

**Thelma Marcuson's porcelain vessels in the Tatham Art Gallery,
Pietermaritzburg**

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Declaration

This MAFA dissertation is ready for examination.


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Declaration

This dissertation is the unaided work of the candidate. It has not been, nor is it been submitted before for any degree or examination at any other university.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Fahmeeda Omar', with a horizontal line extending to the right.

Fahmeeda Omar

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Abstract

The aim of this dissertation is to contextualise the use of porcelain by the South African ceramist Thelma Marcuson (1919-2009). This paper focuses on her ceramics in the Tatham Art Gallery's Permanent Collection in Pietermaritzburg. I hope to give recognition to Marcuson as she is considered one of the pioneer South African studio potters by Garth Clark and Lynne Wagner's in *Potters of Southern Africa* as she is ranked amongst the top fifteen in that distinct group (appendix 4: *Potters' art demo*).

This dissertation is divided into three chapters. Chapter one primarily focuses on the influence of contemporary European studio potters on Marcuson's work, in particular that of Lucie Rie, Mary Rogers and Ruth Duckworth. This chapter also examines the development of ceramics from industrial ceramics, involving mass productions in factories, to the modernist revival of studio ceramics by Bernard Leach, where each piece was handmade and often regarded as an art form, as in the work of the twentieth century British ceramist William Staite-Murray. Chapter two focuses on Marcuson and South African studio ceramics and considers South African potters who had an influence on Marcuson's early training, and also looks at her involvement with the Association of Potters of Southern Africa (APSA) founded in 1972. In the last section of this chapter I will discuss ceramic practices and technical issues about porcelain and high-firing glazes, specifying how they are made and used, with particular reference to South African developments and local studio potters. As Marcuson was particularly interested in porcelain, this chapter also outlines glaze applications with specific reference to porcelain and firing methods. Chapter three focuses on Marcuson's ceramics and offers in particular an analysis of the nine pieces of her work in the Permanent Collection of the Tatham Art Gallery in Pietermaritzburg. Through my research I was able to acquire photographic documentation from other South African museums for comparative purposes, such as the Durban Art Gallery and the William Humphreys Art Gallery in Kimberley, as well as some private collections (see appendix 1).

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Prefatory note

The aim of this dissertation is to contextualise nine ceramic works by Thelma Marcuson (1919-2009) in the Tatham Art Gallery's Permanent Collection. In Clark's and book *Potters of Southern Africa* (1974), he places her in the top fifteen leading ceramists in South Africa (appendix 4: *Potters' art demo*).

The text style used throughout is the *Harvard method* as stipulated by the Centre for Visual Art (CVA) at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), Pietermaritzburg. Some of the abbreviations used in this text are TAG for Tatham Art Gallery; WHAG for William Humphreys Art Gallery; DAG for Durban Art Gallery; APSA for Association of Potters of Southern Africa is. Within this dissertation Thelma Marcuson is referred to as Marcuson and references to personal communication have been shortened to pers comm.

This text consists of one hundred and eighteen pages. This includes documentary photographs which have been added to as illustrative materials to the text, and seven appendixes of supporting documents.

This study focuses on a selected body of Marcuson's ceramics works at the Tatham Art Gallery in Pietermaritzburg, but also notes that there are exceptional examples of Marcuson's work in the Durban Art Gallery and the William Humphreys Art Gallery in Kimberley as well as in some private collections.

A glossary of words used in this text appears at the end of this dissertation on page eighty one to eighty three. The glossary terms originated from the book by Peter Lanes' book *Contemporary Porcelain: Materials, techniques and expression*.

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Introduction

The aim of this dissertation is to contextualise the use of porcelain by the South African ceramist Thelma Marcuson (1919-2009), in particular her ceramics in the Tatham Art Gallery's Permanent Collection in Pietermaritzburg. I hope to give recognition to Marcuson as she is considered one of the pioneer South African studio potters by Garth Clark and Lynne Wagner's in *Potters of Southern Africa* as she is ranked amongst the top fifteen in that distinct group (appendix 4: *Potters' art demo*).

Marcuson was a studio potter based in Johannesburg in the 1960s and preferred being referred to as a 'potter' rather than a 'ceramist'. She felt that the term 'ceramist' was a glorification of what she did and liked to keep things simple (pers comm Thelma Marcuson 2008). This simplicity can also be seen in the way Marcuson worked with her medium and can be observed in several of her pieces.

For the purpose of this dissertation, as well as analysing Marcuson's work in the permanent Tatham Art Gallery collection in Pietermaritzburg, as I will briefly discuss the porcelain pieces in two other South African museums, namely the Durban Art Gallery and the William Humphreys Art Gallery in Kimberley.

Beginning in the 1970s ceramics began to be deliberated as an art form and in South Africa, largely due to the Association of Potters of Southern Africa (APSA, which was founded in 1972 and will be discussed later in chapter 2) ceramics gained a wider public acceptance (Zaalberg 1985). This study intends to enhance the available information regarding the development of local stoneware and porcelain which has only recently been collected by art museums in South Africa. In this context, my research aims to amplify the little existing information that details the ceramic works of Marcuson.

Although there were other artists working with porcelain during the 1970s in other parts of the country (for example Marietjie van der Merwe [for further information on Marietjie van der Merwe see Lara Du Plessis's thesis, 2007] and Esias Bosch); Marcuson was the first South African studio ceramist to have a solo exhibition of her porcelain at the Goodman Art Gallery in Johannesburg (Zaalberg 1985:72; Mayer 1988:16). This prestigious gallery was originally managed and owned by Linda Givon, who was one of Marcuson's most notable gallery dealers (pers comm Thelma Marcuson 2008). One of the key emphases in this research will be to examine the significants of Marcuson's works in the Tatham Art Gallery

within the context of developments in South African studio ceramics in the latter part of the twentieth century. As Marcuson's main ceramics influences from abroad were located in British studios, I shall briefly discuss the history of modernist studio ceramics in the United Kingdom.

This research aims to provide critical research information to museums, as Marcuson is represented in major art museums and private collections across South Africa. The collection in the Tatham Art Gallery provides an important insight into Marcuson's work as a key porcelain studio potter in South Africa from the 1970s until 1988. Although she was mostly self-taught, her ceramics were well received in South Africa. In his book, *Potters of Southern Africa*, Garth Clark places her as one of the top fifteen potters in the country (appendix 4; Zaalberg 1985: 72; Katz 1974:30).

Since I am a practicing ceramist, whose Master of Fine Art exhibition is concerned with studies of porcelain vessels, my empirical knowledge will assist my analysis of Marcuson's work. Hence much of my text will enumerate the often highly technical nature of studio ceramics and processes; I aim to provide more insightful and contextual analysis of Marcuson's work. By assessing key ceramic art works made by Marcuson together with detailed photographic documentation of particular porcelain pieces in the examples provided in the Tatham Art Gallery's collection, I will provide technical information about the materials, method and techniques used in her work in order to emphasise the extent of her achievements as a South African ceramist of note.

Through personal contact and visits I have acquired invaluable information particularly from a personal interview with Marcuson that took place in August 2008 at her home in London shortly before her death in 2009.

This dissertation comprises three chapters, enumerated as follows.

Chapter one summarises the influence of contemporary European studio potters on Marcuson's work, in particular that of Lucie Rie, Mary Rogers and Ruth Duckworth. This chapter also examines the development of ceramics from industrial ceramics, involving mass productions in factories, to the modernist revival of studio ceramics by Bernard Leach, where each piece was handmade and often regarded as an art form, as in the work of the twentieth century British ceramist, William Staite-Murray.

Chapter two assesses Marcuson and South African studio ceramics and considers South African potters who had an influence on Marcuson's early training, and also looks at her involvement with the Association of Potters of Southern Africa (APSA) founded in 1972. In the last section of this chapter I will discuss ceramic practices and technical issues about porcelain and high-firing glazes, specifying how they are made and used, with particular reference to South African developments and local studio potters. As Marcuson was particularly interested in porcelain, this chapter also outlines glaze applications with specific reference to porcelain and firing methods. Some of Marcuson's glaze recipes can be found in appendix 3

Chapter three focuses on Marcuson's ceramics and offers in particular an analysis of the nine pieces of her work in the Permanent Collection of the Tatham Art Gallery in Pietermaritzburg (see appendix 8). Through my research I was able to acquire photographic documentation from other South African museums for comparative purposes, such as the Durban Art Gallery and the William Humphreys Art Gallery in Kimberley, as well as some private collections (see appendix 1).

In all, my research aims to contribute substantially to the history of South African studio ceramics from the 1960s, in the context of local practices developed with particular reference to Marcuson's work in general, and specifically her ceramics in the TAG Collection. I hope to demonstrate that her work is significant in all respects.

Chapter 1

This chapter provides a brief historical summary of Western developments in mainstream Modernist studio pottery, focusing primarily on those potters who, through their influence, contributed to the development of South African studio ceramics in the twentieth century. This chapter also focuses specifically on the three female artists, Lucie Rie, Mary Rogers and Ruth Duckworth, who had a direct influence on the work of the South African ceramist Thelma Marcuson (1919-2009) (pers comm Marcuson and personal observation).

The industrial revolution in England reached its pinnacle in the 1830s, resulting in handmade products being replaced by machine-made items. The latter were cheaper as they were mass produced as opposed to the handmade products which were more time consuming to create. However, lack of design training resulted in excessive ornamentation complicating the functionality of the form instead of complementing it (Rose 1955:1; Armstrong 1981:1).

It was only in the 1850s at the Great Exhibition of 1851, that the public was exposed to designs of better quality contemporary works. The profits from this exhibition were used by Henry Cole (1808-1882) to establish the first design school, the 'Department of Practical Art' at the Normal School of Design in 1852 to train teachers, designers and art workmen. Cole believed that the combination of art and industry would only be successful if the designers and craftsmen involved were educated and learned to understand that form and function were an integral part of the item to be made and that unnecessary ornamentation detracted from the functionality of the form (Rose 1955: 1; Armstrong 1981:1).

The Paris Exhibition in 1867 initiated the start of the individual studio ceramics movement in England as had been evident in the International Exhibition held in London, where the development of nineteenth century design was clearly apparent (Armstrong 1981:1-8). This was continued in the late nineteenth century by William Morris who headed the Arts and Craft Movement in Britain focusing on the production and design of aesthetically pleasing handmade goods (Armstrong 1981:1-8; Rose 1955:3; Sentance 2004:22).

The late nineteenth century saw the introduction of so-called 'Art Pottery' into the industrial manufacturers such as Doulton owned by Henry Doulton (1820-1897). Art Pottery was a term used to describe a wide variety of decorative wares made by a range of manufacturers (Buckley 1990:6 and 57-59). In the potteries the forms were made by a professional thrower and embellished by decorators, not designers. It took exhibition organisers and the public

time to fully appreciate the difference between studio pottery and art pottery; until the 1930s the two were merged as one (Armstrong 1981:1-8; Rose 1955:3; Sentance 2004:22; Watson 1990:12).

Henry Doulton was the first person to employ female potters and designers and permit them to sign their work. He hired artistically trained women to carry out both painting and tracing, as he regarded ceramic decoration as a suitable occupation for middle-class women. They were not responsible for the labour intensive side of ceramic production and were set apart in comfortable, private studios away from their male workers who manufactured the pieces. The women were encouraged to draw and paint their designs onto thrown green ware (wares that had not been fired in the kiln) (Armstrong 1981:1-8; Rose 1955:3; Sentance 2004:22; Watson 1990:12).

This was the first indication of women decorators being used in the ceramic industry as accomplished designers who decided on their own designs and signed their work accordingly. The employment of middle-class women in respectable studios such as Doultons' provided a solution to one of the problems facing widowed or unmarried women without an income; that of making a living without threatening their status as ladies through contact with the commercial world (Buckley 1990:6).

Hannah Bolton Barlow (1851-1916) was a renowned artist in this category. Barlow had no formal education but had developed a talent for drawing in the Essex countryside. She enrolled at the Lambeth School of Art where she developed a distinctive style of drawing directly from nature and then from memory (Buckley 1990:6 and 57-59; Fleming and Honour 1977:243). She was also very keen on ceramics. She was inspired by the Japanese products seen at the 1862 International Exhibition at South Kensington. In 1871 Barlow went to Doulton seeking employment (Buckley 1990:6 and 57-59; Fleming and Honour 1977:243). This was not the start of studio ceramics but indicated a beginning for middle-class women to make items for sale that were sophisticated and highly regarded by the public to purchase as a decoratively functional item (Buckley 1990:57-59).

This is important to note in my dissertation about Marcuson because she was also a woman in a South African studio context largely dominated by male potters.

20th Century Studio Ceramics in the United Kingdom

The next section outlines the major developments in British modernist ceramics, and the significant issues that shaped Marcuson's own ideas about her ceramics in South Africa. The term Studio Potter/Pottery was first used in England to describe a person/team who produced small scale, individually handmade products. A Studio Potter was often described as an 'artist craftsman' working primarily with their hands, at their own pace and on their own ideas (Watson 1990:10-15). Studio Pottery is a term given to artists who are both designers as well as the makers of the object as opposed to Hannah Barlow who did not make her work but decorated a ready thrown piece (Vurovecz 2008:13, Watson 1990:12, pers comm Armstrong, 2011). The term was used more frequently in the 1920s to distinguish a certain kind of potter's work from that of the industrial 'art pottery' for which Barlow was a 'member'.

At the beginning of the twentieth century art schools, such as the Central School of Arts and Crafts in London, did not offer pottery-making on the syllabus. The female students were limited to learning brushwork decoration on industrially produced works and not encouraged to apply physical means of making and forming works. Similarly, at the Royal College of Art in South Kensington, the emphasis was on decorated pottery. A male professional thrower from the Derby factory, George Lunn, was employed to give instruction on the throwing wheel at the Royal College of Art and assisted at the Camberwell School of Arts and Crafts in South London, but after his death pottery-making at these institutions ceased (Vurovecz 2008:13-15; Rose 1955:6-8). A small group of students at the Royal College of Art, including John Adams (1882-1953) and Dora Billington (1890-1968), continued without a tutor and were successful in teaching themselves how to throw. A pottery department was eventually established under Miss Billington's direction in 1926 at the Central School of Art in London (Armstrong 1981:1-8; Rose 1955:6-8).

It was during the 1920s and 30s that pottery was redefined as a fine art. Bernard Leach (1887-1979), William Staite-Murray (1881-1962) and Michael Cardew (1901-1983) were the main artists responsible for the shift. These artists had a profound influence on some of South Africa's pioneer studio potters. They broke away from industrial ceramics and created a renewed interest in ceramics and glaze chemistry, which at that time were guarded secrets within the industry. This enthusiasm and liberation of the making of clay vessels continues today (Coysh 1976:87; Jones 2007; Rose 1955:9).

Leach was educated in England at the Slade School of Art in London and after graduating he went to Japan to teach drawing and etching in 1909; however he took up pottery instead and became the sole student of the Kenzan School. Ogata Kenzan (1663-1743) was a Japanese potter and painter. Kenzan was considered to be one of the greatest ceramicists of his time (Rose 1955:9).

Whilst in Japan, Leach produced three types of ware, raku, earthenware and high fired wares such as stoneware and porcelain, using naturally sourced and found geological materials to prepare both the clay body and the glazes. Leach spent eleven years in Japan learning about Japanese art and culture and when he finally returned to England in 1920, he was accompanied by his friend Shoji Hamada, a young Japanese potter who had trained at the Kyoto School of Pottery in glaze chemistry (Cooper 2003:72-75 and 133; Cooper 2003:xi; Cooper 2003:146; Rose 1955:9). This was a major consideration in Leach's 'orientalism' that marked his own work and his influence on the revival and development Studio Pottery in modernist ceramics; it was to provide a point of reference in Marcuson's highly individual ceramics whose work I suggest, were not expressive of the so-called Anglo-Oriental genre of mainstream South African ceramics.

Leach and Hamada worked together from 1920 to 1923 and established the St Ives Pottery in Cornwall where they built and used an *anagama* kiln (Birks and Digby 1990:95). Leach's firing method was an essential part of his Anglo-Oriental philosophy and technique, which also highlighted the use of natural material. This meant doing everything from building the kiln, making up of glazes, digging of one's own clay and mixing it. He stressed the importance of gesture and functionality (utilitarian) in contrast to the industrially made ceramics. As these were essentially handmade wares they were slightly flawed and lacked in industrial finish as compared to industrial ceramics (Arnold and Schmahmann 2005:142-143).

The kilns at St. Ives were fired with wood but coal was used to start the kilns (Cooper 2003:146-156). Leach also experimented with salt firings in the *anagama* kiln but later changed the firing process to an oil firing (Birks and Digby 1990:95; Cooper 2003:146-156). Leach and Hamada's arrival at St Ives was described by Michael Cardew as one of the most crucial events in the history of Studio Pottery, impacting on the developments in both England and South Africa. He writes in 1990: 'the landing of Bernard Leach and Shoji Hamada on the island of Britain in 1920 was for craftsmen potters the most significant event

of the 20th [thus] century' (Birks and Digby 1990:95). Leach produced functional work both individually decorated and signed which was manufactured as affordable; utilitarian wares serving as a source of income for himself (Cooper 2003:150-157).

In 1933 Leach taught part-time at Dartington School in Devon before returning to Japan in 1934. Leach had a number of students and successors, amongst them Michael Cardew. Cardew made functional pots and believed that the real quality of pottery was controlled mostly by the clay and not by the potter. Cardew left England in 1942 for Africa where he spent the next six years working and teaching in at Vume in Ghana and then from 1951 to 1965 he taught at Abuja in northern Nigeria, introducing wheel made pottery and stoneware to African pupils, and at the same time developing and extending the range of his own work (Birks and Digby 1990:121). Cardew had a profound influence on the South African potter Esias Bosch and became Bosch's mentor (Coysh 1976; Birks and Digby 1990:121; Rose 1955:20-22; Jones 2007:84; pers comm Marcuson, 2008) (Bosch's expressed admiration for Marcuson is discussed in my text below).

One of Leach's greatest rivals was William Staite-Murray who was in his forties when he started working with clay. In contrast to the earthenware industrial work of the time, Staite-Murray along with other twentieth century potters such as W.B. Dalton and Reginald Wells, began producing high fired stoneware in the oriental manner in England. It was however due to the important contribution of Leach's work that a better understanding of pottery and the potter's position in industrial society was achieved (Coysh 1976:87; Jones 2007:83-84; Rose 1955:9/22). Staite-Murray was strongly influenced by Hamada's work and by George Eumorfopoulos' (1863-1939) collection of Chinese Imperial ceramics which were first exhibited for public viewing at the Royal Academy in 1936 (Rose 1955:21). He was inspired by the technicalities, different forms and glazes used by the Chinese which he attempted to emulate and formulate his style of studio ceramics based on the teachings and understanding of Zen Buddhism (Rose 1955:21). Developing his ceramic techniques and forms independently from the St Ives group, Staite-Murray concentrated on one-off pieces and was able to achieve higher prices for his artwork. He was fascinated by glaze technology and was responsible for using English materials to emulate Chinese glazes for his needs (Coysh 1976:87; Jones 2007:84; Rose 1955:9/22).

Of all the potters of the inter-war period Staite-Murray was the most prominent British potter of that modernist era who asserted that ceramics was an art form that was both modern and

abstract (Rose 1955:21-22). He taught ceramics at the Royal College of Art in London in 1925 and was made the head of ceramics department at that institute in 1926. In 1929 he moved his workshop to Berkshire and then left England in 1939 for Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) with his wife. They were stranded there when World War II broke out. After he left England, Staite-Murray never worked with ceramic materials again. He did return to England where he had a very successful final exhibition of his works in 1957, but by this time he was suffering from cancer which claimed his life in 1962 (Jones. 2007:80-84); Cameron and Lewis 1976:6-7; Rose 1955:22).

Leach and Staite-Murray were largely responsible for promoting modernist ideas about ceramics in a 'studio' context - and both played important roles in this regard. Leach enjoyed a market for his work by both the British and Japanese public. Staite-Murray considered his vessels as a canvas on which to make marks and through his teaching practice really only enjoyed a small, yet successful, following of his work. These were both men in the history of Studio Pottery and, as has been mentioned, the only woman who made her own pottery but, as a female figure was less known for her work, was Dora May Billington (1890-1968). Billington trained at Tinstall and Hanley School of Art until 1913 and then took a diploma in ceramics at the Royal College of Art between 1915 and 1916 where she eventually taught ceramics (Rose 1955:6-8). In 1924 she moved to the Central School of Arts and Crafts and was the president of the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society from 1940-1956. She played an educative role to young women (and men), both at the Royal College of Art and the Central School of Arts, teaching women such as Katherine Pleydell-Bouverie and Norah Braden, who in turn became important contributors to the Studio Pottery movement in Britain in the 1920s and 30s (Buckley 1990:89). Billington also had an indirect influence on the pioneers of early South African stoneware ceramics such as Hilda Rose (later Ditchburn), Bosch and Morris who had all studied under her (Bosch and Morris were both ceramist-colleagues of Marcuson on the Reef).

I emphasise that female studio ceramists like Marcuson were entering a male dominated profession in Studio Pottery headed by Leach, Cardew and Staite-Murray even though Cheryl Buckley's book *Potters and Paintresses* (1990) stresses the important role of women in industrial ceramic productions (in which Billington's role as ceramist-educator is apparent).

As Wilma Cruise (in Arnold and Schmahmann 2005:133) states, 'in the first part of the 20th Century 'Anglo-Orientalism' exerted a considerable hegemony over ceramic production and

the lives of women potters'. Cruise went on to argue that there was an overt cult of masculinity around the practice of studio ceramics and this marginalisation prevailed in Southern Africa into the 1980s with the exception of women like Hilda Ditchburn (1917-1986), and the women who pioneered Olifantsfontein and Linnware Studio Potteries.

Lucie Rie (born Gomperz) (1902-1995)

Historically western women practising as studio ceramists were very few, and Lucie Rie is pre-eminent in this regard. Her ceramics were of primary significance to Marcuson in influencing her choice of ceramic forms and glazes (pers comm Marcuson, 2008). The next section points at some features of Rie's work in order to anticipate my discussion of Marcuson's ceramics.

The Austrian-born ceramist Lucie Rie lived in a prosperous and enlightened upper-class homestead in Vienna and attended the Kunstgewerbeschule (Art School) in Vienna from 1922 to 1926 where she trained under Michael Powolny (1871-1954), a craftsman and a modeller (Jones 2007:118; De Waal 2003:151). Here she became an acknowledged artist potter before moving to England before the war where she eventually developed an independent style of making studio ceramics and was ultimately known for her thin, delicate, raw-glazed porcelain.

Lucie, and her husband Hans Rie, left Vienna in 1938 and moved to England, leaving behind her life of comfort and style. It was at the Little Gallery in Chelsea, run by Muriel Rose, that Rie was introduced to Bernard Leach in 1939. Leach had never heard of her before despite her certificates and prizes from at least four international exhibitions in Europe in the 1930s and had also exhibited in London in 1934. When she showed Leach her Viennese pots he had nothing positive to say about her ceramics at all, which came as quite a blow for her as she was a celebrated ceramist in her country of origin (Birks 1987:33). In 1939 she was invited by Leach to stay with him for a week at Dartington Hall in Devon, where he ran workshops under the patronage of the EL Mhursts (Birks 1987:35). She first worked in Soho making buttons until 1941 when the factory was destroyed by German bombers (Birks 1987:38). She then set up her own pottery and made ceramic buttons in Albion Mews, north of Hyde Park (Birks 1976:120).

Rie met and interacted with the contemporary potters in London at that time. Although she initially found it difficult to break into the market of the British potters, and for the public to

take interest in her work, she seems to have been acquainted with the studio ceramic academics in London (Houston 1981:14-16). Muriel Rose's criticism of her work was that her pots did not have enough control and her foot-rings on her forms were treated too weakly! (Houston 1981:16). W.B. Honey, a curator at the Victoria and Albert Museum, suggested that her 'earthenware pots were wrongly clothed with stoneware glazes' (Houston 1981:16). 'William Staite-Murray,[thus] asked her when she was going to start making pots', and Leach found her pots too thin and the foot-rings were too fussy (Houston 1981:17). Despite all of this criticism she persevered with what she thought was appropriate for her to make and it was only when she met Hans Coper (1920-1981), a German refugee from Saxony who came to work with her in 1946, that she regained her confidence and he helped her re-establish herself with a fresh overview of her ceramic work (Birks 1976:119).

Coper had no training as a ceramist but Rie took him as her assistant in her re-opened button factory (Birks 1987:41). Things started to change in 1948 when Rie and Coper (see figure 1) made tableware which was unique to their style but remained functional and innovative. Together they produced standard domestic ware such as coffee cups, tea sets and bowls, glazed in either a glossy white or black earthenware glaze. They set a new standard of precision in handmade pots, characterised by a simple design, straight pulled handles for milk jugs, fine rimmed coffee cups and wide pulled spouts that poured without dripping (Sellars 1992:18; Birks 1976:119; Birks 1987:43; Houston 1981:18). It was after this association that Rie was affirmed in her quest as Coper endorsed her ideals of form and function (Birks 1987:41-43).



Figure 1. From left to right: Lucie Rie and Hans Coper
http://www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk/gallery/hiddenhistories/biographies/bio/friendship/coperrie_biography.html. Accessed by Fahmeeda Omar, 2011.

Figure 2. A comparison of Lucie Rie's stoneware bowl (left), 1960-65, which was thrown on the potter's wheel and then glazed and Hans Coper's stoneware pot (right) which was also thrown on the potter's wheel and glazed with a black glaze.
<http://ncclayclub.blogspot.com/2010/07/here-were-some-of-pots-we-got-to-see.html>. Accessed by Fahmeeda Omar, 2011.

Rie, like Coper, had a down to earth attitude and felt quite humbly that they were just potters (Birks 1987:77). She understood and admired the Anglo-Oriental tradition in Britain but never tried to emulate this style for herself despite the local doyens encouraging her to do so. Her wares maintained simple elegant lines whether they were earthenware, stoneware or porcelain forms (Frankel 2000:74).

Rie threw her vessels on the wheel and worked in earthenware until the 1940s when she switched to stoneware and porcelain firings. Her earliest porcelain piece was dated from 1949 (Frankel 2000:68-69). She used a continental kick wheel with a hardwood head on which she threw her pots. Her wheel could be used as both a manual wheel or supplemented for an electric motor (Sellars 1992:18; Birks 1976:119; Houston 1981:18).

Rie made a wide range of pottery vessels including bowls, cylinders and vases (see figures 4 and 5 below). After Rie had thrown her regular cylindrical forms she would often manipulate them, which later became a particular signature trait of hers (Birks 1976:119).



From left to right:

Figure 3 and Figure 4. A comparison of one of Hans Coper's vases (left), 1966-70 and one of Lucie Rie's vases (right), 1967. These pieces can be found at the Fitzwilliam Museum Collection in Cambridge.

http://www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk/gallery/hiddenhistories/biographies/bio/friendship/coperrie_biography.html. Accessed by Fahmeeda Omar, 2011.

Figure 5. Lucie Rie holding her bottle with a long thin neck and flared rim. This form is one that Marcuson admired and emulated in her own work, an example of which can be seen in the Tatham's Collection. www.siegelproductions.ca. Accessed by Fahmeeda Omar, 2010.

Rie painted her glazes onto the green ware carefully over time so as not to wet the clay form excessively, building up layers of glaze to create the desired effect (Sellars 1992:18; Birks 1976:119; Houston 1981:18). This is a noticeable trade mark of Rie's bowls. This technique enabled her to use sgraffito and consequently control the marks she made with precision and care. She used fine lines that distinguished her sgraffito and inlay pots from other potters'

works. Her work is characterised by the process of carving through either the glaze or the manganese wash applied to the surface of her pieces, as is evident in several of her porcelain bowls (see figures 6 and 7 below). Some of her work would involve intricate criss-crossing and, when the design was inlaid, she would refer to them as ‘knitted’ pieces (Frankel 2000:74). Rie felt that raw glazing gave a quality of depth to her pots (Sellars 1992:18; Birks 1976:119).

