GILLIAN STILL

Gillian Still is an artist in porcelain. These key words — artist and porcelain — conjure up very different traditions which are synthesised in her work. Looking back on her student days at Farnham College of Art Gillian Still considers herself fortunate to have been trained under the National Diploma in Design. The course offered what she calls a ‘renaissance’ training allowing students to experience a variety of techniques and media in the first two years before choosing an area of specialisation. She became a sculptor of large scale figurative work in plaster of Paris — a modeller rather than a carver, it was only a short step to move over into ceramics.

As a young artist she taught sculpture at Harrow College of Art, a most unusual post for a woman to hold. Sculpture, even 25 years later, is still a male stronghold within the art college system. During the 1960s Harrow was famous for its ceramic course set up by Victor Margrie and Michael Casson and the buzz from the ceramic department left its mark. She was drawn into the excitement with clay, glazes and kilns. In fact she had never enjoyed the casting process associated with her sculpture technique. Although domestic pottery was the main emphasis on the course it was the possibilities of figurative modelling in clay that attracted her. She began to produce smaller scale pieces and found a wider audience for her work.

Gillian Still’s career pattern exemplifies the choices that artists have to make. Ceramics is a field in which it is possible to earn a living but it is never easy in Britain where there is no strong tradition of private patronage from collectors. Many artists produce work in the full knowledge that it is unlikely to sell. It is sufficient that they see their work exhibited and purchased occasionally by collectors and museums. But to do this the artist has to have another income of which the most common is that from being a teacher in an art college. This activity buys the artist freedom to produce in a way that is relatively unpressured by the market. In her early career she was a full time teacher, a post she enjoyed but found too time consuming and draining to allow her to make work as she wished; 23 years ago she decided to move to Wales where she could find a less frenetic life style and live in a beautiful environment. For many years she taught part-time gradually moving the balance of her time towards her own production. For the last three years she has given up teaching entirely and is now able to exist on the sale of work. At one point she considered an offer of a contract with a London gallery who were to promote her work but she was quickly disillusioned with the deal on discovering that they wished to straightjacket her into producing the commodity that they felt would be marketable. In everything she does personal freedom seems to be a strong motivation. She and her husband are planning to set up a gallery where they will sell a variety of art work — painting, sculpture, glass, prints and ceramic sculpture. They will not be selling domestic pottery as they feel that there are many other venues for that.

Gillian Still has always worked in porcelain.
It is her dialogue with this material that produces the rewards in viewing her work. Her modelled figures have many precedents, from fanciful ornamental shepherdesses to clowns or character figures. An awareness of these forebears runs through the work but it is the surprising deviations which catch the imagination.

Her doll figures have been her most popular subject over the years and she makes them regularly alongside more experimental pieces. Porcelain dolls appeal to a nostalgia for Victorian and evoke childhood memories but there is more than that. Many artists have been fascinated with dolls and manikins and they can become metaphors for the human condition. Gillian Still’s dolls have recently become more evocative. Broken dolls emerge from boxes or limbs dangle in awkward poses. We take pleasure in the manipulation of the medium in which the once-plastic-now-brittle body is transformed into something soft and light with intriguing details of strands of hair, or the fall of cloth, or the floppy bow. How do we know they are dolls and not just figurines? Dolls have a particular character which makes them a special kind of human model. They sit in that characteristic sprawled way and stare with that impenetrable expression, innocent yet knowing. The dolls are made in part from moulds which allows a more rapid production of the basic pieces which can then be modified.

She describes porcelain as a wayward material, unpredictable but full of surprises. Its translucence whiteness makes it a fine surface on which to apply colour. She makes full use of the delicacy, even prettiness, of the material but in a quite contrary way she often depicts the ugly, the grotesque, and the humour of everyday life. A lively tension between oppositional characteristics is created: the beautiful young girl covered in tattooing, figures cut off at certain points emphasising unusual aspects, the earthy sensuality of burns in the air or low cut dresses, tight jeans, flying hair, or flexed muscles.

