



BULLETIN
NOVEMBER
1988

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FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Saturday 19th November 9.30 am. POTTERS OPEN DAY at
Rudolf Steiner School (formerly the "New School"), Langley
Hill, Kings Langley.

Friday 16th December (Not 9th as stated on the programme
card) at Northchurch. JED HOILE - MASK MAKER.

SPECIALIST GROUPS AND OTHER NOTICES

RAKU Two sites now available for members' use as follows:

- 1 Pitstone Museum, Pitstone, near Tring. A sheltered kiln
with workshop beside it which includes two wheels. Can be
used any time.
Details from Christine Bull (Princes Risborough 3515)
- 2 Berkhamsted, Bulbaggers Tip. For details contact Roy
Adams, Berkhamsted 71095.

MEDIAEVALISTS Contact Lesley & Ann Sutherland: 01 907 4944
if interested in the making of medieval pots.

SALT GLAZE KILN Available for use to Guild members and
their friends. Wood fired, and about 30 cubic feet of
setting space. £10 will entitle you to as many firings as
you would wish during the year. Contact Christine Bull
(Princes Risborough 3515) for further details.

VIDEO Two titles available £2.50 plus deposit (weekly).
Rolled Figures Audrey Blackman, *Exhibition Work* Audrey
Blackman. Other titles on the way. Guild use is for
members' showing at Open Houses (no charge then). The
video-tape made by Mr Athill of the Dave Roberts Raku
demonstration last June is now available.

CLAYGLAZE now have a video library of pottery tapes.

CHORLEYWOOD ARTS CENTRE Regular members' meeting each Wednesday, plus opportunity to pot. Ring the Chairman of the Chorleywood Community Arts Centre on Chorleywood 2918, or the Secretary on Chorleywood 4627 for further info.

STEVE DIXON - 9 SEPT 1988

Pauline Littlewood was due to give a demonstration to the Guild, using coloured slips. However, I believe she has moved to Scotland and had to cancel. Mo Yupp agreed to fill the gap but this proved difficult and his lecture has been postponed to new year. Steve Dixon stepped in with a slide show and an amusing commentary.

The evening was opened in a light-hearted way by Murray who recalled similar problems and personalities in the early days of the Guild.

Our guest, Steve Dixon, graduated from the Royal College of Art in 1986. He tried his hand at various disciplines and it was almost by accident that he discovered ceramics. Like many a convert, he devoted all his energies to his new found medium. Such as nearly setting the Royal College afire with raku firing in an unconventional way, filling the place with smoke.

His early work was very sculptural, made up of complete and incomplete tubes, squares, circles and triangles that seemed to be more akin to bronze technology. On first sighting I thought these pieces to be monumental, suitable for a modern office block forecourt. They were on closer inspection quite small and accessible.

His later work has a political bias, influenced by his own North of England spirit and the artistic ideas of pre-Columbian art and the Etruscans. Steve, supported by a grant from his home town in Tyne and Wear, visited the Tuscany tombs and museums, during a festival in Italy, celebrating the arts of these relatively unknown people who pre-dated mighty Rome.

His lidded pots have either moulded or applied figures scattered about the surface, peeping around or over the rim, scaling the dome of the lid or standing upon it. All are restless, as if escaping from their labours.

The pre-Columbian influenced pieces were even more graphic, being up-dated adaptations of erotic art. The rape of El Salvador (a young woman representing a small nation) and the United States in the form of Uncle Sam (the rich and powerful) re-enact the primitive originals. These are caricatures of human life, but they do carry a very powerful message with a great deal of humour.

It is hard to generalize on the slides as they were in turn humorous and thought-provoking, assisted by a commentary that explained or embroidered each as we went along.

This is my personal view of the evening and how I related to it. I have not mentioned materials or glazes as I did not record them at the time, being totally absorbed by the inventiveness of the man.

As you have read, the evening was different, enjoyable and well attended. Generous thanks were given as Steve had had little time to prepare for what can be a difficult task, entertaining a knowing audience expecting another speaker.

BRIAN BICKNELL

SLIDE SHOW OF MILDRED SLATTER

14 OCTOBER 1988

AGM's are not the sort of evenings that fire the imagination however well-chaired but the second half of the evening was entirely different and a great pleasure. As a new member, I cannot tell how long Mildred has been connected with the Guild, but I can say that she is held in great affection.

She explained that she had studied art in its widest aspects. Weaving at Heals, silver-smithing until the start of the Second World War when licences were issued to long-standing users only. Being unable to obtain one, she tried pottery and was placed as a teacher by a most respected but fearsome head. This is where her understanding and learning began.

Mildred started her slides with a showing of her own work in High Wycombe and at her present studio in Fulmer, and its gradual development into its present forms, including her pierced porcelain bowls and trains made up of thrown sections and slab work.

It is remarkable that an international ceramics exhibition in Istanbul was yearly held without a British entry. This was in 1977 before the creation of the Crafts Council. To assemble an entry Henry Rothschild took various pieces from people's mantelpieces to make up a collection. These pieces and not necessarily the best, included samples of David Leach and Lucie Rie besides many others. Just on the slides alone, I would like to visit Istanbul to see the palaces and streets that Mildred recorded so lovingly.

