

CROMWELL PLACE

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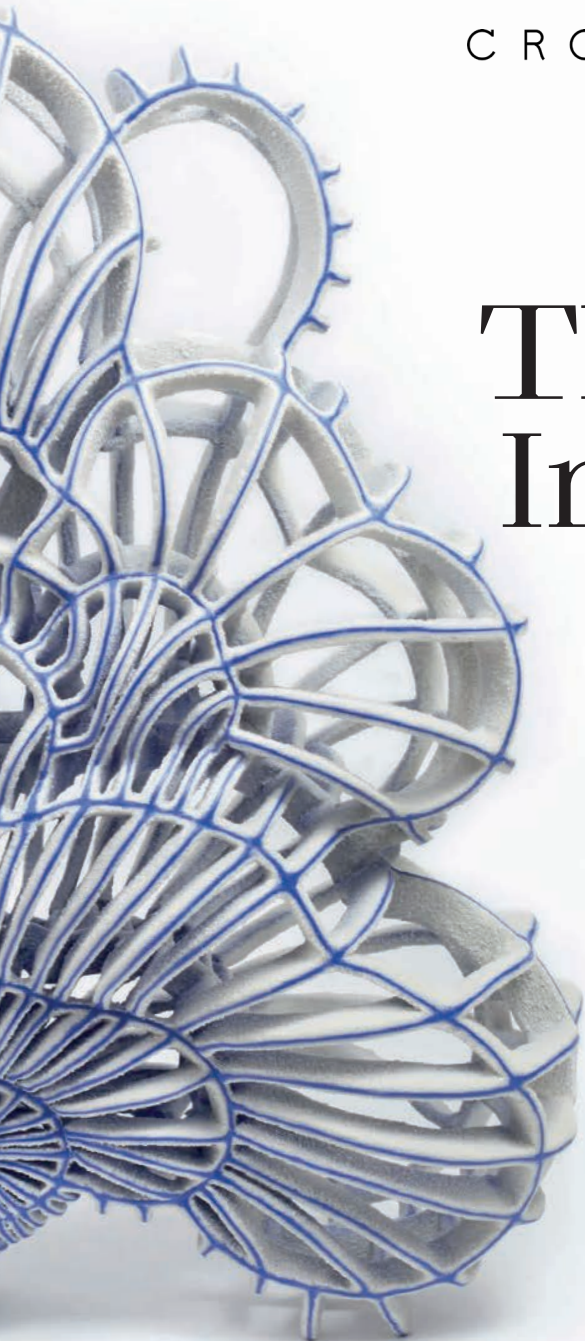
# The Value In Things

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2023

TING & YING

VESSEL GALLERY



# Introduction

by Brian Kennedy, Curator

The title, *‘The Value in Things’*, is meant to be provocative. Too often the contemporary object is dismissed as being decorative, slight, insubstantial, merely a ‘thing’. The exhibition challenges this perception and asserts that these contemporary objects have significant cultural value and deserve serious consideration and collection. Both Ting Ying and Vessel Gallery represent some of the most exciting, innovative and important artists across the fields of contemporary studio glass and ceramics. Each of these galleries has a distinct voice and my task is to ensure the exhibition represents both their similarities, differences and make for a cohesive and harmonious whole.



A series of commissioned essays by eminent writers in this field, looks at the journey these objects take from the studio, through the gallery and into collections, both institutional and private. These essays address what sets these ‘things’ apart from the ordinary. What makes owning them relevant? What their value is within the broader cultural landscape? What makes them collectable?

One of the great advantages of showing at Cromwell Place is that it is so close to the Victoria & Albert Museum. This is ‘our’ museum, the place where the histories and values that support and underpin the work in this exhibition are held. Many of the artists in *‘The Value in Things’* already have work included in this most venerable of institutions and these purchases have often been facilitated through these galleries.

The objects in this exhibition are culturally important and significant, bear scrutiny and have a relevancy to the time and place where they were made. Objects of the present with importance for the future.

Set over three galleries at Cromwell Place *‘The Value in Things’* gives the visitors an opportunity to see wonderful works, understand their stories, appreciate their power and debate their value. In these times where we are all rightly questioning meaningless consumption, this exhibition addresses the issues of ownership and the importance of collecting, the joy that these objects can bring in the now while caring and preserving them for the future.

