

In Search of James Towerß

James Tarr? No James Tao-er, with a 'T'.¹ He died in 1988, the year I started the Three Dimensional Design (Ceramics) BA at Bower Ashton (Bristol Polytechnic). Back then, I was unaware of his work. In fact, I don't think I really noticed it until I went to see 'James Tower and Contemporary Ceramic Art', at Gimpel Fils, London, in 2012. There was some strong work present, but it didn't hang together as an exhibition. I expect Tower would have been disappointed to see that the gallery hadn't sourced any contemporary work that bore a direct relation to his oeuvre, apart, perhaps, from that of Gordon Baldwin.

While most UK ceramicists of the latter half of the 20th century would have given their eye-teeth to have occupied a stall in the Gimpel Fils stable, this may have contributed to Tower's lack of presence in the ceramic mainstream. If so, it is a shame, particularly as he was driven by a love of the English tinglaze and slipware traditions. As a practitioner and enthusiast in the field, I'm often surprised at the dearth of discernible movements, or even serious, committed work that openly wears its influences, *from within the field* [I could, of course, level this criticism at myself]. As a teacher, I often ask students what, or who, their work is in dialogue with and encourage them to locate themselves in a 'tradition' that is a little more tightly focused than, say, 'the vessel', or 'the figure'.

I remember making a comment, that was intended to be positive, about the influence of Richard Slee's work on that of Dawn Youll, at a Marsden Woo event. It wasn't well received. Anxiety of influence Harold Bloom. I guess we might pull in the usual suspect - the low status of ceramics.

In her 1996 essay, 'Painting Now', Bridget Riley quotes Beckett, quoting Proust: The task and duty of a writer (not an artist, a writer) are those of a translator.² Riley adds, 'This could also be said of a composer, a painter, or anyone practising an artistic métier. An artist is someone with a text which he or she wants to decipher.' While Beckett's Proust sees this text as only discoverable by the artist himself and as his most precious possession, Riley extends the thought:

...although the text may be strong and durable and able to support a lifetime's work it cannot be taken for granted and there is no guarantee of permanent possession. It may be mislaid, or even lost, and retrieval is very difficult. It may lie dormant and be discovered late in life after long struggle...

Tower, I would suggest, lost his text, but was fortunate enough to retrieve it. The métier in question is ceramics, not sculpture.

Wilcox p 63 – 1958 / 1978 – leaving and returning to decorated ceramic pots.

the decorated pot.

George Woodman

Ceramics is an artistic expression which involves a unity between a clay form and its surface treatment which cannot be separated out, and it cannot be said that one is more important than the other.

I think that the understanding of this connection between pots and the marks applied to them has partly been obscured by the notion that ceramics is somehow connected to sculpture... The natural handmaiden of ceramics is not sculpture but painting, because a sensibility to the organization of surfaces in relationship to their contours is not really the province of construction and space, but of visual organization of fields... A *decorated* pot is usually a very simple pot, not all that interesting, and

¹ A joke for Northern Irish Taoists and those who live with them, a select band.

² *The Eye's Mind* p. 291 The parenthesis is Beckett's.

has been embellished, has been adorned, so it has painting on it which we can truly call decoration... perhaps one pot in a thousand is really decorated.

Ceramic Decoration and the Concept of Ceramics as Decorative Art
Ceramics Symposium, 1979, Syracuse
p. 144 Ceramic Millennium

This is a remarkable, if conservative, piece of analytical writing, a marker in the sand, that is contemporaneous with Tower's return to ceramics.

I don't really care what the sources of his mark-making were, in the same way that I don't need to know the lyrics of my favourite songs – it's the *sounds* and the way they hang together that are what it's all about.

Notan – Marlys Mayfield 1968
Japanese word meaning dark-light balance

– the interaction between positive (light) and negative (dark) space.
In the yang and the Yin symbol, as in Notan, opposites complement, they do not conflict. Neither seeks to negate or dominate the other, only to relate in harmony. It is the interaction of the light and the dark, therefore, that is most essential.
p.6

Le Guin translation of Lao Tsu
Tower is a mark-maker, a designer, a painter, a ceramicist.

