

*The play must be brother to the work.*

– Walter Kerr, *The Decline of Pleasure*, 1962

**T**ell someone you are a studio potter, and you are likely to get one or both of the following reactions: *Can you make a living at that?* Or: *Oh, my (aunt/neighbor/sister-in-law) makes pottery.* An ongoing ambition of modern studio ceramics seems to be proving to the culture at large that this is a *job* – a profession, even. Our field is at pains to acquire the trappings of professionalism – credentials, organizations, and so on – and working potters carefully distinguish themselves from the hobbyists. Moreover, the term “studio potter” is tinged with an exalted sense of calling: an all-consuming, all-satisfying life in which work and play are indistinguishable. Why, then, would such a person need a hobby?

This issue of *THE STUDIO POTTER* is concerned with the interplay between our primary work identity and our “outside” activities. For some of us, the studio is the locus of the former but we engage, often quite passionately, in another pursuit which is, importantly, *not-work*. Others of us choose not to burden our studio practice with the necessity of supplying everything – money, advancement, social standing – that we require of our work identity, so as to preserve the sense of play and freedom more easily found outside of workplace.

An avocational pursuit can allow us to see anew, or even to recapture, the wondrous excitement that clay held when we first encountered it. Or, as Ellen Shankin observes in her piece on learning a martial art, it might increase our empathy for students struggling to master skills we have long taken for granted. But there are also makers – accomplished, serious ones – for whom no amount of mastery will use all their potential or completely satisfy their ambition to make a difference; they flip the work-play equation. Either way, the monolithic notion of pouring every talent, idea, and need into one’s studio practice fails to represent the complex and diverse ways we actually live our creative lives. And our privileging of work over other, less driven activities impoverishes our beings.

Elsewhere in the book quoted above, Walter Kerr says: “Our foolish diversions and ephemeral amusements belong to an instinctive strain in the human personality that, given its head and nursed to its highest, might place us in the unexpected and exhilarating position of being reborn...” Here are tales of makers at play, and at work.

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