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COFFEE, CHOCOLATE, AND LIQUEUR SETS

by

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in the College of Fine and Applied Arts
of the Rochester Institute of Technology.

15 May 1972

Advisors:

Prof. Hobart Cowles
Prof. Fred Meyer
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MINE

Not yours the work I have to do, but mine;
These colors are for me to choose and blend;
Peculiarly my own be the design
I make from any gift that heaven may send.
To you, your own; it may be fairer far
Than anything this heart or hand can do;
Perhaps in that high ether where you are
No one can live except the chosen few.
Not mine to use your works or ape your lines,
Not so I bring to life this present dust.
If I but follow you, the song declines;
For me the song I sing because I must.
If, by myself, I quicken what I do,
Though it be small I shall not envy you.¹

Grace Buchanan Sherwood

¹Grace Buchanan Sherwood, Water Meadows
(New York: The Wings Press, 1937), p. 11.

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COFFEE, CHOCOLATE, AND LIQUEUR SETS

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this thesis has been to make porcelain coffee, chocolate, and liqueur sets which fit the spirit of the beverage they are to serve and the medium from which they are made. I have tried to make these things in a unique way so that my own "handwriting in clay" shows through without being too detrimental to the functional requirements of the pots.

Now, that purposeful beginning makes it sound as though I knew all along what I was doing. But no. Originally I had intended to make porcelain vessels of all sorts; however the dangers of wandering aimlessly through such a broad gamut prompted Mr. Cowles to suggest that I narrow the scope to some specific types of pots.

Coffee, chocolate, and liqueurs are three kinds of drink to which I have sentimental attachments. I have had the most delicious of these beverages in the most congenial of surroundings, so the idea of making services for them was very appealing.

As to somehow having them look as though I had made them, that was not my concern at the beginning. In fact "finding myself" in clay was not one of my aims when I came to R.I.T. That, I thought, would

come naturally just by continuous work.

Well, the first year of the two year program I worked continuously, bumbling from one style to another. (It is funny that I chose a tough, professional, and masculine tendency to mimic - rather badly for the most part. That way of working is powerful and vigorous when done well and is very impressive in its own way. So I suppose that if one is not sure of where he is going, he will latch on to what appears strongest.)

Then at the beginning of the second year, I began to make slab stoneware bowls that resembled flowers and cabbages that I had been drawing during the summer. It was much less frustrating making those, and I even made some more little porcelain tea bowls and demitasses as I had done a few times before. These were ethereal small things and were pleasant to see, but I still did not take them seriously until after Christmas vacation and even a week or so into the thesis work.

After suffering through a few big handbuilt stoneware wine jugs, I realized, much to my sadness, that that magical quality which had begun to bloom before Christmas was completely gone. It was then I decided that small winsome cups were to be taken seriously, that one should not be afraid of making

"little old lady" things.² Just relax, but double the work, and make sugary blue cups if that is all along what you have wanted to make.

So with that huge dose of being honest with myself I started in making coffee servers for after-dinner coffee.

A note here: As much as the poem by Grace Buchanan Sherwood is appropriate, there is an aside which does not contradict it, but it is this: that one needs others (just a few are all that are necessary) with whom to talk every once in a while. They help one steer oneself and make one react more quickly to the work of others, to aspects of one's own work, and to life in general. It probably would have taken me longer to start doing satisfying work without the advice and encouragement of a few highly regarded teachers, historical figures in the art world, and fellow students.

²Anyway it is not necessarily what little old ladies do that is bad, it is how they do it. A person of any age who makes or sees a simple little cup and does not notice that it is a being in and of itself, knows nothing of art. Also anyone who makes a cup and denies it the magic it could have held... the same thing. Or maybe it is not altogether the person's fault. Maybe there is simply too much noise around. And as to slander against little old ladies, that is due to great misunderstandings. For not only are many of them intriguing and delightful people, but also their vision of the world has much to recommend it.

THE SETS THEMSELVES

There are colors that enhance the drink. Coffee is in formal colors for having after dinner, yes, in small vertical cups. These cups must make a closed space because for some reason we want after-dinner coffee hot, with possibly just a touch of milk or cream and sugar to cut it.* The glazes should be shiny; bluish white inside, dark green outside, or maybe just all sensuous celadon tones. The shape: formal yet friendly; and lightness in weight is important in making the cup a delicate shell around the liquid. (See plates V and VI.)

