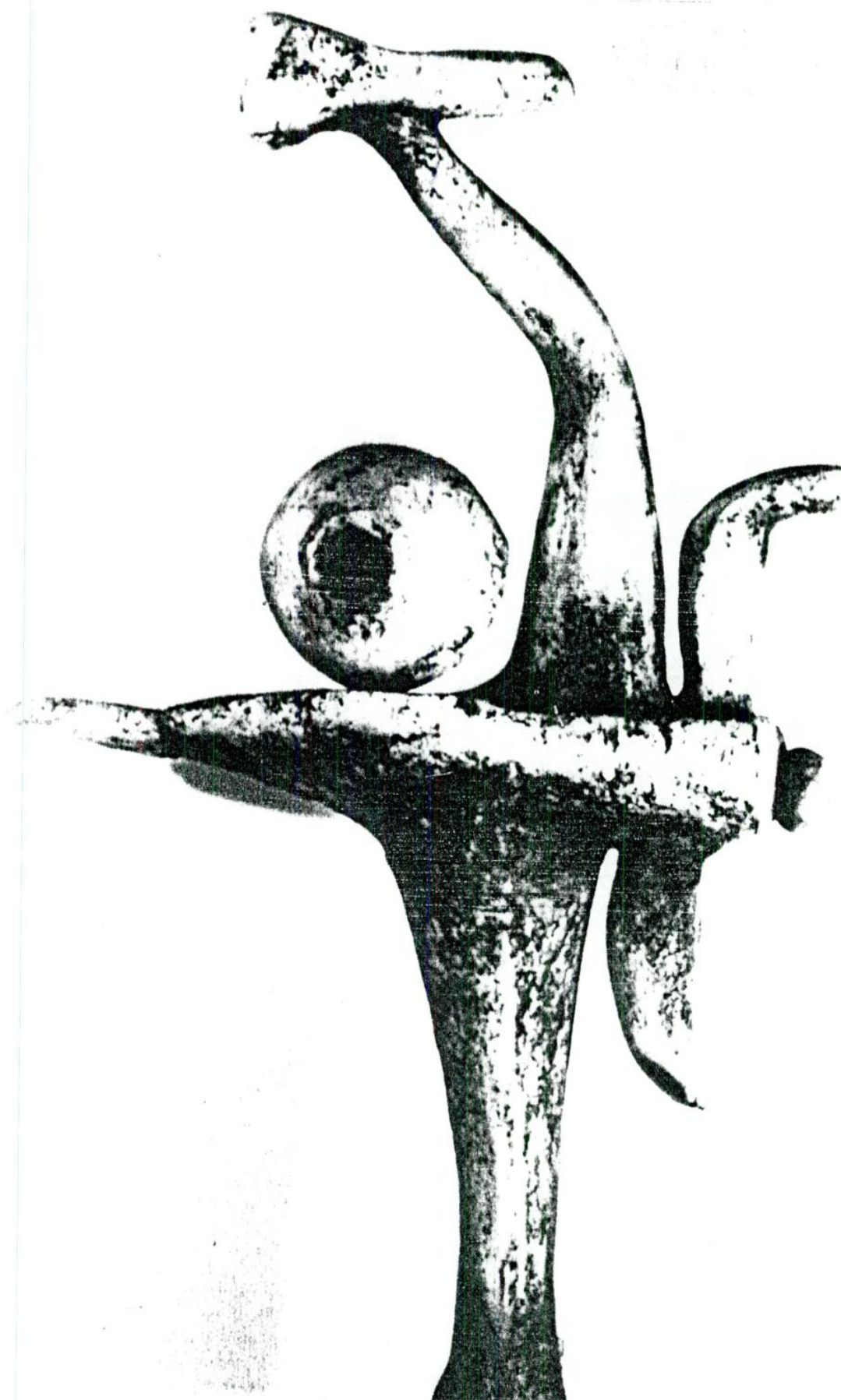


FIG 11: Ruth Duckworth, Untitled, Free-standing stoneware form, 1973, 6'



FIG 12: Ruth Duckworth, Untitled, stoneware panel, 8'.

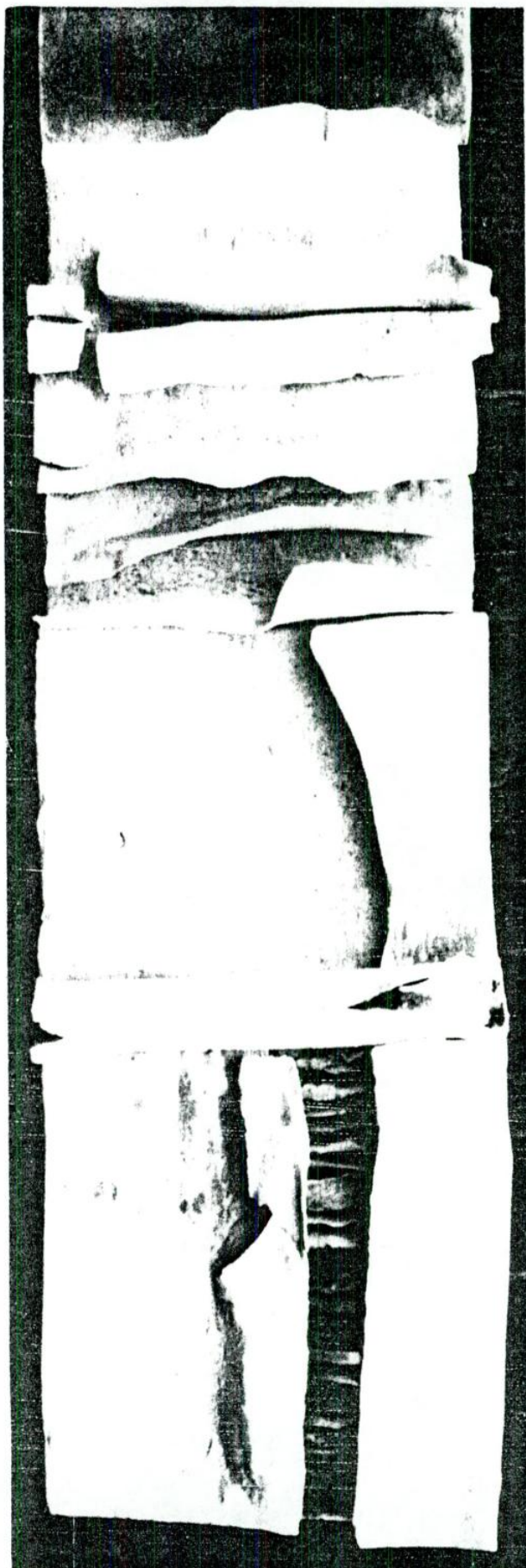


FIG 13: Ruth Duckworth, Untitled, Porcelain Panel, 1975, 6'

