

## COASTAL CERAMICS (From to Crannog to St Anthony's Well)

I was lying flat, resting my back. I was 59, and since having surgery on my spine over 22 years ago, I have occasional bouts of discomfort and difficulty in walking. Mostly though, I am fine and get the utmost pleasure from movement and body awareness. I have practiced Tai Chi, Chi Kung and meditation since recovering from that major surgery, which in many ways was my 'wake-up' call.

Lying in the autumn sunshine, life really was not all that bad! I had made the transition from making large scale artworks as a public artist and lecturer, with a greater emphasis on working in my studio making sculptural ceramics and delivering occasional courses and workshops. I was happy and contented and creatively engaged, my personal life was good, and I had fulfilled my family responsibilities as a single parent. My practice of Tai Chi had led me to a deeper spiritual awareness.

I reflected on the movement in life that being 60 brings. What is a life well lived? What really matters? The more I focused, the more I allowed deep concerns and joys to surface and crystallize. My work has a profound and energetic connection with the earth. Particularly the cliffs and coastline of West Wales, which has been my home for 20 yrs, informs my ceramic pieces. I wanted to make a journey that would be a dedication to the earth, creativity and the soul. One that would mark the transition into this last stage of life. It would be an act of celebration of awareness of the wonders of our environment, not a movement coming from fear.

The Coastal Ceramics Project evolved during those days of lying flat, and 40 years of professional practice, at a time when I had difficulty walking to the kitchen!

I plan to create a new body of ceramic work incorporating and experimenting with site-specific materials collected from the coastline of Ceredigion, Pembrokeshire and Carmarthenshire. It will celebrate the natural environment of the Welsh coastline, and the elemental nature of clay, earth and fire.

The project is a journey to mark my 60th year. I plan to walk along the West Wales coastal path linking the spiritual centres of St Crannog in Llangrannog to St Anthony's Well in Llansteffan. I will collect and mail back to my studio natural elements from the cliffs and coastline of 60 places along my path. These will then be incorporated into porcelain and other clays to form the basis of an experimental ceramic exploration. The walk is intended as a meditation on our natural heritage, and the subsequent studio development will mark the beginning of a new body of work.

The walk will cover the coastal paths of Ceredigion, Pembrokeshire and Carmarthen. Walking this spring, over a period of 30 days, from the spiritual centres of Capel Crannog near my home in Llangrannog (St Crannog was a seafaring saint, Capel Crannog has recently been gifted to be used as a community art centre) to St Anthony's Well (St Anthony who is connected with nature and animals featured in my recent ceramic tile panel for Llansteffan School which was opened by HRH Prince Charles) in Llansteffan. The magical St Nons Well at St David's will be the halfway mark.

People are joining me at convenient places along the walk. These include – artists, my students, ecologists, environmentalists, archaeologists, walkers (I am a member of the Ramblers Association), Tai Chi and Chi Kung players, (I am a member of the Rising Dragon School of Tai Chi) and of course friends. Wheelchair users can join at the accessible areas of the coastal path (I sit on the Executive Committee of Disability Arts Cymru). Email contact groups are set up. My "Walking Buddy" is Jon Turner, who will co-ordinate the walk from his studio. Jon is also making a film of the project. The enthusiasm and interest so far has been wonderful.

'This is process-based work, which cannot be bought or sold, involving participation. You only really begin to understand the work when other people engage with it" Clair Twomey, conceptual ceramicist.

I believe it resonates on many levels of meaning in current art practice. This experimental and innovative project will combine the spiritual with the material. It will celebrate our coastal heritage and conservation issues. It highlights the natural environment, in particular the stunning coastal heritage of the Welsh coastline: its delicate balance of renewal, and our need to operate with ecological awareness. It involves a broad range of people and organisations. The project takes this as its starting point and will use the materials collected as a transformation into art objects of beauty, expression and contemplation. I would like the completed body of work, together with the film and documentation, to form the basis for a touring exhibition.

"We saw the whole world of the universe mirrored within the form" said Tetsuyuki Hirano when I was awarded the International Grande Prix in Japan in the nineties. My ceramic forms are informed by the dynamic meeting of the sea and rock structures. I am moved by the deeper, unseen forces of energy that have shaped our landscape over time, and my work deals with articulation of surface which is expressed through the structure of the form.

The collected materials will be used initially in the structure and surface of my work as experimental tests to give me a wider visual and

technical language with which to work. I plan to use them as additives to clays, as slips, and incorporated into glazes and firing techniques. Natural mud can be used to create dark lustrous slips that pool and run. The silica and salt in coastal sand can give eruptions and unusual colours when mixed with clay, and interact with glazes, particularly when high fired in a neutral or reduction atmosphere. Shells can be crushed and used as additives at all stages, again affecting the structure and appearance of ceramic materials. Plant materials, which burn away during firing, can leave interesting shapes and trace elements affecting glazes. They can also be pre-burnt and use in an 'ash glaze'. So called 'glaze faults' where the surface bubbles, blisters and splits can only be achieved through the ceramic medium and is an upcoming area of interest. I plan to experiment with the addition of paper to various clays including porcelain, to add texture, structure, lightness, green (unfired) strength and translucency. Commercial paperclays are readily available, but are expensive and very uniform. By making my own, I can control, make small amounts, and experiment. I will also be using renewable materials.

Even during the early stage, it grew beyond my expectations. It initially attracted a Special Project grant from the Arts Council of Wales towards the studio development of new work, with further support from The Gulbenkian Foundation towards research and development. 'This is a very nice project. Besides meeting our Public Art aims it sounds as if it might contain some genuine art/science interaction too, especially where you involve other people along the way... an excellent opportunity to bring your substantial artistic creativity to meet up with the environmental concerns that relate to the area, all of which need highlighting further and it could turn into a unique and exemplary higher profile project' Sian Ede, Arts Director, Gulbenkian. I am mostly used to taking part in public art projects where the brief is set by the commissioners. This being an artist-led project, it is heartwarming to get such clear affirmations of its worth from large organizations.

Little did I realise when I struggled to walk to the kitchen, that I was hatching my life-work that would involve walking the equivalent of climbing Everest once I was collecting my pension

From The Way of the White Clouds. Lama Anagarika Govinda  
'Thus the pilgrimage in the outer space is actually the mirrored reflection of an inner movement or development, directed towards a yet unknown, distant aim which, however, is intrinsically and seed-like contained in the very direction of that movement. Herefrom springs the readiness to cross the horizon of the known and the familiar, the readiness to accept people and new environments as parts of our destiny, and the confidence in the ultimate significance of all that happens and is in harmony with the depth of our being and the universality of a greater life'.

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