

KILN' TIME



MARCH 2021

THE OFFICIAL CLAY ARTS GUILD NEWSLETTER

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:



Find out what some of us have been doing lately!



Join the Clay Arts Guild and support the studio!

Read about what our guild is up to on page 2.

Turn to page 7 for links to the Center for Community Arts website.

Message from the New CAG Prez ...



Hello CAG members!

It seems that it has been such a long time since we have been able to meet up at the studio! I have been keeping busy with babysitting the new grand baby, trying to train our new puppy, and picking unwanted fruit from my neighbors' backyards to donate to the needy.

I hope you have had a chance to take some of the wonderful virtual classes that have been offered by Community Arts this past year. Our incredible instructors have been so patient while the students figure out how to use Zoom and all the while utilizing multiple camera views and coming up with fun projects to stretch us in new ways. This past year has been quite stressful for everyone, and I have found that being able to go out to my studio and work on my new project ideas from class allows me to relax.

We are very excited to be in the planning phase for a CAG Outdoor Mothers Day Pottery Sale! The event will be held on the paved area right outside the studio front door on Sunday, May 2. Thanks to Bill Schaff we have a wonderful set up that will allow plenty of space for artists and customers to stay safe. If you would like to participate as an artist or a volunteer and have not let me know, please email me so I can get you on the list. More details coming soon!

Hope to see everyone soon!

Pat Alger



Last year at this time, this is how our studio looked.

Turn to page 8 for the new look.

MEMBERS of the BOARD

President: Pat Alger
patalger08@gmail.com
Vice President
Mary Ellen Brownell
bbmebb@mac.com
Fin. Officer: Bill Schaaf
billschaaf13@comcast.net
Secretary: Millie Robinson
millie.robinson@comcast.net
Membership: Ann Henderson
annadele@comcast.net
Librarian: Aletha Biederman-Wiens
alethajuanita@gmail.com
Social Media: Facebook & Instagram:
Nicole Collins
nicolelanguage@aol.com
Hospitality: Betty Medwedeff
bmedwedeff@gmail.com
Monitors: Erika Goldstein
ebgoldstein@comcast.net
Newsletter Editor: Jane Burns
juburns@sbcglobal.net
Layout Editor: Mary Leigh Miller
mlmiller602@gmail.com
Curator: Florence McAuley
fbmcauley@comcast.net
Data Base Manager:
Gary Guglielmino
garyg@astound.net
Web Master: Brad Krebs
bradkrebs@berkeley.edu
CAG Website: Colleen Whitman
whitman.colleen@gmail.com
Educational/Social Event Coord:
Michele Browne
Community Outreach:
Bette Sindzinski
bettesindzinski@hotmail.com
Empty Bowls: Mona Moxley
monamoxley@yahoo.com

Kiln' Time Newsletter

Published 5 or 6 times a year

Editor ~ Jane Burns
Please submit all articles to Jane
juburns@sbcglobal.net

Visit our website:
www.wcclayartsguild.com
See the latest *Kiln' Times*
in full color!

CAG MEMBERSHIP

HAVE YOU JOINED CAG YET?

Sign up for Spring classes started Wednesday, Feb 24. There are many different virtual classes to choose from, so go to the Community Arts webpage to see which ones you want to take. *Remember that if you are a CAG member, you get a discount on the Outdoor Glazing Open Studio sessions.* **See box at bottom for more details.**

Now is a great time to renew your CAG membership! CAG supports the studio and the students by contributing to the purchase of much needed new equipment for the studio. As many of you may know, our new Blaauw kiln is in the process of being installed and not a minute too soon! Takemi has been able to keep our kilns firing, but they are getting worse all the time. We are now in the process of budgeting for a second Blaauw kiln that will greatly help in getting all our work fired in a timely manner. We also purchase items such as pottery wheels, bats, slab rollers and other critical items for the studio.

