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National College of Arts and Design  
Faculty of Design, Department of Craft, Ceramics

Edmund de Waal : Potter and Writer

by

Rosemary Knipe

Submitted to the Faculty of History of Art and Design and  
Complimentary Studies in Cadidacy for the Degree of Bachelor of  
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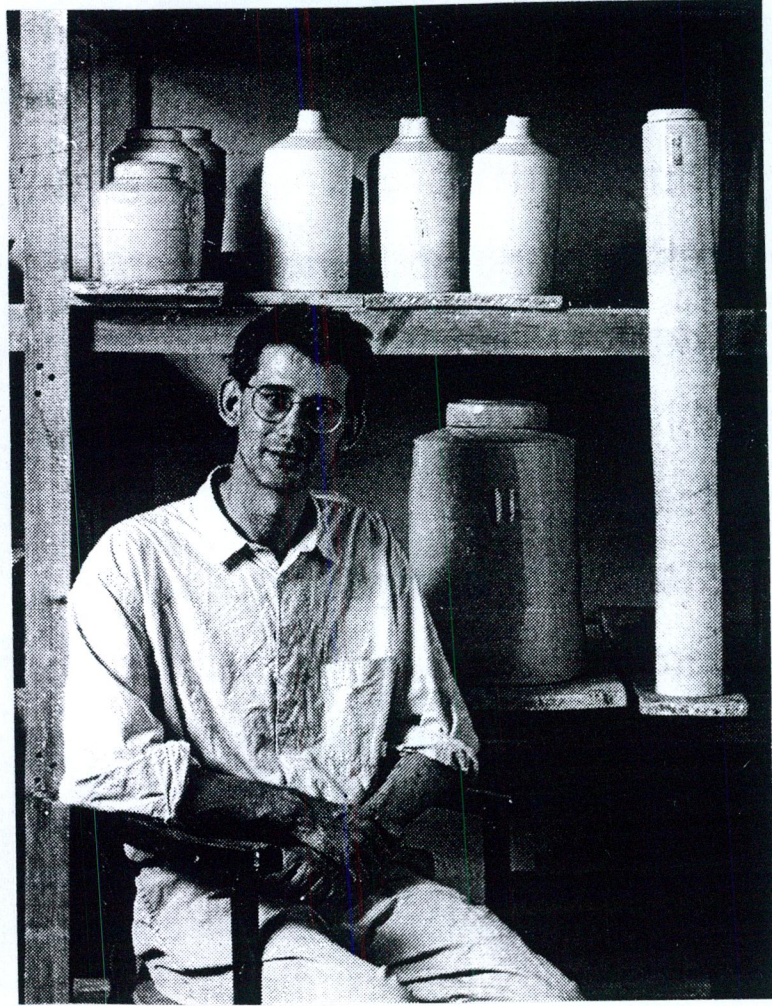
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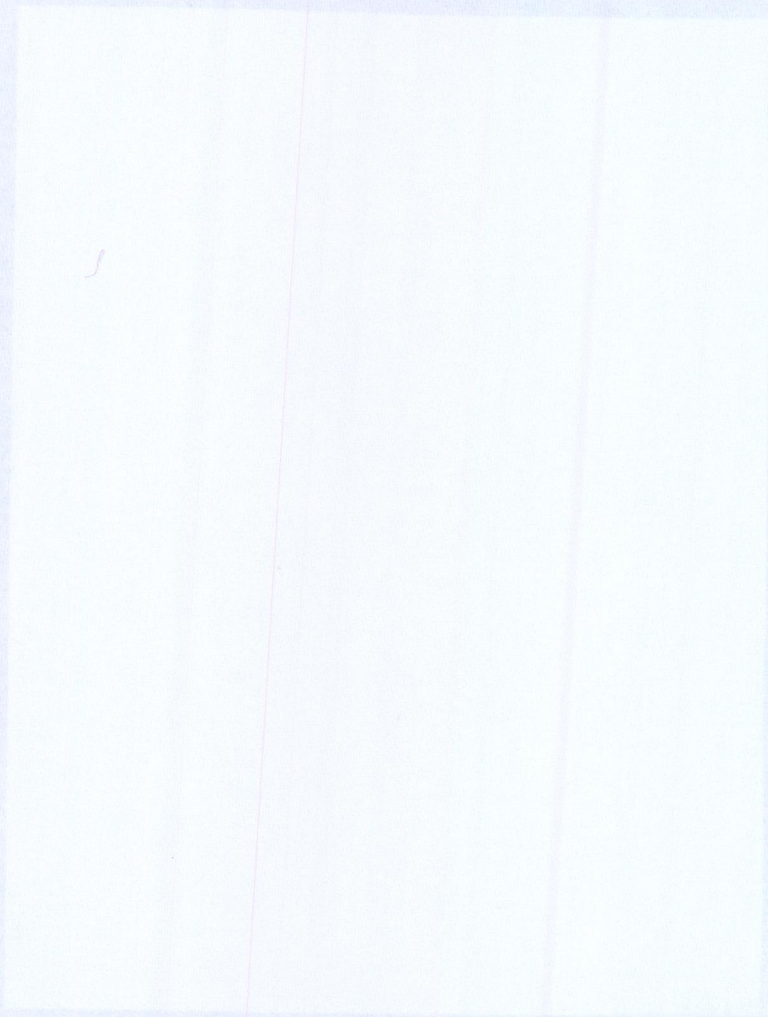
## Acknowledgements

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# Introduction



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Chapter one includes de Waal's biography to date. The "Leach School" is referred to several times which entails; a potter working in a rural setting making anglo-oriental domestic ware with a palette of oatmeal, temoku, black, brown, cream glazes.

Chapter two deals with de Waal's Japanese and Korean influences, continuing to chapter three which deals with his forms, glazes, seals and latest installations. I have concentrated on discussing his work following his return from Japan.

Chapters four and five deal with de Waal's writings on Rie, Coper, his book on Bernard Leach and writings on contemporary theories surrounding craft.

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## Chapter One

### Edmund de Waal: Biography

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In 1969 Edmund de Waal saw a potter at a throwing demonstration at Lincoln in England. He was immediately transfixed. At only five years of age, de Waal plagued his clergyman father and his mother to let him enrol in a local adult evening class and eventually his parents conceded.

Naturally one would assume a child of five would be attracted to animals, bright colours or patterns but de Waal, who refers to himself as a “precocious brat” (1), was interested only in making plain white cups and bowls, totally devoid of decoration. Even at this early age, we can see his strong concern for form. From this time on his decision had been made to become a potter.

De Waal attended King’s School, Canterbury where a potter called Geoffrey Whiting (1919-1988) had been artist in residence since 1972. When de Waal was twelve, he helped Whiting every afternoon after school, and during the holidays, mixing glazes, brushing the floor, etc. Whiting was very much of the “Leach school” and his work was inspired by Oriental and Medieval pottery. All the while de Waal was absorbing these influences and at the age of seventeen he decided to go to Japan, a very brave and determined journey to take. During his four months there de Waal studied the Japanese Tea Ceremony.

On returning to England in 1981, de Waal became apprentice to Whiting. The same year, on a visit to England, a Grand Tea-master from Japan, Dr. Soshitsu Sen XV, added one of Whiting’s tea bowls to his unique collection.

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From the age of twelve, de Waal was absorbing concepts of how pots should be: functional, anglo-oriental, in stoneware, with oatmeal tenmoku and chun glazes.(Plate one) De Waal had been trained in production throwing and felt that was the way forward. He therefore wanted to become a rural potter making domestic production ware.

After a two year apprenticeship with Whiting, de Waal went to Trinity Hall at Cambridge University to read English Literature. During the holidays in Herefordshire (1986-88) he began making a range of domestic stoneware which he now detests. Then, in 1988, de Waal moved to Sheffield. As the steel works had closed, de Waal was able to buy a fairly large house with a studio for £12 000. A friend, by chance, gave him a bag of porcelain to try. The idea of porcelain had been drummed into de Waal as being much too difficult a medium to work with. He found this porcelain a fantastically seductive material to throw with; de Waal wanted to use it in the fluid way he knew how to work stoneware, not deciding yet what to make, but being very excited about it.

