

# Nesting Bowls

I remember the smell of wet clay almost like my mother, its ozone-like smell, of thunderstorms and lightning. My parents were both artists, Ann and Carl Beam, and in my earliest years they were homeschooling me and travelling through the American Southwest, the Pacific Rim, and back to our family home in M'Chigeeng on Manitoulin Island. Everywhere we went, travel was punctuated by curious stops to rock cuts and roadside ditches. Gathering pinches of clay, flowing sands through hands to imagine grit. Even beach-side building and rolling pots in the crushed shell frit of the Pacific Ocean at winannish.

I watched them paying such attention to their natural surroundings. I think that we talk about being grounded maybe without realizing how exact the etymology of the word is. To have both feet planted firmly on the ground, to have earthy qualities. All of these statements speak to the soothing enduring qualities of clay, and earth pigments.

These days find me more than a decade past my father's passing, and my mother gone to dementia. As I raise my tiny family, and as



Anong Migwans Beam, gathering clays, Manitoulin Island ON

we all enter these strange and anxiety-filled times, I found myself reaching back to clay. Feeling the immediate comfort of placing a ball of tender porcelain in my hands. Watching my body memory, the intelligence of fingertips form and shape until a round bowl appeared, and then stood on its own.

I realize now the education I was privileged to receive from my parents; even though it had its hungry days, it was a rich childhood. I continue to

dig and explore with my two sons, the oldest born on my father's birthday. To be a builder, maker, in clay is to be part of the physical history of our planet in a very tangible way! It is also such a wonderful community that spans all our continents, and makes such lovely conversations, from Korean glaze masters to Santa Clara blackfiring wizards. The shared language we speak of heat and earth connects us to all our ancestors, and when we bring our children, to all future generations.

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Anong Migwans Beam is a painter living and working on Manitoulin Island ON  
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Clockwise from upper left: preparing pigments; processing cup-and-saucer red clays; slip drying; and red and cream clay gathered by me and my sons on Manitoulin Island ON, 2019



Clockwise from upper left: Carl Beam, my father, preparing clays and slips, New Mexico, 1983; Ann Beam, my mother, sanding a large handbuilt bowl; Carl Beam and Tiny Anong pit firing; and me with my Mum's bowl, 1983

For over 30 years, Ann Beam has worked in mixed media painting, ceramics and construction using recycled materials, with a focus on cultural histories of women's labour in building homes, in motherhood, cooking, and teaching. She founded the Neon Raven Art Gallery.

Carl Beam (1943-2005) works in drawing, watercolour, etching, non-silver photography, photo transfer, installation and ceramics. His work brings autobiographical, commercial, photographic, and art history references into contact to suggest dissonance between Indigenous and North American settler cultures.