MEALS ON WHEELS

CAG participates in many community outreach activities. A new one that has just been added is a collaboration with Meals on Wheels. **Barbara Moreland** has offered to lead the effort and we already have a few volunteers to help out. We will be donating small hand made pottery items such as mugs, cups, trinket bowls and flower vases that will be included in the meals that are delivered to the elderly population. It is a great way for us to give back to the community and help out one of the groups that has been impacted the most by the recent "stay home" orders.

There are also benefits that directly impact CAG members. When you join CAG, you are offered a reduced rate for the Open Studio Glazing sessions as well as Master Potter Workshops. CAG members are also offered the opportunity to sell their pottery in our two large studio sales as well as our smaller "pop-up" sales.

CAG POP-UP SALE

We are in the process of planning our next studio sale. It will be held on **Sunday, May 2, from 10 am to 3 pm**. We are setting up the sale right outside the studio front door so that everyone can enjoy the sale while staying safe. We already have 17 artists signed up to participate so it should be a wonderful sale. Please contact **Pat Alger** if you are interested in participating.

CAG membership is on an annual basis from September 1 to August 31. Dues are prorated if you join now, so it only costs \$62.10.

Click on this link to join or renew: <https://clay-arts-guild.square.site/>



TEN FEET of LEARNING by Mary Ellen Brownell

Ever since we decided to move to a new house, I wanted to make my own kitchen back splash. I had done some home hobby ceramics (after one class at a JC). It looked fairly easy.



I took my first class at the studio just to make the tiles. Ed was the teacher and in his gentle way he explained the many steps involved. Ok, not as easy as I thought but still doable.

First draw the design to scale. Graph paper really helped. The tiles were to go around a window looking out onto oak trees. The design tried to reflect the close proximity of the tree on the left with the more distant view of the trees on the right. More challenging than I understood at the time, I chose to wrap the image around the window sill and sides. Second, draw a full scale layout. Large sheets of paper taped together with hand marked grid lines. We tacked the design in place and lived with it for several months, splashing food etc on it and making some esthetic changes.



Meanwhile, back at the studio, I started making "test tiles", most of which were unnecessarily large and cumbersome. I have always liked the look of sgraffito and I also wanted a three-dimensional aspect for some of my tiles. The work of Natalie Blake was an inspiration, although I knew I didn't have the skill and experience to copy it. Ed had suggested a few clay bodies that would work for the project.. Background color was important so Soldate and XX were out but sculpture mix was a better match for the cabinets around the splash. Small unique bisque molds were made to drape the tiles over to emphasize the larger branches.

Next, more tests to choose the engobes, slips, stains and underglazes to scratch through. The choices were a bit overwhelming, so I kept it simple with three colors. On all those tiles I kept trying to improve and refine my sgraffito technique. Most of those tiles are in a box now, just to remind me of the knowledge I gained. Thank goodness I still had the distraction of the projects for the other classes I was taking.

Now, with one of the several copies of the full-size drawing in my hand and the test tiles in the box,



I was ready to roll out some slabs! The bisque molds were placed on the paper and the slab draped over. Ed had said that the shrinkage of the clay would provide enough room for grout so I could just sgraffito over the whole surface. Using the other copies for a guide, the colors were applied and carved through. Choosing to have the cut lines follow the design and not on a grid was another potential problem, but there were very few breaks or chips. The cut tiles were allowed to dry for about two weeks and fired in batches. I misplaced one tile and had to redo it but it all came out ok.

Clear glaze was sprayed lightly on the bisque pieces and fired to cone 5. They didn't need a higher firing as the tiles were going on a wall not a floor. A grout was found to match the clay color. It was then painted with acrylics to extend the designs.

I'm glad I took my time and persevered. I'm very happy with the result.



What We're Up To ~ Clay-wise and Otherwise ...



Hello Fellow Creators!

Hoping this finds you all safe and well! I have not been able to create more ceramic forms as I don't have a great set up for hand-building at home but would not allow icky COVID to dampen my whimsy!!! I have turned to painting with water colors on cards and they have been a great hit!!! New characters have joined the collection!!! I do miss our community and creating with that fabulous clay!!! Here's hoping to once again being together soon!!! Be well!

