

Expanding Scale and Surface in Contemporary Ceramics

1. Summary of the impact

Research into properties of scale and surface undertaken by ceramicist Felicity Aylieff has achieved substantial national and international impact in cultural life and education since 1996. The research leads to significant innovations in ceramics, especially in the areas of monumental sculptures and translation of traditional techniques to contemporary use. These are realised in a body of work and dissemination by public speaking, exhibitions and publications. Through innovative international collaborative projects, the established separation between studio ceramics and industry has been bridged globally.

2. Underpinning research

Formative research undertaken by Aylieff at the Royal College of Art (RCA), *The Elusive Body* 1996 [s3.1], challenged the firmly entrenched canons embedded in studio ceramics and opened the way for innovative developments in the area of scale. Methodical testing led to the development of large-scale press-moulding techniques, clay aggregates, and ceramic colour editions of clay bodies to create specific visual qualities. The work was shown in a major solo exhibition 'Sense and Perception' (Manchester City Art Gallery, 2002), toured to Bath and Cumbria (2003), and was reviewed widely [s3.2].

In 2006, Aylieff became the first ceramicist to undertake a series of extended residencies at the Experimental Factory in Jingdezhen, China, a city of historical significance for its porcelain development. She initially collaborated with highly skilled artisans at a manufactory recognised for making traditional monumental vessels for the Chinese market, to investigate properties of scale and surface. As an extension of this project, Aylieff was selected for an exhibition and organised a related international symposium on aesthetic, historical, cultural, and technical aspects of porcelain [s3.3]. Original research during her second residency into the traditional Chinese soft-colour technique of *fencai*, a low-fired on-glaze enamel technique with strong visual and tactile qualities, led to the development of a European interpretation of this unique technique. The results of this research – a series of monumental *fencai* decorated pieces – were exhibited in London [s3.4 and s3.5].



Aylieff Painting *Fencai* in the Studio (left); Aylieff's Jingdezhen Tornado Tower Installation, Qatar (right).

Building on her research into the traditional blue and white porcelain produced in Jingdezhen, Aylieff was awarded a residency in 2010 at Royal Delft, the only remaining traditional factory in the Netherlands. By combining collections research in museums and studio practice in a factory context Aylieff developed new surface patterns, translating the conventional blue and white imagery into contemporary plate designs. One research outcome was a solo exhibition at Galerie Terra Delft (2011) [s3.6], which explored the connections between Aylieff's work in Jingdezhen and Delft.

From 2012-13, Aylieff extended her investigation into the blue and white aesthetic and questions of scale through a series of monumental porcelain sculptures commissioned for the Tornado Tower (QIPCO Tower) in Doha, Qatar [s3.7]. The project involved extensive study into

the decorative language of Islamic pattern and was informed by the history of the trade of cobalt blue between the Middle East, China, and Europe, which Aylieff researched using the collections of the Islamic Museum in Qatar and the British Museum. Aylieff conducted exhaustive testing to create a contemporary equivalent to Islamic cobalt blue colouring. The project also demanded investigations into prototyping, firing and assembling the internal supporting structures for monumental pieces of up to 4.5 metres high.

3. References to research

The outputs listed below have been subjected to critical and professional judgement following the criteria of excellence in the applied arts. The venues in the UK and overseas are of national and international significance for the discipline of creative and applied arts curation. Panel review and critical reception of works are standard and conform to peer review processes. All references cited below are available on request to the HEI and cross-references to Aylieff's REF 2 Outputs are given under 3.5, 3.6 and 3.7 below.

3.1) Felicity Aylieff, *The Elusive Body* (Unpublished MPhil thesis, RCA, 1996).

3.2) *Sense and Perception* (Solo exhibition, catalogue, touring exhibition, educational programme, resource exhibition room, video and published educational slide pack, 2002–3). Funded by Arts Council England (National Touring Programme, £12,000); Manchester Metropolitan University. Reviewed in *Ceramic Review* (2002), 197; *Crafts* (2003), 180; *AN for Artists* (2003); *Telegraph Magazine* (2003). Works acquired by Crafts Council, Contemporary Arts Society, Birmingham Museum and Art Galleries, Manchester Metropolitan University.

3.3) 'White Gold' (Curated exhibition and symposium, 2006). Funded by Daiwa Anglo-Japanese Foundation; Royal College of Art. Reviewed in *Crafts* (2006), 199.

