NEW HAVEN, CT (September 12, 2017) — The Yale Center for British Art presents the first major survey of British studio pottery ever organized in the United States. Bringing together nearly 150 ceramic objects—including vases, bowls, chargers, and monumental forms, as well as a range of historic works from China, Japan, and Korea—"Things of Beauty Growing": British Studio Pottery traces the evolution of the vessel form, which has defined the ceramic medium from the turn of the twentieth century to the present. This exhibition demonstrates that the story of studio pottery is a global one—as these pots and potters have traveled between England, continental Europe, Asia, Africa, and beyond. It also underlines that studio pottery is an ongoing practice, and the display includes works created especially for the occasion by contemporary makers, as well as drawing from distinguished private and public collections in the United States and the United Kingdom.

“The antiquity of the vessel, the familiarity of its shapes and forms, provides a ready-made language, which ceramic artists have for decades invoked and emulated but also distanced, transformed, and renewed. This exhibition seeks to shed new light on the development of British art and culture, while placing it in an international context,” said exhibition co-curator Martina Droth, Deputy Director of Research and Curator of Sculpture at the Center.

In the early twentieth century, Bernard Leach (1887–1979) saw himself as a conduit between East and West, promoting pottery as a combination of both cultures, as well as a lifestyle that married art, philosophy, design, and craft. For several decades, Leach’s influence was ascendant—his studio, Leach Pottery, founded in 1920 with the Japanese ceramist Shōji Hamada (1894–1978), served as a training ground for many influential potters, including Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie (1895–1985), Michael Cardew (1901–1983), Norah Braden (1901–2001), and Richard Batterham (b. 1936). Leach has been widely regarded as the “father of British studio pottery,” in large part due to his influence as a writer—A Potter’s Book, which he first published in 1940, has never been out of print.
“THINGS OF BEAUTY GROWING”: BRITISH STUDIO POTTERY
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“The exhibition considers the influence of the pioneer studio potter Bernard Leach but casts a new light on his role as a collector—we will present important ceramics Leach had personally owned in juxtaposition with the innovative pots that were the ‘exemplars,’ or standard-setting works that underpinned his beliefs and lifetime’s work,” said exhibition co-curator Simon Olding, Director, Crafts Study Centre, University for the Creative Arts, UK.

In addition, the presentation and its accompanying book includes the first public display of photographic portraits of the potters themselves. Many of these portraits were taken by the photographer Ben Boswell (b. 1961), who has been photographing potters for some thirty years. His early portraits of potters, including those of Pleydell-Bouverie and Cardew, are placed alongside those of contemporary makers, which were taken especially for the occasion of the exhibition.

Glenn Adamson, Senior Research Scholar at the Center and a co-curator of “Things of Beauty Growing,” stated that “despite the firm aesthetic resolve of British studio pottery, the field has been marked by vibrant debate since its inception.”

This exhibition will be organized chronologically, in the following sections:

MOON JAR
One of the iconic works in the history of British studio ceramics—a seventeenth-century Joseon dynasty moon jar—demonstrates the continuing importance and influence of this form to artists working today and how British studio ceramics have historically incorporated forms from other cultures. The opening section of this display presents a series of recent moon jars, some made specially for this exhibition by Gareth Mason (b. 1965), Akiko Hirai (b. 1970), Adam Buick (b. 1978), and Nao Matsunaga (b. 1980).

VASE AND BOWL
Focusing on the early history of studio ceramics, these two sections features the strong Eastern origins of studio pottery in Britain. In the hands of pioneer makers such as William Staite Murray (1881–1962), Leach, Hamada, and Pleydell-Bouverie, traditional forms were reinvented for a modern aesthetic. Vases and bowls made in Britain in the 1920s and 1930s are positioned alongside influential historic works from China and Korea, including several from Leach’s personal collection.

CHARGER
The charger, or plate, served as a “painting in the round” for British potters in the first half of the twentieth century. Made to be shown on walls, mantelpieces, or sideboards, the charger was more decorative than functional. This section contrasts different types of
painterly treatments used on the charger’s surface, including slipware dishes by Leach, Hamada, and Cardew, which reference seventeenth-century English examples, as well as avant-garde works by Sam Haile (1909–1948) and Hans Coper (1920–1981), created under the influence of Pablo Picasso.

