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An exploration of the work of selected British artists and designers from the 1880's to the 1990's, through the form of the teapot.

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CHAPTERS

INTRODUCTION

This study is concerned with a collection of artists, designers and craftspeople. Their techniques and materials range from mass production and designed metalware to ceramic sculpture. One form that is common to them all is perhaps the most familiar and evocative form of all in Britain - the teapot. By the second decade of the 18th century the teapot had been standardised into a globular body with a loop handle and straight spout. The artists discussed here have interpreted the teapot form in a way that expresses their design principles and ideas and I will be looking at several examples, varying from the fashionably decorative to the distinctly bizarre.

For many potters, the basic requirements of a container for brewing the tea, a lid to keep in the heat, a spout to pour with and a comfortable handle are only the starting points in making a teapot. By the middle of the eighteenth century, tea had become Britain's most popular beverage. Tea had been used as an aid to meditation by monks in China as early as the eleventh century A.D. and the tea-ceremony was introduced to Japan by Zen Buddhist monks in about the twelfth century. The Dutch started to ship tea to Holland from Japan at the beginning of the seventeenth century and it was through Holland that tea, and teapots, arrived in England. The early pots that arrived from China were often embellished with dragon spouts, serpent tails and other decorative features typical of Oriental art, which in turn inspired European potters.

Over the course of centuries, the ceremony of tea drinking has been reduced to the instant ceremony of popping a tea-bag into a mug. The teapot has also evolved from a container of liquid to a container of ideas. In the last two decades, in particular, the teapot has become a familiar form capable of expressing the unfamiliar, with the investigation of the teapot as a pure art form reaching an inventive peak for artists, designers and craftspeople.

This essay is a contextual study of the teapot's form and functions in Britain, using examples from Christopher Dresser (1834-1904) to contemporary British studio potters. Today, Dresser is seen as a pioneer of Post-Modern design while in the 1930's

he was seen as a pioneer of Modern design, working in a determined way towards an ideal of modernity. Dresser's metalwork, as opposed to his Minton or Linthorpe ceramic work, shows most clearly his design and craft principles in that he avoided all but the simplest of materials and decoration. His designs are based on constructive simplicity and purity and his ideas on form and function in relation to the teapot are very clear. He used strict geometrical shapes with straight legs and angular handles. Some of his designs have now been reproduced a hundred years later by Alessi and still appear to be totally contemporary in their use of form, materials and technology.

As an example of a ceramic designer who was successfully involved in the areas of designing, making, decorating and the production of tableware, I will be looking at the work of Susie Cooper (1902-1995). While Cooper's teapots are not particularly distinctive by themselves, it is her overall design for tableware and her general attitude towards design that is of interest in this study. Cooper remained at the forefront of British ceramic design particularly during the 1930's, through a combination of business acumen, design talent and market foresight.

Dresser and Cooper were both designers who considered function to be as important a principle as aesthetic appeal. The 20th century has seen the Modern Movement and the stripping away of ornament, the use of simplified and abstract forms and the development of an industrial aesthetic. However, since the 1970's and '80's there has been a challenge to both functionalism and ornamentation, where humour and individuality have been used to challenge the predominance of rationalised design thinking.

A teapot today can be a symbol, it can express an idea that a purely functional piece could not. I shall be looking at the work of selected contemporary British studio potters who deal with the teapot form in an unconventional way when related to the ceremony of brewing tea, and whose work has played a role in blurring the perceived borders of defining a teapot, such as the work of Linda Gunn-Russell and Angus

Suttie. This experimentation with the teapot form has become an art form in itself. There are, however, and always will be, the traditionalists who believe in the utilitarian aspect of a pot and who make work accordingly. As our society becomes increasingly concerned with cost and time, there may be a new path for studio potters who can adapt their individual designs for production in order to produce an attractive yet affordable range of ceramics, rather than rely on once-off art pieces. Janice Tchalenko is such a potter whose role as a designer for Dart Potteries developed from her one-off studio pieces. I will also focus on Walter Keeler as an example of a potter who strongly believes in a utilitarian role for pottery.

Throughout this investigation, I shall be looking at such trends and traditions through the form of the teapot as it is a recognisable form that represents an essential part of our everyday lives. I am interested in the artists backgrounds and their influences as much as the work that they choose to make and I have chosen to focus on these particular designers/ artists/ craftspeople as their work appears to relate to their social and economic surroundings. What they have in common is a desire to express themselves through a familiar form in a particularly original and influential way. Also, in writing about quite a long period of history and covering such a wide field I have inevitably had to use a high degree of selection but the focus is on a period of roughly a hundred years - 1880 - 1980.

CHAPTER ONE

Christopher Dresser: Electroplated teapots- Simplicity and Function.

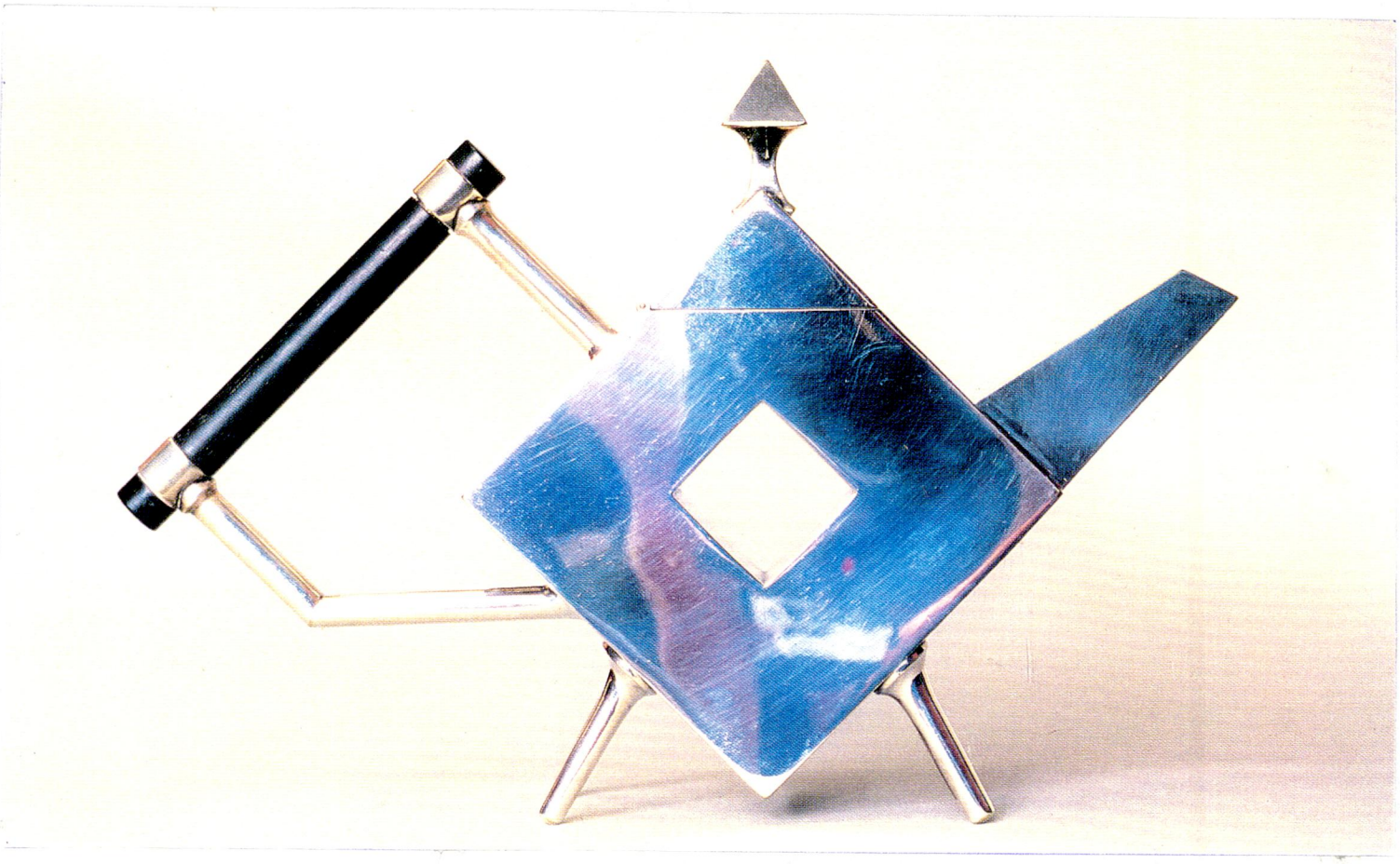


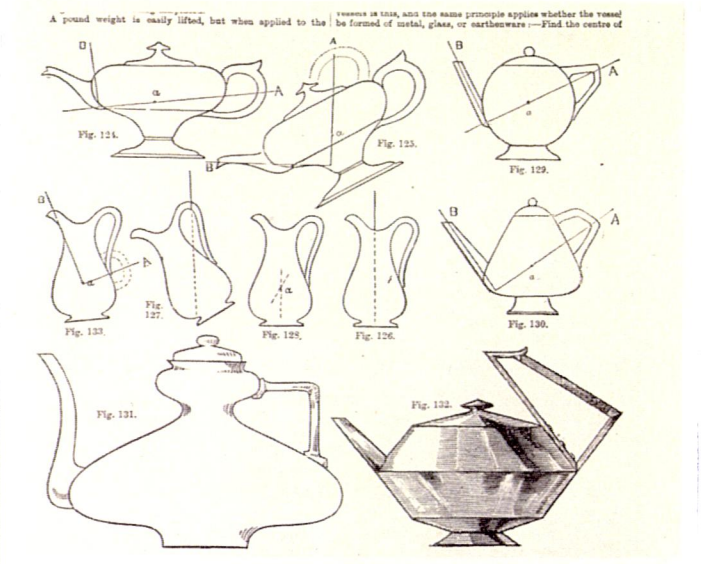
Fig. 1
Christopher Dresser, Electroplated teapot with ebony handle, designed by Dresser and manufactured by James Dixon & Son, 1880. Height 9in.

The teapot in fig.1 with its purely angular form and petroleum colours is hard to place in 1880. Dresser designed some of the most advanced looking metalwork to emerge from the nineteenth century. Consequently, Dresser's designs such as this teapot, have been compared to the twentieth century products of the Wiener Werkstätte and the Bauhaus. There is the same geometrical simplicity and contained functional feel. His work has a stylistic affinity with Bauhaus work produced when Moholy- Nagy was in charge of the metal workshop from 1923 to 1928. Both men were interested in science and its application to art and they both had a strong desire to pass this on through teaching. A Marianne Brandt teapot produced some forty years later than Dresser's, under the direction of Moholy-Nagy, resembles the designs of Dresser because a similar mental approach, inspired by science, lies behind both.

