

THE SUBVERSION OF TRADITIONAL PORCELAIN IN THE WORK OF  
SELECTED ARTISTS (2000-2012)

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# THE SUBVERSION OF TRADITIONAL PORCELAIN IN THE WORK OF SELECTED ARTISTS (2000-2012)

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Technology: Fine Art in the Faculty of Fine Art and Jewellery Design at the Durban University of Technology.

I declare that this dissertation is my own work and has not been submitted previously for any degree or examination through any other institution.

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APPROVED FOR FINAL SUBMISSION

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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation documents and evaluates the subversion of traditional porcelain in the work of the selected artists from 2000-2012. The artists selected for research are Edmund de Waal (1964), Paul Scott (1953), Katharine Morling (1972), Rachel Kneebone (1973) and Clare Twomey (1968). They are British ceramists who work in porcelain in diverse ways, thus providing evidence of a wide range of the subversion of traditional porcelain.

An explanation of the research methodology used is provided.

The research begins by providing a history of porcelain from the earliest times to the present, documenting the shift of porcelain from the East to the West, as well as the history and properties of porcelain (white china clay). The position of porcelain in the discipline of ceramics is discussed. This includes a thorough investigation and analysis of the physical properties of porcelain and its functional application through history.

The meaning of the term subversion, in the context of ceramics, is clarified and evidence of the subversion of traditional porcelain is provided through a discussion of the selected artists' work. Conclusions are drawn and analysed.

My art practice in the form of an exhibition entitled *Entwined* is discussed in the context of the subversion of traditional porcelain. This includes a discussion of my working method, an explanation of the body of work and an analysis of similarities and differences between my work and that of the selected artists.

The dissertation concludes with a discussion of the research findings and provides suggestions for further research.

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this paper to my female family and friends who have influenced my life and are central to this body of work. Life is to be celebrated and enjoyed.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge and thank my supervisors Mr Anthony Starkey and Professor Graham Stewart for their understanding, patience and exceptional guidance in writing this dissertation. Mr Starkey is to be particularly thanked for the way in which he mentored my practical work and assisted in my growth as an artist.

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## PREFACE

The following conventions have been used in this dissertation:

- The Harvard method of referencing has been used throughout.
- Titles of publications and exhibitions (in the text) are in *italics*.
- Titles of artworks are rendered in **bold**.
- Artworks are labelled by numbers for example, Figure 1.1
- Footnotes have been used throughout.
- “\_\_\_\_\_” have been used for direct quotes.
- ‘\_\_\_\_\_’ have been used for a quotation within another quotation.
- Double indentations have been applied to the entire document with one line space indicating direct quotes.

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## INTRODUCTION

The aim of this practice-led research is to investigate the subversion of traditional porcelain in the work of Edmund de Waal (1964), Paul Scott (1953), Katharine Morling (1972), Rachel Kneebone (1973), Clare Twomey (1968), and my art practice. The artists selected for this research are contemporary British ceramists who work in porcelain in diverse ways, thus providing evidence of a wide range of the subversion of traditional porcelain.

Subversion<sup>1</sup>, in the context of this paper, will be understood as meaning 'to overturn' or 'to overthrow'. The term is usually used with reference to a regime or government. Claudia Clare (2013:1), in a paper presented at the Subversive Ceramics Symposium, states that "The term 'subversion', in the context of ceramics, appears to be far broader, however, encompassing modifications in design to make an object look more contemporary as well as those that allow the artist to develop a political narrative or critique".

In order to establish the subversion of traditional porcelain in a postmodern context, it is necessary to understand the term 'postmodernism'. The term 'postmodernism' is difficult to define, as is clear from the many different interpretations and debates surrounding it. From the term itself one can determine that it has a certain relationship to 'modernity' or 'the modern period'. The term 'modern' implies a development from old to new, a progress towards a new goal. Steven Best and Douglas Kellner (1991:29) confirm this and state that:

Postmodern discourses thus denote new artistic, cultural or theoretical perspectives which renounce modern discourses and practices. All of these 'post' terms function as sequential markers, designating that which follows and comes after the modern. The discourse of the postmodern thus involves periodizing terms which describe a set of key changes in history, society, culture and thought.

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<sup>1</sup> Subvert – "Overturn, overthrow or upset, (religion, government, the monarchy, morality, etc)". (*The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English*. 8<sup>th</sup> edition. 1990:1217).

Hal Foster (1985:ix) argues that "... a basic opposition exists between a postmodernism which seeks to deconstruct modernism and resist the status quo and a postmodernism which repudiates the former to celebrate the latter: a postmodernism of resistance and a postmodernism of reaction". Foster (1985:x) refers to resistant postmodernism as being concerned with "a critical deconstruction of tradition, not an instrumental pastiche of pop- or pseudo-historical forms, with a critique of origins, not a return to them". Foster (1985:x) states that a resistant postmodernism "seeks to question rather than exploit cultural codes, to explore rather than conceal social and political affiliations".

The subversion of traditional porcelain seeks to question and explore, to deconstruct the traditional and present it in a new way. Linda Hutcheon (in Shugart 1999:433) describes the subversive use of irony in art as either deconstructive or constructive. I understand the contemporary subversion of traditional porcelain to be constructive. Hutcheon clarifies this (in Shugart 1999:433) by referring to the subversive use of irony in art as "The other, constructive kind of irony ... [i]rony opens up new spaces, literally between opposing meanings, where new things can happen".

Porcelain refers to both material and form. Traditional porcelain ware is generally understood to consist of forms which are purely decorative and ornamental, such as vases, bowls or tea sets. Pieter Stockmans (in Russell 2002:1), in discussing traditional porcelain ware, states "In terms of porcelain, one immediately associates it with figurines from China and Japan, or porcelain from Limoges, of nicely decorated dinner-services and bonbonnières". However, in speaking of contemporary porcelain production, Stockmans (in Russell 2002:1) states that:

Porcelain is a material that as art is just as useful as acrylics, azure-stone, or polyester; only it had to be (released) from the traditional way of looking at it. ... So it felt urgent to break with this traditional imagery, to show that exceptional things can be made.

Jack Doherty (2002:7) notes that “Porcelain is, by reputation, the most difficult and capricious of ceramic materials”. When fired it has qualities of fineness, purity, translucency, whiteness, strength, hardness and durability which define it (Doherty 2002:7). A large number of contemporary studio potters use porcelain to make functional artefacts; however, there are many artists who use porcelain to communicate conceptually and, in doing so, subvert the traditional use of porcelain.

For example, Clare Twomey (2007:26), in discussing terminology and materials usage in contemporary ceramic practice, states that:

The ever more complex and sophisticated uses of clay in today's visual culture leaves us in no doubt that as a material, it has transcended its role as a mere modeling material. The breadth of practice and variety of forms that clay has embraced has led us to fundamentally question our understanding of such practices.

Twomey here clearly postulates the notion that the traditional divisions between art and craft are no longer appropriate to contemporary art practice.

The value of this research is to investigate and assess how each of the selected artists subverts porcelain in a contemporary and postmodern context. Edmund de Waal (2003:200) states that postmodernism can be seen as a “condition of anxiety about received truths, a self-consciousness about making art and about its reception”. de Waal (2003:200) continues:

Being authentic, being true to a tradition, were unattainable ideas: the ceramicist was a commentator ... [Postmodernism] has, however, led to work that engages with the nature of the history of ceramics: with questions of how national identity is displayed, or how the canon of ‘good taste’ is created. This led to the resurrection of certain formal structures concerned with patronage and with display in ceramics, principally the dinner service, the elaborate stand and garniture, that were not only absent from the repertoire of the studio potter, but anathematized.

The contemporary subversion of traditional porcelain involves its deconstruction. Foster (1985:95) notes that “The deconstructive impulse is characteristic of postmodernist art in general and must be distinguished from the self-critical tendency of modernism” which sought clarity and functionality.

The research will locate the work of the selected artists in the context of postmodernism as a subversive device. In discussing ceramics in the context of postmodernism, de Waal (2003:29) argues that “postmodernism arrived on the ceramics scene in the early 1980’s ..... This led to an extensive use of ironic reference, of pastiche and quotation to unsettle hegemonic notions of cultural identity.” Porcelain, as with other clays, lends itself to be manipulated, altered, fragmented, physically deconstructed, reconstructed and embedded with fragments; these characteristics mirror elements of postmodernism.

Alun Graves (2009:8), commenting on the contemporary use of porcelain states “Underpinning much contemporary practice is a renewed appreciation of and commitment to the material, with its own particular histories, associations and qualities.” He continues by saying that “clay has meanwhile offered a potent material for use by artists whose practice is located in those areas traditionally termed fine art” (2009:8). de Waal has consistently articulated the significance of porcelain, referring to its desirability, its contradictory aspects of strength and fragility (Graves 2009:8).

Glen Brown (2009:5) notes that “One can, however, expect ceramics criticism and theory to yield to a greater rigor, complexity and professionalism as academically trained critics and art historians such as Ezra Shales, Sandra Alföldy and Glenn Adamson focus increasingly on investigation of ceramics and the crafts in general.” It is apparent that, despite the recent interest in ceramics shown by academics, there is a gap in the literature, relating to the subversion of traditional porcelain. This

research will contribute to this knowledge gap and will inform my ceramic art practice.

This practice-led research utilises a qualitative methodology. Jennifer Webb (2008) describes practice-led research as “research carried out by a practitioner in the course of performing their practice”. In order to subvert traditional porcelain, conventional methodologies such as archival research have been used together with experimentation in different approaches with porcelain clay.

Qualitative research in the context of this dissertation will be understood to have the following characteristics, as summarised by Alasuutari (in Silverman 2005:326):

One preferably starts directly from empirical examples, develops the questions by discussing them and gradually leads the reader into interpretations of the material and to more general implications of the results. If one feels like discussing and constructing them, the best position for grand theoretical models ‘is in the final pages’.

This approach is applicable to an investigation of the subversion of traditional porcelain that positions contemporary porcelain as an artefact of postmodernism. This will add to the small body of literature in this field.

A number of books, journal articles, internet sites and electronic databases were used to source secondary data related to the subversion of traditional porcelain.

The on-line websites Wilson’s web and JSTOR were an on-going source of information and reference throughout this research.

Primary data was gathered through unstructured interviews with Katherine Morling and Clare Twomey when in London in 2010 and 2011.

Artworks were analysed as visual texts, using formal, historical and theoretical approaches. Data from the interviews and secondary sources was analysed in the context of ceramics as a subversive element.

The dissertation consists of three Chapters. Chapter One provides an historical overview of porcelain. This includes the history of porcelain from its beginnings in the East to the shift of porcelain from the East to the West (and other parts of the world), up to the time of Bernard Leach and the Modernist movement.

Chapter Two consists of an investigation of the subversion of traditional porcelain in the work of the selected artists.

Chapter Three investigates my art practice and its subversion of traditional porcelain, in relation to the work of the selected artists.

The Conclusion presents research findings and suggests new areas of research.



## CHAPTER ONE

### AN HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF PORCELAIN

The purchase of traditional porcelain objects such as a cup, a bowl or vase has become commonplace today. It is therefore difficult to imagine that only three centuries ago porcelain was unobtainable in the West and became more sought after than gold.

The history of clay objects, both utilitarian and ritual, made out of different clay bodies, dates back more than ten thousand years. However, this research will concentrate on the discovery of porcelain which evolved in China over a period. Margaret Medley (1976:11) states that "From the earliest ages of the civilization of China the potter has held an [sic] unique position in the social structure. ... the potter has had a creative task, to make vessels for storage, for cooking, and drinking, each essential parts in the chain of activities required for survival."

This chapter will discuss the origins of porcelain as a material for manufacture, its use in mainly traditional vessel forms and its introduction into Europe.

In order to establish the precise nature of the movement of porcelain ware between the East and West, it is imperative to understand the value placed on porcelain objects, and why it was so sought after by the West. To distinguish porcelain from the other clays, a description of the most common clay bodies used at that time will be presented. The search for a porcelain body and the beginnings of studio pottery in England will be highlighted, as a context for a discussion of the selected English ceramic artists.

The discovery of porcelain by the Chinese evolved over many centuries. According to Shelagh Vainker (1991:9) the Chinese were able to produce a large number of ceramic artefacts as there was a wide distribution of high

quality raw materials. The skill the Chinese potters showed in using these materials, as well as knowledge of kiln technology, resulted in an organised industry from earliest times. Vainker continues by saying that “The function and status of the resulting earthenwares<sup>2</sup>, stonewares<sup>3</sup> and porcelains varied from dynasty to dynasty, so that they may be utilitarian, burial, trade, collector’s or even ritual objects, according to their quality and their era”.

During the Shang Dynasty (17th-11th century BC) potters produced ceramics that were white and unglazed, intended mainly for ritual purposes, not domestic usage. They were hand carved and were similar to ritual bronzes, both in form and decoration (Doherty 2002:9). These were made from a clay body containing kaolin<sup>4</sup> and were probably fired no higher than 1200°C (Doherty 2002:9). This clay body is generally known as earthenware, although fired higher than earthenware normally is (see footnote 2).

Although improvements to white earthenware and light coloured stoneware clays were developed, it was during the Tang Dynasty (AD618-906), that kiln technology and material knowledge had considerably improved and a true white translucent body was achieved (Doherty 2002:9). Sasha Wardell (2004:7) confirms that the first porcelains were made either during the Sui

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<sup>2</sup> Earthenware – “Any opaque ceramic ware fired under 2000°F [1093°C] as distinguished from porcelain, which is fired at higher temperatures. Earthenware has a relatively coarse, highly absorbent body and is commonly of a reddish colour” (*Collins dictionary of art terms & techniques*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. 1993:130). My note: Earthenware is also available as a white body.

<sup>3</sup> Stoneware - Potter and author Alison Sandeman (1979:7) describes porcelain as fine white translucent stoneware and states that “the dividing line between porcelain and stoneware is rather fine”. She notes that porcelain has a higher degree of vitrification than stoneware, and glazes in porcelain combine more with the body. I agree with Sandeman, but I have never thought of stoneware (even a white body) as being comparable to porcelain. In the West the body is composed of coarser materials (more grog added) and stoneware remains less dense.

Robert Finlay (1998:144) notes that “Stoneware is produced at about 1,000°C to 1,250°C, resulting in a ceramic whose hardness lies between that of earthenware and porcelain; it is vitreous (or glassy), almost entirely nonporous, resonant when struck, and varies in color [colour] from light gray to black”

<sup>4</sup> Sandeman (1979:10) states: “The name kaolin is derived from the Chinese Kao (high) and Ling (hill, i.e. a high hill or ridge where the clay was first discovered)”. This is similar to where china clay is found in Cornwall, England, where some of the finest china clays are extracted. I visited the Wheal Martyn China Clay Museum in Cornwall which is located in two old china clay works, Wheal Martyn and Gomm. The site is situated alongside the St Austell River in a valley which contained several China Clay works. Work began there as early as 1820. I observed a demonstration of the way china clay was extracted by using water to wash the soft kaolinised granite from the surrounding hills. The waste quartz and mica are then removed and the clay is dried. (Details extracted from the booklet *Wheal Martyn China Clay Museum*: St Austell China Clay Museum. n.d:5).

Dynasty (AD581-617) or Tang Dynasty (AD618-906), but stated that “they were of an appearance that we today would liken to a high-fired white stoneware”.

In the West the different clay bodies are described as earthenware, stoneware or porcelain depending on the different chemical compositions of each body. The Chinese, however, refer to only two types, that of earthenware and *ci*, which describes both stoneware and porcelain. As a result, it has become difficult to pin-point the exact moment in time when porcelain first emerged. Robert Finlay (1998:145) claims that true porcelain, which when fired is dense, white, vitrified<sup>5</sup> and translucent where thin was only discovered in the Yuan dynasty during the 13<sup>th</sup> century, whilst most other accounts date the discovery of porcelain earlier in the 11<sup>th</sup> century. Depending on which contemporary account one reads, it may have been sometime between the Zhou [Chou] (BC1027-221) and Yuan (AD1260-1368) dynasties (Finlay 1998:145).

Therefore, “the terms *proto-porcelain*, *quasi-porcelain* and *porcellaneous stoneware* (Figures 1.1 and 1.2) often are used to identify pottery made with some of the ingredients of porcelain and sharing some of its physical characteristics, centuries before the emergence of supposed ‘true porcelain’ at Jingdezhen in the Yuan dynasty” (Finlay 1998:146). White ware is another term that is frequently used to describe porcelain. It can be concluded from the above that it is not clear exactly when porcelain was first discovered and that it evolved over a period of time.

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<sup>5</sup> Vitrify - “Convert or be converted into glass or a glasslike substance especially by heat” (*The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English*. 8<sup>th</sup> edition. 1990:1373).



Figure 1.1 Shang-Zhou dynasties. **Vase** (n.d). Proto-porcelain. No size given. Museum of Wuyi Mountain, Fujian Province, China. (Photograph by G. Stewart 2013).



Figure 1.2 **Vase** (n.d). Proto-porcelain. No size given. Museum of Wuyi Mountain. Fujian Province, China. (Photograph by G. Stewart 2013).

Chinese porcelain is made up of two materials, kaolin and petuntse. Kaolin is a white clay body with a high alumina silica content which vitrifies at 1260°C. Petuntse is a hard feldspathic stone which was fired, broken down, made into a paste and formed into little white bricks, before kaolin is added to it. Petuntse is a natural mixture of potash mica, soda feldspar and quartz (silica). This description of what constitutes Chinese porcelain is confirmed by Sandeman (1979:10), Tregear (1982:154), Doherty (2002:10) and Carswell (2000:11). Petuntse (or china stone) gives translucency and hardness. It is difficult to work with on its own, therefore kaolin (or china clay) is added in order to achieve plasticity, smoothness and whiteness (Finlay 1998:145). It is important to note that these materials are unobtainable in the West. Their nearest equivalents are china clay and Cornish stone (Sandeman 1979:10).

Finlay (1998:146) states that for the Chinese:

Grouping porcelain with stoneware was natural since the new material resulted from incremental change within an established tradition, mainly a matter of adjusting the proportion of known ingredients. Because porcelain vessels, in their hardness, resonance, and impermeability, seemed indistinguishable from stoneware, potters had every reason to regard the new Jingdezhen product as just another, improved variety of *ci*.

At the start of the Song Dynasty (AD960-1278) kiln sites in Jingdezhen, situated in the north east of Jiangxi province in China, were the centre for white ware. They were established in the 10<sup>th</sup> century (Tregear 1982:143) as a result of the availability of kaolin, petuntse and ample supplies of wood for kiln fuel. It is well situated on inland waterways (Wardell 2004:9; Doherty 2002:10). These kiln sites exist today and produce porcelain. The map below (Figure 1.3) indicates these sites.



Figure 1.3 **Major Song dynasty kiln sites.** *Kiln sites of ancient China: recent finds of pottery and porcelain.* London, 1981. (Tregear 1982:8).

The image below (Figure 1.4) show workers at Jingdezhen in 2008.

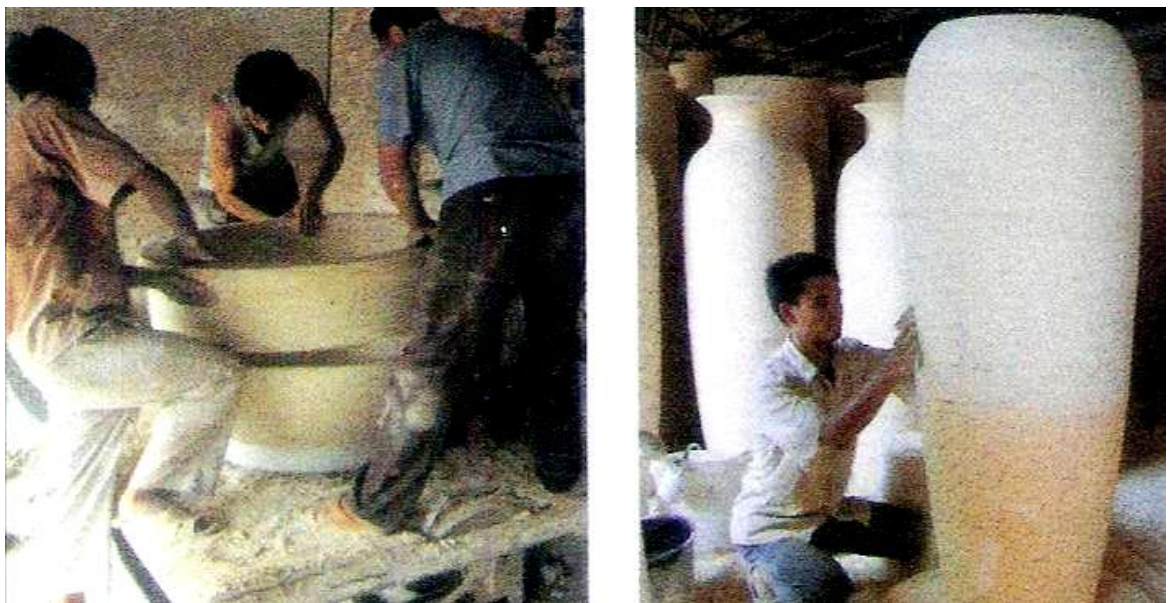


Figure 1.4 **Workers at kiln sites.** (2008). Jingdezhen, China. (Ventura 2008:57).



In discussing artefacts made at Jingdezhen Mary Tregear (1982:143) states that:

the ware for which the Jingdezhen kilns were to become famous – and which was to influence the ceramic culture of not only China but also the whole world – was not developed until the 11th century. It was a hard-bodied, high-fired white ware that was translucent and covered by a glassy transparent glaze with a definite bluish tinge.

This is known as *Qingbai*. Two pieces from the Song Dynasty (Figures 1.5 and 1.6) are examples of *Qingbai* porcelain.

