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Thiébaut Chagué Wood Firing in Action

Exhibition 4 March – 30 April

Firing the Kiln 30 – 31 March



L: Example of Chagué's wood-fired kiln at Nancy, France

R: Maquette of *Blazing Embodiment*

A key highlight of Messums' Ceramics Season will be a dramatic wood-firing spectacle from French ceramicist Thiébaud Chagué whereby the act of making becomes part of the exhibition. Chagué has transformed the Messums Tithe Barn into a live studio space, presenting to view all phases of ceramic making. Visitors have been able to experience the project as it unfolds and 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. The firing will be a dramatic spectacle taking place on Thursday 30 and Friday 31 March and the public are invited to watch this exciting event as it takes place.

Chagué is renowned for his unique wood-fired stoneware sculptural pieces. He explores the intersections between the natural and the man-made, organic forms and elemental surfaces flow and burst in the high heat. The works seem almost growing, living creatures, works of the earth, from the earth.

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Wood-firing is an age-old technique that dates back thousands of years to when humans first understood how to fire clay in pits and wood kilns. With the many firing options contemporary ceramicists now have, the commitment to wood-fire is one that embraces the volatile and unpredictable nature of ceramic making. The process cannot be completely controlled by the artist, the forms are fluid and changeable, splits may occur, glazes may crack and bubble – by nature the resulting work is spontaneous and always unique. Wood-firing is slow and highly physical, measured by instinct and experience. In working this way Chagué embraces the element of chance and gives his work up to the game of fire.



L: *Blazing Embodiment* maquette and work in progress
R: *Blazing Embodiment* work in progress and *Phoenix*

The final piece is a 5-metre megalith, *Blazing Embodiment*, a shrine to clay and flame, that symbolises a fiery rebirth. The piece is formed from a gathering of extruded hexagonal clay pieces, each made using a refurbished mechanical extruder (itself made from World War II battlefield scrap near Alsace). Separately the extruded pieces are stalagmite-like, growing upwards from the muddy ground, together the sculpture is reminiscent of a geological rock formation, a roaming fragment of the Giant's Causeway.

The exhibition will display this monumental sculpture alongside other works by Chagué that speak to these geological and organic themes. Smaller works are reminiscent of natural fauna, flowering plants and gourd-like bulbs, their surfaces ripple and glisten as if

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just uprooted. These are complimented by another large-scale work, *Phoenix (Fire gives, Fire takes)*, which is an expression of the volatility of fire and bears witness to the lived experience of wood-firing ceramic.



L-R: *Erubescence* (h. 23cm), *Albarelle Azurée* (h. 32cm), *Girandole Mystérieuse* (h. 87cm), all Thiébaud Chagué

ABOUT THIÉBAUT CHAGUÉ

Thiébaud Chagué was a student of Master studio potters Richard Batterham and Michael Cardew. Like Cardew, Chagué has undertaken many trips and residencies in Nigeria, including working with women potters in the Gwari village of Tatiko and has utilised techniques from sub-Saharan traditions. His preference for wood-firing relates to these Nigerian connections and his love of the process. In 2009 Chagué built a giant clay sculpture which he fired in the courtyards of the V&A Museum to mark the opening of its new ceramic 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.

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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.