

CROSS CULTURAL INFLUENCES IN THE WORK
OF IAN GARRETT AND MAGDALENE ODUNDO.

By

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DECLARATION

This dissertation is the unaided work of the candidate. It has not been, nor is submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.

Alexa Jane Farina

Pietermaritzburg 2001

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Abstract

This thesis explores the ceramic work of Ian Garrett and Magdalene Odundo, in order to examine the manner in which two artists of opposite identity in terms of race, gender and global location, come to create art which is visually, technically and conceptually similar. It is the intention of this study to focus primarily on the cross-cultural aspect of the two artist's work. However, it has been necessary to include biographical and technical information as this information gives a more complete understanding of the cross-cultural issues involved.

Most of the information for this study has been gained through interviewing the artists. Copies of two interviews with Ian Garrett are appended at the back of this thesis. The interviews were conducted with Garrett in Cape Town. The first interview took place in 1998 and the second interview was conducted in the year 2000.

A week was spent with Magdalene Odundo in Surrey, England, during May 2000. In this time similar questions to those asked of Ian Garrett in October 2000 were put to Odundo. The interview was, however, conducted in a conversational form and was not recorded as Odundo finds recording an interview has the potential to be a limiting factor, preferring her work to remain open-ended.

This thesis discusses the broader implications of Garrett and Odundo's art. The study makes an attempt to situate their work globally, suggesting not only that their work plays

an active role in narrowing the boundaries which exist between African art and western art, but that it also plays a part in closing down the distinctions which continue to exist between art and craft. Finally, the thesis suggests that Garrett's and Odundo's art can be seen as a symbol of current cultural conditions and global affairs.

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INTRODUCTION

This study explores the ceramic work of Ian Garrett and Magdalene Odundo in the context of the phenomenon of cross-culturalism. Garrett is a white, South-African-born male, producing ceramic vessels in South Africa; Odundo is a black, Kenyan-born, female producing ceramic vessels in England. These two artists have been selected for cross-cultural analysis in this study because, even though they are at opposite poles in terms of race, gender and location, they create ceramic work, which is undeniably similar in form, content and technique.

The study aims to examine the work of Garrett and Odundo in detail, firstly, by considering among other things, the cultural interests that have influenced them and had an effect on their work, and secondly, by drawing conclusions about what their work has to say regarding the position of ceramic art today, both in terms of the art/craft distinction and the African / western art debate.

Much of the information in this study has been obtained through personal discussion with the two artists; copies of two interviews with Garrett are included as a postscript. Odundo however, was reluctant to be recorded on tape as she finds this limiting; her interview thus took the form of a conversation, no copy of which exists. The questions posed to Odundo were, however, similar to those put to Garrett in the interview that was conducted in Cape Town during October, 2000.

The study is set out in the following format. Chapter 1 briefly explains the meaning of terms such as post-modernism and post-colonialism, and provides a short account of past and present ceramic traditions, thus situating the work of Garrett and Odundo in its historical context.

Chapter 2 opens with a biography of Ian Garrett, after which Odundo's corresponding details are presented. Then follows a description of Garrett's work, given with reference to the illustrations and a detailed account of his ceramic technology. A review of

Odundo's work comes next, also made with reference to the illustrations, and Chapter 2 closes by describing her ceramic technology.

Chapter 3 deals with the origins, theoretical content and reception of Garrett and Odundo's ceramics. Garrett's work is discussed first and then Odundo's. An attempt is made to compile some major similarities and differences between the art of the two ceramists, and this concludes chapter 3.

Chapter 4 locates the art of Garrett and Odundo within its context, concluding to what degree it can be said to supply evidence of a universal global culture, break down the barriers between western and African art, and abolish the art/craft distinction.

Following Chapter 4 are the illustrations, which are referred to throughout the text. These are followed by a list of references. Copies of the interviews with Garrett are then appended; firstly, the interview conducted in 1998 and secondly, that conducted during October, 2000.

CHAPTER 1

Virtually all of Africa had been colonised by western powers by the early 1900's, resulting in the suppression of various indigenous people. Since the white colonisers formed the dominant power, the indigenous were severely marginalised and became the "silenced" other. Under European oppression they found themselves devoid of power in most spheres, though, by the early 1960s the majority of them had gained political independence.

The period after the achievement of independence is known as the post-colonial era. This age is not, as the term 'post' suggests, a time which is finished with colonialism and everything associated with it, but is instead a period when the power and presence of the coloniser has shifted. Post colonialism can be seen as referring not only to the period after western colonial domination, but also to the entire colonial process (Adam and Tiffin, 1991; vii-xv). It is, therefore, impossible to separate colonialism and post-colonialism, as the impact of colonialism is irreversible and has changed the course of history forever.

It was the initial aim of colonialism to consolidate boundaries, but, in fact, the movement had the reverse effect. Thus, it broke down borders (Gikandi, 1996; 19), mingling peoples from different continents and prompting them to interact and influence one another. Colonialism thus resulted in a meeting of ethnic traditions with the importation of new ideas from the west.

In the post-colonial era, however, a general interest and respect among the different races and cultures has tended to develop. These social changes have caused the meeting of western ideas and ethnic traditions to become at times a process of conscious mixing. Thus, many values that originally marked a disparity between the colonisers and their colonised subjects have since become the emblem of shared ideals in the post-colonial environment (Gikandi, 1996; 11-14).

It has been the tendency of most former colonies to reconstitute to their national identity while at the same time embracing what they have assimilated and consciously selected from the west, thereby combining their own ethnic traditions with western ideas to form a new hybrid identity. It was initially the colonial process, however, that set this interaction of different ideas, peoples and cultures in motion.

Post-modernism, like post-colonialism, has also had an effect in eliminating boundaries and moving countries towards a shared global identity. Post-modernism emerged in the 1960's as a European and American movement; it was (and still is) chiefly concerned with artistic and cultural practice, whereas post-colonialism was rather engaged in the greater historical and political arena (Adam and Tiffin, 1991; vii-xv).

Post-modernism is, however, also a movement concerned with giving a voice to the marginalised "other", and has played a role, too, in destroying the belief that western ideas, standards and lifestyles are of more worth, validity and importance than the values of marginalised groups.

The eradication of borders and geographical barriers by globalisation has also played an important part in liberating previously marginalised groups. Globalisation is the history of a growing engagement between the world's major civilisations: it can be said to have begun with sporadic encounters amongst the earliest civilizations (Held and McGrew, 2000; 47). It was, however, only in the late 1960's, and early 1970's that the term actually evolved, and there is still no generally accepted definition of it (Held and McGrew, 2000; 1).

The 20th century witnessed a wave of technological innovations in transport and communication that had a huge impact on global infrastructure. The development of transport, for example, liberated people from confinement to a single geographical locality and thus to one culture. The emergence of communication systems, again, such as radio, television, the internet, satellite and other digital technologies, has diffused information instantly, affording people in different corners of the world immediate and

constant contact with one another. Thus, what happens on one side of the globe has an instant result on the other side.

English, too, has emerged as a dominant language that is fast becoming universal, thereby creating a linguistic infrastructure for transmitting ideas and cultural values. As a result of these developments, people almost everywhere around the globe are continually being exposed to the values of other cultures; mutual understanding and interest are developing and barriers are falling away (Held and McGrew, 2000; 17).

The social changes that have occurred in most African countries due to post-colonialism and globalisation, combined with an awareness of the premises of post-modernism, have been reflected to some degree in most African art. Post-modernism has blurred the boundaries between high art and craft, having initiated a more diverse eclecticism that has blurred the distinction between art and artefact (Cruise, 1991; 13). So the boundaries between African art and western art, rural craft and fine art have begun to disintegrate. A shift has occurred not only in the art created by African artists, but likewise in the art produced by western artists. Taking England as an example, demographic shifts and fluctuations in power have caused English culture to be flooded by foreign influences (Armitage and Said, 1999; 6); and this trend has inevitably filtered down into every aspect of English life, including art.

Ceramic artists have embraced the idea of multi-culturalism in their art to a greater measure than their counterparts in the other visual arts, such as painting and printmaking. This could be a result of the fact that most cultures have produced ceramic work from earliest times. Vessels have most commonly been made for a combination of functional, ceremonial and decorative purposes. They are usually used to carry food and drink, but they often serve the further purpose of commemorating certain important ceremonies.

Ceramic vessels are also widely employed by a variety of cultures to hold the ashes of the dead. This is another example of how they are used to signify life's important rites of passage. Thus, ceramic vessels form an intrinsic part of the life and culture of the people

who produce them and they always show a tendency to embody cultural attributes more readily than the other art forms.

Ceramic work can be traced back to the earliest history of neolithic man, who left behind him pot shards and remnants of metallic tools as the earliest evidence of his existence. It is the permanence of fired clay which yields our clues to the earliest civilisations (Rawson, 1984; 6). Unlike the remnants of the first metallic tools that are not akin to anything in use today, the ceramic vessels of the past are not unlike those created in our time by a broad range of different cultural groups; these vessels betray strong cultural associations in that they link the past with the present and connect diverse cultural groups (Clark, 1995; 6).

In both east and west as in Africa, certain groups have engaged in ceramic production throughout their history; as already seen, ceramic work has always been a strong symbol of the culture from which it comes. Ceramic vessels show the specific idiosyncrasies of the culture responsible for their production and, at the same time, they relate their provenance to other cultures that use the same material to fulfil similar functions. Thus, ceramic work has always reflected the group which made it, while at the same time revealing its broader functional associations (Arnold, 1988; 1). In a world tending to multi-culturalism and universal globalisation, it is understandable that the ceramics of our time should betoken these influences.

The other visual art forms, such as painting, are more readily associated with western art practices. Western culture has in the past considered ceramics as a functional craft rather than as a high art form and ceramic production has only begun to gain artistic recognition *per se* in recent times. The exclusion of ceramics down the years has also featured in an observable tendency to confront the development of multi-culturalism and in a willingness to move away from the old western perceptions that once hampered ceramic artists.

Britain has been the dominant center of ceramics since the 17th century. Other European ceramists overshadowed pre-17th century British potters, although the rise of British industry brought about the rapid sophistication of the local potter's craft. Factories such as the ceramic concern of Wedgwood thus emerged and became world-famous for their industrial ware (Clark, 1995; 26). During the two centuries which followed the emergence of industry, Britain revolutionised the manner in which pottery was made, distributed and sold; the country thus became Europe's leading ceramic maker, a position it maintains to this day.

Ultimately, working with clay as a medium of artistic expression began little more than a century ago (Freestone and Gaimster, 1997; 206). Artist-potters, such as William de Morgan and the four Martin brothers, bridged the gap between industrial potters and contemporary studio potters. These artists were working at the time of the Arts and Crafts Movement, which emerged in 1888. In the wake of the Arts and Crafts Movement came a general aversion to industry in favour of a return to handmade crafts.

Ceramics is one of the most prominent of the hand-made crafts and was, thus, deeply influenced by the tenets of the Arts and Crafts Movement (Clark, 1995; 103). The era of the artist-potter was essentially over by 1920. From this point on, the studio potters began to emerge. Bernard Leach (1887-1979), who is often acknowledged as the father of modern studio pottery, set up his first English workshop at St Ives, Cornwall, in 1920 (Freestone and Gaimster, 1997; 207). Leach worked at St Ives with a team of potters, producing a range of tableware and individual pieces that were inexpensive and could be cheaply replaced.

Studio pottery can be split up into three main phases, the growth of the movement to the present covering about eighty years. Firstly the "traditionalists" emerged, running from about 1910 to 1960. People such as Bernard Leach, Michael Cardew and William Staite Murray marked this period, ceramists who had an interest in early Chinese stoneware and British slipware (Clark, 1995; 136-165).

The second group of studio potters were the “modernists”, a movement featuring ceramists such as Lucy Rie, Hans Coper and Ruth Duckworth. Adhering to a contemporary idiom, they flourished from about 1950 to 1970 (Clark, 1995; 166-191).

The third and final movement of studio potters, the “post-modernists”, appeared in the 1970s and survives down to the present (Clark, 1995; 192).

Contemporary studio potters enjoy artistic and technical freedom; they are not restricted by a dominant technology or by prevailing styles, but invent or use techniques and processes derived from any part of the world or from any historical period (Clark, 1995; 192-218).

Studio potters had, and continue to have, a tendency to look to the past for much of their inspiration: hence, the general revival of interest in handbuilding that has presently occurred. Handbuilding is a technique practised by the potters of the past, and by potters in rural communities who have no access to higher technology such as a potter’s wheel. Present-day studio ceramists tend to adopt making techniques, firing methods, and styles of the past and to combine these with their own ideas to form new work with its own hybrid character (Freestone and Gaimster, 1997; 206). It is only the work of the “post-modern” studio-potters that is truly valued for its artistic attributes and which embodies no pretensions towards necessity or function.

Ian Garrett and Magdalene Odundo are two contemporary ceramists whose work clearly shows the willingness of ceramic artists to embrace multi-culturalism, to create a global identity, and to make these trends visible in their work. Both these artists have attained this development for themselves by embracing techniques previously associated with ethnic traditions, and combining these with certain western art characteristics and perceptions to produce unique vessels, which are highly valued in an art world still dominated by western concerns. The western art tradition lays great store by work which is loaded with content, which can be displayed in a gallery, and which is “perfectly” finished.

CHAPTER 2

We have seen that Ian Garrett is South African born, that he is a white male producing ceramic vessels in South Africa; that Magdalene Odundo is a black female, that is Kenyan born, and that she produces ceramic vessels in England. Yet the art of Garrett and Odundo we have also noted, is visually and technically similar.

Thus, in accordance with the aims of this study, we must now explore the work of these two artists by showing how it is that, despite their very disparate identities, they nevertheless produce comparable art; and by considering what this implies about contemporary society. Let us start from a short biography of the two artists and then present an account of the ceramic technology employed by each.

A biographical overview of Ian Garrett

Ian Garrett was born in East London, South Africa, and has lived in South Africa all his life. He attended school in East London, where he first came into contact with clay at age 10, when ceramics was introduced into his school class. Garrett's affinity for clay was immediate and as a young boy he played a great deal with it, even going so far as to dig for his own (Interview, 1998; 1-2). After completing his schooling, he went on to obtain a BAFA degree from Rhodes University, majoring in sculpture. In 1993, he registered at Rhodes University for a masters degree in ceramic sculpture, prompted by his enduring love of clay. He found the course limiting, however, as it did not provide him with the technical knowledge he desired. In 1994, he began afresh at the University of Natal in order to obtain his masters degree, undertaking a course there, which focused solely on ceramics. He was thus able to receive the specialised training he sought (Interview, 2000; 3).

At this stage Garrett experimented widely with pit-firing and gas-firing techniques, perfecting methods of burnishing. He also tried different ways of smoke-firing and produced a thesis exploring the work of the rural Zulu ceramist, Nesta Nala. He finally

obtained his master's degree with distinction, retaining his fascination with the rural potters of KwaZulu-Natal and travelling extensively to record their methods of construction, burnishing and firing.

Garrett currently lives in Kalk Bay in the, Western Cape Province, where he has his own studio. His situation allows him to work independently, producing vessels for sale to galleries and private collectors. He has had numerous exhibitions and has won prestigious awards such as the 1995 regional A.P.S.A. exhibition. He was awarded an interesting second place at the 1995 Vita Craft exhibition (Interview, 2000; 5-6), which was won by the Zulu potter Nesta Nala mentioned above. Garrett teaches occasionally on a part-time basis and is presently engaged in running ceramic workshops from home, specialising in handbuilt low-fired burnished ware.