A scholarship was offered to de Waal from the Daiwa Anglo-Japanese Foundation to promote cultural exchange between the U.K. and Japan. De Waal accepted even though the first year entailed having to learn to read, write and speak Japanese fluently. This first year was “hellish” (3) but de Waal managed to obtain a Post-Graduate Diploma in the Japanese Language. The second year of the scholarship made all the study worthwhile. De Waal was to spend a year in Tokyo, a year he describes as a “crucial and liberating experience” (4).

The afternoons de Waal would spend in the Japanese Folkcraft (Mingei Museum) archives. There he found letters from Bernard Leach and Dr. Soetsu Yanagi, the first director of the museum, as



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Goeffrey Whiting  
Teapot, resist decoration, cane handle, stoneware 1975  
Plate 1



well as diaries belonging to Yanagi and articles from 1915-19 on the subject of Morris and Ruskin. De Waal excitedly set about unravelling all this new information. This discovery process was proceeding parallel with his making. Every morning would be spent in the Mejiro Ceramic Studio with other makers and sculptors. Through his research, de Waal came to realise that being a “Leach school” potter was not compulsory. This was truly life-changing for him. “If contemporary potters in Japan could work unburdened by piety to a particular tradition could not I?” (5)

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As de Waal studied Japanese language and culture at first hand, so they have been major influence, alongside Korean, rather than Chinese celadon pottery. The name 'celadon' was the name of a hero in a seventeenth century French play, a pastoral drama by Honore d'Urfe. Celadon, the hero of L'Astree, was clothed in a variation of subtle shades likened to the blue, grey-greens of a celadon glaze.

Potters in Korea traditionally had a very low social status, so no records were made of individual makers since they were not regarded as artists. The kilns in which their ware was fired were heavily guarded by officials, by appointment of the court.

With de Waal's work in mind, I have selected celadons from the Koryo dynasty 935-1392 A.D. This period is renowned in Korea for the outstanding quality of the ware made then. It is the particular period from 1100-1150 in which the simplest celadon was produced that is referred to as Koryo celadon.

This ware fulfilled two functions in Koryo life in which it played an important part. The first, for ceremonial purposes, was in Buddhist temples, used for tea or water. The Buddhist division in Korea was known as Son, Zen in Japan and Chan in China. The second purpose was for the aristocratic elite. The Koryo nobility enjoyed social gatherings immensely. Drinking, reading and composing poetry were very much celebrated.

In Plate No. 2 there is a clear example of the Korean love of nature, the bowl is formed in the shape of an opening lotus flower. The lotus flower in Korean terms can indicate summer although more importantly it is the flower which, for Buddhists, signifies the rise of the pure, new life form and is therefore an emblem of rebirth.



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Bowl in Lotus Shape  
Celadon-glazed stoneware  
1100-50, Koryo dynasty, Diam 16.5cm  
Plate 2



The inside of the bowl has been left plain and where the glaze has crackled the bowl catches the light. On the outside the petals have been incised, overlapping just enough to give the feel of an open flower. The bowl asks to be used, to be held in the hand.

In Plate No. 3 (a) on the bowls to the front and back left, popular Korean motifs are incised on the inside, one has parrots, the other has fish. The fish shape, in general, is symbolic of abundance and prosperity. The decoration and form are so much part of each other. Overall such a subtle effect has been achieved that decoration with the glaze seems to melt into the form. The bowl to the right is impressed on the inside with the imagery of babies amongst lotus flowers. All three bowls have narrow footings. Usually, when decoration is placed on the inside of an object, it draws the eye inwardly. Because of the subtlety used by the makers, the eye takes in the form as a whole. This fineness and sensitivity appealed greatly to the aristocrats of that time.

I have included Plate No.3 (b) mainly because de Waal shows particular affection for this little tea bowl. This was the first slide he chose for his recent talk at the development of his work, having used a postcard of this tea bowl for many years as a valuable source of influence. It is a sixteenth century Kizaemon Ido Tea bowl from the Korean Yi dynasty.

There are three main kinds of tea bowls: those originating in China, in Korea and in Japan. The tea masters of Japan regard those of Korea as the most lovely. Out of twenty six teabowls registered as 'meibutsu' (which means finest in Japanese) this particular bowl is considered to contain the "very essence of tea" (6). An important honour was bestowed on this everyday Korean vessel and mythical meaning surrounds this little bowl since it was mentioned in Yanagi's "The Unknown Craftsman".

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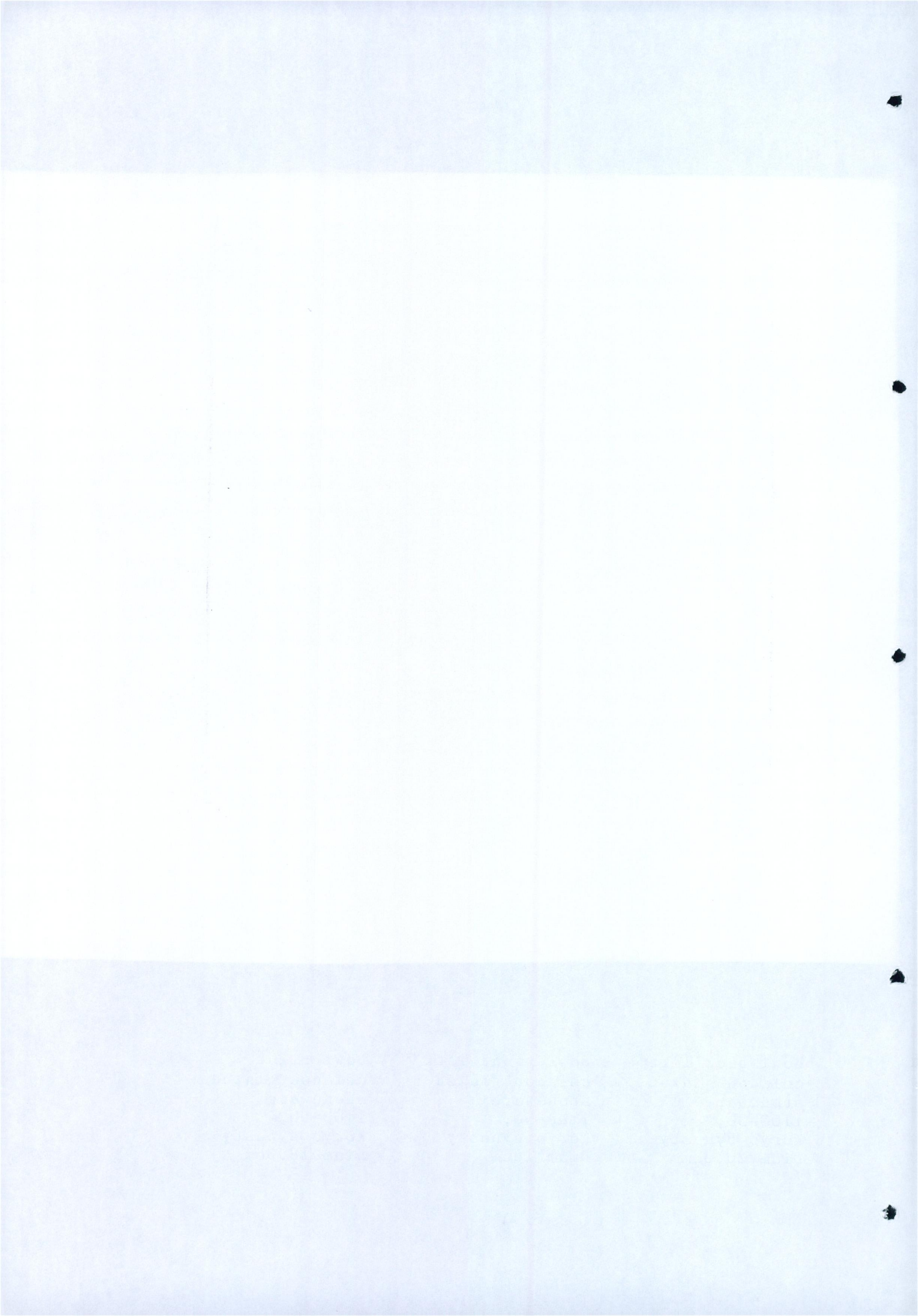
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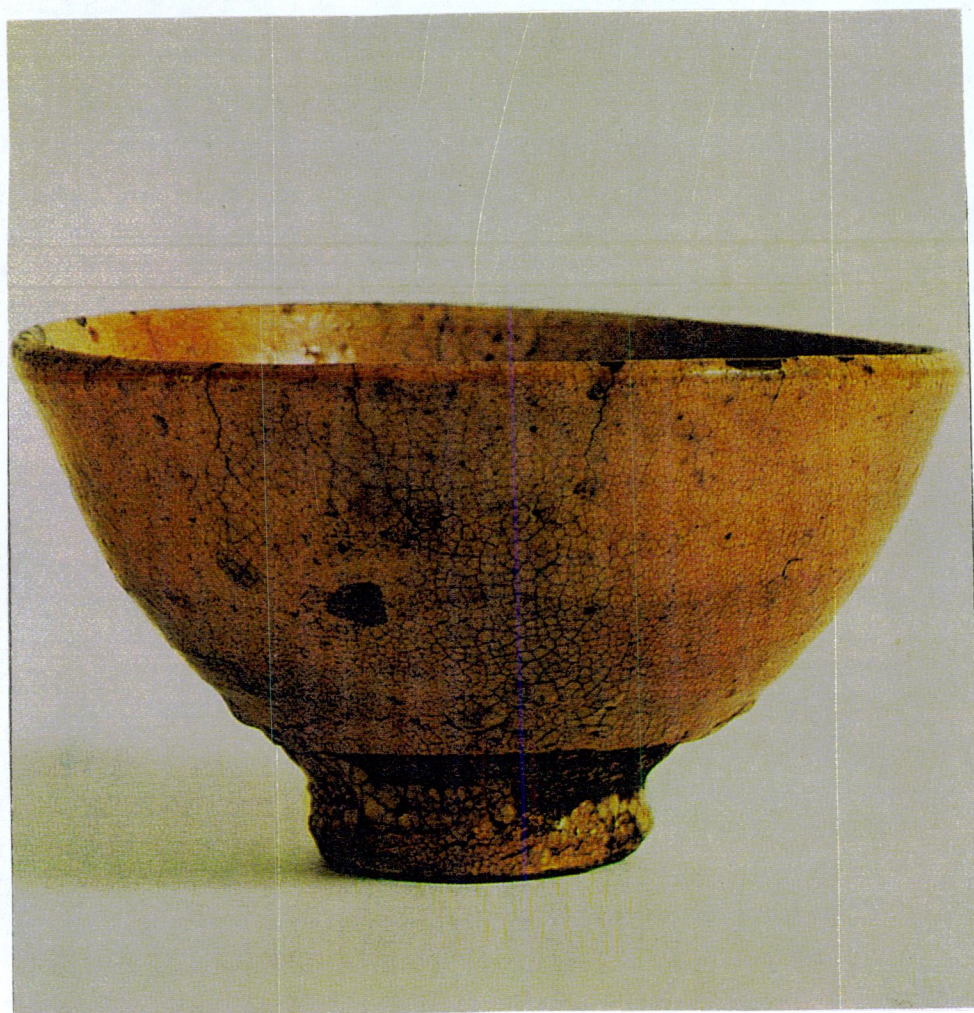


