

Jennifer Lee: the potter's space

Kettle's Yard
9 July – 22 September 2019

Press View: 5 July 2019, 11am – 1pm

Kettle's Yard is pleased to present 'Jennifer Lee: the potter's space', the first solo exhibition of the renowned ceramicist's work in a UK public gallery since 1994. The exhibition will show 40 works spanning the artist's entire career and will also include a number of new works which have been especially made for the exhibition at Kettle's Yard. Jennifer Lee has achieved international acclaim in her 40-year career, collaborating with Issey Miyake and Tadao Ando in 2009 and winning the LOEWE Craft Prize in 2018. Described by Edmund de Waal as 'the embodiment of place, complex and intriguing,' Lee's pots focus on the interaction between materials and elements, powerfully evoking experiences of time, place and process in a way that feels at once ancient and contemporary. This exhibition at Kettle's Yard will present periods of reflection and innovation as distinguishing features of Lee's practice.

The exhibition will show Jennifer Lee as a major presence to have emerged from studio ceramics practice. Lee and her contemporaries succeed the 1970s innovations of studio ceramics, which saw artists such as Alison Britton, Jacqueline Poncelet and Richard Slee dismantle notions of clay as a medium confined to functional forms and domestic environments. The exhibition will demonstrate contemporary studio ceramics as an independent and distinct art form, occupying its own space and freed from the increasingly obsolete 'art versus craft' debate.

Lee's pots are hand-built unglazed stoneware, characterised by their smooth surfaces and rich colours. Beginning with a pinch pot base, which is built upon by coiling lengths of clay, the roots of Lee's process lie in the earliest forms of vessel making. Her pots are coloured by introducing raw metal oxides into the clay, either before or during the making process.



Jennifer Lee, Pale, speckled, emerging rim, 1997, 21.8 x 13cm.
Shigaraki Red, dark, red tilted shelf, 2014, 15.2 x 11.8cm.
Asymmetric amber lichen, 1986, 28.5 x 15.4cm. Photo: Jon Stokes.

Lee draws from her archive of coloured clays, some of which were mixed up to 30 years ago. The oxides in the clay react when the pots are fired to achieve the distinctive effects that are characteristic of Lee's work.

The exhibition will investigate Lee's accumulating knowledge of materials, forms and processes, presenting the works on a single plinth that has been designed to be exactly the height of her studio workbench. Viewers will be encouraged to contemplate each work individually, whilst remaining conscious of their developmental relationships to one another. Small groupings of pots will draw attention to particular forms. For example, a pair of 'coned rim' pots with soft convex edges will sit near a series of 'emerging rim' pots whose dramatic, layered edges demonstrate Lee's careful development of themes, moving incrementally from one to the next.

Making around 12 pots a year, the slow and rigorous processes of repetition and analysis form a fundamental part of Lee's process, with careful sketches of and adjustments to each pot in relation to its predecessor. Sketchbooks, drawings and video documentation will be on display in the Research Space to further elucidate the artist's working practice.

The exhibition will also demonstrate the significant influence of travel on Jennifer Lee's work. A series of Shigaraki Red pots (2014–2016), made using a red clay from Japan, will present a notable shift in tone, density and scale. Lee has spent a significant amount of time in Japan on residencies in Shigaraki, where the veneration shown to handmade culture has stimulated the materiality of her practice. When in Japan Lee has grasped the freedom to focus on making, allowing her to experiment freely with process and materials, such as with throwing and producing flat-slab pieces with inky, watercolour-like qualities.

Lee also spent eight months travelling in the United States between 1979 and 1980, a time in which she encountered changing understandings of ceramics and the capabilities of clay. As a student Lee found inspiration in Ancient ceramics, such as Neolithic Egyptian clay forms and Prehistoric Southwest Native American pottery, specifically from the Anasazi and Mimbres cultures. During her travels, she also visited contemporary West Coast potters. Ceramics practice in this region had undergone a fundamental shift, with 'Abstract Expressionist' ceramicists such as John Mason and Peter Voulkos as the leading innovators in this field, both of whom Lee met. With dynamic studio set-ups and an irreverence for the craft approach to fired and glazed forms, these artists freed pottery from known conventions, establishing ceramics as an experimental medium, and left a lasting impression on Lee.

Inspired by both urban and rural contexts, Lee routinely collects natural and found objects that evoke a strong sense of place. Ranging from a rusty exhaust pipe uncovered in a derelict farm when driving through Spain in the 1980s, camel bones picked up in the Simpson Desert that 12 years later are still impregnated with Australian deep red sand, to terracotta chai cups from Rajasthan in India. These items sit in the artist's studio, house and garden.

