



Duration

01:05:28

Reference

OH2

Subjects

Ceramics / Leach Movement / Commercialisation of Craft

Recording date

18 May 2015

Recording location

Interviewee's home, Forest Hill, London

Interviewee

Slee, Richard (RS – speaker, male)

Interviewer

Lin, Gloria (GL – speaker, female)

Synopsis

In this 2015 First Decade interview, the ceramist Richard Slee (b. 1946) discusses his time studying at the Central School of Art and Design and his eye-opening experiences in Yugoslavia and the United States, which heavily influenced his work in the 1970s and 1980s. He discusses other influences on his work during this time, including contemporary design, 1950s Disney cartoons and pre-Columbian art. He reflects on regrets, peer-envy, changing techniques and feeling torn between a desire to be decorative and fear of being shunned by his contemporaries. Slee humorously opens up about his views on the Crafts Council in the 1970s and his feelings about being beyond or outside of the Leach movement that was taking place, before describing his memories of 'flogging' jewellery (often made from dolly mixture sweets) at Selfridges to earn a living.

Recording

00:00 RS discusses the years following his graduation in 1970, when he worked with friends.

02:22 RS talks about his 'miserable' experience in Industrial Design at Central School (a course he describes as too rigid: the vision was not progressive) and transferring to Ceramics (which he describes as very 'anti-Leach'). **'It was an exciting time to be a student of ceramics.'**

07:23 GL asks about gender equality on the design courses. RS responds by discussing the female domination of courses towards the end of his teaching career,





suggesting that it might be down to the decline of ceramics in popularity among men. 'An image of pottery might be a bearded country potter, and there aren't many bearded women around!'

12:12 RS describes his experience of making ceramics in Macedonia, Yugoslavia, where he stayed for six months as a young ceramist.

16:49 RS says he went through various jobs after returning from Yugoslavia. He discusses early stylistic influences and pieces such as non-functional teapots and vases.

20:09 RS talks about how his work narrowed once he moved into a studio. He started using earthenware in order to make his work colourful and structurally unusual. He talks about teaching experiences between 1973 and 1975, and highlights his work in Hastings.

24:01 RS describes his first experience in the US, in Las Vegas and Los Angeles, as 'mind-blowing'. He talks about the disparities between America and postwar Britain ('dirty').

30:24 GL asks if this influenced his subsequent pieces. RS states that much work came out of his experience in America, in particular 'Art Moderne' signage in Las Vegas. He talks about his sketchbooks.

32:37 RS talks about returning from America. He spent time in Hastings and then moved to London. He used a friend's studio in Wandsworth for a year before moving to Hackney.

37:28 RS mentions his first solo show in 1977, referring to Peter Smith's gallery *Smith and Others*, where it was held, on Kensington Church Walk. RS describes his own work as being influenced by pre-Columbian art.

41:57 RS mentions the Crafts Council (CC). He states that the review of his work in *Crafts* magazine was very negative: '[A] thing that really annoyed me was that it ended up by saying "punk pottery", and I thought "they don't understand punk!" And I wasn't part of that, I was too old by then to be a punk! [...] I've been everything: a Teddy Boy, a hippy, a... [GL prompts: "New Romantic?"] Yes, I've got photographs of me wearing earrings [...] but I was never a punk.'

44:03 RS states that his view of the CC at that time was that 'it was very conservative'. He discusses his feelings about the CC's agenda with hindsight. He felt that he was



very much outside or beyond Leach-movement ceramics; he talks about having eclectic influences.

46:22 GL asks what drew RS to pre-Columbian work. RS discusses his feelings towards it and describes it as Disney-like. GL and RS talk about early cartoons.

48:54 GL asks if cartoon style has influenced his work. RS discusses changing techniques and his feelings of jealousy towards his peers, such as Andrew Lord, who made the work look so easy.

54:20 RS reflects on feelings of 'regret' about the 70s and 80s: **'I wish I'd known some things [I know] now 20 years ago.'**

57:30 RS talks about his work at the influential show *Fast Forward*, held at the ICA.

58:54 GL and RS discuss commercialising work in the 70s and 80s, and making jewellery (often from dolly mixture) to 'flog' at Selfridges.

01:03:58 GL asks if wording was difficult in defining or titling pieces. RS talks about changing terminology.