

**A Talk with the Artists:**  
**Claire Willis and Andrea Kielpinski discuss “The Shape of Presence”**

*How did you arrive at the theme of your show? What is “the shape of presence”?*

Andrea: A lot of us feel disconnected as we substitute internet reality for, well, real reality. Clay & Company itself is offering a way to keep students more grounded through working with clay.

As artists, we make original, one-of-a-kind works. Each one has our energy and attention poured into it. In a way, a work of art or craft is an intentional act of presence, transformed into matter.

Claire: When throwing clay on the wheel, I need to be sensitive and aware at every moment the wheel is spinning. If I pay attention to all its subtle signals, the lump of clay becomes a beautiful, symmetric object under my hands. But if I lose my focus on the present moment, the clay lets me know immediately, getting farther and farther away from balance. Then I have a frustrating mess on my hands!

Andrea: With a painting, there’s more time perhaps—no wheel is spinning. But still, I am looking for a dynamic balance—even a single misplaced stroke can make the whole thing look “off.” I’m also trying to stay present to something harder to describe, some sense of meaning that can’t be described in words but that can be felt.

*Your work seems to complement each other’s beautifully. How did that evolve?*

Claire: It was something quite natural—I guess we are kindred spirits. We looked at each other and realized how well our work played off one another’s, even though our media and styles are so different. It made sense to show our work together. And the gallery space has that spacious intimacy that allows viewers to really slow down and absorb the impressions.

Andrea: I use a lot of texture in my work, and my process involves responding to the materials and the developing artwork. So I have a palpable and responsive approach, which I think is pretty similar to what’s needed in working with clay.

Because the colors and textures go together so well, the show also works together as a whole. It's like one big artwork to be explored and enjoyed.

*Claire, can you explain what a “wood-fired” vessel is?*

A wood-fired kiln reaches the high temperatures needed for firing clay using wood as the fuel, rather than gas or electricity. The ceramic pieces are not glazed—wood ash creates an environment that produces that distinctive surface. And because the kiln has to be fed 24 hours a day until the firing is complete, it becomes a community event, with round-the-clock shifts and a lot of hard work. A whole special shared energy of presence infuses every piece. So these wood-fired pieces seem especially suited to the theme of our show.

*Andrea, you work in a variety of media. How does the “shape of presence” come through the different media you use?*

A common feature of my work is a kind of responsive listening. I was trained as a musician, so I see an abstract painting expressing meaning through shapes and colors, just as music uses melody and harmony. Images like the Sphinx or a hungry bird can evoke deep resonance in a viewer. So can “earthy” materials like horse hair, twigs, and scraps of cloth. It's an improvisation—like a musical jam session! With photography, a responsive alertness is also needed, being present to an overlooked studio corner, or to a fleeting quiet moment.

*Anything else you would like viewers to know about the show?*

Claire: The show has been extended till October 21. We're thrilled to have you visit, so please feel free to come more than once. Art can hold something new each time you see it.

Andrea: When you see or acquire a piece of art, you're not just seeing an object, but sensing the energy and intention that produced it. Our hope is that our work will help you reconnect with your own sense of presence.