For the coffee pots, I like the idea of making the beverage in the pot itself, rather than making it in another vessel and then transferring it to a server. No, the coffee server should also be the coffee maker. There are only drip pots in this thesis because I like drip coffee best.³

Perhaps the coffee pots look top-heavy with that water drip apparatus on the top. (Plate II)

³We tried all sorts of roasts and grinds to know which makes the best coffee in Rochester. It is A&P's Bokar in the black bag -- Columbian. The clerk grinds it for you there in the store before your very eyes. But even better would be to do that at home.

But that is the way they all look, even the cylindrical metal ones. My coffee pots will look that way only for the few minutes during which time the coffee is being made. Then that paraphernalia is removed and (behold) the coffee server part is left in all its coherence. But, you know, that jittery look, I like it. Morandi painted still lifes with a similar feeling to them. I clearly remember the quivering lips of that sweet bowl by the shells and the ruffled fluting winging up and around that tall thin bottle. The experience of seeing his paintings was like that of crashing through to a dear new friend.

So the coffee pots look a bit unstable. That must somehow be fitting and not too much of a functional drawback. I want these pots to retain a naivete they had at the beginning, yet also possess an accomplished look they should have after several months of my working on them.⁴

⁴I know that one loses all innocence when one becomes aware of one's innocence. Mr. Wildenhain said that he has to fight a tendency of his to like dilettantish pots when he is talking with students, because the students must improve; but, too bad, their work will lose some of that amateurish quality which is pleasing. But then Nietzsche said that becoming mature is regaining that innocence one had as a child. So maybe there is still hope there in the future after one crosses the middle stage in development. Middle age! I am not sure that I like it so much.

Then there is the placement of the spout. Some say it should be short and high-up so the grounds are left at the bottom. Well, given the coffee ground basket in the pots, the grounds never get into the coffee itself. Most French and Italian pots have long slender spouts which carry an elegance that I associate with coffee. However, some high-up-short-spout types are nice, especially for coffee at the breakfast table.

As for pitchers, we have small ones for cream (because that is rich) and sugar bowls to go along. There are also larger pitchers to hold hot milk for morning coffee. (Plates III, VI, IX, and X)

Now morning cups of coffee are very different from after-dinner cups of coffee. The drink is almost entirely hot milk with a little coffee and sugar added. The cup itself: maybe white or very pale blue, and large, because that cup of milk is a meal in itself. The cup should be bowl shaped; for the drink does not have to be as hot as plain coffee. (Plate XI)

So the after-dinner coffee and cup should be formal yet friendly. And the morning coffee and cup should make you feel better even if you are sick.

But chocolate -- so sweet and dense and not unpleasing as to color -- is a different matter.

It would sit well in white cups with touches of blue and brown. The chocolate cups should be more flared at the top than coffee cups in order to let that big blob of chocolate flow into your mouth. The previously mentioned high-up-short-spout with a wide opening is perfect for a chocolate pot. Chocolate is less formal than coffee, and a spout of this sort would go very well with a beverage that is thick and needs a large opening through which to pass. This spout is also easier to clean than the long slender type -- a feature which seems more critical when it comes to cleaning out chocolate as opposed to coffee. (Plates XIII to XVIII)

And liqueur sets... What a delight it is to make those paper thin flowers from which to drink distilled nectars. Subtle celadons harmonize with thick clear liquids. And a cobalt blue here and there with them is very strange indeed. (Plates XXI, XXII, XXIII)

All the sets, whether for coffee, chocolate, or liqueur are for small groups (maximum of four), because I do not like large groups. And besides, these drinks lend themselves to sitting at a small table by oneself, or with a friend -- talking and maybe playing dice, cards, or dominos -- except in the morning when, at best, one is simply there ... staring into the cup.

If someone were to buy such a set as one of these, he would probably use it only for special occasions. Maybe, maybe not. I like to use my pots everyday. But if you are one for whisking dishes about in the kitchen, this is not the ware to use.

WORKING WITH PORCELAIN

When I think of porcelain, I think of

whiteness
 delicacy (be it playful or
 elegant)
 mistiness
 winsome clean gracefulness
 a perfect small dreamy cup
 standing there with no
 effort at all
 but most of all - magic.⁵

It is a myth that porcelain is difficult to work with. The problem may lie in how one works with it. During the summer I tried making waist-high coil sculptures using porcelain with some grog added. (I thought that would help it from cracking in the firing.) It worked better than stoneware; however, it did crack in the firing. The flame cannot hit such a big piece of porcelain directly. But for small things, porcelain is perfect from start to finish.

