

CERAMIC PIECES

by

Colin Pearson

15—30 JULY 1981

**FINE ARTS GALLERY,
UNIVERSITY CENTRE, SANDY BAY**

Gallery hours: Mon-Fri 10-4; Sat 10-12.

THE UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA FINE ARTS COMMITTEE

PREFACE

Les Blakebrough

It is always satisfying when ideas become reality, and it has been an idea of mine for a long time to see a collection of Colin Pearson's work here in Australia.

Being aware of other potters' work in other countries through books and magazines always has its drawbacks — scale especially; and the real feeling that comes across when we are confronted with work is never realised two-dimensionally. Having it here to see and touch is the reward for the work that Guy Noden, Anita Martin and Stephanie McDonald have done. I have always been impressed with Pearson's work: at first with his domestic ware that was always so well finished with thoughtful attention to detail, and latterly with his individual obsession with cylindrical winged forms. On face value you would perhaps expect that a year or two's work would exhaust most of the possibilities of such a theme. Not so with Pearson. His winged forms continue to emerge like the Phoenix from the ashes with diversity and wit that display an inventiveness which seems inexhaustible.

The new work utilising the familiar cylinder plus wings has developed from crisp and sometimes tight forms of small scale in porcelain to massive and demanding work on a large scale. It is no easy transition merely to 'scale up' work, and Pearson's large winged forms have a monumentality about them that is most compelling. From looking at photographs it was my experience that these large forms didn't seem to work nearly as well as the small earlier work, but in reality the experience was quite reversed, and reinforces the need to see work first hand. To have had the opportunity to see Colin Pearson at work here in Hobart at the School of Art's 1981 Summer School and produce the series of larger work in this exhibition was a privilege indeed.

It's a fine exhibition of one of Britain's leading ceramic artists and credit for its organisation goes to Guy Noden, Anita Martin and Stephanie McDonald of the School of Art.

INTRODUCTION

Anita Martin

Colin Pearson, like our own potter Les Blakebrough, started off his art school training by studying painting — as he says, because he had been good at drawing at school. It was whilst studying painting at Goldsmiths College, London, that he was first introduced to clay, and he became intrigued by the dramatic transformation that took place between wet, plastic clay and the fired end-product. Anyone who has ever come into contact with this process of making pots can, I am sure, relate to this magical experience. Colin's pots absolutely verify this statement in terms of the visual impact they convey, whether the delicate, subtle winged porcelain forms reflecting the strength combined with fragility and other-worldliness of porcelain, or the diametrically opposed brutal bronze stoneware forms emerging from the firing looking somehow primitive and akin to pagan symbols, very earthy and inextricably linked with fire and water.

His credentials are impressive: after serving in the Royal Air Force during World War II, he entered Goldsmiths College School of Art in 1947 at the age of 24. After the switch to ceramics and receiving his Diploma, he was advised to work with a professional potter and was thus apprenticed to Ray Finch for three years. During this period he consolidated the craftsman's approach to clay and wheel throwing and refined his techniques, a discipline absolutely necessary if one's creative aims are ever to be expressed fully and without compromise. After this grounding he went on to work as assistant to David Leach at Aylesford Pottery and was promoted to manager.

In 1961 he set up his own pottery at the Quay, Aylesford, a quaint building in the centre of one of Kent's most picturesque villages on the River Medway, an idyllic setting only an hour away from London. Here he still works and lives with his family, his wife Leslie having a studio above the pottery where she makes woven wall hangings.

