



C E R A M I C
S E R I E S ●

Tony White

Aberystwyth Arts Centre



MARCH 1999 number 93

Tony White

Raku is a dramatic ceramic technique that originated in Japan, and the raku effect is a striking feature of all Tony White's work. At the height of a glaze firing, when the glaze has just fluxed, the pot is removed, glowing and molten, from the kiln. On exposure to the cold air the glaze cracks, which causes the characteristic crazed surface. Next the pot is 'smoked' by covering with combustible material, such as sawdust or wood shavings. The material ignites on contact and the carbon that is produced darkens the crazing. Timing is crucial for the raku potter: as soon as the optimum effect has been achieved, the pot is plunged into cold water to prevent any further change. The process causes enormous shock to the clay body, and special clays, such as the 'T-material' used by Tony White, have been developed that can withstand it.

Tony White first encountered raku after he and his family moved to West Wales in 1983. At a weekend art event he helped to build a wood fired raku kiln out of house bricks. The results were mixed. Damp weather conditions added to the difficulty of the technique, and he decided that while raku could provide an entertaining spectacle, it was not suitable for production wares. At that time he and his wife Barbara had bought a cottage near Tregaron and he was working in a converted barn next door. He made domestic stoneware which was sold in craft shops and galleries all over Wales. He simply could not afford the indulgence of a technique which can often result in cracked pots.

The Whites had a lot to lose when they relocated to Wales from their home town of Hinkley in Leicestershire. On leaving school at fifteen, Tony had worked in a factory engineering machine parts for aircraft landing gear. Barbara worked in a hosiery factory. They married in 1968. On Friday evenings Tony attended pottery classes at Hinkley College of Further Education. As he says, he 'took to pottery'. So much so that in 1979, after he was made redundant, his next job was as a technician at Hinkley College, where he taught ceramics himself one night a week. By this time, he had his own wheel and kiln at home and was selling work privately. The move to Wales was born of frustration. As a technician, he was in a good position to acquire new skills and ideas, but time constraints meant he rarely had the opportunity to apply them in his own work. Meanwhile he had become

engrossed in a process of ceramic self-education. His reading included Bernard Leach's famous *A Potter's Book*, and he was a regular visitor to Leicester Museum, where the collection includes work by studio potters like Leach and Shoji Hamada, as well as examples of industrial wares. Mick Casson, and his 'The craft of the potter' series on television, was another very strong influence.

Technique has always been an important factor in Tony White's ceramics. He likes the challenge of new methods and different decorative effects, but he aims to control rather than be controlled. Perhaps his background in precision engineering is reflected in his approach. In 1986 he took another job as a technician, this time in the University of Wales Art Department at Aberystwyth. There he was introduced to the modern ceramic fibre kilns and equipment which make raku a more viable option. Firing student work of all shapes and sizes meant that he became very experienced at manipulating the technique. His own education continued apace. The University collection of ceramics provided further stimulation, as did contact with visiting potters at Aberystwyth Arts Centre workshop sessions. David Roberts was one of these; the scale of his pieces with their wide expanse of raku surface particularly interested Tony White.

When ceramics was dropped from the curriculum at the University Art Department in 1990, Tony and Barbara White decided to try working for themselves again. They had moved to Cymstwyth two years previously, and had again set up a pottery workshop next to their house. With a family of three to support, they were keen to identify a product that would sell. Inspired by a postcard showing an India Runner duck that was pinned up in their kitchen, Barbara suggested they try making animals. The rest, as they say, is history. They soon developed what Tony refers to as the 'house style'. There are two key features. One is the innovative template method that is used for all the different animal forms. It is not dissimilar to the way soft toys are made. The basic shape is cut from a flat sheet of clay using a paper template. It is draped and folded over a support and feet, ears etc., are added. Simple incised marks are used to indicate different parts of the body, like the shape of a dog's leg or a duck's eye. The pieces are burnished so as to give a smooth surface that is pleasant to handle. This system makes for fairly fast cost-effective construction, with the result that more time can be spent on the second key feature - surface decoration. The White's use of the raku technique means that each piece is bound to be different from the next.

