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## **“Stayin’ Alive - Survival tactics for the Visual Artist”**

by Robin Hopper.

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### ***Biographical Sketch Laurie Rolland***



My father was a woodworker whose many interests and abilities provided fertile ground for development in my youth. He modelled the lifestyle of a maker that I would eventually choose. His romantic yet practical attitude towards life influences me still. I experimented with various mediums, and ultimately found that clay best suited my as yet unrecognised but burgeoning compulsion to “make things”.

After several years in BC, I moved back to Ontario, and took an intensive clay course at a college in Toronto.

4 women potters exerted a critical influence at this time. Judy Lowry was one of my instructors there; I much admired her work and with her advice and encouragement decided to learn my trade more fully and enrol full-time at Sheridan College School of Crafts and Design, as until then I was basically self-taught.

The projects that Angela Fina, my 2nd year master gave us, triggered a love of assembly of multiple parts that still remains strong. Angela's decision to leave a secure and lucrative teaching post to return to potting was and is an inspiration to me.

Christine Dell, another Sheridan graduate, was exhibiting sensitive, colourful, handbuilt and non-functional Ceramics. She was successful and she was from my home town of Orillia. I could do it too! My goal was to make my living as a potter, as it is the making that inspires and motivates me, and a small book on the life and work of Clarice Cliff confirmed this idea as possible. The examples of these successful potters was critical, because they were women continuing a tradition that in contemporary Western culture was dominated by men. The influence of the sixties encouraged the idea of independent work as an integrated lifestyle.

The year before I graduated in 1978, I set up a studio in the alley behind the major Toronto Street that we lived on. The apartment was a 3rd floor walk-up above a hair dressing salon. The empty building behind the adjacent shoe repair proved adequate for my pottery; with space upstairs for another to share expenses - from the beginning I was planning for what was practical and do-able, working towards realistic and achievable goals.



"Circinate" Hand-built, cone 6 oxidation. 51cm long x 15cm high x 34 cm deep. 2002.

Everything was second hand, salvaged and handmade. Shelves, dollies, pallets, gas heater and a huge scale were scavenged from a defunct Bathurst Street candy store. The \$30 kiln (shoehorned out of a Rosedale mansion) helped to eventually purchase a larger, newer one. Using second hand equipment is an excellent way to get started.

I spent my final year at Sheridan developing work that I would be able to produce in that studio. As the situation did not allow large wood, gas, or salt kilns I focused on developing a vocabulary that enhanced electric kiln firing. Many of my building techniques and surface treatments have resulted from this conscious decision to take advantage of oxidation. Hand built and structurally decorated with coloured clays, slips, and stains, this early work was based on the functional format.

The artificial limiting of choices can be extremely helpful in defining a focus and direction. Staying within the confines of oxidation firing and learning how best to work with it, has become

after 30 years of work and development the best way for me to realise my ideas. It is no longer a restriction but a direction.

The circumstances requiring a small operation when first beginning are no longer the same, although I choose to remain so. Working solo, without distractions suits the regular 9 -5 work hours I keep and the radio dial stays where I want it. Remaining small means I am entirely independent, free from large overheads, employee concerns etc. and free to take risks with new ideas. I work for most of the year producing a limited line of handbuilt functionally based "repeat" work, then take several months or more solely to develop new work for exhibition. The skills developed doing the "repeat work" inform these new ideas. This time is extremely important to maintain a central core of ideas and fulfilment.

I sell a limited amount of work wholesale, do one quality retail show a year, and sell the rest on consignment. This allows all of my work to change and grow as I decide.

I encourage marks that are a result of process. The forms and surfaces of ancient ceramics and especially of ritual objects provide not only inspiration for my work but underline how the marks of those early makers connect me with the song of the universe. The individual "pushing 'good enough' into something better", using universal symbols in a language that is clay unites us through time & space. There is also an 'organic intent' that is evident in all of my work, for I am surrounded by what inspires me, the ocean, our garden, the forest. Being a potter and part of such a noble profession is important to my identity as a maker for it helps to place my work in a context of meaning. The traditions of the functional and the ritual object are the poles around which my work revolves.

In 1999, ten years after returning to B.C., my new partner and I built a shared pottery studio & wood working shop ourselves. My 2nd floor space was designed to specifically suit my working methods. Windows were carefully

placed to prevent glare, I work standing up so the correct height of 38" on my custom table was very important. My kilns are in a small separately vented room. The old candy shelves from the first Toronto studio are still in use, transformed by my partner to hold glaze materials.

There is a tremendous satisfaction for me in the process itself. For some potters, keeping going is often harder than getting started. By taking risks and letting go of what is certain it is possible to stay passionate and engaged for 30 years! An attitude of exploration and change is what has kept me inspired, motivated and satisfied with being a potter.

Laurie Rolland

April 2002



"Mitosis Series #2". Hand-built, cone 6 oxidation. 73cm long. 2002.



Jug. Hand-built, cone 6 oxidation.  
46cm high. 2002



Teapot. Thrown and hand-built, cone 6 oxidation. 33cm high. 2002