



THE INTERNATIONAL

MAGAZINE OF THE INTERNATIONAL POTTERS' FESTIVAL

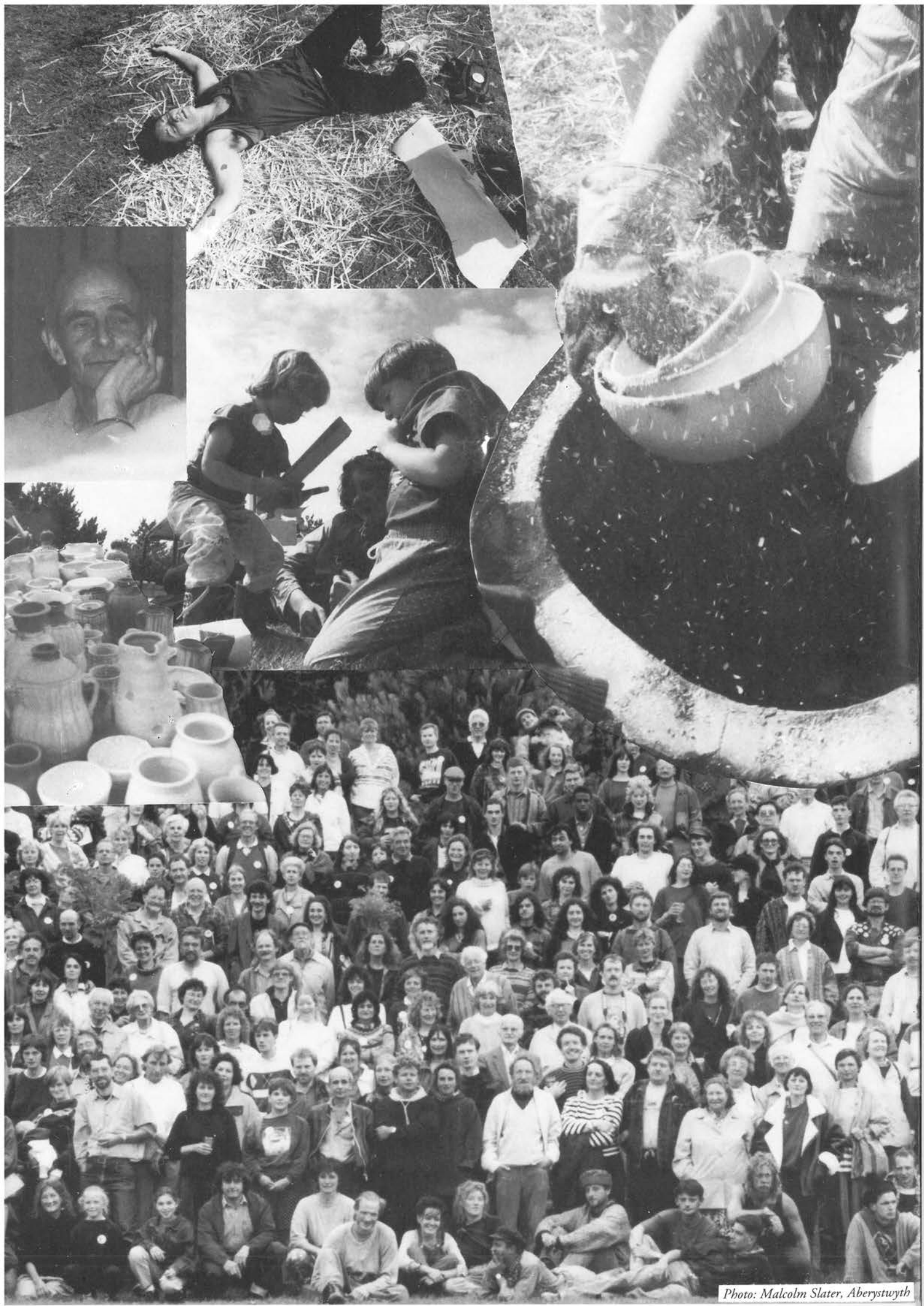


Photo: Malcolm Slater, Aberystwyth

This magazine celebrates the third International Potters' Festival, a biennial event which burgeoned quite suddenly into life and continually develops in a climate of energy, optimism and enthusiasm. The festivals bear little resemblance to commercial conferences. Organised voluntarily by potters, they retain the sensitivity of approach that nurtures the best, accommodates the impromptu and is unfussed by minor disaster: The pots blew up? Well these things happen.

The third Festival, held at Aberystwyth Arts Centre in July 1991, was fun, educational, provoking and perhaps for some of the 500 or so visitors, pivotal. The potter Janet Leach alluded to such inherent possibilities when she formally opened the festival and spoke of perspective-changing events in her own career - events that lead to her visit to Japan and her meeting with Bernard Leach. Later she said: "I was so glad I was invited. I'm not sure I made a contribution to the Festival but it made a contribution to me. There's real spirit here."

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This magazine was produced and edited by **Sheila Tyler** (Tel: 0766 830601 / 0908 652894), with photography by **Morris Freeman** (Tel: 081 523 3980) except where stated. It was designed by **Touchpaper** (Tel: 0235 530541) and printed by **Powys Printers Ltd** (Tel: 0963 554783). Text copyright: International Potters Camp Ltd. The views expressed are those of individual writers. Text may be reproduced with permission.

A Festival in which contrasts between demonstrators were particularly striking, it was also one in which difficult choices had to be made. There were constant demonstrations (with quickly-scheduled sequels by popular request), a full and excellent lecture programme, two hands-on projects, two-and-a-bit kiln projects, three exhibitions, videos, no lunch breaks: we sometimes ate the arts centre's renown food in irreverent haste. And en route between one thing and another were the trade stands - a tantalizing emporium. One could be single-minded, plotting a predetermined route through the weekend; one could take risks which might or might not be productive: go and see the Japanese dancing, playing with clay? Hear them talk about not Yanagi and Zen but beer and ...? Walk out in a fit of pique? Find solace or irritation in Patrick Sargent's more-Japanese-than-the-Japanese approach? Be amused or outraged by Dave Cohen's paper pots and cardboard kiln - what, all that effort, just for burning? Mental salve wasn't necessarily provided by the other demonstrators, in fact the mind never seemed to rest: perhaps that was why conversations went on long into the night. The easy openness that makes talk flow is consciously fostered by the festival organizers: accessibility is their stated aim - no pedestals please. It works well, establishing the important social and cross-cultural function of the festivals among whose audiences are to be found members of various craft councils, a solid body of art educators, craftspeople, amateurs and students along with potters at least as well-known as those demonstrating and previous participants - a compliment indeed.

Festival Organization

The Festival was jointly organized by South Wales Potters, North Wales Potters and Aberystwyth Arts Centre. The 1991 organizing committee included Phil Mumford (chairman), Marya Fforde (guest co-ordinator), Adrian Childs (treasurer), Pauline Patterson (secretary), Alan Hewson (director of Aberystwyth Arts Centre), members of North and South Wales Potters, Aberystwyth Arts Centre, the Welsh Arts Council and University College of

Wales, Aberystwyth. The organizers wish to thank all those who assisted, and to gratefully acknowledge: the Crafts Council; Development Board for Rural Wales; PotteryCrafts Ltd who provided equipment and materials; Butterley Bricks Ltd who supplied bricks, brickclay and clay blocks for the mural project; Budget Rent-a-car (Aberystwyth); Color UK Ltd; University College of Wales Students' Union; Aberystwyth Arts Centre staff; student helpers; donors of raffle prizes.

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Demonstrators

RYOJI KOIE (Japan)
 KATSUE IBATA (Japan)
 CLAUDI CASANOVAS (Spain)
 DAVID COHEN (USA/UK)
 BENTHE HANSEN (Denmark)
 MO JUPP (UK)
 JEFF MINCHAM (Australia)
 PATRICK SARGENT (UK/Switzerland)
 GERHILD TSCHACHLER-NAGY (Austria)
 BRONWYN WILLIAMS-ELLIS (UK)
 NIGEL WOOD (UK)
 TAKESHI YASUDA (Japan/UK)
 MICK CASSON (UK) was Master of Ceremonies

As part of its involvement in the Festival, Aberystwyth Arts Centre organized the visit by the two Japanese potters Katsue Ibata and Ryoji Koie, together with the exhibition of Japanese contemporary tableware 'Thought for Food'

Lectures

Lectures were given by demonstrators and:

MIKE DODD (UK); PIPPIN DRYSDALE (Australia)

RUPERT FAULKNER (UK); MARIAN PRITCHARD (USA)

Rupert Faulkner, deputy curator of the Far Eastern collection at the Victoria and Albert Museum, spoke on Tradition and Change in Contemporary Japanese Ceramics; Mike Dodd spoke on the influence of Japanese philosophy on his work (Selling Water by the River). A discussion around the theme Old Philosophies, New Ideas was chaired by Moira Vincentelli, an art historian with University College of Wales, Aberystwyth, who arranged the lecture series. Pippin Drysdale spoke about her work and contemporary Australian ceramics; Marian Pritchard, who is on a British American Arts Fellowship exchange, spoke about her work and contemporary artists and craftspeople in Philadelphia.

