

# Celebration of Clay 2022 — "Uplifted"



Sara D'Alessandro

Sara D'Alessandro's "River of Styx" earned the artist the Best of Show award in this year's Celebration of Clay exhibit.

The New Mexico Potters and Clay Artists is holding its annual Celebration of Clay exhibit, "Uplifted."

The New Mexico Potters and Clay Artists is an association of more than 175 Ceramic art enthusiasts from all over the state of New Mexico and beyond, and has been thriving for more than 40 years.

The Celebration of Clay is a greatly anticipated annual member's exhibition and it is a marvelous way to stay up-to-date with what is happening in New Mexico's ceramics and pottery world.

"Uplifted" is this year's theme. For so many of the Association's members, their connection with the practice of clay-making is their inspiration, they are "Uplifted" with a material that encourages expression of both formative and new experiences. The medium itself brings spontaneity even in a habitual routine. Members turn to clay and to their clay community to uplift them with new ideas and the camaraderie that only other clay people know.

Every year, this exhibit allows members to enter their own selection of work, and features awards to highlight exceptional works, selected by a juror. This year they have three jurors: Hebé García, Abby Salsbury, and Jules Epstein. They will be selecting Best in Show Award of \$150, the University of New Mexico Arita Porcelain Award for Beauty, Quality and Functionality of

\$100, and Merit Awards of \$50 each. Cuba-based D'Alessandro said, "I am not faithful to ceramics as it is generally understood."

"River of Styx" departs from a style D'Alessandro is well known for. It is more angular and in tensioned. It reminded one viewer of a funeral pyre.

Her studio is named Mud Wasp and it accurately describes the work that has been associated with D'Alessandro, mainly extremely organic shaped pieces, which are large, that resemble the tubular shapes one finds in mud wasp nests.

"The hand-built fired clay unique has been my sculpture medium for almost six decades," D'Alessandro explained. "My sculpture is 'organic' because the method of formation is an evolving one; it is not designed.

"Clay is the physical past ground by the maw of time, and so, it is the embodiment of flux. It has plasticity, immediacy and ability to record history. It can even convey intent. Pursuing energy and animation, not idealization,

"I prefer asymmetry over symmetry and 'the heat of creation' over refinement. I am committed to the process of the unique (one of a kind). I may work a form, such as the column, the spire, the spiral, in series, but each work is begun anew from scratch. This permits new ideas to enter the dialogue and allows the potential for new energy. Sculpting for me is a dialogue, a seeking. Clay with its frightening fecundity and eternal potency has much to impart.

"Although I have work for indoors, my primarily focus, these last 20 some

years, is on large sculptures for the outdoors," D'Alessandro continued. "Fired clay is a suitable and durable material for outdoor sculpture. I am prepared to discuss this with anyone who doubts. Fired clay satisfies a thirst for volume and deep and rich texture absent in most public sculpture. Solar transit mobilizes shadow to emerge and to recede, shifting form, animating the pieces throughout the day.

"The scale of my sculpture is personal, not monumental. Multiple element installations create larger forms responsive to the site in which they inhabit. Arising up from the same ground with the viewer, mingling among the elements becomes an invitation to be part of the assembled. This emphasizes the individual as a part of a larger entity, rather than promoting the cult of the individual."

The "Lobed Bowl" by Rinconada potter Lee Akins is sensually shaped and features an earthen palette.

"My work seeks to combine figurative imagery with the format of the traditional clay vessel," Akins said. "The vessel has historically been a powerful metaphor for the body, with each part of the pot being named for the corresponding area of the body. A full lip, a gentle curve of the neck, a rotund belly or a broad shoulder all combine to provide animation to the pot.

"Some of my pieces are predominantly male, some are a synthesis of male and female but most are female forms inspired by fertility figures found in most early cultures.

"The Venus of Willendorf and the stone carvings of the Cycladic culture are some of the most powerful to me. My most recent work strives toward an elegant organic form, one that is obviously a hand-made object but has an internal natural order.

