

Past, Future, and Present: Short History of Influence

By: Ben Gufford



This face jug brings together global influences, nevertheless, I can't forget the roots from which I started. I title this face jug accordingly. Inspired by the old so as to bring on the new, this face jug is titled "The Modern Mud Man".

This short essay is a brief history of my introduction to face jugs and North Carolina Pottery. In the 1980s' David Holt paired with UNC-TV to produce an epic documentary series of the arts in North Carolina titled Folk Ways. Of the notable North Carolina artists David visited were Etta Baker, Doc Watson, and Burlon Craig. I have watched a thousand times the videos of Etta, Doc, and Burlon. The intrigue of Burlon's face jugs stuck and later in my academic studies, during the mid to late 90s, I visited the Catawba Valley area, the Catawba Valley pottery festival, Kim Ellington, and many more potters. Currently, I have visited almost every notable potter whose work I admire and I have attended many North Carolina Pottery conferences. However, there still remains a few potters and ceramicist that I have yet to meet. My vacations were and still are centered around clay. I've traveled to some of the most beautiful places to visit potters such as Penland, Burnsville, Bakersville, Spruce Pine, Hickory, Asheville, Waynesville, Floyd, VA, Edgefield, SC, Mars Hill, Seagrove, Pittsboro, Brevard, and so on. And today I still make the time to visit, learn and just marvel at the infinite possibilities clay takes on from the hands and minds of the most interesting creative people I've ever met. Most of the potters I've met are engineers of the highest caliber, creating brilliant solutions needed to produce art unlike anything ever seen. These potters are a breed of tight-knit self-sufficient folks, working together to support art that preserves and innovates simultaneously. While I live many hours away from these arts-filled communities, I continue to feel connected and inspired by the works of some of the most phenomenal clay artists in the world living in my home state of North Carolina.