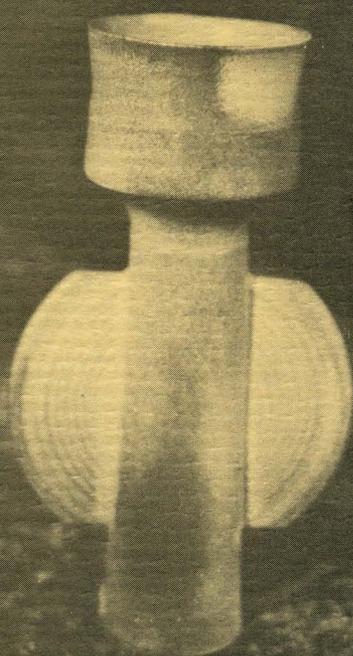
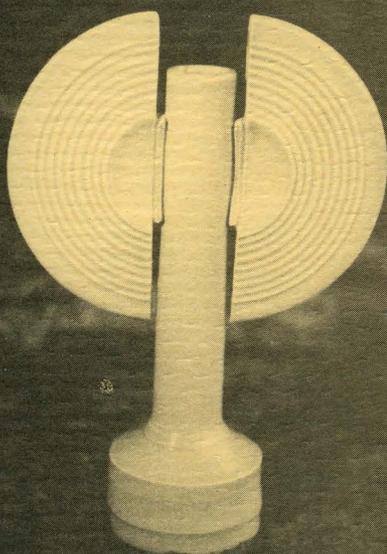
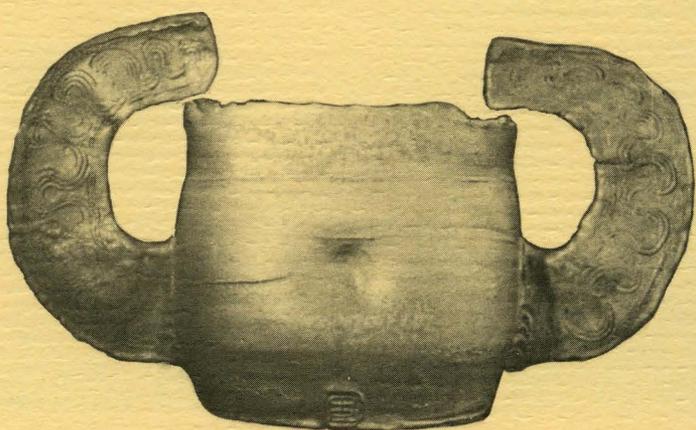
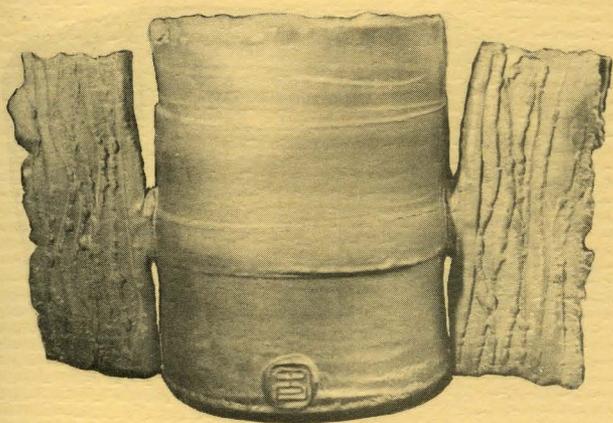
In the pottery all clay bodies and glazes are produced from time-tested recipes. He prefers to stick to a limited number of glazes and to use them to their full potential. His pugmill, he says, is indispensable and much more efficient than careful wedging of the clay by hand. He gas fires his work in reduction atmosphere to 1280°C.

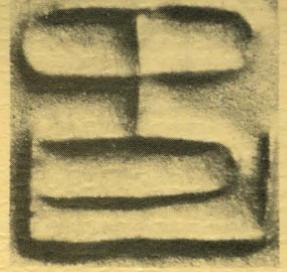
He has built up a wide range of domestic ware, 90 different designs in all, which he raw glazes and fires only once. This is a speedier process and for him preferable to bisque firing before glazing. He began producing the more individual, artistic pieces in 1971 and these have taken precedence over his standard range. His pots are sold in many galleries throughout England and Europe.

Since 1962 he has exhibited frequently and has won five major awards, including the International Ceramics (Victoria & Albert Museum) British Award in 1972, and the 33rd Premio, Faenza, in 1975. Whilst this exhibition is under way, he is also exhibiting at a British Council exhibition in Belgium.

