

HISTORY OF RAKU POTTERY

Raku first and foremost is the surname of the family who discovered this firing technique in Japan in the 14th century. The line of succession remains unbroken punctuated over the centuries by tradition and subtle invention. All other pottery made in this manner is called, "Raku-like." In the original technique the glazed pottery is taken hot from the kiln and set outside to cool and oxidize. Glazes are subtle whites, blacks and crackles. The nature of Raku captures both beauty and imperfection and is highly prized as wares for the Japanese Tea Ceremony (the Cha No Yu). This ritual more than anything else has elevated Raku to the realm of the spiritual.

NAKED RAKU

Naked or Sacrificial Raku is an alternative to the glazing process. In "naked" the bisqued ware gets a pour of slip which is then covered with glaze. It dries completely and then is fired to a low temperature, whereupon it's taken out of the kiln with tongs, post-fired in a container with combustibles and allowed to cool. The slip is then peeled off revealing the smoked crackled pattern beneath. It can be great or awful. If the piece isn't up to snuff, it can be re-bisqued which turns it white again. It's fiddly work requiring patience for experimentation and a stomach for failures.

WESTERN RAKU

Western Raku is glazed and fired in different manner. Glazes have been formulated with oxides that produce vivid flashes of copper, blues, purples and yellows. A glazed piece is removed from the kiln with tongs when the glaze has fluxed, then placed into a container holding combustible like leaves, saw dust paper or straw. When the fire roars the lid is placed and as the fire dies down the reduction of oxygen pulls out the unpredictable colours of the oxides.

PHILOSOPHY OF IMPERFECTION

Raku pottery is not beautiful in a Western decorative sense. When successful it becomes a contemplative art form. As a potter, raku has become a teacher and guide to me. After 20+ years of practice and experimentation it is always at the very end a "letting go" during the dance between the pots, the heat and flames, the day's weather, temperature and barometric pressure. That and the unseen "other" Muse. Some make it and many don't. Some are even occasionally-sublime.

In my experience this maverick beauty can be a form of self-portrait and a strong teacher. During cycles of failure, just continuing on is strong medicine. When work emerges that is in extreme of my abilities, I have gazed into the Mystery. Doing this work has never been about money or success. It seems to be about trusting an invisible process that comes out of me in pots! There's been a lot of experimentation, discoveries, meltdowns (uch!) and piles of failures now buried in several backyards. The ones I have kept have somehow woven a storyline that's fascinating to observe. A most unexpected love affair.