"My pieces are coil-built out of terra cotta clay," Akins continued. "Coiling allows me to control the form while the joining marks provide an inherent rhythm to the surface. The terra-cotta gives me a warmth to the colors, yet allows a wide choice of finishes. Peeling paint and mossy rocks provide sources of inspiration for the color and textures of my work."

Sheena Cameron's "Our Deb Haaland" pays tribute to the Interior Secretary from New Mexico and is a departure from Cameron's usual subject matter, which often uses horses, a horse being the second piece in Cameron's entries this year.

"While never intending to work primarily with the form of the horse, it turns out to be perfect for what I am trying to do with my work," Cameron said. "They are allegorical and give me the opportunity to add gemstones for the mane and tail.

"The symbolism of the horse itself is so fitting for the problems of the modern world. Horses survive and thrive by living in community and being extremely sensitive to their surroundings. They are teachers and healers. Most of them open to reveal the inner life, the unseen realms. I thought I wanted to make sculpture, not pottery, but realized most of the objects I am making are containers. They seem more and more to be exploring the Sacred Feminine.

"This has led me to my newest work — the Goddess series of Horses. I am trying to rediscover and bring to the surface the teachings and archetypes of the Goddesses of old. Clay seems like a perfect medium for this. The mixed media horses come with a miniature 'book' that gives the title of the work, lists the stones and added elements, what they mean symbolically, the theme and other interesting information."

Sharon Brush's "Acclimation" earned her an award of merit.

"I have always been drawn to objects whose history is written upon their surface: The river rock worn smooth from centuries of tumult; the bleached, chewed bone found on the desert floor; the bare-bones landscape of the American southwest" Brush explained. "These things speak to me of timelessness and mystery and rouse a thousand questions that will never find an answer. It is all that I don't know, that deepens my viewing experience. The influence of such objects and landscapes seep into every piece I make.

"I approach the construction of each of my vessels as a sculpture-- working to create rhythm, flow, reverberation and quiet within each one. Intrigued by contrasts, I move from slow, sweeping curves to staccato points and ridges; from enclosed space to open passage; from deeply textured surface to river-rock smoothness; from black to white. It is my hope that the finished piece will bring the viewer a sense of calm and quiet."

Marina Rabinowitz started doing ceramics at the age of seven in Argentina and has continued working with clay since. Although her primary occupation is not an artist (PhD in Political Economy), art has always been an important component of her life and in many ways a guiding force, applying concepts of hegemony, instability, and naïvité as visual cues. In New York, at Parsons, she discovered murals and the technique of tile making and molds. In awe of the possibilities she expanded the compositions to mixed media: ceramic, glass and metal. From there the missing piece was technique, which she acquired thanks to the generosity of Laura Robbins.

Leonard Baca's stoneware thrown, spray glazed "NM Turquoise Flared Bowl" is elegant in its apparent simplicity. Its smooth glazed surface combined with the subtle undulations make this a piece that calls out to the viewer to be touched delicately.

This piece makes the work of the artist look simple, when in fact it is extremely complex and intense.

"Clay is in the blood, I feel the clay as I mold it, form it on the wheel," Baca said. "I select the exact color to make it beautiful.

"In the summer of 2011, I went to help at the volunteer camp at Ghost Ranch, this was the second time meeting members of New Mexico Potters and Clay Artists, we all had a great time and it was nice to see Pot Hollow blossom," Baca continued. "That is where two friends asked me if I would like to help and be on the board for The Association.

"Years later I am still helping the organization. We have a new studio at Ghost Ranch after the 2015 flood took out Pot Hollow.

"Being part of the Association is a great way to meet potters and ceramists who enjoyed the feel of clay as much as I do," Baca elaborated. "I have been working with clay for eleven years. I have been amazed at the diversity of ceramics and pottery in New Mexico and the talent we have as artists. I look forward to meeting more people and developing my craft.

"Over the past few years, I keep developing my skills working with different clay bodies and seeing how different glazes affect the pieces. Also different firing techniques. I do a combination of dipping, brushing, and spraying my glazes. The combination of glazes with the clay is what intrigues me."

Hebé García's "It Takes A Village" features García's iconic style along with