



Images: Corey Bartle-Sanderson; Paul Scott, courtesy of the artist

This September/October issue of *Ceramic Review* arrives with you at the height of summer. As this issue goes to press, temperatures in parts of the UK are set to reach almost 40°C and a historic heatwave is being reported across Europe. I hope the record-breaking temperatures do not cause you any problems and you find respite in the pages of this latest issue.

The influences and motivation behind why people make with clay is fascinating. With such a diverse material it is a great choice for those who like to communicate and make statements through their work. Our cover star this issue, Jessica Harrison (profiled on pages 12–18), takes existing Royal Doulton figurines and remodels them into disfigured shapes, enabling her to create a dialogue about the body, skin and the representation of women, a long-standing theme in her work. 'In remaking the figures in a more unrefined way, I hope to bring them into a more plausible and physical space, activating the poses that in the originals are passive and inert,' Harrison explains. For her, 'the most important thing in art is for people to see or feel something from what you are doing.' Her *Broken Ladies* series and ongoing work with figurines, for which she perhaps remains best known, are just one part of her practice however; residencies at both the European Ceramic Workcentre (EKWC) in the Netherlands and in China, have given her the opportunity to experiment with the malleability of clay and take her making to the next level. We are looking forward to seeing what she achieves next.

One of our reviews this issue also features someone who makes statements through their work. Paul Scott's latest exhibition *New American Scenery* at Aberystwyth Arts Centre's Ceramic Gallery features over 50 transferware platters, plates and jugs. Scott uses these as a canvas to make political, ethical or ecological comments that reflect life in America. In *Souvenir of Portland, Oregon, 2020* (pictured below), for example, the bottom half of the plate (originally given over to vignettes of Portland's important civic edifices) has been overlaid with silhouettes of a line of National Guards firing tear gas and rubber bullets at crowds protesting against the police murder of George Floyd. His pieces are carriers of historical events, of the making (and suppressing) of America's story, and one that is far from benevolent, as Scott reveals. You can find out more on pages 45–48.

We hope you enjoy the issue and look forward to seeing you again in the autumn.

Karen Bray, Editor





The magician's

trick



Ellen Bell reviews Paul Scott's latest exhibition, a new collection of blue and white transferware that feature hard-hitting political messages on American history

The simplicity implied by the minimal blue and white aesthetic of Paul Scott's *New American Scenery* exhibition at Aberystwyth Arts Centre's Ceramic Gallery is a deceptive one. Over 50 transferware platters, plates and jugs hang, stand or rest in the gallery's cabinets. The curation is unfussy, reverent almost; there is space for them to breathe, to be taken in – and we are, taken in. We are reassured by their domesticity, their familiarity. We know these things, don't we?

A masterclass in blue and white transferware (though a few are monochrome), particularly 19th-century American transferware – known in the US as 'Settler's Porcelain' – Scott's new collection is also a bravura performance in sleight of hand. The magician's trick of distraction, of lulling the viewer into a false sense of security is essential here if it is to deliver the jolt that it does, over and over again. For things are not as they seem, though the changes, the adaptations, the artifices are, in some cases, incredibly subtle. You have to look, really look, to find them.

This is a collection to be ingested slowly. You have to decipher the layers, and they are worth the effort. Concept and craft are indivisible. Evidently an avid collector, Scott knows his subject and shares the details – dates, materials and original makers – generously. It is a necessary grounding for the hard-hitting political message that, in Scott's hands, these pots promulgate. For they are carriers of historical events, of the making (and suppressing) of America's story, and one that is far from benevolent, as Scott reveals.

COMMEMORATIVE CANVAS

A market cornered by Staffordshire in the 1800s, which adapted its transfer imagery specifically for the American consumer, Scott has taken 19th-century American souvenir and commemorative-ware as his canvas. Replacing the romanticised rural-idyll imagery of the post-Industrial Revolution English style, these mainly cobalt blue (during the 19th century only cobalt blue could withstand the heat of the glost ovens) on pearlware transfers depict the self-aggrandising 'scenery' of the New American Republic. Here the 'landscape' is one of city halls, libraries, universities, court houses and penitentiaries. With a deftness equal to that of German artists Hannah Höch or John Heartfield, Scott manipulates our reading of these images through collage, montage and overpainting. It is a subversion crafted with elegance and restraint.

In *Ghost Gardens of Detroit*, No: 1, 2020, a derelict clapboard house fills the plate's well, surrounded by vignettes interspersed between its original black and white floral motif. There is a closed-up TV repair store, a deserted building and, rather surreally, an abandoned child's toy car with a rigid-bodied doll stuffed headfirst into its interior. Found in junk shops, libraries and on eBay during Scott's research visits to the US, these snapshots of 20th and 21st-century America offer a dystopic vision, all the more so when set against the self-congratulatory optimism illustrated in the domestic ware of the centuries before.

After *Wood & Warhol* No: 3, 2020, a plate blazoned with Warhol's iconic *Birmingham Race Riot* in 1964, shows a black protester being attacked by a police dog (an image appropriated by Warhol from a photograph by Charles Moore for *Life Magazine* in 1963). Scott is aping Warhol in reflecting America back to itself. But it is an America that, almost 60 years on, is neither looking nor listening.

