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Gary Quirk: The Nature I See Through Clay

Written by Gallery Coordinator Karen Jean Smith

Stories of the natural world are told in the clay tile work of Gary Quirk, on view at Baltimore Woods Nature Center during March and April. The public is invited to the informal opening reception on Saturday March 7 from 2:00 until 4:00 when visitors can meet the artist, learn more about his process, enjoy refreshments and view the exhibit, "The Nature I See Through Clay."

The John A. Weeks Art Gallery, located in the BWNC Interpretive Center, is open Monday through Friday 9 - 4 and Saturdays 10 - 4. Admission and parking are free and all artwork is for sale.

Gary Quirk creates images in slabs of clay as a way of remembering and celebrating the world around him. According to Quirk, the images emerge from chance sightings or from dreams of sightings yet hoped for. They are derived from encounters with the outdoors that range from grand vistas to familiar urban settings, some from his own neighborhood. It is his wish that his tiles will serve as a focal point for other people to observe the beauty we find in our world.

Indeed, beautiful flora and fauna, as well as landscapes both urban and rural, are among the subject matter in Quirk's work. A great blue heron flying over a pond or lake is typical of his imagery. Lovers of woodland plants will recognize the trillium, yellow trout lilies, and pink lady's slipper. In some of the tiles the flowers are set within a complex forest of trees; in others the artist has focused on them alone.

Because the tiles are illustrative and framed, they are decorative works of art that function in the same way as a painting. With his focus on nature, the choice of clay tile as the process, and the style of wood framing, Quirk's work seems influenced by that of the Arts and Crafts Movement and yet, this ceramic artist makes it his own.

As for the process, it involves multiple steps each of which is time-consuming. Every tile begins as a drawing which is transferred to a slab of clay and meticulously carved in relief. This original carving is cast in plaster to form a mold which is then used to reproduce the image in fresh soft clay. A slow drying process, an initial firing to prepare the work for color work in glaze, the

painting on of the glaze and another firing follow. Framing by Quirk in North American hardwood completes most pieces.

Gary Quirk's love of clay began in high school in Fulton, where he learned the basics of throwing and hand building. He is largely self taught but gives credit to other ceramic artists already working in the field for their support and guidance. Information gained from books and occasional workshops have added to his knowledge base. Experience garnered in ten years of furniture repair and restoration for antique dealers influenced both the quality of his woodworking and his artistic style. He continues to explore and dabble in other artistic fields including painting and printmaking, ceramic restoration and most recently an interest in Medieval book illumination. A lifelong resident of New York State, Gary Quirk now lives in Syracuse.

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Connecting communities and nature in wisdom and wonder.

Baltimore Woods Nature Center is a leader in facilitating opportunities for people to build personal connections to nature. Through engaging experiences and place-based exploration, we envision communities united in stewardship and love of the natural world.