Dresser's approach to teapots was scientific and his main concern was that they should pour well and lift easily. In The Art of Decorative Design, Dresser stated that

> *An object should not only be fitted for the work for which it is intended that it is possible to use it for the purpose of its production but it should be perfectly adaptable to meet all the requirements of the work to which it is assigned and that in the easiest and most simple manner.*
> (Collins, 1979, p.183)

This teapot is based on a geometric and solid shape and form. Dresser has used sharp angles and proportions in relation to the handle, spout and legs. His scientific approach was apparent in the placing of the handles and the spout so that the teapot could be easily lifted and poured (fig.2). Christopher Dresser was a leading and outstanding industrial designer of the nineteenth century. He was one of the most advanced English designers of his age and among the first whose training equipped him for mass-produced furniture, textiles, wallpapers, glass, ceramics, silver and metalwork. He pioneered a rational and scientific attitude to design and his theories stressed the importance of function, simplicity, mechanical skills and the use of easily available and inexpensive materials.



In nineteen cases out of twenty, handles are so placed on teapots and similar vessels that they are in use lifted only by a force capable of raising two or three such vessels . . . The law governing the application of handle and spout to vessels is this . . . Find the centre of gravity . . . draw a line through the centre of the handle, and continue it through the centre of gravity of the vessel. The spout must now be at right angles to this line . . . this law, if obeyed, will always enable liquid to be poured from a vessel without its appearing heavier than it actually is . . .' *The Technical Educator,* London 1870-73.

Fig.2
Illustration from Dresser's Principles of Decorative Design, 1873.

Dresser trained at the London Government Schools of Design between 1847 and 1853, where he specialised in botany. He turned to design after seeing Japanese objects at the London Exhibition of 1862. Here for the first time, Japanese art and artefacts were displayed, in a separate section, to a large number of Westerners. The section was composed of objects sent in by the British Minister in Japan at this time, Sir Rutherford Alcock. These included textiles, ceramics, lacquerware, ivory carvings and metal objects of bronze, iron, silver and gold. Prints and illustrated books were also shown, along with some Japanese paper and specimens of timber. Along with Alcock, other contributors to the Japanese section included the British Consul at Kanagawa, Captain F. Howard Vyse, who among other things showed a pair of large screens. A French company exhibited Japanese cloisonné, inlaid cabinet work and lacquerware, porcelain and silk. This indicates that by 1862 there were already a number of collectors of Japanese objects in Britain.

Dresser was anxious to be seen as a designer and complained that he had been trained by artists rather than ornamentalists. He rejected the humanistic and pictorial references of Renaissance art, probably because they had been created by painters and sculptors and seemed inappropriate for designed artefacts. Instead he looked to Egyptian, Greek, Islamic, Indian and Gothic influences and also to the then newly appreciated cultures such as those of Peru, Mexico and Japan. The influence of Japanese culture had become part of avant-garde European design vocabulary by the early 1860's and Dresser showed an early interest in this.

In 1876 he went to both Japan and America. He found in Japanese design a directness which inspired much of his work for metalware and ceramics. He was also impressed by the use of inexpensive materials such as coarse brown Japanese earthenware and stated in his *Principles of Decorative Design* (1873) "Workmen! It is fortunate that the best vehicles for art are the least costly materials" (Dresser, 1973, p.3). Dresser was one of the leading figures in the introduction of Japonism to the West. His visit to

Japan in 1876 was the first of its kind by a European designer and he published his impressions under the title *Japan, its Architecture, Art and Art-Manufactures*, in 1882. The 1862 International Exhibition, where Dresser had first seen Japanese objects had been enthusiastically reviewed by the press and Japanese arts and crafts began to be compared favourably with the art of other countries. Here was a fresh source of art from which artists and critics could draw inspiration. Dresser found that Japanese theories were similar to his own and which led him to attempt to really comprehend the true aesthetics of Japanese art.

Dresser's admiration for Japanese teapots and other cooking vessels clearly inspired his original metalwork. His review of the Vienna International Exhibition in 1873 expressed regret that "While the kettle is an object of use in every house in the land, we have to go to Japan to learn how to make one as it should be " (Halen, 1990, p.146). He was amazed at the variety of materials and eccentric shapes used in Japanese metalwork and was particularly intrigued by the exposure of rivets and joints of various metal belts. Work of his produced by Elkington (fig.3) in 1885 reveals his preference for simple shapes, straight legs and angular handles at a time when the fashion was for more ornate and decorative objects. Dresser's approach to the teapot form was to produce simplified designs at a time when the elaborate and the ornate was more common. As a decorator and pattern maker, Dresser was seen to use far more decoration and ornament than he did when designing for metalware, even using cats, mice and frogs. When designing his teapots and other metalwares Dresser was concerned with the material perfectly serving the end for which it was formed. In using silver, economy was a concern for him and he used thin sheets of silver instead of silver throughout and his teapots were designed with strict principles on the placing of handles and spouts. They had to be placed so that the liquid could be poured perfectly while also taking the shape of the teapot into account. The handle in the illustrated teapot (fig.1) is not mere ornament but part of the vessel structurally. These electroplated teapots in fig.3 show his attention to detail, particularly on the handles

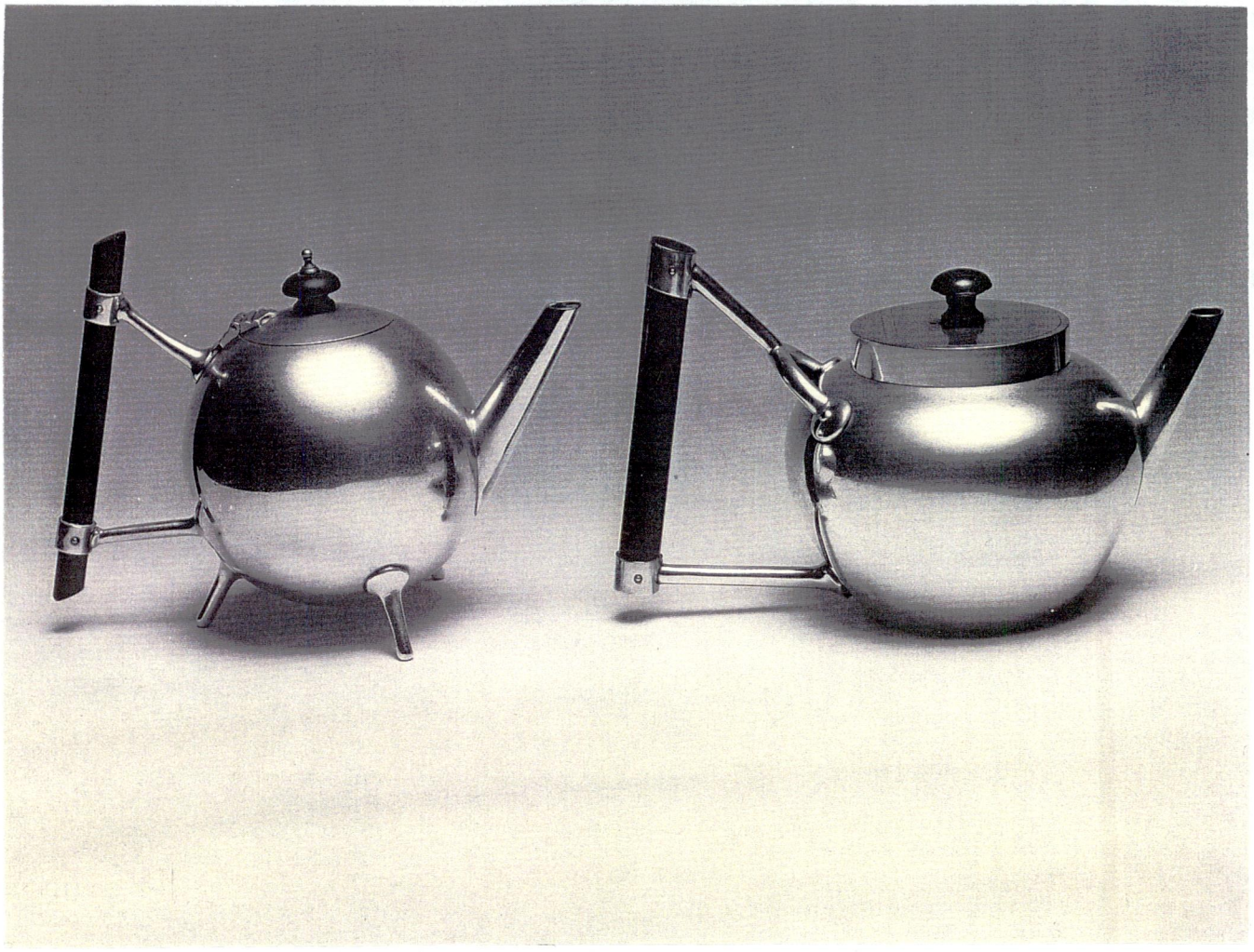


Fig.3
Christopher Dresser, Electroplated teapots, designed by Dresser and manufactured by Elkington & Co, 1885. Height 4.5in.

and in joints. This detail was unusual for the 1880's but typical of Dresser's metalwork. He avoided all but the simplest of materials and decoration in his designs although such smooth unexpected forms had not previously been seen in the western tradition of design.

Looking at other electroplated teapots produced by Hukin and Heath and designed by Dresser in October 1879, the Japanese influence with its concern for function is particularly apparent (figs.4 & 5). Here, crest patterns and foliage decorations in the Japanese style provide an elegant alternative to Dresser's usual smooth surfaces. The strict, geometric shapes and angular spouts are similar to the vessels that Dresser had admired at the Vienna International Exhibition in 1873.

Although Japonism found favour among many of Britain's artists and designers it was not entirely adopted by the Aesthetic Movement, which emerged in the early 1860's and lasted into the 1880's and supported an "art for art's sake" philosophy that rejected the notion the art should serve a social or moral purpose. Although this was at odds with the Utopian Socialist beliefs of the Arts and Crafts Movement the two remained closely connected and many followers of the Aesthetic Movement converted to the Arts and Crafts camp later in the 1880's, notably Lewis Day and Walter Crane. A central figure in the Aesthetic Movement was Oscar Wilde. One object more than any other that has come to symbolise the movement is the two-sided teapot from Royal Worcester, produced around 1882 (fig.6). This teapot, while not an obvious portrayal of Wilde himself, shows a limp-wristed young man on one side and on the other, a young woman; the male sports a sunflower buttonhole and the woman a lily. Its handle is made by one hand resting on the youth's hip while the other limply defines the spout. Intended as a satire of the sexually ambivalent pose of Oscar Wilde and more generally a response to the Aesthetic Movement's feminine character, today it as a fascinating record of the androgyny and sensuality that was part of the Aesthetic Movement's character.

