



**Sculptural Form**  
h 30 cm x w 24 cm x ø 35 cm

# BARBARA GITTINGS

TIM SAUNDERS

**H**and building bottles and bowls using the Japanese technique of Nerikomi is Barbara's specialism. "Nerikomi artists often use quite strong stains whereas I prefer oxides, which are much softer and more natural," Barbara explains. "I do occasionally use stains but I go for softer ones rather than bright colours."

Nerikomi consists of cutting and slicing different coloured blocks of clay and building up a pattern through it. "I start by staining the clay", she says. "Then I'll roll out different thicknesses and layer them up, alternating colours. I will then slice through the layers, perhaps in a triangular pattern and join the triangles so that they are opposing each other, building up to make a block. I slice through the block, revealing the pattern running through. I join the slices to make a slab and roll it to strengthen it." Barbara usually lets the block of patterned clay sit for a while so that the colours settle and meld onto each other. "I sometimes use an extruder. This is a tube with a die at the end and you put the clay into the tube. Often it will be a slightly patterned clay already or bits I have reclaimed; bits I have had over from something else. The extruder has a plunger and you push the clay through to make the shape. The dies are different shapes; they might be square or triangular or a slightly loopy shape. So that's another way for me to make my block."

Then the building commences.

"I make bottles that are very geometric. First I make a paper pattern, a bit like a maquette. I produce a large slab, big enough for all the pieces to lay alongside each other, so that the pattern will hopefully run around the bottle and match up. I then slab build. I like to push the form, seeing how far I can make each piece lean and twist. For the bowls I use plaster moulds. They have a more patchwork effect, as I gradually build up using small sections. Gener-

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**Little Bottle**, h 12.5 cm x w 8.5 cm x ø 4.5 cm

ally the bowls are less planned. I allow the pattern to dictate what I'm doing, depending on how they fit together, so an element of chance plays a part. When I first started doing Nerikomi I lost an enormous number in the kiln because the colours would part company. It has been quite a long learning curve. I tend to work on several pieces at once and it depends whether I've got a lot of pattern built up. It takes quite a lot of time to create the patterned clay. In fact it takes much longer to do that than to build the actual piece.

Sometimes I'll have quite a lot of patterned clay waiting to be worked on. I'm currently trying to make enough patterned clay for a really big pot and I've been doing it for about four days – I had a little bit of pattern left over from something else so I'm incorporating that into the new pattern."

Barbara has to be careful about where she keeps her clay and has lots of bits of damp fabric and plastic to wrap it up in.

"You do have to be careful that you



"Head" bowl, h 16 cm x w 14 cm ø 16 cm

Three Leaning Bottles, largest h 34 cm x w 16 cm x ø 9.5cm



don't leave it for too long. I have in the past had the experience of making a piece, taking me ages to make and then going back to use it and it's dried out. When that happens I have to reclaim it. I can't use that actual block as it is. I'll dampen it and layer it up again and get a totally different pattern. Sometimes those patterns are really lovely and they're totally unplanned but serendipity comes to my aid."

Larger work is Barbara's focus now. "I've just made a very big perfect semi-circular bowl shape mould with a 30cm diameter. I'm trying to make enough patterned clay to build this bowl. I have made another piece, probably bigger than which is half mould and half free form so I started off in a mould then I built up the sides just with free form slabs. That's my biggest piece to date. Your heart is in your mouth when you put it in the kiln because you just don't know what will happen. It's quite hair-raising at times."

Barbara wants to make more sculptural pieces as well. "I'm not one to just sit back and make work that I've made before. There are some shapes that are successful so I do keep making those but I want to make more challenging things as well. I want to do some wall pieces that stand out in relief. So I'm playing with ideas in my head of how I can achieve that. I go into my studio and the world just recedes."

Earthstone grogged porcelain contains a very fine grog, enabling it to withstand Barbara's smoke-firing process. "The temperature shock can often crack clay and especially with the Nerikomi it can force the colours apart so the grog helps it to withstand the thermal shock of it. I use a paper clay version of the same clay to join with because that strengthens the joins. I also intend to start making with the paper clay because I think I can achieve larger pieces that way as well. I love the whiteness of porcelain as well as how tactile it is. It absorbs the smoke and it takes the colour of the oxides very well."

Once completed her work is low fired. She used to only fire once but nowadays she first fires up to 800 degrees Celsius ensuring that if there is a crack she can repair it with clay and then she re-fires the piece at 1,040 degrees Celsius. "Then I smoke fire it in the bin with crumpled up newspaper to give it an extra layer of effect. It's a very slow process, which results in me producing no more than one successful piece a week; 50 a year."

#### **TIM SAUNDERS**

*is a British journalist. His articles have been published in the Expat Daily Telegraph, Lincolnshire Life and Dorset Life to name but a few. He regularly contributes to publications on subjects including art, ceramics, travel and motoring. He enjoys making pottery and paints under the pseudonym, Ted Wates.*

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**Barbara Gittings** spent 35 years working in the fashion industry. She started adult education classes in pottery in 1999 and quickly became obsessed with clay. Mainly self-taught she has attended several intensive courses including a week smoke-firing with Jane Perryman and a City and Guilds course at the City Lit with Robert Cooper and Dan Kelly. Between 2006 and 2013 Barbara lived, worked and exhibited in France. In 2006 she was selected as one of six potters for the CPA Associates' stand at the Oxford Ceramics Fair. Returning to the UK in 2013 she set up her own studio and since Christmas 2013 she has shown at both the May and Christmas Artists Open Houses in Hove with Miararts at 9A Hove Place. Her work has been shown in several galleries across the UK.

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