Talking to Artists on Collaboration with Company

Anniversary Celebrates 90 Years/40 Years of Consistent Collaboration

By Lolly Schoonover, Owner - Kellar Mahaney Gallery of Contemporary Art - Released 2009

If you ask ceramic artist Eva Kwong to say a few words about AMACO® products and how they improve her work she says, “Oh that’s easy, I can talk about that all day. I used to make my own glazes but now I use the AMACO® velvets—they are wonderful. It is the reliability factor—you know what to expect”.

To gather information for the 90th Anniversary of American Art Clay Company and the 40th Anniversary of Brent®, I interviewed all the presenters (Debra Fritts, Ovidio Giberga, Susan Kemenyffy, Eva Kwong, Jeffrey Nichols, and Lana Wilson) at the National Potters Council Exhibit and Conference “Surface, Form, & Substance” held in September 2008 at AMACO® headquarters in Indianapolis. This group of talented, experienced ceramic artists is recognized internationally, and so they provided wonderful insights about AMACO’s practices and products.

The word “consistency” was brought up frequently—in product, in technical support, and in innovation. Artists and educators are quick to point out that AMACO® has stayed flexible and involved in product development to accommodate the changing market. Susan Kemenyffy, who taught one of the very first workshops featuring nationally known ceramics artists with AMACO® in 1983, sums it up like this: “You have to shift with the times, combining the best of the past with what is current to go forward successfully. That is exactly what AMACO® has done”.

The theme of collaboration runs through AMACO’s 90-year history as well. From T.O. Philpott’s 1919 partnership with a friend to create Permoplast® modeling clay, Kenneth Smith’s 1950 joint project with Herron School of Art to create Summer Workshops for Teachers, to current CEO L. Bond Sandoe’s acquisition of the Brent® Corporation in 1977, AMACO® leadership has always valued relationships. AMACO’s successful evolution is due to this creative, collaborative corporate culture that is cultivated every day in all areas of manufacturing, marketing, and sales.

To further illustrate this vision, as you enter AMACO’s headquarters in Indianapolis, you walk into a flowing gallery space dedicated to showcasing the quality and diversity of ceramic artists work. The AMACO/Brent Contemporary Clay Gallery brings the idea full circle that offering the artists and educators a place to share their work with the public, and to meet in workshops, creates an atmosphere where conversation and exchange leads to inspiration in production and outreach.

The imaginative company of AMACO/Brent has so much to proudly celebrate: a family-owned company based in Indianapolis since 1919; a pioneering history with a legacy of innovative product development; a commitment to education from its inception; and a collaborative spirit that infuses all areas of operation. So even as the celebrations are beginning, you can be sure that AMACO/Brent is looking forward with a local and global perspective, developing new ideas to enhance the future of Ceramic Arts.