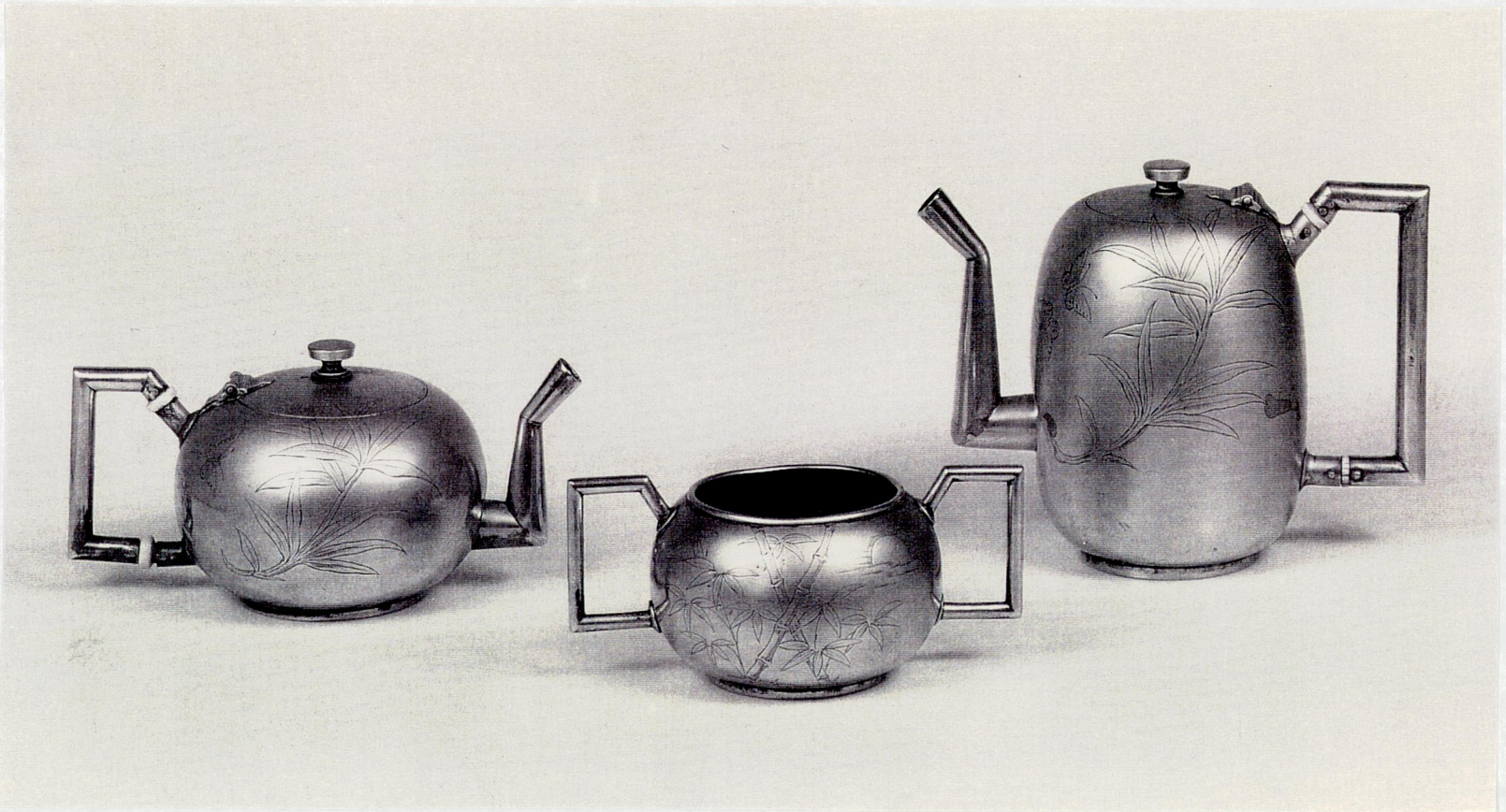


Fig.4
Christopher Dresser, Solid silver tea and coffee sets with incised Japanese crest decorations, designed by Dresser and manufactured by Hukin & Heath, 1879.
Height 5-8in.

Fig.5
Christopher Dresser, Electroplated tea-set with incised Japanese decoration, designed by Dresser and manufactured by Hukin & Heath, 1879.

Fig.6
Aesthetic Teapot (Oscar Wilde),
Worcester Porcelain Company, England, c.1881. Glazed porcelain. Height 6in.
The base of this teapot is inscribed with a parody of Oscar Wilde's famous epigram, which reads
"*Fearful consequences through the laws of natural selection and evolution of living up to one's teapot.*"

While Dresser's metalwork has been compared to the twentieth-century products of the later Wiener Werkstätte and the Bauhaus, his style is more organic than theirs and reflects his studies of plant and animal forms. Dresser's career in botany was an important inspiration for the development of his work and the influence of his study of plant structures can be seen clearly in much of his ceramic, glass and textile work. Although design replaced botany as a profession for him, he continued to draw inspiration from plant forms throughout the rest of his working life. A centre-piece with revolving dishes, designed by Dresser for Hukin and Heath in May 1881 and electroplated toast-racks of the same year (figs.7 & 8) show see atom-like joints that reflect Dresser's scientific interests. The centre-piece was designed so that the individual dishes, as well as the entire frame, would revolve. Electroplated silver was a medium that met Dresser's requirements for inexpensive materials.

His domestic items such as tea-sets and toastracks are based on geometric and solid shapes and forms such as the square, circle, triangle, cone or cube. He used sharp angles and projections with simple natural materials in conjunction with metal, often revealing rivets and construction points. These designs are devoid of excess ornamentation and the clean-cut shapes exemplify Dresser's principles of constructional honesty and purity. They also convey his concern with creating unexpected but serviceable objects available at reasonable prices to almost everybody. *The Studio Magazine*, which showed many of his works, emphasised the

> *Strenuous efforts of Mr. Dresser to raise the national level of design, not by producing costly bric-a-brac for millionaires, but by dealing with products within the reach of middle classes, if not for the masses themselves.*
> (Halen, op.cit, p.188).

The Arts and Crafts Movement in Britain with its rejection of industrial production led to the revival of traditional craft pottery and a desire to break down the divisions that

Fig.7
Christopher Dresser, Centre-piece with revolving dishes, designed by Dresser and manufactured by Hukin & Heath, 1881. Height 10in.

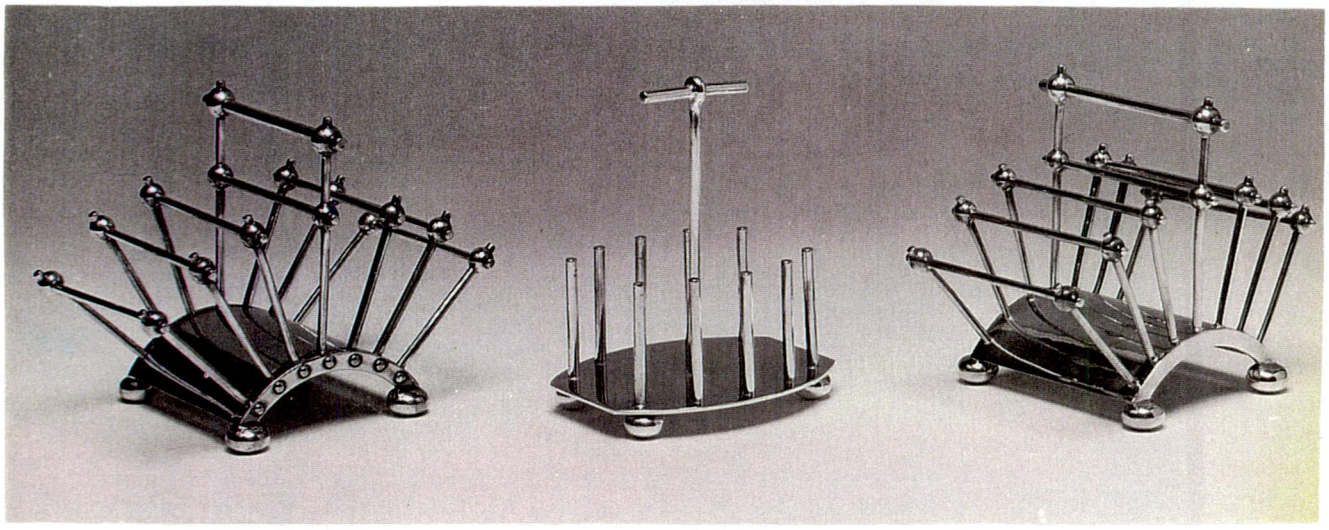


Fig. 8
Christopher Dresser, Electroplated toast-racks, designed by Dresser and manufactured by Hukin & Heath, 1881.

had arisen between the artist, the designer and the craftsman. Dresser's enthusiasm for the machine was in contrast to the views expressed by William Morris and John Ruskin, who believed in art for the masses but could in no way match Dresser's output of design for mass-production. Art potteries flourished towards the end of the 20th century and the designs of Dresser, first at Minton's and Wedgwood, then at Linthorpe and Ault played an important part in a widening range of influences.

In ceramics and glass, Dresser's designs are often organic, sometimes with incised or raised decoration. Protrusions and indentations form positive and negative volumes, while handles and spouts form voids as important visually as the solids which they serve to delineate. In fig.9, we can see a variety of ceramic forms designed by Dresser for Linthorpe Art Pottery. In this work Dresser exhibits a mastery of the formal values of three dimensional design, encouraging the viewer's eye to travel around the object in much the same way as contours do in sculpture. Pots can be seen from virtually any angle but this changes as soon as a spout or handle is added. At once the pot acquires a new position in space. A pair of strong projecting handles suggest an invitation to viewers to place themselves squarely before the pot. A teapot can suggest a posture to viewers, urging them to reach for a handle at the side or to stand above a stirrup type of handle. The profiles of these handles can become an important element in the expression of the whole pot. Much of Dresser's ceramic work also contains a sense of humour. Skeletons or cockroaches as motifs for decoration may not appeal to us today but Dresser embraced "bad form" in much the same way as Sotsass and his colleagues did in the 1960's.

The teapot in fig.1 is not a form that we would expect to see used in relation to the teapot. But while it appears unconventional and unique, it manages to combine aesthetic appeal with purely functional aspects. Often, as we will see later in this essay, one of these issues is sacrificed for the other. Dresser managed to design these unusual forms for teapots whilst retaining their ability to lift and pour well.

Fig. 9
Christopher Dresser, Linthorpe Art Pottery vases designed by Dresser, c.1880.
Height 6-19in.

Dresser described himself as a commercial artist and his clients were manufacturers. While there is now documentation on Dresser, there is little information on the methods of production or sales. His products are now valuable collected items, the teapot in fig.1. being valued at £50,000 in 1992, which would indicate that while he produced a large quantity of designs, they may not have actually been put into production on a large scale. Many of Dresser's designs were clearly ahead of their time, perhaps being almost too revolutionary or eccentric for the 1880's but one hundred years later, the same designs seem to be entirely appropriate. In 1991, Alessi brought out a collection of solid silver tableware -*Archivi*- which comprised entirely of objects designed by Dresser. All the pieces were designed between 1864 and 1885. A triangular teapot on slim legs dated 1880 is available now in a limited edition of 99 pieces. Research was done on Dresser's work and a number of records on production techniques proved extremely useful to the Alessi project. These techniques included sand and lost wax casting processes for legs, handles and knobs, bending sheet metal, lathe-shaping rounded forms and the use of rivets to connect pieces together, providing an insight into Dresser's vast knowledge of metal- working techniques.

CHAPTER TWO

Susie Cooper: Modern teapots in the British style.

