

Press Release

GRAPHIC POTS

21 September - 26 October 2019

Oxford Ceramics Gallery's upcoming autumn show, 'Graphic Pots', (21 September - 26 October 2019) is a bold curation of work from both the UK and Internationally; showcasing the varied ways that artists & makers use the surface of ceramics to explore both personal and political ideas through the use of line, image and montage.

For the first-time Oxford Ceramics will show works by Australian/UK artist Stephen Bird, alongside those of South African artist Hylton Nel. Closer to home there are pieces by the late John Piper, whose ceramic work have left a strong legacy in the Oxford College collections in the form of stained glass, paintings and prints. Piper is viewed as one of the early catalysts behind the founding of Modern Art Oxford through his pioneering work shown at the Bear Lane Gallery in the 1950s & 1960s. Other contemporary artists being shown include Bruce McLean; who, like Piper has worked with Fulham Pottery, Philip Eglin, Stephen Dixon & Paul Scott

The 'Graphic Pots' show has been an extensive journey from the initial inception to the upcoming show, co-curated by Amanda Game, Independent Curator and James Fordham, Director of Oxford Ceramics Gallery. Game feels 'ceramic surfaces have rarely been purely decorative or wholly innocent affairs – political slogans, coded social and personal messages, and subversive as well as commemorative images can all be found across the surfaces of pots through time.'

Director James is 'excited to be pulling together such major artists working with decorated ceramics. Hopefully this graphic show will excite and provoke viewers! Particular highlights include Paul Scott's 'Foot and Mouth, no.5' Platter, 'Our Daily Bread' by Stephen Bird and 'Vase with flared rim depicting Elgin Chapter House' by John Piper. Made at Fulham Pottery and originally exhibited in "New Ceramics by John Piper" at Dan Klein Ltd in 1982.'

Featured Artists: Stephen Bird; Stephen Dixon; Philip Eglin; Bruce McLean; Hylton Nel; John Piper and Paul Scott

Sculptor *Bruce McLean's* dynamic gestural work has included clay as part of his wide-ranging portfolio over many years, firstly working in collaboration with Fulham Pottery and most recently with the series collectively titled Garden ware, created in partnership with the V&A in 2017. Dance and theatre are also fundamental to McLean – although to him, there is no distinction between 'art' and these forms.

The late *John Piper* had a similarly diverse portfolio which included theatre design; stained glass and printmaking. His work with ceramics – the latter in collaboration with the potter Geoffrey

Eastop and with Fulham Pottery – explored recurring folk images such as the Green Man – a figure that often appears in Piper’s wider work.

South African artist *Hylton Nel* works are rarely shown in the UK of recent. The rich visual language that he has developed over the past four decades takes references from across the worlds of decorative arts, historical art & literary traditions, and objects collected from popular media whilst living in South Africa. Nel is subtly inventive with his use of tin glazes; his figurines and drawings illustrate a witty sense of humour, they use a mix of playful sexual imagery of the male nude form, surreal motifs of cats & mermaids and Adam and Eve.

Jerwood award winning UK artist *Philip Eglin* draws on similarly diverse, but very different sources – from newspaper photographs to childrens’ drawings, historical ceramics and graffiti. Eglin’s sophisticated use of industrial ceramic techniques – mould making; transfer printing – underpin his striking surface collages redolent with images and events from contemporary life.

Australian artist *Stephen Bird* studied/read fine art at Dundee (he was raised in Stoke-on-Trent the centre of ceramics in UK) his work picks up on the bold, child-like images found in outsider & folk art and 1980s underground comics to create his satirical, challenging and subversive plates and sculptures of the human form.

Paul Scott is a Cumbrian artist, he is acknowledged as an expert on ceramics and print, using this knowledge to create a form of ‘transgressive creative salvage’ – taking familiar patterns of industrial wares such as Spode Willow Pattern and re-making them so the pattern is transformed to an explicitly political commentary, on topics ranging from prisoners of war to climate change. Scott is currently working on pieces for a large scale UK touring museum show funded by The Arcturus Foundation, based on images of the American landscape.

For *Stephen Dixon*, the Manchester artist and academic, satire is central to the work he creates. Dixon brings his own socio-political satire to life in a series of printed and incised plates that draw on his study of the complex history of Australian art. His work can be viewed as a response to the English traditions of caricature from Gilray to Scarfe but folded into, and transformed by, his understanding of the popular traditions of commemorative ceramic wares and his command of the ceramic surface.

Private View: Saturday 21 September, 4-6pm 29 Walton St Oxford OX2 6AA

For further information and images

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