Terry Bell Hughes

Looking back I recollect that the first time I saw and handled a pot by Terry Bell Hughes was at Aberystwyth Arts Centre. A tall slender jug narrowing from a wide base to a slender neck and rim. Glazed in tenmoku with bands of wavy combing from the rim to the shoulder. I was impressed; totally unpretentious, echoing the medieval yet with a presence enough to allow it to stand out and be noticed in a small room crammed with ceramic treasures. The style has changed a little since then but the pots we see here in his current exhibition still retain that quiet authority that never shouts but seldom goes unnoticed.

Terry was born in North Wales but by the early sixties found himself a civil servant in London. Teacher Training college came next and then a year teaching in a Secondary School. He had started wanting to be a painter, an ‘artist’ not remotley interested in pots. However, it was while at Training College that he was shown a Hans Coper pot and was moved by its modernistic sculptural qualities. He began making pots with Coper’s work very much in mind. In recollection he knows the pots were poor but his increasing fascination with clay led to him joining the Harrow Studio Pottery Course in 1967. Victor Margnne and Michael Casson were in charge at the time. “A whole new field of vision opened, a struggle with simple domestic pottery, the difficult task of resolving forms and the technicalities of making domestic pots that were visually pleasing and functionally sound”. After leaving Harrow he opened a workshop in Shepherds Bush with Trefor Owen (now in Meentwrog) where he made slipware, stoneware both oxidised and reduced, porcelain and hand built figures. He loved it all, clay day was marvellous and he was determined to experience its full range of possibilities. They sold pots on the street in the Bayswater Road for eighteen months until the workshop closed to allow the building to be demolished.

By this time he had met and married his wife, Beverley, also a working potter. She knew Rosemary Wren and they were offered a workshop at Oxshott in the grounds of the house belonging to Denise and Henry Wren. Terry has many fond memories of the lady regarded by many as as much an instigator and pioneer of pottery as Bernard Leach, she had opened her first workshop in Kingston on Thames in 1909 and brought a kiln from America as there was nothing available in Britain at that time. She went on to pioneer saltglaze and was eventually and somewhat belatedly made an honorary life member of the Craftsman Potters association in 1973. Three of her well known elephant forms have a place on a shelf in Terry’s living room.

On their return to Wales they set up a workshop in Llandudno Junction in 1978. The house workshop is tucked away behind other houses and difficult to find. Their living room has that pleasantly cluttered appearance that makes it a pleasure to visit. Many examples of Terry’s pots line window sills and mantelpiece. Three large, round lidded jays sit on the dining table. Having just returned from an exhibition in Denmark, the colours are brown and grays with cobalt blue muted in tone, its edges softened by an ashglaze with a soft, satin touch. Pots from other people figure largely on the shelves around the room, a wide shallow bowl by Michael Cardew, others by Walter Keeler, Denise Wren and Michael Casson the only one of all where I can see obvious influences from a contemporary potter. (Terry worked for him at Prestwood while still at Harrow, they have great respect for each other’s work). A number of examples of slipwares from Buckley are there as if to remind him of his roots and position in life.

When asked about the development of his work over the last 10 or 12 years, Terry somewhat undersells himself. He sees little that’s continuous, linking his different stages. He very much sees himself as a butterfly flitting from idea to idea settling only for a short time. He admires Bernard Leach’s ‘Professional Amateur’ attitude in trying everything possible and cites the Leach retrospective at the Victoria and Albert the best exhibition of pottery he has ever seen. I see a number of strong links in his work. The throwing has always been generous, often full and round carried out with a minimum of fuss. His earlier porcelain teapots almost spherical in shape with proportionally small lids were carved with a freedom, enveloping shapes reminiscent of the way his slips cover a pot now, like string around a parcel. A particular straight sided teapot with a clay strap handle over has lasted the course, the proportions have changed, the spout lower and thinner, lower placed. Decoratively slip has always figured strongly. Previously used to enhance the covering glaze or to be drawn through with landscapes and animals, now it stands as the decoration alone covered with glaze only to soften and unify and to develop their full colour potential. The stronger oriental influence of earlier work has diminished, although not disappeared, whilst a feeling of the warmth and honesty of the British slipware has for the present emerged the stronger influence.

Terry dislikes turning, “turning changes the nature of the pot but it done with the same
spirit as the throwing has a significance of its own. However, sometimes turning is unavoidable, he turns his dishes and bowls and throws footings from added coils of clay.

The decoration or patterns in the slip are as much derived from their method of application as any outside inspiration, the unique flowing lines from the slip trailer or the broader expanses of body colour left after wiping away with a sponge. Lines of different quality are created by drawing through the wet slip with a point. The base colour slip is usually applied one day with the broad sponge sweeps, the finer lines and brush work the following day depending on the weather. Don’t let the casual nature of the decoration fool you, each requires intense concentration from the aesthetic and the purely practical standpoint. The results are abstract patterns, vaguely tree like, in total harmony with the shape they surround.

Terry has two gas kilns, one a very small updraught that has served for most of this production in the past often firing everyday for a week or more to meet large orders. The other is larger, 48 cu. ft., only recently completed and to date has only been fired once but will now serve for the main production. Both are fired to 1280-1300°C a shimmering white heat that unites glaze and slip as one. “I like high firing because the fusion of all the processes is more complete and as one” The smaller kiln sits in his workshop which is really quite primitive and very compact and horribly cold in winter. The racks at the far end hold pots that have been decorated but not fired, their clean edges and distinct colouring in sharp contrast to the working jumble around them.

