

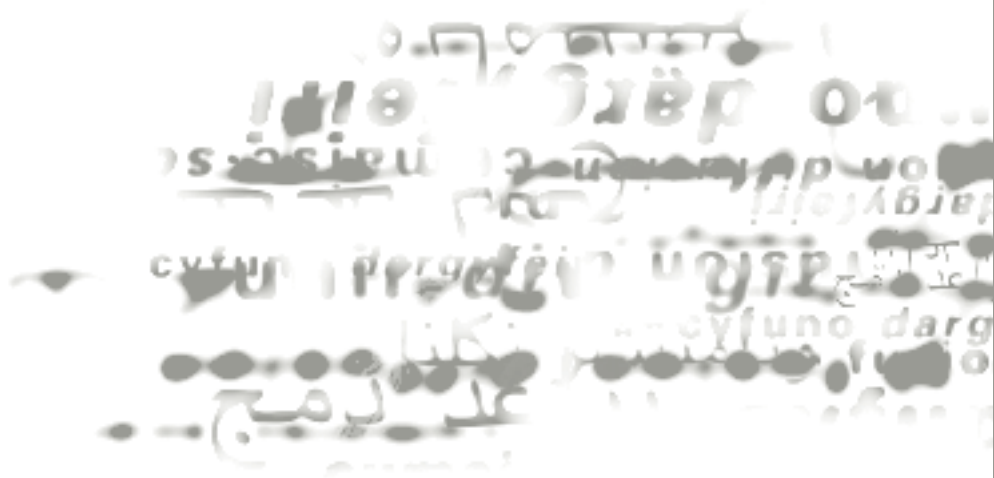
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MA CERAMICS 2010

Cardiff School of Art and Design  
University of Wales Institute Cardiff

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# *Ceramics in 21st Century Post Materiality Culture*

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In considering the scope of ceramics, we have only to think about the versatility of the media and its myriad applications. These qualities have given ceramics a unique place in human activity, embracing a multitude of separate concerns including historical, cultural, ethnographic, commercial, and artistic endeavour. We have a rich heritage upon which to draw. Clay and its attendant processes are capable of expressing and fulfilling both artistic and practical needs.

Despite the intrinsic qualities of clay, it is a material without form. Clay's usefulness is essentially in its potential, requiring the artist/maker to provide a purpose through which its qualities can be exploited. An understanding of its attendant processes such as firing which make it permanent and extend its possibilities, is also vital. Therefore, much of ceramic activity may be perceived as only bound up with technology and craft - how things are made - but as important are the ideas and concerns of the artist practitioner, and how they can be effectively conveyed through this medium to bridge the artificial boundaries that are too readily imposed. This is a huge topic in itself, touching upon many other areas of knowledge in both the Fine and Applied Arts and the Sciences. Clay is both a seductive and demanding material. Initial appeal lies usually in its tactile qualities, its capacity to be formed and fashioned in an infinite number of ways and to a vast range of purposes. But further involvement reveals hidden demands and pitfalls, requiring discipline, resilience and determination to achieve one's aims. Such characteristics and qualities of the individual's approach to practice can be readily associated with the Fine and Applied Arts, and Design.

The purpose of Higher Education study through to MA level within the medium of ceramics demands a non territorial approach if understanding, insight, and a contribution to the discipline and to the Visual Arts is to be achieved. The preparedness of the individual completing these programmes assures that they are equipped both intellectually and technically within their chosen medium. It is for them to apply these experiences with a confidence in their abilities, and utilise the multitude of applications of their knowledge and creativity to enthuse their audiences as artists, designers, makers, and importantly as educators.

Ceramics is no longer tethered to the world of handicrafts alone. It can occupy that domain, but the continued development of this medium within the contemporary sphere has demonstrated its capacity for the expressive, aligning it with those materials often associated with Fine Art; sculpture, painting, drawing, etc. And yet, it still has the capacity to be as prescriptive as the methodologies associated with Design. The physicality of doing within ceramics is both an intellectual and creative process. It is as demanding as any of those areas associated with the visual world, from the Fine and Applied Arts through to Design.