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Front Cover: Left - XU Shiyuan, Blue Vein No.14. Right - Karin Mørch, Flow Grey Blue | Above: Cromwell Place illustration

# The Value In Things



Su Xianzhong | Paper No. 1

by Emma Crichton Miller

Screeds have been devoted to the philosophical idea of value. We understand that market value is generated in the gap between supply and demand and that cost value can be calculated by adding together man-hours, and, in the case of objects, the costs of materials, processing, packaging, marketing and transport. We know, in addition, that objects can have many other different kinds of value: functional, aesthetic, cultural, symbolic and sentimental just to think of five. There can be huge discrepancies between these different values. The art object, in particular, is notoriously difficult to value in any absolute sense. Imaginative power, expressive force and political or social resonance are hard to quantify; while public reputation, the swirling forces of art market status, mediated by museums, galleries, auction houses and the press, or the simple arrival of a few passionate collectors on the scene, can each differently add value to an object not made for use. As we know, it is also entirely possible to have an art work that is not an object at all. And there is some virtue in that. As the American proto-Conceptualist Douglas Huebler announced in 1969: "The world is full of objects, more or less interesting; I do not wish to add any more. I prefer, simply, to state the existence of things in terms of time and/or place."

In this respect, highly crafted art works occupy an intriguing place between Conceptual art and functional objects. They are, after all, profoundly material whilst also representing astonishing displays of skill and ingenuity. Whether the original material is gold, for a goldsmith, or silica, for a glass artist, or clay, for a potter, there is an intrinsic value in the object related to the technical challenge and knowledge of materials it represents. You have only to look at the objects in this exhibition, created by established ceramic and glass artists, each of whom has invested years in developing the expertise to bring those capricious elements – earth, water, air and fire – under their control, so that they might become a medium for personal



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expression. With both glass and clay, what is particularly inspiring is the alchemical transformation of humble ingredients into objects of high value through a whole range of distinctive and idiosyncratic processes.

But however great our admiration for these masters, we are still talking here about value in relation to the price put upon something, the value of something. Whereas what we are invited to consider in this exhibition is the value “in” things. Here we touch on the qualities inherent in objects, which are the qualities that inspire and create collectors. These qualities are a combination of the psychological and the physical. Our eye may be caught immediately by the colours, forms and surface textures, and then we are stimulated by the emotions communicated, or the ideas suggested or the allusions to other experiences or art works. So, with Xu Shiyuan, we are drawn in by our attraction to her objects to a contemplation of the miraculous life of single-celled organisms in the ocean or the plant seeds on the land, and ultimately, to a thrilled encounter with the building blocks of all life forms. Babs Haenen’s dancing works with their painterly glazes evoke the movements of rivers, oceans and mountains, the liveliness still vivid in rocks and trees, revivifying our memories while exciting our eyes. Philip Baldwin and Monica Guggisberg use their extraordinary skills with blown glass – combining Venetian cold-working techniques with Swedish overlay techniques, where two bubbles of colour are brought together – to produce elegant, precise work that poses large cultural and political questions. Bethany Wood by contrast uses glass as if it were paint, conjuring in the act of blowing multilayered, three dimensional evocations of momentary visions – whether of the urban landscape or wild nature. With the ceramic sculptures of Janet Lines, the clay offers simultaneously an illusion of rippling textile and an echo a highly contoured landscape, whilst also being the abstract record of the period of making, the movement of Lines’s own mind, expressed through her hands, as she builds, pushes and pulls. The vulnerability of this bag – an exile’s only possession? A mother’s womb? – is enhanced by patches of ash or Lines’s own finger marks





on the surface, suggesting narrative, and yet, as the dark of ash at the rim testifies, this is also an exercise in sophisticated abstract art making – drawing a black line around a hole, defining a void.

Ultimately, however, these qualities, which makes up the value in the object, are impossible fully to express. They reach back to our earliest tactile encounters with the world, our earliest haptic experiences, before we had language to explore or explain. The eye and the hand – indeed the whole body – had to work together to decipher the substance and scale of things. In turn, the eye and the hand and indeed the whole body respond eagerly to these purposefully created, meaningful objects. Some people are drawn viscerally to ceramics, others to glass, and for some what is pleasurable is the uncertainty about materials, the disjuncture between eye and hand. In the work of Vezzini and Chen, for example, the dialogue between Vezzini's organic plant shaped ceramic elements and Chen's graceful clear blown glass is what gives the works their liveliness. Maria Bang Espersen's delicious glass works – in their candy colours – look soft and malleable, provisional, even once hardened. For Amy Cushing, however, it is her sheer technical mastery of fused glass that is impressive. Anna Silverton similarly expresses in her exquisitely poised works a pure celebration of her discipline – porcelain and the wheel. She pursues a balance between the soft, inexact art of throwing clay and the precision of turning, between the dense purity of porcelain and its fragile translucency, between the elegance of her sleek forms and the playfulness of her bright glazes – and in so doing centres our own emotions.