A biographical overview of Magdalene Odundo

Magdalene Odundo was born in Kenya. As a child she lived for a brief spell in India before going back to Kenya. On her return she went to school locally, attending institutions and growing up in the bigger cities of Kenya, such as Nairobi and Mombassa. Thus, she lived an urban life style in Kenya and studied at schools which were based on the British model. She first trained as a graphic artist in Kenya. In 1971, however, with the help of a sponsorship, she moved to England to continue her education in art (Berns, 1997; 1).

Odundo initially enrolled in a vocational course centred on graphic design at the Cambridge College of Art. The focus of the programme did not satisfy her, however, and she felt a strong need to pursue her innate affinity for clay. In 1973 she enrolled at the West Surrey College of Art and Design at Farnham, where she resolved to concentrate on ceramics and more specifically, on handbuilding and vessel-making (Berns, 1997; 3).

While still a student at the West Surrey College, Odundo enjoyed the enriching opportunity of visiting the Abuja centre in Nigeria. This was a potter's training school

established in the city of Abuja by the traditionalist English potter, Michael Cardew, who aspired to expose African ceramists to more advanced techniques, while at the same time nurturing their own ceramic abilities and styles (Berns, 1997; 3).

At the Abuja centre, Odundo was taught handbuilding by influential ceramists such as Ladi Kwali, who is discussed later in more detail. Ironically, it was there, too, in Africa, that she learned to throw clay on a wheel. In 1975 Odundo returned to Kenya to research her thesis entitled "A complete study of woman's pottery techniques and the use of ceremonial vessels in rites of passage".

Odundo completed her Bachelor of Arts degree in 1976, after which she chose to travel. During her journey she had the opportunity to observe such important ceramists as Maria Martinez (1887-1980), who was one of the most influential native-American potters ever known. Martinez was from San Ildefonso Pueblo, a community located 20 miles north-east of Santa Fe in New Mexico. She was responsible for reintroducing the art of pottery-making to her people who had previously produced low-fired, handbuilt functional ceramic ware and were renowned for their mixing of ancient traditions with Spanish emblems and English convenience (Frank and Harlow, 1990; 7). Odundo then returned to England to do a masters degree at the Royal College of Art in London, which she successfully completed in 1982 (Berns, 1997; 5).

Odundo now lives in Farnham, England, where she works independently from her studio at home, producing handbuilt vessels mostly for direct sale to galleries and private collectors. She thus avoids the large gallery commission generally levied on art works. She has had many solo exhibitions all over the world and has an international name. She teaches on a part-time basis at the Surrey Institute of Art and frequently travels internationally to share her expertise or take part in exhibitions. She is currently studying for a masters degree in philosophy.

The ceramic technology employed by Ian Garrett

We turn now to Garrett's ceramic technology. He produces simple, elegant vessels that are similar to one another in shape and vary only slightly in size or surface decoration. Fig. 1 is a typical item made by Garrett. The surfaces are decorated with incised patterns and are highly burnished, with subtle colour variations. The decorative designs on the surface of Garrett's vessels work rhythmically around the entire form, enhancing rather than detracting from its perfect symmetry and balance, as one expects from a decorated surface (Scott, 1995; 11). This effect is most likely due to the integration of the designs with the surface of the work, where the patterns appear as part of the vessel rather than as adhering to it, as is often the case with decorated ceramic work. When looking at Garrett's vessels, it is hard to believe that their symmetry has been achieved by hand, as they display almost flawless precision. They are similar in form to the Zulu beer vessels known as *ukhamba*; (this is discussed further in Chapter 3). The technical processes employed by Garrett will now be described.

Garrett works on two to three vessels at a time, which are similar in size and shape to each other. He uses smooth red earthenware clay, which he buys locally and which can be purchased throughout South Africa (Interview, 2000; 1). He occasionally kneads grog into the clay that he grinds himself from discarded vessels of his own, the grog giving the clay the advantage of further strength when handbuilding (Interview, 1998; 9).

Garrett uses a method of handbuilding to build his vessels, which is known as coil building. He begins the ceramic process by making a small ball of clay, which he then flattens into a disc-like shape, pinching up the edges slightly. He then rolls a coil between his palms, which is approximately 3cm thick, he adds the coil onto the disc and pinchers up the walls of the coil until it is approximately 8cm high. He then repeats the process by adding more coils of clay, smoothing the clay with home-made plastic scrapers as he progresses with the form, until he is satisfied with the size and shape of the new vessel (Interview, 2000; 1).

Once the vessel is leather-hard, Garrett surforms the rim and exterior to a uniform surface. The surform is a tool that serves to grate away a thin layer of clay; it is commonly used by ceramists to create even surfaces and to remove discrepancies. Garrett then scrapes the vessel down with a metal scraper until the clay is uniformly thick all over. He then re-wets the surface with a sponge and scrapes it smooth with a plastic scraper (re-wetting forms a thin layer of clay on the outside, which acts like a slip on the vessel's surface); he then smoothes the rim of the vessel with a strip of plastic (Interview, 2000; 2).

The vessel is now ready to have the patterns applied, which must be accomplished before the form dries any further and the clay becomes too hard and dry to work. Garrett uses a white mussel shell called the "perna-perna", which is found on the eastern Cape coast, to impress the little dots and lines into the clay. With the use of this shell he creates a complex, rhythmic, linear pattern which covers the vessel and (as noted) enhances its form (Interview, 1998; 9).

Once the patterns are applied, the vessel is ready for its first burnishing, which is a very time consuming, labour intensive process. He burnishes, firstly, the inside and the background of the designs with a tumbled agate pebble. Garrett then leaves the pot to dry completely before burnishing it again with vegetable oil so as to create the final sheen. At present Garrett occasionally applies an iron rich slip to the leather hard clay. This slip adds a further colour variation to the surface and it is a technique which Garrett is currently exploring further (Interview, 2000; 2-3).

Next, the vessel is fired. Garrett usually does an oxidation firing in an electric kiln, low-firing the work to a temperature of between 880 and 990 degrees Celsius - a relatively low temperature for clay (Interview, 2000; 3). This ensures that the burnished sheen is not diminished. Higher temperatures have the effect of destroying a burnished surface, leaving it dull and without a patina. Garrett has pit-fired work in the past, but due to certain limitations this is seldom possible (Interview, 1998; 9).

The oxidation firing produces a uniform orange surface which, left untouched, is rather lifeless: so Garrett frequently smoke-fires his vessels in order to give them a richer, more interesting surface. He smoke-fires works on a tripod and uses newspaper rather than grass or any other fuel, since newspaper burns cleanly and does not deposit resin on the surface of the vessel (Interview, 1998; 9). The longer a pot is smoke-fired, the darker its surface will be. In the past, Garrett has smothered a pit-firing, another technique commonly used by the Pueblo potters to produce a dark surface. The result is usually satin black with patches of a metallic sheen (Interview, 1998; 9).

The ceramic technology employed by Magdalene Odundo

We now turn to Odundo's ceramic technology. She makes undecorated vessel forms, which have a rhythmic grace and a very powerful, quiet presence even though they brim with energy as if they were objects caught in some static pose between movements. As Mala Berns says in her book *Ceramic Gestures*, "all her vessels are taut with the tension of frozen movement, tempting us with the possibility of sudden release" (Berns, 1997; 25).

Fig. 2 is a typical example of a vessel by Odundo. Her creations are mostly similar in size and shape, but never to the same extent that Garrett's tend to be. Each vessel has a strong sense of individuality, is markedly sculptural and usually has, as its basic elements, a large round body with a thinner, elongated neck and a larger flared opening. Many of Odundo's works have only slight, subtle variations from one another. For example, one neck may be a little extended beyond another, or may move at a somewhat different angle (Berns, 1997; 7). As can be seen in **Fig. 3**, however, Odundo does at times abandon more characteristic forms: this vessel tends to be more linear, having neither a big symmetrical belly nor a thin elongated neck with a large flared opening.

Odundo's vessel surfaces are smooth and without decoration, apart from the occasional nodule protruding like a nipple from the unbroken plane. In some instances, a few of these nodules run down the vessel like a spinal column (**Fig. 2 and Fig. 3**). The colour of

the surface of Odundo's work varies from an intense earthy orange to satiny black with a range of colours in-between. Some of Odundo's latest pieces are bigger than those she has produced before; they incline to be more cylindrical and are without the characteristic body, neck and lip of most of her earlier work, being instead somewhat like columns. She does, however, continue to make her more characteristic forms. **Fig. 4** shows a work that was made fairly recently.

Odundo, like Garrett, works on more than one piece at a time. She creates slowly in her search for perfection and she may spend months working on one piece, continually altering it until perfect harmony and balance are achieved.

Odundo uses a blend of two clays, which she discovered many years ago as a result of rigorous testing and experimentation (Berns, 1997; 7). She has searched for and found a clay mixture that has great flexibility and strength and is, thus, well suited to the handbuilding process. The clay is a mixture of 75% Etrurian marl, which is smooth red clay from Stoke-on-Trent, England, and 25% brick which is a sandy, yellow clay from southern England (Berns, 1997; 7).

Odundo like Garrett also uses a method of handbuilding, which can be broadly termed coil building. She starts her building process with a large ball of clay. Plunging a hand into the centre of the ball, from where she begins to push the clay out, she pulls up the sides while circling around the form (Blandino, 1998; 34-35). This manner of handbuilding resembles throwing on a wheel but is, of course, done much more slowly. It can be closely related to what Odundo learned from Ladi Kwali at the Abuja centre (this is discussed later on in more detail).

Odundo does this initial building process rapidly and with ease, using a coconut shell scraper to help achieve the curved profile of the vessel and to push out the clay into a rounded form, so creating volume and thinning the clay from the inside out. She then adds the coils onto a form of substantial size, pulling the shoulder of the pot around and adding more clay to form a narrower, elongated neck. Working on the neck is a much

slower process for Odundo, as it requires a greater level of concentration and finer work. She finally applies the attachments, whether they are nodules or handle-type shapes (Fig. 2) (Blandino, 1998; 34-35).

Once the vessels are leather-hard, Odundo begins the first of a sequence of burnishing processes; polishes the vessel all over with smooth pebbles before applying a slip of terra sigillata - a highly refined clay from which all sediments above one micron in size have been removed (Zakin, 1990; 109).

It should be added that larger sediments are removed from this terra sigillata by deflocculating the clay, that is to say by adding alkaline materials and water to the clay, which causes the slip to lose most of its viscosity and the larger, heavier particles to sink to the bottom of the container. This mixture of clay, water and alkaline material is then decanted, the fine particles are saved, and the heavier ones on the bottom of the container are discarded (Zakin, 1990; 113).

It is these finer particles of terra sigillata which Odundo applies to her vessels by firstly pouring it into the inside, and, when this has dried, by actually dipping the outside of the vessel into the container of terra sigillata. She then lightly burnishes the slip, as described above, to achieve the highly polished surface that she desires (Berns, 1997; 7).

There are many different formulas for creating terra sigillata; Odundo's specific type is made from a mixture of a red clay body (1500g), water (3500cl) and sodium hexametaphosphate (7,5g) (Blandino, 1998; 35).

Once the slip is burnished, the pot is ready for the first of what may become as many as four or five firings. The first firing is by oxidation, which is done in a gas kiln. Odundo fires her work to a relatively low temperature, the first firing being between 900 and 1080

degrees Celsius, and the subsequent firings between 700 and 800 degrees Celsius (Blandino, 1998; 35).

It is possibly the terra sigillata that allows Odundo to fire her vessels to a slightly higher temperature than one would usually do with burnished work. Under normal circumstances, when no slip is applied to the clay body, the burnish diminishes when temperatures over 950 degrees Celsius are reached. Possibly owing to the terra sigillata, however, Odundo is able to employ higher temperatures without losing the sheen of her burnished surface. These higher temperatures are desirable, since clay gains strength and resilience when subjected to heat.

After the first firing the bisque ware is a uniform orange in colour. Odundo then subjects the vessel to a reduction firing in order to darken and add interest to its surface. She does this by placing the vessel in a closed container called a saggar, which is usually made out of fired clay and is sealed to prevent oxygen from entering during the firing. The work is placed in the saggar, which is packed with wood chips and shavings that burn in the kiln. By placing her vessels in a saggar Odundo subjects her clay to an environment poor in oxygen, which causes the burning wood-chips to draw oxides from the clay itself, thus chemically altering it and turning it black (Berns, 1997; 9).

It is possible for Odundo to manipulate what happens in the saggar to a large extent, but random results are largely unavoidable when using this technique of firing. Odundo, however, likes to work with an element of chance, although she sometimes finds it necessary, as we have said, to fire some of her pieces four or five times in the saggar, until she is completely satisfied with the results (Berns, 1997; 9).

Odundo can achieve anything within the range of velvet, matte, or metallic black finish; she often leaves hints of red to shine through the black, thus adding elements of depth and greater richness to a surface. Some vessels are not reduced at all, as she prefers to leave them as uniform orange (Fig. 11).

Chapter 3

The origins, theoretical content and reception of Garrett and Odundo's work will now be discussed in further detail. It is in the nature of art that each work should speak of who the artist is and of the influences and influential events to which the artist has been exposed. Every artwork is, thus, autobiographical to a certain degree, whether in an abstract sense like the work of Garrett and Odundo, or whether in a more literal sense as with a self-portrait. Both Garrett and Odundo agree that what a person produces can only be the sum of their own experiences, whether as a result of direct experience through a primary activity or as the product of exposure to secondary sources such as books. Thus, if Magdalene Odundo had not undergone her extensive education in Britain, and if she was not a Kenyan woman, she would probably not have arrived at her highly individual style (Blandino, 1998; 31). It is equally unlikely that she would have been involved in creating highly refined sculptural vessels, which disclose both African and western traditions in her own idiosyncratic manner.

Similarly, if Ian Garrett were not a white South African male, and if he had not received the particular training that he did, he too would not have attained his own individual style, which is one of highly refined decorative vessels that have a rhythmic harmony and grace which speak so eloquently of Zulu tradition, while at the same time adhering to western perceptions of art and aesthetics.

Garrett and Odundo both confess to being highly eclectic people, allowing themselves to be receptive to the world surrounding them. They do not mimic what they see but are rather enriched and influenced by their external environment on a deeper level, absorbing influences and processing knowledge until it emerges again in a subconscious, unpretentious manner. Garrett and Odundo have both been exposed and enriched by African and western ways of life. They are both highly educated in Fine Art and more specifically ceramics. Thus, they are well aware of the context within which they are working and out of which they have come. As a result of their empowered, educated position, the choices which they make are conscious decisions prompted by an awareness

of the premises of post-modernism, post-colonialism and cultural globalisation; their choices are not an instinctive form of assimilation, as tends to occur among uneducated artists (Herskowits, 1958; 11).

The origins and content of Ian Garrett's work

Turning to the origins and content of Garrett's work, it is the interplay between personal "nuance" and historical reference which interests him most when it comes to making a vessel (Interview, 2000; 9). Garrett is not overly concerned with literal content in his forms; instead he is preoccupied with elements such as balance and harmony, resolution and equilibrium, and is involved with continually reinventing these aspects. It is the physical process of making the work which fascinates and drives him more than the other aspects involved in the production of an artwork; he is not as deeply concerned with such things as a direct search for aesthetic beauty, or a quest for a deeper level of personal content; it is the physical process of making the piece which holds his fascination and consumes him most intensely. He believes that aesthetic beauty is not a preconceived end-point but rather arises from the process of making (Interview, 2000; 9).

