

INTERNATIONAL POTTERS CAMP

Aberystwyth 1989



INTERNATIONAL POTTERS CAMP, ABERYSTWYTH 1989



Heidi Birck



Aage Birck

The 1989 International Potters Camp was again hosted at the Arts Centre in Aberystwyth, an ideal location and a successful collaboration which is to continue.

But what is this phenomenon 'The Potters Camp'? The name itself is misleading and brings images of scouts around a camp fire to our minds. While scouts there aren't — fire there certainly is.

These festivals are all about sharing and communicating ideas and experiences. They are about meeting people — people with a common interest in this world of ceramics. A world where language is not a barrier, where the language of clay is universal. The event is also about fun, for at whatever level you participate, this clay stuff is fun.

One of the complaints about the Aberystwyth Camp is that there is too much and quite often with all the events happening simultaneously some very difficult choices have to be made. But this is what makes this festival so different. The calm of the kiln site, the intensity of the demonstration arena and the awesome schedule of slide shows and talks all combine to make this event memorable.

It would be impossible to mention all the highpoints for me but the sight of Asabe Magaji and Assibi Iddo from Nigeria carrying their smoking pots to the firing ground will stay with me for many years, as will the quiet subtlety of Vladimir Tsivin gently forming his beautiful figures.

Compare this with the hundreds of people working like bees under Jim Robison's canopy. The sheer enthusiasm of the creators far outweighing any sense of frustration at their eyes not being able to be everywhere at once. And frustration there certainly can be, not least from the organising committee who have been able to see very little of the event — but the atmosphere is still there.

So why do they do it? Two years of nail biting which culminates in a weekend of self inflicted lunacy. So why DO they do it? — I don't know, you tell me but I'm glad they do.

I would like to thank all the members of North and South Wales Potters Associations and Aberystwyth Arts Centre for all their hard work in continuing to organise such a stimulating event. Thanks also for financial support from the Welsh Arts Council, the Crafts Council and the Visiting Arts Unit of Great Britain (particularly for the Arts Centre's Nigerian exhibition and demonstration). Also to the pottery companies which support us in many ways.

Steve Mattison, Chairman 1989.

Photography by Aled Jenkins.

The second International Festival of Ceramics was held at Aberystwyth Arts Centre on 14-16 July 1989, organised jointly by North and South Wales Potters and Aberystwyth Arts Centre.

Mick Casson was Master of Ceremonies, and the guest demonstrators were:

Heidi Guthmann Birck (Germany/Denmark)
Aage Birck (Denmark)
Sebastian Blackie (England)
Scott Chamberlain (U.S.A.)
Vladimir Tsivin (U.S.S.R.)

Charles Hair (France)
Frank Hamer (Wales)
Karin Hessenberg (England)
Gus Mabelson (England)
Archie McCall (Scotland)

Jim Robison (U.S.A./U.K.)
Gillian Still (Wales)
Claude Varlan (France)
Assibi Iddo (Nigeria)
Asabe Magaji (Nigeria)

This publication was compiled by Moira Vincentelli from tape recordings collected at the event for the Ceramic archive at U.C.W. Aberystwyth. The views expressed are those of individual participants. As part of their involvement Aberystwyth Arts Centre organised the visit by two Nigerian potters and a major exhibition of Nigerian pottery.

GUS MABELSON

on the Surprises of Saltglaze

I come from Northamptonshire and live in Kettering and have a workshop about three miles out in the country. I have been there 10 years now and have gradually built up my workshop, mainly producing functional things including architectural commissions. I like my pots to be used and handled. It is good when someone comes up to you and says 'I use your pot'.

My main interest is in saltglaze and I have a variety of kilns including an electric kiln in the workshop but I especially like outside firing. My oil fired kiln has a capacity of about thirty cubic feet and I produce tiles, pots and jugs. I have a good area where I can build kilns outside. I went to college at Loughborough and we used to build kilns and knock them down again — for me a kiln is a personal tool. Architects want the work to look all the same but this is quite the opposite. There are no set rules — you work the way you want to.

