

M. C. Richards: Finding The Center

M. C. Richards, the long awaited poet-sculptor-writer-teacher-you name it, arrived on campus this weekend and kicked off her week-long residence with a fascinating two hour gallery talk on her philosophy and works in the "nonverbal medium" of pottery Monday night in the Vardell Gallery.

A large and enthusiastic crowd was on hand for Ms. Richards' talk, milling about the gallery looking at the various items on display before her arrival and settling onto the floor as she began to talk.

"I've been a long time coming," she began. (English Program Chairman) Whitney Jones wrote me two years ago to see if I would come to St. Andrews as part of the Black Mountain College Festival," she said, "but I was too sick to come.

ts were the central discipline no matter what your major was - the arts and the community were the center out of which every thing else differentiated."

Ms. Richards described her philosophy - in much the same terms. "Every person has a centering point from which all of the facets and dimensions of his personality grows, just like that point in the plant, sometimes only a cell wide and also called a centering point, from which we reach both up and down - up, into the blue sky, the heights of activity and thought, and down into the earth, into the murky depths of ourselves.

"I have a sort of a mental picture," she said, "a vision of the human. I see the human as a five pointed star, with two lower points for the legs and, of course, two side points for the arms, and then the top-most point for the head. Above

was willing to follow in the direction of my interests. If you have a mind that can think, why can you not have an intuition that can feel differently, crossing over from one language to another without feeling fragmented?" she asked her audience.

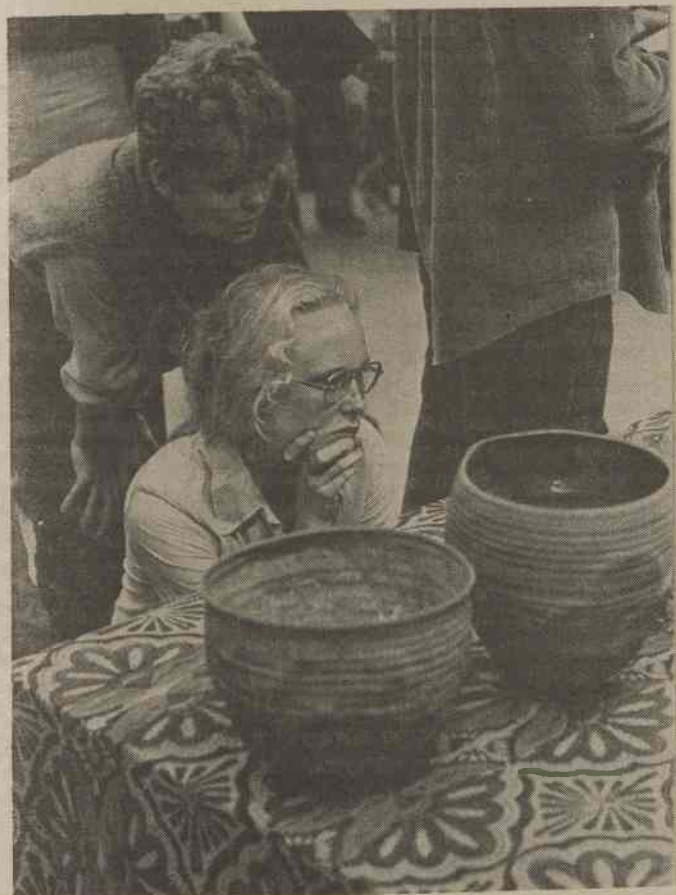
"As one experiences oneself," she continued, "doing things, one should feel quite intact and at the same time altogether mobile. A sort of polarity seems evident in that, but it is really no polarity at all. It is the discovery of the contours of our being. Like the north and the south, we are neither one nor the other, but a sphere, encompassing both at once. They are interlocking and inseparable."

Ms. Richards then went on to connect her views on life and art with the works on display, delighting the audience with the ideas and thoughts she conveyed in the works. One series of vessels, for example, were called dances - "I decided to call them that and make them from that perception to see if the results would be different from those I would get from looking at them as pots or vases or things of that sort." Discussing several other groupings, she told her audience she decided with those to "try to create art as a sequence rather than as a gathering of separate entities - one of this, one of that. When you go to a museum you look at one pot and then another without feeling any real relationship or connection between them. I made these to go together, each a part of the others and of the whole."

Implicit in the Vardell exhibit as well as the poetry Ms. Richards read Tuesday night in New Meck dorm was what she called "feeling the world as a living being, living being, appreciating the con-



(Photos By Kim McRae)



"Then he wrote again last spring and wondered if I would come down for the Jargon Press Festival with Jonathan Williams and Fielding Dawson and some of my other old cronies from Black Mountain, and I was again to sick to come. This winter," she said, "I decided to travel south to see if I could get through one winter without getting sick, wrote Whitney and said I would be in the area, and asked if I could drop in-even if only to meet him, as persistent as he was."

Discussing her background, Ms. Richards told the group that "mine was a strictly intellectual education, education then being seen, as strictly divided into verbal and nonverbal spheres." This view stayed with her for the most part until she joined the faculty of the now defunct Black Mountain College in Black Mountain, North Carolina, where "I came into an environment where the ar-

that head is a rainbow arching over the head in all the colors of the spectrum and inside that arch a sun shining brilliantly, its rays pointing out each of the vocabularies - all the things that we do - the languages of the potter and the poet.

"Each of these special rays," she continued, "has unique qualities (like the fingers of the hand, for example) but still emanates from a common center."

Ms. Richards held that each person needs to find that common center in himself to experience that rare combination that makes possible the divergent interests and characteristics of each human. She sees her own work as a potter and poet and writer in that way. "My life and work have developed across the separateion between verbal and nonverbal art... my journey has taken me into activities I was educated to see as mutually exclusive... I

tinuum that moves throughout out life and all of its transformations, that something continues - a spiritual reality that underlies all the changes in life. How does a thing that does not exist come into existence? Where is it when it isn't? Look at yourself in a photograph taken when you were a baby, and the look at one taken yesterday. Are you the same person?"

"The sooner humans realize how powerful they are in the creation of the world through the thoughts they have, the deeds they do, the things they make, the better we can come to understanding and use our creative energies. Expressions of powerlessness, the feeling that what we say or do doesn't count, create just that. When we are making something and offering it to the world," she concluded, "It is as real as we are, as humble and small, as fragile and real as we are."

