



# Smithsonian

*Archives of American Art*

## A Finding Aid to the Ralph Bacerra Papers, 1957-2015, in the Archives of American Art

Sarah Mundy

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Archives of American Art  
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## Collection Overview

<b>Repository:</b>	Archives of American Art
<b>Title:</b>	Ralph Bacerra papers
<b>Date:</b>	1957-2015
<b>Identifier:</b>	AAA.baceralp
<b>Creator:</b>	Bacerra, Ralph, 1938-2008
<b>Extent:</b>	3.4 Linear feet
<b>Language:</b>	English .
<b>Summary:</b>	The papers of Los Angeles ceramic artist and educator Ralph Bacerra measure 3.4 linear feet and date from 1957 to 2015. The collection documents Bacerra's career through correspondence, professional activity files including teaching files from Chouinard Art Institute and Otis Art Institute, exhibition files, writings and notes including the artist's ceramic formulas and a diary, artwork including sketchbooks and drawings, photographs including images of Bacerra and his work, and printed material relating to Bacerra's career.

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## Administrative Information

### Acquisition Information

The Ralph Bacerra papers were donated in 2003 by Ralph Bacerra, in 2016 by Cindy Bass, Bacerra's niece and executor, and in 2017 by Jo Lauria Fargo on behalf of Bass as part of the Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America.

### Related Materials

Also in the Archives of American Art is an oral history interview of Ralph Bacerra conducted on April 7-19, 2004 by Frank Lloyd, for the Archives of American Art's Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America, in Los Angeles, California.

### Processing Information

The collection was processed, and a finding aid prepared by Sarah Mundy in 2021.

### Preferred Citation

Ralph Bacerra papers, 1957-2015. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

### Restrictions

This collection is open for research. Access to original papers requires an appointment and is limited to the Archives' Washington, D.C. Research Center.

### Conditions Governing Use

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## Biographical / Historical

Ralph Bacerra (1938-2008) was a ceramic artist and educator in Los Angeles, California.

Born to a Filipino father and mother from Montana, Bacerra grew up on a farm in Garden Grove, California where his parents settled before he was born. Bacerra began studying art in high school and later went onto study commercial art and ceramics with Bill Payne at Orange Coast Junior College. Bacerra planned on continuing his commercial art studies when he enrolled in Chouinard Art Institute, now the California Institute of the Arts, but changed his major to ceramics after taking a class with Vivika Heino, who became his mentor. Heino and her husband Otto were respected figures in the ceramics field. In 1959, on a road trip from Los Angeles to New Hampshire, Heino introduced Bacerra to prominent artists across the country.

After graduating with a Bachelor of Fine Arts, Bacerra joined the Army and served for two years. Upon his return to Los Angeles, he began teaching at Chouinard. Heino, who headed the ceramics department at the time, left the school to teach at the Rhode Island School of Design, leaving the department in the hands of Bacerra and John Fassbinder. A few years later, Bacerra became the department head. In 1971, when Chouinard became the California Institute of Art, the ceramics department was discontinued. Over the next decade, Bacerra focused on studio work and travel to Asia, and the influence of Japanese Imari and celadon can be seen in Bacerra's work. Bacerra also did commercial work for the Induction Stove Corporation and developed an advanced ceramics technique using electromagnetic induction. From 1983 to 1997, Bacerra taught at the Otis Art Institute. After retiring, he devoted his time to studio work.

Bacerra's work is in the permanent collections of the Smithsonian Institution and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, among others. His work has been exhibited throughout the United States and abroad. In 1998, he was awarded honorary membership by the National Council on Education for the Ceramic Arts.

Bacerra died in Eagle Rock, California in 2008.

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## Scope and Contents

The papers of Los Angeles ceramic artist and educator Ralph Bacerra measure 3.4 linear feet and date from 1957 to 2015. The collection comprises correspondence with the Decorative Arts Council, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the Theo Portnoy Gallery, and others; professional activity files including teaching files from Chouinard Art School and Otis College of Art, exhibition files, and a file for his National Council on Education for the Ceramic Arts award. Also found are writings and notes containing ceramic formulas, Bacerra's student notes, and a diary record of his road trip with Vivika Heino in 1959; artwork consisting of sketchbooks and drawings from Chouinard, the Shoji Hamada workshop at the University of Southern California, and other sketches of ceramic designs; photographic materials of Bacerra and his work, personal photographs, Asian art, sculptures, and travel; and printed materials relating to Bacerra's career.

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## Arrangement

The collection is arranged as 6 series.

