

GARETH MASON SEEING THINGS

LONDON | 11 OCTOBER – 22 DECEMBER



CARPENTERS WORKSHOP GALLERY

Carpenters Workshop Gallery London presents *Seeing Things* by British contemporary ceramicist Gareth Mason. The exhibition marks Mason’s first solo show in the UK in over a decade, featuring a collection of never-before-exhibited works, some new and others composed over time—a process he aptly refers to as ‘composting’.

For Mason, ceramics is an arena of extravagant observation. His artworks engage the viewer at a level where sight becomes sensation. Whether through pareidolia or via more abstract association, the artist is deeply preoccupied with the moment at which physical, material qualities ignite the imagination and engender themselves emotionally. His artworks tend towards allusion-bypassing-logic: objects that communicate a non-verbal language between the forming hand and the beholding eye. “I ask a lot of the pot”, he says.

This relationship between material and immaterial implies a delicacy, which the artworks could easily belie for Mason habitually pushes his ceramic palette to brutal extremes, finding that, “materials acquire a more penetrating voice when forced into states of discomfort”. Multiple firings and interventions and the use of harsh-seeming foreign objects, inclusions and contrasts may incline his pieces toward aesthetic disclosure but not solely through force and capitulation. It is more like symbiosis. There is a finesse, alertness and sensorial relish to his approach; and an intimacy: Mason sums this up as ‘listening’. Properties emerge in extremis that neither artist nor artwork expect.

Mason’s sensory fascination with clay began under the tutelage of ceramicist Judith Trim, and he has since developed his art arguably in line with the deconstructive style of Peter Voulkos or Lucio Fontana. Challenging porcelain’s pristine reputation, he teases established norms of observation and expectation in ceramics. His distinctive art intertwines the disciplined intuition of Art Informel with the highly skilled techniques he has mastered in over 35 years spent exploring the field.

Carpenters Workshop Gallery are delighted to be representing the work of the artist in collaboration with Jason Jacques Gallery.



PESKY
2023

Porcelain, Glazes, Slips, Oxides, Lustre
34.5 x 45 x 20 cm
13 5/8 x 17 3/4 x 7 7/8 in
Unique

Pesky exemplifies Gareth Mason's interference with the accepted conventions of 'pot-hood'. This ceramic flask, a form that echoes through to antiquity, has seen hard usage and a fleshy flume is surreally attached to its shrapnel-pocked side. Pierced and seemingly blown wide open, this pot alludes to some long-lost utilitarian function. Its large apertures operate as windows into contrastingly luscious inner regions.



BONNEFACE
2023

Porcelain, Stoneware, Slate Gravel, Layered
Slips, Glazes and Oxides, Lustre
38.5 x 33 x 22 cm
15 1/8 x 13 x 8 5/8 in
Unique

Alluding to the deep cultural lineage of ceramics, *Bonneface* is encircled by appendages that nod disrespectfully to the decorations that have adorned vases and pots immemorially. The dark, rocky under-segments of the artwork's handles replaced earlier sections destroyed in repeated-firing mishaps. Re-framing accident as opportunity, Mason filled these voids with gnarled, discordant extensions as a statement against aesthetic constraints. The piece is now orbited by a corrupted halo, epitomising the dichotomy between accepted and rejected beauty.



KERNEL
2023

Porcelain, Stoneware, Layered Slips
and Glazes, Shards, Lustre
41.5 x 21 x 21 cm
16 3/8 x 8 1/4 x 8 1/4 in
Unique

Kernel captures the sublime nature of Gareth Mason's art; both its agony and ecstasy. The piece is covered in a lustre of deep earth-toned glazes as well as scorched, blistered and warped passages of oxide-saturated clay. *Kernel*, like much of Mason's work, passed repeatedly through the kiln, with its flame-licked surfaces accruing an astonishing range of textural response along the way.



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UNDONE
2023

Porcelain, Stoneware, Granite Inclusion,
Layered Oxides and Slips, Glazes, Lustre
69.5 x 37 x 28 cm
27 3/8 x 14 5/8 x 11 in
Unique

The use of 'inclusions' in clay bodies is a time-honoured practice employed to strengthen the material. Mason selectively 'includes' various sands and gravels in his clays. The granite and slate elements included in the rough-hewn base of *Undone* are a deliberate aesthetic choice. Their unpredictable vitrification and irregular particle size imbue a guttural texture, and additionally imply a strong material link to the work's geological origins and the powerful processes unfolding beneath our feet.



