

Interact with artists in their studios on tour

Amy Brenner, For the Poughkeepsie Journal 12:06 a.m. EDT October 20, 2016



(Photo: Amy Brenner/Courtesy photo)

Editor's note: Backstage is a regular feature in Enjoy! that offers a glimpse behind the scenes of those who work in theater, the arts and music. If you are involved in the arts and would like to contribute to this feature, email bfarrell@poughkeepsiejournal.com

I started working with clay nearly 40 years ago when I moved from Woodstock, where I lived for five years, to the Boston area. I learned etching and lithography at the Art Students League in New York City and continued making etchings, monoprints and collographs when I got to Woodstock. I ran the studio and taught for a couple of years in the printmaking shop underneath what is now the Woodstock Art Association and Museum, where I experimented with color resist etching.

During the 10 years I lived in Somerville and Cambridge, Massachusetts, I worked in several community clay studios where I paid for access, not classes. I am pretty much self-taught, watching and listening to potters working around me.

My husband and I moved to Wingdale in 1986, onto a beautiful property that had been his family's retreat. My pottery studio is on the ground floor and didn't get much use while we raised two kids and worked full time in the food biz. I wasn't able to make many pots, and that was frustrating.

I now have a lot more time to spend in the studio. I make functional tableware on the wheel, fire to cone 6, glaze in primarily yellow, green and pink, having experimented to get the exact hues I craved. As decoration, I have been adding series of dots, and using wax resist to layer green over yellow in free form strokes, and sgraf fito.

For several years I have been making sgraf fito portrait plates. After the plate is thrown and trimmed but before it is bisqued, I apply an iron slip or underglaze colors to the surface and cut through with a variety of tools to the light colored clay below. While the first plates were sepia, I then began to add color, carving and also painting in colors. I did a series of American performers: Chuck Berry, Keith Richards, Ray Charles, Marilyn Monroe, Willie Nelson, to name a few. I have recently started a Hubris Series with plates of Idi Amin, Chairman Mao and Imelda Marcos. I also make colorful animal plates that bear my idiosyncratic imprint. Sgraf fito is similar to the techniques of printmaking: cutting away to define the image, and adding in colors as I did with the oil resist etchings.

I have just finished my participation in the inaugural Clay Way Open Studio Tour that took place over Columbus Day weekend. You can learn more about this at ClayWay.net to plan for next year.

This season will mark my fifth in the ArtEast Open Studio Tour that continues this weekend. Celebrating its 10th anniversary, this tour in eastern Dutchess County continues to grow in popularity. I am thrilled to be part of this community of artists working with fiber, stone, paints, printmaking, mixed media, clay (there are four potters on the tour), photo and video. An all-volunteer endeavor, we welcome the public into our workspaces to meet our accomplished artists. Some work is for sale and commissions can be arranged, but our motivation is to mix with the community and let them take a peek behind closed doors and get some feedback on our art making, which is often a solitary undertaking.

Not only will you get a chance to interact with artists in their native habitats, but you will have just cause to travel interesting rural roads and to visit unique homes and studios in the beautiful countryside of the Hudson Valley during peak foliage season. I continue my tradition of giving away a tiny vase to all who visit, and there will be snacks.

Artist Amy Brenner works in clay. Visit AmyBrennerPottery.com

If you go

The ArtEast Open Studio Tour runs from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., Oct. 22-23; guests can prepare their own self-guided driving tour and learn more about the artists by visiting ArtEastDutchess.com

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