Bowl back left  
celadon glazed  
stoneware  
1100-50,  
Koryo dynasty  
Diam 20.3cm

Bowl front left  
celadon glazed  
stoneware  
1100-50,  
Koryo dynasty  
Diam 16cm

Bowl right  
celadon glazed  
stoneware  
1100-50,  
Koryo dynasty  
Diam 18.3cm

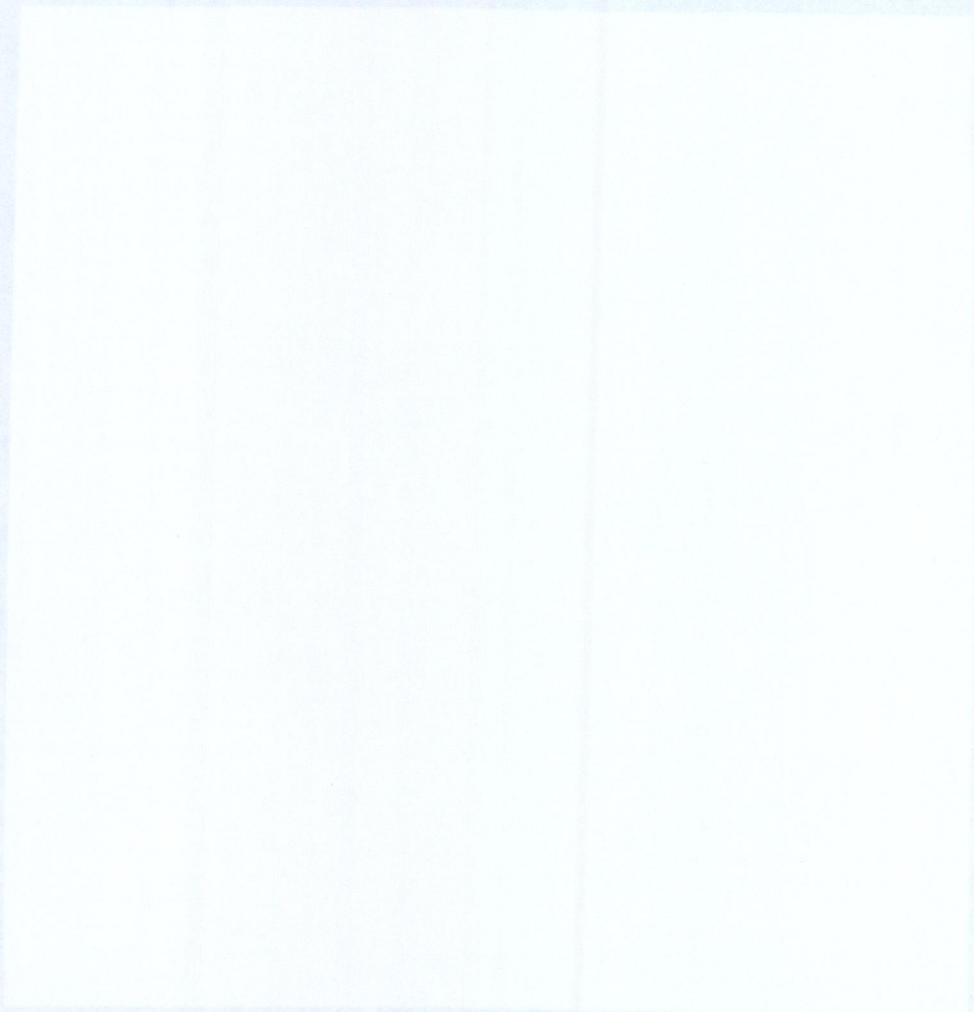




Kizaemon Ido teabowl. Korea. Yi dynasty (sixteenth century)  
Height 8.8cm

Plate 3b





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## Chapter Three

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De Waal returned to England in late 1993, full of enthusiasm for work and writings toward his impending book on Bernard Leach commissioned by the Tate Gallery at St. Ives before he left for Japan. He settled into a studio, situated near the Thames at Woolwich in London, which he shares with his friend and fellow potter, Julian Stair. Now using only Limoges porcelain due to "...its plastic body that dries and fires well, and partly an emotional reason. Limoges constitutes one of the great European ceramic traditions that spans both the vernacular life of domestic porcelain and Sevres with its complexity of court taste and wild extravagance of formal accomplishment." (7) De Waal shares common ground with the contemporary, English minimalist architect John Pawson;

I don't draw much. When I design, I have a very strong mental picture of a space and how I want it organised....I look for a balance of proportion, scale, light and geometry. Both scale and proportion are tools that the designer can bring to bear in creating artefacts, buildings of spaces that have quality of simplicity. (8)

Working drawings were more like working thoughts for de Waal, with a mental picture of experiences, deep thoughts, proportions calculated and resumed in his work. There were no boundaries. De Waal was now using porcelain more fluidly, more gesturally, learning to be more free and enjoy himself as a potter. Personal thoughts about his upbringing and memories came to the fore which, in turn, was visible in the way de Waal allowed the porcelain to warp, indicating the movement that was already happening more clearly.

He had not had many exhibitions before leaving to go to Japan. When people began to show interest in his fresh, new execution of ideas it left de Waal amazed. So the much less uptight, slightly warped, slumped and dented porcelain was beginning to achieve him recognition.

