

(Un)Settled Podcast Episode 3: Bill Harris Transcript

Drew Baron: The (Un)Settled Podcast is a presentation of the American South Consortium, a multi-year partnership of the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, the Columbia Museum of Art, Mobile Museum of Art, and the Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts as part of the Art Bridges Cohort program. This innovative cross-regional partnership explores new ways of interpreting art and the American experience through dynamic exhibitions and an array of complementary public programs.

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Drew: Hey, welcome back to the (Un)Settled podcast, the show where we explore the rich, complicated and evolving topic of what the American landscape represents through the lens of American art. Produced in conjunction with the exhibition (Un)Settled: The Landscape in American Art, on view at the Columbia Museum of Art through September 8th, 2024.

I'm your host, Drew Baron, and today we'll be traveling to the Catawba Cultural Center to sit down with artist Bill Harris, whose grandmother, Georgia Harris, is featured in the exhibition. But before we get to that, once again I'm joined by the Columbia Museum of Art's curator of education, Glenna Barlow. Glenna, welcome to the show.

Glenna Barlow: Thanks Drew.

Drew: You know, it's really exciting to have these pieces on view again for this exhibition. What's your take on that? How do you feel about, seeing these pieces in a whole new light?

Glenna: Yeah, well, I love that. I mean, to me, the important thing that happens in a museum is not just, you see art, but hopefully the museum is giving you some context in which to see and maybe understand that art a little bit. So, these are pieces that are from our larger collection of Catawba art within the museum's collection. And so, we've seen them in a lot of different lights, even just recently. So last summer, some of our visitors may recall that we had a whole exhibition devoted to Catawba art. And it wasn't just ceramics. It was really delving into the whole history of these Catawba traditions, one of them being pottery. But that was just sort of one of the facets of this really rich culture.

And we've also seen these pieces on view upstairs in our collection, in our Art and Identity gallery. So, in that context, they're with a lot of other works of art that are very different, but that all speak to some idea about, how an art object can reflect someone's identity or, you know, who they are, the statement they're making, the culture they come from. And of course, with these pieces, it speaks to being in that lineage of Catawba culture, but also, you know, the artist's own identity.

I think it's really interesting that this is a largely female dominated tradition. There are obviously men potters. We'll hear from one of them shortly. But there this is, you know, traditionally has been done by and large by women, and it was passed down along these matrilineal lines. So, we're thinking about the artist, like Sara Ayers, for instance, as a female artist, but also as part of this, you know, Catawba culture.

And then, of course, now we're seeing the pieces in the broader context of American art and how cool to be able to nod to that really long, rich tradition of Catawba pottery, but also to see these in concert with other works by different indigenous artists, and to think about just the objects themselves being literally a piece of America, right? They're made from the clay on the banks of the Catawba River. So, we're thinking about them as far as their material, but also the history and the traditions that they can teach us about.

Drew: Yeah. And I mean, this is, kind of a relationship that has, been established for a really long time. I mean, I think the very first time the Columbia Museum of Art featured Catawba pottery was in 1973 when they did an exhibition, of Catawba Pottery, that all three of these artists that are featured in (Un)Settled, were in that exhibition. So, it's kind of fun to see that kind of full circle moment of us delving and reaching into, this, pool of wonderful culture, that we have right here in South Carolina.

Glenna: Yeah. And it's interesting, actually, I noticed that the three pieces that we chose for this exhibition kind of bear that out. We have pieces of the museum acquired right after that 1973 exhibition. So, one of them, the museum purchased in 1974. And then we have one from like the early 2000s and I think one from 2010.

So, it speaks to this long and ongoing, pattern of engaging with and collecting objects from the Catawba people, but they also reflect different facets of the Catawba traditions and how those are changing over time. Because I think there's this, tendency that people have to think about a particular tradition, especially if it's a Native American tradition, there's maybe some misconceptions or, you know, lack of understanding that these are longstanding traditions, but also ongoing living practices that people are still doing. So, we get to see a little bit of that.

So, you see some of the traditions reflected in like the effigy heads, of the piece by Georgia Harris. You know, something that you see often in Catawba pottery, but you also see the snake as a motif, and that is very specific and important to the Catawba culture. And you see the wedding vase, that kind of double headed vase that has more broad appeal. I think you'll see that in various indigenous cultures and not specifically just the Catawba. So, the pieces that we have on view that we've assembled as part of this exhibition, again, kind of speak to the Catawba practices, but also how they, you know, are linked to some of these other bigger ideas.

