

London Potters News



Summer of gold

LP News looks at the impressive profiles of some of our new members, reviews the latest books and shares the celebrations of our members' newest achievements.

LP Member profile - Tessa Eastman

We continue to be lucky with our membership comprising talented makers and teachers and Tessa is no exception as a part time maker and teacher. In the first of 4 profiles, she shares with us her path to her life and work.

I first discovered clay as a child at school and fell in love with the material. I am sure any clay enthusiast will agree that clay is a magical material in the way this mud from the earth can be manipulated and modelled into something unique and alive. I would like to think I am in control of the process but a great deal of surrender is required, from the creation of an idea to finished piece through construction, drying, firing and glazing.

I studied an Art Foundation at Wimbledon and then carried out a degree at Harrow to gain a BA Hons in Ceramics in 2006. It was at Harrow where I met Lesley Risby and Ferri Farahmandi, 2 members of London Potters.

My work has tended to be sculptural rather than functional. I enjoy the challenge of pursuing a structural complex idea and making quick sketches prior to starting work on building a three dimensional ceramic object. Objects have always fascinated me. I am intrigued when visiting strangers or indeed my grandmothers home, observing the vast array of odd objects ranging from a Venetian glass animal, to plastic ring, to Faberge egg. The idea of creating something permanent when life is transient has deep meaning for me.

Time was spent during my degree exploring the use of colour with glazes and coloured clays. I discovered the excitement of purchasing commercial brush on glazes which brings to mind the childhood experience of selecting sweets from a sweet shop. I wish the glaze to give an effect similar to plastic and the pieces to appear on first glance like mass produced childrens' toys.



In contrast to the commercial aspects mentioned above, pieces take time to create both in the making and glazing. Ashraf Hanna's white raku clay body from Scarva is used and fired to a high bisc in an electric top loader kiln before firing to low earthenware glaze temperature. Pieces are meticulously painted with different colours selected for parts of the piece. I glaze fire up to 3 times to achieve richness of gloss and colour.

I handbuild using slab and coiling methods and combine these techniques with press and sprigg moulding. Plaster two piece press moulds and spriggs are made from childrens toys selected from charity shops.

A lady from Richard Challoner recently brought in a china 3 headed doll, one face is asleep, the other happy, the other crying. I have made a mould of this head and am yet to design a piece incorporating this mould.

My work explores relationships, identity, childhood innocence versus adult experience, nature; the cycle of

life of plants with growth and decay and also the life and death of humanity and the trials and tribulations that this brings. These themes are juxtaposed to create objects of a surreal nature that verge on the beautiful, bizarre and grotesque.

Artists who inspire me are skilled clay workers; Kate Malone, Carol Mc Nicoll and Mary Rogers and artists Niki de Saint Phalle, Louise Bourgeois, Frieda Kahlo, Yayoi Kusama and Bridget Riley to mention but a few.

I work in series, the last was a collection of wedding and birthday cakes exhibited at Contemporary Applied Arts earlier this year in the Harrow show. See www.tesseastman.com images. Two ex Camberwell students assisted with these pieces, Naomi Heath and Joanna Mires, who is now setting up her own ceramic studio and exhibiting.



I am currently at work on some broken puzzle pieces that if pieced together form various animals such as a rabbit, hedgehog and squirrel. Morley College student, Kaya and member of London Potters came to the studio and assisted with making spriggs, cleaning up puzzle sections and glazing.



I work at Richard Challoner Secondary School assisting in the art department and with clay projects (Ryan's work, left). The way a pupil doing art as a last resort subject with not much interest in school in general, can suddenly be taken alive by work produced for their A-level fills me with joy. One pupil this year, whilst carrying work to put on display for the summer school exhibition became very concerned about dropping his work and the appearance of his display. This was a vast shift from his personality at the start of the year. I believe just as clay has the power to transform, it also transforms people's lives and all who encounter the material from pupil both young and old to buyer and collector.

Art and clay objects are timeless. One can never tire from looking at them and the object can inform the viewer knew with new things every day.

I also am technician at the Malden Centre and teach adult and junior courses. Courses run during the term and through the summer. Please call 020 8336 7770 for further details. I run Pottery Parties here and fire big electric front loading kilns, pug clay and mix glazes. All of this informs my practice.

Tessa Eastman Ceramics
<http://www.tesseastman.com>

Opposite page, top left - 2 separate figures, bottom right, Slices of Death (detail), this page top right - Challoner Chapel project, middle left Ryan's Work, bottom right, Tessa Eastman at work. All photos courtesy of Tessa Eastman.

