

Figurative ceramics with Annie Peaker

Searching the adverts in a 2010 edition of Ceramic Review to find a course teaching only hand-building / figurative ceramics, also one which was not based at the other end of the British Isles, I was pleased to find 3 and 5 day courses being offered by Annie Peaker of Kirk Neuk Studio in Lazonby. So in September 2010 I arrived at Annie and Andy's lovely home to a warm welcome and where I met the rest of the group. That first evening was the start of a week of fabulous food, courtesy of Andy, which fortified us for a happy and busy 5 days of making and learning with Annie, a very gifted artist and teacher.

We concentrated on animals first and how to make legs that support a body. It was a skill I needed to learn and with Annie's clear demonstrations we proceeded to make a macquette of a horse. This was followed with models of standing figures and then we learnt about, and applied, body stains. The figures were bisque fired on the Wednesday. On Thursday glazes were discussed then applied. Annie packed the kiln for an overnight firing and by the afternoon of the fifth and last day we shared the excitement of the kiln being opened and our creations emerging to cool down on a table in the garden. There we gathered in mutual admiration before packing them up and saying our goodbyes.

This course so exceeded my expectations I couldn't wait for the 2011 dates to be fixed in order to sign up again. And yes, I am now home again after another wonderful week of studio tuition with Annie, fortified by Andy's 5 star cuisine. This time Annie was able to help me go about realising an idea I had for an abstracted, standing figure, something that has been in my head ever since I came to the Western Isles. During the week she also covered the making of heads, necks and shoulders; cylindrical columns on which to place our mini-Nelsons or whoever; quick and easy ways to make decorative fish; reclining animals; plus helping anyone who was pursuing a separate path. Again there was the achievement of the two firings which I attribute to Annie's good organisation of our time and her own professional skills.

Lazonby is only about 25 miles south of the border on the old A6 and lies in the beautiful Eden Valley. On this second trip my husband came with me to fish the Eden River and to walk in that peaceful part of Cumbria. We stayed in a nearby, dog- friendly, holiday house but the previous year I had a comfortable B&B stay in the Peakers' home.

Anne McVean

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