One of the results of industrialisation was that the role of design became a separate area in the factory process. Another implication of industrialisation was the effect that mechanical production had on the ware itself. It became possible to reproduce complex work which had previously involved a lot of expensive hand work or work that varied in shape and texture.

Susie Cooper began her training in ceramics in 1919, after she had previously taken night classes in plant drawing at Burslem School of Art. After receiving a scholarship to train full time, Cooper completed three years, including a foundation in Fine and Applied Arts and classes in modelling and decoration. It was during these years, in the early 1920's, that she was introduced to A.E.Gray, who was a supporter of hand painting and argued that mechanisation, particularly of the decorating processes, had taken away the satisfaction of creative achievement from workers in the industry.

Cooper went to work for A.E.Gray and Co.Ltd. of Hanley, who recognised her talent, and she was quickly promoted. She developed new ideas for decoration, recognising that hand painted decoration often involved repetitive tasks. Simple brushwork became a predominant feature in her patterns, exploring the optimum effects that could be achieved with brush and colour, yet remaining within the limits of the paintresses' abilities.[1]

Cooper left Gray's in 1929, at the age of 27. She was becoming frustrated by the limited opportunities to design her own pottery shapes. In 1930, Cooper set up her own pottery in Burslem, with a team of paintresses, mainly 14 year-old girls from Burslem School of Art whom she trained in colour and basic painting techniques. She bought in white-ware and her designs became more simplistic and restrained. She now

1.Paintress is the word used in the pottery industry to describe the women who paint the glaze decoration on the ware. Many of Cooper's designs resulted from her need to produce designs which could be reproduced perfectly by her paintresses.

had total freedom of expression and was able to experiment, the work resulting in further innovative patterns. Cooper was now involved in all aspects of the business: recruitment, quality control, promotional strategies, marketing and creativity. Combined with her intuitive perception of the shifts in public taste, the factory's wares were guaranteed to maintain their popularity.

Within a year of production, Cooper was also able to negotiate with her suppliers of white-ware the manufacture of her own designs, giving her control over both shape and pattern. She was now in the position to design shapes incorporating her ideas about the sort of modern design that she had heard Gordon Forsyth discussing at lectures. Her emphasis was on less extreme modern forms and the retention of a limited amount of decoration. Whether or not designers of this time accepted the ideology of modernism, their responses were of a more practical nature. If they were to agree that fewer shapes should be produced and decoration should be eliminated, then the jobs of skilled craftspeople and designers such as Cooper would be under threat. She aimed her market at buyers of middle-priced earthenware that retained a degree of colour and decoration. Cooper wanted to develop both aspects of design and decoration together, an unusual approach in an industry which divided the design of pottery shape from the design of pottery pattern. This was more in keeping with the emerging studio pottery movement potters such as Leach and Staite Murray, who insisted on an interdependant relationship between shape and surface decoration, although working with different emphases.

Cooper also identified the demand for smaller sets of pottery rather than the enormous dinner sets of the preceding decades. Her largely middle-class customers were not giving elaborate dinner parties, nor employing servants to clean up after them, so she designed small sets of tableware intended to meet the basic needs of modern life. These sets could then be added to as required, suiting the needs of a young married couple.

Her colours complemented contemporary colour schemes and a whole table setting could be achieved, down to candlesticks and lamp bases to match if desired.

Cooper aimed to produce a shape that was both functional and attractive in its own right when completely plain, whilst being suitable also for a broad range of decoration. She achieved this with the Kestrel shape (fig.10) which combined the simple yet significant merits of being easy to handle, with teapots that poured without dripping, to critical acclaim from the design authorities. We can see in fig.11 the "Graduated Black Bands" pattern applied to the Kestrel shape in some of its many colour variations. This pattern was developed so that the paintresses could reproduce the pattern to a consistently high standard, as demand for the productions increased.

In comparison to a standard traditional teapot, Cooper has altered the teapot shape by making a feature of the spout. She has given it a dramatic beak-like curve which has been emphasised even more by the colour which follows the curve but leaves a white outline. She has used a slanting semi-circular shape for the knob on the lid instead of the more traditional ball shape, again leaving a white outline. This streamline outline was clearly related to the smooth, undecorated forms found in the Modernist- inspired architecture and design of the 1930's, in which form was emphasised in preference to applied decoration. Whilst using strong colour, much of the body of the teapot is white, allowing the form to speak for itself.

If Susie Cooper teapot designs seemed to be veering away from the traditional teapot form, they were really quite conservative in comparison to others being produced at the time. Curved shapes were often decorated with geometric designs which generally failed to harmonise with the shapes to which they were applied. A square, spoutless teapot with a recessed handle appeared during the 1930's. Triangular handles on Clarice Cliff's Bizarre ware were not easily used. They were more concerned with fashion and wit. These 1920 Art Deco efforts to conform to modernity often failed and

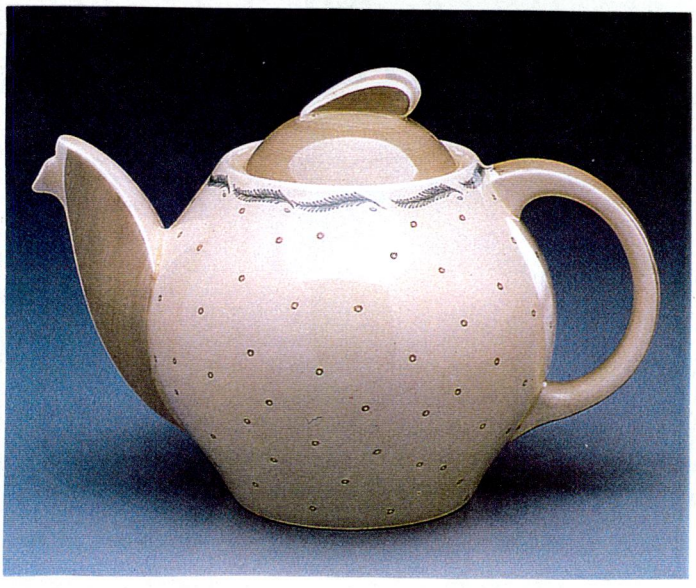


Fig. 10
Susie Cooper, Kestrel teapot with polka dot decoration, 1932.

Fig. 11
Susie Cooper, "Graduated Black Bands" pattern, showing some of the colour variations, applied here predominantly to Kestrel shaped wares, 1932.

the preference appeared to be for the more conservative yet imaginative teapot such as a Susses Cooper Kestrel shape, bringing together a pattern and form that satisfied both the public and the critics.

Cooper was also involved in many Art and Ceramic Societies which were keen to promote fresh approaches to the use of modern materials, new production techniques and new technology. Some of the most eminent writers in the applied arts of the pre-war period, such as Gordon Forsyth, Nikolaus Pevsner and Herbert Read, celebrated the qualities supported by the Modernist School and Cooper's wares embodied these qualities. Generally, ceramic manufacturers bought in patterns from printers but the results were often poor. Putting lithography into practice in 1935, Cooper decided to work with the printers more closely to maintain standards, producing patterns with consideration of the form and function of the ware to be decorated. This attitude was noted by Pevsner: "I know of only a few cases where adventurous potters have begun to design modern lithographs to satisfy their standards. Miss Cooper, so far as I know, was the first to do this" (Casey, 1992, p.47).

While Cooper strived for her work to be distinctive, she was able to maintain a style that was in the vogue and taste of the day. Cooper was influenced by the circumstances surrounding her and her ideas were therefore very much part of a general feeling about design prevalent at the time. Her shapes, such as the Kestrel and the Falcon were flexible in terms of the type of decoration that could be applied to their surface and had a lasting appeal to the ceramic buying public. The decorative process involved the spraying of colour onto the ware and could also include sgraffito motifs and patterns ranging from the most complex designs to simple circles, diamonds and crescents.

After the outbreak of war in Europe in 1939, the ceramic industry faced a shortage of skilled labour due to conscription and problems in obtaining raw materials. The Susie Cooper Pottery Ltd. was licensed to produce essential Utility ware with strict

limitations being placed on the range and types of goods produced. However, any attempts to contribute to the war effort were halted due to a fire at the premises and the factory remained closed until after the war.

The return to freehand painting and banding after the war was due to the destruction of transfers during the fire. Fig.12 shows a group of wares from the immediate post-war years, depicting vivacious free-hand patterns ware with aerographed designs and banded decoration rather than the lithographic transfers that had been destroyed. With this change in method also came a change of style. Bold, abstract motifs based on organic forms were developed, investigating the relationship between positive and negative shapes.

In the 1950's Cooper purchased the Jason China Co. Ltd in London, which meant that she now had total control over all production stages from conception and design to final decoration. This level of involvement with an unfamiliar medium, bone china, provided Cooper with a fresh challenge. The Fluted shape appeared rather more ornate than her Modernist designs, stressing the qualities of bone china by using less decoration (fig.13). The Can shape, functional and clean lined, was also introduced, providing yet another shape of outstanding versatility which remained in production until 1989. The contemporary fashion for drinking coffee demanded a larger cup than the traditional after dinner demi-tasse, a trend recognised and catered for by Cooper. In fact, she retained a remarkable ability to anticipate social and market trends, realising that young people of the day had a different and separate lifestyle from their parents. This consisted of the middle income bracket and under forty age group- people whose lifestyle had perhaps been changed the most in the years after the war. More women in this group, for example, were continuing in jobs and it was to these people that the labour-saving aspects of goods were sold. Convenience foods and the practice of eating out or "taking away" was becoming more common and, as a result, mealtimes became less formal. The family structure that mealtimes had reinforced was slipping

Fig. 12
Susie Cooper, a group of wares from the immediate post-war years. These free-hand patterns were designed due to the lack of lithographic transfers that had been destroyed in a fire.

Fig. 13
Susie Cooper, Bone china tea and coffee wares in the Quail and Fluted shapes, 1951.

and young members were becoming more independent. Cooper provided tableware for this target group as well as filling orders for overseas and designing commissions for Her Royal Highness, the Princess Elizabeth.

Susie Cooper Ltd. became absorbed into Wedgwood in 1966 due to the changes that swept through the ceramic industry after the end of the Second World War. The Board of Trade Working Party recommended the amalgamation of smaller factories and a co-operative approach to distribution, marketing and research. The takeover of Susie Cooper Ltd. with its huge following for her designs, was a bonus for Wedgwood. This participation in a large scale concern also had its benefits for Cooper, as she could now concentrate totally on design without the distractions of other business responsibilities. She found fresh inspiration in the vibrant fashions of Carnaby Street and the King's Road, producing new patterns which contrasted with the more traditional tastes of her established customer base (fig.14). However, the marketing policy and selection committees of Wedgwood restricted her designs somewhat, only passing designs that were likely to sell in massive quantities, although the designs that did reach their requirements were marketed world-wide.

Cooper resigned as a Director from Wedgwood in 1972, possibly due to the loss of control over her products, and remained on solely as a designer. She continued to visit her studio part-time until 1986, when she left the Potteries. She was 84 years old.

When looking at the approach to the designing of a teapot, Cooper was obviously led by a desire to produce a product that suited the lives and aspirations of her consumers, middle-class professionals with not so much money as taste. The streamlined shapes and minimalist patterning of all her tableware were elegant and practical and although seen as Modernist, were never threatening.

