

Ceramic Series

ABERYSTWYTH ARTS CENTRE No. 24 5

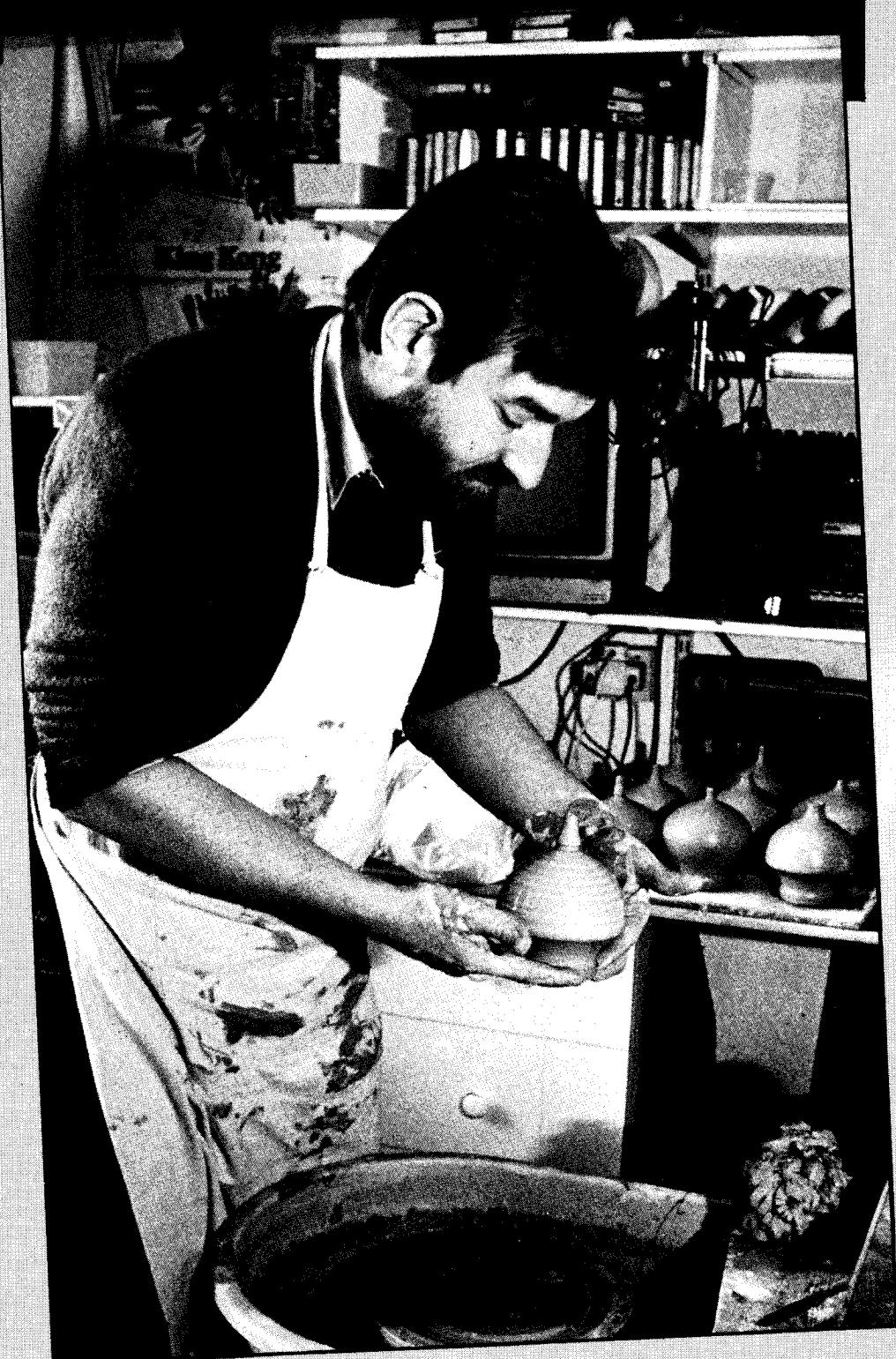
GEOFFREY SWINDELL

Geoffrey Swindell stands in front of the shelves arrayed with his work dating back to the late sixties right up to the present. He picks up one of his recent pots, cups it in his hands and clasps it to him. The gesture expresses it all "I just want people to respond to their beauty and craftsmanship, to the pleasure of holding them, to delight in the surfaces. It is not in the least complicated." Over the years his philosophy as a maker has been refined and simplified. He may indeed be returning to his roots.