The MA Ceramics cohort of 2010 has embraced this philosophy in the intense and demanding journey they have taken within the time frame of the one year full-time and two year part-time programmes. They demonstrate in their exhibited work a broad and diverse approach to the medium, challenging the capacity of ceramics to express their individual creativity, innovation, and imagination, unified

by material understanding. It brings into greater focus the importance of individual sensory experience of the world, the flux between the real and imagined where materiality is that conduit to self, a counter to a post material culture that is never present, fleeting, only virtual.

**Peter Castle FHEA**  
**MA Ceramics Programme Director**  
**National Centre for Ceramic Studies in Wales**  
**September 2010**

The MA Ceramics programme as part of the National Centre for Ceramic Studies in Wales is one of the longest established masters programmes in ceramics in the UK. Having a truly international reputation it has drawn students from all over the world. Having celebrated its 27th year of student intake, the programme remains one of the longest established discreet ceramics masters programmes in the UK. Over 400+ students (with a third from countries outside of the EU) have successfully completed the programme, many of whom are now today's leading practitioners, researchers, academics and educators in the field of ceramics and related professions within the visual arts.

[www.uwic.ac.uk/mac ceramics](http://www.uwic.ac.uk/mac ceramics) | [www.csad.uwic.ac.uk/baceramics](http://www.csad.uwic.ac.uk/baceramics)

# *Ceramics within an ever-widening context*

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Ceramics is a highly versatile medium for the contemporary artist and designer and it provides unrivalled possibilities for education within the visual arts. The range of clay-forming, decorating and firing techniques is seemingly endless, with cutting edge digital processes now being applied with great success within the discipline. These developments are complemented by the continued use of traditional hand building approaches and industrial methods, which are proving to be inexhaustible in their potential for the production of innovative forms and surfaces.

Alongside this multi-faceted range of material possibilities there is to be found a versatility of a different kind. The field of ceramics touches upon a huge array of associated interests and contexts which offer students the chance to challenge, extend and refine their own ideas in the light of knowledge and insights gained by practitioners and theorists of all kinds.

The students graduating from the 2010 MA Ceramics programme at Cardiff School of Art and Design have discovered, like so many of their predecessors, that their course of study has enabled them to become not just skilled, professional artists, but well-informed, articulate and highly educated people. They are alert to the fast moving world in which they find themselves and they have the ability to understand something of the powerful, although often unacknowledged, forces and trends within culture and society that have brought them to this point in their lives and careers.

The students' individual concerns can often be found to overlap with those of painters, printmakers, sculptors and installation artists, but they are just as likely to be critically aligned with the design world or the ever-shifting arena of 'The Crafts'. This area of practice has recently been energised by a growing number of publications which argue for the value of the hand-made object in an increasingly mechanised and electronic world. The 'fine art' to 'applied art' spectrum is one that ceramics students learn to negotiate with considerable freedom, investigating and assimilating as they go the particular ideas that will inform and illuminate their own studio work.

For some students the materiality of clay becomes their primary focus, although they are rarely content to deal exclusively with the manipulation of the material in order to gain certain aesthetic effects. More often than not they are soon led into a consideration of phenomenological ideas and towards reflections on the meanings of our sensory and bodily encounters with the world. For other students our place within the natural world is the key to their understanding as artists, and the discovery of a rich, longstanding discourse concerning the ways that nature can be experienced and interpreted impacts upon their work in subtle but meaningful ways.

Without exception the students develop an acute sense of their place within contemporary art practice. In some cases this is predicated on an in-depth understanding of previous art movements – the 'history' of art is something that is constantly rediscovered, interrogated and renewed

in the light of ongoing work within any particular genre or subject area. There is an awareness of the importance of the ways in which art has been, and continues to be, presented to an audience. Issues of display are now often to the fore, with students taking an active curatorial role in the exhibition of their own work, paying careful attention to all aspects of the arrangement of the individual pieces and self-consciously engaging in a dynamic exchange with the spectator.

