MICHAEL CASSON – STUDIO POTTER – 1925-2003

In class this morning I ran a google search for a picture of Mycenaean marine style pottery, and it turned up an obituary for Michael Casson, the studio potter. He was a giant in the world of craft pottery, a pioneer of 20th century studio ceramics, and a lovely man. He died last December. We hadn't known.

I had a good deal of contact with him in the early 90s when he taught at Cardiff Art College. I was researching ancient Corinthian ceramics, was keen to get expert opinion on pottery manufacture and had heard about his interest in the history of ceramics from Helen, my wife, also a studio potter, whom he taught. We met several times when we discussed archaeology and pottery at length from his perspective and with his vast experience of all kinds of pottery making – industrial, studio, ethnographic. I particularly recall a lunch at St David's Hall in Cardiff when I showed him several seventh century BC Corinthian aryballoi that Anthony Snodgrass at Cambridge had generously let me borrow from the university's collection. He loved them. Key issues for Mick: the brushes for painting these exquisite miniatures – they must have been so refined; the clear evidence for using apprentices on the best wares – poorly applied handles; the trickiness of applying slip on slip – some of the perfume jars are multicolored; the clay – needing considerable preparation; and the speed with which they could have been made – a skilled thrower could run one off in 45 seconds or less. I incorporated this and more from him in my book on archaic Greek art.

photo – UK Potters

He was such an inexhaustible energy and a delight to talk with. A delight. He had an expert interest in everything to do with ceramics, craft, art history. And he could engage you because he listened. He crossed borders.

And sure enough – his salt-glazed stoneware shows his interest in Mycenaean pots. Simple beautiful things.

What a loss.

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