His roots go straight to the heart of British ceramic traditions. He was brought up in Stoke on Trent and at fifteen went to college for a year to train as a painter: the aim was to gain the skills to be a painter of faces on figurines. It was a man's job and it was comparatively well paid. The women who painted the dresses were paid much less. But the experience at college broadened horizons, he studied hard to obtain some academic qualifications so that he could follow the DipAD course at Stoke and then he went on to the Royal College of Art whose MA course has produced so many of Britain's best known artists and ceramicists. His ten years of training took him from the simple expectations of a working class background to the bastions of privilege of the elite London art world. He has had to come to terms with these polarities in his work and in his life.

The synthesis becomes clear with a visit to his home in a pleasant Cardiff suburb. Children ride their ponies along the street on Sunday mornings. I was warned that it would not look like a pottery and the freshly painted semi-detached house with its neat garden gave nothing away. Only a more concerted inspection revealed the flaws in the conventional exterior. A person of passions lives inside: motor bikes, mechanical toys, shells, garden ornaments, science fiction images, drums. These are not the polite tastes of the neighbours. His collections of objects displayed in cabinets invade several rooms in the house. The front room is his workshop and there is another workshop in the garden for glazing and firing. Geoffrey Swindell lives here with his wife and two young sons.

Teaching ceramics at South Glamorgan Institute of Higher Education occupies four days a week during term time. The other three can be used for potting, but family activities are an essential part of his life. A balance has to be achieved and he considers all three aspects, teaching, domestic life and potting to be equally important. Inevitably his other commitments restrict his ceramic output, but the production corresponds to his needs as a maker and to the requirements of the market. His year is planned in a cyclical schedule and he does not work at potting during the summer vacation but gives that over to projects connected with the house. Designing and constructing a climbing frame



for the children gives him just as much challenge and satisfaction as making a pot. He feels himself to be unusual in this. At the same time he is quick to assert how essential it is for the teacher to remain a practitioner.

Like many ceramicists working in porcelain his pieces sell best in Germany and the USA.

