

Ceramic Series

ABERYSTWYTH ARTS CENTRE · No. 2

JANICE TCHALENKO

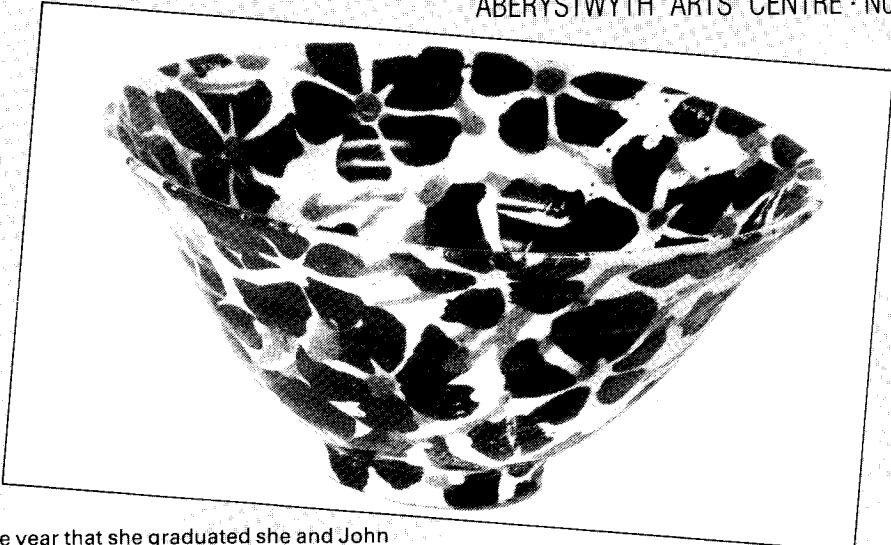
A Potter who Decorates by Emmanuel Cooper

Janice Tchalenko's decorated pots combine a wide range of different ceramic and fine art traditions that include the high fired techniques of the Far East, the decoration of Persian and Islamic pots, the robustness of French country ware and the decorative qualities of a Matisse painting. The result is a colourful range of useful wares which makes imaginative use of trailed decoration which are a delight to see.

Like many others Janice Tchalenko decided to become a potter after starting a career in a completely different profession. Janice worked as a clerk in the telephone department of the Post Office before becoming a clerical officer in the financial department of the Foreign Office in London. At school, though a good all-rounder the emphasis was on academic achievement rather than art, and she had little opportunity to explore these practical skills.

The big change in her career came when she was 21 and met her husband-to-be John, who though British born had a Russian father and German mother. Encouraged by John to do "something with her life" she had a memory of the thrower on one of the BBC Television's 'Interludes' and decided to be a potter. "I knew I could do it" she said. She duly enrolled for five days a week at Putney Art School under Tony Benham and here she learnt basic potting skills. As a keen associate member of the Craftsmen Potters Association she attended meetings, visited many exhibitions and got to know a wide range of potters. For a time she worked in Paul Metcalfe's Notting Hill Gate pottery, mostly weighing out glaze trials and glazing pots. This was followed by work in Fay Russell's studio in Barnes, mixing clay and generally helping in any way she could. As a potter she decided she was still very much an amateur. In 1968, feeling she still needed professional training she applied and was accepted for the Harrow Studio Pottery Course, then run by Victor Margrie and Mick Casson.