Corsham
Kate Kigwana

Godard constructed this film in a way that suggests something that is open, provisional or ongoing because central to his idea of cinema is keeping alive the separation between the actor and the character. Things or events are constantly being interrupted, another voice entering, another sound, another image so it is difficult to place yourself as a viewer in charge of stable references.
Jonathan Myles

Hymns to the beauty of the world

Duration

The idea of a painting in a constant state of change recalls Henri Bergson's theory of 'duration', which proposed an understanding of time as a constant flux rather than a series of static moments, a constant state of becoming rather than being. Bergson's philosophy had been an important source for the Cubists and went through a revival after the Second World War; specifically, through the advocacy of the potter James Tower, he was the subject of particular interest amongst the staff at Corsham in the early 1950s.

Chris Stephens, *Bryan Winter: St Ives Artists*, London: Tate Gallery Publishing, 1999, p. 49

Bergson held to the irreducible flux of becoming. This notion of becoming for Bergson was the fundamental reality, which he called "duration." Duration is the irreducible flux or flow of time. Although we are able to break up or isolate different pieces of this continuous flow into fragments of time or "states of consciousness," this "knowledge" is merely derived or abstracted from the original source of duration as "concrete time." For this reason, duration

cannot be known in the normal sense of the word “knowing.” It requires a particular kind of access or descent into the self in order to experience this flux in its originality.

But duration as the ultimate reality does merely encompass individual selves, it also envelopes or runs through all things. When people turn their attention to “outward things” which initially appear to be stable entities in themselves, they can discover that like themselves, they exist in a kind of transience or flux, never standing still but always “caught up” in this passage of time. For this reason everything changes; everything is in movement.

Since in all rational knowledge, one understands through concepts, which “freeze” the ultimate reality of duration into static representations, there must be a way to penetrate this ultimate reality in order to “know” it. Bergson calls this means of access “intuition.” Intuition is opposed to intellect and is used as a philosophical method by which one enters into a reality in order to experience it immediately in its original manner. For Bergson, intuition is deeper than intellect and so is able to penetrate the reality and so experience it even if it can’t know it, strictly speaking, through rational analysis.

http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Henri_Bergson

We live in incredibly exciting times (Costing the Earth – Ammonia R4)

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m0002z43>

We are somewhere between stages 1 and 2 of the five-stage grieving process, over the human destruction of the biodiversity of the planet, known to some as the sixth mass extinction.

LRB, Besides, I’ll be dead, Meehan Crist, Feb 2018, Vol. 40, No. 4

The Water Will Come: Rising Seas, Sinking Cities and the Remaking of the Civilised World by [Jeff Goodell](#), Black Inc

Sea level rise is a problem humans are particularly ill-equipped to handle. We’re not good at thinking on geological timescales and ‘we are not wired to make decisions about barely perceptible threats that gradually accelerate over time.’ To help explain inaction in the face of rising seas, Goodell invokes, as others have, the five stages of grief outlined by the Swiss psychiatrist Elisabeth Kübler-Ross: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, acceptance. He suggests that in Miami at least, denial is giving way to anger and bargaining, with overtones of fear. But classical grief paradigms, in which the object of attachment has gone and must be mourned, don’t map neatly onto the experience of living in a city that may soon be submerged. Reading this, it seemed to me that there is another psychological paradigm, less often invoked in discussions of climate grief, that might be more apt. In the 1970s Pauline Boss, studying families of soldiers who had gone missing in action, coined the term ‘ambiguous loss’ to describe the arrested mourning that follows a loss without closure or understanding.

Boss describes two types of ambiguous loss: when the object is physically absent but psychologically present (as with soldiers missing in action), and when the object is physically present but psychologically absent (as with Alzheimer’s disease). The first helps illuminate the arrested mourning often experienced by climate refugees. How do you mourn a home that is sinking into a faraway sea, but remains psychologically present? The second type of ambiguous loss is appropriate to the experience of living in an area threatened by a rise in sea levels. The object of attachment is there but not there – still present, but slowly disappearing. How do you mourn the loss of someone whose hand you can still hold? How do you mourn a home increasingly prone to flooding, but not submerged, yet? The parallels aren’t perfect, but even the disjunctures reveal how wickedly hard the problem of climate grief can be. When a beloved person is slowly disappearing into the fog of senescence, the endpoint is known. With rising seas, the endpoint remains unknown. Three feet? Eight feet? Grief is stalled by uncertainty. For what eventuality should you and your community

prepare? Of what do you need to let go in order to move forward? The incentive to wait and see is powerful. But hoping for a rise in sea levels of just one or two feet by 2100 is starting to look a lot like self-delusion, and for those who have the luxury of choice, clinging to life at the waterline is increasingly an exercise in self-defeat. For politicians and the rich, who prosper from maintenance of the status quo, it is increasingly unconscionable.