3.4) *Out of China: Monumental Porcelain* (Exhibition, book, DVD, reviews, article, workshop, artist talk, 2007–9). Funded by Arts Council England (£21,578). Reviewed in *Crafts* (2007), 209; *Ceramic Review* (2007), 229; *La Revue de la Céramique et du Verre* (2008), 158.

3.5) 'Working to Scale' (Solo exhibition, catalogue, lecture: Contemporary Applied Arts, London, 2009) and 'Contemporary Craft Comes to No. 10' (Group exhibition, No. 10 Downing Street, London, 2009). CCA catalogue funded by Arts Council England. Aylieff REF2 Output 1 and 4.

3.6) 'Out of Delft/Out of China' (Artist in residence, industry collaboration, catalogue and film, 2010–11) and 'Felicity Aylieff' (Solo exhibition, 2010–11). Featured in 'Brandpunt Terra 2011' catalogue. Artist's residency documentary film *Out of Delft* produced by Stichting Keramiek Promotie, Brandpunt Terra, and Galerie Terra Delft; directed by Sara Verweij. Reviewed in *Crafts* (2011); *Klei Keramisch: KLEI* (2011). Aylieff REF2 Output 2.

3.7) Felicity Aylieff, 'Three Monumental Sculptures' for Tornado Tower (QIPCO Tower), Doha, Qatar (2013). Plans and designs available on request from the HEI. Aylieff REF2 Output 3.

4. Details of the impact

Impact 1: Cultural Life: A ceramic artist of international standing, Aylieff bridges fine and applied art by showing monumental work in public settings and museums, contributing to cultural life and education. Since 1994, Aylieff's research, as cited in Sections 2 and 3, has resulted in 26 solo exhibitions and work has been selected for 98 group shows. There have been 31 publications (catalogue essays, profiles, reviews) about the work. Funding for projects has come from a variety of sources, including the Arts Council [s5.1]. At least an estimated 140,944+ visitors have seen the work in the exhibitions listed in this case study. The impact of Aylieff's research as cited in Section 2 is best represented by three exhibitions with high visitor figures, 'Sense and Perception' (46,369+ visitors), 'Out of China: Monumental Porcelain' (46,590+ visitors) and 'White Gold – Contemporary Porcelain from Jingdezhen' (37,469+ visitors) [s5.2].

In 2002, Manchester City Art Gallery commissioned Aylieff to launch its exhibition programme in new galleries with 'Sense and Perception' [see s3.2]; this exhibition drew an estimated visitor figure of over 30,000. It resulted in six purchases from public institutions, including the Crafts Council and Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery [s5.3]. 'Out of China: Monumental Porcelain' [see s3.4] (2007–9) was an Arts Council England-funded touring show that comprised site-specific work on an extreme scale (three metres high), a size not normally associated with porcelain. This project was significant for its cross-fertilisation between Eastern and Western traditions, techniques, processes, and contemporary idioms. It reached a wide audience and was shown at One Canada Square, Canary Wharf (2007) as well as numerous public galleries (2008–9). The exhibition resulted in six acquisitions by public institutions, including the Victoria and Albert Museum [s5.3] and received major funding from Arts Council England [s5.1].

Exhibitions frequently lead to acquisitions by major museums, providing an enduring legacy; 29 sculptural ceramic works have been obtained for public collections [see s5.3]. 'Her works were chosen for their daring yet delicate reinterpretations of three types or styles for which Jingdezhen was historically well-known' (Keeper of Applied Arts/Exhibition Curator, The Fitzwilliam Museum [s5.2]). In the case of the recent acquisition of a large-scale ceramic sculpture for the National Museum Wales, it was suggested that the work 'will offer our visitors a completely different experience of contemporary ceramics' and that 'the public impact of the work was an important consideration from the outset of the acquisition process' (Senior Curator of Applied Art, National Museum Wales [s5.4]).

Aylieff's research contributes to bridging cultural traditions in the ceramics of Europe, the Middle and Far East. Her residency at Royal Delft focused on the application of established techniques and contemporary aesthetics of Delft blue and white ware, re-connecting the rich historical and cultural traditions of the twinned cities of Delft and Jingdezhen [s5.5]. Aylieff's collaboration with skilled ceramic workers at the manufactory in Jingdezhen has shown how ceramic artists can successfully produce works according to new aesthetic ideas [s5.6]. Her artist's residency provided a model for other recognised figures from the world of ceramics to take up similar positions [s5.6]. 'Her activities have drawn attention to our factory within Jingdezhen, as a factory that facilitates artists and encourages experiment and as a consequence we have been host to a number of international artists' (Owner of Zhen Shang San Bao Factory, Jingdezhen [s5.6]).

