



C E R A M I C
S E R I E S ●

christine constant



A B E R Y S T W Y T H A R T S C E N T R E

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Though the terms studio - potter and artist - potter may be considered more or less synonymous, their prefixes carry enough resonance to place Christine Constant firmly within the latter classification. Christine's largely handbuilt sculptural ceramics borrow more from the vocabulary of fine art than they do from traditional pottery idioms. Besides, the term studio - potter, has overtones of a somewhat remote and rarefied existence, which does nothing to convey the generous scope of Christine Constant's ceramic involvements.

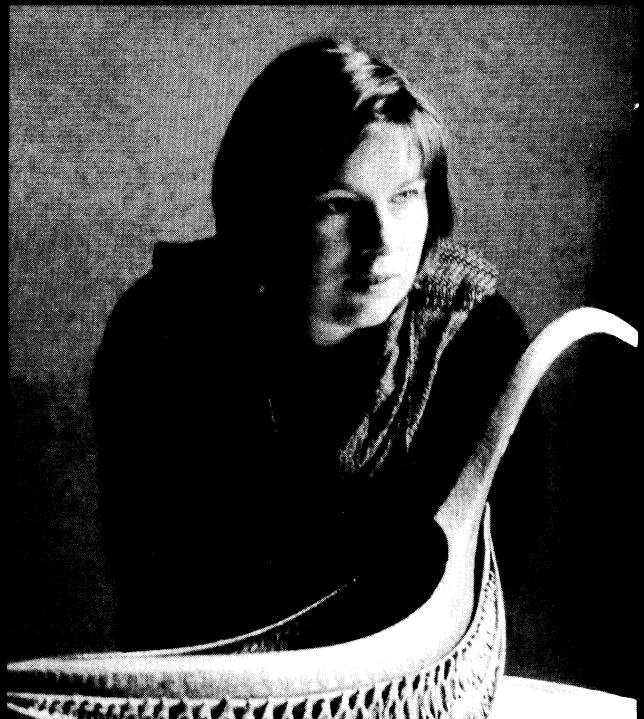
Influences on her work are also broad, though most immediate are her own photographs - of ancient artifacts and boats, ferns, leaves, light and shadow, weathered wood, corroded metal, tangles of fishing line and wire fences. Artists including Brancusi and the 'outsider' Pascal Verbena, basket - maker Lois Walpole and textile artist Louise Baldwin are all referred to.

Ceramics citations are rather fewer, but Ian Byers, Elizabeth Fritsch, John Ward and Judy Trim have all influenced her outlook. An initial impetus to Christine's development came from Dan Arbeid, a pioneer of handbuilding during the 1960 's who ran the department at Central School of Art and Design where she took her Ceramics degree from 1977-80 . A subsequent Advanced Intensive Ceramics course at Croydon College of Art introduced her to the potential of raku firing, which continues to be her characteristic technique.

Having built her own raku kiln she started to make ceramics which quickly confirmed that her interest lay not in discrete functional vessels but in relationships between essentially sculptural forms. Rather than merely existing as objects for passive contemplation however, Christine's pieces invited a positive tactile interaction. Solid, slip - cast components were tightly interlocked with hollow coil - built ones, and the pieces needed to be taken apart to expose hidden inner surfaces and forms. This invitation to handling was enhanced by the rich patina and well - worn quality of raku, and by the intriguing half - familiar forms, suggestive of archaic weaponry and esoteric instruments of divination. Impossible to assign to any particular culture or period, these probing and questing forms passed effortlessly into the streamlined marine repertoire of fish, molluscs, shells and boats, which are still central references in her work. The comfortable fusion of natural and constructed forms also

remains, with the sense of organic growth and structural precision conspiring together to hint at ambiguous origins. Christine's idiosyncratic vision attracted immediate attention when she began exhibiting in the mid 80's, but the prospect of cultivating her reputation within London's crafts circuit appeared too exclusive. It lacked the sense of 'completeness ' which comes from a balance of opposing forces and which is central to Christine's approach to life as it is to the formal and conceptual concerns of her work. Her growing interest in communicating with a different, wider set of people led to her appointment in 1987 as the first potter - in - residence in Gateshead, Tyne & Wear. The residency, based in a community centre, achieved inspiring results. Christine's expertise and commitment was accessible to everyone from school children to stroke patients, and enabled them to draw on unexpected abilities and produce highly proficient and imaginative pieces. When the residency ended in 1989, having been extended from one year to two, she stayed in Gateshead, and now works from the studio in her terraced house and holds weekly classes at the community centre.

