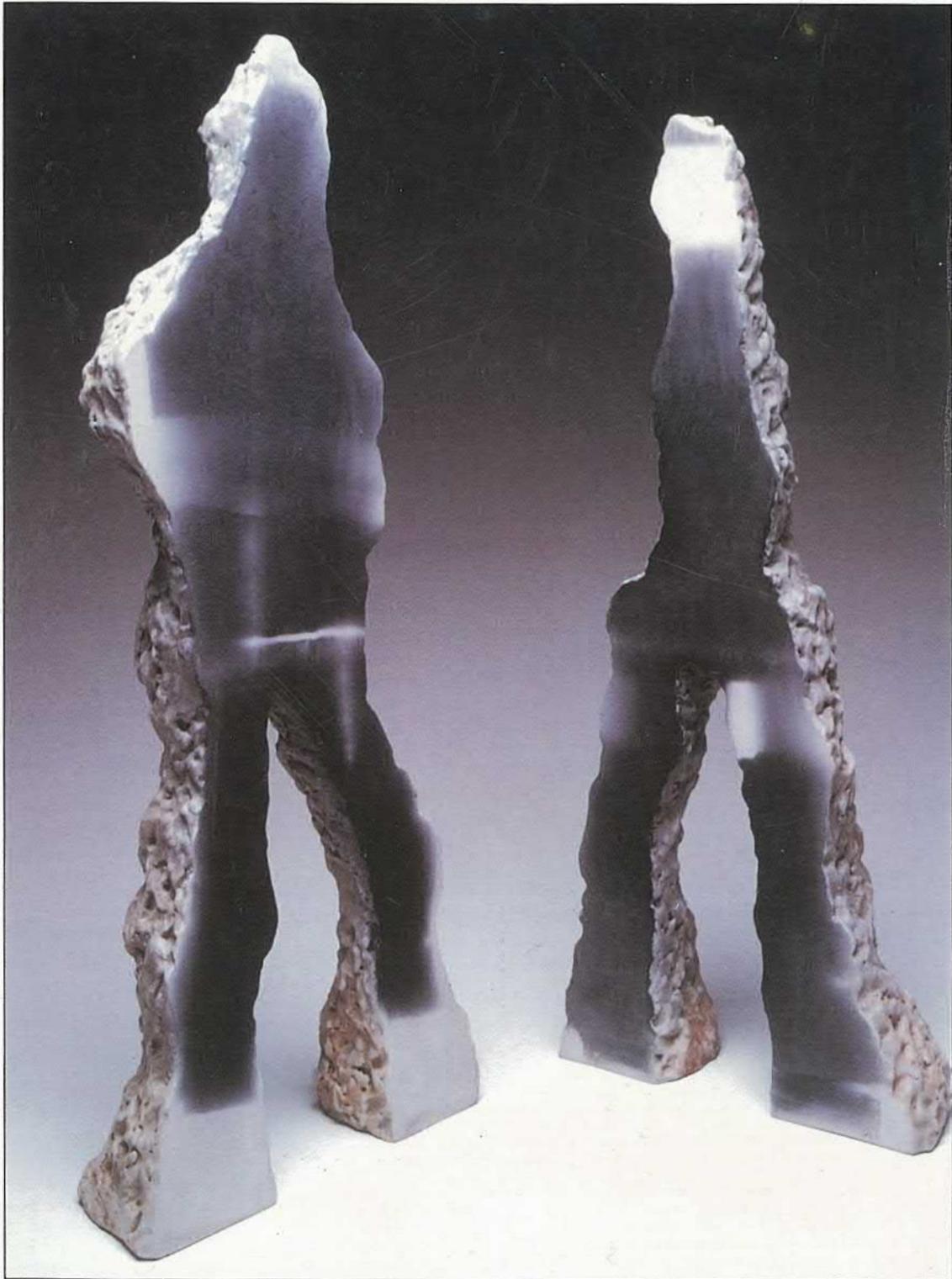


New Zealand Potter

Volume 38 □ Number 2 □ 1996



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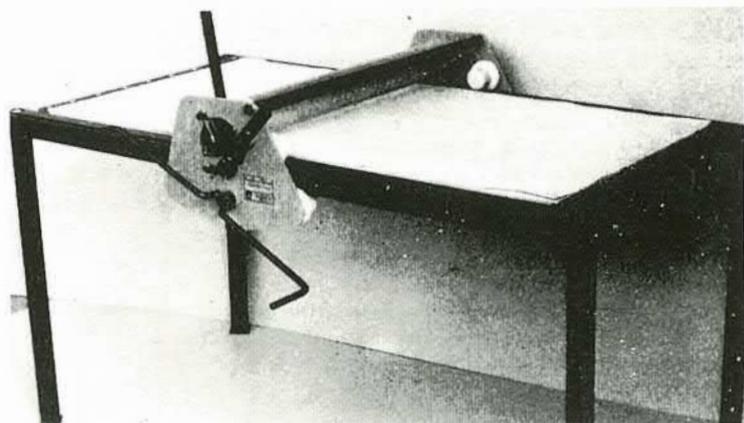
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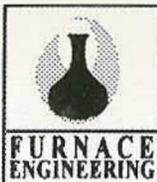


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COVER PHOTO

*A Pair with Shadows, the winning work from
the Fletcher Challenge Ceramics Award
Exhibition, by Yasuko Sakurai, Japan.
Photo by Haru Sameshima
see page 12*

The Fletcher Challenge Ceramics Award

1977-1996

The partnership between Auckland Studio Potters and Fletcher Challenge Limited which resulted in the annual Fletcher Challenge Ceramics Award celebrates its twentieth anniversary in 1996. It is ranked, along with those at Faenza, Italy and Mino, Japan as one of the three most prestigious Ceramic Award exhibitions in the world and is eagerly supported by ceramists everywhere.

In this, the anniversary year, the story of its origins deserves to be told.

FLETCHER BROWNBUILT POTTERY AWARD 1977-1986

In 1975 Ian Firth was elected President of Auckland Studio Potters. At the society's April Annual General Meeting he announced his intention of establishing a permanent centre for its operations and of establishing a sponsored ceramics award of international standing. His intention in proposing this was to lift pottery above the "Cinderella" status it currently held in comparison with the other arts.

Many of those associated with the Award are familiar with a legend that it was conceived on a beach in Fiji. That legend is also part of the story. Shortly after ASP's 1975 Annual General Meeting the potter Ruth Court and her husband Ralph took a midwinter holiday at Denba with Trevor Hunt, then director of Fletcher Brownbuilt, a subsidiary of Fletcher Holdings, and his wife Ailsa. One day Mrs Court talked of Ian Firth's suggested ceramics competition explaining that such an event might generate revenue to finance premises and a teaching facility for Auckland Studio Potters.

By August 1976 a Centre Committee had been established by Ian Firth, its members including himself, Roger Paul, David Parton, Leo King, Ruth Court and Trevor Hunt. At its first meeting Ian Firth, not knowing that Ruth Court had already prepared the way, asked Trevor Hunt if Fletcher Brownbuilt would be prepared to sponsor an ASP-organised ceramics competition. Trevor Hunt agreed at once and the planning which began immediately went on into the small hours.

A Housing Corporation house under threat of demolition to make way for the Eilerslie-Panmure highway had already been earmarked as suitable premises for ASP. The then Mayor of Onehunga, Mr Leo Manning, came to the society's rescue by gifting land in Captain Springs Road, Onehunga on to which the Panmure house was re-located. Support for this undertaking came from Sir Tom Clark, Managing Director of Crown Lynn Potteries, who provided an interest-free loan to ASP to cover the costs of removal and re-establishment in Onehunga. Goods and labour from Fletcher Brownbuilt were authorised by Trevor Hunt whose interest in both the provision of premises and the ceramics competition had already been fired.

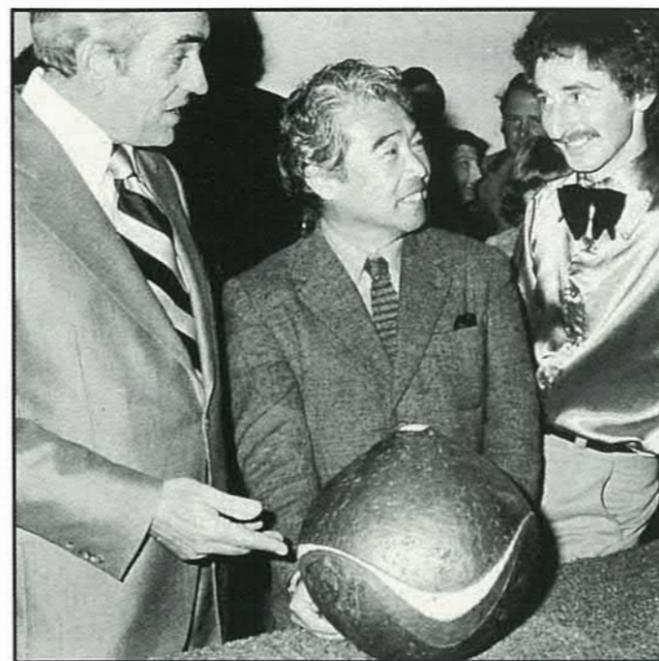
Trevor Hunt's commitment to the Award was grounded in the conviction that industry had a moral responsibility to foster the arts, particularly those enduring financial burdens. He was interested too in advancing the quality and standards of ceramic activity in Auckland and in encouraging ceramists to explore the sculptural as well as the more traditional domestic/utilitarian aspects of their work. Not the least of his intentions was the desire to change the arts community's perception of business people and to encourage his own staff to become enthusiastically involved in a creative undertaking outside their daily eight-to-five office routine.

Fletcher Brownbuilt carried the total costs of the fledgling 1977 exhibition and supplied all the organisational skills and almost all the labour for the first decade of the Fletcher Brownbuilt Pottery Award. Brownbuilt staff picked up the ceramics as they arrived in Auckland and set up the hall for the judge's selection process. ASP and Brownbuilt staff jointly helped to paint the display stands. In keeping with the original purpose, all profits from the Award exhibitions were directed towards Auckland Studio Potters, thus providing funds to enable it to maintain a teaching/workshop facility for existing and potential membership.

THE FIRST FLETCHER BROWNBUILT POTTERY AWARD EXHIBITION

The first exhibition in 1977 attracted 64 entries all of which were displayed to the public. It had been decided that judges for the Award should be from outside New Zealand and of international repute. The first to be invited was Les Blakeborough, of Australia who named John Anderson of Auckland as Premier Prizewinner for his clay replica of a pot-belly stove. People still recall that he advanced to receive his prize of \$2000 dressed in a green sweater with its elbows torn out, patched jeans and gumboots. Dramatic black-painted scaffolding formed the basis of John Parker's imaginative exhibition design.

The criterion for entry for the first exhibition was based on the sculptural aspect of ceramics. After the first exhibition it was decided that excellence would be the only criterion. The chief preoccupation of many potters at the time was the vessel and the emphasis initially given to sculptural ceramic forms was designed to counter this by encouraging a more innovative approach.



Trevor Hunt, General Manager of Fletcher Brownbuilt, 1978 Award judge Shigeo Shiga and ceramist Rick Rudd with his winning piece, a raku bottle decorated with undulating lines of black and white.

Since then Award entries have been judged solely on the criterion of 'excellence'.

OVERSEAS ENTRIES

For the first two years entry submissions were not sought outside New Zealand but in 1979 overseas entries were invited. This had always been the intention of the Award's first organisers but in the interests of caution had been deferred until the event was firmly established on the New Zealand ceramics calendar.

The 1979 Award exhibition displayed 75 works, the majority of them from New Zealand, five from Australia and two from England. Australian judge Peter Travis gave the Premier Award to Carl McConnell of Australia. The following year, 1980, 23% of the works selected for exhibition were overseas entries, mostly from Australia and the USA.

To avoid prohibitive costs in the first years, organisers looked across the Tasman for judges, drawing on both Australian nationals and potters visiting that country. Robin Welch, an English potter working in Australia in 1980, was available to accept the invitation to select and judge the exhibition for that year. In 1982 the invited judge was Gwyn Hanssen Pigott who each year continues to contribute works for exhibition. Polish clay artist Maria Kuczynska was secured as judge for the 1985 award under similar circumstances. Among other Australian judges was Jeff Mincham, who had been Premier Award Winner in 1985 and who returned in 1986 as judge.

FLETCHER CHALLENGE CERAMICS AWARD 1987-1996

In 1987, following the retirement of Trevor Hunt, Fletcher Challenge Limited inherited the funding role previously held by its subsidiary Fletcher Brownbuilt. The company's contribution to the re-named Fletcher Challenge Ceramics Award became a

monetary grant, organisational aspects being undertaken by Auckland Studio Potters committee or committee appointees under the overall direction of Leo King. The same year heralded an increase in the Award prizes from \$5,000 to \$10,000 in order to give the Fletcher Challenge Ceramics Award parity with other international ceramics competitions.

The 1987 Award exhibition was the first occasion on which two potters were jointly awarded the Premier prize. They were Chester Nealie (NZ) for a wood-fired jar of traditional form and treatment and Steve Fullmer (NZ) for a vessel which, as judge John Maltby of England put it, exemplified the essence of modern ceramic expression.

In 1988 the major prizewinner was Sandra Black from Australia while six other entries received Certificates of Merit from American judge Patti Warashina. The following year, 1989, Peter Lane from England chose Jeff Mincham as Premier winner and awarded 15 Certificates of Merit.

INTO THE 90S

In 1990 Moyra Elliott took over from Leo King as director of the Award for ASP. Her mandate was to increase international participation in the Award, a task she performed with considerable success. In that year overseas entries numbered 179. Of these 79 pieces were included in a display totalling 178 ceramic works, the largest selected exhibition to date. It included entries from West Germany, Belgium, Spain, Peru and India along with more than 20 pieces from Japan. Contacts made with Mr Shigenori Itoh, director of the the prestigious Akasaka Green Gallery, Tokyo were an invaluable means of encouraging the ongoing participation of Japanese ceramists in the Award.

The 1990 judge was Elizabeth Fritsch from England who selected joint winners Eiichi Kawano and Seiji Kobayashi, from Japan. The winning works were both containers, contemporary in form and concept and featuring variegated patterns with vivid colour and metallic slips. Design for the 1990 exhibition was again in

Jeff Mincham discusses his 1985 Premier Award winning large raku jar with Fletcher Challenge's Neville Darrow and Gaye and Michael Andrews.



John Parker's capable hands while Penny Evans continued the essential tasks she still performs as Award administrator.

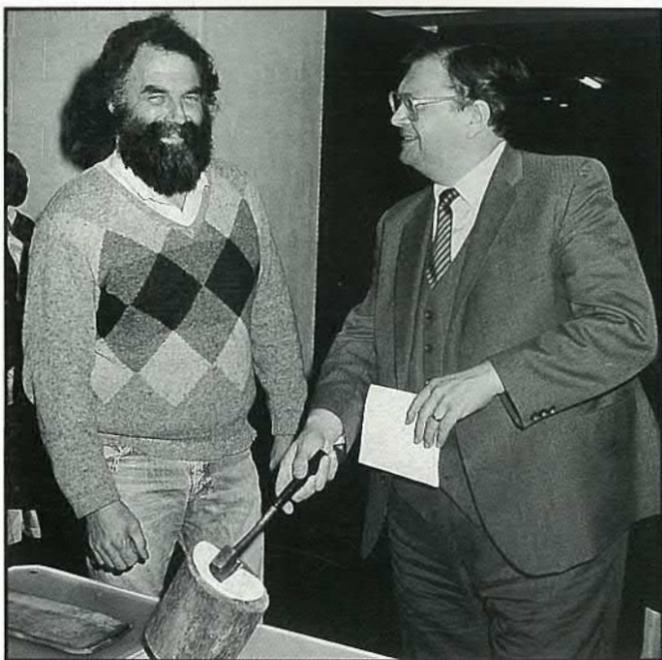
In the past, any number of Certificates of Merit had been awarded at the Judge's discretion but in 1990 provision for an allocation of five \$1,000 Awards of Merit was introduced. The number of Judges' Commendations awarded has continued to vary at the discretion of individual judges.

Efforts to increase international awareness were particularly rewarded in 1991 when overseas entries from 233 ceramists eclipsed the number of New Zealand entries, 220, for the first time. In this year Ron Nagle, from San Francisco, USA, was the invited judge. His choice for Premier Award winner and for a special double Award of Merit to the value of \$2,000, were both unprecedented. The winner was New Zealander Tim Currey of Port Charles, Coromandel for his *Rock Column* while the double Award of Merit went to a large, tenmoku-glazed teapot by Jeff Oestreich of USA which Nagle described as "poetic". These works continue to stand well among their peers and defined the year of their winning as a triumph for ceramic diversity.

In keeping with international exhibitions of similar structure and prize status, for the first time in 1992 colour transparency entries were called for. This alleviated increasing pressures arising from the transit and storage requirements of entries which eventually might not be accepted for exhibition. Slide selection proved an enticement for a greater number of international ceramists who might otherwise not have sent work due to high costs.

Again entries from 38 individual overseas countries outnumbered those from New Zealand, although with 35% of its entries accepted, New Zealand was on a par with other leading countries in the statistics tables, being surpassed only by Australia with 46% and Japan with 61%. South America was represented for the first time with 9 entries from Argentina, one of which was accepted, a wall piece by Vilma Villaverde. She gained an Award

Prime Minister David Lange admires his brother Peter Lange's 1985 Fletcher Brownbuilt ceramic entry entitled *Home Economics*.



of Merit and \$NZ1,000 for her work *El Juguete*, a positive/negative representation of disappearing childhood.

The judge, Akio Takamori, a Japanese-born United States resident, chose Lara Scobie of Scotland's *Stoneware Vessels* for the 1992 Premier Award. This consisted of a pair of vessels at once contemporary and yet ancient, with rich detailing and containing references to vessels, architecture, basketry and jewellery. The judge gave Awards of Merit to work from Hungary, Netherlands, USA, and New Zealand as well as Argentina. His ten Merit Certificates were awarded to ceramists from Australia, Japan, Netherlands, England, Denmark, Germany, USA and New Zealand. Contemporary and traditionally sourced vessels through to smaller and large scale sculpture were all singled out for praise by the judge.

The 1992 exhibition of 166 pieces filled the Auckland Museum's two large exhibition halls for the first time and was stunning in its impact, bringing many favourable remarks from the public and over 13,000 viewers to the show. 500 entries had been received and coverage of the Award in the international ceramic press was unprecedented. ASP's profit from the exhibition designed by Jeannie van der Putten was an all-time high.

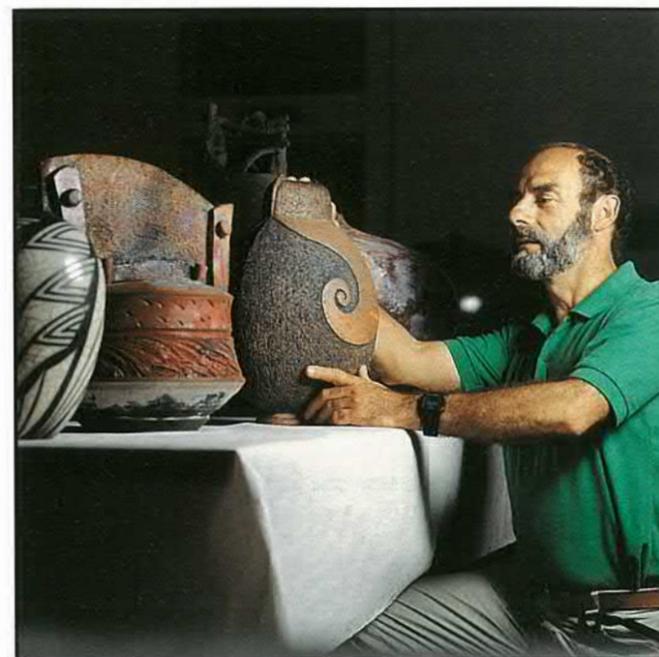
Using profits accrued from past Awards work began the following year on building Auckland Studio Potters' new premises at Onehunga. The original building had gradually become too small to accommodate a growing number of members and there were problems with upkeep of the old building.

The 1993 judge was Kari Christensen of Norway who, as intended by Award Director Moyra Elliott, brought a distinctive focus to her choice of exhibition. This was the year which favoured European influences as John Hood, Fletcher Challenge's Chief Executive Officer, Building Industries pointed out in his Opening Night speech. With their clearly defined abstract shapes, often hard edged and invariably "scratched" with sgraffito, these ceramic pieces were of undoubted interest to all who viewed the exhibition. Ms Christensen's selection did not however neglect the more exuberant American tradition nor the Anglo-Japanese, from which so many New Zealand ceramists have drawn their inspiration.

The 1994 exhibition, judged by Jindra Vikova from Hungary, created enormous interest. Mitsuo Shoji's *Many Wishes* took the Premier Award while the Double Merit Award given to New Zealander Matt McLean's *Dancing Wall* brought cheers of approval from the ceramic community assembled on Opening Night.

