

ABERYSTWYTH ARTS CENTRE

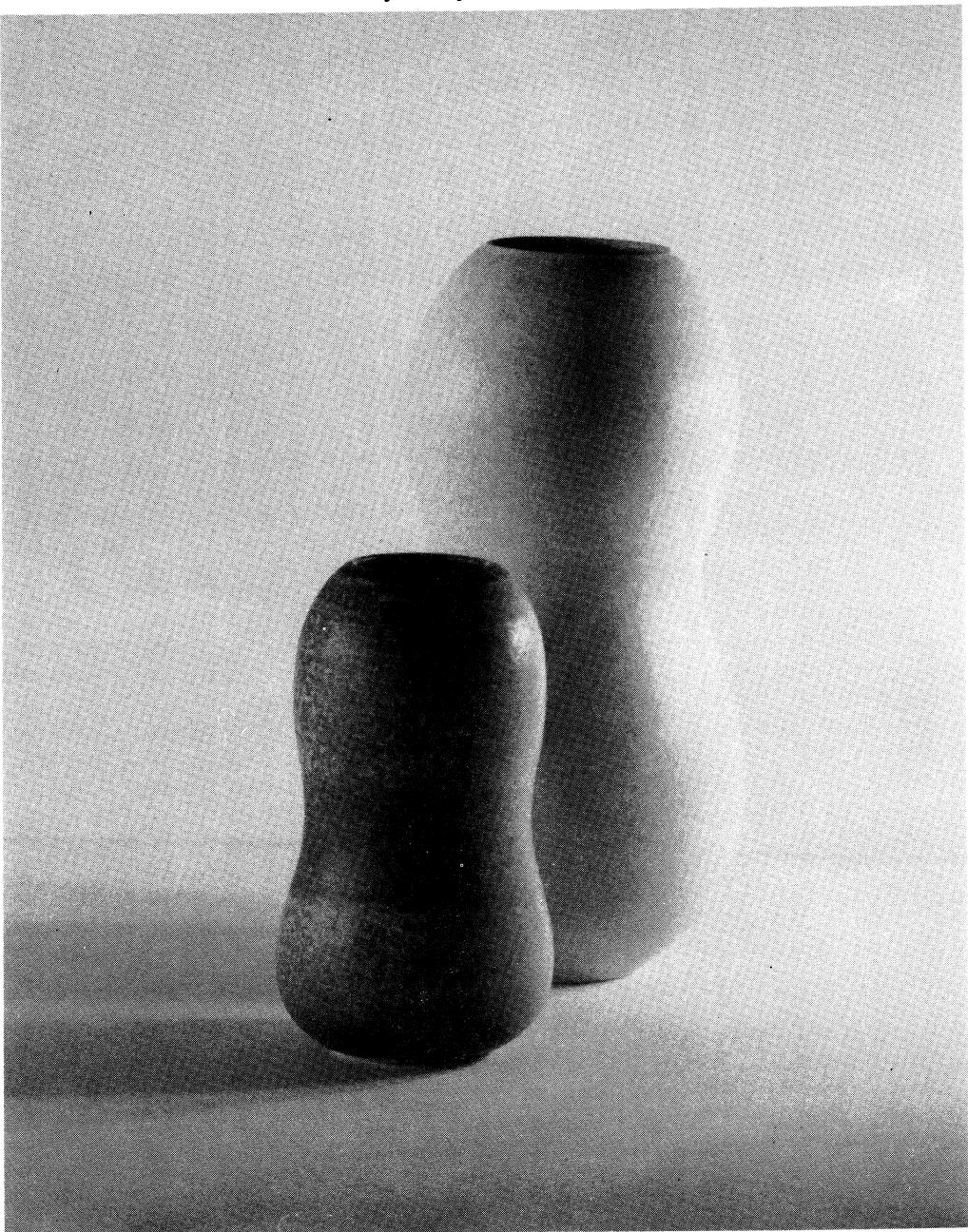
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CERAMIC SERIES

EILEEN LEWENSTEIN

by Tanya Harrod



Just after the war when rationing was still in effect and daily life seemed relentlessly drab Eileen Lewenstein and Brigitta Appleby started Briglin Pottery. They had first met at an occasional class at the Central School of Art and both had worked with potter Donald Mills with Eileen as his co-partner. In 1948, with all the confidence and recklessness of youth, Eileen and Brigitta decided to go it alone. Today Briglin is less well known than it should be, but its wares are well documented in the Studio Yearbook of Decorative Art from 1957 onwards. The sequence of photographs reveal that here was an assured alternative to the Oriental aesthetic espoused by Bernard Leach and his rapidly expanding band of followers. Briglin's functional earthenware and handsome vases took design inspiration from Scandinavia add also from the work of two urban emigre potters, Hans Coper and Lucie Rie.



