

Nasher Sculpture Center honors 10 with all-star exhibit of avant-garde ceramics

BY [KENDALL MORGAN](#)

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Pablo Picasso, *Fish on a Sheet of Newspaper (Poisson sur feuille de journal)*, 1957. White earthenware, with clay attached, impressed with newspaper type, painted with oxides, glazed; incised, glazed. 12 9/16 x 15 3/8 in. Private collection. *Photo courtesy of Nasher Sculpture Center*

There's no denying the [Nasher Sculpture Center](#) is marking its 10th anniversary in an extraordinary way. In addition to the city-beautifying [Xchange program](#), the museum is

making its birthday more engaging for sculpture aficionados with “[Return to Earth](#),” a rare opportunity to view ceramic works by some of the 20th century’s most significant artists.

Featuring 75 pieces — many of which have never been seen in the U.S. — “Return to Earth” focuses on sculptures of fired clay created by Lucio Fontana, Fausto Melotti, Joan Miró, Isamu Noguchi and Pablo Picasso in the post-war period.

Some of the most prominent artists of the avant-garde – Miró, Picasso, Noguchi – turned to ceramics around World War II.

“The idea came from discovering Lucio Fontana ceramics from the late 1940s that I’d never seen, and it made me start thinking about other modernists that worked in ceramic,” says curator Jed Morse. “I came to the realization that some of the most prominent artists of the avant-garde turned to ceramics around World War II.”

The common thread he discovered wasn’t necessarily a lack of metal or other mediums to work with; instead, these pieces are the result of the artists’ desire to literally go back to the earth.

“The pieces are incredibly free, where some of their work may be more labored or conceptual,” Morse says. “For many of them, [ceramics were] something they were completely unfamiliar with, so they could dispense with their knowledge and get back to the basis of creation without any preconceived notions.”

Morse sourced the exhibition over the last three years through public and private collections, turning up such gems as Miró’s 6-foot-tall *Goddess*, originally commissioned for an outdoor sculpture garden in the South of France. For him, “Return to Earth” is a logical extension of the Nasher’s recent exhibition by [Ken Price](#), and the works on view have a resonance that continues to influence the next generation of experimental sculptors.

“There are a number of contemporary artists who are incorporating ceramics into their work, and the ‘Return to Earth’ exhibition, in a number of ways, provides historical precedence for that practice,” Morse says. “They feel completely free to use any material they want, and they realize the potential ceramics have beyond the utilitarian or decorative.

“There’s something very primal about working with clay and getting your hands dirty. There’s something kind of basic and essential to the experience.”

“Return to Earth: Ceramic Sculpture of Fontana, Melotti, Miró, Noguchi, and Picasso” is [on view September 21-January 19, 2014.](#)