

# FUNCTIONAL CERAMICS 2015



# Not Yet

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Suze Lindsay

While listening to a TED talk in the studio the other day, I heard an educational specialist speak about the aspects of reward or retribution when grading student work, describing the effects of accolades and achievement when receiving an "A," and degradation when graded "below average." The speaker purposed that if this grading strategy could change, and a simple "not yet" is delivered to the student, then everyone experiences success. "Not yet"—it implies that there is still more work to be done, there is no deficiency and the student can experience some sense of accomplishment, being unburdened, moving forward with his or her work.

Not yet.

This really struck a chord with me, in my own studio practice and as a workshop leader, and I have taken note and applied this to my thinking.

Personally, I have been challenged by the investigations of clay form and its meaning. In my early days of potting, I struggled with skill levels and the technical aspects of making. I had so many ideas, but not the ability to execute the idea. Sketchbook and writing became a way to record ideas for the future and develop my personal vocabulary, which helps me with the analytical processes, thus helping my work to grow. Paulus Berensohn calls the sketchbook his "portable studio"—we can take it anywhere and record anything since it is our own personal journal. As I continue to look through old sketchbooks, I notice my own "not yet," and it supports me in moving forward, in redefining an old idea, in pondering what might be implied by the piece.

Not yet.

When teaching, I have discovered that many of us struggle to describe what we want our work to be. To make "good pots," not only do we have to be incredibly proficient in our craftsmanship, we also have to address our intentions. Is it an object of service? Is it an object of contemplation? And how do we develop that vocabulary? One quote I love is from John Cage, who stated, "Don't try to create and analyze at the same time. They are different processes." And I believe this to be true. I love to sit at the wheel and respond to this amazing material called clay. When thinking about the Cage quote, I can break my processes into two parts: form—or the

way in which a thing is made—and meaning—the purpose for which a thing is made. I have found it extremely helpful to do writing exercises that help describe what is wanted from the work. I have experienced success when taking this practice into the classroom, with short writing exercises for students, the objective being that each one acquires his or her own words. These words can bring some revelations, and assist us in creating a body of work that is personal and meaningful to the maker. Students learn what to praise, what to polish, and hopefully give themselves some space and time to get the results they want.

Not yet.

So, how lucky we are to attend conferences like Functional Ceramics Workshop in Wooster, to meet each other, to find a community, a tribe, to talk about problems and solutions, and to stimulate ideas and keep our creative fires burning. We get to watch our peers and our teachers handle clay in ways that spark our imagination, inspiring a new way of thinking and approaching our own work. We appreciate that we can take this experience home, interpret it in a way we enjoy working, innovate, and start to apply that experience to what and how we work.

Not yet.

The most exciting and rewarding part about working in clay is that as I continue to make, to struggle, to explore, to fail, to find a better way, to get pleasure from what I make and to see others respond to my work, the work will grow and improve and will always challenge me to move forward...Not yet.

**Suze Lindsay** maintains Fork Mountain Pottery with Kent McLaughlin in Bakersville, North Carolina. She was a featured presenter at the 2014 Functional Ceramics Workshop.