...Goodell's conclusion is crystal clear: 'If we want to minimise the impact of sea level rise in the next century, here's how we do it: stop burning fossil fuels and move to higher ground.' If humans stopped using fossil fuels entirely by 2050, we might face two to three feet of sea level rise by the end of the century. Instead of 4.9 feet. Or 11 feet. But the water will come. The future depends on how humans rise to meet it.

Why would we still practice and teach ceramics? To learn how to play / how to engage deeply with the world / resistant materials / to share our learning.

To settle deeper into the mesh of objects that constitutes the world. Sometimes I think that global warming should trump everything else, I say to my students. So how do we develop our practices with that in mind? How do we make a living? I don't know the answer. I teach and write and make. Increasingly, I produce writing and research about making, rather than made objects.

[Tower quote about making.](#)

Collini

Good change: research / less predation of female students

Bad change: lack of confidence / metrics / managerialism p.40

James Tower set up and began teaching a course in pottery at Corsham in 1949, at the invitation of Clifford Ellis, principal of Bath Academy of Art. The two had met in... and discovered a mutual enthusiasm for the English traditions of slipware and tinglaze.

Corsham in the early 1950s was one of the most interesting and progressive art schools in England. Artists such as William Scott, Kenneth Armitage, Bernard Meadows and Peter Lanyon were teaching there. There was a constant flow of visiting artists and critics and the atmosphere was alive with discussion and polemic. I found Clifford Ellis's ideas sympathetic and enlightened. An absence of compartmentalism and an underlying feeling that all arts were one. A constant urge for innovation and experiment.

Leafing through prospectuses and catalogues in the seventieth anniversary year of ceramics teaching in Bath, what strikes me most is a sense of confidence.

An acceptance of cognitive dissonance seems the only workable response for those working in Art Schools within the corporatised Higher Education sector in the UK today. On the one hand, we believe in what we do and desperately want to be proud of the institutions for which we work; on the other, we constantly find ourselves in opposition to a top-down, managerialist culture.

Leafing through a collection of prospectuses and catalogues held in the special collection of the BSAD library only intensifies this feeling. Bath Academy of Art

James Tower's role as head of the pottery workshop is a distant counterpart to my role as Course Leader for the MA Ceramics course at Bath School of Art and Design.

While Tower was 'a lovely man' there was a predatory culture in the Academy, with some male tutors seemingly having license to seduce female students. Some things, at least, change for the better.

As we **grapple with the benefits and challenges of** moving to a more formal cross-disciplinary curriculum at Masters level in the School, a passage from Tower's personal statement stands out:

In her 1996 essay, 'Painting Now', Bridget Riley quotes Beckett, quoting Proust:

The task and duty of a writer (not an artist, a writer) are those of a translator.
p. 291 The Eye's Mind

Riley adds, 'This could also be said of a composer, a painter, or anyone practising an artistic métier. An artist is someone with a text which he or she wants to decipher.' While Beckett's Proust sees this text as only discoverable by the artist himself and as his most precious possession, Riley extends the thought:

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Wilcox p 63 – 1958 / 1978 – leaving and returning to decorated ceramic pots.

Notan – Marlys Mayfield 1968
Lao Tzu (Heidegger)
Limits (Bogost)
Tower and English tradition

Gestalt

PbR / the meaning of art (doc)

Notan

Too often the art student is offered a bewildering array of materials and techniques. Instead of finding the discipline he wants and needs, he is often told, "Be creative," or, "Do what you want to do." There can be so many variables in any one assignment that the student finds to his disappointment that he has no objective measure of his achievement. He can never be sure what he has learned or where and how he has succeeded. p.7

Tower statement

The Art of the Matter, Peter Hill
Mark Fisher – Capitalist Realism

My interest in ceramics was first aroused in 1949. At that time I was a student at the Slade and was struggling to assimilate the principles of abstraction.