Almost all the work here is made from very thin slabs. These can be made literally paper-thin by alternately throwing the slab out on a canvas and

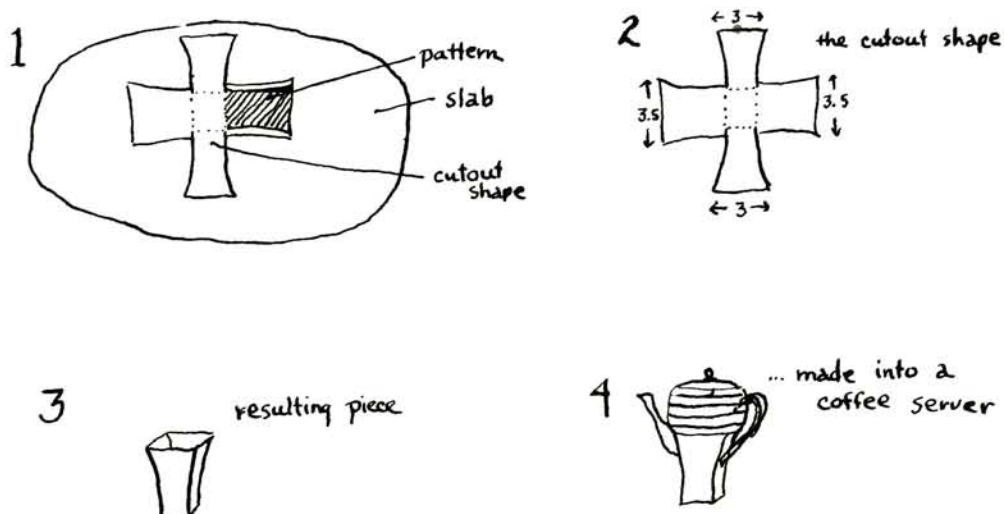
⁵Not every piece in this thesis work has these qualities. Sometimes a handle, nice as it may be, might really have looked better on a stoneware pot. And other times a glaze, though it made a pleasing color over the porcelain and complimented the drink, made the piece look less like porcelain.

compressing it out more with a rolling pin. After a few minutes of setting up, these slabs can be cut with a knife or scissors and bent into the desired shape. No scoring is needed along the seams -- just a little slip and some pinching or paddling.

At first I used stoneware molds into which were pressed long thin strips of clay -- a technique which rendered a delicate surface pattern similar to overlapping leaves. (Plate I) But it was too difficult to foresee what would be the result when making pots in such a round-about way. First the two piece mold had to be made with the shape of the pot carved out of the inside; then it had to be bisqued; next the porcelain strips could be pressed in and left to dry, at which time each half of the mold could be pulled away from the piece; and then (and only then) could it be told whether the mold shape was a good one. Not wanting to get carried off into male and female molds, slip casting, and everything which that entails (that can come later)⁶, I started to work more directly with the clay. That means I went from molds to patterns. These were paper patterns

⁶One of my aims in doing this thesis was to get rid of the debilitating habit of rigidly following a preconceived idea and being unable to change and adapt when necessary as the work progresses.

which I made while going through the trials and errors of the first piece. The pattern was cut, tried out, and then modified along with the resulting clay piece until the desired shape with its pattern were achieved. Then more of that same shape could be made. (Plates II - VI, and VIII all have some pattern-made pieces in them.)



- figure 1 -
Paper pattern and clay cutout.

This method was still too regimented though. So I began to picture a pattern and the piece it would make in my mind and do the cutout directly in the clay. Scissors were very helpful in trimming uneven edges as the clay was too thin to take an ordinary fettling knife dragging through it. (Plates VII, XII, XIII, XIV, XV, XXV.)

Well, the imaginary pattern not being much different from the paper pattern, I decided to just build the shape going around and up, around and up as though the pot were a three-dimensional painting -- putting dots of clay here instead of coils, putting flattened coils there, and rounded ones in yet another area. Sometimes after the basic pot was finished (plain slab piece, coil piece, or motley combination) I would go back into the surface pressing and smearing strands of clay, or ripping a coil out a little and then patching in from behind, but always being aware of the shape itself, not only the surface. (Plates VII, X, XVII, XVIII, XXIV, XXVI.) Subdued lumps have begun to swell out from the most recent pieces. And the next step will be to make those lumps and undulations come into their own, which all harkens back to some mastodon molars I was making during the summer. But then I was working with a completely different point of view (still mimicking the tough guys.) Now those shapes somehow re-occur having been assimilated, and this time they will be much more mine.