Drew: Yeah. I'm really excited to kind of sit down with Bill and talk to him about some of these big ideas. So, with that, why don't we go ahead and transition over to the Catawba Cultural Center, where I previously recorded this interview?

Bill Harris is an artist and teacher based in South Carolina. From 2011 to 2023, Harris served as the chief of the Catawba Nation. In 2016, Harris was honored as a recipient of the Jean Laney Harris Folk Heritage Award, and most recently he worked as an artist in residence at the University of South Carolina Lancaster's Native American Studies Center.

Bill was taught the art of making pottery by his grandmother, Georgia Harris, who took the art form to the national stage when she was honored with an NEA National Heritage Fellow in 1997. Her work, Bowl with Effigy Heads is featured in the exhibition (Un)Settled: The Landscape in American Art. You'll also hear a few clips from an interview recorded with Georgia from 1980, provided courtesy of the University of South Carolina Lancaster's Native American Studies Center. Let's hit the road.

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Drew: Welcome to the show Bill, thank you for being here.

Bill Harris: It is a pleasure to be here, and I will say you're quite welcome. I'm glad you're inviting me to be here. And I want to thank you for allowing to be a part of the show.

Drew: So, as I mentioned a moment ago, you were the chief of the Catawba Nation for many years now. For our layman at home that don't necessarily know the inner workings and politics of the Catawba Nation, can you tell me a little bit about what that role was, and what you did during that time, and just a little bit about yourself in general.

Bill: Well, I think to condense it down, the best way to describe the chief of the Catawba Nation is he's a mayor of a small city. With that, everybody seems a bit, can wrap their head around that now. So, you know, when you when you talk about, you know, what does it mean to be chief? Well, you are elected by the people. You have a constitution. You adhere to this constitution. We built programs that we you know; we have our own police department now. We have our sanitation department. So, you know, it is a small city, but I think because people recognize that the sovereignty that comes with being an indigenous community, you know, it's not granted to all.

You know, there are 573 federally recognized tribes in the United States. Now, the sad thing about that is, is that all those other tribes who had a relationship with the U.S. government, because that's one of the bases for being a federally recognized tribe, is you had to have a relationship. Well, there was only the English government and then the U.S. government. So, yes, you had a relationship with these people. So, I don't understand how there are tribes out there who are having to jump through hoops. Because there was no other government here. People would, you know, they say, well, what do you do day by day? Well,

you know, first and foremost, you know, I'm having a relationship with the U.S. government. You know, because the U.S. government cannot have a relationship with 4000 Catawba citizens. So as the elected leader and there were five of us, we had an assistant chief, or, we have an assistant chief, a secretary treasurer and two council members. So, it's a five-person committee. And with that, you know, we are dealing with South Carolina, trying to get them to understand, you know, what it is to deal with the only federally recognized tribe in the state of South Carolina.

And like I said, there's only about 33 tribes east of the Mississippi that are federally recognized. And you can take that back to a man named Andrew Jackson who decided that, you know, that during the War of 1812, he went through the eastern tribes and said, "Come fight with me and you'll keep your lands forever. So long as the rivers flow." Well, the rivers never stopped flowing. But when he became president, he instituted the Removal Act. And that's what moved most of the tribes on the eastern coast, to what is now called Oklahoma. And that's why Oklahoma has 39 tribes.

Drew: You know, that was actually kind of some kismet in terms of, way to end that statement, because, my very next question was kind of related to the river. Right? So, like the, the Catawba. Ye Iswə? Did I say that right? I'm trying. It translates the people of the river. The reservation itself today runs alongside the Catawba River. Mmhmmm It does. Can you kind of talk to me about the significance of that waterway to the Catawba people?

Bill: We were not named for the river. The river was named for us. So it wasn't, you know, they. Hey, we got a river right here called Catawba. What do you want to call those indigenous people running along the banks? Oh! We'll call those Catawba people. So, it's just reverse. It was, we were here first, actually probably the river was here first, but we got to actually be the people of the river.

Drew: Well, and, I mean, I think it was probably a significant, I mean, you know, most civilizations build on waterways for a reason, right? It's not just because, oh, what a pretty view. I mean, it's also it's a form of sustenance. It's where you get your food. It's where you clean your stuff.

