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Rose Cabat

Tucson-based **Rose Cabat** (b. 1914) carved out a particular niche, a distinctive form, and worked it consistently through a long career. This was what she called a “feelie,” a globular vase tightening down to a minuscule neck, these extremes producing a quality of aliveness that she heightened with satin surfaces. Everything worked toward the creation of an object that asked to be held. While a variety of sizes and surfaces made the feelies beautiful to look at, Cabat’s instinctive urge was to emphasize the tactile above all.

Bronx-born Cabat first worked with clay in 1940, when her husband, Erni, brought some home from his job as an assistant to Vally Wieselthier. She responded immediately and became a member at Greenwich House Pottery, where she taught herself to throw. In 1956 she took a five-week glaze-calculation course at the University of Hawaii, but she is otherwise self-taught. She first used earthenware, then stoneware, and in the late ‘50s began to use porcelain, following the usual materials chronology of the times. After moving from New York to Tucson in 1942, she had to find her own way: clay from a local brickyard, a wheel that ran with a washing-machine motor. Before long she bought a more professional Randall wheel (and she was still throwing on it when she was 90).

In the ‘50s she developed a line of “wind bells,” and she has often produced works incorporating the forms of animals or insects. But opposed to these commercial works, she always considered the feelies to be an art expression—which makes it surprising and ironic that they have been her best-sellers, with response from curators as well as the public. Feelies were included in “Objects: USA,” in a U.S. Information Service show that toured Brazil, in a

University of Kansas show that traveled to 23 American cities in the '70s, and in the Renwick's touring "American Porcelain, New Expressions in an Ancient Art" in the '80s. But the whole process—both the career and the refinement of the form—"was not planned but simply evolved in response to something felt."¹