

## Ceramics Gleam on Many Stages

By Laura Joseph Mogil

Sept. 16, 2008

MENTION the word ceramics and most people conjure up images of beautifully glazed teacups, plates, pots and vases. What they probably won't think of is a three-foot-tall sculpture of a little girl wearing a pink dress and holding a submachine gun by the artist Cynthia Consentino or a gigantic caldron made of highly textured clay by Paul Chaleff.

These and about a thousand other works are part of the vast breadth of ceramic artistry that will be exhibited this fall as part of "All Fired Up! A Celebration of Clay in Westchester," a project involving more than 65 sites in the county and more than 600 regional, national and international artists. Taking place throughout October and November, "All Fired Up!" is spearheaded by the Westchester Arts Council, the Clay Art Center, the Westchester County Office of Tourism and a steering committee of nine cultural institutions.

"Exhibitions will show the diversity of expression from earliest times to contemporary issues explored in the medium of clay," said Judith S. Schwartz, a world-recognized expert on clay arts who is the consultant for "All Fired Up!" and a professor in the Department of Art and Art Professions at New York University. Works will range from functional to decorative, whimsical to confrontational, representing numerous cultures and a diversity of styles.

"We've provided this range so the public can become aware how truly pervasive and powerful this expressive material can be," Dr. Schwartz said.



**SCULPTURED ARTISTRY** "Self-Portrait With Gun" by Cynthia Consentino.

Spotlighting clay creations on the smaller end of the continuum, "Transformations: 6x6" at the Clay Art Center in Port Chester will feature 185 noted potters, sculptors and vessel makers who have been asked to channel their creativity into a six-by-six-inch tile.

On the larger side, Mariani Gardens in Armonk will present "Space Meditations," showcasing outdoor fountains, troughs and vessels by Mr. Chaleff, Tim Rowan and Jeff Shapiro. Dr. Schwartz, the show's co-curator, called these works "massive, powerful contemplations of sculptural space."

Some of the more historic ceramic pieces on view in the county can be found at the Caramoor Center for Music and the Arts in Katonah, in the current exhibition, "A Journey in Maiolica: Italian Renaissance to American Contemporary." The show includes highlights from the museum's permanent collection of 16th-century Italian tin-glazed earthenware delicately painted in shades of yellow, blue, green and ochre. Also on view is a set of 12 Catalan tiles from the 18th and 19th centuries depicting whimsical musicians designed by the Spanish artist Francisco Goya.

Examples of more current creations will be on exhibit at institutions like the Katonah Museum of Art, where “Conversations in Clay” will feature installations by 10 internationally acclaimed contemporary artists. The show will include brightly colored wall reliefs in clay and paint by Betty Woodman and Charles Simonds’s 12-foot-wide “Mental Earth,” a highly textured, earth-colored tableau that Janet Kardon, the co-curator, describes in the exhibition catalog as an “astounding clay construction” suspended from the ceiling and cantilevered into space.



**INTERACTION** Left, Betty Woodman’s “Internal Courtyard” at Katonah Museum of Art. Right, from top, “Rabbit” by Susan Halls at Muscott Farms, Somers, Paul Chaleff’s “Cauldron in Garden” at Mariani Gardens and Kiersten Bassion’s “Dinner Set” at Lyndhurst in Tarrytown.

At Lyndhurst in Tarrytown, “The Artful Tabletop” will present contemporary tableware by 110 potters from across the United States in the second-floor grand art gallery. In the first-floor dining room, a show of historically based trompe l’oeil, or trick-the-eye, ceramics, including plates, serving pieces and centerpieces, from Este Ceramiche e Porcellane of Italy, will be on display.

At the Westchester Italian Cultural Center in Tuckahoe, “Ceramica Magnifica: Celebration of a Heritage: Este, Italy” will spotlight contemporary ceramics fabricated at Este that were created by more than 60 renowned artists, architects and designers, including Ottavio Missoni, Armando Milani and Adam Tihany.

