

My Life in Clay

Sara Swink



Big Cry Baby
Ceramic
22" x 15" x 11"



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I make clay human and animal figures with a psychological stance. My hand-built sculptural work imparts ideas through stories, often with a humorous edge. I've always loved animals and enjoy expressing human foibles through the animal persona. I like to form fast in a gritty sculpture clay, incise into the clay, bisque fire, finish with oxides, underglazes and glazes, then fire to cone 5.

My ideas derive most often from a process methodology that I teach in workshops, which employs simple and accessible techniques like collage and doodling to unleash the unconscious. Then I try to stay out of the way, letting ideas flow, selecting the ones that most resonate to bring into clay. I also get ideas from what I'm reading, a phrase or concept that triggers an idea for a piece. I sketch a lot, and one piece often leads to more ideas. There is a thread of personal narrative that runs through all my ceramic work. Reflection and writing help me to recognize and make some sense of the progression. It's the process of inner exploration that keeps me moving forward.

My love of clay began at the age of 8 with the encouragement of a neighbor who was a potter. In high school, I learned to throw on the potter's wheel, hand build, and mix glazes; I bought my own wheel with money earned cleaning houses. I left ceramics behind until I took a class at Palo Alto Art Center nearly twenty years later. This was followed by a workshop in 1998 with Coeleen Kiebert, which fused artmaking and ceramics with the psychology of the creative individual. For many years I took classes from Kiebert and early on was invited to teach her approach, while at the same time pursuing an academic art education in art history, ceramics, drawing, printmaking and foundry work at Foothill College, San Jose State University, and San Francisco State University through the first year of graduate study in ceramics. I taught at a number of California venues and in my own studio, while participating in regional shows. In 2006, I moved to the Portland area, where I established Clay Circle Studio and continue to show and teach. I show my work at Hanson Howard Gallery in Ashland, OR, Imprint Gallery in Cannon Beach, OR and Row Boat Gallery in Pacific City, OR, and at a number of other venues and exhibitions in the Pacific Northwest and beyond. In 2013, I was featured on Oregon Public Broadcasting's "Oregon Art Beat". I am a member of Oregon Potters Association and exhibit annually at OPA Ceramic Showcase in Portland.