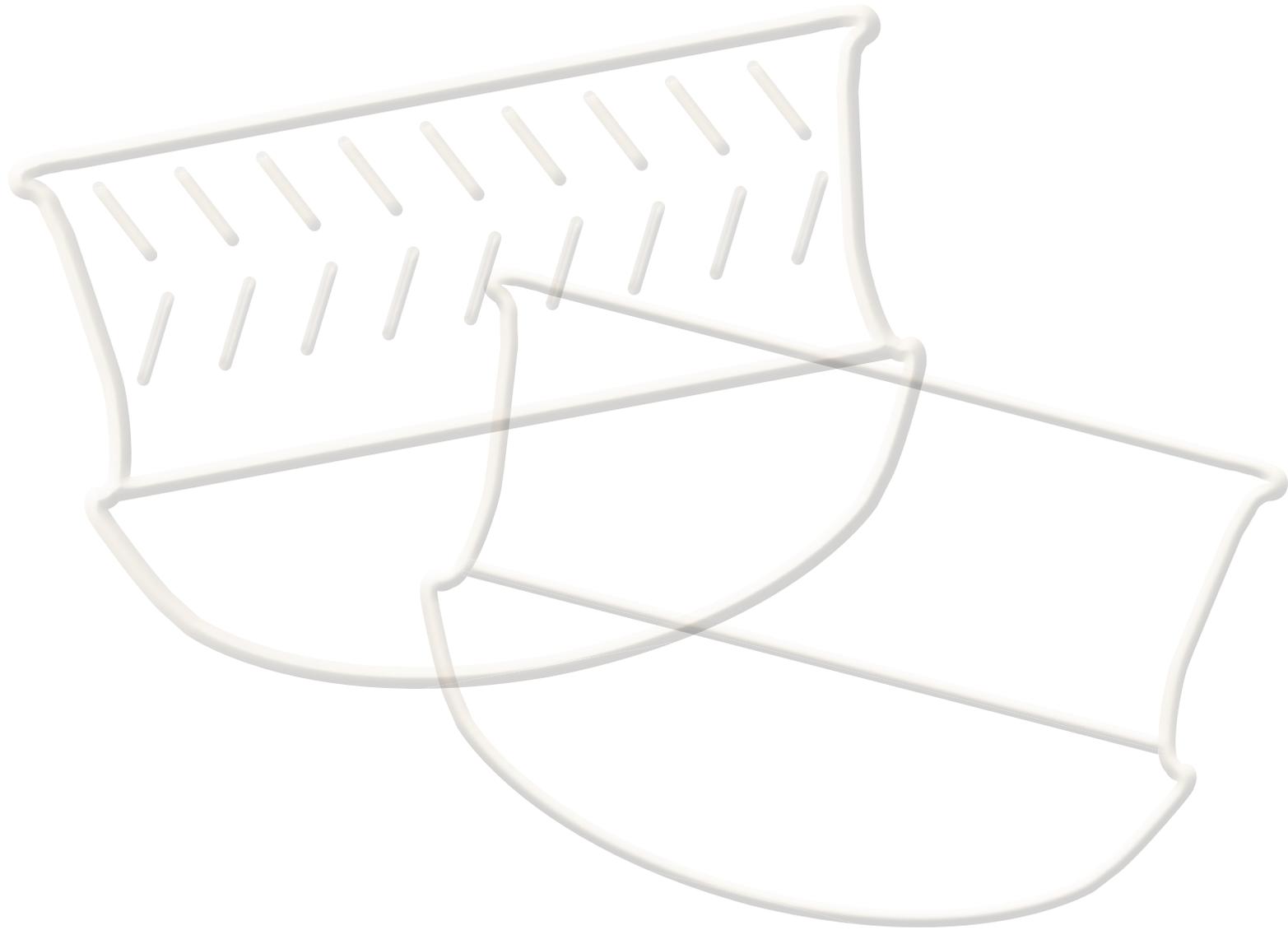


My beautiful
pot



Why is my pot more
beautiful than yours?

By Cătălina Dănilă



The earth is power; it conveys mass, concentration, weight, stability, force, calm, fertility, rebirth. The piece of clay, fresh and generous, held in the hand gives us all its energy to build a world of our own, to receive ideas, to nourish ourselves and to resist. It's like a counterpoint when we walk, listening tenaciously to the law of gravity that is impressed upon us. It propagates the energy that we consume for living, breathing and thinking.

It is the element from which we all are born and where we will all return. Still, the earth would not be like this without water, air, sun and fire. It would not bear life, it would not represent anymore the motherly environment that nourishes and vivifies everything. It is the element that reminds us pregnantly of our childhood. The earth attracts us like the seed that tries to penetrate it, and take from it all that it needs to germinate and to reach the light and warmth of the sun. The earth gives us safety and certitude; everything that it is and that it will be.



