

## *'Mujeres del Mediterráneo'*

### **Paige McMahon**

Visiting Europe this year, I discovered the country which most reflected my personal ideal was Spain. An image which comes to mind reflecting the Mediterranean is one of a dry rural town with cactus' in old clay pots, a pink clay building and with old women sitting nearby eating traditional foods. Another image is almost of the reverse, with young women on white sand beaches with crystal clear blue water as the backdrop. My trip to Spain, France and Italy is that which influenced bringing my ideas to reality. Visiting the Denon wing in the 'Louvre' and looking at the Islamic tile art it inspired me to work on tiles.

The name of my work is 'Mujeres del Mediterráneo' which translates to 'Women of the Mediterranean'. I chose this statement as the title of my piece because it describes the relation of my work to the Mediterranean countries I visited and the portrayal of women that could identify with both through the art I saw and my own personal interactions.

The sixteen tiles which make up the first piece of my body of works have reflected these ideas that I gained from my experiences. Each tile is individual and is constructed and inspired by my trip to Europe, specifically Spain and pre-conceived ideas I imagined of the Mediterranean. The vibrant earthy colours, which I both saw and imagined, were used to help create the colour scheme of my tiles. Many tiles contain; mandarin, blue, yellow and purple. These colours all complement one another and reflect the warmth of the Mediterranean. The satin glaze helped as it saturated the colours and helped emphasise the painting qualities I wanted. Four of the tiles have arches incorporated into their design which is an architectural feature from that derived from Italy. From wandering the streets in Spain and Italy, in particular, I realised that all buildings have arched windows and door frames. Similarly, Helen Lundeborg, an artist who inspired me, often draws landscapes through a window or arch. Her style is simplistic and is something I had to adjust with in my painting of the tiles as the underglazes are not forgiving and don't allow shadowing to be done easily. With no previous experience of working with tiles or underglazes I wasn't sure it was going to turn out as I intended, as I had only painted on traditional surfaces before.

The four 'body' tiles were inspired by Picasso. Many of the galleries visited on my Europe trip displayed his works, and I found that he could work on a variety of media to achieve distinct styles. Picasso is known for his stylised and abstract works that he developed after starting very early in life as a gifted realism artist, and there is no exception with the human body. Two of the 'body' tiles are black and white, to break up the continuity of coloured tiles and also make these two tiles distinct from the others. They show there is no vision of what is considered the average or normal human figure, it can be any shape or size, any length or width. As a young women, I feel that displaying this is important with young women being so critical and struggling with their body image.

Anne-Fleur Kan is a spokesman for embracing the women's figure. Her works with clay inspired me to try and sculpt my own figures. The second part to my body of works is a series of big and small sculptures that compliment and contrast with the tiles work. These sculptures can also be seen as vessels/pots and are shaped using my ideas on Mediterranean women, seen with imperfections but content. The small sculptures show women torsos, one is curvy, slim and the other is pregnant. It is important to show the women's figures in all different shapes because when women view my work I

want them to have the idea of inclusivity. Each body has its own beauty. The larger sculpture depicts the torso, bottom and left shoulder. The sculpture which is shaped like a bottom is curvy however it is not smooth, bumps were intentionally left to replicate cellulite something which many women worry about, something which is natural and should be embrace. The other two other large sculptures have breasts, one reflects youth and the other maturity. Breasts are idealised as young and small, for women with large or mature breasts can feel that youth has been lost and the ideals of the human body challenged. These things are things women can't help or change and they are quietly often self-conscious as considered unappealing in contemporary society.

In the countries, I visited there seemed to be less concern about body image and this can be reflected in these works. In my work, I wanted to identify women as being beautiful in their own individual way. The use of a metallic glaze helps those sculptures appear solid and demonstrate the strength of women across time and culture.

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