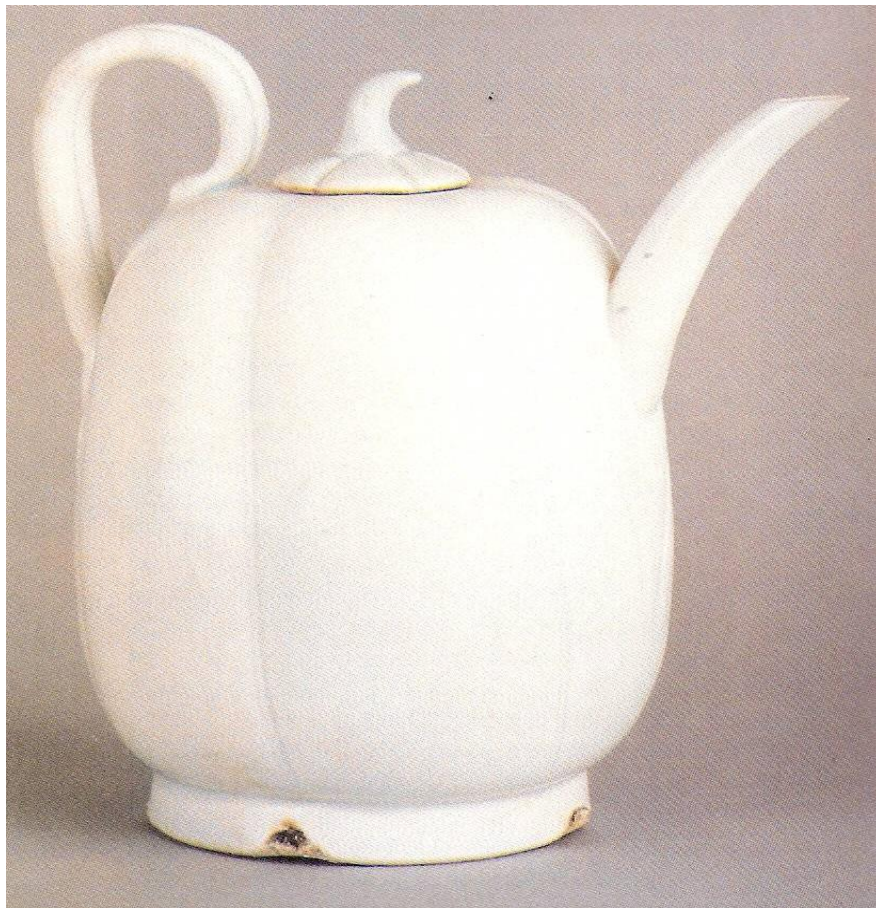


Figure 1.5 Northern Song dynasty. **Qingbai melon-shaped ewer** (n.d). Qingbai porcelain. No size given. Permission of the Museum of East Asian Art, Bath. (Wardell 2004:7).



Figure 1.6 Southern Song dynasty. **Meiping vase** (1200-50). Qingbai porcelain. Jingdezhen, China. No size given. Victoria and Albert Museum. (Photograph by A. Kempthorne 2009).

Some of the finest examples of porcelain ware were produced under the control of court patronage during the Song period. Doherty (2002:9) states that “this was one of the great periods in Chinese ceramic history”. He maintains that porcelain makers mastered the use of materials and techniques to such an extent that it prompted artist, potter and author, Bernard Leach (1887-1979) to write “Of all pottery that of the Song period is most expressive of its material, it is in fact the purest of pottery” (Leach in Doherty 2002:9).



Form was considered to be more important than decoration and potters were encouraged to make simple forms that demonstrated restraint and sophistication. Tregear (1982:38) confirms this and argues that “It seems clear that certain kilns, either by reason of their exceptionally fine craftsmanship, outstanding clay and glaze material or, more probably, a combination of all these characteristics, made a type of ware that was admired and prized by connoisseurs”.

Finlay (1998:148) agrees with Tregear and notes that the tunnel-like kilns (dragon kilns), which were built using the natural slope of the hillside and could be as long as 60m, produced a natural draft that raised the kiln temperatures. This encouraged potters to experiment with kaolin and china stone, as these minerals were able to withstand the high temperatures (1200°C-1300°C) that were obtained in the hottest part of the kiln. As a result vessels were whiter and harder than had previously been made. Temperatures within the kiln could vary by 600°C (Finlay 1998:148).

The whiter and harder body resembled the pale shade and thin body of silver work vessels, which had been introduced to China from western Asia in the Tang period (AD618-906) (Finlay 1998:148).

Two examples of *Qingbai* ware (Figures 1.7 and 1.8) demonstrate that, although both these objects would be used for domestic purposes, they are beautifully crafted.

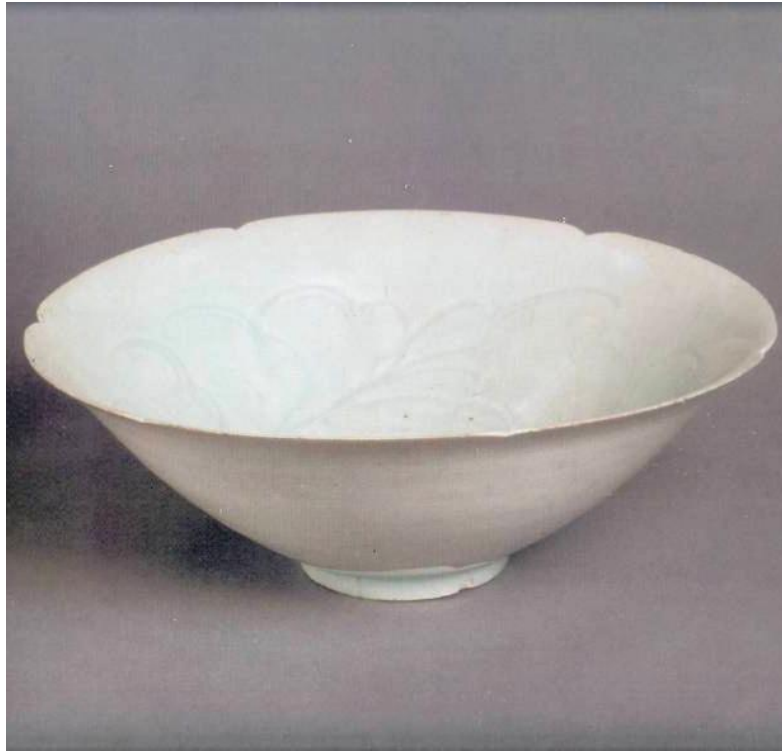


Figure 1.7 Northern Song dynasty. **Six-foamate bowl** (Late 11<sup>th</sup> century). White porcelain, pale-blue transparent glaze. Qingbai ware. D. 17.09 cm. Jingdezhen. (Tregear 1982:39).

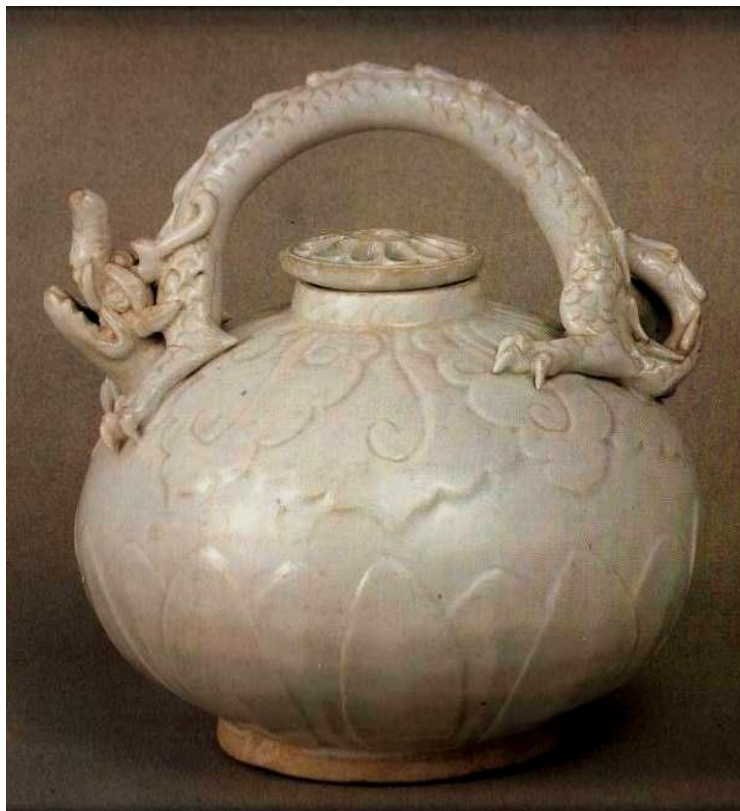


Figure 1.8 Southern Song dynasty. **Ewer with dragon-shaped handle** (Late 13<sup>th</sup> century). White porcelain, pale-blue transparent glaze. Qingbai ware (possibly from Dehua in Fujian). H. 20 cm. (Tregear 1982:155).

The long period that was required for these large kilns to cool down sometimes produced a bluish green shade on the glazed ware<sup>6</sup> (Finlay 1998:149). The process brought about striking effects.

The glaze revealed a depth, brightness and opalescence which made the Chinese potters realize that, by controlling the kiln temperatures, aesthetically pleasing glaze effects could be achieved. Finlay (1998:149) highlights this when he notes that:

The Chinese prized vessels with bluish green glazes because the surfaces resembled the colors [colours] of jade, a material of enormous ceremonial and symbolic significance in China. More prosaically, an eighteenth-century Chinese connoisseur praised Song glazes for being 'as transparent and thick as massed lard'.

Most vessels had monochrome glazes such as celadon<sup>7</sup> which gave the form depth and texture. Ceramic pieces were collected and valued as highly as objects made out of other, more precious materials, such as jade, bronze and silk. According to Vainker (1991:10):

ceramics were influenced by lacquer in shape, by jade in surface texture and by silk and most other precious media in their ornament. It is perhaps this versatility which has led some scholars to place ceramics at the head of China's traditions in applied arts.

This is apparent in the two examples below (Figures 1.9 and 1.10). The green of the celadon glaze is different in each example. The colour depended both on the amount of iron in the clay, as well as the position in which it was placed in the kiln.

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<sup>6</sup> My note: This is known as reduction firing where oxygen is limited in the kiln, and special effects can be achieved with glazes.

<sup>7</sup> Celadon is a ceramic glaze containing iron. It is produced in reduction firing in which red iron oxide is reduced to black by the removal of oxygen from the glaze. The reduced colour may be olive green, grey-green, or grey. Celadon ware was developed and perfected during the Sung [Song] Dynasty. It was apparently valued by the Chinese for its resemblance to jade, and has always been highly esteemed in the West (Collins dictionary of art terms and techniques. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. 1993:72). My note: Celadon glazed vessels may also be referred to as *greenware*.

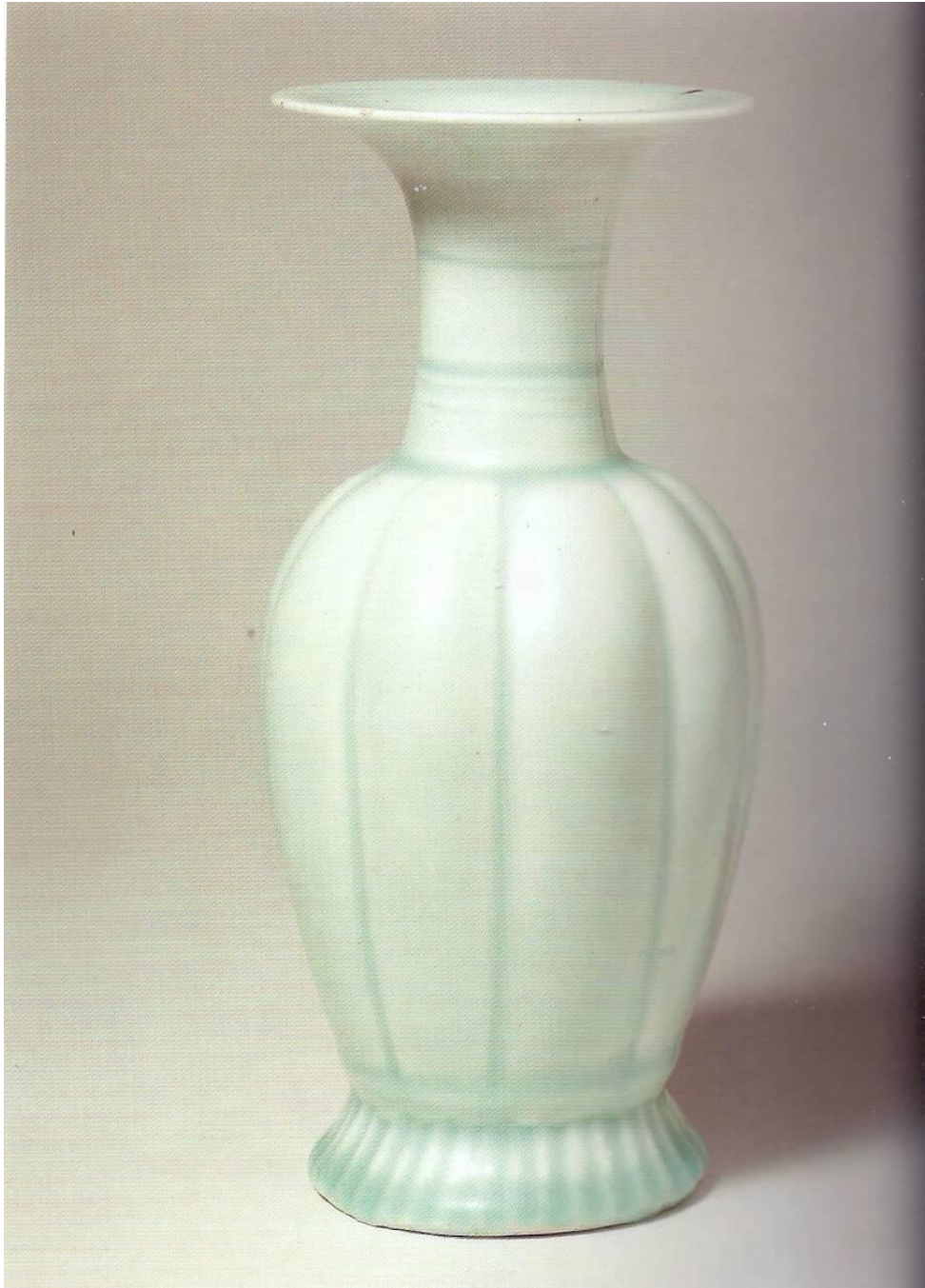


Figure 1.9 Song dynasty. **Vase** (11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> century). Porcelain, thrown and modelled, blue celadon glaze. H. 25.6 cm. (Cooper 2003:63).



Figure 1.10 Southern Song dynasty. **Green-glazed funerary jar** (1200-1300). Lonquan kilns, China. H. 25.2 cm. Victoria and Albert Museum, London. (Photograph by A. Kempthorne 2009).

Artist and historian Edmund de Waal, one of the artists selected for discussion in this research, referred to the classical Chinese potters of the Song Dynasty (Figure 1.11) when he created work for an installation entitled *Signs & Wonders* at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London in 2010 (Adamson, Graves and de Waal 2009:49).



In discussing this Adamson (2009:42) states that de Waal is influenced by ceramic history. de Waal has an affinity with classical Chinese pottery as is evidenced in his work, but the refinement of eighteenth century experimental porcelains and the rationalist rigour of modernist ceramics were also instrumental in his choice of work for his installation entitled *Signs & Wonders* (Adamson 2009:42).



Figure 1.11 Northern Song dynasty. **Two dishes, Xing ware** (left) and **Ding ware** (right) (10<sup>th</sup> to early 11<sup>th</sup> century). Hebei Province (China). No sizes given. Victoria and Albert Museum, London. (Adamson, Graves and de Waal 2009:49).

British studio potter, Lucie Rie (1902-1995) also references Chinese potters as can be seen in her work **Two bowls** (Figure 1.12). This reference by Rie is noticeable when one compares Rie's work to the small Chinese cups and bowls in the Sir Percival David collection in the British Museum in London (Figure 1.13). Tregear (1982:221) comments that Lucie Rie "shows the sense of rapport between present-day European potters and those of twelfth-century China".



Figure 1.12 Lucie Rie (UK). **Two bowls** (c. 1960-70). Porcelain, thrown and turned with yellow glazes. H. (tallest) 14 cm. (Cooper 2000:287).



Figure 1.13 Ming dynasty. **Collection of small porcelain cups and bowls** (n.d). British Museum, Sir Percival David collection, London. (Photograph by A. Kempthorne 2012).

It was during the Song Dynasty that porcelain became a major export commodity and Vainker (1991:10) notes that “Since then porcelain has almost constantly been one of China’s most important exports”. Vainker (1991:10) continues that silk alone could be seen to be equal to ceramics as “the long history, physical quality, craftsmanship and the multifarious role of ceramics

[indicates]; internationally, the influence of Chinese porcelain on the material cultures of other nations is unrivalled”.

The Song Dynasty ended when the Mongols came to power and the Yuan Dynasty (AD1280-1368) was established. Many changes and innovations took place. The kiln sites at Jingdezhen began to expand rapidly and trade routes were re-established with the Middle East.

Chinese porcelain production expanded to produce ware for the Persian Arab community (Doherty 2002:10). John Carswell (2000:15) states that “the Mongol Empire embraced not only China but most of Asia as well, invigorating the trade routes to the West following the silk road”.

It was during this time (in the early part of the 14th century) that blue and white ware appeared.

Cobalt oxide, which at that time was imported from Persia, led to the establishment of “the classic and much admired blue and white ware... achieved by painting a cobalt pigment on to a white glaze” (Cooper 2000:68). Carswell (2000:11) notes that “With hardly any precedent, blue and white porcelain sprang on to an empty stage, a platform which was to dominate in the history of world ceramics for the next four hundred years”.

The exquisitely decorated vase and jar (Figure 1.14) are examples of this application.





Figure 1.14 Yuan dynasty. **Lidded Meiping Vase with dragon decoration** (14<sup>th</sup> century). Jar in guan form with phoenixes, peonies and qilin. (c.1350). H.38.75 cm. (Cooper 2000:66).

Although the Yuan Dynasty (AD1260-1368) was relatively short-lived, during this time the trade routes were expanded considerably. After its collapse the Ming Dynasty (AD1368-1644) came to power and trade continued.

The Ming Dynasty lasted for approximately 300 years and was a period of peace, prosperity and expansion (Doherty 2002:10). The established trade routes led to the export of porcelain in vast quantities to the outside world, making Jingdezhen kiln sites the source of the world's porcelain at that time (Doherty 2002:11). Finlay (1998:172) states that:

From the kings of Portugal to the tsars of Russia, the princes of Europe collected porcelain. Like palaces and ermine robes, massed displays of the ceramic functioned as assertions of power and magnificence. Porcelain became the currency of social emulation among the aristocracy of every nation and spread down the social ladder to prosperous burghers and country gentry.

Finlay (1998:172) claims that:

The popularity of porcelain throughout Europe stemmed not only from its use in dining but also from its incorporation into the new consumer vogue from interior decoration, a trend that grew as the elite built increasingly spacious homes. According to Daniel Defoe (1660-1731), Queen Mary at Hampton Court introduced the English to the 'fatal excess' of 'piling their china upon the tops of cabinets, scrutores, and every chimney-piece, to the tops of the ceilings, and even setting up shelves for their china-ware, where they wanted such places, till it became a grievance in the expence of it, and even injurious to their families and estates'.

Large shipments were exported to the West during the Ming period (Wardell 2004:9). This is confirmed by Doherty (2002:10) and Vainker (1991:145). As a result this fuelled a great deal of interest in porcelain and, in particular, in blue and white ware.

An example of the type of traditional ware that was being made for both export and domestic use can be seen in Figure 1.15.

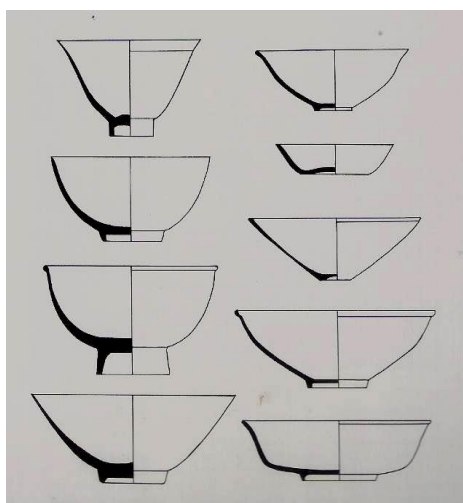


Figure 1.15      **Profiles of bowls from Jingdezhen kiln sites. China. (Tregear 1982:144).**

The European term for porcelain was *porcellana*, a Portuguese word for cowry shell, which is thought to have been attributed to the material by explorer, Marco Polo (1252-1324) when he explored China. He compared the porcelain he saw to the thin white shell of the cowry (Vainker 1991:145; Sandeman 1979:10). Emmanuel Cooper (2000:160) confirms this, but acknowledges that there may also be a link with the Italian word *porcella*, a diminutive of *porca* (sow). This association may have been as a result of the whiteness and the smooth, compact texture of this animal's skin.

The Portuguese dominated the trade routes into China in the early 1500s, but were superseded by the Dutch and Spanish. Chinese porcelain had by then reached nobility in other parts of Europe, including Henry VIII in Britain and Francesco I de' Medici in Italy (Wardell 2004:9).

The high value and prestige that was associated with possessing a porcelain object led to numerous attempts to discover how it was made. Under the patronage of Francesco I de' Medici, Grand Duke of Tuscany, in the late 16th century, an attempt was made to produce Chinese porcelain, as seen in the **Ewer** (1575-8) (Figure 1.16).