One of the most significant trends to be noted within contemporary student work at postgraduate level is the growing interest in ideas relating to change and flux. For some decades now postmodernism has offered a challenge to the idea of 'essence' in art and this has required us to engage with the unsettling idea that there are no fixed meanings or boundaries; we have no alternative but to move around within a shifting landscape where we have to look hard to find any reliable paths or signposts. The 2010 cohort of MA Ceramics students at Cardiff have shown that they are up to this challenge. As a diverse group of people, drawn from many cultures all over the world they have learnt to embrace difference in their lives and their work. A sense of identity continues to be important, but just as important is the sense of becoming – a condition in which we move forwards constantly, finding new ways of making art in an ever-changing, ever-widening global context.

**Dr Jeffrey Jones, Reader in Ceramics  
Cardiff School of Art and Design, UWIC**

# Raising the Game: Cardiff's M.A. Ceramics Programme in Context

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This is an exciting time for ceramics and the ever broadening possibilities of what can be done with clay, of how it can be stretched, teased and pushed into quite new territory. As is evident in this strong group of MA students now graduating from Cardiff's Centre for Ceramic Studies, the areas of enquiry remain complex; from examining the material nature of clay in relation to process and time to its rich physical ambiguities, from its use in the most familiar of objects, part of a domestic language and iconography, to the mysteries of the vessel's spatial landscape. There is a strong engagement too with the history of clay, with its metaphorical meanings and significance. The work here reflects so eloquently the broader picture, that of ceramists continuing to probe ever deeper into the abstract and narrative, conceptual and functional aspects of ceramics, of clay's expressive nuances and subtleties and sheer force, the kind of liberation that results from what Peter Voulkos called creative "gut feeling". Clay is at once the most responsive and elusive of materials, a hard taskmaster that can be as difficult to pin down and channel as our rumbling unpredictable imaginations. But perhaps it is this substance's corporeal intimacy, the "human clay" about which W H Auden memorably wrote (in terms of both its bodily aspects and the objects we have used over thousands of years) that makes it such a sensitive register of our innate need to make and express.

One is obliged to re-evaluate why the medium of clay is so important. It shouldn't have to justify itself, but its continued need to do so in a culture often suspicious of artistic endeavour has increased as the place of ceramics

in British higher education has come under such threat. It may remain one of the visual and tactile arts' most fertile and productive areas, but the educational support given to ceramics has dramatically fallen away in the last decade. This has manifested in several ways. There has been an alarming decline in ceramics as part of the school curriculum and at foundation level, and a consequent fall in student applications to art colleges. But even where ceramics courses are successful and rates of application are high, their survival, at least in their original form, is no longer guaranteed. If not abolished outright, BA courses have been frequently absorbed into broader 3-D degrees and other mergers, a highly corrosive process of dilution, in which closure is often the end result.

The 'swinging cuts' now made in many university departments is the result of a culture that thinks more in terms of profit margins than providing varied and diverse choice in education. We have lost our sense of priorities. Courses have, more and more, to justify themselves on a financial rather than educational level. Ceramics, with its necessary but expensive equipment and technical support, has been one of the first in the line of fire, from the school curriculum upwards. The internationally famous course at Harrow (University of Westminster), set up in 1963, is the latest high profile department to go. We are applying the reductive and simplistic language of the market to an area – education – where it is least appropriate, and the result is one of collective uncertainty. Now the case has surely to be made for the consolidation and strengthening of the few

departments that remain, with Cardiff very much a jewel in the national crown. With its outstanding BA and MA studies in pure ceramics, it now offers the most comprehensive syllabus in the medium. The MA programme is one of the oldest of its type in the country, with well over 400 graduates to its name, many of whom have of course become well established artists. Recent British alumni include Claire Curneen, Daniel Allen, Helen Felcey, Anne Gibbs and Sara Moorhouse; a group of ceramists who encapsulate so much of today's diverse language, from exploring the timeless beauty of the vessel to the expressive depth of the human figure and the poetic resonances found in our personal space, in the things we use.