Garrett sees his work as being a part of the international studio-ceramic tradition and, more specifically, as playing a part in the "handbuilding revival". The tendency of "post-modern" studio potters to revert to the handbuilding traditions of the past, and those used by the potters of rural communities, was discussed in Chapter 1. Garrett has identified himself with this resurgence of handbuilding and believes that if his work is to be categorised, this is the category of potters to which he belongs. He thus groups himself with the studio potters, such as among others Elizabeth Fritsch (Interview, 2000; 9). Fritsch was one of the first pioneers of the handbuilding revival in England and is considered to be one of England's most important and influential ceramists (Rice and Growings, 1989; 158-159). Garrett, of course, also aligns himself with ceramists such as Magdalene Odundo, who have clearly played an important role in the revival of handbuilding and past ceramic traditions and who are presently internationally influential ceramists (Rice and Growings, 1989; 214).

There are numerous other artists such as Gabriele Kock who can be seen as belonging to the contemporary studio-pottery tradition and more specifically to the handbuilding revival (Kock is briefly discussed later in this study).

The method of handbuilding which Garrett follows (already discussed in detail) is a common construction technique used frequently by rural ceramists around the world and is mostly used by communities for producing functional and ceremonial ware. Finding “strandlooper” pottery shards on the eastern Cape coast sparked off Garrett’s initial interest in handbuilding and the rural cultures that practise handbuilding. He found these “strandlooper” shards when he was a youngster (Interview, 1998; 1); it is not known whether they belonged to the Khoi people or were in fact remnants from the early ancestors of the Xhosa (Interview, 1998; 1). They sparked Garrett’s initial interest in handbuilding, however, and in the numerous cultures which make use of it. As mentioned earlier, Garrett, as a schoolboy, was keenly interested in finding his own clay and firing his own work without the use of a kiln. He lacked facilities as a youngster to practise any other form of ceramics, as it would have demanded more advanced technology (Interview, 1998; 1). Such disadvantages aside, however, he was initially attracted by the completeness of his chosen process and it duly became his preferred method of working with clay. Thus, he was intrigued by pit-firing, which combined with his archaeological interest in the “strandlooper” shards, encouraged him to explore cultures that practise handbuilding and the techniques which it entails.

Garrett is now fascinated by a diverse range of cultures, most (but not all) of which are from southern Africa; he has the deepest interest in these groups, since it is with them that he can enjoy the most direct contact. Thus, he shows a particular regard for Zulu, Sotho, and Venda ceramics, all of which spring from southern Africa. Their methods of construction, and the different firing processes they employ, preoccupy him deeply. He is also fascinated by the work of the Pueblo potters of the south western USA and Mexico. Their pattern construction and pit-firing techniques engross him (Interview, 2000; 6).

Garrett relies on books for most of his information and stimulation; they are the source from which he has learnt about, and become intrigued by, Yang Shao Chinese pottery, and iron age European, Etruscan, Mindao and Cypriot ceramics (Interview, 2000; 6). He also keeps abreast of contemporary ceramists at work throughout the world and is drawn to and inspired by the ceramics of Alev Siesbye and Gabriele Kock (Interview, 1998; 8).

Alev Siesbye is a Danish artist of Turkish origin who produces simple, functional, classical work which is carefully scraped down and finished. Garrett admires this work as it is work which draws from the roots of the ceramic tradition (Interview, 1998, 8).

Gabriele Kock is an English ceramist who grew up in the Black Forest on the Swiss/French border of Germany. Kock spent time in Spain and was deeply influenced by Spanish terracotta cooking-pots. Now Kock lives and works in England producing highly burnished, dramatically smoke-fired work (Perryman, 1995; 51-55). It is the technical aspects of Kock's work that Garrett relates to and that sustains his curiosity.

Garrett's cultural tastes are not limited to ceramics; he is also deeply interested in and inspired by African music, the rhythm of which is to a certain extent conveyed in the decorative aspects of his work. Garrett's interest in African music extends beyond one group of people, as he says it encompasses the whole continent, but is specifically focused on Zimbabwean rhythms (Interview, 1998; 5).

It is the Zulu ceramic tradition which has, however, had the profoundest impact on Garrett, perhaps because the Zulu people of South Africa are particularly well known for their finely made, distinctive ceramic vessels. They are also the people with whom Garrett has had the closest contact (Interview, 1998; 1).

While doing his masters degree at the University of Natal, Garrett was appointed a field assistant to his two supervisors at the Centre for Visual Art, Juliet Armstrong and Ian Calder, who were researching Zulu ceramics at the time (Interview, 1998; 1). Garrett

was, thus, able to visit many Zulu homesteads in the area, including the Magwaza family who live in the umPabalane district north of the Tugela River (Armstrong, 41; 1998).

He also made numerous calls on Nesta Nala's family who live deep in the Tugela valley (Garrett, 47; 1998). Garrett paid less frequent visits to other Zulu families involved in the making of sorghum-beer vessels; and made many trips to the Mona market north of Nongoma where such vessels are usually for sale. Thus, Garrett was able to observe at first hand the different methods of construction and the firing styles employed by Zulu potters, from whom he took further time to learn the processes and techniques directly.

On first inspection Garrett's vessel forms (Fig. 1 and 5) are similar in shape and size, as already noted, and closely resemble the vessel forms made by the Zulu ceramists, which are known as *ukhamba* (Fig.6). The Zulu vessels are all associated with the drinking of sorghum beer, which is called *utshwala* and is made by the Zulu-speaking people (Armstrong, 1998; 41). The Zulu ceramists (who are all female) make vessels of a variety of different sizes and shapes to facilitate drinking sorghum beer. The smallest vessel is called the *umancishane*, the largest vessel is known as the *imbiza* and the medium-sized vessel is termed the *ukhamba*. The Zulu ceramists also make what is called an *uphiso*, a vessel unlike the others in that it has a neck to prevent spillage of the beer (Garrett, 1998; 44). The Zulu ceramists create work for domestic use within the homestead; for sale to other surrounding Zulu homesteads; and for disposal to tourists (Calder, 1998; 61).

The sorghum beer is mixed with millet and is, thus, a good and valuable source of nutrition for rural Zulu people (Armstrong, 1998; 41). Not only is the beer valued as a source of nutrition but it also serves as an important element in the everyday social and ritual contexts of Zulu rural living (Armstrong, 1998; 41). It is consumed at Zulu rituals and festivals, playing an important role in rites of passage such as births, marriages, deaths, coming of age ceremonies and other formalities (Armstrong, 1998; 41). At these rituals and festivals sorghum beer is not there simply to be enjoyed, but further serves a functional role in the Zulu people's spiritual beliefs being used to commemorate the Zulu ancestral spirits who are collectively called *amadlozi* (Garrett, 1997; 8).

After burnishing their vessels with worn river pebbles that have been tumbled smooth in the waters from which they come, the Zulu ceramists fire their work in an open area without any semblance of a kiln, using dried aloe or *umthomboti* wood as fuel (Wissing, 1996; 33). The type of crops and vegetation in the area naturally dictates the fuel that is used by rural African ceramists. The Zulu potters find the aloes and *umthomboti* trees that grow within their area to be the most effective source of fuel, as both these forms of vegetation create hot temperatures of approximately 890 degrees Celsius when burning (this was observed by the writer while on a field trip with the University of Natal, during which a portable pyrometer was used to gauge the temperature).

The duration of the Zulu ceramist's firing, and of African firing processes in general, is very short; it lasts only a couple of hours as compared with the European, American or Oriental process, which usually takes at least a day. It is not possible for the Zulu potters to reach temperatures much higher than 900 degrees Celsius with this manner of firing their work (personal obs.). This temperature, however, is high enough to chemically bond the clay and expel the molecular water that cannot be removed by simply drying the clay.

Clay undergoes two basic stages in firing, namely, dehydration and vitrification. At 350 degrees Celsius molecular water is driven off the clay and beyond this point vitrification takes place. The process of dehydration is essentially complete by 500 degrees Celsius. Beyond this temperature the molecules of silica and alumina in the clay body begin to collapse together and fill the spaces left by the water that has been expelled. A relatively firm bond is thus created, giving the clay hardness and strength, so that it will no longer chemically absorb water and can never return to its original plastic state. The low firing temperature of 500 degrees Celsius, however, results in the vessels remaining fragile and porous even after firing, whereas higher temperatures produce further vitrification, causing the clay to lose its porous quality and become harder and more brittle (Hamer, 1975; 127-132). African potters do not fire their work to a low temperature merely out of ignorance or lack of fuel. Rather they are aware of the fact that low-fired clay offers

optimum tolerance to thermal shock and that its porous quality is beneficial, as will be discussed later (Garrett, 1997; 8).

After the initial firing process, most of the vessels are subjected to a second firing in order to blacken them. The Zulu ceramists use thatch grass, wood or (on some occasions) old rubber shoe-soles to create a smoky fire which carbonises the vessels and turns their surfaces black (Armstrong, 1998; 43). The blackened vessel is then rubbed with beef fat to create more sheen (Garrett, 1998; 44). It is the Zulu belief that the blackness of the vessel makes it accessible to *amadlozi* (Garrett, 1998; 44). The Zulu ceramists do not always bother to blacken the vessels which they make for sale to tourists, as it is not necessary for the *amadlozi* to have access to such items (personal obs).

The sorghum-beer vessels serve their functional role very effectively, because they are low-fired. This low firing, as noted, results in the clay retaining a slightly porous quality, allowing for slight absorption through the walls of the vessel. This in turn facilitates evaporation and the beer is kept cool. The walls of the vessel are also said to enhance flavour (Garrett, 1997; 9).

The Zulu vessels are usually stored on the floor of the homestead; hence their decoration is intended to be viewed from above. The decorative motifs, apart from adornment, also facilitate a firmer grip when the vessel is picked up, and are thus usually confined to the broad band around the shoulder of the pot (Armstrong, 1998; 42).

The Zulu potters respond dynamically to continually changing social circumstances (Calder, 1998; 62). This is evident in the decorations which they create on their beer vessels. The members within different family groups usually adhere to similar decorations. For example, the Magwaza family tend to create geometric motifs, while the Nala family increasingly use figurative imagery such as playing cards, fish, shields and houses (Garrett, 1998; 47).

This use of figurative motifs is seldom seen on conventional beer-vessels and is an example of how the Zulu ceramists consistently modify their vessels to suit their

customer demands. The Zulu potters make use of raised, incised, impressed, applied and imprinted textures as styles of decoration (Garrett, 1998; 48)

Although Garrett's vessels resemble the *ukhamba* in their basic form, there are substantial differences between the two types. Garrett's vessels are not intended to be functional at all; he enjoys the fact that they could be, but it is not with this consideration in mind that he works (Interview, 1998; 8). His vessels are instead produced for a fine-art market, and it is, therefore, his intention that they should be seen carefully displayed in galleries and collection-type settings. Garrett's vessels break boundaries, which is a typical characteristic of most western art practices (Scott, 1997; 11). He pushes the medium and the proportions of his vessels to the limit, in matters of size, fragility, refinement and burnish (Scott, 1997; 11).

This tendency to exploit extremes is not a consideration of the rural African potters, as such expedients do not necessarily add to the functional efficiency or immediate aesthetic appeal of ceramic vessels. The rural potters, thus, have no reason for taking the added risk of manipulating clay to its limits, since it is the functionality of the artefact that is of primary concern to them (Schmalenbach, 1988; 9-24).

Structurally Garrett's forms differ from the traditional *ukhamba* in that the feet are narrower, the shoulders wider, and the necks short and slightly concave (Scott, 1997; 11).

Galleries usually display their exhibitions at eye level, as is intended for Garrett's work; the decorative patterns he applies are meant to be viewed at that height. His surface designs are elaborate and well thought out so as to appeal to western perceptions of beauty, grace and harmony (Interview, 1998; 10). The art market for which he works puts great store on the finish and perfection of art objects; thus his forms are impeccably complete and appear perfectly made and "polished". Garrett would at times like to make less finely finished, less perfect work, but he feels compelled to maintain the level of exactness which one sees in his work, in order to maintain his position in the market (Interview, 1998; 10). His art is, consequently, ridged and controlled, exactly and laboriously worked, unlike the work of rural potters.

The reception of Ian Garrett's work

The reception of Garrett's work has entailed criticism from certain people; for example, the art critic Suzette Eglinton-Munnik for drawing too heavily on a culture which is not his own. Munnik accused him of making glamorised reproductions of the "real thing"-her reality being "authentic" African pots made by rural black people. Garrett is, however, by no means trying to emulate or exploit the Zulu tradition; he does not appropriate their decorative and aesthetic qualities; as noted, his interest is rather in the process and the technology employed by the Zulu speaking people. The result is a body of work that shares certain qualities with the work of Zulu potters. Garrett has used the Zulu ceramic tradition as a point of learning and cultural enrichment rather than as a source of imitation or assimilation; he has learned from the Zulu tradition of vessel-making just as he has learned from reading about the design and pit-firing techniques of the Pueblo potters: and he has likewise been enriched by the rhythms of local African music.

Garrett's response to criticism like Munnik's is that he is happy to have his work pose challenges and provoke questions about what belongs to whom; he feels that these are important, thought provoking themes that need to be confronted. He believes, further, that just as a Zulu speaking person has the right to make a teapot, so he, Garrett, is entitled to make a beer pot (an *ukhamba*), if that is what pleases. Garrett, however, as we have noted, neither sees his vessels nor intends them to be seen as drinking pots at all. (Interview, 1998; 8)

The reception of Garrett's work has in general been good; as can be seen, for example, in a review by Lindsay Scott which appeared in the 1997 June addition of Natural Ceramics Quarterly. In this article Scott has recognised Garrett for his mastery of form and design and for the interesting questions that his work provokes regarding cultural complexity in ceramic art. Garrett has received other favourable reviews, such as an article by Dan Cook, "Going Batty Over Pots", which appeared in the September 27 issue of the Sunday

Tribune in 1998. Garrett is thus highly esteemed nationally for his status as a ceramist and has exhibited widely in South Africa.

Garrett's work is included in most exhibitions of contemporary South African art; it is interesting to note that in certain circumstances he is classed as a truly "African" potter, while in others he is excluded from this category. Fairly recently, for example, he was chosen to represent the country at a convention of African craft practitioners taking place on the Ivory Coast. He was very pleased with the opportunity to represent the country as an African ceramist; he believes that exhibitions of African art are frequently mistaken as exhibitions by black artists only; that too often "African" and "black" are taken to mean the same thing. This view of African art excludes white people who are "African" in the sense that they have been born and raised in Africa. Garrett believes that the exclusion of these people is a mistake; they cannot be termed anything but "African" and they contribute to form a part of what is contemporary African life (Interview, 2000; 8).

Garrett's work is not particularly well known on the international art scene. He has taken part in international group exhibitions, at which he represented South Africa, yet he has struggled to have solo exhibitions abroad. He believes that the British art scene is a particularly exclusive one and very hard to break into. (Interview, 2000; 6). He has found, however, that there is a demand for his work among European interior decorators. He is unhappy with this development, as he does not wish his creations to become simply objects of design devoid of all intellectual content.

The origins and content of Magdalene Odundo's work

As to the origins and content of Odundo's work, she like Garrett, is also searching relentlessly for the "perfect" vessel: a form with perfect harmony, perfect symmetry, perfect balance. It is the formal aspect of her work that consumes her, but this is not the

only dimension to her preoccupation. Odundo's forms are rich in content; in a subtle abstract way they speak clearly of who she is, where she has been and what fascinates her. As she is so intriguingly located globally and has such diverse cultural interests, the content of her art is absorbing and highly relevant, as will appear later in this study.

Odundo's vessels tend towards pure abstraction; thus, the content is not literal and may not be immediately apparent to all. She wishes her work to be read on its own terms and is, thus, unconcerned about the content being variable. She is well aware (and content) that some people may see things in her work that she herself overlooks, and that others will miss what she perceives. Odundo does, however, hope that all her viewers will see the energy embodied in the interaction between shape, colour, texture and detail which occurs in her work; she aspires to stir emotion in the viewer, of whatever kind it may be (Berns, 1997; 25).

