

ARTIST SPOTLIGHT

Ernest Miller



The precision and tight attention to line and detail in Ernest Miller's porcelain art is distinctive. It's a body of work that has developed and grown in the 12 years that Ernest has been an Artist-Instructor with the Minnetonka Center for the Arts Ceramics Studio.

From making his own clay, "small-batch artisan porcelain" as he says, to experimenting with and finely tuning his glazes with help from a Minnesota State Arts Board (MSAB) grant, Ernest exerts controlled craftsmanship end-to-end in his creative process. And it shows. Ernest's sublimely elegant, sophisticated porcelain has all the earmarks of fine art, yet there's an honesty and accessibility to his work that comes from his roots and his values.

Ceramics requires a lot of hard work, curiosity, diligence, persistence and the ability to step back and see the big picture and not take things personally. Ernest learned much of that growing up on a small farm in southern Illinois. After earning his Bachelor of Arts degree, Ernest helped a friend establish a studio and felt lucky working in the arts right out of college. Moving to Minneapolis he rented studio space at Fired Up and began teaching. He was a substitute teacher here until Steve Hemmingway, who was retiring, invited Ernest to take over his classes. "I really appreciate the foundation he put down and the friendliness of the atmosphere he created," says Ernest reflecting on the legacy left to him and the opportunity to forge his own classroom culture.

"I'm what I call a Clay Coach," says Ernest. "If you come in expecting it's all going to be done for you, it's not going to happen like that." In the studio classroom he provides plenty of demonstrations and is always present for support and encouragement, knowing that students learn more by experimenting and playing with presented concepts. Ernest teaches how he makes his work but pushes beyond that, showing traditional approaches and experimental

techniques that he's seen to present a vocabulary broader than his work alone. "The Ceramics Studio is my little arena to focus on what the students need," he says. "The simple goal is I want them to walk out the door at the end of class a little happier than they were when they walked in."

Ernest brings an energetic quality to the classroom, emanating from his personal values of being healthy and physically feeling good to do his best work. "Clay is attractive to me for the creative reasons but also for the physical engagement reasons behind it," says Ernest. Travelling to art fairs regionally and nationally, he always has a camera and a bicycle along and spends three or four hours tooling around the cities and towns that he's in. He takes in the lines and architecture, colors and forms, capturing what he loves to use in his work. "The last time I was home I took some beautiful photos of an old Oliver tractor. It's not been used in ten years, trees have started growing up underneath it." It came to life in his Teen Clay class as they talked about what if a tractor became a robot.

Teaching has become an outlet and a vital loop in the creative process for Ernest. "I'm not grading papers or going to faculty meetings," says Ernest who says the classroom provides wonderful perspective and feedback, artistically, emotionally and psychologically. "I utilize the classroom as an environment to experiment with my work." Ideas that arise in the classroom



end up back in his studio where they have a chance to mature and develop. Ernest's studio is all about efficiency, the motor he needs to generate an income. Yet these ideas from the classroom and threads from the past continue to intertwine and interject themselves on Ernest's admiration of function and utility.

"I'd like to think that I'm in the middle of an evolution of ideas and growth," he says. "I'm trying to balance that idea of utility, with some sort of expression and aesthetic idea, and craftsmanship coming together." Ernest can see how his rural past, urban present, playful spaceships and tractors, functional teapots and immense tightly crafted urns and vases have a common source. Some pieces push farther into the sculptural region or pure play region or could be just a great dinner plate. "Harkening back to my roots," he says, "I'm trying to bring it all together somehow."

The past year has been one of some triumphs

for Ernest. He participated in the St. Croix Valley Pottery Tour and the American Pottery Festival, both an invitation-only honor. And he is pleased to have a piece published in the 420-page coffee table book *500 Teapots Volume 2* published by Lark Crafts in August 2013.

More than anything, Ernest appreciates the quality of the students at the Minnetonka Center for the Arts. "That is one of the most gratifying things, I've always had a continuous base of students who are there because they're curious about the ceramic process, they want to be creative, they want to get into the studio space and step outside of their everyday life." He says it's the students that keep him coming back.

See more of Ernest Miller's art at www.ernestmiller.com



The Ceramics Studio

Visit our large, bright, well-organized space!

- 15 electronic wheels
- 2 Lockerbie wheels
- 1 Leech wheel
- 5 large worktables
- Dedicated wedging tables
- Handbuilding boards
- Wheel throwing bats
- Ware boards
- Banding wheels
- Sculpture stands
- Slab roller
- Hand and wall-mounted Scott Bailey extruders
- Ceramic and plaster slump or hump molds
- Nice wide array of community tools, rolling pins, texturing tools
- Large palette of 30+ glazes
- Large contingency of prepared, auxiliary glazing options (stains, washes, terrisiges, engobe slips)
- Spray booth
- In-studio photo booth with lights
- Regular cone 10, gas reduction firings (at least 1x/week)
- Soda firings (1x/month)
- Mid-range, cone 6 firings
- Earthenware firings
- Raku firings (in class)
- Ample project storage and personal lockers
- Dedicated adult open studio hours, at no additional cost

