

Faculty PROFILE

of Irina Okula



PHOTO BY DAVID OXTON.

“IRINA OKULA IS THE ENVY of her fellow teachers. Her classes are so popular they have waiting lists, her ceramics students are winning more awards than ever before, and her own art career is soaring. Irina Okula, steady and modest, has quietly become a rock star at Govs.

Visit Kaiser Art Building at lunchtime almost any day of the week, and you will find a row of students sitting at the potter’s wheels in the ceramics room. Most of the students are doing extra work on ceramic projects, but some of the students aren’t even in Irina’s class! They are taking advantage of a wonderful opportunity—to spend time with one of the best ceramics

teachers in New England. And there’s Irina, sitting in the middle of them, patiently working with any student who needs extra help. Just amazing.

Irina is truly a lifelong learner—always going to workshops, always bringing back new techniques that she puts into play in her classroom. The unguarded excitement she displays when she’s figured out a fresh new way to shape clay or when she’s discovered a new glazing method is an important reason why her classes remain so vibrant.

We dominate the Boston Globe Scholastic Art Awards every year because we have a special weapon. Irina’s students crush every competition with ambitious, meticulously crafted pieces. Eight of her ceramics students have earned recognition at the national level. Irina’s own ceramic artwork is very highly regarded—it is featured in magazines and sold in the best galleries in New England. Irina is constantly invited to major shows. At the Smithsonian Craft Show, she won the Excellence in Ceramics Award in 2015—the highest honor given to a sculptural ceramics artist—and at the Fuller Craft Museum she won the Juror’s Choice Award in 2014.

Irina is a very big deal. An incredible artist working at the top of her game. An inspiring teacher whose classes have waiting lists. Although she’s been teaching at The Academy for thirty years, she has never grown comfortable. She is always trying to improve. Our students are lucky to have a teacher as passionate and talented as Irina Okula at Govs.”

– David Oxton P’03, ’08

Years at the Academy

Thirty years

Education

BA, Fontbonne University,
St. Louis, MO
MFA in Ceramics,
Southern Illinois University

Faculty Duties

Ceramics Instructor: 1987–present
JV Girls Tennis: 1987–2000
Coordinator of the annual
“Soups On” fundraiser: 2002–present
Boston Globe Scholastic Art Show
Coordinator in Ceramics: 1990–present

Favorite Books

The Hero with a Thousand Faces
by Joseph Campbell, *The Forger’s Spell*
by Edward Dolnick, *Maria: The Potter*
of San Ildefonso by Alice Marriott

Favorite Music

The Kingston Trio, The Beatles,
The Who, Johnny Cash, and Vivaldi

Activities and Interests

Traveling, walking at Bradley Palmer
Park, going to an art museum, visiting
art galleries, attending summer art
workshops, and traveling to China
and Japan.

Passions

Attending workshops, doing my own
work, participating in craft shows, and
firing the “Dottie Bragdon” soda kiln.

Greatest Satisfaction

Family, grandchildren, getting
accepted to the Philadelphia Museum
Craft Shows and the Smithsonian Craft
Shows, receiving the excellence in
Ceramics Award at the Smithsonian
Craft Show in 2015, and hearing one
of my students get excited about their
ceramics work and want to take it home.