

Cranbrook Art Museum

JOHN GLICK ALEGACY INICLAY

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Jo Lauria

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MENTORSHIP AS A LIFELONG COMMITMENT

BY JO LAURIA

"An investment in knowledge pays the best interest." Benjamin Franklin (1706–1790)

John Glick's enduring commitment to the practice of mentoring evolved over a long period of time. He welcomed the first full-year participant to the mentorship program in 1964 and bid farewell to the last in 2014. During the ensuing five decades, Glick imprinted his philosophy, work ethics, and business acumen onto the assistants who eagerly stepped over the threshold at Plum Tree Pottery. Designated as a historic landmark, Plum Tree Pottery encompasses several buildings on a farm property in Farmington Hills, Michigan, which Glick purchased in 1965. Originally consisting of a farmhouse and shed, Glick has since restored, rebuilt, and built anew-there now stands a beautifully appointed residence with original Glick tiles and other ceramic flourishes, alongside two fully equipped buildings that function as pottery studio, kiln room, machine shop, storeroom, photography enclave, office, and retail showroom.

Thirty-three eager newcomers have passed through Glick's studio doors since the program's genesis. Glick first referred to his studio helpmates

as "apprentices," then as "assistants," and finally as "residents." The last title in the progression, in use from the 1980s to 2014, represented an expansion of studio responsibilities, guided access to Glick's cultivated community, and the freedom of making one's own work. "My relationships with new residents in the studio deepened," recalls Glick, "as I became more of a mentor, while so much sharing happened in both directions."1 In the beginning, Glick was not much older than the college-age apprentices he accepted. But by the end of the mentorship program Glick would celebrate his seventysixth birthday, with a fifty-year difference in age between mentor and apprentice. This evolution produced an environment in which generations co-mingled, promoting the teaching and sharing of skills from one generation to the next-in practice, mirroring the Renaissance guild systems of Europe.

Glick pursued becoming an artist-potter with deliberateness and determination. After completing his undergraduate degree at Wayne State University in Detroit, he studied ceramics under Maija Grotell at Cranbrook Academy of Art. Grotell followed the Bauhaus atelier paradigm and taught by example, requiring students to work independently and insisting they challenge their perceived limitations. With her guidance and encouragement, Glick could envision the pathway to becoming a studio potter and resolved to take steps in that direction.

Becoming a mentor, however, happened more by chance than plan. Following his graduation from Cranbrook, Glick was drafted into the United States Army and sent to West Germany. Stationed near the famous Westerwald district, home to the centuries-old saltware pottery community, he spent his free time visiting, observing, and photographing the small family potteries in the area. As Glick remembers, "I was consciously absorbing in the Westerwald area something I'd never seen at home: viable family potteries. They demonstrated how beneficial it was to stay small and personally committed to making original work. That gave me the final piece I needed for my vision: I returned to Michigan and set up my own pottery and showroom."2

Once established in Farmington Hills, Glick's mentorship program reached interested applicants through a variety of channels, but most were engaged by word-of-mouth and student recommendations from faculty who knew Glick. Residencies typically lasted one or occasionally two years. Residents were expected to find their own living arrangements and report to the pottery five days a week, working eight hours alongside Glick in the studio.

As Glick describes, he provided the residents with "ample time and workspace to develop a body of work, with daily feedback and critiques as needed." It was his intention that the residents would devote 50 percent of their time to making their own work. Glick would also introduce the residents to his colleagues, collectors, and dealers, and when appropriate, invite them to accompany him at workshops. Additionally, he provided training in the financial accounting of operating a studio, consistent with small business practices. In exchange, residents would partake in all ongoing studio projects and share tasks related to equipment maintenance, clay mixing and testing, glaze preparation and application, and loading and unloading of kilns. On the business side, they managed the showroom, interfaced with customers, and packed and shipped work.3 When Glick was younger, he always felt he would have benefited from the experience of having a mentor and working as an apprentice. He has long believed that providing assistantships contributes to the field because it offers emergent artists the opportunity to evolve, experiment, and experience within the context of daily creative inquiry and a supportive framework.4 An "assistantship is a post-graduate course set in a real-world environment-a working studio," as Glick summarized, "kind of experiential learning, because it preserves a vital forum for reality-based educational opportunities in the clay field." 5

PROVING THE METHOD: A TRIBUTE

Lauria: What skills and knowledge do you think

ROSTI EISMONT, APPRENTICE.

