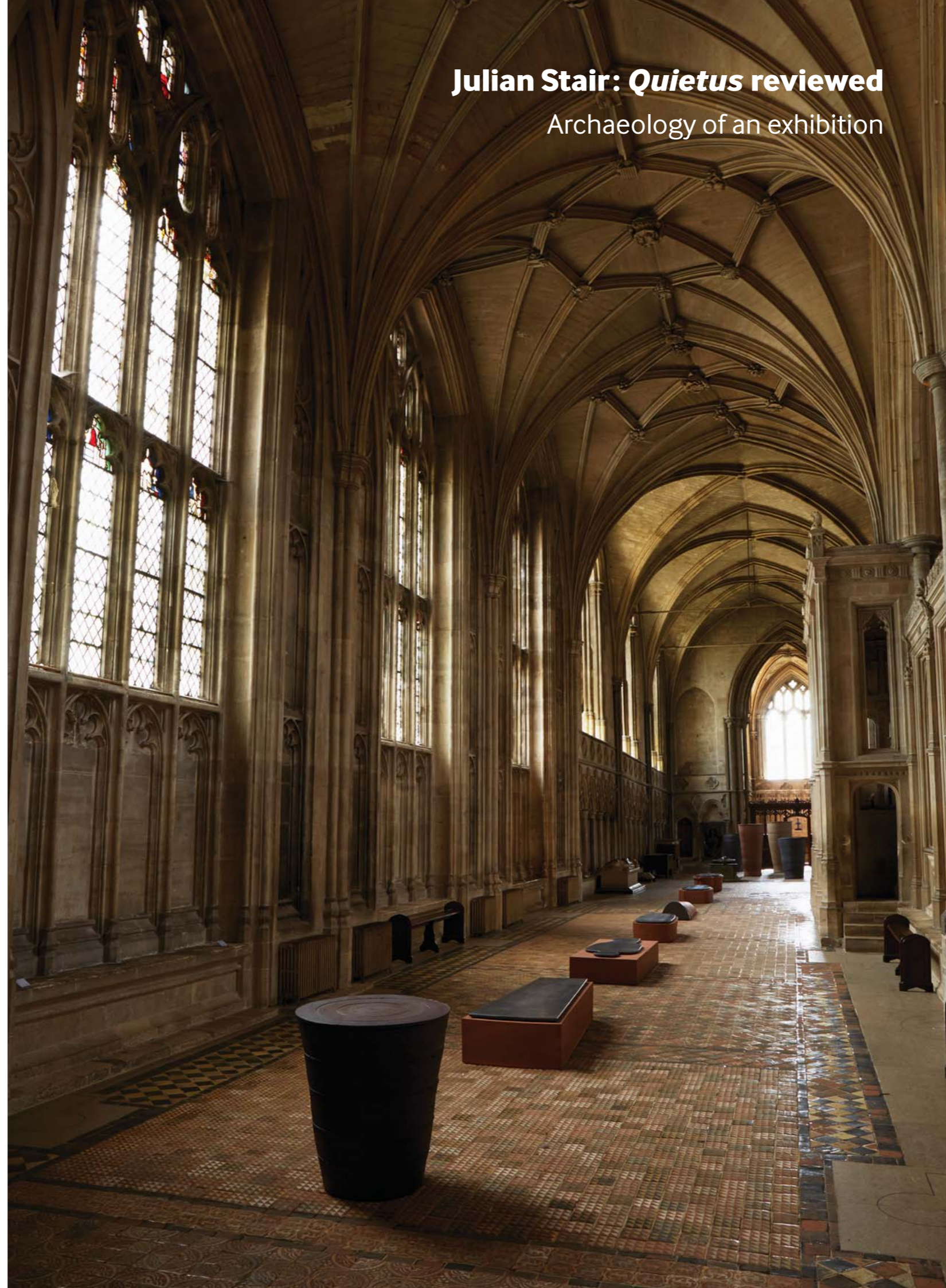
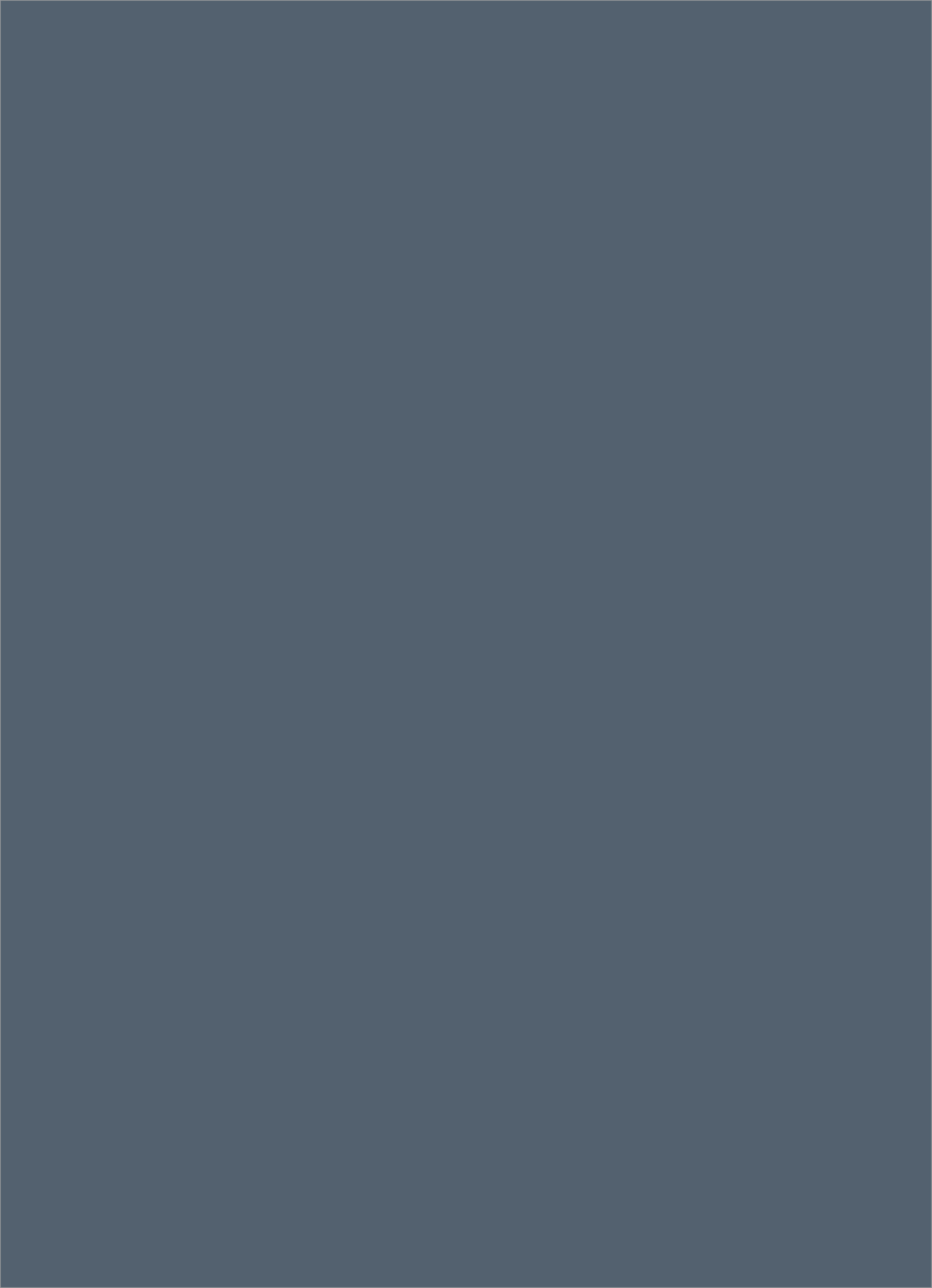


Julian Stair: *Quietus* reviewed
Archaeology of an exhibition







previous page: *Memoriam: Reliquary for a Common Man* (detail), mima, Middlesbrough
left: *Origins* gallery, National Museum, Cardiff, 2013: *Cinerary Jar* by Julian Stair displayed with Bronze Age vessels

Julian Stair: *Quietus* reviewed

Archaeology of an exhibition

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Julian Stair: The experience of *Quietus*

Columbarium, mima, Middlesbrough



More than a decade has passed since I first discussed with Julian Stair his emerging interest in funerary and cinerary ware. At the time I was Director of National Museum, Cardiff, part of Amgueddfa Cymru – National Museum Wales. Since 2012 I have worked as an independent curator and occupy a Professorial role at Bath School of Art and Design, Bath Spa University. My research and teaching in the School addresses the relationships between curating, studio and public art and craft practices, and audiences.

This publication addresses two key questions. They are specific to Julian Stair's project, now named *Quietus*, but also bring into play some important generic issues about curating.

The first: how have the curatorial approaches and specific architectural and institutional settings for each showing of *Quietus* influenced the experience of the work? The second: what testimony is available to those who wish to discuss the experience of an exhibition into the future?

All exhibition projects throw up the possibility that a 'catalogue' is prepared well before the exhibition opens, with work in progress and display setting not yet finally pinned down.

The production of retrospective exhibition publications has sought to address this. Yet these can simply be reiterations of the exhibition's initiation. Equally, evaluative reports and documents often feature documentation, but may not be able to retain the differentiated qualitative experiences of people involved in a project.

In the case of *Quietus*, an initial exhibition publication carried texts by two distinguished authors, Glenn Adamson and Nigel Llewellyn. The publication was delayed by a few days to permit the inclusion of a selection of installation shots at mima, the first venue.

However, each venue for *Quietus* is so different that at times it was challenging to fully grasp the different experiences offered. This, indeed, is generally asserted as always true of objects and works of art seen in different

contexts. The nuances they accumulate over different moments of display accrete as part of the object's meaning.

This publication therefore reviews some of the experiences of creating and seeing Julian Stair's work over 2012–13 in three main venues and in a fourth related project.

The texts include:

- an interview with Julian Stair by curator and writer Helen Waters, discussing the relationship of the *Quietus* work to Julian's studio and practice
- a text by James Beighton, Senior Curator at mima, on the relationship between *Quietus* and mima's programme of large-scale ceramics installations
- a text by Andrew Renton, Head of Applied Art at Amgueddfa Cymru – National Museum Wales, discussing how archaeology specialists contributed to the project, integrating Bronze Age/Iron Age funerary and cinerary ware
- two parallel texts by Sophie Hacker, arts consultant to Winchester Cathedral, and Roland Riems, Canon Chancellor of Winchester Cathedral, describing the *Quietus* displays at the Cathedral
- my own text assessing *Quietus* using a commentary based on audience responses at each venue

The publication coincides with a seminar at the final showing of *Quietus*, Somerset House in London. It is produced by Wunderkammer Press at Bath School of Art and Design in collaboration with University of Westminster and the venues, and designed by Geoffrey Winston of Graphics with Art, the studio which produced the earlier *Quietus* publication, using Jan Baldwin's wonderful photography.

Thanks therefore go to the authors, the design team, our colleagues at the three venues, and the funders of the project and this publication. Julian Stair has, of course, been involved throughout, and we are grateful for his collaboration.

Michael Tooby

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October 2013



left: Installation view, *Origins* Gallery, National Museum, Cardiff, with Sarcophagus by Julian Stair in foreground right: *Monumental/Jars*, Winchester Cathedral





Julian Stair's studio, London

Interview between Julian Stair and Helen Waters

September 2013

HW Julian – my first encounter with your work was in your old studio in Vanguard Court about 10 years ago. You were making what I would describe as tea sets – a teapot and two simple cups, in beautiful muted greys and reds and blues. You have talked and written about the importance of the everyday object – can you tell me a little about this older work and your thoughts on this subject?

I've always been interested in the idea of use – but not so much from the Leach ethical position, which has really dominated so much of British studio pottery rhetoric. I was lucky enough to be taught by Philip Rawson at The Royal College of Art. What he did, in the most fascinating way, was to re-position pottery at the centre of so many cultures. It is perhaps unfashionable to say this but it felt as if he gave pots universal aims and characteristics.



Julian Stair, *Teapot and Two Cups*, 2010

So my interest in pots is in making an art that one engages with, an idea of art operating in a social context. What I've come to realise is that I want to make art that shapes human actions – and is like an active narrative.

It's about making art that is the pivot for human behaviour. We are eating off plates that I've made and my studio assistants have made, and we are breaking bread. The social element becomes very important – and how people come together through objects. In childhood I would go to my great aunt's for tea and at the centre were these china objects: a tea pot, tea cups, a jug for hot water, bowls for slops, and there was a very structured ritual, with conversation on top, as orchestrated as a Japanese tea ceremony.

Funerary ware does the same thing: I make cinerary jars for holding cremated ash and sarcophagi for burial. They might appear to be absolutely poles apart – a 2 metre high, 400 kilo thrown pot to hold a body and a small porcelain cup that you can drink tea from. But I think the underlying principles are the same.

JS At the core of my practice is just an interest in making pots. Why pots? Because they operate on so many levels...

If one thinks about the mechanics of appreciation, there is both the optic and the haptic.

I think the experience of the tactile, the haptic, is so significant to our understanding of the world, and is so underused in the world of art. When we appreciate objects – touch them – hold them in our hand – somehow it's a material reinforcement of our physical selves. I'm really interested in the idea of how we negotiate our way through life physically as well as intellectually.

HW Obviously in the last ten years, scale has become of increasing importance and interest to you. Let's talk about the monumental jars. There is a question of scale and the relationship with your own body. How did they first come about?

JS The idea came from wanting to make pots that shaped the way we dealt with death. The obvious thing was to make cinerary jars for the cremated body. I'd always been interested in, one might say in awe of, China's ceramic achievements. But I was also interested in European archaic pottery. When I first came across Cretan monumental jars – probably made for storing olive oil – they burned themselves on my brain. There is a relationship with the body as you say – it's not just about picking something up in your hands but this is a kind of *quid pro quo* – an exchange.

Now at the same time, pots can also be very invisible – so familiar that they disappear. Yet the experience of the everyday is important. When you have a cup in the hand it feels warm with, say, the tea or coffee, and it cools down – and you are aware of this. So there's a temporal element, a kinaesthetic relationship with how things work through the body. These objects are moving through time.



Julian Stair, *Eleven Cups*, 2011

There is the most beautiful early Greek ceramic sarcophagus in the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge and I also came across burial jars in the British Museum containing the body in a crouching position. So having spent (and still spending) a lot of time looking at objects in museums it became apparent that death was and is an arena that played a huge part in the way pots were made. Since these pots were buried many have therefore been preserved, from votive ware, pots made to hold food for the deceased's after-life, to pots to contain the body itself.

But it wasn't so much for me an automatic development from the study of objects and death to the large-scale work. There was also the thought that pots don't often translate outside the domestic arena. If they do it's often in the form of multiples – so you have a collective – many examples pulled together to form a mass.

