Raku has a particular sort of built-in dramatic quality – a production method not for the faint-hearted. The firing process, a vital and central part of raku, involves placing the pot into the kiln, which is glowing at bright red heat, and removing it, once ‘cooked’, at the same high temperature. Careful handling and placing of the pot is essential as is timing because if the glaze is overmelted it will be blistered and boiled, if underfired it will be dry and dull. The potter cannot move far from the firing. Then follows the lifting of the glowing vessel from the kiln using a long pair of tongs to avoid scorching and burning. In the tremendous heat calm movements are essential; haste or panic is likely to be fatal to the pot as it is gently but firmly placed in the reduction chamber; this is usually an old metal dustbin where the pot is subjected to a reduction atmosphere by burning organic material such as sawdust, grass or straw to create a thick smoke which will blacken the body, affects the colour of the metal oxides and reveals any crackle in the glaze.

For many potters the speed and drama of the firing process is as tempting now as it was for Bernard Leach when he was introduced to it over eighty years ago. Like Leach, many potters start with small scale pieces which can be placed with metal tongs into the heat of the kiln with some confidence and not too much sweat. Typical raku glazes celebrate the quick, low-temperature firing and the equally magical sooty reduction, with glazes which are blood red or glistening gold lustre, proclaiming their baptism of fire. Form tends to be ignored; swamped by the theatricality of the effect and the sheer glamour of the surface. Effects are instantly achieved, but often have short-lived appeal.

David Roberts’ raku takes no such route. His influences come from large scale raku pieces made by such raku masters as Paul Soldner, whose carefully controlled plate forms made a particularly strong impression on Roberts. The small-sized more intimate raku teabowls of Bernard Leach or his philosophy inspired by Zen Buddhism found little reference. In some aspects, Roberts’ confident handling of the raku process almost belies the heat, flames and smoke of the firings; yet the particular quality of finish and surface richness he achieves, a central and vital part of his work, comes from the raku firing. This gives him such effects as his crackle and dense blackened clay body which no other method would yield.

But the most remarkable aspect of David Roberts’ raku forms is their sheer scale, for by any standard they are large pieces. To successfully handle such vessels and take them through the raku process involves skill, a steady hand, a clear objective and nerves of steel.

Like many potters, David Roberts arrived at his chosen craft through a circuitous route. Trained as a painter at Bretton Hall, his first handbuilt pots tended to reflect his current concern with the landscape. Jobs teaching followed, and he started handbuilding shapes at home on the kitchen table. A move back to Yorkshire brought him into contact with the large forms of Jim Robison, and he felt he had found his particular technique. Though he learnt to throw he did not feel it enabled him to create the shapes he wanted, nor give time for reflection of shape.

Handbuilding became his preferred technique. In his vessels there is a combination of tradition, of an awareness of shape and a careful control of the raku process. Even in the early forms the David Roberts’ style was evi-
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dent. First there was the scale. One of the advantages of handbuilding is that there is virtually no limitation on size. By coiling and smoothing, shape can be carefully considered as it 'grows' and, unlike throwing on the potter's wheel, the slowness of the process enables subtle changes to be made over a period of time.

Early pieces consisted of rounded bowl forms with tallish walls ending in a gently undulating edge. Movement was quiet and restrained, emphasis was on volume and shape, on the vessel as container. Decoration in the form of stripes was painted or stencilled on to the glaze: during the firing this was softened and sufficiently integrated into the surface to introduce some element of articulation without disturbing or challenging the poised form of the pot.

Later bowl forms have become more open and flatter, celebrating inner rather than outer qualities. On these, areas of crackled, semi-matt white glaze have been contrasted with dry, unglazed clay body, decorated in an ingenious process with black crackle lines. The undulating edges, well considered and again carefully finished, recall the distant horizon, a defining presence, but not intrusive. On other bowls the influence of American Indian decoration can be identified. Their bold handling of black and white figurative and geometrical patterns is rendered in a style which neither replicates nor duplicates the original, but draws on its strengths. Lines of symmetrical pattern work most neatly around the pot, echoing and articulating the form. An almost op-art effect is created, but kept well on the surface to add an extra dimension of surface control.

David Roberts' bottle forms have now become something of his hallmark. Standing nearly three feet tall, they soar upwards, confident and controlled, calmly commanding the space they inhabit. Each bottle has its own character; some shorter, more related to the surface on which they sit, others taller, more noble, move upwards, growing straight and imbossed. All are a recognizable part of the Roberts' raku family. The vessel/bottle forms enclose space, aware of shape and volume, their precisely defined silhouettes rise up from a base rounded and full, moving into a more geometrical and harder-edged neck, a clever counterbalance to the stretched fullness of the generous belly. The surfaces tend to be cool white with a black crackle, sometimes large in scale, other times smaller and more dense, which enhances the surface like some exotic but well integrated skin. It is a glaze which is of interest in its own right whilst contributing to the overall success of the form.