A good proportion of the MA students, nearly a third, have come from abroad, and this graduating group is just as international in scope, a heady cosmopolitan mix. The MA has allowed each student to really grow as artists, to give them the creative and logistical space to realise and develop their technical and imaginative concerns and to bring them, after a summer of pure studio work, to fruition. It always amazes me how much clarity of intention is achieved in a relatively short time, how a complexity of thoughts are honed down into a clear corpus of work by September. What makes the MA programme stand out is the rigorous attitude to academic teaching – to the concepts and theories inherent in the study of ceramics – but also, quite literally, its down-to-earth attitude, its emphasis on clay as a physical material. There is as much concentration on empirical knowledge and the riches of clay as a substance as the ideas that may

shape it. No doubt this would have pleased the late Michael Casson, once a distinguished teacher at Cardiff, who was never prescriptive about what one should do with clay, but passionately believed in learning with and through the material. It is a life-long process, and the MA programme embodies this notion, opening up channels of enquiry that form an effective basis for future investigation.

Cardiff gives one genuine hope for the years ahead. Ceramics education may be currently embattled (and who knows if a new initiative to take clay back into schools will take off) but Cardiff is certainly holding its own. Visiting the MA programme is heartening. Here you find a supportive institution, a team of hard working and committed staff, and a group of passionate and focused students who each bring the benefits of their knowledge and background to a mutually supportive pool of experience. The sense of community is clear. Clay has grown up in the last fifty years, an ever widening and increasingly ambitious field, extending its remarkable versatility to new kinds of installation, architectural and environmental art as well. The creative game is being continually raised, and Cardiff has played a major role in this story. Long may it continue to do so.

**David Whiting, August 2010**

**David Whiting is a writer and critic. He is currently External Examiner for the MA Ceramics programme at University of Wales Institute, Cardiff.**

**'Pehchaan' – the identity**

'Pehchaan', is an urge to seek and establish identity and its significance.

It speaks of stories, slogans and rhymes from a dispersed nation. Of the hidden treasures, the colourful life and the struggle to live through boundaries and everyday hurdles. It raises questions of misinterpretation and misrepresentation of a country. Most poignantly, it seeks to enlighten knowledge of an identity, understanding of a life that is nothing extraordinary - nothing derogatory.



**Main** | *Means what?*  
20 x 16 x 10cm

**Inset left** | *Star series*  
(detail)

**Inset right** | *Serendipity*  
(detail)





# patricia | *león león*

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For twenty years my ceramic practice has been marked by a constant search of ways to express sensation and emotion, those intangible properties that can only be summoned, evoked in the mind of the viewer. Now I have come to realise what lies behind that search. My vision, my aesthetic sensibility has been shaped by the beauty and force of the natural environment surrounding me, the Ecuadorian Andes.

Their majestic forms, their unapproachable heights, their unseen movement is a part of who I am, it informs my creativity and my instinct to exude and rupture energy through my ceramic work. The rhythm, the profound spaces, the texture and colour

has marked my unconscious. These ceramic forms are a synthesis of the rhythm of the Andes, personal exploration of freedom and creativity.

**Main** | *Matter 1*  
50 x 50cm

**Inset left** | *Matter 2*  
50 x 60cm

**Inset right** | *Matter 3*  
20 x 20cm





My work speaks about transition from one culture to another. The process of change and transformation encountered when different societies interact. For an artist, this often results in a retelling of their culture, their past now seen differently through the eyes of a new context. Yet, amongst the divergence and contrast there is also a sense of return, a revisiting of original values. Our identities remain preserved they are woven into our thinking like thread into a fabric. My work explores this journey. Using the symbolism of Islamic calligraphy voices weave through multiple forms, a collective re-telling of journeys made. These voices are in transition, freely moving around the Islamic icon

'Ka'aba'. Its rigid form harmonizes with the fluidity of the fabric, suggestive perhaps of the harmony between Islam and gender.

**Main** | *The Third Space*  
Varies between 30 x 30cm and 10 x 10cm

**Inset left** | *The Veil*  
30 x 30cm

**Inset right** | *Belief*  
10 x 10cm



Grasping the handle of the pitcher, carefully aiming the water past the rim to satisfy the capacity beneath. Twisting the tap and allowing the water consent, filling the basin, disappearing through the drain. The gleeful whistle from across the room signals the kettle's deed. Tea rushes from the spout, inhabiting the space below. Stretching the length of the table, clumsily knocking the salt and pepper in a desperation for the sugar. Seizing the jar, its soft shiny surface sliding across the wooden plane of the table, bumping over the grain. Lifting the lid with one hand, the opposite dexterously clutching the spoons polished handle between two fingers and

a thumb. Scooping a mound of sugar into the cup and stirring it until it dissolves.