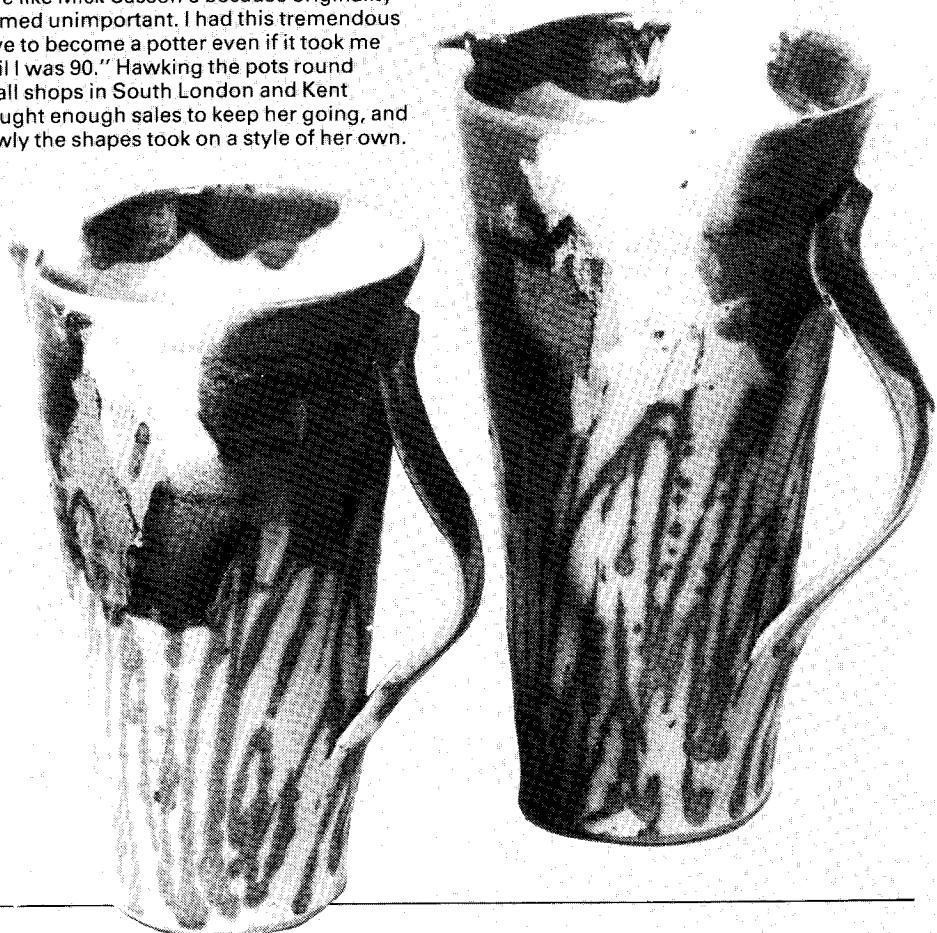
The two years were for Janice a dynamic and rewarding experience with everyone teaching and inspiring each other. She learnt to throw well and at speed and generally felt the workshop like atmosphere gave her the necessary experience for setting up her own pottery. Spurred on by Mick Casson's comment that there are no good women throwers (excepting Gwyn Hanssen) she was determined to prove him wrong by throwing better and faster on a kick wheel than the male students did on an electric wheel. One hundred pots a day thrown on the wheel were commonplace and they were all tossed in the bin. The pots she and most of the other students made were very much inspired by the Leach tradition, and were fired with oriental-type glazes in reduction kilns. "We didn't talk much about aesthetics, but we did talk about technique" she said.



In the year that she graduated she and John bought very cheaply a large Victorian house in Peckham, then an unfashionable part of South London. Here she set up her studio in half of the ground floor and ever since has struggled to keep home and workshop separate. With £100 saved during the Harrow course (great emphasis was laid on setting up your workshop, and the magic sum of £100 was seen as the necessary capital) and with a further loan of £100 from the Gwen Mullins Trust, she bought materials and a small top loading electric kiln. She was in business as a potter.

'At that time I just wanted to earn my living as a potter and didn't much care if my pots were like Mick Casson's because originality seemed unimportant. I had this tremendous drive to become a potter even if it took me until I was 90.' Hawking the pots round small shops in South London and Kent brought enough sales to keep her going, and slowly the shapes took on a style of her own.

In 1972 a £500 grant from the Crafts Council (then the Crafts Advisory Committee) enabled her to buy a 15 cu. foot gas kiln from Kilns and Furnaces which was installed in a building in the yard, and this has given her excellent use ever since. At this time her pots started to take on a more personal style. New glazes were evolved and her range developed to include slightly off-beat items such as neatly fitting nesting bowls, steamers, colanders and the like. "My work was very much part of the studio pottery movement which was such a feature of the late 60s and 70s; all were fired at stoneware



temperatures in reduction kiln, were glazed with typical reduced glazes and were not decorated." Janice drew inspiration mainly from the work of Michael Cardew, and from mediaeval English wares.

Though identified as a studio potter, she did not feel totally a part of the wholefood movement, and she did not think that the pots she made combined all her interests — "I really wanted to decorate" she said "and to use rich bright colours on my pots." Three months in Russia had introduced her to the decorated Central European wares, and further time in the Middle East had brought the superb decorated ware of Persia to her attention. During travels in France she had come across traditional French high wood-fired country pots and these too had a liberating influence. Through her friendship with Roger Hilton she came to know and be inspired by Matisse.

