



Memoranda



26 July to 1 October 2011



A memorandum is a communication that aids the memory by recording events or observations on a topic. Memoranda are agreements, reminders, plans that refer to the past to inform the future, curators Tessa Peters and Janice West contend in this exhibition that craft objects offer an excellent opportunity to study the transfer or recreation of memory through artefacts. Innovative artworks by contemporary makers are shown to interrogate the complex ideas that objects can carry.

The exhibition includes works by artists Maisie Broadhead, Steve Dixon, Laura Potter and Elaine Wilson and they have been asked to select material from the Crafts Study Centre archive to give a further dimension to the theme.

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Crafts Study Centre, University for the Creative Arts, Farnham

26 July - 1 October 2011

Curators: Tessa Peters and Janice West

The curators introduced four visual artists to the archives and collections of the Crafts Study Centre, a significant repository not just of British craft objects of the 20th and 21st centuries, but also their creators' test pieces, sketches, source materials, notes and documents.

The artists Maisie Broadhead, Stephen Dixon, Laura Potter and Elaine Wilson each have a distinctive and innovative practice that explores the power and significance of material culture. They were invited to select items that particularly interested them from the collection and to use the ideas, histories and evocations that these objects produced for them as a spur to new work.

An accompanying book with a foreword by Professor Daniel Miller and contributions by the artists, curators and Dr Glenn Adamson, Chair of the Crafts Study Centre, will be on sale. The book is supported by the National Lottery through Arts Council England and the MIRIAD research group, Manchester Metropolitan University.

Maisie Broadhead

Selected an English, 13th - 14th century earthenware pot with pricked strap handle from the Bernard Leach source collection.

Maisie Broadhead: *'I was aware that Alison Britton, who is a member of my family, had a strong connection with the Centre and that she had curated an exhibition there called*

Three by One. I knew that Alison had scrutinised the collection very carefully ... I thought that if I could follow her lead and observe what she had chosen and find out why, then that would be a nice way in for me. So I chose a large pitcher or jug that was part of Bernard Leach's own collection, a work he had collected ... I also decided that Alison would be the subject of the work.

When I asked if I could take a picture of her with a piece from the collection, she said 'Only if I like the piece that you've chosen'. I said 'Actually it is one of the pieces you chose ... she said that it was one of her favourite pieces too, so it all fell into place. Obviously I have memories of her ceramic work, which was a strong presence in my childhood, so I decided to include some of her work in the photograph, to put it all together and to join up the dots. I like the idea that the piece that Bernard Leach owned is pouring into one of Alison's works, giving a sense of the one feeding into the other, the past informing the present ...'

Maisie Broadhead's work is titled *Made in Britton* and references Vermeer's *The Milkmaid*, a woman pouring milk from a jug, from the collection of the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.



Maisie Broadhead, *Made in Britton*, 2011. Digital C-type print, 45.5 x 40.5 cm

Stephen Dixon

Dixon's selection includes 21 small stoneware tiles demonstrating different saltglaze tests by Denise Wren, made in the 1960s and Lucie Rie's plaster button moulds.

Stephen Dixon: 'The artifacts that really excited me in the Crafts Study Centre archives fall into two separate groups. The first group consists of documents ... Barron and Larcher's order book provides us with an amazing account of their creative lives. It is sketchbook, business history and diary all in one. Three-dimensional objects form the second group, some quite small and easily overlooked, like the little plaster cast sprig moulds from Rosemary Wren and a series of Lucie Rie button moulds. What I love about these pieces is the sense of a history of their use. They aren't formally works in themselves but they are essential to the making of the object. They are the usually unseen shadow elements that are never seen by the public. They carry the history of their use and meaning on surfaces that have been stained, distressed, chipped and patinated over many years ... my attention was also caught by Denise Wren's salt glaze test tiles. I was attracted by them because they are such a potter's thing! Every potter has endless series of glaze tests lying around their workshop; they are a fundamental part of the potter's language. But these are particularly beautiful ones in subtle stoneware colours. I also liked the strong graphic sense in the way the tests were laid out, five rows of four and then one on its own at the bottom.

*Recently I was in Italy and I was on the lookout for interesting documents ... By chance I came across an intriguing folio of papers, a personnel file from WW2. It contains letters, forms, memoranda and a photograph relating to young Ligurian, Livio Sassi, who appears to have been conscripted into the Italian army as a driver and sent to North Africa, ending up as a prisoner-of-war in Tripoli. This has contemporary resonances with the 'Arab Spring' of 2011 and the ongoing conflict in Libya. My plan is to work all this into a new piece, called *Letters from Tripoli*, which encapsulates past and present conflicts in the region.*

Other objects I have recently collected in Italy are shards and fragments of ubiquitous white pottery, found whilst gardening, walking in the olive groves, and beachcombing in Liguria. The Memoranda pieces ... incorporate aspects of [these] ceramic fragments ... along with the documents I found in the Italian personnel file from the 1940s. These documents will be scanned and digitally transfer-printed on to the pieces. I envisage the outcome as a kind of three-dimensional snapshot of events in the early 21st century.'