Nobuo Ookawa interpreted for Katsue Ibata and Ryoji Koie; Anita Besson (of Galerie Besson, Old Bond Street) interpreted for Claudi Casanovas.

Bread and Flowers

Jim Robison

Potters' festivals thrive on the diversity of approaches and the carnival atmosphere in which performers present their skills in an entertaining and informative way. For me, David Cohen and Patrick Sargent represented the polar opposites of opinion about ceramics and pottery. On one hand, there was art with its visual language, creative content and emotion, experimental use of materials and exciting, open-ended results which flourish in colleges and universities around the world. On the other hand there was concern for roots, historical tradition and belief in the rightness of ancient methods which have given us centuries of beautiful work with functions that intimately relate to human activity.

At the Aberystwyth festivals, interaction between demonstrators and public is a feature. David Cohen, American sculptor/potter, long-term resident of Scotland and head of ceramics at Glasgow College of Art, was invited to enlarge on this theme of participation. This he did, literally reaching for the sky with a structure of wood, steel cable, card, paper and straw.

Everyone was invited to contribute to this gigantic simulated kiln stacking by making a colourful paper sculpture or pot. The vibrant mixture of figurative sculpture, animals, fruit and vessel forms, was finally crowned by an enormous jug with Mick Casson's image emblazoned on its side. Then the stack was ignited – a larger than life pyrotechnic event that filled the sky and made a fitting conclusion to a spectacular weekend. The entire project was an enterprise of imagination. There was freedom of expression with pleasure in bright colour and immediacy of form without fear of failure or imposition of what or how things should be done.



Bread and Flowers

In contrast to flights of the spirit were the down-to-earth but near Herculean efforts of Patrick Sargent. Assisted by dedicated followers from Manchester Polytechnic, a smaller working model of his Swiss 'Mule' – an Anagama-style kiln was built and successfully fuelled with wood. Affectionately called 'The Donkey' it was created during the preceding week by near round-the-clock efforts.

The work fired in it sought to create the restrained and subtle harmonies of clay and slips, modified by the effects of wood firing and deposits of ash. Patrick's insistence on bare essentials – a momentum wheel and wood firing – coupled with a desire to create 'real pots' from very direct methods, results in work which recalls Leach and Hamada ('my heroes' he calls them). The vigorous and sturdy pots reflect a disciplined philosophy and a determined lifestyle.

English raised and trained but now working in Switzerland, Patrick takes his return to 'real methods' to extremes which include eating with chopsticks and mixing all his clay by foot. "Pottery is not a modern thing and maybe I live in the past – I never accepted gas or electric kilns," he says.

For some, the prescriptiveness of this approach suggests a way in which potting, life style and beliefs can merge. Without doubt the commitment required is tremendous and the energy and sheer hard work impressive. But one wonders at this belief-without-questions and how it relates to the modern world.

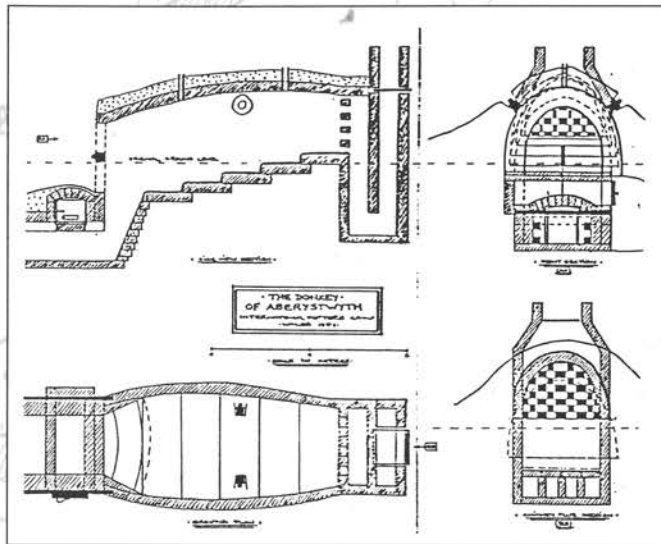
Watching Patrick Sargent's struggle with elemental forces and David Cohen's flights of poetic imagination, I was reminded of Sir Alec Clegg, the noted educational leader in the West Riding of Yorkshire. He compared knowledge with bread and art with flowers – and stressed the need to balance both. Whatever the dietary preferences of those at Aberystwyth, we all ate well.

Photos of David Cohen's project - front and back covers



CAJOLING the DONKEY

ALEX
MC ERLAIN



Lying half-buried in a Swiss hillside is a large wood-fired kiln, impressive in size, location, operation and, perhaps most of all, looks. Most kilns have a simple utilitarian characteristic which sometimes renders a degree of charm, but this kiln has an aesthetic which has been painstakingly nurtured. 'The Mule of Nyffel', Switzerland, is Patrick Sargent's kiln, the name referring to the qualities of the animals brought together in a mule.

A long-distance call from Patrick began: "They want me to build a version of 'The Mule' in Aberystwyth". It would mean building from scratch, firing and cooling it all in seven days. Madness! Patrick tackled the logistics of a plan and schedule while I began to look for a group of skilled helpers. Eventually a team arrived at the Aberystwyth site on Sunday evening, five days before the Festival began.

The kiln had to be finished by Thursday evening to dry it out before setting. The tight schedule meant excavation on Monday, base construction and firebox on Tuesday, and chamber arch and chimney completed by Thursday. The speed of such an operation would normally suggest a fair amount of bodging; not however when working for Mr Sargent who tolerates nothing short of perfection.

For Patrick a kiln is more than a utilitarian construction. He is totally committed to a way of firing as a creative process and it is vital that the kiln gives pleasure and satisfaction. This is important when firing 'The Mule' for 60 hours. The wood needs to be in the right place, cut and stacked. If it is also arranged beautifully it complements the surroundings. The kiln and kiln shed are complementary in their materials and construction. Efforts were made at Aberystwyth to demonstrate by example the importance placed upon a high aesthetic quality. The only temporary feeling came from the scaffolding shelter.

Firing began on Friday evening and lasted 26 hours. It came as a difficult concept to many people that the longer the firing took the better it was. There was no sense of urgency by Patrick to reach temperature. The common response to pyrometer fluctuation was disappointment; sighs of "Oh hasn't it finished yet" highlighted the different attitude to kiln firing.

The pyrometer finished up reading 1334°C and the cone 11s were completely melted. However, actual temperature is only one factor in the creative use of an Anagama kiln. The passage of flame among the pots and the depositing of ash have endless potential. Thus, sustaining a firing at high temperature, constant raking of ashes and controlling the atmosphere all make important contributions to the finished pots.

Building, firing and emptying 'The Donkey' took less time than it takes to fire and cool 'The Mule'. But the purpose was not to invent a quick-build-and-fire Anagama, but to demonstrate attitudes and what goes into Patrick's mode of working which has a direct influence on the pots he produces.

The team consisted of: Duncan Ayscough, Anne Brennan, Chris Helson, Will Levi Marshall, Ed Marshall, Duncan Murray and Patrick Sargent with additional help and support from Renate Sargent, Phoebe Barlow and Alex McErlain.

THOUGHT FOR FOOD:

Takeshi Yasuda select the nine ceramists for the exhibition of contemporary Japanese tableware, 'Thought for Food', organised by Aberystwyth Arts Centre. Peter Reynolds interviewed him about his selection criteria and reviewed the exhibition.

Considering the large influence of Japanese ceramics on British studio pottery in the 20th century, it is perhaps surprising how little is known of contemporary Japanese ceramics in Britain today. Even Takeshi Yasuda, the Japanese born and trained potter, was surprised by the variety of new tableware being made in Japan when he returned for the first time in 18 years in 1988.

With the possible exception of Shiro Otani, none of those selected for the exhibition 'Thought for Food' produce work within a recognisable ceramic tradition. Yasuda's main selection criterion was that those chosen should be attempting to expand their frame of reference, aware of tradition but not blindly following it. There was no intention to provide an embracing survey of contemporary Japanese ceramics - that would have been impossible given its sheer diversity. Rather, Yasuda's selection was very personal, that of a potter, not an art historian.