In Plate No.4 there are two tapering lidded jars or 'pistachio pots' (1994) with pink copper

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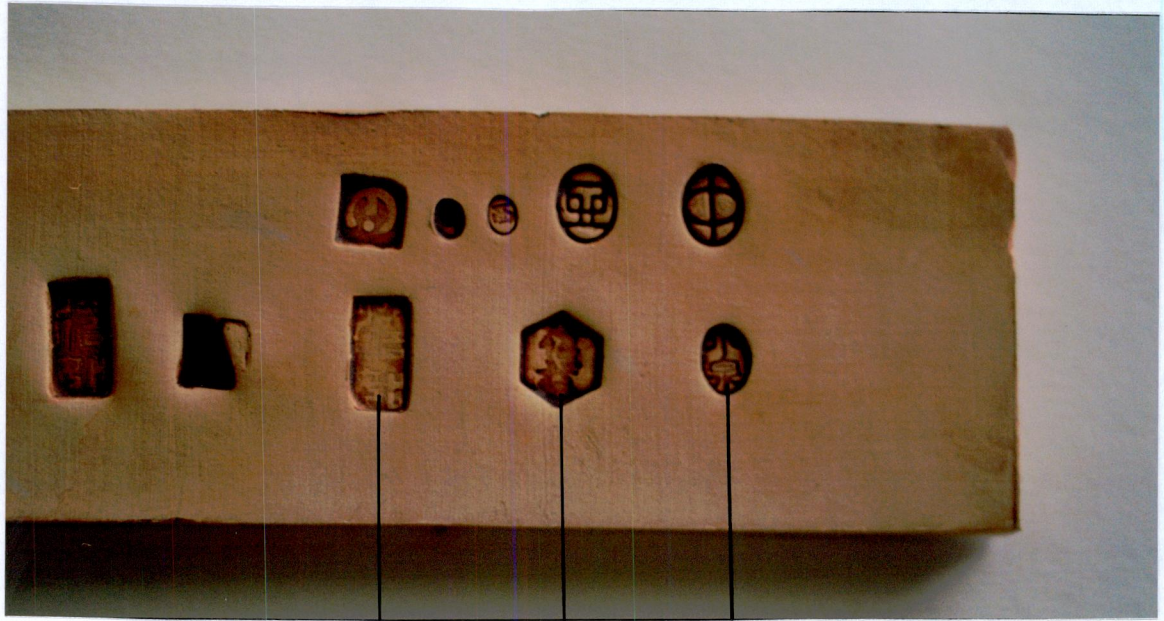
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Porcelain lidded jars, pink copper seal marks, white crackle glaze, height 35 and 33cm, 1994



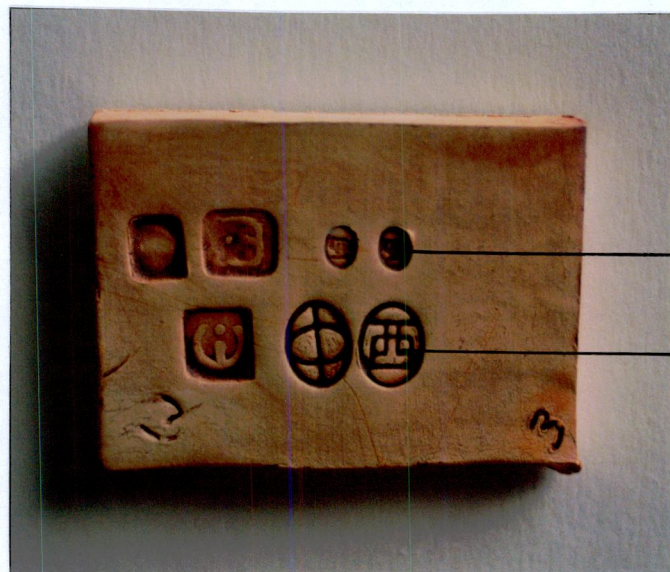




(c)

(a)

(b)



(d)

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Plate 5



seal marks and white 'crackle' glaze. Denting seemed to arrest the clay in motion. Similar to the Korean celadons these jars, as with much of de Waal's work, beg to be held and touched.

De Waal is noticeably dismissive of two notions about porcelain: the first being that it is much too difficult to throw with. It is a matter of getting to know the clay as a friend. Secondly, the precious, don't touch, look in awe, attitude. De Waal's work mentions that porcelain is, "actually warm to the touch". (9) A refreshing step forward. Plate No.5 shows seal marks and these are Japanese calligraphic imprints from which I have photographed from the seals de Waal uses.

Margot Coatts is of the opinion that these stamps, "trap the pot in ancient oriental form. The only oriental clothing Edmund de Waal's pots should wear is their celadon glazes," (10) however, these stamps are not used to convey influence or decoration for decorations sake. Some of the seals contain meanings about himself and his work, a kind of dialogue between pot and maker. Others tell stories of where the actual seal was bought and its history. Several are specially made and can only be understood by de Waal. When I asked could someone fluent in Japanese understand them, he replied "No," they were his own adaptation of Japanese symbols.

The three main imprints, taken from seals in his collection and stamped onto clay as samples, are Japanese trade seals.

(a) Is seventeenth century, made of soapstone and originating from Kyoto, Japan.

(b) Is eighteenth century, made of glass, from Kyoto also.

(c) Is nineteenth century, made of ivory, from Tokyo.

De Waal has a strong interest in the cargo and aspects of trade between East and West.

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When making a service of espresso cups for the Japanese fashion designer K. Kawakubo de Waal used this stamp as a play on the usual stamp, "Made in Japan" in English, which is common on so many imports to the West.

De Waal's use of these stamps can also be seen as a kind of movement between the perfect profile and the wet clay, illustrating the influence of his interest in Japanese literature as well as Japanese tradition.

In Plate No. 6 a fine execution of simplicity is apparent. The contrast from the cool, soft body of these bottles with the precisely turned shoulders, to the spontaneously thrown and ripped necks, illustrates carefully thought out proportions. The bottles are empty vessels but contain a complexity of human spirit. De Waal uses matt glazes and we can see some aspects of design translated into the thoughts and making of the teapots. Plate No. 7 (a) & (b)

The "...most familiar and evocative form of all Britain - the teapot....the form of the teapot is a recognisable form that represents an essential part of our everyday lives." (11) This teapot design 7(a) was born out of de Waal's year in Tokyo. At first it had a bamboo handle. It took 4 years for the steel wire handle we see now to come about. Geoffrey Whiting was once quoted, after making a slightly 'fussy' teapot and resolving to simplify the decoration, "Why does it take so long to see the obvious?" (12) In this case the obvious for de Waal was breaking away from "Leach School" tradition but adding a bamboo handle that was very much from that tradition.

