

PHOTO: WES NAMAN  
BY BLAKE DRIVER

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Standing in front of an unassuming two-car garage in a quiet neighborhood in Trumbull Park, it's hard to imagine that behind one of the closed garage doors is the home studio of celebrated ceramicist **Lia Rosen**. As prayer flags flutter peacefully under the porch awning next to the garage, the petite Rosen, with her short, salt and pepper coiffure, gets off her bike and opens one of the doors for me.

I do the limbo under the door as it only opens halfway and lean my bike against boxes of New Mexico clay stacked high along one of the walls. This half of the garage is, well, just a garage, but when she leads me through the plastic curtain covering the doorway between the two halves, I enter another dimension, and suddenly I feel like a giant; either because Rosen is a good foot shorter than me or I've just entered a tiny space where big things happen.



Lia Lynn Rosen working in her studio

"Welcome to my studio," she says with a proud smile.

This is where Rosen, just this year, created four painted award plates that were commissioned by the Anti-Defamation League. One of the awards, the Distinguished Public Service Award, was presented to Mayor Martin Chávez. High up on one of the walls in her studio is an unframed, 8 by 10-inch color photograph of Rosen and a smiling Chávez holding the award. The photograph is almost lost in the sea of artwork that covers every square inch of already limited wall space, most of which was done by the many children she has instructed in public schools around the state over the last few years.

"I've never been on the cutting-edge," Rosen states simply. "I'm always more interested in the work I do in the community than in having my own pieces reviewed. I want to find that one child or person in the community who feels isolated by their creativity and put them in a group with other creators."

As a traditional folk-artist, connecting people and the past is at the heart of Rosen's work. Even her hand-shaped logo suggests the Jewish-Arabic hamsa that both cultures have shared for centuries. And another profound image on her studio walls is a black and

white poster of famed master ceramicist Marguerite Wildenhain, operating the kick-wheel like a graceful ballerina. As a high school student in the Midwest, Rosen attended summer programs at Decorah, Iowa's, South Bear School, with Dean Schwarz, one of Wildenhain's students, and thus became a part of a profound legacy of potters.

"Dean was all about passing down knowledge, and I think it's important to continue that (practice)," Rosen stated. "If you want to think in terms of mastery — which many artists don't anymore — an artist is first an apprentice, then a journeyman, and finally a master. But I think only when artists understand traditional methods and then use them to create something new, are they considered masters."

But Rosen is little concerned with mastery. Teaching others traditional pottery techniques such as clay digging, hand building, and outdoor firing is more about introducing them to what is right under their noses, especially given New Mexico's rich pottery tradition.

"In Minnesota, you don't trip over ancient pottery shards everyday. In New Mexico, you do," she says with a mystic gleam in her eye.

After leaving the Midwest, she eventually came here to study traditional Native American methods in pottery design, focusing on the ancestral techniques of the Mimbres people, and studying under renowned art history pioneer J.J. Brody of the University of New Mexico.

"I get the sense that people in the Southwest feel overwhelmed with the promotion of Native American art," she says, "but the commitment and skill it takes to execute the traditional, fine-line black-on-white designs are still competitive with contemporary techniques. I look at a pottery shard or geometric design from a thousand years ago and think, 'that is the math part of my brain!'"

Rosen is hosting an open studio for interested newcomers from 9a to 9p, Apr. 21 at [4725 Trumbull SE](#), Albuquerque, NM 87108. For more information, call [505-262.4801](tel:505-262-4801).

She will be celebrating Earth Day with an outdoor booth at La Montañita Coop's 18th Annual Celebrate the Earth Fest, from 10:30a to 6p, Sun., Apr. 22, in Nob Hill. And, if you happen to be in Las Cruces between May 4 to June 30, stop by the Las Cruces Museum of Art to check out the piece Rosen is featuring in the exhibition **From the Ground Up XXIII**.



[505-262-4801](tel:505-262-4801)

[liarosen@earthlink.net](mailto:liarosen@earthlink.net)

[WWW.CLAYKODESH.COM](http://WWW.CLAYKODESH.COM)