The benefit with this glaze technique is that very little water is used and the glaze can be brushed on and scratched into. Examples of this technique can be seen on a pink bowl with lines scratched into it with the manganese glaze along the rim and a white bowl with a black band at the base and a gold band on the rim (see figures 6 and 7) (Sellars 1992:18; Birks 1976:119; Houston 1981:18) (for comparison, see Marcuson’s porcelain bowls appendix 1; accession numbers 1912 and 1914). Rie was also fascinated with glaze chemistry (as was Marcuson discussed in my text in Chapter two) and experimented with her glazes until she knew the exact outcome and disapproved of chance in her work. She used an oxidised firing technique in a large top loading electric kiln (as did Marcuson) which was fired once a fortnight (Houston 1981; Rose 1955:24).



Figure 6 and Figure 7.

Left: Lucie Rie, glazed porcelain bowl with narrow foot-ring and wide rim. This is a well know trait of Rie’s which Marcuson liked. The rim and the foot-ring of this bowl has manganese glaze. Here Rie scratched through the glaze leaving a lined pattern on the inside and outside of the bowl. Date of works unknown. www.ready4thehouse.blogspot.com. Accessed by Fahmeeda Omar, 2010.

Right: Lucie Rie, a porcelain bowl with manganese wash on the rim and base of the bowl and glaze. This bowl also has a lined pattern scratched on the inside and the outside of the bowl, however the foot-ring on this bowl is not as narrow as figure 6 and appears more stable. www.mutualart.com Accessed by Fahmeeda Omar, 2010.

Rie experimented with her bottle shape (as seen in figure 5 on page 14 and figure 59 on page 71; which is also a recurring form in Duckworth’s work- see figure 16 on page 20) in the late 50s and the form grew from there, using matt glazes with oxides to achieve her colour

scheme. The shapes and sizes of the bottle form vary, from a cylindrical base with a narrow neck and a wide lip to a more delicate form with a rounder base. Later in the 70s her bottle forms evolved further and, she used a bronze glaze on her porcelain bottle (as seen on pages 48-49 in Houston 1981). Rie experimented with different types of glazes to achieve various surface textures (Houston 1981:48-49). On one of her pieces the glaze is applied thickly and gives the surface a pitted texture. Her glaze experiments were of particular importance when considering the role Rie had to play in the evolution of women working as studio ceramists in the later twentieth Century; this provided Marcuson with a role-model.

Finally, at the age of 80, Rie's work was given the recognition she aspired to by having an exhibition in London at the prestigious Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts. This was quite an achievement at the time as, prior to this, Sainsbury's generally only showed works by well-known artists based on their reputation as painters or sculptors (Houston 1981:29). This historically marked ceramics as an artistic medium, giving recognition not only to one of the first women to achieve this accolade, but also to the formerly considered 'craft'. This was a ground breaking achievement by publicly recognising a 'non fine art medium' on the same basis as the so-called 'fine arts' which included sculpture, painting and drawing (Sellars 1992:18; Birks 1976:119).

Mary Rogers (1929 -)

The ceramics of Mary Rogers and Ruth Duckworth both provided crucial inspiration to Marcuson.

Mary Rogers, a ceramist from Belper in England, studied graphic design at Watford School of Design. After graduating she studied calligraphy for two years at St. Martin's School of Art in London from 1947 to 49 and studied ceramics at the Loughborough School of Art from 1960 to 64. She worked for several years as a calligrapher and graphic designer before she established her own workshop in Loughborough and continued to work there for most of her career. Finally she moved to a new studio near Falmouth, Cornwall (Cameron and Lewis 1976:126). This experience with design offers an interesting parallel to Marcuson's training at Johannesburg Technikon [thus] (pers comm. Marcuson 2008), where a similar range was taught. When Marcuson started at the technikon she took a painting course but left to focus her full attention on ceramics.

Rogers commented that once she had started working with clay she immediately realised that this was the medium for her (Cameron and Lewis 1976:126). Initially Rogers hand-built her pieces which were generally large, coiled stoneware pots inspired by nature. She believed that building these forms slowly and quietly by hand was a way of exploring the natural world, which usually leads to a heightened awareness of natural forms, since the method of 'construction inevitably gives organic and somewhat asymmetrical effects similar to those of naturally growing forms' (Rogers 1979:9). This would not be possible to achieve if the pieces were made on the wheel.



Figure 8. Mary Rogers. Organic pod form made in porcelain and glazed. Date unknown. <http://www.mintmuseum.org/chasanoff/artists/index.htm#rogers> Accessed by Fahmeeda Omar, September 2010.

Figure 9. Mary Rogers. Porcelain bowl 1975-79. Part of the Metropolitan Museum of Art Collection. This bowl is made using a mould. Date unknown. <http://www.metmuseum.org/collections/search-the-collections/?&what=Ceramics&deptids=21&who=Mary+Rogers&pg=1> Accessed by Fahmeeda Omar June, 2012.

Figure 10. Mary Rogers. Flattened oval shape yellow/buff body. Decorated with pattern of grey/brown ovals under a white crackle glaze which turns blue/green on ovals. Date unknown. <http://www.ceramics-aberystwyth.com/mary-rogers-c1269.html> Accessed by Fahmeeda Omar, June 2012.

Figure 11. Mary Rogers. Detail of folds on porcelain bowl. Date unknown. <http://janestreetclayworks.com/2011/03/25/draped-and-folded-porcelain> Accessed by Fahmeeda Omar, June 2012.

In the early 1970s, Rogers began making small porcelain bowls shaped like leaves, flowers, twigs, pods and other natural forms (similar to those in figures 8-10 above). She began working with porcelain in order to explore delicacy and movement in her work (Rogers 1979:9). Porcelain is fragile at all stages of production and this particular quality of the material presents creative challenges to which many ceramists continue to respond; delicacy, fragility and thinness of form. As discussed here, these particular qualities manifest in my own ceramics as well as the porcelain works of Marcuson (and her examples in the Tatham Art Gallery Collection (which I admire and form a source of inspiration in my ceramics).

As a practicing ceramist I work mainly with porcelain and handbuild my forms using very thin coils; hence my pieces are extremely fragile even before being fired in a kiln. When compared to a match stick (as seen in figure 12 below) the match stick is at least twice the size of my coils. These coils are individually rolled out by hand and then joined together to form one piece (see figure 13 below). Depending on the scale of each piece being constructed, it could take anything from a few hours to a whole day to complete one piece. With such minute coils drying happens very fast and I find that the handbuilt piece must be completed quickly before the form dries out completely causing it to be very fragile and difficult to handle.



Figure 12. Fahmeeda Omar. A comparison of hand rolled coil to match-stick. Photographed by Fahmeeda Omar, 2011.

Figure 13. Fahmeeda Omar. Black and white porcelain vessel, 2011, porcelain, H:11.8 cm. Photographed by Fahmeeda Omar, 2011.

Forms in nature are recurrent sources of inspiration in handbuilding, as Rogers's notes (Rogers 1979:9). She advises that by slowly building, refining and decorating the form one can find 'a sense of peace and enjoyment' (Rogers 1979:9). The purity and translucency of porcelain helps her capture the organic qualities of her forms (often vessel-forms) which have the intricate textural details of shells and pods (as seen in figures 8 and 10 on page 17). She also used an inlay technique which allows her to use more than one colour; this is more evident in figure 9 on page 17. All her porcelain pieces are high fired to 1300°C and are all fired in an electric kiln (Rogers 1979:9). Although Rogers retired from making ceramics in the 1990s, her works are in many international collections such as the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

Marcuson was very aware of Roger's international prominence as a leading British ceramist, particularly in her porcelain works that pointed to nature and organic forms as a sculptural theme; this provided a refreshing alternative for Marcuson in her own ceramic productions, in the face of Leach's dominance in studio pottery.

For Marcuson, another international ceramist whose work related more to organic forms of mainstream modernist sculpture of the 1960s, was Ruth Duckworth.

Ruth Duckworth (1919-2009)



Ruth Duckworth In Her Studio

Figure 14. Ruth Duckworth in her studio. <http://catherinewhite.com/rough-ideas/2009/10/ruth-duckworth-sculptor-and-mu.html>. Accessed by Fahmeeda Omar, 2012.

Ruth Duckworth was a sculptor who specialised in ceramics (see figure 14 above). She was born in Hamburg, Germany and in 1936 she trained at the Liverpool College of Art until 1940 where she studied drawing, painting and sculpture. In 1955 she studied at the Hammersmith School of Art but later that year transferred to the Central School of Art and Crafts in London where she studied from 1956 to 1958 and subsequently taught there from 1959 to 1964. During her stay at the Central School of Art she produced abstract works incorporating material such as pebbles and rocks. She moved to the United States in 1964 to teach at the University of Chicago. There she produced her mural series *Earth, Water and Sky* (1967-68) which was commissioned by the University for its Geophysical Sciences Building and included topographical designs based on satellite photographs with porcelain clouds overhead. In 1977 she stopped making utilitarian pieces and shifted her focus to large stoneware murals, freestanding sculptures and small porcelain pieces that were inspired by nature (<http://www.mintmuseum.org/chasanoff/artists/index.htm#duckworth>).



Figure 15. Examples of Ruth Duckworth's bottle shaped forms.

<http://www.bellasartessgallery.com/exhibitions.html>. Accessed by Fahmeeda Omar, 2012.

Figure 16. Ruth Duckworth's wall piece. <http://www.craftscouncil.org.uk/crafts-magazine/news/view/2009/ruth-duckworth-at-ruthin?from=/crafts-magazine/news/list/2009/6>. Accessed by Fahmeeda Omar, 2012.

As mentioned earlier, this bottle shape (figure 15 above) is very common amongst Rie, Duckworth and Marcuson. Duckworth used plain clean colours (as seen in figures 15; 16 above and 14 on page 19) in comparison to Marcuson's works, with her bright yellow (seen in figure 33 on page 43) and I believe that it was more the forms that were of interest to Marcuson rather than her glazes. Marcuson would have started with simple glazes (like her dolomite glaze) and then later, as she gained confidence through experimentation, she moved on to more complex glazes such as the glazes used on her transmutation bowl in the Tatham Art Gallery's Permanent Collection (figure 64 on page 75).

The point I wish to emphasise here is that Duckworth's main concern was for sculptural form, rather than pottery. Even though Marcuson did not produce much sculpture (other than a few studies at the start of her career in ceramics), Duckworth's and Roger's ceramics demonstrated to her that their interests in organic forms and surfaces could be valuable sources of inspiration in her own ceramics, particularly porcelain (pers comm Marcuson, 2008).

Chapter 2

Ceramics in twentieth century South Africa studio pottery

Studio Pottery emerged in South Africa in the early twentieth century as a result of the increase in travel abroad by local ceramists/potters. Being a Studio Potter meant focusing on the 'tradition' of handmade pottery, namely the process of producing wares starting with the making of the clay through to the final firing. The artist had complete control over every aspect of the work thus amplifying the uniqueness and handmade aspects of the object.

Most studio based artists in South Africa started working with earthenware, as many potters found earthenware easier to handle as opposed to working with porcelain the techniques of which had not yet been mastered in South Africa before the 1950s. Some noted South African artists who were able to travel included Joan Methley, Gladys Short, the late Hilda Ditchburn, Esias Bosch, Hyme Rabinowitz, Andrew Walford and the late Tim Morris. These artists were financially able to travel and study overseas at tertiary education institutions and private studios where potters held workshops to disseminate their techniques for this medium. They returned to South Africa with the technical skill and knowledge to start teaching or making their own work (Clark and Wagner 1974:9; Gers 1998:6-8; Vurovecz 2008:36-38).

However, it was only after World War I that the studio ceramics industry in South Africa grew and this was mainly in the region of Olifantsfontein (pers comm Armstrong June 2010; Hillebrand 1991:4-6; Vurovecz 2008:24). In 1918, at the Durban School of Art, ceramics was introduced as an educational subject; this was through the expertise of John Adams and his wife Truda. It was here that Adams built and fired the first earthenware kiln which was used by numerous artists over the years. He returned to England in 1921 where he and Truda worked and stayed until his retirement in 1950, but his reputation for design, functionality and enthusiasm for ceramics lived on to this day (pers comm Armstrong, 2011).

Hilda Lutando Ditchburn (née Rose) (1917-1986) was a student at the Durban Art School in the 1936. In 1937 the Fine Arts Department moved from Durban to the Natal University College (N.U.C) in Pietermaritzburg, along with the ceramics department. Rose studied under Professor John Oxley until 1938 when she obtained her Bachelor of Arts (S.A.) Fine Art Major from Natal University College Pietermaritzburg, with 3 Bachelor of Arts in Fine Art and courses in Modelling and Pottery (Vurovecz 2008:25-27). She was later put in charge of the ceramic section of the Fine Art Department at the University of Natal (1941-1981) and in

1947 applied to study ceramics in England through the University of Natal, having taught ceramics and modelling at the University for six years. She was accepted at the Central School of Art in the ceramic section which was under the renowned ceramist Dora Billington. As has been discussed, Billington was particularly interested in teaching the hand-made aspects of ceramics as opposed to the industrial wares that were commonly made in other British Art schools at that time (Buckley 1990:141). Rose completed her course in 1949 but, before returning to South Africa, she travelled extensively through England and Europe, visiting art exhibitions and galleries, as well as some potteries. This exposure to ceramic studios aided her understanding and practical reference of stoneware ceramics as well as studio pottery and the functioning thereof (Vurovecz 2008:6). When she returned to South Africa in 1950/51 she introduced glaze chemistry into the pottery course at the University of Natal. Her desire to introduce stoneware to the course came later with the introduction of her oil-fired kiln. Rose married Leonard Ditchburn between 1964 and 1966 (the exact date is unknown) and thus changed her name to Ditchburn (Vurovecz 2008:6). Ditchburn was fortunate to be able to attend the first International Craft Conference of Potters and Weavers in 1952 at Dartington Hall, where she was introduced to Leach through Muriel Rose, the Officer for Crafts at the British Council (Leach 1967:13; pers comm Armstrong, 2010). At this meeting Ditchburn spoke to Leach about her desire to build an oil fired kiln in South Africa and he referred her to the British firm B. and S. Massey with regards to a fan for the oil-burner of the stoneware kiln she wanted to build in Pietermaritzburg (this development is expanded in Vurovecz 2008).

As I have established through my research, it is uncertain whether Marcuson and Ditchburn ever met, or discussed their ceramics directly, however I assert that Ditchburn was also working with porcelain in 1970 in Pietermaritzburg (pers comm Armstrong, 2009). Ditchburn built the oil kiln at the University of Natal in the ceramics department (which is now the clay-making room) and made local ceramic history in firing her kiln for the first time to stoneware temperature in 1955. The advantage of stoneware is that it is stronger than earthenware as it is fired to a much higher temperature (1200°C) causing the clay to vitrify enabling it to hold liquids without leaking. Ditchburn had been inspired to develop these technical means, firstly in her training at Central School of Art and Design with Billington, but following this in the modernist aesthetics of stoneware and reduction-firings she had observed in her visits to ceramic studios such as Leach's and Cardew's in England after her participation in the Dartington Hall conference. However the technology for producing stoneware was not

available in South Africa, as earthenware was the dominant medium of studio potters (Vurovecz 2008:24-25). The need for ceramics was for functional and decorative wares in South Africa. Consequently local studios, like the work made at Olifantsfontein, produced wares that were earthenware fired and cost effective and were easily sold on the South African market (Gers 1998:6).

However as I have stated, the local ceramists who were financially able to travel overseas had a profound influence on studio ceramics in Southern Africa by bringing back with them the technical expertise of the making and firing of high fired ceramics and porcelain. Leach's 'oriental' style ware was not fashionable or popular in South Africa as it was in Britain; I contend that the popularity of this style in South Africa took another thirty years to take effect.

In the 1960s, individual, emerging studio potters in South Africa like Bosch, Morris, Walford and Rabinowitz were greatly opposed to industrial mass-produced wares. They followed the British studio ceramists' belief in the importance of the individual potter like Staite-Murray.

It is necessary at this point to outline the evolution of studio ceramics in Johannesburg (or the Transvaal) in the late 1960s. Studio ceramics in South Africa had gathered momentum and it had become an important aspect for making a living through selling hand-made work made in the studio, to a pleasurable pastime for hobbyists and ceramic enthusiasts. By the late 1960s high fired electric kilns were imported into South Africa from manufacturers in the United Kingdom or people built their own kilns to suit their firing needs and purposes. Many potters imported their glaze materials as raw materials or made up glazes; John Adams probably ordered his glazes from the supplier Wengers as in 1918 it would have been difficult to obtain the properly milled raw materials for use on a small scale, also the women at Olifantsfontein ordered their made up glazes from Wengers in England as early as 1926 (pers comm Armstrong, 2011; Hillebrand 1991:4).

Up until the early 60s South African Studio Potters and the industries imported their glazes and ceramic materials. In 1968 José and Harold Fowell, owners of the Potters Suppliers & Mail Order and friends of the late John Edwards (Marcuson's teacher at the Johannesburg College of Art which later became the Johannesburg Technikon, then University of Witwatersrand and now is known as University of Johannesburg), emigrated to South Africa (Tasker 1992:14-15). Here Harold set up Blythe Colours to start manufacturing glazes for the

South African studio ceramic and industrial market (Tasker 1992:14-15; Guassardo 1987:23). As Edwards and his wife Valmai (1934-2011) had been living in South Africa for eighteen years (since 1950), he assisted the Fowells by suggesting that they set up a small shop in Orange Grove called the Potters Shop, in Johannesburg, to supply the growing need for potters' materials and tools. The enterprise was a success, and they were supported by the growing local ceramic enthusiasts, including the likes of Esias Bosch (1923-2010) and Tim Morris (1941-1990). Whilst José ran the business, Harold built kilns and manufactured the glazes for both the Studio Potters and the industry (Tasker 1992:14-15; Guassardo 1987:23).

John and Valmai Edwards were important figures in the pioneering of studio ceramics in South Africa. Edwards trained in England at Stoke-on-Trent Technical College, then relocating to South Africa where he taught at the Johannesburg College of Art and was of great help to Marcuson during her studies (Clark and Wagner 1974:108; pers comm Hoets, 2011; pers comm Marcuson, 2008). Digby Hoets (pers comm) claimed that John met Valmai at the Johannesburg College of Art where she was a student at this time. Valmai also received her formal training and had a keen sense of design. She was not responsible for the wheel work, which John taught, but she taught, made and fired her hand-made items. John taught mainly wheel work and Val, who was more artistically inclined, taught hand-building techniques. John's interest was in the mechanical side of ceramics and was therefore involved in building kilns and wheels and experimentation with glazes. According to Hoets, it was Edwards who discovered a high firing material (Vereening Refractories fireclay) which was used in the kiln-brick allowing potters to reach temperatures of 1200°C and above. John initially worked on his own and then he worked with Bob Fox to build kilns and with Libra Verga to build wheels. When he and Val moved to Natal, Bob took over the kiln business and Libra the wheel business and Digby took over the studio practice and teaching students (pers comm Hoets, 2011). Edwards played a crucial part in the development of studio ceramics through his enthusiasm, knowledge and assistance. John was not really known for exhibiting his own work as much as teaching others to throw and assisting them with wheel and kiln making. In 1969 the Edwards and the Fowells opened a shop in Louis Botha Avenue, called the Potters Shop, where the studio potters could find everything they needed under one roof. The Potters Shop was sold in 1971 and José and Harold Fowells started the 'Potters Supplies & Mail Order' (pers comm Hoets, 2011; Tasker 1992:14-15; Guassardo, 1987:23). It is important to note these historical details since they provide an understanding of the technical means by which stoneware materials and supplies became available in commercial outlets on

the Reef and which paved the way for Marcuson's own ceramic productions; in a receptive context for the development of stoneware and porcelain in South Africa.

Studio potters and stoneware in South Africa

As stated in chapter one Bernard Leach, William Staite-Murray and Michael Cardew had a profound influence on some of South Africa's leading Studio Potters. The knowledge and enthusiasm for making high fired stoneware came to South Africa via potters such as Bosch, Rabinowitz and Morris. It was Morris who helped Marcuson make the transition from earthenware to stoneware. Later she found that she was making her stoneware pieces too thin and consequently the forms lost their stoneware quality. She therefore decided to work with porcelain. It is interesting to note that Gillian Bickell was also making porcelain but had started in 1978 at Fourways in Mulder's Drift (pers comm Juliet Armstrong with David Walters, 2012). It is necessary here to point out that in the 1960s there were potters who were in the know on how to manage and fire a stoneware kiln, but it must be understood that it was difficult for the amateur potter using stoneware to access professional advice and technical assistance with the difficulties involved in the setting up of a successful ceramic studio. The people who did know what they were doing and how to remedy high fired technical problems were only a privileged few and included people like Esias Bosch, Hilda Ditchburn, Hyme Rabinowitz, Bryan Hayden (taught by Hilda Ditchburn), Marietjie van der Merwe and Tim Morris. For the purpose of this dissertation I will focus my attention on the artist potters who had the most direct influence on Marcuson's work. These artist works can also be found in major art galleries across the country.

Esias Bosch (1923–2010)

Esias Bosch, was controversially considered by some (Bosch and De Waal 1988:12) as the father of South African studio ceramics, but in my readings of *Cruise on Breaking the mould*, *Women Ceramists in KwaZulu Natal* and maybe South Africa, such as Hilda Ditchburn who was a pioneer in her own right but in a very male dominated society have not been recognised (pers comm Armstrong, 2011). Although by reputation, Bosch did develop a ceramic tradition that influenced a great number of potters around the country. His charisma and enthusiasm backed by his association with Michael Cardew and Raymond Finch, gave Bosch a credibility and influence that was highly influential in South African studio ceramics and his pots were eagerly sought-after.

Bosch enrolled at the University of Witwatersrand to become a dentist but found that his interest was more art related and so after a week quit the course and registered for a Bachelors of Art in Fine Art. The course was newly established and was mostly theoretical; he stayed for a year and then moved to Johannesburg Art School where he acquired his teachers' diploma. It was at the Johannesburg Art School that Bosch met Valerie Verster, his future wife (Bosch and De Waal 1988:16-17). After graduating in 1946, Bosch left Johannesburg to teach in Kimberley at Diskobolos School (a school for handicapped children). Valerie stayed in Johannesburg where she saw an advertisement in the newspaper for the Robert Storm Ceramics Bursary which enabled the recipient to study for three years overseas at the Central School of Art and Design in London. Bosch applied for the bursary and won a scholarship to study ceramics at the Central School of Art in London under Dora Billington, at that time (the end of 1949), head of its ceramics department, (Bosch and De Waal 1988:15-16) (this was after the then Hilda had completed her studies at the Central School of Art (pers comm Armstrong, 2012).

Soon after enrolling, Bosch realised that he did not want a diploma but rather wanted more practical experience and so Billington introduced him to a former student of hers, Raymond Finch who worked at Winchcombe Pottery where he produced earthenware and later stoneware utilitarian wares. Finch joined Winchcombe Pottery in 1936 after having trained as Cardew's first apprentice until 1939. Bosch joined Finch between 1950 and 1951. After a year, Bosch moved to Wenford Bridge Pottery in Cornwall in 1952, where he worked for Michael Cardew (Bosch and De Waal 1988:15-21). Although he experimented with stoneware at Winchcombe it was from Cardew that he learned the basic technique of

stoneware and wood-fired kilns. Through Cardew, Bosch met Bernard Leach and Shoji Hamada and was inspired by Leach's technique and philosophies, but it was Cardew who had the greatest influence on him (Bosch and De Waal 1988:15-21; Clark and Wagner 1974:14-15; Vurovecz 2008:37).

Bosch returned to South Africa in 1952 with the desire to start his own pottery studio. However, a partial requirement of the bursary was to spend two years teaching in Durban. He taught at the at the Durban Art School until 1955 before moving to Pretoria; Bosch commented on the difficulties in finding a market in Durban for his individual slipware pieces which he had based on the Leach and Cardew tradition.

Nobody wanted my pots in Durban. Handmade pots were foreign to them. They said they imported their pottery from England. They really looked down on local hand-made ceramics - except for the 'African' pots decorated with bushmen, of course! (Bosch and De Waal 1988:22).

However the women at Olifantsfontein had an earthenware market that sold wares in Durban, Port Elizabeth, Johannesburg and Cape Town and they could make a living from their work. It was shop owner and entrepreneur Helen de Leeuw, herself a potter, who had a commercial outlet in Hyde Park, Sandton, Johannesburg during the 1960s and offered Bosch an opportunity to sell his work together with several other potters at her Craftsman's Market. This was one of the first outlets in South Africa to sell so-called 'craft work' (Leeb du Toit year unknown). In 1961 he sold his first stoneware pots at De Leeuw's (Bosch and De Waal 1988:22-24).

Bosch's wood firing kiln was intended to be used for his own work and not specifically for teaching (Bosch and De Waal 1988:33-35; Clark and Wagner 1974:17; Vurovecz 2008:38). After Bosch visited Cardew in Nigeria, his work was given further status and credibility as it won a silver medal in 1963 at the ninth International Exhibition of Ceramic Art in Washington DC, sparking his international career (Nilant 1963:55-56).

In 1975 Bosch changed from stoneware to porcelain. He referred to the medium of porcelain as 'the ultimate challenge to the potters [thus] skill and artistry' (Bosch and De Waal 1988:36). His porcelain pieces were bold with fine uncluttered lines. The piece below (figure 18 on page 28), which is part of the Corobrik Collection, was thrown on the wheel, bisque fired, glazed and fired to over 1200° C (pers comm de Clark, 2010).



Figure 17. Esias Bosch. Porcelain bowl thrown on the wheel. Glazed and then high fired.
H:120mm; W:330mm. Collection: Corobrik Collection.
<http://ceramicssa.org/Corobrik.html>. Accessed by Fahmeeda Omar, September 2010.

Figure 18 and Figure 19. The above pictures are all Esias Bosch's work. Collection: the Pelmama Permanent Art Collection. www.pelmama.org/BOSCH.htm. Accessed by Fahmeeda Omar, 2010.

Though this summary may appear to be aside from the point, it is important to see Marcuson's entry into local ceramics in the context of Bosch's own pioneering achievements, not only as one of the first professional stoneware potters of South African studios, but also because of his strong affiliations through Cardew and Finch to a mainstream of modernist developments in British ceramics – which were largely dominated by Bernard Leach. I think it is important to note that Marcuson's ceramics did not depend on the 'Leach tradition' – with which Bosch's work is often connected (Cruise 1991:178).

Marcuson had a good eye for collecting, as seen in Bosch's respect for her, and claims in a farewell tribute (Bosch 1988:18-19) 'I have seen Thelma judge other potters' exhibition entries, and what impressed me greatly was her sense of fairness - she would never say an unpleasant word about another's creativity. She is an excellent critic, however with a sharp and selective perception.'

Hyme Rabinowitz (1920-2009)

Rabinowitz may be considered more an adherent of the so-called 'Anglo-Oriental tradition' (Cruise 1991:46) than Bosch, as mentioned in the section above.

Rabinowitz was a close friend of Marcuson's (and was of the same generation). He was born in 1920 in Concordia Namaqualand and was educated mainly in Cape Town, having initially trained as a chartered accountant, but left this profession to pursue a career in pottery in the late 50s early 60s. In 1956 Rabinowitz spent six months training under Kenneth Quick at the Tregenna Hill Pottery in England where Quick was making mainly earthenware (and some

oxidised stoneware). After six months Rabinowitz returned to South Africa and in 1961 he worked with Bosch at White River making reduced stoneware in a wood firing kiln (Clark and Wagner 1974:133). In 1962 he set up his own permanent pottery studio at Eagles Nest in Constantia Cape Town where he originally fired a wood-fired kiln for many years before changing to an oil-fired kiln (see figures 20-23 on page 29 for examples of Rabinowitz stoneware pieces) (www.arttimes.co.za/news_read.php?news_id=609).