I wanted to see if I could keep hold of that idea of a single, stand-alone object that existed on its own, in its own space, form, and surface colour, but on a larger, architectural scale. So it was not just about holding a body, but about holding architectural space – including outside areas – how can that not be interesting?

HW You make the large scale works in a brick factory – how did that come about? Did you just know you had to find somewhere industrial in scale?

JS It is very simple. Whatever you make in ceramics has to be fired, so you need a kiln. If you make something big you need a big kiln – and where are there big kilns? At brick factories.

The first time I showed a small scale cinerary jar was in 1999, but the first monumental jar was made in 2003 and shown in 2004. At the outset, once I knew I wanted to pursue the large scale, I knew I had to get into a brick factory. Alan Grieve from the Jerwood Foundation put me in touch with the CEO of Baggeridge Brick and I went to meet him. I think I played the death thing down to begin with! They were very nice and gave me a space. Initially I was completely bemused, totally lost and floundering. I slowly ploughed my way through in a very basic 'nuts-and-bolts' way. I gradually got to grips with the mechanics, which are actually quite complex, and the fourth session ended up with the pieces I showed in *Collect 2004*.

It is completely knacker and very expensive to do, so since then I have picked it up every two years or so. I hadn't been in a brick factory for four years when I started working on *Quietus* – so that was a reasonable break. That was no bad thing as I started afresh.

HW I remember the first time I saw your monumental jars, when we installed two at the New Art Centre at Roche Court. I was struck how much personality they had. Can you talk a bit about your interest in the relationship between the vessel and the human body?

JS It is so interesting, the way we talk and think about pots. It starts with an anthropomorphic language, as we use parts of the body to describe pots – the foot, neck, belly, shoulder. We talk about the pot as a container – a vessel for holding things. The way we think about the body is as containing the soul, spirit, so there is such a strong correlation. Given the strong anthropomorphic element, making a large pot is, in a way, like making a large scale version of a person – an abstracted figure.



Interior of kiln, Sedgley Factory, Baggeridge Brick, Staffordshire, 2005 (photograph: Julian Stair)

But it's not making a sculpture of the body, not like an Antony Gormley, or a Rodin or a Henry Moore. I still work within the frame of reference of it being a vessel. That is important and central to me. That historical weight is still relevant. There is a physicality with a large pot – you do measure yourself against it, your height, width and so on, and as I said earlier it's a haptic art form. I think this doesn't feature a huge amount in the discussion of contemporary art. Herbert Read used to write about Moore in terms of a haptic experience but it doesn't happen a lot nowadays.

HW Yes, it's very difficult because in the museum context you are not allowed to touch things and most sculptors are touching their work all the time.

JS It's the paradox of putting something on display that you can't touch – or putting it away behind glass, which robs objects of a huge part of their identity, their reason for being. With *Quietus*, people couldn't control their hands. It's as if these objects were giving them permission to touch. At mima we considered putting up signs saying 'don't touch' but decided not to. Equally, we didn't put up signs saying 'please touch', as I have done in the past,

and we agreed that if people were careful the invigilators would allow them to touch the exhibits. It's to allow your hand to reach out to confirm what your eye sees, the same way a child reaches out and puts something in its mouth.

HW I have thought and written about the concept of site specificity in the work of other artists. The *Quietus* exhibition is very interesting in relation to this. Can we talk about the three different contexts for this exhibition – the art gallery, the museum collection and the cathedral. Was the exhibition made with the venues in mind – or did the venues follow the making of the work? Which came first?

JS Good question. Ideas always evolve in stops and starts, going off at tangents and coming back again. I think it all coalesced at the same time. It took twelve years to come to fruition. This was a good thing, I think, because although the idea was always there it needed time to develop.

HW The idea was well conceived – and the idea came first – you were going to make an exhibition about pots and death. So you were thinking about the work initially rather than where it was going to be exhibited?



Sedgley Factory, Baggeridge Brick, Staffordshire, 2005

JS Way back in the beginning I didn't even have an idea of what I was going to make. The making process is absolutely central to the evolution of the idea. If you sit down to work, in six months you can be in a totally different place, so decisions are made in an incremental way... it's like writing – you have an idea – then when you commit, the words take shape on the page.

The first manifestation of the idea was for the show being in Cardiff and from the outset it was about tying in to the archaeological collections. I also did a show in York this year called *The Matter of Life and Death* which, although it was distinct from *Quietus* also included archaeological funerary ware with some of my own work alongside.

HW But wasn't this exhibition in York in a church?

JS Yes, originally the show was meant to be in the York Museum. York has a great ceramics collection from the Ismay to the Milner White Collection, all the early 20th century material I was studying for my PhD when I was younger: Leach and Staite Murray, many great pots.

York Museums Trust then got funding for refurbishment and couldn't do the show in the museum, so they said I could have the space in St Mary's instead. This is a city centre church now managed by the Museum as a location for artists to do installations. I couldn't get anywhere with the idea of taking modernist pots and putting them in a deconsecrated church. It just didn't make sense to me – to put domestic objects made in response to vernacular traditions, so time specific in their nature. I couldn't see a way of bringing York's collection into St Mary's until I went into the archaeological stacks when suddenly it all fell into place. Here was almost a counterpart to *Quietus*.

So, to recap, it started with Cardiff, about the work that was to become *Quietus*, and a contemporary take on the archaeological collection. That was the genesis of the idea, but there again, due to the refurbishment of the Museum, this idea got shelved for a while. So, several years after the first discussions with Cardiff, while the show there was 'on hold', mima said they wanted to do a show, and when this was confirmed I was delighted that Cardiff came back in.

HW What about Winchester – did that come along afterwards?

JS Yes. I'd originally had a conversation with Canterbury. I'd heard a talk by the Dean of Canterbury at the Artworkers' Guild and thought, wouldn't it be fantastic to do an exhibition in a cathedral. A lot of the first discussions about shaping this idea were with the Chief Archaeologist of English Heritage, David Myles. He bought a pot from my first solo show in 1983. I was referencing archaic pottery in my work; not many people were doing that then and he had responded as an archaeologist to my work.

David was incredibly helpful to *Quietus*, we had many informative conversations about death, how bodies were contained and dealt with. Initially, we talked about doing something in an English Heritage site, and then we both went to see the Dean of Canterbury. That possibility then just fell away so I approached Winchester.

HW Where of course there is a history of working with contemporary artists...

JS ...which I didn't realise at the time.

HW And there are some wonderful things permanently on display in the cathedral, such as Cecil Collins, Gormley, the Hepworth outside.





JS Exactly. I was a bit nervous about the content of my work and was delighted it seemed to sail through their decision making process. When I asked how the discussion had gone, Sophie Hacker, the arts consultant, said 'we do death quite well in cathedrals'. From their point of view it was interesting to have a contemporary take on something so central to the cathedral's identity. Apparently their guides were very taken with *Quietus*, and we had to get the leaflets reprinted, so it is interesting that it struck a chord with them.

HW But of course putting that kind of work in a cathedral loads it with a different kind of meaning. Do you find that the work takes on more complex layers of meaning the longer it remains in the world and the more it is seen in differing contexts?

JS Yes it does. I think this comes back to what I said at the outset: the idea that pots have such layers of meaning. When I first started to make the monumental pots I'd only ever seen them in the surroundings of the brick factory. When mima bought *Jar V* they had an exhibition of new acquisitions. So I went up and I was quite nervous – here's me trying to make monumental pots and I'll finally see one in a big space – is it going to work – will it hold up? I was so relieved when it exceeded my hopes and expectations.

I have to say, they do have presence. I think unglazed clay pots particularly have more of a presence than if they were glazed or decorated. It is to do with seeing raw material. It was amazing to see that the monumental jar held the space. The 'white cube' spaces of mima allowed an abstract reading of the form and offered a 'neutral' space that put an emphasis on the work and enabled it to take possession of the volumes of the rooms in a creative way.

Cardiff was all about making connections with the archaeological collections. So instead of being about stand alone abstract work, the inclusion of Neolithic, Bronze Age and Roman pots (which had human bodies inside them) placed *Quietus* in an historical ceramic context which wasn't in evidence at all at mima.

I thought the visual impact of mima followed by Cardiff would be hard to beat, but Winchester does it for me, I have to say. There was something about being able to make the correlation between the pots and the tombs. The *Columbarium* was placed on top of the high screen above the altar, so it was totally different from mima and Cardiff.

What was amazing was the fabric of the clay fitted into the material of the cathedral incredibly well.

We also sited work on the 13th-century encaustic tiled floor that I fell in love with as a student. What's it made from? Simple, raw, unrefined clays with a simple palette of colours: iron red with a pale inlay, stone, black marble. It's the palette of my pots – just extraordinary. So the fabric of the building and the pots are an incredible fit.

HW If you didn't know it had other venues you would think it was made for this space.

JS That's what people have been saying... 'we can see why you made the exhibition for Winchester...'. So it is incredible how the work has appeared very different. In Cardiff I was unsure about it, being such a smaller space – it felt very intimate. But then I put some of the work in the archaeology galleries as well. I put some work in the 'Bronze Age' cases in those galleries, and sited a sarcophagus opposite a Roman one.

HW How are you feeling now it's coming to an end?

JS We have another venue! It's a bonus, since it's going into a strange space in Somerset House in London... in the 'Deadhouse'... they've only had about three exhibitions in there. It's a subterranean corridor with coal holes off it underneath the square. The show is opening in December. It's a kind of late arrival at the ball – trying to bring the show to London. It is also good to be working with the Director Gwyn Miles whose husband David was so instrumental in shaping the early stages of the project.

HW *Quietus* has taken up so much of your time. How does this exhibition connect with and inform your studio practice and affect your wider career?

JS I'll tell you when I find out! It was twelve years in conceiving and delivering. It was about three years full time work in the planning, applying for grants. And, of course, it took an awfully long time to make...

HW It sounds to me as if you would have made it anyway. It's great that you got to show it in so many different places to so many different people, but I imagine that if you hadn't had the shows the work would now be stacked up around the studio somewhere – or do you think the exhibition gave you the impetus to do something different?



Columbarium, Winchester Cathedral

JS I would have done it anyway. It's really expensive working in the brick factory, not only the facilities and materials but I have to take a team with me, rent accommodation. The preliminary stage of making was essentially self-funded, but I was lucky enough to get an Arts Council Grant for *Quietus*. Yes, I would have done it anyway – but the show validated it, gave it momentum – and enabled me to do it in the way I wanted to.

HW Knowing you are going to have an audience or a multiple audience for a particular body of work – that must make a difference as well...

JS Yes, panic is a great motivator – the fear of acute professional embarrassment! What I didn't realise was that managing the tour would become a full-time job. Just doing the installation was such hard work. When you do a show there are also all the secondary things – press, openings, etc – so I will probably get withdrawal symptoms but will also be massively relieved at the end of January.

As to other work – I've not made a lot since *Quietus* went up a year ago. I had a nice commission through Adrian Sassoon, and was invited to make a new body of work for Chatsworth by the curator, Sarah Griffin, whom I have

known a long time. I'm not a great one for stately homes, but Chatsworth knocked me off my feet.

Bizarrely, I made small-scale domestic work again – a series of plates to hang on the wall and some of them are almost 'pretty' porcelain. I used gold lustre for the first time since 1979, when I was a student. It couldn't be further from *Quietus*.

It has been really interesting making small-scale work again – dropping my shoulders in relief, but it has also been a return to core values. I don't see a fundamental difference between making a monumental pot on the one hand and a small, domestic, porcelain cup on the other. There is a difference, of course, but a logistical and physical one.

HW The show was about something very personal. We are all going to encounter death one day. Can we discuss making something so personal so public? And particularly in relation to your family and the piece at the end of the exhibition with Les Cox: a surprise when I encountered it, very moving and a fantastic addition. It made the exhibition for me. From what I've heard you've had lots of very emotional responses to the show – had you realised it would have this impact on people?

JS No I hadn't. The reaction was a great surprise. The one consistent response was: 'I was really surprised how emotional I found it, how moving I found it'. Art that really moves me is art that has a strong human dimension. It is tied into my core values in terms of what I think pots can represent and should represent, and in a wider sense to what art can represent, which is a real engagement with life in terms of content and meaning.

Since I have made pots for death people have frequently said to me things like 'my dad came back from the crematorium in a bright yellow plastic pot – if he had been buried in that he'd be turning in his grave – it is so unlike him'.

Again this is the idea of art engaging with life – if these objects can help to mediate and shape something as profound as a passing of a life, and help those left behind – because in my view it is really to help those people left behind. If art can do that through music and through words then we should be doing that through objects – through material culture. That was a motivation and a very early prompt in thinking about *Quietus*. So, for me, what *Memoriam*, Les's piece, was about was that he lived a lovely full life, was such a fantastic character and it's like a nice big full stop at the end of a paragraph.

The infant sarcophagus is going to the V&A, so, on a personal level, that is very satisfying. Some people know my personal history (our first child was stillborn) and I was really pleased that this one object was able to condense and summarise all these factors. Meanwhile, the idea was that Les would be the everyman of the exhibition. Les was the keystone that held the arch up.

HW I'm very glad you included it. I liked the different media – I liked the film, I liked the slide show, and the soundtrack – they added a different dimension to the show. It made it incredibly personal to suddenly see a real person, a real human being who had been alive.

JS It was very unnerving, but done with great fondness and humour. He would have loved it. It was done with the help of my brother-in-law, Mark Wilcox, Les's nephew, a filmmaker. It was done with great love. As Glenn Adamson said – the display at mima worked so well because of the circularity of the layout, with *Columbarium* as the first and last space in the installation. One came out of *Memoriam* and saw *Columbarium* again, not as a selection of pots but a selection of individuals.

And that's exactly what I wanted the columbarium to be: the house of the dead, but also a house of people's lives, a summation.

There is a particular Roman funerary pot I chose in York. Romans were burned on pyres so the bones weren't crushed by machines to get the fine granular powder we know today. Therefore you can see bits of bones and identifiable things. I chose this one because, amongst the ash in this very simple urn, were three hair pins, beautifully turned from bone. All of a sudden – as Les's film did – looking at these objects gives a window, telling you that these were people who were like us, who lived and loved and breathed like us – that's what human history is about. It is simply very powerful.

Memoriam wasn't shown at Winchester. I just got an answer 'no' from the Chapter. It's to do with ecclesiastical issues about bodies etc. So it's not that they didn't like the idea. It's just outside of their dos and don'ts re handling bodies after death – though that building is littered with dead bodies!

HW You mentioned you are going to write something soon about ideas you want to consolidate – alongside making you have also always written. How important is it for you not just to sit at the wheel, but think and write also...

JS It's really important, and I've done it for an awfully long time now. The first time I published something was 1982. That was the year after I left the Royal College of Art. I was trying to put myself into an historical context, through writing about Hans Coper and European modernism. History has always been really important to me. I learn from pots in the past and have always looked at them, both archaic pots and modern pots. Archaic pots are divorced enough from the present to be seen dispassionately, then there's the immediate history of studio pottery – Leach and so on.