Visually, Odundo's work is filled with power and tension, which accounts in part for the numerous contradictions implicit within it. The vessels are at once quiet and brimming with movement and energy; they are extremely austere, yet at the same time powerfully sensual; they could be used functionally, yet they are pure abstract form (Blandino, 1998; 31).

Odundo uses the vessels as a painter might use a canvas, leading the viewer's eye in and out and around the work as if it were a two-dimensional piece (Berns, 1997; 7). She employs the nodules mentioned previously to add tension to the vessel and to help direct the viewer's gaze on its journey around the work, the nodules protruding at unexpected points from its silky, undecorated surface (Fig. 2, 3 and 4). Odundo's surfaces remain unpatterned, as she does not want anything to distract unnecessarily from the simplicity and sculptural form of her pieces. It is possibly a combination of this simplicity and innate tension that gives her work its powerful impact, as suggested above (Blandino, 1998; 31).

Odundo, as noted, like Garrett, makes use of a handbuilding technique that is commonly used by many rural ceramists. The two artists' building methods do, however, differ considerably in so far as they learned their specific manner of handbuilding from different rural cultures. Garrett, as noted, assimilates his handbuilding techniques from the traditions of southern Africa, whereas, Odundo's manner of building derived most closely from the methods employed by certain rural communities in West Africa. (The origins of Odundo's building method will be discussed in further detail later).

Odundo, like Garrett, is fascinated by the ceramic work produced by ancient and rural societies. Her interest in anthropological and ethnographic material was sparked off when she initially arrived in England. In Cambridge she had access to large well-equipped museums and libraries and it was here, at the Centre for African Art, that her specific interest in African art, and in African culture generally, was further developed (Berns, 1997; 1). Later, while visiting the pottery training school in Abuja, she was taught handbuilding by the world-renowned ceramist Ladi Kwali and other Gwari women potters. She spent three months at the Abuja centre in 1974, which, as noted, was started by Michael Cardew in the 1950's. Cardew introduced the potter's wheel, high temperature firing, and glazing to the pupils at the centre. Odundo learned various techniques while in Abuja, although it was ultimately the handbuilding techniques passed down by Ladi Kwali and the other Gwari women potters which proved to be her most valuable and influential acquisition (Berns, 1997; 3).

Odundo's work, however, cannot simply be classified as deriving from handbuilt West African pots; its references and cultural complexities are far too numerous for such neat arrangements. Like the vessels of Garrett, the content and purpose of her art is very different from that of functional African vessels.

Rosemary Hill implies in the catalogue New Works: Magdalene Odundo that Odundo's work appears to come from everywhere, yet at the same time from nowhere (Hill, 1987;

8). This is perhaps the statement that most effectively sums up Odundo's work. She has been exposed to so many different ways of life and is interested in such varied aspects of the world, both historical and contemporary, that all of this has become manifest in her work.

She does not, however, simply copy or repeat what influences or inspires her: her art is utterly unique. Thus, it speaks her own hybrid language, echoing at once all that is old and all that is wholly new, and so appears to come from everywhere, but at the same time from nowhere, as Hill points out.

Odundo is fascinated by, and has absorbed, the methods of a number of diverse sources. Some of her interests include the ways of the pre-Colombian potters, the techniques of British vessel-making, some of the traditions of Pueblo potters, the ceramic modes of the American South West, the ways employed by 20th-century sub-Saharan African potters, and some of those devised by the potters of ancient Greece and Rome (Blandino, 1998; 31-33). Odundo also holds a more specific interest in particular art objects from history, such as the "earring" figures of ancient Cyprus, the geometry of Cycladic figures, the elegant contours and precise details of Attic vases, the heaviness and energy embodied in the pots from Jomon Japan, the graphite-polished pots made by the Ganda of Uganda, the decorated vessels of the Nupe of Nigeria and the gourd-shaped pots made by the Pokot of Kenya (Berns, 1997; 11).

Odundo is also fascinated by non-ceramic work, for example, the masks that are made by certain African groups for ritual purposes. She also has an interest in metalwork in general and specifically in African metalwork. In 1995 she curated an exhibition entitled "African Metalwork", which was organised by the British Crafts Council and housed in their gallery in London.

Odundo admires the work of some of the modernist sculptors such as Brancusi, Arp and Gaudier Brzeska (Bern 1997; 13). Due to Odundo's location in England, which is today one of the most central, active and dominant areas of contemporary art and more specifically ceramics, she is able to keep well abreast of the current art scene. She has great admiration for the work of some of her contemporary ceramists and is at present particularly enchanted by the work of Gwyn Hanssen Pigott (personal obs).

Gwyn Hanssen Pigott is an Australian ceramist who has worked both in France and England (de Waal, 2000; 1). Her work is presently much sought after in England. Pigott at present produces a range of mug, bottle, and bowl like forms, which she arranges and groups together so as to form one piece out of multiple objects. She arranges her ceramic mugs, bottles and bowls almost like a painter would arrange a still life. The bowls, mugs and bottles are glazed in very subtle shades of greys, blues, pinks and yellows. The colour of the glazes is not at all dominant, at first glance there appears to be more of a tonal difference caused by the effect of light and shadow rather than by the effect of difference (de Waal, 2000; 1). Thus, one is reminded of the tonal differences that would be found in a drawing and in this manner Pigott makes further reference to two-dimensional work. Odundo admires the subtle perfection in Pigott's work and the manner in which Pigott manages to say so much and question the distinction between two-dimensional and three-dimensional work without losing contact with the roots of the ceramic tradition in which she is working.

When one observes the form of Odundo's work, it is possible to see traces of most of the foregoing cultural interests, although at times there may be just a semblance. For example, if we observe **Figs. 2, 3, 4 and 11** of Odundo's work and then look at **Fig. 7, 8, 9 and 10** showing work from a diverse group of cultures - Jomon Japan (**Fig. 7**), the Pueblo Indians (**Fig. 8**), the ancient Greeks (**Fig. 9**), the rural Kenyans (**Fig. 10**) - it becomes clear that something similar exists between the work of these ceramists and the art of Odundo, even though it may be no more definable than an essence.

As mentioned, the technique that Odundo uses to build her work can be closely related to that of the Gwari women of Nigeria; it has been fully discussed in Chapter 2. The method of pulling up the clay as if throwing on a slow wheel by circling around the form and working the clay rhythmically with the fingers is used widely in West Africa (Barley, 1994; 24-32). The Ashanti of Ghana, the Fon of Dahomey, the Gwari of Nigeria, the Nupe of Nigeria and the Mo of Ghana all practise a form of this 'pulling' technique. It has many variations, but it is only the Gwari women who start with a large ball of clay (as Odundo learnt from Ladi Kwali) and plunge their fist into the centre of the ball in order to start pulling. The Gwari women thus pull the entire pot up from the bottom, the ball of clay forming the base of the vessel. The women use a piece of corncob, broken calabash, or carved wood with a rounded edge to smooth, consolidate and remove the excess surface of the vessel and they finally smooth the rim with a piece of cloth or hide (Barley, 1994; 24-45). Odundo too uses a piece of cloth to create a rounded, smooth edge on the lip of her vessels (Personal obs).

The surfaces of Odundo's vessels have numerous associations with past ceramic traditions. The colouring at times resembles the red surface of work made by the ancient Greek potters. Other vessel surfaces resemble the polished black surface of some of the work made by the Pueblo potters. The burnished sheen of the surface often recalls the pots of African ceramists, who frequently use burnishing as a functional aid to seal their vessels, rather than to enhance their aesthetic quality, as Odundo does with her work.

The slip terra sigillata described previously, which Odundo applies to her work, is rich in historical links. It was first used by the Romans of Arrezzo early in the first millennium A.D. (Berns, 1997; 9). Terra sigillata has been used extensively by the potters of the past, including the ancient ceramists of Corinth and Athens, the Etruscans and the Romans, and the Colombian potters of the New World (Zakin, 1990; 109). At the beginning of the 20th century, there was a great interest in classical Greek pots; this encouraged ceramists to strive to duplicate these vessels as well as the techniques that their makers employed.

Scientists rediscovered a way of making terra sigillata in the late 1920s and early 1930s, and it is now used frequently by many contemporary ceramists (Zakin, 1990; 109).

Odundo also has an interest in the organic world: she is fascinated by both human and organic movement; her sketchbook is filled not only with drawings of vessels, but also contains numerous sketches of organic forms such as plants (Hill, 1987; 8-9). Odundo maintains a particular interest in women's clothing and the restrictions which it imposes on the wearer. She has observed women's clothing, ranging from the dresses of 16th century Europe to the head-dresses of the Mangbetu women of north-eastern Zaire (Berns, 1997; 18). Both categories tightly bind the body, altering its shape and restricting its form, and thus create a visible external tension. In the case of the 16th century woman it is the waist that is particularly constricted, in order to over-emphasize the woman's form and shape. In the case of the Mangbetu women, the head is very tightly bound so as to obtain what is considered by them to be a desirable outward appearance. Indeed, the head is often so tautly constricted that its shape becomes permanently altered and deformed. Odundo is particularly interested in the way women, throughout a range of different cultures, feel compelled to alter their body shapes, often by undergoing what is drastic and physically painful (Berns, 1997; 17).

So Odundo is also intrigued by the elongated, emaciated forms of fashion models who often sustain a diet verging on starvation in order to "keep their figures". She relates the fashion models' shape to many of the elongated necks of her pieces, using their thin bodies as a source of inspiration (Berns, 1997; 17), as can be seen in **Fig. 11**.

Odundo is also interested in the functional biology of women's bodies. The idea of containment is very important to her (Hill, 1987; 10), and relates, on the one hand to her interest in and fascination with the female body, which can of course be seen as the container of new life. On the other hand, containment also recalls the ritual vessels of her native Kenya, in which it assumes a central role (Armitage and Said, 1999; 2).

As already mentioned, many vessels from a vast range of cultures serve the purpose of funerary urns. Thus, life is enclosed in its earliest state as a foetus in the womb - the vessel of a woman's body - and similarly is held in its final state, as funerary ashes, in a ceramic container. Thus, the enfolding of life is circular and the vessel form marks the beginning and the end of the journey from birth to death.

Odundo expresses concern, however, about being classified as a feminist artist, as this is not her intention or wish. She sees her work as a celebration, if anything, of women and their bodies and is not concerned to adopt a political stance on the position of women.

The reception of Magdalene Odundo's work

The reception of Odundo's work in general has been excellent. She is valued internationally as one of today's eminent ceramists and is constantly invited to exhibit throughout the world. She is in the interesting position of being classified both as one of Britain's leading ceramists and as one of Africa's, too, a distinction which she finds vexing.

Odundo's work is hailed by most for its aesthetic beauty, its masterly skill, its uniqueness and cultural complexity. Odundo is content with this reception of her art. She is, however, displeased that her work is too often classed as "African art" and is included in exhibitions of "authentic African art". The Brooklyn Museum of Art in New York, for example, has one of her vessels on display in the African art section, and the British Museum houses another in the Department of Medieval and Later Antiquities (Barker, 1999; 150). Although classification as an "African" artist does allow Odundo entry into these bigger museums, it is not in this category that she thinks her work belongs. People too often presume that because she is black her work is uniquely African. This is a

mistake, as Odundo sees herself as a global person, remarking: "I will only draw from Africa if it suits me in my quest for perfect simplicity, for natural forms".

Odundo is now an English citizen living an English lifestyle away from Africa and, as noted, her response to African and other ceramic traditions is highly personal and innovative (Barker, 1999; 149). Her inclusion in books such as The Potter's Art by Garth Clark a work on English ceramists is perhaps a realistic assessment of her art, as it is there taken for the contemporary expression which it is and is examined within its global context.

Similarities and differences that occur between the work of Ian Garrett and Magdalene Odundo

It has been seen that Ian Garrett and Magdalene Odundo produce art that shows numerous similarities. This is not to say that their work is the same, as it clearly betrays a host of differences, both formal and conceptual; both artists do, however, create an undeniably similar type of art.

Firstly, each is involved in making vessels, a centuries-old occupation historically associated with women potters in both western and African cultures (Armitage and Said, 1999; 18). Secondly, both handbuild their work, burnishing it highly, and both fire it at low temperatures; it can, thus, be said that technically they work in a similar manner.

Again, both artists are engaged in a search for the perfect vessel and adhere rigorously to a single mode of working, with only slight variations on their previous pieces. This unwavering application is more closely akin to an African than to a western method of working. Western artists tend to perfect a mode, then discard it and progress to another

(Vogel, 1991; 21). Then too, both artists make work, which pushes their clay medium to its physical limits of refinement and proportion; as noted previously, this characteristic is in conformity with western rather than with African techniques of working.

Garrett and Odundo's work is devoid of pretensions towards functionality; they actively take the medium to its limits, enriching the content and cultural complexity of their pieces. The result is that both artists are actually breaking the boundaries that have existed, and continue to exist, between craft and art production and which have hampered ceramists in the past. They make ceramic work having craft competency on the one hand, and, on the other hand, give creative expression to their medium as fine art; they make vessels that have the potential to be functional, but which are valued as, and intended to be, objects of aesthetic beauty and abstract expression devoid of functionality. Finally and most important, each artist makes art which subtly affirms African as well as western traditions.

Garrett and Odundo's work differs in that Odundo's forms are more sculptural and innovative than Garrett's, whereas Garrett also focuses more on the decorative quality of his surfaces (**Fig. 2** as compared to **Fig.1**). Their building techniques (although both practise handbuilding) differ slightly, as already mentioned. Garrett draws mostly on the building employed by potters in southern Africa, whereas Odundo relies mainly on the building used by certain West African potters. Inevitably, there is also a difference in the other sources that interest and inspire the two artists and, this too, is evident in their work. Odundo perhaps draws on a wider range of interests than Garrett's. So, both ceramists create distinctively in a highly personal manner and their work naturally differs in this regard as well. They produce individualised work, speaking not only of what they have experienced outwardly, but also of their inward personality and temperament.

CHAPTER 4

Conclusion

Garrett and Odundo are well educated in the field of fine art and are correspondingly attuned to the cultural complexity of their work and the implications behind it. They are also well aware of the distinction between art and craft and of the fact, that ceramic work has been and still is regularly classed as craft. Thus, they are sensitive to the fact that their own work plays an important role in elevating the position of ceramics from craft to a fine art and similarly realise that their work plays a part in narrowing the boundaries, which continue to exist between African art and western art.

First and foremost, however, Garrett and Odundo are both concerned with the joy and pleasure that they derive from the process of making. They are absorbed in a search for perfection of form and are fascinated by the achievement of abstract elements such as rhythm, balance, and harmony in their pieces. They do not create primarily to make a social comment, nor is their main aim to actively elevate the status of ceramic work from craft to fine art. They are keenly aware of the questions that their work provokes by virtue of its reflective theoretical content. They also recognise the position that it holds in terms of its classification both as craft and fine art and they accordingly grasp their own classification as both western and African artists. Fundamentally, however, it remains their own inner need to create that they wish to satisfy.

Their work does, however, unavoidably speak of the society from which it comes and the influences, which they have been exposed to. Thus, whether it is intentional or not Garrett and Odundo do make a social comment. Their work address the issue of cultural complexity in art, this is as a result of who they are and where they originate from, more

than as a result of what they are wanting to consciously say. Similarly, their work plays an important role in liberating ceramic work from the restrictions of being classified as a craft practice

Making pots is one of the most universal of human skills (Armitage and Said, 1999; 11). Most cultures have at some stage practised a form of ceramic production, the vessels most often being made as a functional necessity and often having spiritual associations. Thus, the vessels are usually valued as objects of great importance in the community from which they derive. It is, therefore, understandable that ceramic production should lend itself to cross-cultural interests and cultural complexity.

