

# JOSLYN TILSON





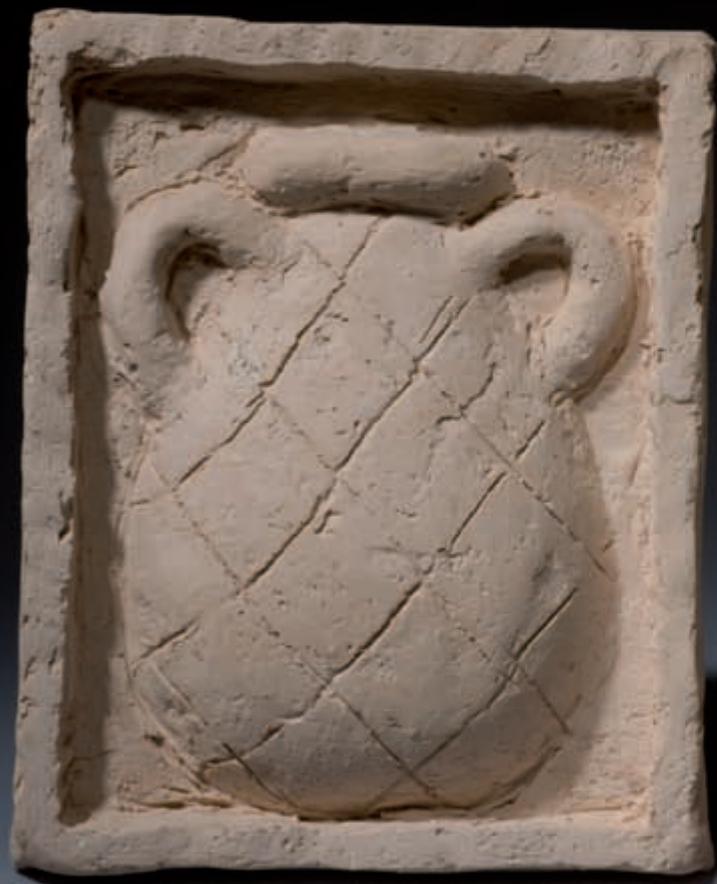
# JOSLYN TILSON

## Terracottas and Weavings

13 January - 4 February 2010



15 ROYAL ARCADE · 28 OLD BOND STREET · LONDON W1S 4SP  
TEL 020 7491 1706 · FAX 020 7495 3203 · MONDAY-FRIDAY 10-5.30  
E-mail: [enquiries@galeriebesson.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@galeriebesson.co.uk) Website: [www.galeriebesson.co.uk](http://www.galeriebesson.co.uk)











When Joslyn Tilson's eye fixes on a subject of fascination to her, be it a series of arches, pillars, steps that zigzag in two directions, archaic pot forms or even a tree, her curious imagination leads her to construct her own versions in myriad different ways. Being a sculptor, she draws not with lines but three-dimensionally, most often using terracotta and sometimes flattening the object into a relief or 'portrait'.

Slightly altering the emphasis each time, she will make and remake anew the forms and combination of forms that intrigue her. 'I get obsessions,' she says simply. 'I tend to go on and on and on. When I work on a series I take it to its full length.' Such persistent application of possibilities leads to surprisingly fresh and unprecious work.

Coming as she does from a family – and a long tradition – of weavers, in which all the eldest daughters weave (and she is one), she also translates her vision into thread. This complicated process, she finds, comes more naturally to her than painting, to which it is akin. But while her pot forms are rounded and substantial, with uneven matt surfaces, her weaves are miniature and precise, with subtle variations and flashes of colour – shades found in the natural world but startling nonetheless.



Her series of objects make satisfying groups. Their variations feed into each other, creating a rhythm. The terracottas are often uncoloured, or red or black – rusty hues made from oxides. They often contain architectural 'conceits', such as a doorway set within a doorway (as in a De Chirico painting – a favourite of hers), or stairs slotted into a cube. And she is more likely to focus on a small detail or fragment of a building or landscape (or a formal arrangement of elements within it) than a panorama. Alice in Wonderland-like, her miniature aqueducts, buildings and pillars do not feel tiny, but have a momentousness to them.

Joslyn studied as a sculptor both in England (at Bath Academy of Art under Kenneth Armitage and Bernard Meadows in the 1950s) and then in Italy, first under Marino Marini at the Brera in Milan, and then at the British School in Rome. In the sixties and seventies she brought up her three children. Her interest in clay was reawakened in the early 1980s when her husband Joe was teaching at a summer school in Anacapri and she joined the potter Nino Caruso's classes.

