

INGER SODERGREN

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Inger Sodergren lives and works in Kisa, a small town situated amongst hills, lakes and woodland in central Sweden, considered to be an area of great natural beauty. I met her in 1992 when she attended one of my first smoke-firing workshops in Cambridge, and since then she has been developing her own distinctive style. While her strong forms, with their dynamic surfaces, refer to ancient processes of burnishing and smoke firing, their inherent sense of Scandinavian design give them a contemporary edge. She says,

I am (primarily) interested in the form, and I like to work with forms in the exciting intersection between functional and sculptural expression.

Sodergren's vocabulary is one of restraint. Her concepts have been realised through the investigation of simple vessel-based forms and the restriction of a monochrome palette of black through to white for the surface decoration.

My work with dishes has been going on for about ten years and has turned towards the



Black Eye, 2004, 56 x 44 x 22 cm (22 x 17 x 8½ in). Photo: Nisse Peterson





Kiln packed with newspaper and pine. Dishes partly covered with resist clay and turned upside down.

Photo: Inger Sodergren



Inger Sodergren controlling the flames by opening and closing the metal lid.

Photo: Christina Wassberg



After the firing.

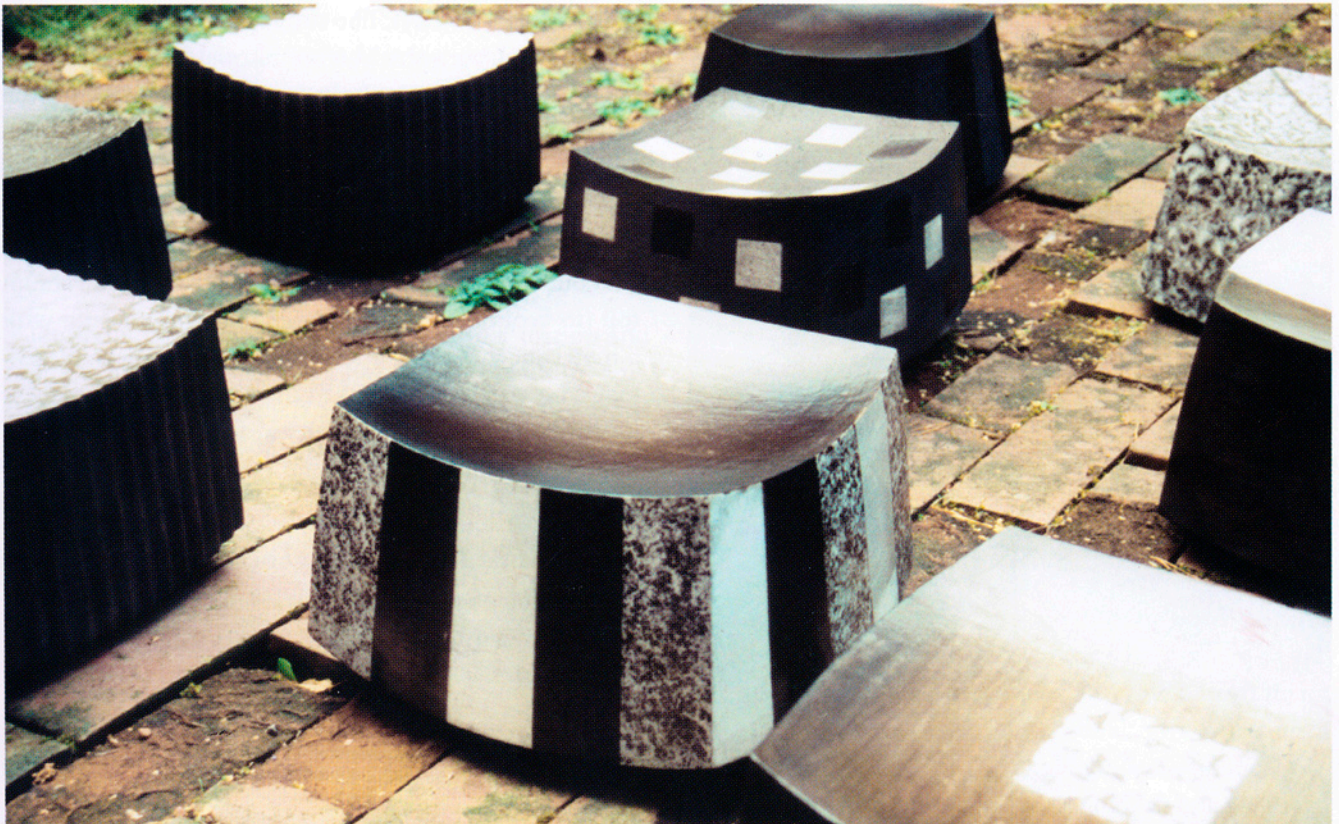
Photo: Inger Sodergren

questions, 'What is a dish, what does it look like and when does it stop functioning as a dish?' My first dishes were round with graphic black-and-white patterns. Then came a period with thick and square plateau dishes. They were slab-built and often inspired by the urban environment.

The influence of large cities developed from a trip to New York followed by a project to interpret

Stockholm's subway into her work. For a week she travelled continuously under the streets of Stockholm – it was crowded and stressful but informed a point of departure for the subsequent exhibition. The 'plateau' dishes which evolved challenged the traditional dish form by metamorphosing into architectural cubes tapering slightly from their round-bottomed bases to a concave shape at the top. They

Plateau Dishes, 2000. 25 x 25 x 17 cm (10 x 10 x 6½ in). Photo: Inger Sodergren





Fingal, 1998. 50 x 50 x 17 cm (20 x 20 x 6 1/2 in). Photo: Niklas Forslind

were designed to sit directly on the floor, without stands, and displayed as an installation.

Other projects have involved a collaboration with the percussionist Peter Bruun, which involved travelling to Africa and studying the instruments of Benin and Nigeria. Sodergren made a variety of *udus* – a kind of coiled drum made of clay.

By experimenting I learned how they work, their requirements and principles. The tradition was only the starting point.

She reinterpreted these traditional drums through her aesthetic of austere, controlled forms and geometric surface patterns, and Bruun prepared a recording of the sounds of the *udus* which was subsequently played during the exhibition. Recently, Sodergren has looked to organic forms of different plant species for inspiration. These pieces are basically black-fired undecorated oval forms treated with sharp cuts at the leatherhard stage to form a rhythmic, linear surface.

Sodergren works with the handbuilding techniques of coiling and slabbing, using a mixture of T-Material and

white stoneware clays. The surface is covered with a ball clay slip and burnished before bisque firing to 1000°C (1832°F). She then applies a masking technique to the surface with a combination of tape and clay slip, using a range of slips, consistencies and brushes to give different results (where the slip is applied thickly, it will be more efficient at blocking out the smoke). Smoke firing is carried out in a simple brick kiln wrapped with aluminium foil (to avoid too much air entering) and covered with a metal sheet. Fuel is a mixture of newspapers, glossy-magazine paper and wood from the garden. The piece is placed above the burning material and the fire controlled by opening and closing the lid or by adding more fuel if necessary. Finally, after cleaning, the piece is polished with beeswax.

With the smoke firing I can reach results that are impossible with glazes, subtle variations between black and brown and unexpected marks from the smoke.