

# WOOD, FIRE, TERRA SIGILLATA

AN INTERNATIONAL EXHIBITION AT MUSÉE BERNARD PALISSY

by Patsy Winstons and Mark Kopylov

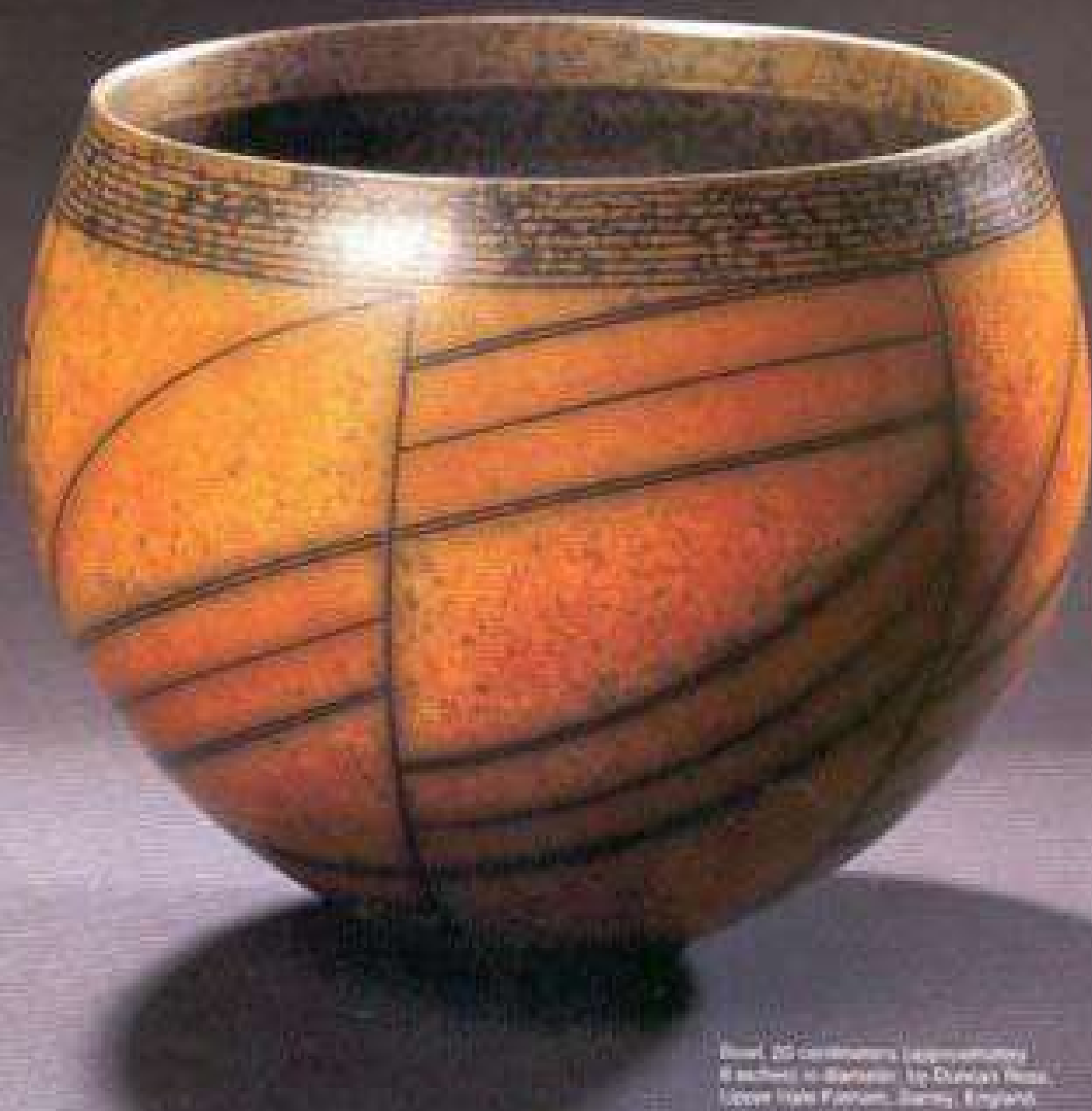


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Upper House Furnace, Surrey, England



Spoon and rest, 43 centimeters (approximately 17 inches) in length, handbuilt and carved terra cotta, raku fired, by Fabienne Girola, Jura, Switzerland.



Lidded jar, 37 centimeters (15 inches) in height, by Pierre Bayle, Narbonne, France.



Sculpture, 9.5 centimeters (approximately 4 inches) in height, photographic transfer on terra cotta, by Tjok Dessauvage, Sint-Eloois-Winkel, Belgium.

with terra sigillata in the early 1970s [see "Pierre Bayle: Quest for Beauty" in the January 2001 CM]. It's interesting to note that it was because he could only afford to build himself a small kiln that couldn't reach high temperatures. Most of his contemporaries were making stoneware at that time. Of course, the area where Bayle lives is so rich in examples of ancient terra sigillata that

he found ample inspiration. The surrounding nature is also a never-ending source of ideas.

