



Playing with Shape

Eden Prairie artist Susan Feigenbaum creates colorful, abstract sculptures.

IT TAKES A CREATIVE MIND TO BELIEVE that chartreuse is practically a neutral color, but in Susan Feigenbaum's world it is. The Eden Prairie resident's quirky sculptures play with shape and space in unique ways, and although they might appear whimsical at first glance, there's actually something slightly off-kilter floating below the surface.

"The point of my work is to communicate a sense of delight but a sense of unease at the same time," she says, after referencing a quote from one of her influences Jean Dubuffet: "Art should always make us laugh a little, and be frightened a little." It's this balance joy and fear—and Feigenbaum's unique marriages of color, shape and texture—that grabs art lovers' attention. "When people see my work, they stop and stare and smile, Feigenbaum says. "That's a very consistent reaction and that's a very gratifying

one." Her work is on display at Studiopolis 423 in the Northrup King Building, and in August one of her pieces was selected for the Fine Arts Building at the Minnesota State Fair. She's also demonstrated her work at the Eden Prairie Art Center and offering classes through the center this spring.

Feigenbaum grew up in Chicago and attended an arts school at the Art Institute of Chicago. "I grew up with art," she says. "Every week I'd be walking past masterpieces to get to the school. They're like old friends."

In the mid-1980s Feigenbaum moved to Minnesota with her husband, Dennis. Together the couple runs a graphic design firm, Feigenbaum Design Group, out of their home. Although Feigenbaum and her husband are graphic designers by trade, both are drawn to expressing themselves through more artistic endeavors. Dennis creates

large geometrical wall structures that represent precisely folded shapes.

Feigenbaum began working with clay in the early 1990s when she realized she needed another outlet for her creativity. "I wanted to do something different than graphic design, because design is very precise and very detail-oriented. It's intense," she says. "It's also very flat. You're at a computer screen all day, looking at things you can't even touch."

She learned how to throw on a wheel, but liked the process of hand building better. "It's very direct communication with the clay, and I like that a lot," Feigenbaum says.

Slowly Feigenbaum moved away from the idea that her work had to be functional and started experimenting with different forms and shapes. She keeps sketchbooks to jot down visual notes as they come to her. "Much of my inspiration comes from looking at other artists' work," Feigenbaum says, noting that she's not influenced by the natural world, but enjoys exploring nonrepresentational shapes and forms. "I look and see if there's anything out there that looks like my work and that helps drive what I do because I like to have an original twist on things," she adds.

In her home, which is filled with art by her, her husband and their favorite artists, Feigenbaum has a kiln and studio space set aside in the lower level. A rolling pin for creating clay slabs, and various objects for creating shapes and textures—including tennis balls, foam forms, and stamps—dot her work space. Much of the texture of Feigenbaum's work comes from the colored glazes she uses, which can provide anything from a crackled effect to beaded dots.

She enjoys working in series, and is currently working on a few different series, including tower forms; pleasure domes, which look a bit like abstract heads; and alcoves, which are small works containing niches full of activity. Feigenbaum is also planning a series based on lives of saints.

While her graphic design business definitely comes first, her goals are to share her experiences with clay by teaching classes, increase awareness of her work and to continue to refine her technique. And no doubt she'll continue to walk the line between whimsy and unease. //



For information on Susan Feigenbaum's latest shows and classes, and to see more of her work, visit susanfeigenbaum.com.