

# Bob Kingsmill no ordinary potter

Bob Kingsmill's relationship with clay started in 1963 when, as a young man, he was living in a boarding house in Winnipeg. Renting the adjacent room was a lady called Muriel Guest, who was a student of Zen Buddhism. Kingsmill was smitten by this older lady's free spirit and her dedication to clay. She taught pottery, so he attended one of her classes. Thus began his love affair with clay, which has lasted 45 years.

At his Coldstream studio, he carresses and moulds it into elegant shapes as he chats with the visitors he always welcomes. Then he takes a board and whacks great gashes into it or prods it with various shapes to create non-symmetrical patterns.

Tree spirit masks hang outside the studio. One of his favourites was rendered to the texture he sought by flinging it against a tree trunk before shaping its strong, indifferent face. Others have been cast in bronze.

His store, adjacent to his studio, also houses more traditionally shaped bowls and platters, but there is always something unique about them. A leaf impression might be left in a slice of clay shaped into a square receptacle, or a teapot might give the appearance of a Victorian lady's gown.

Outside Vernon's Performing Arts Centre, Kingsmill's bronze masks hang from the trees and even upon the building itself. His clay masks and wall murals decorate countless homes and public buildings – from a Japanese teaching college to the Vancouver Children's Hospital; from a professor's retreat in Cambridge, England to the Community Arts Theatre in Kelowna. His pots and sculptures are part of private collections throughout Canada, the U.S., Germany and Switzerland.

Although, with due cause, he is recognized in the Okanagan and Lower Mainland as a figurehead and mentor, there's nothing snobbish or pretentious about Kingsmill.

As an instructor for the now discontinued Emily Carr College Outreach Program and former faculty member of North Vancouver's Capilano College and Nanaimo's Malaspina College, he gives young pottery students space to work at his Granville Island studio. And, because of his diplomatic way with words, he's often asked by other studios to act as spokesperson if disputes arise.

Born in Vancouver, he grew up in Winnipeg and tells tales of freezing prairie winters contrasted by warm neighbourhood communities.

In the late '60s, he moved to the Okanagan and opened his first studio in Kelowna's Mission area where his production of stoneware and raku-fired pieces, as well as masks and wall murals, had to be speedy to keep up with demand. He helped Okanagan potters gain recognition locally by instigating the Mission Hall Sale, which continues to this day.

In the early '70s, he established a studio on Bowen Island where he published his first book, *A Catalogue of B.C. Potters*.

These days he runs his Granville Island studio in conjunction with his Okanagan one. Consequently, his relationship with the Coquahalla has become almost as intimate as his relationship with clay.

While he's away, his patient wife, Mary Anne, holds the fort as she maintains her writing and publishing business.

Kingsmill is currently creating murals representing four prophets for the Presbyterian chapel in the Vancouver School of Theology at UBC. When completed, they will hang beside the stunning murals of the four gospels he made over a decade ago.

Working with clay affords Kingsmill the peace and clarity of mind that media-tors enjoy. When visitors drop in, either to buy or simply chew the fat, he switches between wisecracks and down-to-earth philosophy as he carves and turns. Sharing his wit and wisdom contributes as much to their enjoyment as does witnessing his deft expertise and the artwork that produces.

For a piece of his work, his wit or his wisdom, contact Kingsmill at 250-549-4615 in Vernon or 604-682-6575 on Granville Island.

**Christine Pilgrim is a writer, teacher and performer specializing in history. She will give a lunchtime presentation at the Caetani Cultural Centre's Wrap and Rake party on Nov. 8. She'll also perform her one-woman wartime show, *We'll Meet Again*, at the Kamloops Museum on Thursday and Coldstream's Mackie Lake House on Nov. 11.**



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