



*'Raku Bow with Blue Wave', 2015, copper patina disc, 38 x 30 cm*



*'Couple', 2015, canal clay with copper patina, 38 x 24 cm*

## PETER HAYES' CERAMIC JOURNEY

The ceramic sculptures of Peter Hayes are replete with texture, patina and lustre, often with inclusions of metal components such as copper and brass, as well as marble and other stones in their composition. Text by Tim Saunders.

CANALS and navigations play a significant part in the ceramics of Peter Hayes, who lives in Bath where there are lots of waterways. When the canals were being built the navvies would deposit a ton of clay every third of a mile along the side to stop spillages and flooding. Hayes discovered these little mounds and collected the clay for use in his studio. 'It has been on the surface exposed to the elements for 50 years so it is weathered and beautiful and this positively affects the look and finish of the end product. I call it my Canal Clay and I don't remove any of the stones that are in it but mix it all together. I make my bases and a great many sculptures out of this resource.'

He adds: 'The reason I work in clay is that when I was a student I could literally dig it up and make something. It is supple and easy to work with and a blank canvas.' Today his work can be found in major public and private collections throughout the world. But he still enjoys the



*'Marble Disc', 2015, mounted on canal clay base, 38 x 40 x 15 cm*



'Brass Blade on Ceramic Base', 2015, stoneware, 40 x 28 cm



'Raku Disc with Blue Wave', 2015, stoneware, 70 x 60 cm

process of digging it out – it's very primitive.' In addition to his local supply, Hayes also uses clays from all over the world, including Australia. As a student he took part in archaeological digs during which he discovered all manner of ancient pottery shards, which inspired him to incorporate bits of metal into the making process. For instance, with his porcelain forms he sometimes applies copper to the surface of the clay prior to firing. When the copper becomes molten he uses tongs to extract the piece from the kiln and plunge it into sawdust, which starves it of oxygen and produces some fabulous lustres. Minerals, such as iron and copper, that are introduced into the raku process have their own affect on the colours and patterns on the clay. This erosion process continues with sanding so that the texture and cracks do not interrupt the surface but become an organic, integral part of the patina. Each piece takes on its own developing surface, its own history and its own unique aesthetic.

The sources of Hayes' inspiration are diverse. He picks up ideas during his many visits to Canada, America, Israel, Japan, Korea and Egypt. 'Objects evolve through creative thinking,' he says. 'My aim isn't to compete with nature but for the work to evolve within the environment. I am naturally drawn to the shapes of artefacts and objects, from other cultures and times – but which remain timeless.'

Several different types of clay are used by Hayes, ranging from smooth semi-porcelain for his raku ware through to china and stoneware. Each type of clay has its particular demands and requires varying degrees of time to produce a finished work. He never works on one piece at a time, instead preferring to be engaged on as many as 15 pieces alternatively, 'which spreads the knowledge'.

After completing training at Birmingham College of Art his career took off when his work caught the eye of some New York galleries. 'During a 10-year period I had some great shows twice a year in New York and Chicago, which introduced me to an international market. In fact, I established my reputation in America before I did in the UK. In those early days 70 per cent of my sales occurred in the States. I have broadened my appeal since then.'

He is now commissioned to produce sculptures all over the world. On receiving a commission for a large sculpture in India, his client suggested that he should make it there rather than in the England.

'My first response was that such a proposal was absolutely impossible. I would have to find the right clay, build a suitable kiln and set up a workshop. Their response was "why not come after Christmas and avoid a chunk of winter? Here the weather is perfect, the monsoon is almost over and everything is green and the sun shines every day".'

At the start of 2013 Hayes set off for the city of Udaipur, the City of the Lakes, in Rajasthan. 'The family put me up in a guest house with a cook and a driver. They found me a makeshift studio where I could at least make a start. The first two weeks, however, were an utter shambles. The first lesson I learnt was you cannot do it the English way. The Indian way seemed chaotic and at times frustrating, but it worked. Eventually I found suitable clay in Calcutta, 1,600 miles away. I ordered 20 tons and it arrived in 50 litre plastic containers. It was slip. I was unaware that you didn't dig clay during the monsoon season. We poured the whole lot onto the flat roof of the studio and let the sun do the rest. I ended up with eight tonnes of clay.'

Each morning on the way to his workshop Hayes would arrive at a main road junction where small groups of men congregated in the shade waiting for the possibility of employment. One morning a man stood out from the rest. He was holding a hammer head attached to a length of conduit pipe and standing to attention like a cold stream guard. 'If I do anything in India, I shall employ him,'



'Bone China Discs on Clay Base', 2015, 28 x 15 cm

thought Hayes, and he did despite not speaking Hindi. But nothing in India is ever simple. I was told I couldn't employ him alone; he came in a team: Gangaram, Dollar Singh and "half man". Negotiations over, I had my team. The first few weeks were difficult – misunderstandings, language problems and even simple tasks were tricky. It was going to be a steep learning curve. Half man became my shadow, he would stand a half pace behind me wherever I went with a beaming smile. I'm sure he would have thrown himself in front of a bus to save me if need be.

Gangaram, my hammer man, has lived up to my expectations. Unfortunately, they've been told they are working for a famous artist all the way from the UK. So far I have not impressed any of them with my art. Dollar Singh, the old man, looks at my work and shakes his head before shuffling away. The Hindi word for clay is *mitti*. I have elevated half man to "Mitti" man and suggested that this is what he should call such from now on. I don't think this moniker is too bad; after all I started my elevated career as a clay monitor at Cherry Orchard Infant School in Birmingham. Gradually things are coming together on my Indian project, which will be completed by the time this article is published.'



Peter Hayes

Peter Hayes acknowledges that he has been so fortunate in meeting and working with other talented artists, whose introduction of new materials, techniques and different ways of making, has been invaluable in expanding the range of his own practice.

**Tim Saunders**



'Raku Bow with Blue Wave', 2015, copper patina, 38 x 30 cm



'Bottle Pots', 2015, stoneware with copper patina, 92 x 17cm and 16 x 9 cm