



CONVERSATIONS: A RETROSPECTIVE EXHIBITION

Georgette Zirbes '62

March 10 – April 9, 2017

DePauw University, Richard E. Peeler Art Center
10 W. Hanna Street, Greencastle, Indiana

From March 10 to April 9 the Peeler Art Center at DePauw University will host *Conversations: A Retrospective Exhibition* highlighting works by 1962 DePauw alumna, Georgette Zirbes. After teaching for 37 years at The University of Michigan, Georgette Zirbes now serves as the Arthur F. Thurnau Professor Emerita for the Stamps School of Art and Design. Professor Zirbes agreed to share some details about her artistic practice and career as a teacher in a written interview with Alexandra Chamberlain, Assistant Curator of Exhibitions and Education at DePauw University.

Having traveled and produced artwork all over the world, Professor Zirbes credits her time and experiences at DePauw for her accomplishments today:

"I came to DePauw in September 1958, attracted to a small liberal arts college that had a reputation for strong academics. Since I thought that I would be a chemistry major, I enrolled in a chemistry course my freshman year. I knew I needed a balance in my studies, so I also took a drawing class. Over the year, my time and energy shifted dramatically from chemistry to drawing. By the fall semester of my sophomore year, I was a visual art major.

The art department had moved into the old Carnegie Library just in time for classes to start in fall 1958. There were four full time faculty: Reid Winsey, Ray French, Garret Boone and Richard

Peeler. I did not understand until years later how fortunate I had been to have landed in a rigorous academic environment that included an art department that had four accomplished faculty members and a newly renovated facility, called The Art Center.

I took classes in 2D and 3D composition and graphic design (which we called Commercial Art in those days) with Garret Boone. He had just finished his MFA in painting at Indiana University and was very focused on preparing students for a professional career. He taught me about the responsibility and seriousness of the role of an artist while at the same time encouraging the integration of visual play and humor into the work. His teaching was always a mixture of structure and freedom, something that I have sought to integrate in both my teaching and my making.

I did not take a ceramics class until my junior year, but I knew before I took the class that ceramics would be my concentration. Richard Peeler had recently been hired and was committed to building a strong and energetic program. He had a focused and rigorous work ethic that was contagious. He was a vessel maker but he also exposed us to artists who were working to deconstruct the vessel. He emphasized the integration of art and craft in working with clay. The basement of The Art Center was my home for the next two years.

I came from a working class family where education resulting



Cover image: *Drotarska Conversations #5* / 2007, Academy of Art and Design, Bratislava, Slovak Republic. 10 inches x 10 inches x 3 tiles. Modra factory shards. Photo credit: Patrick Young.

Left image: *Georgette in her studio* / 2017. Photo credit: Jodi Burton.

Below image: *Halle Conversations #9* / 2000, Hochschule fur Kunst Und Design, Halle, Saxony-Anhalt, Germany. 16 inches high x 19 inches wide x 4 inches deep. Meissen factory shards. Photo credit: Patrick Young.

Bottom image: *Gang of Ten* / 2009, San Bao International Ceramic Art Institute, Jingdezhen, Jiangxi, China. 14 inch equilateral triangle created by 10 cups on plexi cylinders. Chinese folk pottery shards. Photo credit: Patrick Young.



the energy and commitment of artists who were politically and economically deprived and yet, did so much with limited resources. My connection with these artists led to an invitation to my first International Symposium in 1990 outside Prague. One connection then led to another, and by 2009 I had participated in 16 international residencies. I felt like my work had become an entry card, a visual passport, to the world."

More than thirty of Professor Zirbes's works will be on display for *Conversations: A Retrospective Exhibition*. Spanning across her series, travels, and influences, visitors can witness not only a body of work developed through constant change and growth, but also the process of creativity throughout an artist's life.

in a job was the key to my future. My likely destination was to be teaching in the public schools somewhere in the Chicago area, but I just wanted to keep learning and making stuff. Richard Peeler talked to me about graduate school and had visiting artists talk to me about the three strong programs at that time, Alfred University, Cranbrook Academy of Art, and The Ohio State University. I had no money and my portfolio was minimal, representing just four semesters of ceramic work. Richard Peeler had contacts at Ohio State and helped me put together my portfolio. I was admitted and received full financial aid and was ready for a big university experience."

After graduating from The Ohio State University in 1964 with a M.A. degree, Professor Zirbes realized her artistic practice could be her guide to exploring the world:

"I always wanted the nature of travel to be integrated with my professional work. When I committed to the life of an artist, I thought France would be my travel after college, so I studied the French language at DePauw. Then I got hooked on ceramics and as a graduate student discovered Japan and its rich ceramic traditions. I was fortunate to receive a Fulbright Grant and lived and worked in Japan from 1964 to 1967, a life changing experience. Later, in 1985, I made my first trip across the Atlantic, traveling with my sister and my uncle to our ancestral village in Eastern Slovakia. I saw images that were familiar to me, though I had never actually seen them. I knew I needed to return for a more extensive period. I received a Fulbright Grant to (what was then) Czechoslovakia in 1987. I spent six months visiting artists, studios, museums, galleries and studying ceramic traditions. I was impressed with