

CERAMIC SERIES

EMILY MYERS

by David Whiting



Emily Myer's pots are very distinctive — bowls, dishes and vases with strong and controlled forms, their sculptural nature derived not only from the shapes created in throwing, but often through variations made when adding parts at the leather-hard stage. With their clean, sharp lines and the intensity of their glazes, most commonly turquoise, green and Persian blue, they have a clear-cut strength, and yet are surprisingly light to handle. Contemporary pots they certainly are, but made with a strong awareness of the process of clay and to be enjoyed for their functional, as well as aesthetic qualities.

Emily opted to be a potter in preference to studying art history at university, her original intention, feeling that an academic course would be pointless when her instincts were creative. So, in 1983, she went to art school, in fact to do the foundation course at Camberwell, which was of great benefit, though she now feels that a broader craft-based structure would have been better for her. In 1984, Emily went on to pursue a ceramics degree at Bristol Polytechnic, a period she recalls with pleasure. The course provided the freedom to develop individual ideas — a broad framework in which one could progress, and there were also a number of powerful teachers. She admired the virtuosity of Mo Jupp, remembering now the skill with which he would throw a dish and bring up the rim wall vertically. She made a note of Nicholas Homoky's method of adding extrusions to thrown pieces, but perhaps the most important lessons were learnt from Walter Keeler. To Emily he was not only an inspired technician, but like Homoky, opened up fresh possibilities for thrown forms; there was a fluency yet precision in his work, an almost relaxed ease with which he created his shapes, and yet the result was controlled and exacting. His cutting and assembling of parts gave Emily ideas about sculptural variations — new and inventive shapes which could be made without pots losing their 'thrown nature'.

Total absorption in her course, and useful throwing experience with David Winkley in her spare time, gave Emily the confidence to work on some interesting and original projects at Bristol. Developing an interest in the sculptural and surface properties of metal objects and machinery, she began to play around with the idea of exhaust pipe forms, extruded and added to a thrown base. She had the use of a compressor and spray booth, which allowed her to employ directional spraying, applying glaze more thickly at points which would emphasise the form of the surface, and provide textural interest. It was a method that seemed 'arbitrary but controlled', a quality important to Emily and something she admires in her favourite potters. The forms were quirky, quite whimsical, and certainly the most sculptural work to date, with no qualities of function.

In 1987, when she returned to Camberwell for an extended study period, she concentrated more on traditional functional forms, but also developed her skill and ease with extruded elements (extruding is a process which forces clay through a die-plate, producing a continuous section). There was plenty of room to refine ideas that had been planted at Bristol, and the great advantage of another final show to work towards.

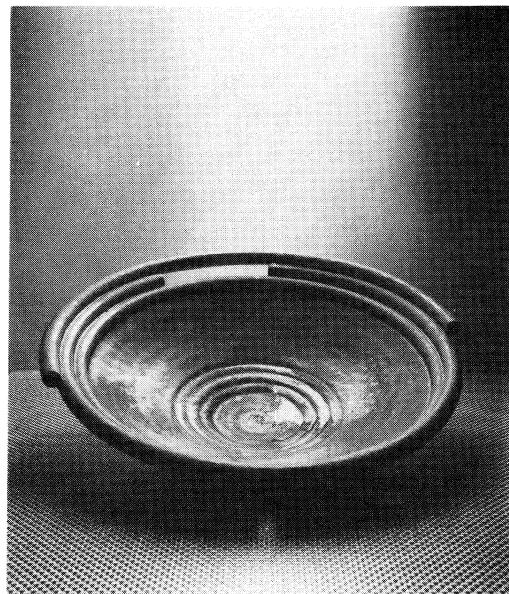
Since leaving Camberwell, Emily has established herself in the shared Union Street studio in Southwark, a busy but beneficial environment in which to work. Her reputation as a ceramist has grown rapidly. She is a fellow of the Craft Potters Association and her work is exhibiting and selling widely (the V&A Crafts Shop and Wilson and Gough are among her outlets, as well as the C.P.A.). Her success must be due in part to the high technical standard of her craftsmanship and the production of controlled and balanced forms with enlivening glazes, that have further extended the vocabulary of modern ceramics.