I am influenced by other saltglaze ware, especially the tradition around Nottingham and I am fascinated by the surface quality you can get. I have a way of salting over a long period of time, slowly putting in small amounts at a time. Drawn or scratched marks are picked out by the salt in the glaze which gives a rich textured surface. The firing yields very different pieces. No two pots are ever alike; even though you work with a run of jugs the quality of the firing will make them all different; they are all unique. That excites me. Anything raised on the surface is picked out in the saltglaze. Over the last year or so I have been using stamps which I carve in plaster. Even such low relief designs are picked out by the salt in the firing.

With the new kiln I built last year I am not sure how the work will develop. It is a much bigger kiln than the one I knocked down and fires slightly differently. I have a variety of slips and lots and lots of colour tests but I have never dared to use them yet. Gradually the work will change but I am not quite sure in what way it will go.

ARCHIE McCALL

on Patterns and Passions

I work at Glasgow School of Art in the famous building designed by Charles Rennie Mackintosh. He was a painter, architect, furniture designer and decorator doing all the kinds of things that all creative artists should be considering all the time. You can't work in this building without it affecting you. Its overall concept and mix between fine art and craft are a great inspiration. The library especially has all kinds of characteristics which I admire. The sense of being Scottish, combined with an interest in orientalism and the romantic linear qualities of Art Nouveau, creating a joyful, even playful, cross-fertilisation.

I started off as a potter, served an apprenticeship and worked very much in the Leach tradition, then decided I wanted to paint, went to art college and eventually returned to being a potter again. I am interested in the possibilities of working in pattern. We have rather strange notions in the west, different from the far east where pattern makers are regarded very highly indeed. I like the idea of pattern as an abstraction from nature involving spatial relationships, line and form. It was a breakthrough suddenly to realise that landscapes could be made in more than one way and that we could use symbols and images as well as literal representation and take a lot more risks — that was a revelation. Eventually the landscapes took on a persona of their own.

A few years ago I hurt my back and couldn't throw so I began to get away from round shapes. It has been a challenge to make odd shapes and find a possible way of decorating non-round form.



Archie McCall

NIGERIAN POTTERS *in conversation*

Tanya Harrod and Elspeth Owen talk to Assibi Iddo from Abuja and Asabe Magaji from Tatiko with Michael O'Brien as interpreter.

Who taught you to make pots?

A.M.: My mother.

A.I.: Gwari people are well known for their pots. My mother taught me when I was just a little child. She gave me a little clay to start me off when I was around five or six years old.



How many pots do you make in a day?
Four small ones or three bigger ones.

Who gets the clay for the pots?

A.I.: We collect it from our own farms, then it is dug out with a hoe and collected in an enamel bowl.

A.I.: The Gwari collect the 'yumbo', a kind of clay, from a swampy area on their land. They collect it in baskets which are carried on their shoulders. Other Nigerians laugh at the Gwari because we carry things on our backs and not on our heads.

How many different pots do you make?

A.M.: We make big water pots. There are different sizes, five, six and seven gallon but there is a really big one of twenty gallons. Sometimes they are stood half buried in the ground to store water and keep it cool but we use tins to fetch the water. We also make pots for cooking food, for making soup, one like a bucket for washing, one like a kettle for ritual ablutions and there are also serving bowls, flower vases and plant pots. We also make a drum which is

important, a special brazier to keep the room warm when the women have just had a baby, money boxes, mortar and pestles, beer and palm wine pots with narrow mouths and pots for storing cloth.

Do you prefer to throw pots or build them by hand?

A.I.: I prefer to build them by hand without the machine. When I was at Suleja (the new name for Abuja) when Hadjia (Ladi Kwali) was alive I threw pots but since her death I nearly always build by hand.

When you make pots do you talk with other people or do you work silently like here?

A.I.: I do not normally talk because you have to concentrate but when we break we talk. Sometimes I sing songs but handbuilding is difficult so you have to concentrate.

What about Asabe? Do you work on your own?

A.M.: No, I work with other people at home and sometimes we talk and have a laugh.

