

PRESS RELEASE

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Ceramics Season – Spring 2023

Messums London and Messums Wiltshire

15 February – 30 April 2023



Martin Smith, Red Black Bartlett, 2015

Clay is more than a material of making. It is much contemplated, romanticised, opposed and transformed, central to fundamental artistic debates and diverse in its application. Clay is craft, art and idea: domestic, sculptural, industrial and architectural. Recent landmark exhibitions have highlighted clay as a material worthy of examination in its own right, but how does the lumping together of art as ‘clay’ serve the variety and depth of ceramics?

In 2023 the spring season at Messums celebrates contemporary ceramic across its various spaces with a programme of exhibitions and events that seek to showcase the richness and breadth of the medium, profiling a number of significant contemporary practitioners and focusing particularly on the importance of the journey of making.

To mark this celebratory season, a symposium will be held at Messums Wiltshire on 1 April 2023 and will highlight the diverse potential of clay in art. The symposium programme will include talks by leading practitioners and experts in the field including presentations by the exhibiting artists and a highlight talk from Paul Greenhalgh, author of *Ceramic, Art and Civilisation* (Bloomsbury, 2020).

This symposium will be paralleled by a ‘Young Clay Symposium’ also taking place on 1 April 2023 organised by Messums Creative where participants aged 10+ can celebrate contemporary ceramic through hands-on learning. During the day, there will be the opportunity to explore the story of clay and for participants to make their own fire sculpture. Together with these symposiums, our programme of clay workshops at Messums’ Chilmark studios will present further opportunities to experience and enjoy the material and discover the process.

Celebrating clay and the creative processes involved, a key highlight of the exhibitions and events programme will be a dramatic wood-firing spectacle from French ceramicist Thiébaud Chagué whereby the act of making becomes part of the exhibition. Between January and April, Chagué will transform the Messums Tithe Barn into a live studio space, presenting to view all phases of ceramic

making. The artist will give talks to the public in the barn every Monday at 11:30am from February onwards providing updates on the project as it unfolds and welcoming visitors to enjoy the making journey. Once the six-metre-tall wood-fired kiln is built, Chagué will fire a larger-than-life sculpture, created on site from moulded and extruded clay forms, in a celebration of fire, clay and landscape. Together with this, a series of smaller pieces will be fired in the kiln which will subsequently be shown in the exhibition alongside further works by the artist. The firing will be a dramatic spectacle and the public will be invited to watch this exciting event as it takes place.



Thiébaud Chague's kiln firing in Nancy, France, September 2022

Chague is renowned for his unique wood fired stoneware sculptural pieces. In 2009 he built a giant clay sculpture which he fired in the courtyards of the V&A Museum to mark the opening of its new ceramics galleries. Examples of his work can be found in public collections across Europe. He is represented in the V&A museum and has recently exhibited in the Louvre.

In conjunction with Thiébaud Chagué's exhibition in the barn, surreal figures and forms by French artist Sandrine Bringard will populate the Pod Gallery. Bringard was taught by Chagué and spent a year in residence working at his studio, experimenting with high-temperature wood-firing and learning from his expertise. Her ceramic work focuses on the theme of the body and body parts, investigating notions of the interior – the invisible and the suggested, and the exterior – the visible and space.



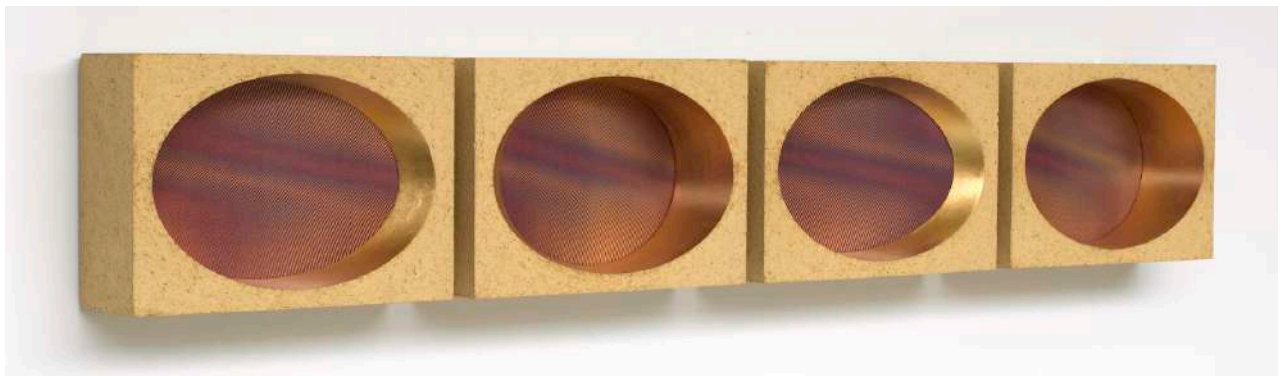
Thiébaud Chagué, Madrépore I and II, 2019



Sandrine Bringard, Marcheur, 2019

At Messums London, Cork Street from 15 February until 17 March, there will be a solo presentation of new and recent works by Martin Smith. Smith has achieved international recognition as one of the UK's leading ceramic artists. He trained at Bristol Polytechnic Faculty of Art and Design and the Royal College of Art, and sees himself as an artist, making his work with the mindset of an architect and meticulously planning each piece. Since the start of his career in the late 1970s, Smith has exhibited internationally, and examples of his work can be found in many public collections worldwide. A major retrospective was held at the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam, in 1996 and in 2001 he made *Wavelength*, a site-specific work for Tate St. Ives.

His continuing practice in the field of ceramics consists of an on-going project investigating the formal language of the vessel and the way that it can both contain a space and define a place. Investigations into both material and process underpin his work. This exhibition presents new wall-based works produced by Smith which are characteristically ideas-driven, precision-made and explore illusory perspective and geometry. A 60 page, full-colour exhibition catalogue will be available featuring an introduction by Paul Greenhalgh and an essay by Natalie Baerselman le Gros and a Q&A with Dr Claudia Milburn.



Martin Smith, Squaring the Circle No.7, 2022



Martin Smith, Exhibition catalogue

In the Long Gallery at Messums Wiltshire from 4 March until 30 April, themes of abstraction and innovation in clay will be continued in a presentation of works by pioneering British ceramicists: Natasha Daintry, Nicholas Lees, and James Rigler, each taught by Martin Smith and all sharing an affinity with his work. These artists represent a generation exploring the ceramic medium who have been given licence to experiment. Each has developed their own abstract language within the ceramic discipline whilst together they point to a greater understanding of the potential of the medium. They exemplify mastery of technical accomplishment and innovation.



Natasha Daintry, Flame, 2020



James Rigler, Crown, 2018



Nicholas Lees, Spheroid Forms, 2022-23

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For further information and press images, please contact: press@messumswiltshire.com

MESSUMS WILTSHIRE is a leading multi-purpose gallery and arts centre set inside a restored thirteenth-century tithe barn and surrounding buildings with exhibition space, sculpture garden and restaurant.

MESSUMS LONDON is a 2,000 sq ft exhibition space on Cork Street behind the Royal Academy. It hosts a rolling programme of exhibitions for our contemporary artists and is home to our photography department.