Bill: And the river was also a trade route. So, you know, the thing that was great about, indigenous communities that live close to rivers is they were easy access to trade. So, there was a lot of trade going between indigenous communities that we don't recognize because it's it's like, well... If you find obsidian in South Carolina, it was brought in from somewhere. Obsidian doesn't exist in South Carolina. So, when you find that black obsidian stone that's usually coming out of Alabama or, or somewhere not, not native to us.

Drew: Yeah. And I mean, I think, you know, historically, that trade was really important. And I know that pottery eventually became part of that trade.

Bill: Yes, it did.

Drew: And so now feels like a really good time to transition to talk a little bit about the pottery tradition in the Catawba. I mean, as we mentioned earlier, I mean, this goes back thousands of years, probably the, I'm sure oral history, 4000 years. I'm being told right now, through that subtle hand signal. But, you know, it's still practiced today, and you don't see a lot of traditions that have that sort of sustainability.

Bill: So, Catawba Pottery, is, like I said, is right at 4000 years old. Some people are saying it's even older than that, but, you know, it's only through archeological digs that we get this information. You know, Catawba did not have a written history. So, it was all oral.

One of the great chiefs of this nation is King Hagler. King Hagler died in 1763. So, it was during the, French and Indian Wars. And with that he saw what was coming and he prepared the people. If we do not accept some of their ways, they will just push us away, and there's enough of them coming that we will not be able to stop them. Our numbers have diminishing, so diplomacy is where we need to focus. It's not about, you know, you don't have enough of us to fight. Because you know you're not going to win this one. So, with that, assimilation became part of it and we gave away a lot of ourselves. But I think the thing that comes back to is we never gave away our pottery. So, the year is 2024, and I go to my studio at least five times a week to put my hands in clay, to make a bowl, to make a traditional bowl, to be creative with clay. So, there's something within that clay that is speaking to me. That's pulling me to it. And I have students who are now feeling that draw.

My grandmother, Georgia Harris, there's not a higher honor that the United States can gift to its artists than recognition by the National Endowment of the Arts. And my grandmother was awarded as one of those. There were 250 million plus people in America. There were 11 people that year who were chosen. Just play with those numbers any way you want to, but you cannot diminish that. You have a woman who grew up basically in poverty. But yet she never felt poor. Her pride that was instilled in her came from her parents and her grandparents and her great grandparents. And that was passed down to me. But the thing that I got from her was love of clay. Because my grandmother would put her hands in clay and just, it was artistry as you watched it. And she did it so effortlessly, she could just have a conversation with you here and make a bowl.

And the other part of that I always tell people is, you know, I don't need to make a bowl. I can go to anywhere off this reservation and buy a bowl. But to be able to go and dig in that clay hole that's 500 plus years old and find that clay that our ancestors have, like I said, there's 500 plus years in this one particular hole, and I stand on those lands. And I sense that, you know, this is as close as I'm going to get to a sacred site. But yet the year is 2024 and I get to have that experience.

***Recording provided by the University of South Carolina Lancaster
Native American Studies Center begins playing***

Thomas Blumer: Did you ever play in the clay?

Georgia Harris: Well, we did I, I guess, after I got up around 7 or 8 years old. You know something? They wouldn't let us mess in clay because we put trash in the dirt, you know. And they didn't, my mama and my grandmama neither one. didn't like no dirty clay. It was dirt, but no dirt in it.

Thomas: They wanted clean clay?

Georgia: Yeah. So, you couldn't make little toys? No, we did, we did after we got up a little bigger. I got up 7 or 8 years old, I made the little old things like that. I remember I made it a little cat one time. I thought that was the cutest little thing. I could see that little cat here. And it wasn't no more than about that long.

Thomas: Just a little teeny thing.

Georgia: Just a little tiny thing. Yeah. You know that we used to make the little old chickens, little old ducks, you know, and we played with them after we burned them.

Thomas: So, they didn't sell them?

Georgia: No.

Thomas: Did you decorate it?

Georgia: No we didn't. They never, we was too small to fool with anything like that then. They wouldn't let us fool with their tools like that. Afraid we would leave them out and lose them. They had a set of tools, and you didn't play with them like, you know, kids do now with things. Kids play the things that I wouldn't let mine play with. Yeah, but they wouldn't let us play with that.