Finally, Mildred talked about Bill Ismay who has filled his house with pots. Not just any pots, but treasures of all the great names of this century. This bachelor has hoarded

them in every room in the house, from top to bottom, in every corner, even on the steps of the cellar. Remarkably he knows the position of every pot down to the place in the stack. It is hoped that a collection such as this, which is unrivalled in quantity and quality will be bequeathed to the nation.

These stories just outline the talk, as I have restricted my writing to an edited version of what was her "Life in Pottery" and the enjoyment she has had and imparted to many others.

May I thank Mildred for what was a most enjoyable evening at Northchurch.

BRIAN BICKNELL

LUCIE RIE

(Extracted, with permission, from a "Wednesday Interview" by Rosemary Hill in the Guardian.)

Lucie Rie has lived in the same mews house in Bayswater since 1939. She leased it originally from the Church Commissioners, who allowed her to set up a workshop but were most particular in specifying that she must produce "high-class" pottery. No tenancy agreement can ever have been carried out more scrupulously.

The first group of pots she fired there still stands on a table downstairs, recognisable ancestors of her present work, and Lucie Rie herself has changed remarkable little. At 86 she is still elegant, in a completely clean white apron she nevertheless offers to take off for photographs. Her manner is courteous and rather formal, her accent still unmistakably Austrian. She smiles often and almost ironically.

She was born Lucie Gomperez in Vienna and began her career there in 1921, in a world that now seems unimaginably remote. Part of an intellectual and artistic society that included Kokoschka and Freud, she survived its destruction and came greatly to prefer Bayswater. "I had never liked the Viennese people. They were jealous, not good-hearted, and most of them were Nazis.

She left in 1938. She was not, she says, exactly frightened "but I lived from hour to hour. When the plane landed it was a great relief". Among the small number of possessions she was able to bring with her she included - with characteristic presence of mind - a selection of her pots.

She now finds the early days of her career in Vienna "hardly at all important". The only famous Viennese she remembers with affection is Freud, with whom her father, a doctor, was acquainted. She met Freud on a train when she was 16 and again, some years later, at her father-in-law's house. "When he introduced us Freud said 'We already know each other'. I had forgotten him, but he remembered me." When she knew him better, Freud turned out to be kind as well as inspiring. "Everything he said was so incredibly intelligent and to the point."

But the move to England changed her life. Bernard Leach's messianic campaign to revitalise the crafts was underway and, hoping to find the understanding and encouragement that had eluded her in Vienna, Lucie sought him out and showed him her pots.

Predictably, given his interest in peasant pottery and the traditions of the East, Leach didn't think much of them, and said so, though he changed his mind later. Lucie was not easily daunted. She knew how to take advice discriminatingly and spent a week in Leach's studio, humbly learning to make handles properly.

Their friendship grew from then and continued until his death. "He made me aware of details I didn't notice before. He educated me and I owe him a tremendous lot." But she retained her individuality, resisting his fondness for over-analysis and complaints that her pots were too thin. "He was wrong about that," she notes with satisfaction. "I still make thin pots". Thinness is such a hallmark of her work that it's rather like Monet saying he was glad he stuck with Impressionism.

Her reputation now stands equal, but in contrast, to Leach's. Her work, with its unmistakably European coolness, represents the "other" school of modern ceramics, a balance to the down-to-earthware approach of Leach and Michael Cardew. She never wrote, lectured or proselytised in the way they did, but her influence has been great. Perhaps for that reason she's reluctant to comment too much on the present generation, beyond saying that she wishes more people would make simple pots instead of trying to be artists. That she is against pretension, rather than innovation, becomes clear as she explains her liking for the difficult, sculptural work of her former pupil, Ewen Henderson, pointing out that "he's not consciously trying to be an artist".

Her most passionate admiration is reserved for the work of her friend, the late Hans Coper. His pots stand around her room, filled with flowers, to annoy the cognoscenti. "People tell me it's sacrilege, but he loved to see flowers in his pots and so do I."

Coper, a refugee from Germany, was 18 years her junior. He arrived on her doorstep in 1946 asking for a job making buttons. "I knew somebody fantastic had come. I am a potter but he was an artist."

Although in theory she was the teacher and Coper the pupil she feels it was more the other way round. "He taught me what was right and what was wrong." For Bernard Leach, Coper's small-scale sculptural pots were even more anathema than Lucie's had been. Through her he came to admire Coper and the link she established between arguably the two greatest potters of the 20th century is not the least of her achievements.

Her own fame doesn't seem to interest her much, though she is far from reclusive. "People come to see me now, though I don't get so many. Some I like, some I don't. But mostly I like them. People who like pots are usually nice."

Her main concern now is to fit in as much work as she can. The visitors she doesn't like include those who try to involve her in intellectual criticism of her work. Any attempt to put theoretical questions is met with a polite shake of the head and a gentle but absolute refusal to engage that is - much as she might hate to think so - terribly Viennese. "I can't say anything about that, I never think of it. I make pots. It's my profession."