Speaking of manners of working, directions, and "where will you go from here's," it is interesting that many potters are influenced by nature, and I am too. But there are ways, and ways. Nature has so many faces, and in nature there exist an infinite

variety of inanimate objects -- manmade included. Before, it seemed as though I was simply copying the faces (making shell things, horse shoe crabs, cuttlefish with tentacles and all, rocks, flower-like bowls.) Yes, it was simply copying nature, not working as nature does by evolving, mutating. Perhaps this is what learning really is. Going from the last step (inductive), rather than grabbing out at already existing givens (deductive.) One "gets a lot of good ideas," unrelated as they may seem, just by looking around. But one has to start somewhere; so one begins by trying to execute those "good ideas," and given the right set of circumstances, suddenly one becomes aware of a tendency: a way of seeing things from a uniquely personal standpoint, a way of changing the last step to make this step, and of knowing how to change this step to make the next. Sometimes these steps come so fast that one goes racing along.⁷ And it seems as though

⁷This pace will certainly wax and wane. Just as one's knowledge of what is good grows and diminishes only to grow again. It does not seem that one gets better at distinguishing good from bad, or that one truly moves ahead, the harder one works at it. We will probably have spells of clairvoyance and times of doubt, periods of great activity and days of laxity as long as we live.

this is what learning is: discovering a progression, a moving coherence, understanding what has gone before, what is taking place now, and what will probably occur in the near future.

But even more important for me was the discovery of something antithetical to learning and to logical processes. It was the slow realization that there is a mysterious quality within and around all the everyday things we see (natural or manmade) day in and day out. I had always sensed this, but was never so conscious of the situation till recently. All objects have a silent and disquieting presence of their own which can be best sensed only when there is nobody else around, no radios on, no fluorescent lighting glaring down.

Yes, solitude and absolute silence are minimal requirements for a working atmosphere. Drawing trains the eye; but as for myself, I almost never draw pots I will make. It has proved to be more detrimental than beneficial. Because a two dimensional design is for me still completely distinct from a three dimensional object. However, drawing a flower makes me study it carefully, and those petals might later turn up as the flowing panels of a bowl.

GLAZING THE WARE

To coat these small pots with soft and kindly colors was the intention here -- and maybe to put some waves around the base of one, or tiny seagulls flying 'cross another, just for pure adornment's sake, but with an illogical twist, like Picasso's "Girl with Doll in Hair." Whatever has a doll to do with holding back a lock of hair! or seagulls flying when there is no air; but only cool and pale celadon behind. Now all of this I did not have in mind when mixing up the iron and the spar; but as they sit there after flame against the wind (the funny little sad things that they are), I think I would have more than simply sinned, had I not noticed just how far, and far away from me they smile. Those gently unhappy small ones: how they beguile!

Yes, the colors were to enhance the pots as they were already finished in the green state. Sometimes I erred by using too much slip for decorative purposes (Plate XIV); but in the main I used only those lovely celadons from which come a whole array of greens and pale blues. And the lighter in shade they are, the better for porcelain. The glaze, being transparent, does not obscure the pott(except with catastrophic underfirings when pieces come out opaque.) Therefore the

pot must be finished as perfectly as possible, but not in the least overworked. What I mean is that it should be beyond perfection. Effortless. It takes a while to know just when and where and how to touch the clay so that the cup, bowl, or whatever, looks as though it sprang gracefully into being under some power other than manual. There must be no finger marks showing on the glaze surface either. Some warping takes place at glaze firing temperatures; but that, if only slight, is pleasing. Lids, however, should be fired on the pots and plates made a little thicker to prevent undue warping.

SOME MORE THINGS TO SAY

I will always be indebted to Mr. Meyer for introducing me to Giorgio Morandi, the Italian painter of the Pittura Metafisica school. (Well, what he did was suggest that I look at some of this Morandi's paintings.) And such a surge came over me when I saw; for in his work he is singing of the nectar I am drinking. He is painting the green emerald I love. He is smiling out the same way I am staring, only he perhaps a little better -- but still with those same tints and shades of melancholy. There is such a lyrical sadness to what he says; and that mysteriousness I know well, though how one comes by it I am not sure. Now there are things which give influence from the time one is very young: those dear children's books (which remain to this day some of the very best,) and the poets -- especially the poets -- (Walt Whitman, Robert Frost, and more recently Quasimodo,) and music (Wagner, Prokofiev, Debussy.) But most of all there are the familiar fields, gorges, woods, and forests, the sandy beaches, and sea places wherever they may be. They are a balm and inspiration, a haven when all else goes wrong. These things for me are very important, and I see them as professing that same mystery time and again. Science in its own way