Thomas: Of course. That was serious business.

Georgia: Yeah. because that was something that, if they throw them away or lost them, they had to like make new ones, you know, or something like that.

Recording ends

Drew: You brought up your grandmother a little while ago, and it's like we we already kind of hinted at, you know, her relevance to national history, like, of our current nation being, you know, honored by the National Endowment of the Arts. She has a piece within this show that we have here at the Columbia Museum of Art, (Un)Settled. And I know she was like, she kind of taught you, how to do pottery as well. Can you talk to me a little bit about her and her personality? And you started to go there. But I want you to go further. So, what can

you tell me about your grandmother? Because I've heard some great stories from other folks, but I want to hear from you.

Bill: Okay. I'll give you Bill's story of Georgia, and Georgia was my grandmother. So, I always tell people, you know, I, I got really lucky in life, you know, not only did I get Georgia as my teacher, but also got her as my grandmother, so I was double gifted in that. But Georgia taught a lot of people. She gave her knowledge freely. She didn't hold back.

So, when I was in my early 20s. I, you know, I said to her, I I'm ready to for you to teach me, and she said, okay. So, I would go to her house twice a week to sit on her porch, after work and she would teach me. Now the great thing about that was, there was no air conditioning back then. Or there was none in my grandmother's house. So, you know, you sat on the porch because at least you could catch a breeze. The house was an oven. So you sat on the porch, and everybody says, "Oh, that's nice sitting on the porch." It's like, well, you couldn't sit in the house. Okay. You had to wait, wait for it to cool down and then open the windows and let the cool air in. So, but yeah. So we, we would sit there and before I started she said, "Well I have one request." I said, okay. She said. "If I teach you, you have to become a teacher." And I didn't understand exactly what she was telling me when she said that to me. But as I've gotten older, I understand the value of if we lose our teachers, we're going to lose this.

I think it was Winston Churchill who said, "Any nation that forgets its past condemns its future." And I don't think there's anything more profound than that. Especially when we talk about clay and Catawba. As I say, we gave away our language. We gave away our religious customs. We gave away our spiritual customs in, in this whole evolvment of assimilation. But we never gave away clay. So, when the Europeans first came, before they could set up their shops, they came to the indigenous communities and said, can you make this bowl? And with this new forms were now being introduced into indigenous cultures. You know, there was no such thing as a pitcher prior to European contact, but we were making them for the Europeans.

So, they became part of, and I think this is something that you and I touched on briefly before we started recording, and that is so often, you know, there's outside influences everywhere. And all it takes is an eye to be able to see something and say, wait a minute. You know, I like that shape. What if I actually did this to it? So, you are now, you know, I think so often people want to take art and just compress it. I think what you do as art is you, instead of going this way, you go this way and you just you let it expand. And through that expansion, you're now going to get creativity. You're going to get, you know, the pieces that are made strictly for utilitarian. But I think at some point you're going to inspire that, that person who says, "You know, I think this right here is what I feel today." And they'll let their fingers move through that and create that piece.

One thing that I, I share with people is my wife is a clay artist, Jane Harris. And we did an interview with, Piedmont Guild Winston-Salem. In that interview we were talking and I said,

you know, there's something that I... Because they said, you know you're both clay artists, but you're different. And I said, yes, but here's what's good about me. It's easy for me. I have 4000 years of form to work with. Hers is what's coming out of her head to her fingers. So, in many ways, I have something that I'm able to work with and expound upon that.

So do a bowl, add a snake. Do a vase, add a snake handle. So, you know, it's, and when you can actually look at it and I think what one of the most creative pieces that that has come out of Catawba is to take that European shape pitcher, add a snake which is indigenous, you now have actually take can you pull two cultures together and created one thing.

Drew: And it makes me think about just the term traditional in general. Right? And like what does that really mean? And I think, in thinking about it in terms of Catawba pottery, that's like doubly interesting. Because I'm well aware, being good friends with Alex Osborne, I'm well aware of the contention around the term tradition, or traditional and what is considered traditional pottery and what's not. But to your point, I mean, these we're talking about forms that like, maybe they were coming from inspiration from other folks that were coming in here. It was like dictated more by the needs of the people that wanted to buy the pottery. Right? So, like, how do we define what traditional is? So, for you, how do you define that term? What do you consider traditional?