From the start Briglin operated as a profitable efficient business during a period in which numerous small potteries were set up with post-war optimism, flourished for a while and then failed. Astonishingly Briglin was to continue as a successful pottery for a further 40 years, giving employment to scores of young potters. Eileen remembers the early years at Briglin with intense pleasure but in 1958 she left to work on her own. She was partly inspired by the idiosyncratic work of Catherine Yarrow, a self taught creator of mysterious totemic forms. Eileen's friendship with Catherine Yarrow encouraged her growing desire to stop designing and making functional pottery and instead to explore its sculptural possibilities. It was a surprising and bold step to take.

For the next nine years Eileen taught at Hornsey School of Art and took to working in stoneware-handbuilding, throwing and altering, constructing and slab-building screens and from the early 70s creating more delicate pieces in porcelain. It was a sequence of bold abstract forms in a grid framework shown at the Eva Hauser Gallery in 1966 that led to a large-scale architectural commission for the Covent of Our Lady of Sion in West London. This handsome example of public art demonstrates that makers and architects can work fruitfully together — and that a determined agnostic can sensitively interpret an ecclesiastical brief.

Of course in an ideal world this should have been the first of many such commissions but the lack of a percent-for-art policy in Britain has meant that only during the past few years has a vocal policy for art & architecture begun to make itself felt. Ruth Duckworth, a potter with whom Eileen Lewenstein has a good deal in common aesthetically, left for the United States and remained there just because of this lack of architectural opportunity. But Eileen has always had a strong sense of duty about her craft and art and this has been channelled, as it turns out, in other ways.

She was a founder member of the Craftsmen Potters' Association and in 1970, together with Emmanuel Cooper, she launched *Ceramic Review* which for the past twenty years has provided a unique documentation of the ceramics scene both in Britain and worldwide. These days *Ceramic Review* is a handsomely produced glossy magazine but it has not lost sight of its original intention — to publish articles by and for potters (as well as writing by scholars, polemicists and collectors). The responsibility of running *Ceramic Review* inevitably had its effect on Eileen's output. Without the demands of editorship she would have undoubtedly made more pots and her work would have reached a wider audience.

In 1976 Eileen moved out of London to Hove. Her studio there leads out onto the beach and a windswept garden of sea kale. This new setting both marked a turning point in her work and gave a fresh focus for her natural taste for abstraction. Her regular walks



along the beach (often with camera in hand — she is an excellent photographer) enabled her to assemble a new vocabulary of forms. These celebrate the action of the sea — on the groynes and sea defences and on the flotsam and jetsam thrown up on the beach, subtly altered by the ceaseless motion of the waves.

I am lucky enough to own a stoneware piece that reveals the flexibility and beauty of Eileen's sea inspired imagery. It consists of two thrown but altered and flattened bottles. Each has an irregular profile, one being the mirror image of the other and therefore the two shapes gently interlock. The effect suggests that the two vessels were once joined but subsequently worn apart by the pounding of the waves or some other natural force. This is just one reading of the piece; there is also a tenderer anthropomorphic one. The two pieces suggest honed down figurative sculpture and a memory of Brancusi's *The Kiss* comes floating up — two vessels are transformed into two lovers.

