



Jean Wells
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Artist Biography:

Jean Smaglik Wells, a professional potter for over 30 years, creates contemporary stoneware pottery in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Known for her graphic designs, Jean uses an age-old technique called "sgraffito" in which her stylized designs are individually hand drawn and carved through colored clay on every piece.

Jean studied at the Cleveland Institute of Art from 1985-1988, majoring in Ceramics and minoring in Portrait Painting. She went on to work as an apprentice at Geneva Art Pottery with John and Claire Bailey in Lake Geneva, WI in 1990 and started her own studio practice in the early 90's in Milwaukee.

Jean currently sells most of her work directly through regional Art & Craft shows and her online Etsy shop. Notably, Jean created a successful series of 'limited edition' handmade mugs for Colectivo Coffee shops in the Milwaukee/Madison/Chicago areas. In 2017, the USGA commissioned Jean to create commemorative pieces for the US Open Golf Championship held at Erin Hills Golf Course in Wisconsin.

Jean is the current president of the Wisconsin Craft, a member of the Milwaukee Artists Resource Network and Local First Milwaukee. She is also co-founder of Milwaukee Empty Bowls, established in 1999, an organization that raised over 1 million dollars for local food pantries and meal programs in Southeastern Wisconsin.



Artist Statement:

I began drawing and carving onto my pieces a few years into my life as a potter and have never stopped. My designs have always been inspired by nature and have evolved to include everyday household objects and popular iconography. I strive to create imagery that can be visually beautiful, and at times, somewhat playful.



My stylized designs are carved onto each piece by a process called “sgraffito” or “slip-carving.” After the piece is thrown on the wheel and trimmed, a layer of colored clay called “slip” is brushed on to the surface. Once the slip has been allowed to dry slightly, I hand draw and carve the design through the slip. Colored highlights are painted on after the first firing in the kiln. A clear glaze is applied and fired once more to over 2000 degrees to finish the piece.

The functional aspect of pottery is extremely important to my work. I want to make objects that are durable, of high quality, and used every day with ease. I choose to work with stoneware for this purpose and keep my forms and shapes smooth and simple to showcase the graphic designs I create.

All my pieces are made exclusively on the potter's wheel, hand drawn, carved, and painted. No molds, forms, stencils, stamps, or decals are used. I feel this adds an amazing amount of energy and spirit to each piece along with a distinctive and unique identity for the object and its owner.

Recent Exhibitions:

2021

- (September) Director’s Invitational “WOW” Women of Wisconsin, Alverno College, Art & Culture Gallery

2021

- (March) WDCC, Wisconsin Designer Crafts Council, “Beyond the Norm – Creating through Abnormal Times” Alverno College, Art & Culture Gallery

2020

- (March) WDCC Member Biennial “Makers & Masters...Traditions in Transition”, Plymouth Art Center – Gallery 10 North

2019

- (August) Director’s Invitational “WOW” Women of Wisconsin, Alverno College, Art & Culture Gallery

2018

- (April) WDCC Member Biennial Exhibition, Plymouth Art Center – Gallery 10 North

2016

- (March) WDCC Member Biennial Exhibition, MOWA - Museum of WI Art, West Bend

2015

- (October) Morning Glory Gallery Featured Artist
- (September) “WOW” Women of Wisconsin, Alverno College of Art & Cultures Gallery

2014

- (February) WDCC “Showcasing the Best of Contemporary Craft”, Mt. Mary University Marion Gallery

Special Exhibition Note for this Application:

1995

- (July-September) “Lincoln Art Pottery: Examples by Eight Potters”, Villa Terrace Decorative Arts Museum

Notable Custom Work Created:

2022

- Greater Milwaukee Foundation – Greater Together Awards
- Best Buddies Wisconsin Gala – Champion Awards
- MOWA, Museum of WI Art – “Marion Coffey” Inspired Series – Exclusive custom work for Gift Shop

2021

- Greater Milwaukee Foundation – Greater Together Awards
- Best Buddies Wisconsin Gala – Champion Awards

- Johnson Foundation - Wingspread Gifts
 - Pius XI High School – “Ignite the Spirit” Awards
 - Franciscan Peacemakers – Custom products
- 2020
- Greater Milwaukee Foundation – Greater Together Awards
 - Best Buddies Wisconsin Gala – Champion Awards
 - MOWA, Museum of WI Art – “Aspen” Series -Exclusive custom work for Gift Shop
- 2019
- MOWA, Museum of WI Art – “Hydrangea” Series - Exclusive custom work for Gift Shop
- 2018
- Milwaukee Business Improvement District #21 – Downtown Achievement Awards
 - Colectivo Coffee Mugs – 25th Anniversary Limited Edition
- 2017
- US Golf Association Championship – Commissioned Artist
 - Milwaukee Business Improvement District #21 – Downtown Achievement Awards
 - Colectivo Coffee Mugs – Limited Edition
- 2015
- Colectivo Coffee Mugs – Limited Edition
- 2014
- Colectivo Coffee Mugs – Fall Limited Edition
 - Colectivo Coffee Mugs – Spring Limited Edition
- 2013
- Colectivo Coffee – 20th Anniversary Mugs

