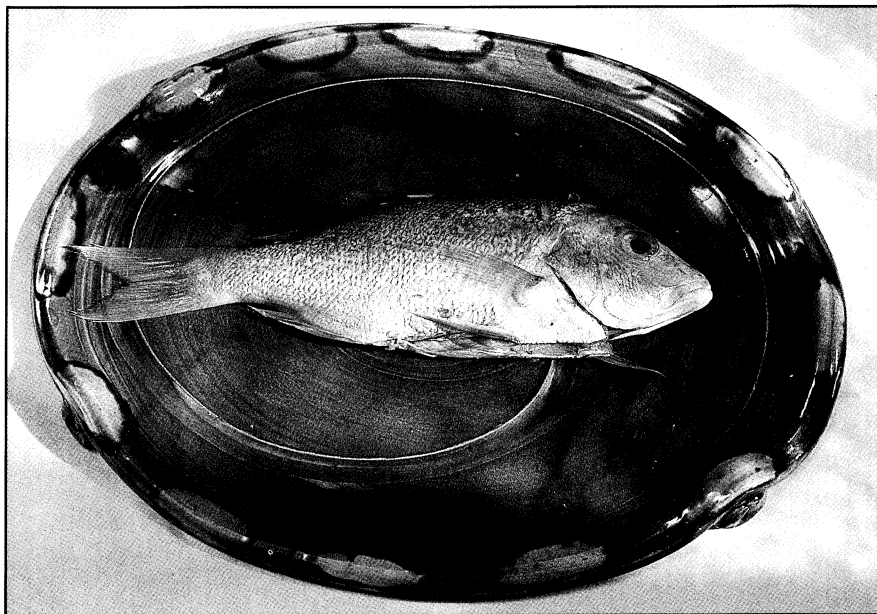


C E R A M I C

S E R I E S ●



fenella mallalieu

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Fenella Mallalieu was already in her mid twenties when she first had a go on a potters wheel and decided it was fun. Since that time she has never really looked back, developing a reputation for her exuberant, well crafted earthenware, functional and eminently usable, but also a clear visual enrichment of the homes it lives in.

Born in London in 1956, Fenella's background was artistic, but the pursuit of pottery was never considered. Instead she became a writer on antiques, involved in research and working for a newspaper, before going freelance. Her primary interest lay with pictures, and it was only in 1982, when visiting Chelsea Pottery and playing around on the wheel that she became enthused with clay. She returned later to make 'more mud pies' on her free afternoons, and taught herself some of the rudiments of throwing.

She then joined Caphne Carnegie's adult classes in Sloane Avenue, developing her skills and beginning to look at the work of other potters and reading what she could. The example of Carnegie's professionalism as a potter, and then seeing an article by Sutton Taylor about the excitement and alchemy of the ceramic processes were factors which helped to clarify her own growing obsession with clay. Carnegie encouraged her to apply to an art college, and after a short period studying part-time at Goldsmiths, she joined the Harrow Ceramics Course, where she achieved a diploma with merit.

Harrow was an eye-opener. She loved the discipline of the art college and what she describes as the 'ritual slaughter' of tutorials. There was also the obligation to draw. Never considering herself a natural draughtsman, she began to decorate scraps of paper with hot wax and coloured inks, and work on abstract designs for her pots. She bought a camera and began to take photographs of details that excited her curiosity. In pursuit of material for college projects she visited collections, like the Museum of Mankind and studied their ancient pots. Fenella became increasingly drawn to Tang dynasty wares with their bleeding lead glazes, and to the mark making and 'energy of line' on Persian and Hispano-Moresque lustreware. She was also impressed by the general vitality of big chunky peasant pots - in preference to over sophistication, for example that of much work coming out of European factories.

In copying an Hispano-Moresque piece for an historical project at Harrow, she used slip instead of lustre pigments, and this helped to give her more decorating confidence (and later she would try out new designs with slip on large pieces of newspaper - ideal for the ambitious size of many of her pots). As she wrote in a charmingly self-effacing article in Ceramic Review No. 143, her taste in modern ceramic heroes is also diverse. I noticed pots by Wally Keeler, Janice Tchalenko, Takeshi Yasuda and Geoffrey Fuller on the shelves in her home. What seems to unite them all is an essential generosity of material, or a richness of colour and surface - qualities Fenella's own work was to develop.