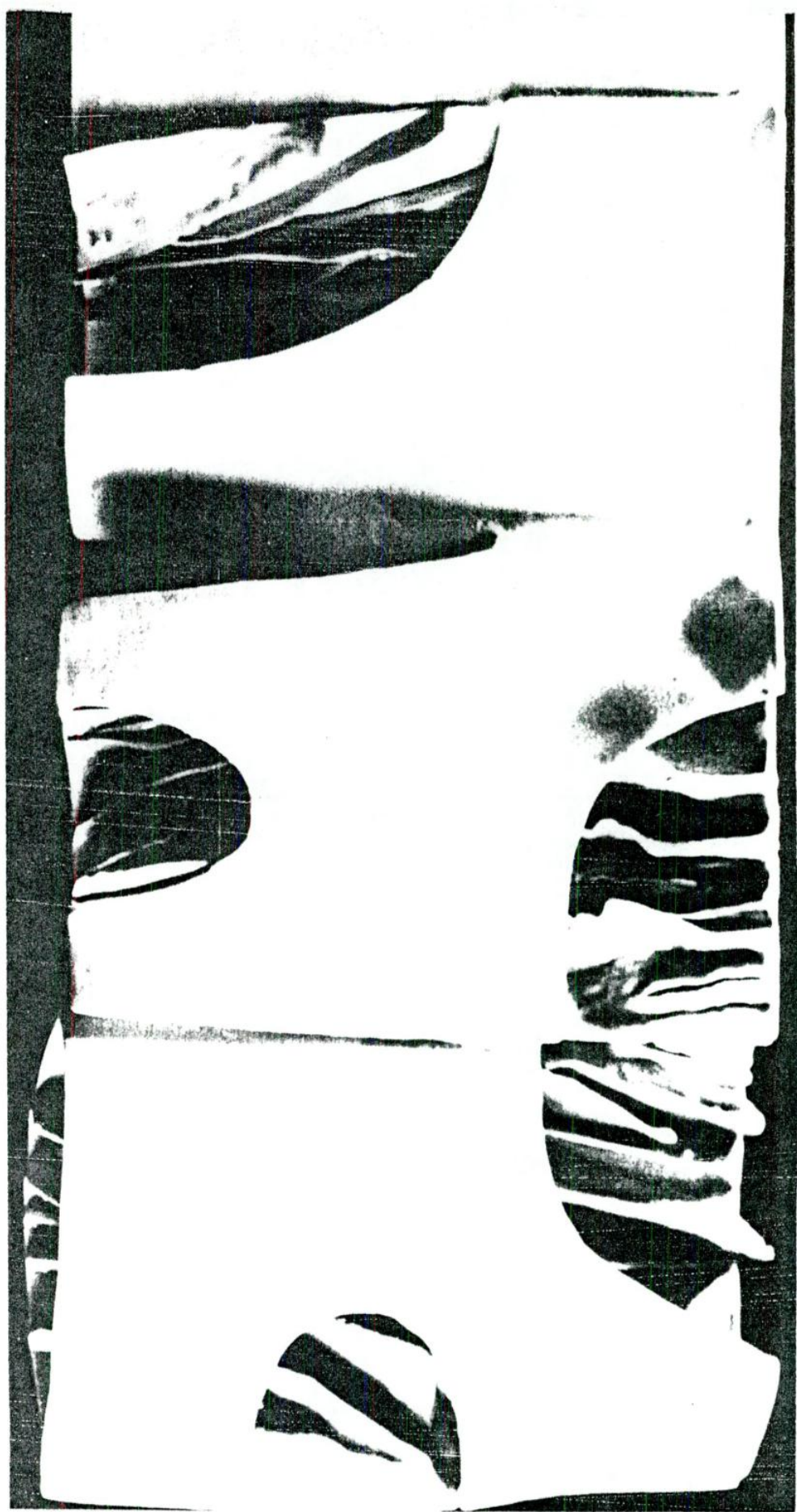


FIG 14: Ruth Duckworth, Untitled, Porcelain, 1976, 20"h

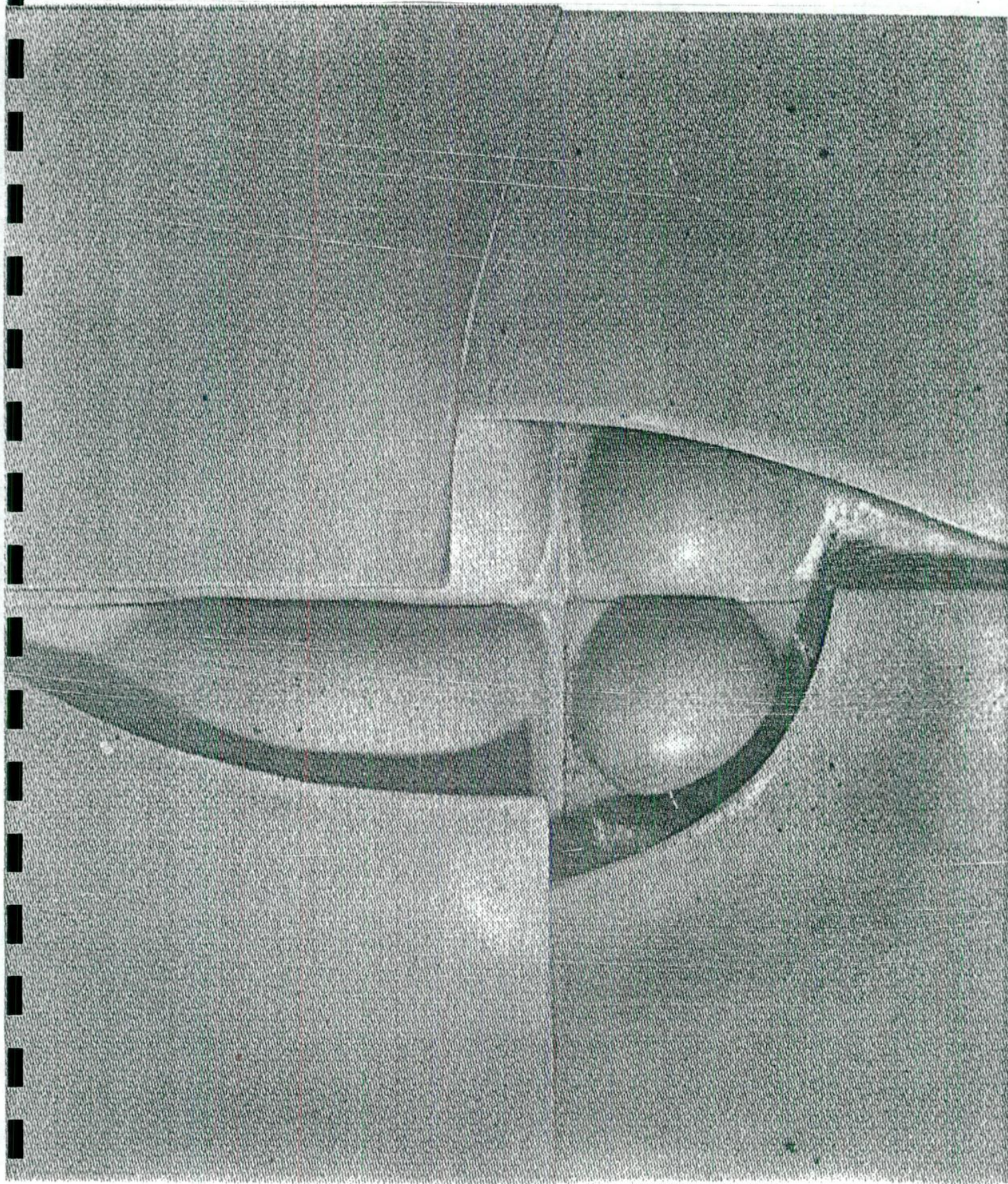
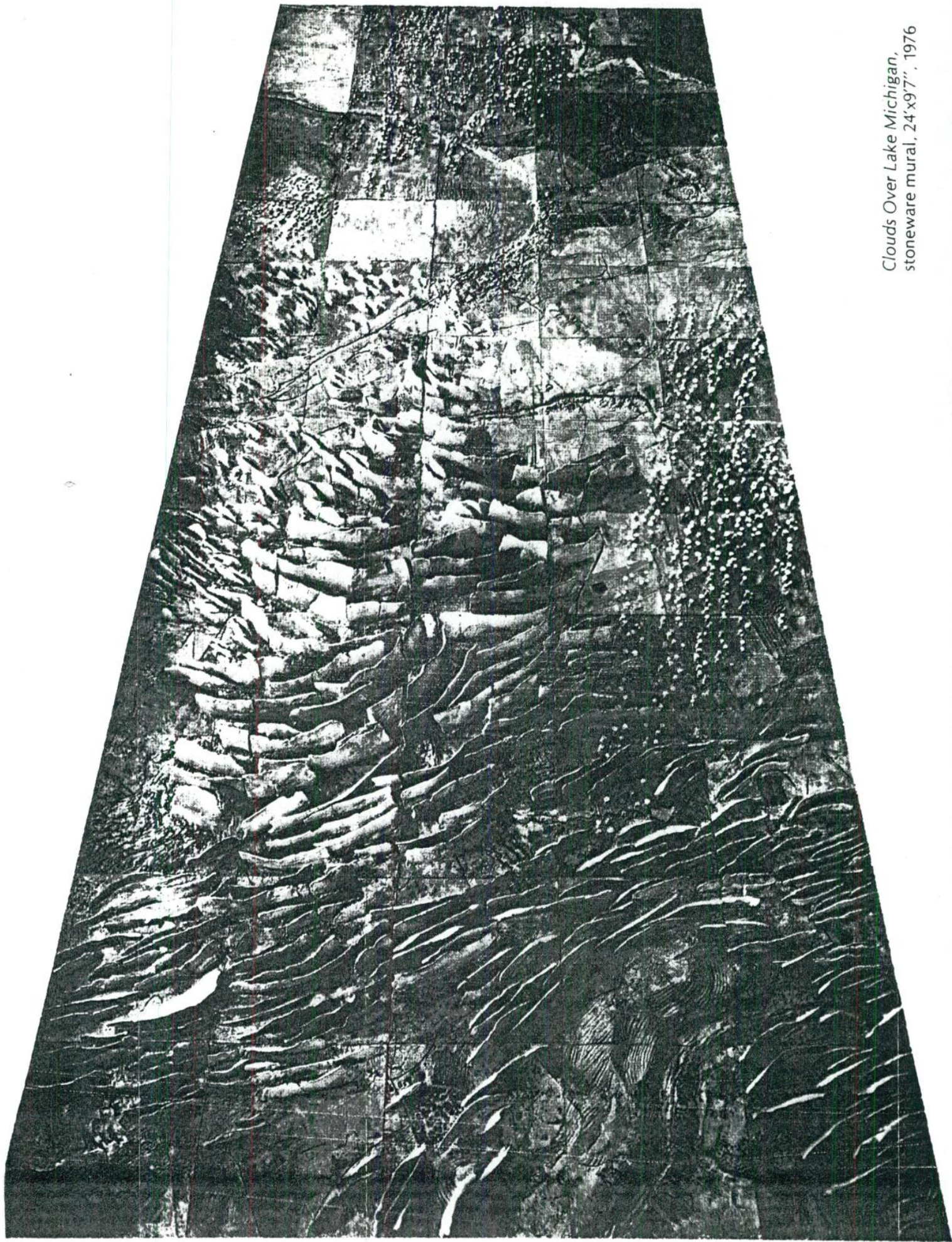