Writing in the *NZ Listener*, Peter Gibbs commented that Vikova's show would be remembered for its sculptural, even architectural bias and the huge numbers of world class entries. Of Matt McLean's *Dancing Wall* he wrote that "In an exhibition hall full of pieces where the clay had been subjugated to the whim of the maker, McLean's piece remained true to the material, revealing the nature of the clay and carrying the marks of its ordeal by fire."

The popular 1995 judge was Takeshi Yasuda, internationally renowned as a clay artist for his love of sensual form and his dramatic table ware. Contrary to expectations he selected a show which included a significant amount of sculptural work. On Opening Night he spoke with great eloquence of his feelings for clay and awarded the Premier Prize to one of the smallest and most delicate exhibits, young Australian ceramist Prue Venables' *Group of Jugs*. As other judges have, Takeshi Yasuda contributed significantly to the New Zealand ceramic community by sharing his philosophy experience at ASP workshops, attending the New



1989 judge Peter Lane with three entries from the exhibition he selected. Jeff Mincham's prize-winning piece is in the centre



Ceramist Seiji Kobayashi, Fletcher Challenge Chairman Sir Ronald Trotter and 1990 judge Elizabeth Fritsch with Mr Kobayashi's joint Premier prize-winning work *Illusion* from *April Clouds* and co-winner Eiichi Kawano's *Red and Silver*.

Zealand Society of Potters' Convention at Palmerston North and conducting a workshop at Wanganui.

1996 AND BEYOND

In order to mark the anniversary of the Award's twentieth year in 1996 prize money has been significantly increased. The Premier Award winner now receives a \$20,000 prize and Awards of Merit are valued at \$5000. To mark the occasion all previous Premier Award winning ceramics now held as part of the Fletcher Challenge Art Collection have been displayed in a special exhibition at Auckland Museum. All exhibitors in the 1996 show will receive a commemorative medallion.

Canadian Judge John Chalke will participate in a forum on contemporary ceramics with other distinguished overseas guests including Australia's Janet Mansfield, editor of *Ceramics, Art and Perception*; Michael Robinson of Northern Ireland, curator, historian and lecturer at the Royal College of Art and the Victoria & Albert Museum and Gabi Dewald, arts commentator and editor of the prestigious German language international magazine *Keramik*. New Zealand participants include Linden Cowell, former head of exhibitions at Otago Museum and lecturer in Ceramic History at Otago Polytechnic; Justin Paton, arts writer and critic and Douglas Lloyd-Jenkins, craft historian, writer and teacher.

The Fletcher Challenge Ceramics Award is now firmly placed on the artistic calendar, not only of Auckland, but the whole of New Zealand. It annually enables New Zealanders and overseas visitors to view one of the world's most prestigious ceramic events and attracts international attention to New Zealand as the sponsoring country. Its results are eagerly sought by ceramic and arts magazines and periodicals world wide. The catalogues, beautifully illustrated by photographer Haru Sameshima, quickly become collectors' items.



In 1993 United States Consul-General Michael Bellows accepted Susannah Israel's Premier Award for *Lobo California*. The work is admired by Award Director Moyra Elliott, Fletcher Challenge's John Hood and judge Kari Christensen of Norway.

Both Auckland Studio Potters and Fletcher Challenge Limited are proud of their long term association and look forward to its continuing health and growth.

Peter Shaw
Curator: Fletcher Challenge Art Collection
From the Foreword to the 1996 Exhibition Catalogue.

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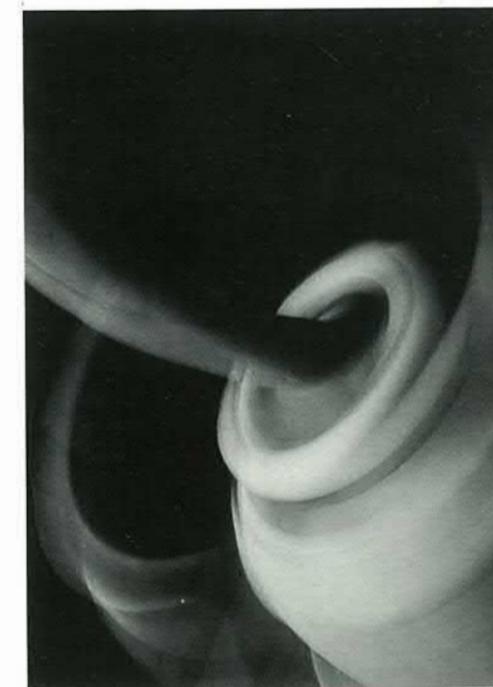


Photo essays by photography students on eight New Zealand ceramic artists exhibiting in this year's *Fletcher Challenge Ceramics Award*, continue to capture the imagination of viewers visiting this prestigious ceramics exhibition. The images, displayed within the exhibition at the *Auckland Museum*, communicate interesting aspects of the ceramists' art and life style.

The *Kodak Award*, which has been set up in conjunction with *Fletcher Challenge*, aims to provide encouragement and practical experience for tertiary photography students. Kodak invites tertiary institutes to select one photography student to complete an essay on a ceramic artist whose work has been selected for the exhibition.

The winner this year was **Tracey Montford**, a student at *Waikato Polytechnic* whose photo essay features ceramist **Jo Beckett**. Tracey received \$500 worth of *Kodak* Professional film as her prize and will hold the camera trophy crafted by Auckland ceramist **Peter Lange**, until next year's award.

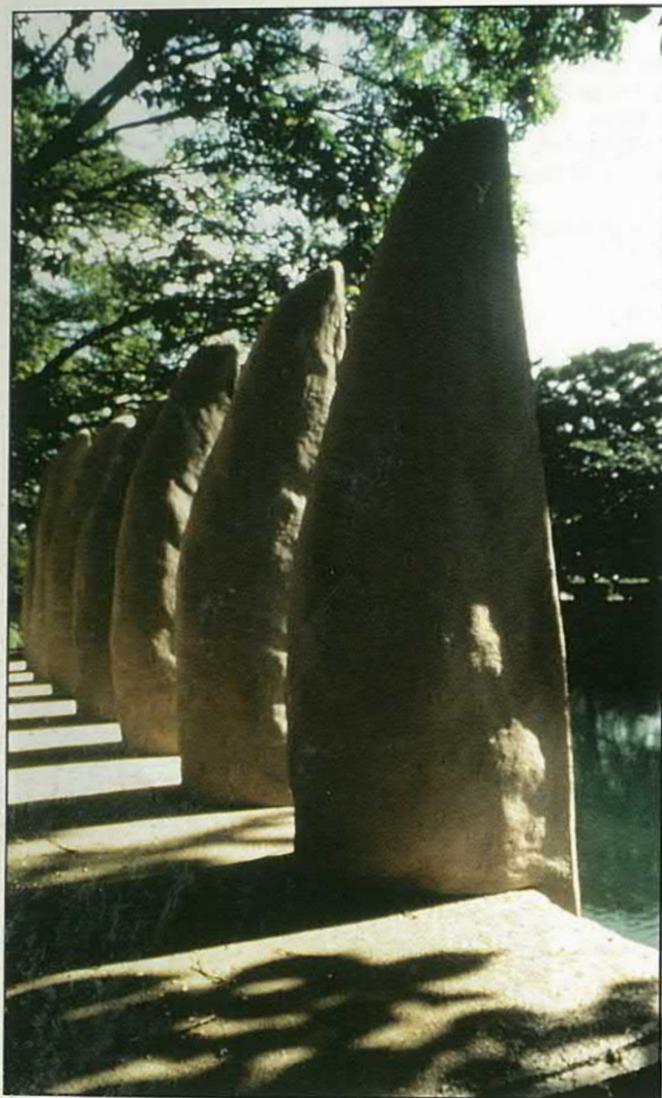
Tracey is pictured receiving the ceramic camera trophy from the *Kodak Award* judge, photographer **Richard Poole**.



Yasuko Sakurai

Winner of The 1996 Fletcher Challenge Ceramics Award

Ann Matheson, Auckland



I had the great pleasure of spending a week with **Yasuko Sakurai**, the delightful, talented winner of the 20th Fletcher Challenge Ceramics Award.

Yasuko was born in Kyoto, Japan in 1969 and graduated from *Kyoto Seika University* in 1991, having studied ceramic art. She began there with sculptural pieces and has continued with these. After graduation she worked in the university through 1992 as a graduate student and then completed a year at *Kyoto City Industrial Research Centre* learning the traditional Kyoto ceramics; wheel work, glazing and hand decorating.

The next year, 1994, was spent at the *Institute of Ceramic Studies* at *Shigaraki Ceramic Cultural Park* where there are many large kilns. Together with nine other young ceramic artists she was able to work alongside the famous resident guest artist, **Paul Soldner** from USA, and was greatly influenced by him. During this year she was a participant in an outdoor workshop in which

members had six weeks to create their piece and then exhibit them in the *Shigaraki Ceramic Cultural Park*.

Now Yasuko has her own studio at home with a small electric kiln. Since 1991 she has been exhibiting in both group and solo exhibitions and is presently working for an exhibition next year in Osaka.

Yasuko said she was amazed to hear she had won the major prize at the *Fletcher Challenge Ceramics Award* in New Zealand and was so excited she could not sleep for three nights! I will try and answer some of the many questions she has fielded during her visit here to receive her award at the exhibition opening in the *Auckland Museum*.

Q: How did she first hear of the *Fletcher Challenge Ceramics Award*?

A: Through her friend **Kanko Nishimura** who received a Judges' Commendation in 1995 and who showed her the catalogue and encouraged her to enter this year.

Q: Is this award well-known in Japan?

A: Only amongst the avant-garde potters.

Q: What was her idea in making this work?

A: She has been experimenting with this style of work for two years. She is interested in the two aspects - a flat front surface as if the work has been cut in half and the organic form of the back surface. The light and shadow of the human character. The flat surface expresses the inside of the mind, and the light and dark colours, the contrasts therein. The idea for this came to her while she was working with and touching clay, and then she was captured by sketches. She hoped the viewer would retain a lingering impression of the work. The firing stage presented difficulties in getting the right colour combinations and the many failures were just stepping-stones to the final successful work.

Q: Did the Hiroshima atomic bomb with its flash and subsequent outline of the human body on walls, have any influence on her work?

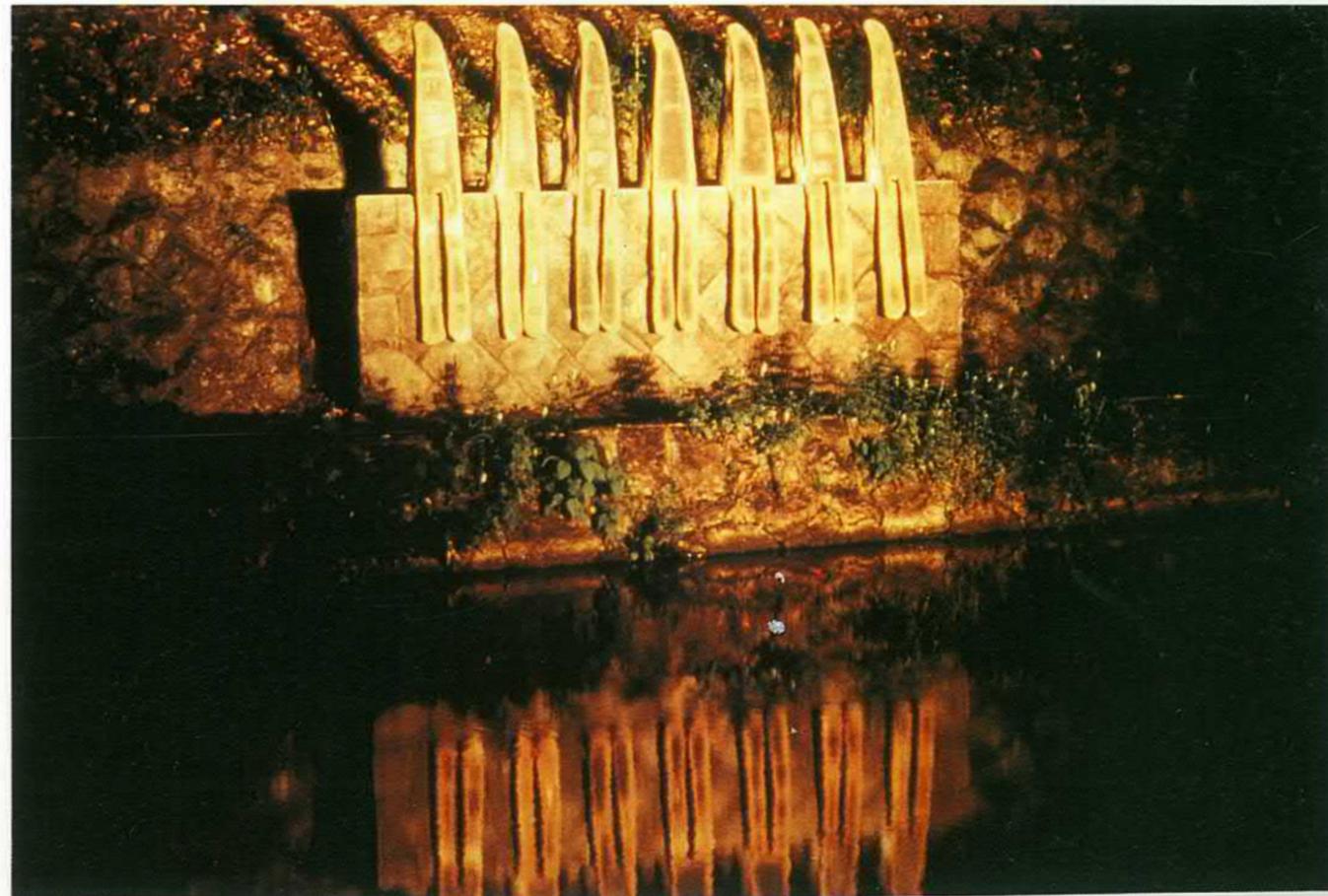
A: Not intentionally at all, but she did experience fear of the bomb from pictures she saw as a child. Possibly there was an unconscious influence.

Q: Construction of the work?

A: The flat front surface was the bottom. Clay was rolled out and cut to the shape of the human form. The reverse side was then hand-built. The shadow pattern was achieved by firing the piece on a wooden base, with sawdust, in a gas kiln to 1100°C. ■

Photos, above and opposite

This group of seven works was made by Yasuko Sakurai two years ago. It is pictured sitting on the bank of a river where it is reflected in the water. This work was exhibited in the Kyoto Arts Festival in 1995. (h 165cm, d 70cm)



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The Fletcher Challenge Ceramics Award 1996

Auckland Museum

Helen Schamroth, Auckland

This article was first published in the New Zealand Herald,
Wednesday, 7 August, 1996

Staging annual ceramics awards for 20 years is no mean feat in a climate of erratic support for art and craft events. What makes the *Fletcher Challenge Ceramics Award* especially notable is that it has developed into a major international exhibition attracting almost 1,000 entries, about a quarter from New Zealand.

The risk is that an internationally selected judge could overlook local entries in favour of work from overseas, which would create a revolt in the New Zealand ceramist ranks. Yet it is a calculated risk that the organisers, *Auckland Studio Potters*, and the sponsors, *Fletcher Challenge*, keep taking. As always, they have been vindicated.

This year's judge, English-born Canadian **John Chalke**, said he responded to the handling of raw clay and its inherent plasticity rather than clay that was over-trimmed or carved. He viewed 2,300 slides in his search for the "insightful and the inspirational".

The result is 163 exhibits, 24 from New Zealand, some wonderful works and, as in every such show a smattering of works whose inclusion puzzles everyone but the judge.

The numbers speak volumes about the quality of New Zealand ceramics, confirming that New Zealand produces leading-edge work that reflects skill, creativity and passion. We knew that, but the affirmation goes down well.

Textures evoking earthy landscapes, loosely worked surfaces, and glazes and forms that emphasise the clay origins of the work, dominate the exhibition. While the joy of making is evident, there is muted celebration and joy in the images; humour and gleaming, refined surfaces are rare. Organic forms triumph over constructed geometry and sombre low-key colours are favoured. And in each instance, exceptions to these "norms" give the exhibition its richness and vitality.

The Premier Award of \$20,000 went to *A Pair with Shadows* by **Yasuko Sakurai** from Japan. Two grey, enigmatic abstracted figures, contrasting a sliced flat surface with an organic, pebbly, dimpled three-dimensionality, stand astride. The flat surfaces are shadowed with black smudges, like graphite rubbed into and out of the surface.

They are disturbing pieces, suggesting devastation. I returned to the works a number of times to comprehend what had captivated and touched the judge. Intellectually I understood, but emotionally a distance remains, as does a respect for his choice and the provocation he has provided.

The five awards of merit are also thought-provoking. *Soft Furnishings* by **Ann Christenson** (USA) must be seen for its painterly qualities, carefully selected metal protrusions, the shadows it casts and its scale, to be appreciated. The catalogue illustration is deceptive, making it difficult to comprehend that this work, and the space it impinges on, fills a wall.

Scale is also a significant component of *Subway Dreams* by **Jonathan Millman** (USA), this time a very glitzy cup and saucer trimmed with gold. An ambiguous political statement that includes transferred images, it is an atypical glossy, carefully finished work.

This Way That Way by **Helen Talbot** (England) takes a different stance. The contemporary mark-making is restrained, subtle, suggestive rather than definitive. It's a sombre work that could have been ponderous, and achieves a lightness by "lifting the skirt" at the base.

Storage Jar - Wood-fired by **Bede Clark** (USA) is in the

Hamada-Leach pottery tradition. There is an easy familiarity here - no intellectual struggle to comprehend the judge's response to sensitive detailing and loose, yet controlled throwing.

It is appropriate to view again the work of previous winners also on show to give this work context. Similar qualities are evident in the work of New Zealander, **Chester Nealie** (the winner in 1982 and a joint winner in 1987). And on the way to the previous winners there is another, more solid-looking work in the same genre by **Owen Rye** (Australia). It's a tradition that still permeates and informs our perceptions.

There are some ceramists whose work consistently appears exhibition after exhibition and receiving recognition as Awards of Merit or Judge's Commendations, which indicates qualities beyond personal preference. Recently **Christine Thacker**, an occasional reviewer in these pages, has been such an artist.

This year's piece, *The Nomad's Tent*, takes the consistent development of her work another step. It is a superbly cohesive work in the form of a black sealed vessel on a circular pedestal. The simple shape has solidity, but the holes that allow light to penetrate alter that perception completely. The result is that the space revealed becomes more important than the clay which links the holes. As the viewer engages with the work and moves around it, the softly defined interior space takes shape against a backdrop of the starry night sky implied in the title - a hint of magic.

The Judge's Commendations acknowledge an eclectic group of 10 works. Like Thacker, **Steve Heinemann** (Canada) has previously received recognition. His large untitled vessel needs no verbal handle; not really oval, not quite a stretched round form, the crusty work has a unique presence and proportion that encloses frangipani-like outlines.

A very different kind of vessel, a relatively small glazed terracotta pot with handles by **Johannes Peters** (Germany) is a comfortable, pleasing work. Confident formation, casual glazing with loose markings including a blue spiral, and a jaunty title, give the work its charm.

Northward by **Jeff Schmuki** (USA) evokes a large 19th century milk can. Silk-screened text, diagrams and symbols on the surface add to its character, and there is an appealing clarity of articulation of the elements.

One of the quirkiest works is *Ewer* by **Peter Beasecker** (USA). A small, smoothly finished vessel-based work, it has an enchanting elegant form, smooth black glaze with subdued accent colours and an animate quality.

Two Faced Bastards Gathering by New Zealander **Tony Bond** has substance despite its light appearance. Its weight, the discovery of a substantial interior and lively graphic surface all make for an unusual exhibit.

Unusual forms are also seen in *A Pair of Chimney Pieces* by **Andre Hess** (USA). The play of silhouettes, the relationship between the white and yellow bodies, the subtle application of colour and texture, and the playful support of kiln shelves sitting on balls of clay, all contribute to the success of this work.

