

ART IS LIFE

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MY NAME IS TANIA BABB and I am a ceramic sculptor. I have a CV of exhibitions and awards as long as my arm and as boring as any other CV. I think that I make beautiful things but you may not. I think that my most subtle and artful creation has been the way in which I have somehow managed to do what I love doing - being a self-supporting single mum and still manage to put Woolies Wheat Free Bread and pure Irish butter on the table. Balancing life, economy and integrity is a tricky business as I am sure many of you are aware.

My epiphanical moment happened while, as a teenage backpacker, I was on a barge floating down the Rhine River. I don't remember any majestic castles or the drone of the tourguide. The magnificent scenery was eclipsed by a startling inner realization, as I wrote in my travel journal in very ornate script "I WANT TO BE AN ARTIST". It was at this point that I realized that being an artist was the only salvation available to me.

Yes, I went to art school. Yes, I lived in a little cottage in the woods in Hout Bay with only outdoor plumbing. Yes, I have done my fair share of waitressing. Yes, my father thought that I was a hopeless idealist and wanted me to get a "real job", or at least marry someone with a "real job."

I am not going to tell you that it was a rags to riches story because my longsuffering friends reading this will know that I am lying. It has been a rollercoaster. - I have worked in advertising and in galleries and have been apprenticed to a ceramic sculptor. I have spent several months a year, for three years running, in America sculpting and stocking galleries there. I started teaching ceramics to children in a few junior schools which has been my economic mainstay for many years. All the while refining and honing in on my own iconography, my own means of expression in clay, and all the while becoming more and more wise to the marketing aspects of being an artist.

I'm sure you know those pregnancy test sticks - those little clinical plastic, pastel pink ones! Well.....The turning point in my life/career happened when one of those inane little sticks told me in no uncertain terms, with no emotional support or fanfare, that I was to be a mother in nine months time. I approached this news with the usual ever optimistic, religious zeal of my Sagittarius ascendant, not fully realizing the



financial implications of motherhood and how it would jeopardize the delicate balance of my life, economy and integrity.

My daughter, India, was born in August, in September I decided to be a single mum, in October my father died, in January I moved house and in March my mother left to be a scientist in Australia. There is nothing like a bit of adversity to get the truly arrogant and pigheaded into top gear. There I was, six months down the line, from carefree, rather rotund hippy to self supporting, virtually orphaned, single mum. I had a hard couple of years. I had my "Scarlet O'Hara" moment standing at the counter of the chemist, unable to afford medicine for my sick child. Again, it was not a meteoric rise to that all illusive "financial stability" - but I clawed my way up.

My work has always been about the powers of the feminine archetype. It has been through different phases but is always about the inherent wisdom of women. The sculptures which come out of me have juxtaposition - the solidity of the clay and a lightness of spirit. This epitomizes, for me, the delicate but real way in which the power of the feminine works in the world. With the history of patriarchal suppression, humour is essential. At this time in my life I have had enough experience of being a woman and a mother in the world to take my work to another level. This time coincided with my discovery of porcelain clay, which is very buttery to the touch, and when fired gives the impression of the vulnerability of human flesh. Hours were spent in my studio playing with porcelain and the feminine form, and putting the Woman astride huge hulking beasts, Elephants, Rhinos, Whales, representing this latent power I always felt within me as part of my Woman-ness.

A porcelain "bread and butter" line emerged, I won an international award with one of the porcelain sculptures and the orders have been pouring in locally as well as from all over the world. It sounds as though I have done all of this on my own - but I have had help. There are some really supportive local galleries to who I owe great allegiance and I would not have been able to come so far without the help of Veliswa, Ahkona and Andiswa, my loyal assistants.

I have recently been exploring oil painting as a medium and having a wonderful time with it. So, hopefully it is now onwards and upwards, and my Dad is smiling down on me from heaven.

Art on exhibition at the Art of Living Festival.