
review

Susan Wintrop

Thirty Phonetic Radicals

Review by Regina Haggio

THE GARDINER
MUSEUM SHOP,
TORONTO
March 27-April 17 1994

This show of 1996 ceramic works is part of a series of one-person exhibitions, at the Gardiner, focusing on content three local ceramists. A graphic artist, teacher and raku potter based in Brook, Ontario, Susan Wintrop looks on "every firing as a new beginning" - a phrase that suggests creative renewal.

Wintrop says that she is strongly influenced by Japanese culture and Buddhist philosophy; the show's title refers to components of a writing system representing Buddhist concepts. True to the spirit of raku, however, she does not attempt to copy Japanese originals, but to create a contemporary object of beauty inspired by the mood of the earlier prototypes.



For me, some works in the exhibition evoke the Chinese idiom as much as a Japanese one. Given the role of the Chinese in transmitting Buddhism in Asia, this is not surprising.

The shapes of the bowls, vases, teacups and candleholders are traditional, stable and deceptively simple. One catches sight of the creamy colored bowl bearing a restrained calligraphic design. A vase and a bowl with carefully ordered stripes conveyed a similar mood.

Other works speak with a louder voice: polychrome vessels in metallic and jewel tones and vibrant reds. Among the strongest of these pieces is a large bronze and red vase decorated with celestial motifs. Less striking, but still eye-catching, is a small, slightly squat vessel displaying a top to bottom symmetry. The dominant hues are green and rich brown. The smooth glaze of the raised, lipped rim contrasts with the intricately textured body. The belly is encircled by a wave like shape scraped out of the polychrome surface. Is interesting to

look at and very tempting to touch and hold.

The vases with figural decoration attracted me most. Their shapes are simple and traditional, with form never subordinated to figural decoration. One example, " Walking Buddha Vase", is distinguished by the frieze of identical figures in low relief. A large covered bowl has frontally seated figures near the middle of the body. Both of these works are reminiscent of ancient Chinese vessels associated with Buddhist ritual.

Many ancient Chinese ceramic vessels were made in imitation of more expensive materials such as bronze and silver. Wintrop's "head" vases evoke that feeling. The color and surface of one well rounded head vase made it look like a metal container. The frieze of attached heads running along the shoulder contrasts in two ways with the shallow, irregular decoration of the belly, being regular and in high relief. The heads seem to invite use as handles, and the same temptation comes to mind with another vase, which has two faces where one might expect a pair of handles. This kind of raised figural decoration recalls not only old Asian vessels but also medieval European decoration, for example, on bronze baptismal fonts.

The title of the show is somewhat distracting; even to someone who knows about Buddhism, its significance is not clear. This makes Wintrop's work appear less accessible than it is. The word *radical* in the title of is appropriate, however, in two ways. It is related to the Latin word for "root", and her work gains strength from being firmly rooted in ancient ceramic conditions. At the same time, Wintrop's willingness to begin anew with each firing, to go beyond the security of the familiar, makes her ceramic art radical in the revolutionary sense.

Niagara Advance ~ November 26, 2005

POTTER AND SCULPTOR TEAM UP FOR EXHIBITION AT THE PUMPHOUSE ART CENTRE

Two artists well-known at the Niagara Pumphouse Visual Art Centre will present Elemental, an exhibit of Raku pottery, relief sculptures and drawings.

Susan Wintrop is a master Raku potter based in Niagara-on-the-Lake. She owns and operates East West Pottery, teaches art throughout the region and exhibits at the Gardiner Museum of Ceramic Art. She began as a graphic designer and calligrapher in Toronto with her own company, Art Tech, and in 1984 she began to take up pottery as a form of therapy while dealing with grief from the loss of her parents.

Arnold McBay is a St. Catharines artist whose work includes drawing and relief sculpture. Both have taught classes at the Pumphouse, and met while Wintrop was attending a class McBay was teaching. He happened to mention that he was a fan of Wintrop's work, and unaware that she was in his class, said he wished he could afford one of her pieces.