Though Emily's forms are classically based, her rib throwing and the inventiveness of added sections (assembled when the clay is leather hard), give her pots great individuality. She favours a white body, so uses white stoneware and sometimes porcelain, and fires the pieces to 1220°C in an electric kiln. Extruded rims have become a Myers hallmark and are central to her work because of their reference to that original source of ideas, metal. Metal strips and nailheads and other components made through industrial processes have deeply affected the style of her forms. Extruding is a manufacturing process, like casting or moulding, and a craftsman's quotation of such techniques is important to Emily, as a maker of pots in the modern world. It is mainly for this reason that she sees herself as an urban potter, to use that coveted phrase, not so much because she happens to live and work in London, but because her points of reference are urban.

Extruded rims are also significant because Emily feels that 'the edge of a pot defines its nature'. She cites examples — for instance, the power and fluidity of rims in the work of Takeshi Yasuda and Patrick Sargent, and the torn seemingly brittle edges in Colin Pearson's pots. Yet in all cases, what we see is the result of great technical skill and experienced control. It can be, in every sense, the 'cutting edge', indicative of the whole pot, and the approach of the maker. Emily sometimes wedges molochite into the clay to make her own rims and achieve jagged edges. In her bowls, the edge is always firmly related to the centre of the piece, which is usually emphasised by clear throwing spirals, themselves becoming a significant part of the form.

These pots certainly have an almost industrial austerity about them, but the shapes are relieved by the relative freedom of the rich blue, green and turquoise glazes, made using lithium and barium. Emily achieves a range of surface effects and tonal variations — matt, crystalline and a sort of glassiness — which refer back to her interest in metal, and most relevant here, its ageing process. The greener glazes, when matt, resemble weathered copper, and she is also intrigued by the patinated surfaces of old armour, scrap car parts, manhole covers and archaeological finds (their shapes have been a sculptural source too). For similar reasons she has also been drawn to London's tube stations, where rich arbitrary patterns have been formed on their walls with time. Years of stripping, flaking and fumes have created a wealth of textures, all part of an urban strata.

Emily feels that she does not 'play enough'. Humour is something she admires in other people's pots, and would like to see more of it in hers. Certainly, she is experimenting with new shapes and glazes, and is currently working around the idea of



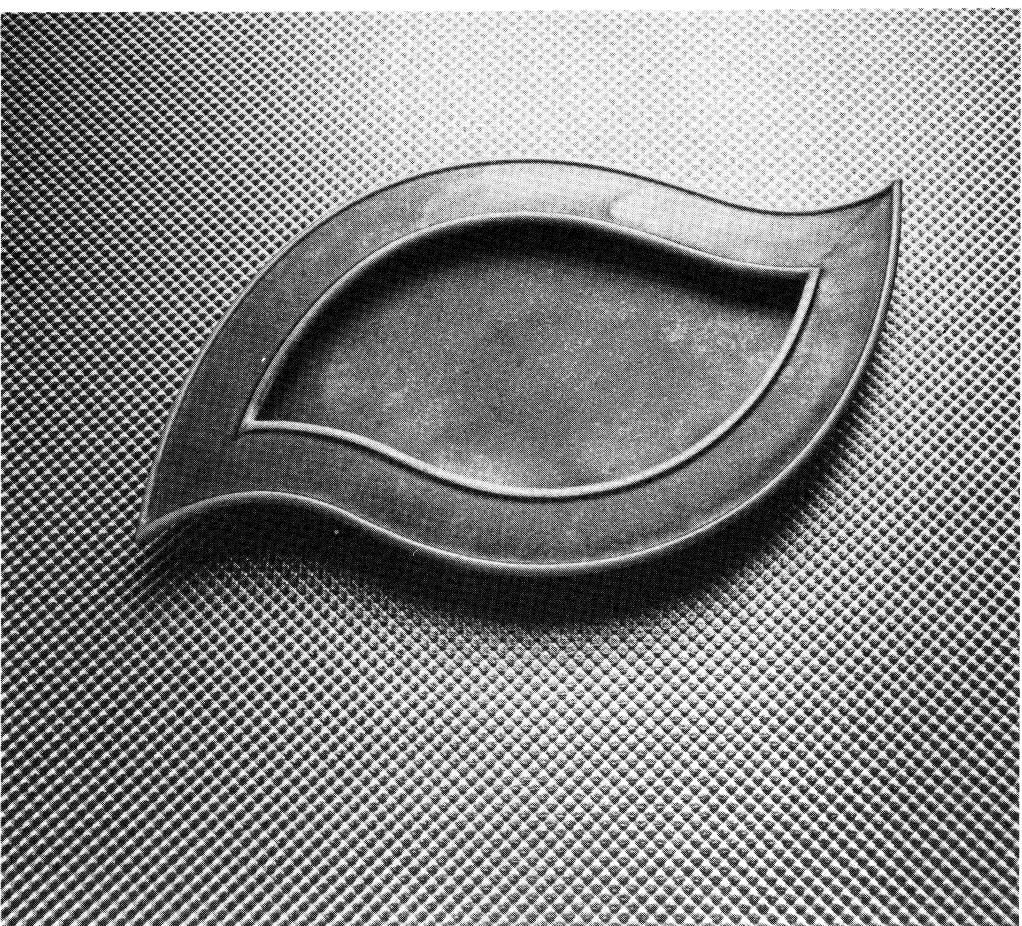
a boat form — an inventive new approach to the container. A recent visit to a traditional pottery in India (which she wrote up in a fascinating article in *Ceramic Review* no. 133) has further fuelled her interest in alternative processes and techniques, and the wider experience of making pots for modern life. She is concerned about development, does not want her pots to stand still, and I am sure they never will.



