

his subject is of the greatest importance, as it affects the buildings we live and work in, and therefore has a direct impact on all of our lives. He went on to say that much architecture had lost the virtues of restraint, neutrality and modesty—indeed, it had become impudent and arrogant. He tried to help his students to become familiar with existing ideas and practices, to focus upon skills that allowed them to develop a concern for Humane Architecture, to connect Humane Architecture to their own agendas, and to tap into the deep connections between their motivations, their processes and their work. Or, as one Guild officer put it more succinctly, to ensure that the ego of the architect did not dominate his building.

Your Secretary (who in one phase of his career had seen many appalling Local Authority buildings) agreed wholeheartedly with Tony Aldrich, but mentioned that two great Guild architects, Past Masters Lutyens and Gradidge, knew what their clients should want and told them so!

Tony Aldrich discussed and illustrated a number of buildings which met his own criteria of Humane Architecture. They included a Japanese cottage, Butterfield's All Saints' (brilliant of course, but more godly than humane), a Finnish log cabin, York Minster (a very great building), Louis Kahn's Exeter Library in New Hampshire, and a number of house interiors. He commented that Humane Architecture cannot be used to circumscribe a single style, and that whilst many buildings possess some of the traits of Humane Architecture, none do so completely.

Tony Aldrich stressed the importance of vernacular and craft traditions, and of the genius loci. He described the latter by showing several illustrations of a building harmonising with a natural setting, often in woodland. But it would have been of greater interest to see examples of buildings in an urban setting which had been designed to achieve such harmony—this is a more difficult task, but a very common need. It was also notable that apart from a child standing in a pond (and a cat), his illustrations were devoid of people, which somewhat limited their humane qualities.

He said that architecture has to have a concern for the 'whole bodily experience' as well as shape, fit, colour, weight, texture, resistance, pattern, hardness, taste and aroma, together with several other qualities. He quoted a comment made of Saynatsaios Town Hall 'that its darkness contributed to the sense of collective reverence'. He quoted Peter Zumthor as saying that when he designed he tried to use a spatially associative quality of thought. Again, the language has to be interpreted—to a degree, this was a barrier between Tony Aldrich and his audience.

As well as contemporary architects, or at least 20th-century practitioners, Tony Aldrich spoke of Morris and Ruskin. He stressed P.M. Morris's ideas on the sustainable and humane society, and Ruskin's principle of 'deep engagement' making the art or craft of intrinsic value. He went on to remark that what counts most is one's attitude of engagement, and that without engagement the resulting building was likely to have the arrogance he talked of earlier.

A number of Brethren joined in the discussion. The Master commented: 'It's not what I think, but it's what I feel'. P.M. Boulter remarked that he set out to fulfil his own dreams and the dreams of the client, and to answer the question: 'Will it work?' Bro. Guy Reid emphasized that if art did not communicate, it failed. P.M. Zachary Taylor wondered about less attractive loci; could Humane Architecture be built there? His wife asked about blocks of flats and Tony Aldrich's criteria for Humane Architecture; she cited the isolation experienced by a mother and child marooned many floors up by a broken lift. On reflection, it is notable that it was mainly non-architects who contributed to the discussion.

One has the impression that whilst there was much support for Tony Aldrich's theories of Humane Architecture, there was some doubt as to their achievability, especially given the economics of building today. There was considerable applause.

CERAMICS TODAY

Bro. Magdalene Odundo and
Emmanuel Cooper

25 November 2004

The Master introduced Bro. Magdalene Odundo and Emmanuel Cooper, both of whom are potters. Emmanuel Cooper lectures on ceramics at the RCA, has written a biography of Bernard Leach, and is editor of the *Ceramic Review*. Bro. Odundo is a noted potter whose work draws on African traditions as well as those of Europe. They were both to speak about and illustrate their own work, and Emmanuel Cooper was also to discuss the work of other British potters.

Emmanuel Cooper spoke first, giving a brief overview of 20th-century ceramics before his presentation of his own work. He started by saying that we have inherited at least 10,000 years of pottery making; it is one of the oldest crafts, as well as an art form. Early man needed and made pottery of a great variety of shapes and sizes, and cultures were often identified by their pots.

The 20th century had seen a revolution in pottery, which was largely due to the advent of the studio potter. The prime exemplar of this tradition was Bernard Leach. He had been influenced by Japanese pottery and by English slipware of the 16th and 17th centuries.

Leach was a great graphic artist and had led the way, through his pupils' and his own example, to create original and imaginative pottery. Examples of his work and that of his pupils was illustrated. The first of Leach's pupils to be mentioned was Michael Cardew. To a degree he had moved away from the studio tradition, in that he wanted to make pots which were usable in everyday life, but his work was snapped up by the art market and priced at levels which few people could afford. The work of other Leach pupils and followers was briefly discussed and shown, including that of Phil Rogers, who was influenced by Korean work, Gareth Mason, Edmund de Waal, and Alan Caiger-Smith. Emmanuel Cooper also spoke of the German potters who came to England as refugees: Lucie Rie, Hans Coper and Elizabeth Fritsch were in this group, adding to the richness of the pottery produced in Britain during the 20th century. In these relatively short introductions to these potters there was much work to be admired, and much that had influenced mass-produced commercial work.

