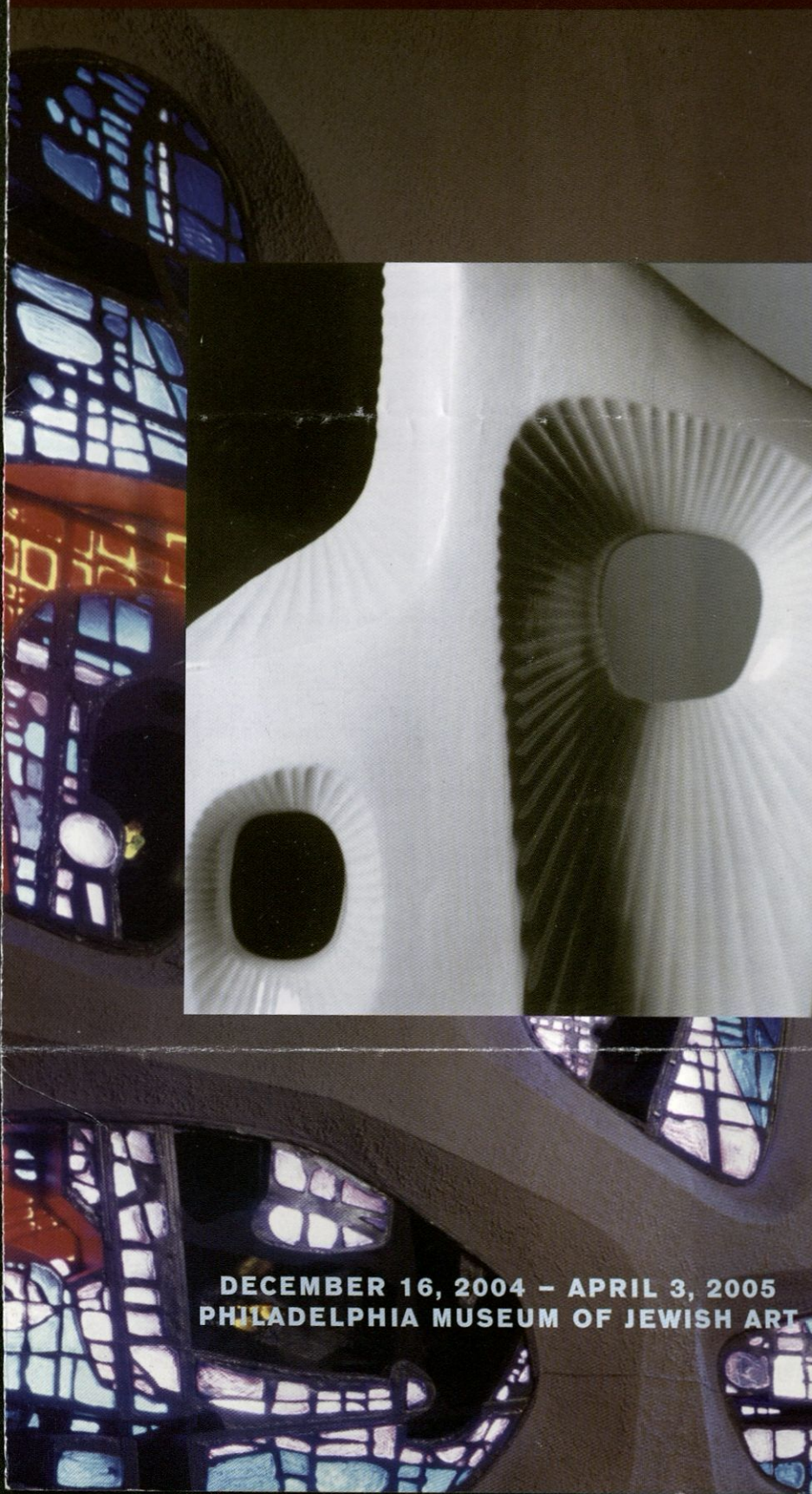


JONATHAN ADLER RE:FORM



**DECEMBER 16, 2004 – APRIL 3, 2005
PHILADELPHIA MUSEUM OF JEWISH ART**

Happy, handcrafted, and luxe. Rare, rustic, and recherché. Earthy, elegant, and eccentric.

