



Why We Make Utilitarian Pots

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Carol and I have been making pots for use for nearly thirty years and although we do other kinds of work as well, we are still challenged and fascinated with making functional pottery. In part we have been influenced by other potters who saw function as a transcendent positive attribute of their ceramic work. We worked two summers in the late 70's with Harry Davis and while talking about the potter's life we discovered a curious linguistic anomaly. When we stayed with Harry in New Zealand in 1980, he told us the life of the potter was "mundane". With huge hue and cry we said it was anything but boring (what most North Americans mean when they say mundane). Oxford and he said it meant "of the earth". Latin mundus.

On reflection, our work for the last several years has been dealing with the attempt to transcend and sometimes recapture the earthiness of common clay. Three territories we have explored: Majolica terra cotta, translucent porcelain and wood fired stoneware are all different ways of transforming raw materials into something useful beyond the ordinary.

The majolica presents both the formal (illusionistic) and the painted world with our recurring themes of nature in flowers, still life, figuration and mythology. The translucent porcelain is a man-made material transformed by the fire to make a glass; a white ground for intense color and the carving and drawing of naturalistic motifs. Lastly, the wood fired stoneware are special pots that have "been somewhere"? they have experienced an extreme assault of ash and flame, a thermal wind that decorates them with scars and blushes where they have been touched by nature. At their best they resemble a beautiful "found rock".

By handling them in their domestic context, the user can sometimes connect with their naturalism. The "bizen style" tea bowl with its feldspar inclusions is similar to a black granite rock spit from the earth and polished by nature. We are back then to the earth. We learn by handling clay how far it will allow us to take it. We are the instrument? it is the transcendent material. It is a constant challenge? anything but "mundane".