

Frank Willett



Frank Willett passed away at age 91 on October 15, 2020 at his home in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Here is some more information about Frank.

Awarded the Governor's Award for Excellence in the Arts in 2013, Frank Willett's work in high fired porcelain and stoneware is widely known and respected in the ceramic art community in New Mexico. A master of his craft, his work has been widely shown and collected both in New Mexico and nationally.

In addition to the Governor's Award, he was honored by the City of Santa Fe Arts Commission Mayor's Award for Excellence in the Arts in 2002, was featured in the December 2005 issue of Ceramics Monthly, and was included in the Ceramic Arts Yearbooks 2015. His work has been shown in numerous invitational and juried shows, including an invitational show in the New Mexico Governor's Gallery, an invitational show of New Mexico potters at Santa Fe Clay, and, most recently, an exhibit of ceramics, "Critical Chaos", in conjunction with an NCECA conference, "Critical Santa Fe, a Symposium" in the Gallery at Santa Fe Community College.

He has taught wheel throwing classes at Santa Fe Community College and Santa Fe Clay, and has given workshops at several colleges and ceramic educational institutions in the region. In conjunction with the International Folk Art Market, he participated recently in a cultural exchange with Korean National Treasure, Mr. Han, and with a group of potters from Kazakhstan where he and they demonstrated their wheel work in front of a large group of students, potters and faculty at Santa Fe Community College.

He holds an MA in Fine Art from CSU Los Angeles and taught high school art in California before moving to Santa Fe in 1971, where he established Santa Fe Pottery on historic Guadalupe Street. Throughout the years he has produced pottery continuously, all with an unerring sense of beautiful form, good design and superb craftsmanship. For more than thirty five years he and his wife, Luisa Baldinger, have collaborated in a number of ceramic adventures. Together they produced Sunridge Pottery, a line of functional wheel-thrown and slab-made pottery for both the wholesale and retail markets, designed and produced "Santa Fe Lights", ceramic architectural lighting fixtures, and continued to sell their work in their shop Santa Fe Pottery. In 2003 they sold the shop. In his "retirement" Frank continues to spend several hours in the studio each day making his more one-of-a-kind pieces on the wheel and collaborating with Luisa on the glazing and firing in both the gas and soda kilns at their studio.



In Memory of Frank Willett, 1929-2020

NMPCA Blog

19 Oct 2020 5:44 PM

Frank, our much loved founding member of NMPCA and mentor, model to many clay people in New Mexico has passed away.

Frank's ready wit and gentle ways have inspired and guided many of us over the years. His fabulous skill in throwing, including thoughtful consideration of the true function of his pots, is unmatched. He and his wife and fellow clay artist, Luisa Baldinger, glazed the pots to perfection, for beauty and functionality.



Frank died at home, surrounded by his family, on October 15, 2020. He was 91 years old. Here is some information about Frank and his career:

Frank held an MA in Fine Art from CSU Los Angeles and taught high school art in California before moving to Santa Fe in 1971, where he established Santa Fe Pottery on historic Guadalupe Street. Through the years he produced pottery continuously, all with an unerring sense of beautiful form, good design and superb craftsmanship. He and Luisa collaborated in many ceramic adventures. Together they produced Sunridge Pottery, a line of functional wheel-thrown and slab-made pottery for both the wholesale and retail markets, designed and produced "Santa Fe Lights", ceramic architectural lighting fixtures, and continued to sell their work in their shop Santa Fe Pottery. In 2003 they sold the shop. In his "retirement" Frank continued to spend several hours in the studio each day making his more one-of-a-kind pieces on the wheel and collaborating with Luisa on the glazing and firing. Frank continued to throw work through August 2020.

Awarded the Governor's Award for Excellence in the Arts in 2013, Frank Willett's work in high fired porcelain and stoneware was recognized in that award as being widely known and respected in the ceramic art community in New Mexico.

In addition to the Governor's Award, he was honored by the City of Santa Fe Arts Commission Mayor's Award for Excellence in the Arts in 2002, was featured in the December 2005 issue of Ceramics Monthly, and was included in the Ceramic Arts Yearbooks 2015. His work has been shown in numerous invitational and juried shows, including an invitational show in the New Mexico Governor's Gallery, an invitational show of New Mexico potters at Santa Fe Clay, and, most recently, an exhibit of ceramics, "Critical Chaos", in conjunction with an NCECA conference, "Critical Santa Fe, a Symposium" in the Gallery at Santa Fe Community College.