While tradition is very much alive in Japan, the physical and social environments have changed considerably. Perhaps the clearest social indicator was the presence of three female exhibitors. When Janet Leach studied in Japan in the 1950s women potters were unknown in their own right. Traditionally they were employed in workshops, often to do the most exhausting chores such as levigating and wedging the clay, and were seldom allowed to make anything. This division of labour still exists in some traditional workshops.

As women have had little access to the mainstream of tradition, it is no surprise that Katsue Ibata, Megumi Oiwake and Chieko Yorigami represented a large proportion of the least traditional exhibitors.

The work of Katsue Ibata, one of the demonstrators at the Festival along with Ryoji Koie, was the most playful in the exhibition. Fresh and direct, her work expressed the youthful exuberance of a rather exceptional young Japanese potter. The spontaneity of her brushwork, and in particular her painted and sgraffito-incised fish, reminded one of Korean 'Punchong' folk pottery. In the same way, Koie's freely-thrown teabowls were nearer in spirit to the simple Korean peasant rice bowls (later to be turned into highly-prized teabowls by 16th century Japanese tea masters) than much of the self-conscious tea ware made in Japan today. It is not coincidence that Koie and Ibata share this playfulness. Ibata once worked as Koie's assistant and acknowledges the influence of his uninhibited approach. Koie is a



Megumi Oiwake (photo by Stephen Brayne)

major figure in contemporary Japanese ceramics but the breadth of his work was not really apparent from the work on display. Apart from one 'Nobezara' (stretched plate), his exhibition pieces consisted entirely of teabowls, although he is perhaps best known in Japan for his ceramic sculpture (some of it with a political message), installations and 'happenings'. There was a glimpse of this aspect of his work in the film 'Hi No Kuni' (Country of Fire) which Koie presented at the Festival.

Megumi Oiwake's work consisted mainly of coil-built pots, the coils sometimes left visible on the outer surfaces. The decoration was restrained, usually a white slip background decorated with thin black lines or sgraffito incisions through to a dark clay body. This simplicity and understatement are much admired in many areas of Japanese ceramics, but seem somehow radical when applied to Western forms such as coffee pots and mugs. Simplicity, too, was conveyed by the work of Shiro Otani. Of the nine exhibitors, he could be most easily linked with a distinct type of traditional Japanese pottery - Shigaraki ware. Yet his forms had a light, refreshing quality that speak of innovation rather than tradition. Tetsuo Hirakawa's large, flat platters seemed to hover above the display surface. His strong, vigorous pieces were complemented by a rich, juicy glaze that provides endless surface interest. Akihiko Miyawaki, on the other hand, created visual interest with freely-brushed overglaze enamel colours. An exception however, were the plain white slabbed plates whose richly-textured surfaces needed no colour to add interest. Their minimalism made them both challenging and impressive.

Chieko Yorigami's delicate pieces and Takehito Takeda's more robust forms encapsulated the urbane sophistication of modern Japan; the Ying and Yang, as it were of a modern aesthetic. Yorigami's 'feminine' pieces, in stained and inlaid porcelain in various pastel shades, contrasted with Takeda's 'masculine' black-glazed work with applied silver and gold leaf. The latter evoked images of the past (Kinkakuji, the Golden Pavilion in Kyoto) as well as visions of the future (rockets or engine cowlings were suggested in the forms of two vases).

Masahiro Mori was the odd one out in this exhibition. A designer rather than a potter, Mori was included by Yasuda to show that industrially-produced ceramics are just as capable of rising to the challenge of innovation. Mori's interlocking plain white dishes, with simple relief patterns, were exemplary. They had the restrained beauty and simplicity of much of Japanese design and echoed the interlocking patterns formed by Tatami mats.

All of the exhibition work was functional. From a Western perspective it is likely that some pieces would be regarded as vessel forms, pots about pots, rather than functional items. But Yasuda hoped people would question their preconceptions about function and come to realise that the function of a pot exists not in the work itself, nor in the intention of its creator, but in the mind of the user.

Peter Reynolds lived in Japan for four years and, after starting to study pottery in Tokyo, spent a year working at the workshops of Koki Nosaka and Eizo Miwa in the pottery town of Hagi. Photos - inside back cover.

AN INNOVATORY MENU

Peter
Reynolds

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I am pleased I managed to get to Claudi Casanovas' London exhibition¹ before heading west to Aberystwyth. It meant I had the added advantage of seeing the extraordinary colours, textures and sheer scale of this Catalan potter's latest complex sculptural pieces prior to the Festival. The show included enormous amphorae, as well as a number of circular dish-like wall pieces – the making of which was to form the basis for his Aberystwyth demonstration and talk.

So three-dimensional are his forms, some seemingly imitating spectacularly-eroded geological samples, others reminiscent of gigantic chrysalae from pre-history, that they seem to provoke a widespread initial reaction, irrespective of whether they are liked: how on earth are such results achieved?

Slides shown at the festival enabled the uninitiated to become at least partly familiar with Claudi's unique style, as did the guest potters' exhibition. The lack of really large pieces on display, however, meant it was not quite as representative as it might have been. A small bowl, made for a Tokyo exhibition of touch art for the blind, was nevertheless a useful example of his interest in shape and textural effect.

During Saturday Claudi started on the first stage of a large wall piece – a plaster mould approximately five feet in diameter. This was made by heat-sealing two layers of polythene sheeting and then inflating this to create a bubble, one side of which was covered in plaster-soaked rags. Though the plaster used proved to be of the slow-drying variety (a quick-drying plaster of Paris normally enables

him to proceed after ten minutes), it was enough to give the general idea, as well as create quite a stir. Was the plaster mould destined for the kiln too?

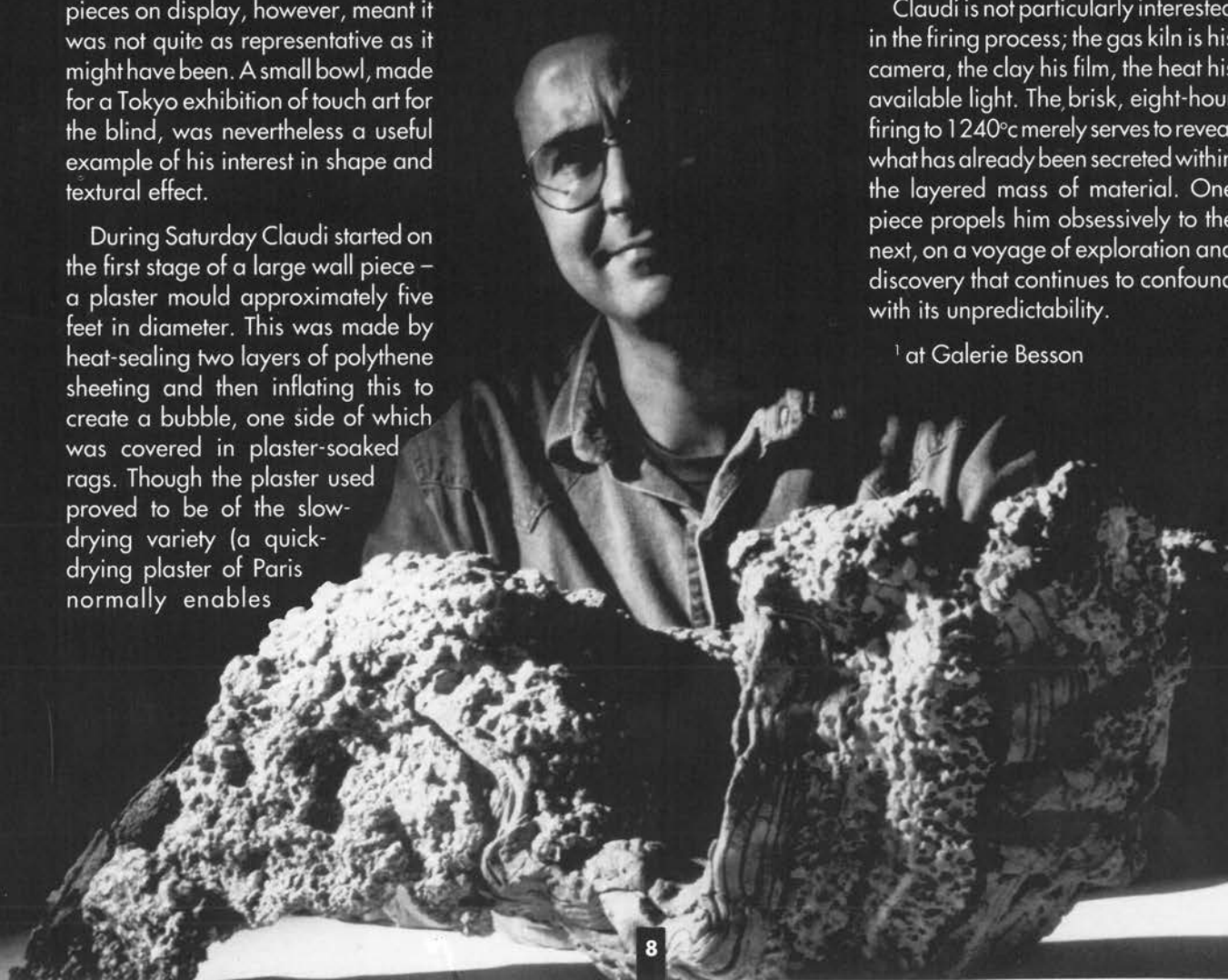
Sunday's video, made over several months by Claudi, put us in the picture. The mould is lifted clear of its bubble and a polyurethane foam is then used to form a 'positive' mould which is far stronger – solid plaster being impossibly heavy. Finally Claudi builds on the mould with slabs and strips of clay – some mixed with powdered granite, others interleaved with veins of flour and sawdust. It is the use of combustible materials such as these, and the effects they have on the relief, colours and texture of the clay during firing, which are crucial to the whole process; Claudi has long since abandoned glazes. A further layer of plaster (it's obliterated during firing) allows the whole – now weighing hundreds of pounds – to be flipped over. Then the foam mould is removed and the 'inside' of the piece similarly built up.

