

## JIM MCDOWELL

### Biography:

Potter Jim McDowell, a studio potter/teacher for over thirty-five years, specializes in creating unique face jugs and folk art representative of his family history and African-American background as it relates to slavery in America. In 2016, Jim McDowell's face jugs were represented by the Calvin-Morris Gallery in New York City, and introduced at the 2016 NYC Outsider Art Fair.

His work has been displayed in art centers and museums across the country and in Europe, among them Cubitt Gallery, London, England; 4-F Gallery, Los Angeles; Walter Anderson Museum of Art, Ocean Springs, MS; others. He's also been a featured potter in several independent films, on the DIY television network, and on PBS's History Detectives.

He's the recipient of an Andy Warhol Museum Grant and awards from the Heinz Foundation. He has taught at the Chautauqua Institution, the Winterthur Museum, and Warren Wilson College, among others, and has presented programs at the Mint Museum in Charlotte, NC, and Touchstone Center for the Arts in Pennsylvania.

Jim McDowell's teaching venues have included art centers and schools from elementary grades through college, summer community programs, major corporations, and art residencies under the auspices of Southern Alleghenies Museum of the Arts in Pennsylvania.

While he earned an Associate of Art degree from Mt. Aloysius College, he is essentially self-taught as a ceramicist, fine tuning his art over the years through workshops and under the mentorship of several world class potters.

Jim McDowell lives in Weaverville, NC. and works out of Reems Creek Pottery Studio there.

### Artist Statement:

I'm a potter who makes face jugs that represent an uncomfortable part of America's history, slavery. I call myself The Black Potter.

Once, as a young man, I attended a family funeral and listened to my elders speak of our history. The story they told of my four-times Great Aunt Evangeline, a slave potter and face jug maker from Jamaica, caught my attention and stayed with me. Many years later, after I'd become a potter myself and had settled in Pennsylvania, I was inspired to make a face jug to honor her and my other ancestors. I knew the jugs were ugly and had spiritual connotations for those of us who descended from enslaved Africans. One story I heard was that the jug was used to revere an ancestor and held a spirit of protection. Others said the jug was buried next to the doorway of a house, or used to mark a grave as slaves were not permitted tombstones.

So I make my face jugs with Black features like wide noses and thick lips, and give them hideous teeth I fashion out of broken china. I engrave anti-slavery sentiments and various sayings and quotes into the wet clay. What I didn't know until a few years after I began to make these jugs was that face jugs were made by other American potters, mostly in the southern states, potters without my Black history. One tradition of the historical southern ugly jug was that it would scare children away from the moonshine stored inside.

I continue to make Black face jugs and I stick to the story of my people. Researchers are finding out more information about face jugs with African features found in the fields of the pottery district of Edgefield, South Carolina. I believe these jugs were made by enslaved Africans and/or their descendants, and I believe they had religious significance.

I make my face jugs to honor my ancestors, including Evangeline, who were brought to America through the Middle Passage, sold into slavery, separated from their family, culture, languages, and not only survived, but thrived.

#### Selected Exhibitions:

- 2022: Hear Me Now: The Black Potters of Old Edgefield, South Carolina, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY  
A Gathering: Work from Contemporary Black American Ceramic Artists, Northern Clay Center, Minneapolis, MN  
Jagged Path: The African Diaspora in Western North Carolina in Craft, Music, and Dance, Blowing Rock Art & History Museum, Blowing Rock, NC  
A Walk in the Woods, Artsville Gallery at Marquee Asheville, Asheville, NC  
"Everyday Rituals" at FARAGO x Tiwa Select, Farago Gallery, Los Angeles, CA
- 2020: Object & Thing: At the Noyes House, Blum & Poe, Mendes Wood DM, and Object & Thing, New Canaan, Connecticut
- 2017: Rebel Clay, Cavin-Morris Gallery, New York, NY
- 2008: A Face Only a Mother Could Love— Face Jug Pottery from the American South, Walter Anderson Museum of Art, Ocean Springs, MS  
"Functional Faces; Pottery with Personality," curated by Tiffany Carter
- 2006: "The Wonder and Horror of the Human Head," curated by Meg Cranston

#### Juried Shows:

Catawba Valley Pottery Festival, Hickory, NC  
Waterford Festival, Waterford, VA  
Shaker Woods, Columbiana, OH  
Yankee Peddler, Canal Fulton, OH  
Wilton Folk Art Show, Wilton, CT

#### Publications:

D'Souza, Aruna. "Jim McDowell, aka 'the Black Potter,' on the fire behind his face jugs," Wallpaper Magazine, June 9, 2023.

Goodman, Wendy. "Object & Thing Goes to the Beach," Curbed, New York Magazine, May 30, 2023.

Collections:

Duke University Nasher Museum, Durham, NC  
North Carolina Museum of History, Raleigh, PA  
Sweetwater Center for the Arts, Sewickley, PA  
The Clay Place, Carnegie, PA  
Krannert Art Museum at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, IL