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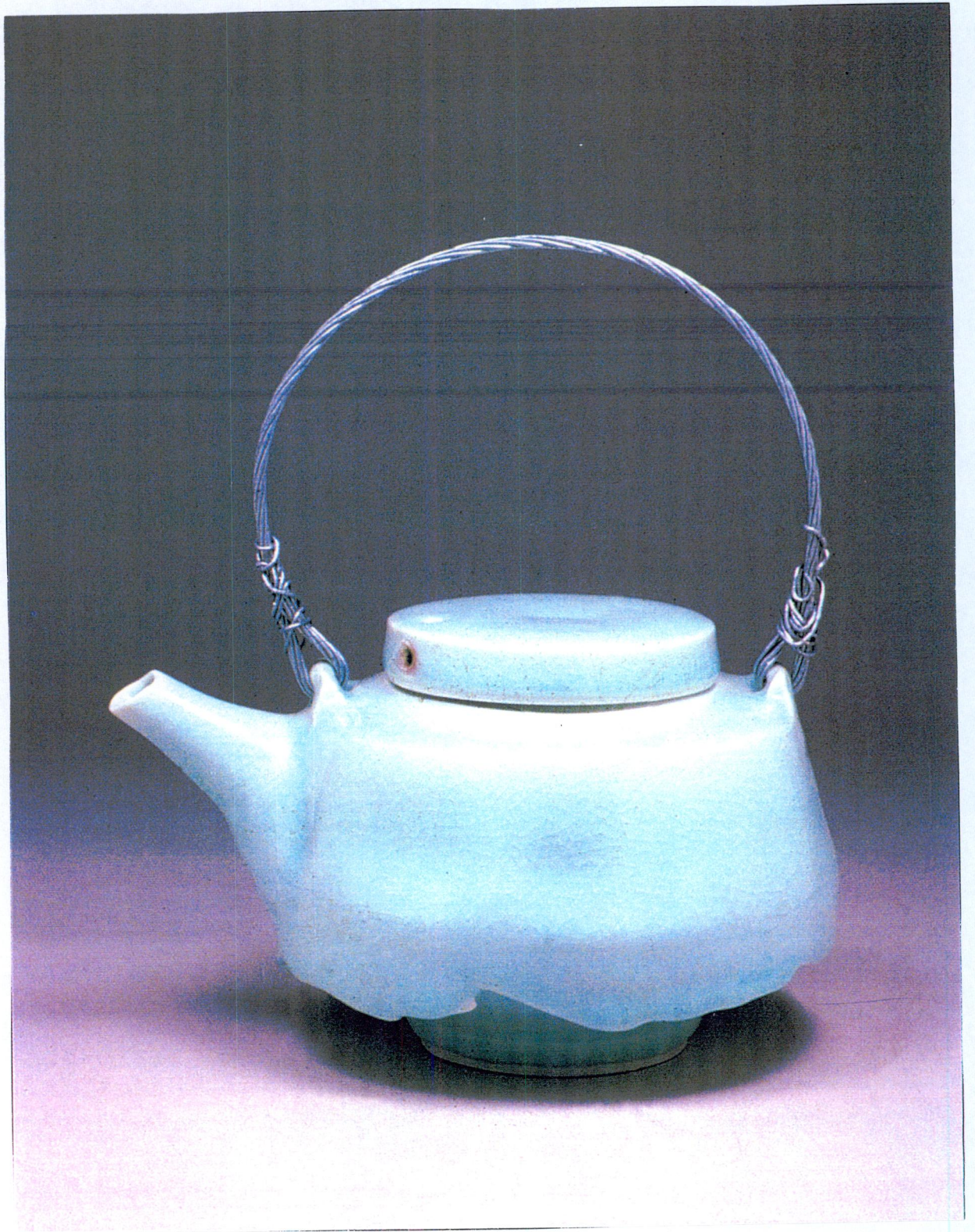
This particular teapot was inspired by Munger (folkcraft or art of the people) tradition but it



Two porcelain Bottle Vases, matt transparent glaze  
max height 28cm 1995  
Plate 6







teapot, limoges porcelain, celadon glaze,  
wire handle, height 26cm 1997

Plate 7(a)



has an undoubtedly contemporary feel to it. The steel wire contrasts beautifully with the soft, sensual porcelain of the teapot body, a semi-precious material against a precious one. The 'skirt' effect on the teapot has the intention by de Waal to draw the eye downwards, to the space and shadow between the body and turned base. This skirt is thrown, at the leather hard stage of turning the clay, as a wall and then ripped, which comes together in polarities of linear turning against the unevenness of the ripping reminiscent in the bottle forms earlier. At one stage de Waal had compromised his teapot design and had sterling silver handles made specially by a metalsmith but that didn't work at all. A valuable lesson.

De Waal has lately been criticised for his ill-fitting lids.

Where does material freedom become a technical flaw? Precariously thin turning on rims that don't adequately anchor their lids and some rather rough bases require a little more care. Does this matter when the pots look so lovely? Well, yes, if you aim for function as De Waal says he does. (13)

In his mentioning of this de Waal refers to his studies of the Japanese Tea Ceremony in which case the sound of the lid being removed and put back is more important than how well it fits. Is de Waal being evasive here; would this not be the sort of reply Bernard Leach would give?

The teapot in Plate No. 7(b) is softly dented; this time the skirt has been attached around the shoulder almost like a collar. This causes the glaze to pool nicely on the inside. This teapot is influenced by Korean silverware. The line of the added collar runs effectively with the lid as if it were guarding it in some way. Again, the steel wire handle flows into the form.

On the making of the cups and saucers in Plate No. 8(a) de Waal has observed that handles

has an undoubted contemporary feel to it. The steel wire contrasts beautifully with the soft sensual porcelain of the teapot body, a semi-precious material against a precious one. The 'skirt' effect on the teapot has the intention by de Waal to draw the eye downwards, to the space and shadow between the body and turned base. This skirt is thrown at the latter hand stage of turning the clay, as a wall and then rippled, which comes together in profiles of linear turning against the unevenness of the rippling reminiscent in the bottle forms earlier. At one stage de Waal had compromised his teapot design and had sterling silver handles made specially by a craftsman but that didn't work at all. A valuable

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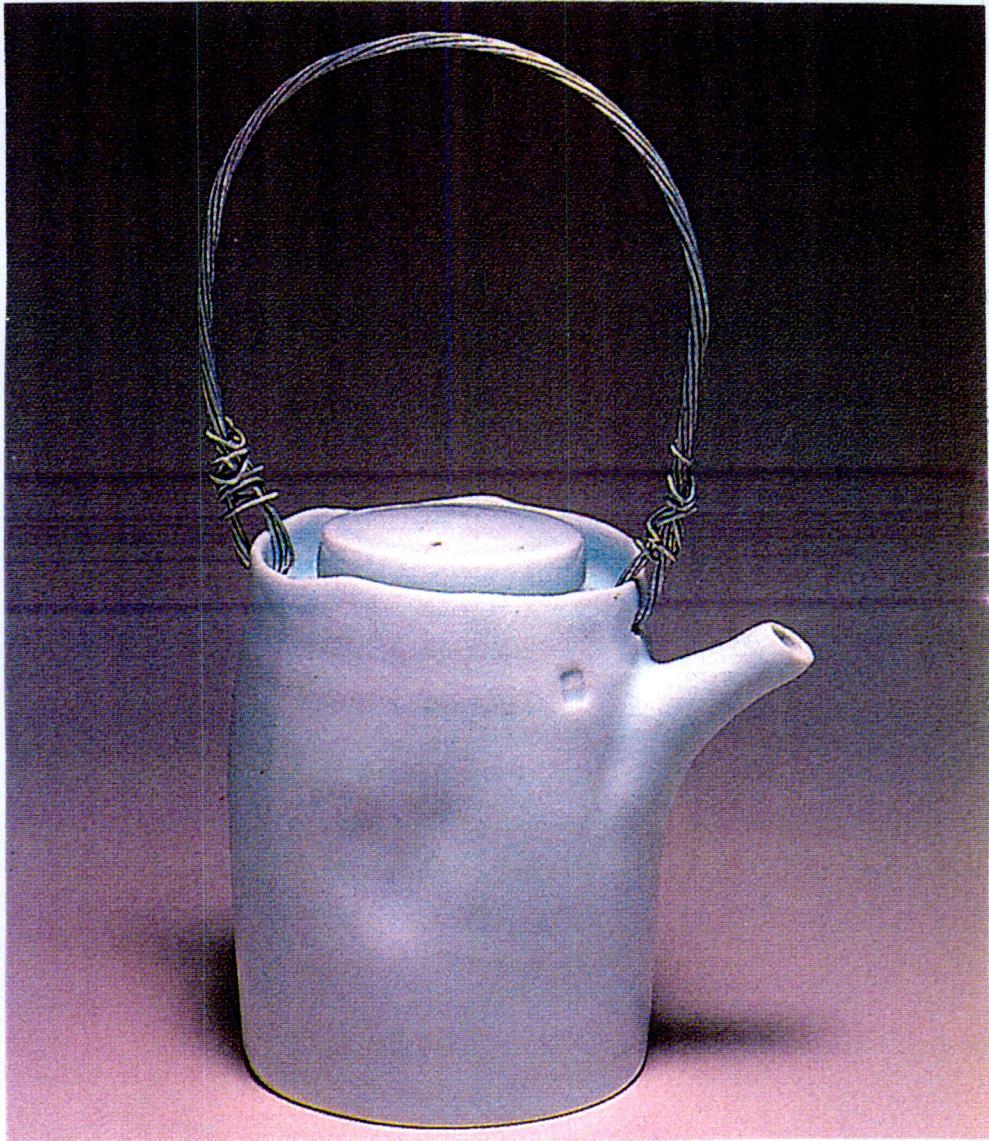
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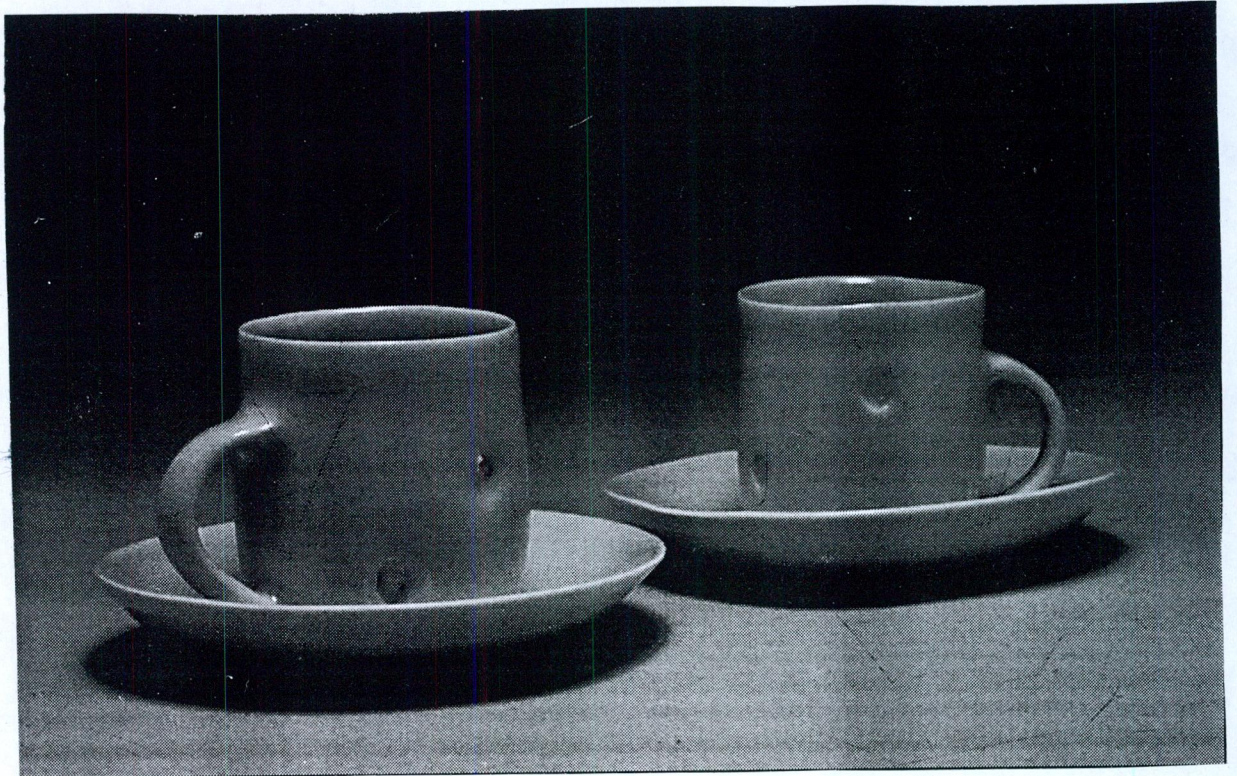
On the making of the caps and saucers in Plate No. 8(a) de Waal has observed that handles