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TIARA
2023

Porcelain, Stoneware, Glazes, Oxides,
Nickel-Silver, Granite Inclusion
59 x 22 x 20 cm
23 1/4 x 8 5/8 x 7 7/8 in
Unique

Tiara is an example of what Gareth Mason terms 'composting', in which he has lived with works long after they are conventionally 'finished', allowing the piece time to re-affect him and for him to in turn revisit and rework it. Originally resembling a traditional vase, *Tiara* is now embedded in an earth-bound foot, acquiring three black 'tongues' and a harsh coronet of textured and 'included' clay, all strikingly at odds with the smooth glazed porcelain of its body.



ZOOMZOOM
2023

Porcelain, Layered Slips and Glazes,
Oxides, Granite, Lustre
38 x 45.5 x 27 cm
15 x 17 7/8 x 10 5/8 in
Unique

Zoomzoom's distorted figure bears all the hallmarks of Gareth Mason's tendency to treat the idea of 'pot-hood' as his personal playground. Cherry-picking from ceramic history, the artist combines elements that pay homage to his discipline's prestigious past, with others that disrespect it entirely. Appendages are added in unsuitable positions, voids cover its body like sores, and abstracted attributes are embellished to purposefully draw in the eye, in keeping with Mason's need to stave off aesthetic complacency.



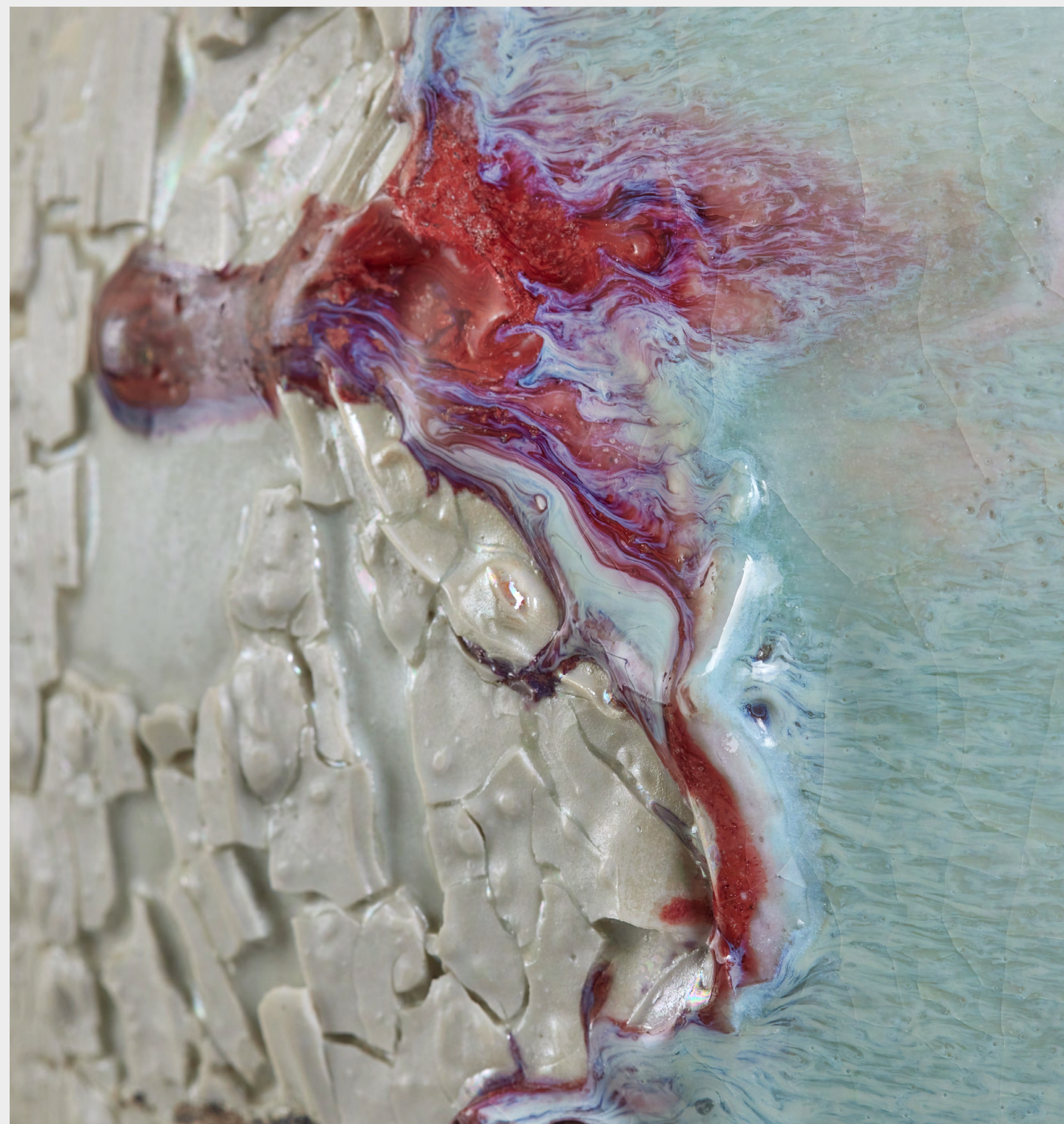
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MENISCUS
2023