Fig. 14
Susie Cooper, Vibrant designs mainly on the Can shape tea and coffee wares, 1967.

CHAPTER THREE

Walter Keeler and Janice Tchalenko: The handmade functional teapot.

For hundreds of years pots have been produced in local communities, often on the wheel, and in industry, as in Stoke-on-Trent, where the wares were made more uniform. Studio potters have inherited both traditions and, in our Post-Modernist society, can use whatever method they feel most appropriate, whether hand-building, throwing or slip casting. Walter Keeler is a potter who is totally committed to making functional pots. He trained at Harrow School of Art and established his first workshop in Buckinghamshire in 1965. One of the major influences on his work has been British pottery, especially 18th century industrial ware such as the white salt-glaze wares of Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent and Wedgwood cream-coloured earthenware. Keeler grew up in a London suburb and as a teenager discovered "mudlarking" which was collecting all sorts of pottery bits from the Thames river when the tide went out, mostly medieval, 17th or 18th century English ware and very occasionally, a Roman piece. From collecting these shards, Keeler developed a sense of what pots were all about before he ever became a potter.

When he enrolled at Harrow as a painter in the late 50's, he was required to choose a craft one day a week and he was lucky enough to have Victor Margrie as his pottery tutor, who was later instrumental in setting up the Harrow Studio Pottery course. As his tutor, Margrie was very demanding but turned a casual interest into a lifelong obsession and love affair with clay. Today, Keeler and his wife, also a potter, have a workshop in Wales where they produce their wares, build kilns and also teach. Keeler's work is distinctive in both style and technique. He uses the salt-glazing method which is a difficult but rewarding way of glazing. It gives a unique finish that forms an integral part of the ceramic piece itself. The result of introducing salt during a firing is typically a glossy, orange peel texture that enhances edges, fire marks and details.[1]

1. Salt glazing originated in Germany's Rhineland between the 12th and 15th centuries, due to rich natural resources, an abundance of wood for fuel and a knowledge of high firing kilns. It is not known how it came about to throw salt into a kiln to produce a glaze, as there is no recorded evidence of the origins of salt glazing.
(Troy, 1977, p.12).

Keeler finds that this particular process suits the forms that he produces. All his pots begin on the wheel, are then usually hit on both sides to change the form and are often assembled with other sections, thrown, extruded or press-moulded. The seams are usually left exposed as he prefers the construction of the pot to be evident.

One of his well known teapots is the Tin Can Pot, which bears a close resemblance to and reflects the metal qualities of a tin can (fig.15). This teapot is a good example of how functional pottery does not need to exclude innovation and experimentation. This piece incorporates a free use of clay with a tautness that is softened by the salt-glaze surface. Its references to the tin can, with its hard edges and constructed feel is created by reassembling the clay when leather hard or by hitting the sides to make creases that dynamically change the form. The joints are left exposed so that the viewer can see the construction involved. The sharpness and angularity of this teapot reflect the influence of simple metal vessels on Keeler's aesthetic. Keeler interferes with the traditional approach to throwing. He uses the elements to make an assemblage, resulting in a teapot that is a mixture of both analytical design thinking and intuitive throwing.

Keeler's treatment of what he calls his Tin Can teapot is rather more in the line of what we would recognise as a coffee pot. The classic rounded belly of a teapot is absent as is the familiar curved spout. Instead we have a cylinder for the body with an unconventional double spout. While it can actually be used, it is debatable whether a buyer would risk using and chipping several hundred pounds worth of teapot. A teapot such as this one would rest more easily on a display shelf than in the dishwasher. Whilst Keeler has retained function he has sacrificed the practical qualities for aesthetic qualities.

Keeler works in a hard-edged way, burnishing the surface of the clay and sometimes drawing taut straight lines on the surface of a rounded teapot. But while there is precision and overall sharpness, the teapots retain the softness of the salt glaze surface

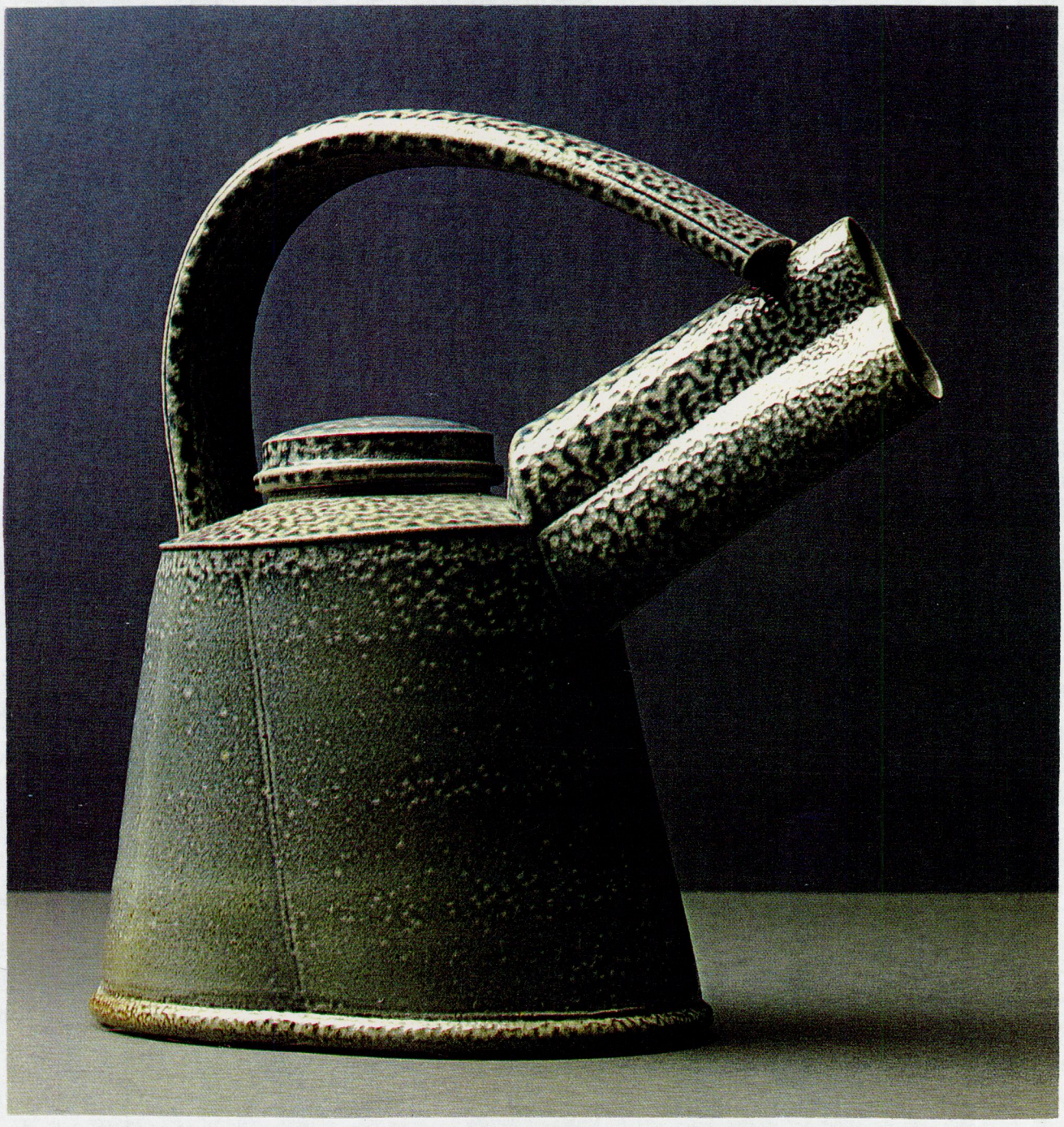


Fig.15
Walter Keeler, Teapot, stoneware, salt-glazed, U.K. 1984
Height 22cm.

and have a humorous element, giving each piece a friendliness and personality (fig.16). A big teapot may have a demure spout and a neat rim at the base. Snake-like spouts, surprisingly large handles and the warm, dark, salt-glaze colours work well together alongside the rivetted-together look of a metal factory construction.

Walter Keeler's work shows that functional pottery need not exclude the innovation usually only associated with one-off type work. He has made a whole collection of functional ware including storage pots, teapots, jugs, pitchers, mugs and dishes and unified them with a salt glaze. He is dedicated to making functional pots and finds it a very exciting area. Some people see function as a bar to creativity, whereas Keeler finds it a tremendous challenge. The idea that utility restricts creative expression is a common one today but because an object functions does not mean that it is not addressing form or material. Keeler is committed to making functional pots yet still pays great attention to the aesthetic qualities of his work.

Many people who work in ceramics, including students, feel that as artists they want to create individual pieces, work that expresses some concept or emotion, work that has depth and substance; this can result in one-off pieces that may attract more prestige and glamour. There has also been a reaction against "little brown mugs", traditional muted colours and sturdy forms being rejected in favour of bright colours and highly decorated forms. At the beginning of the 1970's there was a diversity of work being offered; the Leach and Cardew traditionalist influence was still apparent, Lucie Rie was still very productive and then there were the Post-Modernist ceramists who rejected the limiting traditionalism of Leach and company. It is interesting to note that while the Leach traditions were being rejected, one of the Japanese traditions which Leach supported was the lack of division between art and craft which was also one of the aims of the Post-Modernist ceramists. They freely incorporated pattern and decoration into their work, examples being in the work of Elizabeth Fritsch, Carol

