

INTERNATIONAL POTTERS' CAMP



ABERYSTWYTH '87

Wales has long held a reputation as being the home of many excellent potters and we are particularly fortunate in having two very active specialist guilds, the North Wales Potters and the South Wales Potters. Their coming together to organise the 1987 International Potters Camp at Aberystwyth, their most ambitious project to date, marks a major step forward for the development and status of ceramics in Wales.

The Craft Committee of the Welsh Arts Council welcomed and supported the initiative of the potters and invited Sheila Tyler to record the event. We offer our congratulations to the organisers for a successful event and look forward to the next International Potters Camp in Wales.

Roger Lefevre
Craft and Design Officer
Welsh Arts Council

This, Britain's first international festival of ceramics, was held at Aberystwyth Arts Centre, University College of Wales, UK, on July 10, 11 and 12 1987.

Organised with energy and vision by North Wales Potters in conjunction with South Wales Potters, the camp drew from America and Canada, Australia, Africa, Europe and the UK.

Invited participants were Arne Ase (Norway), Oldrich Asenbryl (Czechoslovakia/UK), Cormac Boydel (Eire), John Chalke (Canada), Greg Daly (Australia), Siddig El'nigoumi (Sudan/UK), Ollie Kent (England), Steen Kepp (Denmark), Anne Lightwood (Scotland), Jim Robison (USA/UK), Barbara Tipton (USA), Ulla Viotti (Sweden) and Rimas T VisGirda (USA). Special guest was Paul Soldner (USA).

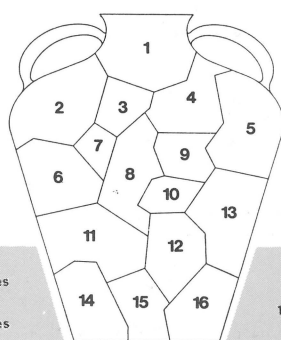
The event was opened by Michael Casson OBE (England) and MC was Peter Starkey (Wales).

In this Welsh Arts Council publication a number of the guests write of their work, their contribution to and thoughts on the weekend. Interspersed are interviews and commentaries including personal perspectives. The views expressed are those of individuals.

Bill Ismay: Circulating

A zigzag between the bays of glass cases housing Aberystwyth Arts Centre's splendid ceramics collection, fronted at the time by the work of Paul Soldner, led one to the lecture theatre where slide talks were given and sometimes repeated by popular demand.

Another row of cases contained the centre's current selling exhibition of work, that of Oldrich Asenbryl. The floor above housed the trade stands and bookstall, bar and cafeteria, the never-still video screen and temporarily, a puppet show. A long exhibition room was set out with a selling display of work by potters from all over Wales and by many of the guests, while next door the Great Hall was the scene of formal demonstrations and informal gatherings around individual work spaces disturbed only by the Saturday night dancing.



1 Ollie Kent
Photo: Lesley James

2 Ulla Viotti
Photo: Lesley James

3 Paul Soldner
Photo: Keith Morris for Aberystwyth Arts Centre

4 Sculptural column in the making: Robison community project
Photo: Keith Morris for Aberystwyth Arts Centre

5 John Chalke
Photo: Keith Morris for Aberystwyth Arts Centre

6 Barbara Tipton
Photo: Lesley James

7 Rimas VisGirda
Photo: Lesley James

8 Barbara Tipton
Photo: Lesley James

9 David Dawson
Photo: Keith Morris for Aberystwyth Arts Centre

10 Flattened cup and saucer by Barbara Tipton
Photo: Lesley James

11 Chalke kilns: night firing
Photo: Lesley James

12 Paul Soldner
Photo: Keith Morris for Aberystwyth Arts Centre

13 Mass action: dismantling the Chalke kilns
Photo: Lesley James

14 Rimas VisGirda
Photo: Lesley James

15 Anne Lightwood
Photo: Lesley James

16 Greg Daly
Photo: Lesley James

Outside on a grassed terrace under a striking, asymmetric canopy Jim Robison presented his work on slab-built sculptural pieces. Nearby, potter Ollie Kent and archaeologist David Dawson built and fired their medieval-style wood-fueled kiln, contrasting with their neighbours, the supply firms, firing their latest models. Behind on the steepest part of the grass slope overlooking sea, hills and the town below, John Chalke's great outline of a Mediterranean jar with shoulder handles took shape.

The days were so full of activity and of simultaneous events that it was impossible to see everything. One had to make a choice and keep circulating, and in this way the camp became a kind of microcosm of life itself rather than something viewed from a theatre seat.



