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No Boundaries - Contemporary Canadian Ceramic

Walter Ostrom, Gregory Payce & Linda Sormin

5 March - 1 May 2022

The Long Gallery, Messums Wiltshire

It is widely recognised that North America has been of global importance for ceramic art for much of the last century. What has been less well understood is that many of the most important artists have been Canadians. Across the range of practice, Canadians have expanded the potential of the pottery field. This important exhibition gathers together for the first time in the UK three artists who span the last three generations, and regions from the east to the west coast.

For the past five years Messums has taken a lead role in promoting the ceramic arts. This has been realised through an innovative exhibition programme, one important thread of which has

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been exhibitions on national ceramic cultures. Korean and British Ceramic have both been subject of ground-breaking shows. The focus now is on Canada.

The Canadians have been a major force in the international ceramic field for decades. It is important to establish this up-front, as there has been a tendency to see the enormous and wonderful vortex that is North American art as a single giant entity, which Canada somehow blends into. While the exchange between the two countries is obviously real and intimate, there is also something very particular about Canadian practice, which differentiates it from the rest.

It isn't that the work has a common style or technique – just the opposite perhaps, it is tremendously diverse – but that there are characteristics within Canadian ceramic that endow it with a distinct ethos: A commitment to technical excellence and a tendency towards narrative as well as intellectual curiosity. The artists see ceramic as a vehicle for ideas, as a means of exploring issues well beyond the walls of the pottery and craft centre. They have no problem understanding that what they do is art in the most profound sense, and has a beautiful complexity to it.

The three artists in this ground-breaking exhibition, for the UK, Walter Ostrom, Greg Payce, and Linda Sormin, demonstrate these three traits. They also represent several generations, and all of them enjoy international reputations. Interestingly, they are also or have been committed teachers.

Over the last five decades, Walter Ostrom, has been one of the most plural thinkers within production and education, anywhere. He is a legendary promoter of studio pottery as a profession. While acknowledging classic studio pottery – he has championed the development of ceramic history – he has also been at the forefront of introducing Conceptualist approaches to ceramic practice. He is as at home with Donald Judd, Sol Lewitt and Joseph Beuys, as he is with Michael Cardew and Bernard Leach.

Greg Payce lives in Calgary, Alberta and was Professor of Ceramic at ACAD before stepping back to concentrate purely on his work. Through the decades he has developed a superb form of *trompe l'oeil* that is entirely his own, in which thrown vessels, sometimes in pairs, sometimes in rows, appear to have standing figures between them. In his work, people fill the voids. In this way, his art gives us one of the most poetic and timeless visions of the relationship of people to pots. He has made for us an essay on the intimacy of ceramic to civilization.

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Linda Sormin is a professor at New York University, but no less Canadian for that. More than anyone engaged in the medium, over the last decades she has pushed ceramic into wholly new terrain, in which the vessel disappears to be replaced by networked clouds of coloured threads and pipes. She integrates into the clay components broken fragments of things, discarded and disowned detritus, and pieces of writing, to create linear, open sculptural works that resemble neurological structures. This is probably a most appropriate analogy: her process of searching, collecting, and assembling seems to be geared to the capturing of the ephemeral: incidents and moments that have gone, leaving behind only fragments of evidence. She describes her outlook:

“To make space for new discovery in any particular place or situation, how might I loosen my grip on language and methodology? Where is there opportunity to reshape my material, visual, spatial, conceptual and kinetic expectations? Research includes scavenging, collecting, disassembling and rebuilding fragments into new forms.”

Three artists representing three generations, and all at the forefront of global ceramic practice. This is a fair representation of Canadian ceramic art at this time.

Text by Paul Greenhalgh, September 2021

Canadian Ceramic

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Linda Sormin

Through sculpture and site-responsive installations, Linda Sormin explores fragility, tension, migration, survival and change. Her work has been exhibited nationally and internationally, most recently at United Contemporary (Toronto, ON), Patricia Sweetow Gallery (San Francisco, CA) and Ferrin Contemporary (North Adams, MA). She was a participant at the European Ceramic Workcentre in the Netherlands this year, creating new work for three exhibitions: “Ceramics in the Expanded Field: Sculpture, Performance and the Possibilities of Clay”, at MASS MoCA, North Adams, MA; Peach Corner Gallery in Copenhagen, Denmark opening in 2022; and Messums Wiltshire.

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Sormin lives and works in New York City, and is Associate Professor of Studio Art at New York University. She has taught ceramics at Emily Carr University, Rhode Island School of Design, Sheridan College and Alfred University. Born in Bangkok, Sormin moved to Canada with her family at the age of five. She has a BA in English Literature and worked in community development for four years in Thailand and Laos. She studied ceramics at Andrews University (BA, English Literature, 1993), Sheridan College (Ceramics Diploma, 2001) and Alfred University (MFA, Ceramic Art, 2003).

Gregory Payce

Greg Payce has been making ceramics for over 55 years. He has exhibited his work in over thirty solo, and over one hundred and fifty group exhibitions in Canada and abroad. He has presented lectures and workshops nationally and internationally. His practice has been reviewed in over fifty publications. His work is included in numerous public and private collections. He mounted *Greg Payce Illusions*, at the Gardiner Museum in Toronto in 2012. He received the Governor General's Award for Media and Visual Arts – Saidye Bronfman Award for Fine Craft in 2013. In 2015, he retired from teaching at The Alberta University of the Arts and is currently Professor Emeritus at the Alberta College of Art and Design. He recently completed a Canada Council senior artist grant to undertake research, make studio work for exhibitions, and present lectures on his practice internationally. In 2018 he held a Solo Exhibition of his work with Art Mur Gallery in Berlin. His work was recently featured on the cover of *Ceramics and Civilization* by Paul Greenhalgh. He lives and works in Calgary, Alberta, Canada.