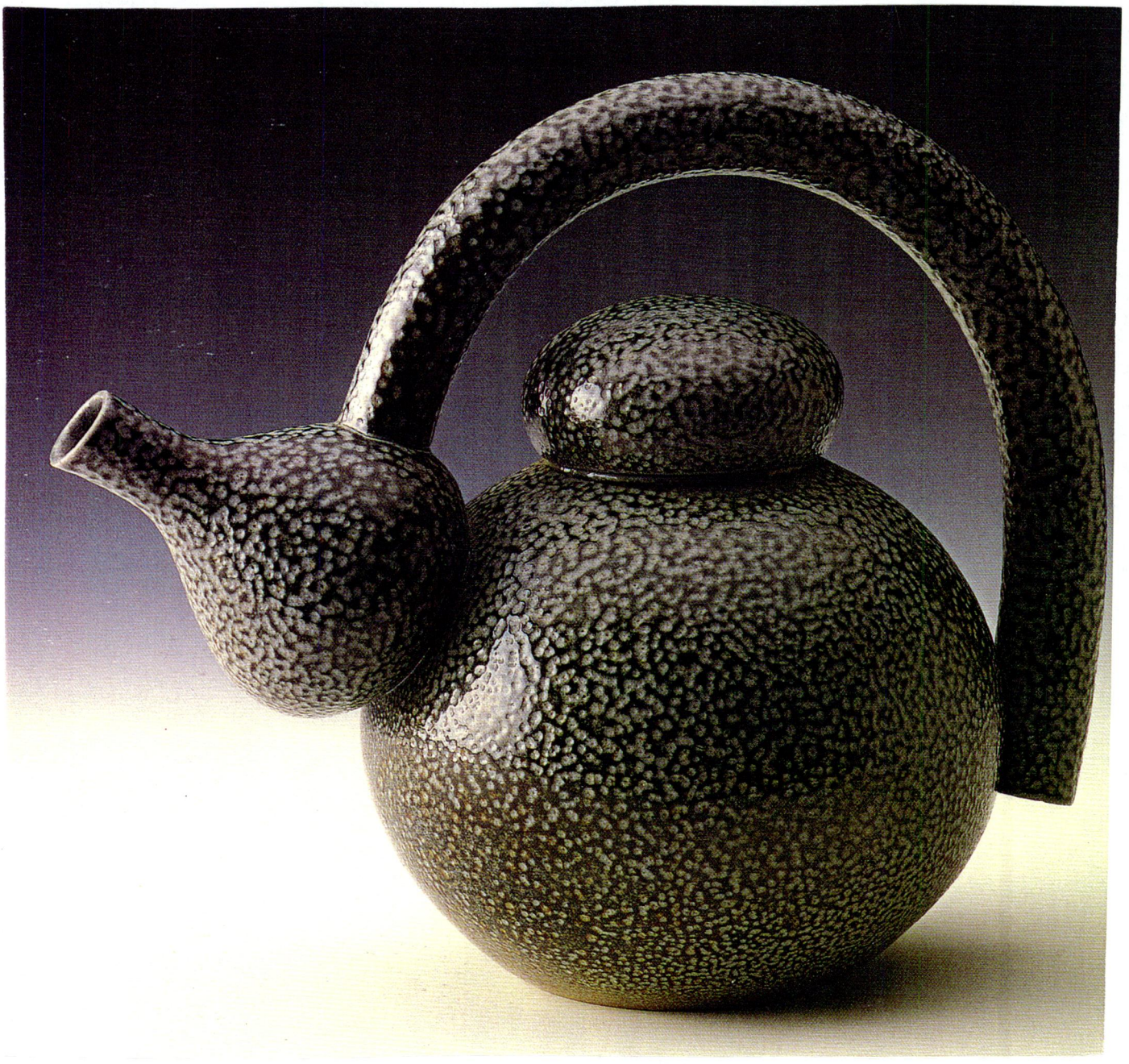


Fig.16
Walter Keeler, Teapot, stoneware, salt-glazed, U.K. 1983
Height 20cm.

McNicoll and Jacqueline Poncelet, whose work had a great impact on the ceramic world at this time.

Janice Tchalenko, also a student from the Harrow School of Art, is another functional potter, who is finding a new path for functional pottery at this time of self-expression. Tchalenko received a Crafts Council grant in 1980 to create new glazes; the sponged and slip-trailed designs that emerged from this research were beautiful, simple forms with colourful and loosely patterned surfaces. Tchalenko's pots before this had been in the hand-made genre of Leach and Cardew rather than industrial, but she wanted to break into a different section of the market, making work that would appeal to people who didn't want traditional brown pottery. As the demand for her ware quickly increased, she found that she couldn't keep up this production by herself. This is when the successful merge between Tchalenko and Dart Pottery took place. In 1975, the Dartington Pottery Training Workshop was set up in Totnes, Devon, to create an environment to train functional potters. By 1983 the workshop was on the verge of bankruptcy, but it was sold, renamed Dart Pottery and Tchalenko was brought on board to design for them.

The pottery now employs a mix of workshop and industrial techniques and has proved to be a success story. In the year after Tchalenko's designs were introduced, turnover nearly doubled and it continued to rise thereafter. In 1988, Tchalenko won the Manchester Prize for Art Production for her Dart designs while the pottery itself received the Radio Times Enterprise Award for the best small business. Tchalenko's personal work and influences are discussed in more detail further on in this chapter.

Keeler's career has not followed this path but has instead concentrated on individual handmade wares that are relatively costly. He began by making wares in quantity and selling them rather cheaply in the traditional style of the functional potter. But he found himself caught in a treadmill where the pressures of high quality, low cost production

left little time or energy to develop any aesthetic qualities in his work and he became frustrated by the endless repetition of forms. So, while remaining committed to the notion of function, he set up his salt-glaze operation and began to experiment with his designs (Keeler, 1991, p.82).

These forms, described earlier, naturally took more time to produce so Keeler raised his prices even though there was a recession in the market at this time, 1980. The response however was positive but there is always the worry that this increased cost of the work is going to remove it from the area of utility. He can now expect to sell one of his teapots for £400, an inconceivable price for a teapot ten years ago, showing a shift in people's perception of the value of pottery. The work is now seen to have considerable investment potential and his collectors understand that unique, handmade functional ware of the aesthetic refinement and technical finesse that Keeler offers, is a luxury product to be valued and prized.

Keeler's work is promoted by the Crafts Council, a body that encourages high standards. Applications for support are often rejected as it has limited funds and this can lead to resentment. This can be interpreted as the promotion of one-off, flavour-of-the-month pieces in preference to straightforward work. Keeler has no complaints as the Council has consistently promoted his work even when it was very simple, functional pottery. He also finds that the galleries that he exhibits in do a good job in promoting his work. They pay up front for his pots so it is in their own interest to sell them quickly. These galleries have their own clientele and they can select suitable pieces for each buyer. In this way, Keeler's work gets plenty of publicity by being shown in a gallery before it ends up in somebody's home. Keeler also supplements his income by teaching, although he actually makes more money these days through the sales of his work (Keeler, op.cit. p.85). He continues to teach as he is interested in supporting younger people coming up through the system and at the same time it stimulates his own creative process.

Keeler maintains that he is committed to making functional pots. His teapots can be used but it is doubtful that he would be concerned about finding the centre of gravity in order to perfect the pouring of the tea. The aesthetic qualities are more important in Keeler's teapots. Each one is a prized object and priced accordingly but a difference between these teapots and Linda Gunn-Russell's, for example, would be that Keeler's could be used; the functional aspect is retained in their making and there is a handle with a spout opposite that will pour tea if you choose to use it.

Janice Tchalenko trained at Harrow from 1969 to 1971 and set up her own pottery in Peckham, South London. She trained in the Leach/Cardew tradition, as a fast, efficient thrower making well thought-out shapes, fired in reduction with Oriental glazes, intended for domestic environments and sold at reasonable prices. The bursary she received in 1980 provided her with the time and opportunity to rethink her shapes and decoration, as the fashion for rural, rustic pottery was beginning to fade. Tchalenko seemed to recognise the mood for change very early and her work evolved from a traditional style to a prettier look involving the use of lavish colour and pattern which suited the changing times.

Tchalenko had been teaching at Camberwell School of Art since 1972 and was in regular contact with an interesting and challenging group of colleagues such as Gillian Lowndes, Ewen Henderson, Carol McNicoll and Jacqueline Poncelet, a group with a very different approach from that of the Harrow School of thought.

Her new work was selling well and it was at this stage, in 1983, that Tchalenko became involved in designing for Dart Pottery. The theory is: she comes up with ideas, works on them with a decorator from Dart Pottery, who then develops them further. Tchalenko is paid a lump sum for her designs plus commission on each piece sold. Dart now employs a glaze expert who can develop new colours to replace ones that lose

popularity. Poppy Service (fig.17) is a good example of Tchalenko's simple forms with colourful and loosely patterned surfaces. The coloured glazes used are copper red, blue, yellow and green. Many of her designs are based on flowers and others are inspired by rich Persian fabrics and ceramics. The highly colourful decorative surface of this functional range is achieved through a combination of brushing, trailing and sponging techniques, applying one glaze onto another. The forms themselves are very simple so it is the decoration and glazes that attract the eye most. A matt surface can often express a sense of reserve. Here, the glossy surface and the rich use of colour, particularly the red, which is not seen frequently in ceramics, create a sense of luxury. This may come across more strongly to another potter, who will relate the process to technology and expense.

A Tchalenko teapot, made in 1983 (fig.18) is a good example of the work that she was producing before her involvement with Dart Pottery. This style of teapot that she was producing was far brighter in colour and pattern than what was being produced by Dartington, which was still dominated by a more rustic tradition. This stoneware teapot is thrown and is rather traditional in its form and function whilst retaining the style of the maker. The use of colour is lose and rich and drips luxuriously down the sides of the rounded belly and perky spout. The colours are bold and bright, with runny red flower forms over a black and beige background. This vibrant effect is achieved by applying layers of glaze over each other. The glazes are sponged on, creating an all-over effect based on loose floral patterns. Her treatment of the teapot form is far more conventional than a Keeler teapot. Rather than attempt to explore new forms of teapots, she has chosen to concentrate on the decoration and colour, using these aspects to create an individual style. This teapot shows that there is enormous potential for the development of new ideas in the making of practical tableware. It shows why the merge between Tchalenko and Dart been so successful. While remaining distinctive, it is easy to see how a range of this ware could be produced on a larger scale, in a studio-based small-scale industry. Tchalenko has designed here a range

Fig.17
Janice Tchalenko, Poppy Service, glazed stoneware, designed by Tchalenko and produced by Dart Pottery, 1991. Plate 30.5cm.diameter.

Fig.18
Janice Tchalenko, Teapot, stoneware, 1983.

specifically for small-scale production which was economic to make, attractive to look at and was capable of catching the public's eye.

Many of the designs she comes up with for Dart Pottery are offshoots from her personal work, which is still what she spends most of her time being involved with. Tchalenko's one- off pieces are obviously of wider limits and freer than her designs for Dart. The overall theme of her work could be described as floral; the Dart pots more obviously so, her personal work in an abstractedly flowery way. On bowls, dishes and jugs, rich flowing glazes in deep blues and reds merge. Jugs have elongated necks reminiscent of bunches of flowers, with rich glossy surface decoration embracing the entire surface of the pot. Her work sells through the Designer's Guild on the King's Road in London. She has also designed a successful range for Next Interiors which proved to be an interesting exercise in a different market area.

Tchalenko's personal work includes collaborating with the sculptor Richard Wentworth in 1990 and with Spitting Image in 1993 for an exhibition at the V&A. Few studio potters want to have anything to do with mass-production but Janice Tchalenko seems to have tackled this dichotomy head-on by using industrial processes for small scale workshops and by making prototypes intended for industrial production in small factories. The successful collaboration between Tchalenko and Dart Pottery is a result of this compromise between mass-produced industrial ware and one-off, hand made pieces. Survival can often mean a change of approach, whether this means a new style of work or aiming at a new market. Dart Pottery survived by producing a "designer" collection.

CHAPTER FOUR

Linda Gunn-Russell, Nicholas Homoky and Angus Suttie: The teapot form; an art or craft?

So far I have focussed on examples of teapots made by craftspeople and designers who have chosen to make teapots in a functional context. For Keeler and Tchalenko, the intention is to make interesting teapots and tableware for everyday use in the home (although Keeler's pricing may restrict the user for fear of breakages), for preparing and serving food and drink in the rituals of sharing and celebrating. There has always been a tradition of novelty teapots, with symbolic and decorative qualities rather than their being purely and conventionally functional. From the earliest Chinese teapots with their dragon spouts and serpent tails to the Aesthetic Teapot of 1880, humour, satire and ornament have played a role in the design and making of the teapot form.