Here Rabinowitz was able to make his own stoneware clay, from the clay deposit situated at Eagles Nest, and his own glazes from local materials. He produced mainly functional pieces and was 'a firm believer in the need for repetitive throwing (as seen below) as a basis for creative work' (Clark and Wagner 1974:133). A visit to the United Kingdom during 1966 and 1967 gave him the opportunity to work with Michael Cardew at Wenford Bridge. In 1979 he won an award in the APSA National Ceramic Exhibition (Zaalberg 1985:63). Even though he started pottery at a late stage in his life, according to Leach, 'Hyme's dedication to the craft resulted in his being awarded a National Silver Medal by Pretoria University in 1990, a Master of Fine Arts Honorary degree from the University of Cape Town and the 'Master Potter' title by the Association of Potters of South Africa (APSA) on his 80th birthday (www.arttimes.co.za/news_read.php?news_id=609).



Figure 20. Hyme Rabinowitz. Reduced stoneware bowl which is found in the Corobrik collection http://www.ceramicssa.org/046_Hyme_Rabinowitz.jpg. Accessed by Fahmeeda Omar, June 2012.

Figure 21. Hyme Rabinowitz. Stoneware vase. http://www.capegallery.co.za/hyme_rabinowitz1.htm. Accessed by Fahmeeda Omar, June 2012.

Figure 22. Hyme Rabinowitz. Stoneware cylinder. Part of the Cape Gallery Collection http://www.capegallery.co.za/hyme_rabinowitz1.htm. Accessed by Fahmeeda Omar, June 2012.

Figure 23. Hyme Rabinowitz. Stoneware pot with lid <http://www.southafricanartists.com/showartist.asp?WorkID=76904>. Accessed by Fahmeeda Omar, June 2012.

Marcuson had a great deal of respect for Rabinowitz and Bosch (and they respected her too, as Rabinowitz commented below). As pioneers of stoneware in South Africa, they inspired and assisted Marcuson in her studio developments, earthenware, stoneware and then porcelain. They were willing to help her with problems and admired her glazing capability. It is evident that her opinion as an artist and as a judge was respected; as Rabinowitz wrote concerning the comments Marcuson made on his work, 'I sat up and took note when Thelma judged my work, which she said bluntly, 'Hyme, you've got to stop putting those silly geometric patterns on your vases' (Rabinowitz 1988:19).

Tim Morris (1941-1990)

Tim Morris was another pioneer in the 'first generation' of South African stoneware potters, as was Rabinowitz and Bosch. That he lived on the Reef made his work and ideas closely accessible to Marcuson.

Morris was born in England and moved to South Africa in 1965 he initially attended Lancing College in Sussex but graduated from St Martins School of Art in London with a national diploma in design, majoring in painting. Following this, he qualified for a teacher's training diploma at London University. After graduating he attended the Central School of Art where he gained the skill and understanding to produce high fired stoneware and was fortunate to study pottery under Ruth Duckworth (with whom he worked with for a short time). Morris was initially drawn to the contemporary British art and design style of the 1960s, which was influenced by Pop Art, but changed his genre to high-fired porcelain and stoneware utilitarian ware (see figures 24-27 on page 31) which became popular in South Africa through the efforts of potters like Bosch and Rabinowitz (Clark and Wagner 1974:121-125; Sellschop 2008:8-9).

Morris' ceramics were mostly decorated with brushwork motifs in a style influenced by oriental pottery. The motifs were based on plant forms, stylised butterflies and birds and occasionally included abstract brushwork. He was also interested in ancient Middle-Eastern pottery (which is characterised by unglazed surfaces and banded motifs), having come into contact with examples whilst spending time at an archaeological dig in Israel (Sellschop 2008:8-9).

Morris used three glazes in combination and often allowed a portion of the piece to remain unglazed to show the texture of the clay. All of his work was fired in a large oil burning kiln

that he built in his studio and fired every three weeks to maintain his volume of production (Sellschop 2008:8-9).

Helen de Leeuw was the first to exhibit his work in the late 60s and early 70s, thereafter his work appeared in the Goodman Gallery and Everard Reed Gallery in Johannesburg. Overall he exhibited his work over sixty times, including eighteen exhibitions at the Goodman Gallery itself. This associated him closely with Bosch, Rabinowitz and Marcuson (pers comm Marcuson, 2008). Coupled with his technically sound utilitarian wares and a supportive public that was keen to acquire stoneware ceramics, these helped to establish him as a contemporary artist and crafter. As an artist, he experimented with ceramic form, making large unglazed sculptural pieces, the surfaces of which he treated with oxides (Sellschop 2008:8-9).

Morris' works are in the Tatham Art Gallery, the William Humphreys Art Gallery and in the Pelmama Permanent Art Collection (Clark and Wagner 1974:121-125; Sellschop 2008:8-9).



From left to right

Figure 24. Tim Morris. Plate. Porcelain. Year unknown. Pelmama Permanent Art Collection. www.pelmama.org. Accessed by Fahmeeda Omar, 2010.

Figure 25. Tim Morris. Flask (1972). Stoneware. Plate. Porcelain. Year unknown. Pelmama Permanent Art Collection. www.pelmama.org. Accessed by Fahmeeda Omar, 2010.

Figure 26. Tim Morris. Lidded Bowl. Stoneware. Plate. Porcelain. Year unknown. Pelmama Permanent Art Collection. www.pelmama.org. Accessed by Fahmeeda Omar, 2010.

Figure 27. Tim Morris. Vase. Stoneware. Year unknown. Plate. Porcelain. Year unknown. Pelmama Permanent Art Collection. www.pelmama.org. Accessed by Fahmeeda Omar, 2010.

In the context of Marcuson's associations and professional interactions with these important ceramists, South Africa's first stoneware potters, her own contributions are perhaps more

significant than has been recorded to the present. The next section aims to summarise her valuable contributions to the founding and development of APSA, as South Africa's first (semi) professional ceramics association – that was intended to provide a local equivalent of the long-established crafts associations in England and USA.

The Association of Potters of South Africa (APSA)

On the first Saturday of every month local potters would gather at Edwards and Fowells' shop (Tasker 1992:14; Guassardo 1987:23) shop bringing their pots which were either to show off or to ask the experts why the various flaws had occurred and for a general discussion with a panel of so called 'experts'. Technically there were only a few people in the Johannesburg area (or South Africa for that matter) who were able to enter into a forum of how and why work had succeeded (or blown up!) An informal panel of ideas and expertise gathered and then decided on a regular meeting; the panel consisted of Josie Fowell, Harold Fowell, Valmai Edwards; John Edwards, Sammy Lieberman and John Raine (an associate from Blythe ceramics industry) who were willing and able to answer queries and solve clay and glaze problems for the emerging studio potters who had very little local reference material about studio supplies in South Africa and desperately needed to get the information.

This gave rise to the idea of the Potters Association (APSA). APSA was conceived in 1972 supported by other potters including Tim Morris, Hyme Rabinowitz, David Walters, Gill Anderson and Thelma Marcuson (Guassardo 1987:23; Tasker 1992:14; De Klerk 2001:11; pers comm Digby Hoets 2011).

Before 1972 potters and ceramists had no forum, so when APSA was formed workshops were held to help educate the South African potters and ceramists about what was happening overseas. The Society aimed to inform potters of upcoming local and international exhibitions and worked towards getting South African artists recognised for their talent. The association held exhibitions (such as MUD at Hilton College, near Pietermaritzburg in which many CVA ceramists were awarded prizes) and began to hold regular regional and national exhibitions. Initially, in 1977, Oude Libertas was the sponsor of the APSA National and Regional Exhibition and they would purchase the winning pieces. In 1982 Corobrik assumed the sponsorship of APSA the also took over the responsibility for the Collection and continued to purchase the winning pieces of the national and regional exhibitions until 1992. During this time the Collection was housed, first at the CVA in Pietermaritzburg, before its

move in 1996 to the Sandton Civic Art Gallery where it stayed until 2001. During this time a trust fund was created between Corobrik and APSA to preserve the Collection but also to aid in the purchase of new artworks for the Collection. The Collection is now housed in the Pretoria Art Museum (Guassardo 2002:4).

In 2004, at the annual general meeting of affiliates, it was agreed that the Association's name be changed to Ceramics Southern Africa and by November that year APSA had officially become Ceramics SA. This body is the official representative body of potters in Southern Africa. The objective of the association is to promote ceramics in Southern Africa by improving the work being produced and to foster an interest in ceramics by the general public. This is done by presenting workshops and organizing exhibitions regionally and nationally. The purpose of Ceramics SA is to maintain a representative forum for the encouragement and fostering of the art and craft of ceramics in Southern Africa (pers comm de Clark 2010).

Thelma Marcuson 1919-2009

To better understand Marcuson's ceramics in this context I will portray her work through a time line. A preliminary survey indicates that there is very little published information on Marcuson's ceramics, although there is some source material in the media, including the South African magazines '*Sgraffiti*', *Artlook* and *Ceramix*.

Thelma Marcuson was born Thelma Sidersky in Johannesburg on the 13th July 1919. She was the youngest of four children. She had an older sister Millie and two older brothers Max and Lionel (see figure 28 below). Her family had fled Germany after World War I and moved to South Africa to settle in Johannesburg. Her father Adolf Sidersky practiced as a jeweller and was one of only a few professional manufacturing jewellers in Johannesburg at that time, with his own factory. It was from an early age that Thelma had a respect for people who worked with their hands and for the works that they created (pers comm Marcuson, 2008; see appendix 4; Katz 1974:30).



Figure 28. The Sidersky Children. Thelma sitting on her sister Millie's lap with her brothers; Max & Lionel, photographer unknown, date unknown.

<http://www.respectance.com/ThelmaMarcuson/photos/>. Accessed by Fahmeeda Omar, 2010

Thelma attended Barnato Park Girls High in Johannesburg but did not finish her studies, as there was not much emphasis on women finishing their schooling in the 1930s and 40s. She helped her father at the factory by working in the office. At the age of twenty two, in 1941, she married a managing director of a textile industry, Neil Marcuson (1913-2001) and had three sons Alan, Tim, and Bobby (figures 29-30 on page 35). Neil was the managing director of his family business A.H. Marcuson & Co. (Pty) Ltd. This company was started in 1908 by Neil's father. After his father's death in 1925, Niel's mother took over the business and was joined by Neil in 1932. He rapidly took control of the business, transformed it and was

Managing Director and Chairman until he sold it in 1983. Thelma and Neil immigrated to England in 1988 (pers comm Bobby Marcuson 2012).



Figure 29. Neil and Thelma just married, Family archives, 1941, Photographer unknown.

Figure 30. The Marcuson family: Alan; Thelma; Neil; Bobby and Tim. Family archives. 1961, photographer unknown. <http://www.respectance.com/ThelmaMarcuson/photos/>

Thelma's ceramic career started late in life. She was already in her 40s. During the 1960s it was commonly assumed that women did not work and that masters of the ceramic craft were men but for a few exceptions. Women who worked from home who did not dig their own clay and fired their works with natural burning fuels, such as wood, were scorned and labelled as garage potters in South Africa and kitchen potters in the United Kingdom. Although England did offer women studio potters some opportunities for those who were brave enough to take up the challenge it was not the same in South Africa (Arnold and Schmahmann 2005:142).

Marcuson had no intention of conforming to this restriction of women. She was a mother and homemaker who wanted an outlet in the creative field in which she could work towards a level of perfection and self-expression. Few women in South Africa were studio potters in their own right, or liberated enough to pursue the technicalities associated with the physical work and dirt associated with pottery. On the other hand, there were a few trained artists and although this is not a comprehensive list of all the female potters I have been able to trace, among the best known would be:

- The potters of Olifantsfontein (1925-1961) most of whom trained at the Durban Art School
- Hilda Rose (later Ditchburn at the University of Natal) Trained at Durban Art School
- Marietjie van der Merwe and the Baxter sisters from Pietermaritzburg

It was only once her children were adults that Marcuson enrolled at Johannesburg Art School as an extra mural student and started off her studies in sculpture (Katz 1974:30). Marcuson's ceramic career started out as a hobby and her intense interest in the medium occurred in the early 1960s after trying her hand in many different fields ranging from working as a short hand typist to being an estate agent. It was after she met and studied under John Edwards at the Johannesburg Art School, whom she insisted could teach an 'orang-utan to throw'! that she took a deeper interest in pottery and registered for a two year part time ceramics course (pers comm Marcuson, 2008; see appendix 4).

As mentioned earlier, she was already in her 40s and although she had little formal artistic training, it was with Edward's encouragement and enthusiasm that allowed her to venture beyond the constraints of the average hobby potter to pursue something that she could develop and call her own. She was a keen and enthusiastic learner. Edwards taught her the basis of everything that she knew from throwing, handling of clay, glazing and firing techniques (pers comm Marcuson, 2008; see appendixes 2; 3; 4 and 8).

In 1963 Marcuson set up a neat, comfortably equipped studio in two rooms of her garden cottage at their Dunkeld home in Johannesburg (similar in style to figures 44-45 on page 58). One room housed two medium sized electric kilns, which she initially fired to earthenware and later to stoneware and porcelain, and used the other room as her studio (pers comm Marcuson, 2008; Clark and Wagner 1974:108). She enjoyed the intimate atmosphere of her home, due to the tranquillity and control of her personal space, in which she could work. This environment was both comfortable and made her feel at ease, which is reflected in the composure of her work, especially her fine translucent porcelain pieces (Katz 1974:30; Mayer 1988:16).

During this time Marcuson visited local artists and friends such as Tim Morris, Hyme Rabinowitz and Esias Bosch. She was also fortunate to travel overseas with her husband Neil on his business trips and was able to visit international potters to look at their work and to better understand their working methods. These encounters added meaning and value to her own work once she started her studio. The rest she learnt through trial and error. Marcuson also subscribed to international magazines such as *Ceramic Review* as well as local magazines such as *Sgraffiti* (which was published by APSA) for inspiration and glaze recipes. This would have enabled her to remain abreast with current trends and ceramic

works made by both local and international potters especially those living in the United Kingdom (pers comm Marcuson, 2008).

As stated, Marcuson had the means to travel overseas, these travels also played a major role in establishing her sense of design and exposed her to the different styles of artists that she was fortunate to meet. According to Peter Jeff, she had at least three Hans Coper pieces in her collection. Coper was a teacher at the prestigious Camberwell College of Art in London from 1960 to 1969 (pers comm Armstrong with Peter Jeff 2012). This on its own would have caused a stir in the ceramic world around Johannesburg as Coper was enjoying status in the British art world by 1955 as an independent with non-oriental style sculptural forms (Rose 1955:24). It has been established that Marcuson met Lucie Rie and Hans Coper on one of her many trips overseas. This meant a lot to her for Rie was one of the inspirational people who influenced her work. It has been established that she had at least four Hans Coper pieces and four to six Lucie Rie pieces (pers comm. Bobby Marcuson 2012). When asked what it was about Rie's work that influenced her, Marcuson noted that when she first saw Rie's work she knew that was the type of work she aspired to make. The simplicity and sophistication of the art works with regards to the form and glazes were inspiring and so she set out to emulate this style of work in her own way (pers comm Marcuson 2008).

It has been established that Marcuson was a dedicated collector of pottery and surrounded herself with work by both local and international artists such as:

<u>International Artist</u>	<u>Local Artist</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hans Coper; 4 pieces (auctioned when she left South Africa in 1990) • Lucie Rie; about 6 pieces (of which 2 were earthenware bowls) (auctioned in 1990 as above) • Mary Rogers; details not recalled • Bernard Leach; one jug • 2 Natzler bowls 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • John Shirley • Tim Morris • Digby Hoets • Hyme Rabinowitz • Andrew Walford • Esias Bosch

(Source for the above information: pers comm Janet Rogers 2010; pers comm Alan and Bobby Marcuson 2010-2011).

In 1975 Marcuson along with fellow artists and friends went to Japan on a guided tour where they meet a famous Japanese potter Uedo. It is understood that it was here that she learned to develop a flexible attitude in response to her understanding of beauty (Mayer 1988:16) (see appendix 4). She also visited America, Italy and England. As already mentioned, Marcuson's greatest influence was Lucie Rie but she was not the sole inspiration for Marcuson's work; she was also inspired and influenced by other artists including Mary Rogers, Ruth Duckworth and Bernard Leach (pers comm Marcuson, 2008; personal observation). She admired the organic forms made by Mary Rogers and recognised Leach as an important figure in the history of Studio Potter in Great Britain, but she never attempted to emulate his work.

Marcuson's earthenware, stoneware and porcelain

Marcuson had the advantage that she did not have to depend on marketing her creative work for a living. Fortunately her husband Neil was able to support her new found interest in ceramics and she was free to concentrate more on experimentation than on monetary output and gain. She was enthusiastic to achieve her goals and aspirations and worked through her mishaps in order to learn from them and better the finished article. Her standards were high and no rejects were allowed to be displayed or exhibited. She usually gave her rejects to friends on the understanding that she did not consider them to be of the quality she aspired to. As mentioned earlier Marcuson was passionate of works of art by other artist and understood only too well the artistic standards which must be maintained, and rigorously adhered to them (pers comm Janet Rogers, 2009; personal observation).

Marcuson started working with earthenware clay forms and glazes but realised that she was making her earthenware pieces look like stoneware (pers comm Marcuson, 2008). She told me that 'one must work in a way that is true to the material one uses' (pers comm Marcuson, 2008). Stoneware was preferred as Marcuson liked the muted glaze colours and the finesse that she could achieve with stoneware forms. This prompted her to change her medium from earthenware to stoneware. To achieve this she turned to Tim Morris and Helen Martin, who at the time were working together, and they helped her make the transition from earthenware to stoneware and also gave her some glaze recipes to start her of (pers comm Marcuson, 2008; appendix 3 and 4; Katz 1974:30).

Up until the early 60s, South African studio potters and the industries imported their glazes and ceramic materials. Initially Neil imported clay and glaze materials for Thelma from

England through his contacts in the firm, but after receiving what she considered a ‘bad batch’, and as she could not return the items to Europe for a refund, she learned how to make the porcelain clay herself, using minerals that were available to her through various sources.



Figure 31 and Figure 32. Thelma Marcuson, early stoneware, late 1960s. Size unknown. Private Collection: Evelyn Cohen from Johannesburg. Photograph by Professor Juliet Leeb-du Toit, 2009.

Marcuson's work varies in form and concept. Her pots change from the square, geometric stoneware planters, constructed by hand from slabs, to the delicacy of her porcelain bowls, thrown on the wheel and translucent in their thinness. She characteristically alternated between stoneware and porcelain to remain knowledgeable about the different clay bodies. When she worked with porcelain she made sure that the studio was clean so as not to contaminate the pure white porcelain with stoneware clay as this medium picks and reflects impurities at high temperatures and the slightest amount of grog or metal contamination will spoil the creamy smooth texture and fleck the whiteness with heavy metal colours (Katz 1974:30).

Her early stoneware pieces were heavily potted (see figures 31-32 above). This is also a feature that is detected in some of her early porcelain which is noted in the Tatham's Collection, particularly figure 52 on page 65, a stoneware pinched vessel which was made in 1974 and figures 53-56 on pages 67-70, the group of three thrown pieces made in 1973 and 1974, which when compared to her later porcelain pieces, are a lot heavier. On close inspection of these pieces they appear to be light and delicate but are inordinately heavy which is a great disappointment to the spectator but she was obviously proud of these early pieces as she deemed them worthy of being sold. It is possible that the group of three pieces may not have been porcelain pieces but rather white stoneware as Marcuson started working with porcelain in 1975 with the help of Tim Morris. Or this could have been seen as one of Marcuson's earlier attempts of making porcelain on her own before seeking help from Tim Morris. These three pieces also do not have the characteristics that are commonly associated with porcelain other than being white. It could also be argued that if they were Marcuson's

early porcelain pieces that she was still adjusting to this new medium which is why it looks like a stoneware piece. This aspect will be further discussed in the analysis of the pieces in the Tatham's collection.

Historically this should be considered as a start in the Marcuson oeuvre as, a beginning to move away from earthenware using stoneware and porcelain glazes. Figure 52 on page 65 is similar to the piece in the Corobrik Collection (www.ceramicssa.org/corobrik.collection) which was made in 1975. Over time, and with practice, Marcuson was able to move from stoneware clay to porcelain and in so doing was able to hone her technique and concentrate on her throwing and turning so as to enhance her forms demonstrating her superior knowledge and understanding of high fired glaze technology.

For the purpose of this dissertation I am focusing primarily on Marcuson's porcelain pieces, with special reference to those pieces in the Tatham Art Gallery Collection, even though she initially worked in earthenware and then stoneware before moving to porcelain. Marcuson was able to use porcelain in a manner that highlighted her advanced knowledge of glaze technology using the simplest of forms to accomplish her finely crafted three dimensional pieces.

It is interesting to note that Hilda Ditchburn also began working with porcelain in the early 1970s; Ditchburn's first exhibition of porcelain was held in the Main Library of the Pietermaritzburg campus of Natal University (pers comm Calder 2012). However, as already indicated it is unknown if Marcuson and Ditchburn knew each other or realised their similar quests to make thrown porcelain pieces. Interestingly enough, their finished work is similar in form and glaze and this is probably through their interest in the work of Lucie Rie and the international attention she was receiving (pers comm Armstrong, 2010). One is able to see that the forms, style and the unique technique of Rie's pieces and glazes were highly influential in Marcuson's work. Marcuson threw her pieces on the wheel and high fired them in an electric kiln. An in-depth breakdown of the process of making and the firing porcelain is given in at the end of this chapter.

Marcuson learned how to make porcelain with Tim Morris assistance which was initiated in 1975 (pers comm Armstrong with David Walters, 2012). She did, however, have difficulty in finding white bentonite, an ingredient required for making porcelain to plasticise the otherwise short porcelain body, due to the South African conflict in the former South West

Africa (now Namibia). The bentonite found in South Africa could have been used as a substitute material but because of the iron oxide impurities in the bentonite it would have given the porcelain a slightly cream colour instead of a sparkling whiteness that is a characteristic of porcelain. The porcelain body that she made had a good plasticity which made it relatively easy to throw on the potter's wheel. Marcuson made porcelain bowls, functional (as seen in Clark and Wagner's text of 1974) and non-functional (see figure 33 on page 43; figures 46-47 on page 58; figures 53-54 on page 67), which were thrown on the wheel. Another common shape that we see in Marcuson, Rie and Duckworth's work is the bottle necked piece. Marcuson clearly enjoyed making this form as there are several examples of it in her private and public collection, one of which is in the Tatham Art Gallery Collection (see figure 56 on page 70), which also appears on the cover of Clark and Wagner's book, and one in the William Humphreys Art Gallery (see appendix 1; pers comm Marcuson, 2008; Clark and Wagner 1974:108).

However, once a design had been perfected, it was rarely repeated and no two pieces were ever the same; although she did occasionally return to earlier forms, she felt that she should rather move on and find new, interesting shapes and effects (Katz 1974:30). 'Clay is such a ceaseless source of creativity', says Marcuson (Katz 1974:30). She was very precise in the way in which she worked and this demanded that she continuously experimented with forms that were not necessarily successful but nonetheless took time and effort to achieve. Another advantage that she found with using porcelain was that coloured glazes had a better outcome and the porcelain body was more responsive and the glazes were more resilient to its white body.

Porcelain became her *metier* because of its technological challenges (pers comm Marcuson, 2008; appendix 2). Marcuson's move to porcelain had been successful and in my interview, when asked what she liked about porcelain, she described it as 'a nervous sort of clay', but liked its responsiveness to the human hand and the quality of the clay (pers comm Marcuson, 2008). She said 'porcelain is just clay. It takes a little more time and patience and application to use successfully' (pers comm Marcuson, 2008).

Other examples of Marcuson's refined porcelain bowls can be found in both the Durban Art Gallery Collection, William Humphreys Art Gallery (see appendix 1) and in Marcuson's private collection. Marcuson often carved into the rim of her bowls giving them a more stylised appearance (examples of this method can be seen in figures 46-47 on page 58;

appendix 2). As opposed to the stoneware and some of her early porcelain work, these bowls do not just look light and elegant, they are balanced both visually and aesthetically and once picked up are a delight to handle an aspect which enhances their aesthetic appeal. Marcuson signed her work on the base either stamping her initials into the clay at the leather hard stage (or green ware) so that the mark could be seen through the glaze or she painted on her initials TM with cobalt oxide on the base as can be seen in several examples in the Tatham Collection. As a matter of interest Tim Morris signed his work with his initials TM, however, one can easily distinguish between the two artists works, based on the appearance and how the initials were written. Marcuson's work is delicate whereas Morris's work is more robust; Morris used combustion kilns and reduction firing whereas Marcuson used an electric kiln and oxidised firing.

Marcuson's interest in glaze chemistry started from early stage in her ceramic career. She did receive lessons on glaze chemistry from Hans Boyum (husband of Karin Boyum, the well-known ceramist who taught at the Witwatersrand Technikon, which assisted her in understanding the firing and reactions of different raw materials when put together, in order to achieve the glazes and colours she wanted (Mayer 1988:16). This understanding of glaze chemistry enabled her to devise and mix up her own colours and experiment with glazes and, as a glaze pioneer, she developed exceptional knowledge and prided herself in her skill. Although Marcuson also received some glaze recipes from fellow artists such as Tim Morris, she preferred calculating and making up her own glazes and perfected them to a point that that she claimed that her glazes were predictable within narrow limits and also informed me that her glaze effects were deliberate (pers comm Marcuson 2008; appendix 3). As has been stated, she fired her pieces in two electric kilns which is more reliable with regards to predictability and standardisation of heat-work and glaze-effects, when compared to the variability of reduction firings.

Further examples of her focus on pottery form can be seen in the porcelain bowl in figure 33 on page 43, glazed with her yellow crackle glaze using a yellow glaze stain (pers comm Janet Rogers, 2009, appendix 3). She tried to make a pale yellow uranium glaze (although at that time she did not yet know that the uranium yellow needs to be a barium-based glaze to achieve the pale yellow (pers comm Armstrong, 2012; appendix 4). Marcuson further remarked that there were few yellow stains on the market at that time that could withstand the stoneware temperatures as they were ephemeral in high firings; I see that she was proud of

this achievement as few potters could produce this colour (pers comm Marcuson, 2008 said that she used about 6 % yellow stain; appendix 3).

The crackle in Marcuson's glaze was achieved in the firing because the glaze and the clay expand and shrink at different rates, causing the glaze to form hair-line cracks. She was evidently fond of crackle glazes because the effect can also be seen in her Jar with lid (figure 58 on page 71) and her peach bloom bowl (figure 65 on page 77) in the Tatham's Collection as well as in figure 33 below. I note in both these pieces that a dark material had been rubbed into the cracks after firing, to emphasise them (Marcuson's glaze recipes are listed in Appendix 3).



Figure 33. Thelma Marcuson. Porcelain bowl with [Chinese rosewood] wooden stand, mid 1980s. Yellow crackle glaze. D:297.5 mm. Collection: private collection. Photograph by Fahmeeda Omar, 2008.

As stated earlier, Marcuson loved experimenting with glazes (as seen in the picture above of an example of her glaze test) and this placed her in a level above 'garage potters' (who tended to buy commercial supplies of ready-made glaze). In my conversation with Marcuson I was aware that she prided herself in her range of glaze experiments, the basic recipes of which she obtained mainly from her Johannesburg colleagues and also from standard ceramics reference books (although she did not specify, books by Leach, Cardew and Rhodes for example had been widely read by the 1970s) and journals such as the British journal, *Ceramic Review*, and the South African *Sgraffiti* which Marcuson mentioned.