In contrast to some previous exhibitions there are few figurative works in this exhibition. A commendation went to *Sleeper 1993* by **Wendy McNally** (Canada) an understated sleeping baby. Other commendations went to **Byoung Gug An** (Korea), **Mary Harden** (USA) and **Jae Won Lee** (USA) for intriguing works. ■

The Fletcher Challenge Ceramics Award 1996

◀ **PREMIER AWARD**
\$NZ 20,000
Yasuko Sakurai Japan
A Pair with Shadows
 800x370x120mm

AWARD OF MERIT \$NZ 5,000 ▶
Ann Christenson USA
Soft Furnishings 600x175x450mm

◀ **AWARD OF MERIT \$NZ 5,000**
Bede Clarke USA
Storage Jar 300x250x250mm

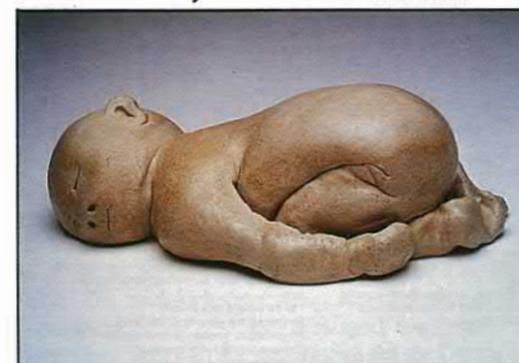
◀ **AWARD OF MERIT \$NZ 5,000**
Christine Thacker NZ *The Nomad's Tent* 520x400x300mm

Jonathan Millman USA *Subway Dreams* 100x100x100mm

AWARD OF MERIT \$NZ 5,000
Helen Talbot England *This Way That Way* 360x380x210mm



JUDGE'S COMMENDATION
Andre Hess England
A Pair of Chimney Pieces 710x930x200mm

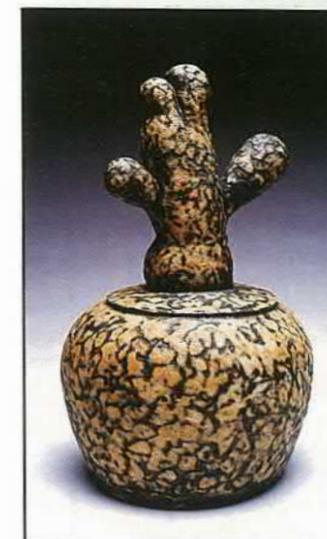


JUDGE'S COMMENDATION
Wendy McNally Canada
Sleeper 1993 88x290x175mm



JUDGE'S COMMENDATION
Steve Heinemann Canada
Untitled 250x710x390mm

JUDGE'S COMMENDATION
Jae Won Lee USA
Indelible Recollection 50x175x172mm



JUDGE'S COMMENDATION
Byoung Gug An Korea
The Land 330x180x180mm



JUDGE'S COMMENDATION
Peter Beasecker USA
Ewer 163x181x81mm

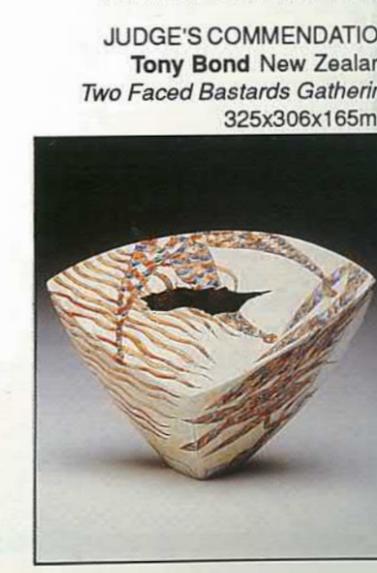
JUDGE'S COMMENDATION
Johannes Peters Germany
Pot



JUDGE'S COMMENDATION
Mary Harden USA
Untitled 900x600x600mm



JUDGE'S COMMENDATION
Jeff Schmuki USA
Northward 500x275x212mm



JUDGE'S COMMENDATION
Tony Bond New Zealand
Two Faced Bastards Gathering
 325x306x165mm

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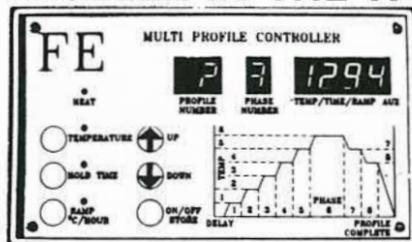
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The Forum: Art for Clay's Sake

An introduction to comments on selected pieces from the 1996 Fletcher Challenge Ceramics Award

Robert Kay, Auckland

With the advent of the 20th Fletcher Challenge Ceramics Award it was the desire of both Fletcher Challenge and the Auckland Studio Potters, that the scope of the exhibition should extend beyond the confines of the exhibition hall. A range of peripheral activities which could be associated with the exhibition, was therefore investigated.

The vision was to take the spirit of the exhibition to a wider audience and in so doing draw attention to the exhibition itself, stimulate and inspire local ceramists and potters and promote more interest in ceramics generally.

Several possibilities were considered, including: solo or joint exhibitions in Auckland galleries by internationally acclaimed ceramists; a forum which would explore the exhibition in depth as well as current trends in ceramics; the publication of critical writing about ceramics with reference to the exhibition.

It was felt these activities would primarily serve the ceramic community, but would also be of interest to other artist/craft workers, as well as the general public. Clearly they would give the exhibition a higher profile and enhance its reputation, benefiting both ceramists and their sponsors, Fletcher Challenge.

With financial assistance from Creative New Zealand and UNITEC, and including a significant financial input themselves, Auckland Studio Potters arranged the first of these peripheral activities; an international forum, Art for Clay's Sake, which took place at UNITEC on July 28. The forum drew speakers from Germany, Northern Ireland, Australia and New Zealand.

The initial focus of the forum was a panel discussion about the exhibition in general, as well as eight selected pieces which the panellists had studied from colour prints sent to them well in advance. These pieces were not chosen to be representative of the work on show in the exhibition, but rather, as examples of some of the current trends in ceramics, for their potential to provoke interesting and stimulating comment and discussion. (Photos of these pieces under discussion are reproduced on page 16).

The forum also included the presentation of papers by two of the panellists, on issues of concern to ceramists.

Part of the brief given to the forum panellists was to produce a written critique of some of the eight selected works. Although the Auckland Studio Potters were unable to obtain funding for a separate publication, the ceramic community is fortunate the New Zealand Potter agreed to make space available for the valuable and stimulating commentaries which follow.

Editor's Note:

Justin Paton and Douglas Lloyd-Jenkins both required their copy to be published without any form of editing. As these notes are from talks given at the public forum, I have published them as they were received. They do not reflect the views or editorial policies of The New Zealand Potter and we take no responsibility for any statements made in any of these forum notes.

As for the use of the word "ceramicist", which was briefly discussed in the forum, my research of eight dictionaries including Frank and Janet Hamer's A Potters Dictionary shows six list only "ceramist". Two list "ceramist" first, with "ceramicist" as an alternative.

The New Zealand Potter will continue to use "ceramist" as its preferred version for a ceramic artist, potter or clay worker.

The critiques about the eight selected pieces from the exhibition had limited value as the six participants were sent, some time in advance, colour laser printed copies of slides of the works.

Their writing was based on these prints, some of which did not do justice to the works and the speakers changed some views after having seen the actual works in the exhibition. Thus some talk differed a little from these written notes.

The observation on the quality of the submitted photos was further extended to the concern that professional slides must be taken of ceramics for entry into competitions or exhibitions, if they are to give judges or selectors a reasonable reading of what the work is really like.

The naming of pieces for exhibition became an interesting point of debate, after several speakers had opined that Christine Thacker's title for her *The Nomad's Tent* adversely affected their appreciation of it, until it was explained that in the writings of Omar Khayyam the title referred to the desert night sky spanned with stars - a very appropriate title for this multi-pierced work which sparkles as the viewer moves around it.

However, it was still felt by some, that the very act of giving titles presumes the work is to be accorded the status of art, even when in themselves they may not warrant such. There will always be good and bad art - clever titles do not necessarily change a work's inherent value. The more esoteric titles become, perhaps the more presumptuous the name-giver.

An interesting aside came later from Christine Thacker when, asked why she had catalogue-priced her work at \$1050, she replied with a smile that that was the temperature to which it had been fired!

Good - and at times a little heated - discussion came from the forum presentations, the heat being engendered when the brief to critique a ceramic work was extended into criticism of the artist behind the work, or of the views of another critic. Discussion briefly degenerated into argument, but was brought firmly though quietly, back on track by Michael Robinson. Destructive criticism does nothing to further knowledge or appreciation and is seen more as an attempt by the critic to display their own prowess (a different art form altogether) rather than objectively evaluate the subject under review.

This first session was followed by major lectures from Gabi Dewald and Michael Robinson, with appropriate meal and tea breaks in between. Gabi's erudite paper entitled, *Welcome to the Club of Outcasts - Why Ceramics is not an Object of Art Criticism* is available in photocopy form for the price of \$2 (in stamps if you like) from: The Editor, The New Zealand Potter, PO Box 147, Albany.

Michael Robinson's lecture was a very lively affair, studded with Irish jokes as well as thought-provoking ideas. It covered, with slide accompaniment, a broad world history of ceramics; the art and function of claywork, from aeons-old fertility goddess models to contemporary abstract ceramic sculpture - and lots of "real" pots on the way. A knowledgeable historian and an astute teacher, Michael made this the best part of the forum, along with the interaction between participants in the breaks.

The day was extremely valuable and a good addition to the lectures, demonstrations, guided tours of the Museum exhibition and the other exhibitions held in local ceramics galleries. If the Auckland Studio Potters continue in this vein we will see the development of an important international ceramic festival alongside future Fletcher Challenge Ceramics Award exhibitions. Many thanks to those who organised this event and to the local and overseas speakers. (For illustrations of work selected for the Forum discussion. See page 16.)

Howard Williams



FORUM : Chris Weaver NZ
Teapot 145x200x175mm



FORUM : Jonathan Millman USA
Subway Dreams 100x100x100mm



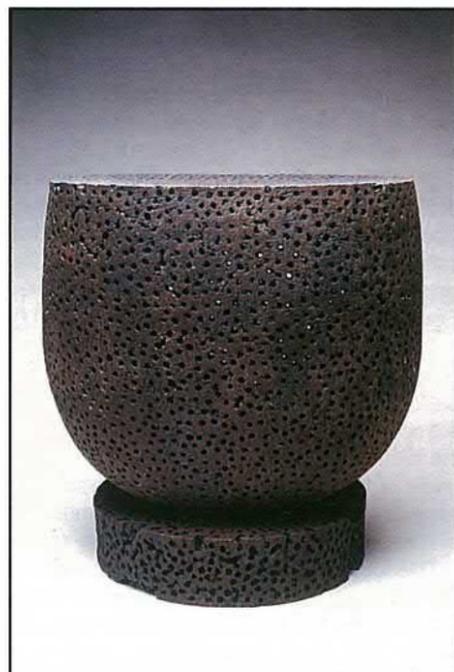
FORUM : Richard Parker NZ
Vase - White Splashed 360x420x180mm



FORUM : Mary Harden USA
Untitled 900x600x600mm

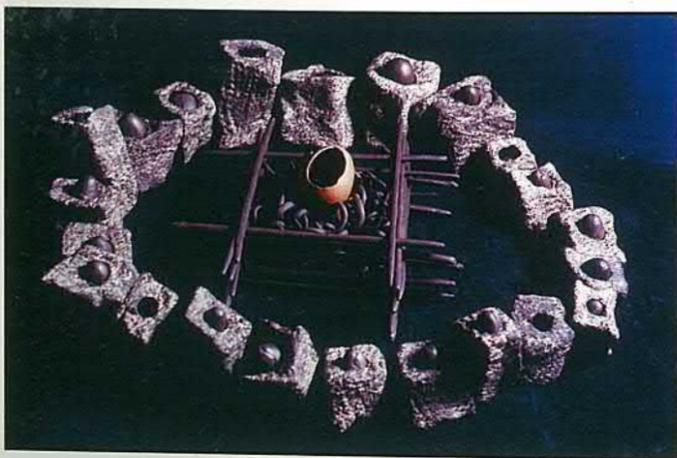


FORUM : Kanko Nishimura Japan
A Fragment 600x350x75mm

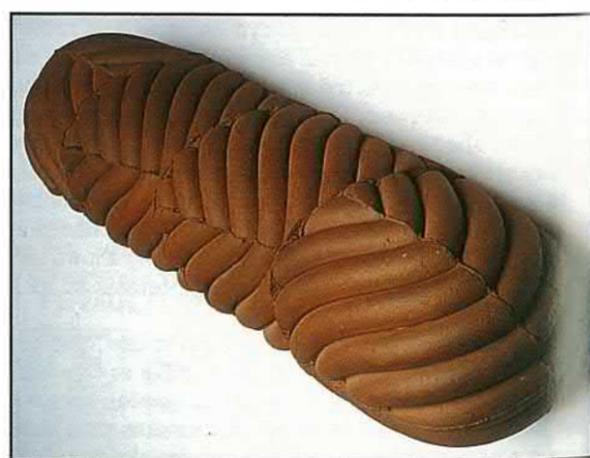


FORUM : Christine Thacker NZ
The Nomad's Tent 520x400x300mm

FORUM : Lai Ching Fiona Wong Hong Kong
Pilgrim 150x600x600mm

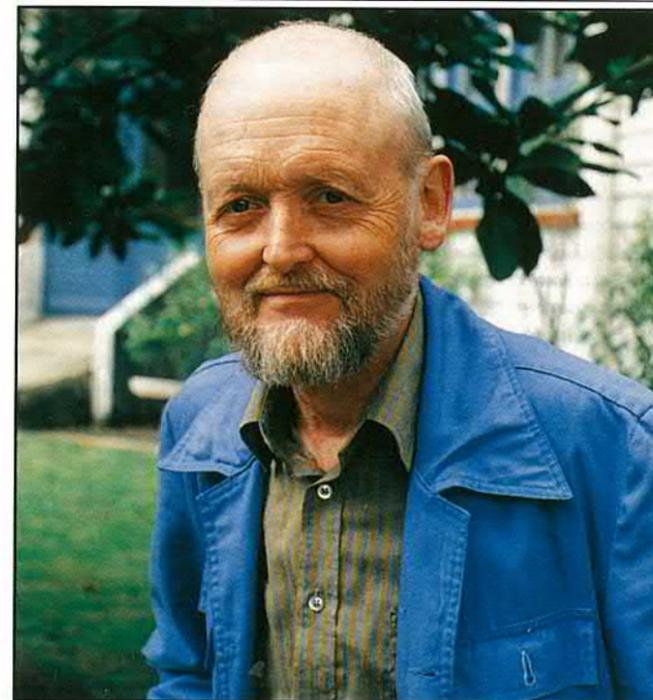


FORUM : Hyoe Imai Japan
Work - 95 - 2 170x660x180mm



Linden Cowell

Linden Cowell is a lecturer in the history of ceramics at the *School of Art, Otago Polytechnic*. When not teaching he devotes his time to painting and small ceramics. He was born in London in 1933 and trained at the *Victoria and Albert Museum* in restoration work. He ended his museum career in 1990 as head of the *Otago Museum's* exhibition department.



Art for Clay's Sake

Many would view the *Fletcher Challenge Ceramics Award* as a good indicator of the direction that expression in the medium is taking. It would be unprecedented if ceramic art did not reflect in some way what was happening in the world outside that of the arts. It is in this larger world that indicators are found for a future for the medium.

I am privileged in my rare occupation of lecturing on the history of ceramics, to meet new students of the craft every year. Their choice of ceramics as a pursuit is often questioned by their families and peers. I no longer put the question myself because I believe the students are rarely aware of the true motivations for their choice. They soon became aware, if they were not before, that the medium has strict procedures, technical restraints and poor material rewards, and still suffers an ambivalent treatment from art theorists and the bureaucrats of the gallery and museum world. Despite this, the ceramic medium is not withering away, although some of us would maintain that it shares somewhat in the limbo that the arts in general are in.

The reasons for the relative vitality of ceramics are hard to explore thoroughly within the limits of this contribution, but I shall try as succinctly as possible to do so, before I discuss my selection of Award entries for comment.

In the Western world both religion and philosophy have contributed to the separation of mind from body. Furthermore, the post-industrial degradation of individual physical and mental labour has been the major contributor to the way meaning is perceived to be leaching out of existence. We must add to this a loss of dignity that follows when power and material gain are considered to be at the heart of all human motivation.

Marshall Blonsky, professor of communications at *New York University*, has described this as a "decadent age without project, with little sense of the future, save vague foreboding". He adds that he has almost given up hope that there can be in the near future a "re-acquisition of the tactile and the sensuous". From many quarters there is a growing unease as we are distanced from our sensate animal nature.

It therefore can be argued that the artist/potter is well suited to play a positive part in our necessary rehabilitation in moving from life-as-consumption to life-as-expression. Ceramic expression is relatively free from the enervation of post-modernist theory because of its anchor in craft. Much progress has been made beyond the limited view of craft activity as a nostalgic reminder of pre-industrial values and now a general theory of craft can be considered an important component in any existential debate. Bernard Leach wrote many years ago that the temptation was for the individual potter to stand back with a paralysis of frustration in face of a sea of change, but he felt we cannot wait until the tide of a new culture arises. I am assuming that this frustration is absent when entering the *Fletcher Challenge Award* because self-expression can replace the consideration of patronage.

In the selection of pieces provided to the panel I chose two sculptural pieces, two of social commentary and one I assume is functional.

Work 95-2 is a sculpture of ceramic properties. Soft and hard, yielding and resistance are the evocations of our memory traces of all sorts of solutions in forming.

The joining of the formal elements in this work are reminiscent of the way crystals form from a matrix and if there was a metaphorical "crystal of plasticity", then this would be a contender.

The Nomad's Tent, as a title I found restricting. My initial sensuous reaction to this work was followed by an aftertaste of the mysterious. Even seeing it as an illustration brings a strong tactile element to the visual as work of this nature stimulates synaesthesia. Both the music and aroma of this work are relatively easy to imagine, but this enjoyable process can be hindered in the individual if the viewer finds a title unsympathetic. (See Editor's comment, page 10).

Subway Dreams is a clever work both in conception and execution, depending on its success for the viewer's knowledge of the history of psychoanalysis. **Father Freud** himself is pictured on a saucer which, if decorated differently, would perfectly fit an artefact used in polite Viennese society at the turn of the century. The cup, which hints at a chalice, has undergone the changes that familiar objects often do in dreams. The social veneer that covers the nightmares of both our conscious and unconscious states is illustrated beautifully by this ceramic.

Untitled would receive the ghostly acclaim of both **Luca della Robbia** and **William Morris**. The human automaton demanded by the fast food industry through the standardisation of product, service and outlet styling is perfectly caught by this artist. It is impossible to believe that any other medium could have made the point so well, with the added bonus that being modelled in clay gives dignity to the human subject.

The first impression I had of *Teapot*, was one of a small animal presence of anything from an invertebrate to a quick little mammal. This piece adds to my desire to see more hybrids in ceramics. Although cane or wooden handles are not uncommon; on the work there appears to be a joining together which is quite biological in nature.

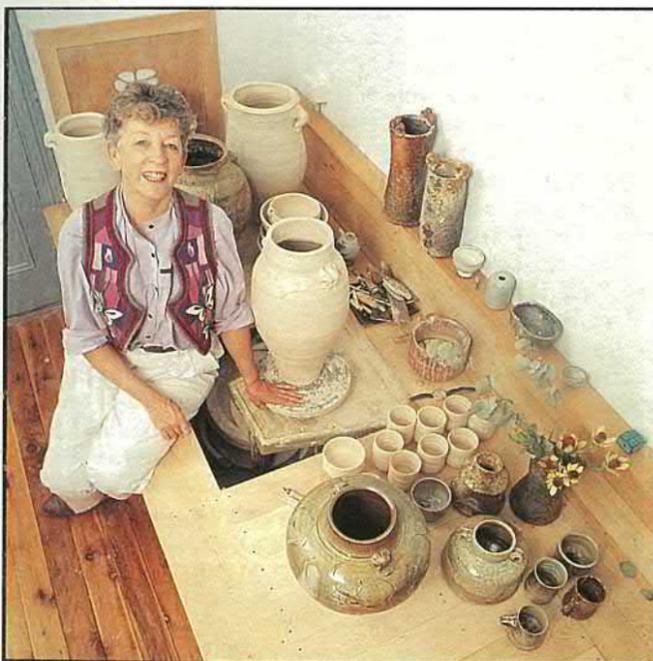
I am disappointed that so many ceramists that enter the *Award* appear to be unwilling to make traditional forms. To try to escape history in ceramics is to ignore its world-wide inclusive evolution. Belief must be given to the idea that beauty can transcend history, but of course that is impossible if you regard beauty as a

concept that is part of a long dead and buried metanarrative. Beauty is a word that causes embarrassment in art schools where one is, no doubt, expected to replace it with pretentious neologisms. However, I have no hesitation in closing with the words of the eminent psychologist and writer **James Hillman** who said, "Aesthetics is not an academic subject and beauty is not decoration. It's a matter of survival of the soul".

Janet Mansfield

Janet Mansfield has been a potter for 30 years, after training in ceramics at the *National Art School, ESTC, Australia*. She has exhibited widely in Australia and overseas and her work is represented in major public collections and has appeared in many international publications. She has been an invited participant in symposia and conferences and a juror in many countries. A member of the *International Academy of Ceramics* since 1982, Janet has received a number of awards for ceramics, including the 1986 Award of the *Australian Ceramics Society*. In 1987 she was awarded an *Order of Australia Medal* for her services to art, especially ceramics. In 1990 she received the *Emeritus Award for Art* from the Australia Council.