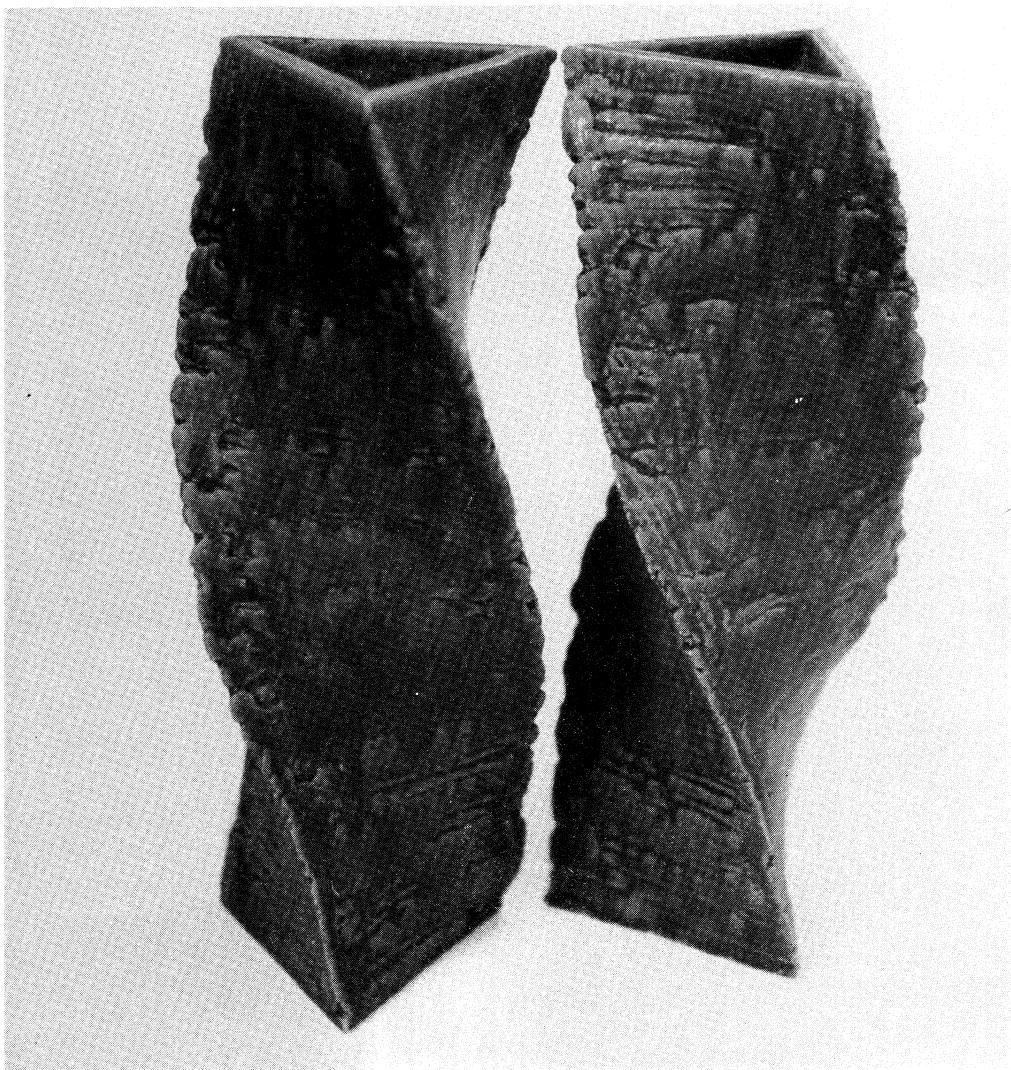
The sea imagery in Eileen's work operates in a host of different ways. There is the grand sequence of press-moulded dishes which carry an abstracted sea landscape and which combine all the translucent freshness of water-colour with the permanence conferred by the firing process. Then there are the tough looking abstract modules that can be arranged in an infinite number of sequences and which are directly based on the great concrete breakwaters that litter the coastline to the west of her house. Above all, the smooth eroded quality of many of her shapes and the pale beauty of her colours evoke the special ambience and bright lightness of the seascape she knows so well.

Eileen Lewenstein espouses a particularly British brand of modernism which is perhaps best exemplified by the paintings, pots, sculptures and objects trouv  collected by Jim Ede at Kettles Yard in Cambridge. Her own home is filled with the fruits of those long walks along the shoreline — pieces of drift wood, pebbles and pieces of transformed plastic and glass. The walls are crowded with paintings, ranging from our own Alfred Wallis to a great range of self-taught non-European artists. Latterly Eileen Lewenstein has been working with renewed energy and commitment and has taken on more exhibitions. New shapes and new effects suggest that this distinguished and experienced potter is about to surprise us again.