In the end, these objects move us so intensely precisely because they mix the matter of the mind – the ideas, thoughts, feelings, memories, the wit and wonder of the individual artists – with the stuff of our planet. They ground fleeting perceptions and bind immaterial intuitions into the fabric of the universe. We sense our kinship with them. More than things, they are, like us, spirit incarnate.

# Complementary colours



Zhao Jinya | *Non-Existent Existence, The Two of Us No.9*

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## How the relationship between museums and commercial galleries can benefit both parties – and their artists

by Emma Park

The choice of 4 Cromwell Place as the location for *The Value in Things* has a symbolic aspect: it is just across the road from the Victoria and Albert Museum, the world's leading collection for the decorative arts. In discovering new artists, giving a platform to established ones, and shaping the taste of private collectors, commercial galleries like Ting Ying and Vessel play a vital role in fostering contemporary culture in ceramics and glass. This role complements that of museums like the V&A, which look to sift through the mass of artefacts created and prized today and pick out those which it thinks worth bringing to a wider audience – including future generations.

For an artist, having a piece acquired by a museum can be a stamp of approval, an indication that their work is considered of more than ephemeral value, as well as a way of becoming more widely known. From the gallery's perspective, 'it gives confidence to a potential collector,' says independent curator Brian Kennedy. 'It's an external validation.'

Galleries can operate in ways that museums cannot. Curators have to plan exhibitions years in advance, and the acquisition of each new piece is subject to budgetary restrictions and a lengthy approval process; galleries can promote artists with greater spontaneity. And while galleries may reap greater rewards financially, they also take risks that museums

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do not. A gallerist can choose to represent an artist at an early stage in their career and have a role in shaping it. In contrast, 'it is very rare that you would see a more established cultural organisation platforming an artist within that emerging category,' says Sarah Rothwell, Senior Curator of Modern and Contemporary Design at National Museums Scotland.

Museums will often have a broader remit than galleries, especially smaller ones, which build their market from a limited number of specialisms. Curators, too, may come to contemporary glass from another field and need to build up their knowledge base. In this situation, galleries can give guidance to a curator looking for a work that represents a particular area. Carolyn Needell, Curator of Glass at the Chrysler Museum of Art, Virginia, first became interested in Chris Day's eloquent glass and metal sculptures when she received a physical catalogue of his work from Vessel through the post. She contacted Angel Monzon, the gallery's creative director, who, during the pandemic, introduced her to more of Day's work via videolink. This led to the Chrysler's acquisition of his *Wander*.

So what is the value of a piece of contemporary ceramics or glass, and how do curators go about choosing future acquisitions? Each curator I spoke to had their own criteria, which seemed to reflect both personal preference and institutional goals. For Needell, the piece has to be 'museum quality', which could be a question of uniqueness, of 'interesting voices, beautiful or compelling works'. Sometimes it is a piece, quite simply, 'that can stand on its own...that is telling you something.'

The object must also fit with the rest of the collection and the museum's ethos. The NMS, says Rothwell, has 'a strategic vision which the museum is looking at, where we have areas that need to be developed.' According





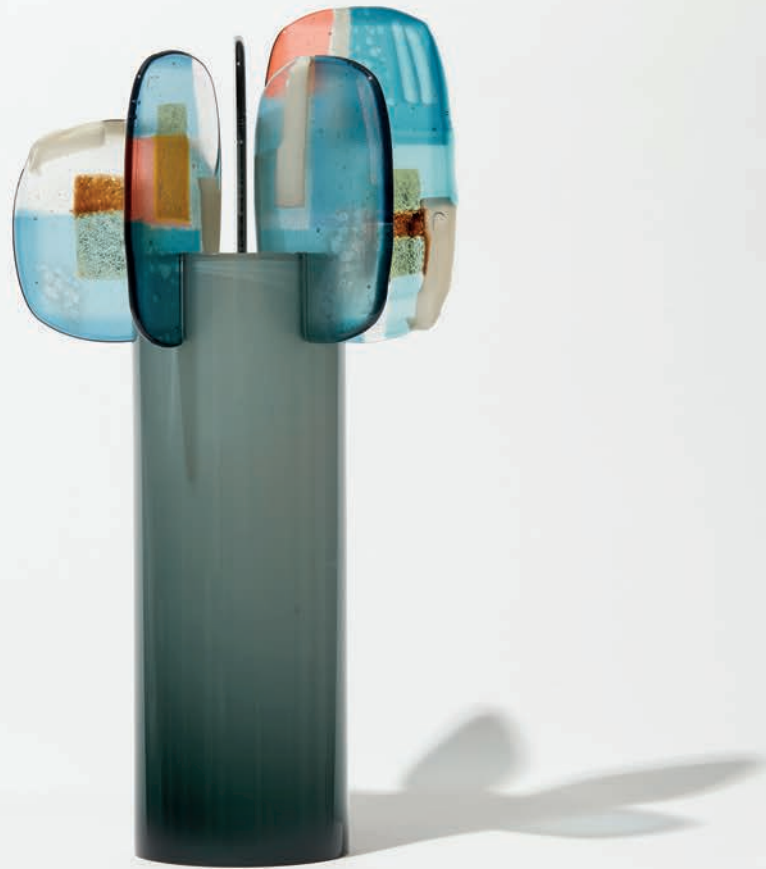
to Xiaoxin Li, Curator of Chinese Collections at the V&A, 'one thing that the museum is very much about is beautiful objects. I also want to see whether the artist's work has any link to traditions, an extra layer that tells the story of Chinese studio crafts.' 'Sometimes the provenance of the piece is more valuable than the material, the object and the craftsmanship,' says Peter Ting, co-founder of Ting Ying Gallery. 'A curator's spin on something can be fascinating.'

