

still out of reach.

work. She also hopes to expand her flowers.

# Marsha McCarthy's design for living is intricately drawn in clay

Continued from Page 1

is in galleries throughout the country and she has been getting more commissioned work. She also plans a limited-edition series of clay tiles.

McCarthy etches her designs into earth-toned clay before firing. The drawings are very detailed and many include lines of poetry and other texts.

"Ideas for my work come from legends and myths of the past, words of Native Americans, modern philosophers and my own thoughts on life and this wonderful, wondrous Earth," she says in a promotional pamphlet.

She uses phrases such as, "We live by the sun. We feel by the moon." "Grow old along with me, the best is yet to be," and "The earth does not belong to us; we belong to the Earth."

Except for the planned limited editions, each of her works is one of

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a kind. A platter, which takes about a week to make, sells for \$600. A jug fetches \$800. A framed tile goes for \$160.

These aren't pieces meant to hold spaghetti and Kool-Aid. They are intended for display.

Her work schedule is anything but grueling.

"I play with the horses, draw some, play with the cats, draw some more, play in the garden," McCarthy said.

She drew herself out of the advertising business over two years. She had found herself sick of the work and suddenly freer of responsibilities after her daughter got married. She tried catering and landscape architecture, but neither satisfied

her. Then she took a pottery course at Wesleyan Pottery in Middletown and found what she had been looking for.

"I said, 'I don't know how I'll make this a career, but this is what I'm going to be doing,'" McCarthy said.

To launch her new career McCarthy sold her house and dipped into the nest egg she had saved from her work in advertising. She has been living off the money for the past few years in a family home. Only recently has her work begun to earn her a living.

"I don't know how anyone would do it without backing and family support," McCarthy said.

The key to breaking into the business was entering craft shows, which can cost thousands. One show in New York costs \$1,200 just for a booth. Tack on hotel and travel costs and promotional materials such as brochures and slides, and the outlay is considerable.

The brochures and slides of her work helped convince show promoters to take her seriously. Judges

deciding who to let into shows can see from her materials that she is a professional, McCarthy said.

"You've got to look like you're a little bit together."

McCarthy's advertising experience taught her she had to market herself to be successful.

Among other startup costs were the kiln she installed in her home and a special clay roller. The kiln cost about \$1,300 and the roller about \$3,000.

The clay, McCarthy said, is the least of her expenses. Clay for a tile costs between 10 and 20 cents, she said.

She does not labor much over the shape of the pottery on which she draws. Her platters are not perfectly round and her tiles may vary in thickness, but the clay is just the canvas. She is concerned only that the surface of the clay is smooth enough to hold her designs.

"As soon as I've got it built, I wash my hands of the clay and I want to draw," McCarthy said.

The clay provides a perfect base for her work. McCarthy said she

likes the resistance the clay offers her etching tools and the tactile sense it gives her work.

"I like the way it feels. I want people to touch them," she said, running her hand over the surface of an etched platter.

She works sitting on a big, over-stuffed chair in an attic studio with her pieces set on the matching ottoman.

McCarthy considers herself at the beginning of her career. She knows she will not make millions, but she feels she will be able to make a comfortable living.

The Boston Society for Arts and Crafts carries McCarthy's works in its galleries. It is the oldest, non-profit arts and crafts society in the country, an organization official said.

Randi Lathrop, director of the gallery at 175 Newberry St. in Boston's Back Bay section, said she owns one of McCarthy's framed tiles. The tiles sell very well, Lathrop said, because they fit a trend.

"A lot of people are looking to display things on a wall beside

painting and watercolors," Lathrop said. The framed tiles fit in nicely.

"Marsha is able to take her media and design a piece and incorporate it on a wall," Lathrop said. The themes she incorporates into her work, such as children, marriage, Judaism and mythicism seem to draw people to McCarthy's work. "People really relate to those in their own personal way," Lathrop said.

Lathrop said she has nothing else similar to McCarthy's works with its symbolism and its tactile features.

Lathrop said she believes hers is the only gallery in Boston that carries McCarthy's work.

The gallery can sell three or four of McCarthy's works in a month, Lathrop said, when it has a selection of six to eight pieces.

McCarthy's work can be also be found at Wayside Furniture in Milford where Carole Greenbaum, the accessories merchandiser, said she had to reorder after selling six to eight pieces of McCarthy's work in two weeks.

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A W E S O M E

Marsha McCarrthy 1994 pg 2



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