

Making Histories:

new responses to the ceramics collection

This exhibition includes new work by contemporary ceramic artists, shown alongside the objects from the collection of Leamington Spa Art Gallery & Museum which inspired them.

Rupert Brakspear

My work often brings me to places where ceramic production has **vanished from the landscape**, but where I can take a shaving of clay from a ditch or bank, gather ashes from a fire, and rock dust from quarries or cliff faces. I have chosen to respond to a mortarium, a Roman mixing vessel which has made me think of the importance of mixing more widely – culture, food, people...

Mortarium, Aoste, Gaul (France), 50-85 CE

Earthenware, stamped with the maker's marks of G. Atisius Gratus

Dredged from Pudding Pan Rock, Whitstable

Mortarium sherds, probably 2nd century CE

Found whilst field-walking ploughed field, Crab Tree Farm kiln site, Mancetter, Warwickshire

On loan from Rupert Brakspear

Disturbing the Surface, 2019-2020

Sherds of broken mortaria are common on archaeological sites dated to the Roman era in Britain, North Warwickshire being one area of mass production during the second century AD. Several kiln sites have been found, for example at Mancetter and along the Hartshill ridge, but the sources of clay these potters used remain mysterious and prompted this enquiry into our relationship with landscape and our impact on the environment.

Mortaria sherd rim charts, 2019

Pen, Indian ink and pencil

A rim chart, or radius chart, is a tool used by archaeologists to measure the size of a vessel using a sherd from the rim. These drawings represent sherds found by the artist while field-walking, which are displayed on the plinth to the left.

Palimpsest landscape photographs taken during fieldwork, Mancetter, Hartshill ridge and Whittleford, Nuneaton, 2019-2020

Digital photographs – iPhone and Canon EOS

Test tiles of local clays, 2019-2020

These tiles were fired at 1000°C ('biscuit'), 1080°C and 1100°C (earthenware) and 1250°C (stoneware). They are all made from local clays and glaze materials gathered, with permission, during the project. The glaze materials include granite dust,

similar to the grit incorporated by Roman potters into the grinding surfaces of their mortaria.

View north from Pennine Lower Coal measures landscape, Whittleford, Nuneaton, 2020

This is the site of both Haunchwood Colliery and Haunchwood Brick and Tile works.

Stoneware mortarium and test bowls, 2020

Hand-dug Whittleford Pennine Middle Coal Measures clay, with glazes made from clay, wood ash and Mancetter stone dust.

Dylan Bowen

I see my work as having its roots in traditional, functional slipwares from the 17th and 18th centuries. They were made fast and loose for everyday use; their energy, vibrancy and expressive wildness seem vital and contemporary. The best work has **some kind of muddy anarchy** that resonates with me – especially growing up in the late 1970s, it connects with my other formative influences.

Jug, England or Germany, c.1300-1500

Stoneware

Excavated at Lillington Manor Pit, Lillington

Surrey jug, England, c.1400-1500

Earthenware

Excavated at Threadneedle Street, London

Owl costrel or pilgrim's bottle, England, c.1400-1500

Earthenware

Excavated at Smithfield, London

Pipkin, England, c.1500-1600

Earthenware

Excavated at Copthall Court, London

Salt cellar, England, c.1550-1600

Earthenware

Small plate, Staffordshire, c.1750

Earthenware with trailed slip decoration

Found in Guy's Cliffe mill pond, Warwick

Cup and bowl, Staffordshire, c.1700

Earthenware with combed slip decoration

Slip-decorated dishes and vessels, 2020

The shapes and decoration of these vessels relate to late medieval and early modern English ceramics.

Rose Wallace

Encompassing the themes of 'water' and 'therapy', I developed a new perspective on the history of the spa baths, the vestiges of their therapeutic role, and the ordinary people who benefited from their use. Like the historical examples, my figures have previously been mounted on an integral base. Viewing the figure through the medium of water was an epiphany for me: afloat, they are encapsulated forever in **the fluidity of suspended movement.**

Andromache mourning the death of Hector

Figure, Leeds, c.1790

Pearlware

In Greek mythology, Andromache was married to Prince Hector of Troy. She is portrayed in the Iliad as the perfect wife, preparing a bath for her husband in anticipation of his return from battle.

Plate, Staffordshire, c.1750-1760

Stoneware

Sling and pulley

Slings and pulleys were used to support patients and help them to exercise their limbs during physiotherapy and hydrotherapy treatments at the Royal Pump Rooms.

Photographs of the hydrotherapy pool at the Royal Pump Rooms

The therapeutic pool at the Royal Pump Rooms was created in the former Ladies' Pool in 1950 (now the main Art Gallery). Patients received treatment there for polio, arthritis and injuries.

Pulling Together, 2020

Press-moulded earthenware figures made from casts of discarded domestic ephemera, earthenware, with Staffordshire glazes; drawn and soldered iron swimming baths hanger,

c.1930s; cast iron pulley block, contemporary plaited cotton rope.

This sculpture shows a patient receiving physiotherapy treatment in the therapeutic pool. This type of treatment used a system of slings, pulleys and weights to exercise the limbs. Examples of the equipment are displayed in our medical gallery.

Letting off Steam, 2019

Press-moulded earthenware figure made from casts of discarded domestic ephemera, with Staffordshire glazes; cast bronze gate valve with threaded iron pipe, c.1930s; cast iron Munsen ring brackets, c.1950s; wooden box, c.1950s.

Alpine Sun ultra-violet lamp

This lamp was used at the Royal Pump Rooms to treat patients suffering from skin diseases, ulcers and varicose veins. During treatment the patient was bathed in ultra-violet light up to three times per week.