Janet was editor of *Pottery in Australia* 1976 - 1990, and is a past president of the *Potters' Society of Australia*, the *Ceramic Study Group* and the *Crafts Council of NSW*. She has written a number of books on ceramics and is editor of *Ceramics: Art and Perception* and *Ceramics: Technical*. She specialises in the salt-glaze and wood-firing ceramics aesthetic, giving workshops and lectures internationally on this subject.



In offering an opinion on the four works I have selected to discuss from those on show at the *20th Fletcher Challenge Ceramics Award*, I acknowledge that my comment is, first and foremost, the opinion of a potter, and secondly, that of an editor and writer. I bring to this opinion some 30 years of working with clay, a singular and directed quest of a personal aesthetic, combined with 20 years as an editor which requires me to look at ceramic art in all its manifestations. I will endeavour to look at the purposes of ceramic artists involved and their use of materials and processes. To place the work stylistically within current trends and noting references to historical and cultural background will be attempted.

The danger in commentary of this kind is that it can be too

critical, destructive or even heartless; it is easy to scoff, to find fault. The maker of the work is not known to the writer and by this anonymity, a critic can easily bypass the intention of the maker. The photocopies that provide the basis for my remarks are no substitute for the actual work. Although I have the measurements for the works, no sense of presence or understanding of scale is evident, nor even of accurate colour.

Looking at the photolaser print of *Fragment*, I reached for my copy of *Artspeak* to look up *minimalism*, for this work is surely minimal in its presentation if not its message. *Fragment* is a simple unenhanced clay slab, rolled out or cut from a block of clay, just which I cannot tell. It shows some fingermarks and other evidences of handling by the artist. It is completely flat, but there is no indication if the work is to be set horizontally or hung vertically. Is it to be part of a wall or could it be set into a kitchen bench top to acquire the patina of use as the oils and spices of food preparation soak into its unglazed body? Or could it be set as a doorstep, gradually showing the wear of feet, as those doorways of old houses show that wonderful curve of constant use.

Tiles have long been a part of architecture, a building block for decoration or protection. Here the artist has resisted any urge to decorate the work. Simply, *Fragment* is about clay. No, I thought again; it IS clay, possibly a celebration of the material showing its colour and texture, its integral and humble nature. The form, almost twice as long as it is wide, has no recognisable proportions, such as the golden mean, for example, but the title, *Fragment* suggests it was once a part of something larger, one tile in a series or part of a clay seam of huge dimension under the ground.

If *Fragment* is about clay, then *Work 95-2* is about process. Looking at the photolaser of *Work 95-2*, I was caused to consider how it was made. Pressmoulded parts perhaps, jammed together with a wet slurry that oozes out between the joins, and

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all left untouched, fresh, mechanical and pristine. The title does not give any indication of why the artist made the piece, nor what it should signify to a viewer. Presumably it is the second work the artist made in 1995, and indeed I have seen this artist's work in magazines for some years and, although the shapes have changed from spherical to elongated, the message must still be the same. I see no development in the idea over time, except perhaps in clay surface colour.

I always think that refusing to title a sculptural work of this nature shows a form of arrogance on the part of the artist. The artist may well say that the work should stand for itself, that the viewer can bring his or her own interpretations to the work, erroneous or not, but what if someone looking at the work has no ideas, no clue to take him or her further? How does my imagination run: a large salami sausage or a bunch of saveloys, a worm gear for my pugmill, or a rolling stamp for impressing patterns on metal or cloth? None of these interpretations is elevating to the spirit. Can we appreciate the work for its own sake, for its form and surface? What is in it to stimulate the imagination in any way? Enigmatic objects are not new to us, but the impact is so much greater if we are given information, learn an appreciation of worth, of reference, of cultural context.

One work offered for comment is titled *Untitled*, but the viewer can easily name this work according to his or her opinion of the subject matter. Here we have a model of a man serving some sort of fast food. The title could involve convenience, service, or more aptly be called *An Invitation to Obesity, Diabetes and Myocardial Infarction*. The expression on the server's face suggest to me that he is unhappy promoting such a product, that he knows that it is full of fat and salt, that the contents are bad for your health and possibly addictive. Framed in a tile-clad window, with his garments and the proffered bag also covered with tile shards, the craftsmanship of the artist is exemplary and the modelling expressive. As a social comment on society today, this is a timely reminder that we are choosing the fast and easy option no matter what the consequences.

Social commentary in ceramics has always been a valid part of the art form, some more and some less overt than this. Clay is an expressive medium capable of fine detail or the nuance of gesture. In this case, the modelling is faithful; the judgement on societal change, good or bad, is left to the viewer.

If there were to be one piece among the eight offered to me for comment that I would be pleased to be taking home, it would be *Vase, White Splashed*. I have seen this artist's work filled with flowers in living rooms from Sydney to Munich, always enjoyed and enjoyable. *Splashed* is a misnomer - it is true that there is a nonchalance to the applied decoration, but splashed, it is not. The white slip has been daubed perhaps, with a loaded brush, the placing precise, the rhythm regular and the expertise evident. There is a theatrical quality to the vase. It stands there, boldly reciting its message in a poetical way, its arms upraised as in a soliloquy. I do not know how it was made, whether cut from a single block of clay and carved and hollowed, or whether it was coiled and scraped, but process is not important here, rather the presence of the piece in its overriding quality. I see by the stated measurements that the work is not a large one, but again, size is not important when the proportions are pleasing, the balance dramatic. The diagonal placing of the decoration and the contrasting black and white conveys a restlessness that makes this vase a dominant work, no matter its overall size. Just as some people are more outspoken in their opinions than others, this work proclaims loudly the ability of clay to express its message through the vessel form and its creator.

The vessel or container, a classic form in ceramic art, continues to have that ability to express the personality of the individual while, at the same time, express the timeless quality of

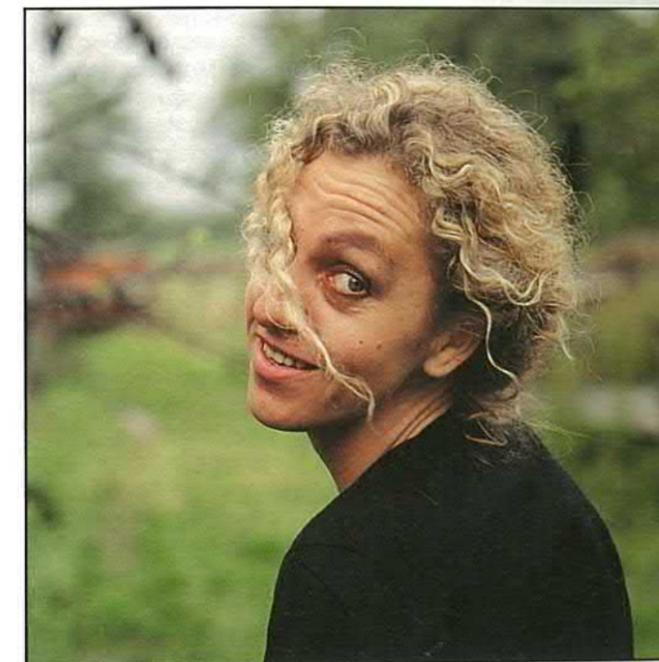
the materials, processes and purposes of ceramic art.

The opportunity to engage in discussion in the forum associated with the *Fletcher Challenge Ceramics Award* should bring to its audience the polarities of different opinions. The response to specific works will be as singular and individual as the works themselves. The ceramics on show have all undergone a preliminary round of judging before being presented in the exhibition, so it may be assumed that quality as regards making and firing is unquestioned. It is now up to each person to agree or disagree with the judge's final choice regarding the perception of artistic excellence.

Gabi Dewald

Gabi Dewald, born in 1956, trained and worked as a nurse from 1975-81 and journeyed through Europe, the Middle East, India and Nepal. She ran her own pottery studio from 1985-90. From 1981-85 she studied Kommunikationsdesign at *Gutenberg Universitat Mainz* and since 1994 has been the editor-in-chief of *Keramik Magazin*, one of the most important ceramics publications in Europe, an arts commentator and critic for German papers and journals and a frequent judge of ceramics competitions.

Translated from the German by Edith Steffen



Untitled. This is - of course - from America! Where else could this hyper-realistic scene have originated? My first association when confronted with this environment made of ceramics is: yesterday's kitsch. Typical European snootiness? That may well be the case. For the second thought that becomes all too obvious here, is that reality and the art it generates differ greatly from one culture to the next and are perceived and digested in very different ways depending on that culture.

So I take closer look at him, the old man who is standing behind some anonymous fast-food stand selling chicken, hamburgers or French fries. His movements have grown stiff and automatic in the course of his soulless occupation, his eyes are empty, his thoughts have long since been mislaid. He is not a straightforwardly unpleasant type (he looks far too sad for that) rather, there is something eerie about him with his deathly pale skin, merely a memory of himself. The frame of the serving-hatch is stable and very correct. He himself is broken. If it weren't for the

frame that holds him up, as it were, he would already have collapsed, crumbled into nothing, a pile of old rubble.

The artist used the same reddish-brown tiles for the vertically rectangular window as for the stomach region of his life-sized protagonist. Indeed, the man is trapped inside his shirt as if it were a corset. In contrast to the true-to-life figure, this piece of clothing appears like a rigid box which is a little on the large side. The same yellow strip which is shown on the package he is holding in his hands, encompasses both the man's chest and head. His shirt and cap have the same white colour as the bag; this man is completely contained, occupied and functionalised by the institution. He himself as a living thing is probably only to be found at this point of the profitable business in which he is involved, because there is no machine which could do his work just as smoothly. In the process, he has turned into an apparatus himself.

Why does this kind of laconic criticism of reality have to be warmed up again, 25 to 30 years after **Duane Hanson**? Why in ceramics? In order to win prizes? Or in order to prove one's technical ability? It is only too well known that decadence and soullessness predominate in the anonymous no-man's-land of our modern western civilisations. Where is the new thought that could justify the existence of this work of ceramics which obviously thinks of itself as a work of art? Hoping to cause consternation and to gain professional admiration - is that sufficient?

I am thinking of works by the East German ceramist **Gertrude Mohwald**. In the times of the GDR regime, Mohwald used the technique of the mosaicked figure as an expression of her political and cultural criticism of the system. She absorbed influences from the antique world, from Cubism and Dadaism, and intertwined them with the idea of the individual as dissolving into, or being made up of many parts, committed to nothing else but the search for the self.

In the light of the ceramics sculpture from America reviewed above, a comparison between both artists came to mind, and suddenly I knew what I appreciate in Mohwald and what I miss here; intellectual complexity and density, the actual correspondence between creative means and contents, the superior, light-footed mastery of the formal, the mental potency which makes man think beyond himself. It is not that I find hope missing here, but rather the freedom which dares to trust the individual vision more than the understanding of the pictorial as taught by Art History. The untitled work here, remains a ceramic reproduction of the American Modern of the 60s and 70s to me, and is thus not particularly exciting.

A Fragment. A still, monochrome and very minimal panel. Should one or can one, indeed, talk about such a work at all on the basis of an A4 laser copy? A work which - in the original too - is more likely to trigger off questions and assumptions in the observer than to state something clearly discernible. I will do it, however, because the reverse is also the case; the characteristic feature of the work to hint, rather than to state, is perhaps actually intensified by the two-dimensional reproduction process.

I know works like this on canvas and in bronze, in wax and on wood, and what I love about them is that they give me, the observer, freedom. This *Fragment* is extraordinarily individualistic but, after all, as old as Homo sapiens. It serves to explore one's own memories, dreams, imaginings. One's fingers feel along the quietly meandering edge of the flat clay panel, over the lightly undulating, soft surface; the colour and the painterly informal use of it make the observer uncertain about the depth and what is lying hidden within, lending the material transcendence and making it hover. Beyond the visual stimulation, the tactile qualities of the material invite one to go on a search for trails. The fragment is a book, a part of a wall, trunk or back, a silent meditation, a window on perceptions which were almost forgotten in

the hubbub of our everyday existence, but which underlie all endeavour.

To unite the fugitive with the eternal (the colour pink and burnt earth hardened to stone) makes for wonderful charm. The extreme abstraction of the pictorial has two functions; a very intellectual one which appeals to a highly sophisticated sensitivity and an extremely archaic one which in effect originates from the dawning of human history. The coincidence of both qualities produces the tension of this wall panel; like a perpetual motion machine, it seems to recharge itself incessantly with new tension, turning into a force field.

Vase, White Splashed. What I love about this piece is that it defines itself simply and beautifully as a vase. A vase. No more than that. Nothing more? What could be more?

Its carefree impetuosity, its verve, its upward movement show all the features of a plant, of a flower - to which the vase will one day give support and water. One can virtually discern the various parts of a flower - the stem with its broader base tapering towards the top, two leaves, an opening calyx. The transformation of organic forms and features into inorganic material has been extremely successful. The child-like spontaneity, even naivety, in the form is juxtaposed with the severe colouring - white on black. The additional, relief-like structuring of the vessel at its foot and neck is obvious and underlines the structure (particularly at the neck). At the same time, this surprising structural intervention reminds one of the sense of the unpredictable - one of nature's as well as art's features.

The slightly raised edges at the strong base give the vase additional momentum, self-confident playfulness and assertive will. The decoration has to be understood both as a symbol of water (rain) and of fertility (seed) forceful, but at the same time



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completely unobtrusive. The downward motion of the pattern is counteracted by the upward thrusting dance-like verve of the movement. This generates an unceasing movement. For me, the piece has musical qualities - with that unaffected energy and imbued with that natural and strong rhythm we know from old folk songs.

This is a successful functional ceramics work, executed with swiftness and assurance, which to me bears all the wonderful characteristics of hand-made applied work; beyond the function, it conveys enthusiasm for the task, shows the individual worldview, love for the material, and acts as an invitation to a dialogue between the user and the maker. The actual use becomes a creative act, a form of creative interaction. Arts and crafts have the task of adding to the dimension of the quotidian, of the necessary, that which goes beyond it. Something which might not be necessary, but which one can certainly not do without. A good hand-made product fulfils more than a function. That is luxury!

Douglas Lloyd-Jenkins

Douglas Lloyd-Jenkins is a New Zealand Craft and Design historian with a long connection to the world of New Zealand ceramics. Born in Auckland in 1963 he currently lectures at *UNITEC Design School* and has published extensively on the history of craft and design in New Zealand.

The Ceramicist's Netherworld

All forms of art have inherent proper circumstances for their own exhibition. A portrait of a Florentine nobleman of the fifteenth century is best understood in a Medici palace. Similarly the white walled galleries of the late modernist period are the natural home of certain types of art developed in that time and in response to that environment - installation and colour field painting come to mind immediately. Other types of art are best viewed against the background in which their primary concerns and motivating factors were developed.

The inherited home of ceramics or pottery (the terms are interchangeable) is the domestic environment. It is here that the work of the potter culminates with the interaction of user and made object. Because the pursuit of a fully functioning domestic environment requires ceramics, whether from studio or factory, the ongoing importance of ceramics is assured. Ceramics can therefore be seen as essential or relevant.

Because domestic environments have been seen to be of lesser importance than public environments and because the transferral of ceramics to the public arena brings with it certain difficulties regarding exhibition - touch and use cannot be accommodated by the gallery - a branch of ceramic practice has abandoned the domestic environment. The move to non-functional ceramics by practitioners, who no longer choose to be called potters, but ceramicists (the terms are not interchangeable) has not been without cost to ceramics as a whole.

The developmental route chosen by ceramicists, a visual art minority, echoes those pursued historically by many cultural minorities. It appears, initially, that the shortest path to assimilation is through the abandonment of those things that signify difference. In the case of cultural minorities these are often language, or religion. In the case of ceramics, its tactile and functional aspects seemed superfluous to art world concerns and so they were exorcised. A new ceramics - nonfunctional ceramics - was now ready to be welcomed into the art gallery.

Twenty-five years later the portals of the art world remain largely shut against the ceramicist. It appears that while ceramicists need art and its institutions to legitimise their new art form, art has little need for the ceramicist or their product. Furthermore the long awaited dedicated critical dialogue which would be drawn to nonfunctional ceramics has failed to materialise, outside a limited series of journals operated by fellow ceramicists.

This response comes partly because nonfunctional ceramics has, with few exceptions, failed to produce works of interest to the art world or correspondingly to the world at large. If they had, artists would be referencing their own works to that dialogue - note the art world's willingness to appropriate any vital dialogue to its own needs. The reason for this lies not in an inherent opposition to ceramics, but because nonfunctional ceramics are perceived as having nothing to say. Function and tactility have not been replaced by anything more resonant than the desire for attention.

Locked out, nonfunctional ceramics lives on in the hermetically sealed circuit of international competition in pursuit of monetary prizes seen to approximate the rewards of the inaccessible art world and provide legitimising compensation for perceived neglect.

Nonfunctional ceramics emerged in the 1970s as a response to a period of smugness and isolation in pottery. That inertia was however even then being overcome by practitioners with new approaches that reflected the environment and times in which works were made. Here and now, the works of **Richard Parker** and **Chris Weaver** engender our ongoing respect because they are the product of an original vision in use in the domestic environment and thereby enriching the lives of those who use them.

There comes a point in the integration of a cultural minority when the grandchildren of the integrators ask why the defining essentials of a culture were traded for acceptance?

Accordingly, potters might now question ceramicist's betrayal of ceramics as an independent, lively, intellectual pursuit with its own forms, concerns, and critical language, in favour of a position as a third rate painting or sculpture?

Most of the works selected for discussion are problematic in that they are by nature deeply implicated in this subversion of ceramic's truths. I intend to focus on **Christine Thacker's** *The Nomad's Tent* (1996) in order to use it as a model symptomatic of the implicit failure of nonfunctional ceramics.

Christine Thacker is a ceramicist, but would probably prefer the appellation "artist". I suspect that the *raison d'être* of *The Nomad's Tent* is to win ceramic prizes and consequently the work exists only because these competitions exist.

It is therefore understandable that it is inside this hermetic world that Thacker's work is most clearly referenced. *The Nomad's Tent* could be seen as sharing formal concerns with *Switzerland* by **Joelle Bellenot** - a crowd pleaser at the 1995 competition. The works are further linked by conceptual concern. Bellenot's artist's statement reads "Interaction between materials (metal, clay, glaze) fusion of structure, support, envelope. (Supplement to Catalogue, *Fletcher Challenge Ceramics Award, 1995*). Thacker has declared her work to be simple exercises in clay. (Ibid).

The two ceramicists' statements of theme are a variation on the commonly heard declaration regarding nonfunctional ceramics - "It's about clay". The fact that such a limited dialogue is deemed worthy of pursuit by both ceramicists and implicated commentators indicates clearly how little prepared both are to participate in the art gallery environment. Even at its most inert pottery spoke more eloquently. The critical netherworld occupied by nonfunctional ceramics is of the ceramicists' making. By opting for non participation in the dialogue of our lives as lived, their objects can justifiably be dismissed as mute or dumb.

Justin Paton

Justin Paton was born in Timaru in 1972. He is a lecturer in Art History and Theory at Auckland's *Unitec Institute of Technology* and has written widely on New Zealand art. From 1992 - 96 he wrote weekly art criticism, feature articles and book reviews for *The Christchurch Press*. He has been an art critic for *The New Zealand Listener* and *Art New Zealand* and written reviews and essays for many magazines and exhibition catalogues. Paton is currently on the shortlist for the *Reviewer of the Year Award* in the 1996 *Montana New Zealand Book Awards*.

Object Lesson

On a table in front of you rest five photographs, quietly awaiting judgement. Each photograph shows an object of - how to put it? - ceramic art. Few of them, it has to be said, look barbed or sexy enough to spin a viewer round; but what can a critic confidently say when he hasn't seen these objects in the flesh? Offering judgement on an art of touch using these flat matt images as one's only guide is like rating a meal according to a photo in a cookbook. Still, those are the rules. So here goes.

Ceramic art. Say it in private and it sounds innocent enough, yet to utter those syllables in the presence of ceramics fans is to walk straight into the firing-line of numerous loaded issues. Those issues have vexed many minds in the ceramics world for a long, long time now. Too long, perhaps. Yet, looking at the five colour images on the desk in front of me, it's hard not to rehearse those geriatric debates.

Art versus craft. Unless you've been sealed in a kiln for the last decade, you know the arguments. Despite years of repair work by new art historians, the gulf between the world of painting and sculpture and that of ceramics remains one of the silliest in the cultural landscape. The last decade or so has thrown up hundreds of attempts to bridge that gap, usually by ceramists who seek to shunt craft into the domain of art. If my radar serves me, a change of critical weather is in the air. The critical barometer, always unpredictable, is altering once again, and its needle is swinging hard away from the coordinate marked "art" and back toward the one marked "tradition". No longer, it seems, are the inhabitants of the ceramics world willing to waste useful hours hankering loudly for the kudos of "Art". Craft cringe, begone. And this new confidence and independence may be the measure of a real shift in the scales: craft still lacks for the museum space awarded to, say, painting, but it does at least bulk larger on art's horizons than those in those dim, dark decades before the democratisation of art history.