"I piped up and said I thought that could be arranged," said Wintrop.

She is excited about the exhibit she is sharing with someone who works in a completely different medium, with a collaboration of ideas and motifs, she said.

"Arnold has an amazing ability to see details in nature, details he forces us to look at. Now, in 2005, the world has become such a connected place, life is becoming so fast and furiously obsessed with things like jobs and the dollar, it is more important than ever to stop, take a breather and have a look at the world around us, be alive and conscious."

McBay says the nature of their work may be "a little unconventional, a little off the beaten track," but yet the two demonstrate very similar ideas in their work, with a creativity that is distinct but complementary.

And with their long association with the Pumphouse, they are looking forward to bringing their different creative ideas to the table for the public to view. A Sunday Salon with the artists will be held Dec. 4 at 2 p.m. at the Niagara Pumphouse, 247 Ricardo Street, NOTL.

The St.Catharines Standard ~ December 16, 2005

ARTISTS TEAM UP AND ASTONISH EACH OTHER

By Lori Littleton

Exhibiting with St.Catharines artist Arnold McBay has been a sort of dream come true for Niagara-on-the-Lake potter Susan Wintrop. Wintrop first saw McBay's work about seven years ago during an exhibit at the Niagara Pumphouse Visual Arts Centre. About a year-and-a-half ago, she enrolled in a weekend workshop McBay was leading so she could meet him and see what he was like.

During the class, McBay was admiring some Raku pottery in a display case, when he remarked he wished he could afford such a piece for his wife, Lisa.

"Then I heard a voice that said, well, I think I can arrange that," McBay said, adding the two worked out a trade of each other's art work.

About 15 months ago, Wintrop was invited to exhibit at the Pumphouse, but was asked to invite another artist. She immediately thought of McBay. "I jumped at it very quickly. And we ended up with a fabulous show," said McBay, who attended Laura Secord and then completed post-secondary studies at Brock University and the University of Western Ontario.

"There is something that drives me to do my work; I don't know what it is. It's an impulse that pushes me," said Wintrop, who owns and operates East West Pottery. "Arnold's work looks like that feeling."

Their collaboration is entitled Elemental and features McBay's relief sculptures and drawings and Wintrop's Raku pottery. The pieces have similar motifs, such as vessels, leaves, bowls and grasshoppers. "Both of our works are very organic. We're interested in natural processes and something you might step on during a hike," said McBay, who works in Brock's visual arts department.

"I'm interested in things that evoke nature and the passage of time and the processes of nature. There is a very natural feeling about my work."

McBay's foray into art began at the age of four with a chalkboard, and that interest continued unabated (for the most part) throughout his teens. He began exhibiting after graduating from Brock in 1988. In 1995, McBay was the subject of a major exhibition at the London Regional Art Gallery and has since been represented by London's Thielsen Galleries. He recently exhibited at the WKP Kennedy Gallery in North Bay.

Wintrop grew up in Toronto and attended the Ontario College of Art. She ran her own company, Art Tech, for almost 20 years as a graphic designer. In 1984, she took up pottery as a way to deal with the death of her parents. She studied the art (Raku Pottery) at George Brown College in Toronto and later with well-known ceramist Michael Sheba.

Wintrop has previously had four solo exhibitions at the Gardiner Museum of Ceramic Art in Toronto and has exhibited at the Pumphouse. Her work is in the contemporary ceramics collection at the Royal Ontario Museum and the Museum of Man, in Hull, Que.

Wintrop, who moved to Niagara-on-the-Lake 10 years ago, said she and McBay met from time to time during the past year to see how each other was progressing on their pieces for the show. Though she thought their work would complement each artist, neither was prepared for the final product. "We were both astonished," she said. "It has a feeling about it. It draws you in to look at the pieces and that's what we were hoping for. There are subtleties in the work we are hoping people will be attracted to and spend some time looking at."