Gillian Still is an observer of people. She enjoys human idiosyncrasies and has always loved to work from the model. Her piece entitled ‘Waiting’ of a woman seated on a settle was based on a friend who, she recalls, always tried to give the impression of being very relaxed but in fact was very tense. That tension is conveyed in the pose and the blankness of the eyes behind the glasses further suggests a screen. On a more witty note in ‘Hungrily Nuns’, inspired by the nuns in a school where she once worked, the triple format with its diagonal thrust makes one feel that at any moment the nuns might fly off separately and arrange themselves like the three flying ducks that have adorned so many sitting room walls.

Strange factors can be the source of new directions. In a house move last year she was not able to take her kiln. Obliged to buy a new one she opted for a much smaller kiln, one third the capacity of its predecessor. It meant work could be fired in batches and passed through the whole process more quickly. Unexpectedly the smaller kiln inspired her to make larger pieces. It was a challenge to make a work that would fill the kiln. She considers it to be a breakthrough.

The first major piece she made after this was ‘Arnold’s Field of the Cloth of Gold Heart Box’. It started from a box form made out of tiles, a hat box in her mind. Inspired by the huge stuffed hearts on showy Valentine cards she created a dome swelling out of the box. Ribbons are taken up the sides and flow into the Three Graces making a handle form. The dome is edged with a series of little figures based on the body builder Arnold Schwarzenegger while the sides are swathed with a flamboyant bow. Gold decoration is applied in touches. It is much less about observation of the external world than many of her earlier pieces and allows her imagination to run around images. The architectural appearance of the object — box but not box — is very strong. Full of references to past art without any being specific or even clearly conscious, it is reminiscent of 16th century mannerist decorations or the extravaganzas of Art Nouveau, a source which can be seen in many works by this artist including ‘Eros with Butterflies’, a sequel to the earlier piece. Its strong Art Nouveau associations play on the theme of a narcissistic Eros as toy boy to the harpies who swirl around the base.

Gillian Still is not a potter and has never made pots. She sees herself as an artist in porcelain. Increasingly she draws on an imaginative collage of images that come together in her mind and flow into her creations which are further entitled by their titles: ‘Arnold’s Field of the Cloth of Gold Heart Box’ — evocative words for evocative work.

Arafat mewn porslen yw Gillian Still. Mae'r diddai air allweddol hyn — artist a phroses — yn awgrymu dau draddodiad gwasanaol law'n i'w gilydd sydd wedi eu cyfluno yn ei gwaith. Wrth edrych yn ôl ar y cyfnod pan oedd hi'n tyfniwr yng Ngholeg Celff Faner Am gillian Still ystyr i'w dyfodol, i'w fynd i deidio â gyfer y Diploma Cerddedol Cymunedol dros y Cynulliad. Roedd y cyrs yn cynnig yr hyn a eilw hi yn hysbys i'r olion dros yr ochr hen sy'n cael ei chwilio am yr adnabyddiaeth yng Ngholeg. Yn ystod y chwedegau roedd Harrow yno i mewn am y cyrs ceramig a sefydlwyd gan Victor Mergel a Michael Cateen ac fe adeilodd gyfrifon adran garameg ei ôl am. Cafodd gan y cymuned oedd yr ymgyllaidd â chwi, yw'r gyfrifon ac yr ohonynt. Yn ei ddiweddar oedd yr hyn sy'n cael ei chwilio am yr adnabyddiaeth yng Ngholeg. Yn eu ddiweddar oedd yr hyn sy'n cael ei chwilio am yr adnabyddiaeth yng Ngholeg. Yn eu ddiweddar oedd yr hyn sy'n cael ei chwilio am yr adnabyddiaeth yng Ngholeg. Yn eu ddiweddar oedd yr hyn sy'n cael ei chwilio am yr adnabyddiaeth yng Ngholeg.