- Series 1: Correspondence, 1959-2002 (0.2 linear feet; Box 1)
- Series 2: Professional Activity Files, 1959-2013 (0.4 linear feet; Boxes 1, 4, OV 5)
- Series 3: Writings and Notes, 1957-circa 1990s (0.4 linear feet; Box 1)
- Series 4: Artwork, circa 1959-circa 1970s (0.2 linear feet; Boxes 1, 4)

- Series 5: Photographic Material, 1958-2001 (1.8 linear feet; Boxes 2-4)
- Series 6: Printed Material, 1958-2015 (0.4 linear feet; Box 4, OV 5)

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## Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

### Subjects:

American studio craft movement  
Asian American artists  
Filipino American artists

### Types of Materials:

Diaries  
Drawings  
Sketchbooks

### Names:

Chouinard Art Institute (Los Angeles, Calif.)  
Heino, Vivika, 1910-1995  
Moore, Eudorah M.  
Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America  
Otis Art Institute

### Occupations:

Ceramicists -- California -- Los Angeles  
Educators -- California -- Los Angeles

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## Container Listing

### Series 1: Correspondence, 1959-2002

#### 0.2 Linear feet (Box 1)

Scope and Contents: Correspondence is regarding exhibitions, events organized by the Decorative Arts Council, Bacerra's donation of work by Adrian Saxe to the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and business dealings with the Theo Portnoy Gallery. Also found is correspondence with Joan Borinstein, Katherine Garret, and Susan Peterson.

Box 1, Folder 1	Art Festival in the Village in Lake Buena Vista, 1978
Box 1, Folder 2	Borinstein, Joan, 1996
Box 1, Folder 3	Decorative Arts Council, 1996-1998
Box 1, Folder 4	Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco Regarding The Art of Craft: Works from the Saxe Collection (1999) Exhibition, 1999
Box 1, Folder 5	Garret, Katherine, 1971
Box 1, Folder 6	Los Angeles County Museum of Art Regarding Bacerra's Donation of Adrian Saxe Artwork, 1997-2000
Box 1, Folder 7	Peterson, Susan, 2000
Box 1, Folder 8	Smithsonian American Art Museum, 1999-2002
Box 1, Folder 9	Theo Portnoy Gallery, 1976-1977
Box 1, Folder 10	First Names Only, 1959

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## Series 2: Professional Activity Files, 1959-2013

### 0.4 Linear feet (Boxes 1, 4)

**Scope and Contents:** The series consists of files for Bacerra's professional activities which include the exhibitions *Craft Today USA* (1989-1993) and *Color and Fire: Defining Moments in Studio Ceramics, 1950-2000* (2000) containing correspondence, contracts, reports, and artist statements; material from Chouinard Art School where Bacerra was a student and later chair of the ceramics department from 1963 to 1971; and student roll books, correspondence, teaching notes containing formulas and other class notes, quizzes and student assignments, and identification cards from Otis Art Institute. Also included are photographs of Bacerra and his work, a small amount of correspondence, and printed exhibition materials that were compiled for a legacy film project by the Otis Art Institute honoring Bacerra.

Box 1, Folder 11-13	Chouinard Art School, 1959-1972
Box 1, Folder 14	Craft Today USA (1989-1993) European Tour, Report by Paul J. Smith, 1989-1993
Box 1, Folder 15	Kalamazoo Institute of Arts, Contemporary Ceramics: The Artist's Viewpoint (1977) Artist Statement, 1977
Box 1, Folder 16	Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Color and Fire: Defining Moments in Studio Ceramics, 1950-2000 (2000), 2000
Box 4, Folder 1	Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Color and Fire: Defining Moments in Studio Ceramics, 1950-2000 (2000), Collage, circa 2000
Box 1, Folder 17	Montreal Museum of Decorative Arts, Designed for Delight: Alternative Aspects of Twentieth-Century Decorative Art (1997), 1996-1997
Box 1, Folder 18-20	Otis College of Art, 1960-1994
Box 1, Folder 21-24	Otis College of Art, Legacy Film Material, 1963-2013 Notes: Folder 22 includes letters from Eudora "Eudie" Moore.
Oversize 5	Otis College of Art, Legacy Film Material, circa 1971
Box 1, Folder 25	National Council on Education for the Ceramics Arts (NCECA), Honorary Membership Award, 1997-1998 Notes: Includes a speech draft about Bacerra by Garth Clarks.

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## Series 3: Writings and Notes, 1957-circa 1990s

### 0.4 Linear feet (Box 1)

Scope and Contents: The series contains an address book, a diary consisting of sketches and handwritten entries describing Bacerra's road trip with Vivika Heino from Los Angeles to Hopkinton, New Hampshire, notes on ceramics and glaze formulas, notes taken by Bacerra while a student, and letters of recommendation written by Bacerra.

Box 1, Folder 26	Address Book, circa 1980s-1990s
Box 1, Folder 27	Diary of Trip from Los Angeles to New Hampshire with Vivika Heino, 1959
Box 1, Folder 28-30	Formulas, circa 1967-circa 1990s
Box 1, Folder 31	Formulas, Celadon, 1994-1996
Box 1, Folder 32	Formulas, Notebook, circa 1974
Box 1, Folder 33	Letters of Recommendation Written by Bacerra, 1993-1996
Box 1, Folder 34	Student Notes Belonging to Bacerra, Chouinard Art Institute, 1957-1958
Box 1, Folder 35	Student Notebook Belonging to Bacerra, Chouinard Art Institute, 1957 Notes: Notes are on color design, religion, and history of civilization.