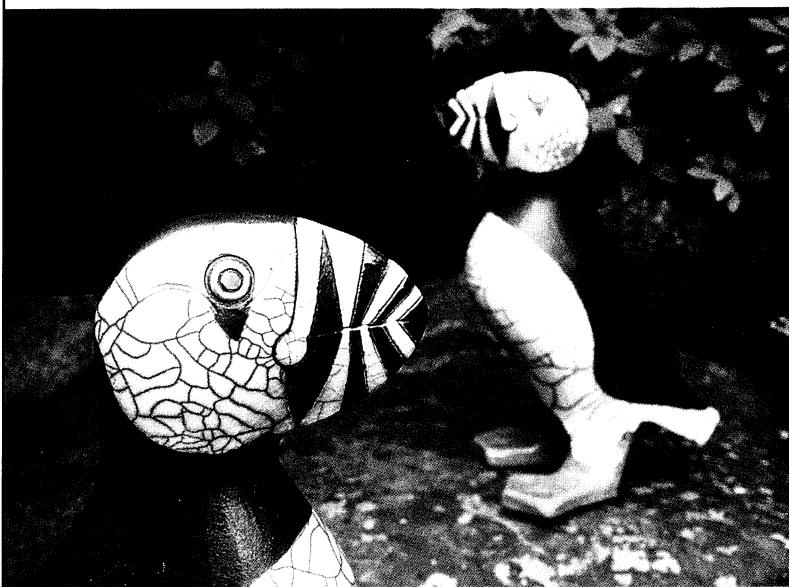
The animals - at first ducks and cats - were immediately

popular. Demand was such that the Whites were able to expand their repertoire to include chickens, seals, puffins, penguins and 'Bob the Dog'. Both he and the cat were originally portraits of family pets. With his turned up, eager begging posture, 'Bob the Dog' is a product of Tony White's sentimental side. He refers to the piece as 'the faithful family hound'. Indeed, another feature of the White 'house style' is a sense of affection blended with humour that pervades the work, and must contribute to its wide appeal.

Ceramic objects like these, which we would broadly define as 'ornaments', draw on folk art traditions. They are lively and unpretentious. But the ceramic ornament per se occupies a rather vexed position within theoretical hierarchies of art and craft. Ornament of any kind was discarded by avant-garde artists and designers for much of the twentieth century, and ornamental objects were consigned to the dustbin as 'clutter'. The few pieces that were admitted into the modern interior, were chosen for their abstract 'aesthetic' qualities, to be the focus of quiet contemplation. It was important that such an object was a unique expression of the maker. Today many studio potters make objects, including animal forms, that could loosely be categorised as ornaments. Very few deal with multiples, however, uniqueness is still a highly valued commodity. In this respect Tony and Barbara White's animals - she has been working with her husband as a full-time assistant since 1996 - are in a category of their own. They are alike but different, they have presence but it is an animated, sometimes slightly quizzical presence more likely to produce a smile than a 'deep and meaningful' idea.

A recent stay in Barcelona, and an exhibition he saw there of work by the Spanish artist Joan Miro, informs Tony White's brightly coloured extruded forms. Made in the first instance for his own pleasure, they are a new development in his work. They offer plenty of opportunity for decoration, and he has adopted an unusually (for him) spontaneous approach. He begins with lines of masking tape wound around the pot so as to give a starting point for the design. These taped lines remain unglazed, but during the raku process they will turn black when smoke penetrates the clay body. Other shapes are painted in under-glaze colours, while some areas, those that will eventually show the raku crazing, have only a coating of raw glaze at this stage. In the making, nothing looks as it will in the end: the design is all anticipation. But the result is all art, at once bold and playful, as a consummate technician enjoys himself.

Jo Dahn February 1999



March 6 - 24 April 1999

The Arts Centre gratefully acknowledges the continuing support of Aberystwyth Town Council, Ceredigion County Council, West Wales Office of the Arts Council of Wales, Arts Council of Wales and University of Wales Aberystwyth.

© Canolfan y Celfyddydau Aberystwyth Arts Centre

Penglais Hill, Aberystwyth, Ceredigion. SY23 3DE 01970 622887



C Y F R E S •

G E R A M E G

Tony White

Canolfan y Celfyddydau Aberystwyth



MAWRTH 1999 rhif 93

Tony White

Techneg ddramatig yw raku sy'n hanu o Japan, ac mae raku'n nodwedd drawadol yn holl waith Tony White. Pan fydd y gwaith tanio yn ei anterth, a'r gwydredd newydd ffylcsio, bydd y pot yn cael ei dynnu o'r odyn yn eirias ac yn dawdd. Wrth iddo ddod i gysylltad â'r aer oer, bydd y gwydredd yn holtti, sy'n achosi'r effaith gracellu ar draws yr wyneb. Wedyn, bydd y pot yn cael ei "bardduo" drwy ei orchuddio â deunyddiau hylosg, fel blawd lli neu sifains, bydd y deunydd yn tanio wrth ddod i gysylltiad â'r pot, a bydd y carbon sy'n cael ei gynhyrchu'n tywyllu'r cracellu. Mae amser'n hollbwysig i'r crochenydd raku: cyn gynted ag y cyrhaeddir yr effaith orau, bydd y pot yn cael ei ddowcio i ddŵr oer er mwyn atal unrhyw newid pellach. Mae'r broses yn peri sioc anferthol i'r corff clai, a bydd Tony White yn defnyddio cleiau arbennig, megis y "T-material". Mae'r rhain wedi'u datblygu er mwyn wrthsefyll y sioc.

