

Bearing



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Bearing • the manner in which one conducts or carries oneself, posture and gestures • the act, capability, or period of producing or bringing forth • something that is produced • the act of enduring or capacity to endure • reference or relation • a supporting part of a structure • Often bearings, direction or relative position.

During the pandemic so much shifted. The death toll was overwhelming. There were layers and layers of loss. It is hard to calculate its bearing on where we are now because ripple effects continue.

During the pandemic so much shifted. People reexamined priorities. Workers were designated front line, essential, non-essential. Some quit. We watched George Floyd murdered. Many joined the fight. Impacts were disproportionate. People from historically marginalized communities bore the brunt. I had to look deeper at complicity in systems that favored me.

In 2021 I started a body of work, a series of large sculptural ceramic vessels, some over 2 feet across, expressing various connotations of the word *Bearing*. As I coil-built each piece over several weeks, I pushed the limits of what the clay could structurally bear; exploring horizontal lines and vast open interior spaces contained by thin walls. I was processing through the clay, and with my hands, the vulnerability I felt, what we had endured, what was birthed and lost, how we could hold ourselves in the wake of it, our relative positions. Now, from my vantage point in 2024, having shifted from a career in academia to a life in clay, I realize that I was also making space. Not only to process the not knowing and the grief, but to hold new understanding, healing, and hope. As I transitioned from one life rhythm to another, these pots became a kind of coming-out story for me. This is who I am and what I do. It is how I process the impossible realities of the world as it appears to me right now. It is where I find joy enough to allow the grief. Coil by coil, layer by layer, something new to hold it all.



Lunar Cycle, Cone 10 brown stoneware, soda-fired 15 x 23 x 23



Burdened, Cone 10 brown stoneware, soda-fired 15 x 20 x 20



Balancing, Cone 10 brown stoneware, soda-fired 13 x 23 x 23



Water Bearer, Cone 10 brown stoneware, wood-fired 15 x 21 x 21



Borne, Cone 10 brown stoneware, soda-fired 16 x 23 x 25

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Jennifer Howe Peace shifted in 2023 from a career in academics to a career in the arts. A pioneer in interfaith studies, Peace co-founded the American Academy of Religion's Program Unit on Interreligious and Interfaith Studies and founded an affiliated Association by the same name. Author of numerous articles, essays, and chapters on interfaith cooperation, her most recent publication, co-edited with Elinore J. Pierce, is called Pilgrimage, Place, and Pluralism: Essays in Conversation with Diana Eck. Her co-edited book, My Neighbor's Faith: Stories of Interreligious Encounter, Growth, and Transformation, received a Catholic Press Association Book Award.

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