Are you training your daughters to make pots?

A.M.: Yes — it has to be taught from an early age and normally girls are taught all the domestic work from an early age. Sons are not taught pottery — boys usually learn weaving.

Does each potter have her own decorations?

A.M.: Generally you can do anything you like but I have two designs — the one with the red... each pot is decorated individually. Our daughters will learn these designs and when they teach their daughters they will teach them the same thing. Different pots have different designs.

What will you tell the people when you get back home after this event?

A.M.: It was a new kind of grass to use for the firing but it worked. We have enjoyed our visit. This place is very beautiful and we feel very proud that our work has been much appreciated. I have never seen such a large amount of water. (The interview took place in Aberystwyth Arts Centre which has a fine view over Cardigan Bay).



THE FUTURE *of* HANDMADE POTTERY *in* NIGERIA

Moira Vincentelli introduced a discussion between Michael O'Brien, potter and ceramics teacher, Susie Mutter, an architect and planner, Jill Salmon and Keith Nicklin, social anthropologists. All have spent long periods living and working in Nigeria and have a special interest in ceramics.

MV: I want to talk a little about the future of Nigerian pottery and how it has evolved and may evolve in a world that is constantly changing. It was heartening to hear Susie being so optimistic about the future observing a strong market for ceramics.

MO: I am not quite so optimistic about handmade pottery. I had been out of Nigeria for two years when I went back in 1989. It was interesting going round the villages with Danlami, who worked in Abuja with Michael Cardew and we visited about six pottery villages. We went to Iddo — the last time we went there there were a lot of potters but this time when we asked to buy pots only about five people came out. Gwari people farm as well, so we thought it might be



Assibi Iddo demonstrating

because we were there in the dry season. Then we went to Kwali, the village with the best reputation for pottery in the whole state. We went into the compounds with Assibi Iddo and I took quite a lot of photographs of pots in use and there were some splendid old pots but no new ones to be seen. There was only one person making pots. Before, when you asked about pots people would drag you by the sleeve to show you their pots. As a European you were fair game. The traditional round Gwari houses were being replaced. There was no pottery being made at all. When we asked the girls why they did not make pots they burst out laughing — it is far too much like hard work.

In Iddo there was a little work being done. It had practically died out and was just starting to come up again. In Ushafa which is quite close the number of different kinds of pots seemed to be much fewer. There were no beer pots which surprised me and not one was brought out for me to buy but there were water pots galore. There seemed to be more pots being made in Ushafa than ever before but less variety. The quality was still good. In Tatiko where Asabe comes from there was a very vigorous pottery production going on — water coolers, beer pots and wardrobes but I am not always sure of the different uses. I think that it is dying slowly and there is a lot more metal and plastic but things change very rapidly. Until about three years ago there was an

enormous drift to the cities but now the oil wealth has declined and the economic policies of the new government have depressed wages and forced people to grow their own food so there has been a reversal from the towns back to the villages again. People are having to go back to the old style of life which may account for the way pottery is coming back in some villages.

MV: What about the potters you train in college? How do they value this? Do they see themselves as being completely separate from it?

MO: They would never work that way. There won't be a revaluing of the old pottery by the people who live in the towns — or perhaps only when it has almost completely disappeared.

MV: What is the future for kiln fired studio ceramics made in Nigeria by students trained in colleges?

MO: Most ceramics graduates are just interested in getting a degree because it opens up general opportunities for them but now a few are going on. When I took over Abuja pottery in 1965 I did an analysis of the sales and I found that about 1% was sold to Nigerians, 99% to expatriates. When I left seven years later about 40% was being sold to Nigerians of a production which had increased four times so I think that it shows a growth in Nigerian middle classes who are using western styles of living. Everything has become so expensive in Nigeria that the prospects now for



studio pottery made in Nigeria must be good. But what is taught in colleges is hopelessly out of touch because what you have to be able to do is use local materials. They don't teach how to make wheels, how to make kilns, how to make glazes which could all be done there. That's what I did. There are six working potteries as a direct result all set up within the last two years.

