Written by Michael LoGuidice
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The current show at the MidCoast Fine Arts Gallery in LeClaire features two well-known artists in the Quad Cities scene, and for those who know their work, the exhibit holds no surprises. Katie Kiley and Akiko Koiso have highly developed styles, and their work is of a uniformly high quality, using themes, colors, and shapes that do not depart much from the artists' recent compositions.

For the past three years, Kiley has concentrated on hands and gestures. She has a series of the Buddhist mudras, showing various hand gestures, and it forms the bulk of this exhibit.

In a departure from the hand theme, she has included two prints of her Celtic Cross. These feature the Christian form of the Celtic Cross, with one of the four arms longer than the others, rather than the more ancient pagan Celtic Cross with its four arms of equal length. It is an interesting choice, because the mudras are ancient sacred images, whereas the Christian Celtic Cross is a relatively modern image compared to the pagan form.

Kiley is quite literate, and her artist statement conveys her message quite well: "My art is about communication, i.e., the need to share something important and personal. For years I have searched for imagery that best conveys those ineffable thoughts, emotions, and spiritual insights that interest me most. This search has led me to a forked path on a visual journey that engages the imagery of the hand. In one direction, hands communicate through gesture – from the ancient sacred sign language of the mudras to modern secular sign language. In the other direction, hands communicate through touch – physical, immediate communication that, when positive, connects, comforts, and even heals.

"I am particularly intrigued with the historical, 'archival' vantage point of gestural imagery. Hand gestures are a natural accompaniment to spoken language. They elaborate and enrich verbal communication. Unlike the fleeting word, the visual hand sign is more permanent. And unlike the written word, the gesture is more universal."

Koiso's ceramics are quite refined, and this show does not disappoint. Her color palette and choice of forms are similar to those she has developed over the past several years.

Her artist statement is as simple and elegant as her work: "Most of my sculpture and vessels are handbuilt using a combination of slabbing, draping, and press-moulding techniques. Rough construction, manipulation, and decoration (carving and incising) are achieved during the clay's leather-hard stages, constantly re-adjusting moisture level to maintain the perfect working condition. …

"For more than 17 years, I have expressed my joy working with clay and have gained a reputation as a ceramist who specializes in raku work and underglazed ceramic sculpture. [The] majority of the works are abstract shapes, reflecting and melding the traditional Japanese aesthetic with a contemporary sensibility. My works do not embody symbolic meaning or philosophical statement. They are simply a reflection of myself."

This show does not break new ground for either artist, but does give the viewer a chance to enjoy the well-executed, mature style that each artist is known for.