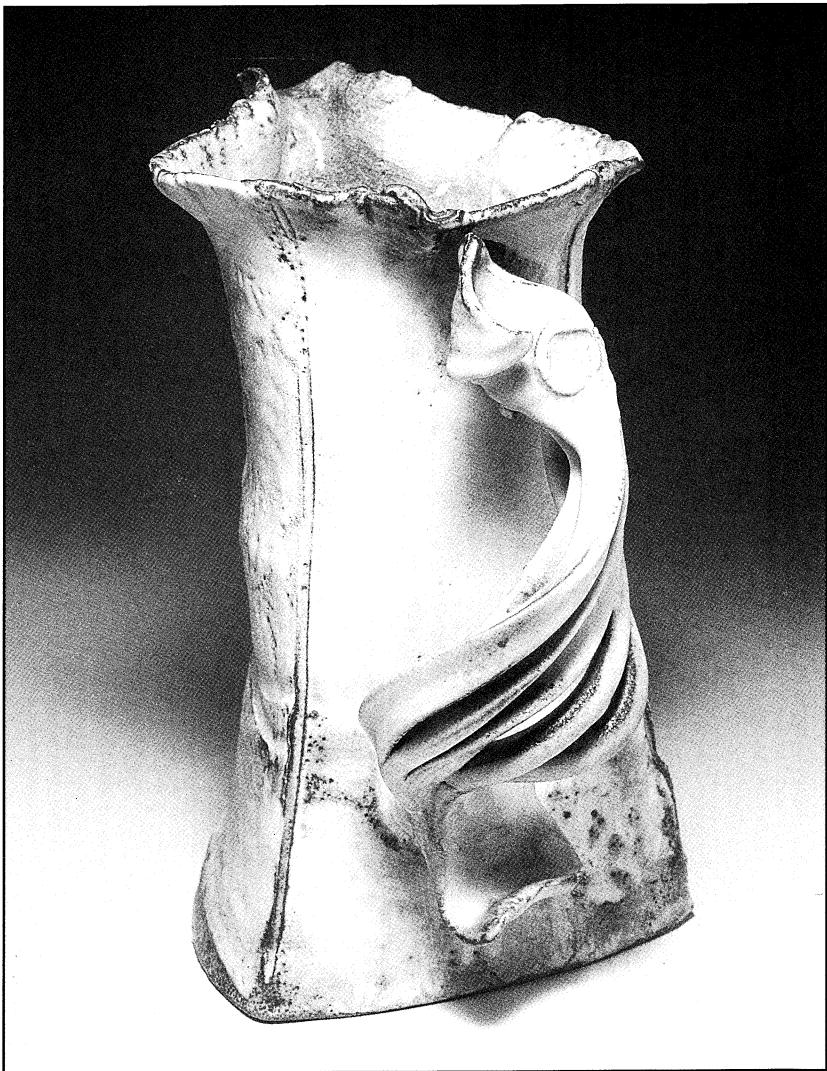


C E R A M I C
S E R I E S •



colin pearson

A stone's throw from Angel tube station in London, on one side of a broad elegant Regency street is Colin Pearson's studio. He has been working here since 1981 - in a low rather unprepossessing building, anonymous except for the sight of some strikingly glazed pots gleaming in the window. Typical of so many city studios of this type, the exterior reveals little else of the intense creative activity going on inside. The place of work and the character of Colin Pearson's ceramic art may seem a far cry from our bucolic image of the country potter, yet Pearson's roots are firmly set in the traditions of his craft.

Pearson, now one of the distinguished elder statesmen of British ceramics, was born in Friern Barnet in 1923. There was no significant artistic activity until 1946, when on being demobbed, he decided to use his ex-service grant to study painting at Goldsmiths College. Like so many potters, he stumbled onto clay quite by accident, in his final year, and took to it with passion. Taught by Kenneth Clarke, he became enthused by the processes of pottery, and the varieties of activities involved, which suited his self confessed low boredom threshold. Never considering himself a natural maker, Pearson has none-the-less loved the problematic nature of clay processes, and mastered each aspect of ceramics in his own determined way.

