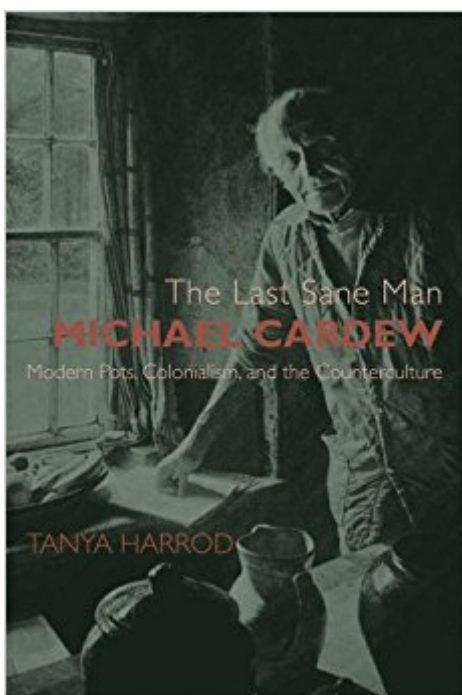


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# The Last Sane Man: Michael Cardew: Modern Pots, Colonialism, And The Counterculture (The Paul Mellon Centre For Studies In British Art)



## Synopsis

The British studio potter Michael Cardew (1901-1983) was a man of paradox, a modernist who disliked modernity, a colonial servant who despised Empire, a husband and father who was also homosexual, and an intellectual who worked with his hands. Graduating from Oxford in 1923, training with the legendary Bernard Leach, he went on to lead a life of pastoral poverty in Gloucestershire, making majestic slipware and participating in the polarised design and political debates of the 1930s. A wartime project in Ghana turned him into a fierce critic of British overseas policies; he remained in West Africa intermittently until 1965, founding a local tradition of stoneware inspired by the ambient material culture, independent of European imports, made by Africans for Africans. He ended his days a ceramic magus, his pottery at Wenford Bridge, Cornwall, an outpost of the counterculture and a haven for disaffected youth. In North America, the Antipodes and sub-Saharan Africa he offered the egalitarianism of craft as an antidote to racism and inequality. As the novelist Angela Carter observed in 1977, he came to seem 'the Last Sane Man in a crazy world.' Along with historians of Empire and civil rights, and art and design historians, readers with a general interest in British cultural history will want to read this book.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Perceptive [and] impeccably researched . . . The intensity of Harrod's lens reveals this grand amateur who never wanted his biography written as a fascinating and wilful figure, whose life encompassed an incongruous mix of modernism, Empire,

craft and self-sufficiency." **Julian Stair, Crafts Magazine** (Crafts Magazine) "Tanya Harrod has written the first great biography of a potter . . . a fearless and lucid account of a perplexing potter whose pots are among the most iconic of the 20th century." **Mark Hewitt, Ceramics Monthly** (Mark Hewitt Ceramics Monthly 2013-04-05) Winner of the 2013 James Tait Black Prizes for Biography, sponsored by the University of Edinburgh. (James Tait Black Prizes University of Edinburgh 2013-05-21) "A remarkably full, eloquent, and even-keeled account." **Christopher Benfey, New Republic** (Christopher Benfey New Republic) Shortlisted for the 2013 Art Book Prize given by the Authors' Club to the best book on art or architecture. (Art Book Prize The Authors' Club 2014-01-07)

Tanya Harrod is an independent design historian, the author of the prize-winning *The Crafts in Britain in the 20th Century* and the co-editor of the *Journal of Modern Craft*.

Who was it that said you can list a mile of facts about a person and still miss the essential? There is a qualitative difference between what was written by Michael Cardew and what was written about him...like the difference between a Spanish mustang and a cowpony, or between a wolf and a dog. Same species, different spirit. The questions that Michael asked were different...dream-driven. What price do we pay, in the end, if we keep looking for quicker and easier ways to do things? What sort of potential and meaning does clay and pottery really have, and how does inanimate material express human feeling? What shape do you want to give your life, using your free will together with the inevitable limits & losses that come? It's interesting that the final paragraph in the book is a challenge. Who now will ask these questions? So, for what it is: Aside from its wonderful title, this biography is a rich and intricate tapestry, an accurate account of a remarkable person: pioneer, philosopher, musician, writer, artist and teacher. A combination of opposites: quintessential Englishman and global person, broadly knowledgeable and keenly focused, logical and intuitive, tortured and confident, austere and exuberant. The impossible situation at Achimota College during World War II is described in excruciating detail, and it's instructive to see how Michael eventually became an expert on the chemistry of clay and glazes to overcome similar difficulties in the future. The subtext here involves a beautiful and humane vision, sacrifice and the currents of destiny.

Michael Cardew led a remarkable life in a time long gone, He explored a new paradigm in his art and life

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