Ceramic Series

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 on having the 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 enrolled for a day a week at Putney Art School under Tony Benham and here she learnt basic potting skills. As a keen associate member of the Craftsman Potters Association she attended meetings and 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 1986, 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 Gwenn Mullan 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 80.” 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 ceramicists such as Glensy 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 Glensy 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 Machin 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 1978 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 press moulded 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 Blumhman 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.)
Y Gwres Gerameq

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 gan sy'n cynnwys technegau gwres uchel y Dwyrain Polll, addurniadau crochenwaith Persia ac Africa, cryfader crochenwaith gwledig Ffraing y nodweddiad addurniol peintiad gan Matthew. Y canlynliadau yw ystod llwgar o crochenwaith defnyddiol sy'n gwneud deunydd dychmygus o addurniadau crug sy'n bleser i erthygl arnynt.

Fel llawer i berson arall penderfynodd Janice Tchalenko fynd yn gorchenydd ar 'co crochet' ar yr ystod wedi'i rhyddhau fel lôr yr adran telefonol Swyddfa'r Post cyn dod y wyddyd clirgorol y adran arianol y Swyddfa Dramor y Llundain. Pan oedd hi'n fferch ysgol, er bod ei gwaith yn gyffredinol ddi, roedd y plaswys ar gyfraeddiadau academiadd yn hytrach nag ar gelfyddyd, ac ychydig o gorfedd a gafodd i arbrofi gyda medrau ymmyrfaen.

A hithau'n un ar hugain oedd o daeth y newid mawr en ei gorfedd pan gyffredfodd â John a ddaeth y ddwleddarach y wyr i'r iâr. Er iddo gael ei eni ym mhrifiau un o'r oedddodd John ddy i fam yr Almaenes. Cafodd ei hunno gan John 'm wneud mwyaeth o'i bywyd' ac roedd gannddi gof o weld crochenwydd y ystod yr 'Egwyllau' ar Deioudor BBC a phenderfynodd mai crochenydd hfyddai hithau. "Roeddwn i'n gwychobod fod y gallu gen i," meddai.

Heb golli amser cofrestredd am bum niwrnod yr wythnos ym Ysgol Gelf Putney i astudio gyda Tony Benham ac yno y dysgodd hi fedrau syfannel crochenwaith. Helaeth iawn gan draddodiad Leach, ac roeddyn y cael eu tanio gyda gwyddrod o'r math ddywerynol mewn olyw 'gostwng'. "Dyddedu ni ddim oedd y trafod llawer ar estheteg, ond roedd ni'n trafod techneg,” meddai.

Yn ei blwyddyn gradd prynodd hi a John ddy mawr Pictoridd y rhyd iawn yn Peckham, Fel is-leol o'r 'Craftsmen Potters Association' roedd hi'n mynychu cyfarfodydd ac yr ymweld â llawer o arddangosfeydd, ac fe ddaeth i anadab llawer o crochenwyddion amrywio. Am beth amser bu'n gweithio yng ngrochenwydd Paul Metaliffe yn Notting Hill Gate, yn pwsio defnyddiau ar gyfer treialon gwedyro ac yng gwedyro potiau ym fel y tafal arbenig. Yn dilyn hyn bu'n gweithio ym swedi Fay Russell ym Barnes ym cymysgu clari ac ym cynorthwyo'n gyffredinol mewn unrhyw ffordd y gallai. Daeth i' r casgliad ei bod o da'i fod o amat i raddau helaeth cyn balled ac yr oedd crochenwaith ym y cwestiwn. Ym 1968, gan ei bod ym teimlo angen rhagor o hyfforddiant broffesiynol, gwasgai gais i fynd ar Gwrs Crochenwaith Siwtio Harrow a oedd yng ngofal Victor Margrie a Mick Casson ar y pryd, a chafodd ei derbyn. Bu'r ddyw fynnedd ym brofiad cyfoethog a grumus i Janice gyda phawb yng nghwedyn ac yn ysbrydoli’i naill y llall. Dysgodd 'daffu’i dda a oedd yng ngrochenwydd o awyrgechu tebyg i weithdy ar y cyfan wedi rhoi iddi’i profiad angenhediol i gyhchwyn ei chrochenydd ei hun. Symboledwyd hi gan sylw Mick Casson nad oes tafelwr da ymhlich merchd (er wahan i Gwyn Hanssen) i fynnu dangos iddo ei fod ym camhynedd dryw ‘daffu’ yn well ac yn gyflymach ar droi droed nag y gail’i dynion oedd ar y cwrs wneud ar droel drydan. Doedd hi ddim ym anghyfreddir iddi’i daffu’i cant o botiau ar y droel mewn diwnord, a’r cyfan ohonynt y cael eu lluchio i’r bin clari. Roedd y potiau roedd hi a’r hyn fwyaf o’i mylifysgrwyrra i’r eu gwneud wedi eu hyfysyddol i raddau