She set up her present house and studio in Islington on leaving Harrow in 1988. Among other peoples pots around the living space are her own, and they suggested something of her range, wanting to make utilitarian but generous ceramics for the home. She likes to work expansively on the wheel (she prefers to throw rapidly, and resists the refinements of turning - which bores her) and is happiest producing big pots - large bowls and platters, soup tureens and sauceboats. A simply conceived platter with loose abstract decoration might recall the old country pots of Spain, but her tureens and sauceboats have a more Baroque quality about them, redolent of some 18th century ceramics, or the Tang pots she loves. Another contemporary hero is Betty Woodman, and you can see the same plasticity and manipulation of form in these pieces, inspired too by 17th century silverware, but also preserving the 'sopping wet shiny look' she loves about pots as they come off the wheel.

Her forms and patterns have been informed by nature as well as ceramic history. Certain shapes - like those of her small jugs for example - were prompted by the characteristic attitude and gait of certain garden birds observed from the window, and Fenella has looked at the details of leaves and fruit to help obtain the minimal decoration she likes. There is a particular resonance about her glazes and slips which give the most simple shapes character and depth. She marks out her patterns with

terracotta slip on the leatherhard pot and then paints coloured glazes into these areas before applying wax, and then dipping the whole pot into a background glaze. There is a certain translucence achieved through the way in which these glazes bleed into one another - not unlike the watercolour washes Fenella has grown up with and admired. With their vibrant yellows and greens, blues and oranges, these pots are a far cry from the ashes and Tenmoku's of traditional stonewares, but they are not garish. They may have little to do with the temperate colours of Northern Europe, but the countries of the South to which her imagination flies have their own rocky aridity. She loves Greece (where she spent six happy months) for its "parched lands and blue skies", and abstract quality which pervades her best work. The nineties have brought considerable rewards. She won joint third prize at the Ceramic Contemporaries exhibition of the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1993, and the following year the Museum purchased her work for its collection. In 1996 she was made Fellow of the Craft Potters Association, and for two years now she has been lecturing part-time at Camberwell College of Art. Teaching is rewarding, especially as throwers at the college are at a premium, and she can concentrate on individuals in the way that she would like. In 1996 Fenella also began to experiment with new glazes and decorative designs for Poole Pottery in Dorset, at the invitation of David Queensberry, and she now visits the factory on a regular basis - an encouraging initiative at a time when the British Ceramics industry has still to make the most of our studio potters.

And as for her own work? Fenella sees her production as a slowly evolving and developing process. New shapes and glazes are tried ("I love the happy accident of breaking through to another colour"), but Fenella is rigorously self-critical and believes in testing new ideas out through months of use in the house. More recently, in attempting to produce and sell more cheaply, she has begun to make some jiggered domestic ware as part of a "bread and butter line" that will help underpin more expensive wheel-thrown work.

Fenella Mallalieu is a serious and committed potter whose bold and lively work is intended first and foremost for the ceremony of every day living - often large and ambitious pieces that would give any dining table the festive quality she desires. As I write, in the dark days of winter, possessing such work would seem to be more a matter of necessity than choice!



DAVID WHITING

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Roedd Fenella Mallalieu eisoes yng nghanol ei hugeiniau, pan roddodd gynnig ar droell grochenydd am y tro cyntaf, gan ddyfarnu ei bod yn dipyn o hwyl. Ers hynny, prin ei bod wedi edrych yn ôl, gan ennill enw iddi'i hun am ei chrochenwaith allblyg, crefftus, sywddogaethol - llestri sydd, yn ddiamheuol, i fod i gael eu defnyddio, ond sydd hefyd yn harddu mewn ffordd ddigamsyniol y cartrefi lle y ceir hyd iddynt.

Wedi'i geni yn Llundain ym 1956, artistig oedd cefndir Fenella, ond ni fu sôn erioed am fod yn grochenydd. Awdures oedd hi'n wreiddiol a fu'n ysgrifennu ar hen bethau gan wneud gwaith ymchwil a newyddiadura, cyn iddi ddechrau ar ei liwt ei hun. Ei phrif ddiddordeb oedd lluniau, a dim ond ym 1982, wrth ymweld â Chrochendy Chelsea a chael cyfle i chwarae o gwmpas ar y droell y cafodd ei hysbrydoli gan y clai. Dychwelodd yn nes ymlaen i wneud "ychwaneg o stwnsh yn y mwd" ar brynhawniau rhydd, ac fe'i dysgodd iddi'i hun rai elfennau sylfaenol o daflu.

