



Paulus Berensohn

Paulus Berensohn's teaching and writing has expanded the way we think about craft by inviting us to think deeply about the personal transformation that working with craft material implies and the way our practice in turn has the potential to transform our society and environment.

Paulus came into craft from an original perspective. As a young dancer in New York with Merce Cunningham he happened to observe Karen Karnes throwing pots. He "had to learn *that* dance," as he has put it, and he has been thinking, writing, and speaking about craft practice as movement ever since. His seminal book, *Finding One's Way with Clay*, (Simon and Schuster, 1968) has been in print continuously since 1968 and is one of the most widely printed books the field, a expansive counterweight to the tight canon of the time, Bernard Leach's *Potter's Book*. His practice of forming vessels by pinching proposed a slow movement decades in advance of the now well-known slow movement in food and invited a more mindful space into our studio practice.

Paulus's own work has evolved over four decades from producing pinched pots to making handmade journals. Over the last several decades he has taught this practice in numerous workshops around the world, advocating that recording ideas and observations can be both creatively fruitful and an act of object-making. His own journals are objects of exquisite beauty, a feast of image, color, and calligraphic freedom. His approach to journaling has inspired an entire curriculum of art in the local public school in Spruce Pine near Penland School in North Carolina where he lives, where every student makes a journal by hand and works through the year to produce a visual representation of their creative process.

What makes Paulus so significant as an educator is his invitation for us to think more deeply about what we are doing transforming materials into objects and how we are transformed in turn by those materials and the objects we make. He invokes diverse sources from astrophysics to anthropology to poetry to get students excited about exploring the creative process. His recitations of poetry are famously moving, inviting students into a contemplative space of great greater possibility. In fact, Paulus is a kind of poet-laureate of the craft field and he is frequently asked say a poem at events around Penland. Also, his insights as a dancer into how we use our bodies in our studios, how the energy flows or is blocked during the motions of working with materials has been essential to helping artists work over long careers.

Paulus doesn't fit the profile of many craft educators. He is unique as an artist and as a teacher. He never taught for any length of time at an institution, and incorporates many media within his own practice. His influence however has been undeniable and has transformed the conversation within the field. He is an American Original, an ecologist before ecology was on the radar, ever thoughtful, seeking, and asking why we make objects and how they make us and inspiring others to take on that challenge.