

Offering Bowl
2007
Earthenware with Terra Sigillata



PAULUS BERENSOHN

For me, Haystack is the home of the soul of American craft and has been since my first day here as a beginning student in clay 45 years ago. On the evening of that first day, Fran Merritt, Haystack's founding director, and M.C. Richards, held a public conversation in front of the fireplace in the dining hall during which M. C. said, and Fran agreed, that is not just pots we are making but life we are shaping; that all the arts we practice are apprenticeships for the big art of our lives. That thought and the language in which it was presented changed my life and its intent. I took it personally. I thought they meant my life. In the decades since, as I have repeated what they said internally again and again, I've come to understand its fuller meaning, that M. C. and Fran were speaking of life itself, human and more than human, life and the central role of the crafts arts and its materials in its healing.

In recent years, under the direction of Stuart Kestenbaum, an inspired poet and attentive host, Haystack's soul has flourished by asking the essential questions that nourish the soul - questions that do not require definitive answers; that by their sincere repetition attract evidence that extends the landscape and makes connections.

Haystack's unique intention and generous pedagogy has had a wide influence, inspiring countless craft schools and university craft programs. But when we come here to this monastery that engenders and protects the seeds of reciprocal making, we come to a source. I feel fortunate and grateful that I began and now conclude my life as craft educator at this small gem of a container of the true and the beautiful and the healing.