So far so fine, but there are dangers here for ceramists, lest this swing of consciousness (the Clay Pride movement, let's call it) curdle into a full-bodied backlash against those values associated with "art ceramics". One instance: the day before I sat down to write this piece I listened to the tail end of an epic lecture given by fellow panellist **Michael Robinson**. Robinson is an expert in his field, no doubt about it, but when it comes to breaking down ye olde art/craft barriers the man remains in the stone age. Instead of argument he offered a fiesta of contemporary art-bashing; instead of debate he offered clots of clichés that carry about as much intellectual weight as the old chestnut about ceramic artists being roman-sandalled, pony-tailed alternative life-stylers holed up in the Coromandel (for him, contemporary art was "six metre-high piles of pig shit" and "underpants nailed to a bit of old wood"). Banging away like an armed policeman on the same easy old targets, Robinson managed to drive the wedge even further into the art/craft divide.

It was, in a new form, the old conspiracy theory about art stealing air-time from craft, and I didn't buy it for a minute. It may come as a surprise to members of the ceramics world, but just about every sector of the art world harbours these insecurities about institutional exposure. Painting, the runt in art's litter, feels threatened by sculpture; sculptors, meanwhile, believe they're slighted by buyers; and photography, not to be outdone, sees itself as the permanent outsider. In a culture always short of resources and acclaim, fame's lens must remain small. In any medium, some makers will get left out in the cold. It's not a sin; just life in an imperfect world. To escape smugness and attain what might solemnly be termed "maturity", the ceramics world has to get over its jealously husbanded sense of exclusion, lest it become addicted to a grudge.

The kernel dilemma faced by ceramic artists today lies in the institutionalisation of an anti-institutional art: for the first time in their long history, ceramics are being made in their vast volumes by artists whose natural habitat is the chilly white cube we call the contemporary gallery. In those air-conditioned precincts, what use is a useful ceramic? Pulled on one side by traditions of the usable object and on the other by the knowledge that gallery-bound ceramics are unlikely ever to be used, ceramic artists are leading a schizophrenic existence. For makers stuck in this quandary, a common aesthetic policy has been to prise form from function. In the context of top-shelf, blue-chip, gallery-bound ceramics, this strategy makes good, if slightly cynical, sense. The maker of aggressively anti-functional ceramics, you see, is just telling a kind of truth about the fate of ceramic art in the late twentieth century as a trophy of taste, a highly expensive ornament in well-heeled interiors, to be looked at but seldom touched, and never, ever, used. Thus, ceramic artists in the last decade have glutted the galleries with smart pots, punning pots, pots about pots, anti-pots, shonky pots, and all kinds of bizarre hybrids. These makers tread a highwire between traditional ceramics and contemporary sculpture. A few do so with ease. Others - among whom the makers of *Untitled*, *Pilgrim* and *Work 95-2* will remain nameless - can't quite command that grace.

Still, it's easy enough to see why a reaction is setting in. Especially when the arty ceramics in question look like that achingly banal image of a baker (*Untitled*) or that hokey ritual site (*Pilgrim*) or the overhyped *Nomad's Tent* ("It looks more like a nomad's toilet" quipped an acquaintance). It's as if these makers have confused uselessness with artistic profundity (if a ceramic ceases to function, what is it? A bit of Fine Art of course). None of these works, and only a few in the larger and largely tepid section, pass my personal acid-test for any artwork: Would I want to have made this? So yes, the neo-traditionalists are right to huff that a lot of these ostentatiously arty ceramics are half-assed and yawn-inducing; but they're wrong to believe that that's a sound reason to retreat into the safe harbour of known forms. After all, a lot of traditional, functional ceramics are half-assed and yawn-inducing too - variations on routines too moth-eaten to deserve repetition. In any genre, geniuses aren't thick on the ground. Dismissing any imaginative enterprise on the basis of its most obvious bellyflops is just too easy. Triumphs are harder to explain away.

Fragment gets to the heart of this dilemma. Aggressively anti-functional, the work hangs on a wall vertically, thus repelling all practical use. This ceramic is, literally, a blank slate. It is no chopping board, rather a sounding board for thought. In the same way that much minimal abstract painting is "about" the onlooker's attempt to make sense of it, this work's subject is the act of contemplation in which it involves the viewer. It is a mental mirror, a becalmed space for the viewer's mind to unravel its thoughts. To be honest, this viewer's mind at first had to wonder why an artist would attempt to do in ceramics what painters were doing

with supreme ability in the 60s and 70s (I'm thinking of the fleshy encaustic surfaces of **Brice Marden's** paintings or the serene, breathy webs threaded by **Agnes Martin's** pencil), but those doubts evaporated in the presence of the object itself. *Fragment* has a beautiful surface, infinitely subtle and gently scarred, in which you seem to be able to trace the passage of centuries silting and abrasions. It was made in 1996, but if its date were 1096 you would hardly feel compelled to question it. Here is a ceramic that confidently occupies a terrain usually commanded by painters and doesn't look foolish for doing so. Most art ceramics spell things out in capital letters; this one speaks in a whisper. Most grab your eye; this one beguiles it quietly. In the frantic babel of the *Fletcher's*, its silence came like music.

After the earnest whimsy, gonzo compositions and mushy mythic themes retailed by some of these objects, *Teapot* has a sober integrity. Inhabiting an art world that still harbours an absurd snobbery toward craft skill - it's often dismissed as "elitist" or "hierarchical" - you learn to relish this rightness of fit between form and function. As photographed here, *Teapot* possesses the compact sculptural weight of an old steel iron. An elegantly practical object, its faults are practical too. The curved base flies in the face of my feeling that such an object should sit sleekly on a flat surface, and the spout looks dangerously prone to breakage; but this object nevertheless answers to one of the first requirements of any sculptural sensuousness. You want to hold it, heft it, gauge its steely sheen and flowing surface with hand and eye (this enthusiasm was dented when I did just this in a Christchurch design store and one of the wooden balls, poorly glued, fell out of its socket).

What's wanted is not a reactionary allegiance to function over form, or an over-eager advocacy of form over function. What's wanted is the best of both worlds: objects that refuse to act embarrassed about the functional traditions whence they spring, while also remaining alive, unruly and conceptually alert enough to hold their own in the image-haze of the 1990s. What might such an object look like? It might look like this urbane and seriously playful little *Vase* by **Richard Parker**, in which a shoal of lyrical white splashes swim diagonally up a licorice-black finish. Passing what **John Updike** has called the "acquisitiveness test" with flying colours, this is an object I would acquire for my ceramic collection. If I could afford a ceramic collection. **Henri Matisse** famously said that he wanted his paintings to be like a comfortable armchair for tired workers to relax into; he might have chosen a Parker vase to sit on a table nearby. What the two artists share is an easy, airy, casual-seeming hedonism that's underpinned by some hard-headed but lateral thinking. With their cheerfully wonky outlines, just-brushed finishes and sexy-plump waistlines, his pieces are like sculptural realisations of wonderfully relaxed and vaguely cartoony sketches. There's a lightness, a good humour to this piece that seems to signal Parker's knowledge that you can be serious in art - seriously playful, in fact - without succumbing to the salt-of-the-earth solemnity that afflicts so much clay art. More, please.

From the domain of ceramics we get, at the very least, eye-popping skill and the intimate pleasures of use. From sculpture and painting, perhaps, comes intellectual density, resistance to stylistic formula, and an alert sense of contexts. Ceramic art should not conduct a meek retreat from "art" nor succumb to a cuddly consensus about

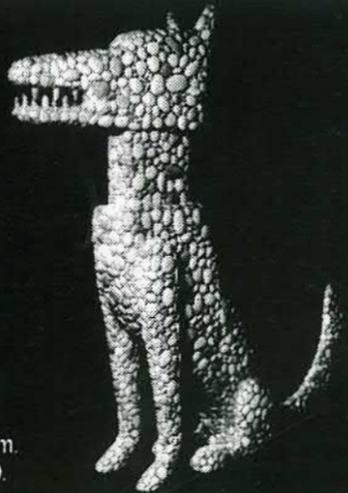
some old-timey "tradition". It has to get ever more barbed and brainy and beautiful. It has to get tough-minded and self-critical. (Before writing this piece I went looking for some New Zealand ceramics "criticism" - as opposed to mere commentary. No luck. Where is it? To do that, to get self-critical, ceramic artists should shuck off both old and new orthodoxies, and enter an expanded field. Staying put, they risk looking less like outcasts (to use **Gabi Dewald's** phrase) than inmates.

For that to happen, though, we have to change the terms of the debate, and if Robinson's rant is any indication, those terms just ain't changing. If we want an image of the debate right now we could do worse than fix our sights on *Untitled*, in which a morose geezer is handing a bag of food to a customer - to us, perhaps - through a clunky ceramic frame. At first glance, the work looks like yet another failed Funk ceramic, a lame one-liner in search of a punch-line. Yet it does (don't laugh) yield some meaning. In its sheer, laboured awfulness, it may be offering us an object lesson about the ritual tedium of current art/craft debates. This artist, you see, has given us an image of contemporary ceramics as junk food for the eye (hence those store-bought tiles) ordered from a set menu and served up dutifully to a public raised on the same old eye-candy: in short, *McSculpture*. Laugh at the joke, but do so nervously, because we may well be its butt.

The art/craft questions are institutional questions, born of people's justifiable fears about the power of language to consign objects to the dustbin of history; but the whole dualism has long been out of whack. Let's ditch it. Ceramics are not an alternative to art, just another kind of art. So we need to change the terms, need to free up our ideas of "use". Aesthetic bureaucrats are always asking "Why?", but the question is dead wrong. The real question is "Why not?", because art's mansion is big enough to accommodate all comers. In those silent moments when we front up to the objects, the question should not be: Is this art or craft? No, the question ought to go something like this: Is this good or bad art? Is it conceptually flabby or mind-expanding? Does it move me, jostle my expectations, enlarge my experience, make me swoon?

Craft, ceramics, art, art ceramics, sculpture....Finally, who cares which artistic ghetto these objects are herded into? The great lesson of twentieth century aesthetics is that attempting to prescribe creativity is like trying to mould mercury, or sculpt smoke. We go to art precisely because the speed and fire of the best stuff makes that kind of bean-counting look beside the point.

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Large White Dog, 1990. Barry Lett.

Michael Robinson

Michael Robinson was for twenty-five years, curator of decorative art in the *Ulster Museum*, Belfast. He began his collections of contemporary ceramic and glass and now lectures and writes on aspects of them, historical and contemporary. He is a frequent lecturer at the *Royal College of Art* and the *Victoria and Albert Museum*, London.

A Distant View

This piece is written in response to eight sets of photographs of work in the exhibition. I have not seen the pieces themselves and whilst a photograph can suggest all sorts of things and recall experience of similar objects and previous responses and reactions to them, I feel it unfair to judge the objects themselves. I will thus subject you to generalisation about the state of ceramics that these pictures arouse and make comment on the work itself later, in its own presence.

Firstly there is the area represented by *Teapot* from New Zealand. It looks as three-dimensionally challenging and satisfying as any of the others and offers the added attraction of being something to handle and use. Given that tactility is one of the major features of ceramic as a medium, this is great, but the real importance is that it brings art into everyday experience. I say art rather than craft because whilst the latter is expected, few people seriously attempt to bring the former with all its notions that we hold in such value, into the everyday and the equally important rituals of our everyday lives: art as something practical and functional, and available and accessible to most, if not all.

Japanese ceramics have had an enormous influence on our time, as finished, admirable objects which stimulate and excite and as a whole set of processes, techniques and approaches to them. Yet if anything, particularly for our western culture, the most important aspect of Japanese ceramics is the status they hold in that culture. Bowls, jars, boxes and plates were not only functional objects; they were conventions able to express values as lofty and deep as any other accepted and used by artists. **Nonamura Ninsei, Ogata Kenzan, Honami Koetsu** were not just great craftsmen and potters, they were regarded in their own time as important artists making a valuable contribution to the needs of their time. In our time we should recognise that all they ever made were domestic, usable, functional artefacts which they imbued with a presence that raised them and what they did, to the highest levels of human activity.

Surely one of the greatest challenges facing the artist in clay today, is not just the exploration of an incredibly exciting new medium, nor the pursuit of totally personal, even capricious images and aims. It lies in rescuing the rest of us from the soulless mundanity that profitable progress continually tries to reduce us to. **Bernard Leach** made his social, ethical, moralistic pontifications on ceramics, fifty years ago. We should not abandon them because they are old or no longer the fashion; they are as relevant to our time as they were then and we could well do with making them a part of a centre stage argument about where we are going. A teapot offers as many sculptural possibilities and problems as any other convention could do, yet we usually succumb to the dangers of non-functional novelty, humour, schmaltz and abstractions that may be no more than the easy way out, and pleasant if transient distraction.

Too often potters stand accused of lack of contact with today's needs and of merely competing with one another in mutual admiration societies, whilst "ceramic artists" swan off on their own indulgent trips into the exotic and irrelevant. It's great doing one's own thing, but one must remember there is an enormous audi-

ence out beyond the footlights whose needs are as important as ours, and who look to us to put art into their lives.

Secondly there is the use of ceramic to deliver a message: ceramic as a vehicle for relating anecdotes and stories; for making personal statements about emotional, political, sexual, environmental issues, etc. All of which may be laudable in their own right and worth the telling, but why in ceramic? I'm not particularly interested in whether it's right or wrong to use clay for this sort of thing, my concern is with its appropriateness. Often the message presented is so literal and graphic, that from being a sympathetically handled medium, clay becomes merely the easiest material to make the statement in, and virtuoso story-telling becomes the only art. As with many 19th century factory-made exhibition pieces, cleverness at manipulating and then disguising a docile and lifeless substance is the real issue. One can always make the finished product look like anything at all, even ceramic, if that is what is desired.

One of the greatest disadvantages of clay is that it is so easy to play with, so compliant and biddable and for a lot of sculptors I feel it is simply an easy way out. The line of least resistance.

The photograph that arouses this reaction is that of *Untitled* from the USA. There is such a long, strong, influential tradition of figurative ceramics in America that I think this particular piece stands out as a cultural object as much as something in its own right. One which makes perfect sense in its own local context, but outside that presents values foreign to other audiences. I must ask myself whether or not I am simply a European responding to something I don't want to handle and bringing prejudice into play. There is the realisation that the field of ceramics is so immense that in one's enthusiasm for the whole, one can lose track of the enormous differences that exist between the component parts. Maybe I don't relate to that which this particular work expresses. It does have a message and it looks to be a strong, even disturbing one, but I find the ceramic content flimsy and don't see why it needed to have been made in clay. Wouldn't man-made materials have conveyed the message more sympathetically?

Thirdly, there is ceramic as a language in its own right, talking about ceramic. The medium as the message and as post World War II conglomerate, universal culture, we have explored and exploited ceramic as never before in history. We have penetrated,

or tried to, all its technical secrets; scoured its history; shattered past values and broken down all the boundaries that protected and restricted its use and status. People who have worked in clay all their lives are still shocked by its variability and seemingly boundless possibilities, and every new generation of ceramists discovers new inherent qualities and expressive values.

The agents of this phenomenal change are no longer time-honoured traditions, nor profit motivated industrial concerns with their complex team structures. They are individual artists seeking their own particular solutions to highly personal needs and problems and using the past as a source to study, emulate, pilage or abandon and ignore, in favour of other mentors. The progress they have made has been too fast for the rest of the art world to adjust to, as the lack of fully relevant criticism shows, and whilst the public have responded favourably to most developments, they are rarely taken into account. Selfish motivation and peer group pressures are the most salient features of the ceramic movement, and its greatest strength. An enormous amount of this explorative activity is of necessity in the nature of self-development exercise, rather than art and the most successful experiment need not be art even though it does please, satisfy and result in greatly increased control. It can be difficult at times to draw the line between artist and ornamentalist or even entertainer. Developments can take place so quickly that transience seems to be built in. Art has become the product of the movement pop, hedonistic and discardable.

Three pieces I find exciting if only for their ceramic qualities are *Vase, White Splashed*, New Zealand, *Work 95.2*, Japan, and *The Nomad's Tent*, New Zealand. This is clay talking about clay. The language is exciting, there seem to be all sorts of allusions and the pieces themselves stand in their own right. If all they are is ornaments it makes them no less significant; the vast bulk of art objects made throughout history fulfil no greater role.

They work as self-proclaiming personalities, and if tomorrow they are out of date, so what.

Pilgrim from Hong Kong would seem to be that double statement, a medium expressing itself as a successful abstract expressionist play with its own qualities, and a vehicle for conveying notions other than clay, which are vividly implied by it - the starting point for the viewer/participant's imagination to take the possibilities further. This is the point at which I feel ceramics has departed from its historically familiar role and taken on a new guise; a new voice. All the previous functional and ornamental roles are on stage and a great number of successful players presenting them, in an enormous variety of familiar and new ways, but today, in our own time ceramics has become an artist's medium with its own voice and its own statements independent of and entirely different from any other.

I look forward to meeting these pieces in the flesh.

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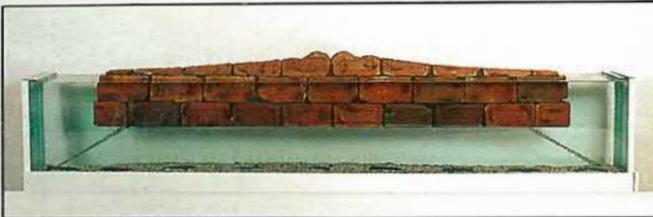
Forum Postscript

Peter Lange, Auckland

Peter Lange was born in 1944 and "wandered into potting by a series of accidents in 1973". He developed into a well-known "journeyman potter" producing, for over 20 years, a range of hand-thrown, brush-decorated tableware, both diesel-fired cone 10 stoneware and electric-fired earthenware.

A visit by Richard Shaw from San Francisco (the Fletcher Award judge in 1981) introduced him to super-realism sculpture using slip-cast earthenware. This medium allowed him to explore a humorous and satirical vein in "ceramic one-liners" - visual puns, social and political comment - and he is now recognised as New Zealand's leading exponent of this genre.

With the assistance of an Arts Council grant last year, Lange produced a major exhibition of sculptural ceramics for the Robert McDougall Art Gallery in Christchurch (NZ Potter, vol 37, no 3, 1995). Besides some ceramic work he now computer-designs headstone graphics for an Auckland firm of monumental masons.



Igneous Geology by Peter Lange
Fletcher Challenge Ceramics Award Exhibition
Photo Haru Sameshima

Critics are tempting targets.

There are all the jokes, fondly remembered TV skits, quotes from clever people to give one comfort when under critical attack: "Critics are like eunuchs in a harem - they hear what's going on, they see what's going on, they know what's going on - but they just can't seem to do it themselves." (probably Noel Coward).

Critics though, are slippery targets, often with editors' skirts to hide behind, and while it may be a completely natural reaction and feel like a classic case of self defence, responding to their criticism will almost always end in a double dose of public humiliation.

I was introduced to this law when my exhibition in Christchurch Art Gallery was critically demolished by Justin Paton who was clearly convinced that the clay would have been much more useful left in the ground, and I decided (against sensible advice) to respond to the review in the gentlest possible way to show there were no publicly evident sour grapes, and to try to retrieve some credibility for a show that I was quite proud of. The Christchurch daily, *The Press*, was not inclined to publish my response; my impotence in the face of this discourtesy (now in my mind elevated to a matter of civil liberties) overrode more sensible advice and I took the case to the Press Council, which of course ruled in favour of "Editorial Discretion" and "Expert Criticism". I had to stand by and watch, while *The Press*, hitherto reluctant to publish anything relating to the review, now took great pleasure in publishing the findings of the Press Council. I had single-

handedly managed to add a large bucket of shite to the barrage of rotten tomatoes.

So I arrived at the forum, *Art for Clay's Sake*, organised by Moyra Elliott as part of the 20th Fletcher Challenge Ceramics Award celebrations and featuring six critics including Paton, fighting fit and ready for a bit of civilised confrontation. I was to be disappointed. Any sign of heat and the chair tipped a bucket of water on it, and with very little time allowed in the eight-hour talk-fest for open discussion, little useful exchange developed. We were talked at, but not invited to respond. Sometimes, not very often, refreshments (great as they were) should take second place to talk.

The panel included critics, historians and writers assembled from Ireland, Germany, Australia, Dunedin and Auckland. If we were looking for value for money the Aucklanders, Justin Paton and Douglas Lloyd-Jenkins, inexpensive locals, should have been given the cash spent on importing Gabi Dewald from Germany and Janet Mansfield from Australia.