Yna, ymunodd â dosbarthiadau Daphne Carnegie i oedolion yn Sloane Avenue, gan ddatblygu ei sgiliau a chan ddechrau edrych ar waith crochenyddion eraill a darllen pob dim y gallai gael gafael ynddo am y pwnc. Bu agwedd broffesiynol Daphne Carnegie ynghyd â gweld eitem gan Sutton Taylor am gyffro ac alcemi'r prosesau ceramig, yn ffactorau a'i helpodd i grisialu'i hobsesiwn cynyddol gyda chlai. Bu Carnegie yn ei hannog i geisio ymuno â Choleg Celf, ac ar ôl cyfnod byr o astudio rhan-amser yn Goldsmiths, ymunodd â Chwrs Cerameg Harrow, lle yr enillodd ddiploma gyda rhagoriaeth.

Agoriad llygaidd oedd Harrow. Roedd hi wrth ei bodd gyda disgyblaeth coleg celf a'r hyn mae hi'n disgrifio fel "cyflafan ddefodol" y sesiynau tiwtorial. Bu'n rhaid hefyd iddi ddyysgu lluniadu. Er na welai'i hun erioed fel lluniadydd naturiol, dechreuodd addurno sgrepynnau o bapur gyda chwyr poeth ac inciau lliw, gan weithio ar ddylunwaith haniaethol ar gyfer ei photiau. Prynodd gamera, a dechreuodd dynnu lluniau o fanylion oedd yn cynhyrfu'i chwlfrydedd. Ar drywydd deunydd ar gyfer projectau colegol, ymwelodd â chasgliadau megis Amgueddfa Ddlynoliaeth, a bu'n astudio eu potiau hynafol.

Dechreuodd Fenella ymddiddori fwyfwy mewn crochenwaith o linach Tang gyda'u gwydreddau plwm gwaedlyd, a hefyd i wneuthuriaid ac "egni llinol" gwaith gloywedd Persiaidd a Hispano-Moresque. Gwnaeth bywiogrwydd cyffredinol potiau gwerinol solet argraff ddofn arni hefyd - roedd y rhain yn well ganddi na'r soffistigeiddrwydd sydd mor nodweddiadol o lawer iawn o'r gwaith a ddeuai allan o ffatrioedd Ewrop.

Wrth gopïo darn Hispano-Moresque ar gyfer project hanesyddol yn Harrow, defnyddiodd slip yn lle pigmentau gloywedd, a bu hyn yn gymorth i roi mwy o hyder addurno iddi (ac yn nes ymlaen byddai'n ceisio cynlluniau newydd gyda slip ar ddarnau mawr o bapur newydd - yn ddelfrydol ar gyfer maint uchelgeisiol llawer iawn o'i photiau). Fel yr ysgrifennodd mewn erthygl hynod wylaidd yn Ceramic Review Rhif 143, mae ei chwaeth o ran arwyr ceramig cyfoes hefyd yn amrywiol. Sylwais i ar botiau gan Wally Keeler, Janice Tchalenko, Takeshi Yasuda a Geoffrey Fuller ar silffoedd ei chartref. Ymddengys mai'r elfen sy'n eu huno i gyd yw rhyw haelioni hanfodol yn y deunydd, neu gyfoeth y lliw a'r arwynebedd - priodweddau a ddatblygwyd gan waith Fenella ei hun.

Sefydlodd ei thŷ a'i stiwdio presennol yn Islington ar ôl gadael Harrow ym 1988. Ymlith potiau pobl eraill o gwmpas y lle ceir rhai o'i heiddo'i hun, ac roeddent yn awgrymu rhywbeth am ei hamrediad, yn creu cerameg y gellir ei defnyddio, ond haelionus ei naws ar gyfer y cartref. Mae hi'n hoffi gweithio'n eang ar y droell (ac mae'n well ganddi daflu'n sydyn, gan osgoi mireinder troelli - sy'n ei diflasu), ac mae hi wrth ei bodd yn cynhyrchu potiau mawr - powlenni mawr a phlatiau, llestri cawl a sôs. Gall plât ar gynllun syml wedi'i addurno'n haniaethol llac awgrymu hen botiau Sbaen, ond mae gan ei llestri cawl a sôs fwy o naws Baroque yn perthyn iddynt, gan atgoffa rhywun o gerameg y 18fed ganrif neu'r potiau y mae hi mor ffond ohonynt. Arwres gyfoes arall yw Betty Woodman, a gellwch weld yr un plastigrwydd a hyblygrwydd ffurf yn y darnau hyn, wedi'u hysbrydoli gan lestri arian y 17eg ganrif ond hefyd gan gadw'r olwg sgleiniog wleib" y mae hi'n dotio ati wrth iddynt ddod oddi ar y droell.

