

As I was going to St Ives...

LIVING A TRADITION AT THE LEACH POTTERY

It's a long way from the tourist fray and the packed summertime beaches that so many people associate with St Ives, Cornwall and that's part of the beauty of the place. Far from the seafront, with its innumerable galleries, craft shops and cafes lies the Leach Pottery, a bastion of tranquillity and East Asian sensibility. Created by Bernard Leach (1887-1979), the esteemed English studio potter, (and widely acknowledged as the most influential potter of the 20th century), it was from the small studio on Higher Stennack in St Ives that Leach contributed so much to artistic sensitivity, both in Britain and in the wider world.

Although a Sunday afternoon drive past the Leach Pottery wouldn't immediately call all this to mind, just one glance at the objects on display inside reveals so much engaging detail of not only the life and production of Leach, but also on the whole myriad of artists whose work have been influenced by him. The American craft potter Warren MacKenzie, instructor at the University of Minnesota for many years and currently Regents' professor emeritus there, is just such a person. He studied with

Leach in St Ives between 1949 and 1952. Portland, Oregon-based potter Carson Culp finished up as a volunteer studio assistant in 2017, and he is currently resident artist at the Museum of Ceramic Art in the legendary pottery town of Mashiko, Japan. He, too, is captivated by the many historic connections between Leach and Mashiko, where Leach first encountered the master potter, Shoji Hamada (1894-1978).

Consisting of a museum, gallery, studio and shop packed with locally made pots, the Leach Pottery is an absolute must-see in Cornwall, and it can easily serve as the focal point to include a look around other centres of artistic production, past and present, in St Ives. Barbara Hepworth's sculpture, for instance, is situated in a museum and garden not far away, and the recently reopened and architecturally striking Tate St Ives fronts the Atlantic a bit further on.

Led by South African Roelof Uys, who began at the Pottery in 2013, a team of potters are regularly on site, producing Leach Standard Ware which is sold in the shop, online and in select lo-





cations around the country. Seasalt, the Cornwall-based retail clothing store, generously provides an annual bursary for an apprenticeship at the Leach Pottery. In addition, three and five day classes are offered for people who want to improve their throwing skills and also for beginners, who need more basic training. Instruction for this takes place in Leach's original studio. Hand-building and throwing classes are conducted in the evening, and MPhil and PhD research is heartily encouraged.

There are four or five selling exhibitions per year in the main Gallery at the Pottery and The Cube Gallery exhibition space features a different show every six months. Following on from the major *Reunion: Potters from the Time of Bernard Leach* show, which featured work of all known surviving potters who studied under Leach, there's now a solo showing of the East Asian inspired work of lead potter Roelof Uys, which runs July 7–October 7 2018.

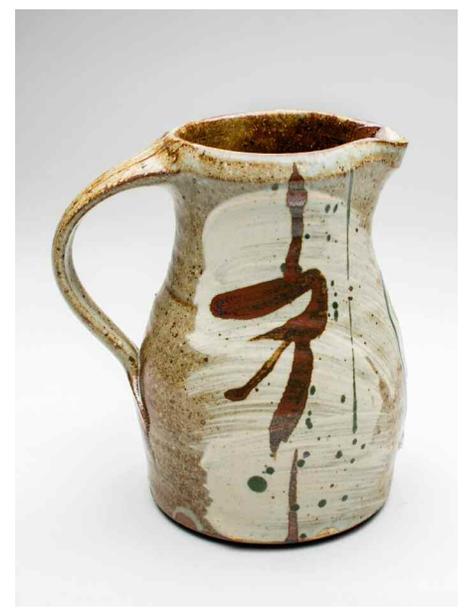
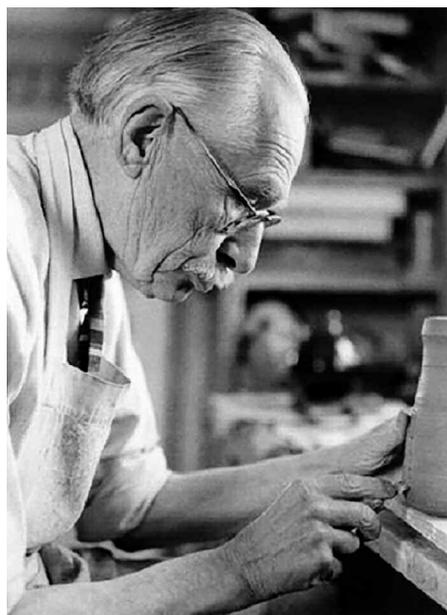
An ongoing programme of talks, masterclasses, workshops and demonstrations are given by visiting potters, lecturers and staff members. Apprenticeships and volunteer placements are available too, and long term volunteers have the opportunity to live on-site. A great recent addition to the Pottery is a resource and

