

U N E A R T H E D :
Relics of Memory

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These are excavations. This body of works in clay and paint, is dedicated to the contemplation of Process—the process of making, and the process of remembering. The geologic accretion of texture and color of the natural ash deposited on the “skin” of the wood-fired ceramic sculptures is paralleled by the similar build-up and break-down of layers, tonalities, and marks made upon the paper-clay canvases. In both there is an homage to the gradual, ragged, wearing, cumulative evidence of Time. In both, there are stories embedded within every wrinkle and crease, concavity, piercing or tear.

There is a human fascination with the bits and pieces that tell us of our most ancient past. We are a species of collectors—of things that give evidence to distant voices, and things that startle with their beauty and complexity as singular objects of contemplation. We are also born story-tellers-- attributing meaning to inanimate matter as we search for what is *meaningful* in our lives. We charge objects with the power of our attention, animating them with our reverence, filling them with our narratives. Are memories not simply the hand-selected stories we tell over and over until their syllables roll like polished river stones from our lips? And relics their embodied repositories?

The ANAGAMA: there is no greater life metaphor, nor more humbling a teacher...

For me, the firing-- albeit the culminating step in the progression of making with clay-- is the initiating passion in the act of creating my ceramic works. The process is more than just a means to an end, and the fascination in this process both predates and outweighs all of these works collected. This is the deliberately prolonged cycle of an *anagama* firing. The anagama is a single-chamber wood kiln, Japanese in name and origin. These kilns are traditionally built partially buried into a hillside and have the appearance of a long rising tunnel. They range in size, as well as length of firing (these pieces were fired for around 58 consecutive hours in a 14 foot long chamber). Wood is the single and only fuel used to attain a temperature of 1280C or higher throughout the kiln. The wood acts however, not only as the source of temperature gain, but also the essential decorative element, as none of the wares are fired with any applied glaze whatsoever.

Throughout the firing, tiny particles of wood ash float through the kiln as if on a river of flame. These particles settle thinly or densely upon the wares, depending upon the placement of a piece, and create a patina that ranges enormously in color, texture, and sheen. The flame itself also plays a role in “painting” the clay surfaces, as it searches for the most expedient path through the kiln. The variables involved in such a firing are many and only slightly controllable. It is precisely the enormous element of chance that intrigues and bewilders and intrigues yet again. It is truly an alchemy: the serendipitous process of turning wet earth into solid vessels of stone with surfaces that look as if they been dredged from the most ancient of shipwrecks.

However, far prior to contemplating the bounty retrieved from such a process, there is meaning etched into each step. From the very moment of loading, there is a bigger significance

to behold. For me, this is a cave of meditation—exacting a focus so intense that the entire world falls away. For three days, I am quieted inwardly, pinpointed in the labyrinthine of puzzle pieces, selecting and laying each pot with such intent as if there could seemingly be no other combination. It is an affirmation: with all its tangents, conundrums, and tribulations, this is the only path that could ever be.

The firing itself is the marathon, demanding strength and the accumulated knowledge that only every successive firing can bequeath. It is a layering itself-- of wisdom and intuition, of listening and responding. Requiring endurance and team-work, this is a community endeavor, a collective summiting, a shared story of resilience. And the people involved are every bit as important as the act itself. Following the exertion of the final rise to 1300C, the kiln is clammed shut and the cooling begins. The body floats away from the physical for a suspended moment; the exhaustion is swept away in a couple of days of forgetting while the kiln slumbers back down to a gentle sauna.

By contrast to the savasana of the cooling, opening the kiln is a wallop of visceral sensation. Confronting all the hidden expectations embedded in our highest hopes of what we each desired to retrieve, the first view of the firebox is akin to a wreckage pit. There is a mute, crest-fallen inevitability. My heart shutters through its inner monologue: I did not want this to become cracked or warped or unable to stand—I saw it whole and beautiful, unscarred and gloriously balanced. The kiln responds in warm silence-- the story of revelation of the textures and scars of a life lived. Those hundreds of pots are unearthed, passed through all the many hands that helped to fire them. There is a Pausing, as pots are sorted. There is a Processing, as pieces are scrubbed and sanded. And finally, a Realization: that the kiln has brought me, in one way or another, yet again, to my knees.