1972 TO 1973:

Mentoring has had a compelling influence on Glick's life. For the past fifty years, being a mentor has fulfilled his objective of transferring knowledge and skills in a structured, productive way. It has also brought Glick much joy as he shared meals, music, and "puns and pranks" with the residents whose lives became inextricably entwined with his. Glick views the mentorship as an incubator and believes the program's measure of effectiveness can be gauged by the continued growth of the residents—how their knowledge, skills, and aesthetics have evolved after the program's completion, and how they have forged their own creative paths in the ceramics field.

Demonstrating a true exchange, the mentorship program has proven to be a positive and transformative experience for the residents as well. The following pages present a selection of the remarks of eight of Glick's studio apprentices and residents, spanning the years 1972 to 2014, and a collection of the works they created during and after their mentorship. Drawn from a questionnaire developed by the author and answered by the mentorship participants, this medley of insights and artistic practices provides a glimpse into the shared experience, ideologies, and methodologies of the program and its lifelong impact.

Lauria: What skills and knowledge do you think you acquired during your apprenticeship?

Eismont:

I know I perfected throwing to such a degree that it is now "like riding a bicycle" and although I have moved away from mimicking John's gestures, occasionally I see my hands performing actions very similar to those I watched him perform. Additionally I experienced the mechanics and complexities of a studio operation. One day John said, "you realize that having a studio is 90 percent kitchen work."

Lauria: How have these practices affected your ongoing and current work in clay? Have you experienced a significant change in your perspective or artistic trajectory?

Eismont:

A commitment to the simple function of basic forms has prevailed. The mug, the bowl, the plate, the cup, the vase, the slab, the pitcher, the tea pot. A form for mixing, a form for serving, a form for presentation. As a minimalist (modernist?) I am interested in the essence of things, the essence of a form. While I appreciate other points of view, the appropriation and excess of postmodernist ceramics does not interest me as much.



Rosti Eismont
Cork Jar, 1973
Made at Plum Tree Pottery
Stoneware
8 x 3 inches
Collection of the Artist
Photo: Al Karevy



Rosti Eismont
Footed Ice Bucket, 1995
Stoneware
8 x 9 inches
Private Collection
Photo: AI Karevy

Lauria: Using descriptive adjectives, can you give a summation of what you absorbed during your apprenticeship?

Eismont:

The belief that an intense personal approach has the potential to provide a fully engaged and evolving artistic experience.

PAUL YOUNG, RESIDENT, 1989 TO 1991:

Lauria: How do you characterize the work you created while a resident at John Glick's Studio?

Young:

While working with John I executed a broad range of functional pots. I spent a lot of time developing and refining techniques, working on handles and lids. Repeating a shape to create a group of pots that worked well together. I explored color and pattern, giving way to the influence of the vast array of slips and glazes on hand. I explored using multiple parts to make a complex form like a teapot, as well as dies for extrusions to use to construct or embellish my pots.

Lauria: How have these practices affected your ongoing and current work in clay? Have you experienced a significant change in your perspective or artistic trajectory?

Young:

Currently I continue to employ many of the



Paul Young
Teapot, circa 1989
Made at Plum Tree Pottery
Stoneware
9 1/2 x 11 1/2 x 4 inches
Collection of the Artist
Photo: Courtesy the Artist



Paul Young
Charger, 2015
Stoneware
16 1/2 x 16 1/2 x 1 1/2 inches
Collection of the Artist
Photo: Courtesy the Artist

practices and rhythms of daily studio work that I experienced while working with John at Plum Tree Pottery. I work in a 40 foot by 90 foot pole barn and sell most of the work I make from a 20 foot by 20 foot outbuilding that houses my showroom and photo studio. One of the more significant changes for me in the last year has been the large-scale production of plates and bowls for a regional gastro pub.

