

# Tulliallan 2020

SPRING WEEKEND WORKSHOP, TULLIALLAN POLICE COLLEGE, KINCARDINE FIFE FK10 4BE

Lesley McKenzie



Lesley initially trained as a graphic artist before starting up her own business in 1996, fusing her love of animals and nature with her broad ranging artist talents she is now well known for her beautiful raku animal sculptures, animal portraits and vivid landscape paintings.

Working as a freelance sculptor for Border Fine Arts over a four year period she produced well over 100 animal studies for the company, whilst during this time continuing to develop her own unique style and also discovering raku ceramic and the beautiful possibilities it held for creating lifelike, one off, handmade animal sculpture.

The raku sculptures that Lesley creates are all one off, handbuilt original pieces, they are made using earthenware clay which Lesley wets down to create a slop before adding paper pulp which aids with the raku firing. The slop is then left to dry out back to near it's original clay consistency before kneading and storing for future use.

The sculpture must be hollow and this is achieved by wrapping a thin skin of clay around paper stuffing to create the basic body shape. At this stage the clay is still very wet and has a tendency to slump, Lesley uses props of any nature she finds suitable to hold the form in place, as the clay hardens she works into the details and finer points, minding that everything added must not trap air. Lastly, any smaller details are carved, cut or scratched into the surface of the now leather hard clay.

The sculpture is then dried before bisque firing and glazing. After glazing the piece is then raku fired, this is a fast firing technique where the gas kiln reaches 980°C in about one hour. At this temp the kiln is opened up and the red hot sculpture is carefully removed and placed in a metal chamber containing wood shavings. The intense heat ignites the wood shavings instantly producing a lively fire pit. The chamber is then sealed and the fire suocates as it consumes all the available oxygen leaving a thick acrid smoke and an



oxygen starved atmosphere. The thermal shock of the process causes tiny hairline cracks to appear in the glaze, these cracks and any unglazed areas absorb carbon from the smoke resulting in a rich crackle glaze with a beautiful smoky finish.

Lesley often uses glazes containing copper oxide, these glazes react with the oxygen levels and can produce some wonderful bronze effect finishes. Some of her pieces have a dull coloured matt finish, this is achieved by under glazing at green stage, the under glaze resists the smoke and produces a dull version of its true colour, this can be particularly useful when working on dog commissions where colour is very important.

As a youngster Lesley was always fascinated by animals and nature, she would often recover road casualties and have a little look inside to see where everything was and what it did and was fascinated with taxidermy and anatomy. Although this may seem a little distasteful it has resulted in an in depth knowledge of

muscle and skeletal forms allowing Lesley to sculpt most species of animal with the most basic of reference material whilst still retaining a natural sense of form and movement, many of her pieces are created from memory and experience alone. She will occasionally simplify the form of a piece to give it more sculptural appeal, polar bears, in particular are a favourite for this style as they lend themselves to such beautiful shapes.

Lesley has worked in a variety of mediums and has won many awards, her work is collected internationally and hosted by many of Scotland's top galleries.