On the more sensational side of the spectrum, “Confrontational Ceramics,” at the Westchester Arts Council’s Arts Exchange in White Plains, will feature 87 artists who “use clay in expressive ways to create artwork that deals with social, political and environmental issues,” said Dr. Schwartz, the show’s curator. In addition to Ms. Consentino’s “Self-Portrait With Gun,” another startling piece in the show is Adrienne Crane’s “Artillery Field.” Made of slip cast and glazed ceramic, the sculpture depicts lotus blossom flowers – an international symbol of peace – which, upon closer examination, are also hand grenades.

Complementing the exhibitions are installations that the public may happily stumble upon by accident. These include floating clay spheres by Sara Mills and Michel-Louis Viala in the Rye Town Park duck pond; large-scale ceramic works by four graduates of the State University of New York at New Paltz on exhibit at the Westchester County Courthouse in White Plains; and Nancy Bauch and John Allen’s organically shaped sculptures in clay, stone, steel and wood sitting on a grid of pedestals inside the courtyard of the Chappaqua Library.

Paul Chaleff at Mariani Gardens in Armonk.  
Susan Farley for The New York Times



To celebrate the start of “All Fired Up!,” Andrew J. Spano, the county executive, declared Sept. 27 as Clay Day in Westchester. Many towns, cities and villages are participating in this free outreach event and have invited volunteer clay artists to engage the public with hands-on activities in their communities. Lectures, workshops, master classes, films and other special events will also be offered throughout October and November to expand the public’s knowledge about clay.

On Oct. 26, a daylong symposium entitled “Why Clay?” hosted by the Clay Art Center will be held at the Performing Arts Center at Purchase College. Programs will range from a historical look at the medium by Ulysses Grant Dietz, curator of decorative arts at the Newark Museum, to a performance piece called “Thrown” by Racoco Productions involving three dancers interacting with a ton of clay on the stage.

“We planned exhibitions as a way of engaging the public, raising their awareness and increasing their knowledge about what’s happening in ceramics, but we can’t just stop there,” said Reena Kashyap, the Clay Art Center’s executive director. “Education happens at many different levels. We thought we’d do a symposium to bring together experts in the field who would have a forum where they could share their research and expertise. We could link what we’re seeing to what’s happening academically, historically and educationally within ceramics.”

The idea for “All Fired Up!” came to Ms. Kashyap after she attended the National Council on the Education of Ceramic Arts annual conference in Baltimore in 2005 and was impressed by the coinciding “Tour de Clay” event in the city.



**CREATING A BUZZ** “Tile 1” by Bryan Hopkins at the Clay Art Center in Port Chester.  
Susan Farley for The New York Times

“Everyone came together to showcase ceramics, and the buzz was incredible,” Ms. Kashyap said. “I came back thinking, ‘Why can’t we do this in Westchester County?’ ”

With her organization’s 50th anniversary approaching in 2007, she met with Janet T. Langsam, executive director of the Westchester Arts Council, to discuss the idea of a countywide project that would highlight ceramics. Embracing the proposal, the arts council reached out to its affiliates to see if they would be interested. While a 2007 date turned out not to be possible, many local museums and arts institutions were able to commit to 2008.

The arts council also sent out letters inviting commercial galleries, libraries, schools, universities and other alternative venues to participate. Area hotels were contacted, and eight agreed to offer special deals and discounts in connection with “All Fired Up!” And over the summer at the Westchester Art Workshop (a division of Westchester Community College), more than two dozen teachers

were trained in the latest clay techniques and how to incorporate ceramics across the curriculum for students in kindergarten through 12th grade.

The scope of the project kept increasing, and even though the arts council had organized collaborations in the past, Ms. Langsam said she never anticipated how large “All Fired Up!” would grow.

“I felt that if we could get five or six, or maybe stretching that, 10 or 12 organizations to participate, then we could do this,” Ms. Langsam said. “I never dreamt we could get so many venues.

“It’s very exciting that we were able to turn this into not just a collaboration but a real tourism opportunity for the county and something that will continue to have a life of its own in the schools and in the after-school programs for a long time to come.”

“All Fired Up!” takes place Oct. 3 to Nov. 30 (although some exhibitions start before or end after the event dates). Information on shows and special events, as well as a list of hotels offering discounts to exhibition visitors, can be found at [www.allfiredup.info](http://www.allfiredup.info); a brochure can be obtained by calling the Westchester Arts Council at (914) 428-4220.