Porcelain, Glazes, Layered Slip, Lustre
43.5 x 25 x 25 cm
17 1/8 x 9 7/8 x 9 7/8 in
Unique

A tactile moment where two worlds collide, *Meniscus* embodies the delicate liquid tension of its title. Balanced on a knife edge, the piece provides a counter-intuitive puzzle, as drips of glaze transgress horizontally from one hemisphere to the next. Transgression is a vital aspect of Mason's practice allowing him access to previously unrealised territories of expression, shown here in the sensual coalescence of two plains of existence entwining around one form.





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BATHE
2023

Porcelain, Layered Glazes, Slips
and Oxides, Lustre
56 x 46 x 44 cm
22 x 18 1/8 x 17 3/8 in
Unique

The variety of texture and voice Gareth Mason is able to draw from clay encompasses the broad experiential potency of the material. Across the globular *Bathe*, islands of interruptions submerge and surface. Mason harnesses competing forces, combining recognisable motifs from ceramic history with visceral ruptures in the material, constantly drawing as much sensation from the object as possible.



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ADAMANTINE
2023

Porcelain, Stoneware, Layered Slips and Glazes,
Oxides, Granite and Slate Inclusion, Lustre
72 x 40 x 30 cm
28 3/8 x 15 3/4 x 11 3/4 in
Unique

The tall spouts of *Adamantine* rise in a complex textural collage. However, Mason never sets out to specifically create visual and tactile intensity. Rather, *Adamantine's* intricate surface arose from the deceptively simple cause-and-effect of undisguised physical manipulation. Each quality is carefully considered with an overt physical pragmatism that helps support unforeseen alchemical surprises, which lead in turn to challenges and delights.





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MELUSINE
2023

Porcelain, Stoneware, Layered Slips
and Glazes, Oxides, Granite and Slate
Inclusion, Nichrome Wire,
Marine Pebbles, Pustre
56 x 46 x 44 cm
22 x 18 1/8 x 17 3/8 in
Unique

Melusine's porcelain tissue is scarred by deep textural veins, contrasting with pristine opalescent swathes around its rim. Whether in its curves and fissures or harsh, igneous base, the hand of the artist is keenly felt. His intimate interventions between firings are clearly discernible, adding their own dissonant patina. Mason intentionally pushes the material away from its comfortable state, and towards something more extreme, approximating 'the sublime'.



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GASP
2023

Porcelain, Stoneware, Glazes, Slips, Oxides, Lustre
39.5 x 25.5 x 21.5 cm
15 1/2 x 10 x 8 1/2 in
Unique

Mid-firing, *Gasp* fell open in the kiln. Mason welcomed its newly-formed fractures as a testament to the 'voices', energies and textures that can emerge unplanned from the flames. Mason adapts to every new material sensation with resourceful enthusiasm. The ability to incorporate accident into his work so fluently demonstrates his ability to flex hard-earned technical skill to meet ever changing circumstance, an undercurrent that runs modestly throughout Mason's practice.



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SOOT
2023

Porcelain, Stoneware, Layered Slips, Oxides and Glazes
32 x 15 x 15 cm
12 5/8 x 5 7/8 x 5 7/8 in
Unique

Firing conventionally represents the final stage in the creation of a ceramic object, the point at which its nature is determined. Not so for Gareth Mason. Passing his artworks through the furnace is more often than not the first stage of their journey, as the artist keeps the piece in a state of flux. *Soot* is a polychrome 'bottle' form, whose slender neck rises to meet a blackened spout, a later addition that amplifies the piece via its evisceration from multiple firings.