Aylieff's research and practice involves meaningful exchanges between artist-practitioner and manufacturer, as well as between countries with different traditions. Aylieff has been described as 'bridging the gap between studio ceramics and industry'. The factory provided technical expertise and support with production, and Aylieff provided contemporary thinking in surface design and identified new potential for areas of development to existing ranges' (Director, Terra Delft Gallery [s5.5]). In Delft, Aylieff's residency and exhibition formed a significant event within the citywide ceramic festival, 'Bundapunt Terra'. The project also had further longer term cultural impact on the city: 'As a legacy of her residency, Royal Delft has since invited a number of Chinese artists to work in the factory, opening up an international dialogue' (Director, Terra Delft Gallery [s5.5]).

Impact 2: Education: Through the dissemination of her research, as cited in this case study, Aylieff has had a significant influence in the field of ceramic education. Exhibiting widely, and showing her monumental work in public and corporate settings, has meant that large numbers of people have had access to it, often in the context of informal learning. 'I have introduced colleagues from the Museum's Education Department to [Aylieff's piece] Still Life and they are extremely excited about its potential for inspiring creativity, as well as generating interest back into the historic porcelain collections' (Senior Curator of Applied Art, National Museum Wales

[s5.4]). Her work was 'a clear point of interest and conversation for the numerous visitors who viewed the exhibition, and was used often by our docent and Gallery Instructor programs in their educational endeavors' (Curator of Contemporary Decorative Arts/'New Blue and White' exhibition, Museum of Fine Arts Boston [s5.7]).

On the basis of her research, Aylieff has devised educational programmes at every exhibition for a range of levels, from the general public to specialists as an integral part of her research projects [s5.8]. These outreach activities take the form of public presentations, demonstrations, and lectures, as well as contributions to conferences and symposia. She has managed the Discovery Programme of Ceramic Art London since its inception in 2004. This is the leading international showcase for studio ceramics, a free daily programme of talks, discussions, demonstrations and films attended by up to 4,000 collectors, enthusiasts and new audiences (Ceramic Art London Organiser [s5.8]).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

Copies of all sources to corroborate the impact are available from the HEI upon request. All URLs last accessed: 22/11/13.

5.1) Arts Council England, Confirmation of award, Grants for the Arts, £21,578 for Felicity Aylieff, 'Out of China', grant reference 8538563, 14 January 2008.

5.2) Letter from Keeper of Applied Arts/Exhibition Curator, The Fitzwilliam Museum (dated 27/08/13).

5.3) Work in public and corporate collections:

2013 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston MA; V&A Museum, London; Cheltenham Museum

2012 Museum of Wales, Cardiff

2011 Grassi Museum, Leipzig; Aberystwyth Arts Centre

2010 FIDELITY (also 2011); (QIPCO) Tornado Tower in Doha, Qatar

2009 Shipley Art Gallery, Gateshead

2008 V&A Museum, London; York Museum

2007 Stiftung Lotte Reimers, Deidesheim, Germany; Stiftung Petra Verberne Venray, Netherlands; Museum für angewandte Kunst, Köln, Germany

2006 Duke of Devonshire, Chatsworth House (also 2008)

2005 Portsmouth City Museum; Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery

2004 Contemporary Art Society; Crafts Council Public Collection

2001 World Ceramic Centre, Korea (also 2003)

2000 V&A Museum, London

2000 Manchester Metropolitan University

1999 Keramikmuseum, Westerwald, Germany; Prior's Court School, Berkshire

1997 Auckland Museum, New Zealand

See also Felicity Aylieff CV and:

<<http://www.adriansassoon.com/contemporary/ceramics?view=artist&id=20>>

5.4) Letter from Senior Curator of Applied Art, National Museum Wales (dated 15/08/13).

5.5) Residency, exhibition and presentations: 'Out of Delft', Galerie Terra Delft, part of festival 'Brandpunt Terra' 2011; and letter from Director, Terra Delft Gallery (dated 10/08/13).

5.6) Letters from Owner of Zhen Shang San Bao Factory, Jingdezhen (dated 01/08/13); and Former Director, Pottery Workshop Experimental Factory, Jingdezhen (dated 01/08/13).

5.7) Letter from Curator of Contemporary Decorative Arts/'New Blue and White' exhibition, Museum of Fine Arts Boston (20/09/13).

5.8) Letter from Ceramic Art London Organiser (dated 13/08/13).