



photo David Bennett

## PROFILE

There are more studio ceramicists in Brighton and Hove than anywhere else in the country outside London. One rising star is **Kellie Miller** whose work, inspired by seaside colours, shapes and light, is crafted both to communicate and to please.

# The challenge of ceramics

Behind an ordinary door in a tiny cobbled street in Hove lies the Biscuit Studio where ceramics artist Kellie Miller produces some extraordinary and sought-after work.

Around the studio are elegant ceramic vessels and wallpieces with textures and lines that make you want to reach out and touch them. Colours are muted - restful cream, white, sand, a touch of grey and black - energised by a vibrant blue with the sharp clarity of the sea in sunshine.

BGA caught up with Kellie at her studio during the 2001 Brighton Festival. The studio had turned exhibition space for the duration of the festival and Kellie was also chasing between displays of her work at venues around Brighton including the Five Ways Artists Group and American Express.

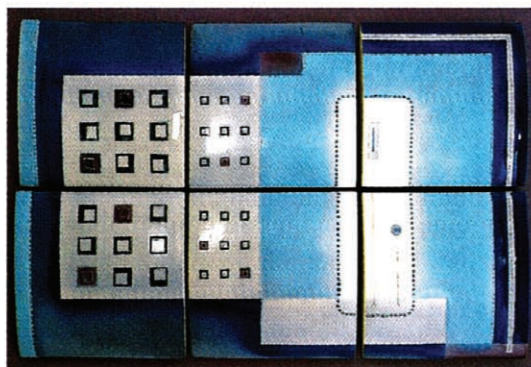
She was delighted that "the exhibitions are being very well received and the festival is proving an excellent showcase for my work."

### Artistic freedom

Kellie graduated with a BA (Hons) in Wood, Metal, Ceramics and Plastics (now BA (Hons) Three Dimensional Crafts) from Brighton's Faculty of Arts and Architecture in 1994, after

completing a foundation course at Camberwell College of Art. The Brighton course suited her perfectly and gave her what she calls "space to play" - the freedom for young artists to experiment and discover what kind of artists they are.

She does not particularly favour the introduction of a strong business element



to art and design courses, although she clearly possesses a sharp commercial sense herself. "Although business skills are important, I think they can probably be learned elsewhere and in other ways. I have been fortunate in the way my career has developed but I think that what would make a more significant difference to young artists starting out would be a shift in the attitude of the artistic establishment and the provision

by it of practical help and financial support."

During the Brighton course Kellie's major interest was in working with wood. But after graduating she taught ceramics in a further education college and became fascinated by the medium. "I felt that, creatively, I'd gone as far as I could in wood, and ceramics offered a new, exciting challenge."

Two years later, with financial backing from The Prince's Trust, she took a leap of faith and opened Biscuit Studio. So why 'Biscuit'? Kellie explained: "Biscuit is the name given to the first firing of a vessel... and we eat a lot of biscuits here!"

### Distinctive style

Living in Brighton for the past 10 years it's not surprising that Kellie's inspiration for shape and colour is primarily the sea.

The process she favours most in her work is a hand-building technique combined with slip casting (slip refers to the liquid clay which is poured into a plaster mould and fired). "This method creates limited edition designed forms, each unique in its surface decoration," she explained.

The concepts behind her work Kellie describes as "notions of hybridity and relationships" and the work itself has a

theme of "constant repetitiveness". The communication between each form is emphasised "by space, decoration, coupling, and grouping, creating an interdependency between the objects.

“Art & design students need space to play”

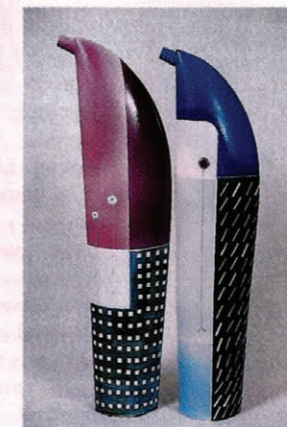
Equally important to the finished piece is the way I use glaze and colour."

As you can see from our photographs there is an unfussy, stripped-down-to-essentials quality in Kelly's work. Visually and texturally it gives pleasure. Clients differ, however, in why they buy her work and how they display it.

"For some people the piece of work is enough for and by itself. Others seem to need to justify possessing a beautiful object by making it useful - as a flower vase for instance. I've also been struck by the way people arrange groups of my wall hangings in ways I wouldn't have thought of, giving them a completely different aspect and dimension."

After several years following the line of development reflected in her current work, Kellie now feels it's time for a change. "I've been studying for an MA in Art Criticism at City University, London and this has definitely helped to sharpen my critical edge and given me a more objective perspective on my own work.

"This has led to a feeling that I've now reached a transition point in my career. I don't intend to abandon the kind of work I've been doing completely, but I do feel the time is right to branch out into something different. I'd like to tackle larger pieces of work now, possibly using the medium of concrete, to make a more powerful personal statement."



### Commercial success

Kellie undertakes commissions for interior and exterior projects and throughout her career as a practising artist she has received support and funding from South East Arts, American Express and the Prince's Trust. She has had solo shows in Germany and London, including the prestigious



Chelsea Crafts Fair, and exhibited extensively throughout the UK and in Denmark.

Her work has also attracted media coverage in publications ranging from specialist ceramics magazines to the Daily Telegraph, The Guardian, House and Gardens, and Elle Decoration.

Much of her work is sold through two major trade shows each year and outlets include Harrods, the Cecilia Colman Gallery in London, and several provincial galleries. One of her pieces has a place in the university's Aldrich Collection.

Kellie sees the immediate future as an exciting time of experimentation but is shrewd enough to know that an artist has to survive too. "I'm exploring the possibility of designing a functional range of ceramics which could be made by other artists, giving me more time to develop in new directions," she said.

In this she is typical of the new breed of young makers who know that, in addition to creative skill, they also need to be market- and media-aware, in tune with interior design fashion trends, and flexible in the way they practise and produce.

With her energetic approach to life, a bubbling optimism and creative drive, Kellie Miller is a name to watch out for. Most importantly, she never seems to lose sight of her audience or her major aim of communicating with it.