Photo call: the hillside gathering
Photo: Josie Jackson

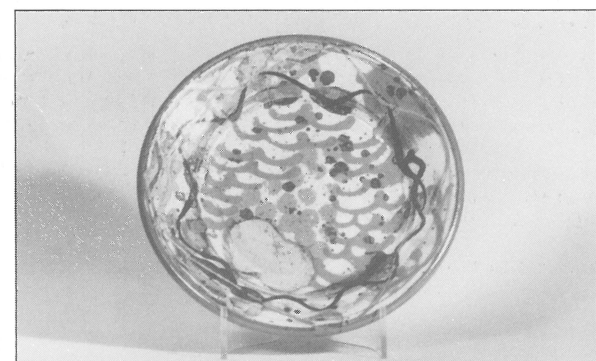
No potter, within the working periods available in a crowded 48 hours, can produce permanent work from start to finish. But from a combination of verbal and visual introduction, rewarding practical exposition of working methods, and finished work on exhibition, it was possible to obtain some vivid impressions. Paul Soldner's video with its speeded-up action, rapid transitions and photographic distortions perhaps gave too violent a first impression of his way with clay: when we saw the man himself, his manual dexterity and quirky humour (with a glimpse of the seriousness beneath), this gave us a human picture in place of almost a caricature, and one could relish his earlier comment that a maker never retires, since however his age advances, he still has work to do.

Sadly I missed Steen Kepp's spell on the wheel but I appreciated in the lecture-room the subtleties of his slide-sequences which interwove scenes from his far-eastern travels with those of and around his pottery in France. I enjoyed Siddig El'nigoumi's quiet evocation of his African sources and working methods, and recall the affectionate round of applause aroused by his rare appearance in Sudanese costume for the camp photograph out on the hillside, which gathered for a moment a crowd that at times exceeded 450.

Greg Daly's demonstration enabled him to broaden the impression already given by his sometimes delicate and always vivid lustreware and his joy in glazes when showing slides. His Australian-produced videos on throwing and turning are the most intimate and detailed I'm aware of. Then when he went on the wheel he was able, almost because of throwing with unfamiliar and over-soft clay, to show us while working on an unexpectedly large scale his awareness of what clay will and will not do.

Another rewarding experience in the lecture-room was John Chalke's loving slide-researches into the earlier history of pottery this century in the Canadian neighbourhood where he has settled. And John's assay at creating a great pot-outline on the hillside of glaze fused onto the soil, became the great symbol of the camp, first as a twin kiln-shape, then in smoke and fire as the fire-boxes were stoked, and then after the unveiling (the unbuilding of the cooled kilns being the largest mass-operation of all) as a form outlined in glaze. It is a symbol which will linger in many memories.

W A Ismay



Dish by Oldrich Asenbryl
Photo: Lesley James

John Chalke

For a couple of years recently I lived in Ohio. When I returned to the foothills of Alberta, people were curious to find out why I came back to Canada. Wasn't life, after all, better down there - a real land of opportunity? A lot of Canadians they knew went down and stayed there, and did well. Why come back to a comparative desert?

For a few months I fended the question with some pretty awkward answers, such as missing my house, my studio, the weather, the skies, friends, clay I was used to, kiln, wheel. But as true as it all was, it was only part of it. One day somebody suggested to me that I came back because I was homesick. **That's** it, that's the collective reason . . . and the right word. Simply, I missed and came back to my roots. Not my English roots, of course. They're still there very much but seem to belong to a different part of me; perhaps a part more mystical.



Chalke marks
Photo: Stephen Brayne for Ceramic Review

Ever since I first began making pots, playing around with kilns has always been a part of the greater experience. Firing, glaze testing, sherds, shaping clay, drawing, clay making, museums still make up the major parts of my ceramic roots. My work and I seem to have sailed down a very slow stream - that is, the stuff doesn't seem much different in many ways to what I began making years ago. In the same way, I've kept those other constants in similar focus. I've always made my clay, always seem to have made tests for new glaze surfaces, always preferred to fire with wood or vapour, and always built kilns.

But I was specifically looking forward to making some pots over here. No, said the organisers, we want you to work on the kiln site. I felt reluctant at first because some plans of things I had in mind to make had to be cancelled. Then it suddenly became clear that a new kiln involvement could be just as useful to me as any of those other things I felt I could to. And continuous enough a part of the ceramic process that it didn't have to feel like a self-conscious novelty. An extension of kiln behaviour, I call it right now.

This time I didn't want to fire any pots. I wanted to be able to take the actual kiln down when I had finished heating it up and see what marks had been left behind. Something like riding my younger bike wheels through a puddle on a sunny day and glancing back. So it had to be a low structure and easy to build; maybe read as a temporary pot itself. Where the flame had passed by would be encouraged by fluxes on the ground. Brief life-marks of activity would remain. Like old ox-bow river beds, ancient pathways and sites of villages.

Once I was crossing an exposed clay bed on the outskirts of Seto in Japan. It was a wet day and we had to be careful not to slip down a cliff. Everywhere was porcelainous white clay, except one place where we found some Chun sherds. My friend asked me if I had possibly noticed a strange, thin, orange line back there on the ground. I had, it so happened, so what was it? The floor of a 13th-century kiln, he said.

