



Duration

01:06:31

Reference

OH4

Subjects

Ceramics / Politics / Craft Revival

Recording date

4 June 2015

Recording location

Interviewee's workshop, London

Interviewee

McNicoll, Carol (CM – speaker, female)

Interviewer

Lin, Gloria (GL – speaker, female)

Synopsis

In this 2015 First Decade interview, the studio potter Carol McNicoll (b. 1943) talks about Rococo asparagus ceramics, politics, satire, Brian Eno, what initially drew her to clay and the importance of laughing at your own work. The interview reveals the influences and thought processes behind McNicoll's 'barely functional' yet beautiful and satirical pieces. She discusses a range of works, from a pink breast plate and a 'chops, chips and peas' serving plate to experimental and impractical teapots made from slip-cast lace-wear. McNicoll's work was transformed by her political activism following the start of the Iraq War in 2003; in this interview, she discusses her views on how activism and politics have changed from the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s to now, hierarchy within the crafts world and her attitude towards identity and collectivism.

Recording

00:00 [CM sorts through material from the 70s and 80s; she has kept a lot of correspondence.]

03:38 CM discusses the beginnings of the Crafts Council as a 'little organisation' and her first involvement with the institution during the exhibition *The Maker's Eye*.

05:14 CM talks about studying Fine Art in Leeds from 1967 to 1970 and then the RCA.

06:57 CM talks about the transition from Yorkshire to London. She thought the RCA was 'ghastly'. She refers to the Leeds fine art department as radical for the time.





09:10 CM discusses what it was like finding her feet in London, mentions being involved with Brian Eno of Roxy Music and reflects on her decision to go to art school.

12:55 GL asks CM what initially drew her to clay. CM talks about her inspirations and her decision to start making ceramics, highlighting the Rococo ceramics at the V&A.

14:50 GL asks how she felt about people describing her pieces as non-functional objects. CM claims it was irritating, but acknowledges her work to be 'barely functional' art rather than useful objects. She talks about her later works and how she arrived at these through politics and making a political commentary.

17:00 CM mentions gender politics and potential discouragement working with clay due to its masculine connotations.

19:00 CM discusses following a different path to other potters in the 70s, her experience in Japan and not working in the Japanese tradition or in an 'Orientalist' mode, which was part of the cultural mood of the 70s.

21:45 CM highlights her enjoyment of making multiple works to be sold in shops and a change of feelings that made her switch to producing one-offs.

23:40 CM refers briefly to galleries and shops that supported or sold her works, like Liberty, and making a living as a production potter.

25:00 CM talks about her division of time between making clothes and pottery, and how the two inform each other.

26:56 CM describes the switching of her thought process towards the political realm, influenced by the Iraq War in 2003, and her experiences in Kyoto, Japan, which started her 'social comment' work.

31:00 CM talks about her enjoyment of making satirical pieces and the importance of finding things funny or absurd.

32:50 CM discusses the difference between clay and filmmaking. She mentions a documentary she saw about the Iraq War protests.

35:15 CM talks briefly about pieces she is making now – broken bits that are a 'tacky reference to broken democracy'.

35:50 CM describes her views on the differences in activism between the 70s and now, and the current political system that claims to be a 'beacon of freedom and democracy'.

39:55 CM discusses changing feelings from being young in the 70s to growing up in the 80s and 90s, and her attitude towards identity.



42:00 CM describes her 'consciousness of hierarchy' in the UK, how that affects being a craftsman and how she goes against the grain.

45:00 CM talks about going from A Level Science to studying Art, and her early experiments in Leeds, including a plate with a cover that was a 'pink breast' and a serving dish with three dishes that represented and were shaped like 'chops, chips and peas', influenced by Rococo asparagus ceramics in the V&A.

48:08 CM describes being influenced by the V&A again when she experimented with lace dipped in slip, with which she created a teapot of a woman in a frilly dress.

49:10 CM refers to an object in her workshop [where GL interviews her] that she has to fix for someone due to wear and tear.

52:00 CM brings out other objects, such as an ashtray, and tells the story behind them.

58:30 CM laughs about a letter from Malcolm Le Grice to Brian Eno.

01:00:05 GL mentions a letter from the Crafts Advisory Committee about CM's workshops.

01:02:40 CM mentions the work she did for Axis in France.