

# NECESSITY PRESSES

by Linda Sikora

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Four teapots have been set upon a narrow mantle. The pots settle so completely into the atmosphere of the room that they are almost indivisible from it. Two of the pots – one at a time – cycle in and out of daily use. Two are for black tea only, the porous flange and gallery stained as brown as the glaze on their bodies; one is for herb tea and smells faintly of mint. The last one is larger, for crowds, and serves whatever is put in it. Two of them have been in use for the past four years. The others are more recent arrivals. Four pots can have more than four narratives, and these do.

The teapots under consideration are all pots I have made; rarely, these days, do I use the teapots of others. This is a phase. The exclusivity is arrogance or humility, or some mix of the two. The exclusivity fosters reconciliation. Rhythms in the studio are reconciled with rhythms in the household.

Of course teapots, like other function-based subjects ceramists may investigate, are not just physical objects. They are ecologies – objects within systems and environments – and it is on these terms that they are made and enjoyed. It has been said that to make a sincere (hardworking) functional pot, such as a teapot, it is necessary to have firsthand experience of the subject through use: one must use teapots in order to truly know them and thereby, truly make them. Under such terms, I began as an imposter. Initially, I did not make teapots in any utilitarian, “steep-and-pour-the-tea” sense. It was the *idea*





of the teapot that engaged me. They were vehicles for aesthetic and technical pursuit, explorations that sound devoid of content to the suspicious but are embodiment – first-hand experience – of the deepest order. To construct, surrender, coax, and navigate material and thought are physical and conceptual acts. Making teapots led me to making tea, not the other way around.

Often, a new cycle of my work is begun with teapots. Perhaps it would be more reasonable to start with a cup, but at this point in my practice, teapots are home. A teapot bundles information and organizes itself to present the value of its constituent parts. The physical parts of the teapot are scripted and nameable. Each has specific behavioral attributes that are quantifiable. One could grow wary of the insistent organization demanded by the parts (body, handle, spout) such that they add up to the whole (teapot) and perform their job (tea) well enough. Is it wariness of convention's demands that explains the aberrant teapot? The parts are more than form, line, and volume; they are operations – that is, if one stays committed to the working teapot. The operations generate a theater of action: postures and gestures that shape the narrative of tea.

It is the hardworking teapot I have come to appreciate. The organization of the parts is exacting, but without this, there would be no urgency. Urgency occurs when necessity presses. Cultural necessity is always debatable; personal necessity is more determined. I depend on the working teapot as the subject, within the range of my studio output, that carries the greatest potential to excel at being both discreet (private) and theatrical (public). The teapots are highly exposed in this wide range of narrative contexts, and in this they risk harsh valuation. It is my reliance on the urgency afforded by the working teapot that undermines my interest in more casual explorations of this subject. I prefer the making of a teapot to occur under pressure, like a confession.



**OPPOSITE PAGE:** Teapot (*bail handle*); 2011. Porcelain, polychrome glaze, wood/oil/salt-fire. 8 x 8 x 6.5 in.

**OPPOSITE PAGE, INSET:** Teapot (*large, back handle*), 2011. Porcelain, polychrome glaze, wood/oil/salt-fire. 7.5 x 10 x 6.5 in.

**ABOVE:** Teapot, 2011. Porcelain, polychrome glaze, wood/oil/salt-fire. 5.5 x 10 x 6.5 in.

**ABOVE, INSET:** Teapot (*Tiger*), 2009. Porcelain, polychrome glaze, wood/oil/salt-fire. 9 x 7.5 x 6.5 in.  
Photograph by Brian Oglesbee.