

Edwin And Mary Scheier: Midcentury Modernists In New Hampshire



Previous Page: Platter, late 1940s. Earthenware, width 11¾ inches. Collection of Brian and Stephanie Fischer.

By Rick Russack

PORTSMOUTH, N.H. — Ed and Mary Scheier are probably New Hampshire's best known midcentury potters, but this creative couple, essentially self-taught, worked in a variety of media, often in partnership. In all, they were vigorous participants in the

Sculpture, 1971. Guanacaste wood, height 45 inches. University of New Hampshire Special Collections.





*Print, 2000. Inkjet on paper, 16 by 20 inches.
University of New Hampshire Special
Collections.*



*Hooked rug designed by Ed Scheier, maker unknown, 1950s.
League of New Hampshire Craftsmen, Concord.*

mid-Twentieth Century studio crafts movement. More than 80 works by the Scheiers are featured in a

comprehensive exhibit presented by the Portsmouth Historical Society in collaboration with the University of



Newbury, Mass., dealer Joan Brownstein holds a monumentally scaled bowl whose intimate subject matter — four pregnant figures — carries great emotional impact. Inscribed “Scheier” and dated ‘92, the stoneware vessel has matte glaze in rust, cream and brown. Reproduced in the DVD “Four Hands One Heart: The Story of America’s Most Acclaimed Potters, Ed and Mary Scheier” by Ken Browne and the Currier Gallery of Art, and shown on PBS television, 2006. Private collection.

New Hampshire, on view at Discover Portsmouth through October 2. The show was organized by Dale Valena, curator of the University Museum, Dimond Library, at UNH.

Two other retrospectives, “The New Hampshire Art Association” and “The League of New Hampshire Craftsmen: A Retrospective,” accompany the display and help place the Scheiers in



Bowl, circa 1945. Earthenware, height 3½ inches. University of New Hampshire Museum, Durham.



Bowl, circa 1950. Stoneware with sgraffito decoration, height 4¾ inches. University of New Hampshire Special Collections, Durham.

the context of their era. As Richard Candee, president of the Portsmouth Historical Society, notes, the next five months promise more art of the 1940s

through the 1960s than the Seacoast region has seen since that time.

Edwin (1910–2008) and Mary Goldsmith Scheier (1910–2007)

Untitled, 1970s. Sand painting on paper mounted on board, height 24 inches. Currier Museum of Art, Manchester, N.H., gift of Edwin and Mary Scheier.

taught at the University of New Hampshire, where a large collection of their work remains. The couple left their personal holdings to the Currier Museum of Art, which had a large Scheier collection even before this bequest. The Zimmerman House, designed by Frank Lloyd Wright and now





part of the Currier, retains the Scheier pottery collected by the Zimmerman family. Additionally, there are several major private collections of Scheier pottery. The Portsmouth display draws from all of these sources.

The Scheiers, who married in 1937, came of age during the Depression and, by different paths, both worked on WPA programs in

Vessel with face design, mid-1960s. Stoneware with low relief decoration, height 20 inches. University of New Hampshire Special Collections, Durham.

the South. Neither set out to be a potter, but when exposed to clay their futures were determined. Their first experiments with the medium came in 1938 when, due to their WPA jobs, they had access to a kiln operated by the Tennessee Valley Authority Ceramics Laboratory in Norris, Ky. TVA staff also provided basic instruction in working with clay. Soon

thereafter, the Scheiers began seeking out local folk potters and learning about the craft. They also learned that these potters were able to earn a living, even in those difficult times, by making utilitarian wares. Within a year, the Scheiers decided to give up their government jobs to be full-time potters. ([Continued on page 1-C inside the E-edition](#))

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