As a student I always wanted to make pots but could never fit in temperamentally, or in sensibility, to the Anglo-Oriental tradition, or the neo-vernacular slipware tradition. I was interested in the ideas that informed the work but could not square this with what I was doing and what I wanted to do. It was just not me. I didn't fit into the movement that rejected studio pottery either – the post-modernist vessel making of Alison Britton and others. I could never find a home to locate myself in.



Cinerary Jars, installation view, National Museum, Cardiff, 2013

Ceramics was always so factional, either pro-Leach or anti-Leach. If you were pro-Leach you didn't question. If you were anti-Leach it was great to have someone to demonise. Leach was beatified or demonised. That was a very convenient way for the practice to exist.

I started a PhD in 1994. It became an historiography of writing on English pottery from 1900 to 1940. In the process I completely changed my views on Leach and realised that his career was formed in such an interesting period with Roger Fry and the Omega workshops, and Herbert Read and W. Staite Murray – that pottery was just a medium that was used by interesting artists and critics to express ideas that were pertinent at that time.

It's about trying to make sense of where you are at the time you are working and in finding a path in relation to what's gone before you – as that's shaped where you are. Also, the critical and historical side of ceramics until recently was very impoverished so I decided to go back and read everything for myself.

This was completely liberating as I got rid of all the baggage. Now I realise pottery is just a vehicle that you can use as an artist to express whatever ideas you think are appropriate. Studio pottery emerged as a brand new discipline in the very early 20th century: fascinating history and stories. I can say with an historian's hat, it's such an interesting era. But from an artist's perspective this has enabled me to bring my own agenda to pottery and not worry about whether I was doing the right or wrong thing. Does that make sense?

HW Yes, it does. I heard Richard Serra speak earlier this week and he was basically saying the same thing – that you position yourself in history – what happened before, what's happening around you and where you want to be in the future and you have to find your way through all of that... I think everybody does that.

JS Pottery is a difficult area, though. The crafts are such a nervous discipline – all the hierarchical issues re category, issues of status, avant-gardism versus tradition, and the fact that pottery is still looked down upon by so many people as an art because it is often domestic, functional. This is a misreading, as so much of early Modernism was about reconfiguring the arts so that they addressed this wide spectrum of ideas that included ideas of use, whether it was Fry, Bloomsbury and Omega or the Bauhaus. Then history gets written and rewritten badly. Leach rewrote history to suit himself, for example. But, yes – the critical side is really empowering for me. Equipping myself with knowledge has enabled me to chart my way through the present.



Julian Stair's studio, London

In other spaces: the sensitivity between ceramics and site

James Beighton



Monumental Jar V (collection, mima, Middlesbrough) installed in mima atrium, 2009

This essay considers how the framing of Julian Stair's project *Quietus* in a 'white box' display aesthetic shaped the experience of it. The question of why this idea is important to mima itself will be explored using both *Quietus* and other mima ceramic shows as case studies.

Collection and display

Stair's project *Quietus: the vessel, death and the human body* (to give it its full title) was launched at mima in July 2012. The exhibition had been conceived initially through discussions with the team at mima following the acquisition of Stair's *Monumental Jar V* in 2008.

Monumental Jar V was presented through the Art Fund's scheme to support acquisitions made at the Crafts Council's annual *Collect* exhibition. When it was shown at mima in a 2008 exhibition drawn from the mima collection, entitled *Material Culture*, Stair recounted how he was able to grasp for the first time the impact that his monumental forms could have within a traditional white walled gallery space.¹

The collection exhibition afforded both the viewer and Stair himself the chance to experience this work, being so deeply rooted in the traditions of ceramics, alongside artworks from different genres, including sculpture and drawings. Thus it was possible to begin to make both formal and conceptual connections between *Monumental Jar V* and works by Anthony Gormley and Langlands and Bell as well as Bernard Leach and Shoji Hamada.

mima, by this stage, had already developed a reputation for allowing artists working with ceramics to engage with a type of space that was not regularly available to them. Stair's work became a potential project in this continuing programme. In tandem, discussions were also taking place between Stair and Amgueddfa Cymru – National Museum Wales in Cardiff about the possibility of a solo show there. This would be in both the Museum's temporary exhibition space and as interventions within the Museum's collection of archaeology. These two points of reference established a framework for *Quietus*.

Quietus was to be the most significant museum exhibition of Stair's career up to that point. It was therefore natural that he should wish it to present a culmination of the investigation that he had been carrying out through his work over the past decade. This had been dominated by his research into inhumation, and to the creation of a series of works which were generated by this thinking.

The subject matter was one that had been the starting point for Stair in developing his body of monumental forms, and which had itself grown out of making his first cinerary jars and small sarcophagi, one

of the latter being held in the permanent collection at the National Museum.

Cardiff's temporary exhibition space offers many of the advantages of a traditional art gallery, but set within a Victorian era museum, with commensurate architectural detailing, and alongside a significant collection of archaeology, social history and decorative arts on continuous display.

mima however, which opened in 2007, was built within the conventions of the 'white cube' gallery aesthetic. Where the building's architect, Erik van Eggeraat, has left his signature on its glass atrium and its limestone façade, the gallery spaces themselves aspire to be neutral. They have white walls and wooden floors, with minimal internal detailing, with the aim of ensuring that the art works placed within the galleries, rather than the galleries themselves are at the fore.

A further distinction between mima and National Museum Wales is their approach to their respective collections. Both have collections, but whereas the National Museum has dedicated collection galleries, mima's collection – which encompasses fine art (with an emphasis on drawing), studio ceramics and artist made jewellery – is not on permanent display.

Instead, mima's series of exhibition spaces weave in loaned works and curated exhibitions with changing collection displays. The three elements of the collection had previously been housed at two different venues: at the Middlesbrough Art Gallery and the Cleveland Crafts Centre, each with a distinct exhibition programme and each with a remit to present fine art and craft respectively, however they chose to define those areas.

As such, collections that had previously been segregated across different venues, both now closed, are brought together at mima, the successor organisation, and a relationship negotiated between them. Some exhibitions at mima have seen galleries given over in their entirety to one element of the collection, but more often different genres of objects are brought together to occupy the same floor space, wall space, sometimes even the same plinth.

The white box and 'boundary blurring'

This practice raises a concern which has informed much of the thinking around programming ceramics at mima, and which has ramifications for the aspirations of those ceramicists who look to place their work within white cube galleries.

The concern is that of what might be termed 'boundary blurring', and the impact this has upon audiences' perception of work. Boundary blurring,

as has been noted by contemporary craft commentators, is a convenient phrase that has often been tagged onto craft based exhibitions in an attempt to break through what are perceived as hierarchical distinctions imposed on artistic practice by market forces and art establishments.

This has been understood as detrimental for those artists working within traditionally defined craft genres, and unfairly so. Boundary blurring exhibitions are an attempt to show that the work included therein expands the scope, the intellectual content and the possible reception of the work from a perceived traditional position of craft, so that the object can (or should) be valued as art whilst also being cherished as craft.

A notable critique of this attitude came in 2006 from Glenn Adamson, whilst working as a curator at the Chipstone Foundation in Milwaukee. In this year he contributed an essay to Paula Marincola's anthology, *What Makes A Great Exhibition*, entitled, 'Handy-Crafts: A Doctrine'.² Adamson presents a challenge to what he sees as the exhibition maker's repeated intention of "eroding the line between craft and art" (to paraphrase a million and one publications since 1950).³ He warns, "if the craft-art boundary were somehow magically erased, then the category of crafts would be vacated entirely".⁴ That is to say that we already have a perfectly good category, known as art, which has its followers, its conventions, its value systems, its markets and its institutions. His analysis prompts the question: if craft also wants to be seen as art, then why do we actually need the category of craft at all? The work will have been subsumed by the art world, presumably achieving the aims of the boundary blurrers in the first place, so why not just call it art?

Adamson presents a persuasive argument, but it is not a new one. In 1979 no lesser figure than Clement Greenberg addressed the first International Ceramics Symposium at Syracuse University where he called into question the value of what he termed 'genre mixing' for ceramics.⁵ His comments foreshadow Adamson's argument in warning the collected audience 'let's suppose that ceramic art, done by artists who were clay handlers before anything else, got accepted as sculpture proper – that and nothing less. Would this rebound to the credit of ceramics? I altogether doubt it. I don't need precedent in order to prophesy here that the ceramics accepted as sculpture would be altogether lost to the art of clay as far as opinion and nomenclature were concerned; it would simply be assimilated to sculpture as such, sculpture as always'.⁶

The artistic motives that Greenberg was here addressing are summed up by Garth Clark in his recollection of Greenberg's talk. He writes: 'Ceramicists

felt they had been backstage for too long already, but Greenberg's careful language and the lack of paternalism in his discussion of ceramics set the perfect tone. The crowd poured out into a bright summer day, talking excitedly and heading off to the various lecture halls... They were ready to engage the speakers and confront their historical heritage. We all had the feeling that at last ceramics had begun to shift away from the narrow dialogues that had dominated critical intercourse up to that point. It was a rare but empowering moment, when one suddenly realized that one was participating in what would become known as an historical moment'.⁷

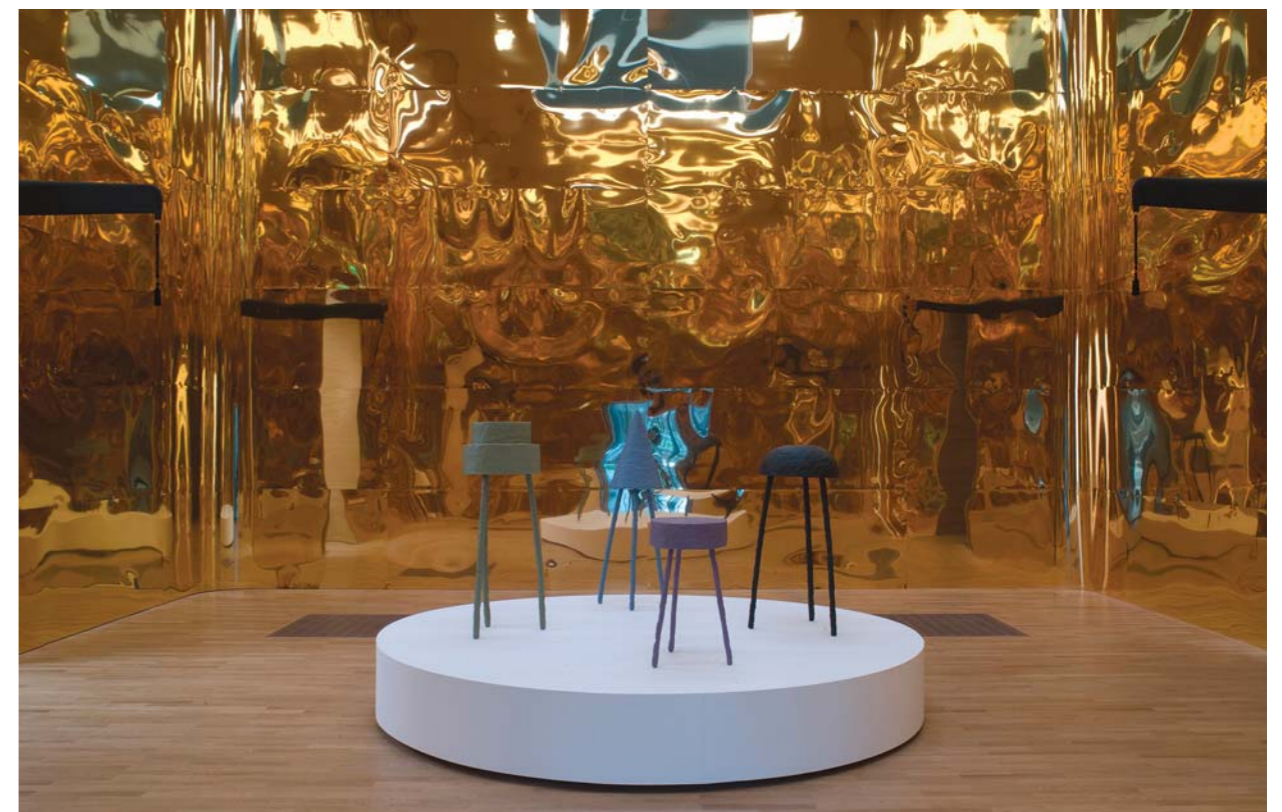
Now it might seem, on the face of it at least, that there are two different things going on here. Greenberg seems to be advising the assembled audience to stop worrying about being sculptors and ceramicists at the same time, if they wish to make sculpture then they should do so, but forget about still being a ceramicist. If on the other hand they want to make ceramics, then they should value that for what it is rather than longing after the prestige of sculpture. Clark on the other hand, whilst acknowledging ceramic's 'historical heritage' still talks about coming out of the darkness into the light and of a shift away from the dialogues that had supposedly hampered ceramics to that point – note, not enlarge those dialogues, but to move away from them.

In a space such as mima it would be tempting to go, wholeheartedly, down the route of boundary blurring, but the arguments put forward by Adamson and Greenberg are persuasive in warning of the dangers of this approach. Furthermore, visitor responses to shows at mima have supported the theory. When mima has programmed ambitious ceramic exhibitions (or even sometimes put studio pots on plinths) they have been judged by visitors as art, with the comments book containing messages about the 'sculpture' exhibitions.

Ceramic displays and mima's 'Cube' Space

One of the signature spaces within mima is the first display space on the visitor route. Rising through three floors its dimensions make it an, almost, perfect 10 metre cube. Calling out for newly commissioned works, this space lays down its gauntlet to the artist, inviting them to take on its superhuman proportions. It has been noted that those ceramicists that have worked at mima have often risen most persuasively to this challenge.

In the opening solo presentation, Edmund De Waal chose to take the beautiful new cube and lower the ceiling in order to house his new work *Imago*, 2007, an installation of some 600 porcelain cylinders in varying shades of grey



Top left: Edmund de Waal, *Imago* (detail), 2007 Top right: Clare Twomey, *Monument* (detail), 2009
Bottom: Anders Ruhwald, *You In Between* (detail), 2008
All installation views, mima Middlesbrough (photographs: Gilmar Ribeiro)

through to yellow. The transition of shading emulated the natural light that was channelled in to the lower galleries through the one-metre aperture that de Waal had left in the ceiling to house his work. With great bravado, nothing was to be encountered on the floor and the viewer would only experience the work by looking up.

mima's second solo presentation by a ceramicist was by Anders Ruhwald proved in 2008. He was similarly un-awed by the space and his installation was equally transformative. Taking a reference to Vienna Workshop design as his starting point, Ruhwald clad the walls of the white cube in gold foil. His installation was both an unapologetic take on European Modernist design, and simultaneously had the nerve to introduce elements of the decorative in to the art gallery, incorporating ribbons, tassels and burning candles.

Arguably the most monumental commission to be realised in this space was *Monument*, 2009 by Clare Twomey as part of the exhibition *Possibilities and Losses* produced by mima in partnership with the Crafts Council.