This is the graceful collision of simple organic matter alchemized by the touch of hands, the power of fire, the transformation of earth into stone, of ego into humility, of cinnabar into gold. For me, this is the spontaneity and the journey of what it means to be alive.

PAINTING with Fire / Painting with Clay: the confluence of 2 dimensions and 3...

These paintings are a combination of tireless layering of sculptural material, texturing of the wet surface, application of washes of oil color, building up and scraping back of pigment, dabbing, dragging, dry-brushing, concealing and revealing yet again. They are visibly three-dimensional, as the use of paper-clay in a variety of thicknesses has replaced traditional canvas primer. The impulsive dimension of wet clay drying on a taught frame offers up spontaneous subtle or extreme cracking of the façade—an unpredictability in which I revel. Similar in an abundance of ways to the ash accumulation and flame marks on the surface of a wood-fired vessel, one process informs the other-- the attraction of the process itself is indelible to both.

This dialogue between clay paintings and fire-painted clay is implicit and continuous. The obsessive striations mark something like the strata of geologic sedimentation-- a coalescence of recorded thought, one ridgeline and furrow at a time. A sort of braille tattoo, the texture delineates a topography to which, with loaded brush, I must react, rather than entirely dictate. The ridges are insistent waves, preserving the timeline of ideas: a first wash of color echoes through like a residual thought, a reminder. In the end, one painting comprises a dozen partially buried previous compositions, the interest is their partial discernibility. These forests of line are meditations upon recollection both conscious and otherwise. They pose as a visual suggestion of the samskaras of Hindu karmic philosophy: the mental impressions left by all our individual

thoughts, actions, and intentions throughout time. Applied color is the reverberating pulse of emotion embedded there within-- the sedimentation and hue of inner landscapes made visible.

MEANING in MAKING: we only ever make ourselves; it is all we know how to do...

These sculptures possess a scale that belies their origination as shards-- the kind lifted from the beach or hillside, dusted free of silt and sand, turned this way and that out of curious wondering, cupped in a palm, pocketed away for later evaluation. Small souvenirs—made precious by the repetitive worrying of fingers and the cyclic burnish of thought. Each piece is begun in miniature-- a singular shape, wrought quickly and viscerally with only a handful of fresh clay—then turned on end, re-positioned, re-oriented, re-examined and then slowly, methodically, enlarged. With scale in the physical, grows weight in the figurative. Shards become relics--fragmented repositories of hopes repeated, wistful re-imaginings, prayers. For what do we do with deepest love or deepest fear other than turn it over and over in the palm of our minds, finding its beauty and caressing its form into something of talismanic power?

Massive boulders balance implausibly on toe, nearly elevated. Refined slopes and concavities bump up against fiercely torn edges and perforated terrain. Elements juxtapose in deliberate contradiction. Roughness is reconceived in elegance. The paradox of beauty coaxed out of pain. These are the ossification of thoughts, a deliberate dwelling on the tenuous fragility of our very bones, the architecture of our physical presence, and the blink of time we each occupy on these shores. They are literal bones-- joints and vertebrae and body parts-- fragmented and translated until a simple curvature remains the last vestige of reference. As an act of necessity and veneration, both-- personal and public, both-- these are a reminder of all that is ephemeral and how infinitely we try to defend against it.

Now they ask of you: what is it to hold or behold something precious of another? To be handed that person's worry-stone, their amulet or relic and to hold it in the grasp of your mind's eye? To witness all the stories that aggregate therein? To wonder at the collective essence of our narratives?

Look closely: these are my bones, and yours, and our children's.
They are a *momento mori*. A koan.

A Human ARCHAEOLOGY:

It all comes back to the river of flame, to the placing of the stones in that river. The whole of our life's story summed up in the cyclical process of making, loading, firing, unloading—each piece a talisman, a fossil record of that journey.

These shards will outlast us all.