

CERAMICS GALLERIST LESLIE FERRIN TRACKS HER 40-YEAR JOURNEY IN “ARE WE THERE YET?”

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Leslie Ferrin at Ferrin Contemporary in 2023, with works by Chris Antemann, Lauren Mabry, and Sergei Isupov. Photo courtesy Ferrin Contemporary; John Polak Photography

“[Are We There Yet?](#)” opening at [Ferrin Contemporary](#) on July 15 is not just another Berkshire summer gallery exhibition. Well, it is and it’s not. Most works, including newly created pieces, are for sale. But some are on loan from private collectors and artist archives, which is odd for a commercial gallery —particularly one of this caliber. Ferrin Contemporary is renowned for its specialization in contemporary ceramics and introduction of living clay artists to a wider population of art appreciators and collectors.

But “Are We There Yet?” is a uniquely introspective exhibition for gallery owner [Leslie Ferrin](#) as well as the 20 participating artists and the community at large. You could call it a survey show, but not of a specific artist’s work. It’s a survey show of the gallery itself.

“We hit our fortieth year during the pandemic,” Ferrin says. “It didn’t seem right to celebrate at a time when people couldn’t gather.”

Ferrin began her career as an artist studying ceramics and glass at Hampshire College in Amherst, Massachusetts. After graduating in 1979, she co-founded a ceramic studio and gallery called Pinch Pottery in Thornes Marketplace, Northampton, with friends [Mara Superior](#) and [Barbara Walch](#). “It was an incubator,” says Ferrin. It was also the first of many manifestations of Ferrin’s entrepreneurial and community spirit which, coupled with her love of ceramics, became her guiding principles. “We were artists who wanted to sell our own

work and [the work of] others who worked in clay in our community,” she says of her goals at the time. “We were exploring what people were doing in the field.”



Mara Superior, Reproduction Rights, 2023, porcelain. Although several classic works by “Are We There Yet?” exhibiting artists are not for sale, new works—including this piece by Mara Superior—will be. Photo courtesy Ferrin Contemporary; John Polak Photography

Ferrin grew more interested in the curatorial and sales side of the business and, in 1987, opened Ferrin Gallery inside the business now known as [PINCH!](#) after it moved across the street. The 1990s marked the start of Ferrin’s relationship with two important people in her life: [Donald Clark](#), her former longtime business partner, and [Sergei Isupov](#), an artist who she’s represented for over 25 years.

Interestingly, the more Ferrin and Clark participated in art fairs in major American art markets including Chicago, Los Angeles, Miami, and New York City, the more the Berkshires were calling. “The collectors who we met nationally were likely to summer here because of cultural tourism,” she says. So, in 2002, they relocated the gallery to Lenox.

The brick-and-mortar gallery allowed the duo to invest not just in their business, but in community initiatives as well as the burgeoning careers of local arts professionals. “[Lenox-based artist] [Maggie Mailer](#) was our first gallery associate,” she says. Others came to work for Ferrin through the Berkshire Hills Internship Program (BHIP), a now-defunct program of the Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts. BHIP lured dozens of young, international arts administrators to the region at a time when student retention was low and the county was hemorrhaging young adults. Cities and towns across the Berkshires were leveraging the arts for downtown revitalization in the 2000s, and Ferrin played an important role in this movement — particularly in Pittsfield, where the gallery was located from 2007 to 2013.

Moving to the Berkshires also gave Ferrin and Clark an opportunity to support a more diverse range of local artists. “Ceramics was always at our core,” she explains. “But [in Pittsfield] we started to show painting, photography, and sculpture by artists in the region. It was very community-based.”

Hundreds of artworks by local artists have graced the walls and pedestals of Ferrin Gallery. [Mark Shapiro](#), a Worthington-based studio potter whose work can be seen in “Are We There Yet?” had his first solo show at the gallery in 2007. Ferrin exhibited dozens of local artists in group shows and mounted solo shows by Mailer (paintings), the late [John Stritch](#) (silkscreen prints), [Paul Graubard](#) (mixed media), [Susan Mikula](#) (photography), [Joe Goodwin](#) (paintings), and [Michael Boroniec](#) (ceramics), among others.

“It was serendipitous that one of the strongest ceramic gallery programs existed in Pittsfield, my hometown,” says Boroniec, who is currently represented by Kasper Contemporary. “I would frequent the gallery openings, seeing some of the most important contemporary ceramics. It was soon after that Leslie added me to her roster of artists. She gave me opportunities that most young artists would have to work at for several years.”

Ferrin has always been able to adapt her business model to meet the changing demands of the market—a testament to her longevity. In 2014, as her clientele grew internationally and a lively northern Berkshire arts community emerged around activities and programs at MASS MoCA, Williams College Museum of Art, and The Clark, the gallery reopened as Ferrin Contemporary. Occupying prime real estate on MASS MoCA’s campus, it is focused on shows and collaborations that support the clay artists she’s represented for decades.

Consistent over the past 40 years is Ferrin’s unwavering commitment to artistic production and career development. “The role that we play is to connect artists with the public and create an opportunity for them to make new work through sales,” she says. What a thing to celebrate!

“Are We There Yet?”

Ferrin Contemporary

1315 MASS MoCA Way, North Adams, MA

On view July 15-September 2, 2023

Opening reception August 3, 5-7 p.m.