GYFRES GERAMEG

EMILY MYERS

gan David Whiting



Mae llestri Emily Myers yn rhai cwbl arbennig - bowleni, dysglau a ffiolau cryfion a rheolaidd eu ffurf y mae eu natur gerfluniol yn deillio nid yn unig o'r ffurfiâu sy'n cael eu creu ar y droell, ond hefyd yn aml o'r amrywiadau a wneir pan ychwanegir rhannau pan maent wedi lled galedu. Gyda'u llinellau glân, siarp, a dwysedd eu gwydredd, glaswyrdd, gwydd neu las Persiaidd gan amlaf, mae cryfder diamheul yn perthyn iddynt ond, er hynny, maent yn rhyfeddol o ysgafn i'w trafod. Yn sicr, maent yn botiau cyfoes, ond fe'u lluniwyd gydag ymwybyddiaeth gref o brosesau clai ac fe'u bwriadwyd i gael eu mwynhau oherwydd eu defnyddioldeb yn ogystal ag oherwydd eu nodweddion esthetig.

Dewisodd Emily fod yn grochenydd yn hytrach na dilyn ei bwriad gwreiddiol i astudio hanes celf mewn prifysgol, oherwydd ei bod yn teimlo na fyddai llawer o ddiben mewn cwrs academaidd i berson creadigol ei greddf. Felly, ym 1983, aeth i ysgol gelf, mewn gwirionedd i ddilyn cwrs sylfaenol yn Camberwell a chael cryn fudd ohono, er ei bod erbyn hyn yn teimlo y byddai strwythur wedi ei seilio'n fwy ar grefft wedi bod yn fwy addas iddi. Ym 1984, aeth Emily ar gwrs gradd mewn cerameg ym Mholytechneg Bryste, cyfnod y mae ganddi atgofion pleserus amdano. Rhoddodd y cwrs iddi'r rhyddid i ddatblygu syniadau unigol - fframwaith lydan y gallai ddatblygu o'i mewn, ac roedd nifer o athrawon Dylanwadol yno hefyd. Mae'n edmygu amlochredd Mo Jupp, ac yn dal i gofio ei fedr i lunio dysgl ar y droell gan godi ochr yr ymwl yn unionsyth. Sylwodd ar ddull Nicholas Homoky o ychwanegu darnau wedi eu hallwthio at eitemau wedi eu llunio ar droell, ond efallai mai oddi wrth Walter Keeler y dysgodd y petbau pwysicaf. Yn ôl Emily, roedd nid yn unig yn dechnegydd ysbrydoledig ond, fel Homoky, roedd yn amlygu posibiliadau ar gyfer ffurfiâu wedi eu llunio ar 'droell; roedd rhwyddineb a manylder ar yr un pryd yn ei waith, rhyw rwyddineb ymlaciol bron yn ei ddull o greu ei ffurfiâu, ond er

hynny roedd y canlyniad yn rheoledig a manwl. Cafodd Emily syniadau am amrywiadau cerfluniol oddi wrth ei ddull o dorri ac o osod rhannau wrth ei gilydd - ffurffiau newydd, dyfeisgar, y gellid eu gwneud heb i'r potiau golli'r ymdeimlad o gael eu ffurio ar droell.

