

Jitka Palmer

## Jitka Palmer's Narrative Vessels

by Jim Weaver



"Hackney Downs," 38 centimeters (15 inches) in height, coiled and pinched red earthenware with slips, stains, oxides and clear glaze, £450 (US\$822).

Jitka Palmer was destined from an early age to be an artist. Had she not discovered clay as a schoolgirl, she would certainly have found another outlet. She grew up in Czechoslovakia during the 1960s and '70s. When it came time to enter a university, she needed to make a career choice. "My parents wanted me to pursue medical studies," she said, "so I did, qualifying as a doctor of medicine at Masaryk University, Brno, in 1984." The following academic year, she taught human anatomy there. "A year later," Palmer explained, "I married an Englishman, moved to London and left medicine behind to become a ceramics artist." She completed the ceramics program at Croydon College of Art and Design in 1987 and received a British Craft Council grant in 1990 to set up a studio.

Her small vessels are wheel thrown, while the larger ones are coil built. She works in red earthenware, because she likes the effect she achieves when the color of clay shows in her work. Palmer's pieces are narratives based on stories and themes, and she prefers to work on a series of pieces linked by a central theme. "I draw on my personal experiences, past and present, to capture the spontaneity of ordinary human life."

Her narratives generally begin on the outside of the vessel and are completed on the inside, and she attempts to create a visual tension between the two surfaces. "Sometimes the outside depicts the real world while the inside is an imaginary world," she said.

Palmer's figures are painted in quick, broad strokes with finer details left to the viewer's imagination. She uses colored slips mixed with oxides and stains to achieve the desired effect. Before the pieces are initially fired, she outlines the figures and other important elements using the pointed end of a paintbrush. This results in a raised surface along the edges of the outlines and exposure of the red clay beneath the slip. Once fired, her works are covered with a clear glaze and fired again to produce a high gloss.

Palmer keeps a sketchbook where she records images of people she sees while going about her daily activities. She uses the sketches to help her remember particular faces and situations. "I look at them when I need a spark," she explains. "I like to sketch people at work, using their tools." When preparing images for her vessels, Palmer draws and paints on large sheets of paper using ink, dry pastel and watercolor. She sometimes makes clay "sketch bowls," where she experiments with ways to convert flat images to curved surfaces. "I enjoy painting on the curved surfaces," she says, "since I believe it is more challenging and the images are often more dramatic."



"Slavonic Dances," 40 centimeters (16 inches) in height, coiled and pinched red earthenware with slips, stains, oxides and clear glaze, £480 (US\$877).



"Florence," 42 centimeters (17 inches) in height, coiled and pinched red earthenware with slips, stains, oxides and clear glaze, £500 (US\$914), by Jitka Palmer, Bristol, England.