When I had become interested in pottery I had become familiar with the slipware and tinglaze painting of the English tradition, and was struck by the **freedom and verve** of the decoration. The wayward, humanist **elegance**, the marvellous sense of the material, the liquidity of the slip, and the rich transparency of the tin glaze painting. I became aware that we had inherited a splendid tradition

in ceramics in this country, characterised by an intuitive elan and spontaneity. A **vitality** that lifted many of these pieces from mere function to major works of art.

The vessels I choose to make are **necessarily mould made**. By avoiding the round section, an enormous range of forms is possible, yet still retaining the inherent simplicity of the ceramic form. This simplicity of shape is **vital** in the sense that broad, pure, areas must be left available for the painter to decorate, so that the surface may be **animated, energised** and made to work harmoniously with the whole form.

Woodman - decoration

If we look at any great period of ceramic history we can see that form, whether fused with painting, or undecorated, is always unique and strong. **Ceramic form is the enclosure of space and the enclosure needs to be taught and energetic.**

Ceramics, as a discipline, is a centre that cannot hold. We shouldn't, I think, define a discipline in relation to a material, or a family of materials. Ceramics constitutes a long period of confusion, based on hierarchy and status. The discipline, surely, is pottery. Then, pottery is free to visit and muck about with painting, sculpture, literature, whatever. I have been wrong. As I've become more confident in other fields (philosophy, poetry, sculpture) I've become less concerned with nominating my ceramics practice as art (though I've been thinking and writing this thought in different ways for many years now).

What would that mean for the course? Some of our best work is cross-, multi- or inter-disciplinary. If we think of the centre as the enclosure of space, we can revolve around that hub. (Where the wheel isn't is where it's useful). Sculpture uses, or explores, space in a different way (Chillida said that space is a fast material) and if we find ourselves working sculpturally, we should be asking ourselves what is sculpture and precisely *how* is this sculptural?

The enclosure of space relates to material and process – clay thrown on the wheel. Coiled clay. Clay pressed, or slipcast from moulds. Extrusion and carving might be usefully set against these techniques.

Lao Tzu

Lao Tzu_Thirty spokes

Thirty spokes
meet in the hub.
Where the wheel isn't
is where it's useful.

Hollowed out,
clay makes a pot.
Where the pot's not
is where it's useful.

Cut doors and windows
to make a room.
Where the room isn't,
there's room for you.

So the profit in what is
is in the use of what isn't.

"The uses of not" (Book One, Chapter 11) by Lao Tzu, from *Lao Tzu: Tao Te Ching: A Book about the Way and the Power of the Way*, translated from the original Chinese by Ursula K. Le Guin (Shambhala Publications, 1998 edition).

Translator's note: "One of the things I love about Lao Tzu is he is so funny. He's explaining a profound and difficult truth here, one of those counter-intuitive truths that, when the mind can accept them, suddenly double the size of the universe. He goes about it with this deadpan simplicity, talking about pots."

Over the fired white tin glaze I pour another darker coloured glaze. When this has dried it can be removed by any sort of tool, knife or finger, revealing the white glaze underneath. The dry powdery glaze is immensely responsive to touch and it reflects the nervous quality of the hand far more sensitively than any brush, for me.

David Pye, tradition

Change is the essence of tradition. Our declining civilisation has largely lost the conception of tradition as continuous change by small variations – as evolution, in other words – and can produce only fashions which, one after another, appear, live for a little while, and die without issue. At each death another deliberately different fashion is launched and promoted, as sterile as the one before.

Eliot

T.S. Eliot (1888–1965). *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism*. 1922.
Tradition and the Individual Talent