Daeth Tony i gysylltiad â raku am y tro cyntaf ar ôl iddo ef a'i deulu symud i Gymru ym 1983. Yn ystod penwythnos o weithgareddau celf, bu'n helpu adeiladu odyn raku a losgai goed, a hynny o frics tŷ. Digon cymysg oedd y canlyniadau. Ychwanegwyd at anawsterau'r dechneg gan y twydd gwlyb, a phenderfynodd Tony, er y gallai raku gynnig sioe ddigon difyr, nad oedd yn addas ar gyfer cynhyrchu llestri. Ar yr adeg honno, roedd Tony a'i wraig Barbara wedi prynu bwthyn ger Tregaron, a bu'n gweithio mewn hen ysgubor drws nesa'. Bu wrthi'n gwneud llestri caled domestig a fyddai'n cael eu gwerthu mewn siopau crefft ac orielau ledled Cymru. Y gwir amdani oedd na allai fforddio poitsian gyda thechneg lle, yn amlach na heb, mai pot wedi'i gracio yw'r canlyniad.

Bu gan y teulu dipyn i'w golli wrth symud i Gymru o'u cartref yn Hinkley yn Swydd Gaerlŷr, Wrth adael yr ysgol yn bymtheg oed, roedd Tony wedi gweithio mewn ffatri'n gwneud cydrannau peiriannol ar gyfer gêr glanio awyrennau. Bu Barbara'n gweithio mewn ffatri sannau. Priododd y ddau ym 1968. Bob nos Wener, byddai Tony yn mynychu dosbarthiadau crochenwaith yng Ngholeg Addysg Bellach Hinckley. Yng ngeiriau Tony, fe "gymerodd at crochenwaith". I'r fath raddau, hyd nes ym 1979, ar ôl colli'i waith, aeth i weithio fel technegydd yng Ngholeg Hinckley, lle y bu'n athro cerameg un noson yr wythnos. Erbyn hyn, roedd ganddo ei droell a'i odyn ei hun gartref, ac roedd yn gwerthu ei waith yn breifat.. Mudodd i Gymru oherwydd rhwystredigaeth. Fel technegydd, roedd mewn sefyllfa dda i ennill sgiliau a syniadau newydd, ond golygai cyfngiadau amser mai'n anaml iawn y byddai ganddo gyfle i'w ddefnyddio yn ei waith ei hun. Yn y cyfamser, roedd wedi ymgolli yn y broses o hunanaddysg yn y maes

cerameg. Ymhlieth ei waith darllen oedd cyfrol enwog Bernard Leach, "A Potter's Book". Bu hefyd yn ymwelydd cyson ag Amgueddfa Caerlŷr lle mae'r casgliad yn cynnwys gwaith gan grochenwyr stiwdio megis Leach a Shoji Hamada, yn ogystal ag enghreifftiau o lestri diwydiannol. Dylanwad arall a fu'n hynod bwysig oedd Mick Casson a'i gyfres deledu "The Craft of the Potter."

Bu techneg erioed yn ffactor pwysig yng ngherameg Tony White. Mae o'n hoffi'r her o ddefnyddio dulliau ac effeithiau addurnadol newydd, ond ei amcan yw rheoli'n hytrach na chael ei reoli. Efallai fod ei gefndir ym myd peirianneg gyfewin gwyr, yn cael ei adlewyrchu yn ei ddull o weithio. Ym 1986, cymerodd jobyn arall yn dechnegydd, y tro hwn yn Adran Gelf Prifysgol Cymru Aberystwyth. Yn y fan honno, fe'i cyflwynwyd i'r odynnau ac offer cerameg ffibr newydd sy'n golygu bod raku yn ddewis mwy cynhaliol. Golygai tanio gwaith o bob siâp a maint gan fyfyrwyr iddo ddod yn brofiadol iawn wrth ddefnyddio'r dechneg. Daliai ei addysg ei hun i fynd rhagddo ar garlam. Fe'i hysgogwyd ymhellach gan gasgliad cerameg y Brifysgol, a hefyd wrth ddod i gysylltiad â chrochenwyr a ddeuai i sesinau gweithdai Chanolfan y Celfyddydau Aberystwyth. Un o'r rhain oedd David Roberts. Bu gan Tony White ddiddordeb arbennig ym maint ei ddarnau gyda'u harwynebau raku helaeth.

