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Lewes artist visits White House

Morty Bachar creates a piece for the Japanese prime minister



Lewes artist Morty Bachar recently was commissioned by the U.S. State Department to create a kintsugi pottery piece ahead of a visit by Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida. RYAN MAVITY PHOTO

By Ryan Mavity
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Lewes artist Morty Bachar found himself taking part in international relations when he was approached by the U.S. Department of State to create a special piece for Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida.

Bachar, who runs Lakeside Pottery Studio out of his home with his partner Patty Storms, created a bowl using the art of kintsugi, a Japanese word about the art of taking a piece of pottery and mending it. Bachar, a native of Israel who lives in Lewes, said kintsugi is more like a metaphor than an art style. He said the legend of kintsugi says that a Japanese king had a piece that had broken in the kiln and was fixed using gold, appearing better than it was before. Bachar said the concept of kintsugi can apply to anything in life.

“It shows the journey of your recovery and your courage,” he said. He said kintsugi is an almost therapeutic style, both for the client and for him. “I connect to the story so that when I make it, I’m inserting a piece of me in it to help them,” Bachar said.

Ahead of Kishida's visit April 10, Bachar was asked by the State Department to create a kintsugi piece as a gift and symbol of friendship toward Japan. He was told the piece must be made in the U.S. and have some Japanese influence. Bachar said he had the idea to use a Japanese tea bowl as the basis for the project.

He first made the bowl using 2 pounds of clay, which he molded, shaped, dried and then glazed and fired in a kiln. And that's when the magic of kintsugi, which has existed for 1,000 years, begins. Bachar said kintsugi originated by using urushi lacquer to mend the pieces together. The lines are then painted with gold and burnished to allow the gold to blend in.

After assembling the bowl, Bachar then broke it, so that it could be reassembled. He used his polymer-based binding agent and then used gold powder to decorate the piece and give it the lines associated with kintsugi.

Bachar got into pottery art full time in his 40s after what he jokingly called a mid-life crisis.

"I wanted to be a ceramic artist," he said. "I took some classes and loved it."

He then started a studio, where he did his own works and taught classes. Much of his work is in pottery restoration, while Storms creates her own pieces.

Happy with his kintsugi piece, the White House invited Bachar to the reception where President Joe Biden and Kishida were present. Storms could not come, so Bachar brought along his daughter, Danielle.

"We were maybe 30 feet from the president," he said. "The most significant moment for me wasn't the prestigious recognition of my art at the White House, but rather the pride and joy I saw in my daughter Danielle as she joined me for this occasion. As parents, we often strive to set examples for our children. Seeing our children take an interest in and appreciate our passions is one of the most rewarding experiences. It's a moment of validation, knowing that our efforts have not only made a difference in our own lives but have also influenced and inspired the next generation."



Morty Bachar's kintsugi piece that was given to Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida as a symbol of friendship between the United States and Japan. SUBMITTED PHOTO



Morty Bachar at the White House.



Morty Bachar in the kiln room making the piece.



The pot being thrown.