In the past, people such as the world-renowned British ceramist Bernard Leach have striven to produce “perfect” ceramic pieces (in his instance functional wheel-thrown ware) by combining the best attributes of two different cultures. Leach and the other early studio ceramists were exposed to such aspirations when the cutting of railways at the turn of the century unearthed early Chinese ceramic work in tombs and stimulated world-wide interest in the art (Freestone and Gaimster, 1997; 206). Leach strove to combine western individualism with eastern craftsmanship: to take what he saw as the best attributes of two ceramic cultures and so to produce “perfect” functional pieces. Now, in similar fashion, we find Garrett and Odundo combining techniques from rural traditions with contemporary, sophisticated intent in order to achieve the unique language and aesthetic attributes which they seek.

Due to the development of transport, communication, and digital systems, there are no cultures to which contemporary studio potters are not readily exposed, and they are, thus, free to choose the source of their inspiration. Unlike Leach and other early studio potters, Garrett and Odundo now have a wealth of cultures from which to draw inspiration. Leach and his compatriots were perhaps so heavily influenced by the unearthing of the Chinese ware, because they were restricted and had seldom been exposed to this type of

occurrence. Garrett, Odundo and the other contemporary studio ceramists are, however, constantly bombarded with cultural differences and cultural information. So they draw their knowledge from much wider parameters than the studio potters of the past could do. Leach and his fellows, however, were clearly inspired by the same cross-cultural interest that appears to be common to the ceramics arena both past and present.

The work of Garrett and Odundo differs greatly from that of Leach in so far as Leach's work was valued and appreciated for its functionality and aesthetic beauty rather than for the interesting mix of cultural practices that it represented. In the past, ceramic work was prized for its functional role above all; it was perceived as functional pottery, rather than as aspiring towards high art. Simplicity, quietude and truth to material were considered elements of the utmost importance.

In recent years, however, ceramic work has to a certain extent been liberated from the art/craft distinction. Ceramic work is now free to be read as texts in the manner in which painting and sculpture have been read for years, but which has always been denied to the world of craft (Armitage and Said, 1999; 18). The works of Garrett and Odundo are, thus, liberated from the craft classification and the functional roles associated with it. Garrett and Odundo pieces are read as texts. They, thus, manage to play a role in closing down the distinction between art and craft to a greater degree. Garrett and Odundo do this without forsaking such things as simplicity, aesthetic beauty and truth to material. In this manner they manage to keep their work a 'pure' form of ceramic practice. Many ceramic artists have a tendency to enter the arena of sculpture so as to elevate their work from having craft associations. This, however, is a compromise and does nothing towards elevating the position of craft in general.

The similarities in the work of Garrett and Odundo, and the dilemma they face with a few galleries and other institutions as to whether they are "African" or "western" artists, are interesting closely affiliated issues. The evidence of both an African and a western

influence in their work is strong, and the difficulty of how to classify them is, thus, axiomatic. It is obvious that certain boundaries and pre-conceived notions of what is “African” and what is “western” still exist, which is an issue that effects both these artists (Interview, 2000; 8), as neither believes that being black constitutes “African” or vice versa. Their work, however, subtly addresses the problem by disclosing its cultural complexity and thereby challenging preconceived notions of what belongs to whom and who should be classified as what.

It can be seen that two artists from opposite poles now face a similar dilemma of classification, which is at odds with much of what is taking place in the world of culture today. The work of Ian Garrett and Magdalene Odundo needs to be examined within the whole context from which it comes, and not simply in terms of race or gender, origin or location. These two artists share a comparable position and create similar art and should thus be classified as producing the same type of art, regardless of their race, gender or location; they are contemporary ceramists and should be exhibited as such.

Ceramic work, as Dean Arnold remarks in his book Ceramic Theory and Cultural Process, is a symbol of the culture from which it originates (Arnold, 1988; 9). The work of Ian Garrett and Magdalene Odundo points to one universal culture, a culture that one would expect to be free of boundaries between race, gender and global location. In the past, it has been such boundaries that have divided people and which have made African traditions so different to western traditions, woman’s “roles” so different to men’s “roles”, and “black” people so different to “white” people. Now, however, we find that due to the premises of post-colonialism, post-modernism and cultural globalisation, these boundaries have undeniably shifted and that there is a growing interconnectedness between political, cultural and economic world affairs (Held and McGrew, 2000; 1-2). It is due to this shift that we now find Ian Garrett, a white male living in South Africa, creating work that is visually and technically similar to that historically associated with rural black women. Similarly, we observe Magdalene Odundo, a black woman living in

England, creating art sought after by western dealers and galleries and commanding high prices in a domain previously dominated exclusively by white western males.

Garrett and Odundo, like all of us, can be seen as the product of their environment. They naturally create work that reflects who they are, what they have been exposed to and the times in which they live. Their art can be valued as a symbol of their own culture, just as anything made in ancient Greece or Rome can be prized as a symbol of those cultures. That the similarities in their work are so striking, however, hints at the possibility of Garrett and Odundo coming from one shared culture. This points to a shared universal culture, an issue that seems to be gathering relevance and becoming more evident in contemporary society. The world appears to be “shrinking” as borders and barriers fall away and as national controls over information become increasingly ineffective and the world moves towards a global identity. The traditional link between the “physical setting” and the “social situation” has broken down with the improvement of travel (Held and McGrew, 2000; 17); people originating from different cultures are now scattered and intermingled across the globe. Individuals increasingly have multi-layered identities, which form the basis for a transnational civil society whose members display complex loyalties (Held and McGrew, 2000; 35).

It is still not possible, however, to affirm that Garrett and Odundo do, indeed, come from one shared culture, as it is obvious that contemporary society has not yet reached this point. Despite a strong tendency in that direction, a significant group of the world’s population still remains untouched by globalisation. People in the rural poor areas of third-world countries are not exposed to, and thus fail to derive benefit from, the advances made in transport and communication (Held and McGrew, 2000; 4). This sporadic aspect of globalisation ensures that it is far from being a universal process that is experienced across the entire planet (Held and McGrew, 2000; 4). There are also people who strongly oppose globalisation, viewing it as a dangerous threat to cherished values; a

deep-seated xenophobia continues to flourish in such communities (Held and McGrew, 2000; I-2)

A move to globalisation, however, does not necessarily imply that all difference will eventually be eradicated. Electronic networks of communication and information can rekindle and intensify tradition. People of certain cultures living in new and different geographical locations can contact and form bonds with people of the same cultures who are dispersed around the globe and vice versa. Globalisation can, thus, serve to create an awareness of difference and to enhance cultural understanding, while at the same time accentuating what is culturally distinctive and idiosyncratic.

To a certain extent the work of Garrett and Odundo reflects this aspect of globalisation: It underscores certain characteristics from the cultures with which they have had direct contact. Both artists emphasise these elements, combining them with other influences to make art that is culturally rich rather than work that renounces all cultural idiosyncrasy.

It is possible to say that Garrett and Odundo live in a shrinking world of intermingled cultures and people. A world where different cultures, races and genders live side by side and work in the same employment, and where there is a growing interconnectedness of human affairs and world systems, where events happening on one side of the globe influence events taking place on the other side. This world continues to value and find richness in the history of the past and in the idiosyncrasies of cultural tradition, but it also continually extends the limits and penetrates the boundaries of what is wholly new. It is often art that prognosticates about the future. As art is not fixed to what is done in the here and now; it can transcend the present and move into the future.

The intermingled contemporary society of today is evident in the work of Garrett and Odundo, as is the potential for an ideal form of globalisation - a world where all boundaries, restrictions and limitations are renounced, where people are familiar with and

informed about universal cultural values, where the globe is a shared arena of equal opportunities - a world where cultural richness continues to be valued and cherished rather than discarded for a bland uniformity.

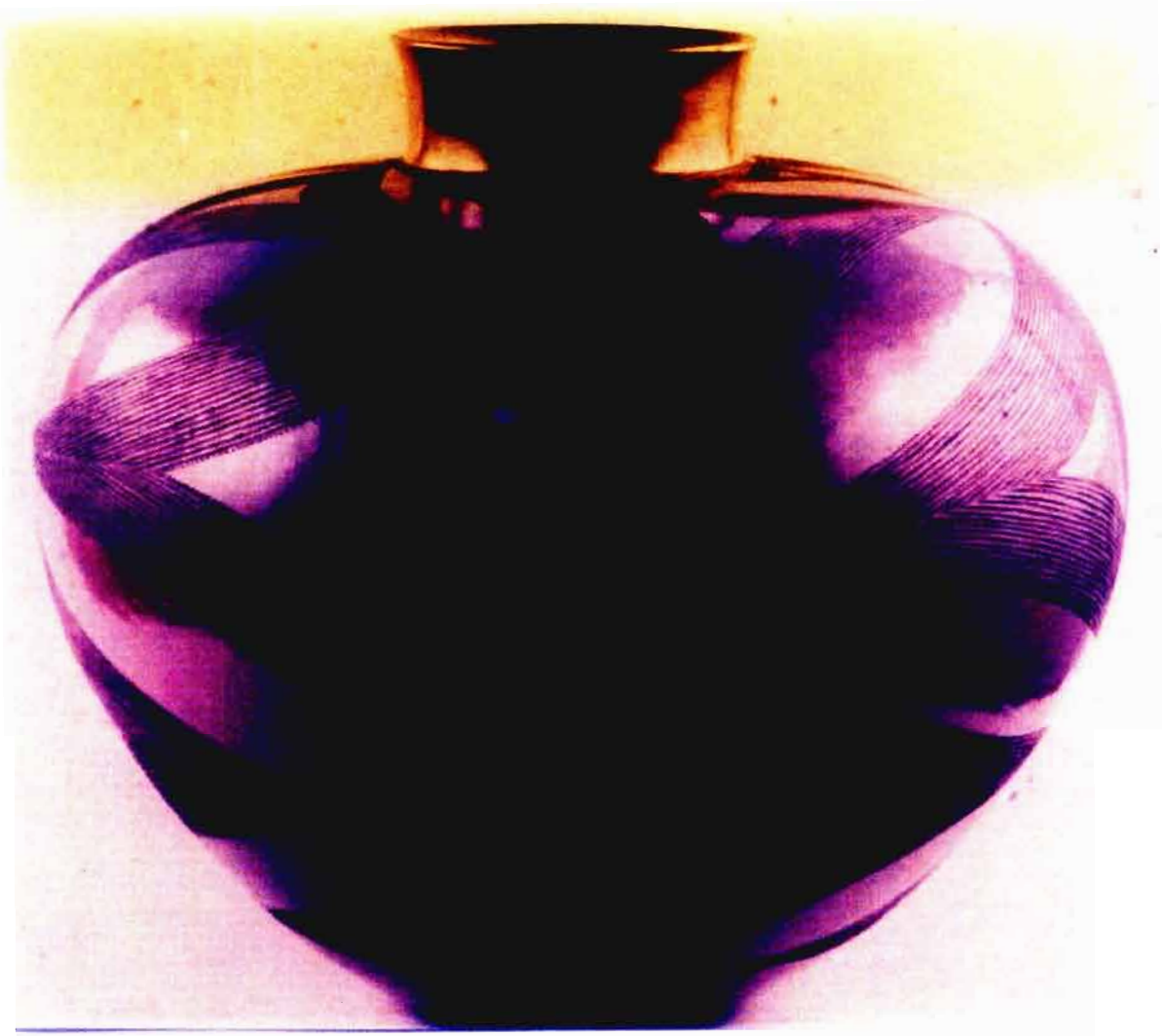


Fig.1.
Ian Garrett.
“Cross Rhythm Jar”.
1995.
Height 42cm.



Fig 2.
Magdalene Odundo.
“Asymmetrical and Angled Piece”.
1990.
Height 43cm.



Fig. 3.
Magdalene Odundo.
“Untitled”.
1994.
Height 45cm.



Fig 4.
Magdalene Odundo.
“Untitled”.
2000.
Approx. Height 55cm.

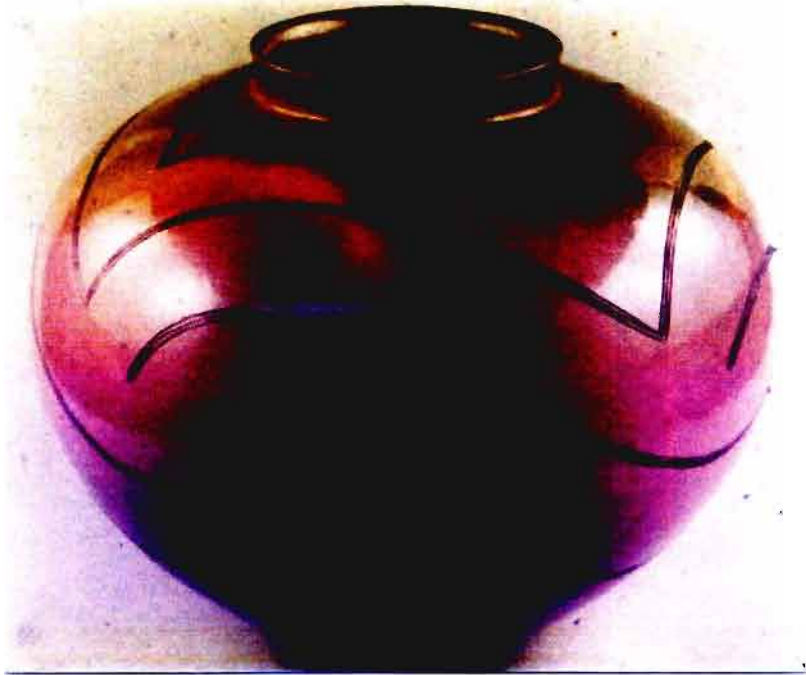


Fig. 5. Ian Garrett “Untitled”. 1997. Height 23 cm.

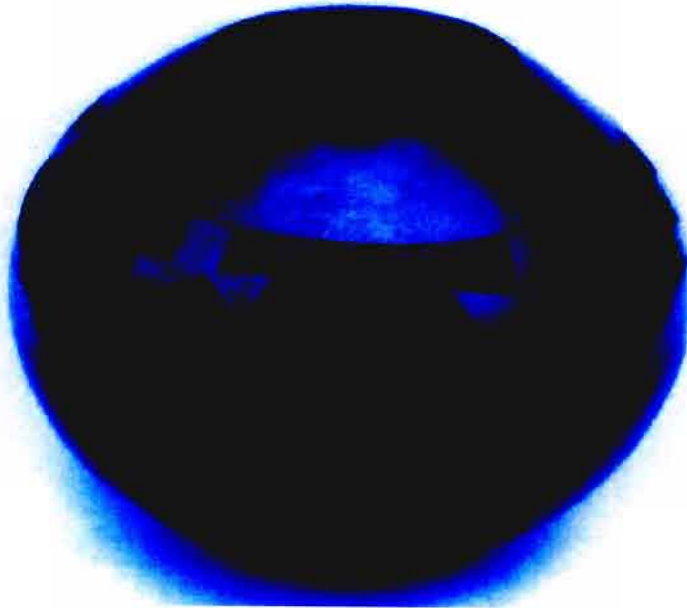


Fig. 6. Nesta Nala. “Ukhamba”. 1993.
Height 24.6cm.

