

Dew produces whimsical kiln works

Penelope Dew is a long-time Ashland resident who received her fine art training in the Bay Area at the San Francisco Art Institute, where she graduated in 1984 with a BFA in ceramic sculpture. For more than 30 years, she has been working with ceramics across a wide range of styles.

In addition to her work as a fine artist, Dew's teaches wheel throwing, hand building, and sculptural decorative glazing, including low fire majolica (painted pottery), as well as how to make and formulate simple glazes. She returned to Ashland more than a decade ago and works extensively with an anagama kiln.

The anagama, which translates to "cave kiln," is an ancient kiln that originated in China and was brought to Japan in about 450 A.D. The anagama kiln is fueled with wood and is fired consistently over a period of several days, with only one outlet (a flue-style opening).

As such, the heat inside is intense and builds up to well over 2,000 degrees, and is retained at the temperature with the ceramics inside for

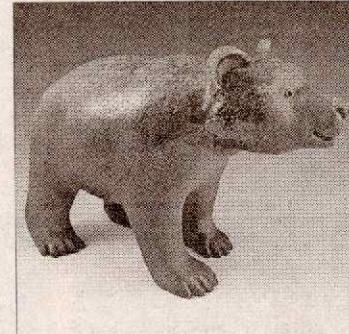


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about three days, before being allowed to cool. A significant amount of ash is created, which settles onto the ceramics and creates a natural glaze that deepens the presentation of the clay and gives it an unusual presentation that is distinct to the anagama firing style.

Dew's work, now on display at Hanson Howard Gallery, goes through this ancient process and comes out the other side with a dark brown burnishing reminiscent of pre-Colombian pottery. While the process itself is ancient and dignified, Dew's figures are delightful and filled with whimsy.

"Frog with Calla Lilies" gives a benevolent smile, arms draped with flowers. In "Kitsune," a fox in a Nehru coat stands upright, holding a small bowl. "Rhino with Cattle Egret" — in which a



"Slyvi Bear," wood-fired ceramic by Penelope Dew. [PHOTO COURTESY OF PENELOPE DEW]

large rhino stands upright in a smoking jacket emblazoned with tiny, pale flowers, carrying on his arm a small white bird — is the centerpiece of the show.

It was inspired by a photograph seen by the artist in which a rhino and a heron were seen walking alongside one another in a posture that epitomizes the symbiotic partnerships found in nature.

Elsewhere, a "Roadside Llama" sits under what appears to be a Zen meditation shawl. "Luciano Goat," "Slyvi Bear" and "Benito" are all small works that bring to mind the hairless dog often depicted in Colima art, known as the techichi.

Each piece has a distinct personality and seems to live in its own vacuum, although the consistency of Dew's process is evident when all the pieces are shown together — the flow of the exhibit is appealing and there is a congruent dynamic at play.

With the 47th Annual Clayfolk Show & Sale having occurred last weekend — the yearly signature event of the Southern Oregon Potters' Association — Hanson Howard was correct to present a well-known and consistently well-received local artist in its gallery for November.

It would be worth stopping in to Hanson Howard over the weekend while you and your loved ones are walking off the Thanksgiving dinner. This is certainly an art form that would appeal to the whole family.

Penelope Dew's work at Hanson Howard Gallery, 89 Oak St., will be displayed through Nov. 30.

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