In less well known fields, galleries can provide curators with recondite knowledge. When Li embarked on a project to chart studio craft in China, she discovered that there was remarkably little material, especially outside the country. Apart from Ting Ying, 'there are no other galleries in the UK with a focus on contemporary Chinese craft,' she says. Peter Ting also introduced her to the glass artist Zhao Jinya. This led to the purchase of Zhao's *Non-existent existence: Just the Two of Us, No 9 (2021)* for the department's collection. 'It's a nice combination of playfulness, the interplay of colour, shape and form, and the obscure and clear qualities of glass,' says Li. 'Her work really focuses your attention on the beauty of the object.'

As the exhibition's title suggests, curators and gallerists are concerned with different types of 'value', and with the place of an object in the lives of its owners and admirers. Aside from external considerations, like personal taste, budget and topical trends, both perspectives have many values in common: beauty, fine work, imaginative depth. The point, says Kennedy, is that whether or not glass and ceramics can be categorised as 'fine' art is irrelevant. What matters is that they constitute 'a fully fledged area with its own history and traditions' – supported, crucially, by galleries and museums.



# Glass art in Britain, 2023



Amy Cushing | Paradise 06 in Midnight Blue

## In hard times, there is much to celebrate

by Emma Park

Glass art in Britain has faced several challenges in recent years, including the closure of glassmaking courses in centres at Wolverhampton and Glasgow, the planned relocation and slimming down of the National Glass Centre in Sunderland, and rising costs everywhere. Yet despite this, there is much to celebrate in the quality of the work being produced, both in terms of technical skill and creative expression in a difficult but magical medium.

The achievements of glass artists in Britain were highlighted in 2022, which was an important year for glass worldwide, being the first year of opening up after the pandemic, and also the UN International Year of Glass. The high point of the UK's glass calendar was the British Glass Biennale, held from August to October in Stourbridge, a former centre of industrial glassmaking in the West Midlands. The Biennale exhibition featured work made by 103 glass artists, selected from over 200 applications by a panel of experts. Among the participants were 22 artists represented by Vessel, including Amy Cushing, Bethany Wood, and Verity Pulford, all of whose work is on display in *The Value of Things*. Pulford lives and works in rural north Wales, where she uses a combination of techniques, including *pâte de verre*, painting and etching, to capture the complexity of natural forms such as fungi, lichen and ferns.

With fairs like the London Design Festival and Artefact, the Contemporary Craft Fair, the capital is thriving as a centre for design. Among its glassmakers is Amy Cushing, whose kiln-formed and fused sculptural groups use bright, luminous colours to provide focal points of contemplation

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and vibrancy in a private home or commercial setting. Also making a name for themselves are Cristina Vezzini (Italy) and Stan Chen (Taiwan), who met on the MA in glass and ceramics at the Royal College of Art, and now run a studio in London, where they are represented by Ting Ying. Vezzini specialises in ceramics and Chen in glassblowing. Together, they have evolved a compelling design aesthetic, which is displayed in their harmonious collection of lighting fixtures, with airy forms reminiscent of flowers, leaves or seeds. One layer, carved in porcelain with minute attention to detail by Vezzini, allows the light to emanate softly through. The other, blown and engraved in glass by Chen, reflects the light and scatters it, at the same time seeming to hold its glow like water in a vessel.

The heritage of Stourbridge's Glassmaking Quarter is also being celebrated at the Stourbridge Glass Museum, which reopened in 2022 at the White House Cone, the site of a former glassworks. Within the museum's premises, there is a hotshop where Allister Malcolm makes his commissions, including a glass slipper for Disney's 2021 remake of *Cinderella*. Across the street, next to the equally historic Red House Cone, Bethany Wood and her partner Elliot Walker have opened a hotshop and gallery space for artists to showcase their work and run glassmaking courses. Wood and Walker also work as independent artists. Wood is inspired by the contrasting palettes of urban and rural landscapes, and views working in hot glass as a form of 'painting'.