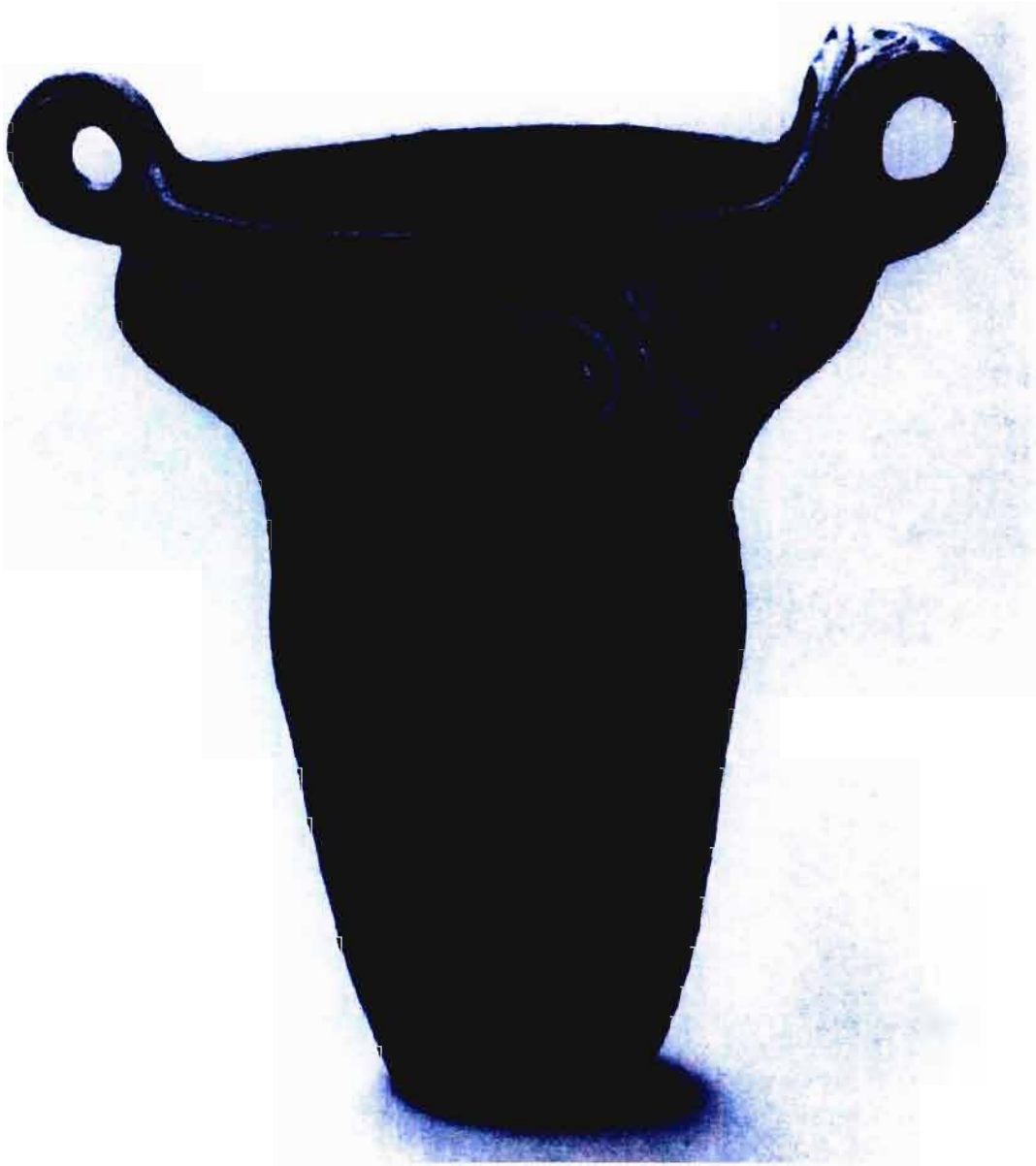


Fig. 7.
Japanese vessel.
Jomon period.
2000 B.C.
Height 45.7cm.

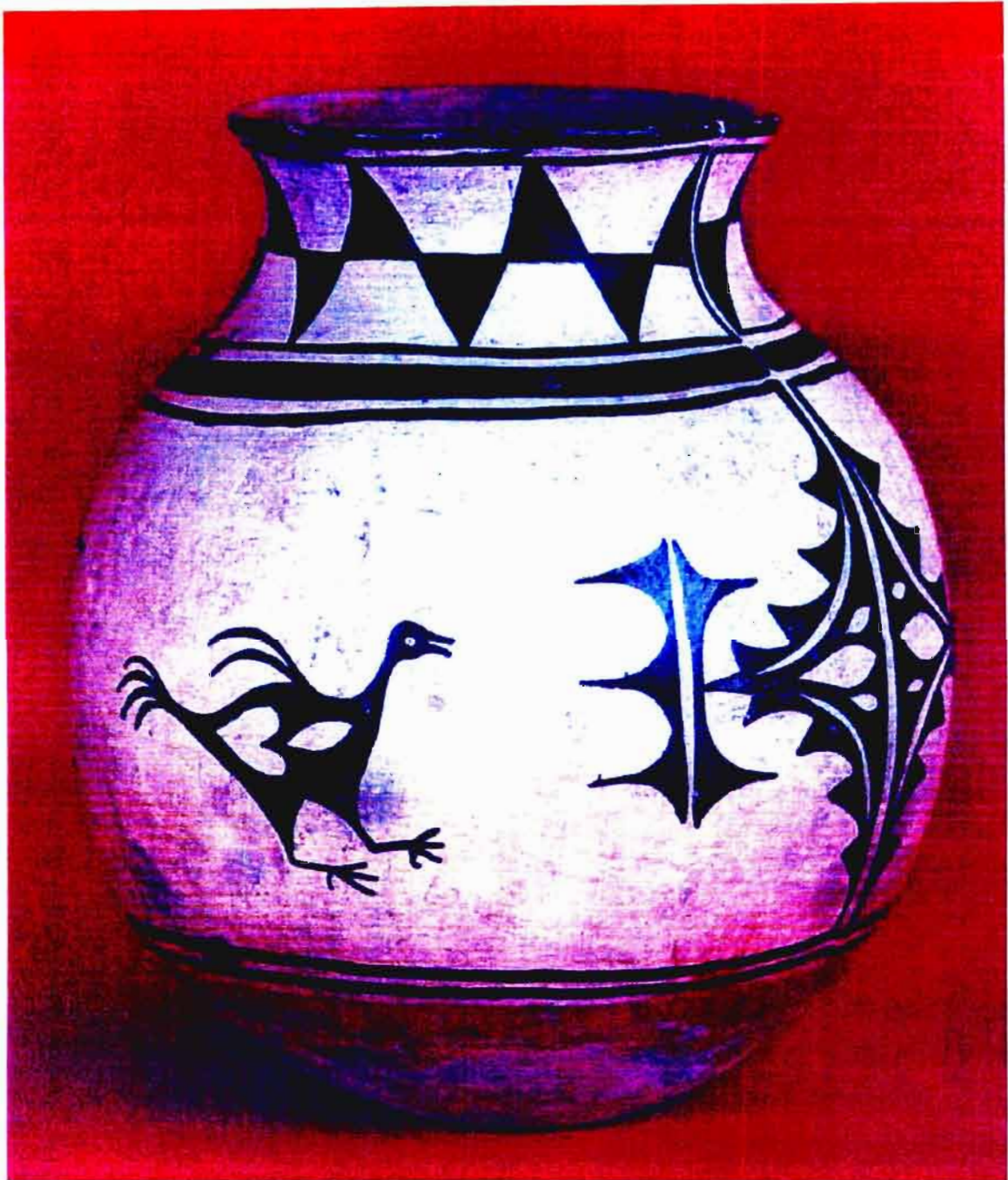


Fig. 8.
Pueblo Indian Vessel.
Santo Domingo Storage Jar.
1915.
Height 46cm.

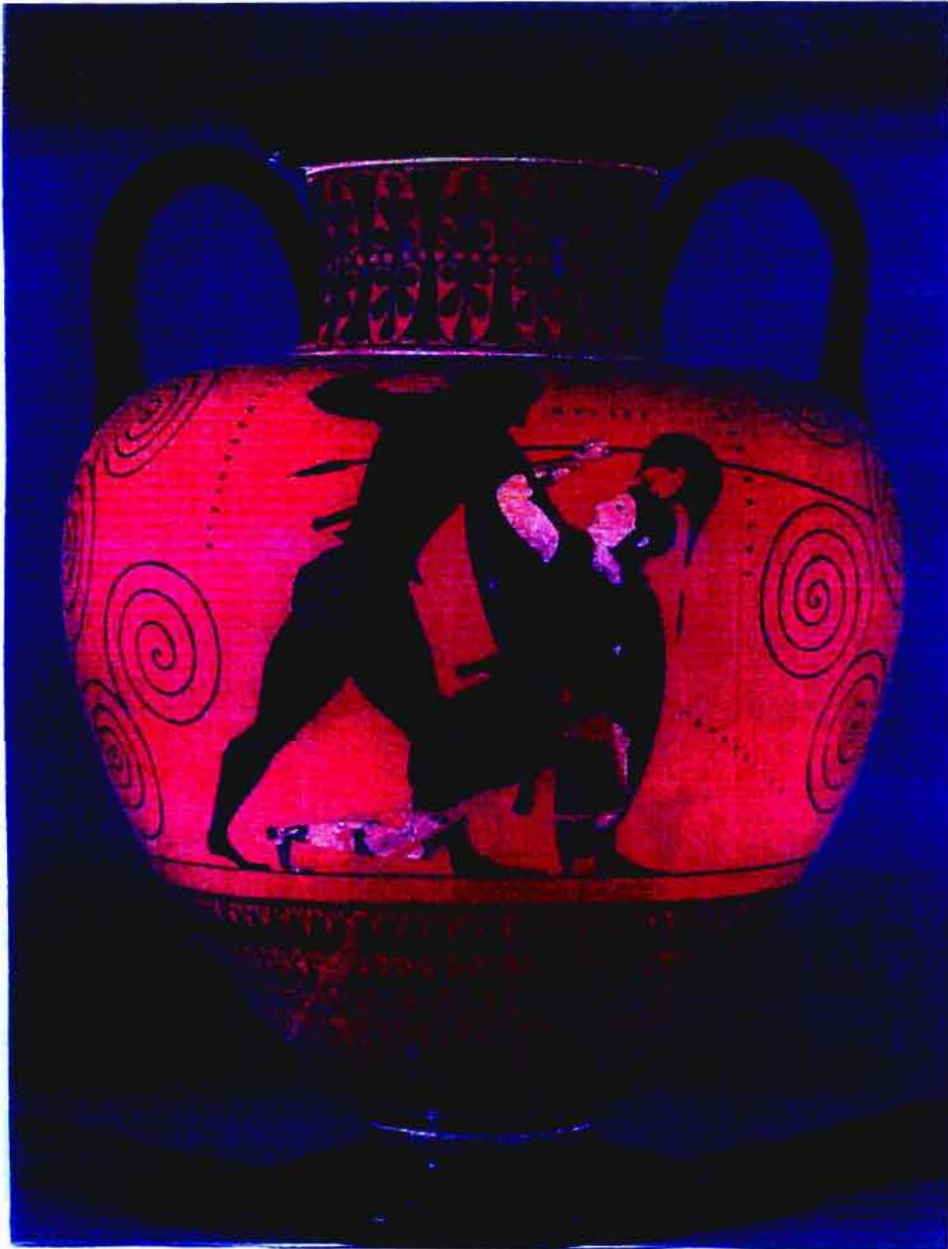


Fig. 9.
Greek Vase.
540-530 BC.
Height 41.6cm.



Fig 10.

Kenyan Vessel.

Artist, Date and Dimensions Unknown.

Picture taken from the cover of Kenyan Pots and Potters by Barbour and Wandibba (1989)



Fig. 11.
Magdalene Odundo.
“Untitled”.
1995.
Height 51.4cm.

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BIBLIOGRAPHIC DETAILS OF CERAMIC ILLUSTRATIONS

Fig.1. Ian Garrett personal collection.

Fig.2. Magdalene Odundo personal collection.

Fig.3. Berns, M. 1997. Ceramic Gestures, Santa Barbara: University of California.

Fig.4. Magdalene Odundo personal collection.

Fig.5. Ian Garrett personal collection.

Fig.6. Ian Garrett personal collection.

Fig.7. Ford, B. and Impey, O. 1989. Japanese Art from the Gerry Collection in The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Fig.8. Frank, L and Harlow, H. 1990. Historic Pottery of the Pueblo Indians 1600-1880, USA: Sciffer Publishing.

Fig.9. Williams, D. 1985. Greek Vases, Great Britain: British Museum Publications.

Fig.10. Barbour, J and Wandibba, S. (Eds), 1989. Kenyan Pots and Potters, Nairobi: Oxford University Press.

Fig.11. Berns, M. 1997. Ceramic Gestures, Santa Barbara: University of California.

APPENDIX 1

INTERVIEW WITH IAN GARRETT (I.G.) CONDUCTED BY ALEXA FARINA (A.F.). CAPE TOWN. APRIL, 1998.

A. F. What was your training? When did you start Ceramics?

I. G. I started working with clay when I was 10 at school & did a bit of pottery on and off and then when I went to University I started off doing Sculpture. Sculpture was my major and then when I finished my degree I wanted to do a Masters and actually started a Masters in Sculpture and then decided to specialise in Ceramics so I went up to Natal to do the specialist course in Ceramics. That was 1994 so I've been doing Ceramics full-time since 1994, just making vessels. Up until then, while I was doing my Sculpture course I worked a lot with clay but made sculptures rather than vessels, but I had always made vessels all along - in that sense I was self taught. I did not really do classes, I did a bit of throwing- classes, which lasted for about 3 weeks with a private potter, and then just as a hobby of my own.

A.F. What are your experiences of other cultures - both in your training and outside your training?

I.G. Inside my training, my experience has been mostly with Zulu culture because of the field research which Ian and Juliet were doing. I got involved with that just as an assistant. My job was to pack the pots into boxes and into the bus and to bring them back in one piece. I used the opportunity to start doing observational research of my own. In my diploma year, which was my first year in Pietermaritzburg, I went along on the field trips just to observe and to decide on an area to study. I already had an idea when I went along to Natal that I would study Zulu Ceramics in some way. I already had an interest in it so the initial field trips were a way of sassing out what was out there and what area I could push into and that was my first experience of Zulu culture in a consistent way.

A.F. What were the initial characteristics of your work?

I.G. I began working with clay by hand-building, coiling and that was while I was still at school and I wanted to be able to fire my own work. I was very interested in 'Strandlooper' pottery shards that you can find in the Eastern Cape on the beach. I grew up in East London and all along the coast there you get these middens - shell middens with pot shards in them which are remains of cultures that lived there hundreds of years ago. Not terribly much research has been done in that area. I know that there is more research down in the Western Cape with the early Khoi inhabitants and the pottery which they made. It's not really known whether the pot shards in the Eastern Cape are Khoi or whether they are the early ancestors of the Xhosa people or who made that early work, but I am interested in it. I used to find shards every now and again. I was interested in that kind of work. That did a lot to promote my interest but I started fiddling around with pit-firing, to fire my own work very early on and, that encouraged an interest to look closely at Zulu culture, how potters fire their work - what do they use, because I was really unsuccessful to begin with. I couldn't get it right. My pots used to break, explode and I was using the wrong clay, the wrong sort of fuel, going about it making all sorts of mistakes. So I think the two fed

off each other - the type of work I was doing created an interest in Zulu ceramics. The Zulu culture being the closest culture to produce handbuilt, pit-fired work to where I was and then I think that in turn influenced my work. So - its kind of a backward and forward of the way I was working, creating an interest and the interest feeding aesthetically back into what I was trying to make.