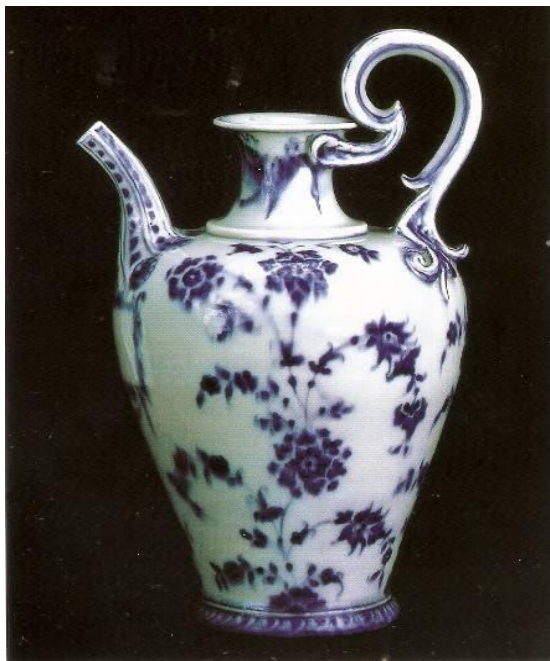


Figure 1.16 **Ewer** (1575-8). Porcelain, painted in underglaze blue in a floral design. Medici workshop, Florence, Italy. H.25.5 cm. (Cooper 2000:161).

However, it had none of the technical resemblance to the Chinese material. For example it contained no china clay and, because of difficulties in its manufacture, only limited quantities were produced (Cooper 2000:161).

Elinor Gordon (1977:8) in discussing the development of Chinese manufactured porcelain items, states that:

At first with the Portuguese, Spanish and Dutch merchants all the porcelain exported was of the blue and white variety and the forms were of Chinese origin. It wasn't long, however, before the trading nations began to order forms which complied with European usage. These nations supplied the Chinese potters with wooden models as well as actual European items in silver, pewter, faience, etc., to be copied in porcelain.

Finlay (1998:156) confirms this when he said that "The potters turned out utensils—such as large dishes, wine jars, ewers, tankers, gourd-shaped bottles, basins, platter stands, and massive vases—that were alien to Chinese taste".

The opening of the port of Canton to Western traders in 1699 prompted a tremendous increase in the volume of exported porcelain, and this flow continued unabated until near the close of the eighteenth century (Gordon 1977:8). The extraordinary admiration and desire of Europeans for porcelain ware is demonstrated by the 43 million pieces of porcelain imported by the Dutch East India Company from the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> to the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Gordon 1977:8).

An explanation of the work of British artist, Paul Scott in Chapter Two demonstrates how he references the imagery of traditional blue and white porcelain, and subverts it by commenting on contemporary events.

Korea was the second country to produce porcelain, having imported it from China since the 3rd and 4th centuries (Wardell 2004:9). By the end of the 12th century Korean potters produced what Doherty (2002:13) referred to as

“typically Korean porcelain”, but by the 15th century they had created a distinctive white porcelain.

The Japanese invasion of Korea in 1592 destroyed Korean porcelain production (Doherty 2002:13) and a subsequent invasion by China in 1636 meant a further delay in re-establishing the industry. When the production of porcelain was re-established in Korea, “the forms had a vitality and vigour” (Doherty 2002:13).

Blue and white ware was also produced. The range of ware included large storage jars and items for stationery such as water droppers and brush stands (Doherty 2002:13; Cooper 2000:74). By the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century Korean porcelain was once again under State control. Later traditional skills were lost as State funding decreased, leading to a decline in the industry (Doherty 2002:13).

Political turmoil in China in the middle of the 17th century saw the collapse of the Ming Dynasty and European traders were forced to find new sources of porcelain (Doherty 2002:13).

A Korean potter, Kanae Sampei (his Japanese name), found porcelain clay deposits in 1616 near Arita on an expedition to Japan. Under Korean and Chinese guidance, the Arita potters slowly began to make refined objects and by the mid-17th century they were producing porcelain objects for export and domestic use (Cooper 2000:79).

These wares are known as *Imari* (after the port through which the porcelain was shipped). They were elaborately decorated with underglaze blue and iron red and were sometimes gilded (Cooper 2000:79). During the 18th century many beautiful *Imari* pieces were made (Figure 1.17).



Figure 1.17 Japan, **Arita** (1690-1720). Porcelain. Painted in underglaze blue, enamels and gilding. No sizes given. Victoria and Albert Museum, London. (Photograph by A. Kempthorne 2012).

A process of transferring the patterns was developed in order to create duplications for the designs on place settings. Figure 1.18 is an example of how factories in the nineteenth century in Britain, such as Derby and Worcester, based many of their designs on *Imari* patterns (Cooper 2000:80).





Figure 1.18 **Bottle, cup and saucer with 'Japan' patterns (1825-1848).** Bone china. No sizes given. Victoria and Albert Museum. (Photograph by A. Kempthorne 2012).

With the introduction of thousands of porcelain pieces into Europe via the English and Dutch East India Companies, there was a growing interest in the ability to reproduce the material in order to manufacture porcelain ware. Wardell (2004:9) states that "It became as important a commodity as gold or 'white gold' as it came to be known. It was common practice for northern European monarchs to create a 'porcelain room' where huge collections were on show".

Tea was imported from Asia, via the ships of the East India Company, into England during the middle part of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. It soon became a sought after drink and needed unfamiliar equipment to prepare it (Goss 2010:4). Steve Goss (2010:4) observes that "The attractive and delicate porcelain

spouted pots and handleless cups brought from China were much admired and tea drinking soon became a status symbol”.

As a result, earthenware vessels made by British potters at that time, were deemed unsuitable for tea drinking as they lacked the delicateness of porcelain. This encouraged the need to discover a suitable porcelain body (Goss 2010:15). The refined appearance of Chinese drinking cups can be seen in Figures 1.19 and 1.20.



Figure 1.19 **Chinese tea bowl and saucer** (about 1690). Blue and white porcelain. No sizes given. Victoria and Albert Museum, London. (Photograph by A. Kempthorne 2012).



Figure 1.20 **Tea bowls** (n.d.) Chinese blue and white porcelain. No sizes given. Sir Percival David collection, British Museum, London. (Photograph by A. Kempthorne 2012).



There were several attempts to make porcelain in Europe during the 1600s but, according to Sandeman (1979:10) and (Doherty 2002:15), it was not until 1710 that a German chemist, Johann Friedrich Böttger (1682-1719) produced true porcelain under the patronage of Augustus II (1670-1733), known as Augustus the Strong. The Meissen porcelain factory was established in 1710 and Saxon porcelain (or Dresden china as it is known in Britain) came into being and dominated the production of porcelain in Europe for approximately 40 years (Doherty 2002:15).

William Cookworthy (1705-1780), a Plymouth pharmacist and scholar, is known as the first person to succeed in the manufacture of true oriental-style hard-paste<sup>8</sup> porcelain in England (Wood 2006:42). According to Nigel Wood (2006:42):

The value of Cookworthy's experiments lies in the way that he correctly identified close relations of Chinese porcelain stones (petuntse) and china clays (caulin) [kaolin] near St. Austell [in Cornwall] and then processed and fired these materials to create true hard-paste porcelains of East Asian type.

Cookworthy's first patent was registered in 1768 when he established the New Invented Plymouth Porcelain Company and produced blue and white porcelain ware (Figure 1.21).

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<sup>8</sup> Hard-paste porcelain is described as hard, high-fired porcelain. It is so-called true porcelain, as distinct from the somewhat softer and lower-fired porcelains called soft paste". (Collins Dictionary of Art Terms and Techniques. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. 1993:193).



Figure 1.21 **Teapot** (n.d). Plymouth porcelain. No size given. Courtesy British Museum. (Wood 2006:43).

A group of north Staffordshire potters, led by Josiah Wedgwood (1730-1795), challenged the renewal of the patent in 1775 and successfully won the rights to use the materials in translucent white ware as well as in true hard paste porcelains (Wood 2006:44). After Cookworthy's death in 1780 these Staffordshire potters were able to purchase the patents outright. The exclusive rights were then used in recipes for bone china<sup>9</sup>, with the addition of fifty percent of calcined<sup>10</sup> animal bones. Wood (2006:44) claimed that bone china<sup>11</sup> "remains our best white translucent china today. The high quality hard-paste porcelains pioneered by Cookworthy ... remain a little more than by-ways in English porcelain manufacture – despite their enormous significance within the larger history of the material".

Today porcelain in the West is made up of different percentages of china clay, feldspar, quartz and ball clay or bentonite to allow for plasticity in the throwing

<sup>9</sup> Bone china is described as hard, white, translucent chinaware, made with a large amount of bone ash. The formula for bone china was perfected in England by Josiah Spode [in] about 1800, and most of this china ware is still produced chiefly in England and Ireland" (Collins Dictionary of Art Terms and Techniques. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. 1993:45).

<sup>10</sup> Calcine – "Reduce to calcium oxide by roasting or burning" (*The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English*. 8<sup>th</sup> edition. 1990:158).

<sup>11</sup> Wood (2006:44) described bone china as a "strangely alchemical 'bone china' material, with [a] high biscuit firing and low glost".

or hand making of objects, whereas bone china can only be used when slip casting into moulds.

Vainker (1991:158), in discussing the result of the production of porcelain in Britain, states that:

The porcelain created at Worcester, Chelsea and Bow in the eighteenth century eventually replaced Jingdezhen ware in England. The Cornish stone of which it was made is structurally comparable to Chinese porcelain stone, and once it had been discovered and processed within a highly organised industry, the Chinese wares had little to offer and were expensive by comparison.

Although the factories had always included creative artists and craftsmen, as the industry evolved in Europe, more sophisticated means of production were sought (Doherty 2002:17). This limited the way in which artists were able to express their artistic abilities within these factories.

William Morris (1834-1896), an English writer, painter, designer, craftsman and social reformer recognised the importance of craftsmanship. This was at a time when mechanisation was growing and the use of machines had become more prominent. Morris used Ruskin's<sup>12</sup> ideas in a practical way. He established a company wherein which the craftsman designed and made the article. His company produced hand-printed, hand-woven, hand-dyed textiles, printed books, wallpaper, furniture and other items (Chilvers, Osborne and Farr 1994:27 and 343). Morris designed wallpapers are well-known and are produced today. Nikolaus Pevsner (2005:15) emphasises Morris' significance as follows:

Morris preaches: 'I don't want art for a few, any more than education for a few, or freedom for a few', and he asks that great question which will decide the fate of art in our century: 'What business have we with

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<sup>12</sup> John Ruskin (1819-1900) is described as "the most influential English art critic of his time". (Chilvers, Osborne and Farr 1994:440). He believed that the foundations of art had become uncertain since the Renaissance and especially since the Industrial Revolution (Pevsner 2005:15). He blindly opposed "all efforts to raise the standards of design in industry and to institute schools for the application of good principles of design to mass-production" (Chilvers, Osborne and Farr 1994:441).

art at all unless all can share it?' ... Morris is the true prophet of the twentieth century.

During the 1890's the Arts and Crafts Movement was formed in England based on the ideas and philosophies of Ruskin and Morris (Chilvers, Osborne and Farr 1994:26). They believed that hand crafted items enriched the life of both those who created them and those who used them. Bernard Leach (1887-1979), potter, artist and writer shared this philosophy and said "Since the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the reaction started by William Morris has been taking place mainly outside industry and has culminated in what I have called the individual, or artist, craftsman" (Leach 1976:14).

Leach was a major influence in establishing studio pottery in Britain. His work and his writings also inspired potters in other parts of the world. He was born in the East and educated in the West. He studied art in Britain, but returned to Japan in 1909 where he remained for 11 years. He originally went there to teach etching (de Waal 2003:88). His first introduction to ceramics was at a 'raku'<sup>13</sup> party and de Waal (2003:88) notes that Leach was "enthralled". Leach then studied ceramics under an elderly potter, Urano Shigekichi (1851-1923), known as Kenzan VI, a decedent of Ogata Kenzan (1663-1743)<sup>14</sup>, who is known for his "economical, near abstract style of spontaneous and powerful brushwork using soft browns, blacks and blues" (Cooper 2000:80).

Kenzan VI was the last member of this well known family of Japanese potters who were noted for their use of calligraphy and painting on pottery (de Waal 2003:88). This had an influence on Bernard Leach, which can be seen in Leach's stoneware bottle (Figure 1.22). The bottle is from one of Leach's most celebrated firings and is illustrated in *A Potters Book* which was first published in 1940 with subsequent editions.

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<sup>13</sup> 'Raku' ware – "is an earthenware developed by Japanese potters in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. It is usually thick, resistant to thermal shock, and quite irregular in form and colours. 'Raku' ware is often used in the traditional tea ceremony" (Collins dictionary of art terms and techniques. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition.1993:342).

<sup>14</sup> Leach wrote a book on Ogata Kenzan (1663-1743) in 1966 entitled *Kenzan and his traditions*. Published by Faber and Faber, London.



Figure 1.22      Bernard Leach, **Tall oxidized stoneware bottle, the brown pattern painted over the white matt glaze** (1931). No sizes given. Victoria and Albert Museum, London. (Photograph by A. Kempthorne 2009).

Leach developed his own distinctive style. He based his ideology on that of the Arts and Crafts Movement “which sought to provide pots for everyday use as well as create individual ‘works of art’” (Cooper 2003:xi). Leach (1983:44) spoke of an interest in contemporary art and states that:

This appears to be one aspect of movement away from domination of money and machine toward the re-establishment of feeling, imagination and personal responsibility in work, not necessarily against science and the machine as such, but fundamentally opposed to that castration of man's inner nature which has taken place during the hundred years since Morris and Ruskin.

Although Leach was in Japan, he kept in touch with what Cooper (2003:xi) describes as "contemporary radical ideas on modern art in Europe, such as theories of abstraction". He was aware of Clive Bell's<sup>15</sup> concept of 'significant form'<sup>16</sup>. Leach (1983:45) states that he wanted to make pots that belong to the present, but which will inherit the past and probe the future. He emphasises that these pots should be "made by and for the whole man, heart, head and hand".

Leach responded to the basic view of modernism, that of truth to materials, the importance of function in determining form and the simplicity of decoration. However, he did not believe in the use of the machine and thought of it as dehumanizing, identifying himself with William Morris' beliefs (Cooper 2003:xii).

During the 1920's, encouraged by Leach, and the fact that pots from the Song Dynasty were being seen for the first time in England<sup>17</sup>, potters began to make forms that were based on Song Dynasty ceramics. Cooper (2003:xii) states that "With their powerful sense of form, minimal decoration and simplicity of glaze, Sung [Song]-dynasty ceramics became part of the modernist principles of greatness in art".

Leach continued to inspire potters with his teaching and writing and spent a great deal of his life moving between Japan and England. He established a pottery studio in St. Ives, Cornwall, in 1920, which is still in existence today.

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<sup>15</sup> Clive Bell (1881-1964) was an English critic and writer on art (Chilvers, Osborne and Farr 1994:47).

<sup>16</sup> Bell described the concept of 'significant form' as "The quality that distinguishes works of art from all other classes of objects" (Chilvers, Osborne and Farr 1994:47).

<sup>17</sup> One of the first major exhibitions of early work was 'Early Chinese Pottery and Porcelain' at the Burlington Fine Arts Club in 1910 (Cooper 2003:369).

Here he experimented with the making of a porcelain body and the basic recipe that he devised is still in use. I make my porcelain body from his recipe. Although Leach did not work in porcelain exclusively, and he preferred white earthenware and stoneware, he did make a number of porcelain pots (Figure 1.23).

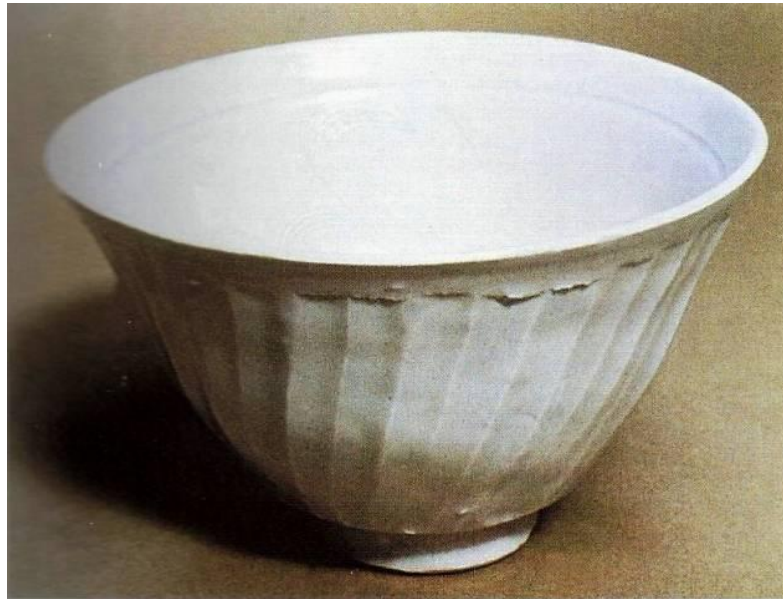


Figure 1.23 Bernard Leach. **Fluted porcelain bowl with white glaze** (n.d). D.15cm. (Doherty 2002:17).

Leach's legacy to ceramics, and particularly that of the studio potter, is significant in the context of modernism.

Doherty (2002:23), in reflecting on the past, states that the 20th century had seen potters "grappling with both aesthetic and technical issues" in which they have strived for the standard that had been set by the Song dynasty potters. Porcelain has become a far more accessible medium to work in, mainly because of its availability, but also because potters value "the essence and unadorned beauty of the material" (Doherty 2002:23).

It is evident that porcelain has a rich history from its earliest beginnings in China and in other parts of the world. What is of particular importance here is the spread of porcelain objects into, and their influence on, the West where

porcelain was seen as a commodity to be admired and treasured. The history of porcelain in the West provides an insight into how ceramicists experimented in the manufacture of true oriental-style hard-paste porcelain. It is evident that Bernard Leach, with his strong links to Japanese ceramics and his adherence to the tenets of the Arts and Crafts movement, was one of the most influential figures in the establishment of studio pottery in Britain. He influenced many potters, craftspeople and artists to establish studios and produce work despite the enormous production of ceramic factories in Britain and Europe. This still continues today.

Chapter Two will consist of an investigation of the subversion of traditional porcelain in the work of the selected artists who are contemporary ceramic makers.



## CHAPTER TWO

### THE SUBVERSION OF TRADITIONAL PORCELAIN IN THE WORK OF SELECTED CERAMIC ARTISTS (EDMUND DE WAAL, PAUL SCOTT, KATHERINE MORLING, RACHEL KNEEBONE AND CLARE TWOMEY).

The handmade object is a sign that expresses human society in a way all its own: not as work (technology), not as symbol (art, religion), but as a mutually shared physical life. [Octavio Paz<sup>18</sup> (1914-1998)]. (In Cooper 2000:314).

This chapter will investigate the subversion of traditional porcelain in the work of Edmund de Waal, Paul Scott, Katharine Morling, Rachel Kneebone and Clare Twomey. They are British ceramists who work in porcelain in diverse ways, thus providing evidence of a wide range of subversion of traditional porcelain.

Kate Wilson (2013:15) reporting on a Symposium<sup>19</sup> entitled ‘Subversive Ceramics’ notes that “the notion of subversion is clearly subjective and can be broadly interpreted”.

Before discussing the subversion of traditional porcelain in the work of the selected artists, it is necessary to examine how ceramics, and particularly porcelain, has gained a foothold in fine art.

Emmanuel Cooper (2009:7), in discussing how this came about, said that “the decline of the grip of modernism on the wider art world allowed for a more pluralistic view, with artists generally feeling increasingly able to look at other materials, to investigate other ways of working”.

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<sup>18</sup> Octavio Paz was a Mexican writer, poet, diplomat and winner of the 1982 Neustadt International Prize for Literature and the 1990 Nobel Prize for Literature. (Available at WWW: [http://m.poemhunter.com/octavio\\_paz/biography/](http://m.poemhunter.com/octavio_paz/biography/). Accessed 16 October 2013).

<sup>19</sup> It is interesting to note that a Symposium titled ‘Subversive Ceramics’ was recently held at the Holburne Museum, Bath, England in November 2012. Only one article has been published from this symposium so far.

Artist and writer Clare Twomey (2007:26), in discussing terminology and material usage in contemporary creative practice, agreed with Cooper when she states that:

Craft has now passed the point where new makers see an amassed division between terminologies from craft or fine art or many other areas of practice; all references to terminology are, when applied intelligently, inclusive and transferable to practice, as a whole – the terminology references the maker's intentions, not a discipline. However it is vital to acknowledge that the recognition of materials is intrinsic to the content and conceptual language of a piece, and by extension to our reading of the piece as an audience.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the Turner Prize was awarded to ceramic artist Grayson Perry in 2003. This marked a seismic shift in the perception of ceramics, particularly in the world of fine art (Cooper 2009:6). Cooper (2009:7) notes that "Perry's award of the most prestigious prize in the art world is part of a loosening of attitudes to craft that has found echoes in many countries".

The movement in the shift from modernism to postmodernism is clear in Perry's vessel entitled **Taste and Democracy** (2004) (Figure 2.1). Here, unlike modernist thinking, he appropriates and references the past in the ancient form of the urn. His use of image and text clearly demonstrates the contemporary and subversive nature of the work. Perry is challenging social norms about sexuality and the preciousness of ceramics with the text (and images).



Figure 2.1 Grayson Perry. **Taste and Democracy** (2004). Stoneware with surface decoration. H. 41 cm. (Cooper 2009:6).

## SECTION 1 – EDMUND DE WAAL (1964)

Edmund de Waal<sup>20</sup> has always made traditional vessels; however, more recently his subversion of traditional porcelain is located in the presentation of works appropriated from museum collections. De Waal's use of subversion lies in the way that he has taken into account the history of porcelain and then makes vessels based on the images he sees. These images could come from classical Chinese porcelain, the refinement of 18<sup>th</sup> century porcelains or the porcelain made by modernists. The way that de Waal places these vessels within historical buildings or museums has the power to subvert as the viewer is confronted by a new way of seeing ceramic vessels.

Alun Graves<sup>21</sup> (2009:8) states that “de Waal's porcelain of the 1990's was most at home within domestic environments, poised somewhere between kitchen cupboard and display shelf” (Figure 2.2).



Figure 2.2 Edmund de Waal. **Three beakers** (1997). Porcelain thrown and turned, with pale blue celadon glaze. H.(tallest) 14 cm. (Cooper 2000:320).

