



C E R A M I C
S E R I E S ●

ian gregory



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

September 1996
number 79

A visit to Ian Gregory's house in deepest Dorset immediately answers some of the questions posed by his current work. Ansty is little more than a hamlet close to the famous eighteenth century village of Milton Abbas. A cluster of rose covered houses and cottages centred on The Fox, a surprisingly large and bustling pub famous in Dorset for an enormous collection of Toby Jugs which line numerous shelves in the bar. Ian Gregory lives in an eighteenth century thatched cottage which boasts a paradise for a garden. Two large ponds fed by a deep and lazy stream are surrounded by a jungle of trees, shrubs and plants in splendid ordered disorder. On the lawns chickens and ducks peck and preen disturbed in their daily routine by the occasional token chase from Gert the family boxer. Jock the black Scottish terrier is now too old to chase but sits and watches his younger partner with the critical eye of a veteran. There is little wonder then that with his glass fronted workshop set amongst this quintessential English idyll Ian has gravitated toward the animal kingdom as the outlet for his consummate modelling skills.

Ian Gregory came to ceramics in the 1960's as a refugee from show business. At the end of the fifties and in the early sixties he had a successful career as a T.V. and film actor even making forays into the pop charts under the guidance of legendary producer Joe Meek. Disenchantment with 'the business' and a desire to live with his six children in the country led him to Dorset and to Crumble Cottage.

During the seventies Gregory became well known as a saltglazer making a range of domestic tableware and miniature furniture in a medium little used by studio potters at that time. The miniature furniture certainly struck a chord with the buying public and many hundreds of pieces were made. Perhaps though, the most memorable works of that period are his large architectural pieces. Tall Victorian buildings often incorporating a shop front packed with produce climbed onward and upward each storey cleverly modelled in architectural detail. I remember a particularly tall example in the Cranks restaurant at Dartington measuring a full seven feet high! His 200 ceramic preview invitations in the form of a shop front, enticing collectors to an exhibition of Martin brothers pots at the Richard Dennis Gallery in Kensington Church Street, have become collectors' pieces in their own right.

For as long as potters all over the world have fashioned clay into vessels they have also made both animal and human representations from the same clay. Indeed the oldest known ceramic objects are the strangely elegant pear shaped effigies of the female human form thought to be fertility pieces. Throughout the millennia clay figures have been imbued with important cultural and religious meaning, others were and still are made purely as ornaments.

Figurative sculptors presently abound in the contemporary ceramic scene. In Wales we have fine makers working in this field. Anna and Sarah Noel produce wonderfully narrative pieces and Catrin Howell's dogs exhibit the raw, undomesticated even savage side to the canine character. William Newland, Susan Halls, Rosa Nguyen, Kerry Jameson and Pamela Leung all produce figurative and particularly animal based work of inspirational quality. Each of these people, in common with Ian Gregory, is engaged in a constant search for that elusive quality that captures the essence of the character of a particular subject without recourse to slavish representation or over sentimentality. There is a fine line to be drawn between that which is finely observed and sensitively modelled with economy of line and that which is mere representation, a form of three dimensional photograph that often verges on the kitsch.

In writing of his own work Ian quotes Josef Skvorecky.

"Art captures the essence which reality sometimes more sometimes less, spreads thin. In art, the essence presents itself as an undiluted, powerful possibility and because art incarnates what is possible it can and does mean anything to the viewer."

Ian Gregory's animals can be savage, hounds with exaggerated limbs crouch in aggressive pose, bared teeth behind a curled lip and that slightly sideways look that shows the whites of their eye announce that you are about to be attacked. Others have that head down, tail in, sneaky 'I'm coming round behind you to nip your arse' look.

Fighting cocks frozen in that earnest dance of death, feet and claws up ready to defend or to cut an opponent open with a downward slash. They can be frightening and disturbing.

