

Retirement article:

Susan DeMay exhibition: “Divergent Practices.” Cohen Memorial Hall, Peabody campus. Opens June 14 and closes August 9. Closing reception is August 9 with an artist’s lecture at 5:00. Refreshments and drink served.

In this exhibition, Susan DeMay’s retirement exhibit, she will have on display selections from three bodies of work that she has produced over three-and-a-half decades of teaching here, while also running a pottery business in Smithville, and additionally creating unique clay works for her personal artistic growth and for exhibitions in which she has participated.

This teacher’s works made in the classroom demonstrate the complexity of ceramic art. The technical demands, the many historical contexts of a particular project, the basic elements and principles operating in any work of art, and the lastly, the personal preferences that make an assignment’s “solution” unique—all these aspects enter into the lecture/demonstration used to present the project and the goals of the project for the students. As a ceramics professor on a mission, DeMay presents a lecture/demonstration during **each** class with an emphasis on art-making which is what a student-centered course would offer, since the majority of the class expects to produce pottery though each student has a different notion as to exactly what that entails.

On occasion these classroom samples, started and finished in a single semester, were produced over the decades at various locations the clay studios at George Peabody College and lastly, in the permanent facilities of E. Bronson Ingram Studio Arts Center. Many of the classroom example works rise above the

usual sample, and become a prized work. In a teaching career of 35 years, these special works do come along periodically and some have been saved because of their artistic qualities.

The practice of the professor involves modeling the process of making ceramics, revealing the artist's involvement in the work from beginning to end product. So much more is required in the making of clay works than the stereotypical impression with which most students come to the course. And in the end the class members get so much more out of the experience than they ever expected.

Another body of work to be exhibited in "Divergent Practices" will be works from the artist's business practice. Having been a lecturer part-time for about eighteen years of DeMay's time teaching here at Vanderbilt, the income from as, at first a lecturer and then a senior lecturer, was insufficient to support a family.

A production line was developed and sold to many retailers. Locally, those stores would be the Tennessee Museum Store and The Frist Art Museum's Gift Shop. Other regional accounts include the American Quilters Museum in Paducah, Kentucky and the Appalachian Center for Craft in Smithville, the town where Susan's pottery facility has resided. The production line includes many simple forms with colorful imagery, using a variety of glazes. Nature motifs such as flowers, trees, leaves and entire landscapes of saturated color was unusual for that time, a time when earthtones and gestural abstraction ruled the day. But her fans loved the work and to this day she continues to make such works.

While in retirement the artist plans to continue these lines of design, and she will also carry on with the creative and quirky works that she has exhibited in other gallery venues. The inspirational sources for these unique work can come from any

number of sources in addition to nature, such as: other fine craft forms, paintings, steampunk genres, and art deco styles.

These works may have a functional origin, or they may be purely small scale sculptural. Most of these employ the use of slabs of clay that are cut and assembled together to create rhomboidal boxes, or boat forms, or towering curvilinear vessels. Many textures are used to embellish these slabs of clay and then glazes of various shiny and flat, matte surfaces add interest to complex sculptural works.

Susan DeMay plans to use her time in retirement to further explore her many divergent practices. Art-thinking does not have to be linear, sequential, or convergent, and this artist plans to fully explore the many “right answers” open to her during her period of complete freedom to go where ever her inspirations take her.