



In Memoriam Arne Rudolf “Rudy” Autio
(1927-2007)

Three Views

I. Stephen Glueckert

(Read at the Rudy Autio memorial, Montana Theatre, The University of Montana, July 21, 2007 in Missoula, MT)

Rudy’s Hands

His hands were simple hands, potters hands.
They dug the dirt, kneaded the clay and stilled
the wet earth.

His hands loaded the kilns, flicked the match,
mixed the glazes, lifted the bags of
bentonite,

hauled the sculptures, and climbed the
scaffolds.

His hands were artist’s hands, they had
knowledge,
confidence, innocence and vulnerability.

His hands were curious, mechanically savvy,
focused and never idle.

His hands hovered and fluttered over a story
when it was being told,
putting mere words in their place.

His hands whispered and laughed, were never
still,
never condescending.

His hands shook many, many other hands
and shared food and drink with still many
others.

His hands penned letters to politicians,
and wrote words of encouragement to aspiring
artists.

His hands were on the throttle of a scooter one
moment

and accepting awards and accolades the next.

His hands were giving hands, and worked, and
worked for community
and never asked for anything.

His hands rested on the shoulders of friend
Voukos, and mentor Hamada
and effortlessly brought east and west together.

His hands caressed a glaze momentarily, and
turned attention to the next sculpture,
holding dirt between his fingers and knowing
its essence.

His hands were giving hands, and worked, and
worked for community
and never asked for anything.

His hands controlled a mouse and refined
computer drawings,
then handling a brush, a pencil, a trowel, he
drew and painted and potted.

His hands playfully scratched through the frost
on window,
and embraced a family and held them close.

These hands were the hands of an artist,
workshop hands that traveled and shared.

His hands were giving hands, and bore the
scars of hard work.

They were simple hands , potters hands, they
were Rudy's hands.

2. Beth Lo

Rudy Autio was a groundbreaking artist, a revolutionary in the ceramic arts, and an inspiration to all for his lifelong pursuit of his vision. He made some of his finest work in the last decade of his life. But his warmth, intelligence and humanity are what made him stand out from other talented individuals. Rudy was a good person and knew how to live his life with grace and generosity. I have always been impressed with how Rudy interacted with children. Rudy would focus his deep gaze right on the child and speak directly and kindly to him or her, with humor and encouragement. Kids would open up to him, show him their artwork, want to share their crayons with him. Rudy managed to keep up a tremendous outpouring of creative work in his ceramics and drawing, and yet had the focus and energy to raise an incredible family of wonderful children and grandchildren. He also maintained deep friendships with multitudes of artists and former students. He and Lela kept the door

open and chairs around the kitchen table ready for conversation. And when I would bring up yet another batch of students to visit his studio, he always found insightful and uplifting words of encouragement to offer, leaving my students breathless with inspiration. I don't think there are many people who can handle greatness with such good will and generosity. Although Rudy has passed away, his life and artwork will continue to be a focus for me in all my walks of life. He left us with so many wonderful lessons.

No piece of writing about Rudy Autio would be complete without a bow to Lela, his wife and partner, who completed him and balanced him, at the same time embodying a different, equally original warm-hearted spirit. We are lucky to have her, Arnie, Lars, Lisa and Chris Autio in our lives and communities.

3. Richard Notkin

(Presented at the Rudy Autio memorial, July 29, 2007, Archie Bray Foundation for the Ceramic Arts, Helena, MT)

I would like to begin by thanking the Archie Bray Foundation for hosting this celebration of Rudy Autio's life, and Lela and the Autio family for choosing the Bray as a place that was quite dear to Rudy. Like many of the artists who have passed through this cherished and world renowned institution, I was, on my first

visit in 1980, shocked by my initial visual impression. "*The Archie Bray Foundation?* Jesus," I thought, "This is a *ghost town, a rubble heap, a dump!*" It didn't seem to live up to its reputation—I had been expecting a more dignified facade. But it only took a half-hour of visiting the artists in their ramshackle studios to understand that this was indeed a place of incredible potential and great magic. Today, the Foundation continues to support ceramic artists—young artists just out of art schools and universities, as well as established ceramists seeking to expand their aesthetics and explore new directions—in a fertile and encouraging environment. And thanks to the dedication and support of many former resident artists and arts supporters, the Foundation is now a bit less of a ghost town—it has morphed into a wonderfully incongruous conglomeration of obsolete brick-strewn factory ruins and state of the art ceramic studios—with the addition of the new Shaner Resident Artist Studio.

Rudy was a lifetime supporter of the Bray.

So . . . It is most fitting and appropriate that we gather here today to remember and pay tribute to Rudy Autio. It was here that Rudy and his lifelong friend and colleague, Pete Voulkos, were invited by Archie Bray to work at the Western Clay Manufacturing Company as the first two artists-in-residence. Were it not for Archie's prescient choice of these two young art students—who would later become America's finest and most influential ceramic artists—I doubt that the

Bray would have grown to become the world's premier ceramic arts residency program. I probably speak for the many artists gathered here today when I observe that very few of us would have ever come to Montana, much less settled here, were it not for these auspicious beginnings of the Bray. Rudy and Pete truly set the standard that all of us have tried, in our myriad ways, to uphold. For this, I thank you Archie, Pete, and Rudy. Your spirits live on, and touch all of us, through this place.