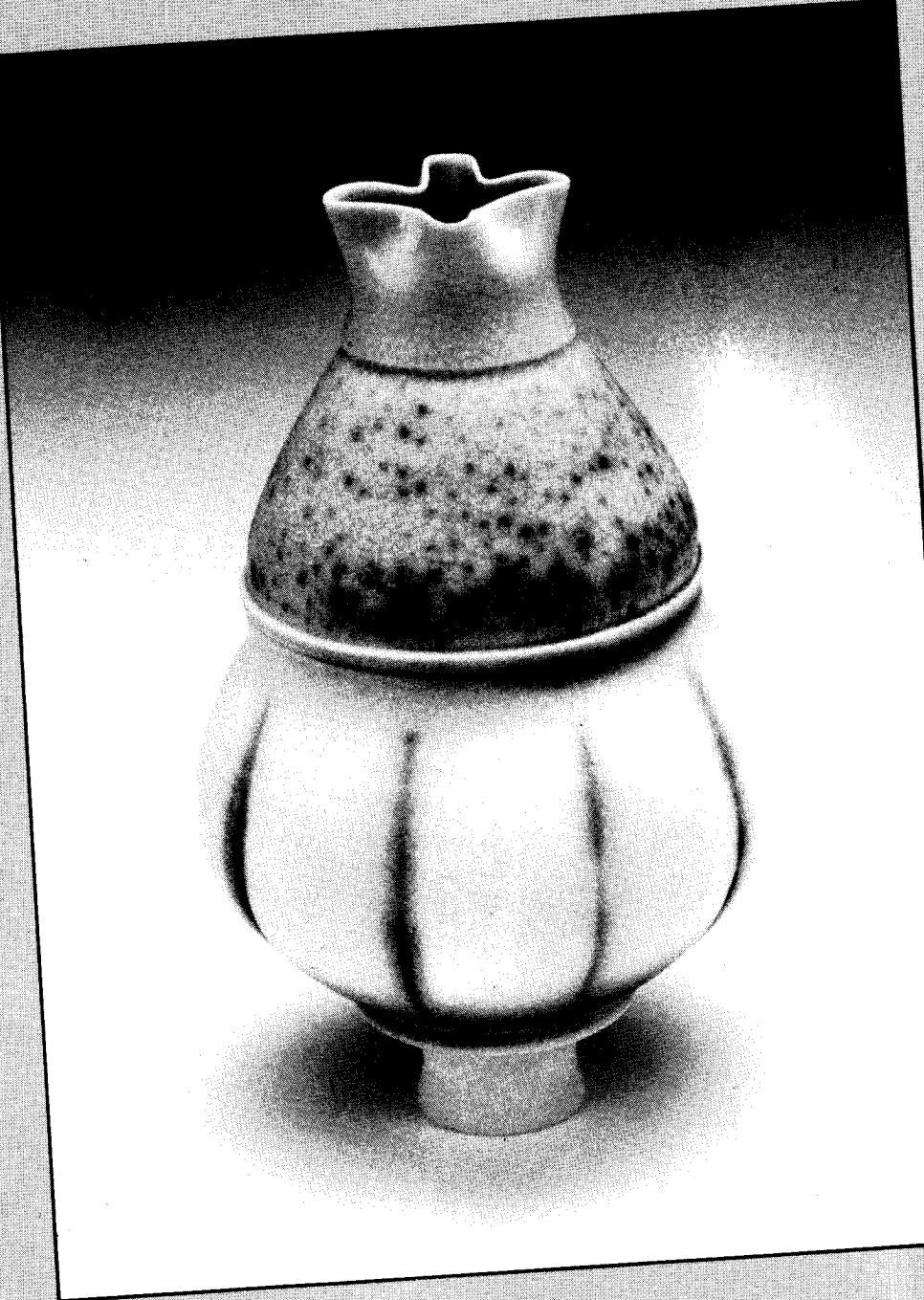
Ten years ago porcelain was at the height of fashion within the British avant-garde in ceramics but fashionable styles now emphasise more painterly and expressive sculptural qualities. Currently big is beautiful. He is no longer working at the forefront of taste. Is he worried? Well, perhaps just a little but there is an integrity and good sense to his

system and rhythm of production which is right for him. Just at the moment there is little time for radical rethinking and no desire to make that kind of upheaval. Compare this with a fellow student at the Royal College, Jacqueline Poncelet. She too first made her name in small-scale delicate porcelain but has now left the craft world behind and designates herself a sculptor. Her large freely painted stoneware objects have an organic suggestiveness reminiscent of sea creatures and have some qualities not so dissimilar to Geoffrey Swindell's forms. The dichotomy is symptomatic of contemporary crafts and their aspirations within the more prestigious art world.

Impatient with the pretentious and complicated ideas behind much avant-garde craft he has reacted against it by espousing and reasserting the old values of simple craftsmanship and the beautiful object. However on a slightly more philosophical note he does assert that he likes the idea that the pot should have a sense of 'still becoming' emphasising the journey rather than the arrival. The form should have potential like a living being as if it might breathe, swell up, spin round and defy its static nature. Mystical notions of pottery are usually associated with the Leach tradition, but in fact this was something instilled in him by Hans Coper, his teacher at the Royal College.

The sculptural and formal aesthetic of Ruth Duckworth, Lucie Rie and Hans Coper is the tradition that he identifies with as distinct from the folkcraft sources of Bernard Leach and his followers. He has no desire to dig his own clay or construct his own kiln. Modern ceramic technology, electric kilns and bought in materials are quite satisfactory for his needs. It is what he does with it that matters: the object is the end product not the lifestyle. He is an unrepentant modernist despite the fact that his preference for highly finished and refined ceramics can be related to his childhood memories of the Stoke Museum and his delight in the precision of early thrown and turned pieces of Staffordshire ware produced by firms such as Wedgwood.

Although some of his early pots are in stoneware Geoffrey Swindell has consistently worked in porcelain for over twelve years. A few helmet-like forms about a foot high were made in the mid seventies but otherwise his work is of small scale, sometimes even tiny. In early years he worked with closed forms, evocative delicate objects that had



connotations of tiny organisms, shells, snails, seed heads, nuts and pebbles smoothed from the action of the elements. More recently the pieces have evolved into vessel forms but they are never functional in the conventional sense.