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## Series 4: Artwork, circa 1959-circa 1970s

### 0.2 Linear feet (Boxes 1, 4)

Scope and Contents: The series consists of sketchbooks and drawings by Bacerra while attending Chouinard Art Institute, sketches of Shoji Hamada during his workshop at the University of Southern California, and sketches of rabbits, flowers, and geometric designs for various ceramic projects.

Box 1, Folder 36	Sketchbook, circa 1970s Notes: Includes sketches of the letter "B," a rabbit design, geometric designs, and the profile of a face.
Box 1, Folder 37	Sketchbook, Chouinard Art Institute, circa 1959 Notes: Includes formula notes in back of book.
Box 1, Folder 38	Sketches from Shoji Hamada Workshop at University of Southern California, 1963
Box 4, Folder 2	Sketches and Drawings of Designs, circa 1970s

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## Series 5: Photographic Materials, 1958-2001

### 1.8 Linear feet (Boxes 2-4)

Scope and Contents: The series contains photographs, slides, negatives, and transparencies of Bacerra, his ceramic work, home, ceramics classes, Chouinard Art Institute, Otto and Vivika Heino, Beatrice Wood, Asian art from Bacerra's collection, Joan Borinstein's commission piece, murals, sculptures of animals, and travel to Hawaii. Also included are six photo albums documenting Bacerra's career, personal snapshots, and his retirement party in 1997.

Box 2, Folder 1-2	Bacerra, circa 1970-1997
Box 2, Folder 3	Bacerra by Jim McHugh, circa 1980s
Box 2, Folder 4	Bacerra with Others, 1971-1991
Box 2, Folder 5	Bacerra in Class, 1958-1989
Box 2, Folder 6	Bacerra in Class and Designs, circa 1970s
Box 2, Folder 7	Bacerra's Clay Demonstration Negatives, circa 1980s
Box 2, Folder 8	Bacerra with Beatrice Wood, Otto and Vivika Heino, circa 1992
Box 2, Folder 9	Bacerra's Home, circa 1970s
Box 4, Folder 4	Chouinard Art Institute, circa 1959
Box 2, Folder 10-11	Personal, 1970s-1990s
Box 2, Folder 12	Photograph of Vivika Heino, circa 1970s
Box 2, Folder 13-14	Ceramics, 1970s-1990s
Box 2, Folder 15	Ceramics by Bacerra at Frank Lloyd Gallery Exhibition, Photographed by Tony Cunha, 2001
Box 2, Folder 16-18	Ceramics by Bacerra, 1970s-1990s
Box 2, Folder 19-21	Ceramics by Bacerra, Binder Collected by Frank Lloyd Gallery, 1980-circa 2000
Box 3, Folder 1	Ceramics by Bacerra and Chouinard Art Institute, 1970s-1980s
Box 3, Folder 2	Ceramics by Bacerra and Fasar Induction Slides, 1975-1985
Box 3, Folder 3	Ceramics and Porcelains by Bacerra and Others, 1970s-1990s
Box 3, Folder 4	Asian Ceramics and Metals, 1975

Box 3, Folder 5	Asian Art Collection, 1978-1992
Box 3, Folder 6	Joan Borinstein Commission Slides, circa 1992
Box 3, Folder 7	Mural of Birds Slides, circa 1985
Box 3, Folder 8	Mural of Dimensional Tiles, Photographs, circa 1980s
Box 3, Folder 9	Photo Album, 1958 Notes: Includes two Awards of Merit won by Bacerra in the Chouinard Art Institute's student competition.
Box 3, Folder 10	Photo Album, Bacerra and Ceramics, circa 1968
Box 3, Folder 11	Photo Album, Portfolio, 1960-1961
Box 3, Folder 12	Photo Album, Personal Snapshots and Ceramics, circa 1980s
Box 3, Folder 13	Photo Album, Personal Snapshots, circa 1961-2000
Box 4, Folder 3	Photo Album, Bacerra's Retirement Party, circa 1997 Notes: Includes farewell notes from students.
Box 3, Folder 14	Sculptures, Photographs and Slides, 1976-circa 1990
Box 3, Folder 15-16	Travel, Slides, 1974-1975

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## Series 6: Printed Materials, 1958-2015

### 0.4 Linear feet (Box 4, OV 5)

Scope and Contents: Printed materials document Bacerra's career through clippings, exhibition announcements and catalogs, postcards, and exhibition posters. Also found in the series is a program for Bacerra's memorial service in 2008.

Box 3, Folder 17	Brochures, circa 1995
Box 3, Folder 18	Clippings, 1958-2000
Box 3, Folder 19-22	Exhibition Announcements and Catalogs, 1963-2015
Box 3, Folder 23	Magazines, 1999-2003
Box 4, Folder 5	Newspaper, 1979
Box 3, Folder 24	Postcards, 2000, undated
Oversize 5	Posters, circa 1980-2015
Box 3, Folder 25	Program, Memorial Service for Bacerra, 2008

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