

Professor Neil Brownsword

Artefact: National Treasure - ceramic, looped film performance with china painter Anthony Challinor, live performance, installation, film, 2014-2017



Figure 1: National Treasure exhibit from Vociferous Void: Topographies of the Obsolete 15-31 June & 1-19 August 2017, Ann Linnemann Gallery, Copenhagen, Denmark

This multi-media work developed out of Vociferous Void – a core exhibition from the international artistic research project Topographies of the Obsolete: Exploring the Site Specific and Associated Histories of Post-Industry. (The former Spode factory, Stoke-on-Trent, 2012-2017).

The work introduces new critical insights into aspects of skill displacement following the aftermath of decades of deindustrialisation in North Staffordshire's ceramic sector. The installation, exhibited in locations in the UK, South Korea and Scandinavia between 2014 and 2017, examines shifts in production from the 'shop floor' to the factory tourism model, through an innovative combination of live performance, installation, social practice, film and artefact that 'bring the traditions of the [ceramics] field into a new category of experience'. Brownsword's parody of this 'artisan on display' format, critiques how the parade of 'indigenous' artisanal craft from the visitor centre experience, obscures the realities of profit first strategies of mass-automation and global outsourcing.

Ex-industry China painters were employed by Brownsword to follow the genre of the romantic ruin commonly depicted in 18th century British ceramics. These intermittent site-specific performances together with their filmic documentation set out to subvert passive spectator consumption. Painting on the backs of discarded platters found at former historic sites of production, with images that documented Stoke-on-Trent's post-industrial fallout offered a new perspective to social realism within ceramic practice. By incorporating the dynamics of hired labour, National Treasure offered an inventive method to elevate and disseminate the endangered practices of a rapidly disappearing culture of labour. The work also explored the ethical implications of appropriating people and their skill as a raw material – a subject relatively absent in contemporary ceramic practice.



Figure 2: stills from looped film projection 15 minutes, 49 seconds, former Spode factory, Stoke-on-Trent. Anthony Challinor, a redundant Spode employee with over 50 years' experience, paints the remains of a pigeon found decaying on the factory floor, as the flapping sounds of the birds inhabiting the empty building, break the silence.

The performative, transient and site-specific research underpinning National Treasure has been at the forefront of 'the expanded field' of ceramics over the past fifteen years. Grounded in learning from his employment in the ceramic industry, Brownsword's sustained body of 'fieldwork' has excavated and reactivated the tangible and intangible heritage of North Staffordshire to address the ongoing reverberations of historic change and lost labour in post-industrial contexts worldwide. The research has been disseminated via numerous conferences including the International Academy of Ceramics 46th General Assembly, Dublin, 2014, and the Holbourne Museum, Bath, 2014;** explored by international critics/writers including Vieteberg, Dahn and Wiggers and exhibited in the UK, Scandinavia and South Korea in 2015 (see below*). As one of 2629 entries by 1470 applicants from 74 countries, a panel of eminent judges 'unanimously' awarded National Treasure the

Grand Prize at the Gyeonggi International Ceramic Biennale in 2015 (the most prestigious stage for contemporary ceramics), in recognition for Brownsword's 'creativity and contribution to the field'. This research has widened public understanding of the value of industrial craft, influenced his co-collaborators work, helped to attract over GBP1, 000,000 for artistic collaborations, exhibitions and collections care and generated new insights into the impact of globalization and new thinking on the value of cultural heritage.



Fig. 3. Colin Minton Campbell – site of the former Minton Factory – now Sainsburys, Stoke-on-Trent (2015)



Fig. 4. Former Hill Works (background) Burslem, Stoke-on-Trent. Image Neil Brownsword (2015). Enamel painting completed by Anthony Challiner on platter salvaged from former Spode factory (2016).



Figure 5 National Treasure (detail). Neil Brownsword, with Anthony Challiner, 2014 -2017. Flags erected in 2010 to celebrate Stoke-on-Trent's ceramic heritage against the derelict site of J.H. Weatherby and Sons. 2016

***National Treasure exhibits, 2015-2018**

8th Gyeonggi International Ceramic Biennale

24 April – 31 May 2015, Icheon World Ceramic Centre, Rep. of Korea.

The GICB 2015 attracted approx. 210,000 visitors over 37 days, with approx. 201,000 visits from Korea plus 9,000 international visits.

Cause and Effect

18 June – 18 September 2016, The National Centre for Craft & Design, Sleaford, Lincolnshire, UK

Vociferous Void: Topographies of the Obsolete

15-31 June & 1-19 August 2017, Ann Linnemann Gallery, Copenhagen, Denmark

Putting it at Stake

11 - 12 August 2017, Rörstrand Center, Lidköping, Sweden, tour

May – August 2018, RIAN Design Museum, Sweden

Place and Practices

23 September - 5 November 2017, British Ceramics Biennial, Spode Works, Kingsway Stoke-on-Trent, ST4 1JB, UK

The Precious Clay

20 September 2018 – 20 March 2019, Museum of Royal Worcester, Worcestershire, UK

National Treasure conference presentations

Brownsword, N., (2014) Re-activating Displaced Heritage, From Geographic Pasts to Virtual Presence, International Academy of Ceramics 46th General Assembly, 8-12 September 2014, The Printworks, Dublin Castle, Dame St, Dublin 2, Ireland. (Unpublished)

Brownsword, N.,(2014) Nature Needs Its Vultures?, Ceramics and Politics Symposium, 14 November 2014, Holbourne Museum, Great Pulteney St, Bath BA2 4DB. (Unpublished)