These two different types although visually closely linked are produced by opposing techniques, the earlier works being press moulded, often with little extrusions or additions taken from moulds of mechanical parts, model kits etc. By contrast the vessels are thrown and turned. Both are preceded by rough drawings and sketches which are the starting point of his process. After the biscuit firing they are glazed sometimes with a combination of different glazes. Lustre glazes are blended or sprayed with paraffin or detergent to create mottled effects. But in many ways, and usually, it is the lengthy finishing process which characterise his technique.

Most of the pots require two to three hours of finishing and he compares himself to a jeweller rather than a potter. All the bases have to be ground smooth and flat, the pots are rubbed with carborundum paper to make

part of the glaze matt, more glaze is sprayed on, certain parts are masked out. Pots are refired. Sometimes they are sandblasted to give a delicate pitted surface, a violent process which often causes breakages. A high wastage rate has to be accepted and he calculates that only about a third of the original pots are finally sold.

He presses his materials to the very edge of endurance. The tensions in the process are conveyed in one's response to the piece creating a visual tension, a knife edge excitement and dynamism. These are qualities which are communicated by the object to a wide cross-section of society, they do not have to be explained. For Geoffrey Swindell the finely crafted object speaks to everyone. That is his reward and he is therefore happy to remain within the camp of craft.

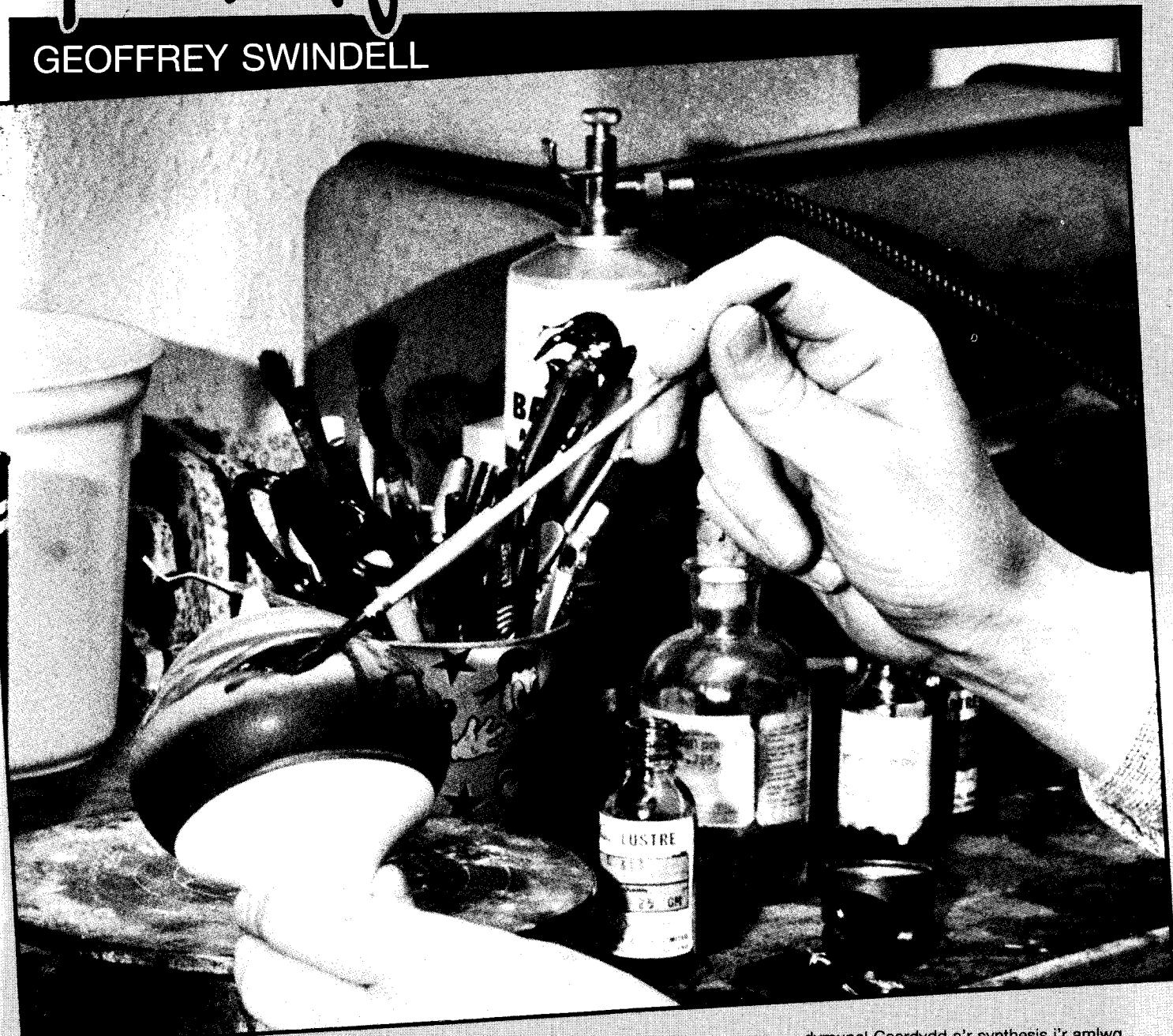
For further technical details about the work of Geoffrey Swindell see *Peter Lane Studio Porcelain 1980*.

