



Untitled

Peter B. Jones (b. 1947)

2005

Ht: 15 ¼"; Diam: 10 ¾"

T0829

[URL coming soon]

By Wahsontioo Cross (Carleton University)

This ceramic pot, made in the “traditional” Haudenosaunee way, may at first sight appear to be a simple red vessel. But upon closer inspection, there is more than meets the eye in this piece, which is filled with history not only in its content but in its material and form.

Peter B. Jones’ untitled ceramic pot was made by building traditional hand-coiled techniques on top of a contemporary, wheel-thrown base. Jones was formally trained as a ceramicist at the Institute of American Indian Arts. He perfected wheel throwing techniques and trained under the guidance of renowned Hopi ceramicist Otellie Loloma (1922-1992).

Jones, a member of the Beaver clan of the Onondaga nation, wanted to rediscover Iroquois pottery techniques and designs, which had disappeared from contemporary practice, but was present in archaeological specimens. By studying these old techniques, Jones is credited with revitalizing this traditional art form. Today he teaches his techniques to younger generations of Haudenosaunee artists. He is known for not only creating more “traditional” designs, but he also combines his knowledge of traditional and contemporary techniques to create unique pieces of art which speak across generations and cultures.

Jones uses humor to address important social and cultural issues in his work. The untitled pot in the Fenimore Museum of Art's collection blends old and new techniques in its seemingly simple decorative form. The pot features two maps of New York State that wrap around on opposite sides of the pot. Each map has a legend, with details corresponding to the events of the Clinton-Sullivan Campaign, which saw the destruction of more than forty Haudenosaunee villages in the state. The first map shows villages that were burned in 1779; the other is a map from 2005 and shows the existing Haudenosaunee communities in the state. Contrasts are made between the sizes of the territories, which have shrunk significantly over time; different materials and imagery are also added to each map.

The top of the pot is fluted into 4 points. Each point is incised into a skull. Below, around the rim, human figures linked by the hand are stamped or incised into the clay. This is a reference to a wampum belt that commemorates the 1794 Treaty of Canandaigua, which was signed by George Washington and which gave some parcels of land back to the Haudenosaunee in New York. However, as shown in Jones' 2005 map, these allotments were much smaller than the territory occupied before 1779.

Today Jones is a prolific artist who continues to make and teach ceramics, using both traditional and modern techniques. He continues a long-standing tradition of Iroquois ceramics in which iconography, language and ideas are referenced, while at the same time infusing modern techniques and sensibilities. The pot is also indicative of the Seven Generations concept in Haudenosaunee tradition, which teaches that looking back is the only way to understand the present and to look forward into the future.

My experience at the Otsego Institute has allowed me to look closely at objects and to help to reveal the stories that these objects are trying to tell us.

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#### **Bibliography**

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