Margie Hughto is captivated by the immediacy and fluidity of working with clay and the way it transforms in a kiln and interacts with glazes. “You can move clay around, press it, and play with it,” she says. “If you don’t like what you’ve done, you can do it again.” Hughto draws inspiration from clay’s connection to ancient civilizations and the natural world, and often incorporates these themes into her art. She likes to embed materials or make impressions in clay, using everything from wisteria, fern, and oak leaves to fossils, gems, minerals, and heavy metals. She roams antique shops in search of objects that catch her fancy and keeps an eclectic collection of items in her home studio for research or future projects. “I’ve really taken to buying rocks these days,” Hughto says. “I go to all these gem and mineral shows and come home with boxes of rocks.”

And whether she is grappling with a commissioned site-specific piece or experimenting with glaze colors for an exhibition work, her art remains very much in the public eye. She recently fabricated a coral reef and elements of the Earth and moon for part of an expansive mural of the solar system at the Natural History Museum subway station at 81st Street in Manhattan, and produced an Egyptian-themed entrance to the Blodgett Elementary School library in Syracuse. She was also one of 40 artists selected to contribute to Visionary Ceramics, a show that will open in 2004 at the Cleveland Museum of Art. Yet, even with all her success and knowledge, Hughto admits clay and glazes still hold a sense of mystery for her. “No matter how long you’ve been in this business,” she says, “when you open a kiln, you’re never sure what’s in there.” —Jay Cox

**Golden Threads (2002) by Margie Hughto** is a triptych with 40- by 19-inch panels featuring colored clays, slips, glazes, and inlaid items.