Claudi is not particularly interested in the firing process; the gas kiln is his camera, the clay his film, the heat his available light. The brisk, eight-hour firing to 1240°C merely serves to reveal what has already been secreted within the layered mass of material. One piece propels him obsessively to the next, on a voyage of exploration and discovery that continues to confound with its unpredictability.

¹ at Galerie Besson

Flour and Sawdust Voyage

Tim Trout



MUD AND MINERALS MAN

Janet Hamer

Can very different spheres of excellence exist in, and be expressed by, one person? The question arose after a point made in Rupert Faulkner's talk which expanded on the co-existence in the Japanese exhibition scene of distinctly-defined ceramic categories. There was surprise that some potters operate in three at one time.

Nigel Wood excels in at least two spheres sometimes thought to be naturally exclusive. We in the West have been encouraged to think that an individual potter should flourish either as a clay-worker or as a minerals and fire expert. As 'a mud and water man' Nigel throws huge plant pots, and as a ceramic scientist he unravels the mysteries of oriental glazes.

He demonstrated an English country-pottery skill, and joy in throwing a generously large pot from a lump of clay. He balanced this with a comprehensive historical/technical lecture, and wonder in the perfection of classic glaze types, in this case, mainly Chinese. He brought to the Festival a respect for the intelligence of fellow potters, for materials and knowledge.

Nigel finds a plant pot of equal height and width a very satisfying form. For each of the 20 inch pots he used 56-60lbs of 'as dug' clay pugged with 10% sand. The clay was hand-pat wedged and assembled as a tall cone of compacted pieces. The throwing technique directed energy where it was most effective but did not use any specialised 'big pot' devices. This is a Western technique. In the Far East the power wheel was late

arriving and few pots are thrown in one piece.

It is said that the more advanced an expert's knowledge, the less able the person is to make that expertise accessible to others. But Nigel distilled for us the latest conclusions on the composition of Chinese bodies and glazes from his research with the

Ashmolean, British and Victoria and Albert Museums, and from papers presented in Beijing and Shanghai. Porcelain, the 'ultimate ceramic material' was not so high fired as had been thought, 1240°C being usual. It had been thought to be feldspathic but it is now known to owe its strength and plasticity to

potash-mica which has a crystal shape almost identical to clay. What a marvel to see these shapes in electron photo-micrographs, magnified 64,000 times!

Porcelain bodies developed according to the material locally available. Attempts in the West to produce true, hard porcelain resulted in success in Meissen in 1710, bizarre imitation in England with bone china, and frustrated success in the early 20th century. Glaze and colour technology was discussed, even a sure-fire technique for copper reds! Nigel next described his construction of an authentic Chinese bronze casting mould. This versatility is like the Chinese yellow Loess clay itself, spread deep and wide, a fertile ground for growing and a material for making - pots, glazes, Great Wall bricks, Xian figures.

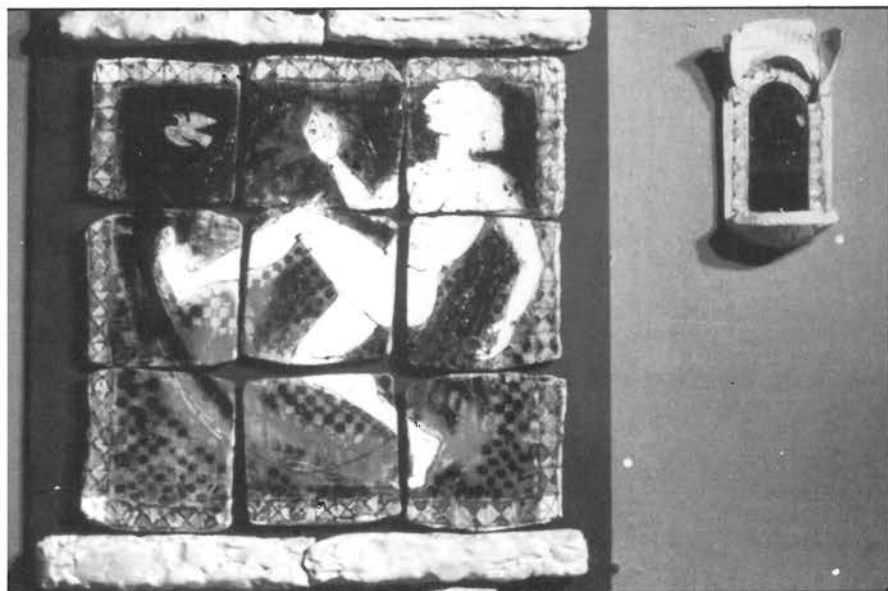


human decoys

sheila tyler

A half-acre terrace of grey concrete paving stones, surrounded by uncompromising 'Sixties architecture, is the foreground to Aberystwyth Arts Centre. A space designed for social convergence, it fails dismally despite its majestic elevation

combinations and compositions were possible. "They didn't have to think 'what is this picture going to be about'. But they had really important things to face: working very large, working with materials they weren't used to, having to throw away this great work and not take it home with them because it was too big. I made everyone doing the mural absolutely aware that tomorrow it might be in a skip; it might not be the 'best' pieces that were saved but the ones that fitted together." It was this balance between individual actions and overarching coherence that lead to particular panels 'working' or not. One of the most striking panels, for example, was largely produced by a group of children. "They wanted to paint individual tiles because that's what you do at school - 'That's my tile; that's your tile'. But they came back the next day to put a figure on the panel and it was one of the nicest there - a combination of abstract pattern with just a



(there is, after all, a fine view of the sea). Precisely because of its unaccommodating air, it was the space Bronwyn Williams-Ellis had in mind in the conception of her set of tile panels - the Festival's 'hands-on' project which culminated, even after selected recycling of panels over the weekend, in the largest clay mural in Wales. Bronwyn used a theme that predominates in her more accustomed ceramics work: the human form. But the theme was adapted to a novel use in which the human figures served as decoys... "like you'd use decoy ducks." Whether it would be possible to provide themes for panels without unduly restricting the experimental freedom of people who worked on them was a question on which Bronwyn deliberated. In the event, it created interesting tensions and surprises. Participants were provided with a panel of a set size, a variety of stencils for borders, backgrounds and figures, and a small range of coloured slips; within those limitations, novel



traced outline of a figure cut into it. They'd seen the context of the whole."

A variety of qualities, both personal and professional, make particular people obvious candidates for 'hands-on' projects. Bronwyn's work - predominantly tiles - is bold and unfussy, frequently large-scale and vibrantly colourful, generous and good



humoured; she prefers uncomplicated technology, and techniques that produce fairly instant results. A disaster, such as a piece shattering during firing is turned into a virtue. Piecing together and gluing become part of the making process. This is no idle ploy to shock or outrage (though it sometimes has that effect) but the result of several pervasive interests - early decorative arts, classical fine-art and archaeology. Sources are used indirectly

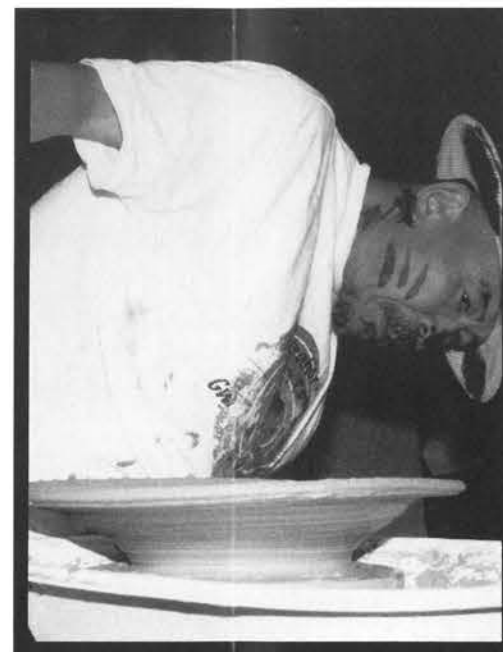
however: "Only in retrospect can I identify them. My interests are like a very wide plaited braid with maybe 25 strands in it. Take the red thread - at a certain point it comes to the outer edge and at a certain point the other outer edge; if you keep on looking at the edge of that braid, all you see, every 25 strands, is that influence, that red colour; what you don't see is that it's interwoven all the way through."

