

## *A Prayer Without Words*

“Prayer is when the mind is one-pointed and man talks to infinity. Meditation is when the mind becomes totally clean and receptive, and infinity talks to the man.” – Harbhajan Singh

This work is a ritual that celebrates and embraces contemplation through repetition. It is an act of centering for the performer and it provides a meditative object for the viewer. Millions of pilgrims travel to Mecca each year to walk in circles around fragments of a mysterious black stone. Meanwhile, civilization continues to circle another black rock in the name of growth and progress, with the United States and China as the top producers of coal.

Touch, and the centrality of this experience familiar to those working with clay, is also a focus, although in this project it is approached from another angle. By using the alternative ten digits located farthest from the mind, the body feels, along with the feet, the effect of its impact on the environment. Touch is an inversion from hands to feet. Contemplation is preferred to product. Space is privileged over form. Iron-rich clay and black adobe are preferred to the sanitized qualities of porcelain.

## *Can't get there from here*

I have a fascination with base materials. Asphalt, coal, and petroleum products, all contribute to our comfortable existence. Yet, we generally wish to keep these matters both out of sight and out of mind. Of interest is the psychology of *value*. What is esteemed/revered? What is discredited/devalued? What happens when we turn instead towards the difficult aspects of our culture and ourselves and listen deeply?

A few years ago, I began to create paths out of recycled waste clay for walking meditation. I felt overwhelmed by the enormity of the problem of human caused climate change. Business as usual no longer would do. We know that the rate of melting continues to accelerate. While humanity's predicament requires technological innovation and vast mobilization of resources to change our infrastructure, more importantly there resides, at the absolute core of the problem, a profound resistance to *felt experience*. It is an issue that is deeply psychological in nature. Rather than a solution that is simply technical or rational, it is instead a matter of humans collectively finding the courage to feel difficult emotions that we would much prefer to sideline or quash entirely.

This way of working with clay, slowly arranging it as particles and then compacting it by walking, arose out of an intention to slow down and remain in stillness with the undesirable parts of my mind and bodily experience. To quote a line from a recent advertisement: “You **never** get **anywhere** in life by sitting down.” Really though, I would argue that one can get a great deal of mileage out of *cultivating a space for stillness*. There is essential wisdom to be accessed in the practice of sitting or walking meditation. Doing ‘nothing’ - on purpose! A painstaking slowness is of tremendous help towards the aim of finding stillness while in motion.

### *The Periphery*

How to synthesize an awareness of the body and the boundaries of the mind? It is a peripheral awareness that is needed. By building the walking meditation paths, I can set up a space to perform an act of *attunement* to the deeper rhythms. Peripheral awareness spreads out the focus and directs attention to the outer boundary of experience. Life energy is finite. But the deeper rhythms intersect infinity. What is it that we are collectively building with our life energy?

The culture needs to slow down in order to get fully into the body with all its attendant weirdness and discomfort in order to consider our collective weight on the world. From this place we can respond with wisdom, rather than react with aggression.

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