FIG 15: Ruth Duckworth, Untitled, Porcelain forms, 1975, 7"d



Clouds Over Lake Michigan,
stoneware mural, 24'x9'7", 1976

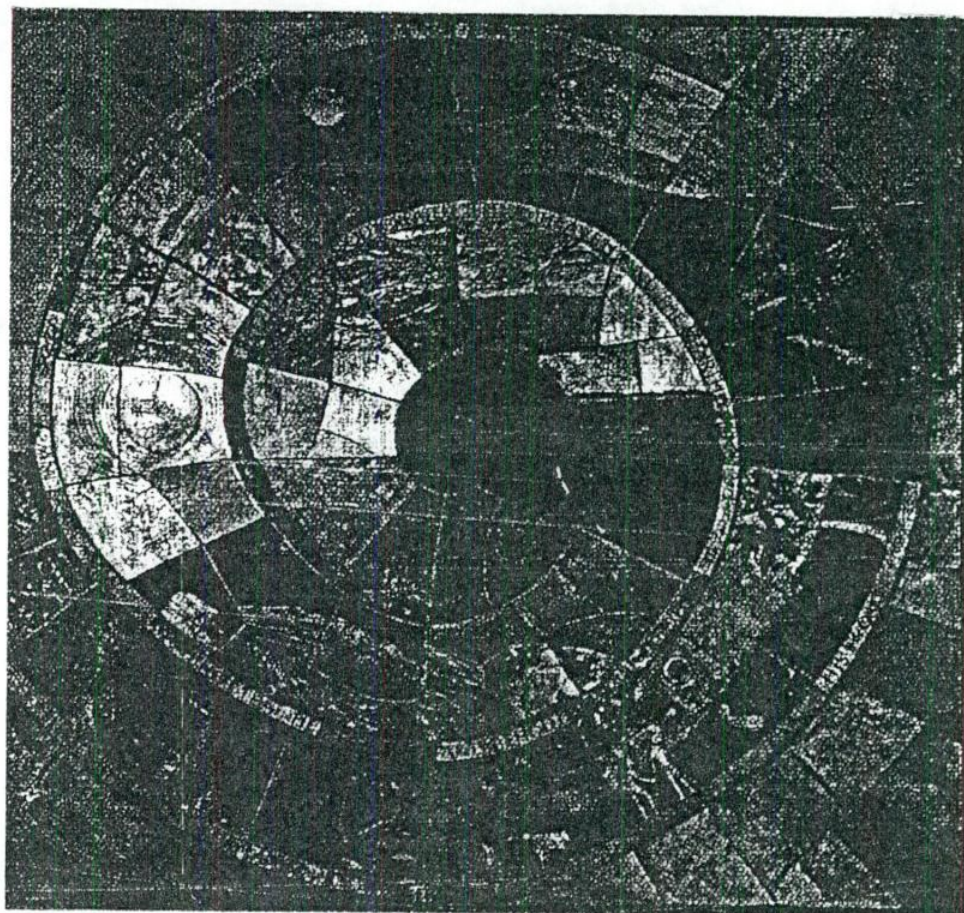


FIG 17: Ruth Duckworth, The Creation, stoneware mural, 1982 -
1983, 14' x 16'

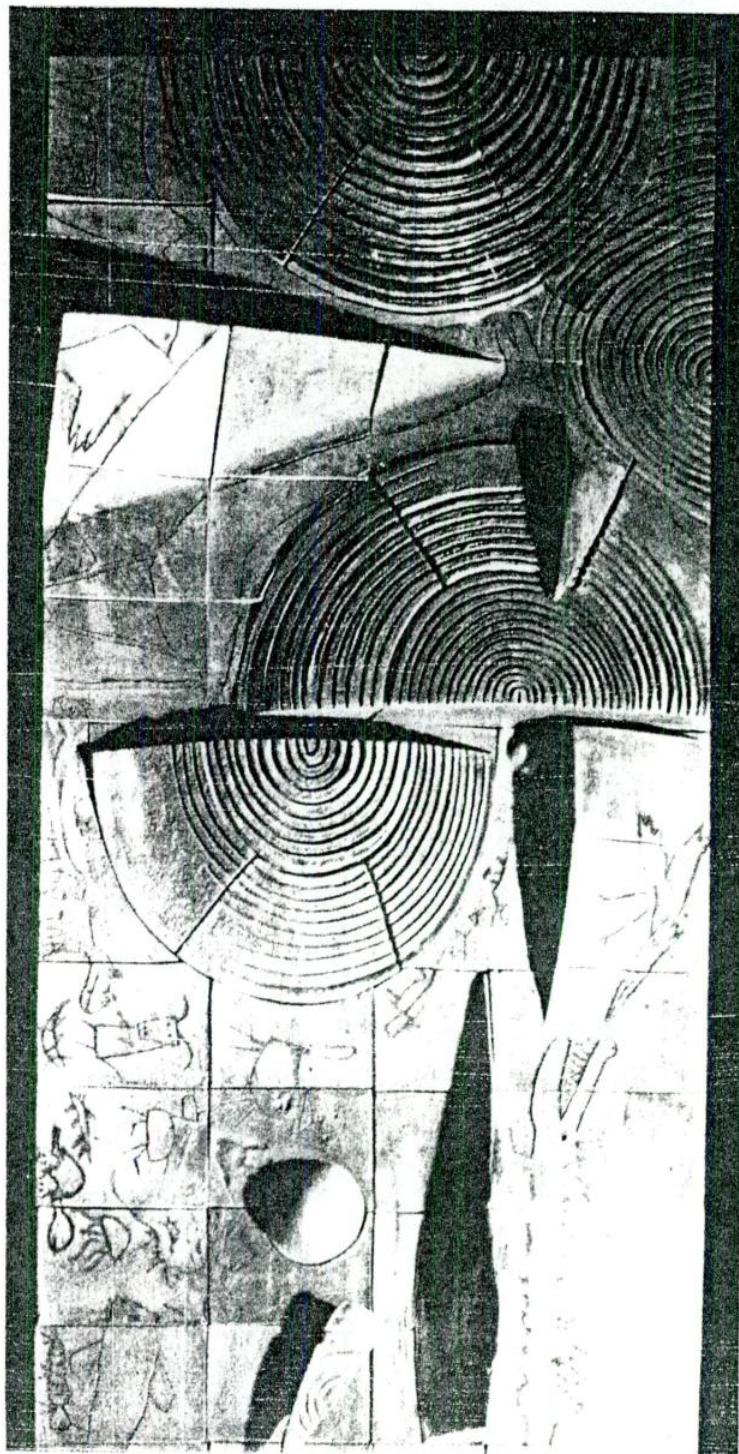


FIG 18: Ruth Duckworth, The Dr. R. Lee Animal Care Centre,
Stoneware mural [section], 1984, 22' x 5'