The presentation of this exhibition has been an Art Theory project for three 4th year students of the Tasmanian School of Art. It represents work produced by Colin whilst in Hobart as Guest Lecturer at the 1981 School of Art's Summer School, and work produced since at his pottery at Aylesford.

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STATEMENT

Colin Pearson

I would say of myself that I am not a cerebral or conceptual artist. My pieces derive from the use and feel of clay in the making process. Whether it is rough or smooth, for example. I prefer it rough, but I do use it smooth and in porcelain. I work very directly, always using a wheel for the primary form, the body, the wheel being rotated often very slowly, especially towards the end of this 'throwing' process. I use various ribs, i.e. shaped pieces of metal or wood, rather than the fingers, to realise both angular and crag-like surfaces, to texture or to smooth it down, and to obtain more precise definition. After I have obtained the main form, I then work in a casual, experimental, exploratory manner to deliberately create an asymmetry from what is essentially a symmetrical process. In larger pieces this is sometimes extreme, and in smaller, often porcelain pieces, it is barely perceptible. The manner of working which I describe I would sum up as being in overall control, but providing conditions for accidents to happen. It is these 'accidents' which I watch for and I stop immediately when I see the something which pleases me. This is the point of the slowly rotating wheel. To give assistance to this process I make use of strongly directional lights — sometimes horizontal and sometimes vertical as the form demands, rather in the manner in which a photographer might work, to make the surface and show nuances of form. If I need to subsequently turn surplus clay off the piece with metal tools, as would be the case if I am making bowls, then the same attitudes and methods are used to try and keep the spontaneity and original directness. At this stage the piece, if it is to have the subsequent addition of 'wings' and other attachments which I use, should look incomplete in itself.

The wings themselves are formed, off the wheel, by methods which are fast and in many cases traditional — combing the surface with serrated edges for example and invariably in the soft plastic state. I rarely carve or incise when the clay is leather-hard. One of my methods is to work in various ways on a block of clay, and then slice through it with a taut wire to obtain thinner sections, sometimes with torn effects. There can be many attempts and failures before I recognise the one which is 'right'. Further, sometimes accidents can happen at the stage when I fit the attachment to the body, when I have to break or tear or cut it to the required shape and size.

I prefer to use glazes which do not hide the surface of the pot, and hence my fondness for the overloaded copper and manganese glaze which produces metallic effects which often emphasise the surface marks I have made previously.

I do not make study drawings in museums, or elsewhere for that matter, preferring to record impressions rather than detail. Any drawings which I make are done to record any ideas which I have. I make a quick drawing and a shorthand note or perhaps work out a technical detail. This can happen at any time, and I break off what I am doing, as I know by experience that if I don't I shall often forget the idea. So most of my drawings are memory aids. Additionally, I do make slides of a lot of my finished pieces for future reference because a lot of my work is based on what I have done before as an evolving process. Occasionally I will return after quite an interval and re-explore a previous item which I had perhaps not taken as far as it could go, and here past records through slides do help me. I go to a lot of trouble making these slides as photographically perfect as I can.

Reactions to my work are often to say 'That looks Viking' or 'Classical'. I see these associations myself and I am pleased when other people get them. However, the pieces do not start out this way. I do not consciously create museum models. Maybe impressions have been absorbed in the past and surface later when I am working. This is what I would hope. The end product of my work is always a 'pot', a container, however sculptural or removed from everyday practicality. I spent many years making tableware for use and I can never quite divorce myself from this previous experience.

LIST OF WORKS

- 1 Shallow porcelain bowl, two prs. of wings, bronze glaze. 9cm high, 23cm wide.
- 2 Flanged porcelain bowl, three flat wings, pale green glaze. 12cm high, 21cm wide.
- 3 Porcelain bowl, two prs. wings, pale green glaze. 14cm high, 20cm wide.
- 4 Porcelain bowl, two prs. extended wings, pale blue glaze. 16.5cm high, 28cm wide.
- 5 Porcelain bowl, two prs. of flattened wings, bronze glaze. 15cm high, 22.5cm wide.

