

In Studio with Shamai Sam Gibsh

Shamai's works are bursting with colour, usually in warm shades of red, and catch the eye with interesting forms and design elements. Participants leave his workshops with an abundance of information about themes such as little-known firing methods like "milk firing".

Evelyne Schoenmann

Shamai, you prefer alternative firing methods. You seem to like open flames ...

Yes, very much so. But I hope you don't think I am a pyromaniac... Joking aside though, my work is carefully planned, but with alternative firing methods, you can never fully control the process. The whole firing procedure has a will of its own, as it were, and the result is correspondingly unpredictable. But that is what I like about this technique: I liberate myself from gas or air pressure in the kiln and surrender to nature,

ton and I've done reduction soda firings. I like the results of these firings too, I find them exciting and unpredictable.

Some of your firing methods, especially "milk firing", are not very well known ...

Although I am satisfied with my alternative firing methods, I am always on the lookout for new ways of achieving more innovative and more interesting results. Milk firing, like obvara, used to be used as a way to seal the body, to make the items more or

participants leave your workshops with a cornucopia of tips and advice.

I firmly believe that knowledge should be shared. I am in the fortunate position of being able to travel around the world a lot and meet a lot of people in the process, and in return I can share my knowledge with them. I collect clay from various countries and integrate it in my works. This enriches me and my work on the one hand and connects me with people from other cultures on the other. I don't think



even knowing that I can never repeat the results. That produces unique objects.

Have you always fired like this or is there "another" Shamai to be discovered?

My enthusiasm for terra sigillata and alternative firing techniques has always predominated, and it is a constant in my work. I would say there is a line connecting the Hellenistic age and my work, just with a personal and contemporary interpretation. Having said that, nevertheless there is a "summer Shamai". Every summer, I have worked with stoneware in Bos-

less functional, perhaps for a lack of glaze or perhaps glaze was too expensive. So using organic material such as milk, flour or egg yolk made sense at that time. Today, we only use these methods for decoration. Milk firing has the advantage that you don't need a kiln; you "decorate" the bisqued pot with low fat milk (1% fat) and then you put it in a bucket full of burning scraps of newspaper. The results are impressive every time!

Instructors often don't reveal their recipes. But you are quite different here. The

much of being secretive and I have no problem when students copy my work. On the contrary, that flatters my ego. Our time on earth is limited so that is why I would like my knowledge to survive and not get lost. As a mentor, I always say to my students, "Collect as much knowledge as possible. That is the only way to find your own artistic language."

Can you recommend a recipe for terra sigillata that both beginners and experienced potters can use?

Gladly! Terra sigillata can be made from

any clay. The recipe is the same for all clay.

- 400 grams of pulverised clay
- 2 grams of sodium silicate
- 2 grams of soda ash (sodium carbonate - mixed with a little hot water)

1 litre of distilled water (rain water or water from an air conditioner is fine too). Mix it all up well with a hand mixer and pour the liquid into a transparent plastic bottle. Leave it to stand for seven days. After these seven days, you can see that the mixture has separated, the clear water has collected in the top half of the bottle. Now pierce a small hole 1 cm below the separating line. Open the bottle cap and let the water run off. What is left in the bottle is terra sigillata and sediment. Carefully pour the terra sigillata into a container and dispose of the plastic bottle with the sediment. The specific gravity should be 1.15 - 1.2. That is to say 100 millilitres of terra sigillata

is a fine, smooth, and plastic element and apply further layers of terra sigillata in various hues and shades. I smooth every layer of terra sigillata with a piece of plastic. The final bisque firing then takes place at 1020° - 1050°C. Smoke firing is then the final stage. This can either happen in a well sealed metal saggar with a handful of sawdust, in a reducing fire or in an electric kiln with a good through draught at 650° - 700°C. (N.B. don't use clay saggars in electric kilns as they are porous and let oxygen in. This prevents the smoking process). Alternatively, you can wrap the bisqued pots in three layers of good quality toilet paper and in the same number of layers of aluminium foil and fire it for two hours at 600°C. After the smoke firings I rub beeswax into my pots.

We would also like to read about your face medallion and the Bodyblaze exhibition.

Let us look ten years into the future. What projects can we find on your wish list there?

I know what I will be doing in the immediate future but as always, everything can change in the course of time. However, I believe that I will develop more into the abstract and I will explore the relationship between the abstract and the concrete. I want to continue giving workshops, taking part in exhibitions and travelling. In 2018, I am going to give masterclasses in India and Israel, a demonstration at the NCECA in Pittsburgh (USA) and I will be taking part in a symposium in Italy.

In addition, you can see a solo exhibition of my work in Denver.

My greatest wish is to find the time to write a book about what I have experienced, about my technique and may knowledge.



should weigh between 115 and 120 grams. Adjust by adding water or allowing liquid to evaporate.

In the photo series here, we see that you use various shades of red. Walk us through the various stages of your technique.

I form my objects on the wheel and smooth the surface with the flexible red rubber kidney. When the pots are bone dry, I apply one or two coats of terra sigillata made from ball clay and I bisque them to 720°C. The pots are still porous enough to be able to use masking tape as a decora-

Bodyblaze, as you say, is the name of one of my exhibitions, including the "personal seals". These are round medallions with the faces of people who are close to me scored in terra sigillata. These faces float in the middle of the medallions, like imperial portraits that you can see on old coins. Each of the medallions is mounted on a thin metal stand. All together, it is like a forest of intimacy and friendship. This work is intended as a homage to all the people who have made an impression in my life up to now.

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Evelyne Schoenmann's next interview is with **Gustavo Perez**, Mexico.

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