First US Survey to Explore the Evolution of British Studio Pottery Opens at the Yale Center for British Art in Fall 2017

Exhibition Features Nearly 150 European and Asian Ceramics from 1900 to the Present, and the US Debut of Clare Twomey’s Monumental Installation Made in China

NEW YORK, NY (December 15, 2016)—In fall 2017, the Yale Center for British Art will present the first major survey exhibition on British studio pottery 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” will trace an array of forms that have defined this medium from the turn of the twentieth century to the present. The objects, many of which have never been publically exhibited, are drawn from distinguished private collections worldwide, as well as major museum collections in the United Kingdom. The exhibition will be on view at the Center in New Haven from September 14 through December 3, 2017, and will subsequently travel to The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge.

“A vessel exists to hold or contain—a purpose it may fulfill literally, metaphorically, or both,” said exhibition co-curator Martina Droth, Deputy Director of Research and Curator of Sculpture at the Yale Center for British Art. “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. With this thoughtful integration of vessel forms, the exhibition seeks to shed new light on the development of British art and culture, while placing it in an international context.”

Glenn Adamson, Senior Research Scholar at the Center and a co-curator of “Things of Beauty Growing,” stated, “Despite the firm aesthetic resolve of British studio pottery, the field has been marked by vibrant debate since its inception.” In the early twentieth century, contrasting views were offered by William Staite Murray (1881–1962), who was closely allied with the avant-garde, and Bernard Leach (1887–1979), who represented a traditionalist view with roots in East Asia. Leach saw himself as a conduit between East and West, and promoted 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 Shoji Hamada (1894–1978), served as a training ground for many influential potters, including Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie (1895–1985), Michael Cardew (1901–1983), Norah Braden
A Potter’s Book, which he first published in 1940, has never been out of print.

“The exhibition considers the influence of Leach as a potter but casts a new light on his role as a collector by presenting significant works from his personal collection of ceramics in juxtaposition with the pioneer pots that were the ‘exemplars,’ or standard-setting works that underpinned Leach’s beliefs and lifetime’s work,” said exhibition co-curator Simon Olding, Director, Crafts Study Centre, University for the Creative Arts, UK.

In more recent years, the more sculptural approach of Staite Murray has returned as a significant reference point. Many artists who came of age in the 1970s forcefully rejected Leach’s “Anglo-Oriental” style and instead explored abstraction and cross-cultural quotation. Today, artists such as Julian Stair (b. 1955), Edmund de Waal (b. 1964), Clare Twomey (b. 1968), and Halima Cassell (b. 1975) continue to redefine the potential of the medium with monumental and conceptually sophisticated works.

The exhibition also will include photographic portraits of each potter included in the display, several of which have been commissioned from photographer Ben Boswell (b. 1961). Some of these portraits, including those of potters Pleydell-Bouverie and Cardew, were taken by Boswell previously; others are being created specifically for this project, and all will be included in the catalogue that will accompany the exhibition.

SECTIONS OF THE EXHIBITION

“Things of Beauty Growing”: British Studio Pottery will be organized chronologically, according to the following sections:

MOON JAR
One of the pivotal works in the history of British studio ceramics is a seventeenth-century Joseon dynasty moon jar, which Leach brought to England from Korea, and it now resides in the collection of The British Museum, London. To demonstrate the continuing importance of this form to artists working today—and how British studio ceramics have historically incorporated forms from other cultures—this opening section of the exhibition will comprise a series of recent moon jars, some made specially for the exhibition, by Gareth Mason (b. 1965), Akiko Hirai (b. 1970), Adam Buick (b. 1978), and Nao Matsunaga (b. 1980).

VASE AND BOWL
These two sections will consider the early history of studio ceramics. In the hands of pioneer makers, including Leach, Pleydell-Bouverie, Staite Murray, and Hamada,
traditional forms were reinvented for English ceramics with a strong sense of their Eastern origins. Vases and bowls made in Britain in the 1920s and 1930s will be positioned alongside influential historic works from China and Korea, including several from Leach’s personal collection of Eastern ceramics.

CHARGER
The charger, or plate, served as a “painting in the round” for British potters in the first half of the twentieth century. Often created to be displayed on walls, mantelpieces, or sideboards, the charger was both a decorative and functional form. This section will contrast the 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 dialogue—or tension—between the handmade and the industrial. The individualism prized by studio potters became a desirable quality in the context of industrial manufacture. This section will juxtapose 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 section will examine 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
The pots displayed in this section by De Waal, Ladi Kwali (ca. 1925–1984), Gwyn Hanssen Pigott (1935–2013), Magdalena Odundo (b. 1950), and Jennifer Lee (b. 1956) will 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.
“THINGS OF BEAUTY GROWING”: BRITISH STUDIO POTTERY

MONUMENT
“Things of Beauty Growing” will conclude with a series of large-scale contemporary vessels by Aylieff, Stair, Duckworth, 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 others, like Alison Britton, fuse creative techniques from past and present into a hybrid form, unique to the ceramic discipline.

MADE IN CHINA
The US debut of Twomey’s ambitious installation Made in China (2010) will be dispersed throughout the Center’s iconic architectural setting. The work is comprised of 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.

CREDITS
“Things of Beauty Growing”: British Studio Pottery is being 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 will be accompanied by a publication of the same title, an elegantly assembled catalogue co-edited by Droth, Olding, and Adamson. Co-published with The Fitzwilliam Museum in association with Yale University Press, this book will feature contributions by an international team of scholars and the biographies and portraits of artists presented in the exhibition.
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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 conservation project of its iconic Louis I. Kahn building.

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Image credits: Clare Twomey, Made in China, 2010, installation of eighty porcelain vases, Collection of the artist; Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie in her studio at Kilmington, Wiltshire, ca. 1982, photograph by Ben Boswell; Michael Cardew, Rose Bowl, ca. 1938, earthenware, Crafts Study Centre, Farnham, UK; Julian Stair, Quietus, three-vessel installation, Collection of the artist, photograph by Ben Boswell; Edmund de Waal, a place made fast, 160 porcelain vessels with gilding in a wood, aluminum, and glass cabinet, Gagosian Gallery, Los Angeles; Unknown maker, moon jar, Joseon dynasty, ca. 1600–1800, glazed white porcelain, The British Museum, London, Hahn Kwang-Ho Purchase Fund; Adam Buick, Moon Jar (in the kiln), 2016, porcelain with white Jun glaze, Collection of Adam Buick, Pembrokeshire, Wales; Lucie Rie, Bottle, 1970s, stoneware, Crafts Study Centre, Farnham, UK; Alison Britton, Leaning Blue and White Pot, 1987, earthenware, slab built, hand built, hand painted, slip, Gift of Ed Wolf, Victoria and Albert Museum, London; Ladi Kwali, Stoneware Water Pot, ca. 1936, hand-coiled pot depicting fish, snakes, armadillos, and other animals, sgraffito decoration through slip, wood fired, Aberystwyth University, School of Art Museum and Galleries Ceramic Collection, Aberystwyth, Wales; Magdalene Odundo, Untitled, 1995, burnished and carbonized terracotta vessel, Gift of Jane and Gerald Katcher, Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven; Clare Twomey in her London studio with Made in China (2010), photograph by Ben Boswell; Yale Center for British Art, exterior view, photograph by Richard Caspole