John Chalke (Canada)

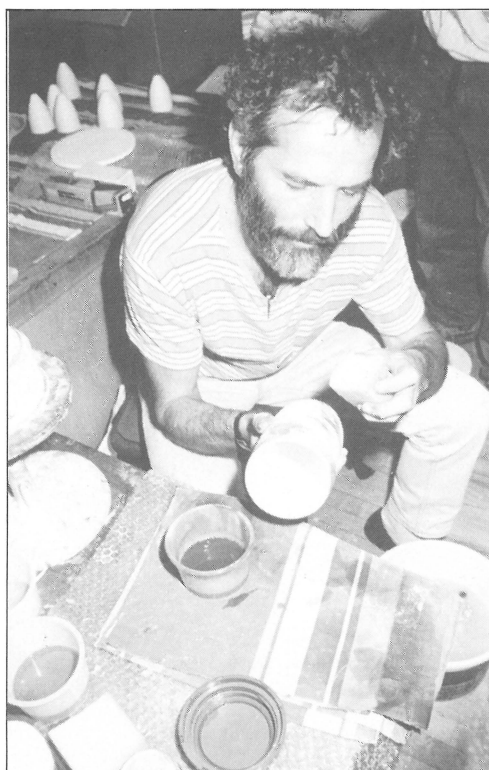
Arne Ase

Arne Ase is master of the gentle shock. A slide of his studio shows, beneath the work table, a white shag-pile rug. From electronic scales to electric cart kiln, capable of firing to 1600C in an hour, his equipment is uncompromising high tech. "Technology is the fastest way of getting what you want. I'd rather go fishing instead of chopping wood for a kiln."

The overstatement is studied, a tongue-in-cheek method of jarring the complacent, though clearly his technical prowess is legion. He borrows from industry, adapts, researches with academic single-mindedness. But it is technology harnessed. Working with porcelain, self colours and light, Ase likens his work to musical composition. "Pottery and music work with the same feelings, much more than with painting and sculpture."

Light and shade are produced by low relief decoration, achieved by sponging around shellac-brushed areas on greenware. His water-soluble colourants are the product of his own studies.* "I paint quite a lot on paper; I liked the water colour, the soft, light colours and I had to find a way of working with ceramic colours that was similar." But colours are not always used, and the work is unglazed. "I took away all that it was possible to take away, anything that can be technical!"

In both technology and art, Ase aims for demystification. "Low technology uses much, it uses life. That is not art. Art is to create the music. Potters play with nostalgic feelings but the result is technological effort. It's too emotional and false." Work should emanate from an intellectual base, he says, and culminate in practical making; there should be attempts at objective description; there should be a broad goal of competence. "Ninety-five percent of what we do is rubbish but that ninety-five percent is necessary to keep up our level of competence. But it's hard for artists to admit that so much of their work is routine."



Arne Ase
Photo: Keith Morris for Aberystwyth Arts Centre

Eschewing romanticism and emotionalism, Ase believes that art is too capable of talking nonsense. That he thinks it elitist is reflected in his prices ("the other side of it is that you shouldn't buy things you have to be responsible for.")

"Artists are used to working for power and working to conserve power. It is in the nature of the artist to be conservative. But creativity is not conserving and artists don't have a monopoly on creativity."

Ase actively seeks change, both as a maker and as a professor at the National College of Art and Design in Oslo where he's intent on setting up a PhD course in ceramics. There is pressure for intellectual rigour. "Why is the professional afraid to exhibit with the amateur?" he asks. And leaves us to provide the answer.

Professor Arne Ase (Norway)
was interviewed by Sheila Tyler

* Arne Ase's book on watersoluble colourants will be published by Oxford University Press in spring 1988.

Barbara Tipton

It was my first time ever in Wales. I knew I couldn't expect to wow anyone by sitting down and just throwing pots - that's been done in Great Britain far better and for much longer than I care to imagine. Besides, I don't just throw pots, anyway. I decided that what I could do that might be interesting was to change the objects I made by altering their form or drawing on them. And hopefully there would be questions about why I was doing this or that. In the search for answers I would find something useful to me as well.

On stage, I slapped some previously thrown cups and saucers down on the canvas-covered table deliberately flatten them, talking about how this may lead to another way of 'drawing'. When handles are pulled and each flattened cup is mated with its saucer, the two begin to look very much like my drawings of cups and saucers on paper. I like the idea of working from a three-dimensional object back into almost two dimensions again, instead of so often the reverse.

It then came time to draw on a plate I'd thrown. I decided to work from a quick line-drawing I'd done earlier while watching one of the performers throw. Working with newsprint stencils (cut from the drawing) and coloured slips I talked about the plate as it progressed. I wasn't sure what would happen, or what the finished object would be like. Each addition of slip or line or pattern required a new decision, and I tried to talk about that, too.