Janice also found great inspiration in the patterns and designs of modern and traditional textiles. Armenian quilts, oriental carpets and contemporary textiles hang in her house, and their patterns influence the decoration on her pots.

Teaching at Camberwell School of Art in London had brought her into regular contact with potters who worked in a very different way. "My 10 years at Camberwell have been an aesthetic education for me" said Janice. From ceramists such as Glenys Barton, Liz Fritsch, Jacqui Poncelet and Alison Britton, Janice learned a great deal from their very different approaches to making ceramics. "I soaked up everything that came along" she said, and she began to see her work in a new light. For example, the first time Glenys came into her workshop she described it as a factory — a description which put the endless production runs into a different light. However, Janice still felt intimidated and oppressed by the vogue for Chinese and Japanese style of brush decoration which she felt totally unable to do even if she wanted. The breakthrough into decorating came when she was talking to Carole MacNicol who said that she too felt unable to decorate but managed by simplifying the shapes and lines, Janice realized that she too could do this if she concentrated on trailed rather than painted decoration.

With new-found confidence, Janice started to apply patterns and designs to her shapes with glaze trailed decoration on top of glaze, and this gave the bright colours she wanted. Janice also realized that she had to re-think the shapes she made if they were to be decorated. In a creative surge of experimental work she made new, simpler shapes and decorated them with a variety of glazes and decorations.

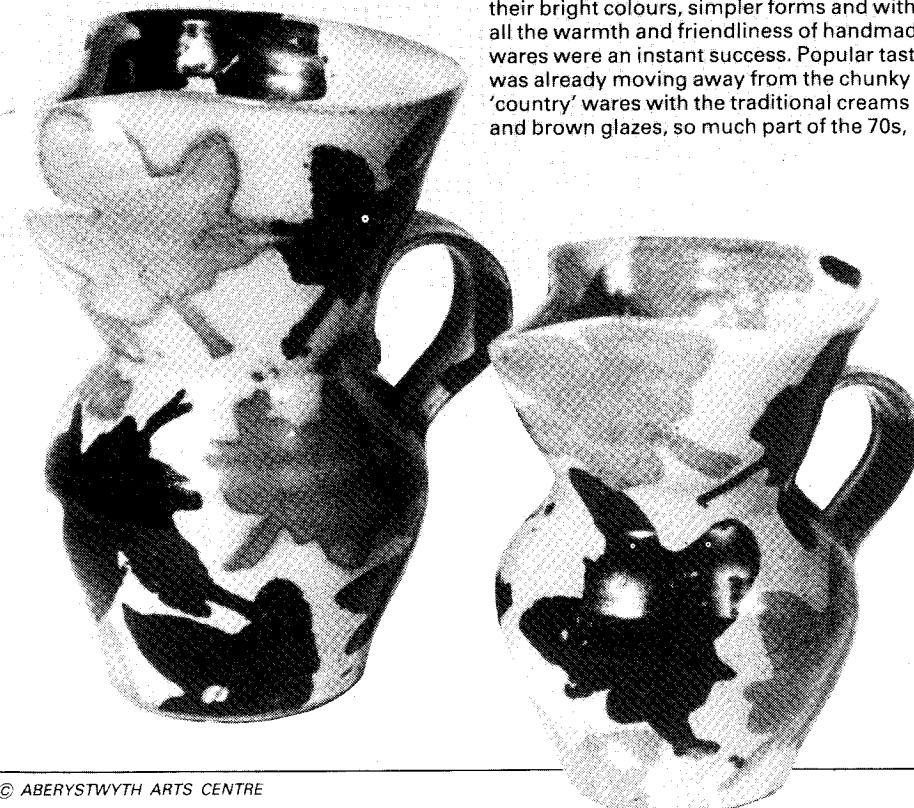
With these new pots made in late 1979 she applied for, and got a Crafts council Bursary in 1980 which was awarded for further research and to develop this new style. The decorated tablewares she produced with their bright colours, simpler forms and with all the warmth and friendliness of handmade wares were an instant success. Popular taste was already moving away from the chunky 'country' wares with the traditional creams and brown glazes, so much part of the 70s,

towards more colour and greater refinement. Though now decorating all her forms Janice regarded herself (and still does) as a maker of strong forms "I am a potter who decorates, not a decorator" she says.