MV: Are they producing things that look African or European?

MO: It takes a long time to absorb a foreign technique. The first English teapots looked Chinese before the form was sufficiently absorbed that it could be said to be English. When I went back in '75 I visited Danlami and he showed me a teapot made by a potter in Abuja. It looked strange but Danlami said he liked it very much so I looked at it again, because I respect his judgement. Then suddenly I saw a completely new kind of relationship of form and it was African. Although it imitated European forms their logic was completely different and African.

No conscious reference had been made to any traditional shape it was simply African in spirit — and a very fine and original teapot it was.

JS: Keith and I spent time in S.E. Nigeria but two years ago we went to Kenya to compare pottery making there. It was extraordinary to see the difference because as you were saying we were overawed at the amount of ceramics that was going on in western Kenya. It does not seem to be dying out, it seems to be thriving. Not having been before we could not compare it but one of the things that was very odd was that they are changing quite dramatically in the forms that they are producing partly as a result of Asian influence. Asians in Kenya are now asking for Asian forms so here too you are getting a blend. To begin with to our mind they looked rather strange but I don't think that it is going to take them one hundred years.

KN: It is interesting what Michael was saying about the effect of the changes in the economy and the re-development of pottery when people have been forced back to the land. There is a great florescence of pottery going on in Kenya very much encouraged by their own government with its decentralised village based industries and low-tech set ups. But I am concerned about where we are going over decades with regards to fuel source. Are you going to build the forest fast enough to supply both the village potters and potters who are kiln firing.

SM: We were involved in calculations for villages to work out how many trees had to be planted every year just to give firewood to cook with and they were putting in all these little trees.

KN: One of the potters we saw at Ksulu had this vast order from the Kenyan government to make stoves. You could cook on that stove long after there was no fuel left because it still retained the heat. Here was a potter himself helping in the conservation of fuel. He even fired some vessels for me in the same kind of thing that you would normally cook on. Incidentally he could go from mixing the clay to firing the pots in six hours four minutes.

MV: Which takes more fuel — firing pots in a kiln or firing in a clamp?

KN: Different firings are different in relation to each tradition. In an

Ibibbio open firing in S.E. Nigeria you are producing certain kinds of ware which cannot be compared with stoneware which needs a kiln. But there you are working in an area of secondary afforestation and you can have a sustainable supply of fuel — because it is what you have available all the time — mainly palm fronds.

MV: Do you think that the death of traditional pottery might be fuel supplies?

KN: I think there is a good chance of it. In Kenya on the banks of Lake Victoria they were not getting enough grass so they were buying up old house roofs. Some use donkey and cow dung but there is a problem there too when the pasture is getting thinner and they cannot keep so many animals. Perhaps we do need to talk about building kilns that are energy efficient.

The pots fired by the Nigerian potters at Aberystwyth were generously presented to Aberystwyth Arts Centre. The Ceramic Collection is also grateful to Sebastian Blackie who presented his piece fired in the paper kiln to the Ceramic Collection and examples of work by Aage Birck, Archie McCall and Karin Hesselberg were purchased at the event. In 1990 with the aid of the Victoria and Albert Purchase Fund and the National Art Collection Fund *Silenus* by Vladimir Tsivin was acquired for the collection.



Asabe Magaji demonstrating



SEBASTIAN BLACKIE

on Paper Kilns and the Alchemy with the Earth

I was told about paper kilns by a Swiss potter, Aline Favre. She has very little English, and I have almost no French and I wasn't sure I had understood. Shortly after that I went to teach in Norway for a bit and I was telling the students about it, and they said — let's do it — and it worked. It's a bit like adapting a recipe in cooking. At first it was very much to do with a teaching function and was a way to get students to work together on one project and gain the feel of how fire behaved. But I began to play a bit more with it, trying to reach higher temperatures. I then started putting less work in and using more fuel and began to find other things started to happen.

It is very time consuming, therefore something one would only do occasionally but it is totally economic because all the materials used this weekend are things that would have been thrown away. But it is not economic in time.