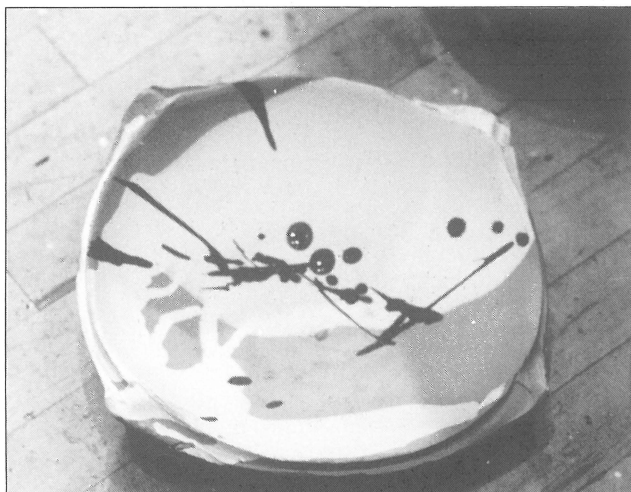
As to the questions and answers I'd hoped for, I wasn't prepared for the British reticence. I had wanted to talk more about idea as well as process, but sadly the only questions during my presentation concerned process . . . what kind of clay was that, where did I get my slip trailer?. This was quite unlike any of my North American experiences, and could have been extremely disconcerting. It almost became so until I realized that the questions and comments I'd hoped for did come, but they came from individuals afterwards on a one-to-one basis. The whole occurrence set me to puzzling about the differences between British and North American ceramics. Even though we all speak English we sure do it in a different way.

Since leaving Wales, I've been to London, Devon, Staffordshire, Herefordshire and Sussex, visiting potters, museums and galleries along the way. I've done a lot of looking, talking, asking questions and listening.

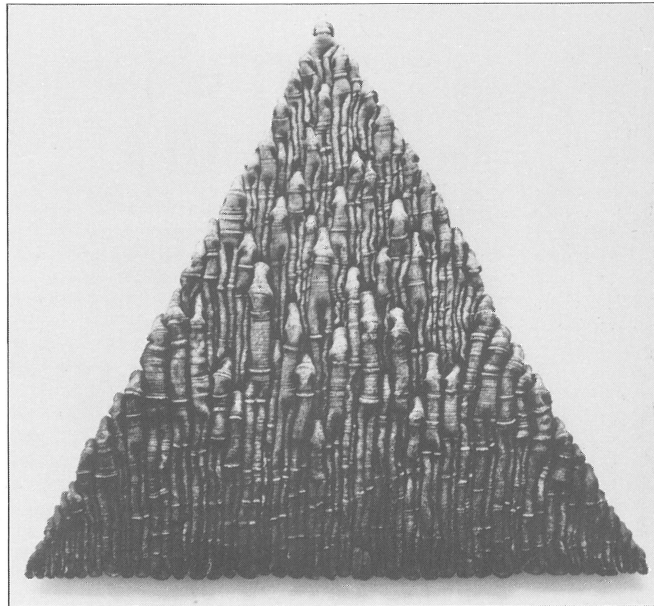
The public feedback I'd originally hoped for at the potters' camp now seems a superficial desire. However, the self-questioning brought about has been useful. It caused me to look more closely at the links between the old and new pots I've seen and to think a little differently about the individuals who made them.

History in Britain is not just relegated to museums - it's everywhere, and that all-pervading sense of the past must have a strong influence. The ceramic past is important to me. But as an individual who makes pots in the present I'm interested in reflecting something about the ties between the past and my feelings about the contemporary ceramic scene. That seems an effective way of communicating.

Barbara Tipton (USA)



Lifetriangle by Ulla Viotti (Swedish State Arts Council collection) Photo: Hans Marklund



There were surprises and a touch of showmanship. A rope emerged from a half-thrown vessel, then practised hands collapsed the finished form. This was no mistake. Final transmutation was achieved with a bucket. "Why make a pot and destroy it? It's the only way I know . . . it has the energy of the hand being inside it, a rope coming out." There was more: folding, treading, the requisitioning of a pair of Wellingtons to leave their mark. Then the wall piece was ready for steam drying and low-temperature salt firing. It was here that Paul Soldner calmly loosed his audience from the secure harbour of established definitions. He makes raku. But there was to be no abrupt removal of work from the kiln, no smoking, no introduction of a reduction medium.

The question that begged is one Soldner has rephrased from the quantitative to the qualitative, providing himself with scope for exploration. "I've been struggling to understand what raku is, to redefine it, to discover whether it is possible to make raku without making it by process alone." The Japanese word means a kind of comfort, but the use of the term in contexts other than pottery leads Soldner to the notion of comfortable, virtuoso performance. He speaks of 'rakuness' - "a quality of performance so special, so breathtaking yet so apparently easy that we forget for the moment the discipline, the endless training, the pain and the focussed dedication that made it possible. It transcends the process of making. When it happens we respond in an emotional recognition. But it doesn't matter what we call it. It takes years of effort to be effortless."

Clearly, Soldner wants to step beyond narrow technical arguments but he is cautious about pronouncements. "They often come back to haunt one, or are taken as absolute truths. Everything changes constantly."

Soldner's chance introduction to raku in 1960 was a freeing event. "My work became softer, playful, spontaneous, bigger. It takes a lot of curiosity. I hope what I've been doing is expanding form, shape, process."