They can also be comedic. Fat lazy pigs and sleeping dogs are cleverly depicted. Ample folds of flabby flesh apparently quickly and easily achieved with clay being allowed to be clay, no pre formed moulded carcasses here!

Perhaps the most alarming, disarming even shocking depictions are the human figures sometimes modelled in isolation and other times in conjunction with the animals. Grotesque humanoids lifted from your worst nightmare, genitals dangling and arms akimbo strike poses of unlikely elegance and poetic sensitivity relying on the trickery of weight and visual counter balance that clay allows us so easily to achieve for their gravity defying composition. The lightness of stance and almost ballet like poise of many of these characters especially when posed with a small bird or animal seem very much at odds with the leering ugliness of the faces. Red lipped tarts with painted pink nipples sit in inviting pose each one modelled with absolute minimum attention to detail and yet each with its own personality. The sexual overtones are obvious. I'm sure though the intention is not to shock. Gregory takes much of his imagery from the pages of mythology especially where there is an obvious man and animal relationship to explore. He chooses clay and the "battlefield of the elements of earth, fire and water" as his medium to illustrate where others may have chosen paper and paint. Gregory is merely allowing us the privilege to have sight of his own personal vision of scenes conjured from whatever sources that intrigue and amuse him.

Gregory is a inveterate experimenter always ready to try a new method of construction or glazing combination or firing technique. Recently he has started to create much larger forms using 'paper' clay. He builds up the large dogs layer by layer working from a steel 'skeleton' that remains inside the dog during and after the raku type firing. He builds and dismantles kilns quicker than anyone I have known and will often devise a 'kiln' to suit a single piece of work. His life size figures for example had their own personal kiln built around them. Another recent development is the post firing reduction of a copper slip that yields rich, deep colours of blue, pink, red and violet and is used to great effect on some of the more light hearted animal pieces. The Raku fire and the post firing reduction of the white glaze to enhance the crackle and blacken the unglazed areas is well suited to the modelled work. The selective omission of glaze around the face of an animal, for instance, heightens the dramatic effect and requires experience, insight and the ability to envisage the finished effect beforehand.

The reintroduction of saltglaze has in one sense brought Ian Gregory full circle. It was with this capricious fire that Gregory made his name as a potter. Now the salting technique that leaves no mark hidden from its pervasive presence serves to enliven the surfaces of his animals, bringing them to life in a way that only saltglaze can.

For the future I know that there are plans for life size horses and riders, the paper clay providing the means to construct and fire massive pieces. It will be fascinating to watch where Ian Gregory's thirst for new techniques of construction and expression of ideas will lead him.

