

Sculpture Exhibit

by Gretha “Mike” Blake

Born in Asheville, North Carolina, Gretha “Mike” Blake developed an interest in sculpture at the age of forty, after spending much of her time during the previous years raising five children with her late husband. She completed an art class over a decade ago, but it wasn’t until 2004 when she found the time to seriously devote herself to her hobby. At her residence in Stratford House in Danville, Mrs. Blake purchased her own supplies and set up a studio where she created portrait busts using live models and pictures from various sources. Working with Diane Kendrick, Professor of Art at Averett University, Mrs. Blake--who is now eighty-three years old--continues to develop her talent in terracotta sculpture.



Terracotta sculpture (from the Italian for “baked earth”) has existed as a ceramic art form for thousands of years. For example, the famed Terra Cotta Warriors and Horses of Qin Shi Huang, the First Emperor of China, date from around 210 BCE. During the Italian Renaissance, this process for creating ceramic sculpture became widely popular among European artists. Typically, artists modeled the clay by hand, removing and texturing the material as required to create a desired shape. Artists could capture fine details and emotional expression in portrait busts and other works without having to carve from a block a marble or create a cast (a technique used for bronze). After the sculpture had been formed and left to dry, it was then either painted or glazed (such as “I Spy,” which has a blue patina finish) or left uncoated (like “The Mountain Man”), and then fired in a kiln.