teapot, limoges porcelain, celadon glaze,  
wire handle, height 28cm 1997

Plate 7(b)

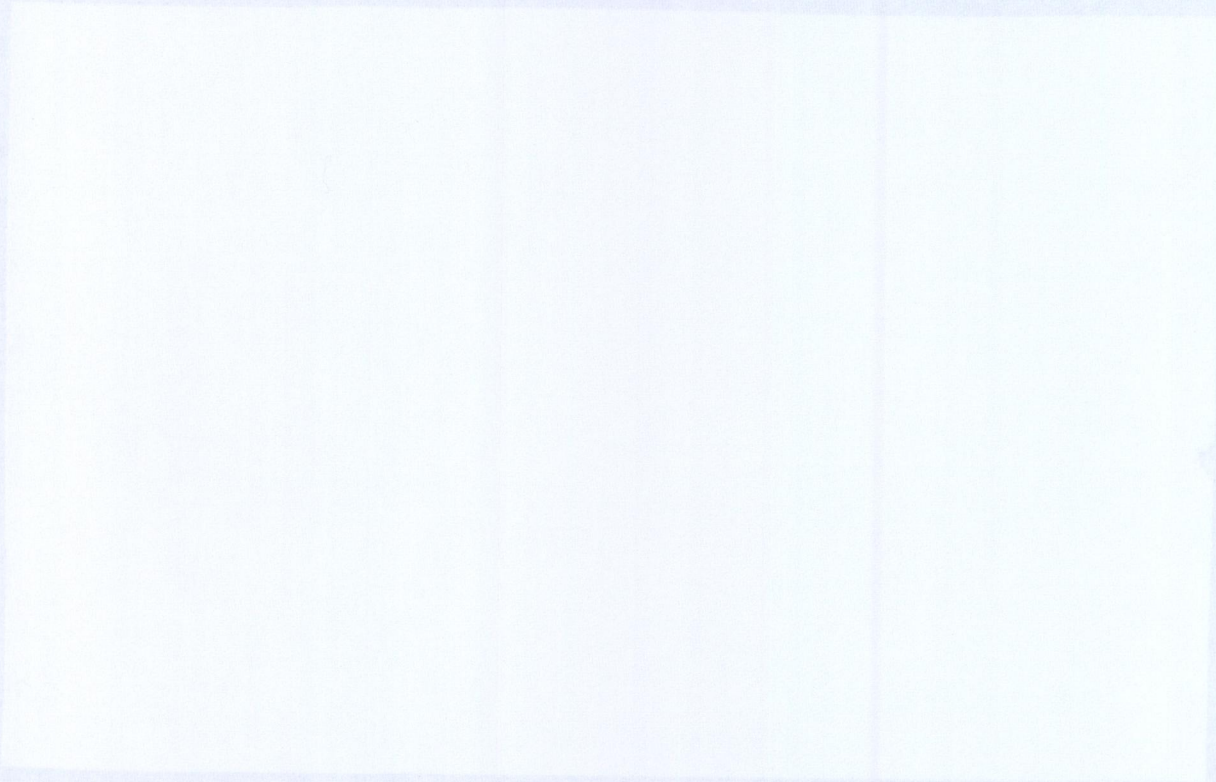




Limoges porcelain espresso cups  
Height 7cm, celadon glaze 1995

Plate 8(a)





sometimes stop the user from turning and touching the vessel. All that is needed is a dent or a rib for the thumb to grip. Similarly Carol Burke observed that Japanese teabowls during the Japanese Tea Ceremony “...are a focus for tactile as well as visual contemplation, being nursed in the cupped palms for prolonged mediative sipping.” (14) In Plate No. 8(b) and 8(c) we can see how these ideas have been executed.

I broached the subject of price with de Waal. How price might affect attitudes of people towards his work, how it might work against him, with people not wanting to touch such expensive pots, let alone use them. De Waal justifies the prices as realistic compared to say a painting or a piece of sculpture, the bonus being that the porcelain, which is an expensive material, can be used. Just because an object is functional it is presumed it may be cheaper. When you consider the costs and time in making the price is not irrational. John Pawson has similar views.

There is nothing sacred about the act of putting pigment on canvas with a brush that it makes it inherently different from making a chair, or a pot. A painting is just a painting. Some other quality makes it ‘art’, and a piece of architecture or design approaches art as and when it expresses the same quality. (15)

When de Waal was asked did he think everything we used should be handmade he replied

That’s a deadend. It’s just too expensive and doesn’t reflect the way we live. I think we can live with good studio pots and good factory wares side by side. Be like the Japanese. Nothing matches. Different courses are served in pots from different kilns, different makers.” (16)

The three “balancing bowls” in 8(c) are described as “fitting snugly in the hand and rock slightly on the shelf.” We can see an element of play here. To drink out of these little bowls is to share a similar feelings as to what I did as a child, when finding a pebble on the beach and clutching it preciously the whole way home.

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I reached the subject of price with de Wael. How price might affect attitudes of people towards his work, how it might work against him, with people not wanting to touch such expensive pots, for alone the fact. De Wael justifies the prices as realistic compared to say a painting or a piece of sculpture, the bones being that the porcelain, which is an expensive material, can be used. Just because an object is functional it is presumed it may be cheaper. When you consider the costs and time in making the price is not irrational. John Rawson has similar views.