Consuming the full volume of the cube, Twomey installed an eight metre high mountain of shattered china, which cascaded from the height of the gallery towards the viewer as they entered. From this ground level the viewer was confronted by the unnerving sight of a form many times their own height, made from thousands of vessels, each of which the viewer could relate to on a more individual and intimate level. From the safer distance of the second floor viewing window, visitors would often spend extended periods of time understanding the beauty of this sculpture.

Monument was inspired by a genuine pitcher pile witnessed by the artist at a factory in Stoke-on-Trent. For Twomey, this mound of broken pottery shards, drawn from around the Stoke area, neatly articulated the poignancy of broken china, both in terms of a personal relation to the vessel form, and an understanding of a great industrial tradition in decay. The work deployed the feelings of loss all too familiar with the breaking of a favorite cup or ornament, but also hinted at a new hope for an industry in transition; after its exhibition the pile of discarded china was broken down to dust and reused as raw material by the factory who supplied it.

These examples illustrate three works that have taken on a space and through their transformative approach have demonstrated the white cube to be anything but neutral. They are immersive works. Ambitious in their thinking, rich in their content and frame of reference, they are also satisfying forms, that show thinking around and beyond the vessel. They are objects that are aware of function and

interested in it, but not constrained by it. They are also works that feel very contemporary and do not permit the sense that ceramics is somehow an anachronistic art form, playing catch up with fine art, which moved on a generation ago. There's another interest though shared through all of these works. They draw heavily upon the history and the cultural importance of ceramics, be they hand made, of the studio ceramics movement, or industrially produced. In some important ways these works are all about ceramics. It is one of their subjects.

References to ceramics traditions

In de Waal's *Imago*, as with many of his works, a prevailing interest is in the history of ceramics display, the way that these have been presented in contexts ranging from aristocratic households to modernist interiors. He is interested in what people are allowed to see and what remains hidden from site: perhaps a Duke's private collection of Chinese porcelain, reserved in a cabinet for his own pleasure, or the Sunday best dinner service that many working class households had until recently, locked away in a china cabinet. The individual vessels are hand made. De Waal makes a point of always throwing the vessels himself, whatever other elements of the work he contracts to assistants and fabricators. It is a manifestation of a joy in throwing as a specific type of making.

One might compare this with Ruhwald's installation. This work might not be about the vessel form, but it certainly is about the decorative and the functional. It asks us to question what the function of an object might be – the mirror placed in the cubicle floor or the awkwardly sized wall that is too thin to properly conceal that which stands behind it. He is also interested in a particular moment of ceramic history, the positions that ceramics adopted in early modernist movements, particular the modernist Vienna of the Secession and the Werkstatte, where the flamboyant and often quite ugly ornaments of the ceramic work shop contrasted with the clean forms of the furniture design being made by the likes of Josef Hoffman.

Clare Twomey's *Monument* is very much about the vessel, but not the hand made, rather the industrial. As already mentioned, this work was inspired by a pitcher pile witnessed outside a factory in Stoke. This pile was the last resting place of misfiring, seconds and broken objects produced by various factories around the potteries. For Twomey, and for the visitors to mima who witnessed it, it was an intensely moving and poignant piece. It identified the ability that vessels have to connect with humans: the associations that we make with them so readily because

we use them on a daily basis – yes, perhaps the Sunday best dinner service, or Granny's teapot, or your own favourite coffee mug. It also captured the moment of distress when that favourite vessel is broken and lost from your life. It multiplied this tiny trauma a thousand fold. It took an object that can be cradled in the hand and enlarged it until it became something that towered above the viewer menacingly.

Art/craft

Contemporary ceramics has reached a more nuanced position that the 'either art or craft' – 'both art and craft' polarities that the argument above suggests, by focussing on the conventions of ceramics and what they have meant to societies that have encountered them over time.

Robert Clark, in a throwaway remark for a listing column announcing the exhibition of *Quietus* at mima, may have remarked 'When does pottery become sculpture? Perhaps when it's exhibited in a prestigious gallery.'⁷ Nevertheless, the evidence of visitors' experiences of *Quietus* demonstrates their openness to transcend the simplistic possibilities of 'category error' and instead focus on the works' powerful equilibrium between form and content.

Yet it still remains fruitful to consider some aspects of how taxonomies help a deeper understanding of objects. Stair's objects remain vessels for the body, whereas sculpture such as Gormley's are ways of understanding the body, if not as vessel. The conclusion one might put forward is that whilst one can agree that at this point the work presented in *Quietus* is 'capital A', 'Art', not 'capital C', 'Craft', it remains nonetheless and importantly 'small c' in both its craftness and ceramicness.

Footnotes

- 1 Other works in the series had been seen within the context of another museum's ceramic collection, presented at art fairs and been housed within Stair's own modern and bespoke designed studio.
- 2 Adamson, Glenn, 'Handy-Crafts: A Doctrine' in Paula Marincola (ed.), *What Makes a Great Exhibition?* (Philadelphia, PA: Philadelphia Exhibitions Initiative, 2006), pp.108–116
- 3 *Ibid.*, p.109
- 4 *Ibid.*
- 5 Greenberg, Clement, 'Status of Clay' in Clark, Garth (ed.) *Ceramic Millennium: Critical Writings on ceramic History, Theory, and Art* (Halifax, N. S.: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 2006), pp.3–9
- 6 *Ibid.*, p.6
- 7 Clark, Garth, 'Introduction: 8 x 29: A Personal Recollection' in Clark, Garth (ed.) *Ceramic Millennium: Critical Writings on Ceramic History, Theory, and Art* (Halifax, N. S.: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 2006), p.xvii
- 8 *Guardian*, 'Guardian Guide', July 14, 2012 and www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/gallery/2012/Jul/14



Quietus in Cardiff: Post Scriptum¹

Andrew Renton

'The way we live today has taken away the privilege of seeing someone through the end of their life.' These are the words of Jody Deacon, an archaeologist at Amgueddfa Cymru – National Museum Wales, but could equally well have been spoken by Julian Stair himself. Reflecting on her experience of working with Stair in planning the showing of *Quietus* at the National Museum in Cardiff, Deacon draws not only on her own close study of excavated funerary vessels and human remains but also on her familiarity with placing such material on public display. In this way she neatly encapsulates the common ground between ceramic artist and museum archaeologist that the *Quietus* exhibition in Cardiff sought to embody.

The body of work that constitutes *Quietus* is a contemporary expression of an age-old and widespread practice of using ceramics in funerary contexts. Our archaeological collections are rich in Bronze Age and Roman pottery vessels excavated in Wales and found in association with interred and cremated human remains. The Museum was therefore an ideal location in which to present *Quietus* in a broader historical and cultural context, and to explore the potential of art and archaeology each to enhance our understanding of the other.

What was created at the National Museum was more than a straightforward juxtaposition of objects (and human remains) from widely different times and contexts. It was always envisaged as a meaningful dialogue with the Museum's physical and intellectual structures, with its archaeological collections in particular, and discussions between the artist and the Museum's archaeology curators and conservators had a formative influence on the project.



1 *Quietus*, National Museum, Cardiff, 2013: Bronze Age collared urn and beaker, with *Monumental Jars* behind

Stair cites as a particular influence Philip Rawson's seminal book, *Ceramics*, an exploration of the aesthetic appreciation of ceramics founded on an all-encompassing view of the subject, on the argument that 'all the ceramic traditions of the world rest upon a common substratum of meaning which is remarkably consistent.'² Rawson's standpoint should not be taken as any kind of prescriptive agenda for Stair or for the *Quietus* project, but from his arguments it is easy to understand how the meeting of Julian Stair the contemporary potter with museum scholars of enigmatic prehistoric ceramics would prove fruitful.

One of Rawson's exhortations, which hints at the interpretative value of an artistic or imaginative perspective on pottery from remote cultural contexts, could easily have been addressed to pre-historians: 'If possible we must try and discover, through active use of imagination, how the live meanings of works of ceramic art which played some role in the life of every patron can be revived in our own minds.'³ Conversely, his peroration encourages artist potters of today to imbue their work with insights drawn from earlier ceramic traditions: '[This book] may, perhaps, suggest how ceramics can re-establish its existential foundations...there is no reason at all why lines of thought taking up from one or another of humanity's past ceramic achievements should not be picked up again, and developed along radical new lines.'⁴

Stair's *Quietus* exhibition proposal to mima in 2008 could be read as a more or less explicit response to Rawson's challenge: 'One of the central aims of the exhibition will be to explore what the critic Philip Rawson referred to as the 'transformative' or symbolic relationship between ceramic vessels and the human body. Anthropomorphism is a concept central to the identity of ceramics through the metaphor of the vessel as 'body' and its role as container.'

The proposal draws on a previous one of 2005 to the National Museum, the result of early discussions about the *Quietus* project, about its synergy with the Museum's collections and with its prehistoric ceramics above all. Sadly, the National Museum's refurbishment schedule made it impossible to programme *Quietus* in 2006 in parallel with the Museum's exhibition *Death in Wales 4000–3000 BC* curated by Dr Steve Burrow,⁵ but common ground between artist and archaeologist was clearly established at this point.

Stair argued for the value of artistic insight into funerary ceramics of the remote past, maintaining 'the ability of pottery to transcend representation or the merely conceptual and become part of the narrative of life through a profound pragmatism.' In his own exhibition, Burrow

Quietus, National Museum Cardiff, 2013: Roman urn containing cremated remains from Hillside Lodge, Caerleon, with *Columbarium* behind



made the complementary case that study of ancient funerary ritual could evoke meaningful contemporary reflection on the subject of death: 'Stone Age people treated their dead in ways very different to us. The exhibition shows these differences. It's as much about letting people reflect on how we treat our own dead as it is about studying the past.'

The revival of the *Quietus* project in 2010 brought the opportunity for fresh dialogue with the Museum's archaeologists. It was immediately apparent that this was a genuine meeting of minds, that artist and archaeologists were drawing on similar anthropological literature, and that the archaeologists were enthusiastic about the reciprocal benefits that each discipline could offer. During visits to the Archaeology department's conservation lab and stores, Stair had close access to Bronze Age and Roman pots from funerary contexts, including a wonderful pair of globular Roman vessels, one glass, one ceramic, newly discovered along with cremated remains on the site of the Roman fortress at Caerleon. [ill. 1] More significantly, he was also drawn into the fascinating speculation over the significance of these vessels that is inevitable for the archaeologist examining contexts that lack contemporary documentation.

Of particular interest was research by Mary Davis into the use of bone inlay in Early Bronze Age funerary vessels at the Museum,⁶ and the imaginative insights that she and Stair brought to each other's practice. Davis's research focused on the use of scanning electron microscopy, X-ray diffraction, ultraviolet fluorescence and infrared photography to analyse white material found within the incised and impressed decoration on prehistoric ceramics, a phenomenon recognised more than a century ago⁷ and identified by early chemical analyses as burnt bone, calcite or gypsum but thereafter not studied systematically and often effaced by ill-informed and over-thorough cleaning.

Davis examined beakers, which are commonly found placed beside the body in inhumation burials, and 'pygmy' cups, a smaller type of ceramic vessel thought to date to a different and slightly later burial tradition in the EBA. The 'Beaker Period' (2500 – 1700BC) saw a move away from communal burial mounds towards individual interments. High-status grave goods accompanied these burials, among them hand-coiled beaker pots made sometimes but by no means always to a high standard. Perhaps used as drinking vessels or for ceremonial purposes, these beakers appear in various styles and sizes. Tools such as bone combs, cord and shells were used to decorate them with incised and impressed patterns which echo those found on jet, amber and gold, on axes, and on monumental stones, and possibly

reflect designs on now lost textiles and basketwork.

As Davis's study of vessels from Wales confirmed, the decoration on such ceramics would have been enhanced by the use of colour. Most of the decorated Early Bronze Age beakers and pygmy cups that she examined were once decorated with white inlay of gypsum, calcite or calcined bone, and some show evidence of deliberate blackening and reddening.

The most exciting discussion concerned the Early Bronze Age beaker found in 1929 at Naaboth's Vineyard in Glamorgan, in a stone-lined grave containing the bones of an adult male in a crouched position. [ill. 2] This finely made and decorated vessel was placed beside the man and is reported to have contained 'slimy stuff', possibly the remains of a farewell drink of beer. The beaker has a



2 Early Bronze Age beaker from Naaboth's Vineyard, Glamorgan

3 Detail of same beaker, showing bone fragments inlaid in impressed decoration

reddish surface layer, different in colour to the soil in which it was found and easily distinguishable from the fired body of the clay. When some of this reddish layer is removed from within the comb impressions white inlay is visible underneath, identified by SEM analysis as calcium phosphate – in other words, calcined bone. [ill. 3] We cannot be sure whether this bone is human or not, but expert opinion is inclined to think that it most probably is.

This use of a white material, whether bone or something resembling it, incorporated into the blood-like red clay 'body' or 'flesh' of the pot and made invisible by a coating or 'skin' of red surface colorants seems to suggest a symbolic association with the human body. The identification between pot and body may also extend to the surface decorative motifs impressed using cords and combs. These could echo basketry or textile patterns but may also be suggestive of the human body and have been specific to an individual or to a group, perhaps defining their position in society.

The incorporation of bone as a temper or inlay in prehistoric ceramic vessels may have something to do with creating and maintaining a relationship with ancestors. Integrating remains of the dead may be about more than commemorating one individual, as a vessel could have been inlaid with the remains of two or more people, a process known as 'enchainment' in which individual remains were dispersed and mixed together with others so that personal identity was erased and the dead recreated as communal or generic ancestors.⁸ Such inlaid ceramics could play a part in invoking these ancestors during funerary and other rituals that were important for the community of the living.

If the incorporation of bone in pots suggests their use as relics and heirlooms and was a means of integrating ancestors, the use of grog as a temper would appear to be analogous. Incorporating ancestral pots both literally and symbolically into the fabric of new vessels implies assimilation of their owners as well. Sherds used to make such special grog were possibly obtained from funerary vessels, which in turn might explain the presence in many graves of pots in a fragmentary condition. A beaker discovered at Merthyr Mawr in Glamorgan, for example, not only has proved to have patterns with inlaid calcined bone but also has a missing section of which no trace was found during excavation. This suggests that it was deliberately broken before burial and a section removed perhaps for incorporation as grog in another vessel. [ill. 4, 5] On occasion, the grog contained in the fabric of one beaker may itself contain grog fragments from a vessel of an earlier generation.⁹



4 Early Bronze Age beaker from Merthyr Mawr, Glamorgan

5 The same beaker photographed under UV light, showing pattern of inlaid bone

Such literal incorporation of the somatic symbolism of a pot echoes Stair's own language in his 2008 proposal: 'In physically containing the object it represents, funerary ware can re-unite both symbol and object, and in the process turn the symbolic language of anthropomorphism full circle, so transforming metaphorical existence back to a material reality.' By incorporating the cremated ashes of a loved individual – uncle Les – in the bone china body of that same individual's cinerary urn – *Memoriam: Reliquary for a Common Man* – Stair has given arresting contemporary expression to an ancient way of thinking. More than this, his creation of a ceramic vessel to serve as a moving focus of contemplation on the life and character of a departed loved one offers a stimulating contribution to the debate over possible interpretations of Bronze Age evidence.

