

## Radical Pots & Cooperative Hands: Katherine Choy and Clay Art Center

Greenwich Historical Society, Cos Cob, CT • greenwichhistory.org • Through February 4, 2024

**R**adical Pots & Cooperative Hands: Katherine Choy and Clay Art Center is an exhibition that showcases the work of an incredible artist, as well as the stalwart community that she helped build.

Katherine Choy first came to America from China to attend college in 1946. By 1952, she had obtained bachelor's and master's degrees and became the head of the ceramics department at the Newcomb College at Tulane University. In 1957, she came into contact with Japanese-American potter Henry Okamoto, and soon after they founded Clay Art Center in Port Chester, NY. Tragically, Choy died of pneumonia at age thirty only one year later in 1958. Despite this hardship, Okamoto, the Port Chester community, and surrounding areas fought to keep Clay Art Center alive, and the nonprofit is a staple of the local arts community to this day.

Okamoto not only saved Clay Art Center after Choy's untimely passing, he and the Clay Art Center staff also saved her work, notes, and her correspondence with Okamoto when the two were making plans for the Center. Many of these historical objects, including business documents, photographs and personal letters are on display alongside ceramic works by both Choy and Okamoto.



Katherine Choy, ca. 1957, Pair of Bottles, left to right: *Bottle with Donut Shape*, stoneware, 9.5"; *Long-Necked Footed Bottle with Thumb Hole*, stoneware, 11". Clay Art Center Collection. Photo: Paul Mutino.

Choy's ceramics are elegant, with great care shown towards delicate forms and complex glazing techniques, which were some of her specialties. Samples of Choy's notes on and experiments with glazes are also on display. Around the time of her death, Choy was beginning to work on a larger scale as her pieces moved away from the functional and towards the purely aesthetic and sculptural. "They show that she's trying to play around with surface and texture and thinking about basically making art that comments on its form

and making," remarked curator Maggie Dimock. Choy was talented and extremely prolific, as well. In the year she lived and worked in Port Chester alone, she created more than 200 pieces.

Greenwich Historical Society, with the help of Clay Art Center and other community partners, honors the legacy of a brilliant potter lost before her time and those who have kept that legacy alive for more than sixty years. — Autumn Duke

## Dearly Departed: Mourning and Memory

Fairfield Museum and History Center, Fairfield, CT • fairfieldhistory.org • Through January 28, 2024

**D**eath and grieving are not bound by epochs. These states are integral and unavoidable aspects of being human regardless of one's physical or chronological location, but a thoughtful exhibition at Fairfield Museum and History Center reminds us that the science, sentiments, superstitions, and rituals around mourning shift throughout history. Inspired by and primarily featuring items from the Museum's collection, this intimate show unpacks the cultural mores around death and grieving as they are practiced by European Americans, focusing on items from Connecticut and New England. The objects and manuscripts on display date from 1777 to 1975, yet curator Chelsea Garth wisely eschews chronological order, instead organizing the exhibition into clear themes expounded through artful wall plaques that employ narrative texts, illustrations, and scans of archival items—including a fascinating *Bridgeport Times* clip about the author of *Sherlock* talking on spiritualism. The exhibition themes include, among others: *Death and Superstition*, where viewers learn that "The fear of lingering ghosts of those who passed and the



Painted silk mourning picture, circa 1815, by Sarah Turney. Courtesy of Fairfield Museum and History Center.

figure of death itself were prominent. Dressing in black aided mourners in hiding from vengeful spirits..."; *Expressions of Mourning*, that includes a case of Victorian-era mourning jewelry made from the hair of loved ones; and *Collective Grief and Mourning* where the relationship between the nascent science of embalming and collective grieving is articulated—specifically, Abraham Lincoln (whose body was now able to be transported by a train that ceremoniously stopped for mourners) and John F. Kennedy (whose body was laid in state and televised). Aesthetically, two painted silk mourning pictures are tender and beautiful; both are made by young Fairfield, Connecticut women—Sarah Turney (c. 1815) and Ruamah Bradley (c. 1805)—as part of their "formal education" to learn "domestic pursuits." For

these reasons and more, *Dearly Departed* is worth a visit. Through smart curating, in-depth research, and engaging objects and manuscripts, this show explores approximately 200 years of mourning, asking viewers to remember not only lost loved ones but also the seldom told histories of how people have processed that loss. — Terri C Smith