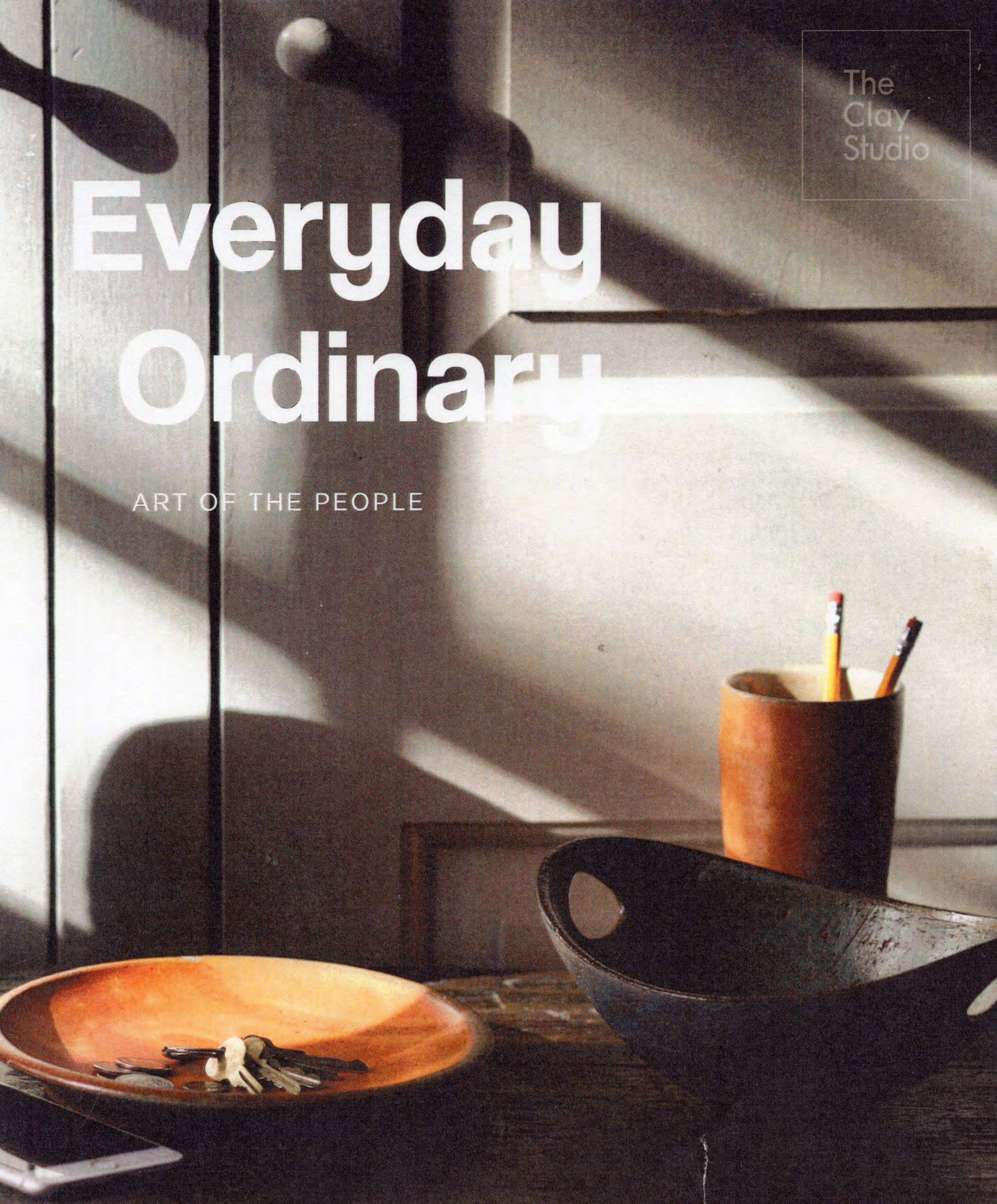


The
Clay
Studio

Everyday Ordinary

ART OF THE PEOPLE



Bernard Leach's seminal work, **A Potter's Book**, was published in London in 1940, almost a full decade before I was born. In concert with his life-long pottery "soul brother," Shoji Hamada, of Mashiko, Japan, Bernard rescued and secured for posterity the folk pottery tradition of both the West and the East, commonly known by the Japanese term Mingei or "art of the people" by recording, collecting, and actually producing wares with his own hands for market in his ceramic studio workshop assisted by apprentices. Formally educated and economically secure, he noted from a safe distance the gathering momentum and cultural impact of the ever expanding industrial revolution's production of everyday goods in both England and Japan. His insights and convictions continue to bear fruit as potent cultural and aesthetic questions, if not resolved solutions.

