



Diana Worthy. Pouring glaze into bowl. Summer 98.

Women Potters, Part One. Diana Worthy

'My first love was horticulture. I wanted to be a gardener, but here I am a potter'

by Joan Witham

Diana Worthy, of Crich Pottery in the Derbyshire Peak District, loved gardening as a child but also spent many hours drawing. A teacher at her all girls school, recognising her talent, enrolled her for Saturday morning classes at Camberwell College in London. The freedom to work as she wished was invigorating for a fourteen-year-old and from 1960 to 1962 her ability and enthusiasm flourished.

The next step in 1962 was a one year Fine Art Foundation Course at Croydon College of Art & Design leading to a three year Diploma at the prestigious Loughborough College. There Diana enjoyed a three dimensional mixed media course, majoring in ceramics. There was ample scope and encouragement to experiment and her enthusiasm for pottery was forged at Loughborough where David Leach and Lucie Rie were often present. Despite qualifying in 1966, Diana did not feel confident enough as a potter to seek full time employment so applied for the postgraduate MA course at the Royal College of Art.

Diana could usually be found in college at all hours, seven days a week. There she met Hans Coper, David Queensberry and Eduardo Paulozzi. Diana won the RCA prize for drawing and also the Frank Denning Memorial Award to study designs in Scandinavia. Her final degree show M (Design) RCA resulted in offers of freelance pottery designing for Kilkenny Design workshops and for Denby Pottery in Derbyshire. She also took a full time lecturing post at Wolverhampton Polytechnic in the Faculty of three-dimensional design.

At Denby Diana found her inspiration to use colour from Doug Stone who made the glazes there. This has remained the cornerstone and focus of all her subsequent work. Designing for Denby was restrictive; it was always necessary to make changes to fit strict commercial controls. Already married and with a baby on her back around the factory, she felt the need for some independence. A small kiln and potters wheel were installed in the kitchen of their bungalow where she made pieces of her own in the evenings. This work was sold by Heal's Liberty's and the British Craft Centre proving that it was marketable in quality outlets. In 1973 Diana and her potter husband bought a house and near derelict farm buildings at Crich, spending the next two years to make them habitable and workable. Production started

ANTIQUES INFO - Mar/Apr 01



Bowls £8 to £60 according to size, cake stand £40, teapots £40 to £50, fluted dishes £40 to £60, pebble vase £8. 1994.



Cups and saucers £16 to £20, mugs £9, rectangular dishes £40 to £60. 1994.



Lamps £40 to £100. 1991.



Wash hand basin £300 to £400, tiles 7.25in square £14. 1984.

tentatively in the make shift workshops but she was catapulted into full time activity by a mass of orders from the International Spring Fair at the NEC in 1976. This was the beginning of twenty-five years of successful potting.

Work has inevitably changed over the years, always in stoneware, thrown, slip-cast, press-moulded or, in the case of plates, using the forming machinery called jigger and jolley on the wheel. Decorative techniques involve using many layers of coloured glazes, made at the pottery, either by dipping or pouring over the biscuit ware (once fired). Each glaze interacts and reacts to produce different colours. The next stage involves drawing designs into the dried glazes (sgraffito) then blending everything together with a final overspray of glaze which again, changes the colours. These techniques were evolved as a result of producing samples for board meetings at Denby during the process of creating a 'range'. Hundreds of trials now go into the creation of a new Crich colourway, as it must look good, be reliable and be reproducible in her oxidising electric kilns. Diana's pots show her love of nature, featuring hills, trees, flowers and leaves and to her constant preoccupation with and love of colour.

Her work has been exhibited and sold at trade fairs, shops and galleries throughout Britain and also in Italy, Germany, America, and Japan. A recent commission produced eighty handmade washbasins which now grace the prestigious Emirates 'Al Maha Desert Resort' hotels and very special water features are fitted in the homes of two wives of Sheikh Mirza Al Sayegh in Dubai. The greatest impetus to business came in 1988 as a result of taking a stand at the Tokyo Trade Fair. Orders remained constant for seven years until the Kobe earthquake destroyed all the showrooms. The contracts had provided a guaranteed market, the shapes and designs appealing to the Japanese public. Pressure was applied to Crich for ever higher standards of perfection and uniformity. Hand potting is not conducive to uniformity but Diana met such demands. One disadvantage of being heavily involved in exporting to Japan for so long meant the home market had been neglected. Hard work was essential to recover lost contacts but fortunately orders from John Lewis kept the pottery afloat during that difficult time. What also helped business was that in 1992 a beautiful gallery had been created at Crich Pottery and this brought customers from far and wide.

In the recession of the mid eighties Diana took several months off to travel with her family overland to India and then to Spain. This was almost the end of potting at Crich as Spain's quality of light kept calling and in 1995 a 'For Sale' notice appeared at the gate. The move would have released her from what had become almost a straight jacket of constant demands. Maybe she needed a whole new opportunity to become free and to experiment in a completely new environment. However, the ties of family and home proved too strong. She is now totally recharged making new pieces without function and just for pleasure, 'Life Force' in her own name.

Diana has a very supportive husband involved full time together with two loyal local helpers. Deceptively, the atmosphere at Crich is very casual and relaxed but in reality 'we all know how to use our time'.

Asked 'what of the future?' she replied, 'who knows?' One thing is certain, this lively, enthusiastic potter will go on for as long as the inspiration and her creative drive enable her to make honest, robust, affordable pottery.

Acknowledgements to Diana Worthy, Lu Jeffrey, and Kevin Tanner, photographers.



Lidded pot £15, biscuit barrel £40, vase £15. 1975 to 1979.



Water feature £95 to £200, made to order.



Pebbles, 'Life Force' £40 to £100. 2000.



Designs for plates at Denby. 1971.



Japanese stewpot £46, candleholder £20, hors-d'oeuvre dish £26. 1993.



The inscribed mark of a letter 'P' within a 'C' is the standard Crich Pottery mark and is found on all pieces.



Square dish, £60. 2000.