Erika Goldstein



12 Tiles Make a Splash!

My good friend, Mary Leigh Miller, had encouraged me to take ceramic classes at Community Arts for years. When I wanted to give up and quit, she would tell me, "you like the people at the studio so just go and enjoy the community." My journey to learning to enjoy working in ceramics had been sketchy to date. I have taken an occasional class from Community Arts, but never felt I truly spent enough time to get to know the art of working with clay.

When COVID-19 shut down the studio, Mary Leigh invited me to come join her in her studio to work. I took on the challenge to make a tile backsplash for my daughter's new kitchen. I had no idea the challenges I would face to successfully get 12 tiles successfully fired. On the surface, making 12 flat 6-inch tiles seemed pretty simple, the drawing of the poppies was what concerned me. The lessons learned from this project have been invaluable.

In the process of finally achieving my goal, the tiles warped and cracked multiple times during the firings. There were times we rushed the drying and all the tiles cracked; another time I used the wrong glaze, ruining the whole batch. I was not about to give up though, as I had committed to making this backsplash for my daughter, and her kitchen had a big space over the stove waiting for the finished tiles.

I learned so much about working with clay through the process. I realize now that having a goal helped me not to give up. I understand it also took many failures along the way before I could enjoy the work. I am now happy to create perfectly imperfect tiles, bowls and cups for the joy of learning something new. We experience frustration, we become impatient, and we struggle to stay the course to achieve the finished product.



The joy of the learning and successfully producing the final product has made for a fun year of working with my "Ceramics Pod." The tiles are now installed and I am making a collage with the broken tiles.

Laura Wittenberg

Read more about what we're up to on page 5

What We're Up To ~ Clay-wise and Otherwise ...

ZOOM CLASSES

What am I doing during this stay at home time? I have actually learned to love Zoom classes. My first experience was Chris Fortin's class for honing your wheel skills. He showed me many useful tips. The best was to breathe and slow down while at work on the wheel. I also feel that I improved my throwing skills. I am so fortunate to have a wheel and space on my patio to practice.

Now, I am really enjoying Leslie Jensen's basic handbuilding class. I am learning patience and many new handbuilding skills. Leslie and Chris both have demonstrated and talked with us, which really was helpful. It is almost as if we were at the studio watching a demonstration.

I really enjoyed an outdoor open glaze session. Eventhough we could not spray our work, my glazing worked out quite well. Thank you, Takemi, for keeping things rolling, answering questions and continually encouraging us.

Do I miss being in the studio and seeing everyone? YES! Hopefully, one day soon we will be together in classes again.

Millie Robinson



Dr. SEUSS COMES ALIVE!



When the studio first closed down, I was desperate to maintain my pottery addiction. I was thrilled that Takemi and the instructors had figured out a way to make classes and glazing work. I was able to fire some pieces in the Glaze Firing class. I took a great Surface Decoration class from Leslie Jensen and got excited by the new ideas she shared.

The most convenient place for me to work on pottery was the kitchen. The only problem being that I share my living space with my family. I had to shield my pieces from my kids' flying balls. I had to negotiate with my husband to let my pieces sit out to achieve the desired level of dryness before working the next step. Too often that perfect level of dryness came and went without me revisiting it. My kids wanted to play inside and my husband wanted the kitchen back. I made 10 tiles at the start of Leslie's class and 7 of them still sit undecorated. I've discovered that I'm a horrible at-home potter and that's OK.

I've explored some alternative creative outlets, such as making family Dr. Seuss themed Halloween Costumes. That took about two months of the pandemic, but it kept the kids and adults interested and busy, with some great results. I have also done some drawing and watercolors, and I reviewed a pottery book, sketching out designs I want to try once we get back into the studio. I've hiked hundreds of miles, each hike appreciating how wonderful it is to have access to open space. Primarily beneficial is having Las Trampas "in my backyard."

