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AMERICAN
art
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*Also Showcasing
Glass, Ceramics & Wood*

ANDREA KONCH

JAMI PORTER LARA

Connecting art and artifact

For millennia, indigenous people traversed the lands of the southwestern region of North America. It was a time before borders. People gathered clay to make vessels for daily use and discarded them when they broke. They also discarded shells, bones and other remains of their daily lives into mounds archaeologists call middens, which are now a valuable source for investigations into the daily life of the ancient inhabitants.

When she was a student at University of New Mexico, Jami Porter Lara took part in the program Land Arts of the American West. She spent time in southern Arizona. Exploring the arroyos, she discovered the discarded two-liter plastic bottles that migrants use to carry water to keep hydrated in the harsh environment.

She recalls, “Not far from the bottles we found pot shards and ruins from earlier cultures. I wondered, ‘Is the bottle a contemporary artifact?’ The plastic bottle is absolutely everywhere. It’s the ultimate border crosser. I thought, ‘This is what contemporary vessels look like.’”

She also points out that characteristics of the bottles reflect elements of design throughout history—the bottom is a pentagram and the top is a spiral.

Part of the excursion involved time spent with Graciela and Hector Gallegos, renowned potters in Mata Ortiz across the border in Chihuahua, Mexico. Before borders, the peoples of the region traded goods as well as ideas. The materials, techniques and designs of Mata Ortiz pottery reflect the influence of the pueblos of the American Southwest.

Lara asked herself, “How do I make a connection to ancient techniques native to this region?” The Gallegos taught her to gather and prepare her own clay and to fire it to turn the clay black. Back at her home in New Mexico, she gathers the clay and perfects her skill with the techniques she learned in Mexico. “Gathering the clay connects me to the landscape and to the tradition,” she says. “At one point I bought



commercial clay, but it wouldn't work for me. It felt dead.”

The ubiquitous form of the two-liter bottle becomes sculpture in her hand-coiled vessels. “My intention is

to make connections between art and artifact. What's ancient trash, and what's contemporary trash? We're thing makers, and we leave things behind,” she says. “The environmental story of humans on



2



3

1
From left: *Untitled*, wood reduction-fired clay, 12 x 4½ x 4½"; *Untitled*, wood reduction-fired clay, 10 x 6 x 3"

2
From left: *LDS-MHB-SPBR-0515CE-08*, wood fire-reduction clay, 14 x 5¼ x 5¼"; *LDS-MHB-SPBR-0515CE-07*, wood fire-reduction clay, 12 x 5½ x 5½"

3
LDS-MHB-SNBR-1214CE-01, wood reduction-fired clay, 9 x 5 x 3"

4
Jami Porter Lara watches over the firing of her work.



4



the scene is one of declension. It's just getting worse and worse. I don't believe that. Saying that humans are pollutants is a failure of imagination. We need to be able to see ourselves as creative

beings. Yes, we're destructive, but we're also creative and can bring something to the world. I want to create the possibility that we can see things differently and contribute to the world."

Lara's work can be seen in the exhibition *Public Selects: A Celebration of Albuquerque Artists* at the Albuquerque Museum through October 4. ●