

# Osa Atoe

## Ceramicist

She's a ceramicist who works in red stoneware clay. Stoneware is dense pottery fired at high temperatures to make it resistant to liquids. Thus so much of Osa's works are vessels of some sort: mugs, tea sets, jugs, vases and commemorative jars or urns.

When COVID hit she wondered what would happen to her business. She worked solely from her home and found, "people were buying pottery like it was going out of style." Added to that were the Zoom classes she offered to students that had "amazing attendance." She now works from her North Sarasota studio where she crafts each beautiful piece. She also has 53,000 followers on Instagram.

There's such a soothing quality to sitting at the wheel and throwing a pot. The hypnotic spin of the clay in motion, the rhythmic sound of the motor and wheel, the fascination with seeing the clay rising from a clump of earth to a graceful column or bowl.

Artist Osa Atoe (pronounced ah-toy) gets to experience this in her north Sarasota studio every time she sits at her wheel. Her creativity fills the shelves of her compact studio space that also has a glazing station and a kiln.

All artists have to have a sense of curiosity as well as creativity. Perhaps that's the order to Osa's career. Rather than art school, a friend told her about a wheel-throwing class she was taking at a community studio. "So...I took a lesson," Osa explains, and that turned into taking all the classes they had to offer and soon after, "I was hooked," she recalls. This was back in New Orleans. She moved on to another studio and learned to make glazes as well as load and unload a kiln. The curiosity continued with YouTube classes and, as she succinctly puts it, "I taught myself."

A couple of years later, after moving to Baton Rouge, Osa completed a one-year post-baccalaureate program for ceramics at Louisiana State University. Her husband Joe's job offer with engineering firm Kimley-Horn brought them to Sarasota back in August, 2020, but they had visited the west coast of Florida many times as both of them love the beach.

Osa had always sold her artwork online and in person at various popups. But when COVID hit, like so many of us, she wondered what would happen, and if anyone would be buying pottery during a pandemic. Louisiana she explains was "locked down hard" and she worked diligently solely from her home and suddenly found, "people were buying pottery like it was going out of style. I sold a lot." Added to that were the Zoom classes she offered to students that had "amazing attendance." She also has 53,000 followers on Instagram.

You could theorize people were home a lot and surfing the web, or maybe they had expendable income, or maybe they

wanted something to add to the new home office they had, or maybe they just wanted something nice to look at.

But that doesn't take into account how beautiful her work is. Osa works in red stoneware clay. Stoneware is dense pottery fired at high temperatures to make it resistant to liquids. It's made from clay, but is more durable than other kinds of pottery and earthenware. Stoneware gets its name from its stone-like qualities.

Which explains why so much of Osa's works are vessels of some sort: mugs, tea sets, jugs, vases and commemorative jars or urns, the latter being used for holding a loved one's remains. A perusal of her website in December showed that everything has sold out. Worry not, Osa took a breather for the holidays, but will be back with more in 2022 — and collectors will be waiting.

Her artist statement on her website (<https://potterybyosa.com/pages/about>) reveals not just her story and her love for pottery, but a bit about her earlier career (15 years) as a punk rock artist (bass and violin), author and columnist. Unlike clay, "punk is very forgiving," she notes. She lived on the west coast and performed with her band throughout the U.S. and Europe.

You'll also read there a bit about her life. "...as a child of Nigerian immigrants living in a post-colonial and global reality. The

United States is a multicultural nation and our daily lives are comprised of an amalgamation of various immigrant and indigenous influences. Furthermore,

I can't erase the ways that British colonization interrupted the cultural identities and practices of my parents and grandparents. I want my pottery to reflect all of this, so I study work from disparate regions and eras, from the Ibo of Nigeria to ancient Cypress, from the Acoma and Pueblo to Ethiopia, as well as contemporary American studio pottery. However, at the end of the day, as it's all translated through my hands, I've hopefully created a rich and widely accessible body of work that doesn't look like anyone else's but my own."

STORY: Louise Bruderle  
IMAGES: Evelyn England