SET
In the mid-twentieth century, British ceramics existed in a constant state of tension between the handmade and the industrial. This section juxtaposes handmade coffee and breakfast sets by Leach, Lucie Rie (1902–1995), and Ruth Duckworth (1919–2009) with serially produced tableware designed by Keith Murray (1892–1981) and Susie Cooper (1902–1995). Together, these works demonstrate the exchange, rivalry, and continuity between “one-off” pots and commercial wares.

VESSEL
This display examines the emergence, beginning in the 1970s, of vessels that signaled a declining interest in function and a departure from traditional forms. Painterly surfaces exploring pattern, texture, and optical illusion became as important as the expressive, organic form. The works selected here demonstrate the vitality and sculptural possibilities of clay in the hands of radical and innovative practitioners such as Gordon Baldwin (b. 1932), Elizabeth Fritsch (b. 1940), Angus Suttie (1946–1993), Jacqueline Poncelet (b. 1947), and Alison Britton (b. 1948).

POT
Pots by Ladi Kwali (ca. 1925–1984), Gwyn Hanssen Pigott (1935–2013), Magdalene Odundo (b. 1950), Jennifer Lee (b. 1956), and Edmund de Waal (b. 1964) stand in contrast to the dynamic painted surfaces of other artists working from the 1980s to the present day. Rather than being symbolic objects, these works are grounded in process and the experiential aspect of the potter’s practice.

MONUMENT
The exhibition concludes with a series of large-scale contemporary vessels by Duckworth, Felicity Aylieff (b. 1954), Julian Stair (b. 1955), and Lawson Oyekan (b. 1961), among others, which underscores a desire to take the vessel into the realm of monumental sculpture. Some of the artists included in this section continue to draw their inspiration from historic slipwares, others look to contemporary sculpture, and some, like Britton, fuse creative techniques from past and present into a hybrid form, unique to the ceramic discipline.
MADE IN CHINA

The US debut of Clare Twomey’s (b. 1968) ambitious conceptual work Made in China (2010) is installed throughout the Center’s iconic Louis I. Kahn-designed building. This work comprises eighty large-scale porcelain vases, each over five-feet tall, which were fabricated in Jingdezhen, China, and all but one was decorated there. The last vase was gilt by hand at Royal Crown Derby in England—the cost of which was equivalent to the production costs of the other vases combined. The project highlights the asymmetrical labor conditions in East and West, providing contemporary comment on the traditions traced throughout the exhibition.

This exhibition is on view at the Center in New Haven from September 14 through December 3, 2017, and will subsequently travel to The Fitzwilliam Museum at the University of Cambridge, where it will be on view from March 20 through June 18, 2018.

CREDITS

“Things of Beauty Growing”: British Studio Pottery is organized by the Yale Center for British Art in partnership with The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge, and co-curated by Martina Droth, Deputy Director of Research and Curator of Sculpture at the Center; Glenn Adamson, Senior Research Scholar at the Center; and Simon Olding, Director, Crafts Study Centre, University for the Creative Arts, UK. The organizing curators at The Fitzwilliam Museum are Victoria Avery, Keeper, and Helen Ritchie, Research Assistant, Department of Applied Arts. The exhibition is accompanied by a publication of the same title, co-edited by the curators. Co-published with The Fitzwilliam Museum in association with Yale University Press, this book features contributions by an international team of scholars and the biographies and portraits of artists presented in the exhibition.

OPENING EXHIBITION PROGRAM

September 12, 2017, 5:30 pm—The curators of “Things of Beauty Growing”: British Studio Pottery are hosting a panel discussion chaired by Glenn Adamson. Following an introduction by Martina Droth, artists and the exhibition’s co-curators consider the deep history, present position, and possible new directions of studio pottery in Britain. Simon Olding, Magdalene Odundo (a potter who synthesizes a myriad of sources into serenely resolved sculptural forms), and Clare Twomey (the artist whose monumental eighty-vase installation, Made in China, populates the Entrance Court and other spaces at the Center) will participate in the panel.
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ABOUT THE YALE CENTER FOR BRITISH ART
The Yale Center for British Art houses the largest collection of British art outside the United Kingdom. Presented to the university by Paul Mellon (Yale College, Class of 1929), the collection reflects the development of British art and culture from the Elizabethan period onward. The Center’s collections include more than 2,000 paintings, 250 sculptures, 20,000 drawings and watercolors, 40,000 prints, and 35,000 rare books and manuscripts. More than 40,000 volumes supporting research in British art and related fields are available in the Center’s Reference Library. In May 2016, the Center reopened to the public following the completion of a multiyear project to conserve its iconic Louis I. Kahn building.

Visit the Center online at britishart.yale.edu.

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