

# Kathy Pallie

By ANDRA BABAN

**When and how did you discover the passion for ceramics?**

Growing up, I was always the artsy-craftsy one, making things out of all different kinds of materials, using lots of different techniques. I loved going to my Dad's office in New York City where they produced display products/props used in retail store windows and interior displays. To me, it was a magical, fantasy industry.

Though I never had art classes in high school, I decided that art would be my major in college. As a first year art student, I was introduced to clay. I immediately loved the tactile sense of working with clay and creating 3-dimensional objects.

My interest in clay took a back seat to advertising design which was my major within the art curriculum. This was followed by a very exciting career in commercial art, designing decorative and functional display products for the retail stores, exhibit world and point-of-purchase industries. Most of these products were 3-dimensional, large scale and fabricated from a variety of materials. It was always exciting and challenging to work with materials that had totally different commercial uses and to create products from them that were applicable to the display field. Much of this was done in foreign countries working with cottage industries, sometimes sitting on the ground outdoors with chickens and roosters strutting by.

Years later, when I retired and put my hands back into clay, I realized that this was a material that really excited and intrigued me, and one I had to explore in depth. I was hooked! My "clay play days" took over. Now instead of designing products that had to be marketable or meet a client's design criteria, this was just me, the clay, and the creative process and didn't need anyone else's approval. I played with clay with a childlike approach, investigating, experimenting, and learning, as much and as fast as I could.

**Tell us more about your creative process. Where do you get inspiration from and how do you find the journey towards the final outcome?**

My inspiration comes from just living and observing and being receptive to what is going on around me. I've always been inspired by the unlimited variety of textures, patterns, and energy found in nature. I love to be outdoors skiing, hiking, swimming, watching the changing light patterns from dawn to sunset, seeing flowers bloom and leaves unfurl. I'll often take photos for reference, pick up pieces of bark to experience the sensation of the surface texture, and closely observe different patterns and details. I interpret my reaction to these things in clay. Though many of my artworks have a trompe l'oeil effect, I am not trying to mimic Nature. Rather, I try to bring the essence of what I have experienced in the outdoors into interior spaces.

Once in the studio, the clay often seems to have a life of its own as it leads me, morphing from one form and concept to another. On other occasions, I can envision the completed piece before even touching the clay.

**You create baskets and figures of clay which surprisingly imitate the structure of reeds and grasses. What is the story behind the works and how did you discover this technique?**

Observing trees, reeds and grasses, all traditional basket making materials, led to my "Clay Baskets" series. These elements are all vertical, linear forms in nature, but are mostly used horizontally when weaving baskets. I make my baskets using clay coils layered horizontally, forming sculptural shapes. Caught up in the rhythmic, meditative flow of basket making, I realized how involved and interwoven, I, as the artist, was with the piece I was creating. What had started out as an idea to be made in clay had seamlessly evolved into a total integration of the artist and her art.

This realization led to a series of narrative figure pieces. As I learned more about the art and traditions of basket making, it became apparent that most basket makers were women. They were the 'unsung heroes' of the tribe or village. While the men, the hunters and warriors, were often away from the village, the women tended the home front as the gatherers, nurturers, and teachers passing on traditions and stories from generation to generation. My basket figures, all women basket makers, tell these stories.

This figurative series made me aware that baskets need not only be utilitarian or attractive artworks, but that they could also tell a story. This turned out to be a much more challenging endeavor than I had anticipated, forcing me to think in the abstract. The series of the '4 Elements - Earth, Wind, Fire and Water' took on a life of its own. As I was struggling with these pieces, someone brought to my attention that I, as the guiding hand, was the 5th element, Spirit, and was an integral part of the artwork. Once again, the artist and her art have become one.

My technique for creating these baskets is not woven at all. I layer extruded clay coil rings, scoring and slipping to make the tightest bond. Then by using a rubber chisel tipped tool, I work around each coil creating a woven effect. Other extruded pieces are surface mounted to give an additional dimensional effect. The pieces are then bisque fired, glazed, and fired.

**Texture has a very important place in your style of work. How do you create these natural surfaces?**

Texture and surface exploration integrated with a 3-dimensional form have always been an important part of my work. My hands manipulate

the clay by pushing, pulling, pinching, incising and rolling it, creating an effect which evokes both the visual and the tactile senses. Some of my favorite tools are natural elements I find outdoors, such as pieces of bark, nuts, sprigs, twigs and leaves. As much as I am drawn to sleek, burnished, smooth, clean lines, and stark contemporary forms, I seem to be happiest when I'm working the surface of the clay creating all different kinds of textures. I like to leave the mark of the artist's hand in my work.

**Is replicating the beauty of nature a purpose of your work? Why do you feel the need to recreate nature in the interior space?**

Replicating nature is not a purpose of my work at all. It is the energy I find in nature that I try to bring into the indoors, to be surrounded by it. Most things in nature grow vertically reaching toward the sun. They are also nourished by the earth in which they are planted. Working in clay, a material which comes from the earth, I am reminded to reach and stretch in my thinking and creative process, to nurture my passion for clay, and to communicate my ideas. The four elements of nature: wind, water, fire, and earth, as depicted in my basket series, are the building blocks to help us all grow and flourish.

Recently, someone who had seen my work at an exhibition sent me an email in which she said: "... we looked at each other with amazement to be standing there looking at an artist's work and feeling life's energy coming through them." Learning that my work evoked such a sentiment from a viewer was the ultimate compliment.

**Where does professional education stand in your artistic development? Do you have a mentor?**

Professional education is an important part of my artistic development. As an art major in college, not only did I learn the tools of the trade, but I was taught to see and to think outside the box, and to always be conscious of design. In a freshman art class, the instructor took the students outdoors and had us look at a tree and describe what we saw. The first answers were the basic brown tree bark and green leaves. Upon further examination, we saw so many other colors and intricate details. The instructor then informed us that never again would we see the way most people did. He was so right! Another wise statement that I recall an instructor saying was that a good designer can design anything, whether it's an industrial product or a fashion garment. Working in clay, not only do I draw on technical knowledge, but every aspect of design, color theory, drawing, art history etc. come into play.

When I retired and got back to working in clay, I studied with Bill Abright at the College of Marin, here in California. Bill has an amazing knowledge of ceramics, drawing, painting, and art history and is a very accomplished artist in all of those areas. His way of teaching resonated with me. Not only