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Functional Ceramic Vessels, Slip-cast earthenware, Jerome Ackerman, 1953-59. Image courtesy of Steve Oliver.

A MARRIAGE OF CRAFT AND DESIGN: THE WORK OF EVELYN AND JEROME ACKERMAN

January 23, 2011 – May 8, 2011

Curated by Jo Lauria and Dale Carolyn Gluckman

LOS ANGELES — Artist-designers Evelyn and Jerome Ackerman brought beautiful, yet affordable, home accessories to a rapidly expanding post-World War II California population. With their talents in decorative art and design, the couple helped to shape the phenomenon that came to be known as “Mid-Century California Modernism.”

The Ackermans’ unique vision and more than 50-year design partnership, from the early 1950s to the 1990s, will be celebrated in an exhibition at the Craft and Folk Art Museum (CAFAM). *A Marriage of Craft and Design: The Work of Evelyn and Jerome Ackerman* will run from January 23 to May 8, 2011.

Evelyn (b. 1924) and Jerome (b. 1920) adopted the German Bauhaus design school philosophy of integrating fine art, craftsmanship, and industrial practices, putting the applied arts on an equal level with the fine arts. While many of their artist-craftsmen peers became known for working in a single medium or style, the Ackermans’ creative expression was remarkable for its diversity of stylistic expressions, techniques, and materials.

“I was impressed at how fluidly they moved from the language of geometry and minimal abstraction—a modernist aesthetic—to a vernacular vocabulary that bordered on folk art,” says Jo Lauria, co-curator.

These two creative individuals branched out from their early studio background into a broader, cross-disciplinary approach to design. Jerome, with a master’s degree in ceramics, brought an interest in experimenting with new materials and production methods, as well as marketing savvy. At the same time, Evelyn’s fine art training contributed a talent for composition, expert draftsmanship, and an unerring eye for line and color.

After making their own westward journey from Detroit, the couple opened a design studio in Los Angeles in 1953: JENEV (a combination of their first names) and then ERA Industries in 1958. As design partners, the Ackerman’s created beautiful and reasonably priced home accessories, furniture, and architectural elements in mediums as diverse as textiles, ceramics, wood, mosaic, and metal. They frequently offered both cool (blues and greens) and warm (reds and oranges) color schemes so their work would complement any decorative palette. In addition to producing affordable lines for the home and office, the Ackermans also produced one-of-a-kind custom pieces for architects and interior designers.

“Embraced by the design community in post-war Los Angeles, the Ackermans provided well-designed objects at affordable prices through extraordinary talent and hard work, without compromising their core Bauhaus values,” notes Dale Carolyn Gluckman, co-curator.



Three Campesinas, Hand-woven wool tapestry, Evelyn Ackerman, 1970-72. Image courtesy of Steve Oliver.

The Ackermans' creative expression was rewarded with the rare honor of being included in every prestigious California Design exhibition, from 1954 through 1976. Over the years, the Ackermans have been the subject of many articles in the local and national press, and their works are in significant public and private collections. Recently the couple was honored with Distinguished Alumni awards from both Wayne State and Alfred Universities.

Although ERA Industries is no longer active, the Ackerman's aesthetic lives on. Through their collaboration, they blended fine art, craft, folk art, and modern design into their timely works.

*This exhibition was organized in an expanded format by Mingei International Museum, San Diego, CA where it was first presented in 2009–2010.

About the Curators:

Dale Carolyn Gluckman is an independent curator, textile historian and museum consultant based in Los Angeles. She has a BA in art history and an MA in costume history, both from UCLA. She was a curator of costume and textiles at LACMA for twenty-two years, the last five of which were as department head and has lectured and published widely on both European and Asian costumes and textiles. Since leaving LACMA in 2005, Dale has curated four exhibitions in the United States and Canada. She served as the textile and fiber arts consultant for *Craft in America: Expanding Traditions* and is currently advising the Queen Sirikit Museum of Textiles, Bangkok, Thailand (opening in August 2011).

Jo Lauria is an independent curator and an art and design historian, with a BA degree in art history from Yale University, a MA degree in Communication Arts from Loyola Marymount University, and MFA degree in studio art from Otis College of Art and Design. Her area of specialization is in modern and contemporary decorative arts, craft, and design. Jo most recently organized the national touring exhibition, *Craft in America: Expanding Traditions*, to accompany the documentary series *CRAFT IN AMERICA* produced for PBS. Concurrently, she is the co-curator of *Splendid Entities: 25 Years of Objects* by Phyllis Green at Ben Maltz Gallery, Otis College of Art and Design.

Situated on historic Museum Row since 1973, the Craft & Folk Art Museum (CAFAM) is an invaluable contributor to Los Angeles culture, exhibiting current artists with intriguing perspectives and distinctive practices. Exploring the leading edge of craft, art, and design, CAFAM gives audience to diverse makers and artists whose work is often not represented in larger art institutions. The museum is a place to see art and make art — all under one roof. CAFAM coordinates a robust roster of hands-on workshops led by professional artists and makers. The intimate, atypical museum space and independent spirit at CAFAM combine to create an atmosphere of excitement and innovation, where people in Los Angeles deepen their relationships to art, creativity and one another. For more information, visit www.cafam.org

Location: 5814 Wilshire Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90036

Admission: FREE every Sunday

Regularly: \$7 for adults; \$5 for students, teachers, seniors, and veterans; free for CAFAM members

Hours: Tuesday-Friday, 11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.; Saturday & Sunday, 12:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.; closed Mondays. Every first Thursday of the month, extended hours 6:30 - 9:30 p.m.