Janice is identified as one of the new wave of studio potters. She no longer makes a range of repetition ware, and though the pots and dishes continue to explore similar forms, all are individually considered. This has slowed down production a great deal. Few of the thrown pots are turned, only such forms as bowls and teapots are given a foot. The introduction of large oval and square dishes which are pressmoulded over hump moulds made out of plaster of Paris, have further extended her range and provided excellent surfaces for decoration. Some are given 'wallpaper pattern' decoration all over, others have carefully worked out designs, mostly abstract or of flower derivation. In her recent work Janice has developed a greater fluidity and strength "I am beginning to achieve the sort of effects I want" she said. The vocabulary of shapes and decorations has been consolidated and extended to include the addition of modelled toads and crayfish as knobs and handles. The designs generally have become more abstracted, achieving an all-over quality of evenness and balance. "They've got easier to do" Janice said.

For the past year Janice has spent much time at Dartington Studio Pottery Training Workshop designing a new range of domestic ware which she saw through the production stage. Her own pots have continued alongside this. Next year the Blumhelman Gallery in New York are showing a large exhibition of her work and it will be fascinating to see how she responds to the American challenge.

(A revised version of the article which appeared in Ceramic Review No.80 March/April 1980).



11 Gwres Cerameg

CANOLFAN Y CELFYDDYDAU ABERYSTWYTH

Rhif 2

JANICE TCHALENKO

Crochenydd sy'n Addurno
gan Emmanuel Cooper

Mae crochenwaith addurnedig Janice Tchalenko yn cyfuno ystod eang o draddodiadau cerameg a chelfyddyd gain sy'n cynnwys technegau gwres uchel y Dwyrain Pell, addurniadau crochenwaith Persia ac Islam, cryfder crochenwaith gwledig Ffrainc a nodweddiadon addurnol peintiad gan Matisse. Y canlyniad yw ystod liwgar o crochenwaith defnyddiol sy'n gwneud deunydd dychmygus o addurniadau crog sy'n bleser i edrych arnynt.

Fel llawer i berson arall penderfynodd Janice Tchalenko fynd yn gorchenydd ar ôl cychwyn ar yrfa mewn galwedigaeth gwbl wahanol. Bu Janice yn gweithio fel cleric yn adran teleffonau Swyddfa'r Post cyn dod yn swyddog clergol yn adran ariannol y Swyddfa Dramor yn Llundain. Pan oedd hi'n ferch ysgol, er bod ei gwaith yn gyffredinol dda, roedd y pwyslais ar gyraediadau academaidd yn hytrach nag ar gelfyddyd, ac ychydig o gyfle a gafodd i arbrofi gyda medrau ymarferol.

A hithau'n un ar hugain oed y daeth y newid mawr yn ei gyrra pan gyfarfu â John a ddaeth yn ddiweddarach y wr iddi. Er iddo gael ei eni ym Mhrydain un o Rwsia oedd tad John a'i fam yn Almaenes. Cafodd ei hannog gan John i "wneud rhywbeth o'i bywyd" ac roedd ganddi gof o weld crochenydd yngystod yr 'Egwyliau' ar Deledu'r BBC a phenderfynodd mai crochenydd fyddai hithau. "Roeddwn i'n gwybod fod y gallu gen i," meddai.

Heb golli amser cofrestrodd am bum niwrnod yr wythnos yn Ysgol Gelf Putney i astudio gyda Tony Benham ac yno y dysgodd hi fedrau sylfaenol crochenwaith.

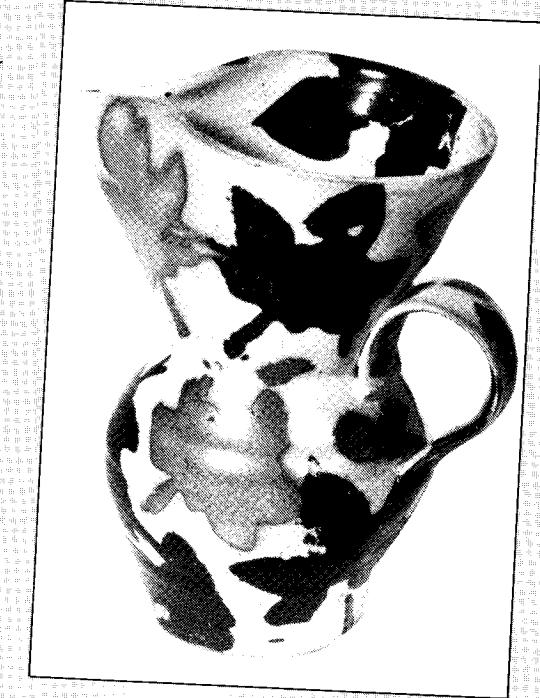
helaeth iawn gan draddodiad Leach, ac roedd ynt yn cael eu tanio gyda gwydredd o'r math dwyreiniol mewn odynnau 'gostwng', "Dodden ni ddim yn trafod llawer ar estheteg, ond rodden ni'n trafod techneg," meddai.

