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Export date: Thu Mar 28 21:03:27 2024 / +0000 GMT

View from the Pines celebrates 40 years of artistic excellence



By Brock Weir

After 40 years, members of the Pine Tree Potters Guild are taking time to enjoy the View.

The celebrated ceramic artists, however, are not covering up their wheels and resting on their laurels, but using this view as a guidepost for the next four decades of artistic creativity.

Last Saturday, the Pine Tree Potters Guild officially marked their fortieth anniversary with the opening of View from the Pines, a juried exhibition of new ceramic works now on through September 28 at the Aurora Cultural Centre.

Bringing together new works from more than 40 guild members, the pieces have been curated by jurors Janna Hiemstra, Executive Director of Craft Ontario, and Angelo di Petta, an internationally-renowned ceramic artist, who curated the exhibition from more than 90 submissions based on craftsmanship, excellence of design and originality.

?With a theme such as View from the Pines, you could approach your work from an environmental standpoint, as someone who loves nature, as someone with a sense of social justice, all with the idea of looking down on things and still having a clear vision of what's around you,? explains Teresa Dunlop, a Guild member of 18 years, who co-organized the exhibition. ?We have pieces that are simply beautiful and useful, we have pieces with rich narratives that really tell strong stories, and there are also pieces that are raising issues of social justice, including one called ?The Wall' which is a reflection of the proposed wall between Mexico and the United States. It is just work that makes you stop and say, ?Ah!'?

Ms. Dunlop has three of her own pieces in the exhibition,

ceramics that are wood-fired and touched by flame and ash. This, she says, seems to ?add another layer of meaning? to her objects, including a set of plates entitled ?Table for Two?, a sculpture ?Tectonic Shift? and an object with large cross-pieces called ?Love Handles.?

She first tried her hand at pottery nearly 20 years ago.
During classes, she fell in love with both the material and the creative process and began to pursue the medium seriously. One of her first stops was the Pine Tree Potters Guild. Since her first involvement, she has served as the organization's studio heat, vice president, president and past-president, and currently serves on the executive.

?I was so inspired by being a member of Pine Tree that
when I retired from teaching I decided to go back to school and study craft and design at Sheridan College,? she says, ?I graduated from there in 2014 and this is all as a result of being a part of Pine Tree, and I've started a second career as a ceramic artist.?

What really inspired her while getting her hands dirty
with clay was the ability of the earthy material to make things that were both beautiful and useful. She found a passion for making things that were functional and also served to enhance and beautify the home ? improving a person's quality of life in the process.

?Clay gives you that possibility,? she says of melding
form and function. ?It's great if you want to make functional things, but it is so wonderful because the material is so plastic, able to accept marks, be manipulated, and it is a medium that has such history and variety of use, variety of processes, that you can be excited by it for the rest of your life.?

This excitement has a trickle-down affect on the viewer
and consumer. An exhibition like View from the Pines, she says, is intended to ?excite, raise questions and make people feel uplifted.?

?That's the goal with this show, to spread the word about
clay within the larger community of York Region,? she says. ?Having a show like this just affirms the importance of art and art is part of a vibrant society.?

Enhancing the exhibition have been the keen eyes of the
jurors who were able to not only select the best of the best, but also suggest next steps to burgeoning artists just coming up through the Guild, many of whom are represented in the anniversary show.

?The work is really accessible and there is something for
everybody because it is quite a diverse collection,? says Ms. Dunlop. ?The 43 pieces really cover the gamut of processes and topics, and there is a variety that will engage everyone. Also, to celebrate our anniversary, we challenged our members to create garden art, so we have 11 garden totems ? that is, stacked items ? ranging in height from three to six feet, made in clay. They are just delightful, and include a series of teacups and another that is a

beautiful collection by members Cristel von Richter and Sheena Griffiths, which is a beautiful scene of a garden with all kinds of birds.?

These ?whimsical totems? are also available for sale.

?This is a great Guild and we offer classes to the public and workshops, so somebody who might want to find a way to do something with their hands, they need some kind of a hobby or release, this is another way of introducing them to Pine Tree Potters and also to the history of the guild within the community,? says Ms. Dunlop. ?There is a lot of great stuff happening within Aurora and York Region and going to this show will help you learn a little bit more about the community you live in.?

View from the Pines, the 40th Anniversary & Juried Exhibition of New Ceramic Works from the Pine Tree Potters Guild, runs at the Aurora Cultural Centre through September 28. Gallery hours are Monday ? Saturday from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. This Saturday, August 24, artist Sheena Griffiths will hold a wheel-throwing demonstration from 1 ? 4 p.m.