Her work is mentioned specifically in the *Sgraffiti* no 14:4-5 in the article, 'Colour in Ceramics' written by ceramics lecturer at the University of Natal, Malcolm [thus] MacIntyre-Read, who in reaction to the 'hairy-brown glazes' that he felt typified South African studio ceramics of that era, seemed to emulate a Leach-like reduction-glaze fashion (pers comm Armstrong, 2012). In MacIntyre-Read's article he observed that the British potter, Robin

Welch, used colour as in secondary importance to shape and form and also that Elizabeth Fritsch's ceramics '[inlaid] colour may be a delicate overall tone, [to] give uplift, radiating interior light' (colour in ceramics 1977:4-5). It is clear that Marcuson enjoyed colour also in her use of stoneware glazes mentioned by MacIntyre-Read and that her technology was far more advanced than the 'hairy brown' ceramics of South African potters. Her use of colour set her apart from the usual muted South African ceramics, where John Dunn noted (Dunn 1977:17) that 'colour is 'kitsch' unless it is in muted greens or browns'

Although she loved strong colour, Marcuson also used some quiet glazes that were also in general use in South Africa. It is possible that her dolomite glaze was taken from the same volume of *Sgraffiti* (to which Macintyre-Read contributed, as referred to above) in which Bill van Gilder (of Kolonyama Pottery in Lesotho) writes (as 'Tips from Bill') about a 'Matt Dolomite' glaze for cone 9-10. The suggestion of this high temperature may have prompted Marcuson to sometimes fire her kiln to 1280°C in pursuit of superior glazes (pers comm Marcuson, 2008).

Marcuson loved a challenge, as is confirmed by the 150 square foot wall panel that she was commissioned to do for the SABC Radio Bantu's reception area in the late 70s. The panel consisted of thousands of individual handmade pieces of high fired stoneware glazed and painstakingly cemented together to form a harmonious whole, which she called an 'abstract free-form ceramic mosaic' (pers comm Marcuson, 2008; appendix 4). The colours of the glazes ranged from blacks, beiges and greys (pers comm Marcuson, 2008; appendix 3 and 4)

Marcuson has been in several group as well as several solo exhibitions. To have a solo exhibition in the 1970s was a significant achievement for any South African ceramist especially for an artist using porcelain as a medium. It must be remembered that the appreciation of ceramics, as an item of contemplation beyond the utilitarian aspects of the medium, were little known in South Africa and consequently there were few commercial galleries who were interested in promoting this aspect of 'the crafts' as such. The galleries that were 'enlightened' to this work were mainly Linda Givon at the Goodman gallery and Helen de Leeuw in Hyde Park and in 1975-6 APSA opened the Potter's Gallery in Hyde Park, formerly known as Potters, patronised by collectors and admirers of studio ceramics that was a relatively new 'fashion' of modernity in South African society (Leeb du Toit).

As has been noted this pottery technology was relatively new to South Africa and Marcuson would have eagerly tested glazes in order to be one with her studio pottery peers. This is an important aspect of her career as she subsequently became a highly regarded potter and artist in her own right and this could be through her knowledge and experimental finesse that she gave to the discipline.

Marcuson's role in APSA

As has been stated earlier in this chapter, the more seriously minded Studio Potters had no means of interacting and discussing their problems and promotions and so APSA was formed to which Marcuson became one of the founder members.

Being a member of APSA allowed Marcuson to interact with other experienced artists and ceramists allowing her to exchange ideas and techniques with them. She loved meeting other potters through the potters association and exhibitions and stated that she learned something from everyone she met (pers comm Marcuson, 2008). She served as chairwoman of the Exhibition Selection Committee for APSA for several years from 1974 and remained a member of APSA until she left for London in 1988 (Fisch 1975:3).

Marcuson had a friendly, amiable and social personality. She had the means to entertain and collaborate with other Studio Pottery with ease. She had a fine sense of aesthetic and contemporary fashion which consequently led her to be sought after as an 'arbiter of taste' in the realm of contemporary studio ceramics (pers comm Armstrong, 2011). Not only was she able to keep up with international ceramic trends through her magazine subscriptions but her overseas travels allowed her to interact with contemporary potters and view their work. It was evident that Marcuson was respected as a potter at this time as she was asked to be a judge at the 1975 Brickor Ceramics Exhibition. This shows that Marcuson had a keen eye for the aesthetics involved in the making of ceramic items, something of which she was respected and admired for by her peers (Bosch 1988:18-19; Rabinowitz 1988:19). She also had a balanced sense of style and elegance which was respected by potters such Rabinowitz.

In May 1976 Marcuson was also a judge at the Brickor Ceramics Art Competition and exhibition at Milner Park, Johannesburg, along with three other people. The object of this competition was to promote ceramics in South Africa and to encourage potters to improve the standard and quality of their work. This would be done by submitting their works to a panel

of experienced and expert judges; Marcuson had been selected as such an appropriate ceramist (see appendix 4).

Marcuson also acted as a member of the judging panel for the 1987 National Ceramics Exhibition along with Wilma Cruise who is a practicing South African ceramist (Cruise 1987:10). It must be remembered that there were few venues in South Africa to which one could go and contemplate beautiful ceramic wares as it was not Government policy to collect ceramics in an Art Gallery at that time. Consequently few people knew anything about studio ceramics and it was decided by the APSA committee that a collection of the best South African work should be assembled. The way in which to achieve this was that anyone who won a prize at the APSA National Exhibitions would automatically be included in the APSA Collection and that the prize money would compensate for this acquisition (pers comm. Armstrong, 2011).

The APSA Collection includes Marcuson's prize piece No 126. APSA was the publisher of South African journals including *Ceramix*, *Sgraffiti* and after changing its name to Ceramics Southern Africa it founded a new magazine, the *National Ceramics Magazine* which is still currently published.

Marcuson was one of a handful of female practitioners working in stoneware studio ceramics as opposed to industrially made wares, but she was one of the pioneers in this field in a largely male dominated discipline during that time (pers comm Marcuson, 2008; pers comm Armstrong, 2010). Other South African women working in studio ceramics would include Hilda Ditchburn (née Rose), Helen Martin, Marietjie van der Merwe, the women at Olifantsfontein (although they had worked only in earthenware) and Sonja Gerlings (Clark and Wagner 1974:26).

In March 1971 Marcuson took part in a group exhibition alongside painters, sculptors and her fellow potter Tim Morris at the Goodman Art Gallery in Hyde Park, Johannesburg. This was a prestigious gallery that foregrounded the work of well-known artists such as Tim Morris who was regularly exhibiting at the Goodman to sold out exhibitions as early as 1969 (pers comm Walters, 2012). Marcuson and Morris again exhibited at the Goodman Gallery in September that same year (appendix 5). The former owner, Linda Givon, was very selective in her invitations to exhibit in the Gallery. In 1972 Givon became Marcuson's agent; thereafter Marcuson took part in several other exhibitions, one of which was at 'Potters' in

Rivonia, Atrium Centre, along with several other ceramists including Andrew Walford, Tim Morris, Lily Pinchuck and Julia Frase (appendix 5). 'Potters' (a gallery for South African studio artists) was owned by APSA and in 1975 it moved to Hyde Park Corner in Sandton and changed its name to the 'Potters' Gallery'.

The first time she started working in porcelain was in 1975 through the assistance of Morris but turned to Bosch for assistance with regards to her technical problems with the porcelain she was using. Bosch was always willing and ever ready to assist his fellow potters with technical problems. He described Marcuson's work as being 'simpler and more subtle, which indicated the ability to eliminate - a gift which only comes with time and experience' (Bosch 1988:18).

In 1974 Marcuson participated in the Brickor exhibition, an exhibition sponsored by Corobrik and later that year, in November, she took part in an exhibition at Helen de Leeuw's Gallery at the Craftsman's Market in Hyde Park. De Leeuw said in a tribute to Marcuson, 'she has indeed mastered her craft, and there is no doubt of her stature as a creative and meaningful artist.' (De Leeuw 1988:18) Although the pieces she exhibited were stoneware, later in 1975 she experimented with crystalline glazes possibly through her friendship with John Shirley and with the help of Tim Morris she was able to move from working with stoneware to porcelain. Later that year, in August and September, she was voted in as an executive for APSA along with Tim Morris and Digby Hoets.

In 1976, at the Normand Dunn Gallery in Hilton, APSA held the fourth National Ceramic exhibition called the MUD Exhibition which Marcuson entered. In comparison with the other artworks that were shown, Marcuson's work stood out at the exhibition. She exhibited eight finely thrown bowls under the specific category of porcelain along with Andrew Walford, Esias Bosch and Juliet Armstrong of which there were a total of thirty seven pieces submitted under this category. The exhibition consisted of over four hundred pieces, ranging in category from sculptural to functional. This shows evidence that porcelain was still a relatively new medium for South African potters. It was at this exhibition that the Durban Art Gallery purchased three of the eight porcelain bowls for their permanent collection (see appendix 1). Marcuson stayed true to her new chosen medium (porcelain) and her glazes did not conform to the 'common or garden Hairy-brown [thus] stoneware' used by the majority of studio potters at that time, as she tried to develop a personal range of pastel colours that she

concocted with her understanding of glaze chemistry and appropriate colouring methods (APSA:Natal. MUD catalogue, 1976; pers comm Armstrong, 2011).

Marcuson had already held her first solo porcelain exhibition in July 1976 at the Goodman Art Gallery, Johannesburg, and this was the second solely porcelain exhibition in South Africa, thus publically pioneering studio porcelain in South Africa (Zaalberg 1985:72). At this exhibition Marcuson's glaze palette ranged from bronze lustre, lacy borders, bright red flecks and glazes reminiscent of the Chinese Chun glazes (appendix 4). As mentioned earlier it was during this year that she and her fellow members of APSA went on guided tour of Japan with particular reference to looking at ceramic artists and their work.

Marcuson's esteem in the South African Ceramic world was boosted by her winning prestigious prizes. She won the National Ceramics Competition three times, once in 1972 for pulled and pinched porcelain, again in 1973 for a grey bowl with blue splash and again in 1979 for a white porcelain bowl, its edge decorated with delicate tracery (De Leeuw 1988:18).

Having gained confidence and prestige with a porcelain body that she could make up herself, she was able to participate in solo and group exhibitions with ease. In April 1977 she exhibited in Cape Town at the Potters Association of Cape Town and South African Association of Art. In July 1978 she had another solo porcelain exhibition at the Goodman Art Gallery and in August 1979 she had a porcelain exhibition in Kimberley at the William Humphreys Art Gallery (W.H.A.G), where the gallery purchased four pieces for their permanent collection. The Gallery International from Cape Town purchased nine porcelain pieces from the W.H.A.G exhibition (see figure 34 on page 49; appendix 1; 4 and 5).

In 1979 she entered the third Oude Libertas Exhibition in Cape Town, along with artists such as Bosch, Hoets, Morris, Rabinowitz and Walters to name but a few. Thelma Marcuson, Hyme Rabinowitz, Gillian Bickell and Neville Brude won awards. Marcuson won a prize for her server bowl. Hyme Rabinowitz entered an ornamented bowl; Gillian Bickell entered five assorted size bowls and Neville Burde a planter. As has been stated Marcuson had won several awards both at National and Regional exhibitions and in this year her work was highly commended (see figure 35 on page 49; pers comm de Clark, 2010).

Then in 1980 she entered the Oude Libertas exhibition held in Natal and was highly commended for her porcelain bowls. The Durban Art Gallery purchased another three of

Marcuson's porcelain pieces at the National APSA Exhibition 1980 (see appendix 1). Marcuson exhibited her porcelain pieces on two separate occasions at the Goodman Gallery with two different painters, one was with Andrew Verster and the other was Judith Mason. In 1982 Marcuson again exhibited at the Goodman Gallery with another painter Wim Blom (see appendix 4 and 5). Later that year she exhibited her porcelain work in a solo exhibition at the Goodman Gallery. She displayed her thinly potted porcelain bowls with their simplistic forms and her long necked Lucie Rie-like vases. She used different coloured glazes to enhance the simple elegant forms. Some of the colours that Marcuson used on her pieces were metallic brown/black, matt white and turquoise which she achieved through reduction and blue bowls combined with very fine combing and sgraffito work (Snyckers 1982:7; see appendix 3; 4 and 5).



Figure 34. Thelma Marcuson setting up her porcelain exhibition at the William Humphreys Art Gallery in Kimberley, August 1979. Photographer unknown (archival photograph courtesy of the William Humphreys Art Gallery, Kimberley).

Figure 35. Left to right: Gillian Bickell, Hyme Rabinowitz, Thelma Marcuson and Neville Burde taken at Hyme's home in Eagles Nest. 1979. Picture courtesy of Gail de Klerk, photographer unknown.

In November 1982 Marcuson along with several other artist such as Tim Morris, Barry Dibb and Shirley Findlay, exhibited at Yellow Door. Marcuson's work was described as 'highly individual and most unusual' by the author Benita Munitz. Here Marcuson exhibited her perspex boxes with 'layered assemblages of thin curling sheets of porcelain in various subtle hues...' (see appendix 4; pers comm Marcuson, 2008). This work is reminiscent of the work made by Ruth Duckworth (1919-2009).

During the 1980s Marcuson's work was displayed on a regular basis at the Cameo Gallery in Stellenbosch. The gallery was often filled with works by South African ceramists such as Tim Morris, Hyme Rabinowitz, Marietjie van de Merwe and Andrew Walford. Marcuson

was introduced to Nana Wagner, the gallery owner, in 1983 through Hyme and Jeni Rabinowitz (pers comm Wagner 2009).

In 1984 Marcuson took part in the Corobrik National Exhibition and in March that year Marcuson, along with forty other ceramic artists, took part in a joint exhibition at the Pitco Teapot exhibition at Things Gallery in Melville.

It was in March 1984 that Lorna Ferguson, the curator of the Tatham Art Gallery in Pietermaritzburg, visited Marcuson at her home Dunkeld home in Johannesburg and purchased nine art works by Marcuson for their permanent ceramic collection, of which one was made with stoneware clay and the other eight were porcelain. Ferguson had studied at the University of Natal Pietermaritzburg under the mentorship of Hilda Ditchburn. Therefore it is not surprising that she noticed the works given the fact that Ditchburn was also working with porcelain when Ferguson was a student and she would have tried using the medium herself (pers comm. Armstrong, 2010).

Ferguson wrote ‘After my visit I bore away nine prize examples of her work, three of which feature on the cover of Garth Clark’s celebrated book *“Potters of Southern Africa”*. The works slipped quietly into our permanent collection, and I hope that this small mention serves in some way to draw attention to the fact that our contemporary South African Ceramic collection has received a shot in the arm with such worthy additions.’ (Ferguson 1984:2)

The basis of this dissertation is to discuss and analyse each piece with reference to Marcuson’s studio work at this time. It is important to introduce how and why Marcuson became the knowledgeable ceramist she was; consequently it is important to state how she became a popular and a sought after artist.

Although Marcuson had emigrated to London in 1988, she continued to be a full APSA member and made extra efforts to exhibit her work at national exhibitions here in South Africa. In 1990 Marcuson’s yellow crackled porcelain bowl (similar to figure 33 on page 43) (this time using uranium oxide to achieve this effect, understandably a rare and difficult colour to use) was displayed in an exhibition at the Witwatersrand Art Museum in conjunction with artists Tim Morris and Hyme Rabinowitz (pers comm Marcuson, 2008; pers comm Janet Rogers, 2009; appendix 3).

Marcuson had been living in London for some time and was ready to get back to making some work. At this stage Marcuson was in her early seventies, she had set up a neat studio in

her London home and needed some help. During this time she would have had easy access to the different materials she needed and could work with ease and dedication, but due to her age she required an assistant. Marcuson met Janet Rogers in 1991 at the Royal College of Art in London at Roger's degree show. Rogers worked full-time for Marcuson from 1991-1994 assisting her in the studio and helped prepare for the exhibition at the Andrew Usiskin Contemporary Art Gallery (see appendix 4 and 5). From 1995-2001 she worked part-time or whenever Marcuson needed her assistance to mix and glaze her work and fire the kiln. According to Rogers Marcuson was very methodical in her approach to her work. 'She was uncompromising on form and where others might have gone ahead and fired a sub-standard pot; unless it would do for the kitchen; Marcuson would break up the raw pot for reclaiming and start another one' (pers comm Janet Rogers 2009).

When Marcuson was in London she heard about the prestigious ceramic conference of invited ceramic artists at Aberystwyth in Wales. She was keen to attend the International Potters Festival where she could meet and interact with other international professional potters from all over the world. As we have established, Marcuson enjoyed esteem in South Africa and was trying to establish herself in England and made a point of exhibiting there. It was in 1992 from October to November, that she had her first public exhibition at the Andrew Usiskin Contemporary Art Gallery in London. Here she displayed a wide range of porcelain pieces and her colour palette ranged from her uranium yellow crackle glaze, a cool grey and pink glaze and black and gold-manganese washes. It was through this exhibition that she was able to establish herself as an artist in London and from her archival records, and according to Rogers, the exhibition was a success and Marcuson was able to attract a lot of attention. Her crackled glazes drew much attention, according to Rogers (pers comm Janet Rogers, 2009; appendix 4; 5 and 7).

When I visited Marcuson in 2008 at her London home in Brookfield, Hampstead Heath, she showed me her studio (see figures 44-45 on page 58 and figures 51a-c on page 62). As mentioned earlier, Marcuson collected art works by other potters and this was evident in her home as the shelves were lined with ceramics works by famous artists that she admired and able to purchase over time; unfortunately by the time I met Marcuson she had sold most of her ceramic collection and had ceased being an active potter due to her frailty and age, as she was 88 years old. According to Rogers, they fired the kiln about six times a year depending on how much work there was to fire. For precision they used a pyrometric cone when firing

and Rogers would patiently observe the cone until it dropped, usually through the night, which was a relief to Marcuson (see appendix 6). Her London studio was similar to her Dunkeld studio in Johannesburg, where one room in her apartment was dedicated as a studio.

She was an ardent follower of women ceramists such as Lucie Rie, Mary Rogers and Ruth Duckworth (as outlined above). Lucie Rie continued to be the major influence with regards to her ceramic forms. Marcuson was also inspired by the independence and confidence these women artists enjoyed and through her career, she was able to make a place for herself in South Africa especially.

The section to follow shows that Marcuson was a highly skilled glaze technician and prided herself in her achievements with delicate porcelain glazes. It is apparent that she accomplished this without resorting to buying her glazes from the growing number of ceramic outlets (like Gillian Bickell's) that were developing in Johannesburg at the time.

Before discussing Marcuson's ceramics in the Tatham Art Gallery Collection, I need to first outline some technological features of Marcuson's work in relation to those of her peers. This part of my dissertation connects an intricate part of my research with the historical issues of Marcuson's own work. As a practicing ceramist, working mainly with porcelain, I feel that my empirical knowledge gives me insight about Thelma Marcuson's porcelain pieces and her practices.

The outline of certain ceramic materials and minerals to follow will emphasise the main sources of information that were known to Marcuson; I find these useful myself in my own ceramics. Hence this review of materials will help to establish the technological dimensions and aesthetic preferences of Marcuson's ceramics, but will also explicate my sense of connection in these practical issues.

Porcelain and high-fired glazes in South Africa

There are many different types of clays which can be made or used by the contemporary potter who will manipulate the body to suit her/his needs. For the purpose of this dissertation I will focus mainly on porcelain but will briefly explain earthenware and stoneware clays, both of which were used by Marcuson at the start of her career. Initially Marcuson worked with earthenware clay progressing to stoneware and finally to porcelain.

Earthenware is a soft, porous low-fired ware, which is fired to 1100°C. Earthenware will melt at a higher temperature and must be glazed with a low temperature glaze, containing lead, soda or borax and clay (Atterbury 1982:12).

Stoneware is fired to the point where vitrification or fusion of the clay materials begins, thus making the clay dense and non-absorbent. It is a fused and hardened high-fired ware that is usually fired to 1200°C. The process of vitrification involves the formation of glass within the body and a progressive melting of the various ingredients (Rhodes 1959:59-62).

Porcelain is distinguished from stoneware by its whiteness, purity, delicacy and translucency when thin, as well as its strength and ability to withstand extremely high temperatures of over 1200°C (Rhodes 1959:59-62). These are the characteristic for which porcelain is held in such high acclaim.

Porcelain was one of the Chinese potters' greatest kept secrets and was made in China almost a thousand years before it was produced in Europe. In China, porcelain was a development of an advanced tradition of pottery-making in the world, this was due to an abundant supply of raw materials (Atterbury 1982:11); Doherty 2002:24). It was a great privilege to own a collection of porcelain, as it was treated as 'white gold' and considered a 'luxury art form' (Atterbury 1982:11, Doherty 2002:24; Rhodes 1959:62). Chinese porcelain was fired to around 1300°C and sometimes less, but not as high as the European porcelain which was fired between 1340°C and 1400°C (Lane 1980:59) At these high firing temperatures needle shaped crystals form within the porcelain, thus strengthening the body (Lane 1980:55-58).

The word 'porcelain' was used to describe the Southern China wares, especially those of Jingdezhen (Atterbury 1982:11). Porcelain is essentially a combination of kaolin and feldspar together with additional silica in the form of flint or quartz, fired in a kiln to the point where the minerals fuse. Most artists using porcelain, including myself, attempt to achieve the whiteness and translucency that porcelain is famous for by firing the porcelain to high temperatures of approximately 1260°C (Lane 1980:55). However, with regards to my coiled pieces (as seen in figure 13 on page 18) whiteness and translucency is not so much the issue but rather strength. Due to the fragility of the piece regarding to the size of the coils, I believe that by firing them to 1260°C the porcelain body is stronger.

Porcelain as a specialised studio medium

The discovery of porcelain in Europe is usually credited to Johann Böttger, an alchemist working for King Augustus until 1705 (Rhodes 1959:31). Porcelain is not a straightforward medium to work with and takes time, patience and practice to master. As with all clays, each porcelain body has its own characteristics.

When porcelain is fired in a kiln, the wares are carried to the brink of melting, making this a unique ceramic material. Fired porcelain has the unique properties of hardness, density and translucency due to its high firing at stoneware temperatures (Rhodes 1959:71; Wensley 1989:139).

Porcelain clay bodies are made from three basic ceramic materials: china clay, feldspar, quartz and a ‘plasticiser’ such as ball clay or bentonite, or both (Doherty 2002:24). Lane suggests that an ideal recipe for a porcelain body is 50% kaolin, 25% feldspar and 25% quartz (Lane 1980:55). Whilst these are all naturally-occurring minerals (which are mined and processed for a range of industries, from paper-making to cat litter (Doherty 2002:24), the compound porcelain is hence an entirely manufactured material.

China clay

The main ingredient of porcelain is China clay or Kaolin; this is referred to as a primary clay as it is found at the site where it was formed. It is highly refractory (free from impurities and oxides other than alumina and silica) and contains a minute percentage of flux unlike other clays. In its pure state kaolin is unchanged by temperatures up to 1700°C (Atterbury 1982:13; Doherty 2002:24; Lane 1980:55-58; Rhodes 1959:62).

Rhodes states in his book *The Art of High Fired Pottery* (1959) that there are two properties of kaolin that are important in porcelain firstly the purity of the material (which determines the whiteness of porcelain) and secondly the plasticity of kaolin as a clay (or its lack thereof) (Rhodes 1959:62).

When compared to naturally occurring earthenware and stoneware clays, porcelain is relatively non-plastic due to the large amount of kaolin it contains. Chinese potters were able to achieve large scale porcelain forms on the wheel due to the plasticity of their kaolin, which can be attributed to their practice of carefully separating the finer fractions of the clay by flotation. By allowing the clay to mature and soak for a long period of time, the clay becomes

‘sourer’ (more workable) which in turn adds to the plasticity of the clay (Rhodes 1959:62). Unlike contemporary ceramic practice, the Chinese fired and glazed their porcelain pieces in one firing only. Rhodes claims that their bowls of eggshell thinness were dipped in glaze and transported for miles to the kilns where they were placed in saggars for firing (Rhodes 1959:63).

These properties were evidently admired by Marcuson in her own porcelain works and manifested in pieces such as figure 33 on page 43 Marcuson’s porcelain bowl with wooden stand made in the mid 1980s, and figures 46-47 on page 59 showing another porcelain bowl which she has incised around the rim and dated 1980.

Feldspar

There are several types of feldspar, the most common are Potash feldspar and Soda feldspar. Feldspar acts as a flux in porcelain and due to the chemical composition, contributes to the whiteness. All feldspars melt around 1200°C to produce an opaque stiff glass (Lane 1980:58; Rhodes 1959: 64-75), and serve as an ideal basis for stoneware and porcelain glazes, as they contain a high alumina-content and allow for a long melting period for vitrification to occur over a wide temperature range. Feldspar must be low in iron to achieve the whitest fired wares, particularly found in the porcelain body (Doherty 2002:24; Lane 1980:58; Rhodes 1959:64).

Marcuson’s feldspar was imported by her husband Neil from England; she used the material in pieces such as the ones that are found in the Tatham’s Collection.

Flint / Quartz/ Silica

Flint, quartz and silicalint are ground from various types of quartz and are the most important glass formers. The function of flint is to add hardness and durability to the clay body. Certain quartz types are transparent when fired and others are opaque. Silica has a melting point of 1710°C and must be used in combination with a flux to ensure adherence to the wares. In the porcelain body between 15% and 25 % of silica is used (Lane 1980:58; Rhodes 1959:64).

For workable throwing clay plasticity is a key factor in the making up of the porcelain body. The plasticizer added to porcelain is Ball clay, however the downside to adding ball clay is that it contains iron and this could cause discolouration in the clay body therefore the amount of ball clay added is kept to a minimum (Doherty 2002:26; Rhodes 1959:64, Sentance

2004:26). **Bentonite** can be added to the clay body to increase its plasticity. There are different types of bentonite and the white bentonite from Namibia is what Marcuson used. (Doherty 2002:26; Lane 1980:56; Rhodes 1959:68).

Once the dry ingredience are weighed out, water is added to the powder to bind the ingredience together. More water can be added to bring the mixture to a smooth, even consistency. Once the ingredients have been thoroughly mixed, the mixture should be left to soak for a few days, if possible. This allows the porcelain or glaze mixture to mature. Once the clay mixture has matured it can be used at will (Atterbury 1982:7; Lane 1980:63).

As a practicing ceramist, I have experienced working with porcelain and therefore wish to comment closely on the ways in which porcelain is used. Handbuilding is one method which includes pinching, coiling, slab building, moulding or modelling; porcelain can also be thrown on the wheel when, however, it is important to add bentonite to increase the plasticity (personal observation). I work with both methods of production. Some pieces are handmade, examples of which are my hand coiled pieces as seen in figure 13 on page 18 in chapter one, whilst others are thrown on the potters' wheel as is evident in the image below (see figures 36 and 37 on page 56). I combine these methods, as seen in my honours degree work, in figures 39-42 on page 57, where I have joined several thrown cylinders together, manipulating the joined thrown form by adding handmade structures. Marcuson often threw her forms and manipulated their rims by hand.

I illustrate below and mention my personal works here as I believe this may highlight Marcuson's use of porcelain and methods of working by comparison. My ceramics, like Rogers, Rie and Duckworth, are based largely on forms derived from nature.



Figure 36 and Figure 37. Fahmeeda Omar, miniature vessels from my MAFA exhibition held in January 2011. Porcelain. Private collections. Photograph by Fahmeeda Omar, 2011.

I think this is evident in the images on page 57, where the thrown cylinders are assembled and the components may be compared with those of Rie's composite forms and matte surfaces or glazes which I admire in organic surfaces (and which Marcuson liked for similar reasons).



Figure 38. Fahmeeda Omar, organic form on the left was entered in London exhibition, 2010. Porcelain. H: 13cm. Photography by Fahmeeda Omar, 2010.

Figure 39. Fahmeeda Omar, organic form on the right was entered in Turkey Exhibition, 2010. Porcelain. H 14cm. Photography by Fahmeeda Omar 2010.