Studio potters today often display complex influences and ambitions even more complex, yet still choose to express these through familiar and traditional forms such as the teapot. Their work seems to be concerned with expressing individuality rather than function. Many contemporary potters seem almost to fear function or see it as too restricting. A ceramic teapot today may be the product of a modern idea and a modern ideology, catering for people who no longer buy a teapot purely out of necessity. Utility has taken a secondary role in much of the work we see today and often a teapot is so far removed from the concerns of function that it resembles nothing more than a representation of a teapot. A teapot that has been formed by dipping a wire mesh shape into slip and firing the clay-coated wire (fig.19) creates an ironic sense of interior, exterior and defeated purpose, reminiscent of Magritte's "Ce n'est pas une pipe", a betrayal of images. It is an image of a teapot, not a teapot.

Linda Gunn-Russell is one of a group of studio potters who deals with the art aesthetic rather than design. Her work is concerned with the abstract teapot rather than a traditionally functional approach. The group of British ceramists who were mentioned earlier in relation to Janice Tchalenko and the Camberwell School of Art, has been eclectic and experimental, emerging in the late 1960's and early 1970's, with a new confidence and creative instinct, ready to reject the Leach traditions and craft-based

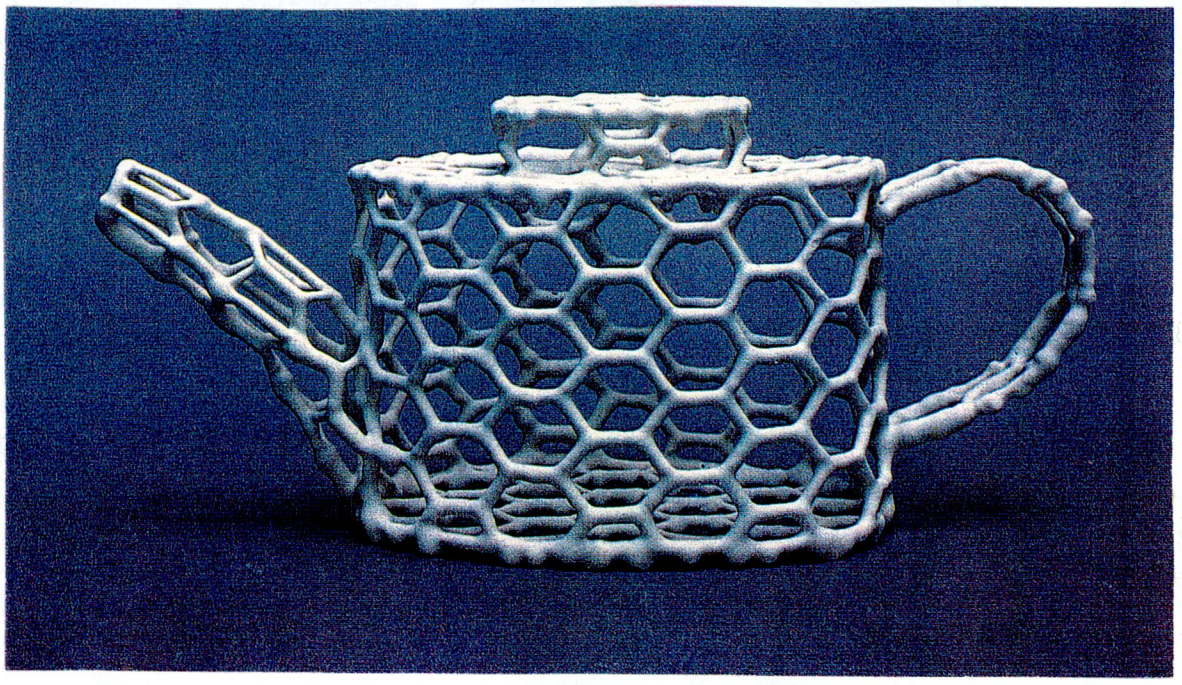


Fig.19
Leopold Foulem, ceramic, wire, Canada. Height 6in, 1989.

philosophy. They have freely incorporated pattern and decoration into their forms, also using figurative imagery and humour. Materials have also been changed, the traditional stoneware being replaced by earthenware which can produce a brighter palette of colour.

One of Britain's strongest contributions to contemporary ceramics has been the emergence of a strong "pictorialism" in the 70's and 80's which deals with form as though it were actually a drawing. Elizabeth Fritsch's work in the 70's showed pots that were actually narrow and flat but, by creating false perspectives, she was able to convey the illusion that these pots were full-bellied, voluptuous vessels. Fritsch's influence on studio pottery was immense, opening up a new relationship between form and drawing.

This pictorialism is clearly expressed in the work of Linda Gunn-Russell. Gunn-Russell left Camberwell in 1975 and set up as a professional potter, making novelty slip-cast functional ware. She made tea services and bottles in runs of a thousand. Realising that they were not actually being used but being put on the mantelpieces, she let go of the notion of utility and turned away from slip-casting to handbuilding and began to play around with teapot and jug forms. Over the years, Gunn-Russell's work has progressed from decorative to expressive concerns. She exploits the formal ambiguities between two dimensional and three dimensional forms, while retaining a connection with ceramic tradition and the vessel.

The teapots illustrated (figs.20 & 21) are witty, surreal constructions showing an impressive level of skill. The pictorial distortions and flattened perspective are borrowed from early Islamic illuminated manuscripts, when the illusion of volume is created by a distortion of scale and perspective. This creates a greater sense of roundness in the form, as more than one plane is shown simultaneously. Also, by controlling size and proportion, she can assign varying degrees of importance to

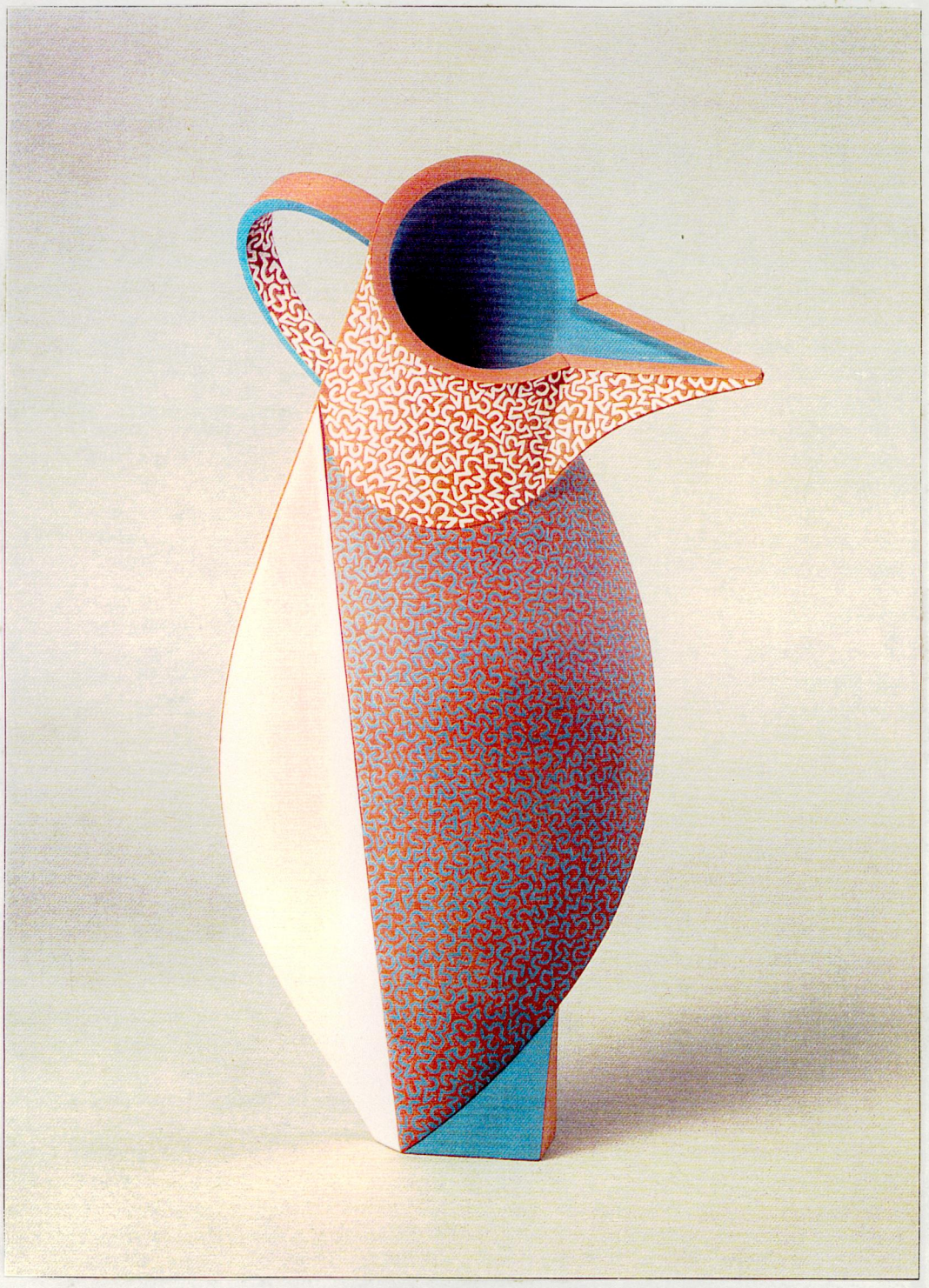


Fig.20
Linda Gunn-Russell, Teapot, earthenware, 1985. Height 38cm.

Fig.21
Linda Gunne-Russell, Teapot, earthenware, 1985. Height 9in.

different parts. This tendency to deviate from ideal proportions enables her to play with eccentricities of scale.

Gunn-Russell's teapots are certainly far removed from the standard rounded teapot form. The nature of pottery is essentially three-dimensional so these flattened outlines are startling with their illusionary forms. The combination of strong vivid colour, blue and white with the more earthy red clay and the intricate pattern emphasises the tension between line and volume. What would these teapots look like without the detailed pattern? I feel that like Elizabeth Fritsch's work, they would appear naked and incomplete until decorated. The teapot in fig.21 is made up of a composition of units. There is a round body, a tubular spout, a curved handle and an eye-shaped lid with a circular knob, all perched on top of a little block. By placing the teapot on this block, it heightens the illusion of scale and perspective while also giving it a finished and permanent appearance, similar to the effect of the framing of a painting.

Although Gunn-Russell's work has moved from teapots to larger, more figurative pieces, the vessel is still of primary importance, but is now presented in the context of the body as a vessel. Where before we could see soaring spouts and rounded bellies, now there are thrusting hips and thin necks, in the same blending of two dimensional illusion with three dimensional form.