Niagara This Week ~ December 16, 2005

SYNERGY THROUGH ART: Sculptor Arnold McBay and Potter Susan Wintrop Collaborate on Exhibit at the Pumphouse Gallery.

By Eddie Chau

Elemental is defined as an entity created by thought or strong emotion, through which the form develops into a separate existence.

It can also describe an inner force that drives two Niagara artists to create unique styles of art that evolve with time. Though they both have a paradox in medium and style, the works of artists Susan Wintrop and Arnold McBay somehow complement each other, which is why the two are co-hosting the "Elemental" exhibition at the Niagara Pumphouse Gallery until January 29, 2006.

"It's like a good conversation with good chemistry," said Wintrop who will showcase her Raku pottery – a traditional Japanese style of pottery – alongside McBay's relief sculpting. "Some things just work well together". McBay said the combination exhibit "just felt right," and that visitors will see both similarities and contrasts between his and Wintrop's pieces. The inspiration between the pair's respective showcases come from cycles and themes drawn from nature and life experiences.

"There's no real cognitive answer (for my work)," said Wintrop. "It has everything to do with my life experiences yet it has nothing to do with it. If a piece comes out that is more extraordinary than I could create, then it's hard to take responsibility for making it.

"It's as though I made it but there was something else that made it greater than I could make it."

The concept of "Elemental" was born over a year ago when Wintrop was invited by the Pumphouse to host an exhibition. Having seen and admired each other's work, the two artists began having regular conversations about having the joint showcase. As the chats progressed, so did the working relationship as both artists discovered they had a lot in common.

"Every time we talked it'd be like talking to the right side of my brain," said McBay. In preparation for the event throughout the year the pair began creating works of art that complemented each other. With Wintrop's Raku pottery and McBay's relief sculpture – which he described as "drawings evolved into hard form" – art enthusiasts will enjoy an exhibition that is in essence about life.

"It's like a snapshot in an endless process," added Wintrop. "This is us, this is everything."

Niagara Falls Review ~ December 2005

ARTISTS TEAM UP FOR ELEMENTAL SHOW

By John Law

Niagara artists Susan Wintrop and Arnold McBay make no promises with their work. Even they don't know what to expect. Every time they begin a piece, they have no idea how it will end. Sometimes it's a disaster. Other times, it's stunning. Either way, each piece is a one-time only thing – no two are ever alike.

"I have a 100 per cent open mind as to what happens in my studio," said McBay, who has done relief sculpture for 20 years. "If something comes out of left field and I have no frame of reference...I just put it aside and let my mind breathe on it for a couple of weeks. Then I come back to it and evaluate it.

"There are other times when things surprise you and you immediately think "thank you, here's my next body of work. The more open you are, the more these doors pop open for you."

For Wintrop, it's even more unpredictable. She literally doesn't know what her Raku pottery looks like until it has cooled off from the firing kiln. It's the mystery of it that can both thrill and infuriate an artist. "It's almost like moments of nature." She said. "Like a snapshot...it forces people to stop and have a look."

That's what they're hoping for with the dual exhibition Elemental, starting a two-month run Sunday at the Niagara Pumphouse Visual Art Centre.

"You don't always know exactly what's going to turn up," said McBay. "It's a real joy – almost like a little gift when you reveal what's there. "You have to have faith and let go of things, that's the real key. You don't need patience as much as the ability to just let the art make itself."

When the possibility for a Pumphouse show came up, Wintrop immediately thought of McBay to join her. The two friends find a connection in their work which, as they say, reflects the human experience and how it parallels evolution found in nature.

Beyond that, it's just cool artwork.

"It's kind of rare, at least in our end of the creative gene pool," said McBay about the aesthetic connection with Wintrop. "It becomes a dialogue between the two of us. Two minds meet and have a nice chat. We don't have the chat over a cup of tea or a pint of Guinness; we have the chat over the phone, over the Internet and between our studios."