CHALLENGING ORTHODOXY

RUPERT FAULKNER

Arriving a few minutes after the start of the joint demonstration by Ryoji Koie and Katsue Ibata, I found the hall echoing with the first of many numbers that were to provide a pulsating rhythm for this most splendidly anarchic of performances. I made my way to one of the remaining seats at the very back of the room which, although rather a long way from where the demonstration was taking place, had the advantage, dare one say it, of being behind the sets of speakers. The sense of primal energy given out by the music was taken up playfully in the costumes of the two demonstrators, Katsue being dressed like a large feline prowling about on an African game reserve and Koie looking like a wacky tourist setting out on safari. Behind them on a large screen were a set of posters on which Koie had scrawled a series of cryptic statements summing up his artistic development through the '60s, '70s and '80s.

While Katsue stamped out her large slabs of clay on the floor, occasionally breaking off to throw iron slip over Koie or to wind her tail round the pot he was throwing, Koie worked with nonchalant fluidity. Only an absolute master can break



were deeply ceramic in feeling. They were readily understandable in the context of the freely sculptural approach to utilitarian wares that has been the hallmark of the best of Japanese ceramics for many hundreds of years. The concrete expression of the controversial stance to which his verbal patter was trying to point us is not to be found in the type of work he was demonstrating at Aberystwyth, but in the non-functional ceramic installations into which he has put so much of his creative energy over the past twenty-five years. Some of this work, such as his 1988 Chernobyl series, is overtly political, but much of it is more closely personal in its concerns. The idea of decomposition, for example, is a recurrent theme which he explores through a haunting use of masks made from impressions taken from his own face. In short, then, what we saw at Aberystwyth was the complete man but only half his work. This is not a criticism, for there is always the question of what is practicable, especially when dealing with somewhere as far away as Japan. Rather it is a plea that one day we should have the opportunity to experience further dimensions of an artist who is without doubt one of the leading figures of his generation.

every rule in the potter's book to produce the marvellously expressive pots for which he is so well known. If the demonstration had any structure to speak of, it was chronological in nature, with Koie showing us what kinds of techniques he had developed at different stages in his career. His explanations, although not much easier to understand than the scrawling calligraphy behind him, helped confirm the image of a man who found his inspiration in alcohol, loud music and an antipathy towards all things smacking of orthodoxy. Again and again his reminiscences returned to the 1960s when he was a young man in his 20s. Were one to look for the roots of Koie's philosophy, it would be to his formative experiences during those revolutionary years that one would undoubtedly turn. If the humorously dismissive attitude to clay-working traditions displayed in Koie's performance was meant to shock, the final products, as seen in the teabowls and dishes shown in the Festival's special exhibition of contemporary Japanese tableware,



I do not know very much about it. I haven't read his work but I was told about this idea which I like. Workaholics work like mad and they get their satisfaction from working all the time but the spider weaves its web and suddenly it is there. That's how I feel I work. I studied just for two years in a short-term university but I don't feel I have studied anything. Three years ago I went for six months as a student to Canada.

What kind of ceramics do you admire?

Works that seem to contain the essence of an age. I can be influenced by such works whether they are traditional or contemporary - they vibrate. Koie leaves the vital moment in his work. I have been greatly influenced by Koie and my boyfriend, Igata, who also works in ceramics. In Canada I met Ron Nagel - he makes small pieces fired many times so I also like works where the artist has taken time.

In Japan the tradition is that men made the pottery and women were the helpers if anything. Would you agree?

That is not necessarily the case. Like in Africa in the ancient Japanese tradition there were women potters as in Jomon ceramics. When Janet Leach met me for the first time she told me that I was the first Japanese woman potter she had seen to use the wheel. I know many women who use the wheel but perhaps that was not the case one generation ago.

Do you have events like this in Japan?

Not quite like this but when there are they would be much more formal and very official. There would be well-known critics and people like me would never be invited. I like the atmosphere of this event. It's great.

Katsue Ibata talks to Moira Vincentelli with Nobuo Ookawe as translator.

Can you tell me how you started to work in ceramics?

At first it was to escape from reality. After five years in ceramics I realised that there was another reality in the world of ceramics - it seemed like an escape but in fact there was no escape.

But in your work and this afternoon in your performance you like to play and joke.

I am timid and I just react according to the situation. I don't always know what is going to happen. I was so nervous but Koie was wonderful and he guided me.

How do you work in Japan?

I have my own studio but it is very tiny and is not near my home. This year I went to my studio for only one month and I was in Asia for five months travelling around and looking at things. You can live very cheaply in Asia. In Japan I earn money by selling work but I am quite happy to live with whatever money I have.

Where do you sell pots?

Usually I have two to three exhibitions a year in Japan but last year in Japan I began to question the system. Everyone is so concerned about making a name for themselves. I don't think I did any exhibitions last year - just a few things in a group exhibition. I used to be a firm believer in individualism but recently I have decided to take things easy. I have become very questioning about the world controlled by money.

Do you admire the ideals of Soetsu Yanagi and the Mingei folk craft movement?

Essence of Time



WRITTEN ON THE WALL

Sheila Tyler

A new mural, mounted in the Aberystwyth Arts Centre restaurant in time for the third International Festival, was the work of visitors to the second festival. It developed out of the 'hands-on' project by Jim Robison (USA/UK) at the first festival. Jim, far right, is pictured with Tony White a potter and ceramics technician with the arts centre.

The arts centre's decision to mount the mural in the restaurant afforded it a fitting context for viewing. The sometimes self-conscious individualism of each decorated tile - in most cases attributed to the carver/decorator - gave the mural the irresistible charm of an autograph book: a good read.



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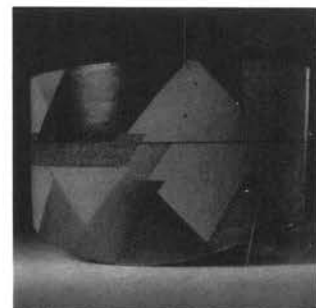
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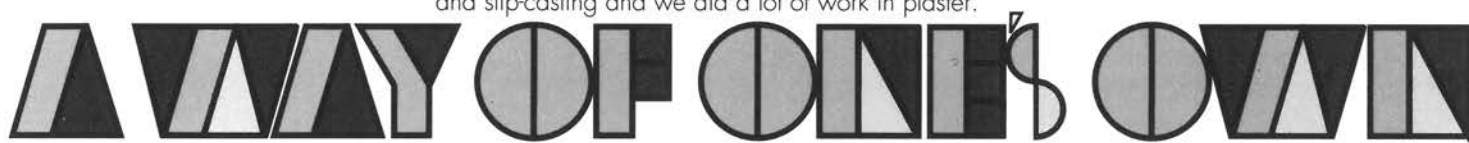
SAYVIT
S

Benthe Hansen is one of the leading ceramic artists in Denmark. She lives in Copenhagen, exhibits her work in Europe and America and is currently a teacher at the school of arts and crafts. Her exquisite vessels are coil-built, carefully constructed from broad, flattened bands of clay. The simple shapes are elaborated by a bold geometry of abstract designs in bright colours. All her work is salt-glazed, giving a mellow warmth to the pristine forms. In conversation with Moira Vincentelli she discussed the Danish traditions of ceramics and her working experience.



"The handcraft school where I trained for four years offered a very broad curriculum but it was most concerned with domestic ware and atelier production. Bernard Leach and that craft tradition were not given any importance. We were all trained so that we could be designers for factories, which was impossible because there was only one factory. So in Denmark there was no-one who could take us in. It was not strictly industrial design, it was more about small-scale production. We used to have a saying in the school – to do a good teapot – that was the test if you were any good as a ceramist. We were trained in varied techniques including throwing, handbuilding and slip-casting and we did a lot of work in plaster.