Certainly the word is not likely to appear in our appreciations of living or dead writers. Every nation, every race, has not only its own creative, but its own critical turn of mind; and is even more oblivious of the shortcomings and limitations of its critical habits than of those of its creative genius. We know, or think we know, from the enormous mass of critical writing that has appeared in the French language the critical method or habit of the French; we only conclude (we are such unconscious people) that the French are "more critical" than we, and sometimes even plume ourselves a little with the fact, as if the French were the less spontaneous. Perhaps they are; but we might remind ourselves that criticism is as inevitable as breathing, and that we should be none the worse for articulating what passes in our minds when we read a book and feel an emotion about it, for criticizing our own minds in their work of criticism. One of the facts that might come to light in this process [of criticism] is our tendency to insist, when we praise a poet, upon those aspects of his work in which he least resembles anyone else. In these aspects or parts of his work we pretend to find what is individual, what is the peculiar essence of the man. We dwell with satisfaction upon the poet's difference from his predecessors, especially his immediate predecessors; we endeavour to find something that can be isolated in order to be enjoyed. Whereas if we approach a poet without this prejudice we shall often find that not only the best, but the most individual parts of his work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously. And I do not mean the impressionable period of adolescence, but the period of full maturity. Yet if the only form of tradition, of handing down, consisted in following the ways of the immediate generation before us in a blind or timid adherence to its successes, "tradition" should positively be discouraged. We have seen many such simple currents soon lost in the sand; and novelty is better than repetition. Tradition is a matter of much wider significance. It cannot be inherited, and if you want it you must obtain it by great labour. It involves, in the first place, the historical sense, which we may call nearly indispensable to anyone who would continue to be a poet beyond his twenty-fifth year; and the historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order. This historical sense, which is a sense of

the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional. And it is at the same time what makes a writer most acutely conscious of his place in time, of his contemporaneity.

David Graeber

MK: The question then becomes, What do these everyday moments of communism mean for a theory of the individual? How do they relate to individuality?

DG: I developed that relation in the *Debt* book, and it's been somewhat misunderstood. One of the ideas I was trying to pursue was how one comes up with something like the value of the individual without having to frame it within the rather mystical notion that you have a unique crystalline core, which is the basis of your value, irrespective of social relations. Because it struck me, if you look at matters like compensation for wrongful death and the ways traditional societies resolve feuds, there is very clearly an assumption of the unique value of the individual. But the uniqueness is predicated on the fact that the individual is a unique nexus of social relations.

And I think that's what we've lost—the notion that we're sedimented beings created by endless configurations of relations with others. I think individuality is something we constantly create through relations with others, and that, in a way, this very fact resolves [Émile] Durkheim's favorite problem, which is: How do I reward society for having allowed me to become an individual? Durkheim had this idea that we are all burdened by an infinite social debt, which he inherited from Auguste Comte—the idea that you owe society for allowing you to be an individual, that individuality is a kind of cosmic debt to society or to nature. I wanted to deconstruct the entire notion that one's existence can be conceived as anything like debt. Since, after all, a debt is a relation of jural equality. It's premised on the notion that there is a contractual relation between two equal parties. But how can the individual and society conceivably be posed as equal partners to a business deal? It's absurd.

So I wanted to move instead to a notion of the individual as a nexus of relations. But in order to do that you have to reimagine a lot of things, including, I suspect, our very notions of mind. A lot of the things we think of as the ultimate products of individuality are in fact products of relationships, of dyadic or triadic relations of one kind or another.

...Then you can also argue that every human possibility is simultaneously present. [Marcel] Mauss thought communism and individualism were two sides of the same coin. But democracy, monarchy, markets—everything is always present. So in that case it's not so much a question of characterizing a system as of looking at which forms of relations are currently dominant and which ones have managed to present themselves as innate, given, the essence of human nature.

This is what I find most useful. If you take that as a starting point, what critique is *is not* revealing the totality of the system. There is no overall totality. If there's an ideological illusion, it's the very idea that there could be—that we live in “capitalism,” for instance, a total system that pervades everything, rather than one dominated by capital. But at the same time, I think it's deeply utopian to imagine a world of utter plurality without any conceptual totalities at all. What we need is one thousand totalities, just as we need one thousand utopias. There is nothing wrong with a utopia unless you have just one.

... As an activist it strikes me that some of the most radical, most revolutionary movements today base themselves in indigenous communities, which are communities that see

themselves as traditionalists but think of tradition itself as a potentially radical thing. So the deeper the roots you have, the more challenging things you can do with them.

Another World, Michelle Kuo talks with David Graeber

Rachel Gotlieb, 'Vitality' in British Art Pottery and Studio Pottery

Bergson's idea of the élan-vital and Jung's theory of the collective unconscious were assimilated into the aesthetics of pottery during the 1920s and '30s, enabling it to become one of the few crafts to be accepted as a fine art by the Modern Movement. The repercussions of this have continued to the present day. P.163

Gotlieb argues that the Arts and Crafts and Studio Pottery movements, while different, both 'tried to promote 'vitality' as a key virtue; this term supplemented by 'virile', 'vigorous', 'organic' and 'alive' coloured their descriptive language. The styles and techniques admired most in each case were those of wheel-thrown, ancient Chinese and medieval English pottery, and it was believed that these age-old processes had atemporal, mysterious connotations which could invigorate contemporary design. p. 164

Leach etc. Rogers and Co. – this is why we don't want anything to do with it.
Tower bucked the trend by pressing.