Another aspect of both ancient pots and Stair's vessels

whose significance could be explored more explicitly is that of colour. Rawson alerts his readers to the fact that what we may consider subdued colours are likely to have elicited much more vivid responses in 'primitive' peoples who experienced a limited range of colour in their lives: 'It is... more probable that red, even in unglazed pottery, added for many pre-industrial peoples, according to their degree of sophistication, a natural excitement to the significance of any ceramic object.'¹⁰

The precise connotations of colour in the prehistoric context remain a matter for speculation, but to witness Stair install *Quietus* was to learn how well attuned he is to the power of colour and of colours in juxtaposition to light, subdue and otherwise orchestrate the emotional response of the viewer to a particular context. The same is therefore likely to have been true in prehistory, where specific colours took effort to achieve and so were probably imbued with special significance in given ceremonial or ritual contexts.¹¹ For example, the production of beakers with a red appearance implies the meticulous selection of iron-rich clays and the careful use of an oxidising firing environment or of red clay washes. Likewise, achieving a blackened appearance or white inlays required careful and time-consuming use of particular technological knowledge. Such knowledge would have been inherited from earlier generations and, by giving potters the power to transform materials irreversibly, may have conferred on them an elevated social status.¹² Davis records common symbolic attributes of particular colours, such as an association of red with blood, life, power, danger and men; of black with night, women, death and evil; and of white with bone, light, milk, semen, purity and goodness.

Stair's stated intention to create art works that 'transcend representation or the merely conceptual and become part of the narrative of life through a profound pragmatism' resonates strongly with the archaeologist's reciprocal pursuit of the conceptual values inherent in the material remains of prehistory. Jody Deacon, who helped select Bronze Age and Roman pots to show in *Quietus* and arranged their display, speaks eloquently about the funerary vessels and associated cremated remains that she has come to know intimately, about their making and about their personal significance.

Stair's commentary on his work reaffirmed Deacon's insights, particularly those concerning the extent to which Bronze Age pots are a vehicle for personal expression. For example, the finest Bronze Age pots are made with such great care that they must in some sense be individual 'statements' by their maker, whose identity and gender we don't know but who is likely to have known the deceased.

Indeed, it is quite possible that several individuals contributed to the making of pots, male and female and perhaps – to judge from the variety of decoration and levels of apparent skill visible on some vessels – even children. The use of fingers and thumbs as a decorating tool may have been a conscious means of personal mark-making.¹³ Personal involvement and process may, in fact, have been more important than the finished product, as sometimes mistakes that could have been rectified in the unfired clay were left 'uncorrected'. We can only speculate about who did what and how, but ceramic vessels may have played an integral part in the performance of ancient burials and in the negotiation over roles which these no doubt involved.

Just as Stair seeks through the inclusion of uncle Les's urn to personalise what might otherwise seem in *Quietus* to be a monumentally impersonal body of work, so too a close reading of the archaeological evidence can enhance our sense of the individuality of a burial and of the person or people cremated. Jody Deacon, for example, is familiar with handling cremated human remains and makes the significant point that the modern process of cremulation pulverises the cremated bones into fine ash, rendering the individual unrecognisable, in contrast to the Bronze Age – and some contemporary cultures – where relatives would have been able to pick through the burned remains, still recognising these as belonging to a person and knowing which bones were which.

In *Quietus*, therefore, the labelling of the ancient pots sought to individualise them, focusing less on the specifics of the vessel type than on how they were placed when found, on their relationship to any cremated remains, and on what the cremated remains tell us about the interred individuals. The Early Bronze Age food vessel from Disgwyllfa Fawr, Ceredigion, for example, was found inside a dug-out oak 'coffin' inside a round barrow, standing upright next to a heap of cremated bone. Another from Holt, Wrexham, was found alongside another small urn and the cremated bones of two adults and a young child.

Evidence is also often there that allows us to read into the lives and well-being of the deceased individuals. The cremated adolescent found at Jacket's Well, Knighton, Powys, probably had a chronic lack of important nutrients in his diet, which caused his porotic hyperostosis; the adult male from Six Wells, Llantwit Major, Glamorgan, suffered extensive osteoarthritis in his spine, knees and ankles. In *Quietus*, seeing and hearing Les in life makes his urn a powerful focal point for reflection on the meaning of a life now gone. In the same way, there is scope to use archaeological evidence in concert with informed imagination to conjure up a sense of the emotional content



6 *Origins* gallery, National Museum, Cardiff, 2013: *Cinerary Jar* by Julian Stair displayed with Bronze Age vessels

of an ancient funerary vessel. A touching example is the Fan Foel Bronze Age burial mound of about 2000 BC, whose excavation in 2004 revealed alongside the cremated bones of an adult, a young child and an infant not only a pottery urn and other artefacts but also the pollen of meadowsweet, the ghost of a delicate floral tribute offered at the time of a hill-top burial in spring or summer.¹⁴

Quietus was an opportunity to reflect anew on approaches to displaying excavated funerary vessels and human remains. Deacon had previously considered these issues when curating the display of Bronze Age pottery in the National Museum's *Origins* gallery, [ill. 6] She stresses that museums are one of the few places where we can see human remains. While her own experience of being close to dead people has normalised it to an extent, she remains conscious that it is a privilege to have such access. With human remains it is important to strike the appropriate ethical approach to display and in *Origins* her aim was to be sensitive to context and to individual, to be creative without sensationalising the material as macabre or gruesome.

Deacon was mindful that these pots were ceremonial and personal, created for someone specific, made by someone who probably knew the person buried, probably too a representation of cross-generational continuity. Her display in 'Origins' therefore tries to recreate the sense of a burial by enclosing objects and remains, by positioning bones carefully, and by respecting the individuality of the pots. Bringing this sensibility to bear on *Quietus*, she positioned cremated bones and vessels



7 *Quietus*, National Museum, Cardiff, 2013: Roman and Bronze Age vessels, associated cremated remains, *Cinerary Jar* and *Monumental Jars* by Julian Stair

with an appropriately understated sense of occasion. [ill. 7] One vessel, a Middle Bronze Age collared urn from Six Wells, was not displayed so as to make its form fully visible but within an open box suggestive of the stone cist in which it had been found. In this way a respectful distance was maintained between it and the viewer, and respect shown for the individuality of the pot, of its burial, and of the remains of the man that it contained. Rather than a tokenistic presence, this made for a neat, thoughtful parallel with Stair's urn for Les on its lead-covered plinth.

Deacon resists the idea of equating the ritual of installation with the ritual of burial – for her this is not a personal experience for the curator – but she has nonetheless a feeling of affinity with the people and the pots. While anthropological theory can be useful in informing an approach to their display, she also values the role of the imagination and finds the artist's perspective helpful. *Quietus* for Deacon was liberating in that it allowed her to get away from the idea that museum curators need always to be 'accurate', to offer chapter and verse on every object. By placing the emphasis on looking at the archaeological vessels rather than reading about them, the exhibition encouraged visitors to trust their own personal responses – or perhaps, as Rawson put it, 'unashamedly to speculate upon the nature of those hidden funds of response to which a pot's forms may appeal.'¹⁵ [ill. 8]

This is not to trivialise the visitors' encounter with these pots but to recognise that their meanings change over time and in different contexts, and that 'meaning is



8 *Quietus*, National Museum, Cardiff, 2013: Bronze Age vessels displayed with *Monumental Jars* by Julian Stair

actualised... by the negotiation of objects by the viewer.¹⁶ Indeed, in the case of objects from historically remote cultures, it is incumbent on the viewer to supply much of the basis for interpretation: '... amassing a file of accurate details... may be forever impossible for the meanings of the arts of most dead or alien cultures. We must again, for our own benefit, be prepared to acknowledge and trust our own responses, hoping to discover resonances in ourselves which the works themselves evoke.'¹⁷

It has been argued that untrammelled speculation on the part of the viewer – restricted, effectively, to that individual's private and possibly idiosyncratic perspective – has limited value in interpreting an object, and that a key role of the museum curator is to elucidate the physicality and historical reality of the object.¹⁸

The insights brought to bear or encouraged by the contemporary artist cannot, however, be dismissed as speculative fancy but instead offer the curator another elucidatory tool. The artist's experience of making aesthetic choices in a particular personal and social context, and with a particular material, is entirely relevant to the attempt to decode similar choices made in different contexts. 'Every object that is made or selected by a human being has shape, colour and texture which that individual, consciously or unconsciously, created or chose from a range of possibilities.... All objects contain aspects that are definable as being 'aesthetic'.¹⁹ In light of this, it is interesting to observe how the juxtaposition of Stair's work with Bronze

Age and Roman funerary vessels and selected cremated remains was received with enthusiasm by a number of visitors, archaeologists among them.

One of the key aims of the *Quietus* exhibition was to explore the metaphorical relationship between ceramic vessels and the human body, moving beyond the comfortably anthropomorphic language we use to describe domestic containers – neck, lip, belly, foot – to create a far more intense physical and symbolic identification between vessel and body. 'Funerary ware', Stair wrote, 'establishes a different physical relationship with the human body by maintaining it in death.' The truth of this statement was eloquently reinforced by the understated testimony of the prehistoric funerary wares.

Presented in a matter-of-fact but respectful way, these vessels, to modern eyes so modest and so functional, embodied the 'poetry of the actual' that Stair aspires to.²⁰ Conversely, Stair's own vessels, physically imposing, technically astonishing, aesthetically alluring, conceptually daring, were a seductive reminder of the technical and spiritual investment that the ancient pots received from their makers and first owners. Stair argues in *Quietus* that in 'our modern Western and predominantly secular world' death is 'an apposite subject for artistic interpretation.' As we learned in Cardiff, our ancient ancestors knew this truth millennia ago.

Footnotes

- 1 For their help in developing this paper I am particularly grateful to Julian Stair and to my colleagues at Amgueddfa Cymru – National Museum Wales, Mary Davis, Jody Deacon, Steve Burrow and Adam Gwilt.
- 2 Philip Rawson, *Ceramics* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971; reprinted Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984), pp. 2–3
- 3 *Ibid.* p. 5
- 4 *Ibid.* p. 206
- 5 Steve Burrow, *The Tomb Builders in Wales 4000–3000 BC* (Cardiff: National Museum Wales Books, 2006); http://www.museumwales.ac.uk/en/1823/?article_id=240 (accessed 25 August 2013)
- 6 Mary Davis, 'Modern Trends: Ancient Patterns' in *Studies in Conservation*, vol. 1 supplement 2, 2006, pp. 184–189
- 7 John Abercromby, *A study of the Bronze Age Pottery of Great Britain and Ireland and its Associated Grave Goods* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1912)
- 8 An apparent example of enchainment from Bronze Age Britain is the site of Cladh Hallan, South Uist, excavated in 2001: <http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/archaeology/research/cladh-hallan/cladh-hallan03> (accessed 25 August 2013); for a ceramic context, see Davis, *op. cit.* p. 5 & n. 29
- 9 Marcus Brittain, 'Do Barrows Matter? Politics, production and practice of the Welsh Bronze Age' in J Last (ed), *Building Complexity: New Approaches to Barrows* (Oxford: Oxbow, nd), http://www.academia.edu/237709/Do_barrows_matter_Politics_production_and_practice_of_the_Welsh_Bronze_Age (accessed 25 August 2013)
- 10 Rawson, *op. cit.* pp. 131, 147
- 11 Davis, *op. cit.* p. 5
- 12 Ann Woodward, 'Bronze Age pottery and settlements in southern England' in *Bronze Age Review*, vol. 1, November 2008, pp. 79–96, http://www.britishmuseum.org/pdf/BAR1_2008_7_Woodward_c.pdf (accessed 25 August 2013)
- 13 *Ibid.*
- 14 <http://www.dyfedarchaeology.org.uk/projects/fanfoel.htm> (accessed 28 August 2013)
- 15 Rawson, *op. cit.* p. 19
- 16 Eileen Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 119
- 17 Rawson, *op. cit.* p. 160
- 18 Susan Pearce, *Museums, Objects and Collections: A Cultural Study* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1992), pp. 210–227
- 19 Chris Caple, *Objects: Reluctant Witnesses to the Past* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 8
- 20 Julian Stair, NMW exhibition proposal, 2005



Quietus in Winchester: programme and process

Sophie Hacker



Detail of Sarcophagus on encaustic floor tiles, Winchester Cathedral

My role at Winchester is Arts Consultant to the Cathedral. A key part of the role is to act as an interface between artists and the Cathedral Chapter. Chapter is the governing body of the Cathedral, made up of the Dean, the Receiver General, the Residentiary Canons and two lay (not ordained) Canons. I am the first port of call for all those enquiring about showing work, and I assess the proposals in the light of our Arts Policy, which I then take to Chapter for approval.

The Policy was developed in 2011. Under it, the Cathedral aims to host three exhibitions per year, broadly following the traditional academic terms. The summer exhibition is usually the principal one, when visitor numbers are at their highest, with two further events of a generally more modest nature in the spring and autumn.

Selection criteria set out in the policy require that exhibitions should 'engage creatively with the building and the Christian faith it embodies' but also 'connect with and represent currents of secular culture'. The policy also sets out that priority will be given to exhibitions which 'will engage and challenge visitors and worshippers' as well as those which 'will have a wide appeal to visitors'.

I met Julian Stair at the Cathedral a year or so before he had started making final preparations for *Quietus*, early in 2011. He made the initial approach for the show, and at first I was a little reluctant to consider it, because we had recently (2009) hosted Ashley Howard's *Ritual and Setting*, an exhibition of sacred vessels. Whilst Howard's work had been warmly received, it is part of my role to ensure that the exhibition programming has variety in theme and material. I was concerned that *Quietus* might have come a little too hard on the heels of this earlier 'monumental ceramic' show.

That said, though, Stair's approach to the work and the Cathedral won me over. We had a very interesting initial site meeting to discuss the possibilities. The fact that we would be planning 2013 as the exhibition year reassured me that a four year gap between Howard's show and Stair's would be enough 'clear blue water' to justify a second ceramic exhibition.

I meet many artists enquiring about showing their work here. Sometimes it is challenging to match their expectations with the realities of programming events in such a busy working building. It is a significant challenge in the first instance simply to co-ordinate the cathedral diary. However, Julian Stair's sensitivity to the place, his willingness to remain flexible and his generosity in finding the funding for the practicalities of getting the exhibition in place enabled us to work very fruitfully together.

With images taken from previous projects I presented

Julian's work to the Chapter member with overall responsibility for artistic projects, Canon Roland (Roly) Riem. Despite *Quietus* being at this stage only conceptual, the quality of the proposal was evident, and Canon Roly was glad to take the proposal to Chapter to approve.