Figure 40. Above left: Fahmeeda Omar, organic form, 2007, white stoneware clay. Collection: William Humphery's Art Gallery, Kimberley. Photograph by Fahmeeda Omar, 2007.

Figure 41. Above centre: Fahmeeda Omar, organic form, 2007, white stoneware clay with porcelain leaves. Private collection. Photograph by Fahmeeda Omar, 2007.

Figure 42. Above right: Fahmeeda Omar, organic form, 2007, white stoneware clay. Private collection. Photograph by Fahmeeda Omar, 2007.

Throwing

Marcuson used potters' standard methods of throwing to make her bowls and tall bottle-necked forms. Before throwing, porcelain must be prepared in special ways. The porcelain is divided into fist-size lumps which are wedged (as describer earlier).

An electric wheel which Marcuson used in her studio was the most usual method of throwing. The basic requirement for a wheel worker is a comfortable working position when throwing, adequate power or torque, smooth operation and sensitive controls; this is manifest in Marcuson's several pieces including the *Jar with lid* (figure 58 on page 71) in the Tatham Art Gallery Collection. The throwing rings are clearly noticeable on the inside of the jar.



Figure 43. Thelma Marcuson. Throwing with porcelain on the potter's wheel, 1980s. Photographer unknown. Family archives

From left to right:

The clay is centred on the wheel first. The form takes shape and the base neatened. Finally the piece is removed from the wheel by cutting through the base with a fine wire or fishing line, placed on a tile and allowed to harden for a while.

Turning

The turning process involves the removal of excess clay from the initial throwing process and the trimming of the walls using a special tool with a hoop which cuts into leather-hard clay. The turning process occurs once the thrown form is leather-hard and has been removed from the wheel head. Marcuson used the process of turning to create a foot-ring at the base of the piece. All her works in the Tatham Collection have turned foot-rings.

At the leather-hard stage the clay can be manipulated and, after turning, the piece can be subjected to incising and sgraffito decoration (this is sometimes apparent in the work of Marcuson). Two of her porcelain bowls, one in the Durban Art Gallery and the other in the William Humphreys Art Gallery Collection, exhibit this type of manipulation. On these bowls Marcuson used a sharp tool to cut pieces out of the porcelain, leaving a patterned row of small apertures around the rim of each bowl (as seen in the porcelain bowl below (figures 46-47 on page 59; personal observation)).



Figure 44 and Figure 45. Marcuson's electric kiln and electric wheel at her London studio. Photograph by Fahmeeda Omar, 2008.



Figure 46. Thelma Marcuson, porcelain bowl, 1980. D:21.2 cm. Collection: Durban Art Gallery, Catalogue number 2102. Photograph by Fahmeeda Omar, 2009.

Figure 47. Thelma Marcuson, white porcelain bowl with pierced edge, 1979. H: 130mm. Collection: William Humphrey Art Gallery, Catalogue number 3873, photographer unknown, 2010. WHAG archives

Once all modifications have been made to the final piece it is left to dry. All clays are biscuited to 1000°C. This is to ensure that the wares are durable and safer to handle in glazing. During the firing chemical changes take (see appendix 6). This firing allows the clay to remain porous, making it easier to apply the glaze coating (Wensley 1989:139-141).

Some potters, such as Marcuson, admired the work of Rie who, as mentioned earlier, often fired her wares only once. Marcuson usually did two firing, namely a biscuit firing followed by a glaze firing (see appendix 3 and 6).

As Marcuson fired her porcelain wares using an electric kiln, as has been mentioned above, it is relevant to discuss the firing of electric kilns in this dissertation. Electric kilns are in a category of their own. Although they consume energy and produce heat, there is no ‘fire’ as such. The design of electric kilns is significantly different from combustion kiln such as those constructed by Bosch, Rabinowitz and Morris. As Marcuson found in her urban environment, the major advantages to electric firings are cleanliness, convenience of firing and ease of installation (Wensley 1989:44-53).

An electric kiln is basically a box which is well insulated with a lining of thermal insulation bricks (and can fire between 1260°C and 1300°C). Channels are carved into the brick face to carry elements in the form of elongated Kanthal coils or springs that produce heat when an electrical current is passed through them. The elements are arranged to produce an even distribution of heat throughout the kiln. Electric kilns have control panels that control the rate at which the temperature is increased (Wensley 1989:44-53).

During the late 1960s and early 70s, John Edwards was experimenting with manufacturing electric kilns in South Africa and was trying to design a high firing kiln for stoneware (pers comm Digby Hoets 2011); he would have been instrumental in the decision Marcuson made in her choice of kiln. It is interesting to note Marcuson’s *difference* in the decade of nascent stoneware in South Africa, as has been mentioned above, that she used electric firings entirely and did not use combustion firings for reduction productions as did her ‘mainstream’ ceramist colleagues (pers comm Janet Rogers, 2009; appendix 7). As such she worked in relative isolation.

In this context it is also interesting to recount (pers comm Armstrong, 2009) that the first stoneware kiln to be built and fired in South Africa was in 1955 by Hilda Ditchburn at the University of Natal (now University of KwaZulu-Natal or UKZN). This kiln has been dismantled and today the university has seven electric kilns of various sizes and a new gas-kiln for experimental reduction firings.



From left to right

Figure 48. Prof Juliet Armstrong and Kim Bagley (MAFA candidate) packing the Gas Kiln at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in Pietermaritzburg. Photography by Fahmeeda Omar, 2009.

Figure 49. The Gas Kiln ready to be fired. Photography by Fahmeeda Omar, 2009.

Figure 50. The kiln was opened at its top temperature of 1300°C to take this photograph. Photographs by Fahmeeda Omar, 2009.

Glazes and glaze technology

Once the pieces have been biscuit fired to between 980°C and 1000°C, it is necessary for the pieces to be glazed in order for them to be used. As previously stated, there are two types of clays, low and high firing clays, we therefore require glazes that are high and low firing. For the purpose of this dissertation I will concentrate on high firing stoneware glazes as these are the glazes that Marcuson is acclaimed for.

The biscuit fired wares are then given a coating of glaze and fired for a second time to a much higher temperature. This process is referred to as glazing. The glaze forms a glassy covering over the body. Essentially a glaze recipe consists of three main ingredients: Silica which is the glass former, alumina which is used as a stabilizer and a flux which helps to lower the melting point of the glaze. In simple terms, glaze is similar to a coating of glass applied to a ceramic surface in the form of an emulsified powder. When fired, the raw materials melt and fuse together to form a glaze that can be transparent, matt, shiny, opaque or coloured. A glaze

provides the wares with a smooth, waterproof surface which is easy to clean, an important attribute in the case of domestic wares (Rhodes 1959:71; Wensley 1989:139).

Marcuson loved experimenting with the different glaze recipes and was highly commended for her glazes. Each of Marcuson's experiments were carried out with the purpose of achieving improved control of her glaze colours as she was a perfectionist and was little impressed with 'chance' successes in kilns. While she received some glaze recipes from fellow potters over the years, it was through her tireless and time consuming experimentation that she was able to acquire such a wide variety of glaze effects and colours. 'Visiting Thelma's haven - her studio - one is immediately struck by hundreds of neat experiments on her shelves, which mean many hours of hard work and which is worthy of respect' (Bosch in Mayer 1988:16-18; also see appendix 3).

Glazes can be applied by dipping, pouring, painting or spraying depending on the desired effect. Marcuson used the standard glazing approach when glazing her works, this method is used by most artists include me. The first glaze is always poured and, if any additional glazes are to be added, than they will be sprayed onto the pieces. As stated earlier, the glazing process follows bisque firing. Marcuson's pieces were then fired to 1280°C and 1300°C. At these temperatures, the clay fuses to the glaze and becomes integrated with the ware. The type of finish achieved is dependent on whether the firing is; hence oxidation was her medium rather than reduction firings that typified the mainstream of South African studio ceramics of the 1960s produced by Bosch, Rabinowitz, Morris, Marietjie van der Merwe, Rorke's Drift Pottery Workshop, Bryan Haden (see appendix 3; personal experience; pers comm Janet Rogers, 2009).



From left to right

Figure 51a. Glazes tests. High fired glaze tests on porcelain and stoneware clays. Photograph by Fahmeeda Omar, 2008

Figure 51b. Buckets of glazes. Used to glazed Marcusons' pieces. Photograph by Fahmeeda Omar, 2008

Figure 51c. Shelves filled with glazes at Marcuson's studio in London. Photograph by Fahmeeda Omar, 2008

Marcuson used a range of different coloured glazes to enhance her simple elegant forms. Her pottery forms were seldom decorated as such (I have not observed a range of brushwork motifs in her work, as there are in the ceramics of Bosch, Rabinowitz and Morris for example) and she concentrated on the tactile beauty of glaze surfaces, with intrinsic oxide colours and/or stains. She was not a 'production potter' (in the sense of replicated utilitarian wares such as mugs, jugs and casseroles) as were many of her South African peers since she focused rather on 'one-off' pieces for exhibitions.

Some of the favourite colours that Marcuson used on her pieces were a metallic brown/black (appendix 1 accession no 3874, found in WHAG) a matt white and a turquoise which she achieved through local reduction (through the use of silicon carbide added into the glaze to cause reduction of its metallic oxides (Hamer.1975:248) and blue bowls (her archive of photographs show that she combed patterns into her clay body and sgraffitoed designs into a glaze (personal observation at her home, London 2008). A 'reduction atmosphere' refers to a kiln atmosphere which intentionally does not have enough oxygen the flames then pull the oxygen molecules out of the clay bodies and glazes, changing the character of oxides of iron and copper particularly (<http://pottery.about.com/od/potteryglossaryqs/g/reduction.htm>).

Marcuson used standard methods of packing and firing her kilns for bisque and then for glazing to 1280°C using ceramic cones to check the temperature inside the kiln (Wensley 1989:44-53; pers comm Janet Rogers 2009). She used Marcuson's work had a simple design and was seldom decorated, and she, like many of her predecessors, was able to focus on once off pieces and sell her pieces at exhibitions.

Chapter 3

Analysis and contextualisation of Marcuson's works in the permanent ceramic collection in Tatham Art Gallery in Pietermaritzburg.

There are nine ceramics by Marcuson in the permanent collection of the Tatham Art Gallery eight porcelain pieces and one stoneware work. All were collected actively (by purchase) following the personal visit to Marcuson's studio in 1984 by the then director of the gallery, Lorna Ferguson. As such, the ceramics encapsulate a particular 'moment' in Marcuson's work, which I consider to be one of significance during her creative production. Hence this chapter will consider the historical context of Marcuson's works in light of the preceding chapters about the leading ceramists and ceramics she admired in Britain and South Africa and also describe and evaluate the attributes of each of the Tatham's works in detail.

Marcuson's works are displayed by a sympathetic museum environment and since the acquisition by Tatham Art Gallery those works have been shown in a group exhibition of South African ceramists (including works by Marietjie van der Merwe, Tim Morris and Esias Bosch) notably curated by Valerie Leigh. The TAG also possesses significant historical collections of international ceramics since its inception earlier that century, which owed its origins to Mrs Ada Susan Tatham who collected donations early in 1903 to purchase works in Britain for the planned art museum in Pietermaritzburg. After an initial temporary exhibition, the Collection was first housed in the Pietermaritzburg City Hall, where it remained until the 1990s (see below). In 1923 the Collection was greatly enhanced through the donations of Lieutenant Colonel R. H. Whitwell who donated a number of paintings, sculptures and a small collection of Nineteenth Century Western, and also Dynastic Chinese ceramics, (see Leigh-Lin Shao's MAFA thesis (1997) about the Tatham's Whitwell Collection of blue-and-white porcelain) which were then added to especially in the latter part of the last century in a new collection of contemporary South African ceramics. In 1990 the Tatham Art Gallery moved from the City Hall into its current premises, formerly the old Supreme Court Building. The Tatham Art Gallery forms part of the Msunduzi Municipality and is governed by a Board of Trustees (pers comm Gail de Clark, 2010; appendix 8).

For the Tatham to accession a work into the Collection, the proposed purchase goes through a selection Committee which involves research, arguments and bargaining in an effort to

maintain a comprehensive collection policy. Ultimately the purchase of new art works is seen as a victory worthy of press publicity (Ferguson, 1984:2 [appendix 8]). However not all purchases are made in this way. An exception was made in 1984, by Lorna Ferguson, the curator at the Tatham Art Gallery; during a visit to Johannesburg where she was introduced to ‘one of South Africa’s most accomplished potters and glaze chemists’ Thelma Marcuson (Katz 1974:30; Mayer 1988: 16). Ferguson had a keen eye for ceramics and was in the privileged position to have studied the medium under Hilda Ditchburn from the University of Natal (from 1969-1971) and realised the importance of Marcuson’s work and the importance that studio ceramics had as an art medium and needed to be collected for public interest and education (Ferguson, 1984:2 [appendix 8], pers comm Armstrong, 2011). It is interesting to note here that it was not common practice in South African galleries to collect contemporary ceramics as this was considered a ‘lesser art or craft’ by those incharge. It can be argued that Ferguson considered that this ceramic addition was in keeping with the Whitwell Collection and that she was merely adding to it with Marcuson’s work. This was not the first ceramic item that had been bought for the Tatham as there was an exhibition of ceramic art in 1973 at the Tatham, organized by the then Tatham curator Valerie Leigh. A number of pieces were purchased from this exhibition by artists such as Bosch, Rabinowitz and Morris (pers comm Bell 2012).

Out of the nine pieces that Ferguson purchased that year, eight are porcelain and one is stoneware. Four of these accessioned pieces had been dated to the early 70s and three of these pieces were documented in Clark and Wagner’s book, *Potters of Southern Africa*; their citation in that era’s first book on South African stoneware and porcelain makes Marcuson’s works highly significant. The other four were made in the early 1980s. All nine pieces are high fired to between 1280°C and 1300°C in an electric kiln. The firings were oxidised, even the one work which utilised a localised reduction process (see chapter 2).

Pinched stoneware vessel



Figure 52. Thelma Marcuson. Handbuilt (pinched) vessel, 1974. Blue dolomite glaze. H: 148mm; W: 96mm. Collection: Tatham Art Gallery. Accession no 17/765/84. Photograph by Fahmeeda Omar, 2008 .

The above vessel was one of Marcuson's handbuilt stoneware pieces made in 1974. The visually elegant form of the piece belies its heavy weight. Pinch-built, with a somewhat irregular form, it is unusual in that Marcuson's productions were mainly thrown on a wheel. It is also unusual in being made from stoneware clay, evident in its buff colour on the area below the glaze on the foot of the form and the iron contents in the clay-body which have leached irregularly into the glaze-flow. This also gives the edge its distinctive yellow-brown colour. The vessel is smaller at the base and wider at the rim, assisting in giving the form an elegant appearance, making it look more fragile than it really is.

It was glazed with a soft barium glaze to which nickel and cobalt were added and the piece was high fired. It was glazed all the way to the base, this is an indication that Marcuson knew the outcome of the glaze that she used and knew that the glaze would be stable enough not to run off the piece and stick to the kiln shelf. On a closer examination of the rim of the piece, the glaze has pulled away from the rim leaving the glaze thinner at the top allowing for the iron oxide from the clay to seep into the glazes giving it a yellow - brown colour along the rim. This also aids in the organic appearance of the form. A similar piece can be found in the Corobrik Permanent Ceramic Collection (<http://ceramicssa.org/Corobrik.html>)

Marcuson incised her initials into the base of this piece; this is different to the other ceramics in the TAG collection in which she signed her work with a stamp, or brushed oxide. Also found on the base of this piece is the Tatham's accession number (17/765/84). According to the Tatham's records, this piece was purchased for R200.00 (see appendix 8).

Two porcelain bowls (part of set of three):



Figure 53. Thelma Marcuson. Porcelain bowl; one of three. 1973. Matt dolomite glaze over slip. H: 99mm; D: 126mm. Collection: Tatham Art Gallery. Accession no 17/766/84 (3). Photograph by Fahmeeda Omar, 2008.



Figure 54. Thelma Marcuson. Porcelain bowl; one of three. 1973. Matt dolomite glaze over slip (which was applied to the exterior only). H: 146mm; D: 158mm. Collection: Tatham Art Gallery. Accession no 17/766/84 (2). Photograph by Fahmeeda Omar, 2008.

These two bowls (on page 67) form part of a set of three (Marcuson noted this personally; the group of three appeared originally in Clark and Wagner's book (1974) were made in 1973 and are examples of Marcuson's early porcelain wares, however these wares appear to be early porcelannous ceramic ware and not porcelain. This attribution is uncertain as the works appear to be a different kind of clay compared to her later porcelain works in the TAG Collection. As has been stated earlier, Marcuson sort help from Tim Morris when making her transition from stoneware to porcelain. This transition took place in 1975. Figures 53-54 on page 67 give the appearance of porcelain but appear to be white stoneware. On Marcuson's invoice to the Tatham she does state that these three pieces figures 53 (accession no 17/766/84(3) and 54 (accession no 17/766/84 (2) on page 67 and figure 56 (accession no 17/766/84) on page 70) are indeed porcelain. These two bowls are glazed with a matt dolomite glaze and high fired in an oxidised kiln (appendix 8; personal observation); possibly because of this firing process both pieces have a warm 'earthy' feeling.

For these pieces, Marcuson first brushed a 'cobalt' slip onto the green ware and combed through it leaving behind visible lines which are seen even after the pieces have been glazed. This is especially visible on figure 54 on page 67 (personal observation). On a closer inspection of the piece one can see that the effect of 'marbling' is only evident on the outside of the bowls; the inside is more monochromatic. It is also noted that piece number 17/766/84 (3) has a thinner application of glaze allowing the cobalt to show through and therefore giving this piece a blue purple colour whereas piece numbered 17/766/84 (2) (figure 53 on page 67) has a thicker application of glaze. The dolomite glaze has a chemical reaction with the cobalt and this reaction turns the glaze a pinkish-cream colour.

These bowls were thrown on the wheel as is evident by the throwing rings which are visible on the insides of both the forms. Figures 53-54 on page 67 have wide rims and narrow bases but this is more evident on figure 54. This makes the piece appear unstable.

In comparison with her early stoneware piece, these bowls are not as heavy and are more appropriately balanced between form and construction in relation to their size. However they are not meant to be functional pieces of 'tableware' because of their very narrow foot-rings; this is also a trait seen in Lucie Rie's bowls in which her aesthetic was driven more by sculptural rather than utilitarian considerations.

These bowls are not signed at the bottom like Marcuson's later pieces and they are glazed right down to the foot-ring including the centre of the foot-ring. They, along with the bottle necked vase (see figure 56 on page 70), were sold as a set of three.

As a matter of fact the lip (see figure 56 on page 70) is wider than the base. Marcuson painted bands of manganese slip on this piece, this is further evident on close examination where the bands of slip are clearly visible through the dolomite glaze. The colour changes depending on the thickness of the manganese slip. Where the slip is thicker a warm brown colour is observed, where thin a warm pink colour is seen and where there is no manganese added the glaze is a creamy white, which is evident on the rim of the lip of the vase. This form was a trait used by both Rie and Duckworth and is evident in figure 15 page 20 and figure 57 on page 70. This group of three was purchased from Marcuson's home for R500.00 (appendix 8). One of Marcuson's bottle forms *Bronze Porcelain Vase* can also be found in WHAG's permanent ceramics collection (accession no 3874, see appendix 1).



Figure 55. This piece of Marcuson's was stamped with her initials on the base. Close up of Marcuson's stamped initials. Photograph by Fahmeeda Omar, 2008.



Figure 56. Thelma Marcuson. Tall Porcelain bottle neck piece; one of three. 1974. Matt dolomite glaze over slip. H: 285mm; D: 186mm. Collection: Tatham Art Gallery. Accession no 17/766/84. Photograph by Fahmeeda Omar, 2008.



Figure 57. Lucie Rie. Stoneware bottle neck piece. Date unknown, matt stoneware glaze over 'marbled' clays. H: 300mm; D: 400mm. [www. waterman.co.uk](http://www.waterman.co.uk). Accessed by Fahmeeda Omar, 2010.

Jar with lid



Figure 58. Thelma Marcuson. Blue/ Green lidded Jar. 1983. Celadon crackled glaze. H: 217 mm. Collection: Tatham Art Gallery. Accession no 17/764/84 (1) Jar and Accession no 17/764/84 (2) lid. Photograph by Fahmeeda Omar, 2008.



Figure 59. Turned foot-ring and glaze just above the base. Photograph by Fahmeeda Omar, 2008.
Figure 60. Marcuson signed this piece with her initials TM using manganese oxide. Photograph by Fahmeeda Omar, 2008.

The jar and lid were thrown on the potter's wheel. It is fairly evenly thrown, an indication that her throwing technique had improved over the years. This is one of Marcuson's later

porcelain pieces. According to the Tatham's records this piece was made in 1983 and both the jar and lid are made from porcelain (appendix 8). The throwing rings on the inside of this piece are a clear indication of the method used. There are no throwing rings on the outside as these would have been removed when Marcuson turned the pot to eliminate the excess clay and to create the foot-ring. The throwing rings appear when the potter is pulling up the clay (see chapter 2, page 58 for details on turning). The lid was thrown separately from the jar and both would be turned at the leather hard stage. The lid is specially made to fit this jar.

Marcuson does state that figure 58 on page 71 is made with porcelain. One can see the colour of the porcelain as the jar has not been glazed all the way to the bottom of the foot-ring (as seen in figure 59 on page 71). The base of both the lid and the jar are cleaned, indicating that it sat directly on the kiln shelf. They would be fired to the same temperature (for Marcuson that would have been between 1280°C and 1300°C). Marcuson has used a high firing green/blue celadon glaze with an alluring crackled effect which would have been deliberate on her part. On close examination of this piece one can clearly see the crackled effect. The jar is glazed on the inside and the outside including the rim. She also glazed the inside of the foot-ring. The jar and lid were not fired as one piece, had she fired these two pieces together, the rim of the jar and the base of the lid would both be unglazed; otherwise they would stick together during the firing when the glaze had melted. Marcuson signed the base of this piece with her initials TM with oxide and then glazed over it with the celadon glaze. As the celadon is a transparent glaze the oxide shows through (figure 60 page 71). The Tatham purchased this piece from Marcuson for R130.00 (appendix 8). This is an indication of the value that was attributed to her work at the time.

I feel this piece is not in the spirit of Anglo-Oriental 'Leach' ceramics, but would like to emphasise rather that Marcuson's choices for this particular lidded form and her crackle-celadon glaze are intentional, mutually reinforcing her references to the classical aesthetics of Chinese Song ceramics. She uses similar classicising references in the glazes of her other Tatham works, which she also titled (discussed in my text that follows) as 'transmutation' and 'peach-bloom': these specialised kinds of glaze were not in the regular vocabulary of reduction ceramic practices of South African Studio Potters, her peers such as Morris, Bosch and Rabinowitz.

Pink crackled glaze



Figure 61. Thelma Marcuson. Porcelain Bowl. 1983. Pink crackled glaze. H: 83mm; D: 199mm. Collection: Tatham Art Gallery. Accession no 17/761/84. Photograph by Fahmeeda Omar, 2008.



Figure 62. Top view of bowl pink crackled glaze. Photograph by Fahmeeda Omar, 2008.

Figure 63. Detail of the crackled glaze with oxide or stain to emphasise the linear effect of the crazes. This is a usual treatment in many classical Chinese celadon wares – it is likely that Marcuson wished to acknowledge the classical sources of her ceramics inspiration, not only in the form of the piece and its notched rim, but particularly in her treatment of the crazes. Photograph by Fahmeeda Omar, 2008.

Figure 61 on page 73, Marcuson's pink crackled glaze porcelain bowl was made in 1983. It was thrown in porcelain and when leather hard the rim was cut into, giving her bowl a flower-like edge with an elegant form (as seen in figure 62 on page 73); this is similar to the classical foliate edges in many Song ceramic bowls illustrated by Mary Tregear in her book, *Song Ceramics*. Marcuson used a pink crackled glaze on this piece and according to the artist's statement to the Tatham, it was a feldspathic glaze which was fired to between 1280°C and 1300°C in an oxidised kiln atmosphere (appendix 8). It is significant that Marcuson was not merely 'replicating' classical Oriental reduction glazes, as were many South African stoneware ceramists of her generation, but was using her electric kiln with enormous technical understanding to make her visual equivalents of the crackle, and celadon glazes of Song China (I observe incidentally in this regard that Marcuson did not use Tenmoku glazes in her work, as was commonplace in South African studio stoneware and porcelain of her era).

On closer inspection one can see that this piece was not glazed all the way to the base, however, the inside of the foot-ring is glazed and signed with her initials in manganese oxide, just like her jar with lid (figure 58 on page 71) (pers comm Marcuson, 2008). After the piece was fired Marcuson rubbed a blue stain into the crazes to emphasis the crackled effect, hence drawing the viewer's attention to them as a feature of the bowl making them more obvious (as seen in figure 63 on page 73). This is further evident on examination the inside of the foot-ring and, on the outside of the piece where the glaze stops, one can see the blue colour. Had the stain been added before the firing the chances are that it would have burned away. This bowl has a narrow foot-ring and a very wide rim. It is stable however not functional. Marcuson exhibited a bowl similar in style and shape to this one at the 1992 London Exhibition (pers comm Janet Rogers 2009). Lorna Ferguson purchased this porcelain bowl for R100.00 from Marcuson at her Johannesburg home (appendix 8). The WHAG Collection also has a *Crackle Pink Porcelain Bowl* (accession number 3876; appendix 1) with the same flower-like edge.

Porcelain transmutation bowl



Figure 64. Thelma Marcuson. Porcelain transmutation bowl. 1982. H: 140mm; D: 207mm. Collection: Tatham Art Gallery- Accession no17/763/84. Photograph by Fahmeeda Omar 2008

This porcelain bowl was high fired twice in an oxidised kiln, with three different glazes (I noticed that the foot-ring has been extensively ground where the fluid glazes ran). It is significant to note here the technical lengths to which Marcuson would go, in twice-firing this work, in order to achieve a maximum aesthetic visual effect, this is not a practice of South African Studio Potters who were driven more by economic considerations and the ‘natural’ effects of reduction firing.

It was thrown on the wheel, and appears proportionately balanced and lighter in comparison to her earlier works which tended to be quite heavy (see figures 31-32 on page 39). This piece was made in 1982. Marcuson refers to this bowl in her statement as ‘transmutation bowl’ as she used more than one glaze on this piece (pers comm Marcuson, 2008; appendix 7 and 8). The word ‘transmutation’ by definition (Hamer 1975:301) is the act of changing the glaze colour unintentionally, this is the case when chromium oxide reacts to tin oxide in a glaze and also titanium dioxide. Iron, manganese, copper and cobalt oxides all transmute effectively.

The glaze used on this piece is shiny and ranges from blackish brown glaze on the rim to a pinkish brown to a pale blue grey. In order to achieve this array of colour, iron oxide was introduced into the glaze. The chemical reaction of these three glazes caused them to run, not only on the outside, but also on the inside of the bowl. Consequently it was necessary to grind the glaze off the edge of the foot-ring with no noticeable damage done to the foot. This would be an influence that she learned from John Shirley, who used crystalline glazes on his work (Biden 1975:4-6).

Marcuson was obviously very pleased with the results of this bowl as no seconds left her studio and this was not considered a reject (pers comm Marcuson 2008; personal observation). The base of this piece is not only glazed but is also signed with Marcuson's initials TM with manganese oxide (as she did with figure 58 on page 71 and figure 61 on page 73). This could have been a piece from a previous exhibition; Marcuson sold it to Ferguson (the curator of the Tatham Art Gallery) in 1984 for R130.00 (appendix 8). Similar pieces can also be located in the DAG's Ceramic Collection and in the WHAG Permanent Collection. The bowl in DAG Collection has not run off the piece, and the bowl in the WHAG Collection (accession number 3875 *Blue Porcelain Bowl*) is applied thinner than the one in the TAG Collection (accession number 2103) and therefore has a brown colour on the inside and blue on the outside (see appendix 1).