Mae natur yn ogystal â hanes cerameg wedi dylanwadu ar ei ffurfiau a phatrymau. Mae rhai siapiau - megis ffurfiau ei jiwgiau bychain, er enghraifft, - wedi cael eu hysgogi gan agwedd a cherddeddiad rhai o adar yr ardd y bydd yn eu gwyllo o'i ffenest, ac mae Fenella wedi archwilio manylion dail a ffrywthau i'w helpu cael yr addurno minimal y mae yn ei hoffi. Mae tinc arbennig

i'w gwydreddau a slipiau sy'n rhoi i'r siapiau symlaf gymeriad a dyfnder. Bydd hi'n marcio'i phatrymau â slip terracotta ar y pot llethr caled ac yna'n peintio gwydreddau lliw i'r mannau hyn cyn defnyddio cwyr, gan ddipio'r pot cyfan mewn gwydredd cefndirol. Ceir rhyw dryloywedd arbennig yn y ffordd y bydd y gwydreddau hyn yn gwaedu i'w gilydd - heb fod yn annhebyg i'r golchion y prifiodd Fenella yn eu cwmni ac a fu'n destun edmygedd ganddi. Gyda'u melynion a gwyrddion, gleision ac orenau bywiog, mae'r potiau hyn yn dra gwahanol i ludw a Tenmoku crochenwaith traddodiadol, ond nid ydynt yn llachar. Efallai nad oes a wnelont fawr â lliwiau cymhedrol gogledd Ewrop, ond mae gan wledydd y De, i ble y bydd ei dychymyg yn hedeg o hyd, eu sychder caregog eu hunain. Mae hi wrth ei bodd hefo Gwlad Groeg (lle y treuliodd chwe mis hynod ddedydd) oherwydd eu tiroedd crin a'i hwybren las, a phriodweddau haniaethol sy'n ymdreiddio i'w gwaith gorau.

Mae'r nawdegau wedi dod ag enillion sylweddol iddi. Roedd hi'n gyd-enillydd y drydedd wobr yn arddangosfa'r Cyfoeswyr Cerameg yn yr Amgueddfa Victoria ac Albert ym 1993, a'r flwyddyn ganlynol, prynodd yr Amgueddfa ei gwaith at ei chasgliad. Ym 1996, fe'i hetholwyd yn Gymrodor i Gymdeithas y Crochenyddion Crefft, ac am ddwy flynedd bellach, bu'n darlithio rhan-amser yng Ngholeg Celf Camberwell. Mae hi'n cael blas ar y dysgu, yn enwedig gan fod tafflyddion yn brin yn y Coleg, gall ganolbwyntio ar unigolion mewn ffordd sydd at ei dant. Ym 1996 hefyd, dechreuodd Fenella arbrofi gyda gwydreddau newydd a dyluniadau addurnol ar gyfer Crochendy Poole yn Dorset ar Wahoddiad David Queensberry ac erbyn hyn, bydd yn ymweld â'r ffatri'n rheolaidd, - cynllun calonogol iawn ar adeg pan fo diwydiant Cerameg Gwledydd Prydain heb eto wneud yr hyn a allai o'n crochenyddion stiwdio.

A'i gwaith ei hun? Mae Fenella'n gweld ei chynnyrch yn broses esblygol a datblygol araf. Bydd yn rhoi cynnig ar siapiau a gwydreddau newydd ("Dwi wrth fy modd hefo'r ddamwain hapus pan fydda i'n torri drwodd i liw arall"). Ond mae Fenella'n hynod hunanfeirniadol ac yn credu mewn profi syniadau newydd ar ôl eu defnyddio am fisoedd yn y tŷ. Yn fwy diweddar, wrth geisio cynhyrchu a gwerthu'n rhatach, bu'n gwneud ychydig o lestri domestig wedi'u jigero fel rhan o'i gwaith bara menyn a fydd yn helpu i gynnal y gwaith taflu-ar-y-droell sydd gymaint yn ddrutach.

Crochenydd ymroddedig sy'n cymryd ei gwaith o ddifri yw Fenella, a bwriedir ei gwaith bywiog yn y lle cyntaf ar gyfer seremonïau bywyd bob dydd - gan gynnwys darnau mawrion, uchelgeisiol a fyddai'n rhoi naws yr ŵyl i unrhyw fwrdd bwyd. Wrth ysgrifennu'r llith yma yng nghanol heth y gaeaf, byddai perchen ar waith o'r fath yn fwy o anghenraid nag o ddewis.

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