

Graceful Elegance

Ken Turner – Artist and Teacher

*By M.M.Gornell and Ken Turner
Photography by Tom Holt*

“For me, Good Art makes you stop and think,” explains Ken Turner. His Art not only compels one to stop and think, but also overwhelms you with its tranquil beauty. From his home studio in Seattle, WA, Ken creates ceramic vessels of elegance, grace, and unforgettable presence. You not only stop, and look, – you become emotionally involved, and feel an obsessive need to touch the work. When you do, you are immediately taken with the excellence of form, lightness, and balance exemplified in every piece.



Ken Turner in his Seattle studio. Background saggar fired sculpture.

Ken, an exacting craftsman and a versatile artist, creates in porcelain and stoneware clays, and fires in high-fire (gas reduction), Raku, and electric environments. Broad in scope, his work spans the ceramic universe from large luster decorated plates and vessels, through an eclectic variety of expertly crafted large and miniature teapots and jars (both classical and organic in design and decoration import), to symbolic ‘life-connected’ Raku altars. His large decorative plates span up to 26” in diameter and his compelling Lava vessels reach 30” tall by 19” wide; while his miniature porcelain teapots are only inches in height and width.

Intrinsic in all his work is the successful synthesis of glaze to form. Often Ken uses precious metals such as gold and platinum, intending to clearly contrast the ‘raw’ with the ‘opulent,’ while simultane-

ously maintaining a delicate balance between the two elements. On some pieces, soft undulating rims and lips suggest a human element, and swirling glaze trailings are intended to “symbolize a complex and elaborate journey representative of man’s inquisitive pursuit of the unknown.” He believes this ‘human connection’ forms the heart and spirit of his work.

Happily, Ken Turner is not only an accomplished artist and craftsman, but also a skillful and successful teacher. His mastery of form and technique is a significant part of the learning experience he brings to the ‘ceramic classroom,’ and his broad base of knowledge and experience with many types of clay, styles, and firing environments translates to a comprehensive learning experience for his students.

Ken is a particularly adept teacher, able to take you from ‘where you are’ to ‘where you want to go.’ He is able to inspire and motivate on a continuous basis, and to



Circle Dancer - 2006, 9"x 9"x9" - Black glazed porcelain vessel with glaze trail design, 23k gold and marbling.

patiently listen and answer the inevitable repeated questions with enthusiasm.

Consequently, Ken’s classes are characterized by numerous demonstrations focused on technique and form, and answering all types of questions - ranging from basics to specifics of various clays, glaze, surface techniques, and firing protocols. Also, generously offered on request, are thoughtful individual work critiques.

Now a successful artist and educator, Ken Turner was first attracted to ceramics as a young child accompanying his parents to The Pottery Shack in Laguna Beach, CA where potters would throw outside in the open air. His first real opportunity to



Assortment of Teapots - 1995, approximately 9"x 7.5"x 12" - Wheel-thrown and assembled porcelain underwent multiple firings. Precious metals were fired overglaze.

explore clay was in the early '70s at Sammamish High School, Bellevue WA, when Regnor Reinholdtsen (Ken's first teacher and good friend) came to his school to give students a demonstration of throwing pots on the potters wheel. "It was like magic!" He was immediately captivated by the powerful seduction and versatility of clay. "I knew this was something I had to do."



The Heart Is a Fragile Thing - 2003, 7" x 6.25" x 10" - Hand built porcelain & stoneware with copper and gold overglaze.

His educational journey continued through Peninsula Community College, Port Angeles, WA, then off to the Kansas City Art Institute, Kansas City, MO, followed by an apprenticeship with designer craftsman/studio potter Courtney Branch and innumerable workshops with notable contemporary artists such as Patti Warashina, Betty Woodman, Jean Griffith, Peter Voulkas, Robert Turner, Robert Piepenburg, Robert Sperry, Michael Cardew, and Ken Ferguson.

Over the years, Ken has developed his own uncompromising craftsmanship levels, aesthetic vision, and working constructs. Modestly though, Ken often refers to the help, wisdom, and technical instruction he received from the afore-

mentioned artists and mentors. In particular, he credits the late Robert Sperry with conveying a lot of wisdom and guidance his way, ceramics and otherwise.

Experience has taught Ken that aesthetics differ, but believes "... if the work does not come from the heart, you cannot expect others to like it." In line with his philosophy, Ken takes great pride in each creation, choosing not to have studio assistants, and painstakingly working on each piece until it's just right - beautiful, meticulously crafted, an occasion to pause and think - and 'from the heart'.