Paton and Lloyd-Jenkins, at times with all the generosity of a Gestapo court-martial, gave New Zealand potters fair warning that ceramic criticism is serious stuff; not descriptive, not in-house, not necessarily kind, not funny. Paton proved that last point with a heavily ironic interpretation of a piece he obviously hated and he was not funny. Michael Robinson from Ireland gave the toughest criticism of the day on the same piece, involving a hammer and a rubbish skip, and the audience fell about laughing.

Paton and Lloyd-Jenkins are not active in the local pottery family business, and so as observers they have potential value to that family. It is asking a lot of any practising potter-cum-critic in this country to do the sort of hatchet job that I copped, on one of their own. That they are not part of that family was most strongly pointed up by their incomprehension at the predictable and fond applause given Christine Thacker during the Fletcher Award ceremony, in spite of the judge's unfortunate arrangement with the audience not to clap award announcements (a true New Zealand crowd would have booed overseas winners, so there was some graciousness shown).

The invited critics were each given inaccurately coloured laser-copies of photos of the selected pieces to base their comments on and this was a handicap especially to those who hadn't seen the actual work. It is inadequate organisation to fly an overseas expert in at some expense, to have them comment on pots they've never seen. Texture and scale could only be guessed at and opinions were modified on the run as new slides were shown.

Fortunately most of the panel had seen most of the pieces which all had a fair going-over in the style of television talent quest entries and Olympic gymnasts, and there was some shifting in the seats as those exhibitors whose work was chosen, and the judge, John Chalke, sat through the session with their approaches to the medium under critical review. Richard Parker's *Vase, White Splashed* was the one piece that had the critics all feeling positive; they were unanimous about a couple of others, but only about their mediocrity.

Christine Thacker's *The Nomad's Tent* caused the widest divergence of opinion. A low blow was dealt when Lloyd-Jenkins suggested she appeared to make her pieces cynically to win awards. Minimal research into her recent work would have prevented such an insult. That this happens around the world is undeniable, but the random nature of the judging of this particular Award (one of its best points) makes it a foolish tactic. He is clearly unimpressed by anything faster than glacial progress towards perfection, with Gwyn Hanssen Pigott the ideal pacesetter. Christine would have been cheered by Michael Robinson's opinion that her piece was his favourite. He was not distracted by her history, only impressed by the piece on the day.

Lyndon Cowell from Dunedin, wise-cracks and all, exposed

us to an emotional interpretation of his chosen pieces, and ceramics in general, which I found uplifting; Dewald had useful opinions, but there was the inevitable handicap of speaking in an unfamiliar language which did not allow for relaxed communication, although her body language often told us how she felt about the pieces; Janet Mansfield epitomised the traditional potter's outlook - increasingly constrained and under threat as clay becomes, to a wider viewing base, just another sculpture medium. A spot check of Bernard Leach's kitchen cupboard is not the litmus test any more.

Form versus function, brownie points for technique, titles, the history of clay, its spiritual superiority - they were all topics touched on, but destined never to be resolved either because of lack of time or because they never will be. Next time the art/craft debate crops up we should all go and do something more useful like nailing a pavlova to a pine tree.

Michael Robinson was important as the star turn, and he performed well. Passionate, entertaining, eloquent, he raised a truckload of debatable points. His presentation was too long only in that it used up the time for that debate. His last couple of declarations stating that critics and historians in the end are of little relevance to the actual activity, and real artists will produce art anyway, ended the day on a supremely ironic note - here we all were, sitting taking in opinions and advice from critics and historians for hours on end, only to be told that a real artist would in fact be at work instead.

It may be that potting lives will change because of this seminar, but I doubt it. Most of us have had the Oriental traditions held up to us already as the epitome of ceramic integrity, and still have not been diverted from whatever bright idea we woke up with, that morning. It was not a "usable" event, more of a fireworks display, an entertainment, a provocation, and occasionally a reassurance which will be of little consequence in a month's time.

Its main impact lay in the exposure of two significant critical talents to the New Zealand ceramics scene. Paton and Lloyd-Jenkins take no prisoners, make no apologies, care not for age, pregnancy or repute, and when they are not using jargon (people I know "use" pots, they don't "interface" with them) produce well-phrased arguments. But there is a misgiving all the same - a song I treasure from the '60s goes, "You know all the words and you sung all the notes, but you never quite learned the songs you sung; I can tell by the sadness in your eyes that you never quite learned the song."

If this "language of clay" does exist, like any language a lot of the joy comes from speaking it, not just studying it. Still, where would we be without the authority of critics in today's world? Or eunuchs for that matter.

I wish their reviewees well - out of interest I went back and read my review in order to put a face and an attitude to the words. It is in my scrap-book, but not in my CV. I have to admit there is a perceptive drift to it; it is tough, smart, derisory and clinical (who says the arts and humanities go hand in hand?) and while it is not enjoyable having yourself and 200,000 others told how trite your latest work is, the episode proved to be a useful catalyst, a tackle heavy enough to end an unsteady career. From now on, clay will be left in the ground where it belongs. Stone will be dug up instead, and "knock-knock" jokes on granite can last until the end of time.

The forum was a useful experiment. Clearly heavily subsidised, perhaps next year the money will be spent more wisely on local rather than overseas experts, and there will be more audience involvement. Keep the same caterers, and as well let's have a kick-boxing match to the death between an artist and a craftsman. It's as good a way as any of resolving this dispute.

The referee, the critic, will still be there at the end, not a hair out of place.

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The Dowse Lectures

A fascinating series of lectures was recently arranged by **Anneke Borren**, Public Programmes Co-ordinator at the *Dowse Art Museum* in Lower Hutt. They featured three visitors to New Zealand who were part of the *Forum the Auckland Studio Potters* put on during the first week of the prestigious *Fletcher Challenge Ceramics Award Exhibition*.

Gabi Dewald Pamella Annsouth, Te Horo

Gabi Dewald, Editor-in-chief of the German publication, *Keramik Magazin* and also a freelance journalist in the field of contemporary art, was one of these three.

Along with slides, mainly illustrating work from the mid '70s she outlined the history of German ceramics, both East and West from around 1860 right through to today when, "Liberation and Individual Expression has at last become valid".

The contribution of **Seager**. Influences from the *Bauhaus*. Wars, when the Germans "seemed to retire into heads." The emigration of many potters, often to England, ie, **Ruth Duckworth**.

The **Leach** influence.

Intellectual separation of those born before, and those born after World War II, when for some, working in stoneware equated with "quality", while others combined to form the radical *Group '83*. (Remember the - mostly painting - exhibition *Wild Visionary Spectral*, new German art shown at *Shed 11*, Wellington in 1986.)

About this time too, the Green Movement nurtured the re-discovery of "Old Craftsmanship". Now many potters show and sell their work at craft markets throughout Germany. For some, it is almost an underground activity for, if they have been unable or unwilling to study and gain specific qualifications from the *German Potters' Guild*, this body can quite literally close their workshops down. Gabi Dewald felt that Europeanism should soon slay this dinosaur.

The lecture was well worth the concentration it demanded as,

Japan

A 1995 Pottery Study Tour of Japan, with Ann Matheson as tour leader, included Peter Collis, Rick Rudd, Libby Boyd, Dick and Chris Todd, Jennie and Ray Russell, Shirley Calvert, Kaye Hancox, David and Phil Barr, Tony Bacon, and Anneke Borren

Anneke Borren, Wellington

Japan; I had resisted it for years!

Leach and **Hamada**; interesting linkages, an intellectual understanding of what they were trying to do, but no emotional involvement of mine - or so I thought at 20. I had turned down the offer of an apprenticeship with Bernard Leach at St Ives - not my style!

I'm North European and gravitated naturally to Scandinavian clay and glass, the perceived simplicity of form and decoration, the clarity and honesty of form and function and above all, the colour and joy of handling. These were my roots.

Back to New Zealand, bringing to the scene THAT colour and whimsy - at that time, my contribution.

Yet, when **Ann Matheson** sent me the 1995 study tour invitation, something within me stirred. Over the years I had understood and felt much more about Japanese clay-use, had become familiar with anagama fired pots, had absorbed much of

apart from Gabi's rich accent and stoic reading of copious notes, her presentation was peppered with squeals, honks and all manner of extraneous noises from those lucky children whose parents brought them to enjoy the current Automotive Exhibition displayed just adjacent to the theatre.

Michael Robinson Mirek Smisek OBE, Te Horo

The *Dowse Art Museum* must be congratulated for giving us the rare opportunity to share **Michael Robinson's** enthusiasm and deep knowledge of the world of ceramics.

His lecture on pre-historic Jomon and Japanese pottery, beginning with Yayoi pottery until present times, spanned a period of 8,000 years.

Michael Robinson is a man of vision, deep appreciation of creativity and the true meaning of Art in Society. He demonstrated this in the contents of his lecture. His method of delivery was intelligent, sensitive and humorous.

Jomon pottery should perhaps have been named Ainu pottery as Ainu people are regarded as the original inhabitants of Japan. Now only a few Ainu people live in Japan, on Hokkaido Island. Jomon culture continued on all the islands for 2,000 years. (3,000 to 1,000 BC) In my view Jomon pottery was some of the most beautiful and meaningful pottery ever made. People of the Jomon culture who lived in very primitive conditions - cone-shaped huts with fires in the middle - created some of the most elegant and sophisticated forms. Apart from being true art, all these ceramic forms had a function as well.

Michael Robinson's selection and observations of modern Japanese ceramics was sensitive and certainly highly informative. I think the slide of *Horse*, through sheer economy of presentation was a classic. There were other classics, like *Prayer*, showing a beautifully decorated and generously proportioned female bottom.

I would like to thank *Dowse Art Museum* director **Bob Maysmor**, Public Programmes Co-ordinator, **Anneke Borren** and the *Hutt City Council* for giving us the opportunity to be enlightened, and look forward to future lectures and similar experiences. ■

the "unknown craftsman", had read lots of haiku poetry and appreciated fully the Japanese Tea Ceremony. (The most memorable one being at the *Japanese Cultural Centre* in Lima, Peru, where **Harry** and **May Davis** held the opening of their exhibition of pots made with their Andean villagers from Izcuchaka). I had also lived in New Zealand for over two decades - within the clay community.

I was doing a commission for the *Porirua City Council* at the time and the remuneration was equal to the cost of the study tour. Too much of a coincidence - so I said "yes". Committed.

On our departure date in October last year, I was a most reluctant traveller. I had fallen in love and did not want to leave, and was very wary - of group travel, even when there were friends in the group, and of the Japanese psyche.

I calmed myself during the flight to Nagoya. Twenty-four hours later, Japan started for me, at day-break - looking out of the window of the airport hotel onto a traditional clay-tiled roof, yet totally cobalt blue! I fell for the colour with a vengeance and vowed



to try and get hold of an end-tile with the stylised chrysanthemum flower.

To Seki, where a traditional knife and sword-making festival was on, a sense of timelessness overwhelming, the skills superb in an excellent exhibition of ancient works, a handle-grip covered with fish-skin (always thought from pictures it was bone-carved; learned something new) and the market place full of stalls; pots, pans and knives, umbrellas at eye-level, and all of it in the rain.

We invented a game - "let's look for New Zealand potters' work in the pots we see" - and there were lots! But no Borren's.

Seki taught me, straight in the beginning, to look for detail and this became more and more true, especially in the big cities with their teeming masses of humanity (all looking the same, to us). The greyness of industrialisation, the mixture of private housing, rice paddies, vegetables, gardens and parking lots, the tackiness of the "love" hotels - an alien lifestyle. I suffered badly from crowd-aversion, but the detail of a traditional Japanese temple roof, window latches, doorknobs and guttering pipes, could lift me out of that in an instant.

Takayama. An old and lovely city. Ancient bridges, a huge sense of history, the autumn festival of floats and an attempt at haiku. Ann and I "homestaying", all of us having different experiences those four days, all equally hospitable and unique, and all of us coming together at the *Third International Workshop in Ceramics* at the *Hida International School of Craft and Design*. Superb facilities - would that we could teach clay in these spaces and lay-out in New Zealand!

Peter Collis wrote about the 1994 Workshop in the *NZ Potter* (Vol 36, No 3, 1994) so this was his second time and it became an interesting mix of varietal and traditional values, exemplified by a demonstration of coiling ancient-style large water-pots, by **Yukata Nakamura** who danced with small steps backwards around an immovable, growing form, for what seemed like many hours. He told us later on, he had been very nervous, as it was his first public demonstration and he had "only been coiling for many, many years!"

A joint exhibition of brought-over pots, New Zealand and Japanese slide shows and, to end the workshop, a formal discussion about the differences in attitude and usage of clay between the two countries. Somewhat frustrating, for our clay language was easier understood, than words. I lightened it up a little by placing my precious cobalt blue roof tile, which my hostess had procured with great difficulty (a "round-eye" wants a roof tile?) on the floor and announcing it to be my new sushi plate, thereby trying to illustrate that in Japan, a roof tile is a roof tile is a roof tile, and one insults the maker by thinking it anything else, whereas

in New Zealand we're allowed to be inventive about its use - the right of the purchaser. This sparked off new ideas. In spite of its weight, my tile survived trains, buses, Underground and the plane home, and now lives happily in my lounge.

Highlights of the next few days were bussing to Echizen, over a bridge flanked by four bronze sculptures of a potter throwing, as part of the landscape, to the *Echizen Museum* with its beautiful garden and ponds with the familiar koi fish surfacing for food to be thrown. Stunning old pots here! Travelling with a chronology of historical ceramics chart, comparing dates in China, Korea and Europe.

Visits to **Mitsuo Oya** and a much more relaxed **Yukata Nakamura** in their studios and with **Zeikan Hata Keyama** who, with us all sitting on his tea-ceremony floor, unpacked out of precious boxes, even more precious ancient pots which we were allowed to handle. Magic!

Train to Kyoto where I could have lived for quite a while; *Kiyamizu Temple*, drinks for "long life" and **Kawai Kanjiro's** home/museum, part of a little street, and which was pure Zen inside; a house filled with self-discipline and a love for mankind, presenting an inner peace, long after the soul departed. Truly magnificently Japanese, and his poetry:

"Fire in my hand,
A cold ball of fire
Fire, which has changed its shape
Hidden in the clay - pottery"

"The man who stokes the fire
is the flame itself"

"Work, which does not seek beauty,
Beauty, which follows work"

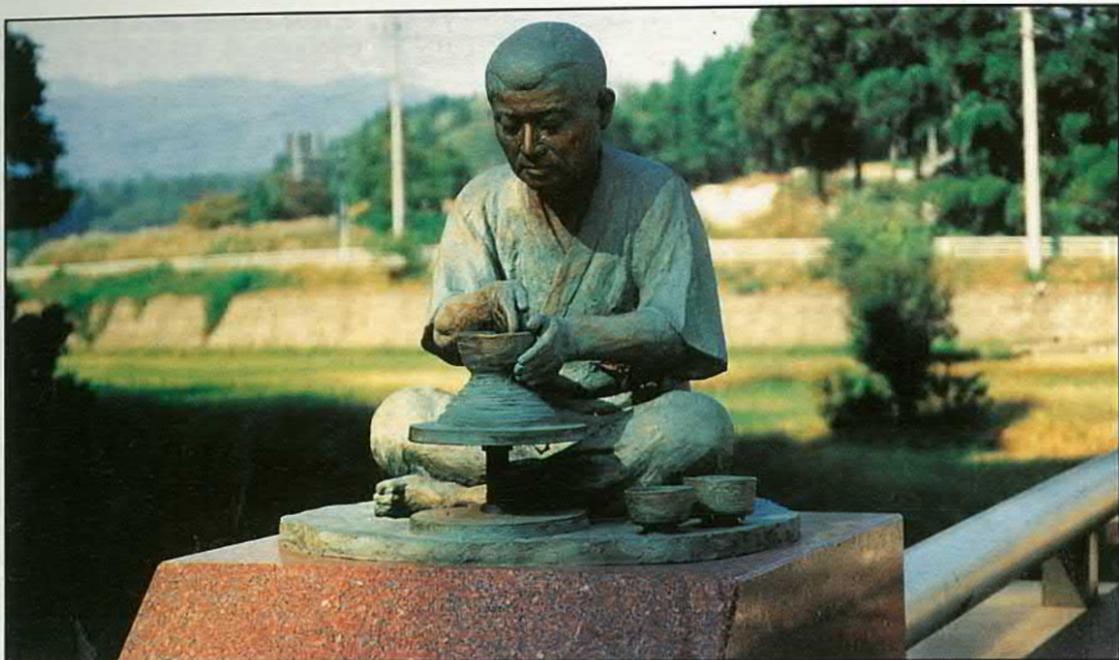
"My past has been an infinite past
My future is endless before me"

Then **Tooru Kawai's** studio/home where we were presented each with one of his tea-bowls; the *Museum of Traditional Crafts* where we hunted amongst exquisite second-hand kimonos gathered from temple sales, no longer worn by the Japanese themselves and cheap, but priceless in their silk weaving and designs.

"Hikari-ed" (bullet-trained) to Tokyo, past Mt Fuji, coping with luggage, standing in queues, racing for time and working out where to go. Thanks heavens Ann was there. The weather was warm, even hot, not autumnal at all; late summer, short sleeves, a pale sun through pollution. Underground and walked through various parts of Tokyo, the standard of living hugely expensive, the excitement of a big city and the total drain of one's energies. **Mr Itoh's** gallery - exhibiting a Japanese potter's work, the most beautiful, thickly-glazed celadon pieces I've seen for a long time; fatty, matt, pure inanga-jade luscious!

And then north; Kamakura, walking again, a templed area (Engaku-ji my favourite) limestone cave country, beautiful and peaceful - along a lane the studio of **Niiyama Mitsuru**, a small place with all of us crowding around to see very lovely *neriage* work.

Then, Mashiko. **Shoji Hamada's** home town and famous throughout the world. Many books have been written by Hamada and others, and who am I to try to put Mashiko into words, into perspective?



One of four sculptures of potters, on the bridge to Echizen. Photo by Anneke Borren

His home/museum is a must for any potter - clay's heaven - but the main feeling of Mashiko is the amount of potters in the whole area. A tribal potters' village of which Hamada became the famous one. Known and unknown, all together and their anonymous work very often beautiful. Not enough time to taste and feel, cradle between hands, lightly touch rims with practised fingers and feel the kinship oozing everywhere.

That night in a traditional inn, our yukata-ed selves became riotous, drunk on clay and sake, our wild laughter echoing around. Edward Sellen couldn't fail to find us.

Kasama the next day, a gentle country train ambling along, and then the station and bicycles. With the Tongan war-cry we set off, pottery shops along the way, bicycle on, bicycle off, absolute heaven again. We all found treasures, mine a red-oilspot sake cup - and Edo hot dogs at Edward's home and studio with his family. Afterwards, the walk to Motoshiko Ito's studio/palace and watching the sun go down over the hills.

Peter Collis, Auckland

This, my second trip to Japan was centred initially at the *Third Hida Takayama Ceramic Workshop*, held at the *International School of Craft and Design* at Hida Takayama. The workshop was organised by **Hitoshi Morishita** and underwritten by the *Hida Takayama Friendship Society*.

Rick Rudd and I had been invited to lecture and demonstrate along with Ichezen potter, **Yukata Nakamura**, who demonstrated traditional Ichezen vessel-making - coiling, paddling and scraping large vessels as he moved quickly around them. A slow, but fascinating technique. On visiting him later in his own workshop, we found he makes a diverse range of work from domestic to sculptural, only making the traditional vessels in demonstrations.

Rick demonstrated his unique method of coiling and I threw very large bowls and platters. I also decorated fired pieces with gold lustre and enamels.

There were 40 participants from Australia, Japan and New Zealand at this workshop. All had hands-on roles, trying all tech-

Advertising signs - *Flesh and Healthy* (vegetable shop). "Sale - 0% off". A placard outside a restaurant serving beef - "Misono Beef has been tasted and valued by GIs and dancers and then expansively rooted in many foreign and world people of gourmet." Knowing that every syllable of our own Japanese pronunciations were probably worse!

I have a wish; that we could teach people in New Zealand to respect their craftspeople the way the Japanese do - an integral part of society.

We thought of the tea ceremony and how it has become such a symbol of Japanese culture, and wondered how we could, as potters, foster such a symbol in New Zealand. What we came up with was the *Chip and Dip Plate*, and then realised the enormous gap in spiritual experience.

Japan. I have a love/hate relationship - there are so many extremes, but I'm glad that recently I had the chance to "homestay" host a Japanese woman engineer from Nishio city on a sister-city visit to Porirua. It repaid my debt a little.

niques demonstrated and taking an active part in the lectures and panel discussions. This was most successful of these ceramic workshops.

