



antra:
personal
expressions in
clay

TEXT: BRINDA GILL



It was during her MFA (Mural Design) at the Faculty of Fine Arts, MS University, Baroda, in 2002 that Antra had her first brush with clay. Her work with the medium led to the crafting of murals, which she says were expressions of creativity, rather than site-specific projects. A year later whilst assisting renowned potter Ray Meeker at Golden Bridge Pottery, her interest in clay work was nurtured; she learned the nuances of the craft from him and steadily found herself being drawn towards it.

Training with Ray Meeker and subsequently with Amrita Dhawan in Kodaikanal, Antra found herself engaged in a dialogue with clay and her expression at the wheel fructified as discs. At her recent show at the Jehangir Art Gallery, Mumbai, she exhibited a collection of discs, of earthy colours and interesting textures that she says revolve around her quest to understand herself in the context of the world. For crafting these discs, Antra places an 8 kg bun of clay on a bat that is placed on the wheel. Almost standing, she compresses the clay — as the wheel moves — into a one-inch-thick disc. On this slab she creates textures, using different objects — tools, natural materials such as seed pods, machine parts, a comb, a net or her hands. She also likes using stamps of Japanese letters (that she finds artistic for their graphics and content), which she crafts out of clay. Once the textures have been created, the slip is applied, and after the top layer has dried (before the clay is leather-hard) Antra stretches the clay to create cracks on the surface.

This process of stretching is what she intensely identifies with. 'I feel it is similar to what I go through. I am often stretched between two opposing factors — as there are opposing forces in the world. The two poles, positive and negative forces, scientific and artistic facets, logical and illogical factors, practical and utopian ideas, all co-exist and this duality, which exists, stretches us. I feel this stretch being released in clay.' After she is



ceramics

satisfied with this process of stretching, the disc is paddled at the rim to give it a regular form.

The discs are then covered with plastic and left to dry slowly over 15-20 days, after which they are bisque-fired to 850 degrees. The glaze is applied with a brush or sponge or poured and wiped. Antra uses a barium feldspar glaze with combinations of nickel, copper or tin oxide as they give her the muted, earthy colours, a matte finish as well as the highlights she seeks. The discs are then reduction-fired at 1300 degrees. At the high temperatures, the glaze melts and reacts with the ash settled on the surface of the piece to yield beautiful colours and also a gradual gradation of colours on some discs. Antra's work predominantly features raw earthy colours, monochromes and matte finishes. 'I like to use glazes that reveal the inherent quality and nature of clay rather than superimposing glazes that are not in harmony with the feel of clay.'

Speaking of one disc that bears vertical lines superimposed on a gently moving but definite spiral, she says the spiral is the movement in the universe and the vertical lines are the friction created by the human mind. Once again speaking of duality, of inward and outward spirals, she says she wishes to be in that spiral that is moving out and upwards and is progressing. Viewing her artistic discs, one is sure this young potter will continue to explore, express and create engaging works in clay. ☺