'the true artist's preference is for the wheel rather than the moulds... Forms spring as it were out of life, out of the dead clay under the craftsman's hand'. Poole Pottery catalogue, 1922

Lived on with Janet Mansfield – Kev story

William Bowyer Honey, the former Keeper of Ceramics at the Victoria and Albert Museum, notes in his autobiography that Bergson suffered a period of 'absurd' popularity in England between 1910 and 1920. Bergson's philosophy claims that the soul and intuition were alternatives to the stagnant rigidity of positivism. Honey's reading of Bergson sees the mind as having two tendencies or two directions, one analytical but incapable of growth and free movement, the other intuitive 'entering into the nature and movement of the living flux of things'. p.165

Fry: 'the nervous tremour' of the creative force. 166, note 22 *Art and Commerce* 1926 in *The Omega Workshops*

What was important to Fry was that their 'felt approximation' enliven the pottery, inviting the viewer to enter into the artist's unconscious creative process.

Developments in psychology and philosophy, in turn, led to a new interest in spiritualism. This interest, combined with the tradition of abstract art, suggests answers as to why pottery, unlike most of the other crafts during this period, became accepted increasingly as an art form by the Modern Movement, and attractive to artists outside the conventional ceramic industry. P.167

Apollo. 127.1988, 163-167

Available on Academia.edu:

https://www.academia.edu/31077251/Vitality_in_British_Art_Pottery_AND_STUDIO_POTTERY

Tower as one of the few 1950s inheritors of this move of the 1920s and 30s.

New Materialisms, OOO, increased interest in animism.

In Fry's 'The Significance of Chinese Art', a contribution to the Burlington Magazine monograph Chinese Art published in the same year as Sirén's Chinese Sculpture, 'rhythm' is also strongly emphasised: 'linear rhythm' is repeated numerous times, 'flowing, continuous character' is likewise repeated, and Fry refers to painting as the 'graph of a dance executed by the hand'.¹³

As a theme within aesthetics, rhythm was peculiar neither to Sirén nor to other writers on China. From the late nineteenth century to the 1930s, it was a key concept in modernist attempts to define and to understand the significance of art and literature. Reynolds identifies rhythm as a bridge between the Symbolist aesthetics of Baudelaire, Rimbaud and Mallarmé and the abstraction that emerged during the early years of this century, in particular in the painting of Mondrian and Kandinsky.¹⁴

<https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/essay/the-reception-of-chinese-buddhist-sculpture-in-the-west/>

Bridget Riley

Owen Bennett-Jones on BBC / LRB 20 December 2018

World Service – ask Andrew about old structure

Head of School – course leaders

Mark Fisher – Capitalist Realism

Pete Bodenham – A level student (private school)

Batterham / Florian Gadsby, etc

<http://www.floriangadsby.com/about/>

Bill Readings, The University in Ruins

The Art of the Matter, Peter Hill

Metrics, Stefan Collini

<http://arts.brighton.ac.uk/research/cappe/cappe-events/seminar-series/what-should-universities-be/what-should-universities-be-stefan-collini>

Weblen – ...convincing appearance of tangible efficiency...

Instrumentality *and* open-ended enquiry

Second order questions relativise first order activities (practical purposes), e.g critique

Paradox – have to be critique and practical

Pragmatic / practical (politicians, administrators, etc) as opposed to critique (academics in books)

Critics are attracted to perceived autonomy – danger of shirking and loafing - Similar to arguments over welfare policy

Research centres of companies

Stoner – Williams

Bakhtin

Ana Pichler-Schmidt – sculpture-trained students

Dreyfus and Kelly
Sennett
Sinead Murphy
Bogost

Transdisciplinary studio as education (Alex Coles)

University as a buffer zone between childhood and adulthood
(24 as end of adolescence)

Elkins – value of research / Bruce McLean as representative artist

Education **Main Collection 700.103/ALL**
Art School: (propositions for the 21st century)

Artist-teacher: A Philosophy for Creating and Teaching (Ebook)

Speaking to Tim about this piece, I could sense

I met Tim in December, 2018 to discuss the subject of this piece. From previous email correspondence, I had a sense that he was after something about the current state of ceramics in Higher Education. I suggested that I would write something political, critical. Not much about Tower. I could tell he wasn't over keen, but that he didn't want to box me in too much by saying yes or no. Rather that he was interested in my perspective (as a teacher / maker) on Tower as a teacher / maker.