Emmanuel Cooper's own work, mostly made at his studio in Primrose Hill, was in his own words small-scale pottery for domestic use, and he described himself as an urban potter. Nevertheless, his work was original and much of it colourful. It often had a chunky quality, giving the feeling of robust work that could stand up to daily domestic use, but one doubted if it now served that purpose—the art market probably consumed much of what he produced. His use of colour was notable: it was often sparing, so that quite bold effects were produced with the minimum of colour. His range was narrow, but each piece had an individual quality which made it stand out, even though it was a variation of a similar pot. From his talk one got a sense of the quality which made him an important teacher at the RCA.

Bro. Magdalene Odundo was very different: her work brought together an intercontinental range of techniques and artistry. It had a vitality similar (in your Secretary's view) to the dynamics of African drumming. It breathed life, and above all it had beauty.

Beauty used to be a word much used in describing various art forms, but it has to a degree fallen out of use—perhaps this is owing to a lack of beauty in much work produced today. Perhaps the horrors of the modern world forbid beauty to emerge. But Magdalene Odundo's work has abundant beauty.

Some of her pots were large, 2 or 3 feet tall, and depending on the piece, swelled to a substantial roundness similar to the African conception of female beauty. They held the eye; one wanted to look hard at them, and felt the need to walk round and see them from many angles, though of course the slides did not permit this. In one exhibition a pot of hers had been shown next to a Matisse, and it was easy to understand that her work would not wilt in the shadow of that master.

She was brought up in Kenya, and her family came from eastern Zaire. She had studied in Nigeria and at Farnham College. Printmaking and photography were also part of her artistic equipment. She had looked at pre-Columbian pottery in the Americas, and like so many others, at Japanese work too.

All of this was distilled into an art which was truly unique, and it was art as opposed to pots of a more domestic purpose. The unique quality came from each pot being original in design and manufacture. She took risks in the firing and in producing a finish which was not repeatable. Similar work might come from her hands, but each piece had its own character.

With some work, whose finish had a metallic look, she had burnished it with stones for hours at a time in order to satisfy her eye. Her descriptions of working in themselves conveyed the intensity she brought to each pot, and the pots were capable of standing before a viewer and giving great satisfaction.

All of this may sound overly poetic and high-flown, but Magdalene Odundo's pottery had that scarce element of beauty so seldom seen today. Much of it is almost impossible to describe, but it demands to be looked at—in its presence the eye is compelled to gaze at it.

Emmanuel Cooper had received appropriately substantial applause, but Bro. Odundo's reception had that warmth which Brethren reserve for unique occasions.

There was considerable committed discussion, both from Brethren and from the many visiting potters also present—there were some twenty in the hall. Bro. Hughes talked of the concept of risk, which he compared to jazz: each pot (or riff) has a unique nature. The idea of not being fully in control made achievement very satisfactory. Bro. Craven spoke of the burnishing technique, and was told of the pebbles that were used, an interesting comparison to a studio potter who might use a machine. Magdalene Odundo also said that if a pot went wrong, you accepted the consequences and moved on. Bro. Swash asked Emmanuel Cooper about the right way to see his pots;

he replied that he had no strong view, except that he felt it was best to walk around them.

In the bar afterwards there was for a time a dearth of customers, as many stayed in the hall to talk to both speakers. Much modern language seems to lack meaning, but this meeting had what can only be described as 'a buzz'.

NOTES

■ OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE OF THE ART WORKERS GUILD 2004/2005

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IMMEDIATE PAST-MASTER
Chris Boulter

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Hon. Treasurer - Gerald Southgate
Hon. Secretary - Anthony Paine
Hon. Secretary - Matthew Eve

ART WORKERS GUILD CHEST

Trustees: P.M. Ian Archie Beck, Bro. Ian Rank-Broadley, Bro. Matthew Eve

■ NEW HONORARY SECRETARY

At the meeting of 20 September 2004 Bro. Matthew Eve was introduced as Bro. Carrie Bullock's replacement as Hon. Secretary continuing for the term alongside Hon. Sec. Bro Anthony Paine.

■ OPEN HOUSE DAY 2004

At the meeting of 30 September 2004 it was reported that just under 500 visitors had attended the Art Workers Guild's Open House Day. The Master thanked Bros. MacCaw and Oliver and all other helpers for helping to make the day so successful.

■ A CENTURY CELEBRATED

On 14 October the Master announced that at the meeting of 28 October the Guild would celebrate the 100th birthday of Bro. Josephina de Vasconcellos. Whilst it was not possible for her to be present, there was a big celebration planned for Bro. de Vasconcellos's birthday on 26 October in Cumbria, where the sculptress now lives. The Master had commissioned Bro. John Nash to write a special commemorative calligraphic tribute from the Guild, which would be presented to her on her birthday. Two weeks later the Master told Brethren that the Guild's gift to Bro. de Vasconcellos had been safely delivered and presented on her birthday. Copies of three books about Bro. Josephina's life and work were open on the front table, and the Master also commented that the artist's birthday had also been celebrated in a short piece on BBC Radio 4.

■ STATUETTE OF P.M. GLYNN BOYD HARTE

On 28 October, Bro. Carrie Bullock announced that on Friday 19 November there would be the unveiling of the new portrait of P.M. Boyd Harte, a statuette made by Bro. Guy Reid. The unveiling would take place between 7pm and 9pm in the bar and front room area. All Brethren were welcome to come. On Friday 19 November about 150 people attended the unveiling which, as an event, had something of the atmosphere and charm of one of Glynn Boyd Harte's pantomimes. P.M. Boyd Harte's family, the sculptor Guy Reid, and many colourful characters from the P.M.'s life attended this wholly successful and enjoyable evening.

■ VALETE

BRO. PETER GARRARD
Painter. Elected 1957.