Yn ei blwyddyn gradd prynodd hi a John dî mawr Fictoraidd yn rhad iawn yn Peckham, Fel is-aelod o'r 'Craftsmen Potters Association' roedd hi'n mynchyd cyfarfod yd ac yn ymwdi â llawer o ardangosfeydd, ac fe ddaeth i adnabod llawer o crochenyddion amrywiol. Am beth amser bu'n gweithio yng nghrochendy Paul Metcalfe yn Notting Hill Gate, yn pwysoddefnyddiau ar gyfer treialon gwydro ac yn gwydro potiau yn fwyaf arbennig. Yn dilyn hyn bu'n gweithio yn siwtio Fay Russell ym Barnes yn cymysgu clai ac yn cynorthwyo'n gyffredinol mewn unrhyw ffordd y gallai.

Daeth i'r casgliad ei bod yn dal i fod yn amatur i raddau helaeth cyn bellied ac yr oedd crochenwaith yn y cwestiwn.

Ym 1968, gan ei bod yn teimlo angen rhagor o hyfforddiant broffesiynol, gwnaeth gais i fynd ar Gwrs Crochenwaith Siwtio Harrow a oedd yng ngorff Victor Margrie a Mick Casson ar y pryd, a chafodd ei derbyn.

Bu'r ddwy flynedd yn brofiad cyfoethog a grymus i Janice gyda phawb yn dysgu ac yn ysbrydoli'r nail y llall. Dysgodd 'daflu' yn dda ac yn gyflym, a themlai fod yr awyrgylch tebyg i weithdy ar y cyfan wedi rhoi iddi'r profiad angenrheidiol i gychwyn ei chrochendy ei hun. Symbwlwyd hi gan sylw Mick Casson nad oes taflwyr da ymhilith merched (ar wahân i Gwyn Hanssen) i fynnu dangos iddo ei fod yn camsynied drwy 'daflu' yn well ac yn gyflymach ar droell droed nag y gallai'r dynion oedd ar y cwrs wneud ar droell drydan. Doedd hi ddim yn anghyffredin iddi 'daflu' cant o botiau ar y droell mewn diwrnod, a'r cyfan ohonynt yn cael eu lluchio i'r bin clai. Roedd y potiau roedd hi a'r rhan fwyaf o'r myfyrwyr eraill yn eu gwneud wedi eu hysbrydoli i raddau.



rhan anffasiynol o Dde Llundain ar y pryd. Yno sefydlodd ei siwtio mewn un hanner o'r llawr isaf ac ers hynny mae hi wedi bod yn brwydro i gadw ei chartref a'i gweithdy ar wahân.

Gyda chan punt roedd hi wedi eu cynilo yn ystod y cwrs yn Harrow (rhoddiad pwyslais mawr ar gychwyn eich gweithdy eich hun, a'r swm hud o gan punt oedd yn cael ei ystyried yn gyfalaf angenrheidiol) a chyda can punt arall o fenthyciad o.

Ymddiriedolaeth Gwen Mullins, prynodd ddefnyddiau ac odyn drydan fechan. Roedd hi wedi ei sefydlu ei hun fel crochenydd.

"Ar y pryd y cwbl roeddwn i ei eisiau oedd ennill bywoliaeth fel crochenydd a doeddwn i'n hidio fawr os oedd fy mhotiau yn debyg i rai Mic Casson, doedd gwreiddioldeb ddim yn ymdangos yn bwysig. Roedd gen i ryw awydd aruthrol i fod yn crochenydd hyd yn oed pe bai'n golygu y byddwn i'n ddeg a phedwar ugain oed erbyn i mi lwyddo."

Wrth bedlera ei photiau o amgylch siopau bychain yn Ne Llundain a Swydd Caïnt lwyddodd i ennill digon i gadw'r busnes ar ei draed, ac yn raddol dechreuodd feithrin ei harddull ei hun.