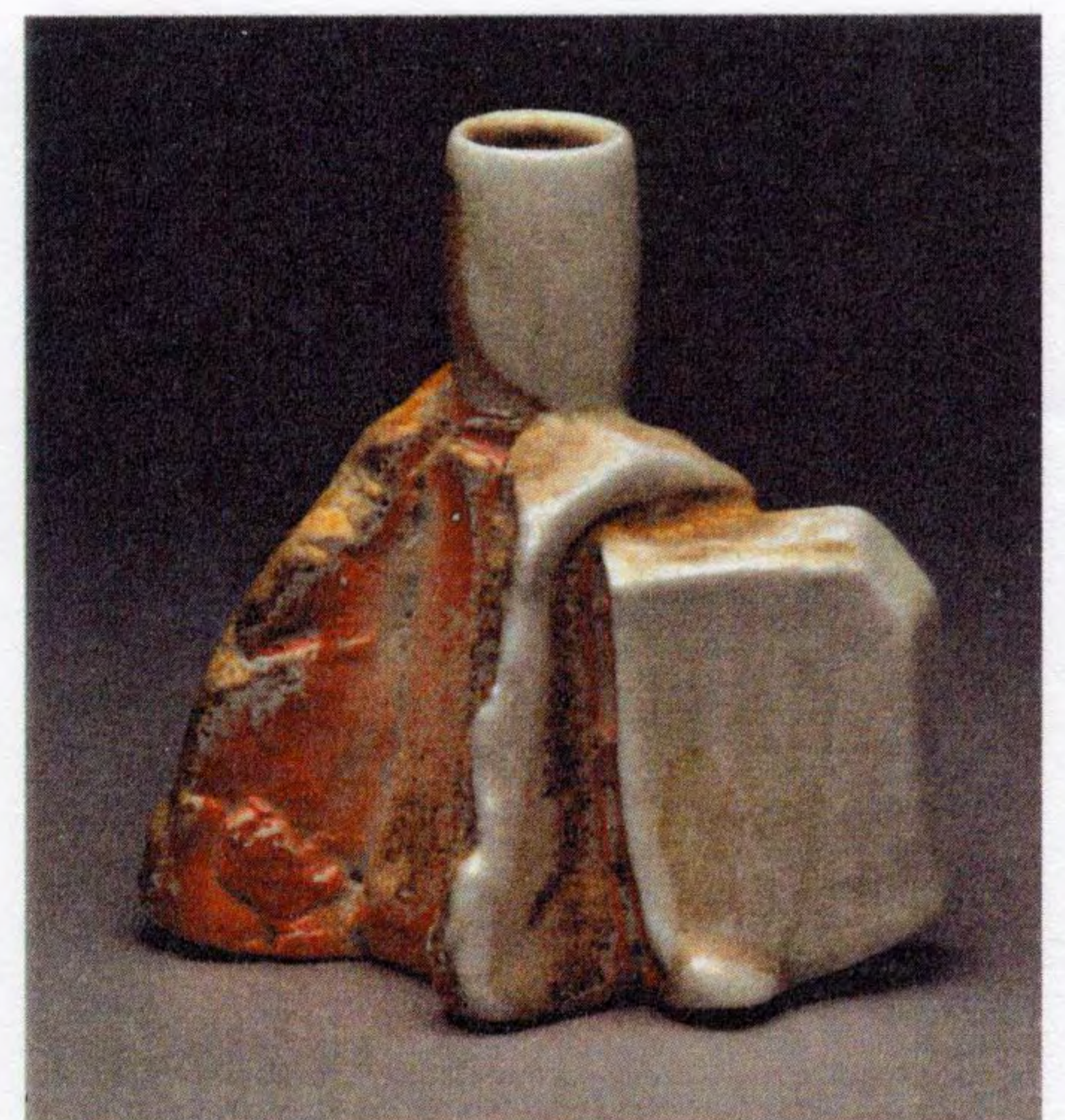
Kodansha International published Sōetsu Yanagi's **The Unknown Craftsman** in English in 1972, the same year I took my first ceramic course as a senior. My ensuing graduate study focused in on another East-West axis conundrum: Reconciling the matt-glazed stoneware vessels of the east coast with the exuberant "envelope pushing" works of such diverse west coast, Bay Area, ceramic practitioners as Robert Arneson, Richard Shaw, Jim Melchert, and Peter Voulkos that I encountered in 1970s craft publications.

