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Richard Prentice - Blackbird Ceramics

RICHARD PRENTICE

When Blackbird Ceramics opened in July 2016, in the harbour village of Saundersfoot in Pembrokeshire, it marked the beginning of the life Richard Prentice had been dreaming about since he was a young child. His interest in ceramics was ignited at an early age, with school trips to museums and galleries in the 1970s. He became fascinated by the versatile and beautiful nature of clay, and the legacies left behind from generations and cultures working with this natural raw material.

This early fascination is evidenced in Richard's work today where he is inspired by classical forms, yet makes them contemporary and relevant to today. His pieces are also evocative of the beautiful surroundings where he lives.

Having moved to Pembrokeshire nearly ten years ago, his studio is located on one of the world's most stunning coastlines. Richard is always mesmerised by his surroundings, he says "There is a great deal of inspiration here, the landscape is constantly changing - from heavy grey Atlantic storms, to the sea being like a mill pond of aquamarine and blue hues, only interrupted by the cathedral-esque quality of the rock formations that take your breath away."

Translating the elements from the Pembrokeshire coast into design, form and style are his priorities. "Evoking a feeling or essence of what exists here is as important in my work as



leaving space and ambiguity to allow my audience and clients to explore their own thoughts, draw their own conclusions, their own feelings, and relate it to their own story," says Richard, who strongly believes emotion is critical in art. "Working with ceramics in such an incredible environment supports my ability to create pieces of ceramic art and studio pottery that have a real sense of place, and are rooted in their environment."

Richard works primarily with three types of clay: Earthenware, black grogged clay, and Fine Bone China with its clay sourced from Cornwall. The techniques he uses are broad, from slab pots, slip casting, hand coiling and throwing pieces on his vintage foot pedal potter's wheel. "I don't like to restrict myself to a specific way of creating my work, I design my pieces and spend a lot of time considering the best way to make each piece."

Richard's 'Sea Globes' and 'Sea Urns' are exquisite forms that act as canvases for his contemporary complex glazing techniques and multiple firings. Each piece is finished with platinum, gold or copper detailing and every Sea Globe or Urn is unique, with the artist working and over-working glazes to create stunning and dramatic effects. "I don't hold back when I am working on these pieces, I take risks, I'm constantly pushing myself, and whilst some pieces don't survive the process, those that do are truly memorable."

Richard is also keen to create pieces that reflect the industrial past of Pembrokeshire and developed Colliery Pots that are inspired by the collieries near to where he lives and the old trams that used to carry coal in front of Blackbird Ceramics Gallery to the Saundersfoot Harbour. These pieces are both iconic and beautiful in their form with a close connection to the historical, cultural and industrial past of where they were made, which is reflected in their design. They are slab pots, made from black grogged clay with hand thrown chimneys to reflect the derelict collieries around Pembrokeshire. They are finished with gold and copper lustres, which not only represents the richness of minerals found underground in Pembrokeshire, but also the royal connection, as Queen Victoria reportedly insisted Saundersfoot coal was supplied to every royal residence. In March 2017, Colliery Pots were exhibited at The Woolf Gallery, London as part of Welsh Art Week and Wales Week London.

Richard's work has sold to collectors from around the UK, and further afield including Canada, U.S.A., Australia, New Zealand, Singapore and Europe. His gallery, situated in the bustling harbour village of Saundersfoot, is a great place to meet the artist and see his work.

To find out more about Richard Prentice and his studio pottery, please visit www.blackbirdceramics.co.uk or you can find him on Twitter @theartfulpotter, Instagram @blackbirdceramics or at his gallery at 12a The Strand, Saundersfoot, Pembrokeshire SA67 8JW

