



Dead Ends and Possibilities

POTTERS – The work of Martin Lungley and Ashley Howard prompts ALISON BRITTON to reconsider the role of the wheel in contemporary studio pottery.

PHOTOGRAPHY – STEPHEN BRAYNE

Martin Lungley and Ashley Howard are in their potting prime. Both engaged with throwing as young HND students in the late eighties, and both have followed determined paths that combine chunks of producing and teaching and also coming back into education.

As mature students at the Royal College of Art, London, where Howard succeeded Lungley, they have risked the upheaval of many of their old certainties and have been part of a new mood re-energising ideas about the wheel. Their 'new' careers have run for only a few years, and *Full Circle* is their first substantial exhibition. They have straightforward aims – they love throwing, are athletic and skilled and full of masculine energy.

The experiments that Lungley undertook at the RCA were to do mainly with scale and texture. A series of very large wide-based bowls in porcelain or brick clay were loaded with slurry (very thick slip of the same body) during the making, which created beautiful rippled and crevassed exteriors; geological encrustations. With a sophisticated balance of control

and leaving-be, the interior surfaces were clean and sharp. Howard also concerned himself with great font-like bowls and his fresh impetus was into printed colour. Making many of his own enamels and taking the transfer into a more painterly 'abstract expressionist' field he was able to make a continuous gestural mark run over the lip of a bowl to be both inside and out, with surprising effect. Both Lungley and Howard have developed a way of being ebullient and modest with scale at the same time – each decided to work with tableware as another strand of their MA investigations, having never done so before. Both have succumbed to the porcelain preoccupation of recent years, where 'Limoges' says it all, but are inclined to glaze in delicate colours as well as white.

These two direct and fluent potters acknowledge Takeshi Yasuda as an inspiration. The existence of a new surge in the British throwing world is due I think to a great extent to his presence in this country for the last three decades. For Yasuda the sensuality of the table and food, the softness of his shapes using clay like butter, the formal composition



of elements, his innovations with glaze, draw another more luscious kind of Asiatic thread from the histories of clay. Also in this wider picture of current wheel-based work, the pots of Simon Carroll and Nigerian-born Lawson Oyekan have further dissolved conventions of stiffness.

Lungley and Howard have the sort of passionate commitment of a protagonist or a proselytiser; both had articles published in *Ceramic Review* on leaving college. Lungley wrote about relations between skill and art school curricula, and Howard about throwing and altering, deforming the perfect circle while soft. Throwing and altering, obviously, expands the range of possible forms, loosens things up, and tells you something else about clay, tension, and the flexible sleeve that is a wet pot.

So what is there to love about throwing? Speed, fluency, the ultra-plasticity of clay in this slippery state, its response to human gesture. Their recent pots express this sense of touch and explore the territory of containing forms with verve and grace.

If the wheel was a dead end to me in the seventies, my eyes now tell me that to feel free with this fabulously variable medium of clay is different today. **CR**

The exhibition *Full Circle* will tour to Zandra Rhodes Gallery, Kent Institute of Art and Design, Rochester, Spring 2005; Handverk Og Hönnun, Reykjavik, Iceland, Summer 2005; Platform Gallery, Clitheroe, September 24 – October 29, 2005.

A fully illustrated catalogue is available, from which this article is an edited extract.

OPPOSITE PAGE TOP LEFT: Ashley Howard – Font, thrown and altered porcelain with enamel collage, Ø60cm **BELOW LEFT:** Martin Lungley – porcelain tea set with iron glaze, H max. 16cm **RIGHT:** Martin Lungley – Celadon and copper glazed porcelain vases, H max. 40cm **THIS PAGE TOP:** Ashley Howard – *Stave*, arrangement of porcelain tea bowls, H approx. 10cm **BELOW LEFT:** Martin Lungley – Celadon glazed porcelain vases, H max. 80cm (Photo: Sam Henderson) **BELOW RIGHT:** Ashley Howard – Porcelain tea set with enamel collage, H teapot 13cm.