

## Inside the Artist - Mame McKee January 2015



### Tell us about your journey in art / as an artist.

We didn't have a lot of art available in school back in my day. I had zero art in high school. My exploration began from the time I was little, collecting odd and interesting things. I was fascinated by how things worked, taking apart and putting them back together again. I enjoy making art from what is around me. This has remained constant; how these resources all around me fit together in both beautiful and functional ways. I often did not have a finished project in mind and would enjoy seeing what the thing I was working on might want to be (I still work that way!). I take as much satisfaction in making paint as I do in the act of painting or the painting itself. I found peaceful moments in art in a childhood that was not peaceful. Art was a good and safe place to be. I could stop the world for a little while on a regular basis, absorb and sit with it, no matter what it was. This remains my philosophy today. Art gives us space for rejuvenation and a way to meet and connect with other people.

In my forties, I switched from a career in human services to an apprenticeship in ceramics. I had bought some clay and had this remarkable concept of starting over. I spent several years studying ceramics and began looking for a space to provide affordable classes for my community. I found the right space, a magical space on the Moscow Road that became Schoolhouse Pottery. We provided classes to local students and adults and also provided private lessons to the tourists (I wanted to be part of creating a positive Vermont experience for them). We were up to 11 classes per week and over a decade later, I thought I was done with the business. It was then, when my then apprentice, Christina Pellechio, encouraged me to look at a vacant space in Waterbury Center that Seminary Art Center came to be. The light and space was magical in a completely different way than the Schoolhouse. The history of education at the Seminary building itself was so inspiring that I decided to keep it moving forward.

**What is the medium you most like to work with/in? What draws you to this medium? What do you like about your materials?**

That is so difficult to answer. I love them all! I was captured by clay in ways that I wasn't by other mediums. Clay has so many facets; from the wheel, to hand building, mold making and creating glazes, the challenge of learning them all appealed to me.

One of my favorite mediums is pastels. The incredibly rich colors and the physicality of it... I could get my hands right into it, just like clay. There is no distance from pastels and I like to get in and make a great mess! I later learned that pastels are similar in pigmentation to oil paints, but unlike oils (which are expensive and require chemical solvents for clean-up), pastels are suspended in clay. I've tried to make my own pastels but wasn't ever successful. I decided this was for the best because if I had succeeded, I would have kept them rather than use them or give them away as gifts! I do believe that art should be given as gifts and that wise adults love to receive art from and created by children.



**What most inspires your work - Has there been anything that has been life changing or that has influenced your practice?**

My beloved Vermont. I was born and raised here and my family has been in New England for generations. I was raised with a strong sense of history and the belief that we stand on the shoulders of giants. There have been so many things that have influenced me in my relationship with art. But it was changed by my flood work [with Rebuild Waterbury]. Not just the initial clean-up that went on, but the harder work that came after. I began to do art in a much more methodical and rhythmic way. Prior to the flood, my art work was experimental and focused on teaching. With the flood work I was doing, I had my muse strike in a whole new way. The art I was creating was really just for me, not

preparing for classes. I was not teaching at Seminary Arts during Rebuild and could only work on my own art when there were small moments of time. There was not time to start and finish, so it had to create its own pace. I had to spend time gathering the materials and then pull it out to work on it when I could. I saw my art evolve in segments and stages and I took as much pleasure from setting up and cleaning up as I did in making the art (definitely not my personality or usual method!). As I look back, I did some interesting work during the time of the flood and I see that it has expanded into other parts of my life, including cooking and home renovations. It has taught me to get pleasure from being thoughtful, organized and not being concerned with the outcome. It literally changed my practice. Touching and handling the colors and making something from nothing.

**What blogs or books are you reading or would recommend?**

I am dyslexic so it is a struggle and takes a lot of energy. I tend to get my information orally and visually. Conversations with other artists help generate ideas. I need to be thinking about it and around it [art] all the time. I believe that most of us are artists and most of us have a "creative life". In my experience teaching adults, it is often a reframing of what it means to be an artist. I imagine all the amazing art that has not been seen outside its original village. It matters most what we do with our art. Although it may not last 700 years, it influences and ripples out into our own community circle.

I do use the internet as a resource, and enjoy the *Ceramics Art Daily* site. I often utilize YouTube and other demonstration videos for inspiration and to view new art [trends]. For example, during the Waterbury Arts Fest one year (formerly SSAF), I was in charge of demonstrations for kids. I decided to make marble paper, so, I researched it, tried it myself for a month and then was ready to create with kids at the festival.

