

Making is learning: A creative life springs from clay

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COUNCIL ON CULTURE & ARTS



Passage

With fists full of slick clay, Erica Passage and her brother would return from their dive to the bottom of their Michigan neighborhood's lake with plentiful working materials. Resurfacing on the swim platform, they would lay the clay out to dry and then shape animals out of the piles. Mud, dirt, and clay were always available as play material for the outdoorsy Passage, and she knew she'd be a serious maker from the moment her elementary school art teacher handed her a ball of clay.

To this day, the pinch pot she crafted remains a relic of her childhood, stowed away in her parents' house. The pot reflects her fourth-grade appreciation for Native American art —Passage recalls digging up her backyard for



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Erica Passage enjoys making coffee outside.

arrowheads and using them as an inspiration for the zigzag design she carved into the side of the pot with her pencil.

"It's gotten to the point where I can't

throw it away," laughs Passage. "That object holds the memory. Objects, in a way, create the memory too, and you can start to wonder if you would even have this memory if the object didn't

exist."

As the supervisor of Lafayette Arts and Crafts Center, she's excited to offer the Tallahassee community new opportunities to slow down and enjoy classes that can unleash their creativity. The center's space is malleable to allow all kinds of experiences, and as an educator, Passage believes in everyone's ability and right to learn. Her top priority is making the center more visible to citizens of all ages, as well as offering a plethora of new classes and summer camps that offer high-quality lessons and activities at a low cost.

The center's newest sessions range from children's classes in modern art history, where students will experience hands-on lessons focused on more than seventy years of art to adult classes in a wide variety of mediums. Currently, an eight-week class for beginning pottery and wheel throwing will give students a taste for how to center clay on

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the wheel and make cylindrical objects.

Passage emphasizes that students do not have to enroll in classes in any kind of sequential order, and credits the center's excellent instructors for making every studio feel like a tight-knit community where all skill levels are welcome. She's particularly excited to introduce more classes for parents and children where families can work side-by-side in activities like sewing and crafting. Recalling her own childhood and working with her mom in art classes, she's hoping this offering, among the many others on the roster, will provide new opportunities for families and attendees to bond through creativity.

"I think these classes benefit the community of Lafayette Park, where parents and children can make sweet memories," says Passage. "Arts are important for the community, and it's great that the city provides this space. The world can be a pretty ugly place at times, but art can show people how to make their lives more beautiful and cherish more moments."

Starting out as an education major, Passage enrolled in a drawing class during her time at Central Michigan University as a way of joining a community. Passage graduated with a degree in Art Education that certified her to teach grades Kindergarten-12, as well as her BFA in ceramics, though she never imagined she'd become an artist.

"I still don't see myself as an artist," smiles Passage. "I see myself as a maker of objects. Through the making of objects, I discover people in my community."

Her process begins by giving herself the challenge to make something out of clay and make it better. For example, after looking at the juicer in her kitchen, she made four variations of the appliance in clay, working to make it better than



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Erica Passage especially enjoys crafting mugs because of their proximity to an individual's space.



If you go

What: Winter Youth and Adult Programs

When: 9 a.m.-9 a.m., Monday-Friday, 9 a.m.-noon, Saturday

Where: Lafayette Park Arts & Crafts Center, 501 Ingleside Ave.

Cost: Varies depending on class

Contact: For more information, call 805-891-3945 or visit www.talgov.com/parks/parks-cc-artscrafts.aspx.

its plastic predecessor. Sometimes she'll draw different shapes or sketch them out in clay. Recently, she's challenging the potter's wheel itself, pushing and pulling clay in order to stretch beyond round shapes.

In her cupboards, bowls, plates and mugs are stacked like Jenga pieces. When Passage knows she has a stressful day ahead, she grabs a mug made by a friend or artist whom she respects, allowing the object to give her a pseudo pep talk.

Passage's sketchbook pots series translates her abstract drawings of feathers, seeds, and cloud formations, onto the pot, which she says allows people to take in the artwork in a special, more intimate way than if they were just hanging on the wall. She especially enjoys crafting mugs because of their proximity to an individual's

space, bringing it up to their mouths and allowing it to nourish them artistically and literally.

"It's about creating something that's a beautiful experience, too," adds Passage. "With a pot or an object, it needs to be beautiful on the shelf or the table but it also needs to be beautiful if you're using it to drink coffee or pouring gravy out of it on Thanksgiving Day. Beauty is translated in different ways in ceramics and painting and it's so subjective, but I love those ideas or moments you can't explain because those to me are the beautiful moments."

Biking around town, Passage continues to seek out ways of slowing down and enjoying moments of solitude and beauty. At Lafayette Arts and Crafts Center, she often takes her breaks outside to enjoy the park. Stemming from this appreciation of nature is her fascination with bringing handmade objects outdoors. Passage is known to pack up her camp stove, coffee press, and favorite mug, bike to the middle of the woods, and set up shop for her morning cup of joe. Her Instagram account, Adventure Pots, has inspired other people to hike up mountains or

walk along beaches with their favorite handmade objects.

"It's about making the most of the moment," states Passage. "In our society today everything is so quick and immediate, but when you spend

three hours biking to a picnic pavilion to drink coffee, you take that one simple quick thing and draw it out as long as possible. To me, it's this hopeful, romantic thought of slowing down."

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).

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Happy 95th Birthday Lois Walker!

Lois Walker will turn 95 on Tuesday, February 7, 2017! She was born in Knoxville, TN in 1922. She was married to Charles H. Walker for 71 years until his passing in 2015. She will celebrate with her 3 children from Ohio, Oregon and Washington on her birthday & other family members throughout the year. We love you, Mother! Ann, Carolyn, & Edwin

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