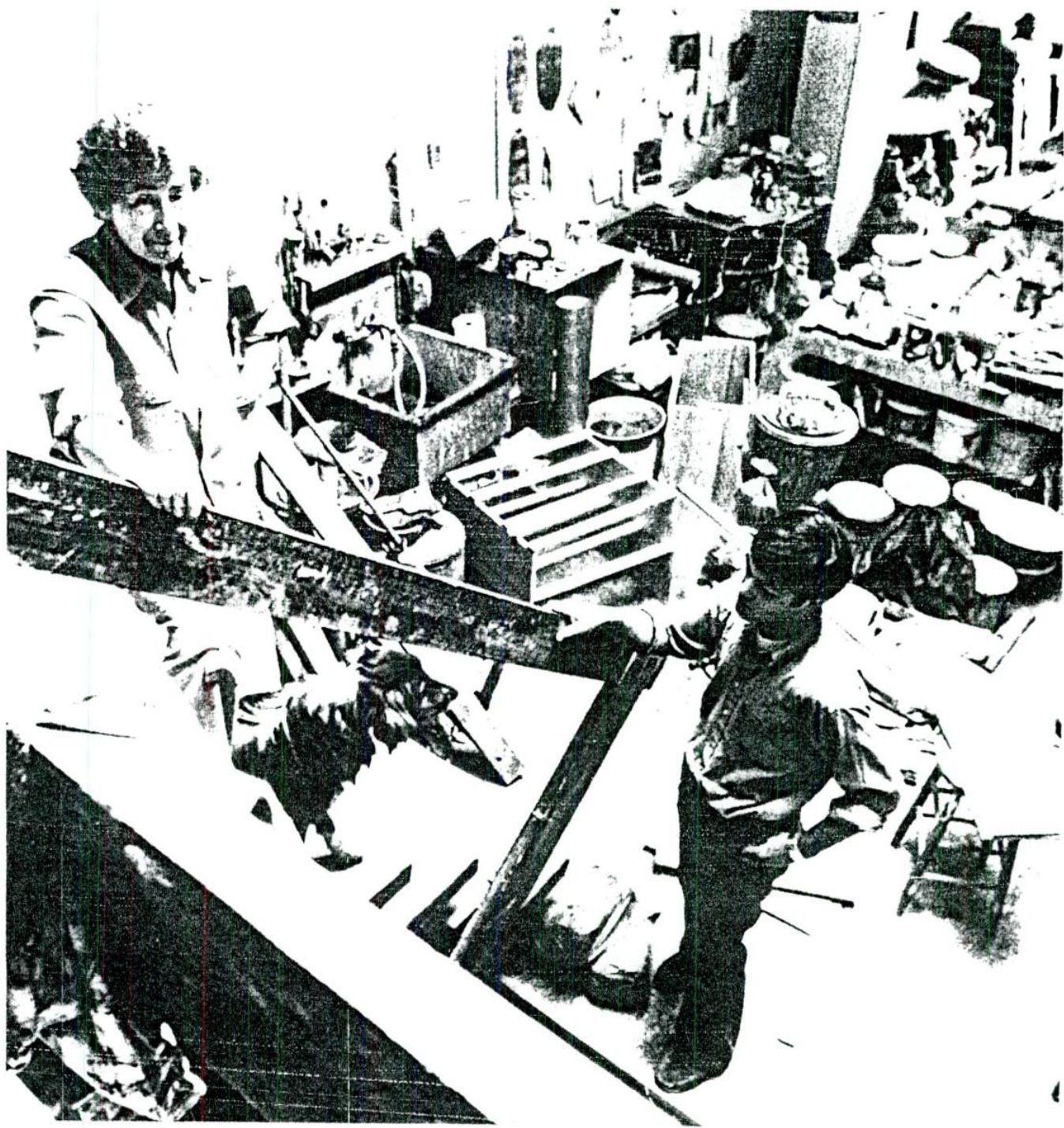


FIG 19: John Flimmelfarb and Ruth Duckworth in her studio
1976

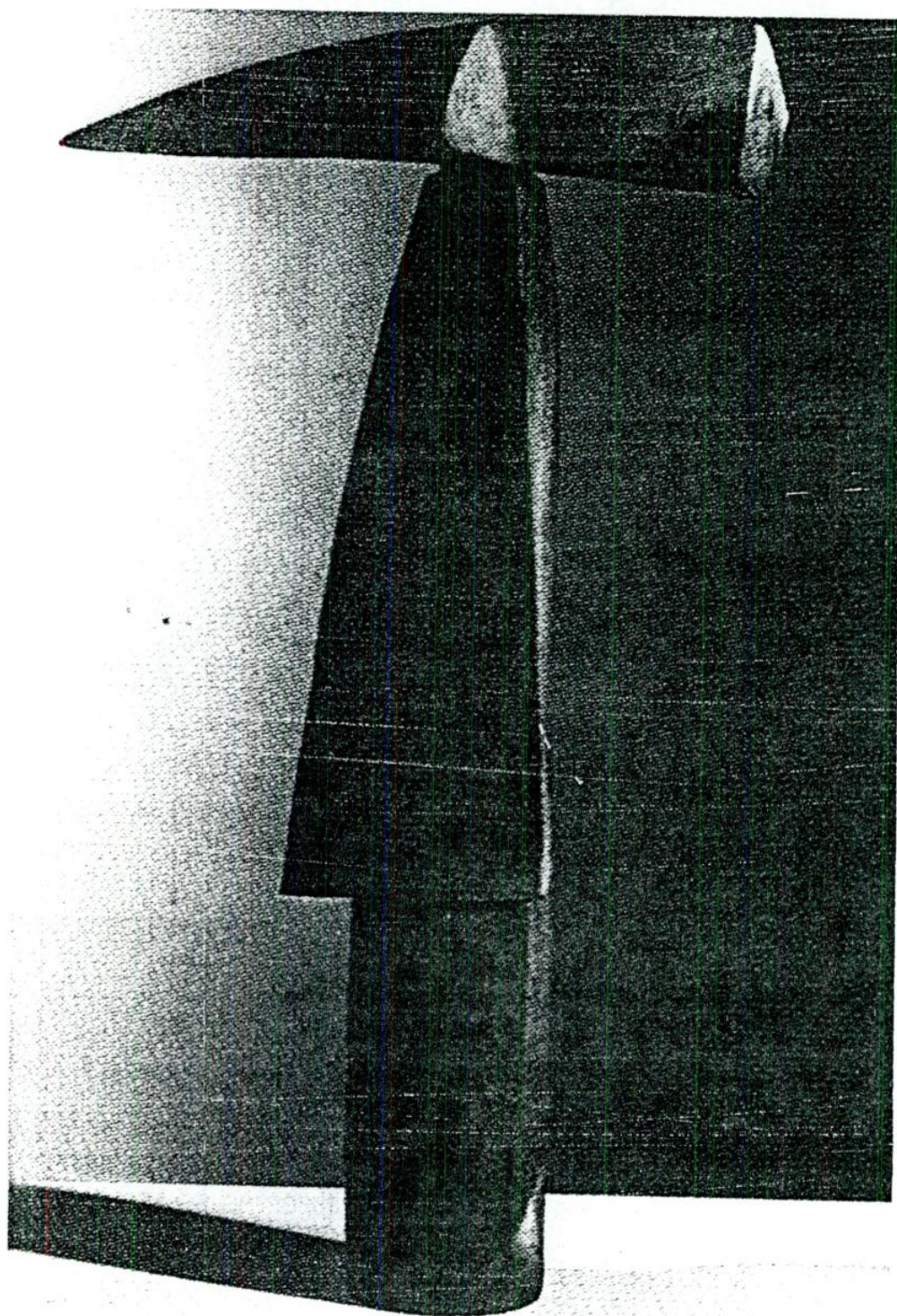


FIG 20: Ruth Duckworth, Untitled, stoneware, 1989,
44 x 27 x 9".

