



One Earth... One Family

ARTIST:
JOY BROWN

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Joy Brown's 20' by 4.5' ceramic mural (see page 8) greets those who enter Hartford Hospital in Harford, CT, with the quiet reassurance that floods her entire body of work. "One Earth ... One Family." That is, after all, Joy Brown's dream and the journey in search of that still, quiet moment has taken Joy to the very ends of the earth.

Born in the United States, but reared in Japan where her father was a medical missionary, Joy attended an international school before returning to the States to attend Eckerd College in Florida. The connections and relationships made at school have remained strong, and truly supportive throughout her life.

Japan was in her heart, however, and after getting her degree in the arts, she returned to apprentice with two different potters in a country known for its reverence for the clay and kiln.

A five year journey

The first year was spent with other apprentices of Toshio Ichino, a 13th generation Tamba potter who taught Joy by having her throw one specific type of sushi cup. "We made thousands of them that year," she recalls with a smile that has left the frustration years in the past. "We never fired one."

The second and third years of her apprenticeship were spent with the master Shigeyoshi Morioka whose pottery in the Wakayama Prefecture south of Osaka provided the perfect environment for Joy to find her "way" with clay ... and to learn the precise discipline of building the sprawling brick kilns that roar with wood fires for a week, cooling for two more weeks before they are finally opened and the potter can discover what the "kiln gods" have done. For the next two years, Joy worked with potters throughout Japan, honing her creative talents, helping build kilns and constantly absorbing nuance and technique.

Learning ... and discovery

Intent on making clay her career, Joy returned to the United States and followed her passion from pottery to pottery, working and learning from other potters, until

she settled in the Webutuck Craft Village near Wingdale, NY.

"I had spent years focused on the essence of the clay," reflects Joy. "When I set up my own studio and welcomed the public, I had to learn a second discipline – learning the essence of people."

Her functional work (cups, bowls, mugs) were very much in the Japanese style, but the response from those who entered her studio was not always reassuring. "I was developing my own style, watching it evolve and change. What I was making and what tourists were expecting weren't always the same. They wanted 'pretty pots,' funky little oil lamps and 'touristy' things." Her work seemed to clash with that consumer attitude. "I worked on achieving what the Japanese call *shibui* – a more subtle beauty."

Art in hand

During the long hours of studio work, Joy's explorations took her into a whimsical direction, and she began making puppets. The heads and hands were created in clay and



Above, top to bottom: Enjoying "The Recliners" in Mitchel Park, 168th Street, New York City. Photo credit Katharine Manning. Joy Brown relaxing on one of her plaster figures in the foundry in China. Photos courtesy of Joy Brown.

the outfits were hand-sewn, animal renditions that evolved into stand alone ceramic animals, and finally stylized human figures.

“I began making large tile murals at the same time, but the figures emerged as unique and expressive ways I could show my own soul.” Even in their smallest iterations, the figures are peaceful, calm, accepting. There is no hint of conflict or violence, just a sense of stillness and a welcoming completeness. There is also a sense of universality in the appearance and the facial projections of her figures. The undercurrent of “One Earth ... One Family” has always been at the heart of Joy Brown’s work, and the evolution of her figures elevates the notion to a level that is both simple and elegant.

Change, movement, adaptation, and resiliency are all characteristics of Joy’s personal and artistic journey. When a friend (recall the connections made during her formative high school experience) offered up five acres of hilltop land on Segar Mountain in Kent, CT, Joy left the Craft Village and established what has become her artistic compound.

At the same time, Joy’s work began to find its own place in the vibrant, exciting territory where fine art meets fine craft. Brilliant potters have occupied that ephemeral space for centuries. Is the work of Hamada ... or Leach ... or McKenzie ... or Matsuzaki fine craft, or fine art? The frustrating answer to that riddle is likely “both.”

The world awaits being seen and known

Gallery group shows with other potters and sculptors and painters morphed into solo shows that attracted the attention of an ever-widening circle of devotees and collectors. Connections from years past stayed in touch, and paid attention. Mural commissions were presented and the generations of Joy’s figures grew gradually larger,

taking up more and more space in the anagama (cave) kiln that she had built at her home.

Among the many moments of serendipity that have been encouraging mile markers on Joy’s personal and artistic pilgrimage three stand out as the “now” part of her career continues to unfold. One is far-reaching, and one is amazingly local.