Ceramic objects, the silent bystanders of our everyday, potent with the energy of our experiences of them. Can these objects be disjointed, dislocated, rediscovered?

**Main** | *Untitled (Sinks)*  
Earthenware with Mixed Media, 320cm x 270cm

**Inset left** | *Untitled (Spout, Jar and Tab)*  
Earthenware, 150cm x 150cm x 150cm

**Inset right** | *Untitled (Salt and Pepper)*  
Earthenware with Mixed Media, 45cm x 25cm x 25cm each



Liminal spaces, threshold points within transformative processes - these ambiguous, indeterminate spaces exist in the moments just prior to, or just post the emergence or dissolution of identifiable structures and status.

The domestic arena embodies this liminal space for me. The unseen backdrop of domestic patterns and rituals intersects the events and experiences that create the narrative of our lives, constituting a space that remains suspended forever in-between.

Ceramic processes are highly transformative. Within the confines of a kiln, solids can become liquid, clay can become glaze, enabling the resulting artefacts the potential of displaying a mid-state condition.

This work attempts to bring the unseen and often disregarded to the fore. It is an archive of both the sounds and tasks that go unnoticed within a domestic space, and an enquiry into the materiality of ceramic - through the gradual stripping away of identities, it attempts to actualise an experience of the liminal.

**Main** | *Tuesday 6th July, 8.34am - sunny outside*  
Porcelain, kiln shelves, 87cm x 82cm

**Inset left** | *Becoming*

**Inset right** | *Tuesday 6th July, 8.34am - sunny outside*  
(detail)



I am interested in history; systems of knowledge, power and control; representation; and ideas of experience.

Systems create rules to determine what is acceptable, rules that affect how history is recorded, how knowledge is collected and which identities are valuable. Ultimately, it is up to the individual to decide which rules to follow and which to break.

A representation can be a picture, a sculpture or a word; it is always open to interpretation and the interpreter brings to it their own experiences which vary according to gender, class or race.

