

## ARCHIVES

### **Maija Grotell Papers (1899-1973)**

Papers, 1955-1972  
.25 linear ft.

Acquisition Number: 2002-08L

Acquisition: These materials were transferred to the Archives from the Cranbrook Art Library. The apron was transferred from the Cranbrook Academy of Art Museum in 1983.

Access: Access to this collection is unrestricted.

Copyright: Copyright to this collection is held by the Cranbrook Educational Community.

Photographs: A portfolio of Grotell's work is included in this collection.

Processing: Leslie S. Edwards, August 2002



## **Biographical Note**

Maija Grotell was born in August 19, 1899 in Helsingfors, Finland, daughter of Carl Gustav and Selma (Wiens) Grotell. She trained in painting, sculpture and Helsingfors' Centralskolen for Konstflit (Central School of Industrial Art), graduating in 1920. She joined a textile firm as an artist, and completed six years of graduate work (1920-1926) in ceramics under Albert William Finch. In October 1927, Grotell emigrated to the United States, settling in New York where she studied for one summer under Charles Fergus Binns at the State College of Ceramics at Alfred. Her first employment came at the Inwood Pottery Studios (1927-1928) in Manhattan. She went on to teach children at the Union Settlement (1928-1929) and at the Henry Street Craft School Settlement (1929-1937), while exhibiting and selling her own ceramics. From 1937-1938, Grotell was a ceramics instructor and research assistant at the Department of Ceramics at Rutgers University. She was naturalized as a United States citizen in 1934.

As Eliel Saarinen's complex of buildings at Cranbrook began to take shape, he sought out distinguished artists and craftsmen to work in the studios. Impressed with a gallery exhibition of Grotell's, Saarinen envisioned her ceramics contributing to the architecture of Cranbrook. In the fall of 1938, she was invited to join the faculty of the Cranbrook Academy of Art as head of the ceramics department, a position she held until her retirement in 1966.

In her teaching, Grotell emphasized ceramics as a medium of artistic expression. Many students trained by her went into teaching and were largely responsible for the development of university ceramics programs. Throughout her career, Grotell actively engaged in research on glazes, including those used for colored glazed bricks in architecture. One of her original discoveries was the use of chromium and iron in place of uranium to produce a brilliant orange glaze. Grotell won numerous awards throughout her career, including the Charles Fergus Binns Medal in 1961 at Alfred University, and the Cranbrook Founders Day Award in 1964. Grotell's work is represented in the permanent collections of many museums across the country. In 1977, the Maija Grotell Court was dedicated at Cranbrook.

## **Scope and Content of Collection**

This collection was artificially arranged from materials previously donated to the Archives. Due to its small size, the collection was not arranged in series. It consists primarily of materials relating to Grotell's work in ceramics, including her vitae and lists of awards and exhibitions (1955-1960). There is also a glaze recipe, and correspondence from a former student, Rhoda Lopez. Most importantly is a portfolio of Grotell's work that was presented to the American Institute of Architects (1972) nominating her for the Craftsmanship Medal. Grotell's apron was donated to the Cranbrook Academy of Art

Museum in 1979 by a former friend and Cranbrook faculty, Ruelba Pitchford. It was transferred to the Archives in 1983.

### **Related Collections**

- The Martha Lauritzen Papers (1999-11) consist primarily of material related to Maija Grotell.
- Photographs are located in the Archives' photograph collection.
- The Cranbrook Art Academy holds a video of films taken 1939-1942 which contain scenes of Maija Grotell at the potter's wheel.
- The Maija Grotell Papers are located at the George Arents Research Library, Syracuse University, and on microfilm at the Smithsonian Archives of American Art. The Cranbrook Archives owns a copy of this microfilm.
- See also: Schlanger, Jeff and Toshiko Takeazu. (1996) *Maija Grotell: works which grow from belief*. Goffstown, NH: Studio Potter Books.

### **Box Number--Description**

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#### **Box 1**

- 1:1 Biographical records, 1956-1966
- 1:2 Correspondence
  - Rhoda Lopez to Maija Grotell, 1962
  - John Gerard to Mark Coir, 1983
- 1:3 Portfolio, 1972
  - Glaze recipe, n.d.
- 1:4 Realia: potter's apron