Peach-bloom bowl



Figure 65. Thelma Marcuson. Porcelain peach-bloom bowl. 1981. H: 98mm; D: 170mm. Collection: Tatham Art Gallery. Accession no 17/162/84. Photograph by Fahmeeda Omar 2008

This thrown porcelain bowl was made in 1981 and was purchased in 1984 for R100.00 from Marcuson's home by Ferguson during her visit (see above) (TAG archival invoice). It is unmistakable that this bowl was influenced by Lucie Rie (in comparison to figure 2 on page 13 and figure 6 on page 15); it has a very narrow foot-ring and a wide lip. This bowl is a much lighter thrown form when compared to her early stoneware and porcelain pieces (figures 31-32 on page 39 and figures 53-54 both on page 67), indicating her increased experience and greater confidence in her throwing. The bowl is not signed under the foot-ring. This piece was fired using a local reduction agent (such as silicon carbide) to 1280°C-1300°C where a chemical reaction with the iron and copper colourants in Marcuson's glaze gave it a variety of different hues (appendix 8). Where thin, it is a very pale green colour and, where thick, the glaze is more of a pink colour. In an electric kiln this would have posed a challenge for her and to have built a reduction kiln in her studio would have been nearly impossible, as she lived in a residential area where smoke emissions would have been forbidden according to the municipal laws (pers comm Ian Calder, 2012). Also firing a reduction kiln is a complex and time consuming process, so she attempted to attain reduction

colours with the addition of a local reducing agent into the glaze (pers comm Janet Rogers, 2009).

The use of silicon carbide for this purpose requires that it be finely ground to a mesh size of 600mm or more. Failing this, the glaze will boil violently and craters will be left in the fired glaze. An interesting aside is that this is probably the material that Lucie Rie used to make her pitted and eruptive ‘volcanic’ glazes (pers comm Armstrong, 2010; Rhodes 1969:181). On closer examination of this piece one can see that the glaze has run slightly, this is evident at the base of the piece on the foot-ring where the glaze has pooled slightly. A blue celadon porcelain bowl can be found in the private collection of Jenny Hobbs (appendix 1).

The title of the piece includes reference to a ‘peach-bloom glaze’, which is significant because Marcuson was reinforcing the source of her inspiration, not in the ‘tea-wares’ admired by her Anglo-Orientalist peers, but rather in a range of classical, courtly porcelains of the Chinese Kangxi dynasty. David Battie defines the glaze as velvety peach – red to sage – green (Battie 1990:197).

Porcelain Wall Piece



Figure 66. Thelma Marcuson. Porcelain wall piece. Date unknown. Height: 205mm W: 306mm D: 60mm. Collection: Tatham Art Gallery. Accession no 17/767/84. Photograph by Fahmeeda Omar, 2008.

Figure 66 is reminiscent of the work made by Ruth Duckworth (see chapter 1 section on Duckworth and figure 16 on page 20). This porcelain wall piece is encased in a perspex casing which is specifically made to be mounted on the wall. There are three sheets of porcelain which have been stuck together. They are unglazed, high fired and translucent where thin. Marcuson rolled out slabs of clay and pushed the slabs into a mould to get the patterns that are seen on these three sheets. This wall piece has a dull white, chalky colour when compared to the porcelain bowls. This piece exhibits some elements of chance implying that there is a lack of final control over what the piece will look like as opposed to throwing, which is technique specific. The pattern does look very similar to that of a seashell. Marcuson has not dated this work or mentioned it in her invoice to the Tatham. Therefore I am uncertain of the year it was made, however I would say it was produced in the early 80s and may have been an experimental piece. When held up to the light the thin parts of the sheets are translucent. It has been pointed out that Marcuson may have first introduced the public to the perspex boxes in 1982 at an exhibition at 'Yellow door' (appendix 4 and appendix 8).

Conclusion

Marcuson's work gave her great joy to make and a sense of creative achievement. The passion for working with one's hand was one of the reasons Marcuson loved working with clay and she especially liked working with porcelain for the challenges that it posed. She was an informed and intelligent woman and was mainly self-taught, created an identity for herself and with the support of her husband Neil, was able to concentrate more on experimentation than on ceramics as a production. She worked towards an ideal as a maker of beautiful ceramic work that was not necessarily to be used but rather as a statement of a particular expertise by a woman in the particularly male dominated ceramic world.

My dissertation stressed that Marcuson derived her aesthetic sensibility from internationally acknowledged female artists such as Lucie Rie, Ruth Duckworth and Mary Rogers, but that Marcuson took great pride in developing her own ability to manipulate glaze chemistry to achieve the glaze effects and special colours in her work, especially in her porcelain pieces, for which she achieved critical acclaim as one of the top fifteen in South Africa. Her works were acquired by local major art galleries as well as private collectors. I emphasised that Marcuson held several important solo and group exhibitions in the late seventies and early eighties when ceramics was just starting to be recognised as an art form in South Africa.

Hence Thelma Marcuson played a significant role in promoting public awareness and enjoyment of studio ceramics as an emergent art form in South Africa. She was seminal in the formation of the Association of Potters of South Africa (APSA) for which she was a member even after she had emigrated to the United Kingdom. She was acclaimed by her colleagues for her aesthetic prowess and it was through this ability that she became an important judge for South African Ceramic competitions in her time.

Her work of the 70s followed her admiration of Lucie Rie with regards to form and design. This can be seen in several of Marcuson's pieces in the TAG collection, for example the bottle form and several of her bowls with a very narrow foot-ring. Marcuson was also influenced by the organic forms of Mary Rogers as seen in her stoneware vase with flared rim (see Figure 52) and the piece in the Durban Art Gallery with the double rim (see Appendix 1); although these pieces are heavily potted they also show that she had a command of form and glaze technology that was admired in Johannesburg and South Africa. Marcuson was

fortunate to have so many well-informed friends who advised and encouraged her, such as Morris, Bosch and Rabinowitz.

In 1984 Lorna Ferguson, the curator of the Tatham Art Gallery at that time, had the foresight to purchase a range of nine representative ceramic pieces by Marcuson for the Tatham Art Gallery. Ferguson realised the national and historical importance of Marcuson's work for public interest and art education.

Through fine, delicate, simple glazing, Marcuson used glaze colours rather than applied or painted decoration to emphasise the form of her pieces. Marcuson found the science of being a potter exciting, mixing the different materials from their raw state, testing their melting temperatures and reaction to the different colouring oxides.

Thelma Marcuson was described as one of the top fifteen potters by Garth Clark in 1974; in this dissertation I hope to have given renewed recognition to Marcuson as one of the pioneers South African Studio Potters.

I emphasise that Marcuson's achievements are not only as a pioneer of studio porcelain in South Africa, but that her sources of inspiration in Rie, Duckworth, Rogers and in the classical Chinese ceramic forms and glazes differed from her peers in local studio pottery. Her male colleagues tended to be grouped together in their singular technological focus in the effects of reduction in stoneware and porcelain and gestural calligraphic brushstrokes derived from Leach's influence. Her understanding of glaze chemistry enabled her mix up her own colours and experiment with glazes and as a glaze pioneer she developed exceptional knowledge and prided herself in her skill.

She passed away at the age of 88 in 2009 shortly after I interviewed her at her home. Appropriately considering her fascination with ceramics, Marcuson was cremated and expressly wanted her ashes to be mixed into a glaze (which Janet Rogers, her studio assistant in London has done) and applied on some as yet unfinished pieces for the family.

Glossary

The glossary terms below originate from Peter Lanes' book *Contemporary Porcelain: Materials, techniques and expression* (1980).

Anagama kiln	An Anagama kiln is a Japanese term meaning 'cave kiln' which consists of a firing chamber with a firebox at one end and a flue at the other.
Ash glaze	A glaze containing a portion of ash from burnt organic material mainly trees and grass.
Batt (wooden)	This is a removable disk attached to the wheel head when throwing. It makes it easier to remove freshly thrown pots.
Batt (plaster of paris)	This is a slab of plaster used to dry out wet clay.
Bisque	Unglazed wares that are still porous.
Bisque firing	This is the first firing of the clay into ceramic. This takes place before the glazing as it makes it easier to handle.
Bone ash	Calcium phosphate. Used in certain glazes and is a major constituent of bone china.
Bone china	A very white translucent ware with a high proportion of bone ash.
Bung	A ceramic stopper used when firing a kiln to plug the spyhole of the kiln.
Casting slip	Used for pouring mould. It is a deflocculated mixture of water and clay.
Celadon glaze	A high fired glaze often used over incised or carved decoration.
Coiling	Coils are made by rolling the clay between the fingers. Forms can be built up with coils joined together.
Cones	An elongated, three sided pyramid composed of ceramic materials used to measure the actual heat inside the kiln during a firing. They are designed to collapse at specific temperatures. Cones can be observed through the spy hole during the firing.
Crackle glaze	A glaze designed to craze by shrinking more than the body. The pattern of the crackled lines is often stained after firing to give them greater emphasis.

Crazing	This occurs when the glaze does not fit the body due to uneven expansion and contraction.
Crystalline glaze	Glaze with crystals visible in and on the surface. The crystals are encouraged to grow with the aid of titanium, zinc, or zirconium and with a long soak and slow cooling.
Dunting	Cracking of the clay body during firing or cooling.
Earthenware	Porous pottery usually fired to temperature under 1100°C.
Flux	An oxide which lowers the melting point of a glaze mixture and aids in the vitrification process.
Foot-ring	The thrown or turned ring of clay that can be found at the base of a bowl to support it.
Fusion	The melting of ceramic materials.
Grog	Fired clay body which is ground up and added to the clay body to provide extra wet strength and reduce shrinkage.
Kneading	Mixing plastic clay to an even consistency by hand and also to remove air from the clay.
Leather-hard	When the clay is stiff but still has sufficient moisture content to be carved, pierced and build on.
Manganese	Used as a colorant [thus].
Opacifier	Materials that are in a glaze which remain suspended in the fired glaze, e.g. tin oxide, titanium dioxide, zinc oxide and zirconium dioxide to name but a few.
Oxidation	This occurs when there is sufficient air supply in the kiln during firing.
Oxidising atmosphere	A clean kiln atmosphere where plenty of oxygen is present.
Plasticity	This is the property that allows clay to be shaped and reformed. Too much plasticity can make the clay unworkable or increase the amount of shrinkage that takes place.
Press mould	A hollow mould that is porous.
Pyrometer	Used to measure the temperature inside the kiln.
Raku	A Japanese word used to describe a particular type of low fired ware made from a refractory clay able to withstand the shock of removal from a red hot kiln with a pair of tongs and rapidly cooled by covering with sawdust to create a reduced atmosphere for specific effects.

Reducing atmosphere	An excess of carbon is introduced into the kiln, usually at around 900°C, so that the oxygen atoms are extracted from the oxides present in the ceramics to produce a range of colour changers in the glaze.
Refractory	Resistant to high temperatures.
Salt glaze	When common salt is thrown into the kiln at a high temperature, decomposes and volitilises to combine with the alumina and silica in the clay body to produce an uneven glaze surface.
Sgraffito	Decoration scratched through the surface of slips or glazes.
Slip	A creamy mixture of clay and water.
Soak	A period during which the kiln is held at its top temperature for a period of time to allow the glaze and the body to mature.
Stoneware	A vitrified ware, usually fired to temperatures in excess of 1200°C.
Throwing	Making hollow pot forms by hand on a rotating wheel
Turning	Removing unwanted clay from a pot by holding a sharp hooped object against the leather-hard clay and shaving away the clay.
Vitrification	The point at which the glassy materials within the body melt and flow into and fill the spaces between the clay particles fusing them together.

Appendix 1

Private and Public collectors of Thelma Marcuson's work

Durban Art Gallery

Cat No	Ac Date	Diameter/ Height	Medium	Insured value and Purchase price	Title	How pieces were acquired
1912	May 1976	D-18.2 cm	Porcelain	R 15.00 R 15.00	White and Beige bowl	Purchased off MUD exhibition, Hilton College
1913	May 1976	D-13.5 cm	Porcelain	R 21.00 R 21.00	White incised bowl	Purchased off MUD exhibition, Hilton College
1914	May 1976	D-20 cm	Porcelain	R 27.00 R27.00	White bowl with beige design	Purchased off MUD exhibition, Hilton College
2102	November 1980	D-21.2 cm	Porcelain	R40.00 R40.00	Bowl	Purchased at APSA exhibition DAG
2103	November 1980	D-17.3 cm	Porcelain	R 135.00 R135.00	Bowl	Purchased off APSA exhibition DAG
2105	November 1980	H-11.2 cm	Porcelain	R 60.00 R60.00	Vase	Purchased off APSA



No 1912



No 1913



No 1914

Photography by Fahmeeda Omar, 2008.



No 2012
Photography by Fahmeeda Omar, 2008.

No 2103

No 2105

William Humphreys Art Gallery

Invoice no	Collection	Category	Artist	Title	medium	size
3873	Purchased	Ceramics	Thelma Marcuson	White porcelain bowl with pierced edge	Porcelain	H :130mm Foot rim 54
3874	Purchased	Ceramics	Thelma Marcuson	Bronze porcelain vase	Porcelain	H :315mm Foot rim 67
3875	Purchased	Ceramics	Thelma Marcuson	Blue porcelain bowl	Porcelain	H :105mm Foot rim 46
3876	Purchased	Ceramics	Thelma Marcuson	Crackle pink porcelain bowl	Porcelain	H: 107 mm Foot rim 42



3873

3874

3875

3876

Unknown photographer.

This piece can be found at the Clay Museum at Rust-en-Vrede in Durbanville. Photographer unknown



Code : 87/12
 Object : Round Porcelain Pot
 Desc : Round pot with metallic bronze glaze
 Material : Porcelain
 Colour : Bronze
 Measurements: 14cm x 19cm



The above piece is in a private collection and belongs to Jenny Hobbs. Photographer Jenny Hobbs, 2009/ 2010



The above bowls belong to a private collector Evelyn Cohen from Johannesburg. Photographer Professor Leeb-du Toit, 2009

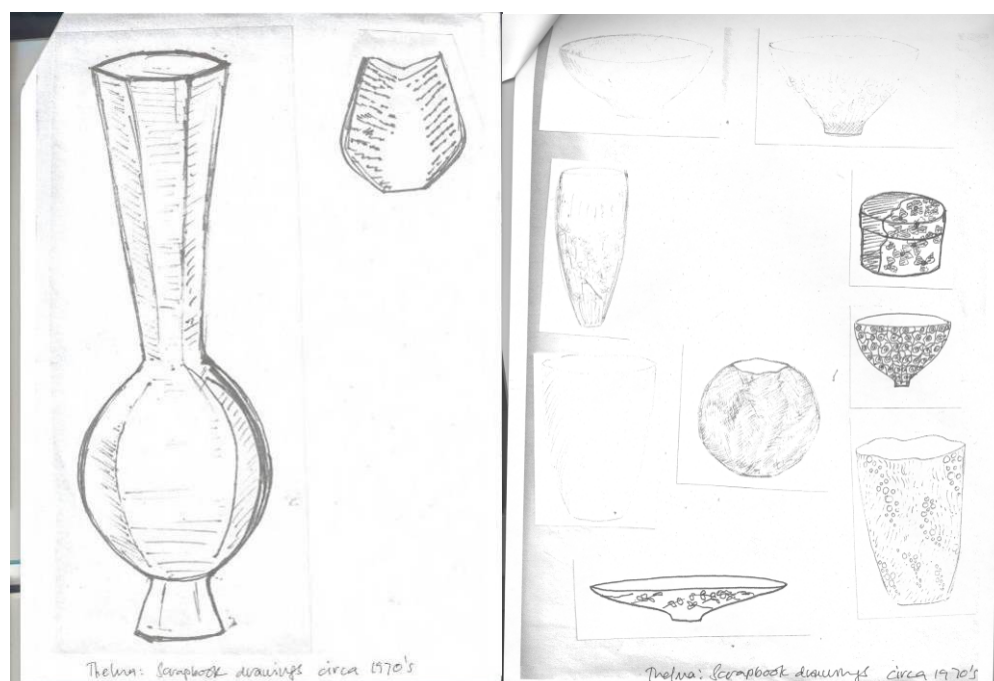
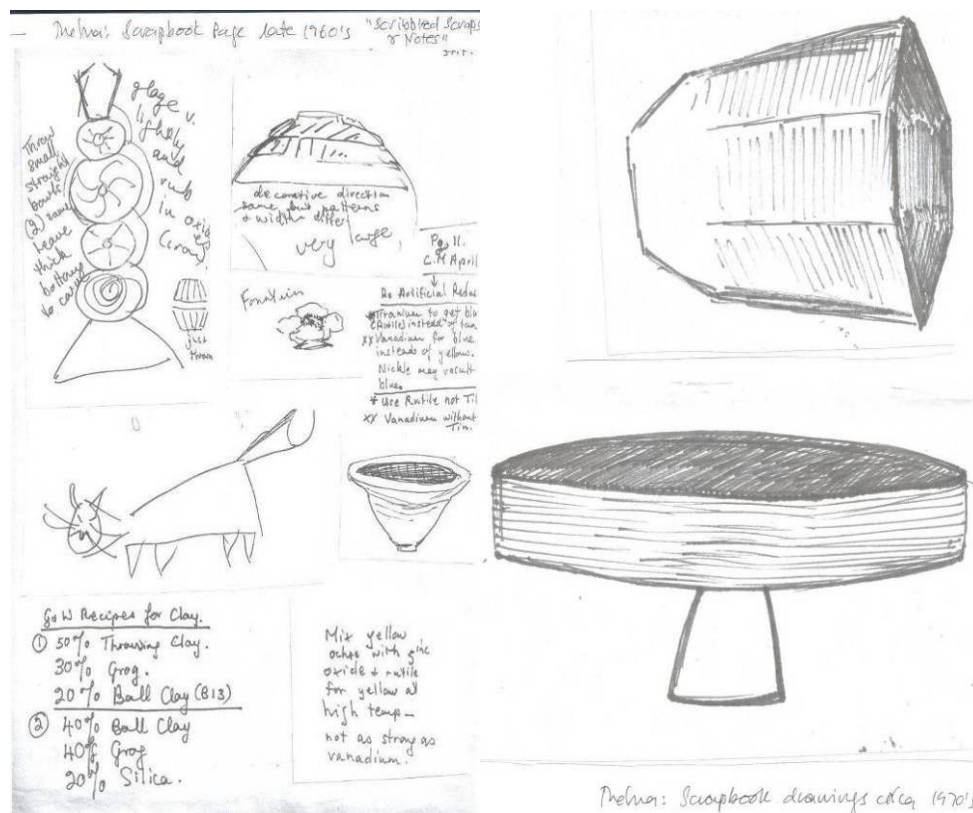
Other people who claim to also have Marcuson's pieces in their collections are

- Myrtle Berman from Cape Town, she has six pieces
- Dr Margo von Beck has three pieces
- John Shirley has one
- Peter Jeff

(The above information was retrieved through email conversations with both the private collectors and the curators of the galleries)

Appendix 2

Thelma's scrap book



Appendix 3

Thelma's Glazes

439a + 7 1/2% Sue's Black mix. (Not very black - try 8%)

440 Soda F 70 CC 20 Dol 20 Copper Carb 2 with 3
See old book for notes.

441 S.F. 70 CC 20 Dol 20 Cob. Carb. 50
Very mousy blue - slight craze.

442a S.F. 70 CC 20 Dol 20 Cob. Carb 1 Copper Carb 2.

442 C.M. (73 Page 31)
F 49 CC 5 Sil 5 Bar. Carb. 26 Zinc 15 Nickel 1
Interesting bright purple/blue matt. - no craze at low temp. Much blue at high temp.

442a 442 without pigment
Sil 20 Sil 5 Sil 3

442b 4% 14 M 124 (Pink)
Needs more heat - mousy pink - bit insipid.

443 Neph. Syn. 80 Whiting 20 CC 5 Pink M 204 5%
Clear broth, bright, shiny crackle pink - colour turns out if too high.

443a P.F. 80 W. 20 CC 5 4% M 204 Pink

443b 1/2 pig. less glossy than 443 (temp lower) Use thick, crackles well

444 Soda spar 80 Whiting 10 CC 10 Yellow st. 5548 G.S.
Very nice crackle 7%

444a 5% 5548 G.S.

444b 50 Cobalt carb. (much too blue)
3% copper carb. 3% lith. Carb. mousy black.

435 6-378 2-37d +

436 Mixture.

437 "

438 S.F. 45 CC 20 Dol 20 Cop. Carb 1.
Large crazes - w. little colour.

438a S.F. 70 CC 20 Dol 20 Cop. Carb. 1.00.

438b S.F. 70 CC 20 Dol 20. Nickel 3.
Mousy green

439 From 395 P.F. 5 N 10 CC 10 Sil 6 Bar. Carb. 20
Cob. or 3 Mang 2 Iron 4 Chrom 1

439a + 4 1/2 Sue Mayer's black mix.

440 Soda F. 70 CC 20 Dol 20 Cop. carb. 2 Lith. 3
Ugly brownish, but when refired turned white.

441 S.F. 70 CC 20 Dol 20 Cob. Carb. 50
Mousy-blue.

441a S.F. 70 CC 20 Dol 20 Cob. Carb. 1. Copper Carb 2.

442 C.M. (73) Pg 31. Very similar to 442
F 49 CC 5 Sil 5 Bar. Carb. 26 Zinc 15 Nick 1.
Interesting bright purple/blue matt

442a Without pig. very dry - maybe measured wrongly.

442b 4% 14 M 124 (Pink) Mousy pink - needs more heat.

443 Neph. Syn. 80 W. 20 CC 5 M 204 Pink 5%
Bright shiny crackle pink.

444 Soda Spar. 80 W. 10 CC 10 Yellow st 5548 G.S.
Very good crackle - bright yellow 7%

yellow crackle

444	448	new yellow 483
Soda Spa 80	Soda Spa 80	S.F. 80
W 10	Dol 20	Dol 10
CC 10	cat CC 18	Whit 5
yellow st. 7%	yellow st 8% (7%)	CC 5
5548 G.S.	5548 G.S.	cat CC 9
very crackle	like nice crackle	yellow 8
bright yellow	plains if too hot	

Pink crackle

483b = (combination of 444 + 448 with diff cobalt)

Soda Spa 80	made new 444
White 5	using potash feldspar
CC 5	
cat CC 9	2 NOV 2002
Dol 10	PR fel 160
Red stain 7%	W 20
14 PM	CC 20
	5548 G.S. 8%
	to fire in 1260 cone 6
	firing no scale

399 from studio porcelain pg 189 (Ruth Duckworth)

fel 40	Silica = 44%
CC 80	Quartz
Wh 30	

very dry, used cone 285

F 156 W 10 W 40 Zinc 34 mixture no Bar. Carb. 66 Cop. carb 6 lith. carb 6.
3 cop. carb. + 2 lith. carb.

393a

393b Studio Porc. Pg 191 Peter Simpson 1240/1260
Neph. Syn. 50 Whiting 3.5 Dol 23 CC 25
+ Nickel ox. 3, lith. carb. 2
794 also has 3 Nickel ox. - no diff in colour between 794 & 794a

395 Studio Porc. 189 Fm. Cooper. (Black/green specks)
P.F. 50. W 10 CC 10 Sil 6 Bar. Carb 20
very good white.

395a + Copper Carb. 2 + 2 lith. carb.
Very bright turquoise. See old book for 395b, c, d.

396 Frit 508 + 20 cc. 1% Zinc.
Develops craze later.

396a 25 carb. carb. 1.50 cop. carb. 1.50 zinc. 50 Iron
Darkish grey. See old book for 396b - g.

397 Mixture.

398 (See 380a + 389a)
F 50 W 15 CC 10. Sil 25 Zinc 3.
Cob. carb. 25 Copper carb. 2.00 Test was glossy

398a 3/4 350 + 398a. (Very nice soft pale blue crackle)

399 Ruth Duckworth Pg 189 Studio Porcelain.
F 40 CC 20 W 30 Very dry useful crackle.
See old book for notes with 399
+ other glazes.

400 Comb. 393 + 350 crackle glazes. See old book and
F 70 W 18 CC 10 5 Bent 2. (350 used)

499 a
 ✓ P Felspar 25
 ✓ Whiting 25
 ✓ C.C. 25
 ✓ Silica 25
 ✓ Zinc 84 (approx. 400 mg)

Dora Williamson 500
 ✓ Whiting 23
 ✓ Cornish china stone 20
 ✓ China clay 28
 ✓ Flint or quartz 27
 ✓ Bentonite 2 (to help suspension).

395 NEW 1000g
 ✓ Neph sy 500 ✓ Bar carb 200
 ✓ Whiting 100
 ✓ C.C. 100
 ✓ Sil 60
 Neph sy instead of feldspar

Basic Green
 F 72
 W 13
 CC 7
 Sil 8
 Cop. ox 3.5
 Cob. .25
 Iron 1.
 or
 3.3.73.
 Cop. ox. .25
 Cob. ox .125
 Cop. carb. 3

New Dol. - Combination mix + Bosch.
 F 57
 W 4
 CC 19
 Dol 19
 Talc 19
 1140 56
 20 4
 380 19
 380 19
 20 2

CLA 1. Porcelain White. Cone 7-10.
 29.6 Potash Feldspar 40
 22.2 Silica 30
 22.2 Whiting 30
 Kaolin 15
 Zinc ox 10
 Titanium Diox 10
 CLA 2. Testa Huan Red. Cone 9.
 Soda Spar 42
 Whiting 32
 Flint 52
 Ball Clay 52
 Red Iron Ox 24

H. Blue.

.50 cobalt.
 2 Rutile
 1 copper carb.
 25 green chroma.

New CLA 1
 (for thin layer)
 P.F. 40
 Whi. 25
 CC 20
 Sil 25
 Zinc 10
 Tit 10

THELMA'S SILKY BLACK GLAZE

Felspar 54
 Dolomite 8
 Talc 10
 China Clay 20
 Borax Frit 10
 (Ferro 571)

plus 7 1/2% Black Mix

THELMA'S BLACK MIX

Cobalt ox 31
 Chrome ox. 7
 Red Iron ox. 37
 Mang. Diox. 12
 Nickel ox. 13

Add 7 1/2% of this dry mix to any white glaze that is not too dry.

226 Crystalline Test Gl.

(226) P.F. 34.9, W 12.6, CC 4.1, Sil 22.6 Zinc 25.8
 Zircon 5 Tit 5
 Copper ox .50 Mang Carb 2
 Beautiful crystalline - see par. + square electrodes (Johans)

(227) As 226 without Zircon

(228) P.F. 34.9, W 12.6, CC 4.1 Sil 22.6 Zinc 25.8
 Tit. 5
 Cob. Carb .50 Cop. ox .50 Iron ox 2.

(229) As 228 only using Soda spar.

(230) Base 1 P.F. 34.9, W 12.6, CC 4.1, Sil 22.6
 Zinc 25.8 Tit. 5
 Cob. ox .50, Bl. Nickel ox 2.

(231) Soda Spar 34.9, W 12.6, CC 4.1, Sil 22.6
 Zinc 25.8 Tit. 5
 Cob. ox .50, Bl. Nickel ox 2.

(232) Soda Spar 34.9, W 12.6, CC 4.1 Sil 22.6
 Cop. ox .50, Mang ox 2, Nickel 1
 Zinc 25.8 Tit 5, Cop. ox .50, Mang ox 2, Nickel 1

(233) Base ditto. Nickel 1. Rutile 1

(462) F54 W 6 CC 20 Noolstanite 12 Frit 571-10
Dol. 8 (from Sue's 423) Test again.