In college he began to make what he later described as 'comparatively bizarre maiolica ware'; work which shared the more abstract sculptural concerns of the 'Picassoettes' William Newland, Margaret Hine and James Tower. The potter Charlotte Bawden however, felt that Pearson would be better suited to the discipline of throwing in an established workshop, and advised him to visit Ray Finch at Winchcombe Pottery. Pearson subsequently became an assistant there for eleven happy months involved in workshop duties in the day, and practising on the wheel in the evening. Winchcombe was a revelation to an art school trained potter who had no previous knowledge of large-scale country production, and Pearson was grateful for the knowledge of throwing it gave him.

In 1954, Pearson returned to London to work at the Royal Doulton factory in Lambeth, employed on slipcasting in the chemical porcelain department. The contrast with Winchcombe could hardly have been greater, and yet the industrial techniques would have fascinated Pearson, who was coming to realise that the 'engineering' of pottery, and the questions inherent in the alteration and innovation of form and surface, were what drew him to it.

In 1955 he was recruited by David Leach to help set up a training pottery at the Carmelite Friars in Aylesford. Here they made slipware and subsequently stoneware, rather based on that at St. Ives. He also began to lecture elsewhere; in 1958 he went to teach at Camberwell, along with the late Denis Healing, marking the start of a long and distinguished career (his students here included Mo Jupp, Ian Godfrey and Ewen Henderson) which was recently recognised by a London Institute honorary fellowship. He has subsequently taught on the Harrow course, and at Medway College - a popular figure with his students. This is no doubt due not only to his infectious enthusiasm, but to his positive and patient response to the day-to-day problems and questions that arise in ceramic training.

In 1961, with the help of his wife Leslie, and the American potter Byron Temple, he set up his own workshop in Aylesford village - the Quay Pottery. Here he began to develop a range of tableware, as well as a number of individual items. The pots had a simplicity and modulation of form that made them perfectly modern - press moulded dishes, large casseroles and plates with confident abstract decoration. Yet despite the success of this range, Pearson was getting tired with repetition, and had begun to experiment with different ways of throwing - making individual forms in a softer more 'plastic' clay on a slower wheel with a rib. They were free and generous, with strong irregular throwing marks, and edges and rims that looked torn and gestural - setting up the conditions for what Pearson has called the 'controlled accident'.

Despite their innovative qualities, these clearly more expressive pieces went largely unnoticed until a watershed exhibition at the British Crafts Centre in 1971, when he modified some of the forms - in porcelain and black stoneware - by attaching extensions or 'wings' as they have become familiarly known. They attracted considerable attention. Pearson was now working as a sculptor, but one who still used the wheel as a springboard - successfully combining the potential dynamism of throwing, with the concerns of construction, alteration and manipulation. Whether working in expansive stoneware or delicate porcelain, the seventies saw a fertile development of shapes and surfaces enlivened by a number of richly pooling sprayed glazes and slips, which enhanced the clay's landscape.

With his move to Islington in the early eighties, Pearson was now - in every sense - a metropolitan potter. He was working in a smaller studio, and exclusively with an electric kiln. In this new creative period, he was stimulated by a search for new glaze combinations to help animate his forms. Assistants continued to be important, no longer for production ware, but to help part time with glaze tests, clay preparation and the assembly of larger pieces. It is difficult to think of a team - presently consisting of Stan McInnes, Marco Toro, and Colin's daughter Clare - who work more closely, and each has a specific role in the workshop. As Pearson's energy has declined more recently, efficiency has become essential, but Stan and Marco still have plenty of time to develop their own work.

