



Forces of Nature Clay Artist Becca Lemon

Clay artist Becca Lemon may have the prettiest ceramics studio ever. Lemon's husband built it for her on the site of their former garage, just steps from her back door and overlooking her garden, a constant source of inspiration and delight for her.

As the youngest daughter of a US Naval officer, Lemon's early life was shaped by a constant change of place and exposure to many environments and cultures. She was born in Portsmouth, Virginia and spent the next eighteen years moving from one coast to the other on the one year/two year cycle of her father's postings. The longest Lemon ever lived

in one place was the three years her family spent in the Netherlands.

Her parents were adamant that their two daughters should get the most out of their time in Europe, and even though she was very young, she says her most vibrant childhood memories stem from her life there. Unlike many of their colleagues, her parents made sure that their children accompanied them on their travels, and she remembers her mother as brilliant about researching where to go and what to see. They lived in Den Hague and spent significant time in Germany, Switzerland, Belgium and France; she attributes her lifelong

love of art and architecture to the experiences of that time.

One of Lemon's favorite European memories is of the month the family spent in a tiny chalet high in the Swiss Alps. Playing in the surrounding meadows, collecting butterflies, hiking to summer grazing villages – it was a childhood heaven, and the natural beauty of the place laid the foundation for her love of wild places.

Art has long been an important constant in Lemon's life. *"I was in high school when I began to think of myself as an artist. I drew and painted, participated in theatre, and also began to write poetry and fiction during those years,"* she says.

Although neither parent thought of themselves as artistic, Lemon recalls finding an impressive drawing that her father made as a teenager, tucked away in an old photo album. But it was her mother's creative spark that she thinks must have shaped her lifelong interest in art.

"Mom was the one who took us to museums, made sure that we went to the theatre, and sought to bring interesting experiences and beauty into our lives. She was a creative and charming hostess, a clever seamstress, and a gourmet cook, and I think she used these interests to satisfy an artist's temperament that she may never even have recognized in herself."

Moving to Sanford, North Carolina, after her father's retirement from the Navy, Lemon was unknowingly living in the center of a clay tradition stretching back almost two hundred years.

"I thought that moving to the 'Brick Capital of the World' just meant that I was stuck in the middle of nowhere. If only I had known then

that I would develop a passion for working in clay," Lemon says now.



Oregon Waters - Missouri Bend | 10.75 x 6 | Stoneware

She went to the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill to study creative writing and theatre, and apprenticed at the Toano Dinner Theatre near Williamsburg, VA, one summer, playing the guitar for dinner guests before performances.

"Having satisfied most of my English and Theatre degree requirements by my junior year, I began to focus on art classes and took art history, painting and print-making coursework. I also became interested in photography from a physics course, of all things. During this time I went to the Penland School of Crafts during a couple of summers to study wood-working with Taje Frijd and photography with True Kelly. Ultimately, I graduated from UNC with a degree in English, specializing in creative writing".



Oregon Waters – Malheur | 16 x 10 | Stoneware

Even after graduating from the University of North Carolina, Lemon and her “army brat” partner continued the footloose lifestyle, moving from Chapel Hill to Vermont, to Maine, to Maryland and then on to Seattle, where he was a shipwright, she studied architecture, and they both became ardent naturalists. Because she had rarely lived more than two years in one town, Lemon was surprised when after living in Seattle for ten years she realized that she had found her true home in the Pacific Northwest. Thirty years in Oregon’s Willamette Valley has cemented that relationship.

After graduating with her Masters in Architecture during one of the worst building slumps in decades, Lemon pursued a more practical career as a software engineer, but has always considered art her true avocation. Since retiring a few years ago, she has been

able to focus on her clay sculpture full time while still reading voraciously, gardening passionately, and kayaking and hiking moderately.

Lemon began working with clay more than thirty years ago when she began taking classes with potter Ginny Conrow in Seattle. Simultaneously she was still exploring several different forms of artistic expression, including but not limited to writing, oil painting, photography, weaving, metalwork, and stained glass.

“Eventually I realized that I would never get anywhere with any one of these arts if I tried to work with them all at the same time, and I gravitated toward clay as the one medium with which I could most easily express myself. Over time I abandoned all pretenses at wheel work and immersed myself in hand-building, and my work became more and more sculptural. The truth is, I couldn’t draw or shape a straight line if I tried.”