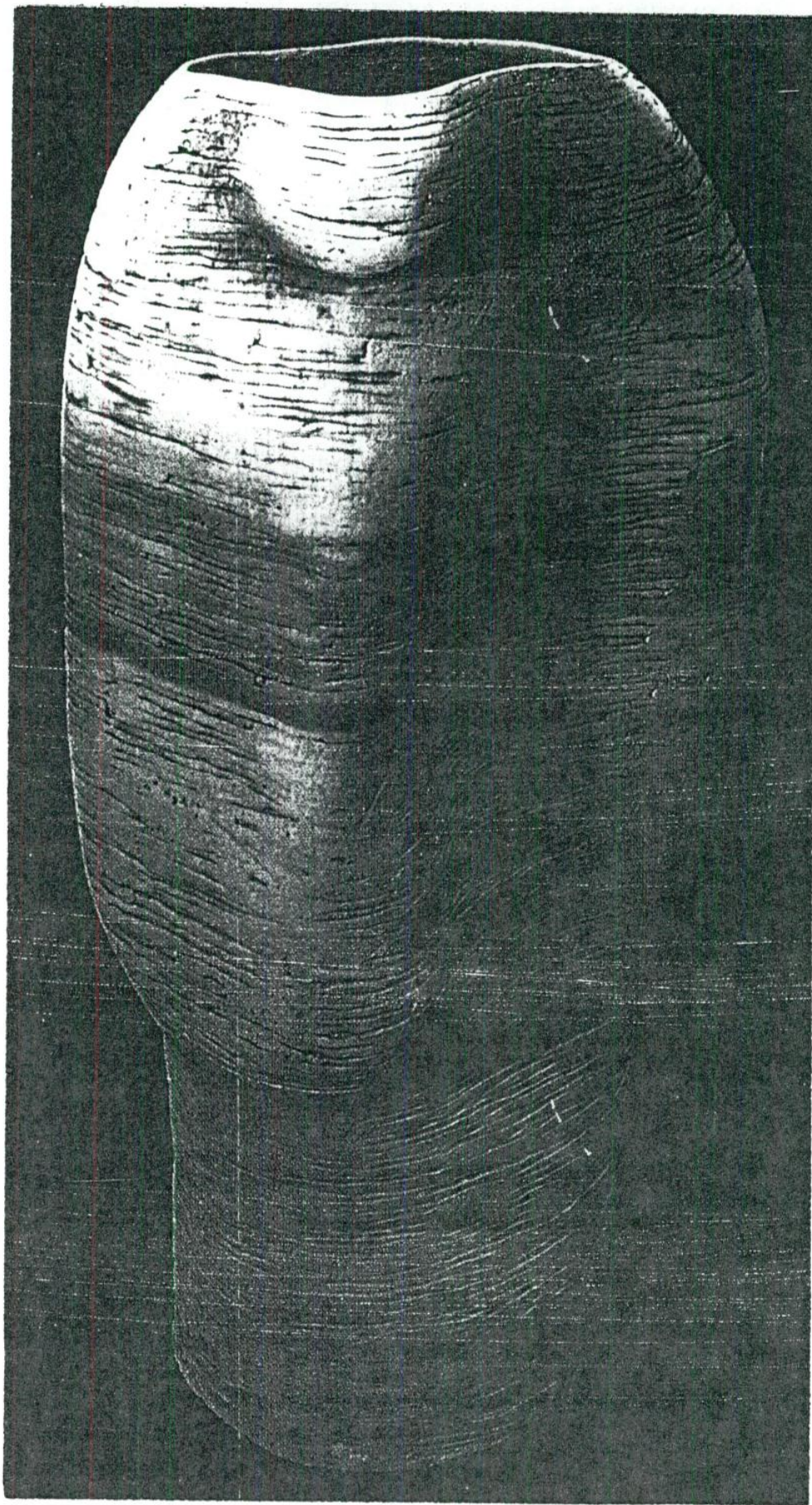


FIG 21: Ruth Duckworth, Untitled, stoneware, 1991,
28 x 14 x 13"

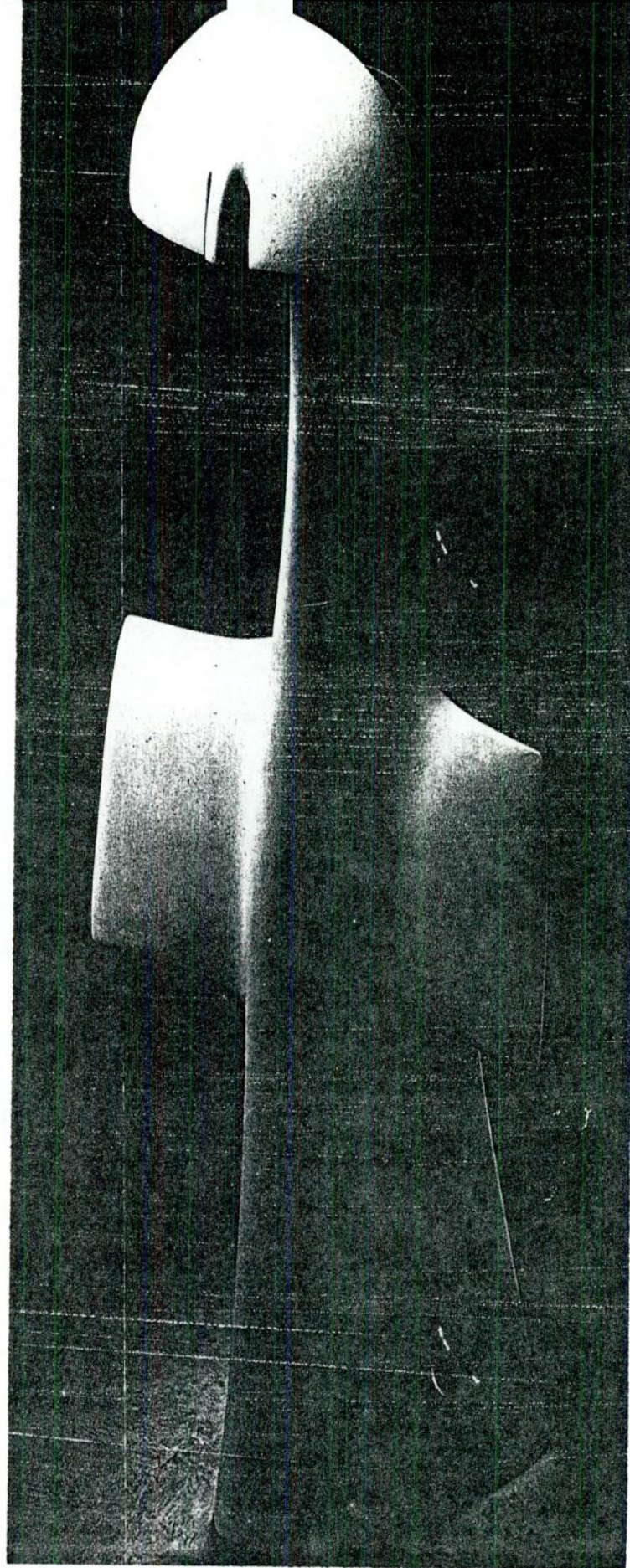


FIG 22: Ruth Duckworth, Untitled, Porcelain, 1991,
22 x 8"