(463) - (464) Mixture - see old book

* (465) Neph. Syn. 30 Soda Spar 20 Bar. Carb 15
Zinc 15 Sil. 15 Frit 571 10 Bent 2.
Copper Carb 1.5 Tit. 3. Interesting green.

(465a) + Yellow St. 6%. Bit too bland a crystalline formation
465 a + b. Bright yellow shiny, etched on sample doesn't show up.

(466) Neph. Syn. 30 Soda Spar 20 Bar Carb 15 Zinc 15
Tit. 6 (increase on 465) F571 10 Sil. 15 Bent 2
Pink stain 14 M 124 5%. Should not have
increased Tit. from 3 to 6.

(466a) Neph. Syn. 30 Soda Spar 20 Bar. Carb. 15
Zinc 15 Tit. 3. Frit 571 10. Bent. 2
Tin 2. Pink St. 14 M 124 6% Nice.

(467) + 1 nickel.
Green splotchy not good.

(466b) 5% Pink (Corad) 14 M 200. Not as nice as 14 M 124

(466c) Neph. Syn. 30 Soda Spar 20 Bar. Carb 15 Sil. 15
Zinc 15. Tit 3 Frit 571/10 Sil 15 Bent 2.
Pink 14 M 124 7% Lith Carb 2 Tin 2.

(395) NEW 3/12/93

Neph Sy 500. whitig 100. china clay 100.
Silica 60. Barium Carb 200

(395a)
13.6.95

S. Spar 50 W 10 CC 9 Sil 6 Bar Carb 20
~~14 M 124 6% Lith Carb 2~~ cop carb. 2 lith carb.

Appendix 4

Newspaper clippings: Thelma's archives

The Cape Times, Tuesday, April 26, 1977 9

Pottery of quality on show in City

THE POTTERS Association of the Cape together with the SA Association of Arts has mounted an enormous exhibition of pottery at their gallery in Church Street. It is not often that one gets the chance to see such a large and representative display of what is being done in this particular craft, and the opportunity should not be missed.

There are 400 exhibits — in earthenware, stoneware, porcelain and Raku — from more than a 100 different potters from almost the whole country, and it is all easy to see, set out without fuss — although had everything been just a little higher off the floor it would have been even better.

It is difficult to appraise so much work, but one can say, without reservation, that the standard as a whole is very

high, and one's progress through the display is frequently punctuated by exclamations of admiration. The forms and sizes, the colours and surfaces, go from one extreme to another; tiny vases in fragile porcelain by Pamela Bass, for example, beside the enormous stoneware dishes of Digby Hoets. But to mention names is almost unfair, for once begun where would one stop? However — just personal preferences — I must remark on Thelma Marcuson's beautiful glazes on her fine porcelain bowls, Margaret Malan's thin, wavy topped pinched vessels, Heyman's bold Rakubaskets, and a very neat lidded jar by Trante Brueck. But these are just a few of the very many excellent specimens.

There are a number of

objets décoratifs, in which, it is interesting to note, a kind of fungal, organic form predominates; but very little evidence of sculptural experiment in the medium.

Die Kunsamer is showing an exhibition of paintings by Eleanor Esmonde-White. The total effect — with all the oranges and yellows putting a tinge of violet into the gallery lighting — is probably more satisfying than the paintings seen individually. They are competent and pleasant, but lack surprises. The first impact is quickly spent.

There are a number of those ageless, Mediterranean women, placid and heavy in the sun, drawn with full curved lines, and all looking pious and much alike. Indeed, it is all about women, variously occupied, and not surprising (no meanness intended) is that the couple of cats included are better drawn and have more confidence than the couple of men.

The style of the work has something of the impressionists and of the developments that immediately followed. There are sunny, loosely knit compositions in a shower of short brush strokes, and others built up of stronger masses edged with a line, and relying more on their abstract qualities for their effect than on the subject matter — such as the pattern of the spread washing and bent women in No. 19, which is one of the more successful paintings.

It is work that is easy to enjoy, and the opposite is also true. The artist and the viewer have been over the same ground too often, and the work is not grand enough to sustain the repetition. It really does need an injection of something new.

Peter Buchanan.

Potters' art demo

MEMBERS of The Friends of the Johannesburg Art Gallery met at the home of well-known porcelain potter, Thelma Marcuson, in Bompas Road, Dunkeld West, where they were treated to a demonstration of the potters art.

Thelma Marcuson started her career in ceramics only ten years ago with little formal training. After a two-year part-time course at the Johannesburg College of Art, she studied for a time under John Edwards.

Top

In his book "Potters of Southern Africa," author Garth Clark has named Thelma Marcuson as one of the top fifteen potters in the country.

"Pottery is her metier and because of its technological challenge, she finds the science of being a potter exciting and experiments a great deal," says Garth Clark.

Thelma Marcuson is an artist in every sense of the word. She is a perfectionist and her standards are high.

Thelma: lady of a thousand parts

By BERNICE
MARGOLIS

WHAT started as a hobby for Johannesburg potter Thelma Marcuson has become her obsession magnificent. The elegant, grandmother of two says "I only started throwing pots in my forties but they took me over".

When she accepted a commission from the SABC to do a 150 square foot wall panel for Radio Bantu's reception area at the massive new Auckland Park complex, she was thrilled by the challenge.

"I got totally, absolutely involved. That kind of intensity produces unique tranquility. But it was sheer hard work and no

creation is without tension".

Work meant thousands of individual hand-made pieces of high-fired stoneware, fired, glazed (to her own recipes) and painstakingly cemented together to form a harmonious whole.

The whole, or the sum of the thousands of parts, is a wall of merging, muted colour with blacks, beiges and greys predominating. Mrs Marcuson calls it purely and simply an abstract free-form ceramic mosaic.

"I find it difficult to work in anything but gentle tones" says Thelma, whose own personality is restful, relaxed. And already the bland newness of the Radio Bantu reception area has been softened by her womanly touch.

While Thelma Marcuson could be just another well-heeled housewife who throws pots for the want of something better to do, preferably arty or crafty, she has instead made herself technically expert.

From her studio at her Dunkeld, Johannesburg, home have emerged graceful, translucent porcelains with uncluttered lines and beautiful finish. A recent exhibition was a sell-out. "It got so bad I had to go to the gallery for my daily fix" she says lightly.

But seriously, after the 'refreshing' change from pots to walls she is bursting with new ideas. "I like to work in an intimate atmosphere such as a home" she says. Any home-owners with a blank wall to fill?



Shape of things to come in pottery

THERE was a time when anyone interested in pottery yearned to possess a really big piece by one of our known potters.

But there has been a move away from established forms and a younger generation are experimenting with smaller shapes using porcelain.

Esther Rouso, who runs a gallery in Cape Town where she exhibits some of the new work, says that South African pottery is in a transitional stage.

"Our potters have become so technically proficient that they can do anything in their chosen medium. I think that there is a split between superb craftsmen and artists who are using clay as a medium for expression. This does not mean that they can't be both at the same time. A functional piece can also be art."

The problem with the latter is that the high prices set upon some of the functional pieces make the buyer very wary of using them in the kitchen where they could be broken.

But collecting smaller pieces which have no function beyond sheer pleasure has been made possible by the delightful work now being produced.

Take Barry Dibb who works



Sea-inspired stoneware forms by Heidi Smallwood

in Natal. Esther Rouso says it took him nine years to perfect his technique before he could express himself as an artist with the medium as a secondary consideration.

His work is pure joy. For some time now he has specialised in boxes, some of which have jagged lids fitting as smoothly as a well-oiled key into a lock. He uses subtle colouring and occasionally lustre, which reflects the light like the inside of a perlemoen shell. He has an astonishing range in both colour and design and one can only look forward to the porcelain platters that he's working on now.

In Johannesburg Thelma Marcuson produces delicate porcelain bowls as aesthetically pleasing as the work done by Juliet Armstrong in Natal. She works in bone china, small shapes of an eggshell thinness which she then punctures with a myriad of small holes. Her work seems as fragile as lace but bone china is surprisingly hard.

The Stellenbosch potters do fine work. Ann Norgard, Di Hofmeyr and Susan Orr, for

example, experiment with boxes which open to reveal unexpected designs.

Sonja Gerlings, who introduced raku to the Cape, is unfortunately leaving for Scotland where she hopes to establish a pottery school. But Marietjie van der Merwe, who studied in the United States, is working again after a year's sabbatical.

"There is a feeling now for airiness," said Esther Rouso. "For something gentler. I don't like the word but one might well describe the new shapes as 'collectables'."

She said increased use of porcelain as a medium was due to the fact that the potters could sell their functional ware at reasonable prices, giving them money to experiment.

"And experiment they must. Nearly everyone can turn out a pottery ashtray but at some point the true artist is confronted with the choice of whether to change or to remain in a rut."

In the new shapes now being produced all over the country, the choice has obviously been made.

DAILY MAIL 3/11/75



Delicate touch

CRAFT

Jane Klein

THERE is a tremendous amount of unnecessary mystique attached to porcelain, says Mrs Thelma Marcuson of South Africa's foremost artists in this field.

Sitting in her Dunkeld studio, Thelma Marcuson brought her spinning potters wheel to a halt.

"In fact porcelain is just clay. It takes a little more time and patience and application to use successfully."

"Working in porcelain is more of a challenge to me today. It requires more delicacy than heavier work. The porcelain body I use has a good plastic quality that makes it easier to throw. But between the lump of clay on the wheelhead and getting in into the kiln there are lots of little disasters."

Porcelain has been treasured since its first appearance in China in the seventh century AD, for its

translucent and delicate appearance.

The European potter in past centuries tried to capture the essential qualities of the few Eastern porcelain pieces that made their way to the West.

But it wasn't until the 17th century that the secret of "hard" or true porcelain, similar to that of China, was discovered in Europe and gone from strength to strength.

"It is only in recent years that people overseas have been using porcelain in small potteries and I think it is slowly filtering through into the studios of South Africa," said Mrs Marcuson.

"Clay is one of the few materials that has no value in its raw state, but can be made into valuable objects. There is a great deal of magic in changing a lump of clay into something."

Thelma Marcuson, a mother and grandmother, took up pottery some 14 years ago. "I had to do something with my hands."

This is not surprising, she is the daughter of a craftsman, Adolf Sidersky,

one of South Africa's early jewellers.

"For two years I took part-time lessons at the Johannesburg College of Art. In order to be a potter you don't have to be an artist, but you must have a certain amount of skill," she said.

Despite this Thelma Marcuson is regarded as one of South Africa's leading artists in the field of pottery.

"When I started pottery I found I was using earthenware clay to look like stoneware and I was working stoneware thinner and thinner until it began to lose its stoneware quality. That is why I started working in porcelain."

"One must work in a way that is true to the material one uses."

★
Mrs Thelma Marcuson, one of the few South African's to make her name through porcelain, stands with a few of her delicate, meticulously worked articles.

2 The Star TODAY! Thursday March 15 1984

PEOPLE



The humble teapot reaches amazingly creative heights at the Pisco Teapot Exhibition at Things Gallery, Melville. More than 40 ceramic artists have transformed this humble and best-known adjunct to living into flights of fantasy and fun. Appropriately, dainty cucumber sandwiches and a potent tea punch were served at the opening. The show is on until March 31.

★ CERAMIC ARTISTS — (from left) Sonja Zytlow, Thelma Marcuson and Capetown's Jenni Rabinovitz and her potter husband, Clam.

D.M. Nov 1, 1974

Interesting glazes

E. WINDER: Art view

ART EXHIBITION—Helen de Leeuw's Gallery, Hyde Park, Sandton.

Interesting and unusual feature of the exhibition of work by some of South Africa's Master Pottery is the ceramic sculpture by Charles Goddard, who has adapted material into some delicate competent and moving pieces.

He knows his anatomy and used this knowledge with considerable skill. His large "Affixion Group" is very needed.

There is also noteworthy use of the therapeutic of the handling of clay in making of domestic

items such as cups and saucers.

Incidentally, the unique pieces being shown by Hanneke van der Wat, I am told, resulted from the satisfaction and nerve-settling to be found in the amorphous lump of clay in the artist's hand. The unexpected results are quite charming.

There appears to have been a rather useful study of glazes by our potters and it seems to me that the matt glaze which is a feature of the work by Lily Pinchuk and Thelma Marcuson, is new.

It has a most attractive velvety quality which is most pleasing. Some of the designs

are truly superb and in this matter our Master Potter Tim Vorris is very noticeable.

His large jars are most beautiful and I particularly noticed a lovely and unusual plaque by Andrew Walford, which might be a remarkably fine feature if built into a wall.

The Rorke's Drift pottery, which was introduced to me some 15 years ago, has developed a certain suggestion of European design and Manttan's miniature animals also seem like a sophisticated development from the "one" which the herd boy produced from the clay of the vlei while he tended his flock.

The Star Tuesday May 25 1976

7

The annual Brickor ceramic art competition and exhibition opens to the public on Thursday at the Flower Hall, Milner Park.

The Mayoress of Johannesburg, Mrs Monty Sklaar, will officially open the exhibition.

The judges are Mr E Bosch, Mrs Karen Jarocinska, Mr Monty Sack and Mrs Thelma Marcusson.

The object of this competition is to promote ceramic art in South Africa and to encourage potters to improve the standard and quality of their work by submitting it to a panel of

Ceramics at showgrounds

experienced and expert judges.

A competition for children under the age of 13 will be held on Saturday. The first 100 children who present themselves at the

Flower Hall from 1 pm will be given a packet of clay, a few tools and a place to work. Judging will take place at 4 pm.

This is the largest exhibition of its type held in

South Africa and it is the 5th year that Brickor will be sponsoring this event. This is evidence of their continuing interest and support for ceramic art in South Africa.

art review Nov. 1982.

A joy to touch and look at

PORCELAIN PEOPLE — the title of the pottery show now on view at the Yellow Door — refers to the craftsmen exhibiting, not the exhibits.

Viewers with a fondness for porcelain will recognize the familiar styles of well-known potters, and will surely enjoy themselves amid the variety of glazed, shaped and textured pots and ornaments.

Barry Dibbs pieces are always a joy to touch and look at. Beautifully proportioned, with wonderful satin sheen glazes and appropriately delicate decoration, his work consistently stands out in any pottery collection. And Tim Morris has similarly developed a recognizable approach. His large, bold pots with their creamy ground, decorated with a combination of geometric and organic designs, have the timeless appeal of good ceramics.

While Shirley Findlay has not yet developed a personal style, she favours egg-shaped forms which are treated in various ways — holed, indented,

ed, smoothed or stemmed.

In contrast Thelma Marcusson's approach to ceramics is highly individual and most unusual. Mounted in perspex boxes, her layered assemblages of thin curling sheets of porcelain in various subtle hues, remind one of fallen autumn leaves — or shell clusters. Her command of glazing techniques is also seen to advantage in some very fine bronze bowls.

Clay 'ripple'

While Marietjie van der Merwe's ceramic work is always rigorously disciplined, she allows herself freedom to create informal shapes which often retain the clay 'ripple' — as seen in her tall slim vases. Maxie Heymann it seems, is similarly seeking freedom from the discipline's constraints — but her experiments in porcelain torsos don't quite come off.

For one thing, these

are too thick and heavy — visually and physically — which is inappropriate to the porcelain medium. And for another, the charcoal greyiness of the skin glazing is not compatible with the happy vest colours.

Margie Chilton produces wall tiles with finely traced relief lines and free-form patterns. Most unusual pieces. The setting is unfortunate though. Glass prevents desired tactile contact, and the heavy aluminium frames are most disturbing.

Dianne Hofmeyr creates exquisitely thin translucent porcelain 'cups' traced with fine pin-hole designs. Light is of the utmost importance to these pieces, revealing subtle tone and shadow variations. Also on show is work by Gillina Bickell and David Walters.

The exhibition closes at the end of the month.

BENITA MUNITZ

● Sidney Poitier and Bill Cosby in a scene from "Uptown Saturday Night."



ART

Poetry in pottery

Anne Sacks

Johannesburg's first exhibition of porcelain pottery is now being staged at the Goodman Gallery by Thelma Marcuson, one of South Africa's foremost potters.

Although porcelain pottery was exhibited in Pretoria a few years ago, until this week Johannesburg had never been exposed to wares that characterise this refined craft.

A large vocabulary of special effects including an unusual bronze lustre, lacy

borders, bright red flecks and glazes reminiscent of the Chinese Chun are features of Thelma Marcuson's work.

She dabbled in painting and pottery until she decided 12 years ago that a craft was more her line.

Today she is one of South Africa's foremost potters. She features prominently in Clarke and Wagners's book on Southern African potters and has a display at the Durban Art Gallery, one of the few museums in this country to exhibit contemporary ceramics.

"You don't have to be wildly artistic to be a potter," says Thelma, who comes from a family of craftsmen in jewellery.

"What is important is a staying power and the ability to remain undeterred by the disappointment of failures.

"At least the indescribable excitement of rushing out in the early mornings to open the kiln compensates for any failures."

Working in Johannesburg, Thelma feels no affinity for earthy and crude work, and her refined methods of working reflect an urban sophistication.

She uses an electric kiln with an oxidised atmosphere to experiment and produce special effects different from those in the reduction atmosphere of an oil, wood or gas fired kiln.



● Thelma Marcuson . . . "you don't have to be wildly artistic."

... who might be a mirrored reflection.

A crack hand with a kiln

THELMA MARCUSON is not yet in sympathy with her new kiln. But one would never know, since the porcelain pots she makes with rich or coolly contemplative glazes have the finesse of a master craftsman.

She now lives in Hampstead, where she has had to install the smaller kiln and grow used to working in less space, but comes from Johannesburg, where she was recognised as one of South Africa's most accomplished potters. Yet she was in her 40s before she began potting seriously.

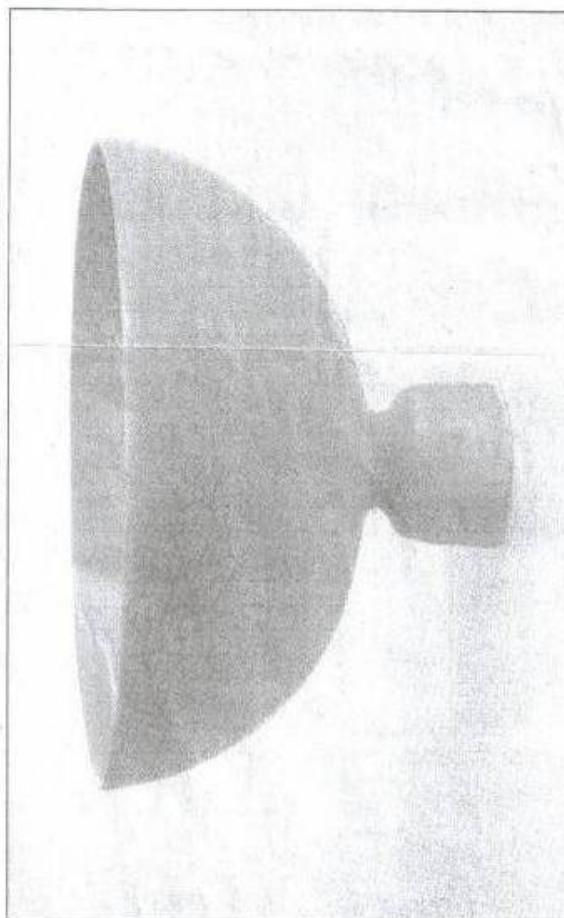
Her work, on show until November 1, at Andrew Uskin Contemporary Art in Flask Walk, Hampstead, discloses inventive variation, within a classically controlled tradition.

Ceramics is an unpredictable craft. Often pots have to be discarded. But sometimes they emerge with unexpected qualities; a unique and accidental beauty. Marcuson makes her own glaze recipes, sometimes influenced by those of other potters.

Many pots on show glow with a warm yellow glaze and are "crackled"; an effect achieved by applying glaze that does not quite fit the pot, so contraction takes place at different times.

There is one with a cool grey finish crackled like a spider's web. A pinkish pot has a rim like a petal and narrow feet, which Marcuson describes as "lyrical but not for using". Others are deep turquoise, bowls into which one might mentally be drawn, to meditate, as though prompted to muse by the Mediterranean.

Tones are often combined, as in one pinkish pot with a darker rim



● Uranium crackle-glazed bowl by Thelma Marcuson.

and centre, the bronze-like effect gained by adding manganese and copper to the slip and elsewhere a black surface is created by adding oxides to the glaze.

There is a three-legged pot with a stippled effect, typical of designs she often makes with a tool on wet clay.

"I was never influenced by African pots and I don't like people copying ethnic crafts which reflect a quite different way of life," she says.

Some pots are pure white. "I have a friend who has bought several and

said she wanted some more. But when she saw the coloured ones, she ended up choosing those instead."

There are amethyst pots, some with a rich well of concentrated colour and others combine a subtle combination of tone or bear formal design.

"I started working with earthenware," she explains. "Then I found I was trying to make it like stoneware. It was getting thinner and finer, so I changed to porcelain. When I was living in South Africa, I had to import it

from England. But the second lot was bad so I made my own from minerals that were available."

"I was lucky to show in the Goodman Gallery — one of the best and which was in my neighbourhood. The owner took everything I had in my studio and they sold well. Showing in London is another matter and I was terrified before this exhibition."

But her work will undoubtedly draw a response from those respecting classicism subject to subtle variation.

RAND DAILY MAIL, Monday, June 7, 1982

7

Fluent, elegant — and pure honest-to-goodness

WIM Blom is a relic of an earlier age, grateful it seems for the current acceptability of "photo realism" (a term indicating gross misunderstanding of the nature of reality, photography and painting).

These are nice paintings redolent of nostalgia, a kind of longing for Grandma's arms, feather bed and potty.

Blom is in love with the antique, it's downright honest-to-goodness. He has a fluency, an undemonstrative ease with paint and a spare and elegant sense of design.

Without doubt or distraction

ART

Ricky Burnett
Wim Blom and
Thelma Marcuson
Goodman Gallery

tion these paintings seem disdainful of modernish, though employing some of its discoveries. They are well achieved within the confines of their limited but honest-to-goodness intentions.

His collage/montages speak of much the same Victorian nostalgia. Small, fine

and precise these are again nice and unquarrelsome.

Thelma Marcuson has made some fine pots. But they're poorly arranged, difficult to get close to. I was terrified of knocking something over.

These are quiet and clean, sturdy, but poised and refreshingly unpretentious, simplicity and clarity being their major and rare virtue.

She is also showing some "ceramicy" little wall pieces. Little bits of nonsense I think, her fine ceramic skills are better employed away from decorative or arty problems.

Refined and translucent work

IT seems so right that the exquisite porcelain by Thelma Marcuson should be sharing this gallery with the superb paintings and drawings by Andrew Verster. The two make this lovely exhibition very much worthwhile.

I cannot recall seeing an exhibition of her delightfully designed and refined work in Johannesburg before, otherwise I am sure that I must have recalled the lovely glazes and translucency of the bronzy lustre she imparts to some of the items in this exquisite show.

The simplicity but satisfying quality of the design is most desirable and another pleasing factor is the total lack of any extraneous or unwarranted decorating.

Andrew Verster's beach paintings are equally charming and competent. They have the peculiar quality of representing the beach one is always seeking.

ART

H. E. Winder
Thelma Marcuson
and Andrew Verster
Goodman Gallery

The stacked deckchairs seem to emphasise a most desirable loneliness almost as though the space of sparkling whiteness in front of you leading to the sea and the horizon belongs to you and you only.

The lovely clean statement by the artist serves to underline those qualities.

There appears to be an unnecessary number of self-portraits all painted with a similarity of pose, but with excellent handling of media.

The Verster drawings and etchings, with a clever economy of line, space and a veracity of statement, achieve an excellent balance of composition.

8

RAND DAILY MAIL, Wednesday, July 19,

PlayMail

Refined and awe-inspiring

THIS is a most refined exhibition — and I mean refined and not "refeened". The awe-inspiring, almost religious sanctity of Judith Mason's beautiful work and the elegant and decorous quality of Thelma Marcuson's porcelain are so completely complementary that the effect is almost awe-inspiring.

It is difficult to give full appreciation to Judith Mason's superb painting and draughtsmanship. I suggest that there is a strange association with the work of Michelangelo.

"Toys for the Four Powers" is marked by an example of the artist's ability to draw and "Skittle set" with the bowl of spent

ART

H E Winder
Judith Mason and
Thelma Marcuson
Goodman Gallery
Hyde Square

cartridge cases a rusty sickle is all


comparable. Thelma Marcuson's porcelain is simple and very decorous.

The line of each item is true and delightfully and her handling of it positively exquisite.

Incidentally the range of colour used in this exhibition is beautiful and legitimate.

Appendix 5

Invites to exhibition openings



goodman gallery

PAINTINGS, GRAPHICS AND SCULPTURE

ABRAMS
ANKLE
BAKKER
BALDINELLI
BISSEKER
BOYS
CILLIERS-BARNARD
COETZEE
DUMILE
HART
KUMALO
LEVY
LIPKIN
MATSOO
PORTWAY
SAOLI
SCHIMMEL
SCULLY
SKOTNES
STERN
VAN HEERDEN


INTERNATIONAL GRAPHICS
TAPESTRIES BY
MARQUERITE KIEVIND
NESTA HILLMAN
VAN HEERDEN

POTTERY BY
TIM MORRIS
THELMA MARCUSON

AGENTS FOR
RHODES NATIONAL GALLERY
RHODESIA

3b Hyde Square, Hyde Park, J.H.A.
Tel: 452 3111
Fax: 452 3111

ARTS & CRAFTS, 1971



ORIGINALS POSTERS

FRAMING MATERIALS

picturedrome
Barford Centre,
Barford Gardens,
Bridleway,
Telokwane 20 1005

Potter's

ATRIUM CENTRE
Main Road, Box 24,
Tel: 706-1226, Rivonia

ANDREW WALFORD
TIM MORRIS
THELMA MARCUSON
LILY PINCHUCK
JULIA FRASER
LIEBERMAN STUDIO TILES
LIEBERMAN POTTERY

ARTLOOK August 1972

The Directors of
**ANDREW
USISKIN**
Contemporary Art

invite you to the
PRIVATE VIEW
SUNDAY 11th OCTOBER
12-6 PM
of new ceramics by

THELMA MARCUSON

Public Exhibition open from
13th October to 1st November 1992.

Andrew Usiskin Contemporary Art
9-11 Flask Walk
Hampstead
London NW3 1HJ
Telephone (071) 431 4484
Fax (071) 435 5520

Gallery opening times
Tues-Sat 10 am-6 pm
Sun 1-6 pm

There are no parking restrictions

Thelma Marcuson has long been recognised as one of South Africa's most accomplished potters.

Her skill in making porcelain and her mastery of the art of glazing combine to produce work of extraordinary quality. She has created beautiful vessels in classic shapes, with finishes that range from deceptively simple whites through pale, cool, translucent greys and celadons to the most magical "uranium"-yellow crackle glazes.

Born in Johannesburg in 1919, Thelma Marcuson only started to make pots seriously when in her forties. She has won several national awards and has had a number of very successful one-woman shows. Her work is represented in museum and private collections in South Africa and internationally. Thelma Marcuson's pottery has been featured in the books *Potters of Southern Africa*, *Keramik der Welt* and *Ceramic Form*.

Good Events, maximum possible shared bond

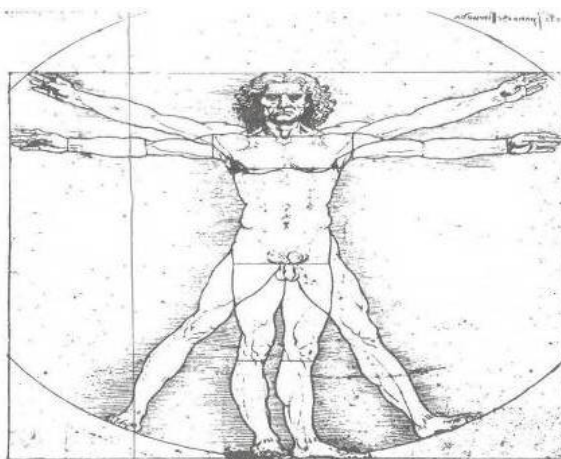
Goodman Gallery
Totem Meneghelli
Gallery 101
Gallery 21
Wolpe Gallery, C. Town
Gallery International, C. Town

POTTERS:
Tim Morris
E. Bosch
Thelma Marcuson
H. Rabinowitz, C. Town
B. Haden

TAPESTRIES & CARPETS:
Coral Stephens, Swaziland



National Institute for Crime Prevention and
Rehabilitation of Offenders
Nasionale Instituut insake Misdadvervoorkoming
en Rehabilitasie van Oorreeders.