Oregon Waters – Santiam | 10.5 x 10.5 | Stoneware

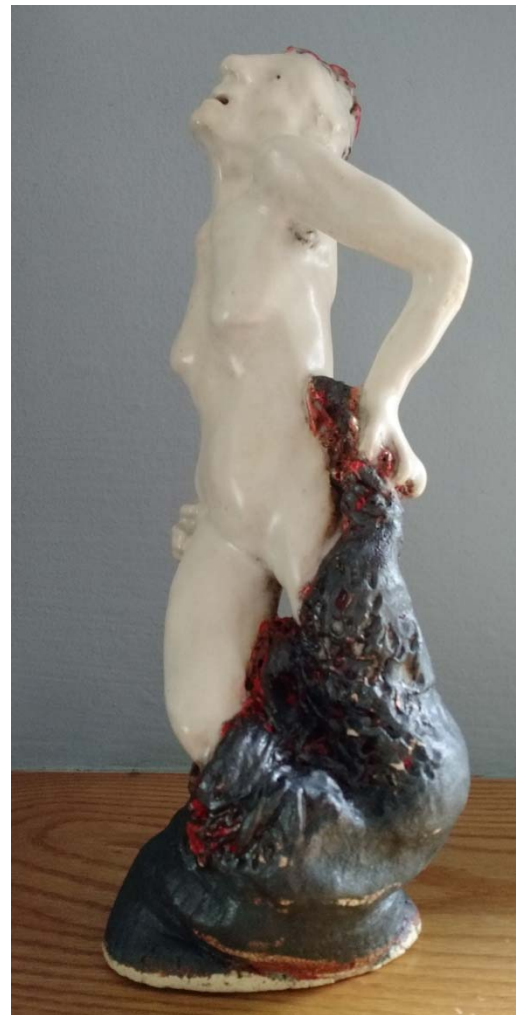
Moving to Corvallis, OR, when her husband began a multiple degree program in biology, Lemon took courses in the excellent ceramics program directed by Jay Widmer at the Linn-Benton Community College, and this is where she decided to focus on clay as a medium.

While she did not pursue a formal art degree, Lemon has taken classes from Widmer, Dale Donovan, Theresa Duncan, and Cynthia Spencer. She has also taken pottery workshops from Brad Mildrexler (*"exuberant freedom of expression"*) and Pat Weber (*"wonderful stories in clay"*) and in Anagama firing from Jay Widmer (*"read the flame"*). Most recently she has pursued her interest in figure sculpture with workshops from her figure sculpture heroes M.J. Anderson, Gabe Parque, Adrian Arleo, and Melisa Cadell (via DVD).

Aside from other clay artists, Lemon has also been influenced by her training in architecture and her studies in painting and art history. She loves the fluid, organic forms of Antonio Gaudi, and the thick, textured impressionism of Van Gogh. Other influences have been Georgia O'Keefe's sinuous flowers and bold landscapes, the energy of Jackson Pollock's large canvasses, and the mysterious aura of Rembrandt's portraits.



Mr. Rosegate (planter) | 21 x 12 x 12 | Stoneware



(placeholder for) Gaia Emergent | 13 x 5 x 6 | Paper Clay

Over the years, as she moved from making pottery to a focus on sculpture, Lemon's work has become more idiosyncratic, strongly textured and experimental. Her glazing techniques have evolved to emphasize the textural surfaces and to reflect the theme of each piece. Lemon describes her style as "improvisational" and explains that she celebrates the accidental.

"My technique has developed through wildly enthusiastic experimentation. One begins by learning "the correct way" and how to avoid common pitfalls. In my case, I've learned how best to pull myself out of the pit. A fine craftsman knows how to minimize errors, but I like to think that an artist knows how to make the most of the mistakes she makes. Every 'accident' is an opportunity."

Lemon's work conveys her keen interest in mythology and folklore, as well as her commitment to honoring the forces of nature that inhabit and enrich her life.

"Living in the Pacific Northwest I inevitably developed a passion for the wild world that surrounds us. I have always been attracted to the notion that everything in our natural world has a form of consciousness. The idea that a tree or a river has a spirit of its own appeals greatly to me, and I was delighted to learn recently that current quantum theory points in that direction," she exclaims.

"I began making masks inspired by the Green Man, symbol of life and nature, who is most often associated with Celtic lore but is actually reflected in ancient cultures all over the world. For the last ten years I've worked to imagine

and to depict the faces of trees, rivers, rocks, mountains. I feel that everything in nature has its own personality, and my masks transmit my awareness of those personalities."

Lemon's masks have, for the most part, lost their leaves and berries, but her intent to depict "spirits of nature" has remained. As her intense love of the natural world has deepened over the years, she has also become extremely attached to the concept of Gaia.

"I love the idea of our world as a sentient persona conveying both the wild and the gentle aspects of our planet. I am excited to pursue work focused on depicting that personage in her myriad forms, and the many varied ways in which our human presence affects her. "



(placeholder for) The Gift | 18 x 11 x 9.5 | Paper Clay