

## THE LEACH POTTERY: ONE CENTURY

Dates: 17th Jan - 14th March 2020

Private View: Friday 17th Jan / 5-7pm

Oxford Ceramics opens its 2020 season by celebrating the centenary of one of the most significant ceramic studios of the modern era: the Leach Pottery, founded in 1920. This pottery has shaped studio ceramics as we know it today, and is a cornerstone of ceramic history. It includes over 200 works sourced from across the globe from these masters of ceramics: Bernard Leach, Shoji Hamada, Michael Cardew, Kawai Kanjiro, and Tomimoto Kenkichi; as well as antique English slipware from as far back as the 18th century. This is a show that weaves together both influence and the finished article. There is something for the collector, ceramic enthusiasts and the plain curious.

“As far back as one goes in time, the works of humanity from prehistoric times have reached us not through stone which crumbles and wears away, or through metal which oxidizes and becomes like powder, but through slabs of pottery, the writing on which is as clear today as it was under the stiletto of the scribe who traced it.” (Bernard Leach, *A Potter's Book*)

James Fordham, the creative director of Oxford Ceramics, says, “This was always going to be a significant show for the gallery, as the Leach Pottery is one of the most respected and influential potteries in the world. I wanted to mark this anniversary with a show that explored not only the work of Leach & Hamada, but that looked deeper into the influences on their work.”

Many great potters studied under Leach and many more were inspired by his written work, including *A Potter's Book*, published in 1940.

“Bernard Leach is often called the father of British studio pottery and played a leading role in the growth of the studio pottery movement, not only as a maker but also through his writing, lecturing and training of future potters. He set up the Leach Pottery in St Ives, Cornwall in 1920, which became a magnet for potters from around the world who supported his views on pottery and wanted to learn from him.” (David Whiting, 2019)

Over the last 18 months, James has brought together several museum quality pieces from opposite ends of the globe, including works from the New York collectors Nancy and Andrew Ramage, whose collection, amassed over 20 years, includes important early works from Leach and Cardew, particularly slipware. Alongside these are works from distinguished Japanese collections, including two rare works from Tomimoto Kenkichi and Kawia Kanjiro – both figures in the formation of the 'Mingei movement.'

These are complemented by several rare books published by Yanagi in 1935 that document the folk craft movement in Japan that influenced Leach and Hamada. These were equivalent to today's weekly magazines, but produced in small numbers, with handmade textile covers, wood block prints, and original photos of pots.

Fordham's highlights for this show include:



Pictured: *Squared Plate* by Tomimoto Kenkichi, 1940, in signed, fitted box, with enamel decoration, 7.5 x 28.5 x 28.5 cms

A Tomimoto dish, made in the winter of 1940, is an exceptional piece rarely seen outside of museum collections. All of Tomimoto's work is unique and very few pieces are in the UK. There are a handful in UK museum collections, and a few more in Japan. Tomimoto was a trained painter, like Leach, and they met in 1913. As Leach wanted to learn more about Japanese potters, he enlisted Tomimoto's help. They befriended Hamada and it was through him that Leach was introduced to the craft. Tomimoto is considered a true master of ceramics.



Pictured: A rare and important Leaping Salmon Vase by Bernard Leach, c1950, BL and St Ives and 'England' seals near base, stoneware, 28.5 x 15 cms / with *O kinawa Style Tea Bowl* by Shoji Hamada, 1970, 8.5 x 13 cms

A Leach vase with a leaping salmon design very similar to one in the collection at the York Art Museum from the Milner-White Collection which has been described as "York's most important pot." That piece was made around 1930-31 by Leach and is considered by many (including Leach himself) to be his best work. It features the famous bracken-ash glaze and is one of the rare pots where the glaze was completely successful. This glaze, along

with the Chinese-influenced shape and skilfully painted leaping salmon motif (which consists of only 26 brush strokes) combine to produce one of the UK's finest and most famous studio pots of the 20th century. (A BBC History of the world)



*Pictured: St Ives Slipware Jug by Michael Cardew, MC and St Ives seals, 22 x 19 cms / with 2 Tankards by Bernard Leach, St Ives seal on both and BL script mark to one, slipware with incised text 'Drink about brother, when this is down we'll have another' and 'St Ives, 1929'. 11 x 8.5 and 11 x 8*

Two early slipware tankards by Bernard Leach and a Devon Harvest jug with script lettering made by Cardew, c 1925.





*Pictured: 18th Century Boney Pie Dish, slipware, 5.5 x 24.5 cms / with 18th Century Slipware Dish, 7 x 33.5 cms.*

An antique piece of early English slipware which Hamada, Leach and Cardew would have drawn inspiration from - the 'Boney Pie,' of which there is a similar example in the kitchen above the fireplace at the pottery at St Ives. Leach said "It seems reasonable to expect that beauty will emerge from a fusion of the individual character and culture of the potter, with the nature of his materials."

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