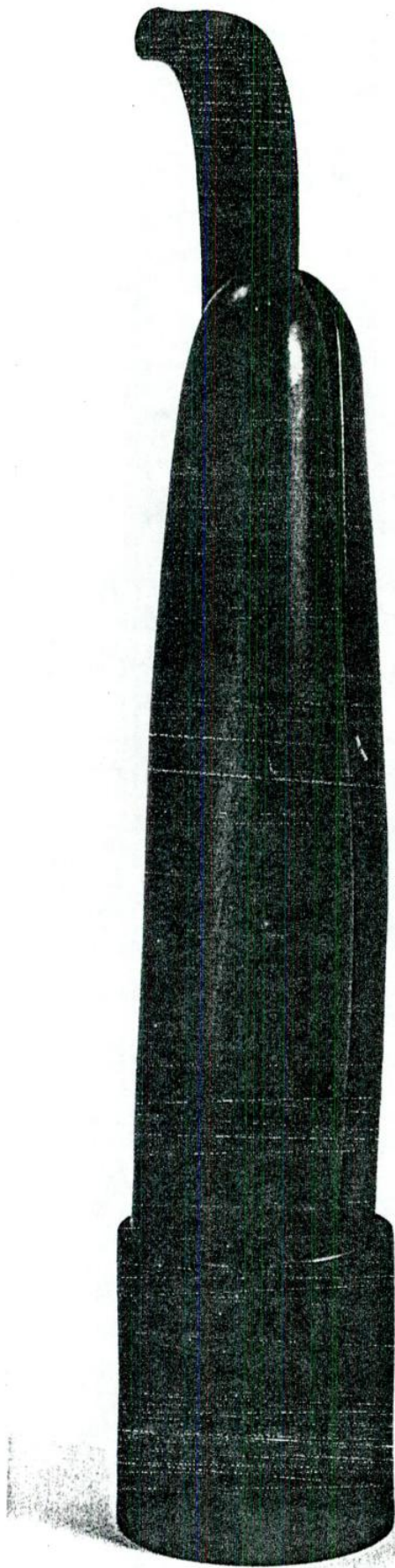


FIG 23: Ruth Duckworth, Avian Bronze, 1991, 25 x 4 x 4"

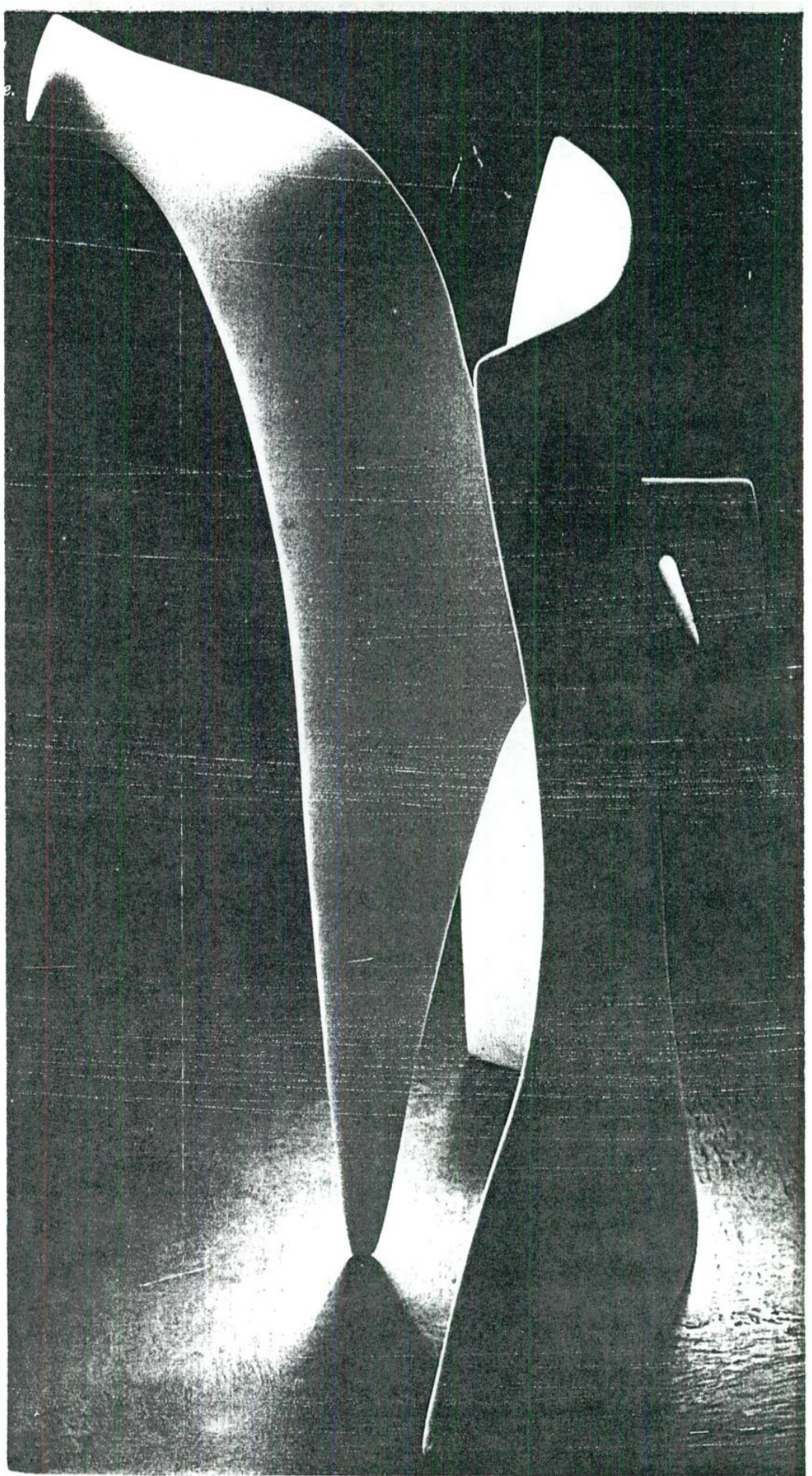


FIG 24: Ruth Duckworth, Untitled, Porcelain, 1992, 4 X 9 X 8"

