

# **FROM CLAY TO FABRIC: THE PUBLIC SIDE OF ART AND THE GALLERIES THAT ENABLE IT.**

## **FIRST IN A SERIES**

**By: Bill Robinson-Parks**

The earliest evidence found of ceramics in the form of a figurine takes us back to between 25,000 to 29,000 years in eastern Europe and the earliest pottery as much as 18,300 years ago was recently found in Yuchanyan Cave in Hunan Province, China. All those shards of pottery and complete intact ceramic artifacts tell us about the ancient common history of our human ancestry. All of those bits and pieces of tattered and whole fabrics remind us of our ancient moments of self embellishment and fleeting chances of adornment to enhance our lives. These objects remind us of our earliest yearnings for grace and beauty. After tens of thousands of years, they are still with us today.

These are the fundamentals upon which our human societies have thrived. The ability of a clay based containers to hold and transport vital sustenance and materials without waste, leakage, and the scourge of grain eating rodents and insects. The capability of woven straw and fibers to help carry stuff and clothe our bodies with the proper demure as well as protect from harsh surroundings is the utility of fabric. The success of the hunt and gathering afforded us time to hone those skills. The success of our cultivation through agriculture and culture afforded us the opportunities to refine these arts. A great river was usually nearby. There were the river banks and stream beds from which the clay was dug and from which the water was drawn to irrigate crops. There is this mental image of going from mud to clay to a well known fabric called mud cloth. By using fire under control, the pottery was fired and glazed and by using vegetable dyes the fabrics were colorful. The inventive twisting of the fabric, knotting it and tying it with cordage provided yet again another innovative visual experience from the dyes. Over time the glazes and the textile colors became more and more vibrant.

On the shores of the Potomac, in the old port city of Georgetown, now an invigorating dining and shopping hub of greater Washington DC, there is an enclave of artistry, where the vibrancy of color and the enduring legacy of ceramics are evident. Galleries are important as spaces where art can be viewed directly by the public, both in passing as cultural amenity and in close-up visits with the opportunity to purchase an original or print. It is very different viewing a piece of art directly as compared to a photographic or computer image. You can see the qualities that the artist intended.

The surface texture and nuances of colors and tones is more available when viewed there with the art. Sculptural pieces and elements are more discernible in the presence of the piece, in the round and in reality 3D. The Galleries 1054 at Canal Square offer an ongoing cultural venue to view art directly. For example Cross McKensie Ceramics offers pottery based art renderings in ceramics and Parish Gallery is now offering a vibrant color display of textile base art.

Currently at Cross MacKenzie Gallery, there is an exceptional exhibit, featuring new ceramics and paintings by the artist Lillian Milgrom inspired by the artist Giorgio Morandi. Recently, the works of Giorgio Morandi, 1890-1964, which is centered on still life paintings of ceramic pieces is known and admired for the austere use of muted colors and soft ambiguous contours suggesting a contemplative state from long years of pondering the essentials of tone and form. Lillian Milgrom has shown the benefit of being an astute observer of a previous artists' dedication and moving the inspiration toward a personal interpretation with a fresh vision, look-see, looking again. Taking this new look at Morandi, Milgrom expressed her discovery of a process which contributed to her growth as an artist. The results are a highly skilled and sophisticated rendering of a concept of texture, form, subtleties and nuances that sets a tone of sublime satisfaction. Milgrom's ceramic pieces that emulates Morandi paintings as sculptural objects replicating his distinct compositional approach is a celebration of long years working the balance and harmony in the texture, volume, and the interplay of functional objects as still life. "Milgrom on Morandi" is on exhibition until September 11, 2009.

Robert Paige at Parish Gallery provides a festive experience in accomplished design and the fine art of vibrant colors on fabric displayed, wearable art and pillow furnishing setting an interior or wardrobe aglow.

A series of articles is to provide a guide to the diverse and invigorating art scene from an additional perspective in concert with other writers interpreting the creative stimulus for cultural vibrancy in a business district model initiative for economic recovery.

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