

PRESS RELEASE

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Please contact: press@messums.org

CERAMIC SEASON 2024

2 March – 29 April 2024

Symposium: 6 April 2024

Messums West

Messums Org has a strong legacy of ceramic exhibitions that explore the frontline of innovative and beautiful making in the material of clay. Recent exhibitions such as *Beyond the Vessel: Narratives in Contemporary European Ceramics* in 2020, *British Studio Ceramic* in 2021, and *No Boundaries – Contemporary Canadian Ceramic* in 2022, exhibited seminal makers and demonstrated the vitality of contemporary clay, paving the way for the first ceramics season at Messums Org in 2023. The season included a solo show of new work by Martin Smith; a barn takeover by French ceramicist Thiébaud Chagué, who created a 3-metre extruded clay sculpture that was fired in a public event in a 5-metre wood-fired Kiln at Messums West; and the first ceramics symposium, attended by over 150 people.

Spring 2024 sees the return of the Messums' Ceramic Season, continuing to feature exhibitions that demonstrate the diversity and breadth of contemporary ceramic practice whilst mining deeper into the medium and its history. Two exhibitions will run concurrently in the Messums West Barn and Long Gallery from 2 March to 29 April 2024. The Messums Barn will also host the gallery's annual ceramics symposium, attended by over 150 people in 2023, on Saturday 6 April 2024.

'of the Earth'

Messums West, Barn

2 March – 29 April 2024



Aligning with Messums' special interest in active environmentalism, the gallery is pleased to present a group exhibition of ceramic artists that interrogate and are inspired by the material of clay as an earthly material and a planetary resource, considering the environmental and ecological impact of their practice.

The raw material of clay is abundant and richly varied across the globe. The surviving archaeological record shows clay being formed into objects such as figurines, vessels, and architecture, from as far back as 30,000 years ago. As such, it has and continues to play a crucial role within the ceremonies and routines of our birth, life and death cycles, whether domestic or ritual customs and its ubiquity within our own lives across time and geography makes it a material easy to take for granted.

But the ceramic medium enacts a heavy toll on the earth, both artistically and industrially, from mining clay and glaze elements to energy consuming kiln firings. It must be recognised that every ceramic object, fired into permanence exists as a debt to the earth, a chunk of raw material extracted and forever changed, not to be returned to its former state.



'of the Earth' explores these connections of raw clay and fired ceramic with the earth, the body and time. This group of artists explore the potential for unadorned clay and ceramic, some that make statements on the global richness of clay, others revelling in the raw materials' performative interactivity, some describing the opposing fragility and firmness of its different states. Each manifests the importance of clay within our lives, from utility to infinity. Many do so with a sense of responsibility, aware of the deep history of making with clay whilst cautious of the future of such an industry and our planet along with it.

The exhibition will showcase work by William Cobbing, Halima Cassell, Nina Salsotto Cassina, Adam Buick, Charly Blackburn, and Claudia Barreira.

'Contem'Plate'
Messums West, Long Gallery
2 March – 29 April 2024

Alongside, in the Long Gallery, Messums presents a contrasting yet complimentary exhibition of historical and contemporary plates with the aim to examine the history of plates and their decorative and functional roles, culminating in a celebration of their contemporary space as an alternative canvas for mark-making, installation, and communication of meaning.

The plate has a long history that stretches far deeper than its entanglement with ceramic, from meer leaves to bread and wood trenchers to pewter tableware, and is intrinsically tied with the domestic function to serve food. Ceramic plates have a central place in the archaeological record, teaching us how people of the past ate and lived, including terra cotta plates in Ancient Greece and Rome, porcelain plates in Tang Dynasty china. But decorative plates from as far back as the ancient civilisations of Egypt, Greece and Rome show us the plate has always offered much more than utility.



Throughout the ceramic continuum the plate has become increasingly commonplace, artistic developments in Europe manifested in numerous important ceramic styles, including Italian Maiolica, Dutch Delftware and Sèvres wares in France. The industrial revolution, with assembly line mass production, transfer printing and mold forms, made the ceramic plate abundant in our homes. Through time, seminal artists of paintbrush and canvas have turned their attention to artistic expression on the plate, such as Pablo Picasso, Jeff Koons, Judy Chicago, Cindy Sherman, and Ed Ruscha.

This exhibition acknowledges the ubiquity of the plate within our daily lives, both as a functional object as part of our everyday eating habits or personal ritual habits, and as a decorative or ceremonial object that adorned walls and china cabinets and populated personal ceramic collections.



Exhibited artists will include Martin Smith, Stephen Dixon, Paul Scott, Makoto Kagoshima, Charlotte Hodes, Bouke De Vries, Abigail Schama and Sandy Brown, as well as historic works from ceramic history.

'Plates with Purpose – Make for Peace'
Messums West, Pod
2 March – 29 April 2024

'Plates with Purpose' acknowledges the coming together of people, family and friends across the dining table, a recognisable and worldwide daily activity, in the act of sharing and eating. Dining and eating together is an act of nourishment, where conflict and argument have no place, a potential starting place for empathy and understanding.



Messums Org have partnered with the David Nott Foundation, who train surgeons working in war and natural disaster zones. It is our hope that the motivation behind 'Plates with Purpose', and the funding it will raise, will begin a discussion to develop a world where such charities are needed less and less in the sphere of conflict. We believe diplomacy and goodwill start at the kitchen table.

Following an overwhelmingly positive response from our creative community on the ethos for 'Plates with Purpose', Messums Creative (the public studio/workshop extension of Messums.org) led a public call out to ceramic artists working on plates to submit their works. The resulting exhibition of over 130 submissions will be a feast for the eyes. A vivid and diverse display will cover the walls of the Messums pod with works from emerging and well-known artists.

Ceramics Symposium
Messums West, Barn

6 April 2024



Following the success of Messums' ceramic symposium in 2023, we are pleased to bring an array of ceramic artist's, researchers, experts and museum professionals to the Messums Barn. The symposium will explore ecological and environmental approaches and concerns with ceramic practice, drawing from themes in our 'of the Earth' exhibition. Talks will look at wild clay and the practice of natural clay and glaze foraging; the global diversity of clay materials and the people's stories they represent; the realities of deep-sea mining for metals used in glazing, making from recycled clays and industrial waste products; and the possibilities and practicalities of making with clay in a post-carbon environment. Full details of speakers will be announced on our website.

Images:

Halima Cassell, *Virtues of Unity*, ongoing. Photo: Nick Bond

William Cobbing, *Terra Cave*, 2023. Photo: Courtesy the artist

Makoto Kagoshima, *Large Apple and Chrysanthanums*, 2023. Photo: Jo Sullivan

Martin Smith, *Blue Phase*, 2002. Photo: Steve Russell

Stephen Dixon, new work for 'Plates with Purpose', 2023. Photo: Courtesy the artist

Ceramic Season 2023, Messums Barn. Photo: Messums Org

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For further information and press images, please contact: press@messums.org



MESSUMS WEST 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.