



Grey antelope vase

Ian Godfrey

Not on display

Title/Description: Grey antelope vase

Artist/Maker: Ian Godfrey

Born: 1988 - 1989

Object Type: Vase

Materials: Stoneware

Measurements: h. 240 x w. 130 x d. 75 mm

Accession Number: 989

Historic Period: 20th century

Production Place: Britain, England, Europe

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Ian Godfrey played a leading role in helping to consolidate an increasingly sculptural and progressive approach to clay which emerged in the 1960s. Although based on traditional, domestic craft forms (such as bowls, ladles and cups), Godfrey's decorative creations appear more as ritualistic and votive objects, inspired by long-established shapes from ancient cultures, studied from museum collections.

Born in Ely in 1942, Godfrey was educated in London, before going on to Camberwell Art School, where his teachers included Lucie Rie, Hans Coper & Ian Auld. Here, he developed a highly individual, instantly recognisable style of working in clay, influenced by predynastic clay and bronze forms of the Mediterranean and from China.

At the heart of his work is a deeply personal and distinctive blend of fantasy and mythology, through zoomorphic and architectural forms. Godfrey worked at London Zoo for a time, an experience that must surely have provided a stimulus for the expressive and humorous character of his work. [1]

Though very similar in form to another antelope vase in the collection (997), the antelope featured on this vase also incorporates bird-like characteristics, of wings and a long tail. The base of the vase reveals a surprisingly elaborate carved design for the antelope's feet, typical of the highly decorative nature of each and every component of Godfrey's work.

Godfrey demonstrated a distinctive working technique, incorporating both wheel-based work and hand-building, carving the almost dry clay with a pen knife and using the point of a ball-point pen to achieve fine detail.

Lucie Rie regarded Godfrey as her best student at Camberwell: "I met Ian when I started to teach at Camberwell. He was a very interesting student, imaginative and original, and a pleasure to teach. Later, when he became a teacher himself, it was a privilege for his students to be taught by him. His pots are unique and beautiful, and happily impossible to imitate." [2]

In 1962 Godfrey started his own pottery workshop in an Islington basement in London, and in 1967-8 he worked at the Royal College of Art on a pottery fellowship. Over the next few years his work was widely exhibited. He enjoyed great success in the 1970s, with major exhibitions at the British Crafts Centre in London, where his work was noted for its finely carved detail. In 1974 Godfrey was awarded the gold medal at the Faenza international ceramics competition.

A change of direction came in the mid-1970s when Godfrey moved to Copenhagen, where he studied its ancient history and archaeology. Here, he set up a workshop for the potter Hans Jorgen Grum, which mostly made domestic pottery. In 1980 Godfrey returned to London and opened a studio in Highgate. His shapes became simpler and more concentrated in form, whilst still retaining the ritualistic feeling of his earlier work.

Katharine Malcolm, November 2020

[1] <https://www.anglianpotters.org.uk/userfiles/file/newsletters/AP-Autumn-2019.pdf>

[2] Cyril Frankel and James Austin, *Modern Pots* (Norwich: University of East Anglia, 2000), p.142.

Further Reading

Cyril Frankel and James Austin, *Modern Pots* (Norwich: University of East Anglia, 2000), p.142.

<https://www.anglianpotters.org.uk/userfiles/file/newsletters/AP-Autumn-2019.pdf>

<http://www.galeriebesson.co.uk/godfrey.html>

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/obituary-ian-godfrey-1542932.html>

<https://www.maaklondon.com/artists/ian-godfrey/>

<https://www.oxfordceramics.com/artists/123-ian-godfrey/overview/>

<https://www.oxfordceramics.com/publications/28-ian-godfrey-an-enchanted-landscape/>

<https://www.arts.ac.uk/students/library-services/special-collections-and-archives/stories/collections-in-focus-for-lgbtq-history-month-ian-godfrey>

<http://www.studiopottery.com/cgi-bin/mp.cgi?item=88>