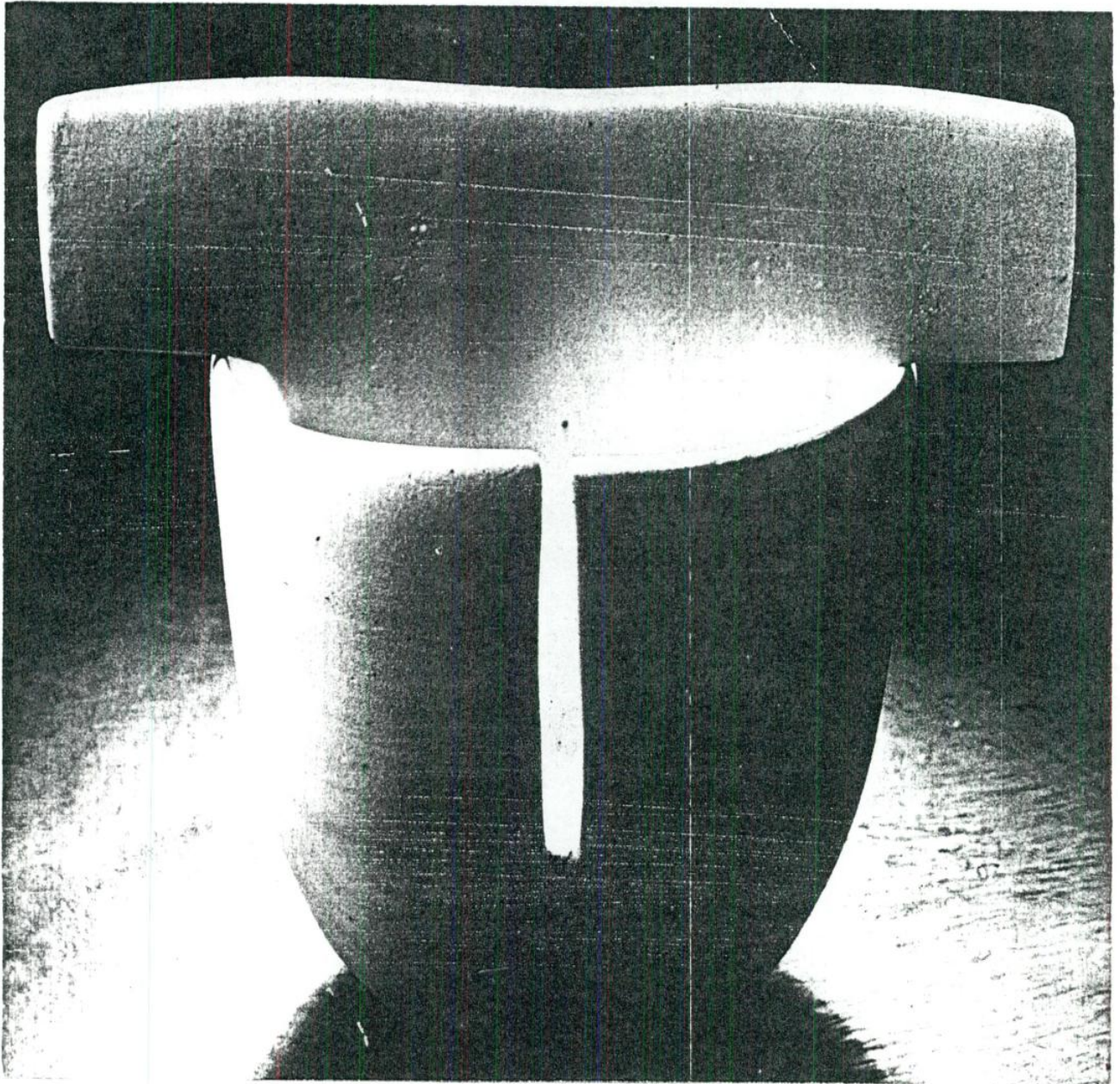


FIG 25: Ruth Duckworth, Untitled, Porcelain 1989, 5 x 5 x2"

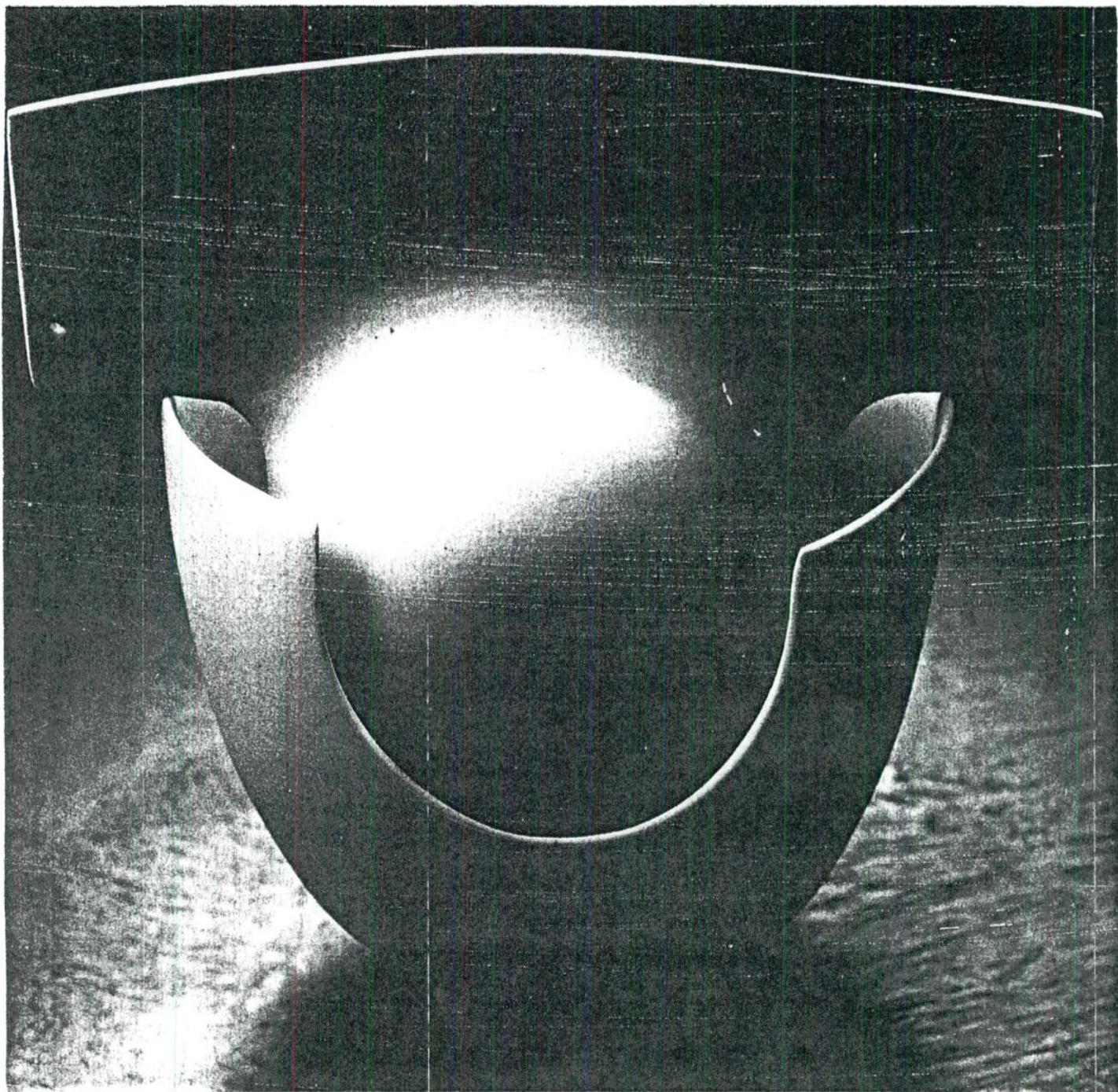


FIG 26: Ruth Duckworth, Untitled, Porcelain, 1989, 5 x 5 x 3"

CONCLUSION

We need to comprehend the significance of the process by which social, economic and political influences have affected art practice, but more so art by women; and as a direct result separated women from the dominant definition of what constitutes 'great art'.

Women's styles were never given any status or recognition; because 'great art' as we know it was not a universal practice!

The area of ceramics also poses similar problems as women in art, because ceramics can be associated to both areas, the Fine Arts and the Crafts;

"The reluctance of the established art world to see clay as a serious medium; capable of expressing content"¹
[Drexler - Lynn, 1990, p27]

is reflective in the restrictive ideals within the area of ceramics in Britain, due to its well - rooted and established conservative, social structure: this breeding a stifling environment, one in which artists are less likely to develop new possibilities for their work.

Then there are artists such as Ruth Duckworth, who need the challenge, the edge which keeps the work alive. She opted for a newer, livelier environment, Chicago.

"The wild town which has allowed her to develop her art to it's present brave scale"²
[Harrod, 1974, p34]

The freedom, vitality and excellent patronage Ruth Duckworth discovered in Chicago resulted in her creating some of her

best work. None of which would have been possible in Britain.

Nonetheless, today in Britain there are various artists, both male and female, practising large scale sculptural ceramics, such as Mo Jupp, Jil Crowley and Elizabeth Frink; all of which are indebted to Duckworth in terms of the changes she instigated, in the attitudes towards the practices of ceramics in Britain. She is considered by many to be a remarkable catalyst in Contemporary Art, exceptional in that she proved that you need not be affiliated to any movement, institution or any group of artists, in order to succeed as an artist. Her work has set its own standards, whether they be in the Fine Arts or the Crafts.

"Art is her way to succour her fellow human beings, give us something of lasting beauty. As Jean Arp said 'Art is a fruit that grows in man, like a fruit on a plant, or a child in it's mother's womb?

Such fruit not only helps define what makes us human, it nurtures us so that we may continue to be human. Can such a purpose be considered a minor art?³

[McTwigan, 1992, 10/2]

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.

