

on the couch with... Carol Hayward Fell (artist)

By Janine Moodley



Carol Hayward Fell is a Durban resident and award winning ceramic artist. Fell obtained her Bachelor Degree in Fine Arts majoring in Ceramics in 1974 and currently lectures at DUT. Well known for her "Fish Wife" works, she is currently producing art inspired by animal and human forms.

SS: You have a bachelor's degree in fine arts, what motivated you to study this?

CHF: In matric, I obtained an "A" for art and an "F" for maths, with all the other subjects somewhere in between. From when I was little, I was always really passionate about art and, as I was

left on my own a lot at home with no siblings to play with, art absorbed my time.

SS: How long have you been practicing fine art?

CHF: In 1970, I received the Art Prize in matric, so it was even before then that I got started.

SS: What inspires the art that you do?

CHF: Many things, my love of ancient art history especially ancient Greek, Roman and Chinese art. When my daughter was tiny, I read many children's books to them and I loved the delightfully simplified animals and birds I saw in the illustrations.

My kids gave me input, too. Once little Sarah asked me why the big colourful fish of my "Fish Wife" sculpture did not have pink cheeks, so I gave the fish pink cheeks just for fun. Much of my work has some element of humour in it. I simply love to play with quirky ideas and combine strange unlikely things together. My latest works combining horses and cats are a perfect example of this.

SS: You are known for your "Fish Wife" series of sculptures. Tell us a little about that?

CHF: Well, the title and concept actually evolved out of a

domestic row. Scorpio wives like me can get very angry when provoked by their spouses at times, and I was no exception to this. In return for a nasty remark thrown at me, I had a creative idea that resulted in my making a very successful series of different "Fish Wives" sculptures. I had the last laugh in the end, because some are now in the Pretoria Art Museum, the Durban Art Gallery, the Tatham Art Gallery in Pietermaritzburg, and another is in the private collection of Mary Slack, daughter of Harry Oppenheimer.

SS: You are exhibiting several of your ceramic horses from 9 November, are you excited about this?

CHF: Yes, I am honoured to take part in this milestone exhibition, but also very sad, as this final exhibition marks the end of an era for us all. I have been a friend of the gallery owner, for 30 years and she has provided a wonderful platform for us artists to exhibit. I had my first solo exhibition with her in 2009 and I owe a great deal to her for her support and continued encouragement in my work.

SS: Which of your art is your personal favourite?

CHF: I think it is my latest work with my ceramic sculptures of horses combined with other animals such as cats, dogs, bird, and I even did a zebra with a monkey. I simply adore making sculptures of horses. The potters keep asking me when I will do something else, yet nobody ever asks them, "When will you stop making pots?"

SS: What advice do you have for aspiring artisans?

CHF: Well, I can only speak for artists, but my advice to anyone who wants to be able to follow their dreams of becoming an original artist, is to first establish another way of earning a regular income so as not to be pressured to make 'Art to sell', in order to survive. I was a DUT lecturer, then a mother and now I teach drawing and painting privately. Being forced to trot out cheap-looking stuff to match current decor trends is the surest way to kill creativity and originality. You might hit on a money-spinner for a while, but in the long run, your work will never be worth anything because it is not reflecting you. In order to be able to come up with original ideas, you need the freedom to make lots of bad stuff without worrying about how you are going to pay the rent. It is out of the bad

stuff and the crazy experiments that the new original ideas emerge. I always tell people that over the years, I have made a lot of bad stuff. I also always tell my painting students to keep painting...you can always paint over a bad painting.

Just for fun:

SS: What do you do to relax?

CHF: Making art is not relaxing, as people might believe, especially if you construct complicated horse sculptures like I do with long spindly legs which require incredibly delicate balance and handling. While I am working, which is sometimes for up to 10 hours in a day, I have discovered that it helps to relax my brain to play recorded TV programmes, which I can mainly listen to. It puts negative thoughts out of my head and keeps me alert, happy and creative. After working all day, I sometimes will go off to an opening of a local art exhibition to meet up with friends, or go off somewhere with the man and a bottle of red, to one of our local Italian haunts.

SS: What type of music do you listen to?

CHF: I enjoy world music of many types especially flamenco, Latin American and jazz, as well as 60s and 70s pop, but I also enjoy going to symphonies. I also have a lot of classical music. I am a member of the Durban Chamber Choir and really enjoy the beautiful chamber music we sing like Handel and Bach. I also get a real thrill at the moment out of listening to unknowns rise to fame out of nowhere in shows like X-Factor.

SS: Who is your favourite actor/actress of all time?

CHF: It's impossible to choose one. I love Colin Firth and Irishmen, Liam Neeson and Gabriel Byrne. Helen Mirren and Meryl Streep are also favourites.

SS: If you had to have anything in the world what would it be?

CHF: Personal happiness, security and knowing that your offspring are successful and happy, is paramount to most women of my age. I also desperately wish to see my country being run properly by decent people with integrity and intelligence. Unfortunately, our current undereducated leaders are only interested in accumulating personal wealth at the expense of the poor, and so long as they revere despots like Mugabe and Gaddafi, we cannot guarantee a bright future for any South African children.