Seat

This wooden recliner was used in the hammam, or Turkish bath, at the Royal Pump Rooms. Patrons moved through a series of three hot rooms, before relaxing on recliners in the cooling room.

Goggles

Patients at the Royal Pump Rooms used these wire mesh goggles to protect their eyes during ultra-violet light treatments.

Health Cures, 2019

Press-moulded earthenware figures made from casts of discarded domestic ephemera, with Staffordshire glazes.

Buoyant, 2020

Press-moulded earthenware figures made from casts of discarded domestic ephemera, with Staffordshire glazes; injection-moulded polythene bowl, c.1930s.

Equilibrium, 2020

Press-moulded earthenware figures made from casts of discarded domestic ephemera, with Staffordshire glazes; mahogany lid and feet from a Victorian commode, c.1850s; cast brass split Munsen ring, c.1970s; spun and dolly-beaten copper ballcock float, c.1910 (from the Harte and Garter Hotel, Windsor, repaired by plumber J. Cox, 1986).

Buff, 2020

Press-moulded earthenware figures made from casts of discarded domestic ephemera, with Staffordshire glazes; folded sheet steel bathroom medicine cabinet, paint, plane mirror, c.1930s.

Michelle Taylor

I take inspiration from abandoned, damaged and discarded wares. I was particularly drawn to the idea that these objects had been gifted to the museum and were once owned and valued by someone. I am fascinated by the detail and precision of historical repairs, and how **emotional attachment can be created** with inanimate objects; how they can become imbued with a physical presence, rich with personal meaning.

Bowl, Worcester, c.1768

Porcelain

Teapot, Caughley, c.1780

Porcelain, Turner's Fisherman pattern

Tea bowl and saucer, Caughley, c.1785

Porcelain

Saucer, Dresden, c.1760

Porcelain, repaired with metal staples

Delftware plate, 17th century, altered and repaired 2020

This plate has been repaired with Japanese gold thread, making a link to the traditional Japanese kintsugi method of repairing ceramics. The thread is usually used in weaving

highly decorative obi belts and embellishing kimono and uchikake robes.

Caughley plate, c.1780, altered and repaired 2020

By replicating every detail of a ceramic object's pattern in intricate embroidery, Michelle Taylor draws links to traditional processes of restoration, as well as the care and skill of the original maker.

Delftware plate, date unknown, altered and repaired 2020

Caughley cabbage leaf jug, 1775-1790, altered and repaired 2020

The gold repair of this jug recalls kintsugi, a traditional Japanese technique in which broken ceramics are glued together using lacquer dusted with gold powder. The seams of gold draw attention to the damage and make it beautiful, showing that the object is valued enough to be repaired rather than discarded.

Caughley coffee cup, c.1790, repaired 2020

Salopian porcelain bowl, 18th century, altered and repaired 2020

Metal staples and rivets were often used to repair ceramics until the invention of epoxy adhesives in the mid-20th century.

Michelle Taylor's use of vintage Japanese flat gold thread echoes the appearance of these crude repairs, but also suggests the emotional investment in an object whose owner has chosen to repair it.

Caughley tea bowl and saucer, repaired 2020

Jon Williams

Playing with materials and process is vital to my making. My ceramics are designed to be interacted with and I love the notion of unorthodox function and learning through play. I made several prototypes and whilst experimenting in a bowl of water, I discovered a whole range of noises and effects could be created by dunking and lifting. I was **transported to being a young child again**, playing with toys in the bath.

Whistling pot, Moche culture, Peru, c.100-700CE

Earthenware with slip decoration

Watering pots, England, c.1400-1600

Earthenware

Excavated in Westminster, London

Watering pots were used to dampen down dust on the road in front of shops.

Interactive water sculpture, 2020

Slip-decorated earthenware

The inspirations for this piece include Tudor watering pots and Peruvian whistling vessels, which use water displacement to create sounds.

Pouring, floating, trickling, rattling, gurgling, bubbling – the possibilities for play are endless!

John Wheeldon

My work is based on **seen or remembered images or objects**, that are rendered as small painted shapes or drawings. I chose these particular objects from the collection mainly because of their shape or pattern. I was looking primarily for interesting outlines, and the shadows that they cast. I was also looking at the arches and brickwork in the building itself, manipulating the outlines into new abstracted shapes.

Plate, Netherlands, c.1750

Delftware (tin-glazed earthenware)

Plate, painted by John Bowen, Bristol, c.1750

Delftware (tin-glazed earthenware)

Flower brick, Liverpool, c.1750

Delftware (tin-glazed earthenware)

Plate, England, c.1760

Delftware (tin-glazed earthenware)

Painted vessels, 2020

High-fired earthenware decorated with underglaze slips

The forms and decoration of these vessels were inspired by Delftware, as well as by the shapes and shadows of various other objects in the museum.

Rhian Malin

Ceramics have been part of everyday life for thousands of years, as utilitarian objects used for storing and cooking as well as being an artistic medium. No matter how much people know about art or design, most people will have a piece of ceramic in their home that they use every day, and it often gives people **the same sense of nostalgia** that I get from it. Whether they consider it art or not is another matter.

Caudle or chocolate cup and saucer, Worcester, c.1765-1770

Porcelain, 'Fine Old Mosaic' pattern

Coffee cup and saucer, Worcester, c.1765

Porcelain, 'Scarlet Japan' pattern

Plate, Chelsea, c.1758

Porcelain, 'Brocade Imari' pattern

Plate, Worcester, c.1808-1812

Porcelain

Teapot, Spode, c.1820

Bone china

Garniture of panelled bottles, 2020

Porcelain

A 'garniture' is a symmetrical arrangement of decorative porcelain on a cabinet or mantelpiece, or above a door. Wealthy collectors often displayed their ceramics in this way from the 17th century until the early 19th century.

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