



## Artist Profile

### Anna Mitchell

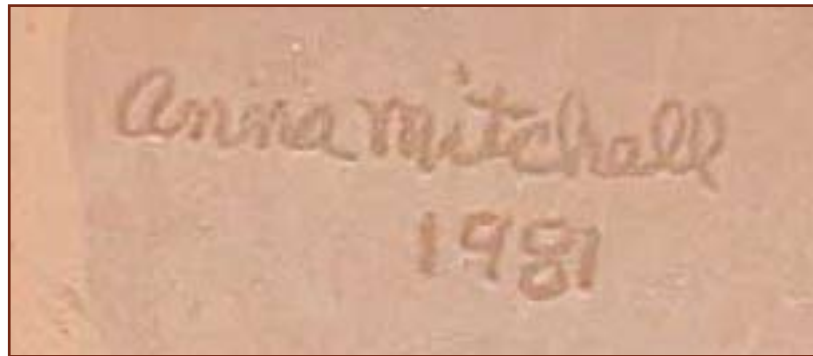
Cherokee potter Anna Mitchell has worked hard for more than 30 years on her pottery and has done much research to make it authentic. She is known today for creating Southeastern and Eastern Woodlands-style pottery, but faced a few obstacles when she began making pottery 34 years ago. There was no guide on creating Cherokee pottery, and few Cherokees were making pottery when she began creating objects from clay found in a pond near her home in Vinita, Oklahoma, in 1967. After creating these small objects, including a pipe for her husband, Robert Clay Mitchell, she became curious about clay and how her Cherokee ancestors created their pottery. "I knew Cherokees hadn't really done pottery since removal, there wasn't anyone doing it or people who knew how to do it," Mitchell said. "But I thought surely it could be done again." When she realized the art of making Southeastern pottery was in danger of being lost, she became more determined to help preserve it. "I believe without art you don't have culture and without culture you don't have art," she said. Mitchell began studying tribal cultures and their artwork, searching for instructions on making Southeastern pottery. There was very little. The knowledge of creating Southeastern-style pottery had lain "dormant" for many years, she said.

She creates her pottery in a small studio near her home, and only works on her pottery in the warmer months, saving the fall and winter to spend time with her family. She usually works on three pieces at a time, working on them at different stages. Depending on the size of each piece of pottery, she can usually prepare a piece for firing in two weeks. She fires her pieces using wood behind her studio

in an area surrounded by bricks. The clay pieces are placed on a metal sheet above the fire for an entire day. The pottery hardens over the fire and gradually cools as the fire cools.

"I try to follow as much as possible what my ancestors did," she said. She decorates her pottery with leaves and other ornaments, which are placed on the outside of her pottery before firing. She has also created her own unique fired-clay stamps, which she uses to stamp different designs on her pottery before firing. Central American Indians used similar stamps, she said.

Mitchell is hopeful the pottery-making she reclaimed from her studies will continue with the next generation. What started from a lump of clay from a pond has opened many doors for Anna Mitchell. As much as she enjoys creating art and learning more about her culture, she cherishes the things that have come with being a recognized artist. (Anna Mitchell)



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