

# Passionate for Pottery

Senior Anna Karnowski is passionate about ceramics and strives to open her own studio

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Walking into the ceramics room is like stepping through a painting. It's hardly a room at all. Instead, the scene is much harder to take in all at once, much harder to appreciate from far away. The finer, minute details are more prominent: the staggered breathing of someone in complete focus, or the discouraged grunt of a slip of the hand.

Walking further into the room, it seemed as though my very presence caused a misstep in the rhythm of steady slapping noises against the clay, and consistent buzzing of pottery wheels. It was as if the body of students as a whole could sense this unconforming presence, changing the dynamic throughout the room and slowing the flow of noise.

Senior Anna Karnowski stood with dripping wet hands, clad in a mustard yellow sweatshirt, masked by a formerly-black apron now covered in lumpy, gray clay.

She walked towards the hallway so her quiet voice could be heard over the high-pitched drilling noises of room 207.

It was easy to watch Anna intently with unprecedented interest as she sat with her legs around the pottery wheel, hunched over her work, both her wrists cradling the spinning blob that was fast becoming a new shape. Easily manipulating the clay, she touched her finger to the top of the spinning, sleek brown object, and the sides of the clay peeled down.

"I began when I was eight or nine. I made really small things that were cracked and too thin in places," she says.

She thought she would hate ceramics; her mom signed her up for a class in the fourth grade, but contrary to what she expected, she immediately felt a connection with the fragile craft.

"The best thing about [ceramics] is being able to use something you make," she says. "You get more of a connection with a piece of artwork when you can hold it and use it."

She began pondering her early years, her head tilted to the side, as she explained how he had continued to take ceramics classes at the Kansas City Clay Guild, making significant progress in her technique and skills.

"I think I have a good sense of what the clay can and cannot handle, which probably does come with a lot of practice, but I feel like I picked it up a lot more quickly," she says.

This natural, innate ability Anna possesses has led her to take ceramics whenever possible, and when she got to

East, the ceramics room became her second home. She has taken the ceramics class a total of eight times, and is currently taking it twice day, and even going in before or after school to work sometimes even 30-45 minutes.

As Anna became more comfortable with our conversation, her shoulders became slightly more relaxed. It was hard to keep up with the motion of her hands. Each transition she took, something new and completely unexpected happened to the clay.

Gesturing to the walls adorned with art, she says, "Everything has an influence on what you do, even if you don't really realize it. I find myself getting inspiration from things in nature that I see; I will draw trees and stuff like that, and even the textures are related to things that I see. A lot of my stuff has weird lines on it, and you see lines everywhere, so literally just everything influences that."

The blob changes form many times, moving in an up and down sort of rhythm, her deft movements making the craft look incredibly easy.

The practice and time Anna has put into her work hasn't come without difficulty. She has to work with all four of the elements: earth, air, fire, water. Each element that is essential to the process of her art could betray her.

She has had to learn how to become a precise scientist. But these difficulties are what make her character. Tilting her head to the side, pausing slightly she finds the right words to describe the nature of ceramics.

"In ceramics you have to get really messy and dirty, and it takes a little more muscle power as opposed to drawing or painting," she says. "I think it has given me more of a sense of discipline than I expected to gain. Granted I love it, so that's probably the reason why I'm in here all of the time. But I have to do things at a certain time, and I have to be on time or else the whole thing is ruined and I have to mix the glazes properly, etc. And that applies sort of in a big way to the future when you have a job. It's been a big learning experience for me."

Part of Anna's learning experience has been her ability to recognize the temperamentally of the art. For Anna there is a great difficulty in putting what she pictures in her head, and making it happen on the wheel.

"It's frustrating," she says. "But that being said, overcoming that, it's more rewarding when something turns out well."

Clay splatters onto the black apron that covers her Fort Hayes State sweatshirt, wearing the name of her home to be. There she will continue to elaborate on what she has already done and major in ceramics.

"I would definitely love to have a studio space and just sell stuff for a living," she says. "I feel it would be really difficult to do that, but I would love it."

After 20 minutes, the shapeless blob, transient in form, had molded into a perfectly shaped mug. She sculpted the clay with her bare hands,

her fingerprints engraved into her work. The clay is a part of her DNA, and she is a part of it. The lines of her fingerprints are woven into the very element of earth. In a way, she and the clay have worked together to shape her own life, each and every minute she spends at the wheel.

Anna's connection with ceramics isn't a superficial thing, instead, it is very real, and it grows with each failure, each broken and cracked piece. It doesn't wreck her, and it never will.

She was furious last week when her bowl cracked in half in the kiln; she was frustrated when her flower pot looked nothing like what she wanted. In spite of her many failures, she hasn't quit. And there's a reason. And to her, a mug is not just a mug. It is an exact replica of her very emotions. The way she felt that day, bright in spirit, calmed in body; the mug reflected that. Curved handle, the sides not rigid or straight, her mug was an emotion. It's not just a tangible thing you can feel. Clay is her element, body and soul.

"[Ceramics] is kind of like when you hear a really great song that you love and it just kind of melts everything away in that moment," she says. "I think that's probably the biggest part of it for me. I mean art in general is kind of an emotional thing, and I feel like it sort of should be. But looking back at my stuff and when I made it, it's like a timeline of my emotional story. It's really weird how it's subconsciously connected."