These are Jonathan Adler's own descriptions of his widely collected pottery. Launched in 1994 with a single order from Barney's, Adler's career in clay has transformed the Brown University-educated New Jersey native into the head of a burgeoning empire that now includes four eponymous retail stores (in New York, East Hampton, Los Angeles, and Miami Beach), representation in hundreds of other shops and galleries throughout the world, textiles that channel folk- and modern-art inspirations through traditional Peruvian weaving techniques, a decidedly eclectic and imaginatively hued line of furniture, and a growing roster of clients for his interior-design services (among Adler's recent high-profile commissions: the Parker Palm Springs Hotel).

Adler is a leading figure in contemporary design. His pottery and other products are regularly featured in periodicals such as *Metropolitan Home*, *Wallpaper*, *Elle Décor*, and *House & Garden*, and establish an urbane and stylish tone on the sets of *Will & Grace*, *The Today Show*, and *The Apprentice*, among other programs. The influence of his organic shapes and textures, in particular, can be seen throughout the offerings of today's home-furnishings manufacturers and retailers, but his work also reflects the fascinations of a happy — and visually and intellectually stimulating — 1970s childhood.

Adler's aesthetic was nurtured in the boldly modern home of his parents, and he found wonder in the newly minted — and, often, architecturally adventurous — temples that sprang up in the baby-booming suburbs of his youth. "I have always been driven by and fantasized about moving into those synagogues," he said in a 1998 profile in the *New York Times*. "They have such a groovy, brutalist, modern thing going on."


This quote is the starting-point for *Jonathan Adler Re:form*. This first museum retrospective of Adler's ceramics pairs his pottery with Paul Rocheleau's photographs of striking modernist synagogues. Like Adler's creations, this exhibition contains an element of whimsy. With Adler's great accomplishments showcased alongside images of a singular source of creative inspiration — the American temple at mid-century — one may delight in Jonathan's inventive forms, surfaces, and colors while exploring a distinctive but largely unsung period in synagogue architecture and American Jewish life.

Matthew F. Singer
Curator, Philadelphia Museum of Jewish Art

Clockwise from top, left: Round Pop Menorah. Introduced in 2004. High-fired stoneware with high-gloss glaze. Temple Beth Shalom, Miami Beach, FL, Percival Goodman, 1956. Photo: Paul Rocheleau. Aorta. Introduced in 1997. High-fired porcelain with matte glaze. Quadra Vase. Introduced in 2002. High-fired porcelain with platinum overglaze. North Shore Congregation Israel, Glencoe, IL, Minoru Yamasaki, 1964. Photo: Paul Rocheleau. Candlesticks from Lantern Collection. Introduced in 1999. High-fired stoneware with matte glaze. Congregation Kneses Tifereth Israel, Port Chester, NY, Philip Johnson, 1956. Photo: Paul Rocheleau.




JONATHAN ADLER AND AMERICAN POTTERY




Let's begin by establishing an American context for Jonathan Adler's ceramics. It all started with the Centennial Exhibition, the international world's fair held here in Philadelphia in 1876. The organizers hoped to improve the quality of American ceramics by providing manufacturers and the public with "superior" European models. Responding to the handcrafted principles of the largely English Arts and Crafts movement, the American pottery movement was founded at such factories as Rookwood and Grueby. Ceramic education took on a new significance, and by the mid-twentieth century

art pottery was being promoted as a profession rather than an avocation. Art potters in the second half of the twentieth century drew inspiration from a variety of sources, including Dada and Surrealist sculpture, and their work blurred the traditional distinction between art and craft.



Industrial designers — most notably Russell Wright and Eva Zeisel — played an increasing role in American ceramics as the twentieth century progressed. Perhaps the most innovative late-twentieth-century production was the often whimsical and stylistically "postmodern" dinnerware commissioned in the 1980s and 1990s by the New York firm of Swid Powell from well-known architects such as Robert Venturi and Richard Meier.

Jonathan Adler represents a new chapter in the history of American ceramics. Like the organizers of the Centennial Exhibition, he has looked to Europe for inspiration — German-born Hans Coper and Italian Piero Fornasetti are particular heroes. Like Arts and Crafts practitioners, he complements his pottery with furniture, textiles, and other domestic items that evoke a unifying ideology — although Adler's, as expressed in his evolving manifestoes, is a bit tongue-in-cheek, declaring that "we believe minimalism is a bummer" and that "handcrafted tchotchkes are life-enchanting." Like Russell Wright, he has brought an entrepreneurial spirit and multimedia approach to design. Finally, like the architects who designed for Swid Powell, Adler is something of a post-modernist, in that he sees modernism as a historically distinct movement that belongs to the (recent) past. Modernism famously decreed that "form follows function," but Adler's work reflects an intuitive understanding that the products of modernism — whether a synagogue, house, vase, chair, lamp, dress, or toaster — now evoke memories and associations quite independent of their intended function. Keeping one eye trained on the past, Adler has — with wit and imagination — done much to set the tone for today's forward-looking domestic style.



