



NEW CERAMICS

"I am a clay addict"

The Israeli ceramist

MICHAL ALON

Antje Soléau



From 3 - 11 December 2005 bowls, vases and installations by Michal Alon will be on show at the Werkstattgalerie Moses-Hielscher, Wallenthaler Str. 17, D-53925 Kall-Scheven, Germany, tel. +49 (0)2441 - 5399, fax - 777996.

Antje Soléau lives in Cologne and works as a freelance journalist for German and international magazines specialising in art and the crafts.

The Israeli ceramist Michal Alon shows strata in her work: geological strata that occur in nature, archaeological layers visible at every turn in the Middle East, and layers of the personality and the psyche.

Fissured surfaces and tattered edges are the unmistakable trademarks of Michal Alon's vessel objects.

Actually, she wanted to be anything but a ceramist. As a child, she had experienced that her mother, Hanna Charag-Zuntz (cf. NEUE KERAMIK 1/99), a pioneer of Israeli ceramics, had had more time for ceramics than for her children. Consequently, after graduating from secondary school, Michal Alon had studied packaging design at the Industrial and Environmental Design Department of Belazel Academy for Art and Design in Jerusalem.

But then everything changed: just before her first big exhibition in her native city of Hamburg, Hanna Charag-Zuntz broke her hip, and her daughter had to be a "substitute for her legs" setting the exhibition up, as she says herself. Michal Alon did graduate from the Academy, but only to begin an apprenticeship with her mother immediately afterwards. Now she describes her mother as the best teacher she ever had, although she never adopted her formal repertoire. It was the way of looking at and working with clay, of experiencing ceramics, and her general attitude to life that she took over from her mother. "Now I am a clay addict", is how she describes her passion today.

After finishing her apprenticeship in Haifa, she went to Hóhr-Grenzhausen to learn from Hildegard Storr-Britz. Another



top -
MICHAL ALON in her studio

left -
vase object - stoneware - thrown -
Seiger cone 6 in oxidation -
d 31 cm - h 24 cm



above -
bowl - thrown - stoneware - multiple glaze firings - Seger cone 6 in oxidation
 d 27 cm - h 15 cm

left -
vase object - stoneware - thrown - Seger cone 6 in oxidation -
 d 29 cm - h 15 cm

great influence on her work was a summer course at the University of Haifa with Colin Pearson. From him she learned that a clean-cut, thrown bowl form can be the starting point for other forms, and especially for the combination of forms. This is what "makes work exciting and alive".

Her work is mainly wheel-thrown. Over the years, however, there has been a shift in emphasis in her work from purely applied art to a more autonomous approach to art. Vessels now longer have to be purely functional; from them, installations big enough to fill a room develop.

For many years, Michal Alon has studied layers and strata. Her immediate environment in Israel provides the best evidence for this in the geological strata recognisable in nature. But there are also archaeological layers that are visible at every turn in the Middle East, and not least, there are the layers of the personality and the psyche. Layers and strata can be found both in Michal Alon's approach to the form of the object and in the technique she uses. "I throw very clear-cut, simple forms which in a sense are a continuation or even an interpretation of traditional objects. Many of my vase forms are reminiscent of ancient amphorae, irrespective of whether they have a foot." It is obvious that the landscape of Israel plays an important part with its deserts and rock formations, which have been shaped by wind, sun and rain. "The tattered edges of my vessels ultimately derive from impressions of the landscape."

These edges are her great speciality. First, she throws a plate, makes tears in the lip and then leaves it on the wheel. Then on another wheel she throws a thick ring and cuts it into thin slices with a knife or a needle. Each slice is then laid on a wooden bat and dried with a hair dryer. Finally, all the individual slices are assembled on the plate. This is how the strata with tattered edges are made.

She usually uses a red or yellow-firing body with pyrite flecks. She fires in an electric kiln to 1220°C.

Michal Alon describes herself as a glaze fanatic. She has innumerable glaze tests. "For me, glazing is far more than just decoration," she says. "On the contrary, glazing is an integral part of every piece, and that is why I try to find a glaze that goes best with a certain form and complements or exaggerates it." She works with several layers of glaze which have to be fired separately. She has recently become deeply involved in textured glazes. Five years ago she began lecturing at the Givat-Haviva Arts Centre. This centre, where both courses of an academic standard and hobby courses are on offer, is a part of the inner-Israeli peace process. Israelis and Arabs, young people and adults all learn together here in a relaxed atmosphere - and almost as a by-product, they get to know and understand themselves and each other better. This centre is a new challenge for Michal Alon. She not only enjoys the teaching but she feels fully integrated in the aims and tasks of the centre.

Michal Alon was born in Haifa, Israel in 1951. She studied at the Industrial & Environmental Design Department der Bezalel Academy for Art and Design in Jerusalem from 1971 - 1973. She trained as a ceramist with Hanna Charag-Zuntz from 1976 - 1979, and in 1979 she studied under Hildegard Storr-Britz in Höhr-Grenzhausen. She began work in her own studio in 1980. In 1986 she attended a course given by Colin Pearson at the University of Haifa. She has been teaching at Givat-Haviva Arts Centre since 2000. Work by Michal Alon can be found in major private collections in Israel, Italy, Germany, Belgium, Australia and the USA as well as the Eretz-Israel-Museum in Tel-Aviv.