Lauria: Using descriptive adjectives, can you give a summation of what you absorbed during your apprenticeship?

Young:

How one maintains a fire and vigor in the belly and mind that excites and informs one's work throughout a career, while not taking yourself too seriously.

KRISTINE POOLE, RESIDENT, 1992 TO 1993:

Lauria: How did your expectations change over the course of the residency?

Poole:

John was so incredibly open about everything in his studio practice—he freely shared any information I asked for and a whole lot I did not know to ask. The more I learned, the more I wanted to know. In retrospect, I don't know that

my expectations changed so much as I changed—I found myself becoming more excited and less intimidated about venturing off on my own.

Lauria: How do you characterize the work you created while a resident at John Glick Studio?

Poole:

While much of the work I created at Plum Tree Pottery was more traditional as I was working to develop my skills in throwing and glazes, John strongly encouraged me to pursue my own unique expressions. The Creature Pot series came out of these explorations of melding throwing methods with hand building. One of the works from this series is a part of the permanent collection of the Las Cruces Museum of Art. I would characterize all the work I created at Plum Tree Pottery as being heavily influenced by the wheel, having the luscious color and surfaces you can only get when firing in John's kilns, and often incorporating elements of whimsy and fun as a reflection of the environment in which we worked.

Lauria: What were some of the most meaningful practices in which you engaged during your residency?

Poole:

I think one of the most meaningful practices was seeing an artist consistently approaching his work schedule with discipline—every day you go to the studio at nine and you work until five, except on days when you work longer. It reminds



Kristine Poole
Creature Pot, 1993
Made at PlumTree Pottery
Stoneware
5 x 7 x 4 inches
Private Collection
Photo: Courtesy the Artist



Kristine Poole
Ktisis: Muse of Creation, 2016
Stoneware
22 x 15 x 9 inches
Collection of the Artist
Photo: Courtesy the Artist



Kristen Kieffer
Mandala vessel, 1997–98
Made at PlumTree Pottery
Stoneware
10 x 6 inches
Private Collection
Photo: Courtesy the Artist



Kristen Kieffer
Teapot, 2015
11 x 11 x 6 inches
Private Collection
Photo: Courtesy the Artist

me of a quotation by W. Somerset Maugham: "I only write when inspiration strikes. Fortunately it strikes every morning at nine o'clock sharp."

It was also a joyful environment: John twostepping around the studio with Susie, sharing laughs and being silly as an integral part of working—it was not a requirement that artists must suffer to create beautiful work. He managed to maintain a terrific balance between focused work, serious time, and play that I am still striving to achieve in my practice.

KRISTIN KIEFFER, RESIDENT, 1996 TO 1997:

Lauria: How do you characterize the work you created while a resident at John Glick Studio?

Kieffer:

Some of it was moderately influenced by his, which continued into the next year. I am much more of a precise maker, so it quickly evolved into my own style. I learned to channel the gesture of what I enjoyed about his work and some of his influences in ways that suit me and my way of making and aesthetic. My year with him also began my love of soda-firing, which I continued for almost 10 years.

Lauria: What skills and knowledge do you think you acquired during your apprenticeship? Was

one of your main objectives to become a practiced potter of functional forms?

Kieffer:

I worked with a studio potter because that is what I wanted to be. I learned everything from how to pack pots for shipping to being playful, from photography skills to studio basics. There are decoration techniques I learned from John that are still a part of my repertoire, and every time I throw I'm leaning against a backrest he designed. Even the tea bowl holding my throwing tools is one I made when I was with him. I am always aware of my body, adjusting things to be more ergonomic when I can, which is very much John's way of working.

Lauria: How have these practices affected your ongoing and current work in clay? Have you experienced a significant change in your perspective or artistic trajectory?