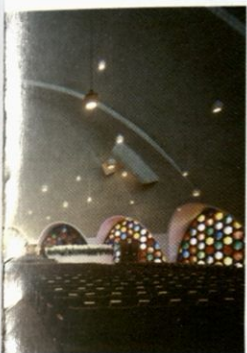
Donna Corbin

Associate Curator of European Decorative Arts
Philadelphia Museum of Art



(OR, GO WITH THE FLOW):

THE MID-20TH CENTURY SYNAGOGUE



Jonathan Adler has stated that his ceramics are inspired, in part, by the synagogue spaces he remembers as a boy in New Jersey. He calls these places “groovy” and “brutalist” – phrases that, while not precise descriptions, suggest the emotions 1960s-era synagogues called forth in him and in so many others. Even when suburban post-war synagogues were little more than spare and simple boxes built quickly and on the cheap, they became filled with furniture and religious fittings that might be considered groovy, at least to a bar mitzvah boy in 1979.

Many of the synagogues built after World War II were designed in a raw modernism that was in stark contrast to two centuries of highly decorated American synagogue design. The best of these new synagogues featured expressive shapes, dramatic lighting, and a rich mix of materials that included old standards, such as wood and brick, and new favorites, especially concrete and steel (it is from the French term for “raw concrete” – *béton brut* – that brutalist architecture got its name). Too often, however, limited budgets

and expediency led to the proliferation of basic boxes – often boring and banal, and sometimes downright ugly. But there were alternatives.

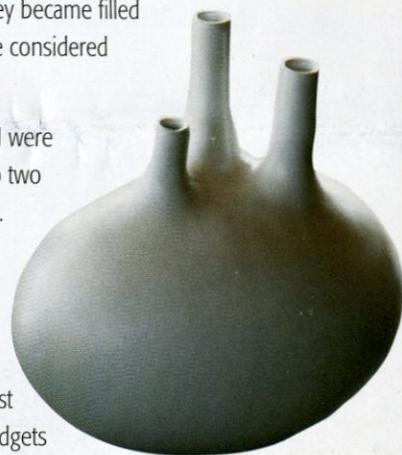
Fluid, flexible, and biomorphic forms became popular among period metalsmiths and ceramicists, while colorful geometric patterns, sometimes incorporating variants on traditional Jewish symbols, predominated for Ark curtains and Torah coverings. These new forms increasingly appeared on synagogue exteriors, too, which were manipulated for symbolic meaning. The best work includes menorahs by sculptors Seymour Lipton and Ibram Lassow, and eternal lights by Boris Aronson, Henry Ferber, and others.

Spaces were enlivened with brightly colored stained glass windows, and sometimes, similarly bold curtains and seats. Nowhere is this effect more intense than in Percival Goodman’s Beth Sholom in Miami, built in the 1950s, and the Gumenick Chapel, also in Miami, by Kenneth Treister, which opened in 1969. It is this building (and a few derived from it) that most closely shares Adler’s aesthetic – though Treister’s display (unlike Adler’s) is utter enthusiasm, without irony or nostalgia.

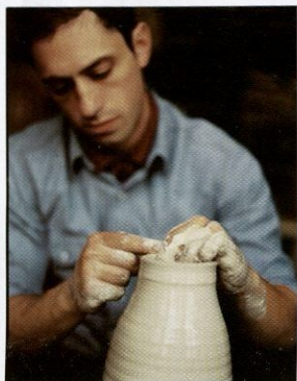
Samuel D. Gruber

Director, Jewish Heritage Research Center (Syracuse, NY)

Author, *American Synagogues: A Century of Architecture and Jewish Community* (Rizzoli, 2003)



JONATHAN ADLER



Matt Singer: What is your creative process? Do you start with an idea in mind — perhaps even sketch things in advance — or does the inspiration come as you're working with the clay?