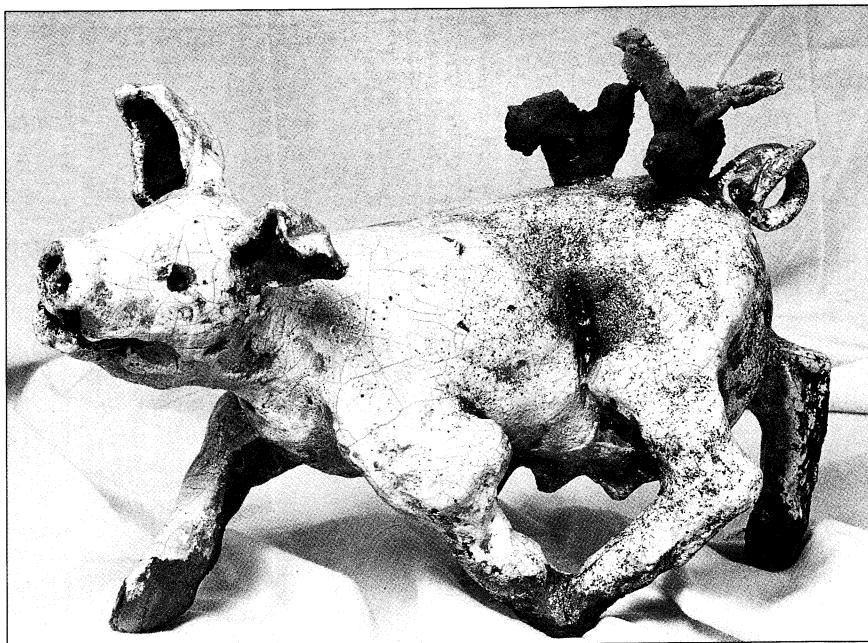
Phil Rogers 1996



Supported by the Craft Department, Arts Council of Wales

© Canolfan y Celfyddydau Aberystwyth Arts Centre

C Y F R E S ●
G E R A M E G



ian gregory

Petaech yn ymweld â chartref a gweithdy Ian Gregory ym mherfeddion Dorset, ni fyddch yn hir cyn canfod atebion i rai o'r cwestiynau a godir gan ei waith diweddar. Lle bychan iawn yw Ansty, gerllaw pentref enwog Milton Abbas a ddatblygydd yn ystod y 18fed ganrif. Ynghanol clwstwr o dai a bythynnod sydd â rhosod yn dringo drostynt saif tafarn y Fox, sy'n fwy ac yn brysurach na'r disgwy, ac yn enwog drwy'r sir am y casgliad enfawr o jygiau tobi sy'n llenwi'r silffoedd niferus yn y bar. Triga Ian Gregory mewn tyd yngl o goed, llwyni a phlanhigion sy'n tyfu mewn anhrefn trefnus rhyfeddol. Ar y glaswellt gwelir ier a hwyaid yn pigo ac yn pincio ac yn cael ambell i gwrs gan Gert, ci bocser y teulu, ddim ond i'w cadw yn eu lle! Mae Jock, y daeargi Sgotaidd du, yn rhy hen i gwrs ond eistedda gan gadw llygad doeth a beirniadol ar ei bartner iau. Ag yntau'n gweld yr olygfa hon, sydd fel darlun delfrydol o gefn gwlad Lloegr, ddrwy ffenest fawr ei weithdy bob dydd, does dim rhyfedd fod gwaith modelu crefftus Ian yn cael ei ysbrydoli gan fyd yr anifeiliaid.

Trodd Ian Gregory at gerameg yn y 60au ar ôl cael llond bola ar y diwydiant adloniant. Ddiwedd y pumdegau a dechrau'r chwedegau bu'n actor llwyddiannus ym myd ffilm a theledu a bu gando recordiau yn y siartiau pop o dan law'r cynhyrchydd enwog Joe Meek. Ond oherwydd iddo gael ei ddadfrithio gan y busnes adloniant ag iddo ddymuno byw yn y wlad gyda'i chwe phlentyn, symudodd i Crumble Cottage ynghanol Dorset.

Yn y saithdegau, enillodd Gregory ei blwyf drwy wneud nwyddau gwydredd-halen. Gwnâi lestri a dodrefn bychain mewn dull oedd yn anarferol i crochenyddion stiwdio ar y pryd. Roedd prynwyr wrth eu bodd â'r dodrefn bychain ac fe wnaed cannoedd lawer o ddarnau. Ond efallai mai gwaith mwyaf cofiadwy'r cyfnod hwnnw yw ei ddarnau pensaerniol mawr. Lluniai adeiladau Fictoraidd tal, gyda siop â llond lle o nwyddau o'i blaen ar y llawr isaf yn aml, a'r lloriau uchaf niferus wedi'u modelu'n fanwl ac yn gywir. Rwy'n cofio un engraifft ym mwtyr Cranks yn Dartington a oedd yn saith troedfedd o uchder! Mae'r 200 o wahoddiadau cerameg a luniodd ar ffurf wyneb siop ar gyfer rhag-ddangosiad o botiau'r brodyr Martin yn Oriel Richard Dennis yn Kensington Church Street yn cael eu hel gan gasglwyr yn eu rhinwedd eu hunain erbyn hyn.