He is happiest talking about questions, the objective aspect of art and, he believes, the proper concern of the artist. He is also content to discuss craft, which he regards as the tangible skills the ceramist must master. There are few assumptions about the area between. His absorbing, sensitive slide-show with as many human forms as ceramic ones, was starkly silent. Influences are seldom direct; he enjoys ambiguity; he leaves his work untitled. "I'm in a minority in that respect. Almost everyone will give a title and what it means. I don't attempt to give information."

"I approach things from the aesthetics of a piece, the shape, the organic qualities of the clay. Then I give it up to the fire. It's comfortable to give it up to the fire."

Paul Soldner (USA)
was interviewed by Sheila Tyler

Paul Soldner Photo: Stephen Brayne for Ceramic Review

Ulla Viotti

For 20 years I have worked with architectural ceramics for public buildings in Sweden, but I also make individual sculptural objects and installations in clay. At the camp I chose to work on a large-scale relief - a Lifetriangle - to demonstrate my modelling technique, which also illustrates how I carry out my architectural commissions.

In Sweden we are fortunate in that the government and most county councils set aside 1% of construction costs for art in public buildings. The Swedish National Arts Council's Information Centre for Public Art today holds more than 20,000 slides of works of art in public buildings, executed since 1950: the famous Stockholm Subway, with about 100 stations, is known as the largest art gallery in the world.

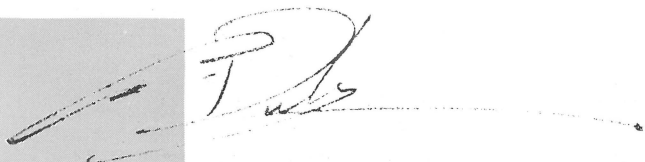
Where I live in the south of Sweden, close to the Baltic coast with its beaches and fishing villages, I am surrounded by historic monuments and remains from earlier times. These have influenced my work as much as a one-year stay in Israel in the 60s.

As a result of working closely with architects and my experience of environmental works, my exhibitions seem to be more like architectural installations. I use different materials such as sand, ropes, stones, water, metals and plexiglass together with ceramic elements. A room can form a whole sculptural environment with sand and ceramic fragments covering a floor like an archaeological excavation; or a meditation place with 'grave' sculptures, wet ceramic figures with water continually pouring over them undergoing a process of destruction.

The Lifetriangle human landscape relief is part of a theme with which I have been working for several years: the lifecircle - petrified figures, 'stonepeople', fossil landscapes, structures of cliffs and cave formations where sand, stones and water have become one with time and with the ancient remains. The 'figures' belong to the rockwall as fossils for future archaeology.

I see my sculptures and installations as archaeological fragments - traces of life. These traces are from an endless cycle of the opportunities for survival, from the millions of years that there has been life. In our destructive world, these fragments constitute a testimony to a culture.

Ulla Viotti (Sweden)



Lustware jar by Greg Daly
Photo: Lesley James



clay but the hollow space in them makes the essence of the pot. And this essence comes from an intangible something in the spirit of the potter which he is able to fuse into the shape of his work, which he blends into all his knowledge of throwing, glazing and firing so that every piece from his hand is as much his own as his heartbeat. Only then will the pot be good, that is, alive. And the more highly-developed a potter is as a human being, the better his pots. For there is no real beauty without character."

Greg Daly (Australia)



Fresh from a week's work in Spain where communication was conducted by head-nod and hand, Rimas VisGirda was reflective. "Words are not really necessary. Looking, seeing, doing are what conferences are about; learning about people, not learning how to hold a brush. That's not where art comes from."

He teased his audience through the technical aspects of his work, with particular focus on his shaded sgraffito drawings: "My forms are extruded, I used to throw a lot but I found that if I made work the way I liked it my students didn't trust me . . . I prefer a choppy, rough, crummy line . . . at this stage I spray with water, it may not be necessary but I do it because I'm a safe person . . ."

The eye-sparkle and soft-lip of humour are evident in his work and when he speaks it's important not to miss the non-verbal cues, though his arguments are succinct. "We're getting to the point of more and more instruction. Young people are very hesitant to accept a challenge; they want to be told what to do and to get rewards for what they do. We need to think independently. I want to avoid language and get back to basics. Words get in the way, they're so open to interpretation. My reason for doing what I do is that I enjoy it and people respect what I do. During a short, intense period like this it's good to give people some information to observe and understand a little quicker. The problem is knowing when to stop."

For VisGirda, the speaking of a common language at the camp veiled rather than revealed cultural differences between demonstrators. "I don't feel that what I do fits into the British culture. American work is much more personal, an expression of the self. The work in Britain is very pretty but very shallow; technically advanced but personally trivial. That's OK - it's a different culture. In America it's most important to develop your intellect through your work. I'm not putting on a value judgement. Britain is Britain. It would probably be better if we didn't speak the same language."

"My attitude is personal, but if you want to fit it into a genre, it's a West Coast attitude. The East Coast is very intellectual, the West Coast very visceral."