Pan yna artist ifanc bu'n dysgu cerfuniath yng Ngholeg Celff Harrow, swydd hynod o anghyfredin i ferch. Hyn y oedd bwrp mlynedd a hag y mynd i ddiddordeb, mae cerfuniath yn daith i fod yna esyb sydd wedi ei gyflymu bron yng Ngholeg a hyfforddiad ym mhen ymhellir ym Mhrydain lle nad oes traddodiad cryf o nawddoeg naeth brefat a du'r cysgodion. Cynhrynchwyd yr hyn oedd lawer o artistiaid sy'n gwbl yrwybodol mai prin lawr y lwyddiannus o'r yrthyn. Mae'n nodi bodon bodon ac ar eu gwaith gan cael ei arddangos ac yn cael ei brynu'n achlysurol gan gasgliwyd ac amgueddfyddiwyd o' r oedd. Ond cyn y gallu wreiddiau hyn oedd y rheil âr artistwr un o'r artistaidd hyn, sy'n iawn ac y gadael. Ei hun, ei hyn, ei hyn ac y gadael. Ei hun, ei hyn, ei hyn ac y gadael. Ei hun, ei hyn, ei hyn ac y gadael. Ei hun, ei hyn, ei hyn ac y gadael. Ei hun, ei hyn, ei hyn ac y gadael. Ei hun, ei hyn, ei hyn ac y gadael. Ei hun, ei hyn, ei hyn ac y gadael. Ei hun, ei hyn, ei hyn ac y gadael. Ei hun, ei hyn, ei hyn ac y gadael. Ei hun, ei hyn, ei hyn ac y gadael. Ei hun, ei hyn, ei hyn ac y gadael. Ei hun, ei hyn, ei hyn ac y gadael. Ei hun, ei hyn, ei hyn ac y gadael. Ei hun, ei hyn, ei hyn ac y gadael. Ei hun, ei hyn, ei hyn ac y gadael.
Stolly wedi datblygu'n fwy atgofa. Ceir dollau toredig yn ymdangos allan o fwythau neu aelodau yn honglân mewn ystym lletgwig. Cawn ein bodhau gan y mordd y caf i'r cyfryng ei dradof nes bod y corff â fu unwaith yn hyd atynt ac sydd bellach yno fregus yn cael ei drawnewid yn rhywbeth meddai ac ysgafn gan fanylôn dengar cudynnu a ollau, neu byd defnydd neu fwa liopa. Sut y gellir dweud mai dollau dyndt yn hytrach na figuryrunau? Mae rhyw ganeryd arbenig y wthry'r dollau i synu eu gwneud yn fath nelirion o fodel dyniol. Mae gadanty eu ffodd nodweddiadol o eistedd gyda'u coesau ar lyciaid dynion a' r llygad ychydig, yn ddiain wedi ddeoeth. Gweir y dollau y ranhori o fowledau, sy'n wylo u o luzio'r ranhau sylfaenol, ranhau a gaff eu haddasu y mewn yma. Maen nhin manteisio i'r o'r gafael ac i'r ysgyfrdelu'n anghwiliadwy, yn ddiainwed ddeoeth. Gweir y dollau y ranhori o fowledau, sy'n wylo u o luzio'r ranhau sylfaenol, ranhau a gaff eu haddasu y mewn yma. Maen nhin manteisio i'r o'r gafael ac i'r ysgyfrdelu'n anghwiliadwy, yn ddiainwed ddeoeth. Gweir y dollau y ranhori o fowledau, sy'n wylo u o luzio'r ranhau sylfaenol, ranhau a gaff eu haddasu y mewn yma. Maen nhin manteisio i'r o'r gafael ac i'r ysgyfrdelu'n anghwiliadwy, yn ddiainwed ddeoeth. Gweir y dollau y ranhori o fowledau, sy'n wylo u o luzio'r ranhau sylfaenol, ranhau a gaff eu haddasu y mewn yma. Maen nhin manteisio i'r o'r gafael ac i'r ysgyfrdelu'n anghwiliadwy, }

hwmor bywyd bob dydd. Y canlyniad yw ten-swn bywicig rhwng nodweddiwn gwyrddyrhirlych; y farch unrhyw hawdd syth wedi ei goruchur- dio â thàthys, figyruau sy'n swyddo mewn mawn- nau sy'n pwyso o waeddau anghyfrifol; gwnaddeo'r daearol pennau o' n yr awyr neu ffrogau deilfennol, jira yna, gwlff ar chwâl neu gytghorau hyflyng.