One vital and intriguing aspect of David Roberts' raku pots is their relationship to the ceramic tradition, to the consideration of classical forms and to the raku process itself. While these pots call on all these aspects of the long history of the craft, in fact his pots are rooted very much in our time, a part of our own ceramic aesthetics. While the bottle and bowl vessels clearly owe much to classical forms, these handbuilt shapes, though symmetrical, are not wheel-ceived and in fact are an intriguing hybrid of hand and wheel production.

The raku process itself has been revitalized and reformed in the postwar years, the reduction process a relative newcomer. The effect of reduced lustre glazes, of blackened ray bodies, of crackle glazes are particular characteristics of this. Raku on a large scale, made more possible by the new technology of lightweight ceramic fibres and bottled gas, is equally a new development. Though Roberts has retained the quiet contemplative qualities of traditional Japanese tea ceremony vessels, the forms he uses are his own. Significantly, Roberts has kept the vessel/container form. Clearly it is one he is familiar with and is happy to push and pull about. His large and impressive forms, thin-walled, delicate and fragile, can be seen as possible containers, their history identifiable, their function clearly defined. They are a tour de force of the potter's art, complete in their own right. They are pots which retain their interest, not through sensationalism but through their quiet insistence on being seen on their own terms and in our own time.

Emmanuel Cooper
David Roberts

Y Gwafres Geraseg

Parthyn rhwy ansawdd ddamgatig gynhenid i 'rakú' - dull o gynhyrchu nad yw'n debyg o apelio at y gwahan-galon. Mae'r broses taniao, mae allwedol a chanolog o'r dull raku, yn golygu doddi'r llestr yr yr odyd pan mae hnon'n wyntas, a'i dynnu allan pan mae'n barod ar yr un tymheredd uchel. Rhaid symud y llestr a'i dddodi yn ei le gyda'r gofal mwyaeth - mae hynny'n hafniodol, ac mae amseru gofiau yr un mor bwsys ohonydd ddos bydd y gwydredd wedi gorriodd neu fferi bydd yn potheithu, ac os na fydd wedi ei danio'n diddol ond bydd yn ymddangos y sych ac yn bw'i. Does wwr i'r crochenhdyd symud ymhell oddi wrth y taniao. Ynwa, dawr bwsnes o dynnwy'r llestr chweithieth o'r odyd gan gorfynyddio gefel hir rhag cael lluos neu ddolur. Yn y gwres aruthrol mae symud di-afyfyro o ddi-blwyg; gall brys a fwsân fod yn dalâirol i'r llestr wrth ei oesod yr ond yr solet yr y siâmbron lluosí di-aer. Fel heibelen hen bin abwriel fetel a ddefnyddir, ac ynddi bydd defnyddio organig megis llwch llif, glaswellt neu wellt yr cael ei losgi nes cynhyrchu mwâr trwchus a fyddyn ynu'n ddu'r llestr gan effeithio ar llwyd yr ocsidwla maecl ac yr amlygu unrhyw gracellau yn y gwydredd.

Mae cyfylltyn a drama'r broses taniao yn deru ac yn tcamlo llawer o grochenyddion yn union fel yr tonymwyd Bernard Leach pan gwyfynwyd ei fy broses dros bedair agwn myndeyd yr olywyd. Fel yn achos Leach, bydd llawer o grochenyddion yn dechnau ddyw tulli o eilemau gweddol fychain gellir eu dodi y wnedol hyders, ac heb chwysu'n ormodol, yng ngwres yr odyd y gwrdaw gefel fetel. Mae gwyfynweddau raku nodweddiant ymgyrch tanio cyflym a dynheredd lledd iel ei ac effaith ryfeddol o y parăddo y sylwedd o y tanio di-aer, sy'n cynhyrchu gwyfynweddau coth bywyd neu loywyd euraid disgylir ac yng daethg eu beddlyd. Y duedd yr amwybyddu flurf llestr a chanolbwyntio ar yr effeithiau theistrig a chlytaedd pur yr awenydd. Caiff yr effeithiau hyn eu creu ar amranid, ond byrhedlog yw eu hapel on y amrywiaeth.

Nid dyniau liwbyrau y mae gwraith raku David Roberts ym eu dilyn. Gweithiwr cael eu raddau fawer, gan feistrir cyfrwng meigis Paul Souldner, sydd wedi dylanwada arno ef. Gweithaf eu flurfiau plaedu wedi eu roehi o afalas argarf arbeneg o gyfr ar Roberts. Ychydig o effaith a gallodd powiau te'r raku bychain mwy personol

Bernard Leach arno na'i afonhaueth a oedd wedi ei hysbyddoli gan Fwidaeth Zen. Ar ryw ystyr, mae duh hyderus Roberts o din prosesau raku bron yr gwadu bodolaeth gwres a fflamau a mwy y tanio; er hynny mae ansawdd arbeneg y gorfenniad a'r cyfdor arwynebedd bynnag nodwedd ganolog a holibwysig o'i waith, yn deillo o'r tanio raku. Dyna sy'n creu effeithiau megis croselu a chial a diwch trwchus arno, effeithiau nasiold ddyw unrhyw ddull arall.