rhan anffasiynol o Dde Llundain ar y pryd. Yno sefydlodd ei stiwdio mewn un hanner o’r llaw isaf ac eis hymnau mae hi wedi bod yn bwydroyd i gadw ei chartref i’r gweithdy ar wahân. Gyda chan punt roedd hi wedi eu cynilo ym ystod y oes Harrow (rhoddodd pwysias mawr ar gychwyn eich gweithdy ei hun, a’r swm hud o gan punt oedd y cael ei ystyrwyd yn gyfalsaf angenhediol) a chyda can punt arall a fenthyodiad o Ymddiriodolaeth Gwen Mullins, prynodd defnyddiau odyd dynain fechan. Roedd hi wedi ei sefydlu hi hun fel crochenydd. "Ar y pryd y bydd roedd i mewn i’r eliau oedd enill bywolaeth fel crochenydd a roedd i’r hifio fawr o oedd y mohliau ym debyg i rai Mic Casson, doedd gwelediad oedd ym ymddangos ym bwsig. Roedd gen i rhyw ddwydd aruthrol i fod yn crochenwydd hyd yn oed pe ba’n golygu y byddwn i’n ddeag a phedwar ugain oed erbyn i mi hwyddo.” Wrth beddura ei phatiat ei amgyrch siopau bychain yn Ne Llundain a Swydd Caint hwydodd i annil digon i gadw llawes ar ei draed, ac yn raddol dechreuodd feithrin ei harddull eu hun.
Yn 1972, gyda chymorth grant o £500 gan y Cyngor Crefaccent y Prifynwyd Crffent y Myngyngorol fel yr oed ar yr pryd byddis brynau o ddyw gan ‘Kilsand and Furnaces’ a’i gosod mewn aelod a’i ymarfer yna’r iardd, ac mae’r oed honno wedi rhoi gwasanaeth ar ddelwacwch swladog ar ddeallwr ddiweddar o’i gosod a’i wneud ar gyfer yr oed honno.

Roedd y ffurfiau o amlyg ymawr gan yr oed honno wedi rhoi gwasanaeth ar ddelwacwch swladog ar ddeallwr ddiweddar o’i gosod a’i wneud ar gyfer yr oed honno.

Roedd y ffurfiau o amlyg ymawr gan yr oed honno wedi rhoi gwasanaeth ar ddelwacwch swladog ar ddeallwr ddiweddar o’i gosod a’i wneud ar gyfer yr oed honno.

Roedd y ffurfiau o amlyg ymawr gan yr oed honno wedi rhoi gwasanaeth ar ddelwacwch swladog ar ddeallwr ddiweddar o’i gosod a’i wneud ar gyfer yr oed honno.

Roedd y ffurfiau o amlyg ymawr gan yr oed honno wedi rhoi gwasanaeth ar ddelwacwch swladog ar ddeallwr ddiweddar o’i gosod a’i wneud ar gyfer yr oed honno.

Roedd y ffurfiau o amlyg ymawr gan yr oed honno wedi rhoi gwasanaeth ar ddelwacwch swladog ar ddeallwr ddiweddar o’i gosod a’i wneud ar gyfer yr oed honno.