

Hand Building Rebecca 23/04/2020

Welcome back, I hope you had a good Easter and are feeling well. This week we are going to look at Magdalene Odundo's work.

Magdalene Odundo



Dame Magdalene Anyango Namakhiya Odundo DBE is a studio potter. She was born in 1950 in Nairobi , Kenya. She received her early education in both India and Kenya. She attended the Kabete National Polytechnic in Kenya to study graphics and commercial art and later moved to England in 1970 to follow her chosen vocation in Graphic Design. Magdalene completed her qualifications in Foundation Art and Graphics at the Cambridge College of Art.

After a while living in England she discovered pottery and in 1974 – 75 she visited Nigeria, visiting the Pottery Training Centre in Abuja and Kenya to study traditional pottery techniques in hand building. She also travelled to San Idefonso Pueblo, New Mexico to observe the making of black burnished vessels.

In 1976 Odundo received a BA from West Surrey College of Art, now University for the Creative Arts. She then studied for a master's degree at the Royal College of Art. She taught at the Commonwealth Institute from 1976 – 1979 and at the Royal College of Art from 1979 – 1982, before returning to teach at the Surrey Institute of Art and design in 1997, becoming Professor of Ceramics in 2001.

In March 2016 she was inaugurated as an Emerita Professor of the University for the Creative Arts, Surrey, with a celebration event held at Farnham Campus against the back drop of a work in glass called Transition 11. She lives and works in Surrey. In 2017 Odundo took the role of Chancellor of the University of the Creative Arts, Surrey.

Odundo's best known ceramics are hand built, using a coiling technique. Each piece is burnished, covered in slip, then burnished again. The pieces are fired in an oxidising atmosphere, which turns them a red – orange. A second firing in an oxygen poor(reducing) kiln causes the clay to turn black; this is known as reduction firing. She uses the same types of techniques used by Ancient Greeks and Romans and takes inspiration from countries like China and Mexico. Her graphic design skills are used in her sketches, she is interested in natural forms and this helps her form ideas for her ceramic creations.



Many of the vessels Odundo creates are reminiscent of the human form, her pieces have necks and bellies. Her work is now part of permanent collections of nearly 50 international museums including the Art Institute of Chicago, the British Museum, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, National Museum of African Art, Washington DC.

In 2019, she had a major show of her work, 50 pieces, the exhibition was titled 'The Journey of Things'. This was displayed in the Hepworth Wakefield museum and the Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, East Anglia. A few years ago Odundo's work, a burnished and carbonised terracotta piece, sold for £37,000 at auction.