

**water-shed: New work by Edmund de Waal**  
**Introduction by Curatorial Officer, Sarah Brown**

The new exhibition at Leamington Spa Art Gallery & Museum, *water-shed*, runs from the 22 January to 11 April 2010. It is comprised of eight new and recent works by contemporary ceramicist Edmund de Waal dating from 2005.

Edmund de Waal describes himself as a potter, who writes. He also curates and advises museums on installations and is Professor of Ceramics at the University of Westminster. His artistic work is represented in many major British and International public collections.

The exhibition showcases a newly commissioned work by same name, *water-shed*. This piece has been made with Leamington Spa Art Gallery and Museum in mind. De Waal has been inspired by the medical collections based at the art gallery and museum and the use of the Royal Pump Rooms for the delivery of medical treatments, including hydrotherapy. These ran from its opening in 1814 right into the late 1990s.

De Waal has attempted to reimagine a medical cabinet; a doctor's travelling case; a container with a very practical use. He looks at the way in which vessels have been used within medicine to store substances, such as water in hydrotherapy.

This piece really does show off his skill in creating new glazes and he has created some of the darkest colours he has used to date including deep turquoise aquatic blues.

This is very much a site sensitive piece which brings to mind what the original purpose of the Royal Pump Rooms in using the saline waters of Leamington Spa – to heal.

Each ceramic piece within the exhibition is different and each pot is individual. *Nonsuch* (a work produced in 2008) is based on Nonsuch Palace, the former opulent golden palace built by Henry VIII in the 1530s. The palace no longer stands and was dismantled by the mistress of Charles II, the countess of Castlemaine in the 1680s. De Waal has created small stacks of pots within pots, diminishing in size, glazed in opulent yellow colours and hidden from view. This is a piece that you have to investigate. It has a small trough in the top of the cabinet and another at the side for displaying pots. It is in through act of investigating the pots within this cabinet, as they are hidden from view through which de Waal gives us the idea of a palace, once opulent, that can no longer be seen.

All of the pots within each of these installations are individual. De Waal does not have a makers mark. He does not use that is to say a traditional stamp that one

would see on the bottom of a piece of porcelain ware. He instead, has trademark shapes, throwing at his potter's wheel something entirely different at every take. On every single pot there is a final note, a final mark, a lip added to a long thin vase or an indent. In doing this these minimalist pots have a life of their own, they become unique and each becomes different.