Rudy was, perhaps, our last direct link to the presence of Archie and his family, the last resident artist who remembered Archie's constant presence in every aspect of the brickworks and the fledgling foundation. I never heard Rudy refer to this place as the Archie Bray Foundation, or even "The Bray," as current and former resident artists fondly call this amazing place. For Rudy, it was always "the Brays," as in, "I'm going over to the Brays."

But what impresses me most about Rudy—and what I loved most about Rudy—was his sincere compassion for everyone he knew, from the youngest aspiring ceramics student to the most revered icons of the art world. Rudy treated everyone as equals, recognizing that each person had a story to tell and a spirit worth encouraging. By his actions and his words—and in the ever-probing inquisitiveness in his own art—Rudy recognized that the making of art was

a difficult task on a daily basis, and a lifetime journey requiring strong personal commitment. He inspired us all by his own exemplary life, and further inspired us with his words and wisdom, in person and in the form of letters and e-mails. He recognized the transformative power of art and the innate human spirit of creativity, and he celebrated these in his life, his work and his relationships with family, friends and colleagues. As an artist, he knew that in our innermost soul, each of us struggles with our creative passions, that in our most private, honest moments, we are deeply critical and often unsatisfied with our work. Rudy understood the artist's constant efforts to expand his or her parameters, both technically and aesthetically, and the inherent internal pressures for growth and evolution. Rudy knew that to make art was never easy, that there was always so much more to learn, that the true artist was always a student. I think that this was the basis for his constant encouragement of all of the artists whom he so naturally and genuinely mentored, whether we were students, friends, colleagues or peers. Rudy made everyone a peer, and we all felt comfortable and welcome in his presence.

The Autio home is a haven of warmth and hospitality, and everyone who ever visited the Autios cherishes their time there. On a crisp fall day at the end of the last millennium, I drove Louanna Lackey over MacDonald Pass to Missoula, where she would be

spending a few days putting the final touches on her biography of Rudy. We got there in the late morning, and, after visiting a few moments, were invited to share in a pot of stew that Lela had simmering on the stove. The two masons setting stone on a new wall being built along Duncan Avenue were invited in. Soon we were joined by several passersby, a few former students, a couple more family members, and Hugh, Rudy's longtime assistant. It seemed that everyone gravitated to this loving home and Rudy and Lela's generosity, and I was beginning to think of the famously crowded steamship cabin in the Marx Brothers film, *A Night at the Opera*, in which everyone who knocked on the door was invited in until the inevitable explosion resulting from critical human mass. And that seemingly bottomless pot of stew was quite tasty. Thank you, Lela.

The day before he passed away, Rudy sent out e-mails to many of his fellow artists and friends. In his usual understated, gently ironic and subtly humorous manner, Rudy said:

I send my love and have decided not to do any more workshops! I feel grateful for all you good friends that have been around me for so many years. Thanks for the good company. Prosper in your work. Keep your ideas going. Love, Rudy.

Rudy remained encouraging and altruistic to the very end, and his kind words will forever resonate in my mind and in my heart.

It will be said, a great many times, that Rudy was a man of gentle spirit, always kind and gracious, that he never said a negative word about anyone. Well, that is mostly true, but if you have ever delved into the realm of contemporary politics, particularly regarding the course of our nation's current government, Rudy would become a bit agitated and quite outspoken, and rightfully so. Rudy was not one to shy away from expressing his concerns for our country and our planet, either in private discussion or in the public forum of letters to the editor. Over the years, he and I have exchanged many e-mails sharing our social and political views, and his references to our current leaders have been less than kind—again, rightfully so. At the core of all of Rudy's remarks was a deep compassion for people, for peace, for the creative spirit, but he also believed in being aware, and being active. In a recent e-mail, he referred to the necessity for "anger with courage where it is needed." In a culture which seems inexplicably loathe to discuss politics and our current predicaments, however dire, Rudy had deep and committed views on peace and justice. I was glad to have shared these discussions with Rudy.

I know I will be repeating what many others have and will observe about the life of Rudy Autio.

As a human being, and as an artist, Rudy will always be an inspiration and a presence in the lives of all whom he touched, through his art, his teaching and his friendship. I will always admire his forthright unpretentious observations—always succinctly and poetically expressed—his genuine compassion for people, our nation and planet, and his deep unconditional love for family and friends. I offer my condolences and love to the many members of Rudy's wonderful family, whose kind and gentle spirits reflect that of this remarkable man. We will all miss Rudy greatly, but we also rejoice that he was in our lives, that his incredible spirit has touched our lives deeply, in significant and lasting ways. This is a gift that will live forever. Rudy, we were blessed by your presence, and we love you.