<sup>20</sup> Edmund de Waal is a distinguished potter, with work in many private and public collections internationally. He studied at Cambridge University, and in Japan. He is Senior Research Fellow at the University of Westminster, and has held a Leverhulme Special Research Fellowship and a Daiwa Anglo-Japanese Foundation Scholarship. His previous publications include *Bernard Leach* (1998). He is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts (de Waal 2003:1). He received an OBE (Order of the British Empire) in 2011 for services to art.

<sup>21</sup> Alun Graves is the Curator in the Sculpture Metalwork, Ceramics and Glass Department at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London.

However “In the context of a museum, such objects always run the risk of seeming dispossessed, of becoming meditations on form and aesthetics alone, stripped of other meaning” (Graves 2009:8).

From the late 1990’s onwards de Waal took a new approach to the display of his work. He began to group his vessels and placed them in particular interiors, such as High Cross House (1999), Blackwell (2005) and Kettle’s Yard (2005) in the United Kingdom.

De Waal had the opportunity to engage with the Le Corbusier<sup>22</sup> inspired environment of High Cross House<sup>23</sup> (Figure 2.3), complete with Bauhaus furniture, when he placed an installation of his vessels in the house. De Waal extended his ideas of groupings, repetition, concealment, and revelation that were already present in his ‘cargo’ works (Gray 2011).



Figure 2.3 **High Cross House, Dartington, Devon** (1932). (Morris 2012).

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<sup>22</sup> “Le Corbusier (1887-1965). Swiss-born architect, painter, designer, and writer who became a French citizen in 1930. Although chiefly celebrated as one of the greatest and most influential architects of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Le Corbusier also holds a small but distinguished place in the history of modern painting” (*Oxford Dictionary of Art*. 1994:281).

<sup>23</sup> High Cross House in Devon, completed in 1932, is a modernist house that was built for William Curry, the first headmaster of Dartington Hall School (Gray 2011).

De Waal (in the John Tusa Interviews BBC Radio 3, n.d) states that:

One of the first groups of pots I started to make was actually about the Silk Road, because actually I started to make pots in groups and called them cargoes of pots, in a very kind of self-conscious way trying to suggest that there were different ways that pots could be seen together, and that there was historical resonance of porcelain pots being unloaded in the docks over many hundreds of years. So I started to make pots in a way that I really enjoyed rather than I felt I had to.

In placing objects not associated with an existing space, de Waal subverts the viewer's perception of the space in the creation of a new dialogue. In the context of the belief that "postmodernism is concerned with a critical deconstruction of tradition" (Foster 1985:x) de Waal challenges the traditional viewing of vessels in a museum or gallery space. De Waal (2003:9) states that "as the identity of domestic space has changed so has the meaning of ceramics: the idea that meaning could lie in how they were handled or placed rather than in their decoration became significant".

This was confirmed by Laura Gray (2011) when she states:

As the work of de Waal demonstrates, the vessel has returned to the domestic environment, but it is a changed vessel, and it is occupying the space on its own terms. There has been a transition from thing to object that allows pots to sit in domestic space but speak the language of sculpture, rather than the language of craft and utility. In the case of de Waal, domestic space has become the site for a more sculptural ceramics practice, a practice that undermines distinction between sculpture and functional objects.

De Waal (in Graves 2009:8) has constantly referred to the significance of porcelain. He speaks of its associations, its desirability and its contradictory notions of strength and fragility. Graves invited de Waal to submit a proposal for a site-specific work for the redevelopment of the new Contemporary Ceramic Gallery at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London to be opened in June 2010. De Waal's response was to construct an installation consisting of a lacquer-red metal channel tracking the circumference of the dome which

houses more than 400 of his pots (Figures 2.4, 2.5 & 2.6). The installation entitled *Signs & Wonders* is a development in his career from domestic potter to installation artist (Graves 2009:10).



Figure 2.4 Edmund de Waal. **Pots within circular metal channel** (2010). Porcelain, thrown, turned and glazed. No sizes given. *Signs & Wonders*. Victoria and Albert Museum. (Photograph by A. Kempthorne, Victoria and Albert Museum, 2011).



Figure 2.5 Edmund de Waal. **Pots within circular metal channel** (2010). (Detail). Porcelain, thrown, turned and glazed. No sizes given. *Signs & Wonders*. Victoria and Albert Museum. (de Waal 2009a:63).





Figure 2.6 Edmund de Waal. **Pots within circular metal channel** (2010). Porcelain, thrown, turned and glazed. No sizes given. *Signs & Wonders*. Victoria and Albert Museum. (Photograph by A. Kempthorne, Victoria and Albert Museum, 2011).

In order to view de Waal's installation from the best position, one has to stand and look up into the dome of the gallery which Graves (2009:10) describes as absurdly grand in the scale and proportions of its architecture. Below the dome a circular stairwell runs down to the ground floor which is six floors below. The vessels housed within the metal channel appear to be very small in the context of such a large space, but one is able to observe their elegance and simplicity (Graves 2009:10). Graves (2009:10) comments that this work is "a magisterial achievement on a scale surpassing anything he [de Waal] has previously undertaken ... [and] in many ways, *Signs & Wonders* – as it is aptly entitled – shows that familiar lightness of touch. Indeed, it appears to float away from the building with the illusion of weightlessness".

De Waal first began viewing ceramics at the Victoria and Albert (V&A) Museum when he was a boy. He explained how he would walk from gallery



to gallery viewing each collection, knowing that his destination would be gallery 141 where the Chinese ceramics were housed. He attempted to compare pots from different galleries and has “memories of the strangeness of seeing through one great glass case into another, the tops of a row of bottles cresting a line of dishes, a layering of one series of forms or colours onto another” (de Waal 2009a:20). He came to the realization that the ceramics were in fact part of the architecture itself. de Waal (2009a:26) concluded that “the museum is embedded in ceramics”.

All the pots in the installation *Signs & Wonders* would be made by de Waal. He (2009a:26) states that:

Many of the pots that I've made [for this installation] are forms that I've never made before. I'd look at some part of the collection hard and then look away and then make the after-image. It was a kind of distillation. What is left of that garniture of seven Sèvres jars when you have looked away? The sense of formality and poise around the fulcrum of a central vessel, the feeling of variations of colour being carefully played out. And so I'd make a garniture, and then another different one, paring down a baroque piece of Sèvres into a few changes of angle and volume. The memory of objects means that Henry Cole's tea set<sup>24</sup> [Figure 2.7] is up there somewhere in close contact with the Bauhaus at last [Figures 2.8 & 2.9].

Glenn Adamson (2009a:38), in discussing the installation entitled *Signs & Wonders*, observes that the “notional functions of containment and covering dissolve in a series of rhythmic volumes. And further along, there is a batch of rectilinear pots, evocative of that modernist crockery from the Bauhaus that was designed to lock together into stable grids, ideal for shipping as well as storage”.

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<sup>24</sup> Sir Henry Cole (1808-82) was the Administrator, working together with Prince Albert, responsible for arranging the *Great Exhibition* of 1851, held in Hyde Park in London. There were nearly 14 000 exhibitors (7381 British and 6556 foreign with over 100 000 exhibits) (*Oxford Dictionary of Art* 1994:171).



Figure 2.7 Sir Henry Cole. **Tea Service** (1846). Earthenware. No sizes given. Minton's factory, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire. (de Waal 2009a:49).



Figure 2.8 Edmund de Waal. **Pots within circular metal channel** (2010). Porcelain, thrown, turned and glazed. No sizes given. *Signs & Wonders*. Victoria and Albert Museum. (de Waal 2009a:68).



Figure 2.9 Edmund de Waal. **Pots within circular metal channel** (2010). Porcelain, thrown, turned and glazed. No sizes given. *Signs & Wonders*. Victoria and Albert Museum. (de Waal 2009a:67).

de Waal (2009a:26) also responded to the after image of the stacked kiln wasters (Figure 2.10) by placing haphazard stacks of small bowls onto the metal channel. These wasters occur from firing difficulties within the kiln. This one is from the Delft factory in Holland which occurred during 1640-60.



Figure 2.10 **Kiln waster** (1640-60). Tin glazed earthenware with fragments of fire-resistant clay. No size given. Delft. (Postcard Victoria and Albert Museum. Purchased by A. Kempthorne at Victoria and Albert Museum, 2009).

This resulted from a desire that he had harboured as a child to get into the cabinets of Chinese bowls at the Victoria and Albert Museum, stack them and observe how the shadows fell (Figures 2.11 and 2.12).



Figure 2.11 Edmund de Waal. **Pots within circular metal channel** (2010). Porcelain, thrown, turned and glazed. No sizes given. *Signs & Wonders*. Victoria and Albert Museum. (de Waal 2009a:80).



Figure 2.12 Edmund de Waal. **Pots within circular metal channel** (2010). Porcelain, thrown, turned and glazed. No sizes given. *Signs & Wonders*. Victoria and Albert Museum. (de Waal 2009a:85).

Glenn Adamson<sup>25</sup> compares this aspect of de Waal's work with elements in the work of Constantin Brancusi<sup>26</sup>, who placed simple forms on top of each other to create a column. Adamson (2009:38) states that "Brancusi departed from the stable hierarchical relation of work to plinth, and inaugurated a new and more open sculptural situation". This, Adamson (2009:38) continues, created a new way for sculptors to use their material. Donald Judd<sup>27</sup> was an important influence on de Waal's stacked works. Adamson (2009:40) states that "If Brancusi did away with the neutral plinth, Judd took away the floor beneath as well" (Figure 2.13).



Figure 2.13 Donald Judd. **Untitled** (1980). Steel, aluminium and perspex. 229 x 1016 x 787 mm. Tate Gallery, London. Purchased 1980. (Adamson 2009:41).

Adamson (2009:40) explains that since a Judd stack is arranged in a linear fashion it seems that it may only be a part within an infinite series, whereas de Waal's use of a red metal circle to hold the pots [and stacks] provides the

<sup>25</sup> Glenn Adamson is Head of Graduate Studies and Deputy Head of Research at the Victoria and Albert Museum. He is the co-editor of the *Journal of Modern Craft*, and author of *Thinking Through Craft* (V&A/Berg, 2007) and *The Craft Reader* (Berg, 2010) (Adamson 2009:46).

<sup>26</sup> Constantin Brancusi (1876-1957) was a "Romanian sculptor, active mainly in Paris, one of the most revered and influential of 20<sup>th</sup> century artists" (*Oxford Dictionary of Art* 1994:71).

<sup>27</sup> Donald Judd (1928-1994) was an "American sculptor, one of the most prominent of Minimalist artists. His work consisted characteristically of stainless steel or painted iron boxes or similar simple forms set side by side without emotional overtones" (*Oxford Dictionary of Art* 1994:260).

viewer with an image of uninterrupted flow. “Instead of a quick take, cleanly demarcated at each edge, we are given a series without end – an appropriate image to anchor the V&A’s [Victoria and Albert’s] ceramic collection, the most comprehensive of its kind” ( Adamson 2009:40).

Adamson (2009:42) states that “His [de Waal’s] remaking of these ‘greatest hits’ of the past is not a narrowly conceived act of replication, nor is it a postmodernist game of cut-and-paste. It involves transformation”. de Waal has kept the colour range of his pots monochromatic, with a slight shift of tone within a narrow range of hues. In addition, there is no surface decoration, which is one of the most important aspects of historical porcelain (Adamson 2009:42). These strategies demonstrate how creatively de Waal has transformed and subverted the original work.

Adamson (2009:44) summed up his evaluation of *Signs & Wonders* when he argues that “Through this work, de Waal simultaneously signals his wonder at the works of many centuries and cultures represented in the V&A [Victoria and Albert] collection, and his desire to stand proud within that grand assemblage”.

De Waal has subverted traditional porcelain through a process of working with after images of pots from the past, drawing on the long history of these vessels, interpreting them and making them his own. The skilful combination of classical Chinese and modernist Bauhaus porcelain forms, in conjunction with an intentional reference to the history of sculpture, result in a unique presentation of porcelain pots.

De Waal (2009a:46) encapsulates the core value of *Signs & Wonders* as follows:

Someday maybe soon, a young potter will look up at these pots, this collection of one man's personal vision in ceramics. She will squint her eyes, trying to make out a certain shape or juxtaposition of forms. After reading this essay, and the other writings in this book, perhaps she'll head over to the National Art Library and read up on Donald Judd and Henry Cole. Then, in her own unpredictable way, she will make sense of it all. She'll take what she wants of this project and leave the rest, and maybe soon after that, her work will even be acquired by this museum. At that point *Signs & Wonders* will have come full circle.

## SECTION 2 – PAUL SCOTT (1953)

Paul Scott<sup>28</sup> is a teacher, curator, author and artist. His contemporary use of traditional blue and white imagery makes reference to, and subverts, the meaning of porcelain through the use of imagery in commenting on contemporary events. This strategy is apparent in **Free at last** (1990) (Figure 2.14) in which he uses an image of President Nelson Mandela on the form.



Figure 2.14 Paul Scott. **Free at last** (1990). Transparent glaze, inglaze screen printed decals on porcelain. 25 cm. (Hamer & Hamer 2004:198).

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<sup>28</sup>Paul Scott (1953) is a Professor of Ceramic Art at the Oslo National Academy of the Arts (KHiO) Norway, Digital Research Fellow at Manchester Institute for Research and Innovation in Art and Design. (Available at WWW: <http://ofa.fas.harvard.edu/cal/details.phd>. Accessed 14 October 2013).

He is also a curator and author of two widely-read books, *Ceramics and Print* (A&C Black, 1994) and *Painted Clay, Graphic Arts and the Ceramic Surface* (A&C Black and Watson Guptill, 2000). He recently completed a PhD fellowship from Manchester Institute for Research and Innovation in Art and Design, Manchester Metropolitan University, England (Gogarty 2009:51).



Blue and white<sup>29</sup> Chinese porcelain was the most widely produced and distributed object of world commerce before the Industrial Revolution. With its distribution into Europe, European potters industrialized the process by creating blue and white transfers<sup>30</sup> which became the standard for industrial produced tableware. Scott's academic research focuses on the history of blue and white ceramic decoration in Britain, Scandinavia, Eastern Europe and elsewhere (Gogarty 2009:51).

Scott uses different methods of applying transfers to ceramic plates or vessels, some of which are industrial mass produced products. Scott (in Hamer & Hamer 2004:198) explains "I paint, draw and print using paper and ink, porcelain and paper porcelain, underglaze colours, metal oxides and glazes. I use porcelain because its whiteness, unlike other clay bodies, does not muddy ceramic pigments but brings out their bright and sometimes very intense colours"

At first Scott used photocopy, collage, drawing and screen-printing to create imitative patterns which contained, for example, nuclear power plants amongst the pastoral scenes. He discovered that the use of the digital image allowed all processes to be saved independently, which enabled retrospective reworking (Gogarty 2009:52). Scott began to manipulate images digitally through the use of a screen printed decal that incorporates a cobalt oxide<sup>31</sup>, which is suspended in the print base (Figure 2.15). These images are then applied to glazed surfaces and fired to temperatures appropriate to the substrate material (Gogarty 2009:52).

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<sup>29</sup> Blue and white refers to a ceramic object that has been decorated with blue (cobalt oxide) imagery painted directly onto the object, or in the form of a transfer that has been applied to the surface of the object. The object is usually made from a clay body that is white. Hence the name 'blue and white'.

<sup>30</sup> A transfer is used to carry an image from an original design to the surface of a ceramic work. The desired image is painted or printed with oil-based ceramic inks onto the gummed side of decal paper. When dry the image is covered by a water resistant layer. By soaking the image in water the transfer lifts from the gummed side of the decal paper and can be transferred to the ceramic object.

<sup>31</sup> Cobalt oxide is a general name for a number of compounds of cobalt and oxygen which have been used as blue stains for potting for nearly two thousand years" (Hamer & Hamer 2004:69). It is a very powerful colourant and only a small amount is needed to stain a glaze.

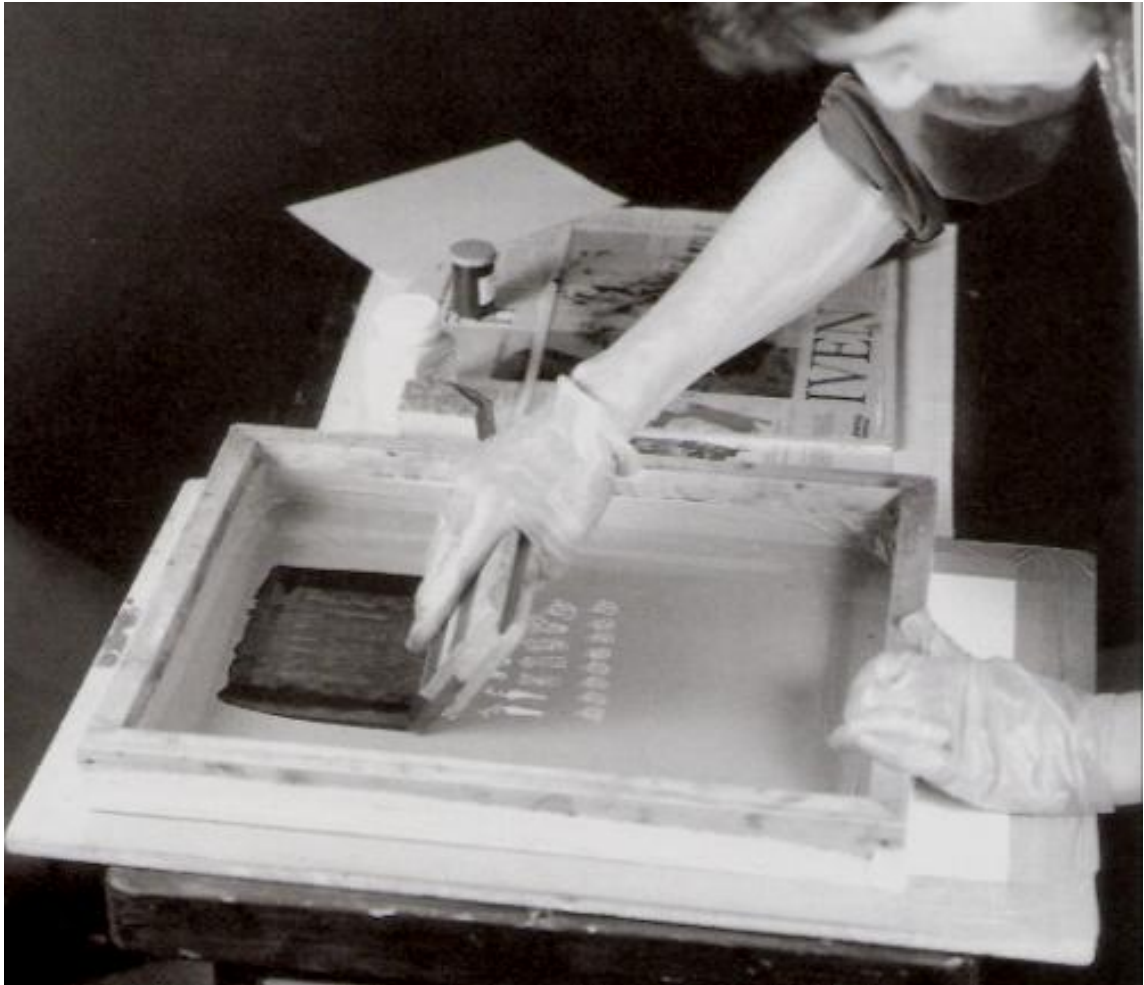


Figure 2.15      Printing onto decal paper, pulling squeegee across silk screen. (Scott 1994:96).

Cobalt, as with other oxides such as copper, has a way of bleeding into the underlying glaze; this has the effect of creating edges that are subtly blended. It is therefore impossible to keep a hard edge (Hamer & Hamer 2004:70). Scott (2010:18) described the process when he said “Crisp blue dot and line were blurred in the kiln to soft cobalt blues under transparent glaze on white porcellaneous bodies”. Blue and white ware has proved so popular because the softened edges allow the print to relate to a painted edge (Gogarty 2009:52). Andy Christian confirms this in the *Ceramic Review* (2010:45) when he states that “The tendency of cobalt to bleed helps invoke that filleted mysticism of nature’s idyll that he [Scott] so effectively undermines. It stirs memories of the painting of Corot and Claude”.

As shown in Figure 2.16 Scott has used the comforting blue and white plate, which portrays a cloistered vision of the English countryside showing the Sellafield Nuclear Power Station in Cumbria, England. Scott has manipulated it to give it his own political stance. The subversion in Scott's work is clearly seen. Andy Christian (2010:42) states:

Scott chooses his canvas carefully. The imagery of ruralism sits there on the blue and white plates and, just like the Lake District itself, it blanks out the low flying jets, the slag heaps, the threat of nuclear fallout and the dangers of foot and mouth disease. To this Scott either adds imagery or erases parts of it. These acute alterations and additions are the backbone of his work.