The RCA continues to attract international students in glass of the highest calibre. Zhao Jinya, represented by Ting Ying, graduated from its MA in 2019 and is now reading for a PhD there. Zhao's recent *Non-Existent Existence* series explores the strangeness of living in a foreign country and the nature of the dialogue between work and viewer. Her work has won





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The glass art, craft and design being made and exhibited in Britain today is notable for its variety, both imaginative and technical

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several awards, and this year she will be visiting the prestigious Pilchuck Glass School in the US for a residency. Back in Jingdezhen in eastern China, she has also co-founded a studio, J Atelier, to represent young craftspeople and designers.

One of the strengths of Vessel is its connection with Scandinavia through Angel Monzon, its creative director, who is half-Swedish. This connection has enabled the gallery to introduce the work of several talented Scandinavian artists into the UK, including Maria Bang Espersen, who was born in Denmark and currently has a studio in Småland, Sweden. Espersen makes unique sculptures by stretching and twisting carefully constructed bundles of glass rods at high temperatures. She describes herself as somewhere between a fine artist, a glassblower and a maker of *konsthantverk*, 'art-handwork'.

The glass art, craft and design being made and exhibited in Britain today is notable for its variety, both imaginative and technical; its makers' spirit of enterprise and willingness to experiment; and its international scope. Whether such a culture is worth preserving for the next generation is a question which the objects can and should answer for themselves.



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# Clay's rebellious streak



Steven Edwards | *Monochromatic Fold III*

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## The infatuation with ceramics

by Malaika Byng

Clay is a material with a rebellious streak. Humans have been shaping it into tools and vessels for 12,000 years, but its behaviour continues to confound us. As it transforms in the kiln, it is prone to shrink, crack or collapse, and one small impurity can wreak havoc, no matter the master. Add glazes to the equation and the results are even more mercurial.

In our mass manufactured world, this unpredictability is part of its seduction for artists, hobbyists and collectors. The medium's popularity has soared in recent years. A vessel by Hans Coper sold for £655,500 at a Bonhams Design auction in October, and more and more of us have tried to wrestle with clay in evening classes or found ourselves hooked by *The Great Pottery Throw Down* series on TV.

The art world's infatuation with ceramics has also grown in intensity since Grayson Perry won the Turner Prize in 2003. Artists such as Theaster Gates and Edmund de Waal have cemented its place in the contemporary art canon, and this winter's hit show *Strange Clay* at the Hayward Gallery – featuring ceramics pioneers such as Betty Woodman alongside artists taking the medium to new places – drew more under 30s to the London space than ever, proving an magnetic antidote to their digital lives. A new generation of ceramics collectors looks set to enter the fray.

Ting-Ying Gallery's artists revel in the temperamentality of clay, surrendering to its whims. The gallery is drawn to makers who take risks. 'Our artists don't try to exert their dominance over the medium or have

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a preconceived end-point in mind, they allow the material to take them on a journey,' says the co-founder, Peter Ting. As a result, every piece radiates with an emotional value for the collector.

Oriel Zinaburg's undulating vessels, for example, are an exercise in letting go. The Israeli artist starts with techniques such as press moulding and slab-building, then rips, folds and distorts the clay using an intuitive process from which the final form emerges. The materiality of clay dictates the folds and – once fired, glazed and re-fired multiple times – the objects seem to freeze human emotions in time.

A sense of movement also pervades the work of ceramicist Babs Haenen, a former dancer, and Vessel Gallery's artist Steven Edwards. Amsterdam-based Haenen works with porcelain slabs, hand-building her organic vessels with rhythmic gestures that give each work an energetic inner choreography and tactility, while in his London studio, Edwards begins by placing the clay under stress, then pulls and contorts his material to provoke a reaction, instilling his forms with an unusual tension.

Often the artists in *The Value in Things* play with the boundaries between freedom and control to dynamic effect. Huang Jing, for example, dribbles a lichen-like glaze loosely over her stoneware *Loop* sculptures – recalling Scholar's Rocks – yet the drips are precise, hardening into peaks onto which the objects balance when turned upside down after firing. Letting go, it seems, is a fine art. For her, this push and pull reflects the shape-shifting experience of moving between cultures: from China, to the USA and beyond.

