

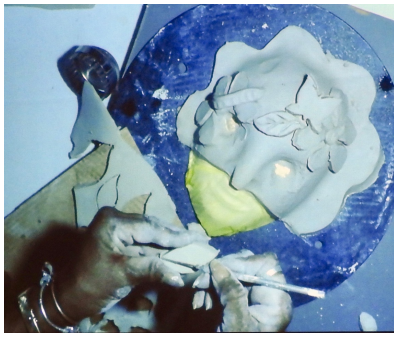
**Demonstration**  
**February 4, 2019**  
**Mary Kay Thomas - Creativity with Ceramics - Mardi Gras Masks**



On this balmy 57-degree evening in February, close to 30 members came to see our featured artist, **Mary Kay Thomas**, work her magic with clay. She immediately went to work demonstrating how to make a Mardi Gras half mask. Thanks to our president, Lee Peters' audio/visual setup, everyone in the room got to see every detail and step along the way. Mary Kay placed her already rolled out clay, which was about 1/4-inch thick, over a form. Working with both hands, she molded the clay to the form and set the



eye sockets. She said that when rolling out the clay, "it must not be too thin or too thick, 1/2" to 1/4" is just about right." She gets her clay from Ohio Ceramic Supply in Ravenna. Using her sculpting tools (and she has a lot of them in plastic, wood and metal), we watched as she created a scalloped edge. She then created clay flower petals, a butterfly, caterpillar, bumblebee, leaves and vines, all of which she layered, artistically, around the mask.



When working with children, Mary Kay especially likes using cookie cutters. For our mask, she used a cutter with a corrugated edge that added texture to the leaves and vines. The mask she created gave the illusion of a flower with the nose being the flower's center. She likes to show movement in her work, like the 3-D caterpillar and butterfly she added, or the octopus and sea shell on the Aquaman mask, which she also brought to show us different possibilities.



The next step in the process was to glue all the pieces in place using a method Mary Kay called 'score & slip'. Slip is a clay glue. Picking up each of the previously placed pieces, she scored the back with her fingernail, then painted it with the slip glue and replaced it on the mask. Then, she refined the edges with a damp sponge. Curing comes next. "Working with clay is like a science project," she said, as she described how to cure it. First, cover it with a plastic bag with no holes for a couple of days and let it get sweaty. Then, open up the bag and let some air in until the clay gets leather hard. Continue to watch it and refine it again. As moisture leaves the clay, the mask shrinks away from the form. The mask takes about 10 days to totally dry. Kiln firing is next. It takes about 3 1/2 hours for a bisque fire, which is the first firing of the mask before it is glazed. She adds color after the first firing and uses a simple lead-free glaze. "Glazing is a process unto itself," she said. She had us imagine what colors we would paint 'our' flower mask....bright colors, of course, in hues of blues, greens, pinks, purples.



Mary Kay warned that you need to treat clay with the utmost respect, as it can be dangerous. She warned that the mask must be totally dry before putting it into the kiln, otherwise it could explode. Clay dust can be very toxic if you inhale it. Plus, clay dries your hands...."no more pretty nails," she quipped.

We learned more about her as the evening went on. As a young child, Mary Kay was strongly influenced by her mother and grandmother, who both played the piano and were active in the visual arts. She learned to embroider at age five and then at age ten she attended Karamu House, where she learned about clay and took lessons in ceramics. Mary Kay started making masks with school age children about 20 years ago. To quote her, "we live our lives behind masks." Art is therapy for her. She teaches art classes at the Children's Museum and participates in the Cleveland Heights summer enrichment program for children. We asked her how she comes up with her ideas, she said, "I dream and then I create. I can see it in my head." She also likes to sculpt in metals, especially copper. Plus, she is a very accomplished acrylic painter. We thank Mary Kay Thomas for a very entertaining and informative evening of art!



At the end, everyone was so caught up in her demonstration that instead of rushing to the refreshment table, we moved to get a closer look at the masks Mary Kay had created, and to ask her more questions. However, we soon 'went for' the delicious homemade treats provided by **Sandi Richards** and **Ellen Howard**. The theme for the evening's refreshments was 'Valentine Table....Going Red'. Two favorites were the red velvet filled mini cupcakes that Sandi made and the 'cherry bomb' cookies, officially called 'Galaxy' cookies, made by Ellen from an old family recipe. We also enjoyed veggies with red pepper hummus, oatmeal cookies, Linzer cookies, and chocolate candy hearts. Thank you, Sandi and Ellen!

