Soon after his arrival in Syracuse, Everson director Ronald Kuchta was approached about a potential project by Margie Hughto, an artist and professor of ceramics at Syracuse University. Hughto’s proposal entailed inviting well-known painters and sculptors to Syracuse to create ceramics under her staff’s technical supervision and to showcase the results in a series of exhibitions. This resulted in three shows that were staged in Syracuse between 1976 and 1981.

According to Kuchta, the idea of the project was controversial (why didn’t we invite potters to do paintings?) but necessary at the time because of an “apparent identity crisis the ceramics world seemed to be undergoing at the time.” Kuchta and Hughto felt that by working with established fine artists with international careers, they could break down the barrier caused by the art world’s seeming disdain for clay.

Invited artists for the first exhibition included Anthony Caro, Jules Olitski, Helen Frankenthaler, Billy Al Bengston, and Dorothy Hood among others. Studio space and technical assistance was provided by Syracuse University, where a massive cast of assistants was assembled to realize the project, which each artist approached in a different way. Billy Al Bengston showed a body of functional dinnerware that had been produced at Syracuse China. Dorothy Hood and Stanley Boxer found themselves entranced by clay’s tendency to crack and change during the firing, while Helen Frankenthaler abhorred cracks and destroyed anything with imperfections. Thanks, in part, to projects like *New Works in Clay*, the barrier between ceramics and fine art has become hazy to nonexistent, with galleries welcoming ceramic artists to their stable.