The British maker Janet Lines, meanwhile, explores the fragility of the material with her paper-thin stoneware vessels. They appear to twist and contort, as if cowering in fear or discomfort. Ceramic vessels have





long held a metaphorical weight, with their connection to human origin stories and their resemblance to the body. For Lines, they carry the emotion of dislocation – that vulnerable state of being confronted by the unknown, an experience we can all identify with. She often smoke fires her work, to darken the exposed rims and interiors, giving them a sombre beauty.

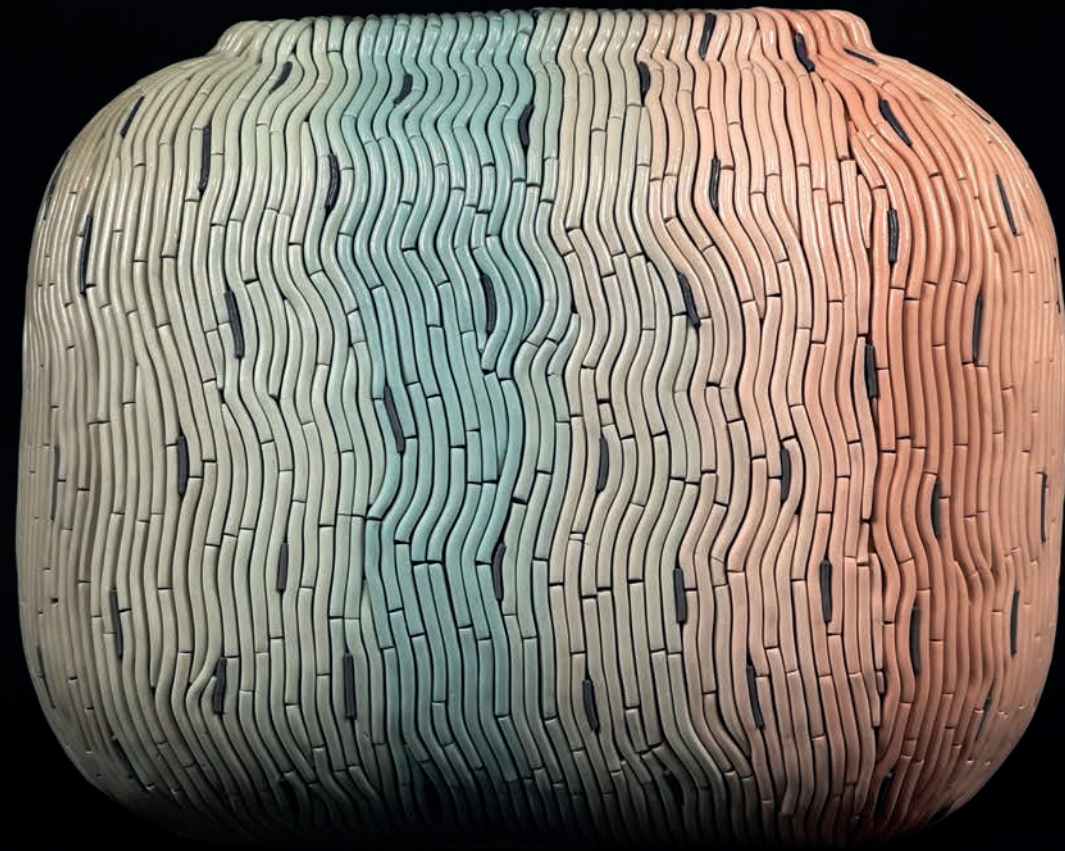
The very ubiquity of clay in our everyday lives lends it a peculiar power for artists. In his catalogue essay for *Strange Clay*, the curator Cliff Lauson wrote that, 'While clay is an eminently familiar material, it also has the potential to disrupt that everyday quality.' We see that here too, in the work of makers, such as Carol McNicoll and Su Xianzhong. McNicoll's witty assemblages of slip cast and found objects often draw on the quaint British tea tradition to take aim at national obsessions and UK politics. World War Two bomber planes mingle with decals of pretty pastoral scenes on *Fly Past*, for example, a cake stand-cum-vase, made in 2001, the year that Britain joined America's War on Terror in Afghanistan. The work brings the heavy toll of war to the table as you enjoy a slice of Victoria sponge.

Su Xianzhong's delicate Blanc de Chine work, meanwhile, holds a more subtle protest. The diaphanous 'paper' porcelain in his sculptures rests on firebricks that once lined the tunnel kilns in the Dehua State porcelain factory, which closed many years ago, putting thousands out of work. His pieces celebrate the fragile beauty of Dehua porcelain while lambasting the failure of a state enterprise. In this way, to collect a piece of Xianzhong or McNicoll's work is to own a slice of history.