Moira Vincentelli

Y Gwylfres Gerameg

CANOLFAN Y CELFYDDYDAU ABERYSTWYTH RHIF 24

GEOFFREY SWINDELL



Siaif Geoffrey Swindell o flaen y silffoedd sy'n dal engrheiftiau o'i waith yn dyddio o flynyddoedd olaf y chwedegau hyd y presennol. Cwyd un o'i greadigaethau diweddar a chau ei ddyddio amdanio a'i gofleidio. Mae'r ystum yn cyflwyno'r cyfan, "Y cwbl rwyf am i bobl ei wneud yw ymaeteb i'w prydferthwch a'u crefft-wraeth, i'r pleser o gydio ynddynt, ac ymhyfrydu yn yr arwynebau. Does dim byd o gwbl ym gymhleth yn y peth." Yn ystod y blwynddoedd mae ei athroniaeth wedi ei symleiddio a'i choethi. Gall yn wir ei fod yn dychwelyd at ei wreiddiau.

Mae ei wreiddiau'n treiddio'n syth i galon y traddodiad cerameg Prydeinig. Magwyd ef yn Stoke on Trent a phlan oedd yn bymtheg oed aeth i goleg am flwyddyn i gael ei

hyfforddi'n beintiwr: y bwriad oedd ennill y sgiliau angenrheidiol i fod yn beintiwr wynebau ar ffigurynnau. 'Gwaith i ddyn oedd hwn ac roedd y cyflog yn gymharol dda. Cai'r merched a liwai'r gwisgoedd lai o dâl o gryn dipyn. Ond ehangwyd ei orwelion gan ei brodian yn y coleg, astudiodd yn galed i sicrhau cymwysterau academaidd fel y gallai ddilys y cwrs DipAD yn Stoke ac yna aeth ymlaen i'r Coleg Celf Brenhinol y mae ei gwrs MA wedi cynhyrchu cymaint o artistiaid a llynwyr cerameg mwyaf adnabyddus Prydain, Anweiniwyd ef gan ei ddeng milynedd o hyfforddiant o ddisgwyliau syml ei gefndir dosbarth gweithiol hyd at ragfuriau breiniol byd celf elitaidd Llundain. Bu'n rhaid iddo ddod i ddygymod a'r pegynau hyn yn ei waith ac yn ei fywyd.