seminar room as well as a library featuring, at last count, 700 books.

Although Bernard Leach was born in Hong Kong and spent his first few years in Japan, he was also active in England and studied at the Slade School of Fine Art in London. It was in Japan, though, that he came to create pots, alongside Hamada, in Mashiko.

Leach's best known work, *A Potter's Book* (1940), is one of the most significant potting handbooks of the 20th century. And the high-profile position enjoyed by Leach meant that he attracted attention to Japanese and Korean arts and crafts, particularly within the American and European artistic communities. He and his publications were influential and his association with Soetsu (Muneyoshi) Yanagi (1889-1961), the philosopher, art critic and primary force behind the Mingei (Folk Art) Movement, played a critical role in the development of the concepts which Leach espoused throughout the course of his long and varied career. Leach met Yanagi in 1909 and they forged a relationship which survived for decades.

When Leach returned to England in 1920, it was Hamada who accompanied him and together they created the Pottery in St Ives. The first East Asian style climbing kiln in the West was constructed



by them together (although it was rebuilt by Tsuronosuke Matsubayashi in 1922), and this kiln was in regular use up until the 1970s.

A further international presence at the Leach Pottery took the form of Texan Janet Darnell Leach (1918-1997), born in Grand Saline, she was Leach's third wife. They met at the illustrious Black Mountain College in North Carolina, where Leach, Hamada and Yanagi were present as part of the 1952 US tour, the same tour which included Santa Fe, New Mexico, where they met with famed Navajo potter, Maria Martinez (1887-1980).

Janet Leach created her own distinctive work at the Pottery for nearly 40 years. After her death, the Pottery continued, though on a different scale, until extensive renovations were begun in the early 21st century. Expansion to the site included more kilns, a new studio workshop, an exhibition space and the Pottery Cottage Showroom where a large selection of pots made on-site are sold. Potters come from all over the world to live and work in the Leach tradition, such as the aforementioned Carson Culp. It's often possible to see these international potters at work, progressing further the East-West philosophical concepts on which the Pottery was founded.

Check the website for more information at www.leachpottery.com. Follow them on Facebook at The Leach Pottery and Twitter @leachpottery.

Further reading on Bernard Leach and the Leach Pottery at St Ives:

.....
Tony Birks and Cornelia Wingfield Digby. *Bernard Leach, Hamada & their Circle*. Oxford: Phaidon-Christie's, 1990.

.....
Emmanuel Cooper. *Bernard Leach: Life & Work. New Haven and London*: Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, Yale University Press, 2003.

.....
Bernard Leach. *Beyond East and West: Memoirs, Portraits and Essays*. London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1978.

.....
Bernard Leach. *A Potter's Book*. London: Faber and Faber, 1940.

.....
Edmund de Waal. *Bernard Leach; St Ives Artists Series*. London: Tate Gallery Publishing, 1998.

.....
Edmund de Waal. *Bernard Leach; British Artists Series*. London: Tate Gallery Publishing, 2014.

Dr Susan House Wade is a design historian, specialising in the exchange of visual cultures of the East and West in the early-mid 20th century. Contact her at housewadepbd@gmail.com



The family doctor.
Redefined.



GP · Paediatrician · Gynaecologist

020 8940 5009
Mon – Sat and evenings

Clinical excellence hassle-free



Join the French speaking
community in London !

Meet our 950 members
Participate in 70 cultural events
Socialize in one of our
local area groups
Join our Mums & Kids activities,
Clubs, Sports courses...
and much more !

Visit and join online on
www.londresaccueil.org.uk

find us on Facebook