The makers in *The Value of Things* roam freely between the functional and the sculptural, defying easy categorisation as fine artists, craftspeople or designers, asking to be judged on their own terms. They delight in the idiosyncrasies of their material while pushing it out of its comfort zone, with electrifying results.



# Alice Walton



Alice Walton | Fosse Ways

## A new door opening

by Emma Crichton-Miller

Alice Walton's highly original ceramic sculptures result from a unique fusion of deeply felt personal experience and an idiosyncratic, experimental way of working. Her forms, created in moulds or hand-built, are inspired by fleeting encounters with man-made objects or architecture in both urban and rural environments, captured in drawings. Those things she has noticed on her daily walks, ephemeral sights – a cluster of leaves softening the bleakness of a stairwell, a bollard with snow on top, a broken park railing with rain drops glistening, an abandoned viaduct in a spring wood, sunlight on a hazel arch – provide the spur to a creative process intent on capturing the moment, what Walton refers to as “that snapshot in time”. First comes the sketch, and then the transformation into a three-dimensional object. But far from that being the end of the business, it is just the beginning. It is then that Walton begins the painstaking task of applying a skin of thin strips of extruded coloured porcelain to the surface of the form. For Walton, this is, as she puts it, “a way of making a mark and replicating it. “This decorative skin is in fact a record of emotions, meditatively recaptured over days, as well as a means of recreating the movement of her daily walks in a static object, so that even after firing, the final work evokes all the vitality and contingency of life. In this sense, her multicoloured pieces are a three dimensional illustration of William Wordsworth's definition of poetry: ‘It is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity’.

Walton is not sure why she chose to do her Foundation in Art and Design at Wimbledon School of Art in 2006, rather than closer to her home in Suffolk. There, however, she found as tutor Annie Turner, the ceramic artist

known for her delicate and evocative cage-like structures, also from Suffolk, who encouraged her to experiment. At Brighton University, where she went for her degree, Walton chose to specialise in ceramics and metal, making for her final degree show large scale open sculptural works in clay, glazed to look like metal, inspired by Victorian bird cages. It was here that she began to work with coils and extruded clay as surrogates for drawn lines, enabling her to explore mark-making and movement, but also the potential of clay to hold stories and emotions. “Whatever mood I am in, however I am feeling, that mark is showing on the clay. I don’t think I could get that so clearly in any other material,” she says.

The pieces in her degree show, however beautiful, were fragile and broke easily. For several years after that, Walton worked as a technician in the department, pushing her technical knowledge, while making black and white tableware. In 2016, however, she embarked on an MA at the Royal College of Art. Here she was able to pick up the thread of her earlier work. Rather than build with line, she could use coils and extruded clay to decorate closed forms created more robustly with moulds or hand-built, and supported internally. A travel scholarship to Rajasthan enabled her to explore colour, noting as she travelled through pink and blue cities that the bold dyes everywhere on display were tempered by the fading effects of the hot, dry and dusty climate. It was this observation that inspired Walton to mix coloured pigment directly with white porcelain – producing the array of muted colours that have increasingly distinguished her work.

For each object, Walton works with strips of a particular length and width, units in a choreography of meaning, the clays coloured in gradations of different hues. Each of her stripes is then subtly squashed or bent,







“it has grown deeper and subtler”

or even, more recently, sometimes curved around small islands of clay. Walton explains that for her, “This emphasises that the placement of lines is random, intuitive, man-made.” It is as if they record the movement of wind or water or human emotion. At the same time, the flow of lines and interrupting marks over the three dimensional surface of the form is also inspired by the very precise art of map making. A walker, Walton is also a map lover, seizing the opportunities of artists’ residencies to plot her wanderings over different landscapes. Her lines are like contours, delineating the terrain of her objects, while the juxtapositions of different faded colours recall the symbolic colouring of areas of land on old maps.

Since she moved to Somerset, two years ago, with her partner, Walton has begun to experiment with glazes for the first time. Noticing a shift in her palette, reflecting her experiences of being in nature through all the seasons – “it has grown deeper and subtler”, she says – Walton has been seeking to enhance the viewer’s experience of her almost imperceptibly achieved colour gradients. Starting with clear glaze, she has begun to add pigment, creating a warm or cold hue. It is as if she is suddenly working in an additional dimension, using contrasts of matt and shiny, cold and warm, to draw peoples’ attention to the dynamics of the surface and the pleasure, as she defines it, of small differences. Walton describes this as “a new door opening.” These works are the first fruit.



# Baldwin and Guggisberg



Baldwin & Guggisberg | Aristotle's Amphorae series

## Eternal return: the metaphor of the vessel, from boats to amphorae

by Emma Park

In the evolution of an artist, one theme emerges from another; there are phases and breaks with the past, but also digressions, returns, reworkings. The career of Philip Baldwin and Monica Guggisberg, who have been a couple in art and life since 1979, has displayed both these characteristics.