Daw ymwelliad a'i gartref yn un o faestrefi

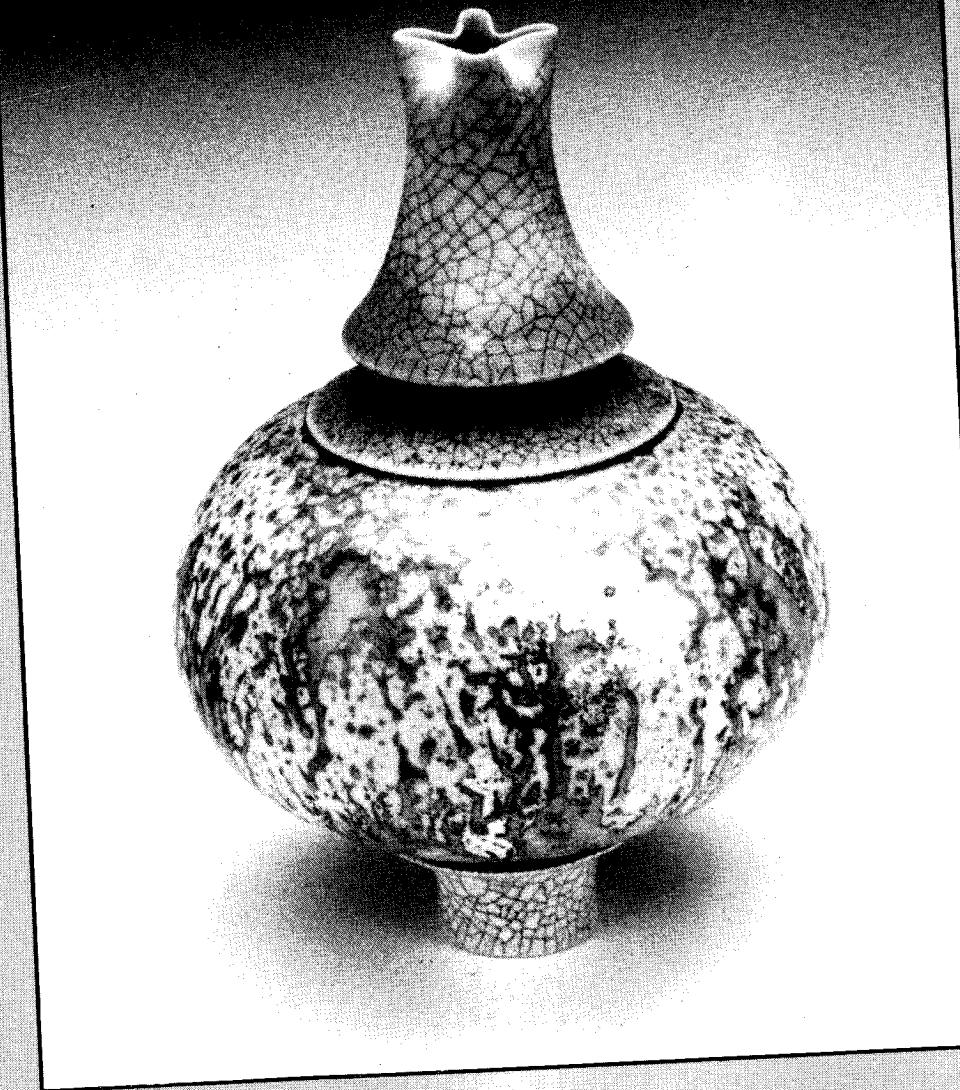
dymunol Caerdydd a'r synthesis i'r amlwg. Mae plant yn marchogaeth eu merlod ar hyd y stryd ar fore Sul. Roeddwn wedi fy rhybuddio na fyddai'n edrych fel crochendy, a doedd dim awgrym o hynny ar gyfyl y semi a oedd newydd ei beintio nag yn yr ardd drefnus o'i flaen. Dim ond ar ol archwiliad mwy dyfal y daeth y gwendaru yn yr allanolion confesional i'r amlwg. Mae person amryfaf ei ddiddordebau yn byw yma: beicio modur, teganau mecanysol, cregyn, addurniadau gardd, cerfluniau ffuglen wydonol, drymiau. Nid dyma ddiddordebau syber a cymdogion. Mae ei gasgliadau o wahanol bethau sydd wedi eu harreddangos mewn cabinetau yn hawlio lle yn amryw o ystafelloedd y cartref. Yr ystafell ffryst yw ei weithdy ac mae gweithdy arall ar gyfer gwydro a thanio yn yr ardd. Dyma gartref Geoffrey Swindell a'i ddau fab bach.