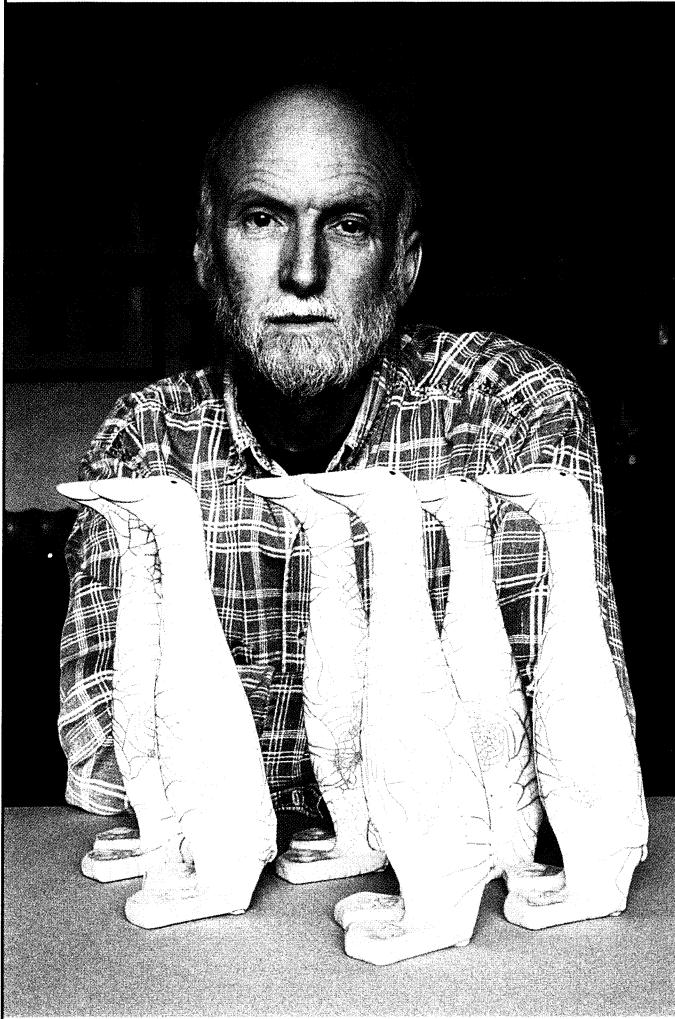
Pan ollyngwyd cerameg o'r cwricwlwm yn Adran Gelf y Brifysgol, penderfynodd Tony a Barbara White i roi cynnig ar weithio ar eu liwt eu hunain unwaith eto. Roeddent wedi symud i Gwmystwyth ddwy flynedd yn gynt, ac unwaith eto, roeddent wedi sefydlu gweithdy crochenwaith drws nesa i'w cartref. Gyda theulu o dri i'w gynnal, roeddent yn awyddus i gael hyd i gynnyrch a fyddai'n gwerthu. Wedi'u hysbrydoli gan gerdyn post yn dangos hwyaden India Rwyber a oedd wedi'i binio ar y wal yn y gegin, awgrymodd Barbara eu bod yn rhoi cynnig ar wneud anifeiliaid. Hanes yw'r gweddill. Yn fuan, llwyddon nhw i ddatblygu'r hyn y mae Tony yn cyfeirio ato fel "steil y tŷ". Mae yna ddwy brif nodwedd. Un yw'r dull templat newydd a ddefnyddir ar gyfer holl ffurfiâu'r gwahanol anifeiliaid. Nid yw'n annhebyg i'r ffordd y bydd teganau meddal yn cael eu gwneud. Mae'r siâp sylfaenol yn cael ei thorri o len wastad o glai gan ddefnyddio patrwm papur. Fe'i gosodir yn llac a'i blygu dros gynhaliaid ac ychwanegir y traed a'r clustiau ac yn y blaen. Torrir rhiciau syml i ddangos gwahanol rannau'r corff fel siâp coes ci neu lygad hwyaden. Mae'r darnau'n cael eu gloywi er mwyn creu arwyneb llyfn sy'n ddymunol i gyffwrdd ag ef. Mae'r system yma'n golygu bod y darnau'n rhai eithaf cyflym a chost-effeithiol a'r canlyniad yw y gellir treulio mwy o amser ar y ail brif nodwedd - addurno'r arwyneb. Golyga'r dechneg raku a ddefnyddir gan y Whitiaid fod pob darn yn rhwym o fod yn wahanol i'r nesa'.

