

What Makes a Potter: Functional Pottery in America Today

Janet Koplos

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In *What Makes a Potter*, art critic Janet Koplos zooms around the contemporary American pottery scene profiling eclectic, beguiling potters with divergent design philosophies and traditions who've fashioned meaningful, sustainable lives.

Introductory chapters illuminate the history of American functional pottery, describe the life and work of noted masters, and tease out "the philosophy that justifies handmaking in the postindustrial age." They are a lesson in critiquing and appreciating pottery, using the vocabulary of its aesthetics and imparting understanding of different materials, methods, decoration, and firing techniques. This makes the book a valuable reference for collectors, writers, and curators, too.

The profiles are organized by theme and geography. There are clusters of potters working in Minnesota and North Carolina who share their stories about organizing studio tours and working from local traditional forms and methods. Chapters examine different business models, education, apprenticeships, and working with potters in other countries, particularly Japan.

The pottery community proves diverse: Japanese American Ayumi Horie sells her decal-ornamented ware and fund raises for charitable and political causes from her rural studio in Maine; Iranian-born Sanam Emami has an extensive academic career and uses computer modeling to design complex motifs and forms. Still other potters create large-scale pots geared for galleries and collector commissions, or focus on more affordable utilitarian pottery and enjoy interactions with a larger market at craft shows and studio storefronts.

Some common experiences unite American potters, including the physical and mental rigor of long training and careers. Many potters come from DIY families and have built or renovated their own homes, studios, and kilns. A surprising number were also competitive swimmers. Most are passionate in describing the struggle of carving out enough income and time to keep their hands in clay.

What Makes a Potter is an informative study of an engaging group of artists in love with the lives that they have handmade.

RACHEL JAGARESKI (November / December 2019)

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