

Poetic Pottery

Ceramist Philippe Madeline taught Jean Cocteau to express his ideas in clay.

By Barbara Dinerman

At age 68, Jean Cocteau decided to learn the art of pottery. By the time of his death in 1963 at age 73, he had created 300 works of what he called "graphic poetry." Cocteau - perhaps the 20th century's most versatile artist, whose oeuvre encompassed poetry, fiction, drama, films, ballets, operatic librettos, drawings and ceramics - learned his final metier from an accomplished ceramist named Philippe Madeline.

Madeline, now 86 and still of impressive height with a full white beard, clearly loves to recall his years with Cocteau -and with Cocteau's circle of celebrity-friends, including Coco Chanel and

Pablo Picasso - at his atelier in Villefranche-sur-Mer, in the south of France. Madeline and his wife, Marie-Madeleine Jolly, were the proprietors of Madeline-Jolly, a respected ceramics factory with a staff of 20 in the Riviera town near Cannes. Born to a family of artists from Brittany, Madeline gave up his career as an engineer shortly after marrying Jolly, an artist who owned an advertising agency in Paris. Their workshop won second prize at the first international exposition of ceramics in Cannes. (First prize went to Picasso's pottery works, Madoura.)

It was no surprise, then, that when the aging Cocteau professed a desire to express his ideas in clay rather than words - "so that I would no longer be misquoted!" - he was recommended to Madeline-Jolly, which was located in the town where Cocteau was renting a house. It was the beginning of eight mutually rewarding years. "At the end of two weeks, we started

to learn from him : Madeline recalls. "We showed Cocteau how we worked with the terra cotta, how the designs were made. Cocteau's great pleasure was to work with the clay himself, to put his hands in it. That was when we began to learn from this natural artist."



Cocteau developed a blue terra-cotta, using his own engobement technique of mixing pigment with oxide. "He made blue, green, black," Madeline says. "He invented an oxide pencil." Madeline, who made the molds for his wife's designs, knew a thing or two about pigments and adapting equipment to new materials, but Cocteau imparted important standards of imperfection. "He would first do a drawing on a large sheet of colored paper, then ask us to translate it into our 'language,'" Madeline says. "We tried to transcribe his chalk drawings into enamel on ceramic, but he would say, 'No, that won't do; it's too smooth, too perfect.' At first, we would





Clockwise from far left : A bronze pendant with gold overlay by Creations after a Jean Cocteau design. Cocteau's bronze "Couple Sur Bleu," 1962. Philippe Madeline displays Cocteau's "Le Theatre Antique" at his home in Charmes-sur-Rhone. Cocteau's "L'Indiscret," 1958, a terra-cotta vase with colored enamel. Facing, from top : Madeline and Cocteau in 1958. Marie-Madeleine Jolly, Madeline and Cocteau leaving the atelier in Villefranche-sur-Mer in 1958. Cocteau's "Le Theatre Antique," 1962.

drawing-board stage during Cocteau's lifetime.

As seen in his groundbreaking 1945 film "Beauty and the Beast," Cocteau is remembered chiefly as a creator of surrealistic fantasy. His romantic, whimsical images of mythological fauns and goats are expressed superbly in such important ceramic works as "Grand Chevre-Cou" (Goat's Head), 1958, and "Le Theatre Antique" plate, 1962. Surreal, Cubist-like images appear in a large plate titled "Les Trois Yeux" (The Three Eyes), 1959, while the whimsical vase "L'Indiscret," 1958, sets the theme. An important green bust titled "Le Chantre" (The Poet), 1958, depicts a pensive man with faun-like ears.

With a catalog of 400 images published two years ago and Cocteau's journal of his ceramics career coming to press soon, the art world will continue to talk about the time Cocteau spent in the Madeline-Jolly atelier and the 60 original works that he completed there. But clearly, the most engaging repository of Cocteau's dazzling output and colorful life in the theatrical world is still the oral history of Madeline, the last surviving figure from the world of a protean genius.

"One of the great lessons Cocteau gave to potters should be heeded : Distrust what is merely pretty," Madeline says with obvious pride. "He talked and wrote about being proud to have become a ceramic artisan. That remark in itself honored our metier." □

have to start over about 10 times." Eventually, the ceramists learned to adapt their technique to approximate the image that Cocteau visualized.

Their new friend visited every other day, allowing the intervening day for a piece to cool from the big kilns. "He didn't understand why we had to wait", Madeline recalls with a chuckle as he sits at an outdoor table at his handsome, farmhouse-style home in Charmes-sur-Rhone, north of Lyon in the Ardeche region.

Madeline has lived here since 1986 ; Jolly died in 1992. He is kept company by his daughter, Anne, who lives in the other house on the property with her

long-time companion, Patrick Laupin. Anne and Patrick carry on the Cocteau legacy under the commercial name Creations Anne Madeline/Patrick Laupin, making jewelry in an adjoining studio. Today, their limited-edition designs, by permission of Cocteau's estate, are shown in numerous expositions in Europe. Designs include renditions in gold and other precious metals of such works from Greek mythology and tragedy as "Les Gemeaux" (The Twins), "Euridice," "Antigone" and a patinated bronze head on a pedestal, "Pythie de Delphes" (Pythoness of Delphos). Many of the Creations Anne Madeline/Patrick Laupin studio designs were still in the