The exhibition will be designed by Jamie Fobert Architects. The design evolved through visits to Jennifer Lee's studio and conversations about emphasising the scale of human experience and closely aligning the public with the private. A number of works will also be on display in the Kettle's Yard House, creating a dialogue between image, sculpture and ceramics. The exhibition's title makes reference to Philip Rawson's seminal 1971 text 'Ceramics', in which he described the singular way in which a pot, an 'imponderable' object, alters the space around it.



Jennifer Lee, Pale, fractured speckled spiral and traces, 2008, 17.5 x 31.5 cm. Photo Jon Stokes



Jennifer Lee, Dark flashed asymmetric, amber bands, titled rim, 1991, 43.2 x 21.2cm. Shigaraki Red, fractionated red, dark base, tilted, 2014, 13.7 x 10cm. Photo Jon Stokes

Notes to Editors

The exhibition is curated by Sarah Griffin and will be accompanied by a catalogue designed by Jake Tilson, including an essay by Tanya Harrod available in August 2019.

Concurrent with 'Jennifer Lee: the potter's space', Kettle's Yard will present the exhibition 'Artist Unknown: Art and Artefacts from the University of Cambridge Museums and Collections', also running 9 July – 22 September 2019.

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About Jennifer Lee

Jennifer Lee (b. 1956, Aberdeenshire, Scotland) lives and works in London. She studied ceramics and tapestry at Edinburgh College of Art between 1975 and 1979. Following this she spent eight months on a travelling scholarship in the USA where she researched Ancient Southwest Native American ceramics and visited contemporary West Coast potters. From 1980 to 1983 she continued to develop hand building techniques in coloured clay using ancient, traditional methods at the Royal College of Art, London. Since then her travels have included trips to Egypt, India, Japan, the United States and Europe. Lee has had retrospective exhibitions in museums in Sweden and Scotland and her ceramics are represented in over 45 public collections worldwide including The Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, Los Angeles County Museum, the V&A and the British Museum. She was invited by Issey Miyake to exhibit in 'U-Tsu-Wa' with Lucie Rie and Ernst Gamperl at 21_21 Design Sight in 2009. The installation was designed by Tadao Ando. She has worked in Japan as guest artist in residence at Shigaraki Ceramic Culture Park four times and will return to Japan this autumn to be guest artist at Mashiko Museum of Ceramic Art. In 2018 she was awarded the LOEWE Craft Prize and she is a judge for the 2019 prize.

About Jamie Fobert Architects

Since its inception in 1996, Jamie Fobert Architects has established a reputation for innovative and inspiring architectural design.

Their clients are diverse: from individual homeowners to major cultural organisations and international retailers. Yet they have demonstrated a consistent approach to resolving client ambitions and site complexities into a tactile architecture of volume, material and light.

Jamie Fobert Architects designed the extension to Kettle's Yard which opened in February 2018.

jamiefobertarchitects.com

About Kettle's Yard

Kettle's Yard is one of Britain's best galleries - a beautiful and unique house with a distinctive modern art collection, and a gallery exhibiting modern and contemporary art. Supporting this is an established learning and community engagement programme, archive, and programme of chamber concerts. In February 2018, Kettle's Yard reopened after a two year development by architect Jamie Fobert. The new Kettle's Yard includes state of the art new exhibition galleries, generous education spaces, a café and new welcome areas. Kettle's Yard's mission is to contribute to society by inspiring and engaging audiences through art, learning and research of the highest quality. We believe that great art should not be the privilege of the few, but for everyone. Our values reflect Kettle's Yard's creator Jim Ede's support for artists and belief in art's power to make us look again and change how we act in the world.

kettlesyard.co.uk

About Artist Unknown: Art and Artefacts from the University of Cambridge Museums and Collections

'Artist Unknown: Art and Artefacts from the University of Cambridge Museums and Collections' will unite objects dating from antiquity to the 20th century, originating from five continents, all of which have been catalogued as 'artist unknown'. Combining paintings, drawings and ceramics with wood carvings, scientific instruments, taxidermy and scrimshaw, the exhibition will invite the visitor to interrogate accepted definitions of what art is and who should be considered an artist. In particular, it will seek to understand why makers have gone unrecorded or misattributed, as well as questioning the emphasis traditionally placed on authorship and authenticity when engaging with art. The display will feature over thirty objects loaned from thirteen museums and collections in the University of Cambridge, including the Fitzwilliam Museum, Scott Polar Research Institute, Whipple Museum of the History of Science and the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, alongside objects from Kettle's Yard's own collection.