

Excerpt; SEX AND THE SINGLE GLAZE

The Monumental Black Amphora

A black and white photograph from the July 1915 edition of *Pottery and Glass Magazine* shows an elaborate display booth for the Fulper Pottery's Vasekraft line at the Panama Pacific Exposition in San Francisco, where Fulper won the gold medal of honor that same year. Two oversized, amphora vases flank the entrance. One is Black Flambé over a contrasting color - creating a two-tone effect. The other stands proudly monochromatic with its stunning glaze of Mirrored Black. This other all black one is now part of the permanent collection of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, located in its own display case above the light filled courtyard of The American Decorative Arts wing. A small plaque reads, "Gift of the daughters of William H. Fulper III, in honor of their grandfather, William H. Fulper II". But before the glass case and the heartfelt plaque, this vase had lived a much less exalted life at our house on the stairway landing next to the hall mirror, amid four children and various pets.

The fact that it's still in one piece is astounding because if you look deeply enough into its lustrous finish, you can see Julie and me bouncing down the steps on long pillows like sleds, crashing into the wall right next to it, Rada careening past it, gleefully stuffing all 5 sticks of Julie's brand new pack of Teaberry gum into her mouth, Julie, keening and flailing behind her, Maddie the cleaning lady, tipsy from the liquor cabinet, assaulting it with the vacuum cleaner, or Aggie, in her saucy skating skirt and tights the color of a bad fake tan, clomping Frankenstein-like around it on wooden skate guards. I'm sure we all bumped into it at some point because I can still hear the noise it made as it wobbled precariously before righting itself.

In my earliest memories, the vase is only slightly taller than I am and together we watch as my sisters primp in front of the mirror. Kleenex is blotted with lipstick, which is then discarded into the waiting depths of the amphora. From my vantage point, the tissues float down like discarded love notes, lip-printed with perfect, oval vestiges of "Love that Red", "Pink 'n Sassy", "Cherries in the Snow" and "Vixen". For me, lipstick and that vase went hand in hand and I practiced kissing on its smooth, cool cheek. Julie extolled the virtues of kissing the side of the bathtub with its added frisson of nakedness, but the amphora had the advantage of being vertical and somewhat body shaped.

Perhaps it was the drama of its sheer size and smooth, silvery blackness, coupled with those kissed tissues that created an imprint on my young brain, that would later figure in my early experiments with a sort of fledgling eroticism.

...

Then out of nowhere, came the rushed footsteps of my big sister, Rada, looking for me.

...I turned in a panic to try and lock the door but Rada was strong and fast and determined. She pushed her way into the bathroom and discovered me - in flagrante - with a black satin apron.

...But before I could explain how I'd gotten a splinter while changing my clothes and was looking for the tweezers...everywhere!, my traitorous sister gave her haughty little all-knowing smirk, turned in disgust and whirled back up the stairs, the monumental black amphora wobbling slightly in her wake, before righting itself.

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Fulper Vasekraft exhibit at Panama Pacific Expo, San Francisco, 1915



Aggie (3rd from right) with friends and amphora



Julie and doll with amphora



Author's daughter, Ella Boureau and doll
visiting the amphora at The Met, 1995