"Post analysis is valuable; critics come along and put art into a logical system. But for me it's not worth thinking about. I leave it to other people to figure it out. Logic is linear and has to do with deduction. Art and expression have to do with intuition. Art has to be a creative expression, it has to say something. Craft shows the beauty of the natural; art shows the beauty of an idea. Art is like physics; craft is like engineering. They're both reputable fields. But craft even though it's steeped in tradition should also grow and become contemporary. One needs to work in the present, not in the past."

Professor Rimas T VisGirda
was interviewed by Sheila Tyler

* 'Lustre glaze and resin lustre.'
Australian paper to appear.



Frank Hamer

Frank Hamer: Artful Deception

During the weekend I made a verbal survey of why people work in clay and most said they do so simply because they enjoy it. This simplicity is a firm foundation on which to develop creativity. It is always an exploration of ourselves and a coming into tune with ourselves and the world around us.

My principle contribution to a workshop is to assist others to connect with their own creativity. This I do through demonstrations of my approach to work and through communication. My Aberystwyth lecture, Contacting our Creativity, gave simple and practical ways.

In Ireland I am currently working in the environment on large scale figurative and ritualistic sculptures in clay to evoke a relationship between artform and landscape. Since Wales shares a common Celtic heritage with Ireland it seemed appropriate that I should continue this theme at Aberystwyth. Whilst aware that ideas are best used as guides and not as strict forms to follow, I chose to work with images arising from Celtic burials which incorporate the spirit of the cycle of death and rebirth from out of the Earth.

I saw a natural outdoor location where I would build a life-size figure and around it, four forms representing earth, water, fire, and air. I would then decorate and part glaze them and build in situ five sculpturally related kilns. The kilns would be fired together and dismantled hot to reveal the glowing and jewel-like assemblage in the earth.



Cormac Boydell
Photo: Lesley James

Because of the limitations of time and location on a seven-day project such as this, I looked at how best to communicate in two days the spirit and the making of such a project. First I discussed the concept, drawing a full-scale floor sketch with brush and oxides to relate the sculptural elements to one another. Then I made from clay the life-size central figure and a winged air form directly on the floor sketch. On to wall-drawings surrounding the sculptures I added information and images as ideas developed. Meanwhile people observed and commented on the unfolding project. At times they entered closer, to work with me. Those were moments of pure magic.

Cormac Boydell (Eire)

Siddig El'nigoumi

This was the most impressive potters' camp I have been to. Gathering together as it did so many potters from so many countries, professionals, amateurs, enthusiasts and collectors, it showed ceramics to be unique among its equals. It has the most followers and lovers. It does not need promoting, it promotes itself and no doubt the art world is seeing something which can no longer be ignored.

My wife, Vicki, a printed textiles designer, says: "You potters are the most lucky people among all other branches of arts and crafts. You are down to earth (clay), not pompous, not jealous of each other. You share your knowledge and secrets and are generous to each other. You have regular gatherings and share both your fun and seriousness for common aims. We do not experience this sort of thing in other professions relating to artistic crafts."

One never ceases to learn from fellow professionals. In my case the camp was another opportunity. I thank them all.

Siddig El'nigoumi (Sudan/UK)

I have to admit to disappointment. Why? Because technology was out. Instead we had anti-technology, the negation of what makes it possible to produce the ceramics such as I saw in the gallery exhibition. Pottery-making and the ceramic industry develop by technology but the world of pottery campers apparently thrives on reversal into the dangerous art of self-deception.

Perhaps this started when we tried to look afresh at the results from a firing. Steen Kepp wanted us to ignore the do and don't of industrial technology and rediscover the results of fire meeting clay and glaze unevenly. A new technology to satisfy new aesthetic criteria almost emerged. Other technology displayed was more predictable and explainable, like that of Ollie Kent and David Dawson who built and fired a medieval-type kiln.

The medieval potter, observing what was happening in making or during firing, invented reasons to explain phenomena. He had to if he were to control, succeed and progress. Whether these reasons were based on myth or elemental magic they still composed scientific theory and when re-applied were technology. I believe all potters do this. Potters do not shy away from difficulties. Anyone who does will soon drop pottery for something less challenging. So potters constantly ask why, and if they cannot invent satisfactory answers they read books or pester other potters for answers. So to pretend that science and technology are unimportant is rubbish. Sure, we all wish it wasn't so complicated, and periodically we all sort out our tool boxes, actual and mental, and try to simplify our potting to what we believe is an ideal - water, clay, hands, sun, wind and fire.

We yearn for an intermediate technology, two steps back from now, which contains no secret science. Siddig El'nigoumi with his rhythmic burnishing and newspaper smoking satisfied that longing. Jim Robison demonstrated a simple working lifestyle technology under the canopy with no walls, mirrors, microphones or inhibitions. But don't be deceived. The stresses created in rolled clay as it deforms at different moisture contents has a whole branch of science called rheology to explain it.

So why didn't we try to explain and discuss it, and all the other scientific facts and pendent technology, just for once, just for this special international occasion. Do we really not want to know? Do we think that technology inhibits our work?