Continuing links with the community also generated innovations in Christine's own work. For the 1990 National Garden Festival at Gateshead she collaborated with local women on a bathroom installation, incorporating one of



her *Swimmers* series. These pairs of striped or dappled creatures shaped like sea - slugs but with the vitality of eels, undulate across a base embedded with their shadow images, and Christine appropriately extended the shadow reference on a tiled backdrop. This totally new departure led to commissions for large figurative tile panels sited at a Cumberland hospital and a hostel for the homeless in London.

The tiles involved considerable experimentation to secure expressive lines and textures, brighter glazes and coloured lustres - properties which fed back into the sculptural pieces. This is apparent in the series of *Oval Spirals* which evoke the form of coracles or upturned abalone shells, and which share the latter's lustrous gleam. Related to these are the more complex series of *Spoons and Cradles*, elongated boat shapes with raised handles which are supported by outer pierced keels. These consist of a skeletal framework of clay, infilled with intricate filigrees formed from flat clay strips. The pattern of this interlacing is precisely matched by the decoration on both the interior and exterior of the 'spoon', almost as if the marks were imprinted onto the surface by light cast through the open texture.

Christine's decorations always relate to the structure of the pieces, and despite the fluent representational abilities demonstrated in the tiles, pictorial decoration and direct figuration are absent in her 3 - dimensional pieces. With one significant exception - an uncharacteristic foray into anthropomorphism seen in several of the Spoons, which contain enclosed press - moulded forms of red clay incised with the outlines of a curled up figure. Carved, burnished and smoke-fired, these blackish-brown kernels look neutral enough when lying in the Spoons, but fittingly reveal their human lineaments only when lifted out and handled. They may perhaps be fairly interpreted as a subconscious expression of Christine's first experience of motherhood. Nor does it seem purely coincidental that the external containers are called 'Cradles'.

In keeping with the compensatory imperative apparent throughout Christine's work however, the *Spoon and Cradle* series evolved into pieces with very different connotations. Now called *Stranded Spirit Spoons*, the deep protective hulls have been dispensed with and the pierced outer sections stretched out into slender, twisting arcs. No longer settled on keels, they are poised on tapering tails and the earlier, curly-cued filigree has given way to more fluid linear strands. The sense of dynamism inherent in these pieces is intensified when they contain enclosed forms - sometimes the compacted chrysalis - type figures, sometimes smooth elongated ovoids. These create a point of stillness, around which the outer section flows like water, or like a shoal of tiny fish - an impression heightened by the shape of the weavings and the iridescent sheen of the glaze.

In direct contrast to these graceful currents of clay, the recent *Core pieces* have a charred, brittle quality and a cage - like appearance. Built up from superimposed layers of latticed clay, they contain pale, fragile discs at the centre of their dense mesh. As always, Christine's preoccupation here is to reconcile opposites, to bring complementary elements together to achieve a sense of equilibrium. It is the equal emphasis given to the internal and external aspects, which reveals the full meaning of her pieces, and as Christine herself has remarked, the enduring theme of her work is one of " enclosure and revelation."