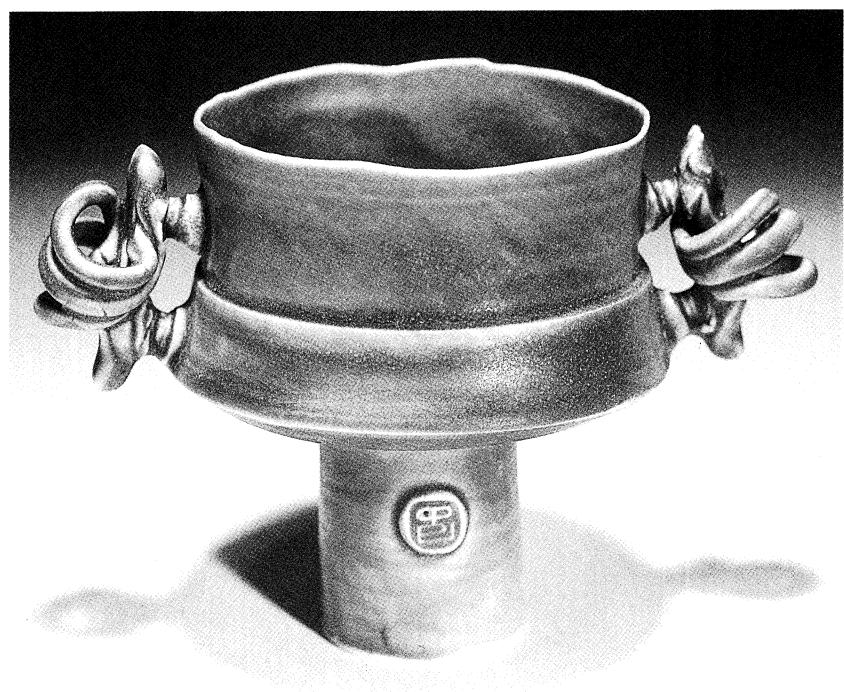
Colin Pearson has taken a basic theme - the winged container - and made it astonishingly varied. Originally working on two essential shapes - a spreading oval bowl, and a broad cylinder form (and ranging in scale from smallish table pieces to monumental vessels); these have been changed and adapted over the years. On his studio shelves when I last visited, were triangular green jugs with convoluted handles, bronze relief-like rectilinear forms, simple white stem bowls and broader oval pots with spiralled wings and peach glazes. As some of these twisted attachments suggest to Pearson the qualities of plant growth (as well as an abstract definition of space) so there is an organic element in much of what he does - in the larger relief forms as well as the pots that broaden as they rise. If there is a certain romanticism in the sweep of Pearson's turning, there is also engineered and articulated quality about the attachments.

In a formal sense, they seem to 'stabilise' each piece, adding a certain classical balance and equilibrium. They act as a foil to the asymmetry and irregularity of what is turned.

Recent demonstrating experience has helped Pearson to work more rapidly, and enjoy the spontaneous effects of such execution - freezing the clay's raw materiality. Ever searching for new ways in which to push his medium, he began to use polyester fibre in his clay. This gives it a pliable and tensile strength, and allows it to be creased, twisted and bent - almost like paper. His triangular jugs - an inventive development of an ancient form - are made using this technique.

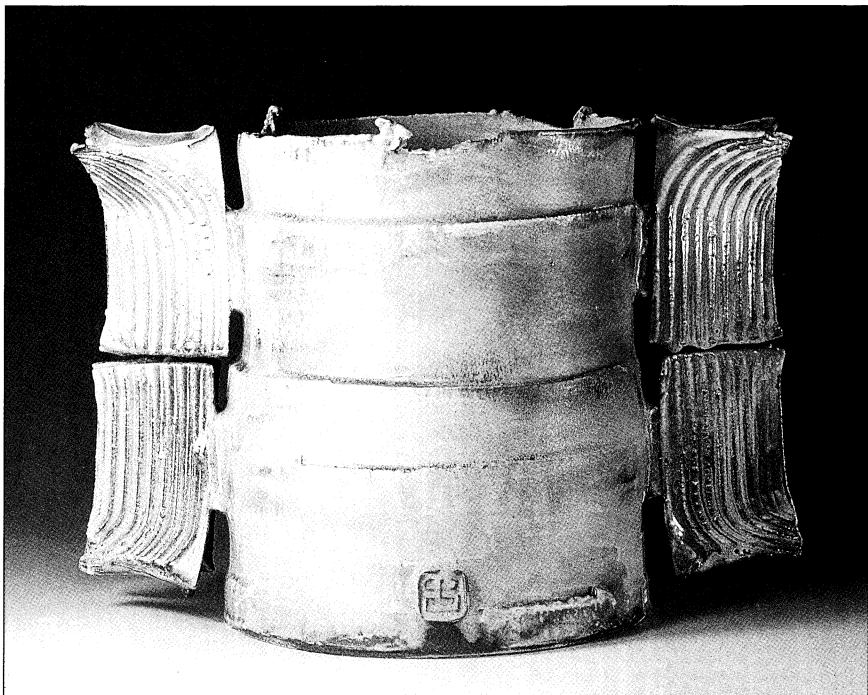
He is characteristically modest about his achievement; 'my pots are really rather traditional' he says, ever aware of his debt to the wheel and to his early training. Yet he is a modern potter, who has responded to modern technology. He has helped to liberate and broaden the language of the thrown form, combining it with the disciplines of cutting and building - and in so doing has made us aware of the flexibility of clay in quite a new way.

