



ARTIST BENDS
'LUSCIOUS MATERIAL'
INTO PORTRAITS

Amanda Sieradzki Council on Culture & Arts

"I practice yoga so I am aware of my body in space," says ceramic artist Kate Piretti. "I am aware of my arms, my legs, the muscles I'm using, and it feels beautiful and it feels strong."

Piretti's embodied practice is made solid in clay. When she was younger, she longed to be a ballerina. This is reflected in her most recent work, which draws inspiration from photographs of famous principal dancer, Misty Copeland. The elegance and long lines of Piretti's figures can be witnessed at 621 Gallery's "Shape Glaze Fire," an exhibit by Tallahassee Clay Arts which opened Oct. 3 and runs through Oct. 25.

Though she started working with clay four

years ago, Piretti started creating clay portraiture two years ago. She quickly joined Tallahassee Clay Arts led by Susan Stelzman, bought a wheel and kiln and built a studio. Piretti was hooked from the first feel of the earthy, pliable medium.

"It is a luscious material," says Piretti. "When I am forming muscles and forming contours, my hands are running over the clay. It is almost a form of massage as I am formulating the muscles and the contours."

In her seventh grade yearbook, Piretti stated she wanted to be a commercial artist. Working

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Kate Piretti's ceramic sculpture will be on display at the 621 Gallery's "Shape Glaze Fire" exhibit, which opened Oct. 3. KATE PIRETTI

Shape

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in the field that is now referred to as graphic design, she created posters using block colors, illustration and Asian aesthetics. Piretti graduated from Florida State University with a bachelor's in fine arts and visual communications before teaching high school graphic design for 17 years.

When Piretti picked up clay, she quickly became disinterested in producing the same form every time. She played with making small figures first and continued to push herself with larger works. Influenced by sculptors like Auguste Rodin, she gravitates towards a classical modern style, though her methods are continually evolving.

"Nothing I do is planned," says Piretti. "Everything I do is like exploring. Each piece is from somewhere in my memory, personal experience or something I'm dealing with in my mind. That's usually how the work starts."

The process begins with the head. Rather than working from live models, Piretti researches photographs until she finds faces that fascinate her. As she works the clay, she thinks about the expression of the eyes, and how that would tilt or turn the head. Next



Kate Peretti

comes phrases or thoughts that she would use to describe the work before she starts on the body.

Piretti works slabs of paper clay into a hollow form. Because she works with larger pieces, the sculptures are segmented into smaller parts so that they can be fired in the kiln before reattaching together. After the head, Piretti focuses on the bodice, the lower body, and finally, the arms.

"It is not a smooth process," says Piretti. "I am finishing one piece right now that collapsed since this is wet clay. She must have collapsed six times in different forms, but I was determined to get her done. She's been fired but I am still trying to figure out how to stand her up right since she is off kilter."

Piretti sculpts the female form since she often projects her own narrative onto the bodies. Her favorite piece, "Metamorphosis," shows a woman dangling with a rope wrapped around her arms, head down-cast. A first impression might be that the figure is being tortured, but Piretti says it is the portrait of a woman in wait, patiently longing for something miraculous to happen.

The paper clay stands up to Piretti's editing process, which involves wetting and re-shaping many

If you go

What: Shape Glaze Fire. Month-long exhibition will showcase 30 artists from Tallahassee who make pottery, sculpture and mosaics out of clay.

When: Exhibit runs through Oct. 25. Celebrate Makers Event from 5:30-9 p.m. Oct. 12 with live music with music by Finn and the Kingsnakes; performance art and wheel throwing demonstrations, and hands-on clay activities. On Sunday, Oct. 20, from 11 a.m.- 3 p.m. there will be a Coffee Cup Social and Sale

Where: 621 Gallery, 621 Industrial Drive

Cost: Free

Contact: For more information please call 850-766-2157 or visit <https://www.facebook.com/events/2368511029870008/>.

times. Sometimes she loses sense of time, and stands in front of a piece for up to six hours at a time for two weeks. Much like her yoga practice respects the limits of her body, Piretti says she must give the same level of care to her figures.

"A lot of times you have to go back because you pushed the clay too far or worked too long," says Piretti. "You have to honor the clay and what it is ready to do."

In the past year, Piretti submitted and was part of COCA's annual Creative Tallahassee and the annual Gadsden Arts Center & Museum exhibitions. These acceptances have encouraged her as she comes into her own as a fine artist. For the 621 Gallery show, she is looking forward to speaking with audiences at an artist talk and seeing her works co-exist with one another in the gallery.

Most importantly, she wants people to connect with the figures and place their own thoughts and narratives onto the sculptures. Piretti believes in the exchange of energy, and hopes that every response or connection to her work sparks inspiration within others. Her piece "The Warped and Weft of Now" encapsulates these beliefs within a self-portrait.

"I love a woman's strong body and I think it is a statement that women are strong and they should not be discounted," says Piretti. "I am very much a feminist and a lot of my work is coming from that viewpoint. My body is aging and I am not as strong as I used to be, but when you look at the piece you look at the body and see that it is still beautiful."

Amanda Sieradzki is the feature writer for the Council on Culture & Arts. COCA is the capital area's umbrella agency for arts and culture (www.tallahasseearts.org).