Bill: And this is why I go with tradition, is I'll say, okay, to me tradition has to be a timeline, because what we created. When the first person, the first Catawba person set down and discovered that mud and water could create a vessel, what was he thinking? He had a stone bowl, or he had a wooden bowl. Why did they think they needed a mud bowl? But somewhere, you know, so that whole process, someone started using clay, and with that, it evolved into what it is today.

So, do we start with 4000 years ago? Or do we use a timeline? Because everything is going to be on a timeline and influenced through that time. Before Europeans came, we were being influenced by other indigenous communities. I mean, there was a bowl shape there. It's kind of like, can you see that? I like that. So, you know, when people talk about tradition, I always want to say, so what is tradition? Because what we now call tradition from 1960 was not tradition from a thousand years past that, or behind that. So yeah, I mean we have to recognize that there's nothing I think can be construed as traditional. Because from, well, let's just go with the Catawba. If we're 6000 plus years old, we're not doing what we did in the year 2024. So, what are we talking about as far as tradition? Is tradition what happened two weeks ago?

So, I think at some point we need to actually discover that through time things changed and they will continue to change. So, when we use the word it's not traditional, traditional to what? Traditions change. It's human nature.

Drew: I wonder if maybe the term cannon might be a better way to, like, kind of go about thinking about that, you know? I think this is, this is honestly, and this is me talking as

myself, I am not representing anyone involved in (Un)Settled in this statement. I want to make that very clear. But I think this has been a historical misstep that we often, we define something as this is a tradition. And like, first of all, that puts it in a place in time that is outside of today. So, like I think right away that's a huge misstep when you're talking about something like a Catawba pottery, which is very much thriving today and is very much being practiced today and coming up with new ideas today. Right?

I was struck, when I was researching for this, I was reading, some stuff written about, Georgia, about your grandmother, and I thought it was really interesting because they're like, "Well, she introduced so many new forms to the canon," and we're gonna say canon, "the canon of, Catawba Pottery." And while I believe that is true, the wedding jug and, a few other forms, to your point, I mean, who wasn't right? It ultimately a lot of it had to do with form and function and, like what does the market need? What does the market demand?

Bill: And I think that's a good way to put it. And at what point did the Catawba transition from function, to tradeware, to art. Yeah. So and I think you can go back to 1973 with the exhibit that that was held by, USC and the museum. It was a huge turning point as far as recognition of, "What is this?" Because, like I said, tradeware was what it been described before. But when the museum came in and was part of that, it elevated that value.

And with that you know people were now saying I think we can, we can charge my, my grandma was, was a leader in that. Yeah. There were people who would come to her house, and they would say, you know, that's a little high. Can you, you know, can you sell it to me, you know, cheaper? And she would say, "You know, it doesn't eat anything, So I'm just gonna leave it on the shelf."

Drew: [Laughs] That's amazing.

Bill: So, once she, I mean, Georgia knew the value of her work. But it too, I think in many ways it took the museum show to let people understand that this is no longer a tradeware, this is now art, and we need to treat it as art.

***Recording provided by the University of South Carolina Lancaster
Native American Studies Center begins playing***

Georgia: I sold my pots just after we got a car.

Thomas: Then you started peddling the pots?

Georgia: We found a place over here on, you know, next to Hendersonville, across the river. I think those roads are different now; they have better roads in there. But we use to go over there, and I found this woman and she bought from me all the time. Well, I didn't have to go all over the place selling pots, I'd just make them and carry them to her, and she'd take them.

Thomas: What all did she want?

Georgia: Well, she bought just practically everything. Whatever I would take she would buy all of it. Everything I'd take.

Thomas: Is she the lady you made the teacups for?

Georgia: Yes. Set of dishes. Made the whole thing. She'd always, she had big ideas, you know, She'd always ask me "can you make that?" And then I'd always have to make everything she wanted.

Thomas: Yeah.

Recording ends

Drew: So, you know we've ran around talking a lot about the idea of tradition and sort of where Catawba pottery fits in maybe an art historical cannon. Maybe we're, like drawing this line, this timeline now. But, you know, what we haven't done yet is really define what makes it Catawba pottery.