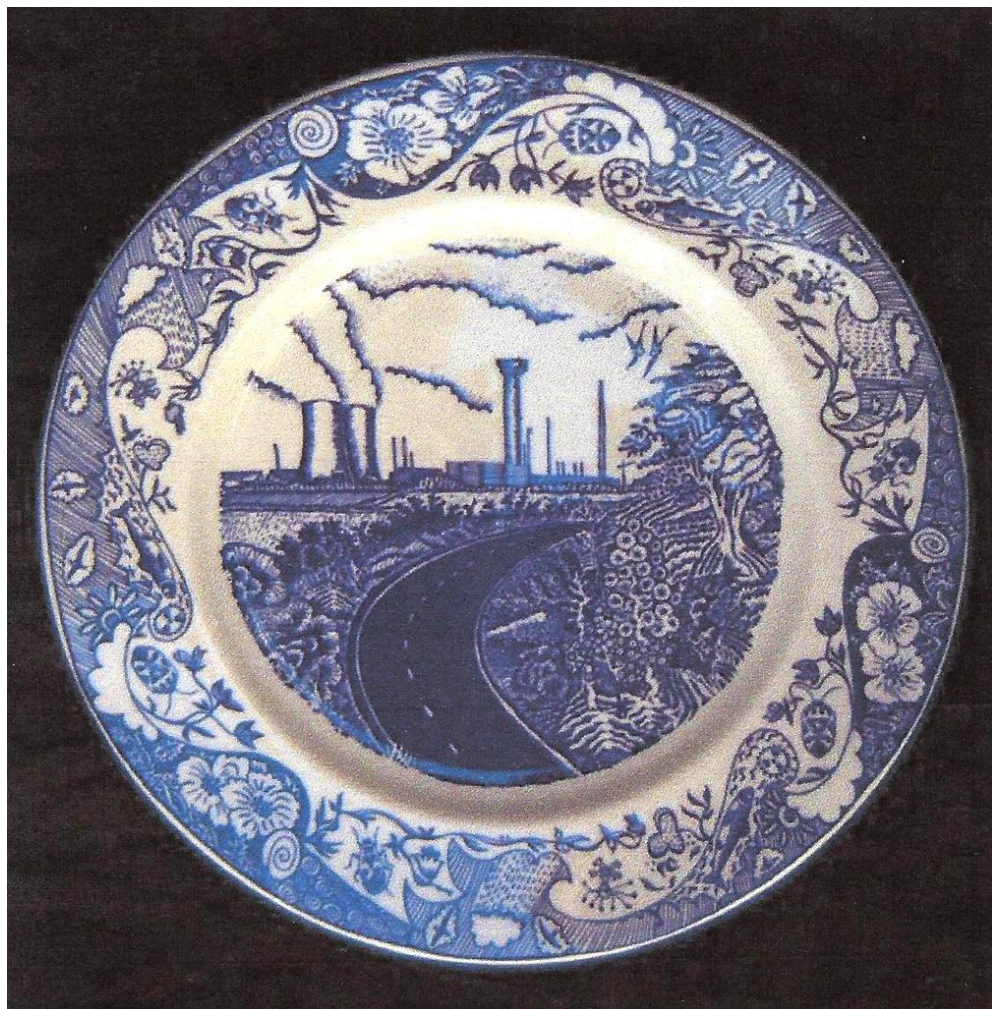


Figure 2.16 Paul Scott. **Sellafield from the Beckermat Road** (1997). In-glaze decal on bone china plate. 27cm diameter. The Scott collection Cumbrian Blue(s). (Scott 2010:141).



Dr. Stephanie Brown writing in *Keramik Magazine* (in Scott 2010:126), states that “He [Scott] collaged engraved imagery from 19<sup>th</sup> century plates with digitally-altered photographs, screen-printing those onto bought plates to produce his *Cumbrian Blue(s)* ‘commerative’ ware” which is part of Scott’s PhD fellowship.

In discussing these works Scott (2010:18) explains that:

To me these printed confections were beautiful – delicate, melted blue line and texture floating in glassy film as well as the sensuous, material attraction, I also saw a rich seam of form and symbolism that had the potential to be mined, to develop a contemporary language capable of dealing with issues affecting the existent landscape in its widest sense.

Scott (2010:18) states that his initial interest lay in the Spode Italian Blue pattern (Figure 2.17), which was first introduced to England in 1816 and had been in continuous production until the Spode factory was closed in 2008.



Figure 2.17 Spode. **Italian** (n.d). Transparent glaze, inglaze screen printed decals on porcelain. No size given. Collection of A. Kempthorne. (Photograph by A. Kempthorne 2013).

Scott (2010:18) describes the Spode Italian blue pattern as a “typical pastoral confection<sup>32</sup> of the time”, apparently created by a travelling Northern European artist who made sketches of scenes as he travelled through Italy. On his return the drawings were combined into a landscape image, which Spode later used and chose to call the Italian Pattern.

Amy Gogarty (2009:51) states that Scott constructs highly artificial, theatrical views and artefacts, compounding a miscellany of elements. Scott refers to this process as ‘confecting’ Gogarty (2009:51) expounds on this when she notes that:

Mixing vintage and modern ceramic dinnerware with printed designs and hand-built sculptural elements, Scott’s ‘confecting’ landscapes and contemporary vignettes<sup>33</sup> generate meanings based on what he calls a ‘blue and white semiotic’<sup>34</sup>.

Scott (in Gogarty 2009:52) describes the way he alters the image as ‘cultural wallpaper’, which explains the ubiquitous, if unacknowledged, presence of the ceramic transfers he creates. These transfers were used to “impart detailed imagery onto everyday ceramic objects, contributing to domestic visual environments in which these images circulated as powerful, if subliminal, markers of cultural values and norms” (Gogarty 2009:52).

In commenting on the exhibition of *Cumbrian Blues* Gogarty (2009:51) states that:

... it embodies themes that have preoccupied him for some time. These include theories of picturesque landscape painting; the remediation and circulation in print form of such painting; domestic ceramic objects printed with landscape imagery and a host of

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<sup>32</sup> Paul Scott (2010:25) defines ‘confection’ in his thesis as “The act of creating something by compounding or mixing a variety of components”.

<sup>33</sup> Vignette is the “term now most commonly applied to an illustration or design (especially a photograph that fades into the space around it without a definite border” (*The Oxford Dictionary of Art* 1994:522).

<sup>34</sup> Semiotic is the “study of signs and symbols in various fields” (*The Oxford Dictionary of Art* 1994:260).

contemporary issues concerning relationships between human civilization and the natural world.

As an example, the BNFL (British Nuclear Fuels Limited) plate, **BNFL in Cumbrian Blue** (Figure 2.18) includes in its border, symbols of radiation and poison and a char fish, one of the rarest fish species in Britain, only found in Windermere, Cumbria. The char fish was appropriated from a print on the side of a char dish used for serving the fish (Figure 2.19) in the Tullie House Museum in Cumbria, England (Gogarty in Scott 2010:140).



Figure 2.18 Paul Scott. **BNFL in Cumbrian Blue** (1999). In-glaze decal collage on bone china plate. 26cm diameter. (Scott 2010:139).



Figure 2.19 **Earthenware Char Dish** (19<sup>th</sup> century). Transfer printed decoration. 15cm diameter. Tullie House Museum and Art Gallery, Carlisle, Cumbria. (Scott 2010:141).

Brown (in Scott 2010:127) argues that that this approach is postmodernist in its use of appropriated, ready-made forms and imagery and in its engagement with kitsch. This is evident in the popular, nostalgic – driven interest in collecting Blue and White pottery. Brown (ibid) continues by noting that “Scott’s preoccupation with the visual coding of pastoral fantasies on tableware is inseparable from his interest in developing a visual language capable of dealing with the contemporary landscape and the issues which shape it”.

In 2003 Scott created **Cumbrian Blue(s), Three Gorges, After the Dam** (Figure 2.20) which was partly in response to Chinese porcelain objects in the Tullie House Museum. Scott’s intention was to commemorate and bring to the viewer’s attention environmental issues relating to the damming of the Yangtze River at Three Gorges in China.





Figure 2.20 Paul Scott. **Scott's Cumbrian Blue(s), Three Gorges, After the Dam** (2003). In-glaze decal collage on stoneware platter, with porcelain slip, in the collection of Tullie House Museum and Art Gallery, Carlisle, Cumbria England. (Scott 2010:175).

Art historian and author, Dr Jorunn Veiteberg<sup>35</sup> (in Scott 2010:174), in discussing the work, observes that:

It is the willow pattern in particular that Paul Scott cites.... it expresses European admiration motifs and stories. It's typical features include a willow tree, a teahouse and a pair of birds. These are all found in the dish by Paul Scott. The widespread popularity of this motif means that many people will associate it with China and something old and perhaps valuable. However only a little of the motif is visible; most of it has been replaced by blue lines that create the illusion of water, and Three Gorges, which is referred to in the title, is the name of the area in China where they are now building a gigantic artificial lake by damming the Yangtze River...

<sup>35</sup> Dr Jorunn Veiteberg is the Professor of Curatorial Studies and Craft Curator at the University of Bergen, Norway.



According to Veiteberg (in Scott 2010:176) the dam was supposed to create economic growth and development, but this has not been the case. The landscape has been affected as the water level has risen by 185 metres and more than 1.3 million Chinese have had to abandon their homes. The social and cultural consequences that this has caused are as big as the changes to the natural environment.

Other examples of Scott's social commentary were made when he was requested to produce work to commemorate the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the adoption by the British Parliament of the 'Act for the Abolition of the Slave Trade (Origination)'. His response was to use the willow pattern on a tea set.

The **Cockle Pickers Willow Tea Service** (Figures 2.21 and 2.22) is the result of Scott's historical, contextual and artistic research. The idea underpinning this work came about as he became aware of the close links between tea and coffee consumption in the United Kingdom and the slave trade. Scott (2010:182) states that "The quintessentially English 'cup of tea' and tea service are inextricably linked with Britain's development of the slave trade. Bowls made in Staffordshire held slave produced sugar from the Caribbean, making palatable the exotic bitter infusion of tea from China and India".



Figure 2.21

Paul Scott. **Scott's Cumbrian Blue(s), Cockle Pickers Willow Tea Service** (2007). In-glaze decal collage on Royal Worcester bone china teapot, sugar bowl and jug, Royal Copenhagen plates and saucer, handbuilt porcelain tea caddy by Jane Smith and late 18<sup>th</sup> century pearlware cup, with gold lustre. (Photograph by A. Kempthorne, Victoria and Albert Museum, 2009).



Figure 2.22 Paul Scott. **Scott's Cumbrian Blue(s), Cockle Pickers Willow Tea Service** (2007). (Detail of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century pearlware cup, with gold lustre). (Photograph by A. Kempthorne, Victoria and Albert Museum, 2009).

One of the points of reference in Scott's work is the example set by 18<sup>th</sup> century industrial potter, Josiah Wedgwood in 1787, when he began a campaign in Britain to abolish the slave trade. He began production of what was to become a series of anti-slavery ceramics. Jasper-ware cameos featured the image of a kneeling black male slave in chains surrounded by, the legend: *Am I not a Man and a Brother* (Figure 2.23)<sup>36</sup>.

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<sup>36</sup> A black basalt seal was originally intended for limited circulation among the Committee's members, but Wedgwood went on to produce thousands of black and white jasper cameos – they became very fashionable. The image became iconic, moving from moulded ceramic to woodcut and engraving – reproduced on paper as well as on ceramic. Variations were extensively used on tableware and tea services by different manufacturers. Top right - wood cut after Hackwood design, bottom – adaptation of Hackwood's design c. 1830. Detail of print on drabware cup usually juxtaposed with the legend – *Am I not a Woman and a Sister* (Scott 2010:179).



Figure 2.23 Josiah Wedgwood. **Cameo** (c.1787). (Detail). Designed by William Hackwood of the London Committee of the Society of the Abolition of the Slave Trade. (Scott 2010:179).

Scott claims (2010:182) that despite the abolition of the slave-trade, slavery exists in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Scott (2010:182) states that it almost always involves illegal immigrants; “On February 5, 2004 twenty-one of these contemporary slaves, Chinese cockle pickers, far from their homes, were drowned in Morecambe Bay, so close to Cumbria and our homes”. Scott (2010:182) continues:

Many of those killed in Morecambe Bay originated from the Fujian Province of China which is known for its production of Oolong tea. A tea service therefore seemed a very appropriate form to create a contemporary comment on the legacy of Britain’s Abolition of the Slave Trade in 1807.

The symbolism in the tea service is multi-faceted in its form, image, material and colour base. A few of the semiotic images include cockle shells in the border, whilst some of the geometric borders have been replaced with images of African slaves taken from engravings in Thomas Clarkson’s book *History of*

*the Abolition of the Slave Trade* (1808). On the inside of the sugar bowl and other items, a small icon of the kneeling slave has been adapted from the print on an 1830 Drab-ware cup and saucer. Swallows are a symbol for sailors and reference a safe return. Ironically these slaves never saw their homes again (Scott 2010:182).

The tea set includes Royal Worcester bone china, Royal Copenhagen porcelain (Denmark was also involved in the slave trade), a tea-caddy by Jane Smith, and a pearl-ware cup from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century which was probably made when African slavery was at its height. The set consists of blue prints which are framed with gold rims. It was thought, during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, that colours were associated with three social divisions, that is gold for nobles, red for freemen and blue for slaves (Scott 2010:183).

Scott (2010:183) concludes that “This contemporary Willow reminds us that interwoven in the richness of our everyday lives are the legacies of our ancestor’s enthusiastic embrace of the slave trade and that slavery is still with us but in a less obvious guise”.

The **Cockle Pickers Willow Tea Set** builds on the already confected Willow in **Three Gorges, After the Dam** and it expresses how image and pattern can work to re-interpret the historical.

Scott’s commitment to the use of imagery is acknowledged, allowing the work’s effectiveness to carry traces of the past and to sustain contemporary inquiry. Scott admits to being fully aware of the work’s subversive power and uses this to full advantage when he adopts the visual style of this outmoded, discredited aesthetic to produce thoughtful and critical works (Scott in Gogarty 2009:52). He is also aware that “industrial ceramics are still used by many people as an art form having relevance to their lives” (Scott in Gogarty 2009:52).

To conclude, Scott (2010:216) states that “Blue and White is part of the cultural wallpaper in our minds – what *Cumbrian Blue(s)* do is play on its familiarity and widespread recognition to insert contemporary art into unexpected places”.

Here Scott uses semiotics to impart his meaning, whilst de Waal uses ceramics from the past to recreate a new way of viewing his pots. Both of these artists subvert traditional porcelain; they unearth the lost and neglected and create new ways of seeing in understanding the past and present.

### SECTION 3 – KATHARINE MORLING (1972)

Unlike de Waal and Scott, Katharine Morling<sup>37</sup> makes large life-size porcelain clay installations based on a direct translation of her drawings. Morling (in Fielding 2011:47) notes “I want people to feel they are standing inside my drawings and can make emotional connections with the objects”. Morling’s use of memory and well as story-telling becomes the source of the subversion when they are translated into large porcelain ceramic installations. Once porcelain is used in this way, it becomes subversive as this runs counter to the traditional exploration of delicacy in porcelain.

Morling claims that her work is an emotional response to a personal narrative. Morling has suffered from dyslexia since birth. She had a difficult childhood, with dyslexia causing her to have large gaps in her education. She eventually left school without a GCSE (General Certificate of Secondary Education) qualification. She then completed a Foundation course in art which led to a Ceramics degree from Falmouth College in Cornwall, England in 2003 (Morling in Fielding 2011:42).

The fact that she suffers from dyslexia has played a large part in Morling’s life. Morling confirmed this when I visited her in June 2011 in her Deptford studio in London. She confided that she felt extremely uncomfortable when she was asked to write anything. This resulted in her drawing a lot as a child, a practice which extended into adulthood. Morling (in Woolf 2010:1) explains “I spent lots of time drawing at the RCA [Royal College of Art] and I wanted to translate my sketches into three dimensions, to be inside them and walk around them. I’m a 3D person and these pieces mark the crossover between ceramics and sketches.”

Morling (in Blakeley 2013:1) expands on this when she said that “**Poison Pen** [Figure 2.24] was a direct reaction of my feeling about being dyslexic”. Morling states that she felt panicky when she had to deal with words. One of

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<sup>37</sup> Morling obtained a Master of Arts degree from the Royal College of Art in 2009.

the main artefacts in **Poison Pen** is the typewriter. This piece is one of the largest pieces that Morling has made and she found it technically quite challenging. She found that it was difficult to control the movement of the typewriter keys. Morling (in Blakeley 2013:2) continues by saying that “she was pleased with how the keys came out. The heat of the kiln had moved the keys just enough to create a sensation of how she feels as a dyslexic with words”. The keys lean erratically so that the letters move around as they do on a page. The letter ‘y’ is missing, punningly suggesting Morling’s avoidance of deep enquiry (Fielding 2011:47). Fielding (2011:47) states that Morling believed that this summed up her feelings.



Figure 2.24 Katharine Morling. **Poison Pen** (2010). Porcelain and black stain. 76cm wide. (Fielding 2011:47).

All Morling’s sculptures are made from unglazed porcelain clay. Each item is outlined in black stain, which gives the pieces a sense of having been drawn. Morling (in Fielding 2011:44) states that “People sometimes think they’re made of paper or icing, but they only have to touch them to recognise the ceramic-ness”.



She chooses everyday subjects that inhabit the domestic landscape such as furniture, vases of flowers, ladders, boxes and caskets, children's toys, keys or chains and padlocks (Fielding 2011:44). Fielding (2011:44) explains “all [objects] suggest human ownership and interaction, yet in Morling’s imaginary world the figure is notably absent. In this drama she is the invisible protagonist and these are the articles remembered from her past and present life”.

With reference to the work entitled **Plenty** (Figure 2.25) Morling (in Blakeley 2013:2) explains that as she made the piece, her first thoughts were that it was about money and friendship, although she admits that “Actually I have no idea what the piece is about. Some pieces reveal themselves to me many years later. I am still waiting to know about this one”.



Figure 2.25 Katharine Morling. **Plenty** (2010). Porcelain and black stain. No size given. (Photograph by A. Kempthorne in K. Morling’s studio, 2011).



Another installation made by Morling is entitled **A stitch in time** (Figure 2.26). These are sewing utensils which Morling made in response to a wicker basket that she had received as a child from her grandmother. Morling used this basket to store her sewing paraphernalia which led to many hours of making and creativity. (Blakeley 2013:2). One of the objects which make up this installation is a tape measure. Morling states (in Blakeley 2013:2) that the tape measure had created a very strong emotional reaction with the viewers who saw the work and those who bought it. Morling (in Blakeley 2013:1) continues:

I have my own personal reasons for creating measuring equipment, but this was something that chimed very strongly with many of those that bought one of the series of 100. I received many emails and letters about what this piece meant to them with responses ranging from a life of domesticity, to a seamstress, to one man who felt that 'this summoned up the measure of his life'. This is where I feel the story is opened by me and continues with the viewer.



Figure 2.26 Katharine Morling. **A stitch in time** (2010). Porcelain and black stain. No sizes given. (Woolf 2010:1).

Morling also creates pieces that consist of locks and chains, such as **Locked and Chained** (Figure 2.27) and **Slightly Open** (Figure 2.27a) which she explains are about secrets (Fielding 2011:47). (Morling in Blakely 2013:2) notes "Amidst 'this massive exposure of my life' certain secrets are never to

be revealed” This is powerfully evoked by boxes submerged in chains and locks.



Figure 2.27 Katharine Morling. **Locked and Chained** (n.d). Porcelain and black stain. No sizes given. (Blakeley 2013:3).

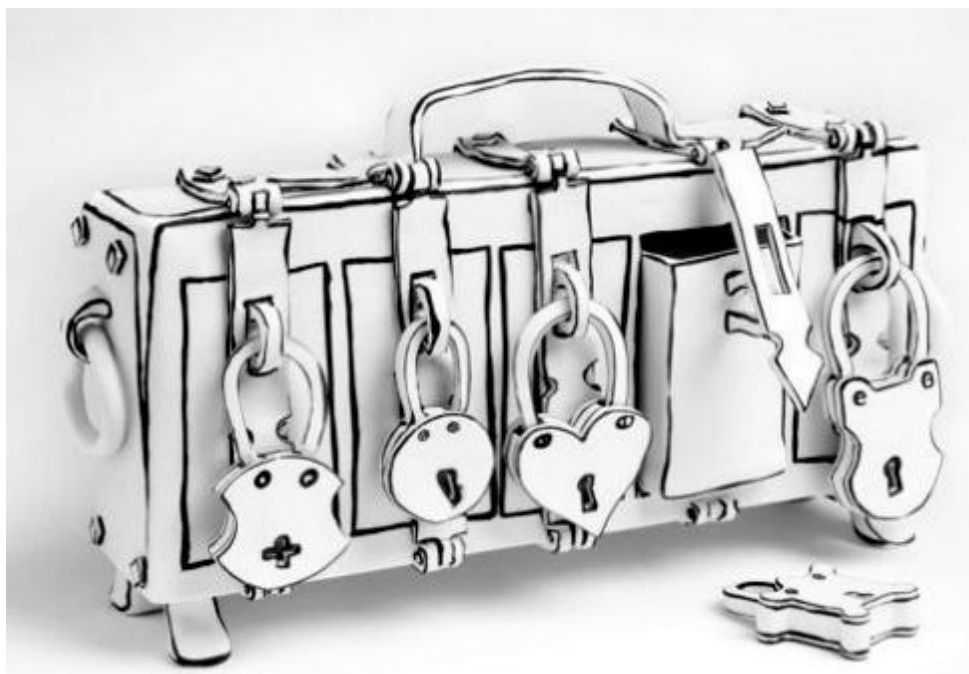


Figure 2.27a Katharine Morling. **Slightly Opened** (2010). Porcelain and black stain. 15cm high. (Fielding 2011:45).

Morling's reference to locked boxes or those that are slightly opened could be explained by the fact that most people have secrets that they never reveal to others. Morling is using the locked boxes as a metaphor about the human condition. By subverting the format of a box that is usually only locked by one lock, Morling submerges the box in locks, thus emphasising her point of view.

In a series entitled *Containers and Vessels* Morling (in Blakeley 2013:1) explains that containers and vessels are not necessarily used to contain food and water alone; "For me, they are containing emotions. The bag is a great place for my baggage". **Everyday Exploration** (Figure 2.28), for example, contains all the measuring equipment for measuring and understanding life (Blakeley 2013:7). Morling finds that however many devices she places in her handbag, some situation seem to be immeasurable (in Blakeley 2013:7).



Figure 2.28 Katharine Morling. **Everyday Exploration** (n.d). Porcelain and black stain. No sizes given. (Blakeley 2013:7).

Fielding (2011:47) states that Morling "as with some other sculptors, is not particularly concerned with art history which she felt could be a terrible trap.

She questioned why should one be bound by ceramic history? Material has no boundaries". Morling subverts traditional porcelain through the creation of life size 'three dimensional' sketches that aim to bring dreamscapes to life (Fielding 2011:47).

My visit to Morling's studio exceeded my expectations. I was surprised at how large the works were, especially from a technical point of view. I was drawn into the work, and felt compelled to touch the typewriter keys, or use one of the keys to unlock a lock. The work is executed with such precision and exactness that it is literally like walking into one of her drawings.

Morling's work represents a personal emotional journey which she remembers from her past and present life. These memories are translated into large porcelain ceramic installations and when porcelain is used in this way, it becomes subversive as this contradicts the traditional delicate nature of porcelain.