One of the prime motivating factors for both the Canon's and my own enthusiasm for Stair's proposal was the artist's excitement at how radically affected the work would become, once taken out of the 'white cube' environment and given the context of a sacred building. Artists are often surprised, even shocked, at how this building can dwarf their work – it is pointless trying to compete with the scale of the interior architecture, whose design and purpose is to point to, and glorify God. One can only hope that artworks will find a level of dialogue that has meaning and congruence. Stair's goal was to address this as an explicit dimension of his project.

Winchester Cathedral welcomes some 300,000 visitors each year. It is impossible to know the motivation of each – whether tourist or pilgrim, seeker or atheist – that brings them through the doors. The challenge for me is to find artworks that offer a fresh, innovative interpretation of the space that may connect at unexpected levels with each visitor. We are also dependent on our guides, trained volunteers with a deep understanding of the stories of this historic place, to help interpret temporary exhibitions, even though we always encourage artists to provide clear written interpretation of their work so that visitors and congregations can reap the greatest benefit from each event.

At this early stage, some two years before the anticipated exhibition, Stair and I began initial conversations with key personnel – the Custos (head virger with responsibility for managing the day-to-day activities inside the Cathedral) and Clerk of the Works, who has oversight of the fabric and precincts.

As an example of the logistical planning required by the project, Stair hoped to place many of the pieces in the east end of the cathedral, known as the Retroquire. This is a raised area the floor of which is made of glorious 13th century encaustic tiles. These tiles had been a very early inspiration in Stair's practice, but they were laid over a floor with no foundations which therefore can only take a limited weight. The Cathedral's structural engineer was consulted to ensure that Stair's work would be positioned in such a way that it would not go straight through the floor to the crypt below.

One sadness for me as both an artist and a curator is the knowledge that visitors to exhibitions here and elsewhere can never fully appreciate such work involved in

putting exhibits in place. Never has that been more true than the amount of effort Stair put into *Quietus*. With a team of eight and support from art shippers, and needing a scaffold tower, a specially-designed and built platform, and a hoist, it took an intensive week merely to get the work into the building and placed.

Final placement of each piece gradually evolved. Although a floor plan had been agreed, inevitably certain adjustments were needed to draw the best from the relationship between the work and the architecture. This can best be illustrated by the location of the two vast 'sentinel' monumental vases. Initially they were planned for the north Retroquire, but they seemed strangely ill-at-ease there. Their stately gravitas was much better suited to the more spacious footing outside the Lady Chapel where they could stand watch over the Shrine of St Swithun and the Federov Icons.

The small cinerary jars, *Columbarium*, installed in previous venues in a single integrated display, initially seemed difficult to locate. By an opportune series of events, the Cathedral's mortuary chests containing the bones of Saxon kings, bishops and one queen, Emma, had been removed for forensic study. This left the tops of the quire screens uncharacteristically empty. Stair's team arranged the piece's large number of jars with infinite care, and they then sat in quiet contemplation through two months of choral evensong and special services, including weddings and funerals.

After a very successful opening the pieces started to do their work. As with the other two exhibition venues, the sarcophagi were originally shown with lead lids. However, something rather strange happened at the cathedral. Because the work seemed so extraordinarily 'at home' visitors did not seem able to immediately respond to them as 'art objects' and began treating them as they did most of the other structures and monuments in the cathedral – exploring their textures through touch, even sitting on them, resting their bags on the tops and children stepping on them. Inevitably this caused damage to the soft surface of the lead, and Stair had no option but to remove them within the first few days of the exhibition's run.

Although it was certainly a shame to lose them, the net effect was certainly not to weaken the power of *Quietus*. Instead, visitors were able to see inside the sarcophagi, and to appreciate the negative spaces within. The sarcophagi, in particular, seemed to find a natural place to inhabit in the North Presbytery Aisle. Placed in procession from west to east, each form found an echo in some aspect of the decorated encaustic tiles. At the east end, the final sarcophagus reached out to left and right to earlier tombs,

seeming perfectly at ease. The colour palette of every piece had an echo in some part of the tiles, so much so that the vast monumental vessels seemed to grow straight out of the floor.

Despite the frequent requests (written and verbal) not to touch the work, visitors continued tapping, stroking, even embracing the pots. One suspects that there is no answer as to how to deal with this difficult issue: 'warding' each piece over every hour that the cathedral was open would not have been able to prevent people from touching the work. The best they could do was to establish a dialogue once a visitor had been seen to touch the objects. Perhaps this is another shift from Gallery to Sacred Space. Visitors feel a greater sense of familiarity and belonging in the Cathedral and there is not the implicit 'do not touch' mentality of the art gallery.

The greatest puzzlement we encountered was 'what are pots doing in the cathedral?' If it had been possible, one would have liked to keep Stair's work in place for a full year, to allow them to run a full liturgical course. That may have encouraged more regular visitors and members of the cathedral to move to a deeper level of questioning about why they had a temporary home at Winchester. Whilst the meaning of the concept of *Quietus* is known, there is another level of what Stair has brought us. By creating quiet and restful physical space, he has offered us an opportunity to face and embrace our own mortality.





Monumental Jars in Retroquire, Winchester Cathedral

Quietus in Winchester: conversation and reflection

Roland Riem

When a student, aged seventeen, Julian Stair visited Winchester Cathedral and was inspired by the carpet of 13th Century encaustic tiles lining the pilgrim way to the Shrine of St Swithun. Their colours became his, so that now when a group of two-metre high vessels cluster on those retrochoir tiles it seems as if they are rising organically from the floor.

At a conceptual level there is also a fit. The exhibition is about death, specifically the threshold or liminal stage between life and death, which is the meaning of the word 'quietus'. The forms of the pottery – the sarcophagus, the cinerary urn, the figural, monumental and crouch jars – represent different symbolic responses to this transition, whether the radical reduction of the body to ashes by cremation or its gradual corruption to bone and dust. The figural pots give a strong sense of an abiding memory of the person, whilst the empty jars evoke the departed soul.

The conversation with the Cathedral at this level is a busy one because many different views of death are represented in the church. For example, the effigies of rotting cadavers under the chantry chapels remind the faithful to pray for souls embarking upon their journey through Purgatory, while the proud memorial statue of a seventeenth century gentlemen needs no such prayers, only his high public achievements and status, to secure his place in the hereafter!

This means that the visitor to the *Quietus* exhibition is left with the opportunity of making his or her own connections. Sadly, the most fundamental connection by touch is not always possible: the polished lead tops used on many of the pieces are easily marked and the gorgeously turned ribbons of fired clay which give rhythm to the surface of the large jars easily damaged. Yet one certainly wants to reach out and feel centred by the simple clay.

Among the delightful visual connections offered by the Cathedral were the two figural pots in the crypt which relate to Antony Gormley's iconic sculpture *Sound II*. Together they breathe an air of serenity and gentle contemplation. Another highly serendipitous arrangement is the two columbaria formed on the top of the north and south presbytery screens. Normally the screens are home to the mortuary chests containing the bones of the Saxon kings, but these are undergoing scientific investigation elsewhere. Instead, these chests are replaced by serried rows of cinerary urns, offering a very different and renewed sense of the presence of the dead gathered around the high altar.

Julian Stair and his team are to be commended for the highly thoughtful and precise way in which the exhibition has been set out in the Cathedral, making new vistas and

points of focus. The scale of the work makes it impossible to ignore. The visitor has to negotiate and come to terms with what these ceramics are saying in the spaces. They are crafted with a beauty and humility equal to those of the many unheralded hands at work over the centuries in this Cathedral; Stair's careful creativity in the face of death is certainly consonant with authentic Christian hope.

As the exhibition closed, we certainly appreciated the easy way in which the work dwelt in the spaces. One small indication of this came in the form of a polite query from one of the regular visitors to the Cathedral about replacing the historic mortuary chests ranged on top of the presbytery screen with urns. The fact that he could even contemplate such a permanent act was testimony to the fittingness of the work in a sacred space.

However, there was one item which we did not feel able to display that I will use to reflect on the difference between exhibiting *Quietus* in a white-cube space and in a place of particular faith. This is the work *Memoriam*, which we did not feel able to exhibit. The decision not to exhibit a piece which recast human remains as a pot was made by instinct, but for sound underlying reasons.

The Cathedral's foundation is tied up with human remains, the relics of St Swithun. His bones made the Cathedral a seat of sacred power. (Burials in cathedral were only prohibited in the 19th century – fortunately for us after the time of Jane Austen!) However, the problem lies not with having human remains evident in the building but in recasting them into a permanent form.

All other pieces in *Quietus* are containers for remains, whether ashes or bones; *Memoriam* is itself a container. It belongs to a modern tradition of retaining material, the most vivid being the fusing of human ashes into a keepsake diamond, but more commonly involves 'having Aunty Flora on the mantelpiece'. In both cases the immortality of the person is associated with the act of holding onto a new, manufactured object.

The message which a Christian church or churchyard enshrines is, in the first instance, that we cannot hold onto people beyond death. All funeral services contain an act of committal, which makes the point of release. And this is also part of the meaning of the biblical story of Mary Magdalene visiting the tomb of Jesus after his death (John 20:11–18), when the risen Lord appears to Mary and says to her, 'Do not cling to me'.

However, the second part of the Christian message is that out of the nothingness of death, God can bring new life – resurrection of the body. The body here means the reality of the whole human person, not simply an ethereal spirit or soul. A famous representation of this is Stanley

Spencer's *The Resurrection, Cookham*, in which the dead are rising from their graves as rounded, clothed individuals.

The radicalism of Christian hope requires that the living should not hold on to whatever remains of the human body but rather entrust them to God's safe keeping. They are what is left of an old story and what will be taken up into a new story where the person is reconstituted in glory. Anything that freeze-frames this decay stands in the way of this sort of hope, even if it results in other sorts of human consolation.

The other objects in *Quietus* honour human remains by containing them, often reminding us by their forms of the human body within, tending to dust and ashes and therefore, as it were, growing into the fullness of nothingness. All this is consonant with Christian hope. It is much harder to find this hope in ashes that have been crafted, however beautifully and with whatever degree of emotional investment, into an object. The permanence of what has been made obviates the need for the subject to be remade in resurrection, to which a cathedral bears witness in many forms of memorialisation.



Quietus: The visitor's voice

Michael Tooby

mima, Middlesbrough



This essay discusses visitor reactions to Julian Stair's exhibition *Quietus*. It compares responses to the show through reviews and statistics with a shared visitor survey used to prompt verbalized responses to the exhibition.

Context

The three showings of *Quietus*: mima Middlesbrough, the National Museum, Cardiff in Wales, and Winchester Cathedral¹ allow comparisons of how individual visitors reacted to a very similar set of objects in three very different contexts.

The comparison centres on what might be termed the subject of the *Quietus* exhibition: the functional and symbolic role of ceramic objects in death. The title directly referenced a specific idea of liminality in death. It was also clear that Stair's intent was to work with clay in a manner consistent with his practice as a 'potter'.

This therefore gave the potential to look at some particular themes within the wider discussion of evaluation of art and craft in public settings. In many studies and reports the focus tends to be on quantifying audience response, on setting out the hierarchies of audience responses, or on the distinctions between the passive reception of exhibits versus the active, planned engagement in practice by targeted groups.²

In contrast, this narrow study compares how institutional methods of evaluation used quotation from visitors with a simple visitor response survey designed to elicit verbalized responses.

The exhibition venues and installations

mima is a purpose built 'white box' space. The exhibition occupied all the major exhibition spaces and a pair of large jars were shown on the roof. Groups of works spread across display zones. The gallery layout and closed doors permitted the separate and distinct presentation of *Memoriam*. This installation centres on a single bone china vase on a lead plinth. It is accompanied by an edit of 'home movies' and a separate sound track with still images featuring a man the visitor gets to know as Les Cox. A text explains that his family agreed that his ashes could be used as material for the jar.

In Cardiff the exhibition was centred on a mid-scale exhibition gallery, which included a dense display of *Quietus* works and examples of ceramics from the archaeological collections. The piece entitled *Columbarium*, shown in Middlesbrough in the first display space as a towering column, became in Cardiff a screen behind which a darker area contained *Memoriam*.

In addition two vases displayed on mima's roof were

presented on the 'bridge' in the Museum's grand main hall, adjacent to a display case which showed archaeological objects. Meanwhile, a group of *Quietus* pieces were also shown in the archaeological galleries themselves.

In Winchester, the exhibits were ranged in many spaces. The main ensemble of works were located in two groups in the retroquire and behind the high altar. Individual pieces were also located in specific isolated settings, such as a small jar in a niche in a side chapel. In the crypt figural jars were placed in the vicinity of Anthony Gormley's *Sound 2*. The Cathedral decided not to show *Memoriam*, a decision discussed elsewhere in this publication.

In house evaluation

Numbers

It is usual to begin an evaluative report with numbers. At mima the total visitor figure was 32,665. Given that *Quietus* occupied the principal spaces, this figure is in effect close to the visitor number for the whole building for that period, and is typical for major exhibitions at the venue. Of this number around 800 is formal educational workshops for primary, secondary, SEN schools as well as further and higher education institutions and sessions.³

At the National Museum visitors totalled 10,045, which the Museum describes as typical for the gallery used. This is a distinct space off the main 'visitor route' for a casual visitor. The number compares with other recent single-artist ceramics exhibitions in the same space: Edmund de Waal's *Arcanum* (2005), with 9,204 visitors; and Elizabeth Fritsch's *Dynamic Structures* (2010), with 9,220.

The relationship between this number and the number for the whole museum (103,762 for the duration of the exhibition) prompts consideration. For example, many visitors would have seen *Quietus* works in other spaces, and therefore be uncounted, and without necessarily associating them with the core display.

In Winchester only the raw statistics are retained. There is a combined figure of 64,658 visitors to the Cathedral over the time of the show, and this includes those attending services and events. The Cathedral is also not required to produce formal evaluation or reports in the same way that the two publicly funded venues do.

It was only at Winchester Cathedral that an admission charge was made. At both mima and the National Museum admission and temporary exhibitions are free.

Responses: normal venue evaluation

In Middlesbrough, the take-up of the normal gallery feedback system is not quantified, but was deemed by



staff as more actively used than in other exhibitions. Most of these unsolicited comments were positive and responsive, and combined general and specific comment.

'We loved the Julian Stair exhibition. We travelled to Middlesbrough today (from Whitby) just to visit mima, and it was worth it! Would have liked to have the Stair video louder to listen to.'

'Loved the concept and presentation for the Julian Stair expo. Thanks.'

mima Education also ran structured visits. These explored, discussed and responded to themes within the exhibition such as life, death and memories.

mima's internal report remarks: 'It was particularly noted through reflection from teachers involved in the START project, that Stair's exhibition had been empowering and an important platform for discussion post visit about memories and death. One teacher described how powerful the exhibition had been and 'provided a launch pad into a difficult area' and 'an excellent way to introduce the topic of death'.⁴

And that '...The strength of visitor engagement with the art and its subject matter is an endorsement of the decision to hold an exhibition on such a challenging subject.'