I spoke about my research and my perception of the lack of makers' writing. David Pye, Alison Britton, etc.

Writers on the value of craft – Murphy, Sennett, Dreyfus, Bogost, Ingold.

Tower's work as research-based practice.

Health and safety.

Corsham: A Celebration. The Bath Academy of Art 1946 – 72

Michael Parkin Gallery, London, 1989

Bill Newlands introduced to Ceramics

Dora Billington at Central School of Arts and Crafts

Met Clifford Ellis who shared love of English tin glaze and slipware

Also Picasso's work in ceramic at Vallauris

Bath Academy – Sept 1949 – one of few FT staff – old stables at Beechfield

Gimpel Fils in 1951

students executed mosaics and worked with architecture students at Bath studios

from about 1959 he and Ellis devised a scheme of sculpture in relation to architecture

Interest developed in sculpture – late 70s return to decorated ceramics

1966-86 head of Sculpture at Brighton Polytechnic

1985 Artist Potters Now, Crafts Council

James Tower obituary in:

The Designer-Craftsman no. 62 / May, 1988

Introduction

‘After their marriage (1931) Clifford and Rosemary Ellis worked as partners, designing book jackets, decorating tiles, making ceramic statuettes, designing mosaics as well as posters.’

At Corsham. A progressive liberal arts college: Bath Academy of Art, Corsham in the 1950s
A memoir by Robin Jesson, Lasse Press, 2017

BBC Artists Must Live, 1953

‘One exercise with Henry (Boys) that I clearly remember was the links he made with music and architecture. He got our music group – only about four of us – to perform the room we were sitting in. Using the intervals made vertically and horizontally by door frames, windows, brickwork and so on, we clapped the rhythms of the spaces. It soon began to sound like early Stockhausen. Architecture is frozen music.’ p. 20

1949 Prospectus
Bath Academy of Art, Corsham Court, Wiltshire

P. 15

SCULPTURE, MODELLING AND POTTERY

All students during their time at the Academy do some work in one or more of these subjects. Instruction is given in modelling from life (illustrated opposite) work in terracotta, plaster-casting, carving in wood and stone, letter-cutting, and in pottery (illustrated on pages 14 and 17).

There are special opportunities for the study of stone and stone carving as Corsham is an important quarrying centre. The quarries, which are subterranean [illustration on page 17] are visited by students of the Academy, some of whom may take sculpture as their first subject.

Plastic decorations are prepared for exhibitions, for the stage (as for example, masks and puppets) and as experiments in the visual presentation of educational material in schools. The courses for art teachers include experience in various types of modelling, carving and pottery suitable for children. The making of a pot or the carving of a stone inscription may also lead to the sympathetic “re-experience” of history : the delight of achievement of a primitive man or the more conscious pride of one of his successors. Modelling may also be used to illustrate, for example, biology and geography.

Violin / Sculpture (Kenneth Armitage) / English / Puppetry / Drawing and Painting / Textile Design / Piano and Organ / Piano and Cello / Music / Dress Design / Architecture / Painting (Peter Potworowski) / Dancing / Design / Modelling / Biology / Dancing / Geography and Photography / Stage Design / Singing / Art History (Colin Thompson) / Pottery (James Tower) / Dancing / Lettering and Typography / Physical Education / Art Education

Prospectus 1963 – 64

In its teaching, the aim of the Academy is to select elements that are learnable and teachable whatever the stylistic inclinations of teacher or student. The work of each course is enlarged by weekly seminars, lectures, reading and visits, and by some of the extra-curriculum activities that are possible in a residential college. As the courses develop, the programmes become increasingly individual, with more unscheduled time for private study.

from Introduction, p. 8

Studies common to all courses (p. 14-18)

1. Studies in Studio and Workshop

Some characteristics and experimental uses of :

- (i) Raw materials collected by the student and used by him for making e.g., paper, woven textiles, ceramic tiles.
- (ii) Manufactured materials in standardized dimensions e.g., plastics, sheet metal, laminated timber; used by the student for making a scale model of a display unit for specified exhibits.