Cyhyd ag y bu crochenyddion ym mhedwar ban byd yn llunio llestri clai, buont hefyd yn defnyddio'r clai i wneud ffurfiâu anifeiliaid a phobl. Yn wir, modelau siâp gellyg o gyrrf menywod yw'r darnau crochenwaith hynaf y gwyddom amdanynt a'r gred yw mai darnau ffrwythlondeb ydynt. Ar hyd y canrifoedd, bu ystyron diwylliannol a chrefyddol pwysig i rai ffigurau clai a gwerth addurniadol pur i eraill.

Ceir llu o gerflunwyr crochenwaith ffiguraidd ar hyn o bryd gyda rhai pobl yn gwneud gwaith cywrain iawn yng Nghymru. Mae Anna a Sarah Noel yn llunio darnau storiol hyfryd ac mae cŵn Catrin Howells yn dangos ochr wyllt a ffyrnid y ci. Mae William Newland, Susan Halls, Rosa Guyan, Kerry Jameson a Pamela Leung oll yn cynhyrchu darnau ffiguraidd ysbrydoledig sydd, yn aml, wedi'u seilio ar anifeiliaid. Mae pob un ohonynt, fel Ian Gregory, yn chwilio'n barhaus am y gynnieddf annifniadwy honno sy'n dal hanfod cymeriad heb ei bortreadu'n slafaidd na mynd yn or-sentimental. Ceir gwahaniaeth main rhwng darn sy'n gynnyrch sylwi manwl a modelu sensitif a chynnwl, a darn sy'n ddim ond portread moel, yn fath o ffordograff tri dimensiwn, di-ddim.

Wrth ysgrifennu am ei waith ei hun, mae Ian yn dyfynnu Josef Skvorecky,

"Mae celfyddyd yn dal yr hanfod sy'n cael ei daenu'n fwy neu'n llai tenau gan fywyd go iawn. Mewn celfyddyd, mae'r hanfod yn bosiblwydd cryf, grymus a chan fod celfyddyd yn ymgorffori'r hyn sy'n bosibl, gall gyfleo unrhyw beth i'r gwylwr".

Gall anifeiliaid Ian Gregory fod yn ffyrnid. Ceir cŵn â choesau annaturiol o fawr mewn ystum ymosodol. Ysgyrnygant eu dannedd gan roi cilwg sy'n dangos gwyn eu llygaid gan beri iddynt edrych fel pe baent am ymosod arnoch. Mae eraill â'u pen i lawr a'u cynffon yn eu gafl gan roi iddynt ryw olwg slei sy'n awgrymu, "Dw i'n dod rownd i frathu dy din di".

Ceir modelau o geiliogod cwerylgar, milain â'u traed a'u crafangau yn yr awyr yn barod i'w hamddiffyn eu hunain neu ymosod ar eu gwrrthwynebydd hyd at waed. Gallant beri dychryn a rhyw deimlaid anesmwyth.

Ceir rhai modelau digri hefyd. Caiff moch tewion, diog a chŵn cysglyd eu portreadu'n grefftus. Rhoddir yr argraff ei bod yn hawdd llunio'r torchau o gnawd blonegog drwy adael i'r clai fod yn glai - 'fu'r un mowld ar y cyfyl yma!

Efallai mai'r portreadau mwyaf dychrynllyd a brawychus yw'r ffigurau o bobl - weithiau ar eu pen eu hunain ac weithiau gyda'r anifeiliaid. Gwelir ffurfiau dynol erchyll, a godwyd o'ch hunllef fwyaf arswyddus, â'u horganau rhywiol yn hongian, eu dwylo ar eu cluniau a'u penelinoedd ar led. Er gwaethaf yr ystumiau brawychus, mae rhywbeth yn gain ac yn sensitif amdanyst a safant ar eu traed, fel pe'n herio disgyrchiant, gan fod clai'n ein galluogi i chwarae triciau â phwysau a gwrrh-bwysau gweledol. Mae llawer o'r cymeriadau hyn yn ysgafndroed, bron fel dawnsiwr bale, yn enwedig pan fydd aderyn neu anifail bychan gyda nhw, ac mae hynny'n taro'n rhyfedd gan fod eu hwynebau mor hyll a mileinig. Gwelir puteiniaid mingoch â'u tethi wedi'u paentio'n binc yn eistedd yn ddengar. Ychydig iawn o sylw a roddir i fanylion wrth eu llunio ond mae i bob un ei phersonoliaeth ei hunan a'i stori i'w hadrodd.

