

A Modern Mermaid



'I'm not a very technical person, I'm afraid,' says Tania Babb, leading us on to her patio which reaches out towards the sapphire sea. We marvel at her ingenious ceramic creations daubed with jewel like glazes. "I tend to do those things which give best results, and express the way I feel, she says modestly, "I may be strolling along a street one day and see a particular colour, or a certain shape which, makes me want to hurry back here and put it into clay." Pert-breasted angels and mermaids gaze at us from, table tops and shelves lining the little cave, which is Tania's creative retreat.

A collage of colourful postcards dapples the walls, and sheaves of careful life drawings seem to grow up from the floor. A collection of bright still life paintings bears testament to a maturing talent. Tania started working with clay in her early teens, under the tutelage of Barbara Jackson. 'She was, very supportive and encouraged me to create pieces which were self-expressive and quite daring," Tania says. After qualifying with a diploma in graphic design from art school, Tania joined a Cape Town advertising agency.

'I was utterly miserable there," she sighs. 'I quickly came to the conclusion I'm not a very good employee. I'm too much of a loner, too headstrong to be a team player. The only thing I could do was break away and strike out on my own. It was very tough at first. I was young and an unknown, and things often looked quite bleak. But I refused to give up. I went out and organised my own exhibitions, took my work to galleries just kept on producing work which was special to me.' Tania recently organised an exhibition for architects and interior decorators in Cape Town. "I did everything. The food, the drinks, and the invitations. Although I was far too frazzled to notice, the evening was a great success, and I picked up some interesting commissions as a result Tania says she loves to see her pieces in a setting where they live", 'I don't mind fashioning something intended for a specific function. In fact, it sometimes makes things easier if I can work to a specific - colour, Size and so on,' she explains.

When she's not cocooned in her little studio, she's teaching ceramics to adults and children, She also finds time to study for the third year of her BA degree through UNISA, and for a teaching course at the Michael Oak Waldorf School in Constantia, where she would love to teach. 'Children are wonderful to work with. They're so spontaneous and uninhabited,' she enthuses. 'It's very satisfying, and I always come home feeling I've gained something precious from the experience.,

That freshness and movement is captured in clay. Tania's work is energetic. Very personal. She tosses the mane of amber hair which ripples like lava down her spine, And suddenly the resemblance becomes quite apparent. The mysterious mermaids and ochre-haired angels watching us from the Studio shelves capture the essence of this young artist's strength and originality.

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