

# HENRIETTE MORO

*The disciplines of being a potter*

by Nicola Scott-Taylor

It is now when I find myself alone, having graduated in ceramics and set up a studio of my own, that I marvel at people like Lucie Rie and others who find the discipline of working on their own a strengthening experience.

One such artist, Henrietta Moro, has in her personality a philosophical depth and self-effacing charm which comes from working with clay. Working alone as she does today from her home in Portugal she has only herself and her life's experiences to guide her. I asked her what is it about clay that fascinates her and keeps her going.

Born in Amsterdam, in Holland, Henrietta became interested in clay as a small child when first, her parents brought into the home some Ming pottery from Indonesia, and second, when at 12 years old she saw a potter working at a wheel. Seeing the liquid earth grow to create a beautiful shape made her want to find out more. In 1960 when she



visited an exhibition in the Boymans Museum in Rotterdam, she saw for the first time contemporary stoneware works by Bernard Leach, Lucie Rie, Michael Cardew, Hans Coper and other famous potters. Enthralled, she wrote to Bernard Leach to see if she could work with him for a few months. A handwritten reply explained he only took students for a period of a year, but an introduction to Geoffrey Whiting was set up through the exhibition organiser. He had a big influence on her life as a potter. In 1962 when she came to England to work with him, she had to reduce her work as a Medical Analyst to concentrate on ceramics. "He taught me not only how to master throwing pots, but how to become disciplined and to work with materials that are around you," she explained. "He was making very high quality ware and always striving to an even higher standard."

Returning to Holland, she began to teach throwing in the Technical Institute of Eindhoven until 1969, when her marriage to a Portuguese businessman brought about her move to Portugal. In the early 70's, living in Lisbon, she was able to buy stoneware clay from a factory, which made drainpipes. It was necessary to sieve it to get rid of the impurities, but within a year she was exhibiting her jugs, bowls and plant holders in three galleries in Lisbon, Parede and Estoril. Today the factory itself has gone and she has had to import crank clay from Algarve and white stoneware from Valencia. The galleries too closed down in the late 70's due to the change after the revolution, when the uprising Communist party chased away foreign business. These new challenges have led her to find other potters who exhibit together in the open.

Up until this point she was using a small electric kiln which she had bought in Holland, but the move to Spain in 1973 heralded a move to gas, to make larger work suitable for the outdoors. She built her first gas kiln in Madrid, which she says was very expensive to run on gas bottles, but enabled the warmer, buttery feldspatic glazes that she liked making using soft wood ash. She found that soft wood ashes, which she got from clipping the blackberry bushes surrounding her house in Madrid, worked better than hard wood ashes to vary the tonality of a glaze. Using the techniques of slab-building and throwing, she began making a number of wall murals and water fountains. The following six years she took part in 4 exhibitions in Toledo, Madrid and Valencia, including the 'Concurso Nacional de Ceramica' in which ceramists and potters from all over Spain gathered to exchange views and demonstrate their techniques. "It was a salutary experience for any creative ceramist especially to see so many different people's work and to realise so many were like me, working alone with only their own ideas," she explained.

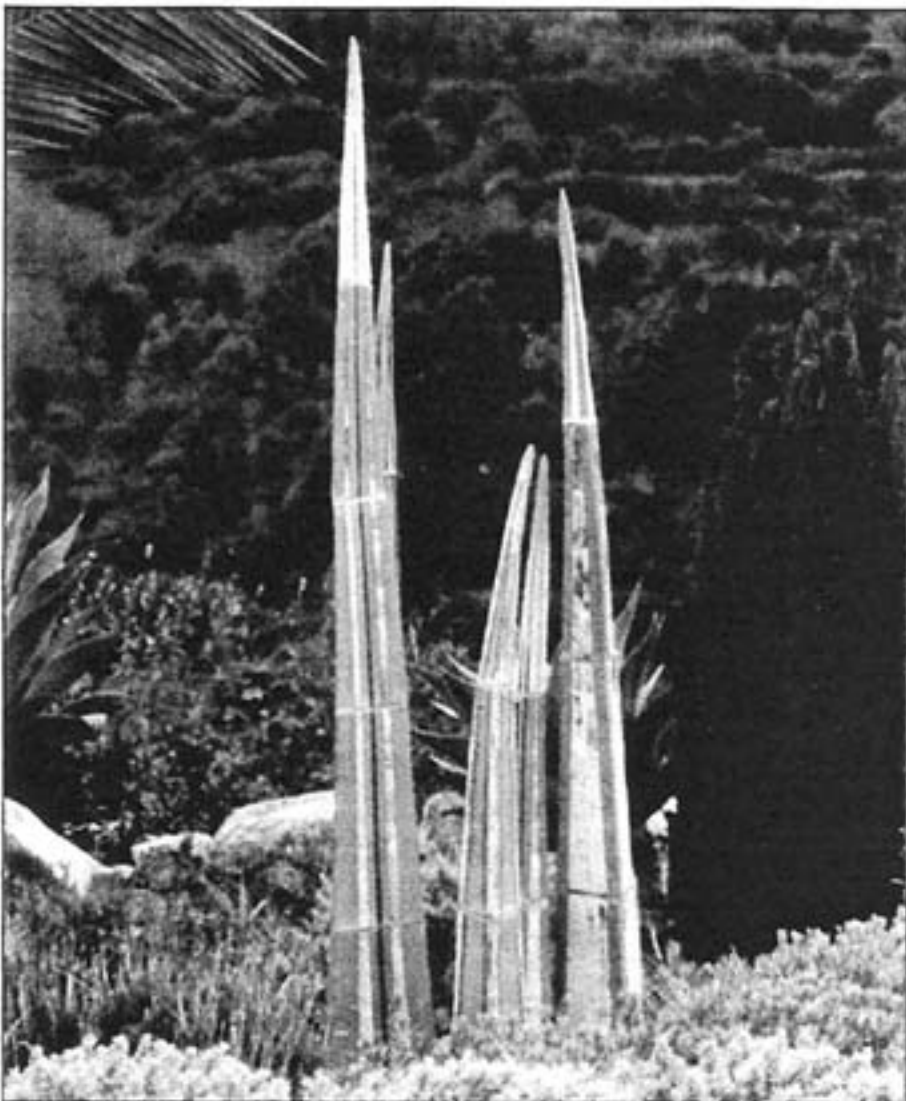
In 1980 Henrietta returned to her homeland, but this time she was using stoneware clay instead of the high manganese earthenware clay she had started with in Holland. She began to evolve and elaborate her murals into more 3 dimensional forms and once again to look for somewhere to exhibit and sell them. Her murals which became encrusted with geometrical shapes were not only decorative, but showed her love for the countryside in the way she combined spiky poppy seed heads with the smooth surface of a lily pad, and subtle creams with browns to enhance her interpretation of nature's



