



Elizabeth Ringus

Interviewed by Saddler Taylor

1. Ringus and her roots in spongeware (02:19)

S. Taylor: Now what were, what were the first type of pots you were making? You mentioned ashtrays...

E. Ringus: I... (Laughs)

S. Taylor: What would you start out with?

E. Ringus: Yeah, I started off with shades of brown pottery but I've always had this real interest in historical pottery. And I, I, I started reading a lot about the imported English ware of the 1800s, which was the sponge-decorated pottery, and which was white tin glaze and then they would take colorants and you would take sponges and you'd cut them into shapes and you'd sponge them on or you'd just used that opened sea... sea sponge to make that lacy design. And I was sort of dabbling around and doing a little bit of that too and people loved blue, shades of blue pottery. So I was like ok, I started making more things. And I went to a, we got bitten by the auction bug and went to an auction one time, where they were auctioning off a big collection of spongeware and this guy in front of me bid two hundred dollars on a butter crock that that had no lid. So I leaned over to him and I said, "Hey, you want a lid for that crock, I can make you one." He said, "Really?" So all of a sudden, I started getting you know, people wanting me to reproduce pieces and then, and yet since I moved here in South Carolina and found out about the clay history here, sort of moved me a little bit away from that, not doing that as much but then every now and then, I'll have people request to do that. That's, that's the thing about having your own studio, you can do whatever you want to do, you know. And I do functional pieces because I like to use things. I want to bake in it, I want to drink out of the mugs, and I want to use it. I think that's maybe part of my Yankee background is like; things have to be useful and serve a purpose and can't control that. I do like to do some kind of crazy,

off the wall things every now and then. That's sort of like my detox time, I call it. Just, just do something different and something people wouldn't expect me to do and I'm not... I consider myself somewhat of a production potter but I don't do you know, thousands of pieces of...

S. Taylor: Right.

E. Ringus: ...at a time, you know. I'm not that kind, I can't do that.

S. Taylor: Right.

E. Ringus: Physically can't do that, my hands are wearing out.

2. Glaze experimentation (02:13)

S. Taylor: A lot of potters will talk about two things; the clay and the glazes. So I imagine you had to do a lot of experimentation with your, determining what clay to use too, right?

E. Ringus: Sure, you know, because if you're working with functional pieces, they're not just decorative. I think of a mug, a beautiful mug, is a beautiful piece of work. It fits in your hand a certain way; you feel it against your lip, there's all these senses involved and then the beauty of the color. A lot of those things play into, you know, the pottery that I do too. But I want people to use it. I've had lots of people say, "Oh I bought this platter and I have it hanging on the wall." Well that's nice and it's art but I intended you to use it as a platter.

S. Taylor: Right.

E. Ringus: Take it down off the shelf and use it, run it through the dishwasher, that's why I work so hard to make sure my glazes fit my clay. I mean that was part of what I did, because I want people to use it. I guess I would have fit really well back in the 1800s because I like to do things from scratch. I like to can, I like to bake, I like to garden, I like to do things. That's why I was interested in learning how to spin, I didn't want to raise sheep, I didn't think I wanted to shovel out sheep, the sheep doo. But um, all that kind of stuff, that's stuff that you use, it's useful and I love...I love that idea.

S. Taylor: So you use one type of clay now, have you gotten to the point...?

E. Ringus: I have several different kinds, I have some porcelain clay then I have... but I try not to, you have to be careful not to cross contaminate things. But I use two different kinds of stoneware. I use a light buff color body stoneware and then one that is darker, more red stoneware and I find that the glazes, the brown glazes fit better on the brown. They look better, look richer; um the white body clay seemed to bleach out the colors that are dark and, and then of course the colors that are light.... Lighter colors look brighter and prettier on a light clay body. It's just, it's a matter, I guess of the opaqueness that there is. Even though you can't see right through the glaze, there's that richness that comes through...

S. Taylor: Right.

E. Ringus: With the dark Albany slip kind of glaze on a dark body.

3. Exposure to face jugs (02:26)

E. Ringus: I saw a face jug that Anita Meaders had done, Anita Meaders is about my age, she might be a year younger than me. Of course the Meaders family has been doing it for generations.

S. Taylor: Oh yeah, mmm hmm.

E. Ringus: But I saw one of her face jugs and, and it was of all things, it was just a store downtown. It was like a barber shop but they were into antiques and they had things. And I was fascinated, I thought, this is really awesome. So, so then I started reading again. You go and you look and you read more about it, and I thought this is really neat, I love the sculpture, I mean it's a jug, it's functional, but you can do some sculpturing and that kind of thing. And Anita did just a um, she would do the white little eyes but she just did the mouth with no teeth, and little tiny, kind of like Shrek ears, I call them. The little ears that kind of stick out. And she just sort of did an alkaline green kind of glaze. I don't know if her particular piece was wood-fired or not, I don't know. Um, it may have been, may have been put in with others but I just fell in love with it and she signed it and I thought that was kind of cool. And when I found out about the face vases and how they would often write something on the bottom you know, something about the society they're living in. And I found out about Dave, the slave potter and how you know, it's so unusual that he actually was,

had to learn to read and write. And it's interesting, because he worked as a typesetter and one of my first jobs, through my senior year in high school and then going into, while I was going to college; was a summer job, was working for a newspaper. And we had letter press lead, at that time they hadn't gone to offset and they had to typeset. You had to put the type in upside-down and backwards so that when it came off the press, it was right side up so you could read it.

S. Taylor: Right, interesting...

E. Ringus: And, and I thought, well that was amazing. Not so much... let alone the fact that he could read or write, but the fact that he could read or write backwards and have it come out right. I thought that was the amazing thing and learning about the potters who came from New England and came down here and influenced a lot of the pottery going on, plus the potters that came over from England and Scotland, and Germany and the whole you know Seabrook or what is it?

S. Taylor: Seagrove in North Carolina, yeah.

E. Ringus: Seagrove area, Seagrove area, and the Moravians and they're pottery. I just love all of that history and how it ties back.

4. Effort and detail to turn pots (01:08)

S. Taylor: I don't think people realize how, how much hand strength you have to have to pull a pot up.

E. Ringus: Mmm hmm, you do.

S. Taylor: Most potters make it look really easy but...

E. Ringus: Yea, that's what they say. They'll say, "Oh you do it so quickly." And I say, "No, I don't, I don't think that I do it that quickly because I have to. I'm aware of the shape that I want and you know, thickness and making sure you have the right compressions so you don't have any cracks and that kind of thing. You know, because I feel that, that you know if you're going to do something and I'm not saying that I don't have things that turn out to be seconds and you know sometimes I'm pretty fussy and my husband will say, "What's wrong with that? You know, just because the glaze stuck a little on the bottom? The rest of it's fine, put it on the shelf and mark it as a second." People love seconds, it's still functional, still works. You

know, it's just... I had one; one face jug the ear fell off, so that was my Van Gogh, Van Gogh pot.

S. Taylor: The Van Gogh pot.

E. Ringus: My dad got the Van Gogh pot, I gave it o him.

S. Taylor: The Van Gogh pot.

E. Ringus: I figured he would love it because his daughter made it, regardless of the ear falling off, (laughs)