Yesterday with five people it took maybe five hours to build and then we put it on fire at 5 o'clock. By midnight it had finished and by 1.30 we could have pulled the piece out. From 5.00 to 8.30 was the period when the wood was turned to charcoal and it was a much purer flame. It is still quite hot this morning. I just fired one pot this time. If you have more pots the kiln fires at a lower temperature because you change the ratio of fuel to ware. In that case the actual firing is rather pure and results tend to be rather bland so I would put salt in — just sprinkled on when packing — and have a low salt firing.

It is like a slow cooking process. I build up my pot in layers and fire it several times. If the pot was fired at the temperature and the speed we normally fire at it would just look ghastly but because the materials are integrated in layers it takes a long time to work and the repeated heating and cooling have a different effect. Prior to this firing that pot has been fired three or four times. Usually I fire in a fibre laser kiln. When I was trained, firing was at the end of the process, now it can be the beginning of a whole series of possibilities.

The two effects I am most interested in are, firstly the melting of the rim which we saw a moment ago. The other thing is that when I build up these layers I am obscuring various things that have happened on the previous surfaces. With the strength of the final firing some of the images and writing re-emerge so you get an overlap of images. I have used various things that are particular to me. They have then been obscured and I write something else at a later stage and in the final firing it comes out again like ruins or graffiti with overlapping images. It suggests the process of time and an effect which you can never quite predict.

I find it fascinating to be able to reveal in one piece the disintegration through fire — all these crackings and so forth are about trying to express the clay in its different states. This is a result of the pressure when it has a certain dryness; this is the result of putting one's hand through when it is very soft. I want to try and express the different states of clay in one piece. I guess what I am fascinated with is the alchemy with the earth.

JIM ROBISON

on the mural project as a record of the International Potters Camp 1989

Two years ago I was invited to demonstrate at the first International Potters Camp. The work I was doing was pretty large scale and I was outside under the big awning. I brought my own roller mangle and made a number of fairly sizeable pieces. We had planned to do something involving the people at the camp but as soon as I let the mangle out of my hands there were hordes of people who wanted to get to try it out and in half a day we had used all the material. We realised what might have been possible if we had had the materials and a clear idea of what could be done and where it might ultimately end up. After the camp I voiced these aspirations and to my delight two years later I was invited to do it again and follow the project through.

We used $\frac{3}{4}$ of a ton of clay but we could have used twice as much. As it was we made well over one hundred and fifty foot-square reliefs. I also managed to get one from most of the demonstrators. I saw this as an opportunity to get individuals to put themselves on record in some small fashion. It is a signature in clay and I wanted the work to reflect the diversity that is present in the climate of ceramics.

Professionals, enthusiasts, family groups all joined in. There were several wonderful tiles made by family groups, some even made a drawing first sometimes working on it all day long. I expected that my own work would have to feature rather largely in it but that has not been necessary. I want to be flexible enough to stay with what happened.

It is difficult to apply one criterion to the whole thing but things that are badly crafted self destruct and there is an element of that already happening. We are trying to preserve the ones with interesting imagery but I haven't found it necessary to eliminate many.

Getting them to hang together may be difficult and I think the solution is to isolate them and box them in so they are individual pieces and no matter how many times you pass, you may see something that you have not seen before. When they are glazed in a fairly homogenous fashion that will unite them and the overall effect will be stronger than the individual tiles.



Jim Robison

The enthusiasm was wonderful and at times you could hardly see the ground for people working on the tiles. In the early stages, the work was not always carefully considered but by the next day, as people saw what had already been done, the standard began to rise as they began to think more and more about designs. At the very least it took an hour to create a piece and many people took several hours, coming back at different points. If a community project is going to reflect the community you have to let the people's work stand. Low points will emphasise the high points and there are some really exciting pieces. The whole thing will stand as an interesting record of the camp.



KARIN HESSENBERG

on Pots and Life's Chance Happenings



I am probably one of the few people here who did not start off by the conventional route of going from school into college. I was forced into the choice between art and science and I chose science because it was more prestigious. I went to university, ended up in medical research but realised I had got into the wrong job when I found myself having to kill white rats, drop them into liquid nitrogen and cut them up. That was it. I was getting out.

