

Book Reviews

DRAWINGS, VERSE AND BELIEF

Author: Bernard Leach

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In 1987, Great Britain issued a special set of postage stamps in honor of the centenary of the birth of that country's most famous potter, Bernard Leach. The ceramic works reproduced on the stamps are testimony both to the artist's vision of himself as "a courier between the East and the West" and to his importance in the history of the modern craft movement. Working from his studio in St. Ives, Cornwall, Leach revitalized the moribund Western pottery tradition and infused it with a fresh vision rooted in Oriental cultures. The artist, who was born in Hong Kong and who also spoke fluent Japanese, lived both in England and the Orient. He had the unusual distinction of being named a Commander of the Order of the British Empire for his contribution to the development of British pottery, as well as receiving an Order of the Sacred Treasure, Second Class, from the Japanese government for his artistic activities in that country.

Those who wish to know more of Leach and the full range of his creativity will be delighted with the appearance of a third, revised and enlarged edition of *Drawings, Verse and Belief*, a collection which was first published in 1973. It joins a series of his other publications—including *A Potter's Book* (1940), *Kenzan and his Tradition* (1966), *Hamada, Potter* (1975) and *Beyond East and West* (1978)—in giving valuable insight into Leach's multitalented expressions in the arts.

The bulk of the book consists of examples of Leach's poetry, paired with charming reproductions of his brush drawings and works in pen and pencil. The subjects range from views of the coastline of Japan to delightful depictions of small animals. The gentle beauty of the Taoist flow of nature is there, as is the Western emphasis on the value of the individual life. A depiction of Leach's young son, David, his innocent face peering from an oversized rain slicker, is poignant; equally so is his portrait of Minagawa, the last pattern-painter in Japan. There is something reminiscent of Rembrandt's profound love of humanity in the sure, expressive strokes.

The poetry shows a similar range of subject matter, and there are often interesting parallels between Leach's visual images and his poems. One can find examples of early works written in anguish over the senseless slaughter of World War I and then trace his development to later works which show an expression of a transcendent oneness with the creative energies of Nature and of the Divine:

JAPANESE MOUNTAINS

Standing
 Upon this pin-point
 Of time and place
 I watch the waters
 Run to the sea,
 And the mountains
 Climb to Heaven.
 The waves of the sea
 Dance before the mountains
 And they before God.

1966

Leach's evolution as a spiritual being was rooted in his deep commitment to the Bahá'í Faith. It was the American artist Mark Tobey who introduced Leach to the beauty of the Bahá'í writings, and it was also Tobey who gently led him from an unhappy agnosticism to an understanding of the nature of the age we live in and the Bahá'í belief in the future development of a world culture uniting the best of all traditions. For Leach, the Bahá'í Faith was

inherent in my thoughts whether written, drawn, or tucked away in the back-ground of my pots. In whatever field of truth and beauty expression is sought, ultimately it appears to be a bridging of gaps between people and things, and of love between people and people, a discovery of Totality enveloping the minor self.

Leach himself chose the poetry and art works for *Drawings, Verse and Belief*, and he also wrote an introductory section. The book ends with reflections by the artist stemming from a 1976 interview for the BBC just three years before his death at age 92. The reader is only left wondering about the identity of the author of the helpful four-page introduction to the entire book, as no indication is given. In all, however, this is a fine contribution to an appreciation of Leach's work and opens further dimensions to an understanding of an artist who has truly shown us what it means to be a citizen of the world.

JULIE BADIEE