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BEAUTY SPOT
2023

Porcelain, Stoneware, Layered Slips, Oxides,
Glaze, Marine Pebble Inclusion, Lustre
40 x 23 x 16.5 cm
15 3/4 x 9 x 6 1/2 in
Unique

A whirlpool of white foam draws in the gaze, as a tsunami of porcelain swoops around the horizon to submerge it. Artist Gareth Mason find the ability for the human imagination to draw such grandiose allusions from the physical properties of his work compelling. This relationship between material and psychological phenomenon lies at the heart of his practice. *Beauty Spot's* oceanic inferences and liquid nature are products of the mind, not a specific intention of the artist.



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ADRIFT
2023

Porcelain, Stoneware, Slate and Granite
Inclusion, Layered Glazes and Slips
62.5 x 34 x 23 cm
24 5/8 x 13 3/8 x 9 in
Unique

Adrift forms a tall trophy, celebrating the many dichotomies Gareth Mason finds in the ceramic experience. Crusted appendages morph into the vessel's smooth body, as the artist pits texture against form, convention against invention, and beauty against an honest but gnarled brutality. Mason seeks equal bliss and horror in his work. *Adrift* captures the simultaneous stages of a ceramic explosion, as hot liquid glaze cools and solidifies into rock.



TANK
2023

Porcelain, Stoneware, Slate, Glazes, Slips,
Oxides, Lustre
32.5 x 50.5 x 17 cm
12 3/4 x 19 7/8 x 6 3/4 in
Unique

Tank is a manifesto of Gareth Mason's core belief: the pot is as powerful as any other form of human expression, comparable to cinema, opera, or poetry. Its objective presence at the centre of human civilisations, and its myriad variations, stand the pot on hallowed ground.

Tank looks closely at what a pot can be. From a central cylindrical element, conventionally thrown on a potter's wheel, Mason extends muscular stoneware 'arms' outwards, a dramatic divergence from conventional ceramic language. This departure climaxes in a raw shard of slate protruding from one extremity.



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ARTESIA
2023

Porcelain, Stoneware, Layered Glazes, Slips
and Oxides, Snowdonia Slate, Lustre
53 x 35 x 34 cm
20 7/8 x 13 3/4 x 13 3/8 in
Unique

Gareth Mason's art appeals directly to the 'old brain' - the instinctual, embodied intelligence that processes visual and other sensory stimuli long before it manifests as conscious thought or language. *Artesia* especially flirts with this pre-conscious awareness around that which we covet and equally that which we cannot comprehend. This interplay between hesitation and attraction extends to the openings in *Artesia*'s 'skin' which arouse a subterranean curiosity.



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CLINKER
2023

Stoneware, Porcelain, Layered Slips,
Glazes, Oxides, Lustre
37 x 33 x 25 cm
14 5/8 x 13 x 9 7/8 in
Unique

Clinker epitomises the synonymous relationship Gareth Mason finds between the human and ceramic experience. A narrative common to both humans and pots is one of becoming, of resurgence, and defiance of the flames. Torn and pierced, covered in psychedelic glazes, with magmatic flows coursing over its scorched body, *Clinker* becomes more than the sum of its parts, a testament to the physical odyssey it has survived.



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TILTING
2023

Porcelain, Slips and Oxides, Glazes, Lustre
37 x 27 x 22 cm
14 5/8 x 10 5/8 x 8 5/8 in
Unique

Caught in a lop-sided contrapposto stance, *Tilting* is an example of the structural capitulation to which Mason frequently pushes his creations. It is his belief that a work's visible flaws are often its most meaningful aspects, the qualities that communicate most powerfully. This is the dissonance that chimes with symmetry and makes beauty fiercer.



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DOTAKU
2023

Porcelain, Stoneware, Layered Glazes and Slips,
Slate Inclusion, Oxides, Lustre
54 x 23.5 x 14.5 cm
21 1/4 x 9 1/4 x 5 3/4 in
Unique

Dokatu takes its name and appearance from the vertical structures of traditional Japanese bells. Reverberating with a sonorous voice, *Dokatu* comprises columns of glazed and oxidised porcelain, that cascade up and down the pieces like jets of a fountain. Gareth Mason's practice is intimately linked with a long history of craftsmanship, spanning civilisations from antiquity to the modern day.



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CAVALIER
2023

Porcelain, Stoneware, Layered Glazes, Oxides,
Feldspar, Slate, Refractory shards, Lustre
49.5 x 24 x 21 cm
19 1/2 x 9 1/2 x 8 1/4 in
Unique

The ceramic process is an arduous journey, that leaves its scars. *Cavalier* is a heavily anthropomorphised figure that openly displays its many battle wounds. Its neck is rent apart; its body is pierced with stabbing, invective missiles of rock. Over many firings and accidents the piece accrued disfigurements to the point where the Mason felt he could not intervene productively anymore, whereby it achieved a semblance of 'completion'.