INTRODUCTION:	Page
Fig 1: Ruth Duckworth in her Studio, Ravenswood, Chicago, 1991	8
 CHAPTER ONE:	
Fig 1: John Ruskin in old age at Brantwood	16
Fig 2: William Morris towards end of his life.	17
 CHAPTER TWO:	
Fig 1: Hans Coper and Lucie Rie at Albion Mews Pottery, London, 1950's	25
Fig 2: Ruth Duckworth in the 1960's.	26
Fig 3: Hans Coper, <u>Spade Forms</u> , Stoneware, 1963-65, 11 x 13" h.	27
Fig 4: Lucie Rie, <u>Porcelain band with criss cross sgraffito</u> , 1955, 11"d.	28
Fig 5: Ruth Duckworth working in London, 1944.	29
Fig 6: Henry Moore, <u>Square Form with cut</u> , Limestone, 1961, 41"h.	30
Fig 7: Epstein, <u>Doves</u> , Limestone, 1947, 13"h.	31
Fig 8: Barbara Hepworth, <u>Pierced Form</u> , Pentelic marble, 1963-64, 56 x 38".	32
Fig 9: Ruth Duckworth, <u>Figurative Form</u> , Hoptonwood stone, 1949, 15 x 10 x 8.5".	33
Fig 10: Ruth Duckworth, <u>Terracotta Form</u> , 1938, life size.	34
Fig 11: Ruth Duckworth, <u>Terracotta Form</u> , 1941, life size.	35

	Page
Fig 12: Lucie Rie, The artist potter	36
Fig 13: Ian Auld, <u>Flat handbuilt Form</u> , 1966, 22"h	37
Fig 14: Ruth Duckworth, <u>Porcelain Form</u> , 1961, 7 x 5"	38
 CHAPTER THREE:	
Fig 1: Bernard Leach, <u>Thrown pot</u> , stoneware, 1923, 10"h.	46
Fig 2: Bernard Leach, <u>Tree of life</u> , stoneware tittle, 1929, 5 x 6"h.	47
Fig 3: Bernard Leach, <u>Tenmoku Bottle form</u> , stoneware, 1927, 13"h.	48
Fig 4: Ruth Duckworth, <u>Free-Form vase</u> , ash glazed stoneware, 1967, 21"h.	49
Fig 5: Lucie Rie, <u>Bowl and Bottle</u> , stains and oxide added to stoneware clay then thrown, resulting in spiralling cues, 1971, 10"d bowl.	50
Fig 6: Hans Coper, <u>Cycladic Form</u> , stoneware, 1962, 42"h.	51
Fig 7: Ruth Duckworth, <u>Vessel</u> , stoneware, 1975, 24"d.	52
Fig 8: Ruth Duckworth, <u>Untitled</u> , stoneware, 1979, 16 x 19"h.	53
Fig 9: Ruth Duckworth, <u>Untitled Form</u> , stoneware, 1978, 15 x 15"h.	54
Fig 10: Ruth Duckworth, <u>Untitled Form</u> , porcelain, 1979, 13"d.	55
Fig 11: Ruth Duckworth, <u>Untitled Form</u> , porcelain with inlay, 1979, 8 x 10"d.	56
Fig 12: Ruth Duckworth, <u>Bowl Form</u> , porcelain with metallic staining, 1979, 13 x 10"h	57
Fig 13: Ruth Duckworth, <u>Untitled Form</u> , porcelain, 1974, 5"h.	58
Fig 14: Ruth Duckworth, <u>Untitled</u> , stoneware, 1987, 14 x 16h x 15".	59

	Page
Fig 15: Ruth Duckworth, <u>Key Forms</u> , porcelain, 1991, 6"h x 9"w.	60
Fig 16: Ruth Duckworth, <u>Key Forms</u> , porcelain, 1990, 6"h x 9"w.	61
Fig 17: Ruth Duckworth, <u>Mama-pot</u> , porcelain, 1979, 5 x 7"h x 4.	62
Fig 18: Ruth Duckworth, <u>Untitled</u> , porcelain, 1973, 7"d.	63
Fig 19: Ruth Duckworth, <u>Platter Form</u> , stoneware, 1987, 25"d. Exhibited at <u>Crafts-Today USA</u> Barcelona, 1992.	64
Fig 20: Elizabeth Caffrey, <u>Crank Form</u> , Terrasigllata and smoked fired, 1992, 13"h.	65
Fig 21: Elizabeth Caffrey, <u>Crank Form</u> , Terrasigllata, crater glaze and smoke fired, 1992, 7"h.	66
Fig 22: Elizabeth Caffrey, <u>Crank Form</u> , Terrasigllata, and smoke fired, 1993, 8"h x 15"w.	67

CHAPTER FOUR:

Fig 1: Rudy Autio, <u>Two Floating Ladies and Cow</u> , stoneware, 1979, 30"h.	78
Fig 2: Peter Voulkos, <u>Plaque</u> , stoneware, 1963, 10"h.	79
Fig 3: Peter Voulkos, <u>Untitled Plate</u> , stoneware, 1977, 23"d.	80
Fig 4: Peter Voulkos, <u>Untitled Plate</u> , stoneware, 1979, 18 x 19"	81
Fig 5: Pablo Picasso, <u>Fish in Profile</u> , white earthenware, 1951, 20 x 15"	82
Fig 6: Ruth Duckworth, <u>Earth, Water and Sky</u> , stoneware mural, 1968, corner detail.	83

	Page
Fig 7: Ruth Duckworth, <u>Earth, Water and Sky</u> , stoneware mural, 1968, east wall detail.	84
Fig 8: Ruth Duckworth, <u>Earth, Water and Sky</u> , stoneware mural, 1968, ceiling detail.	85
Fig 9: Ruth Duckworth, <u>Untitled</u> , stoneware panel, 1969, 27 x 27"	86
Fig 10: Ruth Duckworth, <u>Untitled</u> , stoneware panel, 1972, 24 x 24"	87
Fig 11: Ruth Duckworth, <u>Untitled</u> , free-standing stoneware form, 1973, 6'.	88
Fig 12: Ruth Duckworth, <u>Untitled</u> , stoneware panel, 1974, 8'.	89
Fig 13: Ruth Duckworth, <u>Untitled</u> , porcelain panel, 1975, 6'.	90
Fig 14: Ruth Duckworth, <u>Untitled</u> , porcelain, 1976, 20"h.	91.
Fig 15: Ruth Duckworth, <u>Untitled</u> , porcelain form, 1975, 7"d.	92
Fig 16: Ruth Duckworth, <u>Clouds Over Lake Michigan</u> , stoneware mural, 24 x 10'.	93
Fig 17: Ruth Duckworth, <u>The Creation</u> , stoneware mural, 1982-83, 14 x 16'.	94
Fig 18: Ruth Duckworth, <u>The Dr. R Lee Animal Care Centre</u> , stoneware mural [section], 1984, 22 x 5'.	95
Fig 19: John Flimmelfarb and Ruth Duckworth in her studio, 1976.	96
Fig 20: Ruth Duckworth, <u>Untitled</u> , stoneware, 1989, 44 x 27 x 9".	97
Fig 21: Ruth Duckworth, <u>Untitled</u> , stoneware, 1991, 28 x 14 x 13".	98
Fig 22: Ruth Duckworth, <u>Untitled</u> , porcelain, 1991, 22 x 8".	99
Fig 23: Ruth Duckworth, <u>Avian Bronze</u> , 1991, 25 x 4 x 4".	100

	Page
Fig 24: Ruth Duckworth, <u>Untitled</u> , porcelain, 1992, 4 x 9 x 8".	101
Fig 25: Ruth Duckworth, <u>Untitled</u> , porcelain, 1989, 5 x 5 x 2".	102
Fig 26: Ruth Duckworth, <u>Untitled</u> , porcelain, 5 x 5 x 3".	103

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	Page
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7. Duckworth, <i>op cit</i> , p7.	21
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9. Duckworth, Ruth quoted in 'Ruth Duckworth', <u>American Craft</u> , 10/2, 1992, p22.	24
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1. Clark, Garth, <u>Ruth Duckworth - Split Volumes</u> , New York, Catalogue of her exhibition, Nov 6 - Dec 1, 1990.	39
2. Drexler - Lynn, Martha, quoting in <u>Clay Today</u> , Los Angeles County Museum, Chronicle Books, 1990, p19.	39
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5. Clark, Garth quoted from <u>Organisehe Abstraktion - Ruth Duckworth</u> , West Germany, Kunstammer Ludger Koster, 1991, p23.	41
6. McTwigan, Michael quoted from 'Ruth Duckworth', <u>American Craft</u> , 10/2, 1992, p22.	41
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8. Duckworth, Ruth quoted from <u>Ruth Duckworth</u> , Illinois, Exhibit A, inc, Gallery of American Ceramics, 1977.	42

	Page
9. Duckworth, <u>Split Volumes</u> , 1990, op cit.	42
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	Page
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