



## 20 Appendix 2 - Report on the former Mirek Smíšek kilns

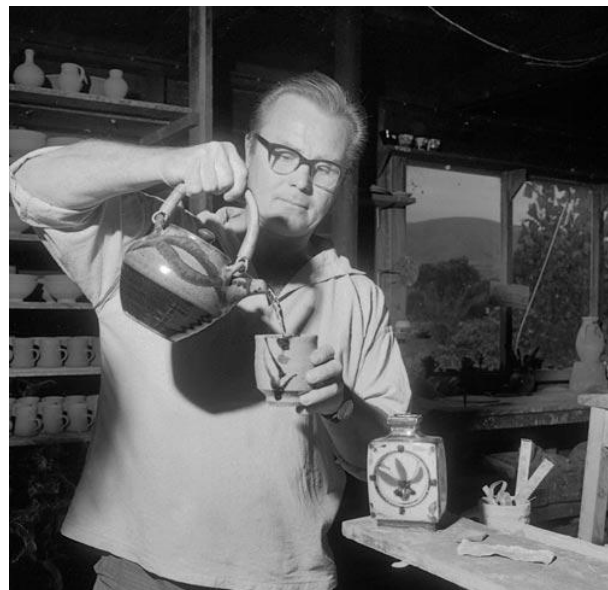
This report was commissioned to investigate the significance of the two beehive kilns on the former Mirek Smíšek property as they are in the line of the proposed Peka Peka to North Ōtaki Expressway.

### 1 Outline biography

The following are two web-based entries, which give an outline biography for Mirek Smíšek and his significance in the New Zealand art scene. The first is a Te Ara encyclopaedia entry from 1967, and the second, a description of a retrospective exhibition of his work held between 2010 and 2012.

#### **Mirek Smíšek 1967**<sup>13</sup>

Mirek Smíšek, originally from Czechoslovakia, arrived in New Zealand in 1951 after a few years in Australia. After working at Crown Lynn Potteries in Auckland he shifted to the Nelson Brick and Pipe Company and became its manager in 1954. He left there in 1957, building a studio in Stoke where he worked as a potter. From 1958 he also taught at the Nelson Technical School. Smíšek became one of the country's first full-time professional potters. He shifted to Te Horo on the Kāpiti coast in 1969. Nelson is endowed with fine clays and glaze materials, which continue to be used by potters.



#### **Mirek Smíšek 60 years 60 pots**<sup>14</sup>

Dates: January 2010 - July 2012

Born in Czechoslovakia in 1925, Mirek Smíšek (OBE) has forged a career as a remarkable New Zealand artist since arriving here in 1951. Mahara Gallery has produced the first ever full survey exhibition and accompanying publication considering Smíšek's life's work.

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<sup>13</sup> <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/nelson-region/14/2>

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.exhibitionsservices.co.nz/exhibitiontours/show/smisek>

*"Mahara Gallery's exhibition 'Mirek Smíšek: 60 Years 60 Pots' is a stunning survey of our pioneering studio potter. Mirek's ceramics are gutsy, resolute and brilliantly muscular. In balancing his forms with innovative texture and limpid glazes he creates pots that actually breathe with life. His melding of ancient Asian and Continental ceramic traditions is a bravura affirmation of an artist's innate affection for the everyday. An important exhibition celebrating an exceptional talent".* **Ron Brownson, Senior Curator New Zealand and Pacific Art, Auckland Art Gallery, Toi o Tāmaki.**

*"Mirek was one of the earliest and a genuine pioneer of studio pottery in New Zealand who gave inspiration to us all. He needs to be at least as well known as the generation that followed him. 'Mirek Smíšek: 60 Years 60 Pots' is a genuine revelation of his achievement".* **Hamish Keith, art writer and cultural commentator.**

*"Mirek Smíšek is one of our great treasures. In the 25 years I have spent working on the fringes – and at the heart – of the decorative arts, Mirek stands out as a maker of real stature, accomplishment and generosity. His personal story, his 'attitude' as a maker, his innovative practice and his distinctive works deserve wider recognition and fuller appreciation".* **Tim Walker, past Director of The New Dowse, art consultant.**

*"In the pantheon of those other 'core' post Second World War studio potters who laid the path for another way in studio based ceramics, Smíšek's career has, surprisingly, not yet received a full survey and analysis which records and recognizes his achievements. This unquestionably needs to happen to extend and balance the conversations about his part of the story".* **Louis le Vaillant, Director / Curator The Johnston Collection, Melbourne.**

*"For too long we have tended to concentrate on the work of just a few of our senior potters to the exclusion of others. This extremely valuable and comprehensive exhibition and its fine accompanying book achieve for Mirek Smíšek something that was due to him many years ago. His work always had a distinctive character which needs to be recognised again as interest in the history of New Zealand's studio pottery steadily continues to grow"* **Peter Shaw, curator, art historian and writer.**

### **Brief Biography**

Born in Bohemia in 1925, Smíšek left Communist Czechoslovakia in 1948 in search of freedom and determined to live a creative life, after spending much of War Two in Nazi prisons and labour camps. He began his working life as a potter in Canberra and Sydney in 1948-49, then assisted English potter Ernie Shufflebottom at Crown Lynn in Auckland in 1951. He became New Zealand's first independent studio potter in 1954, establishing a studio in Nelson, and galvanizing the beginnings of the pottery movement there. During his sixteen years in Nelson, Smíšek also travelled widely, and worked in Japan with pottery Masters Shoji Hamada and Kenjiro Kawai, and with Bernard Leach at his pottery at St Ives in Cornwall. In 1968 he moved to the Kāpiti Coast, and has built three studios here over the past 40 years. He has continued to work prolifically on domestic ware which fuses function and aesthetic qualities to a high degree, inspired by ancient sources including Celtic and medieval Europe, the pre-Japanese Jomon civilization and the 20th century Mingei folk-craft movement.