Kieffer:

John is with me every day. Literally, every day in my studio I use a tool or skill I learned from John. When I teach workshops, I always comment on things I am demonstrating that I picked up from him.

Lauria: Using descriptive adjectives, can you give a summation of what you absorbed during your apprenticeship?

Kieffer:

PLAY. Play is key. Even though making pots is a creative pursuit, it is still a job that can feel serious because making money is a goal. Play was very much a part of his daily routine and is an important part of positive studio practice that made a big impression on me. John was always playful, infectiously so. I remember him dancing around while he glazed, making bad puns, and smiling through his big moustache. If I was down or having a hard day, when I returned from a break, there would be a mini stoneware cat or flower smiley face freshly formed on my wheel (which he glazed for me and I still have). I continue to make time to play in my studio. Thanks, John.

MARK COLE, RESIDENT, 2001 TO 2002:

Lauria: How did your expectations change over the course of the residency?

Cole:

My expectations grew as the residency progressed when I began to realize how the day-to-day operations of the studio unfolded slowly. There is a strong sense of patience and purpose that emerges when you are setting longer-term goals. During John's work cycles, each part of the process of making is an investment, which leads to the next step, building toward the finished work. I really appreciated that logical progression.



Mark Cole
Lidded Jar, 2001
Made at Plum Tree Pottery
Stoneware
12 x 8 inches
Collection of the Artist
Photo: Courtesy the Artist



Mark Cole

Oysters, 2014

Stoneware
21 x 12 x 1 1/2 inches

Collection of the Artist

Photo: Courtesy the Artist

Lauria: Looking back, what are your reflections on that experience?

Cole:

As a mentor and master, John embodied the characteristics of a positive role model during a critical and formative time in the early stages of my journey in clay. As his apprentice, the experience was an invaluable supplement to my undergraduate education, allowing a real-world insight into the daily functions of a studio potter. Thirteen years later, my artist residency at Plum Tree Pottery remains one of the most powerful experiences that continues to inform my studio practice, my work as an educator, and my daily life in meaningful ways.

John's willingness to share his skills, knowledge, and expertise for the benefit of his residents is admirable. For him, there are no trade secrets and no unanswered questions. Working alongside him was not like working at all, as he mentored mostly by setting a good example-setting and meeting goals as the studio work sessions progressed. If this was all that had rubbed off in my year there, it would have been a rewarding one. But like another layer of glaze or a few extra dots and dashes, he had to give a little more, because John loves what he does. Working comes from his heart, his positive attitude, his personal quality, and his enthusiasm for the field. It was exciting to be a part of his engagement, learning, growth, and sense of play in the studio. It is no wonder John's legacy is so strong. Like the energy

he gave his work, being a positive role model to his residents was a way to feed himself, creating love, interest, and joy through his passion.

As I have moved on to mentor others, I remember these ideals. I know that there are many ways of being a role model, but I have come to be very grateful to know one really good one.

ELENOR WILSON, RESIDENT, 2006 TO 2007:

Lauria: How did your expectations change over the course of the residency?

Wilson:

I was pretty open about the whole experience and did not have any strict expectations going in. But mostly what I learned was that a potter spends maybe 20 percent of her time actually working in the studio, and the other 80 percent being a photographer, marketing executive, accountant, carpenter, and groundskeeper. All of which can be rewarding parts of the main goal: making pots!

Lauria: Looking back, what are your reflections on that experience?

Wilson:

My experience was a supremely influential part of my career. I met the most genuine people and knew that I wanted to be a part of the ceramics community for as long as possible. That did not mean I immediately modeled my professional life after John's, as I still am not a full-time potter. But working with him allowed me to understand how to do it when I am ready, and to do it in a way that will sustain myself physically and financially for the long term.

Lauria: Glick refers to his apprentices as "assistants"; what duties did you perform during your residency to assist John in his studio and at PlumTree Pottery?