Yn ystod y tymor ysgol mae dysgu cerameg yn Sefydliad Addysg Uwch De Morgannwg yn mynd â phedwar diwrnod o'r wythnos. Gall ddefnyddio'r tri diwrnod arall ar gyfer crochenwaith, ond mae gweithgareddau teuluol yn rhan hanfodol o'i fywyd. Mae'n rhaid cael cydwysedd ac mae'n ystyried y tair agwedd, dysgu, bywyd domestig a chrochenwaith, yr un mor bwysig a'i gilydd. Mae ei ymrwymiadau eraill yn cyfyngu'n anorfol ar faint ei gynnyrch ceramig, ond mae'r cynnyrch yn cyfateb i'w anghenion ac i alwadau'f farchnad. Cyllun cylchol sydd i'w flwydlyn ac nid yw'n cyffwrdd â'i waith fel crochenydd yn ystod gwyliau'r haf, mae'n neilltuo'r amser hwnnw i wneud pethau o gwmpas y cartref. Caiff yr un slalens a'r un bodlonrwydd wrth gynllunio a chodi ffâr dringo ar gyfer y plant ag a gaiff wrth lunio llestr. Mae'n teimlo ei fod dipyn yn anghyffredin yn hyn o beth. Ar yr un pryd mae'n barod lawn i ddatgan mor hanfodol yw hi i athro ddal ati i ymarfer y grefft.

Fel yn achos llawer i grochenydd arall sy'n gweithio gyda phorslen, yn yr Almaen a Thaleithiau Unedig America y mae ei waith yn gwerthu orau. Ddeng mlynedd yn ôl roedd porslen ar flaen y gad mewn cerameg ym Mhrydain, ond erbyn hyn yr arddull sy'n ffasiynol yw'r un sy'n pwysleisio'r agweddau cerfluniol mwy peintwrus a mynegiannol. Ar hyn o bryd y mawr sy'n brydferth. Bellach nid yw ei waith yn cydymffurfio â'r chwaeth gyfoes. A yw hynny'n peri godid iddo? Wel, rhwymaint efallai, ond mae rhwymaintwydd a synnwyd yn perthyn i'w system ac i rythm ei gynhyrchu sy'n gweddu iddo ef. Ar y funud nid yw amser yn caniatâu yn rhwymaintwydd radical ac nid oes ganddo'r awydd i wnebu chwyldro o'r fath. Cymharer hyn ag agwedd Jacqueline Poncelet, a oedd yn gyd-fyfriwr ag ef yn y Coleg Brenhinol. Daeth hithau i'r amlwg yn gyntaf drwy ei gwaith porslen cain ar raddfa fechan ond erbyn hyn mae hi wedi troi ei chefn ar y byd crefft ac yn disgrifio'i hun fel cerflunydd. Mae awgrym o rywbedd organig sy'n dwyn i gof greaduriaid y môr yn perthyn i'w gwrthrychau crochenwaith caled mawr peintiedig ac nid yw rhai o'u nodweddonion yn annhebyg i ffurflau Geoffrey Swindell. Mae'r dicotomi yn symptomatig o grefftâu cyfoes ac o uchelgais sydd wedi ei hanelu at fyd celfyddyd sy'n uwch ei fri.

Gan nad oes ganddo amynedd gyda'r syniadau cymhleth a hunan dybus sydd y tu ôl i lawer o waith crefft 'avant-garde', mae wedi ymateb drwy fabwsiadu ac ail-ddatgan hen werthoedd crefftwaith syml a gwrthrychau prydferth. Fodd bynnag, ar nodyn ychydig yn fwy aethronyddol, mae'n haera ei fod yn hoffi'r syniad y dylai llestr gyfleo'r ymdeimlad o broses barhaus gan bwysleisio'r creu yn fwy na'r cyflawni. Dylai'r ffurf feddu'r potensial, fel pe ba'i'r rhwymeth byw, i roi'r argraff y gall anadiu, ymchwyloddo, ymdroeli a herio ei gyflwr statig. Fel rheol cysylltir syniadau cyfriniol a chrochenwaith â thraddodiad Leach, ond mewnn gwirinoedd rhwymeth y cafodd ei drwytho ynddo gan Hans Coper, ei athro yn y Coleg Brenhinol, yw hyn.

Estheteg ffurfiol a cherfluniol Ruth Duckworth, Lucie Rie a Hans Coper yw'r traddodiad y mae'n uniaethu ei hunag ef yn hytrach n fynonellau crefftaw gwerlin Bernard Leach a'i ddilnwyr. Does ganddo ddim awydd o gwbl i fynd at i gloddi ei glai nac i godi ei odyn ei hun. Mae technoleg cerameg fodern, odynnau trydan a defnyddiau wedi eu prynu yn berffaith addas i'w bwras. Yr hyn y mae'n ei gyflawni gyda'r pethau hyn sy'n bwysig; y cynnyrch terfynol yn hytrach na chreu ffodd arbennig o fwy sy'n cryrif. Modernydd diedifar ydyw er gwaeth'r ffaith i'w hoffter o gerameg gain offenedig gael ei seilio ar brofiadau plentynnod o weld y



casgliadau yn Amgueddfa Stoke ac ar y hyfrydwch a gaiff ym manylwydd eitemau cynnar o lestri Swydd Stafford a lunwyd ar y droell gan gwniau megis Wedgwood.

