

FALL ART TOUR[®]

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CLAY IS THE WAY!

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OF THE GLOBE CLAY CENTER



Bruce Howdle in his studio.

When my family and I moved to Mineral Point, Wisconsin four years ago, one of the first locals I met was the ceramic artist Bruce Howdle. Like most people who knew him, I was instantly charmed by his personality – a mixture of sharp humor, great storytelling, a slightly mischievous smile, and above all, his curiosity and genuine interest in talking to anyone who entered his gallery Howdle Studio.

Bruce Howdle was not only a well-known artist but also a beloved teacher and mentor to many students who took his ceramics classes at the University of Wisconsin - Madison and later at the University of Wisconsin - Platteville.

Two of his protégées, twin sisters Katie and Joelle White, forged a strong bond with their mentor, becoming his studio assistants and apprentices in 2017. It was heartbreaking for them when Howdle suddenly passed away in August of 2018.

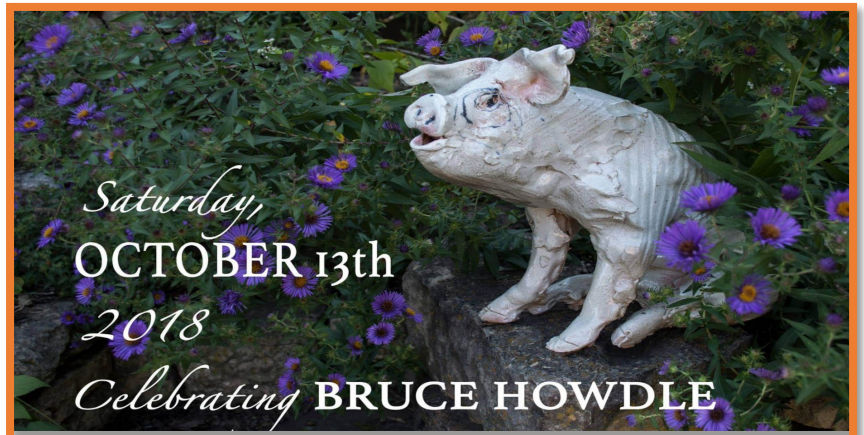
What was going to happen to the gallery and to the Whites' future as aspiring ceramic artists? Were they ready to spread their wings and fly without their mentor encouragingly and helpfully guiding them in their professional journey?



Joelle White, Bruce Howdle and Katie White

It turns out, Katie and Joelle White were not only ready to showcase their own body work but also run a professional gallery. Sue Howdle, the wife of late Bruce Howdle, generously offered the use of the gallery and the studio space to the White sisters. She knew that they were able to handle this challenge. Mrs. Howdle also wanted to preserve the gallery and the studio space that for years have been so important to the fabric of Mineral Point.

Joelle and Katie White started by producing a memorial show of Howdle's work in the gallery. It was a touching tribute to their friend and mentor that also allowed a sense of closure for many of Howdle's friends and collectors. One chapter was coming to an end while another one was beginning.



One of Howdle's well-known pig sculptures.



The work of the White sisters in the gallery

Whenever I visited the gallery after the memorial show, I was amazed by the gentle yet swift transformation. New work filled the gallery shelves, and it was obvious that Katie and Joelle White were well underway as ceramic artists in their own right.

Katie White traversed the country for about seven years prior apprenticing with Howdle, working as an artist in residence, creating her signature style as a ceramist. Joelle White spent more time studying directly with Bruce Howdle at the University of Wisconsin – Platteville. However, her work style was already her own.



Work by Joelle White (left) and Katie White (right)

Even though they are twins, the White sisters' work is quite different. While Katie's approach centers on altering the form, pushing the form out from the inside, and then carving the exterior, Joelle focuses more on surface design, using the ceramic form as a canvas to paint on.

Their work has some common themes too – botanical influences and the wood fired nature with earthy tones and flashing red and orange colors. It works very well in the gallery with each sister's work standing on its own yet very compatible with the other sister's creations.

When I asked how did Howdle's work approach influenced their own, they readily agreed that Howdle helped them loosen up their artistic style. Prior working with Howdle, both sisters strived to make every piece as perfect as possible, sanding and polishing away the tool marks.

Howdle, known for his gestural style, encouraged his students to let go of the perfection and focus on the fluidity and movement, to loosen up and relax when creating their work. The carve marks were there to stay, not to be polished away.

I was impressed by the sheer volume of the new work that quickly filled up the gallery. The White sisters have been producing their own work for quite some time. Craft fairs were their only sales outlets until 2018, so their work was mostly stored in boxes and totes. Once they had a chance to make the gallery their own, all they had to do was to reach into their inventory.



New work by Joelle and Katie White in their gallery.

That would only go so far, though. Their work was selling, and the pieces were disappearing off the gallery shelves. The White sisters thankfully have work ethic in spades. When they are not helping customers in the gallery, they are in the studio below the gallery, making new work.

They have two electric kilns on the premises where they do the initial bisque firing. After that they glaze the pieces and take them to the glaze kiln that belongs to their friends at Windy Ridge Pottery (another Fall Art Tour stop).



Katie and Joelle White using the kiln at Windy Ridge Pottery



A sidewalk sale (2020).

Joelle White credits Joe Cole of Windy Ridge Pottery with teaching her several techniques and being extremely helpful with other tasks. It's this spirit of cooperation that makes Mineral Point's art scene quite unique. The artists understand that it's in everyone's interest to make the local scene as vibrant and inviting as possible. Mineral Point is a destination for art and craft. When visitors come from near and far, all galleries and artists benefit from it.

Last year was challenging for the Globe Clay Center, as the White sisters christened their new gallery. They had to close for three months and gradually reopened in June. Fortunately, their online store was already operational. Curbside pickup was the name of the game for a while, followed by weekend sidewalk sales.



Globe Clay Center's pottery studio ready for a class

Always planning and thinking ahead, Joelle and Katie White understand that people coming out of the pandemic isolation are craving safe travel and new experiences. The White sisters would like to use their studio to offer private lessons. Whether you are traveling alone, with a spouse, or with a small group of friends, they can tailor the classes to your needs.

Give them a call, let them know what works for you, and they will do their best to accommodate your schedule.

Knowing these two talented, optimistic, and hard-working gals, I suspect you'll be in for a treat, and will leave the studio and gallery emotionally recharged with some beautiful pieces to keep the memories fresh.

FIND OUT MORE ABOUT THE WORK OF KATIE AND JOELLE WHITE:

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