

FIVE POTTERS

BY DINA KATZ

INTRODUCTION

The Association of Potters of Southern Africa held its second national exhibition at its gallery in Sandton in October 1974. The association aims at bringing pottery as an art-form before the public and tries to raise the standard of pottery technically and aesthetically, giving the 'emergent' potter a chance to exhibit and sell his work. Regular exhibitions for members are organized. Standards are set by a selection committee. The exhibition drew entries from South Africa and the neighbouring states and the work of five potters who exhibited is discussed. These potters are not among the best known and with the exception of Bill van Gilder, do not feature in the recent book 'Potters of South Africa', though their work is good and their approach sincere.

Photographs by Robin Leibbrandt

BERNARD Leach, grand old man of British pottery, wrote in the mid-fifties: 'In America, with no craft traditions passed on from one generation to another in patient apprenticeship over many years, crafts are taken up with great enthusiasm in brief courses in art schools by men and women as a means of self-expression. Women of middle age seem to form the majority, women whose child-bearing is over . . . who find an outlet in making pots . . . in the freedom of a room of their own'.

At first glance this could sum up pottery in South Africa. Classes are crammed with women of middle age. But what of the teachers and those artists and craftsmen who quietly work in their studios, making quality ware with care and patience? These are people to whom pottery is a vocation and who hope that they will find, somewhere in a class, an individual for whom clay is more than a morning's recreation once a week.

The five potters discussed vary widely in age, training, approach, and style, but they share a deep respect for clay and its properties.

The work of each potter is individual and technically sound. Today originality is virtually impossible, but copying is often accidental.

Some potters prefer the movement of wet clay on a potter's wheel to the slower building of pots a bit at a time. Many alternate between the two, sometimes using both in the making of a single pot. Whatever the means of making, a pot conceived with an experienced eye for form and balance must be pleasing in effect.



The pots illustrated above are examples of the work of: 1. Dina Prinsloo; 2. and 3. Lily Pinchuck; 4. and 9. Digby Hoets; 7, 8, 10, and 11. Bill van Gilder. To give the reader an idea of the size of these pots, the top one, (No. 1), is 40 cm high.

Taste is personal. A preference for fine ware should not blind one to the virtues of a well-made heavy pot. One should be able to recognize a good pot that one does not like, or like a pot despite its obvious flaws.

The studio potter who formulates his own clay bodies and glazes needs to be scientist, mathematician, labourer, and master in the art of patience. Urban potters tend to use electric kilns, so they are part-time electricians too.

Digby Hoets

Digby Hoets and his sister Lesley-Ann run a pottery school in Johannesburg. He teaches throwing, she teaches the techniques of hand-built pottery. Between them they have some hundred students in seven classes a week. Their studio was established by John and Valmai Edwards, from whom the Hoetses took it over in May 1973.