wonders. "I love the challenge of working with the materials you find in the place you live in and of creating durable objects with the earth, fire and water. It affects the way you see the world around you," she continued.

In India, where she moved to in 1988, stoneware clay was more difficult to obtain. Having tried to use the available raw materials: local clay with added horse manure for strength; a string of beads to burnish her work; cow dung and rice husks to fuel the paper kiln and smoke firing; rice straw ash to make glaze, she was able to acquire some stoneware clay from an American potter living in Pondicherry to enable her to work towards an exhibition in Bombay in 1992. Whilst studying Indian folk ceramics she did not so much make, as absorb, but as she explained, "Potting is a continuous journey. Occasionally you can travel a long way in just one day and then sometimes you need to stay still, before being able to set off again."

In 1995 she finally returned to Portugal when her husband retired. It is this stability that has prompted her to work on a much larger scale today. Preferring to slab build her sculptural work she has invested in a slab roller, imported from America and has begun to use a high grogged refractory stoneware clay, since it provides a warm, toasty colour when reduced. "Living in the beautiful surroundings of Sintra is very inspiring and certainly has influenced my latest body of work," which she says, "has to blend with nature and be a part of it". Describing her bamboo cluster sculptures, which are built in sections and stack one on top of another, she explains that they are based on real plants, so as not to look out of place in the garden. "It is fortunate that I am able to bring together my two passions in life, gardening and ceramics. Both require hard work and some determination to carry on when the going gets tough, but I am mindful of Geoffrey Whiting's words: 'A potter is really not such a bad thing to be.'"



# THE BARNES O.S.O. ARTS CENTRE

*Nearly eighteen months ago a community-based arts centre was opened in the Old Sorting Office on Barnes Common. How is it making out?*

*Keith Nicol went along to find out*

Physically, the Centre has three studios linked by partition walls which can be opened to create space for up to 120 people. The studios have sprung floors and a portable stage is available. Alongside is an airy café with a picture window view of Barnes Common. During the day there are Pilates and yoga classes and in the evenings a monthly film club plus theatre performances. Moray Watson is giving a one-man show about James Lees Milne on the 27 and 28 February and *Macbeth* is planned for March. Free play readings with professional actors participating are held monthly. Private functions are catered for and the Centre now has a licence for weddings.

For the visual arts, the Centre offers exhibition space and art classes. Over the past year there have been nine individual exhibitions plus the annual exhibition of the Barnes and Mortlake Arts Society. Recent individual exhibitions included *Antonia Fraser and Friends* and a joint exhibition by *Alan Moss and Gordon Humphrys*. There will be a photographic exhibition by *Jason Pierce Williams* in April and a pottery exhibition by *Gordon Spencer* in May. Each month there is a one-day exhibition of 2D and 3D work by local artists on a "first come, first served basis" where, typically, ten artists can display five works apiece. (Currently this is booked up to February.) This January, a six week Wednesday lunchtime art class is being offered by Gillian Moss.

The Centre is run by a Trust (Chairman: Anne Carroll 020 8876 9885) and its purpose is to provide a diversity of arts and health activities in easy reach of the local community. Judging by the "buzz" I encountered around the place on my two visits, it is succeeding!