‘Exquisite’ vessels

BY JESSICA GELT

Somewhere upright, Ralph Bacerra is molding, says Jo Laura, curator of “Ralph Bacerra: Exquisite Beauty” at the Ben Maltz Gallery at Otis College of Art and Design in L.A.

When Bacerra died in 1986 at age 78, he was well known in design circles but under-recognized showcase. Laura says that’s slowly changing as more people begin to appreciate his legacy, which was to contemporary and popular for the use of overglaze enamels. These were introduced at a low cost and allow for extremely saturated color. The laying technique, which Bacerra picked up during extensive travels to Asia, had been neglected for most of the 20th century by American art schools. Laura said, “Ralph was interested in the design aspect of pattern making,” said Laura, a graduate student of Bacerra’s at Otis in the late 1980s. He studied East Asian and M.C. Escher and came up with a very intricate and signature patterning of his own, which is distinguishably Bacerra.”

Bacerra had two mottos: “Know your materials” and “pattern follows form.” He was concerned with pure artist, and he said that when an object was finished, it should be completely beautiful. Like an ornament. Hence, his use of the metallic luster of gold, platinum, and silver, which ceramics didn’t commonly use in the early 20th century when Bacerra was getting started with the technique. Bacerra’s thoughts on lineless painted Laura as she continued the 10-page show. “I don’t consider it a true retrospective,” she says of the Otis show, which runs through Dec. 6. “To do that, I would want to cover his entire 40-year career, and besides I took a theme and concentrated on the nature part of his career, when he began to ornament his work and make it very jewel-like and complex.”

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