Ben Kinmont

absolutely unchanging, in which we suspect we’re wholly seen despite what we’re wearing, and that has little to do, in the end, with being “clothed.” It seems very connected to the way in which the Old Testament insists that the proper way to pray is in love and fear and that these qualities are in equal measure and absolutely simultaneous. One of the things I worry about in this culture is that love and fear bear no relationship to one another.

Fear is itself a kind of fashion that one pays however much money to feel because it’s as fear as it is, instead of a kind of ontological condition, just a need for more jolts of adrenaline, for dangers that actually aren’t dangerous, or for some simulation of real sensation that seems to me that much of your work is about making certain thresholds appear between what has been in all eras, from Aristotle’s Plato to Augustine to now. And sometimes it feels to me that in our culture love, sadly, is given in a sticky note that says, “You look good today!” You tuck it on your mirror so that you can face the world one more time. You know, if we’re looking for such an easy form of self-assertion, then as a

culture we know nothing of actual fear, existential fear, fear that keeps us aligned with that oblivion that is the counterpart of genuine love.

H owe was also my entry point into these authors and all that language you mentioned. What I feel — what’s so moving — in Anne Hutchinson, Herman Melville, and that whole astonishing bunch is that they had at a single point a certain self a kind of infinity of being, and that they were, to the limit, just brushing up against. Maybe to have an American voice is to always locate oneself in that thinnest strand between an arrival that’s known and everything that threatens the ability to stay at that place, to stay there, to find a way to dwell. It feels infinite and prophetic and godlike and fearless; the only way to do it properly is to understand that love is some dwelling at the other edge of oblivion.

The art I love most offers us these kinds of dwellings. You read a poem and feel as if you’ve climbed into it, so to speak, and that is right there, between knowable things and unknowable things. For a little while, a great piece of work, where those two things coexist and you stay there as long as you can look at it or as long as you can read it. But, of course, no one goes to stay. One can hardly bear it.

The connection between being and power lies and how it is used, we can propose a plan for a more equitable future. But remember — to refer back to the ideas of consensus and disembodiment — that once that new, more just structure is created, it too will need to be challenged and reenacted to meet the needs of others. And so change continually occurs.

By the collapse of various national welfare systems, I think that artists will increasingly become providers of and media tors for lack of civic services. I think they will also continue to explore new ways of being public at the same time they face a narrowing of the possibilities for the expansion of the dominant mode — I mean include a larger “tribe” or “pack,” or even extend to a commons (communal).

But for me, after my Occupy activities ceased, I watched every thing by the television producer and director Josie Whedon, who is most famous for the TV series Buffy the Vampire Slayer. Whedon’s work is all about family — an alternative notion of family that is not dependent on blood relations but rather on shared cultural-urban experiences. In a weird way, his work helped me process my own cathexis of Occupy and ongoing projections about social practice and political engagement. I am still using that work to write about the problems you recognize in your question. How can one both have a family and feel that one is part of something? Likewise, how can one behave in such a way that family and commons become coextensive? Would you care to talk about this transition from the series of works in which you washed dishes for other people to your founding of an antiquarian bookshop in order to care for your

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family? I wonder, too, if we are not all constantly “becoming something else” in the current cultural climate where very few artists can survive on their art alone and most culture workers have more than one job, maybe several?

BK: I have tried to respond to a felt sense of urgency. What needs to be said? What is missing from the discussion? What is not part of the consensus, and what is my culpability in this dynamic? I am interested in the threshold of this community, of what can and cannot be called art. I have watched various ideas come and go, from relevant to irrelevant, and back again. But I would argue that, yes, we are all in a state of becoming, and that as we understand, this transcends into being and power.

2. Artist's project description: "On basketball something else, archive begun 2009. I wrote seven paragraphs to describe the week of seven different artists who had found art practices that led them out of the art world and into new discourses and value structures. In Paris, seven chefs wrote recipes to represent these paragraphs. At the Centre Pompidou, a broadside was distributed, directing people to the chefs' restaurants where they could see the representations of the paragraphs. The project was reactivated four years later through SFMOMA with seven new restaurants and then as a multiple with Galileo High School. Project can be reactivated. Archive in the collection of the artist."

SHIO KUSAKA: frequently asked QUESTIONS

Q: What do you make your pots out of?
A: A lot of my work is made of porcelain. I also use stoneware.

Q: What's the difference?
A: Porcelain is really dense and more like glass. Stoneware is porous and has more sand in it.

Q: Why do you use porcelain?
A: I like how smooth it is. It feels nice in my hands when I make pots.

Q: Isn't porcelain difficult?
A: Yes, if you want to control it.

Q: Why do you use stoneware?
A: Stoneware pots look different. Stoneware also reacts differently when I do the same thing I do with porcelain. If I am making pots in porcelain, after a while I get better at it. Then I switch to stoneware to lose my control over the clay a little bit. I then switch back to porcelain when I am able to make what I'm trying to make.

Q: Do you know what you will be making when you start?
A: I have an idea, but I usually can't make what's in my head. It is part of the process to force myself to make something particular and end up with something else. Sometimes I just make pots without any plans.

Q: Do you draw your ideas?
A: Not usually. I make notes and look at images I find.

Q: Do you use a wheel?
A: Yes, I use a wheel called the Whisper, by Shimpo Ceramics. It's very quiet.

Q: Are the big ones made on the wheel, too?
A: No, I help with the coil building. The clay ropes are rolled and then stacked up. The surface is then smoothed.

Q: Why get help?
A: I don't have the skill but I want to see my pots bigger. Big pots make my small pots look even smaller, which I like. I love my mini pots.

Q: How long have you been doing this?
A: It has been seventeen years since I first took a ceramics class. I was making pots on and off for ten years. I committed to pottery full time in 2006.

Q: How did you first get interested in pots?
A: Ceramics 001 looked like the most interesting to me in the class schedule at the time. I can't remember when and how I first thought making pots on the potter's wheel was magical.

Q: How long does it take to make one pot?
A: Twenty minutes on the wheel. I sometimes work on it a little more the next day. The pot dries from three hours to overnight, depending on the weather. I then flip it and work on the bottom of the pot for ten minutes.

Q: What was the first pot you made that you felt proud of?
A: A planter I made in 2005. I was excited immediately. I have made a bunch since then, and sometimes still make them.

Q: Do you make your clay?
A: No. I buy clay in bags. Usually from a local store.

Q: Do you make your glaze?
A: No. I am not really interested in the chemistry aspect of ceramics.

Q: Colors?
A: The bright colors I use are called underglaze. It's colored liquid clay. I make a pot, dry it a little, then paint two coats of underglaze. Then I carve some patterns out. I fire it once, put clear glaze on, and fire it again.

Q: What about your painted patterns?
A: I make a pot, fire it once, and put clear or white glaze over the pot. I paint patterns on the dry glazed surface and fire it again.

Q: How long does it take to finish patterns?
A: Sometimes I can make ten pots in one day, but sometimes I spend the whole day on one pot.

Q: How long do you wait before firing?
A: I dry small pots for one to two weeks and big pots for three to four weeks.

Q: How high do you fire?
A: The first firing is about 1,800 degrees Fahrenheit and the second firing is about 2,300 degrees Fahrenheit.

Q: How long is the firing?
A: The first firing is about nine to ten hours. The second firing is twelve to fourteen hours.

Q: Do you have a kiln?
A: Yes. I have an electric kiln, the FL-20 by Olympic. It is 28 inches wide, 45 inches tall, and 28 inches deep.