Bill: All right, Drew, let's go with this. I think that this and this is Bill, because Bill is getting this from his grandmother, Georgia. My first experience of digging Clay was with Georgia. And with that, what I understood was not all clay is equal. And because there was a time when they paddled across the river to get clay, they made darn sure of they were getting cleanest clay they could get. So, you may dig, you know, 4 or 5 feet into a bank to get that. I mean, you'd hit the vein, and you would say, okay, this looks good. And my grandmother would look at it and she'd say, "No, keep digging." And so, I would keep digging. And what I learned from that was, you know, not all clay is equal.

So, clay has its own elasticity. And that is what you're looking for. You're looking for that as pure as you can get. So, for me, what makes Catawba pottery is Catawba clay. I can go buy clay. I can make a vessel out of store-bought clay. But to me it is not Catawba. I would not sign Catawba to that. To me is all about going back to the earth. Finding that vein, extracting that, bringing it home, putting it in the sun, letting it dry and harden and then you pulverize it.

Drew: So it quite literally is a relationship with the land?

Bill: Oh my gosh. Yes.

Drew: Yeah. I think that is a big takeaway. And part of the reason, I mean, this is literally part of the reason that these works are in this show, right? Because it does maybe a better job than maybe many other works in the show that I can think of, of really talking about how

that relationship with the land itself dictates the end product. Right? That dictates how the piece is made and what piece is made. Right?

This was a natural resource to this area. And so, it's directly tied to, you couldn't make, to your point, you could make a type of pottery in Maine. Right? You could, there might be clay out there.

Bill: And there and there is clay in Maine.

Drew: Yeah. But it's a totally different type of clay. Like what? As someone who spends a lot of time, or maybe not spends a lot of time, but someone who has spent time, searching through these veins and finding, like, the right spot. What makes it special? What's the consistency of, like, clay from the Catawba region?

Bill: For me, it is. I will, I'll start with this Drew I think for me, it is knowing that, those lands, you know, we have at least 500 years of documentation that we've been digging it. Now, there were several clay sites. On this 630 acres that date, but you know what people didn't understand is that at some point, those veins run out. You know, it isn't like you can plant more clay. So, you know the clay will not be of good consistency. So, people would cover them back up and go in search for another.

But that clay hole that we're digging and continuing digging in, you know, is where everybody goes. So, I think you mentioned earlier that you can't tell, we don't tell anybody. Well and the reason we don't tell anybody is because we understand that we don't know when it's going to dry up. They're not self-perpetuating. You know go out there and add water and add a little sunshine and then it grows. So, you know, it will go away.

Drew: Yeah. I mean, I find that to be really interesting. I know another thing about Catawba pottery that, I mean, maybe it's not only solely unique Catawba pottery, but something I find really interesting. None of this, you don't glaze your work, you know? Or like at least the traditional Catawba pottery.

Bill: And I don't know, I don't know if anybody today has actually glazing their work either. Yeah. You know, I think that you people that have become a little bit more experimental. Yeah. But on the grand scale things, it's still, you know, you go dig your clay, you bring it home, you pulverize it, you strain it, and then you start processing it.

Drew: Then you, like fired raw, right? Isn't that? But then it has such a nice sheen. Is that from the burnishing?

Bill: The sheen is nothing more than a stone.

Drew: Can you tell me about that?

Bill: Sure. I'll pick up this piece and show you. I call this piece my chieftain's piece. A pipe. Because if you were to actually hold it, if you put a stem in there, it holds just like that. The colors are by the fire. The smoothness is by the stones. And the shape is through modern day tools and some of my grandmother's tools.

Drew: See, I think I think a lot of people, if they weren't told that, they would never know that. You know?

Bill: I have I've had people say I like how you painted that.

Drew: Yeah. Because it's such a rich color that you get from the burning. You know, that it does look, it looks very intentional. It looks very much like this was painted on and then burned that way. But it's that's not that's just that is naturally coming from the oxidization.

Bill: Very good. I like that you used that word.

Drew: You know what I try I don't know that I said it right. But that's good. But I'm glad you knew what I meant.

Bill: Yes. Now, what has happened through time is we have had, and this happened to my grandmother's time. people were going to art shows in the 70s, and they were seeing glazed pieces. And so, when they came in, looked at Catawba pieces, they were there, were stunned by, well why is it not a shiny? Well, we're, you know, trying to explain to people, you know, this is this is burnished, that's the glaze so forth.