Jonathan Adler: It's really a combination. Usually I make a sketch and then, when I'm working on a piece, it develops.

MS: You've said that the temples you visited as a kid inspired you. How so? How might that inspiration be reflected in a given piece of pottery?

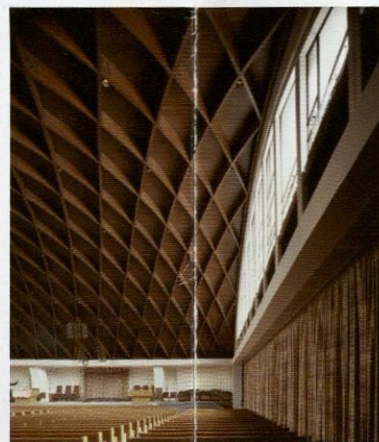
JA: When I was growing up, we belonged to a Conservative congregation (Beth Abraham in Bridgeton, New Jersey), and the building was not very over the top. But, I can still remember the ecstatic frisson I felt when I went to friends' Reform temples. To me, the Reform movement represents a kind of futuristic, utopian ideal. And the Reform temples I visited then were the architectural embodiment of the mod idealism of the movement. Houses of worship have always been architectural gems, from Renaissance churches to Le Corbusier's Ronchamp. Communities really open their handbags wide to pay for temples, and architects really go for it in an attempt to create a transcendental experience. Reform and other synagogue architecture of the period embraced organic modernism as a style and took it to the extreme, with abstract, free-flowing forms and, often, a decorative-patterned overlay. My pottery uses an organic modernist vocabulary with a layer of pattern and decoration.

MS: What's next?

JA: About a squillion things are next — more stores (Miami, Santa Monica, and San Francisco all opening in the next few months), more stuff, more giggles with Simon and Liberace (my husband and dog, respectively), and, I hope, more vacations!

MS: If you could design a synagogue, what would it look like?

JA: I think I would strive to take my idea of progressive synagogue architecture (organic modernism with a nod to transcendentalism) to an extreme. I'd love to design a totally futuristic white pod with pattern and decoration and a sense of fun.



Clockwise from top, left: Jonathan Adler, 2002. Photo: Jurgen Frank. Slide vase from Relief Collection. Introduced in 1998. High-fired stoneware with matte glaze. Temple Beth El, Providence, RI, Percival Goodman, 1956. Photo: Paul Rocheleau. Flame vase from Relief Collection. Introduced in 1998. High-fired stoneware with matte glaze.

JONATHAN ADLER RE:FORM

DECEMBER 16, 2004 – APRIL 3, 2005

Opening: Wednesday, December 15

6:00 – 7:00 p.m.

Discussion with Jonathan Adler. Free and open to the public.

7:00 – 9:00 p.m.

Latke/Vodka Party, a reception for the artist and fundraiser for the Philadelphia Museum of Jewish Art. *The Latke/Vodka Party is a subscription event.*

For tickets, call 215-627-6747.



PHILADELPHIA MUSEUM OF JEWISH ART CONGREGATION RODEPH SHALOM

615 North Broad Street, Philadelphia, PA 19123

Entrance and parking on Mt. Vernon Street

Monday – Thursday: 10 – 4

Friday: 10 – 2, Sunday: 10 – noon

Hours are subject to change;
please call (215) 627-6747 to confirm.

Presenting contemporary art that illuminates the Jewish experience, the Philadelphia Museum of Jewish Art (PMJA) has, since 1975, presented solo and group exhibitions of work in the broadest range of mediums by artists of diverse backgrounds. The PMJA is located within the Metropolitan Temple of Congregation Rodeph Shalom.

The Philadelphia Museum of Jewish Art is dedicated in memory of Jacob C. Gutman.
Gail Rosenberg, Chair • Joan C. Sall, Director

This publication is made possible by a generous gift from an anonymous donor.

Far left: Citron vase from Relief Collection. Introduced in 1998. High-fired stoneware with matte glaze. Left: Reform Temple Vases. Introduced in 2004. High-fired porcelain with clear gloss glaze on textured recesses. Cover: Reform Temple Vase (detail). Introduced in 2004. High-fired porcelain with clear gloss glaze on textured recesses. Gumenick Chapel at Temple Israel, Miami, FL, Kenneth Treister, 1969. Photo: Paul Rocheleau. Brochure design: Veronica Miller.