Mae'r awgrymiadau rhywiol yn amlwg ond rwy'n siwr nad rhoi sioc yw'r bwriad. Daw llawer o ddelweddau Gregory o fyd chwedloniaeth, yn enwedig lle ceir perthynas amlwg i'w harchwilio rhwng dyn ac anifail.

Clai a "maes brwydr yr elfennau - daear, tân a dŵr" yw ei ddewis gyfrwng ef tra bo eraill yn dewis papur a phaent. Yr hyn a wna Gregory yw caniatáu i ni gael cip ar ei weledigaeth bersonol ef o olygfeydd a ysbyrydol gan ffynonellau sy'n cosi ei chwilfrydedd ac yn peri difyrrwch iddo.

Mae Gregory wrth ei fod yn arbrofi ac yn rhoi cynnig ar ddulliau newydd o adeiladu, gwydro neu grasu. Yn ddiweddar, dechreuodd greu ffurfiau sy'n llawer mwy o faint gan ddefnyddio clai 'papur'. Mae'n llunio'r cŵn mawr haen wrth haen gan ddefnyddio 'sgerbwld' dur a adewir y tu mewn i'r cŵn yn ystod y crasu "racw" ac ar ôl hynny. Gall adeiladu odynnau a'u tynnu i lawr yn gyflymach na neb arall y gwn i amdanyst ac, yn aml, mae'n llunio 'odyn' yn arbennig ar gyfer un darn o waith. Er enghraifft, adeiladodd eu hodyn personol eu hunain o gwmpas ei ffigurau maint llawn. Yn ddiweddar, hefyd, bu'n defnyddio slipan copr ar rai darnau. Tynnir yr ocsigen ohono gan wres yr odyn ac mae hyn yn esgor ar liwiau glas, pinc, coch a phorffor dwfn a chyfoethog sy'n effeithiol iawn ar rai o'r portreadau digrif o anifeiliaid. Mae'r modelau'n edrych yn dda o ganlyniad i'r crasu racw a'r ffaith fod gwres yr odyn yn tynnu'r oscigen o'r gwydredd gwyn gan wneud y mân gracian'n fwy amlwg a duo'r rhannau na chafodd eu gwydro. Weithiau, dewisa beidio â gwydro'r rhan o

gwmpas wyneb anifail, er enghraifft, er mwyn ei wneud yn fwy dramatig. Mae hyn yn galw am brofiad, gweledigaeth a'r gallu i ragweld yr effaith derfynol ymlaen llaw.

Wrth ail-ddechrau defnyddio gwydredd-halen, daeth Ian Gregory o gwmpas mewn cylch cyflawn. Dyma sut y gwnaeth enw iddo'i hun ym maes crochenwaith ac yn awr mae'r dechneg halenu hollbresennol na all yr un marc ei osgoi yn dod â bywyd i arwynebedd ei anifeiliaid yn ei ffordd unigryw ei hun.

Gwn fod ganddo gynlluniau ar y gweill i lunio ceffylau a marchogion maint llawn gan ddefnyddio'r clai papur i greu a chrasu'r darnau enfawr. Bydd yn hynod ddiddorol gweld i ble y caiff Ian Gregory ei arwain gan ei awydd angerddol i arbrofi â thechnegau adeiladu newydd a dulliau newydd o fynegi syniadau.

Phil Rogers 1996.