GYFRES GERAMEG

EILEEN LEWENSTEIN

gan Tanya Harrod



Yn fuan ar ôl y rhyfel pan oedd dogni'n dal mewn gryn a bywyd beunyddiol yn ymddangos yn greulon o Iwydaidd, rhoddodd Eileen Lewenstein a Brigitta Appleby gychwyn ar Grochendy Briglin. Roeddent wedi cyfarfod gyntaf mewn dosbarth achlysuol yn yr Ysgol Gelf Ganolog ac roedd y ddwy wedi gweithio gyda'r crochenydd Donald Mills, gydag Eileen yn gyd-bartner iddo. Ym 1948, yn llawn hyder a rhyfyg ieuengtid, penderfynodd Eileen a Brigitta ymrddi iddi ar eu pennau eu hunain. Heddiw nid yw Briglin mor adnabyddus ag y dylai fod, ond mae'r cynnrych wedi ei gofnodi'n drwyadl ym Mlwyddlyfr Stiwdio Celfyddyd Gyfoes o 1957 ymlaen. Mae'r dilyniant o ffotograffau'n dangos bod dewis arall pendant yn hytrach na'r estheteg Ddwyreiniol a oedd yn cael ei phledio gan Bernard Leach a'i griw cynyddol o ddilynwyr. O wledydd Scandinavia y deuai'r ysbrydoliaeth y tu ôl i gynllun llestri pridd defnyddiol a ffiolau hardd Briglin, yn ogystal ag o waith dau grochenydd trefol o ymfudwyr, Hans Coper a Lucie Rie.

O'r cychwyn roedd Briglin yn gweithredu fel busnes proffidiol, effeithiol mewn cyfnod pan sefydlwyd lliaws o grochendai bychain yn optimistaeth y cyfnod wedi'r rhyfel, - crochendai a fu'n llewyrchus am gyfnod ac yna a aeth i'r wal. Yn rhyfeddol aeth Briglin rhagddo i fod yn grochendy llwyddiannus am ddeugain mlynedd gan roi gwaith i ugeiniau o grochenyddion ifainc. Mae Eileen yn cofio'r blynnyddoedd cynnar yn Briglin gyda chryn bleser, ond ym 1958 fe adawodd hi er mwyn cael gweithio ar ei phen ei hun. Cafodd ei hysbrydoli'n rhannol gan waith hynod Catherine Yarrow, gwraig hunan

ddysgedig a oedd yn llunio ffuriau totemig llawn dirgelwch. Anogwyd awydd cynyddol Eileen i roi'r gorau i gynllunio a chreu llestri defnyddiol ac i archwilio posibiliadau cerfluniol crochenwaith, gan ei chyfeillgarwch â Catherine Yarrow. Roedd yn gam hynod o anturus i fentro arno.



Am y naw mlynedd nesaf bu Eileen yn dysgu yn Ysgol Gelf Hornsey a dechreuodd weithio mewn crochenwaith caled - gan lunio â llaw, llunio ar droell, newid a llunio sgriniau gyda thafellau clai, ac o ddechrau'r saithdegau llunio eitemau mwy cain mewn porslen. Dilyniant o ffuriau mawr haniaethol mewn fframwaith grid a ddangoswyd yn Oriel Eva Hauser ym 1966 a arweiniodd at gomisiwn pensaerniol ar raddfa fawr ar gyfer Convent of Our Lady of Sion yng ngorllewin Llundain. Mae'r enghraifft hardd hon o gelfyddyd gyhoeddus yn dangos y gall gwneuthurwyr a phenseiri gydweithio'n gynhyrchiol - ac y gall anffyddiwr rhonc ddehongli briff eglwysig gyda sensitifrydd.

Mewn byd delfrydol, wrth gwrs, byddai hwn wedi bod y cyntaf o amryw gomisiynau tebyg ond mae diffyg polisi canran ar gyfer celf ym Mhrydain wedi golygu mai dim ond yn ystod yr ychydig flynyddoedd diweddaraf y mae polisi hyglyw o blaid celf a phensaerniaeth wedi tynnu sylw ato ei hun. Gadawodd Ruth Duckworth, crochenydd y mae llawer yn gyffredin yn esthetig rhyngddi hi ac Eileen Lewenstein, a symud i'r Unol Daleithiau, ac mae hi wedi aros yno oherwydd y diffyg cyfle pensaerniol hwn. Ond mae Eileen bob amser wedi meddu ar synnwyr cryf o ddyletswydd tuag at ei chreffft a'i chelf ac fel, mae pethau wedi digwydd, mae hynny wedi ei sianelu i gyfeiriadau eraill.

Roedd hi'n un o sylfaenwyr Cymdeithas y Crefftwwr Grochenyddion ac ym 1970, ynghyd ag Emmanuel Cooper, rhoddodd gychwyn ar y Ceramic Review sydd wedi darparu cofnod unigryw o'r byd ceramig ym Mhrydain a thrwy'r byd yn ystod yr ugain mlynedd diwethaf. Erbyn hyn mae'r Ceramic Review yn gylchgrawn sydd wedi ei gynhyrchu'n hardd gyda sglein arno ond nid yw wedi colli golwg ar ei ddiben gwreiddiol sef cyhoeddi erthyglau gan ac ar gyfer crochenyddion (yn ogystal â chyfraniadau gan ysgolheigion, dadleuwyr a chasglwyr). Yn anocheladwy cafodd y cyfrifoldeb o redeg Ceramic Review effaith ar faint cynyrrch Eileen. Heb y galwadau golygyddol mae'n ddiamau y byddai wedi llunio rhagor o waith ac y byddai ei gwaith wedi cyrraedd cynulleidfa eangach.