Stephanie Brown

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C Y F R E S ●
G E R A M E G

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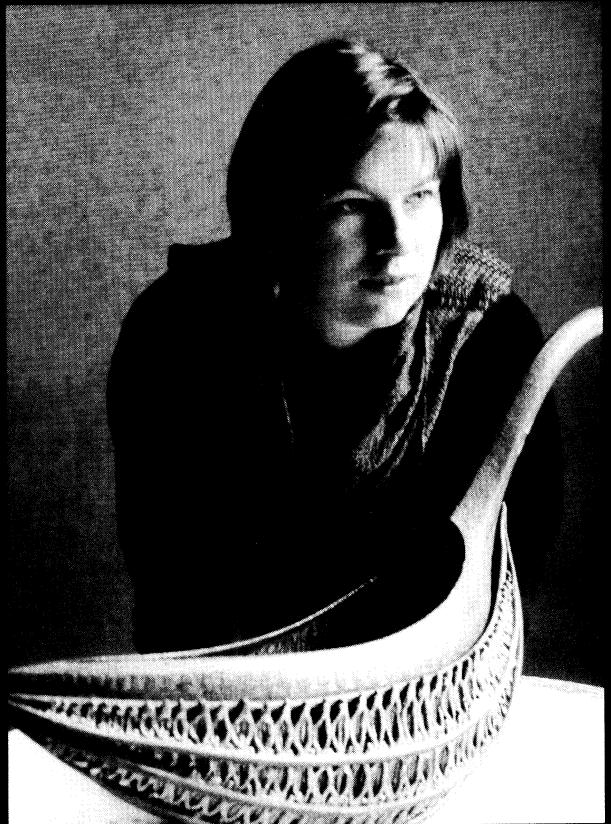
Er y gellid ystyried bod y termau crochenydd stiwdio a crochenydd - arlunydd yn gyfystyr, ceir digon o wahaniaeth rhwng ddynt fel y gellir gosod Christine Constant yn ddigamsyniol yn yr ail categori. Bydd cerameg gerfluniadol Christine, a wneir yn bennaf â llaw, yn benthyg llawer iawn mwy o eirfa celf gain nag o idiomau crochenwaith traddodiadol. Ar ben hynny, mae'r term crochenydd stiwdio yn gallu awgrymu rhywbeth digon anghysbell sydd allan o gyrraedd pobl gyffredin - awgrym nad yw'n cyfleu'r amrediad eang o ffyrdd y bydd Christine Constant yn ymwneud â cherameg.

Eang hefyd yw'r dylanwadau ar ei gwaith, er mai'r dylanwad pennaf yw'i ffotograffau ei hun - lluniau o arteffectau hynafol, cychod, rhedyn, dail, golau a chysgod, pren wedi'i hindreulio, metel sydd wedi'i fwyta gan rwd, clymau mewn lein bysgota a ffensys weiren. Gwelir cyfeiriadau hefyd, ymhliith eraill, at arlunwyr megis Brancus a'r "allanwr" Pascal Verbena, y fasedwraig Lois Walpole a'r arlunydd tecstiliau Louise Baldwin. Ceir llai o enwau o blith arlunwyr cerameg, ond mae Ian Byers, Elizabeth Fritsch, John Ward a Judy Trim i gyd wedi dylanwadu ar ei bydolwg. Cafwyd hwb pwysig ar y dechrau i ddatblygiad gwaith Christine gan Dan Arbeid, arloeswr crochenwaith llaw yn ystod y 1960au, dyn a fu'n bennacth yr adran yn yr Ysgol Gelf a Dylunio Ganolog lle y bu Christine'n astudio am radd mewn cerameg o 1977 - 80. Mewn cwrs dwys uwch mewn Cerameg yng Ngholeg Celf Croydon a ddilynwyd ganddi yn sgil hynny, fe'i cyflwynwyd i botensial tanio raku sy'n parhau fel ei thechneg nodweddiadol. Ar ôl adeiladu'i hodyn raku ei hun, dechreuodd lunio gweithiau cerameg, ac yn fuan profodd nad oedd ganddi ddiddordeb mewn llestri swyddogaethol ond yn hytrach yn y berthynas rhwng ffurfiau sydd yn gerfluniadol yn eu hanfod.