ART DEALER'S FAIR.

REMBRANDT PAVILION, MILNER PARK, 8th-15th AUGUST, 78

You are invited to an
exhibition of Porcelain
Pots and Compositions
by
THELMA MARCUSON

Opening Saturday, 22nd May, 9.30 a.m. to 6.30 p.m.
Gallery Hours: Tuesday — Saturday, 9.30 a.m. to 6.00 p.m.
Exhibition closes: Tuesday, 15th June at 6.00 p.m.

EXHIBITION


OF SELECTED POTTERY BY SOUTH AFRICA'S
LEADING POTTERS

Esias Bosch Thelma Marcuson Tim Morris
Hym Rabinowitz Andrew Walford
2-6 DESEMBER

UITSTALLING

VAN UITGESOEKTE POTTEBAKKERY DEUR
VOORAANSTAANDE SUID-AFRIKAANSE POTTE-
BAKKERS

Esias Bosch Thelma Marcuson Tim Morris
Hym Rabinowitz Andrew Walford
2-6 DESEMBER

GALLERY 

NELSPRUIT Tel. 2567



**GOODMAN
GALLERY**
36 Hyde Sq., North Rd.
Hyde Park, Sandton,
Transvaal, South Africa
Telephone: 788-1113

We invite you to an exhibition
of PORCELAIN by

Thelma Marcuson

Opening Saturday 15th July 1978
9.30 a.m. — 7 p.m.
Exhibition open Tuesday to Saturday
9.30 a.m. — 6 p.m.
Closes Saturday 29th July 1978
at 6 p.m.

William Humphreys Art Gallery

*You are cordially invited to an
Exhibition of Porcelain
by*

Thelma Marcuson

which will be opened by

Mr W. K. Hartley

on Wednesday, 15 August 1979 at 17h30

The exhibition closes on 29 August 1979

27 August 1979

Mrs E Rousso
Gallery International
P O Box 2302
CAPE TOWN
8000

I N V O I C E

PORCELAIN PURCHASED FROM THELMA MARCUSON

No		.....	R47,00
89	Pale Blue/Beige Shallow Bowl (Mrs H Huteau)	.....	R47,00
46	Lattice-edged cylinder	.....	43,00
44	Lattice-edged cylinder	.....	45,00
8	Pink-Crackle glaze vase	.....	40,00
3	Pink-Crackle glaze bowl	.....	52,00
104	Scraffiti bowl	.....	62,00
51	Chun-lidded jar	.....	52,00
81	Dolomite white double-rimmed black-edged bowl	.....	45,00
82	Dolomite white double-rimmed black-edged bowl	.....	40,00
			<u>R426,00</u>

Goods to be despatched on 31 August 1979 by air.

(Mrs) R J HOLLOWAY
CURATOR

Handwritten: 8.11.6 18.30



Handwritten notes in Afrikaans, likely a receipt or inventory list, mentioning items like 'Porselein' (porcelain) and 'Kraakle' (crackle glaze).

Appendix 6

Cone temperatures

The following chart was taken from <http://artpotteryblog.com/2008/05/the-art-pottery.html> accessed by Fahmeeda Omar, February 2012.

KILN FIRING CHART

Firing converts ceramic work from weak greenware into a strong, durable form. As the temperature in a kiln rises, many changes take place in the clay; and understanding what happens during the firing can help you avoid problems. The following chart provides highlights of what happens when firing clay.

Temperature C° F°		Color	Cone (approx.)	Event
1400	2552	Brilliant white	14	End of porcelain range
			13	
			12	
1300	2372	White	11	End of stoneware range
			9	
			7	
1200	2192	Yellow-white	5**	End of earthenware (red clay) range
		Yellow	4	
			2	
1100	2012	Yellow-orange	1	Between 1100-1200°C, mullite and cristobalite (two types of silica) form when clay starts converting to glass. Clay and ceramic particles start to melt together and form crystals. These changes make the material shrink as it becomes more dense. Soaking (holding the end temperature) increases the amount of fused matter and the amount of chemical action between the fluxes and the more refractory materials.
			04	
		Orange	05	
1000	1832		06	
			07	
		Red-orange	08	
900	1652		010	Between 800-900°C sintering begins. This is the stage where clay particles begin to cement themselves together to create a hard material called bisque.
			012	
		Cherry red	013	
800	1472		015	Between 300-800°C, the temperature must be raised steadily and ample air must be present to permit the complete burning of carbonaceous materials (impurities in the clay along with paper, wax, etc.). After 800°C, the clay surface will start to seal off, trapping unburned carbonaceous materials and sulfides, which could cause bloating and black coring.
			016	
		Dull red	017	
700	1292		018	
			019	
		Dark red	020	Quartz inversion occurs at 573°C. When clay is refired for a glaze firing, quartz crystals change from an alpha (•) crystal structure to a beta (•) crystal structure. The inversion is reversed on cooling. This conversion creates stresses in the clay so temperature increase and decrease must be slow to avoid cracking the work.
600	1112		021	
			022	
		Dull red glow		
500	932			
		Black		
400	752			Between 480-700°C chemical water (referred to as "water smoke") is driven off.
300	572			Upon cooling, cristobalite, a crystalline form of silica found in all clay bodies, shrinks suddenly at 220°C. Fast cooling at this temperature will cause ware to crack.
200	392			
100	212			Water boils and converts to steam. Trapped water will cause clay to explode so all water should be evaporated below 100°C. Begin a firing by keeping the kiln below 100°C until all water has evaporated.

PotteryMaking
Illustrated

Appendix 7

Email Interviews

Questions for Thelma Marcuson

1. How did you get started as a ceramist, what first drew you to clay and what was your first response to the medium?

Doesn't like term ceramist-prefers potter

Boys were older had more time on her hands

Visited England, saw a first show of 2 English and South African potters, ignited her interest in the medium

Had to do something with her hands – her father was a craftsman jeweller with his own workshop

2. From whom have you learned the most about ceramics?

Can be taught skills, not taste

Loved meeting other potters – learned from them everyone she met taught her something

Used to visit exhibitions when travelling – absorbing as much as possible

3. How did you acquire training in ceramics: was it formal training/education or informal and who would you regard as your 'teachers' or 'role models'?

Went to art college part time – tried different things but was inspired by pottery

Had a wonderful teacher – John Edwards, could have taught an orangutan to throw

Helen Martin and Tim Morris helped with the transition from earthenware to stoneware

4. In your opinion which other ceramists do you feel have influenced your work and what has been their major influence?

Lucy Rie - her influence on shape and glaze – had a feeling when she saw Lucy's work that she could work in that way – liked the simplicity and sophistication

5. Over the years which major art movements have influenced your art making, and in what way did these movements influence you?

Many influences – considers there to be a conflict between art and crafts – considers herself a craftsperson

6. As a ceramist what was your medium of choice (e.g. bone china, porcelain etc)?

Porcelain

7. What kind of pottery were you making when you first started your career?

Started with earthenware, then stoneware, then porcelain

Enjoyed hand building from time to time

8. When did you first start working with porcelain and what prompted your interest in using this medium?

Liked the responsiveness – a nervous sort of clay – liked the colors you could get with the glazes- found it exciting

9. How would you describe your work?

Crazes for glazes

10. What was the content of your work (themes used, metaphoric use of subject matter etc)? n/a

11. What were the ideal conditions under which you liked to work?

Listening to the radio in her studio in the garden of the house

12. In your experience what has been the most challenging problem that you have faced and how did you solve it?

13. When you were a practicing ceramist where did you source your clay?

Neil her husband imported the clay until she learned how to make it herself – one ingredient difficult to get because of war in SW Africa

14. Over the years did you develop your own glaze recipes, and if so where did you source you ingredients?

Had to redo glaze recipes when switched to porcelain – very time consuming reformulating glaze recipes – made her reputation

15. When did you become a member of APSA?

When it started

16. Are you still a member, if not how long were you a member?

Was a member until couldn't read anymore

Janet's tribute to Marcuson

I met Thelma nearly 20 years ago, at my degree show at the Royal College of Art – That was the beginning of a serendipitous and inspiring relationship and I became her studio assistant. It didn't take long for me to discover that Thelma was an artist as well as a potter and as passionate as she was perfectionist in getting the form of the pot right. Thelma taught me more about making pots than I learned at the Royal College – (As a painter in the ceramics department, I was a novice at throwing and so I worked mainly on hand-built pots). In a way I was an apprentice, as well as studio assistant, to Thelma. She taught me so many things it is not possible to put them all into words: "Stand back from the pot – look at it from all angles" encapsulated Thelma's take on life and how to live it – She taught me not to be precious, to persevere and to "throw away the ones that don't work and have another try..." She encouraged me to strive for the perfect form that expressed the energy and life of the pot – for a sense of uplift that spirals outwards and which would be impossible to achieve if the pot was too heavy at the base – Getting all these things right would make the pot 'sing...'

Even the processes that were involved in preparing the clay were a lesson. Removing the impurities, wedging to get the body of the clay ready for throwing. Glazing and the preparation of the glazes were the most challenging part. Thelma's beautiful yellow crackle glaze was a technical challenge which always kept me holding my breath during firings as the glaze has to shrink a little more than the body of the pot in order to create the crackle – too much and the pot would crack, too little and the crackle would not be there... This was not for the fainthearted! "To crackle or not to crackle?" was often my question as I waited for the firing to cool so I could open the kiln and find out. Every firing was reviewed - Thelma's meticulous recipes and notes helped here and were a source of precise technical information as well as her poetic observations and notes—which were useful in deciding on which recipes should be tested or used again – "too shiney-try without tin.." "nice and hard when raw – may craze (nice crackle?) "or my favourite: "a nice opalescent moon glow..."

Thelma and I spoke 2 weeks before she died about pots and glazes. I asked her what form she would make if she was making a pot now – She started by describing the glaze -she was thinking that she'd like to have a red glaze – not a brownish red, but a pinky red – the form would open up at the base, and then close in, almost creating a sphere and then open upwards and out. I hope to make such a pot- to try to capture that sense of grace, which encapsulates something of Thelma.

I will miss Thelma enormously. I am so thankful for her special friendship over 18 years as well as everything that she taught me and shared with me. I have chosen an extract from a favourite poem by TS Eliot which expresses a glimpse of the spiritual element in Thelma's

pots, which transcends time.....and which for me is a reminder of her spirit expressed in their form...

Dear Janet

Please could you answer these questions for me if you can.? I really do not mind if you just jot down words for me next to the questions. They will be of great help. Please do not worry if you cannot answer a question, I am just trying to gather as much about her as I can as there is very little written about her here.

Thank you for your time and effort. I look forward to hearing from you

1. When did you start working with clay and how did you meet up with Thelma?

I first started working with clay in 1983 at a pottery evening class in London – (My first degree is in Fine Art (painting) from Winchester School of Art) – I decided that working with clay and in 3D would be a good way to explore form and improve my drawing. Three years later I spent 6 months as a visiting artist at the Lalit Kala Academy in Calcutta and my interest in working with clay developed. When I returned to London, I was accepted at the Royal College of Art to do an MA in the Department of Ceramics and Glass –where I hoped to learn more technical skills. I worked in earthenware, mostly making handbuilt, surface-decorated pots and doing surface design – After my first year, my Department asked me to undertake a Degree by Project – to research issues face by artisans and crafts producers in the developing world and produce a report, including case studies– I was awarded a third year at the RCA for this and was encouraged to research other media as well as ceramics. My main case study on block-printed textiles was researched in Bangladesh. I was also commissioned to make pots through the Royal Overseas League and Designers Guild during this time and continue making pots. I met Thelma at my Degree Show at the RCA in the summer of 1991. We discovered that we lived close by each other and she invited me to come to her studio to discuss the possibility of me working with her in her studio on a mutually beneficial basis –.

How long did you share studio space? 1991-94 full time, then part time /occasionally 1995-2001 as a part time job became full-time. I still made regular visits to Thelma and her studio at weekends or during annual leave and kept a supply of clay prepared for her to throw. I helped with mixing and firing glaze trials and also glazing Thelma's pots. During this phase we did an average of 3-6 firings a year. I made several small ranges of my own work during this time as well. From 2001-2002 I changed my working hour to a four day week and returned to work in the studio on Fridays and depending on what was needed for Thelma's pots and mine, on Saturdays and Sundays.

2. What can you remember about Thelma's work ethic and her work?

Thelma was disciplined – and methodical in her approach to work– She was uncompromising on form and where others might have gone ahead and fired a sub-standard pot – unless it would do for the kitchen – Thelma would break up the raw pot for reclaiming and start another one. She was inspired by the work ethic of Bernard Leach –and especially by Chinese and Japanese pots. She was often up and in the studio in her dressing gown before breakfast. Even after dinner if there was something she was working on - she would go back in the studio. She also had a spontaneous streak in her and might decide to stop throwing to make a small hand built sculptural piece or a clay bird to test a new possible glaze or idea. She took an active interest in the work of her contemporaries – and often went to galleries or to see previews of auctions. She had a great eye for detail and collected the work of many other potters including, Rie, Coper, Leach.

3. How often did she work in her/your studio a week?

Almost every day – exceptions were when she and her husband travelled to South Africa for 6 weeks during February/March every year.

4. When did you start working with Thelma?

1991

5. What was your profile in the studio with regards to Thelma's work? Was it your studio she was working in or did you work in her studio?

It was always Thelma's studio – She was very generous in sharing it with me.

6. Please give me a CV of your training and exhibitions. (attached to email)

I have looked on the internet and see you are more of a painter than a ceramist?

I am an artist and designer.

7. B. What is your feeling about this? I looked at the WOW gallery. Is this your work as there may be other Janet Rogers?

This is definitely **not** my work – I don't have any of my paintings on an on-line gallery.

I am familiar with the work of Mary Rogers. Is she any relation?

No - I am not related to Mary Rogers – Thelma – admired her work and had a small pot made by her in her collection. There were two potters on my paternal grandmother's side of the family

8. What is your favourite medium?

I love working with clay – but second to that drawing

9. What temperature did Thelma fire her porcelain at?

We used pyrometric cones - biscuit firing to 1000 degrees – 1260 degrees for most of Thelma's glazes - though we went by the cones and I always watched the kiln through the night. When we were firing

10. Where did she fire her work? I know she had a small studio but did she fire her work there?

Yes she fired it at the studio at Brookfield from when they moved to the UK – Before that her studio was at Bompas Road. She brought her electric wheels with her and much of the studio equipment but a new kiln was purchased

11. Do you know where she sourced her Glaze recipes from?

She got some from fellow potters but also experimented and tested – referring to books The Potter's Dictionary of Materials and Techniques by Frank Hamer and Janet Hamer. She subscribed to Ceramic Review and other potters magazines, was a member of the Craftsman Potters Association.

12. Where did she buy her porcelain?

Potclays or Pottery craft in the UK

13. What was your impression of Thelma's studio work

elegant – accomplished – uncompromising on detail – If she wasn't happy with it would never come out of the studio.

14. Did Thelma influence your work in any way or was she influenced by your work?

Her sense of form and uncompromising commitment to getting this right influenced my work I think my work was less refined when I first started working with Thelma. Sometimes she asked me to paint a line around the rims of her pots when her hand was not as steady as needed.

15. Do you know where Thelma sold her work and if there are any collectors in the UK that you know of?

Thelma exhibited her work and sold it through the Goodman Gallery in Johannesburg. She had an exhibition in Hampstead in the 90s but mostly her pots were given to family and friends with a few sold privately – The family would have more information on this – I think you have cuttings from the newspapers – I don't have the exact date

16. How was her work received in the UK? Did she enter competitions and exhibitions?

By the time she came to the UK Thelma was in her early seventies and she didn't enter competitions and exhibitions, but there was an interest in her and in her work in pottery circles.

Can you remember any particular points about Thelma and her work?

I think I have covered most of this already –I learned some special tips from Thelma and techniques that will I will continue to use when I get the chance to make pots again. One of the more challenging things for me was glazing – getting the glaze on evenly–poured the glaze into the inside- and then spraying the outside of her pots - It was quite a challenge to get the right thickness of glaze – There was a special tool for measuring the thickness – a hatpin!

17. I am honoured that Thelma gave me her wheel before she died and I hope that I shall be able to continue developing my own work when I come back from India (to be based in the UK from 2010 rather than India).

Janet Rogers

Questions for Mrs Wagner

Please could you answer these questions for me if you can. They would be of great help.

1. When and How did you meet Thelma Marcuson?

Thelma Marcuson's work was known to me from when I started my fine craft gallery in 1980. I met her in person through Hym and Jeni Rabinowitz, when they came with the Marcusons to my gallery round 1983. They were good friends of the Rabinowitzes and often travelled with them to Namaqualand to look at the flowers in spring.

2. What were your impressions of her work ethic and did you know that she made earthenware to begin with?

Her work ethics were impeccable. She had an incredible feeling for quality in general and in particular for ceramics. She was most probably her own harshest critic and if she was not happy with some aspects of her work she would destroy it. Yes, I was aware that she started with earthenware, but most ceramicists did in the early days of South African studio ceramics, and, of course, in those days everyone was greatly influenced by Esias Bosch.

3. What did you think of her work as an artist? And more specifically what did you think of her porcelain work?

She had integrity, not only as an artist, but also as a human being. She always gave her honest opinion and was very straight forward in everything she did, but she was also an extremely kind person.

4. Can you think of any artists that may have influenced her work?

Lucy Rie above anyone else.

5. Did she have any other exhibitions at your gallery beside the one in 1980?

I have had her work on a regular basis on display in my gallery until she left South Africa, often with works by Hym Rabinowitz, Tim Morris, Marietjie van der Merwe, Katherine Glenday, Lynnley Watson, and Andrew Walford...

6. Did she have solo exhibitions or were they group exhibitions? If she had a group exhibition, can you remember who the other people were?

Her output was not big because she was so meticulous, I showed her work always with other artists' works.

7. Can you remember exactly when she and her husband Neil left for the UK

Unfortunately I cannot remember the exact dates, but the SA Ceramics Ass. Could surely help you there. I shall also try and find out for you.

- 8. Please would you just jot down any reminiscences you have of her or what she did. It all helps put together a picture of a person who made fine ceramics and helps piece together her history.**

You should read up about the trip to Japan she under-took with Bosch and other SA potters. There is a wonderful story about her carrying a special bowl that was given to Esias Bosch, which she dropped by mistake. When I visited her in her Craighall/Johannesburg home and her studio to buy work, she thought I looked a bit pale and rushed off into her kitchen to make breakfast for me. She had an unfailing eye for good art and was well travelled. She also owned Lucie Rie's work. That is all I can think of right now.

Keep well. Nana

Mrs Morris

Please could you answer these questions for me if you can. They would be of great help.

- 1. When and How did you meet Thelma Marcuson?** I met Thelma in 1970 either before or after I married Tim. I think I met her at the Goodman Gallery in Dunkeld. I remember her exclaiming about my false eyelashes - we all wore them at the time! I liked her immediately.
- 2. What were your impressions of her work ethic and did you know that she made earthenware to begin with?** She was absolutely passionate about pottery and worked very hard developing glazes and new techniques. I did not know that she made earthenware to start with.
- 3. Did you see the earthenware she made and if so what was it like and can you possibly think of who were her influences for this work?** I never saw the earthenware but I did know that she was friendly with Sammy Lieberman who influenced a lot of potters. He was one of the first potters in SA and certainly the only one to set up a production line exclusively in earthenware. He helped Tim in the early days.
- 4. Thelma Told me that Tim was one of the people who influenced her and helped her make the transition from earthenware to stoneware. Can you remember this episode and if so can you jot down any memories you have of this.** I have no memories of Thelma's transition from earthenware to stoneware. This may have been prior to 1970.
- 5. Do you have any of Thelma's art works in your collection?** Yes I have one of Thelma's pieces - a small pinched vase with a flared rim in a pale blue glaze which Thelma gave Tim. It is unfortunately chipped but very beautiful. Similar pots are illustrated in the Clark Wagner book *Potters of Southern Africa* on page 119. The book was published in 1974 and all Thelma's pots are either stoneware or porcelain at that time.
- 6. Please would you just jot down any reminiscences you have of her or what she did. It all helps put together a picture of a person who made fine ceramics and helps piece together her history.** My memories of Thelma are of a warm hearted delightful person. She was a wonderful hostess and gave great lunches under a vast jacaranda tree in the beautiful garden in Bompas Road (now the British Consulate -- I do hope the tree is still there.) There were always lots of potters at her parties - the big guns like Hym Rabinowitz and Esias Bosch etc. Niel was a dear man and a great host and I think they had a very good marriage.

I hope this satisfactorily answers your questions. I will be glad to help in any way I can. Are you writing a thesis?

Appendix 8

Tatham Art Gallery Invoice and Curators Notes

Telephone 788-7435

18, Bompas Road,
Dunkeld West,
Johannesburg,
2196.

7th March, 1984

TATHAM ART GALLERY

POTS FROM THELMA MARCUSON

1.	Pink crackle bowl	R100.00
2.	Peach bloom bowl	R100.00
3.	Transmutation bowl	R130.00
4.	Blue/green lidded jar	R130.00
5.	Group of three (1973)	R500.00
6.	Hand pinched and pulled blue dolomite glazed vessel	R200.00

Dear Lorna,

Herewith a description of the pots as requested and an invoice.

I'm really proud to have my work included in the Tatham's Collection and it has been a great pleasure to meet you and Julia.

Please do get in touch with me when you are next in Johannesburg and come to have a little lunch with me, and if mango ice cream isn't in season I'll think of something else nice, and fattening!

Very sincere best wishes,

Thelma.

POTS FOR THE TATHAM ART GALLERY FROM
THELMA MARCUSON.

1. Pink crackle bowl Feldspathic glaze. 1983
2. Pale green and pink bowl similar to Chinese peach bloom. Achieved by artificial reduction in oxidising atmosphere by use of copper oxide and silicon carbide. 1981
3. Transmutation glaze ranging from brown rim through pinkish brown to pale blue grey. Iron oxide introduced into glaze to produce colour range. Twice fired, hence run of glaze on foot. This glaze appears to mature more fully in a second firing. 1982.
4. Green/blue crackle jar with lid. 1983.
5. Group of three early porcelain pots. The tall form has a manganese slip brushed onto the raw body and the other two are brushed with cobalt slip and combed through. A dolomite glaze was used. 1973.
6. Hand made pinched and pulled stone ware pot. Dolomite glaze. with small additions of cobalt oxide and green chrome oxide 1974

All pots fired in electric kiln between 1280° and 1300° C.

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Tatham Art Gallery

Serving Msunduzi through the Visual Arts

Tatham Art Gallery Articles

from the Tatham Art Gallery Newsletter 1984 No 2

[Home](#) > [Articles](#) > Fund-Raising

Curator's Notes

Fund-Raising

The daunting task of fund-raising continues because we absolutely must reach our target of R125 000 : An opportunity such as the one presented to us by Johannesburg art dealer Dennis Hotz cannot arise again unless the international art market crashes as Wall Street did in the 1930's. Judging from comparable works offered for sale at auction and by a London dealer, the current market value of Deux Danseuses en Buste should be in excess of a quarter of a million rand.

The pastel was given to the Tatham Art Gallery on long option by the art dealer in a sympathetic gesture to allow us to fund-raise, and in this way secure an extraordinary work for our French collection at a low price.

Twice we have held our breath because we believed that a single donor had come forward to make a "newsworthy" gift. The SABC were alerted and were ready to report, and twice there has been a "slip twist cup and lip".

The Pietermaritzburg City Council has taken our campaign seriously and secured the option by offering us bridging finance.

Please support us by sending your contributions to:

- "Trust Fund for Special Purchases"
- The City Treasurer
- P.O. Box 261
- PIETERMARITZBURG

Please note:

The above address and details are included for historical reasons. If you want to make a donation to the Tatham Art Gallery please address it to **The Tatham Art Gallery Board of Trustees** at [our current contact details](#).

Speaking of fund-raising campaigns, congratulations must be extended to

Collection



The Tatham Art Gallery holds an [Art Collection](#) that contains significant British and French artworks dating back to the 18th century. Its South-African art collection is focused on, but not exclusive to, the art of KwaZulu-Natal.

Exhibitions



The Tatham Art Gallery hosts a range of [Art Exhibitions](#). These include traveling and researched exhibitions as well as exhibitions initiated by the Gallery and compiled from the collection.

Articles



A selection of [current and archival articles](#) from the Tatham Art Gallery. These articles provide a historical and contemporary perspective on the Gallery and the visual arts in KwaZulu-Natal.

Art Gallery Shop



The Tatham Art Gallery shop stocks high quality works by local crafters. It is an ideal place to find unique presents and original collectables.

the Durban Art Gallery's Curator, Jill Addleson, the chairperson of the Art Gallery Advisory Committee, Ros Sarkin, and artist and newspaper critic, Andrew Verster, for spearheading the blitz campaign which the Durban public responded to so enthusiastically. The result, of course, was the acquisition, at auction, of the first John Constable oil painting to enter a South African public collection.

The painting is entitled East Bergholt Church and was purchased on the advice of Brian Sewell who, as you know, has acted as the London agent of the Tatham Art Gallery since 1974. The advantage of having Brian Sewell aware of the needs of both Natal Collections is that the art galleries (only 50 miles apart, after all) can dovetail and build up a formidable aesthetic and educational repertoire not only for Natalians but also for visitors to the Province.

New purchases for the collection are a source of pride, I suspect, because the art gallery staff become very intensely involved long before the painting, sculpture or whatever is acquired. After the initial choice of a suitable work is made, the purchasing process of going through two highly critical committees and the full City Council begins. Before and during this process, nervous activity involving research, argument, and bargaining goes on behind the scenes. The gallery staff see most purchases, therefore, as a victory worthy of press publicity.

Not all purchases are made in this way, however. One notable exception was made during a visit to Johannesburg when I was introduced to one of South Africa's most accomplished potters and glaze chemists, Thelma Marcuson. After my visit I bore away nine prize examples of her work, three of which feature on the cover of Garth Clark's celebrated book "Potters of Southern Africa". The works slipped quietly into our permanent collection, and I hope that this small mention serves in some way to draw attention to the fact that our contemporary South African Ceramic collection has received a shot in the arm with such worthy additions.

At other times quite remarkable purchases present themselves by sheer chance. A private collector from Durban, James Logan, who came to the Tatham Art Gallery to deliver a small work to be included in the Clement Senegue exhibition, mentioned in passing that he had been a friend of Merlyn Evans and owned one of his paintings. The Assistant Curator and I travelled to Durban to see the painting. Several exclamations later we were on our way back to the gallery with a heavily insured and blanket-wrapped canvas.

Some good natured bargaining had taken place with neither James Logan nor myself aware of the true current market value of the work; we settled on what seemed to be a reasonable price. Two telephone calls to London and an express delivery of a photograph to our agent established that what we had been offered was not only a rare and major work of the 1940's but also a work worth almost double the price negotiated. Much to James Logan's credit he honoured the original price. We are now the proud owners of a Merlyn Evans oil and tempera entitled Midnight Picnic (an article on the painting appears in the Newsletter under the "New Acquisitions"). We are hoping to offer this work to the Tate Gallery for the Merlyn Evans Retrospective Exhibition which is presently being planned.

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Lorna Ferguson
 Curator

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