None of this is as good as creating work in the studio. I have always appreciated the studio for what it offers, but its closure during the pandemic has given me an even deeper appreciation for the facilities and friendships it offers. The convenience of the studio is unparalleled - the wheels, the tables, the sinks, the lockers, the tools, the glazes and the firing all in one place. Taking classes, attending open studio, and connecting with friends - I miss it all and look forward to the time we can get back to in-person classes. For now, I will continue to draw and look for inspiration elsewhere.

Julie Henderson Dandliker

Read more about what we're up to on the next page

What We're Up To ~ Clay-wise and Otherwise ...

My Year Without Clay

Although I have thought about it a lot, I admit I have not touched clay in nearly a year. The day after my last class at the studio, I had my right shoulder replaced. The surgery went well, but I developed pneumonia, requiring ten more days in the hospital, full-time oxygen, and a lot of care from my children as well as visits from hospital personnel six or seven weeks afterwards.

As I began to regain strength, I took a class from Takemi. I had my children move my wheel to the outside deck, softened a bag of clay so my weakened arms could handle it, and even had plans to make specific items. The softened clay is still sitting in a bag in my kitchen, the wheel has been returned to the garage, and I have taken up knitting and watercolors after spacing out from working about twenty jigsaw puzzles. What I do most, however, is read. I have probably read more books this year than I have the last five years. Thank heavens for my iPad, digital books and our amazing libraries where I can order just about any book I want.

I still dream about working with clay, design great pots and even sculptures in my sleep and wait anxiously to return to in-studio teaching. I received my second vaccine shot March 1, which gives me a spark of hope that we might even be able to have modified classes by summer – and surely by fall.

Ann Henderson

ONLINE WITH MIKE KATZ

I've been keeping my brain busy by taking an online course offered by Matt Katz of the *Ceramics Materials Workshop*.

This class is a deep dive into understanding how and why glazes work. There are about 40 people enrolled in my class, and they're located all over the world. There's a huge range of experience, including a professor, several high school ceramics teachers, and a lot of dedicated hobbyists and full time potters. Some people are working at cone 10 and others at cone 6, and a mix of reduction and oxidation. The common element is wanting to understand, in detail, how and why glazes work. Each person chooses a glaze formula to work on over the course of the term. We all have shared them (and Matt has worked to avoid duplicates) so we have the benefit of seeing what happens to everyone's formula as we go through the labs.

Over the course of the session, Matt covers geology, a lot of chemistry, formulas, flaws, and colors. Each week, he releases a new (recorded) lecture that's about two hours (faster if you play it on 1.25x speed!) and provides some background readings. This is supplemented with an online discussion group where people post questions and Matt answers them (but everyone can see everyone's Q and A, which is helpful). Every other week there is a lab, where we test some aspect of glaze chemistry (which requires making lots and lots of 100 gram batches of your base glaze recipe with small variations, like altering the amount of silica, alumina or flux and seeing what happens). Finally, there are "hangouts," which are online (like Zoom) discussion sessions offered at various times, during which you can submit your lab work and get feedback. Even if you don't submit your own lab work, you can hear the discussion and see other students' tests.

I've been making pots for years and glazing them at community studios, as well as trying to follow and tweak recipes at home, and this course is really solidifying my understanding of why things work (and don't). I'm not yet at the point where I am developing my own glazes, but I've definitely gained a lot of understanding of how to tweak the recipes I use to modify and correct them!

Kate Chenok



Read more about what we're up to on the next page



What We're Up To ~ Clay-wise and Otherwise ...

BACKYARD CLAYTIME

Spring Quarter 2021 Classes and Workshops

[https://www.communityarts.org/
classes/ceramics-sculpture](https://www.communityarts.org/classes/ceramics-sculpture)

Center for Community Arts is offering studio programs taking place indoors at our Shadelands location and virtual programs online through Zoom.

For all studio programs, students will be asked to comply with our Arts + Rec Safety Protocol.