Fodd bynnag, yn hytrach na bodoli fel gwirthychau yr edrychir arnynt yn oddefol yn unig, roedd darnau Christine yn denu ymated cyffyrddol. Byddai cydrannau castin slip, solid yn cael eu cydgoi'n dynn gyda chastinau cau, torchog a rhaid oedd tynnau'r darnau oddi wrth ei gilydd er mwyn datgelu arwynebau a ffurfiau mewnol cudd. Ychwanegwyd at y gwahoddiad yma i gyffwrdd yn y darnau gan y patima cyfoethog ac ansawdd treuliedig y raku a chan y ffurfiau lled gyfarwydd diidorol - ffurfiau sy'n awgrymu rhyw arfau hynafol ac offerynnau dewiniaeth esoterig nad oes modd eu priodoli i unrhyw ddiwylliant na chyfnod penodol. Symudodd y ffurfiau anturus, ymholgar yma yn ddiymdrech i'w rhaglen forol o bysgod, molyscau, cregyn a chyched sy'n dal i fod yn gyfeirnod canolog i'w gwaith. Mae'r asiad cyfforddus rhwng ffurfiau naturiol ac adeiledig hefyd yn aros - twf organig a chywirdeb strwythurol yn cynllwynio i roi rhyw awgrym o darddiad amheus.

I lwyddodd dulliau unigryw Christine i dynnu sylw ar unwaith pan ddechreuodd eu harddangos yng nghanol yr 80au, ond doedd hi ddim yn awyddus i hybu'i henw ymhliith y cylch creffttau yn Llundain. Teimlai fod yno brinder o'r "cyflawnder" sy'n deillio o rymoedd gwirthyferbyniol sy'n ganolog i fyddolwg Christine yn ogystal ag agweddau ffurfiol a chydysniadol ei gwaith. Arweiniodd ei hawydd cynyddol i gyfathrebu â charfan wahanol, changach o bobl at ei phenodi ym 1987 fel y crochenydd preswyl cyntaf yn Gateshead, Tyne & Wear.

Roedd canlyniadau'r preswyliad, wedi'i seilio ar ganolfan gymuned, yn ysgubol. Roedd ymrwymiad ac arbenigedd Christine o fewn cyrraedd pawb, o blant ysgol i gleifion strôc, gan eu galluogi i dynnu ar alluoedd annisgwyl i gynhyrchu darnau caboledig a dychmygu. Pan ddaeth y preswyliad i ben ym 1989, wedi'i ymestyn o un flwyddyn i ddwy, arhosodd Christine yn Gateshead, ac erbyn hyn, mae hi'n gweithio o'r stiwdio yn ei thŷ teras gan gynnwys dosbarthiadau wythnosol yn y ganolfan gymuned. Roedd cynnal ei chysylltiadau â'r gymuned hefyd yn fodd i greu



agweddau newydd ar ei gwaith. Ar gyref yr wyl Erddi yn Gateshead, bu'n cydweithio â gwragedd lleol ar gosodwaith ystafell ymolchi a oedd yn cynnwys un o'i chyfres Nofwyr. Mae'r parau yma o greaduriaid streipiog neu frith, sydd wedi'u siapio fel malwod y môr, ond sydd mor fywiog a llyswennod, yn ymddyngi ar draws gwaelod gyda chysgod eu siâp wedi ymsuddo ynddo. Ynestynnwyd y cysgod yma gan Christine mewn ffordd ddigon priodol ar gefndir o deils. Arweiniodd y datblygiad hollol newydd yma at gomisiynau ar gyfer paneli teils ffigwrol mwy o faint a welir mewn ysbty yn Cumberland a hostel i'r di-gartref yn Llundai. Bu'r teils yn gofyn am gryn dipyn o arbrofi er mwyn sicrhau llinellau a naws mynegiadol, gwydro mwy llachar a gloyweddau lliw - priodweddau a fu'n bwydo'n ôl i'r darnau cerfluniadol. Gwelir hyn yn y gyfres o Sbiralau Hirgrwn sy'n awgrymu coryglau beniwaered a siâp a sglein cregyn abalonaidd. Yn gysylltiedig â'r rhain yw'r gyfres fwy cymhleth, *Llwyau a Chrudiau*, siapau hirgrwn fel cychod gyda dolennau wedi'u codi a ddelir gan gilbrennau sydd wedi'u tyllu ar y tu allan. Mae'r rhain yn cynnwys sgerbwld clai a lenwir gyda ffiligri manwl o stribedi clai gwastad. Mae patrwm y cyblethu yma'n cyfateb yn union i'r addurniad ar ochr fewnol ac allanol y "llwy", bron fel pe bai'r marciau wedi'u hargraffu ar yr wyneb gan gastin ysgafn drwy'r gwead agored.

