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San Bernardino County artist adds creative works to human rights efforts



San Bernardino County artist Cj Jilek has a new exhibit that addresses human rights and women's rights. (Courtesy of Tom Bostick)



By **CONTRIBUTING WRITER** |

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By Greg Archer | Contributing Columnist

For decades, Cj Jilek has devoted herself to making art. Between her extensive ceramic art and porcelain offerings that lean in biomorphic forms, there is no shortage of ideas.

Now she's giving back to the community. The San Bernardino County artist is nurturing a new exhibit that targets human rights and women's rights specifically. Four upcoming exhibits are planned in the region. One, "Systematic Erosion," is running through Dec. 17 at the American Museum of Ceramic Art in Pomona, and the second part of the exhibition will be featured in Ontario.

"My previous work as an exhibiting ceramic artist has been working with feminine identity through the use of botanical imagery," Jilek said. "When I took on this project, it just kind of lent itself to having both an environmental feel and raising awareness around the idea of people's eroding rights around the world right now. Calling it 'Systematic Erosion' created this nice tie between environmentalism and human rights."

That link is drawing interest, but so is Jilek's creativity. The show itself is based heavily on ceramics but there are mixed-media elements incorporated.





An exhibit of Cj Jilek's work, "Systematic Erosion," is running through Dec. 17, 2023, at the American Museum of Ceramic Art in Pomona, with the second part to be featured in Ontario. Here is one of her works. (Courtesy of Cj Jilek)

"I had previously been a two-dimensional art major with drawing and illustration and once I was able to switch over to that super tactile medium and create in three dimensions, all of my creative thoughts just started to accumulate, then be produced," said Jilek, who has been working in the medium for more than 25 years.

Originally from the Midwest, the artist used the world as her canvas. She appreciated the different nuances founded in landscapes and nature — from the sea and mountains to the deserts and floral arenas in between. After completing her MFA degree in 2010, Jilek traveled to Poland so she could work in the traditional ceramic factories of Boleslawiec.

She'd go on to teach ceramics in Santa Barbara for 10 years.



“I’ve always been interested, of course, in women’s rights,” she said of the current exhibit. “And with so many changes happening around the world right now — rights to health care, body autonomy, and education — so much is changing for women and the LGBTQ+ groups that it felt like people need to be voicing their thoughts and making it clear where they stand on all of these changes happening.”

Recently, Jilek received a grant from the [Inland Empire Community Foundation](#) through the [Creative Corps Inland SoCal](#) program, which offers grants to local, regional, and statewide organizations in 58 counties for unemployed and underemployed artists. The grants allow artists to create public awareness messages and projects in support of civic engagement and community participation.

To be sure, Jilek’s art — and in turn, her voice — invite engagement with their unique shapes and styles. Her jewelry designs, for instance, sprang from experimenting with surface studies for her biomorphic sculptures. She spent a great deal of time looking at things on a microscopic level, then pondering “surfaces” — from skin pores and other cells. The works are made from porcelain, beginning with a smooth form created in a press mold.

“The jewelry allows me to share my love of textures and the intricacies of surface in a wearable format,” she said.

The artist’s ceramic pieces are noteworthy, ranging in size and shape, yet all embody inventive use of texture and creative style.

“It’s important anytime artists get extra funding to communicate,” she said. “It’s just so vital artists document their times and communicate what’s currently happening. Communicating your voice is necessary.”

Learn more about Cj Jilek at Cjjilekartist.com.

[Inland Empire Community Foundation](#) works to strengthen Inland Southern California through philanthropy.

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