

keeping on

*On the door it says what to do to survive
But we were not born to survive,
Only to live.*

–W.S. Merwin, “The River of Bees”

At 9:30 on a Sunday morning, the Metropolitan Museum in New York is quiet. In the dim spaces of an exhibit on Chinese art from the Yuan Dynasty, a celadon-glazed porcelain ewer glows in its case. Its cylindrical form is divided horizontally by tooling and vertically by applied strips, and a scalloped collar curving behind the lid marks it as a “monk’s-cap” ewer. It is elegant, but not perfect; a slight awkwardness and softness warm its virtuosic refinement. A scholar might read into it the influence of the nomadic Mongols, of Tibetan Buddhism, and of forms made in metal or leather, but to a potter this marvelous object speaks of other kinships. The tactility of its clay ribbons and bosses, the juxtaposition of its cut-slab spout and smooth thrown body, its expert manipulation of glaze flow and translucency - speak across time, from one maker to another, of a particular kind of potterly delight. The sight of it – the *existence* of it – revives the spirit.

That pots are more than a fuel-delivery system is an article of faith among modern makers. We traffic, you might say, in sustenance rather than survival: in the elements of delight, meaning, and mystery that can adhere to fundamental activities. This informs both our studio practice and the objects we send out into the world. The economics are uncertain, the kudos sparse, and the relevance to modernity constantly under question, yet we continue to go to our studios. Most days, the activity itself supplies enough juice to keep us there. But when we falter and doubt, or when circumstances seem to rise up against us, we look more closely at what sustains our human and studio lives. In winter, our bodies crave solid food, and in dark times our spirits search the psychic root-cellar for nourishment of a different sort: a book, a conversation, a project that enlarges our definition of usefulness. In this issue, we ponder what keeps us going.

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