

VISUAL ARTS & ARCHITECTURE

## Sure hands and heart

### Sculptures, pottery have a folkloric groundedness

By DEBRA WOLF

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Two ceramists at Signature Shop and Gallery offer pleasurable works with a distinctly different touch.

Ellen Shankin's teapots, cups, plates and pitchers are nationally recognized and exhibited in both museum and private collections, yet fully intended for everyday use.



Debra Wolf

Jenny Mendes' 'Mother's Milk' offers a view of duality and continuity: The mother's eyes are open and closed; future generations lie within her belly. The striking combination of soft red, black and white further emphasizes what is halved as well as what is whole and connected.

Strong, simple profiles and earthen hues highlight her ceramics. Her paella dish, for example, exemplifies an understated handling of form and color. Its handles appear gracefully fluted, slightly curled and suggestive of leaves. Bands of saturated red, sage, brown and dripping glaze are used to fine effect, enhancing the circular shape of the dish, as well as its deep interior and softly rounded brim.

Shankin's "Red Pitcher" shows off an intriguing flattened edge alluding to a pagodalike element, which is referenced more directly in other works. Subtle, horizontal lines with [charcoal](#) undertones wrap around the pitcher's body, while similar vertical striations lead the eye toward a lean, high spout, emphasizing clarity of form.

Jenny Mendes, trained at the highly regarded Penland School of the Arts in North Carolina, creates an array of delightful sculptures that draw from multicultural folkloric sources.

"Mother's Milk" illustrates the female's role as life giver, as well as the perpetuation of the generations. A two-headed woman (one face with eyes closed; the other, eyes open) offers a tranquil image, her triangular body housing a younger female inside the belly. Under each arm, this second figure clutches a rabbit (symbol of fertility), while in her lap lies a male in near fetal position.



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Ellen Shankin's 'Red Pitcher' has a modernist, flattened edge and elegant form.



Mendes' birds are charming, wide-eyed creatures, brightly patterned in flurries of dots, spots, stripes, leaves, lines and diamonds.

An irresistible series of tall, conical birds features heads in turquoise, yellow, green and blue. Wide-eyed and sharply beaked and with vividly decorated bodies in bright dots, spots, stripes and squiggles, these charming and somehow canny creatures bear a totemlike quality offered in very human scale.

In Shankin's works, we see the beauty of pottery in clean lines and functional usage — warm, inviting to the hand, impeccably executed. In Mendes' sculptures, the storyteller intertwines humanity, nature and imagination in a festive, celebratory blend of all three.

#### REVIEW

##### Ellen Shankin, Jenny Mendes

Through Oct. 27. 10 a.m.-5:30 p.m. Tuesdays-Saturdays. Prices: \$28-\$3,200. Signature Shop & Gallery, 3267 Roswell Road, Atlanta. 404-237-4426, [www.thesignatureshop.com](http://www.thesignatureshop.com).

**Bottom line:** Functional and festive.