Walter Ostrom

A major force in the world of contemporary ceramics, Walter Ostrom is Professor Emeritus of the Ceramics department at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design University in Halifax. He is also Honorary Professor of ceramics at the Jingdezhen Ceramic Institute in Jingdezhen, China. Ostrom is regarded internationally as a technical and academic expert in low-fire maiolica production, an ancient ceramic technique that he has personally tailored through innovations and decorative methods to reflect the geography of the places he has lived, be it Canada or China. In the span of his nearly 40-year career, Ostrom has investigated many aspects of ceramics in his work, from experiments in high conceptualism in the 1970s to his current focus on the exploration of the vast history, hybridization and social foundation of ceramics. Ostrom's work has been exhibited throughout Canada, and in Europe, China, Australia and the United States.

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About Messums Wiltshire

Messums Wiltshire is a leading multi-purpose gallery and arts centre. It has become a platform for creative expression across artistic genre and a meeting point of minds to explore how art as a language is made, interpreted, resolved and shared.

The gallery opened in Autumn 2016 after a two-year restoration project to bring a thirteenth century tithe barn back to life as an exhibition and event space. The gallery's one year anniversary was marked with the opening of the Long Gallery, a former dairy that lies perpendicular to the main barn to present two-dimensional works of art and objects of scale as well as The Mess Restaurant. The exterior landscape was remodelled in 2020 with sculpture grounds and outside seating,

In 2020 a Membership Programme was launched to help support the ambitious artistic programming in Wiltshire, including international artist residencies, Contemporary Dance premiers and educational workshops. Messums Creative sees the act of physical making, often lacking in a digital world, brought back into focus via ceramic workshops, which have been running since Summer 2021.

This September the gallery is marking its five year milestone with a show of Elisabeth Frink's sculpture: Man is an Animal represents one of the most significant collections to be brought together in this country since the artist's death in April 1993 and runs until January 2022, and recontextualises the importance of figurative sculpture in the latter part of the 20th century. The gallery also launched a Photography Department with a presentation of Robert Capa's work at Photo London and an ongoing collaboration with leading contemporary photographers.

The gallery's ongoing Active Environmentalism programming, a series of talks from leading minds and thinkers, aims to inform individual thinking around collective decisions - thinking at the intersection of science and necessity sits closely with the problem solving inherent in the creative process. Underpinning all of this is an appreciation and respect for nature to which most artists and individuals would readily align.

Messums Wiltshire is an independent business run by a team led by Johnathan Messu with exhibition and event spaces in Cork Street London and Messums Yorkshire in James Street in Harrogate.

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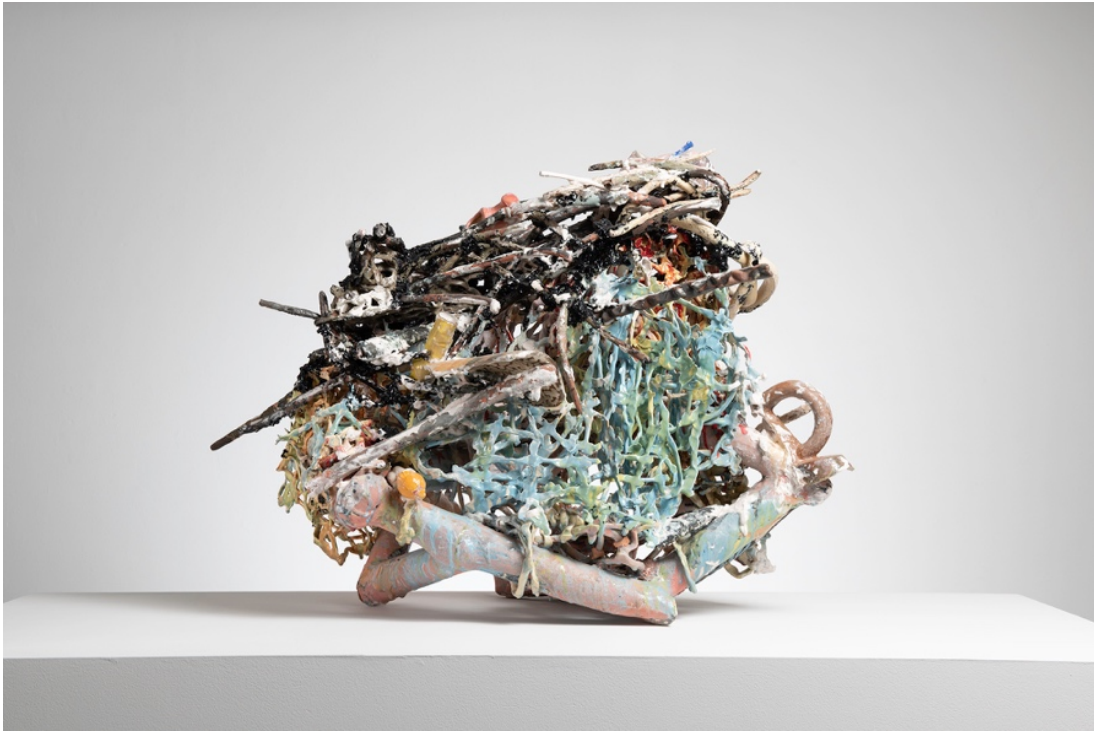
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