is groping after that magic. The unknown alludes itself to us in different ways. As for me, I sense it in much the same way as Morandi, Robert Frost, Debussy; not so much as Isaac Asimov, General Patton, or Sir Edmund Hillary. I am looking to the tragically neglected small things -- the "insignificant" still ones. They are of a world so different and so quiet that we hardly notice them -- the little lacy mats and wooden camels, forgotten hats and broken bath tile samples. That presence: how disquieting and how un-human it is. Would that I could cross over and see for sure! Tomorrow I will make some more pitchers and let those lumps grow out from them a little more.

THE CLAYS AND GLAZES USED

A celadon glaze is transparent and matures at anywhere from 2000° to 2400° F in a reduction atmosphere. A typical celadon base has in it feldspar, whiting, kaolin, flint, (and lead if it is a low temperature glaze.) The colorant is iron in very small percentages (usually 1% to 3%.) * Jade and light green are the most typical colors; although dark greens, light browns, brown greens, and pale blues can also be found in the celadon family. These lovely glazes were originally developed in the far east; but, as one story has it, the French gave them the name celadon after a famous character in a play who wore a light green cape.

Most of the pots included in this thesis were glazed with the following celadons:

SEA CREST

Clinchfield Feldspar..	54.0
Whiting.....	13.0
Barium Carbonate	2.5
Zinc Oxide	2.5
Edgar Plastic Kaolin..	6.0
Flint.....	22.5
	<u>100.5</u>
Red Iron Oxide.....	0% to 3%

The base glaze with no iron added is a soft luminous blue. With 3% iron it is a true jade green. Pieces glazed with this celadon appear in plates III, IV, V, VI, VIII, IX, X, XI, XII, XV, XVI, XVIII, XXIII, XXIV, XXV, XXVI.

PENROD

Cornwall Stone.....	30
Dolomite.....	25
Kaolin	20
Flint	25
Frit 3134	<u>10</u>
	110
Red Iron Oxide.....	0% to 3%

The pieces glazed with Penrod appear in plates VII, IX, XX, XXI.

FALL GREEN

Buckingham Feldspar...	270
Whiting.....	200
Kaolin	200
Flint	330
Bone Ash	<u>30</u>
	1030
Red Iron Oxide	4%

The pieces glazed with this dark green glaze appear in plates I, and II.

With the Sea Crest there was a crazing problem which was corrected (Heaven only knows why) by adding more silica. Usually it is the other way around -- by decreasing the silica or increasing the lithia. Anyway, all three shifts in materials brought about a slight, but unwanted change in the surface quality and the color; so I put up with the original craze. There is nothing wrong with crazes. In fact they are prized in certain circles. It is only that some people think they are defects, and for that reason I thought to get rid of them.

The Penrod and Fall Green did not craze, crawl, or shiver on the porcelain body I used. But the color of the crazy Sea Crest was so luminous that I used

mostly that.

For painting over or under the glaze, the following slips and glaze were used:

Blue

Cobalt Carbonate.. 1
Red Iron Oxide.... 1
Frit 3191..... 1

Cream

Rutile..... 1
Frit 3191. 1

Brown

Red Iron Oxide.. 1
Frit 3191..... 1

Sometimes this
comes out green.

White Glaze

Nepheline syenite.... 25
Whiting..... 15
Talc..... 13
Georgia Kaolin..... 7
Flint..... 25
Zircopax..... 15

This is only successful
when painted over the glaze.
It is also a good glaze by
itself. Pieces in plates
XIII and XIV are glazed
with this.

The porcelain body was this:

SCHMITZ'S PORCELAIN

M&D Ball Clay18
(or OM #4)
Edgar Plastic Kaolin.....40
Cornwall Stone21
Flint15
Dolomite 5

The dolomite can be excluded
to minimize warping; however the
porcelain will then not be trans-
lucent.



Plate I

"Four demitasses and a coffee server."
The coffee pot body was made by pressing strips of clay into a two piece bisqued mold. The spout was made by cutting out four pieces of clay according to a pattern. The lid is thrown; the handle: coil. And the cups are simply built up with very thin strips of clay. The saucers are slabs pressed into molds. The glaze is Fall Green. (See section Clays and Glazes Used for recipes.)



