



SUSAN COLLETT

Established in Toronto in 1993, **SUSAN COLLETT**'s full-time studio practice includes clay sculpture and printmaking. Within the complexities of running a business, a momentum of exhibitions, commissions, workshops and studio visits sustains her.

Her work is in the collections of museums in Canada, including the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts and the Gardiner Museum in Toronto, as well as the Kasturbhai Lalbhai Museum in India, and Sèvres porcelain museum in Paris.

She received her letters from the International Academy of Ceramics in 2007 and the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts in 2008.

ONE of my favourite times of the day is when I leave my studio. I like to turn around and look back into the room to envision tomorrow, to mentally prepare before I return the next day. Mix those glazes ... finish that piece ... start the wire armature.

When I am away, I always have a sketchbook on hand — one in the car, one in my handbag, and always one in my suitcase. Sketching strengthens my hand and mind coordination so that when I arrive in the studio, I can hit the ground running and get straight into the clay and paper.

I was always going to be an artist. I grew up plein-air oil painting with my father off the southern shores of Georgian Bay, Ontario. He was a businessman and a "Sunday painter" and painting was a form of relaxation for him. I thought everyone did this; and luckily, I liked it a lot. From this early experience I learned how to see, understanding that things around me are always changing — the landscape, the light and shadows, and the colours, trees and buildings.

I went on to study at the Cleveland Institute of Art, graduating with a major in printmaking and a minor in ceramics, which I added only in my final year.



From ISABELLE FISH:

Susan Collett is that rare breed of artistic entrepreneur who seamlessly moves from a state of artistic flow to dealing with logistics and sales. Her pieces are in her image: joyful and elegant with a depth that denotes kindness and thoughtfulness. Susan's art elevates us.





MY (DREAM) STUDIO is in downtown Toronto. Layer by layer, I have built a place where I am happy. Although I am in the middle of a booming metropolis, the studio is my splendid walk in the woods, where I look to find myself. It is my daily practice of showing up. Time evaporates here, so often 10-hour days are the norm. Even when there are no deadlines, I am making my own luck just by being in the studio. As Thomas Jefferson said, "I am a great believer in luck, and I find the harder I work, the more I have of it."

The first 15 years of my practice were brimming with tile commissions from interior designers, specifically fireplace surrounds for kitchens and wine cellars. Demanding days of proposal drawings, sample boards, spec invoices and installations. At the same time, I worked on sculpture and print commissions for four galleries and art consultants' hotel placements. I also learned the behind-the-scenes importance of keeping an office and keeping the computer out of the studio!

Early on, I hired a shipper for the afternoon to show me the ropes, and it turned out to be one of the best investments in my studio. No one really talks about the skills required for packing and shipping, yet it is so important for getting your work to market. Now I can pack for shipping worldwide and make international connections that are important to my growth as an artist. Just recently, I crated *GLIMMER* to travel to India to the Kasturbhai Lalbhai Museum for its permanent collection; and sent *THICKET* to the Korean International Ceramic Biennale 2024, where it is now in the permanent collection of the Gyeonggi Museum of Modern Art.





RUNNING A BUSINESS

is the practical side supporting the romance of having a studio. So much was gleaned from the early days about productivity, relations with clients, strict deadlines, how to write up a contract and invoice, and remembering to pay myself and find the steady income necessary to keep the studio going. All stepping stones to where I am now, working with a more focused art portfolio for public and private galleries and collectors, plus studio visits and making a living while making work true to myself.

In my thirty-first year, clay sculpture and fine art printmaking are my focus. The clay teaches me about transformation, of letting go of expectations — from opening the kiln to all the business tasks in between. Everything contributes to an idea. If you can just let go of that expected outcome from life — or from the kiln or the printing press — great discoveries can be realized.

I exhibit the clay and prints together, as they feed each other. From working with clay, the blind-embossing technique inspired a sculptural approach to printmaking, with its three-dimensional relief branch work and veining embossed into the diaphanous washi paper.

The resulting “lifelines” in the clay point to the strength in our lives as collections of experience on that fine line of collapse. The Nichrome wire substructure becomes a drawing line with clay, the wire taking the clay where it could not go alone. I delight in working between these two mediums and letting ideas transform as they impress upon each other.





UPON winning the inaugural Winifred Shantz Award for Ceramics at the Canadian Clay & Glass Gallery, I completed an important residency in China. There, it struck me that the striated landscape of tea farming related to the layered landscape of our own lives. The light and shadow cast from these works remind me of the Rumi quote, “Let yourself be silently drawn by the strange pull of what you really love.” Some things we will never be able to explain. I find this so important – to remain flexible, to respect the ephemeral.

It all relates to an overriding theme of strength up against fragility, the balance of it all. My current *Beacon* series is a sculptural interpretation of memory with all its fragility, gaps and mysteries. The vessel-based form describes in porcelain the collected tension, and thin skins of the known and the unknown as an interior world collides with the exterior.





In the *Racine* series, the use of Nichrome wire as a drawing line within the sculpture arrived at a eureka moment when the kiln techs were in the studio changing the electric kiln wiring one morning. As the used wires lay lifeless on the studio floor, I realized that they had survived the heat, and with the addition of clay could provide a substructure for the tendrils enabling me to “draw” with clay. The wire moved the clay where it could not go alone.

Drawing and printmaking are at the root of my practice. I am interested in the endless permutations of monoprinting, an instinctive approach to printmaking, more like paintings on paper with no two alike. In the process, one image is completed and printed on fine Japanese washi paper, using roofing copper as the plate substrate; and when the copper is wiped clean of ink, a new image is created. The imagery I employ is organic in nature and relates directly to the body in its large scale and reference of lungs, veins and skin.

I do not make preparatory drawings for the sculpture or the prints, rather I hone in on the spontaneous, which perhaps stems from those early plein-air painting days capturing the changing sunlight. And perhaps also from early ballet training, where I learned about being present in the moment, and about movement and gesture. All elements I try to infuse into the work.





Curator **ISABELLE FISH** is a craft ambassador and founder of Rue Pigalle, a community for women patrons of craft. She shares: “I believe in the intrinsic value of manual intelligence, and in the important role that artisans play in their communities. Nurturing craftspeople helps create a kinder and more connected society.” www.ruepigalle.ca

I FEEL the accomplishment of my years within the community at my Tuesday studio workshops. Seven incredible women have come together through word of mouth, forming a core group of kindness and respect, curiosity — and great works! They have returned for over 10 years now and I feel lucky to have their camaraderie and support, reminding me of the pure joys of working with clay. What projects am I preaching to my class? All that I need to learn myself ...

I work hard for art, but that doesn't mean it always brings success, nor will I be paid equally for my efforts. Everything can be going beautifully — the rent paid, the materials ordered, an iced coffee at hand, a clear day stretching before me — and yet no work gets done. Ideas don't arrive like lightning bolts; and more often than not, it's back to the drawing board the next day, and so it goes a daily practice. In fact, I have learned it is important to slow down in order to speed up. In a word: patience ... and that takes practice. You never know what is around the corner in making your own luck.

“Had I not created my whole world, I would certainly have died in other people's.” I have always resonated with that thought expressed by Anais Nin. There is a moment when you may have reached your goals and yet you are only up against yourself. I am not “fit & 40” or “fabulous & 50,” but seriously 60! My goal right now is to continue to be willing to try new avenues; take that fork in the road; walk that country lane in the studio.

The real work is to push through to the next level, and I realize that this is not dependent upon the next opportunity or portfolio sent out, or the next “brilliant” piece, but instead depends on the inner strength of *you*.



More on Susan

www.susancollett.com

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