Ym 1976 symudodd Eileen allan o Lundain i Hove. Mae ei stiwdio yno yn arwain i'r traeth ac i ardd wyntog sy'n llawn morfresych. Bu'r lleoliad hwn yn drobwyt yn ei gwaith a rhoddodd ganolbwyt newydd i'w hymdeimlad naturiol tuag at batrymau haniaethol. Roedd crwydro'r traeth yn rheolaidd (yn aml gyda chamera yn ei llaw - mae hi'n fotograffydd campus) yn ei galluogi i ymgynnull geirfa newydd o ffuriau. Mae'r rhain yn dathlu effeithiau'r môr - ar y llwydni ac ar y môr gloddiau ac ar y broc môr ar y traeth, sy'n cael eu newid yn gynnill gan symud dibaid y tonnau.

Rydw i'n ddigon ffodus i fod yn berchen eitem o grochenwaith caled sy'n dangos hyblygrwydd a phrydferthwch delweddau Eileen a ysbdrydolwyd gan y môr. Mae'n cynnwys dwy botel a luniwyd ar droell ac a newidiwyd a'u gwneud yn fflat. Mae amlinell afreolaidd i'r ddwy ac mae'r naill yn adlewyrchu'r llall gan beri i'r ddaau ffurf gyd-asio'n



esmywyth. Mae'r effaith yn awgrymu i'r ddau lestr fod unwaith yn un, ond iddynt gael eu gwahanu'n raddol gan guro'r tonnau neu gan ryw rym naturiol arall. Dim ond un dehongliad o'r gwaith yw hwn, gellir hefyd gael un anthropomorffig tynerach. Mae'r ddau ddarn yn awgrymu cerflun ffigurol wedi ei hogi'n llyfn a daw adlais o'r Cusan gan Branousi i'r amlwg - mae dau lestr yn cael eu trawsffurfio'n gariadon.

Mae delweddaeth y môr yng ngwaith Eileen yn gweithredu mewn lliaws o ffyrdd gwahanol. Dyna'r dilyniant gwych o ddysglau wedi eu gwasg-fowldio sy'n cynnwys môr-luniau haniaethol ac sy'n cyfuno holl dryloywedd iraidd dyfrliw a'r sefydlogrwydd parhaol sy'n cael ei greu gan y broses o danio. Yna ceir y modwlau haniaethol gwydh eu golwg y gellir eu trefnu mewn amrywiaeth ddiderfyn o ddilyniannau ac sydd wedi eu seilio'n uniongyrchol ar y morwaliau conrid mawr sy'n britho'r arfordir i'r gorllewin o'i chartref. Ond yn bennaf oll mae ansawdd llyfn treuliedig llawer o'i ffurfliau a phrydferthwch gwelw ei lliwiau yn dwyn i gof awyrgylch arbennig ac ysgafnader goleuni'r morlun y mae hi mor gyfarwydd ag ef.

Mae Eileen Lewenstein yn cefnogi dull arbennig Brydeinig o foderniaeth sy'n cael ei ddangos orau yn y peintiadau, potiau, cerfluniau ac objets trouv a gesglir gan Jim Ede yn Kettles Yard yng Nghaer-grawnt. Mae ei chartef hi'n llawn o bethau y daeth ar eu traws yn ystod ei chrwydriadau ar hyd y traeth - darnau o bren a gariwyd gan y llif, cerrig mân a thameidiau o wydr a phlastig wedi eu trwsffurfio. Mae'r muriau'n orlawn o beintiadau, yn ÔÔ amrywio o waith Alfred Wallis o Brydain hyd at ystod eang o waith artistiaid hunan ddysgedig o'r tu allan i Ewrop. Yn ddiweddar bu Eileen Lewenstein yn gweithio gydag ymroddiad ac egni newydd ac mae hi wedi ymgymryd â rhagor o arddangosfeydd. Mae ffurfliau newydd ac effeithiau newydd yn awgrymu bod y grochenyddes nodedig a phrofiadol hon ar fin ein rhyfeddu o'r newydd.