Moira Vincentelli



Now, when I am teaching, I want to show students how to see and be aware of what is happening in front of their eyes – to see the lines and be aware of proportions. I want to give them ideas to work on and then they also learn the techniques.

After my training I went to Bing and Grondahl. They demanded something that was not allowed in the school. I had to find my own personal expression – much more personal than was natural at that time, being so young. As artists we were there to promote the factory's image and we were expected to work for exhibitions and be big names. Later Bing and Grondahl was taken over by Royal Copenhagen and I worked there for four years. They demanded exhibitions too, of course, but they also wanted new things for production although you really had to push your things through the whole process of production yourself.

At the factory it was a weird situation: you were 'kept' in some way – not really fighting. So you felt a bit cushioned. Now that I am working independently it is quite tough. Since Den Permanente closed (a major art and design shop in Copenhagen) there are hardly any galleries showing ceramics in Denmark although there are still people who commission work.



Danish ceramics are very much admired in Sweden and the market is better outside Denmark. My main market outside Denmark is the United States. I think Americans are fed up with all these very expressive artistic ceramics because everyone wants to be as individual as possible and make themselves very interesting. We are still continuing a tradition which is valued by some people. I feel I am fighting to be just normal."

MASTER OF SCALE

MICK CASSON

I knew the pots before I knew the man but as Cardew said, they are the same. Jeff Mincham's pots were on view in several places during the Australian bi centennial exhibitions in Sydney. They amazed me then by their sheer size, boldness and sensitivity to both form and surface.

Jeff came to the International Potters' Festival to demonstrate and talk about the development of his work. He proved to be a master of both, skilled in making and communicating.

Demonstrations away from home with all the hazards of unknown clays and wheels are always a trial for any potter, and many Australian clays throw much better than ours. Jeff seemed to cope with all this quite unperturbed working away in his corner in the main hall for the most part with a sizeable crowd asking questions and receiving information laced with wit. When he occupied centre stage, Jeff was concerned mainly with either making or completing two quite different forms. One was a rotund pot that he gradually closed in completely and then gently cajoled into collapsing into a flat-topped vessel; the audience held its breath as the clay subsided into place. At this point it was a soft organic shape. When it had 'set up' a little he went back and crisped it up into an articulated hard-edged form which he decorated with added clay pieces and his characteristic texturing. The second vessel was much taller, having been thrown in stages and flame-gun stiffened so that only the top section was needed to complete it.



The sharp-angled change of direction to this final part of the vessel ended in a

beaten-clay handle. Jeff decorated this whole surface with sweeping flame-like linear textures finishing the top lid section with what I can only call his nuts and bolts clay pieces which punctuated and accentuated the form. All this was achieved swiftly and deftly, accompanied by a commentary which explained thought processes and dealt with technical details.

Highly-absorbing though these demonstrations were, the picture of the man and his work would have been incomplete without the lectures (Jeff gave a repeat performance by popular request). As he talked through his career as a potter touching on past trials and achievements, he brought his audience up to date with a graphic account of making, firing and finishing his current 'post-firing-reduced earthenware'. He has had to invent methods and adapt processes to meet the demands of his giant forms.

The talks were informative and witty, the vessels shown on slides grew ever more compelling. The very last slide showed a truly great pot like some flame-textured Minoan vessel, five feet tall - his masterwork to date. But, wait for it, he's the potter who says: "The best pot you will ever make is always the next."





CLAY MIRROR

Josie Walter



In his introductory talk Mo Jupp described himself as a functional potter – a rather alarming statement as we were taken through slides, not of teapots and casseroles, but of shoes, horses legs, helmets and small phallic shrines. As the weekend progressed, and Mo talked more, it became clear that we were being asked to address not the idea of clay containers as domestic pottery, but of ceramic pieces whose function was to provoke discussion and comment.

Mo likes to use clay because it does what he wants. Neither bronze nor plaster gives him these qualities – there is something intrinsically interesting about fired clay that is important in his finished statement. The work Mo produces is a reflection of thoughts he has about certain issues, about events that happen to him. Frequently he feels the end result doesn't work and he has to start again.

In the construction of his pieces, Mo is essentially curious about the line and shape of each fragment or how to support tall, thin objects. He has no time for a gratuitous use of clay: each detail should have a reason to exist. This was apparent in his demonstration. He warned the audience as he painstakingly built the figure of a woman: "This is not a spectator sport!" Each angle of a cut was considered at length, his movements slow and contemplative as he sought to create a figure which reflected a sense of waiting, but not quite in repose. Mo teaches at Bristol, Bath, Middlesex and Harrow, amounting to full-time lecturing.

Work has to be done in the evenings, and necessarily develops over a long time. Scrutinized by 400 or so Festival participants, the demonstration must have been unnerving for Mo, working quietly behind his figure.

He is particularly interested in women as subjects for his functional pieces. This can invite negative reactions which Mo strives to overcome. The function is to provoke discussion and comment, but if only a curt dismissal is achieved he feels the piece has failed and he must look for another avenue.

Mo had three small sculptures in the demonstrators' exhibition. One female torso in particular had a curving line through the back, both sensuous and streamlined. It is his appreciation and respect for women that he wants to highlight. It is not only an appreciation of the female body, but the physical vulnerability that he emphasizes. He is sensitive to the physical abuse men can administer, brought home by his wife's involvement with women's groups, in particular battered wives.

This empathy with women is apparent in conversation with Mo Jupp and is what he strives for in his work. However, a finished piece should make the statement independently of its maker to be a success and it is towards this goal that Mo continually works.

FRUITS OF SIMPLICITY

ALAN HEWSON

Tom Jones, not the South Wales/Las Vegas boyo but the book. Or rather the film with its famous sequence between Albert Finney and Susannah York, the 'how to

make love with five pounds of ripe mixed fruit', in the nicest possible way of course. That's the nearest way to describe Takeshi Yasuda's approach to ceramics. For those of you who haven't seen the film, read the book or seen the demonstration, here's a flavour.

"I remember one sensation each time I eat watermelon. Watermelons are quite plentiful in southern Japan. They're very large and watery and sweet. As a kid we used to compete with each other to eat one the fastest. The way to win was you just went for it and ate as funny as possible, then other people just couldn't stop laughing, and while they were laughing you carried on eating. The technique is just like when you wash your face. That was a fantastic sensation I still remember. You eat inside your mouth and outside as well, just gobble lumps and pips."

So with ceramics it's the sensuality of the material that he conveys both in his explanation of his technique, his work, his life. There can't be many people who get an erection at the British Museum but Takeshi does. The Elgin Marbles are the objects of his arousal which he describes as not only sensual but also spiritual. He sums up his feelings for the basic materials in one of the

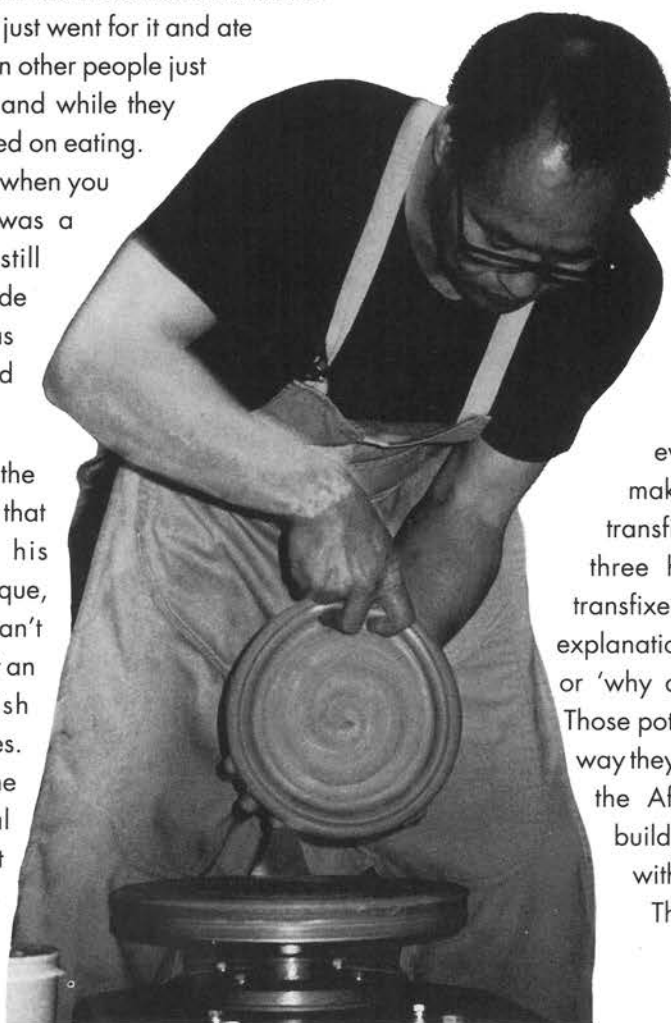
most condensed, compelling and simple explanations as to why so many of us find pottery so enthralling: "Just squeeze clay - that will trap you for a lifetime."

