

PLEASE NOTE: The following material was removed from the final version of the textbook **Makers: A History of American Studio Craft** and is provided on the textbook Web site for reference purposes.
Copyright © The Center for Craft, Creativity and Design, Inc. All Rights Reserved.

Another Important Teacher

In 1946, **Paul Bonifas** (1893-1967) arrived in Seattle to establish a ceramics department at the University of Washington. A sculptor and a native of Switzerland, he had lived in Paris and become a close friend of the French founder of Purism, Amédée Ozenfant, and thus also associated with its co-founder, the Swiss-born, French-based architect Le Corbusier. Bonifas was general secretary of the Purist magazine *L'Esprit Nouveau* in 1921 and '22 but had a falling out with Le Corbusier over ornament. Bonifas's entirely black-glazed forms of the 1930s showed the influence of both men—Ozenfant regarded them as Purist works—and he later made a group of *faiences blanches* to complement those works.

In Europe, Bonifas had conceived works while his assistants did the execution. As a teacher in Seattle—remembered as charismatic and inspiring—he emphasized technical skills, probably because America offered no technicians and because his own knowledge was limited.¹ He mainly made vessels with architectural interest, often in bronze and in small editions. He both handbuilt and used molds. His vessels of the late '40 and early '50s were classically simple forms, occasionally with carved features or press-molded decorations, and with cast handles or spouts. His wife, Simone Bonifas, prepared and applied glazes and assisted him in other ways. He worked in earthenware, even after high-fire materials and kilns were available at the university.

Bonifas was not interested in “creating a totally new formal vocabulary”; he argued that seven or eight “perfect” ceramic forms had been created many centuries before and could be called upon at will.¹ However, his late works were inventive rather than classic

recapitulations: he made sculptural objects in terra-cotta, including stylized figures and masks with titles that were satirical social commentaries. They were often unglazed combinations of different-colored clays, carefully analyzed so that they could be fired at the same temperature.