Smíšek's work is represented in Australia, Belgium, Canada, Czechoslovakia, England, Fiji, Germany, Japan, Korea, the U.S.A and New Zealand. He was awarded a Diploma for Distinguished Work by the World Crafts Council at their 1974 International Exhibition in Toronto and an OBE for his services to New Zealand pottery in 1990.

**Exhibition Content:** Sixty works surveying Smíšek's key forms of bowls, yunomi, vases,

jugs, crocks and plates. The earliest work was made in Sydney in 1949; 3 pieces of Bohemia ware from Crown Lynn, Auckland, 1951; early work from Nelson, 1954-68; Kāpiti, 1969-2009.

**Presentation:** Eight large bowls presented as wall works, four large crocks and vases on floor-plinths. 48 smaller bowls, yunomi, jugs and vases displayed in five enclosed wall-cabinets.

**Publication** A 78 page book including all 60 works in the exhibition reproduced in colour, with a foreword by Gillian Deane, biographical essay by Janet Bayly, and critical essay by Justine Olsen, chronology, potter's marks. The biographical essay by Janet Bayly puts Smíšek's work in the context of his life-story, formed by his childhood in Czechoslovakia, his experiences as a POW during World War Two, his move to New Zealand, and the range of international influences on his work.

Justine Olsen's critical essay surveys Smíšek's contribution to the development of ceramics as an artform in New Zealand since the 1950s, with reference to the Bernard Leach Pottery at St Ives, the Japanese Mingei folk-art movement and Pottery Masters Shoji Hamada and Kenjiro Kawai.

#### **Audio Visual**

Mirek Smíšek, potter (1986). (DVD) An excellent 36 minute video documentary made by Stan Jenkins for the Department of Education, supported by QE 11 Arts Council.

## **2 Beehive kilns, Te Horo**

### *2.1 Description*

The structures built and used by Smíšek at his Te Horo pottery comprise two beehive kilns with a chimney between and to the north of them, under an open timber framed, shingle clad shelter. The kilns are approximately 2.5 metres high and 2 metres in diameter and sit on a concrete base. They have an opening to the south and have cable and steel strapping around their circumference. There are several smaller openings and the east kiln is connected at ground level with the chimney. The kilns have a ring of salt glazed bricks at the springing of the dome and the interiors are both salt glazed.

Next to the kilns and attached to the shelter is a rustic drying shed constructed of found materials.

### *2.2 Condition*

There is some erosion of bricks and mortar, extensive rusting of steelwork and in some cases there are gaps between the bricks from interior to exterior. There is vertical cracking of the chimney, which also has rusting of steel straps and angled corner supports.

There is vegetation growth at the base and some vegetation growth in the mortar joints of the kilns.

The timber shelter has most of the shingles missing and those that remain are rotted. The drying shed is open to the elements and has rotten framing and cladding at its base.

## **3 Conversation with Mirek Smíšek on the kilns, 2.30 pm 30 March 2012**

- considers that the kilns are a “significant cultural asset in the history of New Zealand pottery”
- they are the only kilns left built and used by him, all others have been demolished
- he built the kilns himself with his 2 years old daughter
- the kilns were where he explored and developed his seminal salt glazing technique although he had begun experimentation in Nelson before he relocated to Te Horo
- he fired most of his nationally and internationally significant work in the kilns
- he is happy to advise on any work involving the kilns
- he lived in Te Horo 40 years, which comprised most career

## **4 Outline assessment of significance**

The kilns were built by Mirek Smíšek, one of New Zealand’s earliest and most significant potters and they were used by Smíšek to fire his signature salt glazed pottery. He explored and developed this form of glaze largely at his property at Te Horo, using the kilns over a 40 year period, comprising most of his life as a potter. There are no other kilns built and used by him. His pottery and kilns in Nelson were demolished for the Nelson Bypass.

Therefore, the kilns possess physical, historical and cultural heritage values. The kilns have architectural values in their design and use, and the association with their builder and designer. They also have technological and scientific value in their use by Smíšek to innovate in pottery glazing techniques and they have rarity value in being the only kilns surviving made and used by him. Their historic values are in their association with one of New Zealand’s most highly regarded and recognized potters and in their use by him to explore his art form. The kilns have cultural values in being intimately identified with Smíšek and their educative importance in the history of pottery in New Zealand.

## **5 Recommendations**

Because of their high level of significance, it is recommended that the kilns and chimney be carefully deconstructed and re-erected in a sympathetic environment before construction of the roadway begins.

Ian Bowman

11 May 2012