

2000 +
LISTINGS
& REPORTS

JANUARY 2011

SunshineTM ARTIST

America's Premier Art and Craft Show Magazine

**2011
Planning
Issue**

**Index of
nearly 400
reviews**

**Know
your
shows?**



Vortex Vessel
Jennifer McCurdy

Spirals and Spheres

Jennifer McCurdy

By Nicole Sirdoreus
SA Editor



Jennifer McCurdy's hand-thrown porcelain is at once stark and elaborate. Natural curves coil and fold effortlessly around each other, creating exquisite spirals and spheres that reach both toward themselves and skyward. In their organic shades, McCurdy's pieces appear lithe and fragile in their structures but are actually incredibly strong.

As she creates these intricate pieces, McCurdy strives to discover their natural forms as well as find ways to use their negative space while maintaining a robust structure. "Nature does this all the time," she said. "It's a good thing for a potter because our material is pretty organic. There's a need to have certain structural properties to maintain the integrity of the form."



Gilded Coral Nest,
7" x 10" x 10", Photo by Gary Mirando



Wheat Bottle,
9" x 6" x 6", Photo by Gary Mirando



Photo by Gary Mirando

Given those lithe twists and bends her pottery takes, McCurdy said she is often told that her environment in Vineyard Haven, Massachusetts, has a direct impact on her work. However, McCurdy insists that her pottery is process-oriented and is not evocative of organic objects. “I respond to the beauty of nature, but I seriously don’t know if my environment has anything to do with what I do because I’ve chosen to live where I live,” she said. “If I lived in a city or under a railroad, it would be the same.” Rather, McCurdy said she looks for what she sees in the pot and extrapolates from that, rather than scratching a certain likeness.

As a result, her work is based on the thrown form. “I’m first and foremost a potter, and I work through spherical shapes.” These shapes anchor her pieces before they are manipulated with a carving knife. While she pulls away the clay, McCurdy concentrates on combinations of light and shadow, letting the clay itself shine through. “I think about the convex and the concave and the various continuations that occur,” she said.

But before she could experiment with the form, she had to learn to throw a pot. McCurdy began as a “stupid 16-year-old” who chose clay simply because it seemed interesting. “My teacher in 10th grade showed us a video of someone throwing clay, and I wanted to try it. I ended up liking it.”

However, McCurdy said no one

around her knew how to center or throw clay, so she had to figure it out herself. She’s furthered her skills on her own ever since, and that’s been fine by her. “There’s only so much about clay that you can show a person,” she said. “It’s something you have to pick up by doing.”

By the time she finished high school, McCurdy knew she could make it as a potter. She was already selling her work, which at that point

metal ribs, one inside and one outside, to shape her cylinders. McCurdy flutes certain pieces, which she does by spinning the wheel faster and letting centrifugal force take over.

Next, she traces the aspects she will carve with her index finger. “I cut away parts of the structure, which lets the movement take its course, but other times I shape it.” McCurdy uses a utility knife and a Kemper R3 trimming tool, carving curves on top of



Jennifer McCurdy's work may look like it is based on the natural environment, but it is actually based on the thrown form. At that point, the clay is altered and carved. (Left photo by Julius Friedman, above by Casey McCurdy)

was comprised of functional, glazed stoneware mugs, mixing bowls and goblets. McCurdy went on to get her bachelor’s in fine arts and decided to enter the show circuit, where she has evolved into creating decorative porcelain vessels, vases and sconces.

To craft these intricate pieces, McCurdy uses Miller #550 clay, which she throws stiff. She then uses two

curves. “I try to think about building up and taking away, ending up with an organic-looking piece.”

Then, when the pieces are still greenware, McCurdy sands them before firing them to cone 10. But she often uses the kiln in strategic ways to experiment with their structure, such as firing pieces upside-down or in a chuck.

But when she first took her pottery on the road, McCurdy said she hadn’t realized what a difficult life she would lead selling her work at art shows. “For a while, I thought, ‘Let’s see what I can do to make a living painting.’ They can reach the top of their field, but as much as we can try to push prices, it’s a struggle for my generation to try to move clay into the art realm, where you’re getting \$1,500 for a vase as opposed to \$30 for a mug.”

McCurdy actually credits the judging practices at shows for helping her advance her pottery. “The system can really help people make their work so their craft moves more toward the art aspect,” she said. It certainly helped her. Judging is why McCurdy stopped putting handles on her work early on, realizing they were lowering the quality of her work and “mucking up” the look. “I wanted it all to look beautiful and for the judges to look critically, to look at the curves and see how they go to together. I want them to look at my work as art as opposed to individual pieces.”

The award money that comes from judging never hurt either, especially early on. “Even if you just got \$500, that helps a lot during shows, especially after you worked pretty hard to figure out how to make the work attractive to artistic judging.”

These extra funds helped McCurdy tremendously when she first jumped on to the circuit in 1980. At the time, she was living in Florida. McCurdy spent the next 15 years doing the multitude of events there, including the Las Olas shows, Gasparilla, Winter Park, Tarpon

Springs, Beaux Arts and Mount Dora. “It seemed like you could do a show every other week.” Although McCurdy now lives in Massachusetts, she continues to do the Palm Beach Fine Craft Show in Florida.

Given her experience with juried shows, McCurdy enjoys considering how different they are now from what they were like 30 years ago. “Now I wrap all my work with bubble wrap and transport it in plastic bins, but those bins didn’t even exist then,” she said. “We’d go to the grocery stores and get wax chicken boxes with lids on top. They were the best thing you could put your pottery in, wrapped in newspaper, of course.”

At the time, McCurdy set up her booth with bricks and boards. She also said that for a long time, she didn’t have a tent; she just set up, since rain didn’t hurt her pots. As time went on, McCurdy built an elaborate, professional booth and took stunning photographs of her work. “Things are much more sophisticated these days.”

But no matter how shows have changed, McCurdy said they are absolutely worthwhile. “They’re certainly the most enjoyable way to sell your work; they’re so pure,” she said. McCurdy likes having all the work in front of customers, letting them see and feel the pieces as well as talk to her.

And, naturally, she gets to talk to other artists. “Why I’ll never stop doing art shows is because we have a community. Two artists can meet

up at a show in St. Louis and get together for dinner. One can be from Massachusetts and another from Florida and you always meet up at shows. I have friendships that have lasted 30 years this way.”

In addition to her treasured shows, McCurdy enjoys gallery representation throughout the country, including the Smithsonian’s Renwick Gallery in Washington, D.C., the Everson Museum of Art in New York and the Museum of Art and Archeology at the University of Missouri. She also teaches workshops and is a member of the American Crafts Council. ☼



Echo Vase, 13" x 9" x 9", Photo by Gary Mirando