Morling, unlike de Waal and Scott, uses personal memory from her past and the present as a tool to create her installations. Morling's subversion lies in the use of the material and also in the way that she relates her personal feelings through her work which have resonance with the viewer.

## SECTION 4 – RACHEL KNEEBONE (1973)

Rachel Kneebone (in Elliot 2010:53) states: “Porcelain is only for the brave. Drawing is a starting point... it’s like taking a line for a dance”.

Rachel Kneebone<sup>38</sup> works in traditional white porcelain, creating complex sculptures that have a baroque exuberance, combined with a darkly seductive eroticism (Martin 2009:24).

Kneebone’s sculpture installation entitled *Lamentations* (2010) will be discussed in the context of her subversion of traditional porcelain. The title is taken from a book in the Old Testament, ‘The Lamentations of Jeremiah’. The book consists of a series of verses or songs in which the prophet writes despondently about the causes and effects of the Babylonian defeat of Judah, the destruction of Jerusalem (including the Temple of Solomon) and the exile of the Jews (Elliott 2010:46).

*Lamentations* consists of a series of six large freestanding works, entitled **Shields** based on subject matter relating to themes of death, loss and grief. Elliott (2010:46) explains: “Here Jerusalem is likened to a once-beautiful but now ravaged woman who is punished by a vengeful god who gorges on the transgressions of his people”. Elliott (2010:47) notes that “Throughout the series of *Lamentations*, Kneebone approaches loss as if it were an intimate friend, seeking to give it form the better by which to know it: ‘neither masculine or feminine’”.

In the work entitled **As grave as the imagined as frivolous as the external** (2010), Kneebone quotes Maurice Blanchot<sup>39</sup> by way of a contradictory introduction to the embodiment of grief. On writing about death Blanchot (in Elliott 2010:47) argues that death “had to depend upon the paradox that death

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<sup>38</sup> Kneebone obtained her MA degree at the Royal College of Art, London in 2004.

<sup>39</sup> Maurice Blanchot (1907-2003) was a French writer, philosopher, and literary theorist. His work had a strong influence on post-structuralist philosophers such as Jacques Derrida. (Available at WWW: [http://www.egs.edu/library/maurice\\_blanchot/biography/](http://www.egs.edu/library/maurice_blanchot/biography/). Accessed 31 October 2013).

defined the space within which literature was made and read". Blanchot was writing in Paris during World War II where it was possible to observe the death of others, but not as easy to accept one's own death. The horror of the war meant that the way in which the world was viewed had changed (Elliott 2010:47). Kneebone's sculptures reflect today's world, about which Elliott (2010:47) states "the world that faces us today is no better.... The weight of misery, of loss, has not disappeared; it has just shifted somewhere else".

**As grave as the imagined as frivolous as the external** (Figure 2.29) consists of two figures that appear to have fallen over backwards and lie paralysed. Under them is a tangled mountain of body parts which define a chasm, a pit, or even a grave, on the edge of which the two figures teeter precariously (Elliott 2010:48).



Figure 2.29 Rachel Kneebone. **As grave as the imagined as frivolous as the eternal** (2010). Porcelain. 52 x 58 x 58 cm. (Elliott 2010:10).



Elliott (2010:48) explains that:

.... while she [Kneebone] seeks to suggest 'a soft rather than a hideous death', she does not want to allow the beauty of the porcelain or the delicacy of its modelling to offer the possibility of 'comfort or redemption through the transference of art'. She looks for no less than the complete desolation of a new and terrible form of beauty.

A detail of the work (Figure 2.30) shows its complex structure.



Figure 2.30 Rachel Kneebone. **As grave as the imagined as frivolous as the eternal** (2010). (Detail). Porcelain. 52 x 58 x 58cm. (Elliott 2010:9).

The subversive nature of Kneebone's work is revealed in the way that she handles the porcelain. Although Kneebone models the porcelain in a soft and delicate manner, this does not detract from her subject matter. Here the viewer is confronted by death, but death in the extreme. The visceral nature of her depiction leaves the viewer with an uneasy feeling.

In order to achieve these sculptures, Kneebone uses the process of drawing to generate ideas; she makes quick sketches using simple lines so that the form can begin to emerge. In discussing this process Elliott (2010:53) notes that:

The sparseness of such a way of working reminds me of Rodin's late drawings which are also exclusively of the body, yet the method by which they are made is different. For Rodin drawing became a kind of automatism, his eyes fixed on the movements of the model as his hand rapidly froze different moments. Kneebone works in a more analytical way, rearranging body parts within an imaginary but anatomically convincing structure, yet to do this she has first to work from life.

**I no longer understand at all why I am saying all this to you as if it were absolutely essential to say it** (Figure 2.31) is an example of one of Kneebone's line drawings.



Figure 2.31 Rachel Kneebone. **I no longer understand at all why I am saying all this to you as if it were absolutely essential to say it** (2010). (Detail). Drawing on paper. No size given. (Elliott 2010:71).



The detailed drawing mirrors the forms of the porcelain sculpture. Elliott (2010:54) describes Kneebone's working method:

Kneebone, however, exploits the 'difficulty' of clay as an integral part of her final work. The hard paste porcelain that she uses is particularly tricky in that it has to be worked extremely quickly, allowing little time for modifications; no armature is used and the modelled material has to support its own weight; this is further complicated by the fact that when it is fired its mass can shrink by up to 20 per cent as moisture is driven out and a chemical exchange between body and glaze takes place. As a result, according to the complexity of its structure or the thickness of its material, it can crack or implode. The whole process is subject to chance.

In **The Decent** (Figures 2.32, 2.33, 2.34 & 2.35) Kneebone draws inspiration from Dante's vision of the three tiers of hell. The audience looks down, as if gazing into a well or pit.



Figure 2.32 Rachel Kneebone. **The Decent** (2010). Porcelain. Approximately 3.5m wide (to edge of viewing ledge) x 1.5m high. (Elliott 2010:75).



Figure 2.33 Rachel Kneebone. **The Decent** (2010). Porcelain. Approximately 3.5m wide (to edge of viewing ledge) x 1.5m high. (Elliott 2010:74).



Figure 2.34 Rachel Kneebone. **The Decent** (2010). (Detail). Porcelain. Approximately 3.5m wide (to edge of viewing ledge) x 1.5m high. (Elliott 2010:77).



Figure 2.35 Rachel Kneebone. **The Decent** (2010). (Detail). Porcelain. Approximately 3.5m wide (to edge of viewing ledge) x 1.5m high. (Elliott 2010:76).

Claudia Clare (2010:51) describes the work as a “nightmarish scene unfolding within, crawling with damned souls sliding into the abyss ... glistening white porcelain figures who perch on the edge like anxious nubile divers contemplating the deep, the fall to the middle tier, taut and broken, fragile-looking like chicken-bones, before tumbling, inexorably, into the depths”. This has been clearly illustrated by Kneebone in **The Decent** with hundreds of bodies and body parts falling into the deep chasm. Clare (2010:52) explains that Kneebone draws on the decorative history of porcelain and combines it with Rococo or High Renaissance styles in art, which “leaves the viewer with the unsettling feeling that this is the work of the love-child of Hieronymous Bosch<sup>40</sup> and Giovanni della Robbia<sup>41</sup>” (Clare 2010:52).

<sup>40</sup> Hieronymous Bosch (1450-1515) was an Early Netherlandish painter. Many of his works depict sin and human moral failings. (Available at WWW: <http://www.google.co.za/#q=hieronymous+bosch>. Accessed 30 October 2013).

<sup>41</sup> Giovanni della Robbia (1469-1529) was a Florentine sculptor. (Oxford Dictionary of Art. 1994:426).

Elizabeth Neilson (2010:136) sums up Kneebone's subversion of traditional porcelain when she notes that:

.... porcelain is part of her struggle and a necessary evil in her hands. Her work is about being human and trying to understand what that means in terms of material, language and emotion. The intensity of her sculptures is undeniable, their reference and resonances playful, deathly, terrifying and pleasurable; a morality play told in obsessive white porcelain detail.

Kneebone has developed a personal working method in which hard paste porcelain is intuitively modelled to create complex sculptures that reference literary sources, in the subversion of traditional porcelain. The subversion lies in the combination of a 'decorative' medium and a deeply disturbing subject that creates a powerful reaction from the audience.

## SECTION 5 – CLARE TWOMEY (1968)

Clare Twomey<sup>42</sup> is known for her large-scale, site-specific ceramic installations that she has exhibited around the world. Twomey deals with ideas of time and space as well as the way humans react within that space (Twomey 2007:132).

I met Clare Twomey at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London in June 2011<sup>43</sup> where she was the artist in residence. She explained to me that her work is created in a social and historical context. She always views the space first, takes into account the historical context and only then does she decide on which type of clay to use. She may, for example, choose porcelain, porcelain dust, bone china or earthenware clay. It depends on the nature of the project. She also explained that most of the installations only last for the duration of the exhibition. Some disintegrate whilst in other installations the viewer is encouraged to touch, or to take the objects home.

Twomey's installation entitled **Trophy** 2006 (Figures 2.36 & 2.37) is an example of a site specific installation. Twomey was invited by the Victoria and Albert Museum to exhibit her work. The museum wished to present ceramics in a unique way and to encourage interest in non-traditional approaches to the material. Twomey filled the museum with 4000 sculptures of Wedgwood Jasper bluebirds, which were placed on the plinths of busts, around the bases of statues and scattered across the floor. It was as if an enormous flock of birds had descended on the gallery (Honaor 2007:132).

The viewer was able to interact with the birds, play with them, pick them up and eventually take them home as a 'trophy', allowing the birds to reach a wider audience. The installation played with notions of value, permanence and the culture of collecting (Honaor 2007:132). Honaor (2007:132) states that "Through Twomey's ceramic installations, the gallery spaces are

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<sup>42</sup> Clare Twomey is an artist and writer and is Research Fellow at the University of Westminster, London.

<sup>43</sup> Informal interview with Clare Twomey in June 2011.



reinvented, and the way we behave in particular environments is subtly altered and reviewed". **Trophy** is subversive of consumer culture and the commodification of art in that Twomey engages with her audience and opens up new ways of reacting within a museum space in encouraging the audience to touch or even take a bird home.



Figure 2.36 Clare Twomey. **Trophy** (2006). 4000 units of Wedgwood Jasper Bluebirds 5 x 3 x 4 cm each. (Hanaor 2007:133).



Figure 2.37 Clare Twomey. **Trophy** (2006). 4000 units of Wedgwood Jasper Bluebirds 5 x 3 x 4 cm each. (Detail). (Photograph by A. Kempthorne, Victoria and Albert Museum, 2011).

**Consciousness/Conscience** (2001-2004) (Figure 2.38) comprises several thousand hollow cast bone china tiles laid out on the floor of the gallery space. This work was exhibited in Korea at the opening of the 1<sup>st</sup> World Ceramics Biennale (2001), The Crafts Council Gallery in London (2003) and the TATE Gallery in Liverpool (2004). The tiles are installed so that visitors cross the tiles in order to view other exhibitors' installations. By doing so they effectively destroy the floor. The floor tiles show the path that they have taken. Mark Currah (2003:1) explains that Twomey's intentions "are manifold but the most important in the context of this exhibition is to focus attention on the moment of the work's reception. To shift attention from the work itself to how the viewer responds to the work". This is conceptually linked to ideas of human interaction, social convention and appropriateness (Currah 2003:1).





Figure 2.38 Clare Twomey. **Consciousness/Conscience** (2001-2004). Royal Crown Derby bone china. 1400 x 400 x 2.5 cm. (Hanaor 2007:132).

Currah (2003:1) in describing the work and the working process said that “The work consists of hundreds of carefully made ceramic boxes. Twomey spent a large amount of time researching their material construction, dimensions, wall-thickness, ceramic type and firing time to get them to break exactly as she wants”. Twomey was able to get Royal Crown Derby to produce enough pieces for the floor to be completely re-laid a number of times during the shows.

Twomey (2008:46) explains the conceptual intention of the work as follows:

**Consciousness/Conscience** developed as a conceptual debate about human behaviour and how this could be tracked. The majority of my



installations are reliant on human interaction – physical or philosophical – to validate their intention. In **Consciousness/Conscience** the audience were invited to experience change and awareness of their physical impact on the gallery environment. Their action was destructive; entering the space involved treading on and crushing the thousands of bone china floor tiles produced by Royal Crown Derby (RCD).

Twomey's installation raises awareness of the conceptual content of the use of the materials in this work. By challenging the traditional way of viewing an installation and allowing the audience to participate by breaking the tiles underfoot, Twomey has managed to undermine the traditional and has subverted the notion of preciousness and permanence associated with porcelain.

Twomey and three other artists exhibited work at MIMA (Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art) in 2009. Twomey's installation entitled **Monument** (2009) (Figures 2.39, 2.40, 2.41) challenged traditional perceptions about clay practice and its relationship to the historic models of craft (Twomey 2009:1).

Twomey used broken tiles, plates, cups, jugs, mugs and other ceramic shards, some of which were porcelain, piled one on top of another. The installation had the appearance of shattered domestic objects assembled on a monumental scale. This followed Twomey's encounter with a 'pitcher pile'<sup>44</sup>, a vast heap of broken china at the Johnson Tiles factory in Stoke-on-Trent.

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<sup>44</sup> A pitcher pile is made up of objects that are less than perfect or have been damaged in some way during the manufacture. They are collected and ground down to be reused in the making of new tiles. (Available at WWW: [claretwomey.com/moment\\_info.html](http://claretwomey.com/moment_info.html) Accessed 31 October 2013).



Figure 2.39 Clare Twomey. **Monument** (2009). Waste from the British ceramic industry. No size given. (Twomey 2009:1).



Figure 2.40 Clare Twomey. **Monument** (2009). (Detail). Waste from the British ceramic industry. No size given. (Twomey 2009:1).



Figure 2.41 Clare Twomey. **Monument** (2009). (Detail). Waste from the British ceramic industry. No size given. (Twomey 2009:1).

Here Twomey places materiality at the heart of the work. This precarious, broken monument threatens to break further, collapsing in a landslide of broken china. The title of the work suggests a permanent structure; however its fragility, combined with the everyday nature of the broken objects, fills Twomey's installation with a sense of sadness which undermines the monumental structure. It has the effect of evoking an overwhelming sense of loss, of trauma. It could also be read as a reference to the global economic crisis and the related closure of a number of ceramic production companies in Europe.

**Monument** challenges traditional perceptions about clay practice. By subverting the way that ceramic objects are viewed, Twomey is questioning the historic model of craft and is recognising that change is inevitably at the expense of that which came before (Twomey 2009:1).

Twomey was working on a number of porcelain china clay flowers when I met her at the Victoria and Albert Museum. These had been exhibited at The Royal Academy of Art in London in an exhibition entitled *GSK Contemporary 2009 – Earth: Art of a Changing World*.

Twomey's exhibit **Specimen** (Figures 2.42, 2.43 & 2.44) was beautiful and yet discomforting in its intention. The unfired clay flowers are both natural and unnatural in appearance. Cumming (2009:1) states that "their scale, weight, material and colour are unfamiliar, but their beguiling quality and fragility are recognizable". It seemed that pale porcelain flowers had grown and spilled out over a mantelpiece with garlands that trailed across the parquet floor. They had gathered in the corners, had climbed walls and had blossomed in the glass-fronted bookcases (Cumming 2009:1).

Cumming (2009:1) suggests that the flowers were safe in the gallery as opposed to "Out in the wild, [where] they are gradually coming to dust with every passing footfall". Twomey has subverted the notion of preciousness and permanence associated with porcelain as these flowers are made from unfired clay.



Figure 2.42 Clare Twomey. **Specimen** (2009). (Detail). Unfired china clay. No sizes given. (Photograph by A. Kempthorne, Victoria and Albert Museum, 2011).





Figure 2.43 Clare Twomey. **Specimen** (2009). (Detail). Unfired china clay. No sizes given. (Photograph by A. Kempthorne, Victoria and Albert Museum, 2011).



Figure 2.44 Clare Twomey. **Specimen** (2009). (Detail of installation at The Royal Academy of Arts). Unfired china clay. No size given. (Cumming 2009:1).

In most of her installations Twomey has used porcelain objects that either disintegrate or disappear during the course of the exhibition. In doing so, she subverts the understanding of traditional porcelain.

Subversion, in the context of this research, is understood 'to overturn anything from the foundation'. Twomey and the other artists referred to in this research, have all revealed their abilities to subvert traditional porcelain. This contemporary subversion places ceramic practice within the realm of contemporary fine art.

The above discussion and evaluation of each of the selected artists has revealed a range of diverse strategies in the subversion of traditional porcelain, ranging from large scale, site specific, installations to the use of traditional tableware. This has provided a context for a discussion and evaluation of my art practice in Chapter Three.

## CHAPTER THREE

### *ENTWINED:*

#### THE SUBVERSION OF TRADITIONAL PORCELAIN IN MY ART PRACTICE

The purpose of this chapter is to interrogate and analyse the subversion of traditional porcelain in my art practice, submitted in partial compliance for the Master's Degree in Technology, in the form of an installation entitled *Entwined*.

When reflecting on the installation two quotes, referred to earlier in this research, come to mind. Octavio Paz (in Cooper 2000:314) notes that "The handmade object is a sign that expresses ... a mutually shared physical life" and Rachel Kneebone (in Elliot 2010:53) declares that "Porcelain is only for the brave".

Paz sees the handmade object as tangible and recognisable. The viewer is able, through the material used, to gain a sense of the palpable references that the artist intended. This idea was consciously applied in the making of this body of work.

Traditional porcelain materials and techniques have been used to create this installation. In expressing her belief that the use of porcelain was only for the brave, Kneebone is referring to porcelain as a difficult, contrary and unpredictable material. One is never certain what the end result will be. Doherty (2002:7) confirms this when he observes that "Certainly porcelain makes demands on the sensitivity and skill of the maker, and requires attention and care at every stage of production". Clarification of my working method, and the difficulties I had to overcome in producing this body of work, is presented in Appendix 1.

The conceptualisation and realisation of the installation developed over many months of research, reflection and experimentation with some of the artefacts



resulting in disaster and others in pure joy. New insights into the properties of porcelain, and in particular porcelain paper clay, were the outcome.

In my previous art practice, I reflected on the concept of social and political aspects of the various race groups in South Africa (Figure 3.1). An exhibition entitled *Hair Renaissance* (2000), held at the Market Theatre Gallery in Johannesburg, consisted of a series of black and white photographs that had as their central theme black women's hair care. The work explored issues surrounding the negation of black (female) identity and culture. Similar issues were dealt with in an exhibition entitled *Graphic Expressions* (2001) at The Art Place, Johannesburg.



Figure 3.1 Della Kempthorne. **Untitled** (1999) (left). Gelatine silver print. 405 x 310 mm. Della Kempthorne. **Plaits** (2001) (right). Drypoint. 480 x 383 mm. (Photograph by A. Kempthorne, 2014).

My ceramic work (Figure 3.2), however, has over the years consisted of wheel thrown porcelain domestic items. I have learnt a great deal with regard to porcelain clay. The study and collection of china, mainly from Britain, has been ongoing throughout my life.



Figure 3.2 Della Kempthorne. **Untitled** (2006). Porcelain. (Photograph by A. Kempthorne, 2014).

I was brought up in an English speaking South African home. I am a first generation South African. My mother and grandparents were British. This resulted in a very traditional English upbringing. At tea time or dinner time, my mother would lay the table conventionally and the whole family would gather and enjoy a meal together. This tradition was passed down to me.

The research is premised on the concept of the subversion of traditional porcelain in art practice. In order to discover a personal method of subverting traditional porcelain, I explored different ways in which traditional porcelain could be subverted, such as irony (Paul Scott) or altering the meaning of a work (Edmund de Waal).

I began to establish methods by which to subvert traditional porcelain through drawing on personal experience. Knitting, which I learned from my mother and grandmother, is a repetitive technique and has been part of my life since childhood. I explored how I could combine the two mediums, wool/knitting

and porcelain. From experience I knew that porcelain warped<sup>45</sup> very easily and that paper clay<sup>46</sup> had strength<sup>47</sup>. Paper clay could be moulded very thinly without cracking; my experimentation began tentatively with a ball of string, which I dipped into porcelain paper clay for a short period, dried, and then fired to vitrification (Figure 3.3). The end result was successful.



Figure 3.3 Della Kempthorne. **Ball of string** (2009). Fired porcelain paper clay. (Photograph by A. Kempthorne 2009).

This led to experimentation with the knitting of domestic crockery, such as plates, cups, saucers and bowls which were dipped into porcelain paper clay and fired. My intention was to create all of the items for a full place setting.

The fragility of the knitted artefacts led me to the conceptualisation of an installation of domestic objects that was a celebration of unique and special women in my life who have been close to me. Each woman is represented by a place setting (Figure 3.4). The installation is entitled *Entwined*<sup>48</sup> in order to reflect both the interwoven nature of the women's lives, and the use of the

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<sup>45</sup> "Clay has a memory!" ...memory is a great analogy for the shrinkage that occurs when clay dries and the warping that can result from stresses encountered during the making process. (Finkelnburg 2012:6).

<sup>46</sup> Paper clay is a half solid, half fluid plastic modelling mix of clay, paper pulp and water. (Gault 2005:7). I use tissue paper in the mix.

<sup>47</sup> Paper clay is "Extremely strong as greenware, paper clay can be worked in multiple layers of wet over dry, and altered at nearly any stage in the forming process" (Gault 2005:7).

<sup>48</sup> 'Entwine' is explained as to "interweave; embrace", etc (*The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English* 8<sup>th</sup> edition. 1990:398)

knitting technique in the creation of the artefacts (Figure 3.5). The fragility of the medium references the fragile nature of relationships, and of life itself.



Figure 3.4 Della Kempthorne. **Place setting** (2013). Porcelain paper clay. (Photograph by A. Kempthorne 2013).



Figure 3.5 Della Kempthorne. **Plate** (2013). Porcelain paper clay. (Photograph by A. Kempthorne 2013).

