

Addition and Subtraction

INTERNATIONAL – SARA HAKKERT considers the saggar-fired pottery of Israeli artist Hilda Merom.

PHOTOGRAPHY – AVI HIRSHFEL



For almost twenty years, Israeli artist Hilda Merom has been producing functional ware and sculptural pieces using a variety of firing techniques. It is the art of saggar firing which holds the greatest fascination. Through this process she feels her ideas about pottery, art and life are brought to the fore.

Three different cultures have shaped Merom's identity: born and educated in Argentina of Polish parents she arrived in Israel as a young woman to join a kibbutz and build her life. The work reflects this diversity and the struggle to define her own identity within the amalgamation of immigrants of contemporary Israeli society. She now lives and works in Kfar Veradim (Rose Village) situated in the green hills of the Galilee.

During her days in the kibbutz studio, Merom worked with clay and, under the supervision of a sympathetic potter, started to develop her skills and chose to pursue ceramics as her main occupation. A five year period spent in the United States was significant. She studied Visual Arts at the Florida International University, majoring in ceramics with Professor Bill Burke. Merom became familiar with American art in general and ceramics in particular and participated in seminars with Peter Voukos, Paul Soldner and Don Reitz. Echoes of their influence and that of Abstract Expressionism remain. Merom also discovered various firing techniques of the Far East which she later pursued and adapted to her needs.

Back in Israel, Merom set up her own studio where she realised the significance of her local environment, the landscape surrounding her home and the neighbouring people. These are the resources that feed her creativity and it is within this milieu that she claims to express her origins and her spirit. 'I see an artist's lifestyle as being part of and similar to their work,' said Paul Soldner. Such is the case with Hilda Merom, whose recent body of work has been realised under this credo.

The elaborate procedure of saggar firing not only entails building the work itself but the use of a variety of organic and inorganic matter in the firing. Merom's treatment of surfaces during the making process exploits the firing to the full. 'Saggar firing provides many ways to utilise different materials and is wide open to individual interpretation according to the potter's personality'.

There are few limitations to the materials that go into the work: pieces of iron and copper wire, sawdust, seeds, eggshells, coffee beans, shells and seaweed are a few examples. Nothing is wasted. The ancient olive oil presses in the neighbouring villages provide discarded olive pulp and pits. Merom's brother-in-law, a farmer, sends his unwanted seeds and peat-moss, on which mushrooms are grown. All

THIS PAGE: Saggar Plate, Ø50cm.