



No Lotus without mud.

When we look with full admiration at an old 12th-century Chinese celadon vase of the Song dynasty, what strikes us the most? The shape? The balance between stability and refinement, the soft colour of jade, clear as the moonlight or its crackled texture, smooth and robust with here and there a little flaw?

Through its transparency we suspect the hand of its maker, his efforts in digging and kneading the clay, the movements of the pottery wheel. The glow and warmth of the oven can be felt until today, with the long string of notables, emperors and clients passing by. In our imagination we go the way of the vase and the past comes closer and closer.

Here too, time softens things, rounds them off and makes them more resilient, just as nature slowly erodes the rough rocks into polished surfaces where the elements have less control. Many centuries have left their mark to give this vase the patina in which the new and the old mix, and the mortality suddenly becomes alive. This timeless beauty is in stark contrast to some new creations in ceramics.

What's missing? What are we missing? What do we find in old and not in many contemporary works? That a work may or may not provide the necessary background to its origins is not decisive, because many new works also have this characteristic. But what then lies at the basis of the difference? Is erosion the most important factor over time? Or would the same character, the same beauty already be present at its origin? Is the basic material decisive, or the condition of the maker?

The fact is that clay is now refined as raw material by industrial processing so that little remains of its original character. Of course this has an impact on the final result, but an equally important aspect is the way in which the material and the elements are approached and come into its own.

The loss is apparently an excess of human intervention, to cultural refinement and perfection where too little attention is paid to the spontaneous, the accidental and the preservation of the natural character of the material. This is in contrast to the approach whereby the urge for perfection plays the leading role, in which matter is covered under the cloak of the spontaneous, the accidental and the preservation of the natural character of the material. This is in contrast to the approach whereby the urge for perfection plays the



leading role, in which matter is covered under the cloak of reason and mind. Historically, we find the latter early in traces in Western thought and in art. From Plato to Descartes, from Jewish-Christian thinking, the image of man in the renaissance to the conceptual in contemporary art.

In many ancient Chinese ceramic works influenced by Taoism and Buddhism blows in a very different kind of wind and nature takes a more prominent place with the accidental, the non-pure and the imperfect part of the totality. It is not a matter of and / or just one that arose and perished at the same time. Nature, the body, matter and spirit are one because all of this is part of the great cosmic event. Just as the lotus can't emerge without the mud and the latter carries within itself the seed of the lotus, the coexistence of both and their mutual dependence is not a dualistic encounter but a continuum, and interlocking. The one can't exist without the other. In this harmonious arrangement the seeming contradictions are no longer separate of importance. Nature versus culture, body versus mind, strength versus softness, dynamics and rest, masculine and feminine, all these aspects are no longer separate but influence each other and merge seamlessly. The best ceramic works of this flourishing period testify to this. Such creations no longer give up their opposite for the spectator, but quiet the mind because there is nothing to add and at the same time there is nothing we can take away from it. They are the expression of true art such as life is imperfect and therefore perfect.

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