In order to inform the conceptualisation of an installation of place settings, I researched Judy Chicago's (1939) installation entitled *The Dinner Party* (1975-1979) (Figure 3.6).

This is probably one of the best known works by a female artist<sup>49</sup>. Edward Lucie-Smith (2000:60) states "Like many ambitious works, *The Dinner Party* began modestly. Chicago's desire was to teach women's history through art". It is a mixed media tribute to the cultural achievements of women in history. It was created with assistance from hundreds of volunteers during the late 1970's.



Figure 3.6 Judy Chicago. **The Dinner Party** (1975-1979). Mixed media. (No size given). (Available at WWW: <http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/eascfa/dinnerparty/home.php>. Accessed 21 November 2013).

Chicago (1996:45) revealed that the concept of *The Dinner Party* did not strike her immediately. She had been working on a series of porcelain miniatures entitled *Butterfly Goddess and Other Specimens* in which she

<sup>49</sup> *The Dinner Party* by Judy Chicago is an icon of feminist art, which represents 1,038 women in history—39 women are represented by place settings and another 999 names are inscribed in the Heritage Floor on which the table rests. This monumental work of art is comprised of a triangular table divided into three sides, each 48 feet (14.63m) long. (Available at WWW: <http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/eascfa/dinnerparty/home.php>. Accessed 21 November 2013).



“combined [her] developing vulval/butterfly iconography with various china-painting techniques to create an array of images that would serve as preliminary tests for the first abstract portraits of women on plates” (Chicago, 1996:42). She chose the vulval-form language to suggest that the one thing these different females had in common was their gender (Chicago 1996:45).

Chicago visited a china-painter who had spent three years executing complete place settings for sixteen people. In recalling her visit Chicago (1996:45) said:

But my enduring memory is of exquisitely painted plates (including dinner, salad, and dessert); matching bowls (both soup and serving); similarly treated coffee cups and saucers; as well as a companion creamer and sugar bowl set. These were all arranged upon her dining-room table, where she kept them as a sort of permanent exhibition. While admiring the fine quality of the painting, I experienced an epiphany of sorts, realizing that plates are meant to be presented on a table. This was probably the moment when *The Dinner Party* was born.

Chicago (1996:46) wanted to create a series of plates that could constitute a visual narrative of Western civilization as seen through women’s accomplishments. Chicago sought to show females through the centuries, just as men had been portrayed. For example, Chicago (1996:47) states that Eleanor of Aquitaine<sup>50</sup> (1122-1204) would take the place of Richard the Lionhearted<sup>51</sup> (1157-1199). Chicago (ibid) argues that “This substitution in the context of a ‘dinner party’ was intended to commemorate the sundry unacknowledged contributions of women to Western civilization while simultaneously alluding to and protesting their oppression through the metaphor of plates set upon and thus ‘contained’ by the table”. Chicago (1996:47) points out that she had decided that the plate images would

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<sup>50</sup> Eleanor of Aquitaine was the Ruler in her own right of Aquitaine, queen consort in France then England; queen mother in England. (Available at WWW: [http://www.womenshistory.aboutcom/od/medbritishqueens/p/eleanor\\_aq.htm](http://www.womenshistory.aboutcom/od/medbritishqueens/p/eleanor_aq.htm). Accessed 15 March 2014).

<sup>51</sup> Richard I (also known as the ‘Lion Heart’) was born in Oxford, England and was the son of Henry II and Eleanor of Aquitaine. (Available at WWW: [http://www.bbc.co.uk?history\\_figures/richard\\_i\\_king.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk?history_figures/richard_i_king.shtml). Accessed 15 March 2014).

“physically rise up as a symbol of women’s struggle for freedom from such containment.”

In addition, Chicago became interested in ecclesiastical embroidery. She had the opportunity to try on an elaborately stitched bishop’s glove. Chicago (1996:53) states that “As I drew the jewelled and gold-encrusted object onto my hand, I could literally ‘feel’ the hours of human labor [labour] that had gone into creating it, which seemed to me one reason that ecclesiastical objects appeared to bestow so much importance upon their wearer.”

This gave rise to Chicago making a decision to use embroidery on the tablecloth to enhance *The Dinner Party* table settings. Women were engaged to do the embroidery. Chicago (1996:53) explains:

My aim was to imply that history should be seen as belonging just as much to women as to men, while also paying homage to needlework, which, like china-painting, was primarily a female craft. In addition, I very much liked the idea of telling ‘herstory’ through these particular ‘womanly’ techniques.

Chicago eventually decided on thirty-nine plates, to be presented in place settings that would include not only a runner but a ceramic chalice and flatware, along with a napkin edged with gold. Chicago also embellished the tablecloth with a corresponding gold edging as a way of extending the sacramental associations of the table settings (Chicago 1996:60). These thirty-nine place settings were configured on an open, triangular table resting on the *Heritage Floor*<sup>52</sup> (Figure 3.7).

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<sup>52</sup>“This monumental floor is comprised of 2,300 hand-cast porcelain tiles and provides both a structural and metaphorical support for *The Dinner Party* table. Inscribed in gold luster are the names of 99 mythical and historical women of achievement, who were selected to contextualize the 39 women represented in the place settings”. (Available at WWW: [http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/eascfa/dinner\\_party/heritage\\_floor/](http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/eascfa/dinner_party/heritage_floor/). (Accessed 14 March 2014).





Figure 3.7 Judy Chicago. **The Dinner Party (Heritage Floor; detail)** (1975-1979). Porcelain with rainbow and gold lustre. 14.6 x 14.6 x 14.6m. (Available at WWW: <http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/education/dinner-party/home.php>. Accessed 21 November 2013).

One of the place settings at the table was that of artist Georgia O'Keeffe (1887-1986) (Figure 3.8). O'Keeffe is one of the most well known American painters and is considered by some to be the foremother of the Feminist art movement.



Figure 3.8 Judy Chicago. **The Dinner Party (Georgia O'Keeffe place setting)** (1975-79). No size given. Mixed media: ceramic, porcelain, textile. (Available at WWW: <http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/education/dinner-party/home.php>. Accessed 21 November 2013).

In describing the place setting created for O'Keeffe, (Chicago 1979:96) states:

Georgia O'Keeffe's is the last place setting at *The Dinner Party*. O'Keeffe's image rises higher than any other on the table. Though it tries to force itself further upward, it is prevented from doing so by its firm connection to the plate. Thus, despite their heroic efforts, all the women represented are still contained within their place setting.

The imagery on O'Keeffe's plate incorporates the forms she used in her own flower paintings, such as **Black Iris** (1926) (Figure 3.9), with the central core (or vulval imagery) used throughout *The Dinner Party*. Chicago (1979:96) pays tribute to O'Keeffe's originality and expressed the belief that "Her work provides a foundation upon which we can build a universal language to express our own point of view as women".



Figure 3.9 Georgia O'Keeffe. **Black Iris** (1926). Oil on canvas. 91.4 x 75.9 cm. Alfred Stieglitz Collection, 1969. (Available at WWW: <http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/69.278.1>. Accessed 17 March 2014).

Chicago's *The Dinner Party* suggested the use of porcelain in a table format to celebrate the lives of females of different generations who have influenced my life.

As with Chicago's use of embroidery, the use of knitting in the creation of domestic artefacts, references female crafts. In common with Chicago, women are placed at the centre and celebrated through the metaphor of place settings.

A second installation which I researched was exhibited at a Subversive Ceramics Symposium held at Bath's Holburne Museum in 2012. Ceramic artist Bouke de Vries created a unique contemporary table setting on the Holburne's Ballroom table entitled **War and Pieces** (Wilson 2013:15). De Vries refers to the 17<sup>th</sup> century custom of decorating banqueting tables with extravagant sugar sculpture centre pieces which were carefully preserved and reused as part of the lavish dining experience and as a demonstration of wealth and taste. The centre pieces were replaced by porcelain in the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Bath's Art Museum Exhibition Review n.d).

The centre-piece on de Vries' table (Figure 3.10) is a dramatic depiction of an atomic-bomb mushroom cloud, made from shards of old and new white ceramics. Around the centre piece the table is set with Sir William Holburne's Chinese tobacco-leaf pattern dinner service.



Figure 3.10 Bouke de Vries. **War and Pieces** (2012). Porcelain and found objects. No size given. Holburne Museum, Bath. (Available at WWW: <http://www.holburne.org/war-and-pieces>. Accessed 16 April 2014).

A battle is fought out along the table with figures derived from 1770s Derby porcelain, some of which have mutated into cyborgs using elements from plastic toys (Bath's Art Museum Exhibition Review:n.d). Wilson (2013:15) states that de Vries' work "flirts with subversion in both material and outcome as he searches for 'new narrative, new history, new context', applying his skills as a conservator to reconstruct meaning".

De Vries's table has concentrated on the centre piece and he has used traditional porcelain and cutlery for the place settings to reference the past and the present, whereas my table uses porcelain for all the settings.

The format of the table in the installation entitled *Entwined* references **The Last Supper** (1495-1498) (Figure 3.11) by Leonardo da Vinci and the spiritual beliefs that have guided my life.



Figure 3.11 Leonardo da Vinci. **The Last Supper** (1495-1498). Tempera on gesso. 460 x 880cm. Santa Maria della Grazie, Milan. (Available at WWW: <http://www.totallyhistory.com/the-last-supper/>. Accessed 28 April 2014).

The installation is made up from three tables (Figure 3.12), 275 x 80cm each, joined end-to-end and covered by a tablecloth which has been brushed with porcelain slip, to integrate it with the porcelain objects.



Figure 3.12 **One of three tables.** Wood, enamel paint. 275 x 80cm. (Photograph by A. Kempthorne 2014).

*Entwined* consists of 10 place settings (Figures 3.13, and 3.14); each place setting refers to a female (woman or child) who occupies a special place in my life. The women have either influenced me, or are very close to me. Some are family and others are friends. The children referenced are my female



grandchildren, the next generation. Names and personal items are used to distinguish each person.

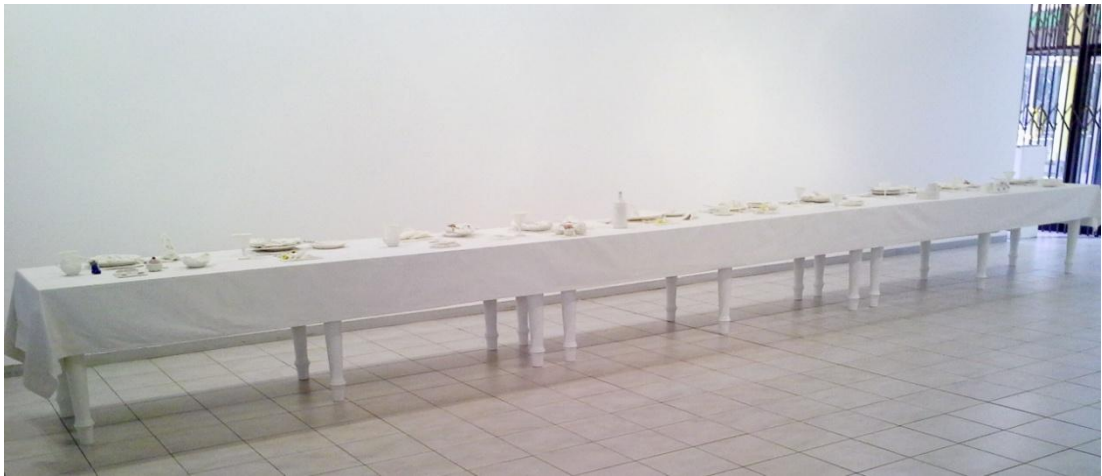


Figure 3.13 Della Kempthorne. *Entwined* (2014). Porcelain, paper clay, cloth, slip, glaze and lustre and wood. 825 x 80cm. (Photograph by A. Kempthorne 2014).



Figure 3.14 Della Kempthorne. *Entwined* (2014). (Detail). Porcelain, paper clay, cloth, slip, glaze and lustre. 825 x 80cm. (Photograph by A. Kempthorne 2014).

The principal and central place setting (Figure 3.15) is my mother, Joan. She is deceased, but will always hold a very special place in my heart. She was born in England, but spent most of her life in South Africa. She was married to my father for 54 years. She was a gentle, compassionate and unselfish person who spent the majority of her life caring for her family. She was a talented homemaker, an excellent cook and my mentor. She lived a life filled with optimism and imbued myself, my one brother and two sisters with the same attitude. Her life was not easy. As a married couple my parents struggled financially and it was not until I was a teenager that they were able to afford to buy their own home.



Figure 3.15 Della Kempthorne. **Place setting Joan** (2014). Porcelain, paper clay, slip, glaze and lustre. (Photograph by A. Kempthorne 2014).

My mother was an ordered person. Each day she would prepare the evening meal and set the table with all the appropriate cutlery and crockery, depending on the courses we were having. The bell was rung and we would all take our places at the table. Each plate would be passed from my mother, to my father then on to the children.



The same ritual would take place over weekends if we were having tea. The tea table would be laid out correctly with all the crockery and cutlery. The homemade cakes would be beautifully displayed. My mother would pour the tea, whilst my father would cut the cake. My mother's place setting contains a cup and saucer not a wine glass; she was not fond of alcohol but loved tea. (Figure 3.16).



Figure 3.16 Della Kempthorne. **Tea cup and saucer** (2012). Porcelain paper clay. (Photograph by A. Kempthorne 2012).

I have two daughters, Tammy and Sherry. The eldest, Tammy, is married and lives and works in London. She has had two children, a girl, Julia, who is five years old and a son, Max, who is two. She met her husband, Roberto, an Italian citizen, in London and they have been married for six years. Julia was born a year after they were married. She is a special needs child. Tammy's place setting (Figure 3.17) contains a plate filled with cup cakes (Figure 3.18) to reference her cooking and entertaining skills.



Figure 3.17 Della Kempthorne. **Place setting Tammy** (2014). Porcelain, paper clay, slip, glaze, lustre and transfer. (Photograph by A. Kempthorne 2014).



Figure 3.18 Della Kempthorne. **Cup cakes** (2014). Porcelain, paper clay, slip and glaze. (Photograph by A. Kempthorne 2014).

Tammy has often said that her life had run along so smoothly, until Julia was born. Since the birth of Julia, my admiration for my daughter has increased

as she has had to cope with extremely trying circumstances. Their place settings are linked by an image of Tammy and Julia holding hands (Figure 3.19).



Figure 3.19 Della Kempthorne. **Holding hands** (2014). Porcelain, paper clay, glaze and transfer. (Photograph by A. Kempthorne 2014).

Julia suffers from Smith, Lemli, Opitz syndrome which prohibits the production of cholesterol. When she was born she was unable to suck and had to be fed by a tube through her stomach. Her development has been slow, but she has recently started feeding herself with a spoon. She can only eat finely pureed food. Her overall development has also been gradual, but she has learned to sit, to crawl and at the age of five walked by herself. She is a pretty girl and smiles and laughs a lot. She is still not talking, but uses sign language to make herself understood. She attends a special needs school.

Her place setting (Figure 3.20) consists of a heart in the form of a rosette (Figure 3.21) to celebrate her achievements thus far, together with a



teaspoon. The fact that Julia now feeds herself is a miracle. Something which we thought she would never be able to do. A large serviette is placed at Julia's setting to reference her struggle to eat.



Figure 3.20 Della Kempthorne. **Place setting Julia** (2014). Porcelain, paper clay, slip, glaze, lustre and transfer. (Photograph by A. Kempthorne 2014).



Figure 3.21 Della Kempthorne. **Rosette, teaspoon and rose** (2014). Porcelain, paper clay, slip, onglaze and lustre. (Photograph by A. Kempthorne 2014).

Mr other daughter, Sherry, is two years younger than Tammy. She is married to Pieter and they live and work on the South Coast of Kwa Zulu Natal. She has one daughter, Caitlin, who is seven years old. Sherry particularly enjoys gardening. I am very fortunate in that they live nearby and I am able to see them almost every day. Sherry and I often share our indigenous plants. Her place setting (Figure 3.22) will consist of an extra entwined rose (Figure 3.23) to reference our enjoyment of gardening.



Figure 3.22 Della Kempthorne. **Place setting Sherry** (2014). Porcelain, paper clay, slip, glaze and lustre. (Photograph by A. Kempthorne 2014).



Figure 3.23 Della Kempthorne. **Entwined roses Sherry** (2014). Porcelain, paper clay, slip, glaze and lustre. (Photograph by A. Kempthorne 2014).



Caitlin is seven years old and is showing a talent in the arts. She has made her own porcelain creations to distinguish her place at the table (Figures 3.24 and 3.25).



Figure 3.24 Della Kempthorne. **Place setting Caitlin** (2014). Porcelain, paper clay, onglaze, glaze and lustre. (Photograph by A. Kempthorne 2014).



Figure 3.25 Caitlin McKinnon. **Place name, Snowman, Tile and Cupcake** (2014). Porcelain, paper clay, onglaze and glaze. (Photograph by A. Kempthorne 2014).



My younger sister, Marji is five years younger than I am and lives in North Carolina in the United States of America. Marji is the breadwinner and has made a success of her career. Three years ago she developed breast cancer. She had a mastectomy of one breast and had to have several lymph glands removed. She underwent all the necessary treatment and is now in remission. Her place setting (Figure 3.26) is referenced by a pink cancer ribbon (Figure 3.27).



Figure 3.26 Della Kempthorne. **Place setting Marji** (2014). Porcelain, paper clay, slip, glaze, onglaze and lustre. (Photograph by A. Kempthorne 2014).



Figure 3.27 Della Kempthorne. **Cancer ribbon** (2014). Porcelain, paper clay and onglaze. (Photograph by A. Kempthorne 2014).

My youngest sister, Trish, is referenced by the use of a wedding cake at her place setting (Figures 3.28 and 3.29). The cake consists of a lone bride who has thrown aside her bouquet of flowers. Trish lost her husband early in her marriage and has never remarried. The cake refers to her difficult adult life.



Figure 3.28 Della Kempthorne. **Wedding cake** (2014). Porcelain, paper clay, glaze and gold lustre. (Photograph by A. Kempthorne 2014).



Figure 3.29 Della Kempthorne. **Place setting Trish** (2014). Porcelain, paper clay, slip, glaze and lustre. (Photograph by A. Kempthorne 2014).

A collection of white ceramic tableware is displayed on a white surface. The items include a large, shallow plate with a scalloped edge and a textured, lace-like pattern, featuring a small red flower-shaped decoration. To its right is a smaller, round bowl with a similar textured pattern. Above the large plate is a small, round, textured bowl. To the right of the large plate is a tall, slender glass with a textured pattern. Various utensils, including a fork, a knife, a spoon, and a small bowl, are also visible, all featuring the same textured pattern. The items are arranged in a cluster, casting soft shadows on the white surface.

Figure 3.30 Della Kempthorne. **Place setting Elaine** (2014). Porcelain, paper clay, slip, glaze and lustre. (Photograph by A. Kempthorne 2014).



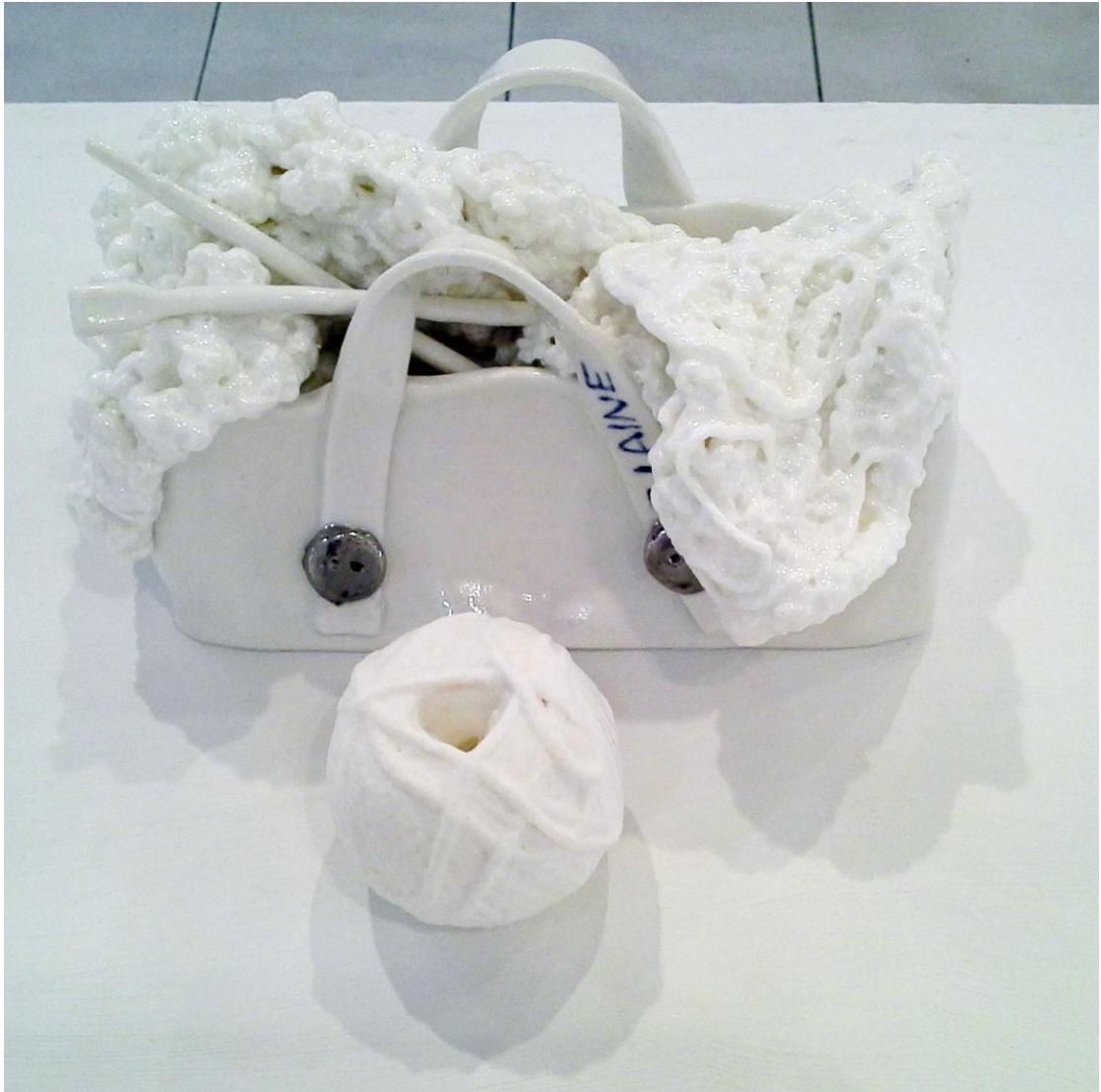


Figure 3.31 Della Kempthorne. **Bag of knitting** (2014). Porcelain, paper clay, glaze and oxide and lustre. (Photograph by A. Kempthorne 2014).

