



Irene Deloris Berchtenbreiter

(1914 -)

“Sometimes something beautiful comes,” Irene Berchtenbreiter thoughtfully acknowledges. A brilliantly creative and intuitive artist, she adventurously delves into her vivid imagination for inspiration, often unsure of the subject, style, colour or shape of a piece until it is completely finished. Her artistic passion and natural talent seem the catalyst for her intimate expressions, revealing her vibrant, youthful soul.

Over her 60-year career, Irene has worked with such prominent artists as John Mason and Jumbo Auciello and explored various mediums, ultimately preferring clay, because of the “great and crazy things” she can do with it.

As a young child, Irene nurtured her artistic spirit through reading and creative writing, often escaping to a spare room in her Vancouver home to daydream. Developing her talent privately, as curriculum art classes sought to discourage her independent spirit, Irene was finally presented with the opportunity to explore her creativity during the summer of 1932 at a retreat with Jack Shadbolt. After this “fabulous and fantastic” experience, Irene enjoyed a brief career as a teacher before marrying Hans Berchtenbreiter, a German architect, in 1939.

The couple settled in an Adobe house in Thousand Oaks, CA, where they developed and sold pre-fabricated bricks to a large clientele, pursued their artistic endeavours and lived a “poor, but happy” life. Moving back to Canada in 1968, ten years after Hans’ death, Irene continued to explore her creative side, working for the White Spot restaurant chain as their interior designer, exciting her interest in quirky relics that she enigmatically describes as “interesting.”

Eventually retiring to Mission in 1980, she surrounds herself with the eccentric décor of her McConnell Creek home that is quintessentially “Irene.” A great lover of animals, she keeps four sheep, a faithful dog, a bundle of cats and kittens and doves and finches as company. She has the freedom to pursue her artwork full time and values this personal independence. “I don’t make plans,” Irene affirms. “Life just goes on and changes and surprises come.”

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