Both realize they'll never be mass marketed, which suits them fine. They're more concerned with what a finished piece says to them (and about them) rather than how many big box stores carry them.

"The integrity of working for yourself means that, in a broader picture, you don't have to worry about the bigger world because they find you," said Wintrop. "If you produce your art for yourself first, you become your own quality control board."

"You need artists of all types," adds McBay. "Everybody has their own agenda and own sense of what will make them a happy person. It's not my business to say, 'I think everybody should do art like me.' There's room in this boat for everybody. "We just happen to be artists with a need to do it for ourselves first. It's a gift, but it's a curse too."

Elemental is at the Niagara Pumphouse visual Art Centre (247 Ricardo Street) Sunday to January 29.

Rio Abajo Rio

A View of the Creative Process

by Susan Wintrop



ISN'T IT EXTRAORDINARY what forms emerged from us? Have you ever nervously wondered if the well would begin to dry up? Then, after making yet another piece of pottery that once inspired you with its shape and color but now stultifies with successful repetition, you catch a glimpse of a picture, an angle, a color, a portion of someone else's work that unstoppers a flood of new ideas and excitement.

When does this creative force come from? Like pottery itself, it originates in the natural elements. The inner fire is one that many can associate with, the undeniable fiery urge to create. It expresses its character even when our hands are not trained in an art. The impulses force us to find the right medium through which to speak; its drive has the presence of destiny about it. Buddhism speaks of it in a spiritual and developmental sense.

We often know when we have made something exceptional because we feel it intensely, transcending even the visual affirmation, knowing that the piece will withstand the test of time. It feeds us. It has been said that in the profound sense we, as artists, must "eat our work". This level of creativity is our meat.

Have you ever look at an exceptional piece of yours and loved it objectively, and felt that it had not sprung from your hands at all? So powerful is such a piece that it separates itself from the maker to assume its own life force. It shatters that perception of what we previously thought was satisfactory. Now the levels of acceptability are altered. "Mediocre", once considered "good", becomes "landfill". That is how one's level of creativity goes forward, driven by one's gut, not by popular demand.

Conversely, when you were working with as much integrity as you are capable of, have you made something that is so un-you that you groaned when you looked at it and felt so restless that the only solution was to destroy it? What is this inner critic?

The creative vision that drives us all is the mysterious "river beneath the river", the Rio Abajo Rio (a Spanish term beloved by story tellers) that flows beneath us constantly. It's murmur may alter as all things fluctuate, but it is the dependable, ever renewing source. It flows during an apparent drought of inspiration and too long days. It needs the dog days to replenish itself. When the deep river is really running we can scent it and feel it in our veins. It is from here that, sooner or later, new forms emerge. When you ask "Where did that for come from?", listen to the river beneath the river and know that you can trust it to be your life time companion whence your true way of expression arises.

How do you find the Rio Abajo Rio? Just do your work - it finds you. It is the master teacher which comes when the tools are in your hands and you love your art with patience to learn for a lifetime. The Rio Abajo Rio shelters you from trends and criticisms and allows your course to remain obvious. You can see aspects of your deepest self in the work that emerges.

My own theory is that the river begins to rise dramatically in our forties to levels previously unfelt. The years of work and development begin to cracker us open, and we never the same again. We are able to see within ourselves all that we are with unexpected tolerance. Immature obstacles to our creativity are washed away, and there's a new endurable platform on which we can stand and ground with peace and composure. Creativity takes on new meaning. No longer up what we do but who we are is mirrored in the deepest of rivers.

The Rio Abajo Rio is the most mysterious of forces. It warms our creative lives and gives form to its whispered visions. It is the wild thing that we are.

Phantoms Lurk in the Wings

by Susan Wintrop

IN THE LAST YEAR, I have had some experiences which have convinced me that my unconscious mind leads a merry life of its own and occasionally offers wisdom to my waking self.