David Whiting



Porcelain oval stem bowl convolute handle

C Y F R E S •
G E R A M E G



colin pearson



CANOLFAN Y CELFYDDYDAU ABERYSTWYTH

Rhagfyr 1996
rhif 81

Tafliad carreg o orsaf danddaearol Angel yn Llundain, mewn stryd Regentaidd osgeiddig, saif stiwdio Colin Pearson. Mae o'n gweithio yn y fan yma ers 1980 - mewn adeilad eithaf distadl ei olwg, ac yn ddi-nôd i bob perwyl heblaw am ambell i lestr wedi'i wydro sy'n sgleinio yn y ffenest. Mae hon yn noweddiadol o'r math yma o stiwdio; does yna fawr i'w weld y tu allan sy'n awgrymu'r holl waith creadigol, dwys sy'n digwydd y tu mewn. Hwyrach fod gweithdy Colin Pearson a chymeriad ei gelf ceramig yn ymddangos fel pe bai'n filoedd o bolion lein oddi wrth ein delwedd werinol o'r crochenydd gwledig, ond mae gwreiddiau Pearson wedi'u bwrw yn ddwfn yn nhraddodiad ei grefft.

Ganed Pearson, sydd bellach yn un o henaduron hypnotaf Cerameg gwledydd Prydain, yn Griern Barnet ym 1923. Ni bu unrhyw weithgarwch celfyddydol gwerth sôn amdano tan 1946, pryd y penderfynodd, wrth ymadael â'r lluoedd arfog, ddefnyddio'i grant fel cyn-filwr i astudio peintio yng Ngholeg Goldsmith. Yn yr un modd â chymaint o grochenyddion, ar ddamwain bron y bu iddo faglu ar draws clai fel cyfrwng, a hynny yn ei flwyddyn olaf, ac fe gymerodd ato'n frwd. Yn ddisgybl i Kenneth Clark, fe'i hysbrydolwyd gan brosesau crochenwaith ac amrywiaeth y gweithgareddau ynglwm ag ef, rhywbeth a oedd yn dygymod â'i "drothwy diflasu isel", chwedl yntau. Ni fu erioed yn yn cael ei ystyried fel gwneuthurwr wrth reddf, mae Pearson, serch hynny, wedi hoffi natur broblemataidd prosesau'r clai, gan feistroli pob agwedd ar gerameg yn ei ffordd benderfynol ei hun.

Yn y coleg, dechreuodd wneud yr hyn a ddisgrifiwyd ganddo yn nes ymlaen fel "llestri maiolica eithaf od", gwaith a oedd yn trafod yr un haniaethau cerfluniol â'r Picassettes megis William Newland, Maragaret Illice a James Tower. Fodd bynnag, teimlai'r crochenydd Charlotte Bawden, y byddai disgyblaeth taflu mewn gweithdy sefydledig yn fwy addas i Pearson, a dyma hi'n ei gynggori i ymweld â Ray Finch yng Nghrochendy Winchcombe. Treuliodd Pearson un mis ar ddeg dedwydd braff yno fel cynorthwydd, yn ymwineud â dyletswyddau'r gweithdy yn ystod y dydd ac yn ymarfer ar y droell gyda'r nos. Agoriad llygaid oedd Winchcombe i grochenydd a oedd wedi'i hyfforddi mewn ysgol gelf heb unrhyw brofiad blaenorol ganddo mewn cynhyrchu gwledig ar raddfa eang, a bu Pearson yn ddiolchgar iawn am yr wybodaeth a gafodd drwy daflu.

