

Jan Kolenda

Inspired by Nature: Beyond Function



"I am a clay artist who works with highly decorated functional and sculptural pottery. Most recently my work has expanded to include large scale relief ceramic tile murals.

The source of my inspiration comes from nature. I grew up in a small town in Michigan surrounded by woods and open land. My fondest memories are of exploring the surrounding area and discovering all that nature had to offer. The trees, bugs, birds, plants, and animals held my total fascination. My interest in the outdoors, and in all things wild and wonderful, has never diminished.

I have worked with clay for over 20 years and the process has never failed to excite and inspire me. I am drawn to the plasticity of the medium and its responsiveness to touch. No matter how many times I take wet clay, manipulate it and finally fire it, turning the material and my impressions to stone, I am continually amazed with the transformations.

The surface of my work reflects my love of nature. I enjoy using elements from nature in the creation of my designs. I often make impressions of fish, insects, plants and shells and apply these images on my pottery. This allows me a vehicle for personal expression and helps give my work individual character and personality.

I strive to create work that is useful but yet playful. I use representational objects as decoration to remind the viewer of the beauty in the everyday images that we take for granted. I want the viewer to be attracted to the form and also be compelled to look closer and discover details and stories that I have left for them."

Jan Kolenda

Jan Kolenda was born and raised in the small town of Mt. Clemens, Michigan. The middle child of 3, Jan was extremely shy and introverted. She became very comfortable exploring the woods surrounding her home. It became an escape for Jan and her fondest and most powerful memories are summer days discovering aspects of nature. One early memory from her childhood dates back to when she was only 5 years old. She constructed a small "sculpture" created from acorns that she had collected from one of her excursions. She remembers being totally absorbed in the process of design and construction.

At one point in her youth, her father had to position a lock on the tool shed to prevent Jan from using the tools when he wasn't home. Her passion for building and constructing things from nature was part of her nature! Jan spent most of her time outdoors collecting pinecones, rocks, feathers, leaves, seedpods, bark scraps, and other amazing gifts of the environment.

She attended Central Michigan University where she majored in Art Education and minored in Biology. It

was there that she took her first ceramics class. It was “love at first touch, and the process of shaping this luscious material to whatever form I desire, and then turning it into stone, never failed to thrill me.” To this day, the excitement of opening a kiln is still like Christmas morning for Jan.

After graduating from college, she married her college sweetheart and had two children, which she considers her most creative achievement. As a stay at home mom, she found time to operate a crafts business and to substitute teach. The family relocated to South Florida in 1979 and she continued to work from her home in various businesses from crafts to installing wallpaper. She taught art classes at night and continued to keep her love of art alive.

When her children went to college, she knew it was time to rediscover her true passion; clay. Being able to express her love for nature through this very responsive medium is the energy that drives her. She began to take classes at Broward Community College and eventually became a ceramics assistant to John Foster. Jan continued her presence at BCC for two years as the Gallery Assistant. She constantly participates in numerous workshops, as Jan is always enthusiastic about learning new ways to express her art through clay and nature.

In 2003 Jan and ceramicist John Foster were the Artists in Residence at the Coral Springs Museum of Art. They created, with the help of 30 volunteers, *The Everglades* ~ A Relief Ceramic Tile Mural, which is installed on an exterior wall of the Museum. Jan teaches ceramic hand-building and wheel technique for clay to children and adults at the Museum and in her studio at home.

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