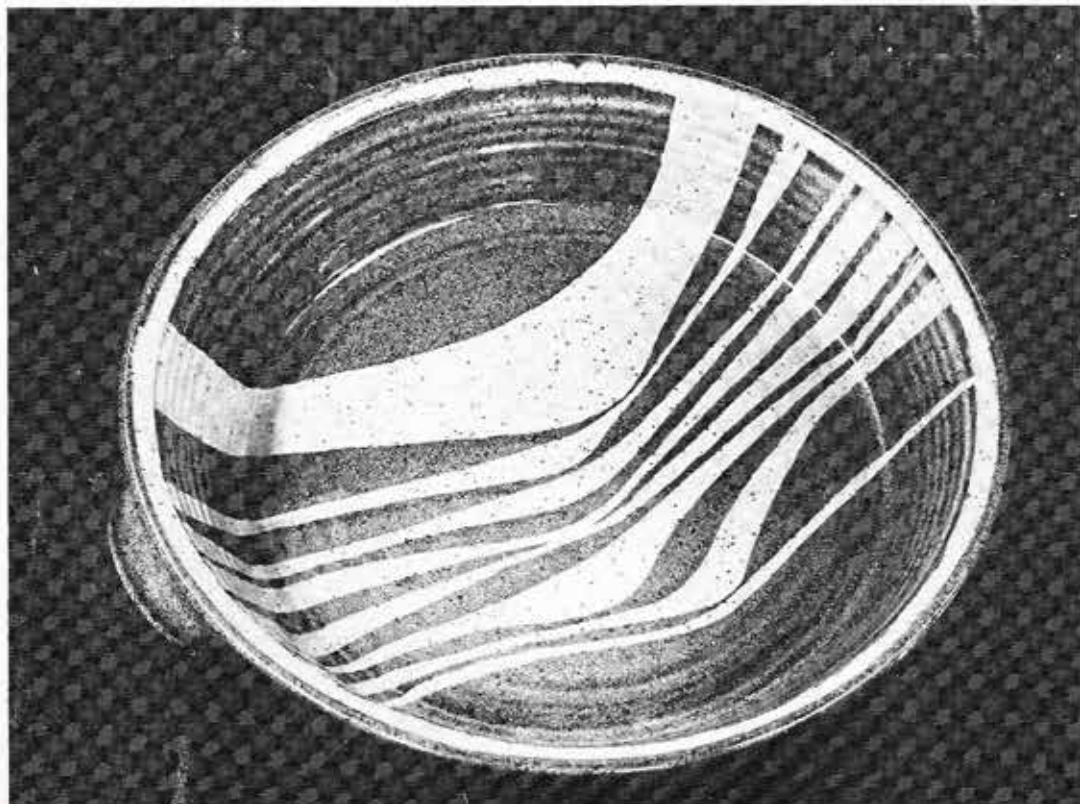
Now 25 years old, Digby was educated at King Edward's. He says: 'Because I wasn't the best in my matric class in art, I opted for science instead of commercial art'. In 1972, while studying for a de-

gree in science, he started teaching pottery with his mother, Dilys, in her studio. His mother is an accomplished potter.

While a student, Digby spent the long vacations in his mother's studio, practising his throwing. In 1971 he threw a chess set which won him the Brickor award for thrown ware in 1972. These periods of concentrated work stood him in good stead, and when John Edwards was looking for someone to take over from him, Digby was the logical choice.

'I learnt as much as I could from

48 cm diameter by Digby Hoets



watching John Edwards. I sat in on his technical courses and was able to apply my science training in knowing how and where to find all I needed to know. My science, geology, chemistry, and physics have stood me in far better stead in the studio than arts would have done.'

Digby is a sound and patient teacher. He can explain and demonstrate with clarity, clay structure, principles of the stages of throwing, turning, and glazing, in terms comprehensible to the average student. His forte is the large, glazed, thrown stoneware form of simple design. His standard is high. 'My criteria for well-made pots are that they must be well thrown, require little or no turning, lids must fit well, handles must be functional and well applied, decoration must be carefully done and suit the pot.' Function and aesthetics must balance in good pottery.

'I like making large pots — rather like an artist's preference for a large canvas. I like to decorate an open form. It gives more scope than anything else. One makes other, smaller forms as a measure of ability. I work in porcelain for this reason. I like to be thought of as an all-rounder.'

'When I'm throwing I know what I want to do. I like to play with the form of a pot until I am satisfied that I have what I want.'

'Clay is just a medium I use — probably because it's always been there. At the moment it is the most satisfying one for me, but the real satisfaction is in the finished article. There is a certain pleasure in the stuff that moves under your hands, but my real pleasure lies in extending the potential of the medium.'

The finish on a Digby pot is meticulous. 'Designs on pots depend on a large element of hit and miss, and a pot is quite different before and after glazing.' His glaze surfaces are even; not for him the random effects of pooled or runny glazes. His pots combine function and design. Pieces are individual or form pairs or small groups. These are made to explore shape or size or decoration, or a combination of the three.



46 cm high, Digby Hoets

36 cm diameter by Digby Hoets

