

Leonor Wangensteen



When I was young and new to South Bend, my mom signed me up for South Bend Museum of Art ceramic classes. I will never forget my favorite instructor, Gundega Penikis, who has been faculty at SBMA for over 30 years now. I tried out different visual arts over time, but was always drawn back to the physical and centering qualities of wheel-thrown pottery. I continued on with ceramics at Adams High School under the guidance of Jay Clark, and then went on to major in Studio Arts and Spanish at the University of Notre Dame, with Prof. Bill Kremer as head of ceramics. When I graduated college in 2003, I thought I was headed toward an MFA in ceramics, but life has its twists and turns, and many signs pointed me toward different paths. I worked in art and framing galleries in West Virginia, Indiana and New Mexico, and finished an MA in Spanish Literature in 2009. I went through about 10 years of major life changes that kept me at bay from producing clay works, but never from my passion for the arts. In January 2016, I finally made it back to working in studio spaces at Notre Dame and at Fire Arts in downtown South Bend, as a hobby. Last year, a new house move meant my dreams of building a small pottery studio at home could come to fruition. I've learned that pottery making at home has many challenges, but the biggest reward by far is enjoying sharing these creative endeavors and hard work with my family and friends. This summer, I have gathered with art and crafting friends to create a traveling "Art Show with Friends," where we take turns hosting mini art sales around town and mingling with other local artists and neighbors in the community.

My Pottery:

I find inspiration in traditional ceramic wares and surface decorations of ancient cultures such as pre-Columbian Mesoamerican, Greco-Roman, and Hispano-Moresque. I was raised in a multi-cultural family, and always valued how art has the power to hold the essence of culture and historical identity of communities. Coming from a Spanish family, I grew up with hand-made regional arts of Spain, but I also have spent time in the Southwest U.S. and am forever at awe with the beauty and intricacy of the many Native American and Mexican pottery designs and cultures. Most of my stoneware pieces are wheel-thrown, then hand-painted with oxide-colored clay slips, and even some sand from Lake Michigan shore lines. I pay attention to a harmonious play between shape, function, and geometric pattern and color to create one-of-a-kind pieces. All of my pottery is non-toxic, food safe, and beckons to be seen as a focal piece on the table or a decorative addition at home.

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