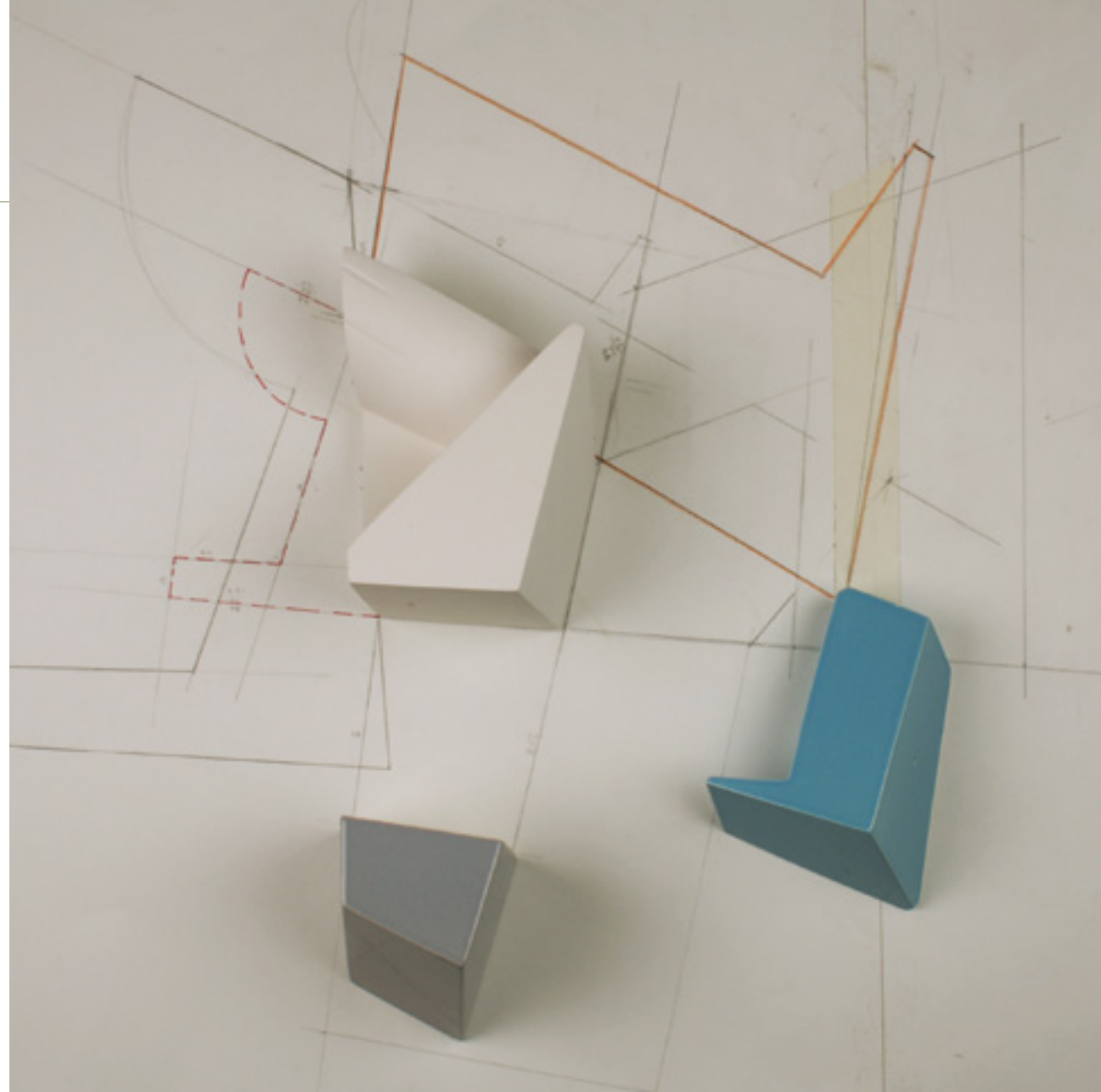
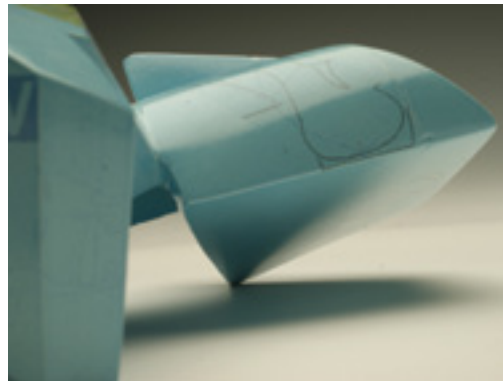
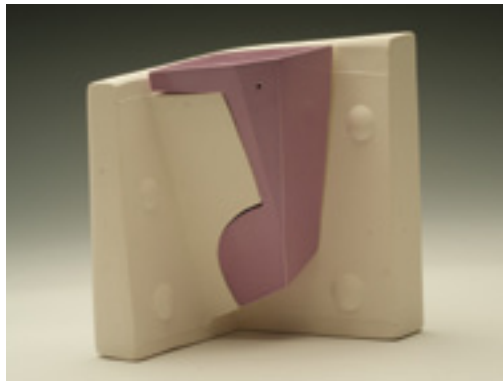
I am interested in situations where different forms of representation meet, separate, converge and divulge, where reality is brought into question.

I seek to provoke excitement and curiosity from everyday objects, my aim is to affect the experience of an object in order to displace meaning, undermine authority, question knowledge and encourage thought for change.

**Main** | *Deobjectification*  
Paper and ceramic, 53cm x 46cm x 8cm (detail)

**Inset left** | *Deobjectification*  
Ceramic, 13cm x 13cm x 15cm (detail)

**Inset right** | *Deobjectification*  
Ceramic (detail)





All things in life are connected and when events trigger change we work with it to see where it takes us. Nothing stays the same everything, everyone, all of life evolves. The material and processes in this work give form to this activity. Each object reflects significant points within the creative journey.