So, it didn't really, it wasn't connecting. So, my grandmother went and found polished stones. Now the original stones are stones out of the river. Well, that stone will only go. Only pull that burnish so high. If you use a polished stone that has been polished by a machine somewhere, then it actually now will bring that that luster of that.

***Recording provided by the University of South Carolina Lancaster
Native American Studies Center begins playing***

Thomas: Well, how about rubbing rocks? Is it hard to find? Well, yours are from where?

Georgia: Off the Catawba River, down here and around.

Thomas: Have you ever found your own down there?

Georgia: Yeah, May Blues got one of mine I found on the river, and I've got to get it from her. I loaned it to her. I'll never get it back if I don't go over there and get it. She'll forget about it. She keeps tell me, she said, "I still got your rock." And if I don't get it, I'll die and forget about it. It came from off the Catawba River, and that's where mostly my grandmother and them picked theirs up, on the river. Yeah, Now I got a few I got in California when I was out there,

and I got some I got in Cherokee. But they're not right slick yet, you know? I'm just using them.

Thomas: They're not as good as the old ones.

Georgia: Well, they will be, in time, if I use of them a lot. They're getting slick now.

Recording ends

Drew: You teach as well, and you're following a little bit in your grandmother's footsteps, you're sort of teaching, both adults and children, right? I just wonder, how does it feel to kind of help keep this art form alive? You know? You're helping teach, like, the next generation of folks that might grow to have the same level of interest that you do in this medium. What does that feel like to share that?

Bill: Well, I'll start with this Drew. When I was a child, I use the age 7 to 8. I watched my grandmother work, make pottery. I came back to her when I was in my early 20s and asked to be a student. After I became a student, once I had the knowledge, I didn't do anything with it for 20 years.

So, when I was in my mid 40s, I started putting my hands back in clay. And with that there was the, you know, being brought back to, my grandmother. The thing that happened with, with me was I did go through different mediums. I built furniture for a while. I did wood carvings for a while. So, when I returned back to doing the clay and what I discovered was my grandmother did quality pieces. And she instilled that quality in me. And we're going to lose that. If I don't teach Georgia.

Something that Georgia taught me, and this is from the first time I sat down with her till the last time I sat down with her, it was, "Bill there's no reason to make an ugly pot. If it's ugly, mash it up and do it again." So, there shouldn't be an ugly piece of Catawba pottery out there. And there's value in what she said because she can valued the work she was producing. And she instilled that in all her students. So, I'm teaching Georgia and what I'm hoping is the teachers who come out after me will be teaching Georgia.

Drew: I love that. Georgia has been referred to as Master Potter. Yes. Arzada Sanders has also been referred to as that. And I've also heard you referred to as that. So, I'm kind of curious what does it mean to take on that title of Master Potter? Like first of all, like, what does that mean? Like what kind of honor is that? And then what do you have to do to be considered that.

Bill: You know there is no criteria to becoming a Master Potter. Within our community, it is those who have seen good pottery they will say, "Bill is getting good with his work." And then at some point they will see me a couple of years later, "Bill your works looking a lot like your grandmother's. And, you know, your grandmother was one of the best potters we've

ever had.” So, in many ways, it's is not a there's no certificate that comes with being a Master Potter. It is acknowledgement from within the community that, “Wow, he's producing really good work.” So yeah, and that's it.

Now for me, I go back to, you know, it's not so much that I want the title of Master Potter, but what I want is to, to be a student of Georgia and to take Georgia's teachings. To have those keep going because, you know, once again, her influence. It's not her piece, but it's her influence.

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Drew: And with that, the sun sets on another episode of the (Un)Settled Podcast. I'd like to thank our guests, Glenna Barlow and Bill Harris for joining us today. I'd also like to give a special thanks to the Catawba Cultural Center and the University of South Carolina Lancaster's Native American Studies Center for providing support and resources for today's episode. If you'd like to find out more about these organizations, I'll leave links to their websites in the show notes.

Additional recording support for today's episode was provided by Victor Johnson. Don't miss your chance to see the work of Georgia Harris and many other artists, spanning 200 years of American art history and (Un)Settled: the landscape in American art, on view at the Columbia Museum of Art through September 8th. And with that, I'm your host, Drew Baron. See you next time.