Marlies and I met when we both went to a pottery lesson with Kim Sacks in Johannesburg. We immediately became firm friends and shortly thereafter we joined Digby Hoets' studio. Each year Marlies and I would hold an exhibition of our work. We decided to work in my studio at home and received commissions. We then sought further art tuition and enrolled at UNISA to do a Fine Arts Degree. We qualified and Marlies went on to do her Masters at the University of the Witwatersrand whilst I moved down to the coast.

She died from caesarean cancer after a very short illness. Her husband was devastated. I still miss her and think of her often when I am in my studio. She is recognised by a bowl I made after Marlies had died (Figure 3.32).



Figure 3.32 Della Kempthorne. **Place setting Marlies** (2014). Porcelain, paper clay, slip, glaze, oxide and lustre. (Photograph by A. Kempthorne 2014).

Each place setting contains a porcelain rose (Figure 3.33); yellow to denote love and friendship; pink for love and appreciation and white for love, purity and innocence. My daughters and my mother's settings have two or more entwined roses to indicate a close relationship.



Figure 3.33 Della Kempthorne. **Rose** (2014). Porcelain, paper clay, slip and glaze. (Photograph by A. Kempthorne 2014).



My place setting (Figures 3.34 and 3.35) is placed next to my mother's. The fact that I am a woman is the central point from which my experiences and ideas are drawn.



Figure 3.34 Della Kempthorne. **Place setting Della** (2014). Porcelain, paper clay, slip, glaze and lustre. (Photograph by A. Kempthorne 2014).



Figure 3.35 Della Kempthorne. **Entwined rose and petals** (2014). Porcelain, paper clay, slip, glaze and lustre. (Photograph by A. Kempthorne 2014).



In analysing my body of work, I became aware that there were elements in common with the selected artists. Most of the objects in my installation are very fragile (Figure 3.36). Twomey's approach in her installation entitled *Consciousness/Conscience*, in which bone china tiles were broken up by people walking on it is fragile. In commenting on this installation Currah (2003:1) stated that "The breaking of China is usually a moment for regret and in the case of a much-used and well-loved domestic item one of great sadness".

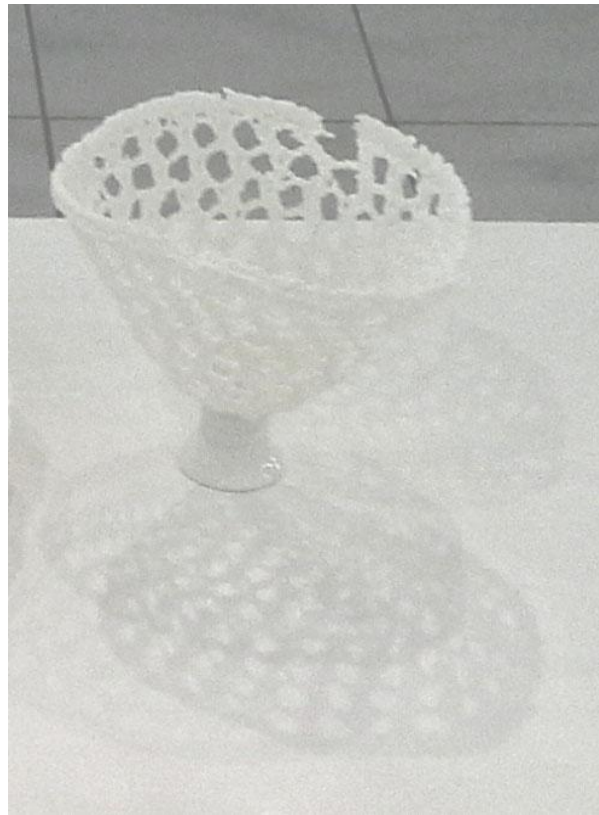


Figure 3.36 Della Kempthorne. **Fragile bowl** (2013). Porcelain and paper clay and glaze. (Photograph by A. Kempthorne 2013).

In my art practice, traditional porcelain ware is subverted on a number of levels. The use of porcelain in the making of the place settings sets up an analogy between the materiality of the work and the fragility of relationships.

Two of my place settings reference women who are deceased. As with Twomey's installation entitled *Specimen*, where the fragility of the unfired clay flowers deal with issues relating to value, permanence and human interaction

with materiality, my place settings reference the fragility of human life and how precious it is. This highlights and contrasts the beautiful with the uncomfortable and again subverts the viewer's expectations.

Further subversion in my installation *Entwined* is evident in the solid and chunky appearance of some porcelain items, such as the cutlery, plates and under plates (Figure 3.37). This runs contra to the expectation of delicate porcelain. I have exploited this aspect in relation to the delicate nature of the knitted paper clay artefacts that, through the use of a knitting technique, has rendered the objects useless for a functional purpose and has subverted the traditional way in which porcelain is used.



Figure 3.37 Della Kempthorne. **Solid against delicate** (2013). Porcelain, paper clay, glaze and lustre. (Photograph by A. Kempthorne 2013).

The creation of metaphorical table place settings, in the form of knitted domestic objects, is a celebration of women. The installation encapsulates both the fragile nature of life, and the need to celebrate it (Figure 3.38). The

porcelain place settings make a reference to, and subvert, traditional porcelain table ware.



Figure 3.38 Della Kempthorne. **Bowl Marlies** (2013). Porcelain, paper clay, slip, glaze and lustre. (Photograph by A. Kempthorne 2013).

## CONCLUSION

The aim of this practice-led research was to document, investigate and evaluate the subversion of traditional porcelain in my art practice and that of Edmund de Waal, Paul Scott, Katharine Morling, Rachel Kneebone and Clare Twomey. Through this research I have gained a deeper insight, not only into my art practice, but that of the selected artists in relation to the contemporary subversion of traditional porcelain. This research posed two questions:

- What is traditional porcelain?
- How and why do the selected artists subvert traditional porcelain?

The research has revealed that porcelain, although thought of as a very delicate and fine material, can be extremely robust and when fired is resilient. In establishing the nature of traditional porcelain, research has shown that the material has a history of versatile use. The most common is in the making of crockery of all shapes and sizes for domestic consumption. However, porcelain has also been used as a medium for sculpture and at times in mould making. I have previously used porcelain to make traditional domestic china on the wheel; however, in creating artefacts for the practical submission in the form of the installation entitled *Entwined*, I was challenged to conceptualise a strategy which both acknowledged, and subverted, traditional porcelain. Traditional tableware forms have been transformed and subverted, through the use of a domestic technique, knitting, that references and celebrates female relationships.

In commenting on recent solo shows in the United Kingdom of several artists, including Rachel Kneebone, who all use clay as a visual medium, Clare (2010:51) observes that all these female artists have been influenced by feminist ideas either in their daily lives or in the development of their work, whether or not they have noticed it. “This meeting – of post-modernism with feminism and materiality has produced a robust yet deceptively tender

approach to retrieving and realising the feminine, which is extremely welcome after decades of austere avoidance". (Clare 2010:51). My conceptualisation of *Entwined* did not use feminism as a theoretical construct; it was based on the use of a feminine technique (knitting) and a fragile material (porcelain), in the exploration of female relationships.

The work of the selected artists has provided evidence of the subversion of traditional porcelain using a number of strategies.

In the installation entitled *Signs & Wonders*, de Waal worked with objects that had been part of his life for thirty years, in making sense of his memories of pots in the galleries of the Victoria and Albert Museum de Waal (2009a:26) referred to this approach as "the use of memory and the after-image as the intense holding of a form on the retina". He threw pots using the memory and after image. He made a large quantity of porcelain vessels (425) which were then installed in a 37 metre red circular metal ring, placed high above the ceramic galleries in the Victoria and Albert Museum. De Waal subverted traditional porcelain in creating a conversation between the past and present, the historical and contemporary.

Scott's subversion comes in a form that "that allow[s] the artist to develop a political narrative or critique" (Clare 2013:1). By mixing old and modern ceramic dinnerware with printed designs, Scott generates meanings in what he refers to as a "blue and white semiotic" (Scott 2010:51). Scott's particular interest is in print technology which relates to picturesque European painting (Scott 2010:51). Transfers on ceramics are usually used as markers of cultural values and norms, but Scott reworks these images to communicate social injustices. Scott has engaged with issues such as apartheid, the environment and social justice, nuclear energy and waste. The subversive aspects of these works usually only emerge with close scrutiny (Scott 2010:53).

Morling's work consists of life-sized porcelain sculptures which are a direct translation from her 'three dimensional' sketches; it is like walking into one of her drawings. Her porcelain sculptures depict domestic objects such as a typewriter, bag and tape measure. These objects imply a human presence and in doing so subvert traditional porcelain in the form of "an emotional response to personal narrative" (Fielding 2011:42). The actual subversion in Morling's work lies in the fact that her porcelain installations challenge the boundaries of the technical, sculptural scale of porcelain.

Kneebone's subversion of traditional porcelain comes in a very subtle guise, in the form of large porcelain installations in which "she does not want to allow the beauty of the porcelain or the delicacy of its modelling to offer the possibility of 'comfort or redemption through the transference of art'. She looks for no less than the complete desolation of a new and terrible form of beauty" (Elliot 2010:48). As the viewer peers down into the sculpture Kneebone shocks the viewer with images of torn limbs and body parts, falling down into a void. It is the disjuncture between the violence on one hand and the beauty of the porcelain and the delicacy of its modelling on the other, which generates the shock which emanates from this work. This is highly subversive. Kneebone combines these into works that recall the past, but comments on timeless issues of death, loss and grief.

Twomey's subversion of traditional porcelain is expressed through her contemporary engagement with issues relating to value, permanence, human interaction and materiality, all of which are associated with the form and content of traditional porcelain products. Twomey (2008:46) stated that "The majority of my installations are reliant on human interaction, physical or philosophical, to validate their intention. In **Consciousness/Conscience** the audience were invited to experience change and awareness of their physical impact on the gallery environment". This experience took the form of walking over fragile tiles that shattered. The fragility of traditional porcelain is highlighted in the use of a contemporary and subversive strategy which deals with the notion of preciousness and permanence.



The writing of this dissertation, together with my art practice over the past three years, has provided a body of knowledge which has imparted an insight into the conceptual and technical possibilities of porcelain clay. Visits to Britain each year to research contemporary developments in art and ceramics has given me an insight into current trends in ceramics, and specifically the shift in porcelain from traditional artefact to conceptual art piece.

These visits resulted in extensive experimentation in my art practice, culminating in the presentation of the installation entitled *Entwined*. The porcelain bowls, plates and cups acknowledge the tradition of porcelain artefacts. However, this is subverted through the use of a knitting technique that renders the objects useless for a functional purpose. The place settings are a metaphor for a celebration of my life and particular female friends and relatives who have joined me in this journey.

Clare's assertion that the term subversion in ceramic practice includes design changes "to make an object look more contemporary as well as those that allow the artist to develop a political narrative or critique" (Clare 2013:1), is relevant to the work of the selected artists and my art practice. Research has revealed that the selected artists have, through the use of different strategies, modified design and developed personal, social and political narratives, in subverting traditional porcelain.

It is evident from this research that there is a growing field of art practice and associated literature that is concerned with the contemporary subversion of traditional porcelain. This new field provides an opportunity for further research.

## APPENDIX 1

### THE DEVELOPMENT OF A PERSONAL WORKING METHOD IN THE SUBVERSION OF TRADITIONAL PORCELAIN

The concept of knitted porcelain objects had its origins in my desire to create a unique working method and artefacts which both exemplified and subverted the qualities of traditional porcelain; fineness, purity, translucency, whiteness, strength, hardness and durability when fired. I began to experiment by knitting very thick string into a square 'mat' (Figure A1), using what is commonly referred to as 'stocking stitch'.



Figure A1 Della Kempthorne. **Knitting mat** (2009). Knitted string and needles. (Photograph by A. Kempthorne 2009).

I took the knitted square and placed it in Plaster of Paris to form a mould (Figure A2).



Figure A2 Della Kempthorne. **Plaster of Paris mould** (2009). Plaster of Paris.  
(Photograph by A. Kempthorne 2009).

When the mould had dried a porcelain/paper clay mixture (porcelain clay with 5% paper pulp) was placed into it. The result achieved was satisfactory (Figure A3).



Figure A3 Della Kempthorne. **Knitted square** (2009). Porcelain paper clay.  
(Photograph by A. Kempthorne 2009).

I experimented by adding other materials into the knitted square (Figure A4) such as copper wire.



Figure A4 Della Kempthorne. **Knitted mat with copper wire** (2009). String, copper wire and needles. (Photograph by A. Kempthorne 2009).

I discovered that the firing process melted the copper, leaving holes and a black coloration. This resulted in a very unstable artefact (Figures A5 and A6).



Figure A5 Della Kempthorne. **Fired knitted mat with copper wire insert** (2009). Porcelain paper clay. (Photograph by A. Kempthorne 2009).





Figure A6 Della Kempthorne. **Fired knitted mat with copper wire insert** (2009). (Detail). Porcelain paper clay. (Photograph by A. Kempthorne 2009).

I made a decision to use paper clay slip and to dip the knitted item into it. These experiments with porcelain paper clay confirmed that it was possible to mould and knit domestic objects such as cups or saucers.

However, two problems arose in experimenting with the knitting of traditional crockery items. The first was to establish the optimum thickness of the string and the second was how to make the body of the cup or saucer, so as to withstand the high temperature in the kiln (Figures A7 and A8).



Figure A7 Della Kempthorne. **Knitted cup** (2010). String. (Photograph by A. Kempthorne 2010).



Figure A8 Della Kempthorne. **Knitted cup and Plaster of Paris moulded cup** (2010). Plaster of Paris and knitted string. (Photograph by A. Kempthorne 2010).

Porcelain shrinks in the final firing which can cause the object to collapse. Following research and deliberation, I began to make moulds for the items. It was important that the mould and the porcelain paper clay shrank at the same rate and at the same time. Most of the moulds were thrown on the wheel and I fired to 1000°C and some were cast from plaster of Paris. This made the mould rigid so that it could be used to mould the knitted item.

By placing the knitted cup around the mould (Figure A9) I discovered that the cup adhered to the body of the mould; this allowed for a porcelain paper clay slip to be applied to the knitting and left to dry (Figure A10).



Figure A9 Della Kempthorne. **Knitted cup around Plaster of Paris mould** (2010). Plaster of Paris and knitted string. (Photograph by A. Kempthorne 2010).





Figure A10 Della Kempthorne. **Moulds and porcelain paper clay wine glass being moulded** (2012). Unfired porcelain and paper clay. (Photograph by A. Kempthorne 2012).

After moulding the item I then completed it by placing a handle on the cup, or a stem on the wine glass (Figure A11).



Figure A11 Della Kempthorne. **Porcelain paper clay wine glasses with stem** (2012). Unfired porcelain and paper clay. (Photograph by A. Kempthorne 2012).

The completed unfired items are shown in Figures A12 and A13.



Figure A12 Della Kempthorne. **Completed porcelain paper clay cup before firing** (2010). Unfired porcelain paper clay. (Photograph by A. Kempthorne 2010).



Figure A13 Della Kempthorne. **Completed porcelain paper clay wine glass after being moulded** (2012). Unfired porcelain and paper clay. (Photograph by A. Kempthorne 2012).

The items were left to dry after which they were raw-glazed<sup>53</sup>. In some cases the glaze was brushed on, as in the stem of the wine glass. In other cases, the object was dipped into the glaze, or the glaze was sprayed on, as evidenced in the tea mug (Figure A14). Not all of the knitted parts were glazed.



Figure A14 Della Kempthorne. **Porcelain paper clay tea mug after glazing and firing** (2012). Porcelain and paper clay. (Photograph by A. Kempthorne 2012).

I used a transparent, shiny glaze and fired them to full vitrification. All methods of application were successful. The glazed objects are stronger than the unglazed ones. I have used both applications in my table settings.

In packing the kiln, some objects were placed on the shelf with the mould in the body of the item, whilst others were fired without the mould (Figures A15 and A16).

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<sup>53</sup> Raw-glazing refers to the process in which the items are not bisque fired. The glaze is applied to the clay in the raw state and then high fired.



Figure A15 Della Kempthorne. **Porcelain paper clay bowl with mould** (2012). Unfired porcelain and paper clay. (Photograph by A. Kempthorne 2012).



Figure A16 Della Kempthorne. **Kiln filled with artefacts** (2012). Unfired porcelain and paper clay. (Photograph by A. Kempthorne 2012).

As the porcelain paper clay released from the mould in the kiln, the knitted porcelain string, which is very delicate, began to crumble (Figure A17).



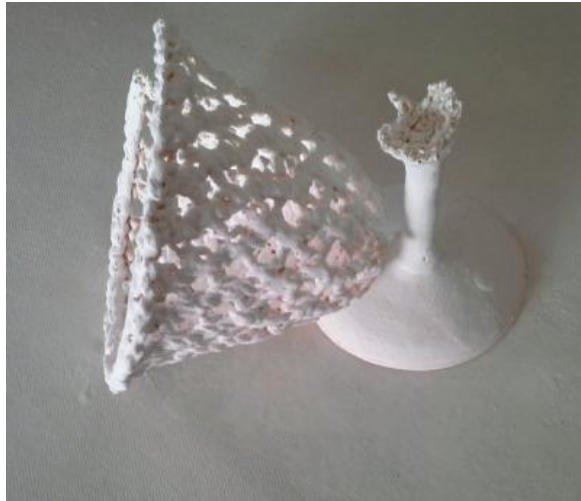


Figure A17 Della Kempthorne. **Fired wine glass** (2012). Porcelain and paper clay.  
(Photograph by A. Kempthorne 2012).

I was very disillusioned by the results of the first firing. Most of the objects either collapsed or fell over in the firing (Figures A18). This was despite the time spent measuring each item, knitting it, making the moulds, dipping or painting porcelain paper slip on to them and then finally glazing them.

This was a depressing low point in attempting to develop a working method and use of materials that subverted the manufacture and function of traditional porcelain.



Figure A18 Della Kempthorne. **Fired artefacts** (2012). Porcelain and paper clay.  
(Photograph by A. Kempthorne 2012).

I questioned the validity of what I was doing and whether I should abandon the knitting of traditional crockery altogether. I made a decision to discover positive outcomes in the work; for example knitting traditional items and firing them as porcelain vessels had, with some of the items, been successful. This was evident in the cup and saucer (Figure A19) that came out of a slightly later firing.

As the process of experimentation developed I began to feel a little more encouraged as many more of the bowls, dishes, spoons, knives and forks survived the firing in a recognizable form (Figure A20).



Figure A19 Della Kempthorne. **Tea cup and saucer after firing** (2012). Porcelain and paper clay. (Photograph by A. Kempthorne 2012).



Figure A20 Della Kempthorne. **Dessert bowl and saucer with spoon and fork** (2012). Porcelain and paper clay. (Photograph by A. Kempthorne 2012).



After my first attempts at firing the knitted items, it was suggested at a critique that I should consider other items that could be made on the wheel and subverted. Traditional South African artefacts such as a potjie pot and a tin mug were suggested. I made a number of these items and although I was satisfied with the results (Figures A21, A22 and A23), I felt that I could not relate to these objects. I wanted to experiment further with the knitted string concept as I believed that I could achieve far better results. I made a decision to continue with knitting traditional crockery items using string and porcelain as a form of subversion.



Figure A21 Della Kempthorne. **Porcelain potjie pot** (2012). Porcelain and paper clay. (Photograph by A. Kempthorne 2012).



Figure A22 Della Kempthorne. **Collection of porcelain potjie pots and bowls** (2012). Porcelain and paper clay. (Photograph by A. Kempthorne 2012).



Figure A23 Della Kempthorne. **Porcelain tea set** (2012). Porcelain clay. (Photograph by A. Kempthorne 2012).

I decided to explore further by knitting items in a lace pattern and establish how the artefacts would react in the kiln. Experimentation began on several traditional items (Figure A24). Some were successful, such as flat items like saucers or plates (Figure A25).



Figure A24 Della Kempthorne. **Knitted pieces waiting to be assembled into a plate** (2013). Knitted string. (Photograph by A. Kempthorne 2013).



Figure A25 Della Kempthorne. **Unfired porcelain paper clay plate** (2013). Porcelain and paper clay. (Photograph by A. Kempthorne 2013).

I experimented with objects made from kitting in a lace pattern, in order to make objects that were extremely light and translucent, as I wanted to achieve the appearance of objects made by Julie Shepherd (Figure A26). She made a tea set out of porcelain, and then created a 'lacy' look by drilling the porcelain with a fine dentist's drill.



Figure A26 Julie Shepherd. **Emperor's new teaset** (2005). Porcelain. Teapot 15 x 24 x 15cm. Cup 6 x 10cm. Plate 3 x 15 x 15cm. (Cooper 2009:51).

Some of the cups, teapots, bowls and vases I had made could not withstand the high temperatures; knitting the lacy objects (delicately) had made them extremely fragile. I then experimented by throwing a plate and placing the knitting on the top of the thrown plate (Figure A27). The knitting successfully fused with the plate. The installation entitled *Entwined* comprises both these methods.



Figure A27 Della Kempthorne. **Dinner Plate** (2014). Porcelain and paper clay.  
(Photograph by A. Kempthorne 2014).

The development and application of a personal working method, knitted porcelain, in the creation of domestic artefacts contributed to the contemporary subversion of traditional porcelain.



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