Stephen Dixon, *Letters from Tripoli* (details), 2011. Transfer printed ceramic fragments, and Lucie Rie plaster button moulds, each approx 4 x 15.5 cm courtesy of the Crafts Study

Centre.

Photo: Philip Sayer

Laura Potter



Laura Potter's selection includes an archive box of Lucie Rie's small test-glazed pots and

Edward Johnston, *56 'a's made as wrongly as possible*, 1931, Ink on paper, demonstration sheet, 66.3cm H.

Excerpt from: An incomplete archive of unfinished ideas by Laura Potter

In an attempt to explain why I am making this work I have decided to write an unedited text.

The Crafts Study Centre is a space full of boxes, and the boxes contain 'documents' that trace the lives and works of important craftspeople. It is an archive; it is a place of safe-keeping for the past, and it does not discriminate in the same way that a collection or retrospective publication might. The archive does not preserve just the 'good', the 'valuable' or the 'exemplar', it

preserves everything because the archive is not given to subjectivity. It stores evidence of life, regardless of qualitative judgment. The CSC has personal photographs, receipts, invoices, shopping lists; private fragments might be as important as major works to someone engaged in some kind of research. In an archive, you keep everything, because you never know when someone might find it useful.

In the CSC there are some documents that are described as 'spoilt' or mistakes in some way. There are tests and experiments; the things you make on the way to making the 'good' work. There is a small box (like a shoe box) containing test-glazed pots by Lucie Rie. It is rough and unglamorous. Rummaging through the tissue paper and unwrapping the tiny vessels feels like you are rifling through LR's handbag, or reading her diary. It feels like you are handling things that were never meant to be seen, let alone shown or revered (studied?).

And so it is this box and its contents that bring me to the idea of my own 'archived' work; the issue of containment and control over how future generations might engage with what I have made.

Note: I will never be Lucie Rie and I am not trying to pretend that my work will ever warrant the level of preservation and scholarship that her practice enjoys. But in a way that's part of the point: I don't expect my work to be archived in the Crafts Study Centre or its equivalent, and so I am doing it myself, or at least some of it. I am archiving the bits that will never be written about because they are fragments of ideas, which I can't or won't continue. They are my equivalents to LR's test glazes, because these are test ideas. They have informed or stimulated other ideas, but in themselves they remain unfinished.

20 + 21.3. Laura Potter 2011



Laura Potter, *An incomplete archive of unfinished ideas*, 2011. Mixed media, and Lucie Rie, Archive box of small test-glazed pots courtesy of the Crafts Study Centre. Photo: Philip Sayer

Elaine Wilson

Elaine Wilson's selections include Lucie Rie's photo album, a selection of Barron and Larcher textile designs and their historic French printing blocks.

Elaine Wilson: *At the Crafts Study Centre what surprised me was that I was more interested in the processes behind the work than the objects themselves ... I really liked the Barron and Larcher wooden textile printing blocks; I thought they were just beautiful three-dimensional objects... such amazing shapes and I was blown away by the skill needed to create the patterns with pins and their contrast with the sculpted forms*

of the wood.

Also, I was fascinated by Lucie Rie's photograph albums. I thought the images in them were quite special. There is a quality to the photographs that really makes one feel that one has a connection with the time when they were taken, yet they come from Vienna before the Second World War, a time and a place that can be truly described as a lost world... I was also interested in how the photographs were taken. Many of them have a soft quality and

the light is diffused, so that the images look shadow-like, and the idea of the shadow is very important to me. Fox Talbot said that 'Photography is the fixing of a shadow' and that is absolutely the case with the Rie photographs.

Some of the images in the photographs are so indistinct that they have lost specificity. They are not recognisable as particular people - as portraits - but are so much more mysterious. This is the case with the profile portrait that I have chosen and this is a quality that I have also developed in my collages. They are not strictly representational. They are not direct portraits and the photographs must be seen through layers of decoration.

When I looked at the collection at the Crafts Study Centre I saw no point in lifting and using objects as they were. I have taken some pieces as inspiration, but changed them radically, because I didn't want to be too specific. I wanted to incorporate the spirit and tradition of the textiles in the collection and how they related to women's lives, rather than be too literal.

But perhaps the most telling image I chose was a profile of Lucie Rie which is very dreamlike and ethereal. I often think of a quote from Virginia Woolf in relation to my work, and it fits this photograph as well: 'It is far harder to kill a phantom than a reality'.

Elaine Wilson, *Family China*, 2011. Fired clay, decals and textile, 50 cm H., and Lucie Rie's photo album courtesy of the Crafts Study Centre. Photo: Philip Sayer.



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