

THE WORK AT HAND

We live in an era in which the critical value of "process" has been steadily eroded by the passion for product. End over means. Child rearing is largely delegated to professional care providers. Local agricultural processes have been replaced by centralized corporate production. Microwaving passes for cooking and "drive through" fast foods have replaced going out to eat. Eat it in the car. The number of meals to which a family sits down together can be counted on half a hand. In the land of "call waiting", no conversation is important enough not to be interrupted by the chance that the next experience may be more rewarding. This eager willingness to sacrifice the essential processes of life is at the heart of environmental and community degradation. For in this loss of process, we lose the stabilizing rhythms of our species that keep us aware of our place in the food chain and protective of what that chain binds together — for now.

As a potter, my work is implicitly environmental; for the earth under our feet is the material I work with. Its health, along with a reverence for process - mine and that of those who use my pots - are necessary for me to function and for the planet to thrive. However, as more and more processes are discarded and the pace of our culture accelerates, the ability of the public to discern craftsmanship gives way to a thirst for novelty. This is the fragile context in which the craftsman/artist works.

There is only one cure for the environmental crisis: Go slow. Want less. Consume less. It is here that the responsibility and the paradox of being a potter lies. For I am a producer of objects in a culture that is "shopped out". The attics and landfills are filled.

I fire my kiln with wood. It is a labor-intensive process for which there are no short cuts. Stoking pine late at night, I've turned over and over this business of being a potter at the edge of the 21st century. I've arrived at an aesthetic that is quiet and contemplative; one that requires the public to meet it halfway. I make pots that ask for - and give - more than a sensitivity to interior design. I want my work to touch that distant quiet place in each of us. Balance, home, grace. I make large bowls and serving platters to encourage the ritual sharing of food by many hands. They are my expression of hope. For it is at the table, in the brief bonding silence, before the bread is broken, that the potter's work lives.

The potter's work is healing work. It affirms and celebrates the dignity of food prepared and shared in joyful awareness and assures us that the solution to the environmental and community crisis lies under our feet. And that it is worth standing on and for.

The pots I make and the way I work must reflect my commitment to right living or my work will be hollow. "Handmade" is not enough. Artists, no less than corporate CEO's, cannot wait until they can afford to do the right thing. We must start now - in our own community, with the task in front of each of us - before we dare to consider saving the planet. The danger we face is great, but not hopeless.

Healing is possible and requires a light touch, lover's eyes and coyote grin.

Peace,

Kevin Crowe