2. Studies in Gallery, Museum and Library, Laboratory and Field

Group A

- 1.
The Helix
The staircase as a three-dimensional form
- 2.
Limestone
Mediaeval sculpture in Wilts and Somerset
- 3.
Industrial metal-casting
Benin bronzes

Group B

- 1.
Adaptive colouration of animals
Public lettering
- 2.
'Ombres Chinoises'
Beginnings of cinema, before 1910
- 3.
Focus
Visual protests

Group C

The 'camera obscura'
Eighteenth century Bath
etc

Ceramic and Mosaic Workshops p. 20

Instruction is given in the use of the following materials and processes:

- i The use and storage of clays and plaster...

iii The preparation, presentation and execution of major works in ceramics or mosaic; consideration of the nature of form, decoration and scale; the accumulation and editing of preliminary material; the development of concepts; the estimating of quantities and costs.

Prospectus 1968 – 69

p.26

Three-dimensional design

Ceramics (Ian Auld)

Set of limits (Tony Birks website)

Like Coper, he restricted his ceramic work to a single material – an unvarying mixture of two buff clays – and a limited colour palette, always based on majolica tin glaze combined with a dark glaze or colour wash. Firing temperature was 1100 °C (2012 °F), carefully controlled to avoid fluidity damaging the pattern.

(dark glaze on top of fired white)

Michael Pennie – Corsham piece – put this at top.

My first experience of Tower was...

My second experience was rather more intimate. Michael Pennie asked me to take a piece from Corham to Sion Hill...

One of the large, sculptural pieces, creamy buff and dark, manganese striations. Like a winged thing, or a fat whale tail. The only way to carry it safely was to put an arm under each fluke and clasp it to my torso / diaphragm.

Tanya Harrod The Crafts in Britain in the 20th Century, 1999

Quite a bit of Tower

Dip AD p. 238

National Advisory Committee on Art Examination - Coldstream Reports – 1961 and 62

First argued for 'courses conceived as a liberal education in art' / students taught in five broad areas: Fine Art (painting) / Fine Art (sculpture) / Graphic Art / Three-Dimensional Design / Textiles and Fashion

15% of the course was to be devoted to the history of art and complementary studies

1962 report looked at studio pottery, amongst other craft subjects.

Dip AD

Determined course leaders were able to ensure DipAD status for courses that were essentially artist-craft courses p. 239

269 – 70 teaching alongside the the then English avant-garde in painting - Terry Frost, Peter Lanyon, William Scott and Bryan Wynter. Corsham connections and Gimpel Fils set him apart from the other Picassiettes.

Lucie Rie... was also part of this new, urban anti-Orientalist movement p. 270

Coper / Baldwin / Duckworth / Auld / Lowndes

New Ceramics, Eileen Lewenstein and Emmanuel Cooper, 1974
No Tower

Ceramics of the 20th Century, Tamara Préaud and Serge Gauthier, 1982
No Tower

British Studio Ceramics in the 20th Century, Paul Rice and Christopher Gowing, London: Barrie and Jenkins, 1989

Showed with Gimpel Fils almost exclusively from 1951 – ‘This isolation from the ‘craft’ world meant that his work is far better known amongst ‘art’ collectors than it is amongst collectors of ceramics and, also, that his influence on other potters has been smaller than would be expected.’ p.150

20th Century Ceramics, Edmund de Waal, London: Thames & Hudson, 2003
No Tower

Studio Ceramics, Peter Lane, London: Collins, 1983
Several mentions and images, including front cover

Black glaze on top of fired white /

‘James Tower is one of the relatively few British potters/ceramic sculptors whose work has regularly been exhibited in an established London gallery (Gimpel Fils), which is normally committed to showing fine art – the popular definition of which usually excludes contemporary ceramics.’ p. 195

A Potter’s Companion: Imagination, Originality and Craft, Roland Larsen, Rochester: Park Street Press, 1993

Pye on tradition, p. 90

I understand Tower. I’ve never been content to be a potter. While my practice has taken a fruitful, I think, path into artistic research, I have wondered for a while if I wouldn’t prefer to simplify things and start making pots.