In Cardiff, the National Museum provided a drop-in comments box in the exhibition for visitors to share their thoughts. Comments were written on plain pieces of paper.

The Museum's report comments: '...it primarily attracted feedback from those with strong feelings about the exhibition, both positive and negative. The majority of comments were positive and suggest that the exhibition made, in some cases, a deep and meaningful impact upon visitors. Many seemed clearly to grasp the context and content of the exhibition and in some instances had a strong emotional reaction to it. The negative comments were most commonly a reaction to the theme and content of the exhibition, with some visitors mentioning that they found it upsetting, or questioning whether it was appropriate for the museum.'

Amongst the positive comments sampled in the Museum's report are the straightforward:

'This is very beautiful. Thank you.'

'Fantastic exhibition. Inspiring me for the Big event.'

'One of the most interesting exhibits I've ever been to.'

'Beautiful work. Like the curation, use of space. Great to be able to walk around the vessels. Love the wall of vessels. Thank you.'

'A wonderful exhibition. Julian Stair's work seems to fill what was a yawning gap. And so beautiful. And perfectly displayed. Thanks.'

'Moving, uplifting and absolutely beautiful. I had to try and stop myself from touching these incredibly tactile exhibits. Scale and intimacy.'

'Speechless – overcome. This show is the most humbling art I have ever seen. HUMILITY AT ITS MOST PROFOUND.'

Some were more analytic, including a comment on other visitors:

'I love this exhibition! I am amused at the fact that people are very willing to stand and look at ancient remains and yet are completely 'freaked out' and disturbed by this exhibition, and by Les's remains being on display.'

Whilst a few were lengthy, from which the following are excerpted:

'I love the link between the archaeology in the collection alongside Julian's work. As an archaeologist, it is a wonderful addition. As we all know, death is the one thing that we will all encounter and how we deal with death is fascinating!'

'My father died in the early hours of yesterday morning nearby the Museum in Cardiff. I was due to drive back to the funeral home in Penarth but for some unknown reason needed to be here. How fortuitous I have been.'

'Would you say those vessels are beautiful? I'm not yet sure about that. There is a simplicity in them which I admire, the wish to touch them, getting a sensual impression – about something which is not possible to reach – death. And then – they remind me of an industry. Buildings of industry. I feel quite lonely and meaningless and the thought about being packed in one of those vessels is frightening. And also a warm feeling, as if I'm not completely alone buried – surrounded by the warm material. Thank you for those impressions!'

Meanwhile the Museum's report notes the following as negative:

'My experience of being in this gallery is very doom and gloom, even more if you have just lost a loved one who is still grieving. Not very nice either if you just lost a baby, see two baby coffins soon as you come through the door. Take down exhibit A. S. A. possible. God Bless.'

'No good. Depressing and very morbid. Not very nice for anyone to see.'

'Send me to heaven in peace and quiet though I'm not ready yet. No good at all. Felt doom and gloom after being in this gallery. Very, very, very, very, very depressing.'

'The room is too small. The sense of magnitude implied by the huge urns doesn't quite come across – it would work better in the cathedral.'

In Winchester, there is no standard feedback methodology. Any written feedback came through



National Museum, Cardiff, including *Figural Jars* and work on paper with Bronze Age urns

the present study. The only comparison is with a word-of-mouth effect that was supported by anecdotes – for example that interest was such that the introductory leaflet to *Quietus* had to be reprinted after its initial print-run of 2,000 was exhausted in the first few weeks.

Discovering the present study was happening, some of the volunteer guides e-mailed the Cathedral. One said: '*Quietus* was a great success, playing right into my thanatological interests. Roly's first word at the reception was PRESENCE, which was also my word for these works which, together, were more than the sum of the parts.'

And another wrote in to say: 'I was excited by the scale of the works, and how they complemented the spaces they inhabited. The large pots were particularly impressive: giant, weighty figures standing at the East End of the Cathedral. It seems hard to believe that they were 'thrown' on a wheel! One marvels at the sheer strength and energy required to complete the works. Here the idea of the 'work' and the 'working process' seems bound together. I loved the 'industrial' feel, confirmed when one read in the 'flyer' how the pieces were made and fired in various brick factories.'

The shared visitor word-association study methodology

The separate visitor study created for the present text was shared between all three venues. It used a visitor questionnaire designed by the author in collaboration with staff at each organisation.

The questionnaire was based on a typical visitor questionnaire. However the questions were shifted to prompt word association and description rather than with the objective of achieving an explicitly qualitative or evaluative response.

Four questions were asked, followed by a prompt:

What in the exhibition felt **familiar** to you?
 What were you **surprised** to find in the exhibition?
 What did you **like most** about the exhibition **and why**?
 What did you **like least** about the exhibition **and why**?
 What single words would you associate with the work exhibited? Use up to three.
 We'd be interested in any other comments.

The forms were distributed by people drawn from the venue's volunteer community. The author also spent sessions observing visitors and the nature of the stay in the space in order to check that the responses were offered individually through the questionnaire process. A total of 185 were gathered, 50 in Middlesbrough, 90 in Cardiff and 45 in Winchester.

An assessment of the forms is not intended to conclude anything quantifiable such as an overall percentile of positive or negative comment. Instead it is intended to allow reflection on the language and terms of reference of those who responded.

With the set of open questions, the goal was to indicate whether visitors prioritized any particular aspects of the display as familiar or new, and to give an opportunity to describe what pleased them or didn't please them.

In the primary testimony, it is evident that people chose to emphasise one side or the other of a duality between material and visual impact and the set of ideas connoted in the work. The majority of people tended either to express a view about surface, colour, form and scale, while a minority chose to comment directly on the idea of mortality, death and the rite of passage associated with it.

Thus, in Middlesbrough, virtually all respondents to 'what did you like most' expressed their general appreciation in what one might term formal and spatial values.

*'Quiet, gentle, clean lines. Impressed by the scale and solidity of some pieces.'*⁵

'The white glazed urns. The room of large urns/vessels. The debris left on each pot.'

Amongst this six gave particular appreciation of the opening room, the *Columbarium*, and five to *Memoriam*. *'The Columbarium – it was breathtaking to walk into that room and be confronted with it.'*

'A celebration of life – Memoriam was celebrating Les.'

'The story of Les and his life and wondering why he wanted his remains to be incorporated into a ceramic.'

A significant minority of visitors linked the two, linking a comment in one section with a comment in another to create a 'read across'. Whilst most comments were generic, many commenting on the sense of scale giving a feeling of being 'inside' the exhibit and its atmosphere. Three gave a specific response to explicit exhibition information such as the benefit of wall texts.

In Cardiff there was a more even balance between formal qualities and ideas, though formal qualities again in slightly higher numbers, when responding to 'like most': *'Rough edges!'*

'The different shades of glaze and finish. I particularly liked the rough finish where splatters of clay could be clearly seen along the edge.'

These compare with: *'Being forced to stop and consider the fragility of the human condition.'*

'Learning the meaning of Quietus. Standing in the optimum place to hear the soundtrack – then afterwards finding that I'd stood as though with respect to the remains in the urn – but unwittingly.'

Perhaps due to the compressed space, proportionately many more respondents than at the other two venues cited the large size and relationship to human scale of the monumental jars as what they 'liked most'.

'The large standing pots – they felt imposing but somehow comforting.'

In Winchester a higher proportion expressed 'like most' in terms of an idea:

'It addresses reality. Not in a gloomy way. Death not to be feared and it doesn't invoke fear. Really liked this.'

'The questions it raises, and encouraging people to find their own answers.'

but still were a minority when compared to comments on form, texture, colour and material in response to the 'liked most' question:

'Variety of shapes.'

'The smooth clay – I wanted to lie in one and see if I would fit.'

'The simplicity of the 'forms':'

'I enjoyed the subtlety of the colours and the connections with the colours in the floor tiling.'

In Winchester, perhaps due to the absence of other forms of feedback, many respondents added a number of longer comments:

'The smaller pots, lined up around the top of the Presbytery screen, took me completely by surprise. They reminded me of preserves which, in a way I suppose they are.'

'Pottery, an ancient art form, made of clay from the earth. I enjoyed the familiarity of the forms, the repetition and the echoes! I shall miss them when they go.'

Visitors used all the questions, but particularly 'surprised by', to pick out works that either spoke to them most or made them most uncomfortable or puzzled.

The most frequently cited were the *Columbarium* and, in Middlesbrough and Cardiff, *Memoriam*. The terms 'scale', 'large vessels' or 'giant pots', being generically expressed, count as most frequently cited in 'most liked' and 'surprised by' at all venues, but not expressed in terms of an individual object. At mima *Columbarium* was cited as 'liked most' closely followed by *Memoriam*, with *Memoriam* being slightly more cited in 'surprised by'.

The infant sarcophagus was second behind *Memoriam* in response to 'what were you most surprised by' and most often cited (more than *Memoriam*) using what might be termed negative or impactful words such as 'unsettling', 'gloomy'. It was given as 'dislike most' in two citations, one at mima, one in Cardiff.

Over a third of respondents in Cardiff gave 'nothing' as their response to 'dislike most', compared with slightly under a quarter in Winchester and under a fifth in Middlesbrough.

However, most specific mentions in 'dislike' were the works on paper – also referred to as paintings or prints by respondents – shown in Middlesbrough and Winchester. These were seen as not consistent with the exhibition and artistically least successful.

It is noteworthy that technicality and approach to display were the most frequently cited negatives in Middlesbrough and Cardiff. In Middlesbrough three people questioned the giving over of so much space, partly to suggest that greater intensity might have been achieved

Cardiff

word 1	word 2	word 3
upright	pots	vases
timeless	essential	contemplative
provocative	brown	simplistic
fun	touchy feely	educative
awe inspiring	beautiful	uncluttered
emotional	feeling of place in world	reflective
eye-opening	skilled	presence
collective	physical presence	mnemonic
loss	absence	peace
monumental	peaceful	
thought-provoking	meaningful	challenging
monumental	inspiring	thought-provoking
calming	impressive	visceral
refreshing	calm	interesting
earthy	caring	beauty
interesting	innovative	thought provoking
emotional	big	thought-provoking
originality	essence	new: modern
beautiful	moving	
calming	loving	interesting
aesthetic		
interesting	attractive	
beautiful	timeless	meaningful
beautiful	poignant	emotive
memory	absence (a sense of)	peace
poignant	powerful	silent
uniform	unexciting	well-crafted
big	interesting	thought-provoking
still	silent	
death	ashes	urns
earthy	ceremonial	humanity
personal	peaceful	timeless
vessel	clay	jar
scale	artistry	visceral
peace	rest	quiet
beautiful	intriguing	original
experiment	death	recall special energy
calm		
process	freedom	energy
earthy	funerary	urn
finality	decay	silence
calm	reassuring	reflective
minimalism	unsentimentality	order
form	uplifting	texture
powerful	graceful	big
big	clay	pots
beautiful	eerie	peaceful
peace	earth	light
contrasting	personal	terracotta
death	peace	wonder
interesting	disturbing	
real	true	natural
mortality	peaceful	inevitability
powerful	evocative	pensive
natural	ageless	
utilitarian	plain	
death	casks	earthy tones
death	big	old-new
huge	hollow	urn
interesting	historical	artistic
clay	potter	death
thoughtful	big	tactile
emotive	creative	
beautiful	peaceful	outstanding (body of work)
scale	shape	death
bold	structured	tactile
function	art	vessel
quiet	interesting	reverence
white	brown	terra cotta
death	peace	finality

Middlesbrough

word 1	word 2	word 3
quietude	death	relaxing
earthy	vast	brick
vast	intriguing	thoughtful
minimal	clay	colour
hollow	life	
monumental	thought-provoking	
mortality	terracotta	vases
really	really	good
calming	centring	
large	repetitive	
calm	well presented	small
death	life	existence
respectful		
fragility		
circular	continuous	
interesting	informative	unusual
stunning	moving	beautiful
inclusive	timeless	personal
universal	inevitable	inspiring
peace	restful	transitional
brittle	dense	clay
boring	austere	humourless
clay	slab	ikea
memory		
sensitive	use of clay	
memory	grandeur	basic
unique	interesting	thought-provoking
earth		
quiet	reflective	enigmatic
stop	ancient	sad
people		
tactile	calming	
reflection	finality	appropriate materials
serenity	beauty	balance
smooth	orange	round

Winchester

word 1	word 2	word 3
simplicity		
unique	modern	connected
unite	mortality	
monumental	gloomy	darkness
mortuary		
smooth	plain	
earthy	aesthetically pleasing	
solid	interesting	
unusual	bizarre	
mortality	morbid	
journey		
tranquil		
unusual		
provoking change	blends with floor	
simplicity	complex paradox	thought-provoking
mortality	simplicity	perfection
irreverent	hideous	indiscreet
death	garden centre	sturdy
stunning	encouraging	
monumental	peaceful	chunky
clayey	calming	contemplative
tactile	puzzling	
pregnant	tactile	echoing
thought-provoking		
death	shapes	

in a tighter installation, and one commented the walls were 'too white'. One gave 'nowhere to sit and reflect' and another wished for more information on the artist.

In Cardiff the nature of the display spaces meant that the soundtrack from *Memoriam* spilled into the adjoining display. This was a source of a very small number of negative comments – 'the show needed silence' – though a few appreciated the accidental interaction.

Two respondents in Middlesbrough mentioned the reference to death in 'most dislike', 'it's a bit depressing', 'depressing sense of time past. Regrets.' And one said '...lacking in humour.... Too earnest. Death is too important to be taken this seriously.' In Cardiff three of all respondents made negative comments about the subject of death.

Only a few respondents, all at Winchester, gave an explicitly Christian reading of the exhibition:

'That it is totally congruent with the venue. Jesus would not have come in as he did in the temple and turned it all over.'
'Well tied in to the theme of the Cathedral.'

Whilst, as in Middlesbrough and Cardiff, more general references to spiritual journeys were made:

'Connected. Unites us in death.'

In Winchester a quarter of respondents commented about the works' setting in the Cathedral, some negatively:

'Not at all sure about having art in a Cathedral.'

'Surprised to find an exhibition in a Cathedral.'

'It did not add to the beauty of the Cathedral.'

'Pieces are hard to walk round. Get in the way.'

'I can't interpret them in the context of the Cathedral.'

'Waste of good terracotta.'

In saying that a formal response was most frequently given, however it is evident that it was understood that formal qualities were crucial to the impact and meaning of the work. Silence, stillness and being able to be amongst the large vessels were frequently cited:

'touching the seams on the large urns – thinking about joins, links and spontaneous gestures.'

'I felt I was inside the exhibition.'

These were both given by respondents at mima prompted by the 'like most?' question.

Equally, the comments made to the four open questions can be read for 'unwitting' or secondary testimony.

