

ARTS & VARIETY

Mary Burwinkel: Artist, Mentor, and More CSP's Ceramics TA Makes Learning Fun

BY BROOKE STEIGAUF

While Mary Burwinkel is a CSP ceramic postbaccalaureate, she is also a pretzel-eating jokester with a lot of knowledge on the creative process. Her largest impact on the Concordia community has come from her position as the ceramics teaching assistant, through which she has not only helped and inspired beginning artists but also contributed to her own development.

Burwinkel says that teaching undergraduates has not only added structure to her life, but also required her to verbalize physical and technical skills in the discipline. When asked what she thinks makes “good artwork,” she said that it “sparks questions, further investigation, and turns your attention to something outside of the work.” Burwinkel has turned her classroom job description into a friend, advisor, and instructor all in one. She assists students in exploring their own artistic intentions, teaching the best approach to creating their vision, and ensuring that pieces are addressed thoroughly in concept and appearance.

Burwinkel completed her BFA in ceramics from Bradley University in Illinois and was one credit short of an art history minor. She says that she is perfectly happy without the completed minor but with the knowledge she gained from those art history classes. Through this, it is clear that Burwinkel is process-oriented, as opposed to product-oriented, which is important for any artist but especially so for a ceramic artist.

Burwinkel takes a comedic approach to viewing life as an artist. What’s the best part? “You can be dirty all the time and no one says anything about it. Your expectations for your life are so low that any success feels amazing. I’m probably gonna be poor; I might not even be able to afford a dog... But if I get into a show or someone buys something from me it’s like, ‘Oh my god, I’m real!’”

Lastly, Burwinkel has some helpful insight for undergraduate students:

1. Every skill is worth learning
2. Take opportunities that arise and be honest with yourself about why you’re taking them. That way, you’ll get the most out of them.
3. Don’t be shy about learning. Ask questions. Be yourself.
4. Always eat before you work. †



Pottery and Place: Art with Common Roots

BY BROOKE STEIGAUF

CSP’S ART GALLERY WELCOMED A COLLECTION of ceramic artwork with a story. While all of the pieces on display are distinctly unique and different, obviously made by different minds through different hands, their artists share one inspirational place in common: a 40-acre farm in southeastern Minnesota.

In 1973, Mark Pharis purchased the property, renovated a barn into a studio, and created a kiln in which to finish his work. With this project done, a new and much more expansive one unfolded unexpectedly. Following Mark Pharis, artists Linda Sikora and Matt Metz began to create their work there, inviting other artists to help care for the feral cat family and use the studio too. Thus, for various extents over the next thirty-three years, artists Janice Knipe, Tim Crane, Karen Newgard, Autumn Cipla, Andy Brayman, Sanam Emami, Autumn Cipala, Rob Surtherland, and Chuck Aydlett used the setting for both artistic and personal growth.

According to art critic and curator of the show Janet Koplos, Chuck Aydlett in particular visited the farm because of a feeling that his work was “missing something.” Each of these artists, whether consciously lacking something or not, found creative support, inspiration, mentorship, and soul-feeding conversation through the experience.

Inadvertently, by the pure selflessness of Sikora and Metz, an informal artist residency was spawned. Artists endured periods of isolation counteracted by times of deep and meaningful connection, and most importantly, they gained a unique learning experience to further their own personal style and life-story.

Koplos said that what she views as the most endearing aspect of the story is the generosity that sparked the farm’s doors to become open and the community that was created so casually by their genuine love and support. She explained that ceramics, by nature of the discipline, is a more communal interest than other artistic media. There is less competition, a higher likelihood of sharing space and equipment, and a lot of time required to complete work (often spent simultaneously talking to others).

Since the farm was sold in 2006, the works of art and artists themselves serve as the main records of its legacy. While every work of art has an imbedded narrative, a special sense of awe and curiosity is kindled while standing in a gallery with the knowledge that a common experience is underlying each distinct appearance. †



Photography provided by Brooke Steigauf

To the right: Mark Pharis’ work. Closest: Teapot, 1984. Middleground: Teapot, 1988. Furthest: Tray, 2019

To the left: Plate by Sanam Emami

Above: Chuck Aydlett’s *Burning Desire*, 2014

