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Other Art Potteries

The Arts and Crafts period was an era of the potter, and ceramics was produced in large and small scale at innumerable potteries across the country. Among others of note on the East Coast was **Wanopee Pottery**, which from 1901 to '03 produced “lettuce-leaf ware” using molds made from actual cabbage leaves and covered with a pale green or a pink glaze. **Merrimac Ceramic Company** of Maine and Massachusetts (1897-1908) attracted attention with pure, simple, unpainted shapes. It won a silver medal at St. Louis in 1904 with *Arrhelian* ware in an early Roman style, and for its brighter-than-Grueby green glazes and an iridescent metallic black. **Tiffany Studios** (1904 to around 1914) produced Favrile pottery first shown at St. Louis in 1904, copying shapes the company already made in enameled copper. Some were cast from molds made from shellacked plants. Tiffany’s ceramics line seems not to have been particularly successful, perhaps overshadowed by his glass. **Clifton Art Pottery** (1905-1911) produced “Clifton Indian Ware” of unglazed New Jersey red clay in forms adapted from American Indian pottery, which was soon copied by others.

In the south, **Niloak Pottery** was established by Charles Hyten of Benton, Arkansas, in 1909. The name is “kaolin” spelled backward. Kaolin is an essential ingredient in porcelain, but little or no kaolin was present in Hyten’s clay. The ware was called “Mission,” also for marketing reasons. Hyten used his knowledge of clay chemistry to combine several local clays so that they wouldn’t separate during drying or firing. Various clays [often blue and brown] were thrown on the potter’s wheel to swirl the colors together in a pattern sometimes like wood grain. The works were fired at a high temperature and polished to a silky texture, exteriors unglazed. By 1912 Niloak pots were offered nationally to art shops and collectors through home decorating magazines. Hyten traveled to promote his wares, often carrying a wheel and a supply of Arkansas clay for demonstrations in department stores and elsewhere.

In the Midwest, **Rookwood** adopted lighter, clearer tones, stylization and the popular American Indian imagery. In 1901, the company introduced new mat surfaces, whose popularity paralleled a preference for mat photographic prints as opposed to glossy ones.¹ **Weller Pottery** hired the Frenchman Jacques Sicard in 1901, and he created *Sicardo* iridescent ware, which was

a great critical success. Complex patterns appeared over backgrounds that shifted in color. This was just one of the lines of Weller, which claimed to be the largest ceramics factory in the world. **Northwestern Terra Cotta Co.** of Chicago introduced a line of art pottery called *Norweta* that included delicate porcelain vases covered with a crystalline glaze and terra cotta vases given the appearance of twisted tree trunks or stylized leaves and flowers in cucumber green or dark blue monochrome glaze (1907 to about 1920).

California had remarkable clay deposits, and the pottery industry there grew in several directions, despite struggles with economic and natural disasters and difficulty in building an audience for the work. **Roblin** was a short-lived Bay Area art pottery founded by Alexander W. Robertson, of the Chelsea Robertson family, and Linna Vogel Irelan. Robertson, new to California, read an 1889 essay about California clays by Irelan and contacted her in 1891 to show her his work with local clay. In 1898 they opened a pottery together in San Francisco. Her dream was to create “a uniquely Californian art” using local materials and motifs. Robertson did the potting and firing and she did most decorating, including modeling (mushrooms and lizards in particular). Roblin received an honorable mention at the Paris world’s fair of 1900—amazing considering its newness—but faced a frustratingly limited local response and could not afford to ship its wares east. In April 1906 the pottery, its recently established school, a collection of the most successful ware and all its stock were destroyed in the San Francisco earthquake. Robertson, then 66 years old, and his son Fred H. Robertson, who had joined him in 1903, left for Southern California and went on potting (see Ch. 3). Irelan retired.