Plate II

"Demitasse and coffee pot." The base of the coffee server is made from a pattern cutout in clay and the rest just built up with thin strips of clay. There is a coffee ground basket which can hardly be seen, since it rests down in the coffee pot. The grounds sit in that basket to receive the scalding water dripping down from the cylindrical top through four tiny pin holes. In the basket the water and grounds mix and the coffee drips on into the bottom portion through many pin holes. The bottom of the coffee pot is Fall Green; the top: Sea Crest with 3% iron; and the demitasse: Sea Crest with 0% iron.



Plate III

"Coffee server with cream pitcher
and sugar bowl." These are glazed with
Sea Crest celadon (3% iron.)



Plate IV

"The alien." This is a tea
service.



Plate V

"Two demitasses and coffee pot."



Plate VI

"Postprandial coffee set."



Plate VII

"Two coffee pots."



Plate VIII

"Two-cup coffee pot."



Plate IX

"Milk pitcher."



Plate X

"Morning coffee set."



Plate XI

"Two morning coffee cups."



Plate XII

"Two one-cup coffee servers" (that
could also be used for chocolate.)



Plate XIII

"Two chocolate pots."



Plate XIV

"Chocolate set."



Plate XV
"Chocolate set."



Plate XVI

"Two more chocolate pots."



Plate XVII

"Chocolate set."



Plate XVIII

"Chocolate pitcher and cup."



Plate IXX

"Two sugar bowls."



Plate XX
"Three Candy Jars."



Plate XXI

"A liqueur set and a
funny pitcher."



Plate XXII

"Liqueur set."

This is Sea Crest celadon. The tray is the base glaze, and the cups are the base with 1% iron, 1% cobalt carbonate.

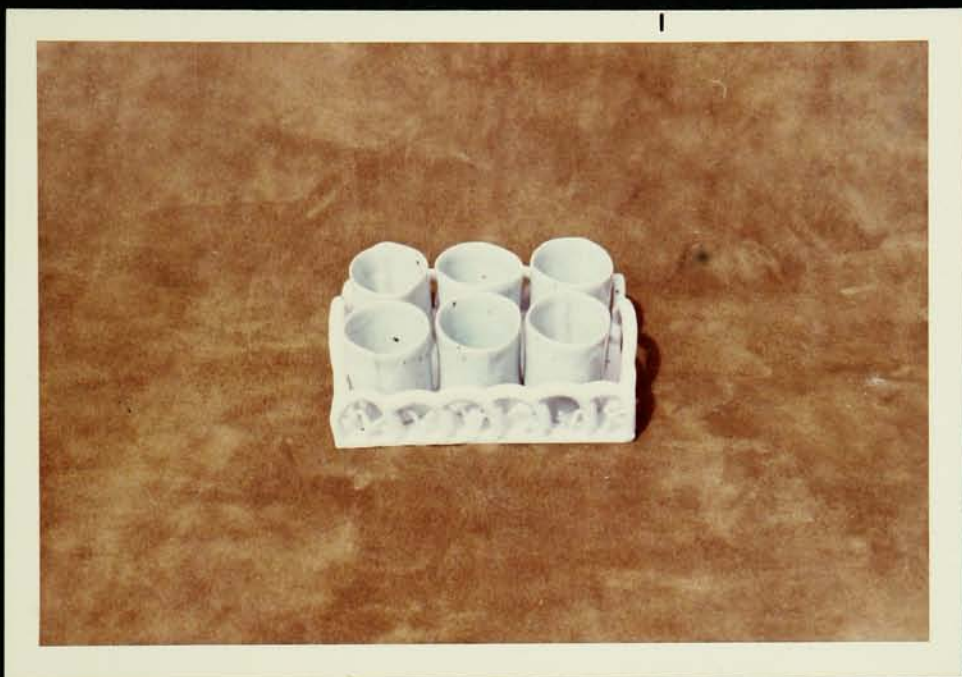


Plate XXIII
"Liqueur set."



Plate XXIV

"Anisette set." The water and big ice cube go in the pitcher, and the anisette stays in its bottle. But the cups get filled with half water, half anisette. A deliciously cool and thirst quenching drink is the result.



Plate XXV
"Anisette set."



Plate XXVI

"Wine set." This set is for a cloudy white wine -- about the only wine that would look better in porcelain than in glass.

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