Bydd addurniadau Christine bob amser yn ymgysylltu â fframwaith y darnau, ac er gwaetha'r galluoedd cynrychioladol rhugl a welir yn y teils, ni cheir addurno darluniadol a ffigwraeth uniongyrchol yn ei darnau 3-dimensiwn. Gydag un eithriad amlwg - fforiad annodwediadol i anthropomorffed a welir mewn sawl un o'r Llwyau, sy'n cynnwys ffurfliau amgaeedig, wedi'u gwasg-foldio mewn clai coch gydag amlinelliad o ffigwr torchog wedi'i dorri i mewn iddynt. Wedi'u cerfio, eu gloywi, a'u mwg-danio, mae'r creiddiau brown-ddu yma yn edrych yn ddigon niwtral pan fyddant yn górwedd yn y Llwyau, ond, yn ddigon addas, ni ddatgelir eu hagweddau dynol heb eu cymryd allan o'u crudiau a'u trafod. Gellir, yn ddigon teg, eu dehongli fel mynegiant isymwybodol o brofiad cyntaf Christine fel mam. Ac nid cyd-ddigwyddiad yn unig mo'rffaith mai "crudiau" a elwir ar y cynwysydion allanol.

Yn unol â'r gofyn cyfadferol a geir yng ngwaith Christine, esblyodd *cyfres y Llwyau a Chrudiau* yn ddarnau a chanddynt gysylltiadau gwahanol iawn. Erbyn hyn fe'u gelwir yn "Llwyau Ysbrydion Amddifad" ac mae'r plisgyn dwfn amddiffynol wedi diflannu ac mae'r adrannau allanol sydd wedi'u tyllu wedi'u hymestyn yn arciau hirion, cordeddog. Heb fod ar gilbrennau bellach, safant ar gynffonau sy'n tapro ac mae'r ffiligri a gafwyd mewn gwaith cynharach wedi ildio i geinciau llinol mwy hylifol. Dwysheir y teimlad deinamig yn y darnau yma gan y ffurfliau amgaeedig - weithiau yn ffigyrâu cryno megis crysalis, weithiau yn siapiau hirgrwn, llyfn. Bydd y rhain yn creu canolbwyt llonydd y bydd yr adran allanol yn llifo ohono fel dŵr neu fel haig o bysgod bach - argraff sy'n cael ei huchafu gan siâp y gweadau a sglein y gwydro.

Mewn gwrtthyferbyniad llwyr i'r cerhyntau clai gosgeiddig yma, mae i'r darnau *Craidd* diweddar ansawdd llosg, brau a golwg debyg i gaets arnynt.

Fe'u codir ar haenau o glai wedi'u delltio, ac maent yn cynnwys disgiau gwelw, bregus yng nghanol y rhwydwaith tynn. Fel arfer, bwriad Christine yw cymodi elfennau gwrtthyferbyniol ac i ddod ag elfennau cyfannol at ei gilydd er mwyn creu teimlad o gydbwyssedd. Y pwyslais cyfartal a roddir i agweddau mewnol ac allanol sy'n datgelu ystyr ei darnau yn ei chyfarwydd, ac fel y mae Christine ei hun wedi nodi, thema barhaol ei gwaith yw "amgau a datguddio."

Stephanie Brown

Arddangosfa yng Nghanolfan y Celfyddydau Aberystwyth,
26 Chwefror - 9 Ebrill 1994

