

★ ASHLEY KIM: BREAKING THE MOLD

BY CATHERINE SWEET



Seeking a reprieve from the intensity of nursing, Ashley Kim experimented with pottery at a community art center.

“I didn’t know where it was going to go, just that I was enjoying it immensely,” she says.

Ashley quickly set aside nursing to pursue ceramics, earning a bachelor’s degree in fine arts from Utah State University and a master’s degree at Indiana University. She then taught ceramics for several years — in Indiana, Kentucky and Minnesota.

Now living in Mission Hills, she spends most days making hand-built pots in the basement. It’s not as dreary as it sounds. The house is set on a hillside, so Ashley and her husband were able to surround the studio with windows, letting light flood in.

Once she builds her fully functional vessels, Ashley uses a variety of tools and techniques to pattern the clay. Her lifelong affection for fiber craft is evident. She employs lace, zippers and sewing patterns to create inlays, using a Korean decoration technique known as *mishima*.



Objects built from one mold might diverge in placement of handles, finish (such as patterns or glaze colors) or other accents. Every piece is different.

“I don’t learn anything if I make two things exactly the same,” Ashley says. In one vase series, she gave each piece a unique glaze and placed a peplum-like “skirt” at varying heights.

“In my mind, I’m clothing the pot,” she says.

Her work has been exhibited from Australia to New York, as well as in local art galleries (currently at Sparks Gallery downtown) and museums (including

Mingei International Museum in Balboa Park). Ashley also seeks out face-to-face feedback.

“I try to do the Mission Federal ArtWalk in April and the San Diego Pottery Tour every December,” she says. During the latter, artists open their studios to the public.

“It has been a great way to connect with the greater San Diego community,” Ashley says.

Although her art has taken off, she has returned to nursing, working two days a week in a hospital’s cardiac intensive care unit.



“It can be physically demanding and emotionally draining,” she says. But, she emphasizes, “I feel like there’s a great balance: I do intricate work in nursing and ceramics. Both propel me.”

Born in Seoul, Ashley lived in South Korea until she was 14, when her family moved to join an aunt in Los Angeles. The difference in opportunities has been stark.

“We were realizing the American dream! I got my college education, then eventually went back to school to study what I wanted to study,” she says. “I’ve created my own little world, and I’m quite proud of it.”



Clockwise, from top left: Basket with two straps, 8.5 x 11 x 6 inches; pitcher, 8 x 5 x 14 inches; and vase with multiple openings, 8 x 12 x 5.5 inches; all glazed clay.

Facing page, left: Ashley Kim in her Mission Hills basement, which doubles as a design studio and workspace.

Facing page, right: Skirted vase, 12 x 8 inches, glazed clay.

★ “IN MY MIND, I’M CLOTHING THE POT.”