For the first fifteen years or so, they focused on 'beautiful tabletop objects,' says Guggisberg. Starting already in the mid '80s, they began to work on design commissions for companies including Venini, Rosenthal and Steuben. The real turning point, however, came when the Muranese maestro, Lino Tagliapietra, introduced them to Paolo Ferro, a highly trained craftsman in *battuto* cutting. They began to experiment with a much wider range of cutting techniques on the surface of a blown vessel than was done in Murano at the time. A collaboration with Ferro ensued stretching over many years, in which they developed a 'vocabulary' of cuts, from shallow to deep, and through layers of coloured glass. This, combined with their aesthetic of perfectly finished, ethereal forms, became their trademark.

Their third phase began in around 2016. This was the move from individual objects and smaller-scale series to ambitious installations in public venues, including St Mary's Cathedral, Edinburgh (2016), Canterbury Cathedral (2018), the Ebeltoft Glass Museum (2020), and the Conches Glass Museum (2022). This also involved a shift in the way they approached their work, from a pure focus on aesthetics, craft and design to the use of glass as a medium for the expression of their ideas: in other words, towards art.

As Guggisberg puts it, through their more recent works, she and Baldwin seek to show their ‘empathy for the world...without losing [their] deep attachment to shapes and forms’ and to the applied arts tradition.

Through these phases, a few symbolic motifs have kept returning in different guises. One such motif is the boat. Appearing in different sizes and materials, it always has the same form of a slim oval pointed at both ends, like a canoe. The motif, in its exact proportions, which are scaled up or down in each case, is based on the model of a ‘peapod’, a wooden boat from Maine, which they started using in their work in 2008-9. The motif alludes to the boats that were in both artists’ lives growing up, as well as to their experience as adults of moving from one country to another. ‘We are rather nomadic,’ says Guggisberg.

In *Under an Equal Sky* at Canterbury, the boat motif took on an additional significance as a metaphor for the migration of peoples around the world, including the ‘dark side’ of this experience. In *The Return of History*, on display in this exhibition, the metal frame of a boat holds a carefully disordered group of amphorae in a multitude of shapes, colours and textures. This combination, with the specific use of the amphora, suggests that ‘globalisation’, the spread of objects around the world, has been going on since far back into the archaeological past.

A second motif is the amphora. This originated at the same time as the boat, and, as in *Return*, the two have frequently been used together. In *Amphore-Métaphore*, an exhibition involving nine installations at Conches, they decided to take the amphora motif in a new direction after visiting the Narbo Via, the new archaeological museum of Narbonne. This gave them an ‘aha moment’, says Baldwin, in which they connected their own aesthetic of the vessel, and specifically the amphora, with an ancient form that links cultures and eras.







The selections from Conches at the present exhibition include *The Aristotle Amphorae*, a set of five vessels patterned with large, lightly textured oblongs, in oranges, reds and blues, whose rectangularity evokes the geometric 'key' design used as a border on Greek vases. The artists view Aristotle as part of the 'great trajectory' of intellectual development in the West that led from the Greeks all the way to the 21st century and artificial intelligence.

A counterpoint to these is provided by *The Harappans*, another set of five amphorae from *Amphore-Métaphore*. Their rounded, tapering forms and mottled shades of grey-blue, amber and charcoal suggest something 'vague and ephemeral', says Baldwin: a civilisation dating to 3,000-1,300 BC in the Indus Valley that was only rediscovered in the 1920s. The theme of the rediscovery of the past and its resonance is also evoked by *Fused Glass Shards*, which rescues glass fragments from the artists' studio and recycles them into a new artwork with a life of its own.

'You can get a message across through beauty,' says Guggisberg. That is what the other works from *Amphore-Métaphore* aim to do. The surface of the amphora entitled *Roads Roads Roads* is gashed, like the Earth, with grey and black lines. *The Arsenal of Democracy*, from a group of four amphorae in the national colours of the US, Russia, China and the Ukraine, makes one of the artists' starkest political statements yet. Wrapped in the Stars and Stripes, its silhouette reminiscent of a nuclear warhead, and stuck through with bullets, *Arsenal* is a visual travesty of American imperialism. The sombre tones of *The Africans*, in contrast, evoke a continent scarred by suffering. If anyone thinks that glass cannot step beyond the medium of craft to evoke moods and ideas, they may need to look twice at these appealing and challenging vessels.



# The Value in Things

Presented by Vessel Gallery  
& Ting-Ying Gallery

1 – 11 March 2023 | Cromwell Place

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