

Homage to the elements

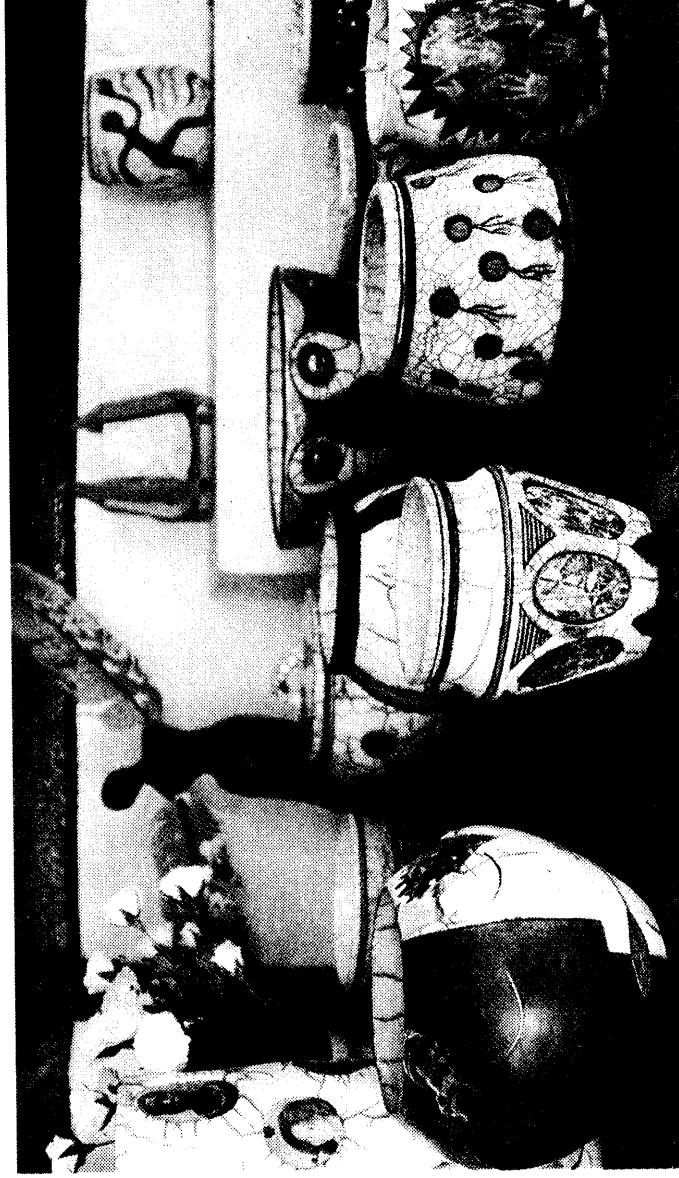
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Be it the pattern of a puff adder, traditional *lolwapa* decoration with ochre, earthen colours, the texture of the Kalahari sands, seeds from the bushveld, plant structures or crawling animals – all this is reflected in the pottery of Rika von Schwerin-Franken and Wendy Keorapetse Phatsima.

The two potters that work together under the brand name of *Terra Cotta* both have a strong bond with the country that is their home, Botswana. They have adapted techniques from Europe and Asia and transformed them to produce beautiful organic, comforting, serene and African ethnic pottery. The colours are earthy and natural as in the desert sands and the shapes are round and soft as in the traditional pottery.

It is the association to local liveliness and aesthetics while incorporating excitingly vivid surface texture and decoration that make these artefacts desirable. They lead the observer back to childhood days in the village, recounting stories of the elders while at the same time introducing modernity and a sparkling creativity.



ration. Thus each piece of pottery becomes an individual piece of art never to be repeated.

The danger of temperature extremes, the fire, the acrid fumes and the occasional loss of craftwork through breakage are factors that the ceramic artists willingly take upon themselves in order to produce this unique earthenware.

Von Schwerin-Franken is a professional ceramicist and ceramic designer originally from Germany who has been learning, living and working in Botswana since 1982. Phatsima originally comes from Gabane and trained as a potter and thrower with her present business partner and at the Pelagano Pottery.

They are currently exhibiting at the Alliance Francaise together with Robert Semeniuk (Ukrainian Photographer) and Petra Rohr-Rouendaal (German Artist). The artists are exhibiting under the theme 'Day by Day'. The concept of the exhibition is to point out everyday-life situations in this country, some of which are tough and deserve attention. The aim is to show the good and the bad and above all, – to point out the truth. The Exhibition opens today (Friday), starting at 6 pm and will run till the December 13.

Von Schwerin - Franken and Phatsima's pottery portray techniques from Europe and Asia

It is their philosophy to inspire people, to pass on messages and to initiate contemplation. The artists want to create awareness as well as produce aesthetically pleasing objects of a practical nature. They aim at touching people and sowing a bit of happiness and thoughtfulness here and there.

The temperature shock due to rapid cooling of the earthenware in air and water produces unpredictable cracks in the glaze where the smoke then penetrates and blackens the artefacts. To extend the irregular and vivid markings into flat surfaces that are not covered in glaze the ceramic artists use the traditional technique of burnishing with yellow ochre which creates a lively mottled red hue in the black partitions.

The whole production process aims at creating surprising and individual asymmetric patterns that supplement the hand-designed graphic elements that make up the overall design. The irregularities give the artefacts life, texture and a specific depth in the surface deco-

The clay work combines imagery relating to nature, tradition as well as social issues with the experiential approach of Raku and local firing techniques. In this firing process, the pots are removed from the red-hot kiln and submerged first into organic material which smoulders and catches fire and then immersed into water. True to their brand name '*Terra Cotta*' (fired earth) they invite not only fire and earth, but also all the elements into creating their artistic products.