**Main | Diverge**  
Ceramic, 54 x 24 x 15cm

**Inset left | Merge**  
Cloth and ceramic (detail)

**Inset right | Diverge 2**  
Ceramic (detail)





# richard | *mountford*

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For all its benefits, the prosperity of civilisation has been at the expense of the natural world. Through tragic apathy, the respect and dependency on the earth as our life source has largely become overlooked. My aim is not to encourage a return to a pre-industrial age, but to facilitate a conciliatory unity between the natural and the man-made.

Through ceramic I strive to embody a harmonious relationship between man and nature, and in doing so encourage a greater awareness of the natural world we inhabit. This series of work is drawn from the "Golden Section" as a representation of mans long acknowledgement of natures superiority and aesthetic

perfection. Natural textures have been blended into man made forms to create objects that are of nature yet not possible in nature. The intention is for the work to act as a potential flux between art and design, an interaction that fuses nature and art, drawing them into a domestic context.

22 | 23



Illusion is always in flux. Where does the boundary lie between illusion and reality? My work explores the elusive and abstract in a series of hand built porcelain vessels and wall pieces. The interplay of forms, lines and colour oscillate between the 2nd and 3rd dimension. Advancing and receding colours, scales and depths create a pulse, a movement across elliptical forms and resonating hues and a playful rhythm that approaches the lyrical. The pieces explore a synergy between surface and form, between certainty and elusion that seeks to challenge perceptions, enhance illusions and create ambiguous, intriguing experiences for the viewer.

**Main | *Oscillation***

Porcelain,

21cm x 20cm x 7cm and 20cm x 24cm x 6cm

**Inset left | *Detail 1***

Porcelain, 16cm x 18cm x 18cm

**Inset right | *Detail 2***

Porcelain



A chair, a bag, an empty hook and a narrative unfolds; a scene evocative of home perhaps as if our own belongings had been discarded on the floor. Yet, these objects cannot function, the boots cannot be worn, the bag cannot be opened.

They have no colour, the hat, the gloves, the hook are all bleached white. These objects have had almost everything stripped away and still, they have the capacity to summon a sense of presence, a sense of identity. This experience is not evident in the details of the work but rather emerges in the mind of the viewer. These objects are symbols aimed to trigger thoughts of similar objects, similar acts about the home.

Curiously, it is the removal of personal detail, the lack of information that allows us to fill in our own.

**Main** | *Bag*  
Earthenware, 30cm x 26cm

**Inset left** | *Bag Detail*  
Earthenware

**Inset right** | *Boots*  
Earthenware, 29.5cm x 8.5cm





My work examines the change of identity facing Contemporary Ceramics by exploiting the very materials and processes that make it unique. The transformational effects of firing enable me to make both historic to contemporary reference, taking the familiar blue and white Willow pattern and allowing it to move, become liberated and transform. For this discipline is not a fractured or broken art but rather vital, innovative and skilled. The movement of the print indicates the movement of Ceramics from tradition to contemporary design. The bird, symbolizes a material liberated taking value from the past and moving forward.

28 | 29

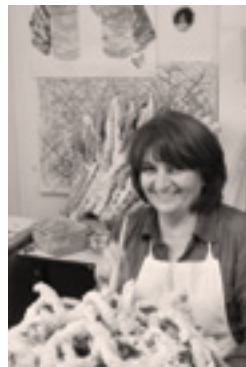
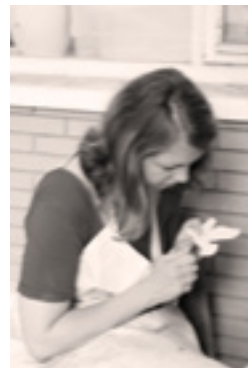


**Main** | *To Take Flight*  
Stoneware ceramic with transfers, 6cm x 37cm

**Inset left** | *A Sense of Becoming*  
Transfer and Stoneware ceramic

**Inset right** | *A moment of rest*  
Stoneware ceramic with transfer





abeer  
asim

adele  
stanley

emma  
cooch

jude  
ridout

juliana  
rempel

michelle-rose  
quinn

patricia  
león león

richard  
mountford

tina  
neale

zoe  
preece

nora  
almazrooa

merge | *diverge*

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