

Artist's Statement - Scott Cooper

I've been making utilitarian pots for over 20 years. My goal is for each one to find a place in someone's home, where it is used and enjoyed. To that end, I try to balance function and aesthetics. I want my pots to be much more gratifying to use than a plastic cup, but also more intimate and accessible than a sculpture. Well-crafted, beautiful, interesting, useful.

So I make pots with the assumption that people will use them: pick them up, look under their lids, rub their feet, feel the rim of a cup on their lips. They need to pour well, stand up to wear and tear, and fit in the dishwasher. If they don't, their owners won't have time to learn the details of their surface texture, see small changes to the curve of a silhouette, feel their weight and balance. Like friendship, a good pot should grow on you over time.

While I usually make pots in short series, groups of the same form and general idea, I try to treat each one as it's own thing. Often, the reward of making is getting another chance to try some slight variation to a handle, a rim, a curve, a line or a mark. There are many persistent qualities in my work over time, but I'm constantly trying new forms, methods, patterns, glazes, and firing techniques. I have more new ideas than the time and attention to try them, and the feeling of being perpetually on the way to the next discovery is addictive.

It helps to use traditional craft techniques, which add their own character and variability to the process. Throwing on the potter's wheel; assembling, finishing and decorating by hand; mixing glazes from raw materials; and firing in a stubborn, atmospheric, fuel-burning kiln.

I love the inherent qualities of clay, and the process of forming and firing it into a near-permanent state. The act of making something out of almost nothing still seems kind of powerful and mysterious. The material still offers almost unlimited potential, but encourages and nudges me along with tangible signs of accomplishment and progress.

There are thousands of little decisions that go into every batch of pots. In making them, I try to listen internally as much as possible, and to tune out the demands of the outside world: who wants what, what might sell best, what they liked in the past. Those demands are like a beguiling curse — seemingly good, but sneakily bad. A poison in an otherwise tasty drink. I aim to make what I want to make, and then treat trying to find a place for whatever comes from the kiln as a separate process — a different problem, to be solved later. This doesn't always work, but it's a goal.

I also try to focus less on the pots I made last year, or the year before, and more on the pots I might make this year, or next.