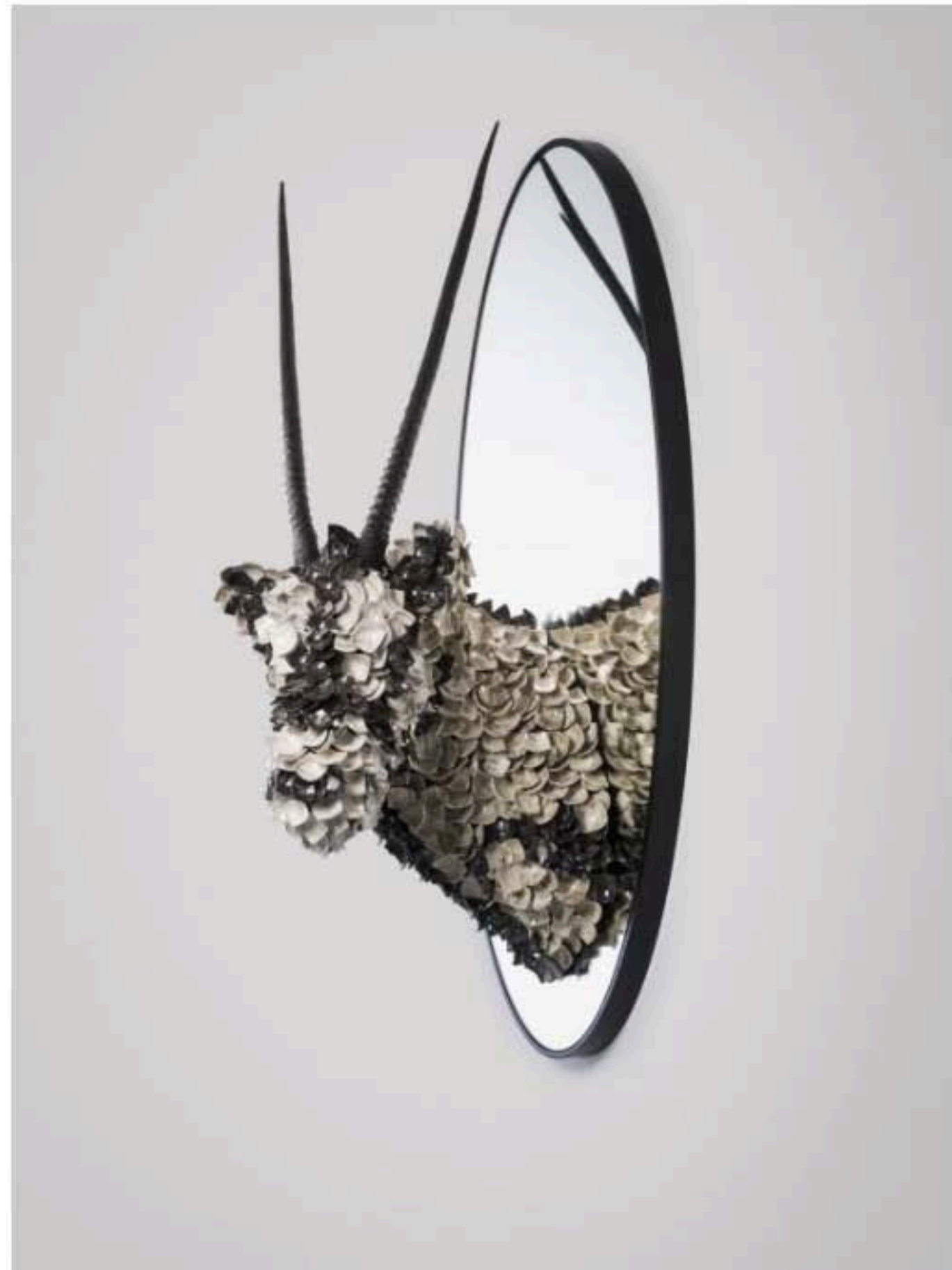


Artist in profile: Barnaby Barford

📅 Tuesday, 15th November, 2016





Meet Barnaby Barford, h.Club 100 Award Winner and artist behind the *ME WANT NOW* exhibition

The last few months have been both busy and rewarding for artist Barnaby Barford. He is about to exhibit his latest work at the David Gill Gallery from 18th November-21st December 2016, which follows hot on the heels of winning the 2016 **h.Club 100 Award** for Art, Craft and Design here in October. Ahead of his *ME WANT NOW* exhibition, we caught up with him to find out about his creative process and inspiration behind his new body of work.