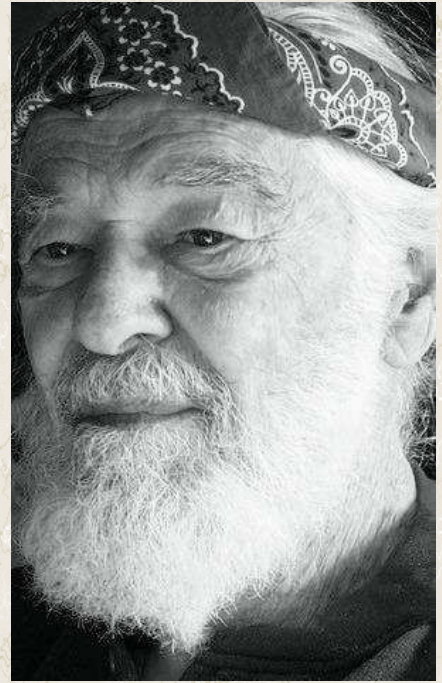
He has taught wheel throwing classes and has given workshops at several colleges and ceramic educational institutions in the region. He was an active member of the New Mexico Potters and Clay Artists (NMPCA) lending his expertise as judge of the Clay Olympics, juror for the Celebration of Clay, lecturing and demonstrating at NMPCA Ghost Ranch workshops, and showing his pieces in the annual Celebration of Clay Exhibitions. See a video of Frank's demonstration of trimming a bowl at Ghost Ranch on the NMPCA YouTube channel.



Frank Willett, 1929-2020

Santa Fe New Mexican paper

Frank Willett, master potter, devoted partner, father, mentor, and beloved by all who knew him, both human and canine, passed away October 15, 2020, from old age complicated by metastatic cancer. Frank held a unique combination of intelligence, playfulness, insight, adventure, and devotion to the pursuit of the perfect pot. Frank was born in Seattle and grew up adventuring in the countryside of Washington State and Northern California, learning the electrical and plumbing trades from his dad, Kermit. Frank's mom, Jean, a registered nurse, ran the largely frontier-like peripatetic household with loving precision. After serving in the Korean War, Frank explored degrees in Sociology, finally settling on a Master's in Fine Art from Cal State, Los Angeles. While teaching high school art in Los Angeles, he met his first wife, Jere Williams, and they began a small home pottery business, selling from a gallery amidst the mountain apple orchards of Oak Glen, CA. Business was brisk, leading them to open a production facility in nearby Pico Rivera, where they made handmade lines of pottery that sold through department stores such as Bullocks in Los Angeles.



Moving to Santa Fe, NM in 1971, he and Jere opened the Santa Fe Pottery on Guadalupe Street, then a dirt backroad of body shops and factories. Throughout the 70's, the Santa Fe Pottery matured and commercialized along with the rest of Guadalupe Street, growing into a potter's co-op that attracted an eclectic group of talented artists as well as a wonderful menagerie of passersby and lingerers.

Frank's life changed dramatically in 1980, when he met his soulmate and future life co-adventurer of the next 40 years, Luisa Baldinger. Together, they produced Sunridge Pottery, a line of functional work with a southwestern landscape motif, architectural lighting fixtures as Santa Fe Lights, and an array of ever-evolving, one-of-kind pottery for Santa Fe Pottery. Beyond pottery, Luisa and Frank shared a passion for flora and fauna of every kind and traveled often and wide in pursuit of new learnings about the natural world.

Frank received a number of awards and accolades for his work, teaching, and mentoring. He was honored with the City of Santa Fe Arts Commission Mayor's Recognition of Excellence in the Arts (2002), a feature in Ceramics Monthly (2005), and the prestigious Governor's Award for Excellence in the Arts (2013). His work has been included in numerous invitational and juried shows, and he was especially featured in the New Mexico Governor's Gallery at the State Capitol and juried shows of New Mexico potters at Santa Fe Clay. Frank considered himself extremely lucky in that potting was a delightful obsession - making pots is fun, like play. He shared his knowledge, enthusiasm, and humor graciously and generously.

Frank is survived by his wife Luisa, his daughter, Catherine and wife Sophie, son Christopher and husband Bryan, stepdaughter Edie and partner Dave, stepson Tom and partner Beth, and grandchildren Nick, Maddie, and Tano.

A memorial will be arranged next spring. For more about Frank's professional life, see: thesliptrail.com/in-memory-of-frank-willett/

