

CORKIN GALLERY

JAMES CASWELL

b. St. Boniface, Manitoba, 1948 – 2015

James Caswell was born in St. Boniface, Manitoba, in 1948 and studied painting and sculpture in Los Angeles. He lived and worked primarily in Santa Monica, California.

Originally trained as a painter, Caswell brought a painterly sensibility to ceramics, working in traditional forms such as vases, bowls, and platters. In the late 1970s, after throwing more than 10,000 pieces, he developed what he described as an “allergy” to circular and spherical forms, leading to a radical shift in his practice. He began creating non-cylindrical, non-concentric, and highly unconventional ceramic sculptures that combined bold colour with unexpected, dynamic shapes.

From 1983 to 1985, Caswell was Artist-in-Residence at the Sèvres Porcelain Manufactory in France, at the invitation of the French Ministry of Culture. He continued to develop his sculptural works, called eccentric vases. Serves put three of his eccentric vases into production. After Caswell returned to Los Angeles, he served as chief designer at a glass factory in Santa Monica.

Over the course of his career, Caswell merged ancient concepts of form, content, and decoration with a modernist sensibility, drawing inspiration from ethnology, shamanism, and tribal worldviews. Mexico was also a significant source of interest and influence. He co-edited *Saints & Sinners: Mexican Devotional Art* (California Heritage Museum), a publication featuring more than 350 examples of Mexican devotional objects—including santos, milagritos, retablos, and works in clay, wood, and metal—that reflect his scholarly and collecting engagement with Mexican folk traditions.

His work was widely exhibited across North America, Europe, and Asia. In 1983, he received a National Endowment for the Arts Individual Artist Fellowship. An avid collector, he opened his shop, *Historia*, on Pico Boulevard in Santa Monica in 1980.