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'Three balancing bowls', Limoges porcelain, Celadon glaze.  
Plate 8(b)



Three Beakers, Limoges porcelain, Celadon glaze, Height approx. 10cm  
Plate 8(c)



The contemplation of the design of a functional object is challenging. How does it pour? How will it handle? Will it be precious as well as functional? The maker can never truly dictate how a piece will be used but he or she can eliminate some of the ways in which the object is not to be used. Take a fruitbowl for example: it doesn't necessarily have to have perfect sides, it can have lots of holes - therefore it won't be used for any kind of liquid. In July 1997 at Galerie Besson in Bond Street, London, de Waal had a show in which "Bluebell Pots" were included. They were tall cylindrical vases that were actually used at de Waal's own wedding reception. Each pot had a thrown lip inside so only one stem could fit, in this case a bluebell; a branch would be equally suitable. Hence de Waal has eliminated the use of these vases for bunches of flowers with his design of a hidden volume.

In Plate No. 9, a lidded jar 33 cm in height, de Waal shows he can and has thrown jars approximately four feet tall. Drying one of these jars takes up to six weeks as firing can cause excessive warpage. The lidded jar in Plate No. 9 has a relaxed feeling, at ease with itself just as the maker is at ease with the clay. De Waal gives back the movement and memory of making by alternating the precision by denting or even bashing the wall in some cases. De Waal likened one of the very tall jars to himself, "a self-portrait of a wayward child." (17) When I asked De Waal to define a 'bad pot' in his eyes he replied that it was laziness in terms of proportion and line, treading water and dull repetition.

A show at Egg in 1998 came together as a very personal experience for De Waal. Egg is a very exclusive gallery/shop for ceramics and clothes located in Knightsbridge in London. Instead of a gallery normally wanting a certain quantity of teapots, jars, etc., de Waal was able to decide to place eight very tall jars to occupy one whole room emulating the idea of a journal or a cargo, each jar could contain grain, water,... De Waal found this exhibition a really wonderful, focused personal experience.

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Lidded jar, limoges porcelain, max height 28cm, 1998  
Plate 9





Plate No. 10 shows a different room at the same exhibition from this exhibition. In the centre de Waal has placed what he calls his “cargo dishes”. On returning from Tokyo De Waal had been making large open bowls. This shape bored de Waal who thought such a practice predictable for a potter throwing with porcelain. He refers to such an activity as “sheer bravado”, for him there was no content in this shape. These “cargo dishes” with their straight sides work well. Their sharp profile is suited to the ribs and markings de Waal incorporates in his making. The more linear and precise a form, the better the alterations and marks appear.

De Waal has been criticised before for his designs appearing a little mundane. On the subject of de Waal’s use of seal marks Malcolm Haslam has enquired, “.... do they simply indicate the makers recognition that his pots tend towards dullness and need a little enigmatic fizz.” (18) Haslem also mentions his incessant use of the same glazes, and then goes on to class de Waal as a “Leach follower”, insinuating that there is “a battle going on in his (de Waal’s) head that is hindering his hand.” (19) The battle in this case could be de Waal’s rebellion against the Leach tradition and his training from Whiting. In some ways there does appear to be a connection with Leach as in the way de Waal defends his badly fitting lids, referred to earlier.

De Waal could be to a degree guilty of making sweeping statements, sometimes appearing a little overfocused on what is good or bad, de Waal can seem to have unbending rules. For example, in a slide lectures by de Waal, which I was lucky enough to attend, he referred to an earlier kettle/teapot he had done with white ‘crackle’ glaze. This teapot sat on a similarly glazed stand which had small props similar to feet, the effect being very oriental. De Waal went on to say “If you start putting feet or legs on your work then you should start worrying.” (20) There were students from all disciplines in

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'Cargo Dishes', Limoges porcelain, clear celadon glaze.  
center  
Plate 10



attendance and I found the statement over-generalizing and condescending, revealing a blinkered attitude.

As can be seen in Plates No. 11, 12 and 13 de Waal is currently moving away from the idea of making single pots, pots that need their own spaces. Thoughts of what brought de Waal to porcelain and his interest in the aspects of East-West trade are becoming more and more significant, coming together and being interpreted into installations of many pots sharing one space. In one, sixty-five jars, which are all interconnected by trade seals, are placed on old, worn, wooden floorboards, appearing as on the deck of an old shipping vessel. The seal marks in some cases here have been 'weathered away' or may appear to have been nibbled by rodents on a long sea voyage, perhaps suggesting the precious contents of the jars had been stolen and, in this act, the seals damaged. Installation is a dramatic step to take and noticeably, when de Waal talks about this progression, there is great excitement in his tone. He is presently showing, at Sotheby's in London, another installation entitled "A very long Line of very Short Pots", the line being approximately five feet long. Subsequently, for the year 2000 an exhibition is planned in the porcelain room, a Large Gallery in The Tate at St. Ives, in Cornwall.

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Installation at Egg, London,  
'A Cargo of sixty-five jars'  
Limoges porcelain, Clear celadon glaze  
Plate 11







Installation at Egg, London,  
'A Cargo of sixty-five jars'  
Limoges porcelain, Clear celadon glaze  
Plate 12





Installation at Egg, London,  
'A Cargo of sixty-five jars'  
Limoges porcelain, Clear celadon glaze  
Plate 13



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Chapter Four

Potters in Parallel:

Lucie Rie and Hans Coper

Bernard Leach, St. Ives Artist

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“... I always knew I would be a potter, not an academic.” (21) I asked him, “Would you not consider yourself accomplished as both?” “My pots are first and foremost. If someone were to make me choose between the two, it would always be my pots. I am a potter and a talker.” (22)

De Waal is a well known writer and thinker on contemporary issues concerning crafts. In “Potters in Parallel”, a book edited by Margot Coatts in conjunction with an exhibition at the Barbican Gallery in London, on the works of Hans Coper (1920-1981) and Lucie Rie(1902 - 1995), de Waal, who was responsible for the second chapter, “Back in London”, portrays feelings of common ground shared between himself, Rie and Coper. The fact of making pots and living in a city, de Waal says, entitles him to be a “metropolitan potter”. This is an issue de Waal is very conscious of. He considers living and working in a city a great advantage. “The dialogue with art, architecture and design, the intellectual encounters the city has to offer.” (23)

De Waal looks at how Rie and Coper were both emigres as well as metropolitan potters; what must it feel like working in a city but not actually having roots, family and traditions there. There is a constant “other”, whether it be language, homeland or relationship. He considers this must be a presence, not bad or good, but existant. Does this presence show in Rie and Coper’s work? The timelessness of both potters work could be a factor or the silence that surrounds them both, with Coper burning all his writings shortly before his death and Rie never composing a word about her work.

De Waal draws our attention to Coper’s house at Digswell and Rie’s flat at Albion Mews. The walls of Coper’s house have been left unpainted. These bare walls contained one chair, one table and



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De Waal draws our attention to Coper's house at Digswell and Rie's flat at Albion Mews. The walls of Coper's house have been left unpainted. These bare walls contained one chair, one table and

one bed which conveys to us a very serious, thinking, focused maker. Engaged in his making he didn't need anything else such as home comforts, pictures etc., or maybe Coper didn't see himself as staying in London.

Rie's flat, with the help of her Viennese architect friend Ernst Freud, was a very linear, precise, Viennese-influenced living space. Both potters lived close to their studio space and work, which might explain the need for their living quarters to be so disciplined, so uncluttered. De Waal interestingly points out that because of Rie's and Coper's close friendships with architects they missed the whole Leach and studio pottery / industrialisation of world war one debates of that time. With architects there wouldn't be any sense of rivalry or hostility. Again, De Waal shares common ground with both and writes "Sharing a studio is an urban necessity." (24) Not only for economical reasons, it is also of mutual benefit, for work and conversation. It is always good to talk designs and ideas through with a second party. A fellow maker can sometimes spot obvious aspects that the maker is too close to the work to see.

De Waal embraces the simplicity in the work of both Coper and Rie and consequently likens their achievement of minimalism to the contemporary, English architect/designers Nicholas Grimshaw, John Pawson and Norman Foster. Simplicity is eloquently discussed by John Pawson:

To achieve simplicity paradoxically requires an enormous amount of effort. To create simplicity, to reduce an artefact, an object, an artwork or a room to its essential minimum, requires patience, effort and care. It means being ready to purge all the clutter and jumble that continually threatens to overwhelm even the most modest interior. (25)

This applies, not only to the work of Rie and Cooper but in De Waal's work as well.

