

McCarty Pottery by deborah fagan carpenter



Word of mouth is apparently all they need to draw a crowd. Without signage, who would guess that behind the weathered Delta Cypress wall, surrounded by thick bamboo, one would find an amazing art environment created by Merigold, Mississippi potters, Lee and Pup McCarty. I had been buying McCarty Pottery for years from shop owners around the South, all of whom advised me to make a pilgrimage to the studio in the Delta where the couple created their unique, minimalist work. So in the spring of 1992, I made the two hour trip from Memphis to the little "Oasis in the Delta," and was immediately enchanted with these two artists, their work and the unique world they had created on an entire city block built from the cypress, which was once a mule barn owned by Lee's Aunt Margaret Smith.

I realized that I had dropped right into the absolute essence of Mississippi Art the moment I entered the studio. There is an indescribable element which often, but not always infuses the art, music and writing that emanates from the state, and the McCartys had completely captured it in their work and the environment in which they created it. The spirit of that creativity permeated the walls of the small shop and was present in every vignette that beautifully displayed the enormous variety of pottery. Paintings they had collected, including one of the petite Pup and the strikingly tall Lee, added interest and intrigue to the unique pottery displays, and was indicative of the extent to which the two had surrounded their lives with art.



Outside the shop was a lush garden, filled with every plant and herb imaginable, and studded with hundreds of pieces of the owner's pottery. A shed near the lap pool housed a long concrete table, on which I imagined the couple hosting fabulous garden dinners.

As I roamed the extensive menagerie of garden rooms, I was fascinated to see how found objects, furniture, sculpture, Delta memorabilia and even religious icons had



been woven into the work of art that was this cypress wonderland.

In the years since, I have made many trips to the quaint Southern town to eat at the McCarty's Gallery tea room, (*another day's post*) shop for pottery and wander through the garden. Pup was taken by illness a few years ago, but it was clear from a recent visit to



the studio that Lee, now in his 80s is still creating art, although currently in the form of ceramic jewelry. I inquired about the parties in the garden, and he said that indeed they had many memorable dinners there, and that Pup would always dress in something fun and festive, even on the evenings when it was just family. His nephews Jamie and Stephen Smith are now carrying on the family tradition, making and selling the unmistakable pottery, with the simple, but elegant glazes, each decorated with a small symbol of the Mississippi River. (photos by fagan carpenter)

www.mccartyspottery.com