It exists, we see it, we touch it, we smell it and we hear it's 'voice' calling for us to mould it into shapes – we are a group of ceramicists – children, artists and archaeologists. We metamorphose one into the other; the children become little artist-archaeologists, and for us adults, childhood transposes us into universal fools of ingenuity. The children are truly special. We begin from lines and dots to decipher together the shapes and colours that will guide us to successfully finishing our clay pots.

Alongside the archaeologists Meli, Steve and Laurence – Alexandra, Dana, Narcis, Roxana and Marius are only a few names of the 17 children that have joined. They are inquisitive and thirsty for knowledge. Students of grades 5-8 from the village of Măgura, Teleorman County, immerse their small and delicate hands into the moist and fresh clay during the workshop *The transformation of clay: shaping, decorating and firing of pots*. I see them working with feverish energy, their impatience driving them ahead, and us adults always circulating around them, making efforts to keep up with them. For each pot that their hands mould, they put in an immense quantity of work, starting with a story that they aren't sure of, and finishing with the materialisation of their thoughts that







miraculously shape up, receiving contour and colour. Sneaking peeks at their neighbours from time to time, and wondering constantly which pot is better? The clay, moulded with passion, takes on the most unexpected of shapes.

Small or large, the clay that we are playing with remains our friend forever. With every piece lifted, polished and caressed countless times to extract the essence that it represents, it reveals to us the secrets of long lost worlds, worlds only seemingly departed, waiting for the archaeologists to wake them from their sleep so they can reveal their beauty again.

The earth grows from inside, its surface washes away, it becomes young and then old. So the thousand-year-old ceramics tell us about creation, love, inner nutriment and death, and, in the same way as our work today, they connect our souls with the ancient ones.

For each and every one of us, from the uncertainty and drowsiness at the beginning, to each piece of clay shaped and lifted to the sky, we are transformed with the confidence and certitude that our pot will be the best of the best. Even though we are exhausted from work and emotions, a sense of inner joy fills our hearts at the end of the day when, after we have embellished them with paint and decor, we admire our little pieces of clay transformed from Cinderellas into princesses.





But the surprise of the day remains the clay tablets into which everyone impressed their hands and where our fingerprints remain forever. The tablets, together with the pots of clay, will finally meet the flames that will enable them to endure.

Our thoughts take flight and fix themselves onto the day when our little creations will emerge from the oven. Only a day separates us, a day perfect for the clay to release its moisture and prepare itself to be fired.

And the time finally comes and two huge ovens appear in the form of big pits with ventilation openings. Near them dozens of little eyes look carefully at everything, from the immersion of the pots to their extraction, and I remember a story that I will tell you now briefly, that of the talking pot:

'...and one night the pot whispered into my ear "You can't understand. I wasn't a pot from the beginning. Once I was a lump of red clay." The master took me and rolled me, beat me hard, battered me repeatedly, and I cried "Don't do this! I don't like it! Leave me alone", but he just smiled and said to me gently "Not yet." Then ah, I was placed on a plate and moulded, moulded and moulded some more. "Stop! I am getting dizzy! I will be sick!" I cried. But the master just shook his head and said quietly "Not yet." He battered me again and hit me and shaped me until I acquired the shape that he wanted. Then a well-deserved break gave me the impression that it was over. But he took me again, he brushed and coloured me everywhere, the smells were horrible. I thought I would suffocate. "Oh, please stop it, stop it" I cried. He just shook his head and said "Not yet." And he put me into the oven. I have never sensed such heat. I cried, I knocked and I kicked the door. "Help! Take me out of here!" I could see him through an opening and I could read his lips when he was shaking his head from one side to the other "Not yet."



I begged him. I insisted, I yelled, I cried, I was sure that I would not escape this time. I was ready to give up. Then the door opened and he took me out and placed me on a shelf, where I cooled, and I waited asking myself what is he going to do to me now? Then he took me and polished me with wax, lots and lots of wax until I got tired, but an hour later he gave me a mirror and he told me "Look at yourself." And I looked. That is not me, that can't be me. It's beautiful. I am beautiful! I am magnificent! I am divine!

He told me gently "I want you to remember, I know that it hurt when you were rolled, battered, hit, spun, but if I had left you alone you would have dried away. I know that you were dizzy when I moulded you, but if I had stopped you would have crumbled and ripped yourself into pieces. I know that the smells weren't good for you, that I brushed and coloured you all over, but if I hadn't done this you would have never truly hardened. You wouldn't have gained the shines in







your life. If I hadn't put you in the oven, even when I knew that it was hurting and very hot and unpleasant, you would have cracked; you wouldn't have survived too long because that fortification wouldn't have lasted. Now you are ready to go out into the world. Now you are what I had in my mind when I first started working with you." '

This old story, from across time, made me think that, just as in our time, people 4, 5 or 6 thousand years ago were experiencing the same transformation and evolution. And like all of us, each child moulded his or her piece of clay; each made his or her pot. In time, each and every one is 'moulded' becoming beautiful, magnificent, or even divine, aspiring to be the best.