The pots of Nicholas Homoky also play with a dynamic between drawing and form. The teapots in fig.22 & 23 are examples of humorous decoration on traditional forms. Using inlay and black slip, Homoky has drawn teapots on the teapots. He uses porcelain, inspired by ancient clay-decorated wares from Cyprus and Greece, enjoying the simplicity of using clay to decorate clay, a simple and direct response to the nature of the material. He exploits the properties of porcelain, firing it to high temperatures to vitrify the body and polishes the surface rather than using any glaze. The teapots begin on a wheel, thrown without a base and are altered by squeezing and stretching the clay.

Fig.22
Nicholas Homoky, Teapot, polished porcelain with slip inlay, 1988.

Fig.23
Nicholas Homoky, Teapot with inlay, 1988.

The surface is smoothed and a base is added on, as are spouts and handles. The linear design is then drawn into the surface. These methods of construction, cutting, stretching, folding, bending, are influenced by non-clay artifacts reminiscent of silver, pewter or even cardboard, their properties being mimicked in clay.

The end result, which has an industrial quality, is far removed from mainstream thrown ware and against the principles such as those of Michael Cardew, who believed that you should never cut or carve the clay. Cardew professed that

> *Pottery in its pure form relies neither on sculptural additives nor on pictorial decorations but on the counterpoint of form, design, colour, texture and the quality of the material, all directed to function.*
> (Cardew, 1977, p.244).

He expressed the opinion that the essence of a craft, as opposed to an art, is that it is useful. He did, however, make cider flagons and harvest jugs that were more in demand for their romantic pastoral connotations than their actual usefulness.

Today, the principle of function is being challenged by ornamentation, irony and individuality. Homoky feels that his work falls into the Hans Coper category of sensitivity because of its graphic purity, feeling that practical use would degrade it (Homoky, 1994, p.27). His teapots are more concerned with exploring paradox than function. The imagery is a play of forms against space and edges. These images relate to each other as well as to the vessel form. The result is one of movement and animation and shows an exciting intuition and sharp eye for the powerful tension between real and unreal and between line and volume. Homoky's style of working, leaving his porcelain pots white and unglazed with defining lines drawn in black inlay, owes more to Coper and Rie than to Fritsch's influence on studio pottery and the relationship between form and drawing. This body of work that has emerged shows another dimension for the studio potter.

Another potter to emerge from the Camberwell School of Art was Angus Suttie. When discussing an abstract approach to teapots, Suttie's treatment of the vessel form, in particular his teapots, contributes to the fresh spirit of adventure in ceramics and its role within the spectrum of visual art. The tutors at Camberwell between 1975 and 1980 included Ian Auld, Gillian Lowndes, Janice Tchalenko, Colin Pearson and Ewen Henderson, so it is hardly surprising that the graduates of Camberwell at this time have contributed strongly to the eclectic, "new wave" ceramics that have emerged over the last twenty years.

Suttie's teapots are concerned with celebration and tradition. He used an object that was at the centre of the domestic environment and he retained the familiar shapes such as a spout, a handle and a lid. The spout is even positioned at its expected place opposite the handle but the end result is far from a typical teapot. His handbuilding method was similar to collage. He would make components of varying size and shape, try different combinations to see how they would fit together and as the teapot developed he would decide where the lid or handle would go (Suttie, 1982, p.30).

His decoration included slips, brushed-on glazes, often several layers on one piece of work and sometimes finished with enamels and lustres. The result is a humorous distortion of the functional teapot, reminiscent of folk art in its lack of sophistication and desire to please. The handling of the clay was intuitive and confident, using the plastic freedom of clay to assemble parts that were pinched and slabbed to create a spontaneous yet complex vessel. The colours, particularly of the earlier pots, are dazzling and vibrant with dots, swirls and dabs of slip freely applied to the earthenware body in a surrealist painterly manner. Picasso, Miro, Greek pots and African sculpture were just some of his influences.

The teapots appear to harmonise utility, expression and decoration. The functional aspect is important in that it provided a parameter to his ideas and imagination.

Function is not something which is static but changes as requirements change: many of the old pots that Suttie admired would have no value in our society. When looking at a history of pots, utility is only one of several functions. Most cultures have produced pots which were not made to be utilitarian but to function as conductors for that society's beliefs or ritual needs. Once mass-production and factory-made pottery came along, potters have had to have a reason for producing handmade utilitarian pottery. Suttie seemed to constantly explore himself and what he believed in through his work.

The teapot in fig.24 is one of Suttie's least eccentric pots. While it can actually be used, it is also intended to be a decorative addition to brighten the everyday world. It was made in white earthenware in 1985 and expresses the thrill of colour and the plastic freedom of clay. A later teapot made in 1988 (fig.25) seems less concerned with domestic pottery and focussed on the vessel, with reference to the body and architecture. The figurative aspects of pots have been endlessly explored, from the freely modelled pots of Roman Britain to the Victorian teapot created in the shape of the youth parodying the excesses of the Aesthetic Movement.

Suttie brought such explorations into our own times with references to the society in which we live. Whilst remaining a teapot, this vessel is larger than his earlier work, more architectural and also more complex. The shape is less fluid and more angular with muted tones on a stoneware body replacing the earlier bright colours. His later works were influenced by the Incas of Pre-Colombian South America and their ancient ritualistic altars, a theme much darker and more brooding than his early domestic pieces. His work became more sculptural and expressed his feelings about the way the body worked and how it is affected by illness. Angus Suttie has left us with a vivid sense of his fearlessness in tackling humanist issues and of bringing ceramics into our emotional as well as our functional lives.

Fig.24
Angus Suttie, Teapot, earthenware, 1985. Height 28cm.

Fig.25
Angus Suttie, Teapot, stoneware, 1140°c, height 28cm., 1988.

CONCLUSION

The question as to what extent "function" is still a guiding principle in craft and design today was debated by Peter Dormer and Paul Greenhalgh at the V&A at a study day exploring the concept of function, in November 1995. Discussions involved the issue of how the function of an object can change, depending on the context in which it is put. A useful object can often end up with a decorative purpose. Peter Dormer used the example of a wine bottle, being an object designed and used to store and pour wine. When that purpose has been fulfilled, the wine bottle can become a candle holder. It now has a new function. The idea that function must mean usefulness or utility is ambiguous. Function can be a type of symbolism. Today, cost and time have become important factors in design and some architecture has been reduced to the principles of a Meccano set - a visual system and a variety of forms that can be modelled into almost anything and constructed by almost anyone. The result is one of uniformity, which in architecture can be aesthetically disastrous. But it also provides comfort and predictability. Each supermarket looks the same. The format is familiar. Perhaps in a world of disorder, people need this predictability. When we relate this to our personal lives, there are two separate functions being served by the objects that we surround ourselves with. We have basic living necessities such as food, cooking utensils and telephones and we also have decorational objects; photographs, plants and ornaments, the second group often outweighing the first.

A teapot can fit into either of these "functions" as we have seen by looking at the work of a maker such as Tchalenko and comparing one of her teapots to a Linda Gunn-Russell teapot. Clay forms can also have content and subject matter beyond the exploration of functional issues. Content can mean addressing political or social issues in functional or sculptural pieces. This can lead to a pot being crowned with the term art, implying an intellectual content, while a good, functional vessel can be seen as mere pottery, implying a lesser status. Use and Beauty for Bernard Leach were supposed to be conveyed in equal parts but the meaning of these words has shifted,

particularly over the last twenty years. A functional object can convey a meaning that goes beyond its immediate function, carrying symbolic and aesthetic values.

The Raw and the Cooked exhibition in 1993 shown in London, Oxford, Swansea and Japan, attempted to bring together the variety of forms and ideas being tackled by contemporary British ceramic artists. But conventionally functional objects were not represented here, although there were works concerned with vessel traditions. An Alison Britton pot has domestic references but it is not intended to be traditionally functional. A wall of plates by Stephanie Bergman is concerned with surface, structural rhythm and decoration but not function. These forty pieces are not glazed and therefore not intended to be utilitarian; they are to be seen as one body of work to go on a wall.

Teapots today are often made or bought out of reasons to do with self-expression rather than necessity although this expression is still often related to experiences of day-to-day life. Function often remains either as an actual or metaphorical component of contemporary ceramics. It is a strength of the pottery tradition that the average person can recognise the form and understand it. Takeshi Yasuda says: "I am a committed believer in an art form called "crafts". This art form is not an escape from real life but life itself" (Dewald, 1995, p.76). It is not compulsory for the object to have a traditionally functional purpose as long as people feel that it adds something to their everyday lives. The usual principles for a good teapot such as a well-fitting lid, a dripless spout and a smooth flow of tea are not always the primary considerations of a teapot. A teapot that pours without dripping is fulfilling a function and many potters may be satisfied with that. But a teapot that pours without dripping and also creates an emotional response is far more successful and fulfils several functions.

A teapot is a three dimensional object, so pattern and colour are only part of its concern. Tactile qualities speak strongly and can emphasise the form. Tea-bowls used

in the Japanese tea-ceremony are a focus for tactile as well as visual contemplation, being nursed in the cupped palms for prolonged meditative sipping. A Dresser teapot, like the one in fig.1 discussed earlier, will obviously have a very different tactile quality from a ceramic teapot made by Bernard Leach or Michael Cardew, but may have more in common with a "designed" teapot with a commercially manufactured body and glaze, such as a Susie Cooper teapot. The tactile qualities of these pots would lie at the "cold" end of the scale as opposed to wares that are not glazed, with the body declaring itself through its own process of making. Pottery, especially teapots, cannot be used without being touched and it is here that industrial ware becomes an example of a designer's concept. It is analytical rather than intuitive. The Memphis group express analysis and idea and keep the craft ideology out of ceramics. But it also must be remembered that the founder members of Memphis, such as Matteo Thun, are working under the guidance of Alessio Sarri, a designer craftsman, and the resulting work is an overlap of craft and design with applied artists becoming more engaged with ideas and designers becoming more engaged in pushing materials to their limits.

The teapots that have been discussed in this essay show a diversity of approaches to the same object. While Dresser, Cooper and Tchalenko can be seem in a designer for industry role as opposed to Keeler or Suttie, whose work is on a one-off basis, they are all striving to put an individual mark on a common object. Whether their teapots may be to everybody's taste or not, I feel that they have succeeded in creating a personal and distinctive style, in a highly skilled way. When involved in the production of a piece of work, I feel that to use the material successfully, skill and technique play a vital role. When clay is treated as an art rather than a craft medium, the notion of manual skill can be devalued. Jeff Koons provides the concept for a ceramic sculpture but it is a team of skilled craftspeople who do the actual making. Ewen Henderson says in the catalogue for Pandora's Box, an exhibition of ceramic sculpture held in the Crafts Council Gallery in London, 1995, that while the formal language is important, the "technical explains itself...a bit of chemistry, a bit of alchemy, but it's not important" (Henderson, 1995, p.5).

Today, to be able to use and understand a material and a technique, regardless of whether it is clay or a computer, I feel is most definitely important. I also feel that the intention of the maker is as relevant as the actual making process. The artists discussed here seem to have taken into account what their teapots are attempting to express and who and where they are for. Whether they end up on a kitchen table or on a plinth is not the issue. They offer commentaries on the social significance of everyday life, from Dresser's teapot in the 1880's to Suttie's teapots in the 1990's.

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