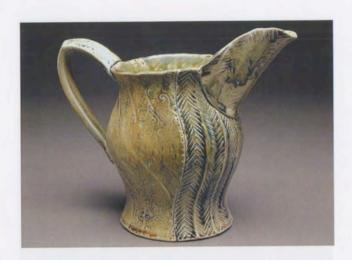
Wilson:

Everything that needed to be done in the studio was done together with John. Making clay, mixing glazes, studio maintenance, loading and unloading kilns, cleaning shelves. I did not make John's work, and I had my own station to make my own work. Occasionally, for a tile commission, we would work together to extrude the tile, or some similar activity, but the whole experience was one of mutual work and trade.

Lauria: What were some of the most meaningful practices in which you engaged during your residency?

Wilson:

I think the most important one was balancing multiple kinds of work with each other, and work with play. The second most important was learning to work in a way that was kind to your body, like throwing in a standing position with back support.



Elenor Wilson

Pitcher, 2006

Made at Plum Tree Pottery

Porcelain

10 x 8 x 5 inches

Collection of the Artist

Photo: Courtesy the Artist



Elenor Wilson

American Tourister Still Life, 2009

Porcelain

40 x 22 x 24 inches

Collection of Racine Art Museum

Photo: Liz Bruhn

Thirdly, food and humor (sometimes the same thing).

Lauria: Using descriptive adjectives, can you give a summation of what you absorbed during your apprenticeship?

Wilson:

I learned how to make a life, not a living. I learned how to problem-solve and let the little stuff go. I learned a lot about who I am as a person, and what it means to be a part of a lineage of American potters.

JAY DION, RESIDENT, 2007:

Lauria: Looking back, what are your reflections on that experience?

Looking back, I value the moments when John shared the keys to becoming part of a community. Being in the same place for some forty years was something that he stressed. I was able to witness a dinnerware client who had been on his waiting list pick out a large set because she fondly remembers eating off her family's set growing up. Her children will represent the third generation that John's plates and cups have touched. This was special.

Lauria: Glick refers to his apprentices as "assistants"; what duties did you perform during your residency to assist John in his studio and at PlumTree Pottery?

Dion:

I think John turned seventy when I was there—at that time I was twenty-six. As his assistant I performed all of the day-to-day physical tasks, but always alongside John. Together we mixed, pugged, and bagged clay. We made glazes and loaded and unloaded kilns. We photographed and documented his new and old work. We shipped work and sold it to customers who walked into the shop. One of the unique experiences was joining him for a two-day workshop at Purdue University. We prepared and packed all of the works in progress and finished pieces necessary for that event.

Lauria: What were some of the most meaningful practices in which you engaged during your residency?

Dion:

For me the most meaningful practice was the daily routine. John has all sorts of tools that he has built and any number of genius workflow solutions, but what I appreciated the most was the work that he put in (and pushed me to do) every day. John is an extremely hard worker. For as much fun as he has and as much as he likes to joke around, he is a prolific potter. That simply cannot happen without hard work.



Jay Dion

Conversation Series 2, 2007

Made at Plum Tree Pottery

Stoneware

14 x 12 x 3 inches

Collection of the Artist

Photo: Courtesy the Artist



Jay Dion
Natural Cups, 2013–2016
Stoneware
3 x 3 x 3 inches each
Collection of the Artist
Photo: Courtesy the Artist

Currently I am a working studio potter. Together with my wife Rie, I started a pottery in Oakland, California, called Atelier Dion that works closely with the coffee and restaurant industries through select wholesale accounts and direct web sales. Most of what I do has benefited from the things I learned from John—not just how to make pots or glaze large bowls, but also how to talk to clients and how to maintain your personal design and creativity in the face of requests to do otherwise. And how to say no. This part is important, especially to a young potter with not a lot of money.

The potter I thought I would be when I first took classes in high school was essentially John Glick: a studio potter making his living making and selling pots. My first image of this was probably up in the mountains somewhere or in the woods, but this image has changed for me as I have been exposed to different approaches: academics, residencies in Japan, employment at Pewabic Pottery, and so on. By the time I got to Plum Tree Pottery I knew that John's model was probably not realistic for me. But ten years later, with graduate school behind me and five years into the establishment of my own business as a potter, I can look back and see how influential this time was. My work and John's could not be more different in terms of design and production, but the methodologies that I learned have woven their way into my daily work.