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TRENCH
2023

Stoneware, Layered Slips and Glazes,
Oxides, Lustre
38 x 28 x 24 cm
15 x 11 x 9 in
Unique

Gareth Mason constantly challenges the reverence imparted on porcelain, seeking to disenfranchise the material's associations of refined civility. The artist is willing to rebel against the strict conventions of 'pot-hood', and show his materials in expressive and contorted states that move far beyond smooth, symmetrical function and beauty. *Trench* exploits these tendencies, maximising the emotional potential of the material and imparting a forceful response to repeated visual scrutiny.



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INKWELL
2023

Porcelain, Stoneware, Glazes, Slips, Oxides
33.5 x 14 x 14 cm
13 1/4 x 5 1/2 x 5 1/2 in
Unique

Throughout the exhibition *Seeing Things*, Gareth Mason explores triggers of aesthetic arousal. Visual dichotomies, as seen in the double-sided nature of *Inkwell*, sustain wordless associations to our ways of seeing, and of being. Clear aesthetic signs can be interpreted in endless ways. It is here the 'art' happens, in the silent strand of communication between object and observer.



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WHITE NOISE
2023

Stoneware, Porcelain, Glazes,
Slips, Oxides, Lustre
45 x 29.5 x 14.5 cm
17 3/4 x 11 5/8 x 5 3/4 in
Unique

White Noise sees several states of visual and formal change rising through the piece. Its base, an ancient-seeming fluted column, suspends a television-like 'screen', one side of which proffers an uninterrupted veil of arid, painterly white marks: static. A similar zone of interference on the opposite face is blocked-in by a Rothko-esque field of red and black glaze. Emergent, its pinnacle gleams gold: incongruous, ambiguous, yet charged with strange significance.



HALCYON
2023

Porcelain, Stoneware, Slate Gravel, Layered
Slips, Glazes and Oxides, Lustre
55 x 56 x 56 cm
21 5/8 x 22 x 22 in
Unique

In *Halcyon*, the body of the work is a site of physical transgression, punctured, stitched together, partially deconstructed and patched. The artist insists these are not violent associations however. Clay is a material voraciously receptive to every mark and trace left on its surface, and every impression that informs its shape. Mason manipulates clay to a point where its very essence appears audibly, as well as physically, anthropomorphised, making his materials sigh, sing and scream.



ABOUT GARETH MASON

Gareth Mason is a potter of 35 years’ standing and exhibits internationally. His first solo exhibition in America was in February 2011. Entitled ‘Other Forces’, it was held at Jason Jacques Gallery in Manhattan and began a long-standing professional relationship, continuing in the August 2022 solo exhibition, ‘Wild Clay’. Residencies include Syracuse University, USA (2019/20), the Jingdezhen International Studio, China (2016) and Long Beach State University, USA (2011). Speaking and ‘Master Class’ engagements include; Everson Museum Syracuse (2019); Fitzwilliam Museum Cambridge (2018); ‘LabArtz’, Taoxichuan, China (2016); International Ceramics Festival, Aberystwyth (2015); Greenwich House New York and The Clay Studio Philadelphia (2014); the American Museum of Ceramic Art, California (2013); SOFA Chicago Expo (2011); International Ceramics Studio, Kecskemet, Hungary (2010). A past columnist for Ceramic Review Magazine, London, he has also written for Ceramics Monthly, Keramik Magazine Europa and Ceramics Art and Perception, with the books, ‘A Decade In Cahoots’ published online by Jason Jacques Press, and ‘More is More’ by the same publisher, held in the Cfile online Library. A dialogue with the author and collector Ashley Thorpe appears in Thorpe’s 2023 book, ‘Contemporary British Studio Pottery’. Group exhibitions include; Shapes from Out of Nowhere, the Metropolitan Museum New York; Ceramics Biennale, Hongzhou, China, Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge; Side Gallery, Barcelona; Centre Tignous, Paris; Yale Centre for British Art, Connecticut; Hiram Butler Gallery, Houston and Boca Raton Museum of Art, Florida. Collections include The Metropolitan Museum New York, Everson Museum, Syracuse, Mint Museum North Carolina and the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, USA. Mason is a Fellow of the Craft Potters Association and Brother of the Art Workers Guild, London. He lives and works in Hampshire, England.



