

W H E N

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C A L L

I BEGAN as a pottery student at Montana State in the mid-seventies, and felt ready to hang out my shingle at my home and studio in Lafayette, Colorado, in January of 1983. I've managed a modest living as a potter, and find it as deeply appealing now as when I began. Porcelain has allowed for the refinement of form that is close to my heart. I love the way its clean lines define classic pottery form and volume, and how its color allows glazes to sing in a way that was never possible with stoneware. I could never forget the workability of stoneware, though, and developing a porcelain body white enough to give glazes clarity, while providing more workability, has been the object of many years of research. I know as well that the distinguishing feature of porcelain is translucency, and it has always been my desire to add this unique characteristic to my range of expression.

I make utilitarian pots to satisfy customer demand, and glowing stories of their use have been a source of tremendous personal satisfaction. If the pots give moments of daily pleasure, then my goal has been reached. The apparent irrelevance of and contempt for beautiful, classically formed pots by the ceramic community and the art world are offset by an inner knowledge that a really good pot can

hold its own with any clay "objet d'art," however sexually explicit, confrontational, or ugly the piece may be. That a smattering of superb pots continues to be included in the biennial NCECA National is proof of this fact.

The stigma of the craftsman/potter/vessel-maker label, which has such a profound effect on the market value of my work, has at last become a motivating force for change, an incentive for a more expansive view of the potential of porcelain clay. A November 2007 slide lecture by Chris Gustin reignited some passions that had been left on my own back burner. I remember driving home from Cheyenne feeling as if an enormous weight had been lifted, a burden carried for so long that it had become unnoticeable. A hunger to make larger-scale decorative porcelain vases, bottles, covered jars, and platters has always existed in me; I make them, when time allows, because they permit my love of decoration a freer hand and because I delight in the challenge of throwing larger vertical forms in porcelain. I've always loved to make pots that straddle the line between strict function and more decorative content, but they have taken a back seat to production, the source of my livelihood. An idea had also been surfacing and receding for years about translucent hand-built porcelain wall pieces, a radical departure from my beloved wheel. The persistence of this idea made me wonder who and what wanted these pieces made. Although at the time studio sales were plummeting, I found myself thinking about colored translucent porcelain, and began a testing program of colorants.

All too soon, it was May and time for the 2008 East Boulder County Studio Tour, where sales tanked badly in the fearful economy. I returned to testing, only to be interrupted by preparation for my annual summer kiln opening party, where less than a third of the audience from the previous year arrived. The year ended with disastrous sales at my annual Christmas show, and for the first time I found myself storing pots that had sat on showroom shelves long enough that I couldn't stand looking at them any more. I was happy to see the year end, but a December 2008 series of firings proved highly encouraging for new translucent porcelain bodies, and another world opened before me.

With my studio filled with unsold work and little need to make pots for the next year's upcoming studio shows, I resumed color testing of translucent porcelain in January 2009. In response to my distress at facing 2009 flat broke, my wife looked at me and said, "Why don't you just stop worrying

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about it?" With this blessing I felt free to pursue larger-scale wheel-thrown work and also hand-built wall pieces. Change had come, as simultaneously cash flow suffocated and creative doors opened.

The speed at which it occurred felt so abrupt that once again I wondered what was trying to make the idea realized. I continually feel the presence of a prodigious and unpredictable creative force, overflowing with its own agenda and yearning to be made tangible through my hands. Gaining an understanding of the psyche and a relationship with the Greater Self has been the most meaningful and difficult journey of my life, and especially in times of change, I've learned the value of looking to the images that appear in dreams. They are often connected with my personal psyche, but sometimes take on a numinous, archetypal quality, such as the Great Mother. These images inhabit the collective psyche, and have proven indelible, surviving in memory for years or decades.

As if to encourage and uphold the sudden change in creative direction, Great Mother appeared to me as a diminutive and beautiful dark-haired woman. In the dream she shadowed me as I ran endless errands, but at some point I gave up the race and settled down to rest, and it was then that she appeared on my left side, quietly squatting down beside me and snuggling close. Once before in my life the tiny anima figure had appeared, and I remembered the piercing gaze, at once compassionate, nourishing, and merciful, yet at the same time willful and infinitely powerful. Her appearance always proclaims change, a launch into the unknown, at moments when I've managed to stay rooted in my being and with some level of humility. She is a figure that unfailingly finds her way into my consciousness with love but also with her own agenda, always managing to make me feel that I am making the decisions.

My ego desperately tries to resist, for ego-driven life is my all-too-familiar way of being. As always, any relationship with the Unconscious means fleeting moments of insight and grace intermingled with long periods of desperately trying to withstand the fire. Often the changes that such intense heat bring are highly offensive; unconscious psychic reality revels in offending every rational expectation of the ego. Yet just as often, the longings of the Muse enlighten the confines of my own best hopes and dreams. I know there are others who have had similar spiritual experiences of knowing and being known, seeing and being seen – being bashed back and forth between psychic assault and the cool balm of grace.

I have always hung my hat on focus and determined self-reliance, but I'm learning to ask for help. Studio sales have all but stopped, and paying the bills and keeping food on the table remain the obstacles they have always been. But studio work has become freeing and engaging in a way that I had nearly forgotten. I remain optimistic and continue to work. To quote an old Traffic song, "Who knows what tomorrow may bring?"

The day after the visit of Great Mother, February 4, 2009, was a stunning Colorado mid-winter day, easily reaching the projected sixty-five degrees. It was time to open the studio doors and windows for some fresh air, and then came the piercing song of a meadowlark, singing for a mate. Only now am I aware that a very long creative and emotional dry spell has passed. That day, in separate calls, I was asked to give a workshop, participate in a show, and join a newly managed gallery. On the other hand, the closing of the retail space in the Boulder gallery that represents my work is regrettable and saddening, to say the least. I recognize that such moments are more than mere coincidence.

The hands are mine, but it's Great Mother's ballgame, and her capacity to inspire creative change is infinite. It has been my choice to make the engagement, and ready or not, I'm compelled to give full attention and consideration when she calls.