Lastly I thought it fitting to include a tribute to Rie by Julian Stair, de Waal's Hans Coper, so to speak.

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De Waal embraces the simplicity in the work of both Cooper and Rie and consequently likens their achievement of minimalism to the contemporary English architect designer Nicholas Grimshaw. John Lawson and Norman Foster's simplicity is eloquently discussed by John Lawson: "To achieve simplicity paradoxically requires an enormous amount of effort. To create simplicity, to reduce an artefact, an object, an artwork or a room to its essential minimum, requires patience, effort and care. It means being ready to purge all the clutter and jumble that continually threatens to overwhelm even the most modest interior." (25)

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Lucie Rie produced work of poise and beauty that had the formal sophistication of the best art of its day. In reflecting the ideas and values of modernism, her work demonstrated the principle that craft practice has the capacity to engage in the intellectual and aesthetic debate of any period. She challenged the conventions of her time by broadening the scope of studio pottery, while remaining within its traditions. In doing so she showed pottery to be capable of evolving with no limitations except the preconceptions placed upon it. (26)

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Turning to de Waal's recent book, "Bernard Leach, St. Ives artist", published December 1997, I first noticed that the title 'artist' instead of 'potter' was chosen. I feel de Waal has used his research to form a deserving, yet critical, analysis of Leach's work, philosophies and close relationship with Yanagi.

Leach formed a friendship with Tomimoto Kenkichi, who had studied architecture and interior design at Tokyo School of Fine Arts. This background, along with Tomimoto's studies in London in 1908, of glass, stained glass, ceramics and metalwork, at the Victoria and Albert Museum, cemented this friendship, leading to a shared interest in the philosophies of William Morris and John Ruskin and the potential of decorative art.

It was with Tomimoto that Leach attended a party, following an exhibition in Tokyo, at which painting and raku were the forms of recreation. Raku is a very immediate form of glazing and firing earthenware at a low temperature of 1050 C whereby the object is taken out of the kiln, still glowing and allowed to cool rapidly, a technique which originated from the Japanese Tea Ceremony, and leaving Leach so overwhelmed that he wanted to learn more.

It is interesting to compare de Waal's first experiences of clay, throwing and form being the main focus, to Leach where it was essentially the decorative process of raku that was his centre of interest. "Leach was more engaged with the dynamics of mark making in its widest sense (drawing, engraving, etching, painting....). He initiated ideas in two dimensions, rather than through experimenting on the wheel with alternate forms." (27) So it becomes clear why Leach engaged a thrower to produce pots for himself to decorate, that for him decoration was prime concern.

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In a review of de Waal's book, by Pamela Johnson, the discoveries in the archives by de Waal on the relationship between Leach and Yanagi led Johnson to assume "great enthusiasms took the place of great knowledge." (28) The fact that Leach spent most of his time in Japan with a very close number of young English-speaking, aristocratic friends in turn concludes that Leach's sampling of Japanese culture was fairly marginal. Johnson also ascertains that pottery for Leach included three aspects, life, art and philosophy with Leach having difficulty clarifying the latter two, resulting in an "...uneasy relationship with both, pursuing neither with any clarity or rigour." (29)

Edward Lucie Smith, however, would not agree. On one hand he classes de Waal's profound opening statement, "Bernard Leach was the pre-eminent artist potter of this century," (30) as an "obligatory trumpet blast" (31). He then goes on to conclude that de Waal had left, "important sections of its subject's reputation in tatters." (32)

I feel de Waal makes us more aware of Leach's strengths and weaknesses; the apparent strengths being in his aptitude for mark making and ever-questioning about the status of the modern craftsman. This book offers a direct approach that leaves the subject's reputation very much intact. Therefore I would agree with Johnson's point in that, "Being part of a contemporary, dynamic craft practice brings with it the need to develop a critical awareness of the past within the present." (33)



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Chapter Five

John Dewey

Ideas in the Making

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De Waal is a prominent figure in *Crafts Magazine*, not only for his pots. In the 'Writers and Thinkers' Section de Waal has examined the ideas and influences of Yanagi, John Dewey (1859-1952) and David Jones (1895-1974).

Dewey was an American Philosopher responsible for writings on aesthetics, educational theory, politics and most notably for his book, "Art as Experience" (N.Y. 1934). Dewey is concerned with the connection of everyday living and the development of aesthetic experiences. It is not the actual finished piece but the act of making and how the object is received which Dewey finds interesting.

The readers should be carried forward, not merely or chiefly by the mechanical impulse of curiosity, nor by a restless desire to arrive at the final solution but by the pleasurable journey itself. (34)

The 'journey' Dewey ascertains can be from the experience of making through the senses to the direct personal participation of using the art object, whether it be functional or non-functional.

Jones, an English poet, painter, writer and maker of inscriptions, took his influences from Roman-Catholic aesthetics in the 1920s. He too was concerned with an understanding of the experience of making hence his use of the word, "haecceity - that is, the irreducible and scared individuality of everything." (35) which can be linked to de Waal's writings concerning objects he made in 'Parts of a Journal December 1997-May 1998'. Amongst the December entry de Waal concerns himself with the questions,

Where are the homes for those things which we make? The homes that are going to take in our objects, nurture them, understand them, give them the room that they need?.....Makers do more than just make things, they make up possible futures, lives or functions for how and where their objects will end up. (36)

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The journey, Dewey asserts, can be from the experience of making through the senses to the direct personal participation of using the art object, whether it be functional or non-functional.

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De Waal is amongst many makers who have written papers to be included in "Ideas in the Making" ( Johnson, Pamela, Crafts Council, 1998) entering the critical discussions that surround contemporary crafts.

In a seminar given by de Waal on 2nd February 1999, at N.C.A.D. in Dublin, he stressed the importance of talking and writing about our own work, "If we can't do this then we can't expect our work to be taken seriously." (37) The status of craft is low, basically because of the silence that surrounds it. Craft history has only really happened in the last thirty years and, therefore, is a fairly new discipline. Before then it was never written down but passed on by word of mouth, master to apprentice, and so on. Crafts people generally have difficulty writing about their work and de Waal suggests that undergraduates should practice the discipline of keeping a journal to show critical thinking, thoughts and ideas, similar to de Waal's submission earlier.

As well as de Waal's journal extracts in "Ideas and the Making" Kate McIntyre has used an example of his work, namely a lidded pistachio jar (1994), to carry out an analysis of how the maker can have impact on the reception of his or her work. From researching magazine articles McIntyre discovers the controlled way in which de Waal either writes his own articles, or lengthy quotes are used from him. Images of his work are included with usually one of himself at work in his studio. If this 'control' is not enforced then art critics, historians or dealers will take it upon themselves to interpret the work. This in turn could be very damaging as totally different concepts would be achieved.

McIntyre, on researching galleries that de Waal's work is sold in, found that timelessness, fashion, 'right work at the right time' was the general view. When I asked de Waal if the reason for his

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McIntyre, on researching galleries that de Waal's work is sold in, found that randomness, fashion, 'right work at the right time' was the general view. When I asked de Waal if the reason for his

work being so popular was linked to the trend for minimal interiors, he replied "...it is great that my pots are selling but for me it has nothing to do with fashion. I'd still be making regardless." (38)



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## Conclusion

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I can understand de Waal's calling on contemporary makers to be more aware of the concepts of their making, and the many facets of craft theory. However, I can't help but be aware of de Waal's fortunate position; his pots selling at very comfortable prices and having a first class honours degree in English Literature, thereby finding it intractably easy to read the philosophers' work that he often uses.

I have entitled my thesis 'De Waal, Potter and Writer' and I have become aware, through his execution of each, the need to find a language of my own to articulate my ideas, readings and concerns in a way that stands alongside my work.

I find the words from Toshisada Wako, Japan, a suitable end to, what has been, for me, a challenging and demanding 'journey'.

Every pot you make must be your own original creation. It should not be mere arrangement of old techniques. You see we are living in this world of today, so therefore we must use the fire of today and sing the songs of today. It sounds easy but it is a very hard thing to do. (39)

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