The first experience was a phone call that came from a woman in Toronto. She had purchased a raku bowl and praised me for the exquisite Japanese calligraphy I used as a design motif. As a Japanese student in Kyoto, she studied classical and Zen calligraphy and complimented me for executing a Zen phrase in archaic script. I was too pleased and embarrassed to tell her that the design was a conglomerate of masking tape woven into a pleasing pattern.

The next call was from a man in Ottawa who had travelled all over Asia learning at the feet of Oriental tea ceremony masters. Along the way, he had acquired several antique ceramic pieces to use in his own ceremonies. He called to tell me he had bought one of my containers and had never seen one possessed such a presence of shibumi, a Japanese word that means *an ineffable beauty*. He planned to have a special laquer lid made for it in Japan to complete his tea ceremony vessels.

Phantoms lurk in the wings. A few years ago, I created a course called "Art, For Those Who Think They Can't". As a way of making it through art college with no drawing talent, I invented a way of drawing and painting and I continue to use this graphic strategy in my work. My students' success has grown to the point where I have designed another class "Art as a Biography".

Art expresses itself in ways that mirrors life experiences and cycles. I recognize that there is a bigger picture in life that I stumble upon largely by accident. When I plan one thing, the fuller reason seems to emerge.



A few years ago, I bought a very large house because I wanted to have one - just once in my life. Into this nightmare of rooms and high bills, I built a pottery studio/ learning center and a Bed and Breakfast. Classes in calligraphy, raku workshops, under glaze painting, tile decorations and throwing lessons enriched my vacationing visitors from May until December. Initially I gave myself two years to find if it would work; not only has it worked, but it is also benefited my community.

As a potter, I have grown to have a great belief in this force that inspires me and infuses my work with newness and spirit. There awaits a phantom in the wings that yields experiences far greater than you can ever imagine.

Susan Wintrop is a ceramic artist and teacher who lives and works in the Niagara on the Lake, Ontario.

The Potters of Somerset

Peter Bolton and The Green Man

by Susan Wintrop

This is the first of two articles on potters of Somerset, England, by Susan Wintrop, raku potter of Frankford, Ontario, who spent the summer of 1994 discovering them. Her next article will be on John Leach

THERE IS A PLACE in England imbued with legend and mystery. The Vale of Avalon in Somerset is home to Glastonbury surrounded by Wells, Bath, and Muchelney. Many artists who live here seek to express in their work some reflection of it's deep past, and to make it to current and relevant.

Peter Bolton is a potter, who chose Wells as his home in 1972. The beauty and history of the region has in no small way influenced the nature of his work. Avalon has for more than 2000 years infused art with ancient stories and motifs. Beyond the Christian traditions there lies the still older pagan nature cults which even



Weekly kiln loads are pre-sold wholesale before they cool. Prior to his dependable following of shops, Peter travelled to street markets organized by the county's craft council's. These venues were useful in the early days to gain recognition and

to test out new ideas, colors and themes in different commercial areas. Then the quality of Peter's pagan motives attracted attention beyond Somerset. A dealer in Cape May, New Jersey has been importing his line for some years.



Myth and History

Peter says that functional pottery in Britain has a low profile, the exception being "art pottery" which appears in "glossy magazines" published by the craft guilds in London, accompanied by over intellectualized articles. As much as possible, Peter tries to express his relationship to myth and history and steers clear of trends and transient influences.

Peter's studio is in the back of his terrace cottage. It is fronted by the original moat that surrounds Wells and overlooks a lovely patchwork fields.

today hold sway.

" Herne the Hunter"

Peter has long been interested in Herne the Hunter, a hermaphroditic creature barely visible on the edge of the woodlands. This theme of tree- like shapes, suggesting sensual anthropomorphic female forms, is exquisitely expressed in his bronze sculptures, truly the soul of this man's work.