Er fod peth o'i gynnyrch cynnar mewn crochenwaith caled bu Geoffrey Swindell yn gweithio gyda phorslen yn gyson er deuddeng mlynedd. Tua chanol y saithdegau luniodd rai ffurflau tebyg i heimedau sydd tua throedd fedd o uchder, ond ar wahân i hynny mae ei waith ar raddfa fechan, yn eithriadol felly ar adegau. Yn ei flynyddoedd cynnar bu'n gweithio ar ffurflau caeëdig, gwrthrychau cain adleisiol sy'n dwyn i gof fân origanebau: cregyn, malwod, hadlestri, cnau a cherrig mân wedi eu caboli gan yr elfennau. Yn fwy diweddar y datblygodd yr eitemau ffurf llestr, ond nid ffurflau defnyddiol yn yr ystyr confensiynol mohonynt.

Er fod cysylltiad gweledol agos rhwng y ddau fath gwahanol maent yn cael eu cynhyrchu drwy dechnegau gwrthgyferbyniol, mae'r gweithiau cynnar wedie eu gwasg-gwoliodd ac yn amlydydd o'r fowldiau o rannau mecaniiddol neu gitiau model ac ati. Ar y llaw arall caiff yr eitemau ffurf llestr eu lunio ar y droell. Yn y naill achos a'r llall mae cychwyn y broses yw dyluniadau a brasliniau. Yn dilyn y tanio cyntaf cânt eu gwydro a hynny weithiau gyda chyfuniad o wahanol wydreddau. Caiff gwydreddau gloyv eu cyd-doddi neu eu chwistrellu â pharaffin neu olchydd er mwyn creu effeithiau brith. Ond ar lawer ystyr, ac mae hynny'n beth

digion anghyffredin, y prosesau meithion i roi'r gorffeniad priodol i eitem sy'n nodweddu ei dechneg.

Mae'n rhaid treulio dwy neu daïr awr i roi'r gorffeniad ar y rhan fwyaf o'i eitemau ac mae'n cymharu ei hun i emydd yn hytrach na chrochenydd. Rhaid llifanu'r gwaeldion yn llyfn ac yn wastad, rhaid rhwbo'r llestr â phapur agalen i wneud rhannau o'r gwydredd yn ddisglein, rhaid chwistrellu rhagor o wydredd gan guddio rhannau o'r arwyneb. Caiff potiau eu tanio am yr eildro. Weithiau cânt eu chwistrellu â thywod er mwyn creu arwyneb pyllog cain, proses arw sy'n aml yn dryllio potiau yw hon. Mae'n gorfol dygymod â gradd uchel o wastraff ac yn ôl ei amcangyfrif dim ond tua thraeann o'r eitemau gwreiddiol sy'n goroesi ar gyfer eu gwerthu.

Mae'n gwthio ei ddefnyddiau hyd yr eithaf, ac mae'r tensiynau sy'n rhan o'r broses yn cael eu cyflieu yn ymateb pobl i'r gwaith drwy greu tensiwn gweledol, rhwym gyffro a deinamism sy'n peri i rywun ddal ei anadl bron. Dyma'r nodweddon a gyflwr gan y gwrthrychau i groesdoriad helaeth o gymdeithas, nid oes yn rhaid iddynt wrth unrhyw eglurhad. Yn ôl cred Geoffrey Swindell mae gwrthrych sy'n gynnyrch crefftwaith gain yn llefaru wrth bob un. Dyna yw ei wobr ac o'r herwydd mae'n berffaith hapus i barhau ungharfany y crefftwy.

Os hoffech gael rhagor o fanylion technegol am waith Geoffrey Swindell gweler ysgrif Peter Lane yn *Studio Porcelain* 1980.

Moira Vincentelli