Conjunction: The Melba and Al Langman Collection
Long Beach Museum of Art

In February of 1999, I received a telephone call from Wayne Kuwada of the Frank Lloyd Gallery in Santa Monica telling me that he had been speaking with the family of Melba and Al Langman, passionate collectors of modern and contemporary ceramics. Wayne mentioned to them that the Long Beach Museum of Art had a long history of collecting and exhibiting work in clay and that we had recently presented a highly successful exhibition entitled *Function and Narrative: Fifty Years of Southern California Ceramics*, which surveyed California ceramics from the 1940s to the 1990s and included a particularly strong concentration of work by Ralph Bacerra, Roseline Delisle, Cindy Kolodziejski, Tony Marsh, and Rodney Tsukashima.

Wayne also told me in our conversation that, over their lifetimes, Al and Melba Langman had gathered a stunning collection of works by many of this country's most significant ceramists with a particular interest in works by California artists. He told me that the Langmans' three sons — Malcolm, Richard and Michael — were looking for a "home" for this collection and urged me to contact Richard. I called him the following day and arranged a visit. At this time I had the great pleasure of meeting Al Langman, shortly before his passing, and I know that he would be very pleased at his family's decision to keep this important collection together as a gift to the Long Beach Museum of Art.

In her early life, Melba was an opera singer. Those who knew her remember her stunning voice, her brilliant red hair, and her effervescent personality. When she retired from singing, she became passionately interested in ceramics, both as a collector and as a ceramist and the Langman Collection includes several beautiful works by her. The delicacy of these thin-walled vessels combined with their lush, opulent color, are a direct reflection of Melba's vibrant spirit.

The collection includes works by many of the most significant figures in late-twentieth century ceramics — Rudy Autio, Ralph Bacerra, Bennett Bean, Roseline Delisle, Ewen Henderson, Elsa Rady, Adrian Saxe, Beatrice Wood, and Betty Woodman. While most of the works in the collection relate to functional, utilitarian traditions and forms, some, such as the Viola Frey, the Marilyn Levine, the Lynda Pleet, and the Akio Takamori emerge from the traditions of clay sculpture.

The gift of the Melba and Al Langman Collection to the Long Beach Museum of Art is all-the-more significant in that it beautifully complements the existing strengths in the Museum's ceramics collection which includes works by mid-century California modernist ceramists Harrison McIntosh, Rupert Deese, Laura Andreson, Gertrud and Otto Natzler, Vivika and Otto Heino, Polia Pillin, and others.

We are extremely grateful to Melba and Al's three sons — Richard Langman, Malcolm Langman, and Michael Arden — for arranging this extremely generous gift in honor of their parents. Through this gift, they have ensured that Melba and Al's passionate commitments will live on, benefitting future generations of Southern California residents and visitors to our community.

—Harold B. Nelson, Director