Lauria: Using descriptive adjectives, can you give a summation of what you absorbed during your apprenticeship?

Honesty, perseverance, hard work, innovation, health, goofiness, fun, respect, balance, technique, HUMAN KINDNESS.

JULIA WALTHER, RESIDENT, 2012 TO 2014:

Lauria: Looking back, what are your reflections on that experience?

Walther:

Again and again, I am so impressed that John trusts relative strangers to come share a year or more of his life with him in very close working quarters. I truly appreciated how much he accepted and found joy in each stage of the ceramic process, including tool-making, mixing glazes, and scraping shelves. All the chores were part of making the pots, and he did not feel the burden of them as I do sometimes. I am part of a very lucky group of potters that were able to be protected and grow underneath his watchful eye, and I am so impressed by how well he treated all of us spring chickens. He gave so much to me in terms of his personal philosophies, the intricacies of day-to-day transactions, and taking me everywhere with him-meeting artists, clients, and curators.

Lauria: How do you characterize the work you created while a resident at John Glick Studio?

My one-word answer: Juicy.

I was playing a lot with plump forms with dimples, which evolved into slip doodles and scribbles. I had not done too much with surface decoration before, and it took me a long while to unlock John's glazes to suit my purposes.

Lauria: What were some of the most meaningful practices in which you engaged during your residency?

Walther:

Learning to take an idea that was not fully formed and just taking the chance to try it was extremely valuable to me. Even if that particular piece did not make it, I had an answer and more information, leading to new ideas and new experiments. John had that playfulness every day in the studio; the excitement of chasing a new high in the ceramic process.

Lauria: What skills and knowledge do you think you acquired during your apprenticeship? Was one of your main objectives to become a practiced potter of functional forms?

Walther:

I wanted to make more of everything! I wanted to make so many pots that I could detach myself from too much investment in one. I learned to



Julia Walther
Sippin' Set, 2013
Made at Plum Tree Pottery
Stoneware
Bottle, 7 x 3 1/2 inches; Cups: 3 x 3 3/4 inches
Private Collection

Photo: Courtesy the Artist



Julia Walther
White & Gold Cacti Pitcher, 2014
Stoneware
11 x 7 x 5 inches
Private Collection
Photo: Courtesy the Artist

make pots in batches—spending the time working on a group of eight or twelve—which was much different from the small amounts of pots I threw in school. I learned the timing of clay.

Lauria: Using descriptive adjectives, can you give a summation of what you absorbed during your apprenticeship?

Walther:

The undaunted spirit of working the way you want to—to spend the minutes, hours, days, and weeks creating the life you want through chasing joy, excitement, and hard work.

Jo Lauria is a Los Angeles-based curator and writer and the current interim executive director of the Architecture and Design Museum>Los Angeles (A+D). She is a design and crafts specialist and author of several historical survey books and many essays and articles. Most recently, Lauria organized the exhibition Peter Shire, Public Work: Lines of Desire for the A+D Museum (2014), and Ralph Bacerra: Exquisite Beauty at the Ben Maltz Gallery, Otis College of Art and Design, Los Angeles (2015).

- 1 Bill Hunt, "John Glick," Ceramics Monthly 63, no. 8 (October 2015): 36–39.
- 2 John Glick, "An Approach to Mentoring in Full-Time Studio Pottery Practice," Studio Potter 31, no. 2 (June 2003): 15–16.
- 3 Ibid., 16.
- 4 John Glick, "Checking the Compass," *Ceramics Monthly* 38, no. 7 (September 1990): 33–38.
- 5 Glick, "An Approach to Mentoring in Full-Time Studio Pottery Practice."

*Other quotes or information not specifically footnoted are drawn from telephone interviews with John Glick that occurred from November 2015 through March 2016.