After studying ceramics at Camberwell I found a studio in East London. It was a shared warehouse, the fine artists were upstairs while the 'humble' craftspeople occupied the ground floor and basement with no natural light. It was very cold in winter. We had an open fireplace which began the idea of sawdust firing. I made small, burnished pots that were fired in a sawdust kiln. When we had a studio show the sawdust fired pots were seized upon by the galleries that came and I sold a lot on the opening night. The Casson Gallery was very supportive in my early days.

Soon after I went off to South America for a year and spent six months in Peru. When I came back I was making animals but in 1978/79 nobody wanted to buy animals so these would not sell. I had to fall back on the kind of pots that were actually going to make some money. One day I had the idea of cutting the pot up after turning it and re-joining it to make an overlapped shape.

I also began to try to control the sawdust firing to get a more consistent effect. I fired up to 980C — a low biscuit — to keep the burnish. A raw, dry pot fired directly in a sawdust firing is far too brittle and fragile for anyone to handle and would certainly not be saleable. Based on something I had read about Japanese potters in a *Ceramic Review* article I began decorating work by putting bits of dried grass under a sheet of fresh, wet clay and then putting them into the sawdust kiln. Later I experimented with newspaper rather than straw.

When we first moved to S.E. London there was a lot of work to be done on the house. My partner, Robin, is tall and was hitting his head on the ceiling in the cellar so he thought he would gouge out the floor. He came up after four hours covered in dust, having made a six inch square in the floor and carrying a bucket of pure, bright yellow clay — London clay with not a speck of grit in it. The bucket of clay has lasted about three years but we

did not dig up any more because next morning the small hole had filled up with water and we had to fill it with concrete. The house was on the water table. So I am having to eke out that bucket of clay quite carefully.

In 1985 we took a long holiday in Northern India and we have since been back again. I was fascinated by the shape of the little shrines or 'stupas' — a square base with a round top and painted white spikes and other bits of gold decoration. I liked the plastery whitewash effect. It is things like this that inspire me and give me new directions. I have been so inspired by Indian and Nepalese architecture that my work has undergone a major change over the past eighteen months. I am now working on large scale sculptural pots.



RELATIVE FREEDOMS

Vladimir Tsivin (USSR), Gillian Still (UK), Scott Chamberlin (USA) in conversation with Peter Durisch with Robin Wolfenden as interpreter.

PD: The idea for this dialogue came when the three of you were on the platform yesterday and a conversation developed about the pressures, political and commercial, that exist for artists in different parts of the world. Scott, for you are there any political restraints? Can you portray anybody the way you want in the States?

SC: Yes, legally I think I could, but I can think of an occasion when an artist made a work in which people had to tread on the American flag. It caused a riot and the artist even had death threats against him from war veterans and others. There are restrictions on what you can do — everyone has restrictions.

PD: Can I ask Vladimir how things are now under Gorbachev in comparison with Stalin or Brezhnev?

VT: If you compare it with the Stalin period the freedom is limitless today but if you compare it with the West there are limits. Of course there are opposing opinions debated in the Supreme Soviet but I have not experienced any art work that is oppositional.

SC: I feel we all have certain kinds of pressures, whether political or commercial. There is a broad spectrum of issues that might be discussed in art. There is other subject matter than political art.

GS: I have made one or two political pieces but about 15 years ago I had a work of an erotic nature in an exhibition and there was a fuss. I think that might have changed now but provincial galleries can still say that they don't like certain subject matter.

VT: In the Brezhnev years there was a complete ban on anything sexual in the cinemas, theatres and on TV. Now the barrier is lower but there is a lot of protest from the public. We have a stricter code than in the West. Many people are against the explicit scene. Even artists themselves don't like it although people do accept it in classical art.

PD: Coming to commercial pressure and making a living, how do you all work?

