

A Sense of Place

PREVIEW - JULIAN STAIR introduces the issues addressed in his forthcoming solo exhibition.

PHOTOGRAPHS - BRENDA NORRISH

Where does pottery live? The answer must be wherever it happens to be at a given moment. By its nomadic nature, pottery is never permanently fixed in space, let alone time. It cruises from hand to lip and from table to sink to shelf with, as John Dewey writes, a 'complete interpenetration of self and the world of objects and events'. But the paradox of showing pottery in galleries is that this transience sits uncomfortably within a codified art world which requires site-specificity for its objects. The ubiquitous white plinth is a microcosm of the gallery itself, reliant on separation from the world outside.

This push and pull of 'does it pour?' versus the 'collector's cabinet' has been a defining feature of studio pottery since its inception. Ian Bennet compared Ray Finch and Elizabeth Fritsch's work as the 'difference between kitchen equipment and art.' If the kitchen is no place for art, is the gallery a place for pottery? Since Hamada's exhibition in Bond Street that launched studio pottery as a movement in 1923, the answer must be 'yes', galleries have been instrumental to its identity.

The ritual and formality of English teatime and the Orient's placing of valued pots on stands have been means of establishing a site-specificity for ceramics. Stands act as a resting place, just as E.H. Gombrich writes about 'the disruption of regularity' that pictorial 'framing' provides. In attempts to establish cultural value, pottery has always been literally and metaphorically elevated, but has done so without the 'spurious authority' Richard Wentworth sees inherent in gallery displays. From fugitive movement to stasis, the temporal nature of pottery and its ambiguous occupation of space is something to be celebrated. **CR**

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