

# New England CRAFTS Connoisseur

A Quarterly Guide to the Finest Contemporary Crafts in the Six-State Region

Volume 9, Issue 3

Spring 2006

## Saluting a special place for clay artists

Retreats often are associated with religion and spiritual get-aways. In New England, however, a mid-coast Maine retreat is strictly for professional clay artists who want time to think, experiment, and create away from their studios and daily routines. Since 1986 more than 800 national and international clay artist have had residencies at the Watershed Center for the Ceramic Arts in Newcastle.

In honor of the center's two decades, the Society of Arts and Crafts in Boston presents, "Watershed Center for the Ceramic Arts 20th Anniversary," an original exhibit of current work by 28 Watershed alums at the Newbury Street gallery through April 30.

Beth Ann Gerstein, the nonprofit society's executive director, said the jurying was open to any national clay artists who spent time at Watershed.

"We received over 400 responses -- in slides, CDs, and emails -- so it took me days to make the final selections. The exhibit represents both functional and sculptural work," she said. "Overall it's a fun show and a real tribute to Watershed."

Among the selected artists are Bonnie Seemans, Ruth Borgenicht, John Glick, Nancy Selvin, Paul Heroux, Rebecca Hutchinson, and two of Watershed's four co-founders, Lynn Duryea and Christopher Gustin.

Lynn Thompson, executive director of Watershed since 1995, said the small-scale residencies are unique for potters and ceramic artists.

"It's ideal for artists because there's no formal programs. There are no restrictions on their freedom for creative messing around," she said during a telephone interview. "You do everything on your own, though there's a lot of self-critiquing within the group. Everyone on staff is a ceramic artist, so there's input if it's needed, but there's no formal structure. This small-scale residency is unique."

Co-founder Duryea is pleased that Watershed has become an institution of national and international renown. "It's really a young institution for what's been accomplished," she said during a telephone interview from her home in North Carolina. "Despite all the improvements and change, it's important that the essence of the place has stayed the same. It's not heirarchical, it's not a teaching program. It is unique.

"It's very gratifying -- not just because of the respect it's earned but because of what we set out to do -- what we envisioned -- has been preserved," she said. "The beginning was so grass roots. The early board did it all -- whatever we thought of we had to do it."

Watershed, which occupies the site of a 19th-century brickmaking enterprise, began with short-term summer residencies and added winter slots 15 years ago when facilities and accommodations improved. The center also has active community programs, among them Mudmobile, a traveling bus offering clay workshops at schools and other institutions around the state.

Watershed is not open to the public except for one Saturday in July at the annual "Salad Days"

benefit with studio tours, a sale of pottery by residents, and a special lunch. The 32-acre property overlooks the Sheepscot River.

During the winter program, six potters live and work nine months at Watershed. They're selected from three levels of participation: a clay artist can apply for space and pay the fees; juried members are chosen on the merits of work and all costs are covered. The third type of artist requires financial aid and is employed at the center.

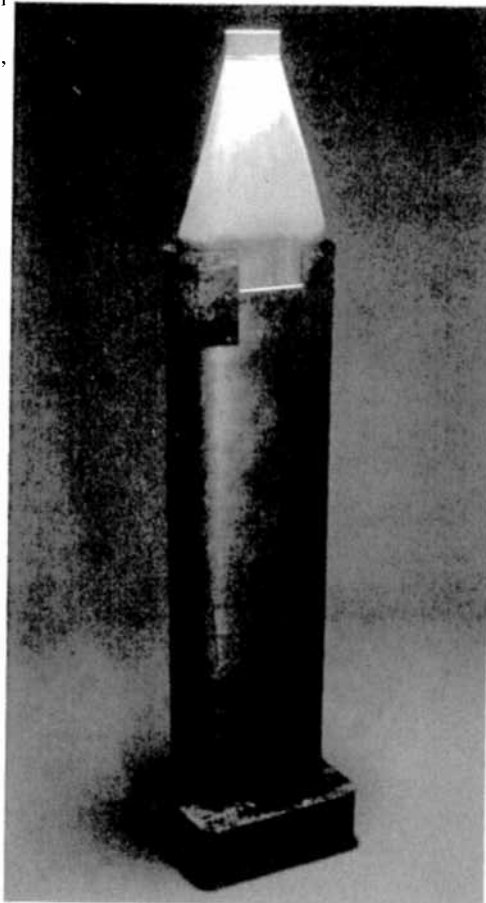
The summer programs involve two-week stays with 6 staff artists and 14 new participants. "The artists end up creating their own community within those two weeks," said Thompson.

