

Jadwiga Ramza is an artist who molds clay with her heart

Jadwiga Ramza has an urge to work with clay. She realizes that each person, including herself, has his or her own concept of beauty, and she expresses hers by throwing clay. In this age when most utensils are mass-produced, she finds joy in watching a piece of earth take on a form in her hands.

Ramza's life is replete with instances of close contact with creative arts. Her parents owned a large foundry in Warsaw, Poland which manufactured bronze and silver art objects and utensils, in addition to industrial castings. When a teenager, Ramza decided to follow the family's artistic tradition and study the art of decorating.

After completing her courses at the Decorative Art Academy in Warsaw and a series of workshops in copper enameling, she joined her parents' shop as a designer. She planned to redirect a substantial portion of the plant operation to producing art objects, and to reduce the production of industrial castings.

"I was young and full of great ideas regarding the plant," Ramza said. But she married and gave birth to a son, which caused her to re-evaluate her plans somewhat. Also, she had not taken into account the political situation in Europe at the time: Hitler's troops were poised to strike Poland, and there was little time to worry about the plant.

"Two weeks into the war my husband, an electrical engineer with the British firm of Brown-Boveri, was ordered to leave Warsaw for the southern part of the country to assist in the repairs of a damaged railroad power system," she said.

Because Warsaw was under constant bombardment, Ramza's husband insisted that they leave the city, leaving behind her mother-in-law and the family maid in charge of their property, including scores of valuable art objects. They hoped to return "upon conclusion of a short war."

"The ensuing months had convinced me that I would not return home as soon as I planned," she said. Always just a step ahead of the advancing Germans, and later the Russians, the Ramzas crossed the border into Rumania. They remained briefly in Bucharest while waiting for their Italian transit visa to France.

"It appears to me that as soon as we found what we thought to be a safe place, that country promptly became either an ally or a victim of the German war machine," she said. So, in quick succession, they leapt from one country to another, finding a brief respite in Paris, where Ramza found a job with a glass-painting art studio.

The German invasion and occupation of France sent Ramza to the English side of the channel. "This time we had a premonition of things to come somewhat sooner," Ramza said. Still, they left France in a hurry, leaving most of their few belongings behind.

During the next 10 years, she found much time to devote to her pottery and metal art, using mostly

silver and copper. During her stay in England, she expanded into new areas. She began producing not only utility vessels, but also decorative wall plates combining clay and metal, copper jewelry, mosaics and incrustations.

"I had a lot of time at my disposal because my son was away in Scotland at the Edinburgh University and my husband was then on duty with the Polish Army in exile," she said.

Ramza's products found eager buyers so fast that she was unable to satisfy all of her customers. In time she found it necessary to hire people to help her.

"My crowning achievement of that time was the completion of a dinner set for Prince Andrew of Greece, the father of Prince Consort Philip," she said. Other orders for members of London's society followed. The prospect of a return to Poland, quite real after the victory over the Germans, became less attractive with the state takeover of their property. Once again, forced by the circumstances beyond their control, the Ramzas decided to reestablish their existence, this time in Canada. They settled in Montreal.

During the next 17 years, while her son attended first the University of Minnesota, and then Pennsylvania State University, Ramza managed to develop a successful art shop, acquiring a large number of customers and national recognition in Canada. Besides the numerous prizes given to her by the Canadian Handicraft Guild, three pieces of her pottery were selected by the National Art Gallery in Florence, Italy, for permanent retention as examples of contemporary art.

In recognition of her contribution to Canadian art, she was selected as one of 200 artists entitled to display their works in the annual exhibitions at the Canadian Mechanical Institute in Montreal.

Shortly after learning that her family plant in Warsaw was being nationalized, Ramza lost her husband. Once again she found herself "packing the suitcases" to join her son in Bryan, this move being — she hopes — the last.

This time, however, she was able to retain most of her favorite works. Visitors to her home must step gingerly from one place to another because the many items in her collection are placed everywhere, including the floor.

"Each small item represents to me a memorable point in my love affair with the pottery," she said. At last she is at peace with herself and her art. There is no need to run anymore. Still, she is as active in the promotion of her art as ever. Every Tuesday night she teaches classes in pottery for a large group of local residents at the Brazos Valley Senior Citizens Association in Bryan.

"I can't live without clay," Ramza said. "It is now a part of my personality. Only I can make something out of clay which best appeals to my artistic taste and best reflects my inner dreams."

She said she would recommend pottery as a good source of income for a person approaching



JADWIGA RAMZA began her career as an artist in Warsaw, Poland, and when World War II struck she fled from the Germans with only a few of her works, but all of her talent. Eventually she settled in England, where she found a large market for her fine pottery and metal work. Here she displays one of her works.

Story and photo

by Frank K. Vasovski

retirement. She said there is a prospect for minimum capital investment with a good potential for additional income, depending upon "a sincere determination to persevere and at least an ounce of artistic addiction" on the part of the prospective potter.

"The term pottery encompasses all kinds of artistic endeavors and combinations for the expression of artistic feelings," she emphasized. "Pottery is a habit, an addiction which cannot be washed out of my blood."

Pottery hints—from a potter

Jadwiga Ramza offers a number of practical hints for persons who want to become involved in pottery. They include:

—Many books related to pottery are available in public libraries. Organized courses of pottery instruction are offered by many school districts as part of adult education programs.

—Local market potential should be carefully examined prior to the investment of funds for equipment and facilities. The Chamber of Commerce or Jaycees can usually provide much of the desired information on that subject.

—At least a minimum familiarity with the throwing wheel, kilns and basic pottery tools is required prior to launching a large-scale operation.

—Private instructors in decorating, glazing and firing are available in most large cities.

—The initial capital investment would be about \$600, which includes the cost of a medium-sized kiln, and electric wheel, a set of tools and materials.

—Excellent artistic effects can be obtained in pottery works through the application of various firing techniques involving manipulating time and temperature factors.

—A variety of selling outlets is always available, even in relatively small towns. Seasonal exhibitions, bazaars, church sales, gift shops, special shows and professional pottery shops are some of the most accessible outlets.

—All potters should insure their products prior to shipment to avoid financial loss.