

Barbara Satterfield  
Artist Statement

I coil low-fire earthenware clay, the same building process that created ritual vessels and storage jars of ancient cultures. I replicate or press mold plant and animal forms that fascinate me, decorative motifs that artists have employed for millennia. When I create a piece, I feel connected to this history: the organic physicality of rolling damp earth into a form and the breathtaking capacity of the natural world to affirm, inspire and enrich my thinking.

It logically follows, then, that my work is often inspired by an already-created object: a nest, a pod, a root, a thorn, an insect — even a fungus. My pieces present, support, house, surround, cradle or protect the found objects, or press molds of same. The objects are selected for their extraordinary features, elegant spatial qualities, or out of respect for the industry of their making or their transformation over time. Lifting them up or bringing them forward for contemplation is my contemporary interpretation of a medium often associated with pottery. My sculptures and vessels explore themes of instinct, adaptation, survival and transformation.

These themes imply action: struggle, diligence and drive. They explore the result of work or, when translated into artistic terms, mark making — the visual evidence of the hand of the artist. Therefore, I celebrate the visible coils and paddled indentations the same way I celebrate the extrusions of a dirt dauber nest and the inconsistencies in a root. Allowing my mark making to be seen is my contemporary interpretation of a medium often associated with glaze. My oil paint and encaustic surfaces reveal the impact of constructing, drying and firing clay through translucent yet permanent surfaces.

As with my initial found-object based art work, begun in 2012, current pieces combine my ongoing homage to the centuries-old practice of coil building, my fascination with often-unexamined things I am historically drawn to, and my desire to give physical form to metaphorical thinking about the diversity, fragility and tenacity I observe in nature, myself and the human condition.