Ym 1954, dychwelodd Pearson i Lundain i weithio yn ffatri Royal Doulton yn Lambeth, wedi'i gyflogi i wneud castio slip yn adran y borslen gemegol. Go brin y gellid cael mwy o wrthgyferbyniad rhwng y ffatri a Winchcombe, ac eto, byddai'r technegau diwydiannol wedi ennyr cryn ddiddordeb yn Pearson a ddeuai i sylweddoli mai "peirianneg" crochenwaith a materion yn ymwineud â newid a newydd-deb mewn ffurf ac arwyneb oedd yr hyn a'i denai ati.

Ym 1955, fe'i ricriwtiwyd gan David Leach i helpu sefydlu crochendy hyfforddi yn y Carmelite Friars yn Aylesford. Yn y fan honno gwnaed crochenwaith slip ac ar ôl hynny crochenwaith caled a seiliwyd yn fras ar St. Ives. Hefyd, dechreuodd ddarllithio mewn mannau eraill; ym 1958, aeth i ddysgu yn Camberwell, ynghyd â'r diweddar Denis Healing. Dyma ddechrau gyrfa hir a hynod (ymhlith ei fyfyrwyr yn fan yma roedd Mo Jupp, Ian Godfrey ac Ewen Henderson), a gydnabwyd yn ddiweddar gan gymrodoriaeth fygedol gan Athrofa Llundain. Ers hynny, mae wedi dysgu ar gwrs Harrow ac yng Ngholeg Medway - ac mae'n boblogaidd iawn gyda'i fyfyrwyr. Does dim amheuaeth ynglŷn â'i frwdfrydedd heintus na chwaith ynglŷn â'i ymateb positif ac amyneddgari'r problemau a'r cwestiynau beunyddiol sy'n codi mewn hyfforddiant cerameg.

Ym 1961, gyda chymorth ei wraig Leslie, a'r crochenydd Americanaidd Byron Temple, sefydlodd ei weithdy ei hun ym mhentref Aylesford - y Quay Pottery. Yn y fan hon, dechreuodd ddatblygu amrediad o lestri bwrrd yn ogystal â nifer o eitemau unigol. Roedd gan y potiau symrwydd a thrawsgyweiriad o ran ffurf a olygai eu bod yn holol gyfoes - dysglau gwasgedig, caserolion mawrion a phlatiau sydd ag addurniadau haniaethol, hyderus. Ond, er gwaethaf llwyddiant y gyfres yma, roedd Pearson yn dechrau laru ar wneud yr un peth o hyd, ac roedd wedi dechrau arbrofi â gwahanol ffyrdd o daflu - gan wneud ffurfiâu unigol mewn clai mwy meddal, mwy "plastig" ar droell arafach gydag asen. Roeddent yn fwy agored eu gwedd gyda marciau taflu cryf, afreolaidd ac ymylon a oedd yn edrych fel pe baent wedi'u rhwyo a'u hymustumio - dyma fan cychwyn yr hyn y mae Pearson wedi cyfeirio ato fel "damwain dan reolaeth"

Er gwaethaf eu priodweddau newydd, ni chafwyd y darnau mynegiadol yma fawr o sylw hyd at gefnddeuddwr o arddangosfa a gynhaliwyd yn y Ganolfan Crefftau Prydeinig ym 1971, pryd y bu'n newid rhai o'r ffurfiâu - mewn porslen a chrochenwaith caled, du - drwy gysylltu estyniadau neu "adenydd" - fel y'i hadwaenir yn gyffredinol. Llwyddodd y rhain i dynnu cryn sylw. Erbyn hyn roedd Pearson yn gweithio fel cerflunydd, ond daliai i ddefnyddio'r droell fel man cychwyn, gan gyfuno'n llwyddiannus

ddeinamig potensial y taflu ag agweddau ar adeiladu, newid ac ymdriniaeth. P'un ai oedd yn gweithio mewn crochenwaith caled ehangol neu borslen delicet, gwelwyd datblygiad ffrwythlon yn y saithdegau lle y cafwyd siapiau ac arwynebau wedi'u sionci drwy nifer o wydreddau a slipiau wedi'u chwistrellu a'u cronni'n goeth, a oedd yn harddu gwedd y clai.