- 6 Shallow porcelain bowl, single wings, pale green glaze. 8.5cm high, 20cm wide.
- 7 Shallow porcelain bowl, 2 prs. extended wings, pale blue/violet glaze. 11.5cm high, 29.5cm wide.
- 8 Enclosed form, white glaze, red and green spiral decoration. 16cm high, 16cm wide.
- 9 Shallow porcelain bowl, two high wings, bronze glaze. 10cm high, 29.5cm wide.
- 10 Shallow porcelain bowl, 2 prs. of flattened wings, pale blue glaze. 9cm high, 21cm wide.
- 11 Shallow porcelain bowl, 2prs. of flattened wings, light grey/purple glaze. 9.5cm high, 23cm wide.
- 12 Porcelain bowl, 2prs. of extended wings, bronze glaze. 17.5cm high, 30cm wide.
- 13 Shallow porcelain bowl, 2 prs. of flattened wings, pale green glaze. 11cm high, 22cm wide.
- 14 Shallow porcelain bowl, 2 prs. of curved wings, bronze glaze. 10cm high, 24cm wide.
- 15 Porcelain bowl, exterior orange flashing, interior blue/green/violet. 14.5cm high, 19.5cm wide.
- 16 Narrow cylindrical porcelain vase, two semi-circular wings, blue/green glaze. 24.5cm high, 16.5cm wide.
- 17 Flanged porcelain bowl, three flattened wings, mottled grey/purple. 14cm high, 24cm wide.
- 18 Porcelain bowl, two prs. of flattened wings, fawn exterior, green interior, with bronze rim. 13.5cm high, 20.5cm wide.
- 19 Flanged porcelain bowl, two flattened wings, green exterior, fawn interior. 11cm high, 21.5cm wide.
- 20 Flanged porcelain bowl, three flattened wings, pale green glaze. 14.5cm high, 22cm wide.
- 21 Shallow porcelain bowl, two prs. of flattened wings, pale grey glaze with red flashing. 10cm high, 22.5cm wide.
- 22 Narrow cylindrical porcelain vase, two semi-circular wings, pale green glaze. 24cm high, 16.5cm wide.
- 23 Porcelain form with folded rim, two prs. of small wings, bronze glaze. 12.5cm high, 16cm wide.
- 24 Porcelain form with folded rim, three flattened wings, brown, tan, white glaze. 9.5cm high, 12cm wide.
- 25 Enclosed porcelain form, bronze glaze. 19.5cm high, 17cm wide.
- 26 Enclosed porcelain form, bronze glaze. 16.5cm high, 17cm wide.
- 27 Enclosed porcelain cylindrical form with flanged top, bronze glaze. 18cm high, 14cm wide.
- 28 Narrow cylindrical vase, two semi-circular wings, grey glaze with brown flashing. 25cm high, 14.5cm wide.
- 29 Large stoneware bowl, two prs. of lugs, bronze glaze. 28cm high, 9.5cm wide.
- 30 Large stoneware bowl, two prs. of flattened wings, bronze glaze. 15cm high, 36cm wide.
- 31 Large stoneware cylinder, four prs. of smooth extended wings, bronze glaze. 27.5cm high, 39cm wide.
- 32 Large stoneware cylinder, four prs. of rough extended wings, bronze glaze. 27cm high, 44cm wide.
- 33 Large stoneware cylinder, two prs. of long extended wings, bronze glaze. 27cm high, 42cm wide.
- 34 Large stoneware cylinder, four prs. of smooth extended wings, bronze glaze. 25cm high, 36cm wide.
- 35 Large bellied stoneware form, two large arms, bronze glaze. 27cm high, 58cm wide.
- 36 Large stoneware narrow based form, two prs. of extended wings, bronze glaze. 22.5cm high, 50cm wide.
- 37 Large stoneware narrow based form, two prs. of large extended wings, bronze glaze. 22.5cm high, 61cm wide.