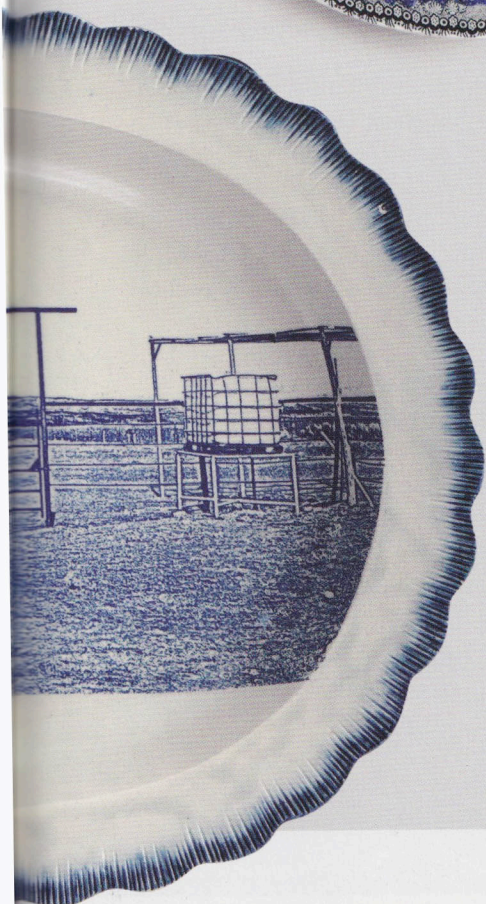
SUBLIMINAL MESSAGES

In *Souvenir of Portland, Oregon*, 2020, the bottom half of the plate (originally given over to vignettes of Portland's important civic edifices including the *Coming of the White Man* statue) has been overlaid with silhouettes of a line of National Guards firing tear gas and rubber bullets at crowds protesting against the police murder of George Floyd. It is an image that Scott uses repeatedly in this collection. Almost like subliminal messaging used in 1950s advertising, it is a strangely effective and potent strategy, particularly when interposed with decorative festoons of flora or oak leaves and acorns, as with his *Sampler Jug*, No: 8, 2020.

A masterclass in blue and white transferware, Scott's new collection is also a bravura performance in sleight of hand



PREVIOUS PAGE: *Sampler Jug, No: 8, 2020*
FROM RIGHT, CLOCKWISE: *Souvenir of Selma, 2020, front and back; After Wood & Warhol No: 3, 2020; Uranium Series No: 2, 2020; Ghost Gardens of Detroit, No: 1, 2020*





ABOVE: *Houston, No: 4*, 2020

The transfers on these blank jugs – marvellously haphazard, mismatched patchworks of 19th-century decorative motifs and border patterns, zoological prints and snippets of grainy photojournalism – are entirely Scott's creation. Managing to critique America's federal policies and the often nonsensical aesthetic eclecticism of 19th-century American transferware (a naïve interpretation of Chinoiserie with echoes of classic English earthenware), these jugs are stunning pieces of conceptual art.


POLITICAL CONTEXT

Critical of the US's environmental misdemeanours, Scott fires uranium glass into several of his plates, including *The Uranium Series No: 2, Farmstead Cove, Az.*, 2020, where it lies at the base of the plate, a cancerous growth threatening to burgeon. The global-warming-induced extinction of species is beautifully referenced through Scott's *Forget me Not* series. In *Forget me Not, Extinct No: 1, Heath Hen, Carolina Parakeet, Passenger Pigeon, Xerces Blue*, 2020, Scott employs kintsugi, a Japanese technique that uses a mixture of resin and gold leaf to seal or join cracks. It is a poetic touch that utilises the Japanese tradition of both preserving and honouring the broken, to show (rather than tell) the dire environmental threat our planet is under.

Clearly keen to educate (and not only about American transferware), Scott's potters' marks on the back of his plates, jugs and platters tell of the political, ethical or

ecological context of the collaged imagery. A cross between a signature and a narrated explanation, some include lengthy quotes such as Chris Arnade's *Guardian* article about Selma from February 2016.

There is a lot to take in at this exhibition, a process that at times can be daunting. But there is whimsy too, such as his inclusion of the *God Bless Our Camper* dish from his own collection. Made circa 1966 and showing a yellow Chevrolet pick-up-cum-campervan, this is the only multi-coloured ceramic in the show. Purchased from eBay while Scott was in the States, there is something neatly cyclical about its Oriental provenance.

With craftsmanship that is as restrained as it is superlative, this collection reverberates with intelligence. As a portrayal of America, it is uncompromising and yet platters such as *Toll (Turnpike No: 12)*, 2020, *Railroad China No: 1*, 2020, and *Houston, No: 4*, 2020, with their panoramic sweep of images across the breadth of the plate reveal something more. Whether it is vast prairie, run-down cityscape or tumbleweed-ed Midwest ghost town, Scott is patently beguiled by this land. *New American Scenery* is a quiet show that simply must be heard. 

New American Scenery, Ceramic Gallery, Aberystwyth Arts Centre, until 25 September; ceramics-aberystwyth.com