Drwy ymgolli'n llwyr yn ei chwrs a thrwy ennill profiad o drin y droell gyda David Winkley yn ei hamser sbâr, cafodd Emily'r hyder i weithio ar rai prosiectau diddorol a gwreiddiol ym Mryste. Ar ôl datblygu diddordeb ym mhriodoleddau cerfluniol ac arwyneb gwrrthrychau metel a pheiriannau, dechreuodd ymhel â'r syniad o ffurffiau pibelli gwacu, wedi eu halldynnu a'u hychwanegu at fas wedi ei lunio ar droell. Roedd ganddi gywasgydd a bwth chwistrellu at ei defnydd, ac roedd hynny'n ei galluogi i ddefnyddio chwistrellu cyfeiriadol a gosod gwydredd mwy trwchus ar fannau a fyddai'n pwysleisio ffurf yr arwyneb ac yn darparu arwyneb diddorol. Roedd yn ddull a ymddangosai'n 'fympwyl ond dan reolaeth', ansawdd sy'n bwysig i Emily ac yn rhywbeth y mae'n ei edmygu yn ei hoff grochenyddion. Roedd y ffurffiau'n gastiog, yn bur fympwyl, ac yn sicr y rhai mwyaf cerfluniol a wnaethai hyd yma, a doedd dim bwriad o gwbl iddynt fod yn ddefnyddiol.

Ym 1987, pan ddychwelodd i Camberwell ar gyfer cyfnod o astudiaeth estynedig, canolbwyniodd ar ffurffiau defnyddiol traddodiadol, ond ar yr un pryd datblygodd ei medr a'i rhwyddineb wrth drin elfennau wedi eu halldynnu (proses o wthio clai drwy blât-dei gan gynhyrchu tamaid di-dor yw allwthio). Roedd digon o le i ddatblygu syniadau oedd wedi eu plannu ym Mryste, a'r fantais fawr o gael arddangosfa arall i anelu ati ar ddiwedd ei chyfnod yno.

Ers iddi adael Camberwell mae Emily wedi ymsefydlu mewn stiwdio y mae hi'n ei rhannu yn Union Street yn Southwark, amgylchedd diwyd ond manteisiol i weithio ynddo. Mae hi'n prysur wneud enw iddi ei hun fel cynhyrchydd cerameg. Mae hi'n gymrawd y Gymdeithas Crochenyddion Crefft ac mae ei gwaith yn cael ei arddangos yn eang ac yn gwerthu'n dda, (mae Siop Creftau'r V & A a 'Wilson and Gough' yn ogystal â'r C.P.A. yn gwerthu ei gwaith). Mae ei llwyddiant i'w briodoli i raddau i safon dechnegol uchel ei chrefftaith ac i'r ffaith ei bod yn cynhyrchu ffurffiau rheolaidd a chytbwys gyda gwydredd sy'n eu bywiocáu ac sydd wedi ymestyn geirfa cerameg fodern ymhellach.

Er bod sail glasurol i ffurffiau Emily, mae'r ffurffiau rhesog a gynhyrchir ar y droell a dyfeisgarwch y tameidiau a ychwanegir pan mae'r clai yn lled galed, yn rhoi cymeriad unigryw i'w chynnrych. Mae hi'n arbennig o hoff o weithio gyda chlai gwyn, ac felly bydd yn defnyddio clai crochenwaith caled gwyn ac weithiau borslen, ac yn tanio'r gwaith i dymheredd o 1220°C mewn odyn trydan. Daeth ymylon wedi eu hallwthio yn un o nodweddion gwaith Myers, ac maent yn ganolog i'w gwaith oherwydd eu cysylltiad â metel, ffynhonnell wreiddiol y syniadau. Mae stribedi metel a phennau hoelion a phethau eraill a gynhyrchir drwy brosesau diwydiannol wedi cael cryn effaith ar arddull ei ffurffiau. Proses gynhyrchu, fel castio neu fowldio, yw allwthio, ac mae barn crefftwr ar dechnegau o'r fath yn bwysig i Emily fel gwneuthurwr potiau yn y byd modern. Dyna'r prif reswm pam y mae'n ei hystyried ei hun yn grochenydd trefol, a defnyddio'r ymadrodd ffasiynol hwnnw, yn hytrach nag am ei bod yn digwydd byw a gweithio yn Llundain; trefol yw ei chyfeiriadaeth.

