



Su Lupasco with garden pot  
LUPASCO



Karin Hesselberg with a garden sculpture

making and skill. Though skill alone does not necessarily produce art, we questioned the acceptance of some work as art despite poor making.

It is mainly women who have been developing new forms of ceramics for outdoor locations, and, as I have already noted, women's work often seems to attract a different sort of attention from men's work. Some commentators appear to find it difficult to separate the gender of the maker from the work. For example, Anatol Orient (*Ceramic Review* 134, 1992) describes Linda Gunn-Russell's work as "celebrating women as goddesses of eroticism and independence", and Jane Hamlyn's "delicious" tableware as "an extension, perhaps, of women as mothers to all". This is presumably meant to be complimentary, but how many male potters have their work described as "fatherly" or "celebrating their virile voluptuousness"?

The five of us could not identify any specifically feminine element in our work, and were unable to tell which work was made by a man and which by a woman simply by looking at it. "I never think of myself being a woman when I'm working, I'm just me getting on with it," says Chris Richards. We could all say the same. However, we can all quote examples of sexist behaviour which remind us of our gender. Jane tells of a letter from a customer who firstly addressed an envelope to her, then placed her name at the top of the page, and began "Dear Sir . . .". The letter was handwritten by a woman! I have personally encountered one or two domineering male gallery owners who seem to employ a different manner of speaking to women than they do to men. Kate has found workmen and suppliers sexist in their attitudes on occasion.

There are women who claim to work to a monthly cycle, but we five do not work in this way. Other women use their bodies as imagery either overtly or subtly. Four of us do not, and Sue Lupasco who has in the past been concerned with the female body does not currently use it as her prime source of ideas. Whilst a student, Su went through a phase of making explicit images of the female genitals, and was astonished at the ferocious response to her work from the

staff. She was even advised to tear up and burn her drawings.

Su's experience at college raised important questions about whether certain work is taboo for women. Why did her work arouse such a negative reaction? Other incidents come to mind such as the angry reactions to Sandy Brown's article on the link between her creativity and menstrual cycle. (*Ceramic Review* 116, 1989). These examples indicate that even today it is not acceptable for women to say or make certain things. Men's work is never considered in relation to their biology. Few people question the acceptability of headless and armless women made by a male potter. However, regardless of aesthetic quality, this can be seen as depersonalisation of women.

Whilst we are not aware of having encountered sexism from organisations such as the Crafts Council, Craft Potters Association, and Regional Arts Boards the incidents I have quoted indicate that stereotypical views of women and their work still persist in some minds. Furthermore, though we do not believe that women are excluded from any area of ceramics, there is a tendency for self-selection. More men than women adopt the philosophy of Bernard Leach, where the making process is as significant as the finished pots. It may not be coincidence that two makers of garden pots who are well reviewed are both male and disciples of Bernard Leach.

Women have been successful in modern ceramics, but old attitudes die hard. Jane Norbury has found it easier to gain acceptance in ceramics than in sculpture, which has traditionally been dominated by men, despite the validation of her degree by sculptors. The achievements of women artists and craftspeople are still not reflected in the staffing of art colleges. Whilst numbers of male and female students are roughly equal, female staff are considerably outnumbered by male staff particularly in senior or permanent posts.

Despite the differences I have mentioned in attitudes to women's and men's work, I have no firm evidence that the relative lack of attention paid to garden ceramics is due to