Paul Soldner abandoned glazes "to get rid of the problem of using exact temperatures." How easily can such a statement be re-interpreted as avoiding the challenge of working precisely. Instead of freeing us for more creativity it leaves us unable to use what will work for us and leads us to accept what will happen.

The guests were carefully chosen for their contrasting work. But somehow the differences were kept isolated. Statements in words or materials remained inviolate. Technical processes went unchallenged and mostly unexplained. The anti-technology virus rendered technical lectures sterile at the very point when cross-fertilisation could have created exciting debate and quite possibly something original.

What did Paul Soldner learn from his failed steam firing and what did Arne Ase think of it? When technology made its challenge the protagonists backed off and made excuses. Like most of the ceramics fired at the weekend, the technical aspects were overfueled to the point of explosive potential but managed to end woefully under-fired.

Frank Hamer (UK)



Ibreeqs water jugs: original from Red Sea Hills villages (left) and interpretation by Siddig El'nigoumi (right), scraffito decorated and burnished.
Photo: Adriano Vincetelli

Anne Lightwood

My life seems full of paradox; I love heat and sunshine yet live happily on the east coast of Scotland; with a boredom threshold of about ten minutes I find myself handbuilding time-consuming pieces; enjoying company I need to work alone; trained as a painter I have become a potter; thoroughly practical as a person my work is decorative rather than functional, though bowls are the most frequent form; liking to work on a large scale I seem now to construct quite intricate small pieces.



Porcelain bowls by Anne Lightwood
Photo: Lesley James

My work changes gradually, with each new direction evolving from what has gone before. I work with a coloured porcelain-type body which I make as a slip and dry out till plastic. Strips and sections and coils are arranged like a mosaic on a cloth then rolled thin. The pattern moves and changes, and the direction of rolling and thickness of the clay have an effect, though it is possible to produce fine lines and subtle colour variations. Press-moulding and firing are followed by polishing till the surface feels like a burnished pebble or an eggshell. No glaze is used: it is important to me that work so light and bright should feel silky and tactile. Each piece is individual and I usually invent names for them, rather like paintings.

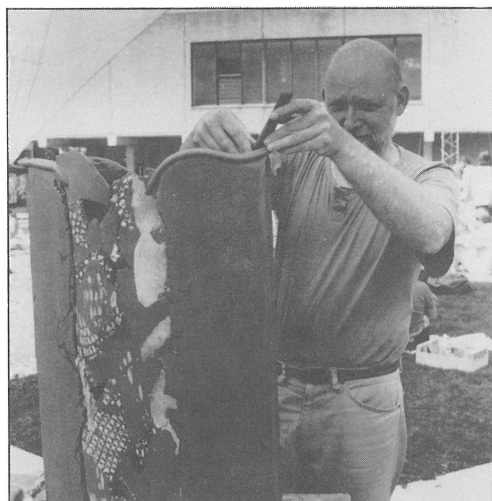
I think I am better at colour and pattern than form, and it was from the desire for the colour to be an intrinsic part of the piece that my present way of working developed. Surroundings are very important to me and ideas usually spring from landscape and natural forms, hoping to express something of their rhythm, movement and harmony; the idea of a cloud, or a garden rather than a literal representation.

I suppose my style is very feminine, and I struggle against its becoming too fussy or merely pretty. I'd like it to be quiet, but strong.

Anne Lightwood (Scotland)

Jim Robison

I have yet to find a way to create for an audience an accurate impression of my working methods without shifting large portions of my studio onto the stage. The stage in this instance was the grassy lawn outside the Aberystwyth Arts Centre, and the studio was a beautiful coloured awning some forty feet in diameter. It was as it turned out, an ideal site to locate the sprawl of moulds, tables, boards, mangle slab roller and assorted hand tools.



Jim Robison
Photo: Lesley James

Two projects were undertaken. One was to use my experience of large scale work to lead a group of weekend participants through the process of creating a sizeable sculpture. The other project involved the creation of smaller work of my own choosing.

For the first project, invitations were issued to the audience to become involved. A modular system using curved support moulds permitted each participant to design, model and alter the surface and colour of a large slab of clay, while keeping a shape which could fit together with others and stack to unlimited height. In the sun and fresh air, the response was immediate and the number of participants was overwhelming. Although seemingly adequate supplies of clay were on hand, the enthusiasm generated by the coming together of so many clay workers under these favourable conditions expressed itself in a desire to do, to make, to create. Attendance at lectures and the observation of skilled demonstrations was not enough.

It is hard to estimate how much clay would have been used during the weekend had unlimited supplies been available. As provision stood, we had to content ourselves with the flavour of what might have been possible.

The other side of my work, the individual pieces, explored the potential of textural fragments which are landscape oriented - fields, hills, rocky outcrops - perhaps modified by man but muted and eroded by the passage of time. Applied porcelain and coloured clays over a stoneware body pierced by ragged holes and crevices, provide an air of mystery attached to an ancient ruin.

While many people wanted hands on experience, there were also many who sought information and inspiration that a demonstration can provide. Hopefully my two-sided approach contributed both enlightenment and enjoyment.

