



Marguerite Wildenhain and the Bauhaus: An Eyewitness Anthology

Edited by Dean and Geraldine Schwarz
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The course of modernism in the twentieth century was established in very large part by one institution: the Bauhaus. Opened in Germany just after the end of WWI and closed by 1933, as a school it lasted just fourteen years, surviving several relocations and changes in leadership but finally done in by the Nazis upon their assumption of power. Its importance is now officially acknowledged by its designation as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, but its impact is virtually immeasurable. Many of its students and faculty ended up in the United States, where they effected a sea change in art, technology and culture, reshaping the skylines of North America, the poetry of the mid-twentieth century, and the practice and development of craft-based art forms like textiles and ceramics.

Marguerite Wildenhain and the Bauhaus: An Eyewitness Anthology is, in a sense, a document of one journey by which the Bauhaus took to America: that of Marguerite Wildenhain (nee Friedlander), a French-born German Jew and ceramist who arrived in California just as WWII broke out, teaching and creating there until her death in 1985.

Wildenhain spent five years at the Bauhaus, in the end acquiring the status of Master Potter. A teaching career she then embarked upon was shattered in 1933 by the rise of the Nazis, and she and her husband moved to the Netherlands where they established a ceramics business.

Were it not for the intercedence of two Americans - Jane and Gordon Herr - Wildenhain would quite likely have died in the concentration camps of WWII. As it was, she left for America in 1940 alone (her husband's emigration was denied and he was eventually drafted into the German army).

She eventually ended up in California at Pond Farm just north of San Francisco, where the Herr's had founded an artist's colony and where Wildenhain re-established herself her twice-disrupted career.

The death of Jane Herr and personality clashes spelled the end of the colony in the 1950s, but Wildenhain stayed on, running her own pottery school that drew students from around the world to Pond Farm each summer. She taught until 1979, and threw her last pot a year later, six years before her death at the age of eighty-eight. Pond Farm itself became a part of one of California's state parks.

Dean Schwarz, who together with his wife Geraldine edited *Marguerite Wildenhain and the Bauhaus* and is one of the principals behind South Bear Press, studied with Wildenhain in the 1960s. While later teaching at Luther College in Iowa, he co-founded South Bear School, where Wildenhain became a regular visitor. A renowned ceramist in his own right, he's the authority on the work and life of his teacher and mentor. The scope of this massive anthology is evidence enough.

The Schwarz's have assembled over 50 different contributors to trace out the life and enduring legacy of Wildenhain. The Canadian connection to the book, comes from Robert Weeden, a former professor of biology, who contributes the anthology's opening essay, which narrates the history and prehistory of the area that became Pond Farm. He's married to Judy Weeden, a ceramist who lives and works on Saltspring Island in British Columbia, and who is founder of North Bear, an offshoot of South Bear School. Her essay "north bear: the alaska connection," traces out her connections with Wildenhain via classes she came to teach at Weeden's school at its original Alaskan location.

But it all begins with Germany. Following Robert Weeden's introductory essay on Pond Farm, the archaeological significance of the area is dealt with before the anthology makes a conceptual leap back to Germany and to a series of essays contextually dealing with the state of ceramics at the time of the Bauhaus. Then it's back to Pond Farm and remembrances of both Wildenhain as a teacher as well as ceramist. Myriad full-colour images of her work and that of former students and contemporaries (Bernard Leach, as well as early pieces by the likes of Peter Voulkos, are but two examples) fill out this remarkable volume.

Marguerite Wildenhain and the Bauhaus: An Eyewitness Anthology is an enormously comprehensive (even somewhat daunting) homage to one of the greats of twentieth century ceramics. And make no mistake about it: this is a substantial and worthy contribution to the literature of clay.