Reaching into the basic instincts of touch and feeling grew out of years of making and thinking. It's a natural process to ask questions as he did: "What is the meaning of life? What does it mean to be a potter in the 20th century? Why are we here? What are we doing here? But it took courage to make the decision that I couldn't care less. I realised that I wasn't up to that kind of question and eventually realised anyway I

wasn't that interested in that kind of question any more.

I am a more simple person."

That is why he could respond as so many others did to the Nigerian potters at the 1989 Festival: "I am sure quite a few of you were here two years ago and experienced that incredible event with the Nigerian potters making fire. It was magical. I was transfixed and I could see about three hundred people who were transfixed as well. We didn't need any explanation about 'what does it mean' or 'why does it make us so excited.' Those potters were so beautiful too, the way they worked, the beautiful rhythm, the African rhythm they had for building pots. Fire and clay: this is without any argument so magical. That's why I make pots."

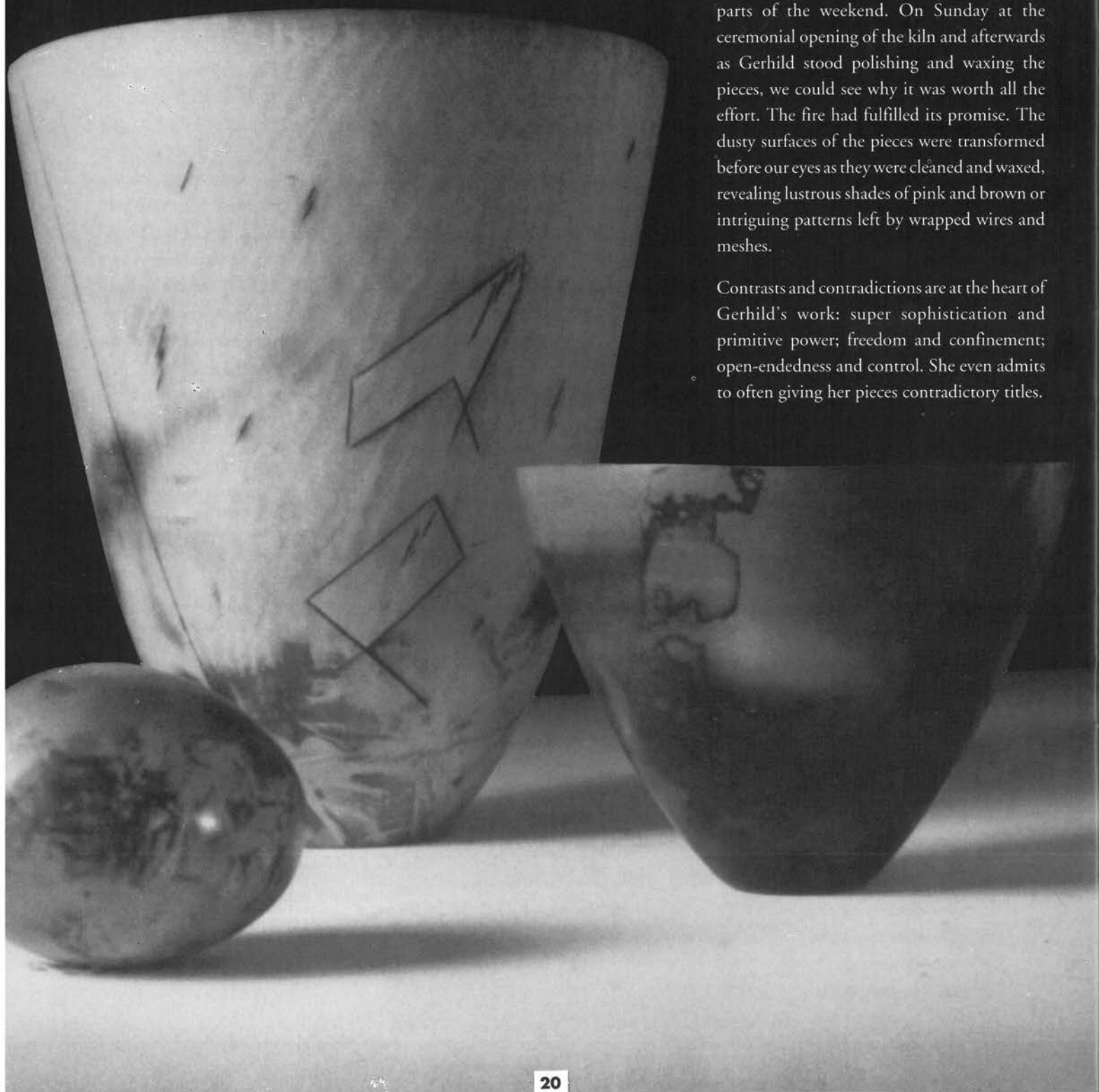


painting with fire

Gerhild Tschachler-Nagy looked a little dejected as she stood in the drizzly rain calling out occasionally to one or other of the helpers as they kneaded the clay with straw, forming it into rough bricks. The weather did not look promising for kiln building. But suddenly the group broke into fits of giggles as they joked together; spirits

lifted and the sun appeared for at least parts of the weekend. On Sunday at the ceremonial opening of the kiln and afterwards as Gerhild stood polishing and waxing the pieces, we could see why it was worth all the effort. The fire had fulfilled its promise. The dusty surfaces of the pieces were transformed before our eyes as they were cleaned and waxed, revealing lustrous shades of pink and brown or intriguing patterns left by wrapped wires and meshes.

Contrasts and contradictions are at the heart of Gerhild's work: super sophistication and primitive power; freedom and confinement; open-endedness and control. She even admits to often giving her pieces contradictory titles.



For many years the artist worked in raku but three years ago her work underwent a drastic change and she turned for inspiration to publications by Hal Riegger on primitive firing and to experiences she had in America using simple kilns where the imprint of the firing could really be seen in the work. Now she mainly uses a fine white stoneware, burnished and sometimes wrapped in rags soaked in ferric chloride or copper sulphate. For a more controlled environment she may fire inside a sagger but normally the pots are stacked between salted straw which in turn leaves its imprint in the process. She can also control effects as when she places one pot inside the other on sawdust to achieve her preference for a darker base. The firing temperature can go up to 1100°C but usually no higher than 1000°C. Currently her work is fired in primitive wood-fuelled clay kilns. The work is exhibited in galleries and more recently in installations. Boats are the central theme symbolising liberty and journeying. Forms are simple and suggestive, enhanced by her recent experiments using the fine membrane of animal intestine wrapped around the clay. The structure of the skin has a



wonderful graphic quality and its translucent effects change but do not obscure the clay surface. The curved boat forms are suspended on metal rods or clay supports. It is work to set the imagination at play. Recently, as a teacher in summer workshops, Gerhild extended her ideas about simple firing processes. It is as if the new kinds of interest in activity courses and workshops have spawned new art forms. Kiln building is arduous but as a group

activity it need no longer be just a means to an end. The kiln can be the work of art: it is a sculptural form which can be fired in situ. At a summer school in Switzerland she supervised the construction and firing of twelve kilns all different shapes and sizes. The one in Aberystwyth was only a 'baby' but it demonstrated the potential of this activity. It proved the power of fire as a creative tool. As Gerhild Tschachler-Nagy says: "Fire is my paintbrush."

Craft Council's Selected Galleries in Wales

As part of its work in promoting fine contemporary craftsmanship and access to craftwork, the Crafts Council compiles a selected list of shops and galleries in England and Wales. They are chosen by the Council for the high quality of work stocked and their knowledge of contemporary work.

Recommendation of our outlet for the selected list does not cover business dealings, either between makers and suppliers, or the outlet and customers. The Crafts Council regards such matters as being personal to the parties involved for which it cannot accept responsibility.

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Tel: (0970) 622882

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A Craft Map is available, free of charge, from either the Crafts Council, 44a Pentonville Road, Islington, London N1 9BY Tel: 071 278 7700, or The Craft Department, Welsh Arts Council, 9 Museum Place Tel: 0222 394711,

STIRRED, SHAKEN AND

One does get carried away. There we are, basking in the fellowship of our mutual craft. Two days cut off from the world's problems and pedestrian daily trivia. We return to our workshops refreshed, inspired, stimulated and in a slightly heightened state (in the past with the possible added ingredient of a new romance – not so noticeable these days). No wonder reports after the event are so anodyne.