Clay Pick up and Drop off Hours:

**Sunday and Tuesday,
11:30 am - 1 pm,
now through March 21**

**1365 N. Civic Dr., Studio E
(Ceramics) Front Door**

Important Website Information:

Virtual Class LAB Protocols

[https://www.communityarts.org/home/
showpublisheddocument?id=25521](https://www.communityarts.org/home/showpublisheddocument?id=25521)

Outdoor Open Glaze Studio Policy

[https://www.communityarts.org/home/
showpublisheddocument?id=25523](https://www.communityarts.org/home/showpublisheddocument?id=25523)

Some of you may already know that I have a ceramic studio in my backyard. It saw a lot of activity when the 350 sq. ft. addition was built around 35 years ago, but as I got more and more involved in classes at the Walnut Creek studio, I spent less and less time out there except to occasionally bisque-fire work in my 17" electric kiln. COVID and shelter-in-place changed all that.



Nowadays, I am joined by Olga Jusidman, Nan Siegel and Laura Wittenberg – our “ceramics pod.” Collectively, we are producing enough work to fill a new 23" kiln (see *photo above*), which replaced my older one several months ago. This current quarter, Laura, Nan and I have been taking Ellen Sachtschale's *Virtual Garden Vessel* class on Monday mornings. We are able to stream the class through a TV screen that I set up in one corner of the studio, making it easy for all of us to see Ellen's demos and online sharing of design ideas from Pinterest.



Olga and I have also been doing a lot of Raku firing in the back section of my driveway, which is conveniently hidden from any neighborhood view. My Raku kiln, which I've been using on and off for a number of years, was converted from an old electric L & L kiln. We typically get about two firings out of a BBQ-sized propane tank and smoke our pieces in a variety of lidded trash can sizes.



(left) One of my Raku pieces.

(right) Greenware waiting to be bisque-fired, including two rabbit sculptures made by myself and Laura in Ellen's class.



Mary Leigh Miller

From the Manager's Office

Hello CAG,

I hope this message finds you and your families well and in good health. I, myself, am remaining positive and looking forward to this new year and hoping we are nearing the end of such painful times. It's been about a year since our last newsletter and a lot has happened... to say the least.

When we started designing our virtual classes, we had no idea what to expect. The only thing I focused on was knowing the magic of clay. I knew as long as



people had a bag of clay and a little guidance, things would be OK. And it seems to be working! I have been

so impressed with the instructors and how they've pushed themselves out of their comfort zone and have embraced a seemingly impossible task. I have been equally impressed with the students and the quality of work being made at home! It's really quite fantastic to see all of the art being made and the quality! Great job, everyone!

For Spring 2021, we remain hopeful that we'll be able to run our Outdoor Open Glaze Studio (OOGS) blocks as the county restrictions lighten. Also, we recognize many of our students appreciate the abilities the virtual classes offer and we're planning to continue to offer them in the future as we transition back into in-person



"Outdoor" glazing in the back studio area.

services, which we are hoping to start this summer. In the meantime, rest assured all bisqueware from Winter 20 (pre-shut down) through current and future classes will be stored at the studio through the rest of

the year and most likely beyond.

As far as the studio, we have some exhaust work currently being done in the kiln room. For those of you that don't know, in 2018, I recommended Community Arts replace 3 of our four gas kilns due to their age and dysfunctionality. Instead of three new kilns, we decided to plan for 2 new Blaauw kilns that perform like three. They are more expensive, but they are up to eight times more efficient with significantly faster turnaround times. It's very exciting for the studio to have this project happening while we are sort of in an 'idle' mode; it's actually perfect timing. The second kiln needs to be planned for (budget wise and logistically) and will be significantly less due to the exhaust work already being done. More to come soon. You can check out Blaauw kilns at <https://www.blaauwproducts.com/>.

With that being said, these next couple years are going to have their challenges. We at Community Arts lost a significant percentage of our staff this last year

due to budget cuts. I truly believe now is the time for us to really push forward together to see through these difficult times for our program and community. We want nothing else but to return to our studio and to bring our community back together in person safely. Thank you again for all of the support and I look forward to seeing you soon in person or at least on Zoom!

All my best,

Takemi

Photos: The studio's "new look."



Pick-up and drop-off area at the studio front door.