Ond nodweddiw i wyf effeithiau flurfiau raku David Roberts yr ewr maint, ohonydd yr oedd unrhyw astdon y mae i eilemau mawr. Mae trafod llestr o'r fath ddyw' r broses raku yng ngwres am fedrulewyd, llaw gadarn, nod bendant a nerfiau o ddu. Ffwrllaw crochenydd arall, daeth David Roberts at ei grefft ddewisog mewn flurfiau anuniongyrchol. Fe'i hyfforddywyd ym ein bythyn ym Brenhilton, ac mae ei lestri gwaith llaw cynharaf y mae ydwy i'w tystiwr ychydig. Ochriad yr ydwy i'w tystiwr a ddwy o' r caled. Difwydwyd hyn gan swyddi dysgu, a dechreuodd lunio eilemau a llaw gartref ar fwyd y gegin. Symudiad ym y ddwy i'w tystiwr a'r flurfiau mawr yr oedd Jim Robsion ym eu lluo, a theimlai o fod wedi darganfod ei dechneg.
Erbyn hyn flurafu polo'i David Roberts yw nodwedd amlycaf ei waith. Maent bron i iathen o uchdher, ei ymestyn i fywy, ei hyderys a di-

fodwgan gan reoli ei lleoliad. Mae i bob potel ei chymeniad ei hun; rha'n ffrach ac yn dwyn perthynas â'r arwinydd y mae'n sethyll amno, rha'n dalach ac yn fwy uddasol, ei ymestyn i fywy y dalsyl. Mae pob un ohonynt y amlyg

yn rhan o waith raku Roberts. Mae'r flurafu llestri/pole'i ei angau golof, ei ymwybodol o flur a foliwm, a'u siwletu, sydd wedi ei diffinio'n glir, yn codi o ffas crwn llaw, ac yn
cyrraedd gwddf sy'n hwy caled a geometraidd ac yn gwrthwybrynu'n gefydd a llawnder yr corff helaf. Mae mwyaf y rwynebwyr y bynn ag clear gyda chracellau duon arnynt, weithiau ar raddfa llaw, weithiau ar raddfa lai a dwysaeth, a hynny'n gwella golygwr yr arwyneb fel ddyw groen ecologig, clos syd bron yr rhan gynhelid ohono. Mae'n wyddred sy'n diddorol ynddi'r hun ac ar yr adn yny cafr eu cynnau tuag at leyddiant clyfeddol y gwaith.

Un o nodweddig pwysig a diddorol llestri raku David Roberts yw eu perthynas â'r tradido-r o cewr, â flurafu clasurol ac â'r broses raku ei hun. Er fod y llestri ei dbyrnu yr a hoff ei eglwydwaith hyn o hanes tir y graff defuo mewn gwirionedd yn hydno y gofyn, yr rhan o'n hestheteg gerama. Tra bod ei amlyg wedi y potel a'r bowenni wedi ei dyfarnu gan flurafu clasurol, mae'r flurafu gwaith llaw hyn, er eu bod yn gwybws, yn gynyliaid diddorol o waith llaw a gwaith ar yr droel.

Calodd y broses raku ei hun newid a'ir hadnewyd y bynn gwybododi ar dyle'r nhfion a dw你能, ond pryses gymharol newyd yw'r broses lleqio di-sar. Mae'r effeithiau a gyfran gan wyddred gloyw wedi ei rhyddhau - y clai wedi ei bardduo, y cracellu ym gwyddred - y arben-

ig o nodweddiadaid. Datbligyd yr un mor newyd yr raku ar raddfa fawr, ac fe'i gwnaed ei bolis gol gan dechnoleg newyd y fibrau ceramig ysgaf a niwy o boteli. Er fod Roberts wedi cafwy ansawdd dawel fyfyrwr llestri te seremonioll, tradodiadaol, Siapan, mae'n
defnyddio ei flurafu ei hun. Yn anwydacos mae wedi grynau ar y flur llestri/cynhywyswyd. Mae'n amlyg ei fod mewn gyfanfawyd â'r flur ac yn cael bododdwch wrth ei ystoenum i'r ymestyn. Gellir ystynydd ei flurafu mawr, trawaidol, gyda'i hofninau a'r mewnog, fel llestri y gellir ei defnyddio i gymysg pethau, er nad oes diflino ar eu hanes, mae eu pwparwedd wedi ei diflinois' gyfiwl. Gorochwistal clyfedd a crochend a ydym ac mae'n gynyliaf ynddynt eu hirau. Llestri ydym sy'n cynnal diflodoed, a hynn ni dyw ein syfateru ond dyn hyfforddwydd wedi ei bod mewn cael eu gweld ar eu teledu eu hunain ac ein hoes ninau.

Emmanuel Cooper