Y Gwyfres Cerameg

Ym 1972, gyda chymorth grant o £500 gan y Cyngor Crefft (Y Pwyllgor Crefft) gallodd brynu odyn nwyr gan 'Kilns and Furnaces' a'i gosod mewn adeilad yn yr iard, ac mae'r odyn honno wedi rhoi gwasaanaeth ardderchog iddi ers hynny. Dyma'r pryd y dechreuodd ei gwaith ddangos arddull mwys personol. Datblygodd wydreddau newydd a datblygodd ystod ei gwaith i gynnwys rhai eitemau ychydig yn anarferol megis nythaid o bowleni yn ffito'n glos, stemyddion, colanderi a phethau o'r fath. "Roedd fy ngwaith yn amlwg iawn yn rhan o'r mudiad crochenwaith siwdio a oedd yn nodwedd mor amlwg o ddiweddu y chwedegau a'r saithdegau: roedd y cwbl yn cael eu tanio ar dymheredd crochenwaith caled mewn odyn 'gostwng', wedi eu gwylodro gyda gwyloddro 'gostwng' nodwediadol ac heb eu haddurno." Cái ei hysbrydoli yn bennaf gan waith Michael Cardew a crochenwaith Seisnig ganoloesol.

Er ei bod yn cael ei hadnabod fel crochenydd siwdio, ni theimlai ei bod yn perthyn yn hollol i'r mudiad cyfanfwyd, ac roedd yn sicr nad oedd ei gwaith yn cyfuno pob un o'i diddordebau. "Mewn gwirionedd roeddwn i eisiau addurno," meddai, "a defnyddio lliwiau cyfoethog disglaire ar fy ngwaith." Roedd tri mis yn Rwsia wedi dod â crochenwaith addurnedig Canol Ewrop i'w sylw, a chynnod pellach yn y Dwyrain Canol wedi rhoi cyfle iddi ymgafanwyddo â crochenwaith addurnedig godidog Persia. Wrth grwydro Ffrainc roedd hi wedi dod ar draws potiau gwledig traddodiadol Ffrainc a oedd wedi eu tanio mewn odynau tân coed gwres uchel, ac roedd y rhain hefyd wedi bod yn gymorth i ehangu ei gorwelion. Drwy gyfrwng ei chyfeillgarwch â Roger Hilton daeth yn gyfarwydd â gwaith Matisse a thynnodd beth ysbrydoliaeth o'r gwaith hwnnw.

Cafodd Janice gryn ysbrydoliaeth hefyd ym mhatriau a chynlluniau gweadwaith fodern a thraddodiadol. Mae cwiltiau o Armenia, carpedi dwyreiniol a gweadwaith

gyfoes ar furiau ei thy, ac mae eu patrymau wedi dylanwadu ar yr addurniadau ar ei chrochenwaith. Daeth cyfnod o ddysgu yn Ysgol Gelf Camberwell yn Llundain â i gysylltiad rheolaidd â chrochenyddion a oedd yn gweithio mewn ffyrdd pur wahanol. "Bu fy neg mlynedd yn Camberwell yn addysg esthetic i mi," meddai Janice. Dysgodd Janice lawer iawn oddi wrth grefftwr cerameg megis Glenys Barton, Liz Fritsch, Jacqui Poncelet ac Alison Britton, pob un ohonynt gyda dull cwbl wahanol o fynd ynghlyn â'r gwaith. "Roeddwn i'n gadael i bob peth dreiddio i mewn," meddai, a dechreuodd weld ei gwaith mewn goleuni newydd. Er enghraift, y tro cyntaf y daeth Glenys i mewn i'w gweithdy fe'i disgrifiodd fel ffatri — disgrifiad a roes olwg wahanol iddi ar y cynhyrchu unffurf diddiweddu.

Fodd bynnag, roedd Janice yn dal i deimlo fod y ffasiwn o ddefnyddio addurniadau brws yn y dull Sieineaid a Siapaneaid, yr oedd hi'n gwbl analluoedd i'w wneud hyd yn oed pe bai hi'n deisyfu, yn ddychryn ac yn dreth arni. Fe dorrodd hi i mewn i'r byd addurno pan oedd hi'n siarad gyda Carole MacNicol a honno'n dweud ei bod hithau hefyd yn teimlo nad oedd hi'n gallu addurno ond ei bod hi'n ymdopi drwy symleiddio ffurfliau a llinellau. Sylwedolodd Janice y gallai hithau wneud hynny o ganolbwytio ar addurniadau crog yn hytrach na rhai wedi eu peintio.