Bu'r anifeiliaid - hwyaid a chathod ar y dechrau - yn boblogaidd ar unwaith. Roedd cymaint o ofyn hyd nes y gallai Tony a Barbara ehangu i gynnwys cywion ieir, morloi, adar pâl, pengwiniaid a "Bob y Ci". Portreadau o anifeiliaid anwes y teulu oedd Bob a'r gath yn wreiddiol. Gyda'i osgo begin glân, cynyrrch ochr sentimental Tony White oedd Bob. Mae o'n cyfeirio at y darn fel "ci ffyddlon y teulu". Yn wir, nodwedd arall ar "steil y ty" yw ymdeimlad o anwyldeb wedi'i gyfuno â hiwmor sy'n ymdreiddio'r gwaith i gyd, a rhaid ei fod yn cyfrannu at ei apêl eang.

Mae eitemau cerameg fel y rhain - eitemau y byddwn yn eu disgrifio'n fras yn rhai addurniadol - yn tynnu ar draddodiadau celf gwerin. Maent yn fywiog ac yn ddifffuant. Ond rhwng safle digon od sydd gan addurno cerameg o fewn hierarchaethau damcaniaethol celf a chreffft. Taflwyd addurn o unrhyw fath o'r neilltu gan arlunyddion a dlynuyddion avant-garde yr ugeinfed ganrif, a sbwriel oedd unrhyw wrthrychau addurnol. Dewisiwyd yr ychydig ddarnau a ganiateir ganddynt oherwydd eu priodweddau estheteg haniaethol. Darnau i ffyrio yn eu cylch odden nhw. Roedd yn bwysig i wrthrych o'r math fod yn fynegiant unigryw o'r gwneuthurwr. Erbyn heddiw, mae llawer iawn o grochenwyr stiwdio'n gwneud eitemau sy'n cynnwys ffurfiau anifeiliaid y gellid eu categoriiddio'n llac yn ddarnau addurnol. Ychydig iawn sy'n cynhyrchu cyfresi, serch hynny. Mae bod yn unigryw'n bwysig o hyd. Yn y cyswllt hwn, saif anifeiliaid Tony a Barbara White - bu Barbara'n gweithio gyda'i gwâr fel cynorthwy-ydd llawn-amser ers 1996 - mewn categori ar wahân. Maent yn debyg, ond yn wahanol; mae ganddynt bresenoliaeth, ond presenoliaeth animeiddiedig, ymhoggar weithiau, ydyw, sy'n debycach o godi gwên na syniad dwys ac ystyrionl.

Mae arhosiad diweddar ym Marcelona, ynghyd ag arddangosfa o waith a welodd yno gan yr arlunydd Sbaenaidd Joan Miro, wedi dylanwadu ar ffurfiau allyrrol, lliwgar Tony. Wedi'u gwneud yn y lle cyntaf i'w blesio ei hun, maent, erbyn hyn, yn ddatblygiad yn ei waith. Maent yn cynnig digon o gyfle ar gyfer addurno, ac mae wedi mabwysiadu dull byrfyfyr anarferol (iddo ef). Bydd yn dechrau gyda llinellau o dâp masgio wedi'u lapio o gwmpas y pot yn fan cychwyn i'r dyluniad. Erys y llinellau tâp hyn heb eu gwydro. Ond, yn ystod y broses raku, byddant yn troi'n ddu pan fydd y mwg yn treiddio i gorff y clai. Bydd siapiau eraill yn cael eu paentio mewn lliwiau tan-wydro, tra na fydd rhai rhannau - y rheini a fydd yn dangos y cracellu raku yn y pen draw - ond yn derbyn haen o gracellu amrwd ar yr adeg yma. Wrth ei wneud, does dim byd yn edrych fel y bydd yn y diweddl. Disgwyl yw popeth yn y dyluniad. Ond celfyddyd i gyd yw'r canlyniad, yn efn ac yn chwaraeus ar yr un pryd, wrth i dechnegydd meistrolgar gael blas ar ei grefft.

Jo Dahn Chewfror 1999



Tony White

6 Mawrth - 24 Ebrill 1999

Mae Canolfan y Celfyddydau yn cydnabod yn ddiolchgar gefnogaeth barhaus Cyngor Tref Aberystwyth, Cyngor Sir Ceredigion Swyddfa Gorllewin Cymru Cyngor Celfyddydau Cymru, Cyngor Celfyddydau Cymru a Phrifysgol Cymru Aberystwyth.

© Canolfan y Celfyddydau Aberystwyth Arts Centre
Penglais Hill, Aberystwyth, Ceredigion. SY23 3DE 01970 622887