



Duration

00:35:04

Reference

OH13

Subjects

Ceramics / Gender / Craft Education / Leach Tradition

Recording date

24 August 2015

Recording location

Interviewee's studio, Forest Hill, London

Interviewee

Tchalenko, Janice (JT – speaker, female)

Interviewer

Lin, Gloria (GL – speaker, female)

Synopsis

In this 2015 First Decade interview, the ceramic artist Janice Tchalenko (b. 1942), best known for her decorative studio pottery, discusses how she broke away from the Leach tradition in the late 1970s. Alongside other notable women of the Crafts Council's first decade, such as Alison Britton, Jill Crowley, Carol McNicoll, Jacqueline Poncelet and Glenys Barton, Tchalenko began experimenting with free forms, colour and decorative, non-functional work. She discusses gender differences in pottery, earning a living from ceramics and her involvement in Dartington Pottery, when she began to pull away from the Oriental and medieval styles that had come before. She reflects on the development of her style and techniques, as charted by her many objects in the Crafts Council Collection.

Recording

00:00 GL asks about JT's involvement in the early years of the Crafts Council (CC). JT reflects on how she had barely even touched clay at this time. She had been working in the Foreign Office and discusses her time there.

00:46 JT speaks about going to Harrow School of Art for a studio pottery course run by potters and headed by Victor Margrie, which she finished in 1971. She got involved with the CC through Margrie. She talks about other First Decade makers from the RCA whom she met through the CC – Alison Britton, Jill Crowley, Carol McNicoll, Jacqueline





Poncelet – and, through teaching repetition throwing at Camberwell College of Art, Glenys Barton.

02:50 JT talks about her studio in East Dulwich and keeping contacts with potters from Harrow through the CC.

04:10 JT recalls serving on various CC committees for many years and receiving a large CC grant in 1979.

04:37 JT talks about pulling away from the Leach tradition and her involvement with Dartington Pottery in the early 80s. She speaks about how the CC helped drive her production, her various inspirations and new techniques that attracted people outside the Leach Oriental style: **'I wanted to change to be more "painterly" so changed the whole thing in the late 70s [...] putting a white background like a canvas and putting coloured glazes on top [...] no one had done this before.'**

08:00 JT discusses interest in industry and 'pots for the people'. **'The Crafts Council didn't accept Dartington pots in their shops because they said it was industry.'** 'I was fighting in those early days to cross a few barriers, and, uh, failing on the whole [laughs].'

09:12 JT talks about communities of craftspeople in ceramics, and on courses and in craft shops.

09:55 'Where did I get the idea that I wanted to be a potter from? I don't know. I mean I didn't... it was obviously in the air. Everybody was feeling this kind of, you know, burgeoning of wanting to make things, I think, and make things properly.'

10:33 JT talks about gender ratios, the motivation to throw **'better than the blokes'** and how this helped her develop her skill set and education trajectory.

11:43 JT reflects on her time at Camberwell and the 'golden years' of the 70s and 80s. Speaking of the vibrancy of the meetings and parties she was involved in, which were important for meeting people and colleagues in different areas, she remarks that this is no longer the case.

13:43 JT describes the CC meetings she was part of. She speaks in general terms of the large meetings, but remarks that **'everything important happened outside them'**.

15:09 GL and JT discuss how makers were part of selection committees at the CC.



17:40 JT discusses the differences between making now and in the 70s and 80s. She emphasises the importance of makers selling products, commenting that it is not therapeutic, but a job.

19:17 GL asks about education and CC initiatives. JT talks about education and gendered issues in making.

22:28 GL and JT look through her old work acquired by the CC.

23:47 JT points out that *Jug with Pink Rim* (1981; P282) was one of the earliest pieces in which she broke away from tradition. She says that it came about when she was spending time with Carol McNicoll: “I want to put some colour on this, I don’t know what to do.” She [CM] said, “Oh I’ve just done a wiggly line and a dot. I just do wiggly lines and dots, I can’t decorate either.” So that’s what I did, a wiggly line and a dot! First one.’

24:16 JT talks about another early piece, *Jug with Blue Rim* (1981; P283). She discusses the change from medieval jugs ‘a-la-Leach’ and Michael Casson to a ‘thin rim and stuck-on handle’. JT notes that this was the first time that ‘anybody of my peasant-pottery ilk had done that, and my colleagues absolutely loathed it! [...] but it’s got to be simple to carry, uh, a decoration. I don’t want it to be medieval-looking.’

26:55 JT discusses *Biscuit Jug* (1980–85; HC162), one of her first Dartington experiments.

27:37 JT talks about pieces from 1980 and experimenting with colour on white, as in *Plate with Squares and Shapes* (P256).

28:02 On her *Nest of Seven Bowls* (1978; P.270.1-7), JT recalls: ‘David Leach said “Oh God! I give up!” It was a first attempt after leaving Harrow.’

28:42 JT highlights that *Pâté jar* (1978; P271a-c) is an example of her medieval pieces.

30:03 GL and JT end the interview by discussing JT’s break with the CC and her relationships with Victor Margrie and other makers.