Helping students obtain their own 'aesthetic vision' is not an easy task. Ken believes in trying to answer all student questions, but also tries to cultivate in his students the desire to make their own discoveries. His uncomplicated advice to the budding ceramic artist is, "JUST WORK - make what you want to make... don't over think it... if you are honest in your efforts to make the best work you possibly

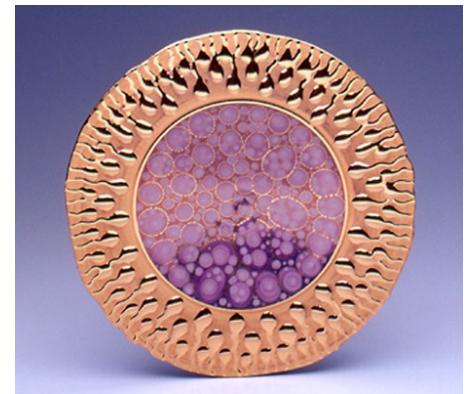


Wheel throwing and slip application demonstration at Moshier Art Center, Burien, WA.



Shape of War and Peace 25"x12"x31.5 2004. Stoneware slab construction, terra sigillata, and foil saggar firing, mix media including wood, medal and wax.

can, and you make your work for the love of creating it, rather than thinking about how much money each piece may bring, people will understand and appreciate that. You can then feel good about selling your work".



Ken Turner USA - Gold Fertility Plate, 49 x 49 x 5 cm. Wheel thrown porcelain plate glaze & glaze trailing techniques with overglaze brush application of liquid bright gold.

It is not often that an artist of Ken's stature also has an interest in teaching, and the skills of a first class instructor. As one of Ken's students, with the passing experience of each new class, each patient demonstration executed, and each question thoughtfully answered, I am reaffirmed in my good luck that Ken Turner continues to consider ceramic instruction a worthwhile endeavor.

Ken currently teaches and conducts workshops at Antioch University Seattle, Seattle, WA, Bellevue College, Bellevue WA, Kirkland Arts Center, Kirkland, WA and Moshier Art Center, Burien, WA. He has also taught and offered workshops and demonstrations throughout the Northwest including Seward Park Art Studio,

Pottery Northwest, and occasionally in his home studio in Seattle.

On a personal note, after study in Kansas City, Ken married "... my soul mate Laura." In 1987 their daughter Alissa was born, and in 1992 their son, Alexander. Working from his home studio has afforded Ken the opportunity to actively and happily participant in parenting while



Richard Hirsch, Lu Pin chang, Ken Turner, Peking Duck Restaurant, Beijing

continuing to pursue his artistic vision and teach. In fact, family and parenting have inspired Ken and influenced his work, such as with his Raku altars.

Ken has had the good fortune to travel through China on two occasions with the help of the China Workers Center for International Exchange (CWCIE), and their US partner, Redmond, WA based business WTE Inc. In 2006 he led a group of artists and art students on a two-week journey visiting five cities, experiencing the arts and culture of China



Platinum Bloom - 2006, 15x15"x2.5" - Porcelain plate with individually impressed floral design in the center. Rim texture derived from glaze. Platinum fired to the rim surface.

in a very intimate way with a focus on the ceramic arts, and concluding with a stay at Sanbao Ceramic Art Institute in Jingdezhen.

In 2009 Ken was invited to join the Archie Bray group led by the director Steven Young Lee. This experience extended more opportunities to work directly with artists and



Ken Turner, Bia Ming a.k.a. "The Shard Shark" & Josh DeWeese, Capital Museum, Beijing 2009

students from China and exchange ideas with scholars, professors, museum curators and collectors.

Northern Star 5" x 5" x 5" 2002. Wheel-thrown and altered, porcelain vessel with platinum overglaze firing.



Ken's experiences in China have had a profound effect not only on his ceramic work, but also on his very fiber. "All of my encounters with the people of China were genuine, rich with gracious hospitality, respect and friendship." Ken knows a great deal about all things ceramic, but he explains, "In China there are many assessable craftsmen with absolute mastery of their specific aspect of the ceramic process; from mining materials, through the creative building and decorative process to firing, packing and shipping." Vari-



Dinnerware Place Setting - 2007 - A small tool is used to individually impress each scale into leather hard porcelain creating this beautiful repetitive pattern enhanced by the glaze.

ous entrepreneurs in China have created venues for ceramic artists from around the world to come and create new work, and take advantage of these master craftsmen to fulfill their vision; much like the conductor of a symphony. Ken hopes to return to China for an extended stay one day to conduct his own symphony.



Running Man 19"x 19"x 26" 2000. Stoneware vessel with porcelain slip texture, glaze trail design and 23k gold fired to the surface.

View more of Ken's work at kenturnerpottery.com

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