At home in Kent

As Joy’s work became more celebrated, Billy Morrison, whose eponymous gallery is a landmark in Kent, CT, invited Joy to be part of his gallery and resulting representation. With experience both in private art collection and the challenging world of public art, Morrison went from being a proficient gallerist to making the connections with New York City Parks and the Broadway Mall Association so that, in association with The Purple Roof Atelier in Shanghai, China, nine of Joy’s great, gentle human figures inhabit the parks along Broadway from 72nd Street all the way north to 168th Street, and will do so until at least the end of November.

The Shanghai, China, reference touches on the span of Joy Brown’s influence and the diversity of her supporters, sponsors, commissioners, and promoters. The theme of Joy Brown’s life and work is, after all “One Earth ... One Family.”

Figures that know no age, no sex, no nationality

The figures that Joy has created for years out of clay and fired in her kiln are somewhat limited by size and weight. Five feet high and 100 pounds are about the limit of pieces that can be moved, placed, and fired in just the right spot in her kiln. To make these pieces suitable for public art, they needed to be larger, and much more resilient to the rigors of human interaction. Her clay figures need to be maquettes for larger sculpture.

Joy has worked with foundries in Thailand and now in China, finding both encouragement and support from the entrepreneurs who directed their business fortunes



into supporting and disseminating public art.

The bronze work she created has graced festivals and installations in Shanghai, Hong Kong, and Tianjin in the People’s Republic of China, in Kobe, Osaka, and Nara in Japan, in Paris, Bangkok, and several cities in the United States, notably including her “Joy Brown on Broadway” debut exhibition in New York City and, close to home, her work at the Mattatuck Museum in Waterbury.

From clay figures to bronze installations

The creation of Joy’s large bronze figures is not only a journey of thousands of miles, but dedication and devotion to allowing the personality of each figure to emerge. Traveling with artist and creative assistant Tanya Kukucka, Joy visits the Purple Roof Art Gallery and Atelier in Shanghai several times a year, being fully engaged in the transformation of the clay pieces

Above: The 108 Bells set in Joy Brown’s front yard on Segar Mountain, Kent, CT. Photos courtesy of Joy Brown.

Continued on next page ...



Above, top to bottom: "One Earth ... One Family," the Joy Brown ceramic mural commissioned by Hartford Hospital. *One Holding a Small One* at 96th Street in New York. Photo credit Katharine Manning. Photos courtesy of Joy Brown.

fired in Connecticut into the large bronze figures that grace parks and sculpture gardens and museums.

"The process truly takes an entire team ... people who have become like family. Using computer three dimensional scans, the figures grow into foam forms which Tanya and I use to create the full-sized plaster figures. When finished, the plaster will be cut up, the pieces turned into molds, the bronze cast into those molds, the pieces welded together and then the long process of grinding, blending chemicals, and applying the patina, and placing the eyes and mouth."

Joy works in the early hours of the day, in solitude, to find just the right spot for the placement of eyes and mouth in the bronze. "When they look back at me, then I know they're right," she says with absolute assurance.

Serenity and the Still Mountain Center

Through much of her artistic journey, Joy Brown has been able to balance her personal creativity with a hunger to bridge disciplines, cultures, and to create the context for understanding. Still Mountain Center, a not-for-profit entity she formed in 1998 has, as its mission statement, a wish that is a mirror reflection of Joy Brown's body of work: "... To support and celebrate artistic exchange among peoples locally and globally by providing

opportunities for cross-cultural appreciation, collaboration, and innovation in the arts."

From years of studying and growing as an artist in Japan to the days of learning to meet the wandering, wondering public in Webutuck to creating a place of serenity and immense creativity at the top of Segar Mountain in Kent, CT, Joy Brown has sought the quiet, still place where one is, as she refers to it, "fully present."

Lessons on the lawn

The long road leading up to Joy Brown's home and studio is populated with some of her clay figures, watching the visitor as the turns and hills are traversed. At the center of the complex of compound she has built is a patch of grass and trees where the first of what will be 108 clay forms flow across the lawn.

"Every year at midnight on New Year's Eve in Japan, the temple bells are struck 108 times," explains Joy. "It's their way of acknowledging the multiple relationships we create through the six senses – eyes, ears, tongue, nose, touch, and mind. It's also the way the past ... the 108 *bonno* or temptations are put behind and the future flows ahead."

In Joy Brown's stunningly imaginative world, the vessels on the lawn underscore her total commitment to the flow of energy that leaves the past behind and searches for "One Earth ... One Family." ●

Enjoy the richness and diversity of Joy Brown's work at www.joybrownstudio.com.

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