

Time has a way of overwhelming the functional values of an object that outlives the men who made and used it, with the power of its own objective presence—that life-invested quality of being that transcends and energizes. When this happens, such objects are forever honored for their own sakes—they are art.

Rose Slivka, "The Persistent Object"
The Crafts of the Modern World
Horizon Press, New York, 1968



Rose Slivka as Prophet

by Jack Lenor Larsen

Author, editor and critic, Rose Slivka was the most penetrating of writers to document the contemporary Craft Movement. She was also so simpatico with the makers and mediums that her descriptions parallel often the forms she described. Slivka's concerns, delved deeply, always probing to discover Why? Although she became in later years a poet with haunting perceptions, her profound contribution is as a farsighted prophet, until now unrecognized.

Not prepossessing except for penetrating eyes and a gift for listening and recording, this diminutive redhead recognized before others the very core, the soul of contemporary craft. Even those of us there at mid-century, those who built the Craft Council and its museum didn't understand craft as she did. Calling ourselves Designer Craftsmen to separate from traditionalists, we saw craft as an aspect of Modern Design, and so, pared down, functional, expressing materials and method. To us, 'Ornament' was *out*; "Architectural" the ultimate compliment.

Rose, married to a sculptor in the West Village, knew as friends the explosive Abstract Expressionists. When, like them, potter Peter Voulkos proclaimed in 1950, "Let us not make teacups! Rather let us work as studio artists," she knew full well where he was coming from and going. She would go there, too. So would *Craft Horizons*, as the Council's magazine was then called, become an art

magazine. Single handedly, blind to both opposition and indifference, Rose pulled us into art and away from functional concerns. Slowly, the focus of exhibitions changed as new/old media such as glass, paper, iron, felt, and basketry suggested works dimensional and sculptural – often in large scale. When our weaving gave way to a host of off-loom structures, Slivka was at the front lines to abet the conflagration as Surface Design swept in like a tornado.

When the Council founder, Mrs. Vanderbilt Webb, focused her attention on the World Craft Council, Slivka's sphere also widened. So did her readers, as American creativity shook up craftmakers globally. *Craft Horizons* also brought us such news as gargantuan sculpture that Europeans crafted in fiber for public spaces, that is, Art Fabrics. Slivka then printed the International Tapestry – Bienalle at Lausanne as "the Greatest Craft Shows on Earth." They were! But Art shows, in craft media. Rose won her long campaign to consider the craft mainstream as art.

Although she left us without a bow or curtain call, her words are as true today as when written.

Jack Lenor Larsen, president, LongHouse Reserve.

Expressions of Culture, Inc. pays tribute to Rose Slivka for her ground-breaking role in founding the critical discourse on the essential nature of the pure object.