A.F. *Why did you use aspects of other cultures?*

I.G. Answered already - because of the interest from the technical aspect of firing my own work. The way that one works, as a potter is very much to do with personality. Ceramics has such an enormously broad spectrum from the high fired reduction, porcelain and stoneware through to low fired earthenware and all the different making techniques - coiling and pinching and throwing and slabing and sculpting - that each sort of personality finds their niche in a way of working they are comfortable with and I am drawn to working directly with clay and having that contact with fire - directly firing my own work, not having to rely on that electrical box that just does it all for you. To begin with I was digging my own clay as well. That was really important to me to find my own source of clay - dig it up - I really enjoyed the process from beginning to end. Finding my own clay, building my own pots out of it, firing them myself, having control over the product. I think it's also a lot to do with who I am as a person that I'm interested in those sort of things.

A.F. *What other influences play a part in your work, are there any other cultures which interest you?*

I.G. Definitely the Zulu Tradition of black finish on Zulu pots is something that I think has fed into my work. I did create pieces more or less in that style before I went to Natal but I think it really got reinforced being surrounded by all that work. It's impossible not to be influenced by it it's such a strong tradition and when it's all around you like that I think it kind of feeds in subconsciously. But also the shapes of the work, the Strandloper work - that more pointed sort of bases - more dramatic shapes. At the same time I've looked quite carefully at other cultures that have produced similar sort of work so - other specific influences would be the Native American work from S. West - the Pueblo potters. Also I am very interested but, know little, about the very early work from China which is handbuilt, pit-fired and then painted with oxides and called (can't remember now!). That's been an influence on my work looking at that tradition.

A.F. *Do you amalgamate cultural differences?*

I.G. I think I do amalgamate cultural differences. I think we all do to some extent. I think you would really have to be quite shut-off to things around you in this country to not be influenced by other cultures. I think a lot of white South Africans don't realise quite how influenced they are by traditional African cultures. A friend of mine who went over to England recently who always thought that she worked in a very Euro-centric way took work

of hers to England and found people said - "Gee, that's really African" - because of the colours she used. Even though its slip-cast work, its a white bodied clay but the forms were bold and dramatic and the colours were bright. She was completely unaware of how African her pottery looked to an English audience. I think that's a cultural influence - I think the way that African cultures have used colour and the boldness and directness of expression in African cultures is something that everyone takes in and at the same time that the other influence - the very western influence on us as South Africans is maybe the context that we work in - the fact that we are working in a studio pottery tradition. I see that as the western influence on my work that my pots are part of that studio tradition. They are made as fine art objects that get put in galleries, that get bought by people and used as display objects rather than as utilitarian pieces in their homes, so I think that's where the mixture is between aesthetically traditional African ideas and the context that most contemporary potters in South Africa work in and that goes for black potters as well - people like Nesta Nala I see as now belonging to a western tradition in that she is making pots for a studio pottery context - her pieces are being made as display, aesthetic objects not as beer brewing and drinking vessels anymore. The Ardmore work is the same. It has that same mixture of aesthetically drawing from Africa but the context has been a western one.

A.F. What problems have you encountered in drawing from other cultures (appropriation)?

I.G. I think the problems are the questions that you have to ask yourself about, relevance and meaningfulness. I think it's very easy to do things in a superficial way. I think the strength in my work is that I have gone through the processes, the production processes that create the aesthetic aspects of Southern African potting traditions in that the surfaces, the colours are not just things that come from nowhere, that people have fished out of nowhere. They are very much a result of a whole process, the clay that is used by Zulu potters, the firing technique even the burnishing has a functional aspect as well as an aesthetic one and I think it is easy, in a way as a cultural outsider, to just pick up on aesthetics and copy, copy designs in a meaningless way. When you actually go through the processes of building, of firing in that way the pots automatically pick up a feeling of Africaness, in this context. I suppose in any other context it would be some other sort of feeling. So I think that is one of the dangers, one of the problems rather of working cross-culturally but at the same time I think that people automatically, that cultures are a moving, fluxing thing and that we can't help it. We are being culturally influenced whether we like it or not. You can't shut yourself off from those processes and change is something that always challenges people; it disturbs people who feel safe within things, it comes along and says - "Hey, who are you, what are you doing, what is it all about?" - and a lot of people don't like to have those questions asked of them, and the answers are not easy to come by and I think that's what art needs to do is to challenge peoples assumptions so if people come along and say to me - "Hey- you can't make this stuff, this is a Zulu tradition and you don't belong to it" - I think even if I can't do that I can at least ask those questions and if my work asks those questions of why I can't do that - its fine and its up to everyone to decide for themselves whether my pieces are satisfying in themselves even if they just provoke those sort of questions, I'm happy about that. I think art needs to ask those sort of questions and similarly I ask provocative questions about, for example, Nesta Nala's

work that people don't like to have challenged in that way, I don't think Nesta Nala belongs to the Zulu tradition anymore just as she is getting recognition from the western art world as a traditional potter I'm turning around and saying to people -" but she's not a traditional potter " - and those questions are uneasy questions. I think it goes both ways within a cultural mix.

A.F. *What did you learn from working at Ardmore and what did you teach them?*

I.G. I think I learned from the context. I think the real strength of Ardmore is the context which has been set up, the incredible interaction which is going on there. Once again - it draws from the aesthetic background of the artists who are creating there and not necessarily from their ceramic tradition but from a kind of visual literacy that people from a Zulu cultural background automatically have, the use of colour, the use of form - it's a visual literacy, its from things that those people have seen, the things that are around them, the clothes that they wear, the way that their homes are created - aesthetically, the things that they are culturally interested in, the context which is once again very much part of a studio pottery context. The vessels which are being made for outside consumption, the artists have very interesting contact with the patrons in that there are patrons all the time coming to Ardmore interacting with the artists that in many ways could go further. The language creates an enormous barrier in terms of communication between the patrons and the artists and I think it would be wonderful to see a lot more interaction going on and then of course the role of Faye Halstead in creating the studio and the dynamic that she feeds in, the aesthetic input that she has through her intervention and if anything I would have learned that it is really exciting to be involved in that sort of context and that there is no need for hesitancy at all. The Ardmore work is so immediate in the way that it is created, it is not bogged down in academic rhetoric, the artists don't question themselves all the time about why they are making what they do. They respond immediately and directly to an opportunity that's been presented to them, so I try to do the same - not bog myself down by asking so many questions that I can't answer, that stop me from creating. I just go ahead and feel my way in a situation and let the questions come along afterwards, I like to just create work first and I think subconsciously in a direction, the questions automatically follow what I am doing and how it fits in.

A.F. *A post-colonial reading of your work might see your work as appropriation or your work may appear to be the product of post-colonialism. What is your view?*

I.G. My view on post-colonialism, I suppose it is post-colonial - it can't avoid that in a sense- that in a way I am eclectically gathering from African Culture, but at the same time I am not an outsider. I don't see myself as an outsider and within the context of this country I think we are all pretty much on an equal footing aesthetically in that the kind of influences are happening both ways in terms of black and white, western and African tradition and I don't think that the things, the aesthetic in-put or the cultural influence that I'm gaining are in anyway..... It is a difficult question to answer ... post-colonialism implies some sort of exploitation in a way... colonialism was an exploitation of Africa - I don't see myself as exploiting in that I don't think that I'm gaining unfairly. I see myself as belonging in this context. I am a South African, it is the sum total of my life experience and what is around me in terms of African culture is part of my context, is part of where I live, of where I come from and by gaining from it I feel that I have a right to look around me, to be influenced by what I can be influenced by - such as black South African artists who come from a traditional context

have an equal right to gain from a western context, to derive what they can from it. I don't see it as an exploitative thing. I am creating the work myself. My view of what I understand as post-colonialism might be quite one-sided.

A.F. What are you attempting to convey?

I.G. I'm not attempting to convey anything specifically. I really enjoy working with clay and as I said earlier I am drawn to the type of way that I'm working, the handbuilding, the pit-firing, I think in a way that, just as African traditions within music influenced a kind of Western Global musical tradition in that they reintroduced a feeling for rhythm in music through Jazz and contemporary Western pop music is enormously influenced by African traditions. It's almost as though in the 20th century western traditions got resensitised - were made aware of the potential of rhythm as a result of African traditions so African aesthetic traditions have had an enormous impact in the century, right from the days of Picasso which was possibly post-colonial in the sense that it almost plundered African ideas and certainly in a very real context plundered cultural art objects. I don't suppose that what the artist did was as exploitative as what the culture did in a greater sense in terms of plundering art objects but the influence which it has on western art is a similar thing in ceramics. I would see it maybe as sensitising or resensitising western traditions to the potential of hand-building as an expressive medium and sensitising western ceramic traditions to the expressive potential of firing pots with fire, pit-firing. You've got the whole resurgence in Britain and I suppose internationally this whole resurgence of pit-firing and smoke-firing in British art in the 80's, you get the beginning of the handbuilding tradition starting with Elizabeth Fritsch and Cox's early work. Betty Blandino in the 80's this hand-building tradition coming back into western ceramic traditions as a result of Native American traditions, West African traditions. Potters such as Maria Martinez suddenly gained international recognition. The western art world started taking notice of them in a serious, respectful way rather than as tourist potters, as curiosities of a non-western world and western artists became resensitised to these things as a result of ethnic traditions all over the world, cultures where handbuilding has kept going as a tradition through the centuries and where people have expressed themselves in that way and so in a way I see my work as belonging to that as well its kind of going back to the roots of what ceramics is all about and so I don't see my work only as expressing an African context and working within a western context I think that ceramics internationally has become resensitised to those kind of techniques - handbuilding, pit-firing techniques and what they express.

A.F. You are involved with work usually associated with woman yet you are a male. What is your view on this?

I.G. Once again I think it is challenging peoples preconceived conceptions and stereotypes about what can and can't be done. Here I am a white male working in a tradition in this

country which is usually associated with black females and yet I don't believe that anything happens to be a stereotype within this country. There are traditions in Africa of men potters working in traditional idioms creating handbuilt pit-fired pieces, there are plenty of artists in America and Europe who are male artists who work in that way. What interests me in the Native American tradition is the way in which one could almost see a change between traditionally woman creating utilitarian work that is associated with the domestic context - vessels that are made for food preparation, brewing beverages and also sacred work and then once the activity becomes commercialised men take over. I think this has happened in European traditions way back - possibly in Medieval times when ceramics become a profession rather than part of a domestic chore - in a way - women would prepare the food, fetch the water, make pots, weave clothe. As soon as things become professions men move in and take over, as soon as activities become associated with money and so in belonging to the western studio pottery context, I don't think it is in any way unusual. I suppose if I were creating beer pots in KwaZulu it would be a challenge. If it is a challenge - good!

A.F. What is your inspiration now that you are in the Cape?

I.G. The Cape is very different to the rest of South Africa in that it is possibly, even more than Natal or the Transvaal or the Eastern Cape, a place where cultural mixing has happened. The African traditions here come from very early Khoi cultures, San cultures and there has been very little continuity in those cultures, those cultures were really destroyed in a way 200 years ago by the Early Dutch Settlers. The remnants became very much mixed and yet Cape Town is still an African place. It, in a way, to me seems to have a similar atmosphere to what I see as the type of cultures that have arisen in East Africa where you have this really strong mixture of Eastern traditions through Arab influences and Indian influences. The trade that happened in the Indian Ocean and African cultures, you have this very strong Swahili culture that has developed aesthetically which is a mixture of African and eastern, you have a similar sort of thing in the Cape, you have very strong eastern traditions, the Malay people, you have the remnants of African culture, you have European culture, it is all mixed together and I think its possibly stronger in food and in architecture here than it is in ceramics but I think there's enormous potential and I find it quite an exciting context to be in that it has this very culturally mixed cross-cultural feeling. Possibly in the same way as North American places like New Orleans, where you also have a very strong cross-cultural mix, and where you have the similar sort of influence of European colonial culture, indigenous culture, also lots of outside influence through trade. Cape Town seems to me to have this tradition - of being almost a trading post - a meeting point between east, west, Europe, Africa and I find that very exciting. I think it will change my work in that there is not the strong earthiness that you find in the rest of Southern Africa, there isn't mud here and clay, its sand, its sea and sand and rocks and seashells and I'm sure that will influence my work, it might lose some of the severity of the very strong African traditions that you find further north and west, east and so it will be interesting to see where my work goes. Certainly in terms of inspiration I want to look again more closely at Khoi tradition and at the shapes. I am fascinated by them, there is very little information on them. I suspect that there are wonderful pieces sitting in collections, buried in Museum vaults here and I think they need to be looked at again.

A.F. What Awards have you received?

- 1994 E.P.I.A. Modus Award
"Teapots"
- 1995 F.N.B. Vita Craft
Award, 2nd Prize
- 1995 A.P.S.A. Regional Prize-winner.

A.F. What are your views on the critical reception of your work?

I.G. The criticism of my work on my Masters exhibition was levelled mainly technically. It was Lyndsay Scott who reviewed the exhibition and he spoke about the impact of my work and its influence derived from Zulu traditions but he didn't criticise me in terms of the actual content of the work. The criticism was mostly technical. The criticism which I have had which followed the 95 Vita Craft Exhibition, of which I won the second prize - I received criticism on the exhibition for having in a way meaninglessly copied Zulu traditions. That the work was inauthentic and that it didn't have the cultural background to justify the way it looked. That was the way I interpreted it and there was quite a strong reaction to that criticism. There was a newsletter published by the Craft Counsel which had a rebuttal to the criticism, the critique of the Vita Craft exhibition was published in the Potters Association Magazine and the Vita Craft Newsletter had a rebuttal to the criticism. They felt that it was unfounded and that it was almost a sort of racist attack in that it said that I couldn't make those pots because I was white which was very strange. It didn't go any further than that, the debate didn't continue. The critic, Suzette Munnik has subsequently indicated that she feels my work has grown sufficiently to have escaped that criticism. I think she felt that my work was too close, too derivative from the Zulu tradition and that she said that in the context of so called authentic work by Nesta Nala, that my work seemed to be invalid, it just didn't look authentic, it didn't, it looked like a shoddy imitation, a rip off of Zulu traditional work and that was fine in the sense that it challenged me with questions. I don't feel in a way that making work that looked somehow more personal or less different to Zulu traditions somehow justified or answered the questions that were being posed. In order to really answer the questions that were being posed I would have felt happier with really making beer vessels and exhibiting them and saying - "Hey, listen I can make traditional pots, there's absolutely no reason why I shouldn't, for exactly the same reason that there's no reason why a black South African potter could not make a teapot - so what, it's a cultural object that comes from a culture outside of that of the person who has made it but - so what - it's a two way thing. There's no reason why a white male potter can't make beer pots that function within Zulu traditions as they are evolving because nothing is static and, of course, I also had a big problem with the critic using the so called authenticity of Nesta Nala's work as a counterpoint to my work because I see Nesta Nala's work as being equally the result of cultural borrowings and cross-cultural contact and so I think those questions were really relevant and needed to be asked but I don't feel that they have been fully answered.

I really want to see a white potter making pots for traditional use. I don't know if it will happen in the same way that there are white sangomas out there working as sangomas and there's no reason why white people can't belong to an African tradition, can't play a part in it.

I suppose it is a touchy subject about exclusivity, who belongs, who doesn't and that is where South Africa is at the moment. It is trying to decide, in a greater sense, what and how to fit its traditions together and how to find some sort of meeting point between cultures that exist here. They are there and it will happen.