Mae Gailin Stilly sy'n sywli'r graff ar bobl. Caff ei bodhau gan eu hynoddiad ac mae hi hi amser wedi hoffi gwylio gyfole. Seiliwyd ei gwaith ddynt i'w llofr a 'Aros', sy'n portreadau gwaith, sy'n eistedd ar setl, ar finid iddi y mae hi hi amser sy'n ei chofio o ceisio rhoi' r graff ei bod ym milar y'n llwyd er ei bod mewn gwirionedd ar bigau' r drain. Cyfiyrur y tawnwn amryw y mewn yr ystum ac mae gwastc a hygieid i tu o llir o sbectod yn ychwanegu awgrwyll pellach o' r ogen. Yn ei 'Lleianod Ar Frys' a ysyfoldwyd gan y lleianod yr ysgol lle bu hi hi'n gwiwthio ar un amser, caer nodyn mwy firaeth i mae'r format ddiwychi gydag ei egni i lletrais yn cyfleu'r teiniad y gallai'r lleianod godi ei oedhedig a wahan unrhyw funnur a threfnu eu hunania y o' r un addau à'r tair hwyaden hedegog a welwyd y addunno wallau cymaint o ystafelloddodd eistedd.

Gall flactorau ryheiddd awain pob i' r gweinyddiau newydd. Pan symudodd hi o un à'i lli llai llyned, fe thododd hi fynd i i hodyn gyda hi. Bu'n rhaid iddi bynu un newydd ac fe ddeithiodd hi o'r olini o'i llawer llai, dim ond tradd eu yna un fanerlon. Golygyd hyn o gyfiawnder tiso u cbwch à'i gall dwybro'r broses o' r llawer mwy cyffym. Yn ryheiddd digon fel i' rys- brychdyddwyd gan yr olin o'i chynhrychiu eto mwy. Bocled cyfhyrchu gwaith a fyddi'n ni leinwirig o' r olin o siolen iddi. Mae hi'n ystiriedy hyn y ddim byddai allweddod o' r gwaith.

Yr etatem gynal a bws o wneud hi'n dylun y newid hwn oedd 'Ardagn's Field of the Cloth or Gold Heart Box'. Dechreuodd gyda blwch wedi ei newud o delis, bocs hesiwa e' yn bryd hi. Dan dolywnad y calonau mawr wedi eu paðo a welir ar rai cardiau Frolant thwysgafwyr, llunidic gwymrom ymchwydodd allan o' r bocs. Mae rubannau y rhedeg i'w phyr i' r ochr ac ym muniad y figurew i' r figurew'r Tair Chwaer Rasol i furfiol dolien. O gwmpas ymlwl o' r gwymrom ceis cyfres o figurew bychain sy'n seilidig ar Arnold Schwarzenegger, y corff-feithrinwr, tra mae' r ochr wedi eu hymcwimo â ruban dolennog ynoch. Ceir addurn ar yma a thrwy. Mae'r gwaith hwn y mibynu llaw ar ei sylwgarth ac yr ybyd o' r chwmpas nag yr oedder llaw o'i heliennau mwy cynmar, ac mae'n caniatáu i'w ddyrchymwg ymmeud â dewiddu. Mae ymdangosod pesaaniol y gwthrych – blwch nad yw'n fwy – yn gyd law. Mae'r gwaith y llaw ymchwydodd ystafellod a'r tair hwyaden hedegog a'r gwaith sy'n ei elus iddi. Mewn tair iddi, mae'r addurnau darlunoliad ym llinell ganrwyr a' r bwmhag neu'r adfranoldd Art Nouveau, fwythi ddwydd i'w chwanfod mewn llawer enghraifft o waith yr artist gan gymruwch "'Eros with Butterflies", dilyniant o' r gwaith bwsao. Mae ei gyflymdydd a cryfion ag Art Nouveau yn cyfylltir â thema Eros narsiclig fel 'toy boy' i'r merched trachantus sy'n chwydro o gwmpas bôr y gwaith.

Nid crochanwyth yw Gailin Stilly ac ni ddyw hi eilio'r dollau yna o'i gynhrychu pob newydd. Fel artist mawr mewn porson mae hi hi mae hi hi'n hystyriedd e hi rhain. Mae hi'n dilynau'r 'rwythwy archwgymg drwyddu o ddel- weddau sy'n dod ymylwch o r i meddw i ac yna lliw i'w o'i rhedegau. Sau' r cael eu bywigo ymhlith o' r talu 'Arnold's Field of the Cloth or Gold Heart Box' — geiriau atgofa am waith sy'n enny lly o' atgofon.