Wrth symud i Islington ar ddechrau'r wythdegau, roedd Pearson bellach - ym mhob ystyr - yn grochenydd dinesig. Roedd yn gweithio mewn stiwdio fechan, gan ddefnyddio odyn drydanol yn unig. Yn ystod y cyfnod creadigol, newydd yma, fe'i cynhyrfwyd gan ymgais am gyfuniadau gwydro newydd i helpu bywiogi'i ffurflau. Daliai cynorthwy-wyr i fod yn bwysig, dim ar gyfer llestri cynhyrchu erbyn hyn, ond i helpu'n rhan-amser gyda phrofision gwydro, paratoi'r clai a gosod y darnau mwyaf at ei gilydd. Mae'n anodd meddwl am dîm, sy'n cynnwys ar hyd o bryd Stan McInnes, Marco Toro a merch Colin, Clare - sy'n cydweithio'n agosach, ac mae gan bob un ohonynt swyddogaeth benodol yn y gweithdy. Wrth i egni Pearson bylu'n fwy diweddar, mae effeithiolrwydd yn hanfodol, ond mae gan Stan a Marco ddigon o amser o hyd i ddatblygu eu gwaith eu hunain. Mae Colin Pearson wedi cymryd thema sylfaenol - cynhwysydd adeiniog - a chynhyrchu amrywiaethau syfranol arni. Bu'n gweithio'n wreiddiol ar ddwy siâp sylfaenol - dysgl hirgron, ymledol a silindr llydan (gan amrywio o ran maint o ddarnau gweddol fach i'r bwrdd i lestri anferthol); mae'r rhain wedi'u newid a'u haddasu dros y blynnyddoedd. Ar silffoedd ei stiwdio pan fues i yno ddiwetha, roedd yna bowlenni coesog gwynion syml a photiau hirgrwn, lletach gydag adenydd sbiral a gwydreddau lliw eirin gwlanog. Gan fod rhai o'r atodiadau cordeddog wedi awgrymu i Pearson y ffordd y mae planhigion yn tyfu (yn ogystal â diffiniad haniaethol o ofod), felly ceir elfen organig mewn llawer iawn o'i waith - yn y ffurflau cerfwedd mwyaf ynghyd â'r llestri sy'n ymledu wrth godi. Os oes yna ramantiaeth arbennig yn y ffordd y bydd Pearson yn eu troi, ceir hefyd nawr beirianegol a chymalog yn yr atodiau. Mewn ystyr ffurfiol, maent fel pe baent yn "sefydlogi" pob darn, gan ychwanegu rhwng gydbwysedd ac ecwilibriwm clasurol. Maent yn wrthgyferbyniad i'r natur anghydfesur ac afreolaidd a geir yn yr hyn sy'n cael ei droi.

Mae profiad arddangos diweddar wedi helpu Pearson i weithio'n gyflymach, ac i fwynhau effeithiau ebrwydd, difyfyr gwaith o'r fath - gan rewi naws amrwd y clai fel deunydd. Hyd yn oed wrth chwilio am ffyrdd newydd i wthio'i gyfrwng yn ei flaen, dechreuodd ddefnyddio ffibr polystre yn ei glai. Mae hyn yn rhoi iddo ryw gryfder hyblyg a thynn sy'n gadael iddo gael ei blygu a'i gordeddu-bron fel papur. Gwneir ei siwgiau trionglog - datblygiad dyfeisgar ar hen ffurf - drwy ddefnyddio'r dechneg yma.

Un hynod ddiy়mhongar ydyw ynglŷn â'i lwyddiant; "braidd yn draddodiadol ydi fy mhotiau i", meddai, yn ymwybodol o hyd o'i ddyled i'r droell ac i'w hyfforddiant cynnar. Eto i gyd, crochenydd cyfoes ydyw, sydd wedi ymateb i dechnoleg fodern. Mae o wedi helpu rhyddhau a lledu teithi'r ffurf dafledig, gan ei chyfuno â disgyblaethau megis torri ac adeiladu - ac wrth wneud, mae o wedi perni i ni fod yn ymwybodol o hyblygrwydd clai mewn ffordd hollol newydd.

David Whiting

