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ON EDUCATION FOR THE CERAMIC ARTS



By Julie Wiggins

For the most part, my pottery is based on utility. I'd like to think my pots are approachable, accessible, and affordable and will be used for anyone's daily use.

~ Kent McLaughlin



Kent McLaughlin, (1953–2021) born in Detroit, Michigan, devoted his life to his family, students, colleagues, and to the ceramic arts. Kent took his first clay class at Brevard Community College in 1973, and for several years studied at the University of Central Florida, and at Penland School of Craft. He apprenticed with a production potter, honing his craftsmanship and learning the business side of a studio potter's life.

In 1992, he moved to North Carolina to work at Penland School, excited to be part of its legacy. While there, his artistry was enhanced by observing the masters, solidifying his commitment to ceramics and to Penland's inspiring community. When they assisted at Haystack School, he met his future wife, Suze Lindsay. In 1995, they bought a small farmhouse in Bakersville, North Carolina, to realize their dream of having a pottery studio near Penland. Kent was a prolific tinkerer; using his extensive skills and boundless craftsmanship, he renovated the farmhouse, and built their studio, as well as salt and reduction kilns. Fork Mountain Pottery was born.

Kent is known for working in both stoneware and porcelain clays fired in gas reduction kilns. He used traditional glazes, including celadons, shinos, iron reds, and warm yellows. He took advantage of the way glazes responded to application of wax resist and layering, often using his own hand-made deer tail brushes. For several years, his curious nature had him using waste oil burners on his gas reduction kilns; in 2008, he taught a Penland concentration class focusing on this technique.

Kent led his life with fullness and abundance. Things came naturally to him. His warmth and genuine kindness could be felt in his bear hugs, in his teaching style, and heard in his laughter. He loved to share his knowledge: talking pots, building kilns, developing glazes, and making true connections wherever he went. He never met a stranger or took himself too seriously. His pots were effortless and he talked about them in a humble, easy way. His playful approach and curious spirit drew everyone closer. Kent had an uncanny ability



KENT MCLAUGHLIN, *Platter*, 2020, stoneware, 18" x 3", Photo credit: Kent McLaughlin

to always see the light. His mantra: every problem or mistake simply offers an opportunity to explore a new direction.

Kent was passionate about handmade objects. He believed that they have the capacity to slow us down for a moment and, while we pause, make us think about their maker. It was always Kent's dream to create a scholarship, specifically for studio potters who make a living selling their work, that fully funds a workshop at Penland and provides a stipend to offset lost production time. With the tremendous support of the community that loved him, The Kent McLaughlin Scholarship at Penland School of Craft has been established.

There are people who come into your life and create positive ripple effects; they just glow. Kent McLaughlin was one of those humans and he continues on in the legacy he left behind.