Terry has firm beliefs about his own and other potters role in society. He admires greatly the anonymous craftsmen from all over the world who in times past made items with great skill and sensibility but with little regard for the ego. “To make something by hand that requires a lifetime of hard won knowledge and experience is to make the man and his product significant and imparts dignity and respect”. For him pottery is about pots that have a domestic function because only in use can a true relationship develop between pot and user. If you buy one be sure to use it, you will enjoy the experience.

Terry’s work is currently available, amongst others, at Spectrum in Machynlleth, Collection in Ledbury and Talking Point in Fishguard, also at the Craftsman Potter’s shop in London.

Phillip Rogers

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Terry Bell Hughes

O edrych yr ôl wrth y cofio mai’r tro cyntaf i mi weld a chydio mewn enghraifft o waith Terry Bell Hughes oedd y Nghano fan Y Celyddydau Aberystwyth. Yn graem, mae’r croesawu'n rhyngynnol i waith y brenin. Yn y teithio, mae’n cael ei gymryd i waith hwnnw, cyflogaeth a chylli." 

Ganed Terry yn Nghogledd Cymru ond oedd yn chweidawu cynnad roedd y ddwyll yn ei hadol o Gymru. Hyfrydlywyd oedd y teithio, yr enghraifft o gyflogaeth a chylli. 

Pan ddasannth yr ôl i Gymru ym 1978 sefydlwyd gweithwyd y nghaflwr Lluduno. Mae’r tŷ a’r gweithdy o’r golwg y tu ôl i da i erial ac nad gwaith hawdd yw dod o hyd iddynt. Mae eu hyffyfion, eu’r hwyl o’r amgylch ac hynny’n annibynol. Yn hysbysebu, mae’n debyg iddynt fel arferal y ddwy i fis i enghraiffta o waith. 

Pan llwyddo am ddabliygad ei waith y byddai dengyn iawn ddefodion oedd Terry’n dduddol i’w defnyddio i hun. Ychydig o ddyn parhaol sy’n cysylltu eu wahanol gyfnodaeth. Yn y teithio, mae’n cael ei gweithio’n rhyngynnol i waith hwnnw, cyflogaeth a chylli." 

Canolfan y Celyddydau Aberystwyth

Rhif 10
Mae'r addurn neu'n patrymau yn y slip yn deilio'n gymaint o'r dull a ddefnyddir i'r llunio ag y maent o unrhyw ysbyrdolaeth allanol, y llenellau rhwydwy unrhyw o'rr taenwr slip neu'r tamediau i'tithach o llw ddiraidd a adewir ar y clai ar ôl ei sychu â sbwng. Caiff llenellau o ansawdd wahanol eu creu drwy eu tymnu'n yntau'n y slip gwybod gwya nodwydd. Mae'r slip lliw gwaelodol fel rheol yn cael ei roi ar y clai gwybod sbwng un diwrod, a'r diwrod canlynol, os yw'r tywydd yn ffeirio, y gwneir y llenellau ceinach a'r gwaith breis. Ond peidioch â chymryd eich twylo gan natur hamddenol yr addurn, mae pob un yn golgu canolbwyntio'n ddwydd o safbwynt esthetig yn ogystal â'r safbwynt gwyb ymarferol. Patrymau haniaethol yw'r canlynol, rhwydwb yn debyg i goed, a'r rheini mewn cytgord ddyrr a'r ffurf y maent yn ei amgylchi.

Mae dwy odgan gyda Terry, un ei thafath bychan y gwyd a drafft ar l'yn y gyfrwch wedi cael ei ddefnyddio ar gyfer ychafodd o'rr gwynt ac yn amlyc y clai ei thanio, ac o hyn anallion hyn atynt yn gyfrifol am yr prif gwynt. Mae'r niaill a'r llall yn cynrychioli 1200-1300°C, gwrwys gwynias sy'n cyfrifog gwyrdd i'r slip fel un. "Rwy'n hoffi ddefnyddio gwrwes uchel gan fod ymarfer i gwaith breisau y fwy cyflawn. Yn ei weithdy, gwyddyd yr edrychennau, gweithdy diogan cynhaltig, hynod o gyflym a dychrynâl a o a o y gcartref. Yn y pen y llafla mae'r rhesei a'r potiadau sy'n dydd eu haddurno ond heb eu tanio yna..." A' llawr, a'u llawiau amlyg a'u hyfrydol drwy'r cyferbynnu'n ddiwydol â'r gymnegeddyr o ddebyg a gwaith sydd o'u cwmnws.

Mae gan Terry anniaethau pendant ynghylch ati'r swyddogaeth, ei hun a chrochenwyr eraill mewn cymdeithas. Edrysiadu a fawr i gyfeiriwr τήνως o bob hun o'ryd y club wedi y gwynt ac wedi ei ddefnyddio. "Mae yna eraill y gwynt sy'ny gwybod a chynlluniau a'u broffesiynol a'r enwadau slwth, llafur celed, yn gwneud y gwneuthurw a'i grynnoch y mewn arclyc ac yn rhoi iddynt barch ac u'rddas." Iddo ef, rhwydwb sy'n ymwnws a lleistr ag iddynt swyddogaeth domestig yw'r o'rr coethaith gan mai dim ond wrth ei ddefnyddio y dtabllygyr perthnas rhwsng y llestr a'r sawl sy'n gwneud ddefnydd ohono. Os byddwch yn prynu un gofalwch eich bod yn ei ddefnyddio, fe gwrth fwythod o'r profiad.

Mae gwaith Terry ar gyfer y mynydd wedi cael ei ddarllen ar y 'Spectrum' o'r Machynlleth, 'Collection' o'r Ledbury a 'Talking Point' o'r Aberystwyth.