

The Crust of the Earth

by Sara Hakkert



PHOTOS: AVI HIRSHPFIELD

Israeli potter Hilda Merom is a prolific artist producing works in many veins, but is currently concentrating on saggar firing. Saggar firing enables Hilda to utilize different materials to reflect a clear aesthetic based on extensive experimentation.

Merom basically makes two shapes—an upright-type vessel, which rests comfortably on a large base and sometimes exceeds 30 inches in height; and a type of plate (thrown or handbuilt), usually a large heavy piece only slightly akin to a normal platter.

The common feature of both shapes is the very distinguished skin, which is unique in color as well as texture. Her pieces are endowed with a very rough surface—harsh incisions crossing their surfaces, and lumps of rough clay scattered—creating a relief of geological quality. Light and shadow spread in a dramatic way, which is

enhanced by patches of muted colors of varied strength—from pale pink to strong red with shades of yellow and white in between. The coloration, as well as the special treatment of the surface, is obtained both in the building of the work and in the firing.

Building the Work

Hilda wedges different amounts of wooden shavings into the clay, which upon firing leave her works lighter and with an uneven surface. The finished pot is never glazed but the surface is enriched by mineral solutions such as copper, iron, etc., applied together with the organic materials to selected areas of the pot. Furthermore, she regularly uses bits of metal, copper wire, sawdust, seeds, eggshells, used coffee grounds, sea shells and seaweed—nothing is discarded in the Merom household, and neighbors and friends willingly supply their share.

Hilda Merom works in a free and spontaneous way, yet the application of the organic and inorganic matter isn't done entirely haphazardly. A clear aesthetic attitude stands behind the impulsive handling and is based on extensive experimentation. She recently conducted over a hundred experiments with different organic materials, thus obtaining a wealth of possibilities for her work.