In the next exhibition room, which was very small, were the sculptures of Fabienne Girola of Switzerland. For inspiration, she usually focuses on specific themes, often objects out of everyday life. Here, a series of spoons were exhibited on a low pedestal.

Raku-fired vessel forms by Tjok Dessauvage of Belgium were among the works shown in the last room. Since 1984, he has been throwing double-walled pots with flat tops, which are incised, textured and glazed.

Altogether, this exhibition offered a fascinating look at how 13 ceramists, though using similar techniques, are able to create such divergent work. ▲

**S**aint-Avit is a tiny, picturesque village in the south of France. Around its Romanesque church, built in the 13th century, are not more than a dozen little houses and buildings, about half of which have been converted into a ceramics museum.

Bernard Palomy, an important Renaissance intellectual who did research on medicine, chemistry, geology, glass, etc., lived and worked in Saint-Avit during the 16th century. He wrote several books, and has been a source of inspiration for generations of ceramists.

By the 1970s, the village had been almost completely abandoned, and many buildings were falling into decay. To attract tourist business, the community council decided to organize a yearly ceramics fair. Later on, the council bought and restored several houses in order to create the ceramics museum. It now organizes an annual contemporary ceramics exhibition focusing on a certain theme. For 2000, the theme was "wood, fire and terra sigillata," a fitting choice, given that the area was a center of terra-sigillata production during the reign of the Roman emperor Augustus.

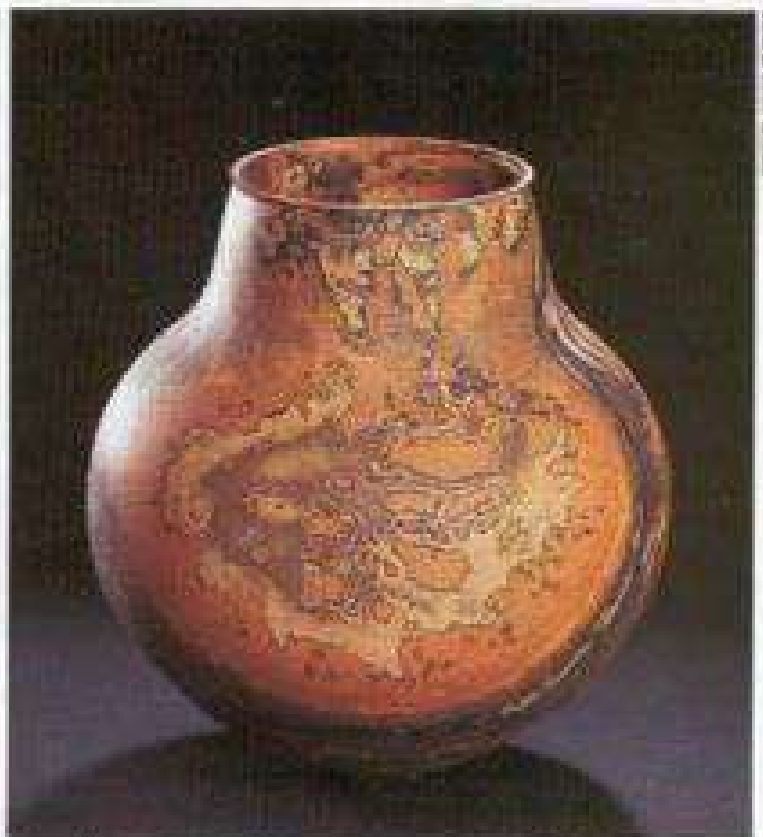
Featuring works by 13 contemporary ceramists, the exhibition was installed in a building called l'Espace Lucas, and at the museum, where ancient ceramics on loan from the Gallo-Roman museum in Millau were on view as well.

On entering l'Espace Lucas, the visitor first encountered the work of Duncan Row of England. Set on a row of pedestals at eye level, his simple, pure forms with burnished terra-sigillata surfaces exhibited an astonishing degree of control over the smoke firing.

To the left were vessels by Jean Grison, a self-taught potter from France. The forms he creates are also pure, but the smoke-firing effects are more random. The smooth surfaces are treated with engobes and lustres; results are sometimes matt, sometimes silky.

The next museum room included the work of Patty Wouters of Belgium. Her vessels refer to universal and spiritual concepts, such as the Tibetan religious beliefs regarding prayers and good wishes sent around the world.

Pierre Boyle's work was on the first floor of the museum. He was one of the first ceramists in France to experiment



Vase, 23 centimeters (approximately 9 inches) in height, terra cotta, with layered engobes, sanded and fired, by Jean Grison, Courtrai, France.



Two vases, 35 centimeters (approximately 14 inches) in height, brown and altered terra cotta, by Patty Wouters, Brasschaat, Belgium.