To make the best of this invitation, Rick and I and eleven other very lucky New Zealand potters were organised into a tour party by **Ann Matheson** of Auckland. Ann, who we decided must be related to Japanese gods, could not have organised a more successful, exciting, titillating or exhausting cultural experience. After two weeks the whole group was potted, cultured, walked, eaten, parchinked and even saki-ed out! But we still buzzed with those extra-special experiences which Ann seemed to conjure out of thin air - like four hundred kimono clad dancers at the Heian Shrine in Kyoto who, it seemed, just appeared to dance for us! Or again, the Yaktori dinner at Fukui where Tongan war-cries by **Anneke Borren** were followed by Maori hakas, much to the cheers and clapping of the restaurant patrons.

We all had wonderful dinners and lunches supplied and paid



From left: Peter Collis, Rick Rudd, Yukata Nakamura and Inoue Koichin

for by newly-made Japanese friends. The experiences different members of the group had over the two weeks, though similar, were no doubt uniquely different and personal to each one of us. The interaction and generosity between our tour party and the Japanese we met, and the pure fun had by all, make the best memories for me.

Our tour started at Hida Takayama. Along with the workshop at the amazingly well-equipped *International School of Craft and Design*, it was the home-stay experience which seemed the best possible way to gain an insight into modern day Japanese culture. Food, housing, bathing, religion, families' lifestyle and language - not to mention festivals. During our stay at Takayama it



Yukata Nakamura demonstrating

was the Autumn Festival. Wonderful colourful processions of floats made in the 16th century, with teams of people in stunning costumes pulling and pushing, stopping every few metres to refresh themselves with copious amounts of sake, made for an ethereal sight. Great celebrations - and us there along for the ride!

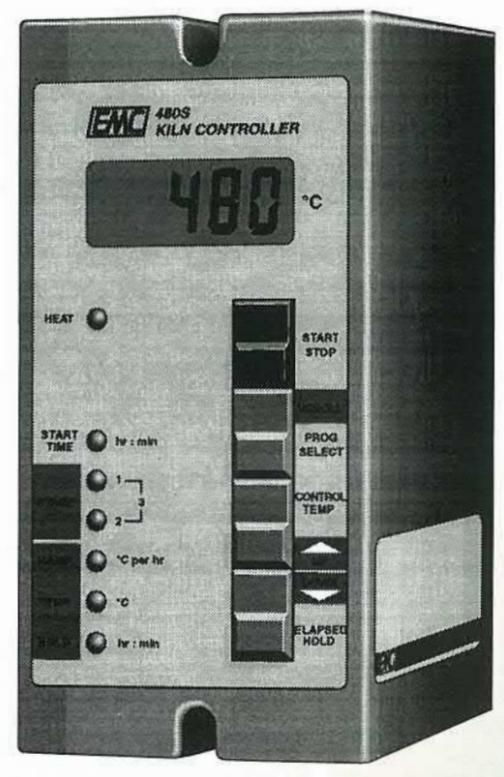
Wherever we went after that, there seemed to be a festival of some type, each incredibly colourful and interesting.

Leaving our tearful new friends at the railway station, we headed to Fukui, where we stayed at *Yours Hotel* and celebrated in style with a party in Rick's and my room. As we had to travel light, the excuse was that we had to get rid of all that duty-free somehow! However, the party, which several of the group couldn't remem-



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ber the next day (but it's all on Ann's video!) set the pace for the next 10 days of exploration.

Potteries and potters were visited in Kyoto, Tokyo, Mashiko, Kasama, Ichezen and many other places in between. Galleries from the traditional to contemporary were subjected to close inspection with many purchases and photographs being collected. I have over 400 slides and a four hour video of this trip to remind me of all the many great moments we had. The strongest memories are still the bonds developed between our tour party and our generous hosts. Rick and I are gratefully appreciative to the *New Zealand Council for Teacher Education* for the grant which made our trip possible.

People ask me, did this trip influence my work - obviously it did, not as a direct thing but, to be in a country where pottery and potters are held in such high esteem, gives one the confidence to pursue one's craft with renewed passion, conviction and interest.

Ann Matheson, Japan Tour Leader

We were happy, happy, HAPPY in Japan! So many highlights, for me too...the wonderfully kind and generous potters we met wherever we went; the warm homestay family and superb food they prepared; the dreamlike quality of a full moon rising above the lanterns on the traditional festival floats; the technically brilliant *neriage* exhibition by the recently elevated to a *National Treasure* potter, **Matsui Kosei**.

So much laughter - **Anneke's** huge bag of peanuts which lasted the whole journey, her Tongan war-cry in the yakitori bar, **Peter's** pachinko miracle, **Rick's** fan dance, **Chris** and **Dick's** famous singing duo etc...This was a great group, totally supportive of each other and always on time! Well, they were probably afraid of being forever "lost in Japan".

For me the most stressful time was arriving in Tokyo on the bullet train loaded with all our bags and hand-carries - into the Tokyo rush hour! We struggled through throngs of people up and down platform stairs to the local "green" train. Along with hundreds of others we had one minute to all get on the train before the doors closed. We let a couple of bulging trains go past without us while we got our minds right, and then it was "Ann said, 'Get on!' - push, shove, desperate squeeze - "Number off!" (I hoped to verify we were all on board).

After half-an-hour standing supported by the crush we were all carried off in the rush at Shinjuku station and, much relieved at our safe arrival, walked to our nearby hotel.



Four hundred dancing maidens at the Heian Shrine

We had a great time in Japan. It was a learning experience for us all. I had tremendous satisfaction in seeing everyone's obvious enjoyment of people, things and places Japanese. Thank you everyone. ■

Japan Tour, 1997

Whatever you do, don't miss our next pottery tour to Japan! April 5 to 20, 1997 at a cost of \$4,800.

Visit the ancient pottery areas of Bizen, Tamba, Seto and Tokoname. Attend a pottery workshop and homestay in Takayama during the Spring Festival. See Kyoto city in cherry blossom season. You will be stimulated and entranced by things and experiences of Japan.

We will also meet **Yasuko Sakurai** in Kyoto, where she will show us her recent works and introduce us to other avant-garde potters in her city. An opportunity not to be missed!

JAPAN TOUR AGAIN!

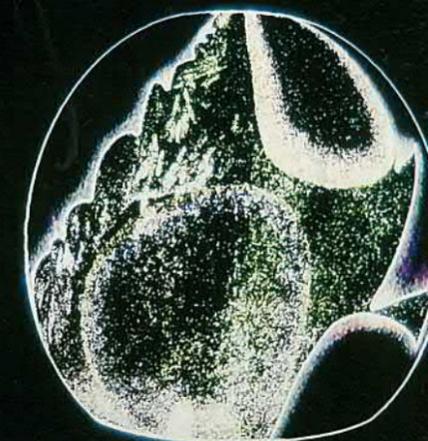
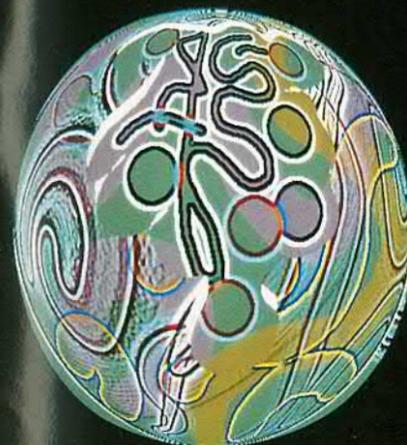
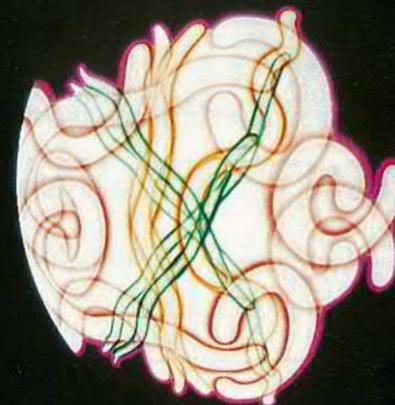
Rick Rudd enthusiastic to have a second Japan total immersion!

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The Electronic Sketchbook

Brian Gartside travelled to Helsinki in July to demonstrate and speak at a Ceramic Conference, about the use of computers for visualising ideas for surface decoration. The conference was followed by a teaching session on a similar theme at a summer school in Red Deer, Alberta.

Here he presents a series of drawings created to fit spherical forms.

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All applications for 1997 should be received by 30 September 1996.

Further Information

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A video is available that gives an impression of the activities of the programmes and is available to schools by calling Irene Gibson on 0-9-815 4321 ext 7256.

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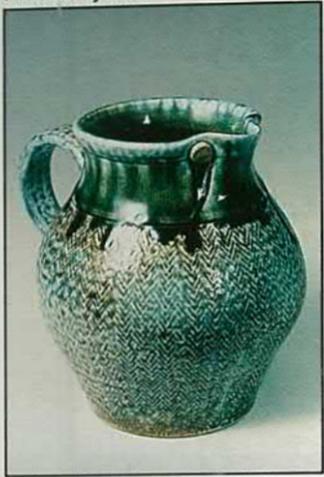
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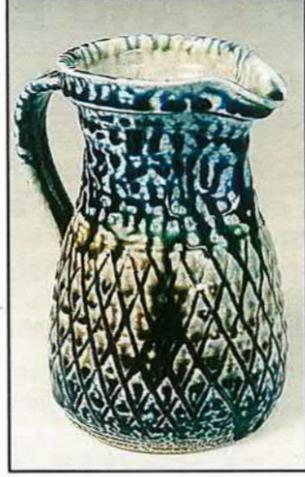
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George Halliday Christchurch



Pamella Annsouth Te Horo



Mirek Smisek Te Horo



Duncan Shearer Auckland



Rosie Murray Auckland



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Margaret Foley Stratford



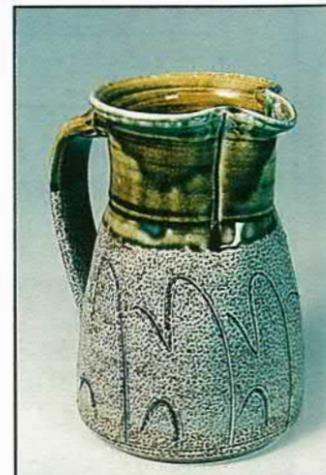
Peter Lange Auckland



Nicky Jolly Auckland



Stephen Bradbourne Auckland



Birkenhead Licensing Trust Pottery Award 1966

A Westshore Community Arts Council Project at the Chelsea Arts Centre, Birkenhead

Judge : Peter Shearer
Display : Ian Firth

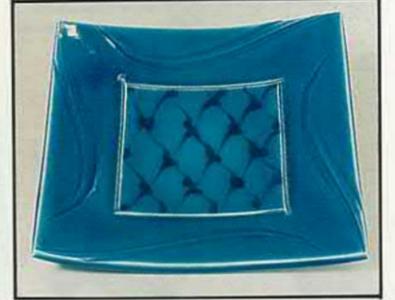


Photos by Howard Williams



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Andrew van der Putten
Auckland *Bottle*



Westshore Award \$250
Merilyn Wiseman Albany
Footed Platter



3M New Zealand Award \$100
Ian Firth Auckland
Pacific Vessel - Lava



Lochores Real Estate Award \$500
Peter Oxborough Mahurangi
Vessel

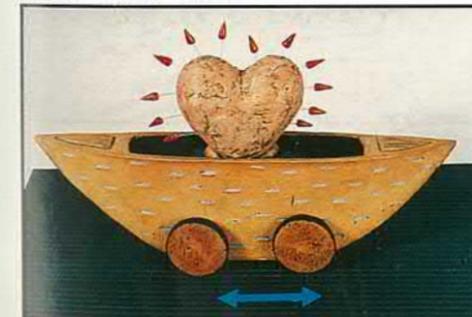


Gilbert Printing Co Ltd Award \$200

Katie Gold Nelson
Summer Brook

Jacob's Photo and Video Award \$50

Nicky Jolly Auckland
Untitled Torso



MERIT **Brendan Adams** Auckland *Love Boat*
MERIT **Susan Newby** Auckland *Three Jugs*



MERIT **Peter Collis** Auckland *Vessel*
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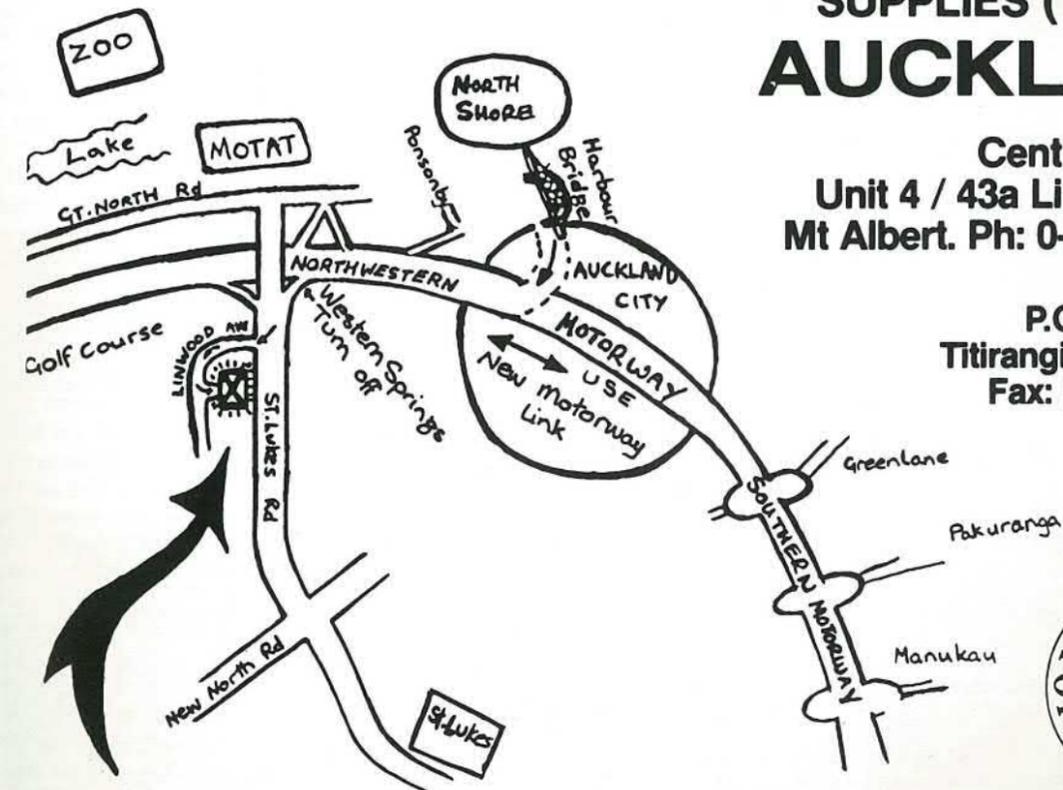
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Chris Weaver

Nancy Malcolm, Nelson



Chris Weaver has an impressive curriculum vitae. He's a founding member of *Coastline Craft Co-operative Gallery* in Hokitika, has had solo exhibitions at the *Dowse Art Museum* and other galleries, has won numerous awards in ceramic shows in Japan and around New Zealand (*Norsewear, Cleveland, Winstone's* and the *New Zealand Society of Potters* among them) and has exhibited in five *Fletcher Challenge* exhibitions. He's also been *NZSP's* North Island touring pottery tutor and last year was awarded a *Creative New Zealand* travel and study grant to the US, the UK and Ireland.

Now 40 years old, he studied at *Otago Polytechnic*, in 1975 earning a *Diploma in Fine and Applied Arts* with Distinction in Design and Sculpture. The following year he earned a certificate in Ceramics, picking up a *McSkimming's Award* for Excellence in Ceramic Studies. He then shifted to the West Coast which he found isolating, but nonetheless helpful for developing his own style without distractions.

In Chris' words, "For me, form and function are most important. I like my pots to have a simplicity of form and something of a sculptural presence. Attention to detail and truth to material and process are also what I try to achieve in my work. Since I introduced another material, wood, I have discovered that a whole new range of design possibilities has been opened up to me.

Each piece I make is a follow-on from the piece made before it, so there are common elements which can be seen flowing from one piece to the next. Most of my recent work has been inspired by my grandmother's pressing iron, a form which has captured my attention for the last couple of years".

Chris confesses to be more interested in design than production. At the time the *Dowse Gallery* invited him to present a show, he was making only teapots. He was forced to design other forms quickly, but he felt comfortable with them because they were natural progressions of his teapots. He now makes a range of tableware which includes teapots, boxes, serving dishes, cups, jugs and vases.

Most of his pieces are spray-glazed with black, cream or celadon. His handles of laminated native timber, rimu, make a striking combination with the glazes. The effect is enhanced by Chris' precise finishing and his meticulous design elements, such as motifs repeated at large and small scale.

The body he uses is *Abbot's White*. He hand-builds his pieces

from altered wheel-thrown sections, fashioning the spouts, handles and feet from extrusions. After bisque firing the pots, he sprays on glazes chosen for their ability to break and pool. He fires to 1250°C in oxidation.

The wooden additions are made from heart rimu - some of the knobs are turned on a lathe, while others are shaped with a belt sander. His teapot handles are laminated rimu glued and clamped around a wooden former, then rounded off with a router, glued and pinned into place with epoxy resin, and finally oiled.

In making his pots, Chris throws the bottoms separately. He smooths out the throwing lines on the exterior of his pots so he can apply a diagonal line which leads the eye around the form. However, he leaves the muted throwing lines on the interior as a subtle testimony that the pot has in fact been hand-thrown. For cutting pots off the batt he uses a pair of twisted steel guitar strings, which gives the bottom a wave pattern reminiscent of traditional Japanese pots (he credits *John Pollex* for showing him this distinctive technique). He delights in making tools from pieces of found driftwood and using low-tech aids for production. For example, the extruder he uses to make teapot spouts and cup handles is home-made, and to prevent pot sections from drying out prematurely, he covers them with plastic bags and stores them in an old disused freezer.

While a design student, Chris learned how to solve problems. He notes that Europeans try to find a unique solution for each problem in a pot, while the Japanese look for a single solution for all of a pot's problems. He insists that it's important that we're aware when designing in clay, that we're in fact solving problems. His growing recognition as a potter is ample evidence that his solutions to problems are imaginative, meticulous and most pleasing to the eye.

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R e c e n t l y S e e n

20 Auckland Potters
Urban Ware
OUT OF THE BLUE, AUCKLAND

Pottery can be austere and earnest or adventurous and fun. Visits to *Out of the Blue* are always an uplifting reminder of the latter.

Twenty Auckland potters present mostly small-scale pieces in this show. Individual works are displayed in and around dotted white road markings and lines of tiny trucks and cars, creating the urban setting.

Diversity as an element of city life characterises the show, from the acid-yellow ceremonial vessels of **Peter Collis** and authoritative bottle forms of **John Parker**, to the colourful raku fish platter of **Zeke Wolffe** and expressive, vibrant bird vase from **Helen Adams**.

Tall Vase from **Sam Ireland** has the look of casual control. Structural looseness in the throwing comes from this piece being a well-practised form. Molten glass chips poke through a white base glaze and lyrical heart images complement the simple, striking form.

It is exciting to see delicate, cylindrical cups and wood-fired country kitchen jugs from **Matt McLean**, well known in Auckland as a maker of some of the large clay walls and monoliths we see.

Review by **Christine Thacker**
NZ Herald, 14 August 1996

Bruce Haliday

Rand Heazlitt
Wood/Salt/USA
POTS OF PONSONBY, AUCKLAND

On hearing that his entry for the 1996 *Fletcher Challenge Ceramics Award* was accepted, Indiana-based potter **Rand Heazlitt** decided to seek out exhibiting opportunities in New Zealand.

He makes wheel-thrown bowls, dishes, teapots, lidded vessels and the like using stoneware and porcelain clays fired in wood, salt or soda kilns.

Clays are mixed in varying proportions depending on the characteristics of colour and texture he wants. To some of his clay blends, Heazlitt adds chunks of crushed feldspathic rock. At high temperatures these melt and burst through the clay surface, producing the random-textured surface qualities he seeks.

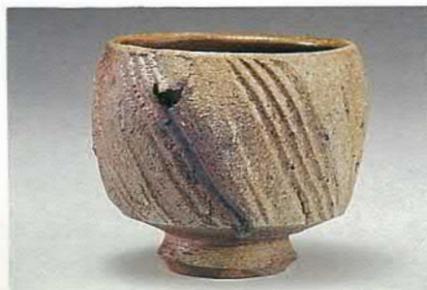
Heazlitt adheres to the code of decorative restraint. Surface effects in his work are from slicing and scoring the clay using cutting wires, cheese slicers and wooden press tools. The toffee-like glaze runs from salt firings, and the flame blushes and ash deposits from wood firing enhance these surface markings.

The pottery has a pleasing weightiness, and lids and handles are well designed and comfortable. Among the most structurally interesting are pieces listed as *Dome Pots*.