Her pot shapes are built by hand and have holes in the bottom so they are of no practical use – their scale and solidity would also prevent such an outcome. Further evidence of her lack of interest in them as vessels came when she finished a series of pots a few years ago, then turned them into small portraits – terracotta reliefs of swelling shapes pushing at the boundaries of their terracotta frames (her weaves often have integral frames too).

Joslyn continues to draw inspiration from the very fabric of Italy: its stones, architecture and landscapes. She lives there for much of the year, dividing her time between Tuscany in the summer and a studio in Venice. Here she finds herself, 'so aware of the arches everywhere and of the light coming through them' that a magical osmosis occurs. Few sculptors succeed in conveying a sense of light, but by looking through shapes, creating shadows by framing a recess with pillars and constructing corners in which to place objects, she does exactly that.

*Annabel Freyberg*



# JOSLYN TILSON b. 1934

- 1934 Born in Edinburgh, the daughter of Flavia Birrell and Alastair Morton, an abstract painter, weaver, and head of the fabric firm Edinburgh Weavers.
- 1934-51 Lived in Cumberland, New Jersey, USA and Yorkshire.
- 1951-55 Studied sculpture at Bath Academy of Art under Kenneth Armitage and Bernard Meadows.
- 1955-56 Awarded an Italian government travelling scholarship, and studied under Marino Marini at the Brera in Milan.
- 1956 Married painter Joe Tilson in Venice.
- 1956-58 Studied at the British School in Rome before travelling through Italy and Spain.
- 1958-72 Lived and worked in London.
- 1968-72 Started AIR with Bridget Riley and Peter Sedgley. Also edited and published the magazine CATALYST.
- 1972 Moved from London, dividing time between Wiltshire and Tuscany. Continued with sculpture and began a continuing series of interpretive weavings.
- 1982 Studied with the potter Nino Caruso in Italy. Began to make large handbuilt pots.
- 1998 - Present Living and working in London and Italy.

## Exhibitions

- 1988 First solo exhibition at Berkeley Square Gallery, London
- 1989 Berkeley Square Gallery  
Cairn Gallery, Nailsworth
- 1990/91 Cairn Gallery
- 1992 Galerie Besson, London, *Christmas Exhibition*
- 1993/94/95/98 Berkeley Square Gallery
- 1999 Siena, Palazzo Pubblico
- 2000/02 Berkeley Square Gallery
- 2007 Galerie Besson, *Italian Terracottas*
- 2010 Galerie Besson, *Terracottas and Weavings*



Two Objects (65), 2005  
12 x 17.5 x 11.5 cm (JT076)  
Two Objects (66), 2005  
17 x 18 x 13 cm (JT077)  
Two Objects (64), 2005  
14 x 17.5 x 13 cm (JT078)



Spoleto II, 2009  
26 x 33 cm (JT088)



Carità, Venice, 2007  
18.5 x 20 x 7 cm (JT074)



Santa Croce, 2004  
27 x 16 cm (JT096)  
View Through I, 2006  
30.5 x 17 cm (JT098)  
View Through II, 2007  
20.5 x 17 cm (JT097)



San Barnaba, 2006  
24.5 x 26.5 cm (JT091)  
Le Zitelle, 2006  
25 x 26 cm (JT092)



Arnaldo's Oak (9), 2001  
31 x 37 cm (JT079)



Framed Double Steps (9)  
2001, 16 x 16.5 x 14 cm (JT089)  
Framed Small Sphere (45)  
2003, 15 x 14.5 x 5 cm (JT090)



Large Black with Holes (7)  
1985, 34 x 35 cm (JT080)  
CC Trentacinque, 1996  
37 x 39 cm (JT081)



Portrait (67), 2005  
28 x 22 cm (JT085)  
Portrait (69), 2005  
29 x 23 cm (JT084)



A. U. Large Terracotta Oval (156)  
1993, 54 x 37 cm (JT082)  
H. L. Large (119), 1990  
49.5 x 34 cm (JT083)



Fragment Tree, 2000  
27.5 x 17.5 x 10 cm (JT075)

All the works in the exhibition will be illustrated on our website at [www.galeriebesson.co.uk/tilson2010.html](http://www.galeriebesson.co.uk/tilson2010.html)

All ceramics terracotta. All weavings cotton, linen twine and wool.  
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