

**JITKA PALMER:
POETRY OF PLACES**

Rood Gallery, 107 Redland Road, Bristol
May 11 – June 9 2002

Rood is a new gallery in Bristol situated on the border of upmarket Clifton. It is a welcome arrival in a city that has a surprising paucity of galleries considering its rich artistic culture. Though small – a former shop that doubles as the eponymous owner's ceramic studio – the space is ideal for a solo show such as Jitka Palmer's, a Bristol-based ceramist whose exuberant painted pots filled it to the seams with energy and colour.

Palmer was born in Prague and lived in Moravia for much of her life before moving to London in 1985. This series of work, based on her travels through Europe, is a very personal response to the people and situations she encountered in places as diverse as Salzburg and Pembrokeshire. Her *Pembrokeshire* pot, the first of the series, was born out of a depressingly wet and muddy holiday in West Wales. Typically, she turned the negative into a positive by photographing the area and discovering all sorts of hidden gems, such as a tiny overgrown chapel with no discernible track or sign. It features in the pot's interior, painted with characteristic veer in stone browns and verdant greens, the secretive inside of her experience, as opposed to the pot's exterior, which depicts the more archetypal image of a tractor plough-



'Malmö', Jitka Palmer, painted earthenware, c.40 cm high

ing a field within a landscape of wind and skewed, sea-bound horizons.

As forms the pots have little intrinsic interest. Their fine terracotta walls rise and flare with hand-built unevenness, but they provide plenty of surface area for slip painting, which is Palmer's real skill. Unlike her early, more graphic style, the quality of painting is fluid and expressive, the colours drawn from a wide palette more akin to oils than ceramic slips. She has an intuitive approach to colour based on memories and emotions; whatever the place or face recalled, it is overlaid with Palmer's own reactions. Flesh tones reach beyond the conventional, incorporating Van Gogh greens, blues and hot yellows, while intense cobalt skies sweep across the background. Sgraffito lines are scratched through the slip in places to reveal the tan clay beneath, heightening the sense of energy but also reminding us that this is not an oil painting but a clay vessel. For all their ambitious compositions and dextrous painting, they're nicely devoid of refinement or pretension. In fact, with their easy brushstrokes and confident use of colour, they give an impression of spontaneity and ease of making that belie the complex process of painting on a three-dimensional object. Ensuring that the curved surface is readable from all angles is an exacting task. And there is the matter of inside and outside, the two very different elements that comprise the whole. The *Moravian Karst* pot, like the *Pembrokeshire* one, exploits the distinction: the exterior celebrates this fruit growing area of the Czech Republic with larger-than-life plums, rendered in luscious purple, while the inner walls depict a sinister legend centred around the limestone gorge, the deepest in Europe. Surprisingly, Palmer finds painting the insides easier than the outsides; because they are less visible she feels less pressure and consequently they often create a personal subtext to the more public narrative of the exterior.

The back wall of the gallery was dedicated to Palmer's small 'sketch' pots, first drafts of an idea that establish themes, colours and motifs. They had almost sold out, possibly because



'Triple Horizontal Inversion', Sarah-Jane Selwood, terr

they are easier to assimilate than their larger counterparts – snapshots rather than the full technicolour movie – yet they share many of their complex elements. Seamless juxtapositions of images, for example, and distortions of scale that give an almost *troupe-facil* sense of distance, Palmer's work is strongly narrative, but rather than tell stories, it captures the flash of a moment – a conversation at the opera, lovers embracing on a bridge, images that are both particular and universal. The Duoim in Florence or a fair in Hackney may create a specific sense of place, but whatever the setting, it is the figures, sometimes solitary, often interacting, that predominate. Palmer's portrayal of everyday human drama is compelling, not least because the artist is up on stage, living it rather than merely observing.

FAMAMADEN

**16/16:16 POTTERS
FROM 16 YEARS**

The Scottish Gallery, Edinburgh

7 May – 5 June 2002

Catalogue: £5

As well as its 160th year of fine-art dealing, the Scottish Gallery is marking 16 years of dealing in contemporary crafts. To celebrate, the gallery assembled an exhibition of recent work by 16 of the potters whose work it has previously shown. In her catalogue introduction, Amanda Game, who runs the Crafts department, ascribes 16/16's origins to a series of exhibitions

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