SC: What is important is that we have a choice of whether to get involved in the commercial side. We don't have the constraints of galleries telling you what you should do. There are artists who never sell much work. I am probably one of them. When I think about the last five years of exhibiting in the States, I certainly haven't made enough money to live or even come close to it. I think the basic assumption that one must make enough money to live from one's art is not necessarily appropriate or valid.

PD: How do you make your living?

SC: I make my living teaching but I used to make it waiting tables and actually made a lot more that way than I do when I am teaching but the basic human responsibility of teaching is greater.

PD: But is exhibiting important to you?

SC: Yes, I do want people to see the work but it is not necessarily about stature or reputation. Art to me is an act of communication. Engaging in dialogue with your peers is important and you don't get that without exhibiting.

PD: Vladimir, do you have a title or designation as an artist?

VT: No, just ceramic artist. The system under which I operate is a system of fees or awards paid for the work you actually do. There is another system under which you can choose the level of income you want and whatever you make you give to the Union. It is a safe kind of system. I prefer the fee system because my income is related to how much I produce and I can normally sell everything I make. The bulk of the work is commissioned for state ministries or organisations — architectural designs for the interiors of buildings. The big sculptures are designed for buildings such as theatres, schools or hospitals. I also work for exhibitions. The work is submitted to a panel of experts who select the exhibition. I can also sell work directly to the public through Union shops but that is quite small by comparison with the work for state buildings. There are also private collectors and a growing number buy modern works. There is a special committee in the Union of Artists which decides the price of works. Prices seem to be quite high compared with this country.



Gillian Still

PD: Scott, would you like to work in the USSR system where you could get a certain status as an artist and a guaranteed income? You don't get rich but you don't get poor and most of your work would be commissions for public buildings in your home region.

SC: If I felt there was an audience in these places, then yes, but what I am interested in is communicating with a somewhat specific audience and they don't tend to be local bureaucrats.

PD: How does an audience communicate with you? How does it affect what you produce?



SC: I don't think it affects what I produce, I think it is more of a positive affirmative kind of dialogue. I think critics are certainly a part of the apparatus we call art, which includes artists, historians and probably dealers and collectors as well. That is our sphere but I don't think anyone ever has total freedom.

GS: I used to teach and I enjoyed it but I didn't have enough time for my own work. I was noticed by a Bond Street gallery and I thought they had seen something in my work. In fact I filled a niche for them. The gallery promised that I would join their stable and be exclusively with them. In return they would promote my work and triple my prices in three years. But I soon found they wouldn't let me change my style. At that time I was making small bronzes and I wanted to experiment with clay and plaster and other materials. I had to choose whether to remain working in this one narrow way which might have made me rich or whether to be freer to experiment with my own work. I decided to stay teaching which has gradually diminished over the years as I have been able to sell more. Now I don't teach at all but it has taken twenty-five years to get to the point where I can make a modest living, but I am free to make what I want or to paint rather than sculpt.

SC: In the States there is the same hierarchy of galleries. When I was younger I thought I should have a



Scott Chamberlin

Vladimir Tsivin

New York gallery but when I tried it I didn't have a good experience. The work was all lost or sold and I was never paid for it. I think if I was given a choice I would still teach.

VT: I am quite lucky to be working in ceramics for with that material you can work quite freely in the Soviet Union. In sculpture and painting there have been more ideological pressures on artists but I don't know what will happen in the future. There are new alternative organisations which have appeared for more avant garde artists who could not get into the Union. They sell their work in foreign countries, have their own exhibitions in the main centres and sell direct to the public. In part this has come about because the Union is too big — 20,000 in Russia. I would prefer to be in a smaller group of like

minded people. These groups still get the benefits from the state and some official commissions but they take less commission. I have been invited to join and I am thinking about it.

PD: Is there one thing that each of you would like for artists?

SC: I think that the state should support artists more. How one sets up the structure is the problem.

VT: I would like to see the Union being opened up into smaller groups but I would not like to see artists lose state financial support.

GS: It would be very nice to have more support but not necessarily money. I would prefer to see it in the form of commissions or free studio space. If every new building also had a percentage added to commission art it would make a huge difference.



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