Barnaby Barford on his *ME WANT NOW* exhibition

ME WANT NOW is an installation of sculpture and drawing, exploring 'me first' culture. Large-scale energetic Word Drawings, embody the chaotic immediacy and forceful nature of pursuing egocentric goals. Acting as 'nets', these drawings trap the audience and the centrepiece, a queue of life-size ceramic animals, by offering what 'we' want now. I hope the exhibition acts as a provocation, an invitation to question ourselves, our values and our choices.

All the animal sculptures are life-size. The Polar Bear is 2.5 metres tall, made up of more than 7,500 individual ceramic pieces and took a few months to make. However, the whole process is more than that; each ceramic piece is handmade by a manufacturer, then in the studio, we attached wires to each piece by hand, and these are individually attached to sculpture structures. The process is labour intensive and hugely time-consuming, it's hard to judge exactly how many hours go into each piece.

In contrast, the large-scale Word Drawings, which form part of the exhibition, offer a departure from this meticulous planning and structure. Although often still labour intensive I enjoy the fact there is no planning; no undo, no rubbing out, no correction, no adjustment. It has been very refreshing.

Every animal in this exhibition is unique in its own way. I thought that perhaps some of the big powerful animals would feel quite threatening, but on the contrary they feel very comforting in a way. They have a good presence.

On the inspiration behind his latest work

ME WANT NOW is a continuation of my exploration of our society; I wanted to focus on the notion that we live in a place where success is measured only in terms of growth. The idea that our satisfaction and happiness is only achievable by doing more, earning more, having more or producing more.

It started with words, making pictures using the same word repeated over and over again warping the meaning and making abstract images. Hope, Glory, Change, Power, More, Choice - It feels like words have never been so important – those written in the press, posted across social media and in speeches from our politicians, in volatile times words can be dangerous. The meanings of the words that I chose changed over time. *ME WANT*

NOW I hope explores the pursuit of these things, the rise of the 'me first' culture' and the collateral damage that ensues when consequences are ignored.

While making this work, the political landscape has shifted drastically, and the title, ME WANT NOW developed new meaning as a result. I saw how quickly political rhetoric can promote fear and in turn a closed border 'me first' attitude can develop. For me, this exhibition is about looking at the collateral damage that ensues when this kind of rhetoric takes a hold.

On plans for 2017

ME WANT NOW includes the first exhibitions of my work on paper and so I am really looking forward to exploring and experimenting with this way of working more in the future. Also, some of my work is featured in *Turn the Page: The First Ten Years of Hi-Fructose* an exhibition currently on at The Virginia Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA). The show features some of the foremost contemporary artists through a ten year retrospective of the art magazine, *Hi-Fructose*. In 2017 the exhibition will travel across the USA to the Akron Art Museum in Ohio and to the Crocker Art Museum in California which is very exciting.

On winning the h.Club 100 Award for Art, Design and Craft

I think I was nominated based on the success of my *Tower of Babel* project which took up residence at London's Victoria and Albert Museum in 2015. It was a monumental undertaking, years in the making and the V&A were very supportive, especially Alun Graves the Senior Curator of the Ceramics and Glass Collection. The *Tower of Babel* was my representation of London today. Standing six metres high, it was made up of 3,000 individual bone china buildings, each depicting a real London shop photographed by me.

Derelict shops and pound stores appeared at the bottom of the tower, while London's exclusive boutiques and galleries featured at the summit. Blurring the boundaries of art and commerce, each shop was for sale through the V&A. With prices rising as the Tower ascends, it confronted us with the choices we make as consumers, through necessity or desire.

On being creative

Inspiration comes from everywhere, looking, seeing, listening, living. Making work is how I try to answer questions, the process is an investigation into ideas but an interest in the human condition is the thread connecting all my work meaning current affairs often influence me. How do we live now? What is happening now? Our hopes, dreams, aspirations and of course our failures, fears and frailties.

As an artist, I am inspired by the work and creativity of many artists, including Hans Peter-Feldmann, Anthony Gormley, Richard Slee, Angus Fairhurst, Les Lalanne, Paul McCarthy, The Chapman Brothers and George Orwell.

On giving advice to aspiring artists

Persistence above all, and be true to yourself. Make the work that you're passionate about and keep at it - don't try to imitate. It is difficult, it is very difficult, but on the other hand, you get to do something you love, so love doing it. Be open, say yes to everything at the beginning and have a go. I think there are always a lot of excuses not to make work, but wherever you are, whatever you have to hand - use it to make work.

ME WANT NOW is being exhibited at **David Gill Gallery** from 18th November-21st December 2016. See more of Barnaby's work on his **Facebook**, **Instagram** and **Twitter**.

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24 Endell Street | London | WC2H 9HQ

☎ 020 7170 9100

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