Gyda hyder newydd dechreuodd Janice osod patrymau a dyluniadau ar ei gwaith ar ffurf addurniadau crog wedi eu gwylodro ar ben gwyloddro, a rhododd hynny iddi'r lliwiau disglaire roedd hi eu heisiau. Sylwedolodd Janice hefyd fod yn rhaid iddi ail feddwl am y ffurfliau roedd hi'n eu cynhyrchu os oedd ynt i gael eu haddurno. Mewn ymchwydd greadigol o waith arbrofol cynhyrchodd ffurfliau newydd symlach a'u haddurno gydag amrywiaeth o wydred ac addurniadau.

Ar ddiweddu 1979, ar sail y gwaith newydd hwn, gwnaeth gais am Ysgoloriaeth y



Cyngor Crefftau ac fe'i cafodd ym 1980 i arbrofi ymhellach ac i ddatblygu ei harddull newydd. Roedd y llestri bwrrd addurnedig a gynhyrchodd yn eu lliwiau disglaire a'u ffurfliau symlach a chydag agosatrwydd a chynheswydd crochenwaith llaw yn llywddiant o'r cychwyn. Roedd y chwaeth boblogaidd eisoedd yn dechrau cefnu ar y crochenwaith gwledig trwchus gyda'r gwyloddro hufen a brown, a oedd yn gymaint rhan o'r saithdegau, ac yn symud i gyfeiriad gwaith mwy lliwgar a choeth. Er ei bod erbyn hyn yn addurno pob un o'i ffurfliau (ac yn parhau i wneud hynny) dalaia Janice i'w hystyried ei hun fel crochenydd sy'n creu ffurfliau cryfion. "Crochenydd sy'n addurno ac nid addurnwr wyf fi," meddai.

Mae Janice yn cael ei hystyried yn un o'r to newydd o grochenyddion siwdio. Dyw hi ddim mwyach yn ail adrodd yr un ffurfliau, ac er bod y potiau a'r llestri yn amrywiadau ar ffurfliau tebyg, mae pob un ohonynt yn cael ei ystyried ar wahân. Mae hyn wedi arafu llif y cynrych yn sylwedol. Ychydig o'r potiau wedi eu 'taflu' sy'n cael eu cyffwrdd ymhellach a dim ond ffurfliau megis bowleni a thebotiau sydd a thraed arnynt.

Pan ddechreuodd hi wneud llestri mawr sgwâr a hirgrwn, sy'n cael eu mowldio ar fowldiau crwm wedi eu gwneud o blastr Paris, fe ehangwyd ystod ei gwaith a chaffod arwynebau campus i'w haddurno. Addurniad 'papur wal' sydd dros rai ohonynt, tra mae cynlluniau haniaethol gan mwyaf, neu rai wedi eu sylfaenu ar flodau, wedi eu gweithio allan yn ofalus ar rai eraill. Yn ei gwaith diweddar mae Janice wedi datblygu mwy o gryfder a rhwyddineb. "Rwym dechrau llwyddo i greu'r math o effeithiau roeddwn i eisiau," meddai. Mae geirfa'r ffurfliau a'r addurniadau wedi ei chadarnhau a'i hymestyn i gynnwys modelau o lyffantod a chimychiaid cochion fel nobiau a dolennau. Mae'r cynlluniau'n gyffredinol wedi dod yn fwy haniaethol gan gyrraedd ansawdd gytbwys a gwastad drwyddyd draw. "Maent wedi dod yn haws i'w gwneud," meddai Janice.

Yn ystod y flwyddyn ddiwethaf treuliodd Janice gryn amser yng Ngweithdy Hyfforddi Crochenwaith Stiwdio Dartington yn cynllunio cyfres newydd o grochenwaith domestig y bu hi'n cadw golwg arnynt cyn bellod â'r pwyt cynhyrchu. Mae ei gwaith hi ei hun wedi mynd rhagddo ar yr un pryd. Y flwyddyn nesaf bydd Oriel Blumhelman yn Efrog Newydd yn cyflwyno arddangosfa fawr o'i gwaith a bydd yn hynod ddiddorol i weld sut y bydd hi'n ymateb i'r sialens Americanaidd.

(Fersiwn ddiwygiedig o erthygl a ymddangosodd yn 'Ceramic Review' Rhif 80 Mawrth/Ebrill 1980)

