

## Local potter/sculptor aware of continued learning's import

"I can call myself a 'green' artist; I had no art background when I began working in clay in 1968."

But Mike Hershey is aware of the importance of continual learning—something he tries to stimulate in his students—and he utilizes it in his pottery.

Hershey's work is distinctive. A good example is the spatial definitiveness of his large plates. His sculpture also is highly distinctive in its planar surfaces, in contrast to its sensual, fluid aspects.

Hershey is now finishing work on his last dinnerware set.

"There are other things I hold more important than making functional sorts of things. It takes many, many hours to make a good dinnerware set, and they are no longer worth it to me," he said.

"By now, I can see what one must consider in making quality dinnerware: the functioning shapes of the different items and just the physical part of glazing each item, cleaning it, firing it, and more.

"I know some potters who would say that making functional pottery is not making art. That's jive. I would agree that functional pottery is more a craft than an art now, simply because man has been doing it so long, he's exhausted most of the ideas," he said.

"But you can still appreciate a really good, strong shape and a good, strong functional idea, or a contemporary useful shape that is more inclined to be strong because of its shape, and not because it's functional."

In regard to his large plates, some of which are pictured here, Hershey says:

"I've finished with them. Those plates represent the termination of some ideas I was working with. They are object-oriented and deal with spatial relationships; I didn't spend enough time developing the colors I was using, in reference to a sculptural, three-dimensional aspect.

"Right now I am going to work on my sculpture. I will go back and work on my large plates, and they will be stronger and more painterly in their orientation, but there are too

many man hours between me and them with nothing new right now.

"If you can put something new between you, a working energy is spawned in your mind and things start to churn. Then you can go back and critique your older material more rationally and with less emotion."

This working energy and consequent churning is like searching and discovery for Hershey.

"I'm finding that art is more and more a very personal thing," he said. "It's not something that can be thought of as the 'international school' or the 'Blank Style.' Much of what is being done today is butchery, emotional butchery.

"It's like a deep searching for something new, and it seems to be a common phenomenon of man to go through these epochs in history. There was one at the turn of the century, and now it's the end of this century and there is searching and exploitation. Some of it is good."

Hershey said he's trying to counteract ignorance through his teaching. Through patience, helping them to experience things and giving them tools to work with, Hershey hopes he is benefitting them. He explained his emphasis on knowing the technical aspects:

"It's necessary for a good motorcyclist, or a good diver to really know his equipment and how it ticks even though his apparent performance is not directly related to that medium.

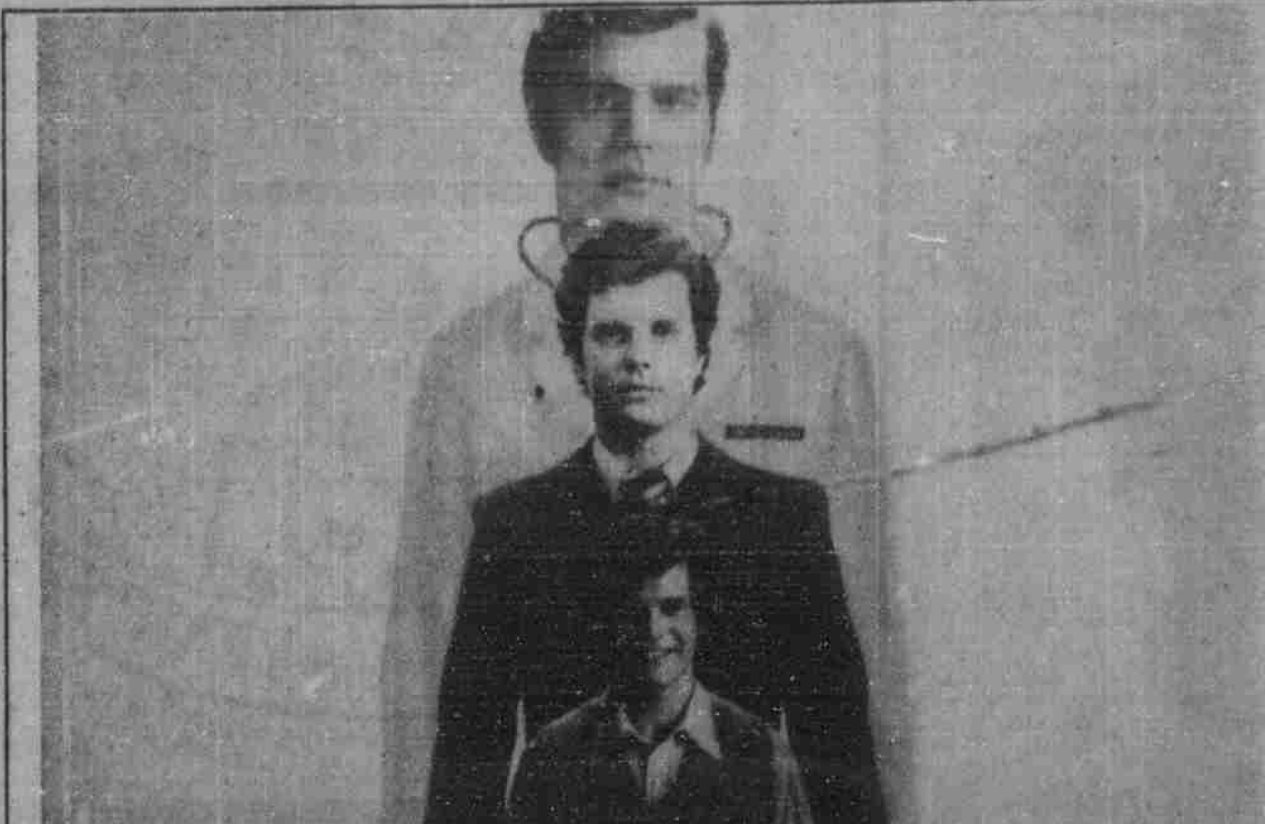
"When you go see a diver, you don't say, 'Hey, that's an oak veneer laminated fiberglass steel core board with teflon embroidered steel springs!' You don't know that. But, hell, he does, and he knows it quite well. It's like knowing your business; if you know it, you're going to be good.

"In pottery, you must understand all the apparent factors, all the technical aspects, but there are more variables involved.

"Through patience, repetition and throwing experiences at them, I'm trying to benefit my students. I hope that with time, they will make the discovery. That's what it's all about."



Potter/sculptor Mike Hershey



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