Mae ymylon wedi eu hallwthio yn arwyddocaol hefyd oherwydd bod Emily'n teimlo bod 'ymyl pot yn diffinio ei natur'. Mae hi'n nodi engrifftiau megis grym a llifedd ymylon yng ngwaith Takeshi Yasuda a Patrick Sargent, a'r ymylon toredig, ymddangosiadol fregus, yng ngwaith Colin Pearson. Eto, ymhob achos, yr hyn a welir yw canlyniad gallu technegol hynod a rheolaeth brofiadol. Gall fod, ymhob ystyr, yn 'ymyl flaenllym', yn nodweddu'r holl lestr â dull y gwneuthurwr o fynd ynglŷn â'r gwaith. Weithiau bydd Emily'n rhoi molochite yn y clai i wneud ei hymylon ac i greu ymylon danheddog. Yn ei bowlenni mae perthynas gadarn rhwng yr ymyl a chanol y gwaith, sydd fel rheol yn cael ei bwysleisio gan sbiral glir wedi ei chreu gan y droell ac sy'n dod yn rhan arwyddocaol o'r ffurf.

Yn sicr mae rhyw lymder diwydiannol o gwmpas y potiau hyn, ond mae rhyddid cymharol y gwydreddau cyfoethog glas, gwyrdd a glaswyrrdd, a geir drwy ddefnyddio lithiwm a bariwm, yn lleddfu peth ar y siapau. Llwyddia Emily i gynhyrchu amrywiaeth o effeithiau arwyneb ac amrywiadau tonaid - mat, crisiau a gwydraidd o fath - sy'n cyfeirio yn ôl at ei diddordeb mewn metel ac, yn bwysicaf oll, yn y ffordd y mae metel yn heneiddio. Mae'r gwydreddau mat mwyaf gwyrdd yn debyg i gopr wedi hindreulio, ac



mae hi'n cael ei swyno hefyd gan y patina ar arwyneb hen arfwisgoedd, darnau sgrap o hen geir, caeadau dyndwll a daganfyddiadau archaeolegol (bu eu ffuriau yn ffynhonnell gerfluniol yn ogystal). Am gyffelyb resymau mae hi wedi cael ei denu i orsafoedd y rheilffordd tanddaear yn Llundain, lle mae patrymau damweiniol cyfoethog wedi ymffurfio ar y muriau yn nhreigl amser. Mae blynnyddoedd o stripio, caenu a mwg wedi creu cyfoeth o arwynebau, y cyfan yn rhan o'r strata trefol.

Mae Emily o'r farn nad yw hi'n 'chwarae digon'. Mae hiwmor yn rhywbeth y mae hi'n ei edmygu ym mhotaiau pobl eraill ac y byddai'n hoffi gweld mwy ohono yn ei gwaith ei hun. Yn sicr, mae hi'n arbrofi gyda ffuriau a gwydreddau newydd, ac ar hyn o bryd mae hi'n gweithio o amgylch y syniad o ffurf cwch - ffordd newydd ddyfeisgar o fynd ynglŷn â llunio llestr. Yn ddiweddar ymwelodd â chrochendy traddodiadol yn India (mae ganddi erthygl hynod o ddiddorol yn adrodd yr hanes yn Ceramic Review Rhif 133) ac mae hynny wedi ychwanegu at ei diddordeb mewn prosesau a thechnegau amgen ac yn y profiad eangach o gynhyrchu potiau ar gyfer bywyd modern. Mae hi'n ymboeni ynglŷn â datblygiad; does arni ddim eisiau gweld ei gwaith yn aros yn ei unfan, ac rwy'n sicr nad yw hynny byth yn debyg o ddigwydd.

David Whiting