To accommodate the practical need of living and family, he gives reign to the "Green Man" idea in his well-made lines of bowls, plates and platters. They are memorable and distinctive, with tree shapes creating subtle faces and dancing forms in soft colors of creamy white engobes and copper cobalt oxides, fired quite high over a red earthenware body.

At 50 years of age Peter has matured beyond the earlier hunger for commercial recognition to be a man blissful in his second marriage, raising another family, surrounded by friends and being a very good original country Potter.

At the end of my conversations with Peter he emphasized that tending to his quality of life comes first and his pottery and sculpture comes second. He wants to get this right - for it has been a long journey for this man to obtain the values he now cherishes.

The Potters of Somerset

The Heritage of John Leach

by Susan Wintrop

This is the second of two articles on potters of Somerset, England, by Susan Wintrop, raku potter of Frankford, Ontario, who spent the summer of 1994 discovering them.

SOMERSET IS A COUNTY in South Western England rich in legend and natural beauty and home to several world-class potters.

My particular interest in pottery has been the life, work and philosophy of Shoji Hamada who, with Bernard Leach, began in a union of eastern and

John calls himself a country potter who does his own lines, unaffected by current public taste. He does not feel he is influencing the direction of pottery in England. But is he?

This "country potter" travels extensively on speaking engagements for which his favorite

western clay traditions at St. Ives, Cornwall at the turn of the century. Bernard's son David, carried on the Leach tradition, and it was in John Leach's studio (son of David) where I now stood.

John's home and pottery nestle in the tiny village of Muchelney which has stone cottages that are beautifully thatched. It's located in the dead center of nowhere, yet at 2 o'clock each afternoon when Muchelney Pottery shop opens to the public, people from all over the world drive in. As I did.

John is a hospitable bear of a man who took me on a tour of his facilities. He shares his studio with two potters, Nick Rees and Mark Melbourne. Postcards, drawings and posters covered every square inch of the massive walls, and kick wheels are anchored in front of the original wind-eyes (windows). Everywhere shelves bend under the weight of drying pitchers, bowls, plates and casseroles. It's a production pottery.



In another building, a large two-chamber brick kiln is being loaded and the cords of seasoned wood made ready. When full, the kiln is fired every 16 weeks or so, and it's a 24 hour stoking marathon which still excites everybody in the pottery even after years of routine.

The adjacent shop is a well-designed showcase for the work. Most sales are from the shop. Wholesale and mail orders provide the next largest number of sales.

I first saw John's work in the Heritage shop in Wells, Somerset. The effect was quite un-Leach-like to me. The lines were clean and contemporary. Here began and ended the enigmatic experience for me. I had the notion that the Leach tradition would be carried on by John but this expectation proved otherwise - or did it?

topics are integrity in one's work, and the avoidance of feeding trends.

While I did see a strong reflection of his family's style in John's work, he sees it as strongly derivative. Many years ago he met Hamada at a show in Chicago. When asked if he was touched by Hamada's philosophy, John laughed, patted his substantial stomach, and said "Hamada believes that you must 'eat' your work ... to believe in and follow what's coming from your gut inspiration. It is the true creative nourishment. And as you can see, I have done that!"



Now I was beginning to glimpse of the beneath John work as the river of his family's heritage, expressed in his own handling of clay.

Is the legacy continuing? John has five grown children, none of whom has turned a hand to clay professionally, but all helped in the studio as they grow up. He has encouraged their individualism and has seen them go their separate career ways.

Back in the shop, a bank of shelves caught my eye. The work is Nick Ree's. Here is Leach-Hamada reinterpreted beautifully, more delicately with softly colored orange-ash glazes. In these pieces I can see and feel the shapes issuing from Nick's hands with love and naturalness. The inspiration is obvious, but the tactic is soft and refined.

The apprentices/partners become the children of the older tradition. I am beginning to catch on now. Here is the meal, served and eaten by those far-reaching country potters, influencing unpretentiously, with a well-developed vision.