As part of a recent capital campaign, Watershed stabilized the 1940s barn, built new cabins, and constructed a new kiln shed. The next project is to finish/refurbish the barn -- the summer studio building -- so it's usable in the winter, she said.

Watershed is the beneficiary of a failed attempt in the 1970s to revive the Watershed Brick and Clay Products Co., the 19th-century factory that used local clay as its raw material.

Duryea credits Margaret (Peg) Griggs, a re-

*Continued on Page 8*



*The Watershed exhibit at the Society of Arts and Crafts in Boston features the work of clay artists who have participated in the Maine institutions's residency programs. Among the selections are Lynn Duryea's "Wrap," a 91.5-inch tall terracotta and sheet steel sculpture (above); Sandi Pieraoz's 9-inch porcelain vase (right); and Ryan Greenheck's porcelain teapot.*

# Celebrating Watershed's achievements

Continued from Page 1



Christine Federighi's "Red Ball," stands at 28 inches tall.

vival investor who ended up with the land and buildings, as the real catalyst for Watershed.

"Peg had a dream for a place where artists could come to work on their own," said Duryea.

Griggs recruited local potter George Mason to organize a pilot program for the summer of 1986. He invited Duryea, a potter in Portland at the time, and Gustin, who was teaching ceramics at Swain College of Design in New Bedford, Mass., to join him in developing the program. (Gustin, the current board president, finished his academic career at UMass-Dartmouth and now runs his own handmade tile studio in southeastern Massachusetts.)

"That first summer, we had about a dozen people -- with two from England -- so we were international from the start," said Duryea. "Out of that first summer, Watershed became what it is today."

Duryea, the first board president, is proud of a special summer program for people with HIV she created and ran for its duration from 1991 to 2004.

A ceramics artist since 1969, Duryea left Maine in 1999 to study ceramic sculpture at the University of Florida where she earned her MFA degree in 2002. Then she moved to Texas for a college teaching position and moved in 2004 to teach ceramics at Appalachian State College in Boone, N.C."

"I've moved six times in two and a half years," she said. "I didn't have my own studio until the middle of this past fall. It's great to be back in my own studio -- I'm a better teacher if I have time in my studio."

Her medium is earthenware and all of her pieces are slab construction. She works in a variety of scales, from 18 inches to 8 feet. She occasionally adds sheet steel as elements of the sculptures. "The final works refer to mechanical, industrial

FYI

## Through April 30, "Watershed Center for the Ceramic Arts 20th Anniversary"

Society of Arts and Crafts, 175 Newbury St., Boston. 617-266-1810. [www.societyofcrafts.org](http://www.societyofcrafts.org). Mon.-Sat. 10 a.m.-6 p.m., Sun. noon-5 p.m.; Fri. until 7 p.m. on "First Friday."

### Public programs for Watershed

207-882-6075. [www.watershedceramics.org](http://www.watershedceramics.org). March 30, 6 p.m., "Chowdah Suppah," American Legion Hall, Boothbay Industrial Park, off Rte. 27, Boothbay Harbor, Me. \$12, includes chowder and bowl. Proceeds to Rotary Community Project and Watershed Mudmobile. July 8, 11:30 a.m.-3:30 p.m., "Salad Days" at Watershed, 19 Brick Hill Rd., Newcastle, Me. \$25 donation includes lunch. Open studios, pottery sale. July 6-9, Collectors Workshop. \$500 with Jane Milosch of Smithsonian Institution's Renwick Gallery.

things," she said. An example of this type of sculpture is in the Boston exhibit. (Duryea also has a solo show at LaCoste Gallery in Concord, Mass., through March 16.)

Like Watershed, the Society of Arts and Crafts is a unique organization. Founded in Boston in 1897, it celebrates the art of crafts through a retail shop, a second-floor gallery for changing exhibits, and the annual "CraftBoston," the spring crafts show with top American artists at the Seaport World Trade Center (March 31-April 2).

The society's next exhibit, "Old Friends/New Work," spotlights another anniversary -- a tribute to the society's first studio furniture show in 1981. Ned Cooke, Hoerta Loesser, then society director and organizer of the initial exhibit, and Gerstein invited 29 furniture artists from more than 250 who had participated in exhibits over the years.

"It's strictly an invitational show," said Gerstein. "No one knew we were doing it."

Address correction requested. Mail updates to NECC Publishing PO Box 207 Milton, MA. 02186

## New England Crafts Connoisseur

NECC Publishing  
PO Box 207  
Milton, MA. 02186