The largest of these are of the shape and scale of a small boulder or a large hamburger bun. Sides have been padded flat and bases rounded, giving a buoyant lift. Small lids and thumb channels for ease of opening add to the success of these small, but substantial forms.

"Pushing the limit of materials" is Heazlitt's self-imposed challenge, and the display includes fine examples of top pottery technique and the unique beauty of the art of high firing.

Review by **Christine Thacker**
NZ Herald, 14 August 1996



XPO
NZ Ceramics and Glass Award
ELLERSLIE, AUCKLAND

The *XPO NZ Ceramics and Glass Award*, this year included glass for the first time. **Andy Hobbs**, chief executive of the award sponsors, said the *XPO Group* wanted to promote both art forms, but could not envisage a large enough number of glass entries to warrant a separate award category. In discussion with the *New Zealand Society of Potters* and the *New Zealand Society of Artists in Glass* it was decided to combine the two disciplines, as although their crafting techniques are different, they are similar in their chemistry and identical in other respects - aesthetic, functional and philosophical.

The glass entries were few, but strong, especially in their use of colour. **Elizabeth McClure** won the glass award for her set of 16 tiny bowls which covered a range of spectacular effects demonstrating laminated colours; under and overlays, with various surfaces cut, ground and engraved. Each miniature piece was unique - the complete set, stunning.

Ann Verdcourt won the parallel prize for ceramics for her *Small Piece About Textures*. A mortar bowl with pouring lip, in rough textured off-white clay, filled with virgin-white eggs so smoothly silky it was hard to see how she had made them.

The premier prize went to **Christine Thacker** for her *White Bowl*, a large, full drum-like shape with a shallow indented bowl top. It was simply covered with a milky white glaze poured over with thick dribbles running from the rim. A subtle undercolour of green showed through the pouring.

Review by **Howard Williams**
Christine Thacker and Andy Hobbs with her winning piece, white bowl



R e c e n t l y S e e n

Peter Collis
True to Form
MASTERWORKS, AUCKLAND

Peter Collis is known for his concern for form in wheel-thrown ceramics. His classically proportioned pots are meticulously turned, providing surfaces for high-glass glazes, gold and silver foil and brushed or trailed decoration.

Here he has launched a completely new series; slip-cast earthenware vessels on a large scale, covered with a variant of Egyptian paste.

In ancient Egypt and into Roman times, scarab charms, beads and ornaments were modelled from a "paste" of sand with a cement-like binder, or clay and powdered glass combinations.

Though difficult to work, this low-plasticity body gives its own rich colours as soluble sodium carbonate migrates to the surface while drying, crystallises and then fluxes during firing to form a glaze. Copper carbonate or silicate of copper with calcium gives the intense, opaque turquoise known as Egyptian blue, but other stains can be used giving similarly strong colour results.

Collis has cast his vessel forms, elongated "canoes" standing on tall plinths, or on cone-shaped columns made of rings stacked in decreasing diameters. Most are plain-faced, though some are corded as though built from parallel coils of clay.

Egyptian paste is sprayed on with a flocking-gun, the encrusted layer breaking over contrasting stains and slips.

These are architectural vessels, not sculpture, in that they carry no narrative or philosophical message, but are visually powerful interior decor objects; true to form with an interesting adaptation of an ancient ceramic material.

Review by **Howard Williams**
NZ Herald, 26 June 1996



John Parker
Recent Ceramics
AVID GALLERY, WELLINGTON

John Parker's forms and aesthetic, of the stark and industrial, have always been out of step with the craft-based, organic orientated mainstream of NZ pottery, owing more to the philosophy of the design movements of *de Stijl* and the *Bauhaus*, than *Zen*.

This exhibition of his latest work involving black and white and re-introducing greys, pinks and lime green followed his interest in **Keith Murray** and **Crown Lynn**.

Parker is often referred to as a true Renaissance Man. He is a freelance writer and has a highly respected parallel career as a theatre designer of sets and costumes. His eagerly awaited exhibitions always contain surprises.

They are always staged, with the pieces present as much for the dramatic effect as for the objects themselves.

However, when working in clay, Parker has always been adamant that he is just a craft potter. Each piece is hand made and unique. He throws and turns all his work on the potter's wheel. He makes ware which is easily recognisable as the traditional pottery vessel, bottle or bowl, but his special concern is to push the concepts of these as far as possible into severe minimalism and into the functional/non-functional debate to explore the very essence of defining these ideas.

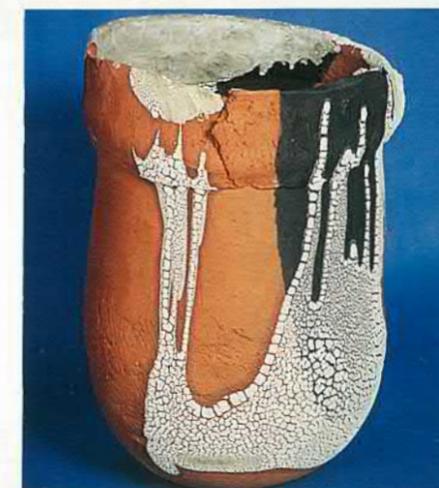


Gaeleen Morley
New Work
PYROMANIA, TAURANGA

There is an imposing sense of anticipation as you mount the stairs to **Gaeleen Morley's** latest exhibition. And this is different. The entire wall areas and props are black - the soft black of building paper. This was rather an ambitious idea of Gaeleen's and it worked wonderfully given the nature of the work exhibited. The otherwise harsh lighting was also softened by the building paper which was an unexpected bonus.

Here Gaeleen has developed a series focusing on the use of black and white over a heavily grogged rich red body. There are large and smaller bowl forms, two very generous urns, teapots and tiles. The black slip used has a smooth satin quality over which she has selectively poured various textured dry white glazes in differing depths of colour and crawl - the smooth black acting as the perfect contrast to the clay body and the whites. The interplay of colours created with the reds, black through to greys and whites is simply stunning - almost aboriginal. Very tactile and strong. I liked this work enormously. Gaeleen has obviously had some fun here.

This theme was broken with two small groupings of teapots, one group glazed in a most unusual fluro lime (How did she do that?) and the other in a vibrant electric blue, along with a series of three multi-coloured wall tiles. Also there is a row of nine white wall tiles with black ceramic pencilled animated teapot drawings, although this work seemed underpowered compared with the rest of the exhibition.



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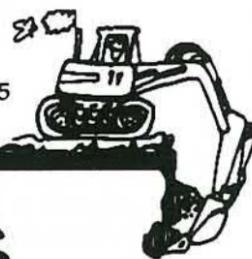
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CC	BROWN	1300	5-8	7.00	30.00	50.00
CC	BRIGHT YELLOW	1300	5-8	7.00	30.00	50.00
CC	PINK	1200	5-8	8.00	35.00	60.00
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CC	DARK BLUE	1400	4	9.00	50.00	90.00
CC	LIGHT BRIGHT GREEN	1300	5-8	9.00	50.00	90.00
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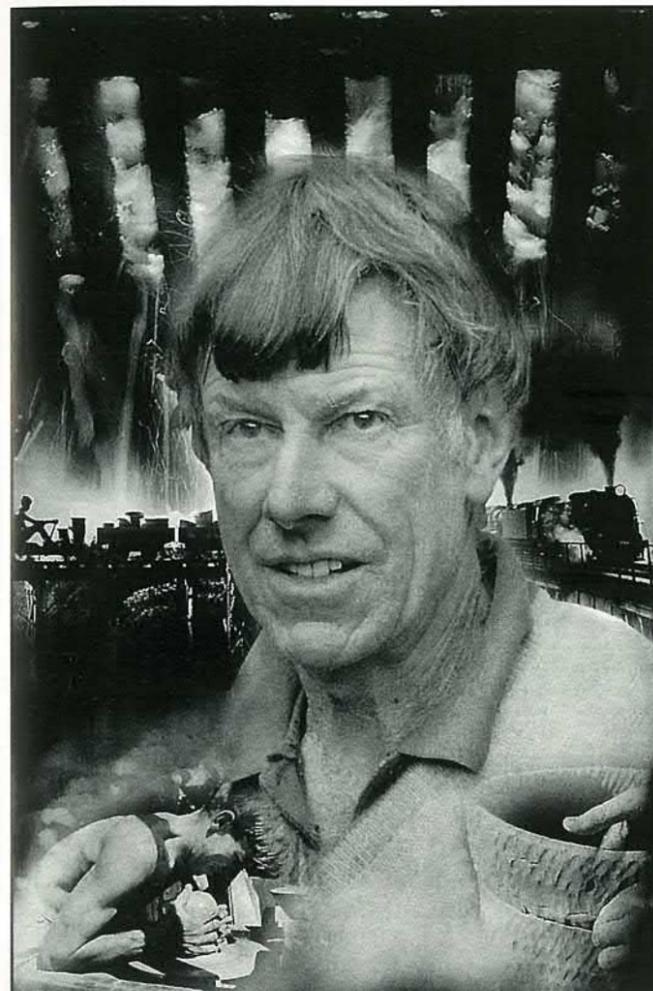
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Book Reviews

Barry Brickell, A Head of Steam by Christine Leov-Lealand

Exisle Publishing Ltd, PO Box 8077, Auckland. \$24.95

Reviewed by Howard Williams



This is the third biography to date from Exisle Publishing, in a series called *New Zealand Lives - the People who shaped the Nation*.

The first in the series was *Elizabeth Yates, the First Lady Mayor in the British Empire*, by Judith Devaliant and the second, *Arawata Bill, the Story of the Legendary Gold Prospector William James O'Leary*, written by Ian Dougherty.

One expects such a series to cover pioneer prospectors and politicians, but as the craft of studio pottery has had a strong cultural presence in the country, particularly from the late 1950s on, this title is a fitting one. The next will also be welcome as Christine Leov-Lealand is currently researching a biography of the artist Theo Schoon, who near single-handedly brought to the attention of an otherwise unaware public, the wealth of Maori rock and cave art hidden in our bush.

This book, *Barry Brickell*, appropriately subtitled *A Head of Steam*, records a life devoted, in a manner so personal as to at times be seen as eccentric, to working with clay, steam-powered machinery and native bush regeneration.

Brickell has always been a steam fanatic and has been instrumental in helping record and preserve parts of New Zealand's railway history. He was a founding member of the *NZ Railway Preservation Society*. He was also a founding member of the *NZ Society of Potters* in 1963 and was a seminal figure in the pottery movement especially through the '70s, when his infatuation with clay and its firing, his exploration of materials and machinery and the exercising of craft skills, all imbued with a passion for expression - a single-minded drive - inspired many others.

A "guru" of his time, even potters who did not directly come into contact with the man were influenced or enthused by those who had. His philosophies and incidental teaching reached further and deeper than most would have been aware of, and many would not wish to admit to.

Each summer in the early 1970s, Brickell's home and workshops at *Driving Creek* in Coromandel became an informal Mecca for idyllic summer holidays where the camaraderie of potters and their families from all over the country was forged into life-long friendships; a sharing of techniques and aesthetics, making pots and music and love, night-long kiln firings, round-the-campfire raves and tube-cleaner - red wine. An expression of the '70s lifestyle which informed a great deal in the pottery world before the government tried the strong-arm tactics of its ill-devised sales tax in 1979.

Things changed for potters then, and again at the end of the '80s when yuppiedom crashed and the changes to imports of ceramics opened up heavy commercial competition for local artisans' clay products.

Through these upheavals *Driving Creek* continued to develop, driven by Brickell's dreams not only in the pottery field, but more with the extension and increasing sophistication of the railway line with its tunnels, double-layer bridge and viaducts through the bush. Access through this afforded the realisation of another Brickell dream, of replanting native plants and trees, until the property is fast becoming a nationally recognised regeneration reserve. This has been with active assistance from the *NZ Forest and Bird Society*.

Hundreds of tourists now visit *Driving Creek* each season to ride the unique railway through the bushed valleys, to buy hand-made pottery, to experience a sort of living, thriving museum, and perhaps to catch a glimpse of the almost legendary Brickell.

He is an enigma. At times a recluse, despairing of contemporary society and its "zoot" values and wishing people would leave him alone in his peaceful bush haven to make his pots and to play on his railway. At other times an open entrepreneur, welcoming those who will spend money, spend time, expertise and sweat to help further his projects, realise his dreams and provide his living. Always though, he is sharing, enthusing, advising, teaching - helping to shape our nation.

The book covers his remarkable story in intimate detail. With well-chosen photographs and an easy, lucid writing style, it tells Brickell's life in facts and dreams, exploring his eccentricities and lauding his successes, in a manner which paints the picture of the man well. It describes his potting life and the astounding number of major exhibitions undertaken, and his connections with other eminent artists and craftspeople, as well as the singular development of *Driving Creek Railways* and its present tourist complex.

As an acquaintance of Brickell's since the days of the summer "Doos" from 1970, I lived many reminiscent moments through these pages; catching the atmosphere, the sounds and the smells, the excitement of making pots and firing them and talking about them, with all the passion of a potter of the time, in this country.

Brickell is a special person in this part of our cultural history, and Christine Leov-Lealand has recorded him well.

Susie Cooper, An Elegant Affair By Bryn Youds

Thames and Hudson, London. \$59.95
NZ agent David Bateman Ltd, Auckland

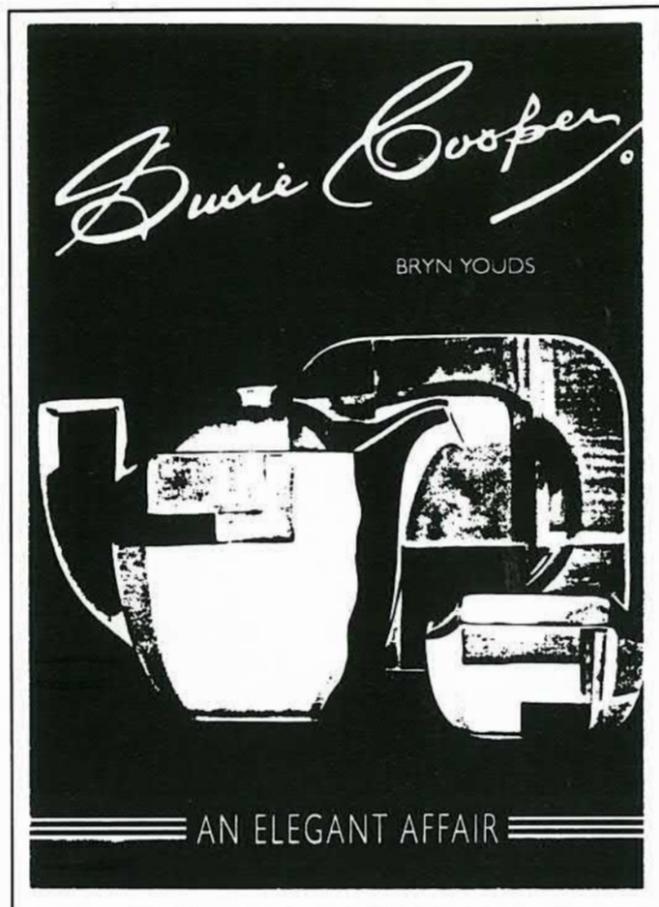
One of the most profoundly inventive and varied achievements in twentieth-century design, the works of **Susie Cooper** holds up a mirror to the history of the decorative arts in this century, from Art Deco twenties to the present day. Like her immediate contemporary **Clarice Cliff**, Susie Cooper is now seen as one of the most significant innovators in world ceramics, a status reflected both in the prices paid for her work and in the accolades of major museums and galleries.

'Elegance with utility' was Susie Cooper's own perceptive description of her work, a phrase which could justifiably be applied both to the dramatic colourful work of the twenties and to the more restrained, subtle forms of the fifties and later.

Her life was one of exceptional creativity coupled with commercial success, recognised in 1987 in a major retrospective exhibition at London's *Victoria and Albert Museum*. It is now celebrated, shortly after her death at the age of ninety-two, by this magnificent, large-format presentation of her work, illustrated with superb colour photographs by **Earl Beesley**, of all her most important pieces. The book is completed by invaluable documentation of her techniques, key patterns, shapes and stamps.

Bryn Youds, a personal friend of Susie Cooper during her latter years, teaches art and design history, with special emphasis on ceramic design. With 96 illustrations in full colour.

A companion volume *Clarice Cliff: The Bizarre Affair* by **Leonard Griffin** and **Louis K Meisel**, also \$59.95, is available from the NZ Potter, at the same special discount as below, \$49.95. ■



Gallery Guide

Entries for this listing cost \$15 — boxed \$20 — (incl GST) for up to 25 words. Cash with order, to NZ Potter, PO Box 881, Auckland

NORTHLAND

BURNING ISSUES GALLERY, 8 Quayside, Town Basin, Whangarei. On site glass blowing, production pottery and sculpture studios, with viewing platform. Open 7 days 10-6pm. Phone/fax (09) 438 3108

NORTHLAND SOCIETY OF ARTS — Reyburn House Gallery, Lower Quay Street, Whangarei. Monthly Exhibitions of artists and artisans in various media. Hours: Tues - Fri 10 am - 4pm Week-ends 1 - 4

NORTH AUCKLAND

PALMS GALLERY, Wayby, Fine selection of New Zealand pottery and studio ceramics. Open 7 days (09) 423 7125. Turn left off S.H.1 15km north of Warkworth.

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LOPDELL HOUSE GALLERY, Waitakere Centre for the Arts, two galleries, two working studios, gallery shop. Open 7 days 10am-4.30pm. Phone (09) 817 8087. Fax (09) 817 3340

MASTERWORKS GALLERY, 77 Ponsonby Road. Phone (09) 378 1256, fax (09) 378 1257. Ceramics, glass, fibre, wood, jewellery. Superb selection of New Zealand's best. Open Monday-Friday 10-5pm Saturday 10-4pm, Sunday 11-3pm

MUDLARKS, Hunters Plaza, Papatoetoe, (behind the trees next to K Mart). Offer an extensive selection of quality stoneware, raku and pit fired pottery. Open 7 days, Phone (09) 277 6868.

OUT OF THE BLUE WORKSHOPS, (Brendan and Kathryn Adams, Sue Newby and Bruce Haliday). Working studio gallery, 507 New North Road, Kingsland. Electric and vibrant ceramics with an off beat slant. Open Monday to Friday 10-5.30pm, Saturday 10-4pm. Phone (09) 849 6376

POTS OF PONSONBY, 298 Ponsonby Road, Auckland. Ph (09) 376 0145. Craft co-operative gallery offering a wide range of quality handmade domestic and decorative pottery and other crafts.

F.T. WEBB DECOR SHOPPE, 1 Kent Street, Newmarket, Phone (09) 520 0268. Quality NZ made pottery. Excellent selection available. Reasonable prices. Open Monday to Saturday.

WAIKATO

EXPRESSIONS - The Museum Shop, Waikato Museum of Art and History, Hamilton. The finest New Zealand pottery, glass, jewellery, silk, books, prints, cards. Phone (07) 839 5100.

FIRE AND FORM, Chartwell Square, Hamilton. "Quality pottery and woodturning. Wide range of domesticware and decorative pieces. Monthly exhibitions by NZ craftspeople in various media. Open 7 days. Phone (07) 854 8333.

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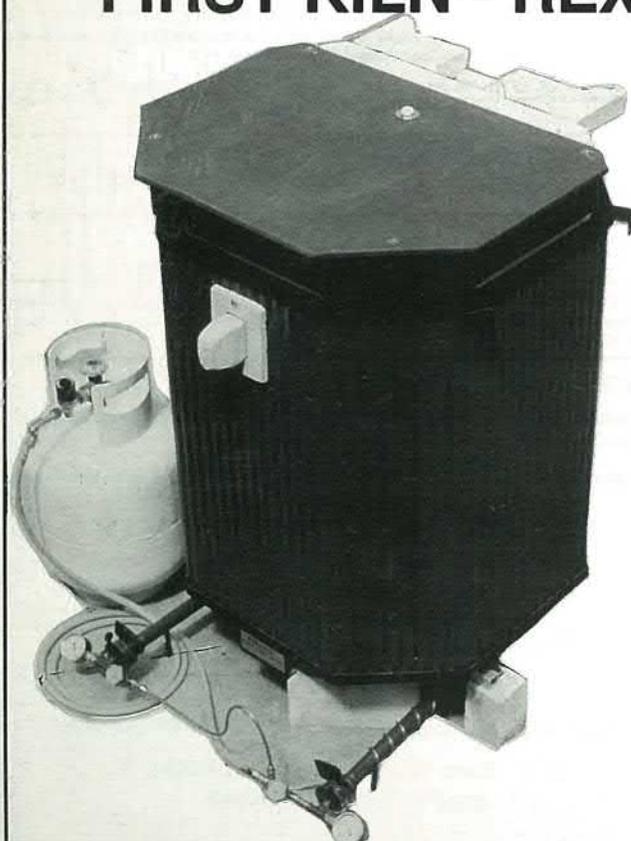
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