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# INSIDE: Travel

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Joe Larese/The Journal News

Judith Schwartz, a curator of several exhibits in the Westchester County-wide clay arts celebration, stands with some of her ceramic pieces at her home in Armonk.

# Feats of clay

## Westchester gets fired up about ceramics

Georgette Gouveia | The Journal News

**H**udson Valley artist Paul Chaleff, who has been working in clay for 42 years, knows exactly what drew him to the medium: He was in a terrible accident in which his best friend drowned. “I want to do something good with my life,” he says, “and I chose to be a potter.”

Chaleff's choice is not surprising. A firm, fine-grained earth found around the world and used to make everything from building materials to tableware, clay conveys a sense of rootedness and commonality but also of becoming. And in becoming, we touch the divine. Adam, after all, was fashioned out of earth.

That connection is not lost on Chaleff as he stands amid some of his clay monoliths and fountains in Armonk's Mariani Gardens, a home-design and garden center that is a kind of commercial Eden.

“It's so primal,” he says.

The primal force of clay and its ability to transform art, space and life itself are the themes of an

unprecedented collaboration among Westchester County arts venues this fall.

Spearheaded by the Westchester Arts Council in White Plains and the Clay Art Center in Port Chester, “All Fired Up! A Celebration of Clay Arts in Westchester” spotlights 600 international artists in more than 60 venues.

Though the celebration officially begins Friday and runs through Nov. 30, some of the shows have already opened while others will continue through the end of the year.

Janet T. Langsam, the arts council's executive di-

A roundup of all the exhibits, **7E**

Please see **CLAY, 6E**



“Inversion” by Judy Moonelis is on view through Nov. 9 in “Beyond Bio: Clay Bodies” at the Castle Gallery in New Rochelle.



Works like this cauldron by Paul Chaleff will be part of an exhibit of large-scale installations of ceramic sculpture Oct. 3-Nov. 30 at Mariani Gardens in Armonk.

# Clay shapes the fall arts scene

CLAY, from 1E

rector, is hoping that clay will turn Westchester into an aesthetic mecca for those who are not necessarily aware of the county's rich offerings.

"When you go into New York City, you can hit the Guggenheim Museum and The Met in one special, critical area," she says. "Westchester is full of cultural sites. But you don't get a sense of critical mass here. This spotlights Westchester as a cultural destination."

And it does so — as illustrated on the clay celebration's Web site, all-firedup.info — by grouping the shows into different geographic

## Share your work

All Fired Up! includes dozens of opportunities to work with clay. Bring some home from an event, do some hands-on creating and show the world.

We would love to see a photo of your work and share it in our photo galleries on LoHud.com.



Please take a digital photo of your work and upload a JPEG image file to [www.LoHud.com/snap](http://www.LoHud.com/snap) and choose the All Fired Up item in the drop-down menu.

Please include the artist's name, town and All Fired Up! in your caption.

We'll keep photos of your clay creations online through the end of All Fired Up! events and exhibits.

Then go to [LoHud.com/photos](http://LoHud.com/photos) and see what your friends and neighbors have done with their clay.

zones.

"As you move around, you're going to be building a vocabulary and developing an eye on the subject," says Judith S. Schwartz, lead consultant on the project and curator of the arts council's and Mariani Gardens' exhibits. "What an education one can get by going around, like on a treasure hunt."

With a professorship in New York University's Department of Art and Art Professions — plus a serenely modernist Armonk home galvanized by colorful clay works and a personality to warm any kiln — Schwartz has led a life permeated by ceramics. Still, she says that she was unaware of Westchester's artistic breadth and depth.

"All Fired Up!" embraces both by playing to the participating venues' strengths.

The Hudson River Museum in Yonkers considers the Victorian passion for scenic tableware in "Eating on Arcadia: Hudson River Views on Ceramics." Muscote Farm in Somers adds Susan Halls' playful pink bunnies and other clay creatures to its own menagerie. The School of the Holy Child, a Roman Catholic middle and high school for girls in Harrison, presents willowy, abstract female figures by Lynn Ainsworth.

"It's so fascinating how these groups took (the concept of clay) and made it their own," Langsam says. "They transformed our idea."

Transformation is key to the clay celebration. Indeed, the Clay Art Center exhibit is called "Transformations: 6x6."

"We have a small gallery. We wanted to make a huge statement, reaching out as far as we could," says Reena Kashyap, director of the center. "We thought, Why don't we ask (the 200 invited artists) to take tiles and transfer their work into



"Birds and Beasts: Susan Halls," Oct. 3-Nov. 29, puts Halls' clay creatures among the animals at Muscote Farm in Somers.

this format?"

The very nature of clay — coupled with the techniques used to fire and glaze it — brings it to transcendence.

"Clay is such a chameleon," Schwartz says over coffee served in ceramic mugs. "It's soft but can be made to look hard. It can be as smooth as silk. It's the kind of material that over centuries has been used in many ways."

The Chinese created celadon, a delicate green pottery, to mimic precious jade. Today, clay is the basis for artificial hips, porcelain teeth and tiles on space ships, Schwartz says.

"There is a knife made out of porcelain that is sharper than any metal," she adds.

As the lines among media have blurred, the decorative arts in general and clay in particular are no longer the step-relations of fine art, a phenomenon that has freed artists.

In "Confrontational Ceramics: The Artist as Social Critic" — the exhibit Schwartz curated for the arts council — 80 artists explore the searing effects of nuclear warfare and other forms of violence, the fear of sexuality, the crucial role of motherhood in the family and our ambivalent attitudes toward the human body, among other themes.

Elsewhere, clay suggests other media and materials.

Judy Mooneles' exquisite "Inversion" — part of "Beyond Bio: Clay Bodies," at the College of New Rochelle's Castle Gallery — evokes a tree, the human lung, bone and Georgia O'Keeffe's paintings of animal skulls. "Inversion" looks as polished as the works by Paul Chaleff, Tim Rowan and Jeff Shapiro in Mariani Gardens' "Spatial Meditations" are rough-hewn.

Chaleff, who lives in Ancram in Columbia County, N.Y., likes the mystery of clay's versatility.

"I don't want you to know what it's made of right away," he says of his rugged columns and wood-like fountains. "I want you to discover it. Is it clay or stone? ... Could it be? Should it be? It gives the viewer a sense of ownership."

While Jeff Shapiro is happy to have art lovers interpret his vessels and giant plates as they wish, he's not seeking to imitate another medium.

"I'm interested in the quality of the work rather than replication," he says. "For me, there are a couple of different issues. One is the connection to nature. I like the effects to be crusted and craggy so the work still has the feel of coming from the ground. To that, I want to bring my own aspect, which is abstraction. When I'm using glaze, I'm painting in three dimensions."

The ashen palette of the plate that dominates his portion of the exhibit is reminiscent of the expres-

sive abstract paintings of Anselm Kiefer.

Shapiro had had no art training when he went off to Japan as a young man in 1973. But traveling there and seeing that nation's great ceramics centers like Bizen fired him to become a potter and build his own kiln site in the Catskills community of Accord, where he lives with his family.

Clay also has played a decisive role in Tim Rowan's life as well as in his jagged boxes, which have a medieval feel to them.

"Ever since I was a little child, I liked playing in the mud," says the Stone Ridge, N.Y., resident.

When he went off to SUNY New Paltz, he decided to study art.

And there, he says, "clay opened up all the doors."

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