A.F. *Are your works intended to be functional?*

I.G. They could be used but I'm fully aware that they are not and I enjoy the fact that they could be used - it's important to me. They could have their context changed and that's what I find wonderful about material objects. It's another aspect of multiculturalism that things can be taken and used by another culture in a different way. That happened to ancient things, it happened to a lot of art objects, a lot of African objects - like dance masks that have finished being used by the people who have made them. They would have been thrown away and outsiders, westerners have come and taken these things and recontextulized them, changed their meaning, made them into something else. They almost become cultural artefacts of the culture which appropriates them and I don't know what will happen in the future. Nobody knows what will happen in the future culturally. Pots last for a hell of a long time - hundreds of years even thousands of years and who knows what my pots could be used for in the future. Even if they ended up as flower pots they could actually be used and that's what's nice about making ceramics or about making any sort of object. It then has a life of its own and it is going to go on and once it's left your hands who knows what some one could use it for. Someone could take your little pot that you spent hours making and throw their old teabags in it or make it into an ashtray or it could be stuck on a shelf and looked at - that's fine and there is nothing to say that at some stage in the future I won't start making higher-fired work, even glazed work. I am interested in glazing and I will probably. I haven't at the moment - I don't make that sort of work because I haven't found a way of doing it I enjoy. I haven't found glazes that really satisfy me and would work on my pots. I've done a bit of experimenting. I've had problems firing the work higher, the handbuilt work warps. It obviously requires very good clay to withstand higher firing. I'm very interested in the work of Alev Siesbye. She is a Danish artist - she is ethnically Turkish - so she comes from an Oriental tradition and she has worked, as far as I know, her entire professional career and has settled in Denmark. She produces work that is very similar, I have been influenced by her work. She produced the most beautiful bowls, simple, very classical. I don't know if they are coil built. They may be thrown but they are very carefully scraped down and finished so that it is difficult to tell - glazed and I've always thought that if I were to glaze work I'd push in that direction. That is the type of work that I would be interested in making. Work that draws from the roots of ceramics.

A.F. *Technically how close is your technique of building to that of the Zulu technique?*

I.G. I coil in the same way that Zulu potters work. I roll coils by hand between my palms,

join them on a few at a time and pinch them up in my fingers, smooth them with scrapers that I make myself. If I can, or when I'm able to, I grind my own grog and add that into the clay to give it the gritty strength that it needs for coiling and then scrape the work down - that isn't really part of the Zulu tradition. Zulu pots tend to be scraped down while they are fairly wet. I wait until the pots are leather hard and then scrape them down with metal scrapers and smooth them down and decorate mostly with mussel shells and by pressing little dots and lines into the clay - that's different to Zulu ways of decorating. It is something that Nesta Nala has started doing. I've never seen it on any other Zulu pots. I don't think it's my influence, it may have been in that she might possibly have seen the technique on the 1995 pot, it's a relatively new technique of hers, at the same time she innovates all the time. She is always searching around for new tools to decorate with and it could just be a coincidence. So my decorating is different - most Zulu pots tend to either have lines inscribed into them or raised bumps added onto them when lines are roletted into Zulu pots; it would tend to be with either the edge of a scraper that's been notched or I've seen potters using the lid of a tin can that has serrations on it for grip, these have been rolled across the clay to create a serrated line. So my decorating techniques are different but then my firing technique is similar in that most Zulu potters tend to fire the pot first in an oxidising sort of fire and then smoke it with thatching grass on a tripod to get the blackened surface and I either kiln fire in an electric kiln or occasionally pit fire and then smoke the work but I use newspapers rather than grass because I find grass tends to give off a lot of resin and on the very highly burnished surface I create, the resin actually sits on the surface and doesn't look very nice - and newspapers burn very cleanly. I use them to smoke the pots. Recently I haven't been smoking them as darkly as I did at first, I've been letting quite a lot of terracotta colour shine through. I tend to darken them at the tops and the bottoms. The other technique that I use is to pit-fire the pots and then smother the fire to create a very, very dark black shiny, satiny finish to the pots. That is a technique that's used by the native American Pueblo potters. I suspect that it is used by Zulu potters from the Msinga area because pots fired in that way tend to have sort of silvery patches on them and a lot of pots from Msinga have those silvery patches and I think that the potters there are smothering the fire with shredded dung to reduce the pots and create that very carbon surface in one operation rather than firing them first with aloe leaves and then smoking them. I think the potters there are using dung for the firing as a fuel and then smothering with shredded dung to create that finish and I haven't seen pots fired in that way from another part of KwaZulu so the specific technique that I use is far more closely related to the techniques that Native Americans use to get that very dense black finish.

A.F. *Do you wish to speak further on the issue of post-colonialism?*

I.G. The market in this country for local artist is really with International buyers and collectors who tend to be westerners - Europeans and Americans I think, to some extent people from the Far East and another way of potential criticism would be that I am in a way taking aesthetically from African traditions - sort of prettifying or polishing up - making traditional looking things acceptable for the western market, prettifying them, adapting them and in a sense its true that western collectors place a higher emphasis on technical perfection in ceramics and if one wants to sell work it has to be kind of perfectly finished off. I find with the burnishing people are really attracted to the very high polish that I put on the works. The

perfection of the burnish, no blemishes, very good symmetry in the work, very even edges, very finely finished off - and that is very much a western aesthetic but I don't see it so much as a kind of prettifying or neatening up or making acceptable African traditions but rather as a kind of mixing and I think one can see the same thing in Nesta Nala's work, that the work has grown refined - that's the word that I'm looking for. It's grown very refined in comparison to utilitarian work because that is really what the buyers' demand. I think that is a kind of colonialism in that once again outsiders are demanding a certain product from Africa or not demanding but expecting, and in a way controlling because of their cultural aesthetic for very refined looking things. European ceramics places this high emphasis on refinement and a lot of traditional African ceramics doesn't have that level of refinement because it was made for very different reasons. It was made for a different context, it wasn't made to be examined under such visual scrutiny. The pots had to be more robust, they were utilitarian and in a context in which nothing was measured with rulers or held up to engineering scrutiny. A pot that wasn't absolutely perfectly symmetrical made sense, it belonged in that context but I think outside patrons tend to be critical of those things, it's something that I would like to see changing. I don't think things need to be refined in order to be acceptable. I know that my work needs to be refined in order to sell, it is at the moment a bit of a compromise but I'm not only attracted to very refined things. I enjoy the directness, the boldness of a lot of traditional African work that isn't refined looking. It has very rough textures on it, it has been vigorously worked. You can see that it has been made boldly and quickly and with confidence and not polished and polished and polished until every little thing has been smoothed down and evened out and neatly finished off and I'm hoping that as the western world becomes more exposed to other cultural outlooks it will become more accepting of things that are not only reflecting its own cultural preferences.

APENDIX 2

INTERVIEW WITH IAN GARRETT

IN CAPE TOWN. OCTOBER 2000.

1. TECHNICAL QUESTIONS

1.1 **Where do you get your clay?**

Cape Potters' Supplies, Cape Town. Smooth red earthenware.

Jeremy Dubber, East London. Smooth red earthenware.

P.S.M.O. (Potters' Supplies & Mail Order), Johannesburg. Smooth red earthenware.

1.2 **What clay body do you use?**

C.P.S. Smooth red earthenware.

1.3 **Construction: -What methods do you use to construct your work? -Do you work in series or do you make one piece at a time?**

I start with a small ball flattened into a patty/disc. I then pinch up the edge of the disc. I roll coils between the palms of my hands +/- 3 cm. Thick. The first coil is pinched down in the base/disc. Each coil is pinched up +/- 8 cm. And smoothed with plastic scrapers. Unless the clay is very firm I dry each coil before adding the next. To join a new coil I wet the wall and pinch it to a very fine edge. The next coil is pinched on to overlap slightly on the inside of the wall. The last coil is pinched up to create the rim. When the pot is

leather-hard I surform the rim level and scrape down the pot with metal scrapers to an even thinness. I then re-wet the surface with a sponge and scrape it smooth with a plastic scraper. The rim is smoothed with a strip of plastic. The impressed patterns are put on when the clay is leather-hard. I work on 2-3 pieces at a time, usually quite similar in shape and size.

- 1.4 **Surface:** -What tools do you use?
 -What is your burnishing method? What tools do you use for this?
 -Do you ever apply slip etc?

Homemade plastic and metal scrapers. A turntable, sharp knife, teaspoon for the curved rim, a fork handle and surform.

I burnish the 'background' and 'inside' of patterns with tumbled agate pebbles when leatherhard (after the textured patterns are impressed). Then I leave the pot to dry completely. I reburnish the same areas with oil and pebbles before firing.

To burnish – a small patch of clay is smeared with sunflower oil and left for a few seconds to dry partially (the oil is absorbed by the clay). This patch is burnished with firm pressure for a few minutes then lightly buffed with a dry finger and the process repeated on the next patch.

1.5 What temperature do you fire your work to?

Between 880° C and 900° C.

1.6 How do you achieve your colour variations and how much control does one have over this process?

Sometimes I apply an iron-rich slip made from the clay body finely sieved (100#) and red iron oxide, 50/50. This is painted onto the leatherhard pot before decorating and burnishing in the same way.

A further amount of colour control is achieved by smoke-firing (longer=darker). Pit-firing and saggar firing give fire-flashes or reduction effects.

2. GENERAL QUESTIONS.

**2.1 I believe you where initially trained in sculpture.
When and why did you turn your focus to ceramics?**

My passion has always been for ceramics. I specialised in ceramic sculpture at Rhodes as this was the best of a limited choice of courses. After one year of a Master's Degree in 1993 I realized my opportunity for formal training in ceramics would soon be at an end and transferred to the University of Natal in 1994 to gain more specialised training.

**2.2 What was your early ceramic work like?
How has it developed and changed over the years?**

My interest has always been in coiling, burnishing and pit-firing. I think my decorative vocabulary has increased slowly and steadily as my personal style has evolved. My early work is less refined in skill.

2.3 Who influenced your work most as a student and in what direction?

Ian Calder and Juliet Armstrong had a large impact in pushing me to refine my skills and develop my ideas.

I have been inspired by reading widely for inspiration. I am fascinated by ancient traditions (archeological material) as illustrated in books. By African handbuilding traditions and especially the revival of handbuilding in Britain and Europe.

2.4 Was there a turning point in your work?

No specific turning point. Discovering my own oil burnishing technique was a breakthrough technically.

2.5 Have you ever experimented with different surfaces such as glazes and different firing techniques?

I have, and still do, experiment with glazing. I hope to develop this further.

At present I only exhibit burnished work. I enjoy experimenting with pit-firing, saggar-firing and smoke-firing.

2.6 Your forms and proportions seem so perfect and harmonious. Do you make drawings and plan your forms beforehand or do you allow the form to develop from the clay as you work?

I always have a pre-conceived mental image of the form before I start building. I sometimes sketch patterns on paper. These are often to work out symmetry construction. I draw the plan as a 2-dimensional pattern on paper and enjoy seeing how it alters on the 3-D surface of the pot.

2.7 A lot of ceramic vessels, for example, those of Magdalene Odundo, have association with the human figure, more specifically the female figure. Do your vessels hold any such associations?

No. The closest metaphor I would find would be an expression of human attitude/gesture, e.g., open, closed, confident, vulnerable etc. I think forms are more about a preoccupation with balance, harmony, resolution, equilibrium and a continual reinvention of those.

2.8 Who is your main market, galleries or private collectors?

Private collectors. I deal mostly with Commercial Galleries (Kim Sacks, Peter Visser, Bayside etc.) but also take private commissions directly from people who contact me.

2.9 What awards have you received?

1994 E.P.I.A. Modus Award

“Teapots”.

1995 F.N.B. Vita Craft Award

2nd Prize.

1996 A.P.S.A. Regional Prize Winner.

**2.10 What future plans do you have for exhibitions?
(Big invitationals/solo etc.)**

I would like to exhibit in Europe but lack contacts.

3. CROSS CULTURAL QUESTIONS.

**3.1 What different cultures are you interested in and inspired by?
Have any of these had a direct impact on your work?**

Yes. Zulu Ceramics, Sotho Ceramics, Venda Ceramics. These have been my only direct source of contact with potters in handbuilding traditions.

Pueblo ceramics pattern construction.

Strandlooper pots – my only contact with archeological work.

Through books – Yang Shao Chinese ceramics, Iron Age European ceramics, Etruscan, Minoan, Cypriot ceramics.

I have picked up ideas for forms and patterns from all these sources.

3.2 Do you consciously amalgamate cultural difference in your work?

Yes, but not in any special way. As far as I have observed all cultures are highly eclectic.

3.3 How would you define your own identity?

I have a dual identity. Euro-African (Colonial) by heritage (inheritance and experience) and international western by education and technological culture (media).

3.4 Why have you chosen to live and work in South Africa?

I feel a sense of connectedness through life experience, family and friends that has thus far prevented me from living elsewhere. I feel increasingly that my identity is becoming individualized i.e. not connected to cultural identity or place. I would like to cultivate an international career.

3.5 Is your work autobiographical to any extent?

I think all art is autobiographical. Mine takes a very abstracted form.

3.6 Have you encountered any problems working across cultures?

I have only made a few pieces that are truly cross-cultural. These were beer-pots made as gifts for Zulu friends. I not only received no criticism but was strongly encouraged to pursue this direction by Zulu colleagues at Ardmore.

In the more obvious sense of cross-cultural borrowings in the work that I have made for competition exhibitions I have received strong criticism.

Some of the criticism that my work appears highly derivative is perhaps valid (this is surely the problem with being eclectic). However, it has also drawn

attention to unintentionally expressed issues of authenticity and traditionalism and ownership or exclusivity of cultural identity.

3.7 Do you think the ceramic medium lends itself to strong cultural associations more than other media do?

Only because there is a long history of interpreting ceramics in this way.

(Pots have survived as archeological evidence of culture where more ephemeral expressions, like music or theatre, don't).

3.8 Are you ever, or do you think that you should be invited to take part in exhibitions on African Art as, for example, Magdalene Odundo is frequently invited to do?

Yes, if an exhibition covers the scope or specifics of contemporary African ceramic expression and, no if an exhibition has focused on the work of only black artists (for whom the word 'African' is often and, I think, mistakenly substituted. To use the word 'African' as a substitute for 'black' is to exclude 'white' people from an identity on this continent).

4. THEORETICAL QUESTIONS.

4.1 How do you understand your work and how do you wish the viewer to read your work. Is there more than one way?

In the broadest context I see my work as part of International Studio

Ceramics, more specifically, as part of what I see as the handbuilding

'revival' as exemplified by potters like Elizabeth Fritch, Gabrielle Koch etc. I am striving to create a personal idiom that can be read on different levels and that makes reference to the various influences I have cited. I do feel that my cultural identity is of importance in placing my work, but it is not my primary concern. I think the interplay between personal 'nuance' and historical reference is what interests me most. I think my work is also extremely process oriented and a lot of its 'reading' is derived from this.

4.2 What is it that motivates you more. The content in your work or the search for aesthetic beauty or are they inseparable to you?

Yes, they are inseparable. Especially in that they are connected via the 'process' that I have just mentioned. The aesthetic beauty is not a preconceived end-point but arises from the process.

4.3 Do you think your work speaks of such things as globalisation and acculturation?

Yes. I think the revival of handbuilding in studio ceramics is part of a larger cultural trend. Perhaps connected to "new age" concepts (a perceived spirituality or meaningfulness in the natural, handmade etc. and a reaction to materialism and globalisation). I think part of the revival of handbuilding is linked to the 80's awareness of ethnic handbuilding traditions (see Betty Blandino's coil building book).

Perhaps it is acculturation in that western ceramics added to its vocabulary from these sources. I am sure it was a part of a larger socio-political change at that time.

4.4 Do you think your work can be seen as a symbol of a post-modern environment?

I don't think I understand post-modernism well enough to say. It must be as it fits in chronologically. Once again, this isn't my primary concern but I am sure it could be read that way.