

Contemporary Clay

Continuing our tour of Scottish design, Local Heroes bring you the first of two forays this year into contemporary ceramics

Words: Stacey Hunter

The ceramics scene in Scotland is an eclectic and highly diversified field, both in character and use of materials. It's also possibly the only sector that embodies themes from early Italian Renaissance paintings, land erosion, Japanese reality and macaroni.

Patricia Shone's work is informed by the powerful landscape around her on the Isle of Skye. Her work has been developing in response to the feeling of connection with Skye's inhabitants and their passage across the land. Firing her vessels by raku, wood and saggar she depicts the erosion of the hills, creating patterns and textures translated into clay. The designer makes mostly functional forms, boxes, bowls and jars "because they are innately human vessels; they represent the human condition of surface and content."

The natural textures produced are hand formed by texturing and stretching. Sometimes by throwing, sometimes carving from solid lumps. The muted colours are achieved with oxides, slips and glazes but mostly by the firing processes and different clay bodies. "As we advance, technologically, the surfaces we touch become increasingly synthetic and machine finished. I feel that what challenges us now is the reality of nature – wild, uncomfortable, dirty, unpackaged, visceral experience." Her work will be exhibited in July at the Red Barn Gallery in Cumbria.

Natalie J. Wood is a ceramic designer and maker whose minimalist pieces in slip cast Parian are produced using plaster moulds she makes herself in her Edinburgh studio. Focusing on clean lines and unique colours, Wood describes her work as "minimal homeware." Her range of water carafes, cups, low pourers and plates is titled Detsu. The meaning came from Wood's two aesthetic inspirations – 'De' from the Dutch word for 'the' and 'tsu' from the Japanese 'genjitsu' meaning reality or actuality. Wood's simple, elegant forms are impeccably restrained, decorative and functional. The designer was featured in the 2017 Wallpaper* City Guide to Edinburgh.



Steph Liddle, *Mimic Trio*

Wood describes herself as a "restless designer" saying "I like to do new things. This year I want to move away slightly from totally utilitarian homeware and experiment more." She has recently collaborated with selected illustrators such as Maria Stoian and Savannah Storm, and Bethany Thompson. "I knew that people liked the idea of putting their illustrations on ceramics but found it too complicated or daunting to deal with, so I was able to streamline the process and the results have been amazing. I have a list of people I would like to collaborate with and it just keeps growing."

Working from her studio in a Victorian jute mill, Steph Liddle is a Dundee-based ceramics designer and maker who draws on her background in illustration to create contemporary, graphic ceramic jewellery and homeware. She works primarily with Parian porcelain clay before



Fiona Byrne-Sutton, *Blue Peninsula (after Joseph Cornell)*

Photo: Michael Wolchover

using underglaze to introduce hand-drawn pattern and illustration, meaning no two pieces are ever exactly the same. Each piece is polished by hand to create objects with a marble-smooth finish.

Focusing on minimal shapes, combined with bold patterns and a limited colour palette, she creates pieces which are "easy to wear and live with." Liddle's work hinges on ideas around home and home comforts, especially the role of food, with many of her minimal patterns inspired by culinary staples. Her recurring dash and curve motifs are inspired by rice and macaroni – classic comfort foods reduced to their most basic shapes. "I'm working on a new collection at the moment which uses copper and gold lustres, which is exciting." Upcoming exhibitions for Liddle include The Hepworth Wakefield Contemporary Ceramics Fair and WASPS

Designers + Artists Summer Sale in Dundee – both in May.

In Fiona Byrne Sutton's work, landscape is distilled according to modernist formalism into discrete windows, huts, recesses or lairs. Her latest assemblages go under the name The Angel's Share, an industry term for the portion of whisky lost in evaporation in the cask barrel. Here it is "a metaphor for the poetics of the temporal soul." The composition, colour and rhythm of her three dimensional assemblages are informed by early Italian Renaissance paintings. The rich layers of metaphor become modular assemblages rendered in a limited palette in porcelain and clay and placed on crystocal plinths creating monumental compositions such as Blue Peninsula. The latest pieces from her Angel's Share series can be seen in a forthcoming exhibition at the &Gallery, Edinburgh 5-29 May 2018.



Patricia Shone

Photo: Shannon Tofts



Natalie J Wood