

Finding the Authentic Self



Richard Bresnahan
Minnesota, USA

The clay works of art that are created at the Saint John's Pottery are made from 144 million-year-old clay deposits, delivered to central Minnesota by glaciers and saved from the mindless road construction crews in Collegeville Township from being contaminated into class five road gravel. Eighteen thousand tons was brought five miles to Saint John's Abbey grounds to be preserved for generations of creativity. The clay is carefully washed with recycled graywater from the power house and aged for a number of years before being shaped by the maker's hands. The glazes come from carefully burning a variety of plant straw often used for animal bedding, and from wood ashes harvested out of my own and my friends' home fires. The ashes are carefully washed with gray water and made into glazes.

The grounds crew from the university and monastery bring diseased and dying trees, or trees blown down in a storm, to the wood kiln site where studio manager, apprentices and students carefully split and stack twenty-two tons of firewood. We spend two months loading as many as twelve thousand pieces of art for each firing of the Johanna kiln. The pottery is fired by forty-five people and five master chefs cooking meals for the ten-day firing. At the end of the firing, the kiln cools for two weeks, and we spend the next week unloading and returning the finished work to the studio. The pottery and sculpture are carefully washed and cleaned over the next several months, prepared to be used in a daily human ritual in relationship to this earth.

Some First Nations people consider clay the bodies of their ancestors. Some cultures look at the spirit of the taste of clay entering the soul of the maker. The nurturing of the community, all of the wonderful people, and the eco-mutual relationship to this earth is what makes the work reflect the person making it. The joy is this human family using the pottery daily and preserving the memory of the maker in pottery long after he or she returns to the earth to become new clay deposits.

curated

ceramics

CuratedCeramics.com Minneapolis (612) 719-9632