



For Immediate Release

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Gary Stoppelman, Executive Director

gstoppelman@dbqart.org

(563) 557-1851 ext. 112

dbqart.org



Groundbreaking Galena Artist's Impact Revealed in Major Exhibition

Bill Farrell expanded our understanding of ceramics

In a career filled with innovation, longtime Galena resident Bill Farrell (1936–2021) showed the world that ceramics can be vessels for ideas, inspiration, and stories, as well as food. A retrospective exhibition organized by the Dubuque Museum of Art (DuMA) and co-curated by his partner, artist Delores Fortuna, and son, Tim Farrell, highlights the pioneering artist's innovation and lifelong dedication to creating and teaching. *Bill Farrell: Investigations with Clay* is on view at DuMA from February 11–June 4, 2023.

Farrell is quoted as saying, "There is something fresh about entering into a new media. The vessel idea points to form, balance, texture, etc. and how they relate to function."

In Farrell's hands, ceramic expression came to include neon light, latex, and rubber. In addition to pushing boundaries, Farrell traveled the world to deepen his own exploration of traditional clay practices. Because of their personal relationships with the artist, the curators also reveal the story of the man behind the work. Guests will experience how the artist's passion for restoring motorcycles and cars influenced his art and shapes like exhaust systems and tire inner tubes found their way into his designs. To illustrate this point, the last motorcycle that Farrell was restoring will be on view in the Museum's galleries. The exhibition starts with his student work as painter in the 1950s and follows his innovations at the School of the Art Institute in Chicago (SAIC) from the 1960s to the 2000s. Following retirement from SAIC, Farrell built a catenary arch kiln at his home and studio in Galena with the help of University of Iowa students. The retrospective concludes with his extensive wood-fired works including his last ceramic works, Raku ware tea bowls, made before his death on July 3, 2021.

Co-curator Delores Fortuna shared these comments from her late partner, “I brought a point of view shared in different disciplines, which helped me to look past the material and focus on what I could make from it. Many potters easily become slaves to clay and therefore love it. I hope to remain adversarial, making my vessels my way. I see the tea bowls as most sensuous, engaging dance, rhythm, the figure, and asking the highest level of passion and craft for maker and user. This is the closest I can be to sculptor and potter without changing hats! Sculpture is more elusive, as metaphor... asking questions without attempting answers, leaving the viewer with sufficient doubt regarding content, thereby teasing you into active thought.”

Bill Farrell’s influence was global, local and everything in between. He built kilns in Bangladesh, Italy, and Lisbon and spoke in Finland, Taiwan, France, and the Netherlands. He invented the first slab roller to create flat clay forms that would be impossible to make on a potter’s wheel. Farrell consulted for Italian ceramic manufacturer Cooperativa-Prospettiva and spent a month residency in Taiwan at a centuries-old kiln. However, his broadest influence likely came from his nearly 40-year career as a ceramics instructor at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC). His approach to art and teaching encouraged openness and experimentation and helped position the SAIC’s ceramics department as a pioneering leader of the avant-garde.

Former student Paul Sacaridiz is now the Director of Cranbrook Art Center and will give a talk about Farrell’s influence Saturday, March 4 at 1:30 pm (free with Museum admission)

A ground breaking artist, Farrell’s work was shown in the first Art Expo (now called Expo Chicago) on Chicago’s Navy Pier. Alongside artists like Wendy Rolfe-Mulgrew, Delores Fortuna, Louise Kames, and Gene Tully, he was featured in DuMA’s first *Voices from the Warehouse* exhibition in 2005. A passionate advocate for the careers of other ceramic artists, Farrell helped found the popular Twenty Dirty Hands art tour. Bill Farrell was a member of the National Council on Education in Ceramic Arts (NCECA) from its inception in 1966 and participated in its first conference in 1967. In 1981, he was the first ceramic artist to receive a National Endowment for the Arts Award for his *Popeye* series of sculptures.

“The extent and influence of Bill Farrell’s innovations in clay may come as a surprise to many in Dubuque and the Tri-State region who knew him,” said Stacy Gage Peterson, DuMA’s Curatorial Director. “This exhibition reveals the major role he had in the wider ceramic world during the formative decades of the 60s & 70s and beyond.”

Accompanying exhibition explores cultural heritage and ground breaking tech

The exhibition *Tibi Chelcea: Randomly Accessed Memories* opens February 25 in DuMA’s Kris Mozena McNamer Gallery and runs through June 11, 2023. Romanian-born, Iowa-based artist Tibi Chelcea combines his background in computer engineering with his artistic practice and Romanian heritage to create technologically-inspired, historically-grounded drawings, paintings, and digital and textiles works. Chelcea explores the patterns, equations, and

encoded histories that underpin the technology we use every day. A digital gallery on dbqart.org reveals how Chelcea has trained an artificial intelligence network to “read and interpret” works of art.

K–8 Student Exhibition returns to DuMA for first time since COVID

The K–8 Student exhibition returns to DuMA from March 1-31. Approximately 75 student works from the Dubuque Community and Holy Family schools will be on view at the Museum for the first time since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2021, high school students curated a digital K–12 exhibition on dbqart.org.

“The students, art teachers and I are excited about the return of the K–8 student exhibition to DuMA,” said Margaret Buhr, DuMA’s Director of Creative Learning. “The positivity expressed by the artists, family and community members about the young artists’ creativity is opportune.”

Events

Cocktails and Conversation March 3 from 5–9 pm

The public is invited to celebrate all three exhibitions with Cocktails and Conversation on March 3 from 5–9 pm. Warm up with an artisanal cocktail from Brazen, an artist talk, curator conversation, music, and small bites of surprising combinations.

5 pm Artist Talk: Tibi Chelcea

6 pm Conversations with the Curators: Delores Fortuna & Tim Farrell

7–9 pm Cocktail Reception with music by DJ Echoras

Tickets at dbqart.org \$15 members/\$20 adults/\$10 under 21/FREE 1874 Society. Tickets include one free beverage.

Gallery Talk March 4, 1:30 pm

Paul Sacaridiz, Director of Cranbrook Academy of Art and former student of Bill Farrell gives a talk about the artist and his influence. FREE with Museum admission

About the Dubuque Museum of Art

The Dubuque Museum of Art (DuMA), founded in 1874 and accredited by the American Alliance of Museums in 2004, is Iowa’s oldest cultural institution. Named a national affiliate of the Smithsonian Institution in 2016, DuMA’s mission is to create engaging art experiences that excite, inspire, and connect our community. The Museum is open Wednesday through Saturday from 10am to 4pm and Sunday from 1pm to 4pm. More information can be found at dbqart.org.

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