From the gown trade to the clay table

Since she was 17, Bayje Pomeroy has been making her living as an artist in some way or another. A year after moving to Santa Cruz in 1969, she was selling her hand-made dresses to stores in town.

Following high school, she started taking classes at Cabrillo College and received two associates degrees: one in studio arts and one in art history. Along the way, she found a passion for clay. But it was only recently that she could really dive into her craft, as she spent the last 25 years running her own business designing and manufacturing wedding dresses.

"Stopping the gown trade finally gave me the time to devote to clay," says Pomeroy. "I’m a ceramist," she says. "For me, a potter is someone who primarily produces functional wares, which I do, but I also do sculptures and many non-functional pieces." Such pieces include a series of striking, hand-painted porcelain plates, charming tea pots, clay chairs and more.

"My pieces are thin, whimsical, light-weight, off-centered, and show movement," says Pomeroy, who adds signature touches by painting and decorating her work with hearts, geese, ladybugs, stars, and mermaids.

With myriad ideas and multiple projects going all at one time, Pomeroy admits that her clay life would be easier if she stuck to one idea and finished it, but it’s just not her style. The creative flow is where it’s at for Pomeroy, who often finds inspiration in the outdoors, and especially in France where she resides part-time and has a studio.

"Clay has given me a freedom that cloth never did," says Pomeroy. "A chance to mold, to stretch, to work in a material that is soft and recyclable. Working with clay is putting my hands in the earth, and most importantly, it’s the freedom to never again need to be precise."

Learn more about the artist at bayjedesigns.com and myfrenchstonehouse.com.

Rediscoversing the lure of art

Half way through her sophomore year at the University of Akron, Sandy Shaw decided she wanted to be financially independent. For her, this meant changing directions from fine art to international business. "Although I changed my major and worked full-time in the corporate world, I continued to paint regularly," says Shaw, who eventually created enough work to begin exhibiting. In 1999 she ditched corporate America to come full circle and pursue her art again.

Now 43, she makes a living selling her paintings and teaching. "I encourage (my students) to pursue their hearts’ desire," she says. "If they love art, then go for it. I grew up believing the myth that you can’t make a living as an artist. However, in reality, there are many creative careers where you can make a very nice living." But most importantly, she believes that if you take time to create and express yourself, you will enrich your life and the lives of those around you."

For Shaw, that creativity comes by way of being a representational abstract painter. She uses acrylics, ink and mixed media on canvas, and also does watercolor paintings. For Shaw, her artistic process begins when she spots a beautiful landscape or colorful flower (not hard in these parts). She studies the subject, then renders realistic drawings and watercolor paintings of it.

"It’s like a visual meditation for me," she says. "I’m quiet and still, and through careful observation, drawing, and painting the subject, I begin to embody an intimate understanding of it."

Next, she turns on the music and expresses her personal interpretation of that subject on a canvas. "I freely draw a deeply personal and stylized interpretation of the spirit of the subject I’m exploring," she explains. And then the rest of the painting unfolds in layers: ink, rice paper and thin, translucent layers of paint, and in the end, she aims to “honor the history of the painting’s evolution” so upon close inspection, a viewer will see original ink drawings from the first few layers.

In the end, she creates vibrant, rich, jewel-toned images that she hopes provide an “uplifting energy.”

Take a closer look at her work at sandyshawart.com.