Jim Robison (USA/UK)



Community project: slabbed and pressed column orchestrated by Jim Robison
Photo: Keith Morris for Aberystwyth Arts Centre

Ollie Kent

I make trailed slip and sgraffito-decorated earthenware, fired and glazed in a variety of ways, and handbuilt and thrown bonfire-fired ware. I particularly enjoy bonfire-firing; there is something wonderfully direct about building and manipulating a big fire over your pot. I enjoy finger marks, tool marks and accidental drips of glaze and slip, so the finish tends to be irregular - tactile as much as decorative or functional. Currently I am experimenting with the effects of reduction on earthenware glazes and trying to devise some suitable alkaline glazes - an area largely neglected as a result of the unfashionability of lead.

Since leaving college in 1978 I have been increasingly involved in experimental archaeology: the need of archaeologists for scientific information coincided with my fascination as a maker with the coarser wares of the medieval and post-medieval periods and their manufacture.

At Aberystwyth David Dawson and I built an updraught kiln with no firebox. The brick cylinder, half-buried in the ground, had an internal floor at ground level, a firing trench to one side, and was roofed with tile sherds. The object was to demonstrate the reduction firing of galena-glazed earthenware between 900° and 950°C. It is possible to produce a range of colours from olive green to purple, by beginning the reduction phase before and continuing it through the glaze melt. Subsequent reoxidation is not necessarily detrimental, merely changing the exposed body back to its oxidised colour. Control of this would be vital if one were trying to achieve copper red or lustre effects, and is the skill behind the firing of colloidal slips to produce black-figure Greek vases.

Ollie Kent (UK)

As an archaeologist, I could not help coming into contact with pottery - it is the commonest surviving human artifact material from the entire span of human history since it was first made in this country over 6000 years ago. As a curator in one of the major provincial museums, my interest developed when I was privileged to care for a rich collection of ceramics from Ancient Egypt, the

Mediterranean, Africa and the Americas, as well as archaeological material from a city (Bristol) which has a long and diverse pottery-making history, ending in the 1960s.

By the late 1970s I found the questions I was asking and being asked of me in my teaching could not be answered by the literature. It was also clear that archaeologists were making too many assumptions about ceramic technology and its development. So in 1978 it made sense to team up with Ollie Kent to address some of these questions.

There was much to learn from trying to rediscover the use of so many lost techniques such as the whole range of earthenware reduction firing, as well as developing a better appreciation of 'primitive' pots.

Plus I enjoy making pots. I aspire to emulate the virtuosity of the medieval potter in exploiting the plasticity of clay and the disciplined abandon of the post-medieval potter's use of slip.

David Dawson (UK)

County Museums Officer for Somerset
Former Curator of Archaeology and Local History at
Bristol City Museum and Art Gallery
DAVID DAWSON (UK)

Unpacking the Kent/Dawson kiln
Photo: Lesley James



Sheila Tyler Shifting Towards the Exit

Funny things, minds. Change one idea and a whole chunk of the world looks different.

Shifts can happen suddenly, or they can happen when you get to the last piece of a jigsaw and find it doesn't fit. Is it the piece that doesn't fit, or is it your original conception of the puzzle that doesn't fit? The way in which you phrase your question is important: it takes a long time to formulate a useful one. You know when you've got one; you know when you've heard one. You feel the crunch as a bit of your internal model of the world gives and changes.

Like scientific theories and hammers, our ways of describing and making things intelligible to ourselves have ranges of convenience. Growth happens when we broaden them, find better and different ways.

Technology and technique are relevant and interesting. So is the narrowly subjective if we are aware of the natural difficulties of personal access. But like other disciplines, ceramics can reach into other areas where the questions are as important as the misnamed answers. It's exciting, rewarding. No-one would do it if it weren't.

The international camp was fun. I liked it most when I looked anew, queried, disagreed, when I was challenged and when I challenged myself. There was Arne Ase on technology and intellect; VisGirda on words; Soldner on redefinition; others on . . . I didn't get that far. I had enough to be going on with. It must have been the same for others, and like them, what I got was gleaned from too-brief private conversation.

Publically we missed too much of what the demonstrators had to offer in that other universal currency of questions and theories. Why? Because our so-British descriptions of ceramics were already imposed . . . but not quite. The camp was a point of exit from the formal demonstration and its overemphasis on the practical: its aim of accessibility, its format of parallel events provided for the tantalizing glimpses that demonstrators gave of something more, something other, and offered us the means for our tentative, quiet exploration. And if more than a few of us came away reflecting on the state of play in British ceramics - too content with the concrete, too shy of the abstract, entrenched in emotionalism and practical process, lacking in burning questions - then the camp succeeded in shifting us.

Its potential was all but visible. I'll risk it and say that the next Welsh international will use it to give formal space to other levels of exchange. Of minority interest they may be, but questions and arguments have a habit of getting loose. When they do British ceramics will have broadened. But we won't forget we need access, choices and a bit of fun.

Sheila Tyler

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