One obvious example is the vocabulary set used to describe Julian Stair himself:

	mima (out of 50)	National Museum (out of 90)	Winchester (out of 45)	Total (out of 185)
Artist	4	2	1	7
Potter	1	0	0	1
Craftsman	1	2	0	3

and the exhibits:

	mima (out of 50)	National Museum (out of 90)	Winchester (out of 45)	Total (out of 185)
Ceramic	4	8	0	12
Clay	5	6	5	16
Pottery	11	8	0	19
Pot	10	29	11	50
Urn	9	17	8	34
Vessel	4	14	4	22
Piece	4	9	0	13
Jar	4	11	1	16
Coffin	6	13	18	37
Sculpture	1	0	1	2
Sarcophagi	4	3	8	15

These contrast with the comments offered in response to the direct 'prompt' for three single words. This resulted in a rich range of responses (see pp.52–53) with a noticeable lack of repetition. Of 213 words used by 185 respondents some gave one or two, some none. 27 words were repeated, of which only eight were used more than twice, those being 'death' (8), 'beautiful' (7), 'big' (6), 'peace' (6), 'peaceful' (5), 'urns' (4), 'earthy' (3, along with 'earth' and 'earthy tones', once each). Faith in visitors' vocabulary might be qualified by the highest citation being 'interesting' (9) whilst 'thought-provoking' was used five times.

Finally, the great majority did not give 'any other' comments. Some used it to reference elements such as interpretative material, particularly if their other comments were positive. However, some of the most touching comments were also found here.

One visitor in Cardiff wrote:

'I came here on a whim today and this exhibition has helped me reflect positively on what was a difficult day.'

and another:

'strange to stop in this mad existence and ponder on our own mortality.'

Responding to *Quietus* and liminality

One of the best known studies to use the terminologies and techniques of anthropology to better our understanding of the art museum is Carol Duncan's *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums*.⁶

Duncan argues that in the post Enlightenment tradition, there is a distinction between the aesthetic and the spiritual, which means that the deep experiences of secular objects becomes a metaphor for the spiritual: 'In this sense, the invention of aesthetics can be understood as a transference of spiritual values from the sacred realm into secular time and space.'⁷

Duncan describes the ever greater burdening of significance in individual objects by the uncluttered museum installation – a kind of 'intense absorption'. She cites the anthropologist Edmund Leach in suggesting that this is important in the symbolic suggestion that objects live outside time and space. She summarises by saying that '... the more 'aesthetic' the installations – the fewer the objects and the emptier the surrounding walls – the more sacralized the museum space.'⁸

Since her text, the changing culture of display has demanded that we review this. The re-invention of complex narrative and juxtaposition in new museum displays has evolved as a challenge to the minimal installation. The impact of participative projects or cross-media installations in museums has also helped reintroduce busy-ness in installations. The role of artist as interventionist in specific settings such as collections and distinctive architecture has extended the range of 'non-museum' but nevertheless ritualized contexts in which objects may be seen. Indeed, the steady growth of showing temporary and permanent contemporary art projects in churches and cathedrals is a good example of this.

The scale and simplicity of the internal architecture at mima gave the sense of drama, space and 'intense absorption' alluded to in Duncan's description of the 'aesthetic' installation. Yet in Cardiff the interaction allowed by a busy display with diverse material was frequently juxtaposed by visitors as alongside and interacting with a sense of engagement in what might be deemed the 'liminal': the passage from life to death, and the stillness and presence of the objects as generative of a particular kind of haptic and visual experience.

The responses in both 'in-house' evaluation and in the shared study were overwhelmingly positive. The venue with most negative comments, numerically and proportionately, was Winchester Cathedral, yet it was also the venue which generated proportionately the most appreciative comment of appropriateness to its setting. If we make a comparison,

one interpretation of this by inference may be that the Cathedral has the highest proportion of regular visitors with an investment in the status quo, given that mima and the National Museum do present changing exhibitions as part of their remit. There may also be an interpretation whereby the formal values which rise to the surface in comment at the venues associated with art and history are indeed an expression of the ritualized awareness of the experience of objects in galleries and museums.

However, what is clear is that it is the objects themselves, their formal qualities – and indeed the haptic qualities so valued by Julian Stair – that speak directly to the visitor. What is equally clear is that visitors of many different backgrounds and ages in three different regions and visitor settings found an extraordinary consistency of response and a rich range of verbal means to express it.

Footnotes

- 1 See interview with Julian Stair by Helen Waters elsewhere in this publication.
- 2 In planning this study I was conscious of different genres of evaluative or analytic projects, which informed the limited nature of this study. For example, it was not the kind of rich multi-layered analysis typical of the studies in the 'enquire' project undertaken by engage and partners: http://www.engage.org/downloads/Enquire_Advocacy.pdf (accessed 10 November 2013). Equally, it is appreciative of, but distinct to, the discussion of behavioural association to categorise visitors, such as the 'culture segments' used by Morris Hargreaves McIntyre and others in the fields of audience development and marketing: <http://mhminsight.com/articles/culture-segments-1179> (accessed 10 November 2013).
- 3 I am grateful to mima Middlesbrough and Amgueddfa Cymru – National Museum Wales for making their reports, produced for internal evaluation only, available for this essay.
- 4 mima's START programme for schools also generated student engagement. The project, funded by the Prince's Foundation, involves nine schools in Middlesbrough identified as being in some of the most disadvantaged areas. Students are given focused activity around exhibitions at mima. <http://www.middlesbrough.gov.uk/index.aspx?articleid=3282> (accessed 10 November 2013)
- 5 Throughout, where there are quotations from visitor responses, spellings have been corrected and ampersands, plus signs, etc., replaced with words.
- 6 Duncan, Carol, *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums* (London, Routledge, 1995)
- 7 *Ibid.*, p. 14
- 8 *Ibid.*, p. 17



Julian Stair

Born, Bristol 1955
Lives and works in London

Education

1974–78 BA Ceramics, Camberwell College, University of the Arts, London
1978–81 MA Ceramics, Royal College of Art, London
2002 PhD, Royal College of Art, London
Critical Writing on English Studio Pottery: 1910–1940

Recent awards

2003 Finalist, World Ceramic Exposition, Seoul, Korea
2004 Queen Elizabeth Scholarship
2004 European Achievement Award, World Crafts Council
2005 Finalist, Hamlyn Award
2008 Art Fund purchase of *Monumental Jar V*, mima, Middlesbrough from COLLECT at the Victoria & Albert Museum
2011 Grant for the Arts, Arts Council England
2011 Finalist, International Triennial of Silicate Arts, Kecskemét, Hungary, Highly Commended

Public collections

Aberystwyth University Ceramic Collection & Archive
Abingdon Museum
Arkansas Decorative Arts Museum, USA
British Council
Cleveland Craft Centre
Contemporary Arts Society
Crafts Council
Fitzwilliam Museum Cambridge
Gallery Oldham
Glynn Vivian Art Gallery Swansea
Hong Kong Museum of Art
Hove Museum
mima, Middlesbrough
Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, Netherlands
Amgueddfa Cymru – National Museum of Wales
Paisley Museum
Rhode Island School of Design Museum, USA
Sainsbury Centre for the Visual Arts, Norwich
Shibley Museum Gateshead
The Mint Museum, Charlotte, North Carolina, USA
The Potteries Museum & Art Gallery, Stoke-on-Trent
Ulster Museum
University of Wales
Victoria & Albert Museum
York City Art Gallery

Recent selected teaching and research

2002–11 Senior Research Fellow, Camberwell College, University of the Arts, London
2004 Research Fellow, Royal College of Art, London
2009 Visiting professor, Muthesius Kunsthochschule, Kiel, Germany
2011 *20th Century British Studio Ceramics*, Courtauld Summer School, The Courtauld Institute of Art, London
2012– Principle Research Fellow, University of Westminster, London
Nominated researcher in AHRC funded research project, *Ceramics in the Expanded Field: Behind the Scenes at the Museum*

Selected recent articles, essays and reviews

2009 'The Employment of Matter: Pottery of the Omega Workshop', essay for *Beyond Bloomsbury: Designs of the Omega Workshop 1913–19* (London: Courtauld Gallery)
2010 *Hybridity, Interpretation and Consumption: New Ceramics and Glass in Britain Today*, European Triennial for Ceramics and Glass (Mons, Belgium: World Crafts Council)
2013 'Factive Plasticity: The Abstract Pottery of William Staite Murray', in *Ben Nicholson, Winifred Nicholson, Christopher Wood, Alfred Wallis & William Staite Murray: Art and Life 1920–1931* (Leeds Art Gallery, Kettle's Yard, Cambridge and Dulwich Picture Gallery, London)

Other recent projects and appointments

2000–08 Trustee, Crafts Council
2008 Cape Farewell voyage to Greenland
2009–10 Curator of British Entry, Second European Triennial of Ceramics and Glass, Mons, Belgium

overleaf, left: National Museum, Cardiff right: Winchester Cathedral
following pages, left: *The Matter of Life and Death*, York St Mary's (photograph: Phil Sayer)
right: Winchester Cathedral, Guardian Angels Chapel

Recent solo exhibitions

2013 *The Matter of Life and Death*, York St Mary's, York Museums Trust
2012–14 *Quietus: Death, the Vessel and the Human Body*, mima, Middlesbrough; National Museum, Cardiff, Wales; Winchester Cathedral, Winchester; Somerset House, London
2010 *Julian Stair*, The Scottish Gallery, Edinburgh
2006 *Out of History*, Galerie Marianne Heller, Heidelberg, Germany
2005 *Julian Stair*, Terra Delft Gallery, Netherlands
2004 *Julian Stair, COLLECT*, Victoria & Albert Museum, London (juried individual exhibitor)
2002 Egg, London
2001 Contemporary Applied Arts, London

Recent selected group exhibitions

2013 *Simon Carroll, Walter Keeler, Janet Leach, Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie, Julian Stair*, Corvi-Mora Gallery, London
Cheongju Biennale, South Korea
Modern Maker, Chatsworth House, Derbyshire
Masterpiece, London, Adrian Sassoon
2012 *TEFAF Maastricht*, Adrian Sassoon, Maastricht, Belgium
Pavilion of Art and Design, Adrian Sassoon, London
2011 *Between Dimensions: The Representation of the Object*, mima, Middlesbrough
Explore Spode, British Ceramics Biennial, Stoke-on-Trent
AWARD, British Ceramics Biennial, Potteries Museum, Stoke-on-Trent (juried exhibition)
3rd International Triennial of Silicate Arts, Hungary (juried exhibition – Honorable Mention)
Vanguard Court, Mashiko Museum of Ceramic Art, Mashiko, Japan
Overthrown: Clay without Limits, Denver Art Museum, USA
Tee Tisch, Galerie Marianne Heller, Germany
2010 Pavilion of Art and Design, Berkeley Square, London
Contemporary British Studio Ceramics: The Grainer Collection, MINT Museum of Craft and Design, Charlotte, USA
2009 *Keramik aus Großbritannien*, Bayerischer Kunstgewerbe-Verein, Munich, Germany
WCC-Europe Award for Contemporary Crafts from 1992 until Now, Karlsruhe, Germany
Cups, Devon Guild of Craftsmen, Bovey Tracey
After Life, Egyptian Galleries, The Manchester Museum

2008 *Material Culture: Recently Gifted Works*, mima, Middlesbrough
Collecting A Kaleidoscope, Designed & Made Gallery, Newcastle
Monumental Pots, COLLECT, Victoria & Albert Museum, London
2007 *Contemporary Collections*, Glynn Vivian Art Gallery, Swansea
2006 *Collecting Contemporary Ceramics*, The Gallery, Ruthin
To Hold, Farmleigh House Gallery, Dublin, Ireland
2005 *Modern Pots*, Dulwich Picture Gallery, London
COLLECT, Victoria & Albert Museum, London (and annually to 2013)
Functional Form Now, Galerie Besson, London
Celebrating 30 Years, Crafts Council Shop at the Victoria & Albert Museum, London
Table Manners, Crafts Council, London
Meister der Moderne, Munich, Germany
2004 *Everything But: Contemporary English Kitchenware*, British Council touring exhibition in Singapore, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Indonesia
Master & Pupil, Clay, Los Angeles (with Carina Ciscato)
Making It Yours, Crafts Council, London
Out of Hand, Browse & Darby, London
2003 *Everything But: Contemporary English Kitchenware*, British Council Colombo, Sri Lanka
Highlights Englischer Keramik, Hetjens-Museum, Düsseldorf, Germany
Second World Ceramic Biennale, Seoul, Korea
Beauty through Use, Yufoko Gallery, Tokyo and Art Salon Kogen, Nagoya, Japan
2002 *Ceramic Modernism*, the Gardiner Museum of Ceramic Art, Ontario, Canada
2001 *Modern Pots: Ceramics from the Lisa Sainsbury Collection*, Sainsbury Centre, Norwich
Land, Ingleby Gallery (with Richard Long, Paul Nash and Thomas Joshua-Cooper), Edinburgh
British Ceramics, Clay Studio, Philadelphia, USA





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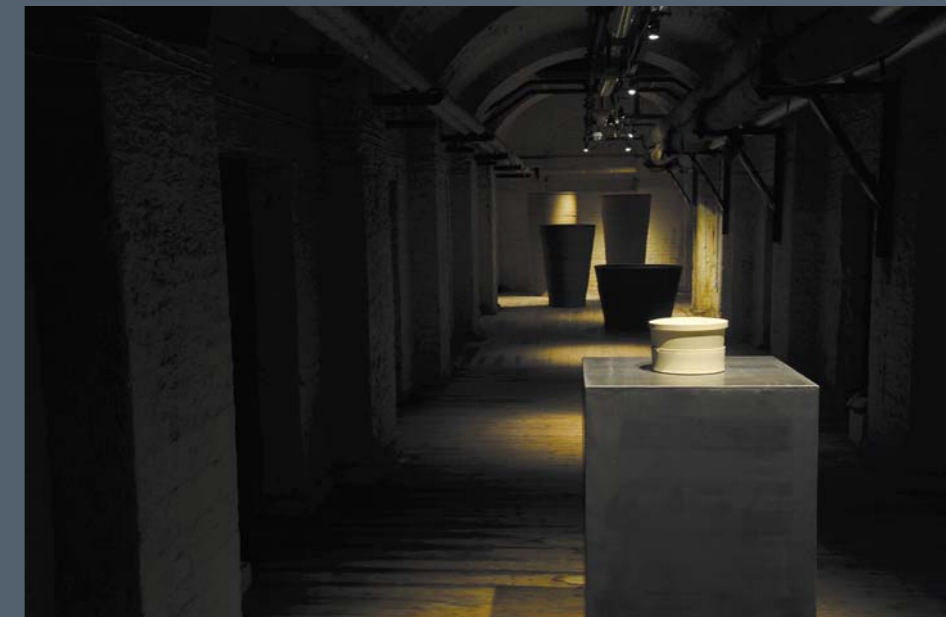
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