We arrived late in the evening and as we entered reception were hugged to death with inebriate welcome. I had consumed my usual three doubles at 6 pm but it did not feel like it. For the rest of the weekend the company quaffed more moderately. I never did discover the cause of this outbreak of Friday-night over-indulgence.

The exhibitions being locked away, we called to pay due homage to Patrick Sargent's impressive kiln. Over the two days, between firing duties, Patrick showed us his manufacturing methods using a slow or slowing-down momentum wheel in order to obtain the asymmetric effects and exaggerated ribbing he favours.

By Saturday evening the multitude around his kiln watched the digital temperature indicator with the intensity of punters in a betting shop. Would he or would he not reach temperature? Patrick, easily exasperated, threw a dirty rag over the indicator, taking regular anxious looks himself. Patrick, of course, did reach temperature. Like the late John Chappell, he is one of those potters who can drive any old pile of bricks up to 1300°C. It does not have to be so traumatic of course, but it usually is.

Because events overlap or occur simultaneously at Aberystwyth, choices have to be made. This has some disadvantages over a serial programme but has the advantage of encouraging one's insular attitudes and prejudices.

The Japanese potted to the sounds of reggae. Did I detect an underlying rattle of Yanagi rotating in his grave? I suppose the theory is that these exercises, designed accidental effects and tea bowling with the feet give a new perspective, allow escape from the prison of cultural indoctrination and unite the spirit with the material. I went through a phase of making those little slab and pat-a-cake dishes after seeing a catalogue of 44 sets by 44 potters from a 1959 Tokyo exhibition. I gave them away.

The experience of watching Takeshi demonstrate was uplifting, however. Here is someone who has understood Ruskin's precepts on perfection and imperfection and maintains a perfect balance. It is insufficient to say he forms the clay – he liberates it.



*David Cohen
and
Benthe Hansen*



Katsue Ibata



SOMETIMES INSPIRED

It is some years since I saw Nigel Wood bigware-throwing and somehow I managed to miss most of it. I saw the finishing of a rhubarb-forcing pot which, when inverted and put on a pedestal, forms an unaffected neo-classical patio terracotta. I used to possess one from Meon that the sheep knocked over. I must search for its segments. Perhaps I could sell the shards in sets of six for £500 like Shiro Otani. Nigel's lecture was fascinating and questioned much of our conventional wisdom about Chinese ceramic and bronze technology but I can't remember any of it. Perhaps Nigel will finish his book one day and then I can take in his research at my own dim-witted pace.

The best lecture was Mike Dodd's. We knew he would have something worthwhile to say but the assured, urbane and professional delivery was unexpected. Loaded with thought-provoking conceptions, aphorisms and quotations, it was yet intellectually unpretentious.

The Austrian contingent was rather unforthcoming early on. I took one look at their kiln and decided it would not produce much. I was wrong. When it came to be unpacked it was a revelation. Beautiful pots, fit for the glass-door cabinet if nothing else. Gerhild Tschachler-Nagy had opened up by then and her lecture was consummate if a little gruesome in parts. We were shown slides of a Black Death ship partially hidden by a frame of stretched intestinal skin, sweating slightly.

We are all victims when it comes to the empathetic spell of Mo Jupp. He always seems so vulnerable and yet street-wise at the same time. His work seems to emerge from some deep emotional concern for something. He touches a chord, which perhaps accounts for his enormous success with students. Just a casual word and you are seeing something quite differently from before. He is disturbing but unthreatening.

The intriguing group-participation mural from a previous festival in the arts centre restaurant was worthy of some study (though with difficulty because it meant leaning over people enjoying refreshments). Over tea we enjoyed attempting to identify the contributions. Some of the best were anonymous and some of the worst by well-known potters. This time Dave Cohen and Bronwyn Williams-Ellis had the task of shepherding and inducing people to shed their reserve and contribute to the group projects. The results were as rewarding as any.



Mick Casson



Ryoji Koie

MURRAY FIELDHOUSE

Technology is the science or systematic knowledge of the practical arts. It is where art and science meet; where science serves art.

We assume, or rather hope, that somebody out there understands the details of the technology on which we rely. If prepared clay, glaze materials or colours give us unexpected results we complain to 'them'. We cannot escape from technology, so how did science served art at the Festival?

WHERE science

FRANK HAMER

Around the trade stands I saw or learned about a new 1800°C fibre and the introduction of stainless steel burners on the Sayvit kiln to overcome specking on porcelain; the new and less costly Studio 2000 two-point kiln controller with digital read-out, percentage input and timed soak from Celtic Process Control and Fulham Pottery; a good French weigh-scale in metric and imperial with one-gram accuracy from Ceramatech; a range of brush-on glazes from Potters Connection, now linked with W G Ball; a slabroller with easy-to-operate adjustments from Pottery crafts; a range of glazes newly-blended by Reward Products Europe; quality wheel attachments from Ratcliffe and Sons; and a raku kit, wall extruder and own-range of glazes from Bath Potters Supplies.

It is natural that we don't particularly want to understand all the technology behind these products but it is different with intermediate technology. We can see how it works and can enjoy it.

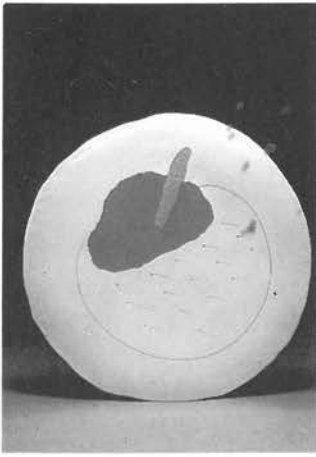
Gerhild Tschachler-Nagy's clay kiln, for example, was straightforward. Air, sucked in at two firemouths, fed the burning fuel and escaped dramatically upwards. Where else would flames go but upwards leaving their heat energy in the pots stacked in the chamber. Not so obvious was the fact that this was post-firing processing. The pots were already high-temperature biscuited so we were witnessing a decorating process to produce a fascinating series of colours, shapes and vignette patches.

Behind the apparently simple technology was a host of involved and interlinked technical points which Gerhild Tschachler-Nagy is exploring. Similar at first appearance was Patrick Sargent's Anagama kiln - wood and air in the bottom, flames at the top, pots inside. But closer inspection uncovered sophistication. There was a scale plan to start with, firebox doors, damper, pyrometers, a chimney with a

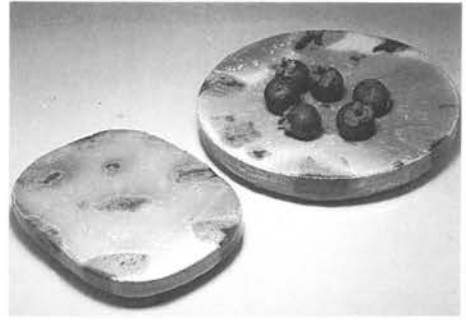
ART meet

U-bend and a character of its own. It reached the predicted 1300°C and fired the clay, melted the glaze and, most importantly, introduced flyash to flux the pot surfaces and 'scorch' the wares.

Do we think technically enough? Throwing needs water as a lubricant. But how much water? How do the Japanese potters manage without a splash tray? Do they know something the rest of us don't? Nigel Wood reminded us of the hexagonal platelets of kaolinite which are responsible for a clay's plasticity so he obviously thinks about his clay in those terms. For myself, I will go on asking questions, enjoying the obvious technology and hoping that science is serving my art.



Chieko Yorigami



Tetsuo Hirakawa



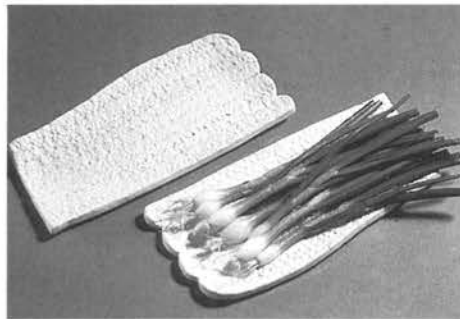
Masabiro Mori



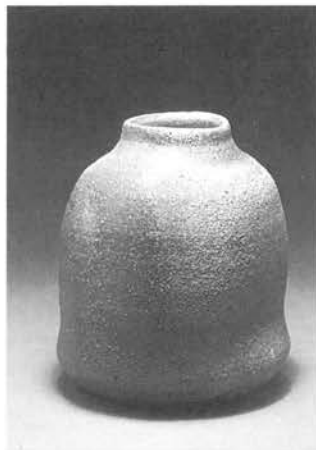
Ryoji Koie



Takehito Takeda



Akihiko Miyawake



Shiro Otani



Katsue Ibata



Megumi Oiwake





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