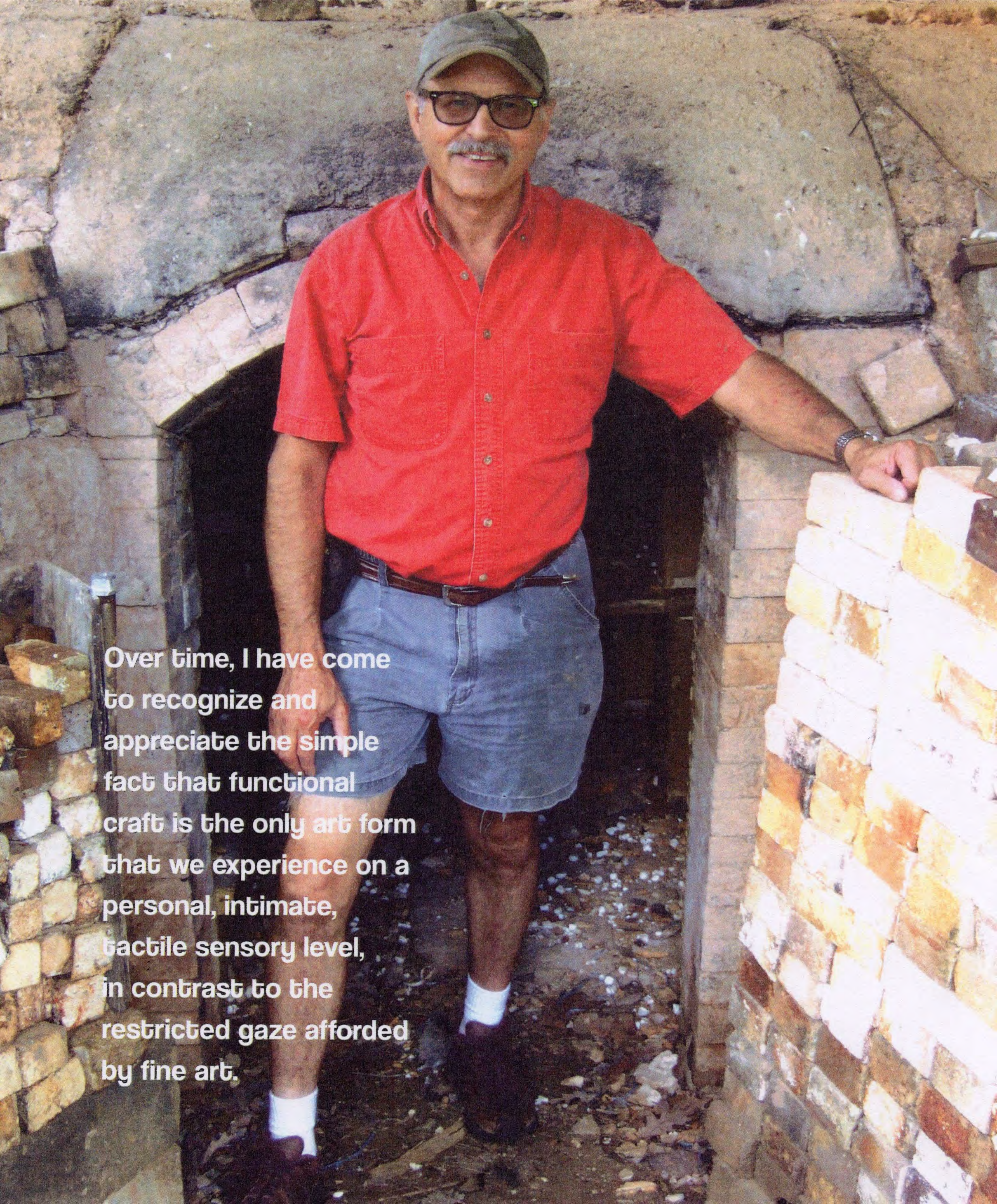
Clary Illian, having apprenticed with Bernard Leach in the 1960's, published her own manual, **A Potter's Workbook**, in 1999, confronting the unspoken ceramic "elephant in the room" head on: *There can be no doubt: handmade pots are made by privileged people for privileged people... they are privileged because they have the luxury of being idealistic... it is a struggle to make a living making pots.*

My current personal signature ceramic production consists of slip-cast, wood-fired, abstract functional sake bottles, a technique combo I refer to as a "synthesis of opposites." Over time, I have come to recognize and appreciate the simple fact that functional craft is the only art form that we experience on a personal, intimate, tactile sensory level, in contrast to the restricted gaze afforded by fine art. This is the critical aesthetic "bandwidth" that Leach, Yanagi, and Illian tuned into and rebroadcast for our aesthetic education and enjoyment through their publications. Reconciling aesthetic value and dollar value is often an elusive pursuit. A wise sage once remarked, "ceramics is basically science, converting clay to cash....that's an art form!"

jim chaney

James Chaney was born in Pittsburgh in 1949. He earned his MFA from Kent State University in 1975 and has taught ceramics at Kutztown University of Pennsylvania from 1977 to 2015. Jim participated in the international residency IWCAT, Tokoname, Japan, in 1997. In 2016 he completed a residency at Shangyu Celadon Modern International Ceramic Art Center, Shangyu, China.





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