

**Ceramics** | 'Mud plus genius' is how

*Emma Crichton-Miller* describes the range and fascination of porcelain and pottery on offer in London



In the 1880s, at a moment of personal crisis, Paul Gauguin started to make vessels and sculpture from clay. He wrote, "Needless to say Sèvres has killed ceramics . . . with the American Indians it was a central art. God gave man a little bit of mud, with a little bit of mud he made metal and precious stones, with a little bit of mud and a little bit of genius."

At the Pavilion of Art and Design this year, the base material of clay is transformed into gleaming vessels, soft lighting, sculpture and even furniture. It seems that, however thrilled we may be by ingenious new materials, the allure of pottery is unassailable.

Barnaby Barford, whose six-metre high "Tower of Babel", a sculpture composed of 3,000 bone china models of London shops, from boarded-up newsagents to Bond Street boutiques, currently dominates the Medieval and Renaissance Gallery of the Victoria and Albert Museum, says, "I have a love/hate relationship with clay." Not a potter but an artist who uses factory-made china to achieve his sometimes satirical, sometimes provocative ends, what fires his imagination is "the shininess, the colours, the hardness, the durability and the idea of using this industrial process to make unique objects."

He is showing at David Gill gallery two

Chieko Katsumata's bright red stoneware Pumpkin makes as much play with the dark cavity within as the many-lobed exterior. Eiko Kishi's striking geometric shapes, their pure surfaces enlivened with crumbled porcelain, are inspired by Noh theatre, while Kazuo Takiguchi makes wonderfully animate, sculptural vessels, some painted with enamel. Adrian Sassoon fields a team of ceramic artists working across a variety of techniques. Felicity Aylieff throws her tall vases with their scribbled blue and white glazes in Jingdezhen, China, once the Imperial capital of porcelain manufacture. Royal College of Art graduate Hitomi Hosono, meanwhile, constructs her beautiful vessels out of many meticulously carved, individual porcelain leaves.

## Fifty shades of clay

From top: Barnaby Barford in his studio; Cheiko Katsumata's 'Red Pumpkin' (2015); vessels by Sandra Davolio (2015) and Kazuo Takiguchi (2015) — Anthony Lycett; Katie Jones; Modernity



sculptural shapes made from small fragments of what was once a porcelain panel, fired with a transfer of Hieronymus Bosch's phantasmagoric painting "The Garden of Earthly Delights". From a distance you see a shimmer of rich colours; close up you catch tiny details on individual fragments. Barford says of his choice of materials, "Once you have found what a material can do, you end up thinking in it."

If the sheen of industrial porcelain is what draws Barford, Danish ceramist Sandra Davolio creates exquisite one-off vessels by hand that echo the forms and textures of unfolding flowers and corals. It is the play of shadow and ambient light on pure white porcelain that generates the drama. The gallery Modernity has been showing her work at PAD in London for five or six years, each year the delicacy and translucence of these spiralling, hand-built pieces growing more refined. This year it is bringing the largest pieces she has ever made. Alongside it will show the bold bulbous creations of Mårten Medbo.

Katie Jones is bringing three Japanese potters to PAD. "The more avant garde ceramic work," she says, "and two women, who used not to be allowed near the anagama kilns during firing."



Johannes Nagel's 'Vessels Cluster' (2015) — Gallery Fumi

Kate Malone, with her "Magma" series, has returned, metaphorically, to the core of her discipline, creating shimmering crystalline geometric structures from hand-built stoneware that evoke the molten and explosive activity within the earth. Fernando Casasempre's square sculptures, white porcelain shot through with soft blue clay, in a technique like watercolour, also allude to the accidents of geology, while Nicholas Rena's serene, intensely coloured, moulded, painted and polished earthenware, recently on view at his exhibition, *After Matisse*, at the Holburne Museum in Bath, find their apotheosis in perfection.

The gloriously rough-cast, anarchic pieces of Johannes Nagel, shown by Gallery Fumi, combine the refinement of porcelain with the primitive technique of casting in sand. It is, as Fumi's director Valerio Capo puts it, "very physical work, you see his hands and his nails."

The same gallery is also showing the poetic work of Lukas Wegworth, who grows luxuriant crystals on the raw edges of broken pots.

**Barnaby Barford says of clay, 'Once you have found what a material can do, you end up thinking in it'**

Gauguin may have despised the etiolated refinements of Sèvres porcelain but today the manufacturer, now called Sèvres, Cité de la céramique, has sharpened up its act. It collaborates with leading designers, including design duo Normal Studio (Jean-François Dingjian and Eloi Shafaï), who will be showing their beautiful porcelain lights, and the Scottish designer Dean Brown, whose witty porcelain vessels with glass and pigments appended were a hit this summer at the manufacturer's gallery in Paris.

A previous collaborator, Pierre Charpin, has some of his amusing clown vessels showing concurrently in London at Galerie Kreo. At PAD, however, the gallery will be showing the latest invention of the ebullient Spanish artist-designer Jaime Hayón: a ceramic light inspired by a football. The joke is that it looks so beautiful. Mud plus genius.

All gallery details from [pad-fairs.com](http://pad-fairs.com)



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